



## SAN JOSE - ITINERARY B4

4 DAYS / 3 NIGHTS

Tuesday to Friday (every 14 days)



Our shortest route gets the most out of just four days on the Galapagos. It combines the exclusive bird-island of Genovesa with the popular highlights of South Plaza and Santa Fe, giving an intense and excellent quick impression of the Galapagos.

Hundreds of thousands of seabirds perch and nest on the cliffs around the flooded crater of Genovesa. Walk a very short distance through the largest insular colonies of Nazca and red-footed boobies, whilst they are courtshipping, mating, breeding, nurturing or learning to fly (depending on the season).

Other not to be missed highlights of this cruise will certainly be the extraordinary Santa Fe and South Plaza, where characteristic Galapagos land iguanas crawl below the bizarre giant prickly pear cacti.

On the last morning we will sail around the bizarre-shaped rock formation of Kicker Rock or Leon Dormido (= Sleeping Lion), just off the coast of San Cristobal. Most elder islands of southeast

Galapagos have azure bays and striking beaches of white coral sand, which are favourite place for large colonies of sea lions. This intense route ends in the harbour with lots of Galapagos sea lions, waving goodbye.

#### **Important notes:**

- The itinerary is subject to change in case of force majeure caused by exceptional and natural circumstances.
- Approximate departure and navigation times are just indicative and depend on the sea state and decisions of the captain.
- Although the Galapagos seldom require quests for wildlife, observation of specific species can never be guaranteed.

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### **Day 1 – Tuesday**

Mosquera is a pleasant start of your Galapagos visit, without the necessity to navigate a long stretch to get first contact with the unique insular nature. This islet stands out by its largest concentration of Galapagos sea lions. Moreover it's one of the few spots inside the National Park where you can stroll around freely.

#### **Programme:**

**AM:** This morning you will fly from Quito or Guayaquil to Baltra Airport.

**PM:** After become welcomed aboard M/Y San Jose, check-in, lunch buffet and the safety-drill you will visit Mosquera for a free beach stroll and snorkelling.

**Navigation:** Shortly before midnight we will lift the anchor and we will sail about 6 hrs – depending on sea conditions – northeast to Genovesa.

#### **AM: Arrival at Baltra Airport**

At Baltra Airport you have to pay your Galapagos National Park entrance fee and your luggage will be inspected. See Getting there for flight and arrival information.

In front of the arrival hall you will meet your naturalist guide and fellow passengers, and the airport shuttle will transfer you to the Baltra Dock where our inflatable dinghies ('zodiacs') take you the last stretch to the yacht.

#### **PM: Mosquera**

Mosquera lies in the middle of the Itabaca Channel, between Baltra and North Seymour. Galapagos sea lions are real beach lovers. Mosquera offers beautiful white coral sand and doesn't complicate their landing as neighbouring Seymour and Baltra do with their steep rocky coastlines. These agile fishers just have to enter the Itabaca Channel, which is a natural trap for marine life, thanks to a submarine ridge between Baltra and Santa Cruz. However, fishing in the channel is not without risk;

sometimes a school of killer whales (orcas, recognisable by their characterising dorsal fins) enters to hunt sea lions.

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## Day 2 – Wednesday

Genovesa is well worth last night's longer navigation. All impressions will be nearly too much for a single day!

Not only because of its historical English name (Tower) Genovesa has a royal touch. Follow in the footsteps of Prince Philip – Galapagos lover for many years and patron of the Charles Darwin Foundation – and visit this favourite birding spot. Besides the largest insular breeding colonies of red-footed and Nazca boobies, they also breed frigatebirds, and the air is teeming with flocks of storm petrels. Look for the remarkable short-eared owl that hunts on foot, which can be considered most peculiar adaptive behaviour!

### Programme:

**AM:** After breakfast and a wet landing on the sheltered beach of Darwin Bay you will go for a guided walk (moderate level; about 3km/2mi) and refreshing snorkelling.

**PM:** Around lunch-time we will sail to nearby Prince Philip's Steps, close to the entrance of the broken caldera. There you can snorkel again, and take a guided walk through clifftop seabird colonies (moderate level; about 3km/2mi).

**Overnight navigation:** After dinner we will lift the anchor and navigate about 8 hours south to South Plaza.

### AM: Darwin Bay (Genovesa)

Genovesa's horseshoe-shaped wall is proof that we have anchored inside the partly collapsed and submerged caldera of a submarine volcano! The visitor's site, Darwin Bay, is located at the very rear. This compact site shows the extreme varied coastal ecosystems of the Galapagos in miniature. The trail starts from the coral sand beach and subsequently passes a zone with saltbushes and mangroves, then crosses tidal creeks and barren lava formations, dry shrub lands, and finally turns on the ridge of some cliffs.

In this extremely varied and peaceful ambience, every single species has occupied its own ecological niche (preferred habitat) without disturbing others. Whimbrels and wandering tattlers forage actively along the surf, next to resting Galapagos sea lions. Herons wait motionless at the tidal pools. Impressive frigatebirds (both great and magnificent species) and red-footed boobies nest in the mangroves, where you can also notice some vocalists such as yellow warblers, Darwin's finches and Galapagos mockingbirds. What's unique is that two subpopulations of the same species large cactus finch differ from singing.

Tropicbirds, Nazca boobies, storm petrels, endemic lava- and swallow-tailed gulls soar along the cliffs. When you have already seen marine iguanas elsewhere, the small Genovesa species might not

look too impressive, but consider that these are virtually the only reptiles that succeeded to reach and survive on this remote, upstream island (and have become endemic to this island).

### **PM: Prince Phillip's Steps (Genovesa)**

Before landing you will take a dinghy-ride along the eastern arm of the caldera. On approach, the 25m/80ft high walls become overwhelming, and will give you a better impression of the dimensions of this crater. Sometimes a Galapagos fur seal will be resting on one of the shaded ledges. Although there are also seabirds, the real spectacle will take place on top and on the outside of the rim, which provide better perching and nesting places.

You will therefore have to hike and overcome the steep stairs from the landing dock to a bush of palo santo shrubs on top. Tropical dry forest vegetation appears dead during most months of the year, but just drops its leaves to prevent drying out by evaporation. It's a threatened ecosystem. Red-footed boobies with different plumages gratefully use these scarce nesting-places; different to their blue-footed relatives 'red feet' don't nest on the rocky ground.

At the seaside of the rim, the bushes open up and you can enjoy wide views, a strong sea breeze and the amazing flying skills of countless seabirds. Following the exposed rim you will first pass a colony of Nazca boobies and finally reach the extensive storm petrel nesting places, where you might be lucky enough to spot how the well-camouflaged short-eared owl hunts for them on foot!

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## **Day 3 – Thursday**

**Heading towards the heart of the archipelago you will visit the extraordinary Santa Fe and not to be missed South Plaza that belongs to the most popular and unforgettable sites. Below the bizarre giant prickly pear cacti you will encounter characteristic land iguanas. Although this 'Jurassic islet' is different to every other site in the National Park, at the same time it is so typically Galapagos with its sharp contrasts, amazing diversity and stunning concentration of wildlife.**

### **Programme:**

**AM:** After breakfast you will take an unforgettable guided walk on South Plaza (easy level; about 1,25 km/0.75 mi; avoidable depths on the cliff-edge).

Before lunch we will sail to Santa Fe (about 2 hrs southeast), possibly escorted by bottle nose dolphins.

**PM:** After lunch you will have time for a refreshing swim or excellent snorkelling in the crystal-clear azure waters of Barrington Bay.

At the end of the afternoon we have a wet landing on the beach of Santa Fe and a guided nature walk. Your guide decides whether to follow the easy shorter circuit, or a strenuous longer hike inland (moderate level; about 3km/2mi).

**Navigation:** After a quiet sleep in the sheltered bay we will lift the anchor in the dead of the night and sail to Kicker Rock, just off the coast of San Cristobal (about 4hrs).

**Additional optional scuba-diving:** Gordon Rocks (Expert/Advanced) or Santa Fe (All levels).

## **AM: South Plaza**

The south of both Plaza islets is the best place to encounter endemic Galapagos land iguanas. Watch your step and don't stumble over one of them whilst distracted by the equally bizarre giant prickly pear cactus-trees! These iguanas are not only ugly as Darwin pronounced, but also very patient and photogenic models with strikingly saffron colours. Overpopulation and severe food competition have affected their smaller size. It is incredible to see how cactus spines don't harm them while chewing pads, flowers and fruits. Also look out for some unique hybrids between a male marine iguana and a female land iguana.

Arriving at the upper rim, you get to know the other, wild and windy face of South Plaza that provides a completely different habitat. About 20m/75ft downwards impressively droning waves splash against the foot of massive cliffs. Being talented rock climbers, sun basking marine iguanas have escaped the cool shadows of the wall. Clouds of petrels, storm petrels, shearwaters and brown noddies make spectacular flights and sometimes appear to walk on the waves. Take your binoculars and don't miss the red-billed tropicbird with its graceful long tail and spectacular mating fights. These cliffs are also a nesting place for the endemic swallow-tailed gull, the most beautiful gull in the world. Its neatly lined eyes are perfectly adapted for its exceptional nightly fishing habits.

## **PM: Barrington Bay (Santa Fe)**

Practically every animal on Santa Fe is unique; endemic to the Galapagos, or even to this island alone and extremely vulnerable! This extraordinary island is a remnant of probably the most ancient volcano on the Galapagos, and gave evolution enough time and isolation to create its wonders.

Your experience starts before anchoring, when the contours of its bizarre giant prickly pear cactus (opuntia) forests become distinguishable. These largest cacti of the islands have extremely thick trunks indeed, and can grow over 10m/33ft tall! You will land right in the middle of a Galapagos sea lion colony on the beach. From their outlooks at the beach ridge surprisingly fearless Galapagos hawks are ready to snatch away a lava lizard; not worrying that even these are unique...

Almost every visitor of Santa Fe becomes eager to get a glimpse of the rare Barrington land iguana. But this pale endemic version is not as easy to spot as its modelling counterparts on South Plaza. This one is more of a quest to find (rather untypical to Galapagos); other times it surprises you by waiting for you next to the trail. Whether you spot it or not, you will keep going from one surprise to the next.

While snorkelling in the azure-coloured Barrington Bay between tropical reef fish, maybe a curious Galapagos sea lion will be willing to play with you!

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## **Day 4 – Friday**

**Sunrise on the natural sculpture of Kicker Rock can be unforgettable! During a dinghy-ride you will feel the early morning ocean breeze in your ear and can watch many sea birds. Besides being one of the landmarks of the Galapagos, Kicker Rock is also one of the favourite diving and snorkelling spots of the archipelago. Later today you will have time to relax aboard or at the cosy waterfront of Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, the halfway point on this full planned cruise route.**

**Programme:**

**AM:** Before breakfast a dinghy-ride and optional snorkelling are scheduled (a snack is available before).

On arrival it's time to say goodbye, leave the yacht and continue to the airport.

**AM:** Check-in and flight back to Guayaquil or Quito.

**AM: Kicker Rock (San Cristobal)**

Kicker Rock has become one of the photogenic landmarks of the Galapagos. Clearly visible from afar, nature has moulded a massive offshore block of rock with a pointy tower next to it. Reaching about 150m/500ft above sea level this compact rock without typical stratified layers of cemented ashes is thought to be the remnant of a former tuff cone, which has eroded completely away; a resistant lava mass that never left the crater pipe remains.

While sailing around and spotting blue-footed boobies and great frigatebirds you can observe this intriguing sculpture from changing angles. From the side it takes the form of a giant shoe, upside down with the tower as the high heel (hence its English name Kicker Rock). In longitudinal direction it rather resembles a sleeping lion (hence its Spanish name Leon Dormido). It is an experience to pass the narrow channel between the main body and the spine.

These steep walls rise out of the deep sea. Kicker Rock is one of the favourite locations amongst scuba divers and snorkellers in the south-eastern archipelago. Amid colourful tropical fish you might have thrilling encounters with octopuses, different species of shark (including scalloped hammerhead sharks!), Pacific green turtles, spotted eagle rays and even – when you are really lucky – with barracudas, manta rays and giant oceanic manta rays!

**AM: Transfer to San Cristobal airport**

Assisted by the naturalist guide and some crew members the dinghy will bring you and your luggage to the airport of San Cristobal. Your guide will accompany you to the check-in counters in the departure hall.

**We expect you to return home with stunning pictures and unforgettable memories for life!**