



SAN JOSE - ITINERARY B5

5 DAYS / 4 NIGHTS

Friday to Tuesday (every 14 days)



Our 4-night southern itinerary gives quite a complete overview of the Galapagos. Moreover this route combines two of the most popular snorkelling sites of the Galapagos: Champion Islet and Bartolomé, where you might swim with fishing penguins.

This intense cruise begins in San Cristobal (with lots of Galapagos sea lions in the harbour), where your visit will be concluded by an interesting visit to the Interpretation Centre, where you can learn what makes the Galapagos so unique, and which conservation challenges are confronted. 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 route also passes the albatross, booby colonies and marine iguanas on Española, and the flamingo lagoon of Floreana. During an impressive 'moonwalk' on the barren lava flow of Sullivan Bay and a short climb to the summit of Bartolomé you will be impressed by the volcanic forces that have created the islands.

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 – Friday

Upon arrival you will stay on the easternmost island of San Cristobal, where plenty of Galapagos sea lions have taken over the harbour, touristic pier and promenade of Galapagos' provincial capital of Puerto Baquerizo Moreno. A visit to the excellent interpretation centre and its botanical garden give you a perfect introduction to this unique archipelago.

Programme:

AM: This morning you will fly from Quito or Guayaquil to San Cristobal Airport.

PM: After become welcomed aboard M/Y San Jose, check-in, lunch, and the safety-drill the inflatable dinghies will bring you to the pier, from where you will visit the interpretation centre and town.

Before dinner your guide will give a first daily briefing and the captain and his crew will introduce themselves and share a welcome toast.

Overnight navigation: Around midnight the anchor will be lifted for a navigation of about 4 hours to the south-eastern island of Española.

AM: Arrival at San Cristobal Airport

See Getting there for flight and arrival information.

A guide will meet you, help you collect your luggage, and escort you on a short bus ride to the harbour of Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, the formal capital town of the Galapagos province. M/Y San Jose has anchored in Wreck Bay.

PM: Interpretation centre (San Cristobal)

The Interpretation centre just outside the provincial capital Puerto Baquerizo Moreno is a perfect introduction as well as an interesting complement to the field-explanations and briefings of your naturalist guide. Information panels (English/Spanish), pictures, maquettes and true to life dioramas tell the background story of the islands in a different way, which helps you to get an overview and learn what makes the Galapagos so unique. The well-maintained botanical garden with native species from the arid zone (including the giant prickly pear and candelabra cacti) is worth your visit as well; and you will probably spot the Chatham mockingbird, endemic to this island, that put Darwin on track of his evolution theory.

The attractive exhibition is quite complete and explains a series of natural circumstances that create the Galapagos' unique environment: such as the volcanic genesis of the islands, their remoteness from the continent, its ocean currents, its special climate, the arrival of different species, and their establishment, among others. It also recounts historic discovery and attempts of colonisation; and shows a diorama with ancient mail barrels from Post Office Bay. Extensively it concludes how times have changed with current conservation and the many ways in which this is being achieved, as well as the environmental challenges that proceed.

Day 2 – Saturday

The next island, Española, is located in the far south-eastern corner of the archipelago and promises to be a highlight of your cruise. As one of its crown jewels, this bird watcher's and photographer's dream offers all that you might expect from the Galapagos. Walk just a few metres past waved albatrosses, booby colonies, sunbathing marine iguanas and Galapagos sea lions and feel as though you're in an exciting nature documentary! Several endemic species give you the opportunity to become an eyewitness of evolution.

Programme:

AM: After a 'wet landing' (bare feet) on the wide sandy beach at Gardner Bay you can stroll along the sea lions colony (easy level), or enjoy a moment of reflection, relaxation, or rolling with sea lions in the surf. Next you can plunge into the alluring turquoise-coloured Gardner Bay for snorkelling.

PM: Back on board we will navigate for about an hour. After lunch you will make a 'dry landing' (with footwear) at Suarez Point. During a longer guided walk (moderate level; 4km/2.5 mi/about 2 hours) you will pass spectacular seabird colonies on top of the cliffs (some short scrambling passages; avoidable depths).

Overnight navigation: After dinner San Jose will navigate about 5 hrs westward to neighbouring island of Floreana.

AM: Gardner Bay (Española)

Make your first 'dive' in the alluring turquoise-coloured Gardner Bay, and admire colourful reef fish, snorkel side by side with a Pacific green turtle, or find yourself in the middle of playful Galapagos sea lions.

The striking white coral sand beach is an important breeding site for Pacific green turtles, but without doubt its main attraction is the Galapagos sea lion colony. Females stay year round in this nursery, suckling their pups up to the age of 3 years, although they start to learn how to fish after 5 months. During the breeding and mating season the colony becomes even more populous. The strongest bachelors and elder males return from their secluded bases and start again to conquer and defend their part of the 1300m/4250ft long beach. Pregnant females choose the best territory to give birth, and will mate with their landlord again within a month.

PM: Suarez Point (Española)

Huge ocean waves crash on the southern basaltic cliffs of Suarez Point, and form a spectacular blowhole, where a fountain of seawater sprays metres/feet high into the air (depending on the tide and how strong the sea breeze pushes the waves). Take a meditative break in silence at this emblematic viewpoint to convert this unforgettable moment into a lifetime experience.

Waved albatrosses soar for most of their lives far out at sea and just come to Española (March-December) to breed and nurture their huge chicks. This spectacular seabird is the only tropic albatross (critically endangered species). Besides some strayed individuals on Isla de La Plata (off the Ecuadorian coast) it only breeds on Española, where you can witness its synchronous courtship dances, which include bowing, whistling and even a stylised form of 'sword fighting' with their bills (especially in October)!

Suarez Point is also a massive breeding site for Nazca and blue-footed boobies, swallow-tailed gulls and red-billed tropicbirds. Blue-footed boobies don't bother to breed in the middle of the trail. Particularly during the food-abundant garúa-season (2nd half of the year) you can admire amusing courtship dances, mating, breeding, emerging from the eggs, nurturing or first flight-attempts.

Española marine iguanas become bright red with a turquoise-coloured crest and legs at the start of the breeding season (starting from Christmas). Hood lava lizards are the largest of the 7 endemic species in the islands, as well as endemic mockingbirds, which have turned to carnivorous behaviour!

Day 3 – Sunday

At about midnight San Jose will drop the anchor at the north cape of Floreana (Cormorant Point), where American flamingos use to forage and breed. Historical Post Office Bay and Baroness Lookout are located nearly at the end of the world. Floreana offers some of most spectacular snorkelling sites. Galapagos sea lions will probably be waiting to play with you while snorkelling at Champion Islet. From the dinghy, bird watchers can amplify their growing spot lists with endemic Galapagos penguins (the only location in the south-eastern corner) and maybe even with the almost extinct Charles mockingbird.

Programme:

AM: After breakfast, a wet landing on the greeny beach of Cormorant Point and walk to a powdery coral sand beach on the other side of the peninsula (easy level; about 1,5km/1mi). En route you can observe the American flamingo lagoon from different viewpoints.

Back on-board we will navigate about 45 min to Champion Islet. There are fantastic snorkelling opportunities here; or if this is not your thing or if you prefer bird watching, you can take a dinghy-ride instead.

PM: While having lunch we will navigate back to Post Office Bay (about 1hr). Post your holiday greetings in the historical barrel, one of three nearby visitor's sites on Floreana's north coast (short displacement, wet landing) and relax. Post your holiday greetings in the historical barrel at Post Office Bay, one of three nearby visitor's sites on Floreana's north coast (short displacement, wet landing) and relax. Explore by inflatable dinghy, another submerged crater rim around the bay of Baroness Lookout.

Overnight navigation: After dinner San Jose will cross-over to Santiago (about 7 hours north).

Additional options scuba-diving: choice out of 9 nearby diving sites (All levels)

AM: Cormorant Point (Floreana)

The peninsula of Cormorant Point forms the extreme north cape of Floreana, which is pockmarked by a number of smaller volcanic cones and covered by tropical dry forest (predominantly palo santo). Please don't expect to spot the flightless cormorant at Cormorant Point. This emblematic example of evolution lives exclusively in the remote west of the Galapagos on Fernandina and Isabela (Route A). Instead, its salty lagoon is one of the best places on the Galapagos to observe a breeding colony of American flamingos. However, when breeding is done and the lagoon dries up, these exotic birds tend to be on the move to look for shrimps and algae from other saline lakes.

At the landing beach you will be welcomed by a small Galapagos sea lion-colony. The green sand contains a high percentage of glassy olivine crystals that have been blown out by the surrounding tuff cones. The 'flour sand' beach on the south side of the peninsula feels very smooth on your feet; this is pulverized by parrotfishes. Schools of sting rays in the surf love using this powdery sand to hide themselves, and Pacific green turtles come ashore to bury their eggs in it at night (first months of the year). Next morning you can notice their tracks from the dunes, or eventually still catch an exhausted, delayed one, crawling back to sea.

AM: Champion Islet (Floreana)

Bottlenose dolphins frequently escort our passage to Champion Islet and you can see them from nearby jumping the wakes! This is just the prelude of an unforgettable snorkelling excursion. Galapagos sea lions turn into playful acrobats underwater – without a doubt the number one attraction. There are also lots of reef fish, and perhaps a Pacific green turtle.

An inflatable dinghy ride along the shoreline of this islet offers sightings of lots of sea birds that are endemic to the archipelago, including Galapagos penguins (at its extreme eastern distribution border; in danger of extinction), blue-footed boobies, magnificent frigatebirds and red-billed tropicbirds. swallow-tailed gulls and lava herons.

Most desired on every serious birder's wish list is to get a glimpse of the Charles mockingbird on top of prickly pear cacti (take binoculars!). To the unschooled eye this unique variant may look hardly any different to their relatives on other islands, but it is almost extinct (less than 250 birds, depending on dry or wet years); so you need some luck to spot it from the beach. This mockingbird is a scientific and historic key species because it put Darwin on track of his theory of 'adaptive radiation'.

PM: Post Office Bay & Baroness Lookout (Floreana)

Bring your unstamped postcards and post them in the peculiar barrel on this historic site. Together with James Bay (Santiago) this used to be a popular base to complement stocks. The present barrel commemorates the improvised mail service between British 16th century whalers and poachers. Returning vessels also picked up letters for home delivery. Finally this post box became the termination of the flourishing British whaling industry in this region (Moby Dick), because it let the American frigate USS Essex easily locate and hijack British whalers during the Anglo-American War (1812-1815).

The arm of a submerged tuff cone protects the turquoise bay at Baroness Lookout. Besides Galapagos sea lions, Pacific green turtles and golden cownose rays you might spot Galapagos penguins! This is the only place in the south-eastern archipelago where some penguins reside; the best chances however will be tomorrow on Bartolomé or in the remote west on Fernandina and Isabela (Route A).

Climb the miniature basaltic cone of Baroness Lookout and dream away at the paradisiacal coast-scape. This viewpoint was the favourite spot of one of Floreana's first colonists, the eccentric Baroness and self-proclaimed 'Empress of Galapagos' Eloisa von Wagner Bosquet, who even built her house a few metres behind. She and one of her lovers were the first in a series of mysterious disappearings and deaths in the 1930s.

Day 4 – Monday

After quite a long stretch northward, San Jose has anchored between two unique sites. Enjoy the famous, wild romantic panorama of Bartolomé and make a 'moonwalk' on the barren lava flow of Sullivan Bay. The forces that have created these islands will impress you forever. Surrounding coral reefs give a second chance to meet endangered Galapagos penguins, and whilst snorkelling you might even encounter these agile hunters fishing!

Programme:

AM: Another full day, largely dedicated to volcanism. After breakfast you will make a not yet too hot moonwalk across the solidified lava flow (guided walk, easy level; ca. 1,5km/1mi). You will be welcomed aboard with a juice before snorkelling.

PM: After 15 minutes of navigation to approach nearby Bartolomé you can enjoy your lunch buffet and prepare for fantastic shallow water snorkelling at the foot of Pinnacle Rock (alternative: walking around or relaxing on the beach).

As soon as the hottest hours have passed you will climb the stairs of Bartolomé's Summit Trail, which is rewarded with panoramic views (guided walk, moderate level; about 800m/0.5 mi; 114m/375ft altitude difference).

Navigation: After dinner we will sail to the north coast of Santa Cruz (about 2:30 hrs south).

Additional options scuba-diving: Bartolomé or Cousin Rocks (both advanced)

AM: Sullivan Bay (Santiago)

Setting foot at the lava stream covering Sullivan Bay is like landing on the moon. The desolate, stretched-out fields seem mostly lifeless, but there is enough to see on this highly popular site amongst photographers. Graphical bas-reliefs of rope-lava in the crust are unique to the Galapagos and Hawaii.

There is even some life! Pacific green turtles seasonally bury eggs in the tiny white sand beach, where you may also encounter crabs, a strayed blue heron or oystercatcher. On the lava flow only sparse pioneer vegetation such as lava cacti and carpetweed can hold. You might encounter a lava lizard, locusts (!) or a small snake species (Galapagos racer) hunting for them.

The barely eroded lava flow seems to have been solidified for short, and suggests that you are just able to set foot on it. The baking sun completes the sensation of heat. The winding and rippled pahoehoe rope-lava has preserved intriguing traces that tell flaming stories about vaporised leatherleaf trees and miniature cones of volcanic glass.

Distinctive tuff cones pockmark the new-formed lunatic landscape. Their rusty, oxidised colours and vegetation reveal that these are from an older generation. Originally these were volcano islets on their own that have become part of Santiago during the latest eruption (1897), when the hot flood of ooze filled up large parts of the bay, which is the black crust you walk on. For the time being only the opposite islet of Bartolomé escaped from incorporation. Ecologically these cones can still be considered as islands, though no longer surrounded by sea, but by wide infertile lava fields.

PM: Bartolome

The wild romantic volcano islet of Bartolomé is among the youngest of the islands, and on a geological scale just recently born out of fire. Although tiny (only 120ha/300ac) and at first sight lifeless, Bartolomé offers some of the wildest landscapes and best panoramas in the entire archipelago. To enjoy the postcard view of the idyllic 'Pinnacle Bay' you have to climb the stairs to the viewpoint on top of the island (114m/375ft). Suddenly enter a dramatic world of threatening (though extinguished) nearby spatter cones, craters, and lightweight lava droplets that have been spewed out by fiery fountains. The Summit Trail is also ideal for witnessing how scanty pioneer vegetation such as lava cactus is struggling to take root in the bare virgin lava fields.

From the summit you suddenly face a second, paradisiacal world; Galapagos' landmark 'Pinnacle Rock' towers prominently over an isthmus with crescent sand beaches on each side, and dunes with evergreen mangrove bushes in-between.

Underwater, a third, completely distinctive world opens up to you, resembling a tropical aquarium. Its shallow, clear and warm waters are ideal for snorkelling between coral-grinding parrot fishes, shoals of surgeonfishes, harmless whitetip reef sharks and Pacific green turtles. If you are lucky you can even catch the sight of fishing Galapagos penguins.

Day 5 – Tuesday

Even at the very end of your cruise the Galapagos Islands keep surprising. On this last morning you will explore the evergreen mangle forest of Black Turtle Cove, and feel for a while as if you are in the Amazon rainforest instead of at the north coast of Santa Cruz. These lagoons and adventurous creeks teem with marine and birdlife, and (seasonally) with mating turtles and sharks.

Programme:

AM: Shortly after your wake-up call and a snack you will leave for this farewell dinghy-ride. After breakfast it's time to say goodbye, leave the yacht and continue to the airport (unless you have booked an extension on the A-route).

AM: Black Turtle Cove (Santa Cruz)

The ancient mangle at Black Turtle Cove has grown out to forest proportions and forms the backdrop for a distinct adventure. You might even feel for a while as if you're in the Amazon rainforest instead

of close to sea; though on a closer look vegetation mainly exists of red mangroves with characteristic aerial roots that let them survive in salty and brackish water. By inflatable dinghy we will explore the calm emerald lagoon and enter the surrounding shallow creeks of these salt-water marshes. The outboard engine is sometimes turned off, so that you can enjoy the ambience at its fullest. You have to keep your eyes peeled when looking around and staring into the crystal clear waters to observe all the life that is flying and swimming around.

You can spot silently hunting lava herons on the banks and brown pelicans nesting on top of the mangroves. Various species of ray and shark come to this nutritious cradle to give birth; scaloped hammerhead sharks come back to the place where they're born and their babies tend to be close to the surface. Pacific green turtles (black turtles was their former name) visit this cove in their reproduction season (November-January); if you're lucky you can catch them mating on the surface! Afterwards their eggs are deposited on coral sand beaches along this north-western coastline of Santa Cruz.

AM: Transfer to Baltra airport

Assisted by the naturalist guide and some crew members the dinghy will bring you and your luggage to Baltra, where we take the airport shuttle. 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!