

GALAPAGOS ISLANDS - FOLLOWING IN DARWIN'S FOOTSTEPS (FROM SAN CRISTOBAL)



INTRODUCTION

Discover the unique and outstanding flora and fauna in one of the most stunning places on Earth, the Galapagos Islands. With this unforgettable journey you will follow in Darwin's footsteps and discover some of the most beautiful beaches, snorkel and swim in crystal blue waters and spot lots of exotic species on land and in the sea. You will visit the Charles Darwin Research Station to see the Giant Tortoise and Land Iguana Breeding and Rearing Program as well as the Galapagos National Park Visitor Centre that presents a comprehensive exhibit of the islands' natural history, human interaction, ecosystems, flora & fauna.

This trip is a must for the nature lover and for those who want to get back to nature for a memorable adventure.

ITINERARY

TRIP CODE

GATSFD8

DEPARTURE

Selected Saturdays.

DURATION

8 Days

LOCATIONS

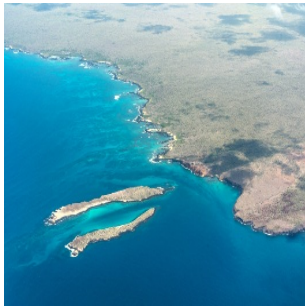
Galapagos Islands,
Ecuador




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DAY 1: Arrive Galapagos island & Bachas Beach

Your day begins with an early morning flight to the Galapagos Islands from Quito, with a brief stop in Guayaquil. You will arrive at Baltra Island Airport and pass through Galapagos National Park inspection before meeting your National Park Guide. After a short bus ride to the waterfront, you will board a panga dinghy and transfer to the Grace yacht. Your luggage will be transferred to your cabin by the crew. Once settled in, you will gather with your guide for a safety review and itinerary overview as the Grace sets off into the archipelago. Your first stop is Las Bachas, located at the north end of Santa Cruz Island. The area consists of two sandy white-coral beaches that are significant egg-laying sites for sea turtles. The name "Las Bachas" is said to have originated from the mispronunciation of the word "barges" by the first settlers to the area after the US military discarded two barges on the beaches during WWII. However, there are other theories regarding the name's origin, including the indentations left in the sand by egg-laying sea turtles and their hatchlings. You will go ashore to the white sandy beach and observe patrolling blue-footed boobies before taking a brief walk to a lagoon where pink flamingos and other bird species can be spotted. Today's snorkeling and swimming will be from the beach, with warmer waters than other places in the Galapagos.



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DAY 2: Darwin bay and Genovesa island

In the morning, we explore Genovesa Island, starting with a visit to Prince Phillip's Steps, named after a visit from the British Monarch in 1964. The landing begins at the base of a 25-meter stairway, leading to a narrow stretch of land that opens out onto a small plateau. Here, we can observe red-footed boobies nesting in the bushes, while their masked booby cousins dot the surface of the surrounding scrublands. After crossing through the sparse vegetation, we reach a broad lava field that extends towards sea cliffs forming the island's southern edge. This area is an ideal nesting ground for storm petrels, and we can observe two species, the Galapagos petrel and the wooden petrel. However, this area is also a prime hunting ground for short-eared owls, which prey on the returning petrels. After a two-hour hike, we return to the vessel to change into our wetsuits for some snorkeling at one of the best sites in the islands. In the afternoon, we continue our exploration of Genovesa Island by snorkeling in the protected southern bay of the Tower's caldera, where we can observe a variety of tropical fish, including oversize parrot, unicorn, angel, and hogfish, as well as schools of perch, surgeon fish, and butterfly fish. This area is also excellent for kayaking and observing nesting birds. After lunch, we head to Darwin Bay, where we land on the white coral sands and are surrounded by the bustling activity of great frigate birds. We can observe puffball chicks and their proud papas, as well as yellow-crowned herons and lava herons. Farther along, we discover a stunning series of sheltered pools set into a rocky outcrop, which leads up to a cliff overlooking the ocean-filled caldera. Here, pairs of swallow-tailed gulls, the only nocturnal gulls in the world, can be seen nesting at the cliff's edge. This area is also a great place to go deep-water snorkeling, where we can spot hammerheads and large manta rays if we are lucky. As the sun sets, we leave Tower Island and set out across the archipelago to the far western islands, keeping an eye out for giant manta rays in the inner bay. Tower Island, with its ocean-filled caldera and stunning birdlife, could easily serve as a film set for a remote secret submarine base.



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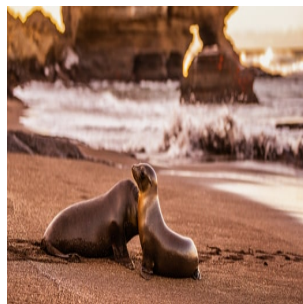
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DAY 3: Puerto Egas and Espumilla beach

In the morning, we will venture along the northwestern shore of Santiago Island towards South James Bay (Puerto Egas). This landing site offers access to three distinct locations. The first landing spot is on a black beach with fascinating eroded rock formations in the inland. A trail then crosses the dry interior eastward and ascends to the edge of an extinct volcanic crater. Cracks in the crater allow seawater to seep in, which dries to form salt deposits that were mined in the past. Darwin recorded his visit to South James Bay in Voyage of the Beagle. Another path leads south, where hikers will come across a series of crystal-clear grottos that were formed from broken lava tubes. These grottos are home to sea lions and tropical fish, and is the best place to see fur sea lions lazing on the rocks by the grottos. Heading further north from the landing, visitors will find another path that leads to a series of inland lagoons that are home to flamingos. Bird enthusiasts will have the chance to spot vermilion flycatchers, Galapagos hawks and the tool-wielding woodpecker finch. Puerto Egas is a great spot for taking pictures, especially during dawn or sunset, where the light is perfect for photography. The lava and the black sand make the animals acquire a surreal and lovely quality. The marine iguanas in the area resemble Samurai warriors and can easily be seen grazing on seaweed in the more shallow pools of the grotto. James Bay is a unique snorkeling site that can be accessed from the shore instead of a dinghy. The sandy beach slopes off into a rocky bottom where sea turtles like to hide by blending in with the rocks. However, these rocks move and will swim right up to you. At certain times of the year, large schools of golden rays and spotted eagle rays also glide by, and both fur sea lions and California sea lions can occasionally be seen passing through. In the afternoon, visitors will head to Espumilla Beach to look for birds instead of fresh water. The short walk up the beach leads inland to a mangrove that is typically inhabited by the Common stilts. Beyond the mangroves is a brackish lagoon where flocks of pink flamingos and white-cheeked pintails wade in search of mollusks. The trail then passes over a tiny hilltop through a sparse Palo Santo forest before looping back to the beach. Galapagos finches and Vermilion flycatchers inhabit the area. The cliffs surrounding the cove have formed tuff formations that create a natural sculpture gallery rising from the sea. These formations include the Monk and Elephant Rock. Hundreds of seabirds look down upon the gallery from surrounding cliffs. Buccaneer Cove and Espumilla Beach offer one of the more challenging kayaking routes in the Galapagos for paddlers looking for a challenge.



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DAY 4: Vicente rock and Tagus cove

This morning explore Punta Vicente Roca on Isabela Island, situated at the northern part of the island and formed by the remnants of an ancient volcano. Here, two turquoise coves provide a well-protected bay from the ocean swells, making it a popular anchorage for panga rides along the cliff. This area is home to masked and blue-footed boobies, flightless cormorants, and sea lions, and it is one of the most sought-after dive spots in the archipelago due to the upwelling of coldwater currents. One of the coves can only be accessed via an underwater passage, which leads to a hidden cove where sea lions laze on the beach. The area also offers deep water snorkeling with sea lions, turtles, spotted eagle rays, and even manta rays. Tagus Cove, also on Isabela Island, named after a British warship that moored here in 1814. Historically, the cove was used as an anchorage for pirates and whalers, and their ships' names can still be found carved into the rock above the landing (though this practice is now prohibited). The cove's quiet waters make for an ideal panga ride beneath its sheltered cliffs, where blue-footed boobies, brown noddies, pelicans, and noddy terns make their nests, and flightless cormorants and penguins inhabit the lava ledges. A wooden stairway rises to the trail entrance for a view of Darwin Lake, a perfectly round saltwater crater barely separated from the ocean but above sea level. The cove and the lake are formed from one, partially flooded, tuff cone on the eastern edge of giant Darwin volcano. The cove provides an excellent opportunity for snorkeling with a carpet of green algae covering the floor of the cove, where marine iguanas and numerous sea turtles graze and glide. It is also a great site to snorkel with Galapagos penguins and rare flightless cormorants. Kayakers can enjoy a paddle around the cove, offering excellent views of nesting birds on the cliff walls above.

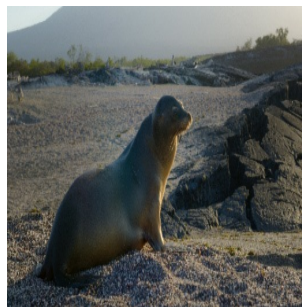


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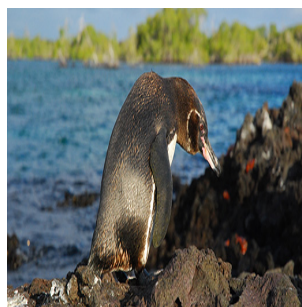
DAY 5: Punta Espinoza and Urbina bay

Explore Punta Espinosa on Fernandina Island, the youngest and westernmost island in the Galapagos. Here, see a variety of unique Galapagos species up close, including penguins, zayapas crabs, herons, marine iguanas, sea lions, flightless cormorants, and more. Snorkeling off the point offers a chance to see these creatures underwater, as well as the opportunity to spot dolphins and whales in the Bolivar Channel. This afternoon, visit Urbina Bay on Isabela Island, where a wet landing takes you to a gently sloping beach that was uplifted by up to 13 feet in 1954. Walk amongst boulder-sized coral heads, mollusks, and other organisms that once formed the ocean floor. See giant land iguanas and sea turtles nesting on the beach. Snorkel amongst marine creatures, or relax on shore, being careful not to disturb the sea turtle nests. Enjoy sunset in the Bolivar Channel, surrounded by the towering shield volcanoes of Fernandina and Isabela, while spotting whales and dolphins and enjoying happy hour at the Sky lounge on the upper rear deck of the boat.



DAY 6: Elizabeth bay and Punta Moreno

This morning, we will visit Elizabeth Bay on Isabela Island where we encounter a rocky islet housing a colony of Galapagos Penguins and witness the grandeur of the Sierra Negra volcano. In this sensitive habitat, we explore the bay aboard pangas, witnessing the serene waters lined with mangroves and diverse marine life including eagle rays and sea turtles. We get up close to a cluster of mangroves to find tree lions in the form of playful sea lions. After lunch on board the Grace, we continue our journey to Punta Moreno, one of the least visited sites in the Galapagos. This landing site offers a unique opportunity to observe Galapagos penguins, flightless cormorants, marine iguanas, and a range of other wildlife, set against the backdrop of a pahoehoe lava field. We explore the area on foot, crossing the fields of broken lava, discovering natural pools and coastal lagoons, where we encounter diverse birdlife and marine creatures such as reef sharks, green sea turtles, and stingrays. Snorkeling off the rocky bottom offers a chance to see a variety of fish, including bumped head parrot fish, king angel fish, and Pacific creole fish.



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DAY 7: Tintoreras and Santa Cruz island

In the morning, we will explore the beautiful Isabela Island starting with a visit to Las Tintoreras, a group of small islets that offer a unique opportunity to observe an incredible diversity of marine life. Here, we will find sea lions, Galapagos turtles, and iguanas, as well as skates, sharks, penguins, sea cucumbers, urchins, and many other native flora and fauna species. The peaceful interactions between these animals make for an unforgettable experience, and we may even question who is really watching who. Afterwards, we will continue to Cuevas del Sucre, an incredible system of lava formations, caves, and tunnels located in an endemic forest. This fascinating landscape is a testament to the volcanic origins of the Galapagos Islands and provides an opportunity to learn about the natural history of the area. Before concluding the morning, we will visit a breeding station for the endemic giant tortoise, led by the National Park Service, and observe the incredible efforts being made to preserve this unique species. We will also have the chance to visit a hyper-saline lagoon frequented by flamingos and other wading and shore birds, offering yet another opportunity to witness the incredible diversity of life that calls the Galapagos home. In the afternoon, we will enjoy a relaxing navigation to Santa Cruz Island, one of the most visited islands in the archipelago. As we make our way through the crystal-clear waters, we can take in the stunning views of the surrounding landscape and observe the unique flora and fauna that call these waters home. With the sun setting on the horizon, this will be the perfect opportunity to reflect on the amazing experiences we have had so far and prepare for the adventures that await us in the days ahead.




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DAY 8: Depart Galapagos islands

In the morning, we bid farewell to the Grace and embark on a 40-minute bus ride to visit Los Gemelos on Santa Cruz Island. These two massive sinkholes were formed by collapsed lava tubes and are surrounded by a lush Scalesia forest, home to many endemic and native species including Darwin's famous finches and the vibrant vermillion flycatcher. The stark contrast between the marine desert coast and verdant highlands is most evident here, where it's possible to encounter rain even when the sun is shining just half an hour away at the coast. After exploring Los Gemelos, we continue our journey with a 20-minute bus ride to the Itabaca Channel. Here, we cross the channel and take a short bus ride to Baltra's airport to catch our flight home. The stunning beauty of the Galapagos Islands will remain with us, and we leave with unforgettable memories of our incredible adventure in this unique and awe-inspiring part of the world.



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INCLUSIONS & DETAILS

Accommodation	Cabin
Inclusions	Shipboard accommodation All meals whilst on board including snacks All shore excursions Guiding and lectures by Galapagos Naturalist Guide English-speaking Expedition team Use of snorkelling equipment and wetsuits Soft drinks, juice, coffee and tea throughout the cruise Exclusions Return airfares from mainland Ecuador Galapagos National Park Entrance Fee (US\$100 per person subject to change) Galapagos Transit Control Card (US\$20 per person subject to change) Visa Fees (if applicable) Travel insurance Gratuities for the crew Optional activities whilst on board Personal Expenses Bar consumption on board (All-inclusive packages available)
Difficulty Rating	1 - Easy
Single Surcharge	Available upon request

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Notes	Contact us for more details
Price Dependent upon	Seasons and availability

SUSTAINABILITY

Being environmentally accountable is a crucial part of our organisation. Chimu is currently striving towards using less paper, taking several initiatives to do so and tracking our progress along the way. Our goal: A paperless organisation. For this reason, all information given to you will be sent electronically. We encourage those who choose to travel with us to support our aspirations and actions and ask that you reconsider printing out documentation. To view these documents, you can download them to your iPad or portable computer before and during your trip.

Chimu is passionate and dedicated to sustainability measures and understands the crucial part sustainability plays within the tourism industry.

We use local guides and office staff to both maximise local employment opportunities and minimise carbon footprint. Local guides also ensure you benefit from the intimate knowledge, passion and culture of the country you’re visiting. Our guides are all highly qualified (most with university degrees) or equip with many years of experience and are paid above the standard wage. Whether it be our knowledgeable local guides, locally produced meals or the transport on tour, we do not use imported goods when local products are available. We aim to minimise our impact on the environment and give as much back as possible to the communities we work in.

Quasar undertake a number of sustainability initiatives to enhance their commitment as a responsible Galapagos operator. Quasar support the Charles Darwin Foundation, which supports undertakes a number of conservation and preservation efforts throughout the islands. In addition, Quasar also sponsor the Galapagos Scouts Program, educating local youth in the Galapagos and fostering their knowledge toward conservation, under the vision of educating the current youth toward the future conservation of the islands. In a more physical effort, groups are smaller to minimise the disruption on both the wildlife and native species and single-use plastics are removed from all vessels.

While visiting the many national parks, heritage sites, museums and landmarks our travellers are encouraged to explore whilst remaining culturally aware and sensitive. We further encourage you to buy appropriate souvenirs and discourage the buying of anything wrongfully made or taken from the environment i.e. shells and endangered species products. Information on how you can be environmentally conscious, and travel responsibly will be made available in our Travellers Guides and provided during your travels by guides and staff.

For more information on our sustainability policies, including how we are striving towards being a paperless organisation, click [HERE](#)

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