

ECUADOR - ESTRELLA



INTRODUCTION

Discover the beauty of the Galapagos Islands aboard the Estrella del Mar, a ship that allows you to cruise the Galapagos in style on this 10-day journey that takes you to the less visited western islands as well as the central and eastern parts of the archipelago. Encounter giant land tortoises, hike the Sierra Negra volcano, explore lava tunnels and discover the magical underwater world with its incredible marine life as you snorkel in the turquoise waters.

ITINERARY

DAY 1: Arrival transfer in Quito

On arrival, please make your way through to the Arrivals Hall where our representative will be waiting for you to transfer you to your hotel. He/she will be holding a sign with your name on it. Should you not be able to locate them, please refer to the front of your itinerary for emergency contact details of our representative office. Please note this service is with a driver only.



NO IMAGE
AVAILABLE

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SEV10LA

DEPARTURE

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29/12/2019

DURATION

10 Days

LOCATIONS

Galapagos Islands,
Ecuador



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DAY 1: Quito

Sitting at 2,850 metres above sea level high in the Andean foothills lies Quito, the capital of Ecuador. The city, a short distance from the Equator and with an amazing backdrop of snow-capped mountains, is known for its stunning colonial architecture and art-work. Founded in the 16th century on the ruins of an Inca city, Quito has one of the largest, least-altered and best-preserved historic centres in the Americas. It was declared a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site in 1978.



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DAY 2: Baltra Island & Santa Cruz

This morning you will be transferred early to the airport for your flight to the Galapagos Islands. On arrival in Baltra you will be met by your naturalist guide and transferred across Santa Cruz to Puerto Ayora where you will board the ship. Please note that the Consejo de Gobierno (Local Government Council) has implemented a system of Transit Control Cards at a fee of USD20 per person. This card must be purchased in CASH at a counter in Quito airport before boarding the flight to the Galapagos. Please ensure that you retain this card along with your passport as you will be required to present it on arrival in the Galapagos Islands. This applies to all tourists entering the Galapagos Islands and is a supplement to the existing National Park entry fee. It is the first of a number of initiatives to track, control, and maintain the sustainable tourism targets set out by the Galapagos National Park and the Ecuadorian government in an attempt to preserve the fragile environment of the archipelago. Please note that the Galapagos National Park charges a visitor fee of USD100, payable on arrival. This funds park maintenance and supervision in the Galapagos, as well as ecological study and conservation. The Galapagos Islands are located about 1000 kilometres (620 miles) off the Pacific coast of South America. The archipelago is comprised of 13 major islands and scores of islets that served as a living laboratory for Charles Darwin, the renowned evolution theorist. Long before Darwin arrived in the Galapagos, seafarers knew these isolated islands as home to some of the strangest and most wonderful wildlife imaginable, including birds that could swim but no longer fly, aquatic iguanas, dragon-like lizards left over from prehistoric times and the giant Galapagos tortoises for which the islands were named. This afternoon we head to the highlands of Santa Cruz Island and visit El Chato Reserve, to see giant land tortoises in the wild in their natural environment. We explore the reserve's lagoon and lava tunnels, keeping an eye out for owls that often roost in the entrances to the tunnels. The lava tunnels are massive underground lava tubes found throughout the island that extend several kilometres in some places. We return to the Estrella del Mar for our first night on board. Carrying only 16 passengers, the Estrella is modest yet surprisingly roomy. We sail overnight to ensure that you arrive refreshed and ready to explore a new destination each day.



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DAY 3: Chinese Hat & Rabida Islands

Today we visit Sombrero Chino (Chinese Hat) to observe the birdlife and sea lions and explore the lava flows and lava tunnels, followed by an excursion to Rábida to see the salt water lagoons. We land at the small island of Sombrero Chino, so called due to its unique shape, lying off the southern tip of Santiago. Here it is often possible to see Galapagos penguins. There is a large sea lion colony as well as many marine iguanas that can be seen on a guided walk amongst the beautiful volcanic scenery and along the spectacular white-coral sand beach. Explore the lava flows and lava tunnels before diving into the turquoise water to cool off and search for fish and sea turtles in the protected bay. This afternoon's excursion takes us to the red sand beaches of Isla Rábida. An abundance of birdlife frequents the island including pelicans, white-cheeked pintails, boobies and a number of species of finches. There are a number of trails here. A short trail leads to a saltwater lagoon and another trail goes past the lagoon to the interior, where the revered palo santo trees grow. When burned, the branches of this tree give off a pleasant aroma that wards off mosquitoes. Back at the beach you can observe the pelicans nesting among low-lying bushes and maybe watch parent pelicans returning with gullets full of fish for the noisy youngsters. There is the opportunity to snorkel here along a cliff wall that drops off into the water - one of the best deep-water snorkelling spots in the Galapagos.



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DAY 4: Isla Santiago

Today we visit Puerto Egas, Playa Espumilla and Buccaneer Cove on Santiago Island. Santiago Island has seen its share of human activity from whalers and pirates over the years, and despite the introduction of goats to the island many years ago, the wildlife of Santiago has otherwise flourished and provides outstanding viewing opportunities. The island boasts marine iguanas, sea lions, fur seals and both land and sea turtles. Here you can enjoy great wildlife viewing, both on land and in the water. Playa Espumilla is one of the most idyllic beaches in the Galapagos Islands, with thick mangroves as well as flamingo and sea turtle nesting sites. At Puerto Egas (also known as James Bay) we see a salt crater as well as a dark sand beach made up of eroded lava and tidal pools. We explore the spectacular shoreline where there are marine iguanas and Sally Lightfoot crabs with fur sea lions found further along the lava flow path. There are many shore birds to be seen here as well as reptiles and the beach is home to an abundance of wildlife. At Buccaneer Cove we cruise alongside the high cliffs and spectacular rock formations. Buccaneer Cove was once a favourite hideout for pirates as they restocked their boats with food and water. Here we may spot sea lions relaxing on the beach and sea birds nesting in the cove.



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DAY 5: Fernandina & Isabela Islands

This morning we visit Punta Espinoza on Fernandina, the youngest of the Galapagos Islands, home to a large colony of marine iguanas and a variety of bird species. There are a number of trails that can be followed including a path along the beach and across lava flows that provides a unique opportunity to explore one of the least-visited areas of the Galapagos archipelago. In the afternoon we make a visit to Urbina Bay, located at the base of Alcedo Volcano where we hike along a trail for views of the caldera, looking out for land iguanas along the way. This unique walk takes us along a vast marine reef that was raised out of the water during an uplift in 1950. Here we will see dried coral “sculptures” and other ocean formations. Urbina Bay is a great place to see flightless cormorants, brown pelicans, marine turtles, rays and vivid yellow land iguanas.



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DAY 6: Isabela Island

This morning sees us visiting Elizabeth Bay with its amazing marine life and bird viewing opportunities. We take a panga ride to explore the mangroves and shallows in search of wildlife such as sea turtles, rays and the flightless cormorant in the sheltered waters. We also keep a lookout for blue-footed boobies, Galapagos penguins and pelicans that feed on the abundant marine life. In the afternoon we land at Punta Moreno, a newly opened visitor site on the southwest coast of Isabela Island to see lava formations, flamingos and amazing views of the three most active volcanoes in the Galapagos Islands. We explore the interesting landscape, home to black lava flows and a unique system of brackish lagoons that attract a wide range of wildlife. We may see Darwin’s finches, Galapagos doves and Galapagos penguins. Punta Moreno boasts a panoramic viewpoint of three of Isabela’s imposing volcanoes - Alcedo, Sierra Negra and Cerro Azul.



DAY 7: Isabela Island

This morning we make an early landing in the small town of Puerto Villamil on Isabela Island before hiking to the rim of the 10km (6 mi) wide crater of the Sierra Negra Volcano, which has the largest basaltic caldera in the Galapagos. We trek across the lava fields and fumaroles with their moon-like landscape, enjoying spectacular views north towards Fernandina and the rest of Isabela Island. The volcano’s last eruption was in October 2005, making it the most recent eruption of the Galapagos. In the afternoon we visit Las Tintoreras and the tortoise breeding centre in the Puerto Villamil area. Las Tintoreras Bay is home to a colony of whitetip reef sharks. Here we take a panga across the bay to "Tintoreras Shark Alley" to observe the whitetip reef sharks found swimming in the channels between the rocks. We may also see pelicans, frigatebirds and diving blue-footed boobies as well as manta rays and rare Galapagos penguins, the only species found in the Galapagos and north of the Equator. We walk through the town’s wetlands to the Giant Tortoise Breeding Centre. We pass basking iguanas and flamingos, before heading into the forest to see the giant tortoises in their natural habitat at this reserve. These incredible animals were on their way to extinction in the late 1950’s and this program was established to protect these noble creatures.



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DAY 8: Santa Cruz

This morning we visit the Charles Darwin Research Centre on Santa Cruz Island. This is the second largest island in the Galapagos, with the largest population and with Puerto Ayora as its main town. It also boasts the most varied of the islands' vegetation zones including coastal, transition, scalesia, miconia and pampa. The Charles Darwin Research Station is located a short walk from the centre of the town. It is a science organization that was initiated in 1964, working to preserve the ecosystem of the Galapagos through the conservation efforts of scientists, researchers and volunteers. It also provides a study location for international scientists and training for Naturalist Guides. We tour the exhibition centre to see photo displays of recent volcanic eruptions, charts outlining geological formations and drawings of the evolutionary development of endemic species. The station is also a great place to observe many species of tortoises and land iguanas in captivity, brought back from the brink of extinction. Here you can see the famous Galapagos tortoise up close. A corral houses adult Galapagos tortoises and there is a nursery in which the young are cared for until around age three when their shells have hardened. **Please note: The Charles Darwin Research Station has partially closed until December 2016. Groups affected will visit the highlands to see the giant tortoises in the wild.** After lunch on board, we hike to the beautiful beach at Tortuga Bay. Here you can relax on the white sand or rent a kayak and search for rays and turtles in the shallow waters. Tortuga Bay (Turtle Bay) is a great place to see sea turtles, sea lions, marine iguanas, pelicans, flamingos and lava gulls which are endemic to the islands and commonly found along the shores. The two beaches at Tortuga Bay are separated by red mangroves. You may see tintoreras sharks, turtles and manta rays in the shallow waters. There is the opportunity to explore the mangroves by kayak. As you paddle through the waters, look out for the wide variety of marine life, including colourful reef fish, rays and sea turtles.



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DAY 9: San Cristobal & Quito

San Cristóbal is the easternmost island of the Galapagos and also one of the oldest. Its principal town is Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, the capital of the Galapagos. We visit the Interpretation Centre where you can learn about the Galapagos Islands from the natural history of the archipelago and their volcanic origins through to their ecosystems, flora, fauna and today’s conservation efforts. The Human History exhibit provides information on the discovery of the Galapagos Islands and their colonisation. After the visit you are transferred to the airport for your flight to Quito. On arrival there is a transfer to the group hotel with time to enjoy one last night in Ecuador’s historic capital.



DAY 10: Transfer to the airport for onward destination

You will be collected from your hotel at the appropriate time and transferred to the airport for your onward flight.



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INCLUSIONS & DETAILS

Accommodation	Standard
Inclusions	<p>9nts in the Galápagos Islands aboard the Estrella del Mar</p> <p>Flights to and from the Galápagos Islands</p> <p>Certified Galápagos National Park Service guide</p> <p>All landings, excursions, and transportation. Snorkelling equipment</p> <p>Visit to a wildlife interpretation centre.</p> <p>All meals while on board, (Allow USD75-100 for meals not included. Drinks and tips while on the yacht are extra)</p> <p>Hotels (2 nts), aboard the Estrella del Mar in twin-share cabins (7 nts).</p> <p>Local flight, Estrella del Mar motorized yacht, van, Zodiac, private bus.</p> <p>Galápagos National Park Service guide while in the islands.</p> <p>Small group experience; Max 16, avg 12</p>

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Difficulty Rating	2 (light adventure)
Single Surcharge	Available upon request
Notes	Contact us for more details
Price Dependent upon	Season and availability

SUSTAINABILITY

Chimu Adventures undertakes a number of sustainability measures within its operations including:

- 1) Only using local guides and office staff to both maximise local employment opportunities and minimise carbon footprints. Local guides also ensure you benefit from the intimate knowledge, passion and culture of the country you're visiting.
- 2) Where possible, using locally owned and operated boutique hotels to maximise the return to the local community.
- 3) Chimu's "Pass it on" programme has provided funding to hundreds of local community projects in Latin America. Our aim is to empower local communities, helping them to develop their own infrastructure for the future. Since 2006, we have been working with Kiva (a well-known Non-Governmental Organisation), providing hundreds of loans to local businesses all over South America.
- 4) In our pre tour information we provide a range of tips and advice on how to minimise your impact on both local environments and communities.
- 5) Chimu Adventures' offices also take a number of sustainability measures including carbon offsets for company vehicles and most staff travel. Chimu Adventure's internal processes are also structured to create a paperless office and to reduce waste. There are also internal programmes to help staff minimise their carbon footprint such as our staff bike purchase assistance plan which encourages office staff to commute to work via bicycle. Currently almost half of our office based staff commute to work via bicycle.

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