

ECUADOR - BEYOND DARWIN'S FOOTSTEPS (FROM SAN CRISTOBAL)



TRIP CODE

ECQBDSC

DEPARTURE

Selected Saturdays

DURATION

8 Days

LOCATIONS

Ecuador



INTRODUCTION


A Galapagos cruise is the ultimate foray into the natural world. This eight-day cruise aboard the MY Grace will take you and just 17 other passengers on a journey through volcanic scenes and turquoise ocean to kingdoms where wildlife reigns supreme. Starting on the island of San Cristobal, Darwin's first port of call in 1835, before sailing to Hood, Floreana (with its history of pirates, whalers and convicts), Santa Cruz, Jervis, Bartolome, North Seymour and Baltra. Sailing on a small vessel such as this transports you to the lesser visited pockets of the archipelago where it is just you and the elements. Expect unrivalled marine and bird life and other worldly scenery.

ITINERARY

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DAY 1: Saturday, San Cristobal & Lobos Island


Take a flight from Quito or Guayaquil to San Cristobal. You will be met at the airport by your National Park guide and driven to the pier to board the M/Y Grace. San Cristobal was the first island Darwin visited when he arrived in 1835. He reported encountering a pair of giant tortoises feeding on cactus during that outing. It is also the place where cultural activities take place, including theatre, exhibitions and workshops. From the Interpretation Center, a short trail arrives at Frigate Bird Hill, where both “magnificent-frigates” and “great-frigates” can be seen in the same colony. Shortly after you will arrive at Lion Dormido, also known as Kicker Rock, a spectacular formation that rises 152 meters (500 feet) out of the Pacific. It takes the form of a sleeping lion, hence it’s Spanish name. To the southeast of Kicker Rock lies Isla Lobos. The tiny island is separated from much larger San Cristobal by a narrow channel and little bay. This basalt island is home to a noisy population of frolicking and barking beasts. It is also a nesting place for blue-footed boobies and an excellent spot for snorkeling with sea lions. After walking the trail for some baby sea lion and booby watching amidst the sands beneath the salt bushes we have a real treat in store. We change into our snorkeling gear for some swimming with sea lions! Your afternoon ends as we head south back to Puerto Baquerizo Moreno.

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DAY 2: Sunday, Punta Suarez & Gardner Bay

The quantity and variety of wildlife at Punta Suarez is remarkable. Sea lions surf the waves beyond the breakwater landing, and tiny pups are known to greet your toes upon arrival. A few steps inland is a colorful variety of marine iguana in the Galapagos. They nap in communal piles or cling to the rocks for warmth. The trail then takes us beside the western edge of the island where masked boobies (also known as Nazca boobies) nest along the cliff's edge. The trail descends to a rocky beach before rising to an open area where you may see a large gathering of nesting blue-foot boobies. Both lava and swallow-tailed gulls, with their red ringed eyes, sit atop the cliffs in company with marine iguanas. On the northeastern shore of Hood, Gardner Bay offers a magnificent long white sandy beach, where colonies of sea lions laze in the sun, sea turtles swim offshore and inquisitive mockingbirds boldly investigate new arrivals. You will be lured from the powdery white sand into the turquoise water for a swim, but just a little further off-shore the snorkeling by Gardner Island offers peak encounters with playful young sea lions and schools of surprisingly large tropical fish, including yellow tailed surgeonfish, king angelfish and bump-head parrot fish. The young sea lions like to snack and play along Gardner Island's sea cliff. Sleepy white-tipped reef sharks can also be seen napping on the bottom. Gardner Bay and Islet also offer inviting waters for those interested in kayaking.

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DAY 3: Monday, Post Office Bay & Punta Cormorant

Floreana has had a colorful history: Pirates, whalers, convicts and a small band of somewhat peculiar colonists—a self proclaimed Baroness among them—who chose a Robinson Crusoe existence that ended in death and mystery. Today roughly a hundred Ecuadorians inhabit the island. In 1793 British whalers set up a barrel as the island’s post office, to send letters home on passing ships. The tradition continues to this day, simply by dropping a post card into the barrel without a stamp. You’ll have a chance to continue the traditions by sending your own card and picking up others. Punta Cormorant offers two highly contrasting beaches; the strand where we land is composed of volcanic olivine crystals, giving it a greenish tint that glitters in the sun. You will also visit Flour Beach. This beach was formed by the erosion of coral skeletons. Between the two beaches, in a basin formed by the surrounding volcanic cones, is a hyper-saline lagoon frequented by flamingoes, pintails, stilts and other wading birds.

DAY 4: Tuesday, Darwin Station & Highlands

This morning we visit Puerto Ayora, home to both the Galapagos National Park Service Headquarters and Charles Darwin Research Station, the center of the great restorative efforts taking place in the park, and a UNESCO World Heritage site. Here we visit the Giant Tortoise Breeding & Rearing Program run by the research station, which began by rescuing the remaining 14 tortoises on the island of Española in 1970. This program has restored the population of animals there to over 1,000 today. You will see many of these animals. This is where famed tortoise, Lonesome George, lived out his last days as the last of his particular race of tortoise. You will also visit the Santa Cruz Highlands, where the sparse, dry coastal vegetation transitions to lush wet fields and forests overgrown with moss and lichens. Our afternoon destination is the Wild Tortoise Reserve where we will have chances to track and view these friendly ancient creatures in their natural setting. This extends to the adjacent pasturelands, where farmers give tortoise safe quarter in exchange for allowing paying visitors to see them.

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DAY 5: Wednesday, Las Bachas & Sombrero Chino

At the north end of Santa Cruz Island is Las Bachas, comprised of two sandy white-coral beaches that are major egg-laying sites for sea turtles. During WWII the US military discarded two barges on the beaches. When the first settlers to the area following the war arrived they mispronounced barges as bachas, resulting in the name. We go ashore on the white sandy beach and are greeted by patrolling blue-footed boobies. A brief walk inland takes us to a lagoon where pink flamingos are often found along with great blue herons, common stilts, brown noddys, white-cheek pintail ducks and migratory birds. Snorkelling today is from the beach and you can also enjoy a swim in these waters which are typically warmer than in other places in the Galápagos. Tiny Sombrero Chino (Chinese Hat) Island is named for the resemblance its shape has to a traditional Chinese Coolie's hat. Our next visitor's site is off limits to larger groups and day boats, making Sombrero Chino one of the least visited sites in the central islands. Our landing site is a tiny crescent shaped cove with sandy white beach cradled between black lava rocks and the crystal turquoise waters of the channel. A sea lion colony likes to rest on the warm white sands, while the rockier sections of the coast are alive with fiery colored sally lightfoot crabs. Marine iguanas sun themselves atop the rocks after foraging for algae in the channel. A quarter mile (400 meter) trail sets off into the island's volcanic interior to explore its rock formations, including excellent examples of pahoehoe lava resembling black rock ropes. You'll also have a chance to see the penguins during a panga ride. Galapagos penguins are the only species of penguin you'll find living north of the nearby equator.

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DAY 6: Thursday, Rabida & Sullivan Bay


At the geologic center of the archipelago is Rabida. Rabida presents an island of a different color with its deep red sandy beach and equally red towering cliffs. Even the starfish are red. The flanks of a sloping volcanic cinder-cone rise sharply from the coast. A noisy colony of sea lions inhabits these scarlet shores. This is also the best place in the islands to get close to nesting brown pelicans raising their chicks in precariously positioned nests atop the saltbush. A short trail inland offers observations of land birds including Galapagos dove, cactus finch and the large ground-finch. Rabida also offers a nice kayaking route. The route passes beneath the island's towering red cliffs. This is a great place to spot sea turtles from your kayak.. Make sure you to stop kayaking when you reach the red diamond shaped sign where there is a large rock where both blue footed and masked boobies like to perch. Our next landing site is Sullivan Bay, named for the channel in which we are anchored. If you created a partnership between well know glass artist Dale Chihuly and mother nature the result would be Sullivan Bay. Back in 1897 the island fired up its own internal kiln giving birth to a field of pahoehoe ("rope-like" in Hawaiian) lava reaching out into the channel toward Bartolome.

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DAY 7: Friday, Bartolomé Island & North Seymour


Bartolomé is famous for Pinnacle Rock, a towering spearheaded obelisk that rises from the ocean's edge and is the best known landmark in the Galapagos, which served as a back drop in the film Master & Commander. Galápagos penguins, the only species of penguin found north of the equator walk precariously along narrow volcanic ledges at its base. Sea lions snooze on rocky platforms, ready to slide into the water to play with passing snorkelers. Below the surface, shoals of tropical fish dodge in and out of the rocks past urchins, sea stars and anemones. A perfectly crescent sandy beach lies just to the east of the pinnacle and across a narrow isthmus another beach mirrors this one to the south. Sea turtles use both beaches and another to the west of the Pinnacle as nesting sites and can sometimes be seen wading back out into the shallow water near the shore, or resting in the sand recovering from the arduous task of digging nests, laying eggs and covering them over. North Seymour Island was lifted from the ocean floor by a seismic event, and its origins as a seabed give the island its low, flat profile. Cliffs only a few meters high form much of the shoreline, where swallow-tailed gulls sit perched in ledges. A tiny forest of silver-grey Palo Santo trees stands just above the landing, usually without leaves, waiting for the rain to bring them into bloom. Blue-footed boobies' nest on either side of the trail where mating pairs perform their courtship dance. You may be fortunate to witness flocks of brown pelicans and blue-footed boobies hunting schools of fish. Frigate birds with wingspans of up to 5 feet soar overhead.

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DAY 8: Saturday, Black Turtle Cove & Baltra

This last morning of our voyage through the Galapagos we visit Black Turtle Cove. Located on the northern shore of Santa Cruz. Four species of mangrove crowd from the shore out into the lagoon, which stretches almost a mile inland. As we drift through the quiet waters in our dinghy, we are likely to see spotted eagle rays and cow nosed or golden rays, which swim in a diamond formation. White-tipped reef sharks can be seen beneath the boat and Pacific green sea turtles come to the surface for air and to mate. Sea birds, including brown pelicans, blue herons and lava herons, come to feed in the cove which has also been declared a "Turtle Sanctuary". It's time to begin your journey home as we set sail for nearby the Baltra Island. During WWII the island was a US Air Force base and one can still see the remnants of the old foundations left behind from that era once ashore. It doesn't take long for the M/Y Grace to navigate north along Baltra's western shore to the island's port. You will then disembark the ship where you will be transferred to the airport for your flight home or onward to the next adventure!


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INCLUSIONS & DETAILS

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

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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

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carbon offsets for company vehicles and most staff travel. Chimu Adventure's internal processes are also structures 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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