

PM – North Seymour

This islet is one of the most visited sites, and it is teeming with birdlife. An easy circular path takes you through the archipelago's most extensive colonies of blue-footed boobies and frigate birds. At the beginning of the breeding season, adult frigatebird-males blow up their vivid red pouches to impressive football-sized balloons. This is one of the few spots where you can compare the magnificent and the great frigatebird breeding next to each other.

Day 2 – Tuesday

AM – Prince Philip's Steps (Genovesa)

Before landing, you will take an inflatable dinghy-ride along the eastern arm of the caldera. As we approach, the soaring 25m / 80ft high walls become overwhelming. Sometimes, a Galapagos fur seal is resting or a seabird is nesting on one of the ledges at the base.

You will then have to hike and overcome the steep stairs from the landing dock to a bush of palo santo shrubs on top. Red-footed boobies gratefully use these scarce nesting places; so that they don't have to nest on the rocky ground.

Upon arriving at the edge of the rim, the bushes open up and you can enjoy panoramic views, a strong sea breeze and the amazing flying skills of countless seabirds. Following the exposed rim, you will first pass the Nazca boobies and finally reach the extensive storm petrel nesting places, where if you're lucky you can spot the well-camouflaged short-eared owl hunting for them on foot!

PM – Darwin Bay

Inside the submerged caldera of Genovesa lies Darwin Bay, with a diameter of more than 1.5km / 1mi and it is almost 200 m / 650 ft deep. The small area will surprise you repeatedly, walking along a coral sand beach, crossing barren lava formations and creeks, passing tidal pools, shrubs and further ahead following the top of some cliffs. With this peaceful surrounding, every single species has occupied its own ecological niche (or habitat) without disturbing others.

Day 3 – Wednesday

AM – Bartolomé

The beautiful volcano islet of Bartolomé is among the youngest of the islands, and on a geological scale was just recently born out of fire. Although at first sight lifeless, Bartolomé offers some of the wildest landscapes and best panoramas of 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). 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 struggles to take root in the bare virgin lava fields.

PM – 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 plenty to see on this highly popular site amongst photographers. Pacific green turtles seasonally bury eggs in the tiny white sand beach, where you might also encounter crabs, a strayed blue heron or an oystercatcher. On the lava flow, only sparse pioneer vegetation such as lava cacti and carpetweed are able to grow. You might encounter a lava lizard, locusts or a small snake-species (Galapagos racer).

Day 4 – Thursday

AM – Charles Darwin Research Station

Although the great majority of Galapagos visitors come here to observe and appreciate natural wonders, it is also interesting to learn how the protection and conservation of the islands are carried out. The main attractions are the National Park information centre, the Van Staelen Exhibition Hall, the Breeding and Rearing Centre for young tortoises, and adult Galapagos tortoises in captivity.

PM – Highlands (Santa Cruz)

The road to the highlands leaves from Bellavista, a small village located a 15-minute drive from Puerto Ayora, and passes through the agricultural zone, near the National Park boundary, the Miconia Zone, and then goes to the Fern and Sedge zone. With clear weather, this area boasts beautiful scenes of rolling hills and extinct volcanic cones covered with grass and lush greenery all year round. Here you will visit the Twin Craters, which are two pit craters, as well as a local ranch where we can observe the giant tortoise of Santa Cruz Island in its natural habitat.

Day 5 – Friday

AM – Cormorant point – Floreana

The peninsula of Cormorant Point forms the extreme north cape of Floreana, which formed from smaller volcanic cones, covered by tropical dry forest (palo santo). At the landing beach, you will be welcomed by a small Galapagos sea lion colony. The green sand on this beach contains a high percentage of glassy olivine crystals which have been blown out by the surrounding tuff cones. The 'flour sand' beach on the southern side of the peninsula is made up of even finer white coral sand which feels very smooth on the feet. Parrotfish have pulverised it, grinding the calcareous skeletons of living coral. You can spot schools of stingrays who love the sandy bottom to hide themselves. During the first months of the year, Pacific green turtles come ashore to bury their eggs.

PM – Post Office Bay (Floreana)

Post Office Bay is one out of three nearby visitor's sites on Floreana's northern coast. Bring your postcards and post them in the peculiar barrel on this historic site. The barrel commemorates an improvised mail service that was set up for communication between British 16th-century whalers and poachers.

Day 3 – Saturday

AM – Gardner Bay (Española)

The striking white beach at Gardner Bay is an important breeding site for Pacific green turtles. However, without doubt its main attraction is the Galapagos sea lion colony. Females stay year round in this nursery, suckling their pups up to an age of 3 years, although they start to fish after 5 months of their birth. During the breeding and mating season, the colony becomes even bigger.

PM – Suarez Point (Española)

Huge ocean waves crash onto the southern basaltic cliffs of Suarez Point, forming a spectacular blowhole, where the water sprays metres high into the air (depending on the season, the tide and how strongly the sea breeze pushes the waves). Take your time for a meditative break in silence at this emblematic viewpoint, and convert this unforgettable moment in a lifetime experience.

Day 7 – Sunday

AM – Pitt Point (San Cristóbal)

Two wind sculptured tuff cones at Pitt Point make up the extreme eastern end of San Cristóbal, and thus, the archipelago as well. These cliffs were the first sight of land when HMS Beagle and Charles Darwin arrived on the 15th of September 1835. On the small green sand beach, you will be welcomed by a group of barking Galapagos sea lions. This is a bachelor colony, where males usually relax and prepare themselves for fighting and mating.

From the saltbush and spiny shrubs behind the beach, a trail leads up to an area of tropical dry forest vegetation: most of the year you will find leafless palo santo trees, yellow cordia shrubs, tiny prickly pear cacti and carpetweed that turns red in the dry season. After the somewhat steep climb through a gully to the clifftop, you can wander around the only colony on the Galapagos that is home to all three species of boobies: blue-footed, red-footed and Nazca booby; as well as both species of frigate bird (great and magnificent), famous because of their scarlet balloon-sized pouches during mating season. Frigate birds prefer to attack returning boobies and conduct aerial battles rather than fishing for themselves.

PM – Witch Hill (San Cristóbal)

The primary attraction of this site is the coral sand beach, an excellent place to swim and snorkel. Witch Hill is the remains of a tuff cone and one of the first sites visited by Charles Darwin. It has an impressive landscape, where it is often possible to see coastal and migratory birds, including pelicans, blue-footed boobies and swallow-tailed gulls; as well as sea lions and marine iguanas. At times, the lagoon is completely dry and deposits of salt can be found at the bottom. The people of Puerto Baquerizo Moreno used to use the lagoon as a salt mine.

Day 8 – Monday

AM – Lobos Islet (San Cristóbal)

The Lobos Islets beach harbours a colony of Galapagos sea lions. As in other colonies in the archipelago, you can approach nurturing females within a few metres. In the breeding season this colony is also visited by territorial males, defending and mating the harem on their part of the beach. This low islet is home to more than just Galapagos sea lions. Two other emblematic species breed here: male blue-footed boobies and great frigate birds who try to impress the females (and tourists) with clumsy dances, heaving their striking blue feet or blowing up their

balloon-sized scarlet pouches. During the breeding season, the fluffy and hungry chicks cry for food, and when their wings get strong enough, they will learn to fly.

PM – Transfer out to San Cristóbal Airport (SCY)

Assisted by the naturalist guide and some crewmembers, the dinghy will bring you and your luggage to the San Cristóbal Airport, where we will take the shuttle back to the airport.