



### **PM – 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.

### **Day 2 – Tuesday**

#### **AM – South Plaza**

South Plaza is located to the east of Santa Cruz Island, and forms part of a pair of islands known as “Islas Plazas”. Despite its small size, some of the most interesting and outstanding species of the Galapagos are found here. The Plazas land iguanas are smaller than their relatives on other islands. Throughout the island there are several hybrid iguanas, a result of crossing a marine iguana with a land iguana. They are unique and can be recognised at first glance by their black/grey color, with a land iguana’s crest, but face and tail of the marine iguana. The big population of iguanas is due to the presence of tuna, their favourite food. Swallow tailed gulls nesting in the rugged cliffs are seen along with other seabirds as: audubon shearwaters, red-billed tropicbirds, frigate birds and brown pelicans.

#### **PM – Santa Fe**

Located in the southeastern part of the Galapagos, this island was formed from an uplift rather than being of volcanic origin, which is why it is mostly flat. There are some theories which claim that this could be the oldest island in the Archipelago. Santa Fe is home to a number of endemic species like the Galapagos Hawk, Galapagos snake, Galapagos mockingbird, rice rats and one of the two species of lands iguanas of the islands. After disembarking into the beautiful and clear waters you will be in contact with one of the many sea lion colonies. Along the trail many salt bushes can be seen as well as the giant prickly pear cactus - gigantism is a characteristic of oceanic islands. There are many possibilities to snorkel with playful sea lions and tropical fish.

### **Day 3 – Wednesday**

#### **AM – Chinese Hat**

Chinese Hat is a 52m/170ft high volcanic cone, forming another islet right off the rocky coast of Santiago, where a small colony of Galapagos penguins have settled. Approaching Chinese Hat from the north, you will understand the meaning of the name. This is an excellent place to learn more about volcanoes, lava bombs and lava tunnels.

You will arrive just in time to witness how this barren islet is colonised by pioneer species that have begun to sprout! Beautiful beaches of white coral sand and holes in the eroding lava fields are filled up with lava sand, which enables rooting. Galapagos sea lions and countless

marine iguanas contribute to fertilisation, and altogether create many favourable options for newcomers, such as saltbush and the sesuvium carpet.

#### **PM – Dragon Hill (Santa Cruz)**

The visitor site at Dragon Hill has been open to visitors since 1993. This site is located in northwestern Santa Cruz Island and consists of a trail that leads to a hyper-saline lagoon behind the beach, frequently visited by flamingos, pintail ducks and other species of birds. This site has been re-populated with land iguanas from Seymour, Isabela and Santa Cruz island. There is a short walk to the hill, which offers a beautiful view of the bay.

#### **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 about 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.

##### **Transfer out to Baltra Airport (GPS)**

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