



# ARCHIPEL II

## GALAPAGOS

### ARCHIPEL II - ITINERARY B

8 DAYS / 7 NIGHTS

Monday to Monday



#### Day 1 – Monday

#### AM – Arrival at Baltra Airport (GPS)

Upon arrival at Baltra Airport, travellers pass through an airport inspection point to make sure that no foreign plants or animals are introduced to the islands, and to pay the park entrance

fee of \$100 (unless it has been prepaid). A guide will meet you, help you collect your luggage, and escort you on a short bus ride to the harbour.

### **PM – North Seymour**

This islet is one of 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 – 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 panoramaso 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 – Espumilla Beach, Buccaneer Cove**

Espumilla Beach is an important breeding site for turtles, as it is no longer suffering from digging wild pigs. The turtles return year after year to bury their eggs into the cinnamon-coloured sand dunes. About two months later (roughly from February to August) the eggs hatch.

The beach ridge hides a mangle with two lagoons on the backside. A colony of American flamingos and aquatic birds used to be its main attraction, but after the climate phenomenon of El Niño, strong sedimentation altered the water environment, and now no longer provides their food.

Vegetation zones are very close by, providing great scenic contrasts. During the climb up a hill, you will be rewarded with a beautiful view of the transitions from sea to beach and from mangrove to a dry palo santo forest.

At the nearby Buccaneers Cove, there is a great snorkelling opportunity.

## **Day 3 – Wednesday**

### **AM – Puerto Egas (Santiago)**

Puerto Egas is a black beach located at the west side of Santiago Island. Volcanic tuff deposits formed this special black sand beach and made it the main attraction of the Island. This site is called Puerto Egas because Hector Egas attempted to exploit the salt, which failed because the price of salt on the continent was very cheap.

### **PM – Rábida**

Rábida Island is unique because of the red colour of the rocks and sand. The volcanic material on this island is very porous and external factors such as rain, saltwater and sea breeze have acted as an oxidising agent. A short walk along a trail leads us to a coastal lagoon behind the beach where we can see land birds including finches, doves, yellow warblers and mockingbirds. Meanwhile at the lagoon there is a colony of flamingos.

### **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 the protection and conservation of the islands. 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 by numbers of 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 formed of even finer white coral sand which feels very smooth on your feet. Parrotfish have pulverised it, grinding the calcareous skeletons of living coral. You can spot schools of stingrays who love using the sandy bottom to hide themselves. During the first months of the year, Pacific green turtles come ashore to bury their eggs.

#### **PM – Baroness Lookout & Post Office Bay**

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 6 – 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 until they are three years old, although they start to fish at five months. 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 on 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 15<sup>th</sup> 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 can find leafless palo santo trees, yellow cordia shrubs, tiny prickly pear cacti and carpetweed that turns red in the dry season. After the steep climb through a gully to the clifftop, you can wander around the only colony in Galapagos that has 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 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 – Interpretation Centre (San Cristóbal)**

The Interpretation Centre just outside the provincial capital Puerto Baquerizo Moreno is a perfect introduction as well as an interesting complement to the field-explanations and briefings of your naturalist guide. Information panels (English/Spanish), pictures, maquettes

and true to life dioramas tell the background story of the islands in a different way, which helps you to get an overview and learn what makes the Galapagos so unique. The well-maintained botanical garden with native species from the arid zone (including the giant prickly pear and candelabra cacti) is worth your visit as well; and you will probably spot the Chatham mockingbird, endemic to this island, that put Darwin on track of his evolution theory. The attractive exhibition is quite complete and explains a series of natural circumstances that create the Galapagos' unique environment: such as the volcanic genesis of the islands, their remoteness from the continent, its ocean currents, its special climate, the arrival of different species, and their establishment, among others. It also recounts historic discovery and attempts of colonisation; and shows a diorama with ancient mail barrels from Post Office Bay. Extensively it concludes how times have changed with current conservation and the many ways in which this is being achieved, as well as the environmental challenges that proceed.

#### **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.