



ARCHIPEL I

BY ONIRIC

ITINERARY B5A4

8 DAYS / 7 NIGHTS
Thursday to Thursday



ROUTE

HIGH CHANCE OF SPOTTING



DAY 1 - THURSDAY

AM - Arrival at Baltra airport

Upon arrival at San Cristobal airport, you will pass through an airport inspection point to ensure that no foreign plants or animals are introduced to the islands, as well as 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 - Fausto Llerena Breeding Centre (Santa Cruz)

At this site, you can observe tortoises that come from various islands of the archipelago. They comply with the captive breeding programme and then return to repopulate the areas where their population has been affected. The land iguanas of Santa Cruz, Isabela and North Seymour are also in a captive breeding programme, as the populations in these areas suffered from feral dogs.

One of the main attractions is the famous embalmed Lonesome George. Estimated to have died between 93 and 109 years of age, it is recognised as the last of its kind and a symbol of the efforts invested to conserve endangered species. The captive tortoises are used to the presence of visitors, so it's a great place to take photos with them.



DAY 2 - FRIDAY

AM - Cormorant Point and Devil's Crown (Floreana)

The peninsula of Cormorant Point forms the extreme north cape of Floreana, which exists out of smaller volcanic cones, covered by a tropical dry forest of 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. During the first months of the year, Pacific green turtles come ashore to bury their eggs.

Devil's Crown offers one of the best snorkelling spots in the Galapagos due to the coral reef in its centre, which attracts a lot of marine life. Here you can spot Galapagos penguins, sea lions, sea turtles, many different colourful fish and even some dolphins. The current can be a bit strong sometimes, so it should not be attempted by novice swimmers.



PM - Post Office Bay and Baroness Lookout (Floreana)

Historically, this site is the location of a wooden barrel that was placed there in the 18th century by the crew of a whaling ship. Letters found inside the barrel were collected and delivered by sailors returning home. There was no postage fee and, surprisingly, this mailbox and its honour system are still in use today. Although letters are no longer important messages from sailors to their loved ones, tourists leave thousands of them today and many still reach their destination. You can also relax on the beach, where in addition to Galapagos sea lions, Pacific green turtles and golden rays, you may see Galapagos penguins. This is the only place in the southeastern archipelago where penguins reside. You can also climb the small basaltic cone of the Baroness Lookout and enjoy the coastline's paradisiacal views. This viewpoint was the favourite spot of one of Floreana's first settlers, the eccentric baroness and self-proclaimed "Empress of Galapagos" Eloisa von Wagner, who even built her house a few metres further back.

DAY 3 – SATURDAY

AM – Osborn Islet and Gardner Bay (Española)

The striking white beach at Gardner Bay is an important breeding site for Pacific green turtles. However, without a 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 into a lifetime experience.



DAY 4 – SUNDAY

AM – Pitt Point

Two wind-sculptured tuff cones at Pitt Point make up the extreme eastern end of San Cristobal, thus the archipelago. 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.



PM – Witch Hill

This site's primary attraction 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 5 – MONDAY

AM – Lobos Islet

The Lobos Islet's 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 – Interpretation Centre and Frigatebird Hill (San Cristobal)

The Interpretation Centre, just outside the provincial capital city of Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, gives a perfect explanation of this unique archipelago. Its attractive exhibition is quite complete and helps you to get a clear overview and learn what makes this archipelago so unique. Information panels (in English and Spanish), pictures, documents, maquettes, and true-to-life dioramas tell various background and conservation stories about the islands in a different way.

A short, though often hot, uphill trail with steps, leads from the Interpretation Centre to the summit of Frigatebird Hill. Four panoramic viewpoints show Puerto Baquerizo Moreno from above, as well as the bays on both sides of the headland. On clear days even the distant, offshore sculpture of Kicker Rock can be seen! These wooded hilltops are one of the rare places where some magnificent and great frigatebirds form a mixed breeding colony. A viewpoint with another Charles Darwin statue is a reminder that the HMS Beagle anchored in the exotic bay below.



DAY 6 – TUESDAY

AM – Santa Fe

Located in the southeastern part of the Galapagos, this island was formed from an uplift instead of a volcanic origin, which is why it is mostly flat. Some theories assure this could be the oldest island in the archipelago. Santa Fe is the home of several endemic species like the Galapagos hawk, Galapagos snake, Galapagos mockingbird, rice rats and one of the two species of land iguanas of the islands. After disembarking in 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 giant prickly pear cactus, gigantism is a characteristic of oceanic islands.

PM – 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 found on other islands. There are several hybrid iguanas throughout the island; a result of crossing a marine iguana with a land iguana. They are unique and recognizable at first glance by their black/grey colour, with a land iguana's crest, but the face and tail of the marine iguana. The big population of iguanas is due to the presence of prickly pears, their favourite food. Swallow-tailed gulls nesting in the rugged cliffs are seen along with other sea birds as Audubon shearwaters, red-billed tropicbirds, frigate birds and brown pelicans.

DAY 7 – WEDNESDAY

AM – North Seymour

Seymour is an uplifted (as opposed to volcanic) island and therefore is generally flat and strewn with boulders. There are good nesting sites here for a large population of magnificent frigate birds. Blue-footed boobies perform their courtship dance in the more open areas and swallow-tailed gulls perch on the cliff edges. Despite the tremendous surf that can pound the outer shore, sea lions haul out onto the beach and can be found bodysurfing.

PM – Chinese Hat

Chinese Hat is a 52 m/170 ft 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 thus create many favourable options for newcomers, such as saltbush and the sesuvium carpet.



DAY 8 – THURSDAY

AM – Twin Craters and El Chato Reserve (Santa Cruz)

The native scalesia forest of El Chato Tortoise Reserve is the best place to search for Galapagos giant tortoises in their most authentic setting! Despite the interesting breeding centres – where you are guaranteed to find tortoises in their corrals – there is nothing better than to observe them in their wild environment. Though it can be quite moist and muddy, your visit may turn into an adventurous quest when they have left their favorite pond silently.

The Twin Craters are found on either side of the road leading to Puerto Ayora. These impressive formations are not really volcanic craters and were formed by magma domes, which hardened on the outside while the lava continued flowing inside, leaving huge and empty magma chambers that eventually collapsed, leaving two large holes. The craters lie within a lush scalesia cloud forest, a high-altitude plant species that are endemic to the Galapagos. This area is also home to the carpenter finch, which uses tools to search for food. There may also be opportunities to see the vermilion flycatcher, a small red-breasted bird.

After this, assisted by the naturalist guide and some crew members, you will be taken to the airport for your flight to Quito or Guayaquil. It has been a pleasure accompanying you on this unique trip and we hope to see you again very soon!