

Itinerary: Galapagos Conservancy Expedition, June 2016



Day 1: June 8, 2016

Arrive in Quito, Ecuador and stay at the **Rincon de Puenbo**.

June 9-11: Baltra Airport and Santa Cruz Island

In the morning, we'll fly to Baltra Island in Galapagos! We'll spend two days exploring the varied ecology of Santa Cruz Island, while staying at the **Galapagos Safari Camp** in the lush highlands. During the course of our stay, we will hike in the moist highlands, visit giant tortoises in their natural habitat, visit the **Charles Darwin Research Station**, stroll through the bustling town of Puerto Ayora, and explore lava tubes. We'll visit a few Galapagos Conservancy project sites to see conservation efforts in action and learn more about how humans interact with the environment. We'll shop, dine well, relax, and mingle with Station scientists and others involved in Galapagos conservation. In the afternoon of Day 4, we will board our yacht, **Integrity**, for dinner and set sail on our Island cruise.* We will live aboard the yacht and spend as much time exploring the islands as park rules permit. Each night, we'll travel on to the next destination.

June 12: Española Island

AM Gardner Bay — We'll stroll along a magnificent white sand beach where sea lions lounge, marine turtles nest, and the curious Española mockingbirds follow our every footstep. We can take a brief swim on the beach or snorkel in the company of schools of colorful fish, turtles, sea lions, and possibly small sharks along the underwater cliffs of Gardner-by-Española, a satellite islet nearby.

PM Punta Suárez — This is one of the Galapagos' most famed visitor sites. You'll be dazzled by spectacular cliff views of pounding surf and seemingly unlimited populations of an amazing variety of seabirds. Brightly-colored marine iguanas and the largest lava lizards of Galapagos frequent the coastline and rest on the trail. From the cliff top you'll watch a blowhole spray water 30 meters in the air. Española is the only island where you'll see waved albatrosses and possibly observe their fascinating mating dance.

June 13: San Cristóbal Island

AM Punta Pitt — Visitors are greeted by the strong stench and cacophony of barking sea lions — a colony of bachelors, exhausted from fighting and mating. The trail to the cliffs leads to the only booby breeding ground in Galapagos where all three species of boobies nest together. The trails also offer a close look at the unique and hardy vegetation that thrives in this volcanic wasteland.

PM Cerro Brujo & Kicker Rock — A short panga ride along the cliffs of Cerro Brujo will be followed by a visit to the lovely coral sand beach, frequented by migrant birds. Snorkelers will see an amazing array of sea life at Kicker Rock, often including manta rays, sea turtles, and sharks. Non-snorkelers will enjoy a cruise around the base of dramatic Kicker Rock (top left photo), a 500 m vertical tuff cone. The orange glow on the rock at sunset is a stunning sight!

June 14: Santa Fé and South Plaza Islands

AM Santa Fé — After landing on a white beach usually covered with sea lions, we'll walk into a giant *Opuntia* cactus grove where we'll have the opportunity to see the endemic land iguanas. The land visit will be followed by snorkeling and/or kayaking in the turquoise waters of the bay, full of sea lions, rays, eels, and fish of all colors.

PM South Plaza — We will see another species of Galapagos land iguana as well as cactus finches. Both North and South Plazas were

formed by geological uplift and tilt to the north, with cliffs on their southern coasts. On small islands like this, terrestrial and marine species interact more than on the larger islands, and the occasional hybrid iguana (land and marine) with its "zebra-like" stripes may be observed. Bachelor sea lions climb steep cliffs in the late afternoon to spend nights away from the larger dominant bulls.

June 15: Genovesa Island

AM Darwin Beach — At the north side of Darwin Bay, this beach was formed by the rim of a sunken crater. Red mangroves along the hiking trail provide habitat for yellow warblers, yellow-crowned night herons, and pintail ducks. The highlight of this site is the incredible abundance of Red-footed Boobies, Frigatebirds, Swallow-tailed Gulls, and Yellow-crowned Night Herons. Although the most abundant booby in the islands, this is one of the few places visitors can observe Red-footed Boobies.

PM Prince Phillip's Steps — While riding in a panga along the base of the eastern cliffs of Darwin Bay, we'll scour the cliff crevices for all kinds of animal life. We'll then climb the Prince Phillip's Steps or the "Stairway to Seabird Heaven." We'll walk through massive colonies of Red-footed and Nazca Boobies and an extraordinary Palo Santo forest on the way to a ridge where storm petrels dart about.

June 16: Santiago and Bartolomé Islands

AM Sullivan Bay (Santiago) — We'll walk across a recent lava flow and view its beautiful structural characteristics. Formed in the second half of the 19th century, the flow is too young for much plant or animal life. It is the lava itself and the contrasting black pahoehoe flow and the reddish-yellow tuff cones that are the stars of this visit. The colors and shapes of the lava are fantastic for photos.

PM Bartolomé — Arguably the most recognized landmark in Galapagos, Pinnacle Rock juts straight out of Bartolomé's northern bay. Snorkeling in the bay provides visitors with a chance to swim with Galapagos Penguins. Climbing up the 600-m trail to the top of the island provides spectacular views of the archipelago.

June 17: Rábida and Sombrero Chino Islands

AM Rábida — We'll land at Red Beach where wading birds and ghost crabs dot the sand. Behind the beach is a saltwater lagoon where Pintail ducks and Common Stilts are frequently seen along with a group of bachelor sea lions. Brown pelicans nest in the nearby salt brush. A short trail inland provides a chance to observe finches, Galapagos Doves, Yellow Warblers, and mockingbirds.

PM Sombrero Chino — The turquoise waters near Sombrero Chino provide one of our best opportunities to see Galapagos Penguins. A panga ride in search of wildlife is followed by a snorkel that often includes sharks, sea lions, penguins, and rays. We will land at a beautiful white sand beach for a short walk along a trail that meanders over varying types of lava.

June 18-19: Baltra Island to Quito on the Mainland

We'll have breakfast on board *Integrity*, then disembark at Baltra Island and fly back to Quito. Your afternoon and evening are free for city exploration. Enjoy your final overnight stay at **Hotel Colon**. You'll depart for home on the 12th day, or continue with your own adventures in Ecuador.



* Itinerary may change under orders from the Galapagos National Park