

# Itinerary 5 days / 4 nights

## B



### DAY 1 - MONDAY

#### AM - Baltra Airport

Upon arrival at Baltra 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 USD 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. Here you will climb aboard the yacht Solaris. After greeting the crew and the captain, your cabins will be assigned to you and then you will enjoy your first lunch aboard.

#### PM - Santa Cruz highlands

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 favourite pond silently. The Twin Craters are found on either side of the road leading to Puerto Ayora. These impressive formations are not 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.

## **DAY 2 - TUESDAY**

### **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 - Mosquera**

Galapagos sea lions are true beach lovers and Mosquera offers beautiful white coral sand beaches, which contrast with the blue water and thus attract numerous sea lions. During a beach walk, you can observe numerous species of waders and sanderlings. Between the rocks, the red clip crabs wait to play hide and seek while you try to get the perfect photo. If you are lucky, you may even encounter yellow-crowned night-herons or even a red-footed booby.

## **DAY 3 - WEDNESDAY**

### **AM - Darwin Bay (Genovesa)**

Inside the submerged caldera of Genovesa lies Darwin Bay, with a diameter of more than 1.5 km/1 mi 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 these peaceful surroundings, every single species has occupied its ecological niche without disturbing others. Whimbrels and wandering tattlers forage actively along the surf, next to resting Galapagos sea lions. Impressive frigatebirds and red-footed boobies nest in the mangroves, where you can also see vocalists such as the yellow warbler, Darwin's finches and the Galapagos mockingbird. Uniquely, two subpopulations of the same species of large cactus finch differ in their singing.

### **PM - Prince Phillip's Steps (Genovesa)**

Before landing, you will take a dinghy ride along the eastern arm of the caldera. As you approach, the soaring 25 m/80 ft 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 food!

## DAY 4 - THURSDAY

### AM - South Plaza

You will enjoy an unforgettable guided walk on South Plaza, the best place to encounter endemic Galapagos land iguanas, patient and photogenic models. You can also look out for some of the unique hybrids between the male marine iguana and female land iguana. Arriving at the upper rim, about 20m/75ft downwards impressively droning waves splash against the foot of soaring cliffs. Clouds of petrels, storm petrels, shearwaters and brown noddies make spectacular flights and sometimes look like they're walking on the waves. Take your binoculars and don't miss the red-billed tropicbird with its graceful long tail and spectacular mating fights. These cliffs are also a nesting place for the endemic swallow-tailed gull.

### PM - 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. Although there is little vegetation on this island, it has two breathtaking beaches, where sea turtles live. At the foot of the mountain you can also discover a small colony of Galapagos penguins.

## DAY 5 - FRIDAY

### AM - Witch Hill (San Cristobal)

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.

- Transfer to San Cristobal Airport

