

## **GALAPAGOS ...THE PATH LESS TRAVELLED**

Isabela is the largest of the islands, some four times bigger than the next largest, Santa Cruz. Yet of a total Galapagos population of some 20,000 only 2,200 people live here on this enchanted island, which contains over 60% of the flora and fauna of the archipelago and is the only one straddled by the equatorial line. Amongst Isabela's attractions you will find five active volcanoes, the most extensive wetlands on the archipelago (recognised as a RAMSAR site), and a three kilometre beach. You will also enjoy the option of trekking with giant tortoises, swimming with white tip sharks, snorkelling with marine turtles, kayaking amongst flamingos...all this in the surroundings of a quiet, relaxed community, where stress is virtually unknown.

### **Option 2 5 days / 4 nights program**

#### **Day 1**

We leave Quito in the morning and make our first stop on the island of Baltra where we will transfer to our connecting flight for a short thirty minute flight over the spectacular Galapagos marine scenery to Isabela or if you are extending your stay in the Galapagos islands we will transfer you by speed boat (-2 to 2 ½ hours) from Puerto Ayora to Puerto Villamil.

After some time to settle into your rooms on our beach front hotel our journey will begin with a relaxing walk on the 1.2km boardwalk to the Giant Tortoise Breeding Centre where the endangered giant tortoise population of the Galapagos Islands is presently recovering.

On our way we will pass by three lagoons where we will likely see Flamingos! Once at the centre a guided tour will be provided of the several large areas where turtles of different ages are being raised before being released into the wild. High quality interpretative materials will be available. We will have the option to either walk to the Centre and back via the boardwalk, or for those who prefer, be dropped off by car at the Centre and walk back along the boardwalk and enjoy the sunset on our way back.

Meals: L

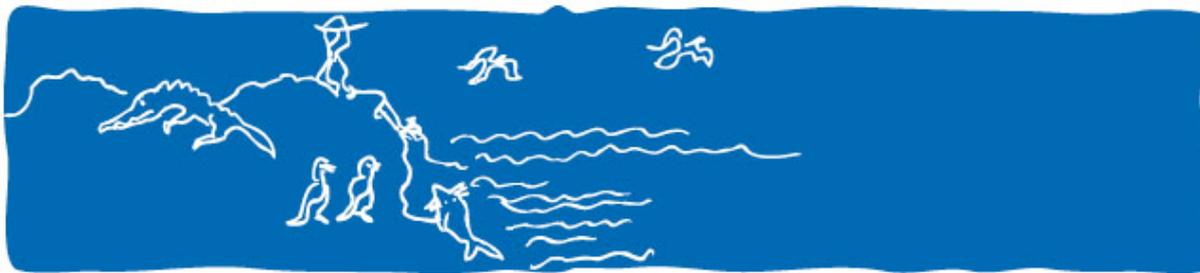
#### **Day 2**

The highlight of today's activities is a visit to the world's second largest volcanic crater, Sierra Negra, located in the highlands of Isabela. We start by visiting El Cura and then on to El Mango where we will be able to enjoy a spectacular view of the southern part of Isabela.

Along the way you will be able to detect the marked changes in the vegetation zones as we climb upwards, as well as the Guayaba forests burned during the eruption of 2005. You will no doubt notice the large trees that stand out in the agricultural landscape. These are Ceibos that were introduced by Antonio Gil in 1897 when colonizing this part of the island.

We will head to 'Volcán Chico' (little volcano) at the eastern rim of the crater where it is much drier. Here you will be able to view multiple volcanic features produced by two recent eruptions: windblown materials on the main crater rim and massive lava flows below in the main crater resulting from the 2005 eruption, and complex lava flows and small cones related to the 1979 eruption. From here, weather permitting, we will also find spectacular views over central and northern Isabela, as well as Fernandina, Pinzón and Santa Cruz islands.

After the visit, late in the afternoon, returning from the volcano we will visit a project that aims to support the national park efforts to recover the giant tortoises with a local environmentalist that has adopted several giant tortoises with the idea of reintroducing them into the wild again.



Meals: B, BL

### Day 3

Our first marine experience starts at the white tip shark canal and a tour around the small island of Tintorerías where we will be able to see the diversity of the Galapagos Islands in miniature. During this morning we will be able to observe a variety of animals and birds: seals and various species of sea birds around the harbour, perhaps a ray or turtle, penguins, sharks and marine iguanas (nesting in season). Amongst the natural features you will be able to observe are pumice stones the result of the eruption of Alcedo, the highest volcano on the island, as well as white lichens which have the ability to grow directly on bare volcanic rock. There is also a small channel on this tiny island where white tipped sharks rest during the daytime and where sea lions often play around them; we may also have the chance to see eagle rays near the harbour. After the visit you will have the opportunity for a relaxing snorkel in the bay.

Later in the afternoon, we will head off by vehicle for the 'Humedales (wetlands) trail', to an area which was designated a RAMSAR site of international importance in 2002. The road ends at the Muro de las Lagrimas (Wall of Tears), which was raised in the late 1940's by the inmates of a prison colony built on the site of a World War II US base. The road initially follows Villamil beach, passing by the cemetery which offers us a glimpse of the history of the island's settlement. After wandering this outstanding system of trails and pathways which leads us through mangroves (all four are found here in one place) and marine iguana colonies we will be able to enjoy a picnic catered by the women of the village and then return to the hotel by way of the beach.

We finish off the day with a peaceful walk through the village.

Meals: B, L

### Day 4

Today we will have our second encounter with Galapagos marine life.

Our journey starts with a visit to Roca Unión, a small island full of life, where we can snorkel amidst clouds of brightly coloured fish, and watch sea lions and boobies from the surface. At Turtle Cove, a secret spot used by fisherman, today considered one of the island's major attractions, we will have plenty of opportunities to snorkel through a maze of small islands and arches (and for the experts, tunnels) in the company of fish, sea turtles and occasional white tipped sharks and rays. There will be more opportunities to snorkel with sea turtles at Finados and from our boat out on the open water the chance to watch sea turtles and manta rays against a background of varied coastal beaches and rocky shores where sea turtles nest.

The afternoon is free for wandering or simply relaxing in a hammock and reading book.

Meals: B, BL

### Day 5

This morning we will start our journey back to the continent, transfer to the airport of Isabela for the flight to Baltra and connect to Quito.

Meals: B

Dinners are included on the Luxury Option