

## ITINERARY Aida Maria

### **DAY 1 Baltra Island, Las Bachas Beach (wet landing)**

Fly from the Ecuadorian mainland to the islands on an early morning 90-minute flight. As you prepare to land in Baltra, look out the window. The landscape below will seem otherworldly – you'll truly be landing in a place like no other. The Galapagos Islands are completely unique and you're about to see why. Your bilingual naturalist guide will greet you at the airport and meet you after customs. During lunch he/she will introduce you to the islands, specifically the flora and fauna that you will encounter at our first destination, Las Bachas Beach.

On the sandy white beaches of Las Bachas you will get a close look at a sea turtle nesting area as well as a lake frequented by pink flamingos and other migratory birds. Afterwards, you'll cool off with a dip in the beautiful, blue Pacific Ocean. As this is the first evening together, the crew will invite everyone to a pre-dinner cocktail on the yacht before the welcome dinner. If the night is clear, as it usually is, the stars above will sparkle; look for the Southern Cross, the Big Dipper (turned up-side down!) and Orion.

### **DAY 2 Genovesa Island: Darwin Bay (wet landing)/ El Barranco (dry landing)**

Early in the morning you'll have breakfast and then you'll disembark at Genovesa "Tower" Island, which is located in the northeastern part of the Galapagos (less than half a degree north of the equator).

At "Tower" Island you'll anchor at Darwin Bay, which is located on the southern part of the island, and is actually the caldera of an extinct, partially eroded volcano, with the surrounding cliffs forming the inner lining of the rim. While the origin of the name "Tower" is not known, one can imagine it had something to do with these towering cliffs. The tour will be a long, fairly-easy walk, but it is usually hot and dry here, so you may want to carry some water. After a wet landing on a coral beach the trail begins in an area where there are several swallow-tailed gulls. As you walk back from the beach, you'll see a variety of Opuntia cactus and mangroves

Tower is an outpost for many sea birds (as Española is in the south). Interestingly, there are almost no land reptiles on Tower, only very small marine iguanas. This is attributed to the direction of the ocean currents, which wouldn't have carried the terrestrial animals here.

Visit El Barranco during the afternoon then return to the boat for dinner.

### **DAY 3 BARTOLOME / SULLIVAN BAY**

Bartolome Island, which at its highest point is 114 meters, is one of the most photographed vistas in the archipelago. This island is quite young and quite volcanic, therefore, it's relatively unpopulated; only a small handful of die-hard plant and animal species have survived long enough to call this lava-land home.

After the visit to Bartolome Island you'll visit nearby Sullivan Bay. At the turn of the century a huge lava flow spilled right down to the sea and today you can stroll across this black volcanic expanse, admiring its time-frozen ripples, bubbles and ropes.

## **DAY 4 DAPHNE / BLACK TURTLE COVE / CERRO DRAGON**

Early in the morning you'll arrive to Daphne Island, a cone formed by the accumulation of volcanic ash, which is home to thousands of birds such as blue footed boobies, frigate birds, tropic birds, and many more. We won't go ashore here, but we'll navigate around this volcanic cone, so binoculars are recommended to get a good look at the birds. Daphne has been a great research site on which many scientists have spent years studying the behavior of Darwin's finches.

After this visit you'll move on to our next site, Black Turtle Cove, which is a red mangrove lagoon on Santa Cruz and is a nursery for many sharks and rays. It's also a great location to observe mating turtles around this time of year. You'll see large groups of resting White-Tip Reef Sharks, schools of Golden Rays and Spotted Eagle Rays, and a few juvenile Scalloped Hammerhead Sharks and Black-Tip Sharks. The water very calm so we often used paddles instead of the loud panga engines to move around the area.

After lunch you'll navigate for a couple of hours to Cerro Dragon, where you'll make a dry landing on lava rocks. Cerro Dragon is a small bay on the west coast of Santa Cruz and got its name from the many land iguanas that live in the area. Land iguanas are endemic to the Galapagos Islands where they have found good mating and nesting areas.

## **DAY 5 Santa Cruz Island (dry landing)**

Charles Darwin Station. After breakfast you'll sail to Santa Cruz Island, where you'll visit the world-famous Charles Darwin Station, a non-profit institution that dedicates itself to studying and protecting the flora and fauna of the Galapagos. This is one of the best places to see land tortoises, including Lonesome George, the last survivor of his subspecies.

Then you'll visit the station's Tortoise Rearing Center. Here you can find baby, hand-sized tortoises, between the ages of one and five, and marvel at how they achieve such large sizes as adults (500 lbs. or more!). Galapagos tortoises are believed to have a lifespan of over 100 years, so the young ones have a long life ahead of them as long as they receive the protection they need.

Aside from the Station headquarters, Santa Cruz Island is home to the largest town and economic center of the Galapagos, Puerto Ayora. In this portside town you can buy souvenirs (postcards, t-shirts, books, etc.) of the islands. Check out the unique Galapagos ceramic shop near the entrance of the Charles Darwin Station.

After shopping in Puerto Ayora and lunch on the boat (guests may dine in town if they desire), you'll explore the upper region, "parte alta" of the island, which is a moisture-rich area with fertile volcanic soils. You'll learn about the vegetation and animal life of this zone, often strikingly different than that found at lower elevations.

Darwin's Finches, Yellow Warblers, and Bright Red Vermillion Flycatchers will fly in and out of the moss-covered trees. From this high vantage point you'll be treated to beautiful views of the surrounding archipelago.

In the late afternoon you'll return to town. For those who wish to check out the nightlife, this is your chance; the boat will be docked in port most of the night.

**DAY 6 Floreana Island: Cormorant Point (wet landing), Corona del Diablo (wet landing), and Post office bay (wet landing)**

When you wake up and look out your porthole on Day 6 you will see Floreana, one of the greenest islands in the archipelago. Ask your guide to tell you about its mysterious history laden with rumors of witches, murderous baronesses, blackmail, and dubious disappearances.

Your first stop is Punta Cormorant, where you'll follow a footpath to a lagoon inhabited by flaming-pink flamingos. You will also pass by Carolina Beach, a Sea Turtle nesting area and a superb spot for watching sea birds and sea rays.

Back on the yacht, you'll skirt the island's coast until you arrive at La Corona del Diablo (the Devil's Crown), a sub-marine crater that offers some of the most spectacular snorkeling in the Galapagos. This is a great spot for seeing the wide array of tropical fish, many endemic to the islands, including purple sea stars and spiky sea urchins. The crater's most thrilling undersea creatures, however, are the white-tipped sharks. As with most of the creatures in the Galapagos they are unperturbed by your presence, so you can swim in their company freely and fearlessly.

After returning to the boat for lunch you'll sail on to Post Office Bay, where the islands' original post office (really only a wooden barrel) was established in 1793. The current system still functions as it did three centuries ago: Visitors drop off unstamped letters and postcards AND pick-up whatever mail they can hand deliver themselves when they return home! (Try it, it actually works!).

**DAY 7 Española Island: Suarez Point (dry landing) & Garner Bay (wet landing)**

Espanola is one of the most magical of all the islands. It is a place where the animals reign supreme and we humans are merely guests. As your dingy brings you to shore you'll see Sea Lion pups sunbathing with Marine Iguanas and Blue Footed Boobies nesting in between, and nearby may be a Galapagos Hawk. If it is Booby mating season watch the bonded pairs do the infamous Booby dance (if it's not mating season, ask your guide to demonstrate - after all it's their job to teach you about the local fauna!).

As you follow the footpath around the island, you will pass hundreds of Blue Footed Booby nesting sites including one colony of masked boobies.

There is a good chance you'll see the thief-like Frigate Bird (which has the habit of stealing other birds' food), as well as the stunning Red-Billed Tropicbird and the nocturnal Swallow-Tailed Gull. If it is the right time of the year (mid-April to December) you'll also encounter the giant Waved Albatross. Apart from a few pairs that breed on Isla de Plata, off the Ecuadorian mainland, all of the world's 12,000 Waved Albatross breed on Espanola Island. At the end of the breeding season, the entire population leaves the island and heads out to sea, where they spend years without touching land; four or five years may pass before the fledglings return to Espanola.

As you make your way around the island you'll pass by El Soplador, a giant blowhole that explodes to heights reaching 25 feet. In the nearby tide pools you can often find lounging sea lions enjoying the blowhole's misty spray. Following lunch on board the yacht, you'll visit Garner Bay, a great place for sunbathing, swimming and snorkeling. Lionfish, Flycatchers, and Galapagos Hawks will keep you company as you relax under the rays of the evening sun. Dinner on the yacht completes your day.

## **DAY 8 SAN CRISTOBAL, ISLA LOBOS / INTERPRETATION CENTER**

On your 8<sup>th</sup> day of visiting the Galapagos you'll arrive early in the morning to San Cristobal, the capital of the Galapagos. The first site will be Isla Lobos, a very small islet made of volcanic rocks that gets its name from the colony of Sea Lions (Lobo de Mar in Spanish) that live there. Here you can observe the behavior and interaction of Sea Lions living in a small community. Before taking the flight back to the mainland you will have some time to visit the town on your own for last minute shopping or people watching in the Galapagos. Transfer to airport.

For passengers that continue 15 days cruise, in the afternoon will be the visit to the Interpretation Center in Puerto Baquerizo, the local branch of the Galapagos National Park Service, where your guide will explain the formation of the islands, how the flora and fauna arrived and were established in Galapagos, as well as visit the corrals where there are several species of giant tortoises under the care of the National Park Service. For those of you arriving on that day, you will go from the airport straight back to the boat to show you to your accommodations. Then you will continue to the visit to Cerro Tijeretas located at 2 km from Puerto Ayora, is the only one site that you can see 2 different kind of Frigates living on the same colony.

Return to the boat , dinner.

## **DAY 9 SANTA FE / PLAZAS**

After breakfast on the yacht, you'll continue to Santa Fe Island. Upon arrival to the island, you'll be treated to a noisy welcome from the local Sea Lion colony. Following your naturalist guide on the island paths you'll reach Santa Fe's main attraction, a towering forest of giant cacti. Scattered around the cacti trees you'll see a number of the island's indigenous sun-seekers: marine and land iguanas, the rainbow-streaked lava lizards and, if you're lucky, land tortoises - the namesakes of the islands. After the walk you'll dive into the salty sea and snorkel in the company of Sea Lions, Lion Fish and Sea Turtles. Finally, you'll return to the yacht for lunch.

After lunch we'll navigate to Plazas Island, where a large colony of Sea Lions lounge daily in the equatorial sun. Plaza also boasts excellent examples of typical Galapagos native flora such as the towering cacti "trees" that form the principal diet for both the Land Iguanas and the Cactus Finch. Other birds that may flutter by include Lava Gulls, Yellow Warblers and Red-Billed Tropicbirds.

## **DAY 10 SANTA CRUZ / DARWIN CENTER / EL CHATO (Highlands)**

For passengers of 15 days, today the visit will be to Tortuga Bay with a guide start the walk of one hour more or less , during this you will have opportunity to see lots of different plants, flowers, gecko lizards and birds.

It is a great location for swimming and even surfing. Located south-west of the touristic town of Puerto Ayora on the Galapagos Island of Santa Cruz.

It is considered by the majority of visitors as one of the most beautiful beaches in Galapagos. The sunsets here are just stunning.

There are two beaches at Tortuga Bay, the main beach is used for surfing due to its strong waves. If you want to swim and just relax you can head to the west side of the beach where the waters are calm.

The beaches are separated by Red Mangrove. Exotic and endemic plants of Galapagos Islands are also all around the beach.

Return to the boat. Dinner.

## **DAY 11 ISABELA ISLAND / VOLCAN SIERRA NEGRA / HUMEDALES / MURO DE LAS LAGRIMAS /**

Your first visit in the morning will take place to Volcan Sierra Negra , will be a walk around 30 minutes to the lap of this famous volcano at Isabela Island.

Volcan Sierra Negra is a large shield volcano at the South eastern end of Isabela Island in the Galapagos that rises to an altitude of 1124m. Also is considered one of the oldest Volcano at the Islands.

In the afternoon after lunch, you will go to visit the humedales, which is a mangrove area with small brackish water lagoons that create the perfect environment for a small type of shrimp that serves as the food for the island's flamingos.

Following this visit you will be transported to El Muro de las Lagrimas or "The Wall of Tears." When the Ecuadorian government first took possession of the islands their main purpose was to harbor Ecuadorian prisoners; since there wasn't much for them to do they were forced to carry rocks to a far location and build a wall. which nowadays is know as The Wall of Tears.

Back on board and night navigation to your next site.

## **DAY 12 PUNTA MORENO / ELIZABETH BAY**

After night navigation you'll arrive to Punta Moreno on the west coast of Isabela, a dry landing on a lava field. The vegetation found in this area is sparse and concentrated mainly in the mangrove area and around the lakes. It should be noted that the three kinds of cacti are found here.

The main attractions at Punta Moreno are the coastal lagoons amid black lava flows where there are several species of birds. Here you'll have a panoramic view of three of the most active volcanoes in the Galapagos, which are Sierra Negra, Cerro Azul of Isabela Island and La Cumbre of Fernandina Island.

After lunch on board you'll continue on your way to Elizabeth bay, located on Isabela Island's west shore, which is an excellent spot for observing marine life. You'll motor past a few islands where you can usually see Galapagos Penguins; this is one of the best areas to take their photos. A colony of these magnificent birds inhabit a rocky islet at the entrance to Elizabeth Bay.

We'll let our boat drift through a small passage lined with mangroves and eventually emerge into an enclosed cove. We'll turn the motor off and look in the sheltered waters for Marine Turtles, Rays, Flightless Cormorants, Sea Lions, and, circling overhead, Galapagos Hawks.

### **DAY 13 ISABELS CALETA TAGUS / FERNANDINA PUNTA ESPINOZA / ISABELA PUNTA VICENTE ROCA**

The visitor's site of Tagus Cove is located west of Darwin Volcano on Isabela Island. The entire distance of the trail is about 1800 meters. This was a favorite spot for pirates and whalers, and the tradition of inscribing the names of boats is a tradition still observed today. At the beginning of the walk, going up and passing the staircase, is a small cave where you'll find inscriptions dating to the 1800s.

The trail, mostly gravel, leads into the interior, along Darwin Lake. During the walk, you can see various land birds and we'll identify the characteristic vegetation of the arid zone. Finally, you'll see the lava fields of Darwin Volcano.

Back on board for lunch and a short navigation to Elizabeth Bay on Fernandina Island

Punta Espinoza is a narrow ledge of lava and sand that extends from the base of the volcano to the sea. There is a vivid description from Captain Benjamin Morrell who witnessed and recorded an eruption of Fernandina in the 1820's that probably gave rise to the Point. In 1975, there was an uprising, about 90 cm, which is why the pier built for landing can only be used during high tide.

Punta Espinoza is a place famous for its large colonies of Marine Iguanas as well as being the habitat of unique species like the Flightless Cormorant, the Galapagos Penguin, the Galapagos Hawk, and the Galapagos Snake, among others. It's an ideal place to observe the lava cactus (*Brachycerus Nesioticus*), which grow on young lava and survive with little water.

After visiting Fernandina you will start the navigation to the central part of the Galapagos and on the way you'll see Punta Vicente Roca, a mostly eroded volcano which now is a great site for seeing Blue Footed Boobies, Frigate Birds and other marine birds from the boat.

### **DAY 14 PUERTO EGAS / RABIDA ISLAND**

James Bay is a black sand beach located on the west side of James Bay and northwest of Santiago Island. South of the beach is Sugarloaf Volcano, which has

deposits of volcanic tuff, the same that helped the formation of the black sand beach. El Cráter is just north of this site, it has a saltwater lagoon, which during the summer dry season becomes a salt mine. Between 1928 and 1930 was the first exploitation of salt; but the efforts did not last long. Then again in 1964 a new attempt was made that lasted for some time.

After lunch on board we'll navigate to our next destination, Rabida

Rábida Island consists of a red sand beach, a coastal lagoon behind the beach, and a loop trail. The approximate distance of the trail is 1.1 kilometers.

The color of the rocks and sand on the beach is due to the very porous volcanic material, which with the help of environmental factors (rain, salt water and sea breeze), has acted as an oxidizing agent.

The main attraction of this spot is the red sand beach and scenery, aside from the vegetation of the arid zone and the presence of native and endemic species.

### **DAY 15 North Seymour Island (dry landing) / Baltra Airport**

After an early breakfast you'll disembark at North Seymour Island. Here you will see Frigate Birds, the clownish Blue-Footed Booby, and of course the ubiquitous Sea Lions. With luck you'll witness the striking courtship display of the male Frigate Bird, in which he inflates a red balloon-like sac below his throat and struts his stuff for all of the young females. Seymour North, Plaza Sur, Plaza Norte, Baltra, northeastern Santa Cruz, Santa Fe and part of Española, were all formed by uprisings of underwater volcanic lavas. They were part of a volcanic lava table deposited in sheet form along cracks located on the ocean floor. The uprisings occurred sporadically and lasted more than a million years to reach its current level.

All marine fossils found in the archipelago are found in these islands and the best example is the North Channel side of Baltra. The fossils date from the Pleistocene, and specifically in the case of Baltra, one can say that these volcanic tables were close to the surface about a million years ago.

Return to the boat & sail to Baltra Island to catch your plane back to the mainland.

***Please note that itineraries are always subject to change without previous notice due to operational purposes, policies of the Galapagos National Park authorities, weather conditions, and for comfort of our passengers.***