

M/Y Odyssey – Route A 6 Tage

Day 1 – Tuesday

AM: Arrival at San Cristobal Airport

At San Cristobal Airport you have to pay your Galapagos National Park entrance fee and your luggage is inspected. In front of the arrival hall you will meet your naturalist guide and fellow passengers, and you will be transferred to the harbour of Puerto Baquerizo Moreno. Our inflatable dinghy brings you the last stretch to the yacht.

PM: Colorado Hill (San Cristobal)

The only (unpaved) road into the highlands of San Cristobal passes the formal sugarcane plantation and penal colony El Progreso and a row of ecologic wind generators on a ridge. Next it reaches the highest parts of the agricultural zone and El Junco Lagoon, one of the scarce sweet water lagoons in the archipelago. Colorado Hill is in the decent to the southern coast.

The *giant tortoise* breeding center on Colorado Hill bears the official name Galapaguero Jacinto Gordillo, but in daily use it is simply called after the red hill on which it is located. This and similar breeding centers on Santa Cruz and Isabela are the most comfortable places where you can see *Galapagos giant tortoises*. All are created to rescue these endangered giants by collecting their eggs in the wild, reproduction in captivity and repopulation once the hatchlings are big enough and less vulnerable for predators. This center works with the local subspecies of *Galapagos giant tortoises* (out of ca. 11 remaining subspecies in total; scientists disagree about the number, and as well if the San Cristobal subspecies should be considered as a distinct species).

Around the large corral, there is also an interpretive botanical trail and an interesting visitor's center. In here the natural history of the local *giant tortoises* is explained to you; including the relationship and evolutionary differences between these and other (sub)species. On the trail you can spot songbirds as well, such as *yellow warblers*, endemic Galapagos *large-billed flycatchers* and the *Chatham mockingbird* (even 'more' endemic, while unique to this island alone), that put Darwin on track of his evolution theory.

Day 2 – Wednesday

AM: Suarez Point (Española)

Huge ocean waves bang onto the southern basaltic cliffs of Suarez Point, forming a spectacular blowhole, where the water sprays meters high into the air (depending on the season, the tide and how strong the sea breeze pushes the waves). Take your time for a meditative break in silence on this emblematic viewpoint, and convert this unforgettable moment in a lifetime experience.

Española marine iguanas become bright red with a turquoise-colored crest and legs at the start of the breeding season (starting from Christmas). *Hood lava lizards* are the largest of the 7 endemic species in the islands, as well as the *mockingbirds*, that have turned to carnivorous behaviour! The successful rebreeded endemic *Galapagos giant tortoise* population resides on a site that is closed to tourism.

Waved albatrosses soar most time of their lives far out at sea and just come on land to breed and nurture their huge chick (March-December). This spectacular seabird is the only tropic albatross, and it is considered a critically endangered species. It just breeds on

Española (besides some strayed individuals on Isla de La Plata, Machalilla National Park, close to the Ecuadorian coast). When you're present on the right time (especially in October, though also noticeable in other months) you will be able to admire their synchronous courtship dances, which include bowing, whistling and even a stylized form of 'sword fighting' with their bills! Suarez Point also forms the massive breeding site for *Nazca* and *blue-footed boobies*, *swallow-tailed gulls* and *red-billed tropicbirds*. Especially during the food-abundant garúa-season (2nd half of the year) you can admire amusing courtship dances, mating, breeding, emerging from the eggs, nurturing or first flight-attempts. *Blue-footed boobies* even don't bother to breed in the middle of the trail. Passing seabirds and *marine iguanas* of the islands in a distance of just a few meters, makes that you feel yourself live within a bustling nature documentary!

PM: Gardner Bay (Española)

The striking white beach at Gardner Bay is an important breeding site for *Pacific green turtles*. But without doubt its main attraction is the *Galapagos sea lion* colony. Females stay year round in this nursery, suckling their pups up to an age of 3 years, although these start to learn fishing already after 5 months. During the breeding- and mating season the colony becomes even more populous. The strongest bachelors and elder males return from their secluded bases and start again to conquer and defend a part of the 1300 m / 4250 ft long beach. Pregnant females choose the best territory to give birth, and will mate again with their landlord within a month.

Day 3 – Thursday

AM: Devil's Crown (Floreana)

With no less than five sea currents, the marine reserve is even more diverse than the archipelago above sea level. For many Devil's Crown is snorkelling site number one of Galapagos, and even one of the very highlights of your cruise. The jagged crater rim just protrudes sea level, and continues to be beaten by the waves. The depth and very transparent waters of this deep-water snorkelling site gives you some sensation of flying. It is like plunging in a huge tropical aquarium, swimming amidst schools of thousands of brightly coloured tropical fish, as *yellowtail surgeon fishes* and *king angelfishes*, and many other species. Sometimes a *Pacific green turtle* or *Galapagos sea lion* is passing; and don't scare when you eventually might meet a *scalloped hammerhead shark*! On the bottom you can distinguish resting *whitetip reef sharks*, different species of *ray* and *starfishes*. The inner walls of the crater rim are coated with coral formations and protected against the surf. Above sea level the dramatic decor of the jagged crater rim provides living space to lots of coastal birds, including *lava gulls*, *blue-footed* and *Nazca boobies*, *brown pelicans*, and *red-billed tropicbirds*, which look for protected nesting places in caves or ledges under a rock overhang (and can fight out spectacular air battles). And the opposite land head of Floreana is a nesting place for *magnificent frigatebirds*, where you could also head for.

AM: Cormorant Point (Floreana)

Please don't expect to spot the *flightless cormorant* at Cormorant Point, on the northern coast of Floreana. This emblematic example of evolution lives exclusively in the remote west of Galapagos on Fernandina and Isabela. Instead, this is one of the best places in Galapagos to observe *American flamingos* among other aquatic birds, such as *pintails* (or *Bahama ducks*). Its salty lagoon houses a breeding colony of dozens of these elegant and exotic, but nervous waders. Though, when breeding is done and the lagoon dries up, the *flamingos* tend to be on the move to look for shrimps and algae from other saline lakes.

The peninsula of Cormorant Point forms the extreme north cape of Floreana, which is pockmarked by numbers of smaller volcanic cones and covered by tropical dry forest (predominantly *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 that have been blown out by the surrounding tuff cones. The 'flour sand' sand beach on the southern side of the peninsula is formed of even finer white coral sand that feels very smooth to your feet. *Parrotfishes* have pulverized it, grinding the calcareous skeletons of living coral. In the surf you can recognize schools of *sting rays* that love the sandy bottom to hide themselves. During the first months of the year *Pacific green turtles* come ashore to bury their eggs. Next morning you can notice their tracks from the dunes, or eventually still catch an exhausted, delayed one, crawling back to sea.

PM: Post Office Bay & Baroness Lookout (Floreana)

Post Office Bay is one out of three nearby visitor's sites on Floreana's northern coast. Bring your postcards and post them in the peculiar traditional barrel on this historic site. These might arrive home quicker than you! The barrel commemorates an improvised mail service that was set-up for communication between British 16th century whalers and poachers. The novel of Moby Dick is inspired on the whaling epoch around Galapagos. Whale oil was very demanded for illumination and smelly ambergris was an essential ingredient for perfumes, but the Atlantic got already depleted. Like James Bay on Santiago, Floreana used to be a popular base to complement stocks. In these pre-Panama Canal times sailors could be years from home, hence the way back around Cape Horn was long and dangerous with storms, pirates, malnutrition and diseases. Returning vessels picked-up letters from the barrel for home delivery. Finally this post box became the termination of British whaling industry in this region. During the Anglo-American War (1812-1815) it revealed easily the positions of the whaling vessels to the American frigate USS Essex, which captured them for their own use.

Proceeding by inflatable dinghy to Baroness Lookout you will follow the graceful arm around the sheltered bay to the entrance of a submerged tuff cone. Alongside you can spot *Galapagos sea lions*, *Pacific green turtles*, *golden cownose rays*, and you might even catch the surprising sight of a *Galapagos penguin*! This is the only spot on the south-eastern routes where some *penguins* reside (best opportunities although on Fernandina, the west coast of Isabela or Bartolomé. After landing you can climb the miniature basaltic cone of Baroness Lookout, and dream away, admiring one of the most striking panoramas of Galapagos. The turquoise and ocean blue waters merge with all year lushly *red mangroves* and basaltic rocks. This viewpoint was the favourite spot of one of the first colonists, Baroness Eloisa von Wagner Bosquet. The eccentric and self-proclaimed 'Empress of Galapagos' even built her house a few meters behind. At last she and one of her lovers were the first in a series of mysterious disappearings and deaths in the 1930s.

Day 4 – Friday

AM: Barrington Bay (Santa Fe)

Practically every animal on the extraordinary island of Santa Fe is unique; endemic to Galapagos, or even to this island alone and therefore extremely vulnerable! Apparently evolution has had enough time and isolation to create the wonders that will surprise you nowadays. And indeed, geologists have determined that Santa Fe is the remnant of probably the most ancient volcano of Galapagos; the 259 m / 850 ft high hill is all that remains from its former cone. Evidences of volcanism, such as 3,9 million old sub-areal volcanic rocks, debunk theories that this would be another tectonic uplift around Santa Cruz.

Almost every visitor of Santa Fe would like to get a glimpse of the rare *Barrington land iguana*. But this pale version is not as easy to spot as its modelling counterparts on South Plaza. This one sometimes asks for an adventurous search, rather untypical for Galapagos; and other times it surprises waiting for you next to the path. Whether you spot it, or not, you will keep going from one surprise into the other. Your experience starts already before

anchoring at Barrington Bay, when the contours of its bizarre *giant opuntia cactus* forests become distinguishable. These largest cacti of the islands have extremely thick trunks indeed, and can grow over 10 m / 33 ft tall! You will land right into a *Galapagos sea lion* colony on the beach, attentively being stared by surprisingly tame *Galapagos hawks*. From their outlooks in the *salt bush*– and *palo santo*-branches on the beach ridge these are ready for snatching away a not to be despised lava lizard; not worrying that even these tiny reptiles are unique...

Snorkelling in the paradisiacal bay gives the opportunity to amplify your quickly growing spot list with (harmless) *whitetip reef sharks*, *spotted eagle rays* and lots of colourful tropical reef fish. Maybe a curious *Galapagos sea lion* is willing to play with you!

PM: South Plaza

Although in line of sight of the main island Santa Cruz, the southern of both Plaza islets is quite different and diverges even from all other sites in the National Park. At the same time it is so typical Galapagos, with its sharp contrasts, amazing diversity and high concentration of wildlife. It is one of most popular, not to be missed islands, and definitely another highlight of your cruise.

There are several large *Galapagos sea lion colonies*, and this islet is best place to encounter the endemic *Galapagos land iguana*. Watch your step and don't stumble over one of them when the equally bizarre *giant prickly pear cactus*-trees distract you! These reptiles are not only ugly: as nobody less than Charles Darwin pronounced: but also extreme photogenic with strikingly yellowish or saffron-colours, and very patient models. On South Plaza the *land iguanas* remained somewhat smaller because of overpopulation and severe food competition. It is incredible to see how cactus spines don't harm their leathery tongues while tasty chewing the pads, flowers and fruits. Beware as well for some unique hybrids, a result of crossing a male *marine iguana* and a female *land iguana*.

South Plaza has two faces, which provide it with complete different ecological niches and corresponding wildlife. At the upper rim of this seismic uplifted formation you will learn its windy, wild face, where dazzling cliffs cut off abruptly the gentle slope. About 20 m / 75 ft downwards powerful waves splash against the foot of these massive walls, impressively droning. Sun basking *marine iguanas* have escaped the cool shadows of the wall proof to be talented rock climbers equipped with strong claws.

Clouds of *petrels*, *storm petrels*, *shearwaters* and *brown noddies* make spectacular flights and sometimes appear to walk 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*, the most beautiful gull in the world. Its neatly lined eyes are perfectly adapted for its exceptional nightly fishing habits. From bird's-eye perspective it is even possible to discover schools of *surgeonfishes*, *Galapagos mullets* and when you are lucky even a jumping *manta ray*!

Day 5 – Saturday

AM: North Seymour

The former seabed of the uplifted tabletop of North Seymour is strewn with boulders and overgrown by dry shrubs. Nevertheless this islet is one of most visited sites, and overloaded with bird life. The surprising proximity to South Seymour (better known as Baltra) enables an ideal combination with your flight to or from Galapagos, either for a quick introduction or for a last farewell.

Two emblematic hosts say "Hello" or "Goodbye". An easy circular path takes you through the archipelago's most extensive colonies of *blue-footed boobies* and *frigate birds*. At the start of the (shifting) breeding season adult frigatebird-males blow up their vivid red pouches to

impressive football-sized balloons. This is one of the few spots (besides Genovesa and Pitt Point) where you can compare the *magnificent* and the rarer *great frigatebird* breeding next to each other. *Frigatebirds* rather attack returning boobies and conduct aerial battles than fishing themselves and get a wet suit. The even more popular *blue-footed boobies* show their cute courtship rituals, in which their remarkable feet play an important role. Moreover you can spot lots of other seabirds, such as *brown pelicans*, *red-billed tropicbirds*, endemic *swallow-tailed gulls* and seasonally even *Nazca boobies*. Between the shrubs you might perceive a *Galapagos land iguana*. North Seymour originally did not count with *land iguanas*, but in the 1930s an eccentric American millionaire moved the last generation from Baltra, and saved them for starvation caused by competition with introduced goats; the afterwards breeding program at Charles Darwin Research Station turned into a big success.

PM: Bachas Beach (Santa Cruz)

Strolling along its coastline, the blinding white Bachas Beach appears full of natural life. But both the turquoise bay and the symmetrical tuff cone-islet of Daphne Major pull your eyes to the horizon as well. Much closer, in the intertidal zone at your feet, run impressive sparkling orange coloured and heavy-armed *sally lightfoot crabs* around the dark basaltic rocks. Beware of a *Galapagos sea lion*, a *marine iguana*, a *shark* fin or (seasonally) mating *Pacific green turtles* in the surf!

You will reach a brackish lagoon in the dunes, with different species of wade and shore birds, including gracious and noisy *black-necked stilts*, *white-cheeked pintails* (or *Bahama ducks*) and hunting *herons*. Migratory aquatic birds that winter in Galapagos, such as *whimbrels*, also frequent this pond. As soon as the water level drops and becomes saltier in the dry season, you might even encounter some *American flamingos* tirelessly filtering water to catch *shrimp* and *algae*!

These two quiet plaques along the remote north-western coast have become the preferred nesting site of *Pacific green turtles* on this main island of Santa Cruz. Females wait for high tide at night before crawling ashore, resulting in an unnoticed, safer and less exhausting effort. In the sunny months (November-February) the powdery coral sand becomes a hot greenhouse, and as soon as the eggs hatch, lots of predators arrive to attend the banquet. 'Bachas' refers to the 'minefield of nest holes' in the dunes strip; though others argue that it is a 'Spanglish' mispronunciation of 'barks', referring to two rusty landing vessels that have been left on the longer second beach in World War II, when the American US Air Force used BALTRA as a strategic base to defend the Panama Canal.

Day 6 – Sunday

AM: Mosquera

Though close neighbours, Mosquera and North Seymour offer a very different experience; diverging habitats attract different residents. While North Seymour contains large breeding colonies for *boobies* and *frigatebirds*, Mosquera stands out by one of the largest concentrations of *Galapagos sea lions* in the entire archipelago. It's also one of the few spots inside the National Park where you can stroll around freely, without being restricted to a trail.

Galapagos sea lions are real beach lovers and Mosquera offers beautiful white coral sand beaches contrasting with the azure coloured water. This islet is just a few meters higher than a sandbank and doesn't complicate their landing, and they can roll relaxed in the surf. For fishing they just have to enter the Itabaca Channel, which is a sort of natural tramp in which lots of marine life and schools of fish are concentrated. When the geological upraise continues, or when sea level would drop, the nowadays submarine parts of the rocky ridge would come to the surface too, and change Mosquera in an isthmus, connecting North and

South Seymour (Baltra). Fishing the channel is not without risk; sometimes a school of *killer whales* (*orcas*, recognizable on their characterizing dorsal fins) enters to hunt *sea lions*.

During a beach walk you can also expect shorebirds and waders, such as groups of sanderlings that steadily have to interrupt their foraging efforts and run to escape each next breaker. Between the rocks wait lots of other intertidal hunters such as striking orange *sally lightfoot crabs*, ready to play seek and hide with you when you want to picture them. If a dinghy-ride is programmed, Mosquera might surprise with some more exotic species as well. The endemic and vulnerable *lava gull* nests on this island, but counts only with a few hundreds of pairs and is the rarest species of gull all over the world. With some luck you can approach a *yellow-crowned night heron* keeping an eye on one of the tidal pools, or you even might catch the view of a strayed *red-footed booby*!

AM: Transfer to Baltra airport

Assisted by the guide and some crew-members the inflatable dinghy will bring you and your luggage to Baltra, where we take the airport shuttle. Your guide will accompany you to the check-in counters in the departure hall.

We expect that you will return home with stunning pictures and unforgettable memories for life!