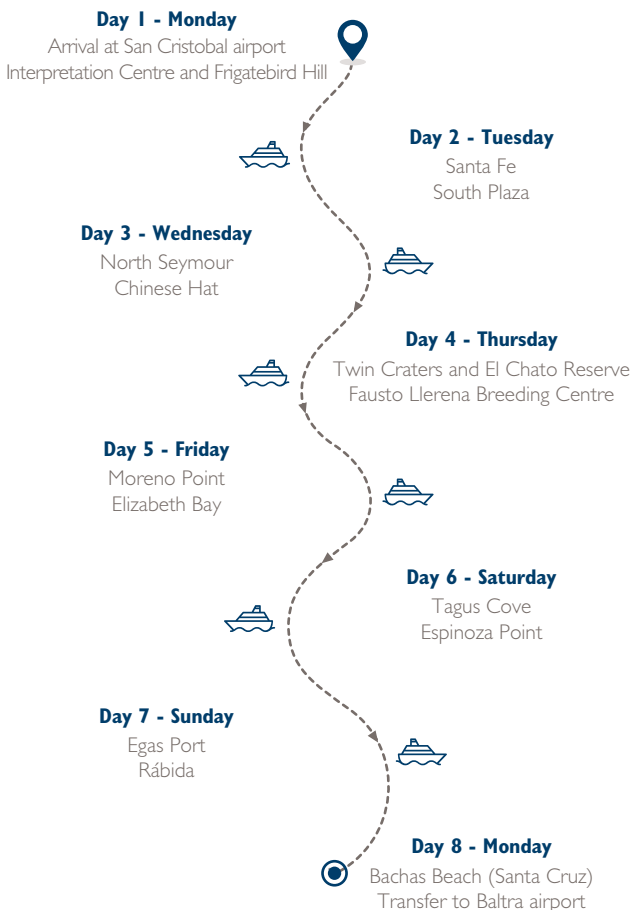




# ITINERARY **A** 8 DAYS / 7 NIGHTS

## Monday to Monday



### HIGH CHANCE OF SPOTTING

	Booby colonies		Great and American frigatebird
	Flightless Cormorant		Marine iguana
	Galapagos giant tortoise		Whitetip reef shark
	Green sea turtle		Galapagos penguin

## DAY 1 - MONDAY

### AM - Arrival at San Cristobal airport

Upon arrival at San Cristobal airport, you will pass through an airport inspection point to insure that no foreign plants or animals are introduced to the islands, as well as to pay the park entrance fee of \$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.

### PM - Interpretation Centre and Frigatebird Hill (San Cristobal)

The Interpretation Centre, just outside the provincial capital city of Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, gives a perfect explanation of this unique archipelago. Its attractive exhibition is quite complete and helps you to get a clear overview and learn what makes this archipelago so unique. Information panels (in English and Spanish), pictures, documents, maquettes, and true-to-life dioramas tell various background and conservation stories about the islands in a different way.

A short, though often hot, uphill trail with steps, leads from the Interpretation Centre to the summit of Frigatebird Hill. Four panoramic viewpoints show Puerto Baquerizo Moreno from above, as well as the bays on both sides of the headland. On clear days even the distant, offshore sculpture of Kicker Rock can be seen! These wooded hilltops are one of the rare places where some magnificent and great frigatebirds form a mixed breeding colony. A viewpoint with another Charles Darwin statue is a reminder that the HMS Beagle anchored in the exotic bay below



## DAY 2 - TUESDAY

### AM - 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.

### PM - South Plaza

South Plaza is located to the east of Santa Cruz Island, and forms part of a pair of islands known as "Islas Plazas". Despite its small size, some of the most interesting and outstanding species of the Galapagos are found here. The Plazas land iguanas are smaller than their relatives found on other islands. There are several hybrid iguanas throughout the island; a result of crossing a marine iguana with a land iguana. They are unique and recognizable at first glance by their black/grey colour, with a land iguana's crest, but the face and tail of the marine iguana. The big population of iguanas is due to the presence of prickly pears, their favourite food. Swallow-tailed gulls nesting in the rugged cliffs are seen along with other sea birds as Audubon shearwaters, red-billed tropicbirds, frigate birds and brown pelicans.

## DAY 3 - WEDNESDAY

### 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 - Chinese Hat

Chinese Hat is a 52 m/170 ft high volcanic cone, forming another islet right off the rocky coast of Santiago, where a small colony of Galapagos penguins have settled. Approaching Chinese Hat from the north, you will understand the meaning of the name. This is an excellent place to learn more about volcanoes, lava bombs and lava tunnels.

You will arrive just in time to witness how this barren islet is colonised by pioneer species that have begun to sprout! Beautiful beaches of white coral sand and holes in the eroding lava fields are filled up with lava sand, which enables rooting. Galapagos sea lions and countless marine iguanas contribute to fertilisation and thus create many favourable options for newcomers, such as saltbush and the sesuvium carpet.



## DAY 4 - THURSDAY

### AM - Twin Craters and El Chato Reserve (Santa Cruz)

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 favorite pond silently.

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

### PM - Fausto Llerena Breeding Centre (Santa Cruz)

At this site, you can observe tortoises that come from various islands of the archipelago. They comply with the captive breeding programme and then return to repopulate the areas where their population has been affected. The land iguanas of Santa Cruz, Isabela and North Seymour are also in a captive breeding programme, as the populations in these areas suffered from feral dogs. One of the main attractions is the famous embalmed Lonesome George. Estimated to have died between 93 and 109 years of age, it is recognised as the last of its kind and a symbol of the efforts invested to conserve endangered species. The captive tortoises are used to the presence of visitors, so it's a great place to take photos with them.

## DAY 5 - FRIDAY

### AM - Moreno Point (Isabela)

Moreno Point is located on the north coast of Isabela Island, between the volcanos Sierra Negra and Cerro Azul. The trail runs along a solidified pahoehoe lava flow into a complex of coastal lagoons. Its main attractions are several species of birds, which are found around the lakes and mangroves.

### PM - Elizabeth Bay (Isabela)

This is a marine visitor site, so the excursion has no landing point. Your dinghy ride starts with a visit to the Marielas islets where the largest and most important penguin colony resides in the Galapagos Islands. The excursion continues into the cove, surrounded by red mangroves where you can admire their red roots and green leaves. Here, you can observe sea turtles, flightless cormorants, spotted eagle rays, golden rays, brown pelicans and sea lions. Frequent visitors have been able to see Galapagos hawks soaring overhead with schools of pompano and dorado fish swimming down below.



## DAY 6 - SATURDAY

### AM - Tagus Cove (Isabela)

A tour along the cliffs in a dinghy will give the visitors a good chance to see the Galapagos penguin, the flightless cormorant and other sea birds. From the landing dock, it is about a 30-minute hike along the trail up to the top of the cliff from where you can view Darwin Lake, an uplifted ultra saline lake saltier than the sea. You can also see several volcanoes from this location. Look carefully at the graffiti on the surrounding cliffs of the cove! They were written by pirates, whalers and buccaneers in past centuries.

### PM - Espinoza Point (Fernandina)

Fernandina is the third-largest island in the archipelago and has a single visitor site: Punta Espinoza, located at the northeastern tip of the island. Marine iguanas conglomerate in larger groups than on any other island. They bask around in the sand, swim near the shore and sometimes block the way at the landing dock. Among the unique species found here, is the flightless cormorant. This bird had to adjust its way of survival and perfection its skills of finding food in the ocean. Their wings, tails and feet progressively adapted for swimming. To see these birds is to witness evolution happening right in front of you.



## DAY 7 - SUNDAY

### AM - Egas Port (Santiago)

Puerto Egas is a black beach located on the west side of Santiago Island. Volcanic tuff deposits have favoured the formation of this special black sand beach and this is the main attraction of the Island. This site is called Puerto Egas because there was an attempt of Hector Egas to start the exploitation of salt, which failed. After all, the price of salt on the continent was very cheap and did not justify its exploitation in the Galapagos. The project was abandoned and they left their infrastructure.

### PM - Rábida

Rábida Island is unique because of the red colour of the rocks and sand. The volcanic material in this island is very porous and external factors such as rain, saltwater and sea breeze have acted as an oxidizing agent. A short walk along a trail will lead you to a coastal lagoon behind the beach that allows for the observation of land birds as finches, doves, yellow warblers and mockingbirds. There is also a colony of flamingos at the lagoon.



## DAY 8 - MONDAY

### AM - Bachas Beach (Santa Cruz)

These two small beaches are found to the west of Turtle Cove. Their sand is made of decomposed coral, which makes it white and soft, making it a favourite nesting site for sea turtles. There is a small brackish water lagoon behind one of the beaches, where occasionally it is possible to observe flamingos and other coastal birds, such as black-necked stilts and whimbrels. The other beach is longer, but it has two old barges that were abandoned during the Second World War, when the USA used Baltra Island as a strategic point to protect the Panama Channel. After this, assisted by the naturalist guide and some crew members, you will be taken to the Seymour Ecological Airport.

It has been a pleasure accompanying you on this unique trip and we hope to see you again very soon!



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