

BIOTREK GROUP

Aida Maria Galapagos Cruise Itinerary
Eight days/Seven Nights

Day 1: Guayaquil to Baltra, Santa Cruz Island & Las Bachas Beach (L/D)

Fly from the Ecuadorian mainland (Guayaquil) to the islands on an early morning 90-minute



flight via TAME Airlines. As you prepare to land in Baltra, peer out the window. The landscape below will seem out of this world - and it is for you have come to a place like no other. The Galapagos Islands are unique to the world and you are about to see why. Your bilingual naturalist guide will greet you at the airport and assist you through customs. During lunch he/she will introduce you to the islands and specifically the flora and fauna you will encounter at our first destination, Las Bachas Beach. On the sandy white beaches of Las Bachas we will get a

close look at a sea turtle nesting area and a lake frequented by leggy pink flamingos and other migratory birds. Afterward, we cool ourselves off with our first dip in the deliciously blue Pacific Ocean. As this is our first evening together, the crew will invite us 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 bedazzle; look for the Southern Cross, the Big Dipper (turned up-side down!) and Orion.

Day 2: South Plazas Island & Santa Fe Island (B/L/D)



After breakfast we will sail to Plazas Island, where a large colony of sea lions lounges daily in the equatorial sun. Soon you will notice their subtly diabolic grins and wonder what they find so humorous; you only hope the joke isn't on you! Plaza also boasts excellent examples of typical Galapaganean 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 with their elaborate tails. After lunch on the yacht,

we continue to Santa Fe Island, a sea journey of 2 1/2 hours. Upon arrival to the island, we will be treated to a noisy welcome by the local sealion colony. Following our naturalist guide on the island paths we will come to Santa Fe's main attraction, a towering forest of giant cacti. Scattered around the cacti trees you will see a number of the island's indigenous sun-seekers: marine and land iguanas, the rainbow-streaked lava lizards and, if you are lucky, land tortoises - the namesakes of the islands. After our walk we will plunge into the salty sea and snorkel in the company of sealions, lion fish and sea turtles. Finally, we will return to the yacht for dinner.

Day 3: Espanola Island, Suarez Point & Garner Bay (B/L/D)



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 will see sea lion pups sunbathing with marine iguanas and blue footed boobies nesting in between. Nearby may be a Galapagos Hawk.

If it is boobie mating season watch the bonded pairs do the infamous boobie dance (if it's not mating season ask your guide to demonstrate - after all it's his job to teach you about the local fauna). Following lunch on board the yacht, we will visit Garner Bay, a great place for sunbathing, swimming and snorkeling. Lion fish, flycatchers, and Galapagos hawks will keep us company as we relax under the rays of the evening sun. Dinner on the yacht completes our day.

Day 4: Floreana Island, Cormorant Point & Corona del Diablo (B/L/D)

Today when you awake and peer out your porthole 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. Our first stop is Punta Cormorant, where we follow a footpath to a lagoon inhabited by flaming-pink flamingos. We will also pass by Carolina Beach, a sea turtle nesting area and a superb spot for watching sea birds and sea rays. Back on our yacht, we skirt the island's coast until we 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. After returning to the boat for lunch we will sail on to Post Office Bay, where the island's original post office - really only a wooden barrel - was established in 1793. The current system still functions as it did three centuries ago.



Day 5: Santa Cruz Island We will visit the station's Tortoise Rearing Center (B/L/D)

Here we can find itty bitty tortoises, hand-sized between the ages of one and five, and marvel at how they achieve such a large size 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 boasts the largest town and economic center of the Galapagos, Puerto Ayora. In this port-side town we can buy souvenirs of the islands (postcards, t-shirts, books, etc.). Check-out the uniquely Galapaganean 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), we will explore the upper region ('parte alta') of the island, a moisture-rich area with fertile volcanic soils. We will learn about the vegetation and animal life of this zone, often strikingly different than that found at lower elevations. (If your tour is a 5 day tour, our visit to Charles Darwin Station will complete our Galapagos adventure. From the station we will take a bus to the airport for departure).

Day 6: Rabida Island, Santiago Island (B/L/D)



Wake-up in the morning to the sound of barking sea lions and the lapping of the sea. After breakfast travel by dingy to the seashell-pink sands of Rabida Island. Here we will see a pelican nesting area on the beach, and then we will set off on the short path across the island, gazing at the sea birds whirling overhead. After stopping at two Kodak-worthy viewpoints we will return to the boat for lunch. Two hours of sailing after lunch will bring us to our second stop for the day, Santiago Island. Egas Port we disembark and follow a footpath across the

island, admiring the grinning marine iguanas, Darwin finches, rainbowed lava lizards, and endemic Galapagos hawks along the way. A special sight on Santiago are the endangered fur seals cooling off in the shade formed by the seashore grottos.

Day 7: Santiago Island, Sullivan Bay & Bartolome Island (B/L/D)



Our second day on Santiago Island takes us to awe-inspiring Sullivan Bay. At the turn of the century a huge lava flow spilled forth and right down to the sea; today you can stroll across this black volcanic expanse admiring its time-frozen ripples, bubbles and ropes. After lunch we will visit nearby Bartolome Island, which at its highest point (114m) has 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 otherworldly lava-land home.

Day 8: North Seymour Island (B)



After an early breakfast we will disembark at our last stop, North Seymour Island. Here we will see frigatebirds, the clownish blue-footed booby, and of course the ubiquitous sea lions. With luck we will witness the striking courtship display of the male frigatebird, in which he inflates a red balloon-like sac below his throat and struts his stuff for all of the young females. After our visit to North Seymour we will sail to Baltra Island to catch our flight via TAME to Guayaquil.