

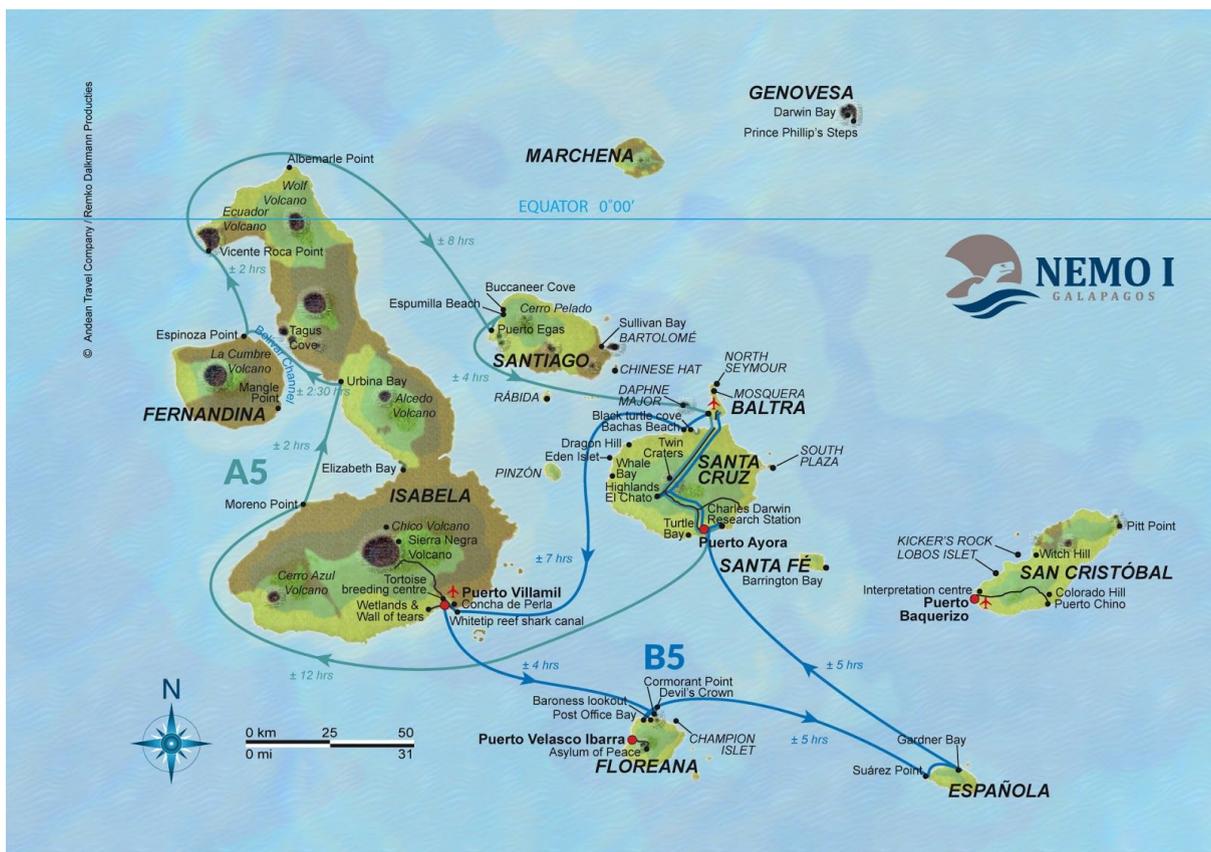


## ITINERARY A5 + B5

9 DAYS / 8 NIGHTS

Thursday to Friday

(every 14 days)



Our new 8-night combination enables you to experience the distinct characters of the west (young and wild landscapes) and east Galapagos (ancient, more friendly scenery); outer islands often belong to the more exclusive places. This is your opportunity to combine sightings of unique species such as *flightless cormorants* and *Galapagos penguins* of Isabela and Fernandina with the tropical *albatrosses* of Española in only 8 nights (and of course many more highlights).

After an introduction in the Charles Darwin Research Centre (*Galapagos giant tortoise* breeding centre) you will navigate round by far the largest island, Isabela, and pass by pristine Fernandina, which are both just recently born out of fire. On its way back Nemo I will anchor at Santiago's James Bay (*fur seal* grottos and great snorkelling) and sail around the *seabird*-laden volcano islet of Daphne Major.

Though less frequented than popular central and south-eastern islands, the desolate west is truly

exceptional. Become a witness to some bizarre miracles of evolution, such as *flightless cormorants*, huge *marine iguanas* and *Galapagos penguins* close to the equator. Discover how pioneer species conquer barren lava fields and create habitats for new colonist species. En route you will have chances to see emblematic and endemic *Galapagos land iguanas*, *American flamingos* and exciting *whale watching*!

The almost extinguished volcano islands in the south-west are geologically the oldest, where evolution has had enough time to create numerous endemic species. Striking coral sand beaches at azure bays are favourite places for large colonies of *Galapagos sea lions*. Española is the sole option for those eager to admire synchronous courtship dances of the only tropical *albatross* in the world. Walk at a short distance past *blue-footed boobies*, *Nazca boobies* and *waved albatrosses*, whilst they are courtshipping, mating, breeding, nurturing or learning to fly (depending on the season). For many, Devil's Crown is the Galapagos' number one deep water snorkelling site, and one of the highlights of their cruise. Besides that this route also offers almost daily snorkelling and plenty possibilities for optional scuba diving.

#### **Important notes:**

- Itinerary is subject to change in case of force majeure caused by exceptional and natural circumstances.
- Approximate departure and navigation times are just indicative and depend on the sea conditions and decisions of the captain.
- Although the Galapagos seldom require you to seek out wildlife, observation of specific species can never be guaranteed.

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## **Day 1 – Thursday**

**After arrival at Baltra your tour will start on adjacent main island of Santa Cruz, where you will cross the surprisingly lush highlands by bus and reach its cosy harbour town Puerto Ayora. A visit to the Charles Darwin Research Station and the famous *Galapagos giant tortoise* breeding centre is an interesting introduction to this unique archipelago.**

#### **Programme:**

**AM:** This morning you will fly from Quito or Guayaquil to Baltra Airport.

**PM:** After being welcomed aboard S/C Nemo I, check-in, lunch, and the safety-drill you will visit the Charles Darwin Research Station as an introduction to the Galapagos and get some free time to stroll through the cosy town of Puerto Ayora.

**Overnight navigation:** Before dinner your naturalist guide will give the first daily briefing, and the captain and his crew will introduce themselves and toast you with a welcome drink.

**Navigation:** The anchor will be lifted early for this route's longest navigation to Moreno Point on Isabela, about 12 hours in a southwestern direction.

#### *AM: Arrival at Baltra Airport*

At Baltra Airport you will have to pay your Galapagos National Park entrance fee and your luggage will be inspected. See [Getting there](#) for flight and arrival information.

In front of the arrival hall you will meet your naturalist guide and fellow passengers, and the airport shuttle will transfer you to the ferry across the Itabaca Channel. On Santa Cruz you continue by bus through the lush highlands to the harbour of Puerto Ayora. Our inflatable dinghies ('zodiacs') take you the last stretch to the yacht.

PM: Charles Darwin Research Station (Santa Cruz)

The Charles Darwin Research Station (CDRS) and the headquarters of the Galapagos National Park Service share the same location on the outskirts of Puerto Ayora. From here biological research and indispensable conservation management of this unique archipelago are directed. The complex houses various interpretation and information centres about the National Park and the Galapagos Marine Reserve.

The most memorable part of your visit will probably be the successful breeding centre and the enclosures with *Galapagos giant tortoises*; even after the death of its world-famous resident, 'Lonesome George' († June 2012; the last known individual of the *Pinta subspecies*, who sadly failed to reproduce offspring). Most remaining adult *giant tortoises* in the corals are former pets and many of them are accustomed to human company.

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## Day 2 – Friday

In the next few days SC Nemo I will navigate clockwise around Isabela, by far the largest island of the archipelago. Its larger living space seems to mean that evolution is hunting for records over here (although some are disputed). Explore some of the most remote visitor's sites in the Galapagos, offshore rocks with a small colony of *Galapagos penguins*, and penetrate Galapagos' highest mangle in the sheltered creeks of the estuary. Perceive how *pioneer vegetation* progressively converts barren lava fields into lush oases and evergreen *mangle* forests, and is creating new habitats for specific species.

Thanks to major upwellings out of the deep sea (Cromwell Current) the nutrient-rich west coast of Isabela is a magnet for all kinds of marine and birdlife. Bolivar Channel (between Isabela and Fernandina) can be great for *whale* watching.

### Programme:

**AM:** After breakfast first we take an inflatable dinghy-ride along the shoreline, followed by a 'dry landing' (with footwear) and a guided hike that crosses the crumbling, pitch black lava fields of Moreno Point (moderate level; about 2km/1.25mi). After a snack snorkelling is scheduled.

**PM:** At noon we will sail for 2 hours to Elizabeth Bay. Meanwhile you can enjoy lunch and a siesta. On arrival a long dinghy-ride is scheduled to both the offshore rocks and sheltered mangles.

**Navigation:** Before dinner we will continue to Punta Espinoza (Fernandina, about 4hrs), while actively looking for *whales*. You will have a relatively quiet floating night.

AM: Moreno Point (Isabela)

Moreno Point tells the continuing story of the famous lunatic lava fields of Sullivan Bay (actually not visited by Catamaran Nemo). This once lifeless lava field becomes dotted with tidal pools and filtration lagoons since parts of the crust have broken and fallen into the undermining lava tunnels.

Pioneer life takes advantage; finally the *lava cacti* get company of two more species of *cacti*, from which the *candelabras* can grow up to 7m/23ft tall, and dominate the rest of the shrubby vegetation. Fringes of *reed*, *sea grass* and *mangrove bushes* transform the picturesque lagoons into lush oases. Your pictures get the perfect finishing touch when bright *American flamingos* forage in the

largest lagoon as well. The fresh promising pioneer vegetation seems on the winning hand; just until Sierra Negra volcano spits a new layering cover, and the story starts all over again.

Tidal pools form natural traps and attract scavengers and hunters, such as bright orange *sally lightfoot crabs*, *oystercatchers* and *herons*. During a dinghy-ride along the jagged shoreline, you can spot *marine iguanas* that wait patiently for their turn at lowest tide to graze weeds on the seabed, and a breeding colony of *brown pelicans* in the mangroves.

*PM: Marielas Islets & Elizabeth Bay (Isabela)*

Although there is no landing point, Elizabeth Bay offers two in one! A prolonged ride by inflatable dinghy combines the Marielas Islets in the mouth of the bay, with the mangles in its innermost heart.

The Marielas islets are an excellent place to spot *marine iguanas* and small family groups of *Galapagos penguins* in the front row of the cliffs. The endangered *Galapagos penguin* is the rarest *penguin* species worldwide (just some 1500 birds over all the archipelago; please don't expect vast colonies as in Antarctic regions). Lofty *palo santo*-trees on top of the cliffs provide *magnificent frigatebirds* a lookout to rob returning *blue-footed boobies*.

Next the dinghy will turn landwards and enter the calm estuary. Whilst exploring lagoons and shallow creeks, the outboard engine can be turned off, to enjoy the sounds of nature. *Brown pelicans* are the only *pelicans* in the world that plunge-dive, though more superficial than the spectacular rocket-like diving *blue-footed boobies*. *Lava herons* and *great blue herons* prefer to wait patiently for what comes along. *Pacific green turtles* swim gracefully around, popping their heads up to breathe (mating season: December-January). You may also encounter *spotted eagle rays* or *sharks*, looking for protected inlets to give birth and leave their young alone. This highest mangrove forest of the Galapagos consists of *red mangroves* (with their characteristic prop roots) as well as *black, white* and *button mangroves*.

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### Day 3 – Saturday

Without any doubt Espinoza Point belongs to the more exclusive sites of the Galapagos National Park. Fernandina harbours one of the world's most virgin, untouched ecosystems. Today you will become an eyewitness of evolution, which is happening right in front of you! Wonder again about bizarre creatures such as the *flightless cormorant*, *marine iguana* and *Galapagos penguin*.

Before leaving the remote west, Isabela will present you with the latest geological curiosity and the largest *Galapagos land* and *marine iguanas*. While crossing the Bolivar Channel to Urbina Bay, you will have more great *whale* watching opportunities!

#### **Programme:**

**AM:** After breakfast and a dry landing, the guided morning walk (easy/moderate level; about 2km/1.25 mi) runs over the lava tongue of Espinoza Point. After a snack we will bring you to today's snorkelling site.

**PM:** While having lunch we will cross the Bolivar Channel for the last time, back to Isabela's west coast. At the geologic interesting site of Urbina Bay you will take a second guided walk, and you can snorkel as well.

**Overnight navigation:** Before dinner we will start our 10 hour's navigation around the north cape of Isabela to Santiago (crossing the equator twice).

*AM: Espinosa Point (Fernandina)*

Espinoza Point is Fernandina's only terrestrial visitor's site, and one of the few locations where you will find some bizarre outgrowths of natural selection. The figurehead is the emblematic *flightless cormorant* that lives exclusively in the remote west of the Galapagos, and could be considered as the 'holy grail of evolution'. The *cormorant* did not have to fear terrestrial enemies and lets you approach very closely. The next generations gradually lost their flying capabilities to become excellent divers. Together with its neighbour, the *Galapagos penguin*, these are two of the rarest and most vulnerable bird species in the world, with less than 2000 individuals each.

Besides the endemic wildlife, you will also love the almost unworldly views with the dominating cone of Volcán La Cumbre (= the summit) as a spectacular backdrop. The narrow headland that you walk is the end of a lava tongue that has reached the coast and solidified on contact with the cold seawater. The black rocks are not yet covered by vegetation except lava cacti and mangroves, but are teeming with hundreds of dragon-like *marine iguanas* that breed and conglomerate in larger groups than on any other island.

*PM: Urbina Bay (Isabela)*

Urbina Bay presents you with Isabela's latest geologic curiosity. In 1954 tectonic forces lifted the former seabed several metres above sea level and formed the present coastal plain. The tilted seabed ran dry at once and 6km/3.75mi of coastline was shifted outward. Pretty far inland you can find marine remnants, such as fish bones, shells, scales from *lobsters*, *urchins* and *corals*. Far behind you will reach the original coastline and the typical *palo santo*-bush from the arid zone. This very wide beach provides ample nesting places for *iguanas*, *turtles* and even for *Galapagos giant tortoises* that descend all the way down from Alcedo volcano in the wet season. The *marine* and *land iguanas* of Urbina Bay are the largest of the Galapagos.

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## Day 4 – Sunday

**At James Bay (Santiago) Charles Darwin spent most of his time on the Galapagos, while HMS Beagle continued mapping the archipelago. A highlight of this pearl necklace of visitor's sites are the outstanding *fur seal* grottos at the beautiful sculptured coastline of Puerto Egas, together with other coastal landscapes that could well be exotic film sets; not to forget Buccaneer's Cove crystal clear snorkelling waters.**

**Programme:**

**AM:** After breakfast you will take a guided walk along the coastline (easy level) to the *fur seal* grottos. Back on-board we will provide a snack before snorkelling.

**PM:** At lunchtime we will navigate 12km/7 mi/45 min north to Espumilla Beach. After a wet landing (bare feet) at the beach, a guided walk leads uphill and inland (easy level; about 2km/1.25 mi). Afterwards you can take a dinghy-ride (or alternatively sea kayaking) along the coastline.

**Overnight navigation:** Before dinner SC Nemo I will continue along the south coast of Santiago to Daphne Major, where we will arrive after about 4 hrs for a relatively quiet floating night sleep.

### AM: Puerto Egas (Santiago)

Dominated by Sugarloaf Hill (395m/1300ft) and named after a former salt mine (1960s), Puerto Egas is the southernmost visitor's site along James Bay. Its masterly sculptured coastline of black basalts and polished multi-coloured ash-layers forms a photogenic scene with collapsed lava tunnels, natural arches, caves and blowholes such as 'Darwin's toilet'.

In a grotto right below a spectacular rock arch at the end of the beach, a colony of *Galapagos fur seals* occupies the shade, sheltering from the equatorial sun. Unlike more common *Galapagos sea lions* this smaller species of seal is no beach lover at all, due to their adorable, but insulating coats. This refuge is the very best place to see these endemic, shy and once heavily hunted marine mammals.

Particularly at low tide Puerto Egas teems with extremely varied intertidal life. Notice how *marine iguanas* just leave, return cold or warm-up after grazing weeds on the seabed at lowest tide. Ossified *night herons* and *lava herons* keep an eye on the tidal pools that are refilled during every flood with small fish, *octopuses*, *star fish*, *snails*, *urchins*, *shells*, *green algae* and many other snacks. Noisy *oystercatchers*, *turnstones*, *plovers* and *whimbrels* inspect these pools zealously. Hundreds of *sally lightfoot crabs* seem even brighter orange against the pitch-black rocks (immature are dark-coloured).

### PM: Espumilla Beach & Buccaneer Cove (Santiago)

Espumilla Beach has been revived as an important breeding site for *turtles*, as it is no longer suffering from digging wild pigs. The *turtles* return year after year to bury their eggs into the cinnamon-coloured sand dunes. About two months later (roughly from February to August) the eggs hatch all at the same time. Most vulnerable hatchlings will sadly never reach the sea, and form a banquet for predators such as *herons*, *frigatebirds*, *mockingbirds* and *ghost crabs*.

The beach ridge hides a mangle with two picturesque lagoons on the backside. A colony of *American flamingos* and aquatic birds used to be its main attraction, but after the climate phenomenon of El Niño, strong sedimentation altered the brackish water environment, and it no longer contains their food...

As often in the Galapagos, different vegetation zones are very close by, providing great scenic contrasts. Upon climbing a hill you will be rewarded with a beautiful overview of the transitions from sea into beach into *mangrove* into dry *palo santo* forest.

At the nearby Buccaneer Cove we have a great snorkelling opportunity.

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## Day 5 – Monday

**Early morning Sailing Catamaran Nemo I will navigate around the characteristic volcanic islet of Daphne Major, inhabited by a wide range of seabirds. In the afternoon you will continue to nearby Bachas Beach at the north coast Santa Cruz. This beach is popular breeding ground for the Pacific green turtle; you will make a relaxed stroll along to an aquatic bird-rich saline lagoon.**

### **Programme:**

**AM:** Early morning Sailing Catamaran Nemo I will navigate around the characteristic volcanic islet of Daphne Major.

**PM:** You will make a wet landing (bare feet) at Bachas Beach, followed by an easy stroll along the waterline of this coral sand beach. Filled with impressions you will return-on board for dinner.

**Navigation:** At dinner time we will lift the anchor and sail about 7 hrs – depending on the sea conditions – south-west to Isabela.

### **AM: Daphne Major**

The characteristic offshore tuff cone of Daphne Major looks how a child draws a volcano islet. You might have already got a first glimpse of it from your airplane window on arrival. Access to the 120m/400ft high islet is restricted because of its fragility and susceptibility to erosion. On your last morning in the Galapagos you will take a dinghy-ride where you can spot large flocks of *storm petrels* and other *seabirds*.

This islet forms an almost undisturbed semi-closed ecosystem and is therefore of great scientific interest. Coexisting *Nazca boobies*, *red-billed tropicbirds*, *magnificent frigatebirds*, *blue-footed boobies* and 8 other breeding species have nicely distributed different sections of the cone, according to their needs and ecological niches. The caldera contains two craters, both completely white-plastered by the increments of *blue-footed boobies*, which have founded a very large breeding colony in this sheltered place. There is a colony of *Galapagos sea lions* on the only small beach. This islet has also been the location for an important multidecade study of *Darwin's finches*. This concluded that population fluctuates strongly and *finches* that survived in dryer years were mainly the ones with larger beaks; results that supported strongly Darwin's theory of natural selection and evolution.

*PM: Bachas Beach (Santa Cruz)*

Strolling along its coastline, blinding white Bachas Beach appears full of intertidal and bird life. But the symmetrical tuff cone-islet of Daphne Major will pull your eyes to the horizon as well. Look out for *Galapagos sea lions*, *marine iguanas*, a *shark* fin or (seasonally) mating *Pacific green turtles* in the surf! Both quiet beaches have become their preferred nesting site on the main island of Santa Cruz. '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 were 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.

Sparkling orange coloured and heavy-armed *sally lightfoot crabs* play hide and seek with you when you want to photograph them on the dark basaltic rocks. A brackish lagoon in the dunes houses different species of *wade and shore birds*, including *black-necked stilts*, *white-cheeked pintails* (or *Bahama ducks*) and hunting *herons*. Migratory aquatic birds that spend winter on the Galapagos, such as *whimbrels*, also frequent this pond. As soon as water level drops and the lagoon becomes saltier, you might even encounter some *American flamingos* tirelessly filtering water to catch *shrimp* and *algae*!

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## **Day 6 – Tuesday**

The first nightly crossing will bring you to Puerto Villamil on Isabela. In the next few days Nemo I will navigate clockwise around this island, by far the largest of the archipelago. Its larger living space seems to mean that evolution is hunting for records over here (although some are disputed).

Huge *marine iguanas* crawl over undisturbed rocky islets just outside the harbour, which also contain a unique tidal channel where *whitetip reef sharks* rest. Saline lagoons in the wetlands house the largest insular colony of *American flamingos* and you will visit the botanical garden of another tortoise breeding centre with native species.

## Programme:

**AM:** Before breakfast (we provide a snack) the inflatable dinghies will bring you to the Tintoreras islets for a guided hike to the tidal channel, following a rough volcanic rock trail (easy/moderate level). After breakfast there is an excellent snorkelling opportunity.

**PM:** After lunch you will have free time to enjoy Puerto Villamil and its striking beach. Then you will visit the local tortoise breeding centre and the surrounding wetlands.

**Overnight navigation:** After dinner the anchor is lifted for rounding the southern lobe of Isabela clockwise to its far west coast (about 6 hours).

**Additional options scuba-diving:** Isla Tortuga, Cuatro Hermanos or Roca Viuda (advanced).

### *AM: Whitetip reef shark channel (Isabela/Tintoreras)*

Just outside the harbour of Puerto Villamil (Isabela), a group of rocky islets protrude just above sea level. These are remnants of a lava flow that is demolished by the waves. A collapsed lava tube forms a channel that fills up at high tide, while the entrance is closed at low tide. Marine life gets trapped, including *turtles* and elegant *white-spotted eagle rays* or *golden rays*. In the crystal-clear water of this unique site you can also observe *whitetip reef sharks* (called *tintoreras* in Spanish; which the islets are named after) resting from their nocturnal hunts. This species of *shark* is fairly common in the archipelago, and often spotted on the seabed when snorkelling, but here you can see them dry and comfortably from the bank.

Unlike the beaches of Puerto Villamil, tiny plaques along these black rocks offer undisturbed breeding places for *marine iguanas*. Over here the largest Isabela subspecies (up to 1.5m/5ft tall!) can reproduce successfully and thrive by hundreds. The rocky shoreline with its intertidal life also attracts *sally lightfoot crabs*, *lava herons* and occasional *Galapagos penguins*. *Galapagos sea lions* occupy the sand beach and complete this stereotypical Galapagos image.

### *PM: Arnaldo Tupiza Tortoise Breeding Centre (Isabela)*

In Arnaldo Tupiza Tortoise Breeding Centre you can see hundreds of *giant Galapagos tortoises* of all sizes. Vulnerable hatchlings are not gigantic at all, even smaller than the size of your hand! This project just outside Puerto Villamil was created to rescue the endangered populations of both of Isabela's southernmost volcanoes.

From the almost incredible estimations of 250,000 *giant tortoises* in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, by the 1970s there were only about 3,000 individuals remaining. One thing becomes clear on your visit: it's hard work to save these queer creatures from extinction by reproduction in captivity and repopulation. The good news is that these programmes are successful and have saved several species from extinction so far. By 2015 their number increased to about 32,000 in all archipelago.

Don't forget to visit the native botanical garden of this breeding centre. It also attracts colourful *songbirds* such as *yellow warblers*, *Darwin's finches*, *Galapagos* and *vermillion flycatchers*. Finally there is no greater counterpart to the cumbersome *tortoises* than the graceful *American flamingos* which frequently filter the saline waters of the adjacent lagoon for *shrimp* and *algae*. They are joined by a handful of species of *aquatic* and *shore birds*, from which some even migrate from Canada and Alaska.

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## Day 7 – Wednesday

*At midnight Sailing Catamaran Nemo I will drop the anchor at the north cape of Floreana (Cormorant Point), where American flamingos forage and breed. For many, Devil's Crown is Galapagos' number one deep water snorkelling site, and one of the very highlights of their cruise. Historical Post Office Bay seems to be located nearly at the end of the world.*

**Programme:**

**AM:** After breakfast, a wet landing on the greeny beach of Cormorant Point and walk to a powdery coral sand beach on the other side of the peninsula (easy level; about 1,5km/1mi). En route you can observe the *American flamingo* lagoon from different viewpoints, then it's time for fantastic deep-water snorkelling around Devil's Crown (though sometimes stronger currents). If this is not your thing then there are other options such as birdwatching, or a dinghy-ride.

**PM:** Post your holiday greetings in the historical barrel at Post Office Bay, one of three nearby visitor's sites on Floreana's north coast (short displacement, wet landing) and relax.

**Overnight navigation:** Around midnight the Galapagos Odyssey will navigate about 5 hours east to Española.

**Additional options scuba-diving:** choice out of 9 nearby diving sites (All levels)

*AM: Cormorant Point (Floreana)*

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*). Please don't expect to spot the *flightless cormorant* at Cormorant Point. This emblematic example of evolution lives exclusively in the remote west of the Galapagos on Fernandina and Isabela ([Route A](#)). Instead, its salty lagoon is one of the best places on the Galapagos to observe a breeding colony of *American flamingos*. However, when breeding is done and the lagoon dries up, these exotic birds tend to be on the move to look for *shrimps* and *algae* from other saline lakes.

At the landing beach you will be welcomed by a small *Galapagos sea lion*-colony. The green sand contains a high percentage of glassy olivine crystals that have been blown out by the surrounding tuff cones. The 'flour sand' beach on the south side of the peninsula feels very smooth on your feet; this is pulverised by *parrotfish*. Schools of *sting rays* in the surf love using this powdery sand to hide themselves, and *Pacific green turtles* come ashore to bury their eggs in it at night (first months of the year). The next morning you can notice their tracks from the dunes, or eventually still catch an exhausted, delayed one, crawling back to the sea.

*AM: Devil's Crown (Floreana)*

The jagged crater rim of Devil's Crown just protrudes sea level and is beaten by the waves. The inner walls of the crater rim are coated with coral formations and protected against the surf. The depth and very transparent waters of this deep-water snorkelling site gives you the sensation of flying once you plunge into this huge tropical aquarium. You will swim amidst schools of thousands of brightly coloured tropical fish, such as *yellowtail surgeon fish*, *king angelfish*, and many other species. On the seabed you can distinguish resting *whitetip reef sharks*, different species of *ray* and *starfishes*. A *Pacific green turtle* or *Galapagos sea lion* might swim by, and don't be scared when you encounter *scalloped hammerhead sharks*!

Above sea level the dramatic decor of the jagged crater rim provides living space for lots of *coastal birds*, including *lava gulls*, *blue-footed* and *Nazca boobies*, *brown pelicans*, and *red-billed tropicbirds*. The opposite land head of Floreana is a nesting place for *magnificent frigatebirds*, where you could also head for during an alternative dinghy-ride.

*PM: Post Office Bay (Floreana)*

Bring your unstamped postcards and post them in the peculiar barrel on this historic site. Together with James Bay (Santiago) this used to be a popular base to complement stocks. The present barrel commemorates the improvised mail service between British 16<sup>th</sup>-century whalers and poachers. Returning vessels also picked up letters for home delivery. Finally this post box became the termination of the flourishing British whaling industry in this region (Moby Dick), because it let the American frigate USS Essex easily locate and hijack British whalers during the Anglo-American War (1812-1815).

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## Day 8 – Thursday

*The next island, Española is located in the south-easternmost corner of the archipelago. As one of its crown jewels, this birdwatcher's and photographer's dream offers all that you might expect from the Galapagos. Walk just a few metres past waved albatrosses, booby colonies, sunbathing marine iguanas and Galapagos sea lions and feel as though you're within an exciting nature documentary! Several endemic species give you the opportunity to become an eyewitness of evolution.*

### **Programme:**

**AM:** Before breakfast (we provide a snack) you will make a 'dry landing' at Suarez Point. During a longer guided walk (moderate level; 4km/2.5 mi/about 2 hours) you will pass awakening seabird colonies on top of the cliffs (some short scrambling passages; avoidable depths). Back on-board you will have a well-deserved breakfast and will navigate about an hour. Next you can plunge into the alluring turquoise-coloured Gardner Bay for snorkelling.

**PM:** After lunch and a 'wet landing' (bare feet) on the wide sand beach you can stroll along the sea lions colony (easy level), or enjoy a moment of reflection, relaxation, or rolling with sea lions in the surf.

**Overnight navigation:** After dinner we will navigate 5hrs north and anchor just before midnight in the sheltered harbour of Puerto Ayora, where you can enjoy a quiet floating sleep.

### *AM: Suarez Point (Española)*

Huge ocean waves crash on the southern basaltic cliffs of Suarez Point, and form a spectacular blowhole, where a fountain of sea water sprays metres/feet high into the air (depending on the tide and how strong the sea breeze pushes the waves). Take a meditative break in silence on this emblematic viewpoint to convert this unforgettable moment into a lifetime experience.

*Waved albatrosses* spend most of their lives soaring far out at sea and just come to Española (March-December) to breed and nurture their huge chick. This spectacular seabird is the only tropic albatross (critically endangered species). Besides some strayed individuals on Isla de La Plata (off the Ecuadorian coast) it only breeds on Española, where you can witness its synchronous courtship dances, which include bowing, whistling and even a stylised form of 'sword fighting' with their bills (especially in October)!

Suarez Point is also an important breeding site for *Nazca* and *blue-footed boobies*, *swallow-tailed gulls* and *red-billed tropicbirds*. *Blue-footed boobies* don't tend to breed in the middle of the trail. 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.

*Española marine iguanas* become bright red with a turquoise-coloured 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 endemic *mockingbirds*, which have turned to carnivorous behaviour!

*PM: Gardner Bay (Española)*

Make your first 'dive' into the alluring turquoise-coloured Gardner Bay, and admire colourful reef fish, snorkel alongside a *Pacific green turtle*, or find yourself in the middle of playful *Galapagos sea lions*.

The striking white coral sand beach 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 they start to learn how to fish after just 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 their part of the 1300m/4250ft long beach. Pregnant females choose the best territory to give birth, and will mate again with their landlord within a month.

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## **Day 9 – Friday**

*This cruise itinerary ends in Puerto Ayora. En route to the airport you will visit the successful breeding centre at the Charles Darwin Research Station. Without any doubt the most emblematic representatives of the archipelago are the Galapagos giant tortoises.*

### **Programme:**

**AM:** After an early breakfast it's time to say goodbye and to leave the yacht. The dinghies will bring you to the pier of Puerto Ayora, where you can visit the Charles Darwin Research Station before continuing to the airport.

*AM: Highlands (Santa Cruz)*

Although the great majority of Galapagos visitors come here to observe and appreciate natural wonders, it is also interesting to learn how the protection and conservation of the islands are carried out. The Breeding and Rearing area of the scientific centre are definitely a worthwhile visit.

This excursion will be accompanied by another guide, while your naturalist guide will visit the highlands with those passengers that stay longer on-board.

*AM: Transfer to Baltra airport*

Assisted by the naturalist guide and some crew members, the 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.

**You will return home with stunning pictures and unforgettable lifelong memories!**