
CNH Tours: Active Galapagos Detailed Itinerary

Pristine and Born of Fire: North and West

Visiting 10 different islands; swimming with sea-lions and spotting sharks, all three booby species, waved albatross (April - November), great landscape diversity.





Day 1: Sunday, Quito Arrival

Mansion del Angel hotel check-in. Free evening for those arriving earlier.

Day 2: Monday, Colonial City Tour

After breakfast at the hotel, you'll get the chance to visit Quito's historic centre. The government of Ecuador and the City government have invested a lot over the past decade and transformed the old city centre into a delightful place to discover history and architecture, along with the opportunity to see Ecuadorians out and about in town.

Historic Quito was inscribed onto the World Heritage list at the same time as Galapagos, in 1978 (see <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/2> for more details). If the morning's sky is particularly clear, we will arrange for a trip on the cable car up to Pichincha volcano, where you should be able to enjoy breathtaking views of the Quito valley below and surrounding snow capped volcanoes. Lunch is provided in a tasty local restaurant. You'll be back at the hotel in time for a quiet late afternoon. Free evening - local restaurants abound.

Day 3: Tuesday, Santa Cruz (Indefatigable)

AM: FLIGHT TO BALTRA ISLAND, GALAPAGOS EMBARKATION

PM: MOSQUERA Islet (wet landing)

Up early this morning - a quick breakfast before the transfer to the airport. At the Quito airport you'll take your bags through the inspection for bio-control - please don't bring any organic matter to the islands (fruit etc...). The flight usually stops in Guayaquil, before heading off to Galapagos. Total transit time is about 2.5 hours. Upon arrival at *Baltra Airport*, you will pay your US\$100 National Park Entrance Fee. Your hand luggage will then be checked by the local Inspection and Quarantine staff again to ensure you have no organic matter. Exiting the arrival area, you will be met by the Samba's naturalist guide, who will assist you with the collection your luggage and will accompany you to the Samba.

After a light lunch, the Samba will navigate to Mosquera Islet, located between North Seymour and Baltra. It is one of the smallest Islands resulting from an uplift of sand, made up of coral reefs and rocks. It boasts one of the largest sea lion colonies in the Galapagos archipelago. There are occasional reports of Orca whales seen preying on the sea lion colony. You'll have the chance to jump into the Pacific for the first time - a great way to start your time in the islands.

Day 4: Wednesday, Genovesa (Tower)

AM: DARWIN BAY (wet landing)

PM: PRINCE PHILIP'S STEPS (dry landing)

After an overnight navigation from Santa Cruz Island to Tower Island, you'll awaken to the cacophony of one of the largest tropical sea bird colonies on the planet. Disembarking at Darwin Bay, the first thing you'll notice are the cliff tops, decorated with frigate birds, red-footed boobies, Nazca boobies, swallow tailed gulls, tropic birds and





many other pelagic animals. Staring up the trail, the red-footed boobies are spotted displaying for potential mates as they collect nesting material and male great frigate birds are seen inflating their gular sacks hoping to attract a mate while others play their favorite game: piracy. Darwin's finches, Galapagos doves and mocking birds stroll the area foraging for seeds and insects. The red mangroves, cactus and saltbushes contrast with the blue sky and the dark basaltic walls.

Following lunch, you'll climb *Prince Philip's Steps*. The steep ascent takes you 100 feet above sea level. At the summit, you may encounter the elegant silhouette of the red billed tropic bird and the aerobatic Galapagos shearwater. Both interact with the precipice on fast approaches. The lava rock trail leads you through the endemic dwarf incense tree (palo santo) forest, where we'll encounter nesting red-footed "lancers" and many of their gannet-like relatives, the Nazcas, loudly claiming the earthen floor as their residence. The Palo Santo forest is dormant most of the year, and awakens only in the rainy season to infuse the air with its refreshing aroma. As you leave the forest, your breath may be taken away by the panoramic view of thousands of storm petrels flying erratically beyond the lava flows. This is the perfect scenario for the island's top predator to make a successful kill. The short-eared owl, known elsewhere around the world as a nocturnal predator, hunts in bright daylight in Genovesa. More cat than owl, it waits patiently outside lava tunnels and crevasses to capture the storm petrels as they leave their tunnel homes after feeding their young.

Snorkeling on Tower offers a view of a wide variety of tropical fish.



Day 5: Thursday, Marchena (Bindloe)

AM: PUNTA ESPEJO or PUNTA MEJIA
PM: PLAYA NEGRA

Almost all other cruise ships travel back south after sailing to Genovesa; the Samba is one of only two that head west-northwest. The Galapagos National Park Service has granted us the rare opportunity to visit Marchena's magical shorelines to snorkel, dinghy ride and kayak. The forbidding endless and untouched lava flows, where only scientists are allowed, has no fresh water and very little precious soil. The island's serenity is awakened by the murmur and surge of the Pacific swells and musical argument of the castaway sea lions. Punta Mejia is one of the best sites in the Archipelago to snorkel. The calm and clear deep blue water of the northwest coast, and the dark hostile topography of the location give the sensation of witnessing the beginning of our planet and its underwater world. Apart from great fish diversity, when we snorkel, we often see rays, reef sharks and sea turtles.

Navigating southwest for 45 minutes to Playa Negra is always an exciting experience. We've often been delighted during this transit by the play of bottle nosed dolphins, other cetaceans or feeding frenzies. After an early afternoon snorkel around a recently formed lava grotto where marine iguanas feed, we will start a 5 to 6 hour sail to the west. As we get further away from the island the sea floor changes dramatically and we enter deep water, an oceanic drop-off. The Cromwell current, which arrives from the west from the very deep waters, brings many nutrients to the surface, contributing to an outburst of marine life. As a result, there are positive effects throughout the marine food chain and we have a good record of spotting whales and other ocean wanderers on this navigation. Whales or dolphins are never a guaranteed, but we will do our best to find them (we'll need your help!). If we do spot whales, we'll see what we can do to get a better view.



Day 6: Friday, Isabela (Albemarle)

AM: PUNTA ALBEMARLE
PM: PUNTA VICENTE ROCA

Human history has left its footprint on this small corner of the Galapagos. *Punta Albemarle*, the most northerly point of Isabela, was one of the

most important US radar stations in the Pacific. Designed to guard against an eventual Japanese attack on the Panama Canal, all that remains is a small and deteriorated building, symbolic of the boredom and routine that was the daily grind experienced by junior navy officers who manned this desolate outpost for rotating three week shifts - where, in the end, the Japanese never came.

In contrast to the calm of the radar station, the wildlife of Punta Albemarle gives the best example of constant struggle for survival, a fight where only the fittest continue. The recent lava flows are nesting grounds for the flightless cormorant, found only in Galapagos. The largest marine iguanas of Galapagos can also be found basking in the sun here. Because not many boats visit this site, the cormorants, which are very shy birds by nature, are totally indifferent to human presence as they build their bulky nests of seaweed. As the morning advances the iguanas reveal their adaptation as they wonder along the shoreline to feed on green and red algae. With this fantastic setting, you are reminded that the only constant in these Islands is change.

Punta Vicente Roca offers an overwhelming diversity of geological formations. Located on the southwest end of Ecuador Volcano, only a few miles south of latitude 0°, the area is an outstanding example of how the Islands were formed and how the forces of change have transformed the landscape and shaped the wildlife over thousands of years. Vicente Roca is the home of tuff cones and lava dikes and is fertile ground for erosion and the disaster of collapse. We will look at the dramatic structures from our dinghies, as we also enjoy watching the Galapagos penguins, brown noddies, blue-footed boobies and other marine life. When the waters are calm enough, the snorkeling is fascinating. The walls of the tuff cones are full of colorful invertebrates and rich, blooming algae gives us of the opportunity to witness numerous sea turtles feeding.

Day 7: Saturday, Fernandina (Narborough) And Isabela

AM: PUNTA ESPINOZA, Fernandina Island
PM: URBINA BAY, Isabela Island



Only 30,000-100,000 years old, Fernandina is the youngest island of the Archipelago. This immature shield volcano is a newborn in geological terms. Not even in your wildest imagination can you conjure up a better setting to witness the start of life on an island. The whole Island is covered with hostile, sterile lava fields. Life has taken root in only a few places. However, at *Punta Espinoza* the shoreline is teeming with life. Reptiles, birds and mammals all coexist in this tiny island of life. Marine iguanas, playful sea lions, hard working flightless cormorants, Galapagos penguins, busy Sally light-foot crabs and much more. Don't forget to look around because the Galapagos Hawk, the resident predator, is always on the hunt. The site is a true cradle of evolution. Snorkeling with turtles, iguanas, cormorants and plenty of fish is the best way to refresh after the lava walk.



The geologic hotspot under the Galapagos generates intense volcanic activity. The western islands are the youngest and most active of the Archipelago. Located in the center of Isabela, Alcedo Volcano is a reminder of how volatile these Islands are. On the western shoreline of Alcedo lays *Urbina Bay*. Here, in 1954, more than ¾ of a mile (1 km) of new shoreline was created overnight by a sudden geological uplifting event. Many coral reef extensions were exposed to air and fish were suddenly left stranded. Evidence is still graphic today. The new land became a perfect nesting terrain for the most beautiful land dragon. The land iguanas of Isabela are the largest in the Galapagos and in Urbina the colorful population offers a great example of the tendency towards gigantism in isolated island ecosystems. The impressive yellow, orange/brown iguanas roam the low lands foraging for the flowers, fruits, leaves and shoots of their favorite plants. Reminding one of the Jurassic Period, when the rains arrive, it is possible to see the land iguanas sharing their habitat with another primitive looking reptile, the giant tortoise.



Day 8: Sunday, Isabela

AM: ELIZABETH BAY
PM: PUNTA MORENO

Isabela Island constitutes almost half of the entire surface of the Archipelago. It is nearly 100 miles (160 km) long and offers a remarkable diversity of habitats. Shaped like a seahorse and with volcanoes over 5000 feet (1.5 km) high, it is also the birth place of vast mangrove extensions. *Elizabeth Bay* is the only place on Earth where mature tropical mangrove forests and penguins co-exist. The ecosystem is also the residence of spotted eagle rays, sea turtles and a nursery for fish and marine invertebrates. We'll opt for rowing our boats here instead of using the motors, so that we can take in the full display of life in its undisturbed condition.

When you land on *Punta Moreno* you understand why the Spanish Bishop that discovered the Islands said: "*It was as if God had decided to rain stones*". When he first set foot on a lava field he struggled to find fresh water and in desperation was reduced to chew on cactus pads to quench his thirst. More than three centuries later a young Naturalist saw beyond the lava. Charles Darwin was amazed by the colonization of plants and the start of life proceeding on this terrain. He thought this process somehow provided clues to the origin of life on our planet. The mystery of mysteries... The pioneer cactus growing over the lava landscape is contrasted with stunning oases. Where lava tunnel roofs have collapsed, brackish water accumulates to give life to greater flamingoes, moorhens, black-necked stilts and Galapagos Martins.

Day 9: Monday, Floreana

AM: BARONESS' LOOKOUT / POST OFFICE BAY
PM: DEVIL'S CROWN

Adventure, survival, mystery and murder are the main ingredients for our next stop. **Post Office Bay** has left a legacy of pirates, whalers, scientific expeditions and fascinating stories. After a wet landing, we walk a very short distance to be part of the most important Galapagos tradition (the post office). Don't forget to bring your postcards and addresses with you so you can take part in this age old tradition! Later, we'll kayak or ride our dinghies to the west. We'll go through a small set of islets with a sea lion colony, boobies and mangroves. Finally, following our ride we will land at the *Baroness's lookout*. On top of this eroded spatter cone we'll embrace the mysterious enigma of the human history of "Las Encantadas".



In the afternoon we boat over to Devil's Crown for some excellent snorkeling, a submerged volcanic cone, with only partial remains of rim emerging from the sea. A combination of vertical submerged walls, varying sea depths, areas of protected waters, and areas subjected to marine currents have made for a diverse marine environment here, where many fish can be spotted, rays and sharks are not uncommon, and sea birds dive for prey.



Day 10: Tuesday, Santa Cruz (Indefatigable)

AM: DISEMBARKATION, SANTA CRUZ HIGHLANDS

PM: HOTEL CHECK-IN, FREE AFTERNOON

After 8 very busy days on the Samba, take the time now to unwind a bit, find your land legs again and get to know the people side of Galapagos. Farmers, shop keepers, restaurant owners, mothers and fathers, children in school uniforms all trying to

get by on this remote archipelago, so far from the rest of the world. These next two days will give you a chance to mingle, to see what life is all about in Galapagos - where we lived for 4 years.

Today, you'll visit the *Highlands* of Santa Cruz island. At 1800 feet (550 metres) the greenery offers the opportunity to admire the remnant of a Galapagos mature forest. The broccoli shaped Daisy trees of the genus *Scalesia* decorate a couple of extraordinary geological formations. Known as "*Los Gemelos*", these twin collapsed craters and their surroundings are the home of many Darwin's finches, mocking birds, vermillion flycatcher and a wonderful diversity of indigenous plants. If anyone is leaving the trip at this point, they will be taken to the airport.

After lunch in the highlands, we'll head down to Puerto Ayora to check into your comfortable hotel. You'll have the chance to visit the Darwin Station with your guide - a 20 minute walk from your hotel - otherwise, enjoy a free afternoon and explore the town.

Day 11: Wednesday, Puerto Ayora Exploration

You'll have a full day to do what you want - here is [a list of options](#) and you'll have the services of a guide to help you out. You may want to just mosey around town - poke your head into different shops, check out the activity at the main pier, stop for a coffee or a cold drink, and spend a bit of time sourcing a suitable establishment for lunch. Join the group for a farewell to Galapagos dinner in the evening.

Day 12: Thursday, Back to Quito

We'll take an early morning bus back to Baltra, and board our flight to Quito. We should be arriving by late afternoon. Your trip ends here, unless you've arranged some fascinating extensions with us...