

## SAN JOSE YACHT

### 4 days / 3 nights – Tuesday to Friday – every 14 days

#### **Day 1 – Tuesday AM: Arrival at Baltra Airport**

At Baltra 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 the airport shuttle will transfer you to the Baltra Dock where our inflatable dinghies ('zodiacs') take you the last stretch to the yacht.

#### **PM: Mosquera**

Mosquera lies in the middle of the Itabaca Channel, between Baltra and North Seymour. *Galapagos sea lions* are real beach lovers. Mosquera offers beautiful white coral sand and doesn't complicate their landing as neighboring Seymour and Baltra do with their steep rocky coastlines. These agile fishers just have to enter the Itabaca Channel, which is a natural trap for marine life, thanks to a submarine ridge between Baltra and Santa Cruz. But 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*.

#### **Day 2 – Wednesday AM: Darwin Bay (Genovese)**

Genovese's horseshoe shaped wall shows unmistakably that we have anchored inside the partly collapsed and submerged caldera of a submarine volcano! The visitor's site named Darwin Bay is located at the very rear. This compact site shows the extreme varied coastal ecosystems of Galapagos in miniature. The trail starts from the coral sand beach and subsequently passes a zone with *saltbushes* and *mangroves*, then crosses tidal creeks and barren lava formations, dry shrub lands, and finally turns on the ridge of some cliffs.

In this extremely varied and peaceful ambience, every single species has occupied its own ecological niche (preferred habitat) without disturbing others. *Whimbrels* and *wandering tattlers* forage actively along the surf, next to resting *Galapagos sea lions*. *Hérons* wait motionless at the tidal pools. Impressive *frigate birds* (both *great* and *magnificent* species) and *red-footed boobies* nest in the *mangroves*, where you can also notice some vocalists such as *yellow warblers*, *Darwin's finches* and *Galapagos mockingbirds*. Unique is that two subpopulations of the same species *large cactus finch* differ from singing.

*Tropicbirds*, *Nazca boobies*, *storm petrels*, endemic *lava-* and *swallow-tailed gulls* soar along the cliffs. When you already have seen *marine iguanas* elsewhere, the small Genovese species might not look too impressive, but consider that these are virtually the only reptiles that succeeded to reach and survive on this remote, upstream island (and have become endemic to this island).

#### **PM: Prince Phillip's Steps (Genovese)**

Before landing you will make a dinghy-ride along the eastern arm of the caldera. On approach, the 25m/80ft high walls become overwhelming, and will give you a better impression of the dimensions of this crater. Sometimes a *Galapagos fur seal* is resting on one of the shaded ledges. Although there are also *seabirds*, the real spectacle will find place on top and on the outside of the rim, which provide better perching and nesting places.

Therefore you have to hike and overcome the steep stairs from the landing dock to a bush of *palo santo* shrubs on top. Tropical dry forest vegetation appears dead during most months of the year, but just drops its leaves to prevent drying out by evaporation. It's a threatened ecosystem. *Red-footed boobies* with different plumages gratefully use these scarce nesting-places; different to their blue-footed relatives 'red feet' don't nest on the rocky ground.

At the seaside of the rim, the bushes open up and you can enjoy wide views, a strong sea breeze and the amazing flying skills of uncountable *seabirds*. Following the exposed rim you will first pass a colony of *Nazca boobies* and finally reach the extensive *storm petrel* nesting places, where you might be lucky spotting how the well-camouflaged *short-eared owl* is hunting for them on foot!

### **Day 3 – Thursday AM: South Plaza**

The southern of both Plaza islets is best place to encounter endemic *Galapagos land iguanas*. Watch your step and don't stumble over one of them whilst distracted by equally bizarre *giant prickly pear cactus*-trees! These *iguanas* are not only ugly as Darwin pronounced, but also very patient and photogenic models with strikingly saffron colors. Overpopulation and severe food competition have affected their smaller size. It is incredible to see how *cactus* spines don't harm them while chewing pads, flowers and fruits. Beware as well for some unique hybrids between a male *marine iguana* and a female *land iguana*.

Arriving at the upper rim, you get to know the other, wild and windy face of South Plaza that provides a complete different habitat. About 20m/75ft downwards impressively droning waves splash against the foot of massive cliffs. Being talented rock climbers, sun basking *marine iguanas* have escaped the cool shadows of the wall. 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*, most beautiful *gull* in the world. Its neatly lined eyes are perfectly adapted for its exceptional nightly fishing habits.

### **PM: Barrington Bay (Santa Fe)**

Practically every animal on Santa Fe is unique; endemic to Galapagos, or even to this island alone and extremely vulnerable! This extraordinary island is remnant of the probably most ancient volcano of Galapagos, and gave evolution enough time and isolation to create its wonders.

Your experience starts already before anchoring, when the contours of its bizarre *giant prickly pear cactus (opuntia)* forests become distinguishable. These largest *cacti* of the islands have extremely thick trunks indeed, and can grow over 10m/33ft tall! You will land right into a *Galapagos sea lion* colony on the beach. From their outlooks at the beach ridge surprisingly fearless *Galapagos hawks* are ready to snatch away a *lava lizard*; not worrying that even these are unique...

Almost every visitor of Santa Fe becomes eager to get a glimpse of the rare *Barrington land iguana*. But this pale endemic version is not as easy to spot as its modelling counterparts on South Plaza. This one asks for an adventurous quest (rather untypical to Galapagos); other times it surprises waiting for you next to the trail. Whether you spot it, or not, you will keep going from one surprise into the other. While snorkeling in the azure colored Barrington Bay between tropical *reef fish*, maybe a curious *Galapagos sea lion* is willing to play with you!

#### **Day 4 – Friday AM: Kicker Rock (San Cristobal)**

Kicker Rock has become one of the photogenic landmarks of Galapagos. Clearly visible from far, nature has molded a massive offshore block of rock with a stabbing tower aside. Reaching about 150m/500ft above sea level this compact rock without typical stratified layers of cemented ashes is thought to be the remnant of a former tuff cone, which has eroded completely away; a resistant lava mass that never left the crater pipe remains.

While sailing around and spotting *blue-footed boobies* and *great frigate birds* you can observe this intriguing sculpture from changing angles. From the side it has the form of a giant shoe, upside down with the tower as high heel (hence its name Kicker Rock). In longitudinal direction it rather resembles a sleeping lion (hence its Spanish name Leon Dormido). It is an experience to pass the narrow channel between the main body and the spine.

These steep walls rise out of the deep sea. Kicker Rock is one of the favorite locations amongst scuba divers and snorkelers in the south-eastern archipelago. Amid colorful tropical fish you might have thrilling encounters with *octopuses*, different species of *shark* (including *scalloped hammerhead sharks!*), *Pacific green turtles*, *spotted eagle rays* and even – when you are really lucky – with *barracudas*, *manta rays* and *giant oceanic manta rays!*

#### **AM: Transfer to San Cristobal airport**

Assisted by the naturalist guide and some crew members the dinghy will bring you and your luggage to the airport of San Cristobal. Your guide will accompany you until the check-in counters in the departure hall.

### **5 days / 4 nights – Friday to Tuesday – every 14 days**

#### **Day 1 – Friday AM: Arrival at San Cristobal Airport**

A guide will meet you, help you collect your luggage, and escort you on a short bus ride to the harbor of Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, the formal capital town of the Galapagos province. M/Y San Jose has anchored in Wreck Bay.

#### **PM: Interpretation Centre (San Cristobal)**

The Interpretation Centre just outside the provincial capital Puerto Baquerizo Moreno is a perfect introduction as well as an interesting complement to the field-explanations and briefings of your naturalist guide. Information panels (English/Spanish), pictures, maquettes and true to life dioramas tell the background story of the islands in a different way, which helps you to get overview and learn what makes Galapagos so unique. The properly maintained botanical garden with native species from the arid zone (including *giant prickly pear* and *candelabra cacti*) is worth your visit as well; and probably you will spot the *Chatham mockingbird*, endemic to this island, that put Darwin on track of his evolution theory.

The attractive exhibition is quite complete and explains a series of natural circumstances that create Galapagos' unique environment: such as the volcanic genesis of the islands, their remoteness from the continent, its ocean currents, its special climate, the arrival of different species, and their establishment, among others. It also recounts historic discovery and attempts of colonization; and shows a diorama with ancient mail barrels from Post Office Bay. Extensively

it concludes how times have changed with current conservation and the many ways in which this is tried to achieve, and environmental challenges that proceed.

### **Day 2 – Saturday AM: Gardner Bay (Española)**

Make your first 'dive' in the alluring turquoise-colored Gardner Bay, and admire colorful reef fish, snorkel side by side with 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 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 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.

### **PM: Suarez Point (Española)**

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

*Waved albatrosses* soar most time of their lives 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 (out off the Ecuadorian coast) it only breeds on Española, where you can witness its synchronous courtship dances, which include bowing, whistling and even a stylized form of 'sword fighting' with their bills (especially in October)!

Suarez Point is also a massive breeding site for *Nazca* and *blue-footed boobies*, *swallow-tailed gulls* and *red-billed tropicbirds*. *Blue-footed boobies* don't bother 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-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 endemic *mockingbirds*, which have turned to carnivorous behavior!

### **Day 3 – Sunday 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 Galapagos on Fernandina and Isabela. Instead, its salty lagoon is one of the best places in Galapagos to observe a breeding colony of *American flamingos*. Though, 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 to your feet; this is pulverized by *parrotfishes*. Schools of *sting rays* in the surf love 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). Next morning you can notice their tracks from the dunes, or eventually still catch an exhausted, delayed one, crawling back to sea.

#### **AM: Champion Islet (Floreana)**

*Bottlenose dolphins* frequently escort our passage to Champion Islet and you can see them from nearby jumping the wakes! It is just the prelude of an unforgettable snorkeling excursion. *Galapagos sea lions* turn under water into playful acrobats that become definitely the number one attraction. There are also lots of *reef fish*, and perhaps a *Pacific green turtle*.

An inflatable dinghy ride along the shoreline of this islet offers sightings of lots of *sea birds* that are endemic to the archipelago, including *Galapagos penguins* (at its extreme eastern distribution border; in danger of extinction), *blue-footed boobies*, *magnificent frigate birds* and *red-billed tropicbirds*. *Swallow-tailed gulls* and *lava herons*. Most desired on every serious birder's wish list is to get a glimpse of the *Charles mockingbird* on top of *prickly pear cacti* (take binoculars!). To the unschooled eye this unique variant may look hardly different to their relatives on other islands, but it is almost extinct (less than 250 birds, depending of dry or wet years); so you need some luck to spot it from seaside. This *mockingbird* is a scientific and historic key species because it put Darwin on track of his theory of 'adaptive radiation'.

#### **PM: Post Office Bay & Baroness Lookout (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. Present barrel commemorates the improvised mail service between British 16th 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).

The arm of a submerged tuff cone protects the turquoise bay at Baroness Lookout. Besides *Galapagos sea lions*, *Pacific green turtles* and *golden cow nose rays* you might spot *Galapagos penguins*! This is the only place in the south-eastern archipelago where some *penguins* reside; best chances however tomorrow on Bartolome or in the remote west on Fernandina and Isabela. Climb the miniature basaltic cone of Baroness Lookout and dream away at the paradisiacal coast-scape. This viewpoint was the favorite spot of one of Floreana's first colonists, the eccentric Baroness and self-proclaimed 'Empress of Galapagos' Eloisa von Wagner Bosquet, who even built her house a few meters behind. She and one of her lovers were the first in a series of mysterious disappearing and deaths in the 1930s.

#### **Day 4 – Monday AM: Sullivan Bay (Santiago)**

Setting foot at the lava stream covering Sullivan Bay is like landing on the moon. The desolate, stretched-out fields seem mostly lifeless, but there is enough to see on this highly popular site amongst photographers. Graphical bas-reliefs of rope-lava in the crust are unique to Galapagos and Hawaii.

There is even some life! *Pacific green turtles* seasonally bury eggs in the tiny white sand beach, where you may also encounter *crabs*, a strayed *blue heron* or *oystercatcher*. On the lava flow

only sparse pioneer vegetation such as *lava cacti* and *carpetweed* can hold. You might encounter a *lava lizard*, *locusts* (!) or a small snake-species (*Galapagos racer*) hunting for them.

The barely eroded lava flow seems to have been solidified for short, and suggests that you are just able to set foot on it. The baking sun completes the sensation of heat. The winding and rippled *pahoehoe* rope-lava has preserved intriguing traces that tell flaming stories about vaporized leatherleaf trees and miniature cones of volcanic glass. Distinctive tuff cones pockmark the new-formed lunatic landscape. Their rusty, oxidized colors and vegetation reveal that these are from an older generation. Originally these were volcano islets on their own that have become part of Santiago during latest eruption (1897), when the hot flood of ooze filled up large parts of the bay, which is the black crust you walk on. For the time being only the opposite islet of Bartolome escaped from incorporation. Ecologically these cones still can be considered as islands, though no longer surrounded by sea, but by wide infertile lava fields.

### **PM: Bartolome**

The wild romantic volcano islet of Bartolome is among the youngest of the islands, and on a geological scale just recently born out of fire. Although tiny (only 120ha/300ac) and at first sight lifeless, Bartolome offers some of the wildest landscapes and best panoramas in the entire archipelago. To enjoy the postcard view of the idyllic 'Pinnacle Bay' you have to climb the stairs to the viewpoint on top of the island (114m/375ft). Enter suddenly a dramatically world of threatening (though extinguished) nearby spatter cones, craters, and lightweight lava droplets that have been spewed out by fiery fountains. The Summit Trail is also ideal to witness how scanty pioneer vegetation such as *lava cactus* is struggling to take root in the bare virgin lava fields.

From the summit you suddenly face a second, paradisiacal world; Galapagos' landmark 'Pinnacle Rock' towers prominently over an isthmus with crescent sand beaches on each side, and dunes with evergreen *mangrove* bushes in between.

Underwater, a third, completely distinctive world opens up to you, resembling a tropical aquarium. Its shallow, clear and warm waters are ideally for snorkeling between *coral-grinding parrot fishes*, shoals of *surgeon fishes*, harmless *whitetip reef sharks* and *Pacific green turtles*. If you are lucky you can even catch the sight of fishing *Galapagos penguins*.

### **Day 5 – Tuesday AM: Black Turtle Cove (Santa Cruz)**

The ancient mangrove at Black Turtle Cove has grown out to forest proportions and forms the backdrop for a distinct adventure. You might even feel yourself a while in the Amazon rainforest instead of close to sea; though on a closer look vegetation mainly exists of *red mangroves* with characteristic aerial roots that let them survive in salty and brackish water. By inflatable dinghy we will explore the calm emerald lagoon and enter the surrounding shallow creeks of these salt-water marshes. The outboard engine is sometimes turned off, so that you can enjoy the ambiance at its fullest. You have to keep your eyes peeled when looking around and staring into the crystal clear waters to observe all the life that is flying and swimming around.

You can spot silently hunting lava herons on the banks and brown pelicans nesting on top of the mangroves. Various species of ray and shark come to this nutritious cradle to give birth; *scalloped hammerhead sharks* come back to the place where they've born and their babies tend to be close to the surface. *Pacific green turtles* (*black turtles* was their former name) visit this cove in their reproduction season (November-January); if you're lucky you can catch them mating at the surface! Afterwards their eggs are deposited on coral sand beaches along this north-western coastline of Santa Cruz.

***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 until the check-in counters in the departure hall.