

Galapagos Island Hopping in Style July 31 – August 7, 2023

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Our Glorious AFS Itinerary

July 30 or 31 – Depart USA. Fly round-trip USA to Quito Ecuador. More on air later in trip tips. (Latam has great rates around \$490 from Miami.)

Aug 1 – Arrive Quito

Hola, Quito! We arrive in Ecuador's gorgeous capital city of Quito. Arrive anytime you like with shuttles available to our nearby four-star hotel. You may choose to fly in a few days early to explore this fabulous colonial capital. Settle in for the evening to prepare for our Galapagos adventure.

Overnight at Windham Hotel Airport

Aug 2 - Quito - Galapagos Islands (flight) to Baltra

We'll fly after breakfast to the Island of Baltra in the Galapagos archipelago and make a transfer to go further via a very scenic inter-island flight directly to Isabela. This is the island with colonies of penguins and active volcanoes!

(We'll need to travel light. These inter-island flights limit passengers' check-in luggage to 10 kg (22 lbs). If needed, it is possible to send excess luggage directly on to the Finch Bay Galapagos Hotel, where you will arrive on DAY 3.)

On Isabela, we head into the forest to the hilltop Scalesia Lodge and enjoy lunch before heading out on our first afternoon of discovery. We'll get to know the youngest side of the archipelago while exploring the iconic National Park, wetland lagoons, and the giant tortoise-breeding center. We wrap up our day at the stunning white beach of Puerto Villamil before returning to the Lodge for dinner. Our cool tented lodge provides you with rubber boots, rain gear and snorkeling equipment, sea kayaks and bikes to explore on your own.

Overnight at Scalesia Lodge. B,L,D (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner). You will love your luxurious safari – style tents at this resort perched on the slopes of a volcano with spectacular views.

Aug 3 - Isabela Island & its Environs

There are three different programs that we can choose from today. The first begins with a walk along the rim of Galapagos' largest

caldera – one of the largest in the world – where we'll see the fascinating lava formations from recent volcanic activity (the last eruption in 2005). A light snack will be provided along the way while lunch is served back at the lodge. The Galapagos' unique wildlife is focused in the afternoon as we seek out Darwin finches, flycatchers, mockingbirds, and occasionally the Galapagos hawk and rail. We'll stroll the beach at Puerto Villamil or rest in the afternoon.

The next option is the Tintoreras Islets. After breakfast, we will drive down to the wharf of Puerto Villamil and board the bay cruiser to explore the maze of reefs and islets off the shores of Isabela. The visit includes a dry landing and a short walk over volcanic terrain (about a half mile in total distance). Here, we should see boobies, herons, penguins, marine iguanas and the white-tipped reef sharks in the nearby lava crevasses. Bring your bathing suit as you will enjoy snorkeling in the shallow reefs.

Lunch at Scalesia and later in the day, we can explore the wetlands of coastal Isabela. Sunsets at Puerto Villamil are spectacular!

The third option is the Wall of Tears hike. A rare combination of human and natural history. A splendid coastal trail combines two segments, wending through mangroves and brackish lagoons (0.8 mile) as well as the arid palo santo forest until we reach the Wall of Tears (an additional 1.4 mi each way). This trail is mostly a flat dirt road (pedestrians and bikes

only). The wildlife we can expect to see includes coastal Darwin finches, doves, stilts, ducks, flamingos, herons and giant tortoises.

Afternoons include magical sunsets from the beach of Puerto Villamil.

Overnight at Scalesia Lodge B/L/D

Aug 4 - Santa Cruz, Volcanoes & Turtles

After breakfast, we head back to Puerto Villamil's airport for a quick flight back to Baltra where we'll take a boat across the Itabaca Channel to Santa Cruz Island with its wonderful beaches!

The day's visit includes a brief exploration of Los Gemelos, a natural volcanic formation in the upper end of the windward side of the island. Surrounded by a forest of high growing endemic daisies, this area is home to some of the most elusive land birds of Galapagos. Then we will visit the Tortoise Reserve and see impressive lava tunnels while enroute to a delicious lunch at a restaurant in the highlands.

In the afternoon, we will reach Puerto Ayora's only pedestrian neighborhood Punta Estrada a lively place to explore filled with cafés and souvenir shops. Continue to spectacular Finch Bay Galapagos Hotel and Spa. After we check in, we have free time to enjoy the hotel's beachfront facilities.

In the evenings, dine where you like but the food here is true gourmet signature cuisines by top chefs.

Overnight at the Finch Bay. (3 nights). B/L

Aug 5 - Full Day Yacht Exploration

Today, we'll have a full day of exploration of the island of Bartolome via yacht. This is the youngest island and most photographed of all islands for its spectacular views and for most, everyone's favorite! Our route will be determined by National Park Regulations visit is subject to change.

The day begins with the Finch Bay's tempting breakfast buffet before setting out for 26-mile drive to Itabaca Channel on the north shore of Santa Cruz, where we board the Sea Lion yacht.

Our 21-nautical mile sailing stretch is great for sightings of dolphins or whales. We have a dry landing followed by a mile walk with much of the trail on this desolate island over a wooden boardwalk. We'll climb a staircase of 366 steps to one of

Galapagos' most famous views: the tilted pinnacle rock, the golden beach of Bartolome and the impressive lava fields of Santiago Island. There are several observation platforms on the way up to the summit of Bartolome (492 ft above sea level), but it's well worth the effort. Depending on the seas, stops will be added for swimming and snorkeling.

After descending back to the coast, we will have a chance to scan the volcanic shore, in search of flashy Sally Lightfoot crabs and Galapagos penguins, before enjoying a soothing dip at the beach. We'll enjoy lunch on board the Sea Lion and a brief exploration of nearby Sullivan Bay before sailing back to the Itabaca Channel for the drive back to the hotel where dinner is at your leisure in the 5-star restaurant.

Overnight at the Finch Bay B/L

Aug 6 - Full Day Exploration!

We have a full day ahead of us, but which program we do for the start of our day will depend on the tides. Your expert naturalist guides will brief you each night on all options to best enjoy your days.

Option 1 - Santa Cruz Coastal Exploration & Charles Darwin Research Station and Tortoise Breeding Facilities:

After breakfast, we leave for Tortuga Bay, voted Ecuador's best beach. We walk from Puerto

Ayora's western border, 1.3 mi along a fairly flat and straight paved path, where we explore and learn more about the arid zone's deciduous forest and its inhabitants. The first stop is Playa Brava, a stunning 0.6 mi long snow-white beach, a seasonal nesting site for the green sea turtles. A few minutes further, we reach Playa Mansa, a secluded natural mangrove cove, with clear and tranquil waters, ideal for swimming, snorkeling, paddling on tandem kayaks, or simply enjoying the landscape from the shade of a mangrove. We will board a small yacht to sail back to the hotel's dock at Academy Bay where we'll have lunch at the Finch Bay. For the afternoon, the grand finale includes strolling around the Charles Darwin Research Station where the highlight is the conservation program for the iconic giant tortoises. The headquarters of the Galápagos National Park Service and The Charles Darwin Research Station are located side by side on the outskirts of Puerto Ayora. There is an interpretation center open to the public and also one may view the tortoise rearing program. Unfortunately, the number of tortoises is so reduced in the wild that this is the only place where many visitors to Galápagos have the chance to see tortoises.

Option 2 - Divine Bay and Charles Darwin Research Station

Just a short distance away from Academy Bay and the bustle of Puerto Ayora lies the quiet and wildlife-rich Divine Bay. Named after one of the islands' first settlers, this cove is protected from the swells by natural volcanic reefs on one side, by a gallery of mangrove trees on the other, and by cliffs created eons ago by the uplift of the lava plateau. The whole provides a wonderful natural shelter for wildlife. Beneath the sea, sea turtles graze on seaweed, hundreds of reef fish species swim about the lava crevices, and young reef sharks and rays employ the brackish streams as havens from large predators while they mature. A refreshing short walk (0.3 miles) takes us to "Playa de los Perros" (Dog Beach) for a view of marine iguanas in their nesting sites and white tipped reef sharks. We will also explore the coast on the pangas and for those who like to snorkel, there is a chance to explore a calm, but active, sector of the cove. Lunch at the Finch Bay before heading out on an afternoon excursion to the world-renowned Charles Darwin Research Station where we will have the opportunity to learn about the giant tortoise rearing program and visit the tortoises in person.

Overnight at the Finch Bay B/L

Aug 7 - Departure Baltra Island to Quito

We'll enjoy our final scrumptious breakfast at the hotel before heading to Baltra Island airport where we fly to Quito and connect to our flights home. All USA flights depart in the evening.

(We may offer you an optional 3-day trip extension at the end to explore Quito. If a minimum of 10 are interested, we can arrange all.)