

# Galapagos Islands

Naturetrek Tour Report

22 February - 11 March 2011

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Blue-footed Booby



The Cachalote



Giant Tortoise



Marine Iguana

Report compiled by Darwin Alvarez



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Jose - Cook  
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## Introduction

One of the most astonishing archipelagos around the world, Galapagos is still captivating tourist attention, now what thanks to the Galapagos National Park together with Charles Darwin Research Station working for islands conservation visitors can still delight of about 95% of the original wildlife. We started our Naturetrek trip in Quito the second Highest capital in the world (2800 elevation) with Gabriela who make as to understand this marvelous culture, well venerated catholic religion, improving economy, and specially friendly people. From island to island there was always something remarkable, at the very beginning the opportunity to see the icons of the islands giants tortoises, later on sea lions adorning the coast, and wherever green sea turtles reaching the surface to get a deep breath to stay possible more than 20 minutes under water, sea birds actively chasing dense shoal of fish, and why not bottle nose dolphins purposing around our pangas, inland Darwin's finches and mockingbirds puzzle our mind with so curios process of adaptive radiation.

## Day 1

**Monday 21 February**

In transit UK to Quito.

## Day 2

**Tuesday 22 February**

Quito city tour.

## Day 3

Wednesday 23 February

At Dann Carlton Hotel in Quito we have a very early wake up call to take a bus to the airport and check out to our Galapagos flight with a stop on Guayaquil, we arrived to Baltra Island about 11:30, and as soon as possible we moved for our first experience, the highlands of Santa Cruz. Giant tortoises roaming, and preparing for their migration to the lowlands since our visit coincided with the breeding season when all these great monsters as Charles Darwin call them nest in the arid zone. La Garrapata a Galapagos fashion restaurant was ready waiting for us with a delicious lunch.

The tortoises Breeding Centre Fausto Llerena is one of the most successful restoration programs to recuperate tortoises in some of the islands where introduced black rats (*Rattus rattus*) has been reducing enormously the natural cycle of reproduction in the wild in addition lonesome George was the highlight, the most famous of the Galapagos tortoises.

What a first day! All people was really tired anxious to aboard Cachalote boat which was anchored at Academy Bay on Santa Cruz Island very near to the largest town and the economical capital of Galapagos, Puerto Ayora. Cachalote was our new home for the next 15 days; we were very welcomed by a charismatic crew all at our disposal.

Understanding how difficult was the first day in Galapagos after dinner there was a briefly explanation about some of the instructions important for all to know about security on board, and our conservation Management Procedure (Smart Voyager), next day program and time to say good night.

## Day 4

Thursday 24 February

South Plaza island is the oldest islands, lava have got a geological age of 4.2 million years by potassium argon dating, and the trail around the island give us the idea that this island in the past was under water by coral remnants among the boulders (pillow lava) actually raising until 25 m elevation. The north coast is decorated by one of the most successful and abundant sea lions colony, where several males side by side patrol their territories, protecting females and babies from intruders and predators. Walking to the eroded south part the arid zone offer us curios and unusual cactus forest, and the still reddish tinge of the ice plant named as carpet weed attract our curiosity, these 0.13 Km<sup>2</sup> Island is a laboratory of evolution, marine and land iguanas hybridize here.

The cliff resulting by constant erosion by waves and prevailing wind blowing from the south east, is a suitable nesting site for a variety of sea birds like shearwaters, swallow tailed gulls, red billed tropicbirds which frequently are gliding around, challenging us to take a picture on the wing, as well some blue footed and nazca boobies where sighted. At the end of the hike around the cliff the sea lions bachelor colony amaze us how skilful climbers they are. Once completing the loop there where migrant birds like ruddy turnstones, wandering tattlers. Afterwards we depart for 2 hours sailing towards our next destination, from the sun deck there was manta rays splashing in order to reduce ectoparasites.

The anchorage site in Santa Fe Island is really peaceful; the air temperature is like 35°C quite stifling so the water was inviting as for the first snorkeling experience, sea lions, parrot fish, yellow tail mullets, stingrays and hundreds of surgeon fish join us and suddenly green sea turtles were included in the party.

The heat obliged us to start with the hike at 4:15 however the temperature at these time was still about 30s, Apparently it was time to eat, baby sea lions were suckling nutritious milk from their mothers, we did not expect to stay that long with them, now ready to walk and search for the endemic Santa Fe land iguana a very strange creature which differentiated from the other species in color and size

After 700 m walk we were ready to return to the boat since the small boats called locally as pangas were waiting but even that late, spotted eagle rays made our back on board even later.

## Day 5

Friday 25 February

Cerro Brujo on San Cristobal Island is remains of a tuff cone; it has been eroded by rain and wind and recently by feral goats. Formed from lava of a very little viscosity and containing very little gas, it was broken while solidifying and pushed by the lava that continued to flow from behind. The lava flow on behind the cone is the A-A type, very fragile and razor sharp.

On visiting the coralline sandy beach, very rich in calcium carbonate, little crabs were intimidating by our passage, still 10 m from them they hidden into their shelters immediately. Sand dunes are nesting sites for green sea turtles so many depressions undulate the upper part of the beach. The second species of mocking bird restricted just to this island *Nesonimus melanotis* waked up again our interest of discovering more species of smaller land birds, small and medium ground Darwin's finches as well delighted our interest. The lagoon right behind the sand dunes was usually a salt mine exploited by ancient colonizers, now is a suitable habitat for common stilts, ruddy turnstones, sanderlings and white cheeked pintails. Bordering the lagoon halophytes it means plants that tolerate salinity efficiently give a green tinge to the area such as sea grape (*Scaevola plumery*) white and black mangroves, carpet weed, beach drop seed (*Sporobolus pyramidatus*) and further on the arid zone pioneering on the lava fields cactae, Scaecia, Croton and Palo Santo trees.

Snorkelling off the beach was the best option for some of our guests to start practicing and gaining more confidence, young sea lions were encouraging snorkelers to follow them to deep water.

All people were announced to collect everything from the beach and after a quick shower during navigation we arrive to Kicker Rock a small eroded tuff located three nautical miles west of the main island, there is an extraordinary geological landscape rising 140 m elevation frigate birds, Nazca and blue footed boobies nest.

At 2 o'clock everyone was ready impatient to know the only resource of fresh water on the highlands of San Cristobal. We start a bus riding from the political capital of Galapagos Puerto Baquerizo Moreno 30 minutes to reach first the most recently program of tortoises breeding in captivity created in 2002 Fausto Gordillo Breeding Centre, The tortoises here were unlike those in Santa Cruz Island. The shell in the front part was partially modified reaction caused by food resource. Mockingbirds, small ground finches, small tree finch, and a couple of warbler finches were spotted.

El Junco lagoon the only permanent resource of fresh water in Galapagos is a crater that during the last ice age 52.5 feet thick layer of sediments was deposited making of these lagoon capable of keeping rain water in a long term. The name of the lagoon is after a plant locally known as El Junco (*Eleocharis mutata*). Besides white cheeked

pintails, moorhens were diving for food. Unfortunately visibility made difficult the view. Back to the town some people were interested on a short walk around.

After dinner we set sail to Gardner bay on Espanola.

## Day 6

Saturday 26 February

Espanola named after the country of Spain, so isolated and one of the oldest in geological terms essentially gorgeous is now one of the best points of tourism attraction. The beach of Gardner Bay was the landing spot in the morning, where a large colony of sea lions welcome as, there is no time to loose, ornithologists prepared their cameras now what the three species of Darwin's finches had to be recorded, fortunately we succeeded in the morning, some people decided to explore the beach by their own others came with me for questions. Along the beach the endemic mockingbirds (*Nesonimus macdonaldi*) always were following as, at the end of the beach red marine iguanas made to wake up our curiosity, talking about them, very high above us a Galapagos hawk was flying in circles possible searching for an American Oystercatcher nesting site nearby. There was hot and humid so everybody was ready to go back on board and prepare for a refreshing snorkelling near to Gardner Island. Water visibility surprise me, so clear it was very easy for all participants to spot an recognize a wide range of fish such as: yellow tailed surgeonfish, blue chin parrotfish, cornet fish trumpet fish, porcupine puffer fish, stingrays and lots of sea stars were feeding on the detritus. Back on board after the shower people were questioning and checking an identification book to have a better idea about what we had seen.

During lunch I asked what time they'd rather disembark in order to avoid landing at the same time with other groups and all agree to start at 4 o'clock even better because there is not too hot at that time.

Perched on the lighthouse a Galapagos hawk was waiting and captivated totally our attention but there were hundreds of iguanas, mockingbirds, Galapagos doves, and Darwin's finches as well. Lava lizards inspire somebody to ask; are they baby iguanas? The question was really inviting since Espanola Island house the largest of them. Walking along the coast it was impossible don't stop around the nazca boobies nesting colony and the blow hole, unfortunately waved albatrosses are absent during this time of the year. In the way back plants like muyuyo (yellow cordia) Galapagos licium, Galapagos crotton, salt bush, and carpet weed call our attention.

Another 5 hours crossing tonight to a famous human history place, Floreana Island our next destination.

## Day 7

Sunday 27 February

Most southern of the main Galapagos Islands; one of the islands with dependable source of fresh water; large scenic lagoon that is unusually inhabited by flamingos, white-cheeked pintails, and migrant shore birds; home of the Wittmer family famous in Galapagos history; site of Post Office Bay, where the famous barrel "post office" is set up and still used; outstanding diving and snorkelling at Devil's Crown; green beach with greenish-brown sand and flour beach ,made up of ground coral; one of the four Galapagos Islands visited by Darwin.

Cormorant point is a visitor site surrounded by tuff cones that is the reason of the sand colour with a little tinge of green thanks to the olivine grains (mixture of silica, magnesium and iron), black, white mangrove, salt bush, lather leave bushes engulfed the flamingos lagoon making of these a suitable nesting site, once at the other side of the

point there were lots of green turtles mating even there was a couple stranded, sand dunes here are the most successful nesting site in this island. Male small ground finches were calling for a mate in the way back.

Devil's Crown is an eroded crater near to the main island, one of the favourite snorkelling sites, here marine currents produce rich upwelling attracting enormous amounts of fish, we had the first chance to see white tipped reef sharks.

Once Back on board we started to move to Post Office Bay and during lunch we refreshed what is in here and what to bring. At 2 o'clock we disembark to check the post cards left them behind by other visitors in this ancient barrel some were found to deliver them by hand to continue with the tradition and we left some as well, maybe in a near future we will get them back by other visitors. Now is time to move to visit an extraordinary volcanic formation near the beach, a lava tube that starts 35m elevation and ends at the sea level, during the short walk Galapagos cotton, Palo Santo trees and yellow cordia decorated the border of the trail, some people decided to stay on the beach for swimming, snorkelling or walking, the idea was to return early on board to take advantage of the wind that on that day blew to raise the sails and set route to Cerro Dragon on Santa Cruz Island, during the navigation people staying on the sun deck could see red necked phalaropes, Galapagos petrels and large flocks of shearwaters.

## Day 8

Monday 28 February

The majority of Cactae on this region is quite young, and a very healthy Palo Santo or incense tree forest dominate the place, The brackish lagoon attracts flamingos, Black necked stilts, lesser Yellow legs, grey plovers Sanderlings, semipalmated plovers, and so on, according to the interest on this group it was necessary to let other groups to move further, now what everyone agree to stay here longer. The aim once walking around the hill was to find land iguanas (*Conolophus subcristatus*), it's a shame but these inoffensive reptiles were suffering a critical threat back to the 1975, feral dogs preying on them, feral goats competing for food, rats and cats feeding on siblings and eggs. The former thanks to the efforts of the Galapagos National Park, Charles Darwin Research Station concluded with successful eradication. After 3 hours hiking we were back to the boat ready to lift anchor and moving to Sullivan Bay on Santiago Island where snorkelling with white tip reef sharks, stingrays, and a couple of penguins make us to be satisfied. The almost desolated pa hoe-hoe- lava field clear outdoor minds to understand a volcanic eruption and all process involved during this event, now what this type of lava preserve efficiently for thousands and thousands of years liquid shapes on the surface. There was no much to see just a couple of plants pioneering on this rash landscape mollugo and lava cactus, lava lizards and painted locusts representing the animal kingdom.

We travel tonight to the paradise of birds heading north east to Genovesa (Tower)

## Day 9

Tuesday 1 March

We wake-up early anchored in Darwin's Bay (Darwin actually never set foot here). A very early landing was planning with the purpose to spot short eared owls and at 6 am is still cool. The Prince Philip steps or el Barranco (the cliff) displays the first appearance of this site. Birds are wherever we point our cameras somebody emphasize. Genovesa Island houses the largest of the birds' colonies in the world. It was the first time to see red footed boobies, the only of the booby species that nest on trees, nazca boobies, great frigate birds courting and these was not enough three short eared owls were seen quite close, others never stop to try to take pictures of Maderian

storm petrels, a couple of people were looking desperately for wedge rumped storm petrels. It was necessary to remain the people that breakfast was waiting for us and after 2 hours we returned to the boat. Thinking about some people who don't participate in water activities a panga ride was a good option these morning, the others did snorkel. Panga riders commented to see fur sea lions, tropicbirds nesting in the cliff, shear waters passing bay any time and frigate birds chasing other sea birds and stilling food on the wing that's why they gain the degree of kleptomaniac birds. Snorkelers as well mention to swim with fur seals, in terms of fish Moorish idols, parrot fishes, puffer fish and surgeon fish.

In the afternoon we planned to land at 4 o'clock, at the coralline sandy beach, there were thousands of birds again but curiously the purpose of recording Darwin's finches fail, just a couple were seen on the wing with no chance for identification, yellow crowned night herons of different ages were waiting for the high tide.

We head south again retracing our steps to Santa Cruz Island to comply with the last visit to some of the guests apart of Naturetrek group that booked a trip just for 8 days.

## Day 10

## Wednesday 2 March

At 5:30 there was a general wake up call to visit Black Turtle Cove, There is no landing site only panga ride is possible, and after passing the islets at the entrance to the cove engines were not used to avoid frightening wildlife especially sea turtles, besides diamond stingrays, black tip sharks, white tipped reef shark , brown pelicans apparently establishing nesting sites on mangrove vegetation, back on board our breakfast was ready and then we had to move to Itabaca Channel to check out the 8 days trip people. Naturetrek participants were announced to sail around the northern part of Baltra Island for about one hour so at 9:30 I was ready to pick them up to visit the Twin Craters, they are huge depressions provoked by islands crust instability. The dominant vegetation is *Scaevola pedunculata* the best example of Adaptive Radiation according to flora is one of the seven endemic genus of plants into the *Asteraceae* family and definitely the largest family in the islands as worldwide.

We had lunch in la Garrapata restaurant as the first day, later riding in the same bus we move to a wonderful beach located to the south east part of the island named as El Garrapatero. Once leaving the bus there was a 500m walk, yellow cordia, incense tree, giant cactae stood up majestically along the trail just turning green by the present rainy season, afterwards people had to be warning because on poison apple tree, dangerous even for allergic people just by touching and then a clear area on the beach with a fresh breeze was so inviting. Somebody spots tree flamingos on a brackish lagoon, we move closer and a hand rail stopped us. What a place to take pictures of moorhens, white cheeked pintails and black necked stills, all these celestial peace was interrupted suddenly by a feral cat. In the way back we tried to find a barn owl in a lava tube with no success.

Full day in Santa Cruz, people was so tired after dinner to ask for check list the next day on Sombrero Chino (Chinese Hat)

## Day 11

## Thursday 3 March

Wake up at 5:30 to disembark at 6 am in order to avoid the heat, there was a wet landing, sea lions still lazy gave as a very welcome, the geological landscape captured our attention immediately, and this was the first time to visit a

cinder cone. Something really disgusting appeared on the trail; a dead rat, lately small proportions of rat poison, effectively the National Park eradication program on this island is doing well.

Due to the rainy season the endemic tomato blossoms as the majority of plants on the dry zone. On the way back to the beach a female sea lion nursing her baby stopped as, all took dozens of pictures unfortunately time flies so we had to go back to the boat for breakfast.

At 10am snorkelling activity was planned with two options: some people with better experience jumped from the panga and beginners from the beach, marine iguanas feeding under water, white tipped reef sharks join us. For 1 hour we sailed to Rabida Island, with only 4.9 km<sup>2</sup> it is a sanctuary of life. At 2 o'clock we had a pleasant snorkelling from the beach, we swam along the rocky island and looked into rock crevices for fish and other forms of marine life. Reddish volcanic sand and gravel astonish our sight and the question immediately was "why?" The colour is the product of a substance that iron an oxide in the sand grains. In other words the sand is literally rusty. Ecologically, the island is entirely within the arid zone. A wet landing was greeted by lounging Galapagos sea lions on the beach. Myriads of Galapagos doves flew around because this is one of the islands where they are most abundant. There were lots of Darwin's finches near to the beach, mostly small and medium ground finches as well as an abundance of yellow warblers. The lagoon near to the beach unfortunately deserted since one of the strongest Nino Phenomenon; 1982- 1983. Another long crossing tonight to Puerto Villamil on Isabella Island, one of the youngest and the largest.

## Day 12

## Friday 4 March

Four people decided to swim very early in the morning around Tintoreras Island (white tipped reef Shark Island) from Naturetrek group only Ann Renfrew participated in this activity now what we had to follow the new itinerary managed by the Galapagos National Park. Later on after breakfast we had permit to visit an amazing historical site. Around 9 am we landed in Puerto Villamil to ride in a bus for about 20 minutes towards the Wall of Tears. Isabela was also a penal colony, which existed from 1944 up to 1959 when the prisoners rebelled, abducted a foreign yacht and escaped to the northern coast of Ecuador. This colony was one of the most famous for the cruelty and torture practiced against its prisoners. The famous "Weeping Wall" was constructed during this period; it is 5 to 6 meters tall by 3 meters wide and has a length of approximately 100 meters. While they were constructing it, parts of it crumbled down and fell on the prisoners, crushing them forever. Its principal characteristic being that lava rocks had to be stocked upon lava rocks, without any type of cement to hold them together, and it is still remains standing.

In the way back to the town we stopped for a short walk around mangrove forest, here it was the best chance to identify the four species of mangroves in Galapagos, and the tide was still low given us a chance to see a fresh water spring resulting from filtration from the highlands, this was the only resource of fresh water for the prisoners and first island colonizers. Walking on the top of a long lava tube made us to understand how they were formed.

Back on board for lunch, weather conditions changed critically because of a very heavy rain that covered the volcano we waited anxiously to visit. Considering the expected conditions on the highlands the majority abort the visit, there was for Naturetrek only Peter Bright and the other three people that joined us in Puerto Ayora participating. Conditions were not so bad, on spite of the rain we had a chance to see the large caldera and even some fumaroles from a spectacular view point. On the way back the most colourful small land bird made us to

change mood, vermilion flycatcher so imposing and majestic flew around and perched sometimes on vegetation making easy to take pictures. The others decided to visit the town at 3:30 so in the way back to the town everybody commented to have had a great time.

Time to leave Puerto Villamil to sail towards Moreno Point a sort of prehistoric site because of the very young lava flows to walk on.

## Day 13

## Saturday 5 March

Very early in the morning we saw from Cachalote penguins and cormorants fishing nearby and at 8 o'clock we took the pangas ashore landing on black rocks, recently colonized by red and white mangroves. Walking on a barren landscape life was very poor at the beginning, pioneer plants like: lava cactus, *Mollugo* sp, Darwin's shrub, Radiated headed *Scaecia*. Oasis sprouts in terms of life with very dense vegetation, these brackish water lagoons are a suitable habitat for a variety of waders like moorhens, blue wing teals, white checked pintails and even some yellow tailed mullets were spotted from the shore.

Snorkelling at Moreno Point at the beginning was quite disappointed now what the visibility was not good but in advance in a kind of protected bay, dense brown algae like kelp hidden a variety of fish, sea horses were spotted less than a meter deep.

The panga ride in Elizabeth Bay was so amazing, near to small off shore rocks penguins, blue footed boobies, flightless cormorants, sea lions and large iguanas were resting peacefully, suddenly a brown pelican landed on Ann Adams shoulders, that moment was so funny, the young bird had to be chased away after 5 minutes but later on was following us for more or less an hour landing again on Dennis Gurner, what a curious behaviour, I've never seen that before. Marine turtles, stingrays, eagle rays, lava herons, striated herons, great blue heron made our visit so special.

Once back on board we moved to Urbina Bay for a couple of hours navigation to stay moored overnight.

## Day 14

## Sunday 6 March

These volcanic Black Sand was our next landing site, a difficult beach to disembark, fortunately the disembark was successful, On the way lots of small and medium ground finches found food on the trail, we stopped for a while and certainly seeds of *Croton* scullery, Galapagos cotton, velvet shrub abound. The rainy season could be the best chance to see giant tortoises, three of them roamed near to the trail.

Someone focus the interest on the composition of the ground, there was remains of marine life wherever we walked. The answer is so simple, these lands emerge from the ocean by enormous volcanic pressure into magma chambers, phenomenon that took place in 1954 and in other words uplift land.

Land iguanas were in the shade provided by dense vegetation few of them appear around but the enormous amount of nests made us to understand how abundant they are here.

Snorkelling activity started from the beach, just after 20 minutes the lack of visibility made us to change mind and we return to the boat, considering that Bolivar Channel is one of the best places to see whales, some blow holes were spotted at the distance.

Snorkelling at Tagus Cove was simply spectacular, Penguins, cormorants, marine turtles were around us lots of fish, sea stars made this even better. Afterwards we landed on a very steep area, graffiti is so disgusting, painted on the tuff cone but on the sides of the trail some of these just carved on the rock are evidence of the rich human history in these place, Charles Darwin visited these island that's why the lake into the crater was named after him. There was a gorgeous view of the lake with a variety of colours depending on the salinity average, depth, and even type of life so the water filtrates from the ocean and during the rainy season especially salinity is low. Hiking towards the summit of the volcano common vegetation typical on the arid zone was so abundant, palo santo (*Bursera graveolens*), radiate headed scalecia (*Scaevola affinis*), Galapagos croton (*Croton sculeri*), Galapagos rosemary (*Macraea rombigolia*) were the most common plants. In terms of fauna mockingbirds, flycatchers and Darwin finches were everywhere. At the very end of the day we rode on the panga along the coast looking for penguins and cormorants.

## Day 15

Monday 7 March

Fernandina one of the most pristine of the Galapagos islands located all the way to the west of the archipelago as well is the youngest and most active central volcanoes standing just up to the hot spot provide us an spectacular and unique visitor site; Espinoza point.

We landed at 7 o'clock on a rocky terrain, people were announced to be careful don't step on the marine iguanas now what more than three thousand individuals could be seen here very well camouflaged with the dark lava, our visit coincided with the nesting season so lots of females were digging their nests on the volcanic sand, sea lions bothered marine turtles and fly less cormorants but just to play. We searched for marine life on the intertidal zone, there were green turtles basking the sun, in tidal pools; little fish, like mullets, bulls eye puffer fish, blennies as well as hermit crabs, sea anemones, sea cucumbers and suddenly an octopus appeared changing colour according to the bottom, that was the most remarkable in these morning. Snorkelling in this area was closed for 6 years, now the Galapagos Marine reserve offers the use of this site again with the new itinerary management, marine iguanas and green sea turtles usually are eating green algae under water.

Two hours sailing to Punta Vicente Roca Point , people staying on the main deck saw bottle nose dolphins and almost arriving to the anchorage site the dorsal fin of a sun fish broke the water surface. Panga ride and snorkelling activities are the options here so the participants on the panga ride had one of the best volcanic landscapes as well as the first time to see Galapagos Martins flying around the cliff. Snorkelling with marine turtles, penguins, cormorants, fur seals made us difficult to leave the water. To comply with our schedule, Cahalote immediately once everybody back on board lift anchor and sailing northward to celebrate in the wheelhouse officially crossing the equator, our bartender Roberto prepared delicious cocktails, peoples mind was hit by the geological landscape of the Equator volcano sunken caldera. We sailed round the northern side of Isabela overnight, anchoring in James Bay on Santiago Island around 1:30 am giving us a quiet night to catch up on sleep.

## Day 16

Tuesday 8 March

We disembarked at 8 am on Puerto Egas, named after the last proprietary of the salt mine which was extracted since the 1920 to 1960s, there were still remnants left behind the miners, Darwin stayed here for few nights though he had trouble erecting a tent because of the enormous amount of land iguanas nests at that time, now this is the only of the major of the central islands that lack these peaceful creatures, maybe the introduction of alien species like cats, rats, dogs, pigs, goats and so on are the responsible of their extinction.

Palo santo, yellow cordial, Croton scouleri, thorn shrub, puncture weed, gray mat plant, narrow leaved chaff flower are the dominant flora. These producers can support successfully lava lizards, Darwin's finches, mockingbirds, dark billed cuckoo, and Galapagos hawk and so on. After walking 600 m we reached the coast and fur seals were peacefully shading on these marvelous grottos, certainly eroded lava tubes by wave and tidal action. We walk back to the beach following the costal line, exploring some of the tidal pools, walking on a very slippery lava covered with green algae which at this time of the year is so poor, any way some marine iguanas foraged in the intertidal zone but the majority of them swam to deep water where this resource is more abundant. On the intertidal zone we record a variety of life; pencil spiny sea urchins and green sea urchins, barnacle blennies, black tailed mullets, rainbow wrasses, volcano barnacles, red tipped hermit crab, and even out of water a four eyed blenny. On the beach some people decided to return to the boat because of the heat and some did snorkelling from the beach, were white tip sharks, green sea turtles and lots of fish delight us.

Three hours sailing from James Bay to Bartholomew Island were so enjoyable, giant manta rays jumped all around. The coast of Bartolome probably is one of the best places to see Galapagos Penguins in the water, and as well something new for our check list, leopard flounders well camouflaged in a sandy bottom.

With a small area this island is one of the best examples of geological process, Pa hoe-hoe lava, AA lava, lava tubes, volcanic ash, spatter cones, submarine crater besides some of the major central and northern islands were seen.

At 5 pm we came back to the boat to sail towards our last destination "North Seymour Island"

## Day 17

Wednesday 9 March

A very early visit was planned here, 6am the pangas were waiting to disembark the two species of frigate birds; magnificent and great are really common we were so lucky to see both breeding that means males with that imposing red sac fully inflated besides blue footed boobies, swallow tailed gulls, brown pelicans flew at any time above us. The large land iguanas here are endemic in Galapagos but introduced on this island. A millionaire American visited the islands several times, Captain Alan Hancock in one of his trips found that the iguanas population on the near Baltra Island were extremely unhealthy so about 76 individuals were liberated in this small island. Later on the iguanas were reported extinct on Baltra when American Militaries were allowed to establish a Military base. Nowadays some of these iguanas were breeding in captivity and repatriated back to their home. It was quiet difficult to say time is over but we had to get the airport early, we had breakfast at 7 am meanwhile the boat was sailing to Baltra Island everybody commented some of the best experiences lived on these paradise. At the airport all were accurately briefed about what to do; there was a very sad Good Bye. Flight 190 took the people directly to Quito after approximately 2 hours flying.

## Day 18

Thursday 10 March

Otavalo/Antisana.

## Day 19

Friday 11 March

In transit Quito to UK

## Day 20

Saturday 12 March

Arrive home.

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