



**GALÁPAGOS ISLANDS NATURAL HISTORY
EXTRAVAGANZA**

27 AUGUST–10 SEPTEMBER 2027



*The majestic **Waved Albatross** can be seen on Española Island.*

Overview

Just under 500 years ago the first Europeans arrived on the Galápagos Islands and marveled at this living laboratory. Today we continue to be awestruck by this constantly changing archipelago. As the Nazca Plate moves and new islands are formed, evolution is illustrated up close. A birding and wildlife tour to the Galápagos is a dream for any naturalist.

From Quito we fly to the island of Baltra. We then make our way to our home for the next eight days, the *Samba*, a spacious and luxuriously designed motor sailing yacht with wide open and shaded sun decks, a fully stocked bar, and a library. The abundant marine life that visits these waters year-round, the **Marine Iguanas** that dominate the rocky coastlines and the remarkable birdlife make it easy to see why this trip is a must for birders and naturalists.

Some of the Galápagos specials that we hope to find on this trip include **Galapagos Penguin**, **Waved Albatross**, **Galapagos Shearwater**, **Wedge-rumped** and **Elliot's Storm Petrels**, **Magnificent Frigatebird**, **Nazca**, **Red-footed**, and **Blue-footed Boobies**, **Lava Heron**, **Galapagos Hawk**, **Lava Gull**, **Galapagos Martin**, **Galapagos Flycatcher**, **Vermilion Flycatcher**, **Galapagos Floreana**, **San Cristobal** and **Espanola Mockingbirds**, **Vegetarian Finch**, **Woodpecker Finch**, **Common Cactus Finch**, **Green Warbler-Finch**, **Large and Small Tree Finches**, **Small and Medium Ground Finches** and **Mangrove Finch**.



Galapagos Hawk is often picked up on Española Island.

In some years, this tour can be combined with our Northern Ecuador: Birding Paradise tour, and/or our Ecuador: The Amazon tour. Please e-mail info@birdingecotours.com for more details.

Detailed Itinerary (13 days/12 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Quito

After arriving at Mariscal Sucre International Airport in Quito you will be met by your guide and transferred to your hotel.

Overnight: Hotel in Quito

Day 2. Buffer Day

This buffer day allows a little wiggle room for late flights. This morning we will walk the trails around the hacienda, taking pictures of hummingbirds. The property borders the Chiche River Gorge and there are several lookouts. There is an underground tunnel dated to pre-Inca times that can be visited. We will also get ready for tomorrow.

Overnight: Hotel in Quito

Day 3. Baltra Island and Santa Cruz Island

After an early breakfast, we will head to the Quito airport for our flight to Baltra Island. Galápagos has its own set of rules and regulations, aside from Ecuador's standard regulations. We will go through the Galápagos Biosecurity Control where our bags will be inspected for any type of stow-away bug or seed and then to receive our Galápagos Transit Cards. Once we have completed both these stops, we will check our baggage in and proceed to the gate to board our flight to Galápagos Islands!

On arrival at Seymour Airport on the island of Baltra we will pay the entrance fee to Galápagos National Park. After picking up our luggage, we will go through the quarantine system. *Samba's* naturalist will be there to greet us, explain the plans for the day, and answer any questions. As we head out of the airport terminal we should spot our first endemics, **Medium** and **Small Ground Finches**. We will also be on the lookout for **Vegetarian Finch**, **Woodpecker Finch**, and **Green Warbler-Finch**, as well as **Large** and **Small Tree Finches**. From here we will take a water taxi to the nearby island of Santa Cruz.

The rest of the morning and afternoon will be spent exploring the highlands of Santa Cruz. We pass Bellavista and then take the north trail to Media Luna, a volcanic crater similar in shape to a crescent moon. Here the scenery changes as we move through disturbed agricultural lands to large expanses of the endemic *Miconia* plants and then into an area sheltered by the Galápagos fern trees and surrounded by lichens, mosses, bromeliads, and orchids. **Galapagos Martin** can often be spotted in this area. **Galapagos Petrels** nests along the walls of the crater, and this is one of the largest colonies. We will keep our eyes open for the ever-so-timid **Galapagos Crake**. This is also a great habitat for **Large Tree Finch**, **Woodpecker Finch**, **Vegetarian Finch** and **Green Warbler-Finch**.

In the afternoon we will stop for lunch near the El Chato Giant Tortoise Reserve and hang out with **Western Santa Cruz Giant Tortoises**. Participants are strongly advised to wear appropriate gear for the visit to the highlands - the area is very moist and very likely to be muddy and humid. Pants, proper footwear, and a rain jacket are a must. **Mangrove Yellow Warbler**, **Galapagos Crake**

and **Paint-billed Crake** could make an appearance around the pond at El Chato. Afterwards, we will make our way to the coast and the town of Puerto Ayora, which is surrounded by cacti, and where we should find **Common Cactus Finch**. After a quick final scan for more finches we will board the *Samba* for our first dinner and night.

Overnight: *Samba*



*The handsome **Galapagos Dove** is one of the many endemics we will be targeting.*

Day 4. Floreana Island

A four-hour boat trip from Puerto Ayora will bring us to the distinctive volcanic cones of Floreana Island at dawn. We will make a wet landing on a green crystal beach made of volcanic olivine (the name of a group of rock-forming minerals, typically found in mafic and ultramafic igneous rocks and green in color). Another Galápagos endemic, the **Galapagos Petrel**, nests here.

Punta Cormorant is located on the northern shore of Floreana. Around the brackish lagoon we can expect to find **American Flamingo**, **White-cheeked Pintail**, **Whimbrel**, **Striated Heron** and **Brown Noddy**, and other shore- and migratory species are also likely to be encountered. On the other side **Green Turtles** use every corner of a white sand beach to lay their eggs. One often sees stingrays and reef sharks from the shore.

Around mid-morning we take a dinghy for a 25-minute journey and have the opportunity to snorkel at Champion Islet. This small islet is one of only two places where the rare **Floreana Mockingbird** survives, as well as **Medium Tree Finch**, due to the lack of invasive predators, like feral cats, that still roam the main island. Other species we can expect here include **Common Cactus Finch**, **Swallow-tailed Gull**, **Magnificent Frigatebird** and **Red-billed Tropicbird**. The landscape of

cactus and terracotta rock formations feels almost dreamlike. **Galapagos Sea Lions** often play in the waters here. The snorkeling around the island is extraordinary.



Brown Noddy can be seen along the shoreline of Floreana.

In the afternoon we stop at Post Office Bay. This former whaling hub dates back to the late 18th century and is well-known for being the first post office on the Galápagos. The original system is still working; you deposit your letter at the office and people heading back to the mainland stop by and pick up letters that are addressed close to their destination. These letters are often personally delivered!

Later we take kayaks and/or zodiacs and head west through a small series of islets and mangroves, with a large sea lion colony close by. We land near Baroness Lookout, named for a Viennese self-proclaimed baroness who lived here in the 1930s. From the top of this eroded volcanic cone we can imagine what this whaling hub looked like during the height of the whaling era. **Dark-billed Cuckoo** and **Galapagos Flycatcher** are often seen up here.

After a quick scan for seabirds and finches we will make our way back to the *Samba* for the night.

Overnight: *Samba*

Day 5. Española Island

Española is one of the oldest Galápagos Islands. Geologists estimate that it was formed over four million years ago as a shield volcano. With the help of low-viscosity lava, Española moved away from the hotspot and became dormant.

Key endemics on the island include **Espanola Mockingbird** and **Espanola Lava Lizard**, and this is a breeding island for the highly prized **Waved Albatross**. Upon arrival at its western tip, Punta Suarez, we will immediately notice the fiery-colored **Espanola Marine Iguanas** and the tame **Galápagos Sea Lions**, which wander around leisurely.

We follow a trail that leads to Punta Suarez, a long cliff face shaped by strong wave action and winds and dotted with **Blue-footed Boobies** and **Sally Lightfoot Crabs**. **Espanola Lava Lizard** in their bright attire line the coastline. As we make our way through saltbrush we will keep a lookout for **Galapagos Hawk** and **Espanola Mockingbird**. As we continue, we will come across large cliff-nesting colonies of **Blue-footed** and **Nazca Boobies**, **Swallow-tailed Gulls** and **Red-billed Tropicbirds**. The trail then leads inland to a rookery of **Waved Albatross** overlooking the ocean to the south. **Galapagos Shearwater**, **Elliot's Storm Petrel** and **Espanola Mockingbird** can often be seen from here, as well as **Espanola Cactus Finch** and **Grey Warbler-Finch**.

Depending on weather conditions we will snorkel or kayak around Gardner Bay either late in the morning or early in the afternoon. Its calm waters and attractive landscape are a great experience, above and below the water.

Along the picturesque white sand beaches we are likely to encounter sea lions and the curious **Espanola Mockingbird**, as well as **Espanola Cactus Finch**. A little behind the beach in the scrub brush we will look for **Grey Warbler-Finch**, **Galapagos Dove** and **Galapagos Hawk**.

In the late afternoon we will again board the *Samba* for the night.

Overnight: *Samba*

Day 6. San Cristóbal Island

San Cristóbal was the first island that Charles Darwin set foot on in the Galápagos, as it was home to the islands' governor. The presence of fresh water at El Junco Lake in the highlands was the reason why the governor set up residence here. San Cristóbal also became a penal colony for mainland Ecuador in the 1880s, and later the inmates were used as slaves for newly established sugarcane plantations and sugar factories. Today we hope to see one new endemic bird, **San Cristobal Mockingbird**.

Before breakfast we will explore Kicker Rock, a large protruding volcanic feature. This eroded tuff cone has vertical walls of over 450 feet (137 meters) and has large numbers of seabirds nesting and resting on it, including **Magnificent Frigatebird**, **Swallow-tailed Gull**, **Red-billed Tropicbird**, **Red-footed Booby**, **Nazca Booby**, **Brown Noddy**, and **Elliot's Storm Petrel**. We will circumnavigate the rock to fully appreciate its size. Snorkeling here is an option and can be spectacular, with **Galapagos Sharks**, sea turtles, and eagle rays swimming around a colorful drop-off, which is also full of tropical fish and invertebrates.



Red-billed Tropicbird breeds on the Galápagos Islands.

After three hours of navigating we will arrive at the Punta Pitt peninsula. Its mind-blowing landscape and protected cove offer a great chance to kayak, for those interested. We should be able to get very close to a large mixed colony of nesting seabirds on a nearby islet. Breeding seabirds here include **Swallow-tailed Gull**, **Lava Gull**, **Great and Magnificent Frigatebirds**, **Nazca and Red-footed Boobies**, **Elliot's Storm Petrel**, and **Galapagos Shearwater**, while **Mangrove Yellow Warblers** can be seen in the nearby scrub. The golden sand and **Galápagos Sea Lions** will welcome us for our wet landing in the afternoon, to explore the area for **San Cristobal Mockingbird**. This point marks the closest distance to South America.

In the late afternoon we will make our way to board the *Samba* for dinner and overnight accommodation.

Overnight: *Samba*

Day 7. Santa Fe and South Plaza Islands

Rock formations on Santa Fe Island date back to 3.9 million years ago. **Lava Heron** enjoys hunting in these waters. Before whalers and pirates arrived, the dense forests of the giant *Opuntia* cacti were once home to the now-extinct Santa Fe Tortoise, but **Espanola Giant Tortoise** has been introduced to Santa Fe Island. There are currently two extant endemics on this island, **Santa Fe Land Iguana** and **Santa Fe Rice Rat** (a subspecies of the **Galapagos Rice Rat**).

The nearby Barrington Bay is a breathtaking inlet, with the white sand on the seabed reflecting the sunlight, turning the calm waters turquoise. There is another large sea lion colony here. A trail takes you into the large *Opuntia* cactus forest, where you can often spot **Santa Fe Land Iguana** and **Galapagos Hawk**.

While enjoying lunch we will navigate south to South Plaza Island, off the east coast of Santa Cruz. The dry landing takes us to a brilliant combination of life and colors. *Sesuvium* succulents, which change from bright green in the rainy season to red, orange, and then purple during the dry season, are gorgeous. **Santa Fe Land Iguanas** wander through bright, red-carpet weeds. Overhead **Swallow-tailed Gulls** nest in the overhanging rock formations, along with **Red-billed Tropicbirds**. This is one of the best spots in the archipelago to see land iguanas; their nests are scattered all over the hills.

In the late afternoon we will make our way back to the *Samba*.

Overnight: *Samba*

Day 8. Santiago and Bartolomé Islands

This morning we will make a wet landing on a small islet 200 yards (183 meters) off the coast of Santiago Island, Chinese Hat, named for its uncanny resemblance to a Chinese wide, cone-shaped hat. The snorkeling in the small turquoise channel is very active, with sharks, sea lions, **Galapagos Penguins** and rays.

In the afternoon we will land on the north beach of Bartolomé Island. There is a small breeding colony of **Galapagos Penguins** along the golden beaches, which are shared by **Galapagos Sea Lions** and **Green Turtles**. The impressive volcanic cone in the background, Pinnacle Rock, was created when expelled magma from an underwater volcano cooled and then exploded. This large rock was formed from thin basalt layers. **Spotted Eagle Rays** and **Black-tipped** and **White-tipped Sharks** can be seen from the beach.

Overnight: *Samba*

Day 9. Isabela Island

This morning we will circumnavigate the geological formation of Punta Vicente Roca, on the north shore of Isabela Island, on our zodiacs. Besides the nesting **Blue-footed** and **Nazca Boobies**, gulls, storm petrels, **Brown Noddy**, and **Flightless Cormorant** may be found here too. The cold waters coming in from the Cromwell Current provide abundant feeding opportunities for seabirds, whales, dolphins, and sea lions. There is a small colony of **Galápagos Fur Seals** here as well.

We will spend the afternoon looking for pelagic birds like **Galapagos Petrel** and **Waved Albatross** as we navigate toward North Seymour.

Overnight: *Samba*

Day 10. North Seymour Island and Baltra Island

After a dry landing on Seymour Island at sunrise, we will walk among the largest **Blue-footed Booby** colony in the Galápagos. **Swallow-tailed Gulls** and tropicbirds decorate the large basaltic walls of the island.

Then we will make our way back to the *Samba* for our final Galápagos breakfast. After navigating back to Santa Cruz Island we will say goodbye to the *Samba* and its crew.

Our driver will be waiting at the port to take us to our lodge for lunch. Perched in the highlands, this spot is a favorite of **Western Santa Cruz Giant Tortoises**. The rest of the day we will bird around the grounds.

Overnight: Galapagos Camp – Santa Cruz Highlands

Day 11. Santa Cruz Islands

This morning we will explore the highlands of Santa Cruz. Right away, the scenery changes as we move through disturbed agricultural lands, to large expanses of endemic miconia plants and then into an area sheltered by Galapagos Tree Ferns and surrounded by lichens, mosses, bromeliads, and orchids. **Galapagos Martin** is often spotted in this area. **Galapagos Petrels** nest along the walls of the crater, this is one of the largest colonies. We will keep our eyes peeled for the ever-so-timid **Galapagos Crake** and **Paint-billed Crake**. This is also great habitat for **Large Tree Finch**, **Woodpecker Finch**, **Vegetarian Finch** and **Green Warbler-Finch**. In the afternoon we will make our way to the Charles Darwin Station. Here we will have the opportunity to learn about the Archipelago's climate and geography, as well as how certain factors influenced the evolution of species on the islands.

After visiting the station we will walk the boardwalk or strand before heading back up to our lodge.

Overnight: Galápagos Camp – Santa Cruz Highlands

Day 12. Flight Back to the mainland

Today is our flight back to Quito, so we will spend the morning birding around the Lodge, before packing up and returning to Baltra Island.

Overnight: *Hacienda Jimenita*

Day 13. Departure

Participants will be transferred to Mariscal Sucre International Airport for flights home.

Overnight: Not included

Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides, and other factors. In addition, we sometimes have to use a different guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling or other factors.

Duration: 13 days
Group size: 4–14
Dates: 29 August—10 September 2027
Start: Quito, Ecuador
End: Quito, Ecuador
Price: US\$ 9,700 per person sharing (**includes Quito-Baltra-Quito flights**) (2027)

Single supplement: US\$ 5,300 (2027)

Price includes:

Return flights (Quito-Baltra-Quito)
Meals
Accommodation
Guiding fees
Entrance fees to Galápagos National Park
All transport while on tour
Tolls
Tips for *Samba* staff and naturalist (usually amounting to \$ 300)

Price excludes:

All international flights
Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts
Alcoholic drinks
Personal insurance
Medical attention
Additional gratuities (please see [our tipping guidelines blog](#))