

WILDLIFE TRAVEL



13th to 26th March 2019 (14 days)

THE GALAPAGOS

Cruising in Darwin's 'footsteps'

"scenery and wildlife excellent, coupled with knowledgeable guides made for an excellent holiday. Even better than expected"
Galapagos 2014

A true 'wildlife holiday of a life time', exploring the Enchanted Islands of the Galapagos.

When **Charles Darwin** first arrived in the Galapagos on board The Beagle in 1835, he described 'a broken field of black basaltic lava, thrown in the most rugged waves and crossed by great fissures... nothing could be less inviting than the first appearance.' On this holiday, we will show you that appearances can be deceptive, as we explore the wonderful natural history of the 'enchanted isles', the **world famous** islands of the Galapagos. Unlike most trips, we also have extra time on the main island giving us a different insight into the life here, plus time to explore the highlands and experience the friendly town at a relaxed pace. We also have excursions in mainland Ecuador to explore the diversity here - an added bonus.

The centrepiece of our trip is a week long cruise on a catamaran motor yacht of a very high standard taking only 16 passengers. Our itinerary extends from the inhabited highlands of Santa Cruz to the untouched wilderness and **Flightless Cormorants** of Fernandina, and the wonderful seabird colonies of North Seymour. The opportunities to enjoy the wildlife from the boat and on walks on the islands are truly magical. Specialities of the Galapagos include comical **Blue-footed Boobies**, **Marine and Land Iguanas** and Galapagos Penguins as well, of course, as Darwin's famous finches and the **giant tortoises**. **Snorkelling** to discover the amazingly rich marine life in these waters is optional (cost included) but promises close encounters with **turtles**, sea lions and (friendly) sharks. After our fantastic time on the boat, we enjoy a two night stay in Puerto Ayora on the island of Santa Cruz.

With their incredible wildlife, who could fail but be enchanted by Las Islas Encantadas?



Price
£7,195

Single Room Supplement
£150 (hotels only)*

Full board

- Day 1** flight to Guayaquil
- Day 2** Cerro Blanco
- Day 3** flight to Baltra board our boat
- Day 4-9** cruising the Galapagos inc. Fernandina, Isabela Santiago, Santa Cruz, disembark
- Day 10** highlands of Santa Cruz
- Day 11** return to Guayaquil
- Day 12** local tour, departure
- Day 13** arrival UK

Leaders

Philip Precey
and local guides

fearless wildlife,
great photographic
opportunities

Wildlife and culture holidays



Our profits are donated to **The Wildlife Trusts**



ITINERARY

Please note that the itinerary may be changed to suit the weather or other practicalities or at the discretion of the leaders.

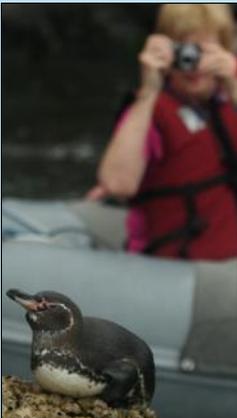
Our tours always include a well-planned selection of islands for a superb range of wildlife. All itineraries, however, are subject to the authority of the Galapagos National Park and amendments may need to be made. Changes to our itineraries have only had to be made on a few occasions in the past and these are mainly due to conservation strategies implemented by the Park.

Day 1 Wed 13th March Flight from UK to Guayaquil, via Amsterdam. Short transfer to our hotel. Dinner and night at Unipark Hotel.

Day 2 Thu 14th March As we acclimatise to Ecuador time and climate, a gentle morning takes us to the reserve of **Cerro Blanco**, just outside the city. This important reserve protects a large area of **Tumbesian dry forest**, an ecosystem unique to the lowlands of southern Ecuador and northern Peru, home to a suite of birds such as Grey-cheeked Parakeet, Grey-backed Hawk, Black-capped Sparrow and Tumbes Pewee. We will also visit a nearby reservoir, where wetland birds including Neotropic Cormorant, Wattled Jacana and various herons may be found. After a picnic lunch we will make our way back to Guayaquil to have a rest before our flight tomorrow to the islands and to catch up with ourselves after the long journey yesterday. Dinner and night at Unipark Hotel.

Day 3 Fri 15th March After breakfast we travel back to the airport and take our morning flight out to the Galapagos Islands, landing at the airport on **Baltra**. On arrival we have time to enjoy our first sights of Galapagos wildlife: Darwin's finches hop around the airport buildings, Galapagos Mockingbirds sing from the top of giant Opuntia cactuses, Magnificent Frigatebirds soar overhead and you may even catch a glimpse of a Land Iguana shuffling past: and that's before passing through customs! We will transfer to our boat, where we will have lunch. After an introduction to the islands, we will take a short trip to **Mosquero Inlet**, a peaceful reef and white sandy beach, where we will have our first introduction to Blue-footed Boobies, sealions and Brown Pelicans. This will be our first night of 7 on the boat. Our routine will be of two island 'landings' each day (or perhaps sometimes a boat trip in one of the 'zodiacs'), one in the morning and one in the afternoon, as well as the opportunity to swim or snorkel almost every day. All our meals are taken on the boat.

Day 4 Sat 16th March This morning we will visit Sullivan Bay on **Santiago** where we will enjoy some of the most spectacular lava formations in the islands. The waters around Santiago are as good a place as any on our itinerary to watch for Bottle-nosed Dolphins: with luck they may even come in to ride our bow wave. From here we then move around



the island to the red beaches of **Rabida**, hoping to catch sight of Galapagos Petrel along the way. The two islands of Santiago and Rabida have recently been cleared of goats, and the vegetation is gradually recovering after years of over-grazing.

Day 5 Sun 17th March After sailing overnight, we will spend our morning on the island of Fernandina. This is the youngest of the islands, the westernmost part of the archipelago and the least affected by the impacts of human activity. Visiting is limited to just a single site, the beautiful **Punta Espinosa**, where large groups of Marine Iguanas haul out on the lava shore and where we will visit a breeding colony of the bizarre Flightless Cormorant. Galapagos Penguins are also found in the area in good numbers. A morning spent on Punta Espinosa is amongst the most memorable of Galapagos's highlights. After our daily dose of snorkelling, and yet another well-deserved lunch, we will board the zodiacs again for a visit to Elizabeth Bay across on nearby Isabela, the largest of the Galapagos islands. The islands at the mouth of the bay are one of the most important breeding sites for the lovely Galapagos Penguin, the northernmost penguin species in the world. We will also take the zodiacs into the mangroves surrounding the bay, where rays glide through the shallow waters, Lava Herons and Great Blue Herons rest among the mangroves and Galapagos Martin may be seen hawking overhead.

Day 6 Mon 18th March Today we will visit two sites on the western side of Isabela: Urbina Bay in the morning, and then an afternoon visit to Tagus Cove. Historically an anchorage for pirates and whalers, who preyed on the whales which can still be found in the deep waters of the Bolivar Channel, our afternoon zodiac ridge here will be our last excursion on Isabela before we set sail back eastwards.

Day 7 Tue 19th March This morning we will wake up in James Bay, on the island of **Santiago**. Our morning excursion will take us around the coast of Puerto Egas, where Galapagos Fur Seals hide among the lava caves and we have our best chance of finding Sharp-beaked Finch among the Opuntia cactus. The beach is also a great place from which to snorkel before lunch. Over lunch we will travel around the island to **Bartolome**. The 372 wooden steps take us across a barren volcanic landscape that looks as if it could have emerged from the sea only yesterday, up to the summit and the most spectacular view in the islands. With the archipelago laid out before us and the sun setting to the west, it's definitely worth the (optional) climb.

Day 8 Wed 20th March After breakfast we will make a wet landing on **Sombrero Chino**, a small island off the coast of Santiago, an excellent snorkelling site.



Endemic birds of Galapagos (from top): Galapagos Mockingbird; Lava Heron; Swallow-tailed Gull; Vegetarian Finch left: getting up close and personal with Galapagos Penguin and Galapagos Hawk

Our afternoon visit will be to **Cerro Dragon**, across the channel on Santa Cruz, where Land Iguanas feed amongst the Opuntia cactuses and fragrant Palo Santo trees. The trail takes us through the arid vegetation to the nearby lagoon, home to Galapagos Flamingos, Black-necked Stilts and White-cheeked Pintail.

Day 9 Thu 21st March We will spend today on the island of **Santa Cruz**, in the centre of the archipelago. We will travel up into the highlands, where we will search for Giant Tortoises in the wild, as well as exploring the cloud forest, a very different habitat to the arid vegetation near the coast. The unique vegetation of the lichen-draped Scalesia forests is home to Woodpecker Finch, Small Tree Finch and the stunning Vermillion Flycatcher. After lunch we will visit the famous Charles Darwin Research Centre and Fausto Llerena Interpretation Centre, to learn more about the conservation challenges facing the islands and some of the projects being undertaken to meet these challenges. In particular, we will be able to visit the captive breeding program for the famous Giant Tortoises: animals from several islands are being bred here to reinforce the wild populations. Amongst the arid zone vegetation, we should find several of Darwin's famous finches, giving us the chance to compare Small, Medium and Large Ground Finches and Cactus Finch side by side. Galapagos Mockingbirds sing from the top of the tall Candelabra Cactuses and Galapagos Flycatchers flit around.

Day 10 Fri 22nd March Our morning excursion takes us around the bird colonies of **North Seymour**. Here Magnificent and Great Frigatebirds nest side by side, enabling us to get to grips with the differences between the two. Blue-footed Boobies nest on the ground amongst the bushes, performing their comical foot-waving dance, while Lava Gulls, the world's rarest gull scavenges around the colony for scraps. Behind the beach is also a good spot to search for Galapagos Snake, while the island's Land Iguanas lumber past. Unfortunately, this is our last excursion from the boat, and all too soon it is time to bid farewell to the Eden and her crew, as we disembark at Baltra. From here we travel across to Santa Cruz and back to Puerto Ayora where we will settle in to our hotel for the next two nights. Night at Hotel Isla Azul.

Day 11 Sat 23rd March We will start the day with a walk out through the arid zone vegetation to the beach at Tortuga Bay. Along the way we will enjoy the endemic plant life, and look for the shy Dark-billed Cuckoo and Galapagos Dove. After a free afternoon, we will end our day returning to the highlands of the island, where we will enjoy a sunset cocktail and a farewell meal overlooking the island as the Cattle Egrets fly down to their roost in the lowlands. Night at Hotel Isla Azul.

Day 12 Sun 24th March After breakfast we travel to the airport and take our flight back to Guayaquil. Night at Unipark Hotel.



Day 13 Mon 25th March Today we will have a tour of some of the more interesting corners of the city and learn something of Guayaquil's revolutionary history. We will also wander through the parks and gardens along the river front, where a surprising number of birds can be found, including a nesting colony of Night Herons and, perhaps, our first hummingbirds. We should also encounter the locally endemic Guayaquil Squirrel and enjoy the bizarre sight of Green Iguanas behaving like city pigeons. After lunch we will make our way to the airport, ready for our evening flight, arriving in Amsterdam next day (**Day 14 Tue 26th March**) and from there on to Heathrow and home.

Snorkelling

This is purely **optional** but for those who want to take a dip, there are some magnificent beaches. The water may be cool but not too cold to swim in for a while. For those who wish to, this is a wonderful opportunity to try **snorkelling**. We normally have at least one snorkelling 'excursion' each day: sometimes from the beach and sometimes from the small boats. The chance to enjoy the fascinating underwater life is not to be missed. Help will be at hand for those who are inexperienced. Snorkelling equipment is included, but bring your own if you wish. If you wear glasses, **a mask with prescription lenses would be a very good investment** as many of our previous travellers have rated the snorkelling as one of the highlights of the trip.



Endemic reptiles of Galapagos (from top): Santiago Marine Iguana; Santa Cruz Giant Tortoise; Galapagos Land Iguana; Satiago Lava Lizard; Isabela Marine Iguana

Accommodation

On Santa Cruz our base is the **Hotel Isla Azul** in Puerto Ayora (2 nights), an attractive and comfortable hotel in the quiet streets behind Darwin Avenue and a short walk away from the 'main drag'. In Guayaquil, we stay at the **UniPark Hotel**, a four star hotel with air conditioning and good food - (3 nights).

Our cruise around the Galapagos will be on board the **Tip Top II**. It is a recently (2016) refitted and redesigned catamaran motor yacht, which accommodates a maximum of 16 passengers, in ten air conditioned cabins. Each twin/double cabin has 'lower berths' only (ie no bunk beds) with individual climate control, security box, and bathroom with shower. The Tip Top II has a comfortable dining room, lounge, bar and a wonderful viewing deck. All the social areas have a direct view to the sea. We will have our evening meetings in the lounge and enjoy relaxing or wildlife watching on the sun/viewing decks. Meals on board are taken in the dining room. (As with all cruises, in the event of having to change the boat, due to unavoidable reasons, a similar standard of boat will be used.)

*Single occupation of a double cabin on the boat would be very expensive and we have therefore given the single room supplement to cover the rooms at the hotels only. Very limited single cabins may be available (however, again, the boat charge a supplement for them). In the past, we have arranged for you to share a cabin with a suitable fellow traveller and this has always worked very well (you spend most time elsewhere on the boat, other than for sleeping). Please talk to us if you are definitely unwilling to do this and we will discuss the current single options with you.

Extending your holiday

Ecuador is a fantastic country, well worth spending more time in. From the amazingly species rich cloud forests of **the Andes** around **Mindo**, home to orchids, hummingbirds and charismatic birds such as Toucan Barbet and Andean Cock-of-the-Rock to the utterly spellbinding Hacienda de San Agustin de Callo with its breathtaking views of snow-capped **Cotopaxi** volcano and some wonderful community-owned eco-lodges in the **Amazonian rainforest**, all with excellent accommodation and comfortable and safe travel. If you would like to extend your holiday please speak to us.

Fitness and health

- No strenuous walking is involved but you need to have a reasonable level of general fitness to be able to participate in the holiday.
- We will sometimes be walking on **rough ground** e.g. in lava areas. Although most of the walks are not long (maximum is a slow walk up to about 3 hours or so), it can be hot. Walking boots are recommended for most areas. There are a few occasions when



walking uphill is needed but this is not excessive and not strenuous. The islands are reached from the yacht by small motor boats and landings are either 'dry', where **we step out onto the rocks or 'wet' onto the beach**. Because of this and the need sometimes to walk on rocky ground (e.g. in some places rounded rocks), the holiday is **not suitable for those with significantly limited agility** or problems of balance. Safety rules (e.g. wearing life jackets whilst in small boats) are strictly adhered to.



- The sun is very strong. Sun protection (hat, sunglasses and sunscreen) is essential. We avoid walking in the hottest part of the day.
- The Galapagos are not known to be malaria or yellow fever areas, nor are the areas that we visit on the mainland but general inoculations for overseas travel are recommended.
- Safety advice given by the leaders must be heeded at all times. We will receive a **safety briefing** once on board the boat.



It is essential that, PRIOR TO BOOKING, you ring us to discuss any potential fitness or health problems that may affect you on this trip, 01954 713575.



Passports and Visas

You must have a valid passport for this trip (recommended valid for at least 6 months after the end of the holiday). Temporary tourist visas are issued on arrival in Ecuador for holders of a UK/EU passport. Please obtain further advice (prior to booking) if you hold another type of passport.



Insurance

Personal travel insurance providing good medical cover is essential for this trip.



Endemic flora of Galapagos (from top): Lava Morning Glory; *Passiflora colinvauxii*; Darwin's Cotton; *Sesuvium edmonstonei*; *Opuntia echios echios*

Leaders

Philip Precey is a Director of Wildlife Travel and has led many of our holidays, from Spitzbergen to New Zealand. Never far from his binoculars, Philip will help you to enjoy all the aspects of the natural history that we encounter, as well as doing his best to make sure we find as many of the endemic birds and other wildlife as possible. Whether it's helping with the tricky Darwin's finches on Galapagos, keeping his eyes peeled for passing cetaceans or identifying the endemic plants of the islands, Philip's natural history knowledge will ensure you have a great time and, unlike other trips to the Galapagos (run by most companies), his knowledge will enable you to explore the full range of natural history on the islands rather than just the most well known wildlife highlights. This will be **Philip's eighth visit** to the islands.



Weather & Sea Conditions

In the Galapagos we should have very pleasant, hot (dry rather than humid), sunny weather although rain is possible. At this time in Galapagos, it is the **'wet' season**, when there are mostly blue skies interrupted by occasional heavy rain (in contrast to the 'garua' season from July to December when it is cooler and drier but can be misty, with colder and rougher seas). Much of the travelling is done at night. Generally, the sea is fairly calm as this area of the Pacific is not affected by severe storms (it is in the 'doldrums').

Flights

Group flight with KLM. It is also possible to fly with Iberia or Lan via Madrid, with a slightly later start, although the price may be more. Ask us for details, if interested.

13th March	Depart Heathrow 06.30, arrive Amsterdam 09.00 Depart Amsterdam 10.15, arrive Guayaquil 18.35 (1 stop in Quito)
25th March	Depart Guayaquil 20.05, arrive Amsterdam 13.30 (next day)
26th March	Depart Amsterdam 15.45, arrive Heathrow 16.05

TO BOOK

Contact us to check availability and reserve a place. Complete the Booking Form and send to Sunvil Holidays (CAA-ATOL Licence 808, ABTA V6218), our tour operator, with your deposit. All details about booking are given in the Booking Pack.

**DEPOSIT PER PERSON £1500,
SECOND INSTALLMENT ON CONFIRMATION OF HOLIDAY £2500.
BALANCE DUE BY 12/12/2018**

INCLUDED: Return flight from London to Guayaquil. Local transport as specified in itinerary, including flights to/from Galapagos. 12 night's accommodation, half board (breakfast, dinner) plus 10 lunches. Entrance fees as per itinerary. Snorkelling equipment on the boat. Tips for boat crew, drivers, hotel staff. Services of leader and guides.

NOT INCLUDED: Galapagos National Park Entry (\$110). 2 lunches (on Santa Cruz, days 10 and 11). Refreshments. Other gratuities. Travel insurance.

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

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