

GALÁPAGOS

Natural History and Evolution of Galápagos Fauna

MAR 452/452L (4 credits)

Jeffrey Parmelee, Ph.D. | jparmelee@une.edu

John Mohan, Ph.D. | jmohan@une.edu

Tentative Travel Dates: May 24 - June 2 | Estimated Travel Fee: \$7,000

Sample Itinerary

DAY 1 | Fly to Quito, Ecuador

Fly from Boston to Quito, Ecuador and meet your escort to the hotel upon arrival.

DAY 2 | Otavalo market and indigenous culture

After breakfast, receive a brief orientation, then visit the town of Otavalo and the famous Otavalo market. The Otavaleños are a trader community by tradition, and are known worldwide for their wonderful work on textiles and tapestries. Visit Peguche, where textiles are still woven using shuttle looms. Taste the flavors of the Andean cuisine while enjoying lunch prepared with typical ingredients and products from the Ecuadorian highlands. After lunch, continue to Cotacachi, a multicultural city famous for producing high quality handmade leather goods that include wallets, purses, and jackets. In the afternoon, return to Quito.

DAY 3 | Galápagos

After breakfast, transfer to the airport for your flight to Baltra Island. Upon arrival, board the Bonita yacht. After getting settled and having lunch aboard the boat, your first visit is to Dragon Hill on the northwestern coast of Santa Cruz Island. This site consists of a mile-long trail running through three different environments. In 1975, it was one of the only places on Santa Cruz Island where healthy land iguanas (*Conolophus subcristatus*) could be found. That same year, the Galápagos National Park and the Charles Darwin Foundation initiated a program to conserve land iguanas. Look for flamingos in the lagoons; at certain times of the year, the shrimp they feed on are more abundant and the flamingo population increases. Return to the ship for dinner.

DAY 4 | Galápagos

This morning visit Espumilla Beach and Bucanero Cove on Santiago Island. The main attractions include palo santo wood, the beach, and the stunning landscape; the beach is a very important site for nesting sea turtles. At one time, invasive pigs were the main predator of tortoise eggs; the pigs were later eradicated with the creation of the Isabela Project. Have lunch back on the boat, and then visit Egas Port, known for its beautiful black sand beach. Further south is the Pan de Azúcar Volcano, whose volcanic deposits have contributed to the beach's formation. The crater of this volcano contains a saltwater lake that dries up during hot weather. Between 1928 and 1930, explorations to develop a salt mine were carried out, but it was decided that a mine was not feasible. The workers' use of endemic woods also damaged the environment, and the development was scrapped.

DAY 5 | Galápagos

Today explore Vicente Roca Point on Isabela Island. This site is a large bay composed of two separate coves, with spectacular sea life. Keep an eye out for seahorses, sea turtles, and the strange-yet-fascinating ocean sunfish (Mola mola). This afternoon, visit Fernandina Island's Espinoza Point. Fernandina is the third largest island in the archipelago and is famous for its large colonies of marine iguanas, which nest from January to June. It's also home to the endemic flightless cormorant, the Galápagos penguin, and Galápagos snakes, and it's the only island that doesn't have any mammals. From Espinoza Point, admire the beauty of Fernandina Island and its volcano, which last erupted in 2005.

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DAY 6 | Galápagos

Continue exploring Isabela Island today. Begin at Urbina Bay, located at the base of Alcedo Volcano between Elizabeth Bay and Tagus Cove. Hike along the two-mile trail, a great place to observe land iguanas, hawks, and tortoises. It's also possible to see red and blue lobsters here. This afternoon, visit Tagus Cove, to the west of Darwin Volcano. While walking, note the rocks marked by inscriptions and graffiti, some dating back to 19th century pirates. From here, you can see Darwin Lake, a saltwater lake approximately 27 feet deep. The lake contains no fish, but it's very common to see a variety of bird species.

DAY 7 | Galápagos

Today take a panga boat ride around Elizabeth Bay, one of the island's breeding sites for penguins. Located on the west coast of Isabela, Elizabeth Point is a marine visitor site. Also visit a red mangrove cove, where brown pelicans, flightless cormorants, spotted eagle rays, golden rays, and sea lions are often seen. After lunch, disembark at Moreno Point near Elizabeth Bay on the west coast of Isabela Island. A plethora of birds can be seen on a dinghy ride along the rocky shores or during a hike along a path that leads through lava rocks to tide pools and mangroves. In the tide pools, green sea turtles or white-tipped reef sharks can be seen.

DAY 8 | Galápagos

Continue exploring the riches of Isabela with a visit to Las Tintoreras. Located in the bay of Puerto Villamil, these small islets are surrounded by calm, turquoise waters. An easy trail takes you through great landscapes with interesting fauna; look for large numbers of marine iguanas basking in the sun, lava lizards, herons, gulls, and sea lions. In the coves, it's easy to find sea turtles, rays, and even penguins. Among the many inlets and channels on the coast, white-tipped reef sharks ("tintoreras" in Spanish) are sometimes seen. This afternoon, explore the lush highland forests of Santa Cruz. Look for the Galápagos giant tortoises in their natural environment, grazing and resting near ponds. Visit a lava tunnel and learn how these formations were created by ancient volcanic eruptions.

DAY 9 | Quito

After breakfast, visit the Charles Darwin Research Station. Take a private bus to the entrance of the breeding center, where you will see tortoises and land iguanas in captivity. This center is the main breeding site on the islands. Animals that were in danger of extinction on the various islands are maintained in captivity. Thanks to the dedicated work of several institutions, some species are being saved. Prior to his death in 2012, this was also the home of Lonesome George, the famous last survivor of the giant tortoise species found on Santa Cruz Island. Lunch at the island airport is on your own today. Enjoy the afternoon back in Quito at leisure before gathering for a farewell dinner at the hotel in the evening. Transfer to the airport.

DAY 10 | Return to the U.S.

Return flight from Quito to Boston.

* Cruise itineraries are subject to change without prior notice due to unforeseen circumstances (e.g. weather) or at the discretion of the captain, guide, or the Galápagos National Park.

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