Full Detailed Itinerary - Galapagos Endemics Cruise

Day 1: Arrival in Quito

Most flights arrive in the evening. You will be met at the airport and transferred to a hotel in Quito for the night. Dinner is provided on this night if you arrive early enough.

Day 2: Quito to the Galapagos Islands (Baltra)

In the morning, we will take a flight from the Ecuadorian capital, Quito, to the island of Baltra in the Galapagos (exact details of this flight are not yet known but will be passed on to you before the tour begins), the main entry point into the islands. We will have our first chances to see some of the strange residents of the Galapagos straight off the bat, with several of the endemic finches, like Medium and Small Ground-Finches likely, as well as Lava Gull and even Galapagos Lava Lizard before the day is done. We may also have a chance to explore nearby North Seymour island, where both species of frigatebirds nest side by side, and puff our their substantial scarlet throat sacs in frenzied excitement of display. This island hosts nesting Blue-footed Boobies and Swallow-tailed Gulls, which will keep us more than amused. We will sleep for the next 7 nights onboard the Nemo III.

Days 3-8: Genovesa, Isabela, Fernandina, Floreana, Española, San Cristobal

These islands all offer different wildlife opportunities, and different endemic bird species, and will be visited on these days, as we cruise from island to island. The exact order that this will be done will not be confirmed by the national park until 50 days before the cruise.

The island of Genovesa is located within the northeast of the archipelago and is likely to be one of the most popular island among birders and photographers alike; there are simply birds everywhere leading to its other name – “Bird Island”. Vast numbers of Red-footed Boobies nest on the Genovesa and do so in small trees within inches of the trails that weave through the colony. Beside these boobies, which only nest on few accessible islands away from this one, we should also see nesting Great Frigatebirds along the same trail too, sitting within arm’s length. Genovesa is also an excellent place to watch Red-billed Tropicbirds hanging in the wind over their nesting cliffs, and three species of storm-petrels forage offshore. Onshore, we can sometimes find the dark endemic form of Short-eared Owl that rests in wait for unsuspecting storm-petrels to prey on. For endemic hunters, then the Genovesa Ground-Finch is a target species confined to this island. Large Ground-Finch and Gray Warbler-Finch are also possible, as are resting Swallow-tailed Gulls, an odd nocturnal feeding gull.

Isabela island lies in the west of the archipelago and is within the geologically youngest part of this volcanic archipelago. While seeing dramatic ancient lava flows there, we will also seek specialties of the western Galapagos like the unique Flightless Cormorant the only one of its kind on Earth, and the ever-popular Galapagos Penguin, the only tropical penguin. This can also be a good island for the sea crossings and

pelagic birds, like Galapagos Petrel, Galapagos Shearwater, Waved Albatross, three species of storm-petrel, and sometimes whales too, species like Bryde's Whales and Orcas occur. It is also a good place to watch out for the scarce Galapagos Martin, one of the scarcer endemics. While walking among sparsely vegetated crusty lava flows underfoot on these young islands, we will also come across oasis like pools that are often home to White-cheeked Pintail and bright pink American Flamingoes. While working the edges of mangroves can lead to us finding Lava Herons blending in with the dark volcanic rocks. Marina life is always close at hand, and seeing sharks, rays (even Manta Rays), and Pacific Green Turtles from above water is not uncommon!

Fernandina will be our westernmost point, and while Flightless Cormorants clamor along the shorelines awkwardly, we will see some staggering number of Marina Iguanas, which are found in epic concentrations on this island. We will see them throughout our cruise, and should also experience some of the Christmas-colored ones that occur on some of the southern island only.

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Floreana is one of the less visited islands, a small one located in the southeast. It has some great areas for snorkeling offshore, and onshore there are pools with ducks, flamingos and shorebirds, like Wandering Tattler. Numerous endemic finches occur on the island, and we will be focusing on finding the one that is only found there – Medium Tree-Finch, Plentiful seabirds abound offshore, with big numbers often foraging overhead whilst snorkeling for the abundant tropical fish that occur there. While at sea off Floreana, we will request to tour Champion Islet by boat to see if we can one of the birds with one of the smallest populations in the World, the Floreana Mockingbird. This will decided by the boat's captain.

Española is a southern island, which has its own endemic finch and Mockingbird, Espanola Ground-Finch and Espanola Mockingbirds, the latter arguably the tamest birds on all of the islands. A beautiful sandy beach at Gardener Bay with tame Galapagos Sea-Lions, and even tamer Espanola Mockingbirds is a treat, as is Punta Suarez, where a rocky coastline and clifftop play host to nesting Waved Albatrosses (almost the entire world population breeds on this remote islands), Nazca Boobies and dancing Blue-footed Boobies, one of the most famous residents of the islands. The walk among the ocean giants of the Waved Albatrosses, which nests in tens of thousands on Espanola (the largest single colony) is likely to be one of the highlights of the tour. Although widespread, this is also a good island for seeking out Galapagos Doves, Galapagos Flycatchers, and Galapagos Hawks while there.

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Moving further east we will reach the island of San Cristobal, the youngest island in the archipelago, which is home to a mockingbird found nowhere else, the San Cristobal mockingbird. Like most places we will visit on the cruise, there will be further chances to see and photograph seabirds, sea lions and marine iguanas at close quarters too.

Day 9: Santa Cruz to Quito

On this day our cruise comes to an end. However, our trip is not yet over. We have the morning to explore the island of Santa Cruz by bus and go up into the highlands for some of the most impressive habitat of the tour, the dense, tall, verdant Scalesia forests found only at the higher elevations. Here we will look for any remaining Darwin's finches we haven't seen, like Vegetarian Finch, Large and Small Tree-Finch, the tool-using Woodpecker Finch, and Green Warbler-Finch. The scarce Brujo Flycatcher is also possible, a rare and declining split from Vermilion Flycatcher. Other species we will be on the lookout for, include Dark-billed Cuckoo, and we will go to a special area to try and track down one of the highlands most elusive denizens, the Galapagos Rail that only lives on a few of the highest peaks on the islands. In the afternoon, we head to the Baltra Airport and catch a flight back to Quito, where we spent the night in a hotel near the airport.

Day 10: Departure from Quito

The tour ends this morning with transfers to the airport.

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