

# Opuntia<sup>®</sup>

GALAPAGOS ECO JOURNEYS &  
HOTELS

## OPUNTIA WILDLIFE DISCOVERY, 5 DAYS



*Following Darwin's footsteps and observing endemic wildlife is what this trip is about! Relax on white sand beaches next to sea lions, snorkel with exotic and colorful tropical fish in one of the best marine reserves on the planet and trek in the land of the giant Galapagos tortoise! Bilingual, naturalist guides will walk with you through this iconic and incredible experience while our beautiful waterfront hotels compliment your stay with quality service and personal attention. You'll discover the experience of a lifetime!*

**Effort:** Easy to Moderate

**Activities:** Walking, swimming, snorkelling, and wildlife viewing.

**Our Opuntia Hotels in the Galapagos Islands are:** Casa Opuntia in San Cristobal Island; Iguana Crossing in Isabela Island and Angermeyer Waterfront Inn in Santa Cruz Island.

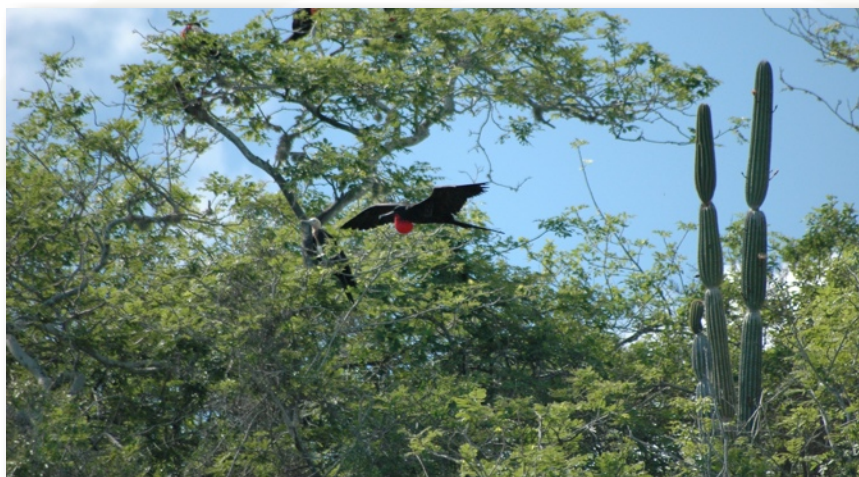
### **Trip Highlights:**

- Swim with sea turtles, sea lions, penguins, sharks, rays, and countless fish.
- Learn about evolution as you meet finches, mockingbirds, boobies, penguins, endemic plants, giant tortoises, land iguanas, and marine iguanas.
- See Lonesome George, the last living giant tortoise of his subspecies.
- Hike an endemic forest of scalesia trees, a long-lost relative of daisy flowers.
- Relax on sandy beaches amongst sea lions and marine iguanas.
- Every step of your journey is expertly led by top-rated naturalist guides.
- Enjoy the exceptional service, waterfront location, decor, privacy, and world class dining of the finest boutique hotels in the Galapagos.
- Support local communities through this eco-friendly, sustainable program.



## DAY 1: ARRIVAL TO SAN CRISTOBAL, INTERPRETATION CENTER VISIT, HIKE AND SNORKEL AT DARWIN BAY.

We travel on a morning flight to San Cristobal Island and continue to our hotel, Casa Opuntia, for a delicious lunch and short overview of our trip. Our Galapagos experience starts with a visit to the local Interpretation Center where we learn about the Galapagos' unique wildlife, geology, natural history, and social dynamics. Next, we hike to Frigate Hill over lava rock trails, and along the way, your naturalist guide will explain all about the Galapagos cotton, palo santo, acacia, and cacti surrounding you. You also spot blue-footed boobies, frigate birds, pelicans, herons, gulls, warblers, mockingbirds, and finches among vegetation and sea cliffs.



This walking tour provides marvelous views of the rugged coastline and the small town of Puerto Baquerizo Moreno.

On the way back, we snorkel or swim at beautiful Carola Beach. We'll find sea turtles, sea lions, and marine iguanas! After a gorgeous sunset and dinner, we explore the friendly and laid-back town. We recommend you take stroll down the boardwalk to view the immense colony of endemic Galapagos sea lions. Overnight at Casa Opuntia (L, D)

## DAY 2: WILDLIFE AND SNORKEL ALONG THE NORTHERN COAST OF SAN CRISTOBAL ISLAND



Today, we head out on an incredible snorkeling adventure! We take a boat and discover Isla Lobos, searching coves and cliffs for sea turtles, sea lions, frigate birds, blue-footed boobies, and Nazca boobies. Once there, you'll snorkel with sea lions, marine iguanas and countless reef fish. This site consistently proves to be the best sea lion encounter in the Galapagos Islands – after all, Isla Lobos translates to Sea Lion Island.

We head to open sea for Kicker Rock, two breathtaking rock massifs (tuff cones) that jut out from the ocean. Above the waters, thousands of sea birds cling to their walls, while millions of fish swim under the surface. The channel between the two rock walls is home to some of the best snorkeling in

the islands. You'll probably see spotted eagle rays, golden rays, Galapagos sharks, starfish, clams, and fish of every shape, size, and color. You might even see hammerhead sharks! After a full day exploring the seas, head back to our hotel, Casa Opuntia, for a delicious gourmet dinner and a relaxed evening. (B, L, D)

## DAY 3: DISCOVER BEACHES, LAGOONS, AND ISLETS IN ISABELA ISLAND

After breakfast, we take a short plane ride to Isabela Island. This is the largest island in the Galapagos, constantly changing and evolving due to 6 shield volcanoes that render it one of the most thrilling, volcanically active spots on the planet.

We hike and visit "El Muro de las Lagrimas" (Wall of Tears), a towering wall of lava rocks built by prisoners during the time Isabela was a penal colony, for no other purpose than to keep the inmates distracted from the madness of isolation. We continue along white sand beaches, an alluring poison apple



forest, a lava tube, and dark mangroves and brackish lagoons. The area is filled with giant tortoises and birdlife including flamingos!

After lunch, we explore beautiful Tintoreras, a set of small islets filled with hidden coves and beaches. Here, we find the endemic and incredibly fast swimmer, the Galapagos penguin, as well as reef sharks, sea turtles, and sea lions! At the end of the day, retire to the gorgeous, Iguana Crossing, our hotel in Isabela Island. Relax in its infinity pool, hot tub, or neighboring white sand beach. After a fusion dinner of latin and exotic flavors, feel free to take a stroll down the seemingly endless beach or down the sand streets of this idyllic lazy town. (B, L, D)

## DAY 4: TORTOISES, LAVA TUNNELS, PIRATES, AND ENDEMIC FORESTS IN SANTA CRUZ ISLAND



After breakfast, we journey by a speedboat to Santa Cruz Island. Along the way we must look out for whales and dolphins! We arrive and head to “El Chato” reserve, a natural habitat in the Santa Cruz highlands, home to the giant tortoise. We believe it to be an honor to hike among these fascinating giants, who can live to be over 175 years old. We will also see pintail ducks, finches, frigate birds, egrets, and hopefully the vermilion flycatcher - a red jewel of a bird.

We continue our natural history exploration by walking through some incredible lava tunnels where pirates frequented and perhaps hid Inca gold! We continue to “Los Gemelos”, two deep volcanic sinkholes at the top of the island. Our walking tour takes us through a forest of endemic scalesia trees, where we’ll lookout for the short-eared owl. The trees are covered with ferns and epiphytes and exude an almost eerie feel. In the late afternoon, we retire to our Santa Cruz hotel, the Angermeyer Waterfront Inn. Expect fine pampering at this lovely boutique guesthouse privately nestled in the bay. The beautiful waterfront property offers magnificent views of the bay, coastline, and town. (B, L, D)

## DAY 5: VISIT CHARLES DARWIN RESEARCH STATION AND RETURN FLIGHT

After breakfast, we visit the Charles Darwin Research Station. Here, we learn about the ongoing conservation efforts on these enchanted islands. The Research Station rears endemic Galapagos plants, land iguanas, and giant Galapagos tortoises for educational, scientific, and conservation purposes. We compare the diverse evolutionary paths of the various giant tortoises from different islands. Our visit ends with a memorable encounter with Lonesome George, the only remaining member of the Pinta Island subspecies. We transfer to Baltra Island for our return flight to the mainland. (B)



**INCLUDED**

Accommodations in the premium Opuntia Hotels; all meals as described (B=breakfast, L=lunch, D=dinner); professional bilingual Galapagos naturalist guide; all sea, land and inter-island air transportation.

**NOT INCLUDED**

Our Galapagos Tour does NOT include flights to and from Galapagos; entrance fee to Galapagos National Park: USD 100 p/p (subject to change); Galapagos transit card: USD 10 p/p (subject to change); tips; hotel & restaurant beverages; personal expenses.

**NOTE**

This Galapagos tour is subject to change without notice due to seasonal changes, last-minute weather conditions, and adjustments of Galapagos National Park policy.

**IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

**BOAT TRAVEL TIME:** 2 to 3 hours

**SMALL AIRCRAFT FLIGHT TIME:** 30 minutes

**SEASON:** All year

**ALTITUDE:** 0 - 3,700 ft (1,124 meters) above sea level

**AVERAGE TEMPERATURES:** December to May: 80°F to 90°F / 25°C to 30°C. June to September: 60°F to 70°F / 15°C to 20°C. October to December: 70°F to 80°F / 15°C to 25°C.

**WATER TEMPERATURE:** The waters of the Galapagos Islands are a unique mixture of warm and cold water, ranging between 65°F and 85°F.

**SUGGESTED ITEMS TO PACK:** Walking shoes, water sandals, rain jacket, flashlight, water bottle, non-cotton trekking gear, sun block, hat, and mosquito repellent.

