Ecuador

Galapagos Archipelago by land



Blue-footed Booby & Marine Iguanas by Dušan Brinkhuizen

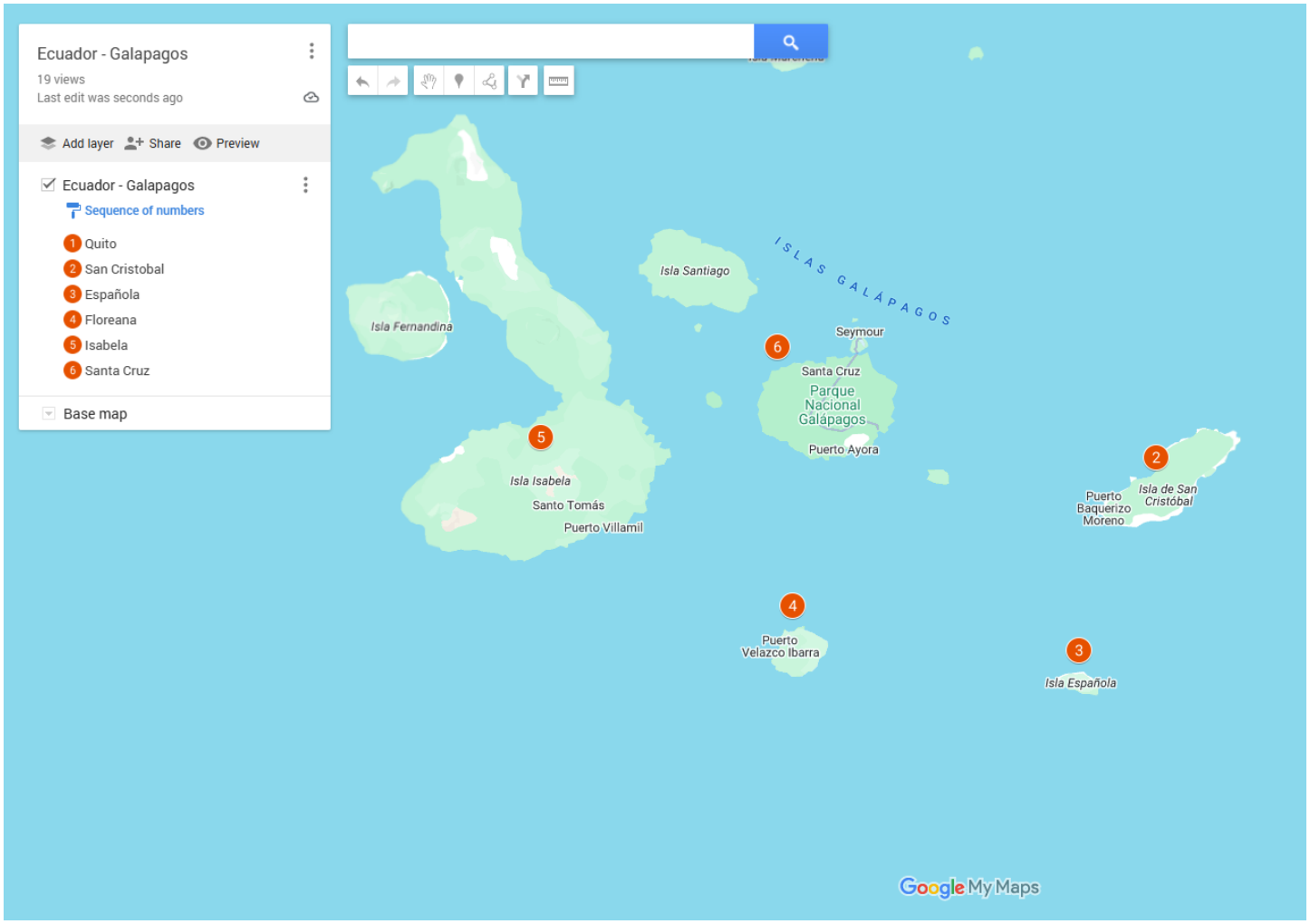
Straddling the equator, some 600 miles west of mainland Ecuador lies perhaps the planet's most fabled archipelago. To many of us the Galapagos signify a paradise of sorts, but when Charles Darwin famously arrived there aboard the Beagle in 1835, he wrote: "Nothing could be less inviting – the country is comparable to what one might imagine ... the infernal regions to be." Among sailors the islands were known as "Las Encantadas", or "the Enchanted Isles", as they were believed bewitched, often with a mysterious mist ("garua") hanging over them. Some even postulated that the land here was not anchored to the ground, but rather floated about at sea, confounding navigation. Indeed, everything present arrived via wind, water, or wings, and though the avenues are few, the proliferation of unique lifeforms is beyond remarkable.

Forever fascinating, this is one of Earth's most active volcanic areas, and the beautiful volcanic formations, together with the matchless wildlife and natural history, make for an utterly unique destination. Perennially popular among birders for the island endemics and stunning seabirds, nearly all the birds are tame, allowing for outstanding photography. In places one must be careful to avoid stepping on a Galapagos Sea Lion, a Marine Iguana, or a Blue-footed Booby. The latter is perhaps the islands most iconic bird, and seeing pairs of them, bow and sway, whistling and honking, as they wave around their cobalt blue feet, is not something one forgets. Equally the thrill of watching a pair of Critically Endangered Waved Albatross performing their intricate dance moves is another of the Galapagos highlights. The snorkelling is a wonder as well, with swimmers at times encircled by sea lions, sea turtles, and even Galapagos Penguins on occasion. The islands are named after their endemic Galapagos Giant Tortoises ('galapagos' means tortoise in Spanish) and seeing these magnificent beasts striding about, or sighing deeply as they wallow in the mud, one feels transported to another time, or even another world.

Anyone who has visited will tell you, the Galapagos are otherworldly. Our special island-hopping tour differs from standard Galapagos cruises, as we aim to see up to 28 endemic birds, while reducing our time at sea, with comfortable accommodations on terra firma. Strategic water crossings provide us good chances for the seabird specialties, while allowing access to areas for endemic landbirds too. And despite Darwin's initial misgivings, this remote archipelago more so than any other place, birthed his theory on the evolution of species, so a visit here is also a homecoming for any nature enthusiast. From revolutionary Darwin's Finches, ugly-cute Marine Iguanas, shrieking Red-billed Tropicbirds, to curious and endearing sea lions, an experience here marks a personal evolution.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Quito**
Day 2	**Quito, flight to San Cristóbal, Galapagos**
Day 3	**San Cristóbal & Punta Pitt**
Day 4	**San Cristóbal to Española**
Day 5	**San Cristóbal to Isabela via Floreana**
Day 6	**Isabela, Sierra Negra Volcano**
Day 7	**Isabela, Iguana Cove**
Day 8	**Isabela to Santa Cruz**
Day 9	**Santa Cruz, flight to Quito**
Day 10	**Final departure**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Sequence of numbers
1 Quito
2 San Cristobal
3 Española
4 Floreana
5 Isabela
6 Santa Cruz
Base map
Isla Santiago
ISLAS GALAPAGOS
Isla Fernandina
Seymour
Santa Cruz
Parque Nacional Galápagos
Puerto Ayora
Isla Isabela
Santo Tomás
Puerto Villamil
Puerto Baquerizo Moreno
Isla de San Cristóbal
Puerto Velazco Ibarra
Isla Española
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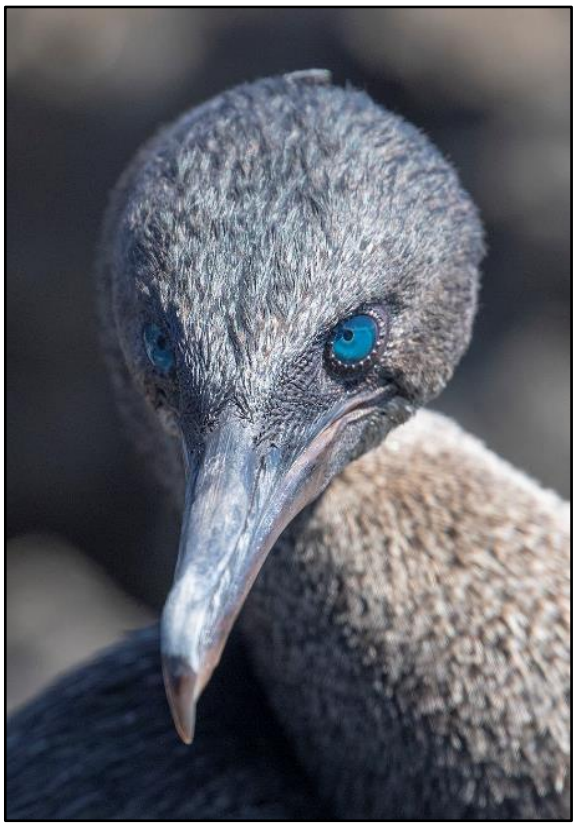
Birding sites in detail

San Cristóbal. On arrival we are likely to see our very first Darwin finches and Galapagos Doves while Blue-footed Boobies, Brown Noddy and Brown Pelican are easily seen while crossing the channel, so do make sure to always have your binoculars ready!



Flightless Cormorant by Dušan Brinkhuizen

After transferring to our hotel, we shall check in before departing to enjoy lunch at a local farm in the highlands. Our program for the afternoon is to visit El Junco lagoon and the surrounding area. El Junco is a crater lake of an extinct volcano, rather than a lagoon in the typical sense, and it is the only freshwater spring in all the Galapagos Islands!

The fresh water attracts both Magnificent and Great Frigatebirds that come into drink. Watching the frigatebirds shear over the water surface is quite a spectacular sight. Other waterbirds that we can expect to see here include the endemic subspecies of White-cheeked Pintail, Common Gallinule and possibly some migrant waders.

Darwin finches that we will be looking for in the highlands include Small Tree Finch and Woodpecker Finch. The latter is famous for its ability to use a tool while foraging and therefore often nicknamed “carpenter finch”. Tools include cactus spines or short twigs that they actively use to pry grubs out of tree branches. The bird may adjust its tool to make it more manageable and often carries it from branch to branch for reuse. The species is usually easy to recognise by its distinct movements which are reminiscent of those of a nuthatch. The endemic and Endangered San Cristóbal Mockingbird is our most important target on this island, but the species is usually not too difficult to find at lower elevations. The rare Galapagos Crake has been reported from the highlands of San Cristóbal, but we will need some luck to find it here.



San Cristobal Mockingbird by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Punta Pitt (San Cristóbal). We will travel by boat to the scenic northern tip of the island called Punta Pitt. It is one of the few places in the archipelago where you can find Blue-footed, Nazca and Red-footed Boobies nesting together. Several other seabirds are sure to be seen, including an active colony of Wedge-rumped Storm Petrel, Red-billed Tropicbird, Galapagos Shearwater and Swallow-tailed Gull. The latter is a rather spectacular nocturnal gull, but usually easy to see in the daytime as well. It looks like a large version of Sabine’s Gull but more alien like with notably large eyes. Lava Gull and Lava Heron are possibilities too. Perhaps the highlight of our time here will be observing Magnificent Frigatebirds as the maraud the nesting Blue-footed Boobies for food.

In the arid scrub at Punta Pitt, we will see several San Cristóbal Lava Lizards while searching for targets that

include San Cristóbal Mockingbird, Galapagos Dove, and Grey Warbler Finch. If we get lucky, we might get to see the rare Galapagos Petrel at sea.



Woodpecker Finch by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Española. After breakfast, we will depart for Española for a day trip and disembark at Punta Suarez. Named Hood Island by the British, Española is one of the oldest islands of the archipelago, being approximately four million years old. This is the driest of the islands, only receiving a few inches of rain per year.

Here we will hike through a spectacular colony of seabirds. The Critically Endangered Waved Albatross is one of our prime targets here that we will be looking for (good numbers usually start to arrive on the island end at the end of March). Other seabirds that can be watched at close range include Nazca and Blue-footed Booby, Red-billed Tropicbird and Swallow-tailed Gull. Other important targets on the island include the ubiquitous Española Mockingbird, Espanola Cactus Finch, unique sub-species of Grey Warbler-Finch and Galapagos Hawk.

In the afternoon, we will visit Gardner Islet which is a great place for swimming and snorkelling. Fascinating creatures we might observe underwater include snake eels, marble rays, diamond rays, Galapagos Pufferfish and Red-lipped Batfish amongst others.

Champion Islet. En route to Floreana, we may pass by Champion Islet where Swallow-tailed Gull is common, but our principal interest is in the extremely rare Floreana Mockingbird. The species is Critically Endangered, and the surviving population is tiny. It used to inhabit the main island of Floreana but after Darwin's visit it soon became extinct here. They now survive on two small satellite islets only.

Floreana. Later in the day, we shall visit the highlands of Floreana at Asilo de la Paz. Here we will target another rare species, the Critically Endangered Medium Tree Finch, which is only found here. We will also search for Small and Medium Tree Finches, Galapagos Flycatchers, Paint-billed Crake and perhaps a Dark-billed Cuckoo. In the late afternoon, we will continue navigating to Isabela.



Waved Albatross by Adam Riley

Volcan Sierra Negra (Isabela). We will drive up to the Sierra Negra Volcano which is one of the most impressive volcanoes in the archipelago. Depending on our birding requirement, we may hike up the trail to the caldera which is the largest of all the Galapagos volcanoes (c. 10km wide). The caldera is our best chance at finding the rare and erratic Galapagos Martin, a species that is chiefly found in the highlands of Isabela. The grasslands and dense thickets are good habitats for the elusive Galapagos Crake, a

species locally known as 'pachay'. This much sought-after endemic is rather secretive by nature, but on occasion may approach to us very closely.



Large Tree Finch by Dušan Brinkhuizen

The Scalesia forest patches along the trail are good for several interesting species, including Woodpecker Finch, Green Warbler Finch, Small Tree Finch, and Galapagos Flycatcher. One of our primary targets in this area is Darwin's Flycatcher. This species is a recent split of Vermilion Flycatcher, also known as Little Vermilion Flycatcher. It is endemic to the Galapagos and most likely Critically Endangered, as numbers have dropped significantly over the last few years. The parasitic *Philornis downsi* fly is the most probable cause of the species' recent decline.

Puerto Villamil area (Isabella). On the way back to Puerto Villamil, we will visit a small pond north of town to look for American Flamingo, Lava Heron and possibly some migrant waders. The arid zone outside of town holds some prickly-pear cacti where we will look for Common Cactus Finch and Galapagos Mockingbird. If time permits, we will visit the nearby Humedales located west of town. Here there is a lovely boardwalk that goes through mangroves and brackish tidal lagoons. It is a good area to search for several species of Darwin finches, Mangrove Warbler and waterbirds like White-cheeked Pintails and Black-necked Stilt. (Unfortunately, no confirmed records of Mangrove Finch yet!).

Iguana Cove (Isabela). We start the day with a boat trip to the Iguana Cove where we expect to find Flightless Cormorant, often seen drying their pathetically tiny wings or swimming about us catching octopus. This iconic Galapagos endemic is the largest species of cormorant in the world, and unique in having lost its ability to fly. Here we also have a chance to encounter the Endangered Galapagos Penguin, the only species of penguin to be found in the northern hemisphere. Previous tours have also found the tricky Galapagos Martin foraging along the rock coastline here.



Darwin's Flycatcher by Adam Riley

We will have a field lunch en route, and in the afternoon, we will visit an area of naturally occurring underwater stone tunnels named 'Los Tuneles'. The scenery is spectacular, and there will be good snorkelling opportunities, that may allow us to view sea lions, Galapagos Penguins, turtles, and numerous fish species. If time permits, we might do some late afternoon birding around Puerto Villamil in case we still need some species.

Isabela to Santa Cruz. During the crossing, we shall keep an eye out for Galapagos Petrel, various storm petrels, Galapagos Shearwater and Nazca Boobies.

Santa Cruz. A delicious breakfast will be waiting for us at our hotel in Puerto Ayora. We will then drive up to the highlands of Santa Cruz and visit a private reserve that

protects large numbers of Galapagos Giant Tortoises. This is an area where we will look for species such as Vegetarian Finch and if lucky, we might run into a Paint-billed Crake.

We will bird the epiphyte draped Scalesia forest at a site named Los Gemelos, which gives us our only chance of finding Large Tree Finch. Here we will also search for Small Tree, Vegetarian, Green Warbler- and Woodpecker Finches amongst others. If time permits (and in case, we missed it on Isabela) we will search for Galapagos Crake and Short-eared Owl at Media Luna.



Galapagos Crake by Adam Riley

We'll also take a tour of The Charles Darwin Research Station outside Puerto Ayora. This research facility is operated by the Charles Darwin Foundation, where the famous Lonesome George once wondered, the last known Pinta Island Tortoise. Today, 'Super Diego' roams the breeding centre practically ensuring the survival of the Española Giant Tortoise. Birds surrounding the station will most likely not be new to us, but we may still enjoy watching species such as Small, Medium and Large Ground Finches and Galapagos Mockingbird.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Mostly to easy, with a few moderate walks & hikes. Terrain can be uneven, muddy, slippery or rocky in places. Several boat & ferry rides. Not suitable for anyone who is unsteady on their feet.
Birding Ease		Mostly undemanding. Small number of low-density species.
Accommodation		Comfortable.
Walking / Trails		Mostly short walks, terrain varies from uneven lava fields to steeper trails in the highlands that can be muddy & slippery. Walking sticks recommended.
Vehicles / Roads		Limited driving (truck) to reach highland sites. Several boat and ferry rides. Seas vary from calm to rough,
Photography		Very good to extraordinary.
Annoyances		Exposed, bright & hot weather conditions. Potential for motion sickness. Mostly no washroom facilities during daily excursions.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 10;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- Ground transportation (including boat transfers);
- Extra activities mentioned in the itinerary;
- Some national park and other reserve entrance fees (except those mentioned below); and
- All guiding services (including tips for local guides and services.)

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Galapagos National Park Entry Fee (US$200.00 per person). Payable at the Galapagos National Park Counter at Quito International Airport.
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- In some areas, it may be very hot and exposed. We will thus make good use of the early mornings and will have early starts to avoid, as far as possible, birding in the middle of the day.
- It is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 18 kg (40 lb) for check in luggage and 5 kg (+-11 lb) for hand luggage. The airlines impose a heavy tariff on any excess baggage.
- This tour does not require a high level of fitness, but **guests should be comfortable walking on uneven terrain and completing some moderately demanding hikes in warm conditions**.
- Accommodation throughout the trip is of a comfortable standard but may not be of the same quality as mainland options.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour will begin in Quito on Day 1, and as this is scheduled as an arrival day, you are free to arrive at any time. The tour will conclude after breakfast on the morning of day 10 at Quito International Airport.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Mariscal Sucre International Airport, Quito (IATA: UIO), Quito is the major port of entry into Ecuador for this tour.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.