



## **Tortuga - Galapagos Islands**

**Meet giant tortoises and iguanas • Swim with manta rays at Kicker Rock • Snorkel with reef sharks at Floreana and Santa Fe Islands • Cycle down San Cristobal Island • Explore Sierra Negra volcano and Santa Cruz Island on foot • Explore lava tunnels • Visit the Charles Darwin Research Station**

**10 days: Quito – Quito**

**Fare: US\$2999**

**Season: Year round**

*The Tortuga is a fantastic way to discover the Galapagos Islands. In typical ACTIVE style, you'll snorkel, dive, hike and cycle the Galapagos, cruising between the multitude of stunning islands in our boat 'Christine'. We start with a short flight to San Cristobal Island to snorkel with seals and tame reef sharks in crystal clear water, snorkel through beautiful ocean channels and hike up an island volcano with the second largest crater in the world. We get up close to some of the most intriguing and fearless wildlife on the planet, with visits to tortoise breeding grounds and sea lion colonies, and share our beach time with friendly iguanas. We explore amazing lava tunnels, cycle to the local townships and visit the fascinating Charles Darwin Research Station.*

*Wednesday*

### **Arrive Quito**

Your trip begins in Ecuador's capital city, Quito. If you're flying in on day one of the trip, your ACTIVE SOUTH AMERICA trip leader will meet you at the airport at 2pm and take you to your accommodation. You'll have the rest of the afternoon to explore this amazing city with its beautiful town squares, quaint cafés and colonial architecture. Quito sits in a beautiful valley surrounded by towering volcanoes just 14 miles from the Equator, giving it a mild, spring-like climate year round. In the evening you'll meet your trip leader and the rest of your group for a full briefing before our first dinner together.

**ACCOMMODATION:** *Hotel Reina Isabel, Quito* (D)

*Thursday*

### **Cycle San Cristobal highlands**

This morning we'll take a short flight to San Cristobal, the easternmost island of the Galapagos Islands chain and home of the provincial capital, Puerto Baquerizo Moreno. After lunch we'll head to the town of La Soledad and bike down through the lush highland cloud forest that blankets the top of the island. With stunning views of the coast, we'll ride all the way to Mann Beach – one of the most beautiful beaches in the Galapagos. We'll also check out La Lobería – a nearby beach that is home to a large sea lion colony and nursery. You're not likely to see this many sea lions in one place anywhere else in the world! This evening, we'll dine on local produce and fresh fish for our first evening meal in the Galapagos Islands.

**ACCOMMODATION:** *San Cristobal accommodations, San Cristobal* (B,L,D)

*Friday*

### **Snorkel or dive with seals and manta rays at Kicker Rock**

Today we'll take our boat out to Isla Lobos off the coast of San Cristobal, where we'll don wetsuits, snorkels and masks (and tanks for the divers – diving option add US\$160) and explore the underwater world for a close up view of sea lions as they fish for their dinner! Isla Lobos is the main sea lion and blue-footed booby colony in the area, as well as being home to the endemic lava lizard. After a swim with the sea lions, we'll get back on our boat and head for Kicker Rock where we'll either snorkel or dive around the remains of an underwater volcano with a rock face rising 500 feet above the surface of the water (dives one and two). Your trip leader will give you a full briefing and then we'll take to the water to explore the walls of the volcano. We'll see sea lions and manta rays as they skirt the edges of Kicker Rock – they're everywhere! Later on today we can hike to Frigate Hill Lookout to see the acrobatics of the local frigate birds as they dart around the cliff tops stealing the catch from other birds. Or you can check out the interpretation centre to learn more about the history and biology of the area.

ACCOMMODATION: *San Cristobal accommodations, San Cristobal*

(B,L)

*Saturday*

### **Snorkel Floreana Island, visit pink flamingos**

After an early breakfast, our little boat will take us away from San Cristobal Island to Champions Islet near the magnificent Floreana Island. Floreana is the sixth biggest island in the Galapagos chain and one of the least inhabited (by humans at least!). With a population of around 70 and only one phone on the whole island, this place has a pretty relaxed atmosphere. On the way, we're often visited by friendly dolphins so keep an eye out! Here we'll be doing some more amazing snorkelling in an area that's home to eagle rays, moray eels, harmless Galapagos sharks and thousands of tropical fish species. This is one of the most amazing snorkelling excursions you're likely to do anywhere in the world, it's brilliant! From here, we'll travel to Isabela Island where we'll take a short walk to a local pink flamingo colony before relaxing at our accommodation and enjoying an evening drink on the beach.

ACCOMMODATION: *Local hotel, Isabela Island*

(B,L,D)

*Sunday*

### **Hike Sierra Negra volcano**

Our hike today will take us to the summit of Sierra Negra volcano, rising nearly a mile above the ocean. See the lowland vegetation change before your eyes as we ascend into a lunar landscape on our way to the top. It's quite a hike to the top of the volcano, but the views across the seven mile wide crater and surrounding coastline are worth the climb! This is the world's second largest volcanic crater, so it's an incredible sight. As we hike, we might be lucky enough to see Galapagos hawks, short-eared owls, finches and fly-catchers that inhabit this region. When we get back from our hike, we'll head to Beto's beachside bar to toast the setting sun over the Pacific.

ACCOMMODATION: *Local hotel, Isabela Island*

(B,L,D)

**Phil says:** *"Beto's bar on the beach at Puerto Villamil is one of the best places in the world to chill out! Relax in a hammock and watch water lapping on the beach as the sun goes down."*

*Monday*

### **Giant tortoise breeding centre, coastal hike, visit sea life**

This morning we'll head to a Galapagos giant tortoise breeding centre where we can meet these majestic prehistoric creatures. Then we'll hike a section of Isabela's pristine coastline to the 'Wall of Tears' – a fascinating remnant of the Galapagos Islands' convict past. On the way, we'll have the chance to see some of the Islands' most amazing wildlife up close. Marine iguanas bask in the sun at our feet, blue-footed boobies sit in pairs on the rock tops, and Sally Lightfoot crabs scurry out of our way along the beach. Later, we'll head out on a zodiac to check out the crystal-clear waters off Isabela Island, inhabited by Galapagos penguins, reef sharks and manta rays. Hopefully we'll be able to slip into the water with our snorkels and wetsuits to swim with marine turtles if they're around. We're often befriended by curious sea lions too!

ACCOMMODATION: *Local hotel, Isabela Island*

(B,L)

*Tuesday*

### **Hike Santa Cruz highlands and Tortuga Bay, visit giant tortoises**

We'll depart Isabela Island early this morning bound for Santa Cruz Island, where we'll hike into the amazing cloud forest highlands. On the way to the summit of Cerro Crocker we'll have another chance to see giant tortoises in their natural environment, along with intriguing birdlife like the vermilion flycatcher. We'll take a look inside the lava tunnels scattered throughout the highlands. These tunnels were formed by petrified lava flowing underneath the Earth's surface, carving out large cylindrical caves. Some are almost a mile long! This afternoon we'll hike to Tortuga Bay, one of the most stunning beaches in the Galapagos, where we'll have the option of trying our hand at bodyboarding or surfing, or just lounging around on incredibly fine sand. Tortuga Bay is accessible only by foot and is home to hundreds of prehistoric-looking marine iguanas, blue-footed boobies and pelicans.

ACCOMMODATION: *Puerto Ayora lodgings, Santa Cruz Island*

(B,L,D)

Wednesday

### Visit Charles Darwin Research Station, snorkel Santa Fe Island

This morning we'll take a short walk to the Charles Darwin Research Station. Founded in 1959, this fascinating centre is dedicated to the conservation of the Galapagos and its ecosystems. The station has a team of more than two hundred scientists, research students and support staff from all over the world. We'll learn the full life cycle of the giant tortoise from the experts, walk through their enclosures, and meet the Galapagos giants face to face! Our island-hopping continues this afternoon as we make our way past Santa Fe Island for our final snorkel of the trip in Las Tijeretas, one of Charles Darwin's first stops in the Galapagos. From the surface you'll have clear views of the most beautiful tropical fish species in the world. Our trip leaders know these spots like the backs of their hands and will point out the subtleties of this amazing reef ecosystem as we observe from the surface. Later we'll return to San Cristobal Island for dinner together before leaving the islands tomorrow.

ACCOMMODATION: *San Cristobal accommodations, San Cristobal* (B,L,D)

Thursday

### Optional hike, return to Quito

You'll have the morning free to explore San Cristobal. There are beaches, a museum and short hikes in the area, and your trip leader will fill you in on the best activities around the island. Then it's a short flight back to Quito on the mainland where we'll share our final dinner together this evening.

ACCOMMODATION: *Hotel Reina Isabel, Quito* (B,L,D)

Friday

### Quito, depart for home

Today is the last day of your trip around the Galapagos Islands with ACTIVE SOUTH AMERICA. If you have a flight today, we'll be sure to get you back to the airport on time. You'll return home relaxed and refreshed from all the great activities, fine food and friendly people you will have met while travelling with us in the Galapagos. (B)

## Important Information

**ACCOMMODATION:** The *Tortuga* is an active, adventure-oriented trip around the Galapagos Islands, not a tour of the fanciest hotels! We stay in clean, comfortable and interesting accommodation and, unlike many other operators, we prefer to stay on the mainland rather than on live-aboard boats. This means we're closer to the local communities and have more opportunities to hike and cycle as well as snorkel and dive. Many of the places we stay are off-the-beaten-track and truly spectacular. For instance, Isabela Island isn't known for its glamorous lodgings, but has stunning beaches, an abundance of wildlife, off-the-beaten-track flavour and rustic charm. We've chosen accommodations for their comfort and cleanliness – not the number of channels available on the television!

**RECOMMENDED FLIGHTS:** You can fly into Quito any time on the first day of your trip, but we recommend you arrive before noon. On the last day of your trip you can fly out at any time. If you want to arrive earlier or leave later, we're happy to help you out with extra hotel accommodation.

**TRIP START:** If you arrive on the first day of the trip, an ACTIVE SOUTH AMERICA representative will meet you at the airport at 2pm and take you to your accommodation. If you're already in Quito, you'll meet your trip leader and the rest of your group in the lobby of the Hotel Reina Isabel at 6pm.

**TRIP END:** You'll wake up in Quito on the last day of your trip, so you can book a flight home departing any time that day – we'll be happy to drop you off at the airport any time before noon.

**FITNESS:** You need a reasonable level of fitness to enjoy yourself on the *Tortuga*. You don't have to be young and extremely fit (although if you are, you won't be bored) but you should be in the habit of doing at least some exercise. Age and experience are not important. We've designed our trips to be as challenging as you want them to be. It's your vacation after all!

**EXPERIENCE:** You don't have to have any outdoor experience to do one of our trips. We offer trips that enable you to make the most of South America's awesome outdoor environment, culture and history. Our trip leaders are highly trained and very experienced outdoor guides, and they'll look after you! You don't need any experience in snorkelling or biking on the *Tortuga*. All you need is to be energetic and in reasonable shape – and we guarantee you'll have a wonderful time. On the other hand if you like a challenge we will certainly give you one! We can offer activities to suit both people who only do a little exercise, as well as those who have a very high level of fitness and experience, in all our activities. We manage the level of commitment to suit your experience, and we have an impeccable safety record.

**DIVING IN THE GALAPAGOS:** Kicker Rock is one of the most interesting dive spots in the world. Our dive guides are all highly qualified with years of dive experience. If you're a diver and would like to dive on the trip, there is an additional fee of US\$160 for two dives and a safety dive, including all the necessary gear. PLEASE NOTE: Due to strong currents, the Galapagos is not a destination for novice divers. We recommend you have logged at least 10-20 dives before diving here and you must bring your PADI or SSI certification to dive.

**FLEXIBILITY:** Galapagos National Park is a fragile wildlife refuge and as such is sometimes subject to sudden rule changes to control potential damage through tourism. We may occasionally need to make itinerary changes in response to this. The Galapagos Islands are in a developing part of the world and we can't tell you that everything runs like clockwork in South America. What we can tell you is that we are experienced adventure travel leaders, and our Galapagos operator is a local specialist who knows how to keep things operating as smoothly as possible, even when conditions are challenging! Often, because of changing sea conditions, we may have to make small changes to our itinerary for safety reasons. If you bring flexibility, an open mind and a sense of humour you'll find your trip is every adventure it's designed to be.

**INCLUDED:** The trip fare is US\$2999. The trip fare includes just about everything, specifically:

- All guiding services. We always have an experienced trip leader with every trip and will have a local guide on many of our excursions for extra local knowledge.
- All ground and air transportation during your trip.
- Comfortable accommodation for your entire trip. We can also book pre- and post-trip accommodation for you if required.
- All your meals, except for two dinners (on Friday on San Cristobal and on Monday on Isabela Island), where we've found most people like to check out the local restaurants on their own.
- All drinking water. Alcohol and other drinks are not included.
- All snorkelling, hiking and biking as described in the itinerary, excluding optional activities, such as scuba diving. None of the activities are compulsory, if you prefer to sit some of them out and just have a 'down day' hanging out with a book and a hammock, then that's fine by us. This is your vacation after all!
- Tips for local activity guides, drivers and boat captains are taken care of by us.

**NOT INCLUDED:** The Ecuadorian Government charges every person who enters the Galapagos Islands a US\$100 park entrance fee. You'll be asked to pay this when you arrive to the airport in Galapagos. INGALA, the coordinating body of Galapagos, also charges a \$10 Transit Control Fee, which is paid through the airline as you check in at Quito airport. Everything else is included in your trip fare. This is your holiday, and we are serious about not nickel-and-diming you! You'll have a couple of meals and drinks to cover, extra activities if you choose them, and you'll probably feel like tipping your guides at the end of a fabulous time, but you won't be pulling out your wallet every few minutes on your ACTIVE SOUTH AMERICA trip!

**We'll see you soon!**

*Itinerary valid through April 2010*