

HARVARD

ALUMNI TRAVELS



THE GALÁPAGOS ISLANDS ON M/V *THEORY*

December 31, 2022 – January 9, 2023

DETAILED ITINERARY

Fly to the Galápagos Islands for a 7-night cruise aboard a 20-passenger premium-class Relais & Chateaux yacht, the 142-foot *Theory*. Accompanied by an HAA study leader and superb staff of resident naturalists, observe Giant Galapagos tortoises, flocks of frigate birds and blue-footed boobies, Darwin's finches, and Galapagos penguins, colonies of marine iguanas and sea lions, along with other fascinating sea life. Conclude with a tour of Guayaquil, Ecuador's largest city, and its lovely riverfront. An optional pre-trip to Guayaquil offers a visit to a charming hacienda and cacao plantation and New Years' Eve dinner in the city. An optional post-trip extension to Machu Picchu offers an excellent introduction to the rich cultural and archaeological wonders of Peru.

SCHEDULE BY DAY

B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, R=Reception, D=Dinner

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 31

DEPART U.S. / ARRIVE GUAYAQUIL

Depart the U.S. on a flight to Guayaquil, Ecuador, and transfer to the hotel upon arrival.

Overnight: *Hilton Colon Guayaquil*

SUNDAY, JANUARY 1

GUAYAQUIL / SAN CRISTÓBAL ISLAND

Fly to San Cristóbal, in the Galápagos where Charles Darwin first set foot in September of 1835. Twelve large islands and many smaller ones, all volcanic in origin, combine to form an ecological niche renowned for its unique and fearless wildlife. Upon arrival, board the luxury yacht the *Theory*, your floating home for the next eight days. After lunch explore El Junco Leke. Spanish for "sedge", El Junco is the caldera of an extinct volcano and only sizable freshwater lake in the Galapagos. Listen for the calls of sea lions as you ride the *Zodiac* and see them lounging on the boats docked in the harbor. This evening gather for the Captain's welcome cocktail party and dinner.

Overnight: *Theory (B, L, D)*

MONDAY, JANUARY 2

SAN CRISTÓBAL ISLAND / CERRO BRUJO / PUNTA PITT

Start your exploration with a *Zodiac* ride to look for wildlife at Cerro Brujo (Wizard Hill.) A great variety of birdlife abounds including brown pelicans and blue-footed boobies. Sally Lightfoot crabs scurry all over the rocks. See unusual geological formations such as the Cathedral. After the *Zodiac* excursion, explore the gorgeous coral sand beach at your own pace. Opportunities for snorkeling from the beach, swimming with sea lions, paddleboard, or kayak.

In the afternoon, disembark at Punta Pitt, an eroded tuff cone, whose trail provides spectacular views of the shoreline. Parts of the trail are rocky with some climbing involved. This is considered one of the best sites for bird-watching and the only place where you'll see the three species of boobies: the blue-footed, the red-footed, and the Nazca. Opportunity to snorkel and swim with sea lions.

Overnight: *Theory (B, L, D)*

TUESDAY, JANUARY 3

PUNTA SUAREZ, ESPAÑOLA / GARDNER BAY

An exciting walk awaits at this site which features a large number of endemic species such as the waved albatross. Enjoy its unique sea bird colonies including Nazca boobies, blue-footed boobies, and swallow-tailed gulls as well as a view of the Galapagos' famous "blowhole." Also look out for red-green-black marine iguanas, red-billed tropicbirds, and swallow-tailed gulls, the only nocturnal gull in the world.

In the afternoon disembark at the picture-postcard white coral beach of Gardner Bay. This site provides a beautiful setting for observing sea lions, cheeky Española mockingbirds, and finches. Expect great snorkeling from the beach, kayak, or paddleboard.

Overnight: *Theory* (B, L, D)

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 4

PUNTA CORMORANT / FLOREANA / POST OFFICE BAY

Step ashore at Punta Cormorant's olive-sand beach for an easy walk to see the flamingos that inhabit a brackish-water lagoon, and other birds like ducks, stilts, and sandpipers. There is a rich variety of plant life including morning glories, mangroves, and Scalesia trees. The trail leads to a beach where sea turtles lay their eggs in the powdery sand dunes and sting rays swim in the shallow water. Don't miss the opportunity to snorkel at a shallow sunken crater colonized by an array of colorful fish and coral, sea turtles, white-tipped sharks, spotted eagle rays, and sea stars.

In the afternoon disembark at the historical Post Office Bay to learn about the human side of the island, its early inhabitants, and the adventures of pirates and whalers. Take a *Zodiac* excursion to Baronesa Point to look for sea turtles and rays. If you have an underwater camera, you'll be busy taking photos of sea stars and a brilliant array of colorful fish.

Overnight: *Theory* (B, L, D)

THURSDAY, JANUARY 5

PUERTO AYORA, SANTA CRUZ ISLAND / CHARLES DARWIN RESEARCH STATION

Wake up at a Puerto Ayora, a harbor full of boats bustling with activity. Travel to the highlands of Santa Cruz Island to view the giant tortoises roaming in their natural habitat. The lush vegetation on this island includes the scalesia forest and birds such as the vermilion flycatcher, tree finches, and the elusive woodpecker finch. Additionally, go underground to explore dormant lava tubes and see the twin massive craters of Los Gemelos. Return for lunch at the yacht.

In the afternoon visit the Charles Darwin Research Station staffed with international scientists conducting biological research and conservation projects. Visit the new exhibit honoring Lonesome George the last surviving tortoise from Santa Cruz Island whose death marked the extinction of his species. Observe and photograph the giant tortoises that are part of the breeding program to release them into the wild. There is free time to explore the town before embarkation.

Overnight: *Theory* (B, L, D)

FRIDAY, JANUARY 6

BARTOLOMÉ ISLAND / SOMBRERO CHINO

This morning, a Galápagos icon awaits—Bartolomé Island. Disembark and hike to its 600-foot summit for a superb view of Pinnacle Rock, Sullivan Bay, and the immense lava fields of nearby Santiago Island (James.) This is a steep climb aided by a wooden staircase, but the view from the top is worth the effort. If you rather skip the hike, you may instead enjoy the beach, snorkel, or take a *Zodiac* ride around colossal Pinnacle Rock to look for the Galápagos Penguins.

In the afternoon go ashore at Sombrero Chino (Chinese Hat), a small island off the southern tip of Santiago that owns its name to its shape. Sea lions await on the beach as well as marine iguanas and oystercatchers. Along the trail observe remnants of the island's geological history with volcanic rubble and cracked lava formations.

Overnight: *Theory* (B, L, D)

SATURDAY, JANUARY 7

SOUTH PLAZA / NORTH SEYMOUR ISLAND

The turquoise waters here contrast brilliantly with the white sand and black lava of the shoreline. A carpet of scarlet succulents serves as ground cover for luminescent green prickly-pear cactus populated by Galápagos land iguanas. Keep an eye open for the remarkable beaks of cactus finches. Along the coastline, one finds sea lion colonies, while sea birds play with the thermals that form along the cliffs of this small but amazing island.

In the afternoon walk along the coast and interior of North Seymour, a favorite of many visitors. This uplifted island is home to a nesting colony of frigate birds. See these magnificent birds with their red sacs on their chests inflated, seeking mates. Opportunities for snorkeling and coastal exploration with chances of spotting fur seals.

Overnight: *Theory (B, L, D)*

SUNDAY, JANUARY 8

SAN CRISTÓBAL ISLAND / GUAYAQUIL

Your journey concludes this morning as you depart for the pier. Before your flight to Guayaquil visit the Interpretation Center on San Cristóbal to discover the human history of the Galápagos Islands. Upon arrival in Guayaquil, check into the hotel to rest and freshen up.

Later, gather for a festive farewell dinner, and some guests may transfer to the airport for flights back to the U.S. late this evening.

*Note: Depending on your return flight schedule, you may depart for flights back to the U.S. late evening on January 8 or on January 9.

Overnight: *Hilton Colon Guayaquil (B, D)*

MONDAY, JANUARY 9

GUAYAQUIL / RETURN U.S.

After breakfast, transfer to the airport for your international flights back to the U.S. or continue to Lima for a post-trip extension to see Machu Picchu. (B)