

9 DAYS | MS SANTA CRUZ II

November 3-11, 2027



Galápagos Islands – In Darwin’s Footsteps (Eastern Route)



[Click here for voyage details](#)

Day 1: Begin your adventure in the vibrant city of Quito

Your journey begins on the Equator in the lush Andean foothills. At 9,350 feet, Quito is the second-highest capital city in the world, and its main draw is the exquisite Old Town which was founded on an ancient Inca settlement. A UNESCO World Heritage site, it's packed with well-preserved colonial architecture as evidenced in colourful plazas, magnificent churches and handsome monuments.

Settle into your hotel and enjoy an overnight stay.

If you have time, why not come a few days earlier and join one of our pre-voyage options.

Day 2: Straddle the Equator in the Middle of the World City

Today, enjoy a guided tour of Quito's remarkable Old Town, one of the largest and best-preserved colonial-era quarters in South America. Wander through cobblestone streets as you admire the architecture and sample delicious chocolate made from the finest Ecuadorian cacao along the way.

Next, you'll head to the iconic 'Middle of the World City', located around 16 miles north of Quito. After lunch, you'll visit the famous monument that delineates the imaginary line that is the Equator. Have your camera ready to capture the moment you stand with one foot in each hemisphere.

Day 3: Get ready to explore the spectacular Galápagos Islands

After breakfast, a short flight will take you to Baltra Island, a part of the spectacular Galápagos Archipelago. A transfer will take you straight to the port, where your comfortable expedition ship MS Santa Cruz II awaits you.

Get your first glimpse of the islands' incredible wildlife on Mosquera Islet, home to one of the largest sea lion colonies in the archipelago. We'll take our small panga boats ashore for a closer look.

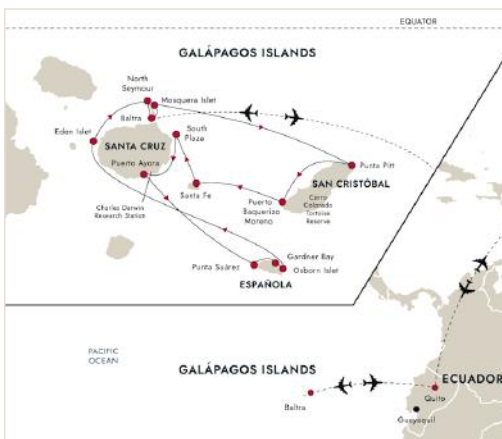
As you stroll across the flat, sandy dunes, look out for blue-footed boobies and Sally Lightfoot crabs, and learn about the marine and terrestrial ecosystems from your naturalist guides.

Day 4: Meet the famous giant tortoises

Your first stop today is the Cerro Colorado Tortoise Reserve, a breeding center for the endangered giant tortoise. It's also home to other endemic species, including the San Cristóbal mockingbird and the lava lizard.

The giant tortoise is probably the most iconic of all Galápagos wildlife, with a lifespan of over 100 years. They thrive here, ambling around forests similar to their natural habitat.

Up to August 2024 we'll call at Cerro Brujo, on the island's west coast.



With its white coral beaches, you'll literally be walking in Darwin's footsteps as the naturalist visited here in 1835. There are plenty of sea and shore birds to look out for here, as well as sea lions.

After August 2024* we'll instead likely explore Punta Pitt in our small panga boats. This is the only site in the Galápagos Islands where you might see three species of boobies. Enjoy a nature walk, explore the coastline by boat, or snorkel and swim in the crystal-clear water. *Note – this is dependent on local authority restrictions.

Day 5: Spot wildlife against idyllic backdrops

We start the day with a scenic nature walk on the blissful beaches of Santa Fe, home to the endemic Barrington land iguana and a colony of sea lions.

You can swim or snorkel from our small panga boats, take a kayak for a paddle around the island, or join a trip in our glass-bottomed boat to observe the marine life below. After a delicious lunch prepared by our onboard chefs, we head to South Plaza Island.

Keep an eye out for frigatebirds, swallow-tailed gulls, and Galápagos shearwaters gliding on the breeze. Here, among a dazzling array of flora, land iguanas laze by the shore while marine iguanas slip in and out of the water.

Day 6: Learn about local conservation efforts on Santa Cruz Island

Today, we pay a visit to the Charles Darwin Research Station in Puerto Ayora.

At this giant tortoise breeding center, you can see recently hatched tortoises and Darwin's famous finches – the birds he used as a basis for his theory of evolution by natural selection. There's also an impressive forest of prickly pear cacti that is home to many land birds.

Enjoy a cooler climate over lunch in the lush highlands, where giant tortoises shuffle about munching on grass and wallowing in pools.

You'll also have time for another activity, such as mountain biking or visiting a sugar plantation.

Day 7: Lava lizards and incredible birdlife

Your Galápagos Islands cruise reaches Española, the archipelago's southernmost island. Birdlife here is truly extraordinary. On cruises from April through December, look for Nazca boobies, blue-footed boobies, swallow-tailed gulls, and the mighty waved albatross.

This is also a great chance to spot red Española lava lizards and marine iguanas, as well as see El Soplador, the famous blowhole that blasts water 75 feet into the air.

After lunch on board the ship, we'll head to the picturesque coral beach of Gardner Bay and nearby Osborn Islet to seek out sea lions, mockingbirds, and finches. If you're feeling active, you can go snorkeling or kayaking.

Day 8: Green turtles, sharks, and rare bird colonies

The abundant wildlife-watching opportunities continue at Eden Islet, where we hope to see Galápagos green turtles, rays, and friendly reef sharks. On shore, look for distinctive frigatebirds with their rubbery, red throats.

You can swim or snorkel to explore the reefs. You can also see the reefs from our glass-bottomed boat or by kayak. After lunch, we'll sail to North Seymour.

The island is a great site for spotting colonies of blue-footed boobies and swallow-tailed gulls. Sea lions and marine iguanas also congregate here, attracted by the bountiful sea life in its waters.

Day 9: From the Galápagos Islands back to Quito

Your expedition cruise draws to a close as you disembark at Baltra Island. A transfer will take you to the airport in Baltra for your flight to Quito to connect to your international flight. If you prefer, you can end your adventure in Guayaquil.

To explore more of Ecuador, why not extend your stay and join one of our post-voyage options.

As you leave this fascinating region, you'll take with you incredible memories of amazing wildlife and wonderful experiences few have the privilege of seeing.

For more information:

Expedia Cruises

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What's Included

Flights

- Flights in economy class between Quito and Baltra, including all taxes

Hotel

- Two nights at a hotel in Quito before the expedition cruise, including breakfast and dinner on Day 2

Transfers

- Transfers between the airport and the hotel in Quito before the expedition cruise
- Transfers between the airport and the ship in Baltra
- Note: If your flights have not been booked with us, please provide us with your full flight details no later than 30 days prior to travel (applies to all transfers from the airport to your booked hotel via HX in Quito on the tour start date)

Excursion

- Full-day excursion: Historic Quito & Middle of the World, including lunch, before the expedition cruise

Extras

- Galápagos Islands National Park admission fee
- Transit control card for the Galápagos Islands
- Access to the airport lounge at the Quito (or Guayaquil) airport upon return from the Galápagos Islands for guests flying internationally on the day of disembarkation

Expedition Cruise

- A stay in a cabin of your choice
- Daily breakfast, lunch and dinner
- Wine, beer and spirits available at meals and throughout the day and evening (subject to licensing laws, excludes premium drinks)
- All day coffee, tea and soft drinks
- A complimentary reusable Ocean Bottle water bottle to refill on board and take home
- An HX backpack
- Professional photos from your trip taken by our onboard photographer
- Complimentary Wi-Fi. Please note, streaming is not supported
- Use of hot tubs, fitness room, lounges and more
- Gratuities included. Fantastic service is standard at HX – though if you'd like to leave something extra, it's always appreciated
- Range of included activities

Onboard Activities

- In-depth lectures and discussions hosted by our knowledgeable Expedition Team
- Full access to the ship's Science Corner
- The Citizen Science Program allows guests to assist with ongoing scientific research
- An onboard professional photographer will give tips and tricks for taking the best landscape and wildlife photos
- Daily briefing with the Expedition Team about the plans for the next day

Landing Activities

- Escorted and guided landings with small panga boats
- Necessary equipment for activities, such as walking poles and snorkelling equipment, will be provided on board on loan. Your HX travel documents will have a recommended packing list.
- Expedition photographer on hand to assist you

Notes

- All planned activities are subject to weather conditions
- Your flight from Baltra will be to Quito. If you wish to end your expedition in Guayaquil instead, contact our Expedition Specialists. You can also change your final destination from Quito to Guayaquil when booking online.
- Quito's altitude is at approximately 9,350 feet above sea level and during your stay, you might experience mild altitude sickness
- Excursions and activities are subject to change
- Please make sure you meet all entry and boarding requirements
- No gratuities expected
- Depending on your flight times, an additional overnight might be needed (not included)

What's not included

- International flights
- Additional overnight(s) if required due to international flight timings
- Travel protection
- Baggage handling



HX

EXPEDITIONS

Change the way you see the world