

# Galapagos Excursion Details (San Cristobal and Isabela islands)

## San Cristobal

### Isla Lobos

Isla Lobos is a small islet that serves as a breeding ground for frigate, boobies, and sea lions alike. We'll take a short walking tour of the island (750-meter path, sometimes over large rocks) and then snorkel in the channel between the islet and the 'mainland' of San Cristobal. Lunch is included today.

- Duration: 4.5 to 5 hours
- 25-minute boat to the Isla Lobos (typically a smooth ride); on the way we'll pass the bay where Charles Darwin first made landfall on the Galapagos in 1835
- 45 to 60-minute walk on the island to see booby and frigate nests, as well as a sea lion colony; this walk is over uneven lava rocks. If you are unsteady on your feet, you may wish to bring a walking stick.
- 30-minute snorkeling along Isla Lobos. If we are lucky, the sea lions will decide to join us! Snorkel, mask, fins, and towel provided on boat. The water here tends to be slightly warmer than on Isabela.
- Lunch on the boat
- If we have time, we will visit a nearby beach. If we prefer to spend more time on Isla Lobos and snorkeling, we can try to arrange that instead.

### Wildlife we may see:

- Frigatebirds (both Great and Magnificent varieties)
- Blue-footed boobies
- Sea lions
- Marine iguanas
- Sally Lightfoots crabs
- All manner of fish & rays

### Bring with you:

- Shoes: The walk on these rocks is uneven and can be jagged. Please wear closed-toed shoes or sport-sandals with a strap. If you know you are extremely unsteady on your feet, you may wish to use a walking stick.
- Sun protection (sunscreen; hat)
- Camera
- Water

- You may wish to use a drybag as things will most likely get wet in the boat after people come in from snorkeling

**Notes:**

- There is a small toilet on this boat.
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## **Kicker Rock**

Kicker Rock, or Leon Dormido (“Sleeping Lion”), is a rock formation 4 miles offshore. This iconic formation is an eroded volcanic lava tuff cone that rises almost 500 meters from the ocean floor. This is your chance to see hammerhead sharks! Lunch is included today.

- Duration: 6-7 hours
- 45 to 60-minute boat to Kicker Rock
- 60-minute snorkeling around Kicker Rock. Snorkel, mask, fins, and towel provided on boat. The water here tends to be slightly cooler than Isla Lobos.
- Lunch on the boat
- Visit to a nearby beach (~90 minutes). You may wish to bring bug spray for this beach.
- 1-hour boat ride back home

**Wildlife we may see:**

- Sharks: Galapagos shark, black-tipped reef sharks, hammerheads
- Sea turtles
- All manner of fish & rays
- Birds nesting on the rock itself
- Sea lions

**Bring with you:**

- Shoes: whatever shoes you wish to have on the beach for walking (mostly sand, maybe some lava)
- Sun protection (sunscreen; hat)
- A windbreaker for the boat ride
- Camera
- Water
- You may wish to use a drybag as things will most likely get wet in the boat after people come in from snorkeling

**Notes:**

- Sometimes the beach visit and the snorkeling order are reversed based on the National Park’s guidance and regulations.
- There is a small toilet on this boat.

- This is more of an open water snorkel than anything else on this journey. You'll want to stay with the group, and you may wish to wear a lifejacket so you can relax!
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## Highlands

Today we'll explore the highlands of San Cristobal, including the Tortoise Breeding Center, lunch at a highlands farm, and an optional visit to Puerto Chino beach.

- Duration: ~6 hours
- 45-minute drive to the Tortoise Breeding Center (also called the Galapaguera de Cerro Colorado or the David Rodriguez Breeding Center)
- Walk around the paths of the Tortoise Breeding Center (about ½ mile of paths)
- Lunch in a restaurant in the Highlands
- Visit to a nearby beach, Puerto Chino (~30 to 45 minutes). You may wish to bring bug spray for this beach, and towels from the hotel to sit on. (Note: we may skip this portion of the journey to allow more time at the Tortoise Center and other activities)
- Return to Puerto Baquerizo Moreno (~40 minutes)

### Wildlife we may see:

- Galapagos tortoises!

### Bring with you:

- Shoes: the trails are maintained at the Tortoise Breeding Center but can still be rocky and/or muddy. Sport sandals or sneakers are best.
  - Sun protection (sunscreen; hat)
  - Camera
  - Water
  - If you wish to swim at Puerto Chino beach, please wear your bathing suit under your clothes (there are no changing facilities there).
  - Towel (please ask hotel for a beach towel)
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## Española day trip

One of the oldest islands in the archipelago, Espanola provides an opportunity to see the waved albatross, as well as a particularly colorful population of marine iguanas. Blue-footed boobies and Nazca boobies are plentiful, as well as sea lions and all sorts of marine life!

Lunch is included.

- Duration: ~8 hours.
- ~100-minute boat ride to Española and 5-minute transfer on Zodiac to dry landing onshore/steps
- ~2-hour walk on the island to see nesting birds. Please wear sport sandals or sneakers; parts of this path are over rocks.

- Lunch on boat
- 25-minute boat ride to snorkeling area
- 1 hour of snorkeling
- Return to Puerto Baquerizo Moreno (~100 minutes)

**Wildlife we may see:**

- Waved albatross (almost the entire world population of this species breeds on the island from March to January)
- Colorful marine iguana subspecies
- Española mockingbird
- Española lava lizard
- Very close encounters with Nazca boobies
- Galapagos hawks
- Sea lions
- The famous giant tortoise named Diego will soon be released to Española to live out his life (although visitors are not allowed to visit the areas where he will likely reside).

**Bring with you:**

- Shoes: Must have closed-toe shoes or sport sandals
- Sun protection (sunscreen; hat)
- Camera
- Water
- Windbreaker for the boat ride
- Walking stick if desired/needed

**Note:**

- This excursion must be booked months in advance, as there are only 12 spots per day and fill up quickly. As of 2020, the price was ~\$250 USD.
- There is a toilet on this boat
- Please see this website for more information about Española:  
[https://www.galapagos.org/about\\_galapagos/about-galapagos/the-islands/espanola/](https://www.galapagos.org/about_galapagos/about-galapagos/the-islands/espanola/)

## Optional trips on San Cristobal

### Interpretation Center (free)

This center is a 15-20 minute walk from the hotel and is a great place to learn about the fascinating, if somewhat sordid, history of the Galapagos and how they are addressing their environmental challenges. Free admission but you must sign in; hours as of January 2020 were 6 AM to 6 PM.

## **Frigatebird Hill Lookout / “Mirador Cerro Tijeretas”**

You can take the boardwalk out the back of the Interpretation Center and continue up the hill 15 to 20 more minutes to reach a viewing platform (stay toward the right at every fork in the path on your way up the hill). This is a great lookout to see the bay where Darwin first landed in 1835, as well as a place to spot frigatebirds. There are two viewing platforms, make sure you see the top one! The walk is mostly a paved path and the last part is stairs.

## **Darwin Statue**

As you descend from Frigatebird Hill Lookout, take the path as it curves to the right; here you can reach the Bay and also the Charles Darwin statue.

## **Playa Carola / Lighthouse**

You can access this beach from the road or from the boardwalks behind the interpretation center. Snorkeling is also possible here.

## **Playa Mann**

This is another beach option for you, a bit closer to home. It is across the street from the entrance to the Interpretation Center and there are amenities there.

## **Playa Tongo**

If you head out of the hotel and to the left, you can wind around to the Navy Base (10-minute walk from hotel). If you leave your ID (a driver's license is fine) with the security guard, you can enter the military base and keep walking to the surf break (another 10 minutes). Here you can watch people (and sea lions) surf the waves! Continue on the sand path another 30 minutes to reach Playa Tongo (although you must walk over lots of rocks).

## **La Loberia**

This beach is about a ten-minute taxi ride (or 35 to 45-minute walk) and is a favorite for sunsets and watching sea lions. A taxi costs \$3 each way and can fit up to 3 people; you'll need to tell the taxi what time to pick you up when you are done (we recommend leaving the hotel ~5 and getting picked up at 6:15 PM; the beach technically closes at 6 PM). The hotel can arrange a taxi for you and can ensure the taxi will return for your pick-up.

## **Isabela Island**

## **Tintoreras**

The Tintoreras islands are named after the Tintoreras sharks that live here (white-tipped reef sharks). These small islands are just off the shore, so the boat ride is calm and the snorkeling is protected (not open water)

- Duration: 3 hours
- 15-20 minutes boat ride in harbor to see wildlife
- 30-minute walk on a small island to see marine iguanas, sea lions and more
- 45-minute snorkeling session; snorkel, mask, fins, and towel provided on boat (note: depending on the tide in rare cases, we may snorkel BEFORE the island walk)

**Wildlife we may see:**

- Marine iguanas
- Sea lions
- Blue-footed boobies
- Galapagos penguins
- Tintoreras (white-tipped reef sharks)
- Sea turtles
- All manner of fish, rays & starfish
- Sally Lightfoot crabs

**Bring with you:**

- Shoes: this island walk is on an easy gravel path, any shoes are OK. You may wish to wear sports sandals, as one potential snorkeling requires a short walk over uneven lava.
- Sun protection (sunscreen; hat)
- Camera
- Water
- You may wish to use a drybag as things will most likely get wet in the boat after people come in from snorkeling

**Notes:**

- There are no toilets on these small boats, so go easy on the coffee this morning!
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## **The Tunnels (Los Tuneles)**

The “Tunnels” are a stunning volcanic landscape with underwater arches that were once lava tubes (or tunnels). This area is also known as Cabo Rosa and Finado. A light lunch served on the boat (you may wish to bring a snack)

- Duration: 5-6 hours
- 45-minute boat to the Tunnels, with a short stop to see Union Rock

- 45-minute snorkeling in a protected lava formation/mangrove area; the water here is slightly colder than at the Tintoreras, so you may wish to rent a short wetsuit. Snorkel, mask, fins, and towel provided on boat.
- Lunch on the boat
- 20-minute short walk on Lava formation
- 45-minute boat ride back home  
(note: depending on the tide, we may snorkel BEFORE the walk)

**Wildlife we may see:**

- Sea turtles
- Seahorses
- White-tipped reef sharks
- Blue-footed boobies
- Nazca boobies (at Union Rock)
- All manner of fish & rays

**Bring with you:**

- Shoes: The walk on this lava is uneven and can be jagged. Please wear closed-toed shoes or sport-sandals with a strap. If you know you are extremely unsteady on your feet, you may wish to use a walking stick.
- Sun protection (sunscreen; hat)
- A windbreaker for the boat ride
- A light sweater or fleece for post-snorkeling, if you are easily chilled
- Camera
- Water
- You may wish to use a drybag as things will most likely get wet in the boat after people come in from snorkeling

**Notes:**

- There is a very small toilet on this boat.
- This 45-minute journey can be choppy at times, so you may wish to use your sea-sickness preventative of choice: Sea-Bands, ginger, Dramamine, etc.

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## **Optional Activities**

### **Sierra Negra Volcano hike**

Sierra Negra, one of 6 volcanoes on Isabela island, has the largest caldera of any volcano on the Galapagos; it is 6 miles across but only 300 feet deep.

- Duration: ~7 hours

- If you hike up to the rest area, the roundtrip distance is about 8 miles. If you go all the way to Volcan Chico, it is about 10 miles roundtrip.
- Very light lunch served (you may wish to bring a snack); you will carry this lunch with you, so please do bring some sort of daybag
- 35-minute drive to the highlands to the start of the trail
- ~90-minute walk (on a wide dirt trail) to view the caldera of Sierra Negra volcano. There is an initial uphill push and then the trail levels out, with only minor sloping upward.
- 20 more minutes uphill to another viewpoint of the caldera and the north part of the island.
- You can choose to continue on to see Volcan Chico (“Small Volcano”) or stay at this covered rest spot and eat your lunch while others go to Volcan Chico.
- For those that continue on, the walk to Volcan Chico is a bit more difficult, up and down over uneven lava rocks. It is typically very hot, as well. The rewards on a clear day are panoramic views across the north of the island (where you can see the Pacific Ocean on both sides of Isabela, as well as surrounding islands). The volcanic landscape, including fumaroles and lava tubes, is otherworldly. If you hike this portion, a walking stick may be useful to you. The roundtrip to Volcan Chico is approximately 45 minutes.
- Walking back to the starting point is at your leisure; if you don’t continue on to Volcan Chico you can even start walking back as soon as you finish lunch. There are covered areas and tables to wait at the trailhead. Those that continue on to Volcan Chico can eat lunch at the rest area before then continuing back to the trailhead.

**Wildlife we may see:**

- A variety of finches and warblers

**Bring with you:**

- Shoes: Please wear closed-toed shoes or sport-sandals with a strap.
  - Please note depending on the weather, some of the trail may be muddy.
  - If you do wear open sports sandals, be aware that the trail is gravel and you may get small stones in your shoes.
- You may wish to use a walking stick if you continue on to Volcan Chico.
- Sun protection (sunscreen; hat)
- Camera
- Water (please bring at least 2 liters, especially if you go on to Volcan Chico)

**Notes:**

- The hike begins at 2,800 feet, and the rest stop is the highest point at about 3,400 feet.
  - Weather: the trailhead is often “in the clouds,” misty and cool. Shortly, though, you walk above the clouds and the weather is typically very hot and sunny.
  - There are only toilets at the trailhead, no facilities while on the hike or at the top.
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## **Kayaking trip**

In this experience you'll use a sit-on-top sea kayak (mostly double, with one or two single kayaks potentially available) to explore the Tintoreras area, just offshore.

- Duration: ~2 hours
- Kayak around Tintoreras bay to see blue-footed boobies diving up close, as well as the potential to see penguins!
- If you wish to snorkel on this excursion, you can do that. You'll be provided fins, mask, and snorkel. You can also rent a wetsuit if you wish.

### **Wildlife we may see:**

- Marine iguanas
- Sea lions
- Blue-footed boobies
- Galapagos penguins
- Tintoreras (white-tipped reef sharks)
- Sea turtles
- All manner of fish, rays & starfish

### **Bring with you:**

- Shoes for kayaking; no walking component on this trip.
- Sun protection (sunscreen; hat)
- Water-safe camera
- Water
- The kayak outfitters will provide you with a drybag if you bring anything else with you (e.g., regular camera, phone, etc).

### **Notes:**

- If you are in a tandem kayak, the stronger kayaker should sit in the rear.
- There is not a lot of instruction given, so please watch this video about kayaking if this is new to you! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TAEkR13ChPs>

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## **Walking west (out and to the left from the hotel) gives you many options!**

- **Tortoise Breeding Center:** about a 30-minute easy walk from the hotel (30 minutes each way)

- **Flamingo lagoon:** there is a lagoon in the center of town, although you tend to see more along the boardwalk en route to the Tortoise Breeding Centre
- **Wetland Complex and Wall of Tears (“Complejo de Humedales y Muro de las Lagrimas”):**

This trailhead is about a ten-minute bike ride or 20+ minute walk from the hotel with lots to see along the way:

- **Wall of Tears:** If you choose to go until the very end (1-hour bike ride or 2-hour walk) you’ll see the Wall of Tears, the place where prisoners were set to hard labor from 1946 to 1959. There is another 20-minute hike up a hill behind the Wall of Tears that provides a gorgeous 360° panorama of the island.
- **La Playita and Playa del Amor:** two lovely beaches along the way
- **Tunel de Estero:** a lava tunnel directly on the sea
- **El Estero (The Estuary):** a beautiful spot beach spot among the mangroves
- **Pozas Escondida, Redonda, y Verdes y Los Tunos:** ponds and wetland marsh areas
- **Camino de las Tortugas:** a long stretch of path often populated by truly wild giant tortoises (especially in the morning)
- **Cerro Orchilla:** a hilltop lookout (though not as high as the one above the Wall of Tears)

Please allow yourself 4 hours (by bike) to 5-6 hours (walking) for this journey if you go all the way to the Wall of Tears, and do bring at least 2 liters of water. The journey is slightly uphill on the way to the wall, so the bike ride down will be faster (please wear your helmet!) We recommend starting this journey at 7 AM to avoid the heat of the day and to see more tortoises on the path.

### **Walking east (out and right from the hotel) from the hotel**

- **Snorkeling at Concha de Perla:** Take the small boardwalk path from the ranger station by the dock and you’ll encounter a wooden dock you can snorkel from. It is a protected area and you may see ray, turtles, starfish and fish, and if you are lucky, sea lions and maybe even penguins. There are hooks to hang your clothes/bag.
- **Small beach by the main pier:** this is a fun place to encounter sea lions and marine iguanas. Keeping heading down the road; the dock is on your left, the beach on your right.
- The restrooms in this area are on your right (if you are facing the water, next to the ranger station), in a dark green circular building

**Note: as of January 2020, renting a bicycle costs \$3/hour or \$15/day. We like the bikes next door to the hotel at Natural Selection, run by Tito and Nuria.**

