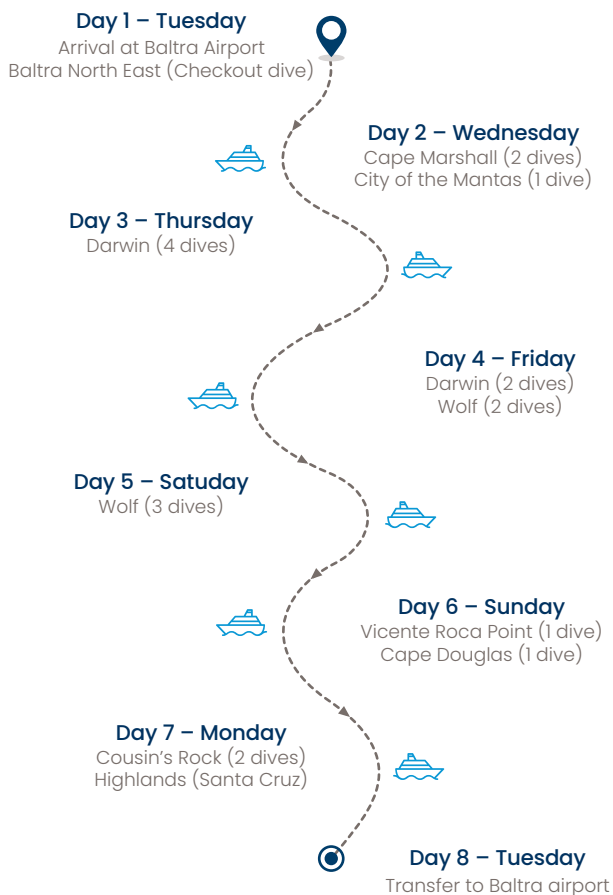




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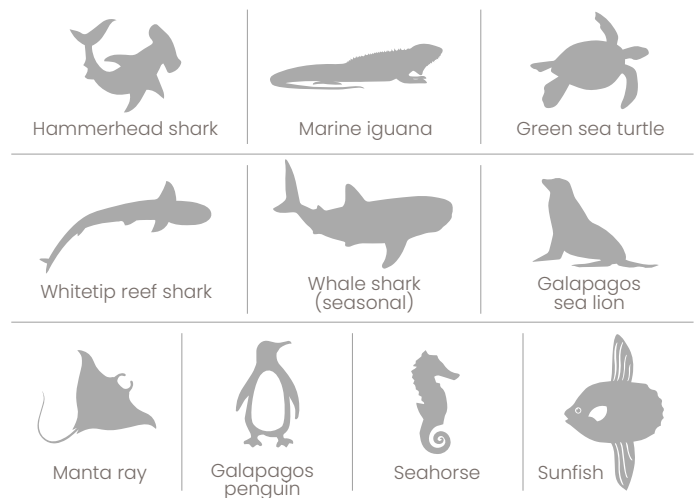


ITINERARY A 8 DAYS / 7 NIGHTS Tuesday to Tuesday



The 8 days/7 nights itinerary onboard M/Y Aqua has been carefully designed for travellers who want to travel “deeper” into the enchanted islands. It enables close encounters with marine life in the most spectacular diving sites of the Galapagos Islands.

HIGH CHANCE OF SPOTTING:



DAY 1 - TUESDAY

AM - Baltra Airport

Upon arrival at Seymour Ecological Airport, a check-up is carried out first, to ensure that no foreign plant or animal species are introduced on the islands. Then, your TCC (Transit Control Card) will be stamped; this must be kept safe during your trip, as it has to be presented again on your return flight. Lastly, entrance to the Galapagos National Park is due for entry (USD 200), if this has not yet been paid.

Your guide will meet you at the airport, assist you with the luggage, and accompany you on the short bus ride. Here you will climb aboard the yacht Aqua, where the crew and the captain will greet all passengers. Your cabin will be assigned and you can check any rented diving gear. After this, the guide will begin the briefing about safety and activity details, as well as the afternoon's dive. Finally, you will enjoy your first lunch on board.

PM - North East Baltra

This is the perfect spot to start your adventure with moderate currents. This dive site is for adventurous divers looking to see fascinating lava and rock formations, as well as an incredible number of marine species. At a depth of around 20m/60 ft, we might see white-tip reef sharks, pelagic sharks, reef sharks, rays, and turtles. Additionally, sea lions will be your companions upon entry and on the safety stops. Occasionally, hammerhead sharks can be spotted swimming nearby.

Return on board for dinner and amusement at the social areas.



DAY 2 - WEDNESDAY

AM - Cape Marshall (Isabela)

Cape Marshall is located on the northeastern coast of Isabela island, just a bit south of the equatorial line and the base of the active Wolf volcano. This area offers drift diving and also an almost vertical wall of volcanic rock that falls all the way to the bottom of the sea. This is a great location for spotting hammerhead, white-tipped, and Galapagos sharks.

Occasionally, whale sharks can also be seen. There are huge schools of black-striped salema and barracudas. You can also see black coral growing along the volcanic wall.

PM - Manta's city

A unique attraction near Cape Marshall's is a place where giant manta rays are so often seen that it was named "Manta's City". They roam feeding in the plankton-rich waters, so visibility can be below. After returning on board the Aqua, we will start sailing towards Darwin, as the distance to cover is quite considerable.

DAYS 3, 4 AND 5 – THURSDAY, FRIDAY AND SATURDAY

Due to the large number of dive sites available in Darwin and Wolf as well as the marked influence that marine conditions can have on the area, the 4-daily dive sites will be chosen with these factors in mind. The guide will communicate with all passengers in advance to inform them about the location, expected conditions and alternatives of each site, and learn about their interests. On Friday, the fourth day of the expedition, conditions may be suitable for night diving in one of the two available locations. The regular options include the following:

El Darwin's Arch, Darwin

Though being one of the most recognizable eye-catching landmarks of the Galapagos, only a few travellers can truly admire the sculpture of Darwin's Arch themselves.

The monumental portal is not even the real highlight during this cruise, as its treasure is hidden beneath the breakers that splash against the reef platform. Long-cherished diving dreams often come true at this world-class underwater theatre. It is an outstanding hotspot for schools of scalloped hammerheads and particularly, whale sharks.

This largest fish in the world has almost the size of a bus and let divers get up close and personal. Almost all whale shark encounters happen frequently between June and November around this arch in the far north of Galapagos, where often-pregnant females make a brief stop-over during their mysterious solitary migration, with remora suckerfish as their sole fellow travellers.



Darwin's Theatre, Darwin

Two bifurcated ridges point from the reef foundations of Darwin's Arch to the north-east and south-east. Under the splashing waves, curving terraces bend around the north branch, which is illustratively called "Darwin's Theatre".

It features a real grandstand with vantage points at about 18 m, just above the edge of a wall that drops deep. The barnacle-covered exposed rocks are the perfect seats to enjoy the aquatic spectacle of whale sharks.

Even if there aren't any whale sharks on the move, there is usually an endless parade of extraordinary marine life, including shoals of hammerhead sharks, patrolling requiem sharks, silky sharks, yellowfin tunas, wahoos, amberjacks, and pelagic fish, the latter transforming into spinning balls when hunted.

El Arenal, Darwin

Sharks, turtles and mackerels visit cleaning stations around Darwin's Arch, to be freed of parasites. They have an amazing symbiotic relationship with the resident butterflyfish, barber fish and angelfish. The busiest area is usually the sandy slope just in front of Darwin's arch, known as "El Arenal".

If the currents are not too strong, it is possible to drop into these shallows, amidst the clouds of *Paranthias colonus*, to come face to face with individuals and small groups of hammerhead sharks, resting Pacific green turtles and rare hawkbill turtles, among hundreds of stretched garden eels and starfish.

Beyond, sloping terraces with debris tumbling into a deep ravine form curved contours of the reef platform. The upper edge offers more hiding places among the rocks to watch for hammerheads. Located just 100m around the corner from Darwin's Theatre, there are new opportunities to swim with the majestic whale sharks, or to marvel at all the marine life that comes with the current.

Did we mention the bottlenose dolphins and giant manta rays?





Shark Bay, Wolf

Shark Bay, located on the exposed east coast of Wolf, is shallower than most of the surrounding sites, but for many, it is the most memorable. In addition to being another shark-abundant site, the local cleaning stations reveal fascinating symbiotic relationships. The hawksbill and the critically endangered Pacific green turtles visit the busy royal angels.

These cleaning fish also groom painted rays and even hammerhead sharks. At these shallow waters, male hammerhead sharks tend to get closer to the stationary divers than females do in open water. Their indifferent character is quite the opposite of that of the curious Galapagos fur seals, which immediately seek out company and love to interact.

El Derrumbe, Wolf

The descent along a rocky slope leads to natural meeting points on the edge of a cliff (at a depth of about 20m). These viewpoints offer a front-row panorama into the blue, where one of the most impressive shark shows in the archipelago takes place.

As you hold on tightly to the rocks, you will enjoy the sight of hammerhead sharks everywhere, plus a few Galapagos sharks patrolling, along with silky reef and blacktip sharks, spotted stingrays, schools of pelican barracudas, and much more.

During the cold water season (Jun-Nov), large whales, such as orcas or humpback whales may make an appearance.



Pinnacle and the Caves, Wolf

This area has some of the best caves in the Galapagos plus a thrilling experience at the Pinnacle and is located at the northern end of the main island.

It has four underwater caves that penetrate the island wall and are easily accessible, as long as the current is not too strong. The entrances to the caves are at depths of 15-21 m, and the ground at the bottom of the wall is sandy. Hawksbill turtles and green turtles often gather in this area to be cleaned by the fish, and they can be found around the opening or swimming in and out. The fourth cave has the largest opening, with an entrance at approximately 18m., and offers an interesting exploration if the weather permits.

In general, the great variety of life around and inside the caves within the caves include schools of soldierfish, pufferfish, moray eels, Galapagos sharks, spotted rays, cardinalfish and lobsters hiding in holes and crevices.

The dive ends at the northeast corner of Wolf, where a tall, massive underwater pinnacle is found, the top of which is just below the surface of the water. The main current comes from the southeast, but there may also be other currents coming from different directions at different depths, creating a kind of whirlpool effect. If the currents permit, you can swim across the gap to the pinnacle to observe the bubbles and the behaviour of the currents. Here you can see large pelagic species such as hammerheads and Galapagos sharks, bottlenose dolphins and turtles.

The Secret Cave (night dive), Wolf

The Secret Cave has its origins in gas spaces dating back to the formation of the island, which over time eroded and collapsed. It is a great alternative on the north side of Wolf if conditions allow for diving here.

Along the wall, sometimes with hammerheads, you'll find the entrance to a cave that may reveal several nocturnal species, such as cardinalfish, spiny lobsters, shrimps, colourful sea urchins, moray eels, as well as Pacific green turtles and sea lions.



El Fondeadero (night dive), Wolf

Wolf's Anchorage is the only dive site located on the islet's protected west coast. The cove and surrounding cliffs reveal the contours of the ancient main crater of this extinct volcanic islet. On the leeward side, the water temperature is higher and the turbulent currents and the treacherous swell of the surrounding area are hardly felt anymore. However, some sharks and reef fish can be spotted during the intervals when they come close to the surface, as well as blue-footed boobies.

Those who dare to take on a quite different adventure during these intense days may opt for a dark and exciting night dive. Just below the anchored yacht, the strange red-lipped batfish walks and jumps with its fins on the sandy bottom at a depth of 20m. Although it is active at night and attracted by the beam of light, this cool activity will probably not be the only chance to marvel at this endemic species of the Galapagos.

DAY 6 – SUNDAY

AM – Punta Vicente Roca, Isabela

Right at the mouth of the seahorse that Isabela Island resembles from space, is located Vicente Roca Point. The roaring echoes of the waves will accompany you as you enter a dark cave under a spectacular arch. Around the corner, the collapsed amphitheatre of the Ecuador Volcano offers another breathtaking view.

The calmer waters of the caves are well protected from the ocean swell and are great to snorkel amongst various species of sharks, penguins, pufferfish and even seahorses. Encounters with sunfish are also very common, and it's worth bearing in mind that the water in this area tends to be a little cold (hence the penguins!).

PM – Douglas Cape, Fernandina

Douglas Cape is sure to provide you with incredible opportunities to observe an abundance of marine life, above and below the water. As you prepare for your dive, you can see Galapagos penguins, Galapagos cormorants and Galapagos marine iguanas, animals that are only found on the islands.

We will also go in search of amazing marine iguanas swimming and feeding on the rocks beneath the surface. Some of the marine life you may see are the red-lipped batfish, horned dogfish, sunfish, and possibly whales!





DAY 7 - MONDAY

AM - Roca Cousin, Santiago

The solitary, symmetrical pyramid of Cousin Rock rises just above the coastal waters of Santiago, approximately 5 km off its coast. This bare volcanic rock serves as a resting place for blue-footed boobies, brown pelicans, Galapagos seals, sea lions and Galapagos penguins, which might be seen during a boat ride.

It doesn't take much imagination to realise that this triangular formation is the tiny top of a huge underwater cone, although only divers and snorkellers can admire the unthinkable colourful world below.

Cousin's Rock features two popular dive sites: an adventurous wall dive around the steep north-east corner (intermediate level) and on the opposite side, an attractive ridge flanked by a lush terraced wall and a rarely visited rock formation further south. The actual points of descent around Cousin's Rock and dive directions depend on the currents.

Normally, you will dive twice at one of these sites. Dive depths at Cousin's Rock range from 12-30m, and the current can vary from medium to strong. The water temperature ranges between 20-26°C from January to May, and between 16-20°C from June to December. Visibility ranges from 12-30 m, and the site is mostly a reef dive. Low visibility usually means an abundance of plankton, which brings large numbers of small and pelagic fish and with them, large animals.

PM - Highlands, Santa Cruz

Your last visit is very contrasting to your previous underwater experiences. You will explore a Giant Tortoise Reserve in the Scalesia forest-covered highlands of Santa Cruz. This is the best place to look for Galapagos giant tortoises in their most authentic environment! Despite the interesting breeding centres -where you are guaranteed to find tortoises in their pens- there is nothing better than watching them in their wilderness. Although it can be quite wet and muddy, your visit can turn into an adventurous quest when you realise they have quietly left their favourite pond.

Unlike the adjacent agricultural area, this Tortoise Reserve is a protected area and an official part of the Galapagos National Park. It stretches from El Chato Hill to the southwest coast of Santa Cruz Island, where females follow Darwin's "tortoise roads" to lay their eggs.

In 2015, an estimated 32,000 tortoises were living in the wild on all the islands, most of them in the restricted locations on Isabela Island. In addition to the tortoises, you can also see a native flake forest, covered with lichens, ferns and other epiphytes. This protected area also offers excellent opportunities to observe numerous endemic songbirds among the dense foliage, savouring the delicacy of the introduced blackberries, including Darwin's finches, colourful cardinal flycatchers and yellow warblers.

The turtle pond is also home to waterfowl, including the red-billed coot. If you're lucky, you might spot the elusive Galapagos chick in the tall grass or the short-eared owl at the entrance to the lava tunnels.



DAY 8 – TUESDAY

Transfer to Baltra airport

It's time to say goodbye to your fellow passengers and crew! Assisted by the naturalist guide and some crewmembers, the boat will take you and your luggage to the Seymour Ecological Airport, to board your flight back to the mainland.



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