

surroundings of home and work, this was a place for adventure, relaxation and close contact with nature.

The cruise

We returned to Quito for one night before flying to Baltra where we boarded The Samba, our home for the next eight days as we cruised around Galapagos Islands. Sailing mainly during the night makes best use of the daylight hours, and this allowed us to visit more of the islands and have plenty of time for exploring on foot or for photography, for peaceful observation or for swimming and snorkelling...perhaps with sea lion pups!

As well as the animals and birds, many endemic to the islands, we also had the opportunity to photograph unusual plants and stunning landscapes. The geological, botanical and zoological charm of these enchanted and enchanting islands are as attractive and awe inspiring now as when Darwin disembarked from the Beagle in 1835.

Our ship

A bit more up-to-date than the Beagle, our ship was a 14 passenger tourist superior, 78 foot, traditional steel-hulled motor sailor that was built in Holland in 1966. This yacht offers comfortable and spacious accommodation, ample open and shaded deck space, delicious Ecuadorian and international cuisine served in the salon or on deck, personal service on board by a superbly trained crew and a National Park licensed naturalist guide. It is fully air conditioned with twin cabins – each with their own private facilities and outward-facing view.



● All aboard: a boat trip in the mangrove swamps of Black Turtle Cove to look for green sea turtles.

The islands

The cruise began at Plazas Island, which teems with wildlife. On the steep banks it is possible to see a great number of birds such as nesting tropic birds and swallow tailed gulls and magnificent frigate birds. Opuntia cacti grow here too and the vegetation changes colour according to the season of the year.

Santa Cruz is the centre of Galapagos tourism and Puerto Ayora, the capital of the Galapagos Islands, has some of the few shops and hotels on the island.

At the Charles Darwin Research Station we saw giant Galapagos tortoise and learned about the conservation issues facing the islands. We then visited the highland interior to see the tortoise in their natural habitat and interesting geological

features such as lava tubes and pit craters.

On Espanola, or Hood Island, the southernmost island in the archipelago, is Gardener Bay, a coral, white-sand beach with sea lions, mockingbirds and many colourful lava lizards. Punta Suarez is one of the most interesting visitor sites in all of the Galapagos, offering a great abundance of wildlife. The landing point is covered with sea lions and their young, and thousands of marine iguanas basking on the rocks. The iguanas here are among the largest in the Galapagos and are brightly coloured throughout the year. The island has a large blowhole around which hundreds of them congregate.

This is the only island where you find waved albatross and is home to the entire world population of around 15,000 pairs. There are blue-footed and masked boobies nesting here, oystercatchers and swallow tailed gulls.

On Floreana or Charles Island, at Punta Cormorant, there is an olive-crystal beach and greater flamingos inhabiting a secluded lagoon. A short walk away is a white-sand beach where sea turtles nest. Nearby is Champion islet, an abundant nesting site for birds and the Devil's Crown, a submerged volcanic cone with beautiful coral formations and great snorkeling. At Post Office Bay there is an old wooden barrel, which was the basis of a do-it-yourself postal service set up by 18th century whalers.

Isabela or Albemarle Island is the



● Spectacular golden rays in the clear blue-green waters of Black Turtle Cove.