



● *Dramatic: the view from the summit of Bartolome Island*

largest island in the Galapagos and is the result of six large volcanic domes that have fused together. It has the biggest volcanoes and largest tortoise population. From Punto Moreno on the south-western side of Isabela we had a spectacular view of the Alcedo, Sierra Negra and Cerro Azul volcanoes.

Punta Moreno has a desolate and pristine landscape of very impressive black lava flows with a unique system of brackish lagoons that are magnets for wildlife including frigate birds, flamingos and pelicans. The newly opened visitors site offers Darwin's finches, Galapagos doves, penguins, blue-footed boobies, mockingbirds and flightless cormorants.

Elizabeth Bay, located on Isabela Island's west shore, is very good for observing marine life. A colony of Galapagos penguins inhabit a rocky islet at the entrance to the bay. An enclosed mangrove cove is home to marine turtles, rays, sea lions and, circling overhead, Galapagos hawks.

Urbina Bay is located at the central west coast of Isabela island at the foothills of Volcanoes Alcedo and Darwin. We landed on a dark volcanic sand beach. This area has excellent nesting grounds for large, colourful land iguanas. It is also home to flamingos, ducks, waders, moorhens, martins, penguins, herons and



● *Giant tortoise are the Galapagos Island's most famous residents.*

brown noddy terns.

Fernandina or Narborough Island is the youngest island of the Galapagos group. It is the westernmost of the islands and is the most volcanically active. At Punta Espinosa you can walk amongst hundreds of marine iguanas on black lava rocks. The walk will also reveal the beautiful shapes that lava forms once it has cooled. At this location, few rocks are older than 400 years of age.

Santiago or James Island is a large, somewhat barren place with a mostly volcanic landscape. Landing at Puerto Egas, where there are fur seal grottoes —

rocky pools surrounded by black lava — we were able to watch both sea lions and fur seals.

Bartolome is perhaps the most photographed location in the entire archipelago. We climbed a wooden staircase to the summit for a stunning view and we were able to observe pioneer plants and lava cactus colonizing the lava flows. To cap it all, there is also a sandy beach here with great swimming and snorkelling.

In the morning of day 12, we visited the mangrove swamps of Caleta Tortuga Negra (Black Turtle Cove) to see the endangered Green Sea Turtles. Then we returned to Baltra, disembarked The Samba and flew back to Quito.

We spent the last day in the capital sightseeing and shopping, or just relaxing and contemplating what we had seen.

I know the word unique is often misused but the Galapagos actually is a unique place, offering unparalleled opportunities for close encounters with such a variety of remarkable creatures.

● *To find out more about trips to Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands, readers can ring Ann on 01773 873497 or call in at Classic Journeys, 33 High Street, Tibshelf or visit the website at www.classicjourneys.co.uk*