

PUERTO AYORA AND HIGHLANDS, SANTA CRUZ ISLAND

Tuesday, December 13th, 2022

Sunrise: 0547; Low tide: 1814, 5.4 ft / 1.8 m

Sunset: 1757; High tide: 1150, 1.5 ft / 0.5 m

Today we reach the second largest island in the archipelago, Santa Cruz (formerly known as Indefatigable), where a very different experience awaits us as this will be our chance to see the human aspect of Galápagos, as well as to visit the lush, cool highlands of an island. Puerto Ayora is home to some 20,000 inhabitants and is the economic hub of the archipelago. As the inhabitants of one of the world's most important protected areas it is important for Galapagos residents to be aware of the implications and responsibilities that come with living in so unique a place. The Lindblad Expeditions – National Geographic Fund has long supported environmental education and community outreach programs, scholarships for local students and even a local school with a very special vision.

We will start the day by landing at the main town dock and taking buses to the entrance of the Galapagos National Park Service (GNPS), to then walk for about 0.4 miles to the Charles Darwin Research Station (CDRS) and GNPS headquarters. This is where scientists gather information for the conservation of the island's unique biota, and is the site of an interesting visitor centre. The CDRS works closely with the GNPS, which is the entity ultimately responsible for managing the region. We will visit one of the most significant and successful programs in the ecological restoration of the islands: the Fausto Llerena giant tortoise captive breeding centre (named after the GNPS warden who has been in charge of the program since its inception). This was the home of "Lonesome George", the last of the Pinta Island tortoises, before the extinction of his species. Such a personal look at extinction is a vivid reminder that protecting other Galápagos creatures from a similar fate is not an option for us, but rather an obligation.

After visiting the breeding program, you walk back through town to the Pelican Bay Plaza, before returning to the buses awaiting at Darwin's Arch. We will have an open shaded shelter in Darwin's Lounge Café, the gathering place where we will have access to restrooms and a refreshment on the house. Please use your masks at all times, the latter is no longer mandatory in Ecuador, but we need to keep ourselves safe and shipboard bubble intact

At Darwin's Arch, we will board our buses (with your morning's naturalist guide and group) for a 30-minute drive to a charming sugar cane mill located in the highlands called El Trapiche. This brief stop will give us the opportunity to learn about the lifestyles of the first settlers in these inhospitable islands. We will then continue on to a delightful restaurant at a ranch named Manzanillo, where we will have our lunch. This ranch is located in the migratory route of the great giant tortoise of Santa Cruz and following lunch we prepare to explore the lush forests and pastures around the restaurant in search of these gentle giants. We will change into rubber boots should conditions warrant it (socks needed). Here we will have plenty of time for observing and photographing these magnificent creatures in their natural habitat, as well as looking out for different species of finches and other land and lagoon birds.

After our visit, we head back down the island to town and will be back on board around 1600 – 1630.

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Tuesday's Schedule

- 0600** Early morning coffee, fruit and snacks are available in the lounge.
- 0630** Join wellness specialist Diana for a stretching session at the observation deck.
- 0700** Breakfast is served.
- 0745** Disembarkation for a dry landing at Puerto Ayora main town dock, then a bus ride (8 minutes) and walk (0.4 miles) to the Charles Darwin Foundation and the National Park's Tortoise Breeding Centre. Faster-paced walks depart first. We will have a minivan standing by to take those who want to avoid the walk to the Centre (please sign up as there are limited spaces, and join the last group).
- After the visit you can walk along the main road of town, past the Fishermen's Dock to the Pelican Bay Plaza. From there you will retrace your steps to "Darwin's Lounge Café", by Darwin's Arch, for refreshments and restrooms (alcoholic beverages and popsicles are not included). During this visit, in order to protect our COVID bubble as much as possible, please avoid going into crowded shops or cafés.*
- You must wear face masks while in town, in shops and public places.*
- 1115-1130** Board the buses once more (same group/bus/naturalist guide) to head into the highlands of Santa Cruz to visit "El Trapiche", a small sugar cane mill operated by a local family.
- 1300** Lunch is served at "El Manzanillo" ranch.
- ~1400** Search for giant tortoises in their natural habitat, as well as different land and lagoon bird species. The ranch will provide rubber boots for our use (please bring an extra pair of socks).
- 1530** We will begin our return to town and then to the ship.
- 1630** All aboard.
- 1730-1830** Artisan market set up in the library.
- 1830** Cocktail hour in the lounge
- 1845** Join Scientist from the CDRS, for a presentation in the lounge.
- 1930** Dinner is served.
- 2045** Join Galapagos Musicians up on the observation deck for entertainment.