



## TRIP OVERVIEW

Join us on a once-in-a-lifetime swimming holiday in one of the most breathtaking locations on the planet: the Galapagos Islands! Lying on both sides of the equator in the Pacific Ocean, this vast volcanic archipelago is home to an abundance of plant and animal species not found anywhere else on Earth.

This trip offers the opportunity for some true ocean swims with a stunning array of marine life, including sea lions, sea turtles, manta rays, dolphins, marine iguanas and countless rare and exotic fish species. Sharing the water with these beautiful creatures is a truly life-changing experience - something which is only possible in this tiny spot of our vast planet.

With its incredible level of biodiversity, the Galapagos National Park and Galapagos Marine Reserve form a fascinating treasure trove of flora and fauna. Charles Darwin visited the islands in 1835, and, from his observations, developed and wrote his opus: *On the Origin of Species*.

This trip is a real wildlife exploration both above and below the water, as we swim in crater rims, around isolated islands and across beautiful bays. If you love the idea of getting up close and personal with stunning wildlife then this trip is definitely for you!

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## WHO IS THIS TRIP FOR?

This trip offers a fantastic combination of exploration, observation and swimming. It is ideal for anyone who is as keen to swim along remote volcanic coastlines as they are to tread water and spot exotic wildlife beneath the waves. Due to conditions of Ocean swims we recommend that swimmers are experienced in open water.

Swimmers should be capable of completing the average swim distance of 2½ km, prior to the start of the trip. The average daily swim distance is around 4½ km (split over two swims).

We have given this trip a 'Moderate' grading. Most swimmers comfortable in the open water will be able to take part and enjoy one of these trips.

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## LOCATION SUMMARIES

### Isabela

The largest island in the archipelago, Isabela was forged by the merger of six volcanoes (five of which are still active), making it one of the most volcanically active places on the planet. With a landscape made up of a mix of lava fields, dense vegetation and red mangroves, Isabela island is home to a diverse wildlife population that often come right up to and interact with humans. It is an incredibly pretty island - a place you may want to consider extending your stay on.

### Santa Fe Island

The dense vegetation of Santa Fe is made up of some of the largest species of cactus, including a prickly



pear forest. The island also boasts its own indigenous Santa Fe land iguana, which is one of the largest land iguanas found on the islands.

### **Santa Cruz**

The central island of the Galapagos archipelago is Santa Cruz. This island is a large dormant volcano and it is estimated that the last eruptions occurred around a million and a half years ago. Here we can find marine iguanas, exotic sea birds and Galapagos crabs, and, at a nearby natural mangrove, we can spot white tip sharks and the enormous Galapagos tortoise.

### **Cuatro Hermanos**

Cuatro Hermanos, or the Four Brothers, is an archipelago of four uninhabited islands located near Isabela Island and is a popular area for diving. The islands are of volcanic origin and are cone shaped, as well as being carved by the motion of the waves. The islands are also home to a bird sanctuary and provide a great spot to observe several different seabird species.

If you decide to join us on the Galapagos trip 10-16 February, you may be fortunate to experience the celebration of Carnival across Ecuador. The cultural tradition is visually spectacular and takes place just before Lent and can read more about the celebration here <https://ecuador.travel/en/culture/>

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## **TRIP SCHEDULE**

<b>Start Point</b>	Baltra Airport, Baltra Island, Galapagos (Airport code: GPS)
<b>Start Time</b>	12:00 on Day 1
<b>Finish Point</b>	Baltra Airport, Baltra Island, Galapagos (Airport code: GPS)
<b>Finish Time</b>	10:30 on Day 7

*Please note that the below daily itineraries are an example of the swims that may take place during the course of your trip, however, actual swim locations and distances will vary according to local weather and sea conditions. Your SwimTrek guides and local boat pilot will determine the most suitable swim locations each day and will communicate the plan with all guests as soon as possible.*

### **Day 1**

On arrival at Baltra Airport, you will need to process your passport and entrance paperwork. Once you have collected your luggage, make your way outside the luggage collection area to the lobby where a SwimTrek representative will meet you. You will then board our Catamaran with your fellow swimmers and at **1300**, transfer over to Isabela Island for the commencement of our trip. This boat journey will give us up to three hours, depending on sea conditions, to view several of the archipelago's distant islands as we follow our course towards the peak of Volcan Wolf, which dominates the Isabela skyline ahead of us.

On arrival on Isabela we check into our accommodation. It is located on a beautiful sandy beach. If time permits we will enjoy an acclimatisation swim to familiarise yourself with the local conditions. If we



arrive in Isabela too late we will make time the following morning. After some time to rest and relax we will meet for dinner at the hotel, included in your package.

## **Day 2**

This morning we set off from Isabela's south side towards the iconic island of Tortuga, whose crater rim is the only remnant of an ancient collapsed volcano. The island is a nesting site for a large variety of seabirds, including frigatebirds and the elusive red-billed tropicbird, as well as being a sanctuary for sea lions and marine iguanas. The sides of the volcano's crater create a protected natural cove, which allows us to split our day into two swims on the outside edge. It really is a swimming experience quite unlike any other.

We take lunch on the boat and then make our way back towards the Isabela where we will stop on route for an afternoon snorkel/swim.

## **Day 3**

After breakfast we head out on our support boats to Los Islotes Cuatro Hermanos (Four Brothers Islands), a group of rocky islands rising out of the Pacific Ocean off Isabela's east coast. They feature stunning underwater vistas and offer some of the archipelago's more adventurous swims. The swim routes here feature caves and tunnels with starfish and sea urchins lining the cliff edge, while the rare Galapagos fur seal can often be seen lying on ledges. Tropical fish can be found all around here and the islands are also well known for the local manta ray population. There are also good opportunities to see white tipped reef sharks, Californian sea lions and sea tortoises during these swims.

The swimming options here are so varied that we bring lunch with us, so we don't miss a thing. Throughout the day, there is an opportunity to snorkel, as well as swim, as the seafloor is so varied and flourishing with life. We may find ourselves staring at penguins or face-to-face with the most playful and delightful Galapagos native: the sea lion!

## **Day 4**

Today is a day of exploration as we first travel to Floreana in the far south of the archipelago. Floreana is one of the oldest islands of the archipelago and is still volcanically active to this day. We take a morning walk to its west coast. Here we'll take a snorkel as this perfectly preserved coastline is home to marine iguanas, Galapagos crabs and many species of birds dotted along the volcanic rocks - there is so much for us to see both above and below the water's surface! Upon completing our morning swim, we make our way back to the to take lunch in a local restaurant overlooking the Pacific Ocean.

We then transfer by boat to Santa Cruz, which is our base for the remainder of the trip and the centre of the Galapagos Islands' conservation efforts. After arriving at our hotel you will have a chance to relax before we meet for dinner; giving you an opportunity to visit these headquarters of conservation within the Galapagos National Park.



## Day 5

This morning we journey to the isolated island of Pinzon, which marks the geographic centre of the Galapagos Islands. Our first swim is a snorkel in a small cove that is home to vast numbers of sea lions and marine iguanas, a truly fantastic experience.

After lunch, we continue our swim clockwise around Pinzon. There are various bays and coves to explore here with a wide variety of marine life to discover. Our on hand naturalist guides are always ready to share their wealth of knowledge and are able to help you learn more about your surroundings.

## Day 6

After an early breakfast, we travel by boat to Santa Fe Island. Located southwest of Santa Cruz, this is one of the oldest islands in the Galapagos archipelago and a real favourite for swimmers. While we are unable to go ashore, we do swim along its dramatic coastline with its numerous blowholes, sea caves and protected bays. Colonies of Barrington land iguanas roam the island, and here we also have the opportunity to swim with the playful Californian sea lions which can often be found slipping in and out of the water on the island's rocky coastline.

The morning swim is a coastal trip along the dramatic western side of the island, after which we will take lunch on board our boats in the stunning Santa Fe Bay with its resident sea lion colony. In the afternoon we swim out from the bay and head east along cliff ledges, which are filled with frigate birds and seals.

It's a wonderful way to bring to an end this week of swimming and exploring in the Galapagos Islands. After arriving back at Santa Cruz, we have our final dinner together as a group and reflect on the incredible experience that we've shared in the Galapagos Islands.

## Day 7

For those departing the Galapagos today, there is an early morning transfer to Baltra Airport. As we drive north we climb into the highlands, which offer a lush contrast to the beaches and arid lowlands before descending again to the crossing to Baltra and the airport for the end of our adventure.

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## TRIP GRADING

We have given this trip a 'Moderate' grading. Most swimmers comfortable in the open water will be able to take part and enjoy one of these trips.

The ocean swims on this trip can present challenges but are also extremely rewarding.

### Swimming Distances

This tour varies from trip to trip because of the regulations set by the Galapagos National Park. For conservation reasons, the amount of time we are allowed in the water will sometimes determine our swims rather than what is listed below. Due to the unique nature of this tour and the abundance of wildlife, we will undoubtedly be stopping to look at marine life which may affect the distances swum. As a rough guide, we plan to undertake the following swims:

Swim	Distance	Swim	Distance
Isla Tortuga	3 km	Swim/Snorkel	1 km
Hermano Mayor (Big Brother)	3½ km	Hermanito (Little Brother)	1½ km
Floreana La Loberia to Playa Negra	2 km		
Santa Fe West Coast	2 km	Santa Fe East Coast	3 km
Pinzon Island	2½ km	Pinzon (from Dumb Islet)	2½ km

### Swimming Conditions

The Galapagos Islands is one of the most diversified ecosystems anywhere on Earth. The variety of sea life is staggering, with sea lions, sea turtles, manta rays and penguins to name but a few. Swimming in the Galapagos is an unforgettable experience, however, you need to be aware that certain marine life such as jellyfish, sharks, sea urchins and coral could be present during the swims. All of our swims are carried out under the approval of the Galapagos National Park, who control the areas from where we can operate. In the areas that we swim, there is a long history of snorkeling and swimming, so sea life is used to human interaction. If you suffer from anaphylaxis please consult the office prior to booking.

Due to the nature of the location, and ocean swim conditions, we recommend that swimmers are experienced in open water. If you're unfamiliar with these kinds of conditions, feel free to consult with the office.

### Walking Distances

There are a number of short walks either to explore the islands or to reach the remote swim locations.



## Walking Conditions

The walks on this trip take place on footpaths and unsealed trails, as well as more challenging terrain, such as lava. We advise that appropriate walking shoes are worn for all walks. Please also note that on most days you can opt out of the walks if you wish.

## Temperatures

Month	Water Temperature*	Air Temperature*
January	22-26°C / 72-79°F	22-30°C / 72-86°F
February	23-29°C / 73-84°F	24-30°C / 75-86°F
March	23-30°C / 73-86°F	24-31°C / 75-88°F

\* Please note that these temperatures are indicative and should be used as a guide only.

## Weather Caveat

For safety reasons, we rely on decent weather conditions when carrying out our swims. Consequently, open water swimming holidays require a certain degree of on-trip flexibility which can result in changes to the planned itinerary. These changes often add a touch of uniqueness to your trip and will be communicated to you by your SwimTrek guides as quickly as possible.

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## TRIP INFORMATION

### Group Size

This trip has a maximum group size of 16 people with two swim guides and a boat crew.

### Boat Support

The trip will be split into a maximum of two groups based on speed, each of which will be accompanied by their own safety vessel/escort.

### Extra Activities

Included in the trip itinerary are wildlife watching ashore and during the swims there is time for snorkeling (see Trip Information section for advice on snorkeling equipment).



## Essential Equipment Checklist

For your basic, essential packing list, please visit our [Packing List](#) page on the website. For **additional, location specific** items, please see the table below.

✓	Item	✓	Item
<input type="checkbox"/>	Waterproof Sun Cream and SPF lip balm (Factor 50 or higher or zinc)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Waterproof Camera
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sea Sickness Tablets (if susceptible)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rash Vest and Swim Leggings or Shorts
<input type="checkbox"/>	Personal snorkel and mask		

**Due to the archipelago's location on the equator, the sun can be very strong and we strongly advise that you bring a rash vest and swim leggings or shorts with you.**

We recommend you bring your own snorkel and mask to use during the trip. If you like to explore whilst swimming and do not want to slow the swim down, we suggest using a swim snorkel and nose clip.

SwimTrek will also provide water and electrolytes at every location, and refill your bottles.

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## GETTING THERE

All flights to the Galapagos Islands are from mainland Ecuador, normally starting in **Quito** and then stopping in **Guayaquil Airport** before flying on to the islands. Due to arrival and departure times, it is often necessary to stay overnight in one of these cities during transit. From Quito or Guayaquil, you can catch a flight to Galapagos Islands.

As SwimTrekkers come from all over the world, and join our swimming holidays in numerous destinations, we don't currently offer flights as part of our SwimTrek packages. We do however want to do as much as we can to ensure that our guests get the best deals when travelling to one of our trips so check out our [SwimTrek flight tips](#) page on the website.

### Flights from Quito/Guayaquil to Baltra

Once you arrive in either Quito or Guayaquil, there are several airlines which operate flights to Baltra (Seymour) Airport on Baltra Island (airport code: GPS). Please ensure you arrive in time for the 1300 catamaran transfer from Baltra. These airlines include Avianca and LATAM, who all operate morning flights to Baltra.

It is also worth mentioning that there is a limit for checked luggage on all flights to Baltra, normally 20kg per person.



## ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE INFORMATION

### Arrival Information

The **trip starts at 1200 and the catamaran will leave at 1300 on Day 1** of the trip from Baltra. On arrival you will need to provide the airport staff your passports, the US\$100 entrance fee and the luggage stub you will have received upon your earlier check in for your flight to Baltra. Once you have collected your luggage, please make your way outside the luggage collection area to the lobby where a SwimTrek representative will meet you with a SwimTrek sign. From here you will wait for everyone to come through arrivals then we transfer you to the Itabac Canal. Here you'll board our transfer boat, for the crossing to Isabela Island. Lunch will be provided onboard.

If you are arriving before Day 1 please see the [transfers and additional nights page](#) on our website for more information.

### Departure Information

It is recommended that guests arrive at the airport at least two hours before their flight in order to check in and reach their departure gate in time. With this in mind, we recommend that guests book their outbound flights for 12:30 or later.

If you choose to book an earlier flight, there may be the option to take a taxi directly from our hotel to the airport. Please [transfers and additional nights page](#) on our website for additional information.

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## ACCOMMODATION

Due to the large distances between the islands, we stay at two different hotels during our trip; the Casa de Marita on Isabela Island and the Posada del Mar on Santa Cruz Island.

Our simplistic accommodation allows you to fully immerse yourself in the beauty of the National Park both in and out of the water. Due to the island's commitment to protecting its environment, many of the processes within the hotels are basic, with the staff working hard to meet every guest's needs.

Casa de Marita is situated on a sandy beach near the small town of Puerto Villamil whilst Posada del Mar offers simple, local-style accommodation in the town of Puerto Ayora. Rooms at both hotels are based on twin share with ensuite facilities with a limited number of single occupancies and sea view upgrades available.

### Pre/Post Trip Accommodation and Trip Extension Options

If you require additional nights' accommodation or you would like to book other tours or day trips before or after the SwimTrek tour, please see our [Transfers and additional nights page](#) on our website for additional information

We recommend stopping over in Ecuador before or after your flights to the Galapagos Islands.



Ecuador's capital Quito is a vibrant city with a well-preserved colonial centre.

## **Food and Drink**

All breakfasts and lunches on Days 1 – 6 are included on the trip. Dinner on the first night (Day 1) is included in your package price, but all other dinners are at your own expense giving you a fantastic opportunity to explore and experience the local cafes and restaurants of your choice over the course of your trip. Please note that on occasion fresh fruit and vegetables can be in short supply on the islands and our local partners try to source all produce locally rather than importing from mainland Ecuador.

As a guide, dinners range from \$25-\$35 for set menus or buffets. Soft drinks are \$1-\$2 and beers are \$2-\$4. Please note that some restaurants may not accept payment by credit card so we recommend that you take some cash with you for these occasions.

Due to the quality of the drinking water, we recommend that you only drink bottled water whilst in the Galapagos. You should also use bottled water to brush your teeth. Complimentary water filling stations are available in both hotels.

For more information, please visit our [food and drink](#) page on the website.

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## **TRAVEL ADVICE**

For more information on any of the following sections please visit the [Travel Advice](#) page of our website.

### **Money, Extra Expenses and Tipping**

You should bring extra money with you to cover items such as dinners, entertainment, souvenirs, etc. The local currency is US dollars and cash bills should be in good condition and small denominations as it is often difficult to change \$100 and \$50 bills on the islands. There are ATMs on Santa Cruz Island and at Baltra Airport, however, there are no ATMs on Isabela Island, so we recommend that you withdraw enough cash for your stay there before leaving Baltra on arrival.

All people entering the Galapagos Islands must purchase an INGALA Transit Control Card from the Consejo de Gobierno in Quito or Guayaquil Airport before departing for Galapagos. The price of this card is US\$20 and must be paid in cash at the INGALA window prior to checking in for your flight.

Upon arrival at Baltra Airport, a \$100 Galapagos National Park entrance fee per person must be paid in cash. (Please note that a member of the VIP team will collect this money from you and take care of the payment while you relax in the VIP lounge). This money is used to conserve and restore the land, water, and animal populations, and to educate the human population about conservation efforts throughout the islands. Please note that this fee must be paid before you reach the area of the airport where ATMs are available, so you will need to bring cash with you on your flight.



Isabela Island Entrance Tax is included in our trip price.

In some countries tipping (gratuities) is not part of the culture, in others it has become an expected norm. We believe that tipping is entirely at your discretion. If you have been provided with excellent service, it may be something you wish to do. That said tipping is part of the culture in the Galapagos Islands and an important part of earning a living for local workers. So, your SwimTrek package includes daily tips for your local boat crew and Galapagos Naturalist Guides who will accompany you on all of your swims. All other tips throughout your stay in the Galapagos are at your own discretion. Nothing is expected for your SwimTrek guides, but many groups like to present something to the guides at the end of the trip.

### **Responsible Travel**

SwimTrek is conscious of the importance of protecting the world's natural wonders. We are acutely aware of our responsibility to not only take care of the natural environments which we are lucky enough to explore, but also to educate our guests about the importance of conservation efforts and responsible tourism. It's for this reason that we have worked so closely with our partners to ensure that our trips are conducted in the most responsible and sustainable way possible, working tirelessly to minimise the impact of our presence on local marine life and the natural habitat.

For more information, please visit our [Responsible Travel](#) page on the website.

### **Passports and Visas**

Visitors to Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands require a full passport that should be valid for six months beyond the expected length of stay. Most nationalities, including citizens of the European Union, the US and Canada, do not require a visa to enter Ecuador (unless the expected length of stay is longer than 90 days in one year).

Non-residents of the United States travelling via the US should ensure they leave enough time between connecting flights and meet US visa entry requirements and visit: <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov/esta/>.

Please note that visa regulations are subject to change and we advise that you check your own visa requirements prior to travel.

### **Travel Insurance**

We consider comprehensive travel insurance to be essential, and we strongly recommend that you purchase insurance which includes, but is not limited to, cover for illness, accident, emergency repatriation, ambulance, air ambulance, helicopter rescue services, cancellation, lost luggage and delays. Your travel insurance should also cover you for open water swimming and any other activity listed in your trip itinerary (including races and competitions, where applicable). Please read your policy details carefully and remember to take them with you on your trip for your own reference. For further information, please visit our [Travel Insurance](#) page on the website.



## **Health Information and Recommended Vaccinations**

Here at SwimTrek we pride ourselves on our focus on safety and the well-being of all our guests. As we operate in some beautiful and remote locations medical facilities are not always easily accessible. SwimTrek Guides, and many staff working for our local partners, are first aid trained. However we ask that you read our [Travel Health](#) page to ensure that you are informed about general Travel and Swim Health precautions.

## **Internet Access, Electricity and Travel Plugs**

Given the isolated nature of the Galapagos Islands and the limited local infrastructure, WiFi coverage is generally slow and can be quite unreliable. While both of our hotels have WiFi, it is sometimes only possible to connect in reception or other common areas.

We suggest you purchase a 3G SIM card to use during your stay in the Galapagos. Our partners at Galapagos Alternative will be able to assist you with this in location.

For a useful source of information on the different electrical outlets, electrical plugs, and electric sockets, please visit [worldstandards.eu](http://worldstandards.eu).