The Galapagos Islands

Sponsored by the MSU Alumni Association

April 14-22, 2012

$5,490 PER PERSON (USD, double occupancy), $9,990 per person (USD, single occupancy)

A visit to the Galapagos is an once-in-a-lifetime experience. Imagine swimming alongside a penguin or seal; gazing deep into the eyes of a 120 year old giant Tortoise; and laughing at the awkwardness of a Blue Footed Booby. Without a doubt, the Galapagos Islands are the most well-known and sought after eco-tourism destination in the world. Due to increasing demand and heavy pressure on wildlife by visitors, travel around the islands is extremely restricted and highly monitored. By far, the best and only way to visit the Galapagos is by private yacht and the ship, the Eden, is elegant, spacious, and comfortable; a superior tourist vessel with the best itinerary among all ships in her category. A week onboard this brilliant yacht will take you to the most interesting and photogenic wildlife landing sites, while at the same time allowing exploration of the best of what the underwater world has to offer. And, with less than 16 guests, you are guaranteed an unparalleled experience both on shore and off; no need to worry about competing with hundreds of other passengers trying to get ashore, timed landings, or packed dining rooms. Join MSU Alumna, host and wildlife biologist, Jessica Pociask, for an unforgettable tour of the Galapagos Archipelago with excellent accommodation, delicious food, educational seminars and amazing wildlife.

Accommodation: Private Yacht

Apr 21
Espanola (Hood) Island/Punta Suarez/Gardner Bay/Isolate Gardner/
Islote Osborn

This morning we have a dry landing at Punta Suarez, Espanola, where we witness the highest rate of endemic species in Galapagos. Sea lions noisily greet us as we land on their beach. Cuppuldfish and schools of red and green colorings. Colorful Sally Light-footed crabs crawl along the shoreline near to the famous “blow hole”. During lunch, we motor to the other side of the Island. On our last afternoon in Galapagos, we have a wet landing on Gardner Bay. Walk along seemingly endless stretches of this white sandy beach where we’ll find large colonies of sea lions. Gardner bay is the place where you can have time alone to reflect, take a long swim, snorkel, or stretch out on the sand as a snooze. Sea Turtles nest on this beach and sea lions conduct helpful snooze workshops as part of their compelling “Live like a Sea Lion” programs. We may find a Galapagos hawk, Darwin’s finches or Hood mockingbird. The choice is yours this afternoon; swim with sea lions from the beach or just relax on yourLast glorious day in Galapagos. There’s an excellent snorkeling spot off Gardner Islet with a colorful diversity of sea life near Tortuga Rock in caves covered with invertebrates. This evening we’ll enjoy a wonderful Farewell Dinner on board.

Accommodation: Private Yacht

Apr 22
San Cristobal Leon Dormido (Chatham)/Interpretation Center/Quito/homebound

Located some 5 kilometers offshore, Leon Dormido is a huge monolith that split apart creating a narrow passage that only the most skilful yacht captains can negotiate. Blue Footed Boobies and Magnificent Frigate birds nest along the lodes, and once through the passage, we’ll explore this unique area by panga. Afterwards, we drop anchor in Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, San Cristobal and visit the Interpretation Center to gain a complete understanding of the natural and human history of the Islands. Time allowing, we may spend a short time in town before heading to the airport for our flight back to the mainland. Following our arrival at Quito International Airport, we will pick up our luggage and check in for our international flights home-bound. Or, in case you are participating in the exciting Ecuador mainland program, you will be transferred to Hotel Quito for a Welcome Dinner and Orientation. While this ends of our fantastic Galapagos experience, our memories will live on forever! Have a safe trip home!

Company Owner and Wildlife Biologist
Jessica Pociask has been to over 50 countries guiding a multitude of trips. Some of the highlights include a successful expedition to the Tien Shan Mountains of Kyrgyzstan to find snow leopards, reaching the Baika Pygmies in the Central African Republic, swimming with sea lions in the Galapagos, trekking gorillas in Central Africa and Uganda, and visiting with Bedouin tribes in Jordan. She holds a B.S. ’07 from the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources from Michigan State University, and is in the process of completing her master’s in environmental management at Duke University. Dedicated to conservation, she has worked extensively with The Nature Conservancy as a crew chief leader on wetland and fem restoration projects in Michigan, and on sustainable development initiatives and climate change studies in conjunction with MSU in Mexico and Antarctica.

Ecuador Mountains and Rainforests Extension

$2,975 per person (USD, double occupancy)
$3,375 per person (USD, single occupancy)

An Ecuador Mountain and rainforest extension post-expedition option is also available April 22-28, 2012. Ecuador has an amazing status among all the countries of the world: it contains the highest number of vertebrate species per square kilometer. Due to the high diversity of different habitats within a small land area, and the year-round stable tropical climate, we find an unbelievable array of fantastic species in Ecuador. A large portion of all the birds, many mammals, and nearly one fifth of the reptile, amphibian and fish species are unique to this area. For more information, contact WANT Expeditions at (231) 620-9268.

For more information and to sign up for the tour, call (231) 620-9268 or go to: http://wantexpeditions.com.
Apr 14 Quito
Our exciting expedition to the wildlife paradise of the Galapagos Islands starts in Quito, the capital city of Ecuador. Nesting high up in the Andes, this is a perfect place for us to arrive, rest and acclimate after our long international flights; then assemble in our comfortable city hotel for an introduction and our Welcome Dinner. Whichever time you arrive to Quito, you will be greeted at the airport and transferred to our hotel. After you are settled in your room, you are free for to explore the city at your leisure. Our official trip will begin with a Welcome Dinner and a discussion of the coming week. After dinner, we will head straight to bed (if you prefer) to conserve energy for the exciting adventures awaiting us! Accommodation: Hotel Quito

Apr 15 Baltra/Bachas Beach
Our day will start with a very early with breakfast at the hotel. We will then gather in the main lobby and depart to Quito airport for our domestic flight to Baltra; the starting point of our visit to the Galapagos Islands! After landing on Baltra Island, we will be greeted by our Galapagos National Park guide. Then its only a 10 minute bus transfer down to the wharf to our yacht. Once on board, we will receive an orientation and safety drill. (During the orientation, our National Park guide will go over the Galapagos National Park rules which request, among others, that you do not disturb or remove anything (not even a rock or shell), do not touch or feed the animals, do not leave any litter and to stay on the marked trails. Show a sense of the primordial, the beginnings of the planet, as gracefully around them. This is an amazing place to get a sense of the patrimonial, the beginnings of the planet, as we wander around on this primitive flow. Occasionally, a colorful Galapagos Grackleshopper (actually a locust) flies just ahead of us, over the flow. You may wonder how it makes a living out in this austere environment! Accommodation: Private Yacht

Apr 16 Genovesa (Tower) Island
- We spend the entire day on Tower (Genovesa), considered to be one of the most spectacular Islands in Galapagos for bird species. This morning, we have a wet-landing on Darwin Bay, a coral sand beach where swallow-tailed and lava gulls gather near the tide pools. Enter a forest of Opuntia cactus and mangroves where colonies of frigate birds nest. The males inflate their red-throated pouches to attract females as they fly overhead. The trail leads through a rich inter-tidal zone where we find a wide diversity of wildlife. After the walk, we can swim from the beach with sea lions in these northern warmer waters. This afternoon, we have a dry landing at Prince Philip’s Steps. Red-footed Boobies nest here in Palo Santo trees and Nazca Boobies nest near the trail. In an open lava field, we find storm petrels in large numbers. If you are lucky, we will see the elusive short-eared owl. Look for the beautiful red-tailed tropic bird usually found in the crevices. We depart this evening to motor back south during the briefing followed by dinner.
Accommodation: Private Yacht

Apr 17 Bartolome/Sullivan Bay -Santiago (At “Pinnacle”) Island
On Bartolome, it seems like we are walking on the moon. This young Island is inestible to most plants and animals. Not surprisingly, the name of the two living organisms we hope most to see are the lava cactus and lava lizard. After a dry landing, we have a gradual climb, up steps, that lead to the summit of a once active volcano. Along the way, we pause to marvel at lava bombs, spatter cones and cinder cones. From the top of the wooden viewpoint, we can gaze out across the island for a panoramic view of the island and “Pinnacle Rock”, an eroded tuff cone. We’ll also be able to see the most recent lava flows on the nearby Islands. Then on the way down, the crystal clear water is an invitation to snorkel from the beach or Zodiac with schools of tropical fish and Galapagos penguins playing around us. In the afternoon, at Sullivan Bay, just across a narrow channel from Bartholomew, on the eastern end of Santiago, we will walk on recent, black pahoehoe lava flows. Here we will see some of the colonizing plants—mohiagui and brachycomes struggling to gain a foothold in tiny cracks in the lava. Small cinder cones stand out where this black blanket flowed gracefully around them. This is an amazing place to get a sense of the patrimonial, the beginnings of the planet, as we see footed Boobies nest here in Palo Santo trees and Opuntia cacti. Vegetation in this area includes the unique Palo Santo trees and Opuntia cacti. Accommodation: Private Yacht

Apr 18 Daphne Island/Caleta Tortuga Negra/Cerro Dragon
Although we don’t have a physical landing this morning, a very special experience for WANT guests is in store! This morning we explore Daphne Major. The two tiny lava tuff cones are located just off Santa Cruz, near Baltra. Visits to Daphne Major are tightly restricted, limited to one party of no more than eight persons per day, and each yacht may make but one visit per month. Finches, Blue-footed Boobies, and Red-billed Tropicbirds nest in the crater, and Nazca Boobies and Frigate birds nest on the flanks. And sometimes, as in this case, the best way of viewing the wildlife is by panga, rather than by foot. From Daphne, we move on to explore Calera Tortuga on the north side of the island. As we are poled quietly along in our panga, we’ll keep our eyes out for Spotted Eagle and Golden rays gracefully swimming in formation just below the surface of the still water. We might also see small sharks and sea turtles moving slowly through these shallow waters and observe several species of herons, (Lava, Great Blue, Yellow-crowned Night) standing in the tangle of red mangrove roots, poised to spear small, unwary fish. A beautiful and memorable experience that reminds you why its so important to support the conservation and protection of such special places in the world. After our exclusive Galapagos access this morning, we reposition to visit the north-western Santa Cruz Island, where the visitor’s site at Dragon Hill is located. A dry-landing, Dragon Hill, consists of a trail that runs through three different environments at just 1,600 m long. Cerro Dragon, along the northwest coast of Santa Cruz Island, contains two lagoons where we’re sure to see flamingos and land iguanas. Vegetation in this area includes the unique Palo Santo trees and Opuntia cacti. Accommodation: Private Yacht

Apr 19 Charles Darwin Research Station and the Highlands of Santa Cruz (Indefatigable)
Santa Cruz Island is home to one of the most iconic animals of the Galapagos; the giant tortoise, and this morning we will get the opportunity to learn about the conservation/research efforts on the island with a visit to the Charles Darwin Research Station and Galapagos National Park Headquarters. Scientists from all over the globe work at the station and conduct biological research from anatomy to zoology. We visit the Santa Cruz Highlands where there are exhibits and a short video presentation on conservation, then head back outside to see three tortoise coals and the breeding center with new hatchlings and adorable miniature tortoises not yet ready to be reared. The last part of the center includes an opportunity to see the pen of Lonesome George, the last surviving member of the Pinta Island subspecies. Efforts have been made to pair him with other females, but without viable reproductive success. Once you have your fill of the center, we can stroll back to our ship through the town of Puerto Ayora (population: 25,000), and the largest town in the Galapagos. Here is a great chance to buy souvenirs, samples of local handicrafts, or look back on an intimate social in the heart of the Islands. Back on our ship for lunch, we’ll head off for an up-close and personal encounter to see the Giant Tortoise in its natural habitat, in the highlands of Santa Cruz. The scenery gradually changes as we wind our way through all seven vegetation zones found in Galapagos. Here, we visit the tortoise reserve at one of the private farms in the highlands where we encounter giant tortoises in their natural habitat. We visit Los Gemelos, Spanish for “The Twins”, a pair of large pit craters where we may spot the bright red male vermilion flycatcher. Then we stop at “The Tunnels”, the largest lava tubes found in Galapagos, before making our way back to the ship. Accommodation: Private Yacht

Apr 20 Floreana (Santa Maria)/Post Office/Baronesa/Punta Cormorant/Devil’s Crown
Our entire day today is dedicated to exploring Floreana Island; one of the most spectacular islands of the Galapagos archipelago! This morning starts with a visit the legendary Post Office Bay and Black Beach, where the Wittmer family still resides (wet landing). Here we’ll learn about the intriguing and notorious human history of the Galapagos, that is just as exciting as its wildlife! Post Office Bay is historically the location of a wooden barrel, which was the center of communication in 18th century by the crew of a whaling ship. Since then, whalers, yachtsmen and tourists have used it as a post-office. If you find a letter or postcard in the box that is addressed to someone living near your next destination, take it with you and continue an ancient tradition of mail delivery on land. After we’ve “picked up” or dropped off your mail, we’ll enjoy the rest of the morning with a relaxing panga ride to explore more of the islands. In the afternoon, we head ashore to Punta Cormorant on the north coast of the island (wet landing). This landing is a great opportunity for us to observe green turtles on the beach or stingrays in the shallow waters. Just behind the beach, in a large lagoon, flamingos sift the sediment of the salty water in a constant search for food. Not to be outdone by the example of natural beauty surrounding us, we will see the Devil’s Crown; a natural phenomenon where an inactive