

SANTA CRUZ & DAPHNE MAJOR

Wednesday, December 14th, 2022

Sunrise: 0547; High tide: 0617, 5.1 ft. / 1.7 m Sunset: 1758; Low tide: 1232 1.8 ft. / 0.6 m

Today we awake once again off Santa Cruz Island, this time alongside the pristine, arid northwestern coast. Our destination is “Cerro Dragon”, which quite literally translates as “Dragon Hill”, as it has historically been the home of the famed, endemic Galapagos land iguanas. This particular population was almost wiped out by feral dogs in the sixties; however, a hugely successful captive and semi-captive breeding program run by the CDF and GNPS has allowed the population to recover and we are now privileged to be able to see these magnificent reptiles in the wild once more.

This visitor site is also home to beaches of white sand, forests of giant prickly pear cacti and incense trees and a small lagoon that is a favorite with shore birds. We will disembark and make a dry landing on an uneven, rocky spit of land, and set off on a relatively arduous trail. The walk itself is a loop trail about 1¾ mile/2.8 km in length, over often difficult, rocky and rugged terrain, but it is a beautiful walk with much to see. As an option, those wishing to take a more relaxed and shorter walk this morning will disembark later.

After the walk, we return to the ship to quickly change into swim and snorkel gear. You may go for an adventurous deep-water snorkel trip to the offshore Guy Fawkes Islets, where you will swim along spectacular, invertebrate-covered cliffs.

We will spend the afternoon visiting Borrero Bay, located on the northern side of Santa Cruz Island. We will explore the bay by kayak/paddle boards or by taking Zodiac rides. We will eventually sail to the famous Daphne Major Islet, to circumnavigate it during sunset. In the seventies, this islet was chosen as a natural laboratory to study the ecology of Darwin’s finches by a couple of British scientists named Peter and Rosemary Grant (Princeton University). Their studies here continue to this day, and the observations they have made during this time have revolutionized the way we understand natural selection and how evolution occurs.

Their story was re-told in the Pulitzer Prize-winning book entitled “The Beak of the Finch”. We shall enjoy the navigation on the foredeck as we circumnavigate this famous islet with narration by your Expedition Leader.

SANTA CRUZ & DAPHNE, Wednesday's Schedule

- 0615-0645** Join our Wellness Specialist on the sky deck for stretching
- 0600- 0730** Breakfast is served.
- 0630** Disembarkation to visit Cerro Dragon (dry landing on rocks - wear good walking shoes) For **Photo Emphasis** Groups (You might stay on the Island for four hours). **Set your alarm.**
- 0730** Disembarkation to visit Cerro Dragon (dry landing on rocks - wear good walking shoes) For **Natural History Emphasis** Groups.
- 0745** Disembarkation for Very Short hike (**avoiding not all but most of the rocky trail**) with Zodiac ride if conditions allow.
- 1015-1030** Exchange snorkeling gear at the sun deck.
- ~1030** Disembarkation for deep water snorkeling.
- ~1045** Disembarkation for snorkeling/swimming from the beach or sunbathing/relaxing.
- 1230** Special Ecuadorian is served in the Dining Room.
- 1330** Join National Geographic Photographer Jonathan Kingston for his presentation: "On Assignment Searching for the Lost Ships of Hernan Cortes".
- 1430** **Zodiac driving lessons for Global Explorers!** And **First Paddle Board outing**
- 1515** Exploration of Borrero Bay by **kayaks** and **Second outing of paddleboards**
- 1530** Zodiac rides depart from the ship to explore the coast of Borrero Bay
- ~ 1700** All aboard
- ~ 1730** Join us on the observation desk, as we circumnavigate Daphne Major Islet. **Wine-tasting event!**
- 1900** Cocktail hour, recaps and briefing about tomorrow's activities
- 1930** Dinner is served in the dining room. **[Pizza Movie Night for Global Explorers, in the lounge.](#)**

Nat Geo Global Explorer Ideas for today (write it all in your field notebook!):

1. Out in the Field:

- Spot it: A bird with yellow feathers, an islet with an English name, a fish without bones, a creature that looks like a dragon, a plant with yellow flowers.

2. Aboard Ship: Watch a great sunset and fill in pages 52 and 53.