

February 21, 2014. After spending the night at the O'Hare Hilton, we spent a full day of flying, first to Miami, then on to Guayaquil, with a nice Cuban lunch at the Miami airport. We arrived in Guayaquil about 8:15pm, and we were happy that we were met by the representative of Lindblad/National Geographic. We had arrived a day before the official tour arrival date, and they sent us off on the Hilton shuttle bus. We settled into our room.

February 22, 2014 Guayaquil. After breakfast, with our Chicago friends Dan Cherry and Ellen McClure, who were also on the trip, we took an official "safe" taxi from the hotel to the Parque de Las Iguanas. It was very exciting to see land iguanas in the park, along with a few fish in ponds and some turtles. The iguanas are different from the ones that we would see in the Galapagos, and very entertaining. They were perched on tree branches up to 20 or so feet above the ground, and scurried up and down the tree trunks.

Across the street from the Parque de Las Iguanas is the Metropolitan Cathedral of Guayaquil, the current neo-Gothic building was built between 1924 and 1937. It is extremely well-kept, with lots of stained glass windows. There is an emphasis on South American saints in the paintings and glass in the cathedral.

From there, we walked to the Guayas River and along the Malecón, a park-like walkway along the river, to the Museo Antropológico y de Arte Contemporáneo. Our first view of the river gave us our first view of "evolution in action," floating clumps of water lilies and other plants drifting down the river to the Pacific Ocean. (It is believed that small animals, particularly iguanas and turtles, drifted on clumps of plants out into the Pacific and were caught up by the Humboldt current and swept out to the Galapagos, where they landed and evolved into the current species. Our naturalists on the ship said that they have seen islands holding entire trees floating along in the current.) The Malecón has sculpture, children's play areas, and The Malecón Botanic Gardens, so was a very pretty walk to the museum.

The Museo Antropológico y de Arte Contemporáneo is a pretty, modern building, opened in 2004, which has rooms of modern art as well as a large collection of pre-Columbian, Latin American and local Ecuadorian art and artifacts (they have 50,000 native Ecuadorian archaeological pieces, but of course only a small percent on display) that covers thousands of years. The descriptions were in Spanish only and the cases were backlit, so it was hard to see details of the individual artifacts. And almost impossible to take photos.

From the museum, we walked back into the town to The Mercado Artesanal. The people running the stalls did not have much English, but they were very friendly and happy to show off their crafts. There were almost no tourists, so it was easy to move up and down the aisles, and it was very clean. Maybe because of the difficult Chicago winter I was really taken by the things woven from alpaca.

At 2:30 we walked back to the Parque de Las Iguanas to a nearby restaurant that had been recommended, La Canoa (opened in 1974), and had really great Ceviche that was accompanied by popcorn (this is standard in Ecuador) and plantain chips. After lunch, we walked across a small alley to the Hotel Continental and requested a safe taxi back to our hotel. We spent some time getting organized (including packing away our winter coats and some alpaca gifts into a spare suitcase that we had brought along to leave at the Hilton while we were off on the ship.)

February 23, 2014 Baltra and North Seymour. Up early, luggage out for the hotel staff to take down to the bus, and then down for a wonderful breakfast before being bused to the airport. The tour people got us through the right security lines, and to the gate, then told us when it was time to board. When we got to "immigration" at Baltra, it was a madhouse because they handed out the entry forms about 10 feet from the desk rather than earlier on the plane!! So everyone stood around using every available space filling out the cards. When we got through, they had a really nice lounge for us with juice and chips waiting. And then they put us all on a bus and took us to the dock where the Zodiacs (rigid inflatable boats) picked us up to take us to the ship.

On the dock, two sea lions were taking a nap under the benches. Some Sally Lightfoot crabs were crawling around by the edge of the water, a sea lion was on a Zodiac that was tied up to a small boat a few feet away. Two pelicans were just standing there. Several marine iguanas were walking around on the rocks, and frigate birds were occasionally flying overhead. We were really excited!! We had never been on a Zodiac before, so I was a little nervous, but they were extremely stable.

The trip from the dock to the ship took about 10 minutes, and once onboard the ship, we had a couple of minutes in our cabin before an introduction to the processes, facilities, etc. and then a drill where the captain decided that we would do the "abandon ship" drill. We put on life vests, went to a meeting place, then went to the area where we would go if we had to abandon ship. While all this was going on, they took the luggage to the cabins and we had just started unloading them when lunch was announced. It was a very nice lunch, with lots of salads, vegetables, an asparagus soup, some desserts. Breakfast and lunch were buffet and dinner was "served" most nights. We were really impressed by the ship and the crew. There were over 30 crew members all together and 47 passengers. The other passengers were interesting. Two couples (about our age) were on their honeymoons.

After lunch, Steve bought an internet card, and we unpacked and reorganized. The cabin was on the small side, so we had to figure out where to put some of our stuff. There was only a tiny shelf in the bathroom, for example. At 3pm we had a briefing about Zodiac safety, use of our life vests, and behavior on the islands and in the National Park. For example, no one can be in the National Park without a certified naturalist (this includes in the water). Fortunately, our group was really eco-friendly and responsible. And then we had a briefing about our hike that day on North Seymour island. These briefings were very useful, telling us the difficulty level of the outing, giving us choices for the hike, and telling us what we would see (animals and landscapes).

At 4, we got into the Zodiacs. There were 4 Zodiacs of about 12 people each, and on North Seymour we split into 3 groups, each with a naturalist. When we got out of the Zodiac on North Seymour, we were immediately overawed by the wildlife. There were pelicans, blue footed boobies, land iguanas, frigate birds, lots of gulls, and Sally Lightfoot crabs...also black crabs that I thought were called lava crabs, but one naturalist told us were baby Sally Lightfoot...another said they were lava crabs. We all took pictures like crazy. We started walking along a 2-mile established path, but it was really over rocks that were sometimes 12 to 18-inches high. We had to watch where we were walking and the birds and iguanas and the flying birds and the sea lions, all at the same time.

The sea lions were amazing; there would be one adult with a bunch of babies. The mothers were out gathering food (later, we saw babies in groups with no mother watching them). Some of the babies wanted their mothers (or their food) and were voicing their discontent. Others were just playing with each other. The pelicans were mostly sunning themselves and occasionally diving for food. The blue footed boobies and the frigate birds were both in mating season, so we got to see the dance that the blue footed boobies do, and also the red swelling throat pouch and courtship of the frigate birds. It is really incredible to see all this, after having read about it! There were also land iguanas, some really large, but only a few along the trail. We also had a Galapagos dove, and most of the group saw a Galapagos snake, but I didn't see it. No turtles yet.

The trail that we were on was a 1.2 mile loop, a rocky stretch followed by pretty easy walking. Except that we were too busy watching wildlife to watch where we were walking. North Seymour is fairly small, 0.73 sq. mi, and only 92 ft. high at its maximum, created by seismic uplift rather than volcanic action. It has a lot of Palo Santo trees, mostly with very few leaves, because the iguanas were eating all the leaves in sight, and cacti. The ground and rock were mostly red from iron traces.

Back on board the ship, the captain gave us a welcome reception, followed by dinner. We set out for Bartolomé and Rabida Islands.

Monday, February 24, 2014 Bartolomé and Rabida I woke up at 4:30am and didn't really go back to sleep (this was mostly excitement!). We finally got up about 5:30, so were up in the lounge by about 6:10 and had some very nice sweet apple bread, before going to Bartolomé Island to hike. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bartolom%C3%A9\\_Island](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bartolom%C3%A9_Island)

Bartolomé is one of the younger volcanic islands, just off the east coast of Santiago Island (the volcano is now extinct). It has red, orange, green, and black volcanic formations. The most impressive formation is Pinnacle Rock, which stands alone next to cinder cones.

It's an incredible volcanic landscape, with lots of remains of cinder cones, and beautiful views. Even at that hour, it was hot (which is why we went so early) but well worth it. As we got off the Zodiac there was the most adorable tiny baby sea lion greeting us. Unfortunately, my camera lens was fogged, so I got a very blurry photo. There were also Sally Lightfoot crabs. (This was a dry landing! There are three ways we have gone off the Zodiac. The easiest is a dry landing, where we can step onto a rock or something directly out of the Zodiac, so don't get our feet wet. You carry (backpack, cameras, etc.) or hand stuff to the guide (walking sticks. etc.) and then do a wrist-to-wrist with two people as you step out of the Zodiac. With the wet landing, we either swung our legs over the sides of the Zodiac and stepped into a foot or two of water and walked to the beach and then changed into hiking shoes for a hike. Or we went straight off the side of the Zodiac into deep water for a snorkel.)

After the hike to the summit (109 feet) of the island (399 steps)...with a stunning view, we came back to the ship and got back just in time for the "real" breakfast. Lots of different kinds of eggs and fruit and breads and cheeses. Then we got our snorkel equipment, bags and flippers, and headed back to Bartolomé for snorkeling, this time from the beach. We could see the tracks that turtles had made down the beach from their nests, but fortunately we were not allowed into the nesting area (I would have been really upset if we had been!!). As we got into the water, a penguin and a sea lion swam

by, and then in the water we saw another penguin swimming (fast!), two sharks, and lots of little fish. From the water we could see 3 sea lions, 3 blue-footed boobies and some pelicans that were all on land. We got back on board just in time for lunch, which was a huge Ecuadorian buffet (I think the best meal of the trip). Lots of really fresh vegetables and salads, and one of the desserts was a sorbet that was made from local berries. One of the amazing breads was a cassava bread, which looked like a lump about an inch and a half in diameter. When I broke it open, it was almost all air inside, but they had put some cheese inside, just a little, so it melted in your mouth.

During lunch we sailed to Rabida. Rabida used to have a colony of flamingos, but a few years ago, high waves swamped their pond with salt water, so they moved to other islands. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R%C3%A1bida\\_Island](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R%C3%A1bida_Island)

After lunch, we snorkeled from the Zodiacs off Rabida, a new experience, though not much different from snorkeling off a boat. We did a drift along a rocky wall of the shore, and there were pelicans every now and then on the rocks, and some pretty fish in the water. We had to come in because we came into a bunch of jellies that were stinging. We have light body suits, so were pretty much ok except our hands and my mouth. We came back to the ship, threw on our hiking clothes, and went back to walk along the beach, which was great. There were sea lions (3 adults and 3 babies) playing, more pelicans, a couple of Sally Lightfoot crabs, and some mockingbirds. The difference in the mockingbirds from island to island is actually how Darwin got the idea of evolution (not from finches, since he forgot to note which islands “his” finches came from). The beach is very red, from the high level of iron oxide. As our Zodiac was pulling out to take us back to the ship, there was a penguin on a rock, near a heron. The Zodiac was bouncing up and down, so my photos were mostly streaks.

After dinner, a National Geographic photographer gave a talk about photography.

February 25, 2014 Isabella and Fernandina. We were up at 6am and went out on deck to watch for sea life. We saw pods of dolphins, the first one probably 200 or so. There were 3 rays, but they were pretty far away so we could just see the flashes of light on them. It was totally exciting. We only saw whales briefly, at two points later in the trip. We crossed the equator for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time (we were asleep the first two times), to much fanfare. We were allowed to go on the bridge and take a photo of the GPS displaying all the zeros for latitude. Then we went under some ribbons that were in the Ecuadorian flag colors, sort of limbo-like, and were given a pin that marks the occasion. After another large breakfast, we did a Zodiac cruise at Punta Vicente Roca, which is at the southern end of the caldera of a shield volcano. The edge has collapsed into the ocean, so we were “inside” the caldera. We were in the zodiac with the Expedition Leader, who is really really good. She let us do an official turtle count in the cove (which is part of Isabela Island), and we found what might be a record, 107 in a very small area. We also saw a manta ray, some little rays, a puffer fish relative that we had never heard of, lots of sea lions, pelicans, and a penguin. Totally awesome. After the zodiac cruise we went back to the same cove and snorkeled with the turtles and penguins.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isabela\\_Island\\_\(Gal%C3%A1pagos\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isabela_Island_(Gal%C3%A1pagos))

The ship sailed to Fernandina while we ate lunch and took a nap. Fernandina is one of the most active volcanos in the world, and the world's largest pristine island. The volcano rises to 5000 ft. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fernandina\\_Island](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fernandina_Island)

We hiked on Punta Espinoza, which is black lava and the flow is really interesting, with lots of buckling in the rock, etc. We were astonished by the number of marine iguanas, lying around in heaps on top of each other, resting and getting heat from the lava. Because they are reptiles they get really cold swimming, and then need the heat from the lava rocks to warm back up again. They have a special gland that helps them clear the salt from the salt water out of their digestive system (so they don't overdose on salt), and they spit out the salt occasionally. We knew this, but it was still totally awesome to actually see them spit (much like a sneeze). There were also sea lion babies playing together while their mothers were out gathering food, and lots of Sally Lightfoot crabs, which were especially pretty against the lava. There were several flightless cormorants and of course pelicans. It started to rain on us before we were finished with the walk, so we were a little damp when we got back to the ship.

February 26, 2014 Urbina Bay and Tagus Cove, Isabela. Isabela is the largest of the Galapagos Islands and shaped like a seahorse. It was created by the fusion of 6 huge shield volcanos. We "docked" at several points on Isabela during the trip, and they were very different from each other. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isabela\\_Island,\\_Ecuador](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isabela_Island,_Ecuador)

Our 2-mile hike in the morning in Urbina Bay was in an area that experienced a huge uplift in 1954. Almost half a square mile of the marine area uplifted almost instantaneously, by as much as 16 feet. We did the two miles in about 2 hours because we kept stopping and looking at things. And taking photos. One area was a difficult scramble over large lava boulders, and I was glad that we had walking sticks. There was a penguin in the water when we got out of the Zodiac, and some Sally Lightfoot crabs. We saw several hermit crabs, which were really cute. At the end of the hike there was a lot of coral that had been displaced. We were first in an area of black lava and some low trees, and we saw tortoise after tortoise!!! Three were walking toward us on the trail, one was eating in a field, and 3 were back in the shrubbery resting! It was so awesome! There were lots of birds, of course, and a few land iguanas. The last part of the trail was on a very rocky area and of course by that time, it was really hot, so we were really glad to get back to the ship for a shower. But of course we would have been happy tortoise watching all day!

We set sail for Tagus Cove during lunch, and after a rest, set out on the Zodiacs for a for a deep water snorkel and later for a hike. On the snorkel, we saw lots of sea stars (I would have called them starfish) and urchins of different colors, sea lions, and penguins! On our hike, we lucked out and got the Director as our naturalist, who is very knowledgeable about the plants and was happy to point them out to us and explain things. When we got a short distance up the hike we could see back to the cove, a little further brought us to a sludgy lake (looking down on it from above...we had gained a lot of altitude by this time), and when we got to the top, we could see a huge sweep of lava flow down to the ocean in one direction and forest in the other. It started to drizzle so we put away camera gear and headed back down to shower and rest up a few minutes.

Our leader gave the day's recap and told us what to expect tomorrow, then gave a talk about her own research, about 1989, for her PhD. She had spent 18 months, mostly by herself, studying the giant tortoises. It was really interesting though sounded pretty boring work (she would chose a random turtle and write down every minute what it was doing. She said her entries were things like "Eating. Eating. Eating...." and "sleeping, sleeping, sleeping..." While she was doing her research the volcano on an

island 20 miles away had a huge eruption. And she showed us later photos of her then-baby daughter (who is now a biologist) with the tortoises.

After dinner we sailed back around the top of Isabela, crossing the equator twice more in the middle of the night. While we were sailing, we went up on the top deck to see if we could see anything in the dark, but we really couldn't. We went to the back deck and were enchanted when we realized that we were seeing bioluminescence in the wake of the ship, that we saw as occasional flashes of light. We started watching for them. Some were bright and moved along the wake of the ship. Others just flashed out and were gone. As in Apollo 13, it was the plankton being stirred up by our wake!

I meant to mention the water temperature. Our first two snorkel trips were in water that was around 82 degrees. We wore our body suits and that was fine, protecting us from the sun (so we didn't have to use as much sunscreen) and from the jellies. (The jellies that we encountered were the little tiny blobs, maybe a centimeter in diameter. The stinging ones seemed to be the ones that had a "stem" about an inch long, with the blobs on the stem, usually four of them. I have been told in the past that these are actually eggs, but I'm not sure I believe that. The third and fourth snorkel trips were really cold, 73 degrees for the third, and they claimed 76 degrees for the fourth, but it felt even colder than the first when we went in. They provided short wetsuits that we wore over our thin body suits, and I wore socks under the flippers. It was incredibly cold when we first went in, and a lot of people thought they would have to get out again, but only a few really did. After a little bit you get used to it and the wetsuits really helped.

We were really impressed by how green-minded Lindblad-National Geographic are. All of the products in the bathroom were biodegradable, natural, toxic free...shampoo, body wash, soap, even the conditioner and toilet paper. Instead of trusting us to separate out our recyclables, they go through our trash and sort them out. They give the paper to local artists who make jewelry and so forth with it, and the glass goes to local artists who make drinking glasses and so forth for sale, and I've forgotten what they do with the plastic, but something similar. They have programs for training the locals for this kind of thing, plus recycling, etc.

February 27, 2014 Espumilla Beach, Buccaneer's Cove, and Puerto Egas, Santiago  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santiago\\_Island\\_\(Gal%C3%A1pagos\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santiago_Island_(Gal%C3%A1pagos))

We got to Santiago sometime before 6am...that's when we woke up, and we were already anchored. We got up and got dressed for the first hike on Espumilla Beach, before breakfast, but got the announcement that it was pouring rain, so the hike would be postponed. We were actually relieved, because we've been doing every activity slot, and it is tiring stuff! So we sat around and talked with people and took photos, and then it stopped raining. The hike that was scheduled was along a beach then up a volcanic outcropping, but once it stopped raining they took people over to the beach who wanted to do that walk. We decided not to do it and just rested and got ourselves organized. The snorkeling in Buccaneer's Cove was along a rocky edge of the island, and mostly deep water which didn't have much visibility, but we were able to see whitetip sharks, lots of fish, a sea lion, and lots of rocks. One of the things I had never seen before was a school of trunk fish, all different colors. I had only seen the grey ones, and alone. The water temperature was 83, so we were able to go in just in our body suits, which I find much easier.



After the snorkel, we had a nice lunch and then rested before a talk about Darwin. The next activity was a walk on Puerto Egas which was postponed until 4pm because it was so hot. It was really great. We walked along a very rough black lava "beach". There were lots of interesting formations, including circular holes in the lava. A lot of them had been formed by the hot lava hitting the sea water during the eruption. There were a lot of Sally Lightfoot crabs, some beautiful heron, and our first "fur" sea lions. They are so beautiful, and I was instantly reminded of a furry St. Bernard!! I was really happy that I discovered the first one, by itself in a place that they are not usually hanging out!! I also found a couple of birds that other people hadn't seen. Fortunately it had cooled off a little. There was some cloud cover and thunder. We clambered out to a point over the lava rock, so we were all pretty happy that on the way back we were able to take a smooth, inland trail...but of course we had needed to do the lava rock to get the animals and the scenery. We got back to the ship just before dark, and didn't get rained on.

After dinner, one of the guides did a "star show" on the deck in front of the bridge and used a laser pointer to point out different stars. The Southern Cross was behind a hill, so we couldn't see it, and the other constellations we pretty much knew. But it was nice to be able to see the stars. After the "star show" we sailed for Santa Cruz.

February 28, 2014. Santa Cruz. We arrived in the harbor of Santa Cruz about 6:15 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santa\\_Cruz\\_Island\\_\(Gal%C3%A1pagos\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santa_Cruz_Island_(Gal%C3%A1pagos)) . After breakfast we took the Zodiac into the town of Puerto Ayora and walked to the Darwin Research Center. They have a few giant tortoises that they are protecting, but most of the work is to repopulate other islands with tortoises so that they will regain their previous strength. The breeding program is strong, and we were able to see "babies" that are probably 2 years old and some that are 5 years old, which is the earliest they can be released back into the wild. The babies are kept in areas with lots of room, but surrounded by very high wire with barbed wire on top to keep people from stealing them!! There were a few iguanas, as well. While we were watching the little tortoises, two of them were on their backs, kicking their little legs in the air. I asked the guide if they were going to be able to get themselves back on their feet and they said sure. I watched, and one pushed itself back against a rock and kept pushing with the feet that were on the ground and suddenly popped right-side-up. It was using a tool. Granted it didn't create the tool, but it used the tool. After looking at the animals, we walked back into town and met the group at a "diner" called the Rock Café (not Hard, apparently) where we were given a juice that tasted like an interesting lemonade.

Buses picked us up and took us to a coffee plantation in the highlands that seemed to grow lots of things besides coffee. We saw sugar cane, banana groves, and other plants. The highlands on Santa Cruz are interesting, with a lot of lush vegetation (mostly introduced species). They had us taste little cubes of the sugar, chew a roasted coffee bean, and offered us coffee and juice. One of the cutest things was two chickens with broods of about 10 little chicks each. The farmer fed them while we were there, and the chicks were pecking around the mother, and the mother was eating anything the babies missed.

We then went to lunch at a restaurant nearby, and sat on a wooden balcony looking down into a nicely vegetated ravine. There was a corrugated iron roof overhead, which was a good thing, because it poured rain the whole time we were there. A very

famous photographer, Tui de Roy, who is a good friend of our activities director, was there with her books. We had read two of them before the trip, and her photographs are really great. It was really wonderful to be able to tell her that we are fans!

After lunch we went to a reserve for tortoises, and saw about 15. One of the tortoises had pulled down some bananas that had been hung from a tree and started eating them. A worker rushed over and gave the tortoise most of the bananas to eat. The other thing we did was walk in a lava tube. We've walked in lava tubes before, but this was a double. ..the tube we were walking in was actually contained in a larger one, and at one point, we could see both tubes! I wonder how often that happens during eruptions. From there we were taken back to town and caught the Zodiac back out to the ship.

At our briefing, we first had a presentation from the Director of the Darwin Center, a young German, with a finance background rather than scientific. They need donations to support the research, so that's why he was brought in. He did say, to our great relief, that the Galapagos would not have survived in their current state without the tourists that come, because the tourism has been the financial push behind the environmental efforts. So without ecotourists like us, the Galapagos would have long ago lost its biodiversity. This is a great relief, because of course we are very concerned about our impact on pristine natural sites. And we know from all of our reading that the pristine natural sites here have not always been so pristine. He also talked about some of the projects they are doing, including work to save small bird species. It's very exciting that they are making headway! After that presentation, we got a short clip of a film about our trip, and to my surprise, my own interview was included and clipped into an actual semi-intelligent form. He took out all the bla-bla-bla, so that was good!

After dinner, there were Ecuadorian musicians and dancers and then we went out on deck and saw a lot of fish swimming near the entry ladder, and a sea lion playing there. I took 3 photos of the sea lion, but they were too dark.

March 1, 2014 Punta Pitt and Leon Dormido, San Cristobal. We got to San Cristobal about 6 am. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San\\_Crist%C3%B3bal\\_Island](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Crist%C3%B3bal_Island) After breakfast, we rode the Zodiac to Punta Pitt for a hike. The beach was really amazing, with a green tint and sparkles (our leader called them "diamonds"). On the way in to the beach, we swung out along the cliffs to see red footed boobies and some sea lions. The hike started on the beach and gained altitude quickly through a ravine with fairly large rocks to climb up. (I was very glad we do leg presses during our workouts at the gym at home!) On the way up we were in shade, but on the way down the sun was on us, so much hotter. The top had some up and down, but much easier walking, though I did slip a couple of times on the gravel. It is an old volcano, but with a lot of erosion...very other-worldly terrain. We saw several groups of red footed boobies, some Nazca boobies, and some blue footed boobies. There were a few other birds, as well. The vegetation was especially interesting. We finally got to see the Scalesia tree that is in the daisy family, which was one of the first plants to evolve on Galapagos, and one of the first to populate lava flows. There was also a succulent that grows near the shore that uses salt water.

At noon, back on the ship, we had instructions on what we had to do the next morning for checkout. (A 10:30am flight, so we had to be up at 6 and out of our cabins by 7, leaving the ship at around 8, depending on the inbound flight.)



Our last snorkel was at Leon Dormido. And, WOW! What a snorkel! Leon Dormido is a very interesting little island. It has two channels cut through at sea level, one several feet wide that is a complete cut and the other that is just a little above sea level, but the rock closes in again above the cut. The water is very deep, so the ship couldn't anchor, so had to just maintain the position. We did our usual Zodiac from the ship, and went off the Zodiac into really deep water (about 80 degrees, but it felt colder at first, of course) and started swimming along a sheer rock face, toward the big cut. Just below the water line was a sloping ledge, and there were a lot of sea turtles on the ledge and in the water. Just at the depth that you could see were millions of fish. It was incredible. Sometimes very big fish would swim up toward us and then down again. Two people saw whitetip sharks. It was very murky in the deep water, and it was all deep water. The guide gathered us all together and we swam through the cut, but you really couldn't see much because of all of the suspended particles. At one point, there was a whole school of trunk fish, in the white-ish grey color we're used to...but we're used to seeing just one. We swam through the cut and around the rock, and saw lots of fish, mostly really deep. Suddenly a sea lion whizzed past Steve and me. It was totally cool. I don't think anyone else saw it. We kept going and when we rounded the next corner, we saw that some of the group really didn't like the rough waves, so were taken back into the Zodiac. One woman had an anxiety attack and had to be helped back. I was honestly surprised that people who weren't used to snorkeling attempted this snorkel, because it was so advanced. At this point there were five of us left in the water, and the guide decided to take us back through the cut to look for sharks. We swam back, and just as we got to the other end of the cut (where we had first entered) three sea lions were playing together and romping in the water right next to us. It was really awesome. They finally got bored with entertaining us and moved off, so the guide took us back to the Zodiac and asked those people if any of them wanted to come back in. A couple did, so then the guide moved us back up the rock to where we started, and there were the sea lions again. Three of us were watching the sea lions play, and the guide kept giving the sea turtle sign. When the sea lions moved off, we went over to the turtles and then thought we were done, but the guide decided that we really should see the sharks, so off we went again back into the cut. By this time we had had a lot of exercise, and we didn't find any sharks, so I was just as happy to get back to the ship. The ship slowly circumnavigated Leon Dormido before heading for Puerto Baquerizo Moreno.

March 2, 2014 Guayaquil. The flight back to Guayaquil was delayed, so we got a little extra time on the ship before being transferred to the airport and flown back to Guayaquil. We checked into the hotel for our last night in Ecuador and rested until a light "dinner" in the lounge.

March 3, 2014 flights home: Our wakeup call was at 3:30 am, with luggage out at 4:00 am and out of the hotel at 4:30 am. The hotel had a nice breakfast set out for us, but at that hour I wasn't particularly interested in eating. Our flights back were uneventful, and we managed to get through customs and immigration in Miami in about 45 minutes, though it took some people 2 ½ hours.



Sally Lightfoot Crab



Galapagos Dove



Land Iguanas



Male Frigate Bird



Mother and Baby Frigate Birds

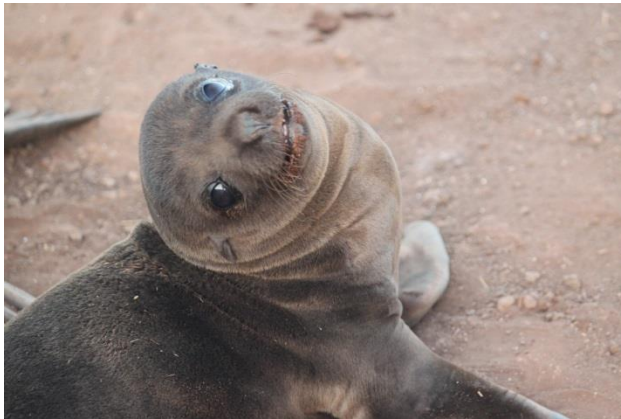




Young Frigate Bird



Blue Footed Boobies



Baby Sea Lions



Climbing some of the 399 steps



On Bartolomé





Marine iguana



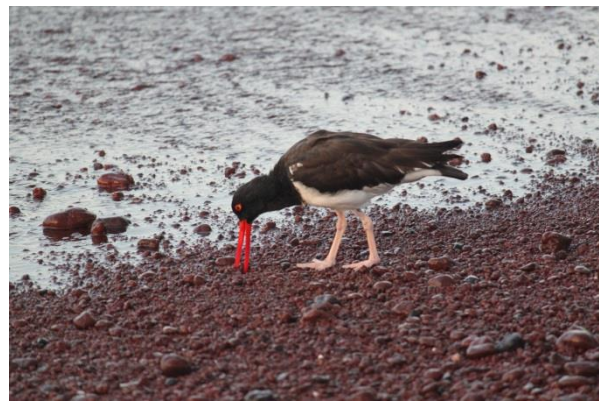
Us, Snorkeling with Sea Lion



Sea Stars



Baby Sea Lions Playing



Oyster catcher

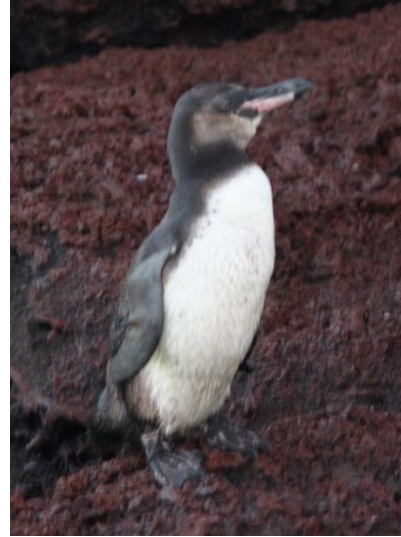




Iguanas



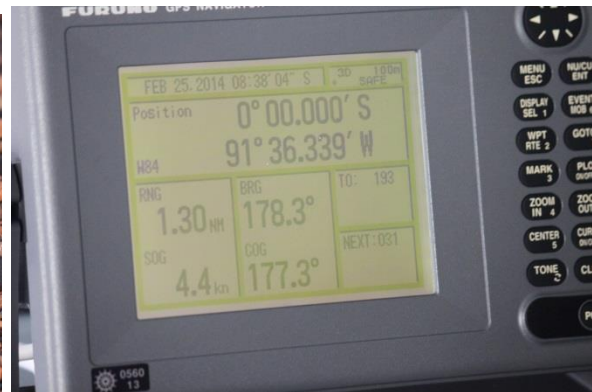
Rabida



Galapagos penguin



Mockingbird



Equator



Sea Turtles





Marine Iguanas



Counting Sea Turtles Punta Vicente Roca



Punta Espinoza



Sea Lions Sleeping



Flightless Cormorants

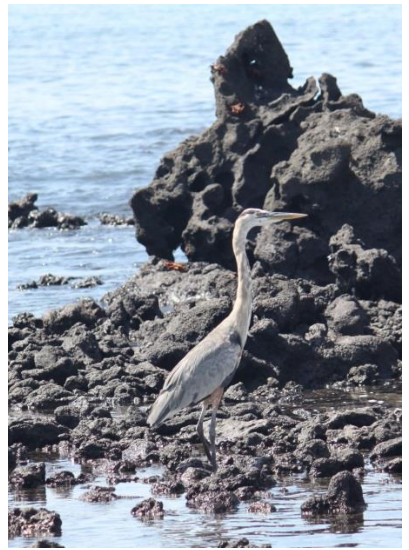




Tortoise



Whimbrel



Great Blue Heron



Uplifted Coral at Urbina Bay



Urbina Bay Trail



School of Trunk Fish



"Fur Sea Lion"





Great Blue Heron



Lava Heron



Striated Heron



Crowned Heron



"Fur Sea Lion" baby



Marine Iguanas





Tortoises



Us with tortoise



Punta Pitt



Punta Pitt Trail



Green Beach



Leon Dormido





Nazca Boobies



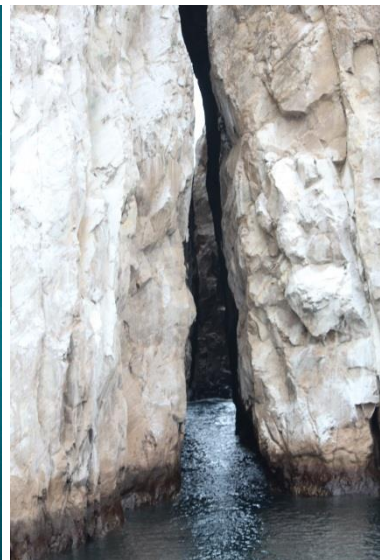
Sea Lions



Steve with Sea Turtle



Sea Turtle



Leon Dormido



Sea Lions playing

