



Monday 2 June – Quito and The Galapagos Islands - Baltra and North Seymour

Woke up almost every hour until we were picked up at 6.50 am for our flight to the Galapagos Islands. My phone beeped with a message at 5.30 am which started Rick off. “You must have a signal, check how many bars you have as I have 5” Determined not to go that way again so I have put my phone on silent. There were loads of armed policemen guarding the building opposite the hotel, apparently there had been some violence involving the manager.



When we got off the plane at Baltra there were lots of big colourful grasshoppers flying about. There followed a short coach ride to a dingy that took us to “The Legend” that was to be our home for the next 7 nights. Sea lions were lying all over the place, one was asleep on a bench and we had to step over another to get in the dingy. Jen couldn’t believe it when one of the American women asked the guide if the sea lions had names. Sea Lions have ears whereas seals don’t. The ship is old fashioned with lots of brass and smells of polish. Jen didn’t like the smell. Our cabin has 2 windows but is very basic and when the air conditioning is on, it is impossible to hear anything else. However, it’s quite a coincidence that our cabin’s name is the Oyster Catcher which happens to be the name of our local pub in Climping. We were told not put any paper in the toilet as it blocks the pipes. After seeing the cabin we were hurried straight into lunch where we met our table guests David and Carol, who we will sit with every meal. Our waiter Hugo is very grumpy and it took some time to explain ‘Gluten free’ to him. The briefings are tedious. There are two guides or ‘naturalists’ who perform the briefings, one is very quick and to the point making them bearable, whereas the second seems to think we are school children and runs over time by at least 20 mins. We have decided to take it in turns to go to them.



Frigate's

At 4.30pm we disembarked to visit North Seymour. When we arrived at the steps there was a mother and baby sea lion and loads of crabs. I forgot to bring trainers so was only wearing flip flops which made it difficult to walk on the lava rocks. During our two hour hike we saw Blue footed boobies, Grand and Magnificent Frigate birds, swallow tailed gulls, larva lizards, land and marine iguanas. It is amazing how they have no fear of humans and you can get so close to them. Our favourites were the boobies. They were very cute, and the males have a courting ritual where they mark their space and perform a little dance whilst sorting out their selection of sticks to offer females as love tokens, similar to men giving us flowers. There seemed to be an abundance of males and very few females. Rick asked the guide where all the loose women were, but he didn't seem to understand. The male frigates puff up the red sack under their chin to attract a mate. It was amazing being surrounded by these big birds performing their mating rituals and others sitting on eggs. They were not fazed by us at all. Many of the plants and trees are endemic to the Galapagos Islands and many to specific islands themselves.



After we arrived back on the boat we had another briefing followed by cocktails with the captain, however after waiting for 30mins we were told the captain was on duty and couldn't come. The day of travelling exhausted us and after dinner we went straight to bed, before 10pm.

Tuesday 3 June – Santa Cruz & Floreana

Breakfast was at 7am as we were disembarking for our visit to Santa Cruz at 8.15am. Jen decided to miss this one out and do a bit of relaxing. Santa Cruz is one of the biggest islands and has 5 towns. The sand was full of crushed shells and once again the rocks were full of lots of red and black crabs. The landscape was rocky with tall cacti and trees and shrubs. The Holy Trees here were taller than the ones on North Seymour. Also, there were many lagoons and Rick got a fantastic photo of a flamingo in flight. The birds inland were much smaller than those on North Seymour and the ones I can remember are the mockingbird who was feeding her baby, Darwin finches, ani, Herons and many others, we also saw some pintail ducks and flamingo's. As there are 101 passengers we have been put into groups for the excursions and our group is called "Albatross". Several of our group have been to one of their daughter's wedding that took place just outside Quito last week. Some of the younger English wedding guests were only let out of the clinic hours

before the ceremony having been on drips as a result of food poisoning. A land Iguana ran over Rick's foot, they are quite big. When we returned to the ship the barman pointed to the upper deck and that is where we found Jen on a sunbed. She said he had been very attentive and kept coming up to tidy up the cushions. We didn't stay on deck too long as the ship was rocking about and we started to feel a bit queasy.



Flamingo's

The afternoon's visit was to Floreana Island where the scenery was much the same as on Santa Cruz but no cacti trees. There were several lagoons with flamingo's but they were a distance away. It was a different landscape on the other side of the island where the turtles lay their eggs in the sand. They each lay about 100 eggs but only one or two survive to adulthood. There were frigates circling overhead looking for the baby turtles. We then walked back to the beach where we landed and had a swim and snorkelled. It was a barbeque supper on deck where we sat with some interesting New York Staters. Jen had to send back her coke as the barman had put a rum in it, he definitely has the hots for her. We watched the sea lions catch the flying fish and also saw a shark.



Wednesday 4 June – Espanola & San Cristabal Islands

It was a rough night with the ship going up and down. I think it's about 29° most days. Espanola is such a fantastic Island with so much wildlife that you have to watch where you step. We were welcomed by some performing sea lions and the path through the beach was full of sea lions, crabs and red marine iguanas. There were iguanas everywhere you looked. During the long, rocky hike we saw a sleeping Galapagos snake whose main diet is made up of the lava lizards. We saw a mockingbird try to catch a finch. There were quite a few Galapagos doves, swallow-tailed gulls, warblers, mockingbirds, blue footed and masked boobies. Then we came across the Albatross, what a magnificent bird. They weren't at all bothered by us and you could get very close to take a photo. They stay on the island for 9 months and then fly to Chile and Peru for the other three. They have the same partner for life not like the boobies who have a new mate every year. They take turns in sitting on the eggs and change over every three hours. We visited their airpeurto, a clear bit of land by the cliffs. It was so interesting to watch them waddle to the edge of the cliff and wait for the right breeze to help them take off. On the way back to the beach we saw a hawk sitting in a tree and then

it was joined by another and started mating. Jen didn't want to photograph it as she thought it was a private matter. The female hawk has five husbands to look after her eggs and babies – sounds good to me. We asked why the other birds didn't seem to be afraid of them and were told that there is an abundance of food around. We watched a frigate try to steal a fish from a blue footed boobie and her baby.



Rick had fixed his glasses but they broke into two again halfway through the hike. He has only bought one pair of swimming trunks with him and has forgotten the lead to download his photos. Jen is causing a bit of a distraction for the male staff, they seem quite excited now that they have found out she is 22. She beat one of the American girls at chess and the barman has asked her to dance with him this evening. I have two words to describe our table guest David and that is "Victor Meldrew". As soon as we set off in the dingy for San Cristobal we discovered that we hadn't taken any money with us. Fortunately, someone lent us \$5 for the internet café. San Cristobal is one of the 5 islands that is actually inhabited, I think by about 6000. Having no internet means I can't check my facts so you will forgive me a few errors. A 45 minute coach ride took us to the other end of the island where we were dropped off at the tortoise sanctuary. There was a problem with the rats eating the baby tortoises so they built the sanctuary to ensure their survival. It was a bit disappointing as there weren't many to see but I suppose that's the reason for the sanctuary. Back in the town the internet café cost just over 1 dollar so we had 4 dollars left to spend. Rick found a shop where he wanted to buy a book, flip flops and hat but we didn't want to ask to borrow any more money. I think I am going to give him a check list next time before we go on holiday. As we went to get on the dingy Rick said something that I am sure you would never hear a girl say "Cor look at the engines on that" it was a small boat with two 200 and one 100 horsepower engines on it.



Land Lizard



Albatross

Back on the ship we sat on deck with the American mother and her son Tom who has made friends with Jen. These are some of the Americans we sat with at the barbeque; they are all very academic. We went to the farewell party for the 3 nighters and watched a video they had made where we made a few appearances. We said goodbye to the crowd of rich Mexican Plastic Surgeons. It was really good and I expect we will bore some of you with it on our return. When we went down for supper the ship started to move around a lot and Jen felt ill and went to the cabin. We were left with David and Carol and I am sorry to say that we cannot put up with their moaning too much longer. As soon as we could we made a hasty return to the cabin as we were also feeling queasy. Another early night for us all.

Thursday 5 June – Baltra & Bartalome Islands

Tom had stuck a note for Jen in the vent of our door but we couldn't get the crucial bit with the email address on out of it. Went to reception to ask them to put us on another table as we were fed up with David and Carol's persistent moaning. Chatted to Tom and his mother until they left for the airport about the differences in education and politics between our countries. Spent about 45 minutes on the sandy beach with crystal clear water where we had a swim and Rick did a bit of snorkelling. The staff handled the table changeover very well and we now have a table of our own. They have put two other couples with David and Carol – good luck to them. As the newcomers flight was one and half hours late we had a relaxing afternoon, even though it was overcast, sunbathing on deck. Galapagos National Park regulations are very strict: do not touch the animals; do not take natural souvenirs (bones, pebbles, feathers etc); do not litter; do not smoke on the islands; always follow the marked trails; always stay with your group; clean your soles before disembarking on the islands. You may carry seeds from one island into another. Bartalome is a small volcanic island with a wild and unearthly landscape and is home to the famous Pinnacle Rock. As we got off the dingy we saw some Galapagos Penguins swimming towards us, they are tiny about 60 cms. We then climbed 360 steps to photograph breathtaking views of [the](#) lunar landscape and sandy beaches. There were loads of mosquitos and Jen got bitten quite badly.



Penguins



Bartalome Island

One of the good things about being on a 7 day cruise instead of a 4 day cruise is that we get to go to 2 welcome and 2 goodbye parties. We celebrated having our own table with a bottle of wine as it now means that we don't have to work hard on polite conversation. After supper we watched the flying fish, who are attracted to the lights, come crashing into the ship and then get gobbled up by the sea lions. The sea lions are very clumsy on land but are fast and exciting to watch in the water especially when chasing the flying fish. A couple of sharks loomed by but surprisingly the sea lions were not at all perturbed; perhaps it's a bit

like the hawk – whose bothered when there is food in abundance. There were also some baby turtles swimming about. Rick and Jen met a bizarre 13 year old who was dressed in a fedora hat, black shirt and tie who is worried that he may tire of seeing amazing things but he is still amazed by baroque cathedrals. Jen took some sea sickness tablets that completely knocked her out.

Friday 6 June – Isabela and Fernandina Islands



Sea Iguanas



Land Oguana

We were supposed to be woken up at 5am to view one of the volcano's on Isabela that has become active this last week, however, they didn't bother as it was misty and you could only see a glow. Jen didn't join us for the morning excursion as she was still knocked out by the pills; funny thing was that it was a calm night. We saw some rays on the way to the beach. Isabela is the largest island in the Galapagos, created by lava flow from six volcanoes, five of which are still active. The beach where we landed only surfaced in 1953 and the sand dunes were full of turtle nests. The hikes are getting repetitive and we are continuously hearing that this plant and species are endemic to the Galapagos or to one of the Islands so it really is a special place. The conservationists were worried that the goats on the island were eating too much of the vegetation and disrupting the eco system. Little bells were put round the females necks, this attracted the males and then they were shot. They only recently eradicated all the goats. Wild cats were also a problem as they ate the baby land iguanas and a special poison was put down to just kill the cats. We saw bones from the goats and cats. We also saw lots of iguanas and tortoises. Iguana poo is very fibrous and contains seeds that they can't digest from the poisonous tree. Tortoise poo is much the same as humans. There were lots of wasps around. A big wave knocked the snorkelling mask out of Rick's hand. A while later he shouted that he had seen it and went charging towards it only to find that is was one of those tiny Galapagos penguins swimming. The beach area was fairly small but with about 100 of us on there it looked like Brighton beach.



Back on the ship we played rummy but Jen and Rick get mad at me because I always win and they don't think it is fair as they think I am not concentrating. The afternoon hike was to Fernandina Island which is the youngest island in the archipelago. We entered the island through the mangroves; these are very important to the eco system as they support a lot of wildlife, many birds nest there. The lava was strange, it looked new, some was smooth with ripples with deep crevices and another type was spiky like lots of corkscrews. There were loads and loads of iguanas again and we watched them snort out the sea water, Jen called it snorting. There was a new type of crab called the Sally lightfoot. We saw the flightless cormorants for the first time. They were quite big but a bit dull looking. Initially they flew in from South America but became flightless due to the abundance of food to be found in the Galapagos, they catch fish from the edge of the sea but I think they can only be found on two islands. They have a courtship dance similar to the booby's where they perform a dance in the sea and select pieces of seaweed and sticks to offer the female as a love token. Laid out on the beach was a whale's skeleton, there are many whales in these waters. It was a slow two and a half hour walk, we could have done it in half an hour and we have come to the conclusion we are iguanaed out. There were thousands of them on the rocks. We saw an Oystercatcher for the first time. It was barbeque night once again on the ship and we had an enjoyable evening sitting with a newly wed couple from Hertfordshire. Rick and Jen had noticed them on the plane because he was sporting Bose headphones and they are both into headphones at the moment. It was 9.30 pm bedtime again but we have decided to have tomorrow morning off as it's getting repetitive.



Saturday 7 June – Santiago & Rabida Islands

Rick woke up to say that his back felt better after being knocked over by a wave yesterday but Jen woke up covered in mosquito bites and with a cold. Went to the library and chatted to a big Indian man who explained why there aren't many Indians in the US. There was a restricted immigration policy for years and when this was relaxed they only let in the professional educated Indians. Some photographers then took lots of photographs of us chatting to a lady from Arizona; we may be included in next year's brochure. The other day they took quite a few of Jen sunbathing. Spent a lazy day reading on deck and looked at the gym which consists of a bike and stepper. Despite what he said earlier Rick's back is not better and he has had another go at sticking his glasses together. He suggested that the couple we sat with last night take a banana with them to attract the fish whilst they were snorkelling and I said he wouldn't look funny going off with a banana in his swimming trunks as they are newly weds after all.



We missed the visit to Santiago but had a pleasant trip to the smooth red sands of Rabida Island. The killer whales like this beach as the sand is smooth, steeply shelving and they can catch the sea lions there. Louis was very excited as we saw a Vermillion Flycatcher, he first saw this bird on this island two weeks ago and so this is only the second time it has been spotted on the island in twelve years. We watched the boobies diving and pelicans mating and nesting. Had a boat ride along the coast to see the baby fur sea lions and birds including the yellow and brown night heron and of course lots and lots of iguanas. Jen is fretting about losing her sunglasses. We have all just showered and they are shocked – me who is so particular about putting on the sun cream is really burnt. It must have been after I had those two cocktails before lunch. I have lines all over me where I have been bending over reading a book and my forehead is burnt also. I am sure it will calm down soon. The dinner was not so good but we had a bottle of wine, only the second in a week. Big entertainment of the evening was the crossing of the equator ceremony. Jen was chosen and she hated it. They had some great dancing music after but Rick and Jen didn't like it. I am sure my sunburn will be alright in the morning. Rick and Jen are disappointed as tomorrow we are not visiting the Darwin centre. If you had the first 3 days you have been really pleased and would have gone home wanting more as it is we have had too much of a good thing. We must look up the Darwin Centre on the internet when we get to Santa Cruz tomorrow; perhaps it is just laboratories after all. Jen found her sunglasses in lost and found.



Sunday 8 June – Santa Cruz – The day of the tortoise

The sea is rough today, there is a big swell making it difficult for us to get into the dingys. We've been out of touch with what's going on in the world and joked with the Australian that we heard Gordon Brown had resigned. Everyone's face lit up – has he? Jen's cold is in full flow and I may be starting one and Rick's glasses have broken again. It's a short distance from the port to the Darwin Centre. The first tortoises that

we see are a group of males who cannot be put back into the wild as they have been contaminated by humans. They are frustrated and we had to watch whilst one male mounted another male and Luis explained the sex life of a tortoise to us. There were lots of baby ones that are kept in rat proof cages for about 5 years before being released. Next was “Lonely George” who was found on Pinta Island. For many years they have been unsuccessfully trying to find him a mate with similar DNA . How about this for a job, a female researcher has been trying to extract sperm from him but after living alone for so many years he has become impotent. We then walked into the town, wandered in and out of the shops and used the Internet Café. It was really difficult getting from the dingy into the ship.



Lonesome George



Shark

We were nearly put off the afternoon trip to the rainy hills to see tortoises in the wild as we were told it was full of mosquito's and horse flies. Jen stayed on board to nurse her cold and we enjoyed the 40 minute coach ride through the lush scenery. I bought a fantastic Trumpet Plant last year which died in the frosts, here they grow into trees. Our guide Luis's wife and two children joined us. The reserve used to be a coffee and cattle farm but the farmer let it all grow wild and this habitat encouraged the giant tortoises to inhabit the land that ranges from fields, ponds, lagoons and wild jungle like woods. He charges \$3 and has about 400 visitors a day – no worries. There were many different types of fruit growing wild, we ate grapefruit, wa wa, guavas, pomegranates straight off the trees. There were pineapples and other exotic fruits with names like wa wa, woo woo and so on. Luis climbed a tree and his children caught the fruit to hand round. There were quite a few giant tortoises wandering around. There poo is full of fruit seeds and this is one of the ways the seeds are dispersed. We then had some Galapagos coffee to keep us awake for the journey back. No mosquitoes, no horse flies and no rain. On the way back we went in a lava tunnel, it was huge. I was one of the last to transfer from the dingy to the boat and it was a bit frightening as the waves were so high and I was sure I was going to be the first to fall in the sea and have to be rescued before being eaten by the sharks. It was the farewell party again and a chance to watch the video of the last few days. Haven't seen an iguana all day!



Monday 9 June Galapagos – Quito

Took all day to get to Quito and Rick and Jen wanted me to change the flights so we could fly home this evening. I was reluctant as I doubt if we will ever come here again and it is complicated as there are two flights involved and also the local tourist office who have arranged all our transfers. Anyway, I want to see Quito. Jen is quite poorly today and her nose has been bleeding a bit and she thought her eardrums had burst during the flight. Here we are at our 5 star hotel in the Quito and I am really pleased as they have put us in the Penthouse Suite. Jen also has a very nice room a few floors down and she has just had a manicure and pedicure for \$15 that £7.50 for both. Tomorrow morning I am going to have a one and a half hour massage for \$33, it's really cheap here. I want to go and look at the old city after the massage. We have some vouchers to use in the casino tonight. Came out of the casino \$30 up but I don't like them as they are full of seedy characters. It's lovely to be on dry land again but everything is still going up and down. The bed looks lovely; fresh crisp cotton sheets, a puffy duvet and a deep mattress. It wasn't a problem sharing a room with Jen and Rick even though they are both very untidy. I just drove them mad keep putting and throwing things away. However, it's lovely having space again. Woke up about 2am when I remembered we hadn't done the internet check-in. It was 4am before we sorted it out, nothing is ever straightforward.

Tuesday 10 June Quito

Had an early morning walk around the streets near to the hotel and went to a chemist to get Jen something for her cold. There were internet cabins, mobile phone and travel shops everywhere. Rick is obsessed with the contents of the medicines and it seems that Jen is the same. They argued for about an hour whether the medication contained Paracetamol and caffeine as it didn't come with a leaflet, only a box. Jen ended up spending ages looking up the ingredients on the internet and then started to look up what the stuff was that the ship doctor gave her. Why they both can't just take a Lemsip and be done with it I don't know but they both say I am very impatient. Didn't get my massage and finally got to start our Quito visit at 11am. Took a cable car that takes off at 9680ft and reaches 13,287 ft giving us a chance to observe the changing vegetation of the Andean highlands and a fantastic view of the city. We felt very dizzy as the air was thin up there and we were still going up and down. Only had time left for a quick look at the old city. Lots of narrow, busy streets and looked in the cathedral and a church full of gold leaf. It only cost \$2 for the taxi driver to drive about 20 minutes through the back streets back to the hotel. When we got to the airport I found that I can send an email on my new phone using the WLAN feature. Rick is jealous of my phone even though I don't get such a strong signal as he does. It was a long, long journey home and I think I have seen enough of airports for a while although we are off to Tenerife for 3 nights on Sunday. We flew from Quito to Guayaquil, got off and took another plane to Madrid, got off and then took another plane to Heathrow, it took about 23 hours, We all agreed that we have had a once in a lifetime experience, our favourite moments were watching the Blue Boobies dancing and offering their gifts. The scenery was spectacular and apart from the long flights home the organisation went like a dream.