



BARTHOLOMEW

# IN THE GALAPAGOS

Carolyn Foreman, Latin America Programme Manager, gets up close and personal with the wildlife of the Galapagos Islands.

After a few days of exploring, eating and getting sunburnt in Ecuador's charming capital of Quito, myself and my partner Paul boarded a plane to the Galapagos Islands, which lie an hours flight from the mainland. By midday we were exploring the Interpretation Centre on San Cristóbal, whilst our expedition boat, the Galapagos Explorer II, waited patiently in the bay. This elegant boat is the biggest cruise vessel in the Galapagos and was chosen by me simply because I get seasick just looking at water and I read that it had stabilisers. (As it turned out, I needn't have worried as the sea was calm for the whole trip.)

The next seven days followed a marvellous pattern. Days began by waking to piped



MASKED BOOBIES

whale noises at dawn, a huge breakfast was followed by a morning guided excursion onto an island with one of the knowledgeable naturalist guides, lunch was a buffet on the open-air deck, then came a siesta, another excursion, dinner, a briefing on the next day's destinations and wildlife, and evening on-board activities that invariably ended by 10pm as everyone was so tired.

I knew that the animals of the Galapagos had never developed a fear of humans, but I was not prepared for just how uninhibited they were. Curious baby sea lions snuffled my shoes and then showed-off with somersaults when I joined them in the sea, boobies who had built their nests in the middle of the path glared at me and refused to move an inch as I walked past, a pair of mating turtles drifted lazily past me as our panga (dinghy) floated through the mangrove swamps. I saw tiny penguins, tangled piles of sunbathing iguanas, a pelican land on the head of a fellow passenger and male frigate birds flirting outrageously by pumping up their huge red chest pouches.



THE GALAPAGOS EXPLORER II



SEA LION

All too soon the week was over. We were set ashore on San Cristóbal, my head full of wonderful memories, my bag full of rolls of used camera film, and my thumb full of stitches from where I had shut it in the cabin door. (The boat's doctor was highly efficient!) As we waited for our transport to the airport, I watched some sea lions play in a rock pool. Despite the fact that I had seen sea lions on every day of the trip, the novelty of watching their sleek bodies diving in the clear water had not worn off and I had to be dragged kicking and screaming onto the bus.

Carolyn loved the Galapagos Islands and has not stopped talking about them since her visit, please call her on **01869 276 210** to plan your trip.