

Galapagos - September 2008 - The Ladles and Generators Tour!

Good morning Ladles and Generators! What is he going on about I hear you ask? Well hopefully it will all become clear. As you know, we ran one of our most ambitious trips to date – The Galapagos Islands. We arrived at Heathrow airport in dribs and drabs – check in was supposed to be the outrageous time of 4.30am and some stayed in the airport, some got taxis, some splashed out on hotels. When we arrived we were pretty much front of the queue – mainly because Lord Smith had gone straight to the front. It was a good plan until we got caught trying to get into the club class area.



Anyway, Iberian airlines (our chosen provider) were still booking passengers onto the plane that left before ours so we were told we would have to wait – could have had more time in bed!!!. Eventually we boarded our luxury transportation to Madrid and after a whacky races style transfer across the runway, boarded another luxury airliner for the long haul to Quito. Now, I know you shouldn't judge people by their looks, and I know we were flying to South America, but was it just me that thought that half the plane looked like some of the hoods from Miami Vice.

Nobody dared to ask for a rum and coke for fear of what they might get! It was packed – the 3 TVs that came down from the ceiling of the ancient plane didn't all work and those that did had some real visual delights such as Kung Fu Panda and a spanish sushi chef making food that was too small to eat. There was even a dog running around – much to Moiras concern. To be truthful, the journey was pretty painful and we all vowed never to fly Iberia again.

On arrival in Quito we eventually got our cases ... once we had realized that they had not put them all on the carousel and that a huge pile of bags were hidden in a corner. We waded past people in ponchos selling pan pipes and then drove to our hotel. In stark contrast to most of Quito it was lovely with a mural on every wall and after some cow for dinner and a couple of Ecuadorian beers the altitude (3,500 m) took its toll and everyone flaked out. The following day we flew into Galapagos and all of us got excited by the first Iguana sighting ... ooh and look there is a sealion on the buoy ... by the end of the first week we had realized that these are everywhere and we need not have been quite so frantic about getting the photo.



A bus ride over the hill on the one road from one side of Santa Cruz to the other saw us ensconced in the Red Booby Hotel – nice clean and friendly. Puerto Aroya (the town) is not the biggest place in the world – in fact you can walk around it in about 10 minutes if you speed up a bit. But it is quite quaint. Pelican Bay is full of well Pelicans. Iguanas sit on the rocks in the harbour and we saw our first Eagle Ray in 2 feet of water by the ferry. Frigate birds are more common than starlings and the other avian species are all peculiar in some way or another.

On the first evening we all went down to the dive centre for that ubiquitous PADI paperwork and to get hold of some kit – it was included in the price of the package which was nice. Then we all met at the “Rock” which became our local haunt for the duration. The next day it was an early start and we were split into our 2 groups for diving. We boarded the bus and went back over the hill (a journey that was to become **very** familiar) to the jetty to meet our boats. The smaller group were in “El Canoe” ... while we were in “El Pallet” which had the hydrodynamics of a 30 ft



skip. We also met our guides, Quike, Jimmy and Paolo. Quike spoke excellent english but struggled with “ladies and gentlemen” Every day was a new surprise, be it Lattes and Giggerybum, Labtrees and Generalmum. It was simply hours of amusement (so now you know what the tour name was all about). What he didn’t struggle with was dive briefings which were excellent. So, day 1 of diving – and according to Quike we were going to see, possibly, manta rays, sharks, eagle rays, sealions, hammerheads. Doubt it we all thought.



We knew it was good, but surely not on day one. But it was true. During every dive during the trip, someone, or everyone, pretty much saw all these big animals. It was only the quantity and proximity that varied. By the end of the 9 days diving we were getting spoilt – you know that stage has been reached when you are trying to shoo away turtles that are getting in the way of the hammerhead photos that you are trying to take. I think the other indication of how good it was, was the lack of air that most people were coming up with. Neil was ok – his dive buddy and wife doesn’t breathe. The rest of us just got so engrossed in the

watching and taking photos that we often had a little under the required 50 bar. Ah well, that’s what buddies are for!!!!!!

The weather was weird as well. A steady and constant wind direction over the Humboldt current (which was bloomin cold!) meant that on one side of the island it rained, the top was always in cloud and the other side was generally fine. It was not hot, in spite of being on the equator, and the thermoclines were interesting!

The evening’s entertainment would begin with a stroll past the fish market to watch the pelicans and sealions try and grab titbits from the fishermen as they prepared their catch on the counter. It then generally involved trying out the various restaurants on offer in the metropolis that was Puerto Aroyez!



Once we had sampled all 5 restaurants we started back round again! Glen managed to double the Island’s tequila consumption during his stay, Mike did the same for the Cuba Libra quota. But, although there were a couple of late nights, in the main everyone was shattered after the days diving – was that anything to do with the 620 metre hill we drove over after diving each day? I enquired about decompression sickness and the issues of going over big hills ... however you will be glad to know the good news is that it is not a concern in Galapagos because “the bus goes quickly over the hill and then back down the other side”. Well that’s ok then. The laws of physics redefined – by Paulo from Galapagos.



The dive sites all lived up to their names and reputations – Gordon Rocks was a favourite – simply because of the sheer numbers of hammerheads that drifted by – sometimes tantalisingly close. But Daphne was wonderful because of the playful sealion that was messing around in the cave when we went into it, the cavern next to the Arch was full of marbled rays, Beagle Rock had lots of Galapagos sharks and the opportunity to snorkel with Galapagos penguins and Galapagos sealions. (By the way, everything is a Galapagos animal in the Galapagos – so dogs we

renamed Galapagos Cats, horses were in fact Galapagos cows and so on – well you have to do something when you are driving back and forth on the only road in the island twice a day for 1 ½ hours! At every site, there was plenty to see – almost too much. Currents were variable and while the rippd through Gordon Rocks there was nothing too difficult for an advanced diver with a reasonable amount of experience. The diving was amazing – more so than I think we thought it would be. El Canoe saw Orcas (Galapagos ones obviously) on the surface on 2 occasions and



we spent 30 minutes on one trip just watching hundreds of Galapagos dolphins mess about in the Galapagos bow waves while we tried to get the whole thing on camera.

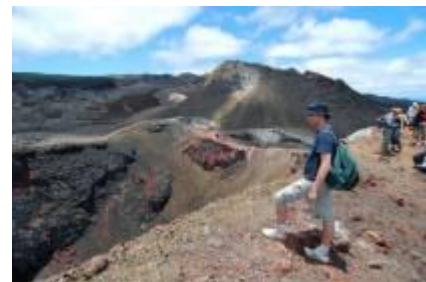
At the end of 8 days of diving and with a few sore ears going around, 8 of us decided to see a different island and went on a trek to Isabella. The island has 3 Galapagos Volcanoes, one of which erupted a few months ago, so we thought it would be a good idea to climb one. The ferry was remarkably similar to the boat we had been diving on so no surprises, except getting wet when you are not planning to go diving is an interesting concept. Isabella was lovely – much bigger, no proper roads, just dirt and sand tracks.



The evening we arrived we all went to see the Galapagos flamingo – yes it was solitary. Not sure where the others had gone. After that we tried to find a beer, hung around in Galapagos hammocks, drank Galapagos beer and pretended we were in an Enid Blyton book ... “Adventures in Galapagos”.

The next day, it was an early start as we set off by bus to the “base camp” – it was raining (wrong side of the island obviously) and this was where we were picked up our Galapagos cows for the day.

Joe had bought a hat specially and looked the part, Stuart spent the journey posing like a cowboy with me adjusting shutter speed to make it look like he was going quicklyand Ruth just hung on for dear life. “Whoay horse, don’t do that you horrible thing” were the words of command. It speaks Spanish Ruth! Mine decided to collapse in a heap as soon as I got on it – either through disgust or fatigue at the weight I know not. And no, stop the rumours, I didn’t fall off, I had to get off because the horse was sitting on my leg. The lady in the blue towelling tracksuit did not appear to be appropriately attired for the journey – and looked even less so after she was unceremoniously dumped in the mud by her equally disgusted mount. It was an hour up the hill and by the end of it some rather sore thighs and bums climbed down with a sigh of relief. We then decided to trek on foot up to the Volcano’s “hole” so that we could peer into it and have lunch while taking in probably the best view in the whole of Galapagos.



The walk back took its toll, as did the ride back down the hill, but we all survived and were glad we had done it. Meanwhile, the Santa Cruz 10 got in another 3 dives and saw more Orcas – its just not fair.

The penultimate day saw us doing another land tour and going to see the giant Galapagos tortoises. And we are talking BIG. Lonesome George (who it is rumoured may well be gay) has just reached his sexual prime at the ripe age of 80, but is not getting that warm feeling about a couple of 70 year olds that have been thrown in with him. Well of course not – he is looking for something more racey!



To be fair, they were quite fascinating, so much so that Lisa spent hours on her hands and knees waiting for one of them to open its mouth, and then missed the photo when it did. Finally we all wondered through lava tunnels (well why not) before getting back for some more food and beer in Yes, the Rock. We seemed to have been away for ages and suddenly it was all over and time to return.

The morning we left, the hotel brought out a huge cake – which was blue – just what you needed before starting out at stupid o’clock in the morning for a 24 hour journey! Eventually we got onto the domestic flight (although this time we all got charged excess baggage – except for Lord Smith who had more than everyone else!!!) The flight was interesting – it went from Galapagos to Guayaquil, then to Quito, then onto another plane, back to Guayaquil, before flying back over Quito to Madrid. Baggage was checked and rechecked (at least 7 times) and we all resisted the temptation for asking for



anything with coke in it once again. At least there were no dogs this time! Around 24 hours later, slightly hungry and smelly we were back home. To be honest I could write pages and pages about the trip – it was that amazing.



So how about a few **Highlights** – the sheer number of fish and marine animals. Looking over the second biggest caldera in the World was also pretty special as was looking at Glen the morning after he had 12 margaritas (but for completely different reasons), The speed that Lisa could get out of her drysuit when she was desperate was incredible and waiting to see if Glen and Stuart had actually been shown any marine life at all by Jimmy was always awaited with anticipation – we wondered what the penalty for murder was in Ecuador. Watching dolphins swim in front of the boat was wonderful, as was seeing hundreds of Blue

Footed Boobies dive in after shoals of fish without hitting any other birds – but did they know you could have an eye out with one of those beaks. And finally wondering whether Glen would actually get through the hole at the end of the lava tube!

By comparison there were no real **Lowlights** – except for realising you only have 10 bar left and a 10 minute deco stop (schoolboy error), breaking a couple of ribs (yes ribs, as in chest and breathing) without being under the influence in Inkerhol, tomatapple juice for breakfast, pungent wetsuits on a hot day, having baggage checked about 15 times by security, Iberian Airlines, Iberian Airlines and ... oh yes, Iberian Airlines. Did I mention that they were pretty grim by the way. In contrast to the airline the dive company we were with was Scuba Iguana. There are about 5 operators on the island and they came up with the best package. Marie-Lou is the person who you speak to to organize things and she could not have been more helpful. Quike and the guides were very good with varying levels of english and knowledge of dive sites and the hotel Red Booby was perfect. We would definitely recommend the hotel and the dive company if you were thinking of planning a trip. Was it another awesome club dive trip yet again we have to say yes – but if we ever go again, next time we are going by Continental Airlines!