

## **DARWIN'S VOYAGE ON THE HMS BEAGLE**

In December of 1831, Charles Darwin set sail from England aboard the HMS Beagle. During that time Darwin studied the plants, animals, landforms, and fossils of the many countries and islands he visited during the five-year voyage. He dissected animals and plants, kept a journal, and wrote letters to friends and colleagues describing his observations.

In 1835, the Beagle traveled west from the coast of South America, arriving off the coast of San Cristóbal Island on September 17. The Beagle explored the Galápagos Islands for five weeks, from September 17 through October 20, 1835. During this time, Darwin landed on at least six of the larger islands, starting at San Cristóbal and ending at Pinta Island. After the visit, the Beagle left the Galápagos Islands and sailed west toward Tahiti.

During his visit to the Galápagos, one thousand kilometers west of South America, Darwin observed that the islands were all formed of volcanic rock. Although the archipelago is near the equator, Darwin observed that the climate was "far from being excessively hot," due to the "low temperature of the surrounding water, brought here by the great southern Polar current."

Darwin also carefully observed the animals in the Galápagos, finding species of birds, lizards, and tortoises unique to each island. Because the climate and geography of the islands were similar, he concluded that species had evolved in response to the different habitats of each island.

The Beagle encountered scarce evidence of humans on the islands. Although the islands were visited by pirates, seal hunters, whalers, warriors, and scientists by 1835, there was only one established settlement, and that was a penal (prison) colony established by the Ecuadorian government on the island of Floreana. Even today, the residents of the Galápagos are citizens of Ecuador and speak Spanish as their native language.