The waters of the Pacific surrounding the Galápagos Islands offer some of the most interesting snorkeling opportunities. If you have never snorkeled before, our local guides can assist you on our snorkeling excursions.

Although the La Pinta has snorkel equipment on board and “shorty wetsuits” for your use, here are some guidelines if you prefer to bring your own equipment for the Seminar.

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT**

**MASK**  
A properly fitted mask is the most important investment you can make for successful skin diving. A proper fit seals out the water and is comfortable to wear. There is a wide selection of mask sizes and shapes to accommodate many faces. We recommend a low-volume mask with tempered glass that allows you to pinch or block your nose for equalizing your ears. Testing the fit of a mask is easy. Put it up to your face without pulling the strap over your head. Breathe in lightly through the nose. If the mask stays in place without the strap, the fit is perfect. When testing the fit of the mask, and when using it in the water be certain that the rubber skirt contacts your face around its entire perimeter. Take care that hair or bathing cap is not caught between your mask and your face.

One additional note regarding masks: poor vision can be a problem underwater as it is on land. Limited underwater visibility and the fact that everything looks 25% larger underwater assist the mildly nearsighted. For those requiring more correction, there are several options available. Some masks can be purchased with corrective lenses that closely match the user’s prescription. There are optical companies that will make and bond lenses of your exact prescription inside any mask.

**SNORKEL**  
The snorkel should have a comfortable mouthpiece. It may have a curve to lower water resistance. It should have a shallow "U" from the mouthpiece to the main tube to facilitate clearing. Many newer style snorkels incorporate a purge valve to help reduce water inside. Your snorkel should be no more than 18" long, and no less that 1/2" in diameter.

**FINS**  
Skin diving fins should be lightweight and flexible. Be sure to specify skin diving as your main intent to avoid the heavy fins used in SCUBA diving. Fins should fit firmly without being so tight that they squeeze your toes or restrict blood circulation. You will probably have a choice between the type with adjustable straps or "full foot" shoe fins. This is largely a personal choice based on comfort. Strap fins facilitate your use of neoprene "booties" worn inside the fins.

**WETSUIT**  
Water temperatures in Galápagos can vary from the high 60s to low 70s
(° F) depending on sun, currents and depth. Individuals will best know their own "comfort zones" which can be extended with the use of a lightweight wetsuit. These are available in "full-length" and "shortie" styles, typically 2 - 3mm thick. Wetsuits help conserve body heat and can add comfort and time while in the water. Our ship, La Pinta, has shortie wetsuits available for your use.

**OPTIONAL EQUIPMENT**

**BOOTIES**
These are rubber slippers that protect your feet from chafing, the cool water and from rocks and coral. While they are not required, you may stay warmer if you use booties or socks to protect your feet while snorkeling.

**T-SHIRT & PANTS**
Strong sun and salt water can be unkind to bare skin. Occasionally, there are small open-water animals that may cause a stinging sensation. Even the most careful skin diver can accidentally brush up against sharp coral. All of these hazards are easily avoided by wearing lightweight clothing in the water. We strongly recommend bringing a lightweight, light-colored, long-sleeved shirt and long pants you don't mind wearing in the water. You may also choose a Lycra body suit designed expressly for this purpose.

**INFLATABLE VEST**
Some skin divers feel more secure in the water when wearing a small, inflatable flotation vest. Depending on your swimming ability, you may find a vest helpful. Skin diving vests are smaller and much lighter than those designed for SCUBA diving, so, as with fins, be sure to specify warm-water skin diving as your main interest.

*Note about contact lenses:* some people successfully risk wearing contact lenses when skin diving. While this arrangement seems to work well, be warned that an escaped contact lens in the open sea is virtually impossible to find. In water, contacts disappear, so if you select this method, pack an extra pair of lenses in your hand luggage.

Consult the sales people in your local dive shop. They are usually friendly and will be of great help as you select your snorkel gear.

**GENERAL TIPS / SAFE SKIN DIVING PRACTICES**

Naturally, the better you are at swimming, the greater freedom you will have in the sea. It’s far more important to be comfortable in the water than to be an expert swimmer. No matter what your swimming background, if you like the water you can enjoy snorkeling.

During snorkeling sessions, keep in mind three important practices, designed for your safety and enjoyment of the water.
1. The Buddy System: Snorkeling is often more fun when done in pairs. If you spot a rare fish or unknown creature, you have someone to share the observation. Also, in the event that you need some assistance, your "buddy" can be an invaluable companion. The "buddy" system implies that while in the water, two people remain in clear communication and become mutually responsible for each other.

2. Personal Limitations: This is really just common sense and refers simply to listening to what your body tells you. Most accidents occur when someone gets just a little too tired. Your personal limitations change from day to day. As you become more comfortable in the water, you may be able to stay in longer, swim further or dive deeper. Other factors can influence personal limitations. These include weather, water temperature, the amount of sleep you got the previous night, and side-effects of alcohol or medications. Paying responsible attention to your physical or mental limits will greatly enhance everyone's safety and enjoyment of our snorkeling activities.

3. Enjoy Yourselves!: Snorkeling in the Galápagos can be the delight of a lifetime. Have fun!