



Galapagos

The Galapagos Islands, 600 miles west of mainland Ecuador, are a collection of 13 larger islands and many smaller islets. Lying on the Equator, they were formed (and are continually being modified) by a combination of volcanic activity and uplift in the last 15 million years. They may have been visited by the Incas, were used by pirates and buccaneers as a hideaway, but have only had permanent inhabitants since the 19th century, due to the harsh conditions and lack of easily obtained water.

The main attraction is the wildlife, which due to the relative lack of predators shows no fear and is easily approached by visitors. As a result of the isolation from the mainland and preponderance of reptiles and birds, new species have evolved on different islands. The observation of this fact played a large part in Charles Darwin's formulation of his theory of evolution expressed in his 'Origin of Species', after a visit in 1835.

A visit to the Galapagos is a unique experience and the holiday of a lifetime. Most of the islands are a National Park, and visitor numbers are controlled. Access is limited to marked paths and all groups must be accompanied by a licensed guide. All this is positive and will enhance your understanding of the islands' fragile environment and rich natural history, the future preservation of which depends on the financial contribution and awareness engendered by visitors.

Climate and when to go

The climate is moderated by the cold Humboldt current. The warmest time is January to April (25-30°C), while July to August is windiest and more expensive. Clearest weather is from April to May and roughest seas in July and August. The *garua* season from July to November means there is often mist or haze.



Sally Lightfoot crab



Sea lion



Visiting the islands

Access is by plane, which leaves Quito, touches down in Guayaquil, and arrives either at Baltra or San Cristóbal two hours later. Although there are hotels on several of the islands, to stay on land severely limits the number of other islands that can be visited, so the best option is to stay on board a yacht. This means you travel between islands at night and maximise the area covered (all the islands are different).

Puerto Ayora, on Santa Cruz island, is the largest town and the site of the Charles Darwin Research Centre.

Galapagos yachts

We generally prefer the smaller vessels, for their more intimate feel. Poor sailors may prefer the larger ones - even though groups have to be divided (usually by language), and there is inevitably some waiting around for shore excursions. All yachts may either be chartered in their entirety with crew and guide (which offers more flexibility over the exact itinerary, but does not necessarily lead to significant savings), or booked by cabin.

All of the vessels in this brochure have air-conditioned cabins with private bathrooms (with fresh water showers unless otherwise stated) and the highest category of bilingual naturalist guide.

We highly recommend 7 night cruises. While some vessels do offer shorter cruises of 3 or 4 nights you will just wish you had stayed

longer! All boats follow specific routes around the islands, which have to be approved by the park authorities. In addition to land visits, all standard itineraries will include daily snorkelling opportunities. 'Active' departures may include a couple of dives, some kayaking or a volcano climb, and some boats have specific family departures.

Diving

The Galapagos is as spectacular below the water as it is above. As there are both cold currents from Antarctica and warm ones from the Pacific the marine life is particularly varied. 50 of the more than 300 fish species are endemic, and it is usual to spot eagle rays, barracudas, bonitos, scalloped hammerhead sharks, open water jacks and many tropical species. Because of the strong currents and cold water diving should only be attempted by experienced divers. Specific dive cruises usually offer two dives per day, occasional land visits, and reach the few islands (such as Wolf and Darwin) that only have dive sites.



Giant tortoise

FINCH BAY HOTEL



On the island of Santa Cruz, across the bay from the main town of Puerto Ayora, with its own private white sand beach. 21 rooms with balconies, hammocks and sea view, set around a small lava flow garden. Pool, jacuzzi overlooking the bay, kayaks, mountain bikes, day trips to nearby islands.



Brown pelican

Alta

A 140' ketch rigged 3-masted schooner with 8 spacious double cabins (twin and double beds). Small library, dining room, lounge, plenty of deck space. Cruises at 8-10 knots under power.



Beagle

A lovely 105' steel-hulled schooner with teak decks and lots of character. Cabins have bunks with double lower and single upper berths. Spacious interior lounge. Cruises at 8 knots under power.



Beluga

A 110' steel-hulled motor yacht with plenty of deck space and 8 cabins (2 with double beds, 4 with twin beds and 2 with upper/lower single berths). Spacious communal areas. Cruises at 12 knots.



Cachalote

A comfortable 95' twin-masted schooner: 7 double cabins (double lower and single upper bunks), one small double cabin forward of the dining area. Good deck space in the bow. Cruises at 9 knots under power.





SAMPLE NATURALIST ITINERARY

- Day 1:** Baltra, Seymour Norte
- Day 2:** Plaza Sur, Santa Cruz (Puerto Ayora)
- Day 3:** Española (Punta Suarez, Gardner Bay)
- Day 4:** Floreana (Punta Cormorant, Post Office Bay)
- Day 5:** Isabela (Punta Moreno, Elizabeth Bay)
- Day 6:** Isabela (Urvina Bay), Fernandina (Punta Espinosa)
- Day 7:** Santiago (Puerto Egas), Bartolomé
- Day 8:** Caleta Tortuga Negra, Baltra



Flamingo

Galapagos visitor sites

The most common island name is given first, with the alternative (usually English) in brackets. The most significant wildlife of a particular site is also summarised.

Isabela (Albemarle)

Elizabeth Bay: a narrow passage lined with mangroves with good views of the marine life, including marine turtles, rays and flightless cormorants.

Tagus Cove: opposite Punta Espinosa, the cliffs are covered with graffiti of ship's names going back hundreds of years and dolphins are often seen. A trail leads up past a parasitic crater with salty water that seeps in through an underground fissure, and at the top there are fine views of the lava fields from Darwin's volcano.

Urvina Bay: remains of a coral reef uplifted from the sea.

Villamil Experimental Station: Breeding programme for the local species of giant tortoise.

Sierra Negra Volcano: the 10km crater, which can sometimes be visited (by horseback) on longer itineraries, is the second largest in the world after the Ngorongoro. Fumaroles, finches, vermilion flycatcher, wild horses and donkeys.

Fernandina (Narborough)

Punta Espinosa: the most westerly island and not visited on all itineraries, this is the principal site where the flightless cormorant (the rarest seabird in the world) can be seen. It is the youngest island geologically, and the AA (uncomfortable!) lava flows are particularly impressive. Galapagos hawk, many marine iguanas.



Red-footed booby

Photo: Liz Rhodes

Santiago (James)

Puerto Egas: a beautiful rocky shoreline and natural cove used by pirates in the past. Seabirds, yellow-crowned night heron, whimbrel, American oystercatchers, fur sea lions.

Espumilla: small salty lagoon behind a long coffee-coloured beach (good for swimming and surfing). Darwin finch, ducks, turtle nests, occasionally flamingos.

Sullivan Bay: usually combined with Bartolomé, this is one of the best sites (with Fernandina) to see a recent lava flow (100 years old). Mainly made up of black *pahoehoe* (ropy) lava, which has surrounded and contrasts with the older red rocks (pyroclastic cones).

Diamante

An elegant 112' brigantine schooner, with mahogany and teak decor. 6 different cabins, with either bunks or beds. Interior lounge/dining area. Cruises at 9 knots under power.



Eclipse

A 210' passenger ship, carrying 48 passengers in 27 cabins (including 4 suites and 2 singles) on 2 decks. Very spacious, with a pool, shop, library, and infirmary. Occasional family departures. Cruises at 14½ knots.



Evolution

A 210' motor sailer with the classic looks of a 1920's yacht, with an infirmary and small pool. 18 double cabins for up to 32 passengers (4 suites, 2 singles). Cruises at 10-12 knots. Family and active departures.



Flamingo, Eric & Letty

83' comfortable motor yachts for up to 20 passengers, all identical. Polished teak furnishings. 3 or 4 night itineraries which can be combined to make 7 nights. Cruise at 10-12 knots.





Rábida (Jervis)

There is a small salty lagoon behind the red sand beach where flamingos can often be seen. A trail leads to the top of the eastern cliffs (sea lions, seabirds, *palo santo* trees).

Sombrero Chino

Beautiful scenery and lava formations around a small volcanic cone giving it the 'Chinese Hat' appearance. Sea lions, marine iguanas.

Bartolomé

The most photographed point on the Galapagos, with a tall rock shattered by US bombers who used it as a practice target during the last war (when they had a base on Baltra). Excellent snorkelling off the shore and a good chance to see penguins. A short walk through dunes leads to another beach (turtles, sharks). Another landing site gives access to the island's summit after a stiff climb through a barren and dramatic moonscape.

Daphne

A large tuft cone, with sparse vegetation and two small craters. Blue-footed and Nasca (masked) boobies, red-billed tropicbirds. Visits are restricted.

Genovesa (Tower)

Darwin Trail: red-footed and Nasca boobies, frigatebirds, cliffs and tidepools.

Prince Philip's Steps: a steep ascent to the top of the cliffs; lava gulls and the lava owl can sometimes be seen.



Sea lions in Gardner Bay

Santa Cruz (Indefatigable)

Puerto Ayora: shops, hotels, guest houses and the *Charles Darwin Research Station*, with giant tortoises in captivity and interesting background information on the issues affecting the Galapagos.

The Highlands: an insight into life for the local human residents, the road across the island to the Baltra ferry passes through various vegetation zones and giant tortoises can often be seen in the wild (best October to May).

Caleta Tortuga Negra: a mangrove-lined inlet on the northern coast offers an extraordinary tranquil view of turtles, rays and small sharks.

Bachas Beach: a lovely beach with thick white sand and two small lagoons. Flamingos, great blue herons, sea lions.

Seymour Norte (North Seymour)

This uplifted island has the largest colony of magnificent frigatebirds, also blue-footed boobies, fur sea lions and iguanas. If you are lucky you will see surfing sea lions!

SAMPLE DIVE ITINERARY

- Day 1:** Baltra, Seymour Norte (equipment test)
- Day 2:** Cousins (dives), Albany (dive), Santiago: Puerto Egas (visit)
- Day 3:** Roca Redonda and Punta Vicente Rocas (dives)
- Day 4:** Wolf (dives)
- Day 5:** Wolf or Darwin (dives)
- Day 6:** Cape Marshall (dives), Rábida (dive)
- Day 7:** Santa Cruz: Puerto Ayora, Highlands
- Day 8:** Caleta Tortuga Negra (visit), Baltra

See our web site for detailed yacht itineraries.



Blue-footed booby

Galapagos Explorer II

A 290', 100-passenger ship with a range of cabin types, two with balconies. Plenty of deck space, pool, Jacuzzi, infirmary and library. Occasional diving on some departures. The largest ship in the Galapagos. Cruises at 17 knots.



Isabela II

A 166' deluxe passenger ship for 40 passengers in 16 twins, 4 doubles (2 cabins with a single sofa bed for triple use) and 1 owner's cabin. Very comfortable and spacious, with plenty of deck space, Jacuzzi, shop, library and infirmary. Cruises at 10 knots.



Lammer Law

A 93' trimaran whose design gives excellent stability, grace and speed. 8 large double cabins. Fully equipped for diving and offers 7 or 9 night dive cruises as well as naturalist and active departures. Cruises at 10 knots under power.



Mistral

A 74' motor cruiser with 6 cabins (bunk beds). Comfortable, and spacious given her size. Fully equipped for diving with regular departures. Cruises at 12 knots.





Nasca booby

Plaza Sur (South Plazas)

One of a pair of small uplifted islands with Opuntia (prickly pear) cactus. Marine and land iguanas, several noisy colonies of sea lions, and five species of seabird which nest in the cliffs.

Santa Fé (Barrington)

A very pretty bay with two trails, one through tall prickly pear cactus and the other to a viewpoint on the top of a cliff. A unique land iguana is sometimes seen.

Floreana (Charles)

Punta Cormorant: a green beach (from olivine crystals) and large lagoon where flamingos, great blue herons and stilts are often seen. A short walk away another beach often has marine turtles.

Post Office Bay: a famous landmark because of the barrel which has served as a post drop since the 18th Century. There are interesting remains of former habitation and a long lava tube which can be explored. Floreana has tales of murder, mystery and Baronesses which always enliven a visit!

Devil's Crown: an eroded volcanic cone just offshore makes a particularly good snorkelling site. Corals, white-tipped and black-tipped sharks.

Española (Hood)

Punta Suarez: a rocky point with one of the most impressive concentrations of wildlife on the Galapagos. Blue-footed and Nasca boobies, mockingbirds, frigatebirds, waved albatross (April to December), Swallow-tailed gulls, finches.

Gardner Bay: a lovely sandy beach. Sea lions and marine iguanas.

San Cristóbal (Chatham)

Puerto Baquerizo Moreno: the official capital of the archipelago. A few small hotels, restaurants, and a Visitors Interpretation Centre.

El Junco Lagoon: one of the few bodies of permanent fresh water in the islands, at 700m. Gallinules, white-cheeked pintail ducks.

Kicker Rock (León Dormido): a large uplifted rock which has split in two leaving a narrow channel passable by small vessels.

Punta Pitt: all three species of booby.

Isla Lobos: blue-footed boobies and plenty of sea lions.



Surf at North Seymour

Parranda

An extremely spacious and comfortable 125' motor yacht with stabilisers for extra comfort. 8 double cabins (twin or double beds). Spacious lounge and wonderful sun deck. Cruises at 12 knots.



Sagitta

A spacious 120', 3-masted motor yacht with 10 cabins (double lower and single upper berths) on 2 decks with maximum capacity of 16 passengers. Large communal areas both inside and out. Cruises at 8 knots under power.



Samba

A charming 78, motor yacht for up to 14 guests. 7 cabins (single upper and lower berths), 6 with en-suite bathrooms and 1 with bathroom across the corridor. Very good value for money. Cruises at 8½ knots under power.



Sea Cloud

An 84' ketch-rigged motor yacht with teak panelling and furnishings. Up to 8 passengers in 4 cabins (bunks). Limited communal space but ideal for a small group or family who enjoy sailing. Cruises at 9 knots under power.





Galapagos Itineraries

ECUADOR AND THE GALAPAGOS



Combine the unique experience and wildlife of the Galapagos with a charming hacienda in the Northern Sierra.

Quito

Day 1: Driven from the airport to the Hostal de la Rábida, a small and friendly colonial hotel in the heart of the city.

Otavalo and the Northern Sierra

Days 2-5: Driven north (2 hours) through the Andes for 3 nights at Hacienda Cusin (see page 39), for a few days to appreciate the highlands and perhaps visit Otavalo market. Driven back to Quito for a night at the Hostal de la Rábida.

Galapagos Islands

Days 6-12: Fly to the Galapagos for a 7 night cruise (see pages 45-48 for Galapagos cruise options).

Guayaquil

Days 13-14: Fly to Guayaquil for a final night at the Hampton Inn, a spotless hotel just a few blocks from the Malecón 2000 and the same distance from the Parque Bolívar (full of iguanas). Transfer to the airport for onward connections.



Guachalá



Waved albatross



Gardens of Hacienda Cusin



VENEZUELA, ECUADOR AND THE GALAPAGOS



Offering the wildlife enthusiast the opportunity to see a wide variety of species in various habitats:

wetlands, cloud forests and the Galapagos.

Caracas, Venezuela

Day 1: A night at the Hotel Avila, in a quiet residential suburb with good views over the city and a small pool.

The Llanos

Days 2-4: Driven south (about 5 hours) for 3 nights at Hato Piñero, arriving in time for an afternoon excursion. The accommodation is rustic but comfortable. Excursions (two per day) are in specially converted vehicles that provide an ideal viewing platform from which to appreciate the wildlife (including over 340 bird species). Depending on the season boat trips are taken on the many streams that cross the savanna, and riding can usually be arranged.

Choroní

Days 5-8: Driven (4-5 hours) to Choroní, on the edge of the Henri Pittier National Park, which contains 6% of the world's bird species. Here you have 4 nights at the Posada La Casa de las Garcia, a lovely inn with rooms set around a courtyard. It is a short walk to the lively town of Puerto Colombia and the beach.

Quito, Ecuador

Day 9: Driven back to Caracas for the 2 hour flight to Quito, and a night at the Hotel Sebastián, a good central 4-star hotel. Restaurants and shops are within walking distance.

The Galapagos Islands

Days 10-17: Fly to the Galapagos for a 7 night cruise (see pages 45-48 for Galapagos cruise options), at the end of which you fly back to Quito for a final night at the Hotel Sebastián before returning to the airport for onward connections.



Capybaras in the Llanos



Hotel Avila



Sea lions in the Galapagos