An Introduction to the Galapagos

GALAPAGOS ISLANDS
In 1934 the Ecuadorian government, in collaboration with the Charles Darwin Research Station, had the foresight to set aside a number of wildlife sanctuaries on the islands before finally declaring the Galapagos a national park in 1959.

About 97% of the island territory is now protected and, thankfully, carefully managed. As a result the park service only allows visits to about 50 sites, in addition to the islands’ few towns. Rest assured that although most of the park is off limits, the sites available to visitors are some of the most interesting and you will not be disappointed!

The thirteen large islands and six smaller islands (land area 7,882 square km’s with marine reserve covering 45,000 square km’s) that make up this cornucopia of unique species have not always been protected. The park has a history of human colonisation that has taken a negative toll on the environment. For this reason, tours of the islands and their surrounding waters are only possible with a guide and visitors must always walk on designated paths.

These organised tours manage to turn visitors into amateur naturalists as they marvel at “vampire” finches, warm-water penguins, hammerhead sharks and friendly sea lions. An entrance fee for access to the park is payable upon arrival and contributes to the fund and the preservation of this incredible habitat.
HOW TO VISIT THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS

A visit to Ecuador would not be complete without a visit to The Galapagos National Park, one of Ecuador’s 21 provinces, a wildlife experience which is truly magical. It captures the essence of being somewhere completely unique and undoubtedly deserves the reputation as being one of the world’s great travel experiences. There are many different options from which to choose from when undertaking a trip to the islands, best explored by boat.

Each yacht has its own itinerary and provides very comfortable accommodation with quality service and first-class guides to ensure you get the very best out of your holiday in the Galapagos. Often families or small groups of friends will travel together to the Galapagos and this works very well in order to charter a whole boat for private use. This can be very advantageous to a group or family and very cost effective.

When undertaking landings in the Galapagos i.e. departing your vessel in order to visit the different islands, a ‘Panga’ (dinghy), will most commonly provide the transfer. This will be on-board your vessel during the duration of your trip and will be attached to the side of the boat when not in use.
WHAT WILDLIFE WILL I SEE?

The creatures of the Galapagos are survivors of a distressed landscape and remain virtually fearless and unaffected by visitors. As a visitor to the Galapagos you will swim next to sea lions, Galapagos penguins (if you can keep up!), swim over turtles and diamond stingrays and snorkel with tropical fish.

On land you will find yourself sidestepping over hundreds of Darwin’s dragon spawn, as well as nesting blue-footed and red-footed boobies, sea lions, and scuttling sally lightfoot crabs. Giant tortoises, flightless cormorants, waved albatrosses, marine and land iguanas roam in what Darwin described as a “living laboratory” of evolution. The islands are fortuitously positioned at the confluence of three distinct oceanic currents, creating a sea of contradictions, as well as one of the highest levels of marine endemism anywhere in the world: nearly one in four species is unique to the islands. In the Galapagos, expect the unexpected. Penguins swim through mangroves in the company of rainbow coloured reef fish, while whale sharks and schools of hammerheads circle in the same waters as the Moorish idol.

The basis for Darwin’s theory of natural selection was based upon the observation of the adapted species that existed on the islands and are now known as “Darwin’s Finches”. These species have adapted to varying diets dependent upon the different vegetation on the islands and all stem from one single ancestor. Puerto Ayora on Santa Cruz is home to the Charles Darwin Research Station where researchers conduct scientific research and environmental education for Galapagos conservation.

The foundation was founded in 1959, under the auspices of UNESCO and IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature. There is, simply put, nothing else like the Galapagos Islands in the world and they undoubtedly deserve their reputation as one of the world’s great travel experiences. There are many highlights – sailing from island to island, watching the sun set from the deck of your boat, the volcanic formations – but undoubtedly the unique and endemic wildlife must come top of the list. Their fearlessness of man is incredible and allows you the closest of encounters with nature.
WILDLIFE

Blue-footed Boobies
The clumsiness and unassuming charm of the blue-footed booby is bound to win you over! The light-hearted and comical whistling and honking of their courtship ritual is wonderful to watch. The name “boobie” comes from the Spanish term bubi, which means stupid fellow. (Islands of Espanola and San Cristobal)

Galapagos Sea Lions and Fur Seals
Differentiated from seals by their external ears and method of moving on land, Galapagos sea lions are irresistible. The soft, dewy-eyed look of the newly born pups will have you reaching for your camera. Whilst in the water, these underwater acrobats will swoop playfully around you, twisting and somersaulting effortlessly. (Islands of Plaza Sur, Espanola, Santa Fe, Rabida and Santiago).

Waved Albatross
Most ornithologists consider the Waved Albatross to be endemic to the Galapagos, with only a few pairs nesting near the Ecuadorian mainland. The elegant and beautiful courting ritual of the waved albatross – only found in the Galapagos - is transfixing to watch as they clash their beaks together in graceful rhythm. (Espanola Island)

Giant Tortoise
One of the island’s most celebrated residents, the giant tortoise is the world’s longest living land animal, with an average lifespan of 177 years. The tortoises are popular with all visitors to the Galapagos. (Islands of Santa Cruz, Isabela, San Cristobal)

Marine Iguanas
Slouched arrogantly on the rocks, their spiky black scales give them a punk-like quality. Supercilious and disdainful they stare with contempt at the approach of camera-touting groups. They are the only example of their species found in the world and can be submerged for up to an hour in the sea, feeding on plankton along the rocks. (Espanola, Fernandina & Santa Cruz)

Magnificent Frigate Bird
Similar to the great frigate species, the magnificent frigate has a vibrant red pouch used for attracting female counterparts. These birds are highly manoeuvrable and famous for waylaying other birds as they return to their nests after a day fishing.

Furthermore, the marine life of the Galapagos is truly incredible. From awesome whale sharks, hammerhead sharks to the endemic Galapagos penguin (the only penguin to live on the equator), the diversity is astounding. Dolphins will jump and surf at the bow of your boat and at certain times of the year you may be lucky to have some amazing whale sightings.
THE ISLANDS

From rocky barrens to lush peaks there are many highlights sailing from island to island. The most important islands are Isla Santa Cruz and Isla San Cristobal due to Santa Cruz’s tourist trade and the home of the Charles Darwin Research Centre. San Cristobal is the most easterly island in the Galapagos and also the oldest of the islands.

Santa Cruz
This is a picturesque port which encounters the majority of the tourist trade and is expanding rapidly. Puerto Ayora harbour will welcome you on arrival to the island from Baltra and you will be greeted by lava herons, sally lightfoot crabs and other species just waiting for the fishermen to return with their daily catch. Here you will witness (if you’re lucky) a feeding frenzy with pelicans, great blue herons and sea lions. In the highlands you will encounter the giant tortoises that enjoy the lush green vegetation. You can also visit the Charles Darwin Research Centre, black turtle cove, Los Gemelos (Twins – two large craters formed by the collapse of empty magma chambers) and scalesia forest.

Plaza Sur
Two small crescent-shaped islands (north and south) located off the coast of Santa Cruz and separated by a channel less than 1km wide. These were formed by uplifted slabs of the sea bed rather than volcanic islands. The North Plaza is reserved for scientific research and closed to the public. South Plaza is open to visitors and here you can view marine iguanas, swallow-tailed gulls, common noddies, red-billed tropicbirds, blue-footed and Nazca boobies.

Santa Fe
An arid vegetation zone with opuntia cacti forest which are among the tallest in the archipelago. With only one visitor site, Bahia Barrington and a 1.5km trail, you can identify a variety of species such as green sea turtles, spotted eagle rays, brown pelicans, boobies (both blue-footed and Nazca), Galapagos sea lions and the endemic Santa Fe rice rat which is nocturnal.
THE ISLANDS

North Seymour
A fairly small, uplifted lava flow island, 1.9km² in area and located just 40km from Puerto Ayora. Here you will see the magnificent frigate bird, land iguanas, lava lizard and of course, sea lions.

Bartolome
The island has two barren volcanic cinder cones, connected by green lush vegetation and golden sand beaches. A landing on Bartolome could be mistaken for that of Mars with its many red craters. Pinnacle rock sits in Bartolome’s northern bay and here you can find Galapagos penguins living at the foot of the rock. Quite a steep climb takes you up to a spectacular viewpoint at the summit of a splatter cone. Snorkelling around the island you can swim with penguins.

Santiago
The official name is San Salvador and it is large enough to hold the endemic subspecies of the giant tortoise and the nocturnal rice rat. Puerto Egas is the remains of a salt-mining operation and here you will see Galapagos hawks. If you head to the west of the island, the trail leads to a series of collapsed black lava tubes which have collapsed opening out to sea, forming fantastic grottos. Here you can watch sea lions and green sea turtles playing in the beautiful turquoise waters.

Rabida
The most striking feature is a high bluff on the north coast, which glows a startling rust-red when the sun is low in the sky. Greater flamingos share a brackish lagoon with sea lions, nesting brown pelicans and herons. Galapagos hawks are also visible on the island.

Isabela
Located directly on the equator, Isabela is the largest island in the Archipelago, over four times larger than Santa Cruz. Formed by six shield volcanoes that have merged into a single land mass, it has the highest point in the archipelago at Wolf Volcano with an altitude of 1646m. All but one of the volcanoes is still active making it one of the most volcanic places on earth.

Only the faster boats are able to go to Isabela due to the distance, so its remoteness adds to the sense of a natural island. Here you will find the Cromwell current; a deep submarine current that up wells at the volcanic platform of the western islands. These cool nutrient-rich waters attract plenty of sea-dependent species which include brown pelicans, blue-footed boobies, noddy terns, shearwaters and the only tropical penguin on Earth, the Galapagos penguin.

Fernandina
The youngest and most active volcano in the Galapagos erupts every few years. The flat lava of Punta Espinosa offers a stark and barren landscape, but here flightless cormorants build their nests on the point, sea lions laze on the beach or swim in the tide pools and marine iguanas climb over one another.

San Cristóbal
Puerto Baquerizo Moreno is the official capital of the archipelago situated to the southeast of San Cristobal. The Visitor Interpretation Centre was opened here by the Galapagos National Park in 1998 and serves as a source of information about the islands communities and natural history. San Cristobal is the only island with a freshwater lake located in the crater of the ‘El Junco’ Volcano. The rain-filled crater, almost 300m across and 6m deep, is a vital source to the Island and majority of tourist ships in the Galapagos.
THE ISLANDS

**Espanola**
This island is thought to be an uplifted lava flow and one of the oldest islands. Punta Suarez is renowned as the only location on earth that is home to the waved albatross which nests here between March and December. Hood mocking birds, red billed tropic birds, brightly coloured marine iguanas and lava lizards are found here, as are nesting colonies of Nazca boobies and blue-footed boobies.

**Floreana**
Officially named Santa Maria, Floreana is an island with a most interesting human history, haunt of the erratic baroness and her entourage. It also has a main post box, an old casket that has been on the beach since 1763 for sailors to place their mail in and collect the post on their way home. It still works today! Land on a green beach of olivine sand and see the pink flamingoes in the lagoon. Over the hill is a coral sand beach known as a nesting area for green turtles, which brings in the white tipped sharks visible from the shore. Snorkel in a volcanic crater, the Devil’s Crown, one of the best snorkelling sites in the Galapagos.

**Genovesa (Tower)**
Also referred to as ‘Bird Island’ for its profusion of inhabitants, expect to see blue-footed boobies and, more uncommonly the red-footed boobies, some of the great birding characters on these islands.

Frigate birds fill the skies and at night the only nocturnal gulls in the world, the swallow-tailed gulls, keep the air alive with sound. The beauty of this island is that it can only be reached on faster vessels and therefore its remoteness adds to its tranquility and its enjoyment. Snorkelling here is full of surprises with its nutrient rich waters.

**Daphne Major**
A steep eroded tuff cone is surrounded by the Canal San Salvador which is so deep that boats cannot anchor. Daphne Major is located 50 km north of Puerto Ayora. Wildlife to view here includes the redbilled tropicbirds and Darwin’s finches, sea lions, nesting brown pelicans and herons. Galapagos hawks are also visible on the island.
WHEN TO GO

The climate of the Galapagos is always conducive to boat tours, but there are slight climatic variations throughout the year. From June to December, the dry season, the southern trade winds bring the colder Humboldt Current north to the islands. The sea is generally cooler at this time and a sea mist occurs ensuring the highlands remain lush.

From January to May, the warm season, the Galapagos’ climate is more tropical with daily precipitation and is more overcast. Ocean temperatures are increased during this season. Whatever the time of year the Galapagos Islands are a unique, spectacular

January
- Rainy season begins. Dry zones flourish and the Galapagos becomes green
- Land birds start nesting, generally after the first rain
- Adult marine iguanas on Española (Hood Island) become brightly coloured (green, red & black)
- Green sea turtles arrive at beaches in Galapagos for the egg laying period
- Land iguanas begin reproductive cycles on Isabela Island
- Both water and air temperatures rise and stay warm until June

February
- Greater flamingos begin nesting on Floreana Island
- Bahama pintail ducks (black-tailed pintail) start their breeding season.
- Nazca (masked) boobies on Española are at the end of their nesting season
- Marine iguanas nest on Santa Cruz
- The highest water temperature reaches 25C (77F) and remains constant until April
- Fewer penguin sightings on Bartolome Island; most have followed cool western waters
- Peak nesting season of the Galapagos dove

March
- Highest precipitation period, rain likely daily with intense sun and humidity. Air temperature 30C (86F)
- Marine iguanas nest on Fernandina
- Summer equinox (March 21st) signals the arrival of the waved albatross to Española.
- Snorkelling excellent in the western islands, especially Punta Vicente Roca (Isabela) where combined sightings of penguins and tropical fish are frequent
- Some shorelines, particularly north facing, can receive deep surges (ola de fondo) from northern currents (warm).
**WHEN TO GO**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- End of the rainy season and yet the islands continue to flourish</td>
<td>- Blue-footed boobies begin courtship rituals on North Seymour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- April and May are often the best months to visit the Galapagos for</td>
<td>- Sea turtles continue hatching on Gardner Bay, Punta Cormorant and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weather and wildlife</td>
<td>Puerto Egas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Massive arrival of waved albatrosses to Española where their amazing</td>
<td>- The majority of marine iguana eggs hatch from nests on Santa Cruz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>courtship rituals begin</td>
<td>- Palo Santo trees begin to shed their foliage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- End of hatching season for the giant tortoises</td>
<td>- Waved albatross on Española start laying eggs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Green sea turtle eggs begin hatching</td>
<td>- Band-rumped storm petrels begin their first nesting period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Land iguana eggs begin hatching on Isabela</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Good visibility in the water for snorkelling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**June**

- Breeding season for many sea bird communities especially blue footed boobies on Española.
- Flightless cormorants perform beautiful courtship rituals and nesting activities on Fernandina
- American oyster catchers begin nesting along the shores of Puerto Egas (Santiago Island)
- Lava lizards initiate mating rituals from now until November
- Cetaceans (whales & dolphins) sightings more likely especially off the western coast of Isabela
- Ideal observation period for the four nesting stages (eggs, chicks, juveniles & sub adults) for blue footed boobies and Nazca boobies
- Maximum water temperature 21C (68F)
WHEN TO GO

**August**
- Galapagos hawks begin courtship rituals on Española and Santiago
- Nazca (masked) boobies and swallow-tailed gulls nest on Genovesa Island
- Ocean temperatures generally drop to 18°C (64°F), although water temperature vary according to the geographic zones among the islands
- Migrant shore birds arrive and stay on the islands until March
- Giant tortoises return to the highlands of Santa Cruz
- Oceans become choppy, strong currents and surges can be expected along south and west shores
- Sea lion pupping season begins. Sightings in western and central islands are likely

**September**
- Peak of the cold (garúa) season
- Air temperature reaches its lowest levels (19°C-66°F)
- Galapagos penguins show remarkable activity on Bartolome frolicking with swimmers and snorkellers above and below the ocean surface
- Female sea lions reach oestrus stage and harem-gathering males are constantly barking and fighting particularly on western and central islands
- Sea bird nesting sites remain active

**October**
- Lava herons start nesting from now until March
- Breeding period for Galapagos fur sea lions
- Blue footed boobies begin raising chicks all over Española and Punta Vicente Roca (Isabela)
- Giant tortoises continue laying eggs
- Garúa likely in most locations except in western islands where most days begin with mist but gradually brighten
- Sunrises in the west can be quite beautiful after the garúa covers only certain locations of the western volcanoes. Summits are clear but low-lying fog covers the shoreline

**November**
- Sea lion pupping season continues
- Sea lions are now sexually active on the eastern part of the archipelago
- Breeding season for brown noddies
- Jellyfish sightings likely especially Genus physalia around Gardner and Tortuga Islets. Stranded jellyfish likely on the shores of Flour Beach at Floreana
- Band-rumped storm petrels begin their second nesting period
- Seas calmer
- South east trade winds have decreased in strength
- Water temperatures are slowly rising
- Weather much improved due to transition of seasons
- Good visibility for snorkelling
- Sea lion pups (especially at Champion Islet) play aqua-aerobics next to snorkellers. Most pups here are curious enough to nibble at fins of snorkellers. The average age of most pups is now 3-4 months)
- Maximum water temperature 21°C (68°F)
WHEN TO GO

December

- Good weather generally anticipated with little wind from the south east.
- Western islands remain dry and water temperatures gradually rise
- Giant tortoise eggs begin hatching from now until April
- Green sea turtles display mating behaviour
- The first young waved albatross fledglings are observed
- First red pouches of great frigate birds are seen on Genovesa Island
- Northern migratory birds begin their journey southward
- Some species of cetaceans begin their migration
We know choosing a boat to visit the Galapagos Islands can be a daunting prospect with so many to choose from. At Steppes Travel we have done the hard work for you. We have visited all the boats and have handpicked the best vessels in each size and comfort category. All you need to do, with our help, is decide what type of boat and what comfort level you require, the options are below. We have access to all boats operating in the Galapagos Islands but below are our favourites based on the quality of comfort, guiding, safety and sustainability.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vessel Type</th>
<th>Occupancy</th>
<th>Vessel Name</th>
<th>Departure Day</th>
<th>Price Per Person</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SMALL MOTOR</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Galaven</td>
<td>Tuesday / Friday</td>
<td>2680*</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMALL MOTOR</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Beluga</td>
<td>Tuesday / Friday / Sunday</td>
<td>2890*</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMALL MOTOR</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Majestic</td>
<td>Monday / Thursday</td>
<td>3410*</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMALL MOTOR</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Seastar Journey</td>
<td>Tuesday / Thursday / Sunday</td>
<td>3015 — 5 Night**</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMALL MOTOR</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Origin</td>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>4595*</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sailing</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Beagle</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>2650</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sailing</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Mary Anne</td>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>3295</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMALL CATAMARAN</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Seamann Journey</td>
<td>Monday / Friday</td>
<td>2820*</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMALL CATAMARAN</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Athala II</td>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>3810*</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMALL CATAMARAN</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>OceanSpray</td>
<td>Tuesday / Thursday / Saturday</td>
<td>4050*</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMALL CATAMARAN</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Petrel</td>
<td>Monday / Wednesday / Friday</td>
<td>4255*</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midsize Motor</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Evolution</td>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>3710*</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midsize Motor</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Isabella II</td>
<td>Monday / Tuesday / Friday</td>
<td>3415 — 6 Night**</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midsize Motor</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Eclipse</td>
<td>Wednesday / Saturday</td>
<td>4110*</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Boat</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Santa Cruz II</td>
<td>Monday / Wednesday / Saturday</td>
<td>2815 — 5 Night**</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Boat</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Galapagos Legend</td>
<td>Monday / Thursday</td>
<td>3155*</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These boats offer shorter and/or longer departures. **These boats offer longer and shorter departures but no 7 night departure.

All prices are for 7 nights/8 days unless stated otherwise, cruises on a full board basis with expert naturalists/guides, based on low season double occupancy. Prices are subject to change and the above is just an approximate guide. Additional costs include return flights from the uk, domestic flights to the Galapagos from Quito or Guayaquil, Galapagos National Park Fee. All boats can be chartered. Diving is possible on some boats which offer specialist 1/2 week diving trips.
GALAPAGOS CRUISING VESSELS

SMALL MOTOR BOATS

Galaven - Sleeps 20

The Galaven is a small 27 m (88ft) motor yacht, which can accommodate 20 passengers. There are 11 cabins (8 cosy doubles, 1 triple, 2 comfortable suites) all with air conditioning and private bathrooms.

Facilities on board include a modern lounge with large picture windows, a dining room with bar area, and a sun deck to relax and look out across the ocean. Snorkelling equipment is available on board.

Beluga - Sleeps 16

The Beluga is a 33 m (108ft) steel hulled motor yacht. It is fully air-conditioned and can accommodate up to 16 passengers in double, twin and triple cabins. The cabins on the lower deck have portholes while those on the main and upper deck have large picture windows.

The Beluga is a comfortable and homely feeling yacht with sofas, carpeted floors and large wooden dining table. The sun deck has plenty of seating and day beds to relax, take in the marine life and watch the sunset.

Majestic - Sleeps 16

Majestic is a motor yacht, measuring 36 metres (117ft), designed specifically to cruise the Galapagos for 16 passengers.

Accommodation is light and fresh in all 8 double cabins, with large panoramic windows, air-conditioning and private bathrooms. There is also 1 single cabin. Facilities on board include an outdoor bar and dining area as well as a Jacuzzi located on the sun deck. The main deck has a stylish modern lounge, restaurant & bar and a small library. As well as snorkelling equipment there are sea kayaks for guests.

Sea Star Journey - Sleeps 16

Sea Star Journey is a stylish motor boat, measuring 43 m (140ft) Accommodation is extremely spacious in all 8 double cabins, with large panoramic windows. There is also one sea star suite measuring a massive 35 square metres.

Some of the cabins have sofa beds and are interconnecting, which is excellent for families.

Facilities on board include an outdoor bar and dining area as well as two Jacuzzi located on the large sun deck. As well as snorkel equipment there are sea kayaks and a glass bottom zodiac.
Origin - Sleeps 20

Origin is a spacious, high end, 44 m (144ft) boat, that can carry a maximum of just 20 passengers. The 10 deluxe staterooms which can interconnect, are all on the main deck, have large panoramic windows and can sleep one, two or three.

On board are plenty of social areas as well as indoor and outdoor dining. The sun deck has a Jacuzzi, wet bar, loungers and hammocks, a great place to relax and take in the landscape. For those feeling active there is a fitness centre, kayaks, stand up paddle boards, snorkelling equipment and wet suits. With two naturalist guides the ratio of passengers to guide is higher than most operating in the Galapagos.

SAILING BOATS

Beagle – Sleeps 13

The Beagle is a magnificent 32m (105ft) steel hulled Brigantine schooner with a teak deck and accommodation for 13 passengers in 6 cosy double cabins and one smaller single occupancy cabin. All cabins have porthole windows, private bathroom and a/c. Facilities on board include an indoor lounge and dining area, as well as a small Alfresco eating area. Snorkel equipment and sea kayaks are available for guests.

Mary Anne - Sleeps 24

The Mary Anne is a beautiful 65m (214ft) traditional sailing boat. The Mary Anne has plenty of room as it can accommodate 16 passengers between 12 double cabins each with air conditioning and private bathrooms. The yacht has a comfortable wooden panelled lounge with a small bar area, there is an Alfresco dining area and a canopied sun deck. As well as snorkel equipment they have sea kayaks for guests and a sun deck to relax and look out across the ocean. Snorkelling equipment is available on board.
**Seaman Journey - Sleeps 16**

The Seaman Journey is a comfortable 28 m (90ft) motorised catamaran which is surprisingly spacious and provides excellent value for money. The boat can accommodate 16 people in eight good size cabins, all with excellent storage and big picture windows. There is an internal dining room and lounge as well as a good outdoor dining area. In general the Seaman Journey offers a lot of outdoor deck space with a great sun deck on the upper level, the perfect place for relaxing and spotting marine life. Snorkelling equipment and kayaks are available.

**Athala - Sleeps 16**

Athala II is an elegant 30m (98ft) motor catamaran constructed in 2007. The Athala II accommodates 16 guests within 4 comfortable upper deck cabins which can interconnect and 4 main deck cabins which have private balconies. All cabins have A/C with large windows and private bathrooms. Onboard facilities include a stylish dining room and separate lounge. There is an alfresco dining area and bar, which is a perfect place to enjoy lunch. The beautiful teak sundeck is home to sun loungers and a Jacuzzi. As well as snorkelling equipment, sea kayaks are available.

**Ocean Spray - Sleeps 16**

The Ocean Spray is a 34 m (113 ft) catamaran that accommodates 16 passengers in 8 large double/twin cabins, all with private bathrooms, air conditioning, private balconies and large windows. Some are interconnecting, which is great for families. There is also 1 smaller single cabin on the upper deck with its own balcony. Facilities on-board include a beautiful, spacious sun deck with loungers and a Jacuzzi. Stylish indoor and outdoor bar and dining room, as well as separate lounge at the front of the catamaran. There is snorkelling equipment and sea kayaks for guests to use.

**Petrel - Sleeps 16**

The Petrel is a 33 m (110ft) high end catamaran designed for comfort and stability. The Petrel can accommodate 16 passengers in nine spacious cabins all with private balconies and huge picture windows. There is one single cabin, six staterooms and two huge suites. The decor throughout is stylish and sleek with spacious social areas, comfortable sofas, both indoor and outdoor dining and bars. The sun deck is the perfect area for relaxing, watching the marine life or taking a soak in the Jacuzzi. Kayaks, snorkelling equipment and wet suits are available to use during the cruise.
GALAPAGOS CRUISING VESSELS

MIDSIZE MOTOR

**Evolution - Sleeps 32**

Evolution is a 58m (192ft) elegant motor yacht which provides plenty of space for just 32 passengers. The Evolution provides a high standard of comfort and is designed to take you back to the romantic era of the 1920s. There are 13 staterooms with portholes and on the upper deck there are three suites with windows, all have air conditioning and are furnished to a high level.

Social areas are plentiful with large indoor and outdoor dining areas, a bar area, small boutique, library and infirmary. On the sun deck is a jacuzzi and loungers for watching the marine life and islands during navigation. Attention to detail is high with a cruise director on board as well as naturalist guides and full crew. Snorkelling equipment and kayaks are available to use during the trip.

**Isabella - Sleeps 40**

Isabela II is a 53m (166ft) motor yacht with a capacity for 40 passengers in 20 double cabins, all with large picture windows, air conditioning and private bathrooms. Onboard facilities include 3 spacious public decks with a bar/lounge, ample sundeck, an elegant dining room (both internal and external), reading room and library, a Jacuzzi and small gym. For those that might feel uncomfortable snorkelling, you can still enjoy the rich marine life by using Isabela’s glass bottomed boat or sea kayaks.

**Eclipse - Sleeps 48**

Eclipse is a spacious, attractive 64m (210ft) ship, accommodating 48 passengers. There are 24 double cabins and 2 singles, elegantly furnished with either picture windows or large portholes. Eclipse staterooms are equipped with air conditioning and private bathrooms. There are interconnecting cabins which are great for families.

Facilities across the 4 decks include a library, comfortable lounge area with a bar and both internal and external dining areas. The sundeck has a Jacuzzi and loungers, a great place to observe the marine life. As well as snorkelling equipment there are sea kayaks for guests. For families the Eclipse cater for younger members too. During the main school holidays the Eclipse offers dedicated family departures, with special activities for children, earlier meal times and specially prepared colourful cabins.
GALAPAGOS CRUISING VESSELS

LARGE BOATS

Santa Cruz II - Sleeps 90

Santa Cruz II is a 70 m (230ft) cruise ship, accommodating 90 guests across five decks. The ship is very spacious as was built for a capacity of 130 but sails in the Galapagos with just 90 people.

The Santa Cruz II has 50 cabins all with large picture windows, most of which can be interconnected. The three Darwin suites on the Panorama deck sleep up to three and can connect to a twin room to create a big family cabin.

Facilities on board include a sky deck with loungers and fitness room. There is both indoor and outdoor eating areas plus a BBQ site on the Panorama deck, and the Expedition deck has a seating area and two hot tubs.

Sea kayaks are available for use during the trip, as an alternative to snorkelling, the glass-bottom boat offers another opportunity to observe the marine life.

Galapagos Legend - Sleeps 100

Galapagos Legend is a 92m (300ft) cruise ship, accommodating up to 100 passengers.

Galapagos Legend provides five categories of accommodation; from the balcony suites which sleeps 3 with a sofa bed and private balcony to the standard cabin.

Many cabins interconnect and some can sleep 3 which is great for families. All cabins have air conditioning and private bathrooms.
**Alternatives to Sailing**

**Finch Bay Hotel, Santa Cruz**

Named after the Darwin Finches which frequent the local area, Finch Bay Hotel is across the bay from Puerto Ayora in a quiet beachside location on Santa Cruz Island.

The hotel offers 27 air-conditioned rooms arranged over two floors, a restaurant and bar serving locally inspired cuisine, and an outdoor swimming pool. Finch Bay Hotel offers day trips to nearby islands aboard its own private yachts. Additional activities include scuba diving, bird watching tours, and mountain bike trails leading to Garrapatero Beach or the El Chato Tortoise Reserve. Finch Bay Hotel has an innovative recycling programme and desalinisation plant coupled with an effective conservation programme.

**Royal Palm, Santa Cruz**

The Royal Palm Hotel is an exclusive property nestled on a 480 acre private estate in the highlands of Santa Cruz. Only a 20 minute drive from the town of Puerto Ayora and Baltra Airport. The Royal Palm Hotel has eight large individual villas that sit within the grounds, each with Jacuzzi, living/dining room, open fire and views across the estate. There are a further five spacious villas which can sleep up to four.

The eight casitas are located together with a bedroom, dining area, indoor Jacuzzi and front porch. The hotel offers a wealth of activities on a tailor-made basis, everything from snorkelling to horse riding and spa treatments to yacht expeditions.

**Villa Escalesia, Santa Cruz**

Villa Escalesia is an oceanfront residence in Puerto Ayora, Santa Cruz Island, operated by The Royal Palm Hotel. A comfortable private home with four ensuite bedrooms, all with sea views and full amenities. The property has an infinity pool, sea front sun deck and bar, total privacy and unobstructed views of Academy Bay and Santa Fe Island.

There is a small annexe building within the grounds that can sleep four, meaning 12 people can be accommodated in total. A great place for a group of friends or extended family. Villa guests also have use of all the Royal Palm Hotel facilities.

**Galapagos Safari Camp, Santa Cruz**

The eco-luxury Galapagos Safari Camp is set on a ridge in the highlands of Santa Cruz Island, overlooking the Pacific Ocean and some of the other islands. The camp has nine spacious safari tents, all elegantly furnished, and each with a private bathroom with hot shower and toilet. The tents are built on a wooden platform above the ground with balconies. In addition to the tents is a three bedroom family suite.

There is a stylish central lodge with a huge balcony and panoramic views. Furnished to a high standard, the lodge building has an open plan lounge area, bar and dining room to enjoy both local and international dishes. There is also the infinity pool, which is the perfect place to relax and unwind.
ALTERNATIVES TO SAILING

Pikaia Lodge, Santa Cruz

A totally new concept in the Galapagos Islands; a high end, contemporary style property with all the benefits of a boat based holiday. Take guided excursions on a high end spacious boat with private cabins, but at night return to the stylish and spacious comforts of Pikaia Lodge to sleep in a full size bed on solid land.

Centrally located in the Galapagos archipelago, Santa Cruz Island offers the perfect spot to base yourself to explore a wide selection of islands, beaches and wildlife. The lodge offers a similar programme to boat based trips with fixed, fully guided excursions, including sea kayaking, snorkelling and guided walks.

Iguana Crossing, Isabela

Iguana Crossing is Isabela’s newest and most innovative hotel. Its minimalist design and superior service offer guests a privileged experience in this scarcely populated Island.

Iguana Crossing offers 12 stylishly furnished rooms, and a master suite, the majority have balconies and sea views. The hotel also has an oceanfront swimming pool, Jacuzzi, roof terrace and restaurant. Iguana Crossing is located in between a white sand beach and directly behind a wildlife-filled lagoon.

Casa Marita, Isabela

Casa Marita is a friendly hotel with a homely feel, located directly on the beach in Puerto Villamil on Isabela Island. The hotel has a selection of garden and ocean view rooms and suites, some with balconies, all are bright and simple in decor.

There are plenty of lounge areas to relax as well as numerous hammocks and loungers in front of the property on the deck and beach.

There is a myriad of choices to be made when deciding how best to see the Galapagos – when to go, what boat to choose, how best to combine with a visit to mainland South America – and the best way of resolving this is to give you candid first-hand advice.
FAQ

Where are the islands in relation to Ecuador?
The Islands are located on the equator approximately 600 miles from the coast of mainland Ecuador. It’s a three-hour flight from Quito or 2 hours from Guayaquil and all flights go via Guayaquil.

How many islands are in the archipelago?
The reserve consists of 19 large islands, and has a land area of approximately 5,000 square miles and the marine reserve covers approximately 50,000 square miles.

How many of the islands are inhabited?
A total of 4 islands are inhabited in the Galapagos National Park; Santa Cruz, San Cristóbal, Isla Isabela, Isla Santa Maria (Floreana) with approximately 28,000 people living there.

Is it possible to visit the islands independently?
You can choose to visit 4 of the Islands but will miss out on wildlife inhabiting the smaller islands.

How can I help preserve the islands?
You can help by following the national park rules and anyone wishing to donate to the non-profit organisation in charge of studying and protecting the islands can do so to the Charles Darwin Foundation www.galapagos.org.

When is the peak season?
Peak season is during the festive period Christmas and New Year and school holidays with low season being in the months of late August, September and October where the majority of the boats go in to dry-dock for maintenance. Generally the Galapagos is a year round destination and the seasons are not defined by the weather.

How will I differentiate between the species?
All boats have a naturalist guide who will help you explore the Islands and are very knowledgeable.

Can I walk anywhere on the Islands?
All walking trails are clearly signed at each visitor site and designated to avoid disturbing the wildlife or vegetation. You must be accompanied by a naturalist guide at all times.

How long should I spend in the Galapagos?
There are many islands to visit therefore 7 night/8 day cruise is usually a reasonable length of time to explore the islands. If time is not restricted then stay as long as you can as there is plenty to see.

What is Garúa?
The annual influx of the Humboldt Current brings cool waters that cause an air temperature inversion around the islands, trapping a layer of thin cloud over the islands. The garúa or dry season is from June to October. This is also evident in coastal Peru & Ecuador.
FAQ

Are the Galapagos suitable for children/families?

Children will have a fantastic time exploring the islands and certain cruise boats namely the larger operate specific family departures.

What about for a single traveller?

The Galapagos is suitable for single travellers; however there are few single cabins available. Single supplements may be applicable for sole occupancy of a twin cabin. Some vessels offer a shared option where you can stay with another single traveller of the same gender.

And the elderly?

All passengers, regardless of age, will be looked after by the Naturalist guide and their personal pace taken into consideration. Walking aids are generally found on board if required. You will be briefed each evening with the following day’s activities so you can plan the evening before if you wish to take part.

If you have further questions, please don’t hesitate to give us a call, we would be delighted to help and assist you in making the right decisions.
EXTENDING YOUR TRIP

When travelling to South America most visitors want to ensure they make the most of their time there. Mainland Ecuador is of course an obvious choice but there are many other countries to visit like Peru and Bonaire which you can add to your trip. On mainland Ecuador you can add a visit to Otavalo and visit a traditional handicraft market, the Amazon jungle to the east, the Cloud Forest and the Avenue of Volcanoes.

**Amazon**

Stay at one of the fantastic lodges in the Northern part of Ecuador’s Amazon Basin, a haven for nature lovers, birdwatchers, scientists and adventure seekers alike. From Quito you will fly into Coca and transfer by a motorised canoe along the Napo River. Alternatively you can stay at a fantastic lodge in the south of Ecuador’s Amazon basin and fly into the lodge’s own air strip. Activities are spread over a wide area and allow visitors to explore several fascinating habitats.

Most trails will take you along the rainforest floor and view 150 foot Kapok trees which tower above you and the rainforest canopy. Early morning hikes are essential to view the birds and wildlife activity as are night walks where you get the chance to view all nocturnal species such as Caiman and electric eels. A 3 night stay is recommended as a good time to spend in the jungle and you should see everything from monkeys to endless species of butterflies and insects.

**Cloud Forest**

A two hour drive from Quito takes you into the Cloud forests on the western flanks of the Andes. Morning alarm calls are provided by toucans, parrots and hummingbirds and after breakfast there is a satisfying choice of pursuits on offer. Some of the exotic animal species found here include Jaguar, puma, ocelot, agouti

**Otavalo**

Set in beautiful countryside, surrounded by Andean peaks, valleys and waterfalls. The Cayambe Volcano is along the main road to Otavalo, at 5,790 ms it is the highest point in the world which lies directly on the Equator. Otavalo is a small town home to the famous Otavalo Indians. It lies at 2,350 ms in a spring like valley situated between the Imbaburo Volcano (4,609m) and the Cotacachi Volcano (4,939m). Saturday is the main market day but everyday there is a market. This town of some 20,000 people is rightly famous for its proud people & their market. Leatherwork comes from Cotacachi, north of Otavalo. This is definitely not a market just for tourists and Ecuadorians come in their thousands to buy and sell livestock, vegetables in abundance - this is the home of the potato, maize and tomatoes. The drive from Quito will take you over the equatorial line passing the monument.

**Avenue of the Volcanoes**

The route south from Quito incorporates the ‘Avenue of the Volcanoes’ a road that literally winds its way between Andean foothills. There are fabulous views of the snow-capped volcanoes and lush green valleys, passing many different towns and cities en-route such as Banos which is situated between the river Pastaza and the Tungurahua volcano, which has recently been active. Banos is famous for its hot springs and at an altitude of 1,800 ms, has a very pleasant climate, with green valley’s offering excellent walking opportunities.
CONTACT US

James Armitage

The opportunity to discover new places, cultures and different people. The amazing experiences, sights and remote places I have been to and more importantly the people I have encountered, will remain in my memory forever. I love travelling ‘off piste’ and some of great places I have visited include – travelling across the Salar de Uyuni in Bolivia, trekking in the high Paramo of Venezuela, diving with sea lions and exploring the underwater world of the Galapagos, incredible wildlife in the Serengeti, Orang-utan encounters in Malaysia Borneo and the ultimate remote Antarctica.

Phone: +44 (0)1285 885 333
Email: james@stepestravel.com

Roxy Dukes

At a young age I longed to be in the heart of a sandstorm or watch a volcanic eruption unfold, fascinated by the dramatic and raw nature of this earth. Soon realising a life of scientific discovery would entail lengthy hours in a lab, I branched out and sought to find my next opportunity to explore different landscapes. I have relished every moment of discovery, and with each comes a new meaning and memory. From awaking to the grunts of hippos in the Selous to chatting to children in Mozambique, watching young polar bears spar to canoeing through the peace of the rainforest. I delight in each and every surprise that awaits and can’t wait for my next adventure.

Phone: +44 (0)1285 885 333
Email: roxy@stepestravel.com
It was on a 1991 jaunt through Ecuador that I first fell for the allure of Latin America, bumping from A to B on chicken buses and high-andean railways (more often than not on the roof). I’ve partied with penguins in Antarctica and over the past couple of decades, broadened my experience throughout Central America, discovering more comfortable modes of transportation and enjoying stays at some of the region’s luxury small boutique hotels and lodges.

I still thoroughly enjoy running up volcanoes, clambering through caves strewn with Mayan relics and snorkelling whenever the opportunity arises. Neighbouring Caribbean also holds huge appeal for me and if you can detach yourself from its beaches, there’s an exciting world of historic, scenic, cultural, culinary and environmental interests to be explored….not to mention a great selection of rums.

Phone: +44 (0)1285 885 333

Email: john@steppestravel.com