

Galapagos Islands, Ecuador



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- Islands

BE ALIVE TRAVEL

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Galapagos Islands, Ecuador



General Information

If you are reading this document it means that you have decided to travel to these magnificent islands. The more time you can stay, the more nature you will be able to enjoy. Even though time and budget can be limiting, we highly recommend going for at least 5 days. Whether you are choosing to do a land or boat based itinerary, the first day is always a half day (arrival flight and transfers to your accommodation), as well as the last day, given all the returning flights are in the morning. If you choose a 5 day itinerary, you are only going to be allotted 3 full days.



Arriving: The only way to travel to the islands is by flight. These flights depart only from the main cities of Quito and Guayaquil. Most flights go to Baltra and limited flights on certain days to San Cristobal. Isabela Island also has an airport, but it is only for inter-island flights on small planes of up to 5 passengers.

Types of Tours: There are two ways to visit the Galapagos. You may pick a *land based* tour, where the tours will begin from the hotels in the islands. You can also do a *boat based* tour, which have less environmental impact on the islands and allow you to visit farther or several islands in a short time.

Did you know?

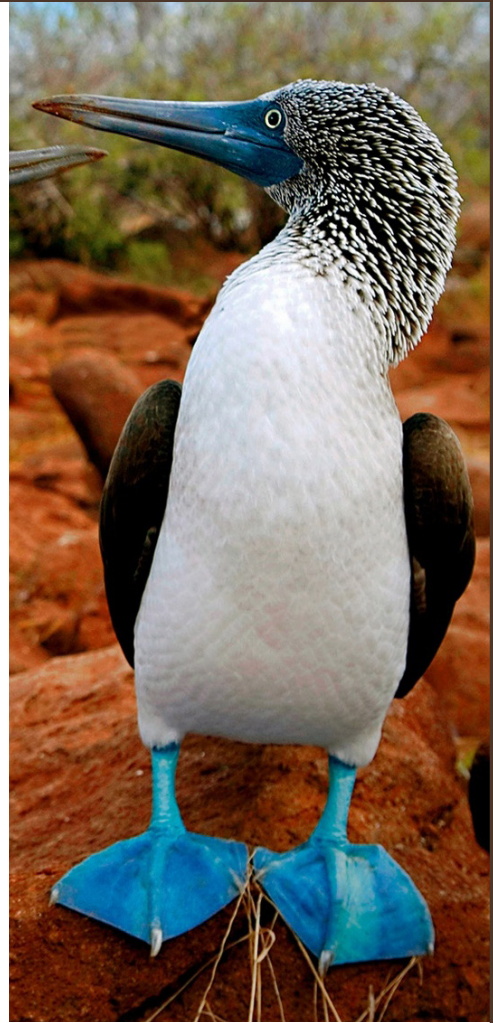
Only 5 islands are populated:
Santa Cruz, Baltra, Isabela,
San Cristobal and Floreana

There is also *live-abroad diving* tours for the strong and experience divers. Most of their itineraries go to the further islands of Wolf and Darwin which have strong currents, cold temperatures, and occasionally poor visibility.

It is recommended that you book your tours in advance. Each boat had fixed itineraries, so if you have a specific island to visit it is better to book in advance. The economic boats might have great last minute deals but tend to be cramped and primitive, some even with a shared bathroom for all the clients on the boat. These economic boats can also can be unreliable.

Rules While Visiting the Galapagos National Park

- Any visit within the protected area, must be with an authorized naturalist guide.
- To ensure the conservation of the natural habitat walk within the marked trails and respect the signs at all times.
- Keep your distance of at least 2 meters from animals to avoid disturbing them.
- Do not touch the animals, this disrupt their behavior and fearlessness towards humans.
- Do not feed the animals. Offering food can create health problems.
- Take videos and pictures without flash to avoid upsetting the animals. Commercial videos must be authorized by the Galapagos National Park.
- There are designated areas for camping, request with at least 48 hours ahead.
- Do not introduce food, animals or plants. Please cooperate with the inspection officials at the airports and docks.
- Do not buy any products and/or souvenirs made from banned substances such as coral, shell, lava rock, animal parts and endemic materials. It is an illegal activity and must be reported.
- Please take your trash with you until you find a suitable place to dispose it. The centers of all populated villages have effective waste management systems.
- Smoking and lighting campfires is strictly prohibited.
- Fishing is not allowed in tourist boats.





Seasons and Climate

Even though the Galapagos is a year-round destination there are only two seasons.

Warm / Wet Season:

January to May – Average Temperature 25°C

- Strong, but short rains
- Humid, sunny and warm days
- Water calm (less disposition to sea sickness)
- Fewer need for a wet suit (water is warmer)
- January to March for divers is not recommended since the waters are murky because of the lack of currents.

Cool / Dry Season:

June to December – Average Temperature 22°C

- Light misty precipitation known as "Garua" which impacts the highlands
- Cold current of Humboldt cools the waters. Wet suits recommended (water averages 18-20°C)
- Rough seas at night (less comfort while sleeping and possibility for sea sickness in smaller boats)
- July to October best months for divers. The cold currents bring tropical fish, whale sharks, hammerheads, and manta rays.

**High season tends to be during the months of Christmas and Easter celebrations.*

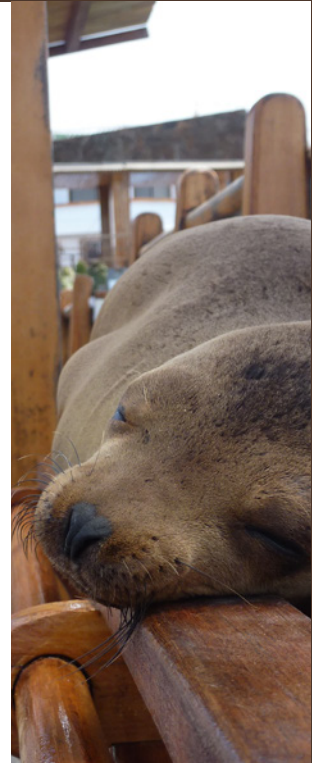


Tips before you travel to the Galapagos Islands

Before you go to these marvelous islands, we have a few important recommendations to help you enjoy your trip as much as you can and take home wonderful memories!

PACKING LIST

- Comfortable clothing
- Tank tops or t-shirts
- Rain coat
- Light pants
- Shorts
- Swimsuit
- Hat
- Sunglasses
- Sandals Teva style
- Tennis shoes or hiking shoes
- Binoculars
- Water bottle
- Insect repellent
- Sun block - sun rays are stronger in Ecuador
- Camera (preferably with a water proof bag)
- Personal medication and a basic first aid kit
- Traveling documents like passport, travel insurance, etc.



MONEY

- National currency is the United States Dollar.
- ATMs only provide \$300 maximum withdrawal daily.
- Credit card use has a 6% additional charge.
- Migration entrance card (Ingala, \$10 – CASH only) is paid in the departing airport (Quito or Guayaquil) allow extra time for this process and not miss your flight. Keep this paper until you depart from the Galapagos Islands, as you will be to ask to present it as you enter in the islands and as you depart.
- Galapagos National Park Entrance fee is \$100 (CASH only), and you pay as you arrive at the entering island's airport. Keep this handy for speedier process. As you pay this, your bags will also be checked for environmental threats to the islands.
- Take cash to the islands to pay for personal expenses and/or tips, as you might not have ATMs available.
- Internet access might be available in cruises, but not economic. Hotels have Wi-Fi accessible on the main port cities.

Santa Cruz



Santa Cruz Island and Near Minor Islands

Santa Cruz
Baltra
North Seymour
Mosquera
Plazas
Daphne
Santa Fe

Santa Cruz

Santa Cruz

Situated in the center of the archipelago, it has the port most developed and with the highest population than any other island. Most visitors will come or go through this island and, even though it has many touristic sites, you won't feel disconnected from the modern man-made world. On Santa Cruz there are some small villages, whose inhabitants work in agriculture and cattle raising. As a testimony to its volcanic history there are two big holes formed by the collapse of a magma chamber: Los Gemelos, or "The Twins".

Near Santa Cruz, there are excellent **diving sites** such as Gordon Rocks, La Loberia, Punta Estrada, Punta Carrion and North Seymour.



Charles Darwin Station: Several scientists and volunteers have devoted time here to aid in research and preservation of the natural resources from the Galapagos Islands. One of its programs includes breeding of giant tortoises.

There is an area where you can see the breeding process of tortoises, few giant tortoises, land iguanas, and also an information center.

Turtle Bay: This beach is sheer beauty, where you can swim, surf, or just sunbathing. Near this beach, you can see sharks, marine iguanas, pelicans and occasional flamingoes.



Highlands: This area refers to the highest parts of the island. It hosts a variety of large and small lava tunnels that you can visit. These tunnels were once formed by the solidifying of the outside skin of the molten-lava flow. Now without lava flowing, you can explore these tunnels, some with near a kilometer in length.

Las Grietas: This rocky crevice, have fresh water where you can take a dive and snorkel to discover its colorful fish.

Dry Landings vs. Wet Landings:

On a dry landing, passengers step directly from a dinghy to rocks or a dock. Wet Landing means that the dinghy edges up onto a beach, where you step into knee-deep water assisted by crew members and guides.

Baltra

Baltra

Also known as South Seymour, here is where most people first experience the Galapagos Islands. There are no visitor sites nor accommodation, just a small military base, and it is also the main airport for the Islands. Most organized tours start or end here, but if you are on your own, you must take a transport that will take you to the town of Puerto Ayora, Santa Cruz (approx. 45 minutes)



North Seymour

North Seymour

This island has a visitor trail approximately 2km in length that crosses the inland of the island and explores the rocky coast. It hosts one of the largest populations of blue footed boobies, frigate birds and a slow growing population of the Galapagos land iguana. Any time during the year, there is always some kind of mating, courtship, nesting or chick rearing to observe. Flocks of pelicans and swallow-tailed gulls feed off shore, and seasonally, Nazca boobies can also be seen.



Mosquera

Mosquera

This islet has a white sand beach where you can see colonies of seals lying in the sun. There is no trails, but visitors can enjoy the beach for a swim.



Plazas

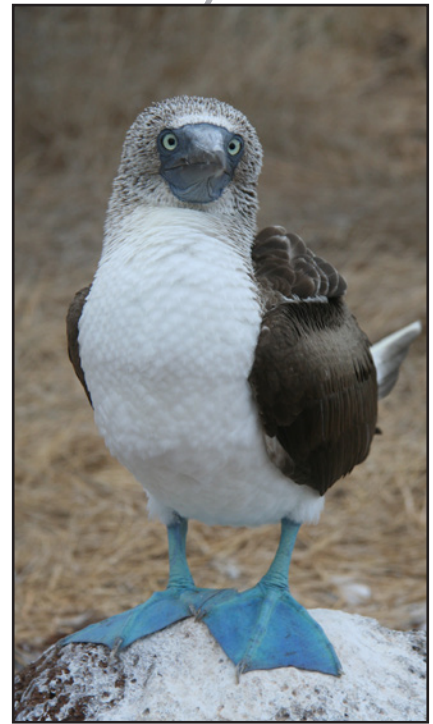
Plazas

These are a group of small islands. Visitors can land in South Plazas (the largest) through day trips from Santa Cruz, or during cruise itineraries. In the walking trail, you can see a forest of opuntia cactus. It also leads you to a colony of sea lions, swallow-tailed gulls and other species. Great spot for birds like red-billed tropicbirds, frigate and pelicans. Snorkeling with sea lions is a possibility.



Daphne

Divided into Minor and Major, only Daphne Major is accessible for tourists while the other one is used for scientific purposes. Daphne is home to a variety of other birds including Galápagos Martins, Blue-footed Booby, Nazca Booby, Short-eared Owls, Red-billed Tropicbirds and Magnificent Frigatebirds. The access to Daphne Major is not easy; you have to scramble up a small cliff. A short, but steep trail leads to the summit of a two small crater (120m). The craters contain hundreds of blue footed boobies' nests.



Daphne

Santa Fe

There are colonies of sea lions and land iguanas, fork-tailed seagulls, and the opportunity to see terns and petrels on this island. Hiking on the island allows you to see a forest of giant cacti and Palo Santo trees. After walking around on land, there is time for a swim or scuba diving. Wet landing.



Santa Fe

San Cristobal



San Cristobal Island

As the fifth biggest island in the Galapagos, and the second largest in population, it is the only one that has fresh water and an airport of its own. There is one major road leading from Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, the capital port city of the archipelago, that leads to the beach of Puerto Chino on the west coast. On the way you'll pass the villages El Progreso and Cerro Verde. There are buses going to the villages or you can take a taxi.



Puerto Baquerizo Moreno: Interpretation Center Here you can learn more about the history of the Galápagos and the conservation of this unique piece of nature. The center is at the western edge of town, Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, near the university. Admission is free.



Cerro Tijeretas: If you follow the trails further up you come to a set of viewpoint overlooking the bay. Nesting frigate birds can be seen here. It is possible to snorkel in the bay below.

El Junco: A freshwater lake at an altitude 700m, where you can see frigate birds bathing in the fresh water. Here you can also observe the typical highland

Miconia vegetation and endemic tree ferns. It is on the way to Puerto Chino and is typically visited on highlands tours. As it is National Park Area a guide is required.



Lobos Island: This Island has the most important colony of sea lions and blue-footed boobies. The scenery is beautiful, with a rocky beach to see marine iguanas. It is one of the best spots for surfing in the islands.

Kicker rock - (León Dormido): After a short boat ride from Port Baquerizo Moreno, you arrive to a natural gigantic rock formed by a volcanic eruption. It's a good place for scuba diving or

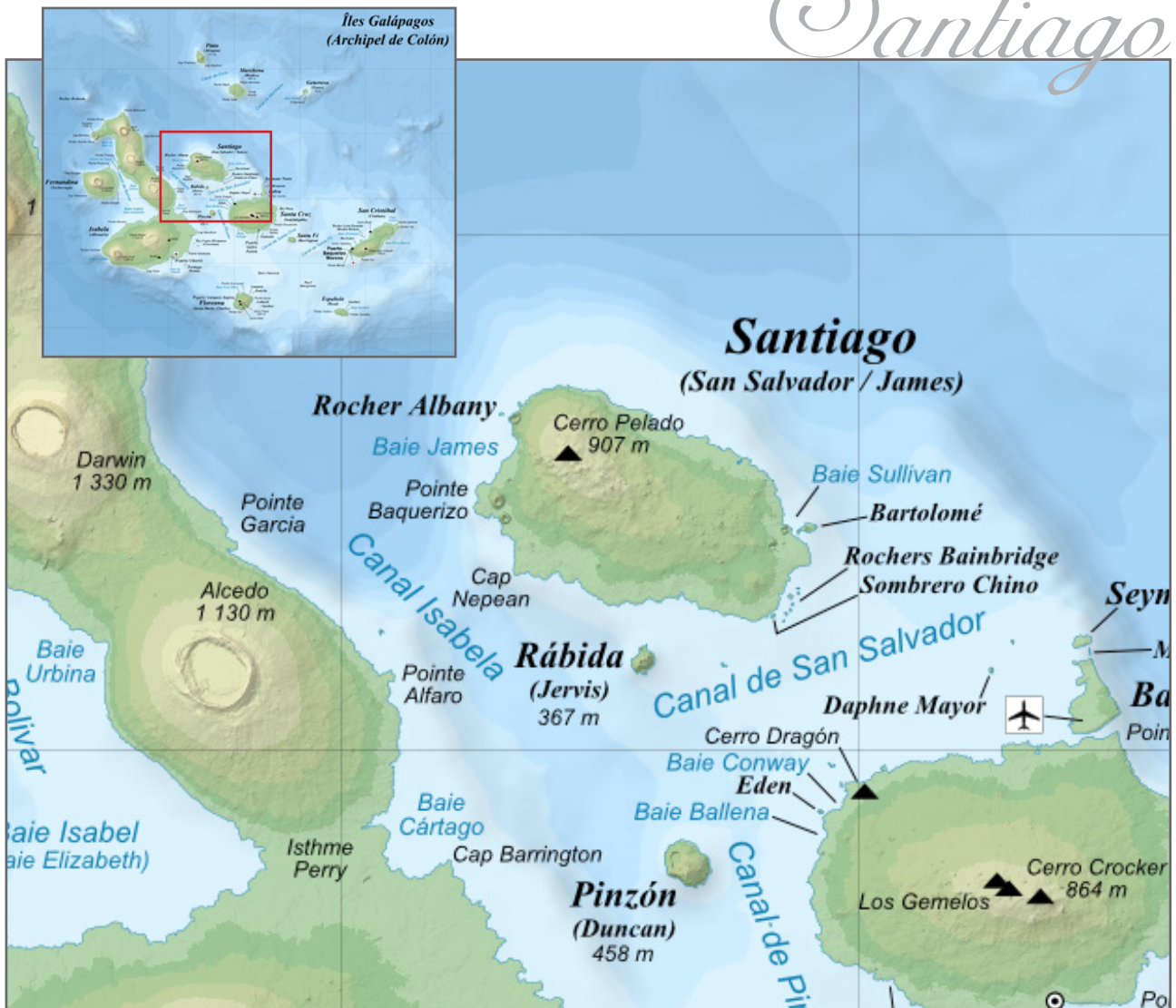
snorkeling. It is divided by a narrow canal that small boats can pass through. This rock is home for a great number of sea birds. Diving spot for hammerheads, eagle rays, stingrays, and seahorses.

Punta Pitt: The farthest point of the island that features all 3 species of booby (Blue Footed, Red Footed, and Masked). The site also features lava formations, and at times, Frigate Birds. The view is impressive when you walk up to the high part of the island.



Cerro Brujo: One of the nicest beaches in Galapagos. An old craterous collapsed outcrop that demonstrated the differences in volcanic rocks with a white-sand beach. It is home to sea lions, blue footed boobies, marine iguanas, brown pelicans, frigate birds, Sally Lightfoot crabs, sea turtles, and rays. Great spot for snorkeling.

Santiago



Santiago Island and near minor islands

Santiago
Bartolome
Sombrero Chino
Rabida

Santiago

Santiago

Sullivan Bay.- Here you can swim and scuba dive with sea lions and penguins. Deboarding is on a beautiful white sand beach where you can see lava formations. Wet landing.

Puerto Egas.- This site is characterized by its black rock lava landscape. There are also natural pools where you can swim or scuba dive with sea lions and marine iguanas. Tourists can hike to observe Darwin's finches, Galapagos hawks and fur seals. This site is excellent for diving. Wet landing.



Bartolome

Bartolome

On this island it is possible to see interesting formations of lava and ash cones. After a 30 to 40-minute climb to the high part, a wooden stairway goes to the top where there is a beautiful view of the nearest bays. This island is one of the most visited and photographed because of its Pinnacle Rock, the sea lions and penguins around its base. Dry landing.



Sombrero Chino

Sombrero Chino

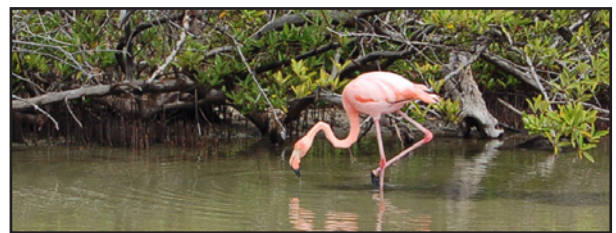
This small island earns its name due to its actual shape, a chinese hat. This visit-trail, begins in a thin white-sand beach where you can photograph sea lions and American oystercatchers. As you continue walking near the coastline you can sneak a glimpse of lava lizards, marine iguanas and Sally Lightfoot crabs. The hike ends in a rocky shore, where the tide leaves a mark of green algae and marine iguanas. You can snorkel and swim along the cove, and play with sea lions and viewing the variety of tropical fish.



Rabida

Rabida

This site has a dark red sand beach where you can observe colonies of fur seals. On the far side of the beach there is a lagoon with flamingos, and you can also see brown pelicans and boobies. There are nine types of Darwin's finches here. This is an excellent place to dive. Wet landing.



Isabela



Isabela Island

Located in the western part of the archipelago, Isabela is larger than all the rest of the islands combined. It is comprised of six volcanoes, each containing different species of giant turtles. The island is about 75 miles long and covers 1,771 square miles. Its highest point on Wolf Volcano rises 5600 feet above sea level. Due to most of the visitor sites being on the western side of the island, far from Santa Cruz, only the longer (and hence more expensive) boats visit this part of the island. The town of Puerto Villamil, at the southern end, offers lodging and food to visitors wanting to stay on the island.



Giant Tortoise Breeding Center: In this center the giant tortoises from Isabela are bred and raised before released into the wild. Its open to the public on weekdays. Follow the 1200m long boardwalk which starts west of Puerto Villamil just past the Iguana Crossing Hotel.

Punta Moreno: It is on the southwestern side of Isabela. As you land in a lava flow, where there are some brackish pools, there is a spectacular view of the Alcedo, Sierra Negra and Cerro Azul volcanoes. Here there are different kinds of birds such as frigate birds, flamingoes and pelicans.

Wall of Tears: Tere are two nice, 5-3 hour (return trip) hikes to the wall of tears. On the way there are lots of things to see including lakes with flamingo's and other wildlife, beaches with hundreds of really big iguana's, beaches with sea lions, giant tortoises and there are some viewpoints. Take plenty of water, sunscreen and a hat.

La Tintorerías: This small volcanic island is where white tip sharks come to rest and can be seen from the trail. It is not permitted to go snorkeling in the lagoon. Along the trail you can also find marine iguanas. There is however excellent snorkeling permitted behind the beach, eagle rays and sea turtles can be seen here.



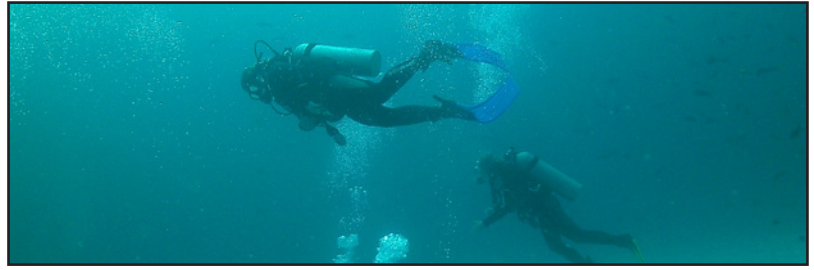
Concha de Perla: It's a natural pool near the boardwalk from the docks, great for snorkeling and playing with sea lions.

Los Tuneles: Canals in the lava rocks with bridges and caves. Cactus grow on the rocks and many big turtles, rays and fish can be seen swimming in the canals and pools filled with sea-water.



Sierra Negra Volcano and Volcano Chico: Sierra Negra is one of the five volcanoes on the island which erupted in late 2005. It has the second largest crater in the world and, when the weather is clear, the views at the crater rim are impressive (the wildlife less so). Follow the rim of the crater to continue to Volcano Chico, where you can see and feel active fumaroles.

Flamingo Lagoon: See flamingos at the lagoon in town, or in larger numbers, along the boardwalk to the tortoise breeding center.



Diving Near Isabela Island:

Isla Tortuga: Pelagic sightings include hammerheads, mantas, eagle rays, etc. Sea fans, coral, turtles, lots of tropicals to see.

4 Hermanos: From June to Nov, trips are unlikely due to rough seas.

La Viuda: Advanced dive only due to currents.



Visits Available on Diving Live-Aboard Cruises:

Punta Vicente Roca: Abundant coral, mola molas, bullhead sharks, sea lions, penguins, flightless cormorants.

Roca Blanca: Abundant coral, sea lions, mantas, white tipped reef sharks, lots of tropicals to see.



Visits Available on Cruise Tours:

Tagus Cove: This site was a natural port where whaling ships arrived and left their names written in 1800. You can climb up to the highest part to see the crater with its salt-water Darwin Lagoon and a spectacular view. Walking through the cliffs, you will encounter penguins, flightless cormorant birds, boobies, pelicans and Sally lightfoot crabs.



Urbina Bay: From here it is easy to reach the Alcedo and Darwin volcanoes. You can see large colored land iguanas here and the possibility of seeing giant

turtles, flightless cormorants, blue-footed boobies, penguins and marine iguanas is excellent.

Punta Vicente Roca: The visit here is in panga through the bay in order to observe hundreds of sea birds. The scenery is spectacular because of the cliffs and caverns. Good place for snorkeling and diving.

Elizabeth Bay: Marine iguanas and rays can be seen in the water and various birds are often present. Islas Mariela are at the entrance of the bay and are frequented by penguins.

Fernandina



Fernandina Island

It is the largest pristine island in the archipelago, with no introduced species. Fernandina is the youngest island in the archipelago.

Punta Espinoza This site has a beautiful backdrop of black rock and lava. Here there are colonies of marine iguanas, a great number of penguins, colonies of flightless cormorants and pelicans. You can swim or snorkel among sea lions. The vegetation is quite different because of the lava and in certain places the plants are dry. More common around Fernandina are whale and dolphin sightings from the boat. This area has been declared a whale sanctuary and Bryde's whales, pilot whales, and bottle nose dolphins are commonly seen. Dry landing



Floreana



Floreana Island

It is located in the far southern portion of the archipelago. The island has a total area of approximately 67 square miles, and its highest point, at 2100 feet, is now now an extinct volcano. Floreana has been inhabited the longest of any of the Galapagos islands, having been used as a water and food source by whalers and pirates as far back as the 1600's. As a result of human disturbance, the wildlife of the island has been vastly disrupted with the native giant tortoise now completely extinct and with the introduction of rats, pigs and goats the native plants and birds have been almost decimated.





Puerto Velasco Ibarra: A small port and the only settlement on the island. The sea lions and flamingoes outnumber its small human population.

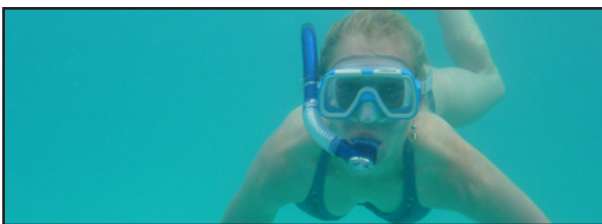
Asilo de la Paz: A road leads from Puerto Velasco Ibarra to the highlands of Floreana. Trails to the tops of some of these hills provide excellent views of the island, and for snail lovers, provide access to one of the only endemic snails on the islands. For non-snail lovers, caves and tunnels used by the buccaneers in the 17th and 18th century offer a glimpse

into the human history of the islands. During the hike on the island you can see the caves where the first settlers of the island lived.

Post Office Bay: Here you will see the famous barrel that served as the mailbox for eighteenth century whaling ships. Today primarily tourists use the post office barrel, leaving a handful of postcards and in turn collecting postcards left by others.



Punta Cormorant: This site has a beach of green olivine crystal sand. The island has a lagoon filled with flamingos. Walking on towards the other side, there is a fine white sand beach where marine turtles nest from December to May. Wet landing.



Diving Near Floreana Island:

Devil's Crown: This site is an excellent place for scuba diving. The beautiful coral formations offer a wonderful underwater panorama. You can also easily see schools of multi-colored fish, sharks and marine turtles at a depth of only 6 meters.



Champion: A small island located very near Floreana, snorkeling around Champion can be excellent. Landings are not permitted on the island, but the extremely rare Charles mockingbird can sometimes be seen from the water.

Espanola



Espanola Island

One of the most dramatically beautiful of all the islands in the Galapagos. It is best to visit during March to December to see the colony of waved albatross, one of the Galapagos' most spectacular birds. Its land hosts Opuntia cactus and giant tortoises thanks to the national Park's restoration efforts of these extinct species due to the introduced goats and hunting in the 1960s.

Punta Suarez: A wet landing onto a beach with Sea Lions and Marine Iguanas leads on to a 2km trail through Masked and Blue-Footed Booby colonies to some cliffs with a blow-hole. The possibilities for swimming or scuba diving are excellent here.

Gardner Bay: Another beautiful beach for swimming and a large sea lion colony. Marine iguanas and Sally Lightfoot crabs can be found on the rocks at the east end of the beach. It has fantastic snorkeling and diving opportunities where you can spot white-tipped reef sharks and hammerheads, marine turtles and rays.



Northern Islands

- Genovesa
- Marchena
- Pinta
- Wolf
- Darwin



Genovesa

Genovesa

Genovesa is considered one of the three must see sights in the Galapagos, featuring the largest red-footed boobie colony in the islands, great frigate birds, Nazca boobies, finches and swallow-tailed gulls. You can also see the sperm whales passing in the distance or short-eared owls. You can also find in this island sea lions and fur seals. The main bay within Genovesa island is actually a flooded volcanic caldera, and provides one of the best opportunities to see hammerhead sharks while snorkeling.



This island is often included in short cruise itineraries, however it does require an overnight navigating time. It has two main visitor sites:



Escalera del Principe: Also called *El Barranco*, as you walk through the lava rocks you find nesting red-footed boobies and masked boobies. There is a Palo Santo forest and many nesting red-footed boobies. This island is full of life. There are frigate birds, red-footed boobies, lava gulls, doves, tropicbirds, petrels and many other kinds of birds.

The rocky trail leads you inland passing by a dry forest vegetation with various seabird colonies. Short-eared owls are sometimes seen and toward the edge of the island Galapagos storm petrels fill the air so thickly that it's a wonder they find space to fly.

Darwin Bay: The landing site for Darwin Bay is a small beach at the end of the bay. Sea lions will often haul out on the white sands, and numerous birds nest in and near the mangroves that line the 0.75 km path. The trail here leads up to the top of the cliffs that surround the bay, providing a nice view.

Wolf and Darwin

Wolf and Darwin

These twin islands are often visited during live-abroad diving cruises. Landing is very difficult as there are only cliffs, where you can see by the thousands frigates, boobies, tropical birds and gulls nesting.

While diving you can observe, schooling hammerheads, occasionally whale sharks, manta rays, green turtles and other pelagic fish. Only near Darwin, you can spot galapagos, silky and blacktip types of sharks.

Pinta

Pinta

The most northern major island in the Galapagos. At one time Isla Pinta had a thriving tortoise population. It is only allowed entrance to scientists and researchers. It is the original home of Lonesome George, a unique species of tortoise found on this island. It was moved to the Charles Darwin Research station where scientists tried to reproduce its species, but failed due to the lack of females of his same sub-species. Lonesome George died on June 2nd 2012.

Pinta Island is also home to swallow-tailed gulls, marine iguanas, sparrow hawks, fur seals and a number of other birds and mammals



Marchena

Marchena

There aren't any visitor's sites on this island, however it is possible to dive in the waters around Marchena with an organized tour. Most visitors only see it if they sail around the northern part of Isabela on the way to Tower Island, its nearest neighbor about 45 miles west.

Another reason why Isla Marchena is so famous is that, it was embroiled in the 'Floreana Mystery'. Here the dead bodies of Rudolf Lorenz and the captain of the ship, washed up mysteriously on the shore of the island and were mummified naturally as there were no natural predators found here.



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