

Galapagos



Further Links

- Remarkable range of life with no fear of man
- Wildlife includes Blue-footed Boobies, Waved Albatrosses, Galapagos Sea Lions and Fur Seals, Marine Iguanas and Giant Tortoises
- Ample snorkelling opportunities for underwater encounters with Sea Lions, turtles, penguins and a myriad of sea life
- Excellent diving options for experienced divers

Situation

600 miles west of the Ecuadorian coast.

Activities

The most popular way to visit the islands is on an 8, 5 or 4 day cruise. It is also possible to stay on Santa Cruz, Isabela and San Cristobal Islands. Day trips to nearby islands can be arranged if staying on Santa Cruz Island.

Cruises to the Galapagos Islands are one of the world's greatest wildlife experiences. The Galapagos Islands are a unique environment where a remarkable range of life exists with absolutely no fear of man. Many of the species found here are found nowhere else on earth, and some even have different sub-species from island to island. Come on a Galapagos Islands cruise here to meet some of the famed inhabitants of the islands that include the blue-footed boobies, frigatebirds, flightless cormorants, the giant Galapagos Islands tortoise, sea lions and fur seals, land iguanas and marine iguanas (the only sea-going lizard in the world), and of course the Galapagos Waved Albatross.

Baltra is just to the north of Santa Cruz, and used for daily flights from the mainland. It is a rather barren, featureless island with little vegetation except a few cacti, Palo Santo trees and some grasses.

Some flights also use **San Cristobal**

Island, which has boobies, frigate birds, sea lions and a good interpretation centre. Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, on the southeast of the islands, is the official capital of the archipelago.

Bartolome

Bartolome is the best place to get an overview of the archipelago. There is an extinct lava cone with a walkway to the summit. You pass volcanic ash fields and spatter cones, with pioneer plants and lava cactus in a moon-like landscape. From the top there is a dramatic view across the islands.

Espanola (Hood Island)

Punta Suarez is one of the most interesting visitor sites in all of the Galapagos. The landing point is covered with sea lions and their young, and thousands of marine iguanas bask on the rocks. The marine iguanas here are unique, displaying copper red patches and keeping some red all year around. This is the only island where you find waved albatross and there is a large breeding colony of them here during the mating season (April to Dec). The island has a large blow hole around which hundreds of marine iguanas congregate. There are blue-footed and masked boobies nesting here, oystercatchers and swallow-tailed gulls. The island's other visitor site is a long white coral beach at Gardner Bay. The beach is frequented by sea lions and the endemic long billed mockingbird or Hood mockingbird, and colourful lava lizards.

Fernandina (Narborough Island)

West of Isabela, the island is the westernmost of the islands and is the most volcanically active. At Punta Espinosa you can see flightless cormorants, and there is an abundance of marine iguanas, pelicans and sea lions.

Floreana (Charles Island)

At Punta Cormorant there is a lagoon where you can usually see flamingoes and other species of shore birds. There is a submerged volcanic cone called the Devil's Crown which is a fantastic place for snorkelling. At Post Office Bay there is an old wooden barrel 'post office' originally used by 18th century whalers, but now a quirky feature for all visitors.

Genovesa (Tower Island)

It is a long sailing distance to Genovesa and it is quite a long way from other islands, so it is not included in many short itineraries. It is, however, home to the largest colony of red-footed boobies and there are lots of frigate birds here too. There are also masked boobies, lava gulls, night herons, mockingbirds and many finches.

Isabela (Albemarle Island)

The largest island in the archipelago, it has the biggest volcanoes and largest tortoise population. The four landing sites are on the west of the island, a long way from most of the other islands in the archipelago. However, between them there is lots to see - flamingoes, ducks, waders, moorhens, penguins, brown noddy terns, marine iguanas, flightless cormorants, herons, and of course blue-footed boobies and sea lions.

North Seymour

North Seymour is very close to Baltra Island and is one of the most popular visitor sites. It has the largest colony of magnificent frigate birds, which look spectacular when inflating their bright red throats in display. There are also blue-footed boobies and swallow-tailed gulls.

Rabida (Jervis Island)

This island has a bright red sandy beach, formed by the erosion of cinder cliffs. There are sea lions on the beach and behind a backdrop of saltbush there is a hidden flamingo lagoon. Several species of Darwin's finches can be seen on this island. Palo Santo trees and Opuntia cacti cover the volcanic rocks.

Santa Cruz

Puerto Ayora, located on Santa Cruz, is the centre of the Galapagos Islands and has the largest human population. It has some of the few shops and hotels on the island. The Charles Darwin Research Centre (CDRC) is located here, where you can see giant Galapagos tortoises and learn about the conservation issues facing the islands. You can also see Galapagos tortoises in their natural habitat in the interior. The highlands have some interesting geological features such as lava tubes and pit craters. It has more endemic plants than any other island and the Scaevola forest and Miconia vegetation zone form some interesting habitats.

Santa Fe (Barrington Island)

This island has a well protected cove which makes a perfect location for snorkelling and swimming. There is a white sandy beach and shallow turquoise waters. There are plenty of sea lions here which makes for some interesting snorkelling. On the small land trail, the main feature is the unique giant prickly pear cactus. The land iguanas here are much lighter coloured than those elsewhere and are endemic to the island. You might see them feeding on fallen pads from the cacti. Galapagos mockingbird, magnificent frigate bird, brown pelican and several species of Darwin's finch are common sights here.

Santiago (James Island)

Puerto Egas is perhaps the most interesting visitor site on Santiago. There are fur seal grottoes here - natural pools surrounded by black lava, where both sea lions and fur seals can be found playing in the water or basking on the rocks. There are also some interesting geological features, such as lava tubes and eroded tuff cliffs. You may see vermilion flycatcher, Galapagos hawk, Galapagos dove, and at the Espumilla landing site, flamingoes and white-cheeked pintail ducks.

Sombrero Chino

This is a very scenic little island consisting of a huge cinder cone shaped a bit like a Chinese hat. There are all kinds of interesting lava formations. The brightly coloured Sally lightfoot crabs are in stark contrast against the black rock. It is a good spot for snorkelling with sea lions and there is also a chance of seeing Galapagos penguins.

South Plaza

This island was formed by uplifted lava and is like a massive tilted plate with one side dipping into the water and the other raised into the air to form a cliff edge. It has tall tree-like Opuntia cactus and the ground is covered with Sesuvium (a succulent plant). The main attractions here are land iguanas, sea lions including a bachelor colony, swallow tailed gulls, red billed tropic birds and Audubon's shearwaters.