

Galapagos, Ecuador

Meta description

With its unique volcanic landscapes and intimate encounters with rare and endemic wildlife, a trip to Ecuador's Galapagos Islands is out of this world.

Highlights

- See marine iguanas basking in the sun
- Swim with curious sea lions and Galapagos penguins
- Witness the incredible mating ritual of waved albatross
- Stand face-to-face with giant tortoises
- Walk alongside blue-footed boobies
- Discover conservation success stories
- Climb to the summit of Pinnacle Rock

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Walk alongside giant tortoises and marine iguanas, and swim with sea lions and penguins in the Galapagos Islands.

Body copy

The significance of the Galapagos Islands can't be over-estimated. A group of largely barren, volcanic islands located around 1,000 kilometres off the coast of Ecuador fundamentally changed humanity's perception of evolution. Home to an awe-inspiring diversity of species, many found nowhere else on Earth, if you want an intimate wildlife encounter, the Galapagos is the place to visit.

Consisting of 13 main islands, 6 smaller ones and a group of islets, the Galapagos were largely unheard of until Charles Darwin landed here in 1835, three years after Ecuador claimed sovereignty over the archipelago. He discovered a living museum and showcase of evolution, immortalised in his seminal book, *On the Origin of Species*.

Today, the islands are a UNESCO World Heritage Site, World Biosphere Reserve and, at 133,000 square kilometres, one of the largest marine reserves in the world. While they have a low population spread over four islands, mainly for tourism, they're largely untouched by man with around 60 designated visiting sites and a host of animals and birds that show little fear of humans.

Each island is unique in its flora and fauna, with different species around at different times of the year, so plan your trip carefully if you want to see something particular. Giant tortoises roam Santa Cruz, where you can learn about the vital conversation work carried out at the Charles Darwin Research Centre. Espanola is home to many unique bird species, including the waved albatross that return here to perform their incredible mating ritual each year.

Snorkelling alongside curious sea lions, sharks, rays and turtles is a highlight of Isabela along with seeing its vivid pink Galapagos flamingos, while over on Fernandina you can see colonies of marine iguanas basking in the sun. The proud outline of Pinnacle Rock presides over Bartolome Island – great for photos – while snorkelling here is your best opportunity of swimming with Galapagos penguins. Other rare and endemic species dotted around the archipelago include blue-footed and red-footed boobies, land iguanas, frigate birds with their incredible red inflated neck pouches, flightless cormorants, brown pelicans, bright Sally Lightfoot crabs and mockingbirds.

To visit the Galapagos, you can opt to stay on one of the islands and explore via day trips, or hop onboard a cruise or more intimate sailing yacht. All visitors are accompanied by experienced Galapagos guides who explain the natural wonders and conversation efforts you see along the way.

With wildlife and landscapes found nowhere else on the planet and the opportunity for intimate encounters with curious wildlife, the Galapagos are literally a world apart from anywhere else on Earth.

Why we love it

Playing with wild sea lions, twisting and tumbling in the water as they swim alongside you, is one of many magical wildlife encounters you'll experience in the Galapagos.