



# Galapagos Islands

Photo: Brendan van Son/Shutterstock.com



RHG/Shutterstock.com

In 1831 Charles Darwin sailed to South America aboard the H.M.S. Beagle. On the return voyage across the Pacific, the vessel stopped on a small group of islands far off the Ecuadorian coast, changing the course of human scientific endeavour and self-understanding forever. Fascinated by the unique wildlife on the islands, Darwin collected biological specimens and studied them over the next 30 years. His findings led to the formulation of the scientific theory of evolution by natural selection. This small group of islands and their one-of-a-kind wildlife are to thank for one of humanity's most remarkable discoveries, and today, almost 200 years later, they remain a source of endless fascination, and a



Luiz Felipe V. Puntel/Shutterstock.com



BlueOrange Studio/Shutterstock.com

Go where no one has  
**VENTURED BEFORE!**

**5 Off the Beaten Track**  
Destinations in Asia

**ArrivalGuides**

Foto: WhitefoxChen / Shutterstock

## Top 5



### Rancho Primicias

Dozens of giant tortoises roam the premises of Rancho Primicias on the island...



### Charles Darwin Research Center

The over 100 scientists, educators, researchers and



### Scuba Diving

For a closer look at the abundant and fascinating marine life, suit up and p...



### Lava Tubes

A network of eerily beautiful underground tunnels extends for several kilome...



### Tortuga Bay

Getting to Tortuga Bay involves a hike of about one hour, but the effort is ...



## THE ISLANDS



*Jess Kraft/Shutterstock.com*

The 18 islands that comprise the Galapagos lie almost 1,000 kilometres off the coast of Ecuador, directly on the equator, with some islands in the northern and others in the southern hemisphere. The landscape is mostly rocky and barren, but fascinating and beautiful in its own way. The islands are volcanic, and thus geologically very interesting, and some of the youngest islands are still in the formation process.

A whopping 97.5% of the archipelago's land area has been made a national park, and the 70,000 square kilometres of ocean surrounding the islands have been declared a marine reserve, the world's largest after the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, as well as a whale sanctuary. The Galapagos Islands have also been recognised as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO and a biosphere reserve. However, the small area that is inhabited by humans – on the five islands of Baltra, Floreana, Isabela, San Cristobal and Santa Cruz – is surprisingly developed, making visits easy and comfortable.

Of course, the biggest draw to these incredible islands is the wildlife. Many of the islands' species are endemic, and the lack of natural predators has caused them to evolve utterly without fear of visitors, meaning that tourists are

thus able to approach and interact with the playful penguins and seals, the friendly marine iguanas and Darwin's finches, the colourful blue-footed boobies, magnificent frigatebirds and sally lightfoot crabs, and of course, the famed giant Galapagos tortoise.

But human development on the islands is having negative effects on the animals as well as the islands themselves. Habitats are being threatened through the introduction of alien species that are taking over or destroying the conditions necessary for native wildlife to thrive. Strict controls are thus being enacted – visitors must be accompanied by guides and are expected to treat the islands and their animal residents with utmost care. A small price to pay to experience these unique and mesmerising islands.

## DO & SEE



*Andrea Izzotti/Shutterstock.com*

The Galapagos Islands feature some of the world's most interesting volcanic formations, and the landscapes often look like something out of fiction or fantasy. Caves, lava fields, beaches and volcanoes offer visitors exceptional hiking, swimming and scuba diving, and wherever travelers spend their days on the islands, they are always surrounded by the abundant fascinating and unique wildlife. Getting up close and personal with this wildlife is a truly unique



experience.

### Rancho Primicias



Dozens of giant tortoises roam the premises of Rancho Primicias on the island of Santa Cruz, and visitors are welcome to explore and get up close

and personal with them. These tame giants can weigh over 400 kg, grow to be 1.8 metres long, and live to be well over 100 years old.

Photo: ANDRZEJ GRZEGORCZYK/Shutterstock.com

Address: Santa Cruz, Galapagos

Opening hours: Daily 8am-5pm

### Charles Darwin Research Center



The over 100 scientists, educators, researchers and volunteers who work at the Charles Darwin Research Center carry out extensive scientific

research and oversee the conservation and safeguarding of the islands' natural resources and wildlife. Visitors are welcome to visit and learn about how they are continuing the scientific inquiries started by Darwin himself, and how their efforts are helping to preserve the wonders of the Galapagos.

Photo: Paul van den Berg/Shutterstock.com

Address: Puerto Ayora, Santa Cruz, Galapagos

Phone: +593 5 252 6146

Internet: [www.darwinfoundation.org/en](http://www.darwinfoundation.org/en)

Email: [cdrs@fcdarwin.org.ec](mailto:cdrs@fcdarwin.org.ec)

### Scuba Diving



For a closer look at the abundant and fascinating marine life, suit up and peek under the waves. Share the waters with fur seals, tuna, manta rays and the world's only marine iguanas, and marvel at the coral beds that decorate the ocean floor.

Photo: Longjournes/Shutterstock.com

### Lava Tubes



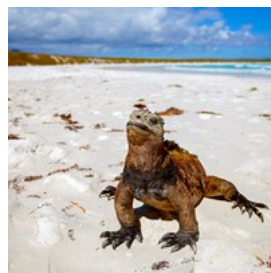
A network of eerily beautiful underground tunnels extends for several kilometres near the village of Santa Rosa. They formed when the

outer layer of a lava flow solidified, allowing the interior to continue flowing, leaving the hollow lava tunnels for travelers to explore freely. They are vast and have electric lighting, making them easy to explore independently, or with the help of hired guides.

Photo: Michael Oswald/Wikimedia Commons (image cropped)

Address: Santa Cruz, Galapagos

### Tortuga Bay



Getting to Tortuga Bay involves a hike of about one hour, but the effort is greatly rewarded by a pristine shoreline and spectacular white sand

beach. You can try some surfing in the gentle breaks, snorkel in the lagoons to admire colourful reef fish, white-tip sharks, rays and sea turtles, or simply relax on the sand alongside marine iguanas and sally lightfoot crabs.

Photo: sunsinger/Shutterstock.com

Address: Tortuga Bay, Santa Cruz, Galapagos

### La Lobería



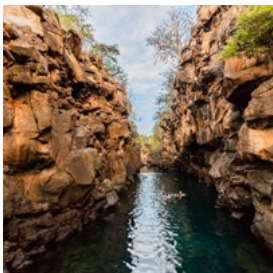
A favourite place to meet and admire wildlife, this stretch of beach is home to (and named after) the large numbers of seals that can always be found

frolicking or relaxing on the sand or among the waves nearby. Seal pups are a common sight here, but be sure to stay clear of the larger male seals, which can be aggressive towards humans if they feel at all threatened.

Photo: RHIMAGE/Shutterstock.com

Address: San Cristóbal, Galapagos

### Las Grietas



Adventure seekers can get their adrenaline pumping at this crystalline swimming hole by jumping from the newly-built platform on

the surrounding cliffs. Las Grietas is a series of crevices that formed during the cooling process of the lava that formed these islands. The hike to get there takes travelers through a forest of huge cacti and over jagged and sometimes tricky lava rock formations, but the azure waters make the trip well worth the effort.

Photo: Diego Delso/Wikimedia Commons (image cropped)

Address: Santa Cruz, Galapagos

### Sierra Negra



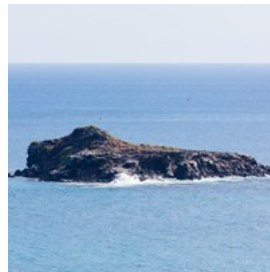
Strong hikers can attempt to scale the Sierra Negra volcano, which boasts the world's second largest volcanic caldera. The hike can

take visitors to the rim of the imposing 6-mile wide crater and over alien volcanic fields and landscapes, giving them the opportunity to admire strange and interesting geological features and to enjoy the views of volcanoes on other islands from a distance. Visiting the volcano can mean a total of 6 hours hiking, though, so make sure you are prepared for such an adventure.

Photo: Frank Schulenburg/Shutterstock.com (image cropped)

Address: Isabela Island, Galapagos

### Las Tintoreras



Las Tintoreras is a set of islets named after the reef sharks that frequent them. It has completely calm turquoise waters where wildlife abounds,

and it is common to view sea lions, reef sharks, sea turtles, marine iguanas, and more. The clear and beautiful waters make it a favourite place for snorkeling.

Photo: Diego Delso/Wikimedia Commons (image cropped)

Address: Isabela Island, Galapagos

### Puerto Egas



This long, black lava shoreline is home to huge amounts of wildlife which spends its days basking in the sun on the flat expanses of lava fields or

among the surrounding caves and formations. Marine iguanas, Sally Lightfoot crabs, Darwin's finches, sea lions, and lava lizards can be seen against the black backdrop of the shoreline.

Photo: putneymark/Wikimedia Commons (image cropped)  
Address: Santiago Island, galapagos

## ESSENTIAL INFORMATION



Iryna Rasko/Shutterstock.com

### Caring for the Islands



Human activity and development have greatly threatened the habitats and survival of the wildlife on the islands.

Measures are being taken

to protect and conserve the animals and the ecosystems they inhabit, but it falls on the shoulders of each and every visitor to take responsibility for this struggle as well. Travelers are expected to be very careful not to harm animals, leave behind trash, or destroy the environment in any way. Together residents, researchers and tourists can and must protect the wonders of these fascinating and important islands for generations to come.

Photo: Dave Gandy

### Airport



There are daily flights from Quito and Guayaquil to the islands of Baltra (GPS) and San Cristóbal (SCY), from where you can find transport to the

other islands.

Photo: Juan Garces

### Transportation Between Islands



Several speedboat companies offer inter-island transportation between Puerto Ayora (Santa Cruz) and Puerto Villamil

(Isabela Island). The ride takes 2.5 to 3 hours depending on the weather, and the water can get a bit rough.

Alternatively, Emetebe offers flights between islands (Baltra, Isabela and San Cristóbal) on tiny planes, for shorter travel times.

Photo: Pham Thi Dieu Linh

Phone: +593 4 230 1277

Internet: [www.emetebe.com.ec/home.html](http://www.emetebe.com.ec/home.html)

Email: [ventas-gye@emetebe.com.ec](mailto:ventas-gye@emetebe.com.ec)

## EXPLORE FURTHER



*Leightonoc*

The Galapagos Islands are a unique and fascinating destination filled with beauty, wonder and adventure.

Visit [ArrivalGuides](#) and discover more!

[www.arrivalguides.com](http://www.arrivalguides.com)

### **Population**

26,640

### **Currency**

US dollar, \$1 = 100 cents

### **Newspapers**

The Galapagos Guardian

Darwin Daily

Evolution Express

The Tortoise Telegraph

The Beagle Beacon

### **Emergency numbers**

Police: 101

Ambulance: 131