

Keene Luxury Travel's Guide to The Galapagos Islands



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Overview of the Galapagos Islands

Every Major Island Has Something Unique to Offer

Bahia Darwin, Genovesa

Often called “bird island” as there are huge colonies of sea birds and one of the few places you can see two species of birds nesting, red footed and Nazca boobies. Walking around the sandy landing site at Darwin Bay you will enjoy a bird watchers paradise. Standing right next to the birds they are totally calm with your presence. Sally Lightfoot Crabs scamper around, a delightful morning.

On Genovesa are the “Phillips Steps” named after the Duke of Edinburgh who visited in 1965. After walking the steps to reach the cliffs you are rewarded with great sightings. The Great Frigate birds with their puffed out red sacs, and Nazca boobies nesting on the ground.



Bartolomé Island

Some of the most spectacular landscapes in the islands come into view. Just off the coast of Santiago, Bartolomé boasts some of the most magnificent landscapes in the islands including the famous Pinnacle Rock, a towering obelisk at the edge of the ocean. After a hike to the summit that is not difficult and is done at easy pace, visitors will have an impressive view of the surrounding islands, including the eroded tuff cone of Pinnacle Rock. There is a lagoon right off the beach where often you can see one or two Flamingo’s. These are very pink and a nice site to see. Sea Lions are also on the beach and fun to watch. Finish your day snorkeling off the beach and hopefully encounter a Galapagos Penguin.



Espanolais

An idyllic beach is waiting for you with the finest white sand against a bright blue ocean. During our visit sea lions lined the edge of the water nursing their young. A stunning Brown Pelican was walking in the shallow. Marine iguanas were on the rocks and another Galapagos Hawk was on a signpost. We walked the length of the beach enjoying the beautiful surroundings. At the western point of the island sheer cliffs provide thermals for the seabirds and the waved Galapagos Albatross maybe seen from April to December.

Fernandina

Is the best for seeing marine iguanas, crabs, Flightless Cormorants nesting sites, the Galapagos Penguins, Galapagos Hawks, and sea lions.

Floreana

Is very isolated and full of a rich history with many stories of the people who first settled here. Two men who lived as nudists, a family seeking isolation and a Baroness with three lovers who wanted to make this a resort island. No one really knows what happened to all these people. On the island there are strange rock carvings of heads reminiscent of those on Easter Island. A mystery island full of stories about the human species instead of the bird and animal species.

Punte Vicente Roca, Isabela Island

(Point Vicente Roca) a wonderful place for a zodiac ride hugging the cliffs to see nesting birds and sea lions. Marine iguanas are sunning on the black lava rocks. Here you may see blue footed and Nazca Boobies.

Santa Cruz

Is the home of the Charles Darwin Research Station, and was the abode of the famous Lonesome George. In 2016 the center is undergoing a refurbishment and should emerge better than ever. Another option is the Tortoise refuge center at the top of the island. About a 45- minute drive but worth it. Here the Dome Tortoises are living in the wild. You can go off the path to view them and it great to wander around and see these magnificent animals. They were on the road as we travelled to the refuge center. The town is quite nice with some restaurants on the waterfront if you wish to spend some time back in civilization or do a little retail therapy.



Santa Cruz (Dragon Hill)

Home to the Land Iguana and a walk up "Dragon Hill" you will see large and more colorful iguanas.



Rabida Island/Jervis

Unique dark red colored beach of volcanic origin, frequented by sea lions, and a flamingo pond. The walk up this island is very rewarding. Only a little steep in certain parts the green trees and spectacular views of the sea are worth the effort. We saw the Galapagos Hawk, the top Galapagos predator within about 10 feet of our cameras. A great outing for sure. After the walk you can snorkel from the beach and enjoy really excellent sea life. Kayaking around Darwin Bay was also an option

Santiago Island

Santiago Island is also known as San Salvador, after the first island discovered by Columbus in the Caribbean Sea or as James Island. The island, which consists of two overlapping volcanoes. The oldest lava flows on the island date back to 750,000 years ago. Sullivan Bay is especially fascinating for those who are interested in geology and volcanology. You can walk over the uneroded, black lava flow covered with lava bubbles and tree-trunk molds in the surface. There are two small beaches where turtles come for nesting.

North Seymour Island

This site is also known of being a major nesting colony of Blue Footed Boobies, and the largest colony of the Magnificent Frigate Bird. At any time of year these Frigate Birds may display their bright red pouch to attract females. The Blue Footed Boobies may perform their courtship dance called “sky pointing”. Marine and land iguanas are around the beach and Brown Pelicans are always fun to watch.

The more knowledge you bring to a travel destination, the more knowledge you will take from it. Be on the lookout for newspaper and magazine articles - and for TV documentaries on the Galapagos Islands. A good narrative book for your Galapagos adventure is *The Voyage of the Beagle* by Charles Darwin. Though first published in 1839, it's still a delight to peruse. This volume will make Charles Darwin's explorations come to life as you visit the islands.

Other Resources

- [Discovery Channel | Galapagos](#)
- [National Geographic | Search for Galapagos](#)
- [PBS Galapagos Archives](#)

What To Expect During Your Galapagos Cruise

What will you see? What should you expect?

Animals and birds

Marine and Land Iguanas, Sea Lions, Sea Turtles, Giant Tortoise, a tremendous variety of birds including Blue Footed Boobies, Herons, Flightless Cormorants, Frigate Birds, Mockingbirds and the Galapagos penguins. The animals here are not afraid of man and you can get extremely close. Snorkeling with the animals is a rare treat and the sea lions will swim right around you and even come to look right in your mask.



The Islands

The islands do vary from one another, some are more mountainous, some are flat, some are mostly lava. All are interesting. Pictures below show the diversity. Getting from island to island is so easy while staying onboard and being transported by ship.



Where else should you visit while you are in this area of the world

Trip to Machu Picchu or to the Amazon jungle are popular extensions to a Galapagos Island trip. We can arrange an extension for you if you choose.

The Climate of the Galapagos Islands

When is the best time to travel to the Galapagos?

The Galapagos Islands are a year-round destination.

Month	Maximum Temperature	Minimum Temperature	Hours of Clear Sky	Temperature of the sea	Wind Force	Sea Force	Rain Fall Inches
	°F	°F		°F			
JANUARY	83	73	5.3	76	3	2	1
FEBRUARY	86	73	7.5	77	2	1	1
MARCH	87	72	6.0	77	1	1	2
APRIL	85	72	7.5	77	2	1	1.5
MAY	83	71	5.2	76	3	2	0.8
JUNE	79	66	4.4	74	4	2	0.3
JULY	77	67	2.8	72	5	3	0.5
AUGUST	76	66	3.3	71	6	4	0.3
SEPTEMBER	76	67	2.9	71	7	4	0.5
OCTOBER	78	67	3.8	72	6	3	0.3
NOVEMBER	79	68	3.5	73	5	3	0.5
DECEMBER	80	69	4.0	74	4	2	0.5

January to May - The Wet Season

During the "hot" season with its frequent afternoon rain showers, the islands are generally much greener and the land birds most active. It is also during this time period that the ocean temperature is warmer for swimming and snorkeling. Also, the seas are generally calmer, so if you are prone to sea sickness, this is the time for you to visit. The rain showers are short and pass quickly and leave behind a bright blue sky. There is no reason to avoid the rainy season as it is a great time to visit.

June to December - The Dry Season

During the "cool" season, the sea mammals are most active. This is the best time for observing courtship displays in the sea birds. Baby chicks are in abundance in November. Seas can be choppy during this time, although seldom deemed rough. Sea surges can make landings more difficult. Ironically, the skies are more often gray than blue during the dry season (especially in August and September) because of overcast thin cloud layers.

No matter what time of year you visit the islands, you will always find the wildlife activity to be absolutely amazing.

Environmental Issues

It took millions of years for the delicate system of the Galapagos to evolve. Human interruption and introduction easily disturb such a delicate system. Thus, there are many environmental problems plaguing the islands, some stemming from the pressures of the introduction of species by humans, such as rats, dogs, cats, and goats. Also, there are concerns with overpopulation, commercial fishing and climate changes such as El Niño.

Impact of Non-native Species

Since the times of the first inhabitants, non-native species have been imported to the Islands, often with drastic consequences. Many of the species have had dramatic effects.

Feral dogs, most likely imported to the Islands as pets of early settlers, have been a threat to tortoise eggs, native iguana species and even penguins.

Four species of goats were introduced to the Santiago Islands in the early 1800's. They went rampant and one estimate calculated that their population had grown to nearly 100,000. The introduced species eradication program, though slow going, has eliminated feral goats from several small islands. Due to their constitution and ability to feed on nearly any plant, goats alone may be responsible for the local extinction of up to 4 or 5 species of vegetation and compete with the Galapagos tortoise for their food source.

Dogs are now absent from the island of Isabela. The efforts to reintroduce and repopulate species such as elephantine tortoise have increased their numbers dramatically.

The [Charles Darwin Research Station](#) constantly searches for solutions to the problem of introduced species.

Human Migration

Looking for work, people from mainland Ecuador have literally invaded the Islands. The Galapagos human population has increased over 300% in the past few decades. Today, more than 40,000 people live on the Islands. The population is doubling every eleven years, which means that there will be 80,000 people on the Galapagos Islands by 2025.

Tourism

For decades, tourists have been coming to the Islands for the rich flora and fauna of the Galapagos. There are two airports, one in San Cristobal and one in Baltra. The airport on Baltra was renovated in 2013 to accommodate larger aircraft. The park service does a great job of regulating the licensing of guides, as well as designating low-impact landing sites. The National Park charges a \$100 entrance fee to foreign tourists.

Over-fishing

Recently, over fishing or illegal fishing has become a large issue. When migrants do not find work in tourism, they often find jobs in the fishing industry. The sea cucumber and sharks of the Galapagos have become alarming targets, both popular in Asian markets for their aphrodisiac or medicinal qualities. Due to the alarming decrease, in the early 1990's an Executive Decree enforced by the National Park service banned all fishing of sea cucumbers in the Galapagos. Fishermen were not filled with enthusiasm. Although the ban has been replaced by a quota, there have continuously been strikes on the part of the fishermen. In April 2004, angry fishermen besieged the Charles Darwin Station and demanded the right to use greater nets and longer lines. The seizure ended with an agreement signed between Ecuador's Minister of the Environment, and the fishermen. The conflict, however, is far from over.

Climate | El Niño

While an entirely natural occurrence, the weather pattern took a vital part of the ecosystem out of the chain. Many fish searched for different waters to feed upon. The fur seals were most greatly affected as they depend on the fish being closer to the surface. The surface waters were heated more during the attacks of El Niño, and the fur seals between ages 1-4 were virtually all wiped out. El Niño also affected coastal birds. The absence of fish in the coastal waters meant that many of the traditional nest areas for birds were abandoned.

Solutions

While there are a great number of issues and problems facing the fragile environment of the Galapagos, there are success stories and potential solutions as well. Environmental education efforts on the Islands help their inhabitants understand the larger picture and need for conservation. Enforcement of responsible tourism and park guidelines help preserve the Galapagos for the future. There are seemingly endless needs for the park's preservation and funding is always limited. Other than what little budget it receives from the Republic of Ecuador, the National Park relies entirely on funding from philanthropists, the fundraising efforts of the Charles Darwin Foundation, Inc. and other private organizations.

How can you help during your visit?

When you visit the Galapagos National Park, stick to the following park rules to help preserve the unique flora and fauna on the Islands.

- Do not remove any plant, animal, or remains of such (including shells, bones, and pieces of wood), or other natural objects.
- Be careful not to bring any live material or food to the Islands, or from one island to another.
- Make sure you do not touch, handle, feed, or chase the animals.
- Do stay within the permitted areas and only visit the Islands together with a licensed National Park Guide.
- Do not leave any garbage or litter on the Islands, or throw any off your ship.
- Do not deface the rocks.
- Make sure that you do not buy souvenirs or objects made from plants or animals from the Islands.

Additional Resources

- [Galapagos National Park Services](#)
- [Charles Darwin Foundation](#)

What to Pack

Clothes

For the daytime in the Galapagos, you will most likely want to be in shorts and a loose comfortable t-shirt or tank top. Also, long, light-weight pants with zip-off legs are a good choice. [Columbia](#) and [Magellan](#) make this type of pant. A wide-brimmed hat or long-billed cap and a pair of sunglasses are essentials for protecting your face, eyes, ears and neck. For the evenings, on the cruise ships have a relaxed country-club casual dress code - a shirt and long pant for the men and a simple sundress for ladies. Also, bring a light sweater or sweatshirt for being up on deck at night. You will pass through Quito, which is also on the Equator, but high in the mountains with a cool climate. Arriving at the airport, being dressed for a little cooler temperature is wise, so pack a light jacket in your carry-on. A waterproof jacket that can double as a raincoat in the islands is a good idea.

Footwear

Without a doubt, water-proof/water-resistant, shoes/sandals like the [Teva](#) brand are the most useful footwear you can bring to the island. They can be worn during dry or wet landings on the islands, protect your feet from the hot, harsh volcanic landscape and keep them cool. Alternatively, you might want the protection and support of tennis shoes or sneakers. If so, bring an older, broken-in pair that can suffer the damage of saltwater, volcanic rock, and sand. If you wear sandals or aqua shoes for the wet landings, you can take these off - dry off your feet with the towel provided by the ship and put on tennis shoes or sneakers with socks for the walk on the island. It is important that you wear comfortable footwear as much of the walking is over uneven surfaces and rocks.

Swimwear and Snorkeling Equipment

A simple swimsuit is perfect for the water. If you have your own snorkeling equipment it may be a good idea to bring it with you. Often it is better to have your own equipment with which you are comfortable and certain of the fit. However, if you do not have your own, or do not wish to pack it, the ships do provide or rent snorkel equipment for use during the cruise. For those that like to spend hours snorkeling and diving deep, you might consider a "shorty" wet suit for the deeper, cooler water. The Silver Origin had wet suits available.

Money

The official currency on mainland Ecuador and the Galapagos is the US Dollar. It would be wise to already bring some Dollars in cash with you. Carry your money and credit cards in a money pouch (held close to your body).

Sunscreen & Medication

The sun hits the equator hard and can burn you before you know it. Use SPF 45 or higher, waterproof sunscreen, and apply this everywhere, especially for those with lighter skin.

First Aid kits are provided on all ships. Always travel with all prescription medicines that you may need. If you are prone to motion sickness, then it is advisable to pack motion sickness medication. Quito is at 9,500 feet, (3,000m) and some people experience symptoms of altitude sickness which in most cases can be remedied by drinking lots of water, getting lots of rest (this can be difficult when traveling), or by taking aspirin. If you experience severe headaches or respiratory problems, consult a doctor immediately. Remember that you are on an isolated ship in isolated islands 600 miles from the nearest continent. If there is something you can't do without, then be certain to bring it with you and preferably packed in your carry-on. **Prescription medications should always be packed in your carry-on luggage.**

Seasons For the Wildlife in the Galapagos

[Click Here for Recent Pictures from a Silver Galapagos Cruise](#)

January

Beginning of the warm, rainy season. Both, water and air temperatures rise and stay warm until June. This is an ideal time for snorkeling. Land birds start nesting, generally after the first rain. On Hood (Española) Island, adult marine iguanas become brightly colored (green & red + black). The green sea turtles arrive to beaches in Galapagos for their egg laying period. Land iguanas begin reproductive cycles on Isabela Island.



February

The highest water temperature reaches 25C (77F). This temperature remains constant until April. On Floreana Island, the greater flamingos start nesting. The Nazca (masked) boobies on Hood are at the end of their nesting season. Bahama pintail ducks (Black-tailed pintail) start their breeding season. Marine iguanas are nesting on Santa Cruz Island. Very few penguins are sighted at Bartolome Island (most have followed the cool waters back to the west or near upwelling areas). The nesting season of the Galapagos dove reaches its peak.

March

The rainy season reaches the highest precipitation; however, this does not mean it rains all day, every day. These are sporadic, tropical rains, and there is still intense sun and hot a climate. Air temperature can reach up to 30C (86F) and humidity is high. Even the western islands have warm waters where snorkeling is excellent. Marine iguanas are nesting on Fernandina. March 21st, the beginning of the summer equinox, signals the arrival of the waved albatross to Española. Punta Vicente Roca (Isabela) can be an amazing site as the penguins, still active in the water, are next to tropical fish! Some shores, especially those facing the north side, can receive deep surges and can be quite a challenge for landings.



April

While the rains have ended, the islands continue to be quite green. There is good visibility in the water for snorkelers. Perhaps, together with May, this is the best month in Galapagos for weather, animals, and water temperature. There is a massive arrival of waved albatrosses to Española and their amazing courtship starts. This month marks the end of the hatching season for the giant tortoises. Also, the eggs of the green sea turtles and of the land iguanas on Isabela begin to hatch.

May

The rains have ended, and the islands continue to be green. Clear waters provide good visibility for snorkelers. Perhaps, together with April, one of the best months in the Galapagos for weather, animals, and water temperature. North Seymour's blue-footed boobies begin their courtship. The sea turtles are still hatching their eggs. Most of the marine iguanas eggs have hatched from their nests on Santa Cruz. The waved albatross on Española start laying their eggs. Ban-Rumped storm petrels begin their first nesting period.



June

This is the beginning of the rainy season and there is drizzle and mist. The southeast trade winds return and currents become a bit stronger so the seas pick-up in surges and wave action. Giant tortoises on Santa Cruz Island migrate from the highlands to the lowlands in search of suitable nesting places. June marks the beginning of the nesting season for the giant tortoises. The red pouches flourish from the males of Magnificent Frigatebirds on North Seymour. Southern migrants have started their journey towards the north. Galapagos is a rest stop for such migratory birds. Some species of cetaceans also follow this pattern of migration. Some groups of Humpback whales that migrate up to equatorial latitudes along the coast of Ecuador, can reach the Galapagos too.

July

Water temperature does not reach more than 21C (68F). Sea bird communities are very active with breeding, especially the Blue Footed Booby on Española. Flightless cormorants perform beautiful courtship rituals and nesting activities on Fernandina. If you walk along the shores of Puerto Egas (Santiago Island), you could find American oystercatchers nesting. Lava lizards initiate their mating rituals which continue until November. Cetaceans (whales & dolphins) are more likely to be observed, specially off the western coast of Isabela. This is a great month to see the four stages of nesting for the Blue Footed Booby: eggs, chicks, juveniles and sub-adults.



August

Oceans are quite choppy and the currents are at the strongest levels; surges can be expected along the shores that face west or south. The temperature of the ocean drops to 18C (64F), which obviously varies according to the geographic zones among the islands. Pupping season (births) of sea lions has started. Western and central islands are common places for such sightings. Galapagos hawks court on Española and Santiago. Nazca (masked) boobies and swallow-tailed gulls' nest on Genovesa Island. Migrant shore birds start to arrive, and stay on the islands until March. Giant tortoises return to the highlands of Santa Cruz.

September

This is the peak of the cold, rainy season. The air temperature reaches its lowest levels at about 19C (66F). Sea lions are very active and the females have reached estrus stage, and so harem-gathering males are constantly barking and fighting. Shore fighting amongst the sea lions is heavy. Western and central islands are the most active in terms of sea lions' activities. Galapagos Penguins show remarkable activity on Bartolome. Since May, swimmers and snorkelers can be delighted at Bartolome with penguins active at the surface or torpedo-like while underwater. Most species of sea birds remain quite active at their nesting sites.



October

The days are not always sunny and drizzly rains can be expected in most locations, except the western islands where most days have a misty start but after few hours of daylight it burns off. Sunrises in the west can be quite beautiful. As the mist rises, it covers only certain locations of the western volcanoes leaving the summits clear, but low-lying fog covers the shoreline. The Galapagos Fur Sea lions begin their mating period. Lava herons start nesting until March. Blue footed boobies raise chicks all over Española and Punta Vicente Roca (Isabela). Giant tortoises are still laying eggs.

November

Seas are calmer as the southeast trade winds have decreased in strength. Water temperatures are slowly rising. There is good visibility for snorkelers. There is generally great weather due to transition between one season and the next one. Popping of sea lions continue. Sea lion pups (specially at Champion Islet) play aqua-aerobics next to snorkelers. Most pups here are curious enough to nibble at the fins of snorkelers. The average age of most pups is 3-4 months. This is the breeding season for the brown noddies. Some species of jellyfish can be seen around the islands. Band-Rumped storm petrels begin their second nesting period. Chicks are abundant which makes for great photo opportunities.



December

Great weather with mostly sunny days. There is hardly any wind from the southeast and the waters continue to warm up. Water temperatures are still too cool for long snorkeling periods. The Western islands remain very dry. The rainy season is just starting to begin and all the plants of the dry zone produce leaves, thus Galapagos becomes very green. Hatching of giant tortoise's eggs begins and lasts until April. Green sea turtles display their mating behavior. The first young waved albatrosses fledge. The first red pouches of Great frigatebirds are seen at Genovesa. Northern migrants have started their journey towards the south. Galapagos is a rest stop for these migratory birds. Some species of Cetaceans (whales & dolphins) also follow this pattern of migration.

Frequently Asked Questions

Where are the Galapagos Islands?

The Galapagos Islands (or Archipelago de Colon) is a Province of Ecuador located 500 miles (800 kilometers) west of the Ecuadorian coast. They lie directly on the equator.

What is the climate like?

[Link to Full Climate Details Page](#)

When is the best time to travel to Galapagos?

[Link to When to Visit Details Page](#)

Are there any required and/or recommended immunizations?

There are no immunizations either required or recommended for the Galapagos Islands. However, if you intend to spend more time in Ecuador, especially in the jungle, immunization is highly recommended. As this changes from time to time, please check with your local health office or [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) | Ecuador/Galapagos Islands](#) a few weeks in advance of your trip.

How do we get there?

From North America, there are daily flights via Miami and Houston to Quito and Guayaquil, Ecuador. From there, you take a flight to the Galapagos.

Can you arrange our air to Ecuador?

The cruise lines arrange the flights from mainland Ecuador.

How do we get to Galapagos from Quito and Guayaquil?

The cruise lines will arrange the Galapagos flight for you. The operators of the ships in Galapagos block spaces on these flights to ensure our passengers are on the flight to meet the ship. You will fly to Galapagos in the morning of the first day of the cruise and return to the mainland in the afternoon of the last day of the cruise.

May we fly to Galapagos from Quito and back to Guayaquil (or vice versa)?

The cruise lines usually start in Quito and then fly to Guayaquil and onto the Galapagos. You stopover but do not disembark, just stay on the plane as it is a short stopover. After the cruise, you can book your international flight home from Guayaquil or return to Quito and fly home from Quito.

Are all of your prices in US dollars?

All of our rates are quoted in US dollars.

What forms of payment do you accept?

We accept Visa, Mastercard and American Express. Payment may also be made by check.

Will we have to exchange any money before we travel to Ecuador or once in the country?

Not if you have US dollars. Ecuador has adopted the US dollar as its official currency.

What is included in the tour package?

The package rates include accommodations and all meals aboard the cruise ships, island sightseeing, all guide and lecture services, transfers in the islands and between the airport and ship in Galapagos, and your flight to the Galapagos (unless otherwise noted).

What is not included in the tour package?

The [Galapagos Entry Tax](#) to Protected Areas (includes the municipal tax, currently \$100 US payable in cash to the national park authorities. (This is, however, included with the Silversea Silver Origin cruise fare.) however this is subject to change.

How much should we bring for gratuities?

Tipping is always a courtesy; however, if you find the service to be pleasing, then use the following general guidelines: Restaurants and coffee shops - 10% - 15% of the bill; Hotel/airport portage - \$1- \$2 per suitcase; Guides on Mainland - \$5 per person, per day; Drivers on Mainland - \$5 per person, per day; Cruise ship Crew and Guides in Galapagos - \$20-25 per person, per day. Please note: All tips are included with the Silversea Silver Origin cruise.

Can you make hotel and other tour reservations for our stay in Ecuador?

We are able to assist you with hotels and tours throughout Ecuador and into Peru for Machu Picchu. We can also help you to plan an efficient itinerary that will make the most of the time you have available.

Can we purchase travel insurance for our trip?

We offer [CSA Travel Protection](#); and [Travelex Insurance Services](#) for trip cancellation, travel and/or medical insurance. Alternatively, you can purchase travel insurance through one of our Tour Operators. Purchasing deadlines do apply for full coverage, so be sure to inquire at the time of your initial trip deposit.

How do we receive our vouchers and tickets for the Galapagos?

The cruise lines will provide you with all of the details you need including any hotel accommodations and any domestic flight in Ecuador.

How experienced are the Naturalist Guides onboard the ship and do they speak English?

Any ship sailing in the Galapagos must have an Ecuadorian staff member in all positions. The Silversea Silver Origin has an excellent expedition team whom are all Ecuadorian or related to Ecuador in some way. All are highly experienced and are qualified naturalist guides and are fluent in English (and often other languages as well).

Will there be time for snorkeling?

There is plenty of time for snorkeling for those that who are interested. Silversea Silver Origin provides you with snorkeling gear that you are welcome to take home with you at no charge.

Is a wetsuit necessary for snorkeling?

Silversea Silver Origin provides a wet suit for every guest at no charge. It is up to you, if you want to wear it or not.

Silver Origin Cruise Ship Review | By Ngaire Keene Hutyra

The Silver Origin – Reviewed by Ngaire Keene

The Ship

A stunning ship with a very light and bright feel. Lots of windows to enjoy the views of the ocean and the islands.

To view all of Ngaire and Ken's amazing pictures of the Origin and Galapagos -[link to their SmugMug pictures here](#).



RESTAURANTS

THE DINING ROOM DECK FOUR

Very well laid out with tables for 2, 4, 6. Some round tables but mostly square tables. They can set up a table for as many as you want. The dining room at breakfast and lunch has a buffet area where salads, appetizers, desserts, breads are available and you also order from the menu. It works really well. The room service menu is also available in the main dining room.

THE GRILL ON DECK SEVEN

The grill area is surrounded with glass walls that cuts down the wind of an open deck but you still feel like you are outside. During the day they have basically the same menu as the dining room with just a few additions from the grill. This area is really nicely laid out, again with flexibility for the number of people who want to dine together. At night it becomes a combination of a regular menu and HOT ROCKS where you grill your own items on a small block that is extremely hot. This can be a lot of fun.

FOOD

All the food is locally sourced. Lots of fresh local fish and the giant prawns that are wonderful. Some of the best seafood I have ever eaten. As all the fish is local the fish dishes were excellent. There is a lot of pork featured as well and this is locally sourced. Beef is available and served and is acceptable but not up to the standards of the fish dishes. The servings are small so if you want more quantity just asked for a double order it is no problem at all.

WINES

Mostly South American wines and some were good. In fact, I found the pouring wines where as good as the some of the premium wines we drank. IF you find a wine you like you can ask for that wine at all meals.

BASE CAMP

Base Camp on Deck 3 is a lovely area and very spacious when loading the zodiacs. Very easy to load the zodiacs. They load with the nose of the zodiac against the landing dock with permanent steps in the zodiac. It is easier and much safer than the moveable steps. This is where the reception area and where you can purchase items with your Shipboard Credit. There is no shop but a display case and then they get the items you have selected and bring them to you.

RECEPTION

Really superior warm and friendly service. I found all the staff at reception were exemplary. This is where you go to do an onboard booking for a discount on a future cruise.

THE EXPLORER LOUNGE

The main Explorer Lounge where recaps and briefings are held is directly opposite the Dining Room that makes it very convenient. What makes this lounge exceptional is on the sides there are TV's that show exactly what is on the big screen. The center area of the room is looking right at the big screen. We found that we were drawn to the small square sections on the side with the TV. Super comfortable seating a combination of sofas and individual chairs. Beautiful room as you see in the picture below.

THE STAFF

Fantastic crew. All the waiters, barmen, cabin cleaners and butlers were "above and beyond" All crew are locals and that seemed to create a very compatible team. Could not have been better. The Hotel Director is around and friendly. Our chef and Dining Room Manager were both female and absolutely outstanding.

THE EXPEDITON TEAM

The expedition leader was one of the best we have ever had. Again, the team were all from Ecuador or had connections to Ecuador. Outstanding team.

THE CABINS

All the categories are well designed with a nice bathroom with shower, good storage and comfortable beds and colors.

The Classic Suite 325 sq.ft: These have the standard balcony where you step out onto your balcony and close the door to the cabin.

The Superior Suite 325 sq.ft: This is the same cabin except the "balcony" is inside the room with top part of the window coming down and creating a full cabin balcony. It certainly makes the cabin feel so much more spacious.

The Deluxe Suite 335 sq.ft: This cabin also has the balcony in the room BUT the layout is different and it is amazing the difference that the 10 sq.ft makes to the suite.

The Medallion Suite is 355 sq.ft: It is very spacious. There is a completely different closet set up and the room is very attractive.

The Larger Suites: Silver, Royal, Grand and Owners, are all outstanding as you would expect.

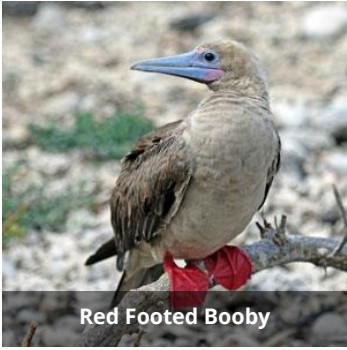
THE ITINERARY

THERE ARE TWO DIFFERENT ITINERARIES-BOTH HAVE PROS AND CONS ONE IS TRULY NOT BETTER THAN THE OTHER. OFTEN PEOPLE DO BOTH ITINERARIES TO GET THE FULL EXPERIENCE.

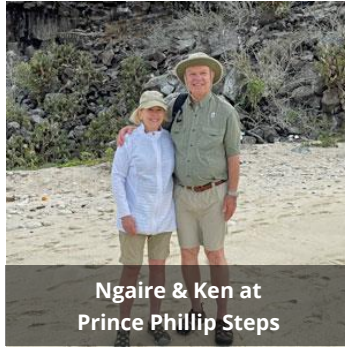
There is only one repeat landing. The giant tortoise and coffee experience. However, the second time we went we walked in a completely different area looking for the tortoise so it was like a new experience. The coffee was the same but still very enjoyable a second time.

NORTH CENTRAL ITINERARY

This itinerary has a higher likelihood of seeing the Red Footed Booby and the Frigate Bird.



Red Footed Booby



Ngaire & Ken at
Prince Phillip Steps



Galapagos Fur Seals

GENOVESA MORNING – Darwin Bay: Nature Walk, snorkeling from the beach and deep-water snorkeling

An easy nature walk with a wet landing starts the day. Great Frigatebirds, Brown Pelicans, Red Footed Boobies, Nazcar Boobies, Darwin Finches, Galapagos Fur Seals, Galapagos Sea Lions

Walking on a circular track you find many nesting red footed boobies and many other species of birds. You can literally get within inches of the birds. Very easy walk and a wonderful introduction to the birds of the Galapagos

GENOVESA AFTERNOON – Prince Phillip Steps: A 2-hour difficult nature walk

This is a famous walk as Prince Phillip did this but it is quite a difficult walk as you climb up over a series of rocks. Once at the top the terrain is flat. Along with many varieties bird and great views the group saw Owls which was a nice treat.



Blue Footed Booby w/ Baby



Frigate Bird

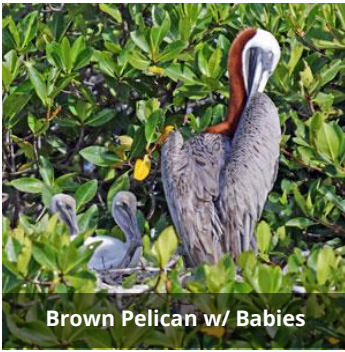


Iguana

NORTH SEYMOUR MORNING – Walks and snorkeling

A 2-hour nature walk with a dry landing on rocks and a very short climb to the top. Not difficult for most people and there are expedition people there to assist. However, if a person has mobility issues this may be better to pass. Here we saw Land Iguanas, Marine Iguanas, Blue Footed Boobies with chicks, Frigate birds displaying their red gular pouches to attract females. Plus, Brown Pelicans, Darwin Finches, Swallow Tailed Gulls.

Also offered was a zodiac cruise followed by a shorter walk. The zodiac drives along the rocks where we saw Fur Seals (not really seals but smaller sea lions) were climbing down the sheer rock walls to reach the sea. Along with schools of fish around the zodiac. You have a choice of going back to the ship after the zodiac tour or going on the short walk but still up the rocks to the walking paths. Deep Water Snorkeling.



Brown Pelican w/ Babies



Galapagos Penguins



Blue Footed Boobies

SULLIVAN BAY, SANTIAGO – *Time at the beach and Lava Field walk*

Leisure time at the beach. Wet landing and snorkeling from the beach. The 2-hour Lava Field walk with a dry landing. This is a challenging and the rocks can be very slippery. Caution is advised. This area is full of Marine Iguanas and also of course a variety of birds. Stunning lava with incredible strata.



Flamingo



Sunning Iguanas



Blue Heron

PUNTA MANGLE – FERNANDINA – *Zodiac Tour, Deep Water snorkeling*

A very nice zodiac tour where we enjoyed seeing the diversity of birds. Including the flightless cormorant drying its short wings, the pelicans breeding colony with young chicks in the nests, blue footed boobies. Also, the sea lions playing and swimming around the zodiacs.

PUNTA MORENO, ISABELA – *Zodiac Tour and a challenging adventure hike*

This zodiac tour was even better than the morning tour because of the Galapagos Penguins. We saw a large group of penguins along with many other bird species.

The adventure hike was pretty difficult and around 2 miles. Walking over uneven lava with crevasses that had to be jumped over. Would only recommend this for those that are very fit and have good stability on uneven surfaces. The payoff was seeing flamingos.

SANTA CRUZ MORNING – *Giant Tortoise and Coffee experience, Deep Water Snorkeling, Nature Walk, Kayaking*

In the morning we visited the highlands of the Islands, Montemar Tortoise Reserve to see the Giant Tortoise in the wild and experience the Galapagos coffee industry. This was a very interesting 3-hour tour. On the way up in the bus we saw tortoise on the side of the road. When we reached the top of the reserve there were multiple tortoises of various sizes. If you got close, they retreated into their shells! In one area, they gathered at a watering hole and would hiss at one another. The largest tortoise won the hissing battle every time.

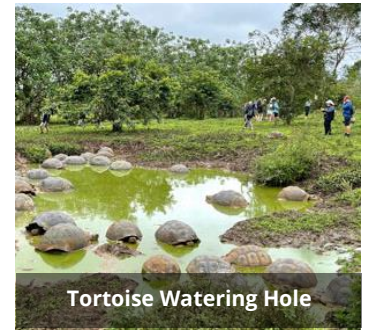
The coffee experience was very interesting and including a chocolate tasting. Explained by the owner of the property was that coffee grown in the Galapagos is high quality. Also, chocolate is made here which was a rich dark chocolate, one salty, one floral and one spicy. A very enjoyable experience with very clean restaurants and a small shop that sold local jewelry, chocolate and coffee.



Giant Tortoise



Santa Fe Island



Tortoise Watering Hole

SANTA FE ISLAND AFTERNOON – *Deep Water Snorkeling, Kayaking and a 1 ½ hour nature walk (moderate – difficult)*

Very rocky uneven terrain for most of the hike with a wet landing. Really neat cactus trees and really large land iguanas, lizards and sea lions on the rocks. Darwin Finches, Galapagos Mockingbirds, and Blue Footed Boobies.

BAHIA GARDNER, ESPANOLA MORNING – *Kayaking, snorkeling from the beach and deep-water snorkeling*

The white sand beach was a perfect place to relax or enjoy snorkeling from the beach. Zodiacs go back and forth every thirty minutes. Snorkelers saw sea lions and turtles along with a variety of fish.



Iguana



Silver Origin



Brown Pelican

PUNTA SUAREZ, ESPANOLA AFTERNOON - *Two hikes*

A dry landing 2 ½ hour challenging hike on the Punta Suarez trail. An uneven and very rocky trail. Galapagos Mockingbirds, Waved Albatross, Nazca Boobies, Blue Footed Boobies. Many birds on nests with chicks. Seals with pups on the rocks, land and marine iguanas and blow holes on the cliffs. Shorter nature walks, with a dry landing hike of 1 ½ hours moderate walk but on uneven and rocky trail.



Tortoise Breeding Center



Seals Sunning



Tortoise Breeding Center

SAN CRISTOBAL – *Tortoise Breeding Experience*

This is a delightful excursion after about a 45-minute drive you arrive at the Tortoise Breeding Center. Here you learn about the work taking place to reintroduce more tortoise into the wild. You will see very small tortoise and then some very big tortoise. They do feed the tortoise and it is quite interesting to see them feeding and hissing at each other over the food. A very enjoyable excursion.

SAN CRISTOBAL - CERRO BRUNO – *beach at leisure and kayaking*

This features leisure time at a beautiful beach, where the ship shuttles people back and forth every 30 minutes. This is the last experience before heading home from this itinerary.

THE WESTERN ITINERARY

This itinerary offers more chance for penguins and the famous Post Office Bay

BARTOLOME'S SUMMIT – *Challenging Hike, Zodiac tour, Snorkeling*

A challenging hike to one of islands most spectacular viewpoints at Bartolome's summit. Dry landing and walking up 388 steps. Not for everyone but this hike was definitely worth the effort for the view. Zodiac Tour was also offered around the coast line of Bartolome and the Sullivan channel. Snorkeling from the beach was offered after the hike and zodiac tours.

SANTIAGO - BUCCANEER COVE – *Zodiac tour*

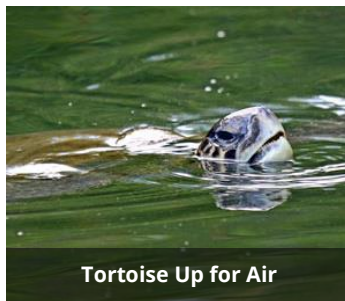
Zodiac tour was around the coastline of this impressive cove. The conditions were absolutely perfect and lots of wildlife to enjoy. Today there was a Mandatory Kayaking Briefing.

PUNTA VICENTE ROCA – ISABELA – *Zodiac Tours, Deep Water Snorkeling, Exploration Walks*

Zodiac tour was excellent. The colors and layers of rock in the side of the island was very interesting. It was very calm and sunny. We saw many iguanas on the rock faces. Penguin and sea turtles in the water. Blue footed boobies, flightless cormorants, both on nests and resting after eating well. We entered a small sheltered area that went into a cave structure that was really fascinating. The afternoon walk was moderately difficult but worth the effort. Marine iguanas were everywhere all piled together. Lots of birds and the highlight was two water turtles together at the water's edge. Also, a lot of cactus tree are present on this walk. A shorter version of the walk was also offered.



Caleta Tagus Bay



Tortoise Up for Air



Seals at Caleta Tagus Bay

CALETA TAGUS – ISABELA – *Power Hike, Adventure Hike, Zodiac Tours, Kayaking, Deep Water Snorkeling*

This hiking walk was a dry landing followed by many steps leading to a quite steep climb up the island. At the top you looked over a salt water lake and stunning views of the area. The power walk was for those very fit who wanted to walk fast up the mountain. No talking and more fast walking – the motto for this hike. Minimum of 8 and maximum of 18 the sign-up list filled up quickly. The regular walk proved to be between moderate and difficult but everyone enjoyed the views and the salt water lake.

Zodiac tour started out a little bumpy. Quite a swell and we ended up moving to another area of the bay that was more sheltered. That gave us a great nature zodiac tour with penguins in the water. Various variety of nesting birds and a hawk on the hunt. Sea lions were around the zodiac. The highlight was seeing a penguin on the rocks, preening after coming back from feeding that paid no attention to us as we got closer in the zodiac. We also saw a black cat. It looked very skinny and was travelling over the rocky cliffs. Many cats were introduced that turned wild. These cats caused havoc with the endemic nesting birds. Most of the cats have been removed so it is a very rare thing to see a cat in the Galapagos now.

ELIZABETH BAY ISALBELA – Mangrove Zodiac Tour

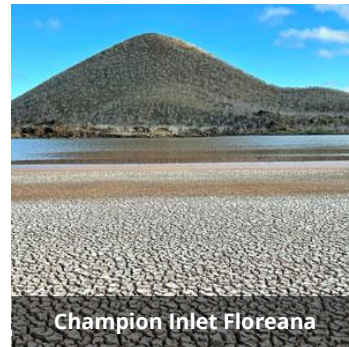
This is a zodiac tour to the mangroves area of Elizabeth Bay. This was a great zodiac tour. Very sheltered area surrounded by mangroves with super clear water. The Sea Turtles and penguins were easy to spot. The zodiac engines were turned off and the driver and naturalist used paddles to move the zodiac. This was quite serene, so quiet and peaceful. Two sea lion pups were resting on a limb of the mangroves, lots of sea turtles, and a sea lion right next to the zodiac. A delightful experience.



Post Office Bay



Zodiac Landing



Champion Inlet Floreana

POST OFFICE BAY – FLOREANA – Snorkeling and the Post Office

A visit to the “post office” This is a wooden barrel where sailors would leave letters for their loved ones at home. Ships would check the barrel before leaving to return home. Any letters in the barrel that were in a close vicinity to a sailor’s hometown would be taken. The letters would be delivered on the sailors return. This is one of the oldest mail systems in South America and was used for over a century. Visitors are encouraged to keep the tradition alive. To leave postcards in the barrel and to sort through the post cards in the barrel and retrieve the mail to deliver back to their hometowns.

This is also a sandy beach where you can snorkel from the beach or just have leisure time ashore. This is an area that does have wasps so it is suggested you do not wear bright colors that attract the wasps.

On our trip one couple left a postcard to their DOG Annie. About a month after the cruise a person came to their door and gave them the postcard to their dog. They were amazed.

PUNTA CORMORAN – FLOREANA – Deep Water Snorkeling, Nature Walk

A wet landing nature walk of moderate difficulty. Again, no bright colors due to the wasps.

SANTA CRUZ MORNING – Giant Tortoise and Coffee experience

In the morning we visited the highlands of the Islands, Montemar Tortoise Reserve to see the Giant Tortoise in the wild and experience the Galapagos coffee industry. This was a very interesting 3-hour tour. On the way up in the bus we saw tortoise on the side of the road. When we reached the top of the reserve there were multiple tortoises of various sizes.

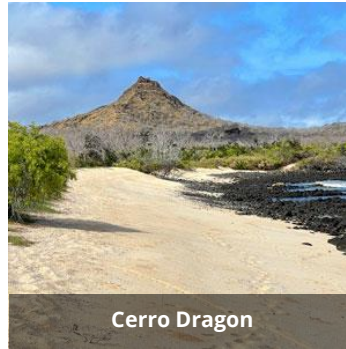
These are wild tortoise and if you got close, they retreated into their shells! In one area, they gathered at a watering hole and would hiss at one another. The largest tortoise won the hissing battle every time.

The coffee experience was very interesting and including a chocolate tasting. Explained by the owner of the property was that coffee grown in the Galapagos is high quality. Also, chocolate is made here which was a rich dark chocolate, one salty, one floral and one spicy. A very enjoyable experience with very clean restaurants and a small shop that sold local jewelry, chocolate and coffee.

FAUSTO LLERENA BREEDING AND DARWIN INTERPREATION CENTER – *Tortoise Breeding Experience and Land Iguanas*

This is a delightful excursion after about short bus drive and a walk of about 10 minutes you arrive at the Tortoise Breeding Center. Here you learn about the work taking place to reintroduce more tortoise into the wild. You will see very small tortoise and then some very big tortoise along with Land Iguanas. You visit the Interpretation Center which is very interesting.

Staying onboard? The ship offered a cooking demonstration and the wine tasting.



CERRO DRAGON, SANTA CRUZ

After a dry landing guest take a 2-hour nature walk. There is a difficult rocky area to navigate from the zodiac to the land there are also some easy trails on the walk. Great viewing on the land iguanas.

GUY FAWKES BAY – *Deep water snorkeling for expert snorkelers.*

Guy Fawkes by is located off the coast of Santa Fe. Depth is up to 80 feet with great visibility of about 23 feet. There is a moderate current. Here they anticipate seeing sting rays, some Galapagos sharks and excellent marine life.

BORRERO BAY SANTA CRUZ

The final landing of the cruise was leisure time at the beach. A wet landing and a beautiful sandy beach to enjoy. Zodiacs running to and from the beach so you can return to the ship at your leisure.

Galapagos Cruise | A Typical Day's Itinerary

A Galapagos Islands ship cruise requires some stamina, because you have an active schedule. Here's a typical 24-hour day. Any problems in basic walking ability could make a Galapagos trip a difficult challenge.

- Early Breakfast
- Morning shore excursion lasting up to several hours
- Return to ship for lunch and (time permitting) snorkeling
- Cruise to next Galapagos site
- Afternoon shore excursion lasting up to several hours
- Return to ship for dinner
- After dinner, meeting/lecture to discuss the next day's plans
- Sleep while ship cruises to the next Galapagos site

The walks ashore are not difficult or excessively hard but the surface is usually uneven and you must exercise caution. Stops are made all along the way to view wildlife and for your guide to explain aspects of the island you are visiting. See also, [physical limitations](#).

Sturdy inflatable zodiacs ferry you between your cruise ship and the Galapagos shore. Some of your landings will be "dry", meaning you step out of the zodiac onto land. Other landings are "wet", meaning you step into shallow water (sometimes up to your knees) and wade to shore. Every now and then, your disembarkation point is rocky or slightly slippery. **A person with average mobility should not have any problems.**

Snorkeling and Diving

Snorkeling is a highlight of the trip for those that enjoy this activity

Each island offers different snorkeling opportunities depending on the wildlife in the region. The Sea Lions will swim right up to you and look in your mask. The Penguins will be swimming around and the turtles will be plentiful. Snorkeling is really very special in the Galapagos.

The cruise ships we recommend offer complimentary snorkeling gear or rent for approximately \$10 per person. Better yet, bring your own gear to ensure availability, quality and good fit.



January to May - the Wet Season

Recognize that the water is warmer and calmer during the wet season.

June to December - the Dry Season

Currents can be strong during the Galapagos dry season, and especially in August and September. You will probably need a lightweight wet suit for the Galapagos Islands. However, in August and September, a medium weight wet suit is sometimes preferable. There are noticeably more fish to observe during the dry season.

Diving and extended time snorkeling

Although the ships set aside time for passengers who wish to snorkel, if you want to do a lot of snorkeling or diving, there are Galapagos ships that emphasize those pursuits on equal footing with shore excursions.

Most snorkelers and divers consider the Galapagos Islands to be one of the world's best destinations. Popular spots include the Devil's Crown just off the island of Santa Maria (Floreana) where you snorkel and dive in a partially submerged volcano cone.