

BIG FIVE[®]

TOURS & EXPEDITIONS

Enriching Lives Through Distinctive Journeys

Destination Information Guide

Galapagos Islands



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Welcome to the World of Big Five!

The following general outline offers practical information, suggestions and answers to some frequently asked questions. It is not intended to be the definitive guide for your trip.

Big Five Tours & Expeditions is pleased to welcome you on this exciting adventure. We take great care to insure that your travel dreams and expectations are well met. Our distinctive journeys allow you to experience the finest aspects each destination has to offer. We also aim to provide you with a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the places you'll visit and the people you'll meet.



GALAPAGOS ISLANDS

The chart below uses Fahrenheit and inches.

	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Max. Air Temp	84	86	88	86	82	78	76	74	76	77	78	80
Min Air Temp	70	74	74	72	72	68	66	64	62	64	66	68
Avg Sea Surface Temp	74	76	76	76	74	74	72	66	68	70	72	74
Avg Rainfall	1	1	2	1.5	.75	.25	.50	.25	.50	.25	.50	.50

WEATHER

The Galapagos climate is heavily affected by cold water currents. Generally, days are warm and nights cool. Humidity is low. The climate is similar to that of California. There are two primary seasons, and while both are good times to visit, each has different features.

December through June is warmer, with highs in the 80s °F / 27s °C. Although the islands receive relatively more rainfall during this time, most of the lower elevations of the islands are quite arid with plenty of sunshine and blue skies. The sea is at its warmest, and is usually calmer.

The drier *garua* season lasts from June or July through November. The *garua* is a mist that forms in the highlands of the islands. Ironically, this season provides more moisture in the higher elevations of the islands than the wet season. There is still sunshine, but it's less intense, with cloudier skies. Air temperatures are lower, with highs in the upper 70s/ 25s °C. The climate in this season is affected by a strong Antarctic current, the Humboldt Current coming from the south. The water temperature, therefore, is at its coolest, about 68°F/21°C.

TIME ZONE

Galapagos Islands is GMT – 6.

PASSPORTS & VISAS

PASSPORTS: For International travel, U.S. and Canadian passports must be **valid for at least six months** from date of departure, containing at least 3 blank pages are necessary.

VISAS: Many countries require travelers to obtain visas prior to arrival. Big Five Tours & Expeditions has appointed Trivisa to process required visas. You will find the necessary forms from Trivisa's website at: www.trivisa.com. Please use account code JP1551, and follow the directions.

Important: Even if you do not need a visa prior to departure, please check your passport well in advance of departure to insure:

- 1) It is valid for at least six months after the date of travel.
- 2) You have sufficient blank pages for visa/entry stamps that will be added as you travel in and out of various countries.

Please note: pages reserved for amendments and endorsements cannot be used for visas.

AIRPORT FORMALITIES

After obtaining your luggage, exit the airport. If you have booked a complete package with Big Five tours, a representative will be holding a sign identifying you or him/her. **International departure tax:** From Quito is \$44.30 and from Guayaquil \$28.27 to be paid locally. For **Galapagos National Park** requires a tax of \$100 per person.

Transit Control Card of \$10 per person, both of which are included in your Galapagos cruise package.

Please note: We strive for accuracy in our materials, but all taxes and governmental fees are subject to change without notice, and are the responsibility of the traveler.

CUSTOMS INTO ECUADOR

The following may be imported into Ecuador without incurring customs duty: 400 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 200g of tobacco; 4 liters of alcohol, a reasonable amount of perfume; gifts and personal effects up to US\$200 (for stay of up to 7 days) or US\$500 (for stay of 2 years onwards).

U.S. CUSTOMS

Returning U.S. residents are allowed to bring back \$800 worth of merchandise duty-free. There are limits on some items. Regulations frequently change. For a list of exempt items and more information contact your nearest Customs office or write the U.S. Customs Service, Box 7407, Washington, DC 20044.

HEALTH

International travelers should be in generally good health. No vaccinations are required for Galapagos Islands. Talk with your personal physician about any shots or boosters recommended depending on your personal health profile and your itinerary. Tetanus and polio vaccines should be up to date. Be prepared to take precautions against sunburn with sunscreen and lip balm. All vaccinations that you have should be recorded on an International Health Certificate, available from your physician or health department.

Yellow fever: Yellow fever vaccination is recommended. It is required if one of the following applies:

- *You are coming from any area other than the United States, Europe, or Canada.*
- *You plan on visiting more than one South American country.*

The following vaccines may be recommended. Discuss this with your physician.

Hepatitis A or immune globulin (IG).

Transmission of hepatitis A virus can occur through direct person-to-person contact; through exposure to contaminated water, ice, or shellfish harvested in contaminated water; or from fruits, vegetables, or other foods that are eaten uncooked and that were contaminated during harvesting or subsequent handling.

Hepatitis B, especially if you might be exposed to blood or body fluids (for example, health-care workers), have sexual contact with the local population, or be exposed through medical treatment. Hepatitis B vaccine is now recommended for all infants and for children ages 11–12 years who did not receive the series as infants.

Malaria: Not a risk in the islands.

Please note: If you are on medication, be sure to bring enough for the duration of the trip. Prescription medicines should always be carried in their original containers in your hand luggage. If you wear contact lenses or glasses, we suggest you bring an extra pair and cleaning fluid.

Health insurance is strongly advised during any foreign travel.

Please check the latest regulations with your local health office or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention hotline for international travelers at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747); fax: 1-888-CDC-FAXX (1-888-232-3299), or their main telephone number in Atlanta, 404-332-4559. To receive these documents, call 404-332-4565 and follow the prompts. You can also get information on the CDC's website at www.cdc.gov/travel.

CLOTHING

*For general clothing information, please review the **Travel Handbook** in your pre-departure materials. See pre-departure information for general packing check list.*

Travel light and bring lightweight cottons and linens, and rainwear in subtropical areas. But allow for a jacket or sweater in the evening as water adventures are cooler during evenings. Clothing should be easily laundered and comfortable. You'll need a wide-brimmed sun hat to protect your neck as well as face and head; sandals (for the boat); sneakers (for dry landings and rocky shores); Teva-style sandals (for wet landings); swim suit; high factor, waterproof sunscreen; snorkel and mask (Most ships have them available free of charge); wind resistant jacket; light sweater or sweatshirt (nights can get rather cool and you don't want to miss stargazing on deck); twice as much film as you think you will need; extra camera batteries; underwater camera; and motion sickness pills, if necessary. Lip balm and a good pair of UV 100 level sunglasses are also necessary. The geographical location of Galapagos means that the sun is more intense than you may be used to, plus that high level of skin-damaging rays also reflects off the water. You will also need biodegradable shampoo and conditioner as most Galapagos ships only have soap. For ships that provide shampoo, they suggest that you use their biodegradable shampoo.

Snorkeling gear can be rented on ships.

LUGGAGE

*For general baggage information, please review the **Travel Handbook** in your pre-departure materials.*

In this security conscious era, airline luggage restrictions may change without notice. Also, luggage limits vary depending on ticket class, plane size, destinations, etc. It is always best to confirm with airlines for specific limitations. Scheduled flights from other countries and within foreign countries generally limit luggage to 44 pounds total, plus one carry-on personal item. Further restrictions may apply for charter flights. This will vary with destination and type of planes used. We will advise you of those restrictions in your final itinerary.

MONEY

Currency: US Dollar (US\$). The US Dollar replaced the Sucre as the official currency of Ecuador.

Currency exchange: Foreign currencies can be exchanged at banks and at exchange houses (casas de cambio), the latter being generally the best option. ATMs are available in large urban areas.

Credit & debit cards: MasterCard, American Express, Visa and Diners Club are accepted. Check with your credit or debit card company for details of merchant acceptability and other services which may be available.

Traveler's checks: Travelers checks are generally accepted in the larger cities and can be exchanged into currency at most banks.

PLEASE NOTE: *Effective immediately, all passengers traveling to Ecuador are advised not to bring \$100 bills as they will not be accepted, cashed or changed, even at banks.* Passengers are advised to carry smaller denominations of US bills instead.

LANGUAGE

Spanish is the first official language, and Kichwa is now the second official language of the country. Some English is spoken.

ELECTRICITY: On the mainland, 110 / 120 volts AC, 60Hz. Most ships have a 220 volt plug in the bathrooms; other areas on board are 110 volts, 60 cycles.

FOOD & DRINK

Be careful with water. Tap water in better hotels and ships is safe to use to brush teeth and clean contacts. Water used for drinking or making ice should first be boiled or otherwise sterilized. Bottled water is available. Milk is pasteurized and dairy products bought in a supermarket or consumed in a hotel, restaurant or yacht should not be a problem. Powdered or tinned milk is available, just make sure that it is reconstituted with pure water. Ecuador has some of the best beer in South America. The most popular brand is Pilsener. International drinks and whiskies are available, but expensive. An Ecuadorian specialty is a unique fruit juice called naranjilla – a taste somewhere between citrus and peach. The best local drink is canelazo, made from sugar cane, alcohol, lemon, sugar and cinnamon. In the vessels and hotel we use, there is little risk when consuming any type of meat. Passengers can feel safe when ordering a medium piece of meat. Likewise, vegetables and fruits are safe to eat in hotel and vessels. Even so, exercise common sense just as you would anywhere else.

TIPPING

Tipping should be done at your discretion and as a reward for good or exceptional service.

For general tipping guidelines please refer to: www.cntraveler.com/travel-tips/travel-etiquette/2008/12/Etiquette-101-Tipping-Guide

SHOPPING

Bargaining is acceptable in small shops and in markets, but prices are usually fixed in tourist stores, boutiques, hotel shops and finer stores. Principal silver stores are in Quito. Special purchases in local markets include native woodcarvings, varnished and painted ornaments made of bread dough, Indian tiles, woolen and Orlon rugs, blankets, baskets, leather goods, shigras (shoulder bags) and hand-loomed textiles, and indigenous art.

QUITO

Ecuador's capital city has a setting of great natural beauty, overshadowed by the volcano Pichincha with its twin peaks of Ruco and Guagua. Quito is located at 2850m (9348 ft) above sea level and some visitors may suffer from altitude sickness during the first hours after arrival. Quito used to be a major Inca city that was destroyed shortly before the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors. Although no Inca traces remain, the city has preserved much of its Spanish colonial character, including the cathedral in the Plaza de la Independencia (the oldest church in South America) and the many old churches and monasteries. Also in the plaza is the Municipal Palace, the Archbishop's Palace and the Palacio Presidencial. Many of the city's famous churches and monasteries contain priceless examples of Spanish art and sculpture, particularly the Monasterio de San Francisco (located in the beautiful plaza of the same name) and the Jesuit church of La Compañía. Quito is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Perhaps the best preserved colonial street is the historic alley of La Ronda. Other places in Quito worth visiting include the Parque La Alameda (a triangular-shaped park), the astronomical observatory, the School of Fine Arts and the modern Palacio Legislativo. As the cultural and political capital, Quito has a number of museums of colonial and modern art. The Museo del Banco Central, located in the Casa de la Cultura, has a vast archaeological repertory as well as displays of colonial furniture and religious art. Also of interest is the Museo Guayasamín, home to many fine works of Ecuador's renowned modern artist Oswaldo Guayasamín. The "Middle of the World" monument is one of the major attractions in the city.

Galapagos Islands

The volcanic Galapagos Archipelago is made up of 13 major and six smaller islands about 600 miles from mainland Ecuador on the equator. It is the second largest marine reserve in the world, spread over 19,500 square miles. In 1959, the islands were turned into a national park to help preserve their natural state. In 1978, UNESCO declared the Galapagos to be 'the universal natural heritage of humanity.' Positioned between three ocean currents, the islands' endemic species make up about 50% of the wildlife currently found there.

Famous for its exceptional and fearless wildlife, it has become a paradise for wildlife, nature enthusiasts and photographers.

Visitors to the archipelago are guided around various islands, each one with different species of fauna and flora. It is possible to pass within inches of mating iguanas, walk between nesting frigate birds; get close to a blue-footed booby feeding its chick; admire fur seals; and watch the thousands of colorful Sally Lightfoot crabs dashing across black volcanic rocks. Also to be seen are albatrosses, lava lizards, flamingos, giant tortoises, masked boobies and Darwin finches. It's possible to swim, snorkel and dive with sharks and turtles, and come mask to face with sea lions and penguins.

Although the islands are volcanic and largely bare of vegetation, they have different geological features that make them dramatic and strangely beautiful. These include a 30-foot-tall cactus, twisted lava flows, spatter cones and lava tunnels, bizarre rock formations, and red, black and white sand beaches.

The islands first became famous with the scientific voyage of the 'Beagle' by Charles Darwin during the 19th century where he was inspired to formulate his theory of evolution by natural selection. Today the archipelago draws an average of 65,000 visitors a year.

Puerto Ayora

Puerto Ayora, on Santa Cruz Island, is the most developed town on the archipelago and the center of the tourism industry. Most visitors stay here while arranging a boat tour to the islands or anchor in the harbor during their cruise and it is a pleasant, friendly town with tourist facilities.

Charles Darwin Research Station

Near Puerto Ayora, Charles Darwin Research Station contains a national park information center and museum. It also has a protected baby tortoise nursery that aims to boost the endangered species of the Galapagos tortoise, whose enormous saddle-shaped shell gave the islands their name (the Spanish word 'galápagos' means 'saddle'). A walk-in enclosure allows visitors to meet the giant tortoises face to face. The station is also home to 150-year old Lonesome George, the last surviving Pinta tortoise in the world. Until he was discovered in 1971, the race was considered extinct. Sadly, the population of these gentle creatures was decimated due to hunting in the 18th century and the introduction, in the 1950s, of goats which destroyed the vegetation.

Vegetation Zones

Different altitudes throughout the islands create different vegetation zones.

Coastal Zone

This evergreen zone is based on salt tolerance abilities of certain species at the land/sea interface. The type of vegetation found varies greatly. The mangroves form forest in coves, while on beaches there are vines, grasses and shrubs. Many plants in this zone are adapted dispersal by the sea and few are endemic because of the unstable nature of the environmental and high immigration rates.

Arid Zone

This is the most extensive vegetation zone. It is a semi-desert forest dominated by deciduous trees and shrubs. The plants have adaptations to withstand drought. There are great numbers of endemic species. Lichens are abundant in this zone because they are tolerant of dry conditions and are capable of absorbing moisture from the occasional garúa mist.

Transition Zone

It is intermediate in character between the scalesia and arid zones, but dominated by different species than either of the adjacent zones. The forest is still mainly deciduous. It is much more dense and diverse than forest of the arid zones and it is often difficult to say whether any species is dominant.

Scalesia Zone

The transition zone merges into the evergreen scalesia forest, which is lush cloud forest, dominated by scalesia pedunculata trees. This type of forest occurs only on the higher islands and, being the richest zone in terms of soil fertility and productivity, has been extensively cut down for agricultural and cattle ranching purposes. The scalesia forest is diverse and has many endemic species.

Brown Zone

It is intermediate between the dense Scalesia forest and the Miconia shrub vegetation. It is an open forest dominated by cat's claw, tournefortia pubescens, and aunistus ellipticus. Trees are heavily draped with epiphytes, mosses, liverworts and ferns, which give this zone a brown appearance during the dry season. This zone has disappeared because of colonization by man.

Miconia Zone

The southern slopes of San Cristobal and Santa Cruz are the only places where there is a dense shrubby belt of Miconia Robinsoniana. Native trees are absent from this zone and ferns are abundant in the herb layer. There are also many liverworts than elsewhere.

Pampa Zone

There are virtually no trees or shrubs, and the vegetation consists largely of terms, grasses and sedges. This is the wettest zone, especially during the garúa season, receiving as much as 2500 mm of rain in some years.

SUGGESTED READING LIST

Many comprehensive and readily available guides are produced by Lonely Planet, Fodor, Insight, The Rough Guide, etc. Here are a few selections we thought might interest you. Barnes and Noble, www.barnesandnoble.com, and Longitude Books, www.longitudebooks.com, have collections of books, searchable by country.

GALAPAGOS, A NATURAL HISTORY GUIDE Michael Jackson

A one-volume, handy and comprehensive introduction to the natural history of Galapagos Islands.

GALAPAGOS, WORLD'S END William Beebe

A vivid account of a scientific expedition to the islands. Full of detailed observations on nature, geology and wildlife by William Beebe, it also includes a chapter the Baroness and other eccentric early colonists.

VOYAGE OF THE BEAGLE Charles Darwin

The wide-eyed tale of a young man on a five-year voyage that changed his life -- and our way of thinking about the world. First published in 1839, this book is still essential reading. Darwin's South American chapters are an excellent introduction to the Galapagos, Beagle Channel, Chiloe, Tierra del Fuego, the Chilean fjords and the Brazilian coast. With maps and appendices.

GALAPAGOS WILDLIFE, A VISITOR'S GUIDE David Horwell & Pete Oxford

A compact guide to the birds, reptiles, insects, plants and marine life of the archipelago featuring a very good selection of large color photographs by Horwell, Oxford and colleague Jonathan Green. Separate chapters cover visitor sites, history, conservation and habitats. The authors, both naturalist guides in the islands, present key information on the flora, fauna and places in Galapagos for the traveler.

GALAPAGOS, DISCOVERY ON DARWIN'S ISLANDS

David Steadman

An insightful discussion of natural history and evolution in Galapagos, packed with photos.

EVOLUTION'S WORKSHOP, GOD AND SCIENCE ON THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS Edward Larson

A vivid history of the Galapagos -- and the role of the islands as a crucible of evolutionary ideas. It covers not just Darwin but the discovery of the islands, visits of Hancock and Beebe, role of the United States during WWII, and the establishment of the national park.

DARWIN AND THE BEAGLE Alan Moorehead

A nicely illustrated, handsomely produced account of the Voyage of the Beagle in the Adventure Library series.

PLUNDERING PARADISE, THE HAND OF MAN ON THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS Michael D'Orso

Not subtle but eye-opening nevertheless, Michael D'Orso focuses on the damage and challenges of people in the Galapagos.

GALAPAGOS, ISLANDS BORN OF FIRE Tui De Roy

A stunning collection of photographs on the wildlife and habitats of Galapagos.

GALAPAGOS, SMITHSONIAN NATURAL HISTORY SERIES J.C. Kricher

A lively natural history of the islands by a favorite author, covering history, geology, ecology and evolution, visitor sites and conservation.

ON THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES Charles Darwin & Mayr Ernst

A facsimile of the original 1859 edition of the book that changed our view of the world.