

CLIA DESTINATION FACTSHEET

GALÁPAGOS ISLANDS



Blue footed boobies on Galápagos Island St. Cristobal

BEST TIME TO GO/WEATHER

The Galápagos is a year-round cruising destination, with temperatures averaging between 26 and 30 degrees Celsius, though there are two distinct seasons. The dry season runs from July to November with strong winds and the chance of fog caused by the cooler waters of the Humboldt Current that pushes the sea temperature down. The hotter rainy season is from December to June, driven by the El Niño current, when the sea is warmer and there are occasional showers.



10 REASONS TO CRUISE HERE

Big-time bucket list – this isolated Ecuadorian archipelago is a natural wonderland of incredible encounters with animals that famously have no fear of humans. It can also be twinned with Peru's Lost City of the Incas, Machu Picchu.

Animal magic – it's impossible to overstate the wildlife thrills that give this legendary destination its cache, where visitors can get close to prehistoric marine iguanas, comical blue-footed boobies, Galápagos giant tortoises and tiny birds that boldly hop around your feet.

Swim with sea lions – snorkelling and diving trips are enlivened by playful sea lions, curious penguins that swim up and tap your snorkel mask, skulking hammerhead sharks and manta rays that launch themselves out of the waves.

Natural treasure chest – there are nearly 9,000 species of animals and plants on these islands, which in 1959 became part of the Galápagos National Park, and many are endemic.

Evolution and inspiration – English biologist Charles Darwin landed at Puerto Egas Bay, Santiago, in 1835 – where some cruise ships now dock – and his renowned work *The Origin of Species* on the theory of evolution was sparked by his study of small birds now known as Darwin's Finches.

Remote and rugged – located 600 miles off the coast of Ecuador in the Pacific Ocean, the 20 or so main islands and more than 100 rocks and islets are among the most volcanically active on earth.

South American adventures – from rainforest treks and cruises along the Amazon in Peru to train rides through the Andes Mountains, plus the natural wonders of Costa Rica and colonial heritage of Colombia.

Into the clouds – Ecuador's high-altitude cloud forest that cloaks the slopes of the Andes is one of the region's most biodiverse regions that is prime bird-watching territory and an adventure playground of forest treks, ziplining and river tubing.

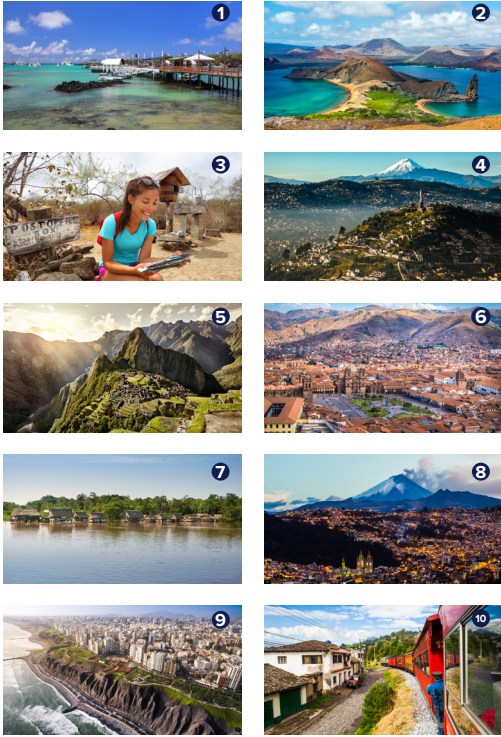
Latino life – the spirit of South America sizzles with the colourful history of Spain's conquering conquistadors, indigenous peoples, native traditions and legends of the Incas.

Straddle the equator – the Intinan Solar Museum, near Quito, claims to be directly on the equator, represented by a painted red line where visitors can pose for pictures with a foot in each hemisphere.

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10 KEY ATTRACTIONS



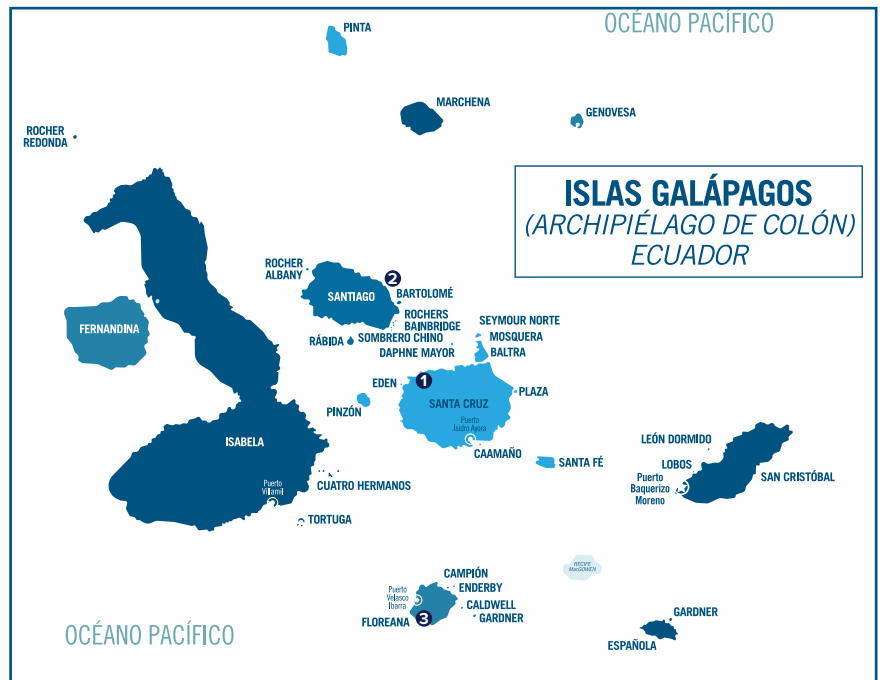
1. Santa Cruz – one of the four populated islands of the Galápagos, this is the main hub and where the largest town Puerto Ayora is located. The Charles Darwin Research station is here and the Highlands region, where around 40,000 giant tortoises roam.

2. Bartolome Island – considered the most iconic for its spectacular setting and distinctive pinnacle rock, which also makes it the most photographed spot in the islands. Home to the endemic Galápagos penguin, which makes for fascinating snorkelling.

3. Floreana – site of the island's first post office, established in 1793 by whalers who devised a system of sending mail whereby seamen put their post in a barrel for passing sailors to deliver. The system exists today with thousands of letters passing through and tour groups picking up and dropping off cards.

4. Quito – sitting 2,850m in the Andean foothills, Ecuador's capital is the second-highest in the world and closest to the equator. The cobbled streets of its old town are full of colonial houses and stone churches with lavish gold interiors and majestic artworks.

5. Macchu Pichu – the sprawling remains of this ancient Inca citadel, tucked into a spectacular backdrop of the Peruvian Andes at nearly 2,500 metres, remains one of the incredible ancient wonders of the lost civilisation of the Incas.



6. Cuzco – gateway to Machu Picchu and former capital of the Inca empire, it is regarded as the historic capital of Peru, with a strong Andean culture, Inca architecture and colonial gems which blend with its more modern, cosmopolitan vibe.

7. Jungle retreats – choose between the Amazon rainforest lodges of Ecuador and neighbouring Peru or the higher-altitude cloud forest and its rustic lodges in Ecuador's Andean foothills with a wealth of lush flora and fauna.

8. Avenue of Volcanoes – the spine of Ecuador forming a jagged line of eight snow-topped volcano peaks stretching southwards from Quito that make prime hiking territory with stays in rustic haciendas.

9. Lima – Peru's capital is a busy, sprawling metropolis of nearly 10 million inhabitants, whose modern face is underpinned by its wealth of historic monuments and colonial landmarks, a legacy of Spanish colonial rule.

10. Hit the rails – jump aboard the Tren Crucero train for an amazing ride through the Andes from Quito to the coastal port city of Guayaquil (from where some Galápagos cruises depart) that includes the infamous Devil's Nose – a hair-raising section of switchbacks dropping 500 metres.



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10 THINGS TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO:

1. It's a long way from home – the only flights to the Galápagos are from Guayaquil or Quito to the islands of Baltra or San Cristobal and take approximately two hours. Flights to Quito are via US or European hubs including Schiphol or Madrid, and are around 12 hours.

2. Allow for stopovers – at least one night is needed in Quito on arrival, but staying longer allows more time to relax, acclimatise and explore the city before flying to the islands. Beware altitude sickness that can strike indiscriminately.

3. Watch what you pack – all luggage is screened by Galápagos National Park Authority staff for fresh fruit, vegetables or seeds to weed out anything that could pose a risk to the islands' delicate eco-system.

4. Pick your best time – cruises operate year-round as there is no off-season, but each month brings different highlights. For instance, May is for blue-footed boobies' courtship rituals; August is when sealion pups are born; November is good for whale shark sightings.

5. Small is beautiful – strict rules mean there are no ships larger than 100 passengers and some are very luxurious. Most cruises are all-inclusive. Larger vessels are also equipped with zodiac boats and have kayaks, snorkelling equipment and wetsuits.

6. Choose your route – ships follow pre-agreed circuits, as agreed with the authorities, that govern days and times they can call at the islands. The broad experience will be similar, but routes vary, with each island bringing its own landscapes and wildlife.

7. Get kitted out – there's no need for anything dressy. Take waterproof footwear for wet beach landings where guests have to jump into the shallows, hiking shoes and/or trainers. Take cameras and video recorders to capture all those magical moments and an underwater camera too.

8. Be fit and active – it ensures guests get the best out of the trip and can take advantage of everything that's offered as there can be three excursions a day, starting from 8am with boat tours, hikes and snorkelling trips.

9. Ultimate family fun – it's a magical and unforgettable trip for all ages, but particularly youngsters. However, the physicality and early starts set a demanding pace, so it's one for older children, around 10 years and above, who can keep up.

10. Save the best 'til last – on multi-centre trips, it generally works better to visit other destinations before the Galápagos. Doing it the other way round can be an anti-climax.



Celebrity Flora is the first ship of its kind to be built especially for the Galápagos Islands.