

A close-up photograph of a brown sea lion resting on a sandy beach. The sea lion's head is tilted upwards, and its long, thin whiskers are prominent. In the background, two people are walking away from the camera towards the turquoise ocean. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

# **ECUADOR** THE GALAPAGOS

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# MAP OF THE GALAPAGOS

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# THE GALAPAGOS

Long isolated, the Galapagos Islands captured the attention of a young naturalist from England, Charles Darwin, who explored the region in 1835 aboard HMS Beagle. The rare wildlife he encountered helped him formulate his theory of evolution. In 1859 he published his ideas in 'The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection' and forever changed the study of biology.

Now, the Galápagos archipelago is world famous for its fearless and unique wildlife. Nowhere else in the world can you swim and snorkel with sea lions, penguins, and sea turtles; stand right next to a blue-footed Booby feeding its chick; watch a giant 400-pound tortoise trudge through the forest; and try to avoid stepping on a "pile" of iguanas soaking up the sun on the island's black lava.





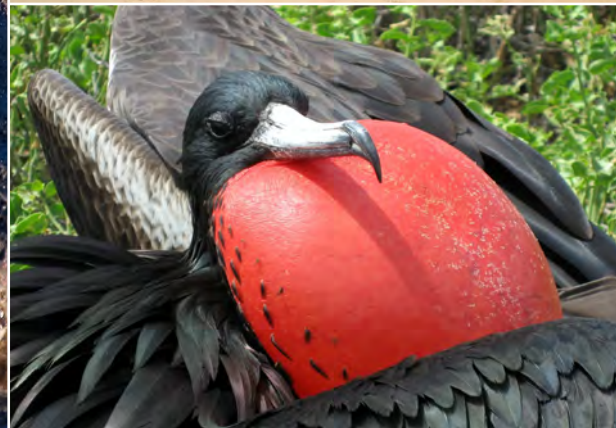
A close-up photograph of two blue sea turtle flippers (pectoral fins) resting on a dark, textured rock surface. The flippers are a vibrant blue color with some lighter, yellowish-green areas, particularly towards the edges. The skin on the flippers has a wrinkled, scaly texture. The background is a light-colored, sandy or rocky surface, slightly out of focus.

# GALAPAGOS HIGHLIGHTS



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## NORTH SEYMOUR

North Seymour is an uplifted – as opposed to volcanic – island which is generally flat and strewn with boulders, it has an arid vegetation including prickly pear cactus, palo santos trees and salt bushes. The visitor trail on North Seymour is approximately (2 km) in length crossing the inland of the island and exploring the rocky coast. Along the way pass magnificent colonies of frigate birds, blue-footed boobies performing their courtship dance and swallow-tailed gulls perching on the cliff edges. Despite the tremendous surf that can pound the outer shore, sea lions haul out. Along the shoreline marine iguanas, white coral, and black lava rocks complete the visit to North Seymour.





## SANTIAGO

On the north western side of Santiago is South James Bay (Puerto Egas). Land on a black beach with eroded rock formations. Follow the trail across the dry interior where the remains of a salt-mining enterprise can still be seen and then continues along the coast. Intertidal pools are home to a variety of invertebrate organisms. Land iguanas are scattered around feeding on exposed algae while Oyster Catchers try to capture Sally Lightfoot Crabs. The trail then leads to the Fur Seal Grottos, one of the only places in the islands where Fur Seals can be seen.



On the other side of the island, the north east is Sullivan Bay. Across a narrow channel from Bartolome there is a possibility of seeing a recent pahoehoe (ropy) lava flow, formed about 100 years ago. It is exciting to imagine how this lava flowed down to the sea, engulfing everything in its way. After exploring the lava flow, swim and snorkel with playful sea lions off two small coralline beaches.





## ISABELA

Isabela is the largest island in the archipelago, composed of six volcanoes that have merged into a single land mass. Wolf Volcano is the Galapagos' highest point. Explore Tagus Cove, and on the way cruise through the Bolivar Channel and see whales and dolphins. The nature trail is an ascent through the typical dry vegetation zone and offers spectacular views of Darwin Lake, a saltwater crater lake and the long narrow inlet that appears to connect with it. At the top of the trail see Galapagos penguins, flightless cormorants and pelicans.



Discover Urbina Bay – a perfect example of the Galapagos's geological activity; in 1954, 3 miles of marine reef were lifted at the shore by 4 metres. Visit the mangroves at Elizabeth Bay, take a panga ride and see rays, turtles, sea lions, and Galapagos hawks. A colony of penguins inhabit a rocky islet at the entrance to Elizabeth Bay. Punta Moreno is a desolate and pristine landscape of very impressive black lava flows with a unique system of lagoon home to Darwin's finches, Galapagos doves, penguins, flightless cormorants, bluefooted boobies, mockingbirds and flightless cormorants.





## FLOREANA

Besides Santa Cruz, Floreana, with its population of about 30 people, is the only other inhabited island. Floreana has a colourful history of pirates, whalers, convicts, and colonists. Punta Cormorant offers two highly contrasting beaches; the landing beach is of volcanic origin and is composed of olivine crystals, giving it a greenish tinge and at the end of a short trail is a carbonate beach of very fine white sand, formed by the erosion of coral skeletons; it is a nesting site for green sea turtles. Between these two beaches is a salt lagoon frequented by flamingos, pintails, stilts, and other wading birds. An old eroded volcanic cone called Devil's Crown is a popular roosting site for seabirds such as boobies, pelicans, and frigates and it is not uncommon to see red-billed tropicbirds in rocky crevices. The centre of Devil's Crown is an outstanding snorkelling spot full of sea lions and colourful fish.







## SANTA CRUZ

Santa Cruz is the second largest island in the Galapagos. The small town of Puerto Ayora is the economic centre of the archipelago, with the largest population of the four inhabited islands (approx. 10,000). Six different zones of vegetation can be seen in Santa Cruz: Coastal, Arid, Transition, Scalesia, Miconia and Pampa Zones. A UNESCO World Heritage site, the Station is also a tortoise breeding and rearing centre, where tortoises of different subspecies are prepared for reintroduction to their natural habitats.

The lush greenery of the Santa Cruz Highlands is a definite contrast with the arid scenery of the smaller, lower islands. A point of interest is the famed lava tunnels, a fun and geologically informative visit. At Black Turtle Cove, the panga will take you into a tidal lagoon to see three kinds of mangrove plants, red, white and black. Whitetipped sharks, spotted rays, mustard rays and Pacific marine turtles frequent the waters here. Las Bachas is a white sand beach that is a major egg-laying site for sea turtles. Las Bachas refers to the indentations left in the sand by laying turtles or departing hatchlings. On the shore there are marine iguanas and in the lagoon flamingos are common. A newer visitors site, Dragon Hill (Cerro Dragon) offers a brackish water lagoon, flamingos, common stilts, pintail ducks and other species of birds. There is a short walk to the hill, which rewards with a great view and a nesting site of iguanas.



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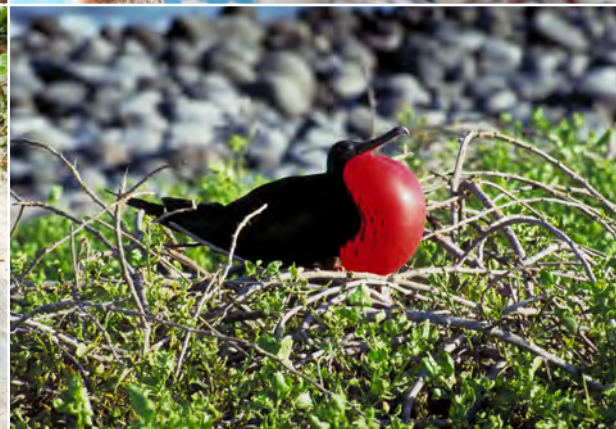




## SAN CRISTOBAL

This is the easternmost island in Galapagos; on its southwest side is the town of Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, the capital of the province of Galapagos. On Puerto Baquerizo, Moreno is the Interpretation Center, truly an extraordinary contribution to the information and education of the island community and the traveller. Continuing the trail that exits from the Interpretation Center, at a short distance is Frigatebird Hill. Here it is possible to see Magnificent Frigatebirds and Great Frigatebirds in the same colony. El Junco Lagoon is one of the few permanent fresh water lakes in the islands. It is located in the highlands of San Cristóbal. On the way, the different vegetation zones can be seen. The lake itself is a beautiful, special panorama and the bird watching is exceptional.

Isla Lobos is located north of Chatham, 1 hour across a small channel. Isla Lobos means "Sea-Lion Island", and the name is certainly appropriate because they frolic, leap and make a racket here. It is also a nesting place for Blue-footed Boobies and a good place for snorkelling. Kicker Rock is a magnificent rock in the middle of the sea. Rising 500 feet straight from the ocean, this giant uplifted rock has the shape of a sleeping lion. It has a split with towering vertical walls on either side, forming a narrow channel through which small vessels can navigate.







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