



# The Galápagos Islands

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## Why Go?

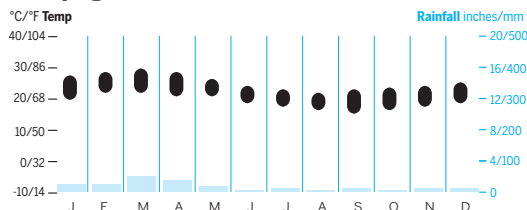
The Galápagos Islands may just inspire you to think differently about the world. The creatures that call the islands home, many found nowhere else in the world, act as if humans are nothing more than slightly annoying paparazzi.

This is not the Bahamas and these aren't typical tropical paradises; in fact, most of the islands are devoid of vegetation and some look more like the moon than Hawaii. More humans live here than is commonly assumed, and there's a surprising level of development in the islands' towns, mostly geared toward the thriving tourism industry.

This isolated group of volcanic islands and its fragile ecosystem has taken on almost mythological status as a showcase of biodiversity. Yet you don't have to be an evolutionary biologist or an ornithologist to appreciate one of the few places left on the planet where the human footprint is kept to a minimum.

## When to Go

### Galápagos Islands



**Jan–May** Sunny, warm, occasional short downpours. Water is less rough and winds slacken.

**Jun–Dec** The cool and dry season. Seas tend to be choppy due to the Humboldt current.

**Jun–Dec** Sea mammals and land birds tend to be at their most active during this time.

## Connections

Isla Baltra hosts one of the islands' two major airports. A public bus or ferry connects the Isla Baltra airport with Puerto Ayora.

The other major airport is at Puerto Baquerizo Moreno on Isla San Cristóbal.

Regular public ferries or private boats provide interisland transportation, although some of the uninhabited islands can only be visited on tours.

## ISLAND BASICS

The islands lie in the Pacific Ocean on the equator, about 90 degrees west of Greenwich. There are 13 major islands (ranging in area from 14 sq km to 4588 sq km), six small islands (1 sq km to 5 sq km) and scores of islets, of which only some are named.

Five of the islands are inhabited. About half the residents live in Puerto Ayora, on Isla Santa Cruz in the middle of the archipelago. Puerto Baquerizo Moreno on Isla San Cristóbal (the easternmost island) is second in importance to Puerto Ayora when it comes to tourism.

The other inhabited islands are Isla Isabela (the largest island, accounting for half the archipelago's land mass), with the small, increasingly popular town of Puerto Villamil, Isla Baltra and Isla Santa María, with Puerto Velasco Ibarra. The remaining islands are not inhabited but are visited on tours.

Most of the islands have two, or sometimes three, names. The earliest charts gave the islands both Spanish and English names (many of these refer to pirates or English noblemen), and the Ecuadorian government assigned official names in 1892. The official names are used in this guide in most cases.

## Fees & Taxes

The Galápagos national park fee is \$100. It must be paid in cash at one of the airports after you arrive, or in advance through a prebooked tour, and you will not be allowed to leave the airport until you pay. Make sure you have your passport available when you pay, and hang onto your ticket until you leave. A transit control fee of \$10 must be paid at the Instituto Nacional Galápagos (INGALA) window next to the ticket counter in either the Quito or Guayaquil airports; the charge is already included in the price of many prearranged boat tours.

## AT A GLANCE

- » **Money** ATMs in Puerto Ayora and Baquerizo Moreno only
- » **Cell Phones** Only GSM phones work; reception spotty
- » **Time Zone** One hour behind mainland Ecuador time

## Fast Facts

- » **Area** 7880 sq km of land over 50,000 sq km of ocean
- » **Distance from the Mainland** 1000km
- » **Number of Islands** 125
- » **Highest Point** Volcán Wolf, 1646m
- » **Population** 30,000
- » **Capital** Puerto Baquerizo Moreno

## Set Your Budget

- » **Midrange hotel room** \$55
- » **Two-course evening meal** \$15
- » **All-inclusive boat tours** \$200 to \$400+ per day
- » **Two-boat-dive day trip** \$200
- » **Bottle of beer** \$1.50

## Resources

- » **Galapagos National Park** [www.galapagospark.org](http://www.galapagospark.org)
- » **Discover Galapagos** [www.discovergalapagos.com](http://www.discovergalapagos.com)
- » **Lonely Planet Thorn Tree** [www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree)