

# THE GALÁPAGOS GO GLAM

Now it's the accommodations that are evolving in Darwin's wildlife haven, spawning a new breed of luxury options

BY CHRISTIAN L. WRIGHT

**I**N THE POPULAR imagination, the Galápagos Islands represent the ultimate natural paradise—an earthy mecca where the wildlife that inspired Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution still waddles and crawls freely about. Lately, however, the place has gotten quite glamorous. A couple of nice resorts have opened and the small expedition ships that cruise the area are becoming more yacht-like. At the silent-auction gala at a fancy Manhattan private school last spring, such a voyage was the “trip of a lifetime” hot ticket. On Showtime's series “Billions,” hedge-funder Bobby Axelrod (Damian Lewis) whimsically suggested to his wife and kids that a quick sail to the Galápagos might be just the thing to help him manage the stress of Wall Street.

That said, glamour only goes so far in the Galápagos. While the trappings of the state-rooms (Châteauneuf-du-Pape on demand!) or suites (masseurs on call!) have been elevated, 97% of the archipelago is protected by the Galápagos National Park, formed in 1959. The blue waters and volcanic terrain have not changed in millions of years, and the Islands are not landscaped or polished or staffed like other in-demand destinations. Here, the flightless cormorant rules the roost. The regulations are still strict—no jet skies, no veering off the authorized path and no touching wildlife (with few predators, the animals show no fear and will get close enough to humans to introduce themselves). Even many consumables, from pomegranates to pasteurized milk, are forbidden. Even so, the possibilities are many. Here, a handful of high-end ways to meet the blue-footed booby and friends.



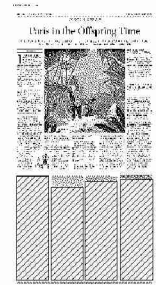
## THE BEAGLE UPGRADE

The exotic allure of the Galápagos hasn't faded much since Charles Darwin, sailing back to England in 1836, waxed on about all his findings in this “world within itself.” The type of vessels sailing around the islands these days are, as you'd expect, far more technologically advanced than Darwin's three-masted HMS Beagle, but every type of watercraft is tightly controlled by the Galápagos National Park. From the number of vessels allowed to cruise among the 20 islands (80 boats, none bigger than 100-passengers) to the approved shampoos (biodegradable only), the Galápagos bows to the

frigate bird and land iguana, not the high-net worth. New luxury ships are compensating with swankier on-board amenities.

Launched in 2015, Santa Cruz II (pictured) bills itself as a chic expedition ship. At 235 feet long with 50 cabins, it's small enough to operate in isolated areas, but still appeal to the urban sophisticate with a Cordon Bleu-trained chef, two hot tubs and a gym. MV Origin, a 142-foot yacht launched in 2016, accommodates 20 people on week-long itineraries and coddles them with Apple TV, picture windows in all 10 cabins and iced tea after snorkeling.

*From \$4,235 per person for a 5-night trip on the Santa Cruz II; from \$7,500 per person for a week on MV Origin; mythsandmountains.com*





**THE LUXE LODGES**

The archipelago, spanning more than 20,000 square miles on either side of the equator, consists of 13 major islands. Humans and hotels inhabit just four of them. The Galapagos Safari Camp nestles in the highlands of the second biggest island in the Galápagos, **Santa Cruz**. Once a family compound (and still family-owned), the 136-acre spread brings an African safari-style lodge to the islands. Nine private luxury tents look out above the tree line to the sea. Between guided wildlife excursions, guests tend to flop down by the infinity pool or

around the fireplace in the open-air main lodge.

Also on Santa Cruz, the unabashedly modern Pikaia Lodge (pictured), a converted cattle ranch, sits atop a volcanic crater a quarter of a mile above sea level. Bamboo floors in the 14 rooms, travertine marble in the bathrooms, cantilevered balconies, a pool and a wine cellar full of notable New World wines upped the region's luxury quotient when the lodge opened in 2014—and the property's 100-foot yacht that takes guests island-hopping adds a whiff of Jay Z exclusivity.

*From \$3,610 per person for five nights at Galapagos Safari Camp, [galapagossafaricamp.com](http://galapagossafaricamp.com); from \$5,830 per person for four nights at Pikaia Lodge, [pikaialodge.com](http://pikaialodge.com)*



SIVAN ASKAYO (LODGE); WILDAID (TORTOISE)

**THE TORTOISE-TOUR CRUISER**

Fourteen species of giant tortoise live on the Galápagos Islands, and all of them are vulnerable to extinction. In partnership with local outfits Angermeyer Cruises and Anando Tours, WildAid—a charity whose mission is to quash the illegal wildlife trade—has recently created the Galápagos Conservation Fund and launched M/Y WildAid's Passion. Originally a 159-foot private yacht that still feels like one, the Passion has been reconfigured as a 12-passenger deluxe tourist cruiser with a staff-to-guest ratio of one to one. The snazzy boat, with four teak decks, marble bathrooms, a

glass enclosed lounge for unobstructed views, has access to trekking on the smaller islands like Bartoleme and Chinese Hat, bird-watching on Santa Fe, and snorkeling off islets like Gardner.

On many of the excursions you're likely to come across some of those famous tortoises—and when you do, pat yourself on the back. Angermeyer, a family-owned operator will make a \$100 donation to the fund for every passenger. Some bookings also help fund WildAid's programs in the archipelago, which range from training park rangers to government conservation initiatives.

*From \$5,980 per person for an eight-day trip on WildAid's Passion, [visitgalapagos.travel/passion-galapagos-luxury-cruise.html](http://visitgalapagos.travel/passion-galapagos-luxury-cruise.html)*