

# Galápagos National Park — What to see

Karen Catchpole, TRAVEL + LEISURE Sunday, November 26, 2017



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Ecuador's amazing Galápagos Islands are a collection of rocky, volcanic lands that are protected as part of the Galápagos National Park. Best known for their unique wildlife (and as the inspiration for Charles Darwin's groundbreaking research on natural selection and evolution), the Galápagos Islands are a ferociously protected area governed by strict rules and regulations meant to protect the delicate ecosystem.

**Related:** [The Surprising Secret of the Galápagos Islands](#)

Here are the facts, fees, and important rules you need to know to plan your [Galápagos trip](#).

## Galápagos National Park Facts

Galápagos National Park was created in 1959, and it was the first national park in the entire country of Ecuador.

But a superintendent and rangers were not assigned to Galápagos National Park until 1971, a dozen years later.

The Galápagos Islands were designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1978.

Galápagos National Park protects more than 3,000 square miles of land encompassing the 127 islands and islets in the Galápagos Archipelago. There are currently 350 park rangers working in Galápagos National Park.

The Galápagos Marine Reserve protects an additional 53,000 square miles of ocean around the islands.

Some 220,000 tourists visited the Galápagos Islands in 2016.



35 percent of visitors spent their Galápagos trip on a [live-aboard cruise vessel](#), like the *Celebrity Xperience* or Ecoventura's small expedition yachts.

65 percent of visitors spent their Galápagos trip based on land. Many travelers opt to stay at the Pikala Lodge, on Santa Cruz Island, or the Finch Bay Eco Hotel, which has a 20-passenger boat for day trips.

10 percent of visitors who took a live-aboard cruise also spent time on land.

Certified Galápagos island guides are trained in tourist guidance techniques, biology, evolution, genetics, and environmental interpretation through an academy in coordination with the Galápagos National Park and Ecuador's Ministry of Tourism. Special preference is given to inhabitants of the Galápagos Islands. When a guide graduates from the academy, he or she receives a license which expires after four years, at which time they must get re-certified.

There are 180 land and water destinations within Galápagos National Park and the Galápagos Marine Reserve that are open to visitors.

The Galápagos Islands are located in the Pacific Ocean approximately 600 miles from mainland Ecuador.

More than 2,000 endemic animal species live in the Galápagos Islands.



## Galápagos National Park Fees

In 2012, former Ecuadorean President Rafael Correa made entry to all national parks in the country free — except for Galápagos National Park. The current park entrance fee for foreign visitors is \$100 per person, which is payable in cash upon arrival at either of the two airports in the Galápagos.

## Important Galápagos National Park Rules

Foreign visitors and Ecuadoreans who reside on the mainland can stay in the Galápagos Islands for a maximum of 60 days in any calendar year.

Drones are forbidden in the Galápagos.

Selfie-sticks are allowed, but visitors must remain at least two meters (about seven feet) away from animals when using them.

Guests on live-aboard cruises must make their land excursions in groups of 16 people or less, and there must be one naturalist guide per 16 passengers.

The Galápagos National Park creates, regulates, and oversees cruise vessel itineraries to help control crowd size and reduce human impact on fragile island and marine environments.

Touching or feeding any animal is strictly forbidden everywhere, at all times.

You are not allowed to smoke or bring any type of food with you during land excursions.



## Most Commonly Visited Galápagos Islands

Though there are hundreds of islands in the Galápagos Archipelago, most are off limits to tourists. The following islands are open for business and are the most commonly-visited destinations.

- San Cristóbal (inhabited)
- Santa Cruz (inhabited)
- Floreana (inhabited)
- Isabela (inhabited)
- Santa Fe
- North Seymour
- Baltra
- Genovesa
- Espanola
- Santiago
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