



Expect the Unexpected in the Galapagos Islands

December 14, 2010

By Melody Wren



I didn't realize how many preconceived notions I had about the Galapagos Islands in Ecuador. When I booked my trip, I was looking forward to seeing animals, sea life and a few birds in their natural habitat, but I wasn't prepared for the vast numbers of sea lions, marine iguanas, as well as the great variety of spectacular birds. I imagined the islands to be low and plain and was thrown by their jaw-dropping beauty, each one so completely different than the previous one. There were views of jagged coastlines, with waves crashing against rocks on islands consisting of little more than lava rock, and no other island life visible besides our small tour group. Every morning, our guide told us that we were going to see one of the most beautiful islands, and our group chorused back asking how that was possible when we saw the most beautiful the day before, and the day before that.

My favorite time of day was a little after 6:00 in the morning, when no one else was up except for a few crew members puttering in the kitchen, and the Captain or first mate taking us to the next island. I would quietly pad into the kitchen area to make myself a cup of tea. Still pajama clad with a sweatshirt over for warmth, I went to the bow of the ship and looked out to sea at the vastness and stillness, with no other ship in my sightline, I felt like an explorer.

A Cruise is the Best Way to Experience the Galapagos Islands

Traveling by ship is the best way to see the magnificent Galapagos Islands and the smaller the ship, the better. In the highly regulated Galapagos National Park, smaller vessels are given access to more islands. Recently, I travelled through them on the Ecoventura line's 65-ft, 20-passenger motor yacht Eric. Our itinerary for the seven night journey took us first to Genovesa in the north, then east to Fernandina, a relatively young island

at half a million years old. We then worked westward through successively older islands back to San Cristobal, crossing the equator four times. On a week-long cruise you visit more islands than if you were staying in a hotel on one island. Also, there is usually one morning activity and one afternoon activity—each day at different locations. The ship travels at night so you wake up at a new island each sunrise.



Sally Lightfoot Crab

Baby Albatross

Marine Iguana

About the Galapagos Islands

The Galapagos Islands sit right atop the equator: an archipelago of volcanic peaks spread across 50,000 square miles from stark Fernandina to relatively fertile Santa Cruz and San Cristóbal. They are separated from the mainland of South America by 600 miles of very deep water, and lie at the confluence of marine currents from the Antarctic, equatorial Pacific and South American coast. The hot and cold water temperatures give rise to a wild diversity of habitats and creatures adapted to them. This extraordinary ecosystem is home to over 3,000 varieties of plants and animals, approximately 20% found nowhere else in the world.

Trip Highlights

One of the highlights of our trip was that the animals ignore human visitors unless you get too close. Any month is good to visit, but October is particularly special because of all the newborns and hatchlings we saw. We snorkeled with penguins, white tipped sharks, sea turtles and sea lions, and came face to face with the giant tortoises which are the signature animals of the islands. We stepped into a veritable maternity ward with dozens of sea lions nursing their newborns. Ambling along the shoreline of Santiago, we came across fur sea lions, a species that was once on the verge of extinction. The many animals and exotic birds took my breath away time and time again, and reduced me to tears on more than one occasion. A flood of marine iguanas lounged lazily in the sun blended into the landscape so well so you had to step carefully to avoid stepping on them or their droppings. Hundreds of dolphins swam alongside our ship one evening and another day as we crossed the Bolivar Channel we spotted seven Bryde whales just off the bow. We hiked along ancient lava tunnels and felt like explorers going back to the beginning of time.

Snorkeling was a focal point of the trip – even for the water shy ,who soon were enraptured by the colourful inhabitants of the crystal clear water: angel fish, parrot fish, yellow tailed graits, surgeon fish, , sea urchins, white tipped reef sharks , sting rays, and chocolate-chip star fish (yes, that is their name). Jumping off the Zodiac into the deep, crystal clear water for the first time to snorkel I expected balmy bath-like water but I yelped like a sea lion once I hit the ice-cold water even though I had a wet suit on. Currents from the Antarctic explained not only the delightfully tiny Galapagos penguins, but also were the reason many in our group were wearing two wetsuits at once.

We had our picture taken with the Galapagos penguins as we snorkeled around Tagus Cove, on the western side of Isabela Island. On the cliffs of Isabela we were surprised to see graffiti, some of it dating back to the 1800's but now banned.

Every day we traveled to one or two islands by zodiac, tossed by the high rolling waves, causing us all to screech and our driver, Luis, to giggle like a school boy at our reactions. Only four of the islands are inhabited, and tourists only get to see a small percentage of them, the rest remain untouched. The ones we did

visit for hiking, snorkeling and exploring were pristine, and we rarely ran into other people.

The islands are formed at the western side by volcanic activity and then they migrate easterly towards South America and are slowly eroded and sink. The youngest is half a million and the oldest about 5 million years old. Isabela and Fernandina to the west are quite barren and volcanic whereas Santa Cruz is lush with vegetation.



Baby Frigate Bird

Great Frigate Bird (male)

Before You Go

Before you go make sure you are prepared. Check with your doctor about any vaccinations that may be required. When I travel I always carry a small first aid kit that I assemble myself and tailor it to each destination, and for this trip I added in Diorolite, Dukurool, Graval, lots of bandaids, polysporin, aspirin or ibuprofen and antacid tablets. Temperatures during the day are hot, but not overly so, with nights cooling down enough that you require a sweater. A sunhat with a wide brim and bio-degradable sun lotion are necessities.

All Galapagos tours are heavily regulated, but they are adventure tours with lots of physical activity. Some people on our ship had a difficult time keeping up with the lengthy hikes for hours, often hiking uneven surfaces (lava rock), stepping from boat to boat, and wading through knee deep water to get to some islands. A one-time entrance fee for the Galapagos national park of \$100.00 gets you a ticket that is stamped upon arrival, and stamped upon exit, to ensure people leave. You will need to arrive at least one day before in Ecuador (Guyaquil) to ensure you are in plenty of time before an early morning flight from Guyaquil to San Cristóbal island.

As Santiago Dunn, President of Ecoventura says, “Galapagos is the type of place where nature and simplicity rule and less is often more.” We saw signs reminding us “Be prepared to leave only your footprints and only take away photographs and memories.” We have many of both.

My Cruise Information

The Ship: We cruised aboard the Eric, a 67-foot motor yacht built in 1990 in Guayaquil, cruising a total of 424 nautical miles, mostly overnight, at an average speed of seven knots

My trip was sponsored by the [tour company Ecoventura](#). The company has a fleet of three small ships and is Ecuador’s first carbon-neutral company. The Eric is one of the first boats in their fleet to have wind turbines, and solar panels.



[Melody Wren](#) is a freelance writer because she believes that work and fun should not be mutually exclusive. She writes about travel, food and green living. Melody loves staying in a place long enough to get acquainted. Local customs, markets and traditional cultures are magnets for this writer. When not writing she's either on the road, in the air, or savoring something tasty.

[Share](#) |

Like

Be the first of your friends to like this.

[Previous Article: No More Bad Ties!](#)

[Next Article: Aging, Ageism and Longevity](#)

Leave a Comment

Name *

E-mail *

Website

Submit

Previous post: [No More Bad Ties!](#)

Next post: [Aging, Ageism and Longevity](#)

- Sign up for our Free Email Newsletter

GO

Privacy by SafeSubscribeSM

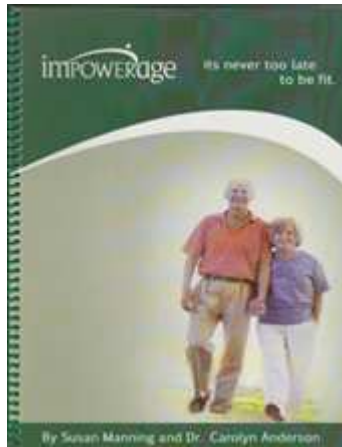
- [**It's Never Too Late to Be Fit**](#)

An exercise program written by a doctor and a personal trainer exclusively for older adults.

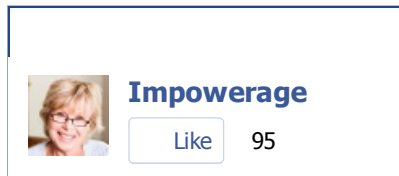
Counteract the Effects of Aging

Start today at any fitness level all from the comfort of your own home!

[Click Here!](#)



• **Connect with us!**



• **Most Recent Articles**

- [Aging, Ageism and Longevity](#)
- [Expect the Unexpected in the Galapagos Islands](#)
- [No More Bad Ties!](#)
- [The Importance of Strength Training](#)
- [Blogging for Newbies](#)
- [Energy Management: Embracing Your Values](#)
- [Tireless Activist- Betty Krawczyk](#)
- [Is Your Estate in Order?](#)
- [Downsizing to a Condo? – Tread Carefully, Read Everything and Ask Questions!](#)
- [How Ageism Affects Your Health](#)

• **Inspiring Quotes**

“The education of circumstances is superior to that of tuition.”

— William Wordsworth

- **Proud Sponsor**



- **20% of our Profits are Donated to fund Macular Degeneration Research**

[Privacy Policy](#) [Terms of Service](#) [Impowermed.com](#) [Impowerwomen.com](#) [AndersoneyeSurgery.com](#) [Sitemap](#)

All contents copyright © 2010 Impowerage.com