

I DISCOVERED  
THE WORLD FAMOUS  
GALAPAGOS ISLANDS IN  
**ECUADOR**

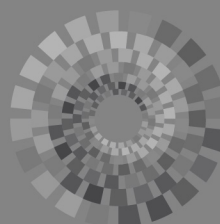
**GALÁPAGOS**

Subsecretaría de Información y Comunicación Turística

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**GALÁPAGOS**



# Galapagos

volcanoes, wildlife  
and conservation

Discovering the Galapagos Islands is an adventure for lovers of nature and adventure sports. This volcanic archipelago, lying 972 km. west of the Ecuadorian mainland, is made up of 13 large islands (four of them inhabited), five medium-sized islands, 215 islets and several rocks. Each of its geographical formations has unique ecological features.

This archipelago still taking shape is a wonderworld of unrivalled landscapes, with the craters of active volcanoes in the west, like Sierra Negra and Chico Volcano on Isabela and lava flows from the last eruptions of La Cumbre Volcano on Fernandina. In the centre and east of Galapagos, the volcanic rock is a permanent feature on walks through scenery carved out over the years and vegetation adapted to extreme conditions.

The geological history of the islands prompted experiments in adapting to living conditions. World-unique marine iguanas evolved on the Galapagos and wander around like the owners of this paradise. We cannot fail to admire the unhurried elegance of the giant tortoises as they amble and reproduce in the scrub land. Finches flutter about pluckily, with their differently shaped beaks that caught the attention of Charles Darwin, who started to see how species adapt to their environment.







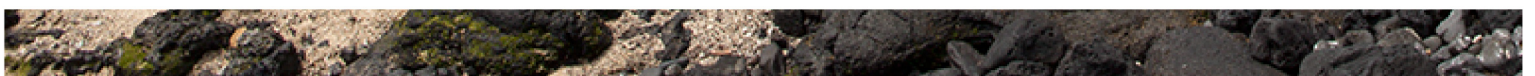
# Galapagos

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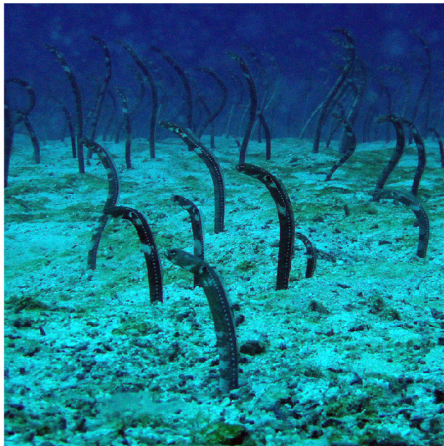
Galapagos straddles the equator while sea currents from the four cardinal points converge off its shores. This configuration has endowed the archipelago with unique biological wealth and an outstanding profusion of natural resources, which are protected by the Galapagos Marine Reserve. All of this can be discovered by snorkelling, scuba diving, kayaking or panga [dinghy] riding.

The islands encompass arid scenery, beaches, cliffs, mangroves, woods, and volcanoes with rain forests reaching an altitude of 1700 metres. This natural wealth led Galapagos to be recognized as Ecuador's first national park in 1959 and to be declared a World Natural Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1979.

The diversity of life forms and the threats faced by the beauty of Galapagos have made people realize the need for sustainable ways of living. Ecotourism is a unique opportunity for visitors to see the islands while safeguarding their natural harmony.



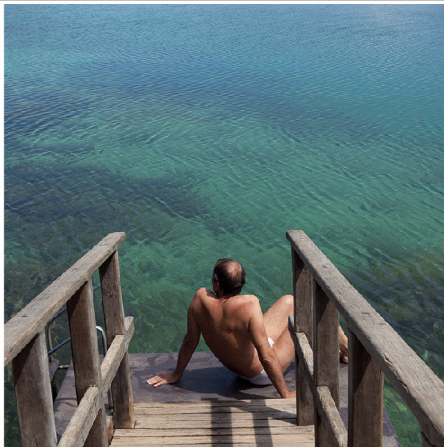




SUBMARINE LIFE



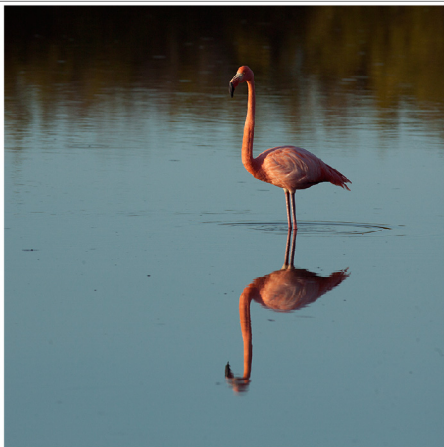
LANSCAPE



RELAX



PENGUIN

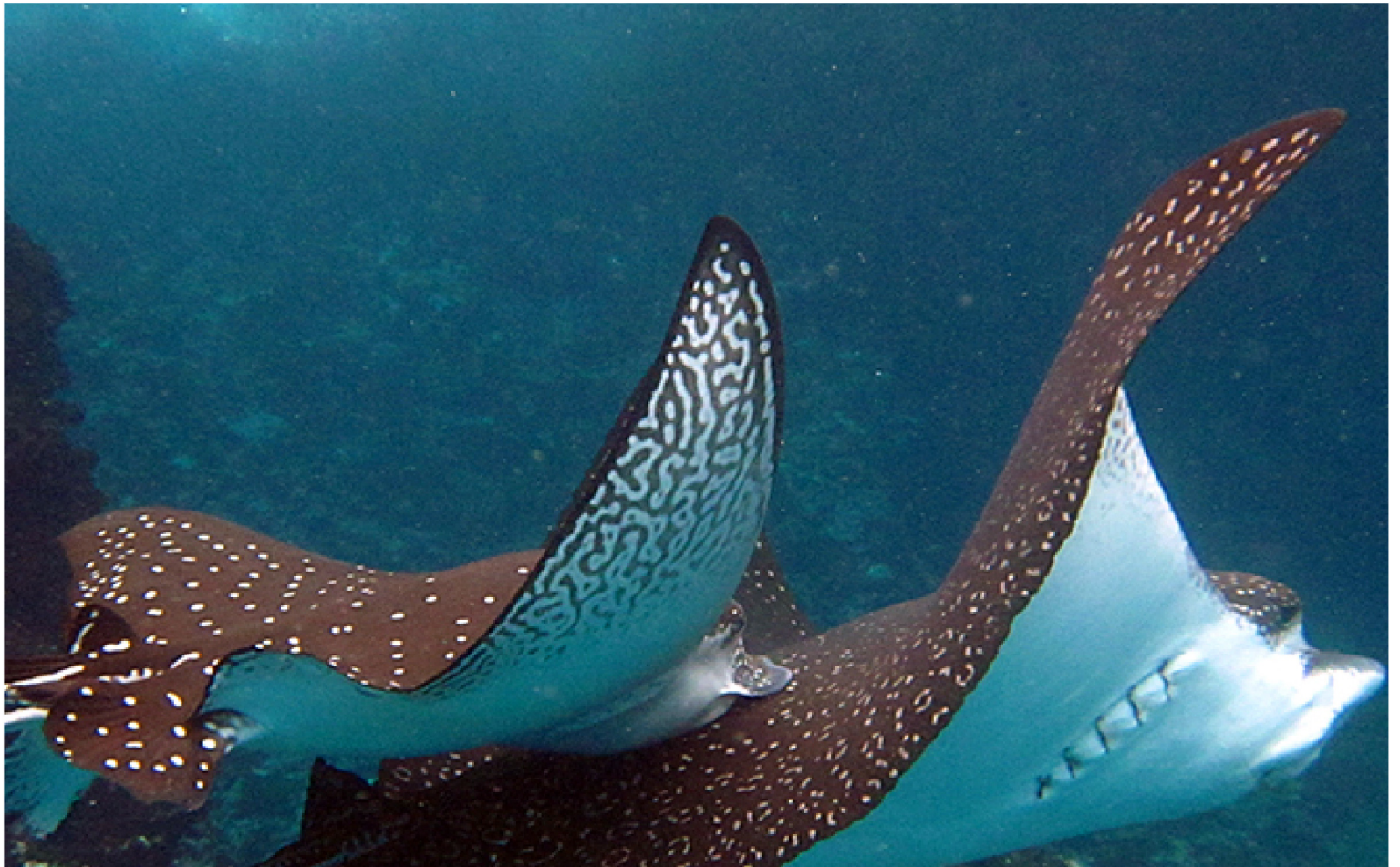


FLAMINGO



FOCAS





## Submarine Life in the Tunnels

From Puerto Villamil, take a boat and head west. While navigating the shallow but choppy seas you'll spot giant manta rays as well as sea turtles as they pop up to breathe. After an hour under the watchful gaze of Nazca and blue-footed boobies, you arrive at the tunnels, a maze of galleries formed by lava in the sea

The landscape surrounding the tunnels is dominated by arches and rocks rearing out of the sea and on which sprout cactus and shrubs perfectly adapted to the dry and saline conditions. The depths of the tunnels can be explored by drifting up inside on the tide. Rocky bridges vault the tunnels from where the seabed can be seen through turquoise waters teeming with fish.





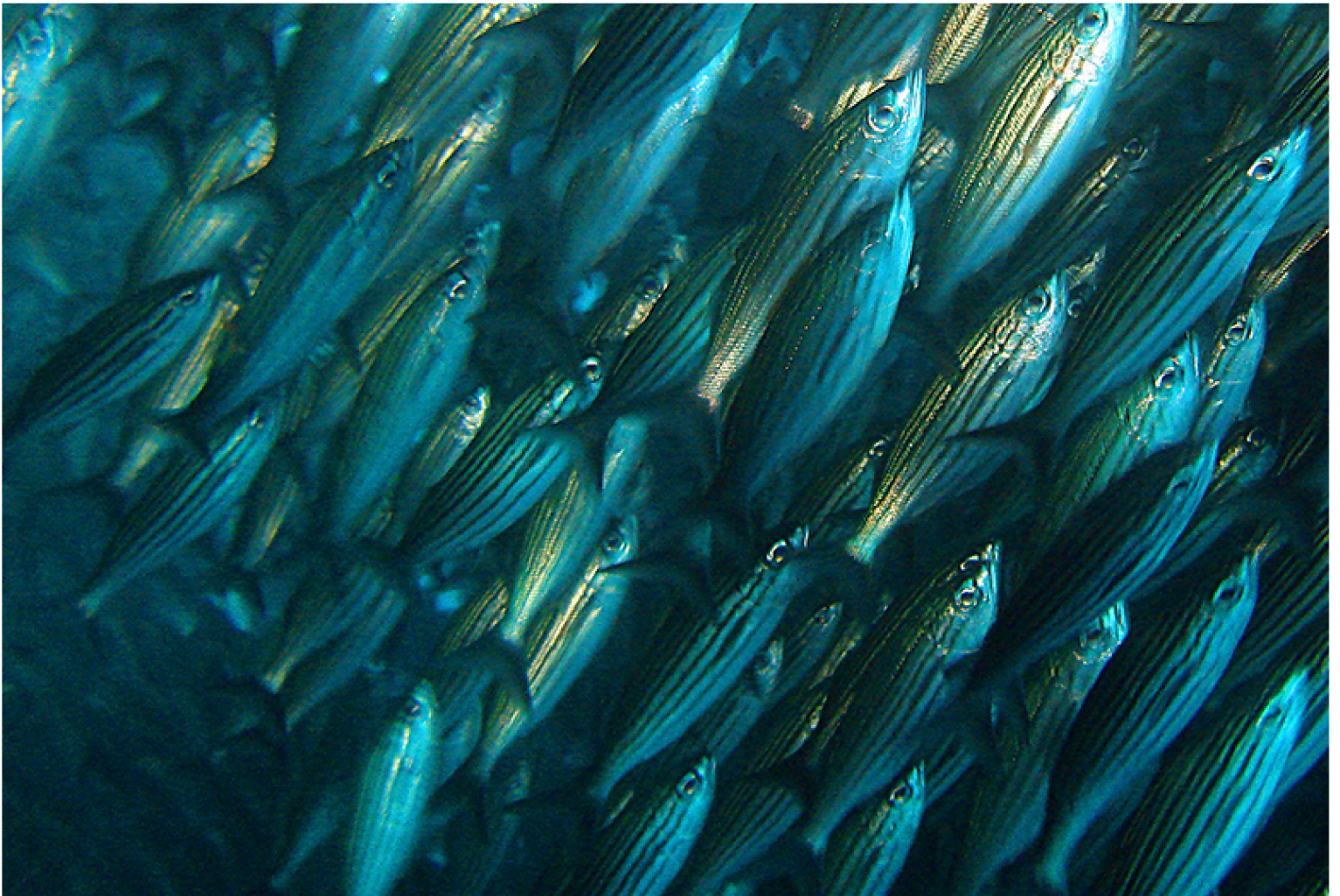


# Submarine Life

in the Tunnels

The archipelago offers no better place for snorkelling. Divers experiencing this adventure amid the tunnels and their natural wealth have compared it to being inside an aquarium. Once under the sea, you may think that you are hallucinating under the influence of the colourful damsel fish, peces zapatilla and, although somewhat rarer, the majestic eagle rays and whitetip reef sharks.

A visit to the tunnels can take up to four hours, but if you are captured by the wonders of the marine life the return to Puerto Villamil may be delayed until late afternoon. The opportunity to enjoy a leisurely visit to an attraction such as this is just one reason to embark on one of the daily tours during your stay on Isabela.







## Galapagos Marine Reserve

unknown natural wealth

The sea surrounding the Galapagos is a meeting place of surface and deep currents that give these ecosystems singular wealth, with animals coming from the four cardinal points. The waters of the archipelago have the right conditions for the prolific reproduction of both resident and migratory sea life.

The Galapagos Marine Reserve protects 133,000 square kilometres of water surrounding the islands for approximately 40 miles. It was declared Ecuador's first marine reserve in 1998 and is the second largest in the world, following the Great Barrier Reef. Both places hold the greatest wealth of sea life known to man.



## Galapagos Marine Reserve

unknown natural wealth

Thousands of species of marine invertebrates swim in the seas of Galapagos. Some are still almost unknown, waiting for scientists to dive in and discover them. Roughly 25% of this life is exclusive to Galapagos. The marine reserve is also a congregation point for 24 species of sea mammals, including two endemic species: the Galapagos sea lion and the Galapagos fur seal. There are also humpback whales, killer whales and dolphins. This earned the archipelago its declaration as a whale sanctuary in 1990.

Galapagos Marine Reserve is a paradise for snorkelling and scuba diving, adventure sports that let us become part of the undersea world, swimming with harmless manta rays, graceful sea turtles, sea lions whizzing past like torpedoes, multicoloured fish that curiously check out the divers and, in the north of the archipelago, giant whale sharks.







## Wall of Tears and the Wetlands of Isabela

The history of the village of Puerto Villamil on Isabela Island is linked to a past of exile and isolation. Puerto Villamil was previously a United States military outpost, as support for the base on the island of Baltra during the Second World War. In 1946, the Ecuadorian government regained control of the facilities and set up a prison for the confinement of dangerous inmates.

The penal colony kept the prisoners working on constructing a wall with blocks of volcanic lava. The great wall collapsed repeatedly and the prisoners were forced to build it again and again. This work resulted in suffering and sometimes death for the convicts, leading the locals to call it "the place where the weak died and the strong cried." The prison closed in 1959 and is now a tourist attraction.

To get to the Wall of Tears, cross through the wetlands of Isabela, a distance of four kilometres that takes you past white sand beaches, brackish sea inlets, lava tunnels, and lagoons. The path arrives at its highest point on Cerro Orchilla, providing an impressive view of the island's volcanic landscape.

This biodiverse journey passes through forests of prickly pear and candelabra cactus, beaches tinted yellow, red, and green by the carpet weed *sesuvium* [or sea purslane], four species of mangroves and the trees on Cerro Orchilla, full of the lichens after which it is named. Tidal pools and lagoons full of crustaceans feed the marine birds and Caribbean flamingos. At the end of this journey, you can also visit the Arnaldo Tupuiza Tortoise Breeding Centre.





## Isabela, the Galapagos paradise

Isabela, located on the western side of the Galapagos, is not only the archipelago's largest island but it also has the most varied ecosystem. At the southern tip of the island is the village of Puerto Villamil from where land and sea trips exploring the natural wealth of the Galapagos embark.

Along with its great neighbour Fernandina, Isabela is one of the archipelago's newer islands. The island is populated by five large volcanoes (Cerro Azul, Sierra Negra and Chico, Alcedo, Darwin and Wolf) which are in constant activity and whose elevations rise up to 1,700 metres. The most notable is Sierra Negra with its crater stretching over 10 kilometres.

The island's western location favours Isabela's natural wealth. It is one of the few islands where both the Galapagos

penguin and the Caribbean flamingo can be seen. Isabela's coastline is characterised by extensive, mangrove-covered beaches and wetlands of vital importance for the seabirds. Lying opposite Puerto Villamil is the Tintoreras islet, a resting place for dozens of whitetip reef sharks and whose beaches are used for nesting by marine iguanas. Visitors can also enjoy experiential fishing on Isabela.

Puerto Villamil's population boasts a curious history. A penal colony was established on the island and some of the former guards still live there today. Nearby are the ruins of the wall of tears, a giant stone wall designed to keep the inmates busy. Isabela's beaches are extensive and sandy. During the afternoon the waves are ideal for surfing, the perfect excuse for local and international surfers to remain in this paradise.





## The Tintoreras Islet: sharks, iguanas and volcanic lava

The coastal strip of southern Isabela is peppered with small islands and channels. Off the south of Puerto Villamil bay lies Tintoreras islet, a ten-minute journey in a motorboat. However, tourist trips are inevitably longer as the route takes in the surrounding rocks that are enveloped with seabirds such as Galapagos penguins and blue-footed boobies, as well as marine iguanas returning after feeding.

This island is formed by "aa" volcanic lava, which is covered in white lichen. The channel from which the island takes its name fills with seawater at high tide and dozens of whitetip reef sharks (*Triaenodon obesus*) come here to sleep during the day before emerging at night to forage. The sharks, resting alongside each other, can be spotted from the viewpoint.

The islet's paths traverse beaches populated by hundreds of iguanas, although signs warn visitors to skirt the nesting areas of these reptiles endemic to the archipelago. Further along the route, female Galapagos sea lions can be seen on mangrove beaches where they congregate to care for their pups.

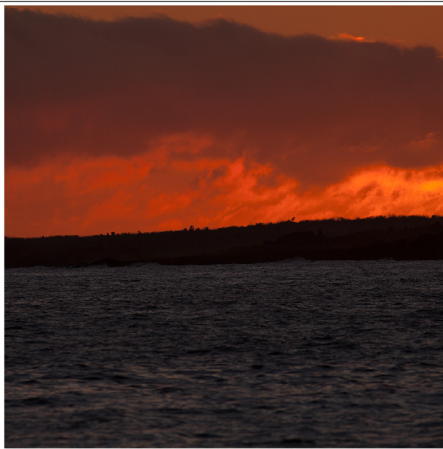
A visit to Tintoreras usually ends at sea. The islet is a superb spot for snorkelling and diving. Among the black rocks stained orange by the red rock crabs, the warm waters beckon to tourists to swim alongside the Galapagos sea lions, the hawksbill turtles and multicoloured fish while gazing down on algae and sea urchins.





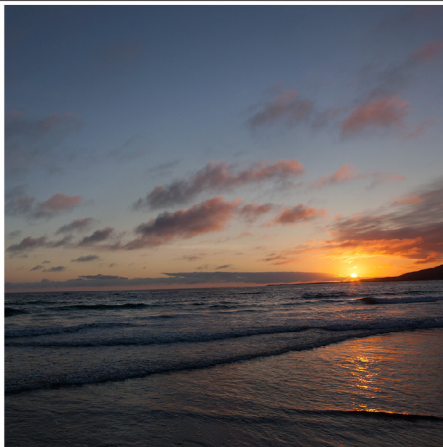
## Poza Salina [Saltwater Lagoon] of Puerto Villamil

In the centre of Puerto Villamil there is a salt-water lagoon where little sea creatures are abundant and serve as food for resident and migratory birds. The main attraction is the colony of Caribbean flamingos that congregate toward the end of the afternoon. These graceful pink birds can be seen from a boardwalk designed specifically for watching them.



## Alcedo Volcano

Alcedo Volcano rises in the central part of the island of Isabela. Getting there requires boat trip from Puerto Villamil to the bay of Urbina from where a four-hour walk leads to the volcano's crater. This tour requires a permit from the Galapagos National Park. Surrounded by a rugged, majestic landscape, the crater is home to the archipelago's largest wild population of giant tortoises.



## Volcán Chico [Small Volcano]

This small volcano is a recent fissure of some parasitic cones on the northeast side of the Sierra Negra Volcano. At an altitude of 860 metres, it is much lower than Sierra Negra (1370 m). The lava flow from this volcano can be seen in the more northern parts of Isabela, including Elizabeth Bay and the eastern side of Sierra Negra.





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