

Into the Wild

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At 1,000km away from the nearest shore, an archipelago of 13 terrestrial islands splattered with rich wildlife and volcanic geology stand in isolation. Together, they form the Galápagos Islands.

With topography unlike anywhere else on the planet, these isles have their secluded location to thank. Circling the equator in the vastness of the Pacific Ocean, the archipelago is home to thousands of endemic and prehistoric species.

During the evolution process, flora and fauna from all corners of the Earth arrived here from different routes across the waters, colonizing the islands' lava beds. Due to the lack of natural predators, these animals thrived and evolved into unique species that cannot be found elsewhere.

Charles Darwin Evolution

One of the first visitors of the islands was the English naturalist, Charles Darwin. During his voyage on the Beagle 200 years ago, he circumnavigated around the atolls and made a breakthrough in his scientific studies. His observations and collections gave the impetus to the famous Theory of Evolution.

In his book, 'On the Origin of Species', Darwin proposed the theory that evolution resulted from a process called natural selection.

In time, this developed into the modern synthesis explaining the basic mechanism of life.

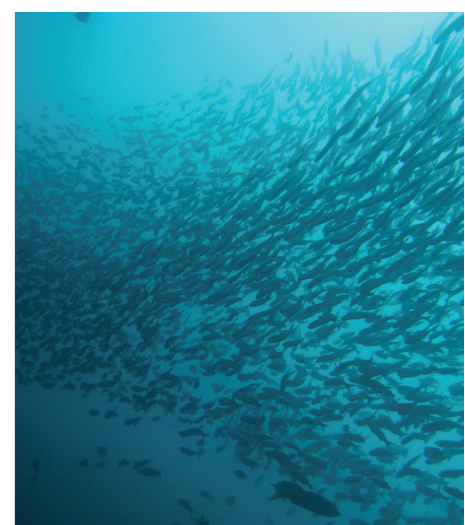
The Modern-day Galápagos

Fast forward to the present, the Galápagos has now developed into a tourist-friendly destination. With luxury cruises and airlines to make the islands highly accessible from mainland Ecuador, travellers come here for a slice of adventure and an out-of-this-world experience. Pleasant temperatures all year-round and a family-conducive environment further enhance its popularity.

Diverse Ecology and Wildlife

Frolic in turquoise waters with playful seals, snake pass giant Galapagos Tortoises or tiptoe alongside fiery red Sally Light-foot Crabs – these animals romp around their natural habitat freely, peering at humans nonchalantly. We are after all, the intruders.

Hiking on lava slopes and lush foliage, it is easy to spot a yellow land lizard sliding by or sneaky frigate birds circling the sky. Scenes out of Discovery Channel!





come alive here. And it's not just animals that people come here for.

Freshwater pools within steep rocky crevices and active volcanoes that spew fumes intermittently are also the islands' draw. One day you might be trekking through the dense rainforest and another day, in the middle of a cactus-strewn desert. Each island differs from another in terms of landscape, foliage and fauna.

Potential Dangers

Unfortunately, all of this is changing. With tourism come environmental destructions. Substantial increases in cruise ship passengers and job-seeking Ecuadorians have fuelled an unhealthy growth in inter-island traffic and therefore damaging elements.

The World Heritage Committee has since placed the Galápagos on UNESCO's List of World Heritage in Danger, with the aim of rallying conversation support.

The Galápagos penguin is "within a hair's breadth of annihilation", according to biologists. If this persists, some of the islands' rare species might face extinction.

The Ecuadorian President has called the Galápagos conservation project their national priority. The country plans to invest significantly in development of sustainable tourism and educational reform.

Do Your Part

While mass tourism is detrimental to the islands, travellers are not discouraged from visiting the Galápagos. On the contrary, responsible tourism is welcomed – contributing to the tourism industry without leaving any carbon footprint is the key.

Quasar Expeditions works to preserve the islands and its endangered species through recycling and conservation efforts.

They also organize responsible boat tours using small vessels, with the motto in mind: To impact lives and not our planet.

By signing up with tour operators that keep these environmental concerns in mind, you are contributing your part. On the islands itself, be aware of your impact, leaving your surroundings in the original state.

For travellers who want to help further, volunteering opportunities are available at non-profit organizations like Fundación Natura. These outfits study the environmental problems and work at tackling them. The Simon Bolivar Volunteer Program also allows people to help in ecological projects, habitat restoration and educational workshops.

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