

CRUISING AROUND THE GALAPAGOS ARCHIPELAGO

NAVEGANDO EN EL ARCHIPIÉLAGO DE LAS GALÁPAGOS

*Text by | Texto por DOLORES BARCIELA
Photos courtesy of | Fotos cortesía de M/Y WILDAID'S PASSION
Map by | Mapa por PIERRE HERVÉ*

We are snorkeling along the rugged coast of Isla Santiago, in the protected waters facing a tiny island aptly named Sombrero Chino or Chinese hat because it resembles a Chinese rice farmer's hat. As I'm done watching colorful fish schools swim by, I remove my goggles and continue drifting with the current while observing how red crabs climb the black volcanic rocks along the coast. Suddenly, I see my first Galapagos penguin swimming nearby. Less than 2 feet long, they're the only penguins in the world that live near the equator. This one is very cute and playful and I enjoy swimming close to him while, some 15 feet away, the rest of the group continues snorkeling. Chema signals me the number 5 with his hand and I think, "Cool, they must be watching 5 other penguins dive underneath them". He later tells me he was referring to 5 mid-sized Galapagos sharks close to the bottom,

Estamos haciendo esnorquel a lo largo de la rocosa costa de la Isla Santiago, en las aguas calmas frente a la pequeña isla acertadamente llamada Sombrero Chino, por su semejanza con un sombrero en forma de cono. Cuando me aburro de ver coloridos cardúmenes de peces, me quito las gafas de protección y me dejo llevar por la corriente mientras observo a cangrejos rojos trepar las negras rocas volcánicas de la orilla. De repente veo mi primer pingüino de Galápagos nadando cerca mío. De menos de 50 centímetros de longitud, son los únicos pingüinos del mundo que viven cerca del ecuador. Este es muy lindo y juguetón y me divierte nadar cerca suyo. El resto de mi grupo continúa buceando a unos 5 metros de distancia. Chema me hace la señal del número 5 con la mano y yo pienso: "Qué bien!, deben estar viendo otros 5 pingüinos bajo el agua". Más tarde me cuenta que se refería a 5

just a few feet away from me. The group is pleased to have seen them, but I'm quite relieved to hear this after the dive ends.

We all climb into our dinghy and get back aboard M/Y Wild Aid's Passion, where we are greeted with warm chocolate by cheerful crewmember Roberto, and are provided towels by other friendly crewmembers, to use after we remove our wetsuits. Roberto announces we now have snacks awaiting us on the top deck and Fernando, the marine biologist leading our expedition, lets us know he'll be giving a lecture on Darwin after dinner in the main salon. We're now relaxing on deck, enjoying warm empanadas while watching a beautiful sunset over Isla Santiago. It can't get much better than this. Seagulls and petrels fly by. Their sound is the only one we hear, along with the soft caress of the water against our hull. We're alone in this virgin corner of the world that, I imagine, looks as pure and authentic as it was hundreds of years ago when Europeans first sighted this archipelago.

It's everyone's responsibility now to help maintain it as pristine as it is, and protect its vast endemic flora and fauna. The Galapagos National Park and the Ecuadorian Government are doing a great job, and so are a few conservation organizations and luxury travel companies like Wild Aid and Angermeyer Cruises/Andando Tours. It's thanks to them I'm here enjoying this pristine paradise, for which I'm truly thankful. Wild Aid's program, in

tiburones de Galápagos de tamaño medio que nadaban a sólo un par de metros míos. Al grupo le gustó mucho verlos, pero yo me alegro de oír esto cuando ya terminó nuestra sesión de snorkel.

Nos subimos a nuestro bote auxiliar y regresamos a bordo del M/Y Wild Aid's Passion, donde nos recibe el siempre sonriente tripulante Roberto con una taza de un delicioso chocolate caliente. Otros tripulantes nos ofrecen toallas para secarnos luego de habernos quitado nuestros trajes de agua. Roberto anuncia que tenemos bocadillos calientes aguardándonos en la cubierta superior y Fernando, el biólogo que guía nuestra expedición, nos cuenta que dará una charla sobre Darwin en el salón principal después de la cena.

Ahora estamos en cubierta relajándonos, disfrutando de empanadas mientras observamos al sol ponerse sobre la isla de Santiago. No podríamos estar mejor. Nos sobrevuelan gaviotas y petreles. Sus sonidos son lo único que se oye, junto a las suaves caricias del agua en el casco del barco. Estamos solos en este rincón virgen del mundo que parece lucir tan puro y auténtico como hace cientos de años, cuando lo descubrieron los europeos. Es responsabilidad de todos el ahora ayudar a mantenerlo tan impecable como luce, y proteger su vasta flora y fauna endémica. El Parque Nacional de Galápagos y el gobierno de Ecuador están haciendo una gran labor, al igual que algunas organizaciones





Dolores with Chema, Benja, and Rosa aboard M/Y Passion



the Galapagos, encompasses certain activities to protect its many diverse marine species and habitat like stopping illegal fishing in the Galapagos Marine Reserve and preventing the introduction of invasive species. Angermeyer Cruises/Andando Tours is a high-end tourism operation that understands conservation is good for business, simultaneously maintaining high standards and environmental consciousness.

The M/Y WildAid's Passion is the largest charter yacht in the Galapagos. At 159' in length and with four decks, the yacht boasts generous space for up to 14 passengers. There are ample interior and exterior social areas, a panoramic sky lounge with bar and sliding glass doors, separate dining room and wonderfully spacious decks with more than 200 square meters of fine teak

de conservación y algunas empresas de turismo de lujo como Wild Aid y Angermeyer Cruises/Andando Tours. Es por ellos que estoy hoy aquí disfrutando de este paraíso sorprendente, por lo que les estoy muy agradecida. El programa de Wild Aid en las Galápagos incluye actividades para proteger sus muy diversas especies marinas y hábitat como lo es detener la pesca ilegal en la Reserva Marina de Galápagos y evitar la introducción de especies invasivas. A su vez, Angermeyer Cruises/Andando Tours es una empresa de turismo local que entiende que la conservación es buena para los negocios, y mantiene altos estándares y una gran conciencia ecológica.

El yate de lujo Wild Aid's Passion es el mayor barco de chárter de las Galápagos. Con 48.5 metros de eslora y cuatro cubiertas, posee



decking and a further secluded sun deck with lounge chairs and Jacuzzi. There are four spacious staterooms, each with private bathroom and tub, and two suites (Master and VIP) with two bathrooms each. All cabins are air conditioned. With a service ratio of one crew member per guest, WildAid's Passion ensures service second to none, while the galley produces gourmet cuisine of international standards. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are often served al fresco in the exterior dining area, allowing guests to enjoy the amazing views and stunning sunsets.

Galapagos. The name alone resonates on so many levels. It's surely a destination on any naturalist's bucket list, and a place where basic evolutionary principles can be observed first hand. The archipelago is located some 600 nm off the coast of Ecuador,

espacio generoso para hasta 14 huéspedes. Ofrece amplias áreas sociales, tanto externas como internas, un salón abierto con bar y puertas corredizas de vidrio, salón comedor separado, y cubiertas de teca de más de 200 m2 que incluyen una cubierta superior para tomar sol con reposeras y jacuzzi. Cuenta con 4 amplios camarotes con baño privado y bañera, y dos suites con dos baños cada una, todos con aire acondicionado. Wild Aid's Passion asegura un servicio insuperable con una relación de servicio de un tripulante por huésped, y un Chef que elabora exquisita comida gourmet. El desayuno, almuerzo y cena suelen servirse al aire libre en el comedor externo, lo que permite disfrutar de vistas espectaculares y preciosos atardeceres.

Galápagos. El nombre en sí resuena en múltiples niveles.



Highlights

- Centrally located near the main attractions
- Modern facilities including a swimming pool and spa
- 5 dining options to choose from on-site

HOTEL ORO VERDE is located in downtown Guayaquil within walking distance of the main tourist attractions such as the Centennial Park and the Malecon2000 waterfront promenade along the River Guayas.

The hotel has a sleek and modern décor and offers guests a range of services and amenities as well as an authentic Ecuadorian service with a very attentive staff.

The hotel features five dining options from local cuisine at the El Patio Ecuadorian to indulgent fine dining such as the award winning Le Gourmet serving French Cuisine. Breakfast is complimentary and consists of a wide selection of pastries, meats and cheese and other choices. Other amenities include on-site spa with Turkish bath, outdoor swimming pool and hot tub and a fitness centre. Head to one of their two shopping stores to purchase Ecuadorian chocolate as well as local crafts and works of art.

In our opinion

"This hotel offers large and comfortable rooms and all the facilities needed to enjoy your holiday. It is the perfect stop-over if you are on your way to or from the Galapagos Islands."

PRICES FROM £450 PER PERSON based on 3 nights accommodation including transfers from Cuenca.



ORO VERDE

Guayaquil



formed from the emergent tips of huge submarine volcanoes. Its nutrient-rich waters support the concentration and reproduction of migratory marine species ranging from humpback whales and sea turtles to giant manta rays and hammerhead sharks. The islands offer an eclectic mix of species that coupled with high levels of endemism make them very special. Here we may see penguins living side by side with sea lions and iguanas, prehistoric giant tortoises, the only nocturnal seagull, the only true marine lizard and the only flightless cormorant in the world. The islands are a rich mix of active volcanoes, stunning beaches and abundant, tame wildlife that's not afraid of humans. I found it a unique experience to be able to closely watch mother sea lions breastfeeding their newborn babies. Some of them even approached us with curiosity. It was a lovely experience to also swim close to sea turtles, colorful fish and penguins. Galapagos is an isolated charming corner of the world well worth discovering. ■

Definitivamente es un destino ideal para cualquier amante y estudioso de la naturaleza, y un lugar donde los principios básicos de la evolución pueden observarse in situ. El archipiélago se encuentra a unas 600 millas náuticas de Ecuador, formado por las puntas emergentes de enormes volcanes submarinos. Sus aguas ricas en nutrientes ayudan a la concentración y reproducción de especies marinas migratorias que van desde las ballenas yubarta y las tortugas marinas a las gigantescas manta rayas y los tiburones martillo. Las islas ofrecen una ecléctica mezcla de especies que sumados a los altos niveles de endemismo las vuelven muy especiales. Aquí podemos ver pingüinos conviviendo con iguanas y lobos marinos, miles de tortugas prehistóricas, especies únicas en el planeta como las gaviotas nocturnas, los únicos verdaderos lagartos marinos y al cormorán no volador. Las islas son una rica mezcla de volcanes activos, deslumbrantes playas y abundante fauna mansa que no le tiene miedo al hombre. A mí me resultó una vivencia espectacular el poder observar de tan cerca a las lobas marinas amamantar a sus bebés recién nacidos. Algunos bebés hasta se nos acercaban con curiosidad. Me encantó la experiencia, al igual que la de nadar junto a tortugas, peces coloridos y pingüinos. Galápagos es un encantador rincón del mundo digno de ser visitado. ■



Located in the upmarket Samborondón neighbourhood, this 19th Century boutique is a haven of tranquility situated amongst the tropical gardens of Guayaquil Historical Park.

Highlights

- Set in a tropical oasis at the centre of busy Guayaquil
- Historical 19th century property
- Riverside dining at the Casa Julian Restaurant

HOTEL DEL PARQUE is a historical gem which has been lovingly restored to provide guests with a relaxing stay away from the busy lifestyle of Guayaquil. The sophisticated hotel was designed by Julio Vinuesa and features two inner patios with fountains and tropical plants as well as a fitness centre and a reading room. Guests can partake in cultural experiences such as chocolate tasting, coffee roasting as well as wildlife walks in the stunning tropical grounds. The 44 bedrooms at Hotel del Parque are elegantly decorated and features authentic Ecuadorian furnishings and views on the courtyard or the garden. Amenities include air-conditioning, smart TV, Minibar, private bathrooms with outsized marble slabs and Ecuadorian toiletries

The hotel can also arrange a private dining experience by the river or in one of the historical building for those who wish to spend an intimate moment on their holiday.

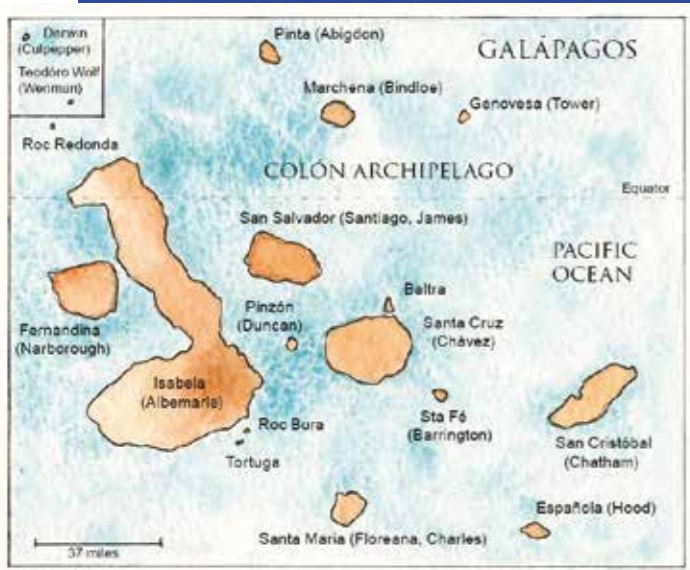
In our opinion

"Hotel del Parque is a historical gem set in a tropical oasis. There are no better places to relax and enjoy all that Guayaquil has to offer."

PRICES FROM £1.102 PER PERSON based on 3 nights full board with transfers and activities

HOTEL del PARQUE
ORO VERDE *Small*





What is the link between Darwin and the Galápagos Islands?

Text by ELODIE MARIE CAMPRASSE

Charles Darwin (1809-1882) renowned naturalist who has proposed innovative and controversial theories in the field of biology, first embarked on board the HMS Beagle from 1831 to 1836 as a geologist. The initial goal of the expedition was to map the coasts of South America. Scientists on board took advantage of the stopovers to make observations and collect samples of flora and fauna. In the Galápagos Islands, Darwin noticed that the same animals had gradually evolved to become different species on the islands where conditions, like food availability, were different. For example, the Darwin's finches' beak morphology had evolved according to the kind of food available. For Darwin, two big ideas emerged from this trip that later would revolutionize the field of biology: the unity and diversity of life can be explained by evolution, and natural selection drives adaptive evolution. In 1838, he speculated that all living species evolved from one or a few common ancestors, with time, through the process of natural selection. For a long time, these ideas did not have unanimous support but nowadays they make up the foundation of biology.

MAKE THIS TRIP MEAN SOMETHING MORE...



Your trip aboard the M/Y WildAid's Passion supports the Galapagos Conservation Fund to help us protect this unique place and its diverse species from numerous threats.

wildaid.org/passion | 1-833-ANDANDO (263-2636) | wildaid@andandotours.com