

A topographic map of the Galapagos Islands, showing the islands' outlines and internal contour lines. The map is rendered in a light green color against a background of wavy, concentric lines that suggest a topographic surface. A horizontal line representing the equator is drawn across the map, with the text "0° 0' 00''" positioned to its right.

0° 0' 00''

CHOOSE WISELY

TRAVEL SMART

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE YOUR GALAPAGOS CRUISE



Galapagos Islands Travel

PERCEPTION VS. REALITY

You've dreamt of it for a lifetime. The Galapagos Islands. A place where history has been made. For centuries, home to pirates and whalers, but mostly to highly unusual fauna, inspiration for Darwin's theory as presented in [On the Origin of Species](#). And one of the few places on Earth where the wildlife shows no fear of humans, meaning you can observe it from just a few metres away. You want to see and do everything. **But with so many options available in this magical, exhilarating, iconic destination, you know there will be some trade-offs.** How to determine what works best for you? How to separate the essential from the merely beautiful? The transformative from the enticing? The perceptions from the realities . . .

1

Perception

I can do any Galapagos National Park approved activity I want, whenever I want, no matter how I visit the islands.

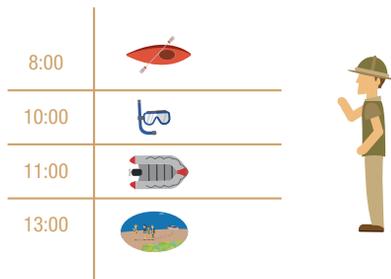
Reality

There are numerous ways to explore and have fun in Galapagos. With land-based travel, you have greater scheduling options for any activity occurring outside the park boundaries. But if you want to visit any sites within the park limits, it's important to remember that the National Park Authorities require that you do so accompanied by a licensed Naturalist Guide, which means you will have the greatest flexibility on multi-guided expedition vessels and yachts.

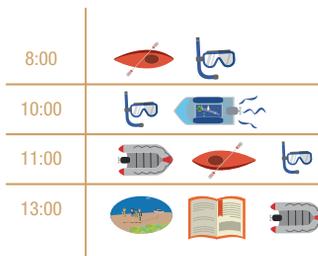
TRAVEL EXPERT TIP:

Ask if more than 1 activity is available at the same time.

Activities inside park boundaries are limited to the number of accompanying guides



Simultaneous activities inside the National Park are possible when you have multiple guides



Not a big fan of swimming but want to see all of Galapagos' underwater show?



TRAVEL EXPERT TIP:

Ask if your provider has a glass-bottom boat..

2

Perception

Cruise ships are too massive for exploring Galapagos.

Reality

In other parts of the world, cruise ships can, indeed, be massive. But in Galapagos, the largest ships hold a maximum of 100 passengers and are perfect for exploring the islands. The options range from single-guided boats, with approximately 6-10 cabins, to two different types of multi-guided ships: Expedition yachts (approximately 16-24 cabins) and expedition vessels (over 24 cabins).

TRAVEL EXPERT TIP:

Ask about your ship's capacity.

Authorized vessels in Galapagos

Max: 100 passengers

Expedition vessel* - over 24 Cabins

75 m



Expedition yacht* - approximately 16-24 Cabins

63 m



Single-guided boat - approximately 6-10 Cabins

30 m



Massive cruise liners are not authorised in Galapagos

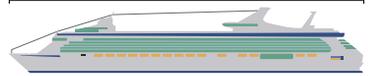
Oasis of the Seas - 2712 Cabins

360 m



Freedom of the Seas - 1816 Cabins

340 m



Grandeur of the Seas - 975 Cabins

279 m



3

Perception

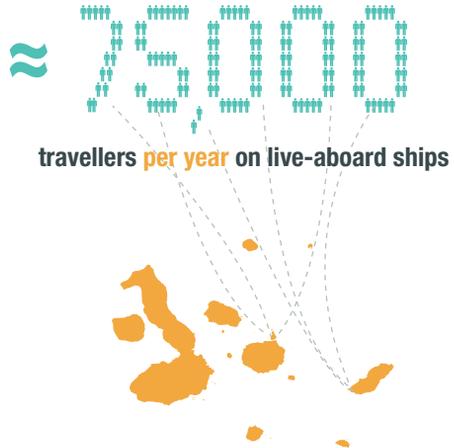
Mass tourism is damaging the Galapagos National Park.

Reality

The Galapagos National Park strictly controls the number of visitors allowed to visit the area each year, making the archipelago one of the most highly protected and monitored destinations in the world. As a result, the total number of people staying on live-aboard ships over an entire year is close to 75,000. . . .and that is less than what a world-class sports stadium holds at just one sold-out event!

TRAVEL EXPERT TIP:

Ask about how tourism helps the Galapagos National Park.



4

Perception

I've done a great deal of sailing in calm harbours, so I guess in the tropical waters of Galapagos my boat won't move enough to cause me any discomfort?

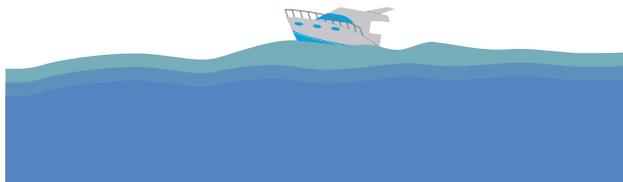
Reality

Stability can make all of the difference for an enjoyable cruise vacation and it is a strong feature of an expedition vessel. Contrary to common assumption, tropical waters are not always calm and an expedition vessel, by its very nature, reduces movement at sea. Single-guided boats often face interesting challenges when sailing between islands.

TRAVEL EXPERT TIP:

Ask what kind of ship will be the most comfortable for you.

Less Stability



More Stability



5

Perception

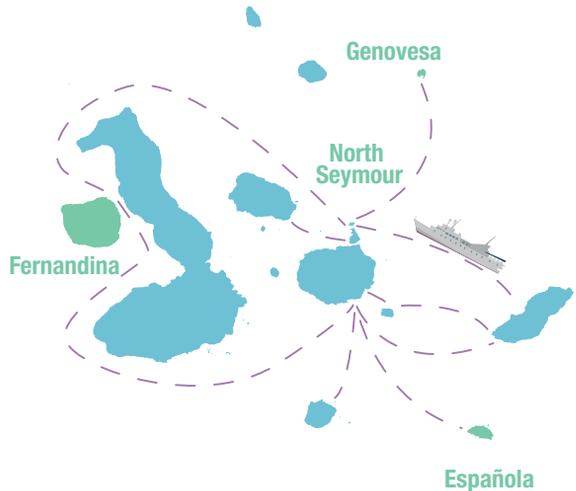
I can go on any ship. After all, they all cover the whole archipelago.

Reality

Not all ships reach all of the islands you might want to visit, such as Genovesa, Fernandina, Española and North Seymour. The archipelago covers a vast area of 138,000 km² (about half the size of Great Britain) and the ship and the itinerary that you choose will determine how you access the unique wildlife of the Galapagos National Park.

TRAVEL EXPERT TIP:

Ask which itinerary or programme will give you the best island and wildlife coverage.



Top-ranked islands for wildlife viewing according to Galapagos Expedition Leaders and Naturalist Guides

6

Perception

Only single-guided boats let you select full-week trips.

Reality

Expedition vessels, yachts, and land-based options offer a wide variety of choices for voyage length. You choose what's best for you with itineraries that range from 5 to 15 days. You can even combine two shorter itineraries to make sure you get the island coverage you want.

TRAVEL EXPERT TIP:

Ask about the best trip date and length for you.



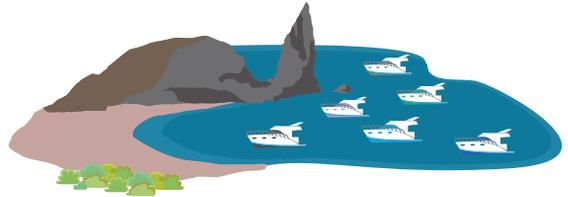
7

Perception

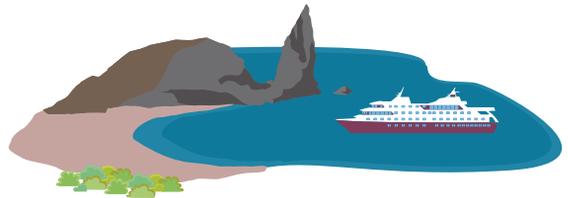
Single-guided boats get exclusive access to secluded National Park locations and do not share the islands with other visitors.

Reality

At each visitor site, you will generally find more than 4 single-guided boats per visitor site or only 1 expedition vessel. Why? Because according to Galapagos National Park (GNP) rules, each visitor site has its own maximum number of guests permitted at any given time. All itineraries must be approved by the authorities. Careful itinerary design, not ship size, is what ensures exclusivity and top wildlife viewing opportunities on island visits.



or



TRAVEL EXPERT TIP:
Ask about your ship's
Galapagos Exclusivity Rate.

8

Perception

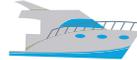
If I want to go ashore in a small group, I must go on a small ship.

Reality

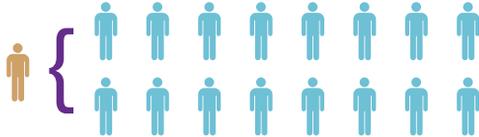
The Galapagos National Park official regulation authorizes 16 or fewer guests per guide. On expedition vessels, the number of guests per guide comes down to an average of just 12.

TRAVEL EXPERT TIP:
Ask about the Guide/Guest Ratio on your ship.

Single-guided boat:
16 guests per Naturalist Guide



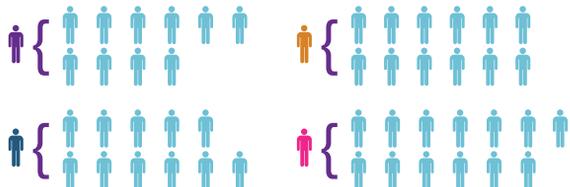
One Naturalist Guide



Expedition vessels and yachts:
16 or fewer guests per Naturalist Guide



Several Naturalist Guides



9

Perception

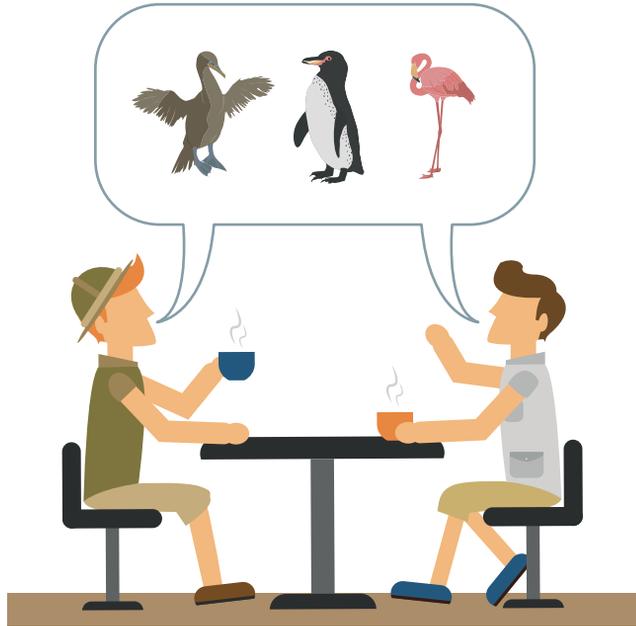
If I travel on a cosy single-guided boat, all my travel mates will be congenial and we will get along just fine.

Reality

Not necessarily, unless you have chartered the entire single-guided boat in order to travel exclusively with a group of dear friends or loved ones. Expedition vessels and yachts give you the freedom to find your own space when you want it or to seek out different guests for company while dining or when you want a friendly conversation.

TRAVEL EXPERT TIP:

Ask about any special interests you may have.



TRAVEL EXPERT TIP:

Ask if your ship has both an expedition leader and a hotel manager to ensure that everyone in your party is comfortable and their specific needs are well attended.

10

Perception

All guests on single-guided boats speak my language and so language issues will not affect my experience.

Reality

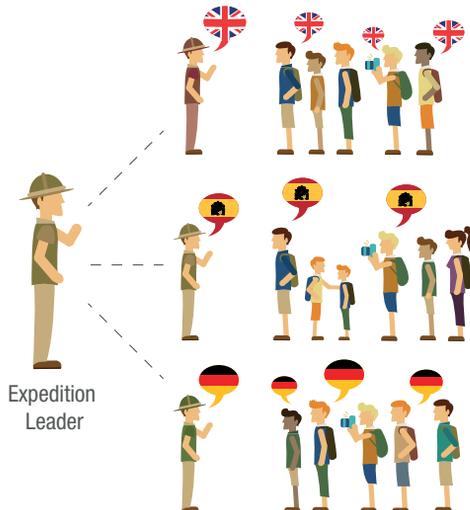
Not everyone on a single-guided boat will necessarily speak your language. Naturalist Guides are generally multilingual and on single-guided boats, they must tailor their guiding to the group on board, which means that they often must repeat information in two or more languages each time they go ashore. Expedition vessels and yachts, with multiple Naturalist Guides, are better able to handle varied language requirements. This means that each group can receive more in-depth, outstanding natural history interpretation in various languages.

TRAVEL EXPERT TIP:
Ask how many guides are on your ship.

Single guide



Multiple guides



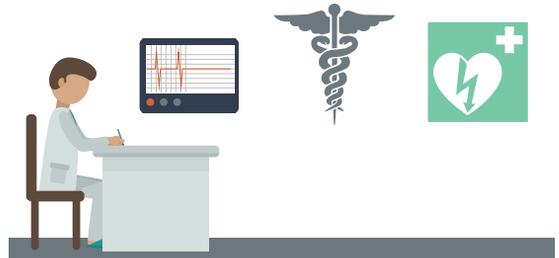
11

Perception

I'm in great shape. Basic first aid on board is enough for me.

Reality

Lucky for you if you enjoy constant good health, but having an MD Officer (Doctor) on your vessel can make all the difference, considering that you're travelling in a remote region. All operators watch out for the safety and security of their guests, and the National Park authority has its own facilities and emergency medical transport available. But some operators take guest safety to another level by investing in a permanent medical presence on board.



TRAVEL EXPERT TIP:
Ask if there is a
Medical Officer on board.

12

Perception

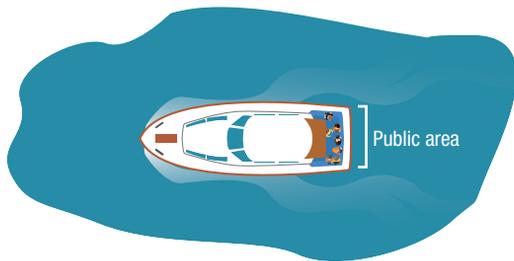
With so few guests on board a single-guided boat, I'll never feel cramped.

Reality

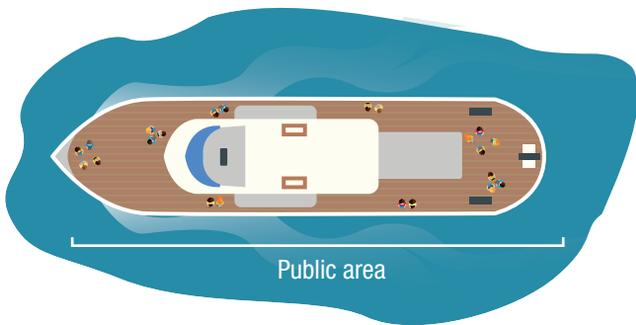
If it's space and freedom you want, take a look at the **Guest Space Ratio (GSR)**, a cruising industry benchmark designed to show how much room each guest has on any given ship and provide a common number that can be compared from ship to ship. Divide the ship's gross tonnage by the total guest capacity. Anything above a GSR of 20 is considered comfortable.

TRAVEL EXPERT TIP:

Ask about the Guest-Space Ratio!



Average **GSR** on single-guided boats is approximately **14**



Average **GSR** on Expedition Vessels and Yachts is approximately **28**

TRAVEL EXPERT TIP:

Ask for **detailed information** about your ship's facilities and where you can go, besides your cabin, when you want some extra space?

13

Perception

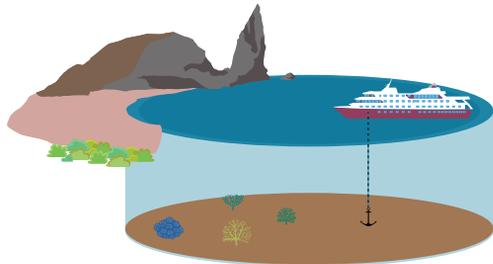
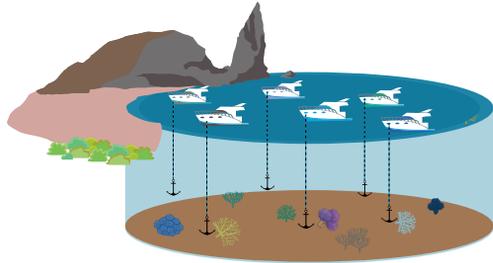
Single-guided small boats can leave a lower environmental footprint.

Reality

Actually, the fewer people on board, the higher the environmental footprint per person. It's a question of basic economies of scale: the inevitable carbon footprint of the vessel, when divided by the number of guests on board, falls dramatically on multi-guided expedition vessels versus single-guided boats. Expedition vessels additionally reduce their footprint on protected areas by investing in cutting-edge technology, training, plastic reduction, solid waste management, and clean processes, many of which are impossible to implement on single-guided boats due to space reasons. Finally, by undergoing regular environmental-impact audits by local authorities, and even third parties, multi-guided expedition vessels guarantee compliance with international standards.

TRAVEL EXPERT TIP:

Ask your operator about its environmentally-friendly initiatives, on-board technology, and sustainability awards.



TRAVEL EXPERT TIP:

Ask about your ship's environmental compliance records and on-board initiatives.

14

Perception

Single-guided boats give you more personalized service on board.

Reality

Expedition vessels have an entire team devoted to making sure that onboard hospitality is everything you need it to be. The Hotel Manager and Expedition Leader, supported by a dedicated staff, cater to guest requirements in terms of languages, special meals, and other specific requests, as you would expect in any fine tourism establishment. A highly-trained staff makes all the difference in your on-board experience. .

TRAVEL EXPERT TIP:

Ask if your boat has an on-board Hotel Manager and Expedition Leader.



TRAVEL EXPERT TIP:

Always ask about the ratio of the hotel staff committed to guest services and hospitality needs.

15

Perception

Inexpensive non-reputable operations can deliver outstanding experiences.

Reality

Galapagos is close to all of our hearts, but it's actually a highly remote destination and experience matters! Safety protocols, area knowledge, navigational records, logistics management, and more can only be mastered after many years of operations in the same place. Crafting a dream journey deserves a top operator.

TRAVEL EXPERT TIP:

Ask how much time the tour operator has worked in the Galapagos Islands.



TRAVEL EXPERT TIP:

Always ask about the tour operator's reputation. Check its social media, travel blogs, trip reviews, compliance accountability, and international presence.



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- 4. Destination stewardship:** Caring for the islands, their resources and communities since we first pioneered tourism in the archipelago
- 5. In-house country and regional expertise:** Serving as dedicated local hosts to showcase the best our country and our region have to offer



Simultaneous activities in the Galapagos Islands



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