
GALAPAGOS
BIG 15
METROJOURNEYS
GALAPAGOS
ICONIC SPECIES
METROJOURNEYS
by Metropolitan Touring

It’s Quite Simple

With so many islands and wildlife experiences to choose from, planning a Galapagos journey can be overwhelming. The **Galapagos Big 15** was created by leading naturalists, scientists, and local experts to showcase the archipelago’s most iconic species.

This curated collection highlights the extraordinary wildlife that makes the Galapagos unlike anywhere else on Earth. Use it as inspiration to imagine your perfect journey and discover the islands through the eyes of their most remarkable inhabitants.

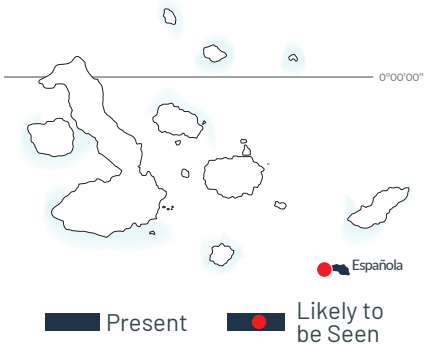




GALAPAGOS ALBATROSS

(Phoebastria irrorata)

With a wingspan reaching 2.5 meters (8.2 ft), the Galapagos Albatross is the **largest bird in the archipelago.** Famous for its elaborate courtship dance of circling, bowing, and bill-clacking, this species breeds almost exclusively on **Española Island.** Considered **critically endangered since 2007,** it can only be seen between April and December, making it one of the most seasonal and exclusive wildlife encounters in the Galapagos.

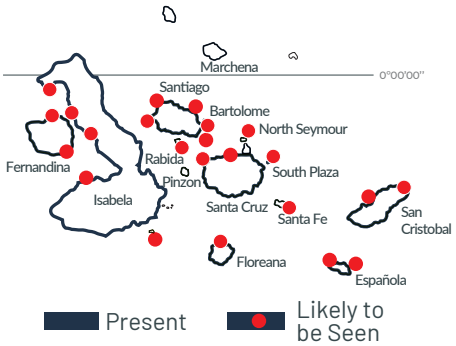


BLUE-FOOTED BOOBY

(Sula nebouxii)



One of the Galapagos' most beloved birds, the Blue-footed Booby is instantly recognizable for its vibrant turquoise feet. Males perform an entertaining courtship dance, proudly displaying their feet to attract mates. Expert plunge-divers, they hunt fish by diving dramatically into the ocean. Nearly **half of the world's population lives in the Galapagos,** making the islands one of the best places to observe this iconic species.

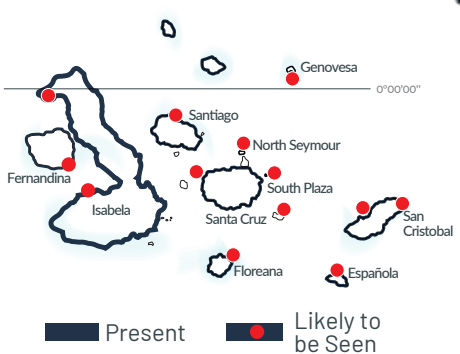




NAZCA BOOBY

(Sula granti)

Distinguished by **its bright orange beak** and elegant white plumage, the Nazca Booby is the largest booby species in the Galapagos. Often nesting along remote shorelines, it is known for its fascinating but ruthless breeding behavior, where stronger chicks frequently outcompete their siblings. Easily **identified in flight by its black wing tips and tail feathers,** it is a striking presence throughout the archipelago.

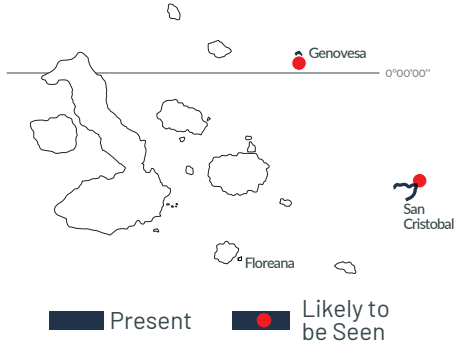




RED-FOOTED BOOBY

(Sula sula)

The **most numerous booby in the Galapagos,** yet one of the least frequently seen, the Red-footed Booby spends much of its life soaring above the open ocean. Its remarkable flying skills allow it to catch flying fish with ease. Breeding colonies are concentrated on **Genovesa and San Cristobal islands,** making sightings a highlight of select itineraries that venture into the archipelago's more remote regions.

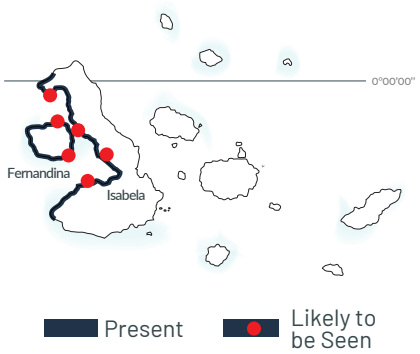


FLIGHTLESS CORMORANT

(Phalacrocorax harrisi)

Found only on Fernandina and western Isabela, the Flightless Cormorant is one of the **world's rarest and most unusual seabirds.** Having evolved without natural predators, it lost the ability to fly and became an exceptional underwater hunter. Equally **fascinating are its breeding behaviors,** where females often leave to find new mates while males take on the responsibility of raising the young.



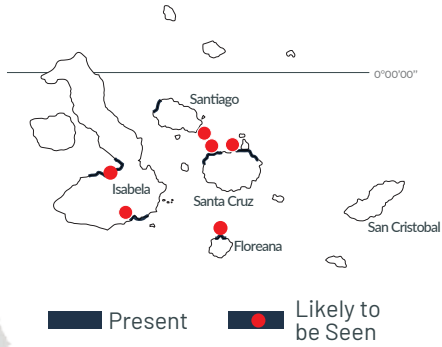


AMERICAN FLAMINGO

(Phoenicopterus ruber)

The American Flamingo brings a vibrant splash of color to the Galapagos lagoons. Its famous **pink plumage comes from a carotenoid-rich diet of shrimp** and other crustaceans. Standing up to 145 cm (57 in) tall, it is one of the archipelago's most elegant birds. Though relatively rare, small breeding colonies can be found in several coastal wetlands throughout the islands.





Present

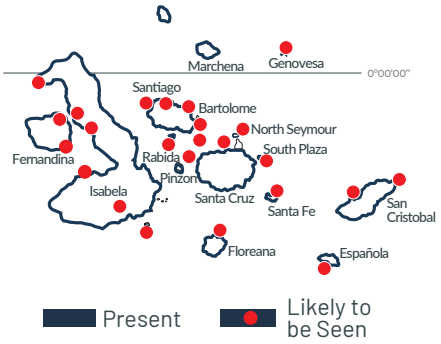
Likely to be Seen

FRIGATEBIRDS: GREAT AND MAGNIFICENT

(Fregata minor) &
(Fregata magnificens)

The Galapagos is one of the best places in the world to observe both the **Magnificent Frigatebird** and the **Great Frigatebird.** Famous for the males' inflatable red throat pouches during courtship, these masters of the sky spend much of their lives airborne. Agile and opportunistic, they often catch prey in flight and occasionally steal food from other seabirds, earning them the nickname "pirates birds."



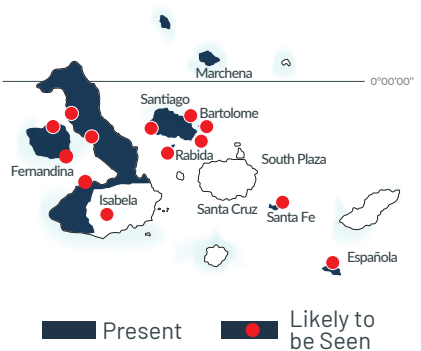




GALAPAGOS HAWK

(Buteo galapagoensis)

As the archipelago's top predator, the Galapagos Hawk **has no natural enemies, but sadly classified as vulnerable by the IUCN** (International Union for Conservation of Nature). Endemic to the islands, this powerful raptor hunts reptiles, insects, and small animals across a variety of habitats. Although found on several islands, it remains **relatively rare**. Its presence reflects one of the most extraordinary examples of isolation-driven evolution found anywhere in the world.

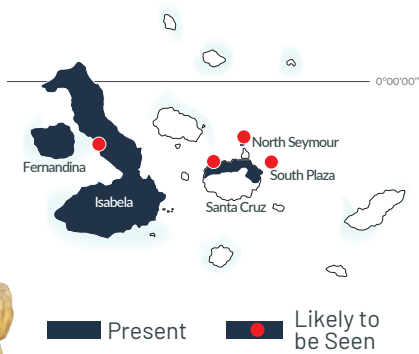


LAND IGUANA

(Conolophus subcristatus)

The Galapagos Land Iguana is **one of the largest reptiles in the archipelago,** weighing up to 13 kg (30 lbs). Primarily feeding on cactus pads, fruits, and other vegetation, it has adapted perfectly to the islands' arid environments. During the breeding season, males display **vivid yellow and brown colors** while competing fiercely for territory, creating one of the Galapagos' most impressive wildlife spectacles.



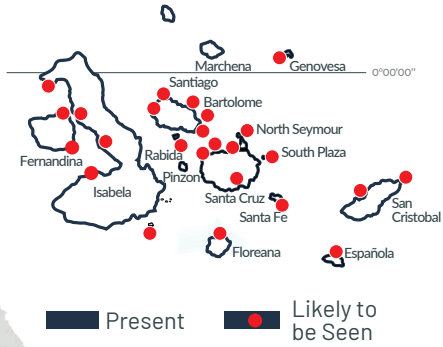


MARINE IGUANA

(Amblyrhynchus cristatus)

Found nowhere else on Earth, the Marine Iguana is the **world's only sea-going lizard.** Descended from land iguanas, it evolved the ability to feed on marine algae and survive in the harsh coastal environment. Its most famous adaptation is the salt gland that allows it to **expel excess salt through a characteristic sneeze.** Their appearance varies dramatically from island to island, making each encounter unique.

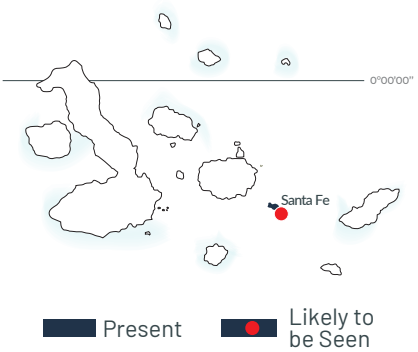




SANTA FE LAND IGUANA

(Conolophus pallidus)

Found exclusively on **Santa Fe Island**, the Santa Fe Land Iguana is one of the **Galapagos' most unique endemic reptiles**. Perfectly camouflaged within its arid surroundings, it can be more challenging to spot than its relatives. Feeding primarily on prickly-pear cactus, it also consumes flowers, insects, and occasionally carrion. Reaching up to 11 kg (25 lbs), this remarkable species **can only be observed on itineraries that visit their home Island.**



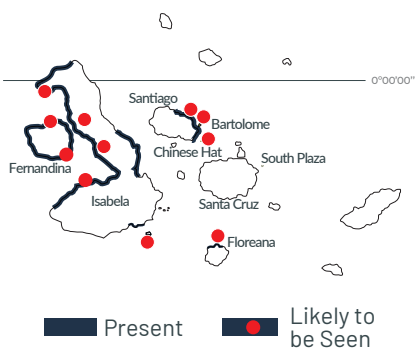




GALAPAGOS PENGUIN

(Spheniscus mendiculus)

The Galapagos Penguin is the **only penguin species found on the equator** and the **rarest of the world's 18 penguin species.** Small in size but highly adaptable, it thrives thanks to the nutrient-rich waters surrounding the archipelago. Unlike most penguins, it has **no fixed breeding season** and can reproduce multiple times a year when food is abundant. These charismatic birds are among the Galapagos' most extraordinary wildlife encounters.

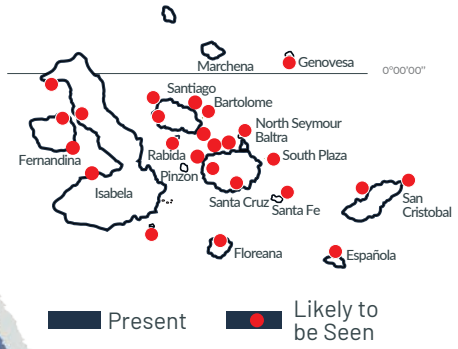


GALAPAGOS SEA LION

(Zalophus wollebaeckii)

Playful, curious, and full of personality, the Galapagos Sea Lion **is one of the archipelago's most beloved residents.** Despite living on the equator, this endemic species thrives in the productive waters surrounding the islands. Found throughout the Galapagos, particularly in the central islands, **sea lions often rest on beaches, docks, and rocky shores,** creating unforgettable encounters for visitors. They are currently classified as endangered.

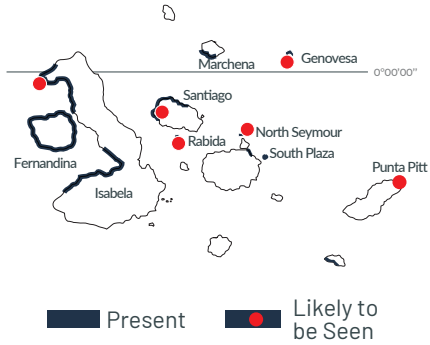




GALAPAGOS FUR SEAL

(Arctocephalus galapagoensis)

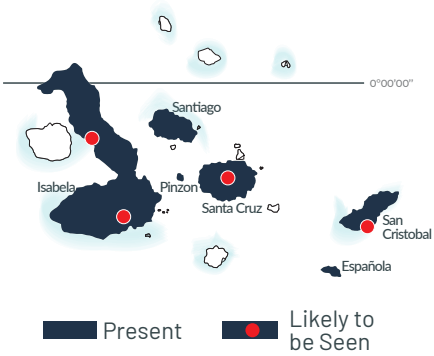
The Galapagos Fur Seal is the **smallest seal species in the world** and one of the archipelago's most elusive marine mammals. **With large eyes and dense fur adapted for cooler waters,** it is most **commonly found along Fernandina and western Isabela.**





GALAPAGOS GIANT TORTOISE

(Chelonoidis nigra)

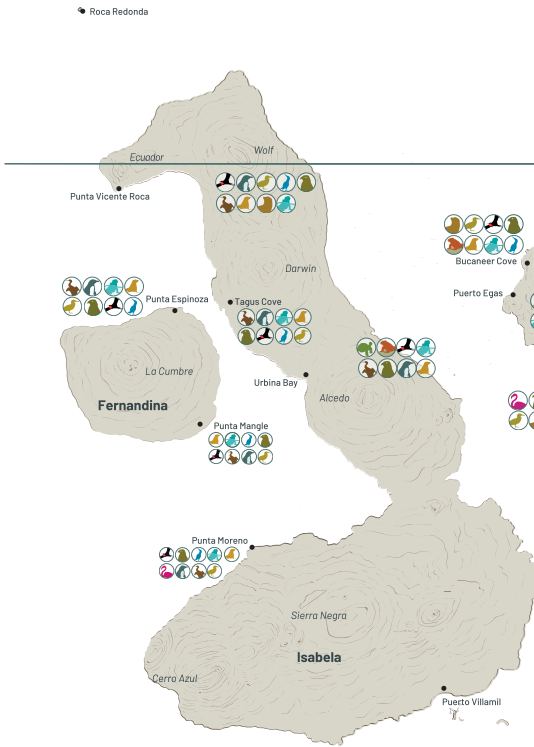


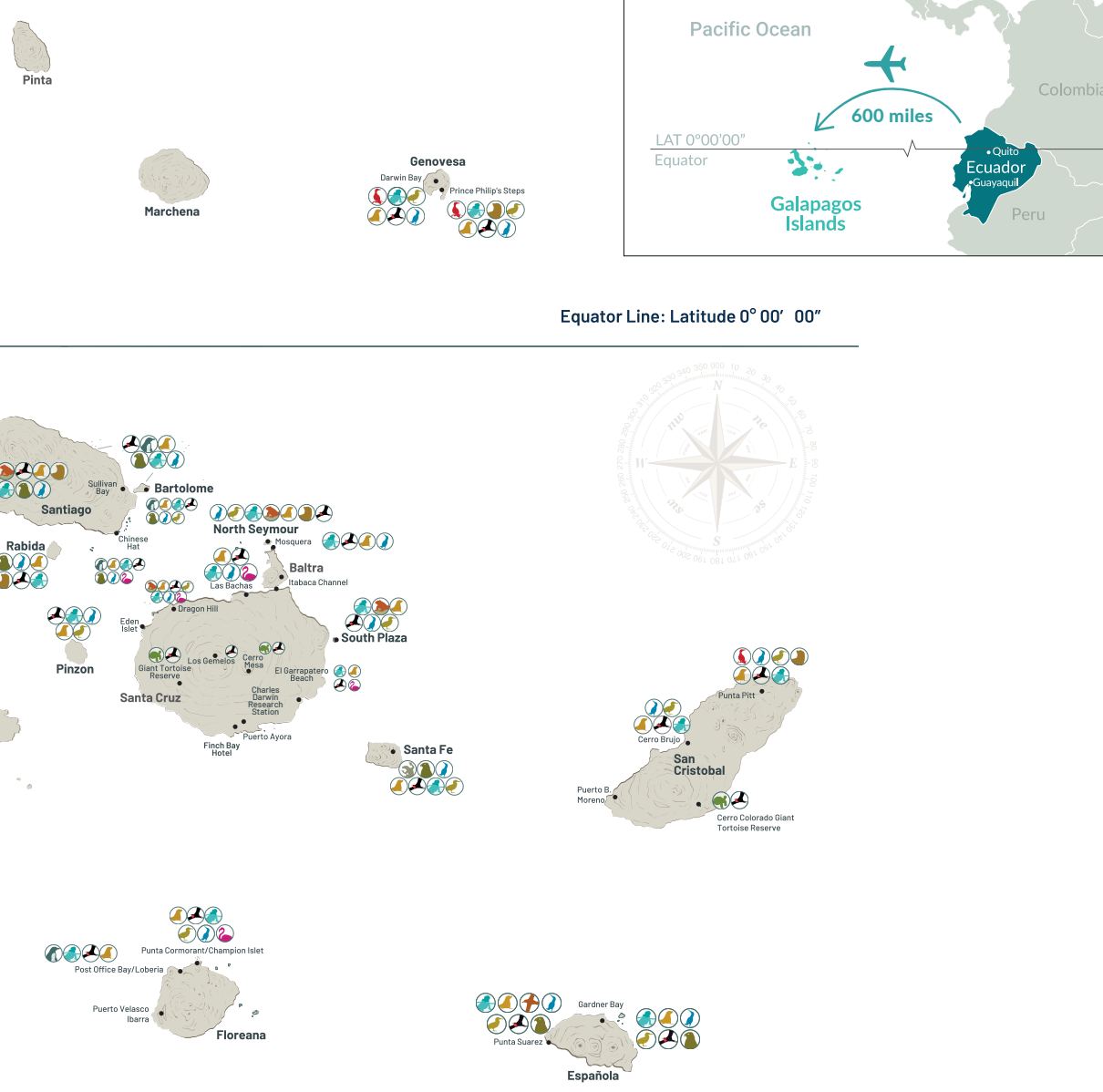
The Galapagos Giant Tortoise **is the largest tortoise on Earth and the living symbol of the islands.** Weighing up to 250 kg (550 lbs) and often living well beyond 100 years, these gentle giants have shaped the archipelago's ecosystems for centuries. **Their shells vary between islands, reflecting remarkable evolutionary adaptations.** Slow-moving yet iconic, t**hey represent one of the most extraordinary conservation success stories in the natural world.**



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- Galapagos Albatross
- Blue-footed Booby
- Nazca Booby
- Red-footed Booby
- Flightless Cormorant
- American Flamingo
- Frigatebirds: Great and Magnificent
- Galapagos Hawk
- Land Iguana
- Marine Iguana
- Santa Fe Iguana
- Galapagos Penguin
- Galapagos Sea Lion
- Galapagos Fur Seal
- Galapagos Giant Tortoise




Pinta
Marchena
Genovesa
Darwin Bay
Prince Philip's Steps
Pacific Ocean
600 miles
LAT 0°00'00"
Equator
Galapagos Islands
Colombia
Quito
Ecuador
Guayaquil
Peru
Equator Line: Latitude 0° 00′ 00″
Santiago
Sullivan Bay
Bartolome
Chinese Hat
North Seymour
Mosquera
Rabida
Las Bachas
Baltra
Itabaca Channel
Dragon Hill
Eden Islet
South Plaza
Pinzon
Los Gemelos
Cerro Mesa
El Garrapatero Beach
Giant Tortoise Reserve
Santa Cruz
Charles Darwin Research Station
Puerto Ayora
Finch Bay Hotel
Santa Fe
Punta Pitt
Cerro Brujo
San Cristobal
Puerto B. Moreno
Cerro Colorado Giant Tortoise Reserve
Punta Cormorant/Champion Islet
Post Office Bay/Loberia
Puerto Velasco Ibarra
Floreana
Gardner Bay
Punta Suarez
Española

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