

PREPARING FOR THE GALÁPAGOS

A practical guide from Cometa Travel

We have prepared this guide with great care and based it on real travel experience, though information may change over time and cannot be guaranteed or considered legally binding.

CONTENT:

1. Galápagos Essentials	1
2. Packing for the Galápagos	3
3. Galápagos – FAQs	5
4. A Few Final Notes	6

1. Galápagos Essentials

Documents & Entry Requirements

Before traveling to the Galápagos Islands, please make sure you have the following ready:

- ✓ Passport
- ✓ USD 200* in cash for the National Park entrance fee, if not prepaid with your cruise
- ✓ TCT card for USD 20* pre-purchased and printed
- ✓ Return flight e-ticket, either printed or saved on your phone
- ✓ Galápagos Biosafety Sworn Declaration QR code, printed or saved on your mobile. This must be completed 72 - 48 hours before your flight at <https://siabg.abgalapagos.gob.ec/declaraciones/nueva>. Make sure the entry date is correct.
- ✓ Booking vouchers and confirmations, either printed or digital.
- ✓ Cash for airport bus, taxi, and more if you're not on an organized cruise.
- ★ Travel insurance documents. Insurance is not mandatory, but strongly recommended; some cruise companies require mandatory insurance.
- ! Please arrive at the airport at least 2 ½ hours before departure.

**Prices are subject to change at any time without prior notice.*

Safety Arrival Time In Ecuador Before Your Galápagos Flight

We recommend arriving in Ecuador at least **two nights** before your flight to the Galápagos. This gives you enough time in case of any unexpected delays or misconnections, and a more relaxed start to your trip.

Galápagos Entrance Fee & Travel Procedures

Traveling to the Galápagos involves a few entry procedures designed to protect the National Park and its unique ecosystem. Understanding these requirements before your trip will help make your arrival smooth and stress-free while supporting sustainable tourism in the islands.

If you book a cruise in advance, the Galápagos National Park entrance fee and the Transit Control Card can usually be prepaid as part of your reservation, making the travel experience even easier.

○ Galápagos National Park Entrance Fee

All visitors to the Galápagos Islands are required to pay the Galápagos National Park entrance fee. The current values to pay in cash when arriving in the Galápagos (if not prepaid with the cruise package) are:

- ★ USD 200* for adults // USD 100* for children under 12 years old.

○ Transit Control Card (TCT)

Transit Control Card (TCT) is a mandatory visitor transit permit required for all travelers entering the Galápagos Islands. The fee is USD 20* per person and must be paid in cash only.

If it is not included in your cruise package, you will need to register and purchase the card at the Consejo de Gobierno de Galápagos airport counter before boarding your domestic flight to the Galápagos.

○ Biosafety Declaration and Quarantine Screening

To protect the Galápagos' fragile ecosystem, all travelers must complete the online biosafety registration. Declare that you are not carrying prohibited items, such as seeds, plants, or animal products, by completing the mandatory online

form 72- 48 hours before your flight through the [ABG Biosafety Declaration Form](#). Please make sure to enter the correct arrival date for the Galápagos.

- ! All luggage must be screened by the ABG - Galápagos Biosecurity and Quarantine Control Agency before check-in for domestic flights to the islands. These measures help prevent invasive species and pests from entering the Galápagos and damaging its unique environment.

Money in the Galápagos

- s **The official currency in Ecuador and the Galápagos Islands is the US dollar.**
- s You will need USD 200* in cash for the National Park entrance fee, as well as cash for onboard expenses such as drinks, wetsuit rental, and tips for the crew and guide.
- s Many souvenir shops in Puerto Ayora and at the airport accept credit cards. Cabins and hotel rooms are usually equipped with small safety boxes for cash and valuables.
- s **ATMs** are available in a few inhabited areas, but they are limited, so carrying enough cash is important. Cabins usually have small lockers for storing money and valuables.
- s On smaller boats, credit cards are generally not accepted, but card payments are usually available only on higher-category vessels. Card fees or surcharges may apply.

Connectivity in the Galápagos

- Because of how remote the islands are, you should expect little to no reliable mobile signal or internet while you are on a cruise.
- Most of the larger, newer ships do offer Starlink satellite internet; however, it is not always stable. It can be slow, cut out, or get overloaded when many people are using it at the same time.
- The easiest and most relaxing approach is to plan for a bit of a digital break.
- ! Let your family and friends know in advance that you may be offline for a few days so they don't worry or become concerned if they eventually can't reach you.

In the water

- If you already have your own snorkel mask, feel free to bring it. A well-fitted mask makes a difference. Otherwise, most ships provide masks, snorkels, and fins, either included or available to rent.
- Water temperature changes through the year. During some months, the water feels pleasantly warm, while others can be quite chilly, especially once you are in for a longer activity.
 - Cool Season (June to November): Water temperature between 20°C and 24°C (68°F to 75°F)
 - Rainy Season (December to May): Water temperature typically ranging from 23°C to 28°C (73°F to 82°F)
- Wetsuits are usually available on board, either included or for a small rental fee.
- A light long-sleeved shirt is also very useful; ideally with UV protection.

Baggage on flights to the Galápagos

- For flights booked through us, the standard allowance is usually one checked piece up to 23 kg, one carry-on piece between 8 and 10 kg, plus a small purse, backpack, or laptop bag.
- If you book your own flights separately, the allowance depends on the airline and fare type, so please check accurately.
- ! When traveling from mainland Ecuador to the Galápagos Islands, all luggage is inspected by quarantine staff from the Galápagos Biosecurity Agency. These inspections help protect the islands' fragile ecosystem and unique wildlife from outside pests, plants, and contaminants.
- It's also worth keeping in mind that inter-island flights inside the Galápagos have stricter limits, especially on weight and sometimes even on bag size. If you're connecting between islands, it helps to pack light and stay within limits to avoid extra fees or delays.

Sports and Adventure activities in the Galápagos

For activities like diving, day tours, snorkeling, biking, or horseback riding, we recommend choosing reputable, licensed local operators. This helps ensure a safe and enjoyable experience throughout your adventures.

Tipping in Galápagos

Gratuities are always optional and completely at your discretion. That said, in the Galápagos, tipping at the end of a cruise is part of the local travel culture and is generally expected.

At the end of the trip, you'll usually find envelopes prepared for both the guide and the crew, and you leave your tips there in one go.

As a rough guide on mid-range yachts:

- For Galápagos National Park guides, people usually give about USD 15 to 20 per person per day. If the guide goes above and beyond, it's totally normal to tip more, especially on higher-end boats.

- For the crew on a mid-range yacht or ship, the usual range is about USD 25 to 30 per guest per day. This is pooled and shared among the whole team of at least 8 to 10 crew members.

If service has been exceptional, it's absolutely fine to be more generous.

Insurance for the Galápagos

! The same recommendation applies in the Galápagos. Because of the islands' remote location, comprehensive travel insurance including medical evacuation coverage is particularly important.

2. Packing for the Galápagos

Shopping options on the islands are limited, so a bit of preparation goes a long way for a smooth trip. Don't worry, the checklist below will help you pack with confidence, and you can also download it as a free printable PDF.

If you plan to visit Quito, the Andes, or the Amazon as well, make sure to pack clothing for different climates since conditions can vary quite a bit between regions.

- Warm season (Dec-May): Warmer water (22-28°C/72 to 82°F), calmer seas, occasional rain
- Cool season (Jun-Nov): Cooler water (18-22°C/64 to 72°F), windier, more overcast (Humboldt current).

Luggage:

Best kept practical and lightweight!

- Suitcase, duffel bag, or backpack
- Daypack, preferably light, comfortable, and waterproof
- Drybag for phone and camera
- Smart organizers: packing cubes for easy sorting and quick access, and/or vacuum travel bags
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Clothing:

Lightweight, breathable, and quick-drying clothing

- Comfortable pants, shorts (ideally with side pockets), summer dress
- T-shirts, lightweight and quick-dry blouses or shirts, tops
- A light sweater, hoodie, or fleece (especially for the dry, cool season (May/June to December). On Galápagos boats, mornings start cool and windy; keep your light jacket or fleece handy for early excursions
- Lightweight windbreaker/waterproof jacket and/or
- Light rain cape/poncho; ideal, lighter if it is too warm for a rain jacket, and protects the backpack and camera bag at the same time (especially for the warm and wet season from January-May)
- Lightweight pajama
- Sufficient underwear and socks
- Swimsuits (at least 2)
- Optional/recommended for higher category cruise: a smart casual shirt, blouse, or summer dress for evening dinners
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- ★ Long-sleeved swim shirt (rash guard) for additional sun protection or to use under wetsuits

Footwear:

- Light trekking or hiking boots with good traction
- Some people prefer trainers or sneakers, and these can be a good option if you are comfortable walking on uneven terrain in them. However, don't bring your best pair; they will suffer in the lava.
- For beach outings or many of the trails: trekking sandals (e.g., Teva, Keen, Merrell, etc.)
- On board/house shoes: lightweight, non-slip slippers or flip-flops (shoes used on islands have to stay outside)
- Optional: flip-flops for the beach (not recommended for excursions)
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Toiletries:

- Toiletry bag, preferably water-resistant and ideally suitable for hanging

- Shampoo, soap, conditioner (solid versions are ideal as they do not leak). Most yachts provide it as bathroom amenities, deodorant
- Toothbrush, toothpaste, dental floss
- Cotton swabs, nail care set, tweezers
- For men: razor
- Hairbrush, comb, hair ties/clips
- Makeup (small quantities, only the essentials). Tip: compressed disposable wipes for makeup removal
- Facial hydration cream
- For women: sufficient menstrual hygiene products. Changes in altitude and climate can affect your cycle
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- ★ Not necessary: Shower and bath towels; provided in most bathrooms. Same for hair dryer
- ★ Tip: Pack a small microfiber towel

Sun protection:

UV radiation is extremely high, even on overcast days!

- Sunglasses with UV protection and a strap
- Head covering (!): a wide-brimmed hat or cap to protect your face from the intense equatorial sun, with ties or a chin strap so it fits securely and stays in place during the strong breezes while traveling from your yacht to the islands by panga boat.
- Sunscreen and lip balm (!) with a high sun protection factor, after-sun care, lotion for sunburn relief
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- ★ A lightweight, long-sleeved shirt, ideally with UV protection, provides additional sun protection when snorkeling.
- ★ Especially for January-April when it's hot and humid: Loose-fitting long-sleeved lightweight sun rash SPF 50, cotton or linen button shirts. They keep your shoulders and arms covered while still letting air flow through, so you feel cleaner and more comfortable instead of using sunscreen and bug spray that does not hold when you sweat.

Medical kit:

- An adequate supply of any daily medication you take
- Copy of prescription
- Pain relievers (paracetamol/acetaminophen, ibuprofen if appropriate)
- Diarrhea & constipation treatment
- Motion sickness medication
- Antihistamines
- Standby antibiotic: If recommended by your physician, a standby antibiotic for severe bacterial infections, such as gastrointestinal infections, respiratory infections, or urinary tract infections, particularly when traveling to remote areas where medical care may not be readily available.
- Oral Rehydration Salts (ORS) and Electrolyte tablets or powder (for Quito and the Andes, hiking, Galápagos snorkeling days. Many travelers underestimate dehydration.
- Eye drops
- Disinfectant
- Plasters, Steri-Strips for cuts and wounds, which can often take the place of stitches
- Blister plasters (e.g., Compeed); these are extremely useful for hiking
- Small elastic bandage; helpful for minor sprains, ankle support, knee support. Especially relevant for active travelers.
- Tweezers
- Thermometer
- Disposable face masks
- Altitude sickness medication for trekking or mountain activity
- Insect bite treatment
- Sunburn cream

Condoms or other contraceptives. Keep in mind that vomiting or diarrhea can reduce the effectiveness of the contraceptive pill, so consider carrying a backup method if needed)

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Photography:

- Camera or camera phone with waterproof protection
- Optional: GoPro camera: underwater action in the Galápagos is really special
- Plenty of memory cards and spare batteries (you will almost certainly take far more photos than you expect).
- Chargers and electricity adapters (110 V, US flat plugs)
- Lens cleaning products
- Optional: underwater camera/GoPro, a recommended extra for snorkelers and divers
- Optional: binoculars
- Drones: prohibited in the Galápagos and in national parks on the mainland
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- ! Flash photography is strictly prohibited on the islands.
- ! Please maintain the required minimum distances of 2 meters (6.5 feet) from the wildlife at all times.
- ! A special permit from the National Park authorities is required for commercial photography.

Miscellaneous:

- Writing materials, your journal, reading material, etc.; always keep one pen in your hand or daypack
- Dry bags, larger and smaller plastic or fabric bags for small items, wet or dirty laundry, etc.
- Optional: sweets or small souvenirs from your home country
- Good flashlight, or even better, a headlamp, with spare batteries
- Hand sanitizer and wipes, paper tissues
- A small bag or piece of detergent (also to buy inexpensively locally); some laundry washing can help pack lighter
- Refillable water bottle
- Glasses or contact lenses, spare glasses or lenses, cleaning products
- Optional: Headphones (for music and optionally noise-canceling)
- Optional: Foldable walking sticks
- Optional: Sarong/Pareo (light, to use on the beach)
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- ★ Tip: multifunctional neck gaiter (Buff) is very useful as a scarf, hat, headband, face covering, etc.
- ! Disposable mask(s): always keep at least one in your carry-on or hand luggage. We recommend always using a mask in situations of poor air quality on flights, or when coughing or flu-like symptoms are present (whether your own or within the group).

What you normally do NOT need to bring if you have booked cruises or tours:

- × Wetsuit and snorkel equipment (except if you prefer your own)
- × Shower and bath towels, hair dryer
- × Jewelry and other urban life valuables

3. Galápagos – FAQs

(*) Subject to change at any time without prior notification

- Does sunscreen need to be reef-safe? Not mandatory, but ocean-friendly is recommended.
- Do I need to pay the National Park fee in cash? YES, USD 200, ideally in cash if you have not prepaid with the cruise package.
- Are credit card payments possible on cruises? Yes, on most larger or upper category cruise ships.
- May I bring my own alcohol on board? Generally allowed. Corkage fees from USD 10 to 25 and more per bottle (*).
- Are drones allowed? **No**, neither in the Galápagos National Park nor in nature reserves and national parks in Ecuador.
- Are there luggage limits on board? None, but regulations apply to flights.
- Is there electricity on board: Yes, 24/7, 110 V, US sockets in all cabins, and mostly also USB sockets.

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- What do wet landings mean? Usually, only your feet get wet; don't forget waterproof bags for electronics.
 - **Food restrictions and allergies:** Are vegetarian, gluten-free, or other dietary requirements/allergies possible on board? Yes, it's possible (except kosher for most of the yachts). **You must fill out the booking form.**
 - Are there prohibited items I may not bring to the Galápagos? **Yes**, to protect the fragile Galápagos ecosystem, the [list of restricted and prohibited items is long](#), but here's a summary for tourists (*):
 - × Fresh fruits, vegetables, plants, seeds, or organic material that may contain insects or microorganisms
 - × Live animals or animal products (meat, dairy, eggs), coffee
 - × Non-native species or biological materials
 - × Single-use plastics (straws, styrofoam, etc.)
 - × Drones (unless authorized by the Galápagos National Park)
 - ★ Chocolate, processed and packaged snacks, and cookies **are allowed**.
 - ! All luggage is inspected by the Biosecurity Agency (SICGAL) before every Galápagos flight to prevent illegal trade and ensure quarantine control.

4. A Few Final Notes

Hospitality forward:

- ♥ We kindly ask you to take care when using sunscreen, after-sun products, hair dye, insect repellent, and other toiletries containing pigments, waxes, or oils, as these may permanently stain fabrics and are tough to wash out, as well as facial products with benzoyl peroxide (for acne), which can bleach textiles.
- ♥ Snorkeling equipment, fins, and wetsuits, as well as all other items borrowed during your experience, are provided for your comfort and should be handled with care and respect.

We hope this guide helps you feel prepared and excited for your journey. Ecuador and the Galápagos have a way of surprising even the most experienced travelers, and we are delighted to be part of your adventure.

The Cometa Travel Team