

Sailing Solo in The Enchanted Islands

Cruising in the Galapagos Islands can be fun on your own

BY JANEEN CHRISTOFF

WHILE HEADING TO THE AIRPORT, I felt a little nervous about going on Lindblad's cruise in the Galapagos Islands by myself. It wasn't traveling alone that bothered me — it was the fear of being the only person on the ship without a companion. When traveling on land and staying in hotels, there are abundant opportunities to meet new people. Though the scenery changes on a cruise, the people stay the same, and I didn't know any of them. Adding to my concern was the fact that the National Geographic Endeavour is an expedition ship that holds fewer than 100 passengers. What if I was the only one on my own?

Fortunately, Lindblad dedicates a section of their website to people traveling solo. It indicated that many people travel alone, that there are cabins for singles and that dining is set up to facilitate socializing. On some cruises, the line even has a program that helps solo travelers find roommates. Although I was apprehensive at the start, by the end of the cruise it was hard to choose who I wanted to sit with at dinner and it was easy to find a snorkeling buddy. I befriended the other solo travelers and even ran into someone I knew onboard. To put it simply, I had a blast.

Lindblad not only offers an excellent itinerary, it puts a lot of effort into fostering a sense of community onboard. Together, we learned about the incredible creatures that populate these unique islands, celebrated the crossing of the equator, attended lectures in order to learn professional photography techniques and braved the cold waters of the Pacific (in wetsuits, of course) to swim with sea turtles, sharks, sea lions and penguins.

Lindblad's Endeavour is one of the largest ships in the Galapagos, and its expeditions are unmatched by other vessels. The line uses Zodiacs to transport passengers to each destination, so even the most remote beaches are accessible.

During our cruise, the seas were relatively calm and everyone was able to get in and out of the Zodiacs easily. There was even a 95-year-old woman onboard who got on and off the ship with relative ease. However, it is essential that your clients are mobile because this cruise is full of activities, including walking, kayaking and snorkeling. The cruise is not ideal for small children either. To really appreciate the trip, kids should be at least 8 years old.

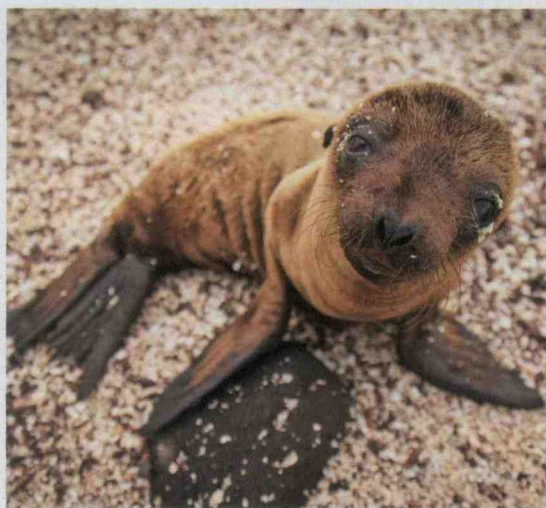
On the Itinerary

The 10-day journey onboard the Endeavour begins and ends in Guayaquil, Ecuador. The port town is easily accessible from the U.S., and flights to the Galapagos Islands leave daily. Guests are picked up from the airport and taken to the Hilton Colon — which is only a 10-minute drive away — for an overnight stay. They depart for the Galapagos

The Galapagos Islands are a haven for diverse wildlife. Bottom: Sea lions are common on the islands.



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Islands the next morning. Expedition itineraries on the islands vary from trip to trip, depending on permission granted by the Galapagos National Park. Clients will fly into San Cristobal or Baltra and visit many of the other islands, including Fernandina, Santa Cruz, Floreana, Espanola, Pinta, North Seymour and more.

Regardless of which islands you visit on this trip, up-close wildlife experiences are guaranteed. The island's fauna include blue-footed boobies and the ever-present and always camouflaged marine iguana. Sea lions are everywhere — I even sat next to one on a park bench. The water is teeming

with sea turtles and, if you're brave, you can most likely get within arms' reach of a shark. Nature is, quite literally, everywhere.

After daily hikes through the islands, panoramic ocean views and memorable interactions with endemic wildlife, it's a bit of a culture shock to be reacquainted with city life when you finally arrive in the small town of Puerto Ayora. The realization that such isolated, wild places still exist in our bustling, chaotic world was refreshing, and discovering it on my own made it that much more rewarding. ■

THE DETAILS: [Lindblad Expeditions](http://LindbladExpeditions.com) (www.expeditions.com)

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