

81 GALAPAGOS ISLANDS

81A Blue footed boobie

81B Giant Galapagos tortoise

81C Land iguana

81D View of James Island

81E Flamingos through the leaves

81F Baby heron

81G Pelican

81H Sea lion

81I Sea gulls on Plaza Island

81J Flightless cormorent (through evolution they have lost their ability to fly)

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Originally named Galápagos by the Spaniards for the huge turtles (galápagos) they found there, these islands were later called Las Islas Encantadas (the Bewitched Islands) by a Spanish sea captain, because his ship was caught in the churning sea produced by the meeting of the Humboldt and El Niño Currents; to the perplexed sailors, the islands themselves seemed to be moving, hence "bewitched" or "enchanted." They were officially named the Colón (Colombus) Archipelago by the Republic of Ecuador, which established its claim to the islands in 1832.

Situated in the Pacific Ocean about 500 miles west of the Ecuadorean mainland and 850 miles south of the Panama Canal, the group consists of 13 principal islands and some 47 smaller ones, with a total area of more than 3,000 square miles of land. Called "five and twenty heaps of cinders" by the novelist Herman Melville because of their volcanic origin, the islands are bleak, barren, and rocky.

Of the many scientific expeditions which have explored this "lost world" of flora and fauna, the most historic was that of the Beagle, carrying aboard the young Charles Darwin a ship's naturalist, in 1835. Darwin's epochal theory of natural selection, set forth in *The Origin of the Species*, grew out of his observations and discoveries in the Galápagos archipelago.

In his journal of the voyage Darwin pointed out the unique nature of the islands: "The natural history of these islands is eminently curious. . . Most of the organic productions are aboriginal creations, found nowhere else; there is even a difference between the inhabitants of the different islands; yet all show a marked relationship with those of America, though separated from that continent by an open space of ocean, between 500 and 600 miles in width. . . Seeing every height crowned with its crater, and the boundaries of most of the lava-streams still distinct, we are led to believe that within a period, geologically recent, the unbroken ocean was here spread out. Hence, both in space and time, we seem to be brought somewhat near to that fact--that mystery of mysteries--the first appearance of new beings on this earth."

Most intriguing of all to scientists and visitors alike are the islands' giant tortoises, some weighing up to 400 pounds and living to the ripe old age of two to three centuries; the land and marine iguanas, and giant lizards out of the prehistoric past. In order to protect the rare flora and fauna of the archipelago from complete extinction, the Government of Ecuador has reserved the islands for a projected national park. Additional conservation measures, approved by the International Zoological Congress in 1957, include the proposal to designate a dozen or more islands as inviolate wildlife sanctuaries and the establishment of a biological research institute to be known as the Darwin Memorial Station. Thus there is hope that Darwin's living laboratory of evolution will not be allowed to perish.

Various attempts at colonization of the islands have not proved very successful and fewer than a thousand persons inhabit them today. The pleasant climate, unusual marine and animal life, and excellent deep-sea fishing all promise to make the Galápagos an important attraction for visitors upon completion of plans for tourist accommodations.