

Blue-footed booby birds are seen daily over the anchorage

Isabela, Galapagos



Want a prime position for viewing wildlife? Tom

Partridge thinks you can't beat this anchorage

The Galapagos Islands is a destination many people place high on their 'bucket list' and for yachts crossing the Pacific Ocean it is a logical stop-off point en route to French Polynesia. Unique wildlife abounds in the water and on land friendly locals and a relaxed atmosphere make it a place where all too often yachts find more and more excuses to delay their crossing.

On the downside, entry requirements for the Galapagos are strict and costs to visit can be prohibitively expensive. Yachts have a choice of a 20-day one-port stop or obtaining an autographo, which allows you to stay from 30 to 60 days with access to up to five inhabited ports. The cost of an autographo for two of us on our 46ft Hylas, Adina, came to just over US\$1,000. Many cruisers have willing family and friends who fly in to help share the costs, as indeed we did.

Added to that are the strict quarantine regulations. Around eight officials will board your yacht and inspect her thoroughly to ensure you are not bringing in any products that could



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cause harm to this fragile ecosystem.

The island of Isabela is a cruisers' favourite with its large variety of wildlife and stark, barren landscape. Shelter from the open ocean and swell is provided by a few small, low-lying islands to the south

of the anchorage, which is just over half a mile from the town of Puerto Villamil. These islands and the surrounding shallows should be given a wide berth on approach. A recommended track of 209°T brings you into the bay and facing the town before bearing east to enter between a green No 1 buoy and a yellow No 3 buoy. The anchorage is not hard to spot with other anchored yachts and the large Galapagos tour boats – anchor well clear of these and consider your swinging space.

Sealions will swim past your yacht and snorkelling with these playful creatures will be a lifetime highlight. A few somersaults are always appreciated! Pelicans find yachts great vantage places to perch and eye out fish for which they dive, often chased by penguins seeking out scraps. The famous blue-footed booby birds with their distinctive blue webbed feet can easily be spotted passing time on the rocks. For children this is an open classroom and there can be no better place to learn about nature and wildlife – stock up in advance on reading material. Day trips include local sightseeing boats to see Los Tuneles, an underwater landscape of lava tubes, or scuba diving to see the likes of graceful manta rays, Galapagos sharks and hammerheads. Another highlight is a day trip to Mount Moreno volcano, as close to walking on Mars as you will ever get. The simple, laid-back town offers a good selection of restaurants and some fresh produce but you should arrive well-provisioned as supplies are limited. ⚓