



G A L Á P A G O S

BIG 15

BY METROPOLITAN TOURING





THE BIG 15

It's quite simple: The more iconic species you see on the Galápagos Islands, the more rewarding and memorable your experience will be!

When it comes to wild animal observation, no place on Earth compares to the Galápagos. Lumbering giant tortoises and curious sea lion pups amid the alien landscapes let you feel what it was like before humans emerged on the planet. But because of the vastness of the archipelago, deciding where to go and what to observe can be quite a challenge. To enable guests to experience the best balance of Galápagos wildlife, Metropolitan Touring sought consensus among scholars, our Naturalist Guides, and island connoisseurs to choose the archipelago's most unique and fascinating animals. Their analysis resulted in our list of the BIG15 that reveals the most iconic Galápagos species.



1. Galápagos Albatross

Island Exclusive Species: found only on Española Island.

The Galápagos or waved albatross (*Phoebastria irrorata*) is the only tropical albatross, and the largest bird in the Galápagos, with a wingspan of up to 250 centimetres (8.2 feet). Albatrosses have a spectacular mating ritual of bill fencing and beak circling and clacking. They can only be seen between April and December.



2. Blue-footed Booby

Thanks to their expressive mating dance, blue-footed boobies (*Sula nebouxi*) are among visitors' favourite animals. During the dance, males display their amazing blue feet in up-and-down movements to attract females. The more turquoise they are, the more successful they will be with the ladies. Their biggest breeding colonies are on Española and North Seymour, but foraging birds are seen in all islands.



3. Nazca Booby

The Nazca booby (*Sula granti*) is easily distinguishable from the other Galápagos booby species thanks to its snow-white plumage, offset with black wing and tail feathers and feet. The main colonies are in Genovesa, Española, and Floreana. Non breeding birds are seen on cliffs along most islands.



4. Red-footed Booby

Limited Distribution Species.

The booby with the largest population, the red-footed booby (*Sula sula*) is, ironically, the most rarely seen Galápagos booby because it feeds on the outskirts of the archipelago's waters, leading them to nest on outlying isles like Genovesa and San Cristóbal, although they may be seen elsewhere. Its beak is light blue, turning to pink around the mouth, and its feet are characteristically red, while its plumage varies from white to brown.



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5. Flightless Cormorant

Limited Distribution Species: Found only on Fernandina and the west coast of Isabela. The flightless or Galápagos cormorant (*Phalacrocorax harrisi*) is the world's biggest and heaviest cormorant. It is also the only one that has lost its ability to fly. This has required particular adaptations: Uniquely, Galápagos cormorants have solid bones and no oil at all to spread along feathers that now look more like fur.



6. American Flamingo

A very small population of American Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus ruber*) are permanent residents of Galapagos, spread among a few islands that have suitable conditions for the main food of these birds, mainly brine shrimp. Flamingos have spectacular breeding rituals, and extraordinary adaptations to survive in extreme harsh conditions. They can stand up to 145 centimetres (57 inches) tall.



7. Frigatebirds: Great and Magnificent

Unusually, two different species of frigatebird coexist practically side-by-side on the Galápagos: the great (*Fregata minor*), and the magnificent (*Fregata magnificens*), the largest species of frigatebird. This marine birds exceeds in flying skills, allowing them to steal food from other species.



8. Galápagos Hawk

The Galápagos hawk (*Buteo galapagoensis*), the largest endemic bird of prey and the top of the terrestrial food chain. They can be seen on several islands including Santa Fe, Española, Santiago, and Isabela, while they are absent in all areas with human population and on Genovesa probably because of an absence of their key food, the lava lizards.



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