

Red Mangrove Lodges, Galapagos

Willamette International Travel • Trip Report

By Nancy Fowler

Red Mangrove (RM) Lodges in the Galapagos are on 3 islands, offer 3 styles and 3 flavors plus 3 experiences! Each lodge is unique, reflecting the character of its home island. The staff, food, and environmental practices are the best in the islands. Any requests I had, or overheard other guests have, were met with “of course, that is possible. No problem”. Don’t expect TV, radio, phones, internet to be available, even though the lodge’s description mentions their availability; it is truly hit and miss.

Likely **Aventura Lodge** at Santa Cruz will be the first you encounter. It is an ocean-front lodge at the edge of Puerto Ayora and within minutes to the Charles Darwin Research Station. This is the largest of the 3 lodges, with 14 rooms. It is a multi-story adobe walled complex built through a mangrove forest. The restaurant fronts the ocean and its deck is a popular sunning spot for marine iguanas and sea lions. Pelicans and frigate birds are overhead as they visit their nests in the mangroves and fish in the waters fronting the lodge. The only accessible hotel room in the Galapagos is in this Lodge.

Floreana Lodge is a grand name for the adventure camp it really is. Constructed over a black lava field, the 10 wooden cabins are located directly in front of the sea with a boardwalk running the length of the cabins. The cabins are approx. 10 ft. X 14 ft., each with a set of bunk beds and a single bed, private bathroom with western toilet and shower, air conditioning, safe, flashlight, and bottled water. Meals are sourced in the town and were some of the best we had during our stay.

In front of the lodge, guests can snorkel and swim with sea turtles (water conditions permitting).

The night sky is incredible: Southern Cross, Big Dipper, and an intense Milky Way are a few of the treats.

On Isabela Island is **Isabela Lodge**, also built beachfront, this time on a lovely, long white sand beach. 8 rooms (2 with beach view), plus a restaurant and bar, roof-top terrace and lounge chairs make this the most relaxing of the 3 lodges. Breakfast and lunch is buffet, dinner is a la carte.

Rooms are large with either 2 beds or a king bed, air conditioning and ceiling fan, tiled bathroom with shower.

Remaining in harmony with the incredible surroundings, these lodges are simple and comfortable, provide healthy meal options using local fresh fruits/vegetables/seafood, and leave a visitor with a sense they stayed “local”, contributing to the protection of this incredible piece of our planet.



While cruising is a popular way to experience the Galapagos, I feel Red Mangrove is an excellent alternative or enhancement to a cruise. When comparing the Lodges’ locations and activities offered on each of the 3 islands, they have little overlap with the cruise ships’ stops. Transfers between the 3 islands is by small boat, averaging 2 hours per transfer.

I strongly recommend the inclusive Red Mangrove packages, as what is included is what travelers need and want to do: meals, ground transfers, local guides, park guides, activities, tips to all staff except the Park Guide, and snorkel equipment. The \$100 park fee is paid locally.

I often hear “Galapagos is on my bucket list”. I encourage you to move this up your list while your health is good. This is a very active destination as the wildlife, flora and fauna, geology do not come to you; you find them, and that takes some work. Days start around 6 a.m., out by 7:30 a.m. doing activities; and they finish at 4-5 p.m. (sunset at 6 p.m.) Walks of 2-3 miles over uneven surfaces, up and down hills, through mud, combined with swimming/snorkeling with penguins, sea lions, marine iguanas, sea turtles, and more make up a typical day. My most extreme day was on Isabela, with a 10 mile trek up Sierra Negra volcano to the world’s second largest caldera. Since 10 miles is more than I walk in a week, and my uphill form is pitiful, I frankly slowed the group down a bit. Avid photographers in the group began lagging behind, shooting vistas, flowers, etc., which saved me. I owe them my gratitude! Had I been there with a gimpy hip or knee, or breathing issues, I’d have missed a truly magical day.

There is so much more I can write about the lodges, the islands, and tips for traveling to them. I learned so much about this incredible destination, its inhabitants’ quick reactions to environmental changes, and what is being done every day to preserve and enrich its fragile structures. I encourage YOU to find for yourself why there are so many adjectives used to describe the Galapagos.