

LOCAL TRAVEL ADVISOR RETURNS FROM ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME WILDLIFE EXPEDITION IN THE GALÁPAGOS ISLANDS

JUNE 26, 2025



JUNE 25, 2025 — Travel advisor Sydney Schellinger, founder of The Poodle Booked It, recently returned from an immersive small-ship expedition through the Galápagos Islands, where she hiked over lava rock, snorkeled alongside sea lions, and spotted everything from hammerhead sharks to blue-footed boobies—all while sailing aboard one of only ~69 vessels allowed to operate in the Galapagos.

"You don't just see the wildlife in the Galápagos—you coexist with it," said Schellinger. "It's the kind of place where you're standing six feet from a giant tortoise or watching a frigatebird puff up its red chest in a full mating display. The experience stays with you forever."

Highlights from the Expedition:

- Espinoza Island: Close encounters with marine and land iguanas in one of the archipelago's oldest landscapes.
- Santa Cruz Island: A walk through a tortoise preserve where wild giants freely roam past guests as they dine outdoors.
- North Seymour Island: Watching the iconic courtship dance of the blue-footed booby.
- Final Snorkel Stop: Adventurous guests(including myself) braved open-ocean swells to spot hammerhead sharks beneath the waves.
- Incredible Onboard Team: From zodiac drivers to Ecuadorian naturalist guides, the staff made the trip deeply personal—spotting rare animals, sharing conservation stories, and always going above and beyond. "Our guide Marcela was literally peeking over cliffs to help me find a marine iguana I hadn't seen yet. That kind of care makes all the difference,"

About the Voyage

The trip was operated by HX (Hurtigruten Expeditions) aboard the MS Santa Cruz II, a small ship with a maximum of 96 guests. Unlike traditional cruises, this journey focused on active exploration, conservation, and naturalist-led learning. Guests visited a different island daily via zodiac (panga), with opportunities to hike, snorkel, kayak, and learn from expert Ecuadorian guides.

"It's not about spa days or luxury cabins—it's about access and experience," said Schellinger. "If you want to feel the Galápagos, this is the way to do it."

Who This Trip Is Best For:

- Curious, active travelers who want an up-close look at nature.
- Couples, solo travelers, and small groups looking for something different.
- Those comfortable with getting in and out of small boats, walking on uneven terrain, and snorkeling in open water, they have kayaks and glass bottom boats for those not wanting to swim, but it is an active trip.
- People who value conservation, culture, and connection more than cruise ship entertainment or extravagance.

Sydney's Insider Advice:

- Pack smart and prepare to move: It's an active trip—bring sturdy shoes, reef-safe sunscreen, and an open mind.
- Add a few days in Ecuador: Quito and the Andes are stunning and often overlooked.
- Go sooner than later: Park fees are set to rise in 2026, and the number of boats is strictly limited.

What really stuck with me about the Galápagos was how close you are to everything. There's no glass between you and the wildlife—you're just out there with them, walking next to a tortoise or watching a booby do its goofy little dance like you're not even there. Each island felt different, and every day had some "holy crap, this is real life?" moment. I've been a lot of places, but this one reminded me how wild and untouched the world can still feel—and how important it is to keep it that way.