

2024.01.18 Cruisers notes on arriving in the Galapagos

By Yacht Hawkeye (Lagoon 450 catamaran) – Richard Freeborn

We would like to heavily caveat **everything** that is written below.

This is just our experience.

None of this advice should in any way replace what your agent tells you.

Please, if your agent gives you advice, then take it, and don't quote anything that we say!

Just because, for example, the officials weren't interested in our cleaning materials might just be because it was a Sunday afternoon and they had better things to do!

So please don't assume that because our experience was X that your experience will also be X.

In fact, your experience could be Y!

Especially (see below) because there are so few yachts here right now.

Therefore, please ***don't be surprised if your experience is different to ours!***

There is much news in the media about the drugs gangs in Ecuador and the 60-day State of Emergency. None of this seems to apply to Galapagos where there is no curfew and, frankly, it seems to be as safe as anywhere. The people are very friendly indeed. There are few places left in the world like Galapagos where bicycles aren't locked! However, the locals have told us that tourism from mainland Ecuador has now plummeted, including because some foreign tourists can't get travel insurance; it certainly seems a little quiet.

We understand that we are the first yacht to visit Galapagos in 2024 although one other yacht has since arrived. There are perhaps only around five visiting yachts that are currently in the entire archipelago.

Before leaving mainland America

Well before leaving the mainland you'll already, hopefully, have already been in contact with your Galapagos Agent which in our case was Xavier from Yacht Agents Galapagos - javier@yachtagentsgalapagos.com who has been superb.

Stick to everything they say and take **ALL** their advice! Read everything they send you and do your best to comply with all their requests and requirements.

Here are some of the notices that we posted showing our arrangements for garbage:





Besides the usual clearance documents, before leaving Costa Rica we had to have a Hull Inspection Certificate by a local diver and Hawkeye had to be fumigated and a Certificate issued.

Before fumigation all fresh food and cutlery had to be removed and air conditioning turned off. Our eleven smoke alarms were most unhappy with the smoke! From the outside looking in through the windows, poor Hawkeye's interior was a complete wall of white mist! We sat in a bar for three hours to wait for the fumes to die down before going on board and ventilating.



When arriving in Galapagos pay careful attention to the latest requirements for what food you can have on board which now includes no fresh eggs.

Voyage to Galapagos

You can see our track here: <https://my.yb.tl/RFreeborn>

Having transited the Panama Canal on 10th December 2023, we left Golfito in Costa Rica on Tuesday 9th January 2024 and arrived into Puerto Ayora on Santa Cruz at 1pm on Sunday 14th January 2023. This is a similar voyage to coming from Panama City and the Perlas Islands. The promised SW trade winds blew too much from the SSW, directly from Galapagos, so we ended up motoring into head seas, currents and winds more than we wanted. First day was great sailing, second and third were horrid, then the trades kicked in for the fourth, fifth and sixth days although we still kept one engine on at low speed (partly because we are softies and need the electricity generated by the engines to have the aircon running 24/7 in three cabins!) so that we were making 7 to 8 knots in around 7 to 12 knots of true wind.

Bear in mind that, as such, when you get within perhaps 100 to 150 miles of Galapagos, the trade winds blow directly from Galapagos towards Panama City! The best advice is therefore not to head directly for Galapagos from Panama City. Instead head due South and do a graceful, slow curve to your right, the SW or SSW, which then brings the winds on to your port side as you approach Galapagos.

About 60 miles from Galapagos you sail over the equator, so watch out for King Neptune arriving to hold court.

We'll send the Court Proceedings document and the sample certificates separately.

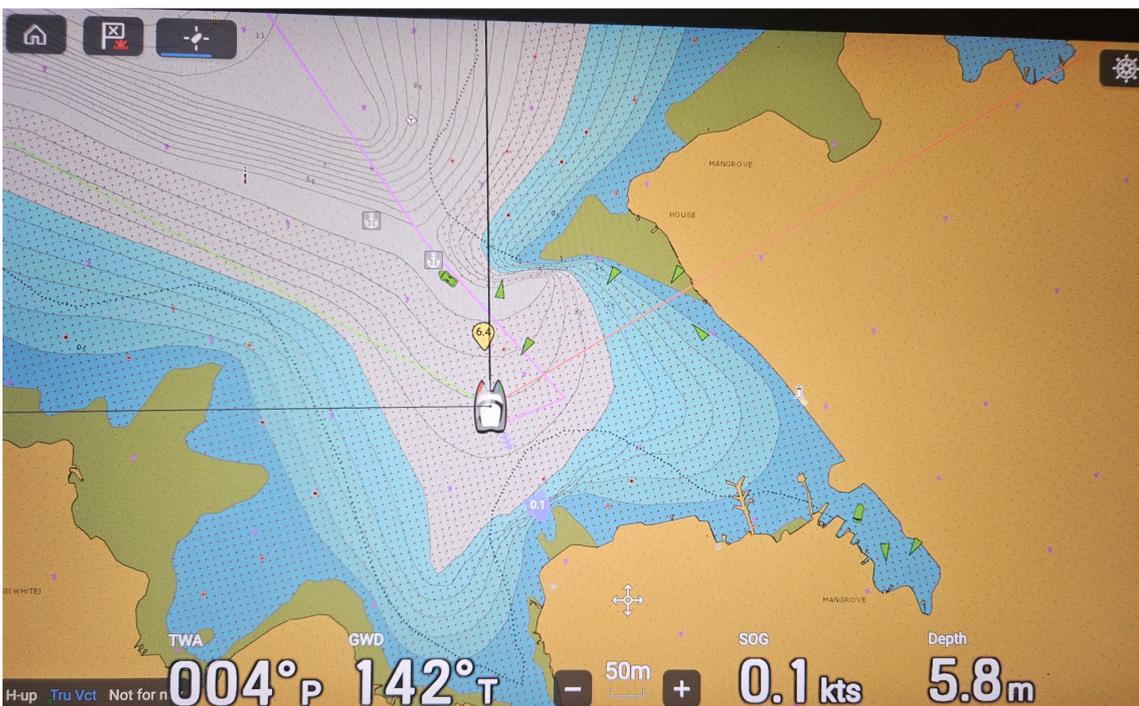


Xavier wanted to be kept updated with our ETA as this is very important to him, as he has to line up a LOT of officials from different departments. He wanted us to be inspected and cleared as soon as possible, which suited us!

Arrival at Puerto Ayora in Galapagos

The first port has now changed from Puerto Baquerizo Moreno on San Cristobal island, which is what all sailors have always told us to head for in the past. From now on you should, instead, head to Puerto Ayora on Santa Cruz island. This anchorage is the only one of the four available to yachts in Galapagos that is completely open to the trade winds and waves. Although that sounds bad, since we've been here there has been not more than about 0.5m swell, and the max true wind speed recorded on the Raymarine instruments since we arrived five days ago, as I write, is just 11 knots. So reasonably comfortable as we are a catamaran and headed straight into it. It could be quite roly for a monohull when the wind doesn't quite line up with the swell from time to time or the wind goes really light. In theory you could anchor on the other side of the harbour where there is slightly more protection from the swells but in practice there is simply no room left over there because of the sheer number of local yachts.

There are two lat/longs provided by our agent to anchor which are shown as anchor symbols on our chart plotter, below. In practice these are taken up by upto a dozen 30m plus Galapagos-based mini cruise ships so we anchored further in, as shown on our chart plotter:



Holding in pure white fine sand is excellent once the anchor digs in.

We are the left of the two catamarans in this photo which is taken from the town quay.



Since this photo was taken there are now a LOT more large mini-cruise vessels anchored ahead of us.

We didn't see any point in laying a stern anchor, not least because they can end up with their line being fouled by water taxis and, anyway, none is required in this part of the harbour. Without exception, all the large vessels just to windward of us are anchored without any stern anchors. There are three commercial vessels near us that are anchored but have laid stern moorings but they don't seem to trouble us.

Arrival & Inspection

Key point is to put **all** your fenders down on your stbd side (as this is most likely to face the town dock) and only board through your stbd boarding gate. Don't try and board at your stern as the 30' long ferries (and imagine the weight with all those people on board!) will simply smash up your stern. We also put out two ropes out by the boarding gate so that when the ferry arrives they pull themselves alongside using those ropes rather than trying to pull on our stanchions or fenders. You need to put these fenders out the moment you are anchored in case a boat with officials turns up!

The day before we arrived we made contact with Danny and Javier on a Whatsapp group which made things easier.

We anchored at 1pm on Sunday, had a quick glass of bubbly, then two hours later we had fourteen officials arrived on board Hawkeye!

Danny, who is Javier's colleague, came aboard with the officials.

The officials were all very courteous and polite although the police and Armada (ie navy) wore heavy black boots, some of which did leave dirt on our decks. Even though it was a Sunday, we paid no overtime fees.

We had a large jug of water and glasses for the officials, who settled themselves down on our aft deck. We also handed out sodas although beers were initially refused.

The inspection took just over an hour.

They were very interested to see our oil spill kit, which was essentially a plastic shopping bag with "Oil Spill Kit" hand-written on it that had a pile of nappies in it and a large amount of clean white rags that we bought from the chandlers in Panama.

They inspected our galley fridge but didn't look in our outside deep freezer, perhaps, with hindsight, because we forgot to point it out to them!

They wanted to inspect one life jacket and asked about the man overboard equipment and liferaft, which we pointed to, but they didn't inspect them.

There is a long form to fill in for immigration for each passport, which takes a little while.

There was no interest in any of our cleaning materials. Looking in the local supermarket, the products on sale are no different to those on the American mainland, so we needn't have worried about trying to find extra-special eco-friendly products although it would be best to find these if possible.

The police and Armada both did an inspection of the inside of Hawkeye including opening some cupboards. The Armada also inspected one engine room, from above, but not the other.

No one looked into any bilges or our generator compartment or bow storage cabins etc.

There were lots and lots of questions about all sorts of things but mostly the officials seemed to just be ticking off their check lists. Danny managed to field most of the questions in Spanish, which was sometimes hard to understand as it's a local dialect, which made it all a lot easier. Danny had all the paperwork printed out for each set of officials, so that made things really easy too.

Danny and Javier had done a first-class job for us, so we were delighted with their service. It also seems that the officials trust Danny and Javier to vouch for us that all was well with Hawkeye, and we are no threat to the Galapagos.

The officials eventually left, most clutching a cold beer, seemingly happy and mostly smiling, apart from one poor guy who was badly seasick and had chundered over the side. Danny stayed behind and kindly answered a multitude of question about places to go, things to see etc. Danny and Javier have been very helpful and continue to answer our questions on Whatsapp.

Later on, by Whatsapp, Javier said that the officials wanted photos of our "fuel dispersant liquid". We sent them photos of our degreaser but this wasn't really what they were looking for. I looked in the ferrateria/chandlers but they had nothing and there was nothing in the supermarket; we are still waiting for them to tell us what to buy, if anything.

Puerto Ayora

Unlike San Cristobal, which is the capital albeit with a smaller population, there is no large colony of sea lions in Puerto Ayora so there is less likelihood of your yacht being boarded by them. However, we have now been boarded by a sea lion whilst we were out for the day, despite putting fenders up at the stern and closing our stern boarding lines. There was a bad mess which we cleaned up immediately before it baked on in the sun but even though it was only on board for perhaps an hour or so we haven't yet managed to get the stains out of the GRP. Most of the boats here have something across their transoms to stop them boarding so we have now beefed up our sea lion defences!

You can only use your dinghy to go to and from the town dock; any other use is highly illegal. There are no beaches in Puerto Ayora to leave a dinghy on. You aren't allowed to leave dinghies on the town dock but even if you did, you would end up with a sea lion on board it. Do bear in mind that it is illegal to go within 2 meters of any animals in Galapagos so once the sea lion is in your dinghy you have to wait, and wait, until it decides it doesn't want to be there anymore. They destroy dinghies! Hence why our dinghy remains in its davits! However, the water taxis are excellent, at \$1 per person each way; make sure you have plenty of small denomination notes! They come quickly when called on VHF channel 14. To be honest, its quicker and easier using a water taxi than our own dinghy. Bear in mind that although the currency is \$USD, the \$1 coin is Ecuadorian.

A boat comes around in the morning to collect garbage at \$3 a bag. We had ours split into three, as instructed – organic, non-organic (ie tin cans, bottles etc) and non-recyclable, in different coloured bags. The guy on the boat then told to put the whole lot on one bag as it would be sorted out onshore. Fine, that saved us \$6! We are still wondering why they made such a fuss about splitting the garbage only to find that it wasn't necessary? However, if you don't have the garbage separated then you will fail not just the initial inspection when you first arrive, but also any subsequent inspections, especially when you move to a different port so we are keeping the regime in place, just in case.

There is an excellent combined Ferreteria /Chandlery (Google Ferreteria Bodega Blanca) about a 10 minute walk from the quay. This is not the same as the Ferreteria that is on the quay. This was well equipped with everything from new Yamaha outboards to refrigerant as well as tools and oils; it was better than many of the chandlers we saw in Costa Rica, Columbia or Panama, which is certainly not what we had expected. There are clearly lots of boats with engines so there will be mechanics that your agent should be able to advise you upon.

Touristy things to do

Puerto Ayora is actually quite a sweet town with good restaurants, brick paved roads, lots of bars, souvenir and jewellery shops with a small but quite good supermarket just on the quay.

Taxis are right by the quay where the water taxi drops you off and are relatively inexpensive.

The Tortuga beach is worth a visit although we found the water cloudy and little wildlife but it is a lovely sandy beach. No alcohol, smoking or music is allowed and the wardens start closing the beach at 4.30. There were a few baby hammerhead sharks about 3' long swimming right off the beach as well as marine iguanas. We made the mistake of taking a taxi, not realising that the taxi

gets nowhere near the beach! When you get out of the taxi there is a one hour walk very hot walk to get to Tortuga Beach. You can't swim at the first beach because of rip currents so it's another 20 minutes to Tortuga beach. The smart money is on taking the water taxi (\$20 per person return) from the pier in Puerto Ayora. It goes four times a day, last one at 4.45pm, but best to book the day before.

It's a 15 minute walk from the quay to the Charles Darwin Research Station. When you arrive at the entrance, its best to pay the \$10 per person so that you can see the tortoises which includes a very good guided tour. Everywhere interesting you go in Galapagos requires you to have a guide, so if you don't pay then you don't see! After the tortoises you can then visit the Charles Darwin centre free, where there is a small café.

It's a 25 minute taxi ride to the tortoise sanctuary, where you can see the giant tortoises in the wild, and the underground lava walk, for which we paid \$50 per cab which took 4 people, return.

Puerto Ayora is the starting point for many of the tours in the Galapagos so this appears to be the best place to base your yacht. It's also where many flights arrive on the sister island of Baltra to the North which is connected by a ferry. However, given that this anchorage is open to the trade winds and swell, it may be that monohulls who may find it roly would be better off in any of the other three anchorages, which are all much more sheltered from the trade winds.

Things we have been told but not yet experienced

Fuel is available in a boat that comes alongside but only in Puerto Baquerizo Moreno at San Cristobal and Puerto Ayora in Santa Cruz. You can check out from Santa Cruz, San Cristobel or Isabela but although the latter is slightly closer to your next stop in French Polynesia, it also requires a \$150 payment for an immigration official to travel over there from Santa Cruz. There is no fuel in Isabela. We will fuel up, store up and clear out for French Polynesia in Puerto Ayora in Santa Cruz which seems the easiest and most sensible option.

Xavier arranged for Hawkeye to be cleared to sail into four islands, which is the most allowed, as shown on the chartlet below. To visit other islands you need to take a ferry. To move port your agent must request your Zarpe from the Port Captain at least 24 hours in advance. The Zarpe from San Cristobal or Isabela will also cover Floreana. Arriving in the next port may mean that you are re-inspected, which can include a hull inspection.



Enjoy the Galapagos.

So far, we have!

Richard Freeborn

Yacht Hawkeye

18th January 2024