

## **GALAPAGOS REPORT 2011-2012**

### **TOURISM**

#### **THE NEW MODEL OF TOURISM: DEFINITION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PRINCIPLES OF ECOTOURISM IN GALAPAGOS**

*JUAN CARLOS GARCÍA, DANIEL ORELLANA AND EDDY ARAUJO*

##### **How to cite this document**

GNPS, GCREG, CDF, and GC. 2013. Galapagos Report 2011-2012. Puerto Ayora, Galapagos, Ecuador.

##### **How to cite this article**

García JC, D Orellana and E Araujo. 2013. The new model of tourism: Definition and implementation of the principles of ecotourism in Galapagos. Pp. 95-99. In: Galapagos Report 2011-2012. GNPS, GCREG, CDF and GC. Puerto Ayora, Galapagos, Ecuador.

*Sources must be cited in all cases. Sections of the publication may be translated and reproduced without permission as long as the source is cited.*

*The authors of each article are responsible for the contents and opinions expressed.*

*The **Galapagos National Park Service** has its headquarters in Puerto Ayora, Santa Cruz Island, Galapagos and is the Ecuadorian governmental institution responsible for the administration and management of the protected areas of Galapagos.*

*The **Governing Council of Galapagos** has its headquarters in Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, San Cristóbal Island, and is the Ecuadorian governmental institution responsible for planning and the administration of the province.*

*The **Charles Darwin Foundation**, an international non-profit organization registered in Belgium, operates the Charles Darwin Research Station in Puerto Ayora, Santa Cruz Island, Galapagos.*

***Galapagos Conservancy**, based in Fairfax, Virginia USA, is the only US non-profit organization focused exclusively on the long-term protection of the Galapagos Archipelago.*



Photograph: © M. Verónica Toral Granda /  
WWF Galapagos Program

## The new model of tourism: Definition and implementation of the principles of ecotourism in Galapagos

Juan Carlos García<sup>1</sup>, Daniel Orellana<sup>2</sup> and Eddy Araujo<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>WWF Galapagos Program, <sup>2</sup>Charles Darwin Foundation, <sup>3</sup>Galapagos National Park Service

The growth of tourism and its environmental impacts were two of the main reasons that the Ecuadorian government declared Galapagos in a state of emergency in 2007. This decision was supported by UNESCO a few months later, when Galapagos was placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger. As a result, a process was initiated to evaluate the state of tourism, immigration, invasive species, and the impact of human development in Galapagos. Recognizing the potential threat caused by tourism, a group of stakeholders at the local, provincial and national levels proposed fundamental changes to the management of this economic activity to minimize its impacts and ensure that tourism becomes a tool for conservation and sustainable development. A group of public and private institutions and members of civil society made significant efforts to identify and diagnose the problems, and to propose strategies for change.

Since October 2009 the Ministry of Tourism and WWF have led a highly participatory process, involving more than 400 participants from the four inhabited islands, to define the components and strategies for a new system of tourism management. This process identified ecotourism as the model for the future development of tourism in Galapagos. The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defines ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people” (Epler, 2007). This definition also identifies three fundamental pillars of ecotourism: 1) environmental conservation; 2) local participation and benefits, and 3) social and environmental responsibility among the tourism industry, the visitors, the community, and other stakeholders.

### First Summit of Sustainable Tourism

The new tourism model for Galapagos was presented and validated by a group of Galapagos stakeholders at the First Summit of Sustainable Tourism, held in Puerto Baquerizo Moreno in September 2010. The Summit was attended by national and international experts and more than 100 representatives of public and private institutions.

The event confirmed the new vision of tourism in Galapagos and generated encouraging results. Stakeholders from different sectors agreed on the major obstacles and challenges for tourism in Galapagos, and on the substantial changes needed in the current tourism model to ensure the conservation of biodiversity and sustainable development of local populations. The Summit generated a series of common objectives, targets and actions under four main areas: 1) governance; 2) reengineering the destination; 3) tourism marketing, and 4) monitoring. The Summit also confirmed that the long-term vision of tourism



Photograph: © Juan Carlos Garcia / WWF Galapagos Program.

in Galapagos is one of a gradual transition to a world-class ecotourism destination. In January 2011, the Governing Council of Galapagos (CGREG) formally adopted this vision as a regional policy and began implementation of activities identified through this process.

In practical terms ecotourism should translate into planning and management methods that will meet the objective of minimizing negative impacts of tourism while maximizing its benefits. However, what does ecotourism mean in the Galapagos context? What may or may not be considered ecotourism? And what needs to be done to convert Galapagos into an ecotourism destination? These initial questions reveal a lack of clarity about the theoretical concept of ecotourism when implemented in a place like Galapagos with unique natural, social and cultural features.

To support the implementation of ecotourism and respond to the challenges of a new development model for the tourism industry, the Galapagos National Park Service (GNPS), WWF, and the Charles Darwin Foundation (CDF) signed a cooperative agreement in October 2010, with the aim of developing ecotourism through a gradual process that will create new options for ecotourism products and services.

### **The Ecotourism Charter: a participatory process**

As a first step after the Summit, the GNPS, WWF and CDF initiated a process to create the "Charter for Galapagos Ecotourism." The development of this Charter was based on a participatory methodology that involved stakeholders (e.g., tourism chambers, associations of suppliers of products and services, the general community) in a dialogue to provide input to the strategic planning processes for a new tourism model at both the canton and parish levels. The Charter, approved by the Cantonal Council of Tourism (CCT) of Santa Cruz in September 2011, analyzes each ecotourism principle, applying them to the context of Galapagos. The Charter is currently under review by the CCT of San Cristóbal and of Isabela.

The Charter reflects the three principles of ecotourism and applies them to Galapagos: 1) maximizing participation and equitable distribution of benefits to local populations; 2) environmental conservation, and 3) shared responsibility. These three principles should be the basis for any public policy, project, activity or service related to ecotourism in Galapagos. These principles are indispensable; if one is missing, tourism cannot be considered ecotourism.

### **The first principle: maximum local benefits equitably distributed**

The first principle of ecotourism dictates that tourism in Galapagos should equitably benefit the local community and promote integrated development, linking multiple products, services and actors into ecotourism networks that stimulate the local economy and support sustainable development. This first principle has the following guidelines:

- *Create locally based networks of products and services:* The formation of local networks to provide products and services to ecotourism activities allows better distribution of income by creating a system that includes other sectors within the tourism chain.
- *Build strategic partnerships:* It is essential that the promotion and marketing of the ecotourism product of Galapagos be supported by external partners (mainland Ecuador and/or abroad) that are recognized for their high quality of service, expertise in capturing the market, social responsibility, and inclusion of local actors.
- *Encourage high quality local employment:* Businesses and tourism activities should encourage local employment making ecotourism an attractive and high quality source of employment.
- *Reinvest in local sustainable development and conservation of the destination:* Ecotourism should contribute to a sustainable lifestyle in Galapagos. At the same time, the sustainability of the ecotourism model in Galapagos requires the continued attractiveness of the islands as an ecotourism destination. Therefore, part of the revenue generated should be reinvested to strengthen the sustainable development model.

### **The second principle: environmental conservation**

The second principle of ecotourism in Galapagos states that any activity must have minimal impacts in order to preserve the uniqueness and value of the area and ensure long-term sustainability. Guidelines under this principle include:

- *Minimize the consumption of fossil fuels in all tourism activities:* Traditional tourism consumes high levels of fossil fuels, causing negative impacts at both local and global levels. Ecotourism should minimize the use of fossil fuels and replace them gradually with clean energy.
- *Minimize use and pollution of water:* Water is a scarce resource in Galapagos and traditional tourism greatly affects its availability and quality. Ecotourism must decrease both the use and pollution of water.

- *Minimize solid waste:* Traditional tourism is a major source of solid waste due to widespread use of disposable and non-recyclable products. Ecotourism should decrease the amount of solid waste produced and promote reuse and recycling of materials.
- *Minimize impacts on the landscape:* The Galapagos landscape is one of the main tourist attractions and distinctive attributes of the Islands. A disorganized tourism infrastructure causes degradation of landscape and negatively affects the uniqueness of Galapagos and its image as an ecotourism destination. Infrastructure for ecotourism should follow guidelines for minimum impact construction and landscape integration.

### **The third principle: shared social and environmental responsibility among the tourism sector or operators, institutions, the local community and tourists**

Ecotourism seeks to promote and disseminate a philosophy of travel and tourist experience very different from what is currently practiced in Galapagos. Ecotourism in the Galapagos should be seen as an experience that places a high priority on learning, exploration, discovery, respect for ecosystems and culture, and shared responsibility for the visitor site, as a unique destination that integrates nature, landscapes and community. The following guidelines should be taken into account:

- *Develop an integrated tourism product using the "slow tourism" concept:* The current model of tourism in Galapagos promotes "lightning" tourism with quick visits and short stays and little time for the visitor to reflect, learn and fully experience the environment. The ecotourism model must promote "slow tourism" or "tourism of time," in which visitors prefer longer stays with more opportunity to enjoy and interact with the environment by experiencing more visitor sites and tourism attractions in the islands, while disconnecting themselves from the fast pace of daily life.
- *Design low-impact ecotourism activities to reduce the human footprint:* Mass tourism degrades the visitor experience and generates significant environmental impacts. Ecotourism should promote low-impact activities such as kayaking, hiking, camping, sailing, bicycling, and snorkeling, among others. Ecotourism should also promote activities for small groups to ensure a higher-quality visitor experience.
- *Develop activities that promote learning, discovery and reflection:* Learning and discovery are key aspects of the ecotourism experience. The current tourism model is based on observation of fauna, flora and landscapes. In many cases interpretive scripts are



**Figure 1.** Ecotourism trails in Floreana (from Puerto Velasco Ibarra, to the highlands of Floreana and Post Office Bay, then ending back at Puerto Velasco Ibarra). Map design: CDF.

preset and repetitive, based on cruise itineraries, and do not generate greater knowledge or provide time for discovery and reflection.

- *Develop responsible and co-responsible tourism:* The current model of tourism encloses visitors in a bubble that prevents them from engaging with the natural and human environment. Ecotourism focuses on visitors who enjoy both the visit itself as well as knowing that they contribute to a model that promotes environmental conservation and a higher quality of life for the local people, and who understands their responsibility within the ecotourism model.

**Implementation of the model: The Experimental Ecotourism Project (EEP)**

After defining the principles of ecotourism, it is necessary to determine the feasibility of its implementation in Galapagos by answering the following questions:

- What is the current status of tourism operations?
- Are there initiatives in place that can be considered ecotourism?
- How should an ecotourism operation in Galapagos function?

The Experimental Ecotourism Project (EEP), implemented by the CDF, GNPS, and WWF, seeks to answer these questions.

Part of this project has involved collecting information on visitor sites, areas, activities and services with potential for

ecotourism in the four inhabited islands. This information has been organized in a geographic database to facilitate its management and use. An example of a map generated using this tool is provided (Figure 1).

The EEP has been gradually implementing the Charter of Ecotourism and establishing new sites to be managed according to ecotourism principals. Currently two sites are being developed: the old road to Post Office Bay on Floreana and the area known as Las Tintoreras in Isabela.

- **Restoration of the old road to Post Office Bay, Floreana:** In conjunction with the community of Floreana, the GNPS and the EEP working group have identified the old road from Puerto Velasco Ibarra to Post Office Bay (Figure 1) as a potential component of an “ecotourism circuit,” using trails that pass through protected areas as well as the agricultural zone, with specific attractions in each area.
- **Convert “Las Tintoreras,” Isabela, into an example of an ecotourism site:** Puerto Villamil, Isabela, is one of the sites on Isabela with the highest visitation (day tours, island hopping, and cruises), which has generated rapid urban growth. The EEP hopes that permitted uses of the various visitor sites will be established and developed within the framework of ecotourism in Galapagos. The EEP plans to use Las Tintoreras, an iconic and frequently visited site of Puerto Villamil, as an ecotourism pilot project. As such, this initiative will include significant involvement of and interaction with the local community; generate social, economic and cultural benefits; conserve the Island’s ecosystem; and integrate with and

complement other tourism activities of Puerto Villamil's services chain.

### Recommendations

It is important that the CGREG approve the Ecotourism Charter to ensure that ecotourism becomes regional policy. There is consensus among stakeholders that ecotourism is the model that will help create sustainable tourism in Galapagos. However, the challenges are significant. Changing a model is inherently difficult and requires a detailed analysis of potentially negative trends or conditions, such as the parallel development of "lightning tourism" or the lack of linkages between tourism and other productive sectors in Galapagos. The move towards ecotourism will be a gradual process where one of the main challenges is to integrate the various programs and projects of different institutions, organizations and actors into joint and complementary action. Doing so will require the development of monitoring and control tools at all levels--from the parishes to the provincial level. Examples include:

- Use of information from the Tourism Observatory (TO) (Garcia *et al.*, this document). The TO generates up-to-date information that can be used by decision-makers to manage negative impacts and to strengthen positive aspects of tourism in Galapagos.

- Monitoring the implementation of the Strategic Tourism Plans of each canton, which have been updated to align with the new ecotourism model for Galapagos.
- Strengthening the institutions that coordinate tourism, such as the Cantonal Tourism Councils and the Provincial Technical Committee for Tourism in Galapagos.

### Acknowledgments

The authors wish to thank the Ministry of Tourism, the Parish Board of Floreana, and the Cantonal Tourism Council of Santa Cruz for their support in the development of the Ecotourism Charter and in the fieldwork and implementation of the principles for generating ecotourism products and services.

### References

Epler B. 2007. Tourism, the economy, population growth and conservation of Galapagos. Charles Darwin Foundation. 68 pp.