

BIOGRAPHY™

Cruising the Galapagos with Grace Kelly

On April 19, 1956, Grace Kelly went from being one of the most glamorous and romantic actresses in the world to being one of the most glamorous and romantic princesses in the world. She made that transition onboard a yacht that now elegantly plies the waters around the Galapagos Islands.

KAREN CATCHPOLE • APR 19, 2014

I am underdressed. That's what's going through my head as I clamber inelegantly off a big, gray inflatable zodiac and step onto the M/Y Grace Kelly, the yacht that would be my home for a week-long tour of the Galapagos Islands in Ecuador. I was dressed for adventure in an athletic tee and a sensible hat, not for the age-of-glamor cruising, epitomized by the ship's former owner, Her Serene Highness, Princess Grace of Monaco.

[Grace Kelly](#), a glamorous [Hitchcock](#) muse and winner of a Best Actress Oscar, met Prince Rainier III of Monaco in 1955 when she visited the royal palace to be photographed with one of the world's most eligible bachelors. Eight months later, allegedly after Grace Kelly submitted to a fertility test, the couple married in the original "Wedding of the Century" (sorry Kimye).

A civil ceremony, required by Monaco law, was held in the palace, which had been completely redecorated in preparation for the wedding. This was followed by a religious ceremony attended by hundreds including [Cary Grant](#), [Ava Gardner](#), and David Niven. Grace's wedding gown, a gift from MGM Studios, was hand sewn by nearly 40 seamstresses and was only outshone by her 12-carat, emerald-cut diamond Cartier ring which she wore in her final movie, *High Society*. In order for Grace to get out of her contract with MGM, the couple agreed to have their wedding filmed and released as a movie.

A message from the Pope was read at the end of the ceremony and at 5 pm the couple drove through the streets of Monte Carlo in a convertible Rolls Royce on their way to an even more luxurious form of transportation, the 147-foot Deo Juvante II yacht. The yacht, a wedding present from [Aristotle Onassis](#), took them on their honeymoon through the Mediterranean.

The royal couple sold the yacht in 1958, and she was renamed and refitted many times until, in 2007, the yacht caught the eye of [Paul Allen](#), co-founder of Microsoft, who wanted to use her as a shadow boat for his mega-yacht the Octopus. It also caught the eye of [Quasar Expeditions](#) which bought the yacht. After two years of upgrades and renovations, including the addition of a third level, the yacht was rechristened the M/Y Grace Kelly in honor of her most glamorous previous owner.





GALLERY

8 IMAGES

Since 2009 the M/Y Grace Kelly has welcomed mere mortals, operating as a luxury cruise vessel and offering week-long trips through the Galapagos Islands for a maximum of 18 guests (not including the spirit of the princess which is always on board.) Photos of Grace Kelly onboard the yacht show the princess wearing an elegant, oversized sun hat. In another shot her head is chically wrapped against the hair-ravaging ocean breezes. She's often wearing gloves and always, always wearing a dress. I looked down at my sensible hiking shoes and reminded myself that I'm here to see the famous Galapagos Islands, not take home any style prizes.

Exploring Darwin's Stomping Grounds

The Galapagos Islands were volcanically formed three to five million years ago in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of Ecuador. They were made a National Park in 1959 and named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1978. The most famous visitor to the Galapagos was [Charles Darwin](#) who explored the area in 1835 and began formulating his theory of evolution which was ultimately documented in 1859 in his book *On Origin of Species*.

Today, more than 200,000 people visit the Galapagos every year to see the animals and landscapes that are unique to this region. It's hard to pick a highlight of my week-long, nearly 500-mile cruise around some of the 127 islands and islets of the Galapagos. Could it be witnessing the courting rituals of pairs of blue-footed boobies, red-footed boobies, and frigate birds on Isla Genovesa? Or the impossibly dense colonies of specially-adapted marine iguanas on Fernandina Island? Or standing close enough to nursing sea lions to hear their adorable suckling noises on Isla Santiago?

Then there was our snorkeling excursion at Vicente Roca where the cold Cromwell current brought in food that attracted everything in the sea. For more than an hour, I shared this water with darting Galapagos penguins, endemic to the area and the second smallest species in the world. I came face to face with curious sea lions and nearly bumped into more Pacific green sea turtles than I've ever seen in one place even after decades of scuba diving. Flightless cormorants sped through the water using their stunted wings to propel them. There was an octopus and three usually-hard-to-spot scorpion fish. When I raised my head above the water's surface for a moment, a skimming lava gull, also endemic to the area, nearly crashed into my face.

Grace & Beauty of the Sea

Returning to the yacht from that excursion, I felt like I should celebrate with a vodka on ice, the cocktail that Grace toasted her engagement with. Luckily, I could do that. In addition to two master suites, two twin suites, and five roomy and sun-filled premium staterooms, the yacht offers spacious decks (including the Albert Deck, Monaco Deck and Carolina Deck), dining areas, reading salons and a shaded, open-air, fully-stocked bar and lounge.

The most storied area of the yacht is also the area that's used the least. Princess Grace and Prince Rainier's first child, [Princess Caroline](#), was conceived on the boat, and the stateroom where that blessed event may have gotten its start is now the inside dining room on the yacht. However, guests, who quickly come to refer to the yacht simply as "The Grace," rightly prefer the breezy and stylish outdoor dining area.

It's fitting that the yacht once owned by Her Serene Highness is now plying the waters around the Galapagos Islands. Even as the dramatic story of evolution and survival of the fittest continues to play out here, this place is serenity defined.