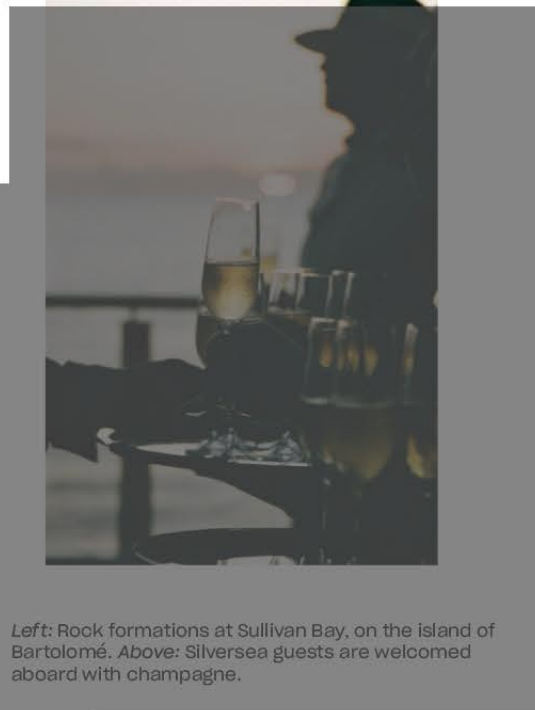
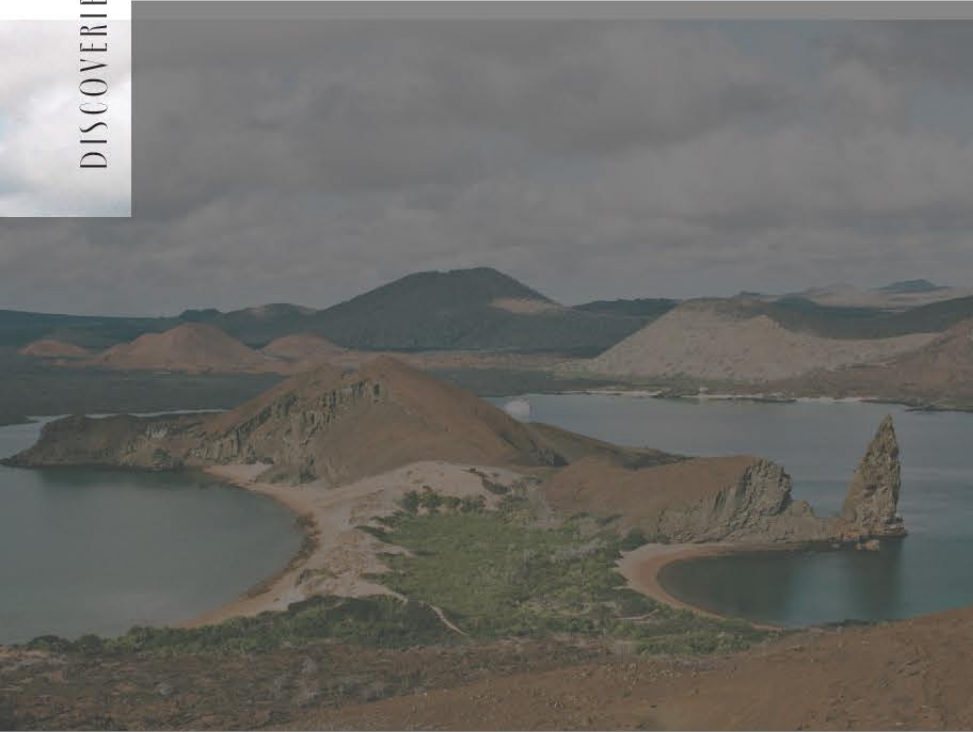


TRAVEL + LEISURE

2022

World's Best Awards





Left: Rock formations at Sullivan Bay, on the island of Bartolomé. Above: Silversea guests are welcomed aboard with champagne.

archipelago's Wolf Volcano erupting on the equator, beneath the North Star and the Southern Cross.

And all the while, we were pampered mercilessly. Every one of the *Silver Origin's* 51 suites comes with butler service, and the ship itself exudes what Silversea CCO Barbara Muckermann describes as "whisper luxury" (breezy white curtains, low-slung couches, gallery-size prints by Silversea partner photographer Steve McCurry).

The ship claims to have the islands' highest guide- and Zodiac-to-guest ratios. Led by Silversea's expert naturalists, almost all of whom are Galapagueños, we saw the iguanas that inspired the 1998 Hollywood remake of *Godzilla*; climbed into collapsed calderas that looked like the



▲ Galápagos sea lions napping among the mangroves.

crowns of giant ogre kings; and floated on the tide in the company of 30-odd green sea turtles. This was beyond a bucket-list trip; it was a life peak.

But does traveling to a place like the Galápagos do anything to expand our knowledge of the species we coexist with, or about ourselves, as Darwin's visit did? Do a few snorkeling sessions and hikes around great volcanic fields make us more humane, more aware, better equipped to be custodians of our home planet? I can't say.

What I do know is that during my 10 days in the islands I had at least four moments of the kind we usually describe as a religious experience—the religion there being nature. Whatever was flooding my system while I was swimming with seven-foot blacktip reef sharks off Champion Islet was intensely narcotic. I don't think I have been more "in the moment" than I was that day.

"You are an ambassador of the Galápagos now," an Ecuadoran friend told me at the end of my trip. And maybe that is the ultimate souvenir from a visit to one of your wanderlures: you are forevermore implicated, involved. A place like the Galápagos leaves a mark on you, carved in bold letters. You remain a citizen in absentia, doing what you can to protect both the myth and the marvelous reality, wherever you may be. *Silversea Galápagos sailings from \$11,150 for seven days, all-inclusive.*

+ MORE SOUTH AMERICA SAILINGS

ECUADOR BY YACHT

Another Galápagos newcomer: **Aqua Expeditions** (aquaexpeditions.com), known for luxury river trips in Southeast Asia and the Amazon. Its new oceangoing vessel, the Italian-designed superyacht *Aqua Mare*, offers an intimate experience with just seven suites—plus a movie room, an outdoor workout area, and regional cuisine from Peruvian chef Pedro Miguel Schiaffino. *From \$9,450 for seven days, all-inclusive.*

COLOMBIA BY RIVER

The languid Río Magdalena gets its first multiday cruise next year with an all-suite boat from **AmaWaterways** (amawaterways.com), with excursions and experiences curated by South American operator **Metropolitan Touring** (metropolitan-touring.com). Start in Barranquilla and end in the town of Mompox, now a UNESCO World Heritage site, in part because of its role in Simón Bolívar's Latin American liberation movement. The seven-night itineraries will also include kayaking, hiking, and bird-watching. *Rates not available at press time.*

PATAGONIA BY FJORD

This region is usually explored overland—but passengers aboard *Esperanza*, the new custom-built ferry from **Navimag** (navimag.com), will see a slow-moving backdrop of spouting whales and sparkling glaciers as they sail along the coast of southern Chile between Puerto Montt and Puerto Natales. Expect simple but comfortable cabins, hearty food, and yoga and tai chi. *From \$840 for four days.* —KAREN CATCHPOLE