

# GALAPAGOS GOURMIET

From one of the world's highest cities, to the unique Galapagos archipelago, Heidi Fuller-Love explores Ecuador's rich food and fauna scene, then discovers where else in the world to enjoy a gourmet wildlife cruise this Easter

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Written by Heidi Fuller-Love  
Photography courtesy of Heidi Fuller-Love

102 ISSUE EIGHT Good Things





*'Our climate is the same all year round and we have every type of fruit and vegetable imaginable here in Ecuador, including more than 200 varieties of potato'*



**M**y ears pop like firecrackers as the plane creaks up over the snow-peaked Andes, before sinking thankfully onto the tarmac of Ecuador's brand new airport.

9,350ft above sea level, Quito is the second-highest city in the world and my ears are still buzzing when a battered taxi whisks me with a machine gun rat-tat-tat of tyres over the cobbles of Quito's Unesco-heritage-classed old town, to Casa Gangotena ([casagangotena.com](http://casagangotena.com)) where afternoon tea, including home-baked corn bread and the chef's speciality cakes, awaits me.

After a blissful night's sleep in this three-storey art nouveau boutique hotel overlooking Plaza San Francisco, I meet Gangotena's chef, Andres Yeardley, for a food tour of this city whose diversity of ingredients is legendary.

Andreas tells me that Ecuador, which stretches from the Andes Mountains via the cloud forest, to the Galapagos Islands, has one of the world's most diverse ecosystems. 'And that's why we have such a huge variety of food,' he explains.

It's Good Friday, and the thronging streets buzz with the tinny rousing sounds of Cumbia music and the fierce whizz of blenders, as lines of vendors prepare fresh fruit juice from the dozens of different fruits that grow in Quito's fertile volcanic soil.

Andres takes me to the Mercado Centrale, market place. Outside it's just a bland concrete slab, but inside it's a riot of odours and colours, with herb vendors offering their treatments next to stands groaning under the weight of exotic fruit and vegetables. 'Our climate is the same all year round and we have every type of fruit and vegetable imaginable here in Ecuador, including more than two hundred varieties of potato,' Andres tells me proudly as I sip rich blood-red sausage soup Yaguarlocro and nibble cuyu - guinea pig roasted over a spit, which as well as being stringy and quite fatty, tastes a bit like duck.

The following day, the same battered taxi drives me back to the airport through crowds of Easter revellers in bright coloured costumes, who dance in the street or parade over the cobbles carrying huge crosses on their backs.

A two-hour flight takes me to the Galapagos Islands. Nineteen Unesco-classed islands formed by volcanic activity a thousand kilometres from the Ecuadorian coast, the Galapagos archipelago is extremely isolated, which is why a huge variety of endemic species, ranging from dog-sized land iguanas, to immense tortoises and rare birds, come here to breed in peace - little wonder that Charles Darwin spawned his theory of natural selection whilst visiting these fascinating islands.



TRAVEL & CULTURE  
GALAPAGOS GOURMET

A rubber dinghy from the main port, Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, ferries me over to yacht La Pinta ([yachtlapinta.com](http://yachtlapinta.com)) where I have dinner with the six other passengers and our team of naturalists. On board the food is excellent: we have marinated seafood ceviche (*see recipe*) and tender wahoo fillets in a rich wine and mushroom sauce, and we even get to try Easter speciality, fanesca soup, made with twelve different beans and grains to represent the apostles.

That night our yacht travels to the tip of San Cristobal and I wake the following morning to views of a craggy lunar landscape that can't have changed much since Darwin came here in 1835 on board The HMS Beagle. Darwin first encountered some of the archipelago's huge tortoises and lizards on San Cristobal, and noted in his diary: 'Met an immense Turpin; took little notice of me.'

After breakfast, our group meets outside La Pinta's muster station to struggle into lifejackets, then we head out in our small boat panga to Punta Pitt.

It is baking hot as we climb to the top of this emblematic chunk of volcanic rock, but the narrow path en route is dotted with blue-and-red-footed boobies, their feet as vivid as wax crayons. Right at the top we find the nest of a rare Nazca booby, with a single chick, like a puppy-sized ball of cotton wool, inside. Later that day we get closer still to the local wildlife as we snorkel with a sixty-plus colony of sea lions, which dart up and around us, occasionally taking a cheeky nip at our wayward flippers.

After three days onboard I end my stay at Finch Bay ([finchbayhotel.com](http://finchbayhotel.com)), an award-winning eco-friendly hotel fronting the white sand beach of Santa Cruz Island. Out hiking the next day through lunar landscapes studded with the island's unique cactus trees, I spot my first giant tortoise.

Meeting this living legend in such an odd, outlandish place is the perfect culmination to my trip to discover Ecuador's unique archipelago.

#### READER DEALS

Contact George Warren ([george@jacadatravel.com](mailto:george@jacadatravel.com)) and mention this article to receive a special discount on Metropolitan Touring's 'Nature and Culture at its Best' programme ([metropolitan-touring.com](http://metropolitan-touring.com))



## WHERE ELSE IN THE WORLD TO SEE WILDLIFE

With milder temperatures and less crowds, the period before and after Easter is often a good time for wildlife cruises. Here are three that you shouldn't miss:

### BREATHTAKING ALASKA

Late winter, when there are plenty of activities, including sled-dog and snowmobile races as well as good chance to see the aurora borealis, is a great time to cruise Alaska.

On one of National Geographic's eight-day Exploring Alaska's Coastal Wilderness tour you'll get a chance to see orcas and bears, explore glaciers and sample local specialities like amazingly-fresh Alaska salmon and sourdough bread.

Find out more: [expeditions.com](http://expeditions.com)

### ASTOUNDING AMAZON

Easter (when the water level is high, making a greater number of waterways accessible to smaller craft) is a great time to explore the Amazon.

Gliding along the river you'll see pink dolphins, monkeys and other wildlife and you'll savour typical Brazilian dishes like feijoada black bean and meat stew served with manioc and leafy green kale, or Easter treats like pacocoa crushed nut paste and Easter ring cake.

Find out more: [aquaexpeditions.com](http://aquaexpeditions.com)

### INCREDIBLE ICELAND

Easter is the ideal time to spot aurora borealis and killer whales in Iceland during a Northern Lights and killer whales photography tour.

Based in a cosy hotel on the seafront you will take boat trips out into the bay of Grundarfjörður to spot orcas. Back at the hotel sample local delights, including smoked lamb hangikjöt and gruel with Icelandic moss.

Find out more: [responsibletravel.com](http://responsibletravel.com)



RECIPE

**TIP**  
Also great  
cooked on a  
barbecue

## LOBSTER TAILS IN SPICY COCONUT BUTTER

SERVES: 4

### INGREDIENTS

#### FOR THE SPICY COCONUT BUTTER:

- 3 tbsp annatto oil
- 2 small red onions, finely chopped
- 5 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 120ml coconut milk
- 50g desiccated coconut
- 1 tbsp chopped fresh parsley
- 2 tbsp chopped fresh coriander
- 120g butter

#### FOR THE LOBSTER:

- 4 lobster tails
- salt and pepper, to taste

#### FOR THE GARNISH:

- chopped fresh herbs of your choice

*Recipe courtesy of Byron Rivera Real, Gastronomic Director, Metropolitan Touring metropolitan-touring.com*

### METHOD

For the spicy coconut butter, heat the annatto oil in a pan set over medium heat and fry the onion and garlic until soft. Add the coconut milk and grated coconut, and cook until sauce-like in texture.

Remove from the heat, add the parsley and coriander, blend until smooth, and pass through a fine-meshed sieve.

Put the mixture in a saucepan set over low heat, add the butter, and allow it to slowly melt in. Add chilli and salt to taste and set aside, keeping warm.

For the lobster, heat the grill to medium-high.

Open the lobster tails by cutting the membrane at the sides to remove the meat from the shell, so you can better control the cooking. Add salt and pepper to taste, and grill for about 3 minutes on each side.

Serve the grilled lobster tails bathed with the reserved coconut butter, garnished with fresh herbs of your choice, with chips or plantains on the side.



RECIPE

## WAHOO IN INFUSION OF ISHPINGO (CINNAMON FLOWER)

SERVES: 1

### INGREDIENTS

#### FOR THE SAUCE

- olive oil
- 30g leek, finely chopped
- 1 clove garlic, finely chopped
- 60g mushrooms, finely chopped
- 50ml white wine
- 250ml fish stock
- 10g fresh parsley, chopped
- 10g chives, chopped
- 1 piece ishpingo (dried cinnamon flower; substitute 5 fresh thyme leaves)
- salt, to taste

#### FOR THE FISH:

- olive oil
- 180g wahoo fillet (substitute dorade)
- salt, to taste
- 20g cooked green peas
- 1 fresh or dried chilli, chopped, to taste

#### TO GARNISH (OPTIONAL):

- lemon mousse
- assorted edible flowers

### METHOD

Heat a little olive oil in a pan set over medium heat and cook the leek, garlic and mushrooms until soft. Add the white wine and fish stock, and cook for 7 minutes to reduce.

Season, remove from the heat, and add the chopped parsley, chives, and the ishpingo. Blend, pass through a fine-meshed sieve, and set aside.

Season the fish fillet to taste, heat a little olive oil in a pan set over high heat and sear until half-cooked.

Reheat the reserved sauce reduction over medium heat, add the part-cooked wahoo, and cook for 3-4 minutes to finish cooking.

Ladle into a deep serving dish with the reduction, cooked peas, and chopped chilli to taste.

If desired, garnish with lemon mousse and edible flowers before serving.

*Recipe courtesy of Byron Rivera Real, Gastronomic Director, Metropolitan Touring metropolitan-touring.com*



RECIPE

## QUITENO-STYLE SHRIMP

SERVES: 4

### INGREDIENTS

#### FOR THE BROTH:

- 1 red onion
- 1 carrot
- 1 pepper
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 sprig coriander
- 1 sprig parsley
- 1 lemon
- salt and pepper, to taste

#### FOR THE SHRIMP:

- 450g/approximately 36 peeled and deveined Ecuadorean shrimp

#### FOR THE CEVICHE MARINADE:

- 250 ml fresh orange juice
- 100ml fresh lemon juice
- 200ml cooled shrimp broth (see above)
- 1 tsp sweet mustard
- 1 whole tomato
- salt and pepper, to taste
- 60g red onion, finely chopped
- 5g coriander, chopped

### METHOD

For the broth, place the onion, carrot, pepper, bay leaf, coriander, parsley, lemon, salt and pepper in a saucepan, cover with water, and cook until vegetables are tender. Strain the liquid, discard the solids, and bring the broth to the boil.

Cook the shrimps in the broth for 1-3 minutes until they just turn white, but the flesh remains firm. Drain the shrimps, setting the broth aside to cool, and plunge the shrimps into iced water.

For the ceviche marinade, mix together the orange juice, lemon juice, reserved cooled shrimp broth, and mustard. Grate in the whole tomato and season to taste with salt and pepper.

Add the cold cooked shrimp, chopped onion and coriander to the broth, and leave to marinate for at least 15 minutes to absorb the flavours.

Serve each diner a small bowl of the ceviche, accompanied by plantain chips, roasted corn, or popcorn. In Ecuador, it is also accompanied with lemon wedges and a spicy sauce made with chilli.

*Recipe courtesy of chef Andrés E. Davila*