



2020 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title of the Story: Galapagos Islands – Innovation, Sustainability and Resilience During Covid-19

Destination Name: *(include any state, province or region)*

Galapagos Islands

Country: Ecuador

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Nomination Category: *(Please check the boxes that indicate the focus of your story)*

- Culture & Communities
- Environment & Climate
- Nature & Ecotourism
- Islands & Seaside
- Immediate responses in dealing with the COVID -19
- Post COVID -19 recovery
- One of the 17 SDGs* *(if yes, which one)* GOAL 14: Life Below Water

*The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. The 17 SDGs are integrated—that is, they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. What are the Sustainable Development Goals? <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html>

For further information on Tourism for SDGs: <http://tourism4sdgs.org/>

Find detailed instructions for submitting good practices [here](#)



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Address each aspect of your good practice story in the different sections being specific including relevant quantitative and qualitative information.

Issues faced

In addition to the existing challenges such as remoteness and biodiversity, the Covid-19 pandemic has brought additional challenges to the Galapagos Islands.

With regards to hospital capacity, the Galapagos Islands were underequipped to handle local and introduced cases of COVID-19. Hospitals were not as equipped since serious events and accidents and illnesses are rare, and there are only four ICU beds. (1 for 7500 people).

To protect against the pandemic, access to the Galapagos Islands was shut down. The shutdown resulted in reduced shipping which caused interruptions in the supply chain, as well as to tourists intake.

The Chamber of Commerce says foreign tourists make up 95% of business on Isabel Island, the largest in the archipelago, and at least 26,000 of them visited last March 2019. Subsequently, approximately 33,000 people were left jobless, and some tourists left stranded in the Galapagos Islands.

In a typical year, the Galapagos Islands result in approximately \$110 million US tourism revenue. In the first months of the pandemic, up to May 2020, at least \$50 million US in tourism revenue was lost. Total revenues for 2020 will be significantly lower than prior years, and there is no governmental support for that lost income for individuals or businesses.

Methods, steps and tools applied

To prevent Covid-19 infection, the Galapagos Islands were closed off from international travel by the national government of Ecuador per the following articles:

Art.- 1.- Foreign or nationals coming from any country will not be permitted entry to the Galapagos from March 15th 2020 at 00:00.

Art.- 2.- People who are in continental Ecuador and do not fall within the provisions of article 1 of this resolution, prior to traveling to Galapagos, will be evaluated by medical personnel from the Ministry of Public Health (MSP), in accordance with the protocol established for The effect.

As of July 1, 2020, the Galapagos Islands are open to international visitors again. Current entry requirements, in place to keep everyone safe, include:



- Presentation of a negative Covid-19 PCR test (valid for 96 hours),
- Registration of the full itinerary for the islands with the Ministry of Tourism,
- Health and temperature checks at the airports

In the event that medical personnel detect that a person presents symptoms that meet the definition established by the World Health Organization (WHO) for “COVID-19”, they will inform the individual to the CGREG personnel and they will proceed to prohibit their entrance to the province.

During the lockdown, existing tourists have been allowed to stay and local tourism is permitted. Galapagos authorities have imposed travel restrictions that will apply to some travelers going to the Galapagos Islands from the Ecuadorian mainland.

Internally with the Galapagos Islands and within communities during lockdown, there has been the development of local and subsistence agriculture and the emergence of the barter economy to address interruptions in food supply, lack of business and decreased economic.

Tourism operations, particularly hotels and marine based tourism are adhering to international tourism safety and hygiene standards.

Hotels have adopted biosafety standards supported by biosafety protocols, supported by the Ministry of Tourism, national Emergency Operations Committee (EOC) , World Health Organization (WHO) and OSHA.

The World Travel & Tourism Council (“WTTC”) has developed Safe Travel protocols for tour operators and cruise ship operations.

An example of hygiene and safety protocol for cruise ship is as follows:

- Every staff member and passenger will take a temperature reading before boarding the ship, each guest will require a prior test proving they are clear of COVID beforehand.
- For those unable to get the test at home, cruise owners and marina authorities will be able to give visitors a rapid COVID test, and following a clearing, guests will be able to board.
- For the duration of the cruise, staff members will be on the cruise or on excursions for the entirety. This means that passengers and staff enter COVID-free, and do not have the chance to get bring the virus aboard the ship at any point.
- During all cruise periods, guides and crew members will have PPE & gloves for boarding procedures.
- All clothing worn during travel to the Galapagos will be stored in a provided bag, and may not be worn until after the cruise. This procedure limits the spread of any contamination during travel.

Finally scientific and research institutions within the Galapagos Islands are using this period for increased research and monitoring.

Key success factors



Galapagos is one of the least infected provinces in Ecuador (70 cases with 1 death: as of 07/17/20)

The keys to its success include the following.

- 1) Remoteness: Galapagos Islands are remote compared to other provinces and populations are separated between islands, and closure of tourism and transport prevented further infections.
- 2) Adaptation and resilience of local people, tourism businesses, governments, and stranded tourists.
- 3) Application of international safe tourism standards to tourism operations, particularly marine based tourism and cruise ships, and hotels.
- 4) Local scientific and research capacity including Charles Darwin Foundation
- 5) Resilience of wildlife and terrestrial and marine ecosystems, particularly given reduced tourist and tourism impacts

Lessons learned

Five lessons were learned in the Galapagos Islands:

- 1) Health of islands' residents most important.
- 2) Local self-sufficiency and adaptability of individuals, businesses, communities and islands.
- 3) Tourism sector, particularly marine based tourism, pro-actively modifying its safety and hygiene practices to address Covid-19 challenges.
- 4) Resilient and adaptable terrestrial and marine wildlife and ecosystems, and related scientific research.
- 5) Good governance at local, island, provincial and national level, including gradual re-opening of island, national and international tourism.

With the Galapagos Islands beginning to reopen from months isolation as of July 2020, there is the opportunity to re-build how tourism and travel to the archipelago is carried out. Much as the islands are renowned for the study of evolution, the archipelago will undergo its own form of evolution to adapt to its new environment.

The Galapagos Islands can act as a canvas for other Pacific island tourist destinations in the coming months, and will be able to learn from and become a model for other remote Pacific tourist destinations.

Results, achievements and recognitions



The Galapagos Islands has previously won many awards for sustainable islands tourism, and for marine and terrestrial biodiversity, including prior Top 100 Sustainable Tourism destination awards.

The recent Covid experience has not yet been externally evaluated, and international and national tourists are only slowly returning. Progress updates on the re-opening and management of Covid-19 in the Galapagos Islands will be provided in August 2020 and for the conference presentation in October 2020.

Unlike Europe and North America, there is no broad governmental support for individuals and businesses affected by Covid-19, so there will be greater and ongoing economic challenges that may take years to recover from.

One aspect that is very important for the Galapagos Islands is the global uniqueness of the sustainable tourism experienced there, excellent marine and terrestrial biodiversity and ecosystems, and the protected status of most of the terrestrial landscape and all of the adjacent marine area.

Therefore tourism will always return. However, this is an important opportunity to re-shape and improve that tourism.

Additional references

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