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U.S. EDITION





# POSH PARADISE

With the opening of Pikaia Lodge in the Galapagos, you can now check this eco-destination off your bucket list in five-star style.

BY RIMA SUOI

While a cruise is undoubtedly the most popular way to explore the Galapagos Islands, travelers not into the 24/7 scafaring experience can behold the “big five” (turtles, blue-footed boobies, frigates, sea lions and penguins) while staying at the islands’ only five-star hotel. Pikaia Lodge Galapagos opened in the fall, billing itself as the area’s only luxury eco-lodge. Set on a bluff on the northeast highlands of Santa Cruz Island, each of the 14 rooms on the 77-acre property has expansive views of lush green valleys, the rocky coastline, the Pacific Ocean and, if weather permits, as many as 10 nearby islands.

Pikaia Lodge is the brainchild of Herbert Frei, an internationally educated native Ecuadorian who is currently the honorary consul general to the Swiss government in Guayaquil. He chose the name Pikaia, as it refers to a small marine creature believed to be the first to evolve into a vertebrate some 500 million years ago. Evolution—clearly an overarching theme in the Galapagos—is also the unifying theme for the interior design of the lodge,

credited to Frei’s daughter, Maria. She chose a neutral palette of beiges and browns, with touches of red to represent lava (these are volcanic islands, and there are two spatter cones on the property). Almost all furnishings were custom made in Ecuador, using primarily teak. The floors are bamboo and the paintings and sculptures throughout are by artists either native to this country, or those who have lived here so long they may as well be. A nice touch, courtesy of Mr. Frei, Charles Darwin’s “The Origin of Species” can be found in all the nightstands.

Those who choose to go the Pikaia route versus a cruise should know that they’ll still find themselves on a boat most days, as that’s the only way to get to other islands for the various activities built into the lodge’s all-inclusive rates. This often means pre-sunrise call times to make the approximately hourlong drive to the other end of the island, where the lodge’s 100-foot yacht, *Pikaia I*, is moored for all-day excursions.

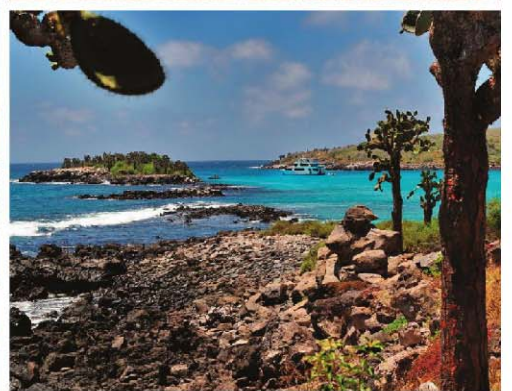
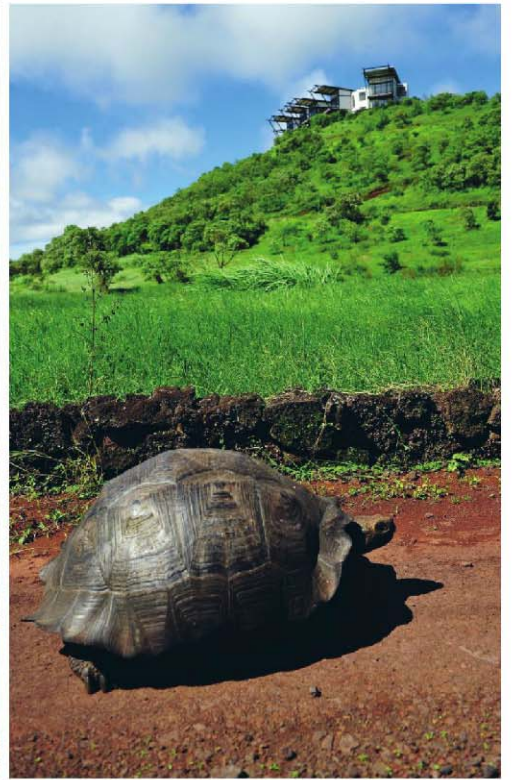
All excursions are meticulously planned and are included in the package price at Pikaia. Activities include

hiking on Seymour Island, where large iguanas sun themselves while male frigates flirt by inflating their red goiters to a balloon-like effect, followed by snorkeling to witness an impressive array of colorful fish. Other activities include heading to Las Bachas beach to check out the flame-orange crabs that gather all over the black-lava rocks and a flock of shocking-pink flamingos, or hiking the dramatic lava fields of Sullivan Bay before climbing the 300-plus stairs to the top of Bartolomé to take in the incredible views of the surrounding islands and the oddly angled Pinnacle Rock. Most excursions to see turtles take place on Santa Cruz, including a visit to the Darwin Foundation Research Station, which is home to many species of turtles, including (for decades) the late great Lonesome George.

Free time is not plentiful (unless you opt out of an excursion), but can be spent luxuriating in the lodge’s infinity pool or hot tub or by indulging in a massage. The bartender makes a mean Negroni, and there’s also a surprisingly good wine list.

Contact your travel agent to explore a trip to Pikaia Lodge.





Clockwise from top left: Wildlife sightings include blue-footed boobies and Galapagos tortoises; view of Pikaia I just off Santa Fe Island; visitors exploring the sights of Bartolomé Island; the infinity pool at Pikaia Lodge overlooking Santa Cruz Island.