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TRENDS OF
THIS CENTURY

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(INCLUDING
THIS SALTED
CARAMEL TART)



Galápagos Glories

Ecoventura brings world-class dining to one of the most beautiful—and remote—spots on the planet.

By Amanda Eyre Ward

MY HUSBAND AND I boarded *Theory*, one of Ecoventura's three luxury Relais & Châteaux expedition yachts in the Galápagos Islands, with scuba masks, binoculars, and a well-thumbed guide to blue-footed boobies packed in our luggage. Six hundred miles off mainland Ecuador, we set sail through one of Earth's most remote archipelagoes—and headed straight to our first dinner on board.

"Everything on these remote ships is frozen and fried," whispered my husband, a scientist who spends weeks aboard research vessels.

"Oh, no," I said.

"Oh, yes," he replied.

Moments later, we were seated in an elegant dining room as León Dormido, a volcanic rock formation shaped like a sleeping lion, loomed outside the window. Our plates began to arrive. And what was set before us was neither frozen nor fried.

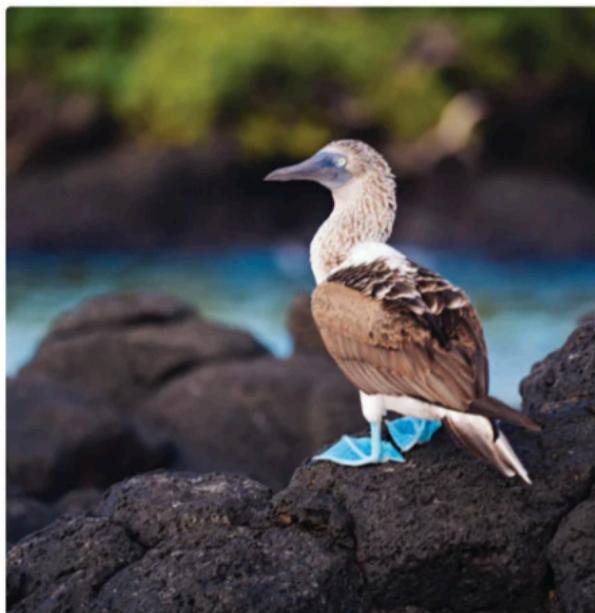
My dinner was a four-course masterpiece, including encebollado, Ecuador's beloved fish stew, fragrant with cilantro, tomato, and sweet onions in a deep bowl flecked with chunks of tender fish. My husband's Basque-style octopus came with charred edges, giving way to succulent meat. It was paired with a smoky roasted pepper sauce and topped with crispy chickpeas.

"Wow," my husband said, grinning.

How does a culinary team create such refinement in one of Earth's most isolated locations? The answer, chef Cristhian Murieta shares, is a meticulous sourcing program that brings more than half the ingredients on board directly from the islands, more than any other Galápagos cruise operator. "Creating a Relais & Châteaux-worthy culinary experience aboard an expedition yacht requires passion, precision, and a deep respect for our environment," he says.

Each morning, the yacht filled with the scent of buttery croissants and freshly brewed Galápagos coffee. A daily buffet of pillowy breads, salads with tangy vinaigrettes, and sweet and savory entrées was also at the ready to fuel a day of hiking, kayaking, and snorkeling with the ship's two naturalists.

On the top deck, lobster tails hit the grill and were served at leisurely barbecue lunches, and happy hour brought zingy cocktails, perfect for sipping as the sun dipped behind black lava cliffs. Concierge Joselyn de los Santos seemed to anticipate every need: steamy hot chocolate after a chilly swim, iced lemonade when the equatorial heat beat down at midday. One afternoon at Gardner Bay, we dined barefoot on the sand, watching sea lions frolic in the surf while savoring charred seafood straight off the grill.



Food was also a part of our learning experience. During a ceviche demonstration while anchored near the brackish lagoons of Floreana Island, we learned to achieve the perfect balance of citrus acidity, using fragrant limes to "cook" the delicate fish. The finished ceviche—firm fish, crisp red onions, and herbaceous cilantro, with a kick from ají chiles—created layers of flavor and texture almost as beautiful as the islands themselves.

Dinner menus shifted nightly. Some meals showed French flair, others Mexican influences, but there was always a featured local Ecuadorian dish. One night, it was tournedos of beef, their caramelized crusts yielding to pink, juicy centers. Another night, it was mahi-mahi with a golden pistachio crust that shattered under my fork to reveal flaky bites.

"We work closely with local producers, everything from fresh fruits and vegetables to award-winning queso media luna," Murrieta said one evening as we dined with the dark silhouette of Española Island stretching behind the windows. "These local flavors bring a sense of place to every plate."

The ship's intimate indoor bar featured craft beer tastings of Galápagos-brewed lagers from Reptilia Galápagos Brewery, alongside Ecuadorian wines from Bodega Dos Hemisferios.

Local snacks were also always on hand. I fell hard for a República del Cacao chocolate punctuated with rose petals, though it was rivaled by one evening's dessert: bananas Foster flambéed tableside. The theatrical presentation drew gasps from fellow diners (now friends) as flames appeared above the golden fruit before settling into a rich, amber sauce.

Of course, the Galápagos Islands provided the true spectacle. On landings in the national park, we wandered trails with only our small group in sight, coming face-to-face with giant tortoises, sunbathing marine iguanas, and those silly-looking blue-footed boobies, who lifted off, no longer silly-looking at all, for graceful flights over the azure waters. Every adventure, though, came with the promise of a feast back on board, one that only the Galápagos could provide, proving that an adventure through the islands is also an adventure in flavor. (*Ecoventura 2026 Galápagos itineraries from \$10,750, ecoventura.com*)



ABOVE: Sailing the Galápagos Islands with Ecoventura guarantees sightings of the area's distinctive blue-footed boobies. LEFT: Cuisine aboard the Relais & Châteaux-affiliated ship is elegant and delicious, as evidenced by this charred Basque-style octopus.