## Are you planning on taking a "Last Minute" Galapagos Cruise?

Here are some things you should know about finding and securing a Last Minute Cruise in the Galapagos Islands.

Buying a Last Minute Cruise is a great way to save money on your Galapagos cruise. Unfortunately many people think if they wait until the very last moment they are going to save hundreds of dollars on their Galapagos cruise. This is somewhat of a myth.

## Can you save money by buying a Last Minute cruise?

The answer is YES, but you do need to have a plan of action of your own to be prepared to secure and make this purchase.

Walking into a travel agency and wanting to leave the next day is more likely to be impossible and possibly more expensive; not to mention you may be buying a cruise that nobody else wanted due to a poor itinerary or the general conditions and accommodations of the ship. The Cheapest Price is not necessarily in your best interest. There is a reason why the price is cheap.

Let me explain:

- What is a Last Minute Cruise? About 2 weeks or less before a ship begins it cruise, the Last Minute prices become available. In an effort to sell any spaces aboard the ship that may be available the ship's owners will discounted the price. These last minute prices are announced directly to the travel agencies in Ecuador.
- Does this mean you don't have to plan out a cruise in advance? NO. Planning is essential! It would be very beneficial for you to have some planning of what you expect from your cruise, even if it is just a week away from when you want to go.
  - a. The reason you want to plan is because you will never know when it is going to be busy or slow in the Galapagos. Often in what is considered Low Season it very busy due to the large number of other bargain hunters traveling to the Galapagos during time of the year. Ships often become fully booked 1 or 2 weeks in advance during this time of the year.
  - b. Consequently waiting until the very last moment in hopes that prices will drop even lower is a very bad plan. While you are waiting and hoping for something that hasn't happened, and is not likely to occur; somebody else will see the same good deal and act on it. Then the spaces you were wanting became sold to someone else.
  - c. All cruise ships and itineraries are not the same! It is true that the all the ships will be visiting only locations designated by Galapagos National Park and ships of all classes will be visiting these locations, but many of the destinations are the not the same in the quality of the experience, sights, and activities. Some itineraries will

include several locations which you could visit on your own or are not the more highly desired locations to visit in the Galapagos Island.

- i. The Galapagos Islands are 97% National Park. You certainly don't want to spend your time visiting the other 3%. Another thing to consider is your ship. You will be spending a lot of your time on the ship. This means you need to think about how important space, accommodations, and services on the ship are to you. For example: the tourist level ships are small, older, and very basic. I would not recommend someone planning a special event in the Galapagos, such as a honeymoon, buying a cruise at the tourist level.
- d. If you are looking for a cruise for more than 1 person this can sometimes more difficult. Often a ship will only have 1 space available. The closer it gets the departure date; the fewer and fewer opportunities are going to be available.
- e. Picking up scraps. The best cruise itineraries will not be available for long. The longer you wait in securing your cruise the fewer options will be available. All the best deals, best itineraries, and the best ships will be taken by other people first. These remaining choices may be the least desirable itineraries in the Galapagos.
- f. Wasted Time. This would be that you spend too much time and energy trying to find something that doesn't exist or isn't going to get cheaper. The worst scenario is you go to the islands without a purchased cruise and you end up spending all your time there running around looking for something. During the high seasons, this would be especially a bad idea. Most likely you will find out there are no cruises available that you can afford and now you are in the Galapagos with no cruise options. This can become a disaster if you have a small window of days in which you can stay in the Galapagos.
- 3. Buy your cruise from an Ecuador Travel agency. You will definitely get better prices from a travel agency in Ecuador than in your home country. Here is the inside information which is very important for you to take into consideration. Any one of these issues can affect how efficiently you are able to quickly purchase a last minute cruise.
  - a. Usually when buying a cruise in Ecuador the only option is to buy in cash. This can create a whole new obstacle because you will need to pay for your cruise before it leaves and you may find yourself in a situation of not having enough time to get the money. This would be due to limitations on daily withdraw amounts and the number of days before the cruise begins. When wanting to save money and buy last minute it is easier to buy with cash. A starting point for cruises with flights is around \$1200 for a four day cruise on a tourist level ship. This is a lot of cash to have on hand or to obtain in less than 24 hours.
  - b. If it is the weekend and you want to leave the next day, this is going to be extremely difficult. Especially, if you do not have the cash on your person and you need flights. Many travel agencies are not going to be open on Saturday or Sunday. It is

difficult to check on availability both on the ship and flight tickets. It will be to your advantage if you are flexible with your travel dates to the Galapagos.

- c. Here in Ecuador some banks have larger maximum amounts which can be withdraw from the ATM; also, depending on your bank at home and your daily withdrawal amount, you may be able to have several withdraws from the ATM in one day. Some banks in Ecuador will allow you to take a cash advance on credit card (not debit). It is always best to communicate with your bank about withdrawing larger than normal amounts of money here in Ecuador for purchasing a Galapagos cruise.
- d. Banks in Ecuador are not usually open on Saturday or Sundays. Only the ATMs will be available for getting money. So if you are showing up on Saturday or Sunday and hoping to leave the next day without a cruise organized with a travel agency, it is most likely not going to happen.

## In conclusion:

You need to think about how much time you have to spend in the Galapagos and plan accordingly. A good Travel Agency can save you hours of research on the internet and the headache of running around trying to save a dollar. You certainly do not want to fly to the islands hoping to find something great and ending up with a not-so-special Galapagos trip. The agent should be able to explain the differences between itineraries, ships, and included services. Also they should find what is right for you and your needs. I would advise speaking with someone who sells numerous ships and not just their company's ships.

Too often, people think they can just go to the Galapagos and speak directly with the captain of the ship and get a great deal. The reality is the captain or crew members do not have the authority to sell cruises and could lose their job for doing such a thing. Only the owners, management companies, or travel agencies can sell you.

The Galapagos is a very special place. With this said, it does have a cost in going there; it cannot truly be done on a shoe-string. As stated before, the islands are 97% national park. What this means is that you cannot just go anywhere you like, and the places you can go on your own are limited. In order to preserve the Galapagos the national park and the government have implemented a system which controls the access to the islands in way that minimizes the human impact on these unique islands. A cruise is the best way to truly appreciate the Galapagos Islands and going to places where nobody lives and the animal experiences are unbelievable. This is what you want from the Galapagos. You will not find these places and experiences just going out there on your own. Day tours only go to the most visited places and do not go to the majority of the locations a cruise will take you. I highly encourage you to seek out the Last Minute Deals to save money. But, do it wisely and be prepared to buy that deal when you see it. I hope you found this useful.

Good Luck,

EE Doc. Boswell