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Galapagos Eco-Tour Company

By Cliff Terry

It's certainly is true that the Galapagos Islands are a popular destination for tourists, and thankfully at least one travel company is trying to keep things in check as it addresses environmental concerns. Ecoventura - Tours and Cruises to the Galapagos recently came out with a 10 point program to encourage its clients to become aware, responsible visitors to the Galapagos Islands.

Some of the 10 suggestions seem to fall into the common sense category, such as "Don't leave any trash on the islands or throw any litter overboard" and "Don't smoke while ashore." ...

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FILMING GREEN

By Annika S. Hippie

Hollywood is known for its pro-environment stance, but the industry itself has always been extremely resource intensive. In recent years, a number of productions have made the effort to go carbon neutral, but for the most part, this has involved calculating a film's carbon footprint and...



4Copas Organic Tequila

By Karen Kaplan

Did you know that there is only one USDA-certified organic tequila in the world? Its name is 4 Copas and it's produced in the lowlands of the state of Jalisco, Mexico, in a town called...



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Galapagos Eco-Tour Company

Cliff Terry



It's certainly is true that the Galapagos Islands are a popular destination for tourists, and thankfully at least one travel company is trying to keep things in check as it addresses environmental concerns.

Ecoventura – Tours and Cruises to the Galapagos recently came out with a 10 point program to encourage its clients to become aware, responsible visitors to the Galapagos Islands.

Some of the 10 suggestions seem to fall into the common sense category, such as "Don't leave any trash on the islands or throw any litter overboard" and "Don't smoke while ashore." Other guidelines on the list include:

- Pack only biodegradable sunscreen, lotion, soap, shampoo and conditioner. (Ecoventura will supply biodegradable soap, shampoo and conditioner.)
- Be careful not to transport any live material, rocks or sand from one island to the next.
- Except for items made of wood, try not to purchase souvenirs made from native Galapagos products: black coral, sea lion teeth and shells of the Galapagos tortoises.
- Listen carefully to your naturalist guide and closely follow all the National Park rules.

"Since 1999-2000, Ecoventura has set the standard for high environmental policies through conservation efforts that include the establishment of a trust with the World Wildlife Fund called the Galapagos Marine Biodiversity Fund," says Doris Welsh, Ecoventura's director of sales and marketing.

"Since 2000, we've put in high-performance filters, reduced our cruising speeds and offset emissions through (Vermont-based) NativeEnergy, which has a carbon offset program. We're also in the process of ordering new plastic water bottles that are free of BPA (the chemical bisphenol A). So we're really on top of things," says Welsh. The company is currently considering a hybrid engine that would be run by solar panels.

"After 9/11, of course, our business died, and many companies also suffered," continues Welsh, adding that Ecoventura's business surged after the 2003 movie release of "Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World," which was filmed in the Galapagos. (Based on a novel by Patrick O'Brian, it stars Russell Crowe as a brash British naval captain during the Napoleonic Wars.)

"And then there was Galapagos featured on the Discovery Channel and Animal Planet, and it just kept taking off. Also, the Tourist Board of Ecuador has been very pro-active in the last few years."

With so many people signing up, Ecoventura decided it was important to come out with its 10 suggestions. Although it's too soon to get feedback from its passengers, Welsh notes

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that "listening carefully to your naturalist guide" can be hard sometimes, especially for photographers. ("They don't like to stay on the trails. Also, people may be tempted to take away a little rock or whatever. I DO think they're pretty good about not taking food onto the islands.")

Another one of the 10 guidelines states: "Prior to your trip, calculate the carbon footprint you will produce from the non-cruise portions of your trip. Ecoventura has already offset carbon emissions for the cruise portion for its guests. Ecoventura recommends purchasing offsets from NativeEnergy, using its carbon calculator:
http://www.nativeenergy.com/pages/ecoventura_travel_calculator/282.php.

"It's really easy to do," Welsh patiently explains, for those who may find that offsets are off-putting. "Just go to a Web site like NativeEnergy, and you calculate your footprint—how much carbon you're using. For instance, how many miles you drive to work, what type of car you have, if you have a swimming pool heater, if you use air-conditioning, how many people live in your house. Then you opt in to contribute X amount of dollars to offset that."

The money is used for things like a methane recapture project on dairy farms, wind farms and other renewable energy programs.

"One other thing," adds Welsh: "On the islands, you can get very close to the animals, but you do have to keep some distance. I remember back in the old days they'd actually allow you to PET the tortoises!" she laughs. "Back then, yeah, you could scratch their heads. Well, you can't do that anymore. So we've really learned some things."

For more on Ecoventura – Tours and Cruises to the Galapagos go to: www.ecoventura.com



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