



The Galápagos Islands, part of the **Republic of Ecuador**, are an archipelago of volcanic islands distributed on either side of the Equator in the **Pacific Ocean**, 906 km west of continental Ecuador. The islands are known for their vast number of endemic species which were studied by Charles Darwin during the second voyage of HMS Beagle, as his observations and collections contributed to the inception of Darwin's theory of evolution by means of natural selection.

The first recorded visit to the islands happened by chance in **1535**, when **Fray Tomás de Berlanga**, the Bishop of Panamá, was surprised with this undiscovered land during a voyage to Peru to arbitrate in a dispute between Francisco Pizarro and Diego de Almagro. De Berlanga eventually returned to the Spanish Empire and described the conditions of the islands and the animals that inhabited them.

The first crude map of the islands was drawn in **1684** by buccaneer **Ambrose Cowley**, who named the individual islands after some of his fellow pirates or after British royalty and noblemen. These names were used in the authoritative navigation charts of the islands prepared during the Beagle survey under captain **Robert Fitzroy**, and in **Darwin's** popular book ***The Voyage of the Beagle***. The new Republic of Ecuador took the islands from Spanish ownership in **1832**, and subsequently gave them official Spanish names. The older names remained in use in English language publications, including ***The Encantadas*** by **Herman Melville** (1854).

Click on the Pictures for two **VIDEOS** on the Galapagos Islands