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Travel plans: Book now for Christmas



These marine iguanas on Santa Cruz Island in the Galapagos show it's not just humans that like to lie on the beach. (Phil Marty, For Tribune Newspapers)

By Phil Marty, Special to Tribune Newspapers

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This article is related to: Holiday Vacations, Trips and Vacations, Christmas

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If you've been thinking about Christmas and are having visions of sugar plums dancing in your head in a far-off destination, you'd better be jumping on that if you don't want to be left out in the cold. Many holiday trips sell out early, so you've been warned.

Sailing the Galapagos

Vaya Adventures, for example, has a Dec. 23-30 sailing on its schooner-style yacht Beagle to the Galapagos Islands. Beagle, you may recall, was the name of Charles Darwin's ship on his famed explorations of the Galapagos, which are home to species found nowhere else in the world. Vaya offers various itineraries on the 14-passenger Beagle, but the Christmas departure will follow the South and Central itinerary, which visits numerous highlight spots, including the islands of Bartolome, Espanola and Floreana, among others. Rates for the Christmas sailing are \$4,180 per person double occupancy. If you can't go at Christmas, rates are \$3,800. Info: tinyurl.com/l4wdpgr

Varied adventures

AdventureSmith Explorations offers a variety of adventures over the holidays. A Hawaiian Seascapes cruise on a 36-passenger yacht runs Dec. 20-27, Dec. 27-Jan. 3 or Jan. 3-10. It explores four islands and has plenty of time for activities such as snorkeling, kayaking and hiking. It's \$3,595 per person double occupancy and can be found at tinyurl.com/q54g6rm. Wild Islands & Treasures of Baja California runs Dec. 20-27 or Dec. 27-Jan.3 on the 62-passenger National Geographic Seabird. Viewing humpback whales and hiking desert areas to see ancient native

art are on the agenda. Price is from \$5,690 double occupancy, and details are at tinyurl.com/nq9uk9l. Peru Mountain Lodge Trek can be booked over four dates covering the Christmas holiday. The trekking in the Andes naturally includes Machu Picchu. Priced from \$2,990 per person double occupancy, it's at tinyurl.com/ozcsapl. Quest for Pura Vida explores the mountains, rain forests and coastal areas of Costa Rica on two dates over Christmas. The nine-day/eight-night trip is from \$2,700. Info: tinyurl.com/lnortug

Marco Polo tour of Italy

If you're looking for a more laid-back holiday, Perillo Tours has the 10-day/eight-night Marco Polo tour of Italy that runs Dec. 18-27. It's regularly priced at \$2,990 per person double occupancy, but for that date Perillo is offering a \$500 discount per person. Among cities visited are Venice, Padua, Florence, Siena and, finally, Rome, where you'll spend Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Included in the price are two nights' lodging in Venice and three nights' each in Florence and Rome, some meals, transportation by motor coach and services of a tour director and local guides. Airfare is extra. Tour details are at tinyurl.com/on4t66e, and details of the discount are at tinyurl.com/pgpan6y.