



Artwork © by Magno Bennett

CNHTOURS - Helpful Guides

Ship Classes Defined Once and for All!

Any search on the internet will show you that Galapagos cruise ships are classed using what appears to be a variety of classifications systems often leaving you a bit puzzled as to what they actually mean. We've done a good amount of research, contacting the Galapagos National Park Service's (GNPS) department of tourism, the Galapagos Chamber of Tourism (CAPTURGAL), and the International Galapagos Tour Operators' Association (IGTOA), and have compared the results to our own personal knowledge of several ships to come up with the following answers we hope will help clarify any confusion.

There is only one official classification system - the one set up by the Galapagos National Park Service in 1995. It classes ships according to 4 basic criteria:

1. Whether or not cabins are private;
2. Whether or not cabins have private bathrooms, and
3. Whether or not there is air conditioning.
4. In addition to these, there are a limited number of ships which are permitted by the Park Service to offer day tours.

Tourism patents are boat operating permits, with a fixed itinerary assigned to each and valid for one year, after which it must be renewed. The boats are divided into the following types according to their performance:

[NAVIGABLE CRUISE TOUR A](#) (66 BOATS) When the tourist operation is performed with luxury boats, equipped with individual cabins and air conditioning, private bathroom and with the necessary specifications for the complete comfort of the tourists during the cruise.

To view these ships, please see:

<http://www.galapagospark.org/embarcaciones.php?page=embarcaciones&tour=a>

cnh tours

Cultural and Natural Heritage Tours
www.cnhtours.com

"Proud of our unmatched personalized service"

NAVIGABLE CRUISE TOUR B (6 BOATS) In this category the tourist operation is performed with semi luxury boats, equipped with similar characteristics as the type A cruiser, except air conditioning.

The navigable tour mode operates a fixed tour system, which means that the DGNP annually authorizes each vessel a particular fixed route between the sites of public use in the protected areas.

To view these ships, please see:

<http://www.galapagospark.org/embarcaciones.php?page=embarcaciones&tour=b>

NAVIGABLE CRUISE TOUR C (5BOATS) The tourist operation of these cruises are done with boats without individual cabins, private bathrooms or air conditioning, and only standard facilities for navigation.

The navigable tour mode operates a fixed tour system, which means that the DGNP annually authorizes each vessel a particular fixed route between the sites of public use in the protected areas.

To view these ships, please see:

<http://www.galapagospark.org/embarcaciones.php?page=embarcaciones&tour=c>

DAILY TOUR C (5BOATS) The operation is assigned a daily tour itinerary with up to 14 visitor sites per week, with two sites per day and one site per turn.

In the case of less accessible sites, far from the port of departure (such as Bartholomew and Santa Fe), the operation corresponds to a single site throughout the day. The flexibility of these operations [favor locally based tourism operations](#), making it competitive with the navigable tour mode whose minor impact on the population leads to

conflicts in the local distribution of the benefits of the main economic activity in the archipelago.

To view these ships, please see:

<http://www.galapagospark.org/embarcaciones.php?page=embarcaciones&tour=d>

Source: http://www.galapagospark.org/nophprg.php?page=turismo_patentes

CNH Tours believes that the very wide range of comfort levels provided by Class A ships does not take into consideration other factors which might, for some people, be important contributing factors to overall comfort. Such factors include:

- **General spaciousness:** Room size, amount of covered and uncovered deck space available, existence and sizes of salons on board, etc.
- **General maintenance standards:** How rapidly does a ship fix broken or run-down items? Will the air-condition work, or is it chronically broken? Does it need a paint job?
- **Professionalism of the crew:** Are they always very attentive? Do they go the extra mile?
- **Guide Quality:** Does he/she really know what he/she is talking about? Is he/she easily understood? Does he/she have lots of enthusiasm?
- **Cuisine:** Simple meals versus multiple course meals with fine china settings, attentive dining room service, freshly brewed coffee versus instant, etc.
- **Quality furnishings:** Presence of polished brass fixings and high end marine décor, use of professionally crafted materials, versus basic fixtures.
- **Extras:** On board pool / sauna, email access, comprehensive reading room, medically trained staff person etc.

It is commonly acknowledged that levels of overall comfort vary greatly *within* ship classes. Some Class A ships will go all the way, whereas other Class A ships, while respecting GNPS class specifications (private berths with air conditioning and private bathrooms) will provide very little deck space, basic dining facilities, moderate attention to furnishings.

In an attempt to convey these differences, an alternative, informal Galapagos ship classification system has evolved, led primarily by the tour industry. Our experience and first-hand knowledge of the ships lead us to believe that the tour industry classification system is *generally* accurate and reliable.

cnh tours

Cultural and Natural Heritage Tours
www.cnhtours.com

"Proud of our unmatched personalized service"

Tour Industry led Galapagos Cruise Ship Classification System:

No formal definitions exist. Most commonly seen classes are:

Luxury/Deluxe - First Class - Tourist Superior - Tourist

Generally, this rating system is fairly accurate, but one can find a ship classed as "First Class" on one web site, and "Tourist Superior" on another.

Luxury/Deluxe ships go all the way in attention to detail, spaciousness and service. They tend to be, but are not limited to the larger vessels. **First Class** ships may have similar service levels as Luxury ships, but are usually smaller, with less deck space. **Tourist Superior** ships are usually quite reliable and offer the basics in service and attention, whereas **Tourist** class ships can be considered backpacker specials. **Tourist** class ships should be considered by those for whom the lowest possible cruise price is the main deciding factor. Having said this, we strongly recommend finding sufficient funds for at least a Tourist Superior class ship – remember, Galapagos is a once in a lifetime experience and it's worth going the extra mile to make sure it's a good one!

Rough / ballpark prices for a 7 night, 8 day cruise in each class (note: cruise prices have been increasing on an annual basis by as much as 10% since 2005. Figures below are for 2010/2011). There is of course some overlap in pricing between classes.

- Luxury/Deluxe: \$3,800 and higher
- First Class: \$2, 800 - \$3,800
- Tourist Superior: \$2,100 - \$2, 800
- Tourist: Anything under \$2,100

OUR FINAL WORD ON SHIP CLASSIFICATION: In the end, we suggest that the price of a cruise generally reflects the relative level of luxury you can expect on board, with the risk of unexpected problems occurring rising rapidly at the very lowest end of the price scale.

cnh tours

Cultural and Natural Heritage Tours
www.cnhtours.com

"Proud of our unmatched personalized service"