



Ecuador is a country in Northwestern South America, with a Pacific Ocean coastline, lying on the Equator between Colombia, to the northeast, and Peru, to the south and east.

Cotopaxi is the world's highest active volcano. Many cities and sites in Ecuador are listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Such cities and best known places are the Galapagos Islands, and the city of Cuenca.



Understand

Ecuador is the most biodiverse country in the world. Ecuador has over one hundred different types of hummingbirds and thousands of orchid varieties. Cuyabeno Wild Life Reserve, Mindo and San Luis de Pambil are all good places to see many types of flora and fauna. The Galapagos Islands are justly famed for their wildlife.

The Cuyabeno Wild Life Reserve is probably the best place to see the **Amazon Rainforest** in Ecuador, even though there are other national parks which are also interesting (such as the Yasuni National Park). It's a place of high biodiversity and nature lovers should feel in paradise. That's a good way to discover the indigenous communities of Ecuador and to eventually meet a local shaman. It's necessary to get to Lago Agrio to reach the reserve. Private transportation is made possible by the local accommodation, which is provided by eco-lodges.

The beaches in Ecuador are amazing, including: Salinas, Bahia de Caraquez, Manta, Crucita, San Jacinto, and San Clemente. They offer very inexpensive hotel accommodations, great food and friendly people. But there are also very upmarket establishments as well.

Climate

Ecuador has many climate zones, from tropical along coast to cooler and dryer inland at higher elevations; tropical in Amazonian jungle lowlands. Ecuador is unusual in that one can choose any climate one wishes by where in the country one travels to. Lying on the equator means there is no summer or winter; however, there are typically wetter and drier seasons. The 'wetter' season is usually between December - June , while the drier season runs from July - November.

Environment

The Environment of Ecuador contains almost 20,000 species of plants, 1,500 species of birds, 341 species of mammals and more than 840 species of reptiles and amphibians.[1] It includes World Heritage Sites like the Galápagos Islands, and magnificent parks such as the Yasuni National Park.

Tourist

Ecuador's official tourism organization is launching the second phase of its "All You Need Is Ecuador" campaign, in 2015 the first-ever foreign-sponsored Super Bowl ad was launched, at a cost of \$3.8 million. The organization is committing \$9 million of a \$28 million global budget to an integrated marketing campaign in the U.S., including TV, print, online, and public events in New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Florida, and California which kicked off in 2015.

Get in

Entry requirements

Citizens of nearly **any country** can visit Ecuador for a stay of 90 days or less. The exceptions are the citizens of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, Cuba, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan and Somalia, who are required to obtain a visa in advance.

By plane

Quito's new airport is state of the art and will have a modern on-site hotel by the end of the year. It is however, a long trek from Quito. The old airport in the City has been closed and is being transformed into a large park with lake.

Another port of entry is Guayaquil, which has a modern airport that includes the typical amenities such as restaurants and duty-free shopping. The airport is located a few minutes north from downtown.

Quito airport charges an international departure tax of \$40.80. The tax is \$26 from Guayaquil. This tax is already included in the cost of the flight.

The amazing Galapagos Islands are one of the Ecuadorian provinces and have two airports, one of which is on Baltra and the other is on San Cristobal. Avianca is the name of the airline which flies to Galapagos. All the flights are through the mainland Ecuador.

Travel by motorcycle

Some of the best motorcycling roads in South America are found in Ecuador. A dual-sport motorcycle (for both paved and unpaved roads) is a great way to get places that you wouldn't want to take a car (especially a rental). A ride through Ecuador will bring constantly changing temperatures and riding conditions. You should be ready for hot sun, heavy rain, hail and even snow! You'll want a riding jacket with a removable liner and be sure to dress in layers. Add and remove the layers as you move up and down in altitude. Be prepared with two pairs of gloves, one for hot weather and one for cold. A riding day can vary in temperature from 90 degrees to the low 30's as you cross the country and change altitude.

Talk

Spanish is the official language. Amerindian languages (especially Quechua) are generally spoken in the more rural, mountainous villages. English is widely spoken in hotels, restaurants and other businesses that cater to high-end travelers. Ecuadorians are friendly and generally tolerant of foreigners who attempt to speak Spanish but make mistakes. It is suggested to approach younger people (specially college students) due to their knowledge of english.

Buy

Money

Ecuador adopted the *United States dollar* symbolised as \$ (or USD in an international context) as its currency. Other currencies are not readily accepted. If you are from a country or territory with the US dollar as a official currency, you will not need to worry about understanding prices and currency transferring. Also if you are from Bermuda, East Timor, Panama, or Bahamas, the official currency(ies) of the mentioned countries and territories have fixed exchange rates to the US Dollar. Meaning what price is said in the U.S. will be understood with your country's/territory's official currency. Example; \$150 US Dollars will equal \$150 Bermudian dollars, but you will still have to exchange currencies.

US paper money is used for most transactions. Ecuador has its own coins, which are exactly the same size and weight as US coins up through 50-cent pieces; both them and US coins are used, although US coins are now used more frequently. US Sacagawea dollar coins are also widely used, more so than in the United States itself. Susan B. Anthony dollars, however, are not generally accepted.

Many merchants examine large bills (\$10 and above) carefully to make sure they aren't counterfeit. Frequently, businesses will not accept fifty dollar bills or hundred dollar bills at all. One must usually go to a bank in order to break hundred dollar bills. Outside of tourist areas and Quito, many merchants do not keep large amounts of money on hand, so getting change for bills large and small may be difficult. This is especially true on cheaper buses. Take lots of one and five dollar bills with you; you will also want to bring the newest possible bills. Worn bills are often regarded with suspicion, and it is not uncommon for a merchant to ask you to pay with another bill if the one you handed them appears old or worn.

Travellers' cheques can be exchanged at some (but not all) banks for a reasonable fee (usually not more than 3 percent). They are also accepted at some hotels that cater to tourists, although it is difficult to use them elsewhere. There is often a surcharge added to use Travellers' cheques.

Credit and debit cards are accepted at many places that cater to tourists as well as at some upmarket shops. However, many places charge a commission for their use as reimbursement for what the banks charge them. You may be asked to show your passport when using a credit or debit card.

Automated teller machines are widely available in major cities and tourist areas. Most claim to be tied in with major international networks, in theory making it possible to withdraw money from foreign accounts. Depending on the transaction fees charged by your bank at home, ATMs offer very good exchange rates. Be aware that you may have to try quite a few different machines before receiving money. TIP: Banco Austro is the only national bank chain that doesn't charge a

withdrawal fee. The others have learned a cue from the States, and typically charge \$1 or more per transaction. Avoid using ATMs on the street as their users are frequently targeted by street thieves. Hotels or other places with a guard nearby are your best choices.

Costs

Prices vary widely in Ecuador. Costs at upmarket hotels and restaurants seem to be close, maybe 10 percent less, to what they would be in the United States. Outside of tourist areas, costs are much less. It is possible to get a meal at a clean restaurant for under \$2 or to pay less than \$10 for a clean but basic hotel room.

In Quito, a very famous tourist site is El Mercado Artesanal where many handmade local crafts can be found, however, after a thorough look around you will realize that there is a bit of redundancy in the items in the sense that people tend to sell similar things. Therefore, after buying a few main items it becomes difficult to find much more variety. Almost everything that can be bought has a price that can be bargained. If you are not a native, they will try and get higher prices out of you, which is why it is recommended to go with someone who is either fluent in Spanish or native to bargain more effectively.

Eat

Throughout Ecuador there is a lot of variety as to what is typically eaten, depending on the location. In the Sierra, potatoes almost always accompany lunch and dinner, and in the coast rice is popular. Soup is also a big part of lunch and dinner. Breakfasts often consist of toast, eggs, and juice or fruit. Batidos, or fruit shakes, are popular breakfast items or snacks. Especially in the Coastline, Ecuadorians make a variety of breakfast meals based on green or sweet plantain and yuca, such as bolonoes, empanadas, patacones, corviches, muchines, pan de yuca, humitas and others. They are cooked with either cheese, pork or fish. They are very filling and inexpensive meals.

Locro de Papa

Restaurants run the gamut in terms of menu, quality, hygiene, hours and price. Basic meals can be had for less than \$2, or it is possible to pay close to US prices in the tourist areas, especially for food from the American chains.

If you're on a budget, your best bet for a good and local meal is to order an almuerzo (lunch) or a merienda (dinner). These normally consist of a soup, a meat main course and a dessert for \$2-4.

More expensive restaurants (say, ones that charge \$4 per meal or more) often add a 12% sales tax and a 10% service fee.

Coffee or tea (including many herbal varieties) is typically served after the meal unless you ask for it sooner.

Except at places that cater to foreigners, it is the custom not to present the diner with the bill until it is requested. While many servers are used to rude tourists, rubbing your fingers together isn't as accepted as in Europe although it's not considered downright rude as in the United States. The best way to get the check is to tell your server "La Cuenta, Por Favor."

Smoking is allowed in most restaurants, but the law explicitly prohibits smoking in closed areas, so it's a good idea to ask for a smoking section, or ask if the restaurant allows smoking.

Favorite dishes

Cuy or Guinea Pig

Locro de papa is a famous Ecuadorian soup with avocados, potatoes and cheese.

Ceviche is a common dish found on the coast. It is a cold seafood cocktail that is usually served with "chifles," thin fried plantains, and popcorn.

Encebollado is a hearty fish soup with yuca, also found on the coast: A tomato-fish soup filled with chunks of yuca, marinated vegetables with "chifles" thrown in for added crunch.

In the Highlands, Ecuadorians eat **cuy, or guinea pig**. The entire animal is roasted or fried and often served skewered on a stick.

Empanadas are also a common local food that are usually consumed as snacks in the afternoon. The most common varieties of this filled pastry are cheese and/or chicken.

Drink

Bottled water is very common and is safe to drink; it comes *con gas* (carbonated) and *sin gas* (non-carbonated). Water from the tap is unsafe to drink. Even Ecuadorians generally only drink bottled (or boiled) water.

Coffee is widely available in cafes and restaurants, and also sold in bean form. Tea is also common, usually with a good selection including herbal.

Fruit juice is plentiful and good, and you will often have many options: piña (pineapple), mora (blackberry), maracuyá (passion fruit), naranja (orange), sandía (watermelon), naranjilla (a jungle fruit), melon, taxo, guanabana, guava, etc. If you'd like it made with milk, sort of like a less-frozen milkshake, ask for a *batida*. Note that often juices are served lukewarm.

Aguardiente, often made from fermented sugar cane, is the local firewater. If possible, have some ground freshly into your cup from the sugar cane.

Sleep...you will sleep in very good hotels, like always with MAXimal Tours

There are many low-cost hostels that can be found throughout Ecuador. Often, the hostels in smaller towns are actually privately owned homes that welcome travellers. As with most things, natives can help you find an excellent hotel at a very low price (\$6-14). Again, large groups will be able to bargain for lower prices. Air conditioning is an amenity which often comes at an extra cost of a dollar or two a night.

Ecuador is also home to an increasing number of Eco Lodges, including many renovated, traditional Haciendas. See our article, *Haciendas of Ecuador*.

Stay safe

Tourists should use common sense to ensure their safety. Avoid problems by not flashing large amounts of money, not visiting areas near the Colombian border, staying away from civil disturbances and not using side streets in big cities at night. Probably the biggest threat in most places is simple thievery: Belongings should not be left unguarded on the beach, for example, and pickpockets can be found in some of the more crowded areas, especially the Trolébus (Metro) in Quito, in bus terminals and on the buses themselves. Buses allow pedlars to board briefly and attempt to sell their wares; however, they are often thieves themselves, so keep a close eye out for them. Hotel personnel are generally good sources of information about places that should be avoided.

You can always ask tourist police officers, police officers or in Tourist information centre for the dangerous regions.

Stay healthy

Ecuador is widely considered to be a developing country and health hazards are a significant issue. Of the most significant are food-borne illnesses, though they can easily be treated with digestive drugs such as antacids or antidiarrheals.

Bottled water is key in Ecuador if you don't want to get sick. This doesn't only apply to foreigners who don't have the stomach for Ecuadorian food but also Ecuadorians who know that if they don't boil their water or drink it from the bottle that they can get very sick. As a result, it can be

purchased almost everywhere (even in the most remote places) for well under \$0.25-0.50. Water bottles are sometimes provided by hostels and hotels, which can be used for brushing teeth.

Respect

The common greetings are "Buenos días", "Buenas tardes" or "Buenas noches", (Good morning, Good afternoon, and Good evening, respectively). It is usually complemented by a handshake, between men, and by a kiss on the cheek between women or between a man and a woman. "Hola" is the most common greeting between friends and acquaintances. Note that, as in most Latin American countries, it's considered normal and polite to stand quite close to the other person while talking.

If you speak Spanish with Ecuadorian commoners, take note of the difference between the two forms for the pronoun "you": the informal "tú" and the formal "usted". It's customary to address older people and people with whom you're not familiar with "usted". Ecuadorians are generally forgiving of non-native speakers, but use "usted" when in doubt.

Among many other cultural idiosyncrasies, in the Sierra regions it is considered impolite to use a downward-facing palm as a reference for the height of a person. Instead, the hand is held on its side, and the measurement taken from the lower edge to the floor. Gesturing with the palm down is appropriate for animals only.

When motioning for someone to "come here," it is impolite to motion your hand with the palm facing up. Instead, use a downward swipe of the hand with the palm facing down.

Acceptable clothing varies by region of the country. In the mountainous Sierra region, including Quito, clothes are usually more warm because of the weather. On the coast, meanwhile, more casual clothes predominate.

Internet

Internet connections in Ecuador are generally of poor quality. Mobile internet packages are up to four times more expensive than in, say, Colombia and the connection outside of big cities is slow. Wifi connections are usually slow and unreliable.

This said, there are free wifi networks here and there in cities, but they are unreliable. Because of this, Internet cafes are on every corner, but expensive at \$1 to \$2 per hour. It reminds you of the good old days ten years ago when mobile internet did not exist. Ecuador needs to catch up with the rest of the world in terms of Internet connection.

Telephone

For most visitors, the easiest place to make phone calls is an Internet cafe, most of which provide VoIP service at reasonable rates. You can call the United States for about \$0.10 per minute and Europe for a bit more. Avoid making a phone call through an operator; the cost for an international call can be \$3 or more per minute. For calls within Ecuador, it is possible to use a telephone cabin. This is an entire store front filled with telephones. Generally, you are assigned a booth by the proprietor, you make your call, then you pay as you leave. Calls within Ecuador are more expensive than domestic calls in most countries, but not unreasonable, except for calls to cell phones, which generate most of their revenue by charging the caller. Also, call prices increase depending on the distance of your call within Ecuador, based on city, province, etc. Visitors making an extended stay should consider purchasing a cell phone. Most are sold on a prepaid-call basis, and phone refill cards can be purchased in all but the smallest towns. It is also possible to get a modern GSM cellular phone "unlocked" so that it will function in Ecuador (you can take your own phone, if it compatible with GSM 850MHz), however, this should be reserved for emergencies as the cost of actually making such a call is usually exorbitant (about \$0.45 per minute).

Claro and Movistar are the two big operators. Claro has the bigger network but is known for poor quality, bad customer service and your credit (saldo) disappearing without you actually using it. Best to top up a dollar at a time, like the locals do.

