

South America - pocket sized! Get to know the diversity of South America travelling just one single country: Amazon jungle, active volcanoes, Páramo highlands, Inca ruins, the unique Galápagos Islands, colonial towns and colorful Indian markets.



ECUADOR - TRAVEL INFORMATION A-Z

Altitude sickness

Given Quito's high location (2,800 m a. s. l.) during the first days after arrival, there may appear symptoms of altitude sickness. Costs for medical treatments and stays in hospitals can be considerably higher than in Europe. Conventional European health insurances frequently do not or only partially cover them. Therefore sufficient protection through reliable international health and repatriation insurances is urgently advised.

Arrival

Please check the current entry and visa requirements with your embassy.

Europeans and North Americans do not require visas for touristic travels to Ecuador (for up to 90 days). Upon entry, all passports must be valid for at least another six months.

The entry stamp is mandatory (also when entering overland from Peru or Colombia). Infringements of Ecuadorian residential laws are subject to severe fines (at least 200 U.S. Dollars). One should always carry a passport or (certified) passport copy. In case of loss of passport, promptly notify your respective embassy or consulate.

Note for exits: The airport tax in Quito for international departures is currently 37.93 U.S. Dollars, as of August 2007, it will be 40.25 U.S. Dollars, and as of August 2008, 42.56 U.S. Dollars.

Banking

The country's official currency is the U.S. Dollar. Money can be exchanged in banks and exchange offices (casas de cambio). Away from the cities, money exchange may be difficult. Exchange fees vary between 1% and 4%, always make sure before exchanging money.

Banks are generally open from Mon through Fri 08:30 a.m. to 04:00 p.m. and Sat 09:00 a.m. to 01:00/02:00 p.m.

Climate

Ecuador is marked by a hot humid tropical climate in coastal areas and the eastern lowlands, the Andean highlands have a moderate climate with strong daily differences in temperature (5 - 25 °C). Rain periods are from January through May and in October/November.

Communications

Mail: Post offices are called correos. Airmail to Europe and North America takes between 10 days and 2 weeks. You should in any case label your mail "POR AVION". Mail may be deposited (poste restante) at some embassies, travel agencies, language schools and hotels. Telegrams may be sent from telegraph offices in major cities. There is a 24-hour telegram service in Quito, some hotels receive telegrams until 08:00 p.m.

Telephone: The area code for Ecuador is: +593. The domestic telephone company is Andinatel (www.andinatel.com/home.htm). In major cities you may find some public card and pay phone booths.

Faxes may be sent and received through travel agencies, some embassies, language schools, hotels and Andinatel offices. The cheapest way to call to Europe and North America are the numerous internet cafés (up to 0.08 USD / minute).

Internet: Internet cafés are frequent throughout Ecuador. Internet can be accessed also at travel agencies, language schools und hotels.

Currency

Ecuador's legal tender is the U.S. Dollar. U.S. dollar bills, cent coins and national centavo coins. Since a relatively large number fake Dollar bills are, usually shops and even banks do not \$ 50 and \$ 100 bills. Travelers should be aware of this when traveling with U.S. Dollar in cash.

Traveler checks, Maestro and credit cards are generally accepted, although some limitations in smaller locations apply. For safety reasons, ATMs should be used only during commercial hours. It is recommended not to carry larger amounts of money in cash.

In cases of financial emergencies, money transfers from relatives or friends may be realized quickly through "Western Union". "Western Union" has a tight network of branch offices in Ecuador, in Quito alone there are approx. 100 partner offices (for Western Union see: www.westernunion.com), whereas conventional money transfers to Ecuadorian banks are not reliable.

Customs

Articles to be brought into Ecuador free of duty are 300 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 200 g of tobacco, 1 l of alcoholic beverages and a small amount of perfume resp. eau de toilette.

Electric Power

110 / 120 Volt AC, 60 Hz. American flat plug adapters and transformers are required.

Geography

As its name says, Ecuador, the smallest of the Andean states, lies on the equator, at the northwestern coast of South America. To the north and northeast it limits with Colombia, to the south and east with Peru and to the west the Pacific Ocean. Its surface totals 283,600 km². The country may be divided in four regions: the coastal lowlands in the west, the Andean highlands in its center, the Amazon basin jungle, and, some 1,000 km west of the mainland, the Galápagos Islands. Its capital, the Andean city of Quito, has approx. 1.7m inhabitants and is located at 2,800 m a. s. l. The country's highest elevation is the 6,310 m volcano Mt. Chimborazo.

Government

Presidential democracy with one-chamber parliament (National Assembly). The president is also the head of state.

Holidays

01.01. New Year's Day
Feb.: Carnival
Easter: Holy Thursday & Good Friday
01.05. Labor Day
24.05. Independence Day / Anniversary of the Battle of Pichincha
15.06. Corpus Christi
24.07. Simon Bolivar-Day
10.08. Independence Day (National Day)
01./ 02.11. Día de los Muertos (All Soul's Day)
06.12. Founding Day of Quito
25.12. Christmas
31.12. New Year's Eve

Language

Ecuador's official language is Spanish. The local population often also speaks Quechua (also called: Quichua), Chibcha and other Indian languages. Partly also English is spoken.

Photografing and Filming

Before taking photos of local people (esp. indigenas) or filming them, ask for their permission; particularly in rural areas but also tourist centers make sure people agree to being photographed. Where photographs are denied for religious or other reasons, it is paramount to respect that desire.

Population

Ecuador's population is currently 12.4 million inhabitants, composed of 45% mestizos, 35% indigenous (from 13 tribes), 10% whites 10% Afro-Ecuadorians. The country's official annual growth rate is currently 2.0%, the population structure is strongly marked by a considerable emigration, mainly to Spain and the U.S.

Shopping

In smaller shops and markets you may bargain, some shops near the major hotels have set prices. In Cuenca and Gualaceo, in the Azuay Province, the ferias or fairs offer a wide range of handiworks and crafts. The best markets are in Otavalo, Ambato, Latacunga, Saquisilí and Riobamba; they exhibit excellent colorful Indian weavings and silverware. Quito is renowned for its silver smiths. Nice souvenirs are wood carvings, painted and varnished figures made of bread dough, colored tiles, woolen carpets, hand-woven blankets and other textiles, baskets, leather goods and Shigras (sling bags).

Shopping hours: Mon - Fri 09:00 a.m. – 01:00 p.m. and 03:00 – 07:00 p.m., Sat 10:00 a.m. – 08:00 p.m.; some shops, especially the small “tiendas”, are open also on Sundays.

Time zones

Time difference with GMT is -5 hours, in the Galápagos Islands, it is -6 hours. There is no daylight saving time.

Tips

Tips are expected by tour guides, doormen, porters and other personnel in tourism, however not by taxi drivers. Quality restaurants add tax (12%) and a service fee (10%) to their bills; cheaper restaurants usually do not. If you want to tip service personnel, you should do so directly and not simply leave money on the table.

Vaccines

We recommend prophylactic vaccines against Tetanus, Diphtheria and Hepatitis A, in case of prolonged stays exceeding 4 weeks also against Hepatitis B, Rabies and Typhoid.

Valid vaccination against Yellow Fever is required for all travelers over age 1 year coming from areas affected by yellow fever (see <http://www.who.int/ith/countries/en/index.html>). Non-compliance of this provision is subject to fines and denial of entry. In the past, yellow fever vaccination was sometimes checked by airlines from neighboring countries on their flights into Ecuador.

Depending on the characteristics of your trip, chemical Malaria prophylaxes may make sense. For Malaria prophylaxis, several prescription medicines are commercially available (e. g. Malarone, Doxycycline, Lariam). Their personal choice and dose, as well as possible side effects or intolerances as a result of the intake of other drugs should in any case be discussed prior to traveling with a specialist for tropical or travel medicine. Given the so-called mosquito-borne risks of infections, all travelers are advised to wear full-length clothing (long pants and shirts) during daytime and to use anti-mosquito sprays or liquids in the evening and night and to sleep under mosquito nets, if necessary.