



ECUADOR GUIDE

The country that has it all

Ecuador is not one thing but many, **four little worlds** thrust into one little country.

Parked on **Latitude 0** between its larger relatives, Colombia and Peru, Ecuador is a colourful clash of **indigenous traditions** and **colonial Spanish heritage**.

Once the home of **Inca rulers** and sophisticated **pre-Columbian civilisations**, cities now bear the marks of the Spanish conquistadors in their **charming plazas** and **grandiose churches**. Meanwhile plentiful **religious festivals** combine the best of both cultures, worshipping **Catholic saints** and the **Pacha Mama (Mother Earth)** all in the same breath.

No one landscape characterises this Andean jewel. Snow-capped **mountains**, windswept **páramos**, steaming **jungles**, pristine **beaches** and extra-terrestrial **lava fields** form the backdrop to **endless adventures**, challenging you to push yourself and your endurance, or to simply **enjoy the scenery**.

The WanderBus **connects the dots**, bringing the disparate destinations together into **one coherent route**, with the most **spectacular experiences** along the way.



AT A GLANCE

Size

283,560 km² (slightly larger than the UK or Colorado State)

Population

16.3 million

Language

Spanish and Quichua

Capital

Quito

Currency

US Dollar (\$)

Ecuador backpacking budget

expect to spend a minimum of US\$30/day for food and accommodation, rising to a minimum of US\$60 with activities factored in.

- Ecuador mainland: GMT/UTC -5
- Galapagos: GMT/UTC -6

Weird fact

You could cross the whole country (either north-south or east-west) in about 10 hours flat – but with so many amazing things to see and do in Ecuador we don't advise it!

WHERE IS ECUADOR?



REGIONS

Ecuador is divided into four distinct regions:

*1) the **highlands**, 2) the **rainforest**, 3) the **coast** and 4) the **Galapagos**, creating some very cool geography*



- Ecuador is located right on latitude zero – thus its name. You can stand on both hemispheres at once!
- Mount Chimborazo is the closest point on the Earth to the Sun.
- The Andes mountain range forms a spine from the top to the bottom of Ecuador, separating the Amazon rainforest regions from the tropical coast.
- Beautiful lakes, one of the highest active volcanoes in the world, the most biodiverse cloud and rainforests on the planet and stunning rivers linked to the Amazon are all found here.
- The largest, yet least-populated, region is the Amazon.

The Napo River is the largest tributary of the Amazon and was where the gargantuan river was 'discovered'.
- There are dozens of amazing Pacific Coast beaches.

+ LOCAL TIP

Due to the raised bump on the Earth's sphere where Ecuador is located, the sun here is strong – really strong. Wear good-quality sunscreen whenever you're outdoors – even if it's cloudy.





LAND OF NATURAL TREASURES

- Ecuador's cloud forests are probably the richest diversity hotspot on Earth, home to 15-17% of the planet's plant species, and almost 20% of its birds.
- Bears, jaguars, tiny tamarin monkeys, pumas, ocelots, anteaters, sloths, armadillos, anacondas, alligators, giant river otters and ocelots are among Ecuador's most exotic residents.
- With more than 1,500 species of birds (700 more species than Australia) Ecuador is a bird-watcher's paradise.
- Charles Darwin was inspired to form his evolutionary theory by the Galapagos Islands and the dozens of strange creatures that exist here and nowhere else in the world, like the Galapagos penguin and the marine iguana.
- The seas of the Galapagos hold more wildlife wonders still, from tropical fish, giant turtles, manta rays and hammerhead sharks.

Unmissable Ecuador National Parks

Almost 20% of Ecuador's land is protected in National Parks. Here are our top five:

Cotopaxi National Park, Cotopaxi	
El Cajas National Park, Cuenca	
Galapagos National Park, Galapagos	
Yasuni National Park, Coca	
Machalilla National Park, Puerto Lopez	

+ GETTING HIGH

There's not much you can do to prepare for the high altitude in Ecuador. Take your time to adjust to it, making sure to drink lots of water, avoid alcohol and cigarettes, and not attempt strenuous physical activities until your body has acclimatised.



ECUADORIAN FOOD

With a geography and climate as diverse as Ecuador's, it's little wonder that there's a great deal of variety in the country's cuisine. Signature flavours include green plantain every way imaginable, dozens of types of corn, the zing of lime, chili, coriander and coconut, the freshest seafood from the Pacific Coast including world-famous Galapagos lobster, and sticky and sweet fried pork. The country is slowly waking up to the needs of vegans and allergy-sufferers with more exciting options available in bigger cities like Quito, Guayaquil, Montañita and Cuenca.

+ EXTREME EATS

Will you be intrepid (or hungry) enough to try guinea pig pizza in Otavalo or grilled insects in the Amazon?

Top three dishes



Locro de papa – a hearty potato and cheese soup from the Andes



Hornado – slow-roasted hog roast, best served with llapingacho potato patties



Ceviche de camarón – delicious with shrimp, but also fish and clams, and vegetarian with chochos (lupin)



HOW TO GET TO ECUADOR

- **Quito:** Fly to Mariscal Sucre International Airport (Quito Airport). Daily connections from Miami, New York, Atlanta, Houston, Panama, Bogotá, Lima, Mexico City, Madrid, Amsterdam...
- Located 38km from the city centre, a taxi from the airport will cost around US\$25. You can also catch a shuttle bus to the Old Airport for US\$8 and take a taxi from there. Or there are public buses (\$1) to the Rio Coca terminal in northern Quito.
- **Guayaquil:** Fly to José Joaquín de Olmedo International Airport. A taxi to the city centre costs around US\$5.
- **Buses** from Peru (south and also east in the Amazon) and Colombia (north).



PASSPORTS & IMMIGRATION

- Tourists are issued with a 90-day visa on arrival. Most nationalities do not need to apply for a visa before arrival.
- Those wishing to continue travelling in Ecuador past the 90-day mark can apply for a visa extension.
- Your passport needs to be valid for at least six months before its expiration date.
- Immigration requires you to have a departure ticket on arrival. Your airline might ask you to present it at check in.



WEATHER IN ECUADOR

Ecuador's wildly diverse geography means that separate climates and seasons are at play within each region. Below is a rough guide, though Ecuador's weather is famously changeable and you might experience four "seasons" in the space of a day...



High Season (June-September)

- In the mountainous areas of the **Andes and Quito** known as the **Sierra**, or highlands, days are sunny and clear.
- In the **Amazon**, there is less rainfall. The rainiest season here is April to June.
- This is the colder, dryer season in **Galapagos** when seas tend to be rougher.

+ LOCAL TIP

Wake up early! When it rains in the Sierra it often does so in the afternoon – rise with the birds and enjoy a sunny morning of sight-seeing.

Mid Season (October-November)

- In the mountainous areas of the Andes and Quito known as the **Sierra**, or highlands, days are sunny and clear.
- In the Amazon, there is less rainfall. The rainiest season here is April to June.
- This is the colder, dryer season in Galapagos when seas tend to be rougher.

Low Season (December-May)

- Temperatures are lower in the **Sierra** and rainfall can be heavy.
- This is high season on the coast, with warm temperatures, sparse rainfall and hours of sunshine.
- January to May is the high season in **Galapagos**.





TOP FESTIVITIES

The mixture of Catholic and indigenous cultures and Latino spirit makes for a great party!

- Carnaval (February)
- Semana Santa (March/April)
- Corpus Christi / San Juan (June)
- Verano de las Artes Quito (August)
- Fiestas de Quito (early December)
- New Year's Eve (December)

MONEY IN ECUADOR

- Currency is US Dollars (US\$)
- ATMs are found in cities and most towns
- Notes of US\$50 or greater are often not accepted – bring plenty of smaller notes
- Hotels, restaurants and shops accept international credit and debit cards including Visa, MasterCard and (to a lesser extent) American Express
- Ecuador backpacking budget: expect to spend a minimum of US\$30/day

+ PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Buses around cities and across the country are cheap (from 25 cents per journey). However, petty crime is prevalent and care must be taken. Timetables can be unreliable and the state of the vehicles are variable.



Is Ecuador safe?

The great majority of Ecuador has been ruled safe for travel by the UK Foreign Office and the US State Department rates it Level 1: Exercise Normal Precautions. However, even when travelling in tourist-friendly, safe zones, it's advisable to take the following sensible precautions:

- Exercise caution when travelling in crowded places
 - Use a money belt
 - Avoid certain neighbourhoods and parks after dark
 - Take licensed taxis (or use a cab hailing app like Uber or Cabify)
 - Photocopy your passport to have with you
 - Be suspicious of people 'trying to help you' (there is a scam where visitors are smeared with mustard (or worse) and approached by a kind Samaritan whose accomplice will divest you of your wallet/bag...)
 - Wear your backpack on the front
 - Take local advice
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Health and Vaccinations

- There is a small risk of yellow fever in some parts of the country; check with your doctor if you need this or other vaccinations.
 - Anti-malaria medicine can be taken for visits to the Amazon, but are not essential for short visits. Precautions such as wearing long-sleeved shirts and trousers, and using mosquito repellent and nets, however are.
 - Only do sport and adventure activities with reputable companies: cheap tour = cheap equipment.
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***Wanderbus
Ecuador strongly
recommends
that you take out
travel insurance
for Ecuador.***

How much time do you need?

The beauty of Ecuador is that it's a small country with tonnes to do and see! Within one week in Ecuador you could climb an active volcano, plunge through the Amazon and swim in the Pacific Ocean. For a more in depth exploration, take three weeks or more to discover the hidden jewels of this diverse South American destination.





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