



Galapagos Information

THE COUNTRY

Although covering just 99,130 sq. miles Ecuador contains one of the most varied geographies in South America. There are four distinct regions: the Andean highlands, the coastal tropical plains, the Amazon Basin and the Galapagos Islands, located 600 miles off the coast in the Pacific Ocean. Quito, on the highlands, is the capital city; Guayaquil, on the coast, is the main port and the largest city in the country.

THE PEOPLE

Of Ecuador's more than 13.2 million inhabitants, those in the highlands are mainly mestizo, a mixture of European and Native South American extractions. Indigenous peoples live mainly in the Andean highlands and in the Amazon regions. Coastal dwellers are descendants of Native South Americans, Europeans and Africans

BANKS AND BUSINESSES

Most city offices and shops open from 9:00 to 18:00 Monday through Friday. Currency exchange facilities are open week days and Saturday morning in major hotels. Banking facilities are not available in remote areas. U.S. Dollars are accepted throughout the country. ATM's are easily found throughout the main cities. Cash advances can be made at most banks or ATM's.

CURRENCY

Ecuador's currency is the US Dollar. U.S. dollars are used for all transactions. There is no restriction on the amount of foreign currency or travelers checks brought into Ecuador.

CUSTOMS

Each passenger is allowed two bags of up to 50 pounds each, plus carry-on luggage, photo or video camera, and binoculars. Professional filming equipment, diving and climbing gear require special permits.

ELECTRICITY

110 volts, 60 cycles AC is used. Most outlets are for two flat prongs. It is useful to carry a small flashlight. For TV and video equipment, Ecuador uses the NTSC system.

LANGUAGE

Ecuador's official language is Spanish, but Kichwa, the lingua franca of the Inca Empire, is the tongue of the majority of the Indian population. English is spoken in major visitor centers.

PASSPORTS AND VISAS

Valid passports are required for entry into Ecuador. No visas are needed for stays of up to 90 days. Before landing, your airline will give you an embarkation/disembarkation card to be filled out and presented to the Immigration officer.

TAXES

There is a sales tax added to purchases; hotels and restaurants charge sales tax and service. There is also an international departure tax to be paid in dollars at the airport.

CLIMATE

Ecuador has a land area similar in size to the State of Colorado and is divided into four different geographic zones: the Amazon, the highlands, the Pacific lowlands and the Galapagos Islands. Since Ecuador is located right on the equator, the country as a whole experiences no extreme weather changes. Rainy seasons vary in each zone. See our specific brochures for information on each area.

FOOD

International cuisine is available throughout the country, but try some of the Ecuadorian specialties: humitas and tamales (made of corn and wrapped in leaves), llapingachos (fried mashed potato patties with cheese), ceviche (a saucy shrimp cocktail), and locro (a soup of stewed potatoes and cheese topped with an avocado). There are many excellent restaurants in the main cities and a restaurant guide is distributed free to all visitors upon arrival in Ecuador.

TIPPING

As in many places, gratuities are customary, but entirely at guest's discretion. Guidelines for tipping will be found in the "Welcome Kit" you receive upon arrival.

TIME

Local time on the mainland is Greenwich Meridian Time minus 5 hours (Eastern Standard Time in the United States). Galapagos time is GMT minus 6 hours.

PARK FEES

Visitors to the Galapagos Islands, the Amazon rain forest, the Cotopaxi National Park and other National Parks and Natural Reserves must pay entrance fees. Such prices vary and are not included in tour rates.

HEALTH

No inoculations are required for entry. Travelers with heart conditions or high blood pressure should check with their physicians about high-altitude travel, as well as preventive measures for visiting tropical areas. Bottled water is advised and available everywhere.

DRINKING WATER AND DRINKS

Bottled mineral water, with or without carbonation, is available at all hotels, ships and lodges. Ecuadorian beer is excellent, and bottled soft drinks are available everywhere. Coffee and tea are usually served at the end of meals.

CLOTHING

Lightweight woolens are ideal for the highlands; and warm jackets are essential after dusk at high altitudes. Cottons for the Amazon, Pacific lowlands and Galapagos. Dress is informal. Dressing in layers is ideal. Do not forget swimming wear and comfortable walking shoes.

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