

Ecuador Explorer

8 days | Starts/Ends: Quito



Discover the highlights of Ecuador in 8 days, from the dizzy heights of Quito and the colourful market towns of Otavalo and Cuenca to beautiful Banos, a spa town famous for its hot thermal springs.

HIGHLIGHTS AND INCLUSIONS

Trip Highlights

- The UNESCO listed colonial city of Quito
- Otavalo Market town - handicrafts, souvenirs and villagers in local dress
- Cuenca - home of the Panama hat, UNESCO listed city with cobblestone streets, open plazas and whitewashed buildings
- Banos - a spa town famous for its hot thermal springs

What's Included

- Airport arrival transfer on day 1
- 6 breakfasts
- 7 nights in simple hotels
- Excursions to Quito, Otavalo, Banos and Cuenca
- Escorted by a tour leader, with specialist guides for some included excursions
- Transportation by public bus

What's Not Included

- International flights to/from our tour start/end points and visas

- Items of a personal nature and additional meals

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1 : Quito

Upon arrival at Quito airport you will be met and transferred to our joining hotel. The first day of your tour is simply an arrival day with no pre-organised activities. In order to allow time to relax and see some of the sights you may wish to add pre tour accommodation. On arrival please ask at the reception for information on when the pre departure meeting will be held.

At 2,850 metres above sea level, Quito is the second highest capital city in the world after La Paz. It was founded in 1534 by the Spanish and was originally an Inca stronghold. As the headquarters of the recently formed Union of South American Nations (which was modelled on the European Union) Quito is also considered the capital of South American integration. It is situated in a hollow at the base of the live Volcano Pichincha and the whole length of the city can be seen from atop Panecillo Hill where the enormous Statue of the Virgin of Quito stands. The city has two main sections – the old and the new. The new is the main commercial area with lots of good restaurants and bars, whereas the old city is the colonial area in the centre, with steep calles (cobblestone streets), busy plazas and indigenous markets.

The Equatorial Monument is just 23 kilometres north of the city, and also houses an excellent museum that displays clothing, other wares and photos of the varied and colourful Ecuadorian people.

Optional Excursions: Teleferico sky tram to Volcan Pichincha – US\$4-7 + taxi fare • Museo Solar Inti Nan – US\$3 + transport • Walking tour through old town (3 hours) – US\$10 • Plaza de la Independencia – free, US\$1 to enter cathedral • Museo de la Ciudad – US\$3 **Overnight - Quito**

Day 2 : Otavalo Markets



Quito - Otavalo - Quito. Today we explore the market town of Otavalo. The market has been a tradition since pre Incan times, and there are many authentic goods and crafts to purchase. Hagggle with the locals for colourful handmade gifts, especially the famous woven textiles. Once we have enjoyed the markets we will return to Quito for the night. **Overnight - Quito (B)**

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Days 3-4 : Banos - spa town



Quito - Banos. We continue by bus through spectacular scenery to Baños, a spa town famous for its hot thermal springs. Besides soaking in the pools, there are pathways to walk into the surrounding mountains and the chance to go horseback riding in the hills (optional). The less energetic can spend their time relaxing in cafés and shopping for souvenirs. Baños is the best place to buy beautifully painted balsa wood animals and try taffy, a local sweet.

Optional Excursions: Canyoning – US\$50 • White water rafting – US\$40-75 • Bridge swing/ bungee jump – US\$20 • Waterfall and volcano viewing • Hot baths – US\$3-4 • Mountain biking – US\$5 (half day) **Overnight - Banos** (B:2)

Days 5-6 : Cuenca - World Heritage Site



Banos – Cuenca. We travel on to the old colonial market town of Cuenca (kwen -ca) - Ecuador's third largest city. Cuenca is the home of the Panama hat and you will have the chance to visit a factory. Cuenca's beautiful colonial air of cobblestone streets, open plazas and whitewashed buildings with ironwork balconies has earned it the UNESCO World Heritage Site status. You have the option to visit the celebrated Inca ruins of Ingapirca, the country's most important archaeological site. The fortress complex has a central platform where the Incas worshipped the sun. The Cañari people built

the original structures and you can still see the place where these pre-Inca folk worshipped the moon.

Optional Excursions: Ingapirca ruins - US\$6 entry + transport • Catedral Vieja and Catedral Nueva – free • Museo de Arte Moderno – free • City Tour – US\$5 • Cajas National Park – free **Overnight - Cuenca** (B:2)

Day 7 : Quito



Cuenca - Quito. A short flight takes us back to Quito where you will have free time to discover the city. Wander around the UNESCO listed old town, a maze of colonial splendour where the vibrant indigenous character is still retained or head to the colourful Mariscal Sucre, the heart of the 'new town'. Here you will find trendy cafes, international restaurants and lively bars.

Optional Excursions: Teleferico sky tram to Volcan Pichincha – US\$4-7 + taxi fare • Museo Solar Inti Nan – US\$3 + transport • Walking tour through old town (3 hours) – US\$10 • Plaza de la Independencia – free, US\$1 to enter cathedral • Museo de la Ciudad – US\$3 **Overnight - Quito** (B)

Day 8 : Quito

Your adventure concludes today, please confirm with the reception the check out time and make your way to the airport for your flight home. If you have a late flight or have lengthened your stay by adding post tour accommodation you will have more time to explore the sights.

Arriving to Quito

Airport transfers

An airport arrival transfer is included. If you are going to be delayed more than two hours, you must advise us of the delay at least six hours before arrival. If we are advised in time, we will make every effort to reschedule your

transfer and your driver will be asked to wait for two hours after your new expected arrival time. However, if we are not made aware of any change, the driver will only wait for two hours after the original scheduled arrival time and after this point it will be up to you to arrange transport to your hotel at your own expense. If you are likely to be delayed, please contact us on the emergency contact person as detailed on your voucher.

Our Start Hotel is:

Cayman Hotel

Juan Rodriguez 270 y Reina Victoria

Quito, Ecuador

Tel: (+593) 2 2567 616

The hotel serves a continental breakfast consisting of bread, jam and tea/coffee or juice, or an American breakfast with eggs. Please check with reception for serving times and prices (breakfast is not included).

Top tips for your arrival

On arrival in Quito we recommend you change enough money into the local currency for the first four or five days of your tour. The currency used in Ecuador is the US dollar. These are available from ATMs or with US\$ travellers cheques. Ecuadorian notes tend to be of poor quality and you will have trouble exchanging these if you are travelling outside of Ecuador.

The hotel has safe deposit boxes for your use (you will get an itemised receipt). Please leave all of your important documents, money and travellers cheques here when you go out but remember to carry some form of ID and a photocopy of your passport with you. It is Ecuadorian law that you carry a copy of your passport with you at all times. It is advisable not to wear chains or expensive looking watches or jewellery while in major South American cities. You should also keep your camera concealed when not in use and carry daypacks on your front for extra safety.

Remember Quito is located at 2,800 metres above sea level, making it the second highest capital city in the world. You may feel the effects of altitude, which affects all people differently. If you have just arrived it is suggested you take it

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very easy for the first day and follow the below recommendations:

- Drink plenty of water, around two to two-and-a-half litres per day. Bottled water is available everywhere.
- The affects of alcohol and cigarettes are made considerably worse by the thin air. Try to avoid these in excess for the first few days.
- Take it easy. Walk slowly and avoid sudden movements

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Our partners Tucan Travel

Please note that our South America group tours (not Galapagos cruises) are operated by Tucan Travel. Travellers on your trip will have made their reservation with either On The Go Tours or Tucan Travel.

Hotels & Arrival Transfers

Arriving at the airport

When you arrive in your starting city the immigration officials may ask to see your onward flight ticket, so you should have your Tucan Travel tour voucher and international flight ticket to hand.

Day 1 of all our tours is simply a joining day and the tour actually departs the joining city on day 2. The last day of your tour is the official departure day and is free for you to pack or sightsee before you depart. All tours are scheduled to arrive at your final destination the afternoon/evening before your departure day. Therefore very little time is spent in each of the starting and finishing cities and you will need to allow a few days at the beginning or end of your tour if you want to explore them further. This is particularly important for passengers joining tours in high altitude cities (Quito & La Paz) so that you can rest and acclimatise before the tour begins. We can book pre and post tour accommodation for you upon request.

Check in time is at 1300 hrs on day 1. If you wish to use the services of a room before or after checkout time, or you are arriving very early in the morning of day 1, you will need to book an extra night, which we can arrange for you. All rooms are on a bed only basis unless otherwise indicated.

An airport arrival transfer is included. Departure transfers are not included but can be booked for an additional fee.

Important: Upon arrival, if you are going to be delayed more than two hours, you must advise us of the delay at least six hours before arrival. If we are advised in time, we will make every effort to reschedule your transfer and your driver will be asked to wait for two hours after your new expected arrival time. However, if we are not made aware of any change, the driver will only wait for two hours after the original scheduled arrival time and after this point it will be up to you to arrange transport to your hotel at your own expense. Please contact us on the emergency number on your tour voucher.

Missing your tour departure

If you miss the start of your tour, please ask at the reception of the hotel for a message from your tour leader which will give you instructions on how to catch up with the group. Any associated costs will be at your own expense (although, depending on the reason, you may be able to claim these from your travel insurance so ensure you keep all receipts).

If you know in advance that you are unlikely to arrive on time, please contact Tucan Travel immediately so we can inform the tour leader. Tucan Travel cannot be held responsible should your airline/boat/coach be delayed and we are unable to refund any unused portion of your tour.

Welcome Meeting

South America Group Tours - The address of your start hotel can be found on your tour voucher. On arrival you should look for a Tucan Travel information sheet and welcome note on the hotel notice board where you will find details of the pre-departure/welcome meeting. The tour leader or a representative will normally hold the pre-departure meeting early in the evening of day one (assuming that all travellers have arrived by then). You will be briefed about the tour, given an outline itinerary for the next few days and any questions will be answered. After the meeting there is usually an option for everyone to go out for dinner and drinks to start to get to know one another.

Please note that you will need to bring the following items to the pre departure meeting:

- The original copy and a photocopy of your passport
- Vaccination certificates (if required)
- Travel voucher
- Details of your travel insurance policy number and their 24hr emergency contact number

Our itineraries

Our detailed day by day itineraries are provided in good faith and it is our intention to adhere to the published route but please be aware that changes may be made before or during your tour for operational or safety reasons or to incorporate improvements. Impromptu changes may also occur whilst you are travelling as a result of one-off circumstances such as an excursion being closed on a particular day, weather conditions or transport. Delays are rare but occur occasionally and for this reason and the reasons above this itinerary should be considered as a guide only. Published transport times are approximations and may vary depending on local conditions.

Optional Excursions

During our South America Group Tours there will be free time to enjoy a range of optional excursions which are listed in the trip notes. Your tour leader will be able to make recommendations and bookings in advance for most of these activities so you have more flexibility and control over your itinerary. Please note that you may not have time to do all of the optional excursions listed. Should you wish to partake in optional activities in the city where your tour starts/ends, please check there is sufficient time to do so or alternatively consider booking pre/post tour accommodation.

Optional excursions are not operated by On The Go Tours / Tucan Travel and while every effort is made prices may not be up-to-date and are intended as a general guide to help you budget for your trip. Prices for vehicle-based excursions are approximate based on the optimum number of participants and the actual price may vary depending on group size.

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Sufficient safety equipment such as helmets and life jackets are sometimes not available and On The Go Tours / Tucan Travel are unable to provide this equipment. If you intend to participate in an optional excursion you may like to consider bringing your own safety gear.

Excursions are run by a local operator or third party with both On The Go Tours / Tucan Travel and the Tour Leader acting as a booking agent only. Optional activities are not part of the tour and our booking conditions do not apply to them. It is your responsibility to ensure you have the correct travel insurance for the excursions you intend to take part in and On The Go Tours / Tucan Travel are not liable for any injuries incurred.

Spending Money

Spending money – allow approximately US\$25-\$30 per day to cover meals, snacks, drinks, limited souvenirs, laundry, tips and any extras on our group tours.

Style of Tour

Our South America Group Tours are designed to suit travellers who love being able to travel on many different forms of transport with local people. There is a certain amount of involvement needed, which will mean carrying your own bags to the bus or train station or even helping the driver throw everyone's packs onto the roof. If you enjoy meeting and interacting with local people and don't mind roughing it occasionally, then these tours will be just right for you.

It is important that you are open to travelling with a range of different age groups. You must also satisfy yourself that you are fit enough to complete the itinerary as there are no refunds if you choose to leave the tour. Based on the nature of this travel style, our adventurous South America tours are generally suitable for people aged between 18 and 60 years old. If you have any questions about this please contact us or speak to your travel consultant.

Our South America tours suit people who are fit and active. On all of our tours there are many walks between bus/train terminals and hotels and travellers must be able to carry their own luggage over various terrains as well as lift up

luggage onto the tops of buses so do not pack more than you can comfortably carry.

The average group size is 8 to 12 passengers with a maximum of 16, however on some included excursions group sizes may occasionally be larger.

Tour Leaders

Our South America Tours are escorted by a tour leader who will be responsible for the day-to-day running of the tour, so you are free to sit back, relax and enjoy the journey. Our tour leaders are genuine travel addicts who will share their passion for their destination with you.

You may be assisted at other times by other representatives, who will escort you at times when your tour leader may not be available. In addition, local guides are used to accompany many of our excursions, such as visits to archaeological sites and the Inca Trail Trek. Their knowledge of the local area and familiarity with its customs and history will enhance your experience by getting to know a country from a local's perspective.

Our South America tours operate on a modular system with smaller tour sections joining and leaving the master tour throughout its duration. This means that you may start your tour with a local representative and then meet up with your tour leader and the rest of your group on day two of the tour.

Tipping

Although tipping is not a natural part of many Western cultures it is expected in South America, where many workers are very poorly paid and depend on tips for their main income. The local people work very hard to provide a good service and this is due in part to the tips they have received from foreigners in the past. However all tips are at your own discretion and you should not feel obliged or pressured to tip at any time – particularly if you feel that the level of service was not up to standard.

As a general guideline a gratuity of 10% of the total bill for your waiter is recommended in restaurants. You should be aware that prices on the menu often exclude service charges but they are added to the bill (10%) and local

taxes (anywhere between 2% and 20%). If it is included then you are not expected to pay an additional tip, although this is still appreciated. Some restaurants have a 'cubiertos' (cover charge) which is normally added onto the food section of the bill, not the total, so watch out for this when dividing the bill with other group members.

It is customary to tip your local guides on both included and optional excursions. As a guideline, we recommend US\$3-5 per person for a half/full day excursion. Your tour leader will generally pass around an envelope for the local guide on included excursions. The tour leader will indicate on the envelope the amount of the tip usually given per person to the guide.

This information is given as a guide as many travellers are unsure how much to tip. Should you wish to give the local guide your tip personally and not with the group tip then please feel free to do so.

Inca Trail and Lares Trek - the commonly accepted combined tip for guides, porters and cooks on the Inca Trail or Lares Trek is US\$30 per trekker. This amount will be collected from each trekker by the tour leader and distributed amongst the Trail team usually at the last dinner.

Tips are also appreciated by your tour leader at the end of your tour. This, however, this is only if you feel that their service was up to standard and is completely at your own discretion. Tipping is an entirely personal gesture.

Group Tour Accommodation

In South America we generally stay in small, locally-owned hotels rather than large international chains. We are occasionally far from towns and cities, staying in unique places such as jungle lodges, Chinese junk boats or remote home-stays. Depending on the tour, the accommodation we use is generally the equivalent in comfort of a two to three star hotel (except on our Peru in Comfort tour which offers 4 star accommodation). We stay in small hotels, hostels and guest houses which are usually situated close to the main sights and town centres. They are chosen for their local character, ambience, cleanliness and security. You will find comfortable rooms with en-suite

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facilities (although on rare occasions bathrooms may be shared).

All accommodation is included from the arrival day until check out time on the final day of the tour. Travellers will share rooms with other group members of the same gender. Mostly this will be in twin rooms although sometimes in triples depending on the group composition and hotel rooming structure.

Please note: Accommodation sometimes has erratic services such as a lack of hot water or no central heating. Depending on the tour, there may be occasions when you are camping or your overnight accommodation is on buses, trains or boats. More details on accommodation can be found on each tour itinerary page. Hotel staff don't always speak English and sometimes our reservations are "lost"! In general, facilities are very good but please be prepared for the occasional mishap, which is all part of the typical travel experience.

Transportation & Travel

On all of our South America Group Tours we use a variety of transportation. Vehicles can range from buses filled with local people and their many possessions to our private minibuses and comfortable air-conditioned coaches. Sometimes you could be travelling on boats, trains, planes, ferries, private shuttle buses, boats, dugout canoes and taxis. Most bus transport is very comfortable, often with reclining seats.

Our aim is not simply to get you from A to B, but to help you to experience each destination as a genuine traveller, not as a first class tourist. A word of warning - please remember that travelling conditions can sometimes be cramped.

The occasional long travel day is inevitable when you are covering large distances. Our South America Tours try to find the balance between long, short and non travel days, ensuring our itineraries aren't too tiring and give you time to explore. We cut down on travel times by including some short flights and overnight trains and buses. Each itinerary is

different, so please check the tour itineraries for information on travel times.

Meals

On our South America Group Tours breakfast is often included. In remote areas such as the Amazon Jungle excursion and on the Inca Trail or Lares treks, much and dinner is also included. Most other meals are not included which gives you the flexibility to choose when and where you eat. Our tour leaders have a wealth of knowledge regarding local restaurants and can advise you of the best places to try the delicious and varied local cuisine.

What to Pack

Our South America tours often involve walks between bus or train terminals and hotels, so travellers must be able to carry their own luggage over various terrains, as well as lift luggage on to the tops of buses. We therefore recommend backpacks over suitcases, as you may be off the beaten track every now and again. It is important that you only pack what you can comfortably carry. By packing less you will have a more enjoyable tour and have more room in your luggage for souvenirs! On tours that include flights, we cover the cost of your checked baggage up to 20kg, even in cases where the airline policy is lower. All baggage over 20kg may still be checked, but charges will be the responsibility of the traveller.

In addition to your main bag, you will need a small daypack for your everyday excursions. Try to keep this bag as light as possible and make sure that all main sections of your bags can be padlocked. This daypack should have enough room to carry plenty of food and snacks for long hikes and treks and be big enough for an overnight excursions.

Essential for all tours

- Tour Voucher and Tour Trip Notes
- Passport - with at least six months after you have finished your tour with sufficient blank pages. (with 2 photocopies - one kept separately & the other to give to the tour leader with your next of kin details)
- Cash/ travellers cheques/ credit & debit cards (with photocopies kept separately)
- Travel insurance certificate (with a photocopy to be given to your tour leader)

- Spare passport photos (you may need these for obtaining visas)
- International airline tickets (with a photocopy kept separately)
- International Vaccination Certificate (Yellow Fever if applicable)
- International student card (may get you discounts into some sites)
- Your travel consultant's phone number and email address (it is very important to have this as it is much easier to confirm/ change flights etc via your agent)

Suggested equipment (some useful, some necessary - use your discretion)

- Cotton money belt and/or pouch to store your valuables under your clothing
- Sunglasses
- Small calculator (to help with currency conversions)
- Lockable pouch for your money and valuables to use in safety deposit boxes
- Plastic bags (very useful for wrapping camera equipment, soap, shampoo bottles, wet clothing etc)
- Inflatable pillow (if trekking in Peru)
- Sleeping Bag (if trekking in Peru)
- Small umbrella (also good for sun protection)
- Pegless washing line and travel laundry detergent (bio-degradable preferably)
- Torch
- Binoculars
- Travel alarm clock
- Travel plug adaptor
- Small medical kit with diarrhoea remedy, rehydration salts, antiseptic cream, sterile dressings, plasters, bandages, pain-killers, safety pins etc.
- Small sewing kit
- Lip balm, sun block with high UV factor (this can be expensive to buy locally)
- Insect repellent (DEET 35% min) and bite cream
- Tampons and condoms
- Toilet paper (best to carry a roll with you at all times) and/or tissues (purchase locally)
- Antibacterial hand cleansing gel (the type you can use without water)
- Moistened face tissues (e.g. Wet Ones)
- Ear plugs
- Travel sickness tablets (these are usually easy to buy over the counter locally)
- Cheap plastic wristwatch

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- Spare pair of spectacles or contact lenses and solution (a lens prescription is also advisable in case of loss or breakage)
- Camera /video camera with plenty of film or digital camera with spare memory cards
- Spare rechargeable batteries for camera etc
- Writing materials, address book and diary
- Pocket size Spanish phrasebook
- Travel games, cards & couple of paperbacks
- As gifts for local children - pens (with advertising on them), coloured pencils, small notepads. To discourage a begging mentality we recommend that you try to give these gifts at schools or childcare centres rather than on the street.

Clothing & Foot wear

All clothes should be lightweight, durable and easily washable. Please do not bring any military or camouflage-style clothing as it can be dangerous to wear and occasionally illegal. Everybody ALWAYS packs too much, so rather than bringing lots of chunky sweaters, wear clothing in layers when in the colder regions. Nights can be cold at higher altitude so it is a good idea to bring at least one pair of warm trousers or jeans plus several thinner sweaters/fleeces which you can layer (note: it is very easy to buy extra sweaters/ jumpers locally).

Check the climate and altitude at www.worldclimate.com to get an idea of what the weather will be like on your tour. We do not feel that it is necessary to include a full packing list as you will know what you need depending on the duration of your tour. However we do recommend that you bring the following:

- A lightweight water/windproof jacket with hood
- Easy to pack wide-brimmed hat or cap
- Sarong - very useful as a beach towel, bag, hat, shawl and wrap around
- Towel
- Swimwear
- Sandals/flip flops

It is also ESSENTIAL that you have good, comfortable shoes that are suitable for walking and trekking. These don't need to be expensive boots, but they should have good ankle support and grip, be worn in and ideally waterproof.

Sleeping Bags

A good warm sleeping bag is necessary on all tours which include the Inca Trail or Lares Trail in Peru. Adequate ones can be hired locally but we take no responsibility for the standard and we therefore recommend that if possible you bring your own. Because these treks are at high altitude, we recommend bringing a four season bag with side zip which can be opened out when you reach warmer weather. Extra blankets can be purchased locally if necessary.

In South America, you may have a number of overnight excursions included on your tour. Thick blankets are supplied when on Amantani Island (Lake Titicaca) but they have a tendency to be dusty, so you may wish to bring a sleeping bag or sheet (they cannot be hired there). You may also wish to bring a sleeping sheet for your overnight excursion into the Amazon Jungle.

A sleeping bag liner/sleep sheet is optional on all other South America Tours. Some passengers like to use them on long bus journeys and overnight trains.

Health

Please see your doctor or travel clinic for an up to date list of all recommended vaccinations for the regions you will be travelling to. We recommend that you do this at least eight weeks before you travel, as you may need a course of medications or more than one vaccination. In general we recommend that you are vaccinated against Tetanus-diphtheria, polio, hepatitis A and Typhoid and if travelling to a jungle area, yellow fever. Vaccinations are solely the responsibility of the traveller and not that of On The Go Tours.

The malarial risk varies in the regions of South America and in some areas appropriate preventive medicines are needed. Measures should always be taken to avoid mosquito bites, such as nets and creams. Please check with your health care professional as to the best and most up to date remedy for this mosquito borne disease.

It is not recommended that you drink the tap water in any of the countries we visit and we recommend that you carry a First Aid kit as well as any personal medical requirements.

Please be aware that quite often we are in remote areas and away from medical facilities, and for legal reasons our leaders are prohibited from administering any type of drug including headache tablets, antibiotics, etc.

Electricity Supply

The power supply varies from country to country and can also vary from region to region within a country. If bringing electrical equipment, make sure that it can be switched over from 110 volts to 220 volts and vice versa. If your equipment is 220 volts it will work on a 110 volt system (albeit slower), but if you use 110 volt equipment in a 220 volt system, it will blow the equipment! Bring a voltage converter and travel plug adaptor (most countries either have 2 pin flat as in USA or 2 round pins).

Personal Safety

It is not advisable to wear chains or expensive looking watches or jewellery while in many South American cities. You should also keep your camera concealed when not in use and carry daypacks on your front for extra safety. Crime in Latin America is not as bad as its reputation but you must be sensible and alert.

Ecuador Country Guide

Ecuador - Fact File

- Official Name: Republic of Ecuador
- Capital: Quito (population 1.4 million)
- Government: Multiparty Republic
- Population: 13.4 million
- Total Area: 283,560 kilometres squared, including the Galapagos Islands (slightly smaller than Nevada, USA)
- Official Languages: Spanish. Others: Amerindian languages (especially Quechua)
- Religions: Roman Catholic 95%
- Voltage: 110 volts. Sockets are a mixture of the European, two-pronged round variety and US flat-pin.
- Time Difference: For time differences please visit www.timeanddate.com
- International airport departure tax: US\$25. This is sometimes included in your airfare - please check with your airline before departure.

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Ecuador - Visas

Most nationals, including citizens of the EU, North American and Australasia do not need a visa to enter Ecuador. Entry is granted on production of a passport valid for more than six months, a return air/bus ticket and proof of funds to support yourself for the duration of the stay. You'll be issued with a T-3 tourist card on arrival, which you should keep safely with your passport as it will be collected when you leave the country. The tourist card can allow up to 90 days stay, although it's up to the immigration official to decide whether you're allocated 30, 60 or 90 days on arrival. Visa requirements do change periodically so you should check for the latest information on your specific visa requirements with your local Ecuadorian embassy or consulate well in advance of your planned date of travel.

Ecuador - Climate

Ecuador is divided into the coastal plain (costa), inter-Andean central highlands (sierra), and flat to rolling eastern jungle (oriente). There's no real summer and winter in Ecuador, with weather patterns varying according to geography, and temperatures determined more by altitude than by season or latitude. As a general rule, the warmest and driest months in the sierra are June to September, though this is complicated by various microclimates found in some areas. Outside these months, typical sierra weather is characterised by sunny, clear mornings and cloudy, often wet, afternoons. In the oriente, you can expect it to be warm, humid and rainy throughout the year, though there are often breaks in the rain between August and September and December to February.

In the lowland areas it can get particularly hot on clear days, with temperatures easily topping 30°C. The coast has the most clearly defined wet and dry seasons, with the best time to visit being from December to April, when you'll get frequent showers but also clear blue skies and warm weather. From May to November, the southern coast, in particular, is often overcast and relatively cool, with less chance of rainfall.

Check the weather chart on our website or visit www.worldclimate.com to get an idea of what the weather will be like on your trip.

Ecuador - Money

Important

In Latin America you will have problems changing the US\$100 CB B2 2001 series notes and it is important you do not to bring them. In some countries banks won't even take them. The serial number is located in the top left hand corner and bottom right hand corner on the side with the President's face. This serial number starts with CB and then a few more numbers and then directly under that B2. At the bottom of the note near the signature of the Treasurer it says which series of notes it is and it is there that it says 2001 series.

Local Currency

In April 2000, the government in Ecuador decided to 'dollarise' the economy due to the instability of their own currency, the sucre. The country now uses the US dollar as its own currency, which means that you do not need to change money on arrival (if you bring sufficient US dollars with you). If you do need to change money into dollars, you can do it at the bank after exiting the luggage hall or use one of the ATMs outside the terminal. Remember that if you are travelling through to other countries in South America, Ecuador is the best place to load up on US dollars cash without paying high charges. Having said that we do recommend that you bring as much US dollars cash as you feel comfortable carrying as it is not always easy to get money out on credit and debit cards. You should carry your US dollars in small denominations (US\$1, US\$5, US\$10 and US\$20 are best) as there is always a shortage of change.

Although bank cards are often the easiest way to go, there are times where they will not work for you even if your bank at home tells you it will! Do not rely on your card as your only source of money. Always have a few back-ups with you.

Ecuador - Local Transport

Most of Quito is easy to visit on foot, although there is a cheap trolley bus system which travels from north to south of the city. There are also normal buses which are cheap but can get very crowded. We recommend that you use taxis at night as they are fairly cheap but also have meters so you do not need to worry about bartering to get a good price – just make sure the driver puts the meter on when you get in.

In other Ecuadorian towns and cities walking is basically the best and cheapest way to see the sights.

Ecuador - Food & Drink

As a guideline a simple snack (e.g. a sandwich) can cost as little as US\$2, a light meal will cost around US\$4-5, and even a meal in one of the best restaurants in Quito or Cuenca costs very little in comparison to what you would expect to pay at home (usually around US\$30-40). Obviously this depends on what you order and if you have wine or other drinks which will certainly increase the bill.

All drinks such as water, soft or alcoholic drinks are at your own expense at all times. The following is a guideline for drinks bought in a shop in the street. Prices in restaurants and hotels can sometimes be more than double the prices specified below;

- 1 litre of water - US\$1
- 30cl bottle of soft drink - US\$0.70
- 30cl bottle of beer - US\$1.20
- 50cl bottle of beer - US\$1.70

Food

In Ecuador the basic diet focuses around chicken, beef or seafood, mostly with french fries or rice (or both) and possibly a little salad. Ceviche is fish marinated in lemon juice, onion and hot peppers traditionally served with corn on the cob and tostado (roasted maize). Other popular dishes include fritada (roast pork), lomo ala pimienta (pepper steak), humitas (ground corn steamed in a maize leaf) and quimbolitas (similar to humitas but with corn-flour and cooked in banana leaves). For a simple fish, you should ask for pescado which can be grilled, pan fried with breadcrumbs (apanado) or served with a sauce. An interesting local speciality is cuy (pronounced: cooe). This is roasted guinea pig which some people say tastes like chicken, others, like cooked cardboard!

Maize and potatoes feature in many dishes, particularly soups. Locro de papas is cheese and potato soup, sancocho de yucca is vegetable soup with cassava or manioc root and sopa de bola verde is vegetable banana dumpling soup. Typical snacks are empanadas (little fried pasties

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usually filled with meat, chicken, cheese or even prawns) and patacones (fried vegetable banana chips, served as a side dish).

Much of Ecuador's food is not too hot and spicy but you will find a bowl of aji (which is a chilli or hot pepper sauce) on most tables which can be added to spice things up.

Vegetarians

If you are a strict vegetarian you may experience a distinct lack of variety in the food available, especially in small towns. You might find that you are eating a lot of omelettes and other egg dishes. Our tour leaders will do their best to organise interesting vegetarian alternatives for included meals, but your patience and understanding is requested.

Drinks

You should be wary of drinking the local tap water. Bottled water, carbonated soft drinks and fruit juices are widely available and are generally safe to drink. Please note however that fruit juices are sometimes made with unboiled tap water and could upset your stomach. An easy way around this is to order juice 'con leche' (with milk) instead. The choice of different juices is incredible e.g. mora (blackberry), piña (pineapple), naranjilla (mixture between mandarin and orange), maracuya (passion fruit), tomato de argol (like a tomato but with a harder texture), guanabana (custard apple) and curia (which has a great taste – just try it!).

In Ecuador some of the hotels we use have bars or serve alcoholic drinks. If there is not a bar in the hotel then there is sure to be a bar within walking distance. In more up-market hotels, imported beers and spirits are available but usually at a high price. If you are happy to drink the local spirits then there is an array of rums, aguardiente (a kind of ouzo) and imported Chilean and Argentine wine can sometimes be found cheaply. There are various brands of beers including Pilsener, Club and Biela.

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