Ecuador

Country Facts
Languages: Spanish, Quichua
Predominant Religions: Christian [Roman Catholic]
Time Zone: Five hours behind Greenwich Mean Time
Voltage Requirements: 110 volts
Telephone Codes: 593, country code; 2, city code for Quito

Introduction:
Ecuador affords the unusual opportunity to travel from the balmy Pacific Coast to the high mountains to a remote corner of the jungle all in one day. The most remarkable species of birds and animals are found on the Galapagos Islands, more than 600 miles/1,000 kilometers offshore, including marine iguanas, giant tortoises, sea lions, blue and red-footed boobies, pelicans and even a few penguins. On the mainland, the Andes Mountains [also known as the Sierra] are home to the capital city, Quito, and the UNESCO World Heritage Site Cuenca. East of the Andes is the Amazon basin [or the Oriente]. This interior jungle region, cut through with rivers and streams, ranks among the most accessible in South America.

Compassion in Ecuador:
Compassion International’s work in Ecuador began in 1974. As of 2010 more than 54,000 children participate in nearly 200 child development centers. The Child Survival Program serves more than 1,870 mothers or caregivers and their infants and toddlers through 32 centers. The Leadership Development Program serves more than 125 students. Compassion partners with churches to help them provide Ecuadoran children with the opportunity to rise above their circumstances and become all God has created them to be.

Cultural Information:
- Handshakes are common among both men and women when meeting and upon departing, although some people will limit greetings to a nod.
- Male friends hug, and female friends kiss. Male and female friends also greet with a kiss on the cheek.
- Titles are important indicators of status and are used extensively [along with last names].
- Food and eating play important roles in Ecuadoran culture. Each town has a specialty dish and each holiday has a special kind of food. Meals are considered the best time for conversation.
- Guests are usually served first and receive the largest and best quality servings.
- It is customary to say “Buen provecho” [roughly translated as Bon Appetit] before beginning the meal and to thank the person whose hands prepared the meal.
- Evening socials and parties often last well past midnight. Guests are not expected to arrive on time which is jokingly called la hora Ecuatoriana [Ecuadorian time].
- Soup is a popular dish and Serranos [people who live in the mountain areas] prefer those made with corn, potatoes and avocado while Costanos [people living in the coastal
areas) like soups made with rice, beans and bananas. Favorite Ecuadorian dishes are *arroz con pollo* (chicken with rice), *llapingachos* (potato cakes) *ceviche* (raw seafood marinated in lemon juice, onions, tomatoes and spices), *fritata* (fried pork), *arroz con menestra y carne asada* (rice with spicy beans, barbecued beef) and cooked bananas called plaintains and *cuy* (roast guinea pig).

- Bargaining is perfectly acceptable in rural villages and Indian markets—it’s part of the experience. When offered a price, offer a lower one and the vendor will reciprocate with a compromise. If you get a stubborn response, walking away or showing interest in another stall nearby should do the trick.
- Trying to bargain in a restaurant, department store, or a shop with advertised prices, however, is considered extremely rude and should not be attempted.
- People in Ecuador, as in all Latin countries, are generally very friendly, polite, and hospitable. You should always be courteous and use “Buenos Dias” (before noon), “Buenas Tardes” (noon until dark), and “Buenas Noches” (night time). It costs nothing to use “Por Favor” (please) and “Gracias” (thank you) whatever the situation, and you should always say goodbye with “Ciao” (like in Italian). South Americans rarely use “adios,” which literally means “to God” and suggests finality.
- Courtesy should also be extended to shoe-shiners and street vendors. You may feel continually pestered with the cries of “limpio” (clean) or the offer of “artesania” for sale, but always use “gracias” or “no, gracias.”
- It is better not to give anything to beggars unless you are willing to give to a great number of them who may follow you.
- As in most countries, tipping is based on the quality of service provided. If you have received good, friendly service from a taxi driver, hairdresser, boatman or baggage handler, tip them accordingly. *(Please note that Compassion staff members do not expect tips, and are unable to accept cash from visitors.)*
- Always be very careful with your purse, camera and other personal belongings especially when walking on the street, using public transportation and in public places.

**Dos and Don’ts:**

- Do carry your passport with you when traveling between provinces in Ecuador. By law, visitors are required always to have their passports in their possession, but this is less likely to be an issue if you’re not traveling long distances (do carry a photocopy of the passport at all times, as well as a copy of the page with your customs entry stamp/printout).
- Don’t point at people with your finger. Use your chin or your entire hand.
- Do say “buen provecho” (enjoy your meal) to companions before a meal and to fellow diners when leaving a restaurant. Also say “con permiso” to get past someone.
- Don’t be surprised to see a lot of uniformed people toting machine guns. They might be soldiers, police or security guards at banks and money-exchange houses.
- Don’t be surprised if you see oil rigs in a jungle clearing or oil pipelines alongside roads. The country’s reliance on oil (and the corresponding environmental damage) has been a source of ongoing controversy.
- Do ask for permission before photographing Amerindians.
• Do shake everyone’s hand and peck everyone’s cheek upon being introduced.
• Do remember to bring photos of your family and/or hometown. Ecuadoreans are very family oriented, and a chat about your relatives will always get the conversation going.

**Travel Tips**

**Personal Safety:**
Although Ecuador has a better record with regard to crime than some South American neighbors, crime is increasing and visitors need to exercise caution. The most common dangers are pickpockets, bag snatchers and thieves who slice open parcels to get at the contents. Be especially wary at transport stations, in public markets (such as the one in Otavalo), in city parks and other busy areas. The large cities of Quito and Guayaquil see the most crime.

Leave at home all unnecessary credit cards, social security card, library cards and similar items you may routinely carry in your wallet. Do not take more cash than you reasonably require for that day. Use the room safe or hotel safe to secure valuables as well as additional cash. Secure cash in multiple locations – wallet, various pockets, money belts. Carry items in front pockets, not back pockets. Do not display large sums of money in public; only make visible the amount of money that approximates your purchase. Maintain a close awareness of your purse, wallet, backpack, etc. as well as the people around you. It’s a good idea to keep one hand or arm in constant contact with these items especially in areas of high people traffic. Never leave items with cash in them (purse, wallet, backpack, etc.) on a bus, car, or any other location, even if the vehicle is being watched by Compassion staff or Compassion-hired contractors. Stay alert and be cautious at all times. Don’t take safety & security for granted.

**Health:**
Sanitary conditions in some local restaurants may pose problems for some travelers. Most hot, freshly cooked food should be safe, but peel fresh fruit and raw vegetables, choose meat and shellfish that are cooked thoroughly, avoid local dairy products, and assume the tap water is unsafe (stick with bottled or boiled drinks).

If you’re flying into high-altitude areas, allow a day or two to acclimate yourself (avoid alcohol, cigarettes, heavy foods and physical activities, and drink plenty of fluids). If you have heart problems, you may find the higher altitudes particularly distressing, so **check with your doctor before going**, but remember that no one is immune to altitude sickness. Some say that the fitter you are, the higher the risk, because you're more apt to ignore such warning signs as fatigue and nausea. If symptoms continue or worsen, return to lower altitudes as soon as possible, such as the Mindo or Otavalo areas. The air pollution in Quito also may pose problems for some travelers.

Bring insect repellent on jungle excursions, and drink lots of water. The sun can be very strong, especially at midday, so slather yourself in sunscreen and wear a hat (you can get high-altitude sunburn from a day’s walk around deceptively chilly Quito). Polarizing sunglasses are a worthwhile investment. Medical care won’t be a problem in major cities, but in rural areas, the
nearest health-care facility might be far away. Most facilities will expect payment in cash regardless of your insurance coverage. For serious problems, you may have to consider being evacuated to another country, in which case having traveler’s insurance would be critical. Bring all prescription medicines needed for the trip. If you’re heading to the jungle areas, it’s wise to take malaria suppressants; **again, please check with your doctor.**

**We strongly advise you to contact the CDC ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)) or check with your personal physician for more information about your specific health needs while traveling, including any recommendations for immunizations. Vaccinations against cholera, yellow fever, polio, typhoid, tetanus and hepatitis may be recommended or required for entry. Anti-malarial medication may be recommended as well.**

**Money:**
The U.S. dollar is the official currency of Ecuador. ATMs are common even in smaller towns, but they can often be out of order, so plan for this when leaving a bigger city. Traveler’s checks are becoming less common and can be a hassle farther from metro areas.

**Weather:**
Ecuador encompasses four distinct regions: the Oriente (covering half the country, this is a region of thick tropical forests in the eastern foothills of the Andes and in part of the Amazon River Basin), the Costa (flat plains along the Pacific coast), the Sierra (Andes Mountains and highland areas), and the Galapagos Islands off the coast. The capital, Quito, is 9,200 feet/2.8 kilometers above sea level on the Sierra plateau.

The climate varies according to region. The rainy season is October through April in the Sierra (April is the wettest month) and January through April on the coast. The coastal rainy season coincides with the warmest water currents for swimming, surfing or snorkeling (in the Galapagos), and these are the most popular months on the coast. The June through September dry season is the most popular in the highlands: This coincides with the wettest months in the Oriente, when roads may be washed out.

Temperatures are determined more by altitude than by the calendar, so you should pack accordingly. The Oriente region and Quito remain constant year-round: Quito is always moderate (lows in the mid-40s F / 6-7 C, highs in the low 70s F / 21-23 C), and the Amazon is always hot and humid.

Lightweight clothing can be worn year-round in the Oriente and Costa, and sweaters and medium-weight jackets are always needed in the Sierra. Bring a sweater for the cool mornings and evenings. Layers and a waterproof/breathable jacket are a very good idea if you will be hiking in the mountains — temperatures can vary greatly and storms blow up unexpectedly. It’s also smart to bring a rain poncho.

**Dress:**
Be prepared for just about anything. Protect yourself from the sun with sunscreen, sunglasses and a good hat. Sturdy shoes are a must for hiking, while sandals are best within warmer climes. Pack a fleece jacket for the cooler highland temperatures and for the jungle; believe it or not, the Amazon can get chilly at night. Layers work best for colder regions, and a rain poncho and umbrella are smart ideas, as well. A money belt will give you some peace of mind in crowded market areas. Neatness in dress goes a long way, especially in the highlands. Do not wear skirts that are above the knee or shorts in churches. Skin revealing dress will draw unwanted attention for women. Anywhere outside of the beach, it is best to go with conservative clothing.

All information taken from Weissmann Reports, the World Factbook and Compassion International.