

INFORMATION ON ECUADOR



Located in South America, Ecuador is covered with jungles, highlands, snowcapped volcanoes and fields of flowers. The natural and diverse wonders make Ecuador an exciting place.

Ecuador is an incredibly beautiful country with good people and beautiful children!

Location and Geography

Ecuador is a Spanish-speaking country and is about the size of Colorado. Ecuador is a republic in the north-west corner of South America high up in the Andes Mountain Range and is one of the smallest countries in South America. It lies on both the Northern and the Southern Hemispheres and is divided by the equator which is why it was given the name Ecuador in the 19th century. Ecuador borders Peru (South and East), Colombia (North), and the Pacific Ocean (West). Many people also know Ecuador for its famous Galápagos Islands that are located off the coast. Ecuador has four diverse regions; the Amazon Rainforest, the Coast, the Sierra, and the Galápagos region.

Population

The population of Ecuador is about 14 million. Ecuador has a variety of ethnic groups are found in Ecuador (indigenous 25%, mestizo—mixed Indian and Spanish 65%, Caucasian and others 7%, African 3%). Religious freedom is recognized although Roman Catholic is the predominant religion (95%). Spanish is the official language but indigenous languages, especially Quichua, are widely spoken (<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ec.html>).

Government

Present-day Ecuador (anciently the northern part of the Inca Empire) is a republic that gained its independence from Spain May 24, 1822, at which time Ecuador became part of the Republic of Gran Colombia, which also included Venezuela, Colombia and Panama, only to become a separate republic in 1830 and be renamed the Republic of Ecuador. Ecuador is divided into 24 provinces and has a democratically elected government.

Climate

Since Ecuador is located on the equator it's an excellent traveling spot with a mild spring-like climate year-round. Temperatures are mild year-round in the mountain valleys (where Cuenca and Quito are located) and hot and humid in coastal and Amazonian jungle lowlands. Ecuador generally does not rotate through four seasons like other countries; it mainly consists of a wet period and a dry period. Snow can usually be seen on top of the Andean Mountain Range. For the most part the average daily temperature in Cuenca and Quito is 50-80 degrees Fahrenheit. It's usually chilly in the mornings and evenings (sweatshirt/jacket weather) and warm in the daytime (short-sleeve weather). Colder months are usually March-April and July-September because these tend to be the rainy season months, but the rainy season varies (if you asked five different people they'd give you different answers!). The most frequent complaints we get from the volunteers about how chilly/cold it is are from June to October. Do not be deceived by the equatorial location of Ecuador and think that it'll be hot and humid...due to the high altitude of being located in the Andes Mountain Range, it can get quite chilly/cold! Afternoon rain showers are quite common, even during the warmer months of December and January. The days and nights are both 12 hours each year-round (and this really only varies about half an hour either way). Because of this, there is no Daylight Saving Time.

Economy

Ecuador's economy is based on their agriculture. Natural resources in Ecuador include petroleum, fish, shrimp, timber and gold. Bananas, seafood, flowers, coffee, cacao, sugar, tropical fruits, palm oil, palm hearts, rice, corn and livestock are some of the agricultural products. The waters surrounding the Galápagos Islands are one of the largest tuna fisheries in the world. An abundance of shrimp may also be caught. Petroleum is another main resource which began being produced and exported in the 1970s. Ecuador is also one of the world's main locations for balsa wood. Mining is also another one of Ecuador's resources. Gold, silver, lead, zinc and salt can be found there (<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35761.htm>).

Currency

Ecuador adopted the U.S. dollar in September 2000. U.S. coins and Ecuadorian coins (which are equivalent to the value of the U.S. coins) are both used.

Culture

Ecuador is a country that has very contrasting cultural patterns. Different cultures are found in the four regions. The highlands mainly consist of indigenous peoples. Many of their ancient traditions are still practiced today such as ancient style songs that are played on flutes and panpipes. The orient is also populated mainly of indigenous peoples, and their customs resemble those of the natives that live in the Amazon Basin. Descendents of the Spanish settlers and black African slaves live mainly along the coast. They've produced a culture that has both of these characteristics combined together. Most of the bigger cities have many people of European descent.

Tourism

Ecuador offers much to travelers, including historical ruins and colonial buildings, open markets and the natural beauty of the tropical coast, the Amazon Basin, the Andes Mountains and the Galápagos Islands.

Health

Health is always a concern when traveling to a foreign country. For our volunteers there is little concern if you take precautions and educate yourself about the water and food quality. Travelers need to be cautious about what they eat and drink. While we do recommend specific vaccinations, these diseases are rarely a problem. The doctors, clinics and hospitals that our volunteers use are very good and provide quality modern care. The poor in Ecuador often do not have access to good food, water and healthcare so their health situation is far different.

Festivals

At Christmas time there's a huge parade called "Paseo del Niño" which is generally considered the biggest and best celebration in Ecuador. Children dress up as biblical figures in bright colorful costumes, and the procession passes through decorated neighborhoods and finally draws to an end where they have a large feast and celebration.

It's a tradition every New Year's Eve to burn Mr. Old Year. Life-size dummies are made to represent characteristics or bad habits (and sometimes even people!) that people want to get rid of. At midnight, the dummies are taken into the street and set on fire in hopes to burn their bad habits away and start fresh for the next year.

The Día de los Inocentes is January 6 and has a huge parade to symbolize the children that were innocently killed by King Herod. Practically the whole city is crammed into the city center—many festivities are going on during this time.

Carnaval is officially celebrated the three days before Ash Wednesday in February (and then the Catholic observance of Lent begins, the 40 days prior to Easter), however, locals love it so much they usually start celebrating in January. Carnaval is basically a glorified water fight in the streets. Children and adults alike get anyone they can wet, whether from a squirt gun or a bucket of water dropped onto you from stories above.

Septenario, a religious festival of "Corpus Christi" is celebrated every June. The festival lasts for one week. There are many games in the streets during the day as well as a night celebration to see fireworks and the "vacas locas." The "vacas locas" are people carrying a structure of a cow lit with fireworks. The "vacas locas" run through the park and thousands of balloons are released into the sky.