

QUITO, ECUADOR

Quito is the capital city of Ecuador and of the Pichincha Province. As the capital city it's the political and cultural hub of the country. Quito is located in a long, narrow valley between the



base of the Pichincha Volcano to the west and a canyon made by the river Machángara to the east. The eastern part of the basin is surrounded by a number of volcanoes. The population of Quito is approximately two million people. It's located in the Andes Mountains about 9,200 feet above sea level. Next to the city of Guayaquil, Quito is the second largest. Quito has little heavy industry; its chief manufactures include textiles, processed food, beverages, leather, cement, furniture, and gold and silver handicrafts. Quito is the oldest South American capital and retains much of

its colonial aspect. Architecturally, Quito has plenty of colonial treasures, and modern building has been strictly controlled in the old town since 1978, when it was declared a world cultural heritage site by UNESCO. Since the older part of town is protected from development, the northern part has all the modern buildings and stores. The city is the site of the Central University of Ecuador (1769), the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador (1946), and the National Polytechnic School (1869).

History

During the pre-Columbian era several tribes inhabited present-day Quito, including the Quito from whom the city took its name. In the beginning of the 16th century, while the Incas controlled Ecuador, Quito served as the Capital of the northern half of their empire. In 1533, the Inca General Rumiñahui destroyed Quito so that it would not fall into the hands of the advancing conquistadors. Just a year later, after the Spanish conquered the Inca, the Spanish Lieutenant Sebastián de Benalcázar began rebuilding Quito from the rubble Rumiñahui left behind.

Ecuador was part of the Vice royalty of Peru from 1544 until 1720, when it joined the newly created Vice royalty of Nueva Granada. In 1563, however, Quito became a Royal Audiencia of Spain, thus, permitting it to deal directly with Madrid on certain matters instead of going through Lima. The name Quito Audiencia is misleading because it gives one the idea that the territory under the jurisdiction of Quito was comparable to the limits of the city of Quito today. In truth the territory of the Quito Audiencia greatly exceeded that of present-day Ecuador, encompassing the north of Peru, the city of Cali in the south of Colombia, and much of the Amazon River Basin east of Ecuador. Modern Quito is a city of two halves, Old and New. The Old City remains much the same as it did at the end of the colonial period but the New City bears no marks whatsoever of its colonial past. While the New City does not benefit from the area's brilliant history, it shines in its own right. New Quito, with its gleaming office buildings and bustling

crowds of business people, is leading Ecuador into the twenty first century. Take the time to explore both “Cities;” neither will disappoint you.

Tourism

Major sights around town include the 16th century Monastery of San Francisco, Ecuador’s oldest church, the stark 16th century cathedral, the beautifully preserved colonial-era alley of La Ronda, and El Panecillo, a hill with fabulous views of the old town and an enormous statue of the Virgin of Quito. There are a number of decent museums, colonial churches and impressive plazas, as well as an open-air Indian market at the foot of El Panecillo.

Old Town Quito is a sight to see (right, lit up at night, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecuador>), including La Basílica (a Gothic cathedral that you can explore and climb all over). Quito has many art galleries and museums and has its fair share of natively made artesanías.



About a half an hour from Quito is the equator—a must-visit destination if you’ve traveled all the way to Ecuador. You wouldn’t want to go home without a picture of you straddling both hemispheres!

Quito Festivals

December 6th is Quito’s Founder’s Day. Watching bull fights and parades is quite popular. You can see the city celebrating out in the streets with street dances.

August 10th is Quito’s Independence Day, their biggest and most important fiesta of the year—the Quiteños love to celebrate their holidays! This day commemorates the revolution of 1809 and the process of becoming liberated from Spain. During this time, you can see art exhibitions, tons of dancing, circuses and many other events.