

SOUTH AMERICA · WILDLIFE · ISLANDS · MOUNTAINS · HIKING · ADVENTURE · CULTURE



Ecuador

Ecuador packs Andean volcanoes, Amazon rainforest, Pacific beaches and the Galápagos Islands into a country a little larger than the UK, so short journeys cross dramatically different worlds. Quito's colonial centre sits at about 2,850m, and the US dollar as official currency makes budgeting refreshingly simple.

**The UK Foreign Office (FCDO) advises against all but essential travel to parts of Ecuador.**

Read the latest FCDO travel advice before planning a trip. Your travel insurance may be invalid if you travel against FCDO advice.
FCDO advice last updated 2 October 2026.

 CAPITAL Quito	 CURRENCY US dollar (USD) £1 ≈ US\$1.34	 LANGUAGE Spanish, Kichwa	 BEST TIME Jun–Sep
 DAILY BUDGET £30–£160 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type A, B 120V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 15h 30m via Madrid, Amsterdam or Bogota ~£700–£1,200 return	 TIME ZONE UTC-5, UTC-6 standard time

Ecuador's appeal is compression: from Quito you can reach cloud forest at Mindo in two hours, Cotopaxi's glaciers in about the same, and Amazon lodges by a short flight and a canoe ride. Most first trips start in Quito, head south along the 'Avenue of the Volcanoes' to Cotopaxi, Quilotoa and Baños, and continue to colonial Cuenca. The Galápagos, 1,000km offshore, deserve at least a week and are usually added at the start or end via Quito or Guayaquil. The Pacific coast, with its surf towns and humpback whale-watching from June to September, makes a cheaper, warmer finale.

The mainland is excellent value: buses are cheap and frequent, set-lunch almuerzos cost a few dollars, and family-run hostales are comfortable. The Galápagos are another matter, with cruises and park fees that can easily cost more than the rest of the trip. Altitude catches many visitors out in Quito and the highlands, and the weather changes by the hour rather than the season — sun, rain and chill in one afternoon. Ecuador suits active travellers, wildlife enthusiasts and Spanish learners; it surprises people with how much fits into a fortnight, and how different the food is between the coast and the sierra.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

WILDLIFE

Galápagos Islands

Volcanic islands 1,000km offshore where giant tortoises, marine iguanas, blue-footed boobies and sea lions show little fear of people. Take a naturalist-led cruise or island-hop between Santa Cruz, San Cristóbal and Isabela; the snorkelling is superb.
- 2

ARCHITECTURE

Quito's historic centre

Among the first places named a UNESCO World Heritage Site, in 1978, Quito's old town packs gilded churches such as La Compañía, the Plaza Grande and San Francisco monastery into steep streets best explored on foot.

3

ADVENTURE

Cotopaxi National Park

Cotopaxi, one of the world's highest active volcanoes, rises in a near-perfect snow cone to 5,897m. Day trips from Quito or Latacunga hike towards the glacier, mountain-bike down the flanks or ride horses across the páramo; access varies with volcanic activity.

4

NATURE

Quilotoa crater lake

A turquoise lake fills this 3km-wide volcanic crater, its rim at about 3,900m. Walk the rim or down to the shore, or spend three days trekking the Quilotoa Loop between Kichwa villages such as Chugchilán and Isinliví.

5

WILDLIFE

Yasuní National Park

One of the most biodiverse places on Earth, this Amazon reserve is reached by flight to Coca and motorised canoe. Lodges on the Napo River offer canopy towers, parrot clay licks, monkeys and night walks with indigenous guides.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Guayaquil

≈ 2.8 million people

Ecuador's largest city and main port is hot and businesslike, but the Malecón 2000 riverside, the hillside Las Peñas quarter and iguanas in Parque Seminario fill a day before Galápagos flights.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Quito

≈ 2.7 million people

Strung along an Andean valley beneath Pichincha volcano, Quito is the natural first stop: acclimatise in its colonial core, ride the TelefériQo cable car and visit the equator monument at Mitad del Mundo.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Cuenca

≈ 600,000 people

Ecuador's most handsome city has a UNESCO-listed centre with a blue-domed cathedral, flower market and riverside walks, and is the base for Cajas National Park and Panama-hat workshops.

Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

When to go to Ecuador

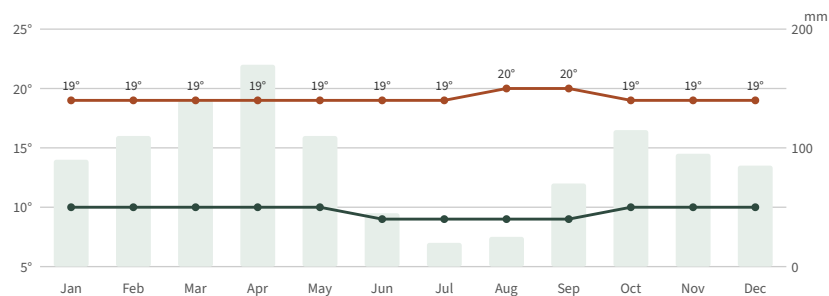
Best time: **Jun–Sep**.



■ Best ■ Good ■ Mixed ■ Poor

Average climate in Quito

— High °C — Low °C ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Feb–Mar	Carnaval The days before Lent bring water fights, foam spray and parades across the country; Guaranda, in the central highlands, hosts the most famous celebrations, and Ambato holds a flower-and-fruit festival.
Jun	Inti Raymi Kichwa communities around Otavalo and Cotacachi mark the June solstice with days of music, dancing and ritual bathing in rivers and waterfalls; the biggest celebrations fall around 24 June.
Dec	Año Viejo On New Year's Eve, families build life-sized effigies, often of politicians and celebrities, and burn them at midnight to see off the old year; men in drag play the widows.

How much does Ecuador cost?

SHOESTRING £30 per person / day ≈ US\$40.09 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £70 per person / day ≈ US\$93.54 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £160 per person / day ≈ US\$214 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Ceviche ecuatoriano Unlike Peru's version, Ecuadorian ceviche usually features cooked shrimp in a tangy lime-and-tomato broth, served with popcorn, plantain chips or toasted corn on the side.	Encebollado A coastal fish soup of albacore tuna, yuca and pickled red onion, eaten for breakfast or as a hangover cure with plantain chips and lime.	Locro de papa A creamy highland soup of potatoes and cheese, topped with avocado and sometimes served with ají chilli sauce — ideal warming food in chilly Quito.
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Getting around

Buses go almost everywhere cheaply, from Quito's Quitumbe and Carcelén terminals; coastal and Amazon routes are long but frequent. Domestic flights save time to Cuenca, Coca and the Galápagos, which are reached by air from Quito or Guayaquil. Quito has a metro line, and Uber and DiDi work in the big cities. Hiring a car suits the highlands, but mountain roads demand care.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE  A B 120V — bring a UK-to-A/B adapter	EMERGENCY NUMBERS Telephone: 911 (ambulance, fire, police) Source: FCDO “Getting help”
DIALLING CODE +593	TIME ZONES UTC-5, UTC-6 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Varies — bottled or filtered is safer

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

Many mid-range and upmarket restaurants add a 10% service charge; leave small change on top for good service, and tip Galápagos guides and boat crew at the end.

ETIQUETTE

Greet shopkeepers and drivers with 'buenos días' before asking anything. Ask before photographing people at indigenous markets such as Otavalo, and dress modestly in churches.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Mariscal Sucre International Airport (UIO), Quito; José Joaquín de Olmedo International Airport (GYE), Guayaquil

Visas & entry for Ecuador

Shown for a British passport.

No visa needed

You can visit Ecuador without a visa for up to 90 days in any 12-month period.

If you're already in Ecuador and want to stay longer than 90 days, you can pay to extend your stay (in Spanish) by an extra 90 days. You must apply for an extension before the first 90-day period ends or you could be fined.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A

Tetanus

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Chikungunya

Dengue

Hepatitis B

Rabies

Tuberculosis

Typhoid

Yellow fever

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever certificate is only required if you arrive from (or transit through) a country with yellow fever risk — not if you fly direct from the UK. There is a risk of yellow fever in parts of the country — vaccination may be advised.

MALARIA

Low risk of malaria

- On mainland Ecuador, there is a low risk of malaria in areas below 1,500m, including the coastal provinces and Amazon basin: awareness of risk and bite avoidance recommended.
- There is no risk of malaria in the Galapagos islands or the city of Guayaquil: bite avoidance recommended.

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Ecuador

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Mon 2 Nov 2026	All Souls' Day
Tue 3 Nov 2026	Independence of Cuenca
Fri 25 Dec 2026	Christmas Day
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Mon 8 Feb 2027	Carnival
Tue 9 Feb 2027	Carnival
Fri 26 Mar 2027	Good Friday
Fri 30 Apr 2027	Labour Day (observed)
Sat 1 May 2027	Labour Day
Mon 24 May 2027	The Battle of Pichincha
Mon 9 Aug 2027	Declaration of Independence of Quito (observed)
Tue 10 Aug 2027	Declaration of Independence of Quito
Fri 8 Oct 2027	Independence of Guayaquil (observed)
Sat 9 Oct 2027	Independence of Guayaquil

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Spanish

ENGLISH	SPANISH	SAY IT
Hello	Hola	OH-lah
Thank you	Gracias	GRAH-see-ahs
Please	Por favor	por fah-VOR
Excuse me	Disculpe	dees-KOOL-peh
How much is this?	¿Cuánto cuesta?	KWAN-toh KWES-tah?

Know before you go

- Quito sits at about 2,850m: take the first day or two gently, drink plenty of water and go easy on alcohol before climbing higher towards Cotopaxi or Quilotoa.
- Ecuador uses the US dollar, but \$50 and \$100 notes are often refused, so carry plenty of small notes; Ecuadorian-minted centavo coins circulate alongside American ones.
- Budget separately for the Galápagos: you pay for a transit card at the mainland airport and a park entry fee on landing, and good cruises book up months ahead.