

Ecuador



Map



Background

- **Land and Climate:** Ecuador is just smaller than Nevada, covering 283,560 sq km. The country is located on, and named after, the equator. Ecuador has four major geographic regions: La Costa (coastal lowlands), which contains rich agricultural land; La Sierra (Andean highlands), with snowcapped mountains; El Oriente (eastern lowlands), beginning at the eastern Andean foothills and containing mostly tropical rain forest; and the Archipiélago de Colón (or Galàpagos Islands), a group of islands in the Pacific about 600 miles (966 kilometers) off the coast. The climate varies with elevation more than with season, but the rainy season is generally from November to May. The driest months are June to September. The coastal lowlands are hot and humid, while the highlands include everything from subtropical valleys to frigid mountains.

People

- **Population:** Ecuador's population of about 13.9 million is growing at roughly .93 percent annually. The majority (65 percent) is mestizo (of mixed indigenous and Spanish heritage). Indigenous peoples, whose culture differs from that of mainstream society, comprise about 25 percent of the population. Another 7 percent is of Spanish descent, and 3 percent is black. Quito, the capital, is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the Western Hemisphere and is home to almost 2 million people. But the largest city is Guayaquil, which has more than 2 million residents.
- **Language and Greeting:** Spanish is Ecuador's official language, although Quichua (also known as Quechua) is spoken by highland Indian groups, including the Quichua, Saraguro, Otavalan, Cañari, and Chimborazo. Quichua is recognized by the constitution as an important part of Ecuadorian culture, but it is not an official language. Many Quichua words have been adopted into colloquial language to supplement the Spanish vocabulary. It is customary to address a new acquaintance by title (*Señor, Señora, Doctor, Doctora*, etc.). Among friends, the title *Don* or *Doña*, followed by the first name, is a common greeting indicating respect and friendship.
- **Religion:** While the constitution guarantees religious freedom, roughly 95 percent of Ecuadorians belong to the Catholic Church. Many national and local holidays/festivals center on the Catholic faith. Rituals such as baptism, First Communion, and confirmation are celebrated in the community, as well as among family. Many other Christian churches are growing in popularity, and people generally are tolerant of other beliefs.
- **General Attitude:** A common trait of all Ecuadorians is the value they place on familial relationships and responsibilities. People are warm and hospitable. Relationships generally take precedence over schedules. Certain sentimentality is evident in popular songs and in the practice of exchanging or giving *recuerdos* (tokens of affection or remembrance). Oratory and leadership skills are admired, as are loyalty and honesty. Occupation, wealth, and family name indicate social status.
- **Personal Appearance:** In urban areas, many Ecuadorians wear standard Western-style clothing. Older women tend to prefer skirts, while younger women often wear pants. Every rural region has its own traditional styles, colors, and fabrics. These clothes are worn by rural and indigenous peoples. Women from these groups usually wear skirts and often wear hats—made of straw in coastal areas and wool or leather in the highlands.

Lifestyle

- **Diet and Eating:** The main meal is eaten at midday. Serranos favor corn and potatoes, while Costeños favor rice, beans, and several varieties of bananas. Fresh fruits abound. Chicken, beef, and fish (on the coast) are dietary staples. Soup is almost always served at both the midday and evening meals. Hot bread is a popular afternoon snack. Food and eating habits play an important part in Ecuadorian culture. Each holiday is associated with a special kind of food and every town has a specialty dish. Mealtime is considered a good time for conversation—catching up, doing business, or socializing.

- **Recreation:** Nationally, *fútbol* (soccer) is the favorite sport, followed by volleyball and basketball. Others include tennis, running, and boxing. Ecuadorian volleyball (*Ecuavolley*) is played with a heavy ball with three players on each side. Visiting and sightseeing are common leisure activities. People in coastal areas take advantage of nearby beaches. Many Ecuadorians participate in community groups (women's clubs, church groups, or sports clubs) and *mingas* (community improvement projects).
- **Holidays:** Ecuadorians mark the New Year by burning images of the old year in the streets on New Year's Eve. These images, or effigies, represent problems they do not want to reencounter in the coming year. They celebrate the *Carnaval* season (in February or March) by dousing each other with water. *Carnaval* culminates in a weekend festival of parades, dances, and parties. Easter, Labor Day (1 May), and the Battle of Pichincha (24 May), which marks Ecuador's liberation, are all national holidays.
- **Commerce and Currency:** Stores generally open from weekdays between 8a.m and 6p.m. Banks close weekdays at 2 or 4p.m. The currency used in Ecuador is now presently the US dollar.

Society

- **Transportation and Communication:** In cities, transportation is provided by buses, taxis, and *colectivos* (minibuses that are more comfortable and faster than buses). In rural areas, *colectivos* are known as *busetas*. Roads connecting cities have been improved and about half are paved. Seaports provide shipping access to other nations. Air travel both to and within Ecuador is increasing. Most urban homes and many rural homes include a television and radio. Private telephones are much more common in upper-class and urban homes. Cities and towns generally have a pay-phone center where people can make local or long-distance calls. Newspapers are readily available in towns and cities
- **Health:** The government provides medical care to all citizens at low (and sometimes no) cost to the patient. However, healthcare professionals, facilities, and equipment are concentrated in urban areas. Those who can afford it might go to a private clinic or doctor. The country still battles diseases such as typhoid, cholera, polio, malaria, and yellow fever. Dengue fever is carried by mosquitoes in some coastal areas. Only about half of the rural population has access to safe drinking water. With improved medical care, the infant mortality rate has been cut nearly in half over the last decade.