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ACCOMMODATIONS

Ecuador has a wide range of accommodations, from wooden shacks in the mangroves to high-end jungle lodges in the Amazon, lovely haciendas in the Andes to traveler-friendly hostels and pleasant family-run guesthouses crisscrossing the country.

Nearly every town of any size has a hotel, but unless you stick to the most touristy destinations, you'll have to tolerate the occasional saggy bed, lousy shower or noisy neighbor – all part of the equatorial experience.

Most hotel rooms have a private bathroom, and reviews throughout this book assume so unless shared bathrooms are specified. Hot water is hardest to come by along the coast

PRACTICALITIES

- Ecuador uses 110V AC, 60Hz (the same as in North America). Plugs have two flat prongs, as in North America.
- Ecuador uses the metric system for weights and measures.
- In Ecuadorian addresses, the term 's/n' refers to '*sin numero*' (without number), meaning the address has no street number.
- Quito's two biggest newspapers are El Comercio (www.elcomercio.com) and the more liberal Hoy (www.hoy.com.ec). Guayaquil's papers are El Telégrafo (www.telegrafo.com.ec) and El Universo (www.eluniverso.com). Ecuador's best-known news magazine is Vistazo (www.vistazo.com). International newspapers, including a locally published edition of the *Miami Herald*, can be found in Quito (p77).
- Ecuador uses VHS NTSC video format (the same as North America).

and in the Oriente, where most locals might call you crazy for wanting it in the first place. In the highlands, you can assume that water is hot unless noted otherwise in our review.

It's fairly easy to rock into town and find a bed for the night. The rare exception is during major fiestas or on the night before market day.

B&Bs

Bed-and-breakfasts are a tried-and-true concept in Ecuador and are especially popular in tourist destinations such as Quito, Baños, Cuenca and Otavalo. Once you're out in the countryside, there's a fine line between B&Bs and *hosterías* (small hotels; see p378).

Camping

Camping is allowed on the grounds of a few rural hotels, in the countryside and most national parks. There are no campgrounds in towns. The constant availability of cheap hotels makes them superfluous. There are

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climbers' *refugios* (mountain refuges) on some of the major mountains, in some national parks, but you need to bring a sleeping bag.

Haciendas & Hosterías

The Ecuadorian highlands have some fabulous haciendas (historic family ranches that have been refurbished to accept tourists). They usually fall into the top-end price bracket, but the price may include home-cooked meals and activities such as horseback riding or fishing. The best-known haciendas are in the northern and central highlands.

Hosterías are similar but often smaller, and more intimate. *Hosterías* regularly have rates that include full board and/or activities.

Homestays

Spanish-language schools can often arrange homestays, allowing travelers to stay overnight, eat meals and interact with a local family. You may want to 'try out' your family for a week before committing for a long period. Occasionally (though not often), families are in it only for the money, giving a less than warm experience. Homestays are mostly available in Quito and Cuenca and are difficult to find elsewhere.

In some rural communities, where there are no hotels, you can ask around and often find a local family willing to let you spend the night. This happens only in the most off-the-beaten-track places, and you should always offer payment (though it may not be accepted).

Hostels

Ecuador has a limited hostel system, though some places – such as Quito – are packed with hostels. The cheapest hostels start at around \$6 per person in dorms. They run the range from saggy, dark and decrepit to cheery, traveler enclaves.

Hotels

Budget hotels are the cheapest option for accommodations. Although rooms are usually basic, with just a bed and four walls, they can nevertheless be well looked after, very clean and excellent value. They can also be good places to meet other travelers. Prices in this category range from about \$8 to \$16 per person. The cheapest hotels have communal bathrooms, but you can often find rooms with a private bathroom for not much more.

Midrange hotels, on the whole, are Ecuador's best bargains. They usually offer a bit more charm and more amenities – cable TV, reliably hot water and a better location – than their budget cousins.

Top-end hotels are found in only the larger cities. They generally offer a bit more luxury – spacious or heritage rooms, great views, top-notch service and the like.

No matter where you stay, make sure to always peek at a room before committing.

Lodges

Ecolodges and jungle lodges provide a fantastic way to experience Ecuador. They're almost exclusively the haunt of foreigners, but often offer the chance to interact with the wildlife. Lodges are most popular in the Oriente and in the cloud forests of the western Andean slopes, and are often the only way to really experience these unique ecosystems. The lodges in the Oriente are generally only available as part of a three- to five-day package, but this usually includes meals and activities. The lodge will arrange any river or jungle transportation, but you may have to get to the nearest departure town on your own.

Prices

Throughout this book, accommodations are grouped by the following categories when a town offers numerous choices: budget (up to \$20 per double), midrange (\$20 to \$75 per double) and top end (over \$75 per double). Throughout the book, accommodation choices are listed in budget order from cheapest to most expensive double room.

Room rates are highest throughout Ecuador around Christmas and New Year's Eve, around *Semana Santa* (Easter week) and during July and August. They also peak during local fiestas. Hotels in resort destinations, particularly along the coast, sometimes charge higher rates (and certainly draw bigger crowds) on week-