

Understand Ecuador

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A movable feast awaits, from meaty *chugchucara* in the highlands to rich seafood *encocado* on the coast.

Ecuador Today

Once considered an economic basket case, Ecuador has reinvented itself to become one of the great success stories of Latin America. Fueled by a burgeoning economy, Ecuador has invested heavily in new roads, hospitals and schools, while also pouring money into social programs. Rafael Correa, the nation's charismatic and popular president, earns much of the credit, though the high prices of crude oil and Ecuador's vast oil and mineral wealth have also played a pivotal role in the nation's newfound prosperity.

Best in Print

The Farm on the River of Emeralds (1978) Moritz Thomsen's compelling memoir about living on the Ecuadorian coast.

Floreana (1961) Recount of eccentric and colorful episodes on the Galápagos by Margret Wittmer.

The Villagers (1934) Jorge Icaza's portrait of the hardships of Andean indigenous life.

Savages (1995) Hilarious and eye-opening account of the Huaorani vs the oil industry by Joe Kane.

The Old Man Who Read Love Stories (1992) Moving story of love and loss set in Ecuadorian Amazonia, by Chilean author Luis Sepúlveda.

Best on Film

Qué tan lejos (2006) Road movie about two young women on a journey of self-discovery in the Andean highlands.

Entre Marx y una Mujer Desnuda (1996) Portrays a group of young intellectuals in Quito.

Ratas, Ratones, Rateros (1999) Award-winning film about two petty thieves on the run in Quito and Guayaquil.

Boom Days

The 'Citizens Revolution' is how President Correa describes the big changes that have swept across Ecuador, and despite the hyperbole, it's hard to deny the enormous gains many citizens have made during Correa's administration. Since he first took office in 2007, the poverty rate has fallen dramatically (from 45% in 2006 to 25% by 2014) as has unemployment (to below 5%), while wages have risen and inflation has been tamed. Annual growth in GDP has churned along at a steady 4%. Correa's administration has nearly doubled government spending on public investment (from 21% in 2006 to over 40% by 2014), pouring money into healthcare and education. The result: infant mortality rates are down, and with the building of new schools and universities, more students have access to schools than ever before.

Big infrastructure projects have sprung up across the nation, including new hydroelectric dams, brand-new highways and bridges and the opening of Quito's new airport. Other projects are in the works, including a 23km metro system underway in the capital – with an estimated completion date of 2017 (at a cost of around \$1.6 billion) – and a new airport for Guayaquil. One of the country's most ambitious projects is the creation of Yachay, a sprawling university and research campus under construction in the northern province of Imbabura. Described as 'a city of knowledge' ('*yachay*' means 'knowledge' in Kichwa), this site is about the size of Atlantic City and is intended to be a major hub for science, technology and innovation – perhaps the next Silicon Valley if things pan out as planned.

Given all this, it's not surprising that Correa enjoys widespread popularity. With an approval rating fluctuating between 60% and 80%, he's one of the most popular leaders in Latin America, and probably the most popular president in the nation's history.