



Understand Ecuador

ECUADOR TODAY346

The new petroleum-powered economy: ambitious aims for poverty reduction, education, healthcare and infrastructure, plus the conservative backlash.

HISTORY348

A sprint through 5000-plus years – from pre-Columbian peoples to conquistadors and on into the tumult of the 20th century.

INDIGENOUS ECUADOR358

An overview of Ecuador's indigenous peoples, from Andean villagers to forest dwellers.

THE SOUNDS OF ECUADOR360

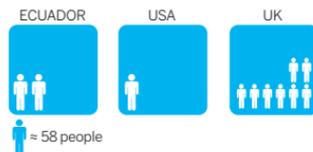
The great Ecuadorian soundtrack, with *música folklórica*, *pasillo* and Afro-Ecuadorian rhythms all adding to the mix.

THE NATURAL WORLD363

Rainforests, cloud forests, *páramo* and the species that live there, plus ongoing environmental threats and future hopes.



population per sq km



Ecuador Today

A New Development Paradigm

- » Population: 15 million
- » GDP per capita: \$7800
- » GDP growth rate: 6%
- » Unemployment rate: 6.1%
- » Poverty rate: 28.6%
- » Adult literacy rate: 91%

Until recently, Ecuador was an economic basket case, plagued by widespread poverty, economic inequality and political turmoil – with more than 80 changes of government since the republic's founding in 1830. In the past decade, Ecuador has seen momentous development, with investment in education, health care and infrastructure. For many Ecuadorians, it's one of the most hopeful and empowering times in the nation's history.

Much of the credit for these events is given to Rafael Correa, Ecuador's popular president, who ushered in a series of changes following his election. A new constitution in 2008, approved by referendum, laid the groundwork for a new social archetype that increased spending on health care and the poor, gave more rights to indigenous groups, accorded new protections to the environment and even allowed civil unions for gay couples.

Ecuador has doubled social spending since 2006, investing \$8.5 billion in education and \$5 billion-plus in health care. More than 5500km of roads and highways have been built or repaired. A new disability program has helped 300,000 people, while the poorest now receive a monthly stipend. The poverty rate has fallen, declining by 9% between 2006 and 2011. Middle-class Ecuadorians have also benefited under programs such as a \$5000 grant for first-time homebuyers.

A Crude Legacy

What's fueling this growth in public spending? It's the worldwide thirst for oil and high crude prices on the world market. Ecuador is particularly well endowed when it comes to petroleum; it's home to the third-largest oil reserves in South America after Venezuela and Brazil, accounting for more than 30% of government revenues and half of all export earnings.

Top Books

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

Floreana (1961) Recount of eccentrics 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, eye-opening account of the Huaorani vs the oil industry by Joe Kane.

Top Films

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.