



# Ecuador

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## Best Adventures

- ➔ Climbing Cotopaxi (p667)
- ➔ Whitewater rafting near Tena (p689)
- ➔ Mountain biking down Chimborazo (p674)
- ➔ Trekking to Ingapirca (p683)
- ➔ Wildlife-watching on the Galápagos Islands (p710)

## Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Secret Garden Cotopaxi (p668)
- ➔ La Luna (p664)
- ➔ Pululahua Hostel (p660)
- ➔ Black Sheep Inn (p669)
- ➔ Cuyabeno Lodge (p688)

## Why Go?

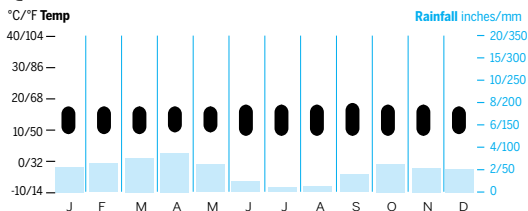
Amazonian rainforest, snow-covered mountains, premontane cloud forests and the Galápagos Islands set the stage for incredible adventures in this small Andean nation. You can spend one day whitewater rafting and the next gazing up to the summit of a 6000m-high volcano. You can take dramatic treks through the  *páramo* (high-altitude grassland), surf excellent breaks off the west coast, and hike, mountain bike or simply unwind amid dramatic scenery.

Wildlife-watching is another way to enjoy Ecuador, with dozens of animal and plant species found nowhere else on earth. Even on a short adventure, it's possible to photograph monkeys from jungle canopy towers, swim with sea lions in the Pacific and see some of 1600 bird species in misty forests.

Ecuador harbors a rich cultural heritage, from gorgeous Spanish colonial centers to traditional highland towns, where buzzing Kichwa markets and baroque 16th-century churches are all part of the dramatically varied landscape.

## When to Go

### Quito



**Jun-Sep** Best weather for visiting the highlands with less rain and warmer, clearer days.

**Oct & Nov** Best time to visit the Amazon (Oriente): rivers are passable, and it's not too wet.

**Dec-May** Rainy season on the coast, but sunny and lush between downpours – good beach days.

## Connections

Major border crossings into Peru are at busy Tumbes-Aguas Verdes (near the coast), Macará and La Balsa (a few hours south of Vilcabamba); hardy travelers with heaps of time can also go by river via Nuevo Rocafuerte. To Colombia, the safest crossing (and the only one we recommend) is at Tulcán-Ipiales, a few hours northwest of Ibarra.

### ITINERARIES

#### Three Weeks

Begin your trip in Quito. Spend two days soaking up the architectural gems of the Old Town, then head north-west to the lush cloud forests of Mindo, continuing east to Otavalo for its famous Saturday markets and hikes around alpine lakes. Next go to Coca, gateway to the Amazon. Spend a few nights at a jungle lodge on the lower Río Napo. On your way back to Quito, stop in Tena, for a whitewater rafting trip, and Baños, for thermal baths, waterfalls and great scenery. End the tour amid spectacular Andean scenery near Cotopaxi or Quilotoa.

#### Six Weeks

From Quito head west, spending a week exploring the coast: beach days in Canoa, whale-watching in Puerto López and surf culture in Montañita. Continue onto Guayaquil and fly out to the Galápagos Islands for a week of wildlife-watching and island-hopping. Back in Guayaquil, head east to lovely Cuenca. Visit nearby Parque Nacional Cajas, and the Inca ruins of Ingapirca. Continue south to Loja and the stunning cloud forests of Parque Nacional Podocarpus, and then onto peaceful Vilcabamba, a scenic base for outdoor adventures.

## Essential Food & Drink

- ➔ **Llapingachos** Fried potato-and-cheese pancakes, often served with fried eggs and roast meat.
- ➔ **Seco de chivo** Goat stew.
- ➔ **Locro de papa** Creamy potato soup served with avocado and cheese.
- ➔ **Churrasco** Fried beef, eggs and potatoes, a few veggies, slices of avocado and tomato, and rice.
- ➔ **Arroz con pollo** Rice with small pieces of chicken mixed in.
- ➔ **Cuy** Roasted guinea pig.
- ➔ **Ceviche** Marinated raw seafood.
- ➔ **Encocado** Shrimp or fish cooked in a rich coconut sauce.
- ➔ **Encebollado** Seafood and onion soup over *yuca* (cassava) and served with *chifles* (fried banana chips) and popcorn.
- ➔ **Sopa marinera** Soup loaded with fish, shellfish, shrimp and sometimes crab.

### AT A GLANCE

- ➔ **Currency** US dollar
- ➔ **Language** Spanish
- ➔ **Money** ATMs in cities and larger towns; credit cards accepted only at high-end places
- ➔ **Visas** not required for most nationalities
- ➔ **Time** GMT minus five hours

## Fast Facts

- ➔ **Area** 283,560 sq km
- ➔ **Population** 16 million
- ➔ **Capital** Quito
- ➔ **Emergency** ☎131 (ambulance)
- ➔ **Country code** ☎593

## Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	US\$0.73
Canada	C\$1	US\$0.76
Euro zone	€1	US\$1.10
Japan	¥100	US\$0.83
New Zealand	NZ\$1	US\$0.68
UK	UK£1	US\$1.53

## Set Your Budget

- ➔ **Hostel bed** US\$7-10
- ➔ **Two-course evening meal** US\$10
- ➔ **Almuerzo (fixed-price set lunch)** US\$2.75
- ➔ **Six-hour bus ride** US\$6

## Resources

- ➔ **Lonely Planet** ([lonelyplanet.com/ecuador](http://lonelyplanet.com/ecuador))
- ➔ **Hip Ecuador** ([www.hipecuador.com](http://www.hipecuador.com))
- ➔ **Ministry of Tourism Ecuador** (<http://ecuador.travel>)