



Ecuador

Snow-capped volcanoes on the equator, Andean markets, Amazon rainforest and the Galápagos Islands, where Darwin's giant tortoises still roam.

AT A GLANCE

Facts to know

CAPITAL

Quito

POPULATION

About 17 million (2022 national census)

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

Spanish. Kichwa and Shuar are official languages of intercultural relations in their communities

CURRENCY

United States dollar (since 2000)

AREA

About 284,000 km², including the Galápagos Islands

GOVERNMENT

Presidential republic. The president is elected for a four-year term

HIGHEST MOUNTAIN

Chimborazo, 6,263 m, whose summit is the point on Earth's surface farthest from the planet's centre

MAIN RIVERS

The Guayas flows to the Pacific; the Napo and the Pastaza flow east to the Amazon

NEIGHBOURS

Colombia to the north and Peru to the east and south. The Pacific Ocean lies to the west

DRIVES ON THE

Right

CALLING CODE

+593

A 45-minute trip to Ecuador

Everything you need is in this pack. No preparation beyond printing. Adapt the timing to your group.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 0 to 5 min | Welcome. Show the map page and find Ecuador together. Ask: who has been there, or knows someone from there? |
| 5 to 15 min | Read the facts at a glance, then three moments from the story: 3500 BC: The Valdivia culture settles the coast; 1830: Ecuador leaves Gran Colombia; 2008: A new constitution gives nature rights. |
| 15 to 25 min | At the table: talk about Encebollado and Prawn ceviche. Idea: bring a small taste (bread, cheese, fruit, tea) if your kitchen can help. |
| 25 to 30 min | Say it like a local: practise "Buenos días" (Good morning, hello), "Buenas tardes" (Good afternoon), "Buenas noches" (Good evening, good night). Everyone says them together. |
| 30 to 40 min | Quiz: read the questions aloud, or play the big-screen version at https://worldstroll.com/countries/ecuador/group . No scores needed. |
| 40 to 45 min | Talk about it (questions page), then stamp or sign everyone's passport page. |

You will need

- This printed pack (one per table, or one each)
- Pens for the quiz
- Optional: a world map or globe, a small tasting, music from the country

Ecuador and its cities



- Quito (Pichincha): Gilded colonial churches and the Plaza Grande, The Middle of the World monument on the equator, A cable car up the Pichincha volcano
- Guayaquil (Guayas): The Malecón, a long riverside promenade, Las Peñas, a hillside quarter of about 444 steps, Encebollado and seafood
- Cuenca (Azuay): The New Cathedral with its blue-tiled domes, Weaving 'Panama' hats, El Cajas National Park nearby
- Otavalo (Imbabura): A big Saturday market in the Plaza de los Ponchos, Woven wool textiles, Mountain lakes and volcanoes
- Latacunga (Cotopaxi): The Mama Negra festival, Chugchucaras, the town's best-known dish, Views of Cotopaxi
- Baños (Tungurahua): Hot springs, Waterfalls such as the Pailón del Diablo, The active Tungurahua volcano
- Riobamba (Chimborazo): The nearest city to Chimborazo, A stop on the Pan-American Highway, A name mixing Spanish 'río' (river) and Quechua 'rispampa' (plain)
- Loja (Loja): Music and the arts, Two major universities, A mild Andean climate
- Tena (Napo): The Amazon rainforest all around, Being the capital of Napo province, Its founder, who also founded Cuenca
- Puerto Ayora (Galápagos): Giant tortoises at the Charles Darwin Research Station, Tortuga

Bay beach, The headquarters of the Galápagos National Park

- Puerto Baquerizo Moreno (Galápagos): The Galápagos National Park interpretation centre, A natural history museum, Flights to the mainland

A short history of Ecuador

Long before the Incas, farming and fishing peoples such as the Valdivia, the Quito and the Cañari lived on the coast and in the Andes. The Incas ruled the highlands for less than a century before Spain conquered them in the 1530s. For almost three hundred years Quito was a Spanish colonial capital. Ecuador won its freedom in 1822, left Gran Colombia in 1830, and has been a republic ever since, with a long border quarrel with Peru that ended only in 1998.

3500 BC **The Valdivia culture settles the coast**

From about 3500 BC, the Valdivia people lived in villages around central plazas on Ecuador's coast. It is one of the oldest settled cultures recorded in the Americas. They fished, grew maize, beans and cotton, and made pottery, including small clay figures known as the Venus of Valdivia.

1463 **The Incas march north**

In 1463 the Inca army, led by Topa Inca Yupanqui, began to conquer the peoples of the Ecuadorian Andes. His son Huayna Capac completed the conquest around 1500, and Quito became the capital of the empire's northern region.

1532 **Pizarro captures Atahualpa**

Atahualpa, who had been governor of Quito, won a civil war against his half-brother Huáscar. In November 1532 the Spanish under Francisco Pizarro captured him at Cajamarca, in today's Peru, and executed him the next year.

1534 **The Spanish found Quito**

On 6 December 1534, Sebastián de Benalcázar and 204 settlers founded San Francisco de Quito on the site of the old Inca city. The Inca general Rumiñahui, who had resisted them, was captured and executed.

1535 **Bishop Berlanga finds the Galápagos**

In 1535 Bishop Tomás de Berlanga drifted by accident to the Galápagos Islands. There is no firm evidence that anyone had reached them before. Pirates later used the islands as a hiding place.

- 1736** **The French Geodesic Mission reaches Quito**
French and Spanish scientists, led by Charles Marie de La Condamine, Pierre Bouguer and Louis Godin, arrived in Quito in June 1736 to measure the length of a degree of latitude at the equator and so learn the true shape of the Earth.
- 1809** **Quito's first call for independence**
On 10 August 1809, leading citizens of Quito set up their own government and called for independence from Spain. It lasted only about two months, but it inspired the rest of Spanish America and gave Quito the nickname 'Light of America'.
- 1822** **The Battle of Pichincha**
On 24 May 1822, on the slopes of the Pichincha volcano above Quito, General Antonio José de Sucre defeated the Spanish royalist army. The victory freed the lands that became Ecuador, which then joined Simón Bolívar's Gran Colombia.
- 1830** **Ecuador leaves Gran Colombia**
On 13 May 1830, the southern district of Gran Colombia broke away and became the independent Republic of Ecuador, with Quito as its capital. Its first president was the Venezuelan-born general Juan José Flores.
- 1832** **Ecuador claims the Galápagos**
On 12 February 1832, an Ecuadorian colonel held a ceremony on Floreana Island to annex the Galápagos. The date is still celebrated in the islands as Galápagos Day.
- 1835** **Darwin visits the Galápagos**
The British ship HMS Beagle reached the Galápagos on 15 September 1835 and stayed five weeks. The young naturalist Charles Darwin noticed that mockingbirds and tortoises differed from island to island, ideas that later shaped his theory of evolution, published in 1859.
- 1895** **Eloy Alfaro's Liberal Revolution**
In 1895 the Liberal Revolution brought Eloy Alfaro to power. He reduced the power of the Church and the big landowners and pushed through the railway linking Guayaquil on the coast with Quito in the Andes.

1942

The Rio Protocol

After a short war with Peru in 1941, Ecuador signed the Rio de Janeiro Protocol on 29 January 1942. It gave Peru much of the Amazon land that Ecuador claimed, and the quarrel over the border went on for decades.

1998

Peace with Peru

After another brief war in the Cordillera del Cóndor in 1995, Ecuador and Peru signed a final peace agreement in Brasília on 26 October 1998, ending one of the longest border disputes in the Western Hemisphere.

2000

The dollar replaces the sucre

After a severe financial crisis, in which the sucre fell to 25,000 to one US dollar, Ecuador adopted the United States dollar as its currency in 2000. The sucre, used since 1884, was withdrawn the same year.

2008

A new constitution gives nature rights

In 2008 voters approved a new constitution, Ecuador's current one. It was the first in the world to give nature itself legal rights that can be defended in court, inspired by the Andean idea of Pachamama, Mother Earth.

What people eat in Ecuador

Ecuadorian food changes with the altitude. On the coast people eat fish, prawns and green plantains, often cooked with peanuts or coconut, a legacy of African cooks. In the Andes the table is full of potatoes, maize, pork and, on special days, roast guinea pig. In the Amazon, cassava (yuca) is the staple. Lunch is the main meal: first a soup, then a 'segundo' of rice with meat, chicken or fish, and finally a dessert and coffee. Supper is lighter, sometimes just coffee or herbal tea with bread.

Encebollado

The coast. Often called a national dish

A hearty fish soup made with albacore or other tuna, boiled cassava and a topping of pickled red onion, tomato and coriander. It is served with lime, toasted corn and crisp banana chips called chifles.

Prawn ceviche (Ceviche de camarón)

The coast. Now eaten all over the country

Cooked prawns served cold in a tangy juice of lime, bitter orange and tomato, with red onion and coriander. Unlike the Peruvian kind, Ecuadorian ceviche is usually made with cooked seafood, and it comes with popcorn, toasted corn or plantain chips on the side.

Encocado

Esmeraldas, on the northern coast

Fish or prawns simmered in a rich sauce made from freshly grated coconut, with garlic, onion and local herbs. It is served with rice and fried plantains.

Bolón de verde

The coast

A ball about the size of a fist, made of green plantain that is cooked, mashed and kneaded with cheese or crispy pork, then fried until golden. On the coast it is a very common breakfast, served with black coffee.

Patacones

The coast, and across Latin America

Thick slices of green plantain that are fried, flattened and fried again until crisp outside and soft inside. They are served with fish, ceviche, stews and rice dishes.

Llapingachos

Ambato, in the central Andes

Potato patties coloured orange with achiote (annatto), stuffed with fresh cheese and cooked on a hot griddle until crisp. They come with a peanut sauce, and often with roast pork, sausage, a fried egg, avocado and salad.

Hornado

The Andes, sold in highland markets

A whole pig, roasted and sold by the plate in highland markets. It is usually served with llapingachos, mote (big boiled maize kernels) and vegetables.

Fanesca

The Andes, above all Quito. Eaten all over Ecuador at Easter

A thick, rich soup of Andean squash, milk and many kinds of tender grains, beans, lentils and peas, with salted dried fish. Households and whole communities prepare it together and share it.

Seco de chivo

The coast, also eaten in the Andes

A slow-cooked goat stew. The meat is first marinated in something sour, such as naranjilla fruit juice, beer or chicha, and then stewed in the same sauce. It is served with rice.

Roast guinea pig (Cuy asado)

The Andes, especially the central and southern highlands

A whole guinea pig, seasoned and roasted or grilled until the skin is crisp, served with potatoes or mote. In the Andes it was traditionally kept for ceremonial meals and festivals, and it is still a dish for special occasions.

Humitas

The Andes. A pre-Hispanic dish shared with Peru, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina

Fresh sweetcorn pounded to a paste, wrapped in a fresh corn husk and slowly steamed. The dish goes back to before the Spanish arrived and is eaten from Ecuador to northwest Argentina.

Pan de yuca

The coast and southern Colombia

Small, soft cheese rolls made with cassava starch instead of wheat flour, eaten hot from the oven. They are soft and chewy inside.

Colada morada with guaguas de pan (Colada morada)

The Andes, eaten all over Ecuador

A thick, warm, purple drink made with purple corn flour and fruit such as blackberries, pineapple, strawberries and babaco, spiced with cinnamon and cloves. It is served with guaguas de pan, sweet bread rolls shaped like a baby wrapped in a blanket.

Helado de paila

The northern Andes, above all Ibarra

A fruit sorbet made by hand: fruit juice and sugar are stirred with a wooden spoon in a large bronze pan (paila) that spins on a bed of ice and straw. Popular flavours include blackberry, naranjilla, soursop and passion fruit.

Canelazo

The Andes, especially Quito

A hot drink of cinnamon water sweetened with raw cane sugar (panela), often with fruit juice such as naranjilla or blackberry, and a splash of aguardiente, a sugar-cane spirit. It is sold by street vendors during the Fiestas de Quito and at Christmas.

GOOD MANNERS

At the table

- Lunch, el almuerzo, is the main meal of the day. It usually starts with a soup, followed by a 'segundo' of rice with meat, chicken or fish, then a dessert and coffee.
- Supper is light. It can be just a coffee or a herbal tea with bread.
- Encebollado is eaten any time of day. On the coast, restaurants that serve only this fish soup open early in the morning.
- Some dishes belong to one day of the year: fanesca to Holy Week, and colada morada with guaguas de pan to 2 November, All Souls' Day.
- Do not drink tap water. Ask for bottled water, and avoid ice unless you know it is made from purified water.

Bolón de verde

A ball about the size of a fist, made of green plantain that is cooked, mashed and kneaded with cheese or crispy pork, then fried until golden. On the coast it is a very common breakfast, served with black coffee.

Ingredients

- 3 large green (unripe) plantains
- 150 g crumbly white cheese, such as feta or queso fresco, crumbled
- 2 tablespoons butter
- Salt
- Vegetable oil for frying
- Fried eggs and coffee, to serve (optional)

Method

1. Peel the plantains: cut off both ends, slit the skin along its length and pull it away. Cut each plantain into 4 pieces.
2. Boil the pieces in salted water for 20 to 25 minutes, until soft. Drain.
3. While they are still hot, mash them well with the butter and a pinch of salt. Take care, as the plantain is very hot.
4. Mix in the cheese, then shape the mixture with your hands into 4 firm balls.
5. Heat 2 cm of oil in a frying pan and fry the balls, turning them, for 5 to 8 minutes, until golden all over. Drain on kitchen paper and serve warm.

Patacones

Thick slices of green plantain that are fried, flattened and fried again until crisp outside and soft inside. They are served with fish, ceviche, stews and rice dishes.

Ingredients

- 2 green (unripe) plantains
- Vegetable oil for frying
- Salt
- 1 lime, cut into wedges, to serve

Method

1. Peel the plantains and cut them into slices about 3 cm thick.
2. Heat 2 cm of oil in a frying pan over a medium heat and fry the slices for about 3 minutes on each side, until pale gold. Lift them out onto kitchen paper.
3. Put each slice between two pieces of baking paper and press it flat with the bottom of a heavy cup or plate, to about 1 cm thick.
4. Fry the flattened slices again in hot oil for 2 to 3 minutes on each side, until crisp and golden.
5. Drain, sprinkle with salt and serve hot with lime wedges.

Llapingachos

Potato patties coloured orange with achiote (annatto), stuffed with fresh cheese and cooked on a hot griddle until crisp. They come with a peanut sauce, and often with roast pork, sausage, a fried egg, avocado and salad.

Ingredients

- 1 kg floury potatoes, peeled and cut into chunks
- 2 tablespoons butter or oil
- 1 small onion, very finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon ground achiote (annatto) or sweet paprika, for colour
- Half a teaspoon ground cumin
- 150 g mild white cheese, such as mozzarella or queso fresco, grated or crumbled
- Salt
- For the peanut sauce: 4 tablespoons smooth peanut butter, 150 ml milk, 1 spring onion, finely chopped, and a pinch of salt

Method

1. Boil the potatoes in salted water for about 20 minutes, until soft. Drain well and mash until smooth.
2. Warm the butter or oil in a small pan, add the onion, achiote and cumin, and cook gently for 5 minutes. Stir this into the mashed potato and season with salt. Leave to cool until you can handle it.
3. Divide the mash into 8 balls. Press a hole into each one, fill it with a little cheese, close it and flatten it into a patty about 2 cm thick. Chill for 20 minutes so they hold their shape.
4. Cook the patties in a lightly oiled non-stick frying pan over a medium heat for 4 to 5 minutes on each side, until golden and crisp.
5. For the sauce, warm the peanut butter, milk and spring onion together in a small pan, stirring, until smooth. Serve the Llapingachos hot, with the sauce on the side.

Canelazo

A hot drink of cinnamon water sweetened with raw cane sugar (panela), often with fruit juice such as naranjilla or blackberry, and a splash of aguardiente, a sugar-cane spirit. It is sold by street vendors during the Fiestas de Quito and at Christmas.

Ingredients

- 1 litre water
- 3 cinnamon sticks
- 4 cloves (optional)
- 80 g panela or dark brown sugar
- 250 ml fruit juice, such as blackberry, passion fruit or orange
- 100 ml aguardiente or white rum (optional; leave it out for a family version)

Method

1. Put the water, cinnamon sticks and cloves in a pan and bring to the boil. Simmer for 10 minutes.
2. Add the panela or sugar and stir until it dissolves.
3. Add the fruit juice and heat through for a few minutes, without boiling.
4. Take the pan off the heat and remove the cinnamon and cloves. If anyone is not drinking alcohol, pour their cups now. Then stir the aguardiente or rum into the rest of the pan, if you are using it.
5. Serve hot in small cups. Keep the alcohol-free cups apart and give them to children and anyone not drinking alcohol.

Useful phrases

Buenos días

BWEH-nohs DEE-ahs · Good morning, hello

Buenas tardes

BWEH-nahs TAR-dehs · Good afternoon

Buenas noches

BWEH-nahs NOH-chehs · Good evening, good night

Mucho gusto

MOO-choh GOOS-toh · Nice to meet you

¿Cómo está?

KOH-moh es-TAH · How are you? (polite)

Muchas gracias

MOO-chahs GRAH-syahs · Thank you very much

De nada

deh NAH-dah · You're welcome

Disculpe

dees-KOOL-peh · Excuse me

¿Cuánto cuesta?

KWAHN-toh KWES-tah · How much is it?

La cuenta, por favor

lah KWEN-tah por fah-VOR · The bill, please

¿Dónde está el baño?

DOHN-deh es-TAH el BAH-nyoh · Where is the toilet?

No entiendo

noh en-TYEN-doh · I don't understand

¿Habla inglés?

AH-blah een-GLEHS · Do you speak English?

¿Me puede llamar un taxi, por favor?

meh PWEH-deh yah-MAR oon TAHK-see por fah-VOR · Could you call me a taxi, please?

Agua sin hielo, por favor

AH-gwah seen YEH-loh por fah-VOR · Water without ice, please

¡Buen provecho!

bwen proh-VEH-choh · Enjoy your meal

¡Salud!

sah-LOOD · Cheers! (also 'bless you')

Déme mirando

DEH-meh mee-RAHN-doh · Please have a look for me (a polite Andean way of asking)

Things you might not know

1. Ecuador is named after the equator: 'ecuador' is simply the Spanish word for it. The line runs through the northern edge of Quito's metropolitan area, which makes Quito the capital city closest to the equator.
2. Chimborazo is not the world's highest mountain, but because the Earth bulges at the equator, its summit is the point on the Earth's surface farthest from the centre of the planet.
3. The 'Panama hat' actually comes from Ecuador. It got its name because the hats were shipped across the Isthmus of Panama on their way to the rest of the world. In 2012 UNESCO added the weaving of the toquilla straw hat to its list of intangible cultural heritage.
4. A fine toquilla straw hat can take from one day to eight months to weave, depending on how fine the weave is.
5. Since 2000 the United States dollar has been Ecuador's only official currency. Ecuador also issues its own coins: the 50-cent coin of the 2000 issue shows Eloy Alfaro, the leader of the Liberal Revolution.
6. The Galápagos Islands are named after their giant tortoises: 'galápagos' is an old Spanish word for a tortoise. The Galápagos tortoise is the largest living tortoise and can weigh more than 400 kg.
7. Lonesome George, the last known giant tortoise from Pinta Island, was found in 1971, spent the rest of his life at the Charles Darwin Research Station and died there in 2012. He became a worldwide symbol of conservation.
8. Archaeologists have found that cacao, the plant that gives us chocolate, was grown at least 5,300 years ago by the Mayo-Chinchi people in what is now southeast Ecuador, more than a thousand years before the first traces of it in Mexico and Central America.
9. Ecuador is a giant of the banana trade: between 2016 and 2018 it supplied about 36 percent of all the bananas exported in the world.
10. In 2008 Ecuador became the first country to write the rights of nature into its constitution, so that rivers, forests and other ecosystems can be defended in court.
11. In 1978 Quito and Kraków became the first two cities to be declared World

Cultural Heritage Sites by UNESCO. The Galápagos Islands were inscribed in the same year.

12. Voting is compulsory in Ecuador for literate citizens aged 18 to 65, and has been since 1936. Voting is optional from the age of 16.
13. The Andean condor is Ecuador's national bird. A condor with spread wings sits on top of the country's coat of arms, above the snowy peak of Chimborazo.
14. Ecuador's yellow, blue and red flag is very similar to the flags of Colombia and Venezuela, because all three countries were once part of Gran Colombia. Ecuador's flag carries the national coat of arms in the centre.

TALK ABOUT IT

Questions for the group

- Have you ever been to Ecuador, or has someone in your family? What do you remember?
- Have you ever tasted Encebollado or Prawn ceviche? What is a dish you remember from a trip?
- Peace with Peru (1998). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- The dollar replaces the sucre (2000). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- Have you seen The historic centre of Quito, in person or in pictures? Which famous place would you most like to see?
- If you could spend one day in any city of Ecuador, which would it be and why?

QUIZ

How well do you know Ecuador?

Circle the right answer. The answers are on the last page.

1. As of September 2026, the UK government advises against non-essential travel to Guayas province, which includes Guayaquil.

- A) True
- B) False

2. What would you say to greet someone at 3 in the afternoon?

- A) Buen provecho
- B) Buenos días
- C) Buenas noches
- D) Buenas tardes

3. Ecuadorian prawn ceviche is usually made with cooked prawns.

- A) True
- B) False

4. Archaeologists found that people in southeast Ecuador grew which plant at least 5,300 years ago?

- A) Coffee
- B) Sugar cane
- C) Cacao
- D) Wheat

5. Cotopaxi is an extinct volcano that has not erupted for thousands of years.

- A) True
- B) False

6. What are 'chifles', served with encebollado?

- A) Crisp green-plantain chips
- B) Toasted maize kernels
- C) Pickled onions
- D) Cheese rolls

7. In Ecuador, what is a 'guagua'?

- A) A baby or small child
- B) A guinea pig
- C) A hat
- D) A market

8. What was the name of Ecuador's own currency before the dollar?

- A) The sucre
- B) The inti
- C) The austral
- D) The bolívar

9. The UK government advises visitors to Ecuador to hail taxis in the street rather than book them.

- A) True
- B) False

10. The summit of which Ecuadorian mountain is the point on Earth's surface farthest from the planet's centre?

- A) Chimborazo
- B) Pichincha
- C) Quilotoa
- D) Cotopaxi

11. 'La cuenta' means the menu.

- A) True
- B) False

12. In Ecuador, voting is voluntary for literate citizens aged 18 to 65.

- A) True
- B) False

Quiz answers

1. True

True. As of September 2026 the advice covers seven coastal provinces, including Guayas, and areas near the Colombian border.

2. D) Buenas tardes

Buenas tardes, good afternoon, is used from about noon until it gets dark.

3. True

True. Unlike Peruvian ceviche, Ecuadorian ceviche is usually made with cooked seafood.

4. C) Cacao

Cacao, the source of chocolate. It was grown by the Mayo-Chinchi people more than a thousand years before the first traces of it in Mexico and Central America.

5. False

False. Cotopaxi is one of the highest active volcanoes in the world, and an eruption began in October 2022.

6. A) Crisp green-plantain chips

Crisp green-plantain chips, thin and salty.

7. A) A baby or small child

A baby or small child, from the Kichwa word 'wawa'.

8. A) The sucre

The sucre, named after Antonio José de Sucre, was Ecuador's currency from 1884 until 2000.

9. False

False. Many express kidnappings start with taxis hailed in the street. Book a registered taxi through your hotel or a radio taxi company.

10. A) Chimborazo

Chimborazo. Because the Earth bulges at the equator, its summit is farther from the centre than the top of Everest.

11. False

False. 'La cuenta' means the bill. The menu is 'la carta' or 'el menú'.

12. False

False. Voting is compulsory for literate citizens aged 18 to 65, and optional for others over 16.

Ecuador visa page

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