



# PROGRAM COUNTRY: ECUADOR



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Ecuador is the smallest of the Andean countries, just smaller than Italy. But, with the Pacific Coast, the Andean Highlands and the Amazon Basin packed into its small surface area, plus the Galapagos Islands off the coast, it boasts a little of everything the continent has to offer – like “South America in miniature” as the locals say. Nowhere else on earth will you find so much natural diversity – and all the fun that accompanies it – in so tiny a place.

## COUNTRY INFORMATION

**Full country name:** Republic of Ecuador.

**Area:** 283,520 sq km.

**Population:** 12,920,092 (growth rate: 2.1 %).

**Capital city:** Quito (pop 2 million).

**Language:** Spanish, Quechua, Quichua, other indigenous languages.

**Religion:** Roman Catholic, other Christian denominations.

**Type of government:** Democratic Republic.

The smallest country in the rugged Andean highlands, Ecuador is among the most rewarding travel destinations in South America. With a great combination of warm people, well preserved colonial architecture, volcanic landscapes, dense rainforest and the magnificent shores of the Galapagos Islands, it packs its perimeters with more points of interest than many countries twice its size. Touch down in its picture-perfect capital, Quito, and you are no more than a few hours from a hike through an all-swallowing Amazonian jungle, a snow swept ascent of a volcano, a sociable haggle with indigenous artesanos, or a welcome wallow on a tropical beach. And all that in a nation no bigger than the US state of Nevada.

Ecuador is located in the Northwest of South America, on the equator, which divides it between the two hemispheres. Ecuador has four regions:

- **The Pacific coast:** has a hot, dry climate in the south and a humid, tropical climate in the north.
- **The Andes:** Varied mountain climate with temperatures ranging from hot to cold.
- **The Amazon region:** High temperature with frequent rainfall.
- **Galapagos Islands:** Made famous by Charles Darwin and his theory evolution, offer a pleasant subtropical climate.

Ecuador is known for its fabulous exotic fruits, high quality fish and seafood, and the countless varieties of Andean potatoes. Across the country you’ll find a broad spectrum of national and regional dishes, including lemon-marinated shrimp, toasted corn, and pastries stuffed with spiced meats. If you’re feeling courageous, you can put your culinary bravery to the test with roasted cuy (guinea pig) or tronquito (bull penis soup). Ecuadorian cuisine varies from region to region. For example, costeños (people from the coast) prefer fish, beans and plantains (unripened banana-like fruits), while serranos from the mountainous regions prefer meat, rice and potatoes.

Ecuadorians are crazy about football, and the national team has shown some successes in international tournaments in the last few years. Ecuadorians are proud of their soccer team and celebrate its victories, regardless of how small these are. Volleyball is also very common, with its variant of Ecuavolley. Among some traditions, you can find bullfighting, a legacy of Spanish roots, very famous in Quito and in some cities of the Sierra. Other forms of popular entertainment are card games for adults and marbles. Hopscotch and skipping ropes are popular pastimes for children. Carnivals and festivals are also varied through the country and highly appreciated by the population, usually featuring many traditional games and fun.

Most Ecuadorians speak Spanish, though many speak Amerindian languages such as Kichwa, the Ecuadorian dialect of Quechua. Other Amerindian languages spoken in Ecuador include Awapit (spoken by the Awá), A’ingae (spoken by the Cofan), Shuar Chicham (spoken by the Shuar), Achuar-Shiwiar (spoken by the Achuar and the Shiwiar), Cha’palaachi (spoken by the Chachi), Tsa’fiki (spoken by the Tsa’chila), Paicoca (spoken by the Siona and Secoya) and Wao Tededo (spoken by the Waorani). Costeños tend to speak more quickly and louder than serranos, and most of them do so in a very informal way. A common term costeños use to call each other is mijo, a contraction for “my son” (mi hijo). Several such terms originate from their fast speech, and they have intricate language humor and jokes, difficult to translate or even understand in other regions. Also, each province has a different variety of accents with specific terms. Serranos usually speak softly and



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very respectfully. Traditionally they are seen as more conservative, and use a number of Kichwa-originated terms in their everyday speech, often puzzling to other regions. A widely known example is the word *guagua*, which means child in Kichwa. Their speech comes from their Incan amerindian roots and can be seen as a variation of other Andean accents. Whistling, yelling or yawning to get someone's attention is considered rude, yet informally done.

Art and music, have a great importance in Ecuador, with differences between the coast and the highlands. Generally, pan pipes, flutes of bamboo, violins, drums and charangos all played often, but with different purposes. For instance, in the Sierra popular tunes played at fiestas include "Rosa Maria" and "El Condor Pasa", with *sanjuanito* being an easily recognizable genre. In the Costa, the instruments are played mostly for *cumbia*, *salsa*, and *pasillos*. Literature is popular with educated people. *Ambato*, a city in central Ecuador, is known as the "City of the three Juanes", with *Juan Montalvo* (a novelist and essayist), *Juan León Mera* (author of the lyrics to Ecuador's national anthem, "Salve, Oh Patria") and *Juan Benigno Vela* (another novelist and essayist), all sharing it as their place of birth. Other important writers include *Eugenio Espejo*, from colonial *Quito*, whose works inspired the fight for freedom from Spain in Ecuador and touched a number of topics, and novelist and poet *Horacio Hidrovo Velásquez*, from early century's *Manabí*, whose works have inspired films.

## SCHOOL LIFE

High school, or secondary school, in Ecuador consists of two parts. The first part is a general curriculum, consisting of various disciplines. In the second part of high school, or the last two or three years (depending on the school), students concentrate on a specific field, choosing between liberal arts, chemistry or physics, which prepares them for admission to a university for that discipline. Exchange students usually take liberal arts which include subjects such as literature, English, philosophy, physics, geopolitics, socio-microeconomic, history, mathematics, orientation, and psychology. Exchange students can also choose to take chemistry or physics.

Students are expected to maintain satisfactory work at school. In the afternoons they must dedicate some time to their schoolwork. They will be seen as a novelty among other students, who are anxious to establish lifelong friendships. Students will be placed in public or private high schools in the city where they live.

The typical Ecuadorian school year runs from September to July. Classes are usually held from 7 am to 2 pm from Monday to Friday. There are about two and a half months of vacation in the summer (July–September), one week of vacation over Christmas/New Year, and one week at the end of the semester, usually in February.

Ecuadorian high schools vary from community to community, as well as public to private schools. Most exchange students will be placed in private schools. The main goal of most Ecuadorian high schools is to prepare students for college. The school, rather than

the student, determines the class schedule. Students remain in one classroom and teachers rotate rooms. Students have the same schedules every week and always share the same classroom with the same classmates. Their classroom is pre-assigned.

All the students wear uniform when they attend school and school activities. The style of the uniforms vary, but normally the students have to wear jacket and pants or blouse and skirt. Schools have their own sweatshirts for physical education classes. Some schools ask students to come with black shoes. Only go to school well-dressed in the appropriate uniform!

Students usually take school transportation (bus) to commute to school. We encourage the students to do so for safety reasons.

Some of the Ecuadorian high schools have very strict rules, such as students' hair style, length of hair, shoes, socks and length of skirt. Most Ecuadorian schools will not permit students to wear make-up and jewelry to school including rings, bracelet, necklace and earrings/piercings.

## Interesting facts:

- Boys-only schools and girls-only schools are very common in Ecuador.
- Some Ecuadorian high schools do not permit exchange students to enroll as seniors in the 12th grade, regardless of how many years they have studied in their home country. The actual grade level is determined by the high school, based on a full review of the student's application, academic record and school policy.
- It is the student's responsibility to obtain and pay for any necessary documents (transcripts, diplomas, course descriptions, etc.) required by their home country for accreditation.
- Students will be required to wear uniforms.
- There is no school on Saturdays.
- The exchange students can contact the school "orientador"/counselor.
- Generally, the exchange students are graded on the same level, but Ecuador does not guarantee accreditation for they year or semester in Ecuador. Students are placed as Juniors or Seniors.
- Is recommended that the students bring \$300 the first month for expenses for books, school material, and uniforms.
- Students can participate in different activities that can be school activities or private lessons. Your Area Representative can help you to arrange them!
- Schools offer different extracurricular activities such as arts, clubs, etc.
- Students can also take Spanish classes in the afternoons if they would like. These classes are approximately \$5 per hour.



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## HOST FAMILY LIFE

Exchange students will be placed in a city with close proximity to everything they need. A typical Ecuadorian family consists of the parents and three children. The family is often helped by a housekeeper. Dinner time is an important occasion for Ecuadorians and this is a great time to reflect and share daily experiences with the rest of the family. The Ecuadorian culture is extremely family oriented, and students will have the benefit of becoming a part of an Ecuadorian family during their stay in the country and after.

Students are placed with carefully matched host families throughout Ecuador, especially in the Quito area.

Ecuadorians place great importance on the family. Elderly members will often live with one of their children. However, in recent years the number of facilities to care for the elderly has grown significantly. Godparents are also far more important in Ecuador than in the West, and they are expected to provide both financial and psychological support to their godchildren.

It is important to note that there are many variations in family structure, as well as in the social and cultural structure in Ecuador, depending on the socioeconomic position in which people live. Generally the upper classes adopt more of the American or European ways of life. This leads to great contrasts within the Ecuadorian society. Roles among the family are established, normally women are responsible for the upbringing and care of children in Ecuador. Men have taken a less active role in this area, though recently this has begun to change, with many men doing housework and caring for children when women work away from home. Daughters tend to be more protected by their parents than sons, due to traditional social structures.

## PROGRAM EXTRAS

Students will have the opportunity to participate in several excursions during their stay in Ecuador. The purpose of these outings is to explore the biodiversity and the rich culture of the different Ecuadorian regions.

The program includes a monthly activity(s) for the exchange students in order to get together and enjoy the diversity. Here is an example of the activities that take place in each month.

**September:** Adventure in the town of Mindo

**October:** Exploring the skies of Quito (Cable Car).

**November:** Visit to the Middle of the World Monument & Thanksgiving dinner.

**December:** Christmas dinner: staff and students.

**January:** Visit the towns of Otavalo, Cotacachi and the city of Ibarra

**February:** Traveling by train to the Cotopaxi volcano.

**March:** Adventure in Papallacta Springs.

**April:** Exploring the Pululahua Crater.

**May:** "Paseo del chagra" in the Middle of the World and popular bull fights.

**June:** Two-day tour to the town of Baños.



*All information is subject to change.*

