



ABOUT ECUADOR

Ecuador encompasses a vast natural and cultural richness, which is distributed throughout its four geographical regions: the Amazon, the Highlands, the Pacific coast and the world renowned Galápagos Islands. Ecuador is one of the smallest countries in South America, and has become in a unique destination given its wide range of landscapes that can be visited in such short distances.

- Ecuador is considered, by the Organization of United Nations, to be a megadiverse country and the one with most diversity per square kilometer.
- The country possesses 6 World Biosphere Reserves and 7 World Heritage Sites, recognized by the UNESCO:
 - Cultural Heritage: The cities of Quito and Cuenca, and the Inca Road
 - Natural Heritage: The Galapagos National Park and the Sangay National Park
 - Intangible Heritage: the culture of the indigenous Tapura peoples and the hand weaving of straw hats (known as the Panama Hat)
- *InterNations* considered Ecuador as the best destination, in the world, to live in, and the international tourism magazine, *Lonely Planet*, included it among the top 5 best places to visit.

Ecuador has a growing economy, which means it carries a high potential for development, making it an ideal place to build connections and establish work and business ties.

GUAYAQUIL

Guayaquil is the biggest - and most populated - city in Ecuador, with over 2.5 million inhabitants. It has great commercial activity, being the most important seaport in Ecuador and having some of the largest shipping inflows in the Pacific coast. The majority of the imports and exports of Ecuador are concentrated in Guayaquil, making the city an important business center as well.

Located in the Coast region, among rivers and estuaries that flow into the Guayaquil Gulf, Guayaquil possesses a warm temperature most of the year, ranging from 25C to 28C, and two well-differentiated seasons: dry season (from June to December) and rainy season from January to May.

Moreover, you can easily reach all four regions in Ecuador from Guayaquil.

TO THE COAST

With 640 km of coastal land and warm weather throughout the year, in the Coast region you will be able to:

- Visit a great variety of beaches
- Taste and enjoy a gastronomy rich in fresh sea products
- Practice water sports such as :
 - Surf and Windsurf
 - Diving
 - Sailing
 - Jet Ski
 - Beach Volley
 - Deep sea fishing

Among the top places to visit from Guayaquil are:

- **Playas**, the closest coastal town, only 45 minutes away from Guayaquil
- **Salinas**, one hour and a half away from Guayaquil, is the biggest and most visited beaches in Ecuador. By being a main entertainment center of the Ecuadorian coast, it has a variety of restaurants, bars, hotels, clubs. With 15 km of beautiful warm-water beaches, the Spondylus route - which follows the country's coastlines, starts here.
- **Puerto López**, located 165 km away from Guayaquil, is the best place to witness the spectacular jumps of the humpback whales, which approach the coast for mating season. From here, you can also visit the gorgeous beach of Los Frailes, located in Machalilla National Park, as well as other tourist attractions nearby.

TO THE ANDES

In the Andean highlands, you will be able to:

- Enjoy spectacular views and landscapes
- Practice diverse activities such as:
 - Camping
 - Trekking
 - Hiking
 - Fishing
 - Mountain Bike
 - Bird watching

The recommended visits from Guayaquil are:

- **Cuenca**, 198 km away, is the cultural city - by excellence - of Ecuador and the third largest one in the country. It has been declared a World Heritage Site, its historical center of colonial architecture is one of the best preserved in the world. Located forty minutes away from Cuenca, you will find Cajas National Park, which is currently a candidate to become a UNESCO World Heritage site as well.
- **The Avenue of the Volcanoes** comprises 84 volcanoes of the Ecuadorian Andes. The Chimborazo volcano is the closest one to Guayaquil, 244 km away. Some of the other important volcanoes include: Tungurahua, Cotopaxi and Quilotoa - crowned with a majestic lake inside its crater.

- **Baños**, located at the foothills of Tungurahua volcano, is known -nationwide- for the vast amount of adventure and risk sports it offers, in addition to its hot springs and vibrant nightlife. The city is a center for national and international tourism, located 299 km away from Guayaquil, and considered to be the gateway to the Amazon region due to its close proximity.

TO THE AMAZON

In the Ecuadorian amazon region, you will be able to:

- Enjoy breathtaking landscapes with a stunning diversity in flora and fauna
- Observe a wide variety of birds, much unique to this region
- Navigate immense rivers and take a dip in waterfalls
- Visit indigenous communities with their own customs and handcrafts
- Practice activities and adventure sports such as:
 - Trips to the jungle
 - Rafting
 - Kayaking
 - Tubing
 - Canyoning

From Guayaquil, there are two main cities in the Amazon that can be reached:

- **Puyo** is the first city in the Amazon easily accessible from Guayaquil, located 367 km away, passing through Baños. It is known as a commercial city - activities in the streets begin early morning and finish around midnight.
- **Tena**, located 434 km away from Guayaquil, is the capital of the Napo province. It takes its name for the river that flows through it. In the city, you can learn about the Kichwa (Quichua) and Huaorani ethnic communities, visiting their villages and attending musical events, indigenous dances and shamanism.

TO THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS

The archipelago of Galápagos is located 1.5 hours away from Guayaquil by plane. It was awarded the status of World Heritage Site in 1979 and is conformed by 13 big islands, 6 middle-sized islands and 215 small islands, with a huge diversity of animal species, most native to each island.

The Galapagos are a natural paradise in which you will be able to dive, snorkel and surf.

The most popular islands are:

- **Santa Cruz Island** is the headquarters of the Galápagos National Park Service, where there is an operation center for the breeding of turtles in order to reintroduce them to their natural habitat; and the Charles Darwin Scientific Station for biological research, operated by the Charles Darwin Foundation. Santa Cruz Island also offers a great night life.
- **Isabela Island** - it is the biggest island in Galápagos. It is also the best choice, if you want to witness - first hand - the natural richness of the archipelago, through excursions that cover the main charming spots of the island, including the Sierra Negra volcano.

- **San Cristóbal Island**, capital of the archipelago. It's main attractions include:
 - Interpretation Center, which walks visitors over the history of the islands, in their natural, human and conservation context.
 - La Lobería, a beach commonly visited by sea lions
 - La Roca León Dormido, which serves as refuge to many seabirds and fish species

VISAS AND RESIDENCY

Exchange students who come to Universidad Casa Grande one semester or **programs that last less than 180 days do not need to apply for a student visa (12-V)** to complete their program, but may do so with the tourist visa they receive upon entering Ecuadorian territory.

Most foreign citizens can remain in Ecuador as tourists without a visa for up to 90 days (approximately 12 weeks), upon entering the country. Since the semester lasts more than 90 days, students must request an extension of their tourist status before the end of the first 90-day period. The International Relations Office staff will advise and accompany the students during the extension process once they are in Ecuador.

Take into account that to carry out this process you will need:

- Original and valid passport
- Color copy of the first page of your passport as well as the page with the stamp indicating the date of entry into the country
- Extension request form (<https://www.ministeriodegobierno.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/FORMULARIO-PRO%CC%81RROGA-MIGRACIO%CC%81N-ultimo1.pdf>)
- Original and color copy of proof of payment of the extension made at Banco del Pacífico.
- **Total cost of the visa extension:** USD 131.33 (value established for 2019).

Note: This document may be required only and exclusively after the initial period of permanence has expired, that is, from the 91st day of your stay in the country, up to 30 days after the deadline, that is, until the 120th day. After day 121, the student must pay a fine to USD 788.00.

On the other hand, exchange students with **programs that last more than 180 days must apply for a student visa (12-V)** in the nearest Embassy or Consulate of the Republic of Ecuador, which has a total cost of 130, 00 USD. You can find more details about basic and additional requirements for applying for temporary residence visas in the following link: <https://www.cancilleria.gob.ec/requisitos-para-solicitud-de-visas-no-inmigrantes-e-inmigrantes/>

CULTURE

Communication Style

Ecuadorians like to get close to communicate. They use their hands a lot during conversations, which tend to be louder than the North American and European cultures.

There are significant conversational differences between people from the Coast and from the Sierra (highlands). In cities at higher altitudes, people value tradition and formality. In the tropical and beachfront cities, voice inflection reveals more emotion and a fast-paced way of life.

Greetings

Ecuador is an affective society. In social scenery, a kiss on the right cheek is appropriate between women, and also between men and women. In a professional ambiance, handshakes and greetings for the time of the day: "buenos días" (good morning), "buenas tardes" (good afternoon), or "buenas noches" (good evening/night).

Food

Ecuador is known for its exquisite exotic fruits, fish, seafood, and countless varieties of Andean potatoes. The cuisine varies depending on the region; however, most meals include starch. It is possible to have several varieties of starch in one meal, such as green plantain, rice, corn, yucca, potato and pasta. Green plantains (a cousin to the sweet banana) are also popular throughout Ecuador and are prepared in a variety of ways. They tend to be firmer and lower in sugar than sweet bananas.

Since Guayaquil is on the coast, there is a great variety of seafood, especially shrimp. Beans and corn are staples in the Ecuadorian diet.

Lunch (*almuerzo*) is the main meal of the day. A typical *almuerzo* usually takes place between 1PM and 3PM: It consists of soup as a first course, followed by rice and/or beans with meat, chicken or fish. Most dishes in Ecuador are complemented by a traditional hot sauce known as *ají*. Similar to Tabasco sauce, you will find *ají* in almost all restaurants and in your family home. It is a good idea to taste it before smearing it all over your meal as each will have its own intensity of spiciness.

Family

The Ecuadorian family is the most important unit in the country. Ecuadorians have a large circle of relatives, who are extended through 'compadrazgo'. Relationships are generally strong in family life.

Cultural Adjustment

At first, you might be tempted to cling to other international students, especially those from your home country. While it is comforting to depend on fellow expats as friends,

you will limit your Ecuadorian experience. Try to make a sincere effort to meet and get to know Ecuadorian people. You will find that people are genuinely warm.

One way to get to know Ecuadorian people is to arrange an *intercambio* in which you exchange one hour of Spanish conversation for one hour of conversation in your language. Even if your Spanish does not need the practice, it is a good way to meet and get to know a local.

Population and Religion

There are 14.4 million people living in Ecuador. Guayaquil is the most populous city, with a population of about 2.4 million and the second most populous is Quito with 2.2 million people.

The population of this country is ethnically mixed –however, it is largely made up of *mestizos* (a mixture of both European and indigenous ancestry), followed by people of indigenous, Spanish and African descent. People are mostly concentrated in two areas: the Coast (approximately 50%) and the Highlands (approximately 46%). The remainder of the population live in the Oriente (Rainforest) and the Galapagos Islands.

Approximately 82% of Ecuadorians are Roman Catholic. Despite this overwhelming majority, a number of other religions exist and are gradually increasing in size, such as Evangelical Christian churches, Latter Day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses. A small percentage of Jews, Bahais, Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus are also present in the country.

DAILY LIFE

Language

The main language of Ecuador is Spanish, although Quichua (an Inca language) and Shuar (spoken in the rainforest region) were recognized as official languages by the 2008 Constitution. The university is multilingual in its class offerings (Spanish and English, plus French and Mandarin language classes). Not everyone is fluent in English.

Personal Safety

Although Ecuador is relatively safe, Guayaquil is the country's largest city, and like any big city it can be dangerous. Cases of "express kidnappings" involving yellow taxis have increased.

Accordingly, considerable caution needs to be exercised when in the city, such as:

- Always carry with you the Emergency Contact List, including the 24-hour cellphone number.
- Conceal your money when travelling and carry your belongings in front of you.
- Avoid carrying more than one credit or bankcards, or large amounts of cash.

- Keep your spending money separate from your credit cards and passport.
- Do NOT take yellow taxis from the street. Casa Grande staff will supply you with a list of trusted taxi companies that you should use at ALL times.
- Never accept anything from a person you do not know in the street.

More safety tips:

- Pedestrians have no rights. Always check for traffic before crossing the street, even if the light is red.
- Carry a copy of your passport at all times.
- Do not give money to beggars on the street as this may expose you to thieves. There are regulated charities where you can safely make a donation.

Women in Ecuador

- The most common annoyance experienced by foreign women is the tendency for men to whistle, hiss and stare insistently at them. This is generally harmless behavior and the best way to deal with it is to ignore it. Sexual assault and rape happen in Ecuador, as they do in any other country.
- There are some strong stereotypes about foreign women being more open to sexual advances and experiences, so please be aware that you are prejudged by your accent, appearance and cultural background. Try not to dress too provocatively.

Despite these warnings, most Ecuadorians are friendly and respectful to both foreign men and women.

Business Hours

Banks: generally open from Monday through Friday 09h00 to 17h00.

Business Offices: generally open 10h00 to 18h00.

Shopping Malls: open from 10h00 to 21h00.

Cafés: Usually open, though they may take a break between two and six o'clock in the morning.

Restaurants: lunch is served starting from 12h30 and dinner starting from 19h00.

Drug Stores: Regularly open 24 hours a day, also have delivery service.

Tipping

Ecuador does not have a great tipping culture like other countries. Some restaurants add a 12% tax and a 10% service charge to the bill. If the service has been satisfactory, add another 5% for the waiter. Cheaper places do not include a tax or service charge.

To tip your server, do so directly – do not just leave the money on the table.

Taxi drivers are not normally tipped, but you can leave them the small change from a ride with a taximeter.

Guides are usually paid low wages, and tips are greatly appreciated. If you go on a guided tour, a tip is expected. If you are in a group, tip a top-notch guide about \$5 per person per day. Tip the driver about half that. If you hire a private guide, tip about \$10 per day.

Read more: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/ecuador/money-costs#ixzz3eq5cS3pw>

Bargaining

Bargaining is a way of life in Ecuador, especially in Ecuadorian markets and often in craft shops too. In fact, prices are not usually displayed in markets, and you have to bargain prices with the vendor. Wait until the seller suggests a price, and then offer to pay half to two-thirds of that price and take it from there.

It is worth checking out prices on a few different stalls with similar products before entering into bargaining, to get a good idea of value. We also recommend buying several items from the same stall since vendors will often discount prices for those buying in bulk.

Read more:
<http://www.vivatravelguides.com/south-america/ecuador/ecuador-overview/shopping-in-ecuador/>

Electricity

Electrical sockets or outlets in Ecuador are very similar to the electrical outlets found in the United States and Canada. Typically if you are coming from North America you will not need an adapter, depending on whether the appliance is 3-pronged or 2-pronged (Ecuador has both types but the 2-prong is more typical). If you are coming from outside of North America you will require an adapter for your electrical devices and appliances.

Electrical outlets in Ecuador usually supply electricity at between 110 and 120 volts AC. If you are plugging in a device from North America, or one that is compatible with multiple voltages, then an adapter is all you need. If your device is from another part of the world, and is built for 220-240 volt electricity for example, then you will need a voltage transformer as well as an adapter.

Transportation and Travel

By Air: The José Joaquín de Olmedo airport in Guayaquil has been awarded by international entities on various occasions, in recognition of its excellence and quality, as the Best Airport in Latin America and the Caribbean, Best Airport in the World (2.5 million passenger category), and many more. This will be your arrival point and from the same airport, you can travel locally to the Galapagos, Quito, Cuenca, and other major cities.

By Taxi: Street Taxis are not recommended. The University suggests the service of 8 taxis that work with the university staff, teachers and students exclusively. There are also two other cab companies that can be used; more details will be offered during Orientation. We recommend students download Uber and Cabify on their phones to request taxis at all times.

By Bus: Not recommended to use inside the city, but recommended for traveling from one city to another, making sure to always get on these in the city's Bus Terminal.

By Metrovía: Is a metro service on the street that connects most of the city. The price is \$0.30 USD. More information:

<http://www.metrovia-gye.com.ec/>

BEFORE YOU COME

Current events

Be sure to become familiar with current events in Ecuador before you go. The people you will meet will expect you to know about their country.

Holidays

Ecuador's public holidays mostly celebrate historic events and religious festivals. Some public holidays are national and apply to the whole country; some are local to a particular city. A holiday may be applied on a Friday or Monday if the actual date falls at the weekend or midweek. Local newspapers and the UCG academic calendar specify the holidays for each year so students can plan ahead of time.

Health

No specific vaccinations are required to enter Ecuador, but it is recommended that all standard immunizations be kept current. Consult with the CDC website (<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/ecuador>) for recommended vaccinations for traveling to Ecuador. Be aware that migration authorities can request students coming from countries categorized as **Yellow Fever Areas** to show their international vaccination certificate.

The water supply in Ecuador is not particularly safe. Filtering and/or boiling water is necessary –therefore, it is highly recommended that you **do not drink from the tap** and buy bottled water instead.

Pasteurized milk and milk products are safe for consumption. Do not eat uncooked vegetables or salads on the streets or in places where sanitary conditions are uncertain. Also, be sure to always wash your vegetables and fruits (and peel them before eating).

Intestinal upsets are to be expected, due to different food and drink in your diet. The most effective treatment for simple diarrhea is rest and plenty of liquids.

It is also recommended that you bring insect repellent with you at all times –mosquitoes are very common in tropical weather, and are bearers of diseases such as dengue, chikungunya and zika virus, among others.

We also recommend applying sunblock constantly: Remember that due to its geographical location, Ecuador is closer to the sun and, therefore, radiation is higher.

Use of toilets

As throughout South America, Ecuadorian plumbing has very low pressure, and putting toilet paper into the bowl is a serious no-no anywhere except in the fanciest hotels. Always put your used toilet paper in the basket (it is better than a clogged and overflowing toilet!). A well-run cheap hotel will ensure that the receptacle is emptied and the toilet cleaned daily.

Public toilets are limited mainly to bus terminals, airports and restaurants. Lavatories are called “servicios higiénicos” and are usually marked ‘SS.HH.’ You can simply ask to use

the *baño* (bathroom) in a restaurant. Toilet paper is not always available, so an experienced traveler always carries a personal supply. Remember 'M' on the door means *mujeres* (women) not 'men.' Men's toilets are signed with an 'H' for *hombres* (men) or a 'C' for *caballeros* (gentlemen).

Read more: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/ecuador/essential-information#ixzz3eIIxUSmv>

MONEY MATTERS

Currency

Since September 2000, the US dollar became the official currency of Ecuador. While every US dollar bill can be used in Ecuador, the contrary is not necessarily true: Local coins stamped in Ecuador (1, 5, 10, 25 and 50 cents) are not accepted abroad.

Credit cards / ATM / Traveler's checks

While credit cards are not as common throughout the country as might be in other places, they are becoming more common. Credit cards will normally be accepted in hotels, shopping malls, restaurants, and other establishments in large cities. Be sure to travel with cash if you are going to smaller towns.

The most common cards are Visa and MasterCard. Be aware of your ATM and/or credit card Company's policy for use in a foreign country as they might charge an extra fee for charges or withdrawals made in foreign currency. Also, if you are going to use your credit or debit/ATM card, be sure to inform your local bank before leaving in order to not be locked out of your account. Almost all major banks in the country will have an ATM which will accept cards issued from banks outside Ecuador.

Traveler's checks are NOT recommended, since you will not find businesses and/or people taking them in.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Main Newspapers

- Diario El Universo: www.eluniverso.com
- Diario Expreso: www.expreso.ec
- Diario El Mercurio (Cuenca): www.elmercurio.com.ec

Ecuador travel guides

- Lonely Planet: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/ecuador>
- Frommer's Guide: <http://www.frommers.com/destinations/ecuador>

Ministries in Ecuador

- Ministry of Health: <http://www.salud.gob.ec/>
- Ministry of Transportation and Public Works: <http://www.obraspublicas.gob.ec/>
- Ministry of International Affairs and Human Mobility: <http://www.cancilleria.gob.ec/>