

Casa Helbling Travel Information

Ecuador

Ecuador is located on the northeast of South America, limited in the north by Colombia, in the south and east by Peru and in the west by the Pacific Ocean. It is one of the smallest countries in South America, with an area of about 280.000 km² and a population of approximately 13,5 million habitants.

Ecuador is one of the countries with most variety in the world. It extent goes from the tropic in the Pacific coast, over to the mountainous and snowed chain of the Andes, down to the rainforest that reaches the flowing of the Amazon. The unequalled archipelago of the Galápagos Islands is located 1.000 km from the solid ground; this is the fourth region of this fascinating country.



The sierra (highlands)

Between the east and the west range of mountains of the Andes is an extent of productive ground. This area expands to the north and to the south and it is from 2.000 up to 3.500 meters high. Nearly half of the Ecuadorian population lives in this part of the country. Quito, one of the cities with colonial inheritance is located in the sierra. It is the capital city of Ecuador, the cradle of the economy and the culture. The majority of the native population works in the country, around 3.600 meters high. The moor extends into the heights and reaches the uncultivable lava areas. On top of that are the white peaks of the Andes located between 5.000 and 6.000 meters high.

The coast

From the Pacific coast to the birth of the occidental Andes are the fertile and tropical “low lands”, which are used for the agro industry. In this enormous plantation lands, workers cultivate bananas (of which Ecuador is the major exporter of the world), coffee, cacao, cotton,



sugar and rice. Along the coast are many shrimp pools, which are increasing with time. The fishing and shrimp cultivation have a predominant role in the Ecuadorian industry. There are still some conserved areas of the cloudy wood in the North West coast. Most of the inhabitants of this region are black. Kilometers wide extended beaches invite you to relax, rest or to have fun in a beach atmosphere.

Guayaquil is the main commercial city of the country and the most important port in the Pacific coast of South America.

Casa Helbling Travel Information

Quito and its surroundings



You will discover beautiful piazzas, surrounded by baroque churches and houses in the colonial style, colorful markets, narrow alleys, colonial art and archeology museums, art galleries with paintings of famous artists, known all over the world, etc. However, you will also come across wide avenues with a lot of traffic, modern shopping centers, good and varied restaurants, original bars and lively discotheques, all this in San Francisco de Quito, the

oldest city in South America. The old and the modern are coalesced; together they form the meeting point of the past and the future.

In the margin of this city, surrounded by scenery of mountains, is the next meeting point, where the two parts of the world come together in the imaginary equatorial line, the middle of the world, *Mitad del mundo*.

The basin of the Amazon

The immensity of the effluents of the Amazon begins on the east side of the Andes. The extended rain forest, still intact, engages almost half of the country area. Just about 4 % of the total population lives in this region. The petrol extraction began approximately 25 years ago in the northeast part of the rain forest.



Although civilization has left a track in the Amazon region, this enormous extension of forest is still considered one of the biggest mysteries of the planet. This incomparable and threaded ecosystem is located in the superior course of the Amazon fountain, in Ecuadorian territory.

The Amazon



Gigantic trees in a cloudy forest, charged with bromelias, orchids and moss, tropical heat, showy, wild watered rivers at the foot of the Andes, chaotic cities, pioneers in the limits with the jungle, colonies and indigenous villages a long the wide streams of the dark watered rivers that flow in the deepness of the Esmeraldas' green jungle. A world full of mysteries, a countless quantity of plants and animals, still not discovered, a place where very antique

indigenous cultures fight against the advance of the modern civilization.

Casa Helbling Travel Information



There is probably no other part in the world where you can find such a varied amount of plants and animals as there are in the region of the Amazon. However, this does not mean, that all animals will be arrayed expecting your visit. The jungle is not a zoo; there are different factors that you have to consider for the observation of animals. A lot of animals hide from their enemies in the denseness of the rainforest. Therefore, you will need a lot of patience, shrewdness, a good sense of smell and a bit of luck in order to have a successful observation of the animals. Anyway, you could say, that the world of plants in the jungle is even more impressive than the animals.

The weather in the rainforest is difficult to predict, but there is one thing you can say for sure, it does rain very often. Although the rain is not always the same, there might be a rainstorm with the characteristics of a deluge that will last a few minutes and will be followed by the strong equatorial sunshine. As it is also possible that there is no sunshine for a couple of days or that, there is not a drop of water falling from the sky. Therefore, you must be prepared. Here some important things that might be useful if you are planning to visit the rainforest:



Light trousers and shorts made of cotton (jeans are not recommended), light, long and short arm t-shirts, swimsuit, bath slippers and sport shoes, a cap that protects you from the sun, sunglasses, sunscreen with a high protection factor, “encauchado” water jacket, flashlight, penknife, binoculars, repellent, biological shampoo and soap, towel (if you are doing a tour that includes camping), a little bottle that you can fill up with water, a little backpack where you can comfortably carry the necessary things for the daytrip and big plastic bags (you can use them as protection against the humidity). The tour organizers provide plastic boots (available from small to size 45).

The Galápagos Islands



The Galápagos Islands are located at almost 1.000 kilometers from the solid ground of Ecuador. This archipelago consists of 13 big islands and around 50 islets, all of them of volcanic origin.

A long time ago, the Galápagos were a hideout of pirates that stole Spanish boats charged with gold. These islands with their exclusive animal life are one of the last animal paradises in the world. The importance and value of the islands has been recognized by Ecuador since 1934, when the Galápagos were declared as a protected zone. After that, in 1959, the islands were declared a National Park, and later on protected by the UNESCO.

Casa Helbling Travel Information

The unique animal planet is one of the most fascinating characteristics of the Galápagos. You cannot find some of the species that habit there anywhere else in the world, as it is the case of the iguanas (large lizards) and the giant turtles. The animals in Galápagos are not frightened of humans; you can observe and take very close pictures of them.



Regulations of the National Park

The fauna and flora of the Galápagos are strictly protected. The visit of the islands (except the inhabited area) is just permitted if you are guided by a natural guide that provides a guiding licence. The visitants have to keep on the signalized pathways. Under no circumstance you can throw any kind of rubbish on the islands. You can't smoke or eat during the wanderings, but you are allowed to take your own drinking water.

The animals cannot be disturbed and even worse touched. Visitants are not allowed to take absolutely anything from the islands as a "souvenir".

When you arrive to the islands you will be informed by the natural guide, about these strict rules, which help conserve the wildlife in the National Park. In order to have future generations enjoy this natural paradise, you have to submit strictly to these rules.

Climate and clothing

The climate is warm-tropical and humid between December and April, between May and November it is delightfully warm. The temperature of the ocean water fluctuates between 24 and 28 centigrade degrees from December to April and around 18 to 28 degrees the rest of the year. In August and September you have to count with a rough sea.

It is recommended to take light summer clothes; it's enough if you take with you a light pullover or a wind safe jacket for the chilly afternoons on board. Besides from that you will need: swimsuit, bath slippers, a cap that protects your head from the sun, sun cream with a high protection factor, sunglasses, resistant sport shoes. Eventually snorkelling equipment (most of the embarkations do provide a limited amount of this equipment, that you can borrow or rent for a small amount of money).



Fares and taxes

The current value of the entrance to the National Park is US\$ 100,--.

Casa Helbling Travel Information

A brief description of the most important islands

Bartolomé

This island consists of lava formations in indescribable colours and shapes; you can see a huge amount of volcanic cones in an extravagant moony landscape. Penguins, sea turtles, and harmless sharks are next to the beach.

Española

In *Punta Suárez*: sea wolves, sea and land iguanas (large lizards) in different colours, blue-footed boobies, masked boobies, *Sinsontes* birds, oyster fishers, seagulls, albatross (from April to December). In *Bahia Gardner*: white coral sand beach with playful sea wolves.

Fernandina

Is one of the most active volcanoes in the world. On the island you can observe fresh black lava flows, pelicans nesting, big sea iguanas, crabs and sea wolves.



Floreana

Post office of the bay: The beach is olive coloured, sea turtles nest on this island, eventually you can see sea turtles nesting on the beach and flamingos at the *Punta Cormorant*. The *Corona del Diablo* is a deep erupted volcanic crater; it is a good place for snorkelling.

Genovesa

On this island you will see colonies of masked and red-footed boobies, white coral sand, sea gulls, frigates and if you wish you can snorkel surrounded by beautiful cliff fishes.

Isabela

Cueva de Tagus: Used to be a hiding place of the pirates. In this island, the biggest of the Galápagos, lays a volcanic lagoon, cliffs with abundant animal life, cormorants which are incapable to fly, Galápagos penguins. Colonies of giant turtles are settled in at the volcanoes *Alcedo* and *Sierra Negra*. You can get there by walking or a horseback-riding excursion.

Seymour norte

Here is where the biggest colony of frigates lives; there are also blue-footed boobies and sea gulls.

Rábida

Flamingos, new types of Darwin finches and sea wolves' colonies enjoying the sun on the red-sanded beach.



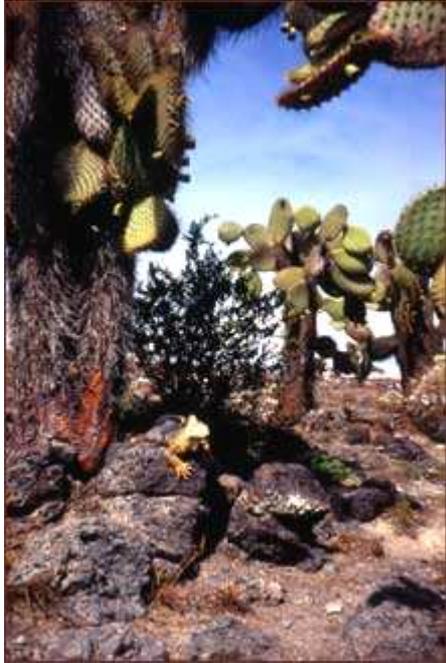
San Cristóbal

The Kicker rock: Is a spectacular boulder that sticks 150 m out of the water, you can see masked and blue-footed boobies and frigates. *Punta Pitt*: Has impressive scenery and animals to admire, masked and red-footed boobies, sea wolves, beautiful beaches where you can swim and snorkel. It is also a good place for diving.

Casa Helbling Travel Information

Santa Cruz

Charles Darwin station: Giant turtles, finches, museum and expositions about the Galápagos and the Charles Darwin theory of evolution. *Tierras altas:* Exuberant vegetation, giant turtle protection area. *Tortuga Bay:* Is a wide white coral beach with frigates and „busardos“, the water is not deep so it's perfect for doing snorkelling. *Bachas:* A beautiful white coral beach, where you can observe big sea turtles, flamingos, frigates and other birds.



Santa Fé

Has a cactus forest, “Santa Fé iguanas”, sea turtles, “papagayo-fishes”, eventually sharks and rays, all this in an idyllic bay.

Santiago

Puerto Egas: Is a black lava coast, the flood has formed lagoons, a perfect place for sea wolves' colonies and red crabs. *Sullivan Bay:* In this bay you can discover a lava river that is geologically interesting.

Sombrero Chino: Sea wolves, „Galápagos-busardos”, pelicans, sea gulls, a good place to snorkel, eventually you can see rays.

Plaza sur: Land iguanas, sea wolves harem, sea gulls, pelicans, Opuntia cactus.

Different ways of visiting the islands

Most of the tourists travel through the Galápagos on cruisers, small yachts or ships. This is the best option if you want to see a lot, because most of the times you travel at night and you have enough time for the wanderings on the islands (two times a day on the journey there and one time on the way back).

Those passengers, who prefer to sleep on solid ground, have different trip options where hotel and boat are combined. During the day they travel on modern and fast boats to get to different visit places on the islands and they spend the night in comfortable hotels on land.

The diving paradise of Galápagos

The Galápagos Islands are not only a paradise for the flora and the fauna, they are also considered as one of the most interesting snorkelling places of the world. Hammer sharks, giant rays, big amount of sea turtles, exotic fishes and lot's more are counted as top attractions in the Galápagos sea. Some of the yachts provide diving equipment and highly qualified staff on board that are in charge of directing this sport.

You can also hire a special boat for diving or gather information in *Puerto Ayora* (Santa Cruz island) in the hotels and travel agencies. They help you with boat hires and organize daytrips to the islands and diving excursions.

Casa Helbling Travel Information

Boat categories

Economic class boats

Capacity of 8 to 12 persons; single, double or four bed cabins. Most of them with shared bathrooms, less quantity of freshwater, small space, slow trip (6-8 knots), the nature guides can't speak good English.



Tourist class boats

Capacity of 10 to 16 passengers, single and double cabins, with private bathroom, sufficient freshwater, spacious, faster than the economic class boat (8-10 knots), some of these boats dispose of bars and terraces, the nature guides have better English and

biology knowledge.

First class boats

Capacity of 16 to 20 passengers, double cabins with air-conditioning, private bathroom, a wide salon, bar, terraces and a nature guide with good biology and languages knowledge. Velocity: 9-12 knots.

Luxury boats

Capacity of 16 to 20 passengers, double cabins with air-conditioning, private bathroom, a wide salon, bar, terraces, excellent food and service. First class guide, also in German (if it is a group). Velocity: 10-12 knots.

First class cruises

Wide simple and double cabins in different categories. Air-conditioning, private bathrooms, bars, dining hall, big salon and terraces. First class service, nature guide with very good languages knowledge. Velocity around 14 knots.



Important Information

Passports

The only valid identification document is the passport which has to have the stamp of the Ecuadorian migration on it. To reduce the risk of stolen passports in Quito, we recommend carrying just a copy with you and leaving the original passport in a secure place in your hotel. For trips and flights out of Quito it is mandatory to have your original passport with you.

Casa Helbling Travel Information

Books and maps

You can find a wide variety of books and maps in the book store Libri-Mundi (*Juan Leon Mera 851 and Veintimilla*) or in the agencies in the Hilton Colon and Swiss Hotel. For more detailed maps of each county of Ecuador you can go to the geographic military institute (*Senierges y Paz y Miño*). It is open from 9 o'clock in the morning to 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

Robbery, Assaults

Ecuador is considered one of the safest countries of South America, although the criminality has increased over the last years. It happens rarely that someone gets assaulted, unless you totally expose yourself to it. What is very common and happens every day, are robberies in places where people are agglomerated, for example, in the colonial part of the cities, in the markets and in the buses. Groups of persons form an agglomeration, while another one tries to steal what he can get. Be aware and protect yourself.

Terms and conditions for entering Ecuador

German, Swiss and Austrian residents must have a passport that is valid at least six months after the return date. If you are staying as a tourist for a maximum of 90 days per calendar year, you will not need a visa. You have to request a visa in your own country if you want to stay for longer. This is a complicated instance that you have to do before your travel. Depending on the circumstances, you can extend your stay in this country in the extranjeria (foreign office). People with other nationalities, please ask in the offices of your corresponding country.

Electricity

In Ecuador you have American style (flat) sockets that provide 110 volts electricity. Electric artefacts that haven't got this electric current, like shaving machines or hair dryers, can't be used.



Food and drinks

The Ecuadorian food is very varied and tasty. Big cities have excellent restaurants that offer international and national specialities from the coast and the sierra.

Even though, you have to take elementary precautions. Don't drink water that hasn't been previously boiled, don't buy food or drinks, which are sold on the streets or in opened places. Every hotel, campsite and boat provides bottled water.

Casa Helbling Travel Information

The altitude

Quito is located at 2.850 meters over sea level. People that are in a good state of health can tolerate this altitude easily. You will notice the altitude when you walk fast or go upstairs.



During the first few days it's not recommended to do sports that require a high physical effort.

Health

There are not much viruses in the Sierra. On that point of view, Ecuador isn't more dangerous than other tropical regions. But if you are planning to travel to the warm-tropical regions (jungle, Pacific coast: specially the Esmeralda's county, northwest of Ecuador) it is recommendable to get a vaccination against Malaria. **Please note:** For the protection of indigenous peoples, proof of a yellow-fever vaccination must be shown when visiting some areas of the Amazon basin. Ask your doctor about this and other vaccinations before you start your trip. People that have high pressure or suffer from heart and blood circulation troubles also have to consult a doctor, respect the influence that the altitude and the tropic zone have in their health.

There are good doctors in Quito that can handle with all type of illnesses and accidents, also several hospitals and emergency stations. The most modern hospital in Quito is the "Metropolitano".



Children

We recommend not taking very young children to the trip. Although, 8 years old and older children can enjoy a lot a trip to the Galápagos and the rest of the regions in the country. The best hotels are generally prepared to receive children; they provide kids menus, extra beds, women that take care of your children, etc.

Clothing

In Quito you require principally spring or autumn cloths. For trips to the mountains you will need good and resistant shoes, rain protection and warm clothes. You also need sun screen with a high protection factor and insect repellent. For the Galápagos, the coast and the rainforest you need light clothing that is appropriate for the tropic.

Climate

During the whole year the temperatures are practically the same, which means in warm days between 15 and 24 degrees and in cold nights between 8 and 10 degrees.

Casa Helbling Travel Information

Opening hours

Most of the shops are opened from Monday to Friday from 9 a.m. until 7 p.m.; Saturdays from 9 a.m. until 1 p.m. Shopping centres also open the whole day on weekends.



The opening hours for banks are: Monday to Friday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Exchange Centres are also opened on Saturday until 3 p.m., they also attend on Sundays in airports and big hotels. Travel agencies are opened from Monday to Friday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Souvenirs and presents

You can get several handmade souvenirs made of different materials. Textiles, artesian carpets, hangings, paintings, jewellery, wooden handicrafts, ceramic, leather and other curious things.



Language

Spanish is Ecuador's official language. Quechua, the Inca's language, is also spoken in the Sierra. In the Amazon zones they speak different Indian languages. English is also spoken in the most important tourist zones as well as in a lot of hotels.



Traffic, car rentals, taxis

The priorities in Quito's traffic are confusion. Normally streets that go from north to south have priority. For the pedestrians we recommend not to trust in theoretical pedestrian zones, there are a lot of drivers that don't respect them.

Renting a car is relatively expensive and it is not so easy to drive in Ecuador if you don't know the traffic, this is why we don't recommend this option.

There are cheaper ways to travel, as it is by bus and taxis. The taxis are safer and not so expensive. They are yellow and should have a taximeter; if they don't have one or it doesn't work you should accord the price before. It isn't usual to give tips to the drivers or to sit in the front seat, especially for women that are travelling alone.

Casa Helbling Travel Information

Tips

Most restaurants add 10 % gratuity, which will be included in your bill. Although, if you are served well you can give the waiter an extra tip, they will be happy about it. In small restaurants the customer decides.

Taxi drivers do not expect tips, but often they try to increase their incomes by putting the prices higher than what it says on the taximeter. Guardians and porters receive US\$ 1 for each piece of luggage. For drivers it is usual to give US\$ 1 to 1,50 per each day, per person. For local guides US\$ 3.

Currency, money exchange and credit cards



The Ecuadorian currency is the US dollar. Ecuador has a free foreign exchange market, which means that you are free to exchange dollars and opposite without a limit.

Specially with dollars, we recommend to bring traveller checks of an American bank (American Express, City Bank, etc.) and additionally some extra cash in dollar banknotes with a low denomination. It is also advisable to have Swiss francs and Euros as a reserve. Traveller checks in those currencies should also be from American Express. Often you can't change traveller checks from Swiss Bankers or Euro checks. All credit cards (American Express, Visa, MasterCard, Diners) are generally accepted in all high levelled establishments, restaurants, hotels and shops. Even though, sometimes it is difficult to obtain cash with a credit card, or it can happen that payment with credit cards are more expensive than in cash (extra commission charge).



Time difference

The time difference between Ecuador and central Europe is 6 hours in the winter and 7 hours in the summer. In the winter when it is 12 a.m. in Europe, in Ecuador it is 6 o'clock in the morning and in the summer 5 o'clock in the morning. In the Galápagos it is even one hour earlier.