

BIG FIVE
TOURS & EXPEDITIONS

ECUADOR



Travel Guide

The following general outline offers practical information, suggestions and answers to some frequently asked questions. It is not intended to be the definitive guide for your trip.



QUITO ~ Elevation: 9223 feet / Latitude: 00 09S / Longitude: 078 29W												
Average Temperature												
°F	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	58	58	58	59	58	58	58	58	58	58	58	58
Average Precipitation												
in.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	4.5	5.1	6	6.9	4.9	1.9	0.8	1	3.1	5	4.3	4.1
GUAYAQUIL ~ Elevation: 30 feet / Latitude: 02 09S / Longitude: 079 53W												
Average Temperature												
°F	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	81	81	82	82	81	78	77	77	78	78	79	81
Average Precipitation												
in.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	8.8	11	11.3	7.1	2.1	0.7	0.1	---	0.1	0.1	0.1	1.2
CUENCA ~ Elevation: 8291 feet / Latitude: 02 53S / Longitude: 079 00W												
Average Temperature												
°F	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	59	60	60	59	58	56	56	56	58	59	58	60
Average Precipitation												
in.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	2	1.8	3.2	4.3	4.3	1.7	0.9	1.1	1.6	3.1	1.8	2.5

Ecuador is a land of contrasts that you will never forget -- divided by nature, yet solidly bonded by a common cultural heritage. Within a small area, Ecuador showcases an enormous variety of natural splendors, both north and south of the Equator. An exotic Coast along the Pacific, majestic Andean Highlands, a mysterious Amazon Jungle and some enchanted islands - the Galapagos - make up this one country. Four regions, geographically different, and each with its own traditions, people, climate, beauty and special interest sites, make up this unique land.

OVERVIEW

Ecuador is bordered by Colombia, Peru and the Pacific Ocean. There are three distinct zones: the Sierra or uplands of the Andes, the Costa, a coastal plain between the Andes and the Pacific with plantations of bananas, cacao, coffee and sugar; and the Oriente, the upper Amazon basin to the east, consisting of tropical jungles threaded by rivers. Quito, the capital city, is in a setting of great natural beauty, overshadowed by the volcano Pichincha with its twin peaks of Ruca and Guagua. Guayaquil, Ecuador's biggest city, is also the chief port and commercial centre. The Littoral is a narrow coastal belt, 560km (350 miles) in length. The chief ports provide visitors with some of the best resorts for deep-sea fishing on the west coast. The Oriente is a primeval world of virgin forests and exotic flora and fauna, still inhabited by Indian tribes. Food specialties include llapingachos (pancakes stuffed with mashed potato and cheese) and the national delicacy of roasted guinea pig. There is little nightlife except in Quito and Guayaquil, where there are excellent restaurants and other attractions.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Area: 272,045 sq km (105,037 sq miles).

Population: 12,646,095 (official estimate 2000).

Capital: Quito. **Government:** Republic since 78.

Head of State: President Lucio Edwin Gutiérrez Borbúa since 2003.

Religion: More than 90 % are Roman Catholic.

Time: Ecuador is EST (Galapagos Islands EST -1).

Electricity: 110 / 120 volts AC, 60Hz.

COMMUNICATIONS

Language: Spanish is the official language but Quechua and other indigenous languages are common. Some English is spoken.

Telephone: Country code: 593. Outgoing int'l: 00.

Mobile telephone: AMPS network is operated by *Otecel*, and AMPS-TDMA network is operated by *Conecel*. Not compatible with GSM handsets.

Internet: ISPs include *Interactive*

Telegram: These may be sent from the chief telegraph office in main towns.

Post: Airmail to western Europe and the USA takes up to a week, but incoming deliveries are less certain.

PASSPORT / VISA

Passports: For international travel, a U.S. passport valid for at least six months from date of departure, containing **at least** two blank pages is necessary.

Visas: U.S. and Canadian citizens do not require visas in advance. Citizens from other countries, consult the nearest Ecuador consulate.

Important: Please check your passport prior to travel to insure that:

- 1) Your passport is valid for at least six months after the date of travel.
- 2) You have sufficient blank pages for visa stamps that will be added as you travel in and out of various countries.

Please note: Pages reserved for amendments and endorsements cannot be used for visas.

ARRIVAL / DEPARTURE INFORMATION

Approximate flight times: To Quito from Miami is 4 hrs, from and from New York is 7 hrs.

Departure tax: US\$25 to be paid locally.

MONEY

Currency: US Dollar (US\$). The US Dollar replaced the Sucre as the official currency of Ecuador in September 2000.

Currency exchange: Foreign currencies can be exchanged at banks and at exchange houses (casas de cambio), the latter being generally the best option. ATMs are available in large urban areas.

Credit & debit cards: MasterCard, American Express, Visa and Diners Club are accepted. Check with your credit or debit card company for details of merchant acceptability and other services which may be available.

Travelers checks: Travelers checks are generally accepted in the larger cities and can be exchanged into currency at most banks.

Banking hours: Mon-Fri 0900-1330; some banks are also open Sat 0930-1400. Casas de cambio are open Mon-Fri 0900-1800, Sat 0900-1200.

DUTY FREE

The following goods may be imported into Ecuador without incurring customs duty: *300 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 200g of tobacco; 1l of alcohol; a reasonable amount of perfume; gifts and personal effects up to US\$200 (for stay of up to 7 days) or US\$500 (for stay of 2 years onwards).*

Note: Prior permission is required for the import of firearms, ammunition, fresh or dry meat and meat products, plants and vegetables.

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Jan 1	.....	New Year's Day.
Feb 23-24*	.....	Carnival.
Apr 8	.....	Maundy Thursday.
Apr 9	.....	Good Friday.
May 1	.....	Labor Day.
May 24	.....	Battle of Pichincha.
Jun 19	.....	Corpus Christi.
Jul 24	.....	Simon Bolivar Day.
Aug 10	.....	Independence Day.
Oct 9*	.....	Foundation of Guayaquil.
Nov 2	.....	All Souls' Day.
Nov 3*	.....	Foundation of Cuenca.
Dec 6*	.....	Foundation of Quito.
Dec 25	.....	Christmas Day.
Dec 31	.....	New Year's Eve.

Note: *These holidays are not official public holidays, but are widely observed. Other holidays, in addition to the above, may be marked locally.

HEALTH

A **yellow fever vaccination certificate** is required from all travelers over one year of age arriving from infected areas. Travelers arriving from non-endemic zones should note that vaccination is strongly recommended for travel outside the urban areas, even if an outbreak of the disease has not been reported and they would normally not require a vaccination certificate to enter the country.

Following WHO guidelines issued in 1973, a **cholera vaccination certificate** is no longer a condition of entry to Ecuador. However, cholera is a serious risk in this country and precautions are essential. Up-to-date advice should be sought before deciding whether these precautions should include vaccination as medical opinion is divided over its effectiveness.

Typhoid poses some risk in rural areas.

Malaria risk, predominantly in the benign vivax form, is high throughout the year below 1500m in 148 cantons in 19 provinces. A high proportion of falciparum cases in Esmeraldas Province are reportedly resistant to

chloroquine. There is no risk in Guayaquil or Quito.

Food & drink: All water should be regarded as being potentially contaminated. Water used for drinking, brushing teeth or making ice should have first been boiled or otherwise sterilized. Bottled water is available. Milk is unpasteurized and should be boiled. Powdered or tinned milk is available and is advised, but make sure that it is reconstituted with pure water. Avoid dairy products which are likely to have been made from unboiled milk. Only eat well-cooked meat and fish, preferably served hot. Pork, salad and mayonnaise may carry increased risk. Vegetables should be cooked and fruit peeled.

Other risks: Endemic onchocerciasis occurs in rural areas. Hepatitis A and B are hyperendemic and inoculation with gamma globulin is highly recommended. Hepatitis D is endemic in the Amazon Basin. Dengue fever might occur. Altitude sickness is a risk flying directly into Quito (2800m). Rabies is present. For those at high risk, vaccination before arrival should be considered. If you are bitten, seek medical advice without delay.

Health care: Medical facilities outside the major towns are extremely limited. Health insurance (to include emergency repatriation) is strongly recommended.

SPORT & ACTIVITIES

Rainforest treks: Travelers wishing to explore the rainforest of the lower Amazon basin and its abundant plant and animal life should head to the Oriente region (see Resorts & Excursions section). It is probably best to do this as part of an organized tour, which can be booked with a number of local operators providing tailor-made itineraries and experienced guides. The presence of hundreds of waterways, many of which are tributaries of the great River Amazon, means that such tours invariably involve traveling by boat. Usually, these are large motorized canoes traveling up the main rivers (such as the Napo or the Aguarico), although trips on non-motorized boats along the smaller waterways are also available, which is a far better way to observe the wildlife. Several indigenous communities living in the region have preserved their traditional lifestyles and are actively engaged in resisting the ongoing attempts by oil companies to develop and exploit the Ecuadorian rainforest.

Hiking: There are some good hiking trails in Cotopaxi National Park, one of them following the shores of Lago Limpiopungo, located at an altitude of 3800m (12,465ft).

Climbing: Ecuador's tourist mecca for adventure sports and trips to the rainforest, also offer climbing expeditions to the volcanoes. Experienced climbers may head to the Cotopaxi volcano which, at 5985m (19,345ft), is one of the world's highest, best reached from Quito.

Wildlife: Apart from the rainforest, Ecuador's rich wildlife is best represented in the Galapagos Islands, whose most famous inhabitants are the giant Galapagos tortoises (weighing up to 272kg / 600lb). Adventure tours around the islands are available, either in large cruise ships or in smaller ships and yachts (advance booking is essential). The amount of time visitors are allowed to stay on the islands is regulated by the Government.

Water Sports: There are 2800km (1750 miles) of coastline along the mainland, with beach resorts offering various types of water sports. Good snorkeling is available via chartered boat trips around the Isla de la Plata (located in the Parque Nacional Machalilla, Ecuador's only coastal national park). Fishing is particularly good off the western coast. Whitewater rafting is also popular in and around Baños.

Scenic train journeys: Several of Ecuador's railway routes, particularly those in the Andes, pass through spectacular mountain scenery, often at dramatic altitudes. The Ecuadorian custom of riding on the roof of the train makes the views even more breathtaking. One of the most famous routes, whose climax is the precipitous 'Devil's Nose' passage, is from Riobamba down to the Pacific coast. Train schedules are fairly erratic and visitors should check locally prior to traveling.

SOCIAL PROFILE

Food & Drink: Best of the jungle fruits include chirimoya, with a delicious custard-like inside; mamey, which has a red, sweet, squash-like meat; and pepinos, a sweet white and purple striped cucumber-like fruit. Specialties include llapingachos (pancakes stuffed with mashed potato and cheese); shrimp or lobster ceviche. This is traditionally accompanied by popcorn and chifles (thinly sliced and fried green bananas) and a nice cold beer; locro (stew of potatoes and cheese); humitas (flavored sweetcorn tamale); and the national delicacy of roasted guinea pig. Bakeries offer delicious sweet pastries and empanadas (hot crispy meat or cheese filled pastries). Another popular snack is patacones (squashed fried green bananas). You will often find that most Ecuadorian homes have a special pounding stone for making this tasty snack. Restaurants have waiter service and there are cafe-style bars.

Ecuador has some of the best beer in South America. The most popular brand is Pilsner. International drinks and whiskies are available, but expensive. An Ecuadorian specialty is a unique fruit juice called naranjilla – a taste somewhere between citrus and peach. Good Chilean wine is available, but expensive. The best local drink is canelazo, made from sugar cane, alcohol, lemon, sugar and cinnamon. Another local drink is pisco, made from fresh lemon. Alcohol cannot be sold after 2 AM.

Nightlife: There is little nightlife except in Quito and Guayaquil, where there are excellent restaurants and other attractions. In smaller towns, social life takes place in the home and in private clubs. The cinema is the most popular form of entertainment.

Shopping: Bargaining is acceptable in small shops and in markets, but prices are usually fixed in 'tourist stores'. A few stores around the major hotels have fixed prices. In the Province of Azuay, the cities of Cuenca and Gualaceo offer a wide variety of handicrafts at ferias or special market days. The top attractions are the ferias of Otavalo, Ambato, Latacunga, Saquisilí and Riobamba, most held once a week. They offer the visitor excellent bargains for Indian crafts and silver. Principal silver stores are in Quito. Special purchases include native woodcarvings, varnished and painted ornaments made of bread dough, Indian tiles, woolen and orlon rugs, blankets, baskets, leather goods, shigras (shoulder bags) and hand-loomed textiles, indigenous art and native weapons.

Shopping hours: Mon-Fri 0900-1300 and 1500-1900, Sat 1000-1400. Some shops open Sunday.

Social Conventions: Casual wear is widely acceptable, but businesspeople are expected to dress smartly. It is important to be punctual when arriving for meetings. Smart clothes are often required when visiting hotel dining rooms and better restaurants. Beachwear should only be worn on the beach and revealing clothes should not be worn in towns. Smoking is widely accepted.

Photography: A tip may be requested if you wish to take someone's photograph and it is better to seek permission first.

Tippling: 10 per cent service charge is usually added to the bill in hotels and restaurants. Taxi drivers do not expect tips.

CLIMATE

Warm and subtropical. Weather varies within the country due to the Andes mountain range and coastal changes. Andean regions are cooler and it is especially cold at nights in the mountains. Rainfall is high in coastal and jungle areas. In the Galapagos the weather is dry and mild.

For more information regarding climate, please see temperature / rainfall charts at beginning of guide. For further information on the Galapagos climate and, please see your included vessel booklet.

Required clothing: Lightweight cottons and linens, and rainwear in subtropical areas. Warmer clothes are needed in upland areas.

For more information on what to bring, please see suggested packing list on page 10.

HISTORY

Ecuador – including the ancient Kingdom of Quito, established by the Shiris – was populated by several mutually antagonistic tribes at the time of the Inca conquest in the mid-15th century. When the Spanish arrived from Peru in the 1530s, they found that while many of the inhabitants were hostile, others hailed them as liberators from Inca repression. In 1533, Sebastián de Balacázar, governor of San Miguel de Piura (the first Spanish town built in Ecuador), undertook the conquest of the Inca kingdom. A year later, San Francisco de Quito was founded in a region known as the Sierra, the central part of the country, where Indian slave labor worked large estates created by the Spanish. The other two regions were described as the Costa, the Pacific coastal plain based on the port of Guayaquil, and the Oriente, the inhospitable region between the Andes and the Amazon headwaters, where normally only missionaries ventured. The early years under the Spanish were marked by civil strife between rival families contesting power. In 1739, the viceroyalty of New Grenada was created and Quito fell under its jurisdiction until independence.

In the following century, as the Department of the South, it joined New Grenada and Venezuela to form the Federation of Gran Colombia. Spanish rule lasted until the early 19th century – after suppressing several rebellions, the Spaniards were finally overthrown in 1822, by a force backed by Simon Bolivar, fresh from victory in Colombia. Soon afterwards, in 1828, the country declared war on Peru, whose armies had invaded Gran Colombia. A year later, a peace treaty was signed and Ecuador's boundaries were permanently established. However, relations between Ecuador and Peru have been tense ever since. In 1830, Ecuador seceded from Gran Colombia and declared independence. Almost immediately, the rivalry between Quito and Guayaquil emerged, initially over trade and then over support for rival political organizations. This rivalry, between secular and religious interests, or between landowners and the merchant/banking classes, inevitably distilled to a conflict between the two cities.

In the early 1920s, the army entered the political fray, claiming that only it could sustain national unity. The period between 1925 and 1948, when the military finally conceded that they did not have a legitimate political role, was one of the most turbulent in the country's history, with continual changes of government, along with economic and administrative chaos. The inter-city rivalry persisted as before. After 1948, civilian administrations predominated, with power alternating between Liberals (from the Costa) and Conservatives (from the Sierra).

The discovery of oil and the sharp increase in world oil prices in the late and mid 70s should have transformed Ecuador's economic fortunes. However, the windfall was largely squandered and Ecuador has suffered persistent economic difficulties ever since.

Partly as a result of this, the Liberal / Conservative stranglehold on domestic politics was broken in 1988, when the Izquierda Democratica (Democratic Left) party took over as the largest party in a coalition government. The right recovered its control during the early 1990s but, in May 1996, the presidential election was won by the Bucaram Ortiz of the Partido Roldosista Ecuatoriano (PRE). The PRE was little more than a vehicle for Bucaram, who had a reputation as a charismatic though eccentric politician. Unfortunately, he was entirely unsuited to presidential office, and his bizarre personal behavior and irresponsible attitude towards the conduct of government led Congress to impeach him in February 1997. Bucaram promptly fled into exile in Panama, although he has since returned and contested the 2002 presidential election (see below) in which he came fifth, polling a respectable 12 per cent.

The 1998 summer presidential election brought to power the former major of Quito, Jamil Mahaud of the centre-right Popular Democracy Party. The party also took control of the National Congress, in a coalition government led by Eduardo Huerta. Mahaud's main achievement was to settle Ecuador's principal foreign policy problem – the long-running border dispute with Peru, concerning a potentially mineral-rich region of Amazonian jungle, which had flared up into full-scale fighting on several occasions during the 1990s. However, he proved unable to arrest Ecuador's deteriorating economic situation and after just 18 months in office, in January 2000, Mahaud was forced out under pressure from the military, led by General Gutierrez, with vital support from the influential federation of ethnic Indian organizations, CONAIE. He was replaced by his deputy, Gustavo Noboa Bejarano. Under strong international pressure Noboa introduced a highly unpopular austerity program which, by the time of the most recent presidential poll in October 2002, had undermined his prospects for retaining office. In the event, he lost the second round run-off to Edwin Gutierrez Borbua of the 21 January Patriotic Movement. This was the same Gutierrez who had led the coup against Mahaud in January 2000: his party is named after the date of the action. Simultaneous national assembly elections returned a coalition government led by centre-leftist Alfredo Palacio. The rise of Gutierrez has inevitably drawn comparisons with South America's other left-wing populist leader, Hugo Chavez of Venezuela. But the more cautious Gutierrez is not keen to promote the connection and there are significant differences in the approaches and policies of the two leaders.

GOVERNMENT

The constitution was approved by national referendum in 1978, taking effect in 1979. The President, elected for a term of four years, holds executive power. He is assisted by the Vice President and a Cabinet, which includes 12 Ministers and a Secretary General. Legislative power is unicameral and resides in the House of Representatives, with 69 members; there are 12 national representatives and the remainder represent the provinces.

ECUADOR'S VARIOUS REGIONS

Quito: Ecuador's capital city has a setting of great natural beauty, overshadowed by the volcano Pichincha with its twin peaks of Ruco and Guagua. Quito is located at 2850m (9348 ft) above sea level and some visitors may suffer from altitude sickness during the first hours after arrival. Quito used to be a major Inca city that was destroyed shortly before the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors. Although no Inca traces remain, the city has preserved much of its Spanish colonial character, the cathedral in the Plaza de la Independencia (the oldest church in South America) and the many old churches and monasteries being among the most notable instances. Also in the plaza is the Municipal Palace, the Archbishop's Palace and the Palacio Presidencial. Many of the city's famous churches and monasteries contain priceless examples of Spanish art and sculpture, particularly the Monasterio de San Francisco (located in the beautiful plaza of the same name) and the Jesuit church of La Compañía. Most of Quito's colonial churches are located in the Old Town, parts of which have been listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. Perhaps the best preserved colonial street is the historic alley of La Ronda. Other places in Quito worth visiting include the Parque La Alameda (a triangular-shaped park), the astronomical observatory, the School of Fine Arts and the modern Palacio Legislativo. As the cultural and political capital, Quito has a number of museums of colonial and modern art. The Museo del Banco Central, located in the Casa de la Cultura, has a vast archaeological repertory as well as displays of colonial furniture and religious art. Also of interest is the Museo Guayasamín, home to many fine works of Ecuador's renowned modern artist Oswaldo Guayasamín.

The Andean Highlands: The Pan-American Highway traverses the country from north to south, a spectacular route which passes through all the principal cities of the Andean Highlands. Tulcan, center of a rich farming area, is the northernmost of these. Further south is Chota, still inhabited by the descendants of former African slaves who retain some of their tribal customs (the city's population being made up largely of Africans). Chota's Indian market (particularly good for traditional art and weavings) is renowned throughout Ecuador. The peak of Mount Imbabura signals the approach to the valley of Otavalo (95km/60 miles from Quito), the town of the same name being famed for its

craftwork and Indian market (which is at its biggest on Saturdays). Approaching Quito, one passes a granite monument which marks the Equator. South of Quito, the region of Latacunga and Ambato has much fine scenery, marked by an avenue of volcanoes. Two active ones are located within the Parque Nacional Sangay, a national park of outstanding beauty which has been listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. The park is characterized by a variety of landscapes, ranging from rain forests to glaciers, as well as numerous indigenous animal species, such as the mountain tapir and the Andean condor. Located within Sangay park, the Tungurahua volcano (5016m/16,453ft) is popular with tourists, especially at night, since it became active again in 1999. West of Latacunga, the Parque Nacional Cotopaxi is Ecuador's most visited national park. It includes the active Cotopaxi volcano which, at 5895m (19,345ft), is the world's highest active volcano. All have refuges at the snow-line where intrepid walkers can make overnight stays. Visitors are however advised to be cautious when setting out on walking or trekking trips as robberies have been reported in certain areas; experienced mountain guides are available. Further south, the city of Cuenca was founded in 1577 and still contains many examples of Spanish colonial architecture. Contrasting with this, a vast cathedral has recently been built. The nearby ancient Inca settlement at Ingapirca, 50km (32 miles) north of Cuenca, is worth visiting. In the highlands of southern Ecuador, Loja is the last city of importance on the Pan-American Highway, being originally a trading station on the Spanish 'gold road'. Not far from Loja, the Parque Nacional Podocarpus is, along with Ecuador's other national parks, a popular destination for walking and climbing.

Guayaquil: Ecuador's biggest city, Guayaquil is also the chief port and commercial centre. A good starting point for sightseeing is the Rotonda, the city's most historic landmark, which faces the beautiful garden promenade of Paseo de las Colonias. Across the malecón are the Government Palace and city hall, while at the northern end one can find the ancient fortress of La Planchada. Other places of interest include the Church of Santo Domingo, the old residential section of Las Penas and the Municipal Museum.

The Littoral: This is a narrow coastal belt, 560km (350 miles) in length. The chief ports provide visitors with some of the best resorts for deep-sea fishing on the west coast. Particularly attractive are the towns of Playas Posoria and Salinas, while Esmeraldas, one of the country's most important ports, is also known for its beautiful beaches. The relaxing island of Muisne is also becoming a popular destination. The region of Santo Domingo de los Colorados, situated some 90km (55 miles) west of Quito, is the domain of the Colorados Indians who still practice many of their ancient customs.

The Oriente: El Oriente is the term used by Ecuadorians to refer to the Amazon basin in eastern Ecuador. This is a primeval world of virgin forests and exotic flora and fauna, still mainly inhabited by Indians. In January 1999, the Ecuadorian President issued a decree blocking future oil exploration, mining and colonization by oil companies of the Cuyabeno-Imuya and Yasuni national parks. These parks are home to thousands of indigenous people, including the Huaorani, the Tagaeri, the Taromenare, the Sionas and the Secoyas. In recent years, the region has experienced ongoing conflicts between oil companies seeking to develop the area and indigenous communities afraid that development will lead to the destruction of their ancestral homeland and loss of their traditional way of life. The principal towns of the area are El Puyo, Tena, Macas, Lago Agrio, Sucúa and Zamora. Tourist excursions are available along the rivers, which provide the principal method of transport. One of the main rivers in this region is the Napo which, like most of the rivers in the Oriente, is a tributary of the Amazon (which lies further east in Peru). Baños is worth visiting, taking its name from the numerous springs and pools of hot and cold mineral waters. It is also the gateway to the Amazon region, passing through the spectacular gorge of the River Pastaza.

Galapagos Islands: Situated about 1000km (625 miles) west of the Ecuadorian mainland, the islands are bleak, barren and rocky. Made famous by Charles Darwin's scientific voyage in the 'Beagle' during the 19th century, the islands' unique wildlife – which includes giant tortoises, lizards and iguanas – remains the most interesting feature for the modern-day visitor. Some 50 per cent of the islands' species are found nowhere else in the world. The islands have been turned into a national park in an attempt to preserve their natural state, and in 1978 UNESCO declared the Galapagos to be 'the universal natural heritage of humanity'. In 1998, the Government enacted a law for the 'Special Regime for the Conservation and Sustainable Development of the Galapagos Province', which states that the protection of the area is a state responsibility.

DEALING WITH JET LAG

With the joys and adventures of international travel come certain unavoidable inconveniences such as occasional lost luggage or bouts of jet lag. In fact, studies reveal that as much as 90% of long distance travelers experience a degree of jet lag.

Jet lag describes that out-of-sorts feeling associated with long flights, particularly those across time zones. Symptoms and severity vary but may include drowsiness, fatigue, irritability, difficulty concentrating, headaches, insomnia, and swelling of the extremities.

The number of time zones crossed affects the severity of jet lag. The internal body clock follows circadian rhythm, which is controlled by the

hypothalamus that processes nerve signals. That clock is designed for regular cycles of light and darkness. Depending on the number of time zones crossed, it may take several days for that rhythm to be restored. But that is not the only influence. Other factors include cabin pressure, stale air, lack of humidity, and your overall physical condition at the beginning of your trip. Although jet lag can not be completely avoided, there are some simple things you can do to help minimize its affects.

Consider the following for your next scheduled trip.

- Start your trip rested with a good night's sleep prior to departure.
- Drink plenty of fluids — water and juices will help you to stay well hydrated. Seasoned travelers recommend that you carry drinking water with you and drink eight ounces every hour.
- Avoid alcohol and caffeine, however, just before and during flights. Both possess diuretic properties that promote dehydration. Alcohol also causes drowsiness and contributes to feeling sluggish.
- As much as possible, create a dark environment on the plane. Bright lights have been shown to have a strong effect on individuals' body clocks. If necessary, try eye shades and earplugs to help block distractions and convince your body that it is nighttime. Closing window shades and turning off overhead lights may also help. Sleep on the plane if your flight has an early morning arrival time.
- Loose-fitting clothing and comfortable shoes will help in the event you experience mild swelling. Experienced travelers often bring lightweight slippers to wear during flights.
- Get adequate rest before starting on your journey to help minimize the amount of catching up you'll have to do when you arrive at the destination. Once home, try to schedule a day of rest before returning to work.
- Although not always feasible, look for opportunities to walk around while in flight. Do simple isometric exercises (contracting and relaxing as many muscle groups as possible) in your seat. These will improve circulation, help promote increased alertness, and reduce chances of swelling.
- If you arrive in the morning, plan to stay awake. If possible, wait until the local bedtime to sleep. Many people swear that this is key in determining how quickly they adapt to local conditions. You will sleep better and will be less likely to suffer insomnia than if you nap upon arrival.
- During extended stopovers, showers are sometimes available. Trans-Pacific pilots report that taking a shower in Hawaii helps them recover more quickly from the general effects of jet lag after the flight.

CAMERAS & FILM

Photography: Always approach people with an attitude of respect and ask permission before taking photographs. Do not take anyone's picture without permission. Many times it is necessary to negotiate a fee beforehand. The same general rule about asking permission also applies to photographing places of worship, religious festivals, and rural homesteads. Never take any photos of airports, police or government buildings, military installations, or borders.

Equipment: Bring cameras and lenses you are comfortable using. If you get new equipment before you go, do so as far in advance as possible. Shoot and develop at least a dozen rolls before departure to work out problems. And, don't forget your camera operation manual, filters, and a flash unit. *Cameras should be packed with good cushioning.* The roads are sometimes rough, and constant vibration can do damage. Keep your camera with you as much as possible, and do not leave it on the floor of the safari vehicle when on the road. Roads in the wildlife parks and reserves are gravel or dirt and dusty. Make sure you have lens caps for all your lenses. Clean your equipment frequently. Bring along a puffer brush and lens cleaning tissues.

Lenses: A combination of fixed and/or zoom lenses with focal lengths from 28 mm to 200 mm is a good for general travel photography, although you can take excellent photographs with only a 50 mm lens. Zoom lenses such as 35-80mm, 70-210 mm, or 100-300 mm will help you capture the sights in a variety of different settings. Many times, however, animals are very close and you will not need high-powered zoom lenses. But serious photographers will want them handy. A macro lens is helpful for shooting close-ups, but a good set of extension tubes will work very well. A 2x converter is also a handy. Point and shoot cameras are nice for a group or indoor shots, but leave something to be desired when photographing animals on a safari. Bring a small cleaning kit and blower brush to keep equipment clean.

Film. It is always best to bring along whatever you need with you. Film is generally more expensive abroad and it may be hard to locate. Larger lodges in Africa sell film, but it is expensive. You'll be surprised at how much film you use when you are trying to capture all those special moments and rare animal poses. Even those not all that interested in photography will probably shoot a couple of 36-exposure rolls per day, and enthusiastic shooters will easily double or triple that amount. Be sure film is fresh and, when possible, keep it refrigerated. A film speed of ASA/ISO 64 is an excellent choice for color slide film. Use this speed when possible rather than higher speed films. There is a noticeable difference in quality that it is worth the extra effort to keep your camera steady at a somewhat slower shutter speed than you would otherwise use. For color prints, there are several good choices,

including Kodak and Fuji films (ASA/ISO 100 & 200) for daylight photography, ASA/ISO 400 & 1000 are good for lower light and nighttime situations.

It is helpful to set up a numbering system for your film, marking each roll with masking tape and numbers or letters, before leaving home. This way you can code the rolls of film and where they were shot. It's quite a job to sort through hundreds of pictures with no clue where or when they were taken.

NOTE: *Recent news reports warn that new explosive detectors used in more than 100 US airports to scan checked baggage will ruin unprotected, unexposed film. This technology will eventually be in place at all airports worldwide. Experts suggest either carrying your film in your carry-on luggage and/or placing film in safety, lead-lined bags to prevent X-ray damage*

Avoid airport x-ray machines whenever possible and request a hand search of your film only. While security people are often obliging, some are not, so allow a little extra time. X-rays are cumulative on exposed and unexposed film so the more times film is x-rayed, the more risk of damage. This is especially true with older machines found in many countries. Lead bags for film are available for purchase and are worth the small investment. Do not have film in your camera because it may be opened for inspection.

Video: If you are planning to shoot video on a safari, be sure to bring plenty of tape and batteries with you. Do not plan to buy videotape in Kenya or Tanzania. Videotape is not affected by airport x-ray - only magnetic fields or prolonged exposure to heat will damage videotape. Your battery charger should be capable of automatically adjusting to 240 volts. You will probably have no problem finding a plug in most of the lodges and larger tented camps, but be prepared with plenty of batteries

Batteries: Put fresh photo-quality batteries in your camera and other electric equipment before you leave and bring at least two sets of spare batteries with you. Your camera will be useless without them, and batteries tend to be expensive.

LUGGAGE

Traveling light is always the first and best rule! We recommend passengers limit their luggage to one medium-sized soft bag per person or two small duffel bags. In this security conscious era, airline luggage restrictions may change without notice. Also, luggage limits vary depending on ticket class, plane size, destinations, etc. It is always best to confirm with airlines for specific limitations.

Generally speaking, from the US, economy class passengers are allowed to check in two (2) normal size pieces of luggage (each piece measuring no more than about 62 linear inches, which means

length plus width plus height), and not exceeding 70 pounds per bag.

Scheduled flights from other countries and within foreign countries generally limit luggage to 44 pounds total, plus one carry-on personal item. Further restrictions apply for charter flights. We will advise you of those restrictions in your final documents.

Most airlines now allow only one carry-on bag in addition to one personal item such as a laptop or handbag. Most bags within the 22 x 14 x 9 (or, a total of 45 linear inches) size restriction will be considered legal carry-on size by major domestic U.S. airlines. Many US airlines check-in desks have sizing boxes within which your bag must fit. Obviously, no knives or cutting instruments are allowed in carry-on baggage.

All luggage should have identification inside as well as secure baggage tags on the outside.

Please note that the US National Transportation and Safety Board now suggests that you do not lock your checked luggage. If a screener has to open your bag, the locks may have to be broken. This applies to flights within the US and international flights originating in the US. This, however, does not address other international travel issues. We suggest that you lock your luggage and bring a couple of spare locks in the event one or more are cut off. But the choice is up to each individual traveler to make.

SUGGESTED PACKING LIST FOR ECUADOR

- Waterproof rain poncho (especially for Amazon).
- Fold-up umbrella, sweater & well-insulated windbreaker.
- Two pairs of walking shoes / one pair flip-flops.
- Waterproof hiking boots & thick socks.
- Long & short sleeved shirts / blouses and T-shirts.
- Sturdy long pants & shorts (cotton).
- Bathing suit & wide brimmed cloth hat.
- Sunglasses (UV protection type).
- Insect repellent & sunscreen (min. 8 protection factor).
- Personal snorkeling equipment (for Galapagos).
- Camera with flash and extra batteries, 80-300 mm zoom and 24-28 mm wide angle are ideal for serious photographers, plus polarizing filters for richer colors.
- Extra film (ASA 400 or higher for low light conditions).
- Canteen or small water bottle

- Personal toiletries and medicines.
- Portable cassette recorder & portable flashlight or headlamp.
- Daypack (preferably waterproof), plus extra duffel bag for souvenir purchases.
- Notebook (preferably waterproof) & "while you wait" reading material.
- Lightweight binoculars.
- Money belt or "kangaroo pouch".
- Spanish phrase book.

Travel hardware:

- Camera screwdriver set & epoxy glue.
- Swiss army knife & sewing kit with scissors.
- Travel alarm clock & plastic adhesive tape.
- Extra small camera & flashlight batteries.
- Pocket compass & altimeter, plus sturdy plastic bags.

TRAVELING TO THE AMAZON?

There never really is a bad time of the year to visit. The year is basically divided up into high water, low water, and transitional. Each period has its unique advantages and disadvantages.

Transitional

The transitional months are a good compromise between low water and high water season. It is not quite as hot as during the low water season and yet one can still view the aquatic life.

Low Water (July-February)

Advantages

- Best for viewing aquatic life
- Land trails drier
- Fewer insects

Disadvantages

- Waterways can become clogged with vegetation limiting access to wildlife areas
- Submerged sandbanks
- Reduced amount of visible wildlife (exception: around isolated lakes)

- Hottest time of year

High Water (March-June)

Advantages

- Best for viewing forest life
- Many waterside plants choose this time to flower
- Cooler temperatures

Disadvantages

- Some forest trails may be inaccessible
- Aquatic life less visible
- Increased amount of insects

SUGGESTED READING LIST

The following is a suggested reading list for travelers available from Longitude Books (www.longitudebooks.com).

GALAPAGOS, A NATURAL HISTORY GUIDE - Michael Jackson - A one-volume, handy and comprehensive introduction to the natural history of Galapagos

GALAPAGOS, A NOVEL - Kurt Vonnegut- Vonnegut's biting funny novel about the future of the human species.

GALAPAGOS, WORLD'S END - William Beebe - A vivid account of a scientific expedition to the islands. Full of detailed observations on nature, geology and wildlife by William Beebe, it also includes a chapter the Baroness and other eccentric early colonists.

VOLCANOES, FIRE FROM THE EARTH - Maurice Krafft - A colorful pocket-size encyclopedia on everything volcano.

VOYAGE OF THE BEAGLE - Charles Darwin - The wide-eyed tale of a young man on a five-year voyage that changed his life -- and our way of thinking about the world. First published in 1839, this book is still essential reading. Darwin's South American chapters are an excellent introduction to the Galapagos, Beagle Channel, Chiloe, Tierra del Fuego, the Chilean fjords and the Brazilian coast. With maps and appendices.

GALAPAGOS WILDLIFE, A VISITOR'S GUIDE - David Horwell & Pete Oxford - A compact guide to the birds, reptiles, insects, plants and marine life of the archipelago featuring a very good selection of large color photographs by Horwell, Oxford and colleague Jonathan Green. Separate chapters cover visitor sites, history, conservation and habitats. The authors, both naturalist guides in the islands, present key information on the flora, fauna and places in Galapagos for the traveler.

EVOLUTION'S WORKSHOP, GOD AND SCIENCE ON THE GALAPAGOS ISLAND - Edward Larson - A vivid history of the Galapagos -- and the role of the islands as a crucible of evolutionary ideas. It covers not just Darwin but the discovery of the islands, visits of Hancock and Beebe, role of the United States during WWII, and the establishment of the national park. Pulitzer Prize-winning Larson, a historian of science, has also written about the Scopes trial (Summer for the Gods) and the creationist controversy in the United States (Trial and Error).

A TRAVELER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS - Barry Boyce

MARINE LIFE OF THE GALAPAGOS - Pierre Constant

DARWIN AND THE BEAGLE - Alan Moorehead

A nicely illustrated, handsomely produced account of the Voyage of the Beagle in the Adventure Library series..

PLUNDERING PARADISE, THE HAND OF MAN ON THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS - Michael D'Orso

Not subtle but eye-opening nevertheless, Michael D'Orso focuses on the damage and challenges of people in the Galapagos.

GALAPAGOS DIARY, A COMPLETE GUIDE TO THE ARCHIPELAGO'S BIRDLIFE – Hermann Heinzel & Barnaby Hall

GALAPAGOS, DISCOVERY ON DARWIN'S ISLANDS - David Steadman - An insightful discussion of natural history and evolution in Galapagos, packed with photos.

GALAPAGOS, ISLANDS BORN OF FIRE - Tui De Roy - A stunning collection of photographs on the wildlife and habitats of Galapagos.

GALAPAGOS, SMITHSONIAN NATURAL HISTORY SERIES - J.C. Kricher - A lively natural history of the islands by a favorite author, covering history, geology, ecology and evolution, visitor sites and conservation.

ON THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES - Charles Darwin & Mayr Ernst - A facsimile of the original 1859 edition of the book that changed our view of the world.

ECUADOR, A TRAVEL JOURNAL - Henri Michaux & Robin Magowan A brief, impressionistic and entirely wonderful account of travels in Ecuador.

THE ENCHANTED ISLES - Herman Melville & Margaret Drabble - Melville's well-known collection of wry tales of the archipelago and its inhabitants, published separately in a handsome little paper edition.