**Ecuador**

**History**

Earliest cultures, from 15,000 to 50,000 years ago, were nomadic hunter-gatherers who gazed on the fertile plains and mountain areas of a small country known today as Ecuador. Incas Indians from Peru conquered Ecuador in the late 1400’s and united many different tribes under one government. Ecuador’s recorded history within the Inca or Pre-Inca cultures was missing prior to the Spanish conquest in 1534. The Spaniards took control of Ecuador and settled in the Andes Highland and built many beautiful public buildings, churches, and set up large haciendas. The city of Quito became the national capital of Ecuador. Ruled by Spain until 1822, Ecuador achieved independence and became a separate republic in 1830.

In 1861, a Conservative Party member, Gabriel Garcia Moreno became president and ruled with landowners of the Andes Highland and the Roman Catholic Church. Until Moreno’s assassination in 1875, his administration developed agriculture and industry, encouraged international trades, and planned railroads and roads. In 1896, a Liberal Party member, General Eloy Alfaro overthrew the Ecuador government and was supported by military leaders and business executives. The Liberal Party ended the Catholic Church power over the government and attempted to modernize the Ecuadorian government.

All the juntas, presidents and dictators from 1500’s up to 1948 have failed to solve Ecuador’s social and economic problems, and have ignored the constitutional rights and needs of the Ecuadorian people. Since 1948 to this present day, there has been progress to allow more Ecuadorian citizens to elect their presidents.

In 1999 and early 2000, Ecuador confronted a severe economic crisis since the country had failed to repay the loans from several international lending organizations and the value of the sucre, the national currency, dropped sharply. The government passed a law in March 2000 to phase out the sucre and the U.S. Dollar became the only legal currency in Ecuador.
Important Dates


The Catholic Spring holidays revolve around Easter, which occurs on the Sunday after the full moon of the vernal equinox. Carnival is the big blowout celebration before Ash Wednesday and Lent season. The Holy Week starts with Palm Sunday followed by Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter morning mass ends Lent.

Location

Ecuador is located on the West Coast of South America and covers an estimated area of 105,037 square miles (272,045 sq. km). Peru lies to the south and east and Colombia lies to the north. Ecuador is the second smallest country in South America with three regions: (1) Eastern Lowland – Oriente, (2) Andes Highland – Sierra, and (3) Coastal Lowland. Ecuador also has claim to the Galapagos Islands. Ecuador lies at 0° 00’ latitude. The city of Guayaquil lies at 21° 00’ S latitude and 79° 53’ W longitude. Quito lies at 0° 13’ S latitude and 78° 32’ W longitude. The equator runs just north of Quito in the northern region.

Geography

In the east, the Oriente is Ecuador’s Amazon, which covers almost half the country with thick tropical forests. The Pastaza and Napo rivers are part of the Amazon River basin and transportation in the Eastern Lowland can only be traveled by boat on the rivers.

The Sierra lies between the Eastern and Coastal Lowlands, which are two parallel ridges, which run north to south, and covers about one fourth of Ecuador’s land area. These mountain ranges rise over
20,000 feet with high plateaus between them. Cotopaxi is located in the northern Andes Highland at an altitude of 19,347 feet and is one of the world’s highest active volcanoes.

The other one-fourth of Ecuador’s land area is the Coastal flat plain that descends west to the Pacific Ocean. There are a few mountain chains between the ocean and the Coastal Lowland. The north plains are swampy and wet, south plain is desert and the tropical forest covers the Coastal Lowland in between.

**Climate**

Ecuador has a variation of climate dependent upon altitude. At low altitude, it is hot and humid in the Eastern (Oriente) and Coastal Lowlands with an average temperature of 75°F (24°C). The plateaus at high altitude of the Andes Highland are usually spring-like with an average temperature of 57°F (14°C). At higher altitudes of 16,000 feet and more, the area is covered with snow. There is two seasonal cycles on the equator: (1) summer (verano) is cool and dry; (2) winter (invierno) is wet and hot.

The most precipitation in the Eastern Lowlands (Oriente) occurs between June to August. The dry season usually takes place between September through December. The Andes Highlands usually have the most rainfall between October to May and the dry season occurs from June to September with a short period in December.

The Coastal Lowland precipitation is influenced by the ocean currents. January to April has very high precipitation with high temperatures, and in May to December the weather is usually cool and dry. The Peru current cools the tropical climate on the Galapagos Islands. It is difficult to estimate the exact precipitation in Ecuador since every few years from December to May the climate is affected by the El Nino phenomenon.

**Population**

The estimated population in 2000 was 12,646,000 with the density of 116 persons per square mile. Sixty-one percent of the population is located in urban areas and thirty-nine percent reside in rural
areas (World Book 2001). The population has increased by 2,997,811 since 1990 census.

Approximately ten percent of Ecuador’s people are of European descents that are the most powerful and wealthiest in the country. Mestizos (mixture of Spanish and indigenous descent) form approximately forty percent, Sierra and Oriente Indians make up about forty percent, and the remaining ten percent are Blacks. The average life expectancy of Ecuadorians is about 68 years. Today, more women are working outside the homes and family planning efforts have slightly decreased Ecuador’s annual birth rate.

**Currency**

The official currency of Ecuador was the sucre. Sucre bills were in denominations of 500, 1,000, 5,000, 10,000, 20,000 and 50,000. The sucre coins denominations were 100, 500 and 1,000. Since March 2000, the U.S. dollar replaced Ecuador’s sucre monetary unit. The current (2002) exchange rate is $1.00 = 25000.0000 sucres, and one U.S. dollar = 100 cents. Exchange rate of Colombian pesos is 1.00 = 11.0120 sucres.

**Trade**

The largest percentage of trade volume is exported to the U.S., Colombia, Italy and Peru. The principal export commodities are live animals (fish, mollusks and crustaceans), fruit (bananas and nuts), and vegetables.

Ecuador’s largest percentage of imports comes from the US, Colombia, Japan, Venezuela, Germany and Chile. Import commodities are machines and transport equipment, basic manufacture, chemicals and related products.

**Agriculture**

The majority of the Ecuadorians are employed in the agricultural industry. Ecuador leads as the world’s producer of balsa wood from the forests in the Coastal Lowland and mahogany hardwood from the Eastern Lowland. Most of the agriculture crop commodities such as potatoes, beans, wheat and corn are produced in the Andes Highlands. Cattle are raised for meat and milk production. Poultry and swine
are raised for meat production; sheep and goats are raised for meat, milk and wool production. Other agriculture commodities such as bananas, sugar cane, cacao and coffee are produced in the Coastal Lowlands. Ecuadorian raises shrimp in ponds and fish (mackerel and herring) in coastal waters.

**Food**

Ecuadorian cuisine is usually cheap, filling and deep-fried. Staples are high carbohydrate foods such as potatoes, corn, rice, yucca and plantains. Grains include quina, which is high in protein, barley and wheat. Corn is consumed whole or fried into tortillas. Chicken, beef, pork, lamb and goat are served grilled or roasted. A considerable amount of fish is consumed as well. Red hot pepper sauce is commonly used to add flavor to bland dishes. Ecuadorian enjoys their ice cream, sweet custards, and sweetbread. Instant coffee is commonly served in restaurants. Ecuadorians drink a variety of juices, Coca-Cola, Sprite, and bottled-water. The vintage production in Ecuador is very poor; therefore, the wines and alcohol beverages are imported from Chile, Europe and the United States.

**Religion**

Ecuador recognizes no religion, although greater than ninety percent of Ecuadorians are Roman Catholics. The state grants freedom of worship and there are various Protestant churches and Jewish faith in the urban areas. Missionaries have visited some of the isolated tribes in the Amazon.

**Education**

Education is divided into four cycles starting with two years of preprimary, six years of primary; secondary is divided into 2 three years and higher education. Primary education in Ecuador is compulsory and free. The literacy rate is quite high, but there are problems with a proportion of the teachers lacking full accreditation, construction of buildings for classrooms, and the number of qualified teachers fail to keep up with the increasing number of students in the rural areas. However, the municipal government, military, and Ministry of Education and Culture have offered literacy programs to decrease illiteracy to non-Spanish speakers and rural populace. Secondary and higher education are usually private.
or religious. The Sierra and along the coast, there are about a dozen state universities that provide free higher education.

**Language**

The official language of Ecuador is Spanish and Quichua (a Quechua dialect). Older generations of Sierra Indians spoke Quichua, although many of them were bilingual at various degrees of fluency, with Spanish. Since the 1980’s, some of the younger generation speak Spanish and they did not learn Quichua.

**Location of Interests**

There are various areas of interest in Ecuador. Colonial architecture, art and artifacts can be found in the city of Quito, which is also the capital of Ecuador. The North has Latin America’s greatest markets surrounded by artisans’ villages and lakes. The Pacific Coast has palm-fringed beaches, mangrove swamps and marimba rhythms. The Western Lowlands is the land of bananas and other agricultural commodities. The Oriente will give anyone the thrill of the Amazon’s live and dangerous wildlife and reptiles. Ethnic markets and Hot Springs are located at the Avenue of the Volcanoes. The Southern Sierra has the Incas ruins of Ingapira, beautiful colonial Cuenca and the Valley of Vilcabamba. The South Coast has beach resorts and the port city of Guayaquil. The Galapagos Islands is where anyone can explore the mystery of mysteries. The creatures on these islands have claimed their fame and were explored by the famous naturalist, Charles Darwin, in 1835.

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