



Ecuador Handbook



CLIMATE

- The temperature in Ecuador doesn't change much throughout the year. In Quito, the climate is spring-like, with lows in the 50s and highs in the 70s.
- In Quito, October through May tends to be rainier than the months of June through September. As the sites you will be visiting in Ecuador are located at a very high altitude, the temperature varies throughout the day, and even depending on whether you are in the sun or the shade.
- January through April are often rainier and warmer on the coast while the months of April through November are when you'll find the most rain near the Amazon.
- The Galapagos have two seasons and no time of year is too hot or cold to visit. The warm and wet season is from December to May.
- The dry and cool season is from June to November.
- Be sure to apply sunscreen regularly, due to the altitude the sun is very strong.

CULTURAL TIP

Air conditioning is not as common as in the US. Don't be surprised if your host family or hotel doesn't have AC. The best way to cool down is to wear lightweight clothing and try to stay out of the sun!

CLOTHING

- Reference the Xperitas Ecuador packing list for advice on what to bring. In Ecuador, the dress is more formal than here in the United States, and people tend to wear pants, even in warmer temperatures.
- Bring clothing items that can be layered to adjust to the changes in temperature due to the time of day and altitude.
- No matter when you travel, you should bring along an umbrella and rain jacket to be prepared for rain.
- If you are going to the Galapagos, bring comfortable clothes and shoes for hiking and exploring, as well as swim gear for water activities.
- If you are going to the Amazon, wet weather and hot temperatures are abundant. Wearing lightweight clothing, rain gear, and waterproof footwear is essential. Casual clothing is very acceptable while in the Amazon.
- Be sure to wear comfortable shoes that are already broken in prior to travel, as you will do a lot of walking each day. People tend to wear more formal shoes or tennis shoes, and most people do not wear flip flops in the Quito area.

ELECTRICITY

- You will not need a converter or an adapter, as the outlets are similar to those in the United States.

MONEY

- The currency in Ecuador is the U.S. dollar. They have their own coins that are of the same denomination as our coins, though you can use U.S. coins as well.
- Contact your bank to alert them of upcoming travel plans and ask about international fees.
- Bring a combination of cash (about \$100-\$200) and cards. Be sure to bring a debit card with a 4-digit numerical pin number in order to take out cash from ATM machines.
- Be sure to carry your cards and the majority of your money in your money belt or neck pouch! Try to use small bills as oftentimes large bills are not accepted at small shops or in markets. Credit cards are accepted in hotels and larger restaurants and stores.
- Some places will not accept bills that are slightly torn or in poor condition. You can exchange these bills at the bank for new ones if you encounter trouble using them.
- While in country, only walk around with the money that you need and a copy of your passport. The rest can be left in your hotel safe.
- A backup, emergency card is a good idea in case one card is lost or stolen.

TIPPING

Tipping is very important as many in the tourism industry depend on tips as a part of their regular income.

Here is a guide to tipping in Ecuador:

Restaurants: A 10% (or \$5) tip is customary if it is not already included in the bill. Hand the tip directly to your server.

Hotel Staff: If hotel staff helps you carry your luggage in to or out of the hotel, it is customary to tip them \$1 USD for each bag that they carry for you. Please leave \$0.50 to \$1 USD per night for the maid if you think they have done a nice job cleaning your room. It is nice to leave the tip on a daily basis rather than at the end of your stay, as it might not be the same person cleaning your room each day.

Local Guides/Bus Drivers: You *do not* need to tip guides and drivers during your time in mainland Ecuador, as those tips are already included in your program price!

Taxi Drivers: Cab drivers are not usually tipped unless extra service is provided (you will probably not ride in any taxis over the course of the program).

Galapagos: We suggest tipping your guides and drivers in the Galapagos around \$5-\$10 per day per person for guides and about \$2-\$3 per day per person for drivers.

Amazon: We suggest tipping your guides around \$5-\$10 per day per person and \$3-\$5 per day per person for the staff members at the campsite.

If you have any other questions about tipping, ask your guide!

ALTITUDE SICKNESS

Quito is located at an elevation of about 9,300 feet above sea level. Mild altitude sickness, or soroche in Spanish, may be experienced by some that travel to high altitudes, due to a decreased amount of oxygen available as elevation increases. Symptoms may include dizziness, headache, nausea, and fatigue.

The following are ways to help your body adjust to the elevation and avoid altitude sickness:

- Stay hydrated - drink plenty of bottled water.
- Take it easy and don't overexert yourself for the first couple of days of the program.
- Eat light meals as you adjust to the altitude.
- Consume more easily digestible foods such as carbohydrates, fruit, and vegetables than heavy foods like meats.

CULTURAL TIP

Be ready to try new foods and always offer to help in the kitchen during your family stay.

FOOD

- Breakfast is included daily, and all meals are included during the family stay. Any other included meals are noted on your itinerary.
- Mealtimes are similar to the United States, though lunch is usually the largest meal of the day, with a lighter dinner.
- The typical breakfast in Ecuador is quite simple, usually scrambled eggs and potatoes or rice. Breakfast is often served with fruit, toast, corn tortillas, and coffee.
- Lunch and dinner consist primarily of rice with meat (such as chicken, seafood, or fish) and a variety of veggies.
- Soup is served with almost every lunch and dinner, and the potato is the king of Ecuadorian cuisine.
- The water in Quito is just fine for taking a shower and brushing your teeth, but it is not good to drink. We recommend drinking bottled water throughout the program.
- Most restaurants have a set menu, called the *menu del día* for around \$10 USD. It will typically include a starter, main course and dessert and is not only a great deal but is an excellent way to sample delicious, typical Ecuadorian food.
- Travelers can find food for every budget! Most restaurants are comparable in price to the U.S., though there are smaller, more typical restaurants and *cafeterías* that are more economical. Buying snacks at kiosks, local *comida rápida* restaurants, or the grocery store is usually the cheapest way to go!

In-Country Transportation & Lodging

- Greet the driver.
- Keep buses clean and loud noises to a minimum.
- Remember that smells intensify in small places.
- Be on time and don't make the buses wait for you.
- Student hotel sleeping arrangements may involve sharing beds, as some hotels utilize a single large bed for their double rooms or two large beds for their triple/quadruple rooms. During the family stay, students may share a room with a host sibling (if applicable), but they will have their own bed.

CULTURAL TIP

Ecuador's culture is diverse with influences from indigenous practices to European culture from colonial times. In general, the lifestyle in Ecuador is slower and more relaxed than in the United States.

Ecuadorians tend to place more emphasis on people and relationships than they do on a strict adherence to a set schedule. It is not uncommon for someone to be 5-15 minutes late.

Health & Safety

- Be sure to keep your passport (and other visas, green cards, or documentation), most of your money and your cards in your money belt or neck pouch while traveling on the plane and from city to city!
- If there is a safe in your hotel room, lock your valuables in it while you are out. If there is not a safe, hide money and valuables in your suitcase. **Don't forget to check the safe before you leave the hotel!**
- Pickpocketing is common in large cities, and they are very good at what they do. Pay extra close attention to your belongings and be sure to keep your valuables close to you at all times, especially when in crowds of people or walking on the street.
- If you have a purse/bag, bring a cross-body purse/bag that zips shut. If you are carrying a backpack, be sure that valuables are not located in easily-accessible pockets. We also recommend wearing your backpack in front of you versus on your back as you may normally do.
- Always travel in groups of three or more.
- Remember, the Xperitas emergency line is available 24 hours a day, but please only call it when you are experiencing a true emergency.
- Review the travel and vaccine recommendations for travelers provided by the [Centers for Disease Control](#) (CDC). See Current Health and Safety Updates for information about current world events and illnesses.
- Keep printed insurance card on you at all times.

Communication

- Check with your cell phone provider regarding any international fees. At least one leader needs to have an international phone plan in order to be in touch with Xperitas if needed.
- For students, we advise using WiFi. There is often WiFi (or a computer for public use) available in your hotel, but keep in mind that the connection is often weak. You can download messaging apps, such as WhatsApp, to communicate with people at home for free while connected to WiFi.
- Ask your leader(s) about their policy around technology use while on the program.
- A great way for the entire group to stay in communication with parents/guardians back home is via a blog, WhatsApp group chat, private Facebook group, or group email.
- During the family stay, you may or may not have access to internet. You will have the contact information of both the local Family Stay Coordinator, as well as your group leader(s). If you do have internet, please be mindful of the time spent on your phone and try to focus on engaging with your host family.

COMMUNICATION TIPS

Ecuadorians greet each other with a beso, or kiss on the cheek. Males greet each other with a handshake.

Ecuadorians are socially engaged people and are open to political discussions. Don't feel offended if they start a conversation about a topic that you may otherwise avoid in the United States. They are just curious!

Personal space is viewed differently by Ecuadorians. They are comfortable standing close to one another. Touch and affection are very common.

When entering a room or store, it is very common to greet the other people around with a buenos días or buenas tardes, which is often shortened to buenas. When leaving, do not forget to say hasta luego, chao or adiós.

Overall, just keep an open-mind and try not to refer to stereotypes!

Xperitas-Arranged Family Stay Experience®

- Your family is excited to meet you! The family stay is a great learning experience. Be sure to keep an open mind, do your best at practicing your Spanish language skills, and have fun getting to know your family.
- Try to be proactive and engage with your host family, such as asking to help cook a meal, offering to go with them to the local market or grocery store, playing a game of cards (Spot-it or Phase 10 are good options), bringing a scrapbook of your family at home), asking to go explore a nearby park, etc. These simple actions can go a long way in breaking the ice, helping with the language barrier/facilitating conversation, and learning about the local culture.
- Try to disconnect during the family stay by not using your phone all the time, and embrace the time to connect with your host family. Disconnecting and truly being present for the experience will allow you to notice more about your surroundings and be more intentional in your observations. We encourage parents/guardians to allow space for their children to disconnect as well.
- If you have any questions or concerns while staying with your host family, please contact your group leader(s) as they can best assist you and work with the local Family Stay Coordinator and Xperitas as applicable.
- If you submitted your family stay applications by the deadline, you should receive your host family's information about 2 weeks prior to departure.
- Respond as soon as possible when your host family contacts you. Keep your social media profiles clean and try not to judge your host by their profiles – better to get to know your host family through talking to them.
- It is nice to bring your host family a gift from your home state and/or a scrapbook or photos to show them what life is like where you live.
- In Ecuador, toilet paper is usually thrown in the trash can to avoid causing problems with the plumbing. If you have any questions about this, please ask your host family.
- Electricity and gas are much more expensive in Ecuador than in the United States. Be conscious of how long your showers are and make sure to turn off the lights behind you.
- Leave a thank you note for your hosts at your house on the last day of the family stay, as sending it via mail can be complicated.