

# Riskline / Destination Report

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# ECUADOR

## Overall risk level

<b>Low</b> Take normal safety precautions	<b>Moderate</b> Take normal safety precautions	<b>Medium</b> Exercise caution	<b>High</b> Reconsider travel	<b>Extreme</b> Defer non-essential travel
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The Overall Risk Level will be determined by the higher of the Security Risk Level and Covid-19 Risk Level.

## Security risk level

<b>Low</b> Take normal safety precautions	<b>Moderate</b> Take normal safety precautions	<b>Medium</b> Exercise caution	<b>High</b> Reconsider travel	<b>Extreme</b> Defer non-essential travel
Safe, with few security risks	Generally safe, with some predictable security risks	Not completely safe, but typically presents predictable security risks	Can be dangerous and may present unexpected security risks	Extremely dangerous and presents unpredictable security risks
Travel is possible with an expectation of routine disruptions and delays	Travel is possible with an expectation of routine disruptions and delays	Travel is possible, but there is a potential for disruptions	Travel is possible, but there is a potential for disruptions	Chaotic; travel impossible

## Covid-19 risk level

<b>Low</b> Take normal safety precautions	<b>Moderate</b> Take normal safety precautions	<b>Medium</b> Exercise caution	<b>High</b> Reconsider travel	<b>Extreme</b> Defer non-essential travel
Travellers should take normal precautions when travelling to <b>Low Risk</b> locations, which have limited or no restrictions on international travel and domestic activities.	Travellers should take normal precautions when travelling to <b>Moderate Risk</b> locations, which have few restrictions on international travel and limited or no restrictions on domestic activities.	Unvaccinated travellers should exercise caution when travelling to <b>Medium Risk</b> locations, and vaccinated travellers should take normal precautions. These locations may have some restrictions on international travel, but few restrictions on domestic activities.	Unvaccinated travellers should reconsider their need to travel to <b>High Risk</b> locations, and vaccinated travellers should exercise caution. These locations may have severely restricted international travel and partially restricted domestic activities.	Unvaccinated travellers should defer non-essential travel to <b>Extreme Risk</b> locations, and vaccinated travellers should reconsider their travel. These locations may have severely restricted international travel and domestic activities.

# Overview

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## Upcoming Events

There are no upcoming events scheduled

# Travel Advisories

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## ● High risk: Borders with Colombia and Peru

Reconsider travel within 20km (12.4 miles) of the border with Colombia in **Esmeralda, Sucumbios and Carchi provinces** and in **northern coastal areas** of **Esmeralda** as well as of the border with Peru in **Sucumbios, Morona-Santiago, El Oro and Zamora-Chinchipe** until further notice because of drug-trafficking, smuggling and other criminal activities.

Ecuador's **northern coastal and border regions** play a key role in the regional drug trade, as cocaine is smuggled from Colombia and shipped off the **Pacific coast** to Central America. International narco-trafficking groups including Mexico's Sinaloa Cartel, Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG), Cartel del Golfo and Los Zetas as well as Colombia's Clan del Golfo (formerly Los Urabeños), the National Liberation Army (ELN) and dissident cells of the former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), including the Border Commands ('Comandos de Frontera', CDF), use the vast jungle areas along the **Ecuador-Colombia border** in **Esmeralda, Sucumbios and Carchi provinces** for arms and drugs smuggling and other illegal activities, with illegal crossings found periodically. An increased enforcement has enabled a string of significant drug and arms seizures, including in **Guayaquil, Guayas province**, in August-October 2021. However, an ongoing war between the country's two most significant gangs, the Mexican Sinaloa Cartel-supported Choneros and the CJNG-supported Lagartos has spiraled into a multi-faceted conflict over drug trafficking inside and outside prisons. At least 265 people were killed and 97 others were injured in prison riots in **Guayaquil, Latacunga and Turi** in 2021; **Guayaquil** alone had three prison riots. Security was heightened due to the wave of violence in the city in January 2022 while a state of exception was in effect in the country's prison system from July-October 2023 due to deadly riots in **Guayaquil's Litoral Penitentiary** and several other prisons. Suspected gang members detonated a car bomb outside the **Litoral Penitentiary** in a failed attempt to free their associates on 25 April 2022.

The region has seen a steady increase in illegal mining operations, often led by Colombian criminal groups. Most of the drug-trafficking activity centres in **Esmeraldas, Carchi, Sucumbíos and Imbabura provinces**, particularly around **Lago Agrio**, while the **San Miguel River** is a major route for smugglers. Authorities

announced the imposition of increased security measures due to an uptick in illegal crossings since 2020, while both Peru and Ecuador deployed additional troops in the border region, including in Tumbes department and **El Oro province** in January 2021 to curb illegal immigration and cross-border crime.

Military operations against criminal activities occur on a regular basis. Violent incidents tend to concentrate on military and police personnel or rival criminal groups. The presence of landmines and unmarked minefields is still apparent near the **Ecuador-Peru border** in **Morona-Santiago** and **Zamora-Chinchipe provinces**. Kidnapping for economic ends also remains a high risk to both local civilians and foreign nationals alike, including in the nature reserves of **Tarapoa** and **Cuyabeno** in **Sucumbios** and **El Angel** in **Carchi** and with journalists targeted in recent years as well. The Ecuadorian military have noted an increased incidence of clandestine drug trafficking camps along the **Putumayo River** in **Sucumbíos province**, near the border with Colombia, since January 2021. In August, clashes between the FARC and Border Commands (CDF) in Colombia's Putumayo department near the **Ecuador-Colombia border** left dozens dead, over the control of drug trafficking routes along the **Putumayo River**; related incidents are reported along the river periodically.

Insecurity along this border region, particularly in Nariño department on the Colombian side, has increased the number of displaced Colombians who have fled to **Esmeraldas** from ex-FARC dissidents. Similarly, the wave of Venezuelan refugees has prompted long queues, wait times and scams at the **Tulcan border crossing** since 2018, as well as hundreds of illegal crossings, of which at least 63 were destroyed by authorities in 2022. Colombian police deployed tear gas and clashed with some 300 Venezuelan migrants who were stranded amid COVID-19 related travel restrictions, and attempted to cross the **Rumichaca International Bridge** in **Carchi province** and into Colombia's Nariño department, in April 2020. At least 300 Venezuelan migrants were also detained for illegally crossing the **Aguas Verdes-Huaquillas border crossing** by Peruvian officials in January 2021. An estimated over 300 migrants entered the country daily through **Carchi, Esmeraldas** and **Sucumbíos**, in 2022.

Maintain a low profile, vary routines regularly and ensure privacy of travel itineraries. Only enter/exit the country at official border crossings. Avoid sailing during night hours or without a local reputable guide as well as loitering along the **Pacific coast** outside of urban areas. While foreign nationals are unlikely to be the direct target of any criminal activity or violence associated with it, the risk of

incidental or by-stander injury is possible. The threat of kidnapping remains high. Register travel details with local embassies or consulates and consider using a local reputable guide for rural, border travel.

## ● **High risk: Gang-related criminal activity in Guayas, Manabí, Esmeraldas, Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, Los Ríos and Santa Elena provinces**

Reconsider travel to **Guayas, Manabí, Esmeraldas, Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, Los Ríos** and **Santa Elena provinces** until further notice because of increased gang-related criminal activity.

With Ecuador swept by a wave of gang-related crime since late 2020, **Guayas, Manabí** and **Esmeraldas** stand out as the most violent provinces nationwide. Over 4,600 homicides were registered in 2022, representing an 82 percent increase compared with 2,500 in 2021 and 1,400 in 2020. Around 80 percent of the homicides took place along the drug-trafficking corridor in **Guayas, Esmeraldas, Manabí, Los Ríos** and **El Oro provinces**. In order to quell the wave of violence, President Guillermo Lasso issued a state of exception in **Guayas, Manabí** and **Esmeraldas** provinces on 30 April 2022 for 60 days; at least 245 homicides were reported in the area during the SoE while over 83,334 operations were conducted. During this time and during subsequent periods, authorities have deployed thousands of additional security forces, suspended the rights of citizens and imposed curfews and other measures. A 60-day nationwide SoE expired on 7 November after the killing of presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio during a rally in **Quito**; drug trafficking gang Los Lobos claimed responsibility for the assassination. The worst-affected areas remain **Manabí** and **Los Ríos provinces**, as well as **Durán canton** of **Guayas province**, in the **Guayaquil metro area**. Authorities continue to impose such measures to combat an ever growing wave of violence not seen in Ecuador in recent memory. Through 31 July, 3,599 homicides were reported nationwide in 2023, a 528 percent increase during the same period in 2019. Ecuador was also the Latin American country where violence crime grew the most in 2022. Security operations will continue in the affected areas in the medium-term as the situation becomes more desperate for security forces and civilians alike.

According to the government, high crime rates derive from the fact that Ecuador serves as a transit route for cocaine produced in Colombia and Peru, the two largest coca producers in the world, respectively. The area around the **Guayaquil**

**port** in **Guayas province** is among the most violent; authorities report that **Durán canton**, located in the immediate surrounding area, moves up to USD1.8 million a month worth of drugs. Recently, 8.8 tonnes were seized at **Guayaquil port** on 26 February. This reality is exacerbated by the influence of Mexican cartels on the drug trade in Ecuador. Mexico's Sinaloa Cartel and Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG) control the majority of the country's drug trade, while Los Choneros, Los Lobos, Los Lagartos, Los Chone Killers, Los Tiguerones and the Latin Kings are among the biggest local criminal groups. As a result, crime scenes depicting bodies hanging off bridges and decapitated persons – a common occurrence in drug cartel affected Mexican states – have been seen at least around **Guayaquil**. Another outcome are the prison riots that have left hundreds dead and show no sign of stopping. In 2021 alone, more than 300 people were killed in prison riots mostly associated with rival gangs – at least 202 in **Guayaquil**. It is believed that roughly 50 percent of the cocaine that arrives in Ecuador from Colombia enters through **Esmeraldas province**. Several cartels, led by the Sinaloa Cartel on one side and the CJNG on the other, fight over control of the territory. Violent tactics associated with Mexican cartels, such as bomb blasts and ambushes have targeted police officers, particularly in **Esmeraldas, Manta** and **Manabí provinces**.

Maintain a low profile, vary routines regularly and ensure privacy of travel itineraries for business-critical travel to **Guayas, Manabí, Esmeraldas, Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, Los Ríos** and **Santa Elena provinces**. While foreign nationals are unlikely to be the direct target of any criminal activity or violence associated with it, the risk of incidental or by-stander injury is possible. Visitors travelling in the affected areas are advised to contract adequate local security and exercise a heightened level of vigilance. Exercise caution in the vicinity of penitentiaries. Avoid travel after dark at all times and comply with the directions of local guides and military/police authorities. Register travel details with local embassies or consulates.

## ● **Moderate risk: Outbreak of mosquito-borne viruses in the Americas**

Mosquito-borne virus cases have seen a steep upward trend in the Americas in 2023, and are expected to rise further amid increasing temperatures. Take measures to prevent mosquito bites and ensure vaccine coverage and medication before departure.

Several mosquito-borne viruses (Chikungunya, dengue, malaria, yellow fever, Zika)

are endemic to tropical and subtropical regions of **Central** and **South America**, the **Caribbean**, **Mexico** and the **United States**, and appear in both rural and urban areas, most often during the rainy season, which varies from country to country.

Climate change, deforestation and urbanisation are some of the factors behind the increasing number of outbreaks of mosquito-borne viruses. Mosquitoes thrive under increased precipitation and higher temperatures; outbreaks have increased even in areas of dry weather. Following a two to seven year cycle, El Niño weather phenomenon is developing since June, further increasing the risk of higher temperatures across the region and above-normal rainfall with an increased risk of flooding on the **West Coast** of the **United States**, **Peru** and **Ecuador**.

Dengue accounts for the largest number of cases in the Americas region, with epidemics occurring every three to five years. In **South America**, dengue is moving further south to countries such as **Bolivia**, **Peru** and **Paraguay**, with over 2.8 million cases reported in 2022 compared to 1.2 million a year earlier. Since January 2023, over 4.1 million cases have been reported of which over 1.8 million have been confirmed in the Americas, with higher-than-usual numbers of dengue cases reported including in **Argentina**, **Bolivia**, **Brazil**, **Colombia**, **Costa Rica**, **Cuba**, the **Dominican Republic**, **Guadeloupe**, **Guatemala**, **Martinique**, **Nicaragua**, **Panama**, **Paraguay** and **Peru**. Authorities in **Costa Rica**, **Bolivia** and **Jamaica** have issued emergency alerts due to the situation as of September.

Confirmed cases of chikungunya in the region have also increased from 50,000 in 2022 to over 230,000 in 2023, with an expansion observed beyond historical areas of transmission. **Paraguay** and **Brazil** reported the highest infection rates. Reported cases of Zika virus have remained in a lower level than in 2022, with **Brazil**, **Bolivia** and **Belize** reporting the highest share of the over 3,200 confirmed cases. While malaria has been nearly or completely eradicated in many countries in the Americas, the region remains vulnerable to outbreaks. **Costa Rica** has reported an ongoing outbreaks of malaria in **Limón**, **Alajuela** and **Puntarenas provinces**, with over 515 cases reported since April. The impact of the increased transmission will depend on several factors, including country capacities for a coordinated public health response, high mosquito densities due to interrupted vector control activities during the COVID-19 pandemic and the susceptibility to infections, particularly in areas where these viruses are newly circulating.

In 2022, cases of both dengue and chikungunya peaked in May in the southern



hemisphere. Transmission rates are expected continue high in the coming months, due to weather conditions favourable for the proliferation of mosquitoes. Such an increase may be followed by a high transmission season in the northern hemisphere, given the susceptible populations and increasing temperatures.

## Symptoms and Treatment

Each of these viruses when contracted present their own list of symptoms and require varied treatment plans, whether preventative or reactive.

Viral infections transmitted by the bite of the **Aedes** mosquito include chikungunya, dengue fever, yellow fever and Zika virus. The most common virus transmitted by the bite of the *Anopheles* mosquito is malaria. Both insects are most active during early morning and late afternoon hours, though some species are nocturnal making preventative measures like repellents and mosquitos nets an important strategy.

Cases of Zika virus are usually mild and include symptoms of fever, headaches, conjunctivitis, rash and joint and muscle pain; most cases are asymptomatic. Zika virus may also be transmitted through sexual contact with an infected person and has been linked to microcephaly in unborn children. There is no treatment for Zika virus, beyond rehydration and bed rest.

Initial symptoms of yellow fever include a high fever, chills, vomiting, nausea and backaches/muscle pain, with a risk of potentially fatal complications, including jaundice, severe haemorrhaging and kidney failure. There is no post-infection treatment for yellow fever, making vaccination against the disease imperative prior to travel.

Symptoms of dengue fever include a high fever, joint pain and headaches, although severe cases may cause significant falls in blood pressure and/or haemorrhaging, which can be fatal. There are no treatments for dengue fever though vaccine research is ongoing.

Symptoms of chikungunya fever include a high fever, joint pain and headaches; the disease is typically non-fatal. In most cases those infected recover after seven to ten days. There are no vaccines or treatments for chikungunya.

Symptoms of malaria include a high fever, joint pain, anaemia, chills and headaches; if left untreated, symptoms can become life-threatening. While pre-departure courses of anti-malarial prophylactics are available, these do not



guarantee immunity to malaria. If contracted and caught early, malaria can be treated easily with a range of anti-malarial medications.

Travellers are advised to take measures to prevent mosquito bites such as wearing long sleeves and pants, applying insect repellent to exposed skin and clothing, using a bed net when sleeping in a room that is not screened or air-conditioned. Travellers should ensure they are up-to-date on vaccines before departure, consult medical professionals about use of prophylactics, take precaution with selection of sexual partners and ensure use of protection.

## ● Medium risk: Heat wave disruptions across South America

Exercise caution for travel in multiple South American countries and territories, namely the **Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay, Argentina, Brazil** and **Ecuador**, in the medium-term due to health risks and possible travel disruptions from ongoing as well as forecast heat waves and drought.

**Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay, Argentina** and **Brazil** have all experienced record September temperatures, as a result of a heat dome, as a ridge of high pressure builds over an area and stays for days or even weeks, trapping hot air. While heat warnings were issued in multiple **Brazilian states** in September, weather officials indicated that higher than usual temperatures also continued in all five regions of the country in October. Officials in **Brazil, Bolivia** and **Paraguay** issued new warnings for high temperatures also in November, with over 100 million people under a red heat warning across central **Brazil** as of mid-November. Earlier in August, **Argentina, Bolivia, Chile** and **Paraguay** registered an unseasonal heat wave linked to a stagnant anticyclone, resulting in a suspension of air circulation and temperatures of over 20 degrees Celsius (68 degrees Fahrenheit) higher than typical for the winter season. Prolonged exposure to high temperatures or high humidity levels have been attributed to dozens of heat-related deaths, which was seen across **Mexico** and the **US** in June-July. During this time, temporary heat wave warnings covered over 100 million people in the **US** alone, and forecasters expect such warnings to continue in many areas of the affected countries/territories in the near-term.

Apart from affecting health conditions directly, heat waves can trigger disruptions to essential services and overland travel, while warmer temperatures increase the transmission of diseases. Heightened demand for air conditioning can lead to

planned or unplanned power outages and the firing of coal plants to meet such demands can produce unhealthy levels of air pollution. Prolonged heat waves can damage road surfaces and deform railway tracks. Extreme temperatures can trigger drought, bushfires and even flooding and mudslides, when snow melt accelerates in mountain ranges, causing considerable damage to crops and infrastructure. High temperatures can also prolong wildfires, resulting in haze and evacuations, as witnessed across **Canada**, and subsequent air quality issues in parts of the **US** since May. Similar situations are possible in wildfire-prone areas of other countries as well.

Meteorological experts have attributed global warming and the El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO) phase warming the Pacific Ocean temperatures, among other factors, as causes of these heat waves. August, September and October are typical hurricane season months when temperatures still remain high in parts of North America and the Caribbean, while South America is heading towards warmer summer months. **Chile** already faces a severe drought from a heat wave in February which resulted in several deaths from wildfires, while authorities imposed emergency decrees in much of **Bolivia** and implemented daily power cuts in **Ecuador** in October, and imposed a 60-day state of emergency in parts of **Peru** through December, due to drought conditions. The biggest impacts of El Niño are expected in February, March and April 2024.

Travellers are advised to check weather forecasts of destinations. There is no universally agreed-upon minimum temperature that qualifies as a heat wave. Temperatures reaching 38 degrees Celsius (100.4 degrees Fahrenheit) often trigger warnings in many countries, but it is generally advisable to avoid enduring any degree of uncomfortable temperature for an extended period of time. Temperatures detrimental to health can vary from person to person and depend on the humidity level, among other factors. When travelling to heat-wave-affected locations, ensure a steady supply of safe drinking water and access to air-conditioned accommodations with sufficient power supply before departure. During hot temperatures, increase non-alcoholic fluid intake, limit outdoor movements during daylight hours and stay in air-conditioned rooms when possible. Anticipate possible travel disruptions from high temperatures damaging transportation infrastructure and heightening the demand for electricity. In case of a wildfire resulting from high temperatures, follow all emergency directives. When pollution levels are high due to wildfires, avoid unnecessary outdoor activities, wear a respiratory mask and expect possible disruptions to overland and air travel

from low visibility.

# Summary

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## Overall ● Medium Risk

Ecuador is a **Medium Risk** destination: exercise caution.

## Security ● Medium Risk

Medium Risk locations are not completely safe, but typically present predictable security risks. Travel is possible, but there is a potential for disruptions.

## Covid ● Low Risk

International travel has resumed. Infection rates peaked in mid-January 2022.

## Political Instability ● Medium Risk

Daniel Noboa has inherited what remains of outgoing president Guillermo Lasso's term after the latter faced widespread public opposition over his economic and social policies and subsequent allegations of embezzlement that led to the dissolution of the National Assembly on 17 May. Noboa's shortened term – set to last until May 2025 – will force the political newcomer to act quickly in implementing his desired pro-business reforms to avoid public opinion triggering another period of violent unrest. The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic amid a deteriorating economy, austerity measures and increasingly powerful drug gangs will further challenge political stability and increase public discontent.

## Conflict ● Low Risk

The country is not involved in any offensive military action at this time. However, spillover from Colombia's ongoing internal conflict has seen joint military operations conducted in **Esmeralda**, **Sucumbios** and **Carchi provinces** to tackle drug smuggling. Cooperation and effective diplomatic channels between Ecuador and its neighbours, Colombia and Peru, limit the risk of interstate conflict.

## Terrorism ● Moderate Risk

There have been bomb attacks and kidnappings in **northern Ecuador**, namely the provinces of **Sucumbíos, Orellana, Carchi** and **Esmeraldas**. There is also suspicion that international terrorist organisations may receive funding from the drug trade and most attacks are likely to be retaliatory against law enforcement engaged in counter-narcotics operations. While attacks in Ecuador are irregular, the Colombian National Liberation Army (ELN) remains active along the **Ecuador-Colombia border**, and ex-Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) dissident groups continue to operate in **Esmeraldas** and **Sucumbios provinces**.

## Unrest ● Medium Risk

The risk of civil unrest in Ecuador has been increasing in recent years, as both a symptom and cause of political instability. Social unrest is driven by union action, environmental activism, socioeconomic issues and anti-government sentiments. Strikes and protests are generally peaceful but often involve roadblocks, including in **Quito, Guayaquil** and on rural highways. These can occasionally turn violent. Extensive and violent protest roadblocks in June 2022 prompted President Guillermo Lasso to impose a temporary state of exception and movement restrictions. Unions and indigenous groups are expected to remain dissatisfied with the government's initiatives, increasing the risk of renewed protests.

## Crime ● High Risk

Crime in Ecuador is mostly opportunistic, but violent crime rates are increasing. Muggings, robberies and pickpocketing are common, particularly in **Quito, Guayaquil, Manta** and **Cuenca**, with armed assaults reported in public parks, in and around transport hubs and on buses. Extensive gang extortion networks target local bus drivers and business executives; short-term visitors are less likely to be targeted by violent crime than residents. Regions near the **Ecuador-Colombia border**, including the provinces of **Sucumbíos, Orellana** and **Carchi** and **northern Esmeraldas**, as well as **Guayas** and **Manabí** are at highest risk of organised violent crime.

## Natural and Environmental ● High Risk

Ecuador is vulnerable to several natural disasters and severe weather. Earthquakes and volcanic disturbances occur frequently in Ecuador. In addition, heavy rainfall can cause landslides and flooding, particularly in mountainous areas where road damage contributes to traffic accidents. Although emergency response efforts have increased in the wake of the devastating 2016 **Esmeraldas** earthquake, the culture of risk prevention remains weak in the country and emergency services are limited.

## Local Travel ● Moderate Risk

Poorly maintained roads and reckless driving add to a considerable number of traffic deaths per year, particularly during the rainy season. Public buses are crowded, unreliable, and are best avoided due to high crime rates. Luxury buses and taxis are the preferred mode of transport and are considered safe. Police checkpoints are frequent, especially near **Ecuador-Colombia** and **Ecuador-Peru borders**. Local airlines are safe for domestic travel. A significant number of vessels operating in the **Galápagos Islands** do not meet international safety standards.

## Health and Medical ● Medium Risk

Adequate medical care is limited to **Quito** and major cities. Private facilities are generally better equipped to handle specialised and emergency situations. Many physicians are well-trained but ambulance response units are in short supply across the country and generally cannot be relied upon in an emergency. Medical facilities in the **Galápagos Islands** offer primary care but any serious condition will require evacuation to mainland medical facilities. Mosquitoes and flies transmit a variety of diseases, including yellow fever, malaria, dengue fever and leishmaniasis.

# Political Overview : ● Medium Risk

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Ecuador is governed as a presidential representative democracy within a multiparty system. The National Democratic Action (Acción Democrática Nacional, ADN) candidate Daniel Noboa was declared the winner of the second round of presidential elections on 15 October, ahead of Citizen Revolution Movement's Luisa González. Noboa obtained support from voters with promises of attracting foreign investment and reviving an economy crippled by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. These public sentiments are compounded by the rising unemployment rate that has seen several impoverished areas nationwide become hotbeds of violence criminal activity, of which Noboa has promised to address.

Noboa, a businessman heir to a banana export fortune and Ecuador's youngest ever president at 35 years of age, succeeded outgoing president Guillermo Lasso on 23 November, whose popularity sank as the result of a corruption scandal which occurred amid one of the largest spikes in the rate of violent crime in the nation's history. Noboa took office with pledges of pro-business reforms that will help attract foreign investors, however, left-wing parties continue to hold a majority of seats in the National Assembly making the feasibility of implementing his ideas uncertain. Lacking legislative support, it will not be an easy task for Noboa to push forward with a USD6.5 billion debt negotiation with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) given that the left-wing coalition remains partially loyal to former president Rafael Correa's vision of active state intervention. The Citizen Revolution Movement with 42 seats and Construye party with 24 seats oppose privatisation measures and new extractive projects.

Since 2015, Ecuador's political environment has grown increasingly unstable. Ecuador's last three presidents, Lenín Moreno, Correa and Lasso, have all faced widespread and sometimes violent protests over their economic and social policies. The most recent of these occurred in June 2022, when Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) activists led nationwide protests for 18 days in an attempt to remove President Lasso and reverse his neoliberal economic policies. Emergency declarations were enacted in multiple provinces to quell the unrest before an agreement was reached on 30 June 2022 to end the protests. The end of ex-President Lasso's administration was marred by embezzlement allegations that saw him dissolve the National Assembly to avoid an impeachment vote. The Armed Forces and Police backed the decision, while the Conaie and Frente Popular called it an



"unconstitutional act". Noboa's tenure will be abbreviated – set to last just 18 months until May 2025 – as Noboa serves out the remainder of Lasso's term, adding pressure to the incoming administration to act fast.

Declining oil prices and a strengthening United States Dollar (USD) have also impacted the Ecuadorian economy hard; oil accounts for approximately a third of Ecuador's export income. After contracting 7.8 percent amid the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, GDP grew 2.9 percent in 2022 and is expected to grow 2.6 percent in 2023. Inflation grew 3.8 percent in 2022 as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and continuing hardships from the COVID-19 pandemic. Diversification of exports and further austerity measures are needed for Ecuador's economy to bounce back, though recent widespread unrest in response to these measures makes their implementation difficult. Encouraging investment and growth in new sectors will be essential for creating jobs and generating additional tax revenue, yet the country's dependence on further external borrowing and necessary austerity measures will likely add to social discontent.

Given the health and economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, a collapsing economy with some 4.9 million people plunged into poverty and very limited fiscal space for additional anti-poverty measures – as well as increasingly powerful drug gangs and frequent prison riots – the risk of continued political instability remains significant. However, the prospect of having a fresh perspective on the issues affecting the country is promising and a challenge that Noboa has said he is prepared to face. He will need, however, to begin implementing new policies immediately in order to make a tangible difference in the eyes of the public with presidential elections looming in the latter half of 2025.

## Recent incidents

15 October 2023 - 16 October 2023

### ● **Moderate risk:** Daniel Noboa wins presidential run-off vote - Update

Local sources indicated that ADN alliance's candidate Daniel Noboa won the presidential run-off by securing around 52 percent of the votes while leftist Luisa González of the Citizen Revolution Movement secured around 48 percent of the votes, with around 96 percent of the ballots counted. González reportedly conceded defeat.

15 October 2023 - 16 October 2023

● **Moderate risk: Presidential runoff to be held on 15 October - Update**

The National Electoral Council indicated that leftist Luisa González of the Citizen Revolution Movement will face ADN alliance's candidate Daniel Noboa, a son of a banana tycoon, in the presidential runoff on 15 October. Political violence increased in the run-up to the snap vote on 20 August, that was called after President Guillermo Lasso dissolved parliament to avoid impeachment.

20 August 2023 - 21 August 2023

● **Moderate risk: Snap elections set to be held on 20 August**

The National Electoral Council (CNE) indicated that snap presidential and legislative elections are set to be held on 20 August, and a possible second round on 15 October, after President Guillermo Lasso issued a decree dissolving the National Assembly on 17 May, amid an impeachment trial against him. Lasso will reportedly not stand for the elections.

16 August 2023 - 21 August 2023

● **Medium risk: Tens of thousands of police officers deployed nationwide ahead of 20 August elections - Update**

Officials announced that more than 100,000 police officers were deployed nationwide to secure key locations ahead of 20 August elections after presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio was assassinated on 9 August. Residents were warned to not carry backpacks or packages near voting stations as they will be stopped and thoroughly inspected.

## Conflict : ● Low Risk

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**Border Conflict:** Tensions over the demarcation of the **Ecuador-Peru border** first emerged in the 19th century shortly after independence and carried on through the 20th century, with three conflicts fought in 1941, 1981 and 1995. A long-running dispute over an 80km (50 miles) strip of frontier jungle was finally resolved through a border treaty in 1998. Under terms of the pact, the boundary in the disputed area was established along the heights of the **Cordillera del Condor**, with each country creating demilitarised national parks on their side of the new border. A peace agreement was concluded the same year. Bilateral relations with Peru are now cordial.

**External Conflict:** The country is not involved in any offensive military action at this time. However, in recent years, security challenges have shifted towards counter-insurgency and counter-narcotics operations in border areas, where violence and other criminal activity, as well as refugees from Venezuela, have spilled over the border. Encroachment of Colombian guerrillas into Ecuadorian territory has led the Ecuadorian Army to deploy more troops to the region around **Puerto Mestanza**, **Puerto Nuevo** and **El Palmar**, among other areas. There have been frequent reports of kidnapping and military clashes with Colombia-based rebels out of **Quebrada del Ají**, located in **Sucumbios province**, where ex-Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) dissident groups and other criminal outfits operate. In the past, significant incursions by the Colombian military into Ecuadorian territory have increased tensions between the two governments. In 2008, a cross-border raid by Colombia's military into a rebel camp in Ecuador led then-president Correa to cut diplomatic ties with Bogotá and order additional troops to the border. Relations have since been restored and improved. In 2020, Ecuador and Colombia signed an agreement expanding bilateral security cooperation to combat ex-FARC dissident activity. To strengthen actions against threats on the Ecuador-Colombia border, the Ecuadorian Armed Forces have intensified reconnaissance patrols and surveillance measures.

**International Relations:** Under former president Correa and his successor Lenin Moreno, Ecuador maintained good ties with all governments in the region but formerly warm relations with regimes in Venezuela and Bolivia have recently cooled. In the international arena, Ecuador is a member of the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of American States (OAS). Ecuador also participates in many regional groups, including the Latin American Economic System, the Latin American Energy

Organization, the Latin American Integration Association and the Community of Andean Nations.

**Strength of Military Forces:** Ecuador's armed forces consist of an army, navy, and air force with an estimated 40,000 active personnel. The military is responsible for both defence and internal security, and can be deployed during natural disasters or periods of intense unrest. Like many of its Latin American counterparts, the Ecuadorian military has been an important political player, having led the country during a period of military dictatorships from 1963-1966 and 1972-1979. The armed forces have remained relatively autonomous from full control by civilian governments since the transition to democracy, largely due to their formidable economic presence operating energy and tourism concerns. That economic power is occasionally used to bend businessmen and politicians to their will through bribes and favours.

# Terrorism

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**Domestic Terrorism:** In May 2022, a state of emergency was declared in the **provincial capital of Esmeraldas** after simultaneous vehicle explosions and gunfire erupted near a school and several busy thoroughfares. Small and relatively minor anti-government groups have been suspected of domestic subversion and involvement in terrorism, including using small explosive devices that release political literature, known locally as pamphlet bombs. In the past, targets have included various government buildings, as well as local and international businesses. Radical groups such as the Alfaro Vive Carajo (AVC), Red Sun (Sol Rojo) and Group of Popular Combatants (GCP) are alleged to have ties with ex-FARC dissidents in Colombia. However, the AVC operates as a legitimate political party, while both Red Sun and the GCP have few members. Although no foreign tourists have been injured in these attacks, foreign nationals visiting or residing in Ecuador are urged to take common-sense precautions and report suspicious items and behaviour to local authorities.

**International Terrorism:** Government efforts to combat terrorism in the past focused on Colombian rebel incursions into Ecuadorean territory as both FARC and the right-wing United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC) operated in the border regions. The Colombian National Liberation Army (ELN) remains active along the **Ecuador-Colombia border**, and ex-FARC dissidents continue to operate in **Esmeraldas** and **Sucumbios provinces**. Attacks in Ecuador are irregular, including shooting at security forces and cases of kidnapping. The proximity of the border to the northern oil fields makes foreign oil workers a particular target for kidnapping. There is suspicion that international terrorist organisations may receive funding from the drug trade. However, most attacks are likely to be retaliatory against law enforcement engaged in counter-narcotics operations.

## There are no recent incidents

## Unrest : ● Medium Risk

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**Violent Unrest:** Ecuador is prone to strikes and demonstrations, especially over political and socio-economic issues. When major demonstrations occur, they are prone to violence by participants as well as police alike without little to no warning. Extensive and violent protests and roadblocks were initiated by the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) in June 2022 over price hikes, prompting a temporary state of exception and related movement restrictions in **Quito** and parts of **Pichincha, Cotopaxi, Imbabura, Chimborazo, Tungurahua, Pastaza, Azuay, Imbabura, Orellana** and **Sucumbíos provinces**. A heavy-handed response by security forces resulted in several deaths and hundreds of injuries, while overstretched police failed to stop looting, particularly in **Guayaquil**.

Protesters often erect road blockades along city streets and rural highways, including major roadways such as the **Pan-American Highway**, which in the past has led to food and fuel shortages.

CONAIE remains a very influential group in Ecuadorian politics and has been partly responsible for the ousting of two previous presidents. Environmental issues serve as a source of conflict as new mining projects tend to be strongly opposed by rural and indigenous societies.

Ecuadorian law prohibits political activity by foreigners; involvement with protests may result in detention or deportation. Travellers are advised to avoid all demonstrations and any perception of interfering in local politics and remain vigilant in the event of civil unrest.

## Recent incidents

24 November 2023 - 27 November 2023

- **Moderate risk:** Rallies against gender-based violence planned in Quito, Guayaquil on 24-26 November

Activists will gather at Casa de Justicia in Quito from 12:00 and 15:00 local time (17:00 and 20:00 GMT) on 24 November, to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Related events will take place at Quito's Arco del Ejido at 10:00 and Guayaquil's Parque Soledad Rodríguez at 14:30 on 25 November and from Quito's Arco Circasiana to United Nations Boulevard 09:00 on 26 November.

26 October 2023 - 27 October 2023

- **Moderate risk:** Transport workers erect blockades in Carchi province

Local sources indicated that Carchi Heavy Transport Association members erected roadblocks in Carchi, including on the Tulcán-Julio Andrade road, as part of an indefinite strike since early morning hours local time, to demand improved security. Members of the National Confederation of Heavy Transport (Confetraper) in El Oro, Guayas, Esmeraldas and Los Ríos reportedly suspended the action to allow for negotiations with the government.



# Crime : ● High Risk

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**Petty Crime:** Bag-snatching, thefts and pickpocketing are daily occurrences in major cities. Pickpockets and petty thieves hang around open markets and hotel zones in **Quito, Guayaquil** and other urban hubs. Thieves often work in pairs, in which one diverts the victim's attention while the other snatches their possessions. Groups of street children who sell candy are often engaged in these types of team operations. Theft of luggage is rampant at bus terminals, airports and other transit points, especially in **Guayaquil, Quito, Manta** and **Cuenca**.

Beware of your surroundings, do not leave your belongings unattended and exercise general personal safety for travel. Only carry what is needed, do not flash expensive valuables or large sums of money, and keep cash, identification and mobile phones in front pockets, or in a zipped or concealed pocket or pouch rather than in a bag. Secure belongings when using public transport or when frequenting markets and other crowded public areas; secure bags diagonally across the body against the chest, keep bags within sight and away from the street. Refrain from using mobile phones or laptops in congested public places; avoid putting bags containing valuables on the ground. Avoid walking in poorly lit and isolated areas. Stay in groups. Reject rides or drinks from strangers and never leave drinks unattended. Exercise extreme caution when purchasing and consuming alcohol in public venues. Do not accept pamphlets in the street or shopping centres; these could be impregnated with potent and disorienting drugs, which permeate the skin. If you start to feel unwell, tell staff or close friends and do not leave the venue alone or with strangers. Shout to attract attention, if needed.

**Violent Crime:** Violent crime remains a growing issue, particularly in **Guayaquil** and along the **Ecuador-Colombia border**. **Guayas, Manabí** and **Esmeraldas** stand out as the most violent provinces nationwide in terms of gang activity, though also **Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas** is a hotspot for violent crime. Travellers are advised to reconsider travel to these provinces until further notice because of increased gang-related criminal activity. Visitors travelling in the affected areas are advised to contract adequate local security and exercise a heightened level of vigilance. Sexual assaults against foreign women have increased in recent years, including in **Santa Elena province**. Criminals sometimes use incapacitating drugs such as scopolamine on unsuspecting tourists in order to rob or assault them.

Commonsense measures are best kept to ensure against becoming the victim of a

violent crime. Travellers are advised to remain vigilant at all times and exercise general personal safety for travel: avoid walking alone at night, do not venture down roads with poor lighting and few access points. Be careful when using taxis and public transport and plot route bypasses around rowdy crowds. Seek local advice for areas to avoid. If you are held-up by an armed robber do not become confrontational as any resistive behaviour may cause more violence by the attackers.

**Organised Crime and Gangs:** Ecuador is an attractive base for drug dealers resulting in increased involvement of foreign criminal organisations. Several international and local criminal gangs operate within the country. Low-income areas of major cities such as **Quito** and **Guayaquil** are prone to regular gang-related shootings and bombing. Travellers are advised against travel to **northern Ecuador**, including **Sucumbíos, Orellana, Carchi** and **Esmeraldas provinces**. The border region is particularly dangerous due to the spread of organised crime, trafficking and incursions and there is a 20km (12.4 miles) exclusion zone along the entire northern-border with Colombia under army control.

Violence is often contained within inter-gang rivalries, though bystanders may be caught up in drive-by shootings, street shootings and armed or arson attacks. Avoid the epicentres of criminal activities, which are often located on the outskirts of urban areas. Seek local advice on specific areas to avoid. Restrict travel in unfamiliar areas to daylight hours. Visitors should avoid association with members of any groups or individuals they suspect of being involved in such activities.

**Piracy and Banditry:** River tour boats have been held up by armed robbers who have stolen valuables and left passengers stranded. More than 850 attacks targeting fishermen have been reported in Ecuador's coastal waters since 2017. The majority of attacks occur in **Esmeraldas province**, a hotspot for cocaine trafficking near the border with Colombia, though also in **Manabí** and **El Oro provinces**. The pirates usually consist of several heavily armed people travelling in at least two boats. Most coastal patrol units are underfunded and not operational.

**Piracy:** In areas without an effective naval force or coast guard, shipping vessels may be vulnerable to an increased risk of pirate attacks. While attacks typically occur on vessels that are berthed or anchored, attacks on moving ships cannot be ruled out. Consult a local port agent or the Maritime Police for the current security situation, designated safe anchorage areas and which vessels to use when crossing higher risk ports. Keep all doors locked if sleeping on board a vessel. Follow best practice safety procedures while travelling in the high seas: extinguish navigation lights, roll up ship

ladders, sail as fast as possible and only at recommended times, use barbed wire and avoid engagement with any fishing boats or vessels requesting assistance. Ensure access to updated HF emergency frequencies to broadcast mayday calls in the event of pirate sightings. Report all suspicious activity to the nearest coastal state and flag state.

**Vehicle Crime:** Thefts from vehicles are also common in Ecuador. Both urban and inter-provincial bus passengers are regular targets of crime, including robbery and sexual assault. There have been several incidents of armed gunmen holding up buses after daylight hours; the routes between **Guayaquil** and **Cuenca** and between **Guayaquil** and **Riobamba** are the most-affected. Motorists have been intercepted by robbers using two vehicles to cut off the traveller around **José Joaquín de Olmedo International Airport (GYE/SEGU)** in **Guayaquil**; victims are usually selected for their perceived affluence. Carjacking has occurred in both rural and urban areas. It is recommended to drive with doors locked and windows rolled up.

**Break-ins:** Expensive-looking vehicles, especially 4x4s, or vehicles with visible valuables are commonly targeted. Visitors should park cars in well-lit areas, preferably in private parking lots with security and ensure that all valuables, including vehicle's papers/insurance, are removed from the vehicle. Lock car doors at all times and make sure windows are rolled up. If renting a vehicle, ensure that it is fitted with a secure car alarm.

**Theft:** A common tactic for confrontational theft is for thieves to smash a car window or pull open passenger doors when cars are stopped at traffic lights, before stealing items such as bags, GPS, radios, phones or wallets. Motorists may also be signalled to stop by the occupants of another car pointing at their tyre and indicating a problem. Alternatively thieves may force victims out of their vehicle at knife or gunpoint in order to steal the vehicle. Avoid driving at night and exercise caution when stopped at traffic lights or in tunnels. Never stop at the indication of another driver. If you are being followed, drive to the nearest police station or public area. Stop at the nearest town or service station if you think you may have a genuine problem with your vehicle.

**Carjacking:** Avoid leaving or returning to your place of work or residence at the same time every day. Vehicles equipped with a coded key or a key fob tend to be increasingly targeted as they make it easier to hijack with jamming devices. Hijackers also tend to stage breakdowns, flagging victims for assistance. Two cars are often used to box the victim in and force them to stop. Leave a safe distance between yourself and the car in front of you at traffic stops, limiting speed as much as possible to avoid

stopping in order to keep the vehicle moving and gain time before the light turns green. Hijackers are often armed and extremely willing to use deadly force so resistance is discouraged. Stay calm and move slowly and exit your vehicle avoiding eye contact with the assailants. Keep your hands in clear sight at all times.

**Fraud and Scams:** Unregistered taxis are common in express kidnapping and robbery. Some 10,000 unauthorised taxis operate in **Quito, Guayaquil** and **Manta** making it imperative that travellers book a taxi through a hotel or by calling a reputable radio taxi service. Credit card fraud is a big issue in Ecuador. Visitors should avoid using credit cards at any smaller or non-reputable locations. Travellers should monitor accounts weeks after their trip. Identity theft is increasing as a method of fraud and banking security is becoming more vital as the fraudsters become more sophisticated.

**Unlicensed Taxis:** Travellers are advised to use only licensed taxis, as unlicensed taxis may overcharge and drivers are not regulated or may be colluded. Always negotiate or confirm the fare before setting off. Consider having a hotel shuttle or registered chauffeur meet you at the airport upon arrival, particularly if arriving after dark. Avoid hailing taxis off the street and opt for private, non-shared taxis; ensure the taxi is empty in the back before getting into the vehicle. If you have to put luggage in the boot, pay the driver after getting it back. If you are tricked, write down the taxi's licence plate and call the police. Ride-share apps may provide a safe alternative.

**Credit Card fraud:** Visitors should only use credit cards when an electronic transaction is possible and when the transaction can be completed directly in front of them. Never let a clerk, sales assistant or waiter take a card to another location for the transaction to be processed. If this cannot be avoided, visitors should insist upon going with the individual to the point of sale to witness the transaction. Keep an eye on the card at all times. Always ensure that you receive a receipt and check the amount to be correct.

**Identity Theft:** Avoid using free wireless access available in public areas and use a VPN to access the internet. Refrain from discussing your travel plans or personal information in the public or over the phone. Visitors are advised to use a paper shredder to dispose of sensitive documents, to avoid identity thieves rifling through garbage to find documents that can be used fraudulently.

**Kidnapping:** Kidnappings have increased in recent years. Assailants tend to target both locals and resident foreign nationals, as well as tourists. The use of unregistered taxis significantly increases the risk of becoming an express kidnapping victim, particularly in **Quito** and **Guayaquil**. Criminal kidnapping for economic ends also

remains a serious problem in the northern provinces of **Sucumbios, Orellana, Carchi** and **Esmeraldas**. The response of law enforcement to kidnapping incidents is likely to be poor.

Travellers should remain aware of their surroundings and follow the latest advisories for their destination. Maintain communications and your itinerary with local contacts, authorities or embassy staff, especially in locations with a higher risk of kidnapping. Consider a local guide or security escort for the highest risk locations.

## Recent incidents

20 December 2023 - 21 December 2023

### ● **Moderate risk: Abducted UK, Colombian nationals released in Manabí province - Update**

Updated reports indicated that Colin Armstrong, the Honorary Consul of the United Kingdom who was recently kidnapped from his ranch in Babahoyo, Los Ríos province, had been rescued in Manabí during early morning hours local time. A Colombian national who was also kidnapped was released earlier in the week. At least nine people were detained. Further details were not available.

19 December 2023 - 20 December 2023

### ● **Medium risk: Deadly robbery reported onboard bus in Quevedo, Los Ríos province**

Local media reported that the driver of a public transport bus was stabbed and killed amid a robbery inside the vehicle on Avenida Walter Andrade, near La Loreto sector in Quevedo, Los Ríos province, during afternoon hours local time on 19 December. The assailant was shot and injured by the driver during an altercation.

16 December 2023 - 17 December 2023

### ● **Medium risk: UK, Colombian nationals abducted in Babahoyo canton, Los Ríos province**

Local media reported that the Honorary Consul of the United Kingdom (UK) in Guayaquil and a Colombia national were abducted from the Rodeo Grande Ranch in Babahoyo canton, Los Ríos province, during early morning hours local time. Further details were not immediately available.

05 December 2023 - 06 December 2023

● **Medium risk:** Shootout erupts between criminals and police in Samborondón, Guayas

Local reports indicated that an exchange of gunfire erupted in Samborondón, located on the outskirts of Guayaquil in Guayas province, during late afternoon hours local time, between members of criminal gangs and police. Possible casualty figures were not immediately confirmed.

# Law

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**Law:** Although the judiciary's independence has increased in recent years, it still suffers from several functional flaws, and officials remain susceptible to pressure and threats from criminal organisations. The judiciary operates slowly and inconsistently despite ongoing efforts to modernise the court system. Most cases experienced lengthy delays before reaching trial. In some cases, judges render decisions more quickly or slowly as a result of bribes or political pressure. The failures of the justice system contribute to cases in which communities take the law into their own hands against suspected criminals. Prisons are overcrowded and conditions remain harsh due to a lack of funding and corrupt staff. Multiple deadly prison riots have erupted in recent years.

**Possession of Archaeological Artefacts:** It is illegal to export or be in possession of any pre-Columbian artefact from Ecuador, whether bought, discovered or given as a present. It is illegal to traffic in ancient relics and foreign nationals who violate this law will face heavy fines and jail time.

**Property Laws:** Foreign nationals considering buying property in Ecuador should engage a competent attorney and carefully research land title issues before making a purchase. Competing claims to property might only surface after an apparently legal sale has been made and disputes can extend for years. Recent reports include several cases of foreign national land owners in Ecuador being threatened with physical harm or confiscation of their property by individuals claiming rights to the land.



# Corruption

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**Corruption:** Corruption is widespread in Ecuador. Although successive governments have introduced legislation to prevent and punish instances of corruption, the authorities have failed to implement these laws effectively. Reports of corrupt government officials soliciting bribes from travellers are frequent. Police officials, customs administration clerks and even medical personnel are the most common perpetrators of corrupt practices. Visitors who are solicited for a bribe should politely refuse and report the incident at the nearest police station. Both the solicitation and payment of a bribe is considered a criminal offence according to Ecuadorian law. Corruption is considered to be pervasive in Ecuador's business sector and can obstruct business activity. Complex and inconsistent bureaucratic and commercial laws are often manipulated to extort bribes and solicit facilitation payments from both foreign and domestic enterprises. Foreign enterprises have also complained that cumbersome labour laws and a lack of regulatory enforcement have both contributed to promoting extortive practices in the country's commercial sector. When applying for government tenders, businesses should avoid offering incentives and commissions to officials involved in tendering processes. Foreign businesses should particularly adhere to the international conventions and protocols on corruption to avoid prosecution by their home countries.

# Security Services

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**Security Services:** The National Police of Ecuador (Policía Nacional del Ecuador) are responsible for domestic security and public safety. Nevertheless, due to a lack of adequate police presence, citizens in remote parts of the country occasionally engage in vigilante justice. Private security guards also support the national police in surveillance and security tasks, carrying their weapons around their workplaces. Police effectiveness is impaired by corruption, poor hiring procedures and insufficient training, supervision and resources. Response times vary but it is not uncommon for it to take police up to one hour before responding to emergencies. Communication with foreign travellers may be problematic due to the language barrier.

Several specialised and local police services supplement the operations of the National Police. Both **Quito** and **Guayaquil** have metropolitan police forces of several hundred officers. Additionally, a tourism police unit is deployed to tourist areas. Travellers staying in the **Quito Historic Centre** should be aware that police occasionally sweep through budget hotels in the middle of the night and enter rooms at random to ask guests to present their documents and execute a cursory search of personal baggage. Most other cities also have some type of local police, generally poorly organised and led, whose contribution to law enforcement and prevention of crime is minimal. In the past decade, successive governments have expanded the military's role in public security and counter-narcotics operations, partly due to rising violence, police corruption and inefficiency. Authorities will declare curfews and movement restrictions in regions affected by civil unrest or high levels of crime. In border areas which are largely rural and lack a police presence, the military is the most visible form of authority.

Police officers are often accused of corruption and brutality. Security forces have been accused of excessive use of force, extortion, torture and involvement in organised crime. Thousands of persons are detained for longer periods than the constitution allows, often years longer, thus violating their right to be tried within a reasonable time.

# Natural Risks : ● High Risk

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Ecuador is vulnerable to several natural disasters and severe weather. Earthquakes and volcanic disturbances occur frequently in Ecuador. In addition, heavy rainfall can cause landslides and flooding, particularly in mountainous areas where road damage contributes to traffic accidents. Although emergency response efforts have increased in the wake of the devastating 2016 **Esmeraldas** earthquake, the culture of risk prevention remains weak in the country and emergency services are limited.

## Volcanic Eruptions

A volcanic eruption occurs when lava, rocks and gas are discharged from a volcanic vent. Eruptions can also trigger volcanic ash clouds and landslides called lahar.

Several volcanoes are active within Ecuador and pose a significant risk to adjacent communities in the event of an eruption. **Tungurahua Volcano**, located 135km (84 miles) south of the capital, **Quito**, is one of Ecuador's most active volcanoes and has been erupting intermittently since 1999, most recently in 2018. Pyroclastic flows of fast-moving fluidised bodies of hot gas, ash and rock pose a significant threat to the tourist retreat of **Baños**, located on the northern foothills of the volcano. Several other volcanoes are also active. There is also a high risk of lahars (flows of water, mud, lava and debris) around glaciated volcanoes such as **Cotopaxi**, especially in the towns of **Latacunga** and **Salcedo**.

In the past, lava and mudflows caused by volcanoes have closed highways and blanketed **Quito** in ash, shutting down **Mariscal Sucre International Airport (UIO/SEQM)** for several days. Ashfall from **Sangay Volcano** has prompted temporary closures of **Guayaquil International Airport (GYE/SEGU)** in the past. Eruptions can occur at any time and without warning. Travellers should seek local advice before climbing any volcanoes in Ecuador and monitor local media for any updates on increased volcanic activity.

In the event of a volcanic eruption, listen to your radio or television until you are told all is safe or you receive instructions to evacuate. Local authorities may elect to vacate specific areas at greater risk. If instructed to remain indoors, stay inside with windows and doors closed and all heating and air conditioning systems turned off. Move to a

ground level interior room without windows. If you are caught in an outdoor rock fall, roll into a ball to protect your head. Immediately evacuate an area when volcanic fumes and gases begin to cause an irritation to your sensory or respiratory organs. Your symptoms should dissipate when you are no longer in contact with the gases or fumes. Keep your vehicle engine switched off. Avoid driving in heavy ashfall. Ash and debris may clog a car's engine, causing the vehicle to stall. If driving is unavoidable, ensure that all windows are rolled up and that the air conditioning system is turned off. In the event of volcanic activity, avoid travel within the radius of the danger zone established by authorities. Volcanic ash clouds may also impact air travel if the volcano is located within range of an airport; confirm updated itineraries with airline representatives if this occurs.

## Earthquakes

An earthquake is the sudden, rapid shaking of the earth, caused by the breaking and shifting of subterranean rock as it releases strain that has accumulated over a long period. Initial mild shaking may worsen and become extremely violent within a matter of seconds. Additional earthquakes, called aftershocks, may follow the initial earthquake.

Ecuador is located in an active seismic area and has witnessed several powerful earthquakes in recent years. A 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck **Esmeraldas** and **Manabí provinces** in April 2016, killing at least 646 people and injuring over 12,000 others. The earthquake and its aftershocks caused power outages, disrupted the water supply and razed hundreds of buildings. Travellers should familiarise themselves with safety procedures and monitor official sources for accurate information and news.

When shaking begins, drop to the ground and take cover under, and hold on to, a sturdy piece of furniture, such as a heavy desk or table that can provide you with air space if the building collapses. If you're not near a strong piece of furniture, crouch down and protect your head and face in an inner corner of a building; only stand in a doorway if you know it is strongly supported. Stay away from windows or glass panels. Most deaths and injuries in an earthquake are caused by collapsing building materials and heavy falling objects. Stay indoors until the tremors stop and you are sure it is safe to exit. Avoid all areas in the vicinity of outer walls and doorways, as these are most prone to falling debris. In a high-rise building, the electricity may go out and the

sprinkler systems may come on. Do not use the elevators. If the lights go out, avoid using candles, matches or lighters during or after the earthquake; if there is a gas leak, an explosion could result. If outdoors, move to an open space away from buildings, electric poles and street lights which are prone to collapse. Do not travel on roads and bridges which may have been damaged by the earthquake. Be prepared for secondary earth movements that follow the initial earthquake; some of these may be large enough to cause additional damage or bring down weakened structures.

## Tsunami

Tsunamis are commonly generated by an earthquake-induced movement of the ocean floor. A strong earthquake lasting 20 seconds or more near the coast is likely to generate a tsunami and imminent coastal impact, possibly before warnings can be issued. However, all offshore or coastal earthquakes carry the potential of generating tsunamis. Warning signs of a tsunami include a sudden rise and fall in coastal sea levels.

Strong and shallow offshore and coastal earthquakes have the potential to trigger tsunamis in coastal areas. While warnings are normally issued by the US Tsunami Warning Centre and a network of sirens exists in **Esmeraldas** and **Manabí provinces**, the territory has not been hit by any hazardous tsunamis in recent years.

In areas at risk of tsunamis, know the height of your street above sea level and the distance of your street from the coast or other at-risk waters. Areas which are less than 7.5 metres (25 feet) above sea level and/or within 1.5 kilometres (one mile) of the coastline are perceived to be the most at risk. Evacuation orders may be based on these numbers. Immediately move inland or to higher ground in the event of a tsunami alert/warning; stay away from the beach. In the absence of an official warning, if you are on the coast and feel an earthquake, or if there is a noticeable recession in water away from the shoreline this is a natural warning of a possible tsunami and should be heeded; move away immediately. Remain out of the tsunami hazard zone until local officials advise otherwise.

## Landslides/Mudslides

Sometimes referred to as debris flows, mudflows, lahars or debris avalanches, landslides/mudslides are a form of mass soil movement that tends to flow in channels

in a surge of water-saturated rock, earth and debris, typically following heavy rainfall.

Heavy rains at various times of the year can cause landslides in many areas, particularly in the mountains, where road damage contributes to traffic accidents. Severe flooding has also occurred in **Manabi** and **Guayas provinces**, including **Chone**, **Portoviejo** and parts of **Guayaquil**. The irregular 'El Niño/La Niña' climatic phenomenon, which occurs every few years, can generate heavy rainfall, which often causes flooding and landslides. Earthquakes and volcanic eruptions can also cause dangerous landslides, and trigger widespread disruptions.

Follow local news updates in landslide prone areas for warnings about intense storms and rainfall. If landslide or debris flow danger is imminent, quickly move away from the path of the slide. Seek shelter on the nearest high ground in a direction away from the path. If rocks and debris are approaching, run for the nearest shelter and take cover (if possible, under a desk, table or other piece of sturdy furniture that can provide you with air space if the building collapses). Anticipate disruptions to overland travel in areas affected by landslides. Confirm the viability of intended overland travel routes before departure and remain alert for landslide warning signs including cracks in the soil or the faint rumbling sound of an approaching landslide or debris flow.

## Recent incidents

24 October 2023 - 29 October 2023

### ● **Moderate risk: Weather warning issued through 28 October in several provinces**

Meteorological officials issued a red warning for heavy rainfall and thunderstorms in parts of Bolivar, Carchi, Cotopaxi, Esmeraldas, Imbabura, Los Rios, Manabi, Pichincha, and Santo Domingo de los Tsachilas provinces through 10:00 local time (15:00 GMT) 28 October. Orange and yellow warnings are also in effect across most of the rest of the country, excluding Santa Elena and Galápagos.

# Health and Medical: ● Medium Risk

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## Overview

Adequate medical care is limited to **Quito** and major cities. Private facilities are generally better equipped to handle specialised and emergency situations. Many physicians are well-trained but ambulance response units are in short supply across the country and generally cannot be relied upon in an emergency. Medical facilities in the **Galápagos Islands** offer primary care but any serious condition will require evacuation to mainland medical facilities. Mosquitoes and flies transmit a variety of diseases, including yellow fever, malaria, dengue fever and leishmaniasis.

## Before you travel

Consult your doctor or a healthcare provider who specialises in travel medicine at least six weeks before your departure. If you have a medical condition, you should also share your travel plans with your doctor.

## Outbreaks and Other Diseases



## Malaria

### Areas with Malaria:

- Areas below 1,500 m (5,000 ft) elevation in the provinces of Carchi, Cotopaxi, Esmeraldas, Morona-Santiago, Orellana, Pastaza, and Sucumbíos
- Rare cases below 1,500 m (5,000 ft) in all other provinces
- No malaria transmission in the cities of Guayaquil or Quito (the capital)
- No malaria transmission on the Galápagos Islands

### Recommended chemoprophylaxis:

- Transmission areas in the provinces of Carchi, Cotopaxi, Esmeraldas, Morona-Santiago, Orellana, Pastaza, and Sucumbíos: Atovaquone-proguanil, doxycycline, mefloquine, tafenoquine
- All other areas with reported malaria transmission: No chemoprophylaxis recommended (insect bite precautions and mosquito avoidance only)

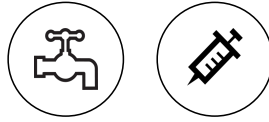
## Yellow Fever

There is a risk of Yellow Fever in some areas.

## Vaccinations, Medicines and Documentation

**Note:** Requirements and recommendations for vaccines and other medicines as well as Yellow Fever vaccine are based on guidelines from the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Yellow Book 2024. All other entry requirements are based on Riskline research.

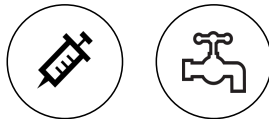
## Routine vaccines



Make sure you are up-to-date on all routine vaccines before every trip. Some of these vaccines include

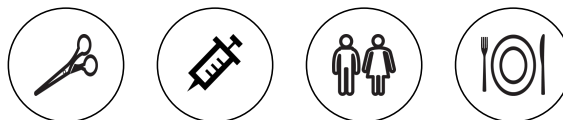
- Chickenpox (Varicella)
- Diphtheria-Tetanus-Pertussis
- Flu (influenza)
- Measles-Mumps-Rubella (MMR)
- Polio
- Shingles

## COVID-19



All eligible travellers should be up to date with their COVID-19 vaccines.

## Hepatitis A



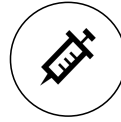
Recommended for unvaccinated travellers one year old or older going to Ecuador.

Infants 6 to 11 months old should also be vaccinated against Hepatitis A. The dose does not count toward the routine 2-dose series.

Travellers allergic to a vaccine component or who are younger than 6 months should receive a single dose of immune globulin, which provides effective protection for up to 2 months depending on dosage given.

Unvaccinated travellers who are over 40 years old, immunocompromised, or have chronic medical conditions planning to depart to a risk area in less than 2 weeks should get the initial dose of vaccine and at the same appointment receive immune globulin.

## Hepatitis B



Recommended for unvaccinated travellers younger than 60 years old traveling to Ecuador. Unvaccinated travellers 60 years and older may get vaccinated before traveling to Ecuador.

## Malaria



CDC recommends that travellers going to certain areas of Ecuador take prescription medicine to prevent malaria. Depending on the medicine you take, you will need to start taking this medicine multiple days before your trip, as well as during and after your trip. Talk to your doctor about which malaria medication you should take.

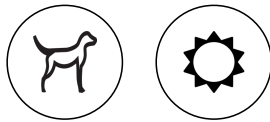
Find country-specific information about malaria.

## Measles



Infants 6 to 11 months old traveling internationally should get 1 dose of measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine before travel. This dose does not count as part of the routine childhood vaccination series.

## Rabies



Rabid dogs are commonly found in Ecuador. If you are bitten or scratched by a dog or other mammal while in Ecuador, there may be limited or no rabies treatment available.

Consider rabies vaccination before your trip if your activities mean you will be around dogs or wildlife.

Travellers more likely to encounter rabid animals include

- Campers, adventure travellers, or cave explorers (spelunkers)
- Veterinarians, animal handlers, field biologists, or laboratory workers handling animal specimens
- Visitors to rural areas

Since children are more likely to be bitten or scratched by a dog or other animals, consider rabies vaccination for children traveling to Ecuador.

## Typhoid



Recommended for most travellers, especially those staying with friends or relatives or visiting smaller cities or rural areas.

## Yellow Fever



**Recommended** for travellers  $\geq 9$  months old going to areas  $< 2,300$  m ( $\approx 7,550$  ft) elevation, east of the Andes Mountains, in the provinces of Morona-Santiago, Napo, Orellana, Pastaza, Sucumbíos, Tungurahua,\* and Zamora-Chinchipe.

**Generally not recommended** for travel limited to areas  $< 2,300$  m ( $\approx 7,550$  ft) elevation, west of the Andes Mountains, in the provinces of Esmeraldas,\* Guayas, Los Ríos, Manabí, Santa Elena, Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, and designated areas in the provinces of Azuay, Bolívar, Cañar, Carchi, Chimborazo, Cotopaxi, El Oro, Imbabura, Loja, and Pichincha.

**Not recommended** for travel limited to areas  $> 2,300$  m ( $\approx 7,550$  ft) elevation, the cities of Guayaquil or Quito (the capital), or the Galápagos Islands \*CDC recommendations differ from those published by WHO.

## Required documentation

### **Yellow Fever entry requirement (Source: USA CDC):**

Required for travellers one year and older arriving from Brazil, Democratic Republic of the Congo, or Uganda; this includes longer than 12-hour airport transits or layovers in any of these countries .

### **Other entry requirements:**

#### **Health document**

All travellers must complete the Traveller's Health Declaration and present it upon boarding. If the digital platform is not available, travellers may present a print-out version at the Ministry of Health airport station upon arrival. Document link: <https://declaracionsalud-viajero.msp.gob.ec/>

#### **Travel (PLF) document**

All non-resident travellers to the Galapagos must submit the Transit Control Card issued by the Galapagos Government Council (INGALA) online at least 24 hours prior to departure. Consult <https://www.gobiernogalapagos.gob.ec/step-by-step-tct-online/> for more information. Document link: <https://www.gobiernogalapagos.gob.ec/pre-registro-tct-turistas/>

#### **Health Insurance document**

Travel health insurance is required for foreign non-resident travellers to enter the Galapagos only; this requirement does not apply to the rest of the country. Consult website <https://www.visitgalapagos.travel/blog/travel-insurance.html> for more information.

**Note:** Documentation requirements are subject to change. Consult your destination embassy or consulate prior to departure for confirmation.

## **While you are there**

<b>Emergency Numbers</b>		
Medical	<b>131; 911</b>	
Emergency	<b>911</b>	All emergencies

### **Emergency services**

Ambulances, with or without trained emergency staff, are in critical short supply

throughout the country. The government has very limited search and rescue capabilities for emergency cases in the **Galápagos Islands**. In the event of a serious illness or accident, medical evacuation to the mainland is necessary, and costs are considerable. The islands are over 1,000km (621 miles) from the mainland and help may be slow in arriving in case of emergency.

## Evacuation

In the event of severe or life-threatening injury or illness, medical evacuation will be required at the patient's expense. In remote areas, emergency medical facilities are limited; air-lift evacuation to the nearest urban centre will be required. Note most rural hospitals will be unable to treat major medical complications.

## Routine care

Adequate medical and dental care is available in **Quito** and other major cities, such as **Guayaquil** and **Cuenca**, but is generally limited outside urban centres. Medical care is substandard outside major cities and in the **Galápagos Islands**. Private hospitals and clinics offer medical services of higher standard than most public facilities but are expensive. Centros de Salud, or public clinics, are based throughout the country, but service is hampered by limited resources and hours of operation. Many doctors in the capital can speak English. Decompression chambers are available in **Puerto Ayora** on **Santa Cruz Island**, in **Santo Domingo** and **Guayaquil**.

## Medicine

Access to high-quality prescription medication is limited and shortages of medicine are common, especially for sclerosis medication, cardiac problems, arteritis and HIV. However, pharmacies across main urban areas are usually supplied with basic medicine and most regular over-the-counter drugs are available. While travellers are unlikely to experience any difficulties in entering the country with their own prescription medicine, it is advisable that all prescription drugs are kept in their original container noting the patient's name. In addition, travellers are advised to carry a letter from a medical doctor explaining the need for the medication and justifying the quantities needed.

## Payment

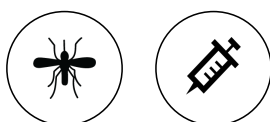
Cash payments are expected prior to receiving medical care at hospitals and clinics. Some providers in major cities may accept credit cards but most doctors will expect immediate payments or confirmations of payment from an insurance company.

Private treatment can be very expensive and uninsured travellers with limited resources may be relegated to seeking treatment in substandard hospitals or clinics. Travellers are advised to have adequate travel health insurance and accessible funds to cover the cost of any medical treatment abroad and repatriation.

## Ailments

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### Yellow Fever



Infection is reported in the following provinces: **Morona-Santiago, Napo, Orellana, Pastaza, Sucumbios, Zamora-Chinchipe** and all other areas in the **eastern Andes Mountains**. Those in **Quito, Guayaquil** and the **Galápagos Islands** are not at risk. Vaccination is strongly advised, as outbreaks do occur, particularly after flooding, and it is a requirement for those entering from infected areas.

*Yellow fever is a serious viral infection, transmitted by the bite of the Aedes mosquito, which is most active during early morning and late afternoon hours and commonly found in urban areas. Initial symptoms include a high fever, chills, vomiting nausea and backaches/muscle pain; in some cases those infected may develop potentially fatal complications, including jaundice, severe haemorrhaging and kidney failure. There is no post-infection treatment for yellow fever.*

### Dengue Fever

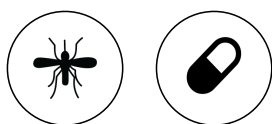


*Dengue fever is a viral infection, transmitted by the bite of the Aedes mosquito, which is most active during early morning and late afternoon hours and is commonly found in urban areas. Symptoms include a high fever, joint pain and headaches, although severe cases may cause significant falls in blood pressure and/or haemorrhaging, which can be fatal. There are no vaccines or treatments for dengue fever.*



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## Malaria



The risk is highest in **El Oro, Esmeraldas, Guayas, Los Rios, Manabi, Morona Santiago, Napo, Orellana, Pastaza, Pichincha** and **Sucumbios** provinces.

Travellers on **Amazon River** tributaries are also at risk. Those in **Quito, Guayaquil**, the **central highlands** and **Galápagos Islands** are not at risk.

*Malaria is a serious parasitic infection, transmitted by the bite of the Anopheles mosquito. Symptoms can be flu-like and include a high fever, joint pain, anaemia, chills and headaches; if left untreated, symptoms can quickly complicate and become life-threatening. While pre-departure courses of anti-malarial prophylactics are available, these do not guarantee immunity to malaria. Caught early, malaria can be treated easily with a range of anti-malarial medications.*

---

## Zika Virus



Only sporadic cases have been reported since the last outbreak in 2015-2017.

Zika virus is a viral infection transmitted by the bite of the Aedes mosquito, which is most active during early morning and late afternoon hours and commonly found in urban areas, as well as through sexual contact with an infected person. Most cases of Zika virus are asymptomatic; where symptoms occur they are usually mild and include fever, headaches, conjunctivitis, rash and joint and muscle pain. Zika has been linked to microcephaly in unborn children. There is no treatment for Zika virus, beyond rehydration and bed rest.

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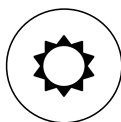
## Chikungunya Fever



*Chikungunya fever is a viral infection, transmitted via mosquito bite. Generally non-fatal, the symptoms of Chikungunya fever include a high fever, joint pain and headaches. In most cases those infected recover after seven to ten days. There are no vaccines or treatments for chikungunya.*

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## Altitude Sickness



Altitude sickness is the most common ailment for those who arrive in **Quito**, which is almost 3,000 metres (10,000 feet) above sea level.

*Altitude sickness is a pathological effect on humans caused by low partial pressure of oxygen at altitudes above 2,400 metres (8,000 feet). Typical symptoms resemble those caused by influenza, including headache, fatigue and dizziness; severe symptoms can include fever, persisting shortness of breath, loss of consciousness or haemorrhages. While preventative treatment and acclimatisation can prevent or lessen symptoms, the only effective treatment is to descend to lower altitudes.*

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## Rabies



In Ecuador, most cases are related to dog bites and **Pichincha** and **Guayas provinces** report the largest number of cases, especially in and around **Guayaquil**. Rabid bats have been reported in **Napo province**.

*Rabies is a serious viral infection, transmitted through close contact with saliva from infected animals (i.e. bites, scratches or licks on broken skin and mucous membranes). Travellers who suspect they may have come into contact with a rabies-infected animal should seek immediate emergency attention: post-exposure treatment has a high success rate if administered early. Late-stage rabies (when symptoms begin to occur) is untreatable and fatal.*

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## Leishmaniasis



Considered a public health problem in rural areas under 2,000 metres (6,500 feet), it is endemic on the **Pacific Coast**, the **Andean Plains** and the **eastern Amazonian lowlands**, particularly in **Imbabura** and **Pichincha provinces** as well as **Zamora, Esmeraldas** and **Manabi provinces**.

*Leishmaniasis is a parasitic infection transmitted by the bite of sand flies, which are most active during early morning and late evening hours. Symptoms of cutaneous leishmaniasis include swollen glands and sores; symptoms of visceral leishmaniasis include fever, swelling of the liver or spleen and weight loss. Leishmaniasis can be treated with a course of Amphotericin B, an antifungal.*

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## Bartonellosis (Carrión's disease)



This severe bacterial disease transmitted by sandflies has been reported for decades in the **highlands region** and along the **Ecuador-Peru border**, including the villages of **Zumba, Ibarra** and **Zaruma**. Transmission of this disease occurs primarily between elevations of 500 and 3,000 metres (1,640-9,840 ft). In the coastal lowland **Manabi province**, however, there are a growing number of cases of coetaneous Bartonellosis, characterised only by chronic verrucous (wart-like) skin lesions.

*Carrión's disease is a bacterial infection transmitted by sand flies, which are most active during early morning and late evening hours. Symptoms are divided into two stages: the early, 'Oroya fever' stage causes headaches, fever and stomach aches; the later, 'verruca peruana' phase causes the growth of lesions across the body. Carrión's disease can be treated with a course of antibiotics.*

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## Chagas Disease



Prevalent in rural areas, Chagas disease is more common in **Guayas** and **Manabí provinces**. Risk of transmission occurs in rural-agricultural areas where there are adobe-style huts and houses that potentially harbour the night-biting triatomine bugs. Travellers sleeping in such structures should take measures to prevent night-time bites. Unscreened blood transfusions are also a potential source of infection.

*Chagas disease is a parasitic infection transmitted by insects, usually the triatomine bug, and is most prevalent in rural areas. Symptoms include fever and swelling at the site of the insect bite. If left untreated, the disease can cause serious chronic conditions, including damage to the heart and gastrointestinal system. Chagas disease can be treated with a course of antiparasitics.*

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### Fascioliasis (Liver Fluke Disease)



Fascioliasis, or liver fluke disease, is not uncommon in the **western highlands** of **Chimborazo, Cotopaxi** and **Azuay provinces**.

*Fascioliasis is a parasitic infection caused by the 'common liver fluke' and transmitted by consuming contaminated wild water plants, such as raw watercress or morning glory. Early symptoms include gastrointestinal problems such as nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain, while in the chronic phase an inflammation and blockage of bile ducts, the liver, gallbladder and pancreas can occur. Fascioliasis can be treated with a course of antiparasitics.*

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### Onchocerciasis (River Blindness)



Onchocerciasis, or river blindness, occurs along river systems in **Esmeraldas province** but outbreaks have spread to other parts of the country. Infection rates up to 95 percent are reported among some Amerindian communities in the **Santiago River basin**.

*Onchocerciasis (River Blindness) is a parasitic infection transmitted by blackflies, which are most prevalent near rivers and streams. Symptoms include inflammation of the skin, bumps under the skin and – if left untreated – damage to the cornea or optical nerve that can result in blindness. Onchocerciasis can be treated with a course of antiparasitics.*

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## Paragonimiasis (Lung Fluke Disease)



Paragonimiasis cases, or lung fluke disease, are elevated in **Esmeraldas** and **Manabi provinces**, where it is endemic. Nearly one-half of Ecuador's rural population is estimated to be infected, making it one of the most prevalent public health problems, but is usually rare for travellers.

*Paragonimiasis is a parasitic infection caused by the lung fluke (flatworm). The disease is transmitted by eating infected raw or undercooked crab or crayfish. Initial symptoms can include cough, abdominal pain, discomfort and low-grade fever 2 to 15 days after infection. Mild infections may produce no symptoms and a long-term infection may mimic tuberculosis. Paragonimiasis can be treated with a course of antiparasitics.*

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## Plague



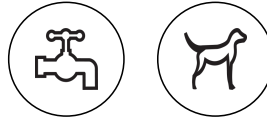
**Chimborazo province** has a history of bubonic plague cases. Direct contact with the infected host or fleas could potentially explain why the disease is endemic in the region. Recent information indicates that no new cases of pneumonic plague have been reported since 2010.

*Plague is a serious bacterial infection transmitted by fleas found on rodents or by close contact with infected persons or animals. The most common forms of plague are bubonic, septicemic and pneumonic; while late-stage symptoms vary, early symptoms in all cases include fever, weakness and headaches. If left untreated,*

*plague can quickly become fatal. Plague can be treated with a course of antibiotics.*

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## Avian Influenza (Bird Flu)



A human case of H5N1 avian flu was recorded in a nine-year-old girl in **Simiátug, Bolívar province**, in January amid an outbreak in poultry in **Cotopaxi** and **Bolívar provinces** since November 2022.

*Avian influenza is a class of viral infections, including H5N1 and H7N9, which can be transmitted through contact with wild or domesticated birds. Symptoms are flu-like, and include fever, muscle aches, coughing, as well pneumonia and – in severe cases – respiratory failure. Treatment includes a course of antivirals.*

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## Recent incidents

19 September 2023 - 27 September 2023

### ● **Moderate risk: HN51 avian flu outbreak prompts health emergency in Galapagos Islands**

The Galapagos National Park activated a health emergency across the Galapagos Islands, after confirming the death of at least a dozen birds infected by the type A H5N1 avian flu virus since 19 September. Visitor access was prohibited to at least five sites, including on Española, Wolf and Genovesa islands. Visitors were urged to respect the distance of at least two metres (6.6 feet) with the species.

07 February 2023 - 08 February 2023

● **Moderate risk:** Authorities extend partial COVID-19 mask mandate – Update

Authorities announced on 7 February that until further notice, the use of masks in enclosed spaces will continue to be mandatory in healthcare facilities and hospitals for staff, patients and visitors. Masks are also required in nursing homes, in all open and closed spaces for those who have respiratory symptoms and are recommended on public transport.

07 January 2023 - 08 January 2023

● **Moderate risk:** Human case of bird flu recorded in Simiátug, Bolívar province

Authorities indicated that a human case of H5N1 avian flu was recorded in a nine-year-old girl in Simiátug, Bolívar province, on 7 January. The patient was hospitalised after being infected following direct contact with birds that carried the virus. Authorities launched vaccination campaigns in at-risk areas and advised affected populations to use masks.

# Covid-19: ● Low Risk

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## Summary

International travel has resumed. Infection rates peaked in mid-January 2022.

**What is the current nationwide Policy?:** Open

**Policy starts:** 17 March 2022

**Policy ends:** indef

**Policy explanation:**

**Policy source:** <https://www.gestionderiesgos.gob.ec/resoluciones-coe/>

**Last update:** 30 October 2023

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## Infection

**Infection Level:** Low

**Infection rate:** 0.0 cases per 100k in the last 14 days

**As of date:** 09 November 2023

**Hotspots:** -

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## International Travel



### International Flights

**Is there a ban on international commercial flights?** No

**Through what date?** indef

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## Flight Ban Explanation:

Commercial passenger air traffic has resumed.

**Last Update:** 30 November 2023

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## Entry and Borders

**Is there a ban on entry for any travellers?** No

**Through what date?** indef

**Travellers from where are banned?**

**Land border:** Open

**Maritime border:** Open

## Entry Rules Explanation:

The country's air and land borders are open. The land border with Colombia has reopened to travellers at Rumichaca and San Miguel from 08:00-17:00 local time. The land border with Peru reopened to travellers at Huaquillas and Macará in February 2022; all travellers are permitted to cross from 08:00-17:00 local time.

International cruise ship operations are permitted in Esmeraldas, Guayaquil, Manta and Puerto Baquerizo ports.

**Entry Rules:** <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/ecuador/entry-requirements>  
<https://www.turismo.gob.ec/comunicado-actualizacion-de-lineamientos-de-ingreso-al-ecuador-continental-e-insular-por-via-aerea/>

**Last Update:**

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## Testing

**Do travellers need to take a COVID-19 test** No

**When?**

**Is it mandatory or optional?**

**Test Type:**

**Minimum age requirement:**

**Pre-travel test validity, in hours:**

**After arrival test days:**

### **Testing Explanation:**

Effective 20 October 2022, proof of vaccination or a negative test is not required for entry to Ecuador or the Galápagos.

### **Testing Rules:** -

**Last Update:** 30 November 2023

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## Health and Travel Documentations

**Do arriving travellers need any health and/or travel documentation?** Yes

### **Documentation Explanation:**

#### **Health document**

All travellers must complete the Traveller's Health Declaration and present it upon boarding. If the digital platform is not available, travellers may present a print-out version at the Ministry of Health airport station upon arrival.

#### **Travel (PLF) document**

All non-resident travellers to the Galapagos must submit the Transit Control Card issued by the Galapagos Government Council (INGALA) online at least 24 hours prior to departure. Consult <https://www.gobiernogalapagos.gob.ec/step-by-step-tct-online/> for more information.

## Health Insurance document

Travel health insurance is required for foreign non-resident travellers to enter the Galapagos only; this requirement does not apply to the rest of the country. Consult website <https://www.visitgalapagos.travel/blog/travel-insurance.html> for more information.

**Health  
Document:**

<https://declaracionsalud-viajero.msp.gob.ec/>

**Travel  
Document:**

<https://www.gobiernogalapagos.gob.ec/pre-registro-tct-turistas/>

**Last Update:** 30 October 2023

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## Tracing App

**Do travellers need to use a contact tracing app after arriving?** No

### Tracing App Explanation:

There is no mandatory national contact tracing app at this time.

**Last Update:** 30 October 2023

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## Quarantine on Arrival

**Who needs to quarantine on arrival** None

**Travellers from where need to quarantine?**

**How many days is quarantine?**

**Is it self-quarantine or operated by the government?**

**Quarantine Explanation:**

From 20 October 2022, inbound travellers are no longer subject to self-isolation upon entry.

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/ecuador/entry-requirements>

**Quarantine Rules:** <https://www.salud.gob.ec/msp-informa-el-protocolo-vigente-para-pasajeros-que-arriban-al-pais-desde-el-exterior/>  
<https://www.turismo.gob.ec/comunicado-actualizacion-de-lineamientos-de-ingreso-al-ecuador-continental-e-insular-por-via-aerea/>

**Last Update:** 2023-11-30

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## Exit

**Is there a ban on exit for any travellers?** No

**Are there special requirements to exit?** No

### Exit Requirements Explanation:

There are no special requirements to exit the country.

**Last Update:** 30 November 2023

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## Vaccination

**Percent vaccinated with at least one dose:** 86.885 as of 24 Feb 2023

**Percent fully vaccinated:** 79.11 as of 31 Mar 2023

**Is vaccination mandatory for entry?** No

**Fully vaccinated are exempt from:** -

**Minimum age for vaccine requirements for travel:** 0

**Exemptions for vaccine requirements for travel:**

**"Fully vaccinated" is defined by the destination as:**  
**Accepted vaccines, validity and special age restrictions:**  
**Is mixing of vaccine doses authorised?** N/A  
**Are specific combinations of mixed doses required?**

**"Boosted" is defined by the destination as:**

**Accepted boosters:**

**"Recently recovered" is defined by the destination as:**

Recovery status is valid from 0 days until after .

**Vaccination certificates accepted:**

**Vaccination certificates accepted in the following languages:**

**Recent recovery document required:**

**Recent recovery document accepted in the following languages:**

### **Explanation:**

From 20 October 2022, inbound travellers are no longer required to present a COVID-19 vaccine or a negative test to upon entry.

Vaccination against COVID-19 is mandatory for Ecuadorian nationals and foreign residents.

**Sources:** <https://ec.usembassy.gov/covid-19-information-ecu-2/>  
[https://twitter.com/Vice\\_Ec/status/1582797199959740416](https://twitter.com/Vice_Ec/status/1582797199959740416)

**Last change to vaccination policy:** 20 October 2022

**Last Update:** 30 November 2023

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## Other International Travel Restrictions

**Exit Requirements Explanation:**

**Last Update:**

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## Domestic Situation



### Areas on Lockdown

**Last Update:**

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### Areas under Curfew

**Last Update:** 30 October 2023

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### Domestic Travel

#### **Domestic Travel Explanation:**

Inter- and intra-provincial transport were permitted to resume at full capacity for vaccinated travellers. Cantonal authorities were urged to increase the frequencies of local public transport to up to 100 percent capacity. Municipalities may maintain or amend restrictions on vehicle movement, business operations and public gatherings.

#### **Quito**

The movement of vehicles is banned in urban areas in Quito municipality from Monday to Friday. Movement is banned from 06:00-09:30 and 16:00-21:00 for license plates ending in 1 and 2 on Mondays, 3 and 4 on Tuesdays, 5 and 6 on Wednesdays, 7 and 8 on Thursdays, and 9 and 0 on Fridays; there are no restrictions on holidays or weekends. Public transport may operate at full capacity.

## Galápagos Islands

All inbound travellers to Galápagos Islands are required to fill in a health declaration form and have a pre-paid transit control card (TCT) provided by Galápagos authorities. Children ages two and younger are exempt from these requirements.

Foreign travellers must also have an international health insurance that covers COVID-19. Consult [https://siiws.gobiernogalapagos.gob.ec/siicgg\\_web/](https://siiws.gobiernogalapagos.gob.ec/siicgg_web/) for the TCT card.

Equair terminated all flight operations through Quito Mariscal Sucre (UIO/SEQM), Francisco de Orellana (OCC/SECO), San Cristóbal (SCY/SEST), Guayaquil José Joaquín de Olmedo (GYE/SEGU) and Seymour Galapagos (GPS/SEGS) airports on 30 September, due to financial issues. Passengers may transfer their tickets to LATAM Airlines Ecuador.

**Last Update:** 30 November 2023

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## Other Domestic Restrictions

**Security-related measures** A state of emergency is in effect across the country until at least 7 November following the assassination of presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio during a campaign rally in Quito. Drug-trafficking gang Los Lobos reportedly claimed responsibility for the attack.

**Last Update:** 30 October 2023

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## Resources

**Government COVID Site:** -

**Health Dept COVID Site:** <https://www.salud.gob.ec/coronavirus-covid19-ecuador/>

There are no recent incidents



# Local Travel : ● Moderate Risk

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## Travel Safety

**Air Travel:** Most visitors to Ecuador will arrive in **Quito** at **Mariscal Sucre International Airport (UIO/SEQM)**. The airport offers multiple internal and international flights. Airport facilities are modern, comfortable and passenger-friendly. Immigration and customs officials are generally competent and welcoming. Still, immigration procedures are strict, and there is no leeway for visitors who do not have their papers in order or who have failed to obtain a visa. Upon departure, travellers may be required to pay an exit tax of USD40; depending on the airline, this exit tax may already be included in the ticket fee.

The airport sits some 2,800 metres (9,100 feet) above sea level and some visitors may experience discomfort or difficulty breathing during the first few hours in the city. The airport is served by public bus, vehicle rental and taxi services. Only use licensed taxis and negotiate the fare before departure.

**José Joaquín de Olmedo International Airport (GYE/SEGU)**, formerly called Simón Bolívar Airport, located five kilometres (three miles) north of **Guayaquil**, is Ecuador's second largest airport. The airport offers internal flights, and international connections, mainly to the Americas. The airport's facilities are comfortable and safe.

Considering the relative size of the country and the dangers posed by some ground travel routes, internal flights are a safe alternative. Domestic airlines link **Quito** and **Guayaquil** to **Cuenca (CUE/SECU)**, **Loja (LOH/SECA)**, **Latacunga/Baños (LTX/SELT)**, **Manta (MEC/SEMT)**, **Salinas (SNC/SESA)**, **Tena (TNW/SEJD)** and **Puyo/Macas (XMS/SEMC)**. Ecuador is a relatively small country, so no commercial flight should take longer than one hour from take-off to landing. There are no recent reports of airline accidents in Ecuador and the country is listed as being in compliance with international aviation safety standards.

**Airspace:** Commercial passenger air traffic has resumed.

**Borders and Entry:** The country's air and land borders are open. The land border with Colombia has reopened to travellers at Rumichaca and San Miguel from 08:00-17:00 local time. The land border with Peru reopened to travellers at Huaquillas and Macará in February 2022; all travellers are permitted to cross from 08:00-17:00 local time.

International cruise ship operations are permitted in Esmeraldas, Guayaquil, Manta

and Puerto Baquerizo ports.

**Exit:** There are no special requirements to exit the country.

**Road Travel:** Traffic in Ecuador moves on the right. Road travel can be dangerous; many roads are unmarked and poorly maintained, heavy rains and mudslides often close or wash out roads while heavy fog is also common in mountainous areas. Furthermore, highways are often unmarked and do not have signs indicating destinations. Road safety features, such as crash barriers and guardrails along steep mountainsides, are rare. In the countryside, livestock are often herded along roads or graze on roadsides. Many roads in Ecuador are used for pedestrian and animal traffic as well as vehicular traffic. Travelling at night can be dangerous due to poor lighting.

Traffic laws are inconsistently enforced in Ecuador and driving habits vary from region to region. On the coast, motorists generally do not adhere to rules and regulations and sometimes disregard vehicle maintenance, while drivers in **Quito** and the **Sierra** and **Oriente regions** drive more slowly, observe traffic signals and slow for speed bumps. Speed bumps to slow traffic abound even on major highways, such as the **Pan-American Highway**. Drivers often turn right and left from any lane and do not yield to pedestrians and cyclists. Travellers should always observe local speed limits, which are 50kph (31 mph) in urban areas and 90 kph (56 mph) outside urban areas and on highways. Police typically take drivers involved in serious accidents into custody, which can lead to prolonged detention. Bus and taxi drivers usually speed, take turns passing each other and stop unexpectedly to pick up or let passengers off. Travellers are advised to drive defensively and stay alert for pedestrians, who often cross city streets without paying attention to oncoming vehicles.

Special caution is advised when travelling to the **Ecuador-Colombia border**. Foreign nationals have been kidnapped in this region by organised crime and terror groups. Police checkpoints are frequent, however. Due to the uncommon nature of foreign nationals driving across Ecuador's borders, expect local authorities to take a special interest in foreign nationals' passports at these stops.

**Rail Travel:** Train services are available but are limited in Ecuador; trains are slow and delays are common. Service is often suspended due to landslides and other natural phenomena. Visitors should opt for an alternate means of transport. If travelling by train, check ahead for the current status of travel at train stations or tour offices. There are no international rail connections.

## Public Transport

**Ferries and Boats:** Many tour vessels operating in the **Galápagos Islands** are neither inspected nor operated in accordance with international regulations and do not meet international safety standards. The quality of inspections, oversight, crewmember proficiency evaluation and other requisites for safe vessel operation vary substantially. Tour boat accidents are more frequent among small vessels carrying fewer than 16 passengers. Travellers are advised to enquire about the safety features of any vessel, regardless of size. Use common sense and do not board boats that are overcrowded or do not look seaworthy. Ports and terminals can be found in **Esmeraldas, Guayaquil, Manta** and **Puerto Bolivar**.

**Buses:** Serious crime, including assaults and armed robberies, has been reported on city buses and on long-distance and international buses, especially after dark. The routes between the cities of **Guayaquil** and **Cuenca** and between **Guayaquil** and **Riobamba** are particularly affected by crime. Buses are generally overcrowded and fatal bus accidents, such as collisions or buses falling into ravines, are common; bus drivers often speed and drive recklessly. Generally, luxury buses (autobús de lujo) are the best option when travelling by bus. These are air-conditioned and drivers are changed more often.

**Quito** has a large network of privately run bus co-operatives, on which most journeys cost less than USD1. Travellers are advised to avoid riding buses while carrying luggage, especially at peak times, when local commuters often complain about the presence of foreign travellers. Foreign nationals are usually targeted for petty theft on city buses, especially during rush hour when buses are overcrowded. A trolley-bus service called Metrovía, which is roomier and safer, is available between the city centre to the northern suburbs. Metrovía service runs from 05:30-23:30 Monday to Saturday and from 06:00-22:00 on Sundays and holidays. In all areas, both intra-city and intercity buses will stop at any point on their route to pick up or drop off passengers.

Travellers should always check that luggage stored in the undercarriage of a bus is not taken at a stop en route and handed over to another disembarking passenger. Travellers should avoid using buses on the more remote and mountainous roads in the south, such as the one that links **Cuenca** with **Loja**, at night. Bus drivers are often partially intoxicated, markedly reducing their ability to successfully negotiate the many tight road bends at high speed.

**Taxis:** Taxis are the best form of urban transport. They are readily available in towns and cities and fares are inexpensive. Officially, cabs are meant to use a metre, but this is not always the case in practice, except in **Quito**. Drivers charge flat rates within the

city centre but visitors are advised to ask locals for rate standards. It is best to negotiate a price before starting the journey. Most taxi drivers are courteous and honest.

Express kidnapping by taxi drivers has become a problem in **Quito** in recent years. It is always wise to use a radio-dispatched taxi service. Do not use unlicensed taxis. As an additional safety measure, taxi passengers in the capital can send an SMS to 2468 with the taxi's registration number to get an instant confirmation about the taxi's status. If you find a specific taxi service to be reliable, you may negotiate with the driver to contract his services for the entire day(s) or arrange for future pickups.

**Vehicle Hire:** Numerous international and local vehicle rental companies are available in Ecuador at airports and major hotels. The major hotels can provide limousines and drivers for hire, both on hourly and day rates. Rental cars, generally, cannot be driven into neighbouring countries and visiting drivers should not pick up hitchhikers. When visiting smaller towns, visitors should reserve vehicles in advance, especially from June to September and December to January.

## Recent incidents

28 October 2023 - 29 October 2023

- **Moderate risk:** Maintenance works to prompt partial closure of Quito International Airport on 28 October

Airport authorities indicated that Mariscal Sucre International Airport (UIO/SEQM) serving Quito will close from 02:00 to 12:00 local time (07:00-17:00 GMT) on 28 October, due to preventive maintenance works on the runway.

27 October 2023 - 28 October 2023

- **Moderate risk:** Authorities impose nationwide daily power cuts due to drought

Authorities have imposed nationwide daily power cuts, to remain in place until further notice, due to a strong drought attributed to the El Niño phenomenon that has hit production at hydroelectric plants. In the Sierra and Amazon regions, cuts will extend for about four hours each day, while along the coast, they will last for three hours daily.

25 October 2023 - 26 October 2023

- **Moderate risk:** Maintenance works prompts partial closure of Guayaquil International Airport

Aviation authorities indicated that José Joaquín de Olmedo International Airport (GYE/SEGU) in Guayaquil was closed from 07:00 to 13:00 local time (12:00-18:00 GMT), due to maintenance works on the runway.

21 October 2023 - 22 October 2023

- **Moderate risk:** Maintenance works to prompt partial closure of Quito International Airport on 21 October

Airport authorities indicated that Mariscal Sucre International Airport (UIO/SEQM) serving Quito will close from 02:00 to 12:00 local time (07:00-17:00 GMT) on 21 October, due to preventive maintenance works on the runway.

# Destination Hotspots

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Ecuador's border region with Colombia is particularly dangerous and there is a 20km (12.4 miles) exclusion zone along the entire northern-border with Colombia under army control. Travellers should avoid staying in the oil-producing **Sucumbíos province**. Insurgents from the ex-Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) use **Sucumbíos** as an area both for rest and recreation and for arms and drugs smuggling. Ex-FARC dissidents have several clandestine medical facilities in the area, including in **Nueva Loja**, the provincial capital. There is a risk of kidnapping in this region as well as **Orellana, Carchi** and **Esmeraldas provinces** and there is a degree of complicity between ex-FARC and the Ecuadorian Army.

# Safety

## Emergency Numbers

Police	<b>101; 911</b>	
Fire	<b>102; 911</b>	
Traffic	<b>103</b>	
Child help-line	<b>123</b>	
Medical	<b>131; 911</b>	
Emergency	<b>911</b>	All emergencies

**Beaches and Public Areas:** Take special care when swimming at all beaches in Ecuador. Ocean currents and undertow are extremely strong and can be dangerous. Warning signs and lifeguards are lacking, and rescue services may not be consistent with international standards. Travellers should therefore seek reliable local advice about swimming conditions. If swimming in the **Galápagos Islands**, be aware of sea urchins and lionfish, which are poisonous.

Remain watchful of valuables while at the beach and in other popular tourist destinations. Never camp on a beach overnight and be cautious when walking on seemingly empty beaches after dark.

**Begging:** In major urban centres, foreign nationals are likely to be hounded by street children asking for spare change. Visitors should know that this may be a ploy by young thieves to steal valuables from unsuspecting victims and run away. In other cases, proving charity may attract other beggars. All requests for assistance and inquiries from strangers should be treated with suspicion and as precursors to criminal activity.

**Corruption:** Corruption is widespread in Ecuador. Although successive governments have introduced legislation to prevent and punish instances of corruption, the authorities have failed to implement these laws effectively. Reports of corrupt government officials soliciting bribes from travellers are frequent. Police officials, customs administration clerks and even medical personnel are the most common perpetrators of corrupt practices. Visitors who are solicited for a bribe should politely refuse and report the incident at the nearest police station. Both the solicitation and

payment of a bribe is considered a criminal offence according to Ecuadorian law. Corruption is considered to be pervasive in Ecuador's business sector and can obstruct business activity. Complex and inconsistent bureaucratic and commercial laws are often manipulated to extort bribes and solicit facilitation payments from both foreign and domestic enterprises. Foreign enterprises have also complained that cumbersome labour laws and a lack of regulatory enforcement have both contributed to promoting extortive practices in the country's commercial sector. When applying for government tenders, businesses should avoid offering incentives and commissions to officials involved in tendering processes. Foreign businesses should particularly adhere to the international conventions and protocols on corruption to avoid prosecution by their home countries.

**Drugs and Alcohol:** Penalties for possession and use of illegal drugs in Ecuador are severe and convicted offenders can expect long jail sentences and heavy fines. The minimum sentence for trafficking in any illegal drug is 12 years. Every year, dozens of foreign nationals are arrested for attempting to traffic drugs abroad or between mainland Ecuador and the **Galápagos Islands**. Common methods of transporting illegal substances include suitcases with false bottoms and other packages. Most of those arrested claim to have been unaware that they were transporting drugs. Travellers should be vigilant, packing all their belongings themselves, watching their luggage at all times and refusing to carry others' belongings with them.

The legal drinking age is 18, although it is rarely enforced. Driving while under the influence of alcohol is a serious offence in Ecuador and the limit is 0.3 milligrams of alcohol per millilitre of blood. Those caught under the influence risk hefty fines and imprisonment.

**Food and Drink:** Practise safe food and water precautions. Tap water is not always safe to drink and water sources are especially prone to contamination during periods of heavy rain. Travellers are advised to drink only bottled water or to take added health measures such as boiling, filtering or chemically disinfecting water. Ice should also be avoided, except in luxury hotels and restaurants.

In general, visitors should avoid eating food sold by street vendors, especially uncooked vegetables and fried food. Cooked foods that have been left at room temperature are particularly hazardous. Visitors should avoid cooked foods that are no longer piping hot. Raw or undercooked meat or fish, including local ceviche dishes, should also be avoided. Eating food, such as salads, that may be washed with tap water is not recommended.



**Import and Export:** Ecuadorian customs authorities may enforce strict regulations concerning temporary importation into or export from Ecuador of items such as firearms, religious materials, antiquities, medications, electronic equipment and currency. Visitors to Ecuador are legally permitted to bring in up to USD1,250 worth of items for personal use, including electronics. You can also bring in up to two litres of alcoholic beverages and 200 cigarettes.

**Landmines and Unexploded Ordnance (UXO):** There are land mines and unmarked minefields in the **Cordillera del Cóndor** near the **Ecuador-Peru border** and along the **Ecuador-Colombia border**. Off-road travel south of **Cuenca**, including **Zamora-Chinchipe, Morona-Santiago** and **El Oro provinces**, should be avoided. Do not get off marked roads in these areas.

**Law:** Although the judiciary's independence has increased in recent years, it still suffers from several functional flaws, and officials remain susceptible to pressure and threats from criminal organisations. The judiciary operates slowly and inconsistently despite ongoing efforts to modernise the court system. Most cases experienced lengthy delays before reaching trial. In some cases, judges render decisions more quickly or slowly as a result of bribes or political pressure. The failures of the justice system contribute to cases in which communities take the law into their own hands against suspected criminals. Prisons are overcrowded and conditions remain harsh due to a lack of funding and corrupt staff. Multiple deadly prison riots have erupted in recent years.

**Possession of Archaeological Artefacts:** It is illegal to export or be in possession of any pre-Columbian artefact from Ecuador, whether bought, discovered or given as a present. It is illegal to traffic in ancient relics and foreign nationals who violate this law will face heavy fines and jail time.

**Property Laws:** Foreign nationals considering buying property in Ecuador should engage a competent attorney and carefully research land title issues before making a purchase. Competing claims to property might only surface after an apparently legal sale has been made and disputes can extend for years. Recent reports include several cases of foreign national land owners in Ecuador being threatened with physical harm or confiscation of their property by individuals claiming rights to the land.

**Outdoor Activity:** If you decide to hike in Ecuador, plan carefully and use reputable hiking companies with professional local guides. High altitudes and unpredictable weather can be dangerous; familiarise yourself with the dangers of altitude sickness, especially if hiking in remote areas, and exercise normal safety precautions. Travellers

are advised to monitor the weather and reconsider plans if conditions are unfavourable.

Hikers and climbers can be subjected to robberies. Travellers are advised against hiking and trekking alone. It is best to bring a guide. Hiking and other adventure sports should only be undertaken with a well-established company.

**Security Services:** The National Police of Ecuador (Policía Nacional del Ecuador) are responsible for domestic security and public safety. Nevertheless, due to a lack of adequate police presence, citizens in remote parts of the country occasionally engage in vigilante justice. Private security guards also support the national police in surveillance and security tasks, carrying their weapons around their workplaces. Police effectiveness is impaired by corruption, poor hiring procedures and insufficient training, supervision and resources. Response times vary but it is not uncommon for it to take police up to one hour before responding to emergencies. Communication with foreign travellers may be problematic due to the language barrier.

Several specialised and local police services supplement the operations of the National Police. Both **Quito** and **Guayaquil** have metropolitan police forces of several hundred officers. Additionally, a tourism police unit is deployed to tourist areas. Travellers staying in the **Quito Historic Centre** should be aware that police occasionally sweep through budget hotels in the middle of the night and enter rooms at random to ask guests to present their documents and execute a cursory search of personal baggage. Most other cities also have some type of local police, generally poorly organised and led, whose contribution to law enforcement and prevention of crime is minimal. In the past decade, successive governments have expanded the military's role in public security and counter-narcotics operations, partly due to rising violence, police corruption and inefficiency. Authorities will declare curfews and movement restrictions in regions affected by civil unrest or high levels of crime. In border areas which are largely rural and lack a police presence, the military is the most visible form of authority.

Police officers are often accused of corruption and brutality. Security forces have been accused of excessive use of force, extortion, torture and involvement in organised crime. Thousands of persons are detained for longer periods than the constitution allows, often years longer, thus violating their right to be tried within a reasonable time.

**Smoking:** Ecuadorian law prohibits smoking in all indoor public spaces, including shops, cinemas, restaurants and offices, but enforcement is virtually nonexistent.

Many Ecuadorians smoke, and bars and nightclubs are often especially smoke-filled.

**Weapons:** Foreign nationals can obtain permits to carry weapons in Ecuador if the need is justified and a valid work permit is presented to military authorities for approval. The process generally takes one month. Carbines and assault rifles are prohibited and possessing one is considered a serious crime. Night vision systems and laser sights are also prohibited. In April 2023, the "possession and carrying of weapons and pepper spray for civilian use for personal defense in accordance with the requirements of the law and regulations" was authorised in the country.

# Culture

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**Cultural/Political/ Religious Sensitivities:** Approximately 69 percent of Ecuadorians are Roman Catholic. Most festivals and annual parades are based on religious celebrations, incorporating a mixture of rites and icons. Indigenous beliefs combined with elements of Catholic worship are common in rural areas. Social conservatism is prevalent in some parts of the country and travellers are advised to behave discreetly and dress modestly, especially when visiting places of cultural and religious importance. 'Machismo' attitudes are still prevalent, and female travellers, especially solo travellers, may be harassed by catcalls from local men.

Many regional differences exist. Indigenous people constitute 25 percent of Ecuador's total population. Indigenous communities, which make up a large proportion of the population in **Otavalo**, **Quito** and **Cuenca**, are generally amiable towards foreign visitors, but they are also fiercely conservative in their cultural and religious traditions, which must be respected at all times. Most indigenous Ecuadorians are very wary of having their photographs taken and it is considered impolite and even aggressive to do so without asking permission first. In many tourist destinations, locals will readily allow themselves to be photographed for a small fee. Visitors should be careful not to offend local religious sensitivities and should respect local traditions, customs, laws and religions.

Greetings are warm and accompanied by a firm handshake; friends might also kiss once on the cheek when meeting. Arrival times at social events are very casual. If invited to an Ecuadorian house, travellers are advised to bring a small gift (e.g. flowers, sweets, alcohol) for the host to show their appreciation.

# Specific Traveller Advice

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## Female Travellers

**Local Customs and Laws:** There are some local customs or laws that a female traveller should take into consideration in Ecuador. Be aware that although local women generally do not attend bars, clubs or sporting events alone, it is acceptable for foreign female travellers to do so. Familiarise yourself with your destination prior to travel, and be respectful and mindful of any possible cultural sensitivities, which may include dress, behaviour and topics of discussions.

**Safety:** There are many safety concerns that a female traveller should take into consideration in Ecuador. Harassment, sexual assaults and violence targeting women occur in Ecuador, including in **Quito** and **Guayaquil**, and also at beach resort towns such as **Atacames**, **Playas** and **Montañita**. Female travellers may receive unwanted attention from men, ranging from open displays of catcalling and staring to physical groping, including at day time. It is best to ignore these advances or confrontations and walk away. In the event that harassment escalates, draw attention to what is happening, and locals will likely come to your aid. Do not walk alone in unfamiliar neighbourhoods, deserted areas or beaches at night, especially in **Quito**, **Guayaquil**, **Atacames**, **Playas** and **Montañita**, due to recent reports of isolated incidents of harassment and sexual assault. Taxis and public transport are among the most common places for harassment in Ecuador. Only use official and registered taxis, reputed radio cabs, ride-hailing services or chauffeur-driven taxis arranged by a reputed hotel and avoid public transport, especially at night, to limit exposure to possible cases of harassment. Consider using tourist shuttle buses instead. Do not hail taxis off the street and avoid sitting in the front seat of the taxi, especially at night, to mitigate risks of assault, as there are recent reports of assault onboard taxis, including in **Quito**, **Guayaquil** and **Manta**. Similarly, refrain from setting off on hiking trips or visiting deserted nature areas alone. Exercise caution if a male guide offers to take a female traveller on a solo tour, especially in remote locations, due to isolated reports of harassment and assault. Female travellers should exercise caution when reporting crimes to local police, as there are reports of law enforcement undermining incidents of harassment and assault. Consider consulting your home consulate/embassy for legal advice and ensure you receive a copy of the police report. If you need to report a crime in **Quito** do so at the nearest Tourist Police who maintain a high degree of professionalism.

**Health and Wellness:** Women have access to some specialised gynaecological and reproductive health services, medicines and products in Ecuador, especially in urban areas. Abortion is legal in Ecuador only in cases where the life or physical health of the woman is in danger and in cases of rape. Specialised clinics are available in **Quito**, **Guayaquil** and **Cuenca**, and prescription emergency contraceptives, prescription contraceptives and feminine hygiene products to some extent also in other urban areas. Consider bringing an adequate supply of female-specific OTC drugs, feminine hygiene products and oral contraceptive pills, which may not be available locally. Consult a health professional prior to travel, especially if pregnant or planning to become pregnant, due to a potential risk of Zika virus.

## **LGBT+**

Homosexuality is legal in Ecuador. There are many legal protections for LGBT+ persons in the country, including anti-discrimination laws and laws concerning gender identity or expression. Same-sex marriage has been legal since June 2019. LGBT+ activity and persons are somewhat socially accepted. A fairly large gay scene has developed in **Quito** and **Guayaquil**. Despite the legal status of LGBT+ rights, social conservatism may be prevalent in some parts of the country and the LGBT+ community continues to suffer discrimination. Police routinely arrest homosexuals and transvestites in public areas. Travellers may prefer to be discreet about sexual orientation and avoid excessive public displays of affection in areas where attitudes towards the LGBT+ community are unknown or generally not accepted. Use caution in conversations about sexuality or LGBT+ issues with strangers or recent acquaintances. Consider booking hotel rooms with two separate beds. Transgender travellers may wish to consider having their passport and identification changed to reflect their new gender before travelling.

## **Technology & Communication Risk**

Travellers are unlikely to face risks related to information and communication technology (ICT) in Ecuador.

Internet access and social media have no restrictions. Challenges to press freedom remain, although media and civil society restrictions have eased in recent years. There are no concerns related to device searches or sensitive technology. Device searches and inspections at the border are unlikely. There are no restrictions in relation to bringing or operating sensitive equipment, which may include photo cameras, satellite phones, drones, and other GPS systems, in the country. State or criminal penetration of private data is unlikely. Authorities implement minimal state surveillance of ICT networks in the country; however, in 2016, mobile phone operators were directed to

provide geolocation data of users' devices to the government for emergency alerts.

Travellers should exercise basic ICT safety precautions. However, travellers should note that ICT laws and practices are subject to change on short notice, and travellers are recommended to confirm the legality/appropriateness of their specific ICT needs prior to departure.

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