

# Ecuador

## Safety and Security

**Safety** – Threats that may affect the ability to travel (petty crime, currency issues, transportation hazards, natural disasters) and that are generally handled by local first responders.

**Security** – Threats to a traveler that include or involve armed conflict (civilian, civil war, military, police use of live ammunition) or physical violence (including violent crime, terrorism, and kidnapping) that may necessitate a federal government response.

## Current Safety Bulletins

### State of Emergency

Reviewed Nov 6, 2024 (Posted May 3, 2024)

A state of emergency, declared in response to armed violence, is in place in Camilo Ponce Enriquez in Azuay province, the metropolitan district of Quito, and El Oro, Guayas, Los Ríos, Manabí, Orellana, and Santa Elena provinces. Curfews are in place in some areas. The presence of heavily armed security forces should be expected. Police and military forces may perform inspections and searches without permission; travelers should have identification readily available. Travelers should maintain a high level of security awareness, carry a fully charged communication device, follow the advice of local authorities, and monitor the situation through local media and embassy communications.

### Consular Travel Warning

Updated Jul 15, 2024 (Posted Sep 13, 2016)

Due to crime and civil unrest, US (DOS) advises avoiding travel to Guayaquil (south of Portete de Tarqui Avenue); the cities of Huaquillas and Arenillas in El Oro Province; the cities of Quevedo, Quinsaloma, and Pueblo Viejo in the province of Los Ríos; the canton of Duran in Guayas Province; Esmeraldas city and all areas north of Esmeraldas city in Esmeraldas Province. US (DOS) also advises reconsidering travel (or avoiding nonessential travel) to Guayaquil (north of Portete de Tarqui Avenue); El Oro Province outside the cities of Huaquillas and Arenillas; Los Ríos Province outside the cities of Quevedo, Quinsaloma, and Pueblo Viejo; all areas south of Esmeraldas city in Esmeraldas Province; Sucumbíos, Manabí, Santa Elena, and Santo Domingo provinces.

A nationwide declaration of internal armed conflict is in place. Increased security measures are likely, especially in places where large crowds gather (e.g., public transportation and at airports and sea ports). Police and military forces may perform identification checks and searches; travelers should have identification readily available. Travelers should also maintain a high level of security awareness, carry a fully charged communication device, follow the advice of local authorities (including on how to handle health care emergencies), and monitor the situation through local media and embassy communications.

## Key Safety Risks

- Road conditions and traffic collisions
- Public transportation
- Maritime safety
- Petty crime
- Heightened crime risk for women
- Food and beverage spiking
- Theft of vehicles
- Scams
- Cybersecurity
- Natural disasters

## Key Security Threats

- Risk of violent protests
- Cross-border threats in areas bordering Colombia

- Explosions in public places
- Landmines
- Violent crime
- Kidnapping, which may target foreign nationals
- Random acts of armed violence
- Piracy

## Emergency Phone Number

The national emergency number is 911.

## Civil Unrest

Protests and demonstrations occur throughout the country and have the potential to turn violent without warning. Bystanders are at risk of harm from violence or from the response by authorities. Disruption to transportation, free movement, or the ability to carry out daily activities may occur.

## Crime

High risk of violent crime (armed robbery and sexual assault) and high risk of petty crime exist throughout the country, especially in Quito (particularly in El Panecillo, El Ejido, and La Carolina parks and the districts of La Mariscal, La Floresta, La Marin, Guápulo, South Quito, and Old Town Quito); in Guayaquil (in the districts of Urdesa, Kennedy, Alborada, and Malecón Simón Bolívar [including Cerro Santa Ana]; near the bus terminal, the downtown and market areas, and the Sagrado Corazón de Jesús [statue of Jesus Christ] on Cerro del Carmen); in other cities (Cuenca, Manta, and Riobamba); on volcano hiking trails (including Cerro Mandango near Vilcabamba, Loja Province, the Pichincha volcano, and the volcano outside the limits of the Quito TelefériQo or its pathway); in Montañita (Santa Elena Province); on beaches in the province of Esmeraldas; in jungle lodges in the Lower Rio Napo and Cuyabeno Wildlife Reserve.

Theft of valuables from unattended accommodations is common.

Kidnappings by criminal groups occur in northern and northeastern areas bordering Colombia and Peru, including the Cuyabeno Wildlife Reserve. Targets may include foreigners (especially Westerners), including foreigners working for oil companies.

Express kidnappings to force cash withdrawals at ATMs occur throughout the country, especially in Quito and Guayaquil.

Scams involving ATMs, credit cards, and the use of distraction techniques to commit robbery (including squirting substances on victims) have been reported.

Risk exists of robberies and/or assaults occurring after consuming intentionally drugged food or drink; tourists are frequently targeted.

## Natural Disasters

The rainy season is from May through November in areas east of the Andes mountains and December through May in coastal areas. Floods, mudslides, and landslides may occur.

Seismic and volcanic activity frequently occur.

## Terrorism Risk

No intrinsic risk of attack by terrorist groups exists, but unforeseen attacks are possible.

## Transportation Safety

Avoid travel by road to areas within 20 km (12.5 miles) of the border with Colombia, except for travel during daylight hours to the Rumachica border crossing, the town of Tulcán, the Pan American Highway, and El Angel ecological reserve (Carchi Province).

Avoid travel by road to Tiwinza (in Morona-Santiago Province) and El Pangui, Nangaritza, and Palanda (in Zamora-Chinchipe Province), near the Peruvian border, due to landmines and unmarked minefields.

Driving is not recommended for safety and security reasons. The traffic fatality rate is high. Avoid travel by road at night for safety and security reasons.

Motorists drive erratically and may be aggressive. Traffic laws (including speed limits) are often ignored. Motorists driving under the influence of alcohol are frequently a hazard. Truck and bus drivers often stop in traffic lanes.

Road conditions vary widely. Some roads are poorly maintained and many lack traffic signs, lighting, and guard rails. Mudslides, landslides, flooding, and fog sometimes disrupt travel. Mud and lava flow from active volcanoes can quickly disrupt travel and are a particular risk near Baños, Latacunga, Salcedo, and low-lying areas in the valley east of Quito.

Pedestrians often walk in roads that lack sidewalks. Roaming animals may be present on unlit rural roads, especially at night.

Serious collisions frequently occur. After a traffic collision, authorities may take the motorist into custody. Criminal charges may result if the injuries or damages are serious, regardless of who is at fault.

Vehicles are often poorly maintained.

Carjacking occurs, sometimes in conjunction with express kidnapping. Armed robbery occurs when vehicles are stopped at intersections, especially in Guayaquil's city center, port areas, and southern parts of the city. Passengers should pay attention to their surroundings, keep doors locked, bags and valuables concealed, and windows closed (or opened slightly) to prevent theft while stopped in traffic. Snatch-and-grab theft occurs and is often carried out by pairs of thieves on a motorcycle.

During traffic stops police may solicit bribes. Politely resist paying bribes by remaining inside the vehicle with doors locked and the window opened slightly; request a ticket for a traffic violation or the officer's name and badge number if no violation is alleged.

Quito restricts motor-vehicle traffic according to the last digit of the license plate number.

Pedestrians should exercise caution when crossing the street because motorists generally do not yield to pedestrians.

Avoid using local and long-distance buses for safety and security reasons; passengers are often targets for petty theft, armed robbery, and sexual assault.

Use official taxi services, prebooked by phone or through the hotel. Official taxis in Quito and Guayaquil use security video cameras, have orange (or white with an orange stripe) license plates, and display a municipality registration number sticker on the windshield and doors. Avoid hailing taxis, especially at night. Express kidnapping occurs, especially from unofficial taxis.

Official taxis can be booked at booths in the Quito and Guayaquil international airports. Travel with trusted companions whenever possible. Write down or photograph the license plate number/taxi registration number in plain view of the driver; text the information to a personal contact while in the taxi.

Ride-hailing apps may be safer than taxis because the ride can be prepaid and tracked. Travelers who use app-based shared ride services should always confirm that they are entering the correct vehicle with the driver indicated on the app. When using a ride-hailing app, text the information to a personal contact who can track the journey for safety reasons.

Travelers who undertake the Quito to Pichincha cable car should use an experienced guide from a reputable company, bring proper equipment (including warm, waterproof clothing because the weather can quickly change and fatalities from hypothermia sometimes occur), and if possible, start the excursion early in the day to minimize risks from possible heavy mist or storms.

Avoid travel in vessels that seem unseaworthy; confirm that life jackets and appropriate safety equipment are available before boarding a ferry or boat. Many Ecuadorian tour vessels operating in the Galápagos do not meet international safety standards. The tour operator should be able to confirm in writing that the boat has certification by the Ecuadorian Navy and meets Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) Convention standards. Piracy and armed robbery of boats occur in and around Ecuador's waters.

The US Federal Aviation Administration has determined that the civil aviation authority of this country oversees its air carriers in compliance with international aviation safety standards. Aviation is generally the safest mode of travel within Ecuador. Travelers should exercise vigilance when departing the airports in Quito and Guayaquil because thieves may follow them. Volcanic ash sometimes disrupts flights.

## Unsafe Areas

A dangerous security environment exists and armed groups are present in areas bordering Colombia, including Cuyabeno Wildlife Reserve.

## Water Safety

Rent water sports equipment from reputable operators. Scuba dive only with personnel certified by PADI or NAUI and use equipment only from PADI- or NAUI-certified dive operators.

*The material above includes information from the US Department of State (DOS), the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCO), Global Affairs Canada (GAC), and Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), as well as from additional open-source material. Standard safety precautions that apply to all international travel can be found in the Library article Safety and Security.*

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