



KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- ❑ Driving is on the right.
- ❑ Drivers are required to carry a valid license, passport, International Driving Permit (IDP), vehicle registration and proof of insurance. Carry a passport or photocopy at all times. A US driver's license is valid for up to 90 days.
- ❑ Armed carjackings often occur. Drivers who are stopped at intersections are especially targeted. Drive with doors locked and windows up at all times.
- ❑ Do not drive or walk after dark. Women are particularly vulnerable to violent attacks and sexual assault.
- ❑ Pedestrians account for an estimated 20% of all traffic deaths. In many areas, a lack of sidewalks forces pedestrians to share roadways with busy traffic.
- ❑ Riders of two- and three-wheeled vehicles make up approximately 19% of all road crash deaths.
- ❑ Legal blood alcohol limit is below 0.03 g/dl for all drivers. Despite legal limits, drink driving is a factor in many crashes, particularly on weekends and local holidays.
- ❑ There are 20.6 road deaths per 100,000 people in Ecuador, compared to 2.2 in Sweden and 2.3 in the UK.



Map source: CIA Factbook

ROAD CULTURE

- **Driving standards** are poor. Drivers often ignore traffic rules and signals.
- **Speeding** is common among all drivers. Bus and taxi drivers may speed in an attempt to make up for time lost in traffic congestion.
- **Drivers use** horns and hazard lights for a variety of reasons, including to greet other motorists or to warn of danger.
- **Many drivers** change lanes suddenly or without alerting other road users as to their intention. Passing on blind curves or under dangerous conditions is common.
- **Motorists rarely** yield to pedestrians and cyclists.
- **Drivers**, including bus and taxi drivers, generally do not respect zebra crossings.
- **Drivers of** slow-moving buses and trucks frequently stop without first signaling to other road users.

ROAD CONDITIONS

- **There are** 43,950 km (27,309 miles) of roads; 8,895 km (5,527 miles) are paved and 35,055 km (21,782 miles) are unpaved.
- **Road conditions** vary widely.
- **Many roads** are poorly maintained and have deep potholes or broken surfaces.
- **In general**, highway surfaces are in better condition than secondary roads. Some highways have been updated and include new tunnels.
- **Roads** and highways are often steep and twisting.
- **Many roads** lack guardrails and crash barriers.
- **There are** many unmarked speed bumps. In rural areas, homemade speed bumps constructed from a variety of materials are common.
- **Speed bumps** may be erected by street vendors to force vehicles to stop. Some vendors may approach passing vehicles or block lanes.
- **There is** a lack of directional or location signs. Existing signs are in Spanish, and may not be readily visible. In cities, many street signs are attached to the sides of buildings above eye level.
- **There are few** streetlights. Roads may be inadequately lit or unlit.
- **Many roads** or sections of expressways are toll roads. Tolls may be paid at toll gates.
- **Drivers** may encounter traffic lights on major highways.
- **Many vehicles** are in poor condition. Drivers often operate vehicles that do not meet acceptable safety standards. Breakdowns are common, and abandoned cars and trucks may block roadways.
- **There are** landmines and unmarked minefields in Tiwinza within the province of Morona-Santiago; in El Pangui, Nangaritza and Palanda; and in the province of Zamora-Chinchipe. Do not drive off paved main roads.
- **Avoid all** but essential travel to within 20 km (12.4 miles) of the border with Colombia, including the provinces of Carchi and Sucumbíos; or to the northern



Road Conditions, continued

part of Esmeraldas province, including Esmeraldas City, due to high levels of violent crime. Exceptions include the El Angel ecological reserve in Carchi province, the Rumachica border crossing, the town of Tulcan, and the Pan American Highway in Carchi province.

- **GPS and satellite** mapping services may be unreliable in many remote and mountainous areas. Carry up-to-date paper maps.
- **Roads are** being repaired and new roads constructed in many areas, particularly in rural locations and in places where earthquake damage has occurred. Construction zones are generally not marked or lighted.
- **Police** and military roadblocks are common.
- **Demonstrations may** occur. Even peaceful demonstrations may become violent or disrupt road travel and public transportation. Protestors may block roads.
- **Pedestrian infrastructure** is better in cities than in rural areas. Outside of cities, pedestrians often walk beside or in busy roads. Street vendors may block sidewalks and force pedestrians to walk in streets.
- **Many people** travel by bicycle. There are dedicated bicycle lanes in some cities, but few in rural areas. Be alert at all times to cyclists.
- **Loose livestock** on rural roads is common. Farmers may also move large herds of cattle or sheep along main roads.
- **The following roads** may present particular challenges to motorists:
 - » **The Abra de Zamora** road is a high mountain pass located 2,802 meters (9,192 feet) above sea level. The road is located in the southern part of the country on the boundary of the Zamora-Chinchipec and Loja provinces. The steep, winding road is paved but is not regularly maintained. Drivers unfamiliar with driving in high-altitude conditions should not attempt this road. Heavy fog is common and may reduce visibility.
 - » **The Cotopaxi Volcan road** south of Quito links the Pan American Highway to Cotopaxi Volcan National Park. The road has a dirt surface with many deep potholes. Rain is often followed by flash floods. This route is popular with visiting drivers on their way to the country’s highest volcano. This road should not be attempted by those who are unfamiliar with challenging conditions including switchbacks, unstable surfaces and high altitude.
 - » **Simón Bolívar Avenue** in Quito is the frequent location of serious and fatal crashes. The road has more than 30 curves over 55 km (34 miles). Drink driving, drug use, speeding and running through traffic lights are factors in many crashes. Areas on the road that are particularly prone to crashes include the roundabout at Zambiza; the roundabout at Carapungo near the El Portal shopping center; and the Oswaldo Guayasamin Interchange.

REGIONAL AND SEASONAL CONDITIONS

- **Many cities**, including Quito, are located at extreme altitudes. Be alert to symptoms of altitude sickness. Dizziness, lack of coordination, headache, fatigue, shortness of breath and nausea can all impair driver judgment and increase road risks.
- **Special permits** are required to enter some Indigenous territories within the Amazon region.
- **Ecuador** is subject to earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic activity, torrential rains, mudslides, floods, fog and forest fires. Severe weather may shut down roads and transportation.
- **There is** frequent seismic activity. There is a high risk of earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and tsunamis. Earthquakes occur across the country, and may be followed by significant aftershocks and

Maximum Speed Limits

Type of road	Maximum speed
Urban areas	60 kph (37 mph)
Rural roads	120 kph (74 mph)
Highways	135 kph (83 mph)

Always adjust speed according to signage, hazards and weather conditions.

Signs are generally pictorial and may not follow European Union conventions.

Example of route sign	Stop	Highway sign	Example of street sign placement	Roundabout sign	Highway directional sign



Regional and Seasonal Conditions, continued

landslides. The northwestern province of Esmeraldas is particularly susceptible.

- **Tsunamis** are a strong risk along the coast and within the Galapagos Archipelago.
- **There are** multiple active volcanoes. Active eruptions are ongoing, and may be followed by “lahars,” which are flows of mixed lava, water, mud and debris. Lahars and falling ash may block roads and impact transportation.
- **Rainy season** is generally from October to May. El Nino weather conditions occur every few years and may trigger heavier than unusual rains and extensive flooding. Flood waters may contain strong currents capable of sweeping away a vehicle. Do not drive or step into flood water.
- **Mudslides** often follow heavy rains. Roads and bridges may be damaged or washed away.
- **Forest fires** occur countrywide, with many fires in the Pichincha province. Strong winds may increase dangers. Smoke can obscure driver vision, and fallen trees or debris may block roads.
- **Heavy fog** is common in mountainous areas, and may impair visibility.
- **Be familiar with emergency procedures.** The Red Cross provides a website and free, downloadable emergency app: <http://www.redcross.org/get-help/prepare-for-emergencies/types-of-emergencies>

TRANSPORTATION

- **Transportation options** include cars, pick-up trucks, buses, bus rapid transit (BRT), mini-bus vans, trolleybuses, taxis, metro, trains and boats.
- **In many** rural areas, pick-up trucks are used as unofficial taxis. Passengers are required to stand in the back of vehicles. Avoid this type of dangerous transportation.
- **Bus routes** link most areas of the country. Main bus stations are not centrally located, and are usually found on city outskirts.
- **Bus and taxi** drivers may not speak English. Carry a copy of your destination written in Spanish.
- **Crashes** involving buses are common. Many buses are in poor condition and are not well maintained.
- **When using** public buses, verify that the company is insured with SPPAT (Servicio Público para Pago de Accidentes de Tránsito; formerly SOAT), which is “mandatory traffic accident public insurance.”
- **Buses are** often overcrowded.

- **Bus destinations** are written on cards placed in front windows.
- **Passengers on** intra- and inter-city buses are frequent targets of crimes, including sexual assault and robbery. Armed assaults occur, particularly in Guayaquil on local city buses.
- **Many buses** have been retrofitted with GPS units to track routes and improve security; safety features include cameras and panic buttons linked directly to the government’s ECU 911 Operations Centre.
- **Bus drivers** often make illegal stops to pick up passengers.
- **There is** a bus rapid transit (BRT) system in Guayaquil.
- **In some** rural communities, vans are used as mini-buses. Vans are unregulated.
- **Quito has** a network of trolleybuses that run on dedicated tracks through the city.
- **Avoid unregistered** taxis. Use only authorized taxis (yellow cabs), and make sure that a municipality registration sticker is displayed on both the windshield and doors.
- **Official taxis** have orange license plates, or white plates with an orange strip on the top.
- **Newer taxis** in Quito and Guayaquil are fitted with interior video cameras.
- **Authorized taxis** can also be booked at booths at Quito and Guayaquil international airports.
- **Insist that** taxi driver reset meter for your ride. Overcharging is common.
- **Express kidnappings** involving criminal taxi drivers occur frequently. Drivers pick up an associate and drive to an ATM where passengers are forced to withdraw money.
- **There is one** metro line, located in Quito. Station openings are underway.
- **Rail travel** is operated by Tren Ecuador. Operations have been suspended until further notice.
- **Rideshare** services are available. Use only rideshare services that have a dispatch app providing vehicle description, license plate number and driver’s name. Verify all information before entering vehicle.
- **Boats** in Ecuadorian waters, including the Galapagos Islands, have been involved in serious maritime mishaps. Use only reputable tour companies, and request an overview of safety features before booking.
- **Some vessels** may not be equipped with life boats or adequate numbers of life vests. Check that these safety features are in place before boarding. For safety, bring your own life preserver.



TRAFFIC REGULATIONS

- **Motorists** may not enter yellow “Metrovia” bus-only lanes in cities where these lanes exist.
- **Drivers should** yield to traffic already within a roundabout.
- **Speed limits** may vary on a single road; speeds are reduced on curving sections.
- **City traffic** restrictions are in place, and are based on the last digits on license plates. Restrictions apply on pre-established days or during peak commuter hours, and vary by city.
- **Drivers** must be at least 18 years of age, and a minimum of 21 to rent a vehicle.
- **Seat belt** use is mandatory for driver and all occupants.
- **Children** younger than 12 years are prohibited from riding in front seats. For safety, children should be seated in safety restraints appropriate to age and size.
- **Helmet use** is compulsory for motorcycle drivers and passengers. Helmets must meet national safety standards and be fastened.
- **Children** younger than seven years may not be passengers on motorcycles. If possible, children should not be motorcycle passengers.
- **Jaywalking** is an offense. Pedestrians are required to use crosswalks.
- **Authorities** may impose curfews on short notice, affecting road travel and transportation.
- **Police may** carry out random breath tests.
- **Police extortion** occurs. “Fines” are demanded from visiting drivers for alleged traffic violations. Police may threaten detention or confiscation of a driver’s passport or other identity documents for nonpayment.

Quito (Capital)

- » The city is positioned at 2,850 meters (9,350 feet). Altitude sickness is common among those unfamiliar with high elevations (see “Regional and Seasonal Conditions”).
- » Driving is not recommended. There are few road signs. Traffic is heavy and unruly.
- » The large roundabout circling Plaza Argentina is a major route. Direction of traffic changes during rush hour.
- » Transportation options include cars, buses, mini-bus vans, trolleybuses, taxis and metro.
- » Many bus and taxi drivers do not speak English. Have your destination written in Spanish.
- » Many serious and fatal crashes involve buses. Drivers may ignore traffic rules and engage in reckless behavior, including making sudden stops in traffic to pick up passengers.
- » Buses are often overcrowded and in poor condition.
- » The city serves as the national hub for buses. Routes link to all major locations.
- » The main bus stations are Terminal Quitumbe south of the city, and Terminal Carcelen north of the city.
- » Some private bus companies operate out of their own terminals near La Mariscal.
- » Bus companies should be insured with SPPAT (Servicio Público para Pago de Accidentes de Tránsito; formerly SOAT), which is “mandatory traffic accident public insurance.”
- » Destinations served by buses appear on cards in front windows.
- » Bus passengers are at risk of assault and robbery. Security measures to reduce bus crime include the installation of cameras, panic buttons and GPS units on many vehicles.
- » Three trolleybus systems run on tracks through the city: EcoVia, running north to south along Avenida 6 de Diciembre; Metrobus, running along America Avenue; and El Trole/Trolebus, which follows 10 de Agosto.
- » El Trole/Trolebus stations and signs are green; Metrobus stations are blue, marked with a “Q;” and EcoVia stations are red, marked with a small “e.”
- » Official city taxis are yellow and have orange license plates, or white plates with an orange band along the top. Videos cameras have been installed in many taxis.
- » Licensed taxis display a municipality registration sticker on doors and windshield.
- » Licensed taxis can be found at taxi booths throughout the city .
- » Overcharging by taxi drivers is common. Request that driver reset meter before departing.
- » Do not use unregistered taxis. There have been many instances of express kidnappings by criminal taxi drivers;



Quito, continued

- » drivers first pick up a colleague, passengers are then driven to an ATM and forced to withdraw funds.
- » Pedestrian infrastructure is underdeveloped. There are crosswalks and pedestrian bridges in some areas. Many pedestrians ignore crosswalks and cross streets at random points, even when heavy traffic is present.
- » Multiple bicycle rental companies operate in the city. There are some dedicated bike paths, but cyclists may be required to share busy roads with motorized traffic in many areas.
- » At some intersections, aggressive “window washers” will approach motorists offering to clean windshields, and may refuse to move from the front of the vehicle. Many window washers will begin to clean windshields and demand to be paid, even if not asked; these individuals may become confrontational.
- » Rideshare services are available. Use only rideshare services that have a dispatch app providing vehicle description, license plate number and driver’s name. Verify all information before entering vehicle.
- » Mariscal Sucre International Airport is located about 18 km (11 miles) east of the city.
- » Official airport taxis are located outside of the arrivals area. Taxis are yellow with “taxi” signs on roofs. License plates are orange, or white with an orange band at the top.
- » Modern coach buses operated by Aeroservicios connect the airport to city center. Tickets may be purchased online.
- » Green city buses link the airport to stations in the northern and southern areas of the city.
- » Most major car rental agencies are represented at the airport. Check condition of car and be sure it is fitted with functioning seatbelts and door locks before accepting rental.

Guayaquil

- » Major port city. Primary departure point for cruises and boat services to the Galapagos Islands.
- » Transportation options include cars, bus rapid transit (BRT), city buses, taxis, metro and boats.
- » Driving is not recommended. Drivers are aggressive. Traffic is chaotic.
- » The road network is confusing. Existing street signs may be in unexpected places including on buildings or fences.
- » Metrovia is a bus rapid transit system that runs in dedicated lanes. Lanes are painted yellow. Motorists are prohibited from entering Metrovia lanes unless they are preparing to make an immediate turn.
- » There are multiple Metrovia bus stations. Buses from individual stations may serve separate destinations.
- » The local city bus system is confusing. Schedules and services may be unreliable.
- » Bus and taxi drivers often do not speak English. Passengers should bring their destination written in Spanish.
- » Buses may be in poor condition and overcrowded.
- » Many buses are recklessly driven, and are frequently involved in serious and fatal road crashes.
- » Drivers may make unauthorized stops to pick up bus passengers.
- » Cards placed in bus windows at the front of vehicles display destination.
- » There are high instances of crime (including robbery, and physical and sexual assault) on local city buses.
- » GPS tracking units, security cameras and panic buttons have been fitted to many buses in an attempt to curb criminal activity.
- » Do not ride in unregistered taxis, which are locally called “taxi amigos.”
- » Yellow, authorized taxis (yellow cabs) display a municipality registration sticker on both the windshield and doors.
- » Official, authorized taxis are fitted with orange license plates or white plates with an orange band on the top of the plate.
- » Newer taxi vehicles have video cameras on the interior of the vehicle.
- » Express kidnappings are common. Criminal taxi drivers and associates drive passengers to an ATM and force them to withdraw funds.
- » Rideshare services are available. Use only rideshare services that have a dispatch app providing vehicle description, license plate number and driver’s name. Verify all information before entering vehicle.



Guayaquil, continued

- » Many boats have been involved in serious maritime mishaps, including tour and cruise boats serving the Galapagos Islands. Use only reputable tour companies. Passengers should request an overview of safety features before booking tickets.
- » Vessels may not be equipped with adequate numbers of life boats or life vests. Check that these safety features are in place before boarding. Bring your own life vest or life preserver.
- » José Joaquín de Olmedo International Airport is 5 km (3 miles) from the city.
- » Transportation to the city is provided by official taxis. Taxis are yellow and have “taxi” signs on roofs, and phone numbers displayed on the sides of vehicles.
- » Most major car rental agencies are represented at the airport. Desks are located on the ground floor of the airport terminal.

ACCOMMODATIONS AND INCLUSIONS FOR MOBILITY CHALLENGED

- **Travelers** with mobility challenges may have difficulty accessing buildings.
- **Sidewalks** in some areas are narrow and poorly maintained. Drivers do not respect marked crossings.
- **Many streets** are steep and lack ramps. Sidewalks may be uneven and have broken surfaces or potholes.
- **Public transportation** does not offer accessibility features.
- **Travelers should** consider groups specializing in adapted travel in Ecuador, which have access to information regarding accessible lodging and restaurants, and offer transportation options equipped with lifts and other accessible features.
- **Dedicated parking spaces** for mobility challenged persons are generally unavailable.

EMERGENCY INFORMATION

- **Responders to emergency numbers** may not speak English.
- **Pre-program** emergency numbers into your phone before departure.
 - » Police, ambulance and fire: 911 or 101
 - » Crime emergency line: 1800-DELITO (335486)
- **Tourism police** are located in Quito in the north, old town, airport and bus terminals; in the towns of Guayaquil and Cuenca; and in the Santa Elena and Imbabura provinces.
- **Responses to** emergency situations may be slow outside of major cities. Urgent medical care may be delayed; medical professionals and first responders may take longer to reach the injured and to provide life-saving care in small towns and rural areas.
- **Ambulances** are not present in all areas of the country and are generally unreliable beyond Quito. Injured or ill travelers may wish to take a private vehicle or taxi to the closest major hospital.
- **Ambulances** are not equipped with state-of-the-art equipment.
- **Appropriate medical care** is generally available only in and near major cities. Care in rural areas and within the Galapagos Islands is well below western standards.
- **Visitors to** the Galapagos Islands should be aware that serious injury or illness generally requires medical evacuation to the mainland or to the US. Evacuation is expensive and may take up to 48 hours to arrange. No air ambulance services are available.
- **Only two** hospitals are located within the Galapagos Islands. The public hospital on San Cristóbal island is well-equipped; the hospital on Santa Cruz Island offers only basic care.
- **Counterfeit medications** are widespread, and may contain dangerous ingredients. Accept medications only from qualified medical professionals.
- **If involved in a crash:**
 - » Call police. Drivers involved in a crash are usually taken into custody immediately, regardless of fault.
 - » Call an ambulance if there are injuries. In crashes involving injury or damages, criminal charges may be applied.
 - » Move vehicle out of the way of other road users if there are no injuries.
 - » Contact insurance company and car rental agency.



ABOUT THE ASSOCIATION FOR SAFE INTERNATIONAL ROAD TRAVEL (ASIRT)

ASIRT is a non-profit humanitarian organization established in memory of Aron Sobel, age 25, who was killed along with 22 other passengers in a Pamukkale Bus Company crash on the roads of Turkey.

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