

Ecuador

Cross-Cultural Considerations

The following are general guidelines to aid business travelers in unfamiliar countries. Customs and practices may vary by socioeconomic status, ethnicity, region, religious or sectarian affiliation, familiarity with Western cultures, and urban/rural setting.

Official Name, Nationality

- Official Name: Republic of Ecuador
- Nationality: Ecuadorian

Conversation

Good manners and unflinching politeness are important. Greet everyone individually upon arrival; greetings may be elaborate. Chitchat is normally exchanged prior to discussing business. Good topics of conversation include family, place of origin, and local sights. Football and local folkloric music are popular. People may ask personal questions. Ecuadorians may discuss things indirectly, rather than be straightforward. Avoid references to Peru, and public expressions of anger or frustration. Urban highland people (*serranos*) may be more reserved than people from coastal cities (*costeños*).

It is illegal to threaten or insult the president or other members of the executive branch.

Currency

The official currency is the U.S. dollar (USD). It is useful to have smaller denominations, especially \$1 notes, as many smaller shops and taxi drivers do not change large bank notes.

Dress

Professional attire is preferred for business for inland cities (dark suit with tie for men; suit or dress for women), with attention to accessories and neat appearance. Dress can be more casual in coastal cities: some men wear a *guayabera* shirt to work; some women wear sleeveless dresses. Shorts are worn only for sports or on the beach. Keep in mind Ecuador's strong, equatorial sun, combined with chilly temperatures year-round for highland locations. Lightweight, natural fiber clothing may be more comfortable in the warm, humid lowland and coastal areas.

Food

The main meal is eaten midday. A dinner party may have drinks and appetizers around 8:00 p.m., with dinner served after 10:00 p.m. Conversation follows a meal (it is rude to leave right away). Parties may end at 5:00 a.m., and include breakfast. In a restaurant, the person who invites usually pays (a businesswoman hosting a meal should arrange payment in advance). Business is usually not discussed at dinner. Women in Ecuador drink wine; visiting women should avoid drinking liquor. Burping is considered rude.

Local cuisine features meats, varieties of corn, and potato-based soups. Traditional foods include *llapingachos* (potato-cheese patties), *locro de papas* (a hearty, potato-cheese stew), marinated fish (*ceviche*) on the coast, and *mote con queso* (a thick, corn-cheese stew). Roasted guinea pig (*cuy*) and roast pork (*hornero*) are specialties of the highlands. *Aji criollo* is a popular hot pepper sauce. Ecuadorians are proud of local tropical fruits, juices, and fruit-flavored ice cream. Ecuadorian-Chinese restaurants, known as *Chifa*, are popular.

Gestures, Touching, and Personal Space

Offer a firm handshake to everyone present in greeting and at departure. Close male friends may exchange hugs (*abrazo*); female friends may exchange air kisses. People may stand quite close or touch during conversation. Maintain eye contact, although indigenous people may respectfully avoid sustained eye contact. Avoid public displays of affection, especially in the highlands. Beckon with the palm down, moving all 4 fingers; avoid pointing or beckoning with the index finger. Twisting a hand back and forth means “no.”

Gifts

Business gifts are exchanged after negotiations are over. Gifts from a visitor’s home region, quality liquor, desk accessories, and small electronic items are popular gifts. Name brands are appreciated. When visiting someone’s home, bring chocolates, wine, or flowers (avoid lilies and marigolds); small presents for children are appreciated. When receiving a gift, effusive thanks are appropriate.

Language(s)

Spanish (*Castellano*) is the official language. Indigenous languages, especially Quichua (a regional dialect of Quechua), are also spoken. Some elite speak English. Quichua and Shuar are official languages of intercultural relations. Use respectful terms of address (*usted* instead of *tú* or *vos*) until invited to use the familiar form.

Translate business card to Spanish on reverse side (include academic or professional title, e.g., *Ingeniero* for an engineer).

Names/Titles

Use academic/professional/religious titles when known (*Señor/Señora/Señorita* as default). Titles are very important, so people may refer to each other by their position/profession (e.g., *Ingeniero* for an engineer); a person with a university degree is addressed as *Licenciado/a*. Ecuadorians use 3 names: the given name; the father’s family name, which is the individual’s surname; followed by the mother’s family name. Friends may use the honorific *Don* (male) or *Doña* (female) with a person’s first name (e.g., Don Eduardo).

Personal

Participation in political activities by foreign nationals is prohibited, including participation in demonstrations, and may result in detention or deportation.

Photography

Ask permission before photographing people; some rural people may refuse or expect payment.

Protocol/Etiquette

Politeness and respectful behavior are valued in this stratified society, and may be expressed with formal language. Respect and deference are shown to people of greater age or status.

Religion

Freedom of religion is provided by law. The population is majority Roman Catholic, with some indigenous faith practices.

Time

Be punctual for business meetings, but understand that local notions of time can be very relaxed; local people may arrive 15-20 minutes later. (Ecuadorians refer to punctual arrival as “Swiss time” and arriving more than half an hour later as “Ecuadorian time.”) Be prepared to wait for important meetings with high status individuals. For social functions, it is polite to arrive 15-30 minutes later than when invited for dinner; 30-45 minutes later than invited for a party. Social events may last all night.

Dates are written day/month/year.

Tipping

Tip 15% in restaurants. It is not necessary to tip taxi drivers, unless they help with luggage. Tip hotel porter a small amount.

Toilets

The sign for restrooms is: SS.HH. Deposit all toilet paper in small bin beside toilet (do not place in toilet). Taps are labeled ‘C’ for hot and ‘F’ for cold.

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