This document is free to download from our website; www.southamericatravelsonline.com for anyone who has an interest in travelling to Ecuador & the Galapagos Islands. The document is made up out of several topics ranging from history and weather, to the geography and things to see and do in the region. The document is set up that you will first have a Peru overview, after which each region is handled individually.

We hope you enjoy reading about what may be your next destination and will get as fascinated as us with this amazing and so diverse country!!

Happy readings,

Your SATO Team
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1) Galapagos Islands

1.1) Galapagos Islands General

The Galapagos Islands are without doubt another of those wonderful South America destinations that cannot be missed by the people looking for unique nature experiences on their holiday. Being part of Ecuador and well connected by flights from the Ecuadorian mainland both from Guayaquil as from Quito, this is a ideal destination for people looking for some days to relax and enjoy all the beauty of this part of the world meanwhile enjoying a great cruise. The islands can also be visited by an island hopping program for several days. Following we will give a small overview of some Galapagos Islands facts, making this such a unique destination.

Some Galapagos Islands facts;

- The Galapagos Islands belong to Ecuador, the closest mainland at about 1000km east.
- The Galapagos Islands contain 15 larger islands, 3 smaller islands and a large number of rocks and islets.
- The largest island is Isabela Island.
- The islands are still being formed by the large volcanic activity of the region.
- The Galapagos National Park was Ecuador’s first national park established in 1959.
- Only Five of the islands are inhabited: Baltra, Floreana, Isabela, San Cristobal and Santa Cruz.

Following is a list of the most important islands of this archipelago;

Baltra (South Seymour) Island; Also known as South Seymour, Baltra is a small flat island located near the center of the Galápagos. This is also the island with the largest airport and probable arrival point for most visitors.

Bartolomé (Bartholomew) Island; Bartolomé Island is a volcanic islet just off the east coast of Santiago Island in the Galápagos Islands group. It is one of the "younger" islands in the Galápagos archipelago.

Darwin (Culpepper) Island; This island is named after Charles Darwin. It has an area of 1.1 square kilometers and a maximum altitude of 168 meters.

Española (Hood) Island; Its name was given in honor of Spain. It also is known as Hood, after Viscount Samuel Hood. It has an area of 60 square kilometers and a maximum altitude of 206 meters. Española is the oldest island at around 3.5 million years, and the southernmost in the group. Due to its remote location, Española has a large number of endemic species.
**Fernandina (Narborough) Island;** The name was given in honor of King Ferdinand II of Aragon, who sponsored the voyage of Columbus. Fernandina has an area of 642 square kilometers and a maximum altitude of 1,494 meters and is the youngest and westernmost island.

**Floreana (Charles or Santa María) Island;** It was named after Juan José Flores, the first President of Ecuador, during whose administration the government of Ecuador took possession of the archipelago. It is also called Santa Maria, after one of the caravels of Columbus. It has an area of 173 square kilometers and a maximum elevation of 640 meters. It is one of the islands with the most interesting human history, and one of the earliest to be inhabited.

**Genovesa (Tower) Island;** The name is derived from Genoa, Italy where it is said Columbus was born. It has an area of 14 square kilometers and a maximum altitude of 76 meters. This island is formed by the remaining edge of a large crater that is submerged.

**Isabela (Albemarle) Island;** This island was named in honor of Queen Isabella. With an area of 4,640 square kilometers (1,792 sq mi), it is the largest island of the Galápagos. Its highest point is Volcán Wolf, with an altitude of 1,707 meters.

**Marchena (Bindloe) Island;** Named after Fray Antonio Marchena, it has an area of 130 square kilometers (50 sq mi) and a maximum altitude of 343 meters.

**North Seymour Island;** Its name was given after an English nobleman, Lord Hugh Seymour. It has an area of 1.9 square kilometers (0.7 sq mi) and a maximum altitude of 28 meters.

**Pinzón (Duncan) Island;** Named after the Pinzón brothers, captains of the Pinta and Niña caravels, it has an area of 18 square kilometers (7 sq mi) and a maximum altitude of 458 meters.

**Pinta (Abingdon) Island;** Named after the Pinta caravel, it has an area of 60 km2 (23 sq mi) and a maximum altitude of 777 meters.

**Rábida (Jervis) Island;** It bears the name of the convent of Rábida, where Columbus left his son during his voyage to the Americas. It has an area of 4.9 square kilometers (1.9 sq mi) and a maximum altitude of 367 meters (1,204 ft). The high amount of iron contained in the lava at Rábida gives it a distinctive red color.

**San Cristóbal (Chatham) Island;** It bears the name of the patron saint of seafarers, "St. Christopher". Its English name was given after William Pitt, 1st Earl of Chatham. It has an area of 558 square kilometers (215 sq mi) and its highest point rises to 730 meters (2395 ft). This is the first island in the Galapagos Archipelago Charles Darwin visited during his voyage on the Beagle.
**Santa Cruz (Indefatigable) Island;** Given the name of the Holy Cross in Spanish, its English name derives from the British vessel HMS Indefatigable. It has an area of 986 square kilometers (381 sq mi) and a maximum altitude of 864 meters (2834 ft). Santa Cruz hosts the largest human population in the archipelago, the town of Puerto Ayora. The Charles Darwin Research Station and the headquarters of the Galápagos National Park Service are located here.

**Santa Fé (Barrington) Island;** Named after a city in Spain, it has an area of 24 square kilometers (9 sq mi) and a maximum altitude of 259 meters

**Santiago (San Salvador, James) Island;** Its name is equivalent to Saint James in English; it is also known as San Salvador, after the first island discovered by Columbus in the Caribbean Sea. This island has an area of 585 square kilometers (226 sq mi) and a maximum altitude of 907 meters

**Wolf (Wenman) Island;** This island was named after the German geologist Theodor Wolf. It has an area of 1.3 square kilometers (0.5 sq mi) and a maximum altitude of 253 meters

**Daphne Major;** A small island directly north of Santa Cruz and directly west of Baltra

**South Plaza Island (Plaza Sur);** It is named in honor of a former president of Ecuador, General Leonidas Plaza. It has an area of 0.13 square kilometers (0.05 sq mi) and a maximum altitude of 23 meters

Another of the interesting Galapagos Island facts is that the islands are located on both the northern and the southern hemisphere with Isla Isabel located directly on the equator. This is one of the reasons for the Galapagos Islands weather and wildlife.

Being home to a large number of animals, the islands are also home to a large number of endemic species. This makes together with the strange geography of the islands up for one of the Galapagos Islands facts that attracts most people visiting the islands.

The climate all year round is very mild with temperatures around 20°C. all year round. The rainy season runs from January to March.

The islands can almost solely be visited as being part of an organized tour. Being protected islands this is to diminish the ecological impact of all the visitors. Most people visit the islands by one of the great cruise ships that offer the Galapagos Cruise. Most of these cruises do more or less the same itinerary and last for 4, 5 or 8 days. Another possibility is to participate in an island hopping program, giving you several overnights on several different islands.

The Galapagos Islands are not a cheap destination due to their location, but a trip here is definitely an unforgettable experience.
1.2) Galapagos Islands History

The Galapagos History started about 3.5 million years ago. Located on the joining of the Nazca and Cocos plates with the Pacific Plate, the islands are located in a very seismic active area.

The modern history of the Galapagos Islands commenced with the (accidental) European discovery of the Galápagos when De Berlanga's (the 4th Bishop of Panama, who was on his way to visit Peru to settle a dispute between the Peruvian conquistadores) vessel drifted off course when the winds diminished, and his party reached the islands on 10 March 1535. Nevertheless, modern studies prove that there has been presence from sailor on the islands before this but as no remains of graves, ceremonial vessels and constructions have ever been found, it was concluded that no permanent settlement occurred at the time.

In the Galapagos Islands history, the Islands first appeared on the maps around 1570. The islands were named Islands of the Tortoises in reference to the giant tortoises found there.

The first English captain to visit the Galápagos Islands was Richard Hawkins, in 1593. Until the early 19th century, the archipelago was often used as a hideout by mostly English pirates who pillaged Spanish galleons carrying gold and silver from South America to Spain.

In 1793, James Colnett was one of the first to actually note that unique fauna and flora of the islands and started to described it. One of the effects was that whalers and hunters for the giant tortoise came to the islands and seriously diminished the tortoise and whale population. The presence of these sailors, pirates and whalers left also other “scars” in the Galapagos History such as immense fires and the extension of several animals.

In 1832, Ecuador annexed the Galápagos Islands naming them the Archipelago of Ecuador. This new name added to several names that had been, and are still, used to refer to the archipelago. The first governor of Galápagos, General José de Villamil, brought a group of convicts to populate the island of Floreana, and in October 1832, some artisans and farmers joined them.

On 15 September 1835 one of the most famous visitors arrived to the Galapagos Islands to revalue the importance of the Galapagos History to the scientific world. The voyage of the Beagle brought the young naturalist Charles Darwin to these islands. Being primarily a geologist at the time, Darwin was impressed by the quantity of volcanic craters they saw, later referring to the archipelago as "that land of craters." His study of several volcanic formations over the 5 weeks he stayed in the islands, led to several important geological discoveries, including the first, correct explanation for how volcanic tuff is formed. During his time on the islands, Darwin became more and more aware of the geographical differences between the islands and the fact that many of them contained endemic animal and plant species. These facts were crucial in Darwin’s development of his theory of natural selection explaining evolution, which was presented in The Origin of Species.
In 1920’s and 30’s, a small wave of European settlers arrived in the islands. Ecuadorian laws provided all colonists with the possibility of receiving twenty hectares each of free land, the right to maintain their citizenship, freedom from taxation for the first ten years in Galapagos, and the right to hunt and fish freely on all uninhabited islands where they might settle.

During World War II, Ecuador authorized the United States to establish a naval base in Baltra Island, and radar stations in other strategic locations. Baltra was established as a US Air Force base. Crews stationed at Baltra patrolled the Pacific for enemy submarines, as well as provided protection for the Panama Canal. After the war, the facilities were given to the government of Ecuador. Today, the island continues as an official Ecuadorian military base. The foundations and other remains of the US base can still be seen as one crosses the island.

The Galápagos became a national park in 1959, and tourism started in the 1960s, imposing several restrictions upon the human population already living on the island. Today most people on the island live from tourism and the islands are visited all year round.

1.3) Galapagos Islands Museums
The Galapagos Islands museums do not really exist but the one centre that can classify as a Galapagos Islands Museums is the Charles Darwin Research Station. This centre is a biological research station operated by the Charles Darwin Foundation. It is located in Puerto Ayora on Santa Cruz Island in the Galapagos Islands, with satellite offices on Isabela and San Cristóbal islands.

The station established in 1964 in Puerto Ayora, Santa Cruz Island, serves as a base for Ecuadorian and foreign scientists who work constantly on research and projects for conservation of the Galapagos terrestrial and marine ecosystems. The Charles Darwin Research Station has a Natural History Interpretation Centre and also carries out educational projects in support of conservation.

The objectives of the Charles Darwin Research station is to conduct scientific research and environmental education for conservation. The Station has a team of over a hundred scientists, educators, volunteers, research students and support staff from all over the world.

The research center can be visited and one can see the large number of animals held here for observation and study. The Charles Darwin Research station also protects the last tortoise of a kind that is virtually extinct.
1.4) Galapagos Islands weather

When is the best time to visit Galapagos? Galapagos is a place that can be visited at any time. There are two seasons and the warmest is between December to May and it is the time when the sky is mostly clear and the sun shines strongly. If you love to dive in amazing places, the best time to visit Galapagos is from June to November. During this season the weather is a little cold but it gives you the chance to enjoy the best from Galapagos' famous marine reserve.

**Galapagos Islands Weather; Dry Season**

From June to December the southern trade winds bring the colder Humbolt current north to the Galapagos. This means that the water is cooler, and a layer of high atmosphere mist pervades the island skies. In effect, the highlands of the larger islands are kept green and lush, while the sea level islands and shorelines have little precipitation.

During this season tourist may observe a big amount of species around the islands or the sea such as: giant tortoises, Humpback whales, blue-footed boobies, cormorants, oystercatchers, lava lizards, Galapagos hawks, and masked boobies, swallow-tailed gulls, sea lions, lava herons, brown noddies, penguins, etc. Due to the water temperature it is the perfect time for diving.

**Galapagos Islands Weather; Warm Season**

December to May - The time period between December and May is considered the "warm season". During this warmer season, the Galapagos' climate is more tropical with daily rain and cloudier skies. Also, the ocean temperature is warmer for swimming and snorkeling.

During this season tourist may observe a big amount of species around the islands or the sea such as: marine iguanas, sea turtle, land iguanas, flamingos, white-cheeked pintails, masked boobies, marine iguanas, albatross, blue-footed boobies, etc. Due to the water conditions snorkeling is the recommended activity during these months.

**Galapagos Islands Weather; The average water temperature during the year:**

January to June: from 70°F (21°C) to 80°F (27°C)

July to December: from 65°F (18°C) to 75°F (23°C)
Weather changes as altitude increases in the large islands. Temperature decreases gradually with altitude, while precipitation increases due to the condensation of moisture in clouds on the slopes. There is a large range in precipitation from one place to another, not only with altitude, but also depending on the location of the islands, and also with the seasons.

Nevertheless the Galapagos Islands weather conditions make that every season has its specialty and specific wild life to be seen. This is why this is a destination one can visit all year round. For people coming back to this destination, it is recommended to come in another season than the first time to enjoy the whole experience again with a new season.

1.5) Galapagos Islands Geography
Located over 1000 km from the South American continent, the Galapagos Islands (officially named the Archipelago of Colon) are a dynamic region constantly changing with volcanic eruptions, new lava fields forming and islands eroding and expanding.

In total land area, the islands are (7880 sq. km and in the total geographical area from Darwin Island to San Cristobal and Espanola, 45,000 sq. km.

The largest island is Isabela, at 4855 sq. km, while it makes up close to half the land area of the Galapagos, is still less than half the size of the island of Hawaii. Its largest volcano, Volcan Wolf has maximum altitude of 1707 m making it the highest point in the archipelago. Each major island being part of the Galapagos Islands Geography, with the exception of the largest island, Isabela, consists of a single large shield volcano. Isabela was formed from six volcanoes joined above sea level. The islands all rose from the ocean floor as the tops of volcanoes, possibly during the Pliocene era, and have never been connected by land to any mainland area. Today, the Galapagos Islands remain one of the most active oceanic volcano areas on Earth.

Just as the extraordinary wildlife of the Galapagos Islands is critical to the study of biology, the unique geology of the islands has implications for the whole planet. In geological terms, the Galapagos Islands geography is quite young, probably no more than five million years old. Some of the westernmost islands, which are the most volcanically active, are actually still forming. Fernandina, for example, at its current rate of activity, may one day expand to meet the shores of Isabela, creating a single, large island. As these amazing changes take place, scientists can observe the effects of the tides, wind and weather on the process.

Though the islands are now quite isolated, at 600 miles from the nearest mainland, some biologists believe that the Coco tectonic plate, which runs under the sea and extends almost the entire distance from Costa Rica to the northern islands, was once a land bridge. These biologists use this theory to explain how some of the life on the Galapagos Islands arrived there, but it has not yet been proven. Although many species of flora and fauna that thrive on the Galapagos
Islands resemble those native to South America, they have evolved so extensively in isolation that they now appear very different from their mainland ancestors.

There are four main ecosystems in the Galapagos Islands, which have been formed over time by wind patterns, differences in elevation and other Galapagos Islands geography characteristics.

Today, there are human settlements on four of the major islands. Tourism is the main business, though cattle and coffee are two popular exports.

1.6) Things to see on the Galapagos Islands

Galapagos Islands Tours

People coming to do a Galapagos Islands Tours will be looking for a unique experience and will be rewarded for their interest. Doing one of the Galapagos Islands Tours is an experience few will forget. Most people visiting the islands do this with a cruise. The cruises on the Galapagos Islands give you the chance to spend a lot of time on the sea, enjoying the islands from the sea and on land. During a cruise you will have several daily excursions, going from visiting the islands and their sites to seeing and experiencing wildlife through actually scuba diving among it.

There are several different Galapagos Cruise boats most of them quite luxurious. There are some catamarans and actual sailing boats as well. Most cruises go for 4, 5 or 8 days. Only the 8 day cruise does visit more or less the whole Galapagos Islands territory. Most cruises leave once a week on a fixed day from Baltra Island as this is the Galapagos Islands biggest airport. On the fourth or fifth day they pass by Baltra Island again and drive the other five or four day loop. The more luxurious sailing boats have a somewhat different route and do not pass by Baltra again.

In general the bigger boats and the catamarans are the most stable boats. The sea is in general quite calm but can have some rougher weather, especially in the months of June till August.

The other Galapagos Islands Tours on offer are Island Hopping programs. These are land based programs that will allow you to stay on some of the four principal islands and do the excursions between them. In general these Galapagos Islands tours are offered starting with weeklong programs.
Galapagos Islands Attractions;

The main Galapagos Islands attractions are of course the large numbers of fauna and flora that mysteriously live on these islands. Following is a short overview of the most important sights and fauna and flora that you can discover on the islands during the Galapagos Islands tours.

**Baltra Island;** The Island is very arid, and vegetation consists of salt bushes, prickly pear cacti and palo santo trees. After being extend on the island due to an experiment, land iguanas were reintroduced to Baltra. As of 1997, scientists counted 97 iguanas living on Baltra; 13 of which were born on the islands.

**Bartolomé Island;** This Island is one of the few that is home to the Galapagos penguin which is the only wild penguin species to live on the equator. The green turtle is another animal that resides on the island.

**Española Island;** This Island is known for its large number of endemic species. It has its own species of lava lizard, mockingbird, and tortoise. Española's marine iguanas exhibit a distinctive red coloration change during the breeding season. Española is the only place where the waved albatross nests. Some of the birds have attempted to breed on Genovesa Island, but unsuccessfully. Española's steep cliffs serve as the perfect runways for these birds, which take off for their ocean feeding grounds near the mainland of Ecuador and Peru.

**Fernandina Island;** One of the main points of interest to visitors is the Punta Espinosa; a narrow stretch of land where hundreds of marine iguanas gather, largely on black lava rocks. The famous flightless cormorants inhabit this island, as do Galápagos penguins, pelicans, Galápagos sea lions and Galápagos fur seals. Different types of lava flows can be compared, and the mangrove forests can be observed.

**Floreana Island;** This Island known for its Flamingos and green sea turtles nest (December to May) on this island. One of the most famous Galapagos Islands attractions can also be found here; Post Office Bay, since the 18th century whalers kept a wooden barrel that served as post office so that mail could be picked up and delivered to their destinations, mainly Europe and the United States, by ships on their way home. At the “Devil's Crown”, an underwater volcanic cone and coral formations are found.

**Isabela Island;** Some of the most famous inhabitants of this island are Galápagos penguins, flightless cormorants, marine iguanas, pelicans and Sally Lightfoot crabs. At the skirts and calderas of the volcanos of Isabela, one can also see land iguanas and Galápagos tortoises. The third-largest human settlement of the archipelago, Puerto Villamil, is located at the southeastern tip of the island. It is the only island to have the equator run across it. It is also the only place in the world where a penguin can be in its natural habitat in the Northern Hemisphere.
North Seymour; This Island is home to a large population of blue-footed boobies and swallow-tailed gulls. It hosts one of the largest populations of frigate birds.

San Cristóbal Island; This island hosts frigate birds, sea lions, giant tortoises, blue- and red-footed boobies, tropicbirds, marine iguanas, dolphins and swallow-tailed gulls. The largest freshwater lake in the archipelago, Laguna El Junco, is located in the highlands of San Cristóbal. The capital of the province of Galápagos, Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, lies at the southern tip of the island.

Santa Cruz Island; This Island hosts the largest human population in the archipelago, the town of Puerto Ayora. The Charles Darwin Research Station and the headquarters of the Galápagos National Park Service are located here. The Highlands of Santa Cruz offer exuberant flora, and are famous for the lava tunnels. Large tortoise populations are found here. Black Turtle Cove is a site surrounded by mangroves, which sea turtles, rays and small sharks sometimes use as a mating area. Cerro Dragón, known for its flamingo lagoon, is also located here, and along the trail one may see land iguanas foraging.

Of course this is by far a complete list and many other animals and sea life can be seen on Galapagos Islands tours throughout the different seasons.
2) Ecuador

2.1) Ecuador General
This country located on the Equator and hence explaining its name; Ecuador is composed one of the smaller countries located in South America, but also one of the most diverse. The fact that in Ecuador you can find beaches, mountains and jungle in one country and can easily reach all of these by road make this country a perfect stop for people wanting to get to know these three regions in a relatively short period of time. Ecuadorian cities also holds some of the oldest colonial centers in South America, especially Quito and Cuenca.

Driving through this country will for sure make you aware of the intense and awesome nature this country has to offer. Andes mountains crossing straight through the country with the pacific coast on one side and the Amazon Rainforest on the other make that this country has to offer something for all types of travelers.

Stand with one foot in each hemisphere, wonder at one of the Inca ruins that can be found here, discover colonial cities and relax on the beach, it is all possible in this country and even more in relatively small distances and travelling time.

2.2) History of Ecuador
Evidence of human cultures in Ecuador exists from circa 3500 BC. Many civilizations rose throughout Ecuador, such as the Valdivia Culture and Machalilla Culture on the coast, the Quitus (near present day Quito) and the Cañari (near present day Cuenca). Each civilization developed its own distinctive architecture, pottery, and religious interests, although consolidated under a confederation called the Shyris, until the arrival of the Inca from the South. After years of fiery resistance by the Cañaris and other tribes, as demonstrated by the battle of Yahuarcocha (Blood Lake) where thousands of resistance fighters were killed and thrown in the lake, the region fell to the Incan expansion and was assimilated loosely into the Incan empire.

Through a succession of wars and marriages among the nations that inhabited the valley, the region became part of the Inca Empire in 1463. When the Spanish conquistadors arrived from the north, the Inca Empire was ruled by Huayna Capac, who had two sons: Atahualpa, being in charge of the northern parts of the empire, and Huascar, seated in the Incan capital Cusco. Upon Huayna Capac's death in 1525, the empire was divided in two: Atahualpa received the north, with his capital in Quito; Huascar received the south, with its capital in Cusco. In 1530, Atahualpa defeated Huascar and conquered the entire empire.
On arrival of the conquistadores In 1563, Quito became the seat of a real audiencia (administrative district) of Spain and part of the Vice-Royalty of Lima, and later the Vice-Royalty of Nueva Granada. The local population suffered a drastic decline due to the battles with the Spanish but even more through the diseases brought by the Spanish conquistadores.

Quito the capital is known to have its importance from before the time of the Inca but under the Inca turned into the capital of the northern part of the empire. When the Spanish came the city grew slowly but it is supposedly here that on August 10, 1809 (the national holiday) the first call for independence from Spain was made in Latin America (“Primer Grito de la Independencia”). On October 9, 1820, Guayaquil became the first city in Ecuador to gain its independence from Spain. On May 24, 1822, the rest of Ecuador gained its independence after Antonio José de Sucre defeated the Spanish Royalist forces at the Battle of Pichincha, near Quito. Following the battle, Ecuador joined Simón Bolívar’s Republic of Gran Colombia - joining with modern day Colombia and Venezuela – only to become a republic in 1830.

The modern history of Ecuador has always been marked by the rapid succession of leaders and rulers some non-democratic elected ones. Other marks in the modern history of Ecuador are the long-lasting border dispute with Peru during which Peru in the end was favored and periods of recession and popular unrest that led to a return to populist politics and domestic military interventions in the 1960s.

The last couple of years have been marked by the election of Rafael Correa as president and his ties to Hugo Chavez, president of Venezuela and the main face of the Bolivarian Revolution. Under his presidency the relationships with neighboring countries have not been at best seeing the incursion of the Colombian army to destroy a military base of the FARC, the Colombian guerrilla and a recent dispute with Peru over international waters. In 2010 Correa survived a supposed coupé d’état and came out with relatively high popularity figures.
2.3) Ecuador Museums
The most important and known Ecuador Museums are located in the country’s two main cities; Quito and Guayaquil. In Quito one can find the following Ecuador Museums;

**Museo de la Ciudad** - A museum dedicated to the history of Quito. Located just east of the Plaza de Santo Domingo, this museum is housed in Quito's oldest building, which dates back to 1565.

**Museo Casa de Sucre** - This museum is dedicated to life of Mariscal Antonio José de Sucre, a hero of Ecuadorian independence. The ground floor has an array of weapons and military relics, many of which belonged to Sucre himself. The second floor has a lively exhibition of what the city and country would have looked like in the century of Sucre.

**Museo Nacional del Banco Central del Ecuador** - This art museum houses one of the bigger collections of art in the Ecuador Museums. Each one covers a different time period, ranging from prehistory to modern Ecuador. The museum also offers changing exhibitions at times.

One the newest and most impressive Ecuador museums can be found in Guayaquil. **The Museo Antropologico y de Arte Contemporaneo (MAAC)** is a state-of-the-art museum exhibiting Ecuadorian, Latin American and Pre-Columbian art and culture. MAAC is located on the Malecón 2000, the renovated river walk in Guayaquil.

2.4) Ecuador Weather
Never mind the fact that Ecuador is located on the Equator, the Ecuador weather is mostly affected by the altitude and the proximity to the Equator. The coastal regions and the Amazon Basin are hot and humid almost all year round. Especially the wet season from December through March can be very hot and wet at times. The highlands are mostly influenced by the altitude. The sun can be very strong and bright during the day but as the night falls temperatures will always drop quite a bit, creating the typical highland extreme weather. In general the whole of Ecuador knows two seasons the wet and the dry season. The wet season runs from December through April and the dry season from May through November.

2.5) Ecuador Geography
Ecuador, one of the smaller countries in South America is bound in the west by the Pacific Ocean. In the South they have a large border with Peru, which is still disputed, and in the north and east with Colombia.

The Ecuador geography is marked by the three regions of the country. The coast is made up out of wetlands and plains that slowly head up to higher altitudes providing more and more cloud forest until you reach the Andes mountain range. This part of the country is the most populated with the biggest city and main national port, Guayaquil as main populated area.
The Sierra or Andes highlands are made up out of a large number of volcanoes, mountain peaks and plains. On the lower slopes of the Andes you can cloud forests, in the west leading to the coast and in the east to the Amazon basin. Ecuador has a large number of active and inactive volcanoes, the most famous being the Cotopaxi located at two hours from Quito. This active volcano is also one of the highest active volcanoes in the world with an altitude of 5897 meters.

In the east one can find the Occidental or Jungle region. This region is made up out of some large rivers such as the Napo and Putomayo rivers which flow down from the Andes to the humid Amazon basin. This part of Ecuador Geography is the least populated, but nevertheless a relatively easy accessible part of the Amazon Rainforest. There are no large cities in this area and there is still a large presence of indigenous populations.

Ecuador geography, including the Galapagos Islands is one of the most diverse in South America and Ecuador hence belongs to one of the 17 mega diverse countries in the world. This fact is especially amazing looking at the size of Ecuador, more or less the size of the US state of Nevada.

**2.6) Things to do in Ecuador**

Being such a diverse country, obviously there is such a scale of things to do in Ecuador that one will probably not get the chance to do them all in one trip. Nevertheless in case you would like to start planning, here are some of the most popular things to do in Ecuador.

**Visit the Galapagos Islands;**

The Galapagos Islands; probably the most important Ecuador tourist attraction the country has to offer and ecological seen one of the most important areas in the world. This archipelago made up out of several small and larger islands is besides a geologically active and amazing sight is also home to several species of birds, mammals and reptiles only found on these islands. The Islands themselves also make quite the site to see. Build on volcanic rocks and still active volcanoes, the Galapagos Islands represent some of the more active places on this globe. Visiting these islands is definitely one of the most unique things to do in Ecuador.

**Visit Quito and the middle of the world monument**

Lending its name from its location, Ecuador is obviously is quite influenced by its closeness to the Equator. This is one of the few places on the earth where the equator runs through a mountainous area. It crosses the Andes at about 28 km north of Quito, Making Quito one of the capitals closest to the Equator in the world. Quito, another main Ecuador tourist attraction is also known for its historical city centre, one of the oldest in South America. Located on the Equator you will find another of the Ecuador tourist attractions; The Middle of the World Museum. This museum is located on what was thought to be the Equator but later on in the GPS era, they found out that the Equator was located 500 meters to the north. This is where strangely enough one can find an ancient Inca Ruin, precisely located on the Equator. You can also find a small local museum here were some of the famous Equator tests can be taken.
Visit Guayaquil;

Guayaquil is Ecuador’s biggest city with a population of over 3 million it also is the country’s economically most thriving city. The city has a mild savanna like climate all year round with temperatures almost never below 20°C Celsius. Humidity is relatively high giving the city a bit of a jungle feel to it. The city has a colonial centre, but is elaborated with more modern neighborhoods and parks. One of the most important sights of the city and one of the new Ecuador tourist attractions is the Malecon 2000, a beautiful boardwalk connecting the city along the river Guayas. This boardwalk holds besides the usual cafes and parks, some of Ecuador’s best museums, such as the Anthropological Museum. Another sight is the Guayas Ship docked at the Malecon.

Visit Baños and its waterfalls;

Based in the Central Cordillera, part of the Andes and known for its high number of volcanoes this part of Ecuador is known for its impressive landscape and the many thermal hot springs in the region. Being a region in between the low jungle and the high Andes Mountains, the region is characterized by a large number of spectacular waterfalls and rapid currents. Besides being quite the sight, this is also the place for another of the many adventurous things to do in Ecuador; Wild River rafting and canopying.

See some of the many volcanoes in Ecuador;

Ecuador mainland and the Galapagos Islands together hold almost 50 active and non-active volcanoes. Ecuador also holds some of the highest volcanoes in the world such as the Cotopaxi and Chimborazo volcano. Another Ecuador tourist attraction is visiting the avenue of volcanoes, an area from where many of the volcanoes can be seen some from close by.

Visit “El Oriente” Ecuador’s Amazon Rainforest;

The Ecuadorian Rainforest, locally known as “El Oriente” makes up almost half of the country and like in the other Amazon Rainforest countries, is very little populated. The region holds many species of fauna and flora. The main mode of transport in the region is by river, the main Amazon Rivers in Ecuador are the Napo and Putumayo River. There are some really nice eco lodges to be found here where one can really grasp the essence of living in the Amazon Rainforest.