



# Beautiful Quito



PHOTOGRAPHS: QUITO VISITOR'S BUREAU

Set in the Andean mountains, Ecuador's capital city, Quito, is full of history, culture and tradition. GILLIAN EVANS reports.

For language travellers, Quito has a major draw. "The Spanish spoken in Quito is a clear spoken Spanish [with] no [particular] accent," claims Norbert Stimpfig at Lector Academia de Quito. "Also, the Quiteños speak slowly and clearly and they also like to hold a conversation with foreigners."

But Quito is not only ideal because of its linguistic attractions. Quito is, according to Andrea Diehlmann, Student Coordinator at Centro de Español Vida Verde, "one of the most beautiful cities in Latin America". She continues, "Here students experience a lot of history, culture, fantastic architecture and different traditions."

Enrique Torres at Ordex Cultural Exchange/Interdeco adds, "Quito is a fun city with many tourist attractions and a variety of museums."

One of Quito's main attractions is the Old City, a

designated Unesco World Heritage Site. With its labyrinth of narrow cobbled streets, magnificent colonial architecture and beautiful Plazas, it is a popular place for visitors and students alike. "During their free time, [students] love to explore the Old Town in Quito," confirms Monica Barreno at Galapagos Spanish School. "Lovely churches and a lot of history awaits visitors there."

One of Quito's best-loved attractions is La Comaniade Jesus Church (1), which dates from the 17th century and has an interior

adorned with seven tons of gold leaf. Another popular trip is to *El Panecillo* (2), which translates as "little bread loaf". Topped by the huge statue of the *Virgen de Quito* (3), a winged Virgin Mary, it offers breathtaking views of the city surrounded by mountains and volcanoes. Other highlights include a ride on the *teleferico* (cable car), the Central Bank Museum, home to an impressive collection of pre-Columbian artefacts, and the Plaza de la Independencia (4) with the President's Palace.

But there is also much more to discover, as Kirsten, a 22-year-old US student studying at Academia de Español Quito, recounts.

"There are lots of cool places to hang out in Quito," she says. "On nice days the Carolina Park is a great place to run, play sports, have a picnic or visit the many attractions located there such as the Botanical Gardens or the Natural History Museum."

Quito also hosts a great nightlife. Kjetil Haugan at Simon Bolivar Spanish School reports that the most popular night-time haunts are in the Mariscal area, "which has been transformed into a *zona Rosa* with bars, restaurants and nightclubs, and is crowded with tourists throughout the

## The locals - 'Quiteños'

Local Quiteños speak a clear Spanish that is easy for language students to understand. Furthermore, Quiteños are friendly people and, as schools in Quito insist, always willing to talk to foreigners





## Agent viewpoints

"We only represent Academia Latinoamericana de Español in Ecuador. Ecuador is quite popular with our clients, [who are] from Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Faroe Islands, Greenland, France and Germany. But they don't necessarily choose only Ecuador, as the Academia Latinoamericana de Español also proposes the possibility to extend lessons in their Peruvian and Bolivian schools. Thus, we have some clients combining three countries. Most of our students [also] combine their Spanish course with volunteering in social institutions in Quito (or in national parks and Galapagos). There's something for everyone [in Quito] – adventure, shopping, culture or just relaxing."

**Marion Andersen, EXIS, Denmark**

"Ecuador is truly one of the most surprising and delightful countries anyone could ever want to visit and enjoy. This is because of its unique location on the Equator, its accessible size, affordable

economy, breathtaking natural beauty, but most of all its loving and attentive people. Quito, [being] the capital and being centrally located, is ideal for its cultural and historic centres, in addition to being the best location for all inter-country travels to any area you can imagine: the unforgettable Galapagos islands, Amazon basin, and alpine-like Paramo of the central highlands. Students are surprised by the rich Indian culture, the mix of modern architecture juxtaposed against the ice-capped volcanoes you can see in the distance, along with its cool climate. The kind, generous and loving nature of the people of Quito is typical of all people of Ecuador. They are so warm and welcoming to foreigners [and] this is what everyone who has been there will remember forever. The food is Andean and is full of fresh flavors of seafood, along with a typical corn/rice/potato based menu."

**Suzanne Bell, Academia Latinoamericana de Español, USA**

"In Ecuador we only offer language courses in Quito. The living expenses are quite low compared to other countries in Latin America. Quito is the ideal place to learn the language as the Quiteños speak a very clear Spanish, easy to learn for every student. Our partner school in Quito offers very good tuition in small classes or individual tuition. The colourful market in Otavalo is one of the most frequented sights in Ecuador. Besides, students are interested in climbing the volcanoes and visiting the hot springs in Baños. Some students enjoy a trip to the rainforest or to the Galapagos Islands. Most students are surprised about the differences between the nice old buildings in the old city and the modern style in northern Quito. A lot of students are impressed about the very kind and helpful people and their strong family bonds. The food is quite surprising."

**Petra Muller, iST Internationale Sprach-und Studienreisen, Germany**

salsa and cooking lessons, offer city tours by day and night, and tours to the region at the weekends." For those wishing to travel further, Quito is, according to Torres, "strategically located to travel to popular destinations such as the Amazon region – five hours – the beach – four-to-five hours – and most flights to Galapagos also depart from here".

As well as the organised activities, students at Academia de Español Quito are often treated to spontaneous activities. Gustavo Moya at the school relates, "One afternoon students may get private salsa lessons in order to show off on Saturday night. Another time, you could be heading back from the museum when your teacher points out a little café that you might never have noticed and inside you enjoy the best *humitas* (corn bread) and coffee in the city."

Quito's main festival, Las Fiestas de Quito, takes place on 5 and 6 December to celebrate the Spanish foundation of the city. During

these two days, the city is alive with street parties and other organised events. "There are a lot of young people partying around," says Moya, "but there are also official celebrations such as concerts, *Reina de Quito* pageant, art shows and bull fights." Other events throughout the year include Carnival during February/March and the Holy Week festivities at Easter. "Easter is a special time for our catholic population," relates Moya. "There is a special, very tasty soup that gathers all the grains of the harvest, and on Good Friday the famous massive Quito procession [takes place]."

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