



PREPARING FOR ECUADOR AND THE GALÁPAGOS

A practical guide from Cometa Travel

Preparing and packing for your trip is part of the excitement. It is the moment when your adventure starts to feel real. It can also bring up plenty of questions, and we are here to help along the way.

Ecuador may be small for South America, but its four distinct regions create completely different travel experiences. In one trip, you can hike in the Andes, explore the Amazon rainforest, swim with sea lions in the Galápagos, and unwind on Pacific beaches. Each region calls for a slightly different approach to packing, so the key is to pack light but pack smart.

This guide, prepared by Cometa Travel, brings together practical advice for traveling in Ecuador and the Galápagos Islands, including entry requirements, health tips, packing essentials, money matters, and Galápagos travel procedures, all based on real experience on the ground. It may feel like a lot at first, but every section is designed to help you feel prepared, confident, and ready to enjoy the journey.

Enjoy the planning process; it is all part of the adventure. If you feel something could be added or improved, we would genuinely love to hear your feedback.

We have prepared this guide with great care and based it on real travel experience, though information may change over time and cannot be guaranteed or considered legally binding.

CONTENT:

1. Before You Travel	1
2. Packing For Ecuador	4
3. Packing List for Ecuador.....	4
4. Amazon Add-On	7
5. Galápagos Essentials	8
6. Packing List For Galápagos	9
7. Galápagos – FAQs.....	12
8. A Few Final Notes	13

1. Before You Travel

Passport & Visa

Your passport must be valid for at least six months from your date of entry and should be in good condition. It is also a good idea to keep a clear color copy stored separately from the original.

Visa

Visas are not required for citizens of the U.S., Canada, the UK, Australia, and most European countries for stays in Ecuador of up to 90 days. Still, it's a good idea to confirm current entry requirements with your local immigration office or the nearest Ecuadorian consulate before traveling, as regulations can change.

Travel Checklist

A little preparation before departure can save a lot of stress later.

- ✓ Scan your important documents and store them securely in an encrypted cloud service, app, or email them to yourself. That way, you will always have access to copies if needed.
- ✓ Keep a record of important passwords, ideally stored securely or encrypted.
- ✓ Save key phone numbers, including your insurance provider, family doctor, and your credit card company's 24/7 emergency hotline.
- ✓ Save the emergency contact details of your travel agent in Ecuador and share them with family or friends at home.
- ✓ Complete your online check-in before heading to the airport.
- ✓ Make sure you have all essential contact details for your destination, including your guide, travel agent, hotels, and a printed copy of your itinerary.
- ✓ Print copies of important documents, such as hotel confirmations, itineraries, and more (so as not to depend on your phone and internet to see them).
- ✓ Fully charge your electronic devices before departure.

- ✓ Back up your phone, laptop, or tablet. It helps you recover more easily if something is lost or stolen during the trip.
- ✓ Clearly label your luggage so it is easy to recognize. Colorful luggage straps or belts are especially useful on crowded baggage carousels where many bags look alike. Use a secure combination lock as well.
- ✓ Take a photo of your luggage before checking it in.

★ Helpful Luggage Tip

When checking in your baggage, take a quick photo of your suitcase at the counter with the airline baggage tag visible if possible. If your luggage is delayed or misplaced, having that photo can make identification and claims much easier.

A simple tip that helps a lot:

Always pack an “emergency kit” in your carry-on: a change of clothes, a toothbrush, and essential medications can be invaluable if your checked luggage doesn’t arrive at the same time as you do.

Medical condition

Parts of your journey may take you to remote areas of the highlands, the rainforest, or the Galápagos Islands. If you have a medical condition that could affect your travel experience, we recommend speaking with your doctor before departure.

! **Prescription medicines:** Keep medicines in their original labeled containers and carry them in your hand luggage. Bring a doctor's letter or a copy of your prescriptions, including the generic drug names.

Altitude sickness: Quito sits at 2,850m (9,350ft). Some travelers experience headaches, nausea, or fatigue. Stay hydrated, avoid alcohol for the first 24-48 hours, consider medication (consult doctor).

Spend 2-3 days in Quito or higher zones for acclimation before heading higher (e.g., Cotopaxi at 4,800m/15,750 ft).

Insurance

! We strongly recommend traveling with comprehensive insurance that includes medical coverage, accidents, trip interruption or cancellation, repatriation, and baggage protection.

Vaccinations

- No vaccinations are currently mandatory for travel to Ecuador, but some are recommended. We suggest consulting your doctor or travel clinic before departure. Do it at least 2-3 months in advance.
- Common recommendations may include Yellow Fever, Hepatitis A and B, Typhoid, Polio, Rabies in certain cases, and Influenza.
- Requirements can vary depending on your recent travel history or country of departure.

! **Important: vaccination guidelines can change at short notice and should always be checked before travel.**

Safety

Ecuador is generally a welcoming destination. As with travel anywhere in the world, a few simple precautions can help you feel more comfortable and enjoy your trip with peace of mind.

- Keep backup copies of your passport, cards, and emergency contacts.
- Avoid displaying phones, jewelry, or valuables in public.
- Use ATMs carefully, protect your PIN, and decline offers of help.
- In the evening, stay aware of your surroundings, keep an eye on your drinks, and carry a copy of your passport.
- After dark, prefer taxis or ride-hailing services and stick to busy, well-lit areas.
- During our tours, we generally recommend returning before nightfall for added comfort and safety.
- Use the hotel safe for valuables and always double-check it before departure.

★ **Helpful trick:** put your room key or a shoe inside so you cannot forget to empty it.

Food & Drinking Water

Ecuadorian food is varied and fresh, with dishes based on rice, potatoes, corn, vegetables, bananas, fish, poultry, and meat. Lunch often includes a soup as a starter.

- Give your body a little time to adjust to new ingredients, spices, and fresh fruit juices.
- Eat fruit only after it has been washed well or peeled, and follow standard precautions with water and ice.
- Avoid drinking tap water. For brushing teeth and showering, municipally treated water is generally considered fine.

★ **Wash your hands regularly and thoroughly, and use disinfectant gel or wipes.**

Money & ATM

Official currency in Ecuador and the Galápagos Islands: since 2000, the **US dollar (USD)**.

\$ Bills up to USD 20 are preferred; USD 50 and 100 bills are often (mostly) refused. In addition to US notes and coins, there are national cent coins, easily recognizable by clearly readable numbers (valid only in Ecuador).

- \$ Credit cards are widely accepted. Ideally, carry a second card as backup.
- \$ Your card should never be taken away; the card reader must be visible or brought to your table.
- \$ Card fees in Ecuador are high, usually included, but for larger amounts (especially in Galápagos), an additional 5-10% may be charged.
- ★ For markets, small souvenir shops, taxis, and tips, you should carry some cash.

ATMs

ATMs are widely available throughout Ecuador and the Galápagos Islands.

- ! When withdrawing cash, stay aware of your surroundings.
- ! Make sure no one is standing too close, including anyone offering assistance, and never accept help from strangers.
- ! If your card is lost or stolen, block it immediately.
- ★ Before traveling, inform your bank and credit card provider about your trip abroad to reduce the risk of your cards being blocked for unusual international transactions.

Taxes

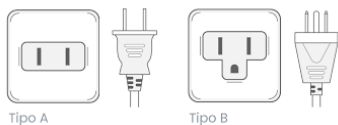
A 15% VAT (IVA, Impuesto al Valor Agregado) applies to most goods and services in Ecuador.

In many mid-range and higher-category restaurants and hotels, a 10% service charge may be added in addition to VAT. These taxes are not always included in listed prices. Look for notes such as “precio incluye impuestos” (taxes included) or “no incluye IVA y servicios” (VAT and services not included).

Internet & E-sims & Electricity

Ecuador's country calling code is **+593**. When dialing internationally, you may see it written as: **00593**.

- Your mobile phone and charger will be very useful for photos, navigation, staying in touch, and sharing your trip. Most hotels in Ecuador offer free Wi Fi.
- Local SIM cards are affordable and easy to find.
- eSIMs such as Airalo, Holafly, Nomad, or similar options are also a very convenient way to stay connected throughout your trip.
- Also remember to bring all necessary charging cables and travel adapters for your camera, mobile phone, laptop, smartwatch, Kindle, and other electronic devices. Ecuador and the Galápagos Islands use the same flat-plug standard as the United States (110 V).
- ★ Also, remember to bring all necessary charging cables and travel adapters for your camera, mobile phone, laptop, Smartwatch, Kindle, and other electronic devices. In Ecuador and on the Galápagos Islands, the same flat plug standard as in the US is used (110 V).



Adventure activities

For activities like canopy tours, rafting, biking, or horseback riding, we recommend choosing reputable, licensed local operators. This helps ensure a safe and enjoyable experience throughout your adventures.

Tipping

Gratuities are always voluntary and at your discretion. That said, in Ecuador, they are a common part of the tourism culture and are appreciated as a reflection of good service, especially given the long hours many tourism professionals work, including weekends and holidays, to make your journey unique.

Indicative guidelines for Mainland Ecuador:

- Tour guides: Small groups: USD 15–25 per day per group // Medium to large groups: USD 5–10 per person per day
- Private drivers: Small groups: USD 10–15 per day per group // Medium to large groups: USD 2–3 per person per day
- Airport transfers: USD 3–5 per vehicle
- Porters: around USD 1 per piece of luggage
- Upscale restaurants: 2.5–5% of the bill, preferably in cash
- Taxis: rounding up the fare is customary
- ★ Gratuities remain voluntary, and these are only guidelines; gratuities can always be adjusted based on service and experience.

2. Packing For Ecuador



Packing for a trip is a special moment; it is the moment when you feel the vacation has truly begun. It often comes with excitement, anticipation, and sometimes a little stress. And that is exactly where we step in.

We have prepared a practical set of recommendations to support your preparation. You will also find a downloadable checklist ready for use.

Rest assured, we are here to support you every step of the way.

Enjoy the planning process!

Ecuador offers very contrasting climates: tropical coast, humid Amazon, temperate Andes valleys, and chilly at night and at higher altitudes. Here's a simple overview by region:

Region	Typical Temperatures
Coast (Costa)	24°C - 32°C (75°F-90°F) year round. Hotter and more humid from December to May.
Andes (Sierra)	7°C - 22°C (45°F to 72°F) depending on elevation. Cities such as Quito, Cuenca, and Otavalo are mild during the day and cool at night.
Amazon (Oriente)	23°C - 31°C (73°F to 88°F). Warm, humid, and rainy throughout the year.
Galápagos Islands	22°C - 31°C (72°F to 88°F) air temperatures. Cooler from June to November and warmer from December to May.

Travel light, dress in layers, and add a change of clothes to your carry-on luggage.

In high-altitude natural areas such as Cotopaxi or Quilotoa, a wool hat and scarf may even be necessary. We recommend the classic "layered or onion look": several lightweight clothing layers that are flexible, functional, easy to combine, and adaptable to changing weather conditions.

3. Packing List for Ecuador

Pack with intention, keeping things light and practical.

- ★ Your essentials will vary depending on the regions you plan to explore in Ecuador.
- ! As a simple precaution, bring one complete change of clothes in your carry-on in case your checked luggage is delayed. This is especially helpful for shorter Galápagos or Amazon trip connections.
- ★ And finally, don't forget the most important things, the ones you can't pack: a positive mindset, flexibility, curiosity, etiquette, and the joy of discovering something new.
- ★ Please adapt this list to your own needs, and feel free to let us know if anything is missing or if you have any personal tips or recommendations that work well for you.

Luggage:

Ideally practical and lightweight:

- Suitcase, duffel bag, or backpack (lockable for flights)
- Daypack
- Rain covers for backpacks or duffel bags to keep them dry and clean at airports, in canoes, or on speedboats
- Lightweight, foldable bag to store part of your luggage at the hotel during overnight or Amazon excursions
- Money belt or neck pouch for cash and passport (ideally with RFID protection)
- Small coin purse for loose change, to have it easily accessible in a daypack or jacket pocket, etc.
- Smart organizers: packing cubes for practical sorting and quick access, and/or compression or vacuum travel bags
- Small combination lock: ideal for added security without the hassle of keys
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- ★ Always carry a few extra plastic bags (liquid bags with a zipper) in your carry-on/hand luggage.
- ! Identify your luggage with a luggage tag, colorful strap, or another easily recognizable marker.

Documents:

- Passport
- Flight ticket, travel itinerary, booking confirmations (vouchers), addresses, and contact details of your agency
- Vaccination record, insurance documents (important: include emergency contacts)

- Optional: diving certification
- Credit card(s), cash
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★ Digitize all documents and emergency contacts and store them in the cloud, email, and on your mobile phone.

Clothing:

- Warm fleece or softshell jacket
- Waterproof breathable jacket (Gore-Tex or similar)
- Rain protection: rain jacket, rain cape/poncho, optionally, but very practical, a foldable umbrella
- Lightweight sweater or cardigan, long and short-sleeved t-shirts, shirts, blouses
- Long and/or quick-drying (trekking) trousers; depending on the destination, also shorts, optional: belt
- Thermal underwear (as a layering piece for warmth and/or as a warmer pair of pajamas in highland hotels)
- Sufficient underwear, bra, and socks (for rain and cloud forest: good socks not slipping inside rubber boots)
- Pyjama
- Swimwear
- Depending on the type of tour/accommodations, a smart casual shirt or blouse will provide added comfort for dinner
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- ★ Tip: A pair of dark (trekking) pants is an ideal option to mix and match without adding extra weight to your luggage
- ★ Our recommendation: Storing clothing in packing cubes or compression bags permits easy packing and quick access.

Footwear:

Often an uncertain theme because it is always space-consuming. Depending on your activities and itinerary, a good pair of well-worn trainers or sneakers may be sufficient for comfortable walking in cities and markets, as well as for light hikes, even on uneven natural terrain.

- Lightweight, sturdy hiking or trekking shoes with good traction
- Sneakers/tennis shoes for city walking, sport, etc.
- Optional: Trekking sandals (such as Teva, Merrell or Keen, etc.)
- Flip-flops for hotel rooms, pools, saunas
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Toiletries:

- Toiletry bag, ideally water-resistant and suitable for hanging
- Shampoo, soap, and conditioner in travel size (solid versions are ideal, as they do not leak). Depending on the hotel category, these are provided as standard bathroom amenities
- Deodorant
- Toothbrush, toothpaste, dental floss
- Cotton swabs, nail care set, tweezers
- For men: razor
- Hairbrush, comb, hair ties/clips
- Makeup (keep it minimal, only the essentials). Tip: compressed disposable wipes for makeup removal
- Facial hydration cream
- For ladies: sufficient menstrual hygiene products. Changes in altitude and climate can affect your cycle.
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- ★ Shower and bath towels are provided in most bathrooms. Tip: pack a small microfiber towel or disposable towels
- ★ Hair dryer: available in most accommodations

Sun protection:

UV radiation is extremely high, even on overcast days!

- Head covering (!)
- Sunscreen and lip balm (!) with a high sun protection factor



- Sunglasses
- After-sun care, lotion for sunburn relief
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Personal Medical Kit:

Medications are generally easy to obtain on mainland Ecuador, often without a prescription. However, in remote regions such as the Amazon, the high Andes, and the Galápagos Islands, access may be limited. We therefore recommend carrying a personal medical kit tailored to your needs and itinerary. If you're unsure what to pack, speak with your doctor or travel clinic for advice.

- An adequate supply of any daily medication you take
- Copy of prescription
- Pain relievers (paracetamol/acetaminophen, ibuprofen if appropriate)
- Diarrhea & constipation treatment
- Motion sickness medication
- Antihistamines
- Standby antibiotic: If recommended by your physician, a standby antibiotic for severe bacterial infections, such as gastrointestinal infections, respiratory infections, or urinary tract infections, particularly when traveling to remote areas where medical care may not be readily available.
- Oral Rehydration Salts (ORS) and Electrolyte tablets or powder (for Quito and the Andes, hiking, Galápagos snorkeling days. Many travelers underestimate dehydration.
- Eye drops
- Disinfectant
- Plasters, Steri-Strips for cuts and wounds, which can often take the place of stitches
- Blister plasters (e.g., Compeed); these are extremely useful for hiking
- Small elastic bandage; helpful for minor sprains, ankle support, knee support. Especially relevant for active travelers.
- Tweezers
- Thermometer
- Disposable face masks
- Altitude sickness medication for trekking or mountain activity
- Insect bite treatment
- Sunburn cream
- Condoms or other contraceptives. Keep in mind that vomiting or diarrhea can reduce the effectiveness of the contraceptive pill, so consider carrying a backup method if needed)
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Miscellaneous:

- Writing materials, your journal, reading material, etc.; always keep one pen in your hand or daypack
- Dry bags, larger and smaller plastic or fabric bags for small items, wet or dirty laundry, etc.
- Optional: sweets or small souvenirs from your home country
- Good flashlight, or even better, a headlamp, with spare batteries
- Hand sanitizer and wipes, paper tissues
- A small bag or piece of detergent (also to buy inexpensively locally); some laundry washing can help pack lighter
- Glasses or contact lenses, spare glasses or lenses, cleaning products
- Optional: Headphones (for music and optionally noise-canceling)
- Refillable water bottle, optionally a reusable shopping bag
- Optional: pocket knife (important: never pack in carry-on/hand luggage when flying!)
- Optional: Foldable walking sticks
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★ Tip: multifunctional neck gaiter (Buff) is very useful as a scarf, hat, headband, face covering, etc.

! Disposable mask(s): always keep at least one in your carry-on or hand luggage. We recommend always using a mask in situations of poor air quality on flights, or when coughing or flu-like symptoms are present (whether your own or within the group).

Photography & Electronics:

Mobile phone and charger with adapter

Camera and charger with adapter

A good cleaning kit, as everything gets really dirty

Optional: laptop with charger, smartwatch, and its charger

Chargers: Ecuador uses 110 V with US flat plugs. Spare battery, portable battery bank

Sufficient SD cards (you will take thousands of photos, so it's better to have some too much than one too few!)

Tip: regularly back up your photos online (e.g., Google Photos, iCloud, Drive, etc.)

Optional: binoculars

Water-resistant bags for camera and accessories (!)

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! Drones are prohibited in the Galápagos and in mainland national parks.

! Always ask permission before photographing locals.

4. Amazon Add-On

The regular Coca flights (Coca = Puerto Francisco de Orellana airport) allow one piece of checked luggage up to 20 kg. However, we strongly recommend leaving part of the heavy luggage in the hotel in Quito and traveling lightly with only the essential personal belongings.

Passport, vaccine records

Personal medical kit and an adequate supply of any daily medication you take, plus a copy of the doctor's prescription

Excellent sun protection:

Photography & Electronics

Personal hygiene

Shoes

Lightweight, quick-drying, and preferably neutral-coloured, long-sleeved shirts and t-shirts; beige, khaki, and light gray attract fewer insects than bright colors.

Lightweight quick-dry hiking pants/trousers (no jeans; they never dry)

Good cotton or sport socks. We recommend tall socks that don't slip easily inside rubber boots (socks slip under the heel and cause blisters). Two pairs per day.

Lightweight rain poncho (inexpensive locally and often available to borrow in lodges)

Swimwear

Flashlight: ideally a headlamp, with extra batteries

Mosquito repellent with tropical protection, anti-itch cream, optional: insect-repellent spray for clothing

Waterproof protection bags for the camera and mobile phone (!)

Plastic bags, Ziploc bags, in various sizes for small items, wet laundry, etc.

Water bottle

Optional: Wildlife guide

Recommended: Binoculars

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★ Rubber boots and plastic ponchos are provided at most lodges (boots usually available up to size 45).

★ In the Amazon, guides usually wear rubber boots and long sleeves year-round, no matter the temperature. It is not only about mosquitoes. The clothing also helps protect against sharp vegetation, muddy trails, and river crossings.

× Avoid heavy cotton clothing in the Amazon; it stays wet for hours.

× Avoid perfumes, scented lotions, and dark colors (attract mosquitoes).

× Do not bring any food; it attracts ants and other critters to your suite.

5. Galápagos Essentials

Documents & Entry Requirements

Before traveling to the Galápagos Islands, please make sure you have the following ready:

- ✓ Passport
- ✓ USD 200* in cash for the National Park entrance fee, if not prepaid with your cruise
- ✓ TCT card for USD 20* prepurchased and printed
- ✓ Return flight e-ticket, either printed or saved on your phone
- ✓ Galápagos Biosafety Sworn Declaration QR code, printed or saved on your mobile. This must be completed 72 - 48 hours before your flight at <https://siabg.abgalapagos.gob.ec/declaraciones/nueva>. Make sure the entry date is correct.
- ✓ Booking vouchers and confirmations, either printed or digital.
- ✓ Cash for airport bus, taxi, and more if you're not on an organized cruise.
- ★ Travel insurance documents. Insurance is not mandatory, but strongly recommended; some cruise companies require mandatory insurance.
- ! Please arrive at the airport at least 2 ½ hours before departure.

**Prices are subject to change at any time without prior notice.*

Safety Arrival Time In Ecuador Before Your Galápagos Flight

We recommend arriving in Ecuador at least **two nights** before your flight to the Galápagos. This gives you enough time in case of any unexpected delays or misconnections, and a more relaxed start to your trip.

Galápagos Entrance Fee & Travel Procedures

Traveling to the Galápagos involves a few entry procedures designed to protect the National Park and its unique ecosystem. Understanding these requirements before your trip will help make your arrival smooth and stress-free while supporting sustainable tourism in the islands.

If you book a cruise in advance, the Galápagos National Park entrance fee and the Transit Control Card can usually be prepaid as part of your reservation, making the travel experience even easier.

○ Galápagos National Park Entrance Fee

All visitors to the Galápagos Islands are required to pay the Galápagos National Park entrance fee. The current values to pay in cash when arriving in the Galápagos (if not prepaid with the cruise package) are:

- ★ USD 200* for adults // USD 100* for children under 12 years old.

○ Transit Control Card (TCT)

Transit Control Card (TCT) is a mandatory visitor transit permit required for all travelers entering the Galápagos Islands. The fee is USD 20* per person and must be paid in cash only.

If it is not included in your cruise package, you will need to register and purchase the card at the Consejo de Gobierno de Galápagos airport counter before boarding your domestic flight to the Galápagos.

○ Biosafety Declaration and Quarantine Screening

To protect the Galápagos' fragile ecosystem, all travelers must complete the online biosafety registration. Declare that you are not carrying prohibited items, such as seeds, plants, or animal products, by completing the mandatory online form 72- 48 hours before your flight through the [ABG Biosafety Declaration Form](#). Please make sure to enter the correct arrival date for the Galápagos.

- ! All luggage must be screened by the ABG - Galápagos Biosecurity and Quarantine Control Agency before check-in for domestic flights to the islands. These measures help prevent invasive species and pests from entering the Galápagos and damaging its unique environment.

Money in the Galápagos

- § **The official currency in Ecuador and the Galápagos Islands is the US dollar.**
- § You will need USD 200* in cash for the National Park entrance fee, as well as cash for onboard expenses such as drinks, wetsuit rental, and tips for the crew and guide.
- § Many souvenir shops in Puerto Ayora and at the airport accept credit cards. Cabins and hotel rooms are usually equipped with small safety boxes for cash and valuables.
- § **ATMs** are available in a few inhabited areas, but they are limited, so carrying enough cash is important. Cabins usually have small lockers for storing money and valuables.
- § On smaller boats, credit cards are generally not accepted, but card payments are usually available only on higher-category vessels. Card fees or surcharges may apply.

Connectivity in the Galápagos

- Because of how remote the islands are, you should expect little to no reliable mobile signal or internet while you are on a cruise.
- Most of the larger, newer ships do offer Starlink satellite internet; however, it is not always stable. It can be slow, cut out, or get overloaded when many people are using it at the same time.
- The easiest and most relaxing approach is to plan for a bit of a digital break.
- ! Let your family and friends know in advance that you may be offline for a few days so they don't worry or become concerned if they eventually can't reach you.

In the water

- If you already have your own snorkel mask, feel free to bring it. A well-fitted mask makes a difference. Otherwise, most ships provide masks, snorkels, and fins, either included or available to rent.
- Water temperature changes through the year. During some months, the water feels pleasantly warm, while others can be quite chilly, especially once you are in for a longer activity.
 - Cool Season (June to November): Water temperature between 20°C and 24°C (68°F to 75°F)
 - Rainy Season (December to May): Water temperature typically ranging from 23°C to 28°C (73°F to 82°F)
- Wetsuits are usually available on board, either included or for a small rental fee.
- A light long-sleeved shirt is also very useful; ideally with UV protection.

Baggage on flights to the Galápagos

- For flights booked through us, the standard allowance is usually one checked piece up to 23 kg, one carry-on piece between 8 and 10 kg, plus a small purse, backpack, or laptop bag.
- If you book your own flights separately, the allowance depends on the airline and fare type, so please check accurately.
- ! When traveling from mainland Ecuador to the Galápagos Islands, all luggage is inspected by quarantine staff from the Galápagos Biosecurity Agency. These inspections help protect the islands' fragile ecosystem and unique wildlife from outside pests, plants, and contaminants.
- It's also worth keeping in mind that inter-island flights inside the Galápagos have stricter limits, especially on weight and sometimes even on bag size. If you're connecting between islands, it helps to pack light and stay within limits to avoid extra fees or delays.

Sports and Adventure activities in the Galápagos

For activities like diving, day tours, snorkeling, biking, or horseback riding, we recommend choosing reputable, licensed local operators. This helps ensure a safe and enjoyable experience throughout your adventures.

Tippling in Galápagos

Gratuities are always optional and completely at your discretion. That said, in the Galápagos, tipping at the end of a cruise is part of the local travel culture and is generally expected.

At the end of the trip, you'll usually find envelopes prepared for both the guide and the crew, and you leave your tips there in one go.

As a rough guide on mid-range yachts:

- For Galápagos National Park guides, people usually give about USD 15 to 20 per person per day. If the guide goes above and beyond, it's totally normal to tip more, especially on higher-end boats.
- For the crew on a mid-range yacht or ship, the usual range is about USD 25 to 30 per guest per day. This is pooled and shared among the whole team of at least 8 to 10 crew members.

If service has been exceptional, it's absolutely fine to be more generous.

Insurance for the Galápagos

- ! The same recommendation applies in the Galápagos. Because of the islands' remote location, comprehensive travel insurance including medical evacuation coverage is particularly important.

6. Packing List For Galápagos

Shopping options on the islands are limited, so a bit of preparation goes a long way for a smooth trip. Don't worry, the checklist below will help you pack with confidence, and you can also download it as a free printable PDF.

If you plan to visit Quito, the Andes, or the Amazon as well, make sure to pack clothing for different climates since conditions can vary quite a bit between regions.

- Warm season (Dec-May): Warmer water (22-28°C/72 to 82°F), calmer seas, occasional rain
- Cool season (Jun-Nov): Cooler water (18-22°C/64 to 72°F), windier, more overcast (Humboldt current).



Luggage:

Best kept practical and lightweight!

- Suitcase, duffel bag, or backpack
- Daypack, preferably light, comfortable, and waterproof
- Drybag for phone and camera
- Smart organizers: packing cubes for easy sorting and quick access, and/or vacuum travel bags
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Clothing:

Lightweight, breathable, and quick-drying clothing

- Comfortable pants, shorts (ideally with side pockets), summer dress
- T-shirts, lightweight and quick-dry blouses or shirts, tops
- A light sweater, hoodie, or fleece (especially for the dry, cool season (May/June to December). On Galápagos boats, mornings start cool and windy; keep your light jacket or fleece handy for early excursions
- Lightweight windbreaker/waterproof jacket and/or
- Light rain cape/poncho; ideal, lighter if it is too warm for a rain jacket, and protects the backpack and camera bag at the same time (especially for the warm and wet season from January-May)
- Lightweight pajama
- Sufficient underwear and socks
- Swimsuits (at least 2)
- Optional/recommended for higher category cruise: a smart casual shirt, blouse, or summer dress for evening dinners
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- ★ Long-sleeved swim shirt (rash guard) for additional sun protection or to use under wetsuits

Footwear:

- Light trekking or hiking boots with good traction
- Some people prefer trainers or sneakers, and these can be a good option if you are comfortable walking on uneven terrain in them. However, don't bring your best pair; they will suffer in the lava.
- For beach outings or many of the trails: trekking sandals (e.g., Teva, Keen, Merrell, etc.)
- On board/house shoes: lightweight, non-slip slippers or flip-flops (shoes used on islands have to stay outside)
- Optional: flip-flops for the beach (not recommended for excursions)
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Toiletries:

- Toiletry bag, preferably water-resistant and ideally suitable for hanging
- Shampoo, soap, conditioner (solid versions are ideal as they do not leak). Most yachts provide it as bathroom amenities, deodorant
- Toothbrush, toothpaste, dental floss
- Cotton swabs, nail care set, tweezers
- For men: razor
- Hairbrush, comb, hair ties/clips
- Makeup (small quantities, only the essentials). Tip: compressed disposable wipes for makeup removal
- Facial hydration cream
- For women: sufficient menstrual hygiene products. Changes in altitude and climate can affect your cycle
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- ★ Not necessary: Shower and bath towels; provided in most bathrooms. Same for hair dryer
- ★ Tip: Pack a small microfiber towel

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Sun protection:

UV radiation is extremely high, even on overcast days!

- Sunglasses with UV protection and a strap
- Head covering (!): a wide-brimmed hat or cap to protect your face from the intense equatorial sun, with ties or a chin strap so it fits securely and stays in place during the strong breezes while traveling from your yacht to the islands by panga boat.
- Sunscreen and lip balm (!) with a high sun protection factor, after-sun care, lotion for sunburn relief
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- ★ A lightweight, long-sleeved shirt, ideally with UV protection, provides additional sun protection when snorkeling.
- ★ Especially for January-April when it's hot and humid: Loose-fitting long-sleeved lightweight sun rash SPF 50, cotton or linen button shirts. They keep your shoulders and arms covered while still letting air flow through, so you feel cleaner and more comfortable instead of using sunscreen and bug spray that does not hold when you sweat.

Medical kit:

- An adequate supply of any daily medication you take
- Copy of prescription
- Pain relievers (paracetamol/acetaminophen, ibuprofen if appropriate)
- Diarrhea & constipation treatment
- Motion sickness medication
- Antihistamines
- Standby antibiotic: If recommended by your physician, a standby antibiotic for severe bacterial infections, such as gastrointestinal infections, respiratory infections, or urinary tract infections, particularly when traveling to remote areas where medical care may not be readily available.
- Oral Rehydration Salts (ORS) and Electrolyte tablets or powder (for Quito and the Andes, hiking, Galápagos snorkeling days. Many travelers underestimate dehydration.
- Eye drops
- Disinfectant
- Plasters, Steri-Strips for cuts and wounds, which can often take the place of stitches
- Blister plasters (e.g., Compeed); these are extremely useful for hiking
- Small elastic bandage; helpful for minor sprains, ankle support, knee support. Especially relevant for active travelers.
- Tweezers
- Thermometer
- Disposable face masks
- Altitude sickness medication for trekking or mountain activity
- Insect bite treatment
- Sunburn cream
- Condoms or other contraceptives. Keep in mind that vomiting or diarrhea can reduce the effectiveness of the contraceptive pill, so consider carrying a backup method if needed)
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Photography:

- Camera or camera phone with waterproof protection
- Optional: GoPro camera: underwater action in the Galápagos is really special
- Plenty of memory cards and spare batteries (you will almost certainly take far more photos than you expect).
- Chargers and electricity adapters (110 V, US flat plugs)
- Lens cleaning products
- Optional: underwater camera/GoPro, a recommended extra for snorkelers and divers
- Optional: binoculars
- Drones: prohibited in the Galápagos and in national parks on the mainland

- ☐
- ☐

- ! Flash photography is strictly prohibited on the islands.
- ! Please maintain the required minimum distances of 2 meters (6.5 feet) from the wildlife at all times.
- ! A special permit from the National Park authorities is required for commercial photography.

Miscellaneous:

- ☐ Writing materials, your journal, reading material, etc.; always keep one pen in your hand or daypack
- ☐ Dry bags, larger and smaller plastic or fabric bags for small items, wet or dirty laundry, etc.
- ☐ Optional: sweets or small souvenirs from your home country
- ☐ Good flashlight, or even better, a headlamp, with spare batteries
- ☐ Hand sanitizer and wipes, paper tissues
- ☐ A small bag or piece of detergent (also to buy inexpensively locally); some laundry washing can help pack lighter
- ☐ Refillable water bottle
- ☐ Glasses or contact lenses, spare glasses or lenses, cleaning products
- ☐ Optional: Headphones (for music and optionally noise-canceling)
- ☐ Optional: Foldable walking sticks
- ☐ Optional: Sarong/Pareo (light, to use on the beach)
- ☐
- ☐

- ★ Tip: multifunctional neck gaiter (Buff) is very useful as a scarf, hat, headband, face covering, etc.
- ! **Disposable mask(s):** always keep at least one in your carry-on or hand luggage. We recommend always using a mask in situations of poor air quality on flights, or when coughing or flu-like symptoms are present (whether your own or within the group).

What you normally do NOT need to bring if you have booked cruises or tours:

- ✗ Wetsuit and snorkel equipment (except if you prefer your own)
- ✗ Shower and bath towels, hair dryer
- ✗ Jewelry and other urban life valuables

7. Galápagos – FAQs

(*) Subject to change at any time without prior notification

- Does sunscreen need to be reef-safe? Not mandatory, but ocean-friendly is recommended.
- Do I need to pay the National Park fee in cash? YES, USD 200, ideally in cash if you have not prepaid with the cruise package.
- Are credit card payments possible on cruises? Yes, on most larger or upper category cruise ships.
- May I bring my own alcohol on board? Generally allowed. Corkage fees from USD 10 to 25 and more per bottle (*).
- Are drones allowed? **No**, neither in the Galápagos National Park nor in nature reserves and national parks in Ecuador.
- Are there luggage limits on board? None, but regulations apply to flights.
- Is there electricity on board: Yes, 24/7, 110 V, US sockets in all cabins, and mostly also USB sockets.
- What do wet landings mean? Usually, only your feet get wet; don't forget waterproof bags for electronics.
- **Food restrictions and allergies:** Are vegetarian, gluten-free, or other dietary requirements/allergies possible on board? Yes, it's possible (except kosher for most of the yachts). **You must fill out the booking form.**
- Are there prohibited items I may not bring to the Galápagos? **Yes**, to protect the fragile Galápagos ecosystem, the [list of restricted and prohibited items is long](#), but here's a summary for tourists (*):
 - ✗ Fresh fruits, vegetables, plants, seeds, or organic material that may contain insects or microorganisms
 - ✗ Live animals or animal products (meat, dairy, eggs), coffee
 - ✗ Non-native species or biological materials
 - ✗ Single-use plastics (straws, styrofoam, etc.)
 - ✗ Drones (unless authorized by the Galápagos National Park)
- ★ Chocolate, processed and packaged snacks, and cookies **are allowed**.
- ! All luggage is inspected by the Biosecurity Agency (SICGAL) before every Galápagos flight to prevent illegal trade and ensure quarantine control.

8. A Few Final Notes

Hospitality forward:

- ♥ We kindly ask you to take care when using sunscreen, after-sun products, hair dye, insect repellent, and other toiletries containing pigments, waxes, or oils, as these may permanently stain fabrics and are tough to wash out, as well as facial products with benzoyl peroxide (for acne), which can bleach textiles.
- ♥ Snorkeling equipment, fins, and wetsuits, as well as all other items borrowed during your experience, are provided for your comfort and should be handled with care and respect.

Ecuador and the Galápagos are extraordinary destinations, and we are delighted to be part of your journey. If you have any questions before departure, we are always happy to help.

We hope this guide helps you feel prepared and excited for your journey. Ecuador and the Galápagos have a way of surprising even the most experienced travelers, and we are delighted to be part of your adventure.

The Cometa Travel Team