

Ecuador Airlines

Ecuador airlines give you great scope to get around this State of Colorado sized country which is just as well when you consider how many obstacles there are to traveling by land.

The Amazon jungle makes up 40% of the terrain and the imposing Andes mountains, rising to nearly 21,000 feet make up another 20% of the surface area.

What this means is that despite good quality main highways, six lanes in places, if you're in a hurry and want to get from the highland cities to the coast or jump over the Andes and down to the exotic Amazon then you'd best fly.

I'm a nervous flyer and the idea of taking flights on airlines of developing countries is not something that's terrifically appealing to me but I've now taken dozens of internal flights on all 4 Ecuadorian airlines without the slightest incident. In fact the un-crowded skies and professionalism of the crews and ground-staff have only gone to further reassure as I make more flights.

Ecuador only has two international airports at present, Quito and Guayaquil. Consequently these two airports are hubs for domestic routes. Quito is the capital with a 1.8 million population and situated in the Northern Andes at 9,300 feet. Guayaquil is the main port with a 2.6 million population and at ground level.



You could catch one of hundreds of buses that travel between these two cities every day. That's if you wanted to be on a bus for 8-9 hours. This is a good option if you are on an extremely tight budget as the cost is only \$8. On the other hand there are roughly 15-20 flights every day that take half an hour and cost about \$60 one way. Go figure!

The four Ecuador Airlines are Tame, Aerogal, Icaro and VIP. Tame is the state airline and flies to the most destinations. Next comes Aerogal which is actually an abbreviation of Galapagos Airways so they of course fly Quito to the Galapagos as well as many other routes. Icaro is the 3rd airline and just flies between the 3 main cities of Quito, Guayaquil

and Manta. VIP started out as a private airline for executives but now additionally it flies to some of the smaller cities and some of its small aircraft are sub-contracted by Aerogal.

Tame flies to the following cities:

Quito - Guayaquil - 13 flights a day

Quito - Cuenca (third city in Ecuador - in southern Andes)

Quito - Esmeraldas - (northern port city near beaches)

Quito - Manta - (central coast port city - near beaches of Manabí & near our project at San Clemente)

Quito - Portoviejo - (capital of Manabi province and near our San Clemente project)

Quito - Machala - (southern port city - near to Peruvian border)

Quito - Loja - (in the far south of Andes - jumping off point to go to Vilcabamba)

Quito - Tulcan - (town on northern frontier with Colombia)

Quito - San Cristobal Island -(fly to one of 2 main Galapagos islands 600 miles offshore)

Quito - Baltra Island - (fly to another of 2 main Galapagos islands 600 miles offshore)

Quito - Coca - (fly to the Amazon town - a jumping off point for Amazon adventure)

Quito - Lago Agrio - (another Amazon town. An oil town and also adventures town)

Quito - Macas - (a pretty town in the Amazon but at slightly higher elevation - cooler)

Guayaquil - Cuenca

Guayaquil - Loja

Guayaquil - San Cristobal

Guayaquil - Baltra

The only international flight that Tame operates is Esmeraldas - Cali. Cali is a 2 million plus population in southern Colombia and is famous for formerly being a capital of drug cartels and also for the beauty of its women (one has to suppose the men must be fairly handsome too but you never hear about that). To travel from Quito to Cali by bus would take 24 hours but a Quito-Esmeraldas-Cali flight connection would see you arrive in 2 hours 15 minutes.

Since it started operations in 1962 Tame has flown 700,000 flights and now flies brand new Embraer 170 and 190 planes (Brazilian), Airbus A320 A319 and Boeing 727-200.

Tame's website is at <http://www3.tame.com.ec/eng/index.htm>



Aerogal is giving Tame some serious competition as they have expanded the number routes they cover as well as introducing an international flight from Miami to Quito and Guayaquil to Miami. So if you are flying from Miami to Ecuador be sure to check out for the best deal available from American Airlines, LAN or Aerogal.

- Aerogal flies from
- Quito - Guayaquil
- Quito - Cuenca
- Quito - Manta (close to san Clemente - just 40 minutes drive)
- Quito - San Cristobal (Galapagos)
- Quito - Baltra (Galapagos)
- Quito - Bogota (capital of Colombia)
- Quito - Medellin (large city in northern Andes of Colombia)
- Guayaquil - Cuenca
- Guayaquil - San Cristobal
- Guayaquil - Baltra
- Guayaquil - Bogota

Aerogal's fleet is all Boeing. Nine Boeing 737-200 Advance and 1 Boeing 727-200 Advance. There website is at <https://www.aerogal.com.ec/website/index.php?idioma=1> .

Icaro is Ecuador's third airline. They fly just two routes and my sense is that they are being driven out of business by Tame and Aerogal. For example they used to fly Quito - Cuenca but now no longer do so. Still, they are generally cheaper by \$10 or so per one-way flight and also offer an alternative on busy weekends when its often real difficult to get a flight.

They fly just

Quito - Guayaquil

Quito - Manta

There fly with Boeing 737-200 s and their website is <http://www.icaro.aero>

You'll sometimes find these websites are down or running slowly or only partially working but my experience is that they are getting better.

Most times its not necessary to make reservations in advance. The exceptions are holiday weekends - Christmas/New Year/ Carnival and Easter. Also some of the routes with less flights such as Quito - Loja or Quito - Cuenca can fill up on Friday evenings and Monday mornings when people are coming back to the big cities after spending weekends at home with the families.

All the Ecuador airlines charge between \$55 and \$70 per one way flight. The difference depends on the airline and the route. The exceptions maybe Loja (\$75) and the international destinations, Cali, Bogota, Medellin and Miami. Also flights to the Galapagos are usually around \$400-500 return due to the longer distance and some extra taxes.

Lastly VIP

VIP is a small airline aimed at executives who want quick boarding and comfort. They do have nice bucket seats. They fly from Quito to the jungle towns of Lago Agrio and Coca flying oil workers and executives out to Amazon and they also fly Quito - Salinas.

VIP flies latest generation Dornier 328 - 100 Turboprops and I having flown in them they are very quite and comfortable.

Salinas is to my mind the best beach town in Ecuador. Small enough not to have crime and noise and hassle but big enough to have a mall and modern clinic. We'll soon have details of our new project just to the east of Salinas which will be a standout project in Ecuador.

Both Manta and Salinas are having larger runways installed so they can accept international flights. Manta already has the runway thanks to the efforts of the US Air force who upgraded it to run their operations. Entering the terminal at Manta you can see the plans for the new terminal building. Salinas is a small airport at present but already

you can see the work has started on the new runway.

If you look at a map of Ecuador and search out the larger towns and cities you may wonder why small cities such as Santo Domingo, Ibarra and Ambato don't have flights to them but in every case it's because the road communications are good to the major cities or there is just not enough demand.

Ibarra and Ambato are both about two hours away from Quito. It's nearly all 4 lane highway from Quito to Ambato and I just heard that there's a six lane highway slated to be constructed from Quito to Ibarra. This will be great news for those of us who live in Cotacachi.

The current 2 lane highway is top quality and generally the travel time is between one and three quarters to two and a quarter hours. Occasionally you can get stuck behind a slow trailer so a six lane highway would probably cut off at least 15-20 minutes of the journey and when we add in the fact the new airport will be at least 20 minutes closer to Cotacachi we could be looking at just over an hours journey.

Until next newsletter - happy flying!