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# I. THE COUNTRY

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## Area and Geography

Ecuador is situated on the Pacific Coast side of South America, covering an area of approximately 270 670 km<sup>2</sup>. One of the smallest countries in South America, Ecuador is bordered by Colombia in the north and by Peru in the south. The Galapagos Islands, located in the Pacific Ocean 1 100 km off the coast, have belonged to the country since 1932.

Geographically, Ecuador is crossed from north to south by two chains of the Andes, which divide the country into three regions of different geographical characteristics and climate.

The Costa, or lowland region, on the west coast consists of flat plains that rise gradually to the Sierra or mountain country; they are crossed by four main rivers. Along its 1 000 km of coast, several port cities have developed, the major ones being Guayaquil, Manta, and Esmeraldas. Fisheries and plantations along the coastal region produce mainly coffee, bananas, sugarcane, rice, cocoa beans, and fruits. Natural gas and oil are under limited exploration in the Gulf of Guayaquil.

The centrally located Sierra, or mountain region, includes fertile valleys, snow-covered mountains of over 4 500 m, and picturesque cities and landscape, and represents about one-fourth of the country's total area. The northern and central valleys lend themselves more easily to the cultivation of agricultural products associated with a temperate climate and to cattle raising than do those toward the south. Here the different soil formations of the mountain ranges suggest that there are minerals yet to be explored and exploited. All along the Sierra, there are high plateaus suitable for forestation, a program initiated a few years ago by the government.

The Oriente, or eastern region, consists of tropical forest which makes up approximately one-half of Ecuador's land area and extends from the eastern slopes of the Andes into the Amazon valley. Except for petroleum production, most of this region remains unexplored and unexploited, although it has some tea and sugarcane plantations, cattle raising and logging.