

History

The majority of Ecuador's earliest cultures developed along the southern coast, not in the Andes.

Ecuador's history is written in its street signs. One only need stroll around Quito for a day, from Avenida de Los Shyris (named after the pre-Inca tribe of the northern highlands) to the Mariscal Sucre neighborhood (named after Ecuador's greatest independence hero) to get a good lesson in Ecuadorian history. Thanks to the country's undying adoration for one of Latin America's greatest independence heroes, it seems every town in Ecuador has a Plaza Simón Bolívar. Independence heroes aside, what's really fascinating about Ecuador's history is its indigenous past, which is present and palpable throughout the country today. The great majority of the country's indigenous peoples live in the highlands and the Oriente. But to dig deeply into Ecuador's human history – before the Spanish and before the Inca – it's necessary to begin with the coast.

EARLY CULTURES

Any romp down Ecuador's coastline will unveil a long list of names – La Tolita, Bahía, Manta, Valdivia, Machalilla – that together tell the story of Ecuador's pre-Inca past. Along with several important groups from the highlands, these pre-Inca cultures are paramount to Ecuadorian identity, their importance in many ways even eclipsing the Inca, who didn't arrive in present-day Ecuador until shortly before the Spanish.

Although it's now generally accepted that Ecuador was populated by people migrating west from Brazil, the most important early societies developed along the coast, which was a more habitable landscape than the highlands. Ecuador's first permanent sedentary culture was the Valdivia, which developed along the Santa Elena Peninsula (p312) from nearly 6000 years ago. The Valdivia are famous for their earthenware figurines – likely used in fertility rituals – depicting women with exaggerated breasts and genitalia and in various stages of pregnancy and childbirth. Quito's Museo del Banco Central (p82) and the Museo Guayasamín (p83) both have outstanding examples of these.

While the Valdivia were the first of Ecuador's settled cultures, the Chorrera were the most widespread and influential of the groups that appeared during this so called Formative Period (4000–300 BC). Both the Chorrera and the Machalilla culture (which inhabited southern Manabí and the Santa Elena Peninsula from 1500 BC to 800 BC) are known for the practice of skull deformation. As a form of status, they used stones to slowly elongate and flatten their craniums, and they often removed two front teeth to further enhance their appearance.

Beginning sometime around 600 BC, societies became more stratified; they were ruled by an elite caste of shamans and elite merchants who conducted highly valued long-distance trade. These included the Bahía, Jama-Coaque, Guangala and La Tolita cultures on the coast and the Panzaleo in the highlands. It is likely the Panzaleo were the first culture to practice the technique of shrinking heads – or *tzantza* – for which the Shuar of the southern Oriente are much more famous (they practiced it until the mid-20th century). Cuenca's Museo del Banco Central

TIMELINE 4000 BC

Ecuador's first sedentary culture, the Valdivia, develops around Santa Elena Peninsula

600 BC

Indigenous societies become more stratified and long-distance trade increases

'Pumapungo' (p200) houses five of what are likely the most impressively displayed *tzantzza* in the country – just in case you're interested.

Slowly, beginning probably around AD 800, cultures became integrated into larger, more hierarchical societies. These included the Mantēños, Huancavilcas, and Caras on the coast; the Quitus (from which the city of Quito takes its name) of the northern highlands; the Puruhá of the central highlands; and the Cañari of the area around present-day Cuenca. Around the end of the 1st century AD, the expansionist Caras of the coast conquered the peaceful Quitus of the highlands and the combined cultures became collectively known as the Quitu-Caras, or the Shyris. They were the dominant force in the Ecuadorian highlands until about the 1300s, when the Puruhá of the central highlands became increasingly powerful. The third important culture was the Cañari, further south. These were the cultures the Inca encountered when it began its expansion into the north.

The Caras, a powerful, sun-worshipping culture from the coast, was ruled by the Shyri family.

THE INCA EMPIRE

Until the early 15th century, the Inca Empire was concentrated around Cuzco in Peru. That changed dramatically during the rule of Inca Pachacuti, whose expansionist policies set into motion the creation of the vast Inca Empire, Tahuantinsuyo, meaning 'Land of the Four Quarters' in Quechua. By the time the Inca reached Ecuador they were under the rule of Tupac Yupanqui, Pachacuti's successor, and were met with fierce resistance.

Many associate the Andes with the Inca; in Ecuador, the Inca were present for less than a century.

The Cañari defended themselves bitterly against the Inca invaders, and it was some years before Tupac Yupanqui was able to subdue them and turn his attention to the north, where he was met with even fiercer resistance. In one battle the Inca massacred thousands of Caras and dumped them into a lake near Otavalo, which supposedly turned the waters red and gave the lake its name, Laguna Yaguarcocha (Lake of Blood; p131).

The subjugation of the north took many years, during which the Inca Tupac fathered a son with a Cañari princess. The son, Huayna Capac grew up in Ecuador and succeeded his father to the Inca throne. He spent years traveling throughout his empire, from Bolivia to Ecuador, constantly suppressing uprisings from all sides. Wherever possible, he strengthened his position by marriage and in the process produced two sons: Atahualpa who grew up in Quito and Huáscar who was raised in Cuzco.

Inca ruler Huayna Capac had a third son, Manco Capac. He was the last Inca ruler and staged one of the greatest revolts against the Spanish. He was killed by a Spaniard whose life he had saved.

When Huayna Capac died in 1526 he left his empire not to one son, as was traditional, but to two. Thus the Inca Empire was divided for the first time – an event that fatefully coincided with the strange arrival of a group of bearded men on horseback in present-day Esmeraldas province. They were the first Spaniards in Ecuador, led south by the pilot Bartolomé Ruiz de Andrade on an exploratory mission for Francisco Pizarro, who remained, for the time being, further north.

Meanwhile, the rivalry between Huayna Capac's two sons worsened, and the Inca nation broke into civil war. After several years of fighting, Atahualpa finally defeated Huáscar near Ambato and was thus the sole ruler of the weakened and still-divided Inca Empire when Pizarro arrived in 1532 with plans to conquer the Incas.

600–700 BC

Long-distance, maritime trade begins to develop and reaches as far north as Central America

1500s

Inca Empire begins expansion north into Ecuador

THE SPANISH CONQUEST

Pizarro's advance was rapid and dramatic. His horseback-riding, armor-wearing, cannon-firing conquistadors were believed to be godlike, and although they were few in number, they spread terror among the natives. In late 1532, a summit meeting was arranged between Pizarro and Atahualpa. Although Atahualpa was prepared to negotiate with the Spaniards, Pizarro had other ideas. When the Inca arrived at the prearranged meeting place (Cajamarca, in Peru) on November 16, the conquistadors captured him and massacred most of his poorly armed guards.

Atahualpa was held for ransom, and incalculable quantities of gold, silver and other valuables poured into Cajamarca. Instead of being released when the ransom was paid, however, the Inca was put through a sham trial and sentenced to death. Atahualpa was charged with incest (marrying one's sister was traditional in the Inca culture), polygamy, worship of false gods and crimes against the king, and he was executed on August 29, 1533. His death effectively brought the Inca Empire to an end.

When Atahualpa was executed, his war-general Rumiñahui was supposedly on his way to Cajamarca with large quantities of gold and treasure as ransom for the Inca. Legend has it that, upon hearing of Atahualpa's death, Rumiñahui stashed the treasure in the impenetrable mountains of present-day Parque Nacional Llanganates (p165); it has never been found.

The general then continued to fight valiantly against the Spaniards for two more years. The general was so fierce that he supposedly dealt with a Spanish corroborator (and possible heir to Atahualpa's throne) by murdering him, breaking all the bones in his body to bits, extracting them through a hole, and stretching the body – with heads and appendages intact – into a drum. By the time Pizarro's lieutenant, Sebastián de Benalcázar, had finally battled his way to Quito in late 1534, he found the city razed to the ground by Rumiñahui, who preferred to destroy the city rather than leave it in the hands of the conquistadors. Quito was refounded on December 6, 1534, and Rumiñahui was finally captured, tortured and executed in January 1535.

Despite the Inca's short presence in Ecuador (just over 100 years), they left a indelible mark on the country. Quecha (now Quichua in Ecuador) was imposed on the population and is still spoken today by a quarter of all Ecuadorians. The Inca built a vast system of roads that connected Cuzco in the south with Quito in the north, and part of the 'royal highway' – the Inca trail to Ingapirca – can still be hiked today (see p194). Ingapirca itself is Ecuador's most important Inca archaeological site and has splendid examples of the Inca's mortarless stonework.

THE COLONIAL ERA

From 1535 onward, the colonial era proceeded with the usual intrigues among the Spanish conquistadors, but with no major uprisings by indigenous Ecuadorians. Francisco Pizarro made his brother Gonzalo the governor of Quito in 1540. Hoping to conquer the Amazon and find more gold, Gonzalo sent his lieutenant Francisco de Orellana away from Quito to prospect in 1541. The lieutenant and his force ended up floating all the way to the Atlantic, becoming the first party known to descend the Amazon and thus cross the continent. This feat took almost a year and is still commemorated in Ecuador today.

When Pizarro set out to conquer the Inca Empire, he did so with only 150 men.

John Hemming's outstanding *The Conquest of the Incas* is by far one of the best descriptions of Francisco Pizarro's conquest of the Inca Empire; although mostly about Peru, there are several sections on Ecuador.

1526

Inca ruler Huayna Capac dies and leaves the Inca Empire to his two sons, Atahualpa and Huáscar

1532

Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro arrives in present-day Ecuador