

Palace guard in Quito, Ecuador

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A young ceremonial soldier guards the colonial palace door of Quito. He is wearing a highly-decorated blue and gold jacket with a high hat emblazoned with a gold eagle. Quito is the capital of Ecuador, though with a population of 1,865,541 (2005) it is the second-largest city in Ecuador behind Guayaquil. The urban center of Quito encompasses 112 square miles and is 9,300 feet above sea level. The pre-Colombian city of Quito was destroyed by the last Inca ruler. Therefore, the historic center of the city dates from its founding by Francisco Pizarro in 1534. The historic center of Quito was declared the first world heritage site by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization). The city of Quito, like much of the central part of Ecuador, is vulnerable to earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. The most destructive earthquake occurred in 1797 when 40,000 people lost their lives. More recently, in 1987 a magnitude 7 earthquake struck Quito killing an estimated 1,000 people.



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