Quito's Old City with a view of the statue of the Virgin

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The steep streets of Old City Quito lead up to the hill of El Panecillo. The statue of the Virgin of Quito sits atop the hill. Numerous cars and pedestrians are visible on the streets.

The hill of El Panecillo rises to 9,895 feet above sea level and commands a view of the entire city. The monument to the Virgin is based on a sculpture made during the colonial period, but it was erected in 1976. The aluminum Madonna stands on top of a globe while stepping on a snake. Interestingly, this depiction of Mary has wings.

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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