

Small travel guide to Ecuador

Crafted with love by Daniela and Enrico for their wedding guests

Galápagos





- **Transportation:** Buses are the most common form of travel between cities, but they can be slow. If you're short in time, consider using domestic flights or private transportation (car rental, taxis).
- **Taxis and Uber:** In cities and towns, taxis are widely available and very cheap. They are often the main mean of transportation within a city. Uber is also widely used.
- **Currency:** Ecuador uses the U.S. dollar. Keep some smaller bills for local purchases (markets, street food). Credit card payment is also accepted in most shops.
- **Safety:** Ecuador is generally safe for tourists. As usual, be cautious in crowded areas, especially in larger cities. Pick-pocketers are really good. Keep an eye on your belongings, avoid empty streets outside touristic areas and walking at night (prefer a taxi or uber!).
- **Food and Water:** Stick to bottled water and avoid tap water. When ordering food that contains water or ice, ask for it to be prepared using bottled water.
- **Respect Local Culture:** Ecuador has diverse indigenous cultures, especially in the Andes and Amazon regions. Ask for permission before taking photos of people, and show respect for local customs and traditions.
- **Altitude Awareness:** Ecuador's mountain region (La Sierra), including Quito, is at a significant altitude. Take time to acclimatize to avoid altitude sickness, and drink plenty of water.
- **Travel agencies:** Take advantage of Ecuadorian travel agencies. They are usually very good , accommodating, and reasonably priced.
- **Hotels:** usual websites work ([booking.com](https://www.booking.com), Airbnb). Even better, book directly through their website (usually cheaper).

La Sierra

La Sierra, Ecuador's mountain region, is part of the impressive Andes mountain chain that crosses South America. It hosts some of the highest active volcanoes in the world and a variety of landscapes (fertile valleys, elevated plateaus), with an average altitude of 2500 meters.

This region has cool and is home to llamas, alpacas, condors, pumas and many more animals. The area is rich in cultural and historical significance. Once hosting ancient civilizations like the Inca Empire and countless before them, today it is home to indigenous communities that have lived there for centuries, shaping the region's traditions and way of life over generations. This is reflected in its art, festivals, and languages.

Here are our personalised recommendations in La Sierra region, from north to south:

Otavalo

Otavalo is known for its diverse **indigenous culture** and the beautiful **Lago San Pablo**. The city hosts the Mercado de los ponchos, the **largest artisanal market of South America** where locals sell colorful handmade textiles, jewelry, and crafts.

- Mercado de los ponchos: [maps](#), [blog](#),
- Accommodation: this town is used to receiving tourists, so any hotel will do. However, for an exceptional experience, we recommend:
 - Hotel Otavalo (in the city center): [maps](#)
 - Hotel Las Cabañas del Lago (at the border of the lake, surrounded by the mountains): [maps](#)

Quito

Quito is Ecuador's capital, where our **wedding** is taking place.

Quito is known for its beautiful *Centro Histórico*, a **UNESCO World Heritage** site and one of the **best-preserved colonial centers in the Americas**.

In the historical center of Quito, you will find cobblestone streets, beautiful churches, and squares. You can taste traditional sweets and other typical street food. Quito showcases the tradition of gold craftsmanship unique to this area, dating back to pre-Columbian times.

For other neighbourhoods in Quito, refer to our wedding website.

Cotopaxi ([maps](#))

Cotopaxi is one of the **highest active volcanoes** in the world at 5897 meters. The area offers breathtaking views, diverse wildlife, and outdoor activities like hiking and climbing. The surrounding landscape features lush valleys and alpine forests.

- You can reach the parking lot by car and then hike up to the hut ([maps](#)). The hut is at 4864 meters above sea level, so do not do this during your first days in Ecuador! Take some time to get used to the altitude!





- The national park offers many activities, organised by lodges (*haciendas*) operating in the park. We recommend a detour to Hacienda Los Mortiños ([website](#)).

Quilotoa lake ([maps](#))

Quilotoa Lake is a **crater lake** located in the Andes, famous for its **clear turquoise waters**. The lake is surrounded by steep cliffs and is a great spot for hiking and scenic views. You can also explore nearby indigenous villages, experiencing local culture and traditions.

Baños ([maps](#))

Baños is a small city located at the junction of the *Sierra* and *Selva* regions. Known for its **volcanic hot springs** and the impressive *Pailón del Diablo* **waterfall**. It's also famous for extreme sports like rafting, canyoning, and bungee jumping. Surrounded by lush forests, Baños is a popular spot for **both adventure enthusiasts and those looking to relax**.

- For all the adventure sports, we recommend this agency: Imagine Ecuador ([maps](#), [website](#))
- Do not miss el *Pailon del Diablo* ([maps](#))
- Make sure to do a trip of the waterfalls in a *chiva*! (example [here](#), but many agencies organise it too)

La Selva

Ecuador's rainforest region, or *La Selva*, is a **tropical paradise** and one of the **most biodiverse places on Earth**. It is home to unique wildlife and ecosystems, including a vast range of animals like jaguars, monkeys, sloths, tapirs, pumas, frogs, and hundreds of bird species like toucan and colorful parrots. The rivers are inhabited by river dolphins and various species of fish, while the forest has countless plant species and insects. In *La Selva* live several indigenous communities since countless generations. Some of these accept visitors, while other violently reject any person entering their territory. For this reason and to preserve the ecosystem, it is possible to enter the easternmost areas of the forest only with certified guides.

If you only have few days to visit the Selva, good options with easy access through public transport are:

El Puyo ([maps](#)) y Parque Nacional Llanganates ([maps](#))

El Puyo is a city within the Ecuadorian Amazon Rainforest. Similar to Baños, it offers a variety of **eco-tourism activities**, such as hiking, visiting indigenous communities, and exploring the surrounding rainforests. The town has a laid-back atmosphere with easy access to natural attractions and possibility of staying in one of the many eco-lodges around. We recommend visiting the nearby **wildlife reserve *Parque Nacional Llanganates***.

El Tena ([maps](#)), Archidona ([maps](#)), and Puerto Misahualli ([maps](#))

El Tena is a town in the Amazon Rainforest from which you will have **easy access to unique eco-systems and local indigenous communities**. It is also surrounded by multiple waterfalls. It serves as a popular starting point for jungle hikes, river rafting and visits to local indigenous communities. More information here: [blog](#)

If instead you have more time, we really recommend doing a **full immersion into the jungle** by spending multiple days in one of the following two protected wildlife reserves:

Parque nacional Cuyabeno ([maps](#))

Cuyabeno is a protected wildlife reserve in Ecuador's Amazon rainforest, with **incredible biodiversity and pristine ecosystems**. There you will find diverse wildlife, including monkeys, caimans, and exotic bird species, and many flora you have never seen in your life. The reserve is home of some indigenous





communities who live sustainably in the forest. You can explore it only through **guided multi-days tours, sleeping in curated camps, and travelling by canoe.** This is Enrico's favourite destination in Ecuador.

More information here: [blog](#).

Here are some ecolodges you can contact (also using [booking.com](#)):

- Cuyabeno Wildlife Center: [website](#)
- Bamboo ecolodge: [website](#)

Parque nacional Yasuní ([maps](#))

El Yasuní is a protected reserve similar to Cuyabeno. It is richer in biodiversity (considered the most biodiverse place on earth), but even harder to reach and hence more expensive. **The ultimate paradise for nature lovers.**

More information here: [blog](#)

La Costa

La Costa, Ecuador's Pacific Ocean coast, offers amazing beaches and warm weather. In truth, while very nice, we suggest to keep La Costa low in your travel priority list this time. This is due to the increasing number of incidents related to criminal organizations in that region.

If you're not scared of that and still want to see the coast, we suggest the town of **Montañita** ([maps](#)), a popular touristic destination with laid-back atmosphere, surfing spots, and lively nightlife (but be careful!).

Galapagos Islands

Galapagos needs no introduction. We have never been there ourselves, so we can not give first hand information. However, if you plan to go there, try to organise the trip well in advance as it is a very popular destination with limited availability.