



North Coast & Lowlands

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Best Places to Enjoy Nature

- ➔ Reserva Ecológica de Manglares Cayapas Mataje (p246)
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- ➔ Reserva Ecológica Cotacachi-Cayapas (p247)
- ➔ Mompiche Whale-Watching Tours (p256)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Playa Escondida (p254)
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- ➔ Casa Grande (p260)

Why Go?

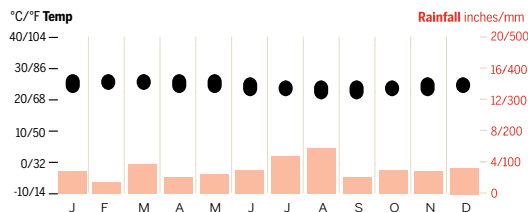
Ecuador's north coast doesn't make it onto many international itineraries – it's hard to compete in a country that offers so much variety. But for surfers, backwoods explorers and nature lovers, this might just be the happiest place on planet earth.

There are empty beaches, steep waves, little-explored mangrove forests, indigenous settlements, spirited parties and entrancing African-Ecuadorian villages. Although noticeably poorer than Ecuador's other regions, the north coast makes up for this with a fascinating warmth and cultural mix. Visit the remote northern outpost of San Lorenzo to dive deeper into the cultural roots of Ecuador's small Afro-descendent communities. Up here, you can head out into the jungle for multiday adventures, sight jungle cats or visit cut-off-from-the-world indigenous villages.

Further south, the sun-kissed beach towns of Same, Mompiche and Canoa are the top backpacker draws, with good surf, peaced-out vibes and bacchanalian brawls that carry on 'til dawn.

When to Go

Manta



Dec–Mar Surf's up. The rainy season brings downpours and bugs, but there's plenty of heat and sun.

Jul–Aug Beach resorts heave with Ecuadorian tourists and the coast is alive with holiday fun.

Sep–Nov Come and enjoy the coast at its quietest while the weather is still great.



North Coast & Lowlands Highlights

- 1 Walk for miles on the lost, lonely and out-of-this-world lovely beaches near **Mompiche** (p256).
- 2 Hike beneath the jungle canopy in the lush **Playa de Oro Reserva de Tigrillos** (p247).
- 3 Take in the laid-back beach and surfer scene in

- Canoa (p258), the region's top backpacker spot.
- 4 Ramble through charming **Bahía de Caráquez** (p259) and the nearby **Chirije archaeological site** (p261).
- 5 Frolic in the waves in the idyllic beachside settings of **Same** (p253).

- 6 Marvel at the verdant scenery of wildlife-rich **Reserva Biológica Bilsa** (p246).
- 7 Take a trip to Ecuador's steamy northern border and enjoy the Afro-Ecuadorian rhythms of **San Lorenzo** (p244).