



Northern Highlands

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Hostería La Mirage (p110)
- ➔ Sumac (p110)
- ➔ Mashpi (p125)
- ➔ Dragonfly Inn Restaurant (p124)
- ➔ Heladería Rosalia Suarez (p114)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Hotel Riviera-Sucre (p103)
- ➔ La Luna (p108)
- ➔ Hostería Cananvalle (p113)
- ➔ Hacienda Cusin (p107)
- ➔ El Monte Sustainable Lodge (p123)

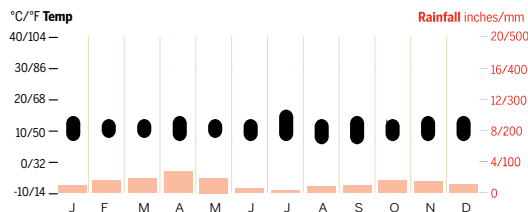
Why Go?

Follow the snaking Panamericana through the awesome Andes to the vibrant market town of Otavaló and the surrounding indigenous villages. As the spine of the Andes bends north from Quito, volcanic peaks punctuate valleys blanketed by flower farms and sugarcane fields. This is Ecuador's beating heart and a cradle of Andean culture: artisans produce their wares using methods unaltered for generations, and visitors find some of the country's best deals here, on everything from leather goods to traditional carpets.

High-altitude landscapes surrender to steamy lowlands in the west, a rich transitional zone where coffee plantations flourish in the spectacular Intag Valley. Further south, the laid-back town of Mindo is a base for bird-watching, hiking and other outdoor adventures. Remote jungle lodges are scattered around the region for those looking to retreat deeper into nature. Wherever you go, off-the-beaten path adventures, sustainable community tourism initiatives and volunteering opportunities are close by.

When to Go

Otavaló



Jun Don't miss Otavaló on June 24, when locals celebrate Inti Raymi, a colorful pagan festival.

Early Sep Try to make it to Otavaló's Fiesta del Yamor, an indigenous harvest festival.

Late Sep Expect music, dancing and lots of food at Ibarra's popular annual fiesta.



Northern Highlands Highlights

- 1 Take in the views hiking around **Lagunas de Mojanda** (p108) outside Otavalo.
- 2 Fill your luggage with crafts and clothes from Otavalo's colorful **market** (p100).
- 3 Tick off bird species wandering through the cloud forests around **Mindo** (p120).
- 4 Go horseback riding in the countryside near a historic **colonial hacienda** (p107) around San Pablo del Lago.
- 5 Take in the lush valley scenery in the dramatic **Intag Valley** (p115).
- 6 Summit the massive, glacier-covered **Volcán Cayambe** (p99).
- 7 Buy great-value leather goods in the shops of charming and sleepy **Cotacachi** (p109).
- 8 Get out into the wilderness on a trek from the highlands around **Oyacachi** (p99) to the Oriente.