



Cuenca & the Southern Highlands

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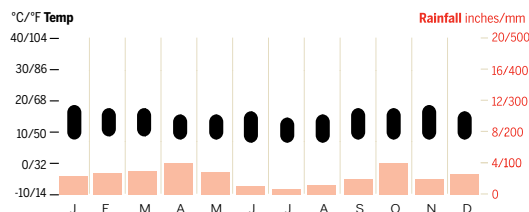
Why Go?

Still mountainous, but also more benign, traveling the southern spine of the Ecuadorian Andes ushers intrepid travelers down through lush valleys that secrete some real treats: pastille-hued colonial towns and cities and remote villages where indigenous culture thrives. And – with the exception of the famous regional capital Cuenca – the highways and byways are way less traipsed.

Most adventures begin in Cuenca: a classic South American traveler hub with one of the continent's best-preserved colonial centers and a thriving dining, arts and entertainment scene. From there, it's a choose-your-own-adventure romp through seldom-visited ancient settlements and untrammelled wild areas toward the vibrant city of Loja and balmy new-age Vilcabamba – from where forays start up into stark ocher hills, along to verdant lower slopes coated by the plantations rearing Ecuador's best coffee and down into sticky semi-tropical forest.

When to Go

Cuenca



Year-round

South of Cuenca, especially around Loja and Vilcabamba, it's spring year-round.

Oct–May

The rainy season is colder, wetter and greener; morning sun and showers later.

May & Aug

Festivals celebrating the Virgen del Cisne bring devotees from around Ecuador.

