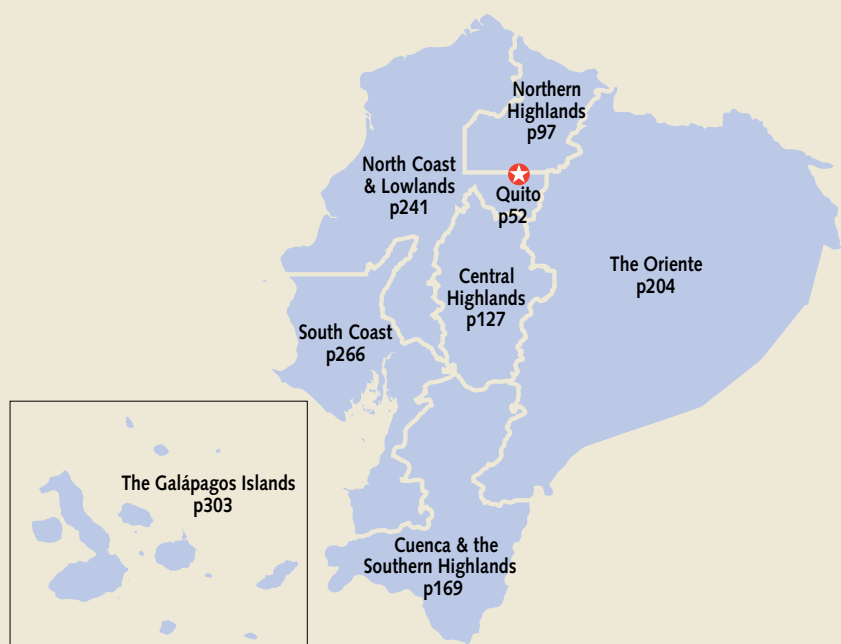




# Ecuador & the Galápagos Islands



THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

Regis St Louis,

Greg Benchwick, Michael Grosberg, Luke Waterson

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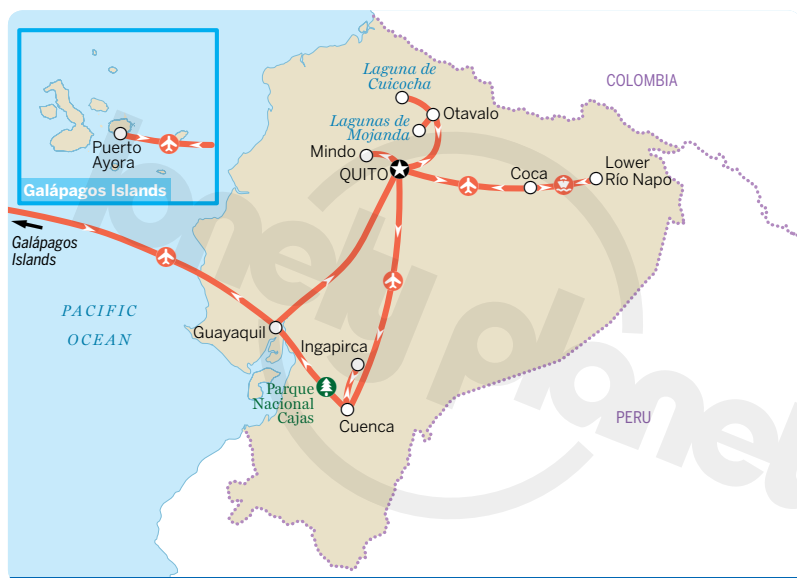
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# Itineraries



2  
WEEKS

## Best of Ecuador

Colonial treasures, cloud forests, rainforests, teeming markets and wondrous wildlife are all on the menu of this action-packed journey around Ecuador. Begin the trip in **QUITO**. Spend two days soaking up the architectural gems of the Old Town, then go 2½ hours north to **Otavalo** for its famous market (best on Saturdays). Spend the night there and squeeze in a hike to stunning lakes such as **Laguna de Cuicocha** or **Lagunas de Mojanda**. On the fourth day, go west (via Quito) to the lush cloud forests of **Mindo**. Over-night in a riverside or mountaintop lodge, then return to Quito for a one-way flight to **Cuenca**, the colonial jewel of the south. Spend two days exploring 500-year-old churches and visiting the fairy tale-like setting of **Parque Nacional Cajas**, 30km to the west. If time allows, visit the Inca ruins of **Ingapirca** before continuing to **Guayaquil** for a flight to the **Galápagos**. Spend four days there, wildlife-watching and island-hopping. For the final part of this Ecuadorian adventure, fly back to Guayaquil and onward to **Coca** (via Quito), gateway to the Amazon. Spend three nights at a jungle lodge on the **Lower Río Napo**, one of the best places to see Ecuador's Amazonian wildlife.



3  
WEEKS

## Exploring the Andes

Traveling along the spine of the Andes, you'll take in sublime alpine scenery, laid-back villages and a mix of colonial and pre-Columbian wonders. Opportunities for hiking, trekking, mountain biking and climbing are superb. Start the highland adventure in **Quito**, where you can acclimatize to the altitude while exploring one of South America's most fascinating capitals. After two nights in the capital, head south for a night or two in a historic hacienda on the flanks of **Volcán Cotopaxi**, where you can horse ride and hike; avid climbers can tackle one of Ecuador's iconic peaks. Around day four, travel south to **Latacunga** and journey into the mountainous landscape of the **Quilotoa Loop**. This is a great place to hike between high-up indigenous villages, overnighing in simple guesthouses along the way.

After two days spent in the clouds near Quilotoa, head to a slightly lower elevation and the delightful subtropical town of **Baños**, where you can soak in natural spring baths, book in to a charming inn with views, and take a fabulous downhill bike ride past refreshing waterfalls to **Puyo** in the Oriente. After Baños, move on to **Riobamba**, an ideal base for setting out on a high-adrenaline mountain-bike ride or hike around **Volcán Chimborazo**. From Riobamba take a bus to **Alausí**, then take a train ride on the famed **Nariz del Diablo**, with its dramatic views of Chimborazo, El Altar, Laguna de Colta, and other vistas dotting the Avenue of the Volcanoes. Returning to Alausí, continue by bus to the marvelous colonial city of **Cuenca**. There enjoy a few days taking in the colonial churches, peaceful plazas and the idyllic river setting before striking out for the Inca ruins of **Ingapirca**. You can visit by bus, organized day trip, or on a more challenging three-day hike along the Camino del Inca (Inca Trail), with gear and guides available in Cuenca. Afterwards, make your way back to Quito for a final night out (Zazu is a good choice, followed by drinks/dancing at La Juliana) and a big send-off to the great Andean experience.



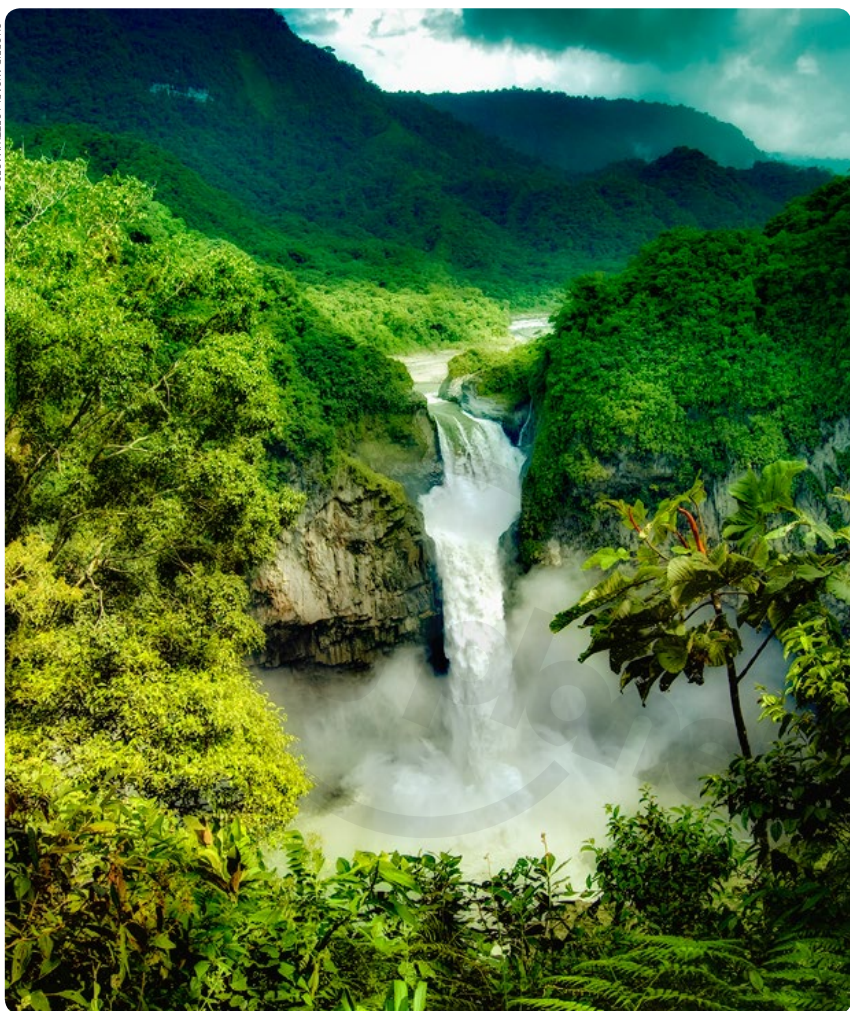
2  
WEEKS

## Southern Ecuador

Heading south of Quito, you'll soon find yourself in bustling market towns, remote indigenous villages and pristine national parks far from the touring crowds. Start your journey in the gateway town of **Riobamba**, a rather workaday mid-sized settlement that's at its liveliest on Saturdays, when a sprawling market takes over. From here, take a detour west to **Guaranda**, a scenic town that's the gateway up to **Salinas**, a fascinating and charming country village where you can visit cooperatives producing chocolate, cheese, mushrooms and wool products; or you can just take a walk or horse ride through the pretty countryside. Stay overnight in the village before heading back through **Riobamba** and continuing east to **Parque Nacional Sangay**, a setting of magnificent volcanoes and diverse flora and fauna. Head back to Riobamba then south to the lovely Kichwa town of **Guamote**. Spend the night in the cozy community-run Inti Sisa, which is also a good place to arrange mountain biking, horse rides or hikes in the pristine countryside. If possible, try to time your visit for Thursday, when a massive indigenous market takes over the town.

After Guamote, travel south to Atillo for a couple of days of spectacular hiking around the crystalline **Lagunas de Atillo**. Afterwards, head back to Guamote, then south to **Cuenca**. After days of rugged traveling, pamper yourself with a stay in one of the city's many fine guesthouses and a meal at one of its eclectic eateries. Recharged and refreshed, continue south to **Loja**, where you can sample one of the city's specialties, *cuy* (guinea pig) – or, if you're squeamish, try its famous corn- and plantain-based delicacies.

From Loja head east to the **Parque Nacional Podocarpus**, a massive park that's home to astounding biodiversity and offers hikes through mesmerizing landscapes of *páramo* (high-altitude Andean grasslands) and cloud forest. Afterwards, go back through Loja and continue south to **Vilcabamba**. This pretty village offers some fine walks, cycling and horse rides, although it's also a perfect spot to simply enjoy the peaceful scenery. Next work your way down the western side of the Andes to **Catacocha**, a charming, little-visited highland town. Spend a day here, then head to **Puyango** to visit one of South America's largest petrified forests.



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Above: San Rafael Falls  
(p209)

Right: Cooking *cuy*  
(guinea pig)



STEVE ALLEN / GETTY IMAGES ©



3  
WEEKS

## Adventure in the Oriente

The Oriente is Ecuador's slice of the Amazon, one of the world's most biologically diverse regions. For adventurers, wildlife lovers and budding anthropologists, there's much to discover here, from indigenous reserves to jungle lodges with an incredible array of plant and animal life. Start in **Quito**; pre-book jungle lodges you plan to stay at and load up on any needed supplies, then catch a bus southeast to **Papallacta**, a sparkling complex of thermal baths with magnificent mountain views on a clear day. With both high-end and budget options, this is a fine place to overnight at before continuing east to **Baeza**, a pleasant base for hiking, biking, rafting, bird-watching and other activities. From there, go north to the thundering drama of photogenic **San Rafael Falls** – Ecuador's highest. For spectacular views of nearby Volcán Reventador in action, make the hike up to the **Reserva Alto Coca**, a remote cloud-forest reserve with great hiking and bird-watching, plus rustic cabins with striking views of the volcano.

Continue on to the gritty oil town of **Lago Agrio**; from here, head out to the **Reserva Producción Faunística Cuyabeno** – a spectacular rainforest reserve packed with biodiversity. Spend a few days at the recommended Cuyabeno Lodge then travel back to Lago Agrio and on to **Coca**, another tiny river settlement turned oil boom town. Take a stroll along the river, then hook up with a jungle guide (best arranged beforehand in Quito) for a trip out to the **Lower Río Napo**, home to some of Ecuador's finest jungle lodges. Here you'll find superb wildlife-watching on hikes, canoe rides or climbs to the top of the jungle canopy.

Get your fill of piranha-fishing, caiman-spotting and bird-watching, then head back to Coca and down to **Tena**. This river town is an ideal spot to gain a different perspective on the rainforest: namely, by rushing past on a white-water-rafting trip through spectacular class IV rapids. If time allows, you can tack on a trip to the less-visited southern Oriente, via **Macas**. Alternatively, the Achuar-run **Kapawi Ec lodge & Reserve** (reachable by chartered aircraft from **Shell**) is a wonderfully remote piece of Amazonia.





**10**  
DAYS

## Surf & Sun

Ecuador's charming coastal villages and attractive beaches draw a wide mix of travelers, including sunseekers, surfers and seafood lovers. Start in the laid-back beach spots near **Same** (*sah-may*) and the Corredor Turístico Galera-San Francisco on the north coast. After the long journey from Quito, book into a beachfront *cabaña* (cabin), walk on the beach, and get your fill of seafood. On day two, catch a bus down to **Mompiche**, a beloved haunt for surfers and paradise seekers alike with a long brown-sugar beach, big waves and a fun traveler scene that still hasn't become overrun. Take a whale-watching day trip from here or visit the island paradise of **Isla Portete** before continuing south.

Next up is **Canoa**, a slow-moving beach town with a long sandy stretch backed by forested cliffs. Canoa invites lingering: you can take surf lessons, study Spanish and ride horses or cycle to deserted beaches nearby. There are some fine beachfront guesthouses and decent restaurants. While in Canoa, leave time for a visit to the **Río Muchacho**, a working organic farm, at which you can take a tour, stay overnight and enjoy the fantastic food grown right on-site.

On day six, continue south to **Bahía de Caráquez** and take a tour (best arranged in advance) through the fascinating **Chirije** archaeological site; you can also explore mangroves, look for frigate birds and take an eco-city tour. Spend the night, then continue on day seven to **Puerto López** (you'll probably have to transfer at Manta). This sleepy town is the gateway to the **Isla de la Plata**, a fine place to see blue-footed boobies if you're not heading to the Galápagos. In season (mid-June to early October), there's also good whale-watching. Other area attractions include the stunning beach of **Los Frailes**, the indigenous community of **Agua Blanca**, and surrounding rainforest with some memorable hiking and horse riding.

Spend your last two days in **Montañita**, a surf town with a serious party vibe. If you're looking for something more mellow, stop instead in **Ayampe** or **Olón**. If time allows, make a detour to **Dos Mangas**, where you can arrange hikes or horse treks to waterfalls and remote coastal villages.



## OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Beijing and Delhi, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

## OUR WRITERS



### Regis St Louis

**Coordinating Author, South Coast, The Galápagos Islands** After Regis' first journey to the Andes in 1999, he returned home, sold all his belongings and set off on a classic journey across South America. Since then, he's returned numerous times, traveling dodgy roads by truck, horse and bicycle; scaling Andean peaks (small ones); and flailing away at Spanish and Portuguese. On his most recent trip he enjoyed biking, kayaking and boating around the Galápagos; he made

friends with local storytellers on enchanting Floreana; and he developed a newfound admiration for the tropically infused city of Guayaquil. Regis is the coordinating author of *South America on a Shoestring*, and he has contributed to some 50-odd Lonely Planet titles. When not on the road, he lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Read more about Regis at:  
[lonelyplanet.com/members/regislouis](http://lonelyplanet.com/members/regislouis)



### Greg Benchwick

**Central Highlands, North Coast & Lowlands** Greg has been traveling across Latin America for the past 15 years, contributing to more than two dozen guidebooks. For this edition of Ecuador he returned to the Central Highlands, taking a day off to film for LonelyPlanet.com along the Quilotoa Loop. He also 'discovered' a few really cool beaches that made their way into our guide for the first time during his travels along the North Coast. Greg is an expert on sustainable travel,

international development, food, wine and having a good time.

Read more about Greg at:  
[lonelyplanet.com/members/gbenchwick](http://lonelyplanet.com/members/gbenchwick)



### Michael Grosberg

**Quito, Northern Highlands** Long ago while in graduate school in NYC focusing on Latin American literature, Michael spent a summer in Quito teaching English and working on his Spanish. He's made many trips back to Ecuador, including three to the Galápagos Islands for previous editions of this guidebook. This is around the 35th Lonely Planet guidebook Michael has worked on while being based out of Brooklyn, NY.

Read more about Michael at:  
[lonelyplanet.com/members/michaelgrosberg](http://lonelyplanet.com/members/michaelgrosberg)



### Luke Waterson

**Cuenca & the Southern Highlands, The Oriente** As a coffee and chocolate addict and devotee of all things Andean/Amazonian, Luke was destined to hit Ecuador sooner or later. For this visit – his fourth – highlights were hiking to Ecuador's most remote cloud-forest lodge and a surprise trip around Macará with a contra-band fuel dealer. Luke has contributed to Lonely Planet's *Peru, Cuba and Mexico* titles, and is also LP's 'man in Slovakia'. He lives there, spending time walking in the mountains and writing – both fiction and his Slovakia travel blog, [englishmaninslovakia.com](http://englishmaninslovakia.com).

Read more about Luke at:  
[lonelyplanet.com/members/lukewaterson](http://lonelyplanet.com/members/lukewaterson)

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