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PLAN YOUR TRIP

YOUR PLANNING TOOL KIT
 Photos, itineraries, lists and suggestions to help you put together your perfect trip

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Craft Markets
 Leave plenty of extra space, plan on buying an extra bag while you're down: Ecuador is a fantastic place for market-lovers. Woolly sweaters, hand-woven bags, pottery, puppets, elaborate

Wild Encounters
 An astounding array of animals live in Ecuador's high-altitude forests.

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UNDERSTAND ECUADOR

GET MORE FROM YOUR TRIP
 Learn about the big picture, so you can make sense of what you see

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Ecuador Today

A New Development Paradigm
 Ecuador is an emerging nation, plagued by widespread poverty, rampant inequality and political instability. With a new wave of government, the country's handling of its natural resources, health care and infrastructure. For more on the state of the most tropical and enigmatic country in South America, see our guide to Ecuador.

The Natural World

The Land
 Ecuador straddles the equator on the Pacific coast of the continent of South America. Despite its small size Ecuador is one of the most diverse countries in the world, offering a wide range of natural experiences. For more on the state of the most tropical and enigmatic country in South America, see our guide to Ecuador.

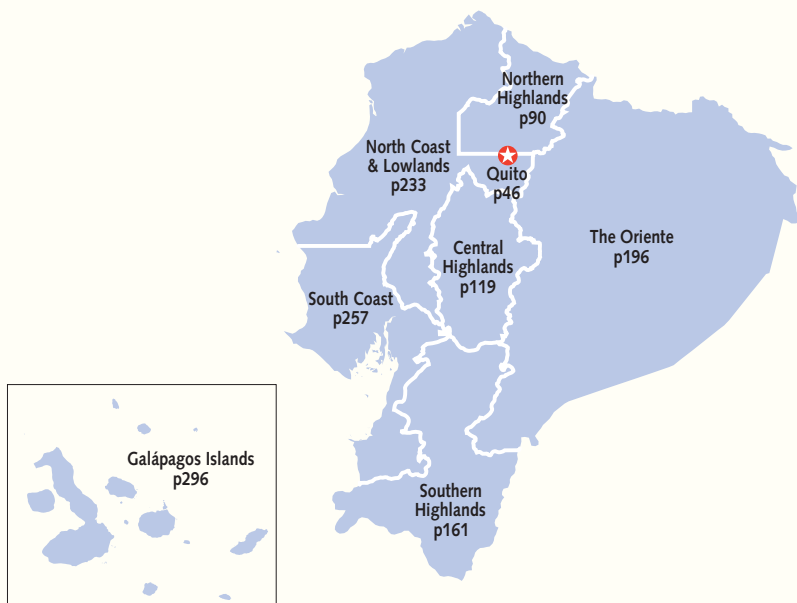
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THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

Regis St Louis

Greg Benchwick, Michael Grosberg, Tom Masters

➤ **Every listing is recommended by our authors, and their favourite places are listed first**

➤ **Look out for these icons:**



Our author's top recommendation



A green or sustainable option



No payment required

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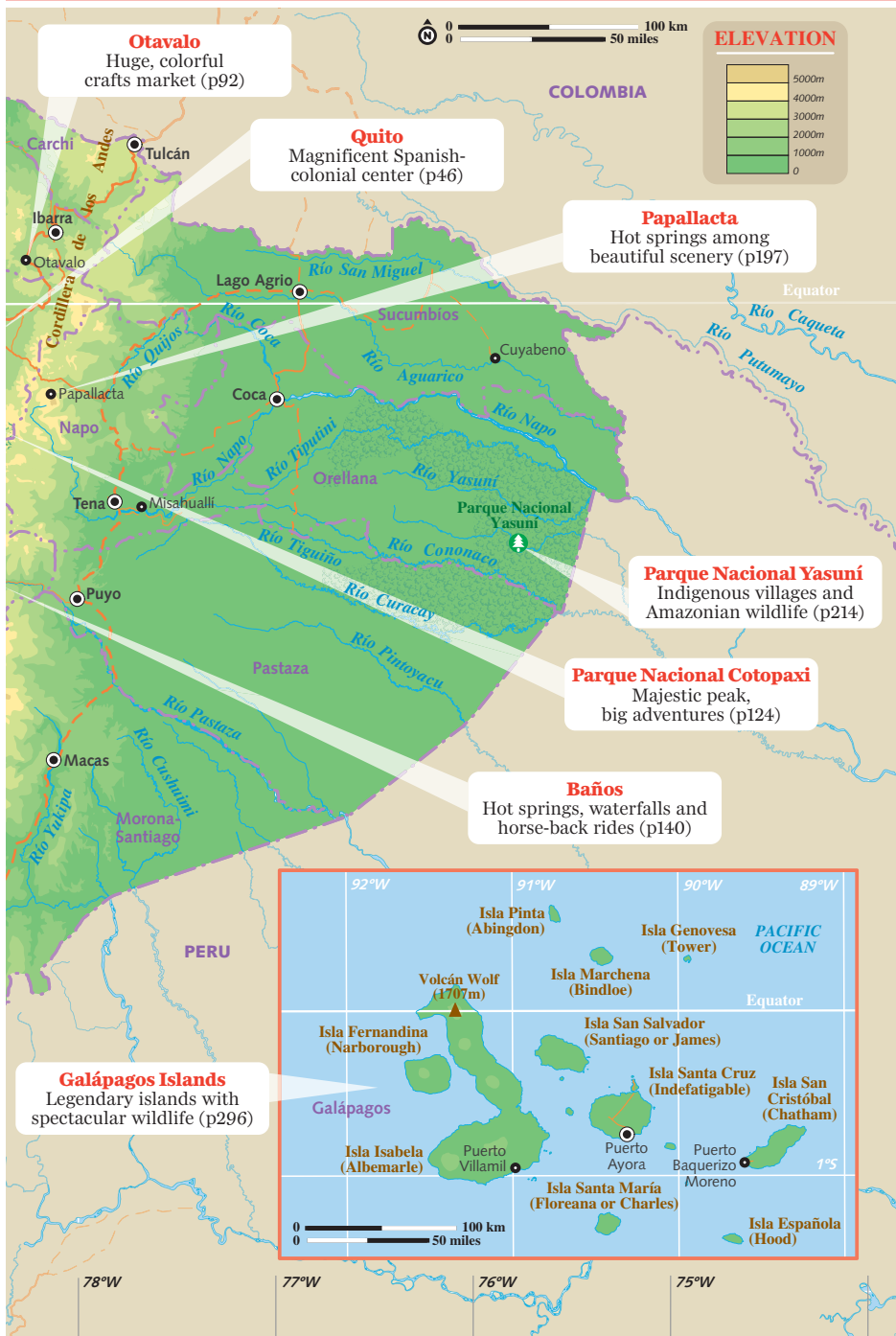
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Ecuador & the Galápagos Islands



Top Experiences >





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 Melbourne, London and Oakland, 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, Quito 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 dined his way through countless *cevicherías*, joined the night ride through Quito's old town and finally learned some salsa moves. Regis is the coordinating author of *South America on a Shoestring*, and he has contributed to more than 30 Lonely Planet titles. He lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Read more about Regis at:
lonelyplanet.com/members/regisstlouis



Greg Benchwick

Central Highlands, Southern Highlands Greg has been writing about Latin America for the past 10 years. He's rumbled through the jungles of Central America, met with heads of state while working for the UN and trekked along ancient Inca roads in Ecuador, Bolivia and Peru. To cap off his research for the central and southern highlands, Greg huffed and puffed his way to the top of Cotopaxi.



Michael Grosberg

South Coast, The Galápagos Islands This is the third edition of *Ecuador & the Galápagos Islands* Michael has worked on. In addition to his Lonely Planet assignments, he's visited Ecuador on a number of other occasions, including a long-ago summer spent teaching in Quito. During his graduate school days he focused on the literature and culture of Latin America. Michael, a reformed academic, is based in Brooklyn, New York and has worked on more than 17 Lonely Planet books.



Tom Masters

Northern Highlands, The Oriente, North Coast & Lowlands Tom first went to Ecuador as a student backpacker and immediately loved this fascinating corner of South America. Since then, he's covered all corners of Latin America for Lonely Planet, including Mexico, Cuba and Venezuela. Covering the vast Oriente, the stunning northern highlands and the super-relaxed north coast for this book was a real adventure that involved fording surprisingly large rivers in a tiny car, anaconda sightings, a laptop breakdown in the rainforest and one shamanic soul cleansing. You can find Tom online at www.tommasters.net.

Read more about Tom at:
lonelyplanet.com/members/tommasters

OVER MORE
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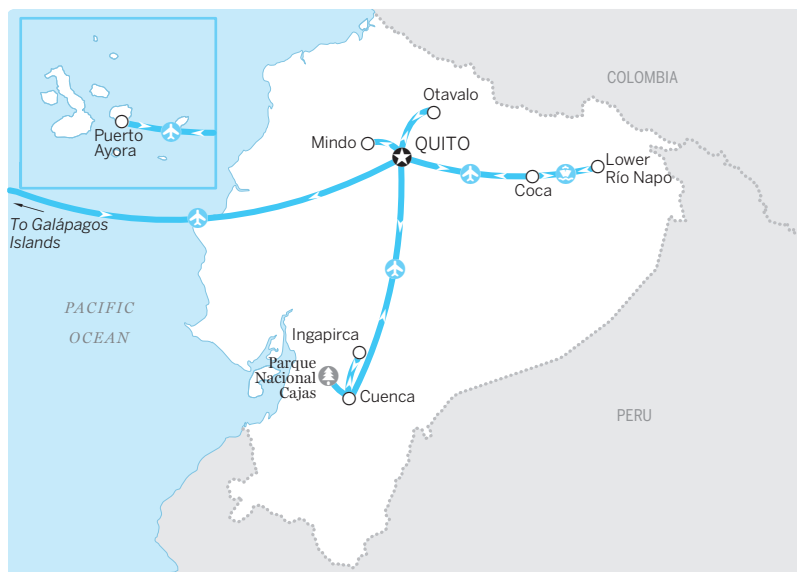
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Bestselling guide to Ecuador – source: Nielsen BookScan, Australia, UK and USA, May 2011 to April 2012

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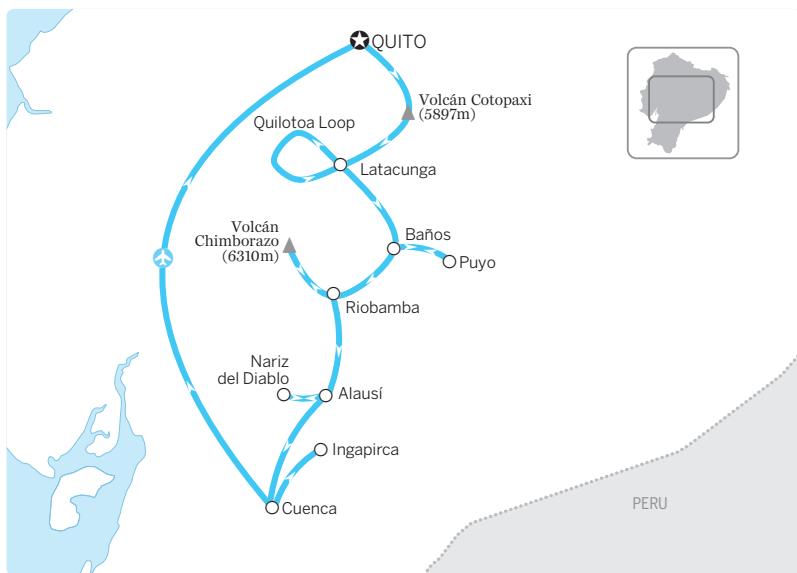
itineraries

Whether you've got six days or 60, these itineraries provide a starting point for the trip of a lifetime. Want more inspiration? Head online to lonelyplanet.com/thorntree to chat with other travelers.



Two 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 fly to the **Galápagos** for a four-day cruise of wildlife-watching and island-hopping. On day seven, fly back to Quito and go two hours north to **Otavalo** for its famous market (best on Saturdays). Spend the night there; then on the eighth day, head back early to Quito for a flight to **Coca**, gateway to the Amazon. Spend three nights at one of the beautifully sited jungle lodges on the lower **Río Napo**. Catch the early morning flight back to Quito, and take a bus two hours west to the lush cloud forests of **Mindo**. Overnight in a riverside lodge, then return to Quito for a round-trip 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 returning to Quito at journey's end.



Three 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 horseback 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 to 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 book passage on the train to Alausí, then on to 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. Alight in **Alausí**, and continue by bus to the marvelous colonial city of **Cuenca**. There enjoy a few days taking in the colonial churches, peaceful plazas and 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.



Two 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 horseback-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 **Guamoto**. Spend the night in the cozy community-run *Inti Sisa*, which is also a good place to arrange mountain-biking, horseback-rides or hikes in the pristine countryside surrounding. If possible, try to time your visit for Thursday, when a massive, indigenous market takes over the town.

After Guamoto, continue south to Atillo for a couple of days of spectacular hiking around the crystalline **Lagunas de Atillo**. Afterwards, head back to Guamoto, then south to **Cuenca**. After days of rugged traveling, indulge in a bit of pampering 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* and cloud forest. Afterwards, go back through Loja and continue south to **Vilcabamba**. This pretty village offers some fine walks or bike or horseback-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**. Spend a day here, then head to **Puyango** to visit one of South America's largest petrified forests.

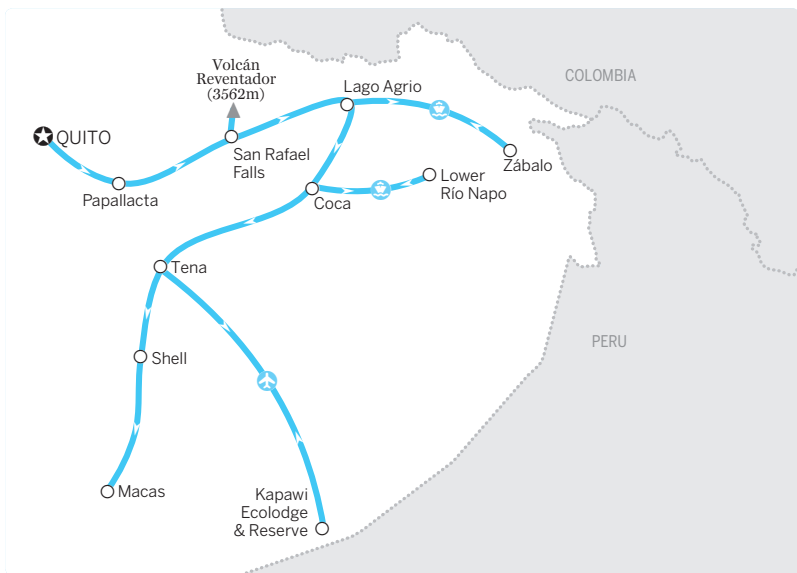


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ALFREDO MANGUÉZ/LOONEY PLANET IMAGES ©

- » (above) Locals sell their wares, Otavalo craft market
- » (left) Canoeing down the Rio Napo in the Amazonian Basin



Three 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 before heading north to the thundering drama of photogenic **San Rafael Falls** – Ecuador's highest. Next to the falls is a small guesthouse and restaurant where you can hire a guide to make the trek up the active volcano of nearby 3562m-high **Volcán Reventador**.

Continue on to the gritty oil town of **Lago Agrio**; from here you can rendezvous with a Cofán guide (arranged in advance in Quito) and take the long trip along the Río Aguarico by motorized canoe to **Zábalo**, home to a small, remote Cofán community amid pristine rainforest. One of the oldest community ecotourism projects in Ecuador, this is a great place to see the riches of the rainforest and learn about the deep traditions of these Amazonian forest people. After a few days here, travel back to Lago Agrio and catch a bus down to **Coca**, another tiny river settlement turned oil boom town. Take a stroll along the river, then hook up with a jungle guide (again, 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 take in a different perspective of the rainforest: namely, rushing past on a white-water-rafting trip on spectacular class IV rapids. If time allows, you can tack on a trip to the less visited southern Oriente, via **Macas**. The Achuar-run **Kapawi Ecolodge & 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 sun-seekers, surfers and seafood lovers. Start your trip in the laid-back beach spot of **Same** (*sah-may*) on the north coast. To get here, take a bus from Quito to Esmeraldas, and change there. After the long journey, book into a beachfront cabaña (cabin), enjoy a long walk on the beach, and get your fill of a decadent seafood feast (Seaflower is a good bet). On day two, catch a bus down to **Mompiche**, a tiny fishing village with palm-fringed sands. Once well off the radar of most visitors, Mompiche is being developed; to enjoy its subdued ambience, the time to go is now!

On day three, continue south to **Canoa**, a slow-moving beach town with a long sandy stretch backed by forested cliffs. Canoa is an easy place to linger for a while. You can take surf lessons, study Spanish or go horseback-riding or biking 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, which you can tour, stay overnight on 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 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 attractions in the area include the stunning beach of **Los Frailes**, the indigenous community of **Agua Blanca**, and surrounding rainforest with some memorable hiking or horseback-riding.

Spend your last two days in **Montañita**, a laid-back surf town that's a major draw among beach lovers from all parts. If time allows, make a detour to **Dos Mangas**, where you can arrange hikes or horse treks to waterfalls and remote coastal villages.

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