



Northern Highlands

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Best Places to Eat

- » Hostería La Mirage (p103)
- » Shanandoa Pie Shop (p98)
- » La Hacienda (p107)
- » Yolanda's Chicha de Yamor (p98)
- » El Quetzal (p117)

Best Places to Stay

- » Ali Shungu Mountaintop Lodge (p101)
- » Hostería La Mirage (p103)
- » Hacienda Pinsaqui (p101)
- » Arashá Rainforest Resort & Spa (p118)
- » Caskaffesu (p115)

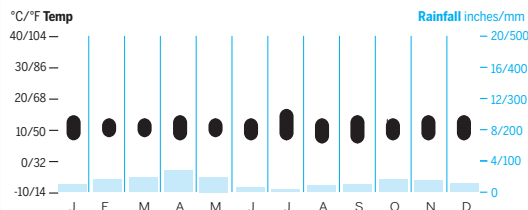
Why Go?

Following the snaking Panamericana – through the awesome scenery of the Andes to the vibrant indigenous town of Otavallo – is a must-do Ecuador experience. As the spine of the Andes bends north from Quito, volcanic peaks punctuate valleys blanketed by flower farms and fields of sugarcane. 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 the steamy lowlands in the west, a rich transitional zone where coffee plantations flourish amid the spectacular scenery of the Intag Valley. Further south, the cloud forests of Mindo, one of Ecuador's fastest-growing destinations, harbor hundreds of bird species: a rich destination for bird-watchers, hikers and anyone looking to retreat deep into nature at one of many jungle lodges.

When to Go

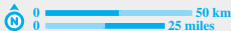
Otavallo



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

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

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



- 1 Browse the dazzling array of goods in Otavalo's colorful **crafts market** (p93)
- 2 Hike into the cloud forests around **Mindo** (p113) to glimpse hundreds of bird species
- 3 Ride through the countryside on horseback starting from a historic

4 Take in the spectacular scenery in the dramatic **Intag Valley** (p104)

5 Summit the massive, glacier-covered **Volcán Cayambe** (p92)

- 6 Drink the fermented corn drink *chicha de yamor* during the **Fiesta del Yamor** (p95)
- 7 Buy yourself great quality leather goods at bargain prices in the shops and markets of **Cotacachi** (p102)