



The Oriente

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Why Go?

This vast landmass holds more drama than a rip-roaring flood or crackling lightning storm. Rivers churn from the snowcapped Andes into the dense, sweltering rainforest on course to the Amazon basin and the distant Atlantic Ocean. Along the way, ancient indigenous tribes call the riverbanks home and, in many places, life goes on as it has for centuries.

Here, those lucky enough to get out to the more remote jungle lodges (often several hours downriver from the nearest town) will find an incredible array of wildlife and nature to enjoy: fish for piranhas on silent black-water lakes; spot the shining eyes of caiman at nighttime; hear the menacing screech of howler monkeys and see colorful parrots feeding at the famous clay licks (areas where nutrient-rich clay is abundant and birds gather to feed on it to supplement their diet). The rainforest is home to 50% of Ecuador's mammals, and exploring the Oriente gives you the unforgettable experience of seeing the natural world up close and personal.

Best Places to Eat

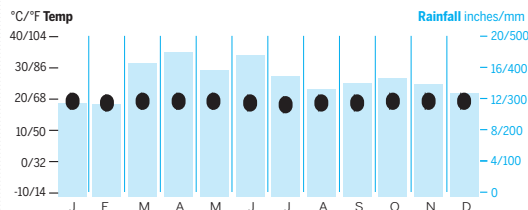
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Best Places to Stay

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When to Go

The Oriente



Dec–Mar The driest time of year when some rivers become impassable due to low water levels.

Apr–Jul The wettest time of year – more than ever make sure you've got a good raincoat!

Oct–Nov The best time of year – the rivers are all passable, it's not too wet and wildlife is easy to spot.

THE NORTHERN ORIENTE

The Northern Oriente is the most accessible part of the Ecuadorian jungle, served as it is by good road and air connections to Quito, and with a developed tourism infrastructure. On the down side, this development and the omnipresence of the oil industry makes it somewhat harder to get into the remoter reaches of the rainforest, but making the effort to do so is definitely worthwhile. The biodiversity remains amazingly impressive, and while indigenous peoples are accustomed to outsiders jockeying for their land and resources, they still proudly share this unique region with the respectful visitor.

A paved road from Quito splits at Baeza; the northern fork makes it way to Lago Agrio, while the southern fork heads toward Tena. The other main road zips from highland Baños to Puyo in under two hours. In the rainiest months (June to August), roads can wash out and airports can close. If you have important air connections from Quito, allow an extra day or two in between.

From Quito to Lago Agrio

PAPALLACTA

ELEV 3300M

Slip into this tiny village's steamy, therapeutic waters to soothe sore muscles or combat the high-altitude chill. At Termas de Papallacta, more than three dozen sparkling pools offer the country's most luxurious thermal baths experience. The complex is about 3km outside the village of Papallacta and is a good day trip from Quito, 67km (two hours) away. Be prepared for cold nights and intense sun.

👁 Sights & Activities

Termas de Papallacta

HERMAL BATHS

About 1.5km before the village, on the left as you approach from Quito, a marked dirt road leads 2km uphill to Termas de Papallacta. The setting is grand: on a clear day you can see the snowcapped **Volcán Antisana** (5753m), 15km south, beyond the lush hillsides. Unfortunately the hot springs are a poorly kept secret; opt for a weekday visit if possible, or, for a truly wonderful experience, come after dark, when it's particularly magical and far less crowded.

There are two sets of pools: the **Balneario** (admission \$7; ☀6am-11pm, last entry 9pm) and the **Spa** (admission \$18; 9am-9pm). The Bal-

neario boasts more than 25 blue pools of varying temperatures surrounded by plush grass and red-orange blossoms. Towels and lockers are available. There's little reason to visit the Spa pools, although they are less crowded, smaller and filled with jets. An indoor sauna can loosen you up for a spa treatment, which can range from \$10 to \$45. The sauna is free at the spa. The treatments include hydrothermal massages, reflexology, body wraps with Andean mud, Turkish baths, body lymphatic drainage and body exfoliation. Pool waters are changed daily.

🛏 Sleeping & Eating

TOP CHOICE Hotel Termas de Papallacta

LUXURY HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎02-256-8989, 02-250-4787; www.termaspa.pallacta.com; r \$135-155, 6-person cabin \$192; 📞📺📺) Most visitors to Papallacta come to stay at this supremely comfortable yet totally unpretentious resort, which is a great way to experience the thermal baths in style. Thatched adobe cabins with smart wood-paneled rooms surround private hot pools for guest use only, and there's a good restaurant, a sumptuous spa and even a set of spacious cabins across the way for groups of friends to share. All accommodations have private bathrooms, thermal heating, hot showers and tubs. Weekends must be reserved well in advance. The Sucus restaurant (mains \$10 to \$25) serves a wide range of international dishes including lamb chops, sea bass and filet mignon, and there are another two restaurants in the Spa and the Balneario.

Hostería Pampallacta Termas

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(☎06-289-5014; www.pampallactatermales.com; s/d incl breakfast \$36-55; 📞📺📺) This is the best midrange option in Papallacta. It's not quite as convenient for the Balneario as the Hostal Antisana, but it's warmer (all rooms have fireplaces) and more charming (all rooms have huge stone bathtubs you can fill with thermal spring water). Management is friendly, and if you don't fancy walking up the road to the Balneario, there's a number of small thermal pools in which to relax.

Hostal Antisana

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(☎06-232-0626; s/d incl breakfast \$25/40; 📺) This echoey 10-room *hostal* (small, reasonably priced hotel) sits just meters from the Termas de Papallacta, but is a fraction of the price of its upscale neighbor, the Hotel