



Southern Highlands

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Best Places to Eat

- » Café Eucalyptus (p172)
- » Café Austria (p173)
- » El Tamal Lojano (p185)
- » Charlito's (p192)

Best Places to Stay

- » Hotel Victoria (p171)
- » Hostal Achik Wasi (p181)
- » Grand Victoria Boutique Hotel (p183)
- » Copalinga (p189)
- » Hostería y Restaurante Izhcayluma (p191)

Why Go?

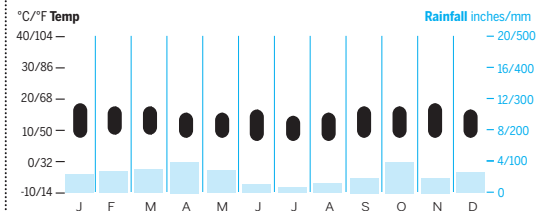
Emerging out of the shadows of glaciers and active volcanoes in the north, the passage down the southern spine of the Ecuadorian Andes brings intrepid travelers through a splendid patchwork of gently rolling mountains and valleys, colonial cities and remote indigenous villages.

From humid lowland forest to chilly elfin woodland, the region is home to hundreds of bird species, thousands upon thousands of plant species, and scores of mammals. These habitats provide unsurpassable outdoor experiences, and a trip to any of the region's large national parks should definitely be on the agenda.

Most adventures begin in the regional capital of Cuenca. The city has one of Latin America's best-preserved colonial centers and a thriving arts scene. From there, it's a choose-your-own-adventure romp southward to the new-age community of Vilcabamba, seldom-visited wild areas and bustling regional capitals.

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.

Southern Highlands Highlights

- 1 Wander the cobblestone streets of colonial **Cuenca** (p165), a Unesco World Heritage Site
- 2 Keep your eyes peeled for orchids, birds and rare mammals in the diverse habitats of **Parque Nacional Podocarpus** (p187)
- 3 Perfect the art of relaxation in **Vilcabamba** (p189) with massages, horseback-riding and strolls in the clean country air
- 4 Grab your boots for a hike in the eerie moors of **Parque Nacional Cajas** (p177)
- 5 Ponder the engineering mysteries of the Incan ruins at **Ingapirca** (p164)

