

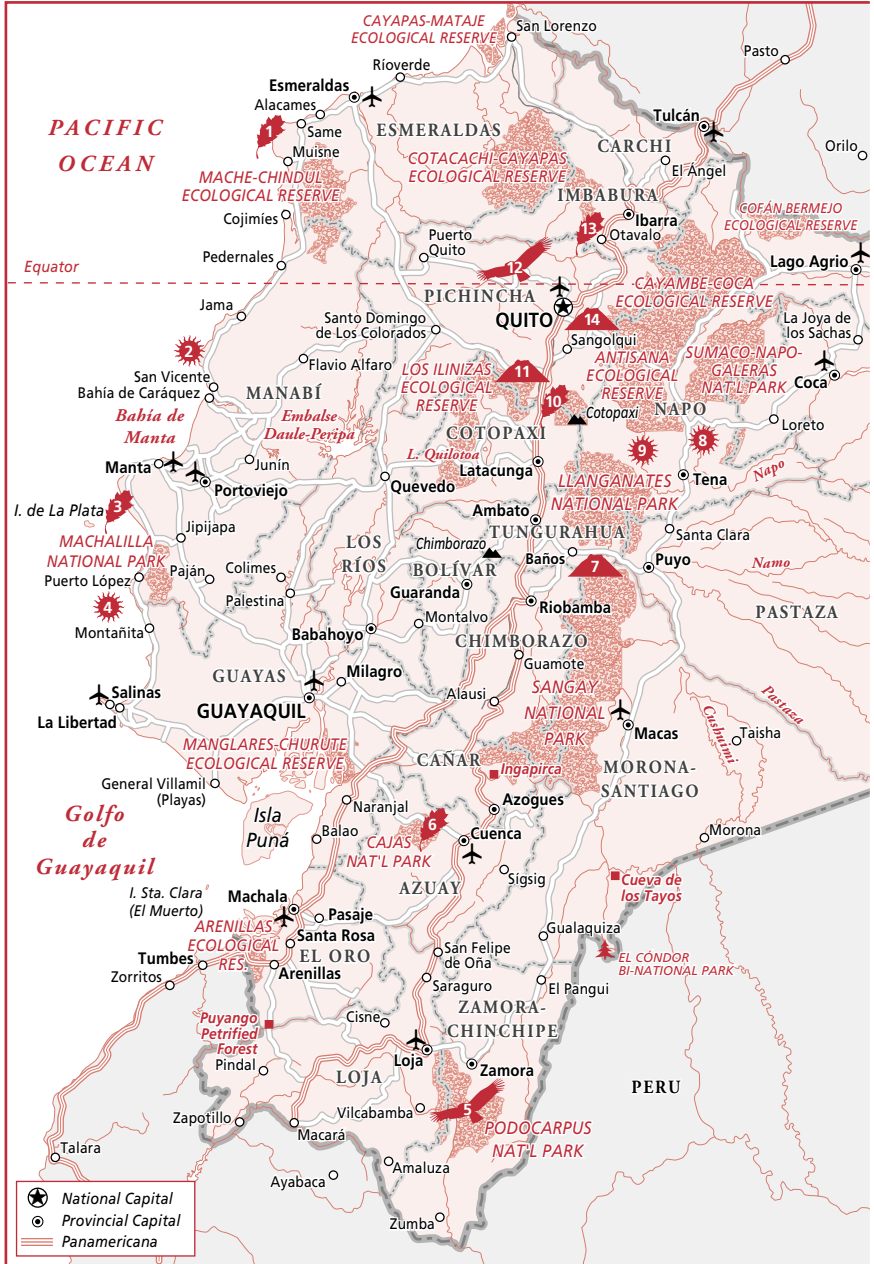
## The Best of Ecuador

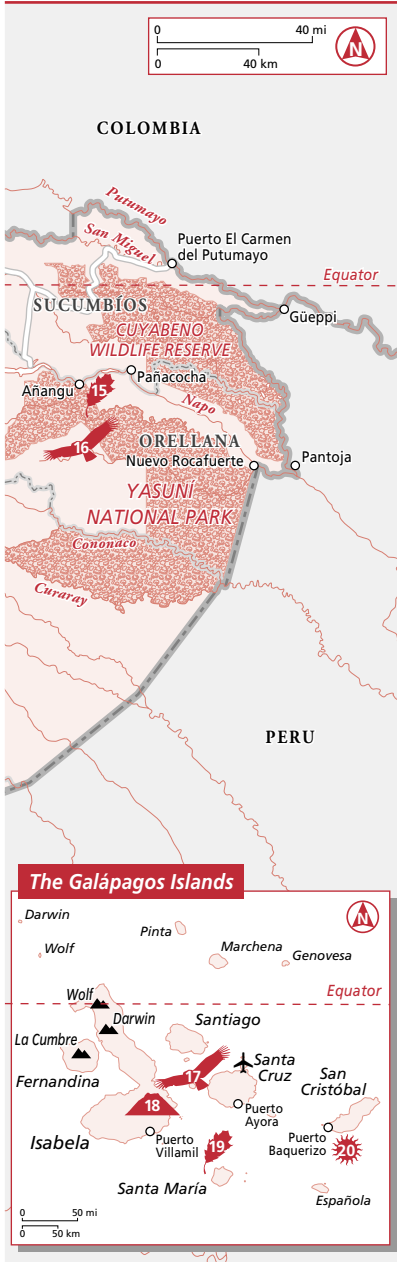
**E**cador likes to boast that it is really four distinct destinations: the Galápagos Islands, the Amazon basin, the high Andean Sierra, and the Pacific coast. In fact, it's much more. Quito offers up both colonial gems and modern pleasures. Cuenca is yet another colonial treasure, with the Inca ruins of Ingapirca nearby. You can visit not only the rainforests of the Amazon basin, but also the cloud forests of Mindo and Bellavista, the dry forests of the southern Pacific lowlands, and the high-altitude paramo of the Central highlands. Active travelers can ride horses on the Andean plains, or mountain bike down the slopes of active volcanoes. Bird-watchers can add to their list from the more than 1,600 species found here. With so much physical and cultural variety, there are plenty of excellent experiences and adventures for any type of traveler. Below is a selective list of some of the best that Ecuador has to offer.

### 1 The Best Purely Ecuadorian Travel Experiences

- **Stepping Back in Time in Colonial Quito:** Founded in 1534, Quito was the first city to be declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Its Old Town seems in many ways to have changed little over the centuries. Walk the rough cobblestone streets and visit the numerous, beautifully restored colonial-era churches, monasteries, convents, private mansions, and public plazas—you'll feel as if you've traveled back in time. See chapter 5.
- **Straddling the Equator:** The country isn't called Ecuador for nothing—the equator passes right through it. Don't miss the chance to have your photo taken with one foot in either hemisphere. There are several popular tourist attractions and marked spots where you can do this. My favorite, though, is the new **Quitsato Mitad del Mundo Monument** (☎ 09/9701-133; [www.quitsato.org](http://www.quitsato.org)), located just off the highway from Quito to Otavalo. See p. 135.
- **Eating Cuy:** You'll see them roasting on spits at little stands along the highways, or on sidewalks in cities and towns. You'll also find them on the menus of some of Ecuador's fanciest restaurants. It's guinea pig to me and you. The skin is served crisp and crackling, and you'll have to work to get much meat from *cuy*. But when it's good, it's moist and flavorful. See restaurant reviews throughout the book.
- **Searching for the Fountain of Youth in Vilcabamba:** The small and isolated village of Vilcabamba is said to have a disproportionately high number of centenarians. Most folks credit the clean water, air, and living. While it may not actually add years to your life, this is a great place to come for a quiet getaway with superb scenery. And whether or not there's any science behind it, a spa treatment or two at **Madre Tierra** (☎ 07/2640-269; [www.madretierra1.com](http://www.madretierra1.com)) or **Hostería**

# The Best of Ecuador





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**Izhcayluma** (☎ 07/2640-095 or 09/9153-419; [www.izhcayluma.com](http://www.izhcayluma.com)) will definitely cure whatever's ailing you at the moment. See chapter 8.

- **Starting Off Your Day with a Glass of Tree-Tomato Juice:** Don't be put off by the name, nor think that it tastes anything like a traditional tomato. A tree tomato (*tomate de árbol* or *tamarillo*) is a unique fruit served just about every which way in Ecuador. My favorite is the juice, although you'll also find tree tomatoes in salads; cooked into jam; or boiled, peeled, sweetened, and served as dessert.
- **Riding on the Roof of a Train Past the Devil's Nose:** Earthquakes, landslides, and volcanic eruptions have wiped out most of the rail-line that used to connect Quito to Guayaquil. The one remaining operational section is also one of the most spectacular, a white-knuckle ride of sharp switchbacks and hairpin turns down the side of a steep rock mountain affectionately known as The Devil's Nose. See p. 199.
- **Buying a Panama Hat:** You shouldn't leave the country without buying one of these stylish straw wonders, which are made in Ecuador, not Panama (for

an explanation, see p. 211). Cuenca is currently the primary center for production of Panama hats; **Homero Ortega P. & Hijos** (☎ 07/2809-000; [www.homeroortega.com](http://www.homeroortega.com)) is that city's top manufacturer, and also has shops in Quito. True aficionados might even head to the small towns of Montecristi or Jipijapa to find their special *superfino* headpiece. See chapter 8.

- **Drinking Chicha:** Homebrewed liquor made from fermenting corn, potatoes, yuca, and just about anything else on hand, *chicha* is consumed by indigenous peoples throughout the Andean highlands as well as in the lowland forests of El Oriente. Most *chicha* is relatively mild, but if you drink enough of it you'll definitely feel its effects—especially at high altitudes. See chapters 7 and 11.
- **Taking a Tour through the Amazon with an Indian Chief:** Born to missionary parents and reared among the Cofán people of Ecuador's Amazon basin, Randy Borman is the tribe's official chief. He'll guide you on a multiday tour through the Cofán lands and villages, and you'll learn about and experience Cofán traditions, skills, cuisine, and culture. See p. 305.

## 2 The Best of Natural Ecuador

With natural delights ranging from the Galápagos Islands to snowcapped volcanic peaks, and from Amazon lowland rainforests to high Andean paramo, Ecuador is a naturalist's wonderland. Whether or not you want to hike or climb, bird-watch or simply admire the innate beauty, you'll find plenty of natural wonder here.

- **Cuicocha Lake:** Formed thousands of years ago in the extinct crater of a massive volcano, this beautiful, clear blue lake is a popular destination. You can choose between hiking around the rim of the crater, or

scrambling down for a boat ride on the waters of the lake. The lake is named after the popular dish *cuy* (guinea pig), because locals thought the islands in its center resembled guinea pigs. See p. 146.

- **Cotopaxi National Park:** Comprising 33,393 hectares (82,480 sq. miles) surrounding the park's namesake and emblematic volcano, this is Ecuador's most popular national park, after the Galápagos. At 5,897m (19,348 ft.), the snow-covered Cotopaxi is the country's second highest peak, and

allegedly the highest active volcano in the world. Tour options here range from leisure hikes at lower elevations, to full-on summit climbs, with a range of other options, from mountain biking to horseback riding to camping. The best general tour operators running trips to Cotopaxi are **Metropolitan Touring** (☎ 02/2988-200; www.metropolitan-touring.com); and **Surtrek** (☎ 02/2231-534; www.surtrek.com). For hard-core climbing and adventures, try **Cotopaxi.com** (☎ 02/2909-640; www.cotopaxi.com) or **Safari Ecuador** (☎ 02/2222-505; www.safari.com.ec). See chapters 4 and 7.

- **Cajas National Park:** Located just outside Cuenca, this beautiful national park is famous for its 232 high montane lakes and misty cloud forests. It is also an excellent place for hiking and bird-watching. Easily accessible, it's a great change of pace from the cobblestone streets, colonial-era churches, and Panama hat shops of Cuenca. See p. 219.
- **Isla de la Plata:** The crowning jewel of **Machalilla National Park** is Isla de la Plata, an offshore island often touted as “the poor man's Galápagos.” Whether or not that's an appropriate or even worthy moniker, Isla de la Plata offers excellent bird and wildlife viewing and snorkeling. What's more, late June through early October, you have the good chance of seeing humpback whales on the boat ride out to the island. On land, Machalilla has some fabulous trails and beaches. See chapter 9.
- **The Beaches West of Atacames:** In general, Ecuador is not a great beach

destination. It certainly can't hold a candle to beaches found in the Caribbean, South Pacific, or even Mexico or Costa Rica. However, the relatively short section of Pacific coast west of Atacames has several small and beautiful beaches. Sua and Same are my favorites, but Atacames itself, as well as Tonsupa, Tonchigue, and Galera, are also pretty. And for someplace really unique and isolated, you can head to the small island of Muisne. See chapter 10.

- **The Rainforests of Ecuador's El Oriente:** When Amazon rainforests are mentioned, most people think of Brazil. But Ecuador's El Oriente is a vast area of lowland tropical rainforest that is part of the Amazon basin which feeds and forms the Amazon River. In fact, Francisco Orellana, who first named and navigated the Amazon River, began his long journey here in Ecuador. Over 500 species of birds and some 15,000 species of flora can be found here, as well as fresh-water dolphins, 11 different species of monkeys, anacondas, caimans, and jaguars. See chapter 11.
- **The Galápagos Islands:** Ecuador's prime attraction is a naturalist's paradise. In fact, if we were talking religion, this would be Holy Ground. It was here that Charles Darwin developed many of his ideas that would later emerge as the *Theory of Natural Selection* and the *Theory of Evolution*. Not only are the Galápagos famous for their wildlife—on land, in the sea, and in the air—but this unique and isolated volcanic archipelago is a unique living geology laboratory. See chapter 12.

### 3 The Best Historical Sites & Museums

From the ruins and relics left behind by pre-Columbian peoples to the ornate colonial-era churches, monasteries, and

convents built by the Spanish conquistadors—not to mention the work of iconic Ecuadorian artist Oswaldo

Guayasamín—Ecuador contains a wealth of fascinating historical sites and museums.

- **Iglesia de San Francisco** (Old Town; Quito): Quito's first church, San Francisco remains one of its most impressive, especially when you factor in the attached monastery, museum, massive altar, and wide stairway ascending from the plaza. The church and its ornate interior are in the midst of a major restoration, which should only make this classic, colonial-era church that much more impressive. See p. 118.
- **La Compañía de Jesús** (Old Town; Quito): There's so much gold and gold leaf adorning this unbelievably ornate 17th-century baroque church that I often feel the need for sunglasses. In fact, the Jesuits who built this church incorporated several sun symbols, which some say was a nod to the Incas who preceded them on this spot. The level of detail and artistry on display here is unparalleled. See p. 120.
- **Museo Nacional del Banco Central del Ecuador** (New Town; Quito): Ecuador's largest museum is also arguably its best. The anthropological and historical displays of the pre-Columbian inhabitants are extensive, interesting, and beautifully displayed. There are also very good collections of colonial-era and religious art, as well as a fine representation of Ecuador's best modern art and artists. See p. 122.
- **Fundación Guayasamín** (Bellavista, Quito): Oswaldo Guayasamín was Ecuador's greatest and most famous modern artist. His striking large paintings, murals, and sculptures had an impact on artists across Latin America and around the world. This extensive museum displays both his own work and pieces from his collection. Combined with the neighboring **Capilla del Hombre**, this is a must-see for any art lover or Latin American history buff. See p. 123.
- **Catedral Nueva** (Cuenca): This massive cathedral took over 80 years to complete. Its two towering blue domes dominate the skyline of Cuenca, especially when viewed from one of the hillside lookouts outside town. Don't miss a chance to tour its beautiful inside, which has white marble floors, stained-glass windows, and a Renaissance-style main altar. See p. 207.
- **Museo del Banco Central** (Cuenca; ☎ 07/2831-255): This modern museum features an excellent collection of archaeological finds and relics, ethnographic displays, and colonial-era figurative and religious art; it's also built right on top of a major Inca ceremonial site that has been semi-excavated. As if that weren't enough, there are extensive botanical gardens here, a small aviary, and llamas roaming the grounds. See p. 208.
- **Ingapirca** (outside of Cuenca): Ingapirca is the greatest surviving Inca ruin in Ecuador. A visit here will allow you to appreciate the famous Inca masonry, with its seemingly impossibly tight joints. Even before the Incas arrived, this spot was inhabited by the Cañari, and some of their original constructions are also on display. The site is believed to have been sacred to both the Cañari and Incas. See p. 220.
- **La Tolita** (North Pacific coast): This unique archaeological site is found on a small island outside San Lorenzo. It is believed to have been inhabited by one of the oldest pre-Columbian cultures, a people skilled at working with gold, silver, and even platinum. One whole beach here contains millions of shards of ancient pottery. See p. 290.

- **Museo Antropológico y de Arte Contemporáneo** (Guayaquil; ☎ 04/2327-402): Large, modern, and well laid out, this is Guayaquil's best museum. There are extensive archaeological collections here from all over Ecuador, as well as a wonderful wing dedicated to contemporary

Ecuadorian art. One of the best features of this museum is its prized location at the northern end of Guayaquil's Malecón 2000, allowing easy access (before and/or after) to both the popular riverside boardwalk and neighboring Cerro Santa Ana. See p. 240.

## 4 The Best Outdoor Adventures

Ecuador's varied landscape, ecosystems, and natural wonders make it a prime destination for adventure travelers, with opportunities to participate in a wide range of adventure sports and activities.

- **Climbing Volcán Cotopaxi:** Although it's actually only the second highest peak in the country, Cotopaxi is Ecuador's most coveted summit. At 5,897m (19,348 ft.), this is no leisurely climb, yet most people in reasonably good condition, with the proper guides and acclimation, can reach the top. The views on the way up, at the summit, and coming back down are spectacular. **Cotopaxi.com** (☎ 02/2909-640; www.cotopaxi.com) and **Safari Ecuador** (☎ 02/2222-505; www.safari.com.ec) are two excellent operators who can get you to the snowcapped summit. See chapters 4 and 7.
- **Playing Cowboy or Cowgirl on the High Mountain Paramo:** In Ecuador, cowboys are called *chagras*, and the *chagra* tradition is alive and well. Whether you sign on for a short ride or actually get to join in a round-up of wild bulls or horses, you'll feel like a *chagra* as you ride your steed over the rugged scrub of the high Andean paramo. **Hacienda La Alegría** (☎ 02/2462-319; www.haciendaalegria.com) offers multiday rides. See chapters 4 and 7.
- **Watching Whales Breach & Breed off the Pacific Coast:** From late June to early October, humpback whales

congregate in large numbers off Ecuador's Pacific coast. They come to the warmer waters from Antarctica to mate, give birth, feed, and nurse their young. The whales here are very social, and often give spectacular displays of breaching. Whale-watching tours are offered up and down this coastline, but **Salinas** and **Puerto López** are your best bases for setting out on a whale-watching excursion. See chapter 9.

- **Surfing Lonely Waves along Ecuador's Pacific Coast:** Surfers love isolated or undiscovered breaks, and Ecuador is loaded with them. In fact, even the most crowded breaks here could be considered deserted by California standards. Beach and point breaks can be found up and down the Pacific coast. Montañita and Canoa are the country's top surfing destinations, and good bases to use for your search for the perfect wave. See chapters 4, 9, and 10.
- **White-Water Rafting & Kayaking:** With high Andean peaks plunging down to coastal lowlands in two directions, Ecuador is blessed with a host of white-water rivers perfect for rafting and kayaking. The small town of Tena, in El Oriente, is the country's hot spot for these sports, with easy access to everything from Class III to Class V rapids. The most popular rivers are the Upper Napo, or Río Jatunyacu, and the Río Misahuallí. There are also opportunities accessible



from Quito and other cities around the country. **Ríos Ecuador** (★★) (☎ 06/2886-727; www.riosecuador.com) is an excellent operator with offices in both Tena and Quito. See chapters 4 and 11.

- **Scuba Diving in the Galápagos Islands:** While most visitors spend their time marveling at the turtles, iguanas, boobies, and finches, diving the Galápagos may just provide the archipelago's most rewarding wildlife-viewing opportunities. The rich and

protected waters here are home to large quantities of sealife, from schools of hammerhead sharks, to manta rays, to large masses of jacks, barracuda, and other schooling fish. Lucky divers enjoy playful encounters with sea lions and penguins. Your best bet for enjoying the diving is to sign up for a cruise on a dedicated dive boat. You can also book dive trips out of Puerto Ayora or Puerto Baquerizo Moreno. See chapters 4 and 12.

## 5 The Best Bird-Watching

Ecuador is home to some 1,600 species of resident and migratory birds. With such a wide range in ecosystems, altitude, terrain, and habitat, you'll have to travel around the country some to get a full sense of the diversity. Many of the popular birding destinations in Ecuador have species counts well over 300 to 400. Below, I list some of the top bird-watching spots. See chapter 4, and the individual destinations, for more information.

- **Enjoying the Mists and Multitude of Species Found in the Cloud Forests of Mindo & Bellavista:** Cloud forests are unique ecosystems, renowned for their biological abundance. Located under 2 hours north of Quito, the cloud forests of Mindo and Bellavista are rich and rewarding stops for birders and nature lovers of all stripes. Over 400 species of birds have been recorded here, and experts believe the actual count is much higher. **El Monte** (☎ 09/3084-675; www.ecuadorcloudforest.com) and **Bellavista Cloud Forest Reserve** (☎ 02/2116-232; www.bellavistacloudforest.com) are two excellent lodges from which to base your bird-watching expeditions of this area. See p. 136, as well as chapter 4.
- **Spotting Some of the More Than 600 Species in Podocarpus National**

**Park:** This remote national park runs from a high of 3,700m (11,811 ft.) down to some 1,000m (3,281 ft.) above sea level, and contains ecosystems that range from high paramo to cloud forest and rainforest. The most common jumping-off points for visiting here are Loja and Vilcabamba. If you're looking for an excellent personal guide, contact Jorge Luis at **Caminatas Andes Sureños** (☎ 07/2673-147) See p. 227.

- **Catching Sight of Hundreds of Species in El Oriente:** The mid-elevation and lowland rainforests of Ecuador's El Oriente are prime bird-watching areas. Many lodges in this region have on-site bird-species lists that number 400 or more. Several species of macaws frolic overhead, while the prehistoric hoatzin inhabits the low branches of riverside trees. Just about any of the lodges in El Oriente can be considered top bird-watching destinations, but I recommend the **Napo Wildlife Center** (www.napowildlifecenter.com), which has a couple of parrot licks right on their grounds, where as many as several thousand mixed flock parrots may gather on any day to extract minerals and nutrients from an exposed clay river bank. See chapter 11.



- **Seeing Endemic Species on the Galápagos Islands:** What can you say? From the 13 species of Darwin's finches, to the only subtropical penguin, to the unique flightless cormorant, the Galápagos provide the

greatest one-stop spot to check off a whole host of once-in-a-lifetime birds from your life's list. In fact, around half of all the bird fauna on the Galápagos is endemic, meaning you can only see them here. See chapter 12.

## 6 The Best Destinations for Families

- **El Teleférico & Vulcano Park** (Quito; ☎ 02/3250-076; www.teleferiqo.com): If you spend any time in Quito, and if you have kids in town, this is a must-stop. The fast and thrilling ride up the mountain in this cable-car gondola is usually enough to put a smile on most kids' faces, and there's also an amusement park (Vulcano Park) at the base of the cable car. See p. 118.
- **Hacienda La Alegría** (Aloag; ☎ 02/2462-319; www.haciendalaalegria.com): This beautiful old hacienda is also a working farm. Kids can watch and even lend a hand when the cows are milked. Horseback riding is the specialty, and they have particularly good horses, trails, and trainers for introducing young riders to the sport. Their safety concern and record are exemplary. See p. 171.
- **Baños de Agua Santa:** While best known as a backpacker and adventure-travel hot spot, Baños is also great for kids. Vacationing Ecuadorian families come here, and many of the hotels and resorts cater to families. **Sangay Spa-Hotel** (☎ 03/2740-490; www.sangayspahotel.com) has a ton of excellent facilities and activities geared towards all ages. See chapter 7.
- **The Galápagos Islands:** Many of the Galápagos cruise ships and tour companies offer specific family-oriented tours. There is tons to see and do, and plenty of science, nature, and adventure to keep the whole family interested and entertained. **Tauck** ★★ (☎ 800/788-7885 in the U.S. and Canada; www.tauck.com) is an excellent soft-adventure company with distinctive family package tours to the Galápagos. See chapter 12.

## 7 The Best Luxury Hotels

- **JW Marriott Hotel** (Quito; ☎ 800/228-9290 in the U.S. and Canada, or 02/2972-000 in Ecuador; www.marriotthotels.com): With an imposing glass-atrium-covered lobby, gorgeous rooms, attentive service, and good restaurants, this is the best large luxury hotel not only in Quito but in all of Ecuador. The pool, spa, and recreational facilities are excellent, as are the business services. See p. 103.
- **Plaza Grande** (Quito; ☎ 02/2566-497; www.plazagrandequito.com): One of Quito's newest hotels is housed in an old classic-colonial home that was once the residence of one of the city's founding fathers. The meticulous restoration here is complemented by over-the-top luxury and personalized service. In addition to that you will be sleeping in the heart of Old Town, right off the Plaza de la Independencia (Plaza Grande). See p. 107.
- **Hotel Dann Carlton** (Quito; ☎ 02/2249-008; www.hotelesdann.com): The Dann Carlton is in many ways two hotels in one, combining the ambience and attention of a small boutique hotel with all the amenities,

facilities, and services of a luxury business-class hotel. Higher-floor rooms have excellent views. See p. 109.

- **La Mirage Garden Hotel & Spa** (Cotacachi; ☎ 800/327-3573 in the U.S. and Canada, or 06/2915-237; www.mirage.com.ec): Arguably the most exclusive and opulent boutique hotel in the country, La Mirage offers refined accommodations, fine dining, and a spectacular spa. If that's not enough, a range of excellent hikes and adventure activities is available, and Otavalo is just a few minutes away. See p. 151.
- **Luna Runtun** (outside of Baños de Agua Santa; ☎ 03/2740-882 or 03/2740-665; www.lunaruntun.com): With a breathtaking setting in the shadow of Volcán Tungurahua, this luxury spa offers up relaxations and rejuvenation, as well as a full plate of adventure activities and tours. The views from the rooms and suites are spectacular, and the spa here is one of the best in the country. See p. 191.
- **Hilton Colón Guayaquil** (Guayaquil; ☎ 800/445-8667 in the U.S. and Canada, or 04/2689-000 in Ecuador; www.guayaquil.hilton.com): Guayaquil gets a lot of business travelers and hordes of folks overnighing on their way to and from the Galápagos Islands; this is the top hotel in town. The large rooms are well-appointed and some have good views. There are plenty of restaurant and nightlife options here, including a modern casino, and the hotel provides easy access to both the airport and downtown Guayaquil. See p. 243.
- **Royal Palm Hotel** (Santa Cruz Island, Galápagos; ☎ 05/2527-409; www.royalpalmgalapagos.com): This is the most luxurious hotel on the Galápagos, and one of the plushiest in the whole country. Every room here is gorgeous, but you'll want to splurge and get either a villa or a suite. See p. 346.

## 8 The Best Moderately Priced & Budget Hotels

- **Hotel Vieja Cuba** (Quito; ☎ 02/2906-729; viejacuba@andinet.net): Beautifully restored and wonderfully located, this Mariscal-district hotel provides great value. Hardwood floors, mosaic-tile bathrooms, a central courtyard fountain, and an excellent restaurant are just some of the perks. See p. 105.
- **Hotel San Francisco de Quito** (Quito; ☎ 02/2287-758; www.sanfranciscodequito.com.ec): Offering tidy and comfortable rooms in a wonderfully preserved 17th-century converted home, this is my favorite budget option in Quito. This hotel is situated in the heart of Old Town. You get colonial charm and a great deal all in one. See p. 108.
- **Hacienda Guachala** (Cangahua, Cayambe; ☎ 02/2363-042; www.guachala.com): Dating back to 1580, this rustic old hacienda provides all the colonial-era vibe and experience offered up by its more fancy brethren, at very reasonable prices. Granted, the rooms are quite rustic, but you'll have the undeniable feeling of staying at what was once a thriving colonial-era hacienda. A host of tours and activities are available, including a number of horseback-riding adventures. See p. 152.
- **Finca Chamanapamba** (Baños de Agua Santa; ☎ 03/2742-671; www.chamanapamba.com): With a perfect setting, awe-inspiring views, neighboring Chamana waterfall, and

comfortable accommodations, this is an excellent choice in the Baños area. I particularly like the waterfall-view balconies found around the grounds. The owners can arrange a number of tour and adventure options. See p. 192.

- **Posada del Angel** (Cuenca; ☎ 07/2840-695; ☎/fax 07/2821-360; www.hostalposadadelangel.com): It's hard to believe you can find such a charming room in such a charming converted old colonial home for such a bargain. The building is over 120-years old, yet the place is lively and cheery. There are a couple of classic interior courtyards, and second floor lounge areas. If you want more privacy, and a bit of a view, ask for a room on the third or fourth floor. See p. 215.
- **Hostería Alándaluz** (south of Puerto López; ☎ 04/2780-686; www.

alandaluzhosteria.com): An environmentally conscious and eclectic collection of rooms and bungalows on a beautiful spot along the Pacific coast, this is one of my favorite beach hotels in all of Ecuador. Rooms come in a wide range of styles and prices, from semi-rustic doubles to almost opulent suites. Even the least expensive options are quite nice. Heck, you can even camp here. See p. 261.

- **Hotel Sol y Mar** (Puerto Ayora, Isla Santa Cruz; ☎ 05/2526-139): When you can score an ocean-front room with a balcony on the Galápagos Islands for under \$50 (£25), you know you've found a good deal. Accommodations here have tasteful decor, and the common areas are wonderfully inviting. See p. 348.

## 8 The Best Ecologes & Haciendas

Two distinct, yet in some ways similar, lodging options in Ecuador are small, converted old haciendas and isolated ecolodges. While the haciendas tend to be located on the high Andean plains, the ecolodges are mostly found in the Oriente or the Amazon basin. Both tend to be small and isolated, and nature-viewing and active adventure activities are the order of the day.

- **Hacienda Cusín** (San Pablo del Lago, Otavalo; ☎ 06/2918-013; www.haciendacusin.com): This 17th-century hacienda was sold originally at auction in Spain by King Phillip II. It's located just outside of Otavalo, beside the pretty San Pablo Lake. Accommodations, food, and service are all top-draw, and the surrounding gardens and volcano views are delightful. See p. 150.
- **Hacienda Zuleta** (Angochahua, Imbabura; ☎ 02/2228-554; www.zuleta.com): With sprawling grounds;

a working cheese, cattle, and horse farm; and the largest original entrance plaza of any hacienda in Ecuador, this place exudes authenticity. Once the home of President Galo Plaza, and still in his family, the hacienda offers wonderful and comfortable rooms, tasty family-style meals, and a host of tour options. Horseback riding is excellent here. They also have a condor rescue project on their grounds. See p. 154.

- **Black Sheep Inn** (Chugchilán, Cotopaxi; ☎ 03/2814-587; www.blacksheepinn.com): This isolated high-altitude eco-lodge is built on a hillside overlooking a beautiful river canyon. Situated about midway along the famed Quilotoa Loop, this is hands-down the best place to stay while taking part in the hiking, biking, trekking, and other adventures available in this pretty and pristine area. See p. 178.

- **Hacienda Leito** (outside Patate, Baños; ☎ **03/2859-328**; [www.haciendaleito.com](http://www.haciendaleito.com)): This isolated hacienda provides a fabulous mix of old and new. The original ranch building, with its original cobblestone driveway, central fountain, and antique artworks and furnishings, is a classic example of a colonial-Spanish hacienda. But the brand-new and extensive spa, up-to-date rooms, and free Wi-Fi let you know you're in the 21st century. See p. 183.
- **Hacienda San Agustín de Callo** (Lasso, Cotopaxi; ☎/fax **02/2906-157**; [www.incahacienda.com](http://www.incahacienda.com)): My pick for the most unique hacienda in Ecuador, this place is built inside the ruins of both an Inca palace and a colonial-era monastery. Some of the rooms here have walls laid by Inca masons, with their distinctive stone work. All are stunning and unique, with artistic touches that range from hand-painted murals to working stone fireplaces. See p. 170.
- **Hostería La Andaluza** (Chuquipogoyo, Chimborazo; ☎ **03/2949-370**; [www.la-andaluzaec.com](http://www.la-andaluzaec.com)): Located on the outskirts of Riobamba, in the shadow of Chimborazo peak, this converted old hacienda is the best hotel for many miles around. A relaxed and cozy vibe and colonial-era authenticity are prevalent. The restaurant here is excellent, and a number of activities are available. See p. 200.
- **Kashama** (outside of Santo Domingo de los Colorados; ☎ **02/2773-193**; [www.kashama.com](http://www.kashama.com)): This is a beautiful and relaxing jungle lodge and spa set on the shores of the Río Blanco. Creative design elements and arty touches abound. The inviting pool features a tall, sculpted waterfall, and the excellent spa here offers a wide range of treatments and cures. All sorts of tours and adventures are also offered. See p. 298.
- **Napo Wildlife Center** (lower Río Napo; ☎/fax **02/2897-316**; [www.napowildlifecenter.com](http://www.napowildlifecenter.com)): Run as a joint venture with the local Añangu Quichua community, this, like Kapawi (see below), is one of the top ecolodges in the Amazon basin. The 10 lakefront bungalows are rustically luxurious, and the guides, food, and service are superb. Tours and adventures are offered, including visits to local indigenous communities and tours of the rivers, lagoons, and creeks of this lowland rainforest region. See p. 312.
- **Kapawi Ecolodge & Reserve** (on the Río Pastaza; ☎ **800/613-6026** in the U.S. and Canada, or **04/228-5711** in Ecuador; [www.kapawi.com](http://www.kapawi.com)): This pioneering ecolodge is located deep in the Amazon rainforest among the villages of the Achuar tribe. You can only reach Kapawi on a private charter flight, and the isolation is part of the charm. Beautiful cabins (built on stilts over a black-water lagoon), great food, and fantastic guides don't hurt, either. This place provides a top-notch Amazon rainforest experience. See p. 322.

## 10 The Best Bed-and-Breakfasts & Small Inns

- **Mansión del Angel** (Quito; ☎ **800/327-3573** in the U.S., or **02/2557-721** in Quito; [www.mansiondelangel.com.ec](http://www.mansiondelangel.com.ec)): With crystal chandeliers, Oriental rugs, and four-poster beds, this boutique hotel offers all the elegance and style of a bygone era, in the heart of Quito's New Town. Located steps away from the bustle and blur of all the restaurants and

clubs of the Mariscal district, this place is a quiet and calm oasis inside. See p. 104.

- **Hotel Café Cultura** (Quito; ☎/fax 02/2224-271; www.cafecultura.com): Hip and European in feel, this cozy Mariscal hotel features unique, artistically designed and decorated rooms, an excellent restaurant, and super service. Hand-painted murals abound, and many of the bathrooms are works of art in themselves. See p. 104.
- **Hotel Santa Lucía** (Cuenca; ☎ 07/2828-000; www.santaluciahotel.com): Set right in the heart of colonial Cuenca, in a house that dates to 1859, this is one of the best boutique hotels in Ecuador. The colonial vibe is maintained throughout, but the rooms also feature plasma-screen televisions and free Wi-Fi. The central courtyard here is home to a towering magnolia tree, as well as an excellent restaurant. See p. 214.
- **Mansión Alcázar** (Cuenca; ☎ 800/327-3573 toll-free in the U.S. and Canada, or 07/2823-918 in Ecuador;

www.mansionalcazar.com): Like the Santa Lucía (above), this charming little hotel is housed in a remarkably well-restored old colonial mansion. The Alcázar has a pretty garden and several sumptuous sitting areas and lounges. See p. 213.

- **Madre Tierra** (Vilcabamba; ☎ 07/2640-269 or 09/3096-665; www.madretierra1.com): This fun, funky, and arty little hotel is a great retreat. The accommodations, featuring creative design touches, are all unique. There are stunning views from many of the rooms as well as from the common areas, and the hearty, healthy cuisine here is legendary. See p. 231.
- **Vistamar** (Manta; ☎ 05/2621-671; www.vistalmarecuador.com): From the two large jade horses near the entrance to the large Buddha sculpture in the main lounge area, you'll be struck at every turn by the art, sculpture, and decor here. When that stops piquing your interest, you can marvel at the ocean views from the hillside perch. See p. 275.

## 11 The Best Restaurants

- **Café Mosaico** (Quito; ☎ 02/2542-871): With an eclectic menu, convivial ambience, and outstanding view over Old Town Quito, the Café Mosaico is a must-visit spot. Come a bit before sunset and hopefully you'll be able to snag a table with a view. It gets very crowded here, and for good reason. See p. 113.
- **El Nispero** (Quito; ☎ 02/2226-398): While Ecuadorian cuisine is tasty enough, this upscale place takes the traditional fare and, in the words of a famous TV chef, "kicks them up a notch." Traditional dishes and ingredients are treated to creative preparations and pairings, although the chef never strays too far from his source. See p. 114.
- **Zazu** (Quito; ☎ 02/2543-559): Brash and bold, Quito's hippest new restaurant is also one of its most satisfying. The Peruvian-born chef uses his native sensibility, fresh local ingredients, and ample imagination to create a consistently successful string of new and exciting dishes. Just about everything on the menu shines, but my favorite way to dine here is to trust the chef and sign on for his nightly tasting menu. See p. 114.
- **Hotel Ali Shungu** (Otavalo; ☎ 06/2920-750): Housed inside a popular hotel, this is my favorite restaurant in Otavalo. The healthy and creative international cuisine is served in a cozy and inviting ambience. Locally grown organic produce is used wherever

- possible. This is a welcome treat for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. See p. 149.
- **Café Hood** (Baños de Agua Santa; ☎ 03/2740-573): A popular backpacker hangout, this cozy restaurant serves everything from Mexican burritos to Pad Thai, with a wide range of international and vegetarian dishes filling out the long menu. After eating you can browse the book-swap library, play a board game, or mingle with fellow travelers. See p. 193.
  - **Villa Rosa** (Cuenca; ☎ 07/2837-944): Excellent Ecuadorian cuisine is matched with an elegant setting and superb service in this Cuenca restaurant. Although traditional Ecuadorian dishes are the mainstay here, they often are given little twists and turns that set them above what you'll find at most other local joints. This place is almost always busy—and it's closed on most weekend evenings—so reservations are essential. See p. 217.
  - **Lo Nuestro** (Guayaquil; ☎ 04/2386-398): Elegant and relaxed, this is the best place in Guayaquil to enjoy classic Ecuadorian cooking in a refined setting. The restaurant is located a little outside downtown, but it's definitely worth the ride. See p. 246.
  - **Sea Flower Restaurant** (Same; ☎ 06/2733-369): It's almost worth a trip to Ecuador's Pacific coast just to dine at this delightful spot. Presentations are eye-catching, and the food served lives up to the fanfare. Be sure to have a reservation—this place fills up fast. See p. 294.
  - **The Marquis Restaurant** (Tena; ☎ 06/2886-513): You'll be as surprised as I was to find a relatively fine dining experience in such a remote and rural town. Grilled meats are the specialty here, and the restaurant does an excellent job with them. The nightly three-course prix-fix menu is an excellent deal. See p. 318.
  - **La Garrapata Restaurante** (Puerto Ayora; ☎ 05/2526-264): Good food and a relaxed ambience are what you'll find at what's probably the most popular restaurant on the Galápagos. You're just steps from the ocean, and the seafood here is excellent. On weekends there's often live music. See p. 349.

## 12 The Best Shopping & Markets

Ecuador is renowned for its artisans and their craftsmanship. Woven products, made from sheep, alpaca, or even vicuña wool, are perhaps the most well known, but a wide range of arts and crafts is produced. The indigenous tribes of El Oriente weave bags and baskets and make ornamental jewelry from local products, while craftspeople and artists produce high-end art, silver jewelry, and *superfino* Panama hats in Cuenca.

- **Olga Fisch Folklore** (Quito; ☎ 02/2541-315; [www.olgafisch.com](http://www.olgafisch.com)): Olga Fisch was a pioneer in recognizing and promoting the artistry of Ecuador's artisans and craftspeople. She helped

them refine and improve some of their designs. Today her shop-gallery remains the top place to go for the best selection of high-end products. You'll find everything here, from clothing to ceramics to paintings. You can get chess sets, with pieces carved from tagua nuts, or fine, one-off silver and gemstone jewelry. See p. 126.

- **Tianguez** (Quito; ☎ 02/2230-609; [www.sinchisacha.org](http://www.sinchisacha.org)): Housed in a mazelike series of rooms that feel like catacombs under the San Francisco church, this is my favorite place to shop for handicrafts. Just about every corner and region of the country is represented here, with pieces from

the various Amazon basin indigenous tribes, as well as primitive paintings from artisans of the central Sierra. You can buy trinkets for next to nothing, or fine works that will make a dent in your wallet. See p. 126.

- **Otavallo Market** (Otavallo): This is the most famous market in Ecuador, and perhaps in all of South America. Indeed, it's the place to come for all sorts of locally made crafts, including alpaca sweaters, rugs, and wall hangings, as well as a wide range of wood work, primitive paintings, and jewelry. Musicians can pick up some pan pipes or a *charango*. See p. 144.
- **San Antonio de Ibarra**: It seems as if everyone in this little town in Imbabura province is a woodcarver. Many of the works produced here are religious in theme, and often of monumental proportion. Still, you can get

plenty of decorative and functional pieces, and some that are easy enough to carry home with you (the others can be shipped). See chapter 6.

- **Cuenca**: From Panama hats to locally produced handicrafts, fine art works, and one-off jewelry, Cuenca holds its own against Quito and Otavallo as one of the top shopping cities in the country. Of particular interest are the visits to the actual Panama hat factories and the studio of renowned ceramic artist Eduardo Vega. See chapter 8.
- **Galápagos Jewelry** (Puerto Ayora; ☎ 05/2526-044; www.galapagosjewelry.com): These folks have excellent one-off pieces, many in the shape and image of local flora and fauna. Cast silver is their strong suit, but they also work with stones and other metals. They also have a couple of outlets in Quito. See p. 345.

### 13 The Best After-Dark Fun

- **Mariscal District** (Quito): The 4- to 5-square-block area known as Mariscal, in the heart of Quito's New Town, is chock-full of bars, clubs, discos, and restaurants. It's busy here every night of the week, but especially Thursday through Saturday. Consider starting off on the Plaza Foch with a pub crawl, but be careful and use common sense, because crime against tourists is not unheard of here. See p. 130.
- **Baños de Agua Santa**: As befits a bustling backpacker and adventure-tourist town, Baños has a rocking nightlife. If the rumblings of Volcán Tungurahua keep you up at nights here, stroll down Calle Eloy Alfaro, where you'll find a string of bars, clubs, discos, and *peñas*. See p. 185.
- **Café Eucalyptus** (Cuenca; ☎ 07/2849-157): Great tapas, an excellent wine list, locally produced tap beer, and top-notch call liquors combine

with a warm and welcoming ambience to make this hands-down the top after-dark gathering spot in Cuenca. I like the couch seating near the fireplace, but the bar is also a good place to settle in. Or, if you're looking for a little more privacy, head to the second floor. See p. 217.

- **Montañita** (South Pacific coast): In addition to their prowess on the sea, surfers are legendary for their après-surf sessions. Montañita is the top surfer town in Ecuador, and the raucous nightlife it has is fed by the flood of local and international surfers. See p. 254.
- **Puerto Ayora** (Galápagos): Puerto Ayora has a surprisingly lively, albeit limited, nightlife and bar scene. **Bongo Bar** (☎ 05/2526-264) is the most happening place in town at night. It's located on a rooftop and opens at 4pm but usually doesn't get busy until after 8pm. See p. 349.



## 14 The Best Websites about Ecuador

- **Latin America Network Information Center** (<http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/Ecuador>): This site contains a collection of diverse information about Ecuador. It's hands-down the best place for Web browsing, with helpful links to a wide range of tourism and general-information sites.
- **Vive Ecuador** ([www.viveecuador.com](http://www.viveecuador.com)): This is the official website of the Ecuadorian Ministry of Tourism. There's a lot of information here, although much of it is quite basic and the format can be hard to navigate at times.
- **Ecuador.US** ([www.ecuador.us](http://www.ecuador.us)): This is a large and comprehensive tourism English-language site, with loads of useful information, history, and links.
- **Quito Cultura** ([www.quitocultura.com](http://www.quitocultura.com)): Although this site is in Spanish, it's the place to go to find out what concerts, art exhibits, and cultural activities and events are happening in Quito.