

# Ecuador

## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Galápagos Islands** – snorkel with penguins, stare down meter-long iguanas, stand face-to-face with fearless seabirds and scuba dive with monstrous manta rays (p724)
- **The Oriente** – stay in a jungle lodge, raft on tropical rivers and spot caimans, howler monkeys and two-toed sloths in Ecuador's slice of the Amazon Basin (p698)
- **Parque Nacional Machalilla** – witness the awesome sight of humpback whales and explore the unique tropical dry forests of Ecuador's only coastal national park (p714)
- **Quito's Old Town** – let the trancelike sounds, myriad smells and breathtaking architecture of Quito's historic center transport you into another world (p652)
- **Off the beaten track** – journey up the Río Santiago to Playa de Oro, where gold panners, jungle cats and the magical tropical forest do strange things to your brain (p708)
- **Best journey** – by milk-truck, shoe or saddle, make your way around the Quilotoa Loop, one of the Andes' most spectacular roads (p679)

## FAST FACTS

- **Area:** 283,560 sq km (roughly the size of New Zealand or the US state of Nevada)
- **Best bargain:** wool sweaters
- **Best street snack:** *empanadas de verde* (plantain empanadas)
- **Budget:** US\$15-20 a day
- **Capital:** Quito
- **Costs:** budget hotel room in Quito US\$6, bottle o' beer US\$1, national park entrance fee US\$10-20
- **Country code:** ☎ 593
- **Famous for:** the Galápagos Islands
- **Languages:** Spanish, Quichua
- **Money:** US dollar
- **Phrases:** *bacán* (cool), *jguácala!* (disgusting), *farra* (party)
- **Population:** 12 million
- **Time:** GMT minus 5hr
- **Tipping:** 10% in restaurants; tip all guides
- **Visas:** North American and most European citizens need only a valid passport



## TRAVEL HINTS

Pack lightly and you can carry your backpack inside the bus. Save money by ordering the *almuerzo* (set lunch) and shopping in the markets.

## OVERLAND ROUTES

Major border crossings at Ipiales (Colombia); at Tumbes/Aguas Verdes, La Tina and La Balsa (Peru); and via Iquitos/Nuevo Rocafuerte (Peru by river).

Nowhere else on earth will you find so much natural diversity – and all the fun that goes with it – in so tiny a place. Ecuador is the second smallest country in South America, but the range of landscape it offers is no less than astounding. One day you'll be picking through hand-woven sweaters at a chilly indigenous market in the Andes, and the next day you'll be sweating all over your binoculars while spying on howler monkeys in the rainforest.

For nature lovers, the place is a dream: exotic orchids and birds, bizarre jungle plants, strange insects, windswept *páramo* (high-altitude grassland), dripping tropical forests and the fearless animals that hop, wobble and swim around the Galápagos Islands all await your hungry eyes. For the adrenaline junkie, the choices are outrageous: climbing, mountaineering, trekking and white-water rafting are world class. Toss in some horse-riding, hiking and surfing and you'll leave Ecuador with a happily aching body. And for the culture vulture, Ecuador is alive with indigenous heritage, with traditional costumes and highland markets, where a constant rhythm of sound and movement draws you slowly into an other-worldly state of mind.

## CURRENT EVENTS

Presidential politics in Ecuador never lack drama (the country has had seven presidents in the last ten years). Ousted and exiled former-president Lucio Gutiérrez made a surprise return to Ecuador in October, 2005, claiming he was the country's rightful leader. He was immediately jailed. Time in the pen may have cleared up his claims to the throne, but it didn't deter him: upon his release in March 2006, he took to the presidential campaign trail once again.

In a country where oil profits constitute nearly half the national budget, oil is always big news. Keep your ears open for developments in the Chevron Texaco case. At the close of this edition, the company still faced charges in a class-action lawsuit filed by 30,000 Ecuadorians. They claim the company deliberately dumped 18 million gallons of toxic waste into the Amazon, causing untold environmental damage and forcing two indigenous cultures to the brink of extinction.

Free trade talks with Washington were stalled in March 2006 after indigenous protests opposing free-trade paralyzed the nation. The US then pulled out of the talks after the Ecuadorian Congress passed a law that would funnel 50% of foreign oil companies' windfall profits into government coffers at a time of heightened world oil prices.

It's not all so dreary in the news. In October 2005 Ecuador qualified for its second World Cup, which was celebrated with two days of music, fireworks and merrymaking. This is a country with an estimated 25% indigenous population, so perhaps it's no surprise that in April 2006 an Ecuadorian shaman visited all 12 World Cup sites to banish evil spirits from the fields before the tournament began.

The mojo must have worked: the Ecuadorian squad went as far as the second round – a feat thought impossible – before finally getting knocked out by England.

## HISTORY

Ecuador's past is written in its street signs. One only need stroll around Quito for a day, from Av de Los Shyris (named after the pre-Inca tribe of the northern highlands) to the Mariscal Sucre neighborhood (named for Ecuador's greatest independence hero) to get a good lesson in Ecuadorian history.

## Early Cultures

The oldest tools found in Ecuador date back to 9000 BC, meaning people were mucking about the region in the Stone Age. The most important early societies developed along the coast, which was a more habitable landscape than the frigid highlands. Ecuador's first permanent sedentary culture was the Valdivia, which emerged along the Santa Elena Peninsula nearly 6000 years ago.

By the 11th century AD, Ecuador had two dominant cultures: the expansionist Cara along the coast and the peaceful Quito in the highlands. These cultures merged and became known as the Quito-Caras, or the Shyris. They were the dominant force in the highlands until the 1300s, when the Puruhá of the central highlands became increasingly powerful. The third important group was the Cañari, further south. These were the cultures the Inca encountered when they began their expansion north from present-day Peru.

## Land of the Four Quarters

Until the early 15th century, the Inca empire was concentrated around Cuzco, Peru. That

changed dramatically during the rule of Inca Pachacuti, whose expansionist policies set into motion the creation of the vast Inca empire, Tahuantinsuyo, meaning 'Land of the Four Quarters' in Quichua (called Quechua elsewhere in South America). By the time the Inca reached Ecuador they were under the rule of Tupac Yupanqui, Pachacuti's successor and they met with fierce resistance, both from the Cañari and the Quito-Caras. In one battle the Inca massacred thousands of Caras and dumped them into a lake near Otavalo (p669), which supposedly turned the waters red and gave the lake its name, Laguna Yaguarcocha (Lake of Blood).

The subjugation of the north took many years, during which the Inca Tupac fathered a son with a Cañari princess. The son, Huayna Capac, grew up in Ecuador and succeeded his father to the Inca throne. Huayna Capac had two sons: Atahualpa, who grew up in Quito, and Huáscar, who was raised in Cuzco.

When Huayna Capac died in 1526, he left his empire not to one son, as was traditional, but to two. Rivalry developed between the sons, which eventually boiled into civil war. After several years of fighting, Atahualpa defeated Huáscar near Ambato in central Ecuador. Atahualpa was thus ruling a weakened and still divided Inca empire when Francisco Pizarro landed in Peru in 1532.

### The Spanish Play Dirty

Pizarro's advance was rapid and dramatic. He successfully exploited divisions within the Inca empire and enlisted many non-Inca ethnic groups that had been recently and reluctantly subjugated by the Inca. Most importantly, Inca warriors on foot were no match for the fully armored conquistadors on horseback who slaughtered them by the thousands. Within three years, and after betraying Inca rulers on several occasions, the Spanish controlled the former Inca empire.

### Settling In

From 1535 onward, the colonial era proceeded with no major uprisings by indigenous Ecuadorians. Francisco Pizarro made his brother Gonzalo the governor of Quito in 1540. Hoping to find more gold, Gonzalo sent his lieutenant Francisco de Orellana to explore the Amazon. The lieutenant and his force ended up floating all the way to the Atlantic, becoming the first party to descend

the Amazon and cross the continent. This feat took almost a year and is still commemorated in Ecuador.

During the first centuries of colonial rule, Lima, Peru was the seat of Ecuador's political administration. Ecuador, originally a *gobernación* (province), became known as the Audiencia de Quito in 1563, a more important political division. In 1739, the Audiencia de Quito was transferred from the viceroyalty of Peru, of which it was a part, to the viceroyalty of Colombia (then known as Nueva Grenada).

Ecuador remained a peaceful colony during these centuries, and agriculture and the arts flourished. Churches and monasteries were constructed atop every sacred indigenous site and were decorated with unique carvings and paintings, the result of a blend of Spanish and indigenous artistic influences. This so-called Escuela Quiteña (Quito school of art), still admired by visitors today, has left an indelible stamp on both the colonial buildings of the time and Ecuador's unique art history.

Life was comfortable for the ruling colonists, but the indigenous people – and later, the *mestizos* (people of mixed Spanish and indigenous descent) – were treated abysmally under their rule. A system of forced labor was not only tolerated but encouraged, and it is no surprise that by the 18th century there were several indigenous uprisings against the Spanish ruling classes. Social unrest, as well as the introduction of cocoa and sugar plantations in the northwest, prompted landowners to import African slave laborers. Much of the rich Afro-Ecuadorian culture found in Esmeraldas province today is a legacy of this period.

### Adios, Spain

The first serious attempt at independence from Spain was made on August 10, 1809, by a partisan group led by Juan Pío Montúfar. The group took Quito and installed a government, but royalist troops regained control in only 24 days.

A decade later, Simón Bolívar, the Venezuelan liberator, freed Colombia in his march southward from Caracas. Bolívar then supported the people of Guayaquil when they claimed independence on October 9, 1820. It took another two years for Ecuador to be entirely liberated from Spanish rule. The decisive battle was fought on May 24, 1822,





when Mariscal (Field Marshall) Sucre, one of Bolívar's best generals, defeated the royalists at Pichincha and took Quito.

Bolívar's idealistic dream was to form a united South America. He began by amalgamating Venezuela, Colombia and Ecuador into the independent state of Gran Colombia. This lasted only eight years, with Ecuador becoming fully independent in 1830. That same year a treaty was signed with Peru, establishing a boundary between the two nations.

### Liberals Versus Conservatives

Following independence from Spain, Ecuador's history unfolded with the typically Latin American political warfare between liberals and conservatives. Quito emerged as the main center for the Church-backed conservatives, while Guayaquil has traditionally been considered liberal and socialist. The rivalry between these groups has frequently escalated to extreme violence: conservative president García Moreno was shot and killed in 1875, and liberal President Eloy Alfaro was killed and burned by a mob in Quito in 1912. The rivalry between the two cities continues on a social level today (see *The National Psyche*, p642). Over time, the military began assuming control, and the 20th century saw more periods of military rather than civilian rule.

### War with Peru

In 1941, Peru tried to take nearly half of Ecuador's territory, and war broke out between the two nations. The boundary was finally redrawn by a conference of foreign government ministers in the 1942 Protocol of Rio de Janeiro. Ecuador never recognized this border, and minor skirmishes with Peru have occurred because of it – the most serious was the short war in early 1995, when several dozen soldiers on both sides were killed. Finally, after more fighting in 1998, Peru and Ecuador negotiated a settlement in which Peru retained a majority of the land in question.

### Recent Political Developments

Ecuador's most recent period of democracy began in 1979, when President Jaime Roldos Aguilera was elected. Over the next two decades, control flip-flopped democratically between liberals and conservatives.

In the 1998 elections, Jamil Mahuad, former mayor of Quito, emerged victorious and was immediately put to the test. The devastating

effects of El Niño and the sagging oil market of 1997–98 sent the economy into a tailspin in 1999. The sucre, Ecuador's former currency, depreciated from about 7000 per US dollar to about 25,000 by January 2000. Things were out of control.

### Dollarization: A Touchy Subject

When Mahuad declared his plan to dump the national currency in exchange for the US dollar, the country erupted in protest. On January 21, 2000, marches shut down the capital, and protesters took over the Ecuadorian Congress building, forcing Mahuad to resign. The protesters were led by Antonio Vargas, Coronel Lucio Gutiérrez and former supreme court president Carlos Solorzano, who immediately turned the presidency over to former vice president Gustavo Noboa. Noboa went ahead with 'dollarization,' and in September 2000, the US dollar became Ecuador's official currency.

### Presidential Comings & Goings

President Noboa was succeeded in 2002 by former coup-leader Lucio Gutiérrez, whose populist agenda and promises to end government corruption won him the crucial electoral support of Ecuador's indigenous population. But shortly after taking office, Gutiérrez began backing down on his promises of radical reform and implemented IMF-encouraged austerity measures to finance the country's massive debt. If that wasn't enough to turn the population against him, Gutiérrez tossed out most of the supreme court in late 2004. This act allowed him to expel his rivals from the court and change the constitution in order to drop corruption charges against his former ally, the popularly despised ex-president, Antonio Bucaram. Not surprisingly, protests erupted in the capital, and in April 2005, Congress finally voted to throw Gutiérrez out, replacing him with vice president Alfredo Palacios. Palacios held the reins at the close of this edition. For details on what went down after Palacio took the presidential chair, see Current Events, p638.

## THE CULTURE

### The National Psyche

Most Ecuadorians have three things in common: pride in the natural wealth of their country (both its beauty and its resources); disdain for the corrupt politicians who prom-

ise to redistribute yet continue to pocket that wealth; and the presence of a relative in another country (over 10% of the population – some 1.3 million people – have left Ecuador in search of work elsewhere).

From there, the psyche blurs, and attitude becomes a matter of altitude. *Serranos* (people from the mountains) and *costeños* (people from the coast) can spend hours telling you what makes them different (ie better) from the other. Following the historic rivalry between conservative *quiteños* (people from Quito) and more liberal *guayaquileños* (people from Guayaquil), *serranos* call people from the coast *monos* (monkeys) and say they're lazy and would rather party than keep their cities clean. *Costeños*, on the other hand, say *serranos* are uptight and elitist and that they pepper their interactions with shallow formalities. Of course, *serranos* still pour down to the coast in droves for holidays and *costeños* speak longingly of the cool evenings of the highlands.

### Lifestyle

How an Ecuadorian lives is a matter of geography, ethnicity and class. A poor *campesino* (peasant) family that cultivates the thin volcanic soil of a steep highland plot lives very differently from a coastal fishing family living in the mangroves of Esmeraldas province, or a family living in the slums of Guayaquil. An indigenous Saraguro family that tends communally owned cattle in the southern highlands lives a dramatically different life to that of an upper-class *quinteño* family, which might have three maids, a new computer and a Mercedes in the garage.

An estimated 60% to 70% of Ecuadorians live below the poverty line, and paying for cooking fuel and putting food in the belly is a constant concern for most Ecuadorians. But, as most first-time visitors are astounded to experience, even the poorest Ecuadorians exude an openness, generosity and happiness all too rare in developed countries. Fiestas are celebrated with fervor by everyone, and you'll sometimes roll around in bed, kept awake until dawn by the noise of a nearby birthday bash.

### Population

Ecuador has the highest population density of any South American country – about 45 people per sq km. Despite this, the coun-

try still feels incredibly wild, mainly because 30% of the population is crammed into the cities of Quito and Guayaquil, and another 30% resides in Ecuador's other urban areas. Nearly half of the country's people live on the coast (including the Galápagos), while about 45% live in the highlands. The remainder live in the Oriente, where colonization is slowly increasing.

About 65% of the Ecuadorian people are *mestizos*, 25% are indigenous, 7% are Spanish and 3% are black. Other ethnicities account for less than 1%. Most of the indigenous people speak Quichua and live in the highlands. A few small groups live in the lowlands.

## SPORTS

The national sport – no surprise – is *fútbol* (soccer). Major-league games are played every Saturday and Sunday in Quito and Guayaquil, and impromptu games are played everywhere. The country's best team is Barcelona (from Guayaquil), although you should avoid shouting that around Quito. Volleyball is also huge. Bullfighting is popular in the highlands; the biggest season is the first week of December in Quito. Finally, the *pelea de gallos* (cockfight) is a national favorite – a town ain't a town without a cockfighting ring.

## RELIGION

The predominant religion is Roman Catholicism, although a small minority of other churches are found. Indigenous peoples tend to blend Catholicism with their own traditional beliefs.

## ARTS

### Architecture

Many of Quito's churches were built during the colonial period, and the architects were influenced by the Quito school (see Visual Arts, right). In addition, churches often show Moorish influences, particularly in the decorative details of interiors. Known as *mudéjar*, this reflects an architectural style that developed in Spain beginning in the 12th century. The overall architecture of colonial churches is overpoweringly ornamental and almost cloyingly rich – in short, baroque.

Many colonial houses have two stories, with the upper floors bearing ornate balconies. The walls are whitewashed and the roofs are red tile. Quito's Old Town and Cuenca are Unesco World Heritage Sites and both

abound with beautifully preserved colonial architecture.

## Music

*Música folklórica* (traditional Andean music) has a distinctive, haunting sound that has been popularized in Western culture by songs such as Paul Simon's version of 'El Cóndor Pasa' ('If I Could'). Its otherworldly quality results from use of a pentatonic (five-note), scale and the use of pre-Colombian wind and percussion instruments that conjure the windswept quality of *páramo* life. It is best heard at a *peña* (folk-music club or performance).

Northwest Ecuador, particularly Esmeraldas province, is famous for its marimba music, historically the sound of Ecuador's Afro-Ecuadorian population. Today it's becoming increasingly difficult to hear live because many Afro-Ecuadorians have swapped it for salsa and other musical forms.

If there's one music you won't escape, it's cumbia, whose rhythm resembles that of a trotting three-legged horse. Originally from Colombia, Ecuadorian cumbia has a more raw (almost amateur), melancholic sound and is dominated by the electronic keyboard. Bus drivers love the stuff, perhaps because it so strangely compliments those back-road journeys through the Andes.

When it comes to youth culture, Caribbean-born *reggaetón* (a blend of Puerto Rican *bomba*, dancehall and hip-hop) is now practically the only thing anyone anywhere listens to. It seems that the only kids who despise the stuff are the country's *rockeros* (rockers), who prefer foreign heavy metal or the poppy rock and roll sounds of Ecuadorian bands like Kruks en Carnak, Hijos de Quién and Sal y Mileto.

## Visual Arts

The colonial religious art found in many churches and museums – especially in Quito – was produced by indigenous artists trained by the Spanish conquistadors. The artists portrayed Spanish religious concepts, yet infused their own indigenous beliefs, giving birth to a unique religious art known as the Escuela Quiteña (Quito school of art). The Quito school died out with independence.

The 19th century is referred to as the Republican period, and its art is characterized by formalism. Favorite subjects included heroes of the revolution, important members

of the new republic's high society, and florid landscapes.

The 20th century saw the rise of the indigenist school, whose unifying theme is the oppression of Ecuador's indigenous inhabitants. Important *indigenista* (indigenist school) artists include Camilo Egas (1889–1962), Oswaldo Guayasamín (1919–99), Eduardo Kingman (1913–97) and Gonzalo Endara Crow (1936–). You can (and should!) see the works of these artists in Quito's galleries and museums. The former homes of Egas and Guayasamín, also in Quito, are now museums featuring their respective works.

### Cinema

Ecuador's most internationally applauded director is Sebastián Cordero, whose *Ratas, ratones, rateros* (1998; English title is the same) tells the story of a *quinteño* kid who's ex-convict cousin drags him into a nasty life of street crime. The film offers a glimpse into the capital's dark side – one you likely won't get otherwise. Cordero's more recent *Crónicas* (2004; *Chronicles*), which takes place in a coastal lowland city, revolves around a warped deal between a serial killer and a Miami reporter.

### Literature

Ecuadorian literature is mostly unknown outside Latin America, but indigenous novelist Jorge Icaza's *Huasiungo*, a naturalistic tale of the miserable conditions on Andean haciendas in the early 20th century, is available in English translation as *The Villagers*. Also worth checking out is *Fire from the Andes: Short Fiction by Women from Bolivia, Ecuador & Peru*, edited by Susan E Benner and Kathy S Leonard.

## ENVIRONMENT

### The Land

Despite its diminutive size, Ecuador has some of the world's most varied geography. The country can be divided into three regions: the Andes form the backbone of Ecuador; the coastal lowlands lie west of the mountains; and the Oriente, to the east, comprises the jungles of the upper Amazon Basin. In only 200km, as the condor flies, you can climb from the coast to snowcaps, over 6km above sea level, and then descend to the jungle on the country's eastern side. The Galápagos Islands lie on the equator, 1000km west of

Ecuador's coast, and constitute one of the country's 21 provinces.

### Wildlife

Ecuador is one of the most species-rich countries on the globe, deemed a 'megadiversity hot spot' by ecologists. The country has more than 20,000 plant species, with new ones discovered every year. In comparison, there are only 17,000 plant species on the entire North American continent. The tropics, in general, harbor many more species than temperate regions do, but another reason for Ecuador's biodiversity is simply that the country holds a great number of habitat types. Obviously, the Andes will support very different species than the tropical rainforests, and when intermediate biomes and the coastal areas are included, the result is a wealth of different ecosystems, a riot of life that draws nature lovers from the world over.

Bird-watchers flock to Ecuador for the great number of bird species recorded here – some 1500, or about twice the number found in any one of the continents of North America, Europe or Australia. But Ecuador isn't just for the birds: some 300 mammal species have been recorded, from monkeys in the Amazon to the rare Andean spectacled bears in the highlands.

### National Parks

Ecuador has over 30 government protected parks and reserves (of which nine carry the title of 'national park'), as well as numerous privately administered nature reserves. A total of 18% of the country lies within protected areas. Ecuador's first *parque nacional* (national park) was the Galápagos, formed in 1959. Scattered across mainland Ecuador are eight other national parks, including the most visited (from north to south):

**Parque Nacional Cotopaxi** (p676) The towering ice-capped cone of Volcán Cotopaxi makes for spectacular year-round hiking and mountaineering.

**Parque Nacional Yasuní** (p701) Amazon rainforest, big rivers and caiman-filled lagoons, plus monkeys, birds, sloths and more, mean year-round forest fun.

**Parque Nacional Machalilla** (p714) Coastal dry forest, beaches and islands are home to whales, seabirds, monkeys and reptiles. Hiking and beaches are superb.

**Parque Nacional Sangay** (p681) Volcanoes, *páramo* and cloud forest harbor spectacled bears, tapirs, pumas and ocelots and offer hiking, climbing and wildlife watching year-round.



**Parque Nacional Cajas** (p693) Shimmering lakes and moorlike *parámo* make this highland park an excellent adventure from Cuenca.

**Parque Nacional Podocarpus** (p696) From cloud forest to rainforest, this epic southern park is best explored from Loja, Zamora or Vilcabamba.

Many parks are inhabited by native peoples who were living in the area long before it achieved park status. In the case of the Oriente parks, indigenous hunting practices (which have a greater impact as outside interests diminish their original territories and resources) have met with concern from those seeking to protect the park. The issue of how to protect these areas from interests such as oil, timber and mining, while recognizing the rights of indigenous people, continues to be extremely tricky.

National park entrance fees vary. On the mainland, most highland parks charge US\$10, and most lowland parks charge US\$20 per visitor, but both fees are valid for a week. In the Galápagos Islands, the park fee is US\$100.

### Environmental Issues

Deforestation is Ecuador's most severe environmental problem. In the highlands, almost all of the natural forest cover has disappeared. Along the coast, once-plentiful mangrove forests have all but vanished, too. These forests harbor a great diversity of marine and shore life, but they have been removed to make artificial shrimp ponds. Esmeraldas province has some of the last large stands of mangroves in the country. Opening new shrimp farms is now prohibited.

About 95% of the forests of the western Andean slopes and western lowlands have become agricultural land, mostly banana plantations. These forests were host to more species than almost anywhere on the planet, and many of them are (or were) endemic. Countless species have surely become extinct even before they were identified. An effort is now being made to conserve what little there is left.

Although much of the rainforest in the Ecuadorian Amazon remains standing, it is being seriously threatened by fragmentation. Since the discovery of oil, roads have been built, colonists have followed and the destruction of the forest has increased exponentially. The main causes of this destruction are logging, cattle ranching and oil extraction.

Clearly, these problems are linked tightly with Ecuador's economy. Oil, bananas and shrimp are the nation's top three exports. However, the serious environmental damage caused by the production of these and other products requires that their value be carefully examined.

The rainforest's indigenous inhabitants – who depend on the rivers for drinking water and food – are also dramatically affected. Oil residues, oil treatment chemicals, erosion and fertilizers all contaminate the rivers, killing fish and rendering formerly potable water undrinkable. Unfortunately, government policies allow oil exploration and encourage the colonization and clearing of land with little regard for forests, rivers, wildlife or residents.

Ecuador lacks the financial resources to commit itself to strong government-funded conservation. However, local and international conservation agencies, indigenous groups (which survive on the rainforest's natural resources) and ecotourism have brought international attention to Ecuador's environmental crises and contribute to an ever-increasing demand to protect the environment. But, as any environmentalist in Ecuador will tell you, this is no time to rest. New mining, oil, logging and other projects are continuously implemented, and pressure is needed from all sides to minimize or eliminate their impacts on the environment.

## TRANSPORTATION

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

#### Air

The main international airports are in Guayaquil (p717) and Quito (p647). Direct flights go to Bogotá (Colombia), Buenos Aires (Argentina), Caracas (Venezuela), Curaçao, Guatemala City (Guatemala), Havana (Cuba), Lima (Peru), Panama City (Panama), Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), San José (Costa Rica), Santiago (Chile) and São Paulo (Brazil). Connecting flights (via Lima) are available to

#### DEPARTURE TAX

Unless they are merely in transit, passengers on outbound international flights must pay a US\$25 departure tax. This does not apply to the Tulcán–Cali (Colombia) flight.

Asunción (Paraguay) and La Paz (Bolivia). There are also three flights per week between Tulcán (in the northern highlands of Ecuador) and Cali (Colombia).

### Boat

For information on boat travel between Nuevo Rocafuerte (Ecuador) and Iquitos (Peru), see p701.

### Bus

International bus tickets sold in Quito often require a change of bus at the border. It's usually cheaper and just as convenient to buy a ticket to the border and another ticket in the next country. The exceptions are the international buses from Loja (p694) to Piura, Peru (via Macará), and from Guayaquil (p717) to Peru (via Huaquillas); on these, you do not have to change buses, and the immigration officials usually board the bus to take care of your paperwork. These are the primary routes between Ecuador and Peru. Zumba, south of Vilcabamba (p697), is gaining popularity as an alternative route to/from Peru due to its scenic location and lack of use. The main bus route between Colombia and Ecuador is via Tulcán (p675). Other border crossings between Colombia and Ecuador are unsafe.

## GETTING AROUND

You can usually get anywhere quickly and easily. Bus is the most common mode of transport, followed by plane. Buses can take you from the Colombian border to Peru's border in 18 hours. Boats are used in the northern coastal mangroves and in the Oriente.

Whatever form of transport you choose, always carry your passport with you, both to board planes, and to proffer during document checks on the road. People without documents may be arrested. If your passport is in order, these procedures are cursory. If you're traveling anywhere near the borders or in the Oriente, expect more frequent passport checks.

### Air

With the exception of flying to the Galápagos (see p729 for details), most internal flights are cheap. One-way flights average US\$50 and rarely exceed US\$60. Almost all flights originate or terminate in Quito or Guayaquil. Some domestic flights have marvelous views of the snowcapped Andes – when flying from Quito to Guayaquil, sit on the left.

Ecuador's major domestic airline is **TAME** (www.tame.com.ec). **Icaro** (www.icaro.com.ec) is the second biggest, with fewer flights but newer planes. Between these two airlines, you can fly from Quito to Guayaquil, Coca, Cuenca, Esmeraldas, Lago Agrio, Loja, Macas, Machala, Manta, Tulcán and the Galápagos. From Guayaquil you can fly to Quito, Coca, Cuenca, Loja, Machala and the Galápagos. There are no Sunday flights to the Oriente. **AeroGal** (www.aerogal.com.ec) flies mostly to the Galápagos.

If you can't get a ticket for a particular flight (especially out of small towns), go to the airport early and get on the waiting list in the hope of a cancellation.

### Boat

Motorized dugout canoes are the only transportation available in some roadless areas. Regularly scheduled boats are affordable, although not as cheap as a bus for a similar distance. Hiring your own boat and skipper is possible but extremely expensive. The northern coast (near San Lorenzo and Borbón) and the lower Río Napo from Coca to Peru are the places you'll most likely travel to by boat (if you get out that far). Pelting rain and glaring sun can induce serious suffering, and an umbrella is excellent defense against both. Use good sunscreen or wear long sleeves, pants and a hat. A light jacket is worth having in case of chilling rain, and insect repellent is useful during stops along the river. Bring a water bottle and a stash of food, and you're set. Keep your spare clothes in plastic bags or they'll get soaked if it storms.

### Bus

Buses are the lifeblood of Ecuador and the easiest way to get around. Most towns have a *terminal terrestre* (central bus terminal) for long-distance buses, although in some towns, buses leave from various places. *Busetas* are fast, small buses offering direct, and sometimes frighteningly speedy, service. Larger coaches usually allow standing passengers and can get crowded, but are often more interesting.

To get your choice of seat, buy tickets in advance from the terminal. During holiday weekends, buses can be booked up for several days in advance. Companies that offer frequent departures don't sell advance tickets, but arriving an hour early usually guarantees you a seat. For immediate travel, go to

the terminal and listen for your destination to be yelled out. Make sure your bus goes direct to your destination if you don't want to change.

If you're traveling lightly, keep your luggage with you inside the bus. Otherwise, heave it onto the roof or stuff it into the luggage compartment and keep an eagle eye on it.

Long-distance buses rarely have toilets, but usually stop for 20-minute meal and bladder-relief breaks at fairly appropriate times. If not, drivers will stop to let you fertilize the roadside.

Local buses are usually slow and crowded, but cheap. You can get around most towns for about US20¢ to US25¢. Local buses also often go out to nearby villages (a great way to explore an area).

### Car & Motorcycle

Few people rent cars in Ecuador, mainly because public transport makes getting around so easy. Ecuador's automobile association is **Aneta** (in Quito ☎ 02-250-4961, 02-222-9020; www.aneta.org.ec), which offers 24-hour roadside assistance to its members. It also offers some services to members of foreign automobile clubs, including Canadian and US AAA members.

### Hitchhiking

Hitchhiking is possible, but not very practical in Ecuador. Public transportation is relatively cheap and trucks are used as public transportation in remote areas, so trying to hitch a free ride isn't easy. If the driver is stopping to drop off and pick up other passengers, assume that payment will be expected. If you're the only passenger, the driver may have picked you up just to talk to a foreigner.

### Taxi

Taxis are cheap. Bargain the fare beforehand though, or you're likely to be overcharged. A long ride in a large city (Quito or Guayaquil) shouldn't go over US\$5, and short hops in small towns usually cost about US\$1. Meters are obligatory in Quito (where the minimal fare is US\$1) but rarely seen elsewhere. On weekends and at night, fares are always about 25% to 50% higher. A full-day taxi hire should cost from US\$50 to US\$60.

### Train

Little remains of Ecuador's railways after the damage to lines due to the 1982–83 El Niño

rains. Only the sections with tourist appeal have received enough funding to reopen. A train runs three times a week between Riobamba and Sibambe, which includes the hair-raising Nariz del Diablo (Devil's Nose), the country's railway pride and joy. The Ibarra–San Lorenzo line, which used to link the highlands with the coast, is on its deathbed; *autoferos* (buses mounted on railway chassis) only make it a fraction of the way to San Lorenzo. One easy way to ride the rails is aboard the weekend Quito–Cotopaxi route, which stops at Area de Recreación El Boliche, adjacent to Parque Nacional Cotopaxi.

### Truck

In remote areas, *camiones* (trucks) and *camionetas* (pickup trucks) often double as buses. If the weather is OK, you get fabulous views; if not, you have to crouch underneath a dark tarpaulin and suck dust. Pickups can be hired to get to remote places such as climbers' refuges.

## QUITO

☎ 02 / pop 1,400,000

Spread across a spectacular Andean valley and flanked by volcanic peaks, Quito's setting alone is enough to strike you speechless. The historical center, or 'Old Town,' is a maze of colonial splendor, a Unesco World Heritage Site since 1978. Despite intensive restoration projects (completed in 2006), the Old Town retains the vibrant working class and indigenous character that has always defined it. To walk its narrow streets is to wander into another world. Stray dogs saunter past indigenous women carrying impossible loads, past legless guitar strummers, blind accordion players and giant roast pigs peeking out of narrow doorways. The constant hum of hollering vendors hangs in the air like chanting in a monastery, and the myriad smells threaten sensory overload. Only a 20-minute walk away, Quito's 'New Town' is a different world entirely. For travelers, its heart is the Mariscal Sucre, chockablock with cafés, restaurants, travel agencies, cybercafés, bars and hotels.

Quito was a major Inca city that was destroyed by Atahualpa's general, Rumiñahui, shortly before the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors. The present capital was founded

atop the Inca ruins by Sebastián de Benalcázar on December 6, 1534. Unfortunately, no Inca structures remain.

## ORIENTATION

Quito (elevation 2850m) is Ecuador's second-largest city, after Guayaquil. It can be divided into three segments. In the center is the colonial Old Town. Modern Quito – the New Town – is in the north, with major businesses, airline offices, embassies and shopping centers. The New Town also contains the airport, middle- and upper-class homes and the Mariscal Sucre neighborhood (the travelers' ghetto known simply as El Mariscal). Av Amazonas, with its banks, hotels, crafts stores, cafés and corporate business offices, is the New Town's best-known street, although Avs 10 de Agosto and 6 de Diciembre are the most important thoroughfares. The south comprises mostly working-class housing areas.

The **Instituto Geográfico Militar** (IGM; Map pp650-1; ☎ 254-5090, 222-9075/76; map sales room ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Thu, 7am-12:30pm Fri), on top of steep Paz y Miño, publishes and sells Ecuador's best topographical maps. You'll need to leave your passport at the gate.

## INFORMATION

### Bookstores

**Confederate Books** (Map pp650-1; J Calama 410) Ecuador's largest selection of secondhand books in English and other languages.

**English Bookstore** (Map pp650-1; cnr J Calama & Av 6 de Diciembre) Bookstore-café with great selection of used books in English.

**Libri Mundi** (Map pp650-1; JL Mera 851) Quito's best bookstore; excellent selection of books in Spanish, English, German and French.

**Libro Express** (Map pp650-1; Av Amazonas 816 & Gral Veintimilla) Good for guidebooks, coffee-table books and magazines.

## Cultural Centers

**Alliance Française** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 224-9345/50; Av Eloy Alfaro N32-468 near Av 6 de Diciembre) Films, language classes and information on Ecuador and France.

**Asociación Humboldt** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 254-8480; www.asociacion-humboldt.org in Spanish & German; cnr Vancouver & Polonia) German center and Goethe Institute.

**Centro Cultural Afro-Ecuatoriano** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 252-2318; JL Tamayo 985) Information on Afro-Ecuadorian culture and events in Quito.

**Centro Cultural Metropolitano** (Map p653; ☎ 295-0272, 258-4363; www.centrocultural-quito.com; cnr García Moreno & Espejo; admission US\$2; ☎ 9am-5pm, patio until 7:30pm Tue-Sun) The hub of cultural events in the Old Town.

## Emergency

**Fire department** (☎ 102)

**General emergency** (☎ 911)

**Police** (☎ 101)

**Red Cross ambulance** (☎ 131, 258-0598)

## Internet Access

While the Mariscal area (especially along J Calama) is bursting with cybercafés, they're trickier to find in the Old Town. All charge US70¢ to US\$1 per hour. The following are a few of the more popular choices:

**Friends Web Café** (Map pp650-1; J Calama E6-19) Vibe here is as good as the juices and snacks.

**K'ntuña Net** (Map p653; Chile Oe4-22, Pasaje Arzobispal, local 14) Located in back patio of Palacio Arzobispal.

**Papaya Net** (Map pp650-1; J Calama 469 at JL Mera) Groovin' music, alcohol, espresso drinks and snacks.

**Sambo.net** (Map pp650-1; JL Mera at J Pinto) Comfy place, fast connection.

**Stop 'n' Surf** (Map p653; Espejo Shopping, Espejo Oe2-40, local 64)

## Internet Resources

**Corporación Metropolitana de Turismo** (www.quito.com.ec in Spanish)

## GETTING INTO TOWN

The airport is on Av Amazonas, about 10km north of the Mariscal Sucre neighborhood (where most of the budget hotels are). As you walk out of the airport, south is to your left. Cross Av Amazonas and flag a south-bound bus. It costs 30¢ to get from here to the Mariscal. From there, you can catch a bus or the Trole (electricity-powered bus) to the Old Town, about 2km further south. A taxi from the airport to the Mariscal should cost no more than US\$5, and about US\$6 to the Old Town.

The bus terminal (Terminal Terrestre Cumandá) is a few blocks south of Plaza Santo Domingo in the Old Town. Take a cab into town if you arrive at night. Avoid the Trole at any time if you're loaded down with luggage.

**Gay Guide to Quito** (<http://gayquitoec.tripod.com>)  
**Que Hacer Quito** ([www.quehacerquito.com](http://www.quehacerquito.com) in Spanish)

### Laundry

The following laundries will wash, dry and fold your whiffy clothes within 24 hours. All charge between US75¢ and US\$1 per kg.

**Opera de Jabón** (Map pp650-51; J Pinto 325 near Reina Victoria)

**Rainbow Laundry** (Map pp650-51; JL Mera 1337 at Cordero)

**Sun City Laundry** (Map pp650-51; JL Mera at Foch)

**Wash & Go** (Map pp650-51; J Pinto 340 at JL Mera)

### Medical Services

**Clínica de la Mujer** (Map p657; ☎ 245-8000; Av Amazonas 4826 at Gaspar de Villarroel) Private clinic specializing in women's health.

**Clínica Pichincha** (Map pp650-51; ☎ 256-2408, 256-2296; Gral Veintimilla 1259 & U Páez) In the new town; does lab analysis for parasites, dysentery etc.

**Dr Alfredo Jijon** (Map p657; ☎ 245-6359, 246-6314; Centro Meditropoli, office 215, Mariana de Jesús & Av Occidental) Gynecologist.

**Dr John Rosenberg** (Map pp650-51; ☎ 252-1104, ext 310, 09-973-9734, pager 222-7777; Foch 476 & D de Almagro) Internist specializing in tropical medicine; English and German are spoken. He also makes house calls.

**Dr Silvia Altamirano** (☎ 224-4119; Av Amazonas 2689 & Av de la República) Orthodontist and dentist; excellent.

**Hospital Metropolitano** (Map p657; ☎ 226-1520; Mariana de Jesús at Av Occidental) Better, but pricier than Voz Andes.

**Hospital Voz Andes** (Map p657; ☎ 226-2142; Juan Villalengua 267 near Avs América & 10 de Agosto) American-run hospital with outpatient and emergency rooms. Fees are low.

### Money

There are several banks and a few *casas de cambio* (currency-exchange bureaus) in the New Town along Av Amazonas between Av Patria and Orellana, and there are dozens of banks throughout town. Banks listed in this section have ATMs and change traveler's checks.

If you need to change money on a Sunday, head to the Producambios at the airport; the *casa de cambio* in the international arrival area is open for all flight arrivals.

**American Express** (Map pp650-51; ☎ 02-256-0488; Av Amazonas 329, 5th fl) Sells Amex travelers checks to American Express card holders only. Also replaces lost or stolen checks.

**Banco de Guayaquil** Av Amazonas (Map pp650-1; Av Amazonas N22-147 at Gral Veintimilla); Colón (Map pp650-1; Av Cristóbal Colón at Reina Victoria)

**Banco del Pacífico** New Town (Map pp650-1; Av 12 de Octubre & Cordero); Old Town (Map p653; cnr Guayaquil & Chile)

**Banco del Pichincha** (Map p653; Guayaquil at Manabí)

**MasterCard** (Map p657; Naciones Unidas 8771 at De Los Shyris)

**Producambios** (Av Amazonas 350; ☎ 8:30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat)

**Visa** (Map p657; De Los Shyris 3147)

**Western Union** Av de la República (Map pp650-1; Av de la República 433); Colón (Map pp650-1; Av Cristóbal Colón 1333) For money transfers; charges US\$90 for a US\$1000 transfer from the USA.

### Post

You can mail a package up to 2kg from any post office. Packages exceeding 2kg must be mailed from the Mariscal Sucre or parcel post offices (listed here).

**Central post office** (Map p653; Espejo 935) In the Old Town; this is where you pick up your *lista de correos* (general delivery mail; see p738).

**DHL** (Map pp650-1; Av Cristóbal Colón 1333 at Foch)

**Mariscal Sucre post office** (Map pp650-1; cnr Av Cristóbal Colón & Reina Victoria)

**Parcel post office** (Map pp650-1; Ulloa 273) If you are mailing a package over 2kg, use this post office, near Dávalos.

**'PostOffice'** (Map pp650-1; cnr Av Amazonas & Santa María) Private company offering FedEx, UPS and other international courier services.

### Telephone

Local, national and international calls can be made at the following:

**Andinatel main office** (Map pp650-1; Av Eloy Alfaro 333 near 9 de Octubre)

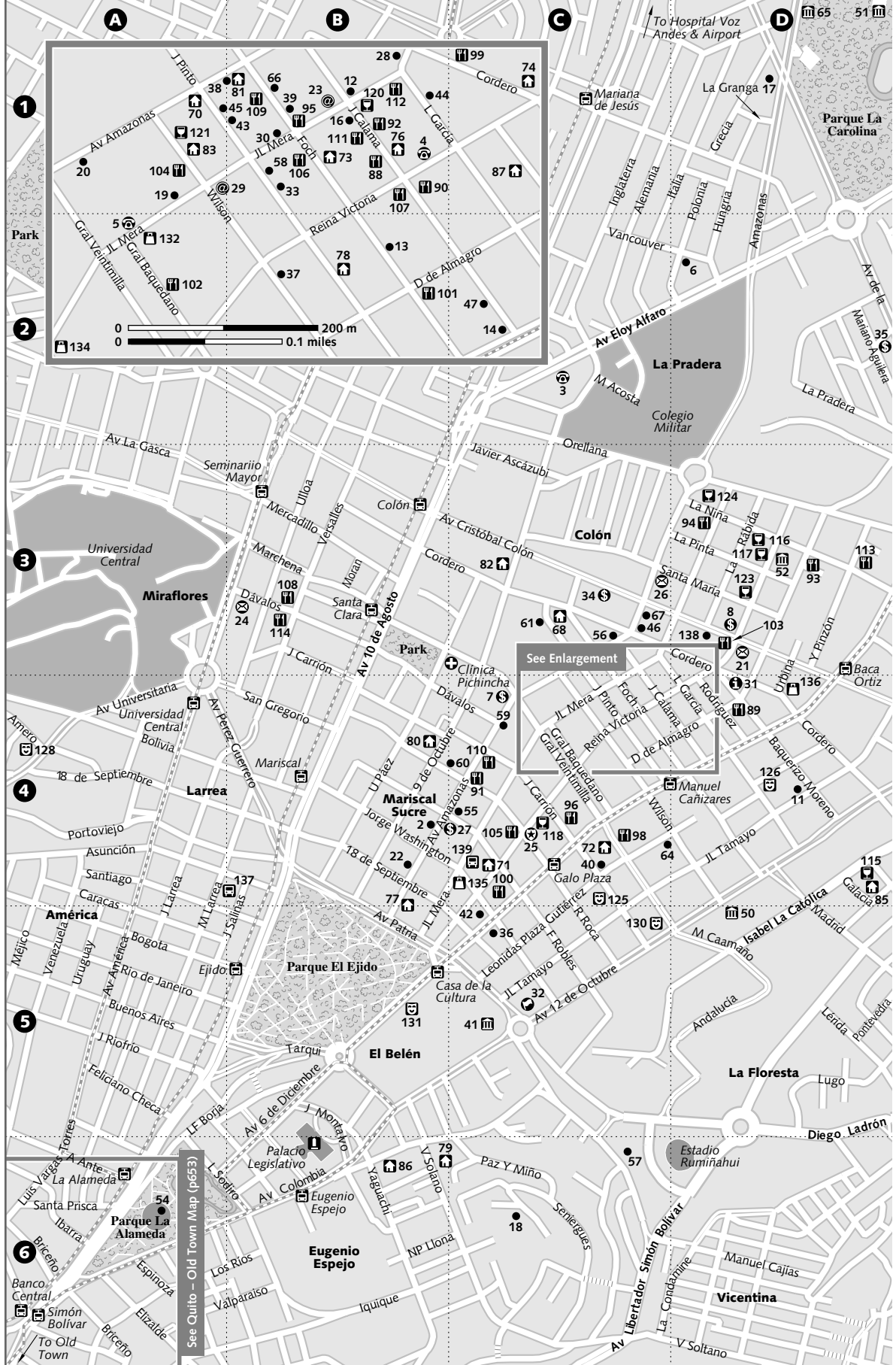
**Andinatel Mariscal offices** JL Mera (Map pp650-1; JL Mera 741 at Gral Baquedano); Reina Victoria (Map pp650-1; Reina Victoria near J Calama) Located in the Mariscal area.

**Andinatel Old Town offices** Benalcázar (Map p653; Benalcázar near Mejía); García Moreno (Map p653; cnr García Moreno & Sucre)

### Tourist Information

**South American Explorers** (SAE; Map pp650-1; ☎ 222-5228; [www.saexplorers.org](http://www.saexplorers.org); Jorge Washington 311 & Leonidas Plaza Gutiérrez; ☎ 9:30am-5pm Mon-Wed, Fri, 9:30am-6pm Thu, 9am-noon Sat) For more information on this excellent travelers' organization, see above.

# QUITO - NEW TOWN



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**Tourist Information Kiosk** (Map p653; cnr Venezuela & Chile, Plaza Grande) Convenient for general questions, directions and maps.

**Tourist Offices** (Corporación Metropolitana de Turismo; www.quito.com.ec in Spanish); Old Town 'El Quinde' (Map p653; ☎ 257-0786; García Moreno N12-01 at Mejía; 🕒 9:30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun); Old Town Palacio Arzobispal (Map p653; ☎ 258-6591; Chile & Venezuela, Plaza Grande; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat); Mariscal (Map pp650-1; ☎ 255-1566; Cordero at Reina Victoria; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri); airport (☎ 330-0163)

## Travel Agencies

**Ecuadorian Tours** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 256-0488; www.ecuadoriantours.com; Av Amazonas N21-33) Good all-purpose travel agency.

**Metropolitan Touring** New Town (Map pp650-51; ☎ 250-6650/51/52; www.metropolitan-touring.com; Av Amazonas N20-39 near 18 de Septiembre); Old Town (Map p653; ☎ 228-9172; Olmedo 0e-548) Ecuador's biggest travel agency.

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Quito's reputation as a dangerous city is increasing. The Mariscal Sucre neighborhood (in the New Town) is extremely dangerous after dark, and you should *always take a taxi*, even for short distances. The Mariscal has been plagued by drugs, muggings, assaults and prostitution, and the city has only recently taken even the most token steps to control it (and the police corruption that allows it to continue). Despite some inconveniences, consider staying in another neighborhood (like the Old Town or La Floresta); besides safety issues, you'll have a more authentic experience to boot. Sunday, when no one is around, can also be dodgy in the Mariscal.

With the restoration of the Old Town, and increased police presence there, the historic center is safe until 10pm or so weekdays and until midnight on weekends. Avoid the climb up El Panecillo hill; take a taxi instead (there are plenty up top for the return trip). As usual, pickpockets work crowded buses (especially the Trole and Ecovía lines), the bus terminal and markets. If you are robbed, obtain a police report within 48 hours from the **police station** (Old Town Map p653; Mideros & Cuenca; New Town Map pp650-1; cnr Reina Victoria & Vicente Ramón Roca) between 9am and noon.

If you are arriving from sea level, Quito's 2850m elevation might make you somewhat breathless and give you headaches or cotton mouth. These symptoms of *soroche* (altitude

sickness) usually disappear after a day or two. To minimize symptoms, take it easy upon arrival, drink plenty of water and lay off the smokes and alcohol.

## SIGHTS

If you're short on time head straight for the Old Town. It's here that Quito distinguishes itself from all other cities in the world.

### Old Town

Built centuries ago by indigenous artisans and laborers, Quito's churches, convents, chapels and monasteries are cast in legend and steeped in history. It's a magical, bustling area, full of yelling street vendors, ambling pedestrians, tooting taxis, belching buses, and whistle-blowing policemen trying to direct traffic in the narrow, congested one-way streets. The Old Town is closed to cars on Sunday between 8am and 4pm, making it a wonderful time to explore the historic center.

Churches are open every day (usually until 6pm) but are crowded with worshippers on Sunday. They regularly close between 1pm and 3pm for lunch.

### PLAZA GRANDE

Quito's small, exquisitely restored central plaza (also known as Plaza de la Independencia) is the perfect place to start exploring the Old Town. Its benches are great for soaking up the Andean morning sun as shoeshine boys and Polaroid photographers peddle their services around the park. The plaza is flanked by several important buildings. The low white building on the northwestern side is the **Palacio del Gobierno** (Presidential Palace; Map p653; García Moreno at Chile). The prez does carry out business inside, so sightseeing is limited to the entrance area. On the southwestern side of the plaza stands Quito's recently painted **cathedral** (Map p653; cnr Espejo & García Moreno; admission US\$1, Sunday services free; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, Sunday services hourly 6am-noon & 5-7pm). Although not as ornate as some of the other churches, it's worth a peek. Paintings by several notable artists of the Quito school adorn the inside walls, and Mariscal Sucre, the leading figure of Quito's independence, is buried inside. The **Palacio Arzobispal** (Archbishop's Palace; Map p653; Chile btw García Moreno & Venezuela), now a colonnaded row of small shops and several good restaurants, stands on the plaza's northeastern side.



Just off the plaza, the outstanding **Centro Cultural Metropolitano** (Map p653; ☎ 295-0272, 258-4363; www.centrocultural-quito.com; cnr García Moreno & Espejo; admission US\$2; ☒ 9am-5pm, patio until 7:30pm Tue-Sun) was the first restoration work undertaken in the Old Town, and it fast became a hub of cultural activity. It houses several temporary art exhibits and hosts excellent art shows on the

main interior patio. Along with two more interior patios and two beautiful rooftop terraces (all worth seeing), it houses an auditorium, a museum, a library and an excellent café.

**NORTH OF PLAZA GRANDE**

One of colonial Quito's most recently built churches, **La Merced** (Map p653; cnr Cuenca & Chile;

**QUITO – OLD TOWN**

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	Museo Camilo Egas.....22 C1	Corvina Don 'Jimmy'.....(see 52)	Museo Camilo Egas.....22 C1
	Museo de Arte Colonial.....23 B1	El Cafeto.....42 C2	Museo de Arte Colonial.....23 B1
	Museo de la Ciudad.....24 A3	El Kukurucho del Maní.....43 A2	Museo de la Ciudad.....24 A3
	Museo Franciscano.....(see 20)	Frutería Monserrate.....44 B2	Museo Franciscano.....(see 20)
	Palacio Arzobispal.....25 B2	Govindas.....45 C1	Palacio Arzobispal.....25 B2
	Palacio del Gobierno.....26 B2	Hasta La Vuelta, Señor.....(see 25)	Palacio del Gobierno.....26 B2
		Heladería San Agustín.....46 B2	
		King Chicken.....47 B2	
		La Colmena.....48 B2	
		La Cueva del Oso.....49 B2	
		La Guaragua.....50 B2	
		La Posada Colonial.....51 B2	
		Mercado Central.....52 C2	
		Nuevo Cordovéz.....53 B2	
		Tianguéz.....(see 20)	
		<b>ENTERTAINMENT</b>	
		La Casa de la Peña.....54 C1	
		Teatro Bolívar.....55 B2	
		Teatro Sucre.....56 C2	
		Vox Populi.....(see 44)	
		<b>SHOPPING</b>	
		Tianguéz.....(see 20)	
		<b>TRANSPORT</b>	
		Terminal Terrestre Cumandá..57 B4	
		Train Ticket Office.....58 A2	

admission free; ☎ 6am-noon & 3-6pm), finished in 1742, stands two blocks northwest of the Plaza Grande. Among the wealth of fascinating art inside, paintings depict such calming scenes as glowing volcanoes erupting over the church roofs of colonial Quito and the capital covered with ashes.

One block to the northeast, the excellent **Museo de Arte Colonial** (Map p653; ☎ 221-2297; Mejía 915 at Cuenca; admission US\$50¢) houses Ecuador's best collection of colonial art. The museum was closed for restoration in 2005 and 2006, with plans to reopen in 2007.

The **Museo Camilo Egas** (Map p653; ☎ 257-2012; Venezuela 1302 at Esmeraldas; admission US\$50¢; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun) contains a small but fabulous collection of works by the late Camilo Egas, one of the country's foremost indigenous painters.

High on a hill in the northeastern part of the Old Town stands the Gothic **Basílica del**

**Voto Nacional** (Map p653; ☎ 258-3891; cnr Venezuela & Carchi; admission US\$2; ☎ 9am-5pm), built over several decades beginning in 1926. The highlight is the basilica's towers, which you can climb to the top of if you have the nerve; the ascent requires crossing a rickety wooden plank inside the main roof and climbing steep stairs and ladders to the top. Liability? Pshaw!

### PLAZA & MONASTERY OF SAN FRANCISCO

With its massive stark-white towers and a mountainous backdrop of Volcán Pichincha, the **Monastery of San Francisco** (Cuenca at Sucre; admission free; ☎ 7-11am daily, 3-6pm Mon-Thu) is one of Quito's most marvelous sights – both inside and out. It's the city's largest colonial structure and its oldest church (built from 1534 to 1604) – it's not something to miss.

Although much of the church has been rebuilt because of earthquake damage, some of it is original. The **Chapel of Señor Jesús del Gran Poder**, to the right of the main altar, has original tilework, and the **main altar** itself is a spectacular example of baroque carving. To the right of the church's main entrance is the **Museo Franciscano** (☎ 295-2911; www.museofranciscano.com; admission US\$2; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun), which contains some of the church's finest artwork. The admission fee includes a guided tour, available in English or Spanish. Good guides will point out *mudejar* (Moorish) representations of the eight planets revolving around the sun in the ceiling, and will explain how the light shines through the rear window during the solstices, lighting up the main altar. Both are examples of indigenous influence on Christian architecture.

### CALLES GARCÍA MORENO & SUCRE

Beside the cathedral on García Moreno stands the 17th-century **Church of El Sagrario** (Map p653; García Moreno; admission free; ☎ 6am-noon & 3-6pm). Around the corner on Sucre is Ecuador's most ornate church, **La Compañía de Jesús** (Map p653; Sucre near García Moreno; admission US\$2.50; ☎ 9:30-11am & 4-6pm). Seven tons of gold were supposedly used to gild the walls, ceilings and altars inside, and *quiteños* proudly call it the most beautiful church in the country. Construction of this Jesuit church began in 1605 and it took 163 years to build.

Further south, the 18th century arch, **Arco de la Reina** (Map p653; García Moreno at Rocafuerte), spans García Moreno. On one side, the **Museo de la Ciudad** (Map p653; ☎ 228-3882; cnr García Moreno &

### VIEWS OVER QUITO

Quito is a city of mind-boggling views. Hitting as many high spots as you can in a day makes for an adventure, and it's a unique way to see the city. Skies are clearest in the morning. Here are some of the best:

- Holiest view – El Panecillo (opposite). Climb up inside the Virgen de Quito at El Panecillo.
- Deadliest view – Basílica del Voto Nacional (right). Hold on to your stomach for the hair-raising climb into these gothic towers.
- Tastiest view – Café Mosaico (p662). The most amazing balcony in town.
- Most patriotic view – La Cima de la Libertad (Map p657). This independence memorial is west of the Old Town on the flanks of Volcán Pichincha. Take a taxi up, bus down.
- Most sweeping view – Parque Itchimbia (opposite). Kick off your shoes and take in the 360-degree views from the grass.
- Most breathtaking view – Cruz Loma and the telefériQo (opposite). At 4100m, breathing's made wheezy.
- Strangest view – Monastery of Santa Catalina's bell tower (opposite). Who said church tours can't be fun?

Rocafuerte; admission US\$3, guided tour additional US\$4; ☎ 9:30am-5:30pm Tue-Sun) houses an interesting museum depicting daily life in Quito through the centuries. On the other side of the arch stands the **Monasterio de Carmen Alto** (Map p653; cnr García Moreno & Rocafuerte), another fully functioning convent, where cloistered nuns produce and sell some of the most traditional sweets in the city. Through a revolving contraption that keeps the nuns hidden, they also sell traditional baked goods, aromatic waters for nerves and insomnia, bee pollen, honey and bottles of full-strength *mistela* (an anise-flavored liqueur).

### PLAZA & CHURCH OF SANTO DOMINGO

**Plaza Santo Domingo** (Map p653; Guayaquil at Bolívar) is a regular haunt for street performers, and crowds fill the plaza to watch pouting clowns and half-cocked magicians do their stuff. A fabulous Gothic-like altar dominates the inside of the **Church of Santo Domingo** (Map p653; Flores & Rocafuerte; admission free; ☎ 7am-1pm & 4:30-7:30pm), and the original wooden floor was only recently replaced. Construction of the church began in 1581 and continued until 1650.

### EL PANECILLO

The small, ever-visible hill to the south of the Old Town is called **El Panecillo** (Little Bread Loaf) and it's a major landmark in Quito. It's topped by a huge statue of **La Virgen de Quito** and offers marvelous views of the whole city and of the surrounding volcanoes. Go early in the morning, before the clouds roll in. Definitely don't climb the stairs at the end of García Moreno on the way to the statue

though – they're unsafe. A taxi from the Old Town costs about US\$5, and you can hail one at the top for the return trip.

### PARQUE ITCHIMBIA

High on a hill east of the Old Town, this newly resurrected green space boasts magnificent 360-degree views of the city. The park's centerpiece, the glass and iron **Centro Cultural Itchimbia** (Map p653; ☎ 295-0272; Parque Itchimbia) hosts regular art exhibits and cultural events. The park has cycling paths and walking paths too. Buses signed 'Pintado' go here from the Centro Histórico, or you can walk up (east on) Elizalde, from where signed stairways lead to the park.

### telefériQo

Quito's newest attraction – and a mind-boggling one at that – is the **telefériQo** (Map p657; ☎ 250-0900; www.teleferiqo.com; Av Occidental & Av La Gasca; admission adults US\$4, children under 6 US\$3, express line US\$7; ☎ 11am-10pm Mon, 9am-10pm Tue-Thu, 9am-midnight Fri & Sat), a multimillion dollar sky tram that takes passengers on a hair-raising, 2.5km ride up the flanks of Volcán Pichincha to the top of Cruz Loma. Once you're at the top (a mere 4100m), you can hike to the summit of Rucu Pichincha (p658).

The telefériQo complex itself is an eyesore of overpriced restaurants, video arcades, a go-cart track, souvenir shops, a dance club and even a theme park (admission US\$2 to US\$10). On weekends the wait can last up to four hours; either pay the US\$7 express-line fee or (even better) come on a weekday. A taxi costs about US\$2 from the Mariscal.

### UNEARTHLY DELIGHTS

Southeast of the Plaza Grande stands the **Monastery of Santa Catalina** (Map p653; Espejo 779 at Flores; admission US\$1.50; ☎ 8:30am-5:30pm Mon-Sat), a fully functioning convent and monastery that opened to the public in 2005. Since its founding in 1592, entering nuns have spent five years cloistered in private cells. To this day, the 20 nuns inside have only one hour to talk to each other or watch TV. They do, however, make all sorts of natural products (shampoos, non-alcoholic wine, hand cream, elixirs and more), which you can purchase from a rotating door that keeps the nuns hidden.

A tour of the monastery and its interesting museum lasts over an hour – and it's a gruesome hour at that: 18th century religious paintings depict virgins and saints presiding over the fires of purgatory while devils grind the bodies of sinners on spiked wheels. One painting shows a thirsty flock of sheep slurping up rivers of blood pouring from Jesus' wounds, while another depicts cherubs plucking the flesh from Christ's ribs after a session of brutal self-flagellation.

Supposedly, secret underground tunnels connect Santa Catalina to the church of Santo Domingo three blocks away.

## New Town

### PARQUE LA ALAMEDA & PARQUE EL EJIDO

From the northeastern edge of the Old Town, the long, triangular Parque La Alameda begins its grassy crawl toward the New Town. In the center of the park is the **Quito Observatory** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 257-0765; admission US\$20¢, night viewings US\$40¢; 🕒 8am-noon & 3-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat), the oldest European observatory on the continent.

Northeast of La Alameda, the pleasant, tree-filled Parque El Ejido is the biggest park in downtown Quito and a popular spot for impromptu soccer games and volleyball. On weekends, open-air **art shows** are held along Av Patria, and artisans and crafts vendors set up stalls all over the northern side of the park, turning it into Quito's largest **handicrafts market**.

A solitary stone archway at the northern end of Parque El Ejido marks the beginning of modern Quito's showpiece street, Av Amazonas. North of the park, it's the main artery of the **Mariscal Sucre** neighborhood.

### CASA DE LA CULTURA ECUATORIANA

Across from Parque El Ejido, the landmark, circular glass building, **Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana** (Map pp650-1; www.cce.org.ec in Spanish), houses one of the country's most important museums, the **Museo del Banco Central** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 222-3259; cnr Av Patria & Av 12 de Octubre; admission US\$2; 🕒 9am-5pm Tue-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun). The museum showcases the country's largest collection of Ecuadorian art. In the **Sala de Arqueología** (Archaeology Room), moody tribal music drones over a marvelous display of more than 1000 ceramic pieces dating from 12,000 BC to 1534 AD. Among other magnificent pre-Hispanic gold pieces, the **Sala de Oro** (Gold Room) displays the radiating golden sun-mask that is the symbol of the Banco Central. Upstairs, the **Sala de Arte Colonial** (Colonial Art Room) showcases masterful works from the Quito school of art. Finally, the **Sala de Arte Contemporáneo** (Contemporary Art Room) boasts a large collection of contemporary, modern and 19th-century Ecuadorian art.

### PARQUE LA CAROLINA

North of the Mariscal lies the giant Parque La Carolina (Map pp650-1). On weekends it fills with families who head out to peddle paddleboats, play soccer and volleyball, cycle along the bike paths, skate or simply escape the city's urban chaos.

The park's newest addition is the **Jardín Botánico** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 246-3197; admission US\$1.50; 🕒 9am-3pm Mon, 9am-5pm Tue-Sun), featuring over 300 plant and tree species from around Ecuador and an outstanding *orquideario* (orchid greenhouse) with nearly 1000 orchid species. To further acquaint yourself with Ecuador's flora and fauna, head next door to the country's best natural-history museum, the **Museo de Ciencias Naturales** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 244-9824; admission US\$2; 🕒 8:30am-1pm & 1:45-4:30pm Mon-Fri).

Contemplating the thousands of dead insects and arachnids on display is a good way to rile your nerves before a trip to the Oriente.

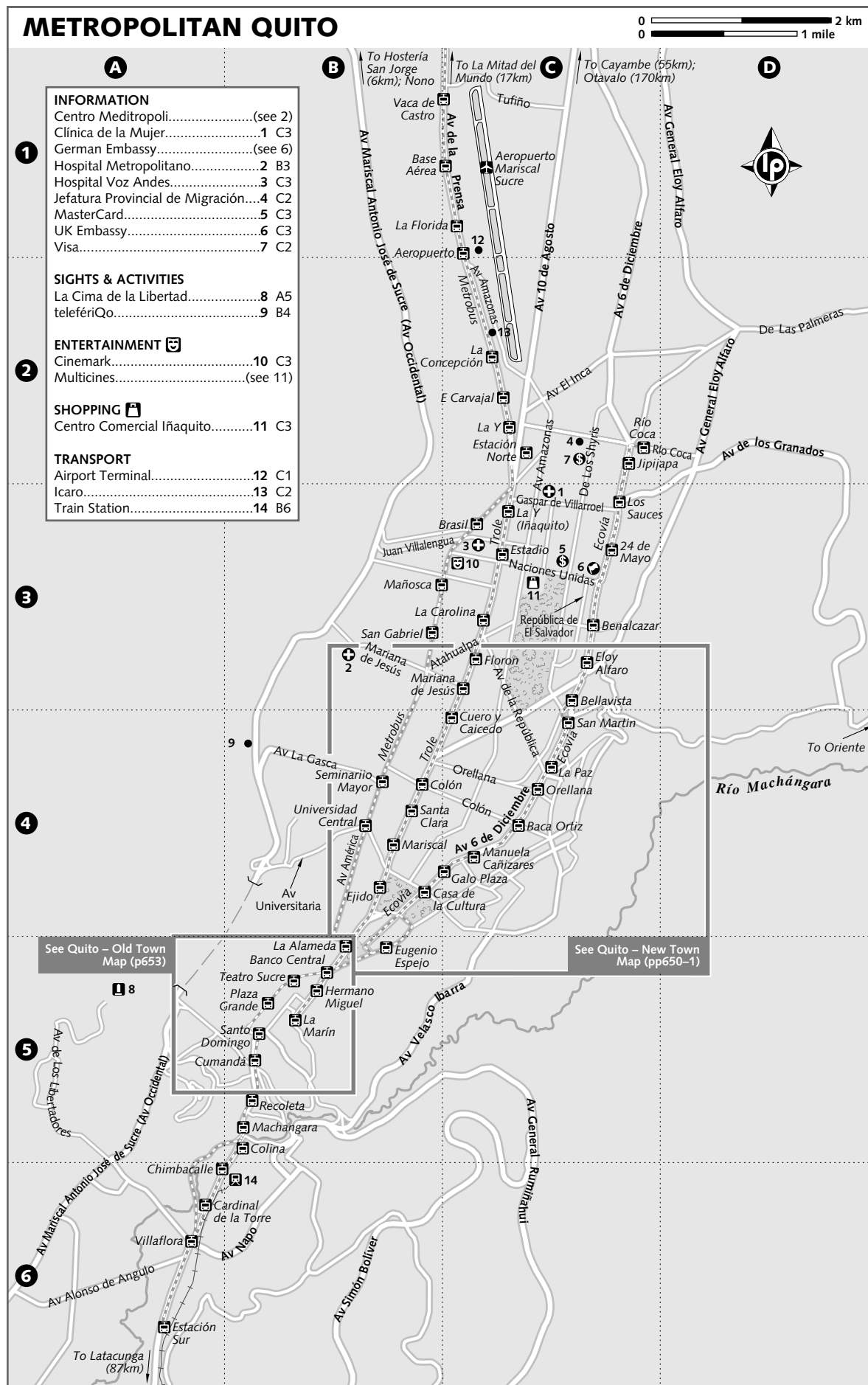
Nearby, you can provide further fodder for your jungle fears with a visit to the **Vivarium** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 227-1799; www.vivarium.org.ec; Av Amazonas 3008 at Rumipamba; admission US\$2.50; 🕒 9:30am-5:30pm Tue-Sun), home to 87 live reptiles and amphibians, mostly snakes. It's a herpetological research and education center, and all but one of the critters (the frightening looking king cobra) are native to Ecuador.

### MUSEO GUAYASAMÍN & THE CAPILLA DEL HOMBRE

In the former home of the world-famous indigenous painter Oswaldo Guayasamín (1919-99), the **Museo Guayasamín** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 246-5265; Calle Bosmediano 543; admission US\$2; 🕒 9am-1:30pm & 3-6:30pm Mon-Fri) houses the largest collection of his works. Guayasamín was also an avid collector, and the museum displays his outstanding collection of over 4500 pre-Colombian ceramic, bone and metal pieces from throughout Ecuador.

A few blocks away stands Guayasamín's astounding **Capilla del Hombre** (Chapel of Man; Map pp650-1; ☎ 244-6455; www.guayasamin.com; Mariano Calvache at Lorenzo Chávez; admission US\$3, with purchase of entry to Museo Guayasamín US\$2; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun). The fruit of Guayasamín's greatest vision, this giant monument-cum-museum is a tribute to humankind, to the suffering of Latin America's indigenous poor, and to the undying hope for a better world. It's a moving place, and the tours (available in English, French and Spanish and included in the price) are highly recommended.

The museum and chapel are in the neighborhood of Bellavista, northeast of downtown. You can walk uphill, or take a bus along Av 6 de Diciembre to Av Eloy Alfaro and then a Bellavista bus up the hill. A taxi costs about US\$2.



## OTHER MUSEUMS

Anyone interested in the indigenous cultures of the Amazon region should pop into the small **Museo Amazónico** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 256-2663; Av 12 de Octubre 1436; admission US\$2; 🕒 8:30am-12:30pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) or the **Museo Etnográfico de Artesanía de Ecuador** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 223-0609; www.sinchisacha.org; Reina Victoria N26-166 & La Niña; 🕒 8am-6:30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat). The latter, run by the highly regarded nonprofit Fundación Sinchi Sacha (also see Tianguéz, p662 and p666), closed for remodeling with plans to reopen in early 2007.

## Guápulo

If you follow Av 12 de Octubre up the hill from the Mariscal, you'll reach **Hotel Quito** (Map pp650-1; González Suárez N27-142) at the top. Behind the hotel (which has a top-floor bar with magnificent views), steep stairs lead down to the somewhat bohemian neighborhood of El Guápulo, set in a precipitous valley. At the center of this small neighborhood stands the lovely **Santuario de Guápulo** (Map pp650-1; 🕒 9am-noon), built between 1644 and 1693.

The best views of the church are from the **Mirador de Guápulo**, behind the Hotel Quito, at the **Statue of Francisco de Orellana** (Map pp650-1; RL Larrea near González Suárez). In the statue, Francisco de Orellana is looking down into the valley that saw the beginning of his epic journey from Quito to the Atlantic – the first descent of the Amazon by a European.

## ACTIVITIES

Quito is one of the best places to hire guides and organize both single- and multiday excursions.

### Cycling

On the second and last Sunday of every month, the entire length of Av Amazonas and most of the Old Town are closed to cars, and loads of peddlers take to the street for the bimonthly **ciclopaseo** (bicycle ride).

Local mountain biking companies rent bikes and offer excellent single- and two-day guided off-road rides in Andean settings you'd otherwise never see. Day trips cost about US\$45. **Biking Dutchman** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 256-8323, 254-2806; www.bikingdutchman.com; Foch 714 at JL Mera) is Ecuador's pioneer mountain biking operator and has good bikes and guides and an outstanding reputation. **Arie's Bike Company** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 290-6052; www.ariesbikecompany.com;

Wilson 578 at Reina Victoria) offers similar trips and has received great reports from readers. Check both to compare prices and trips.

### Climbing

Climbers can get a serious fix at the **Rocódromo** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 250-8463; Quéseras del Medio s/n; admission US\$1.50; 🕒 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-6pm Sat & Sun), a 25m-high climbing facility across from the Estadio Rumiñahui. There are more than a dozen routes on the three main walls, a four-face bouldering structure, and a rock building. Shoe rental costs US\$1.50, ropes US\$2 and harnesses US\$1. Chalk bags and carabiners are extra. If you rent equipment, the staff will belay you. The Rocódromo is walking distance from the Mariscal.

**Compañía de Guías de Montaña** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 290-1551, 255-6210; www.companiadeguías.com.ec; Jorge Washington 425 at Av 6 de Diciembre) is a top-notch mountain climbing operator whose guides are all licensed instructors and speak several languages. Two-day trips cost US\$224 per person, three days US\$330, not including park entrance fees. Tailor-made trips are available. **Alta Montaña** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 252-4422, 09-422-9483; Jorge Washington 8-20) is another recommended climbing operator.

**Montaña** (Map pp650-51; ☎ 223-8954; mountain\_refugecuador@yahoo.com; Cordero E12-141 at Toledo; dm US\$7, s/d US\$9/15) is a meeting place for climbers from Quito. It's a good source of non-biased information (no one's trying to sell anything but a cup of coffee) and a good place to meet local climbers.

See opposite for more agencies that offer climbing tours.

### Hiking

Quito's new telefériQo (p655) takes passengers up to Cruz Loma (4100m). From there you can hike to the top of jagged Rucu Pichincha (about 4700m). Beyond the rise of Cruz Loma and past a barbed wire fence (which no one seems to pay any attention to), well-marked trails lead to Rucu Pichincha. It's approximately three hours to the top, and some scrambling is required. Don't attempt this hike if you've just arrived in Quito; allow yourself a couple days' acclimatization.

Before the telefériQo went in, climbing Rucu Pichincha was dangerous due to armed robberies, but that danger seems to have disappeared entirely. It's easy to assess from the top of the telefériQo, and you can enquire at

SAE (p649) if you want to make sure. It's a spectacular hike, best done in the morning before the clouds roll in.

### White-Water Rafting

Several companies offer rafting day trips, departing by van from the capital, or you can sign up for a multiday rafting trip further afield. Rates start around US\$65 per person per day. Visit the following:

**Sierra Nevada Expeditions** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 255-3658; www.hotelsierranevada.com; J Pinto 637 near Cordero) A good rafting operator.

**Yacu Amu Rafting/Ríos Ecuador** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 223-6844; www.yacuamu.com; Foch 746 near JL Mera) White-water rafting, kayaking trips and courses. Australian owned, highly experienced. Daily departures.

## COURSES

### Dancing

Tired of shoe-gazing when you hit the *salsotecas* (salsa clubs)? Try salsa dance classes – they're a blast! Merengue, cumbia and other Latin dances are also taught. Private classes average US\$5 per hour at:

**Ritmo Tropical** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 255-7094; ritmotropical5@hotmail.com; Av Amazonas N24-155 at J Calama; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri)

**Tropical Dancing School** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 222-0427; tropicaldancing@hotmail.com; Foch E4-256 at Av Amazonas; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, Sat & Sun by reservation only)

### Language

Quito is one of the better places in South America to learn Spanish. Most schools offer all levels of instruction, in private or group lessons, and can arrange home-stays with families. Some programs also include dance classes, cooking courses or cultural events. Rates for private lessons vary between US\$6 and US\$9 per hour. Some charge an inscription fee (usually around US\$20).

**Beraca** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 290-6642; beraca@interactive.net.ec; Av Amazonas 1114) Cheap and well-liked.

**Bipo & Toni's** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 255-6614, 256-3309; www.bipo.net; J Carrión E8-183 at Leonidas Plaza Gutiérrez)

**Ecole Idiomas** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 223-1592; info@ecotravel-ecuador.com; L Garcia E6-15 near JL Mera) Volunteer projects available.

**Guayasamín Spanish School** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 254-4210; www.guayasaminschool.com; J Calama E8-54 near 6 de Diciembre) Ecuadorian owned; lots of reader recommendations.

**San Francisco Language Institute** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 252-1306; www.sanfranciscospanish.com; Av Amazonas 662, 2nd fl, Office 201) Pricy (\$9 per hour, plus US\$50 inscription fee) but gets high recommendations.

**Vida Verde** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 222-6635, 256-3110; www.vidaverde.com; Leonidas Plaza Gutiérrez N23-100 near Wilson)

## TOURS

Organized tours are sometimes cheaper if they are booked in the town closest to where you want to go, although this demands a more flexible schedule. If you prefer to start in Quito, the following agencies and operators are well received and reliable. For cycling, rafting, climbing and other activities, see opposite.

**Dracaena** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 254-6590; J Pinto E4-453) Offers four- to eight-day tours of Cuyabeno (p699) that have received excellent reviews. Five-day tour US\$200 per person.

**Emerald Forest Expeditions** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 254-1278; www.emeraldexpeditions.com; J Pinto E4-244 at Av Amazonas) Consistently outstanding reports from travelers for its Oriente trips. US\$60 to US\$80 per person per day.

**Fundación Golondrinas** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 222-6602; www.ecuadorexplorer.com/golondrinas; Isabel La Católica N24-679) Conservation project with volunteer opportunities; also arranges walking tours in the *páramo* west of Tulcán (see p675).

**Galasam** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 250-7080; www.galasam.com; Av Amazonas 1354 at Cordero) Known for its economical to midrange Galápagos cruises, but reports from customers have been mixed. Complaints are frequent; some raves.

**Gulliver** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 252-9297, 09-946-2265; www.gulliver.com.ec; cnr JL Mera & Calama) Trekking, climbing, mountain biking and horse-riding trips in the Andes. Excellent prices, daily departures. Most day trips cost US\$30 to US\$45 per person. Economical five- to seven-day Cotopaxi trips are based out of its Hostería PapaGayo (p677) and cost US\$360 to US\$450 and US\$500 respectively.

**Rainforestur** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 223-9822; www.rainforestur.com; Av Amazonas 420 at F Robles) Excellent for Cuyabeno Reserve jungle trips. Also offers rafting trips near Baños, and trekking and indigenous market tours in the Quito area.

**Safari Tours** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 255-2505, 250-8316; www.safari.com.ec; Foch E5-39; ☎ 9am-7pm) Arranges everything from jungle treks and Galápagos cruises to volcano climbing. Loads of day trips.

**Sierra Nevada Expeditions** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 255-3658; www.hotelsierranevada.com; J Pinto 637 near Cordero) Climbing, biking and river-rafting trips.

**Tropic Ecological Adventures** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 222-5907; [www.tropiceco.com](http://www.tropiceco.com); Av de la República E7-320) Three- to six-day tours to the Oriente, Andes and cloud forest.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The city's biggest party celebrates the founding of Quito in the first week of December, when bullfights are held daily at the Plaza de Toros. On New Year's Eve, life-size puppets (often of politicians) are burned in the streets at midnight. Carnaval is celebrated with intense water fights – no one is spared. Colorful religious processions are held during Easter week.

## SLEEPING

Most people shack up in the New Town – particularly in the Mariscal neighborhood – so they can be near cybercafés, bars and restaurants. Unfortunately the Mariscal is extremely dangerous after dark. With the restoration of the Old Town, historic Quito is once again becoming a popular area to stay. You may not find banana pancakes and hostels around every corner, but you will find something more traditionally South American.

Adjacent to (and safer than) the Mariscal, the hip La Floresta neighborhood has a few places to stay and plenty of bars.

## Old Town

The hotels between Plaza Santo Domingo and the bus terminal are some of the cheapest, but it's a dodgy area after about 7pm.

**La Posada Colonial** (Map p653; ☎ 228-2859; Paredes 188; r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$4/5) Although a bit close to the bus terminal, this wood-floor oldie is still one of the Old Town's best values. Beds are saggy, but it's extremely well-kept and totally secure. Bright and cheerful.

**Hotel Huasi Continental** (Map p653; ☎ 295-7327; Flores 332; r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$4/7) Several readers have recommended this hotel with spartan but clean, comfortable rooms. Unfortunately, few have windows, but the beds are firm.

**Grand Hotel** (Map p653; ☎ 228-0192, 295-9411; [www.geocities.com/grandhotelquito](http://www.geocities.com/grandhotelquito); Rocafuerte 1001; s/d with shared bathroom US\$4.50/8, private bathroom US\$6.50/12) This old backpacker haunt is clean and full of character (and characters!). Rooms are gloomy if you don't get a window. Good if you want cheap and non-touristy.

**Chicago Hostel** (Map p653; ☎ 228-0224; [chicago.hostal@panchored.net](mailto:chicago.hostal@panchored.net); Los Ríos 1730; dm US\$5.50, s/d with shared bathroom US\$6/12, private bathroom US\$9/16; ☎) On the New Town border, this ultra-friendly new hotel has spotless, straightforward rooms with cable TV. Dining room, bar and left-luggage service.

**Secret Garden** (Map p653; ☎ 295-6704, 316-0949; Antepara E4-60 at Los Ríos; dm US\$6.75, s or d with shared/private bathroom US\$17.50/24) Owned by an Ecuadorian-Australian couple, this new, colorful hostel is easily one of the best budget digs in Quito – no one can compete with the view from the 5th floor terrace. An all-you-can-eat breakfast (additional US\$2.50) and nightly dinners (about US\$3.75) are served.

**Hotel Catedral Internacional** (Map p653; ☎ 295-5438; Mejía 638; s/d US\$7/12) Extremely tidy hotel, with old but cared-for decorations, odd furniture and marvelously outdated bedspreads. Get a window.

**Hotel Internacional Plaza del Teatro** (Map p653; ☎ 295-9462, 295-4293; Guayaquil N8-75; s/d US\$10/16) This old-time hotel maintains a hint of its former elegance with its marble staircase, wide hallways and balconied rooms. The off-street rooms lack balconies and character, but are quieter. Nonchalant staff; popular with Ecuadorians.

**Hotel Viena Internacional** (Map p653; ☎ 295-4860; Flores 600 at Chile; s/d with bathroom US\$11/22) Though the c-1972, grapevine wallpaper can bug your eyes out, the spotless rooms, top-notch service and cheerful interior patio make this the best hotel deal in the Old Town. Rooms have hardwood floors, TVs, hot water and good showers. Balcony rooms can be noisy.

**Hotel San Francisco de Quito** (Map p653; ☎ 228-7758; [www.uio-guided.com/hsfquito](http://www.uio-guided.com/hsfquito); [hsfquito@andinanet.net](mailto:hsfquito@andinanet.net); Sucre 217; s/d with private bathroom US\$14/24, mini apartments with kitchenettes US\$18/30) If you want to sleep in style (old style, that is) in colonial Quito, try this centuries-old beauty. Rooms lack windows, but double doors open onto a lovely balcony over a pretty interior courtyard.

Also recommended:

**Hostal San Blas** (Map p653; ☎ 228-1434; Caldas 121, Plaza San Blas; s/d with shared bathroom US\$5/6.75, private bathroom US\$6.75/10,) Good deal if you don't mind minuscule rooms.

**Hostal La Casona** (Map p653; ☎ 257-0626, 258-8809; Manabí 255; s/d US\$6/8) Three floors of dark, clean, musty rooms and plenty of things to bump your head upon.

**Hotel Auca Continental** (Map p653; ☎ 295-4799; [ucahotel@hotmail.com](mailto:ucahotel@hotmail.com); Sucre 0e4-14; s/d incl breakfast US\$10/20) Plain and time-tattered but totally fine.



## New Town

**Casa Bambú** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 222-6738; G Solano 1758 near Av Colombia; dm US\$4, r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$5/7) This gem boasts spacious rooms, a wee garden, guest kitchen, a book exchange, laundry facilities and outstanding views from the rooftop hammocks. Worth the uphill hike.

**Hostal Déjà vu** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 222-4483; www.hostalsdejavu.com; 9 de Octubre 599; dm US\$6, s/d with shared bathroom US\$10/12, private bathroom US\$12/15) Colorfully painted walls and old wacky furniture give this slightly run down but popular *hostal* (cheap hotel) a somewhat underground feel.

**La Casa de Eliza** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 222-6602; manteca@uio.satnet.net; Isabel La Católica N24-679; dm US\$6, d US\$12) Although this old favorite is definitely showing its age, it's still a friendly, homespun place. It's a converted house with a big guest kitchen, a sociable common area, a wee book exchange and basic rooms.

**El Cafecito** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 223-4862; www.cafecito.net; Cordero E6-43; dm US\$6, s/d US\$9/14) An eternally popular budget choice. Rooms are clean, the place has a mellow vibe, and the excellent café below makes breakfast convenient. All bathrooms are shared.

**Crossroads** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 223-4735; www.crossroads.hostal.com; Foch E5-23; dm US\$6-7, s/d with shared bathroom US\$12/18, private bathroom US\$15.50/25) Big, converted house with bright rooms and a welcoming communal atmosphere. Facilities include a good café, cable TV, kitchen privileges, luggage storage and a patio with a fireplace.

**L'Auberge Inn** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 255-2912; www.ioda.net/auberge-inn; Av Colombia N12-200; s/d with shared bathroom US\$7/13, private bathroom US\$10/17) With a pool table, sauna, safe-deposit facilities, fireplace in

the common room, courtyard, kitchen, luggage storage, laundry service, in-house travel agency and a great pizzeria (say no more), this is an excellent deal.

**Albergue El Taxo** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 222-5593; Foch E4-116; s/d with shared bathroom US\$7/14, private bathroom US\$8/16) Friendly and modest, El Taxo occupies a converted c-1970s house with pleasant, colorful rooms, most of which have shared bathrooms. The no-frills common area has a fireplace (rarely fired up), and the guest kitchen is well kept.

**La Casona de Mario** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 254-4036, 223-0129; www.casonademario.com; Andalucía N24-115; r per person US\$8) In a lovely old house, La Casona de Mario has homey rooms, shared spotless bathrooms, a garden, a TV lounge and a guest kitchen. Numerous readers have recommended the place for its hospitality, atmosphere, quiet but convenient location, and all around value. Outstanding.

**Amazonas Inn** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 222-5723, 222-2666; J Pinto E4-324 & Av Amazonas; r per person US\$9-12) Outstanding value. Rooms are straightforward and spotless, with private bathrooms, constant hot water and cable TV (70-plus channels!); those on the 1st floor have windows. Friendly staff, central location.

**Aleida's Hostel** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 223-4570; www.aleidashostal.com.ec; Andalucía 559 at Salazar; s/d with shared bathroom US\$11/22, private bathroom US\$17/34 or US\$22/39) This friendly three-story guesthouse in La Floresta is family run and has a very spacious feel with lots of light, huge rooms, high wooden ceilings and hardwood floors. The owner welcomes guests with a shot of *punta* (homemade firewater).

**Casa Helbling** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 222-6013; www.casahelbling.de; Gral Veintimilla E18-166; s/d with shared bathroom US\$12/18, private bathroom US\$18/26) This homey, converted, colonial-style house in the Mariscal is clean, relaxed, friendly and has a guest kitchen, laundry facilities and plenty of common areas for chilling out.

**Folklore Hotel** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 255-4621; www.folklorehotel.com; Madrid 868 near Pontevedra; s/d with breakfast US\$15/25) Delightfully converted house in La Floresta with spacious, colorful rooms. It has a small garden and a welcoming family feel.

Also recommended:

**Hostal Vamara** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 222-6425; hostalvamara@yahoo.com; Foch 753 & Av Amazonas; dm US\$3, r with shared bathroom per person US\$6, with private bathroom & TV per person US\$8) Has some of the cheapest dorm beds in town.

### SPLURGE!

**Café Cultura** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 222-4271; www.cafecultura.com; F Robles 513; s/d US\$77/89) This ultra-charming boutique hotel occupies a converted mansion with a garden. The beautifully painted common rooms have three crackling fireplaces, and the bedrooms are individually decorated and have murals painted by different artists. Water is purified throughout the hotel (go on, drink the shower water!). Travelers love this place and reservations are advised. Several languages are spoken among the international staff.

**Hostal Alpa Aligu** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 256-4012; [alpaaligu@yahoo.com](mailto:alpaaligu@yahoo.com); J Pinto 240; dm US\$4)

**Loro Verde** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 222-6173; Rodríguez E7-66; s/d US\$9/18) Simple but comfy; great location.

**Hotel Nueve de Octubre** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 255-2424/2524; 9 de Octubre 1047; s US\$10-13, d US\$14-16) Drably institutional but totally acceptable.

**Hotel Pickett** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 254-1453, 255-1205; Wilson 712; s/d US\$10/20) Straightforward hotel; perfectly fine for the price.

## EATING

As a popular tourist destination and the nation's capital, Quito – especially the New Town – is laden with international restaurants. But the real treat here is sampling the many varieties of Ecuadorian cuisine – from landmark mom-and-pop places cooking up a single specialty, to the occasional splurge in a gourmet restaurant offering nouveau Ecuadorian fare.

Restaurants in the Old Town used to stick with the inexpensive, unembellished Ecuadorian standards. Most still do, but a handful have recently opened that serve outstanding traditional fare to a more upmarket and foreign clientele.

If you're pinching pennies, stick to the standard *almuerzos* or *meriendas* (set lunches and dinners). Many restaurants in the New Town close on Sunday.

## Old Town

You'll find Quito's most traditional eateries in the historical center, places which, unlike in the Mariscal Sucre, have been honing family recipes for generations. Cafés offer some of the best deals.

## CAFÉS & SNACKS

**El Kukurucho del Maní** (Map p653; Rocafuerte 0e5-02 at García Moreno; snacks US\$25-50¢) C'mon, where else do they cook up kilos of sugary nuts, corn kernels and *haba* beans in a copper kettle big enough to cook a pig in? Classic *quiteño* snacks.

**El Cafeto** (Map p653; Chile 930 y Flores, Convento de San Agustín; coffee drinks US\$75¢-52) This superb Ecuadorian-owned coffee shop serves coffee made from 100% organic Ecuadorian beans. The espresso is likely the best in town.

**Cafetería Modelo** (Map p653; cnr Sucre & García Moreno; snacks US\$1-2) Opened in 1950, Modelo is one of the city's oldest cafés, and a great spot to try traditional snacks like *empanadas de verde* (plantain empanadas filled with

cheese), *quimbolitos* (a sweet cake steamed in a leaf), *tamales* (cornmeal stuffed with meat and steamed in a banana leaf) and *humitas* (similar to Mexican tamales).

**Heladería San Agustín** (Map p653; Guayaquil 1053; ice cream US\$1.20) The Alvarez Andino family has been making *helados de paila* (ice cream handmade in big copper bowls) since 1858, making this Quito's oldest ice-cream parlor and an absolute must for ice cream fans.

**Frutería Monserrate** (Map p653; Espejo 0e2-12; mains US\$1.50-3) Best known for the giant bowls of tropical fruits smothered in raspberry topping and whipped cream, this outstanding café also serves delicious soups, sandwiches, Ecuadorian snacks and excellent breakfasts. Popular with locals and hygienically impeccable.

**Café del Fraile** (Map p653; Chile 0e4-22, Pasaje Arzobispal, 2nd fl; drinks US\$2-4, sandwiches US\$4.50) Old world atmosphere and balcony seating make this café-cum-bar the perfect spot for evening hot chocolate or a stiff cocktail. Sandwiches, snacks and desserts too.

**Tianguez** (Map p653; Plaza San Francisco; mains US\$3-5) Tucked into the stone arches beneath the Monastery of San Francisco, Tianguez is one of the city's most perfectly situated cafés.

**Café Mosaico** (Map p653; Manuel Samaniego N8-95 near Antepara, Itchimbia; mains US\$8.50-11, drinks US\$2.50-5; ☎ 11am-10:30pm, from 4pm Tue) Sure the drinks are overpriced, but you won't find a balcony view like this *anywhere* else, and tourists are a rarity.

## RESTAURANTS

**Cafetería Fabiolita** (Map p653; El Buen Sanduche, Espejo 0e4-17; sandwiches US\$1, seco de chivo US\$2.50) For over 40 years this spic-and-span eatery beneath the cathedral has been serving up the city's favorite *seco de chivo* (goat stew), one of Ecuador's most traditional dishes (served 9am to 11am only). The *sanduches de perril* (ham sandwiches) humble even city politicians.

**Govindas** (Map p653; Esmeraldas 853; almuerzo US\$1.20-1.60) Leave it to the Krishnas to whip out a delicious buffet-style vegetarian lunch in the Old Town.

**La Guaragua** (Map p653; Espejo 0e2-40 near Flores; mains US\$2-6) The tables are a bit office-like, but the food is excellent. Try the *tortillas de quinoa* (quinoa patties) and empanadas.

**La Colmena** (Map p653; Benalcázar 619; almuerzo US\$2.35) For 50 years, the Vaca Meza family has been serving one of Ecuador's favorite dishes, *guatita*, a tripe and potato stew in a

seasoned, peanut-based sauce. Whether you can stomach tripe or not, it's well worth sampling the original.

**Cafetería La Zamba Teresa** (Map p653; Chile 1046; almuerzo US\$3, mains US\$4-8) Attached to La Cueva del Oso (see below), this is the people's chance to sample some of the restaurant's outstanding cooking. The set lunches are a steal.

**Hasta La Vuelta, Señor** (Map p653; Chile 0e4-22, Palacio Arzobispal, 3rd fl; mains US\$6-7) Ecuadorian cuisine gets a gourmet twist at this excellent restaurant with balcony seating. Thursday through Sunday it's a great place to try the highland's two most famous soups: *yaguarlocro* (blood sausage soup) and *caldo de patas* (cow hoof soup).

**La Cueva del Oso** (Map p653; Chile 1046; mains US\$7-10) Lounge-like Cueva del Oso serves exquisitely prepared Ecuadorian specialties. The bar, with its low, round booths, makes for a sultry escape from the noise outside.

For those pinching pennies, you'll find good family-style food and cheap *almuerzos* at the following:

**Nuevo Cordovéz** (Map p653; Guayaquil 774; almuerzos US\$1.40-1.75, mains US\$2-3) Colorful booths and a bullfighting theme.

**La Posada Colonial** (Map p653; García Moreno 1160 near Mejía; almuerzos US\$2, mains US\$2-3)

**Café Quiteño Libre** (Map p653; Sucre 0e3-17; almuerzos US\$2, mains US\$2-3) In the brick-wall cellar of the Hotel San Francisco de Quito (p660).

**King Chicken** (Map p653; Bolívar 236; mains US\$2-4) Good fried chicken, big ice-cream sundaes, diner-like atmosphere.

## MARKET FOOD

**Mercado Central** (Map p653; Pichincha btwn Esmeraldas & Manabí; full meals under US\$1-3; ☎ 8am-4pm, to 3pm Sun) For stall after stall of some of Quito's most traditional (and cheapest) foods, head straight to the Mercado Central, where you'll find everything from *locro de papa* (potato soup with cheese and avocado) and seafood, to *yaguarlocro*. Fruits and veggies too.

**Corvina Don 'Jimmy'** (Map p653; Mercado Central, Pichincha btw Esmeraldas & Mejía; mains US\$2-4; ☎ 8am-4pm, to 3pm Sun) Open since 1953, this is the Mercado Central's most famous stall, serving huge portions of *corvina* (sea bass). Ask for it with rice if you don't want it over a big bowl of *ceviche* (marinated, raw seafood).

## New Town

If you're willing to splash out a bit, you can have a lot of fun filling your stomach in the

New Town. On the flipside, most of the Mariscal has succumbed to foreign tastes, making it hard to find anything resembling a local, reasonably priced restaurant. You can still find loads of inexpensive, family-style places that cater to locals by wandering the streets in the area west of Amazonas and north of Jorge Washington, and along Cordero northwest of Amazonas.

## CAFÉS

**Kallari** (Map pp650-1; Wilson E4-266 at JL Mera; breakfasts US\$2, lunches US\$2.50) Besides the fact that Kallari's chocolate bars induce orgasms on the spot, this Quichua coop serves up delicious, healthy breakfasts and lunches as well.

**El Cafecito** (Map pp650-1; Cordero 1124; mains US\$2-4) Serves inexpensive, mainly vegetarian meals and snacks all day long. Great breakfasts.

**chiQuito** (Map pp650-1; Camino de Orellana 630; snacks US\$2-4) This intimate, artsy café makes for a perfect stop during a leisurely walk down to Guápulo.

**Café Amazonas** (Map pp650-1; cnr Av Amazonas & R Roca; coffee US\$60¢, mains US\$2-4) An Amazonas classic, with outdoor tables and prime people-watching.

**Café Sutra** (Map pp650-1; J Calama 380; snacks US\$2-6; ☎ noon-3am Mon-Sat) With its dim lighting, mellow music and cool crowd, Café Sutra is a great place for a snack and a beer before a night out.

**Magic Bean** (Map pp650-1; Foch E5-08; mains US\$4-7) Diminishing in value, but long the epicenter of the Mariscal for well-prepared, breakfasts, lunches, juices and coffee drinks.

**Grain de Café** (Map pp650-1; Gral Baquedano 332; mains US\$4-7) Kick back over coffee or order a full meal. Lots of vegetarian options.

## RESTAURANTS

**Cevichería y Marisquería 7 Mares** (Map pp650-1; La Niña 525; mains US\$1-5) This is the place to go for cheap *encebollado* (a tasty seafood, onion and yucca soup). Bowls – served *cafetería*-style – are only US\$1.30 and make an excellent lunch.

**El Guambra** (Map pp650-1; Av 6 de Diciembre at Jorge Washington; mains US\$1.25-4) It doesn't look like much, but this wee restaurant serves knockout *ceviche* and seafood dishes at rock-bottom prices.

**Chacha** (Map pp650-1; cnr JL Mera & Foch; mains US\$1.50-2) Readers and travelers continually recommend this Argentine eatery for cheap pizza, pasta and *empanadas* at outdoor tables.

**La Cocina Quiteña** (Map pp650-1; R Roca E5-86 at Reina Victoria; mains US\$1.50-4) Free popcorn and a local crowd make this as authentic as you can get around the Mariscal. Everything's cheap. Outdoor tables too.

**El Chisme** (Map pp650-1; Luis Cordero 1204 near JL Mera; almuerzos US\$2) This friendly, locally owned eatery cooks up cheap Ecuadorian meals. Great set lunch.

**Sakti** (Map pp650-1; J Carrión 641; almuerzos US\$2, mains US\$2-3; ☎ 8:30am-6:30pm Mon-Fri) Cheap, wholesome soups, veggies, fruit salads, pastas and lasagna dished out *cafeteria* style.

**Aladdin's** (Map pp650-1; cnr Diego de Almagro & Baquerizo Moreno; mains US\$2-4) Extremely popular soul-themed restaurant with great falafel and shawarma sandwiches, outdoor seating and giant hookahs.

**Hassan's Café** (Reina Victoria near Av Colón; mains US\$2-6) Lebanese food – shawarmas, hummus, kebabs, stuffed eggplant, veggie plates – is good, fresh and cheap at this 10-table restaurant.

**El Maple** (Map pp650-1; cnr Foch & Diego del Almagro; mains US\$3-5) Excellent organic vegetarian food. The four-course set lunches (\$2.80) are a steal.

**La Bodeguita de Cuba** (Map pp650-1; Reina Victoria 1721; mains US\$3-5) With its wooden tables and graffiti-covered walls, this is a great place for Cuban food and fun. Live music Thursday nights.

**Chifa Mayflower** (Map pp650-1; J Carrión 442; mains US\$3-6) If it's good enough for celebrity chef Martin Yan (check out his autographed photo by the door), it's good enough. Lots of veggie options.

**Mama Clorindas** (Map pp650-1; Reina Victoria 1144; meals US\$3-7) Delicious national specialties are served to a mostly foreign clientele.

**Adam's Rib** (Map pp650-1; J Calama 329; mains US\$4-6) These barbecued meats have been feeding a faithful stream of expats since 1986.

**Cevichería Manolo** (Map pp650-1; cnr D de Almagro & La Niña; mains US\$4-6) Join the locals at this excellent and affordable seafood restaurant, with several types of *ceviches* on the menu, plus great seafood dishes.

**Red Hot Chili Peppers** (Map pp650-1; Foch E4-314; mains US\$4-6) Popular Mexican restaurant with a big-screen TV. Go straight for the fajitas and piña coladas, and you'll be singing Jimmy Buffet all the way home.

**Le Arcate** (Map pp650-1; Gral Baquedano 358; mains US\$4-6) This Mariscal favorite bakes over 50 kinds of pizza (likely the best around) in a

wood-fired oven and serves reasonably priced lasagna, steak and seafood.

**Su Cebiche** (Map pp650-1; JL Mera N24-200; mains US\$4-7) Slick little lunchtime joint with excellent coastal specialties.

**Siam** (Map pp650-1; J Calama E5-10; mains US\$5-8) Delicious Thai food, smallish portions.

**Boca del Lobo** (Map pp650-1; J Calama 284; mains US\$5-9; ☎ 4pm-1am Mon-Sat) Ultra-hip restaurant with ambient grooves and a mind-boggling menu of delicacies such as rosemary sea bass, salmon *ishpungo* (a spice similar to cinnamon), stuffed plantain tortillas, raclette, focaccias, pizzas and excellent desserts. Fun place to splurge.

**Churrascaría Tropeiro** (Map pp650-1; Gral Veintimilla 546; all you can eat US\$12) With ten types of meat, three types of salad and an all-you-can-eat policy, how can you go wrong?

## SELF-CATERING

**Mercado Santa Clara** (Map pp650-1; cnr Dávalos & Versalles; ☎ 8am-5pm) This is the main produce market in the New Town. Besides an outstanding produce selection, there are cheap food stalls.

**Supermercado Santa María** (Map pp650-1; cnr Dávalos & Versalles; ☎ 8:30am-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-6pm Sun) Huge supermarket conveniently across from Mercado Santa Clara.

**Supermaxi** (Map pp650-1; cnr La Niña & Y Pinzón; ☎ daily) Biggest and best supermarket near the Mariscal.

## DRINKING

Most of the *farra* in Quito is concentrated in and around the Mariscal, where the line between 'bar' and 'dance club' is blurry indeed. Bars in the Mariscal, for better or worse, are generally raucous and notorious for 'gringo hunting,' when locals of both sexes flirt it up with the tourists (which can be annoying or enjoyable, depending on your state of mind). Dancing on the bar tops is generally *de rigueur*. Bars with dancing often charge admission, which usually includes a drink. Remember to always take a cab home if you're out in the Mariscal at night (see p652).

For something far more relaxed, sans the pickup scene, head to La Floresta or Guápulo, where drinking is a more cerebral affair.

**El Pobre Diablo** (Map pp650-1; www.elpobrediabolo.com; Isabel La Católica E12-06) Friendly, laid-back place with live jazz Wednesday and Thursday nights, wood tables, a great vibe and a solid cocktail menu. Restaurant too.

**La Reina Victoria** (Map pp650-1; Reina Victoria 530) With a fireplace, dartboard, bumper pool, great food and excellent British pub ambience, it's hard to beat this Mariscal institution.

**Mirador de Guápulo** (Map pp650-1; R L Larrea y Pasaje Stübel) This cozy café-cum-bar sits on the cliffside overlooking Guápulo. The views are unbeatable, and the snacks are tasty. Live music Wednesday through Saturday nights (when there's a US\$4.50 cover charge).

**Ta Güeno** (Map pp650-1; Camino de Orellana N27-492) Sneak off to this wonderful bar in Guápulo for its bohemian air, friendly vibe, fabulous terrace and big pitchers of *canelazo* (a traditional, hot alcoholic drink).

**No Bar** (Map pp650-1; cnr J Calama 380 & JL Mera; admission US\$3-5; ☎ 6pm-3am) This Mariscal cornerstone has four small, dark dance floors, a chaotic bar (always with dancing on top) and plenty of beer-bonging and spraying of Pilsener. It's mobbed on weekends. Expect lots of pick-up lines.

**Tijuana** (Map pp650-1; cnr Reina Victoria & Santa María; admission US\$3-4) Locals pack this small dance floor so tight, it's amazing they can still bump and grind. Edgy.

English pubs have long been the rave in Quito. The following are the most popular.

**Patatu's Bar** (Map pp650-1; Wilson E4-229)

**Turtle's Head** (Map pp650-1; La Niña 626)

**King's Cross** (Map pp650-1; Reina Victoria 1781)

**Ghoz Bar** (Map pp650-1; La Niña 425)

## ENTERTAINMENT

For movie listings and other events, check the local newspapers *El Comercio* and *Hoy*, or pick up a copy of *Quito Cultura*, a monthly cultural mag available free from the tourist offices. Online, check out [www.quehacerquito.com](http://www.quehacerquito.com) (in Spanish).

### Cinemas

The first two listings are state-of-the-art multiplexes which usually screen Hollywood hits with Spanish subtitles.

**Cinemark** (Map p657; ☎ 226-0301; [www.cinemark.com.ec](http://www.cinemark.com.ec) in Spanish; cnr Naciones Unidas & Av América; admission US\$4)

**Multicines** (Map p657; ☎ 225-9677; [www.multiplex.com.ec](http://www.multiplex.com.ec) in Spanish; CCI – Centro Comercial Iñaquito; admission US\$4)

**Ocho y Medio** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 290-4720/21/22; [www.ochoymedio.net](http://www.ochoymedio.net) in Spanish; cnr Vallodolid N24-353 & Vizcaya) Shows art films (often in English) and has occasional dance, theater and live music. Small café attached.

### Live Music

*Peñas* are usually bars that have traditional *música folklórica* (folk music) shows.

**Vox Populi** (Map p653; Espejo 0e2-12 at Flores; ☎ 4pm-11pm Tue, Wed & Sun, 4pm-2am Thu-Sat) The hippest, slickest bar in the Old Town features excellent live music ranging from Cuban *son* to Latin jazz. The jams begin at 10pm Thursday through Saturday.

**Ñucanchi Peña** (Map pp650-1; Av Universitaria 496; admission US\$5; ☎ 8pm-2am or 3am Thu-Sat) One of the best places to catch a *música folklórica* show.

**La Casa de la Peña** (Map p653; García Moreno N11-13; admission US\$3-5; ☎ 7pm-midnight Thu, 7pm-2am Fri & Sat) The setting alone, inside an ancient building in the Old Town, makes this intimate *peña* a great place to hear Ecuadorian folk music.

**Café Libro** (Map pp650-1; [www.cafelibro.com](http://www.cafelibro.com); J Carrión 243; admission US\$3-5; ☎ 5pm-1am Mon-Fri, from 6pm Sat) Live music, contemporary dance, tango, jazz and other performances draw an artsy and intellectual crowd to this cozy, bohemian venue.

### Nightclubs

**Seseribó** (Map pp650-1; cnr Gral Veintimilla & Av 12 de Octubre, Edificio Girón; minimum consumption US\$7; ☎ 9pm-1am Thu-Sat) Quito's premier *salsoteca* shouldn't be missed. It's small and friendly, and the music is tops. Finding dance partners is rarely a problem and usually a polite process.

**Mayo 68** (Map pp650-1; L García 662) This fun *salsoteca* is smaller (and some say, for that reason, better) than Seseribó.

### Theater & Dance

**Teatro Sucre** (Map p653; ☎ 228-2136, 02-228-2337; [www.teatrosucre.com](http://www.teatrosucre.com); Manabí N8-131; admission US\$3-70; ticket office ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-6pm) Recently restored and now standing gloriously over the Plaza del Teatro, this is the city's most historical theater. Performances range from jazz and classical music to ballet, modern dance and opera.

**Teatro Bolívar** (Map p653; ☎ 258-2486/7; [www.teatrobolivar.org](http://www.teatrobolivar.org), [info@teatrobolivar.org](mailto:info@teatrobolivar.org); Espejo btwn Flores & Guayaquil) The historic Bolívar is currently undergoing restoration work, but performances – everything from theatrical works to international tango-electronica gigs – are still given.

**Humanizarte** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 222-6116; [www.humanizarte.com](http://www.humanizarte.com); Leonidas Plaza Gutiérrez N24-226) Presents both contemporary and Andean dance every Wednesday at 5:30pm.

**Teatro Prometeo** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 222-6116; www.cce.org.ec; Av 6 de Diciembre 794) Affiliated with the Casa de La Cultura Ecuatoriana, this inexpensive venue often has modern-dance performances and other shows that non-Spanish speakers can enjoy.

## SHOPPING

Numerous stores in the Mariscal (especially along and near Av Amazonas and JL Mera) sell traditional indigenous crafts. Quality is often high, but so are the prices. The best deals can be found at the two crafts markets listed here, where indigenous, mostly *otavaleño* (people from Otavalo), vendors sell their goods.

### Crafts Stores

**La Bodega** (Map pp650-1; JL Mera N22-24) Highest quality crafts, old and new.

**Ag** (Map pp650-1; JL Mera N22-24) Ag's selection of rare, handmade silver jewelry from throughout South America is outstanding.

**Centro Artesanal** (Map pp650-1; JL Mera E5-11) This excellent shop is known for its crafts and paintings by local indigenous artists.

**Tianguez** (Map p653; Plaza San Francisco) Attached to the eponymous café (p662), Tianguez is a member of the Fair Trade Organization and sells outstanding crafts from throughout Ecuador.

**Folklore Olga Fisch** (Map pp650-1; Av Cristóbal Colón 260) The store of legendary designer Olga Fisch. Highest quality (and prices) around. Pretend it's a museum.

**Productos Andinos** (Map pp650-1; Urbina 111) This two-floor artisans' cooperative is crammed with reasonably priced crafts.

### Markets

On Saturday and Sunday, the northern end of Parque El Ejido turns into Quito's biggest crafts market and sidewalk art show. Two blocks north, on JL Mera between Jorge Washington and 18 de Septiembre, the  **Mercado Artesanal La Mariscal** (Map pp650-1; cnr JL Mera & Jorge Washington) is an entire block filled with craft stalls.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

Quito's airport, **Aeropuerto Mariscal Sucre** (Map p657; ☎ 294-4900, 243-0555; www.quitoairport.com; Av Amazonas at Av de la Prensa), is about 10km north of the center. Many of the northbound buses on

Av Amazonas and Av 10 de Agosto go there – some have 'Aeropuerto' placards and others say 'Quito Norte.' Also see Getting Into Town, p648.

In order of importance, Ecuador's principal domestic airlines are:

**TAME** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 250-9375/76/77/78,

02-290-9900; Av Amazonas 1354 at Av Cristóbal Colón)

**Icaro** (Map p657; ☎ 245-0928, 02-245-1499; Palora 124 at Av Amazonas) Across from the airport.

**AeroGal** (☎ 225-7301/8087/8086; Av Amazonas 7797) Near the airport.

Prices for internal flights vary little between the airlines. The following price information and schedule is subject to change. Prices quoted are one-way. All flights last under an hour, except to the Galápagos (3¼ hours from Quito, 1½ from Guayaquil).

**Coca** US\$43-57, 3 per day Mon-Sat with Icaro and TAME.

**Cuenca** US\$63, 2 per day Mon-Fri & 1 per day Sat & Sun with Icaro, 3 per day Mon-Fri, 2 per day Sat & Sun with TAME.

**Esmeraldas** US\$33-37, 1 per day Tue, Thu, Fri & Sun with TAME.

**Galápagos** US\$390/344 (round trip) in high/low season, 2 every day with TAME.

**Guayaquil** US\$53, 1 per day with AeroGal, 3 per day Mon-Fri & 1 per day Sat & Sun with Icaro, 10-12 per day with TAME.

**Lago Agrio** US\$43-56, 1 per day Mon-Sat with Icaro, 2 per day Mon, Thu & Fri & 1 per day Tue, Wed & Sat with TAME.

**Loja** US\$49-55, 2 per day Mon-Fri, 1 per day Sat & Sun with Icaro, 2 per day Mon-Sat with TAME.

**Macas** US\$43-57, 1 per day Mon-Fri with TAME.

**Machala** US\$55, via Guayaquil only, 1 per day Mon-Fri with TAME.

**Manta** US\$45, 1 per day Mon-Sat with TAME.

**Tulcán** US\$30, 1 per day Mon, Wed & Fri with TAME.

### Bus

The **Terminal Terrestre Cumandá** (Cumandá Bus Terminal; Map p653; Maldonado at Javier Piedra) is in the Old Town, a few hundred meters south of Plaza Santo Domingo. The nearest Trole stop is the Cumandá stop. If arriving by taxi at night, ask to be taken *inside* the station to the passenger drop-off; you'll probably have to pay the 10¢ vehicle entrance fee, but you'll be safer.

From the terminal buses go to most major destinations around the country several times a day, and several run to some places per hour, including Ambato and Otavalo. Book

in advance for holiday periods and on Friday evenings.

Approximate one-way fares and journey times are shown in the following table. More expensive luxury services are available for long trips.

Destination	Duration (hr)	Cost (US\$)
Ambato	2½	2
Atacames	7	9
Bahía de Caráquez	8	9
Baños	3½	3.50
Coca	9 (via Loreto)	9
Cuenca	10-12	10
Esmeraldas	5-6	9
Guayaquil	8	7
Huaquillas	12	10
Ibarra	2½	2.50
Lago Agrio	7-8	7
Latacunga	2	1.50
Loja	14-15	15
Machala	10	9
Manta	8-9	8
Otavalo	2¼	2
Portoviejo	9	9
Puerto López	12	12
Puyo	5½	5
Riobamba	4	4
San Lorenzo	6½	6
Santo Domingo	3	2.50
Tena	5-6	6
Tulcán	5	5

For comfortable (and slightly pricier) buses to Guayaquil from the New Town, and to avoid the trip to the terminal, ride with **Transportes Ecuador** (Map pp650-1; JL Mera N21-44 at Jorge Washington) or **Panamericana** (Map pp650-1; cnr Av Cristobal Colón & Reina Victoria). Panamericana also has long-distance buses to Machala, Loja, Cuenca, Manta and Esmeraldas.

## Train

Although most of Ecuador's train system is in shambles, you can still ride the rails if you're determined. A weekend tourist train leaves Quito and heads south for about 3½ hours to the Area Nacional de Recreación El Boliche, adjoining Parque Nacional Cotopaxi. Many passengers ride on the roof.

The **train station** (Map p657; ☎ 265-6142; Sinchola-gua & Vicente Maldonado) is about 2km south of the Old Town. Purchase tickets in advance at the **train ticket office** (Map p653; ☎ 258-2927; Bolívar 443 at

García Moreno; per person return US\$4.60; 🕒 8am-4:30pm Mon-Fri).

## GETTING AROUND

### Bus

The local buses all cost US25¢; you pay as you board. They are safe and convenient, but watch your bags and pockets on crowded buses. There are various bus types, each identified by color. The blue *Bus Tipos* are the most common and allow standing passengers. The red *ejecutivo* buses don't allow standing passengers and are therefore less crowded, but they are more infrequent.

Buses have destination placards in their windows (not route numbers), and drivers will usually gladly tell you which bus to take if you flag the wrong one.

### Taxi

Cabs are yellow and have taxi-number stickers in the window. Drivers are legally required to use their *taxímetros* (meters), and most do; many however charge a flat rate of US\$2 between the Mariscal and the Old Town, which is usually about US25¢ more than you'd pay if the meter was on. Whether you think the extra quarter is worth haggling over is completely up to you. When a driver tells you the meter is broken, flag down another cab. Late at night and on Sundays drivers charge more, but it should never be more than twice the metered rate. You can also hire a cab for about US\$8 per hour, a great way to see outer city sites.

### Trole, Ecovía & Metrobus

Quito has three electrically powered bus routes – the Trole, the Ecovía and the Metrobus. Each runs north-south along one of Quito's three main thoroughfares. Each line has designated stations and car-free lanes, making them speedy and efficient. But as the fastest form of public transport, they are also usually crowded and notorious for pickpockets. They run about every 10 minutes from 6am to 12:30am (more often in rush hours), and the fare is US25¢.

The Trole runs along Maldonado and Av 10 de Agosto. In the Old Town, southbound trolleys take the west route (along Guayaquil), while northbound trolleys take the east route (along Montúfar and Pichincha). The Ecovía, runs along Av 6 de Diciembre, and the Metrobus runs along Av América.

## AROUND QUITO

### MITAD DEL MUNDO & AROUND

☎ 02

Ecuador's biggest claim to fame is its location on the equator, and you can hardly come this far without making the excursion out to the hemispheric line at **Mitad del Mundo** (Middle of the World; admission US\$2.50; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7pm Sat & Sun), 22km north of Quito. It's touristy, sure, but hopping back and forth between hemispheres is quite a sensation. On Sunday afternoons live bands rock the equatorial line in the central plaza area, and *quiteños* pour in for the fun. A planetarium, a wonderful scale model of Quito's Old Town and other attractions cost extra. Outside the Mitad del Mundo complex is the excellent **Museo Solar Inti Ñan** (☎ 239-5122; admission adults/children under 12 US\$2/1; ☎ 9:30am-5:30pm), supposedly the site of the real equator. Definitely more interesting than the official complex next door, it houses fascinating exhibits of astronomical geography and has some fun mind-boggling water and energy demonstrations.

**Rumicucho** (admission US\$1.50; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat & Sun) is a small pre-Inca site under excavation 3.5km north of Mitad del Mundo. On the way to Calacalí, about 5km north of Mitad del Mundo, is the ancient volcanic crater of **Pululahua** – the views are great from the rim or you can hike down to the crater floor.

To get to Mitad del Mundo from Quito, take the Metrobus (US25¢) north to the Cotocollao stop. At Cotocollao, transfer to the green Mitad del Mundo bus (they're clearly marked) *without* leaving the platform. The transfer costs an additional US15¢ (pay on the bus), and the entire trip takes one to 1½ hours. The bus drops you right in front of the park entrance.

Buses continue past the complex and will drop you at the entrance road to Pululahua – ask for the Mirador de Ventanillas (the lookout point where the trail into the crater begins).

### REFUGIO DE VIDA SILVESTRE PASOCHOA

This small but beautiful wildlife **reserve** (admission US\$7), 30km southeast of Quito, has one of the last stands of undisturbed humid **Andean forest** left in central Ecuador. It's a recommended day trip for naturalists and bird-watchers, as more than 100 bird species and many rare plants have been recorded here. Trails range from easy to strenuous, and overnight **camping** (per person US\$3) is allowed in designated areas. Facilities include latrines, picnic areas and water. A basic 20-bunk **shelter** (dm US\$5) is available. The reserve is operated by **Fundación Natura** (☎ 02-250-3385/86/87, ext 202, 203; Av República 481 & Diego de Almagro) in Quito; it offers directions, maps and information.

To reach the reserve, take the bus from La Marín in Quito's Old Town to the village

#### MYTHS FROM MIDDLE EARTH

The closer you get to the equator, the more you hear about the equator's mysterious energy. But what is fact and what is fiction?

There's no point in starting softly, so let's debunk the biggest one first. The Mitad del Mundo is not on the equator. But it's close enough. GPS devices show that it's only about 240m off the mark. And no one who sees the photos has to know this, right?

Another tough one to swallow is the myth of the flushing toilet. One of the highlights of the Museo Solar Inti Ñan is the demonstration of water draining counterclockwise north of the equator and clockwise 3m away, south of the equator. Researchers claim it's a crock. The Coriolis Force – which causes weather systems to veer right in the northern hemisphere and left in the southern hemisphere – has no effect on small bodies of water like those in a sink or a toilet.

How about some truth: you do weigh less on the equator. This is due to a greater centrifugal force on the equator than at the poles. But, the difference between here and at the poles is only about 0.3%, not the approximately 1.5% to 2% the scales at the monument imply.

If all this myth-debunking has brought on a spell of the doldrums, rest assured – it comes with the territory: the Doldrums was the name given by sailors to the regional lack of winds along the equatorial belt caused by the intense heating of the earth's surface at the equator. The heating causes air to rise, rather than blow, and rising air doesn't sail a ship. But that's all fun on the equator.



of **Amaguaña** (US\$1, one hour), then hire a pickup (about US\$10 per group/truck) to take you the last 7km to the park entrance.

## TERMAS DE PAPALLACTA

📍 02

After a sweaty jungle expedition or an arduous Andean hike, a soak in the celestial hot springs of **Termas de Papallacta** (in Quito 📞 250-4747, 256-8989; admission US\$6, free for hotel guests; 🕒 7am-9pm) is pure medicine. About 67km (two hours) from Quito, these are Ecuador's most luxurious, best-kept and probably most scenic thermal bathrooms. The complex itself is part of the posh **Hotel Termas de Papallacta**, but day-trippers are welcome. It makes for an excellent jaunt from Quito. Cheaper hotels are available outside the complex in the village of Papallacta itself, though it's easy enough to head back to Quito. It's best to go during the week since weekend crowds can swell to 2000 people!

Any of the buses from Quito heading toward Baeza, Tena or Lago Agrio can drop you off in Papallacta. To avoid the congested Quito bus terminal, take a taxi to the intersection known as El Trébol (p653, ask your taxi driver) and flag a bus there.

## NORTHERN HIGHLANDS

The steep green hills, dust-blown villages, bustling provincial capitals and cultural riches of the northern highlands are but a stone's throw from Quito. Those traveling to/from Colombia are bound to pass through the region, and there's plenty worth stopping for: the famous Otavalo market, which dates back to pre-Inca times, is the largest crafts market in South America, and several small towns are known for their handicrafts, including wood carvings and leatherwork. Best of all, the people – especially the indigenous *otavaleños* (people from Otavalo) – are wonderfully friendly.

### OTAVALO

📍 06 / pop 31,000

The friendly and prosperous town of Otavalo (elevation 2550m) is famous for its giant Saturday market, where traditionally dressed indigenous people sell handicrafts to hordes of foreigners who pour in every Saturday to get in on the deals. Despite the market's popularity, the *otavaleños* themselves remain self-determined and culturally uncompromised.

The setting is fabulous, and the entire experience remains enchanting.

The most evident feature of the *otavaleños'* culture is their traditional dress. The men wear long single pigtails, calf-length white pants, rope sandals, reversible gray or blue ponchos and dark felt hats. The women are very striking, with beautifully embroidered blouses, long black skirts and shawls, and interesting folded head cloths.

### Information

**Andinatel** Calderón (near Modesto Jaramillo); Salinas (at Plaza de Ponchos)

**Banco del Pacífico** (Bolívar at García Moreno) Bank with ATM.

**Banco del Pichincha** (Bolívar near García Moreno) Bank with ATM.

**Book Market** (Roca near García Moreno) Used books.

**Native C@ffé Net** (Sucre near Colón; per hr US\$1) Internet access.

**Post office** (Sucre at Salinas, 2nd fl)

**Vaz Cambios** (cnr Modesto Jaramillo & Saona) Changes traveler's checks.

### Sights

In the wee hours of every Saturday morning, while the tourists are still sawing logs in their hotel rooms, vendors pour into town lugging massive bundles of crafts to sell at the **Saturday market**. By 8am, things are in full swing, and by 10am, the **Plaza de Ponchos** (the center of the crafts market) and nearly every street around it is jammed with people. Both traditional crafts (such as weavings, shawls and ponchos) and crafts tailored toward tourists (such as woolen sweaters with Rasta motifs) vie for buyers' dollars. Bargaining is tough but possible, and the *otavaleño* sellers are always friendly.

The **animal market**, on the western edge of town, offers an interesting break from the hustle of the crafts market. Beneath the volcanic backdrop of Cotacachi and Imbabura, indigenous men and women mill around with pigs, cows, goats and chickens and inspect, haggle and chat in the crisp morning air. It generally winds down by 8am. The **food market** is near the southern end of Modesto Jaramillo.

The **Instituto Otavaleño de Antropología** (admission free; 🕒 8:30am-noon & 2:30-6pm Tue-Fri, 8:30am-noon Sat), just off the Panamericana north of town, houses a small but interesting archaeological and ethnographical museum with exhibits about the area.

## Activities

There's some great hiking around Otavalo, especially in the Lagunas de Mojanda area (p672). **Diceny Viajes** (☎ 292-1217; Sucre 10-11) offers warmly recommended hiking trips up Volcán Cotacachi with indigenous guides. **Runa Tupari** (☎ 292-5985; [www.runatupari.com](http://www.runatupari.com); Sucre & Quiroga) partners with local indigenous communities, offering hiking, horse-riding and mountain-biking trips. Its day trips include a 2000m mountain bike descent into tropical cloud forest and a round-trip ten hour hike up Cotacachi (4939m).

The oldest and best-known information and guide service in town is **Zulaytur** (☎ 09-814-6483; [www.geocities.com/zulaytur](http://www.geocities.com/zulaytur); cnr Sucre & Colón, 2nd fl). It's run by the knowledgeable Rodrigo Mora, who offers a variety of inexpensive tours, including visits to indigenous weavers' homes, where you can learn about the weaving process and buy products off the loom.

## Courses

Readers have enthusiastically recommended **Mundo Andino** (☎ 292-1864; [espanol@interactive.net.ec](mailto:espanol@interactive.net.ec); Salinas 4-04), and **Instituto Superior de Español** (☎ 292-2414; [www.instituto-superior.net](http://www.instituto-superior.net); Sucre 11-10). One-on-one classes cost US\$4 to US\$5 per hour. Both arrange homestays.

## Festivals & Events

Held during the first two weeks of September, the **Fiesta del Yamor** features processions, music and dancing in the plaza, fireworks, cock-fights, the election of the fiesta queen and, of course, lots of *chicha de yamor* (a delicious nonalcoholic corn drink made with seven varieties of corn).

## Sleeping

Otavalo is crowded on Friday, because of the Saturday market, so arrive on Thursday for the best choice of accommodations.

**Residencial El Rocío** (☎ 292-0584; Morales 11-70; r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$4/5) Friendly, simple accommodations with hot water and rooftop views of the hilltops.

**Hostal Valle del Amanecer** (☎ 292-0990; [amanecer@uio.satnet.net](mailto:amanecer@uio.satnet.net); cnr Roca & Quiroga; r per person with breakfast & shared/private bathroom US\$7/9) Rooms are small and hospitality is hit-or-miss, but the shady hammock-strewn courtyard and tasty breakfasts still lure loads of over-nighters.

**Chukitos** (☎ 292-4959; [www.chukitoshostal.4t.com](http://www.chukitoshostal.4t.com); Bolívar 10-13 & Morales; s/d with bathroom US\$7/14; 📺)

Slightly dusty rooms with narrow twin beds, Andean folk decor, cable TV and hot water.

**Hotel Riviera-Sucre** (☎ 292-0241; [www.rivierasucre.com](http://www.rivierasucre.com); García Moreno 3-80 & Roca; r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$7/15) This Belgian-owned hotel occupies a sprawling, charming home with large, colorful rooms, fireplaces, a library, a courtyard and plenty of hot water. Outstanding value.

**Rincón del Viajero** (☎ 292-1741; [www.rincondelviajero.org](http://www.rincondelviajero.org); Roca 11-07; r per person incl breakfast with shared/private bathroom US\$7.50/10; 📺) Warm hospitality, colorful murals and homey, snug rooms make this a great deal. It has a TV lounge, a fireplace, hot water and a rooftop terrace too.

**Cabañas El Rocío** (r per person US\$10) A comfortable garden escape in the San Juan neighborhood on the other side of the Panamericana.

**Hotel El Indio** (☎ 292-0060; Sucre 12-14, s/d US\$10/15) While the inadvertent 1970's ambiance adds kitsch-appeal, there are better values out there for the price.

Other reliable cheapies include:

**Hostal María** (☎ 292-0672; Modesto Jaramillo near Colón; per person US\$3).

**Residencial San Luis** (☎ 292-0614; Calderón 6-02; r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$4/5)

**Residencial Santa Fe** (☎ 292-0171; Colón near Sucre; r per person US\$5)

For a marvelous setting outside of town, try the tranquil **La Luna** (☎ 09-973-7415; [www.hostallaluna.com](http://www.hostallaluna.com); camp sites US\$2.50, dm with/without breakfast US\$5.50/4, r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$9/10), 4km along the road to Lagunas de Mojanda. The breakfasts are filling and perks include kitchen facilities, fireplace, dining room, views and free pickup from Otavalo if you call ahead. A cab ride out costs about US\$4. The owners arrange mountain biking and hiking tours.

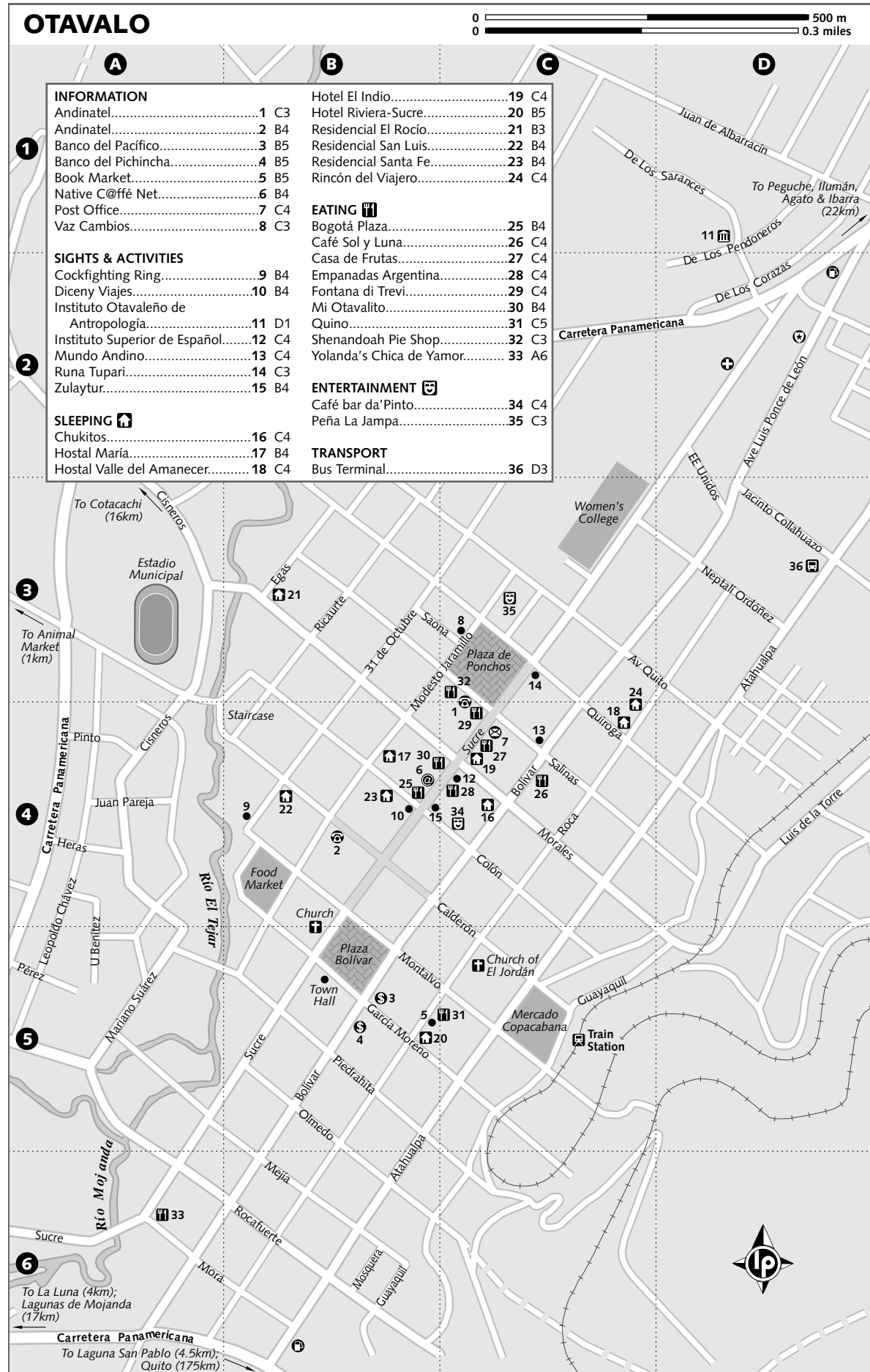
## Eating

With all those kitchenless travelers sauntering around town, it's hardly surprising that Otavalo has plenty of restaurants.

**Empanadas Argentina** (Sucre 2-02 & Morales; empanadas US50¢) Join the student crowd for a slice of pizza or salty beef, cheese or corn-and-pineapple (whoa!) empanadas.

**Shenandoah Pie Shop** (Salinas 5-15; pie slices US\$1) Famous for its deep-dish pies stuffed with sugary fruit. Best with a vanilla milkshake.

**Bogotá Plaza** (Bolívar near Calderón; mains US\$1.50-3) Try this tiny family-run place for a filling set



lunch and cups of robust Colombian coffee.

**Mi Otavalito** (Sucre 11-19; mains US\$2-4) Great for Ecuadorian dishes and family atmosphere. Good-value *almuerzos*.

**Casa de Frutas** (Sucre near Salinas; mains US\$3-5) Serves up satisfying granola and fruit bowls, omelette breakfasts, salads, soy burgers, juices and local coffee.

**Quino** (Roca near García Moreno; mains US\$5) Best seafood in *these* hills. Try the grilled fish or shrimp *ceviche*.

**Café Sol y Luna** (Bolívar 11-10; mains US\$5-6) This small Belgian-owned café boasts a cozy dining patio, a warm interior and healthy, mostly organic food.

**Fontana di Trevi** (Sucre near Salinas, 2nd fl; mains US\$5-6) Otavalo's original pizza joint still serves some of the best pizza in town.

**Yolanda's chicha de yamor** (green house at Sucre & Mora; ☎ late Aug to mid-Sep) Open during festival time, Yolanda serves delicious, authentic local fare, but the real draw is her *chicha de yamor*.

## Entertainment

Otavalo is dead midweek but lively on the weekends. *Peñas* are the main hangouts.

**Peña La Jampa** (cnr Modesto Jaramillo btwn Av Quito & Quiroga; admission US\$2-3) Showcases live salsa, merengue, rock and *musica folklórica*.

**Café bar da'Pinto** (Colón btwn Bolívar & Sucre) Sticks mostly to *musica folklórica*.

**Cockfight** (admission US\$50¢) Held every Saturday starting about 7pm in the ring at the southwest end of 31 de Octubre. One local argues it's not about gamecocks, but about the passionate audience, whose faces 'express the full range of each human emotion.'

## Getting There & Around

The **bus terminal** (Atahualpa & Jacinto Collahuazo) is two blocks north of Av Quito. Transportes Otavalo/Los Lagos is the only company from Quito (US\$2, 2½ hours) that enters the terminal. Other companies drop passengers on the Panamericana (a 10-minute walk from town) on their way north or south. Frequent buses depart the terminal to Ibarra (US\$45¢, 35 minutes).

## AROUND OTAVALO

☎ 06

The quality of light, the sense that time has stopped, and the endless Andean vistas give the countryside around Otavalo an enchanting

character. Scattered with lakes, hiking trails and traditional indigenous villages, it's an area well worth exploring. Tour agencies in Otavalo (p670) can provide information or organize hikes, or you can explore on your own.

The beautiful **Lagunas de Mojanda**, in the high *páramo* some 17km south of Otavalo, make for unforgettable hiking. The area acquired protected status in 2002. Taxis from Otavalo charge about US\$12 each way. You could also walk up and camp. For information about the lakes, stop at the Mojanda Foundation/Pachamama Association directly across from Casa Mojanda on the road to the park. Zulaytur (p670), in Otavalo, offers guided hikes which include transportation for about US\$30.

Strung along the eastern side of the Panamericana, a few kilometers north of Otavalo, are the mostly indigenous villages of **Peguiche**, **Illumán** and **Agato**. You can walk or take local buses to all three. In Peguiche, **Hostal Aya Huma** (☎ 292-1255; www.ayahuma.com; s/d with shared bathroom US\$8/12, private bathroom US\$14/20) is a beautifully set, mellow *hostal* that serves good, cheap homemade meals (veggie options too). You can also hike to a pretty **waterfall** 2km south of Peguiche.

**Laguna San Pablo** can be reached on foot from Otavalo by heading roughly southeast on any of the paths heading over the hill behind the railway station. You can then walk the paved road that goes all the way around the lake.

The village of **Cotacachi**, some 15km north of Otavalo, is famous for its leatherwork, which is sold in stores all along the main street. There are hourly buses from Otavalo and a few hotels in Cotacachi.

About 18km west of Cotacachi, the spectacular crater-lake **Laguna Cuicocha** lies within an extinct, eroded volcano. The lake is part of the **Reserva Ecológica Cotacachi-Cayapas** (lake admission US\$1, entire park US\$5), established to protect the large area of western Andean forest that extends from **Volcán Cotacachi** (4939m) to the Río Cayapas in the coastal lowlands. A walk around the lake takes about six hours (ask about safety at the ranger station at the park entrance). To get there, take a truck or taxi (both US\$8, one way) from Cotacachi.

## IBARRA

☎ 06 / pop 108,535

Though growth has diminished Ibarra's former small-town allure, its colonial architecture, leafy plazas and cobbled streets make

it a handsome city – at least on weekends when the streets aren't so choked with traffic. Ibarra's unique blend of students, *mestizos*, indigenous highlanders and Afro-Ecuadorians give it an interesting multicultural edge. The elevation is 2225m.

Ibarra's old architecture and shady plazas sit north of the center. Make calls at **Andinatel** (Sucre 4-48). The **tourist office** (iTur; ☎ 06-260-8409; [www.turismoibarra.com](http://www.turismoibarra.com); Oveido & Sucre; 🕒 8:30am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) is two blocks south of Parque Pedro Moncayo. **Banco del Pacífico** (cnr Olmedo & Moncayo) changes traveler's checks and has an ATM.

### Sleeping

Ibarra is bursting with cheap hotels. The cheapest are near the bus terminals.

**Hostal Ecuador** (☎ 295-6425; Mosquera 5-54; r per person US\$5; 📍) Bare, bright rooms give a sanitarium effect, but the attention is sincere.

**Hostal El Retorno** (☎ 295-7722; Moncayo 4-32; r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$6/7) A cheery little place with pint-sized beds and en suite TVs. Request a window.

**Hostal El Ejecutivo** (☎ 295-6575; Bolívar 9-69; s/d US\$7/12; 📍) Old plaids dominate the ample rooms (some with balconies) and add a retro feel. Rooms have hot-water bathrooms, telephone and TV. Cybercafé on the 1st floor.

**Hostal del Río** (☎ 261-1885, 09-944-2792; Juan Montalvo 4-55 & Flores; s/d US\$12/15) This excellent *hostal* fuses modern art deco with regional colonial style; rooms have hardwood floors and comfy beds. Located in a quiet neighborhood a few blocks east of center.

### Eating

Ibarra is known for its tasty *nogadas* (nougats) and its sweet *arrobe de mora* (a thick black-

berry syrup), available at the sweets kiosks across from Parque La Merced.

**Heladería Rosalía Suárez** (Oviedo 7-82; ice cream US\$1.50) Don't leave Ibarra without having a scoop of ice cream at Heladería Rosalía Suárez. It's the most famous ice cream shop in Ecuador, opened by Rosalía herself over 90 years ago. Rosalía is credited with perfecting the tradition of *helados de paila*; she lived to be 104.

**Antojitos de Mi Tierra** (Plaza Francisco Calderón) The place to go for traditional snacks such as *chicha de arroz* (a sweetened rice drink) and *tamales*, *humitas* and *quimbolitos* (corn dumplings steamed in corn husks or leaves).

**Café Arte** (Salinas 5-43; mains US\$4-6) A funky and relaxed artist-owned gathering spot, this is a good place to socialize and check out local bands. Food leans toward Mexican.

**Los Almendros** (Velasco 5-59 & Sucre; lunch US\$2.25) Customers line up out the door here for well-prepared Ecuadorian standbys.

**Órale** (Sucre btwn Grijalva & Borrero; mains US\$4) Tasty Mexican food is served in a casual atmosphere.

### Getting There & Away

#### BUS

Ibarra's new bus terminal is located at the end of Av Teodoro Gómez de la Torre. You can grab a taxi to/from the center for US\$1. There are regular departures to Quito (US\$2.50, 2½ hours); Guayaquil (US\$9, 10 hours); Esmeraldas (US\$8, nine hours); Atacames (US\$9, nine hours); San Lorenzo (US\$4, 3½ to four hours); Tulcán (US\$2, 2½ hours); Otavalo (US\$35¢, 35 minutes) and numerous other destinations.

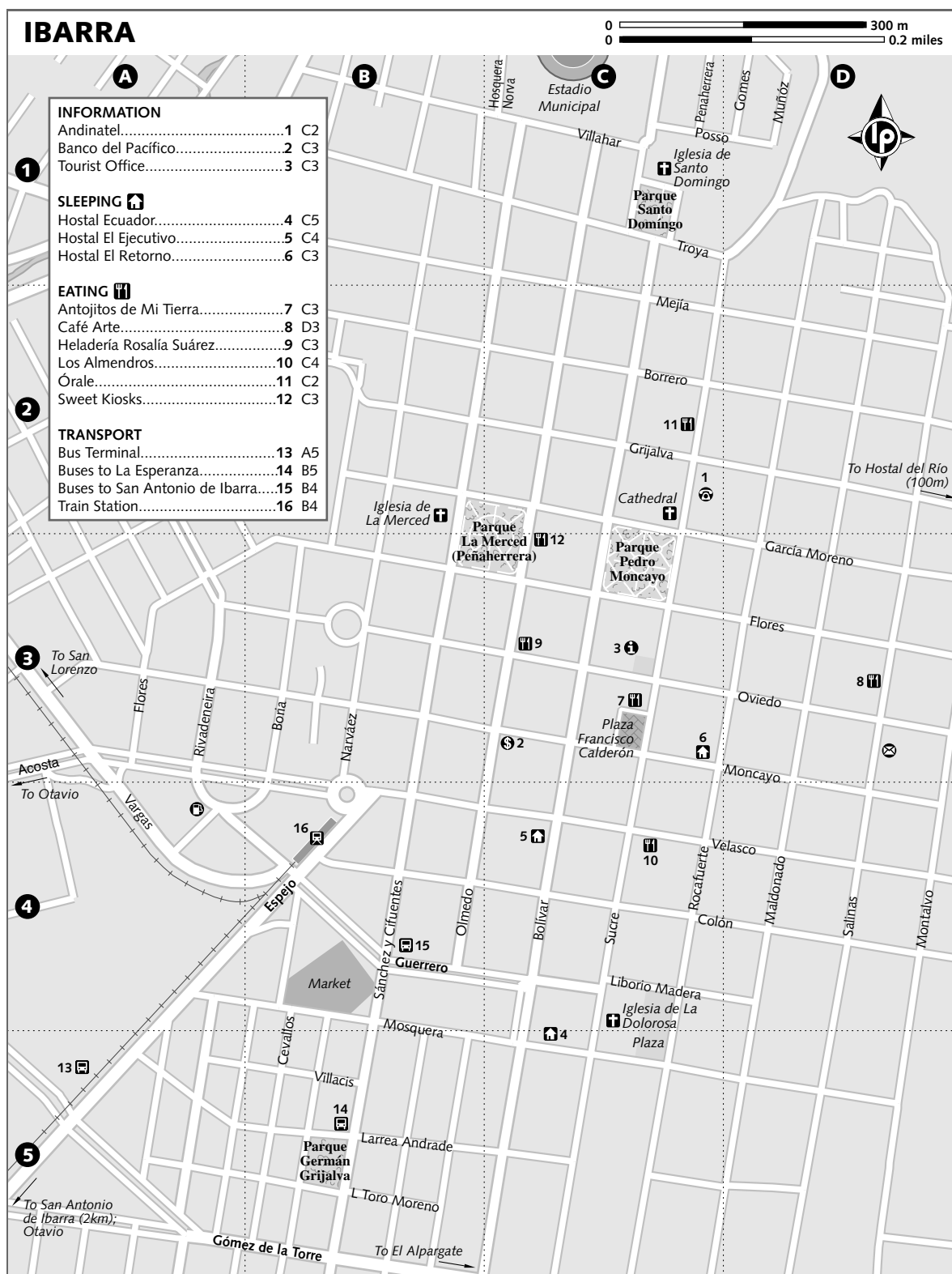
#### TRAIN

With the completion of the road to San Lorenzo, the spectacular Ibarra-San Lorenzo

#### DETOUR: RESERVA BIOLÓGICA LOS CEDROS

Intrepid travelers will enjoy holing up at the rustic **Los Cedros Scientific Center** ([loscedros@ecuanex.net.ec](mailto:loscedros@ecuanex.net.ec); [www.reservaloscedros.org](http://www.reservaloscedros.org); r per person US\$30), a research station within the magical, 6400 hectare Los Cedros biological reserve. The center is set in primary forest within one of the most bio-diverse regions on the planet.

Getting to Los Cedros involves making your way to the village of Chontal and undertaking a rugged 4-6 hour hike through the Magdalena River valley into the Cordillera de la Plata. Contact the reserve in advance (via email) to arrange for a guide, pack animals and accommodations. Rates include all meals (making the price a bargain) and guide services. Buses from Otavalo go to Chontal. From Quito, **Transportes Minas** (☎ 02-286-8039; Calle Los Ríos) goes to Chontal (3½ hours) at 6am every day from near the Ayora Maternity Hospital. In Chontal you can get breakfast at Ramiro and Alicia's *hostal* while waiting for your pack mules and guide.



railway, which once linked the highlands to the coast, no longer runs. However, *autoferos* go as far as Primer Paso (US\$4 one way, 1¼ hours), less than a quarter of the way to San Lorenzo. It's essentially a round-trip tourist attraction and departs only with a minimum of 16 passengers. Cancelled departures are the norm. For more information, call the **train**

**station** (☎ 295-0390/5050; Espejo) or check out [www.imbaburaturismo.gov.ec](http://www.imbaburaturismo.gov.ec).

### AROUND IBARRA

☎ 06  
Famous for its wood carving, nearby **San Antonio de Ibarra** is bursting with shops selling carvings of all sorts and sizes. Buses leave fre-

quently for San Antonio from the intersection of Guerrero and Sánchez y Cifuentes in Ibarra, or you can walk the approximately 2km south along the Panamericana (which you'll reach by walking southwest along Espejo).

The pretty little village of **La Esperanza**, 7km south of Ibarra, is the place to stay if you're looking for peace and quiet. There's nothing to do here except talk to the locals and stroll through the surrounding countryside. The basic but friendly **Casa Aida** (☎ 264-2020; Calle Gallo Plaza; r per person US\$4) has simple rooms and serves good, cheap meals, including vegetarian dishes. Buses from Ibarra leave from the terminal near Parque Germán Grijalva, or you can walk.

## EL ÁNGEL

☎ 06

The stark, still Andean village of El Ángel is the entry point to Páramos El Ángel, a misty wilderness favored by foxes and condors. It's part of the 16,000 hectare **Reserva Ecológica El Ángel** (admission US\$10). You can arrange *páramo* visits through La Casa de Eliza (see p661), in Quito.

Simple restaurants and lodgings are found in town. Transportes Espejo, on the main plaza, goes to Quito (US\$3.50, four hours) via Ibarra (US\$1.20, 1½ hours) every hour.

## TULCÁN

The drab, wind-whipped city of Tulcán is the principal gateway to Colombia. Besides the Sunday street market (which is low on crafts), the only real tourist attraction is its famous **topiary gardens**, located behind the cemetery.

The **tourist office** (☎ 298-5760) is near the cemetery entrance. **Banco del Pichincha** (cnr 10 de Agosto & Sucre) has an ATM and changes currency and traveler's checks on weekdays only.

## Sleeping & Eating

Tulcán's budget hotels are a dismal lot, but there are plenty to choose from.

**Hotel San Francisco** (☎ 298-0760; Bolívar near Atahualpa; s/d US\$4/8) One of the best budget options in town. Request a *ventana* (window).

**Hotel Los Alpes** (☎ 298-2235; JR Arellano near Bolívar; s/d US\$5/10) Perfectly adequate option near the bus terminal.

**Hotel Lumar** (☎ 298-0402/7137; Sucre near Pichincha; s/d US\$7/14; Ⓟ) Carpeted rooms have soft beds, cable TV and phones; modern hotel with good service.

**Hotel Machado** (☎ 298-4221; cnr Ayacucho & Bolívar; s/d US\$13/26; Ⓟ) A fresh coat of paint and gleaming bathrooms create a welcoming atmosphere.

Tulcán's Colombian restaurants – there are loads near the intersection of 10 de Agosto and Bolívar – provide a welcome alternative to the Ecuadorian staples. **El Patio** (Bolívar near 10 de Agosto; mains US\$3) is one of the best. **Chifa Pack Choy** (cnr Pichincha & Sucre; mains US\$2-3) serves the town's best Chinese food. By the border, there are plenty of snack stalls and fast-food carts.

## Getting There & Around

The airport is 2km northeast of the town center en route to the border. **TAME** (☎ 298-0675; Sucre near Ayacucho) has offices in town and at the **airport** (☎ 298-2850). It offers daily flights to/from Quito (US\$30), and flies Monday, Wednesday and Friday to Cali, Colombia (US\$78).

Buses run to/from Ibarra (US\$2.50, 2½ hours) and Quito (US\$5, five hours). Long-haulers go to Cuenca (US\$17, 17 hours, once a day), Guayaquil (US\$13, 11 to 13 hours) and other cities.

The **bus terminal** (Bolívar at JR Arellano) is 2.5km southwest of the town center. City buses (10) run along Bolívar to the center. Taxis to/from the center cost about US\$1.

## WESTERN ANDEAN SLOPES

☎ 02

The western slopes of the Andes, northwest of Quito, are home to some of Ecuador's last remaining stands of tropical cloud forest. Along the old road to Santo Domingo (which continues to the coast), you'll encounter some fabulous places to explore these cloud-swept forests. The best place to start is the village of **Mindo**, which is famous for its bird-watching and its environmentally conscious inhabitants. Once in Mindo you can hike in the cloud forest, hire bird-watching guides, swim in the Río Mindo and *relax*.

There are several basic but charming accommodations in town, including **Hostal Bijao** (in Quito ☎ 02-276-5740; r with shared/private bathroom per person US\$4/7.50); **Rubbi Hostal** (☎ 235-0461; rubbihostal@yahoo.com; r per person US\$5); and **La Casa de Cecilia** (☎ 09-334-5393; casadececilia@yahoo.com; r per person US\$5).

Direct buses running from Quito to Mindo (US\$2.50, 2½ hours) leave from the **Cooperativa Flor de Valle bus terminal** (Map pp650-1; M Larrea, Ascunción, near Parque El Ejido, Quito) Monday thru Friday at 8am and 3:45pm. On weekends buses leave at 7:20am, 8am, 9am and 3:45pm.

After passing the turnoff to Mindo, the old road meanders down through the lowland villages of **Puerto Maldonado** and **Puerto Quito** before meeting the north-south road between Santo Domingo and Esmeraldas. From the Mindo turnoff you can flag a bus to Santo Domingo.

## CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

South of Quito the Panamericana winds past eight of the country's 10 highest peaks, including the picture-perfect snowcapped cone of Volcán Cotopaxi (5897m) and the glaciated behemoth, Volcán Chimborazo (6310m). For trekkers and climbers, the central highlands are a paradise, and even inexperienced climbers can have a go at summiting some of the country's highest peaks. Those who are happier *off* the hill will find the region just as thrilling. You can hike between remote Andean villages near the Quilotoa Loop, gorge yourself on homemade cheeses and chocolate in Guaranda and Salinas, barrel downhill to the Oriente on a rented mountain bike from Baños, hike or trek in spectacular national parks or ride the roof of a boxcar down the famous Nariz del Diablo. The central highlands are home to scores of tiny, indigenous villages and many of the country's most traditional markets. Being haggled out of your change up here by traditionally dressed *indígenas* (indigenous people) is one of the country's most memorable experiences.

### PARQUE NACIONAL COTOPAXI

 03



The centerpiece of Ecuador's most popular **national park** (admission US\$10) is the snowcapped and downright astonishing **Volcán Cotopaxi**

(5897m), Ecuador's second highest peak. The park is almost deserted midweek, when nature freaks can have the breathtaking (literally) scenery nearly to themselves.

The park has a small museum, an information center, a *refugio* (climbers' refuge) and some camping and picnicking areas. The gate is open from 8am to 6pm (longer on weekends), but hikers can slip through just about anytime.

The park's main entrance is via a turnoff from the Panamericana, roughly 30km north of Latacunga. From the turnoff, it's 6km to **Control Caspi**, the entrance station. Any Quito-Latacunga bus will let you off at the turnoff. Follow the main dirt roads (also signed) to the entrance. It's another 9km or so to the museum. About 4km beyond the museum is **Laguna de Limpiopungo**, a shallow Andean lake 3830m above sea level; a trail circles the lake and takes about half an hour to walk. The climbers' refuge is about 12km past (and 1000m above) the lake. You can drive up a very rough road to a parking area (about 1km before the refuge) or hire a truck and driver from Latacunga for US\$20 to US\$30.

From the lake you can walk to the refuge, but walking at this altitude is difficult for the un-acclimatized, and altitude sickness is a very real danger; acclimatize for several days in Quito or elsewhere before attempting to walk in. Continuing beyond the climbers' refuge requires snow- and ice-climbing gear and expertise. Outfitters in Quito (p658 & p659), Latacunga (opposite) and Riobamba (p685) offer guided summit trips and downhill mountain-biking tours of Cotopaxi.

Near the main entrance to the park, about 2km west (and across the Panamericana), the **Albergue Cuello de Luna** ( 09-970-0330, in Quito  02-224-2744; www.cuellodeluna.com; dm from US\$11,

### GETTING TO COLOMBIA

The Rumichaca border crossing, 6.5km north of Tulcán, is the principal gateway to Colombia and currently the only recommended crossing. All formalities – which are very straightforward – are taken care of at the border, which is open 24 hours every day. Crossing is free. Minibuses (US\$80¢) and taxis (US\$4) run regularly between the border and Tulcán's Parque Isidro Ayora, about five blocks north of the central plaza. The buses accept Colombian pesos or US dollars. Be absolutely certain that you have your papers in order and be ready for drugs and weapons searches on both sides. Stay abreast of the conflict in Colombia and inquire locally about the safety of travel in Colombia before you pounce across the country line. Once across the border, there is frequent transportation to Ipiales, the first town in Colombia, 2km away.

If you're crossing *from* Colombia, see p620.



**SPLURGE!**

**El Monte Sustainable Lodge** (☎ 09-308-4675, 390-0402; www.ecuadorcloudforest.com; cabins per person US\$86) You'll be hard-pressed to find a more relaxing place than this intimate lodge nestled in the cloud forest on the banks of the Río Mindo. Eat fabulous home-cooked meals (included in the price), fall asleep to the chorus of frogs, wake up to a hot shower and a delicious breakfast, and bird-watch, orchid hunt and hike all day long. Owners Tom and Mariela (who speak English and Spanish) take wonderful care of their guests. Rates include meals and guided activities. Each cabin is hidden in the trees and sleeps up to four. Reservations are recommended.

s/d/tr without bathroom US\$20/26/36, s/d/tr/q with bathroom US\$23/34/45/53) is friendly and popular, and serves good meals (US\$7 to US\$10). Further north, **Hostería PapaGayo** (☎ 02-231-0002, 09-990-3524; www.hosteria-papagayo.com; Panamericana Sur Km 43; camping US\$3, dm US\$6, r with private bathroom US\$8-12) is a stunningly converted, 150-year-old farmhouse and a perfect base for acclimatizing and exploring Cotopaxi.

Camping in the park costs US\$3 per person. A bunk in the refuge costs US\$17; cooking facilities are available. Be sure to bring a warm sleeping bag.

**LATACUNGA**

☎ 03 / pop 51,700

A bustling market town and capital of Cotopaxi Province, Latacunga (elevation 2800m) appears rather dull from the Panamericana. But once you cross the bridge over the swift Río Cutuchi, the buildings get older, and old Latacunga starts to look pretty damn cool. The town is famous for its Mamá Negra festivals and seems to have more barber shops per capita than any town in Ecuador. It's a good base for transport to Cotopaxi, it's the starting point for the Quilotoa Loop (p679), and it's the best point from which to visit the Thursday morning market in Saquisilí.

**Information**

**AJ Cyber Café** (Quito 16-19; per hr US\$1) Internet access.

**Andinatel** (Quevedo near Maldonado) Telephone call center.

**Banco de Guayaquil** (Maldonado 7-20) Bank with ATM.

**Captur** (☎ 281-4968; cnr Sanchez de Orellana & Guayaquil, Plazoleta Santo Domingo) Tourist information.

**Discovery Net** (Salcedo 4-16; per hr US\$1)

**Post office** (Quevedo near Maldonado)

**Tourist Information** (Panamericana s/n) Inside the main bus terminal.

**Activities**

Several tour operators offer day trips and two- to three-day climbing trips to Cotopaxi (opposite). Day trips cost US\$35 to US\$45 per person, depending on the size of your group. Two-day summit trips to Cotopaxi cost US\$130 to US\$150 per person – but make sure your guide is qualified and motivated. The following outfitters are all licensed by the department of tourism and have received positive reports from readers:

**Expediciones Volcán Route** (☎ 281-2452; volcanroute@hotmail.com; Salcedo 4-49)

**Neiges** (☎ 281-1199; neigestours@hotmail.com; Guayaquil near 2 de Mayo)

**Tovar Expeditions** (☎ 281-1333; reivajg1980@hotmail.com; Guayaquil 5-38)

**Festivals & Events**

Latacunga's major annual fiesta (September 23 and 24) honors La Virgen de las Mercedes. More popularly known as the **Fiesta de la Mamá Negra**, the event features processions, costumes, fireworks, street dancing and Andean music. This is one of those festivals that, although superficially Christian, has a strong indigenous influence and is truly worth seeing.

**Sleeping**

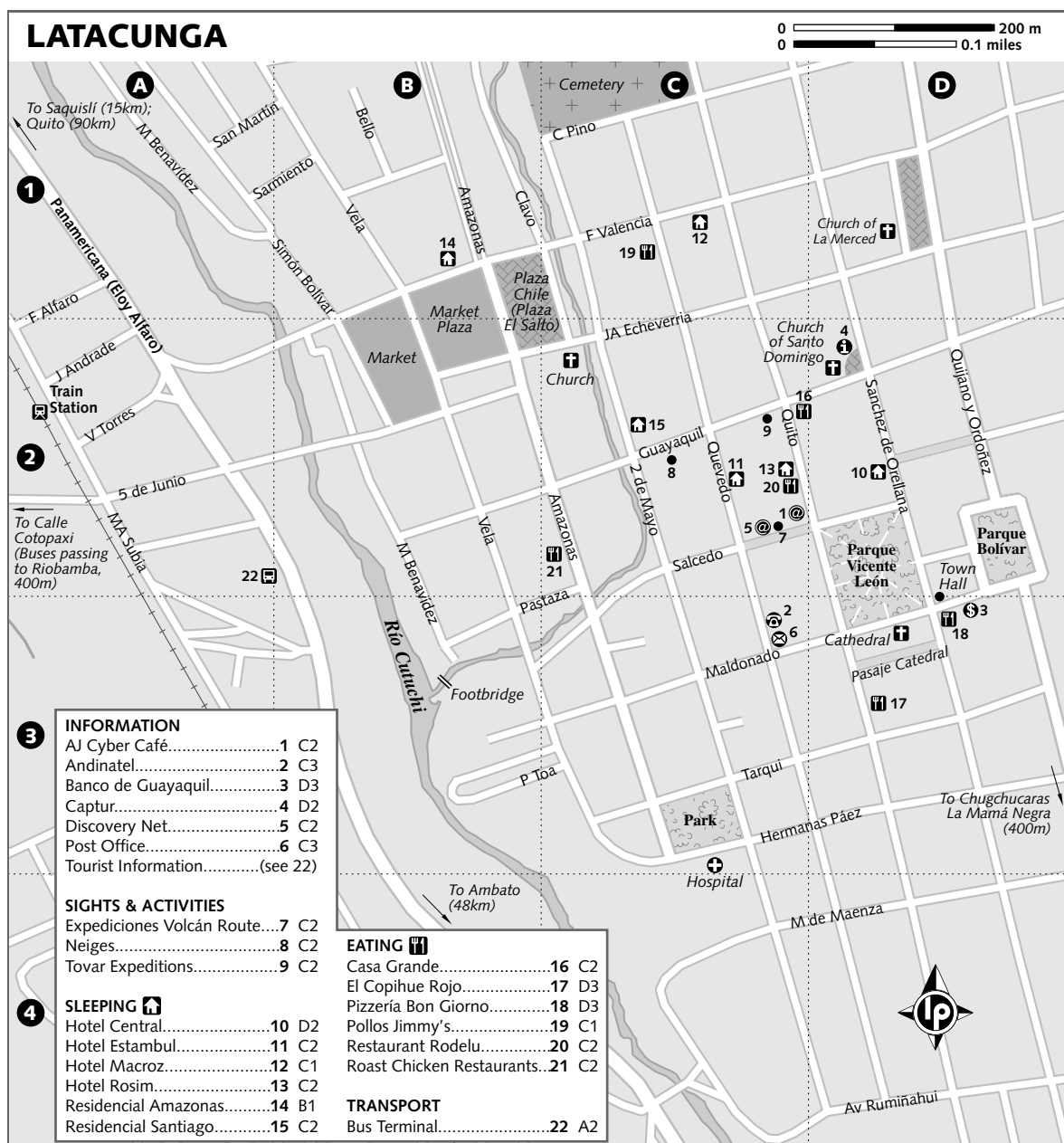
Hotels fill up fast on Wednesday afternoon for the Thursday-morning indigenous market at Saquisilí.

**Residencial Amazonas** (☎ 281-2673; F Valencia 47-36; r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$3/5) Well, you can't beat the price. As for the rooms, they're decent enough for a night.

**Residencial Santiago** (☎ 280-0899; 2 de Mayo & Guayaquil; s/d with shared bathroom US\$5.50/11, private bathroom US\$6.75/13.50) Readers recommend this hospitable, no-frills hotel with turquoise walls and average size rooms.

**Hotel Estambul** (☎ 280-0354; Quevedo 644; r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$8/10) This long-time favorite has lost much of its former friendliness, though the rooms remain spotless and comfy. Immaculate shared bathrooms.

**Hotel Rosim** (☎ 280-2172; Quito 16-49; s/d US\$8/16) Clean, stark and friendly place with strong,



hot showers and big white towels. Good value.

**Hotel Central** (☎ 280-2912; Sanchez de Orellana at Salcedo; s/d US\$10/14) Homey decor, kitschy finishing touches (like c 1960s ceramic ashtrays) and friendliness make this one of the best deals in town.

**Hotel Macroz** (☎ 280-0907; [hotelmakroz@latinmail.com](mailto:hotelmakroz@latinmail.com); F Valencia 8-56; s/d US\$15/25, two beds US\$30) Black-and-gold 1980's decor and other amenities make this the swankiest pad in Latacunga. Breakfast included.

**Eating**

Latacunga's traditional dish is the *chugchucara*, a tasty, heart-attack-inducing plate of *fritada* (pieces of fried pork meat); *mote*

(hominy) with *chicharrón* (bits of fried pork skin); potatoes; fried banana; *tostada* (toasted corn); popcorn; and cheese *empanadas*. There are several *chugchucara* restaurants on Quijano y Ordoñez, a few blocks south of the town center. They're most busy on weekends, when families fill the tables and musicians stroll from door to door.

There are loads of cheap roast chicken restaurants along Amazonas between Salcedo and Guayaquil.

**Casa Grande** (cnr Quito & Guayaquil; almuerzos US\$1.30; ☑ 7am-5pm Mon-Sat) Tiny, family-run place serving cheap *almuerzos*.

**El Copihue Rojo** (Quito 14-38; almuerzos US\$2, mains US\$3-5) Delicious daily *almuerzos*, plus meats, pastas and five types of soup.

**Pollos Jimmy's** (Quevedo 8-85 near Valencia; mains US\$2.25-2.50) Pop in for delicious rotisserie chicken.

**Chugchucas La Mamá Negra** (☎ 280-5401; Quijano y Ordoñez 1-67; chugchucara US\$4; ☒ closed Mon) One of the best places for *chugchucas*.

**Pizzería Bon Giorno** (cnr Sanchez de Orellana & Maldonado; mains US\$4-7) Giant portions of hearty lasagna and good pizzas.

**Restaurant Rodelu** (☎ 280-0956; Quito 16-31; mains US\$4-7) Good pizza, delicious breakfasts and passable espresso drinks.

### Getting There & Away

Buses from Quito (US\$1.50, two hours) will drop you at the **bus terminal** (Panamericana) if Latacunga is their final destination. If you're taking a bus that's continuing to Ambato or Riobamba, it will drop you at the corner of 5 de Junio and Cotopaxi, about five blocks west of the Panamericana. Buses to Ambato (US\$1, 45 minutes) and Quito leave from the bus terminal. If you're heading south to Riobamba, it's easiest to catch a passing bus from the corner of 5 de Junio and Cotopaxi. Otherwise, bus to Ambato and change there.

From the terminal, Transportes Cotopaxi departs hourly for the rough but spectacular descent to Quevedo (US\$3.75, 5½ hours) via Zumbahua (US\$2, two hours). For transport information to other destinations on the Quilotoa Loop, see below.

## THE QUILOTOA LOOP

☎ 03

Bumping along the spectacular dirt roads of the Quilotoa Loop and hiking between the area's Andean villages is one of Ecuador's most exhilarating adventures. Transport is tricky but the rewards are abundant: highland markets, the breathtaking crater lake of Laguna Quilotoa, splendid hikes, and traditional highland villages. Allow yourself *at least* three days for the loop and bring warm clothes (it gets painfully cold up here), water and snacks.

### Latacunga to Zumbahua

Ten kilometers west of Latacunga, **Pujilí** has a Sunday market and interesting Corpus Christi and All Souls' Day celebrations. The road winds into the upper reaches of the  *páramo*, passing the speck-like village of Tigua about 45km after Pujilí. Tigua is known for the bright paintings of Andean life made on sheepskin

canvases. Cozy lodging is available at **Posada de Tigua** (Hacienda Agrícola-Ganadera Tigua Chimbacucho; ☎ 281-3682, 280-0454; laposadadetigua@latinmail.com; vía Latacunga-Zumbahua Km 49; r per person half/full board US\$17/23), a working dairy ranch; and **Samana Huasi** (☎ 281-4868, in Quito 02-256-3175; www.tigua.org; Km 53; dm, r & board per person US\$19).

Some 15km west of Tigua, the tiny village of **Zumbahua** has a small but fascinating Saturday market and is surrounded by green patchwork peaks, a setting that makes for spectacular walking.

Accommodations and food in Zumbahua are basic. The town's three lodgings fill up fast on Friday, so get there early; the best of them is **Condor Matzi** (☎ 281-4611; s/d US\$5/10), on the square.

### Zumbahua to Saquisilí

From Zumbahua, buses and hired trucks trundle up the 14km of unpaved road leading north to one of Ecuador's most staggering sights – **Laguna Quilotoa**, a stunning volcanic crater lake. Near the crater rim are several extremely basic, inexpensive accommodations owned by friendly indigenous folks. Bring a warm sleeping bag.

About 14km north of the lake is the wee village of **Chugchilán**, which is an excellent base for hiking and has three lovely, traveler-friendly hotels. The best of them is the much-loved, North American-owned **Black Sheep Inn** (☎ 281-4587; www.blacksheepinn.com; dm/s/d/tr/q US\$22.50/48/67/91/112; ☎ ☒), where rates include two delicious vegetarian meals. **Hostal Mama Hilda** (☎ 281-4814, in Quito 02-258-2957; www.hostalmamahilda.com; r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$13/16) is friendly and popular with backpackers; rates include breakfast and dinner. Delightfully friendly **Hostal Cloud Forest** (☎ 281-4808; jose\_cloudforest@hotmail.com; r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$6/8) is the cheapest and simplest.

About 23km north of Chugchilán is the village of **Sigchos**, which has a couple of basic lodgings. From here, it's about 52km east to **Saquisilí**, home of one of the most important indigenous markets in the country. Each Thursday morning, inhabitants of remote indigenous villages, most of whom are recognized by their felt porkpie hats and red ponchos, descend upon the market in a cacophony of sound and color. Accommodations are available in a couple of cold-water cheapies in town.

## Getting There & Around

No buses go all the way around the loop. From Latacunga, they only travel as far as Chugchilán (US\$4, four hours), and they either go clockwise (via Zumbahua and Quilotoa) or counterclockwise (via Sigchos). The bus via Zumbahua departs Latacunga's bus terminal daily at noon, passing Zumbahua at around 1:30pm, Laguna Quilotoa at around 2pm, arriving in Chugchilán at about 4pm. The bus via Sigchos departs daily at 11:30am, passing Saquisilí just before noon and Sigchos at around 2pm, arriving in Chugchilán at around 3:30pm; the Saturday bus via Sigchos leaves at 10:30am.

From Chugchilán, buses returning to Latacunga via Zumbahua leave Chugchilán Monday through Friday at 4am (good morning!), passing Quilotoa at around 6am, Zumbahua at around 6:30am, arriving in Latacunga at around 8am. On Saturday this bus leaves Chugchilán at 3am, and on Sunday at 6am and 10am. Buses via Sigchos leave Monday through Friday at 3am, passing Sigchos at around 4am, Saquisilí at around 7am, arriving in Latacunga at around 8am. On Saturday this bus departs at 7am. On Sunday you must switch buses in Sigchos.

A morning milk truck (US\$1) leaves Chugchilán for Sigchos around 8:30am and will take passengers, allowing you to skip the predawn wakeup. In Zumbahua, trucks can be hired to Laguna Quilotoa or anywhere on the loop.

Don't worry – everyone's confused.

## AMBATO

☎ 03 / pop 154,100

Ambato (elevation 2577m) takes warming up to. Compared to nearby Baños, it offers little for the traveler, except the chance to experience a totally non-touristy Ecuadorian city. Ambato's claims to fame are its chaotic **Monday markets**, one of the biggest in Ecuador; its flower festival, held in the second half of February; and its *quintas* (historic country homes) outside town. Above town, there are fabulous views of the puffing Volcán Tungurahua.

From the bus terminal, city buses marked 'Centro' go to Parque Cevallos (US20¢), the central plaza.

## Information

**Banco del Pacífico** (cnr Lalama & Cevallos) Bank with ATM.

**Banco del Pichincha** (Lalama near Sucre) Bank with ATM.

**Net Place** (Juan Montalvo 05-58 near Cevallos; per hr US\$1) Internet access.

**Tourist office** (☎ 282-1800; Guayaquil & Rocafuerte)

## Sleeping & Eating

Ambato's biggest drawback is its choice of hotels. There are a couple of exceptions, but overall it's a dismal, overpriced lot, and comfort rarely seems to correlate with price.

**Residencial América** (JB Vela 737; s/d US\$4/8) The best of the numerous cheap and basic hotels in the slightly seedy area around Parque 12 de Noviembre and the nearby Mercado Central, it offers shared bathrooms and tepid showers.

**Hostal Señorial** (☎ 282-5124; cnr Cevallos & Quito; s/d US\$14.50/29) In a more attractive area and decorated in a way that only die-hard *Miami Vice* fans might appreciate, the Señorial has clean, carpeted rooms with telephones, cable TV and mirrored headboards (fun!).

**Chifa Nueva Hong Kong** (Bolívar 768; mains US\$2-3) Whips out good, but standard Chinese food.

**Pizzería Fornace** (Cevallos 17-28; pizzas US\$3-5) The best pizza and pasta in town.

**El Alamo Chalet** (Cevallos 17-19; mains US\$3-6) Ecuadorian comfort food.

## Getting There & Away

The bus terminal, 2km from the center of town, has many buses to Baños (US\$1, one hour), Riobamba (US\$1, one hour), Quito (US\$2, 2½ hours) and Guayaquil (US\$6, six hours). Less frequent are buses to Guaranda (US\$2, 2½ hours), Cuenca (US\$7, seven hours) and Tena (US\$5, six hours).

## BAÑOS

☎ 03 / pop 12,300

Hemmed in by luxuriant green peaks, blessed with steaming thermal bathrooms and adorned by a beautiful waterfall, Baños is one of Ecuador's most enticing and popular tourist destinations. Ecuadorians and foreigners alike flock here to hike, soak in the bathrooms, ride mountain bikes, zip around on rented quad-runners, volcano-watch, party, and break their molars on the town's famous *melcocha* (taffy). Touristy as it is, it's a wonderful place to hang out for a few days.

Baños (elevation 1800m) is also the gateway town into the jungle via Puyo (p705). East of Baños, the road drops spectacularly toward the upper Amazon Basin and the views are best taken in over the handlebars of a mountain bike, which you can rent in town.

Baños' annual fiesta is held on December 16 and preceding days.

### Information

**Andinatel** (cnr Rocafuerte & Halfflants) Telephone call center.

**Banco del Pacífico** (cnr Halfflants & Rocafuerte) Bank with ATM.

**Banco del Pichincha** (cnr Ambato & Halfflants) Bank with ATM.

**CD Comp** (Ambato near Alfaro; per hr US\$2) Internet.

**Direct Connect** (Martínez near Alfaro; per hr US\$2) Internet.

**La Herradura** (Martínez near Alfaro; per kilo US\$1) Laundry.

**Post office** (Halfflants near Ambato)

**Tourist office** (☎ 274-0483; mun\_banos@andinanet.net; Halfflants near Rocafuerte)

### Sights

Pop into the **Basílica de Nuestra Señora de Agua Santa** (Ambato at 12 de Noviembre; admission free; ☎ 7am-4pm) for a look at the bizarre paintings of people being saved from auto accidents and natural disasters by the Virgin of the Holy Water – Baños' patron saint. The Virgin is honored for the entire month of October, when indigenous musicians flock to the streets. Above the church, a small **museum** (admission US\$0.50; ☎ 8am-5pm) houses an odd taxidermic display and traditional crafts exhibits.

### Activities

A small town in a fabulous setting, Baños offers loads of outdoor fun.

### HOT BATHS

Soaking in the hot baths with vacationing families and screaming children is what Baños is all about. Go early in the morning (ie before 7am) if you want peace. All of the baths have changing rooms and bathing suit rental. The only complex in town with hot bathrooms is **Piscina de La Virgen** (daytime/night US\$1/1.20; ☎ 4:30am-5pm & 6-10pm), located by the waterfall. **Piscina El Salado** (admission US\$1; ☎ 4:30am-5pm), 2km west of town, is similar but has more pools of different temperatures. Catch the bus on Rocafuerte, near the market.

### HIKING

Baños has some great hiking. The tourist office provides a crude but useful map showing some of the trails around town.

From the bus terminal, a short trail leads to Puente San Francisco (San Francisco Bridge), across Río Pastaza. Continue up the other side as far as you want.

At the southern end of Maldonado a footpath leads to Bellavista (the white cross high over Baños) and then to the settlement of Runtún, two hours away. South on Mera, a footpath leads to the **Mirador de La Virgen del Agua Santa** and on to Runtún.

### CLIMBING & TREKKING

Climbers are advised not to ascend the currently active Volcán Tungurahua (5016m), which rumbled back to life in 1999 and had a major eruption in August, 2006 (see p683). The refuge on that volcano has been destroyed; although some people climbed up to the site before the 2006 eruption, to do so now would be suicidal. The volcano is part of **Parque Nacional Sangay** (admission US\$20).

Climbs of Cotopaxi and Chimborazo can be arranged. Reputable climbing outfitters are **Expediciones Amazónicas** (☎ 274-0506; amazonicas2002@yahoo.com; Oriente 11-68 near Halfflants) and **Rainforestur** (☎ 274-0743; www.rainforestur.com.ec; Ambato 800). The going rate for climbs with a minimum of two people is US\$65 to US\$80 per person per day, plus park fees.

### MOUNTAIN BIKING

Numerous companies rent bikes for about US\$5 per day. Check the equipment carefully. The best paved ride is the dramatic descent to Puyo, about 60km away by road. Be sure to stop at the spectacular **Pailón del Diablo**, a waterfall about 18km from Baños. There is a passport control at the town of Shell so carry your documents. From Puyo (or anywhere along the way) take a bus back to Baños with the bike on the roof.

### HORSE-RIDING

You can rent horses for about US\$10 per half day (more with a guide) through **Ángel Aldáz** (☎ 274-0175; Montalvo near Mera) and **José & Two Dogs** (☎ 274-0746; josebalu\_99@yahoo.com; Maldonado & Martínez). **Hostal Isla de Baños** (☎ 274-0609, 274-1511; islabanos@andinanet.net; Halfflants 1-31) offers guided half-day and multi-day horse-riding trips.

### RIVER-RAFTING

**GeoTours** (☎ 03-274-1344; www.ecuadorexplorer.com/geotours; Ambato at Halfflants) offers half-day trips



### ERUPTION NEAR BAÑOS

In 1999, after nearby Volcán Tungurahua erupted back to life, Baños was evacuated for months. Activity decreased, and things went back to normal until May, 2006, when once again the volcano spewed huge clouds of hot gas, prompting President Alfredo Palacio to declare a state of emergency. Then, on August 17 2006, the volcano erupted violently, destroying nearby villages, closing the Riobamba–Baños road and forcing the partial evacuation of Baños once again. If you plan to travel to Baños or nearby villages, keep yourself apprised of potential dangers, and check the weekly updates in English at Global Volcanism Program ([www.volcano.si.edu](http://www.volcano.si.edu)) and in Spanish at the Instituto Geofísico ([www.igepn.edu.ec](http://www.igepn.edu.ec)). Also note that travel times to/from Riobamba and Ambato will likely be effected indefinitely.

savings aren't significant. You won't see animals in the forests nearer Baños; if you want primary rainforest, make sure you're going as deep as the lower Río Napo area (p701).

Owned by a member of the Shuar community (an indigenous group from the southern Oriente), **Rainbow Expeditions** (☎ 274-2957, 09-895-7786; [rainbowexpeditions2005@hotmail.com](mailto:rainbowexpeditions2005@hotmail.com); Alfaro at Martínez) is an extremely well-run operation with interesting trips. Other recommended operators are **Rainforestur** (☎ 274-0743; [www.rainforestur.com.ec](http://www.rainforestur.com.ec); Ambato 800) and **Vasco Tours** (☎ 274-1017; [www.vascotours.banios.com](http://www.vascotours.banios.com); Alfaro near Martínez). For more tour information, see p659.

### Courses

One-on-one Spanish classes start around US\$4.50 and are offered at the following places:

**Baños Spanish Center** (☎ 274-0632; [www.spanishcenter.banios.com](http://www.spanishcenter.banios.com); Oriente 8-20 near Cañar)

**International Spanish School for Foreigners** (☎ 274-0612; 16 de Diciembre & Espejo)

**Si Centro de Español y Inglés** (☎ 274-0360; Páez near Oriente)

### Sleeping

There are scores of hotels in Baños, and competition is stiff, so prices are low. Rates are highest on Friday evenings and holiday weekends when every hotel in town can fill up.

**Hostal Plantas y Blanco** (☎ 274-0044; [option3@hotmail.com](mailto:option3@hotmail.com); Martínez at 12 de Noviembre; r per person US\$4.50-7.50; 📺) Attractively decorated and eternally popular, 'Plants and White' (you figure it out) scores big points with travelers for its rooftop terrace, outstanding breakfasts, on-site steam bathroom and overall value.

**Hospedaje Santa Cruz** (☎ 274-0648; [santacruzhostal@yahoo.com](mailto:santacruzhostal@yahoo.com); 16 de Diciembre; r per person US\$5-7) Great value for spacious rooms with bathroom and hot water. Rooms are a bit low on light, but

there's an overgrown garden where you can get all the sun you need.

**La Petit Auberge** (☎ 274-0936; [reservation\\_banos@hotmail.com](mailto:reservation_banos@hotmail.com); 16 de Diciembre; dm US\$6, s/d US\$10/16, with fireplace US\$12/20) With a rustic, cozy cabin-like feel, this is a fabulous deal and especially homey if you nab one of the pricier rooms with a fireplace.

**Posada El Marqués** (☎ 274-0053; [www.marquesbanios.com](http://www.marquesbanios.com); Pje V Ibarra; r per person US\$8.50) Colorfully painted indigenous motifs adorn the airy rooms of this comfortable hotel at the end of a quiet street. Conveniently close to Piscina de La Virgen bathrooms.

**Hostal El Pedrón** (☎ 274-0701; [www.elpedron.banios.com](http://www.elpedron.banios.com); Alfaro near Martínez; r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$9/13.50) This rustic old-timer boasts the biggest garden in town, complete with a few hammocks and chairs strewn around. Rooms are well worn but clean.

**Villa Santa Clara** (☎ 274-0349; [www.hotelvillasantaclara.com](http://www.hotelvillasantaclara.com); 12 de Noviembre; s/d US\$10/20; 📺) Considering the swimming pool, this is a good deal for simple motel-style rooms opening on to a sparse concrete patio area. Kitchen privileges.

**Hostal Isla de Baños** (☎ 274-0609, 274-1511; [isla\\_banios@andinanet.net](mailto:isla_banios@andinanet.net); Halfflants 1-31; s/d incl breakfast US\$14.50/24.50) This quiet, German-run *hostal* is set in attractive gardens and boasts cheerful, clean rooms with brick walls and lots of Andean art. The pricier rooms have balconies.

**Villa Gertrudis** (☎ 274-0441; [www.villagertrudis.com](http://www.villagertrudis.com); Montalvo 20-75; s/d US\$15/30; 📺) Low-key and quiet, Villa Gertrudis has a beautiful garden, c 1960s wood furniture, hardwood floors and a relaxing vacation feel. Prices include breakfast and use of the indoor pool across the street.

Other long-standing and totally acceptable hotels include:

**Residencial Lucy** (☎ 274-0466; Rocafuerte 2-40; r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$3/5) Three-floor motel-like structure; fine for a night or two.

**Residencial Rosita** (☎ 274-0396; 16 de Diciembre near Martínez; r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$4/5) Big rooms, shared bathrooms. Two apartments.

**Residencial Timara** (☎ 274-0599; [www.timara.banios.com](http://www.timara.banios.com); Maldonado; r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$4/8) Best of the super-cheapies, assuming you go for the shared bathroom.

**Pensión Patty** (☎ 274-0202; Alfaro 5-56; r per person US\$4.50) Well-known, family-run, dark and funky. Old climbers' favorite. Shared showers.

**Hostal Kattyfer** (☎ 274-1559; [hostalkattyfer@hotmail.com](mailto:hostalkattyfer@hotmail.com); 16 de Diciembre near Martínez; r per person US\$5) Large, simple rooms and a guest kitchen.

## Eating

Restaurants line the pedestrian section of Ambato between the basilica and Parque Central; they're great for people-watching, but the food is generally mediocre. Hit the side streets for the best restaurants. Most restaurants cater to travelers and stay open late. Baños is famous for its *melcocha*; makers pull it from wooden pegs in doorways around town.

**Mercado Central** (Alfaro & Rocafuerte; almuerzos US\$1.50) For fresh fruits and vegetables and cheap, cheap *almuerzos*, visit the town's central market.

**Rico Pan** (Ambato near Maldonado; breakfast US\$2-3) Best bread in town and great breakfasts.

**La Abuela Café** (Ambato near 16 de Diciembre; mains US\$2-4) Pastas, chicken dishes, steaks, Mexican plates and veggie options make for a varied menu, and the *almuerzos* are cheap. Good atmosphere.

**El Paisano** (Vieira at Martínez; mains US\$2.50-4.50) Despite the bright florescent lighting and faint smell of paint, El Paisano serves up some of the most nurturing veggie food in town.

**Casa Hood** (Martínez at Halfants; mains US\$3-4) A giant hearth warms the dining room, the book exchange is the best in town, and the food – lasagna, blackened sea bass, Pad Thai, veggie plates, falafel and more – is delicious.

**La Bella Italia** (16 de Diciembre; mains US\$3-5) Little and friendly Bella Italia serves delicious Italian food.

**La Closserie de Lilas** (Alfaro 6-20; mains US\$3-5) Great little family-run place (kids included) serving steaks, trout and pastas.

**Café Hood** (Maldonado, Parque Central; mains US\$3-6) Some of the dishes here are simply excellent, such as the soft tacos or the chickpeas and spinach in curry sauce. Lots of veggie options.

**Quilombo** (cnr Montalvo & 12 de Noviembre; mains US\$3-6; ☎ Wed-Sun) *Quilombo* means 'mess' or 'insanity' in Argentine slang – come see why it's a fitting name for this excellent Argentine grill house.

**El Jardín** (Parque de la Basílica; mains US\$3-6) Popular hangout with a leafy outdoor patio and a variety of dishes and sandwiches.

**Café Mariane** (Halfants & Rocafuerte; mains US\$4-6) Excellent French-Mediterranean cuisine at reasonable prices.

**Santa María Supermarket** (cnr Alfaro & Rocafuerte) Stock up here.

## Drinking & Entertainment

Nightlife in Baños means dancing in local *peñas* and hanging out in bars. The best place to barhop is the two-block strip along Alfaro, north of Ambato.

**Jack Rock** (Alfaro 5-41; ☎ 7pm-2am) British pub meets Hard Rock Café; there's dancing on weekends.

**La Abuela Café 2 Tobacco y Ron** (Alfaro near Oriente; ☎ 4pm-2am). Wee place with karaoke and a great little balcony.

**Peña Ananitay** (16 de Diciembre near Espejo; ☎ 9pm-3am) Catch live *música folklórica* here.

**Peña Bar Mocando** (Alfaro near Ambato; ☎ 4pm-2am) Eternally popular bar with sidewalk seating and a party atmosphere.

## Getting There & Away

From many towns, it may be quicker to change buses in Ambato, where there are frequent buses to Baños (US\$90¢, one hour).

From Baños' **bus terminal** (Espejo & Reyes), many buses leave for Quito (US\$3.50, 3½ hours), Puyo (US\$2, two hours) and Tena (US\$4, five hours). The road to Riobamba (\$1, one hour) via Penipe recently reopened, so buses no longer need to drive via Ambato.

## GUARANDA

☎ 03 / pop 20,474

Despite being the capital of Bolívar province, Guaranda (elevation 2670m) is small enough and removed enough that residents still take to staring at foreigners when they roll into town. It's a dignified, provincial place with beautiful old adobe buildings, crumbling wooden balconies, Spanish tiled roofs and a handsome central plaza. The roads from Riobamba and Ambato offer mind-blowing views of Chimborazo. Guaranda celebrates Carnival vigorously.



## Information

**Andinatel** (Rocafuerte near Pichincha) Telephone call center.

**Banco del Pichincha** (Azuay) Bank with ATM; no traveler's checks.

**Post office** (Azuay near Pichincha)

## Sleeping & Eating

**Hotel Bolívar** (☎ 298-0547; Sucre 7-04; s/d US\$8/16) Two floors of pleasant, simple rooms surround a straightforward courtyard. There's a good restaurant and a great café attached.

**Hostal de las Flores** (☎ 298-0644; Pichincha 4-02; r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$8/9) Guaranda's most traveler-oriented hotel is a pretty place in a lovingly refurbished old building.

**Los 7 Santos** (Convención de 1884 near 10 de Agosto; mains US\$1-3) Quite possibly the best reason to come to Guaranda, Los 7 Santos is the town's one traveler refuge, an artsy bar-café with three generations – grandma, mother and son – at the helm. Snacks, light meals and breakfast are available.

**La Bohemia** (Convención de 1884 & 10 de Agosto; mains US\$2-4) Cozied up with grain sacks on the ceilings and serving delicious cheap *almuerzos* (US\$2), this family run joint is easily one of the town's best. Chase your meal down with one of the giant *batidos* (fruit shakes).

**Pizzería Buon Giorno** (Sucre at García Moreno; pizzas US\$3.50-7) Fluffy-crust pizzas, lasagna and burgers.

**Queseras de Bolívar** (Av Gral Enriquez) Stock up here on the province's famous cheeses, chocolate and other treats.

## Getting There & Away

The bus terminal is half a kilometer east of downtown just off Ave de Carvajal. Buses run to Ambato (US\$2, two hours), Quito (US\$4.50, five hours), Riobamba (US\$2, two hours) and Guayaquil (US\$4, five hours). The trip to Guayaquil is spectacular.

## SALINAS

☎ 03 / pop 1000

Set in wild, beautiful countryside and famous for its excellent cheeses, salamis, divine chocolate and rough-spun sweaters, the tiny mountain village of Salinas, 35km north of Guaranda, makes for an interesting jaunt off the beaten track. The elevation is a whopping 3550m. Facing the main plaza, the **tourist office** (☎ 239-0022; [www.salinerito.com](http://www.salinerito.com)) will organize visits to Salinas' unique cooperatives.

Above the plaza, **El Refugio** (☎ 239-0024; dm US\$6, r with bathroom per person US\$8) is a clean, comfortable *hostal* run by the local youth group. Buses to Salinas leave Plaza Roja in Guaranda at 6am and 7am daily and hourly from 10am to 4pm Monday through Friday.

## RIOBAMBA

☎ 03 / pop 126,100

Deemed 'the Sultan of the Andes', Riobamba (elevation 2750m) is a traditional, old-fashioned city that both bores and delights travelers. It's sedate yet handsome, with wide avenues and random mismatched shops tucked into imposing 18th- and 19th-century stone buildings. The city is both the starting point for the spectacular train ride down the **Nariz del Diablo** (Devil's Nose), and one of the best places in the country to hire mountain guides.

## Information

**Andinatel** (Tarqui at Veloz) Telephone call center.

**Banco de Guayaquil** (Primera Constituyente at García Moreno) Bank with ATM.

**Café Digital** (Rocafuerte near 10 de Agosto; per hr US70¢) Internet access.

**Lavandería Donini** (Villaroel near Larrea; per kilo US80¢) Laundry.

**Parque Nacional Sangay Office** (☎ 295 3041; [parquesangay@andinanet.net](mailto:parquesangay@andinanet.net); Av 9 de Octubre near Duchicela; ☎ 8am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) Get information and pay entry fees to Parque Nacional Sangay here.

**Post office** (Espejo & 10 de Agosto)

## Sights

On **market day** (Saturday), Riobamba's streets become a hive of activity, especially along the streets northeast of Parque de la Concepción.

The renowned **Museo de Arte Religioso** (☎ 296-5212; Argentinos; admission US\$2; ☎ 9am-noon & 3-6pm Tue-Sat), in the restored Iglesia de La Concepción, houses a morbid and fascinating collection of religious art. Its signature piece is a priceless, meter-tall gold monstrance inlaid with more than 1500 precious stones.

## Activities

Thanks to the proximity of Volcán Chimborazo, Riobamba is one of Ecuador's most important climbing towns. Two-day summit trips start around US\$140 per person for Chimborazo (\$160 for Cotopaxi) and include guides, climbing gear, transportation

and meals. Rates rarely include park entrance fees (US\$10 to US\$20).

Mountain biking is also gaining ground, and day trips start at US\$35 per person. Downhill descents from the refuge on Chimborazo are adrenaline-charged and worth every penny.

Recommended operators:

**Andes-trek** (☎ 295-1275, 09-929-8076; [www.andes-trek.com](http://www.andes-trek.com); Colón 22-25) Climbing operator.

**Expediciones Julio Verne** (☎ 296-3436, after 6pm ☎ 296-0398; [www.julioverne-travel.com](http://www.julioverne-travel.com); El Espectador 22-25) Climbing, mountain biking and more. Dutch and English spoken.

**Pro Bici** main office (☎ 295-1759; Primera Constituyente 23-51 & 23-40); annex (Primera Constituyente near Larrea) Outstanding mountain bike trips and rentals. English spoken.

**Veloz Coronado Expeditions** (☎ 296-0916; [www.velozexpediciones.com](http://www.velozexpediciones.com); Chile 33-21 at Francia) Outstanding climbing operator.

## Sleeping

The best hotels are in the town center, nearly 2km east of the bus terminal. Budget hotels tend to be pretty dingy.

**Hotel Los Shyris** (☎ 296-0323; Rocafuerte 21-60 & 10 de Agosto; r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$6/7) The large and modernish Hotel Los Shyris is a great value for its central location and clean rooms. Slim on character, but lots of sunlight.

**Hostal Oasis** (☎ 296-1210; Veloz 15-32; r per person US\$7) When it comes to friendliness, value and down-home cutesiness, it's hard to beat Oasis. Rooms are centered around a garden, complete with a llama and two squawking parrots. Free transport to/from train and bus stations.

**Hotel Tren Dorado** (☎ 296-4890; [htrendorado@hotmail.com](mailto:htrendorado@hotmail.com); Carabobo 22-35; r per person US\$9) Conveniently close to the train station, the friendly Tren Dorado has spotless, comfortable, flowery rooms that would make Martha Stewart proud. A self-serve breakfast (\$3 extra) is served at 5:30am on train days.

**La Estación** (☎ 295-5226; Unidad Nacional 29-15 near Carabobo; s/d US\$10/20) Colorful rooms make for a cheerful stay at this friendly hotel across the street from the train station.

If everything else is full, you'll be fine at:

**Residencial Ñuca Huasi** (☎ 296-6669; 10 de Agosto 10-24; r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$3/5) Old backpacker haunt in desperate need of a facelift.

**Hotel Imperial** (☎ 296-0429; Rocafuerte 22-15;

r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$5/6) Clean, friendly and noisy.

**Hotel Segovia** (☎ 09-445-9626; Primera Constituyente 22-26; r per person US\$6) Drab and impersonal but secure and clean.

## Eating

**La Abuela Rosa** (Brasil 37-57 at Esmeraldas; mains US80¢-\$1.50) Drop by Grandma Rosa's for *comida típica* (traditional Ecuadorian food) and tasty snacks.

**Mercado La Merced** (Mercado M Borja; Guayaquil btwn Espejo & Colón; mains US\$1-3) Even if you don't like Ecuador's classic *hornado* (whole roast pig), it's worth wandering into this clean market where saleswomen shout things like 'Hey handsome, try *this* pork!' over giant roasted-brown pig carcasses. Best on Saturday.

**Natural Food** (Tarqui near Primera Constituyente; almuerzos US\$1.50) Herbivores, beeline it to Natural Food for delicious, hearty (and cheap!) vegetarian *almuerzos*.

**Pizzería San Valentín** (Av León Borja & Torres; mains US\$2-5) The cornerstone of Riobamba's nightlife, San Valentín is great for both eating and socializing.

**Sierra Nevada** (Primera Constituyente 27-38; mains US\$3-4) Serves excellent seafood and Ecuadorian dishes and likely the best *almuerzos* in town (US\$3).

**El Rey del Burrito** (Av León Borja 38-36; mains US\$3-5) Serves Mexican classics like burritos, tacos and enchiladas.

**El Chacarero** (5 de Junio 21-46; mains US\$3.50-5) Great atmosphere, great pizza. Skip the pasta dishes.

**La Parrillada de Fausto** (Uruguay 20-38; mains US\$4-6) This fun, Argentine-style grill serves great barbecued steaks, trout and chicken in a ranch-style setting.

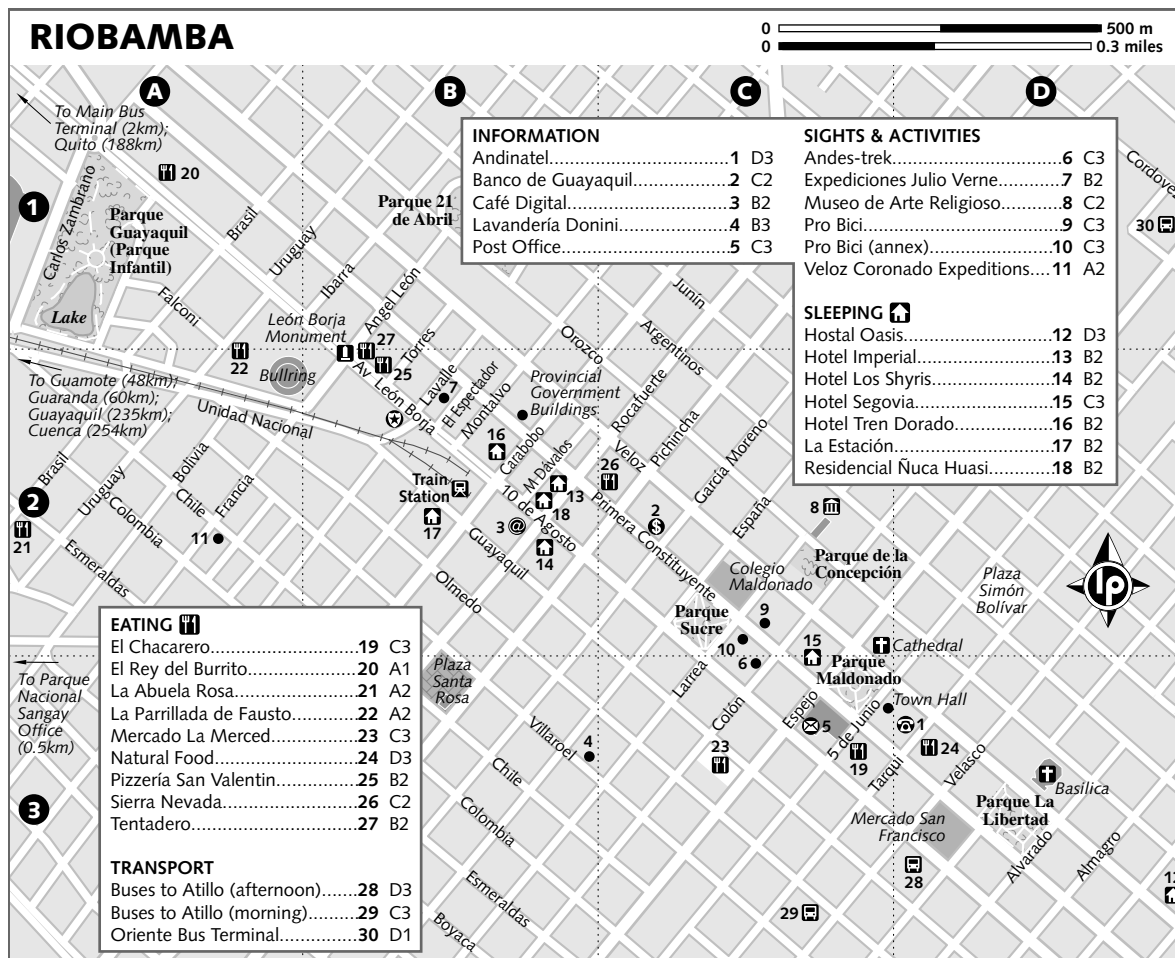
## Entertainment

Nightlife, limited as it is, centers around the intersection of Av León Borja and Torres and northwest along León Borja. On weekends the area turns into a teen madhouse. **Pizzería San Valentín** (Av León Borja & Torres) is the epicenter. Nearby, **Tentadero** (Av León Borja near Ángel León; admission US\$3; ☎ 8pm-late Fri & Sat) is the town's spiciest *discoteca*, spinning electronica and salsa well into the night.

## Getting There & Away

### BUS

The **main bus terminal** (☎ 296-2005; Av León Borja at Av de la Prensa) is 2km *northwest* of the center. Buses



run frequently to Quito (US\$4, four hours), Guayaquil (US\$4.75, five hours) and Alausí (US\$1.50, two hours), and less frequently to Cuenca (US\$6, six hours). There's at least one morning bus to Machala (\$6, six to seven hours). Local buses run along Av León Borja, connecting the terminal with downtown.

Buses to Baños (US\$1, one hour) and the Oriente leave from the **Oriente bus terminal** (Espejo & Luz Elisa Borja) just northeast of the center.

**TRAIN**

The spectacular train ride to Sibambe (US\$11, five hours) begins in Riobamba. The train stops in Alausí (p688) just before trudging down the world-famous, hair-raising switchbacks known as the **Nariz del Diablo**. From Sibambe, the train immediately makes a return trip to Riobamba, stopping again in Alausí. Most people get off at Alausí and either spend the night or head back to Riobamba by bus. The train departs Riobamba on Wednesday, Friday and Sunday at 7am. Buy tickets at the **train station** (☎ 03-296-1909; Av León Borja at Unidad Nacional) either the day before, or from 6am on departure day. Roof riding, of

course, is permitted. If you're buying tickets for friends, bring their passports.

**VOLCÁN CHIMBORAZO**

Not only is the extinct Volcán Chimborazo the highest mountain in Ecuador, but its peak (6310m), due to the earth's equatorial bulge, is also the furthest point from the center of the earth – tell that to your K2-climbing buddies. The mountain is part of **La Reserva de Producción de Fauna Chimborazo** (admission US\$10), which also encompasses **Volcán Carihuirazo** (5020m).

To simply get close to the beast, you can hire a truck-taxi in Riobamba (ask at your hotel) for about US\$25. The driver will take you to the lower of two **climbers' refuges** (beds US\$10) at 4800m and wait while you hike 200m to the upper refuge. Climbers who plan on staying more than a day can arrange a return trip for a later day, most likely paying another US\$12 per person. The refuges have mattresses, water and cooking facilities; bring warm sleeping bags.

Climbing beyond the refuge requires snow- and ice-climbing gear and mountaineering experience, as does the ascent of Carihuirazo.

**DETOUR: LAGUNAS DE ATILLO**

With the 2005/2006 completion of a road from Guamote (a small town south of Riobamba) to Macas (in the southern Oriente), a spectacular sector of **Parque Nacional Sangay** (admission US\$20) is suddenly accessible: the *páramo* lakes region of Lagunas de Atillo. From the village of **Atillo**, it's possible to hike, in six to eight hours, over a ridge to the beautiful Lagunas de Ozogoché. After exploring the region, you can make your way from Atillo down to Macas by bus, an infrequently traveled route. From Riobamba, Cooperativa Unidos buses to Atillo leave at 5:45am and 3pm from near Plaza San Francisco. Get hiking directions in Atillo. More information is available at the Parque Nacional Sangay office in Riobamba (see Information, p685).

Contact one of the recommended guide outfits listed under Riobamba (p685) or Quito (p658). Avoid inexperienced guides; a climb at this altitude is not to be taken lightly.

There are also excellent trekking opportunities between the two mountains. Topographical maps of the region are available at the IGM in Quito (p648). June through September is the dry season in this region, and the nights are very cold year-round.

If you're up for an 8km walk (not easy at this altitude), you can take a Guaranda-bound bus from Riobamba and ask the driver to drop you at the park entrance road.

**ALAUÍ**

☎ 03 / pop 5570

The busy little railroad town of Alausí (elevation 2350m) is the last place the train passes through before its descent down the famous Nariz del Diablo. Many jump on the train here, rather than in Riobamba, though you're more likely to score a good seat in Riobamba (see p687).

Many hotels are found along the one main street (Av 5 de Junio), and most fill up on Saturday night. Spotless **Hotel Europa** (☎ 293-0200; 5 de Junio 175 at Orozco; s shared/private bathroom US\$5/8, d US\$8/14) is one of the best. You'll also be fine at **Hotel Americano** (☎ 293-0159; García Moreno 159; r per person US\$5), near the train station, or family-run **Hotel Tequendama** (☎ 293-0123; 5 de Junio 152; s/d US\$5/10).

Apart from the hotel restaurants, you'll find a couple of basic eateries along the main street.

Buses run hourly to/from Riobamba (US\$1.50, 1½ hours) and several buses a day also go to Cuenca (US\$4, four hours).

The train from Riobamba to Sibambe stops in Alausí before heading down the Nariz del Diablo (US\$11 round trip). Tickets go on sale at 7am. It takes about two hours to

reach Sibambe, where the train immediately changes course to return to Riobamba. Riding on the roof is allowed (and encouraged!), although it's often full with passengers from Riobamba.

**THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS**

As you roll down the Panamericana into the southern highlands, the giant snowcapped peaks of the central highlands fade from the rearview mirror. The climate gets a bit warmer, distances between towns become greater, and the decades clunk down by the wayside. Cuenca – arguably Ecuador's most beautiful city – and handsome little Loja are the region's only sizable towns.

Although you won't be out scaling glaciers down here, outdoor activities abound. The lake-studded Parque Nacional Cajas offers excellent hiking and camping, and in Parque Nacional Podocarpus you can explore cloud forest, tropical humid forest and *páramo* within the same park. From the laid-back gringo hang-out of Vilcabamba, you can spend days walking or horse-riding through the mysterious mountainside, returning each evening to massages, vegetarian food and hot tubs.

**CUENCA**

☎ 07 / pop 417,000

Comparing the colonial beauty of Cuenca and Quito is a favorite pastime around here. In grandeur, Quito wins hands down. But Cuenca – that tidy jewel of the south – takes the cake when it comes to charm. Its narrow cobblestone streets and whitewashed red-tiled buildings, its handsome plazas and domed churches, and its setting above

the grassy banks of the Río Tomebamba, all create a city that's supremely impressive. Though firmly anchored in its colonial past, Ecuador's third largest city (elevation 2530m) also has a modern edge, with international restaurants, art galleries, cool cafés and welcoming bars tucked into its magnificent architecture.

## Information

### INTERNET ACCESS

The following charge about US\$1 per hour.

**Bapu Net** (Presidente Córdova 9-21)

**Cuenca Net** (cnr Calle Larga & Hermano Miguel)

**Cybercom** (cnr Presidente Córdova & Borrero)

**Dot Com** (Hermano Miguel near Presidente Córdova)

### LAUNDRY

**Fast Klín** (Hermano Miguel 4-21)

**Lavahora** (Honorato Vásquez 6-76)

### MEDICAL SERVICES

**Clínica Santa Inés** (☎ 281-7888; Daniel Córdova 2-113) Consultations at this clinic cost about US\$20.

### MONEY

**Banco de Guayaquil** (Mariscal Sucre at Borrero)

Bank with ATM.

**Banco del Pichincha** (cnr Solando & 12 de Abril)

Bank with ATM.

### POST

**Post office** (cnr Gran Colombia & Borrero)

### TELEPHONE

**Etapa** (Benigno Malo 7-26) Telephone call center.

### TOURIST INFORMATION

**Bus Terminal Information office** (☎ 284-3888;

Bus Terminal)

**Tourist information** (iTur; ☎ 282-1035; i\_tur@cuenca.gov.ec; Mariscal Sucre at Luís Cordero) Extremely helpful; English spoken.

## Sights

Be sure to take a walk along 3 de Noviembre, which follows the northern bank of the **Río Tomebamba**. The river is lined with colonial buildings, and women still dry their laundry on the river's grassy banks. A patch of **Inca ruins** lie near the river, between the east end of Calle Larga and Av Todos Los Santos. Most of the stonework was destroyed to build colonial buildings, but there are some fine niches and walls.

**Parque Calderón** (Benigno Malo at Simón Bolívar), the main plaza, is dominated by the handsome 'new cathedral' (c 1885), with its huge blue domes. Opposite stands the diminutive 'old cathedral' (construction began in 1557), known as El Sagrario.

Go smell the flowers (or at least snap a photo of them) at the **flower market** in front of the wee colonial church on **Plazoleta del Carmen** (Padre Aguirre at Mariscal Sucre). Afterwards, hoof it over to the quiet **Plaza de San Sebastián** (cnr Mariscal Sucre & Talbot) and check out the **Museo de Arte Moderno** (Mariscal Sucre at Talbot; admission by donation; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-6:30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat & Sun), which has a small exhibit of contemporary local art.

Cuenca's most important museum, the **Museo del Banco Central 'Pumapungo'** (www.museo.pumapungo.com; Calle Larga near Huayna Capac; admission US\$3; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) merits a visit for the fabulous ethnographic exhibit alone, not to mention the entrancing display of *tsantsas* (shrunken heads).

**Museo de las Culturas Aborígenes** (Calle Larga 5-24; admission US\$2; ☎ 9am-6:30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) houses an excellent collection of over 5000 archaeological pieces representative of about 20 Ecuadorian pre-Colombian cultures. The worthwhile **Museo de Artes Populares** (Cidap; Hermano Miguel 3-23; admission free; ☎ 9:30am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) displays changing exhibits of traditional indigenous costumes, handicrafts and artwork from around Latin America.

## Activities

Cuenca is an excellent base for exploring – by foot, horse or bike – nearby attractions such as Parque Nacional Cajas, the Inca ruins of Ingapirca and indigenous villages. Head out on your own or set yourself up at one of the tour operators listed following. Day trips average US\$35 to US\$40 per person; note that park entrance fees are generally not included in the cost.

**Expediciones Apullacta** (☎ 283-7815, 283-7681; www.apullacta.com; Gran Colombia 11-02) Day tours to Ingapirca and Cajas.

**Ecotrek** (☎ 284-1927, 283-4677; ecotrex@az.pro.ec; Calle Larga 7-108) Recommended for trekking, mountaineering and Amazon travel.

**Humberto Chico** (contact Cabañas Yanuncay, ☎ 07-288-3716, 281-9681; yanuncay@etapa.com.ec; Calle Canton Gualaceo 2-149) Guides overnight trips to Cajas, the southern Oriente and elsewhere.

**Mamá Kinua Cultural Center** (☎ 284-0610; Torres 7-45, Casa de la Mujer) Excellent Quichua-run cultural tours. Great organization.

**Terra Diversa Travel Center** (☎ 282-3782; [www.terradiversa.com](http://www.terradiversa.com); Hermano Miguel 5-42) Horse-riding, mountain biking and hiking, Ingapirca trips, and three-hour city tours (US\$15).

### Courses

Cuenca's a wonderful place to study Spanish. One-on-one classes cost US\$5 to US\$7 per hour.

**Abraham Lincoln Cultural Center** (☎ 07-282-3898; [rboroto@cena.or.ec](mailto:rboroto@cena.or.ec); Borrero 5-18)

**Amazing Grace** (☎ 283-5003; Mariscal Lamar 6-56) Good for advanced students.

**Centro de Estudios Interamericanos** (☎ 283-9003, 282-3452; [info@cedei.org](mailto:info@cedei.org); Gran Colombia 11-02) Offers courses in Spanish, Quichua, Latin American literature and indigenous culture.

**Sampere** (☎ 282-3960; [www.sampere.com/cuenca](http://www.sampere.com/cuenca); Hermano Miguel 3-43)

### Festivals & Events

Cuenca's independence as a city is celebrated on November 3 with a major fiesta. Christmas Eve parades are very colorful. The founding of Cuenca (April 10-13) and Corpus Christi are also busy holidays. Carnival is celebrated with boisterous water fights.

### Sleeping

Cuenca has a great selection of hotels, but prices are a tad higher than elsewhere.

**Hotel Norte** (☎ 282-7881; Cueva 11-63; r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$4/6) Best of the cheap hotels around the Plaza Rotary market.

**Hostal Paredes** (☎ 283-5674; Luis Cordero 11-29; r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$4/6) Paredes is a whacky, friendly place in an early 20th-century building. Dali-esque paintings adorn the walls, plants fill the lobby, and a few caged parakeets compliment the quirkiness. Great deal.

**Hotel Pichincha** (☎ 282-3868; [karolina7a@hotmail.com](mailto:karolina7a@hotmail.com); Torres 8-82; r per person US\$4.50) Mammoth by Cuenca standards, this impersonal 60-roomer is fair value and popular with backpackers and Ecuadorians alike. Rooms are clean but the shared bathrooms are pretty shabby.

**El Cafecito** (☎ 283-2337; [www.cafecito.net](http://www.cafecito.net); Honorato Vásquez 7-36; dm US\$5, r with private bathroom US\$15) Party paaaad! That, and it has a great café full of cigarette-smoking, coffee-jacked travelers

munchin' tasty snacks. It can be noisy, but some love the scene.

**Verde Limón** (☎ 283-1509, 282-0300; [www.verdelimonhostal.com](http://www.verdelimonhostal.com); Jaramillo 4-89 near Cueva; dm US\$6, r per person US\$7; ☑) 'Green Lime,' refers to the neon-green walls that make this little hostel almost blindingly vibrant. Though the kitchen could use some sprucing up, it's a good value.

**Hostal El Monasterio** (☎ 282-4457; Padre Aguirre 7-24; r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$6/8) This six-floor hotel boasts stunning views from its communal kitchen and eating areas, and the rooms are comfy and clean.

**Hostal El Monarca** (☎ 283-6462; [hostalmonarca@hotmail.com](mailto:hostalmonarca@hotmail.com); Borrero 5-47; s/d US\$7/14) Earthy orange walls, groovy art and the life-is-good-let's-turn-up-the-music vibe is just what some of us road monkeys need. Bathrooms are shared.

**Casa Naranja** (Naranja Lodging; ☎ 282-5415, 288-3820; [www.casanaranja.galeon.com](http://www.casanaranja.galeon.com); Mariscal Lamar 10-38 near Padre Aguirre; s US\$8-15, d US\$12-18) With stunning results, a local *cuencana* artist turned her 100-year-old family home into a modest but delightfully artsy guesthouse. Rooms are simple; communal kitchen.

**Hotel Milan** (☎ 283-1104, 283-5351; Presidente Córdova 9-89; r per person US\$9) The eternally reliable Milan offers good, comfortable rooms with firm beds, cable TV and consistent hot water.

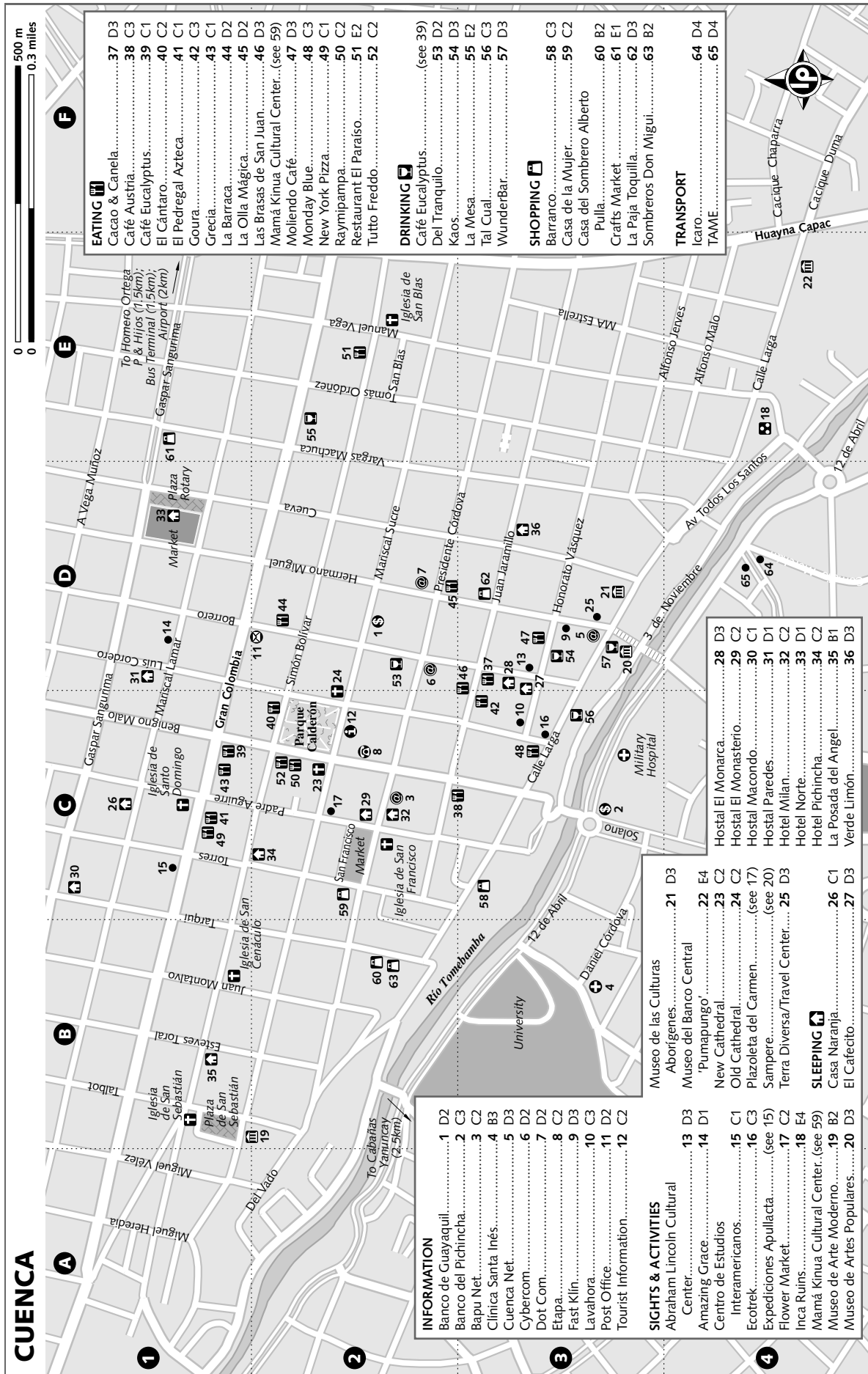
**Cabañas Yanuncay** (☎ 288-3716, 281-9681; [yanuncay@etapa.com.ec](mailto:yanuncay@etapa.com.ec); Calle Canton Gualaceo 2-149; r per person US\$12) This quiet guesthouse, 3km southwest of downtown, offers rooms in a private house or in two cabins in the owner's garden. Rates include breakfast, kitchen privileges and the use of the hot tub. Organic dinners cost US\$6. The owner, Humberto, speaks English and German and arranges local tours.

**Hostal Macondo** (☎ 284-0697, 283-0836; [www.hostalmacondo.com](http://www.hostalmacondo.com); Tarqui 11-64; s/d with shared bathroom US\$13.50/20, with private bathroom US\$19/26) The splendid, colonial-style Macondo keeps travelers pouring in with its sunny back garden, cheerful indoor sitting areas, artisanal decor and excellent breakfasts.

**La Posada del Angel** (☎ 284-0695; [www.hostalposadadelangel.com](http://www.hostalposadadelangel.com); Simón Bolívar 14-11; s/d US\$31/46; ☑) Color, character, history; you name it, Posada del Angel has all the ingredients of the perfect B&B.

### Eating

Most restaurants close on Sunday, so start your search *before* your blood-sugar crashes.



**EATING**

Cacao & Canela.....	37	D3
Café Austria.....	38	C3
Café Eucalyptus.....	39	C1
El Cántaro.....	40	C2
El Pedregal Azteca.....	41	C1
Goura.....	42	C3
Grecia.....	43	C1
La Barraca.....	44	D2
La Olla Mágica.....	45	D2
Las Brasas de San Juan.....	46	D3
Mamá Kinua Cultural Center... (see 59)		
Molliendo Café.....	47	D3
Monday Blue.....	48	C3
New York Pizza.....	49	C1
Raymipampa.....	50	C2
Restaurant El Paraíso.....	51	E2
Tutto Freddo.....	52	C2

**DRINKING**

Café Eucalyptus.....	(see 39)	
Del Tranquilo.....	53	D2
Kaós.....	54	D3
La Mesa.....	55	E2
Tal Cual.....	56	C3
WunderBar.....	57	D3

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Casa del Sombrero Alberto		
Pulla.....	60	B2
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La Paja Toquilla.....	62	D3
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TAME.....	65	D4

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Banco del Pichincha.....	2	C3
Bapu Net.....	3	C2
Clinica Santa Inés.....	4	B3
Cuenca Net.....	5	D3
Cybercom.....	6	D2
Dot Com.....	7	D2
Etapa.....	8	C2
Fast Klin.....	9	D3
Lavahora.....	10	C3
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**SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**

Abraham Lincoln Cultural Center.....	13	D3
Amazing Grace.....	14	D1
Centro de Estudios Interamericanos.....	15	C1
Ecotrek.....	16	C3
Expediciones Apullacta... (see 15)		
Flower Market.....	17	C2
Inca Ruins.....	18	E4
Mamá Kinua Cultural Center... (see 59)		
Museo de Arte Moderno.....	19	B2
Museo de Artes Populares.....	20	D3

**MUSEO DE LAS CULTURAS**

Aborígenes.....	21	D3
Museo del Banco Central 'Pumapungo'.....	22	E4
New Cathedral.....	23	C2
Old Cathedral.....	24	C2
Plazoleta del Carmen.....	(see 17)	
Sampere.....	(see 20)	
Terra Diversa/Travel Center.....	25	D3

**SLEEPING**

Casa Naranja.....	26	C1
El Cafecito.....	27	D3

**HOSTELS & HOTELS**

Hostal El Monarca.....	28	D3
Hostal El Monasterio.....	29	C2
Hostal Macondo.....	30	C1
Hostal Paredes.....	31	D1
Hotel Milán.....	32	C2
Hotel Norte.....	33	D1
Hotel Pichincha.....	34	C2
La Posada del Angel.....	35	B1
Verde Limón.....	36	D3

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**UNIVERSITY**

Museo de las Culturas	21	D3
Museo del Banco Central	22	E4
New Cathedral	23	C2
Old Cathedral	24	C2
Plazoleta del Carmen	(see 17)	
Sampere	(see 20)	
Terra Diversa/Travel Center	25	D3
Museo de las Culturas	21	D3
Museo del Banco Central	22	E4
New Cathedral	23	C2
Old Cathedral	24	C2
Plazoleta del Carmen	(see 17)	
Sampere	(see 20)	
Terra Diversa/Travel Center	25	D3

**SLEEPING**

Casa Naranja.....	26	C1
El Cafecito.....	27	D3

**Tutto Freddo** (cnr Benigno Malo & Simón Bolívar; ice cream US\$75¢-\$3; ☎ daily) Likely the best (and definitely the most popular) ice cream in town. Meals too.

**Moliendo Café** (Honorato Vásquez 6-24; light meals US\$1-3) Moliendo Café serves delicious Colombian *antojitos* (appetizers) at prices that makes everyone happy.

**Café Austria** (Benigno Malo 5-45; US\$1-3) Austrian-style cakes, coffee and sandwiches.

**La Olla Mágica** (Hermano Miguel 6-70; mains US\$1.50-2.50) It's hard to beat pork chops at this price.

**New York Pizza** (Gran Colombia 10-43; mains US\$1.50-3.50; ☎ daily) Thin-crust pizza starts at US\$1.10 a slice.

**Mamá Kinua Cultural Center** (Torres 7-45, Casa de la Mujer; almuerzos US\$2; ☎ 8am-5:30pm Mon-Fri) Pop into this women-run restaurant for some of the tastiest *almuerzos* around. Food here is mostly vegetarian.

**Cacao & Canela** (cnr Jaramillo & Borrero; sandwiches US\$2-4; ☎ 4-11pm Mon-Sat) Wholesome sandwiches and good coffee.

**Café Eucalyptus** (Gran Colombia 9-41; plates US\$2-6) Two crackling fireplaces, two big couches, two floors of tables, one beautiful bar, 30 wines, several microbrews and 100 small-plate dishes make this *the* place to treat yourself.

**Monday Blue** (cnr Calle Larga & Luís Cordero; mains US\$2.50-4; ☎ 4:30pm-midnight) The festive Mexican atmosphere is more Cancún than Cuenca, but it's undeniably fun wolfing down Mexican food, shawarmas and pizza in this restaurant-cum-bar.

**La Barraca** (Borrero 9-68; mains US\$3-4) The casual atmosphere and great music complement excellent snacks (guacamole and chips, popcorn and the like). Main courses are mediocre.

**Raymipampa** (Benigno Malo 8-59; mains US\$3-5; ☎ daily) This Cuenca institution serves food hanging somewhere between Ecuadorian comfort food and diner fare.

**Las Brasas de San Juan** (Jaramillo 7-34; mains US\$3-9) One reader claimed these are the best steaks in Ecuador.

**El Pedregal Azteca** (Gran Colombia 10-33; mains US\$5-9) Delicious Mexican food, but the portions can be small; fill up on the free corn chips.

The following all serve straightforward Ecuadorian fare and are best for their cheap *almuerzos*. You'll find more locals than tourists at most.

**Grecia** (Gran Colombia 9-69; almuerzos US\$1.50, mains US\$3-4)

**Restaurant El Paraíso** (Ordóñez 10-19; almuerzos & merienda US\$2, mains US\$1.50-2) All vegetarian; ice cream too.

**Goura** (Jaramillo 7-27; almuerzos US\$2; mains US\$2-4) Vegetarian.

**El Cántaro** (Simón Bolívar 8-50; mains US\$3-4, almuerzos US\$2.20)

## Drinking

Café Eucalyptus (left) is an excellent spot for a relaxed drink with a mostly gringo crowd. Women drink free 6pm to 10pm Wednesday.

## Entertainment

Discos are open Thursday through Saturday nights. Midweek Cuenca's as dead as Pizarro. There's a slew of small, friendly bars on Honorato Vásquez near El Cafecito (p690). Along Presidente Córdova, east of Hermano Miguel, there are several popular bars with dance floors.

**Tal Cual** (Calle Larga 7-57) Cozy, friendly bar with live music Thursday through Saturday.

**La Mesa** (Gran Colombia 3-55) Known as Cuenca's best salsa club.

**Del Tranquilo** (deltranquilo@hotmail.com; Borrero near Mariscal Sucre) Live music Thursday through Saturday nights.

**WunderBar** (Hermano Miguel at Calle Larga) This hoppin' German-owned hangout near the river is good for a fun night. Food is served.

**Kaos** (Honorato Vásquez 6-11) The laid-back British-owned Kaos has couches, pool tables and snacks.

## Shopping

There are several good crafts stores along Gran Colombia and on the blocks just north of Parque Calderón. The best place for a serious spree, however, is the **Casa de la Mujer** (Torres 7-33), which houses over 100 crafts stalls and makes for hours of shopping fun.

The Thursday market at **Plaza Rotary** (Mariscal Lamar & Hermano Miguel) exists mainly for locals (which means it stocks pigs and polyester, fruit and furniture), but there are also a few worthwhile craft stalls. You're better off heading to the nearby **crafts market** (cnr Gaspar Sangurima & Vargas Machuca), which has an odd but quite interesting combination of basketry, ceramics, iron-work, kitchen utensils, bright plastic animals, gaudy religious paraphernalia and guinea pig roasters (which are a great gift for mom, but a little tough to get home).



## Getting There & Away

### AIR

Cuenca's **Airport** (Aeropuerto Mariscal Lamar; ☎ 286-2203; Av España) is 2km from downtown. **TAME** (☎ 288-9097, 288-9581; Astudillo 2-22) and **Icaro** (☎ 281-1450; Milenium Plaza, Astudillo s/n) fly daily to Quito (\$63) and Guayaquil (\$45).

### BUS

Cuenca's **bus terminal** (España) is 1.5km northeast of the center. Buses to Guayaquil (US\$8) go either via Parque Nacional Cajas (3½ hours) or Cañar (5½ hours). There are regular departures to Quito (US\$10, 10 to 12 hours). Several go to Machala (US\$4.50, four hours); a few continue on to Huaquillas (US\$6, five hours). Buses go regularly to Alausí (US\$4, four hours). Several buses a day head to Loja (US\$7, five hours), to Macas (US\$8.50, eight hours via Guarumales; 10 hours via Limón) and other Oriente towns. Buses for Gualaceo (US80¢, 50 minutes) leave every half hour.

## Getting Around

Cuenca is very walkable. A taxi to/from the bus terminal or airport costs about US\$2. From the front of the bus terminal buses depart regularly to downtown (\$0.25).

## AROUND CUENCA

### 07

From small indigenous villages, to hot springs and hiking, there's ample opportunity for excursions from Cuenca.

### Ingapirca

The most important Inca site in Ecuador, Ingapirca was built toward the end of the 15th century during the Inca expansion into present-day Ecuador. The **site** (admission US\$6; ☎ 8am-6pm),

50km north of Cuenca, was built with the same mortarless, polished-stone technique used by the Inca in Peru. Although less impressive than sites in Peru, it's definitely worth a visit. A museum explains the site, and guides (both the human and the written varieties) are available. **Ingapirca village**, 1km away, has a craft shop, simple restaurants and a basic pensión.

For an economical visit, catch a direct Transportes Cañar bus (US\$2.50, two hours) from Cuenca's bus terminal at 9am or 1pm Monday through Friday, or at 9am on Saturday and Sunday. Buses return to Cuenca at 1pm and 4pm Monday through Friday and at 9am and 1pm on Saturday and Sunday.

### Gualaceo, Chordeleg & Sigsig

Famous for their Sunday markets, seeing these three villages together makes a great day trip from Cuenca. If you start early, you can be back in Cuenca by the afternoon. **Gualaceo** has the biggest market, with fruit and vegetables, animals and various household goods. **Chordeleg's market**, 5km away, is smaller and more touristy. **Sigsig's market** is 25km from Gualaceo and is an excellent place to see the art of panama-hat making.

From Cuenca's bus terminal, buses leave every half hour to Gualaceo (US80¢, 50 minutes), Chordeleg (\$1, one hour) and Sigsig (\$1.25, 1½ hours). You can walk the 5km from Gualaceo to Chordeleg if you don't want to wait for the bus.

### Parque Nacional Cajas

The stunning, chilly, moor-like *páramo* of **Parque Nacional Cajas** (admission US\$10) is famous for its many lakes, great trout fishing and rugged camping and hiking. It's a good day trip from Cuenca (only 30km away). **Camping** (per person

### IT'S NOT A PANAMA, IT'S A MONTECRISTI!

For well over a century, Ecuador has endured the world mistakenly crediting another country for its most famous export – the panama hat. To any Ecuadorian worth his or her salt, the panama hat is a '*sombrero de paja toquilla*' (toquilla-straw hat), and to the connoisseur, it's a Montecristi, named after the most famous hat making town of all (see p712). It's certainly not a paaa...

Cuenca is the center of the panama hat trade and a great place to hunt down a fine sombrero. Try the following:

**Barranco** (Calle Larga 10-41)

**Casa del Sombrero Alberto Pulla** (Tarqui 6-91)

**Homero Ortega P & Hijos** (www.homeroortega.com; Gil Ramirez Davalos)

**La Paja Toquilla** (cnr Hermano Miguel & Jaramillo)

**Sombreros Don Migui** (Tarqui near Calle Larga)

### THE INCA TRAIL TO INGAPIRCA

Though it sees only a fraction of the traffic that the Inca trail to Machu Picchu gets, the three-day hike to Ingapirca is a popular trek. Parts of the approximately 40km hike follow the original royal road that linked Cuzco with Quito and Tomebamba (at present-day Cuenca).

The starting point for the hike is the village of **Achupallas**, 23km southeast of Alausí (see p688). The route is faint in places and sometimes even nonexistent, so travel with a compass and three 1:50,000 topographical maps – Alausí, Juncal and Cañar – available at the IGM (p648) in Quito. There are sometimes locals around who may provide directions. Pack extra food in case you get lost. The area is remote but inhabited, so don't leave your stuff lying around outside your tent. Also be prepared for extremely persistent begging from children; most travelers refuse to hand anything over so as not to encourage the begging from future walkers.

To get to Achupallas, take one of the daily trucks from Alausí or, more reliably, hire a taxi-pickup for about US\$10 to US\$15 one way. Alternatively, there is transportation from Alausí to **Guasuntos** (also known as La Moya), from where you can wait for trucks (US\$10) to Achupallas. It is about 10km from Alausí to La Moya and another 15km to Achupallas. There is nowhere to stay at either place.

US\$4) is allowed, and a small refugio has eight cots and a kitchen; the latter fills up fast. Hiking solo in Cajas can be dangerous – the abundance of lakes and fog is disorienting. It's best to be finished by 4pm when the fog gets thick. Shorter trails are well marked. Glossy, topographical trail maps are free with admission.

Guayaquil-bound busses pass through the park, but drivers refuse to sell reduced-fare tickets for the one-hour ride. To avoid paying the full US\$8 fare to Guayaquil, take a Transporte Occidental bus (\$1.25, one hour) from Ricardo Darque between Av de las Américas and Victor Manuel Albornoz, in Cuenca. Even after a taxi (\$2) to this bus stop, it still comes out cheaper. Buses depart daily at 6:15pm, 7pm and 10:20am and at noon, 2pm, 4pm and 5pm. To return to Cuenca, flag any passing Cuenca-bound bus.

## SARAGURO



South of Cuenca the road winds through eerie *páramo* until, after 165km, it reaches Saraguro, which means 'land of corn' in Quichua. Quaint little Saraguro is home to the indigenous Saraguro, the most successful indigenous group in the southern highlands. The group originally lived in the Lake Titicaca region of Peru but were forcibly relocated through the Inca empire's system of colonization, known as *mitimaes*.

Today, the Saraguro are readily identifiable by their traditional dress. Both men and women (but especially the women) wear striking flat white felt hats with wide brims that are often spotted on the underside. The men sport

a single ponytail and wear a black poncho and knee-length black shorts, occasionally covered with a small white apron.

The best day to be in Saraguro is Sunday, when the local market draws Saraguros – dressed beautifully for the occasion – from the surrounding countryside. Sleep at friendly **Residencial Saraguro** (☎ 220-0286; cnr Loja & Antonio Castro; r per person US\$4) and eat at indigenous-run **Mamá Cuchara** (Parque Central; mains US\$1.50-2.50; ☎ closed Sat).

Any Loja-bound bus from Cuenca (US\$4, 3½ hours) will drop you a block from the main plaza. Buses to Loja (62km, US\$2, 1½ hours) leave hourly during the day.

## LOJA

☎ 07 / pop 170,000

Thanks to its proximity to the Oriente, Loja is blessed with a delightfully temperate climate. The city is famous for its musicians (everyone seems to play something) and its award-winning parks. Despite the fact that it's the provincial capital, it's still a small town at heart – so much so that you'll find a day or two plenty of time. Loja (elevation 2100m) is a good base for visiting nearby Parque Nacional Podocarpus and the main stop before heading south to Vilcabamba and Peru.

Good views can be had from the **Virgen de Loja Statue** (La Salle). The annual fiesta of the **Virgen del Cisne** (September 8) is celebrated with huge parades and a produce fair.

## Information

**Banco de Guayaquil** (Eguiguren near Bernardo Valdivieso) Bank with ATM.

**Clínica San Agustín** (☎ 257-0314; 18 de Noviembre & Azuay) Clinic with a good reputation.

**Jungle Net** (Riofrío 13-64; per hr US\$1) Internet access.

**Ministerio del Medio Ambiente** (☎ 258-5421; podocam@impsat.net.ec; Sucre 4-35) Provides information on Parque Nacional Podocarpus.

**Pacifictel** (Eguiguren near Olmedo) Telephone call center.

**Post office** (cnr Colón & Sucre)

**Tourist office** (iTur; ☎ 258-1251; cnr Bolívar & Eguiguren) In the Town Hall.

**World Net** (Colón 14-69; per hr US\$1) Internet access.

**Sleeping**

**Hotel Londres** (☎ 256-1936; Sucre 07-51; s/d/tr US\$4/8/12) With creaky wooden floors, big white walls and saggy beds, Hotel Londres is as basic as

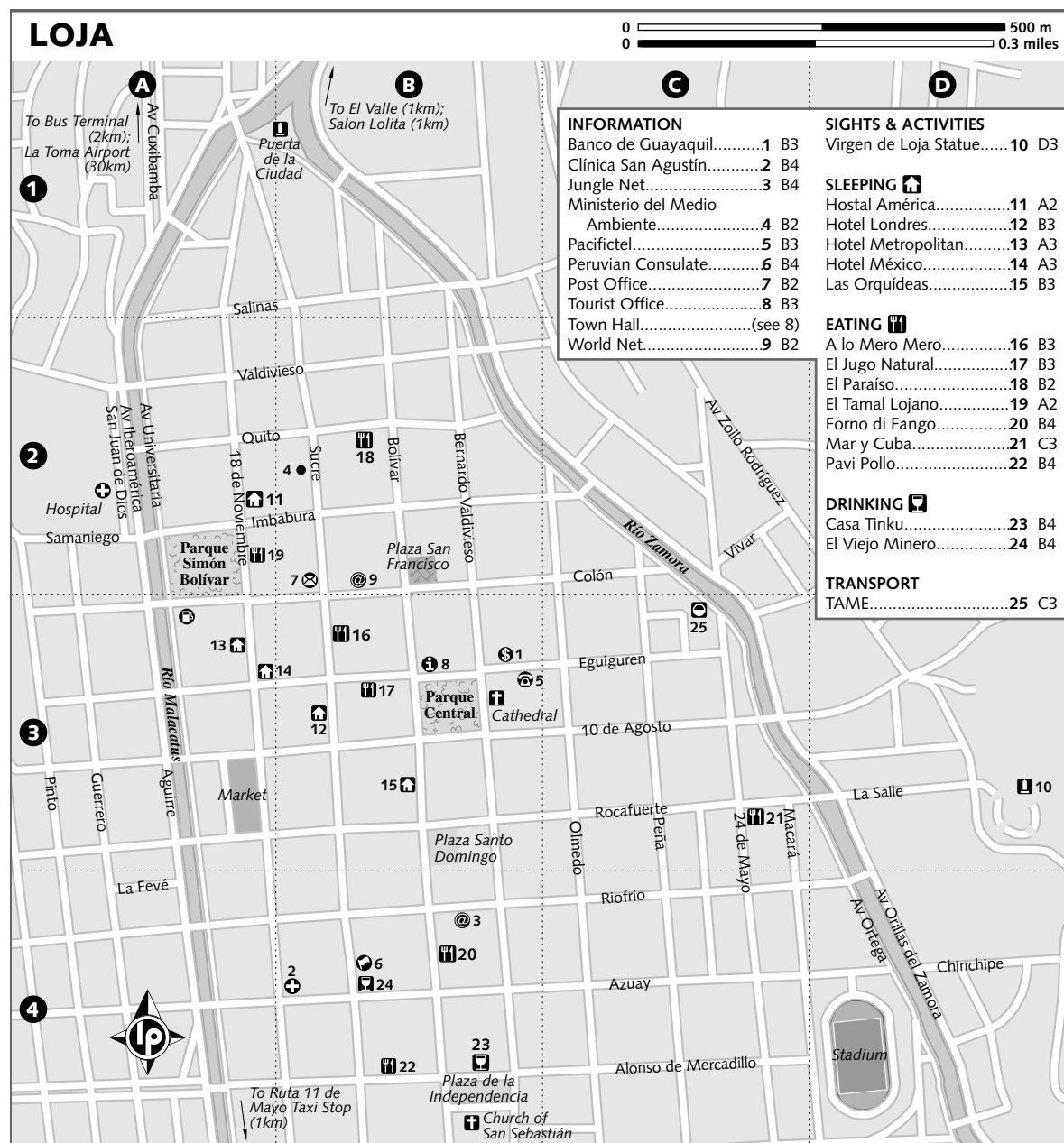
they come, but it's a tried-and-true travelers' favorite with spotless shared bathrooms and friendly young owners.

**Hotel México** (☎ 257-0581; Eguiguren 15-89; s/d US\$4/8) Beat-up digs that only just barely do the trick.

**Las Orquídeas** (☎ 258-7008; Bolívar 08-59; s/d US\$8/16) The small rooms here aren't as cheerful as the flowery lobby might suggest, but they're clean and totally acceptable.

**Hotel Metropolitan** (☎ 257-0007/244; Calle 18 de Noviembre 6-41; r per person US\$10) The Metropolitan is friendly and comfortable, with hardwood floors, decent beds and cable TV.

**Hostal América** (☎ 256-2887; Calle 18 de Noviembre near Imbabura; s/d incl breakfast US\$20/27) Modern, comfortable hotel with giant rooms.



## Eating

**El Tamal Lojano** (18 de Noviembre 05-12; light items US\$0.70-1, almuerzos US\$2) People flock here for the excellent *quimbolitos*, *humitas* and *tamales lojanos* (all delicious variations on corn dumplings); and *empanadas de verde*. Try them all!

**El Jugo Natural** (Eguiguren 14-20; US\$1-2) Great place for a fruit-and-yogurt breakfast.

**El Paraíso** (Quito 14-50; set meal US\$2) Wholesome vegetarian lunches and dinners are available here at US\$2 a pop.

**A lo Mero Mero** (Sucre 06-22; mains US\$3-4, almuerzos US\$2) It's not quite up to Mexico City standards, but if you've a hankering for refried beans and tortillas, it's the only place you'll get them.

**Salon Lolita** (Salvador Bustamante Celi at Guayaquil, El Valle; mains US\$3-8) This is *the* place for traditional food from Loja. *Cuy* (guinea pig) comes roasted whole in US\$8, US\$10 or US\$12 sizes. Take an 'El Valle' bus from Av Universitaria at Parque Simón Bolívar.

**Mar y Cuba** (Rocafuerte 09-00 at 24 de Mayo; mains US\$4-5) Excellent seafood, *ceviche* and Cuban classics.

**Forno di Fango** (Bolívar 10-98; pizzas US\$4.50-13) Tasty adobe-oven pizza.

There are numerous grilled-chicken joints along Mercadillo, west of Bolívar where you can pick up a quarter-chicken with soup and fries for about US\$2. **Pavi Pollo** (Alonso de Mercadillo 14-99) is a good one.

## Drinking

On Sunday nights from 8pm to 9pm, in the Parque Central, the local military marching band rips into what are likely the liveliest marching tunes you'll ever hear.

**Casa Tinku** (Alonso de Mercadillo near Bernardo Valdivieso) Spirited little bar with a great vibe and live music on weekends.

**El Viejo Minero** (Sucre 10-76) Rustic old watering hole, perfect for a relaxed beer.

## Getting There & Away

Loja is served by La Toma airport in Catamayo, 30km west of town. **TAME** (☎ 257-0248; Av Ortega near 24 de Mayo) flies to Quito (US\$49) Monday through Saturday and to Guayaquil (US\$36) Tuesday through Thursday. For airport transport (US\$4, 40 minutes) call **Aerotaxi** (☎ 257-1327, 258-4423).

Loja's bus terminal is 1km north of town. Several buses a day run to Quito (US\$15, 14 to 15 hours), Macará (US\$6, six hours), Guayaquil

(US\$9, nine hours), Machala (US\$5, five hours), Zamora (US\$2.50, two hours) and Cuenca (US\$7, five hours), as well as other destinations.

Buses to Vilcabamba (US\$1, 1½ hours) depart once an hour. Vilcabambaturis runs faster minibuses (US\$1, one hour). Fastest of all are the *taxis colectivos* (shared taxis; US\$1.20, 45 minutes) which leave from the **Ruta 11 de Mayo taxi stop** (Av Universitaria), 10 blocks south of Alonso de Mercadillo; ask a local taxi driver to take you.

## ZAMORA

☎ 07 / pop 16,074

Perspiring peacefully on the tropical banks of the Río Zamora, this easy-going jungle town is the best base for exploring the verdant lowlands of Parque Nacional Podocarpus (below). Although it's geographically part of the Oriente, Zamora (elevation 970m) is closer to Loja by bus (two hours) than to other jungle towns, most of which are quite a long way north. Decent budget hotels in town include **Hostal Seyma** (☎ 260-5583; 24 de Mayo near Amazonas; s/d US\$3/6) and **Hotel Chonta Dorada** (☎ 260-6384, 260-7055; hotelchontadorada@hotmail.com; Pío Jaramillo btwn Diego de Vaca & Amazonas; s/d US\$7/11.50).

Continuing north through the Oriente by bus, you will find a few basic hotels in the small towns of **Gualaquiza** (five hours), **Limón** (about nine hours), **Méndez** and **Sucúa**. **Macas** (p706) is approximately 13 to 15 hours away.

## PARQUE NACIONAL PODOCARPUS

One of the most biologically rich areas in the country and a wonderful park to explore, **Parque Nacional Podocarpus** (admission US\$10) protects habitats at altitudes ranging from 3600m in the *páramo* near Loja to 1000m in the steamy rainforests near Zamora. The topography is wonderfully rugged and complex, and the park is simply bursting with plant and animal life. Parque Nacional Podocarpus' namesake, Podocarpus, is Ecuador's only native conifer.

The main entrance to the highland sector of the park is **Cajanuma**, about 10km south of Loja. From here, a track leads 8.5km up to the ranger station and trail heads. The best bet for a day trip is to ride all the way up in a taxi from Loja (about US\$10), hike for several hours and walk the 8.5km/two hours

## GETTING TO PERU

Five hours from Loja by bus, the dusty little border town of **Macará** lies 3km from the Peruvian border (crossing free; open 24 hours). This route into Peru is far more scenic and less traveled than the conventional one via Huaquillas (p724). Most people buy tickets direct to Piura, Peru from Loja (p694) aboard **Loja International** (☎ 257-9014, 257-0505). Buses depart Loja at 7am, 1pm, 10:30pm and 11pm, and the bus stops at the border, waits for passengers to take care of exits and entries and then continues to Piura. The entire ride is eight hours (and costs US\$8). Try to buy your tickets at least a day before you travel. If you want to break the journey from Loja, do so at **Catacocha**. The Loja-Piura bus stops in Catacocha and Macará, so you can get on in either town as well.

back to the main road where you can flag a passing bus.

To visit the tropical, lowland sector, head to Zamora and get a taxi (US\$6) or walk the 6km dirt road to the **Bombuscaro entrance**, where there is a ranger station, trails, swimming, waterfalls, a **camping area** (per person US\$2) and a small **refugio** (cots per person US\$5). Access from Vilcabamba is possible by horseback.

## VILCABAMBA

☎ 07 / pop 4200

Deemed the valley of longevity, Vilcabamba is famous for having inhabitants that just don't kick the bucket. And it's no wonder – with a setting so peaceful, weather so sublime and a pace so *re-laaaxing*, who in their right mind would want to toss in the towel? Backpackers stop here to get in on the mellowness and to hike, ride horses, enjoy the food, get massages and chill out in Vilcabamba's cheap guesthouses. It's also the perfect stopping point en route to/from Peru via **Zumba**. The elevation is 1500m.

Bring cash; there are no banks. Telephones, cybercafés and the post office are all easy to find.

## Activities

**Orlando Falco**, a trained, English-speaking naturalist guide, leads recommended tours to Parque Nacional Podocarpus and other areas for about US\$20 to US\$35 per person, plus the US\$10 park fee. Find him at Primavera, his craft shop on the plaza. **Caballos Gavilan** (☎ 264-0281; gavilanhorse@yahoo.com; Sucre) offers affordable, highly recommended horse-riding trips, which can last from four hours to three days. Several readers and numerous locals have recommended local guide Jorge Mendieta of **Caminatas Andes Sureños** (jorgeluis222@latinmail.com; Central Plaza) for his guided hikes.

## Sleeping

**Hostal Mandango** (☎ 09-370-5266; Huilco Pamba near Juan Montalvo; r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$3/5; 🍷) Behind the bus station, Mandango might just be the best super-budget choice in town. Rooms are small, but those with private bathrooms also have firm beds, and everything is clean.

**Residencial Don German** (☎ 264-0130, 09-132-4669; Jaramillo; r per person US\$4) Simple digs with clean cheerful rooms and shared hot showers. There's a tiny well-lit common area and a communal kitchen. It's basic, but totally acceptable.

**Rumi-Wilco Ecolodge** (rumiwilco@yahoo.com; http://koberpress.home.mindspring.com/vilcabamba; r per person US\$4-4.50) About a 30-minute walk from town, Rumi Wilco consists of the four-person **Pole House** (d/tr US\$16/18), a serene hideaway with hammocks, kitchen and a private drinking well; and several other exquisitely set cabins. Wonderfully relaxing.

**Hostería y Restaurante Izhcayluma** (☎ 264-0095; www.izhcayluma.com; dm US\$7, s US\$13-20, d US\$20-30; 🍷) With sweeping views over the valley, a swimming pool, a flower-filled garden and supremely comfortable rooms, Hostería y Restaurante Izhcayluma is hard to beat. Located 2km south of town.

**Jardín Escondido** (Hidden Garden; ☎ 264-0281; www.vilcabamba.org/jardinescondido.html; Sucre; dm US\$8, r per person US\$10-15; 🍷) Recently remodeled, colorful Jardín Escondido is the slickest in the center, and it really does have a garden hidden within its doors. The priciest rooms are quite luxurious.

**Rendez-Vous** (☎ 09-219-1180; rendezvouscuador@yahoo.com; Diego Vaca de Vega 06-43; s/d US\$8/16) French-owned Rendez-Vous is a lovely place near the river with immaculate rooms that open onto a beautiful garden. Each has a hammock. Breakfast with homemade bread included.

**Cabañas Río Yambala** (☎ 09-106-2762; [www.vilcabamba.cwc.net](http://www.vilcabamba.cwc.net); cabins per person with 2 meals US\$10-14, without meals US\$5-9) About 4km southeast of town, Cabañas Río Yambala is another Vilcabamba original, run by friendly Brits with six charming, rustic cabins of varying sizes, all with private hot showers and views. You can walk up or hire a taxi (about US\$4) from the plaza.

**Hostal Madre Tierra** (☎ 264-0269, 09-309-6665; [www.madretierra1.com](http://www.madretierra1.com); dm US\$13.50, r per person US\$13.50-25, ste per person US\$34; 📺 📶) About 2km north of town, this stunning, down-to-earth hotel-spa pioneered the pleasure-aesthetic that most Vilcabamba hotels adhere to today. Rooms are in cabins spread around the hillside, and some have views. The full-service spa (treatments US\$16 to US\$40) is open to non-guests.

### Eating & Drinking

**Izhcayluma** (☎ 264-0095; [www.izhcayluma.com](http://www.izhcayluma.com)) has an excellent restaurant. Others in town are easy to find.

**Restaurant Vegetariano** (Salgado at Diego Vaca de la Vega; mains US\$2-3) Good vegetarian option; US\$2.60 *almuerzos*.

**La Terraza** (Central Plaza; mains US\$2.50-4) Italian, Mexican and Thai plates; plenty of vegetarian options.

**Jardín Escondido** (Sucre & Agua de Hierro; mains US\$3-5) This place serves Mexican food in a lovely garden setting.

**Shanta's Bar** (mains US\$3-6; 🕒 noon-3am) On the road to Río Yambala, Shanta's serves great trout and pizza and more. It's also the town's best bar.

### Getting There & Away

Transportes Loja runs buses every 90 minutes to Loja (US\$1, 1½ hours). Shared taxis leave from the bus terminal and take five passengers to Loja (US\$1.20, 45 minutes). Buses leave daily to Zumba (\$6, six hours) near the Peruvian border.

## THE ORIENTE

Ecuador's slice of the Amazon Basin – aka, *El Oriente* – is one of the country's most thrilling travel destinations. Here you can paddle canoes up to caimans lurking in blackwater lagoons, spot two-toed sloths and howler monkeys, fish for piranhas and hike through some of the wildest plantlife you'll ever lay

eyes upon. At night, after quelling your fear of the things outside, you'll be lulled to sleep by a psychedelic symphony of insects and frogs.

This section of the book describes the Oriente from north to south (see Zamora, p696, for the region's southernmost towns.) The northern Oriente sees more travelers, while the region south of Río Pastaza has a real sense of remoteness. Buses from Quito frequently go to Puyo, Tena, Coca and Lago Agrio. Buses from Cuenca (p693) go through Limón to Macas. Buses from the Southern Highlands town of Loja go via Zamora to Limón and on to Macas. From Macas, a road leads to Puyo and the northern Oriente. It's possible – although arduous – to travel down the Río Napo to Peru and the Amazon River.

### LAGO AGRIO

☎ 06 / pop 34,100

Unless you like edgy frontier towns, Lago's main tourist draw is its status as jumping-off point for the nearby Cuyabeno wildlife reserve (opposite). The Sunday morning **market** is visited by indigenous Cofan and might be worth a peak. Booking a tour to Cuyabeno from Lago can be difficult: most people arrive from Quito with a tour already booked, guides show up, and everyone's gone the next morning.

If you're stuck in town, try **Hotel Casablanca** (☎ 283-0181; Av Quito 228; s/d US\$10/15) or **Hotel D'Mario** (☎ 283-0172; [hotelmario@andinanet.net](mailto:hotelmario@andinanet.net); Av Quito 1-171; s US\$15-32, d US\$17-40; 📺 📶 📷). Both are on the main drag, where you'll find just about everything else. The latter has a popular pizzería.

### Dangers & Annoyances

With an increased pitch in the conflict in neighboring Colombia, border towns such as Lago Agrio have become safe havens for Colombian guerrillas, anti-rebel paramilitaries and drug smugglers. Bars can be sketchy and side streets unsafe, so stick to the main drag, especially at night. Tourists rarely have problems but be careful.

### Getting There & Away

The airport is 5km east of town; taxi fare is US\$2. **TAME** (☎ 283-0113; Orellana near 9 de Octubre) and **Icaro** (☎ 283-2370/71, 288-0546; at the airport) fly Monday through Saturday to Quito

(US\$43 to US\$56); it's best to book in advance.

The bus terminal is about 2km northwest of the center. Buses head to Quito regularly (US\$7, eight hours). There are one or two daily departures, mainly overnight, to Tena (US\$7, eight hours), Cuenca, Guayaquil (US\$14, fourteen hours) and Machala. Buses to Coca aren't usually found in the bus terminal; flag a *ranchera* (open sided bus; US\$3, 2½ hours) on Av Quito in the center – ask locally for where to wait.

## RESERVA DE PRODUCCIÓN FAUNÍSTICA CUYABENO

This beautiful, 6034 sq km **reserve** (admission US\$20) protects the rainforest home of the Siona, Secoya, Cofan, Quichua and Shuar people. It also conserves the Río Cuyabeno watershed, whose rainforest lakes and swamps harbor fascinating aquatic species such as freshwater dolphins, manatees, caiman and anaconda. Monkeys abound, and tapirs, peccaries, agoutis and several cat species have been recorded. The bird life is abundant. Though there have been numerous oil spills, huge parts of the reserve remain pristine and worth a visit. The reserve is nearly impossible to visit on your own; most visitors make arrangements in Quito (p659) or Coca. The nearest town is Lago Agrio.

## COCA

☎ 06 / pop 18,300

If you're one of those folks who digs sitting around in tropical heat guzzling beer and watching small-town street life, you'll find Coca oddly appealing. Otherwise it's just a dusty, sweltering oil town and little more than a final stop before boarding an outboard canoe and heading down the mighty Río Napo. It's a good place to hire a guide for visits to Pañacocha, Cuyabeno and Parque Nacional Yasuní (p701).

## Information

**Andinatel** (cnr Eloy Alfaro & 6 de Diciembre)

**Banco del Pinchincha** (cnr Bolívar and 9 de Octubre)  
Bank with ATM.

**Casa de Cambio 3R** (cnr Napo & García Moreno) Cashes traveler's checks.

**Imperial Net** (García Moreno; per hr US\$1.80) Internet access.

**Post office** (Napo near Cuenca)

**Tourist office** (cnr García Moreno & Quito)

## GETTING TO PERU

About 125km south of Vilcabamba lies the wonderfully remote border crossing known as **La Balsa**, near the outpost of **Zumba**. From Vilcabamba (or Loja), it's an all-day journey to San Ignacio, Peru, the best place to spend the night. From San Ignacio, you can travel to Jaén (three hours), on to Bagua Grande (another hour) and then to Chachapoyas (p923; three more hours), the first sizable town. From Jaén you can also travel to Chiclayo (p905), on the Peruvian coast.

If you're traveling from Peru, see p907.

## Tours

Coca is closer than Misahuallí to large tracts of virgin jungle, but to hire a guide you should have a group of four or more to make it affordable. Trips down the Río Tiputini and into Parque Nacional Yasuní (p701) are possible, but require at least a week. Visiting a Huaorani village requires written permission from the community. The following are all reliable tour operators. Tours average US\$50 to US\$60 per person per day and include everything except park entrance fees.

**Emerald Forest Expeditions** (in Quito ☎ 02-288-2309; www.emeraldexpeditions.com; cnr Quito and Espejo) has over twenty years in the guide business and is highly recommended. **River Dolphin Expeditions** (☎ 09-917-7529; Guayaquil near Napo) has received mixed reviews from readers; it's worth feeling out. Both companies offer 10-day expeditions down the Río Napo to Iquitos, Peru.

Hotel El Auca (p700) doesn't arrange tours but is probably one of the best places in town to meet guides looking for work, as well as to meet other travelers who can tell you of their experiences or help form a group.

## Sleeping & Eating

Coca's cheaper hotels are dingy, overpriced and fill up quickly with oil workers.

**Hotel Oasis** (☎ 288-0206; yuturilodge@yahoo.com; Camilo de Torrano s/n; s/d US\$8/16) Rooms are run-down, but there's a pleasant deck with a view of the river. The staff arranges trips to economic lodges on the Río Napo.

**Hotel San Fermin** (☎ 288-1848; Quito and Bolívar; s/d with fan US\$9/17, with air-con US\$18/28; 🚽) The





**CULTURAL DETOUR**

For a cultural experience far from the trodden path, grab a Tarapoa-bound Transportes Putumayo bus in Lago Agrio and head 23km east to the jungle town of Dureno, an indigenous Cofan village. Ask the driver to drop you at the **Comuna Cofan Dureno** (not the colonists' village of Dureno, 4km further east), then walk 100m to the Río Aguarico. At the shore, start hollering and waving your arms at the folks across the river so the boat operators will come over and pick you up. You can usually sleep in a hut and hire indigenous guides.

Travelers arriving and departing by river must register their passport at the *capitanía* (port captain), by the landing dock. If you're on a tour, your guide usually takes care of this.

**BUS**

There are bus offices in town and at the bus terminal, north of town. Several buses a day go to Quito (US\$10, nine hours via Loreto, 13 hours via Lago Agrio), Tena (US\$7, six hours) and Lago Agrio (US\$3, three hours), as well as other jungle towns. Open-sided trucks called *rancheras* or *chivas* leave from the terminal for various destinations between Coca and Lago Agrio, and to Río Tiputini to the south.

**RÍO NAPO**

☎ 06

East of Coca, the Río Napo flows steadily toward Peru and the Amazon River. This long, lonesome stretch of river contains some of Ecuador's best jungle lodges. Except aboard the boat to Nuevo Rocafuerte, independent canoe travel is expensive. If you're visiting a lodge, transport is part of the package.

Pompeya is a Catholic mission about two hours downriver from Coca on Río Napo near the **Reserva Biológica Limoncocha**. Now that there is road access and nearby oil drilling, the area is rather depressing and not ideal for spotting wildlife. The area is easily accessed by buses from the oil town of **Shushufindi**, one hour from either Coca or Lago Agrio.

About five hours downstream from Coca, **Pañacocha** is another settlement you can visit independently. You'll find a gorgeous black-water lagoon with great piranha fishing and

incredible biodiversity among cloud forest and dry forest. Tours from Coca go here but you can also take the public canoe slated for Nueva Rocafuerte (see opposite) for added adventure. Cheap accommodations are available at **Pensión Las Palmas** (riverfront; r per person US\$3) but you might be more comfortable camping. Inexpensive *comedores* (cheap restaurants), including Elsitita and Delicia, are within view of the boat landing.

Those who prefer comfort, wildlife guides and tasty food should consider a lodge. The least expensive in the area is **Yuturi Lodge** (Yuturi Jungle Adventures in Quito, Map pp650-1; ☎ 250-4037/3225; [www.yuturilodge.com](http://www.yuturilodge.com); Amazonas N24-236 & Colón; packages per person for 4 nights US\$350), which has received good reports. **Sani Lodge** (in Quito, Map pp650-1; ☎ 02-255-8881; [www.sanilodge.com](http://www.sanilodge.com); R Roca 736 & Av Amazonas, Pasaje Chantilly; packages per person for 3/4/7 nights US\$285/380/665) is a wonderful place, with outstanding guides and service while still reasonably priced.

The Río Napo flows just outside the northern border of Parque Nacional Yasuní and finally enters Peru at Nuevo Rocafuerte.

**NUEVO ROCAFUERTE**

A distant dot on the map for most, Nuevo Rocafuerte lies five hours downstream from Pañacocha (12 to 15 hours from Coca) completing a seriously arduous journey to the Peruvian border. The very basic **Parador Turístico** (☎ 238-2133; behind national police office; r per person with shared bathroom US\$3-5) fills up fast, since it's the only lodging in town. A few two-shelf stores sell basic provisions; for a hot meal ask around. Electricity is only available from 6pm to 11pm. Local guides and tours up the Río Yasuní into Parque Nacional Yasuní (below) can be arranged.

If you are continuing to Peru try to make arrangements well in advance. If you don't time it right you could be stuck here for some time. Bring adequate supplies of water-purification tablets, bug repellent and food. Operators in Coca offer jungle tours which end in Iquitos, Peru.

**PARQUE NACIONAL YASUNÍ**

Ecuador's largest mainland **park** (admission US\$20) is a massive 9620-sq-km swath of wetlands, marshes, swamps, lakes, rivers and tropical rainforest. It contains a variety of rainforest habitats, wildlife and a few Huaorani communities. Unfortunately, poaching and,

## GETTING TO PERU

For travelers continuing to Peru, exit formalities are taken care of in Nuevo Rocafuerte; in Peru entry formalities are settled in **Iquitos**. The official border crossing (no fees) is at **Pantoja**, a short ride downstream from Nuevo Rocafuerte. Timing is the key: a cargo boat leaves Iquitos, Peru around the 18th of every month, arriving in Pantoja around the 24th. Catch this boat in Pantoja for its six-day return trip (about US\$70) to Iquitos. To get to Pantoja, ask for a ride (about US\$5) with the Peruvian *militares* (soldiers) who visit Nuevo Rocafuerte daily by boat. Conditions on the cargo boat are extremely basic – there's one bathroom and a lot of livestock on board. Bring a hammock, food, five gallons of water and water-purifying tablets. Another option is to try to get to Santa Clotilde, downriver from Nuevo Rocafuerte, in Peru. Santa Clotilde has boats to Iquitos on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday for US\$25.

If you're traveling in the opposite direction, see p936.

increasingly, oil exploration are damaging the park.

Visiting the park independently is difficult, but operators in Coca (p699) and Quito (p659) offer tours. Recommended independent guides include **Oscar Tapuy** (in Quito ☎ 02-288-1486; [oscarta23@yahoo.com](mailto:oscarta23@yahoo.com)), one of the country's top bird guides and **Jarol Fernando Vaca** (in Quito ☎ 02-224-1918; [shiripuno2004@yahoo.com](mailto:shiripuno2004@yahoo.com)), a Quito-based naturalist and butterfly specialist. Both speak English and Jarol is authorized by the Huaorani to guide in their territory. Contact them by email or telephone.

## TENA

☎ 06 / pop 16,670

Ecuador's de facto white-water capital sits at the confluence of two lovely rivers – Río Tena and Río Pano – and draws paddlers from all over the world. It's an attractive, relaxed town (elevation 518m) where kayakers lay around hotel-room entrances and boaters hang out in pizza joints, rapping about their day on the rapids. Rafting trips are easily arranged, and several operators offer interesting jungle trips.

## Information

**Andinatel** (Olmedo near Juan Montalvo) Telephone call center.

**Banco del Austro** (15 de Noviembre) Traveler's checks; ATM.

**Cucupanet** (main plaza at Mera; per hr US\$1.20) Internet access.

**Electrolava** (next to police station, main plaza) Laundry.

**Police station** (☎ 288-6101; main plaza)

**Post office** (cnr Olmedo & García Moreno)

**Tourist office** (☎ 288-8046; Augusto Rueda) Local hiking information available.

## Activities

If you didn't pack a kayak, sign up for a rafting trip. They range from scenic floats to big-water runs on the **Río Misahuallí** and offer panoramas of beautiful jungle, cloud forest and canyons. Depending on difficulty, day trips run US\$50 to US\$65 per person. Long in the business, **Ríos Ecuador/Yacu Amu** (☎ 288-6727; [www.riosecuador.com](http://www.riosecuador.com); Orellana) offers several day trips as well as a four-day kayaking class (a bargain at US\$250). British-operated **River People** (☎ in Quito 02-290-6639, 288-8384; [www.riverpeopleraftingecuador.com](http://www.riverpeopleraftingecuador.com); 15 de Noviembre & 9 de Octubre) is a top-notch outfitter and has received rave reviews.

For waterfall and caving tours, guide **Manuel Moreta** (☎ 288-9185; [manuel.moreta@eudoramail.com](mailto:manuel.moreta@eudoramail.com)) is recommended.

## Tours

The popular **Amarongachi Tours** (☎ 288-6372; [www.amarongachi.com](http://www.amarongachi.com); 15 de Noviembre 438) offers various good-time jungle tours for US\$40 per person per day. Also offering tours at this price is the well-recommended **Sacharicsina** (☎ 288-6839; [sacharicsinatour@yahoo.com](mailto:sacharicsinatour@yahoo.com); Montesdeoca 110), operated by the Quichua-speaking Cerda brothers. For emphasis on Quichua culture, visit **Ricancie** (☎ 288-8479; [ricancie.nativeweb.org](http://ricancie.nativeweb.org); Av del Chofer & Hugo Vasco). **Sachamazónica** (☎ 288-7979), in the bus terminal, is run by local indigenous guides who know their stuff.

## Sleeping

**Hostal Limoncocha** (☎ 288-7583; [limoncocha@andinanet.net](mailto:limoncocha@andinanet.net); Ita 533; r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$4/6) Chipper backpacker digs with a guest kitchen, hand painted murals and clean private bathrooms. Breakfast and beer available.

**A Welcome Break** (☎ 288-6301; [cofanes@hotmail.com](mailto:cofanes@hotmail.com); Augusto Rueda 331; s/d US\$4/8) Cramped rooms

have bare concrete floors, but the resident family is embracing. Shared showers, guest kitchen and a yard.

**Hostal Travellers Lodging** (☎ 288-6372; 15 de Noviembre 438; r per person US\$6 & US\$12) The US\$12 rooms have great views; cheaper rooms are small, thin-walled and dark, but still comfortable. All have private bathrooms and hot water. Popular.

**Brisa del Río** (☎ 288-6444/6208; Orellana; dm US\$6, s with bathroom US\$10) Spic-and-span hostel with pastel dorms and row-showers.

Also recommended:

**Hotel Amazonas** (☎ 288-6439; cnr Juan Montalvo & Mera; s/d US\$3/6) Fine for a night.

**Residencial Danubios** (☎ 288-6378; 15 de Noviembre; r per person US\$4-6; P) Reliable budget option.

**Hotel Hilton** (☎ 288-6329; 15 de Noviembre; s/d US\$6/12) Tidy and cramped; welcoming owners.

**Indiyana Hostel** (☎ 288-8837; Bolívar 349; s/d US\$8/16; P) Just like grandma's house. Comfortable.

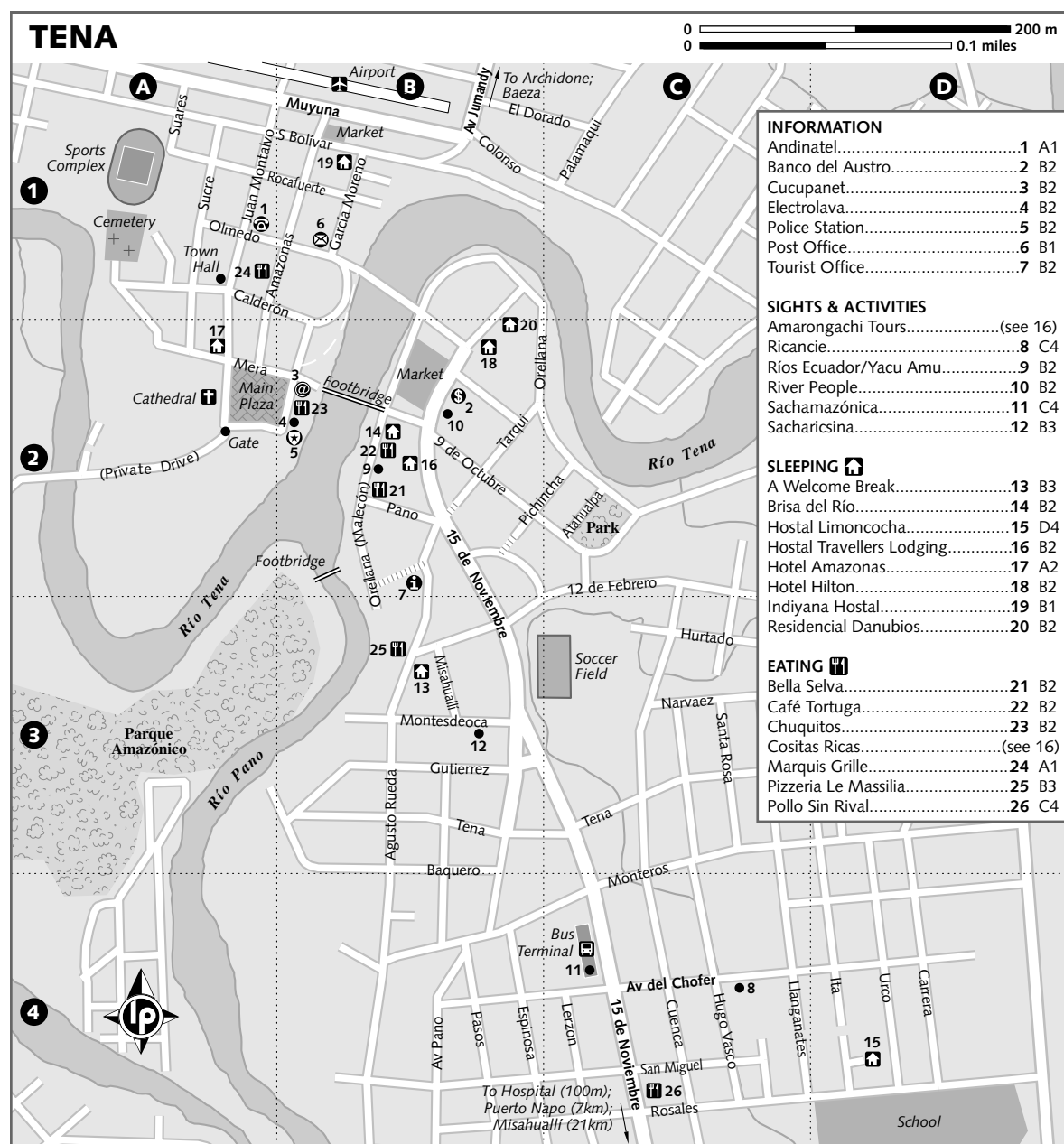
### Eating & Drinking

**Pollo Sin Rival** (15 de Noviembre; mains US\$1.50-3) Perfect if you have a hankering for roasted chicken.

**Café Tortuga** (Orellana; snacks US\$2) Excellent new Swiss-run café on the riverfront serving *empanadas*, fruit frappés, cappuccinos, breakfast and more.

**Bella Selva** (Orellana; mains US\$2-6) Riverfront pizza parlor with tropical tunes and tasty veggie pizzas.

**Chuquitos** (main plaza; mains US\$3-5) An old favorite with a varied menu and excellent fish.



**Cositas Ricas** (15 de Noviembre; mains US\$3-6) Cositas Ricas is a popular place whipping up tasty vegetarian and Ecuadorian dishes and fresh juices.

**Pizzería Le Massilia** (Agosto Rueda; pizzas US\$4-6) Another great riverside pizzeria; nachos too.

**Marquis Grille** (Amazonas 251; full dinner US\$12) Upscale, but family run – a wonderful spot for a splurge. Dinner includes salad, wine and dessert.

For the adventurous, there are grills by the pedestrian bridge cooking up sausages, chicken and *guanta* (a jungle rodent). In addition you'll find cheap food kiosks and cafés with patio seating and cold beer.

### Getting There & Away

The bus terminal is less than 1km south of the main plaza. Several buses a day head for Quito (US\$6, six hours), Lago Agrio (US\$7, eight hours), Coca (US\$7, six hours), Baños (US\$4, five hours) and other places. Buses for Misahuallí (US\$1, one hour) depart hourly from in front of the terminal.

## MISAHUALLÍ

☎ 06

One of the Oriente's sleepest jungle towns, Misahuallí (Mee-sah-wah-YEE) sits swathed in greenery at the junction of two major rivers – the Río Misahuallí and the Río Napo. This was once a bustling connection for jungle tours, but nowadays most trips are booked in Quito. The surrounding area has been colonized for decades, and most mammals have been either hunted or forced out. Still, there are lovely walks to be had (either on your own or with a local guide) and a variety of jungle birds, tropical flowers, army ants, dazzling butterflies and other insects can be seen.

Change money, use the Internet and make phone calls in Tena (p702). There are no street names in Misahuallí, but you can't get lost.

### Activities

The dirt roads around Misahuallí make for relaxing walks to outlying villages. You can also walk to a nearby **waterfall** for swimming and picnics. To get there, take a Misahuallí-Puerto Napo bus and ask the driver to drop you off at Río Latas, about 20 minutes from Misahuallí; ask for *el camino a las cascadas* (the trail to the falls). Follow the river upstream to the falls, about an hour's walk up the river – be prepared to wade.

Be sure to visit the **Butterfly Farm** (admission US\$2; ☎ 9am-4pm), a block off the plaza.

### Tours

If you're hoping to see any of the wildlife, make sure you're venturing well away from Misahuallí. With most tours arranged in Quito, independent travelers to jungle-entry points such as Misahuallí have a harder time organizing a group on-site. If you have a small group you might get a cheaper rate here. Guides will approach you in the main plaza offering tours – most are inexperienced and unlicensed. You're best off hiring a guide recommended here or by other travelers. Tours range from one to 10 days and prices usually include the guide, food, water, accommodations (which range from jungle camping to comfortable lodges) and rubber boots. Rates are usually around US\$25 to US\$40 per person per day.

The following guides and operators are all recommended:

**Ecoselva** (☎ 289-0019; [ecoselva@yahoo.es](mailto:ecoselva@yahoo.es); on the plaza) Excellent guide; accommodations in a rustic lodge or jungle camps.

**Douglas Clarke's Expeditions** (☎ 288-8848; [douglasclarkeexpediciones@yahoo.com](mailto:douglasclarkeexpediciones@yahoo.com)) Reader recommended; most overnights involve camping. Contact the Hostal Marena Internacional.

**Aventuras Amazónicas** (☎ 289-0031; on the plaza) Tours for US\$25 per day. Based in La Posada.

**Luis Zapata** (☎ 289-0084; [zorrozz\\_2000@yahoo.com](mailto:zorrozz_2000@yahoo.com)) Independent guide.

**Marco Coro** (☎ 289-0058; [cachitours@hotmail.com](mailto:cachitours@hotmail.com)) Independent guide.

### Sleeping & Eating

Water and electricity failures are frequent here, and most of the hotels are very basic (forget about hot water), but friendly and totally safe.

**Hostal Shaw** (☎ 289-0019; s/d US\$5/10) Simple rooms with fan and shared bathrooms. Above Ecoselva, on the plaza.

**Hostal Marena Internacional** (☎ 289-0002; r per person US\$5-8) The upper levels of this multistory hotel have a delicious breeze.

**El Paisano** (☎ 289-0027; s/d US\$7/11) This backpacker haunt is remodeling its stagnant rooms so it will most likely look even better than it used to. Cool place.

**Residencial La Posada** (☎ 289-0005; on the plaza; s/d US\$7/14) Basic rooms with hot water and fans are found above this rambling, corner restaurant.

**CRE** (☎ 289-0061; s/d US\$8/16) Tidy and informal motel-style rooms and rustic cabins. Hot water and firm mattresses.

**France Amazonia** (☎ 288-7570; www.france-amazonia.com; s/d incl breakfast US\$16/32) The best in town. Shady thatched huts set around a sparkling pool and connected by stone pathways.

**Restaurant Nico** (☎ 289-0088; Calle Santander; mains US\$2-4) Nico is the best option in town for filling US\$1.75 *almuerzos*.

### Getting There & Away

Buses to Tena (US\$1, one hour) leave hourly from the plaza. Outboard canoe rentals cost US\$25 per hour (up to 12 passengers). If you're staying at a lodge on the Río Napo, transport will be arranged.

### JATUN SACHA BIOLOGICAL RESERVE

On the southern bank of the Río Napo, about 7km east of Misahuallí, **Jatun Sacha Biological Reserve** (admission US\$6) is a biological station and rainforest reserve protecting 850 butterfly species, 535 bird species and an unquantifiable but nonetheless thrilling quantity of fungi. It is run by **Fundación Jatun Sacha** (in Quito ☎ 02-243-2240, 243-2173; www.jatunsacha.org; Pasaje Eugenio de Santillán N34-248 & Maurián, Urbanización Rumipamba), an Ecuadorian non-profit organization. You can visit the reserve on a day trip or stay at **Cabañas Aliñahui**. For the latter, make reservations at the Quito office of Jatun Sacha.

Jatun Sacha and Cabañas Aliñahui are reached from Tena: take an Ahuano or Santa Rosa bus and ask the driver to drop you at either entrance. Aliñahui is about 3km east of the Jatun Sacha research station, or 27km east of Tena on the road to Santa Rosa.

### PUYO

☎ 03 / pop 24,432

An odd mix of concrete and clapboard at the jungle's edge, this friendly, sprawling town is an important stopover for travelers. It's only two hours by bus from the highland town of Baños (p680) and three hours south of Tena. There are often impressive views of the volcanoes to the west – quite a sight from a little lowland town on the edge of the jungle. Nearby indigenous villages make interesting visits.

Marín and Atahualpa are the main downtown streets with the most services. North of downtown, a bridge crossing the Río Puyo leads to the **Paseo Turístico**, a short trail through the woods.

### Information

**Amazonía Touring** (Atahualpa near 10 de Agosto) Changes traveler's checks.

**Andinatel** (Orellana) Telephone call center.

**Banco del Austro** (Atahualpa) Bank with ATM.

**Cámara de Turismo** (☎ 288-6737; Marín, Centro Commercial Zuñiga, 2nd fl) Tourist office.

**Centro de Información de Turismo Responsable** (CITR; 9 de Octubre at Bolívar; Internet access per hr US75¢) Internet access, information on community tourism, and indigenous crafts.

**Post office** (27 de Febrero)

### Tours

The highly recommended **Papangu-Atacapi Tours** (☎ 288-3875; papangu@andinanet.net; 27 de Febrero near Sucre) is a unique Quichua-run tour operator specializing in cultural tourism, offering travelers the opportunity to visit Quichua villages, stay with local families and learn about Quichua lifestyles. The money you spend here goes directly to the communities you visit. One- to 10-day tours (two-person minimum) cost US\$40 per person per day.

### Sleeping

**Hostal Jared** (☎ 288-5670; 27 de Febrero; s/d US\$6/12; Ⓟ) Bright, crisp rooms with ruffled bedcovers and new installations make this friendly spot a great deal.

**Hotel Libertad** (☎ 288-3681; Orellana; s/d US\$6/12) This tranquil spot offers cramped but spotless singles.

**Las Palmas** (☎ 288-4832; www.laspalmas.pastaza.net; cnr Av 20 de Julio & 4 de Enero; s/d US\$10/20) Big yellow colonial place with attractive gardens and a chattering parrot. It's a few-blocks walk to the center. Great value.

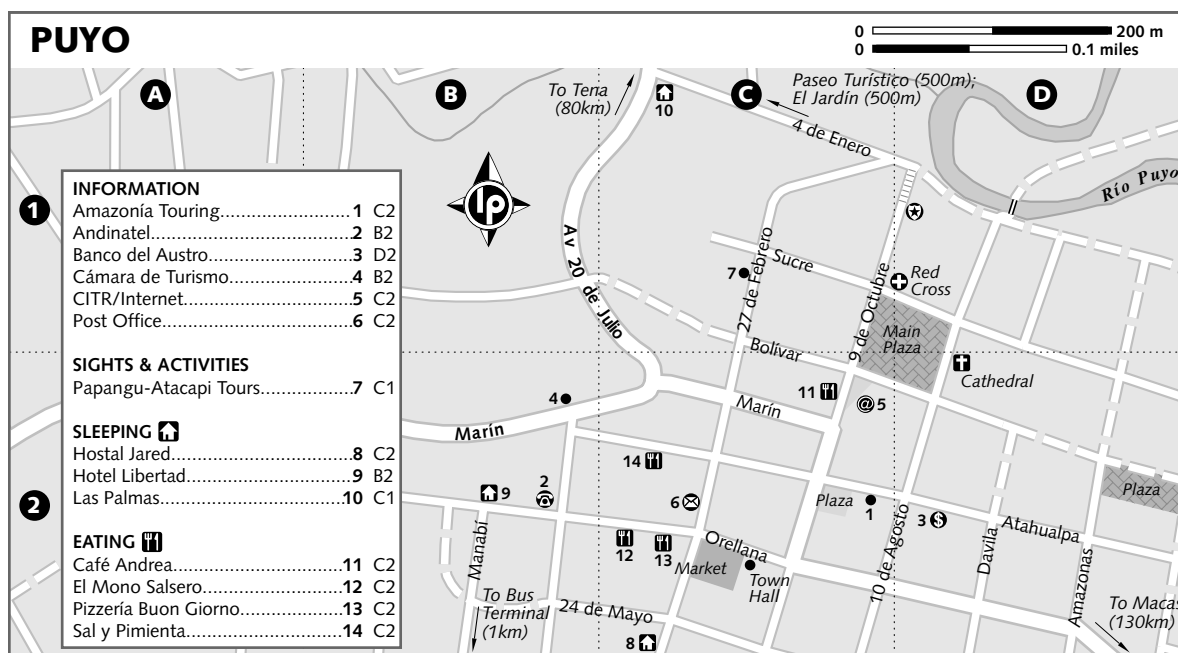
**El Jardín** (☎ 288-6101; www.eljardin.pastaza.net; Paseo Turístico, Barrio Obrero; s/d US\$15/30) A welcoming spot set behind a large garden, this rustic wooden house has hammock balconies and plain but comfortable rooms. Breakfast with fruit and yogurt included.

### Eating

**Café Andrea** (9 de Octubre & Bolívar; snacks US\$2) A cozy spot on the plaza serving cappuccinos, delicious *empanadas de verde* and other snacks.

**Sal y Pimienta** (Atahualpa; almuerzos US\$2) Locals pack this steak joint for cheap, fast meals.

**El Mono Salsero** (Orellana near Villareal; mains US\$2) Pull up a stool at this cheery street-shack and chow hotdogs and *ceviche* with the locals.



**El Jardín** (Paseo Turístico, Barrio Obrero; mains US\$4-5) This ambient house with gardens by the river may just have the best grub in the Oriente. It's just across the footbridge leading to Parque Omaere, at its eponymous hotel.

**Pizzería Buon Giorno** (Orellana; pizzas US\$4.50-6) Pop in for cheese-heavy, thick crust pizza and beer.

### Getting There & Away

The bus terminal is 3km out of town. Buses run regularly to Baños (US\$2, two hours), Quito (US\$5, six hours), Macas (US\$5, five hours) and Tena (US\$3, three hours). Services to other towns are also available.

### MACAS

☎ 07 / pop 13,600

Macas' slow and steady pace and approachable locals make it a welcoming stop. It's also an excellent launch pad for adventures further afield. Macas is situated above the banks of the wild Río Upano, and there are great views of the river and the Río Upano valley from behind the town's cathedral. On a clear day you can glimpse the often smoking Volcán Sangay, some 40km northwest. Though the biggest town in the southern Oriente, it's definitely a small town at heart.

### Information

**Banco del Austro** (cnr 24 de Mayo & 10 de Agosto) Bank with ATM.

**Cámara de Turismo** (☎ 270-1606/0300; Comin near Soasti) Tourist information kiosk.

**Cyber Vision** (Soasti; Internet per hr US\$1.50)

**Pacifictel** (24 de Mayo) Telephone call center.

**Post office** (9 de Octubre near Comin)

### Tours

There are many fascinating trips to be had in the southern Oriente, and Macas is the place to book them. Be aware that the indigenous Shuar do not want unguided visitors in their villages. **Asociación Ecoturismo Danu** (☎ 270-1300; Amazonas & Bolívar, 2nd fl) does trips near and into Parque Nacional Sangay. A three-day tour for two people costs US\$45 per day. **Planeta Tours** (☎ 270-1328; Comin at Soasti) offers cultural tours in Shuar territory, waterfall hikes, fishing and some whitewater canoeing.

Knowledgeable, independent Shuar guides include **Bolivar Caita** (☎ 270-1690; bolicaita@hotmail.com); **Nanki Wampankit** (nanki\_82@hotmail.com) and **Tsunki Marcelo Cajecal** (tourshuar@hotmail.com). Email is the best way to contact them.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Residencial Macas** (☎ 270-0254; 24 de Mayo near Sucre; r with shared/private bathroom per person US\$4/5) Great deal if you don't mind miniscule rooms.

**Hotel Las Orquideas** (☎ 270-0970; 9 de Octubre near Sucre; r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$7/8) An excellent value, with prim, pink rooms away from the noise.

**Hotel Sol del Oriente** (☎ 270-2911; Tarqui & Soasti; r per person US\$8) Nondescript high-rise with large, bright tiled rooms and city views.

**Hotel Heliconia** (☎ 270-1956; h\_heilconia\_macas@hotmail.com; Soasti & 10 de Agosto; s/d US\$13/22) Par-

quet floors, panoramic views and all the mod-cons make this high-rise hotel the best in Macas.

**La Italiana** (Bolívar & Soasti; mains US\$1.50-4) Burritos, pasta and pizza.

**Café bar Maravilla** (Soasti near Sucre; mains US\$4-6) This wonderfully atmospheric eatery serves creative fare and delicious cocktails.

**Restaurant Pagoda** (cnr Amazonas & Comín; mains US\$4-6) The best *chifa* (Chinese restaurant) in Macas.

The *comedores* on Comín near Soasti sell tasty *ayampacos*, a jungle specialty of meat, chicken or fish grilled in *bijao* leaves.

### Getting There & Away

**TAME** (☎ 270-1162/1978; airport) flies to Quito (US\$43 to US\$57) on Monday and Thursday. The bus terminal has several daily departures for Cuenca (US\$8.50, eight hours), Gualaquiza (US\$8, eight to 10 hours), Riobamba and Ambato. Several buses a day leave for Puyo (US\$4, four hours); you have to cross Ríos Pastaza and Pano by footbridges. Buses wait on the other side to continue to Puyo. It's well synchronized.

## PACIFIC COAST & LOWLANDS

Ecuador, land of lively Andean markets, Amazon adventures, gripping Galápagos cruises and ... beaches? Nobody thinks of the coast when they think of Ecuador. It's last on the list for most, and many – after seeing everything else – never actually make it here. It's their loss. Ecuador's northern coast (from the Colombian border south to around Manta) is a land of giant mangroves, Afro-Ecuadorian culture, incredible biodiversity and serious off-the-beaten-track travel. The southern coast (from Parque Nacional Machalilla to the Peruvian border) is justifiably famous for its seafood and has the country's best beaches, including some fabulous stretches along the 'Ruta del Sol' (Route of the Sun). Admittedly, it's no Caribbean, but it's ocean nonetheless. And if it's the sun you're after, time it right: June to November is the rainy season, but also the sunniest; the sun blazes both before and after the afternoon downpour. December through May is often rather overcast and chilly.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Most places along the northern coast can be reached from Quito in a day's travel. The main, fastest route from Quito to the coast is the newer road via the unappealing lowland city of **Santo Domingo de los Colorados**, which has plenty of hotels should the need arise. The *old* road to Santo Domingo passes through Mindo (p675) before winding down to Esmeraldas city.

San Lorenzo (in Esmeraldas province) can be reached by paved road from Ibarra (in the northern highlands) in only four hours. From Cuenca, Guayaquil is less than four hours away via the new road through Parque Nacional Cajas. Nearly the entire coastal highway is now paved. A spectacular road links Latacunga in the highlands to the lowland city of Quevedo, an important junction en route to the south coast. Many people endure the 11-hour bus ride from Quito to Puerto López (p715), a groovy little fishing village and access-point to Parque Nacional Machalilla and the Ruta del Sol.

### SAN LORENZO & AROUND

☎ 06

Encircled by verdant jungle, at the edge of a dank, still sea, San Lorenzo (population 14,600) is a decrepit, lively hodge-podge of blazing heat, tropical beats and crumbling storefronts. Marimba notes and salsa music flavor this mostly African-Ecuadorian outpost, which goes all out in August with an annual music festival. The main reason to visit is to explore the infrequently visited mangroves of the area. Boat tours can be arranged down at the port.

If you're heading south, the road to Esmeraldas passes a recommended hostel in Río Verde (p708). You could also travel by boat through the mangroves via **Limones**, and stop at the muddy fishing village of **Olmedo** (a short walk from La Tola; p708), where there's a tiny hostel run by local Afro-Ecuadorian women. There are few beaches in this area – it's all mangroves.

### Orientation & Information

Calle Imbabura is the main drag. Buses roll into town, pass the train station (on the left) and stop at the end of Imbabura at the plaza. The port is a couple of blocks further down. Money-changing opportunities are poor. Don't wander from the main drag after dark.

## Sleeping & Eating

Hotels are *all* basic. Mosquito nets and fans are recommended and water shortages are frequent.

**Hotel Carondolet** (☎ 278-0202; Parque Central; r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$3.50/4.50) Diminutive rooms with tin-roof views; make sure the sheets are clean.

**Hotel Pampa de Oro** (☎ 278-0214; Calle Tácito Ortíz; r per person US\$6) This hotel has cheerful, clean rooms with fan, mosquito net and private bathrooms.

**Hotel Continental** (☎ 278-0125; Imbabura; r per person with fan/air-con US\$7/10) Fishing murals and creaky floorboards adorn this antiquated hotel. Sizable, clean rooms have TV and warm showers.

**Ballet Azul** (Imbabura; mains US\$2-6) Excellent seafood and knockout *batidos*.

**La Red** (Isidro Ayora near Imbabura; mains US\$3-10) Ambiance is minimal, but the food is lip-smacking good. Try the *encocado* (fish in spicy coconut sauce).

## Getting There & Away

Buses to Ibarra (US\$4, four hours) depart at 1pm and 3pm from the corner of Imbabura and Tácito Ortíz. Buses to Esmeraldas (US\$5, five hours) and Borbón (US\$1.20, one hour) depart hourly between 5am and 4pm from the central plaza.

Although boat traffic has dwindled with the completion of the road to Borbón and Esmeraldas, there are still departures at 8:30am and 11am for La Tola (US\$6, 2½ hours), via Limones (US\$3, 1½ hours). The ride through the coastal mangroves to these tiny, predominantly Afro-Ecuadorian fishing villages is quite an experience. Prepare for sun, wind and spray. The 8:30am departure connects in La Tola with buses to Esmeraldas (four to five hours).

## BORBÓN & AROUND

☎ 06

The only reason to stop in this small, muddy, ramshackle lumber port (besides to watch the old men play dominoes) is to make boat connections up the Ríos Cayapas and San Miguel to Reserva Ecológica Cotacachi-Cayapas, or up the Río Santiago to Playa de Oro. In Borbón, **La Tolita Pampa de Oro** (r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$3/5) offers basic lodging in a rambling blue boarding house. There are several simple restaurants in town.

An hour beyond Borbón (traveling along the coast, not upriver) is the friendly seaside village of **Río Verde**, where the recommended **Hostería Pura Vida** (☎ 274-4203; [hosteriapuravida.com](http://hosteriapuravida.com); r per person US\$10, cabañas US\$15; meals US\$3-5) offers clean rooms or *cabañas* near the beach. It also has a restaurant. The owners arrange mountain biking, fishing and other excursions and volunteering in local schools.

Buses from Borbón to Esmeraldas (US\$3, four hours) and San Lorenzo (US\$1.20, one hour) leave frequently. Esmeraldas-bound buses will drop you at Pura Vida, 2km past the Río Verde bridge.

## RESERVA ECOLÓGICA COTACACHI-CAYAPAS

Borbón's daily passenger boat to **San Miguel** (US\$8, five hours, 11am) is a fascinating trip into the little-explored coastal interior, enthusiastically described by one visitor as 'the other heart of darkness.' San Miguel is the jumping-off point for trips into the rarely-visited Reserva Ecológica Cotacachi-Cayapas (admission US\$5).

The park boasts waterfalls, rainforest trails, great bird-watching and opportunities to see monkeys and other wildlife. A shop in San Miguel sells a few supplies and basic meals are available for about US\$5. Indigenous Cayapas people live across the river and can be visited. The **San Miguel Eco-project** (☎ in Quito 02-252-8769; [www.ecosanmiguel.org](http://www.ecosanmiguel.org); tour/accommodation package per day US\$30) is a community-run program offering two and three day trips into the rainforest. The **ranger station** (per person US\$5), perched on a small hill with spectacular views of the rainforest and river, offers basic accommodations. Beware of ferocious chiggers. The best time to visit the park is from September to December.

The daily passenger canoe does not return to San Miguel unless passengers have made previous arrangements, so advise the boatman. It will then leave San Miguel around 4am.

## PLAYA DE ORO

The other river leading inland from the Borbón is Río Santiago. The furthest community up the river is the remote settlement of **Playa de Oro**, near the border of Reserva Ecológica Cotacachi-Cayapas. Half an hour upstream from Playa de Oro is the **Playa de Oro Reserva de Tigrillos**, a 10,000-hectare reserve that protects native jungle cats. The best way to experience



it is by staying at the community operated river-side **jungle lodge** ([www.touchthejungle.org](http://www.touchthejungle.org); r per person US\$50). Prices include three meals and local guides. It's an authentic-feeling and totally unique experience.

Playa de Oro is about five hours upstream from Borbón, but there are no regular boats. You have to take the 7:30am bus from Borbón to Selva Alegre (US\$3, two hours). From Selva Alegre, if you made a reservation, a boat from Playa de Oro will motor you up to the village or the reserve. The two-hour river trip (2½ hours if you're going to the reserve) from Selva Alegre costs US\$50, split among the number in your group. Reservations must be made at least a month in advance with **Rosa Jordan** ([rosaj@touchthejungle.org](mailto:rosaj@touchthejungle.org)) or **Tracy Wilson** ([tracy@touchthejungle.org](mailto:tracy@touchthejungle.org)); both speak English.

## ESMERALDAS

☎ 06 / pop 95,124

Lively, noisy and notoriously dodgy, Esmeraldas is an important port and home to a major oil refinery. For travelers, it's little more than a necessary stop to make bus connections. If you need to spend the night, the old, wooden **Hostal Miraflores** (☎ 272-3077; Bolívar 6-04, 2nd fl, on the plaza; s/d US\$4/8) is the best bet for backpackers.

The airport is 25km up the road to San Lorenzo; taxi fare is US\$6. **TAME** (☎ 272-6862/3; Bolívar at 9 de Octubre), near the plaza, flies to Quito (US\$33) on Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday.

Buses leave from different stops within walking distance of each other and the main plaza. **Aero Taxi** (Sucre near Rocafuerte), **Transportes Occidentales** (9 de Octubre near Sucre), **Transportes Esmeraldas** (10 de Agosto, Plaza Central) and **Panamérica International** (Piedrahita near Olmedo) all go to Quito (US\$6, six hours). Occidentales and Esmeraldas both have many buses to Guayaquil (US\$5 to US\$7, eight hours), Ambato, Machala (\$7, nine hours) and other cities. **Reina del Camino** (Piedrahita near Bolívar) serves Manta (US\$7, seven hours) and Bahía de Caráquez (US\$7, eight hours).

**Transportes La Costeñita** (Malecón Maldonado) and **Transportes del Pacífico** (Malecón Maldonado) head frequently to Atacames and Súa (both US\$80¢, about one hour) and Muisne (US\$2, two hours). These companies also go to Borbón (US\$3.50, four hours) and San Lorenzo (US\$5, five hours). These buses pass the airport.

## ATACAMES

☎ 06 / pop 9785

Crowded with thatched bars, sarong shops and festive *serranos*, Ecuador's most popular beach can be interpreted in two ways: as chaotic fun or a crowded nightmare. Impressions depend on mind-set and time of year. During the high season (July to mid-September, Christmas through New Year's, Carnival and Easter), it's nonstop *farra*. The rest of the season, it's dead.

Buses drop passengers off in the center of town, on the main road from Esmeraldas (get off at the tricycle rickshaw stand). The center is on the inland side of the highway, and the beach is reached by a small footbridge over the Río Atacames or by rickshaw (US\$1). Most of the hotels and bars are along the *malecón* (waterfront).

## Dangers & Annoyances

A powerful undertow here causes drownings every year, so keep within your limits. There have been assaults on late-night beach goers, and camping is unsafe. Don't leave anything unattended on the beach.

## Sleeping

Hotels fill up fast on weekends and holidays. Prices quoted here are for the high season, during which hotels generally charge a four-person minimum (the number of beds in most hotel rooms).

At the west end of the *malecón*, Calle Las Acacias runs away from the beach toward the highway. Atacames' cheapest hotels are along this street. Most of them are simple but just fine.

**Galería** (☎ 273-1149; Malecón; r per person US\$8; 📺) Guests have raved about this bare-bones beachfront motel with all the ambiance of a pile of driftwood washed ashore. Pool use costs US\$2 extra.

**Hotel Jennifer** (☎ 273-1055; near Malecón; r per person US\$10) Spartan but good rooms, plus rustic cabins out back. Excellent value.

**Cabañas Sol y Mar** (☎ 273-1524; r per person US\$10; 📺) Service is indifferent, but rooms are tiled and airy.

**Cabañas Los Bohios** (☎ 273-1089; Calle Principal; r per person US\$14; cabañas per person US\$27 📺) Amenable but cramped doll-sized bamboo *cabañas* with TV and fans set in prim gardens.

**Hotel Tahiti** (☎ 273-1078; Malecón; r per person US\$20, cabañas US\$12; 📺) Beachfront digs

with cheap, dark *cabañas* or cheerier hotel rooms.

**Villas Arco Iris** (☎ 273-1069; [www.villasarcoiris.com](http://www.villasarcoiris.com); Malecón; r per person US\$22; 🚻 🚿) Atacames' coziest beachside retreat has impeccable service and a relaxed atmosphere.

### Eating

Restaurants near the beach all serve the same thing – the day's catch. Locals pour into the *ceviche* stalls west of the footbridge. You adventurous eaters should join them. Bowl starts at around US\$3.

**Walfredo's** (Calle Principal; mains US\$3-6) For a seafood selection as giant as its open-air dining area, try this local favorite (the street is parallel to and behind the *malecón*).

**Pizzería No Name** (Malecón; pizzas US\$5-8) The place for pizza.

### Getting There & Away

There are regular buses to Esmeraldas (US\$80¢, one hour), as well as south to Súa (US\$50¢, 10 minutes), Same (US\$50¢, 15 minutes) and Muisne (US\$1.50, 1½ hours). Transportes Occidentales and Aerotaxi, whose offices are near the highway, both go to Quito daily (US\$9, seven hours).

## SÚA

☎ 06

This friendly fishing village, 6km west of Atacames, is far more tranquil than its party-town neighbor. It's a good place to kick the feet up in the sun and swim in the mellow bay.

There are fewer lodgings here than in Atacames, but they're also quieter and often better value if you aren't looking for nightlife. **Hotel Chagra Ramos** (☎ 273-1006; r per person US\$7) has a good, inexpensive restaurant, a little beach and nice views. Off the beach, the perfectly acceptable **Hotel El Peñón de Súa** (☎ 273-1013; s/d US\$8/16) has concrete-wall rooms. On the beach, **Hotel Las Bouganvillas** (☎ 273-1008; s/d US\$8/16) has cheery rooms with balconies.

### SAME & TONCHIGÜE

☎ 06

Exclusive hotels hug the palm-fringed coast of Same (*sah-may*), a resort village 6km southwest of Súa. A notch tamer than even Súa, its quiet, moneyed aesthetic is the antithesis of Atacames. Colombian-owned **Azuca** (☎ 733-343; Entrada Las Canoas, Carretera; r per person US\$10), on the highway, is the cheapest place in town. It's an

eclectic, artsy place with just a few rooms over a good restaurant.

About 3km past Same, Tonchigüe is a tiny fishing village whose beach is a continuation of the Same beach. **Playa Escondida** (☎ 273-3122, 09-973-3368; [www.playaescondida.com.ec](http://www.playaescondida.com.ec); camp site per person US\$5, r per person US\$8-12) is 3km west of Tonchigüe and 10km down the road to Punta Galeras. It's an isolated, quiet, beautiful spot, run by a Canadian named Judy. It has a restaurant and lots of empty, hidden beach.

## MUISNE

☎ 05

Muisne's long, wide beach is exposed to the wind and backed by a few sandy little hotels and simple restaurants. Most of Muisne is on an island, separated from the mainland by the Río Muisne. Buses stop at the dock, where boats (US\$20¢) cross the river to the town. On the island, the main road heads from the dock through the 'center' of town and crumbles slowly away to the beach, 1.5km away. Hire an 'ecotaxi' (tricycle) for a ride to the beach if you're feeling lazy.

The rustic, wooden, rambling pink **Playa Paraíso** (☎ 248-0192; r per person US\$5, cabañas US\$8) is the best on the beach. It has a lovely garden, hammocks and English-speaking owners. Just down the beach, **Spondylus** (☎ 248-0279; r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$7/9) is also good.

Many of the restaurants scattered along the beach serve *encocado*; it's usually excellent.

La Costeñita runs hourly buses to Esmeraldas (US\$2, 2½ hours) via Atacames (one hour). Transportes Occidentales has night buses to Quito (US\$8, eight hours). Buses head daily to Santo Domingo, with connections to Quito and Guayaquil.

The easiest way to work south from Muisne is by bussing to the road junction known as **El Salto** (US\$50¢, 30 minutes) and then grabbing a passing bus to **Pedernales**. Between El Salto and Pedernales, you sometimes have to change buses in **San José de Chamanga** (you'll recognize Chamanga by the floating piles of garbage and stilted houses). Pedernales has connections further south and into the highlands.

## MOMPICHE

☎ 05

Besides a stretch of palm-fringed sands, Mompiche has little else. That's the beauty. Its claim to fame is its world-class wave – a left-hand point-break that rolls to life during

big swells. Get your 40 winks at **Gabeal** (☎ 09-969-6543; east beach; camping US\$3, r per person US\$15), a set of bamboo cabins with cold water bathrooms. Horse-riding and surf lessons are available.

*Rancheras* go to and from Esmeraldas every day (US\$3.50, 3½ hours), passing Atacames on the way.

## CANOA

☎ 05 / pop 6086

Surfers, fishermen and sun-seekers share this gorgeous, fat strip of beach – one of the best around – and the village continues to grow. **Caves** at the northern end of the beach can be reached at low tide.

Hot showers and friendly service make **Hostal Shelmar** (☎ 09-864-4892; [shelmar66@hotmail.com](mailto:shelmar66@hotmail.com); Av Javier Santos 304; r per person US\$6) a great deal. It's a few blocks from the beach.

Dutch-owned **Hotel Bambu** (☎ 261-6370; [www.ecuadorexplorer.com/bambu](http://www.ecuadorexplorer.com/bambu); camp sites US\$2, s/d with shared bathroom US\$7/12, private bathroom US\$20) rents spotless, cottagelike rooms on the beach. The grounds are scattered with hammocks, the restaurant is excellent, and juices and cold beers make everyone happy.

Spacious cabins surround a clean swimming pool at **La Posada de Daniel** (☎ 261-6373; [posadadedaniel183@hotmail.com](mailto:posadadedaniel183@hotmail.com); camping US\$4, r per person US\$8; ☎ ☎). Three blocks inland.

**Arenabar** (Malecón; pizzas US\$2-3) has tasty pizza and dancing on Saturday nights.

Three blocks up from the beach, **Restaurante Torbellino** (mains US\$3-5) serves excellent seafood and delicious, cheap *almuerzos*.

## SAN VICENTE

☎ 05

This busy town is a short ferry ride across the Río Chone from the more popular resort of Bahía de Caráquez. Most travelers stop only for bus connections or to catch the ferry to Bahía.

Buses leave from the market area near the pier. Costa del Norte offers hourly service to Pedernales (US\$3, three hours). Coactur serves Manta, Portoviejo and Guayaquil (US\$7, six hours) daily. Ferries to Bahía de Caráquez (US35¢, 10 minutes) leave often from the pier between 6am and 10pm.

## BAHÍA DE CARÁQUEZ

☎ 05 / pop 19,700

Chalk-colored high-rises, red tile roofs, manicured yards and swept sidewalks give this self-proclaimed 'eco-city' a tidy impression.

You'd hardly know it was devastated by a massive earthquake, followed by floods, in 1998. Today, the town market recycles its waste, organic shrimp farms are starting up, and reforestation projects dot the hillside. There are several interesting eco and cultural tours worth checking out, but if you're after beaches you'll have to head elsewhere.

## Orientation & Information

The town is on a small peninsula only four blocks wide at its narrowest, northern point. Ferries from San Vicente cross the Río Chone and dock at the piers along Malecón Alberto Santos, on the peninsula's eastern side. Most services are on and around the *malecón* and the parallel street of Bolívar, one block west.

**Genesis Net** (Malecón Alberto Santos 1302; per hr US\$1.60) offers Internet access. **Banco de Guayaquil** (Bolívar & Riofrío) cashes traveler's checks and has an ATM.

## Tours

Tours in Bahía are unique. The two operators listed here devote themselves to ecotourism and will show you local environmental projects and take you to handmade-paper cooperatives. Both companies offer day trips to Islas Fragatas in the Chone estuary. **Guacamayo Bahíatours** (☎ 269-1412; [www.guacamayotours.com](http://www.guacamayotours.com); Bolívar at Arenas) also arranges stays at nearby Río Muchacho Organic Farm. **Bahía Dolphin Tours** (☎ 269-2097/86; Bolívar 1004) offers visits to its nearby archaeological site.

## Sleeping

The cheapest places usually have water-supply problems.

**Bahía Hotel** (☎ 269-0509; Malecón Alberto Santos at Vinuesa; r per person US\$7-10) Rooms at this cheery hotel overlooking the water are a little worn out, but they're clean.

**La Herradura** (☎ 269-0446; Bolívar 202; s US\$8-16, d US\$20-25; ☎ ☎) Old Spanish home with antiques and artwork brimming from its nooks. Upper-level rooms have balconies; two have ocean views.

Other cheapies include:

**Residencia Vera** (☎ 269-1581; Ante 212 near Bolívar; r per person US\$4) Fair value; very basic but fine.

**Bahía B&B** (☎ 269-0146; Ascázubi 322; r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$6/8) Fine for a night.

**El Viajero** (☎ 269-0792; Bolívar 910; s/d US\$8/16) Ample, simple rooms in a rambling old house.



wooden fishing boats are still built by hand on the beach, continuing the *manteños* (people from Manta) strong seafaring tradition. This may not be the place for empty, paradisiacal beaches, but it's an interesting place to soak up the atmosphere of a busy, relatively safe Ecuadorian port city.

Manta is named after the Manta culture (AD 500 to 1550), known for its pottery and navigational skills. The Mantas sailed to Central America, Peru and possibly the Galápagos.

### Orientation

A stinky inlet divides the town into Manta (west side) and Tarqui (east side); the two sides are joined by a vehicle bridge. Manta has the main offices, shopping areas and bus terminal, while Tarqui has the cheaper hotels.

The airport is 3km east of Tarqui, and the bus terminal, conveniently, is in Manta, one block off the *malecón*.

### Information

**Banco del Pacífico ATM** (cnr Av 107 & Calle 103, Tarqui)  
Traveler's checks, ATM.

**Banco del Pichincha** (Av 2 at Calle 11, Manta)  
Traveler's checks, ATM.

**Cyber Café** (Av 1 near Calle 14; per hr US70¢)

**Municipal tourist office** (☎ 261-1471; Calle 9, Town Hall)

**Pacifictel** (Malecón de Manta) Telephone center; on the Manta waterfront.

**Post office** (Calle 8 at Av 4, Manta)

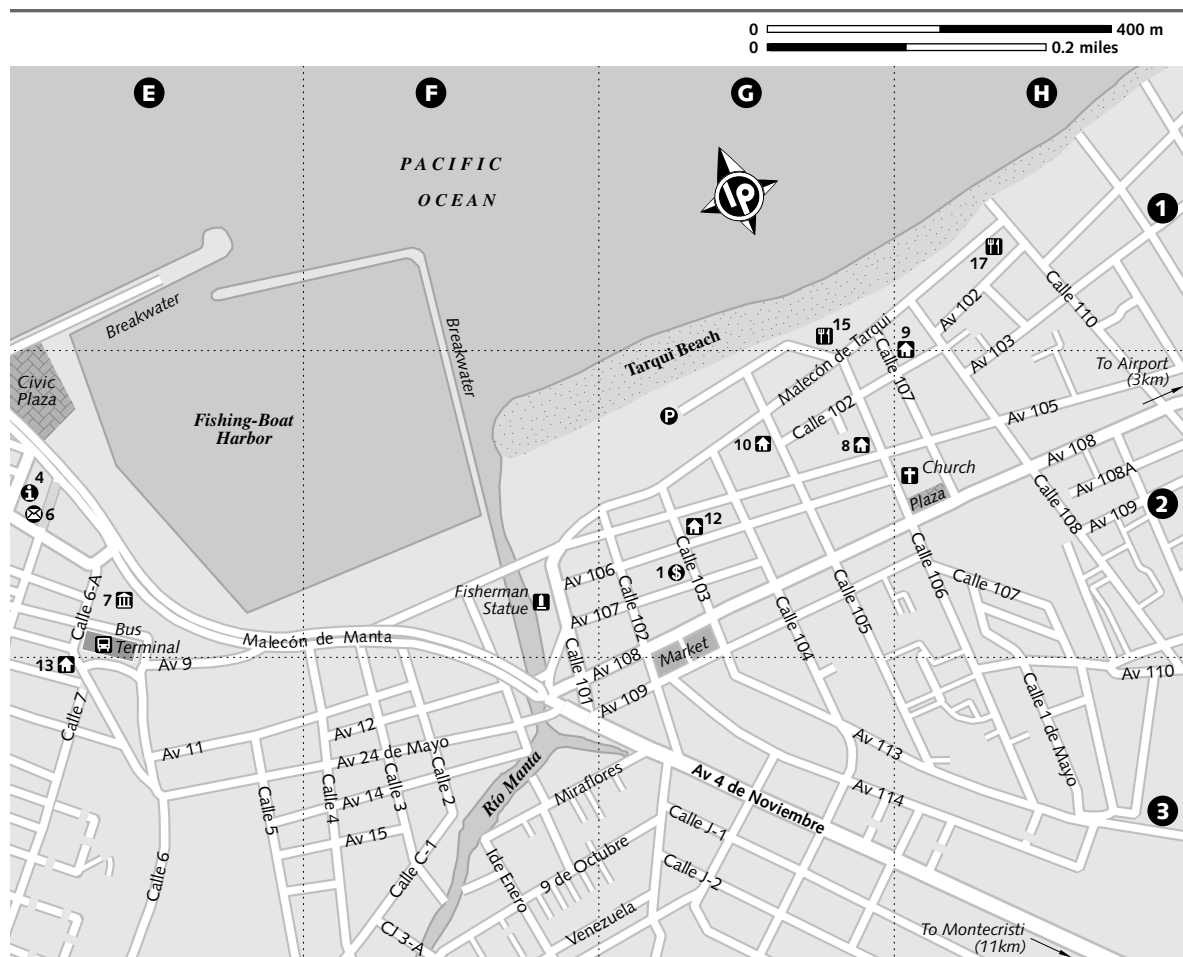
### Sights

The clean, wide **Playa Murciélago**, which lies 2km west of Manta's center, is popular with residents and Ecuadorian tourists alike. **Tarqui beach** is less picturesque, but it's interesting in the early morning when fisherfolk haul their catches ashore in front of the boat-building area.

The **Museo del Banco Central** (Malecón de Manta; admission US\$1, free Sun; ☒ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-3pm Sun) houses a small but interesting exhibit on the Manta culture.

### Sleeping

Prices rise during holiday weekends and the December-to-March and June-to-August high seasons, when single rooms are hard to find.



**Hostal Astoria 2** (☎ 0262-8045; Av 105 at Calle 106, Tarqui; r per person US\$5) Fresh paint and new furnishings make this well-kept cheapie a great value.

**Hostal Miami** (☎ 0262-2055; Av 102 & Calle 107, Tarqui; r per person US\$5) Spacious but spartan rooms in sea foam green offer ocean views off the balconies.

**Hotel Panorama Inn** (☎ 261-1552; Calle 103 near Av 105, Tarqui; s/d US\$6/12, annex US\$20/40; 🚽) Barebones but spacious rooms have private bathrooms, TV and large windows. Drab, yes, but it's a good deal. Pricier rooms in annex have air-conditioning.

**Hotel El Inca** (☎ 262-0440; Calle 105 & Malecón, Tarqui; s/d US\$10/20) This old-world pension has small, neat rooms, wall murals, worn edges, and nostalgic appeal.

**Leo Hotel** (☎ 262-3159; Av 24 de Mayo, Manta; s with fan/air-con US\$12/15; 🚽) Best of the batch near the bus terminal. Good place.

**Hotel Manta Imperial** (☎ 262-2016; Malecón at Calle 20, Manta; s/d with fan US\$27/34, with air-con US\$32/40; 🚽 🍷) This 1960's concrete palace has seen better days, but it's still one of the better deals on the Manta side.

## Eating

Cheap outdoor seafood restaurants line the eastern end of Tarqui beach. The **Playa Murciélago seafood** restaurants are newer but still cheap.

**Fruta del Tiempo** (cnr Av 1 & Calle 12; mains US\$1-3) Slip into a bamboo chair for great juices, breakfasts, filling lunches and ice-cream sundaes.

**Bufalo Grill** (Av 6 btwn Calle 13 & Calle 14; lunch US\$2) Freddy cooks up tasty lunch specials in this local hole-in-the-wall favorite.

**Pizzería Topi** (Malecón de Manta; mains US\$3-6) Pizzas till the wee hours.

**Rincon Criollo** (Flavio Reyes & Calle 20; lunch US\$3.50; 🍷 lunch only) This hopping local haunt serves traditional peanut soup, chicken and rice and more.

**Picantería El Marino** (Malecón de Tarqui & Calle 110; mains US\$4-6) Blue checkered tablecloths, whopping seafood plates, ocean views and icy air-con!

## Drinking

The epicenter of Manta's nightlife is the intersection of Flavio Reyes and Calle 20, uphill from Playa Murciélago.

**Tantra** (Flavio Reyes & Calle 20) Packed on weekends with stiletto-heeled salsa dancers.

**Madera Fina** (Flavio Reyes near Calle 23) This long-time favorite features salsa, reggae and tropical rhythms.

**Krug** (Flavio Reyes) An amenable bar with a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere.

## Getting There & Away

The **airport** (☎ 262-1580) is some 3km east of Tarqui; a taxi costs about US\$1. **TAME** (☎ 262-2006; Malecón de Manta) flies daily to Quito (US\$45).

Buses depart frequently to Portoviejo (US\$75¢, 40 minutes), Guayaquil (US\$4.50, four hours), Quito (US\$8, nine hours) and Bahía de Caráquez (US\$3, 2½ hours); and to Puerto López (US\$2.50, 2½ hours) and Montañita (US\$5, 3½ hours). Coactur goes to Pedernales (US\$5, seven hours) and Canoa regularly. Most other major destinations are also served regularly.

## PARQUE NACIONAL MACHALILLA

☎ 05

Preserving isolated beaches, coral formations, two offshore islands, tropical dry forest, coastal cloud forest, archaeological sites and 20,000 hectares of ocean, Ecuador's only coastal **national park** (admission US\$20) is a marvelous and unique destination. The tropical dry forest seen here used to stretch along much of the Pacific coast of Central and South America, but it has been whacked nearly into extinction. Plants in the park include cacti, various figs and the giant kapok tree. Howler monkeys, anteaters, iguanas and some 200 bird species inhabit the forest interior, while the coastal edges are home to frigate birds, pelicans and boobies, some of which nest in colonies on the offshore islands.

The beautiful beach of **Playa Los Frailes** is about 10km north of Puerto López, just before the town of Machalilla. Buses stop in front of the ranger station, from where a 3km road and a 4km trail lead to the beach. The swimming is good, seabirds are plentiful and camping is allowed.

The barren, sun-charred **Isla de la Plata**, an island 40km northwest of Puerto López, is a highlight of the park, especially from mid-June to mid-October when humpback whales mate offshore and sightings from tour boats (arranged in Puerto López, opposite) are practically guaranteed. The island itself hosts nesting seabird colonies, and a short hike is usually included in the whale-watching tours.

Outside whale season, you may see dolphins. It takes two to three hours to reach the island. Camping is not permitted.

From the mainland park entrance, 6km north of Puerto López, a dirt road goes 5km to **Agua Blanca** (village admission US\$3), a little village with an **archaeological museum** (admission free with village entry; ☎ 8am-6pm) and a Manta archaeological site nearby. The area has hiking and horse trails, and guides are available. Camping is permitted here or you can stay in people's homes.

Visitor information is available in Puerto López at the **park headquarters and museum** (☎ 260-4170; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri). The US\$20 park entrance fee covers all sectors of the park (including the islands) and is valid for five days. If you plan to visit *only* Isla de la Plata, the fee is US\$15; the mainland-only fee is US\$12. The fee is charged in all sectors of the park, so carry your ticket.

## PUERTO LÓPEZ

☎ 05 / pop 7720

Chipped blue fishing boats bob on a beautiful fishhook bay and cheerful hotels, a smattering of ex-pats, slow smiles, happy cafés and a dirt-road pace of life make it tough to leave. With its unbeatable location near Parque Nacional Machalilla, Puerto López is an obligatory stop on any coastal jaunt.

There are Internet cafés in town, and **Banco de Pichincha** (cnr Machalilla & General Córdova) has an ATM and changes traveler's checks.

### Tours

Numerous outfits offer trips to Isla de la Plata and/or tours of the mainland area of the park. Most agencies charge US\$35 per person (not including the park entrance fee) for a trip to the island and seasonal whale watching. Licensed companies have better boats and more equipment (such as life jackets, radio and backup) than the unlicensed guides who offer the trip for nearly half the price. Companies with good reputations include **Exploramar** (Malecón), **Machalilla Tours** (☎ 230-0206; Malecón) and **Mantaraya** (☎ 230-0233; General Córdova at Juan Montalvo).

### Sleeping

**Sol Inn** (☎ 230-0248; [hostal\\_solinn@hotmail.com](mailto:hostal_solinn@hotmail.com); Juan Montalvo near Eloy Alfaro; r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$5/6) Sol Inn definitely has a *buena onda* (good vibe) thanks to its friendly, young owners. It's a two-story bamboo-and-wood

structure with colorfully painted rooms and a communal outdoor kitchen.

**Hostal Monte Libano** (☎ 230-0231; Malecón southern end; r per person US\$5-6) Rooms are not for claustrophobes, but the place is nonetheless clean and friendly. It's close to the beach.

**Hostal Flipper** (☎ 230-0221; General Córdova at Rocafuerte; s/d US\$6/12) Immaculate new *hostal* with terracotta walls and airy rooms.

**Hostería Itapoá** (☎ 09-984-3042, in Quito ☎ 02-255-1569; Calle Abdón Calderón; cabañas per person US\$7.50) This hospitable Brazilian/Ecuadorian place is an affordable retreat of whitewashed *cabañas* set around a blooming garden bordered by hammocks.

**Hostería Mandala** (☎ 230-0181, 09-950-0880; cabins s/d/tr US\$15/24/36; ☎) Just north of town, this beautiful beachfront *hostería* (small hotel) has a handful of ecologically-minded cabins set in a labyrinthine garden. The lodge has a bar, game room and multilingual library, and the restaurant serves delectable breakfasts, Italian fare and local seafood. Outstanding.

### Eating

**Café Bellena/The Whale Café** (Malecón; mains US\$2-6) Serves great breakfasts (the apple-cinnamon pancakes are sublime), excellent desserts and pizzas and vegetarian meals.

**Patacon Pisa'o** (General Córdova; mains US\$3) Forget seafood. This tiny Colombian joint serves fantastic *arepas* (maiz pancakes) with shredded beef, chicken or beans.

**Bellitalia** (Juan Montalvo; ☎ from 6pm) This candlelit little number offers divine Italian food, good wine and a great tiramisu.

Along the *malecón* you'll find traditional seafood restaurants with patio dining. **Restaurant Carmita** (Malecón; mains US\$2-3) is the best known but others, like Picantería Rey Hojas and Mayflower, serve up comparable fare.

### Getting There & Away

There are several daily buses to Quito (US\$12, 11 hours). Buses to Jipijapa can drop you at the national park entrance and at other coastal points. Hourly buses head south to Santa Elena and can drop you at points along the way.

## SOUTH OF PUERTO LÓPEZ

☎ 04

This stretch of the Ruta del Sol (Route of the Sun) is particularly inviting, thanks to its tiny fishing villages and wide beaches. Some 14km south of Puerto López (right after the village

of Puerto Rico), **Hostería Andaluz** (☎ 278-0690; in Quito ☎ 02-254-3042; [www.andaluzhosteria.com](http://www.andaluzhosteria.com); camping US\$4, r per person US\$14-33) is one of Ecuador's first self-sustaining, low-impact resorts. It's Ecuadorian-run and built from fast-growing (and easily replaceable) local bamboo and palm leaves. You can bask on the undisturbed beach, ride horses, play volleyball or just hang out – the atmosphere is very relaxed. Meals are provided at reasonable prices.

The next village south (blink and you'll miss it) is **Las Tunas**. The beach here is long, wide and empty. You'll know you're in Las Tunas when you spot the grounded bow of a giant wooden boat, which is actually the restaurant-half of a hotel, appropriately called **La Barquita** (The Little Boat; ☎ 278-0051, 278-0683; [www.labarquita-ec.com](http://www.labarquita-ec.com); dm US\$10, d/tr US\$28/36) and has clean, comfortable doubles with hammocks out front, a few *cabañas* and inexpensive dorm beds. Also in Las Tunas is **Hostería La Perla** (☎ 278-0701; [www.proyectospondylus.org](http://www.proyectospondylus.org); s/d US\$20/40), a romantic beach house weathered by sun and sand. Owner Mónica Fabara is a marine biologist and highly regarded local guide.

Sandwiched between verdant tropical hills and another long, wide beach, the sandy little village of **Ayampe** is about 17km south of Puerto López, right on the Guayas-Manabí provincial line. Of the handful of excellent guesthouses here, the tiny, delightful **Cabañas de la Iguana** (☎ 278-0605; [www.ayampeiguana.com](http://www.ayampeiguana.com); r with shared/private bathroom per person US\$7/8) is the cheapest. The hillside **Finca Punta Ayampe** (☎ 278-0616; [www.fincapuntaayampe.com](http://www.fincapuntaayampe.com); r/cabaña per person US\$8/12) is very groovy.

The next coastal village is **Olón**, which has a nice beach, a cheap *pensión* and a pricey hotel.

## MONTAÑITA

☎ 04

Blessed with the country's best surf – and more budget hotels than you can shake your board at – Montañita means bare feet, baggy shorts, surf and scene. Some dig it, others despise it. Despite its rapid growth, it's as mellow and friendly as ever. Several shops in town rent boards.

There are several **cybercafés** in town. **Banco de Guayaquil** has an ATM.

### Sleeping & Eating

Hotels in the village are cheaper than those along the beach toward La Punta (The Point).

Book a room in advance (and bring earplugs) during the December-through-April high season. Restaurants are plentiful; stroll around and choose what looks best.

**La Casa del Sol** (☎ 290-1302; [www.casasol.com](http://www.casasol.com); r per person US\$4-10) Comfortable but not too luxurious, this one's laid-back and lovely – an excellent choice down on the beach.

**Tiki Limbo Backpackers Hostel** (☎ 254-0607; [tikilimbo@hotmail.com](mailto:tikilimbo@hotmail.com); r per person from US\$5) Noisy as the rest of 'em on this strip, the Tiki Limbo boasts a fantastic second floor lounge area. There's a good vegetarian restaurant attached.

**El Centro del Mundo** (☎ 278-2831; r per person with shared/private bathroom US\$5/6) Three-story behemoth close to the beach with no frills rooms and makeshift shared toilets and showers. Communal balconies face the ocean.

**Cabañas Pakaloro** (☎ 290-1366; [pakaloro69@hotmail.com](mailto:pakaloro69@hotmail.com); s/d US\$6/11) Beautiful craftsmanship, attention to detail, immaculate rooms, porch hammocks and polished wooden floors makes this one of the best in town.

**Charo Hostal** (☎ 290-1344; [charo117@msn.com](mailto:charo117@msn.com); r from US\$8) Though it lacks the rustic vibe of others in town, its beachfront location and clean, well kept rooms are recommended.

**Paradise South** (☎ 290-1185; [www.paradisouthec.com](http://www.paradisouthec.com); r US\$10-20) Down on the beach and great for those seeking silence. The adobe-walled cottages have ceramic floors and modern bathrooms.

### Getting There & Away

Three CLP buses pass Montañita on their way south to Guayaquil (US\$5, 3½-four hours) at 5am, 1pm and 5pm. Buses south to Santa Elena (US\$1.50, 1¼ hours) and La Libertad, or north to Puerto Lopez (US\$1.50, one hour) pass every fifteen minutes.

## MANGLARALTO

☎ 04

With a smattering of basic hotels and restaurants, this wee town on a wide-open beach lies 4km from Montañita. South of Manglaralto, **Valdivia** is home to Ecuador's oldest archaeological site.

**Fundación Pro Pueblo** (☎ 278-0231; [www.propueblo.com](http://www.propueblo.com)) offers travelers the chance to visit remote coastal villages and stay with local families. A nominal fee includes meals, guides and mules. This nonprofit organization promotes sustainable development, local artisans and responsible tourism.



Just north of town on the beach, **Kamala Hostería** (☎ 242-3754; www.kalahosteria.com; dm per person US\$3, cabanas US\$25-\$45) is a hodgepodge of jerry-rigged *cabañas* owned by four backpackers. PADI dive courses, horse-riding and day tours are offered, and a restaurant serves food. Monthly full-moon parties too!

## SANTA ELENA & LA LIBERTAD

If you're heading south to Guayaquil and don't take one of the direct CLP buses (see Montañita), you'll have to change buses in one of these two cities. Santa Elena is easiest – the driver will drop you where the road forks; cross the street and flag a bus on the other fork. Avoid the ugly, dusty, busy port of La Libertad.

## PLAYAS

☎ 04

Hovering somewhere between interesting and ugly, Playas is the nearest beach resort to Guayaquil. It's slammed from January to April, when prices rise, tents and litter adorn the beach, discos thump into the night and the open-air seafood restaurants (half the fun of Playas) stay packed all day. It's almost deserted at other times.

There's some good surf around Playas; get information at the local surf club **Playas Club Surf** (☎ 09-725-9056; cnr Paquisha & Av 7) at Restaurant Jalisco.

The cheapest hotels have brackish running water. **Residencial El Galeón** (☎ 276-0270; cnr Guayaquil & A Garay; r with shared/private bathroom per person US\$4/5), one block east of the central plaza, is clean and friendly. The spotless, four-story **Hotel Arena Caliente** (☎ 228-4097; www.hotelarena.caliente.com; Av Paquisha; s/d US\$28/35; ♿ ♿) is easily the cream of this crop.

Transportes Villamil runs frequent buses to Guayaquil (US\$2.50, 1¼ hours).

## GUAYAQUIL

☎ 04 / pop 2,118,000

Sure, the country's biggest city is an oppressively hot, noisy and chaotic place. But it's worth hanging around for a few days to understand why *guayacos* (people from Guayaquil) are so damn proud of it. For starters, Guayaquil has come a long way from its dismal days as a dangerous port town offering nothing but trouble to the visitor. The city has transformed the once crime-ridden waterfront along the wide Río Guayas into a 2.5km

outdoor showpiece. The historical neighborhood of Las Peñas, as well as Guayaquil's principal downtown thoroughfare, Calle 9 de Octubre, have also been restored. These areas, as well as the city's downtown parks, plazas and museums, are safe and fun to explore. If you're not enamored of big cities, however, you won't like this one.

All flights to the Galápagos either stop or originate in Guayaquil. Subsequently, it's the next best place (after Quito) to set up a trip to the islands.

## Orientation

Most travelers stay in the center of town, which is organized in a gridlike fashion on the west bank of Río Guayas. The main east-west street is 9 de Octubre. The Malecón 2000 (the city's recently rebuilt riverfront promenade) stretches along the bank of the Río Guayas, from the Mercado Sur (near the diagonal Blvd José Joaquín Olmedo) at its southern tip, to Barrio Las Peñas and the hill of Cerro Santa Ana to the north. The suburb of Urdesa, which is frequently visited for its restaurants and nightlife, is about 4km northwest and 1.5km west of the airport.

## Information

### BOOKSTORES

**Librería Científica** (Map pp720-1; Luque 225) A small selection of English-language travel guides are available here.

### INTERNET ACCESS

The following cybercafés charge under US\$1 per hour.

**American Cyber** (Map p722; ☎ 264-7112; Oxandaberro near Av Isidro Ayora)

**Cyber@City** (Map pp720-1; Ballén near Chile, Unicentro Shopping Center)

**CyberNet** (Map pp720-1; Luque 1115) Next door to Hotel Alexander.

**Internet 50¢** (Map pp720-1; Rumichacha 818 near 9 de Octubre; per hr US\$0.50)

**Joeliki Cybernet** (Map pp720-1; Moncayo near Vélez)

**SCI Cyber Center** (Map pp720-1; cnr Chile & Ballén)

### MEDICAL SERVICES

**Clínica Kennedy** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 228-6963/9666; Av del Periodista, Nueva Kennedy suburb) Guayaquil's best hospital.

**Dr Serrano Saenz** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 230-1373; Boyacá 821 & Junín) Takes drop-ins; speaks English.

**MONEY**

The following banks change traveler's checks and have ATMs. There are loads of other ATMs downtown.

**Banco de Guayaquil** (Map pp720-1; cnr Rendón & Panamá)

**Banco del Pacífico** (Map pp720-1; Paula de Icaza 200)

**Banco del Pacífico** (Map pp720-1; cnr 9 de Octubre & Ejército)

**POST**

**Post office** (Map pp720-1; Carbo near Aguirre)

**TELEPHONE**

**Pacifictel** (Map pp720-1; Chile) As well as Pacifictel, around the block from the post office, there are also loads of other telephone call centers.

**TOURIST INFORMATION**

**Centro de Turismo** (Map pp720-1; Malecón) Very helpful; in a train car on the Malecón.

**Dirección Municipal de Turismo** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 252-4100, ext 3477/9; www.guayaquil.gov.ec; Pichincha 605 near 10 de Agosto) Inside the city hall building.

**Subsecretario de Turismo Litoral** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 256-8764; infotour@telconet.net; Paula de Icaza 203, 5th fl) Information about Guayas and Manabí provinces.

**TRAVEL AGENCIES**

The agencies listed here arrange affordable Galápagos trips.

**Centro Viajero** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 230-1283; centrov@telconet.net; Baquerizo Moreno 1119 at 9 de Octubre, Office 805, 8th fl) Great service; Spanish, English and French spoken.

**Dreamcapture Travel** (Map p722; ☎ 224-2909; www.dreamcapture.com; Alborada 12a etapa, Benjamín Carrión at Av Francisco de Orellana) French-Canadian owned.

**Galápagos Sub-Aqua** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 230-5514; Orellana 211 near Panamá, Office 402) Highly recommended Galápagos scuba-diving operator.

**Galasam Tours** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 230-4488; www.galapagos-islands.com; 9 de Octubre 424, Office 9A) Great deals; bargain hard. Some complaints.

**Dangers & Annoyances**

The downtown area is fine during the day, but sketchy after dark. The Malecón and the main stairway up Cerro Santa Ana are perfectly safe, even at night. There is a persistent problem with post-ATM withdrawal robberies, so be extra aware for at least a few blocks after leaving the bank. Watch your belongings in the bus terminal and in the Bahía street market.

**Sights****MALECÓN 2000**

If you've just arrived and you're frazzled and sweaty, get down to the newly reconstructed **waterfront promenade** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 7am-midnight) and take in the breeze blowing (if you're lucky) off the wide Río Guayas. Known as Malecón 2000, the waterfront is Guayaquil's flagship redevelopment project, stretching 2.5km along the river, from the **Mercado Sur** at the southern end to Cerro Santa Ana and Las Peñas (see following section) to the north. The area is heavily policed and completely safe, even at night (which is when it's most pleasant).

Just north of the Mercado Sur, in the area bound by Olmedo, Chile, Colón and the waterfront, is the crowded and colorful street market **La Bahía** (Map pp720-1; Pichincha), a fascinating area to explore (but watch for pickpockets).

Calle 9 de Octubre is Guayaquil's principal downtown street and oh what a feeling to bounce among the hordes of business people, junk sellers and newspaper vendors beneath some of the city's more austere buildings. The street meets the Malecón at the impressive **La Rotonda** monument. Further north along the Malecón is the modern **Museo Antropológico y de Arte Contemporáneo** (MAAC; Map pp720-1; ☎ 230-9400; Malecón & Loja; admission US\$3 Wed-Sat, US\$1.50 Tue & Sun; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun), a museum of anthropology, archaeology and contemporary Ecuadorian art. MAAC also has a 400-seat noncommercial art cinema, an open-air stage and a food court.

**LAS PEÑAS & CERRO SANTA ANA**

At the northern end of the Malecón, these two historic neighborhoods have been refurbished into an idealized version of a quaint South American hillside village – brightly painted homes, cobblestone alleyways and all. The stairway winding up Cerro Santa Ana past the brightly painted buildings is quite touristy, but views from the hilltop fort (called **Fortín del Cerro**) and the **lighthouse** are wonderful.

To the right of the stairs, the historic cobbled street of **Calle Numa Pompilio Llona** winds past elegantly decaying wooden colonial houses propped half-heartedly on bamboo supports. Many of the houses over the river are art galleries.

**DOWNTOWN AREA**

Dinosaurian iguanas roam around the handsome, tree-filled **Parque Bolívar** (Parque Seminario;

Map pp720-1; Chile at Ballén) and stare down small children for their snacks. They're an odd sight. The modern **cathedral** is on the plaza's western side.

The main thoroughfare, **9 de Octubre**, is definitely worth a stroll to experience Guayaquil's commercial vibrancy. Guayaquil's biggest plaza, **Parque del Centenario** (Map pp720-1; 9 de Octubre at Garaycoa), covers four blocks, is full of monuments, and marks the center of the city. The city's most impressive church is the **Church of San Francisco** (Map pp720-1; 9 de Octubre near Chile), which has been reconstructed and beautifully restored since the devastating 1896 fire.

### MALECÓN EL SALADO

Like its more famous sister development on the Río Guayas, the Malecón El Salado is an attempt to reclaim the city's other waterfront for the everyday use of its residents. There are several eateries and cafés in a streamlined, modern mall-like building along the estuary and a walkway above.

### CITY CEMETERY

This dazzling-white hillside **cemetery** (Map pp720-1; Moncayo & Coronel), with hundreds of tombs, monuments and huge mausoleums, is a Goth's wet dream. A walk through the palm trees leads to the impressive grave of President Vicente Rocafuerte. The cemetery is best reached with a short cab ride.

### Festivals & Events

The whole city parties during the last week of July, celebrating Simón Bolívar's birthday (July 24) and Guayaquil Foundation Day (July 25). Hotels fill up and services are disrupted. Celebrations are huge during Guayaquil's Independence Day (October 9) and Día de la Raza (October 12). New Year's Eve is celebrated with bonfires.

### Sleeping

Budget hotels are generally poor value and pricey. Downtown is the most logical area to stay. Parts of the northern suburbs are technically closer to the airport and bus terminal, but because of traffic and round about routes, it's no more convenient to stay there.

**Hotel Sander** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 232-0030; Luque 1101; r per person with fan/air-con US\$9/11; 🚽) Despite the bare-bones rooms and large bunker-like appearance, 24-hour security, friendly service

and a working elevator make the Sander one of the better cheapies.

**Hostal Suites Madrid** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 230-7804; Quisquis 305; r with fan/air-con US\$12/15; 🚽) The large, modern rooms here are kept spotless and bright, and lack that down-and-out feeling so characteristic of Guayaquil's budget hotels.

**Hotel Montesa** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 231-2526; Luis Urdaneta 817 near Rumichaca; r with fan/air-con US\$12/15; 🚽) Another good budget choice, this new hotel has a gleaming tile lobby to match the small but gleaming rooms. Hot water is hit or miss but the staff is friendly and professional.

**Hostal Mar del Plata** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 04-230-7610; Junín 718 near Boyacá; s/d with fan US\$12/20, s/d with air-con US\$18/23; 🚽) If you don't mind outdated TVs and a missing toilet seat these clean rooms are a solid choice.

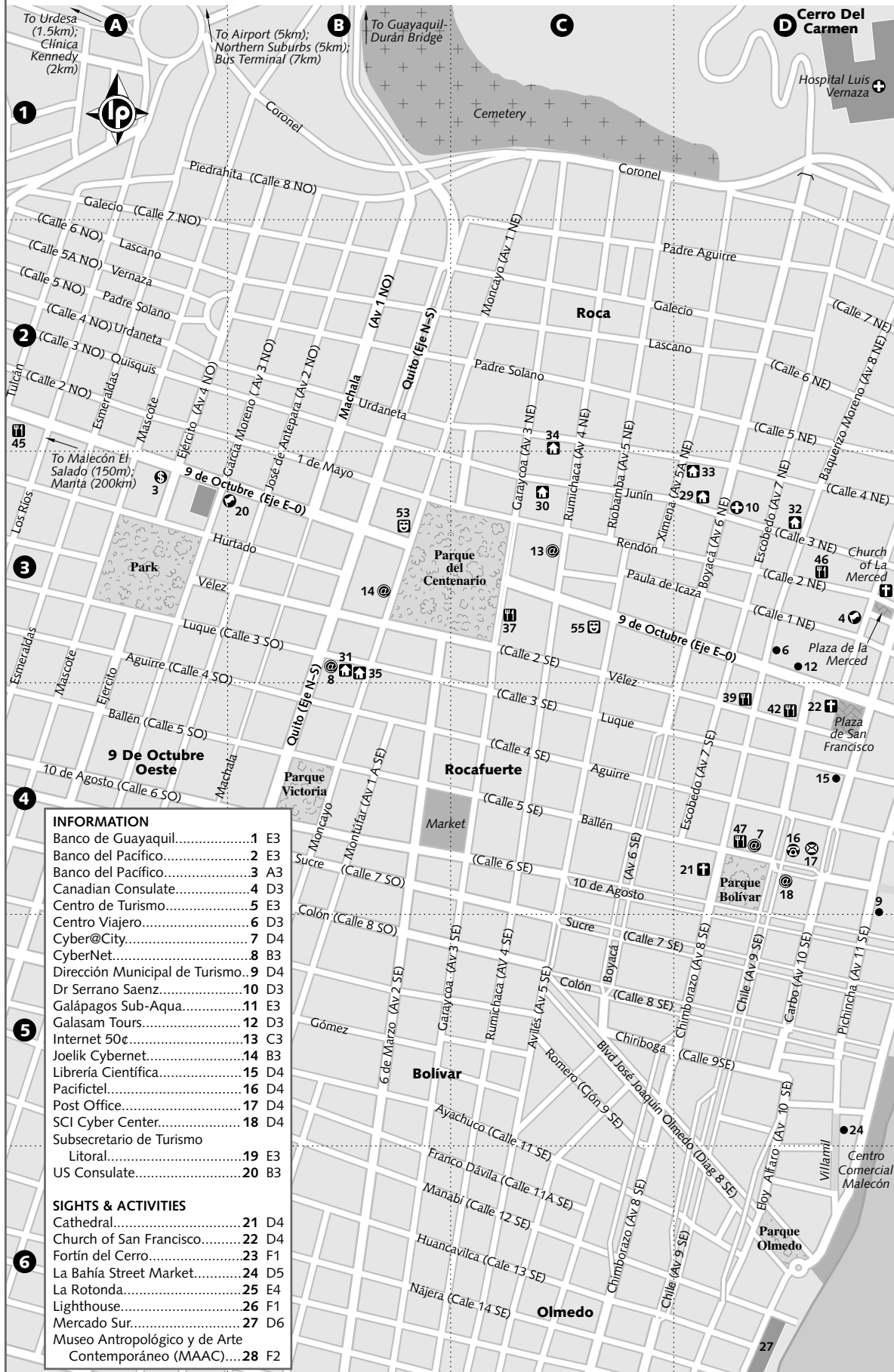
**Dreamcapture Hostel** (Map p722; ☎ 224-2909; www.dreamcapture.com; Alborada 12a etapa, Manzana 2, Villa 21; s/d with shared bathroom US\$12/20, with private bathroom US\$18/28; 🚽 🚿) In the northern suburb of Alborada, this small, friendly Canadian/Ecuadorian-owned *hostal* boasts spotless rooms, a breakfast room, a TV room and a small garden. There's lots of travel info lying around, and a wholesome breakfast is included in the price. The *hostal* is on Sixto Juan Bernal near the intersection of Benjamín Carrión and Francisco de Orellana. There's no sign; look for the dreamy paintings.

**Hotel Andaluz** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 231-1057; hotel\_andaluz@yahoo.com; Junín 852; s/d US\$18/36; 🚽) The gate-protected lobby seems incongruous with the attractive facade, but a maze of hallways leads to clean and comfortable rooms.

### GETTING INTO TOWN

Guayaquil inaugurated a new international airport in August 2006, but it hadn't yet opened for service at the close of this edition. It's practically next door to the older Simón Bolívar airport on Av de las Américas, 5km north of the center. The bus terminal is 2km north of the airport. A taxi to the center should cost about US\$4 to US\$5 from either, provided you cross Av de las Américas (rather than hailing one from inside) and bargain. This may not be possible from the new airport. From the bus terminal, buses run down Av de las Américas past the airport to the center; No 71 is a good one to take.

**GUAYAQUIL - CITY CENTER**



**SLEEPING** 🛏

Hostal Mar del Plata.....	29	D3
Hostal Suites Madrid.....	30	C3
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Imax.....	54	F2
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**TRANSPORT** 🚗

TAME.....(see 12)

**Hotel California** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 230-2538; Urdaneta 529; s/d US\$20/24; 🚽) The rooms aren't as appealing as the marble lobby and professional staff might suggest, but they have cable TV and modern bathrooms.

**Hotel Alexander** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 253-2000; hotelalexander@hotmail.com; Luque 1107; s/d US\$25/30; 🚽 📶) Central location, a pleasant on-site restaurant, free Internet (wireless too) and professional service make up for dark, unimpressive rooms. Great value.

### Eating

In terms of eating, downtown Guayaquil hasn't kept pace with the northern suburbs. There are bunches of little, inexpensive eateries catering to working folk, though there are few stand-out restaurants. Informal *parrillas* (grill restaurants) are found around Parque del Centenario, and there are several concentrations of bright, clean fast-food restaurants along the Malecón 2000 and the Malecón El Salado. There's a large food court in the Mall del Sol north of downtown. The best dining experiences are in hotels downtown or in the northwestern suburb of Urdesa.

**Poly Restaurant** (Map pp720-1; Malecón 303; almuerzos US\$1.50) One of the last local style eateries in the area around the Malecón and Las Peñas – serves good cheap lunches.

**Asadero Costeño** (Map pp720-1; Garaycoa 929; almuerzos US\$1.50) Great for cheap grilled chicken.

**El Toro Asado** (Map pp720-1; cnr Chimborazo & Vélez; mains US\$1.50-4) Casual joint with good, reasonably priced grilled meats. *Asado y menestra* (grilled beef with lentils or beans) is the specialty.

**Frutabar** (Map pp720-1; Malecón; drinks from US\$1.50) Here you can choose from over 20 types of *batidos* and sandwiches, snacks and dozens of juice creations.

**Restaurant Ali Baba** (Map pp720-1; 9 de Octubre; mains US\$2) Head to Ali Babas for Middle Eastern staples like hummus and falafel.

**Ristorante Casa Italia** (Map pp720-1; Rendón 438; mains US\$3, almuerzos US\$2) The set lunches are a deal at what just might be the only Italian restaurant downtown.

**Artur's Café** (Map pp720-1; Numa Pompilio Llona 127; mains US\$3-7) Long-time local favorite for its unbeatable hideaway atmosphere and superb location over the Río Guayas in Las Peñas. Ecuadorian cuisine is the specialty.

**Bopan** (Map pp720-1; Malecón & Paula de Icaza; mains US\$3-7) Crepes, tortillas, sandwiches and pastas make this a welcome stop on the Malecón.



downtown (Map pp720-1; ☎ 256-0778, 256-0920; Paula de Icaza 424, Gran Pasaje); airport (☎ 228-2062, 228-7155) offers several flights daily to Quito (US\$53), one or two daily to Cuenca (US\$41), three a week to Loja (US\$41) and one every week-day to Machala (US\$28). TAME and **AeroGal** (☎ 228-4218; www.aerogal.com.ec; Airport) fly to Baltra and San Cristóbal airports in the Galápagos (US\$344, round trip; US\$300, mid-January to mid-June and September through November). **Icaro** (☎ 229-4265; www.icaro.com.ec; Airport) flies to Quito.

**BUS**

The bus terminal is 2km beyond the airport. There is service to most major towns in the country. Many buses go daily to Quito (US\$9, seven to ten hours), Manta (US\$4.50, four hours), Esmeraldas (US\$7, seven hours) and Cuenca (US\$8, 3½ hours).

Several companies at the terminal go to Machala (US\$4.50, three hours) and Huaquillas (US\$4.50, 4½ hours) on the Peruvian border. The easiest way to Peru, however, is with one of the international lines. **Rutas de America** (☎ 229-7383; Los Rios 3012 at Letamendi),

whose office and terminal is southeast of downtown, has direct buses to Lima (US\$50, 24 hours) every day at 6am. **Expreso Internacional Ormeno** (☎ 229-7362; Centro de Negocios El Terminal, Bahía Norte, Office 34, Bloque C) goes daily to Lima (US\$55) at 2pm, stopping in Tumbes (US\$20, five hours). Its office and terminal is on Av de las Américas just north of the main bus terminal. These services are very convenient because you do not have to get off the bus (let alone change buses) at the border – formalities are taken care of on the bus. Both companies also go to several other South American countries.

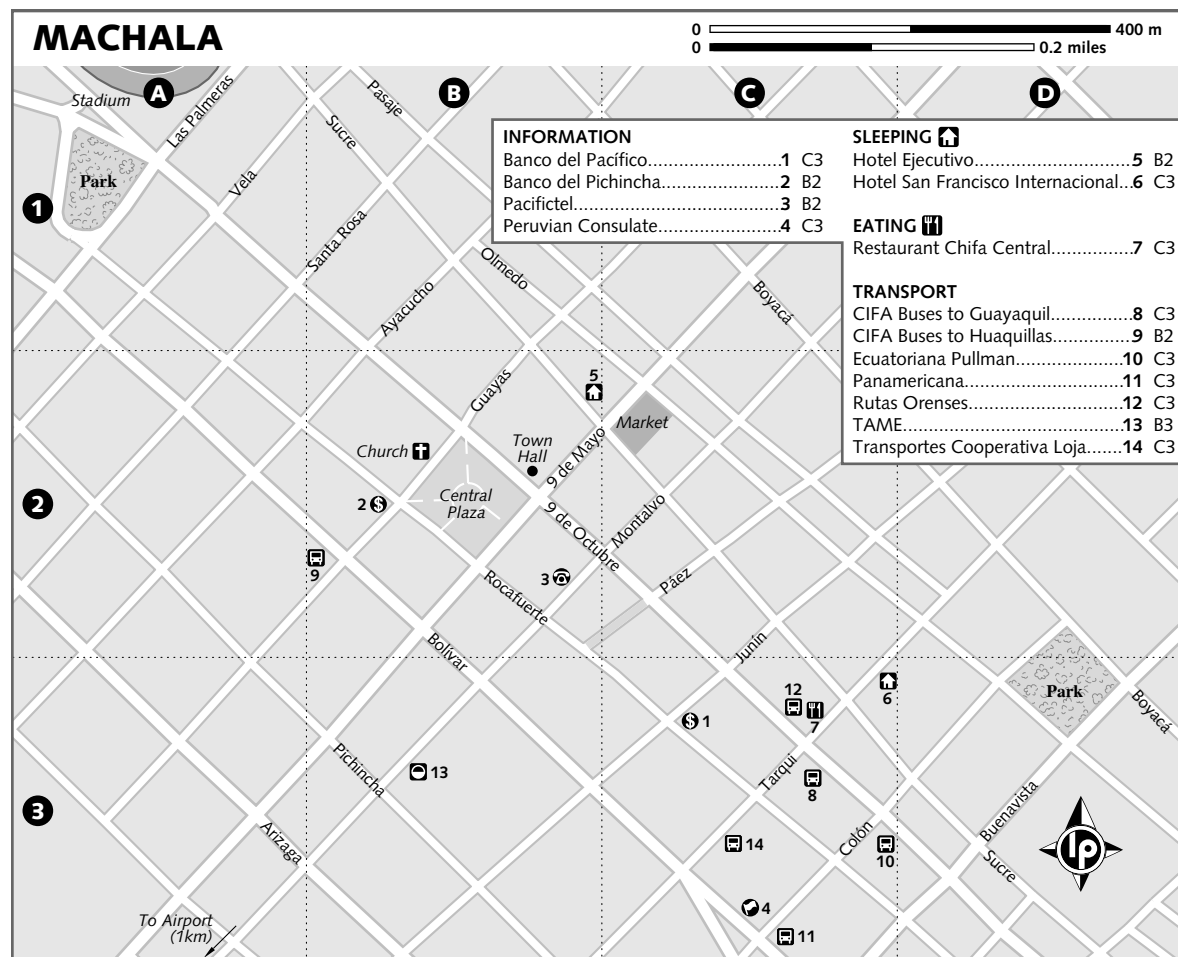
**Getting Around**

Walking is the easiest way of getting around downtown. City buses are cheap (about US20¢) but routes are complicated. A taxi within downtown should cost no more than US\$1.50.

**MACHALA**

☎ 07 / pop 216,900

The self-proclaimed ‘banana capital of the world,’ Machala is Ecuador’s fourth-largest city. Most travelers moving to and from Peru



pass through here, but few stay more than a night. It's a chaotic city whose finest attribute is probably the presence of free bananas on restaurant tables. Páez is a pedestrian-only zone between Rocafuerte and 9 de Octubre.

There are many cybercafés in town. **Banco del Pacífico** (cnr Junín & Rocafuerte) and **Banco del Pichincha** (cnr Rocafuerte & Guayas) have ATMs and change traveler's checks. Make phone calls at **Pacifictel** (Montalvo near 9 de Octubre).

### Sleeping & Eating

Most hotels have only cold water, and mosquito nets come in handy. There are several cheap *parrilla* restaurants serving inexpensive grilled chicken and steaks on Sucre near Colón.

**Hotel San Francisco International** (☎ 293-0445, 293-0457; Tarqui near Sucre; s/d with fan US\$12/18, with air-con US\$17/23; 🏠) The cheaper rooms are small, and have old furniture and chipped paint, while the new rooms are almost snazzy.

**Hotel Ejecutivo** (☎ 292-3162; Sucre & 9 de Mayo; s/d US\$18/25; 🏠) Rooms have views over downtown; the hallways are bright and sunny.

**Restaurant Chifa Central** (Tarqui near Sucre; mains US\$2-5; 🕒 11am-10pm) Whips out massive portions of Chinese food.

### Getting There & Away

The airport is 1km southwest of town; a taxi costs about US\$1. **TAME** (☎ 293-0139; [www.tame.com.ec](http://www.tame.com.ec); Montalvo near Pichincha) flies to Guayaquil weekdays (US\$30); it continues on to Quito (US\$55).

There is no central bus terminal. Buses with **CIFA** (cnr Bolívar & Guayas) run regularly to Huaquillas (US\$1.50, 1½ hours) at the Peruvian border, and to Guayaquil (US\$3, four hours) from 9 de Octubre near Tarqui. **Rutas Orenses** (9 de Octubre near Tarqui) and **Ecuadoriana Pullman** (9 de Octubre near Colón) also serve Guayaquil, the latter has air-conditioned buses.

**Panamericana** (Bolívar at Colón) offers several buses a day to Quito (US\$10, 10 hours). **Transportes Cooperativa Loja** (Tarqui & Bolívar) goes to Loja (US\$4.50, seven hours).

### HUAQUILLAS

☎ 07 / pop 30,000

Called Aguas Verdes on the Peruvian side, Huaquillas is the main border town with Peru and lies 80km south of Machala. There's little reason to stop. Almost everything happens on the long main street. Ecuadorian banks don't

change money (though they have ATMs). The briefcase-toting moneychangers do change money, but numerous rip-offs have been reported.

If you need to spend the night, you'll be fine at **Hotel Hernancor** (☎ 299-5467; 1 de Mayo; s/d US\$13/16; 🏠) or **Hotel Rody** (☎ 299-5581; Av Tnte Cordovez & 10 de Agosto; s/d from US\$5/10).

CIFA buses run frequently to Machala (US\$1.50, 1½ hours) from the main street, two blocks from the border. Panamericana goes daily to Quito (US\$10, 12 hours). Ecuadoriana Pullman has buses to Guayaquil (US\$4.50, 4½ hours). For Loja (US\$5, six hours), use Transportes Loja.

## THE GALÁPAGOS ISLANDS

☎ 05 / pop 19,000

Just as it did with Darwin (who came here in 1535), the Galápagos Islands may inspire you to think differently about the world. A trip to these extraordinary islands is like stumbling upon an alternate universe, some strange utopian colony organized by sea lions – the golden retrievers of the Galápagos – and arranged on principles of mutual cooperation. What's so extraordinarily special for humans is the trait that has made the islands' inhabitants famous: fearlessness. Blue footed boobies, sea lions, prehistoric land iguanas – they all act as if humans are nothing more than slightly annoying paparazzi. Nowhere else can you engage in a staring contest with wild animals and lose!

Visiting the islands is expensive, however, and the only way to truly experience their marvels is by taking a cruise. It's possible to visit four of the islands independently, but you will not see the wildlife or the many smaller islands that you will aboard a cruise.

### ENVIRONMENT

The Galápagos Islands were declared a national park in 1959. Organized tourism began in the 1960's and by the 1990's some 60,000 people visited annually. Today, over 100,000 people visit each year. With increased tourism, more people have migrated to the islands to work, both legally and illegally. The dramatic increase in human activity has begun to impact the islands' fragile ecology. In 2005,



the largest of the eighty tourist boats operating in the Galápagos held 96 passengers. In 2006, the 500-passenger *MV Discovery* made its first visit to the islands. Many see it as the writing on the wall when it comes to mass tourism in the Galápagos.

The islands have faced other problems that include oil spills, the poaching of sea lions for their reproductive organs (which are sold on the international black market), over-fishing, illegal fishing for shark, lobster and other marine life, and the introduction of non-native animals. Obviously, the Galápagos National Park has its hands full protecting itself. Anyone wishing to donate money to the **Charles Darwin Foundation** ([www.galapagos.org](http://www.galapagos.org)), the non-profit organization in charge of protecting and studying the islands, can do so online.

## ORIENTATION

The most important island is Isla Santa Cruz. On the southern side of the island is Puerto Ayora, the largest town in the Galápagos and where most of the budget tours are based. It has many hotels and restaurants. North of Santa Cruz, separated by a narrow strait, is Isla Baltra, home of the islands' main airport. A public bus and a ferry connect the Baltra airport with Puerto Ayora.

Isla San Cristóbal, the most easterly island, is home to the provincial capital, Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, which also has hotels and an airport. The other inhabited islands are Isla Isabela and Isla Santa María.

## INFORMATION

All foreign visitors must pay US\$100 (cash only) upon arrival to the national park. The high seasons are from December to January,

around Easter, and from June to August; during these periods, budget tours may be difficult to arrange. Note that most of the islands have two or even three names. Galápagos time is one hour behind mainland Ecuador. For the latest news on the islands check out the Charles Darwin Foundation's news site at [www.darwinfoundation.org](http://www.darwinfoundation.org).

## COSTS

Plan on spending more money than you want to. For an economy tour, you can count on a minimum of US\$500 to US\$700 for a one-week trip in the low season, or US\$1000 in high season, always plus airfare and the US\$100 park entrance fee. The cheapest (although not the best) time to go is between September and November, when the seas are rough and business is dead. You may save money if you arrange a tour independently in Puerto Ayora, though you must factor in hotel expenses.

## WHAT TO BRING

Many handy (or even indispensable) items are unavailable in the Galápagos. Stock up on seasickness pills, sunscreen, insect repellent, film, batteries, toiletries and medication on the mainland.

## BOOKS

Lonely Planet's *Ecuador & the Galápagos Islands* has loads of Galápagos information. The best general wildlife guide is Michael H Jackson's *Galápagos: A Natural History Guide*. The only guide describing *all* of the vertebrates occurring in the archipelago is *Birds, Mammals and Reptiles of the Galápagos Islands* by A Swash & R Still. Bird-watchers

### GETTING TO PERU

Formalities are straightforward on both sides of the border. Many travelers report that crossing by overnight bus is easier – it allows you to avoid the crowds, touts and overzealous immigration officials (at night, officials simply want you on your way). The bus company CIFA offers direct international departures from both Machala and Guayaquil to Tumbes, Peru.

The Ecuadorian **immigration office** (no fees; ☑ 24hr) is 5km outside of Huaquillas and 3km north of the border. Entrance and exit formalities are carried out here. The bus doesn't wait, but if you save your ticket, you can board another passing bus for free. There are also taxis.

When leaving Ecuador, you'll get an exit stamp from the Ecuadorian immigration office. After showing your passport to the international bridge guard, take a shared mototaxi (US\$50¢) to the Peruvian immigration building, about 2km beyond the border. From here, *colectivos* go to Tumbes (US\$1.50; beware of overcharging).

If you're coming *from* Peru, see the boxed text, p912.

should consult *A Field Guide to the Birds of the Galápagos* by Michael Harris. There is also *A Field Guide to the Fishes of Galápagos* by Godfrey Merlen. J Weiner's Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Beak of the Finch* is an eloquent lowdown on evolutionary research in the Galápagos and elsewhere. For more book recommendations, see p734.

## VOLUNTEERING

On Isla San Cristóbal, the community organization **Nueva Era** (☎ 252-0489; www.neweragalapagos.org) needs volunteers to work with local kids on environmental issues, art, dance, crafts, beach cleanup etc. Volunteers pay room and board. It's an admirable local organization.

## VISITOR SITES

To protect the islands, the national park authorities allow access to about 50 visitor sites, in addition to the towns and public areas. Other areas are off-limits. The visitor sites are where the most interesting wildlife and geology are seen. Apart from the ones mentioned later (near Puerto Ayora and Puerto Baquerizo Moreno), most sites are reached by boat.

Normally, landings are made in a *panga* (skiff). Landings are either 'wet' (where you hop overboard and wade ashore in knee-deep water) or 'dry' (where you get off onto a pier or rocky outcrop). People occasionally fall in the surf (ha ha ha! not funny) of a wet landing or slip on the algae-covered rocks of a dry one. Take it slow and put your camera in a watertight bag. Boat captains will not land groups in places other than designated visitor sites.

In addition to the sites on land, many marine sites have been designated for snorkeling or diving.

## TOURS

There are basically three types of tours in the Galápagos: boat-based trips with nights spent aboard; day trips, returning to the same hotel each night (usually in Puerto Ayora or Puerto Baquerizo Moreno) and hotel-based trips, staying in hotels on different islands. The newest type of tour is the kayak tour, currently offered by **Row International** (www.rowinternational.com) for about US\$3300 per person. The last two types are usually out of the budget traveler's reach.

Tours do not include the US\$100 park fee, airfare and bottled drinks. Neither do they

include tips. On a cheap one-week tour, the crew and guide are tipped *at least* US\$20 per passenger (about half to the guide).

If you're going to spend a large chunk of change getting to the islands, then seeing the Galápagos is probably important to you and you want to get as much out of it as possible. The economy-class boats are usually OK, but if something is going to go wrong, it's more likely to happen on the cheaper boats. If this is all you can afford and you really want to see the Galápagos, go! It'll probably be the adventure of a lifetime. But, you might consider spending an extra few hundred dollars to go on a more comfortable, reliable boat and get a decent guide. All that said, most people have the time of their lives, regardless.

## Day Tours

Most day trips are based in Puerto Ayora, but a few are offered in Puerto Baquerizo Moreno. Several hours are spent sailing to the visitor site(s), the island is visited in the middle of the day and you may be part of a large group. Only a few islands are close enough to either Santa Cruz or San Cristóbal to be visited on day trips.

Because time is spent going back and forth and because you don't visit the islands early or late in the day, we don't recommend day tours. The island visits may be too brief, the guides poorly informed and the crew lacking an adequate conservationist attitude.

Day-trip operators in Puerto Ayora charge about US\$40 to US\$120 per person per day. Talk to other travelers about how good the guide and boat are. Reject any tour that involves a fuel stop – it can take hours.

## Boat Tours

Most visitors go on longer boat tours and sleep aboard overnight. Tours from four to eight days are the most common. You can't really do the Galápagos Islands justice on a tour shorter than a week, although five days is acceptable. To visit the outlying islands of Isabela and Fernandina, two weeks are recommended. On the first day of a prearranged tour, you arrive from the mainland by air at about noon, so this leaves only half a day in the Galápagos; on the last day, you have to be in the airport in the morning. Thus a 'five-day' tour gives only three full days in the islands. Arranging a tour in Puerto Ayora avoids this.



Often, a one-week tour is two shorter tours combined, for example a Monday to Thursday tour combined with a Thursday to Monday tour. Try to avoid one-week trips such as this, as you'll spend most of Thursday dropping off and picking up passengers.

Tour boats range from small yachts to large cruise ships. The most common type of boat is a motor sailer carrying six to 16 passengers. Tour categories range from economy and tourist to deluxe and luxury.

Seven-night/eight-day economy tours are generally aboard small boats with six to 12 bunks in double, triple and quadruple cabins. Bedding is provided and the accommodations are clean, but damp and cramped, with little privacy. Plenty of simple but fresh food and juice is served at all meals, and a guide accompanies the boat (few guides on economy tours speak English).

There are toilets and fresh water is available for drinking. Bathrooming facilities may be saltwater deck hoses or freshwater showers on some boats. The pre-set itineraries allow you to visit most of the central islands and give enough time to see the wildlife.

Occasionally, things go wrong, and when they do, a refund is usually extremely difficult to obtain. Problems have included last-minute changes of boat (which the contractual small print allows), poor crew, a lack of bottled drinks, not sticking to the agreed itinerary, mechanical breakdowns and overbooking. Passengers have to share cabins and are not guaranteed that their cabin mates will be of the same gender; if you are uncomfortable sharing a cabin with a stranger of the opposite sex, make sure you are guaranteed in writing that you won't have to do this. Generally speaking, the cheaper the tour, the less comfortable the boat and the less knowledgeable the guide.

### Arranging Tours On-site

Most people arrive in the islands with a pre-arranged tour, although it can be cheaper to arrange a tour for yourself in Puerto Ayora or Puerto Baquerizo Moreno. Generally, only the cheaper boats are available once you get to the Galápagos; the better boats are almost always booked. Therefore, don't fly to the Galápagos hoping to get on a high-end boat for less money. Flying to the Galápagos and arranging a tour is not uncommon, but it is not as straightforward as it sounds. It can take

several days – sometimes a week or more – and is therefore not an option for people with time constraints.

The best place to organize a tour is from Puerto Ayora. It is also possible to do this in Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, but there are fewer boats available. If you are alone, or with a friend, you'll need to find more people, as even the smallest boats take no fewer than four passengers. There are usually people looking for boats, and agencies can help in putting travelers and boats together.

Finding boats in August and around Christmas and Easter is especially difficult. The less busy months have fewer travelers on the islands, but boats are often being repaired or overhauled at this time, particularly in October. Despite the caveats, travelers who arrive in Puerto Ayora looking for a boat can almost always find one within a week (often in just a few days) if they work at it. This method isn't always cost effective since by the time you pay for hotels and meals in Puerto Ayora, you may not save anything.

The most important thing is to find a good captain and an enthusiastic naturalist guide. You should be able to meet both and inspect the boat before booking.

### Arranging Tours in Advance

If you don't have the time or patience to arrange a tour on-site, you can arrange one in Quito or Guayaquil. Still, you may have to wait several days or weeks during the high season. Check various agencies to compare prices and get a departure date that works for you. Sometimes you can get on a great boat for a budget price, particularly when business is slow – agencies will drop their prices at the last minute rather than leave berths empty.

### INDEPENDENT TRAVEL

Visiting the Galápagos on your own is – for better or worse – a wholly different experience than touring the islands on a cruise. Only four of the islands – Santa Cruz, San Cristóbal, Isabela and Santa María – can be visited independently. When you add up hotel costs, day tours (which you'll surely want to take) and inter-island travel, it probably won't be much cheaper than a cruise. Most importantly, you will not see the many islands, nor the wildlife (the main attraction) that require a guide (ie a cruise) to see. But you *can* have an amazing time – and more time – hanging out and get-

ting to know these four islands in ways you cannot on a short cruise.

You can fly independently to either Santa Cruz or San Cristóbal, and a passenger ferry (right) runs regularly between the two islands. Puerto Ayora on Santa Cruz is a bit pricey, although there are some great visitor sites (namely Bahía Tortuga) that you can visit on your own. Setting up diving trips and day cruises is easy from here. Puerto Baquerizo Moreno on San Cristóbal is cheaper and more laid-back, and has world-class surf, good snorkeling, places to camp and several interesting visitor sites that you can visit without a guide. Puerto Villamil, on Isabela, is even cheaper. It's rarely visited, and you may be the only one around for days on end (and with only two ferry boats calling at Isabela each month, you'll have plenty of days on end!). Finally, Isla Santa María (Floreana) can be reached (and left) only once a month by boat, and there's only one place to stay and eat (not cheap, although you may be able to camp), but it's truly an escape.

Going it alone in the Galápagos is worth it only if you have *at least* two weeks, preferably three or more. The best time for this type of travel is in the off season, when hotels are cheaper and unlikely to be booked solid.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Most visitors fly to Isla Baltra, from where a bus-ferry combination goes to Puerto Ayora on Isla Santa Cruz. Flights are available to Puerto Baquerizo Moreno on Isla San Cristóbal, but Puerto Ayora has more facilities, so travelers wanting to arrange tours on-site should go there.

Between TAME, Icaro and AeroGal, there are several daily flights from Quito (US\$390 round trip, 3¼ hours) via Guayaquil (US\$344 round trip, 1½ hours) to Baltra and San Cristóbal (same fare). Flights are cheaper – US\$344 from Quito and US\$300 from Guayaquil – in low season (May 1 to June 14 and September 15 to October 31). You can buy one-way tickets to one island and leave from the other, or fly with an open return. To change an already ticketed return date (US\$7 fee) you must do so in person in Puerto Ayora or Baquerizo Moreno; changes are more difficult in high season. Get to the office early to avoid an excruciating wait. Always reconfirm flights.

If you are signed up with a tour, make sure you are flying to the right island! People

occasionally end up in the wrong place and miss their tour.

## GETTING AROUND

### Air

The small airline, **Emetebe** (Puerto Ayora ☎ 252-6177; Puerto Baquerizo Moreno ☎ 252-0036; Puerto Villamil ☎ 252-9155; Guayaquil ☎ 04-229-2492), flies a five-passenger aircraft between Baltra and Puerto Villamil (Isla Isabela), between Baltra and Puerto Baquerizo Moreno (Isla San Cristóbal), and between Puerto Baquerizo Moreno and Puerto Villamil. Fares are about US\$120 one way, and there is a 13kg baggage-weight limit per person.

### Boat

**Ingala** (in Puerto Ayora ☎ 526-151/199) operates *Ingala II*, an inter-island passenger ferry. It goes from Santa Cruz to San Cristóbal about three times per week, from Santa Cruz to Isabela about twice monthly (usually on a Friday) and once a month from Isabela to Floreana. The office in Puerto Ayora can give you up-to-date details, as can the Cámara de Turismo in Puerto Ayora. Departure times change often. Fares are US\$50 for foreigners (sometimes cheaper in low season) on any passage and are purchased on the day of departure.

The cheapest rides are usually on the smaller (but often faster) private boats that zip between the islands with supplies and occasional passengers. Ask around the harbors in Puerto Ayora on Santa Cruz and Puerto Baquerizo Moreno on San Cristóbal.

## ISLA SANTA CRUZ (INDEFATIGABLE)

Most visitors only pass through the archipelago's most populous island on their way from Isla Baltra to Puerto Ayora. But Santa Cruz is a destination in and of itself, with easily accessible beaches and remote highlands that offer adventurous activities far from the tourist trail.

### Puerto Ayora

Clean little Puerto Ayora is the Galápagos' main population center and the heart of the tourist industry. It's a friendly place to hang out and the best place in the islands to set up a cruise.

### INFORMATION

**Banco del Pacífico** (Av Charles Darwin) The town's only bank has a MasterCard/Cirrus ATM & changes traveler's checks.

**Cámara de Turismo** (☎ 252-6153; www.galapagos.tour.org; Av Charles Darwin) Tourist office; report any complaints about boats, tours, guides or crew here.

**Laundry Lava Flash** (Av Bolívar Naveda; per kg US\$1) Laundry.

**Limón y Café** (Av Charles Darwin) One of many cyber-cafés.

### ACTIVITIES

The **Red Mangrove Hotel** (☎ 252-6277; Av Charles Darwin), near the cemetery, rents sea kayaks, sailboards and bikes. **Galápagos Tour Center** (cnr Pelicano & Padre Julio Herrera) rents surfboards (half-day/full-day US\$8/18) and mountain bikes (half-day/full-day US\$8/15) and offers fun snorkeling trips (US\$25).

The best dive centers in town are **Scuba Iguana** (☎ 252-6497; www.scubaiguana.com; Av Charles Darwin), in the Hotel Galápagos, near the cemetery, and **Galápagos Sub-Aqua** (☎ 252-6350; www.galapagos-sub-aqua.com; Av Charles Darwin). Both are excellent and offer a variety of tours that include gear, boat and guide. Full PADI-certification courses are available.

### TOURS

If you're setting up a cruise from Puerto Ayora visit the following agencies to compare prices and tours. They all offer last-minute deals (when they exist).

**Galápatour** (☎ 526-088; Av Rodríguez Lara & Genovesa) Behind the municipal market.

**Moonrise Travel** (☎ 526-403/348; sdivine@ga.pro.ec; Av Charles Darwin) Reputable agency long in the business; great for cheap, last-minute tours.

**We Are the Champions Tours** (☎ 252-6951; www.wearethechampionstours.com; Av Charles Darwin) Ecuadorian-German-run outfitter offering all kinds of ecologically minded Galápagos trips.

### SLEEPING

Most hotels in Puerto Ayora are along Av Charles Darwin.

**Hotel Sir Francis Drake** (☎ 252-6221; Av Padre Julio Herrera; s/d US\$8/15) While the dull grey shades and concrete at Hotel Sir Francis Drake don't delight the eye, the tile rooms are well maintained.

**Hotel Lirio del Mar** (☎ 252-6212; Av Bolívar Naveda; s/d US\$8/16) Three floors of colorful concrete rooms are basic but clean, and a shared terrace catches the breeze.

**Hotel Salinas** (☎ 252-6107; Av Bolívar Naveda; s/d from US\$10/15) Two-story hotel with spacious but plain rooms, hot water, TV and fans. Try for a room on the second floor.

**El Peregrino B&B** (☎ 252-6323; Av Charles Darwin; s/d incl breakfast US\$13/26) This simple, four-room guesthouse boasts a central location and warm, family-like atmosphere.

**Hotel Castro** (☎ 252-6173; Av Padre Julio Herrera; s/d US\$20/30; 🚻) The Castro has clean, well maintained rooms with tile floors and hot water. It's only a block from the harbor.

**Estrella del Mar** (☎ 252-6427; estrellademar@ayora.ecua.net.ec; s/d from US\$28/40) Though the rooms at this family run hotel are basic, those with windows and ocean views make up for the shortcomings; others are less expensive.

**Casa del Lago** (☎ 271-4647; www.galapagoscultural.com; r from US\$35; 🚻 🚰) By far the best place to feel at home in the islands, Casa del Lago has only three large suites, each made from recycled materials and filled with attractive tiles and textiles. Suites also have large kitchens with stove and refrigerator. Lots of little perks.

### EATING

The cheapest places to eat are found out along Av Padre Julio Herrera.

**Tropicana Restaurant** (Av Bolívar Naveda; mains US\$2) Good, cheap, local option.

**El Chocolate Galápagos** (Av Charles Darwin; mains US\$3-6) Besides coffee, fruit drinks and chocolate cake, there's an extensive lunch and dinner menu.

**Hernan Café** (Av Padre Julio Herrera; mains US\$3-9) Excellent café with sandwiches (US\$2), hamburgers (US\$3), pizzas (US\$5) and slightly pricier seafood.

**Familiar William's** (Charles Binford; encocados US\$4-7; 🕒 6-10pm Tue-Sun) Famous for its *encocados*, Familiar Williams is one of the best of the great food kiosks that line Charles Binford.

**Garrapata** (Av Charles Darwin; mains US\$4-9) Serves everything from sandwiches to chicken in pineapple sauce or shrimp in garlic sauce.

**Rincón de Alma** (Av Charles Darwin; mains US\$6-9) Great *ceviches* and other seafood and cheap *almuerzos*.

**Restaurant Salvavidas** (Harbor; mains US\$6-16) A dockside favorite for beers, snacks and seafood.

Near the harbor, **Proinsular supermarket** (Av Charles Darwin) is the place to stock up on food supplies. There's also a **municipal market** (Av Padre Julio Herrera).

### DRINKING

**La Panga** (Av Charles Darwin) The most popular disco in town.

**Limón y Café** (Av Charles Darwin) Limón y Café is a nice laid-back little hangout with a pool table.

**GETTING THERE & AWAY**

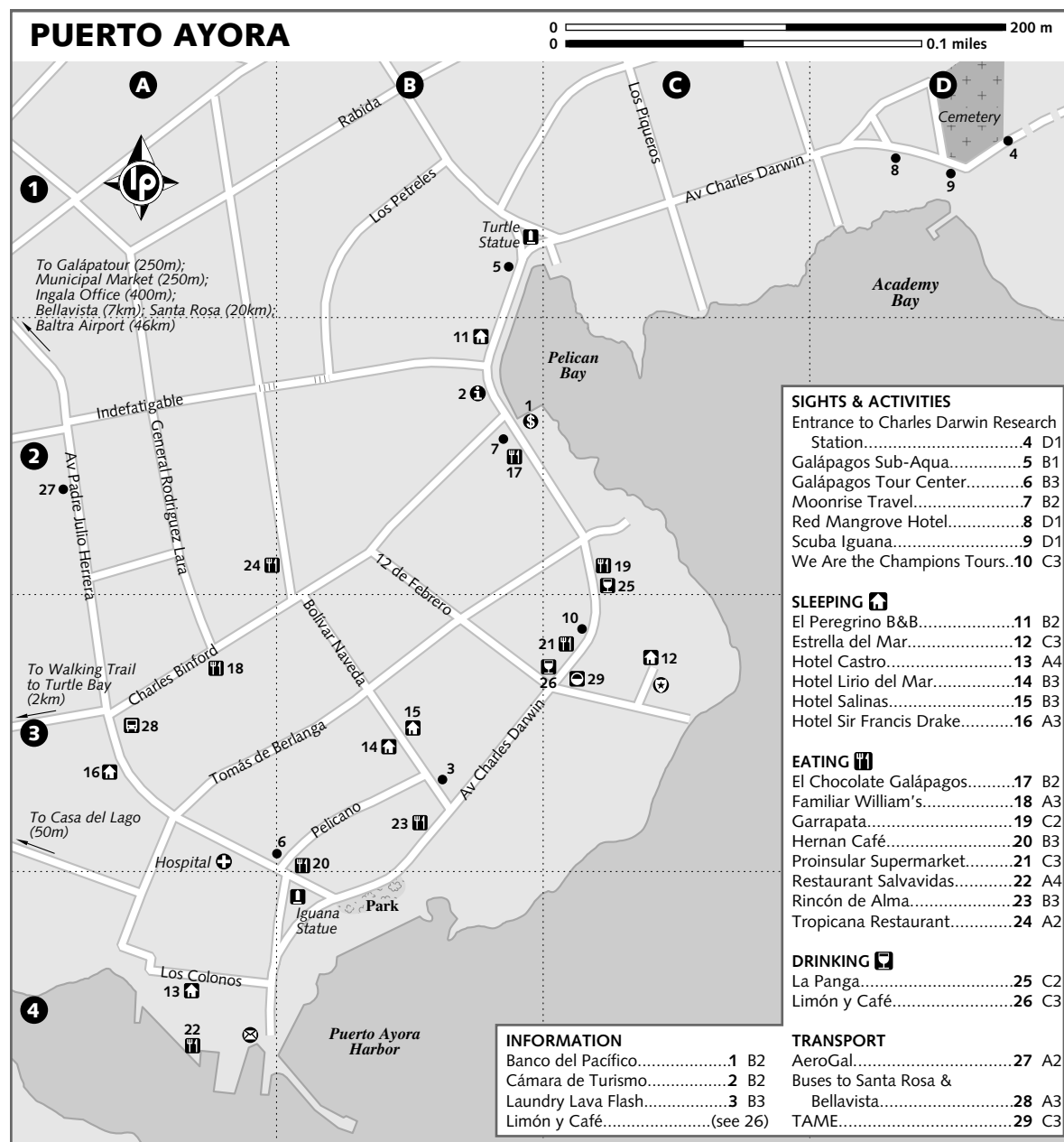
For more information on flights to and from Santa Cruz see p729. Reconfirming your flight departures with the **Aerogal** (☎ 252-6798; www.aerogal.com.ec; Av Padre Julio Herrera) or **TAME** (☎ 252-6165; www.tame.com.ec; Av Charles Darwin) offices is essential.

Arriving air passengers in Baltra are met by a crew member (if on a prearranged tour) or take a public bus-ferry-bus combination to Puerto Ayora (US\$2.60, two hours). From Puerto Ayora, buses start leaving for Baltra at 7am.

**Around Puerto Ayora**

Though much of the island is off-limits without a guide, there is plenty to see. Unless otherwise noted, you can visit the following sites by yourself. The **Charles Darwin Research Station** (Map p731; www.darwinfoundation.org; admission free) is about a 20-minute walk by road northeast of Puerto Ayora. The station features an information center, a museum, a tortoise nursery and a walk-in tortoise enclosure where you are able to meet these Galápagos giants face to face.

Southwest of Puerto Ayora, a 3km trail takes you to the paradisiacal **Bahía Tortuga** (Turtle Bay; Map p727), which has a beautiful, white, coral-sand beach and protected swimming behind a spit. The beach is backed by mangroves,



and you may spot harmless sharks (worry not), pelicans and even flamingos. Marine iguanas abound. Beware of strong currents on the exposed side of the spit. Follow the sign from Av Padre Julio Herrera.

Buses from Puerto Ayora go to the villages of **Bellavista** (Map p727) and **Santa Rosa** (Map p727), from where you can explore some of the interior. Neither of these villages has hotels. If there's room, you can hop on the airport bus at 8am from the park. In Puerto Ayora, you could also hire a truck or rent a mountain bike for the day (it's uphill to the villages).

From the village of Bellavista, 7km north of Puerto Ayora, you can turn either west on the main road toward Santa Rosa, or east and go about 2km to some **lava tubes** (Map p727; admission US\$2). These are underground tunnels more than 1km in length; bring a flashlight.

A footpath north from Bellavista leads toward the highlands, including **Cerro Crocker** (Map p727) and other hills and extinct volcanoes. This is a good chance to see local vegetation and birds. It is about 6km from Bellavista to the crescent-shaped hill of Media Luna and another 3km to the base of Cerro Crocker. This is national park land, and a guide is required.

The twin craters called **Los Gemelos** (Map p727) are 5km beyond Santa Rosa. They are sinkholes, rather than volcanic craters, and are surrounded by Scalesia forest. Vermilion flycatchers are often seen and short-eared owls are spotted on occasion. Although less than 100m from the road, the craters are hidden by vegetation, so go with a guide.

Near Santa Rosa, **El Chato Tortoise Reserve** (Map p727) protects giant tortoises roaming in the wild. A trail from the village (ask for directions) leads through private property to the reserve, about 3km away. The trail is downhill and often muddy. It forks at the reserve boundary, with the right fork going up to the small hill of Cerro Chato (3km further) and the left fork going to La Caseta (2km). A guide is required. All manner of locals will offer to guide you. Bring plenty of water. Horses can be hired in Santa Rosa.

Near the reserve is a **ranch** (admission US\$4) owned by the Devine family. This place always has dozens of giant tortoises. You can wander around at will and take photos for a small fee. A café sells coffee or herbal tea that's welcome if the highland *garúa* (mist) has soaked you.

## ISLA SAN CRISTÓBAL

Locals call San Cristóbal the capital of paradise and, since Puerto Baquerizo Moreno is the capital of Galápagos province, it technically is. The island has several easily accessible visitor sites, killer surf and the lovely, laid-back capital itself.

### Puerto Baquerizo Moreno

Often just called Cristóbal, Puerto Baquerizo Moreno is a relaxed little town, busy with tourists during the high season and dead the rest of the year. Arranging tours is possible, and mellowing out is a cinch. Three world-class surf breaks are nearby.

Air passengers arriving in Puerto Baquerizo Moreno can walk into town in a few minutes.

**Casa del Ceibo** (☎ 252-0248; r per person US\$4) How does two rooms in a tree house sound? Kitchen access too.

**Hotel San Francisco** (☎ 252-0304; s/d US\$7/14) The cheapest hotel in town is basic, but fine.

**Hotel Mar Azul** (☎ 252-0139; [hotelmazarul\\_ex@hotmail.com](mailto:hotelmazarul_ex@hotmail.com); Av Alsacio Northia; s/d US\$12/20) Friendly, with pleasant patios and rooms with hot showers, TV and fan.

Restaurants abound and *almuerzos* are cheap. Be sure to have a *batido* at **El Grande** (Villamil; drinks US90¢-\$1.50); surfers swear they keep them energized all day.

### Around Puerto Baquerizo Moreno

You can visit the following sites without a guide. About 1.5km southeast of Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, **Cerro de las Tijeretas** (Frigate-bird Hill; Map p727) provides good views and can be reached on a trail without a guide. You'll pass a national park information office en route, and there's excellent snorkeling on the ocean side.

For about US\$2, taxis in Puerto Baquerizo Moreno will go to the farming center of **El Progreso** (Map p727), about 8km east at the base of the Cerro San Joaquín (896m), the highest point on San Cristóbal. From El Progreso, you can catch one of the occasional buses (or hire a jeep, hitchhike or walk the 10km) to **El Junco Lagoon** (Map p727), a freshwater lake about 700m above sea level with superb views. The road continues beyond the lagoon and branches to the isolated beach of **Puerto Chino** (Map p727), where you can camp with permission from the information office on Cerro de las Tijeretas. The other branch goes to **La Galapaguera** (Map p727), where giant tortoises can be seen.



About an hour north of Puerto Baquerizo Moreno by boat is tiny, rocky **Isla Lobos** (Map p727), the main sea lion and blue-footed booby colony open to visitors (a guide is required) to Isla San Cristóbal. The island has a 300m trail and you can see lava lizards here.

## ISLA ISABELA

**Puerto Villamil** (Map p727) is the main town on seldom-visited Isla Isabela. An 18km road leads from the town up to the tiny village of Santo Tomás. Puerto Villamil has a handful of places to stay, all of which are fairly affordable.

**Hotel Las Gardenias** (☎ 252-9115; r US\$10) is one of the cheapest options in town. Or, you can try **Cormorant Beach House** (☎ 252-9200; [www.galapagos.com](http://www.galapagos.com); Av Antonio Gill & Malecón; r from US\$20), with two large *cabañas* by the beach, and **Hostería Isabela del Mar/Ballena Azul** (☎ 252-9030; [www.hosteriaisabela.com.ec](http://www.hosteriaisabela.com.ec); r per person US\$20), which has a few rooms with ocean views.

There are a few basic *comedores*, and most hotels offer meals.

## ISLA SANTA MARÍA

Also known as Floreana, this island has fewer than 100 inhabitants, most centered around **Puerto Velasco Ibarra** (Map p727), the island's only settlement. There you will find **Floreana Hotel & Restaurant** (☎ 252-0250; s/d/tr US\$30/50/70), run by the family of the late Margaret Wittmer, who is famous for being one of the islands' first settlers. She is also the author of the book *Floreana*, which tells of her early years on the island. Beachfront rooms have hot water and fan, and the place is rarely full. Puerto Velasco Ibarra also has a small gift shop and post office.

# ECUADOR DIRECTORY

## ACCOMMODATIONS

There is no shortage of places to stay in Ecuador, but during major fiestas or the night before market day, accommodations can be tight, so plan ahead. If you are going to a town specifically for a market or fiesta, try to arrive no later than early afternoon the day before the event. Most hotels have single-room rates, although during high season some beach towns charge for the number of beds in the room, regardless of the number of people checking in.

Ecuador has several youth hostels, although they're rarely the best value. *Pensiones* are

the cheapest accommodations, although the rooms are sometimes rented by the hour and cleanliness may be suspect. Staying with families is an option in remote villages.

## ACTIVITIES

Where to begin? There are so many exciting activities in Ecuador that any list will certainly miss something. For climbers, the volcanic, snowcapped peaks of Ecuador's central highlands – including Chimborazo (a doozy at 6310m, p687) and Cotopaxi (5897m, p676) – attract mountaineers from around the world. Quito (p647), Riobamba (p685), Baños (p680) and Latacunga (p677) are the best towns to hire guides and gear.

How about hiking? The moor-like landscape of Parque Nacional Cajas (p693); the cloud forests of Parque Nacional Podocarpus (p696) or Mindo (p675); the windswept *páramo* of Lagunas de Mojanda (p672), near Otavalo; the spectacular high-Andean Quilotoa Loop area (p679); and the coastal dry forests of Parque Nacional Machalilla (p714) are just a few of Ecuador's hiking possibilities.

If bird-watching ruffles your feathers, you're in for a real treat. During the Audubon Society's 2004/2005 Christmas Bird Count, 420 species were spotted and logged near Mindo (p675) in a single day. The count was topped only by the lower Río Napo region of the Amazon (p701), where 471 bird species were logged. Galápagos birdlife, of course, is extraordinary.

Tena (p702) in the Oriente is Ecuador's kayaking and river-rafting capital, where it's easy to set up day-runs down the nearby upper Río Napo (class III) or Río Misahuallí (class IV+).

The surfing is world class at Montañita (p716) and on Isla San Cristóbal (opposite) in the Galápagos. Playas (p717) has some decent nearby breaks, but you'll have to get in with the locals (try the Playas Club Surf, p717) to find them. The Galápagos are also famous for scuba diving and snorkeling (think hammerhead sharks and giant manta rays), while Parque Nacional Machalilla (p714) qualifies as 'pretty damn cool.'

And mountain biking? You can rent bikes for about US\$5 per hour in places such as Baños (p680) and Riobamba (p685), or go for the extreme downhill day trips offered by outfitters in those towns, as well as in Quito (p647) and Cuenca (p688).

## BOOKS

Lonely Planet's *Ecuador & the Galápagos Islands* offers more detailed travel information on the country.

If there's one book that nails Ecuadorian culture on the head, it's the eloquent and humorous *Living Poor*, written by Moritz Thomssen. Joe Kane's *Savages* is a more recently written account that illustrates the oil industry's impacts on the Ecuadorian Amazon.

*The Panama Hat Trail*, by Tom Miller, is a fascinating book about the author's search for that most quintessential and misnamed of Ecuadorian products, the panama hat. For a more literary (and surreal) impression of Ecuador, read Henri Michaux's *Ecuador: A Travel Journal*, or Kurt Vonnegut's absurd *Galápagos*, which takes place in futuristic Guayaquil as well as the islands.

## BUSINESS HOURS

Reviews throughout this book provide opening hours only when they differ from the following standard hours: banks generally open Monday through Friday, from 8am to between 2pm and 4pm. In bigger cities, most business and government offices are open Monday through Friday between 9am and 5:30pm, and close for an hour at lunch, which is sometime between noon and 2pm. On the coast and in smaller towns, the lunch break can be dragged on for two or more hours. Many businesses operate midday hours on Saturday, but nearly everything – including restaurants – closes on Sunday. Restaurants generally open for lunch from around 11:30am to 3pm and for dinner from 5pm to 10pm; some stay open all day. Bars usually open sometime between 5pm and 7pm and close between midnight and 2pm. Telephone call centers are almost invariably open 8am to 10pm daily. Post offices are generally open 8am to 6pm Monday through Friday and 8am to 1pm Saturday.

## CLIMATE

Ecuador's climate consists of wet and dry seasons, with significant variation among the different geographical regions (depending on whether you're in the Andes, on the coast or in the Oriente).

The Galápagos and the coast have a hot and rainy season from January to April; you can expect short torrential downpours with skin-cooking sunshine in between. You'll be a walking pool of sweat if you travel on the

coast during this time. From May to December it rains infrequently, but the skies are often overcast and the beaches cool. Travel is definitely more pleasant, but you may find the beach is just a little too nippy for sunbathing. Ecuadorians hit the beaches during the wet season.

In the Oriente, it rains during most months, especially during the afternoon and evening. August and December through March are usually the driest months, and April through June are the wettest, with regional variations. Malaria is more common during the wet season, but river travel is usually easier due to higher water levels.

Travel is pleasant in the highlands year-round, although you'll definitely be dodging raindrops October through May. It doesn't rain daily, however, and even April, the wettest month, averages one rainy day in two.

Daytime temperatures in Quito average a high of 21°C (70°F) and a low of 8°C (48°F) year-round.

For more information and climate charts see the South America Directory (p1062).

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Ecuador is a fairly safe country, but you should still be careful. Pickpocketing is definitely on the increase and is common in crowded places, such as markets. Armed robbery is still unusual in most of Ecuador, although parts of Guayaquil and Quito's Mariscal Sucre neighborhood have a reputation for being very dangerous.

Every year or so, a couple of long-distance night buses are robbed on the way to the coast. Avoid taking night buses through the provinces of Guayas or Manabí unless you have to.

Due to the armed conflict in neighboring Colombia, areas along the Colombian border (particularly in the northern Oriente) can be dangerous. Tours though are generally safe.

Take the normal precautions as outlined under Dangers & Annoyances in the South America Directory (see p1063). If you are robbed, get a *denuncia* (police report) from the local police station within 48 hours – they won't process a report after that.

## ELECTRICITY

Ecuador uses 110V, 60 cycles, AC (the same as in North America). Plugs have two flat prongs, as in North America.

## DRIVER'S LICENSE

An international driver's license, alongside a home-country license and passport, is required to drive in Ecuador.

## EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

As well as the information provided below, see Visas, p407.

### Embassies & Consulates in Ecuador

Embassies and consulates are best visited in the morning. Australia and New Zealand have no consular representation in Ecuador.

**Canada** Quito (Map pp650-1; ☎ 02-256-3580; www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/Ecuador; Av 6 de Diciembre 2816 & P Rivet, 4th fl); Guayaquil (Map pp720-1; ☎ 04-256-3580; consulc1@gye.satnet.net; Córdova 810, 4th fl)

**Colombia** Quito (☎ 02-245-8012; www.embajadacolombiaenecuador.org; Atahualpa 955 & República, 3rd fl); Guayaquil (☎ 04-263-0674/75; Francisco de Orellana, World Trade Center, Tower B, 11th fl); Tulcán (☎ 06-298-0559; Av Manabí 58-087)

**France** Quito (Map pp650-1; ☎ 02-254-3101/10; franciac@andinanet.net; Diego de Almagro 1550 & Pradera); Guayaquil (☎ 04-232-8442; José Mascote 909 & Hurtado)

**Germany** (Map p657; ☎ 02-297-0820; www.embajada-quito.de; Naciones Unidas E10-44 at República de El Salvador, Edificio Citiplaza, 12th fl, Quito)

**Holland** (Map pp650-1; ☎ 02-222-9229/30; www.embajadadeholanda.com; Av 12 de Octubre 1942 & Cordero, World Trade Center, Tower 1, 1st fl, Quito)

**Ireland** (☎ 02-245-1577; Antonio de Ulloa 2651 & Rumipamba, Quito)

**Peru** Quito (☎ 02-246-8410, 246-8389; embpeecu@uiosatnet.net; República de El Salvador 495 & Irlanda); Guayaquil (☎ 04-228 114; conperu@gye.satnet.net; Av Francisco de Orellana 501); Loja (Map p695; ☎ 07-257-9068; Sucre 10-56); Machala (Map p723; ☎ 07-930-680; cnr Bolívar & Colón)

**UK** Quito (Map p657; ☎ 02-297-0800/01; www.britembquito.org.ec; Naciones Unidas & República de El Salvador, Edificio Citiplaza, 14th fl); Guayaquil (☎ 04-256-0400/3850; Córdova 623 & Padre)

**USA** Quito (Map pp650-1; ☎ 02-256-2890; www.usembassy.org.ec; Avs Patria & 12 de Octubre); Guayaquil (Map pp720-1; ☎ 04-232-3570; 9 de Octubre & García Moreno)

**Venezuela** (☎ 02-226-8636; Av Los Cabildos 115, Quito)

### Ecuadorian Embassies & Consulates Abroad

Ecuador has embassies in Colombia and Peru, and also in the following countries.

**Australia & New Zealand** (☎ 02-6286-4021, 6286-1231; www.embassyecuadoraustralia.org.au; 6 Pindari Crescent, O'Malley, ACT 2606)

**Canada** (☎ 613-563-8206; www.ncf.ca/ecuador; 50 O'Connor St, Ste 316, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 6L2)

**France** (☎ 331-4561-1021; www.ambassade-equateur.fr; 34 Av de Messine, 75008 Paris)

**Germany** (☎ 030-238-6217; mecuadoral@t-online.de; www.embajada-ecuador.org; Kaiser-Friedrich Strasse 90, 1 OG, 10585 Berlin)

**UK** (☎ 020-7584-2648, 7584-1367; www.ecuador.embassyhomepage.com/; Flat 3, 3 Hans Crescent, Knightsbridge, London SW1X 0LS)

**USA** (☎ 202-234-7200; www.ecuador.org/esp/principal.htm; 2535 15th St NW, Washington, DC 20009)

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Many of Ecuador's major festivals are oriented around the Roman Catholic liturgical calendar. These are often celebrated with great pageantry, especially in highland indigenous villages, where a Catholic feast day is often the excuse for a traditional indigenous fiesta with drinking, dancing, rituals and processions. The most important are listed here.

### February

**Carnaval** Celebrated throughout Ecuador. Dates vary.

**Fiesta de Frutas y Flores** (Fruit & flower festival) Held in Ambato the last two weeks of February.

### June

**Corpus Christi** Religious feast day (the Thursday after the eighth Sunday after Easter) combined with the traditional harvest fiesta in many highland towns; includes processions and street dancing.

**Día de San Juan** (St John the Baptist) Fiestas in Otavalo area. Held on June 24.

**Día de San Pedro y San Pablo** (St Peter & St Paul) Fiestas in Otavalo area and other northern highland towns. Held on June 29.

### September

**Fiesta del Yamor** Held in Otavalo, September 1 to 15.

**Fiesta de la Mamá Negra** Held in Latacunga, September 23 to 24.

### December

**Fundación de Quito** (Founding of Quito) Celebrated the first week of December with bullfights, parades and dancing.

## FOOD & DRINK

Eating reviews throughout this chapter (and book) are given in order of budget, with the least expensive options first. For information about standard restaurant hours, see Business Hours, opposite.

## Ecuadorian Cuisine

For breakfast, eggs and bread rolls or toast are available. A good alternative is a *humita*, a sweet-corn tamale often served with coffee.

Lunch is the main meal of the day for many Ecuadorians. A cheap restaurant will serve a decent *almuerzo* (lunch of the day) for as little as US\$1.50. An *almuerzo* consists of a *sopa* (soup) and a *segundo* (second dish), which is usually a stew with plenty of rice. Sometimes the *segundo* is *pescado* (fish), *lentejas* (lentils) or *menestras* (generally, whatever legume stew – usually it's beans or peas – happens to be in the pot). Some places serve salad (often cooked), juice and *postre* (dessert), as well as the two main courses.

The *merienda* (evening meal) is a set meal, usually similar to lunch. If you don't want the *almuerzo* or *merienda*, you can choose from the menu, but this is always more expensive.

A *churrasco* is a hearty dish of fried beef, fried eggs, a few veggies, fried potatoes, slices of avocado and tomato, and the inevitable rice.

*Arroz con pollo* is a mountain of rice with little bits of chicken mixed in. *Pollo a la brasa* is roast chicken, often served with fries. *Gallina* is usually boiled chicken, as in soups, and *pollo* is more often chicken that's been spit-roasted or fried.

*Parrillas* (or *parrilladas*) are grill houses. Steaks, pork chops, chicken breasts, blood sausage, liver and tripe are all served (together or individually, depending on the establishment). Some *parrillas* do the Argentine thing and serve everything together on a tabletop grill.

Seafood is good, even in the highlands. The most common types of fish are *corvina* (technically white sea bass, but usually just a white fish) and *trucha* (trout). Popular throughout Ecuador, *ceviche* is uncooked seafood marinated in lemon and served with popcorn and sliced onions. It's delicious. *Ceviche* can be *de pescado* (fish), *de camarones* (shrimp), *de concha* (shellfish) or *mixto* (mixed). Unfortunately, improperly prepared *ceviche* is a source of cholera, so avoid it if in any doubt.

*Chifas* (Chinese restaurants) are generally inexpensive. Among other standards, they serve *chaulafan* (rice dishes) and *tallarines* (noodles dishes). Portions tend to be filling, with a good dose of MSG. Vegetarians will find that *chifas* are the best choice for meatless dishes. Vegetarian restaurants are rare outside touristy areas.

Restaurants usually offer a wide range of dishes, including the following classics:

**Caldo** (*kal-do*) – Soup or stew. Often served in markets for breakfast. *Caldo de gallina* (chicken soup) is the most popular. *Caldo de patas* is soup made by boiling cattle hooves.

**Cuy** (*kooy*) – Whole-roasted guinea pig. A traditional delicacy dating to Inca times, *cuy* tastes rather like a cross between rabbit and chicken. They're easily identified on grills with their little paws and teeth sticking out.

**Lapingachos** (*la-peen-ga-chos*) – Fried mashed-potato-and-cheese pancakes, often served with *fritada* (scraps of fried or roast pork).

**Seco** (*se-ko*) – Literally 'dry' (as opposed to a 'wet' soup), this is stew, usually meat, served with rice. It may be *seco de gallina* (chicken stew), *de res* (beef), *de chivo* (goat) or *de cordero* (lamb).

**Tortillas de maíz** (*tor-tee-lya de ma-ees*) – Tasty fried corn pancakes.

**Yaguarlocro** (*ya-gwar-lo-kro*) – Another classic. Potato soup with chunks of fried blood sausage floating in it. Many people prefer straight *locro*, which usually has potatoes, corn and an avocado or cheese topping – without the blood sausage.

## Drinks

Purify all tap water or buy bottled water. *Agua mineral* is carbonated; Güitig (pronounced weetig) is the most famous brand. *Agua sin gas* is not carbonated.

Bottled drinks are cheap and all the usual soft drinks are available. The local ones have endearing names such as Bimbo or Lulu. Ask for your drink *helada* if you want it out of the refrigerator, *al clima* if you don't. Remember to say *sin hielo* (without ice) unless you really trust the water supply.

*Jugos* (juices) are available everywhere. Make sure you get *jugo puro* (pure) and not *con agua* (with water). The most common kinds are *mora* (blackberry), *tomate de árbol* (a strangely appetizing fruit with a greenish taste), *naranja* (orange), *toronja* (grapefruit), *maracuyá* (passion fruit), *piña* (pineapple), *sandía* (watermelon), *naranjilla* (a local fruit that tastes like bitter orange) and papaya.

Coffee is widely available but is often disappointing. Instant – served either *en leche* (with milk) or *en agua* (with water) – is the most common. Espresso is available in the better restaurants.

*Té* (tea) is served black with lemon and sugar. *Té de hierbas* (herb tea) and hot chocolate are also popular.

For alcoholic drinks, local *cervezas* (beers – memorize it) are good and inexpensive.

Pilsener is available in 650mL bottles, while Club comes in 330mL bottles. Imports are tough to find. Local wines are terrible and imported wines are expensive.

*Ron* (rum) is cheap and good. The local firewater, *aguardiente*, is sugarcane alcohol, and is an acquired taste but can be good. It's very cheap. Imported spirits are expensive.

## GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

Ecuador is probably not the best place to be outwardly affectionate with a partner of the same sex. Homosexuality was illegal until 1997. Quito and Guayaquil have underground social scenes, but outside the occasional dance club, they're hard to find. Check out **Syberian's Gay Guide to Quito** (<http://gayquitoec.tripod.com>) or **Gayecuador** ([www.gayecuador.com](http://www.gayecuador.com) in Spanish).

## HOLIDAYS

On major holidays, banks, offices and other services are closed and public transport is often very crowded; book ahead if possible. The following are Ecuador's major national holidays; they may be celebrated for several days around the actual date:

**New Year's Day** January 1.

**Epiphany** January 6.

**Semana Santa** (Easter Week) March/April

**Labor Day** May 1.

**Battle of Pichincha** May 24. This honors the decisive battle of independence from Spain in 1822.

**Simón Bolívar's Birthday** July 24.

**Quito Independence Day** August 10.

**Guayaquil Independence Day** October 9. This combines with the October 12 national holiday and is an important festival in Guayaquil.

**Columbus Day/Día de la Raza** October 12.

**All Saints' Day** November 1.

**Day of the Dead** (All Souls' Day) November 2. Celebrated by flower-laying ceremonies in cemeteries, it's especially colorful in rural areas, where entire Indian families show up at cemeteries to eat, drink and leave offerings in memory of the departed.

**Cuenca Independence Day** November 3. Combines with the national holidays of November 1 and 2 to give Cuenca its most important fiesta of the year.

**Christmas Eve** December 24.

**Christmas Day** December 25.

## INTERNET ACCESS

All but the smallest of towns have cybercafés. Prices hover around US\$1 per hour, higher in small towns.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

**The Best of Ecuador** ([www.thebestofecuador.com](http://www.thebestofecuador.com)) Comprehensive tourist information.

**Ecuador Explorer** ([www.ecuadorexplorer.com](http://www.ecuadorexplorer.com)) Extensive information and good classifieds.

**Latin American Network Information Center** (<http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/ecuador/>) Links to everything Ecuadorian.

**Ministry of Tourism** ([www.viveecuador.com](http://www.viveecuador.com)) Sus out everything from health and budget issues to country highlights.

## LEGAL MATTERS

Drug penalties in Ecuador for possession of even small amounts of illegal drugs (which include marijuana and cocaine) are severe. Defendants often spend months in jail before they are brought to trial, and if convicted (as is usually the case), they can expect several years in jail.

Treat plainclothes 'policemen' with suspicion. If you're asked for ID by a uniformed official in broad daylight, show your passport.

In the event of a car accident, unless extremely minor, the vehicles should stay where they are until the police arrive and make a report. If you hit a pedestrian, you are legally responsible for the pedestrian's injuries and can be jailed unless you pay, even if the accident was not your fault. Drive defensively.

## MAPS

Ecuadorian bookstores carry a limited selection of Ecuadorian maps. The best selection is available from the **Instituto Geográfico Militar** in Quito (p648). *The Pocket Guide to Ecuador*, published in Quito, includes maps of the country and the major cities.

## MEDIA

The *Explorer* is a free monthly booklet printed in English and Spanish listing what's on in Quito. The country's best newspapers are *El Comercio* ([www.elcomercio.com](http://www.elcomercio.com) in Spanish) and *Hoy* ([www.hoy.com.ec](http://www.hoy.com.ec) in Spanish), published in Quito, and *El Telégrafo* ([www.eltelgrafo.com](http://www.eltelgrafo.com))

### THE AGE GAME

- Legal drinking age: 18
- Minimal driving age: 18
- Suffrage: 18
- Age of consent: not defined.

.telegrafo.com.ec in Spanish) and *El Universo* (www.eluniverso.com in Spanish), published in Guayaquil.

## MONEY

Ecuador's currency was the sucre until it switched to the US dollar in 2000, a process called dollarization (p642). For more on costs and money see p20.

### ATMs

ATMs are the easiest way of getting cash. They're found in most cities and even in smaller towns, although they are sometimes out of order. Make sure you have a four-digit PIN. Bancos del Pacífico and Bancos del Pichincha have MasterCard/Cirrus ATMs. Bancos de Guayaquil have Visa/Plus ATMs.

### Bargaining

Bargaining is expected at food and crafts markets. Sometimes you can bargain on hotels during low season.

### Cash

Bills are the same as those used in the US. Coins are identical in shape, size and material to their US counterparts, but instead of US presidents, they feature the faces and symbols of Ecuador.

Change is often quite difficult to come by here. Trying to purchase inexpensive items with a US\$20 bill (or even a US\$10 bill) generally results in either you or the proprietor running from shop to shop until someone produces some change. If no one does, you're out of luck. Change bills whenever you can. To ask for change, make a deeply worried face and ask, '¿Tiene suelto?' (Do you have change?).

### Credit Cards

Credit cards are useful, particularly for buying cash from a bank. Visa and MasterCard are the most widely accepted.

### Exchanging Money

Foreign currencies can be exchanged into US dollars easily in Quito, Guayaquil and Cuenca, where rates are also the best. You can also change money at most of the major border crossings. In some places, however, notably the Oriente, it is quite difficult to exchange money. Exchange houses, called *casas de cambio*, are normally the best

places; banks will also exchange money but are usually much slower. Usually, exchange rates are within 2% of one another in any given city.

Major towns have a black market, usually near the big *casas de cambio*. Rates are about the same, but street changing is illegal (though ignored), and counterfeits and cheating are serious risks.

Exchange rates at press time included the following:

Country	Unit		US\$
Australia	A\$1	=	0.75
Canada	C\$1	=	0.88
euro zone	€1	=	1.25
Japan	¥100	=	0.84
New Zealand	NZ\$1	=	0.66
UK	UK£1	=	1.87

### Traveler's Checks

Most banks and nearly all exchange houses will cash traveler's checks, but only top-end hotels and restaurants will consider them.

### POST

It costs US\$1.25 to send a letter to North America, US\$2 to Europe and US\$2.25 to the rest of the world. For a few cents extra, you can send them *certificado* (certified). Sending parcels of 2kg to 20kg is best done in Quito.

To receive mail in Ecuador, have the sender mail your item to the nearest post office, eg Joan SMITH, Lista de Correos, Correo Central, Quito (or town and province of your choice), Ecuador. Mail is filed alphabetically, so make sure that your last name is clear.

For members, the SAE (p649) will hold mail sent to the clubhouse. If your incoming mail weighs over 2kg, you have to recover it from customs (and pay high duty).

### RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

Responsible travel in Ecuador is a tricky issue. 'Ecotourism' is a major buzzword used by nearly every tour operator in the country, and it really comes down to your own impression of the company you're dealing with as to whether it practices the responsibility it espouses. The SAE in Quito (p649) is an excellent resource for finding tour operators and hotels or lodges that truly practice ecotourism.

On a personal behavior level, there are several things you can do to leave a minimal impact (or maximize your positive impact) on the country. If you're taking a tour in the Oriente, make sure your guide does not hunt game for cooking or cut trees for firewood. If you plan to visit an indigenous community, make sure the guide is from the community or has a good working relationship with the community (or written permission to visit, in the case of the Huaorani). In the Galápagos, do not approach the animals (no matter how tempting) or wander off the trails. With the sheer number of tourists visiting the islands, this is incredibly important. On the islands, as well as on the coast, think twice before eating lobster or shrimp – lobster is overfished and shrimp farming is one of the most ecologically damaging practices in the country. Do not buy anything made from coral, particularly black coral. Don't litter, even though many Ecuadorians do.

With all the stories travelers love to tell about slashed or stolen packs, it's easy to get paranoid. Remember that Ecuadorians travel their country too, but you'll never see an Ecuadorian with a newfangled, wire-mesh locking bag around their luggage. Items like this simply shout that you don't trust the people you're supposedly here to get to know.

See Responsible Travel at the front of this book for more information.

## STUDYING

Ecuador is one of the best places to study Spanish on the continent. Quito (p647) and Cuenca (p688), and to a lesser extent Otavalo (p669) and Baños (p680), are the best places to shack up with the books and go one-on-one with a teacher. Prices range from US\$5 to US\$10 per hour.

## TELEPHONE

Andinatel (mainly in the highlands and Oriente) and Pacifictel (mainly on the coast) provide local, national and international telephone services. The city of Cuenca uses Etapa. Calls cost about US35¢ per minute to the USA, about US45¢ to the UK and Australia. You can also make Internet phone calls in larger towns for about US25¢ a minute.

Reverse-charge (collect) calls are possible to North America and most European countries. Direct dialing to a North American or European operator is also possible;

the numbers are available from your long-distance service provider. From a private phone within Ecuador, dial ☎ 116 for an international operator.

Two-digit area codes change by province. Dial ☎ 09 for mobile phones. Drop the area code if you're calling within a province. If calling from abroad, drop the 0 from the code. Ecuador's country code is ☎ 593.

To call locally, you can use either a Pacifictel or Andinatel office or a public phone box. Public phones operate with prepaid phone cards, which are available at kiosks.

All telephone numbers in Ecuador now have seven digits, and the first digit – except for cellular phone numbers – is always a '2' (except in Quito where some begin with a '3'). If someone gives you a six-digit number (which happens often), simply put a '2' in front of it.

## TOILETS

Ecuadorian plumbing has very low pressure. Putting toilet paper into the bowl may clog the system, so use the waste basket. This may seem unsanitary, but it's much better than clogged bowls and water overflowing onto the floor. Expensive hotels have adequate plumbing.

Public toilets are limited mainly to bus terminals, airports and restaurants. Lavatories are called *servicios higiénicos* and are usually marked 'SS.HH.' People needing to use the lavatory often ask to use the *baño* in a restaurant; toilet paper is rarely available – carry a personal supply.

## TOURIST INFORMATION

The government run **Ministerio de Turismo** ([www.vivecuador.com](http://www.vivecuador.com)) is responsible for tourist information at the national level. It is slowly opening tourist information offices – known as **iTur** offices – in important towns throughout Ecuador.

**South American Explorers** (SAE) has a clubhouse in Quito (see p649). For general information on this helpful organization, see p649.

## TOURS

Most of the Galápagos archipelago is accessible to visitors only by guided tour (ie a cruise). Many travelers also opt to visit the Amazon on organized tours, as these are efficient, educational and often the only way to get deep into the rainforest.

## TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

Unfortunately, Ecuador's infrastructure for disabled travelers is virtually nonexistent.

## VISAS

Most travelers entering Ecuador as tourists, including citizens of Australasian countries, Japan, the EU, Canada and the USA do not require visas. Upon entry, they will be issued a T-3 tourist card valid for 90 days. Sixty-day stamps are rarely given, but double check if you're going to be in the country for a while. Residents of most Central American and some Asian countries require visas.

All travelers entering as diplomats, refugees, students, laborers, religious workers, business-people, volunteers and cultural-exchange visitors require non-immigrant visas. Various immigrant visas are also available. Visas must be obtained from an Ecuadorian embassy and cannot be arranged within Ecuador. See p735 for a partial list of Ecuadorian embassies.

Officially, to enter the country you must have a ticket out of Ecuador and sufficient funds for your stay, but border authorities rarely ask for proof of this. International vaccination certificates are not required by law, but some vaccinations, particularly against yellow fever, are advisable.

## Visa Extensions

Tourist card extensions can be obtained from the **Jefatura Provincial de Migración** (Map p657; ☎ 02-224-7510; Isla Seymour 1152 near Río Coca; ☒ 8:30am-noon & 3-5pm Mon-Fri). On top of the original 90 days, you can obtain a maximum of 30 additional days, a process that can be performed three times, for a maximum of 180 days (six months) per year. You cannot get an extension until the day your tourist card expires.

## VOLUNTEERING

Nearly all organizations accepting volunteers in Ecuador require a minimum commitment of one month, and many require at least basic Spanish-speaking skills. Most also *charge* volunteers between US\$100 and US\$300 per month, so don't expect free room and board in exchange for your work – it's rarely given. By far, the best place to get information in Ecuador is the Quito clubhouse of SAE (p649). **Ecuador Explorer** ([www.ecuadorexplorer.com](http://www.ecuadorexplorer.com)) has a great classified page listing numerous organizations that need volunteers.

## WOMEN TRAVELERS

Generally, women travelers will find Ecuador safe and pleasant, despite the fact that machismo is alive and well. Ecuadorian men often make flirtatious comments and whistle at single women. Really, it's just sport – a sort of hormonal babbling amongst groups of guys – and the best strategy is to brush them off. Women who firmly ignore unwanted verbal advances are often treated with respect.

On the coast, come-ons are more predatory, and solo female travelers should take precautions like staying away from bars and discos where they'll obviously get hit on, opting for taxis over walking etc. Racy conversation with a guy, while it may be ironic or humorous, is not common here, and a man will probably assume you're after one thing.

## WORKING

Officially, you need a work visa to get a job in Ecuador. English teaching positions occasionally pop up in Quito or Cuenca. The pay is low but enough to live on. Tourist services (jungle lodges, tour operators etc) are good places to look for work.

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