

Trip Report - Northern Ecuador (Quito, Otavalo, Guayaquil, Mindo area)

By Linda and Chuck, s/v Jacaranda

September 19 - October 16, 2013 and several visits afterwards

In General

Ecuador gets its name from straddling the Equator. Great to be able to use American dollars which is their currency since 2000.

Ecuador is a major exporter of bananas (first place worldwide in production and export), flowers, and the seventh largest producer of cocoa.

Buses in Ecuador are comfortable and about as cheap as you will ever find anywhere (we figure about a dollar an hour). A major contributor is the cheap price of gas (\$1.50/gallon) which is subsidized by the government (the subsidy is due to end in 2016).

Resources/Extra Reading about Ecuador

<http://www.thisisecuador.com> - I found their little magazine in the office of Safari Tours in Quito.

Getting There - Took an 8 hour bus from Bahia de Caraquez to Quito. We went on the Reina del Camino Especial bus from Terminal Terrestre for \$10 each (discount available for jubilado). Left Bahia at 8 a.m. and arrived Quito at 4 p.m. They will ask to see your passport when you buy your ticket (we were able to buy in advance by going to the terminal 2 days before). We like to sit in seats 11,12 (middle of the bus towards the front).

The trip closer to Quito is spectacular. Sit on the left side going to Quito for a great view as you climb into the cloud forests near Illiniza National Park.

QUITO (elevation 9,350 feet)

The highest capital city in the world housing administrative, legislative and judicial functions (which by definition discounts La Paz, Bolivia). It is the second most populous city (2,300,000 +) after Guayaquil. Nestled amid snowcapped Andean peaks. It is in

the Andes, lying in a long valley flanked by 2 volcanoes (with 7 more in the area). Some of these are active. Because of its elevation and its proximity to the equator, Quito has a fairly constant cool climate, with spring-like weather year-round.

The fantastic Cento Historico - historic center of Quito - has one of the largest, least-altered and best-preserved colonial centers in the Americas. Quito, along with Krakow, Poland were the first World Cultural Heritage Sites declared by UNESCO in 1978. The area of the city known as La Mariscal caters to tourists and is the center of entertainment. Quito, the capital of Ecuador, was founded in the 16th century on the ruins of an Inca city and stands at an altitude of 2,850 m. Despite the 1917 earthquake, the city has the best-preserved, least altered historic centre in Latin America. The monasteries of San Francisco and Santo Domingo, and the Church and Jesuit College of La Compañía, with their rich interiors, are pure examples of the 'Baroque school of Quito', which is a fusion of Spanish, Italian, Moorish, Flemish and indigenous art. With its historic centre and its buildings the city is an outstanding example of the Baroque school of Quito, a fusion of European and indigenous art.

There are about 130 monumental buildings (which hosts a variety of pictorial art and sculpture, mostly of religious inspired in a multi-faceted range of schools and styles) and 5,000 properties registered in the municipal inventory of heritage properties.

City of many large and beautiful parks.

Orientation

Independence Square or [Plaza Grande](#) (colonial name), around which were built in addition the Archbishop's Palace, the Municipal Palace, the [Hotel Plaza Grande](#) and the Metropolitan Cathedral.

La Mariscal is a taxi ride from the Centro Historico.

When we arrived in Quito at the Reina del Camino bus terminal (which is NOT Terminal Sur - the city's main bus terminal) we took a trole (trolley) (12 centavos) to Plaza Santo Domingo in the center, rather than a taxi. The trole was very crowded and we had trouble squeezing in with our duffle bags. Linda had a policeman stuff her duffle through the closing doors. Besides, we were nervous of rumored pick pockets --but we did fine.

Hotels

[Portal de Catuña Hotel Boutique](#) - Centro Historico right off San Francisco Plaza Bolivar OE 6-105 and Cuenca
www.portaldecantuna.com

On a private alleyway off the Plaza de San Francisco
Sonia and son Bernardo Sanchez

Oct. 15 -- Room #13 - second floor - matrimonial; has windows to outside and was quiet although there was a little alley noise.

Was quoted on phone \$106/nite but got it through Booking.com for \$59 (\$66 with tax). Old mansion in the Sanchez family - a lot of character - especially the sitting room which was in its original state and beautiful: Parisian mirrors, chandeliers, painted walls and around ceilings, gold leaf details on the arches; wood floors; original furniture with crushed velvet upholstery. Bernardo's great grandfather owned land around Cotopaxi. Breakfast included - outside underneath the building in the original stables is their little restaurant. Met a nice Australian couple.

Traveller's Inn - Mariscal - (Across from the Spanish Embassy)

La Pinta E4-435 & Amazonas Ave.

Phone #22556985

www.travellersecuador.com

info@travellersecuador.com

Nice Ecuadorian family owns this old home that they used to live in themselves. Some family (Estafania and Daniel) speak english; Jhonny the night guard is very nice. The folks here are vey nice and helpful but too bad they are not really warm like some Ecuadorians can be.

Excellent security.

Breakfast and wifi included. We also used their laundry service.

You can arrange for them to pick you up at the airport for \$45.00

We had the rooms w/private bath on the first floor closest to the front of the building and they were large and spacious (#104 had a fireplace).

****Room 203 on the second floor is very large, sunny, with good wifi since it is near the office; can be a bit noisy during the day when the owners' grandkids are around. This is the room we always ask for.

Rm. 202 is small and comparatively dark but has a nice bathroom.

They recommend taking a taxi rather than walking every place you go in Mariscal because of safety reasons. But we walk a few blocks to our favorite restaurant anyway (Cosa Nostra italian food - great pizza).

They can also arrange sightseeing transportation and tours.

Hotel San Francisco de Quito - Centro Historico - our favorite!

Great location and safe to walk!

Had large corner room on the second floor but on a busy street so was very noisy

Hotel fronts a walking street.

Moved to a triple on the second floor overlooking the courtyard.

We stayed 4 nights are were quoted the following prices:

\$55/night for double with private bath

\$49/night for double with private bath if you stay for a few days and pay in cash = Total of \$211 (\$52.75/night with taxes)

I paid \$240 for three doubles and one triple with my credit card (base charge of \$214.36 plus IVA of \$25.72) (Also paid for a water and tea)(checkout Sept. 23)

From friends on svArmagh who recommend this place in Centro Historico:

La Casa Toleña

Chile E-413 y Leon

Tel. 3160213 / 0984 824-194

www.lacasatolena.com

hostallacasatolena@gmail.com

\$12 per person without breakfast

Nice cheap hostel with very friendly proprietors (Carolina and Belgica) - not much english; good location (10 minutes walk to center); roof terrace with great views.

Near Estacion Marin Central

Things To do:

La Capilla del Hombre and house of Oscar Guayasamin - DO NOT MISS THIS!!!!!!!

In the hills in the Bellavista neighborhood - Mariano Calvache E18A y Lorenzo Chavez (junto a la Capilla del Hombre)

Take a tour in English (free with \$6 admission; \$3 for senior discount); several videos about him are outstanding.

Guayasamin is the most famous Ecuadorian artist of international fame and Capilla del Hombre is considered to be the most important art site in South America. His house/ studio is fantastic (his collection of antiques, art, and archeological artifacts is amazing).

The Capilla is very special.

There is a cafe with a plaza with a great view over the city; also a gift store

There are plans for another museum on the property overlooking the city.

Free on Sunday, closed on Mondays and holidays.

Walking tour

Through the tourist office on Plaza Independencia

\$15 each - was private since no one else was there.

9:30 a.m.

At first given a guide who spoke little english and for the price we complained. The new guide was also a policewoman - everyone saluted her on the street. Very good - liked her alot. Took us the City Museum, La Compania Church. Stopped in to church to get homemade cookies and lime candies.

The [Church of La Compañía](#) began construction in 1605; it took 160 years to be built. By 1765 the work was completed with the construction of the façade. This was done by Native Americans who carefully shaped the [Baroque style](#) in one of the most complete examples of this art in the Americas. La Compañía is probably the richest church in South America with its golden altar.

The houses of Quito are chiefly built in the old Spanish or Moorish style.

The building material in general use is sun-dried brick, covered in the better houses with plaster or stucco.

The public buildings are of the heavy Spanish type. Facing on to the principal square are the cathedral, the government palace, the archbishop's palace and the city hall. The finest building in the city is the Jesuit church, La Compania, the facade of which is covered with elaborate carving.

View from Basilica

La Ronda - small bohemian street with lots of bars and restaurants and live music coming out of every doorway! It was crowded on the weekends - mostly with nationals and locals. Dancing and street performers on some corners. Reminded us of Bourbon Street in New Orleans.

Bus Tour - Quinde Tour - on/off tour

Almost 3 hours (Sept. 20)

We got off at El Panecillo for lunch and then got back on.

Tickets (\$12 each) with taxes is \$15 each (\$6 for jubilado)

Teleferiqo - aerial tramway to 13,500 feet built in 2005

\$9 for foreigners

Great view on a clear day where you can see the many volcanoes (most snow-capped) in the distance. Visitors center, hiking trails and photo areas.

Unfortunately there is no visual key to what you are seeing (either brochure or directional plaques) so you get no explanation - a real shame, especially considering the price you pay.

Restaurants

***Cyril Bakery - <http://www.cyril-boutique.com>

Irlanda E10-124 y 6 de Diciembre (approach it from Irlanda Street where there is parking)

593-2452-511

OMG!! You think you've died and gone to Paris!! Expensive but the bread and croissants are worth it - especially if you are longing for the real thing and to get away from the stuff they call bread in Ecuador. The chocolate section, pastries, gelatos, and drinks (the hot chocolate is so thick your spoon will stand up in it - try the one with lavender) is just all PHENOMENAL!! What a place!!

Pain Autrefoi (\$3.15), almond croissants (\$1.75 each), and plain croissants (.65 each)

Heladeria San Agustin

Guayaquil 1060 y Chile

2285082

Wonderful place for lunch; crowded with locals.

go before 11 to watch them make the famous ice cream -

Lunch on Sept. 23

Bill for 2 for ceviche (delicious) and empanada, appetizer, lemonade, 4 take away snack pastries and ice cream was \$19.60

Theatrum - a real experience!!

Expensive dinner (Sept. 21)

Manaby y Flores above the Old Theater (separate entrance on the side)

\$172 for 3 people (with 2 glasses of wine, incl. taxes, service) (me, Chuck, Tari)

Nice multi-course menu option dinners and a fun desert of tropical fruits

Cosa Nostra

good Italian restaurant in Mariscal (best pizza in SA)

Banquerizo Moreno E7-86 y Diego de Almagro

2 527145

Pizza is about \$9.00; 1 shared pizza and lemonades plus service, tax=\$17.00

Zazu - Expensive - (near Parque Carolina)

upscale with delicious food

\$66.99 for both of us (Oct. 15)

Fried Bananas (Mariscal)

No. 1 on TripAdvisor!

www.newfriedbananas.com

Foch E4-150 y Av. Amazonas (3 blocks west of Plaza Foch)

223-5808

Good food - we were the only ones there

The Magic Bean

Near the Traveller's Inn

Juan Leon Mera and Mariscal Foch

Good for lunch - Food is ok but overpriced

From friends on svArmagh (Steve and Patti)

Cafe San Blas - inexpensive and very good Italian restaurant

Jose Antepará E4 09 y Vicente Leon

+593 2-228-6762

Small - so advised to get there early for dinner.

From friends on svArmagh

Cafe Aguila de Oro - terrific coffee and they sell beans

Benalcazar N3-123 y Espejo

www.cafeaguiladeoro.com

Tel. 2280-523 / 2602-594

ZAO - upscale asian

Paul Rivet N30-145 y Whympier

2523496

<http://zaoquito.com>

Good sushi and asian and Thai food. But not as good as the Tripadvisor reviews lead you to believe. Nice atmosphere. We shared an order of sushi and a salmon dish for \$37.00 including non-alcoholic drinks, tax, and tip.

Tanoshii (1/8/15)

Japanese, Thai, Asian restaurant

Av. 12 de Diciembre y Luis - Upscale in Swissotel

They have like a Benihana seating around a grill in addition to regular tables

Very good sushi but expensive - will go to Noe's next time

Lunch was \$41 for 1 miso soup, 2 8-piece sushi rolls, 2 waters

Noe Sushi Bar

Cumbaya. Isabel La Catolica. Jardin. Quicentro. CCI

+593 1800 663 663

We liked the Sushi that we ate in Noe's in Guayaquil so would go here next time we wanted sushi

Shopping

Great stores in Mariscal, especially on Juan Leon Mera St.:

Artisan Market (I buy spondylus from my buddynCruz in Stall #39 - excellent quality)

Zigze - Juan Leon Mera N 23-84; graphics on bags, computer cases, T-shirts

www.zigze.com

Cacao&Cacao - Ecuadorian chocolate sales and cafe - Juan Leon Mera N241 y Roca

Artesanias Andinas - Juan Leon Mera N. 24-33 (Pinto y Wilson)

Galeria Latina - Juan Leon Mera N23-69 (833) y Veintimilla - www.galerialatina.com.

Great upscale craft store - has both Panamanian and Ecuadorian tagua figurines, beautiful jewelry, antique textiles, crafts of all kinds, and alpaca clothing.

AG and the store next to it

Tianguez (Museo Tienda Tianguez) - connected to the Mindalae Museo - etnohistorico de artesanias del Ecuador - high quality crafts at fair trade prices

Plaza San Francisco - Underneath the San Francisco church next to cafe of same name. tianguez2007@yahoo.com; tel. (593-2) 2954326

www.mindalae.com

Fair trade prices.

I bought some jewelry and a painting by Tiga artist.

Liked many things there.

Resources/Extra Reading about Quito

36 hours in Quito: http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/18/travel/36-hours-in-quito-ecuador.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

La Mitad del Mundo (The Middle of the World)

22 miles north of Quito (35 km)

GPS has recently determined that the actual equator is 790 feet north of the monument.
(see transportation below)

Edwin, van driver guide, drove us there on the way back from otavalo)

Parking Fee

Entrance Fee

Museum Fee - exhibits on multi-levels showing indigenous people from different regions of Ecuador.

9/29/13 - Lunch at Plaza Sol overlooking the plaza where dancing and music took place on Sundays. Lunch for both of us was \$29.

Inti-ñan Museum (outside La Mitad Parque) (Museo de Sitio Intiñan)

www.museointinan.com.ec

Entrance Fee - \$4/person

1875 House

Little "scientific" tests for being at the equator (water flow direction, balancing egg).

Mansion del Rio

<http://www.mansiondelrio-ec.com/en/principale.htm>

OTAVALO

Private van from Quito (Traveller's Inn to Otavalo (see Transportation below)

Hotel Riviera Sucre

Garcia Moreno 380 y Roca

06-2920241

rivierasucre@hotmail.com

www.rivierasucre.com

Near Parque Bolivar

Very nice stay - next to a lovely pedestrian walkway and park

Staff were very friendly.

We had two rooms in the back of the property which was almost like a private suite off the pretty garden.

Double room with private bath was \$28

Breakfast was an extra \$3

Alternative: didn't stay here but nice place

Hostal Doña Esther

Juan Montalvo 4-44 y Bolivar

Nice correspondence with the owner (Wendy) Tour groups stay here.

Transportation

Edwin Correa

Phone # 0987566742

Took us to Otavalo one way transportation in his van arranged by Traveller's Inn (who he does work with) (\$60?)

One hour trip.

Great guy and highly recommended. Wonderful clean van and Edwin spoke a little english.

We privately arranged for him to pick us up a few days later in Otavalo, take us to La Mitad del Mundo, and back to Quito.

Then privately arranged for him to drive us one way from Quito to Riobamba (\$120?)

GUAYAQUIL

Took Reina del Camino bus from Guayaquil to Bahia on 8/21/13 at 12:50 - fare was \$7.00 each. Seats 3,4.

Hotel

Hostal Linda (Downtown)

Good location in the center within walking distance of the malecon.

Lorenzo de Garaicoa 809 and Victor Manuel Rendón - overlooking Parque Centenario
\$25 for a double room (matrimonial) - be sure to ask for a room with a window. We had one overlooking the Park.

Phone: 04-256-2495

Cell: 0998287835

Mansion del Rio - VERY upscale (Downtown)

<http://www.mansiondelrio-ec.com/en/principale.htm>

Phone: 04-256-6044 / 04-256-5827 / 04-256-5983 / 04-230-3576

E-mail: reservas(at)mansiondelrio-ec.com

Address: Barrio Las Peñas, Calle Numa Pompilio Llona No. 120, next to Puerto Santa Ana, in front of Río Guayas.

Fabulous historic building in historic Las Peñas neighborhood, overlooking the River at the end of the Malecon

\$133 for a double room (tax included)

Rates include breakfast buffet and afternoon tea, and hotel/airport round trip transfers.

Hotel Livingston Inn (our cheap choice for being near the airport)

Address: Av. Juan Tanca Marengo Km 1, Guayaquil, Ecuador

Tel: +593 4-239-5301

Across the street from the Howard Johnson (\$145 w/out breakfast which is \$14) and within walking distance to the Del Sol Shopping Mall

Very helpful staff.

Cheap (includes breakfast), good location 2 minutes from the airport, and you can have good meals in the mall (try Noe's Sushi).

This hotel is butt ugly but it is clean with comfortable rooms. Each room is different so ask to see a few. We get a room in the rear off the main busy street

Rooms have air conditioning, a fridge, excellent reading lights over the bed, good showers with hot water, lots of space including a little "make-up" area near the bathroom, a couch, cable TV, wifi, and electrical outlets.

Restaurants

Red Crab Restaurant (Urdesa) - Great seafood (cracked crab and cebiche)

Dinner for 3 was \$83.00

Phone - 0994795598

U.E.E. 1205 y Laureles

NOE Sushi - Del Sol Shopping Mall near Livingston Inn

Excellent but on expensive side

Mindo Area Cloud Forest

Pacha Quindi

<http://www.pachaquindi.com>

This is a very special place in the cloud forest that is a Hummingbird Reserve developed by our friends Tony and Barbara. They have been working on this for 20 years. We saw about 25 species of hummingbirds and 3,000 individuals while we were there over three days. We stayed in their self-catering cabin. Very special.

Description from their website: Pacha Quindi, which means Hummingbird Place in the native language of Quichua, for nearly two decades has been dedicated to protecting and preserving the natural habitat of the Andean cloud forest in NW Ecuador. This being one of the most biologically diverse habitats on the planet, Pacha Quindi understands the need not only to protect and preserve the Andean cloud forest, but also to educate both local residents and visiting tourists of the importance to do so. Having established a Nature Refuge in this area Pacha Quindi is able to allow others to experience for themselves the natural beauty and wonder of this very unique and biologically diverse environment.

More for Next Time:

[Bellavista Cloud Forest Reserve](#) conservation and bird watching lodge

[Cotopaxi](#) National Park

Rose plantations

Artisan villages specializing in weaving outside of Otavalo