



Nine of Cups

Notes for Cruisers – Ecuador Inland Travel Guayaquil/ Riobamba / Quito / Otavalo

Notes:

- Trip Duration: 10 Days – October 2003; Quito/Otavalo 6 days March 2005
- This was our first Ecuador inland trip and a good introduction to the diversity of the country.
- There's much more to see (e.g. Banos, Vilcabamba), but we list below only things we did, saw and tried.
- Guide: Lonely Planet Ecuador

Guayaquil

- Liberpesa (or CLP or Costa Azul) bus from Libertad to Guayaquil (\$3.00/ea)
- Hotel Alexander – We found this to be a good businessman's hotel; comfortable, central and reasonable; Luque 1107 (most cab drivers seem to know it); A/C, hot water, cable TV, restaurant; matrimonials ~\$26/night including tax.
- We have tried only a few notable restaurants in Guayaquil and have found nothing outstanding.
 - Casa Baska at Parque Bolivar is nice and a little pricey. It offers primarily Spanish (Basque) food and nice atmosphere.
 - Resaca on Malecon 2000 is trendy and the food was pretty mediocre when we were there.
 - Salon China – same block as Hotel Alexander on Luque; excellent Chinese food, reasonable prices.
 - McDonalds at Malecon 2000 ...what you'd expect.
- Taxi to downtown runs about \$3-4 from the bus terminal; it's cheaper coming back. Bus to "Malecon" is 30 cents.
- Places of interest:
 - Parque Bolivar – great if you like iguanas...they're everywhere!
 - Malecon 2000 – great views of the Rio Guayas; upscale, safe and beautiful. IMAX theatre.
 - Las Penas and Cerro Santa Ana – 444 steps to the top with boutiques and shops along the way, a lighthouse, chapel and great views from the top; a small military museum at the top (free).
 - Artisan's Market – Loja & Moreno; open daily. Good assortment of crafts from around the country.

Riobamba

- Bus to Riobamba ...we just chose the next bus leaving. ~\$4/ea about 4-5 hours...great views.
- Hotel: Hotel Tren Dorado – \$14/night; it was cold and rainy when we were in Riobamba and the hotel seemed cold, too. We had an inside room, no TV, poor lighting in a small, cramped room BUT it was clean and next door to the train station so convenient for train boarding at 0600 and they served breakfast (not included, \$3/pp) at 0530. Others who have stayed subsequently, liked it.
- Places of Interest:
 - El Nariz del Diablo (the Nose of the Devil) is a great (albeit long) train ride from Riobamba through Alausi to Sibambe and back to Alausi. There is nothing in Sibambe; the train turns around and you get off in Alausi. They offer padded seats for rent (\$1 ea) at the train station...the best buy of the day! Vendors walk along the top of the railroad cars selling food and drinks! There are two stops along the way with souvenirs and banos...take advantage! Ride on top...everyone does. It's terrific and really not particularly "daredevilish" as Lonely Planet states. There are no longer any tunnels and the train is diesel, not steam. Buy your tix the day before \$11/each plus \$1 for the brochure. Train leaves Riobamba at 0700 (Weds/Fri/Sun) and arrives back in Alausi about 2pm. Take a bus back to Riobamba (they are waiting for you in the square when the trains arrives - \$1.20/ 1½ hrs).
NOTE: Cruisers who visited in February 2005 were disappointed because the train was a "bus on rails" and was definitely not as advertised; check before booking tickets.
 - The Tagua Shop (Ave Leon Borja) – we have seen carved tagua (vegetable ivory) in Colombia, the San Blas Islands and Panama, but never saw any carved pieces we thought were of much interest until we visited Riobamba. This little shop was great with intricate carved pieces of jewelry, chess sets, etc. at very reasonable prices (carved seahorse necklace on leather cord - \$2.50).
 - Tour to Chimborazo (highest peak in Ecuador) – We arranged this at Hotel Tren Dorado (\$30 each), but found out from our guide, Maria Garcia, that you can contact her directly to arrange the tour for less \$. She speaks excellent English (spent time in the U.S.); Tel: 03- 962-41 email: cerroviejo33@hotmail.com. Includes van pickup at hotel ~0830, a very scenic ride up to the National Park where we saw vicuñas in the wild. Maria waits at the first refuge hut while you climb up to the second hut and have a cup of hot maté de coca at 5,000M (16,000 feet). The altitude makes it tough, but take your time and it's very do-able; the views are spectacular. Lunch is at her family's "farm", Cerro Viejo, with a "gourmet" Ecuadorian lunch prepared from all fresh, local foods and views of Chimborazo that were outstanding. She will drop you off back at the hotel or at the bus station if you're heading out. Entrance fee to the National Park is NOT included and was posted \$10/ea, but we paid \$5 with Maria. The tour lasted till about 3PM. Dress warmly, it's chilly up there. This tour was the highlight of our whole trip!
NOTE: Cruisers who visited in 2005 said Maria may no longer be doing the tours, but the tour was still available thru the Hotel Tren Dorado.
- Restaurants – Nothing outstanding. We ate "off the street" from the vendors near the train station.
- There's a little supermarket (Tia) along the main street heading downtown which has a good assortment of drinks, snacks, etc.
- Internet was readily available at several places. \$1/hr.
- ATMs – several in town

Quito

- NOTE: The Esmeraldas bus leaves from its own terminal in downtown Libertad near the Immigration Office and offers an overnight bus to Quito. Current departure time ~8:30pm, but check schedule.
- Bus to Quito - through the "Avenue of the Volcanoes"; very scenic; 3-4 hrs (\$3.50)
- The "Trolley" stop, right outside the bus station, is convenient and cheap (25¢) and takes you within 2-3 blocks of the hotel.
- Hotel: Hostal Amazonas Inn (~\$18/night/couple); matrimonial; cable TV, small rooms, some with no windows, but clean, central and quiet; hot water; hard beds; small café. Ask for Jeannette, the owner...she speaks English and is very hospitable.
- Travel/tour agencies are all around this area to arrange local as well as national tours.
- Bookstore: Libri Mundi is right around the corner from the hotel and has an excellent selection of English language books. Good browsing.

- Restaurants:
 - Magic Bean – near the hotel; huge breakfasts, good coffee; pricey.
 - Lots of restaurants around; we found nothing spectacular.
- Places of Interest:
 - Walking Tour – We took the "walking tour" described in Lonely Planet which was terrific.
 - Museo del Banco Central – Terrific museum; we spent nearly the whole day there. (\$3/each)
 - Mitad del Mundo – A must! Catch a bus on Avenida America (35¢/45 mins) marked "Mitad del Mundo"; they seem to run constantly throughout the morning. \$1 entrance fee to park; \$2 entrance fee to museum/observatory. Lots of exhibits to see in the park with interesting information about the Equator. Get your passport stamped at the Equator. Restaurants, gift shops, banos all available. Museum just outside Mitad grounds is worth a visit.
- Internet – Lots...several near the hotel. \$1/hr
- Supermarket/Mall – El Jardin within walking distance (a long, but safe walk) of the hotel with SuperMaxi, lots of stores and restaurants including a Baskin-Robbins.
- ATMs – around town and also at the bus terminal

Otavallo

- Buses from Quito leave several times an hour starting early in the morning. (\$3/3 hrs)
- Hotel: Hotel Coraza (Sucre & Calderon); central, modern; large, clean rooms overlooking the marketplace. \$30/night/matrimonial including American breakfast. We thought this was a great place and an excellent value. Convenient for making purchases and dropping them off in the room or taking a breather during the day.
- Things of interest:
 - Without a doubt, THE marketplace of Ecuador and perhaps of South America. There are small stalls and shops set up all the time, but the Saturday market is unbelievably large (almost overwhelming). The offerings are diverse...everything from live animals, to fresh cuy (guinea pig), to produce to gold glass beads and handcrafted musical instruments. Lots of woven goods and alpaca sweaters/scarves. We

found polished bull's horn jewelry (sounds weird, but it's beautiful) inlaid with silver for \$2-4 per necklace.

- ATMs – In 2003, we couldn't find an ATM to save our lives, but in 2005, they were everywhere.
- Internet – Several around town \$1+/hr.
- Restaurants:
 - Mi Otavalito – our favorite...the "trucha" (trout) was terrific.
 - The Pie Shop – good assortment of pies, highly recommended by LP and other cruisers, we found it mediocre the one time we went.