

Trip Report - Peru to Ecuador Through the Back Door

By Linda and Chuck, s/v Jacaranda

August 14 - August 21, 2013

Overview -

The entry into Ecuador from Peru through The Back Door is a little travelled route. Cuenca is the second most important and beautiful colonial city in Ecuador

Itinerary: San Ignacio (1 night), Vilcabamba (2 days), Cuenca (4 days)

PEDRO RUIZ

We thought we would go from Chacahapoyas to Pedro Ruiz to have to spend the night here and were told this is the best place to stay in the area; we didn't stay overnight here because we visited Huembo Hummingbird Reserve instead and left for the Back Door Journey from here.

SAN IGNACIO

Town in the middle of a coffee producing region. The best place to stay overnight on the Back Door journey.

Gran Hotel San Ignacio - about the only game in town

VILCABAMBA

Hotel/Restaurant

Hosteria and Restaurante Izhcayluma, 2 km south of town, off the highway a short walk uphill from the town

www.izhcayluma.com

Beautiful place!

Great restaurant with german specialites and ecuadorian food served in an open air setting.

Double with private bath, incl. breakfast - \$35/night

Has a bar and swimming pool

French restaurant in town

CUENCA

A UNESCO World Heritage Site (1999), Cuenca is an outstanding example of a planned inland Spanish colonial town. The successful fusion of the different societies and cultures of Latin America is symbolized in a striking manner by the layout and townscape of Cuenca.

A strong concentration of vernacular architecture is located along the River Tomebanba (el Barranco) that defines the boundaries of the historic town on the south side. It is also in this sector that the site of Pumapungo is located (Puma Gate) in the heart of the Inca town of Tomebamba, and that of Todos Santos (All Saints) where the vestiges corresponding to Canari, Inca and Spanish cultures have been unearthed by archaeologists.

Resources:

Look for the brochures called Cuenca Guides - one on Gastronomy and another on Artisans

<http://www.cuencahighlife.com/default.aspx>

Tours

Bus City Tour - www.cotratudossa.com

Tel. 288-35-64

Catch it in front of the old cathedral (Catedral del Sagrario, Luis Cordero y Sucre). 2 hour tour.

So much to see that the tour guide couldn't keep up with a bilingual translation and since we were the only gringos on the bus, we told her it wasn't necessary to do the english version so we just relied on our spanish. Bus up to the Turi Mirador was worth the money because it was so far outside the center - if the tour had only been within the old center, it would not have been. It was a Sunday and there was nothing open, no people around, so this was the best activity for the day. Generally, we find bus tours very unsatisfying except for a general orientation and overview if the locale is large and extends over a large area. The bus interior was very cool - all wood.

Art Cuenca Tours - Simon Bolivar and Miguel Heredia

Contact: Sonia Punin

M-Sat. 9:30 - 7

593-72828558

Interesting tours to artist studios

Hotels

Casa Ordoñez

Great location within a few blocks of the main square; nice breakfast.

This is an old home that has been remodeled into a hotel - owned by the Ordoñez family for centuries. Alberto, the son, is supposed to be incredibly gracious and helpful. Unfortunately, he was away when we stayed there and his other family (sister Inez) and staff were nice enough but offered no special help. It appears this hotel got such a high ranking on Tripadvisor because of Alberto. While nice, we were not overly impressed with this hotel. I would like to stay in Hotel Victoria next time.

Mansion Alcazar - Calle Bolivar 12-55 y Tarqi

email: info@mansionalcazar.com

website: www.mansionalcazar.com

Phone: 07-2823-918/-889

The most luxurious charm and elegance! A lot of true class.

Great location. Sandra, the reception, was over the top friendly and helpful. She even made reservations for us one night at another restaurant when we arrived there and the the excellent Casa Alonzo restaurant was booked (see Restaurants below)

Rates include breakfast, English tea service, wifi and taxes (22%)

Double - \$213.50

Single - \$128.10

Garden Suite - \$280.60

Hotel Victoria - Calle Larga 6-93, in the Barranco District

07 - 2827401

Beautiful historic building; liked the area near a nice plaza with a cafe where we had coffee, overlooking the river, on Calle Larga - an artsy part of town also near many of the museums and very near the archeological ruins.

I took a look at the rooms when we had lunch in their El Jardin Restaurant (see Restaurants below) - the rooms looked wonderful with views of the river; staff was very very nice.

Double w/breakfast - \$75

DO NOT stay at Hostal Villa de Rosario where some friends who had a disagreement with the owners were physically attacked. Stay away!

Restaurants

Cafe Eucalyptus - Gran Colombia 9-41

Described as a "hot" bar but not so crowded when we went for dinner. Very nice and comfortable courtyard dining. Good food.

Raymipampa - on main square - Benigno Malo 8-59

Highly recommended several times but we didn't go here.

La Fornace - Borrero 8-29 y Sucre

Italian gelateria-cafeteria

Good pizza; excellent chocolate ice cream (cone is \$1)

Casa Alonzo Restaurant (in Mansion Alcazar)

Excellent!! Need reservations. One of the best meals I have had in South America! The food was outstanding; service impeccable (the chef also came out to greet all the diners); in a wonderfully elegant setting.

Dinner for one - (appetizers and dessert) - \$50.50 - misticanza salad, soup, lamb chops, sliced strawberry dessert.

El Jardin (in Hotel Victoria)

Very lovely - food is very good and the setting is very nice in an elevated "greenhouse" overlooking the garden and river. The beautiful menus were all handpainted (nice touch).

Coffeetree Cafe

Crafts and Shopping

Panama Hats - Cuenca is the epicenter for manufacturing

Casa del Sombrero Alberto Pulla, Tarqui 6-91 - Cuenca's most famous hatter to the stars!

or

Panama Hat Museum, Calle Larga 10-41

Tel. 2831569

Barrancos - Barrancospanamahats.com - Paredes Roldan family (60+ years)

or

Homero Ortega (115 years and 5 generations), Davalos 386 - best-known hat seller/exporter

www.homeroortega.com

www.genuinepanamahat.com

Jewelry artists on steps (Escalinata) near Museo de Popular Arte (CIPA)

Sumaglla Antiques, Calle Larga

Gift shop at the Museo Culturas Aborignales - lots of quality crafts and jewelry, including necklaces with archeological beads

JW Artes - Curio shop a few doors away from Museo Culturas Aborignales

Artists on Calle Larga - <http://www.captivatingcuenca.com/artists-on-calle-larga-cuenca.html>

Museums

Museo de las Culturas Aborígenes (Anita is the owner)

Museo de Popular Arte (CIPA)

OUTSIDE CUENCA

Gualaceo (35 km. east of Cuenca)

One of several indigenous villages in the surrounding area (often visited with Chordeleg and Sigsig on the same day, esp. Sunday market day)

La Casa de la Makana - Ikat textiles (artisanal workshop)

Sr. Jose Jimenez.

[www. tejidosikat.com](http://www.tejidosikat.com)

Cel. 0995699163-0984344333

Tel. 07 - 2171661

Facebook: Ikat Jimenez

tejidosikat@hotmail.com

Sector San Pedro de los Olivos, km. 10 on the El Descanso-Gualaceo highway

This are the highest quality award-winning ikat textiles to buy - Sr. Jimenez's work has been purchased by the president and can be found in the presidential palace. Visit their family compound to meet his wife and see the looms, weaving technique and dyeing process explained. The large open compound looks like a rustic museum in itself. There is a showroom on the top floor but I poked around in a dark storage area downstairs to find more selections. They take credit cards.

Gualaceo Mercado - Go to the stalls on the second floor and eat the famous "hornado" - pieces of pork with crispy skin. Also the tortillas de choclo (pancakes made with rough corn flour).

La Casa de la Makana - \$170 for Ikat textiles

Workshop, home, and showroom for exquisite Ikat textiles

Prepared, dyed, and woven in the traditional way

Jimenez has earned many awards and their textiles were purchased by the President and are in the Presidential Palace in Quito

August 19 11 a.m.

via Gualaceo

Santuario Hibiscus Guesthouse - looks interesting

www.santuariohibiscus.com

4 rooms

Located in Yunguilla Valley in La Union 1 1/2 hr. from Cuenca

Ecuagenera - Orquideas del Ecuador
orchid nursery

La Floresta

www.ecuagenera.com

2 -2236547

Contact: Ivan Portilla

Major operation.

Nursery, propagation, display, sales with shipping, and accommodations with pool for orchid collecting/viewing excursions in the mountains.

Chordeleg (10 km south of Gualaceo)

One of several indigenous villages in the surrounding area

Gold and silver filigreed jewelry

Also paja toquilla baskets and woven crafts

Guides

Tour to Gualaceo and Chordeleg -

Guide - we went with Miguel Arias - 0995510856

ecuamiguel76@hotmail.com

Highly recommended - good english. Took us to lunch to have hornados at Gualaceo market. he tried to get a social project for the kids in the market to learn english with the gringos but it didn't work out.

Alternatives:

Efrain Arevalo of Mio Tours but he was unavailable.

Also read about Jose Morocho 347-441-3955

Transportation from Cuenca to Guayquil

Van operated by Operazuaytour

074-203537

www.operazuaytour.com

\$12 each; about 3 - 4 hours.

For Next Time

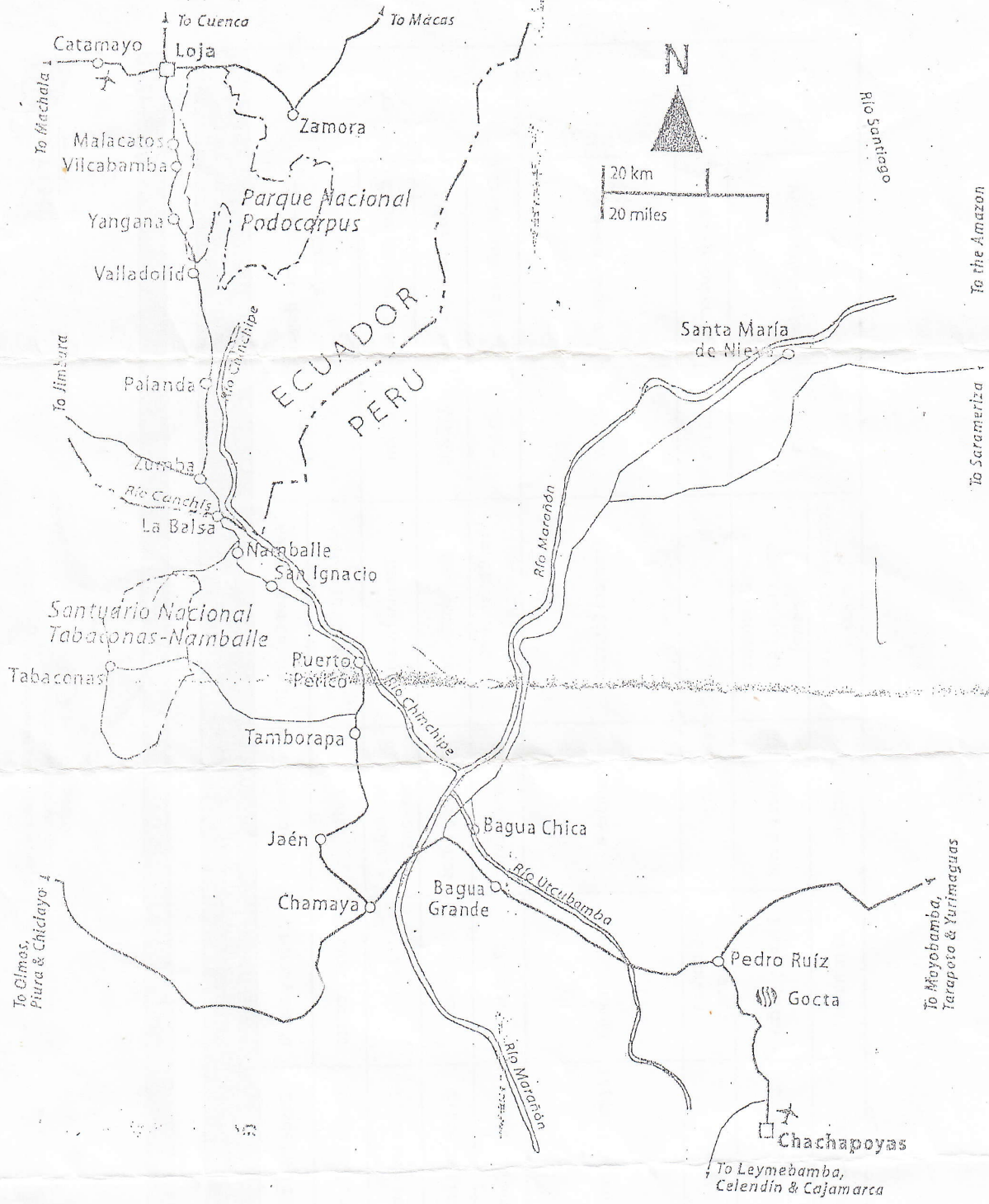
More time in Cuenca, including more of its museums and Eduardo Vega's ceramic studio

Cajas National Park

Ingapirca Ruins

Saraguro - indigenous culture

Chachapoyas - Vilcabamba



RUTA CHACHAPOYAS - ECUADOR VIA AEN

País	Ruta	Distancia	Dirección	Tipo de Transporte	Tiempo de Viaje	Horarios	Tarifa Referencial
Perú	Chachapoyas - Bagua Grande	106 km	Av. Libertad Cuadra 10	Minivans	2 horas y media	Desde las 4 am - 7 pm	S/. 15.00
			Jr. Grau Cuadra 3	Autos	2 horas y cuarto	Desde las 3 am - 8 pm	S/. 22.00
	Bagua Grande - Jaén	63 km	Terminal Mori	Combis, Autos y minivans	1 hora	Desde las 5 am - 6 pm	S/. 6.00 combis S/. 10.00 autos
	Jaén - San Ignacio	112 km	Av. Pakamuros	Minivans y autos	2 horas	Desde las 4 am - 8 pm	S/. 20.00
	San Ignacio - La Balsa	47 km	km 01 Carretera San Ignacio La Balsa	Minivans y autos	3 horas	Desde las 5 am - 6 pm	S/. 17.00
Ecuador	La Balsa - Zumba	27 km	Frontera Ecuador	Ranchera	1 horas y media	12 pm / 5:30 pm / 7:00 pm	\$ 1.75
	Zumba - Vilcabamba	180 km		Bus	5 horas a Vilcabamba	Todo el día.	\$ 6.50
	Vilcabamba - Loja	40 km	Terminal Terrestre (3 cooperativas de transporte) Centro de Loja - Taxi Ruta 11 de Mayo	Minibuses y buses	1 hora y media	Desde las 5am - 6pm	\$1.00
				Colectivos	50 minutos	Desde las 6am	\$1.50

