

The Essential Guide to **BAÑOS**



Tucked between the lush foothills of the Andes and the Amazon rainforest, the small town of Baños de Agua Santa has become known as Ecuador's adventure capital. Baños is the perfect place for those

seeking the adrenaline rush of outdoor adventure sports and is an easy jumping off point if you're headed south (Riobamba, Cuenca, Guayaquil) or farther east down into the Amazon basin.

HOW TO GET THERE

A popular destination in Ecuador, you'll find several modes of transport that will get you to Baños in a few hours.



■ **Public transportation**

To get from Quito to Baños by public transport, you'll need to first go to the Quitumbe bus terminal ("Terminal terrestre Quitumbe"), located in the south of Quito. To get to the terminal from northern Quito (where most hotels and hostels are located), you can either take a taxi (depending on the time of day, this can cost between \$10-20 dollars) or the Trole line headed south. If you decide on the trolley, make sure you travel by day and always keep an eye on your belongings.

Once in Quitumbe, you'll find regular buses departing Quito to Baños from 6:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. for around \$4. The trip takes about four hours by bus.

■ **Wanderbus Ecuador**

Alternatively, you can get to Baños on the Wanderbus, which leaves regularly from Quito at pre-selected, convenient pick-up points. Wanderbus saves you the hassle of dealing with public transportation and is also a much safer option.

For instance, the **Jacamar Pass** goes from Quito to Baños three times a week, stopping by the Cotopaxi National Park (Limpiopungo Lake) and the Quilotoa crater on the way. This is an excellent way to see some of the sights you might otherwise miss en route to your final destination.





Popular activities

TO DO IN BAÑOS

Baños offers activities for all types of travellers, from nature lovers to adrenaline junkies to your average tourist whose sole purpose is to R-E-L-A-X.



■ Thermal baths

The name Baños is short for *Baños de Agua Santa*, which translates as “baths of holy water”, referring to the thermal baths located near the town center. After a full day of activities, you’ll definitely want to soak in these pools, which are open daily from 5:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. Entrance fees vary between \$2 and \$3 at the local baths, like Termas de la Virgen. However, if you want a luxurious spa experience, look at Luna Runtun or Samari Spa (over \$100 per person). Many of the spas offer massages (~\$25/hour), facials manicures and more.

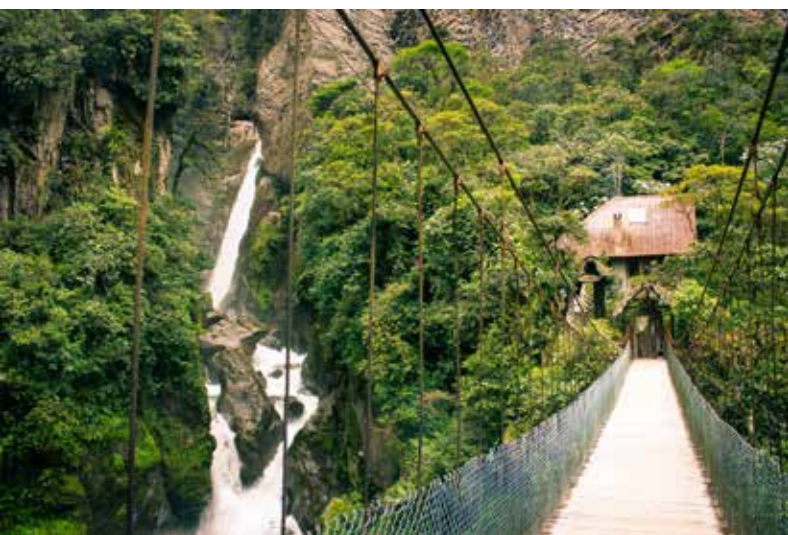
■ Waterfall Route

One of the more popular activities to do in Baños is the Waterfall Route, which takes you to seven tropical waterfalls amidst the surrounding rain and cloud forests. You can either do the route by bicycle, motorcycle or on a dune buggy. Rental costs vary between \$5 and \$10 per day (check that vehicles come with locks and take a short test drive to check gears/brakes). To rent a motorcycle or dune buggy you’ll need a valid driver’s license.

By bicycle, this route can be completed in around 3 hours, depending on your level of fitness. Some companies also offer to bring you and your bike back by truck.

When driving along the road, ensure you stick to your right and avoid going through the tunnels as there is often traffic.





■ **Pailón del Diablo**

Located along the Waterfall Route, visiting this waterfall is well worth the 45 minutes it will take to hike down and back up the canyon. Follow the signs and stairs that will take you directly into (and under) this breathtaking waterfall.

If you get hungry, you can grab something to eat at the nearby town of Rio Verde.





■ **Volcano watching**

Tungurahua volcano overlooks Baños and is quite active. In fact, on a clear day, you might see plumes of ash emit from its peak. If you hike in the surrounding area, you'll likely see impressive views of this 5,000 meter (16,400 ft) high mountain. Ask your hostel for more information on hikes up toward the volcano.

■ **La Casa del Árbol**

This "highly instagrammable" spot near Baños has been made famous on social media. A simple tree swing on a cliff overlooking a valley, the Casa del Arbol is a wonderful place to appreciate the lush landscape around Baños and get a bite to eat. Get here walking or by bus from the city centre - your hostel will be able to provide you with more detailed instructions.





■ **Ziplining and bungee jumping**

What better way to get around than zipping across canyons and valleys? Called “canopying” by the locals, this is an adrenaline-filled activity you should experience while in Baños.

A canopy tour usually takes 2 hours and costs between \$10-\$20. Most tours offer the same options and have similar facilities, including around 6 ziplines which you can go on alone after some instruction, or in tandem with a guide. Along the same route, for around the same price, you can **bungee jump** off a bridge overlooking the Río Blanco River or the San Francisco River



■ **Horseback riding**

There are a few companies in Baños where you can organize a lovely horseback riding tour, including Imagine Ecuador and Isla de Baños that charge about \$10 an hour. If you book through these agencies, they will transport you out to where the stables are located, usually 2-4 hours out of town. If you purchase a longer tour, it usually includes a packed lunch and transport, though you should definitely take snacks in case you get hungry.

■ **River rafting, kayaking and canyoning**

Given the number of rivers and waterfalls in the area, a few white water adventure companies have set up shop in Baños to offer visitors these activities. While walking around town, you’ll see many small tour operators that can organize activities for you and your group at reasonable rates.

If you’re going river rafting or kayaking, keep in mind that a rafting tour usually take about 5 hours and descends the Pastaza river from Baños towards the Amazon basin. This means you’ll be out the open all day, so take plenty of sun cream, insect repellent, and water.

The majority of these tours include safety gear, wetsuits and lunch. If you have a waterproof case or bag for your phone, definitely bring it along. Budget around \$30 for this tour.



PLANNING your time in Baños

Here are our suggestions for your time in Baños – of course, it all depends on what YOU like doing, but here we go:



DAY 1

- **AM:** get your bearings and find out about available tours in the area for the following days.
- Lunch at the main market.
- **PM:** Go for a canopy zipline ride.

DAY 2

- **All day:** White-water rafting
- **PM:** Head to the Casa del Arbol for swinging fun

DAY 3

- **All day:** Rent a mountain bike for the ride downhill to the Pailón del Diablo, or beyond to Rio Negro.



DAY 4

- Go horseback-riding
- Soak in a thermal spring
- Head up to Café del Cielo for a splurge-dinner with amazing views.



WHERE TO STAY

As a bustling tourist destination, there are plenty of hotel options in Baños.



- **Community Hostel**
Average rate:
Dorms 10\$ / Private 30\$
- **Papachos Hostel**
Average rate:
Dorms 9\$ / Private 25\$
- **Casa del Molino Blanco**
Average rate:
Dorms 9\$ / Private 15\$
- **Great Hostel Backpacker Los Pinos**
Average rate:
Dorms 10\$ / Private 25\$
- **Santa Cruz Backpacker Hostel**
Average rate:
Dorms 8\$ / Private 16\$
- **Latina**
Average rate:
Dorms 7\$ / Private 20\$
- **Hostal Princesa Maria**
Average rate:
Single bed 10\$ / Twin 22\$



- **Selina**
Average rate:
Dorms 7\$ / Private 21\$
- **Hostal Monte Carmelo**
Average rate:
Double room for one: 18\$,
for two: 24\$
- **Hotel La Floresta**
Average rate:
Double room 70\$
- **Hostal & Spa Casa Real**
Average rate:
Twin room for one: 25\$,
for two: 44\$



- If you have a larger budget, we highly recommend **Luna Runtun** and **Samari Spa**, both incredible spa hotels.
- **Hacienda Manteles** offers visitors incredible views of the Tungurahua Volcano from a different angle than that in town. Though it's a bit on the pricier side, this place is well worth a splurge.



WHERE TO EAT

No matter where you eat, it's hard to avoid all the candies/sweets in Baños, made locally from all the sugar cane that grows in the region. You'll find delicious dark purple concoctions made from guayaba (guava) as well as all sorts of caramels.



BREAKFAST

Cafe Hood

Offering a variety of "international" dishes from Thailand, India, Mexico and Ecuador, this is one of the best spots in town to get a delicious breakfast, lunch or dinner.

Swiss Bistro

The Swiss Bistro in town sells delicious pastries and offers breakfasts with homemade bread. It also boasts a delicious selection of cheese that is otherwise hard to find in town. They have a hostel and restaurant off the road to Puyo, in Cumandá, that's well worth checking out if you want to get off the beaten path a bit.

LUNCH

Central Market

Dine like a local at the central market, which offers meals as well as fresh fruit, veggies and more. You can taste a plate of local hornado (roasted pork), llapingachos (fried potato cakes), or locro de papa (thick potato soup with cheese and avocado). Most dishes will cost \$2 - \$3 and include soup and a main dish.





DINNER

La Tasca de Baños

This tapas restaurant is owned by a couple from Málaga, Spain and offers amazing home-made Spanish delicacies, including delectable seafood dishes, as well as an excellent selection of wine.

Leoni Pizzeria

Get a taste of some thin crust pizzas cooked in Leoni Pizza's traditional wood fire.

Cafe del Cielo

A little outside of Baños you'll find a spot worth stopping at Cafe del Cielo, perched on the mountain above Baños and part of Luna Runtun. At sunset, this place has incredible views of the surrounding landscape and also serves crepes, ice cream, and local coffee.

Other suggestions

- Honey Tea & Coffee (\$)
- Cafe Good (\$ \$)
- Casa Hood (\$ \$)
- Carpe Diem Di Verdi (\$ \$)
- ZUMO Food & Drink (\$ \$)



NIGHTLIFE

Most tourists in Baños don't spend their day in town because of all the things there are to do in the surrounding areas. At night, however, Baños becomes a lively little party town. In fact, you'll find an entire street called Eloy Alfaro full of small clubs and karaoke bars.

A few spots to keep an eye out for:



- The **Stray Dog Brewpub** offers guests some hardy craft beer.
- Practice your salsa moves at the **Leprechuan Bar**, a decent-sized discoteque with different spaces playing various music genres.



Baños WEATHER

If you're traveling from Quito to Baños, you'll be dropping in elevation to 1,800 meters (6,000 ft) so prepare for warmer and more humid weather, though the evenings and mornings can get chilly, especially in the rainy season.

The climate in Baños is temperate and often tropical, but almost always pleasant throughout the year and sits in the low 20s (Celsius), or low 70s (Fahrenheit), though this will vary depending on whether it's the rainy season.

In Baños, it rains between May and September and it pours in the months of June, July and August.





Baños PACKING LIST

- Comfortable shoes to walk, hike, climb
- Sandals to change into back at the hotel
- Rainproof jacket
- Bathing suit
- Change of clothes for wet day trips
- Sun protection (hat, sunglasses, sunblock)
- Warmer gear if climbing to higher elevations (fleece, windbreaker)

OPTIONAL

- GoPro or other waterproof camera to capture your adventures!





WHAT'S NEXT?

As mentioned earlier, Baños is an excellent jumping off point if you're planning to explore more of the country.

If you want to head farther into the Amazon, there are several agencies in town that organize tours in the Amazon from Baños or the nearby city of Puyo. You can head to this area yourself on public transport. Buses will take you from Baños to Puyo for only \$2 (2 hours), or to Tena for \$4 (5 hours). You can even

take a bus to Coca, a 10 hour trip that costs \$10 and takes you pretty much as far into the Amazon as you can get by road.

If you're headed on to Guayaquil, you'll find daily buses that do the 7 hours journey for \$9. Other buses will take you to Riobamba and Cuenca, just ask your hostel for more information or go directly to the bus company at the bus terminal.





@wanderbusecuador
www.wanderbusecuador.com