

# A GUIDE TO MANABÍ, ECUADOR



The coastal province of Manabí is a gem among Ecuador's natural treasures. As a traveler here, you can experience its pristine beaches, mouthwatering local dishes and rich biodiversity, both on land and below water. Read on to discover the Wanderbus team's tips to some of the best destinations to explore in Manabí from Ayampe to Cojimies. Don't forget your sunblock!



## OVERVIEW

Located between the provinces of Esmeraldas and Santa Elena, Manabí is one of the most beautiful segments along the Ecuadorian coast. It's main cities are Manta and Portoviejo, followed by Pedernales, El Carmen and Chone.

Manabí is best known for its gorgeous, often isolated beaches, and is a sought after destination for both local and international visitors. It's one of the warmest regions in Ecuador and the area along the coast is known for its dry forests that are teeming with wildlife.

Within Manabí, the most visited locations are located in and around Machalilla National Park, including the islands Isla de la Plata and Isla Salango. Here, you can appreciate the surrounding natural beauty through activities such as snorkeling, scuba diving,

hiking, horseback riding, and even a dip in a natural mud bath. However, if you prefer to base out of a larger town with more restaurants, hostels and nightlife, you'll find that in Manta, Puerto Lopez and Canoa.

A great way to explore this province is to follow the Spondylus Route (Ruta del Spondylus), which begins in the northern province of Esmeraldas, passes along Manabí's coast, stopping at some of its top beach destinations, and ends near Salinas, in the province of Santa Elena.

Whether you travel by public transport, the Wanderbus or a private vehicle, you're bound to find a nook along your way that you won't want to leave!





## HOW TO GET THERE

If you're heading to Manabí, you're likely starting from Guayaquil, in the south, or Quito.

### Public Transport



Beginning in **Quito**, you can get to Manabí via Santo Domingo or Quevedo by public transport. The route through Santo Domingo will take you to Pedernales and Cojimíes, in the north of the Manabí

province, whereas the route through Quevedo will get you closer to Portoviejo, Manta and Puerto Lopez, in the south of the province.

In Quito, you'll need to head to the bus terminal in the south called **Quitumbe** ("**Terminal terrestre Quitumbe**"). To get to Quitumbe, you can either take a taxi or the trolley line headed south. In Quitumbe, you'll find regular buses departing Quito to the Manabí province.

**Puerto Lopez**, the largest town near Machalilla National Park, and a popular destination among travelers to Manabí, is located around 490 km (304 miles) from Quito and the bus routes to Puerto Lopez include:



- Quito to Latacunga to Quevedo to Portoviejo-Montecristi to Puerto Lopez (8 hours)
- Quito to Santo Domingo to Portoviejo-Montecristi to Puerto Lopez (8 hours)
- Latacunga to Riobamba to Guayaquil to Puerto Lopez (9-10 hours)

The best part about traveling on public transport is always the price: \$9 to get to Puerto Lopez, that's roughly a dollar an hour!

If you're starting in **Guayaquil** and working your way up the coast, you'll find regular buses heading north, likely stopping in Montañita. Farther inland, you can also find routes through Jipijapa, which will get you closer to Manta.

**Domestic flight:** A convenient, but more expensive, option is to fly to Manta from either Quito or Guayaquil. Check out websites like [LATAM](#) or [Despegar.com](#) for deals on flights. Once on the coast,

it's easy to find buses that take you between the smaller towns to explore the beaches and surrounding natural habitats.

**Wanderbus Ecuador:** The Wanderbus is the most comfortable way to visit some of the Coast highlights and still have the flexibility to hop on and off at the smaller stops along the way.

If you're open to visiting other towns along the Andes on your way to the Coast, we highly recommend getting the Wanderpass, for a complete loop around Ecuador.

The Wanderbus leaves regularly from Quito and other cities at pre-selected, convenient pick-up points, and is a much safer option for travel to the coast and around the country.

Please contact Wanderbus today to inquire about schedules and routes to get to Puerto Lopez, Manta and other destinations in Manabí.



## AN OVERVIEW OF THE TOP DESTINATIONS BETWEEN AYAMPE AND COJIMÍES

### *Ayampe*

An oasis along the Manabí coast, Ayampe is a quaint surfer town around 25 minutes south of Puerto Lopez and 30 minutes north of Montañita. It's an ideal destination to relax and has become increasingly in demand over the last 5 years, though it still feels small and welcoming. There are a number of comfortable and affordable hostels and restaurants, as well as activities like surfing, hiking, horseback riding, paragliding and more. This quiet, green town is a wonderful spot to spend with your partner or on a solo journey.



### *Puerto Lopez*

Puerto Lopez is one of Ecuador's primary sources for fresh seafood and has become more widely known as the whalewatching destination in the country. Travelers come from far and wide to observe as migrating humpback whales spawn and birth, depending on the season. Puerto Lopez is also the primary gateway into Machalilla National Park (Ecuador's only coastal national park), with a handful of beautiful destinations. Read more about what to do in Puerto Lopez.

## Manta



Though Portoviejo is the capital of Manabí, Manta is the province's main port city and is significantly more developed. Over the past decade, it has also become somewhat of a destination for international retirees.

A few spots to visit in the city include Murciélago Beach and its oceanfront boardwalk, the Malecón Escénico. Watch as local fishermen haul in the catch at the Manta fish market and make sure to try a plate of bolón de verde or tigrillo, both made with plantain, cheese and served with a cup of coffee and fresh fruit juice.

## Bahía de Caráquez



Located about one hour north of Manta, Bahía de Caráquez is another regional destination and offers visitors many eco-friendly activities and accommodation options. One of its main attractions is an archeological museum that displays artefacts from numerous pre-Colombian cultures of the region. Just outside of Bahía you'll find a number of long, sandy beaches to spend the day.

## Canoa



This coastal town offers visitors numerous outdoor activities and accommodation to choose from. Canoa has gained the reputation of being a party town but, during low season, it resembles a typical sleepy beach town. It's a great spot to learn how to surf, horseback ride along the beach and eat a few delicious local



meals before moving on to your next destination. There are also a number of lovely hikes and nearby remote beaches to explore.

## *Pedernales*



You'll likely stop through Pedernales at some point during your trip in Manabí. Much of the city was destroyed with the 2016 earthquake and has since been rebuilt. Visitors can hang out on its main beach, try some local dishes, along with fresh agua de coco (coconut water), and test the surf. From Pedernales,

you can move north to explore the more tropical Cojimíes beach, or head south to discover other pristine beaches in Manabí.

## *Cojimíes*

The most northern beach in the province, Cojimíes is often associated with Esmeraldas rather than Manabí due to its tropical climate and afro-Ecuadorian population and culture. The beach here is wide, lined with palm trees and is also a spot where you can observe passing humpback whales and other marine life.



## PLANNING YOUR TIME ON THE COAST

What you decide to do during your time on the coast depends greatly on your preferences. If you like to party, you might be spending more time in one of the larger towns like Canoa or Manta, whereas if you prefer experiences in nature, head to Puerto Lopez and Machalilla park.

Travel from Quito to Puerto Lopez by bus and another 25 minutes south to reach the sheltered beach town of Ayampe.

Grab a bite to eat and explore the town to get a feel of the place. If you have time, go on a sunset horseback ride before retiring for the day.



Head out early to explore Machalilla National Park, spend the first day on Los Frailes Beach. Make sure to take some snacks and/or sandwiches.

On your way back to Ayampe, stop by the Sea Turtle Rescue Center in Salango. Have a late lunch/early dinner at Restaurante de Jimmy, a small surf restaurant located just north of Ayampe. You'll find a number of local seafood dishes often with a delicious peanut sauce, popular in this region of Ecuador. Shrimp, fish or octopus ceviche is also especially good here!



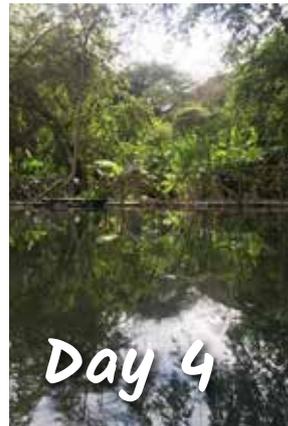
Get up early to surf, you'll find surfboard rentals and classes at nearby locations on the beach. Alternatively, go whale watching in Puerto Lopez (make reservations in advance and start early!)

Have an early lunch at the Barn in Ayampe before heading to Barcelona, about 1 hour south of Ayampe, where you can watch as local women harvest and prepare paja toquilla, a type of straw used to weave baskets and the popular Montecristi hats (also known as Panama Hats).



Head out early to explore more of Machalilla National park, like the Agua Blanca museum and lagoon. Alternatively, consider a hike along EL Rocío trail or Bola de Oro trail near El Pital, or a day trip to Isla de la Plata, "Poor Man's Galapagos", for some snorkeling and scuba diving.

Spend the night in either Puerto Lopez or Ayampe.





If you're in Puerto Lopez, start early to see local fishermen haul in and clean their catch. After an early breakfast, head to Bahía de Caraquez.



Stay at the Rio Muchacho EcoLodge and Organic Farm



Explore the trails and work at Rio Muchacho before heading to Canoa or spend half a day visiting the town of Chone, around Mate de la Fortuna, and trying their famous tongas manabas, a local dish.



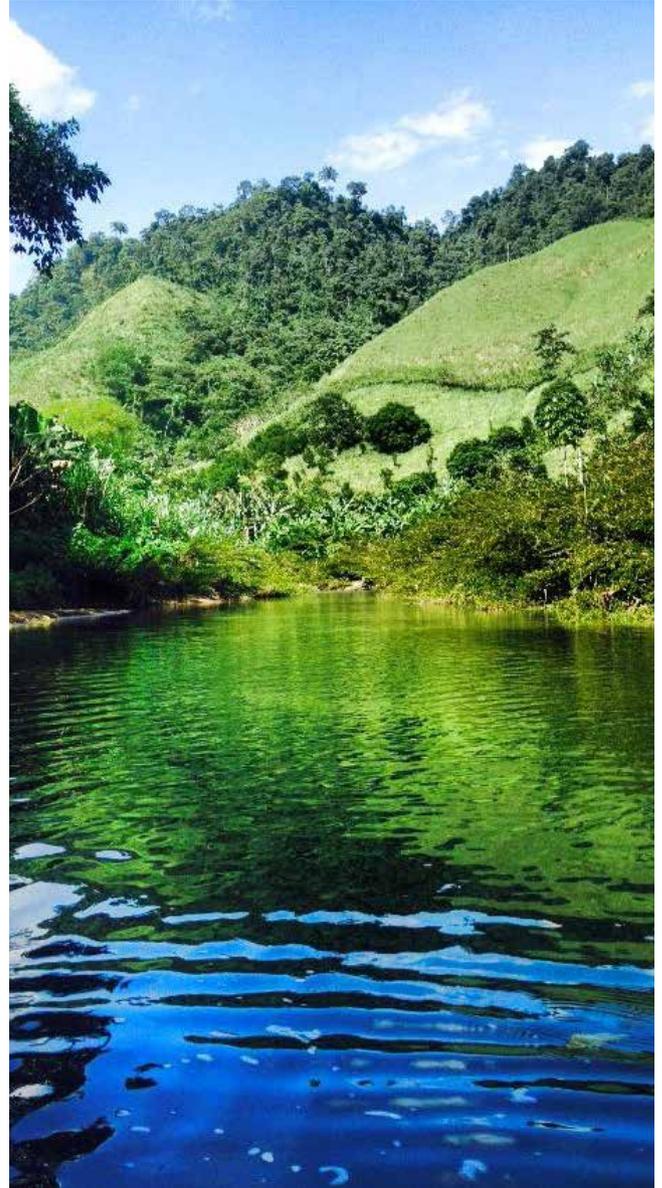
Stay the night in Canoa



Spend a final day on Canoa's beach to surf, horseback ride, paraglide (and more!)



Head back to Quito on the Wanderbus or overnight public transport



## WHERE TO STAY



Most of the below listed businesses organize activities for their guests. Make sure to inquire directly with the hotel about what they offer.

### *Ayampe*

**Guesthouse El Paso** - A family-run hotel and restaurant with a pleasant atmosphere

**Refugio el Colibri** - Located just outside of Ayampe in a tropical microclimate, this hostel provides visitors with an up close experience of some of the region's hummingbird species.

**Viejamar Hostel** - A cozy hostel between Ayampe and Puerto Lopez, Viejamar's location provides easy access to many of the nearby attractions.

### *Puerto Lopez*

**Hosteria Cabañas Itapoa** - A conservation-focused family enterprise, Itapoa also offers visitors lush grounds and direct access to the beach.

**Hotel Piedra del Mar** - This is an affordable boutique hotel that offers breakfast and wifi, a small swimming pool and easy access to the beach.

**Victor Hugo Hotel** - This hotel faces the water and features rustic wood furnishings. It's only 7.5 miles from los Frailes beach.

**Mantaraya Lodge** - This is a beautiful property with an off-the-grid feel overlooking the sea from a hilltop.

**Hotel Ancora** - Located 50 meters from Puerto Lopez's beach and boardwalk and offers guests access to a pool. The hotel organizes tours and activities for guests.

**Nautilus Lodge** - A small piece of paradise, ideally located. Enjoy the peaceful tropical garden 5 min away from the touristic activities in Puerto López. True luxury.

**Hostel Dannita** - Just a 6-minute walk from the ocean this affordable hostel provides private rooms with TV cable.

**Hostal d'Mary** - An affordable hostel only 300 meters from the beach in Puerto Lopez.

## *Manta*

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**Balandra Hotel** - Comfortable, spacious and clean. Surrounded by nature and close to attractions.

## *Canoa*

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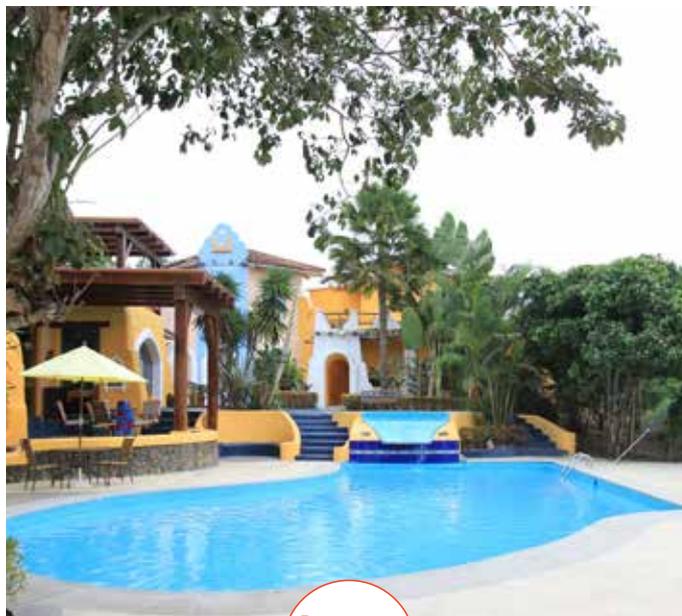
**Hostal Rutamar** - Friendly owners and a welcoming atmosphere with a great view of the ocean. Communal use areas and surfing lessons available.

**Rio Muchacho Organic Farm & Accommodation** - Located farther inland from Canoa, Rio Muchacho is a beautiful organic farm that offers eco friendly facilities and activities, and also takes on volunteers

## *Bahía de Caráquez*

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**La Piedra Hotel** - Seafront hotel with well-lit, comfortable rooms.



## WHERE TO EAT

We've included a few exceptional places to eat in Manabí. Wherever you decide to go, make sure to try a *tonga manabita*, a tasty local lunch wrapped in banana leaves and filled with rice, your meat of choice, fried plantain and a peanut-based sauce.

### *The Barn*



A delicious pastry shop / bakery in Ayampe and a great place to work for a couple of hours before heading to the beach.

### *Peggi's Pizza*



One of the best pizza spots in Puerto Lopez. They offer pizzas as well as french fries and burgers.

### *Restaurante de Jimmy*



Visit this small surf restaurant located north of Ayampe and before the town of Puerto Rico.

### *Delfin Magico*



Located in Salango, is a restaurant made popular for its delicious seafood. If you haven't yet tried scallops in a garlic sauce ("al ajillo"), now's your chance!

### *Bambu Hotel, Bar and Restaurant*



Attractive beachside restaurant in Canoa with outdoor seating directly facing the ocean. International, local and vegetarian cuisine.



## NIGHTLIFE

In Puerto Lopez there are also a few places to party along the boardwalk (*malecón*) where you'll find pop up beach bars to order fresh Piña Coladas. Feel like dancing? Check out Wett, a bar that offers salsa classes.

Unless it's high season, nightlife in Canoa stays pretty low key. You'll find a lot of small bars along the main beach where you can grab a drink. Places like Coco Bar, the Surf Shak, and Coco Loco are good options for a group of friends and, if you feel like dancing, head to the Shamrock Dance Bar on the beachfront in the center of town.



*You'll need a valid ID to get into most places, so make sure you make a copy of your passport. Don't carry more than enough cash for covers and drinks, and definitely don't carry your credit card around. It's best to leave any valuable belongings at your hostel, just in case.*



### Weather

*The temperature in this area doesn't vary too much and is significantly drier than the northern coast of Ecuador. It fluctuates around 23 – 28 C (74 – 82 F) with the hottest months of the year between February and April when temperatures rise to 30 C (86 F). In terms of the best times to go, with good sun and warm waters, aim for late November to April. The rest of the year (particularly June to October) it's pretty overcast.*

## Packing List



Your packing list may vary depending on the activities you decide to do and on the weather.

Apart from your regular packing items, you should include the following to your packing list:

- Flip flops/sandals (you can also buy a cheap pair there)
- Comfortable shoes to walk, hike, climb or horseback ride
- Rainproof jacket
- Bathing suit
- Change of clothes for wet day trips
- Clothes that make you look sexy (for those nights in Montañita)
- Sun protection (hat, sunglasses, sunblock)
- Binoculars for dolphin and whale spotting

Optional

- GoPro or other waterproof camera to capture your adventures!

## What next?

If you've traveled down through Manabí and reached Puerto Lopez or Ayampe, continue south toward Montañita and visit la Comuna de Barcelona (5 minutes from Montañita) to observe the harvest and preparation of paja toquilla. Stay in Montañita or Olón before continuing towards Guayaquil.

If you've been traveling north through Manabí, continue to beaches like Mompiche and Same, or head back to Quito to explore regions of the Andes and the Amazon.

The Wanderbus picks up travelers from Puerto Lopez to Quito. [Contact us for exact details.](#)



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