

Baños

Written by Kristin Brinner

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Driving the aptly named Route of the Volcanoes between Quito and the small town of [Baños](#), you will pass 5 immense volcanoes, each taller than 15,500 feet. Looming over the town of Baños is the threatening and active Volcan Tungurahua, which means 'little hell' in the local indigenous language. This volcano fuels the natural hot springs around town as well as a healthy industry of massages, steam baths, and mud facials.

If driving to Baños, just before the town of Ambato, be sure to take the 'Paso Lateral' and follow signs for Baños. The town is hopping on Saturday night, the streets thronged with tourists both foreign and Ecuadorian, all watched by the eerily lit cathedral that adorns the main town square. To keep warm during the cool nights visit La Piscina de La Virgen (hot springs three blocks off the main square). The super hot pool is usually full of quiet adults, while the warm pool full of rowdy children.



If you feel a little adventurous, spend an enjoyable day biking the Route of the Waterfalls. There are lots of bike rental shops in town, some less reputable than others and always changing ownership. Find a shop that rents real bike helmets, and be sure to checking your bikes' gears and brakes by riding around the block in downtown Baños, *before* taking off for the mostly downhill ride to Rio Verde. This route winds next to the deep gorge cut by the gushing Rio Pastaza, and through a pitch black tunnel, along beautiful roads clinging to the side of sheer cliffs, and across several bridges. At several points along the ride you can opt for a hair-raising *teleferico*

(gondola) ride across the river to see one of the many waterfalls up close. The bike trip ends in the tiny town of Rio Verde, home of the Pailón del Diablo. It is a steep 15 minute walk down to this roaring waterfall. It careens over a sharp cliff and crashes onto huge boulders into the

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boiling waters below. It is worth paying the extra \$5 to get up close and personal with the waterfall. This involves crawling through a series of caves and narrow passageways, where you end underneath the top of the waterfall, the gushing water lit a spooky green. Warning: you will get soaked to the bone from this experience. Hike back up to Rio Verde and get a ride back with a pickup truck to Baños. They wait till they are full (5-8 people) and it's about \$4/person for the 30 minute trip.



There are several beautiful hikes around Baños as well. It is 45 minutes to the Santa Martin Shrine, or 45 minutes to the statue of the Virgin, for nice views of the river and the town. You can also continue either of these hikes to the spectacular resort of [Luna Runtun](#). High above Baños, it has very nice food, great views, and is a good place to reward yourself after your hike.

Places to stay: Splurge at the 'adventure spa' of [Luna Runtun](#) from \$60 to \$300 depending on the degree of luxury. Spare your wallet in downtown Baños at the Hostal El Eden, at 12 de Noviembre and Montalvo (2 blocks off the central square). Hot water, nice rooms, \$7/person.

Places to eat: Luna Runtun has nice meals for \$10-\$15 (it is about a \$6 cab ride from Baños to Luna Runtun), but if you want to stay in Baños for your meals, you can eat well at Casa Hood (on Ambato near Eloy Alfaro) or the Suisse Bistro (on Calle Martinez and Eloy Alfaro) for \$7/person. Typical European fare, including pastas, fondues, and well prepared meats with tasty side dishes.

Services: Every corner has people handing out brochures for massages, mud baths, and other treatments. Costs vary, but shouldn't run much more than \$30/hour.