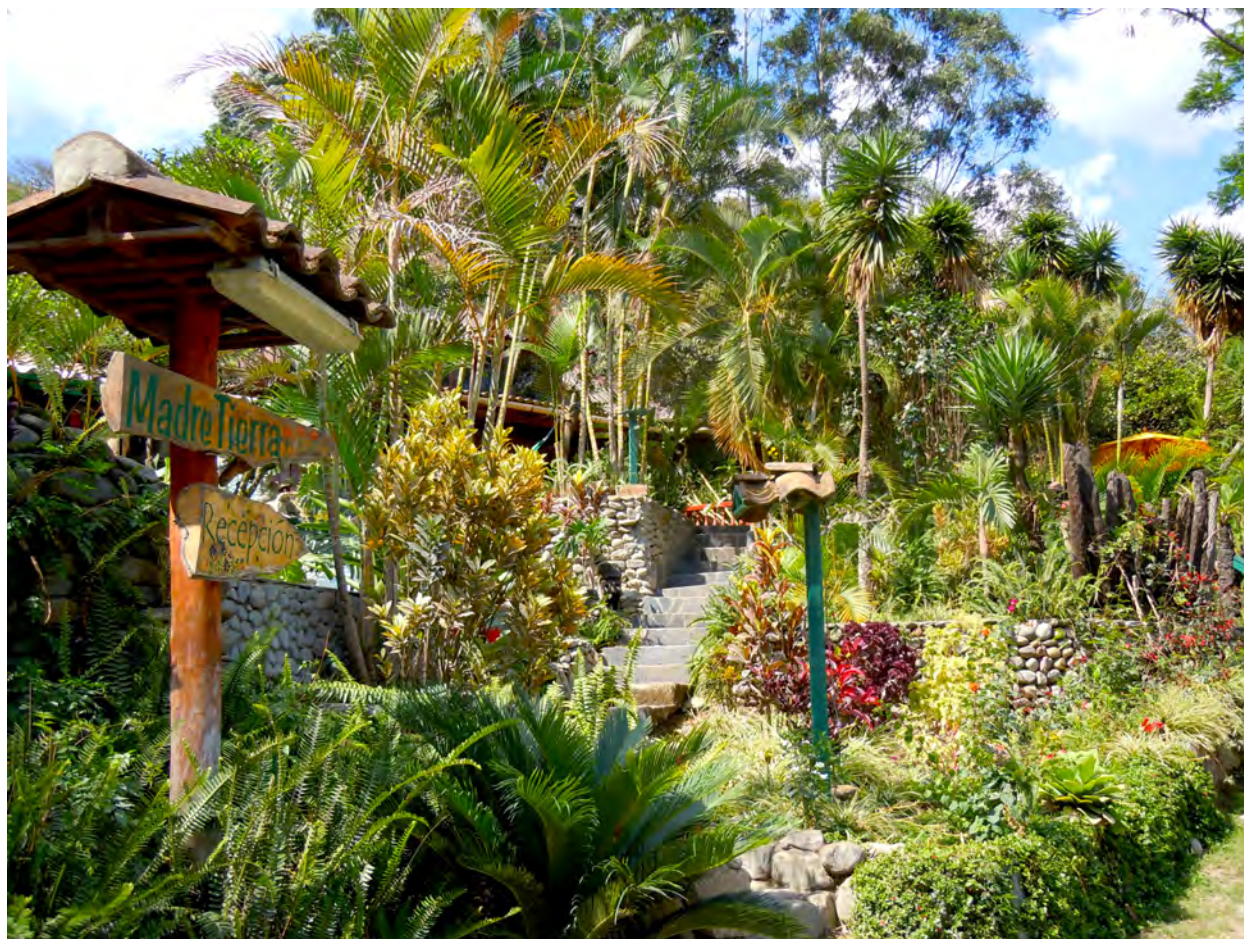


Madre Tierra

Frequently Asked Questions

www.madretierra.com.ec



1. About Madre Tierra

Madre Tierra (meaning “Mother Earth”) – one of the first tourist hotels in Vilcabamba – opened to new management in 2010. But we’re more than a hotel: we’re a family, we’re the warmest welcome one could wish for, we’re a growing and evolving conference center, and we’re a spa and integrated health resource dedicated to helping you relax and heal.

We operate all year round, and are committed to the values of peace, community, art, health, and sustainability. *(Approximately 80-90% of our income goes to supporting our local Ecuadorian staff and other operating and overhead costs.)*

Over the past couple of years, this inspiring, artistic and tranquil setting has attracted thousands of guests from every corner of the globe. Many of these turn out to be kindred spirits ranging from students and teachers of the arts, new science, deep ecology and environmental activism to ones who seek to lead a more peaceful and sustainable lifestyle free from the pressures of life in North America, Europe or Australia. Our website www.madretierra.com.ec gives further details and updates about all our ongoing services and activities.

2. How do I get there?

Your international flight should arrive in either Quito or Guayaquil. There are several daily nonstop flights from cities in the U.S., South America and Europe. You'd then connect on a domestic flight to our closest city Loja, sometimes overnighing in Quito or Guayaquil. Prices for hotels and taxis are reasonable. The flights from Quito are on comfortable jets operated by Tame airlines. Reservations can be made on www.tame.com.ec, or through ourselves. It's best to make prior reservations for domestic flights in case your preferred flight is full.

On weekdays, Tame has three flights from Quito to Loja: at 5:45 am, 8:40 am and 4:30 pm, and two daily flights on the weekends (please check, as this schedule is subject to change). From Guayaquil, [Saereo airlines](#) has morning and afternoon flights to Loja during weekdays and only Saturday morning and Sunday afternoon on weekends.

Write us at info@madretierra.com.ec to make your reservation. When you've purchased your domestic air tickets, write us again and we'll send out a taxi to pick you up at Loja baggage claim for the ninety-minute \$30 scenic ride to here through the Andean foothills. The driver will be holding a Madre Tierra sign, probably with your name on it. We recommend you use these prearranged Vilcabamba taxis because they are bigger, safer and lower cost... and they know where we are.

*** I'VE HEARD THAT LOJA AIRPORT WILL BE CLOSED FOR A PERIOD SOMETIME IN 2012. IF SO, HOW DO I GET TO MADRE TIERRA?**

The long-planned upgrade of Loja airport means that you'd fly into Cuenca instead. Cuenca has many flights daily from Quito and Guayaquil, and is a four-hour ride from Vilcabamba on an excellent new highway over the Andean foothills. There's a \$12, 3-hour van service three times daily from Cuenca to Loja. Cuenca itself is a beautiful old colonial city, well worth visiting.

3. Is it better to fly to Quito or Guayaquil?

It's your choice. All other things being about equal, we prefer Quito: the road and flight connections are better, and it's generally safer downtown. Quito has an interesting historic area and is nestled in a scenic green Andean valley. The altitude is 9200 ft. (2,800 meters), so we suggest taking it easy if you're sensitive to altitude (see travel tips at #6 below). It's a bit cooler in Quito than here, with no indoor heating – so we recommend you bring a sweater, jacket and long pants, which will be useful here as well.

4. Do I need any vaccinations or special visas to enter Ecuador?

No, a passport is all you'll need. Entering Ecuador is easy, and immigration and customs are almost always rapid. You'll receive a 90-day visa stamped in your passport. Vaccinations aren't recommended for Quito, Guayaquil or Vilcabamba. We're not in the jungle – and mosquitoes are almost unknown in this temperate, pleasant, mile-high climate.

5. What should I bring with me?

Clothes are casual for almost everyone in Vilcabamba. We recommend you bring lightweight long pants and walking shoes for during the day and a sweater, jacket, flashlight and warmer pants for the evenings; and the usual toiletries, health products, and any food you might want to snack on after our restaurant is closed.

Here's a suggested packing list. Life is simple here, so it's not necessary to bring an exhaustive wardrobe. There's laundry service at the hotel.

- Light sweater, jacket or sweatshirt for cooler evenings/mornings
- Shoes suitable for walking/hiking
- Swimsuit
- Insect repellent
- Flashlights & cameras. Flashlights for walking at night are a great idea. (The sun sets every evening at around 7pm)
- Battery rechargers
- Umbrella or rain poncho
- Binoculars (you can consider these mandatory if you're excited about bird watching and spotting wildlife)
- A refillable water bottle with some type of carbon filtration is ideal. However, inexpensive bottled water is readily available.
- Money: you'll need cash for souvenir shopping and any spa therapies you might wish to have. Ecuador's official currency is the US dollar. ATMs are available in the cities, and there are a couple in Vilcabamba itself (though these sometimes run out of cash). Bring bills of \$20 and under: \$50 and \$100 bills are sometimes not accepted, or the vendor will not have change. (If you bring with you a bunch of \$1s and \$5s we'll gladly buy these from you at the hotel front desk) A roll of pennies, dimes and nickels would also be appreciated as banks always seem to have a shortage of these.
- Most importantly don't forget to bring these.... a Positive Attitude, Flexibility and Good Energy!

* PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST

Prior to departing on your adventure, it's essential that you have the following:

1. Currently valid passport(s)
2. Proof of Medical Insurance (if you have it)
3. Airline tickets, e-tickets or confirmation numbers

4. Emergency cash (separate from any obvious place such as your wallet)
5. Credit cards/Debit cards.

Be sure to make backup documents or copies for each person of:

- Passport
- Driver's license
- Credit cards + customer service numbers in case you need to report them lost or stolen
- Debit card pin numbers
- Your travel itinerary to leave with someone at home and/or the hotel
- All your travel documents to leave with someone at home in case of emergency
- Emergency contact phone numbers to leave with someone at home.

A good strategy for backup copies is to scan and email them to yourself so you can have access to them from any internet connection (very available and inexpensive in Ecuador in hotels or internet cafes).

6. Do you have any other general travel tips?

We'd recommend that you regularly back up digital photos or videos you may be taking. There are easy-to-use free services such as [Picasa](#) or [DropBox.com](#) available online – and if you were to lose your camera, at least you'd still have most of your memories. We can recommend [Carbonite.com](#) for computer backup if you carry a laptop: for less than \$60 per year you can have peace of mind at home and on the road.

Drink lots of water when you travel in Ecuador, as altitude sickness is occasionally experienced – especially in Quito, which is almost 2,800 meters (9,200 feet) above sea level. If you're arriving in Quito from much nearer sea level, it may be a good idea to abstain from alcohol! (It's dehydrating, and good hydration is helpful in avoiding altitude headaches.)

Negotiate and agree taxi rates before you get in the car. You might ask a local how much it should cost to a certain destination before hailing a cab.

At Quito Airport there's a window staffed with someone who will collect your fare, based on the destination, and give you a ticket to hand to the driver. If you choose to tip the driver, that's up to you.

In many hostels and hotels in Ecuador it's necessary to ask for hot water in advance. Unlike Madre Tierra, it's not necessarily automatic everywhere.

Sewage systems in Latin America are not as tolerant to extra content as in the West. Most bathrooms have a waste basket for toilet paper disposal. Using the basket will identify you as a savvy traveler!

Believe it or not, 99% of the salt in restaurants and stores in Ecuador contains fluoride. If you plan to eat in restaurants other than Madre Tierra, it's wise to bring your own salt. If you are ordering anything that the cook would salt, ask them to prepare it without if you're concerned about fluoride. *(Editorial note: If you haven't read a fluoride toothpaste label lately, check it out. Why are governments and "health" organizations around the world determined to put this in our water and salt for ingestion?)*

7. How safe is it to travel in Ecuador?

Travel in Latin America is an exciting and sometimes challenging experience. While we step out of our own countries and travel through new ones, we experience new cultural encounters and meet many people from all walks of life. While common sense is the surest approach to dealing with daily situations, we offer the following guidelines to think about while traveling:

*** THEFT OF BAGS OR LUGGAGE**

Don't leave your bags alone in airports or bus stations. Bags are generally safe underneath the buses: the driver will have a way to lock all the luggage bays from inside the bus. Keep your valuables in your daypack or in a money belt on your person (credit cards, bank card, money and passport). This daypack should stay on your lap when using public buses. Be very careful indeed if you are considering using a night bus (e.g. from Quito to Loja). A number of thefts have been reported from passengers who have fallen asleep.

* ATM (CASH MACHINE) PRECAUTIONS

As in any city, insure that nobody is watching you while you take money out of the cash machine, or looking at you while you enter your pin number.

* PEACE OF MIND

For the most part, Vilcabamba is a very safe community and exists in a bit of a “bubble” – especially while staying at Madre Tierra. However, while most Ecuadorians are polite, respectable, honest, respectful and appreciative of visitors (foreigners or ‘*gringos*’), we offer this advice:

It’s a good idea not to bring anything of great value with you. Dress modestly, and don’t flash fancy jewelry, wads of cash, or expensive electronics. This may well invite a situation that could easily have been avoided.

You’re guests in a foreign country. Even though Ecuador uses the US Dollar as their currency, this is not the 51st State (for those from the USA). Efficiency and organization are sometimes optional here! Humility is a great quality that will serve you well as you set aside preconceived expectations of a new culture. The pace here is substantially slower than in the west – so relax, savor the new experiences, and enjoy the pace. As the locals say, “*tranquilo*”!

* MISCELLANEOUS ADVICE:

It’s good to have a card that has the Madre Tierra hotel address and telephone number on it with you at all times.

Upon request, we can email a list of Spanish phrases that may be helpful in travel situations. We also have luggage tags that could be printed and attached to your baggage. All you need to do is type in your personal information to make it a customized tag.

We’d recommend traveling with homeopathic remedies, and a high potency Probiotic such as [Dr. Ohhira's Probiotics 12Plus](#). It’s not uncommon for your intestinal flora to need an “adjustment” when traveling in another country or continent. Although you can expect western standards at Madre Tierra, you will also be traveling or maybe staying elsewhere while on your trip here.

If someone doesn't speak your language, it doesn't help to raise your voice! This does not help the other person to understand the words you are saying.

The banks in Ecuador charge exorbitant fees to merchants who take credit cards (6% or more). As a result of this, most vendors don't accept cards. If they do, they may well charge more for credit card transactions. Cash is king. And as a reminder, the prices quoted for your Madre Tierra room are cash prices.

For the reason above, many of our guests prepay for meals, spa services, tours, airport transfers, etc. by making a deposit along with the room payment. Please let us know if you'd like to take advantage of this option. It can be easily done in exactly the same way you're paying for your room.

If you have a jigsaw puzzle, spare board game, chess set and/or good novel or resource book that you'd like to contribute to our library, we will gladly receive it. Occasionally guests enjoy some down time, or fellowship around a puzzle or game. There are also times when the balcony and hammock require a good book from our little library.

9. How far is Madre Tierra from Vilcabamba?

We're a 10 minute walk into town along the main road – or a quick \$1 taxi ride (the last taxis run at about 9 pm, or a little later at weekends). Vilcabamba has quite a number of restaurants, small food stores, shops containing a surprising number of different items, and internet cafés. We're always willing to call a cab for you to take you wherever you need to go from here, including your return ride to the airport.

10. What can I do in and around Vilcabamba?

There are many things to do here. It's a mecca for getting into nature. While you get to experience all this right here at Madre Tierra, there are numerous trails going through the river valleys and up the nearby peaks, either on foot or by horseback. Those arrangements can be made after you get here along with any other plans for touring, your return taxi to the airport, etc.

There's also an active growing expat community in Vilcabamba with lots of activities and spontaneous friendly gatherings at the cafés and parks.

One can also take excursions to the high jungle near Zamora – about two and a half hours' drive away from us with good overnight accommodations.

Cuenca is a beautiful historic city, with a number of modern shops, restaurants, movie theaters and malls, 4-5 hours drive on an excellent highway going to the north of here. Some of our guests go there for a few days either before or after they visit Madre Tierra. There's frequent air service between Cuenca and Quito or Guayaquil.

11. How about real estate?

For a number of reasons, we are not giving recommendations other than to say *"let the buyer beware."* We'd advise NOT rushing to buy, but renting first while searching carefully. Madre Tierra is a great initial landing place for those seeking residency, seasonal stays, and educational vision quests as well as a relaxing retreat to get away from it all. As such, we're quite independent from any commercial interests although we could talk about it after you get here.

12. How is the weather in Vilcabamba?

At about a 5,000 feet (1,700 meter) elevation, we enjoy an ideal year-round climate: about 70-75°F (20-25°C) by day and 60°F (15°C) by night. The drier season is August to November, and the wetter season is February through April – but this does vary from year to year. We love the rainy season because everything is so green, fresh and springlike. Almost every day has some sunshine with rain only in the afternoons and/or nighttime, and picturesque misty mountains in the mornings, a haze that lifts to make way for later sunshine.

We have many microclimates in the region. To our East is the continental divide of the Andes with cloud forests, descending further East into one of the most biodiverse rainforests of the Amazon basin. To our West is the sacred mountain Mandango, beyond which there are deserts and more mountains and valleys.

Sunsets can be a photographer's paradise, especially when rainbows appear over Podocarpus National Park toward the rainy East. We feel very blessed to be at such a special spot on Earth, always comfortable and with no special requirements to "brave the elements" or to prove anything besides to enjoy the unique ambiance of Madre Tierra.

13. What about mosquitoes and other insects?

We are blessed by being almost completely mosquito-free. There's a surprising (and welcome!) lack of unpleasant insects.

14. What kinds of conferences and workshops are held at Madre Tierra?

Madre Tierra has a well-equipped and large conference hall, holding over 100 people: a locally much appreciated venue for events ranging from seminars on contemporary subjects to choral music, art, dance, and theater – some events being valuable experiments in designing a sustainable future, expressing the arts, or presenting alternative and creative ways of eating, growing, and healing.

In all, we expect to have more and more guests coming here for transformational education far, far away from the crazy world up North.

Keep checking www.madretierra.com.ec for announcements of future conferences, workshops, seminars, and events celebrating the arts. Part of the vision of Madre Tierra is to support the co-creation a peaceful, sustainable and just new world through innovation and compassion for all of nature and humanity.

15. What is your carbon footprint here?

We have one of the lowest carbon footprints on the planet: no need to heat or cool, and almost all the labor, food and materials are local.

16. How do I keep connected with the real world?

Madre Tierra can provide you with good wireless internet, and the cellphone coverage throughout the area is excellent. You can enjoy being thousands of miles from home and still keep in close touch with friends, family or business colleagues.

17. How well can you cater for guests who like to live and eat healthily?

Excellently – and with great pride and pleasure. The Madre Tierra restaurant has become famous in Vilcabamba for its creative cooking, specialty meals, and high quality salads and other raw food. To supplement the restaurant menu, we have our own juice bar which provides deeply nourishing, whole-fruit, sugar-free smoothies that are the equal of those found anywhere. Combine our wide-ranging restaurant fare with the deeply relaxing massages and other therapies available at the spa, and you will find yourself pampered, contented – and more than ready to return for more.

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# What Madre Tierra can offer:

Vilcabamba (meaning "Sacred Valley") is known for its equable climate, its tranquil lifestyle, and its steadily growing international community of visionary artists, writers, healers and entrepreneurs who have chosen to lead changed lives here.

Many new arrivals come to Madre Tierra first. Join them here. Let us take care of you.

