



At Los Frailes Park, you'll enjoy stunning Pacific views and one of Ecuador's most beautiful beaches.

## The Best Hikes in Coastal Ecuador

The Andes mountains that bisect Ecuador offer great opportunities for hiking. But few visitors (or expats) know that there are some outstanding trails on the coast, as well. If you get tired of the surf, sun, and sand, here are three of the many places where you can get out and enjoy the scenic beauty and fresh air.

In the Salinas/Chipi area, visit **La Puntilla**, the nature preserve at the western tip of the Santa Elena peninsula. This park has over five miles of hiking and biking trails to enjoy. You can watch the large sea lions resting on the rocks at La Lobería, or climb almost 300 feet up to the top of El Morro for a panoramic view of the peninsula and the Pacific Ocean.

A few hours up the coast in Ayampe, pick up the **Río Ayampe** trail. This will take you up and down lush hills on a well-maintained path, as you trek upstream by the winding Ayampe River. If you want a challenge, you can pick up another trail and complete a 15-mile trek all the way to Puerto López. Mountain bikers will also enjoy this trail. Remember to bring plenty of water and food.

For a more relaxing hike, try the trails at the **Los Frailes** park, north of Puerto López. This is a protected, white-sand beach, where visitors are not allowed to take anything in that could be left behind as trash. As a result, it is one of the cleanest and most beautiful beaches in Ecuador. The trails are great for beginners, running about two miles in and along the ridgeline, giving you wonderful views of the Pacific. The trail also lets you visit an even more remote and private stretch of the beach for a refreshing swim before you head back.

*One of the cleanest and most beautiful beaches in Ecuador."*

## The Savvy Traveler's Corner



## Snow-Capped Mountains and Fairytale Beauty in the French Alps

Barbara Diggs

The Brothers Grimm themselves could not have dreamed up a more exquisite fairytale town than Annecy. Set in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alps region in southeastern France, the small medieval town is all cobblestone streets, graceful bridges arching over flower-decked canals, and bustling food markets filled with woven basket-carrying locals. A stunning 15th-century turreted castle and snowcapped mountains sit majestically in the background.

Less than four hours from Paris by train, Annecy makes for the perfect overnight trip, with round-trip tickets starting from \$150.

This is a town meant for wandering and letting your fancy take you where it may. Consider starting out on rue Sainte-Claire in Annecy's medieval quarter (*Vieille Ville*), where you can't help but be charmed by the twisty cobblestone streets and 16th-century arcades that line them.

The *Vieille Ville* market is held on this lovely street on Tuesday, Friday, and Sunday mornings. Even if you don't buy a thing, it's a sensorial experience you won't want to miss. It's fun to fawn over the fantastic huge rounds of regional Savoyard cheeses, the unusual local sausages (blueberry sausage, anyone?), and the bright heaps of fresh fruits and vegetables.

If you're set on having a historical cultural experience in Annecy, then visit the Palais de l'Isle, which sits on a triangular islet on the Canal de Thiou, in the center of town. A 12th-century marvel, the former palace (and former prison) is now a museum that focuses on local architecture and history.

Worth sampling is the local *raclette*, a delicious—and extremely filling—Savoyard dish of melted Swiss cheese and boiled potatoes. The *raclette* at the restaurant Le Freti (12 rue Sainte-Claire) is the best in Annecy and costs just \$15.

But the lake, *Lac d'Annecy*, is unquestionably the star of Annecy. Shimmering blue-green, half-surrounded by pines, utterly unreal. It's the sort of lake you could imagine being the source of all kinds of fantastic magical tales and legends.

You can enjoy its breathtakingly clear turquoise waters in any number of ways: swimming at one of its 11 beaches, sailing, water-skiing, or taking a cruise on a paddleboat or motorboat. It's also a treat to admire the incredible views by cycling the path that runs along the lake's shore. Bike rentals at Roul' Ma Poule start from \$8 an hour.



In Annecy, you'll find a stunning lake and medieval treasures waiting to be explored.