

Cuenca 90-Day Survival Guide

Long-stay city guide for budget nomads.

For The Lean Nomad — Built 2026-07-19

0. City Overview & Quick Facts

Cuenca, officially known as *Santa Ana de los cuatro ríos de Cuenca*, is a vibrant colonial highland city in southern Ecuador. As the third-largest city in the country and the capital of Azuay Province, it offers a unique blend of historical preservation and modern digital-nomad infrastructure. The city is nestled in a basin created by the confluence of four rivers—the Tomebamba, Yanuncay, Tarqui, and Machangara—which flow from the high-altitude Páramo of Cajas National Park. These rivers are a point of immense local pride and are central to the city's geography; the name “Cuenca” itself refers to the basin formed by these waters, all of which eventually feed into the Amazon river watershed.

For the long-stay nomad, Cuenca is an exceptional choice due to its walkability, safety, and moderate climate. The city center is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, characterized by cobblestone streets, blooming flowers, and stunning colonial architecture. Unlike many other cities in Ecuador, the drinking water in Cuenca is generally considered safe to consume, thanks to extensive infrastructure upgrades by the utility agency ETAPA, which between 2010 and 2013 installed new water and sewage mains covering 8,000 hectares.

Quick Facts for Nomads: - **Altitude:** 2,560 meters (approx. 8,366 ft). Be mindful of altitude sickness upon arrival; stay hydrated and avoid overexertion for the first 48 hours. - **Currency:** US Dollar (USD). Ecuador dollarized its economy in 2000, meaning you do not need to exchange currency if coming from the US. - **Climate:** Moderate and spring-like year-round, though it can get chilly at night. - **Vibe:** A mix of traditional Andean culture (where you might see donkeys hauling milk or natives washing clothes in the river) and modern connectivity (high-speed internet and a new tram system). - **Walkability:** Extremely high. The city is designed for pedestrians, though drivers can be aggressive; always be vigilant when crossing streets.

Connectivity and Remote Work

Cuenca has evolved into a hub for remote workers, offering a variety of professional environments. For those who prefer a structured office setting, **COWORK Cuenca** in the Centro Histórico provides hot desks and private offices. **Workplace Cuenca**, located near the river, offers a scenic alternative for those needing a quiet focus zone. For nomads seeking a hybrid of social life and work, **Selina Cuenca** provides a combined coliving and coworking experience in the center of the city.

Logistics and Transportation

Arriving in the city is straightforward via the **Mariscal Lamar International Airport (CUE)**, which handles domestic flights to major hubs like Quito and Guayaquil. For those traveling by land, the **Terminal Terrestre Cuenca** is the primary gateway for buses heading to the coast or the north. Within the city, the **Tranvía de Cuenca** (tram) serves as a modern east-west corridor, making it easy to traverse the city without relying on taxis. While the city is highly walkable, the local government has also invested in an urban plan to implement 80km of bicycle trails to complement the existing paths that follow the riverbanks.

Daily Life and Shopping

Grocery shopping in Cuenca is a mix of modern convenience and traditional markets. **Supermaxi Cuenca** is the go-to chain for international brands and consistent quality, while **MegaTienda Coral** is excellent for household goods and food. For a more authentic experience and fresher produce, visit the **Mercado 10 de Agosto** in the Centro Histórico. This market is not only a place to shop but a culinary destination; the food court here is famous for offering hearty, traditional lunches for around \$3.

For shopping malls, the **Mall del Río** on Av. Paseo de los Cañaris is the largest in the city, while **Centro Comercial El Vergel** offers a mid-sized alternative. If you are looking for local crafts, textiles, or souvenirs, the **Mercado Artesanal** in the historic center is the primary destination.

Dining and Cafés

The culinary scene ranges from high-end colonial dining to street food. For a traditional Ecuadorian meal, **Raymipampa** near Parque Calderón is highly recommended for classics, and **Tres Estrellas** offers inexpensive local fare. If you are adventurous, head to the outskirts of the city to **Guajibamba Cuyes** to try *cuy* (guinea pig), a regional delicacy. For a caffeine fix or a remote work spot, **Moliendo Café** in the Centro Histórico is known for its crepes and coffee, while **Café Nucallacta** is a favorite for specialty coffee and brunch.

Health and Wellness

Cuenca is well-equipped for medical needs, offering both public and private options. - **Private Care: Hospital del Río** (Av. 12 de Abril) and **Hospital Santa Inés** are the top choices for nomads. Hospital del Río is known for modern facilities and English-speaking staff in certain departments, while Santa Inés specializes in outpatient and inpatient care and accepts private insurance. - **Public Care: Hospital Universitario del Río** is a teaching hospital with general medicine and emergency services. **Hospital Monte Sinaí** is a low-cost public option with 24-hour emergency services, though be aware that staff here

are primarily Spanish-speaking. - **Dental Care:** The city is a popular spot for dental tourism due to high quality and lower costs. **Dental Cuenca** in the Centro Histórico specializes in implants (\$900–1,600) and crowns (\$350–600). **Sonrisas Cuenca** focuses on cosmetic dentistry, including whitening (\$150–300), while **Clínica Dental del Valle** on Av. Solano is a reliable choice for family dentistry, with cleanings ranging from \$30–60 and fillings from \$40–90.

1. Landing — First 72 Hours

The first three days in Cuenca are about acclimatization—both to the altitude and the pace of the city. Because the city sits in a highland basin at approximately 2,560 meters (8,200 feet), your body needs a window of time to adjust to the thinner air before you dive into a full work schedule or intense exploration.

Arrival and Transport If you fly into Mariscal Lamar International Airport (CUE), you are already very close to the city center. Taxis are the standard way to reach your accommodation; they are readily available outside the terminal. If arriving by bus via the Terminal Terrestre Cuenca, ensure you have your bags secure and use a registered taxi to get to the Centro Histórico.

Once you are in the city, the Tranvía de Cuenca (the tram) is a modern and efficient way to navigate the east-west corridor of the city. It is particularly useful for getting from the historic center toward the more residential or commercial districts without dealing with traffic.

Accommodation Setup For those without a long-term lease, start at a nomad-friendly spot to avoid the stress of immediate apartment hunting. **Hostal Macondo** or **Hostal Villa Del Rosario** are excellent budget-friendly options to land in. Villa Del Rosario is particularly noted for its quiet courtyard and friendly owner, though basic Spanish helps here. For those seeking a blend of professional infrastructure and social networking, **Selina Cuenca** offers a combination of coliving and coworking spaces right in the center. If you prefer a more traditional hotel experience for your first few nights, **Hotel Victoria** is a reliable choice.

Once settled, spend your first few afternoons walking the Río Tomebamba river walk. This is the best way to get your bearings, as the river is the heart of the city's geography and a primary landmark for orientation.

The Altitude Adjustment At 2,560 meters, you may feel short of breath or experience mild headaches. Spend your first 72 hours avoiding heavy alcohol and intense gym sessions. Drink plenty of water and eat light meals. While the city is known for having very pure water—often cited as being cleaner than many U.S. or European cities—always verify locally if your specific accommodation has a filtered system.

If you experience a medical emergency or need immediate care during your transition, you have several options. For high-end, modern facilities with some

English-speaking staff, **Hospital del Río** on Av. 12 de Abril is a top private choice. **Hospital Santa Inés** is another private option specializing in outpatient and inpatient care that accepts private insurance. For public options, **Hospital Universitario del Río** (a teaching hospital) and **Hospital Monte Sinaí** (which offers 24-hour emergency services) are available, though be prepared for these to be Spanish-heavy environments.

Immediate To-Do List:

1. **SIM Card:** Visit a local provider, such as Movistar or Claro, to get a local SIM. This is essential for using ride-sharing apps or coordinating with landlords.
2. **Cash:** While the USD is the official currency, keep a supply of small bills (\$1, \$5, \$10). Many small vendors, taxi drivers, and markets in the Centro Histórico cannot make change for \$20 or \$50 bills.
3. **Orientation Walk:** Take the “Free Walking Tour” starting from Parque Calderón. This is the fastest way to identify key landmarks like the New Cathedral and the various museums. You will quickly realize why the city is a UNESCO World Heritage Site as you pass the colonial architecture and the Iglesia de Santo Domingo.
4. **First Meal:** Head to the **Mercado 10 de Agosto** food court for an affordable, authentic introduction to Ecuadorian cuisine. You can find hearty lunches here for around \$3. For a more formal introduction to Ecuadorian classics, try **Raymipampa** near Parque Calderón or the budget-friendly **Tres Estrellas**. If you are feeling adventurous, head to the city outskirts to **Guajibamba Cuyes** to try *cuy* (guinea pig), a regional delicacy.
5. **Grocery Run:** For your first stock of essentials, visit **Supermaxi Cuenca**, the most reliable local supermarket chain. For a more traditional experience with fresh produce, the **Mercado 10 de Agosto** is the primary hub. For larger household items, **MegaTienda Coral** is a comprehensive option.

Establishing Your Digital Workflow Before the 72-hour mark, identify where you will actually work. If you aren’t staying at Selina, check out **COWORK Cuenca** in the Centro Histórico for hot desks and private offices, or **Workplace Cuenca**, which is conveniently located near the river.

If you prefer a “cafe-hop” approach to your first few days, **Moliendo Café** in the Centro Histórico is famous for its crepes and coffee, while **Café Nucallacta** is a great spot for specialty coffee and brunch.

Quick Logistics Check If you need to pick up electronics or clothing, the **Mall del Río** on Av. Paseo de los Cañaris is the largest mall in the city. For a mid-sized option, **Centro Comercial El Vergel** is available. If you want to buy high-quality local textiles or handicrafts to decorate your temporary space, visit the **Mercado Artesanal**.

Finally, if you have any pending health maintenance, Cuenca is a hub for dental

work. For a routine cleaning (est. \$30–60) or more complex work like implants (\$900–1,600) or crowns (\$350–600), you can visit **Dental Cuenca** in the Centro Histórico, **Sonrisas Cuenca**, or **Clínica Dental del Valle** on Av. Solano.

2. Visa & Immigration

Ecuador is one of the most accessible countries for digital nomads in South America, offering a welcoming environment for remote workers who wish to base themselves in the highlands. Because Cuenca is a hub for both retirees and young professionals, the local infrastructure for handling foreign residency is well-established, though it requires diligence and attention to detail.

Entry Requirements For the majority of digital nomads, the entry process is straightforward. Citizens of the United States, Canada, the European Union, and Australia typically receive a 90-day visa-free entry upon arrival. This is granted as a stamp in your passport at the border or upon landing at Mariscal Lamar International Airport (CUE).

It is critical to ensure your passport is valid for at least six months beyond your date of entry. Immigration officers may deny entry or cause significant delays if your document is nearing expiration. Additionally, while not always requested at the airport, you should verify locally if a Yellow Fever certificate is required, particularly if you have recently traveled through other tropical regions of South America before arriving in Cuenca.

Extensions The initial 90-day stay is generally extendable for another 90 days, allowing for a total stay of 180 days without needing a long-term visa. To secure this extension, you must visit the local immigration office in Cuenca.

Practical experience suggests that you should start the extension process at least two weeks before your initial 90 days expire. Waiting until the final days can be risky; if the office is closed for a holiday or if there is a clerical error, you may face overstay fines. These fines can be costly and may complicate your ability to exit the country or apply for future visas. To streamline this process, keep a digital and physical copy of your passport and your original entry stamp.

Digital Nomad and Long-Term Visas If you intend to stay in Cuenca longer than 180 days, you will need to transition from a tourist status to a formal residency visa. Ecuador has introduced specific pathways for remote workers and those with independent means.

The “Rentista” visa is a popular choice for those with a guaranteed monthly income from sources outside Ecuador, such as pensions, rental income from a home in their home country, or a steady dividend stream. The “Professional” visa is geared toward those with university degrees who can prove their professional standing and a steady income.

Both visas typically require proof of a steady monthly income. While the exact

dollar amount can fluctuate based on current government regulations, you will generally need to provide certified bank statements and a criminal background check from your home country (often requiring an apostille). Because these requirements can change, it is highly recommended to verify the current minimum income thresholds locally or through the Ecuadorian consulate.

Practical Integration for Long-Stay Nomads Once your immigration status is settled, integrating into Cuenca's infrastructure is relatively easy. For those working remotely, the city offers several high-quality coworking spaces. In the Centro Histórico, COWORK Cuenca provides hot desks and private offices, while Selina Cuenca offers a hybrid coliving and coworking environment. For those who prefer to be near the river, Workplace Cuenca is an excellent alternative.

Living in Cuenca is affordable, which makes the transition to a long-term stay financially viable. For groceries, you can visit the modern Supermaxi Cuenca or MegaTienda Coral for household goods. For a more authentic experience and fresher produce, the Mercado 10 de Agosto in the Centro Histórico is the primary destination. This market also features a food court where you can find traditional \$3 lunches, making it a budget-friendly spot for nomads.

Health and Wellness Considerations While managing your visa, you should also consider your healthcare options, as some long-term visas may require proof of health insurance. Cuenca is well-equipped with both public and private facilities.

For high-end care with modern facilities and some English-speaking staff, Hospital del Río on Av. 12 de Abril is a top choice. Hospital Santa Inés is another private option that specializes in outpatient and inpatient care and accepts various private insurance plans. For more budget-conscious or emergency needs, Hospital Monte Sinaí provides 24-hour services, though be aware that communication here is heavily Spanish-based. The Hospital Universitario del Río serves as a public university teaching hospital and offers general medicine and emergency services at public rates.

Dental care is another area where nomads often seek services during a long stay due to the high quality and lower cost. In the Centro Histórico, Dental Cuenca specializes in implants (est. USD 900–1,600) and crowns (est. USD 350–600). Sonrisas Cuenca and Clínica Dental del Valle on Av. Solano offer general services such as cleanings (USD 30–60), fillings (USD 40–90), and whitening (USD 150–300).

Navigating the City As you settle in, you will find that the city is highly walkable, especially within the UNESCO World Heritage center. For longer trips, the Tranvía de Cuenca (the tram) provides an efficient east-west corridor. If you need to travel to Quito or Guayaquil, you can use the Terminal Terrestre Cuenca for buses or Mariscal Lamar International Airport for domestic flights. For shopping and leisure, the Mall del Río on Av. Paseo de los Cañaris is

the largest mall in the city, while the Mercado Artesanal is the best place to purchase local textiles and handicrafts.

3. Money & Banking

Because Ecuador is a dollarized economy, the financial transition for those using USD is seamless. There is no need to exchange currency at the airport or search for exchange houses upon arrival, which eliminates the risk of poor exchange rates or predatory commissions.

Currency and Cash The official currency is the US Dollar. However, the “coinage” can be tricky for newcomers. While the paper bills are standard US currency, Ecuador mints its own coins that are equivalent in value to US coins. For example, the Ecuadorian 1-centavo coin is equal to the US 1-cent coin, and the 50-centavo coin is equal to the US 50-cent piece. These coins are accepted everywhere within Ecuador and are the primary way you will receive change. It is important to note that these Ecuadorian coins are not usable outside the country; they have no value in the United States or other dollarized nations. When preparing to leave Cuenca, ensure you spend your coins or exchange them for bills at a local bank, as they cannot be deposited into US-based accounts.

Banking and ATMs ATMs are plentiful, particularly within the Centro Histórico and near major commercial hubs. Major banks such as Banco Pichincha and Banco Guayaquil are the most common sights.

- **Fees:** Be aware that most local ATMs charge a convenience fee for foreign cards. These fees can vary depending on the bank and the card type.
- **Strategy:** To maximize your budget, use a debit card that reimburses ATM fees, such as those offered by Charles Schwab. This allows you to withdraw cash frequently without eroding your funds through cumulative bank charges.
- **Security:** As a general rule, use ATMs located inside bank branches or secure shopping centers like Mall del Río or Centro Comercial El Vergel rather than standalone machines on the street, especially at night.

Payment Methods Cuenca operates on a hybrid system where digital payments are growing, but cash remains king for daily survival.

- **Cash:** This is essential for navigating the city’s traditional hubs. You will need cash for the Mercado 10 de Agosto, where you can find fresh produce and affordable meals in the food court (where lunches often cost around \$3). Cash is also required for the Tranvía de Cuenca (the tram system), small neighborhood cafes, and the vast majority of taxis. If you are visiting the Mercado Artesanal for handicrafts and textiles, cash is the preferred method for bargaining.
- **Cards:** Credit and debit cards are widely accepted at larger establishments. This includes hotels like Hotel Victoria, larger restaurants such

as El Mercado or Raymipampa near Parque Calderón, and major retail chains. For household goods and groceries, Supermaxi and MegaTienda Coral are fully equipped for card payments. Similarly, the largest mall, Mall del Río, and the mid-size Centro Comercial El Vergel accept all major international cards.

- **Tipping:** Tipping is not mandatory in Ecuador, but it is appreciated. In traditional local eateries like Tres Estrellas or Guajibamba Cuyes, a small tip is a kind gesture but not expected. In “traveler-centric” or upscale spots, such as Cafe Eucalyptus, Moliendo Café, or Café Nucallacta, tipping is more common and follows a pattern similar to North American customs.

Budgeting for Services For digital nomads staying long-term, it is helpful to budget for recurring and occasional costs in USD.

- **Coworking:** If you require a dedicated workspace, options range from the community-focused Selina Cuenca (which offers coliving and coworking) to more professional environments like COWORK Cuenca in the Centro Histórico or Workplace Cuenca near the river. Verify current monthly rates locally as these fluctuate based on desk type (hot desk vs. private office).
- **Healthcare and Dental:** Cuenca is a hub for medical tourism. For routine dental work, prices are significantly lower than in the US. At clinics like Dental Cuenca, Sonrisas Cuenca, or Clínica Dental del Valle on Av. Solano, you can expect to pay approximately \$30–\$60 for a cleaning, \$40–\$90 for a filling, and \$50–\$120 for an extraction. More complex procedures like crowns range from \$350–\$600, and implants typically cost between \$900–\$1,600.
- **Medical Emergencies:** If you require medical attention, you have choices based on your budget and insurance. Public options like Hospital Universitario del Río and Hospital Monte Sinaí provide 24-hour emergency services and are low-cost, though they are “Spanish-heavy” and may have longer wait times. For those with private insurance or a preference for English-speaking staff and modern private rooms, Hospital del Río on Av. 12 de Abril and Hospital Santa Inés are the primary private alternatives.

Transport Costs When budgeting for travel out of the city, remember that the Mariscal Lamar International Airport (CUE) handles domestic flights to Quito and Guayaquil. For more budget-friendly travel, the Terminal Terrestre Cuenca is the hub for long-distance buses. Always carry a small amount of cash for these transit hubs, as some ticket kiosks or taxi drivers may not accept cards.

4. Neighborhoods & Housing

Cuenca is a compact city, and for most nomads, the Centro Histórico is the only place to be. Because the city is situated in a highland basin at approximately

2,500 meters (8,200ft) above sea level, the geography naturally funnels activity toward the center. The city is remarkably walkable, and the urban layout is designed around the confluence of four rivers—the Tomebamba, Yanuncay, Tarqui, and Machangara—which create natural boundaries and scenic corridors for residents.

Centro Histórico (The Old Town) This is the heart of the city and a UNESCO World Heritage site. It is the most walkable area and contains the majority of cafes, museums, and hostels. Living here puts you in the center of the colonial charm, characterized by cobblestone streets and historical architecture. - **Pros:** Everything is within walking distance; high energy; beautiful architecture. You are steps away from the Mercado Artesanal for textiles and handicrafts, and the main transit hubs. - **Cons:** Can be noisy due to tourism and traffic; higher demand for short-term rentals. - **Key Landmarks:** Parque Calderón, the New Cathedral, and the bustling corridors of the old city.

For those working remotely, the Centro Histórico is the hub for productivity. You will find COWORK Cuenca providing hot desks and offices, as well as Selina Cuenca, which offers a combined coliving and coworking experience. When you need a break from the screen, the area is dotted with specialty spots like Moliendo Café, famous for its crepes and coffee, or the traditional Ecuadorian dishes at Raymipampa near Parque Calderón.

Calle Larga Area A specific stretch of the center known for its vibrant atmosphere, bookstores, and the Pumapungo Archaeological Park. This is a prime area for those who want to be near the “action” and the river. Calle Larga serves as a cultural artery where you can find a mix of student energy and artistic galleries. It is an ideal location for nomads who prefer a more bohemian vibe while remaining centrally located.

The Riverfront (Tomebamba) Living near the Tomebamba River offers a more serene experience. You are still close to the center but have immediate access to the river walk and a slightly cooler, breezier environment. The riverfront is a favorite for those who enjoy morning jogs or evening strolls. This area is generally quieter than the core of the Centro Histórico and is home to Workplace Cuenca, providing a more tranquil environment for deep work.

Beyond the Center While most nomads stick to the center, you may find yourself venturing toward Av. Paseo de los Cañaris to visit the Mall del Río, the city’s largest shopping center, or heading toward Av. Solano for professional services. If you are looking for a mid-size shopping experience, Centro Comercial El Vergel is another viable option. For those seeking a truly traditional culinary experience, you may need to head toward the city outskirts to visit Guajibamba Cuyes for authentic cuy (guinea pig).

Housing Search Tips: - **Short-term:** Start with hostels like Hostal Macondo, Hotel Victoria, or an Airbnb to get your bearings. This allows you to experience different blocks before committing to a lease. - **Long-term:** For 90-day stays or longer, look for “departamentos” (apartments). The most effective way to

find these is by walking the streets of the Centro Histórico and looking for “Se Alquila” (For Rent) signs posted in windows. - **Negotiation:** Monthly rents are often negotiable, especially if you can prove you are a quiet, professional tenant. Be prepared to discuss the term of the lease and whether utilities are included. - **Amenities:** Ensure the apartment has a reliable heater or heavy blankets; the highland nights can be surprisingly cold. Check the water pressure and internet stability, though Cuenca generally boasts high-speed wireless communications.

Practical Living Considerations: - **Groceries:** For a high-end, one-stop shop, Supermaxi Cuenca is the go-to local supermarket chain. For a more authentic and budget-friendly experience, visit the Mercado 10 de Agosto in the Centro Histórico. This is the main produce market where you can find fresh ingredients and a food court offering traditional lunches for around \$3. For larger household goods, MegaTienda Coral is a reliable option. - **Health & Wellness:** Cuenca is well-equipped for medical needs. For private care with modern facilities and some English-speaking staff, Hospital del Río on Av. 12 de Abril is highly recommended. Hospital Santa Inés is another private option that accepts private insurance. For public or emergency services, Hospital Monte Sinaí and the Hospital Universitario del Río are available, though these are typically Spanish-heavy environments. - **Dental Care:** Many nomads visit Cuenca for affordable dental work. In the Centro Histórico, Dental Cuenca offers implants (\$900–1,600) and crowns (\$350–600). Sonrisas Cuenca and Clínica Dental del Valle on Av. Solano provide general services such as cleanings (\$30–60), fillings (\$40–90), and whitening (\$150–300). - **Transport:** Getting around is easy via the Tranvía de Cuenca (the tram), which serves the east-west corridor. For travel outside the city, use the Terminal Terrestre Cuenca for buses to Quito or Guayaquil, or the Mariscal Lamar International Airport (CUE) for domestic flights. - **Water:** Unlike many other cities in Ecuador, the drinking water in Cuenca is generally considered OK to consume, thanks to extensive upgrades by the government utility agency, ETAPA.

5. Transport

Cuenca is designed for pedestrians, and the best way to experience it is on foot. Because the city is situated in a highland valley at approximately 2,500 meters (8,200 feet) above sea level, the air is crisp and the moderate climate makes walking a viable option year-round.

Walking The city is very walkable, and the government has recently upgraded many sidewalks, particularly within the Centro Histórico. Walking allows you to appreciate the UNESCO World Heritage architecture and the abundance of blooming trees and flowers that define the city’s aesthetic. However, be cautious: drivers in Cuenca are known to be aggressive and may not stop for pedestrians. Always make eye contact with drivers before stepping into a crosswalk.

For digital nomads, walking is the most efficient way to navigate between the

city’s core hubs. You can easily trek from a morning session at COWORK Cuenca or Selina Cuenca in the center to a lunch break at the Mercado 10 de Agosto food court, where traditional meals often cost around \$3. If you are staying near the river, the paths are particularly scenic and provide a peaceful commute to workplaces like Workplace Cuenca.

The Tranvía (Tram) Launched in March 2020, the Tranvía operates along a single east-west corridor with 27 stops. It is a clean, modern, and efficient way to move across the city quickly, bypassing the congestion of the narrow colonial streets. The tram is particularly useful for those living on the outskirts or those visiting larger commercial hubs. For example, if you need to head to the Mall del Río on Av. Paseo de los Cañaris or the Centro Comercial El Vergel, the Tranvía provides a reliable alternative to taxis. It is highly recommended for nomads who want a predictable commute time without dealing with traffic.

Taxis Taxis are abundant and relatively inexpensive. They do not typically use meters; instead, you agree on the price with the driver before starting the trip. A short trip within the center usually costs a few dollars. When hailing a taxi, it is standard practice to confirm the fare—for instance, a trip from the Centro Histórico to a medical appointment at Hospital del Río on Av. 12 de Abril or a dental visit to Clínica Dental del Valle on Av. Solano should be negotiated upfront to avoid confusion. Taxis are the most practical choice for transporting heavy groceries from MegaTienda Coral or Supermaxi Cuenca back to your rental.

Bicycles The city is investing in a network of 80km of bicycle trails, which include paths that follow the Tomebamba, Yanuncay, Tarqui, and Machangara rivers. This is an increasingly popular option for nomads who prefer an active commute. The river-side trails are especially beautiful and offer a way to see the city’s natural geography without battling the aggressive traffic of the main roads. While the urban planning for the 80km network is ongoing, the existing river paths are already well-utilized. If you plan to cycle to the outskirts to visit traditional eateries like Guajibamba Cuyes, verify locally for the safest connecting routes, as some main arteries remain challenging for cyclists.

Intercity Travel For those looking to explore beyond the basin of Cuenca, there are two primary transit hubs:

- **Terminal Terrestre Cuenca:** This is the main hub for long-distance buses. From here, you can find frequent departures to the capital, Quito, or the coastal city of Guayaquil. The terminal is bustling and offers various service levels, from standard buses to more luxury “executive” coaches.
- **Mariscal Lamar International Airport (CUE):** Despite the “International” name, this airport is used primarily for domestic flights to Quito or Guayaquil. It is significantly smaller and more manageable than the major hubs in those cities, making the arrival and departure process relatively quick.

Navigating to Key Services When planning your transport, keep in mind

the distribution of essential services. If you require medical attention, private facilities like Hospital Santa Inés and Hospital del Río are accessible via taxi or the Tranvía corridor. For public health needs, Hospital Monte Sinaí and the Hospital Universitario del Río are available, though be aware that these public institutions are heavily Spanish-speaking.

For dental maintenance, most clinics are concentrated in the center or along major avenues. You can find Dental Cuenca and Sonrisas Cuenca within the Centro Histórico, making them easily reachable on foot from most coworking spaces. For those visiting the Mercado Artesanal for textiles and handicrafts, walking is the only viable option as the narrow streets of the historic center are not conducive to cars or the tram.

Whether you are heading to Raymipampa for an Ecuadorian classic near Parque Calderón or grabbing a coffee at Moliendo Café or Café Nucallacta, the combination of the Tranvía for long stretches and walking for the “last mile” is the most effective way to navigate Cuenca.

6. Food & Dining

Cuenca offers a spectrum of dining, from \$3 market lunches to high-end jazz dinners. Because the city is a hub for both retirees and digital nomads, the culinary scene is a blend of traditional Andean flavors and modern international trends.

Budget Eating (The Lean Way) For those looking to keep their daily expenses low, the **Mercado 10 de Agosto** in the Centro Histórico is the gold mine for budget nomads. This is not just a place to buy fresh produce, but a culinary destination in its own right. The food court offers traditional Ecuadorian meals—typically consisting of a hearty soup, rice, beans, and a protein—for around \$3. It is the most authentic and cheapest way to eat daily, allowing you to experience the local diet while staying well within a lean budget.

If you prefer to cook for yourself to save more, the city has several reliable options. **Supermaxi Cuenca** is the most prominent local supermarket chain, offering a wide variety of imported goods and local staples. For a more warehouse-style experience with competitive pricing on household items and bulk food, **MegaTienda Coral** is a highly efficient alternative.

Mid-Range & Casual When stepping up from market prices, Cuenca has a variety of reliable, casual spots that balance cost and quality. **Raymipampa**, located near the iconic Parque Calderón, is a staple for those wanting to try Ecuadorian classics in a comfortable setting. Similarly, **Tres Estrellas** provides a dependable and inexpensive local food experience, making it a great choice for a quick lunch between coworking sessions.

For something different, **La Fornace** is a popular local pizza chain. While it serves traditional savory pies, it is specifically known among locals and expats

for its unique fruit pizza and affordable ice cream, making it a favorite for a casual dessert or a low-key dinner.

Specialty & Nomad Cafes The “cafe culture” in Cuenca is robust, providing essential third-spaces for digital nomads to work and socialize. **Goza Espresso Bar** is highly praised for its specialty coffee and its heated street terrace, which is a lifesaver during the cooler highland evenings. If you are looking for a mix of brunch and high-quality caffeine, **Café Nucallacta** is a top choice for specialty coffee and creative brunch plates. For those with a sweet tooth, **Moliendo Café** in the Centro Histórico is the go-to spot for delicious crepes paired with locally sourced coffee.

For a more social, traveler-centric atmosphere, **Cafe Eucalyptus** operates as a popular tapas bar. While it is slightly pricier than the local eateries, it is a primary gathering point for the international community.

Traditional Delicacies No visit to the Azuay Province is complete without trying *cuy* (guinea pig), a traditional Andean delicacy prized for its flavor and cultural significance. While you can find it in some city spots, **Guajibamba Cuyes**, located on the outskirts of the city, is the most renowned destination for this dish. The experience of traveling slightly outside the urban center to eat authentic cuy is a rite of passage for long-stay nomads in Cuenca.

Drinking & Nightlife Cuenca’s nightlife is more relaxed than that of Quito or Guayaquil, but it has several distinct pockets of energy. **La Mesa** is a fantastic “salsateque” that comes alive on Wednesday nights; it is particularly popular with both locals and long-stay nomads who want to practice their dance moves.

For a more laid-back start to the evening, **El Cafecito** serves as an ideal jumping-off point. Operating as a hybrid hostel-bar-restaurant, it offers a casual environment with sandwiches and drinks, making it easy to meet other travelers before heading deeper into the city’s nightlife.

For a more sophisticated evening, the **Jazz Society Café** is a must-visit. Combining a high-quality dinner menu with live jazz performances, it offers one of the most atmospheric dining experiences in the city. Because of its popularity and limited seating, reservations are strongly recommended.

Practical Dining Tips for Nomads When dining in Cuenca, remember that the city is located at approximately 2,500 meters (8,200 ft) above sea level. Staying hydrated is key, and unlike many other cities in Ecuador, the drinking water in Cuenca is generally considered OK to consume thanks to extensive upgrades by the utility agency ETAPA, though some nomads still prefer filtered water for peace of mind.

If you are spending your days at **COWORK Cuenca**, **Workplace Cuenca**, or **Selina Cuenca**, you will find that most of these hubs are within walking distance of the Centro Histórico’s dense concentration of eateries. For those staying further out, the **Tranvía de Cuenca** (the tram) provides an efficient east-west corridor to reach the larger shopping districts, such as the **Mall del**

Río on Av. Paseo de los Cañaris or **Centro Comercial El Vergel**, both of which house various fast-casual dining options and food courts.

7. Remote Work & Coworking

Cuenca is an increasingly popular hub for digital nomads due to its blend of colonial charm and reliable infrastructure. While the city is smaller than Quito, the internet stability in the Centro Histórico is generally high, making it easy to maintain a 90-day remote work stint. The city's geography, situated in a highland valley at approximately 2,500 meters (8,200ft) above sea level, provides a moderate climate that makes spending long hours at a desk more bearable than in the humid coast.

Coworking Spaces For those who need a dedicated professional environment, there are several established options that cater to different working styles:

- **COWORK Cuenca:** Located in the heart of the Centro Histórico, this is the primary destination for those needing a structured professional environment. They offer a variety of plans including hot desks for flexible users and private offices for those requiring more security and silence. It serves as a vital networking hub, providing a stable community of local Ecuadorian entrepreneurs and international nomads.
- **Workplace Cuenca:** Situated near the river, this space offers a more scenic backdrop. The proximity to the Tomebamba river provides a calming atmosphere that is highly conducive to deep work and focused productivity, away from the bustle of the main plazas.
- **Selina Cuenca:** A classic nomad choice in the Centro. Selina combines coliving with a dedicated coworking space, making it ideal for those who want to network with other travelers immediately upon arrival. It is particularly useful for those who prefer an all-in-one ecosystem where their accommodation and office are in the same building.

Café Culture & Working If you prefer a more fluid environment, Cuenca's café scene is excellent. The city's culture is a unique mix of the traditional and the modern; you will often find yourself using high-speed wireless communications while sitting in a building that is centuries old. Many nomads frequent the following spots, though it is polite to buy a coffee or snack every 2 hours to support the local business:

- **Goza Espresso Bar:** Known for high-quality specialty coffee and a heated street terrace. It is a great spot for light work, administrative tasks, and people-watching.
- **Café Libre:** A dedicated spot in the Centro Histórico that bridges the gap between a traditional café and a coworking space. It is often favored by those who find traditional offices too sterile but need more reliability than a standard coffee shop.
- **Moliendo Café:** Located in the Centro Histórico, this spot is popular

for its crepes and coffee, offering a cozy, warm atmosphere perfect for short-term tasks or a mid-day break.

- **Café Nucallacta:** Another excellent option for those seeking specialty coffee and brunch, providing a bright environment that helps maintain energy during a long workday.

Connectivity Tips Most Airbnbs and hotels in the city center provide decent Wi-Fi, but always ask for a speed test screenshot before booking a long-term rental to ensure the upload speeds meet your requirements for video calls. For backup, local SIM cards are affordable and provide strong 4G/LTE coverage throughout the valley. Be aware that during heavy rain, some older colonial buildings may experience minor power flickers; a good power bank or a UPS for your laptop is a smart investment.

Integrating Work and Life One of the greatest advantages of working remotely in Cuenca is the ability to integrate your professional schedule with the city's high quality of life. Because the city is highly walkable and the Tranvía de Cuenca provides an efficient east-west corridor for transport, you can easily transition from a morning of deep work to a midday break.

For affordable lunches, many nomads head to the Mercado 10 de Agosto food court in the Centro Histórico, where hearty meals can be found for around \$3. If you have a longer break, a visit to the Mercado Artesanal for handicrafts or a stroll along the river trails—which are part of a larger urban planning effort to create 80km of bicycle trails—can help clear your head.

Health and Wellness for the Long-Term Nomad Maintaining your health is critical when working long hours. Cuenca is well-equipped for expats and nomads. For routine dental maintenance, there are several reputable options in the city: - **Dental Cuenca** (Centro Histórico): Specializes in implants (\$900–1,600) and crowns (\$350–600), with cleanings ranging from \$30–60. - **Sonrisas Cuenca:** Offers general and cosmetic dentistry, including whitening (\$150–300) and fillings (\$40–90). - **Clínica Dental del Valle** (Av. Solano): A family-oriented practice offering extractions (\$50–120) and standard cleanings (\$30–60).

Should you require medical attention, you have a choice between public and private facilities. For high-end care with English-speaking staff in some departments, **Hospital del Río** on Av. 12 de Abril is a modern private option. **Hospital Santa Inés** is another private facility that accepts private insurance for specialist care. For public or emergency services, **Hospital Universitario del Río** and **Hospital Monte Sinaí** (which offers 24-hour emergency services) are available, though be prepared for a Spanish-heavy environment at the public hospitals.

Logistics and Supplies To keep your home office stocked, you can rely on **Supermaxi Cuenca**, the most common local supermarket chain, or **MegaTienda Coral** for larger household needs. For fresh, local produce, the **Mercado 10 de Agosto** is the primary hub. If you need to travel for a “workation” exten-

sion, the **Mariscal Lamar International Airport (CUE)** handles domestic flights to Quito and Guayaquil, while the **Terminal Terrestre Cuenca** is the main artery for bus travel across the country.

8. Healthcare

Cuenca is well-regarded for its healthcare services, often attracting retirees from North America due to the high quality of care and lower costs compared to the US or Canada. For digital nomads, the city offers a balanced ecosystem of high-end private facilities for those with international insurance and affordable public options for general needs.

Private Hospitals (Recommended for Nomads) For those with international insurance or a preference for English-speaking staff and modern facilities, private hospitals are the gold standard in Cuenca. These institutions typically offer faster triage and more comfortable amenities.

- **Hospital del Río:** Located on Av. 12 de Abril, this is a top-tier private facility known for its modern equipment and private rooms. It is one of the most recommended options for expats and nomads because they are more likely to have English-speaking staff across various departments, reducing the stress of navigating a medical emergency in a second language.
- **Hospital Santa Inés:** Another high-quality private option, this hospital specializes in both outpatient and inpatient care. They are well-versed in the administrative requirements of international patients and are accustomed to dealing with private insurance providers, making the reimbursement or direct-billing process smoother.

Public Hospitals Public healthcare is available and significantly cheaper, though wait times are longer and communication is almost exclusively in Spanish. These facilities are essential for those without comprehensive insurance or for those who prefer a more budget-friendly approach to general medicine.

- **Hospital Universitario del Río:** As a public university teaching hospital, this facility is a reliable option for general medicine and emergencies. Because it is a teaching institution, it often has access to a wide range of medical expertise, though you should expect the slower pace typical of public health systems.
- **Hospital Monte Sinaí:** This public hospital provides 24-hour emergency services. While it is a cost-effective choice for urgent care, be prepared for a “Spanish-heavy” environment. If you are not fluent in Spanish, it is highly recommended to bring a local friend or a translator to ensure clear communication with the medical staff.

Dental Care Cuenca is a popular destination for “dental tourism” due to the high quality of practitioners and the significant cost savings compared to North American or European rates. Whether you need a routine cleaning or major

restorative work, there are several reputable clinics.

- **Dental Cuenca:** Located in the Centro Histórico, this clinic is a strong choice for major restorative work. They specialize in implants and crowns. Estimated costs for an implant range from USD 900 to 1,600, while crowns typically cost between USD 350 and 600. Routine cleanings are available for USD 30 to 60.
- **Sonrisas Cuenca:** This clinic focuses on general and cosmetic dentistry. For those looking to maintain their smile while working remotely, they offer cleanings for USD 30 to 60, professional whitening for USD 150 to 300, and fillings ranging from USD 40 to 90.
- **Clínica Dental del Valle:** Situated on Av. Solano, this is a great option for family dentistry. Their pricing is competitive, with fillings between USD 40 and 90, cleanings from USD 30 to 60, and extractions ranging from USD 50 to 120.

Pharmacy & General Care Pharmacies (Farmacias) are ubiquitous in Cuenca and are often the first stop for minor ailments. Many basic medications that require a prescription in the US or Canada may be available over the counter here; however, for anything potent or controlled, a local prescription is required.

For minor ailments—such as the common cold, altitude sickness, or mild digestive issues—local clinics (centros médicos) are scattered throughout the Centro Histórico. These clinics offer quick consultations and are generally much faster than visiting a hospital for non-emergency issues.

Practical Health Tips for Nomads in Cuenca - Water Safety: Unlike many other cities in Ecuador, the drinking water in Cuenca is generally considered OK to consume. The city government utility agency, ETAPA, invested heavily in new water and sewage mains between 2010 and 2013. However, if you have a very sensitive stomach, verify the current status of the water in your specific neighborhood or stick to filtered water. - **Altitude Adjustment:** Cuenca is located at approximately 2,500 meters (8,200 feet) above sea level. Some nomads may experience shortness of breath or mild headaches upon arrival. Staying hydrated and avoiding excessive alcohol for the first few days can help with acclimatization. - **Insurance:** While private hospitals like Hospital del Río and Hospital Santa Inés are excellent, always carry a digital and physical copy of your international health insurance policy. If you are using a travel insurance provider, check if they require a guarantee of payment before admitting you to a private facility. - **Emergency Contacts:** Keep the addresses of the nearest 24-hour emergency room (such as Hospital Monte Sinaí) saved in your phone. If you are staying in the Centro Histórico, you are centrally located to most of the city's clinics and pharmacies.

9. Dental

Dental tourism is a significant part of Cuenca's economy, attracting a steady stream of expatriates and digital nomads from North America and Europe. The quality of work is generally high, and the prices are a fraction of those in the US or EU, making it an ideal location for those needing extensive restorative work or routine maintenance while living abroad. Because the city is a hub for medical services, you will find a high density of clinics that are accustomed to treating international patients, often with English-speaking staff and modern equipment.

Recommended Clinics

Depending on your specific needs—whether it is a quick cleaning or a full-mouth restoration—different clinics in the city offer varying specializations.

- **Dental Cuenca:** Located in the Centro Histórico, this clinic is highly rated for major restorative work. If you are looking for permanent solutions such as implants or crowns, this is a primary recommendation. Their location in the historic center makes it easily accessible for those staying in colonial guesthouses or working from nearby hubs like COWORK Cuenca or Selina Cuenca.
- **Sonrisas Cuenca:** This practice is a great choice for general and cosmetic dentistry. They specialize in aesthetic improvements, including professional whitening and high-quality fillings. It is a preferred spot for nomads who want to maintain their smile while traveling without committing to heavy surgical procedures.
- **Clínica Dental del Valle:** Located on Av. Solano, this is a family-oriented practice. It is particularly suitable for routine maintenance, basic fillings, and extractions. Because it is situated slightly away from the immediate tourist center of the Centro Histórico, it often provides a more local, community-focused atmosphere.

Estimated Pricing (USD)

Cuenca uses the US Dollar, which simplifies budgeting for international visitors. While prices vary by clinic and the complexity of the case, typical estimates for nomads include:

- **Cleaning:** \$30 – \$60
- **Fillings:** \$40 – \$90
- **Whitening:** \$150 – \$300
- **Crowns:** \$350 – \$600
- **Implants:** \$900 – \$1,600
- **Extractions:** \$50 – \$120 (at clinics like Clínica Dental del Valle)

These prices represent a significant saving compared to Western markets, often ranging from 50% to 80% less than typical US rates.

Practical Tips for Dental Care

If you are planning major work, such as implants or a series of crowns, it is recommended to schedule a consultation during your first week in the city. Major procedures often require multiple visits over several weeks for fitting and healing, so aligning your dental schedule with your long-term stay is essential.

Most clinics in the Centro Histórico are welcoming to foreigners and are used to the “dental tourism” model. However, to avoid misunderstandings regarding costs, always request a detailed written quote before proceeding with any treatment. This quote should include the number of visits required and the total cost of materials.

Integrating Dental Visits into Your Routine

Since many of the top clinics are located in or near the Centro Histórico, you can easily combine your appointments with other daily activities. For example, after a visit to Dental Cuenca, you can walk to the Mercado 10 de Agosto to pick up fresh produce or enjoy a budget-friendly \$3 lunch at the market’s food court. If you have a gap between appointments, the nearby Moliendo Café or Café Nucallacta offer excellent spaces to catch up on emails.

For those who need to work around their appointments, the city’s coworking infrastructure is excellent. You can book a hot desk at COWORK Cuenca or Workplace Cuenca to ensure your productivity doesn’t slip while you are undergoing treatment. If you are staying at Selina Cuenca, you have the added benefit of coliving and coworking in the same building, making the logistics of medical appointments much simpler.

Emergency Care and Hospital Support

While most dental issues are handled in private clinics, some complex oral surgeries may require hospital support or general anesthesia. Cuenca has a robust healthcare system with several options:

- **Hospital del Río:** Located on Av. 12 de Abril, this is a premier private hospital. It features modern facilities, private rooms, and English-speaking staff in several departments, making it the most comfortable option for expats facing a medical emergency.
- **Hospital Santa Inés:** Another high-quality private hospital that offers specialist outpatient and inpatient care. They are known for accepting various forms of private insurance, which is worth verifying if you have international coverage.
- **Hospital Universitario del Río:** A public university teaching hospital. While it offers general medicine and emergency services, rates are typically lower, but wait times may be longer.
- **Hospital Monte Sinai:** A public hospital providing 24-hour emergency services. It is a low-cost option, though be aware that staff here are more likely to speak only Spanish.

For those who are not comfortable navigating the public system, the private hospitals (del Río and Santa Inés) are the recommended route for any procedure

requiring hospitalization.

Getting to Your Appointment

Navigating to your clinic is straightforward. If your dentist is located along the east-west corridor, the Tranvía de Cuenca (the city tram) is an efficient and modern way to get around. For clinics on Av. Solano or near the outskirts, taxis are plentiful and inexpensive. If you are staying near the Mall del Río or Centro Comercial El Vergel, you can easily find transport to the Centro Histórico where many of the specialized dental offices are clustered.

10. Safety & Emergency

Cuenca is generally considered cleaner and safer than most large cities in developing countries. However, standard urban precautions apply. For digital nomads staying long-term, understanding the nuances of local safety, health-care, and emergency protocols is essential for a stress-free experience.

General Safety The city is very walkable and generally peaceful, characterized by a relaxed atmosphere and a strong sense of community. The most common issues are petty crimes, such as pickpocketing in crowded markets or the theft of opportunistic items left in cars.

- **Street Safety:** Walking in the Centro Histórico is safe during the day and evening. The area is well-patrolled and active. However, as night falls, stick to well-lit streets and avoid deserted alleys or outskirts where foot traffic is sparse. When visiting high-traffic areas like the Mercado 10 de Agosto or the Mercado Artesanal, keep your valuables in front pockets or secure bags to deter pickpockets.
- **Traffic and Pedestrian Safety:** Be extremely cautious when crossing streets. As noted by locals, drivers may not always watch for pedestrians, and the right-of-way is not always strictly observed. Always use designated crosswalks and remain alert, even when the light is green. The Tranvía de Cuenca (the city tram) provides a safe east-west corridor for transit, but be mindful of the tracks when walking or cycling.
- **Water and Environment:** Unlike many other cities in Ecuador, the drinking water in Cuenca is generally considered OK to consume. The city government and the utility agency ETAPA have invested heavily in water and sewage infrastructure. While this makes the city more convenient for nomads, always verify the specific plumbing of your rental if you have a sensitive stomach.

Emergency Contacts - General Emergency: 911 is the standard emergency number in Ecuador for police, fire, and ambulance services. - **Police:** There is a strong police presence in the Centro Histórico, particularly near the main markets and the New Cathedral. If you encounter an issue, officers are typically visible and accessible in these central hubs.

Health Emergencies Cuenca offers a tiered healthcare system ranging from low-cost public clinics to high-end private hospitals. Depending on your insurance and the urgency of the situation, you have several options:

- **Private Care (Recommended for English Speakers):** For the fastest access to English-assisted care and modern facilities, head to **Hospital del Río** on Av. 12 de Abril. This private facility offers private rooms and English-speaking staff in several departments, making it the preferred choice for expats and nomads. Another excellent private option is **Hospital Santa Inés**, which provides specialist outpatient and inpatient care and is known for accepting various forms of private international insurance.
- **Public Care:** For 24-hour emergency services at a lower cost, **Hospital Monte Sinaí** is a reliable public option, though be aware that communication here is heavily Spanish-based. For teaching hospital rates and general medicine, the **Hospital Universitario del Río** serves as a public university hospital providing comprehensive emergency and general medical services.

Dental Care Cuenca is a popular destination for “dental tourism” due to the high quality of care and significantly lower prices compared to North America or Europe. If you need routine maintenance or major work during your stay, consider the following:

- **Dental Cuenca (Centro Histórico):** Specializes in more complex work. Estimated costs include implants ranging from \$900 to \$1,600 and crowns from \$350 to \$600.
- **Sonrisas Cuenca:** A great choice for general and cosmetic dentistry. You can expect to pay between \$30 and \$60 for a cleaning, \$150 to \$300 for whitening, and \$40 to \$90 for fillings.
- **Clínica Dental del Valle (Av. Solano):** A family-oriented practice offering affordable basics. Fillings typically cost \$40 to \$90, cleanings are \$30 to \$60, and extractions range from \$50 to \$120.

Digital Nomad Security Tips Since your livelihood depends on your hardware, take extra precautions with your gear: - **Coworking Safety:** When working from spots like COWORK Cuenca, Workplace Cuenca, or Selina Cuenca, do not leave your laptop unattended when stepping away for coffee or a restroom break. While these environments are generally safe, “grab-and-go” thefts can happen in any public space. - **Transport:** When using the Terminal Terrestre Cuenca for long-distance trips to Quito or Guayaquil, keep your luggage locked and keep your passport and phone on your person rather than in a shared luggage compartment. - **Shopping:** When visiting the Mall del Río or Centro Comercial El Vergel, use the provided secure parking. Avoid leaving any visible electronics or bags on the seats of your car, as opportunistic theft is the most common crime in parking lots.

Altitude and Health Cuenca is located at approximately 2,500 meters (8,200

feet) above sea level. While not as high as Quito, some nomads may experience mild altitude sickness, shortness of breath, or headaches upon arrival. Stay hydrated, limit alcohol consumption for the first 48 hours, and consult a doctor at one of the private clinics if you have pre-existing respiratory or cardiovascular conditions.

11. Weather by Month

Cuenca is located in a highland valley at approximately 2,560 meters (8,400 ft). Its moderate climate makes it enjoyable year-round, but the “eternal spring” comes with daily fluctuations. Because the city is situated in a basin formed by the confluence of four rivers—the Tomebamba, Yanuncay, Tarqui, and Machangara—the local microclimate is heavily influenced by the surrounding mountains and the moisture from the nearby Cajas National Park.

The General Pattern The city does not have four distinct seasons but rather a wet and dry cycle. The most important rule for Cuenca is to dress in layers; you can experience “four seasons in one day.” It is common to wake up to a crisp, chilly morning, enjoy a warm and sunny midday, and then experience a sudden torrential downpour by 4:00 PM.

- **January to March:** This is a transition period. You can expect a mix of sunny mornings and afternoon rain showers. Temperatures remain mild, making it a great time to explore the Centro Histórico. If you find yourself caught in a sudden shower while working from COWORK Cuenca or Workplace Cuenca, you will notice that locals are well-prepared with umbrellas. This is a good time to visit the Mercado Artesanal to pick up a lightweight, locally made shawl or poncho to handle the shifting temperatures.
- **April to June:** This is often the rainier period. Frequent showers occur, though they are often short-lived. Despite the rain, the city is exceptionally green, and the flowers for which Cuenca is famous are in full bloom. The rushing waters of the Tomebamba river are at their most vibrant. During these months, the dampness can make the air feel cooler, so a heavier sweater is recommended when visiting the Mercado 10 de Agosto or dining at Raymipampa near Parque Calderón.
- **July to September:** This is the “dry” season and the sunniest time of year. Mornings are crisp and clear, while afternoons are warm. This is the absolute best time for hiking in Cajas National Park, as the trails are less muddy and the visibility of the Páramo is higher. Because the sun is stronger at this altitude, sunscreen is essential. If you are spending your days at Selina Cuenca or visiting the Mall del Río, you will find the weather most predictable during these months.
- **October to December:** Another transition period occurs here. Rain returns toward the end of the year, coinciding with the festive December

parades. The humidity rises slightly, and the temperature fluctuations become more pronounced. This is a popular time for visitors to enjoy the warmth of a specialty coffee and brunch at Café Nucallacta or a crepe at Moliendo Café to escape the afternoon chill.

Temperature Range - Highs: Usually range from 18°C to 23°C (64°F to 73°F). - **Lows:** Can drop to 8°C to 12°C (46°F to 54°F) at night.

It is important to note that “warm” in Cuenca is relative. A 22°C afternoon can feel hot under the equatorial sun, but as soon as the sun dips behind the mountains, the temperature drops rapidly. If you are staying long-term, you will find that the interior of older colonial buildings in the center can remain quite damp and cool, even in the dry season.

Practical Impact on Daily Life

Clothing and Gear: Always carry a light jacket and a compact umbrella, regardless of the month. A waterproof shell is highly recommended for those planning trips to the Cajas mountains. For those who arrive without gear, the Mall del Río or Centro Comercial El Vergel offer a variety of retail options to purchase weather-appropriate clothing.

Health and Wellness: The altitude and changing weather can occasionally impact your respiratory health or skin. If the dampness of the rainy season leads to health concerns, Cuenca has a robust medical infrastructure. For private care with English-speaking staff, Hospital del Río on Av. 12 de Abril or Hospital Santa Inés are the primary choices. For public or university-based care, Hospital Universitario del Río and Hospital Monte Sinaí provide essential services, though you should verify locally regarding current wait times and language accessibility.

Dining and Activity: The weather often dictates where you eat. On rainy afternoons, the food court at Mercado 10 de Agosto is a cozy spot for a \$3 lunch. On sunny days, the outskirts of the city are perfect for visiting Guajibamba Cuyes to try traditional guinea pig. The Tranvía de Cuenca is an excellent way to move between the east and west corridors of the city without worrying about the rain.

Dental Care Timing: Many digital nomads schedule dental work during the transition months. Whether you are visiting Dental Cuenca in the Centro Histórico for an implant (est. \$900–1,600), Sonrisas Cuenca for whitening (est. \$150–300), or Clínica Dental del Valle on Av. Solano for a cleaning (est. \$30–60), the moderate climate ensures that recovery is generally comfortable.

Packing Essential: A high-quality windbreaker, a sturdy umbrella, and a pair of walking shoes that can handle both cobblestones and occasional puddles. If you are arriving via Mariscal Lamar International Airport or the Terminal Terrestre, ensure your heaviest layer is easily accessible, as the highland air can be biting upon arrival.

12. Shopping & Daily Life

Daily life in Cuenca is a blend of traditional colonial pace and modern convenience. The city is highly pedestrian-friendly, with many residents relying on walking or the *Tranvía*, the modern tram system that serves as a primary east-west corridor for commuting. Because the city is situated in a highland valley at approximately 2,500 meters (8,200ft), the moderate climate allows for an outdoor-centric lifestyle year-round.

Modern Shopping & Groceries For electronics, branded clothing, and a standardized retail experience, head to the malls. **Mall del Río**, located on Av. Paseo de los Cañaris, is the largest shopping center in the city. It features a large food court and cinemas, though be aware that movies are typically screened in Spanish. For a more mid-sized, convenient experience, **Centro Comercial El Vergel** is a reliable option for general shopping needs.

When it comes to stocking your kitchen, you have a choice between high-end convenience and local authenticity. **Supermaxi Cuenca** is the go-to local supermarket chain for those seeking a wide variety of imported goods and a clean, organized environment. For household essentials and bulk food items, **MegaTienda Coral** is a practical alternative.

However, the heart of Cuenca's food culture is found at the **Mercado 10 de Agosto** in the Centro Histórico. This is the main produce market where you can buy fresh, local fruits and vegetables. For a budget-friendly meal, the market's food court is legendary, offering traditional Ecuadorian lunches for around \$3.

Artisans & Local Crafts Cuenca is world-famous for its textiles and hats. To see the traditional process of how a straw cone is transformed into a finished piece, visit **Rafael Paredes & Hijos**, one of the most respected Panama Hat workshops. For a broader variety of handicrafts, the **Mercado Artesanal** in the Centro Histórico serves as the central hub for local artisans.

For those seeking specialized craftsmanship, the **CemuArt Building** (the distinctive yellow building located across from the police station) is a goldmine for leather work, intricate embroidery, and handmade musical instruments. If you are looking for exclusive arts sourced from rural southern Ecuadorian communities, the **Centro de Bordados Cuenca** specializes in high-quality traditional embroidery.

Books & Culture English speakers can find a curated selection of books at **ABC Librería**, located diagonal to the flower market. For those who prefer second-hand finds, there are two used English bookstores on Hermano Miguel; while their collections are eclectic, prices can be slightly higher than standard used bookstores.

Dining & Cafés The city offers a spectrum of dining, from high-end colonial charm to street-side staples. For a classic Ecuadorian experience, **Raymipampa**, located near Parque Calderón, is highly recommended for traditional

dishes. If you are looking for a truly local, inexpensive meal, **Tres Estrellas** is a favorite for authentic flavors. For a daring culinary adventure, head to the outskirts of the city to **Guajibamba Cuyes** to try *cuy* (guinea pig), a regional delicacy.

For digital nomads needing a caffeine fix or a place to work, the Centro Histórico is dotted with options. **Moliendo Café** is well-known for its crepes and excellent coffee, while **Café Nucallacta** offers specialty coffee and a great brunch menu.

Health & Wellness Cuenca is well-equipped with medical facilities, ranging from public teaching hospitals to high-end private clinics.

For private care with modern facilities and a higher likelihood of finding English-speaking staff in certain departments, **Hospital del Río** on Av. 12 de Abril is a top choice. **Hospital Santa Inés** is another private option specializing in outpatient and inpatient care, and it is known to accept various private insurance plans. For public options, **Hospital Universitario del Río** serves as a public university teaching hospital, while **Hospital Monte Sinaí** provides 24-hour emergency services; however, be prepared for a Spanish-heavy environment at these public institutions.

Dental care is a common reason for long-term stays in Cuenca due to the high quality and lower cost. - **Dental Cuenca** (Centro Histórico) specializes in implants and crowns. Estimated costs are \$900–1,600 for an implant, \$350–600 for a crown, and \$30–60 for a cleaning. - **Sonrisas Cuenca** focuses on general and cosmetic dentistry, with cleanings at \$30–60, whitening from \$150–300, and fillings between \$40–90. - **Clínica Dental del Valle** on Av. Solano is a great choice for family dentistry, with fillings at \$40–90, cleanings at \$30–60, and extractions ranging from \$50–120.

Digital Nomad Infrastructure The city supports remote work through several dedicated spaces. **COWORK Cuenca** in the Centro Histórico offers a professional environment with hot desks and private offices. **Workplace Cuenca**, located near the river, provides a scenic yet productive atmosphere. For those who prefer a hybrid of living and working, **Selina Cuenca** offers a combined coworking and coliving experience in the center of town.

Transport & Logistics Navigating the city is simple, but leaving the city requires planning. For domestic flights to Quito or Guayaquil, use the **Mariscal Lamar International Airport (CUE)**. For those traveling by bus, the **Terminal Terrestre Cuenca** is the primary hub for long-distance routes to the coast or the capital. Within the city, the **Tranvía de Cuenca** is the most efficient way to traverse the main corridor, though the city's commitment to urban planning has also led to the development of extensive bicycle trails and paths along the four rivers (Tomebamba, Yanuncay, Tarqui, and Machangara).

13. Groceries, Markets & Meat

Cuenca offers a fantastic variety of food sourcing, from high-end supermarkets to traditional open-air markets. For a long-stay digital nomad, the best strategy is a hybrid approach: utilizing modern supermarkets for specialty imports and household staples, while visiting the local markets for fresh, organic produce and affordable daily meals.

Supermarkets For a “Western” shopping experience with imported goods, organized aisles, and air conditioning, the city has several reliable options.

- **Supermaxi:** This is the most reliable local chain with multiple locations throughout the city. If you are looking for specific international brands, imported cheeses, fine wines, or specialty baking ingredients, Supermaxi is the gold standard. While prices are higher than at the street markets, the quality control and variety make it the best choice for those craving a taste of home.
- **MegaTienda Coral:** A great alternative for both household goods and groceries. Coral often functions as a hypermarket, meaning you can pick up cleaning supplies, small electronics, and kitchenware in the same trip as your produce. It is generally competitive in pricing and offers a wide array of local and imported products.

For those who prefer a more curated shopping experience, the larger malls in the city also house grocery options. The **Mall del Río**, located on Av. Paseo de los Cañaris, is the largest mall in the city and provides a convenient stop for high-end shopping and food needs. Similarly, the mid-size **Centro Comercial El Vergel** offers a streamlined shopping experience for those living in the surrounding residential neighborhoods.

Traditional Markets To truly integrate into Cuenca’s culture and keep your cost of living low, the traditional markets are essential. These hubs are not just places to shop; they are the heartbeat of the city’s social and culinary life.

- **Mercado 10 de Agosto:** Located in the Centro Histórico, this is the primary produce market for the city. It is the absolute best place to buy fresh fruits, vegetables, tubers, and grains. Because the city is located in a highland valley at 2,500 meters, you will find an incredible variety of highland produce that is often fresher and cheaper than anything found in a supermarket. When shopping here, be prepared for a sensory experience—vibrant colors, loud shouting from vendors, and the smell of fresh cilantro and earth.
- **Market Food Courts:** One of the best-kept secrets for nomads is the food court within Mercado 10 de Agosto. Here, you can find hearty, traditional Ecuadorian lunches—often consisting of a soup, a main protein, and rice—for around \$3. These meals are authentic, filling, and provide a great way to experience local flavors without spending much.

If you are looking for non-food items, the **Mercado Artesanal** in the Centro

Histórico is the place to go for high-quality handicrafts and textiles, though it is less about groceries and more about the region's famous weaving and artistry.

Meat & Specialty Items Sourcing protein in Cuenca is a matter of preference between convenience and artisanal quality.

- **Butchers (Carnicerías):** Most traditional markets, including Mercado 10 de Agosto, have dedicated meat sections. For high-quality cuts of beef or pork, look for specialized *carnicerías* within the markets where the butchers can cut the meat to your exact specifications. These are typically more affordable than the pre-packaged trays found at Supermaxi.
- **Traditional Delicacies:** To experience the regional culinary identity, you must try *cuy* (guinea pig). While you can find it in some restaurants, for the most authentic experience, head to the outskirts of the city to **Guajibamba Cuyes**. This specialty is a staple of the Andean highlands and is typically served roasted.
- **Local Dining Alternatives:** If you prefer not to cook, there are several local spots that offer inexpensive, authentic food. **Tres Estrellas** is known for being budget-friendly, while **Raymipampa**, located near Parque Calderón, is an excellent spot for those wanting to try a wide range of Ecuadorian classics in a more formal setting. For a lighter start to the day, **Moliendo Café** in the Centro Histórico offers great crepes and coffee, and **Café Nucallacta** is highly regarded for specialty coffee and brunch.

Water Quality One of the most unique aspects of Cuenca compared to other cities in Ecuador is its water infrastructure. Unlike many other regions where bottled water is a strict necessity, the drinking water in Cuenca is generally considered OK to consume.

This is the result of significant investment by the utility agency, ETAPA, which between 2010 and 2013 installed new water and sewage mains covering 8,000 hectares. The city is proud of its four rivers—the Tomebamba, Yanuncay, Tarqui, and Machangara—and the purity of the water coming from the Páramo of Parque Nacional Cajas.

However, a word of caution for digital nomads: while the water is treated and generally safe, travelers with sensitive stomachs or those not accustomed to the local mineral content may still experience digestive upset. If you have a sensitive system, using a filtered water pitcher or buying large jugs of purified water from Supermaxi or MegaTienda Coral is a safe bet. Verify locally with your landlord or neighbors about the specific plumbing in your rental building to ensure the pipes are well-maintained.

14. Language & Local Etiquette

Cuenca is a city where tradition and modernity coexist. While Spanish is the official language and the primary means of communication, the city has a significant expat community, meaning you will find some English in tourist-centric areas. However, for a 90-day stay, basic Spanish is essential. Navigating the city without it is possible in the short term, but true integration and cost-saving opportunities only open up once you can communicate with the local population.

Language Dynamics In the Centro Histórico, many restaurant staff and hotel employees at places like Hotel Victoria or Hostal Villa Del Rosario may speak some English. You will also find English-speaking environments at digital nomad hubs like COWORK Cuenca, Workplace Cuenca, or the coliving spaces at Selina Cuenca. However, once you step into the Mercado 10 de Agosto or interact with local artisans at the CemuArt building, Spanish is the only viable option.

For the long-term nomad, the “language gap” is most apparent when accessing essential services. If you visit a public facility like the Hospital Universitario del Río or the 24-hour emergency services at Hospital Monte Sinaí, expect the environment to be Spanish-heavy. In contrast, private facilities such as Hospital del Río on Av. 12 de Abril or Hospital Santa Inés are more likely to have English-speaking staff in certain departments, though Spanish remains the primary language of administration.

Learning phrases for bargaining, ordering food, and navigating transport will significantly lower your daily stress and potentially your costs. For example, when visiting the Mercado 10 de Agosto food court for a \$3 lunch, or ordering specialty coffee and brunch at Café Nucallacta, a few polite Spanish phrases can lead to better service and a warmer welcome.

Social Etiquette Cuencanos are generally polite, reserved, and proud of their heritage. A few key cultural notes for the long-term nomad:

- **Greetings:** Always start an interaction with a “Buenos días” (Good morning) or “Buenas tardes” (Good afternoon). Jumping straight into a request—whether you are asking for a crepe at Moliendo Café or a taxi at the Terminal Terrestre Cuenca—is often viewed as rude. A polite greeting acknowledges the person before the transaction.
- **Pace of Life:** The city operates on a slower clock than North American or European hubs. This is particularly evident in local eateries like Tres Estrellas or traditional spots like Raymipampa near Parque Calderón. Be patient with service; rushing your server is considered uncouth.
- **The “Cuenca Pride”:** Locals are deeply proud of their geography and history. The city’s full name, Santa Ana de los cuatro ríos de Cuenca, reflects its identity as a basin formed by the confluence of the Tomebamba, Yanuncay, Tarqui, and Machangara rivers. Showing interest in the city’s UNESCO World Heritage status or the architecture of the New Cathedral

and El Sagrario is a great way to build rapport with locals.

- **Dress Code:** While it is a casual city, the highland culture is slightly more conservative than the coast. Dressing neatly when visiting churches or formal institutions is appreciated. While you can wear athletic gear for a hike in the Cajas National Park, opt for “smart casual” when visiting the Mall del Río or Centro Comercial El Vergel to blend in better with the local professional class.

Tipping and Payments Tipping is not mandatory but is appreciated in restaurants and for tour guides. In small cafes or markets, a few cents or a dollar is a kind gesture. Since Ecuador is dollarized, you do not have to worry about exchange rates, but the physical currency you carry matters.

Always carry small denominations (\$1, \$5, \$10). Many small vendors at the Mercado Artesanal or local transport operators for the Tranvía de Cuenca cannot break large \$20 or \$50 bills. If you are shopping at a large chain like Supermaxi or MegaTienda Coral, credit cards are widely accepted, but for the smaller “tiendas” (corner stores), cash is king.

Practical Service Interactions When seeking medical or dental care, be prepared for different communication styles based on the venue. At private dental clinics like Dental Cuenca in the Centro Histórico, Sonrisas Cuenca, or Clínica Dental del Valle on Av. Solano, the staff are accustomed to international patients. You can expect clear pricing for services—such as cleanings ranging from \$30–60, fillings from \$40–90, or more complex work like implants (\$900–1,600) and crowns (\$350–600). However, confirming these prices in writing or via a clear quote in Spanish is always recommended to avoid misunderstandings.

Similarly, when using the Terminal Terrestre Cuenca for buses to Guayaquil or Quito, or the Mariscal Lamar International Airport (CUE) for domestic flights, keep your documents organized and use polite, formal Spanish (“Usted”) when speaking with officials to ensure a smoother experience. By respecting the local pace and linguistic preferences, you will find that Cuencanos are incredibly welcoming to those who make an effort to embrace their culture.

15. History & Culture Snapshot

Cuenca, officially known as *Santa Ana de los cuatro ríos de Cuenca*, is a living museum of Ecuadorian history. Its identity is defined by its geography—a basin formed by the confluence of four rivers—and its colonial architectural legacy. The city is situated in a highland valley at approximately 2,500 meters (8,200 feet) above sea level, which contributes to a moderate, enjoyable climate year-round. The name itself reflects this geography: in Spanish, *cuatro ríos* means “four rivers” and *cuenca* means “basin.” These rivers—the Tomebamba, Yanuncay, Tarqui, and Machangara—originate in the Páramo of the nearby Parque Nacional Cajas and are a source of immense local pride.

Colonial Heritage The city center is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, characterized by cobblestone streets and stunning religious architecture. The New Cathedral, with its iconic blue domes, dominates the skyline and serves as a symbol of the city's grandeur. In contrast, El Sagrario (the "old cathedral") offers a glimpse into the city's 16th-century roots, with construction beginning in 1557. Walking through the Centro Histórico, you will encounter the Iglesia de Santo Domingo and other colonial structures that maintain the city's historic aesthetic. This preservation is balanced by modern urban planning, including the Tranvía de Cuenca, a tram system that provides an east-west corridor connecting the historic core with newer developments.

Indigenous Roots Long before the Spanish arrival, the region was inhabited by the Cañari people. This indigenous history is best explored at the Museo y Parque Arqueológico Pumapungo, where Inca ruins and ethnological exhibits (including the famous shrunken heads) provide context on the pre-Columbian era. The influence of the indigenous culture remains visible today in the vibrant textiles and crafts sold throughout the city. For those looking to purchase authentic local goods, the Mercado Artesanal in the Centro Histórico is the primary hub for traditional handicrafts and textiles.

A City of Contrasts One of the most striking aspects of Cuenca is the juxtaposition of eras. It is common to see a digital nomad working on a high-speed laptop in a cafe like Goza Espresso Bar or Moliendo Café, while just a few blocks away, locals are washing clothes in the river or leading donkeys and cows to graze. This blend of 21st-century technology and centuries-old agrarian tradition gives Cuenca a unique, timeless charm.

For the modern professional, this contrast is embodied in the coworking scene. You can find high-tech hubs like COWORK Cuenca and Workplace Cuenca (located near the river), or the hybrid coliving and coworking environment at Selina Cuenca. Yet, a short walk leads you to the Mercado 10 de Agosto, the city's main produce market, where the food court offers traditional \$3 lunches that have remained largely unchanged in price and style for years.

Artisanal Tradition and Local Flavor Cuenca is a hub for craftsmanship. From the world-famous Panama hats (which are actually woven in Ecuador) to the intricate embroidery found at the Centro de Bordados Cuenca, the city's economy is deeply tied to manual artistry. Visiting Rafael Paredes & Hijos allows visitors to see the transformation of straw into a finished hat, highlighting the city's commitment to preserving traditional trades.

This commitment to tradition extends to the culinary scene. To experience authentic Azuay province flavors, visitors often head to the outskirts of the city to Guajibamba Cuyes for traditional *cuy* (guinea pig). Within the city center, Raymipampa near Parque Calderón serves Ecuadorian classics, while Tres Estrellas is known for providing inexpensive, authentic local food. For a more contemporary take on the city's coffee culture, Café Nucallacta offers specialty coffee and brunch.

Modern Infrastructure and Living Despite its colonial feel, Cuenca offers sophisticated infrastructure. The city is noted for being cleaner and safer than many other large cities in developing countries. Notably, the drinking water is generally considered safe to consume, following extensive upgrades to water and sewage mains by the utility agency ETAPA.

Shopping ranges from the traditional to the ultra-modern. While the Mercado 10 de Agosto is ideal for fresh produce, residents often use Supermaxi or Mega-Tienda Coral for household groceries. For those seeking a climate-controlled experience, the Mall del Río on Av. Paseo de los Cañaris is the largest mall in the city, while Centro Comercial El Vergel serves as a mid-size alternative.

Practical Health and Travel Context The city's growth as an expat and nomad hub is supported by a robust healthcare system. Private options like Hospital del Río on Av. 12 de Abril and Hospital Santa Inés provide modern facilities and English-speaking staff. Public options include the Hospital Universitario del Río (a teaching hospital) and Hospital Monte Sinaí, though the latter is noted for being Spanish-heavy. Dental care is particularly accessible; clinics such as Dental Cuenca, Sonrisas Cuenca, and Clínica Dental del Valle on Av. Solano offer competitive pricing. For example, a professional cleaning typically ranges from \$30–60, while crowns are estimated between \$350–600 and implants between \$900–1,600 (verify locally for current rates).

Connectivity to the rest of Ecuador is handled via the Mariscal Lamar International Airport (CUE) for domestic flights to Quito and Guayaquil, or the Terminal Terrestre Cuenca for long-distance bus travel. Whether staying at a historic landmark like Hotel Victoria or a modern apartment, the experience of Cuenca is one of balance—between the rushing waters of the Tomebamba and the high-speed fiber optics of the modern remote worker.

16. Tourism & Day Trips

For a 90-day stay, Cuenca serves as an excellent base for exploring the southern highlands of Ecuador. The city is highly walkable, and its status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site is evident in the preserved colonial architecture and the vibrant atmosphere of the Centro Histórico. Because the city is situated in a basin at approximately 2,500 meters (8,200 feet) above sea level, the climate remains moderate year-round, making it ideal for outdoor exploration.

Within the City

The heart of the Cuenca experience is the river system. The city's full name, Santa Ana de los cuatro ríos de Cuenca, reflects its geography; the Tomebamba, Yanuncay, Tarqui, and Machangara rivers all converge here. The River Walk along the Río Tomebamba is the city's primary artery for relaxation. It is a peaceful escape from the urban bustle where you can observe the juxtaposition of modern life and tradition—it is not uncommon to see locals washing clothes

in the river while using smartphones.

For a panoramic vista of the entire valley, head to the Mirador de Turi. The most convenient way to reach this viewpoint is by taking the sightseeing bus from Parque Calderón. From this height, you can see the layout of the city and the surrounding mountains that frame the basin.

Cultural exploration is central to a long-term stay. Visit the CIDAP (Inter-american Center of Crafts and Folk Art) to view one of the largest collections of American folk art, or the Museo de las Culturas Aborígenes for an impressive array of pre-Columbian pottery. For a more architectural perspective, visit the New Cathedral. For approximately \$3, you can climb to the rooftop terrace, providing a unique bird's-eye view of the city's grid and the historic center.

If you need a break from sightseeing to handle errands or shopping, the city offers a mix of traditional and modern options. For high-end retail and a wide variety of international brands, visit the Mall del Río on Av. Paseo de los Cañaris, the city's largest mall. A mid-size alternative is the Centro Comercial El Vergel. For those seeking authentic Ecuadorian textiles and handicrafts, the Mercado Artesanal in the Centro Histórico is the premier destination.

Short Excursions

A visit to Cajas National Park (Parque Nacional Cajas) is non-negotiable for any long-term resident. Located about 45 minutes west of the city, this high-altitude paradise is characterized by glacial lakes and rugged, windswept mountains. The park is the source of the Tomebamba, Yanuncay, and Tarqui rivers. Be prepared for cold weather and thin air, as the park reaches significant elevations; waterproof gear and layers are essential.

For a more urban excursion, spend a morning at the Mercado 10 de Agosto. This is the city's main produce market and a sensory explosion of colors and smells. Beyond the fresh produce, the food court is a favorite for digital nomads and locals alike, offering hearty, traditional lunches for around \$3.

If you are looking for a culinary adventure, venture to the outskirts of the city to visit Guajibamba Cuyes. This is the place to try *cuy* (guinea pig), a traditional Andean delicacy. For those who prefer to stay closer to the center, Raymipampa near Parque Calderón serves a wide array of Ecuadorian classics, while Tres Estrellas is known for providing local food at an inexpensive price point. For a slower morning, Moliendo Café in the Centro Histórico is excellent for crepes and coffee, and Café Nucallacta is highly recommended for specialty coffee and brunch.

Regional Trips

Cuenca is well-connected for those wishing to explore the rest of the country. For those wanting to see the coast or the capital, the Terminal Terrestre Cuenca provides reliable and frequent bus connections to Guayaquil and Quito. Alternatively, the Mariscal Lamar International Airport (CUE) offers domestic flights

for a faster transit to these major cities.

Within the city, the Tranvía de Cuenca (the tram) provides an efficient east-west corridor, making it easy to move between the historic center and the more modern residential and commercial districts.

Practical Tips for Long-Stay Visitors

For those staying 90 days, integrating into the local infrastructure is key. For groceries, Supermaxi is the most reliable local supermarket chain, while Mega-Tienda Coral is a great option for household goods and food.

If you are working remotely, the city has a growing coworking scene. COWORK Cuenca in the Centro Histórico offers hot desks and private offices, while Workplace Cuenca is conveniently located near the river. For those who prefer a hybrid of living and working, Selina Cuenca in the Centro district provides a combined coworking and coliving environment.

Regarding health and wellness, Cuenca is well-equipped. For private healthcare with English-speaking staff and modern facilities, Hospital del Río on Av. 12 de Abril and Hospital Santa Inés are the top choices. Public options include the Hospital Universitario del Río (a teaching hospital) and Hospital Monte Sinaí, which offers 24-hour emergency services, though these are typically Spanish-heavy.

Dental care is also a common draw for long-term visitors due to high quality and lower costs. In the Centro Histórico, Dental Cuenca specializes in implants (\$900–1,600) and crowns (\$350–600). Sonrisas Cuenca offers general and cosmetic dentistry, including whitening (\$150–300), while Clínica Dental del Valle on Av. Solano is a preferred choice for family dentistry and extractions (\$50–120). Standard cleanings across these clinics typically range from \$30 to \$60.

17. Master Links

Official & Immigration For digital nomads and long-term residents, staying compliant with Ecuadorian law is paramount. The Ecuador Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the primary resource for understanding the various visa categories available, including the Digital Nomad Visa. However, specific rules regarding visa extensions and residency permits can change frequently; it is highly recommended to verify the latest requirements locally at the nearest consulate or through a legal representative. For those currently in the country, Migration Ecuador serves as the official portal for entry requirements, stay durations, and the processing of residency cards.

Transport & Logistics Navigating Cuenca is relatively straightforward due to its compact nature and integrated transit. The Tranvía de Cuenca is the city's modern tram system, providing a reliable east-west corridor that connects the historic center with residential and commercial districts. For those traveling

within the country, the Terminal Terrestre Cuenca is the central hub for long-distance bus travel, offering frequent schedules to major cities like Quito and Guayaquil. For air travel, the Mariscal Lamar International Airport (CUE) handles domestic flights, primarily connecting the highlands to the coast and the capital.

Work & Community Cuenca offers a variety of professional environments tailored to the remote worker. COWORK Cuenca, located in the Centro Histórico, is a premier choice for those needing hot desks or private offices in a professional setting. For those seeking a blend of social interaction and productivity, Selina Cuenca provides a comprehensive coliving and coworking portal in the center of the city. Another strong option is Workplace Cuenca, which is conveniently situated near the river, offering a quieter atmosphere for deep work. To unwind and network, the Jazz Society of Ecuador is a cornerstone of the local expat and arts community; check their event calendar for reservations and live performances.

Tourism & Culture The city is a treasure trove of colonial architecture and natural beauty. The UNESCO World Heritage Centre listing for the city center highlights the historical significance of its buildings and plazas. For a deep dive into regional history, the Museo Pumapungo offers extensive exhibitions on the indigenous cultures of the area. Those interested in local craftsmanship should visit CIDAP, a gallery dedicated to folk art and traditional textiles. For a more tactile shopping experience, the Mercado Artesanal in the Centro Histórico is the best place to find high-quality handicrafts and textiles.

Health & Wellness Cuenca is well-regarded for its healthcare infrastructure, offering a mix of public and private options. For high-end private care with modern facilities and some English-speaking staff, Hospital del Río on Av. 12 de Abril is a top choice. Hospital Santa Inés is another private option specializing in outpatient and inpatient care and is known for accepting various private insurance plans. For public health services, Hospital Universitario del Río serves as a teaching hospital with general medicine and emergency rates, while Hospital Monte Sinaí provides 24-hour emergency services; note that public hospitals are generally lower-cost but are heavily Spanish-dominant.

Dental care is a major draw for long-stay nomads. In the Centro Histórico, Dental Cuenca specializes in implants and crowns, with estimated costs for implants ranging from USD 900 to 1,600 and crowns from USD 350 to 600. Sonrisas Cuenca offers a broader range of general and cosmetic dentistry, with whitening services between USD 150 and 300 and fillings from USD 40 to 90. For family-oriented care, Clínica Dental del Valle on Av. Solano provides cleanings for USD 30 to 60 and extractions ranging from USD 50 to 120.

Dining & Groceries The culinary scene in Cuenca ranges from budget-friendly markets to upscale dining. For the most authentic and affordable experience, the Mercado 10 de Agosto food court in the Centro Histórico is famous for its USD 3 lunches. For traditional Ecuadorian classics, Raymipampa near Parque

Calderón is a staple, while Tres Estrellas offers inexpensive local fare. If you are looking to try cuy (guinea pig), Guajibamba Cuyes on the outskirts of the city is the local favorite. For a more relaxed pace, Moliendo Café in the Centro Histórico is known for its crepes and coffee, and Café Nucallacta is a go-to for specialty coffee and brunch.

For grocery shopping, Supermaxi Cuenca is the most reliable local supermarket chain for imported goods and standard staples. For fresh, local produce, the Mercado 10 de Agosto is the primary hub. For larger household items and bulk food, MegaTienda Coral is the preferred destination.

Shopping & Leisure For those seeking a modern shopping experience, Mall del Río on Av. Paseo de los Cañaris is the largest mall in the city, featuring a wide array of international brands and dining. Centro Comercial El Vergel serves as a mid-size alternative for those staying in different sectors of the city.

Beyond the city center, the geography of Cuenca—defined by the Tomebamba, Yanuncay, Tarqui, and Machangara rivers—offers endless leisure opportunities. The city is surrounded by mountains, and a trip to the Cajas National Park (Parque Nacional Cajas) is highly recommended for hikers and nature lovers. The city is also becoming more bike-friendly, with the government implementing an urban plan for 80km of bicycle trails to complement the existing paths along the riverbanks. Notably, the drinking water in Cuenca is generally considered safe to consume, a rarity for many cities in the region.

18. Final Budget Table

All figures are in USD for a total 90-day stay.

Item	Lean Nomad	Comfortable Nomad	Premium Nomad
Room	\$600	\$1,200	\$2,100
Food	\$450	\$800	\$1,500
Transport	\$90	\$180	\$300
Coworking	\$120	\$250	\$450
Insurance	\$150	\$200	\$300
Visa	\$0	\$0	\$0
Entertainment	\$200	\$500	\$1,000
Buffer	\$490	\$1,050	\$1,850
TOTAL	\$2,100	\$4,200	\$7,500

Budget Breakdown and Practical Implementation

The figures provided in the table represent a 90-day window, which aligns with the standard tourist entry permit for many nationalities. Because Cuenca is a highland valley city with a moderate climate and a high quality of life, your

spending will vary significantly based on your preference for local versus expat-centric services.

Accommodation (Room) The Lean Nomad budget of \$600 (\$20/night) assumes a shared apartment or a modest room in a residential neighborhood outside the immediate Centro Histórico. The Comfortable Nomad (\$1,200) typically rents a private, furnished one-bedroom apartment with reliable Wi-Fi, often located near the river or within walking distance of the city center. The Premium Nomad (\$2,100) likely opts for high-end coliving spaces like Selina Cuenca or a luxury rental in a prime area, providing more amenities and social networking opportunities.

Food and Dining Cuenca offers a massive spectrum of dining options. For those on a Lean budget, the Mercado 10 de Agosto food court is the gold standard, where hearty lunches can be found for around \$3. Shopping for produce at the Mercado 10 de Agosto and buying staples at MegaTienda Coral or Supermaxi Cuenca will keep costs low.

The Comfortable Nomad will mix market finds with mid-range cafes. You might start your morning with specialty coffee and brunch at Café Nucallacta or enjoy crepes and coffee at Moliendo Café in the Centro Histórico. Dinner might consist of Ecuadorian classics at Raymipampa near Parque Calderón or local fare at Tres Estrellas.

Premium Nomads will frequently visit upscale establishments and indulge in specialty delicacies, such as traditional cuy (guinea pig) at Guajibamba Cuyes on the outskirts of the city. This budget also accounts for more frequent dining at the food courts of Mall del Río or Centro Comercial El Vergel.

Transport The Lean budget relies heavily on the Tranvía de Cuenca, the modern tram that serves the east-west corridor, and walking. The Comfortable budget includes frequent taxi rides and occasional trips to the Terminal Terrestre Cuenca for bus travel to Quito or Guayaquil. The Premium budget accounts for private airport transfers to Mariscal Lamar International Airport (CUE) and more frequent use of ride-hailing services.

Coworking and Connectivity For those who cannot work from their room, COWORK Cuenca in the Centro Histórico and Workplace Cuenca (located near the river) offer professional environments with hot desks. Selina Cuenca provides a hybrid coliving and coworking model. A Lean budget assumes a few days of coworking per month or using public cafes, while the Premium budget covers a dedicated private office or a full-time monthly membership.

Health and Insurance While the budget table includes a baseline for insurance, nomads should be aware of the local healthcare landscape. For emergency or low-cost care, Hospital Monte Sinaí and Hospital Universitario del Río are

public options, though Monte Sinaí is noted for being Spanish-heavy. Those with private insurance or a higher budget will prefer Hospital del Río on Av. 12 de Abril, which features modern facilities and some English-speaking staff, or Hospital Santa Inés for specialist outpatient care.

Dental care is a common “add-on” expense not included in the daily budget. For those needing work, Dental Cuenca in the Centro Histórico offers implants (\$900–1,600) and crowns (\$350–600). General dentistry, such as cleanings (\$30–60), fillings (\$40–90), or whitening (\$150–300), can be found at Sonrisas Cuenca or Clínica Dental del Valle on Av. Solano.

Entertainment and Buffer Entertainment ranges from free walks along the Tomebamba, Yanuncay, Tarqui, and Machangara rivers to shopping for textiles at the Mercado Artesanal. The Premium budget allows for excursions to the Cajas National Park (Parque Nacional Cajas) and high-end shopping at Mall del Río.

The “Buffer” is critical for unexpected costs, such as the occasional high-cost domestic flight from Mariscal Lamar International Airport or sudden changes in rental deposits. Note that since the drinking water in Cuenca is generally considered safe to consume due to ETAPA’s infrastructure, you will save money and plastic waste compared to other Ecuadorian cities.

Verify all current pricing locally upon arrival, as market rates for short-term rentals and coworking memberships can fluctuate based on seasonal demand.

19. Glossary of Local Terms

Navigating Cuenca as a long-stay digital nomad requires more than just a basic grasp of Spanish; it involves understanding the specific cultural, geographical, and economic terminology that defines life in the Azuay Province. Because the city is a blend of colonial tradition and modern urban planning, you will encounter terms that describe everything from ancient Andean ecosystems to the latest transit infrastructure.

Cuy Pronounced “kwee,” this refers to the guinea pig. In the Andean highlands, cuy is not a pet but a traditional delicacy. It is typically served roasted (asado) or fried. For an authentic experience, head to the outskirts of the city to Guajibamba Cuyes, where the preparation follows traditional methods. You can also find it at Raymipampa near Parque Calderón, where it is served alongside other Ecuadorian classics.

Ruana A ruana is a heavy, traditional wool cloak or poncho. Given that Cuenca sits at approximately 2,500 meters (8,200 feet) above sea level, the highland climate can be chilly and unpredictable. The ruana is the local solution for warmth and is a common sight throughout the city. If you are looking to purchase one, the Mercado Artesanal in the Centro Histórico is the primary hub

for high-quality textiles and handicrafts.

Páramo The páramo is the high-altitude alpine tundra ecosystem characteristic of the Andes. It is a wet, spongy landscape featuring unique grasses and shrubs. The most accessible example for residents is the area surrounding Cajas National Park (Parque Nacional Cajas), located to the west of the city. The páramo is the source of the Tomebamba, Yanuncay, and Tarqui rivers, which are central to the city's identity.

Tranvía The Tranvía de Cuenca is the modern electric tram system that serves as the city's primary east-west corridor. It has significantly modernized urban transit, connecting the Centro Histórico with residential and commercial districts. It is a clean, efficient way to navigate the city without relying on taxis.

Salsateque A term used to describe venues or specific events focused on Salsa music and dancing. Cuenca has a vibrant Latin dance scene, and spots like La Mesa are well-known as salsateques where nomads and locals gather to practice their steps.

Centro Histórico This refers to the colonial old town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This area is characterized by cobblestone streets, historical churches like the Iglesia de Santo Domingo, and a high concentration of digital nomad infrastructure. You will find COWORK Cuenca, Moliendo Café (known for its crepes), and the Mercado 10 de Agosto all within this protected zone.

Dolarizado This describes the state of the Ecuadorian economy since 2000, when the country officially adopted the US Dollar as its currency. For digital nomads, this simplifies budgeting significantly, as there is no need to exchange currency or worry about the volatility of a local peso. All prices in this guide, from a \$3 lunch at the Mercado 10 de Agosto food court to a \$900 implant at Dental Cuenca, are in USD.

Cuatro Ríos While not a single term, you will often hear the full name of the city: *Santa Ana de los cuatro ríos de Cuenca*. This translates to "Saint Anne of the four rivers of Cuenca." The "cuenca" (basin) is formed by the confluence of the Tomebamba, Yanuncay, Tarqui, and Machangara rivers. The Tomebamba is the most prominent, and many coworking spaces, such as Workplace Cuenca, are situated near the riverbanks to take advantage of the scenery.

Medical and Health Terms When navigating the healthcare system, it is important to distinguish between public and private facilities: - **Hospital Público:** Public hospitals like Hospital Monte Sinaí or the Hospital Universitario del Río (a teaching hospital) offer low-cost care and 24-hour emergency services, though they are typically Spanish-heavy and can be crowded. - **Hospital Privado:** Private facilities such as Hospital del Río on Av. 12 de Abril or Hospital Santa Inés offer modern facilities and private rooms. These are more likely to have English-speaking staff in certain departments and generally accept private international insurance.

Dental Care Terms Cuenca is a hub for dental tourism. When requesting

quotes at clinics like Sonrisas Cuenca or Clínica Dental del Valle on Av. Solano, you will encounter these common price points (verify locally for current rates): - **Limpieza (Cleaning)**: Typically ranges from \$30 to \$60. - **Calza/Empaste (Filling)**: Generally between \$40 and \$90. - **Blanqueamiento (Whitening)**: Estimated between \$150 and \$300. - **Corona (Crown)**: Estimated between \$350 and \$600. - **Implante (Implant)**: Estimated between \$900 and \$1,600.

Shopping and Logistics - Supermaxi: The most ubiquitous high-end supermarket chain in the city. - **MegaTienda Coral**: A large-scale store for both household goods and food. - **Terminal Terrestre**: The central bus terminal used for long-distance travel to Guayaquil or Quito. - **Mariscal Lamar (CUE)**: The local airport used for domestic flights. - **Mall del Río**: Located on Av. Paseo de los Cañaris, this is the largest shopping center in the city, contrasting with the more traditional Mercado Artesanal.

20. Sources & Credits

The information provided in this guide is synthesized from a combination of global travel databases, specialized digital nomad resources, and local Cuenca service directories. To ensure the highest level of accuracy for long-stay residents, the following sources were utilized to compile the practical data regarding healthcare, coworking, dining, and logistics.

Wikivoyage: Cuenca (Ecuador) Guide General city overviews, historical context, and geographic data were sourced from Wikivoyage. This includes the city’s status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and its position as the capital of the Azuay Province. The guide draws on Wikivoyage’s descriptions of the city’s moderate climate and its unique geography, situated in a highland valley at approximately 2,500 to 2,560 meters above sea level. Specific details regarding the “four rivers” (Tomebamba, Yanuncay, Tarqui, and Machangara) and their origin in the Páramo of Parque Nacional Cajas were derived from these records. The guide also references the city’s infrastructure, including the water utility agency ETAPA and the development of urban bicycle trails.

Digital Nomad Facts Data regarding the legalities of residency, visa requirements for remote workers, and the use of the US Dollar (USD) as the official currency of Ecuador were sourced from Digital Nomad Facts. This ensures that nomads have a baseline understanding of the financial environment and the administrative steps required for long-term stays.

POI Database: Healthcare and Wellness To provide concrete options for medical care, the guide utilized a local Point of Interest (POI) database. For those seeking high-end private care with modern facilities and English-speaking staff, Hospital del Río on Av. 12 de Abril is highlighted. Hospital Santa Inés is noted as a private alternative specializing in outpatient and inpatient care that accepts private insurance. For public or teaching hospital options, the guide references Hospital Universitario del Río and Hospital Monte Sinaí; the latter

is noted for its 24-hour emergency services, though users should be aware that communication is primarily in Spanish.

Dental care pricing and locations were cross-referenced from local listings to provide estimated costs for nomads. Dental Cuenca in the Centro Histórico is cited for major work, with implants estimated between \$900–1,600 and crowns between \$350–600. For general and cosmetic dentistry, Sonrisas Cuenca is listed, with whitening ranging from \$150–300 and fillings from \$40–90. Family dentistry needs are addressed via Clínica Dental del Valle on Av. Solano, where cleanings are estimated at \$30–60 and extractions at \$50–120.

POI Database: Coworking and Connectivity To support the professional needs of digital nomads, the guide identifies several key hubs. COWORK Cuenca in the Centro Histórico provides traditional hot desks and private offices. Workplace Cuenca is noted for its proximity to the river, offering a more scenic environment. For those seeking a hybrid of hospitality and work, Selina Cuenca in the Centro district is listed as a primary coliving and coworking destination.

Local Knowledge: Dining, Shopping, and Logistics Practical daily living data was gathered from local business directories and community feedback.

For groceries and household supplies, the guide recommends the Supermaxi chain for a standard supermarket experience, MegaTienda Coral for larger household goods, and the Mercado 10 de Agosto in the Centro Histórico for fresh local produce. Budget-conscious diners are directed to the Mercado 10 de Agosto food court, where traditional lunches are available for approximately \$3.

Culinary recommendations include Moliendo Café in the Centro Histórico for coffee and crepes, and Café Nucallacta for specialty brunch. For traditional Ecuadorian cuisine, the guide suggests Raymipampa near Parque Calderón for classics, Tres Estrellas for inexpensive local fare, and Guajibamba Cuyes on the outskirts of the city for those wishing to try cuy (guinea pig).

Shopping recommendations are divided by need: the Mall del Río on Av. Paseo de los Cañaris is identified as the largest mall for international brands, Centro Comercial El Vergel serves as a mid-size alternative, and the Mercado Artesanal in the Centro Histórico is the primary source for traditional textiles and handicrafts.

Transportation logistics are based on the city’s primary hubs. The Mariscal Lamar International Airport (CUE) is the designated point for domestic flights to Quito and Guayaquil. For regional travel, the Terminal Terrestre Cuenca is the main bus hub. Within the city, the Tranvía de Cuenca (the tram) is highlighted as the primary east-west transit corridor. Accommodation references, such as Hotel Victoria, were sourced from local hospitality listings.

Verification Note While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of prices and service availability, users are encouraged to verify current rates and appointment availability locally, as prices in the dental and medical sectors may fluctuate based on the specific case and provider.