



Life **in** Loja

BY JONA POMA





Welcome to Loja!

This is a self-guided walking tour created by Life in Loja. All rights are reserved. As you use this guide you will want to pause after getting the walking directions and then start again when you arrive at a new location. The starting point is the plaza at the corner of Bolivar and Colon Streets. Ready, set, go.

It is a pleasure to help visitors know this city better. This self-guided walking tour in English will introduce you to some of the key historical and cultural sites of the city. It is designed to take about 1-1/2 hours from beginning to end but, of course, you are encouraged to linger and investigate further at stops that grab your interest. Most buildings are open for you to enter and look around. A few, such as the Museo Conceptas, have a very small admission fee.

If you desire a bilingual interpreter for this tour to assist you, then one can be arranged by hourly, half-day, or full-day rates.

On this tour you will discover: 1) Why Loja is considered one of the most important cultural sites in Ecuador. 2) Why Loja is known as the 'cradle of artists'. 3) Why we are considered the music capital of Ecuador. 4) You will learn about our roots from the original settlements up to today. 5) You will see the most beautiful plazas, markets, houses and museums in Loja, and 6) You'll visit places where you will see our cultural and economic way of living.

Please, use care when crossing the streets. That said, the tour begins...



1 PLAZA SAN FRANCISCO AND STATUE

(at corner of Bolivar and Colon Streets)

The Plaza de San Francisco is full of history, culture, and religion. The statue honors the founder of Loja - Spanish conqueror Alonso de Mercadillo, born in Loja, Granada Spain, in 1515.

Mercadillo came to America in 1535 and became one of the most important captains in the army of conqueror Gonzalo Pizarro. Pizarro gave him the task of founding a city in the province of the Paltas Indians. Thus in 1546, he established a city called "La Zarza."

Who were the Paltas?
According to myth, these natives initially settled in the

area known today as Catacocha, which is in Loja province about 95 kilometers from the city of Loja. "Paltas" (which translates as Avocado) refers to the shape of their heads. They traditionally would bind the heads of their young with sticks, so as they grew their skulls were modified to resemble an avocado shape.

They were fierce warriors, and it is said they were never defeated by the Incas. In fact, some stories say they aligned with the Spanish to defeat the Incas. In the end, the Spanish rewarded them death, slavery, and demands for tribute to the crown.

Did you know Loja was founded twice? Loja was founded for the first time in 1546 in the Garrochamba Valley, (Catamayo). Then Mercadillo was sent on a "peacemaking" mission to deal with Spanish rebels. Upon his return, he found the city almost empty, and the few men left were complaining about the lack of food, water and the heat. Mercadillo then decided to cross the hills and arrived in this valley known as "Cuxibamba." On December 8, 1548, he founded a new city, baptized this time with the name of Loja, as a tribute to the city where he was born.

Please note that this square is surrounded by beautiful colonial houses and is a calm environment to take a break in the heart of the city.



2 ST. FRANCIS CHURCH

(at corner of Bolivar and Colon Streets)

Franciscan brothers arrived with Don Alonso de Mercadillo to evangelize and begin construction of the Church of San Francisco which was completed in 1564. The church was rebuilt twice after earthquakes in 1749 and 1851. The church retains its colonial character despite the reconstructions. From the Franciscan brothers, Lojanos received their religion and also their taste for music. It is said that there is no Lojano who does not sing, play guitar, write verses or at least read music. The city of Loja is known for its musicians and there is a museum dedicated entirely to music in Loja.

If it is open, you may take a look inside the Franciscan convent to the left of the church. Note the infrastructure of the convent. Stepping inside is like going back in time, and it is easy to imagine the city of yesteryear when courtyards were framed by natural balconies.

Now cross Colon Street to the covered sidewalk and walk east. Just before the end of the block is the next stop on your right.

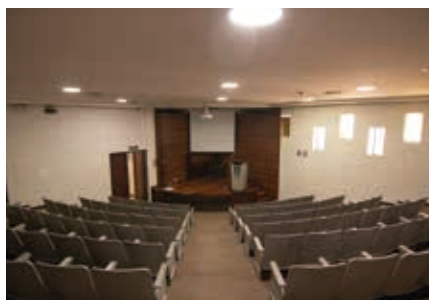


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CASA DE LA CULTURA ECUATORIANA BENJAMÍN CARRIÓN (CCE)

On the first floor is the "Sala Ángel Rubén Garrido" art gallery. Upstairs is the "Pablo Palacio" auditorium of the CCE. Every Wednesday at 7:00 p.m the auditorium shows free films for the enjoyment of the public and visitors alike.

Manuel Benjamín Carrión Mora was born in Loja on April 20, 1897. Carrión was an award-winning journalist, author, poet, and politician, known for being innovative, dynamic and practical. Perhaps he is most famously known for his quote:
"If we cannot be a military and economic power, we can instead be a cultural power nurtured by our richest traditions."



That sentiment was the motivating force inspiring Carrión to found La Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana after Ecuador's military defeat in the 1941 war with Peru that resulted in a loss of almost half of the country's territory. Carrión believed that culture could improve morale, and as president of the Casa de la Cultura, he worked to promote young writers, both nationally and internationally, particularly people in their thirties.

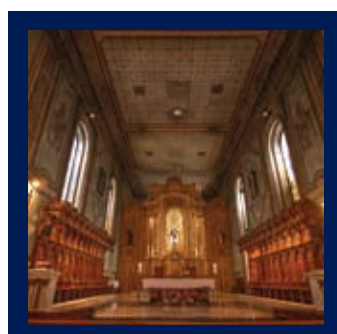
Pablo Arturo Palacio Suarez, for whom the auditorium is named, was born in Loja in 1906 and died in Quito in 1947. He was a great writer of the avant-garde known for his absurd, grotesque and irreverent nature. At the age of three he received a blow to the skull that left a deep scar for life.

It is assumed that because of this injury he began to experience certain mental disorders and, as an adult, would be declared insane.

Consequently, the last seven years of his life were spent in a psychiatric clinic, joined and cared for by his loyal wife, who worked in the same clinic just to be able to bear the costs of treatment.

Pablo Palacio worked as a journalist, writing legal and philosophical articles, but today he is best known as a literary author. In 1927 he published his book of tales "Un hombre muerto a puntapiés" ("A Man Kicked to Death") described as anti-romantic because it presented vulgar and drug-fueled passions. He is also known for "Debora," a subjective novel that excels in its deep exploration of the psychology of its characters. These books made him the most discussed and admired young writer among Quito intellectuals.

Now finish walking the short distance to the end of the block and turn right onto Bernardo Valdivieso Street. Walk one block to Parque Central (Central Park).



4 CENTRAL PARK

The park is surrounded by government and public buildings. They represent the legacy left to us by the Spanish conquest. Three types of government are represented - the municipality, the prefecture, and the governorate. Also, there is Iglesia Catedral (the Church Cathedral) which is the most important religious emblem in Loja. There is a reason for this distribution of governing and religious symbols of power.

According to the 'Laws of Indians', it was mandatory to create this type of plaza at the intersection of four main streets, and then surround the plaza with political buildings, churches, monasteries, convents, or catholic schools.

Remember that the mission of the Spanish conquest was not only to occupy America but also to impose the Catholic religion. History books narrate that in the beginning every single Spanish home was used daily to evangelize indigenous people. In fact, Loja is still one of the most religious cities in Ecuador. This building plan and power distribution helped avoid revolts. This was because the inhabitants of the houses had a view of all the sides of the plaza and main streets, so if there was a revolt they could stop it almost immediately. As you keep walking you'll see more clearly this pattern of construction in the city.

5 CATHEDRAL

Across from the northwest corner of the park is Loja's Cathedral, built in an eclectic style using historical elements. Besides the gold adornments decorating the interior and the long history, one of the most important features of the church is the German organ imported by Monseñor José María Masiaa. The Cathedral facade is composed of three naves crowned by the church's steeple and tower.

This square is important because it is here that Loja welcomes the Virgin of El Cisne on August 20th every year. People come from different parts of Ecuador and Perú to witness her annual visit. The statue of the Virgin is carried here by the faithful on a 70 km pilgrimage from the town of Cisne. When she finally arrives, there is a party with castles made of cardboard. These castles are filled with fireworks and burnt to honor the Virgin. In September, there is also a great international fair that lasts 15 to 20 days in her honor.



6 STATUE OF BERNARDO VALDIVIESO

In the middle of the park, you will find a statue of one of the most important benefactors to education in Loja. He was born in September 1745. Valdivieso was an honest philanthropist, intellectual, and much more. He endowed the educations of generations of children and youth by donating most of his lands to build high schools and other public institutions.

He founded Bernardo Valdivieso High School, considered to be the most exemplary high school in Loja. Many students from Bernardo Valdivieso have become important artists, writers, musicians, patriots, judges and lawyers. Bernardo Valdivieso was also a mayor of Loja and an army captain. Loja remembers him for his public generosity.



7 MUSEUM OF LOJA'S CULTURE

On the south side of Central Park is a building that belonged to one of the wealthiest men in Loja's history. Daniel Alvarez Burneo was a landowner and very rich man who donated his property for education and community centers in Loja.

Loja's Supreme Court of Justice was located here, and also the governorate house.

The building was later bought by the Central Bank of Ecuador to create a museum of Lojano history and culture. After restoration in 1986, it became the Museum of Loja's Culture. Here you will find examples of tools and artifacts of our aboriginal cultures, photographs from the creation of the Republic of Ecuador, and many works of art such as paintings, sculptures, and drawings.

The house's decorations reveal how Lojanos lived in centuries past.

Now continue walking south on Bernardo Valdivieso Street and cross 10 de Agosto Street to be in front of the bank. Turn left (east) and walk a short distance to the first old doorway on your right which is just past the bank.



In 1705 the chapel located inside the Monastery was inaugurated. This is now part of the present museum, making it over 300 years old. The portion of the monastery that is dedicated to the museum, houses at least 70 religious-themed paintings, sculptures, liturgical clothes from about 60 years ago, and rooms set up to illustrate monastic life.

One of the legacies of the museum is the content of these works of art, which were made with the purpose of evangelizing and catechizing the Indians. The paintings are in the Jesuitical style, also found in Quito, Lima, Cuzco, and several parts of South America. They are highly decorated paintings that attract attention and are pleasing to the eye while portraying characters from the biblical text.

Now return west to Bernardo Valdivieso Street and turn left in front of the bank. Continue along this street one more block toward the south to Vicente Rocafuerte Street. At Rocafuerte, turn left and walk one block, stopping at Jose Joaquin de Olmedo Street. Immediately to your right is the parking lot of the Bolivar Theater.

8 MUSEUM MADRES CONCEPTAS AND MONASTERY

Near to the central plaza you'll find the "Museo de las Madres Conceptas," which is the oldest museum in the city - over 400 years old - and part of a monastery. It contains a huge value of works of religious, historical and cultural character.

This Monastery was built in 1597 and is considered the cultural, religious, colonial, and historic identity card of the Lojanos. Within the walls the conceptualist nuns live (and die) in seclusion from the world while observing an eternal silence. They have chosen to offer their lives to God and prayers for a better world. No person has access to them.

According to local historians, the Monastery was created for

Spanish upper classes or children of Spanish colonists. "This place functioned for the high social class of Spanish people in Loja, it was not an institution for the poor."

Another of the essential aspects of the Monastery is the presence of Hermanas Conceptas, a population of nuns who dedicate their lives to the convent and cloister in the same way as their ancestors lived 700 years ago. They still pray at the same hours repeating the same prayers. Even burial rituals, when one of the nuns dies, are cloistered. They have their own cemetery. "All this is the patrimonial treasure that encloses the monastery," according to their literature.

The nuns, in addition to dedicating their lives to God, prepare natural medicines and healthy foods, such as pills, nutritional broth, and sweets with beneficial properties. For example, they make pills for calming the nerves, stomach pain, fighting gastritis, and colon cleansing, among others, for an average price of \$1.



9 BOLÍVAR THEATER

This is the oldest theater of the city. This building is very important to Lojanos, because it is the first theater in the city. Many cultural, musical and social activities happen here year-round.

Before the Bolivar Theater was built, cultural and entertainment programs were directly connected to religious events, with theatrical-musical activity being an essential element of the Loja culture since colonial times.

Annual examples of these activities continuing today include the visit of the Virgin of El Cisne, the provincial fair created by South America's liberator Simón Bolívar, the December Christmas fair, and

various Catholic festivals. Processions and masses were combined with other festivities full of games, bullfights, and music by orchestras from traditional institutions.

In the 19th century, every city that was respected (and even more educated and cultured than Loja) usually contained a distinguished stage. Wishing to elevate Loja, cultural icons like Miguel Riofrío, Manuel Enrique Rengel, Agustín Cueva, Máximo Agustín, Adolfo Valarezo, José Angel Palacios, and Pio Jaramillo championed acquiring space and building a public theater.

In 1913, the house belonging to the Lequerica family, located at the corner of the current

intersection of Bernardo Valdivieso and Rocafuerte streets, was made available. Delays in planning and construction resulted in the theater not being built until the 1930's.

The building you see before you has undergone extensive renovations recently.

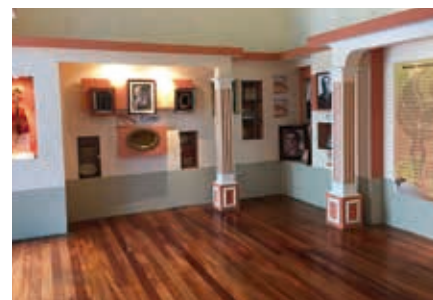
Now go back along Vicente Rocafuerte street to the intersection with Bernardo Valdivieso. Turn left, and walk along Bernardo Valdivieso to the second doorway on the left, which opens into a courtyard.

10 MUSIC MUSEUM

The Music Museum occupies the courtyard of the first Bernardo Valdivieso school, and is part of one of the most important cultural projects in the city and in Ecuador. The project's purpose is to save the city's historic musical heritage. The museum exhibits the legacy of a representative number of Lojano musicians who lived from 1890 to present. The collection includes approximately 7,000 sheets of music, more than 10,000 musical compositions, and 65 musical instruments belonging to the artists.

Loja earned the title of "Music Capital of Ecuador" due to the many talented musicians, whose compositions and possessions are maintained in the Music Museum. The displays feature the lives and works of renowned musical performers and composers like Salvador Bustamante Celi, Segundo Cueva Celi, Manuel de Jesús Lozano, Carlos Valarezo Figueroa, Marcos Ochoa Muñoz, and Víctor Moreno Iñiguez, among others.

Turn left out of the museum and continue along Bernardo Valdivieso for 2-1/2 blocks. As you walk this route you'll pass a beautiful little church and a plaza of flower sellers, both of these on your left. You will arrive at Plaza San Sebastian on Alonso de Mercadillo street.





11 PLAZA SAN SEBASTIÁN

St. Sebastian Plaza is also known as Independence Square. It is surrounded by ancient buildings whose main characteristics are their large doors and wooden balconies. These houses now function as local businesses, restaurants, and offices.

At its inception, this plaza was dedicated to commerce. In fact, most of the trade fairs used to be held here. Now the plaza is used for concerts and political events. Presidents and other politicians usually come here during their campaigns to give speeches and talk about the problems of Ecuador. It has always been an important location, known as Independence Plaza, because our first leaders held secret meetings here to win our independence from Spain on November 18th, 1820.

In the middle of the plaza, there is a 32 - meter - high tower. This architectural landmark was inaugurated in 1950. At the top is a clock, and on the base are four bas-reliefs representing the main historical eras in Loja: the Palta era, the governorate of Mainas and Yaguarzongo, the independence of Loja, and finally, the federal government of Ecuador.

Explaining these four times of our history will explain many Lojano characteristics and the way we behave. The Paltas were mentioned earlier, so look to the other reliefs.

The governorate of Mainas and Yaguarzongo: was founded by Juan de Salinas Loyola who wanted to link the most important areas of southern Ecuador.

There was the mining zone of Zamora and Zaruma, the agricultural area of Loja, and the harbor area of Paita in Piura, Peru. The idea was to create a self-sufficient and impenetrable fortress.

Despite the efforts to achieve this goal, there were two main problems: First, the powers in Quito and Lima didn't want another fortress in their region. Second, the plan was socially unsustainable because it was based on excessive tributes paid to the king of Spain that the indigenous people resisted. In fact, during this period more than 20,000 indigenous Paltas and Amazonian Shuars were killed during the Spanish search for gold which provoked a revolt by some of the indigenous groups.

The independence of Loja: The story of independence in Ecuador began in Quito on August 10, 1809 with a meeting of patriots demanding liberty. Unfortunately, they were defeated by Spain. They were put in jail and tortured every day of their imprisonment for nearly a year before they were executed. It was meant to be a warning for other people wanting to rebel against that system, but it didn't work. In fact, that was the beginning of

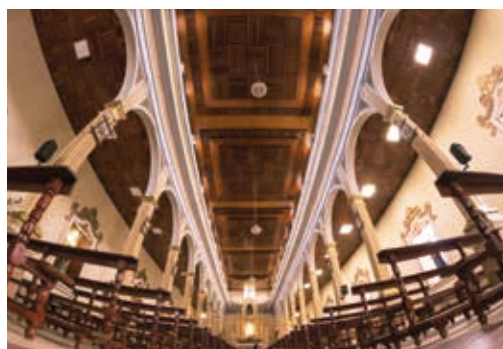
many secret meetings around Ecuador to plan rebellion against the Spanish king. The first city in Ecuador that achieved independence was Guayaquil on October 9th, 1820. The city of Loja declared independence on November 18th, 1820. Lojano patriots held their secret meetings in the building that you see next to St Sebastian Church. When Loja's revolt against Spain happened, men, women, and even children took to the streets

in order to demand their rights. In Loja, the colonial government was brought to heel in only three days. Loja had also supported Simón Bolívar and other liberators with money, food, and guns throughout the struggle for independence. Two years later, in 1822, the final battle that ended Spanish rule was fought in Pichincha province near Quito.

Federal government of Loja: You will learn about this history once you arrive to the next plaza which is dedicated to this event.



ST. SEBASTIAN CHURCH



One of the places that stands out the most in the plaza is the St. Sebastian Church. It was built in 1650 to honor the Virgin of Lourdes.

The current name of "St Sebastian" came from a priest, Eliseo Alvarez, who thought the saint's name would protect the church from earthquakes. Unfortunately, it didn't work, because the church has had several reconstructions over time due to earthquakes. But quakes are not usual in this region, so worshipers continue to come to the church and thank God for

all the things they have instead of clamoring for things they don't - and this is part of Lojano culture as well.

Now walk south on Bolivar Street along the west side of the church to the next intersection, which is Lourdes Street to your right.



12 LOURDES ST.

This single block going west is where you can get an idea of what Loja looked like in colonial times. Lourdes Street is an attractive part of Loja to relax in its cafes and visit its varied small businesses. The houses and balconies on Lourdes street are full of color. To the naked eye it may seem like these houses are

small, however, behind the front doors are spacious interior courtyards often ringed by second-floor balconies above.

Now walk back toward the city center on Bolivar Street to Plaza Santo Domingo at the corner of Bolivar and Vicente Rocafuerte streets.



13

STO. DOMINGO CHURCH

Facing this plaza is Santo Domingo church, one of the most architecturally attractive churches in the city.

Built in 1557, under the rule of a religious community founded by Santo Domingo de Guzmán, its construction took 43 years and was made a reality thanks to charity and taxes levied by conquistador Juan de Alderete. The church has an eclectic style combining Romanesque historicism and gothic details in its towers. Inside the church, people venerate the image of the Virgin of the Rosary, which was brought from Seville in the year 1550. There is also an image of Christ Crucified, which is presumed to be a work by the indigenous quiteño artist known as "Caspicara."

The architectural style of this church is unique due to its two gothic style towers which project higher than the other Loja churches, making it easy to spot from any geographic viewpoint of the city.

The decoration and interior paintings of the church were done in 1928 by Fray Enrique Mideros, who painted other Ecuadorian churches. The interior decoration is composed of 18 large murals, 36 medallions, and 16 portrayals of the mysteries of the rosary.

Who was Fray Enrique Mideros? Jonas Mideros Almeida was born in San Antonio, Ibarra on October 14, 1892. Later, when he joined the community of Dominican

priests, he took the name of Fray Enrique. From childhood he really loved to paint and was brilliant at charcoal drawing.

He produced more than a hundred oil paintings with religious themes that adorn Dominican convents and churches. His uncountable works grace different convents in Cuenca, Quito, Latacunga, Loja, Ambato, and Baños.

It is presumed that in the catacombs and underground niches of this church there are the remains of one of the founders of Loja: Juan de Salinas Loyola.





FEDERAL LOJA AND PLAZA DE SANTO DOMINGO

This is known as the Federal Plaza of Loja. Lojanos are well known for rebelliousness, independence, and self-sufficiency. On September 18, 1859, an open town council was called which adopted the goal of breaking away and making Loja province into a federal state.

This proposal was reached when the country was going through one of its most difficult moments: the country was invaded by Peruvian troops, and there were several governments at the same time. Driven by these economic, political and social circumstances, the town hall named Don Manuel Carrion Pinzano as its civil leader and military chief.

The Federal Government was temporary, but Carrion Pinzano held control and management of this autonomous area until another government was constituted.

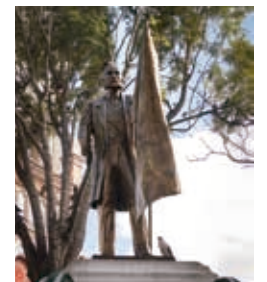
During this time, Loja's university was established and annexed to the schools of San Bernardo and La Unión, with chairs of medicine, theology, and jurisprudence. Loja became a self-sufficient province, and ruled by its own rules it prospered. Loja advanced in the search for science and culture, and at the same time protected its frontier while maintaining a military alliance with the rest of Ecuador. The independent government didn't last long, but the advance in Loja's society was obvious.

Who was Manuel Carrion Pinzano? Manuel Carrion Pinzano was born August 6, 1809, in Spain. His professional career included being a governor, senator, civil head and military chief of the province of Loja. He also founded the Superior Court of Justice and the National University of Loja when

establishing the Faculty of Jurisprudence, Theology and Medicine, by means of decree on the 31st of December, 1859.

He regulated the customs service and led the creation of the diocese of Loja. Manuel Carrion Pinzano was the figurehead representing an event of singular transcendence in the local history of Loja and an eminent figure of Ecuador. He died in February 2, 1870.

You may end the tour here, or you may continue up to the City Gate which is 8 or 9 blocks to the north. To continue the tour, go west two blocks to 18 de Noviembre Street and turn right. This walk will lead you past the Central Public Market and Bolivar Park. 18 de Noviembre Street ends at City Gate.





14 CITY GATE AND MONUMENT

This is the "City Gate," and a contemporary monument dedicated to the Spanish conqueror Don Juan de Salinas y Loyola.

The "City Gate" is a replica of the coat of arms granted by the Spanish King "Felipe II" in 1571 to Loja. The building before you was recently erected and contains art galleries, a museum, tourist souvenir items for sale, and a lookout point and restaurant upstairs. Pass through the archway to access the ground-level doors in each wing.

Loja was considered the gateway that opened this part of the country to the conquest of the legendary El Dorado gold.

Conquistador Francisco Pizarro dreamed of taking this gold by capturing the Kingdom of Peru from the Incas. Juan de Salinas y Loyola

joined Pizarro's quest, and later founded a dozen cities, including Lima and Cuzco in Peru, plus Cuenca and Loja (with Alonso de Mercadillo) where he was the first mayor.

With the story of Juan de Salinas the tour ends. 'Life in Loja' wants to thank you for taking this tour and to say Loja is a city full of pride and culture. It is called the Cradle of Hospitality and Kindness. The people are always struggling to find the best options to improve the city. One objective now is to become the first eco-friendly city in Ecuador. Energy comes from our wind-farm, and biowaste is managed. Loja has the purest water in Ecuador and one of the most important national parks called Podocarpus. The city is the cleanest in Ecuador, and Loja is not just the best place to visit but also to settle and live the good life.



REFERENTIAL MAP



- 1 PLAZA SAN FRANCISCO AND STATUE
- 2 ST. FRANCIS CHURCH
- 3 CASA DE LA CULTURA ECUATORIANA BENJAMÍN CARRIÓN (CCE)
- 4 CENTRAL PARK
- 5 CATHEDRAL
- 6 STATUE OF BERNARDO VALDIVIESO
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If you'd like more information, customized experiences are available. Send an email to lifeinloja@gmail.com or start a chat on WhatsApp to the number 098-674-5994.