

CUENCA expats

magazine

issue
eleven
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Welcome to Hillary Resort

Gateway to the Province of El Oro

celebrating life together



Cathedral Tour

By Keith and Tina Paul.

Photographs by Keith Paul

Everyone would agree the most iconic pictures of Cuenca are those of the blue domes of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, affectionately referred to as the New Cathedral. Located in the heart of the historic center, known for its colonial architecture, the New Cathedral with its bright blue domes blends the new with the old. Cuenca is a UNESCO World Heritage site, and the New Cathedral is part of this site, but it is not that old. Construction of the New Cathedral began in the 1880s and took over 80 years to complete. Consecration of the Cathedral took place in 1967.

No matter how long you have lived in Cuenca, there are always interesting things to discover. We have visited the New Cathedral many times but recently decided to take the guided tour when some friends were visiting us from the States. If you are like us, you may not have even known that these tours are available. In the back of the church is a small office that will coordinate a guided tour for you. The tour costs \$3 and includes the interior of the church, the crypt and access to the patio between the towers. Our guide was very knowledgeable and passionate about educating our party of four on

the history and the materials used in building the cathedral, all in English. We walked the entire area of the main floor of the church before being taken to the choir balcony where we began our over 150 step climb of the circular staircase in one of the towers to reach the outdoor plaza located between the towers. The views of the city with its red tiled roof tops and other magnificent churches is breathtaking. From the patio, you can get a view of all of Parque Calderon and the beautiful colonial buildings that surround it. The original plans called for the two towers to be larger. Truncation of the towers was necessary because the foundation of the church was not strong enough to support the projected weight of the bells and the towers. The New Cathedral does not have bells. Covering those iconic blue and white domes are blue and white tiles from Czechoslovakia.

The cathedral is a combination of many architectural styles, but Romanesque Revival is predominant. The interior of the cathedral is opulently decorated with gold leaf though out. Stained glass windows made in Germany, Belgium, and Cuenca grace this magnificent place. Much of the interior of



the church is faced with local marble, with pink marble from Italy covering the floors. Twisted columns of wood similar to St. Peter's Basilica make up the main altar, but here the wood along with the rest of the altar is covered in gold leaf.

When you think of a crypt, you might think dark, damp and dingy. The crypt of the New Cathedral is anything but that; it is spectacular. We descended 30 some marble steps into the basement of the cathedral. The crypt is 96 meters in length. As you first enter the crypt lights come on to illuminate the beginning of the crypt as you move further down the long wide hall more lights come on in sections. Some very famous Cuenca residents are at rest in the crypt, among them; Fray Vicente Solano and Remigio Crespo Toral. The crypt was intended to be the burial place for important Cuencanos, religious figures, and military men. Today there is only room left for religious figures. At the end of the 96 meters lies a simple yet elegant altar. As you reach the altar, the entire crypt is illuminated. The crypt is truly a treasure onto itself.

You are missing out on a world treasure if you do not take the guided tour of the New Cathedral!





Rione Hotel

by Keith and Tina Paul - Photographs courtesy of Rione Hotel

Looking for a place to stay in Cuenca, look no further than the boutique Rione Hotel and restaurant. At the Rione, they want every guest to feel like family. Putting their heart and soul into every encounter with their guests, they go out of their way to meet each guest's needs. This family owned and operated hotel was a dream 20 years in the making. During your stay, you will most likely meet one or more of the owners Clara, Ivan, and Tatiana, who make sure your needs are being met. This boutique hotel compares to those found in major cities around the world. Their style is sleek with bold splashes of color. Its intimate size, 30 rooms, produces a cozy yet stylish ambiance with an independent spirit to match its guest's individual needs. The Rione offers 24-hour receptionist, laundry and room service, and can cater to special dietary restrictions.

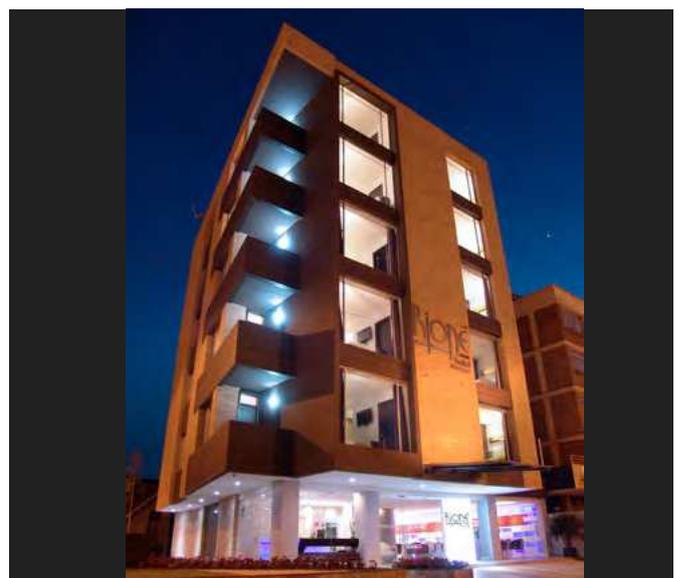
What makes this hotel stand out from the rest is that it is relatively new. A little over two years old, the rooms of this hotel are exceptionally clean, contemporary, comfortable and beautifully decorated with upgrades like flat screen TV's, mini-refrigerators and artwork from a well-known local artist.

Your stay includes a complimentary hot breakfast buffet beginning at 7 am for early risers. They offer special rates for an extended stay, speak English, and are small pet-friendly. Located in an up and coming restaurant area, the Rione Hotel is safe, quiet, and within walking distance of El Centro while being just far enough away to be free from the construction congestion and noise in downtown. A spacious king bed suite with balcony provides a comfortable, temporary housing for transitioning expats or out of town guests.

The Rione also has a bright, modern restaurant open from 7 am until 9:30 pm serving breakfast, lunch, and dinner. They provide fine dining experience at a very reasonable cost

including beer, wine, and cocktails. Be sure to ask what the chef's specials are. We had the Chicken Parmigianino and the Four Cheese Fettuccini that were both fabulous.

The Rione Hotel is a hidden gem. People often ask us for recommendations of places to stay when they are considering relocating to Cuenca. After discovering Rione, we have our recommendation.



**Hotel Restaurant Hours: Monday: 4pm - 10pm
Tuesday - Saturday: 12pm - 10pm
Ave. Luis Moreno Mora & Eduardo Malo**

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