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A Divine Hotel Stay at Oro Verde in Guayaquil, Ecuador

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Setting out on a once-in-a-lifetime trip with my family to the [Galapagos Islands](#) from our home in Los Angeles meant we had a super long trip ahead of us, so a relaxing stop-over was key. We flew from LA to Miami and then on to [Ecuador](#), which is the nearest country to this stunning archipelago in the Pacific. Many choose to break up their journey in the country's capital Quito before heading to San Cristobel in the Galapagos, but I opted for [Guayaquil](#) because it was at lower altitude—and because it boasted a magnificent five-star hotel, the [Oro Verde](#). I made a great choice for my family as it proved to be the perfect luxury kick-start to a fabulous vacation.

We were joyfully greeted at the airport by our smiling driver, Milton, who was polite and helpful as he ushered us into a pristine, air-conditioned limo. We loved his happy attitude and were relieved to have an easy transfer after such a long journey. The Oro Verde has been recently exquisitely refurbished and is the only hotel member of the Leading Hotels of the World chain in continental Ecuador, boasting 236 rooms and suites, all with high-speed Wi-Fi and minibar. The beds were exceptionally sumptuous, fitted with super-soft 300-thread-count cotton sheets, which was just what we needed after our long journey.



We were welcomed in the lobby by a breathtaking tower of Ecuadorian chocolate, which my kid is still talking about to this day. We were then shown to our magnificent suite, where he played with a gift from the hotel: a tiny bowling set that kept my son occupied as we got ourselves settled and was very much appreciated by mom and dad.

I noticed immediately that our concierge, Diego, proudly wore the golden **Les Clefs d'Or** pin awarded by the international organization of professional hotel concierges. He was so sweet, and happy I knew what his pin symbolized. Concierges like Diego must go through a rigorous board review; the application process is so stringent that the organization has only 450 members in the United States, so you can't help but be impressed. He was absolutely fantastic and attended to our every need, as did the rest of the staff.



We made full use of the hotel's fabulous outdoor pool, and if I'd had time I would have booked a massage in the spa, which boasted a sauna, a steam room, and a whirlpool. Of course, all that traveling and swimming made us exceptionally hungry and the Oro Verde's well-regarded restaurants were absolute delights.

On the first night, we ate at the flagship dining room **Le Gourmet**, which is recognized as one of the best restaurants in Ecuador and offers contemporary cuisine. The décor is magnificent baroque, and we felt like celebrities as we dined on seven-spice crab and prawn and pumpkin cream soup with a chorizo crumble for our appetizers, followed by a delicious salmon gratinée with chanterelles and a tender rack of lamb. The food took center stage and the room was colorful and energetic. We ended the meal with a crème brûlée and lavender cheesecake, which was very fancy and delectable. In fact, it was all absolutely stunning and magical and the perfect way to kick off our holiday



At breakfast the next day we once again ate like royalty with every kind of breakfast food you could wish for, from granola to eggs to pancakes and back again. What I loved about the lively breakfast buffet room was they offered a cell phone-charging booth, which proved exceptionally helpful. Your cell phone is nearby but under lock and key while it charges, and the added benefit is that the families sitting at their tables were talking, not texting.

However, our favorite meal was at the hotel's Swiss restaurant **La Fondue**, which will remain a family highlight for many years to come. My son had never eaten fondue and it had been years since I'd enjoyed the fine tradition of bringing food to the table to be dunked in hot, gooey cheese. In Switzerland, this dish is called *raclette* (named after a type of cheese), and small pans keep the cheese warm and runny. It's so much fun! We loved the Camembert fondue, which had a hint of garlic, white wine, and pepper and came with bacon bread rolls and Swiss cold cuts. We also grilled veggies, onions, and meats at our table. We loved the experience so much we ate there two days in a row; on the second day we brought another family with us, who also loved it.



The Oro Verde gifted us immediate, divine, luxurious vacation joy. By the time we left for the Galapagos we felt utterly pampered, relaxed, and happy—and ready for a new adventure!