

# From the Basilica del Voto Nacional, Quito, Ecuador

by Callie Dean

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No gargoyles here. Guess those little gothic grotesques couldn't handle the altitude. Instead, the local fauna stand, stoic—a row of chiseled iguanas and condors and tortoises—protecting the parapets like loyal sentries at their stations. Is this a consolation prize, some relegation to the rooftops, the closest they'll ever come to crossing the threshold of a church? But, oh, the tortoises! Each one a cathedral unto itself, bearing the weight of centuries in the stonework of its scutes. Each domed shell pointing toward the heavens, as worthy an offering as Michelangelo's.