

# expats

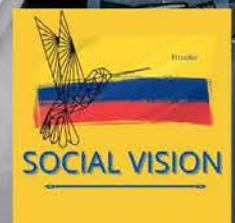
magazine *Cuenca*

42  
ISSUE

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21



**Social Vision**  
Together Aiding  
the Medically Vulnerable





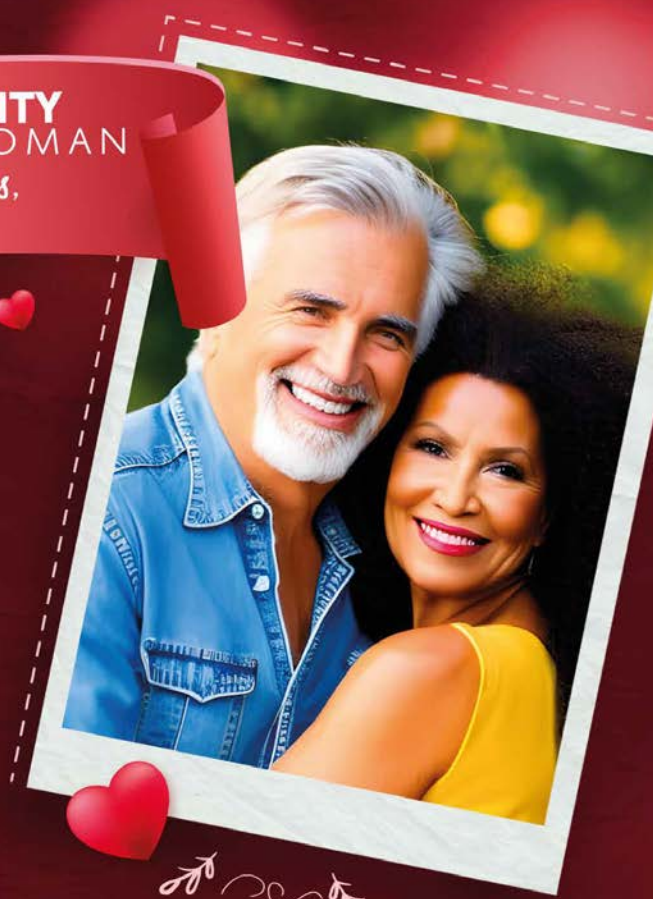
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## **Hello** **beautiful Cuenca!**

I can't believe that we are already in the month of June! It appears as though the first half of the year has flown by quickly. Either that or I am just growing older faster than I would like to admit. LOL. I am thrilled to share this issue, highlighting all the great new things we have discovered in Cuenca. The Cuenca Expats Magazine team makes a diligent effort to bring you all the unique and exciting opportunities available in our diverse community.

What is Social Vision? Learn about Jim and Jennifer Cory, along with Cuencano Dr. Ivan Vallejo's joint endeavor to support all those needing professional eye care in Cuenca thus creating the Social Vision Foundation in 2022. This article details their journey towards making vision and other medical care available to all community members at little to no cost. Learn about these community heroes and their endless work.

Don't forget to read the second of our four-part series regarding the experiences of Cuenca Expats Magazine's staff members Ed Lindquist, (managing partner) and Yenis Bejas (general manager) as they explore the Galapagos Islands. They ask the important question: Are you going to visit or explore?

In addition, I hope that you enjoy our other articles about the extraordinary 1-year Anniversary of idiomArt, and our growing Russian expats community. This jam-packed issue also includes information about the glorious Grand Columbia Suites and includes seven tips on increasing your retirement savings.

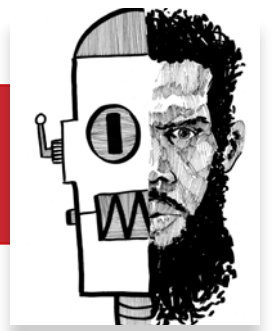
Last but not least, I encourage you to read about our Managing Partner, Ed Lindquist's participation while "glamping" in the Amazon.

*Best regards to all...*

**Melody**

# Contributors

**Daniel Williams** is a visual artist, writer, and educator from Augusta, GA. His illustrative style is marked by his use of ink and patterns. In his five years in Cuenca, Daniel has held an artist's residency, shown his work in solo expositions, and taught workshops surrounding the fundamentals of realism.



**Evgeniia Avdeeva** and her family relocated to Cuenca from Siberia six years ago. Socially active and with a desire to help people no matter their nationality or circumstance, she launched her first FB group, "Expat families. Cuenca": a group formed mostly for English-speaking expat families. Her new group, "Cuenca Rusa. Русская Куэнка," is specifically for Russian speakers who share similar goals and principles. Her 16-year-old son is known for assisting his father with translations while meeting with Ecuadorian authorities. You may often catch her talented daughter singing and playing guitar in Cuenca's many restaurants, squares, and parks.

In addition to an economics degree from Rutgers, **Mr. Ryerson** holds several professional designations including Retirement Income Certified Professional (RICP)®; Certified In Long Term Care (CLTC)®; Certified Financial Fiduciary (CFF)®, and Certified Identity Theft Risk Management Specialist (CITRMS)®. He also the authored the book "What's The Deal with Identity Theft? A Plain-English Look at Our Fastest Growing Crime."



**Edward Lindquist.** Successful California-born businessman, Ed is Managing Partner of Expats Magazines Group, parent company of Cuenca Expats Magazine, Coastal Expats Magazine, Quito Expats Magazine, REDBOOK, the Directory of English-Speaking Businesses and Services, and YAPA On-Line. Ed has called beautiful Cuenca his home for the last 9 years.

**Teresa Drake**, formerly of Florida, has been in Cuenca 1 ½ years with her husband of 11 years, Raymond Drake. Graduated Ferris State University BA with honors, fiber artist, quilter, award winning photographer, former photographer for Great Lakes Lighthouse Festival, published author and writer.



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magazine *Cuenca*

ISSUE

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# New kid in town:

## Social Vision

By: Teresa Drake

Photos: Courtesy of Social Vision



Seniors and children who don't have the means to buy needed medicine or eyeglasses, let alone pay for vision-saving examinations and corrective surgeries, have been given new hope by the new kid in town, the Social Vision Foundation.

In July of 2022, Social Vision was created. Social Vision serves the people of Cuenca, both children and adults—unfortunate people who fall through the cracks. Yes, Social Vision helps people with eye problems, such as those needing glasses or surgery. Approximately 50% of what it does is based on vision, and the other 50% helps people with their general medical necessities.

It is the dream child, as it were, of expats Jim and Jennifer Cory and Cuencano Dr. Ivan Vallejo, who saw a very serious need in the Cuenca Community—medical services for all ages, but especially the elderly who need help.

Too often Jim and his wife, Jennifer, would see people in a pharmacy who either did not have enough funds to fill a prescription or for the medicine they needed and would leave the pharmacy empty handed. After seeing people in pharmacies struggling to pay for prescriptions or walking away because they did not have the money,



Jim approached a local pharmacy and worked out an agreement with them. He regularly provided a certain amount of money and the pharmacy would make up the difference from Jim's generosity to fill the prescription. It did not take long before the word was out. As Jim stated, "there is nothing I won't do to help this community... nothing."

Jim soon began to look to see where the need was more significant. As if an answer to a prayer, in stepped Dr. Ivan Vallejo who is a tireless warrior for the people of Azuay Province. Dr. Vallejo is Social Vision's medical director. He works at Monte Sinai Hospital and is also the president of Orthopedics and Traumatology for all of Azuay Province.

He not only assisted them to get started, but he continues to help by seeing Social Vision patients at the drop of a hat. After much discussion, Dr. Vallejo and Jim came up with the concept of incorporating expats into Social Vision's services since many expats really don't know where to turn for their medical needs.

Expats can contact Social Vision where they are connected to a specialist. The doctors involved with Social Vision either don't charge for an office visit or they offer greatly reduced fees. That can make a big difference in getting the patients the help they need. Instead of paying for the office visit, the doctors suggest that the expats donate to Social Vision to help raise funds. It is a win-win for everyone.

Once it became viable, Social Vision signed a contract with Monte Sinai who gives deep discounts to patients from Social Vision on everything from bloodwork to band aids. Jessica Moscoso at Monte Sinai works hard to see that Social Vision patients get everything they need. With reduced costs, Social Vision is able to serve more people. Less than a year since its inception, Social Vision



has helped more than 60 people, officially, with medical needs. Unofficially, over 100 more people have been aided while the foundation awaited its nonprofit status. Social Vision's main hospital agreement is with Monte Sinai, but they also have agreements with Clinica Latino and work with many doctors from Hospital del Rio.

One of the first friends Jim and Jennifer made in Cuenca was Robert Mora, owner of El Mercado restaurant. He told them, "I am there for you and with anything you need." They had no idea just how much they would come to rely on him. He gladly agreed to become a member of the Board of Directors when Social Vision began.

Robert set them on the path of obtaining a non-profit status in Ecuador—something they were told was nearly impossible. Social Vision is now recognized as a non-profit not only in Ecuador, but in the United States as well.

In addition to Jim, president and board member, and Jennifer, board member and secretary, board members are made up of people from the community. They were selected because they have proven they are people who can get things done.

For example, Ray and Linda Lewis are expats who are very successful at raising money and work tirelessly to promote Social Vision; Brian Hitsky is the treasurer and keeps Social Vision in line with every detail required to maintain its non-profit status; and Ana Puyol, who is an expert in everything Ecuador and has worked for non-profit foundations worldwide her entire career. Also, for all things social media, they are lucky to have a teenage genius, Harshita Madhan, from California.



Social Vision, in addition to working with the hospitals, also works with a wide range of specialists. Some of Social Vision's team players are Dr. Guillermo Lopez, pain management, Dr. Carlos Arias, neurosurgeon, Dr. Andres Astudillo, general surgeon, Dra. Margarita Aveiga, neurologist, Dr. Bolivar Quito, pediatric neurologist and Dra. Yadira Tapia, dermatologist. One of its biggest surprises has been the number of doctors who have reached out to offer their services, based on the Foundation's outstanding reputation for helping people. Social Vision has a long-term friendship with Exilaser, an ultra-modern clinic specializing in screening for vision problems and offering discounts for glasses. This relationship has turned into a great benefit for the foundation because of the expertise of Dr. Giuseppe Miotto, Dr. Diego Torres and Dra. Naty Torres. Claudia Tonon, Exilaser's social worker has been a valuable asset, assisting Social Vision in accessing a patient's issues. If Social Vision doesn't have a specialist for a particular need, they make it their business to find one.

Jim and Jennifer work tirelessly, as do all the volunteers and doctors who are part of the Social Vision team of players. Yet, there is one important member who has yet to be mentioned. This member loves attention and seems to attract notice wherever he goes. That conversation starter is an adorable little Pomeranian puppy named Teddy. A tiny little ball of fluff that is like dynamite when it comes to breaking the ice and being a conversation starter. Teddy is Jim's service dog and assists him with his Parkinson's disease. Jim was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease more than 20 years ago. If he has a problem, Teddy has a very distinctive bark that immediately gets your attention.

Teddy is extremely intuitive, keeps a close eye on Jim, and loves making people happy. Not only does he assist Jim, but he has helped Social Vision connect with its patients and help ease their worries. He is known throughout Cuenca and puts a smile on everyone's face. People are attracted, like a magnet, to that little ball of fur and always stop to speak with Jim and Jennifer.

Service dogs are very important to people like Jim who have a problem with balance, or perhaps epilepsy, and those dogs alert their owners that a seizure is about to happen so that the person can sit down or lie down and not be injured by a fall. Service dogs, or support animals, are not



very common in a medical setting in Ecuador. They are not allowed in most places, except a restaurant that is "pet" friendly. Social Vision is hoping to change this point of view. With Teddy's help, they are slowly altering this opinion. A lot of work still needs to be done in that area as people, for example, who may have a seeing-eye dog are not allowed to bring them into Supermaxi or many other stores or malls. Even after explaining they need the animal, and it has a "Service Dog" jacket, people are still denied entrance.

Jim does not let his disability interfere with his work in getting the word out about Social Vision and how important it is for the Cuencano and expat community. To watch him in action and how he talks about Social Vision and what it can do for the community, you would never know that he himself has problems. Social Vision only works within Cuenca. Perhaps, later down the line, they may expand to other parts of Ecuador, but for now Cuenca is more than enough for them to handle.

When asked what Jim wished the expat community to know about Social Vision, he replied that he urged expats to follow his example and give back to the community any way they can. Even the smallest positive action or a simple donation can help those in need. If a guy with Parkinson's disease can do it, anyone can.





Social Vision is a registered non-profit foundation both here in Ecuador as well as in the United States. It has no paid employees. All of its staff are made up of volunteers. Operating costs are kept very low, and they have been fortunate to have many of their corporation needs met by finding volunteer providers.

Yes, there is a new kid in town, and like the pebble thrown into a pond, they are having a ripple effect on not only the Cuenca community, but the expat community as well. They are a ray of sunshine and a beacon of hope for many people here in Cuenca and they can use all the help they can get. It is the organization's hope and dream that Social Vision becomes a truly self-sustaining entity that will continue on long after Jim and Jennifer are no longer able to work. Won't you help Social Vision in its efforts to help those who are not getting the help they need—be it medical, food or other needs, by making a donation.

For more information on Social Vision, or if you would like to make a donation or find out how you can help, you can contact Social Vision at the following:

✉ [socialvisioncuenca@gmail.com](mailto:socialvisioncuenca@gmail.com)

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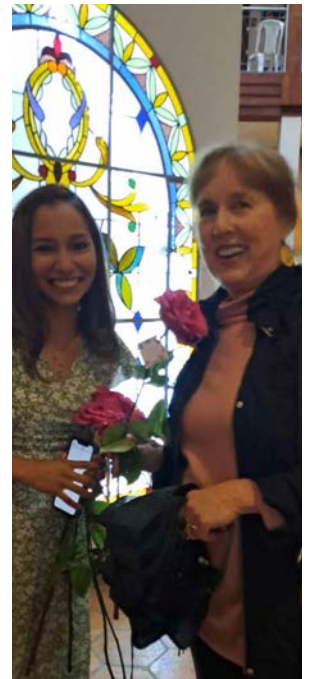
**Social Vision may be the new kid in town, but it is definitely one that walks the walk and does not just give lip service.**

**Social Vision is a much-welcomed addition to the Cuenca community.**



# Expats in

## Enjoying The Expats Open House



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## How idiomART has mastered space and experience

By: Daniel Williams

Photos: Courtesy of idiomART's

As the owner of an ever-expanding community center, Sarah Hanenbauer has changed the way idiomART's supporters experience culture. She approaches the concepts of community and collaboration by thinking beyond the typical food-and-drink meetups and embraces the wild realm of imaginative possibilities. IdiomART is an amplifier for creative ideas. From Sufi twirling workshops to environmentally conscious tours in the Andean Highlands, this creative sandbox has become a nexus of artistry within our community. June 8 will mark idiomART's one-year anniversary at its new location on Mariscal Lamar and Estevez Toral. In order to celebrate what they've become, I'd like to delve into the past and briefly share how this space's transformation has helped me and many other artists develop our careers.

IdiomART has changed immensely over the past few years. When I arrived in Cuenca in 2017, I was an inexperienced artist with no real audience or direction. Sara Coppler and Kathy McCullough, the founders of the center, had recently moved idiomART to its second location. We worked from a colorful and cramped duplex on the fringe of El Centro. It functioned as a coworking space, and much like now, on any given visit you'd encounter various types of artists. The inconspicuous center was teeming with energy and potential. This cluttered little space holds a special place in my heart because it provided me with the opportunity to start teaching and sharing recipes for self-expression to a group of excited young learners. Months later, I helped Kathy and Sara move two blocks down the road to their new location, a two-story house with a beautiful garden. There was now enough space for private art studios, outdoor concerts, and a small gallery. During this time, Sara Coppler passed the torch to Sarah Hanenbauer, who made it her mission to expand the open-armed, public-based approach that lies at the heart of idiomART's mission. This venue and its residency program attracted a revolving door of traveling artists, authors, musicians,



and even drag queens. My artist's residency at idiomART provided me with my first tangible sense of community, and the feeling of empowerment behind displaying vulnerable concepts. After a period of dormancy and uncertainty during the pandemic, the community center has made a bold and explosive recovery. They've relocated to a larger property, complete with ample studio space and a reverberant atrium for musical and theatrical performances. IdiomART is more active than ever. Starting in June, Sarah will be collaborating with art director Ximena Moscoso from Museo Pumapungo and la Dirección Municipal de Cultura to curate more immersive and conceptual art experiences. Sarah is already bridging the gap between expatriate communities and Cuencanos with her platform by connecting diverse artists and patrons. Her goal is to keep providing quality experiences that foster growth for Ecuador's arts industry, including the classes that are frequently offered by idiomART's prolific residents. IdiomART continues to host a wealth of life-changing events, adventures, and courses. When you attend an event at idiomART, you'll find yourself in a sublimely unique experience, in a surreal space surrounded by amazingly creative people.

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- 2 Open an individual or group chat.
- 3 Tap **Attach > Location > Send your current location**.
- 4 Tap 

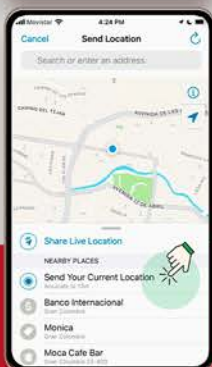
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## The Russians Are Coming

By: Edward Lindquist  
Photos: Courtesy of

Ed. Note: It's estimated Cuenca's Russian community may be the same size as those expats from the UK or Germany. Recently, many Russians have come to Ecuador and to Cuenca in particular. Some of them are attracted by a warmer climate, others simply seek to make a radical change in their lives by moving to the other side of the Earth. Some come to Ecuador due to international marriages between Russians and Ecuadorians, while other Russian newcomers wish to escape the political regime in their home country, migrating with their entire families, including young children and even babies. Still, some Russians have been hired by Ecuadorian companies as specialists. Most of the immigrants are middle-aged and left everything they had in their motherland to start from zero. Nowadays, remote work is a common way to make a living for Russians and many other expats. Others start small businesses such as making smoked sausages, pickles or bread; providing services such as manicures and pedicures, or professional photography; teaching classes on such things as martial arts; and some work on construction projects.

The Facebook group Cuenca Rusa was created to connect co-nationals (and Russian speakers in general) with each other to contribute and exchange information, obtain possible assistance and support, or simply gather together. New members join every day, and at present, the group

boasts around 100 members. People of different nationalities who simply enjoy Russian culture, who are planning to go to Russia one day or had studied in Russia are also interested in meeting Russian speakers. Many Ecuadorian students get their university degrees in Russia, as there are numerous international educational government programs there. Russian higher education is valued all over the world and is relatively affordable.

We meet at the parks to play volleyball and other sports and games and organize picnics with relay races. Together, we cook traditional food, celebrate birthdays and other holidays, dance and sing, go out to try Ecuadorian food, attend concerts, hike, watch movies, and share our traditions with locals, while generating new ideas and creating common plans. We refrain from discussing politics. Sometimes, some of us meet at the Russian bar Kalashnikov on Remigio Crespo, which is very popular among young Ecuadorians as well as the many Russian ex-pats here. Its menu includes signature cocktails with names such as Sangria Rusa, Lada, Chernobyl, and many others.

If you are interested in meeting the Russian community in Cuenca, get in touch with us and join in on the fun and support we offer.



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# Glamping in the Amazon Jungle

By: Ed Lindquist

Photos: Courtesy of Macas Glamping

It's been many years since I went trekking in California's Sierra Nevada Mountains on week-long Boy Scout camping trips. Great memories. So, I jumped at the chance to try the latest trend in camping—glamping. Glamping (from glamour and camping) describes a style of camping with amenities, and in some cases, resort-style services not usually associated with “traditional” camping. Our friends at Macas Glamping invited us to come for a visit. Macas is the capital of Morona Santiago province in southeastern Ecuador. Macas was founded in 1563 and since the 17TH century has been one of the main settlements in the Amazon region due to its geographical location. This was a twofor for me: my first-time glamping and first visit to the Amazon.

Our driver José picked us up on time at 7 a.m. in his new crew-cab diesel pickup for the four and a half hour drive to Macas. We use José for all our Travel and Adventure road trips when we need safe transportation through the mountains. Before he retired, José worked for the government and was the driver of choice whenever the president of Ecuador visited the area.

**NOTE:** When traveling through the mountains of Ecuador, use a safe and skilled driver who knows the roads. The unexpected is always around the bend. If you would like to use José, text me and I'll provide his number.

From Cuenca, there are two ways through the mountains to Macas via Paute or Gualaceo. We chose Paute to go, and Gualaceo for the return to get a feel for both road conditions. The trip up and back had fairly good paved two-lane roads, except in places under construction and spots awaiting road crew cleanups in the never-ending duels with mud and rock slides typical of the mountains.

Once you leave Paute, you'll find few places in the morning to get a bite to eat, but we did find a very small restaurant serving ham and cheese sandwiches and hot horchata. Macas Glamping, chosen by Forbes Ecuador as one of the best of



its kind in the country, is about 20 minutes from the center of town. We were greeted by Nikolay, the owner, and Jordano, our glamping host and chef, with a delicious hot cup of guayusa (a popular health tea only grown in the Amazon). Macas Glamping was founded by Nikolay and his wife Fanny in 2021 during COVID when Nikolay's travel and tourism business dried up and he was looking for a new project to keep him busy during the pandemic slowdown.

After visiting a few other glamping operations in Colombia, and based on his 20 years in the tourism business, he adopted the best ideas and added his own.

Macas Glamping's goal is to provide guests with a “different experience.” Macas Glamping is located on five acres of jungle with its own lagoon, and it is part of a larger bird sanctuary for 12 different species. Macas Glamping has five distinct units or camps. Each unit is placed in a different area of the property, so you are unable to see or hear anyone else. And, each unit has a different design.

The goal is someone can stay in a different unit each night and have a totally distinct experience. I was happy to see that they kept an outdoor camping feel to these units.



So many other places have jumped on the “glamping” bandwagon name, but they are nothing more than lodges or hostels. Not here. There is one unit shaped like a glass pyramid (as a tribute to Ecuador’s many volcanos), a domed unit positioned so you can follow the path of the moon across the sky, and there is even one unit with an African safari-like tent. I was lucky to stay in the glass pyramid unit. It allows you to sleep under the stars, without the discomfort of a sleeping bag on the ground. Macas Glamping really spoils you. The unit has a comfortable queen-size bed and is climate controlled—no problem with insects or unwanted creatures of the night. There is a comfortable two-person swinging bench, a well-stocked mini-fridge, a bottle of wine ready to service, and your own hot tub. And what camping outing is without a campfire? (The pit ready with wood.) The unit is also equipped with a modern bathroom that has a very large walk-in shower with a waterfall showerhead, plenty of oversized towels, bathrobes, and slippers.

You can even reserve a relaxing message during your stay. I chose to unplug from everything—no phone, Internet, or Netflix, just the peace and quiet of this outdoor adventure, and I fell asleep hours earlier than normal. Macas Glamping is perfect if someone wants to get away from the hustle and bustle of city life for a few days, or it’s an excellent home base to explore the surrounding areas.

**Here’s a link <https://macas.gob.ec/>** that will give you an idea of what you can do, including a day-long adventure visiting a real Shuar village. The indigenous Shuar (of headhunting fame) live in a tropical rainforest between the upper mountains of the Andes and in the tropical rainforests and savannas of the Amazonian lowlands. A very good breakfast prepared by Chef Jordano is a part of your package when you stay at Macas Glamping. They also serve lunch and dinner if you are staying on the property. If you go into Macas, there is a number of very good restaurants. Many think the beef from the Amazon region is the best in Ecuador. So, as you walk around town, you’ll notice there are many steakhouses in which to choose. We stayed on the property for our meals. For lunch, we chose the Filet Mignon—a very large cut perfectly grilled. They served an appetizer in a metal skillet called Picada Macabea. It’s a traditional beef dish from the area. I mistakenly thought it was the main course; it was so filling. It was served with “French fried” yucca (to my taste better than potatoes). Then the main meal! For lunch, we tried the shrimp pasta. Very tasty. Both meals even included an edible flower from the area (begonia or hortensia) as part of the plate presentation.

**Ready for our trip back to Cuenca. Our time here ended too quickly. We left Macas Glamping with the promise to return soon.**



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[www.macasglamping.com](http://www.macasglamping.com)

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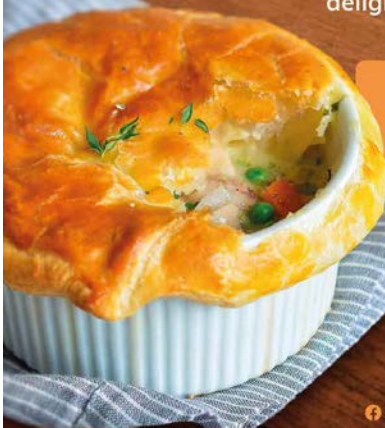
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## 7 Tips That May Help to Increase Your Retirement Saving

By Robert Ryerson

Many retirees, unfortunately, are ill-prepared to actually retire. In fact, about 37% of retirees in 2022 said that they didn't have enough money to enjoy their golden years. This guide covers several ways to save for retirement and avoid becoming part of that 37%.



### 1 Take Advantage of Employer Match Plans

Many employer retirement plans offer matching contributions. What it means is that for every dollar you save in your plan, your employer partially or fully matches your contribution. Although most of these matching plans are capped at a certain amount, the caps are often quite high. A typical employer match amount is 3% of an employee's salary, but is often as high as 6%, which can work out to thousands per year in "free money."

### 2 Make Use of Catch-Up Consultations

One of the reasons why it's important to start saving early if you can is that yearly contributions to IRAs and 401(k) plans are limited. The good news? As of the calendar year that you reach age 50, you're eligible to go beyond the normal limits with catch-up contributions to IRAs and 401(k)s.

### 3 Automate Your Savings Plans

Thanks to modern technology, many banks and financial institutions have APIs set up that allow you to automatically set up payments to your retirement fund. The benefit here is that you can set the automation to pull money from your bank on a certain day of the month.

### 4 Delay Social Security Savings

Another tactic for putting more money aside for retirement is to delay your Social Security benefits. Starting at age 62, you can receive reduced Social Security benefits. However, each year you wait to take your benefits, up until age 70, you earn what are called "delayed retirement credits" of 8% per year. These can obviously increase your Social Security benefit significantly.

### 5 Take Advantage of Double Contributions

Another big way you can save for retirement is by contributing more than once to your retirement plan. Although many people aren't aware of this, some teachers, public sector workers, healthcare employees, and employees at nonprofits are able to add double the amount of cash to their retirement plans.

### 6 Apply for Uncle Sam's Retirement Savings Credit

Lower-income earners can also take advantage of savings credits to help them save for retirement. For instance, Uncle Sam's Retirement Savings Credit offers a tax credit of up to 50% of your retirement plan contribution.

### 7 Consider Where You'll Retire

Many individuals don't realize that the location in which they choose to retire can have big implications for their nest egg. A few states actually have no state income taxes, meaning that you won't have to pay those taxes on your income during retirement.

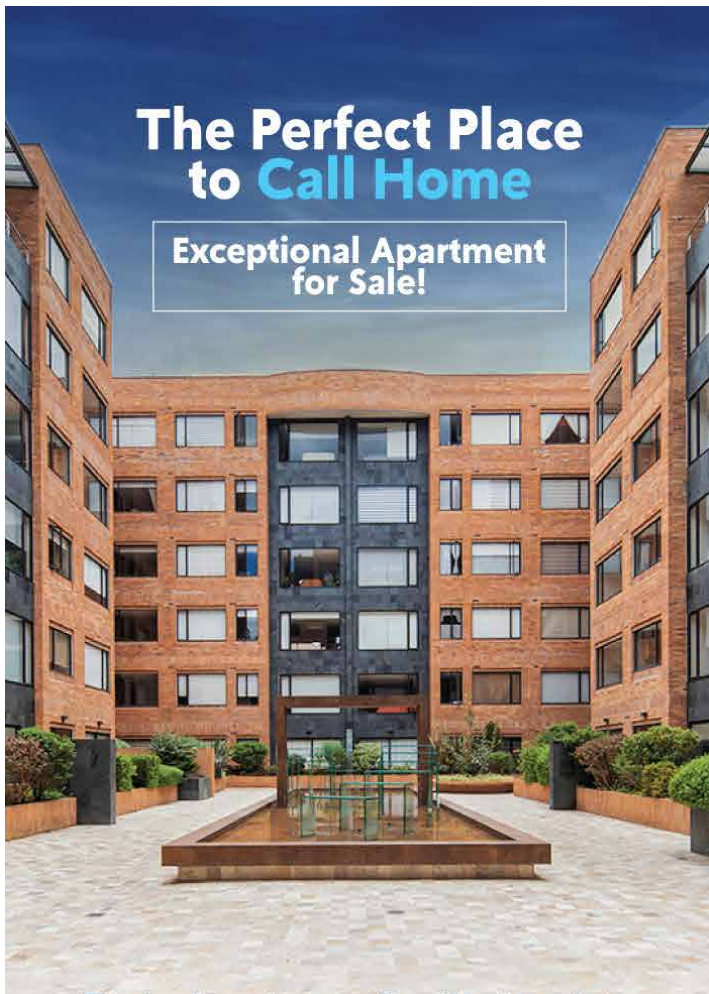
## FINAL THOUGHTS



Saving for retirement can be daunting. However, with the right plan in place, you can start building a nest egg that will offer enough cash for you to comfortably enjoy your golden years.

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# Exploring Ecuador's

## Natural Treasure: The Galápagos Islands

By: Ed Lindquist and Yenis Bejas

Photos: Courtesy of Metropolitan Touring and Cuenca Expats Magazine

**Ed. Note:** This is the second in a four-part series exploring the Galapagos Islands. Go to Issue 41 to read Part 1.

### Your first decision—visit or explore?

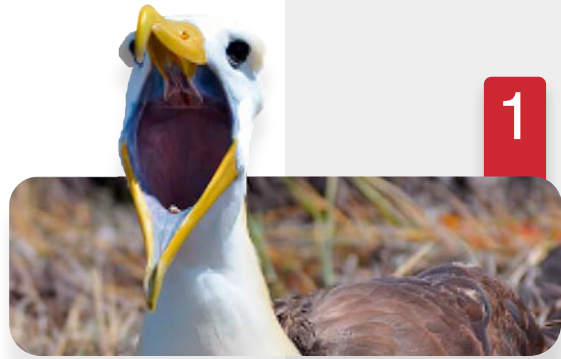
Galapagos is large—53,000 square miles. On the unique landscape of archipelagos, the size of Florida, there are 20 islands, 42 islets, and over 250 named rocks, plus species you cannot find anywhere else in the world. These animals have little fear of humans, so to view them in their own natural habitat is a life-changing experience. So, how many of the “Big 15” are you hoping to see? (You will be hearing a lot about the Big 15. They are the most iconic species you see on the islands.)

You may also want to consider the following questions before you go: Do I just want to snorkel or scuba dive and see the 400 species of fish and other under-water wonders? Am I active? Do I wish to hike the islands? How much time will I have on the islands? The more you learn about the islands the better you'll enjoy your trip—matching your itinerary to your interests.

The last thing you want to have happen is to travel all the way there only to end your journey with a bunch of “I-wish-I-had-seen-or-done” regrets. The best time to visit the islands is any time. The chart below shows land and water temperatures and wind factors. We thought it would be fun to visit the islands in the same month of the anniversary of Darwin's arrival some 187 years ago.

If you wish to explore (not just visit) the islands, how much time should you allow? Based on our experience, five or six days minimum.

Our journey was for six days, and we were only able to explore about one third of the islands we wanted to see. We chose to fly the one and a half hours to the islands on LATAM from Guayaquil.



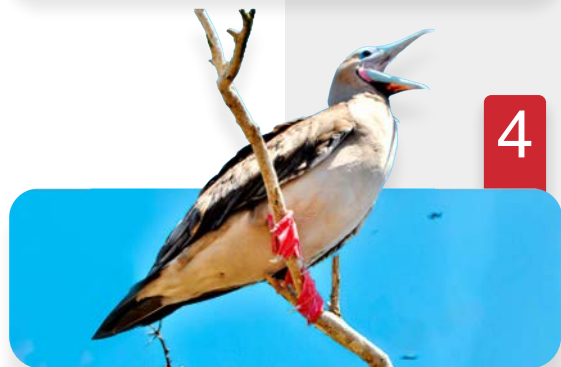
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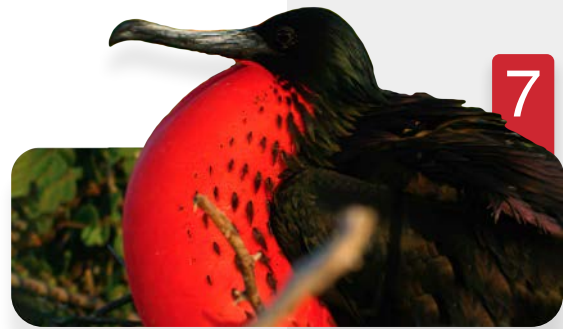
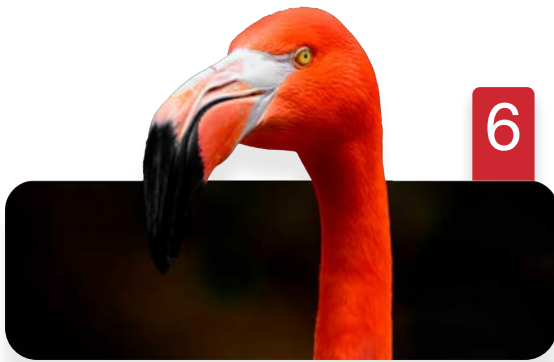
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5



Depending on the day, they have two to three flights to Baltra (the island airport in which we were headed) and one or two flights to the smaller airport on San Cristobal. The flight was full, so remember to book early. Like other educated people, we are concerned with the well-being of the earth and appreciate the delicate balance of the eco-systems on the islands. We wanted to make sure we left nothing behind other than our footprints. This was one of the reasons we chose Metropolitan Touring—a carbon neutral company. Metropolitan Touring will celebrate its 70th year in operation soon, and it was the pioneer along with the park service in creating modern tourism of the islands some 60 years ago.



We wanted to see the most islands and the most (Big 15) wildlife we could within the six days we had. Since the islands' area is 94% water, it seemed logical for us to choose to stay aboard a ship for the majority of our trip. Surprisingly, less than 40% of the visitors to the islands do so. The rest stay at land-based hotels, with many taking day trips to visit nearby islands. However, the best day trips are usually booked up early and difficult to get, and smaller day-boats can only go out 25 miles or so, which can limit your travels. And, there can be safety concerns regarding some of the island ferries. Make sure yours is not booked over capacity and there are life-vests for everyone: not locked somewhere inaccessible in case of an emergency.



Metropolitan has three vessels to choose from: the larger 90-passenger Santa Cruz II, the sailing yacht La Pinta (48 passengers), and the sailing yacht Isabela II (40 passengers). And, all vessels follow strict safety measures. We chose the Santa Cruz II. This ship has three sailing alternatives: five days/four nights to the west, five days/four nights north, and seven days/six nights east. The western itinerary fit perfectly into our schedule.



11



12



13



14



15



Before you decide on an itinerary, we would highly recommend you read “Choose Wisely Travel Smart”—helpful hints for any traveler to the Islands. Use the QR Code. Interestingly, all vessels must be Ecuadorian owned to visit the islands, and you must have a certified guide with you at all times on island wildlife tours.



**CHOOSE**  
TRAVEL SMART  
**WISELY**

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE YOUR GALAPAGOS CRUISE

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LATAM flies from Quito with connections in Guayaquil to the Islands. And, we recommend you book everything through Metropolitan. In this way, you can coordinate all your connections in case of a travel delay. When you check in (we joined the flight in GYE), it's almost like traveling to another country. Airport authorities want to make sure you are not carrying any prohibited items to the islands, such as plastic bottles, food, etc. You have to first check in with a government office to receive a form called a Transit Control Card to travel to the islands. It's \$20 per person. When you get in line, make sure you have your return ticket to show them, and keep the Transit Form they give you handy, as you'll need to present it to officials when you land on the islands. So off we went on LATAM's punctual departure to start our adventure.

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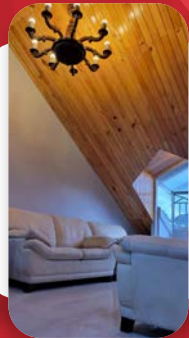
### Property # 401

- 🏠 Property Size: 2,153 ft<sup>2</sup>
- 🛏 Bedrooms/Bathrooms: 2/3
- 💰 Price: \$120.000
- 📍 Cuenca Area: Medio Ejido



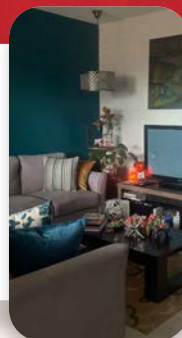
### Property # 402

- 🏠 Property Size: 1,550 ft<sup>2</sup>
- 🛏 Bedrooms/Bathrooms: 4/3
- 💰 Price: \$129.000
- 📍 Cuenca Area: Baños



### Property # 403

- 🏠 Property Size: 3,552 ft<sup>2</sup>
- 🛏 Bedrooms/Bathrooms: 3/1
- 💰 Price: \$250.000
- 📍 Cuenca Area: Primero de Mayo y las Américas



### Property # 404

- 🏠 Property Size: 1,024 ft<sup>2</sup>
- 🛏 Bedrooms/Bathrooms: 2/2
- 💰 Price: \$115.000
- 📍 Cuenca Area: Primero de Mayo, Misicata



### Property # 405

- 🏠 Property Size: 2,799 ft<sup>2</sup>
- 🛏 Bedrooms/Bathrooms: 4/3
- 💰 Price: \$240.000
- 📍 Cuenca Area: Urb. Privada de Río Sol

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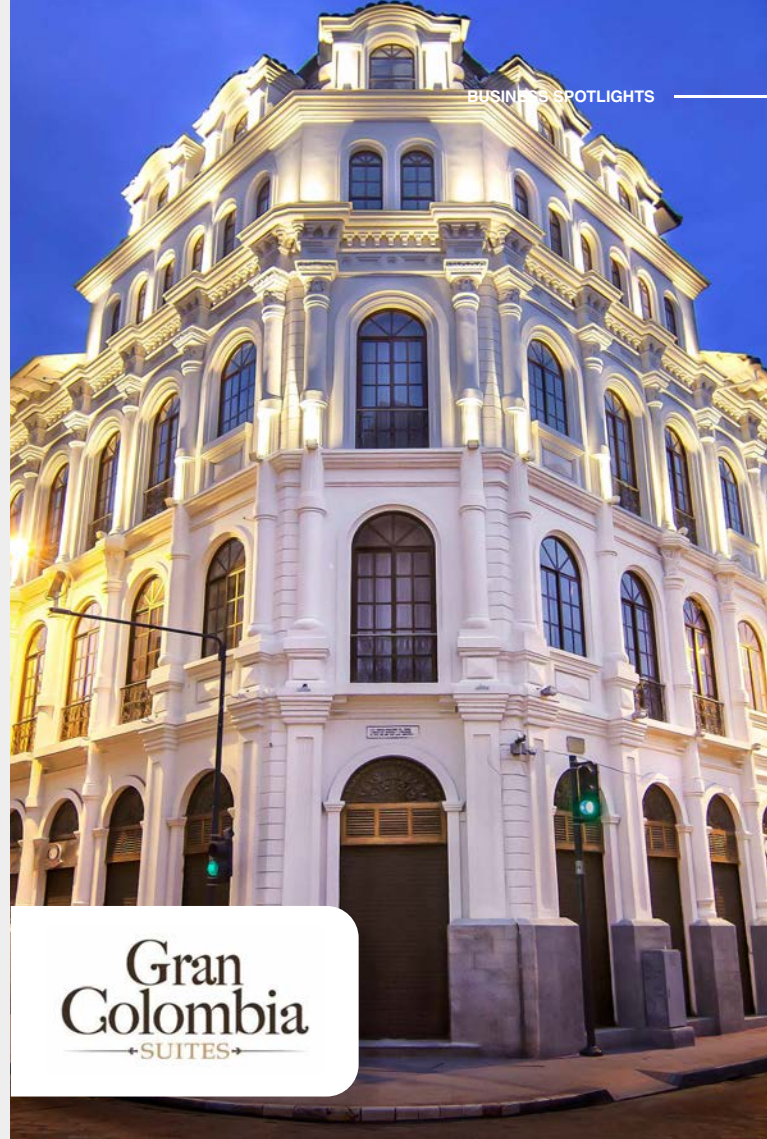
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# Gran Colombia Suites

## Celebrating Cuenca's Premier Extended Stay

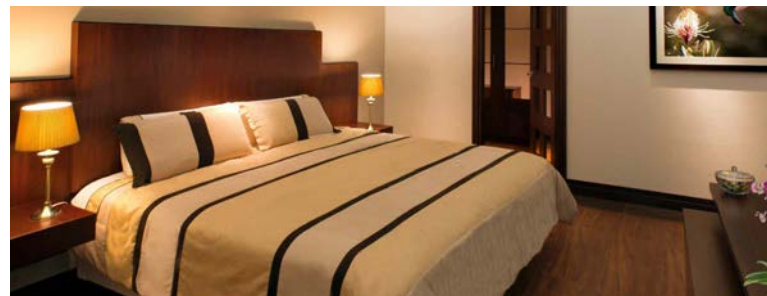
By Cuenca Expats Magazine Staff Writer

Gran Colombia Suites is going to be 10 years old soon! To celebrate, I jumped at the chance to tell about my experience there. When it was just opening, I was a guest for 4 months. Just me and the original French Tranvía engineers. Since then, the property has earned well-deserved praise from travelers from around the world and has the highest occupancy rate of any in town. And why not? Ably managed for the last 3 ½ years by Isabel Casajoana, the beautiful historic building is on the corner of Luis Cordero and Gran Colombia (a block from Parque Calderón). The structure was constructed by José Montesinos, It was operated for almost 30 years as "Hotel Patria." A two-year restoration project by the Vázquez Family was completed in 2014. It was transformed into executive suites for discerning travelers, who want to stay in El Centro and want to walk to numerous restaurants, museums, and explore the heart of the city.



When you enter Gran Colombia Suites, your eyes will be immediately drawn to the stunning design. Every element has been carefully perfected, from the art on the walls to the soaring atrium. After the bustle of El Centro, Gran Colombia Suites is remarkably peaceful and quiet. If you have ever tried to get a good night sleep in El Centro, you will here, because each Suite is spacious and comfortable, with a kitchen, large sitting areas, high ceilings, and palladium double panned windows, guests will have their very own lovely apartment. The one- or two-bedroom suites are fully furnished and beautifully decorated, so it's not hard to imagine moving in for a long visit. There is an on-site 24-hour Front Desk, Concierge and Security Service. Returning guests, when asked what they liked best about their stays at Gran Colombia Suites, they always comment how they love the beautiful building and rooms, the cleanliness of the place and the friendly staff that will do anything for you, having a 24-hour English-

speaker at the Front Desk, access to amenities with no extra cost, the safety, and the closeness to all the wonderful things in El Centro. Plus, there is unlimited, powerful hot showers! Gran Colombia Suites is wholeheartedly recommended by our very own Jan Loman who enjoyed her 2 weeks stay, immensely. It was there on my suite's dining table the dream of Cuenca Expat Magazine became a reality. The next time a friend asks for a recommend place to stay in Cuenca, I trust you'll do them a favor and recommend Gran Colombia Suites. I do all the time.



Gran Colombia Suites is offering discounts if you book directly through their website [www.grancolombiasuites.com](http://www.grancolombiasuites.com) or their email [info@grancolombiasuites.com](mailto:info@grancolombiasuites.com) or call them to +59372829862. You will experience the best stay in Cuenca.

# Introducing Bonsai Sushi

## Let Your Taste Buds Embark on an Extraordinary Journey of Flavors.

BY: Cuenca Expats Magazine Staff Writer  
 Photos: Courtesy of Bonsai Sushi

If you live in the west part of town, you're in for a real treat. A fantastic new sushi restaurant has opened, conveniently located near Mathew Bagels Store on the tranvia line. The restaurant opened earlier this year to the delight of expat sushi lovers. Venezuelan high school friends Ederwin Báez, Robin Contreras and Edwin Báez own Bonsai Sushi. For over 12 years they learned their trade first in Caracas. Later, each separated and migrated to different countries to hone their skills. In 2021, they decided to come back together and develop the team skills necessary for allowing them to follow their dreams of owning their own restaurant.

They all migrated to Ecuador. Cuenca was selected as their first restaurant site because of its safety and growing international vibe. The owners have put a priority on the quality and freshness of their seafood and their customer service.



Customers love the way the chefs combine Thai and Chinese flavors creating a greater fusion for their Japanese food. Unique to Bonsai Sushi. There is a surprisingly wide menu selection from classic rolls to more creative and innovative dishes. Expat favorites include the Special Alaska, the bonsai roll, edamame, and the tempura squid. Whether you're seeking a memorable dining experience, a delightful takeout treat, or catering for your special event, they've got you covered. Their dedication to exceptional customer service ensures that every visit to Bonsai Sushi is an unforgettable one. **Come visit today!**

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