

# CUENCA experts

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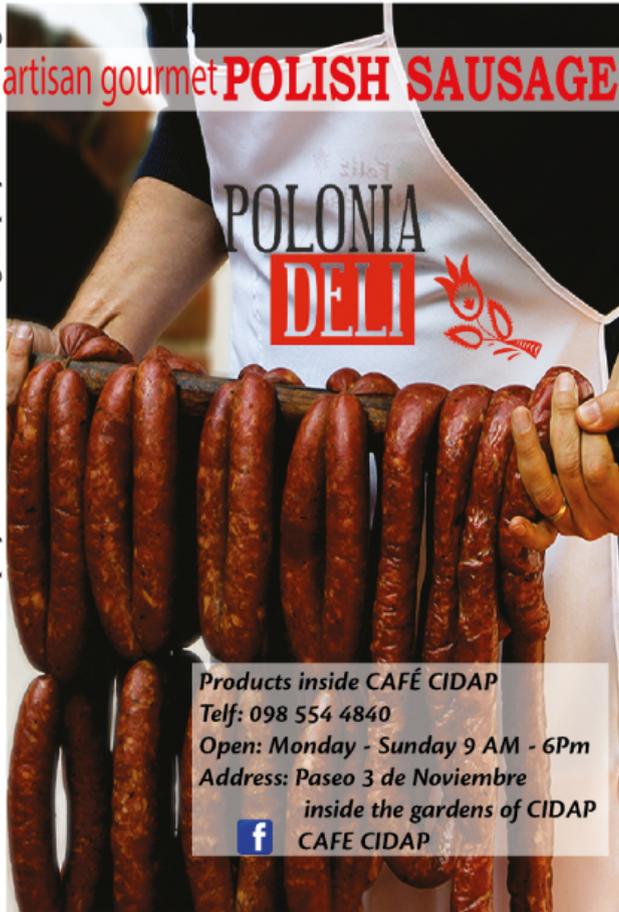
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# CUENCA expats magazine

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**37**

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# PUBLISHER'S LETTER



Hello, Beautiful Cuenca!

My goodness, we have had some beautiful, sunny skies lately. The sunsets have been just as magnificent. I can feel the warmer weather coming! It is our little hint that the holiday season is just around the corner. I can't wait to see the entire city of Cuenca, with its towering Christmas tree, river lights, and holiday decorations everywhere. As the festivities begin, I hope that each of you have a joyous and safe season.

Time sure flies by in Cuenca. It was four years ago that we first featured Maite Duran from Gringo Visas on our magazine cover. We are honored to have her back as she shares the many new changes in visa policies and regulations. You can read up on these and the many other services her office provides on page 4. Welcome back to the cover Maite.

One special event that I was recently able to be a part of was the Halloween Spooktacular. This annual event is held for the women and children of Casa Maria Amor, a battered women's shelter. Turn to page 19 to read up on this amazing celebration and how the expat community came together to ensure that these little ghosts and goblins had a fun and sticky Halloween experience.

Exciting News! Cuenca Expats Magazine was able to gain an exclusive interview with the Honorable Xavier Martínez, the new Governor of Azuay. Of real interests to expats is his belief that the Governor's Expat Humanitarian Award has been very positive for the community and he is excited to see it continue. The next tentative event date is set for May 2020. More details will be given after the first of the year, but start thinking of your nominees now.

Best regards to all,

*Melody J. Crabb*

*Ps Cuenca Expats Magazine is celebrating its 4th anniversary of publishing. For an interesting interview with Managing Partner Ed Lindquist on the Magazine's history, you'll find the video on Cuenca Expats Magazine Facebook, or go to Youtube and type in Cuenca Expats Magazine.*

## CONTRIBUTORS



Native New Yorker **Madelaine Barry** came to Ecuador in August of 2016 from Chiangmai, Thailand. Before that, she taught for eight years at an international school in Shanghai, China. She appreciates the chance to meet her interviewees, whom she might never have met otherwise.



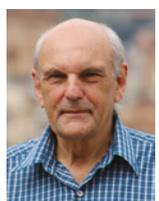
**Tom Larsen** is a local expat author. Read his new short mystery "Aliento del Diablo" set in Cuenca in the upcoming September/October Issue of "Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine" or follow him on Amazon: <http://www.amazon.com/TOM-LARSEN/e/B00N00JLZM>



**Teresa Drake**, formerly of Florida, moved to Cuenca with her husband, 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.



**Hugh Prather**, a native of Charlotte, NC. is a former Vice President with Charles Schwab. Hugh along with his wife, Rosalba have created 2 businesses over the past 3 years. Ecuador USA Roses is a farm direct to client online retailer and Hit Attractions Trading, is the exclusive distributor for Portuguese Wines, and other fine products.



**John Keeble** has been writing for more than half a century. Today he uses his experience in writing, photography, and videography as a media volunteer helping NGOs and individuals to present their causes to the wider public. In 2016 he came to Ecuador for a year of writing and photography but soon became involved with an animal rescue team after the earthquake caused massive damage along the coast. [john.keeble2712@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:john.keeble2712@yahoo.co.uk) / [www.johnkeeble.net](http://www.johnkeeble.net)



**Jeff Salz.** Google 'anthropologist/adventurer' and at the top of all listings is one guy—Jeff Salz. Celebrated as "America's Leading Anthropologist and Adventurer" by both the Discovery Channel and History Channel, Jeff is a member of the prestigious Speaker Hall of Fame and author of *The Way of Adventure: Transforming Your Life and Work with Spirit and Vision* (published by John Wiley and Sons). Reach Jeff at: [www.wayofadventure.com](http://www.wayofadventure.com).



Marcos Chilusia  
Founder EcuAssist



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educational feature



## Beetroot & Walnut Bread

Photograph by Luis Nieto

**Beetroot is such a versatile vegetable you can enjoy it in both sweet and savory dishes, and it can be enjoyed for breakfast, brunch, or as a healthy snack. It is made without yeast so doesn't require kneading. This quick bread with beetroot and walnuts is moist yet fluffy and moderately sweet. We make this beet bread super nutritious by using a mixture flour.**

*Matthew Bagel Store is an American-Jewish bakery and cake shop. It caters mainly to expats who reside in Cuenca, Ecuador. Matthew Bagel Store provides a variety of mature and fresh cheeses imported from different parts of Europe. It also offers wines and of course the famous Dill Pickles (olives, eggplant, etc.).*

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# GRINGO VISAS

PERMANENT RESIDENT VISAS

## Why Go Anywhere Else? Maite Duran, Gringo Visas

By Teresa Drake

*Photographs Courtesy of Tiro Al Blanco and Gringo Visas*

So, you want to get a visa to live in Ecuador, and specifically Cuenca. Where do you go? Do you go to your friend's friend who is a taxi driver who facilitates for them? How about the gringo you just met who swears he knows a super quick and cheap way? How do you decide?

If you are smart, you go to a professional whose specialty is visas. And not just any professional; you'll go to see Maite Duran, founder of Gringo Visas. She is the ultimate authority on the procurement of visas and cédulas in Cuenca. Ms. Duran's name may sound familiar

to many of you and it should. Four years ago, Ms. Duran was featured in an article in this magazine, which covered her as a rising star in the world of procurement of visas and cédulas for people desiring to relocate from their native countries to Ecuador. Today she is the authority on visas.

Maite (pronounced my-tay) has been helping expats obtain their residency visas since 2010. Although Maite was born in Ecuador, she moved to the United States as a teenager where she attended and graduated high school and college. She enjoyed a successful career in real estate



Photo:

Maite and her Gringo Visas  
Cuenca Staff

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

***Maite helps her clients find the right type of visa that will work for them. She does this by asking the right questions. It is this attention to detail that resulted in Maite providing more visas for expats than anyone else.***

and finance, but the pull of Ecuador and wanting to be closer to her family found her returning to Cuenca.

She got her start working for a company in Cuenca that offered relocation services, ultimately becoming their visa specialist. It was during this time that Maite saw a rapidly growing need for a service that would not only specialize in visas, but also deliver the level of customer service that expats expected. Maite founded the headquarters of Gringo Visas in Cuenca. The office consists of a multi-lingual team including immigration attorneys and additional legal counsel in Ecuador's capital Quito. To be of the utmost benefit to her clients, she and her staff visit immigration headquarters at

least once a week. With the number of North American expats wanting to relocate to Ecuador on the rise, Maite opened a fully staffed office in Danbury, Connecticut to better meet the needs of her clients. The Danbury office allows North Americans to begin the procedures necessary to obtain their residency visas. Maite has become the authority in Cuenca on the ins and outs of procuring visas and cédulas and has been successful in processing all types of visas, as well as legal documents, for thousands of expats from all around the world.

Maite takes her responsibilities seriously to provide the best service, legal advice, and counsel to her clients, and she strives to provide the best experience possible. To that end, either she or a member of her staff travel to the government offices in Quito to check on the requirements and documentation needed to obtain a residency visa. By going this extra step, she and her office are not caught off guard by a change in the law or the documents needed. The laws in Ecuador can and do change rapidly and only by keeping her finger on the government pulse is she able to provide up-to-date information. This focus on customer service and the ability to provide informative answers and solutions to her clientele is what has endeared Maite to so many happy expats. If something changes, clients are notified immediately so that they are not caught unaware. The last thing anyone wants is to arrive in Ecuador, travel to Machala, Azogues or wherever and discover that their documentation is incomplete, incorrect, or has expired.

Maite helps her clients find the right type of visa that will work for them. She does this by asking the right questions. It is this attention to detail that resulted in Maite providing more visas for expats than anyone else. When an expat obtains a visa or cédula, the occasion is celebrated by a photograph evidencing the happy clients holding their visa or cédula. Because Maite and Gringo Visas only do visas, they have become the number one authority on visas in Cuenca.

So, why do you need a visa expert and who needs to apply for an Ecuadorian visa? Having a visa expert is a must to avoid problems in the processing and obtaining of your



Maite on the first cover of Cuenca Expats Magazine

> cover story

visa and/or cédula. While your friend's friend may have successfully helped them get their visa eight years ago, times and laws have changed as have governmental rules, regulations, and fees. Why play Russian roulette with your money, your time, and your peace of mind. It makes more sense to do something of this importance correctly the first time and not be caught off guard with changes in the laws or requirements.

By having an office in Danbury, Connecticut, Maite and Gringo Visas can help expats obtain their temporary visas before coming to Ecuador. This saves time and money as all the original documents are checked before the visa application is submitted to the nearest Ecuadorian Consulate. There are no fears of traveling to Ecuador only to find out one or more of your documents were prepared incorrectly or have expired and finding it necessary to return to the United States to get new documents.

For more information, you can visit Gringo Visas on Facebook, go to their website at [www.gringovisas.com](http://www.gringovisas.com), or visit them at their office at Av. Ordóñez Lasso 7-86 y Calle de los Claveles, Riverview Building, second floor #3. You can also email Maite at [info@gringovisas.com](mailto:info@gringovisas.com) or call either the Cuenca office at +593 98 915 3622 or in the U.S. by calling the Danbury, Connecticut office at (203) 648-4511. Gringo Visas is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. (closed for lunch) and 2 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. They are closed on Saturday and Sunday, but available by special appointment.

Remember, Gringo Visas is committed to obtaining your residential visa quickly, easily and at an affordable price. Maite also offers free consultations, so you can get all your questions answered upfront at no cost. Gringo Visas, in addition, provides a wide range of visa related services, so one stop is all you need.

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After 21-months can apply for permanent residency

Note: \$1,450 Adult dependents, \$750 children under 18

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Assistance to open a bank account  
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Transportation to government offices

Can leave up to 90 days each year

After 21 months can apply for permanent residency

### Investor \$1,550

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Pre-approval by immigration attorney  
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Notarize documents in Ecuador  
Power of Attorney for CD deposit (\$40,000 min.)  
Register investment with Central Bank of Ecuador  
Government fees \$450  
Cédula processing and fees

\*Property Lien Registration add \$300

No restrictions on travel on main applicant.

After 21-months can apply for permanent residency.

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# GRINGO VISAS

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# Amelia and JP

## Our Unconventional Life

By JP Stonestreet - Photographs Courtesy of Amelia and JP



Amelia and JP



Mercado Shopping

We were living the dream. We owned a nice house in the suburbs of Denver, Colorado. We drove nice cars. We had a nice, conventional life. But then everything changed.

One afternoon, while walking Daisy (one of our dogs) around the neighborhood, I found it increasingly difficult to lift my feet. My legs felt heavier and heavier with each step. I had noticed some strange nerve sensations over the previous few months but never weakness like this.

Struggling to walk, I finally made it home and called Amelia, then my doctor. An hour later, I was in the doctor's office getting my blood drawn. They ran a battery of tests to see if I had ALS or some other terrifying neurological disease. My life flashed before my eyes. Luckily, those tests came back negative.

The next step was an MRI which revealed a shattered disc in my neck that had nearly pinched off my spinal cord plus three pancaked discs in my lower back. Soon after, I was in emergency surgery to replace the disc in my neck, and four months later I was in surgery again for a 5-level lumbar fusion. My spine was literally falling apart at age 43. My life would never be the same.

Those two surgeries cost nearly one million dollars. My insurance covered most of it, right before they dropped me, but my new insurance was going to cost \$1,200/month. After being out of work for almost a year while I relearned how to walk and manage the pain, that was simply unaffordable. We didn't know what to do.

The whole experience made us take stock of our lives. We asked ourselves if any of it really mattered. The house?

The cars? The stuff? The dream? We were given the gift of more life just when we thought it was about to end, and we didn't want to waste it.

That's when we made the decision to sell everything we owned, move to South America with our two dogs, and live our unconventional life in Cuenca, Ecuador. We chose Ecuador for a variety of reasons, one being the excellent, affordable healthcare which is something I have to think about for the rest of my life.

After we had been living in Cuenca for a year, we decided to start sharing our story and our lives on YouTube. We wanted to encourage other people to take a risk: to live a different, more intentional and meaningful life.

Since we first pressed record on my camera a year ago, we've posted over 130 videos sharing nearly every aspect of our expat lives here in Cuenca. From trips to the mercado to an interview with a health insurance agent to a procedure performed on Amelia by our favorite dentist. If you want to know something about Cuenca, we've probably covered it, or we soon will.

We post our expat videos every Tuesday and Saturday (and sometimes Thursday) at 2 pm ET on our YouTube channel, "Amelia and JP." We've been told our videos are very informational, but many of our subscribers say they watch just to smile and laugh along with us. We sincerely hope our "joie de vivre" is contagious!

Amelia and I are so fortunate and thankful to be living our unconventional life here in Cuenca, Ecuador. We hope you'll join us on YouTube for our incredible adventure.



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# Irma LaFrentz

## Helping Cuenca's At-Risk Women

By Tom Larsen

Photograph Courtesy of Globalpress Connections, Inc.



After three years in Cuenca, Irmgard (Irma) LaFrentz recently returned to her home, friends and family in California's Silicon Valley. But Irma left behind quite a legacy of giving in her short time here.

In 1984 Irma emigrated from her native Germany to the United States, where she started a highly successful Silicon Valley international public relations agency: Globalpress Connections, Inc. How did she end up in Cuenca? Let's find out.

"A big part of running a successful business is the connections you make," she said. "In 2009 I started attending Rotary meetings in Cupertino, CA to add community work to my life. Soon, I found myself heavily involved and became the Youth Counselor for the local Rotary Student Exchange Program."

"We had a young student from Challuabamba named Carolina Tamariz Malo. Her first host family was not a good match, so I was able to move her to the home of my best friends. They instantly became a real family. In 2013 I visited Carolina and her family [in Ecuador--the Tamariz Malo family] and

fell in love with Ecuador and its people. After retirement in 2016 I was looking for some adventure. Carolina's mother said, 'You have friends and family in Ecuador. Why not come here?' So, I did."

Irma soon discovered that she wasn't ready for retirement in the true sense. Not cut out for a life of leisure, she began to look around for an organization that needed her help, one where she could use her skillset to make some real change in people's lives at a basic level.

Irma began volunteering with the Fundación Casa María Amor, a local organization that provides shelter, basic education and job skills training for more than one hundred women and their families each year. All these women have suffered physical, emotional and sexual abuse.

The organization's fundraising director told Irma that they needed to upgrade their promotional materials.

"What we need," she said, "is someone who can make a good PowerPoint® presentation."

"No," Irma chuckled. "This is the twenty-first century. We need a video that is compelling and tells the story of the victims of domestic violence."

Irma created the concept for the video "A Place to Restart Life" —three women talking about their journeys—and with the help of Esteban Amon, a young Cuencano videographer, concept became reality within three months.

To get the video done quickly, Irma provided most of the funding from her own pocket, and it became a cornerstone of the group's fundraising efforts. Diana Vázquez, coordinator of Fundación Mujeres con Éxito, a sister organization to Casa María Amor, presented the video during her two-week trip to the US, establishing new connections with other shelters.

Find the video on Youtube as "Casa María Amor."

In 2018 came Irma's biggest idea. Her local Rotary Club was willing to underwrite a global grant if Irma could find a local club in Cuenca to partner on the grant application. Irma admits it was a challenge to write a grant within a different culture: differences in work style and communication. But after fifteen months of hard work, a Rotary Global Grant for \$48k was approved. Rotary Club Tomebamba is responsible to spend the available funds for more and better therapies for the women and children, to add a vegetable garden to the existing greenhouse and to install a better water system.

Irma stays in contact with the foundation directors and is always looking for new opportunities to help this important cause. She says that she will return to Cuenca as often as she can--hopefully next Spring to visit with expat and Cuenca friends, her Tamariz Malo family, and to get her street food and mercado fix. If you see her, be sure to say hello, and thank you.

# How Dreams Come True Heavenly Hacienda Santa Ana

By Jeff Salz - Photographs by Jeff Salz



**I**t is as exotic and dreamy a destination as anyone's imagination could create: crimson flowers bloom in lush green fields, purebred ponies prance, wide-eyed llamas graze and gaze from beneath massive guardian stone arches half-a-millennium old. Catch a morning flight from Cuenca to Quito, grab a cab at the airport and you'll be enjoying fine Ecuadorian-urban cuisine on the lawn in the shade the world's highest active volcano before noon. Welcome to the world of Hacienda Santa Ana de Cotopaxi.

But the best is yet to come. You are about to meet the entirely remarkable woman who runs the place.

"Everything starts with a dream," explains Rocio Zalumbide, scarcely able to contain her excitement. She's wide-eyed with child-like wonder, thrilling to her own tale. "We were engaged. I was twenty-one and Javier was twenty-six. Our dream was of a place in the middle of nowhere, somewhere to take our kids so they could spend time discovering nature the way we had. We bought four bridles: one each for me and my husband and two more for our sons who would be coming soon - even if we did not know when. We married. Five years later, near Salinas de Ibarra, we saw a guy riding a beautiful horse. I told my husband to stop the car because I wanted to buy that horse. He said: *You are crazy. We don't have any place to put a horse!* He was right, of course, but I reminded him that his uncle had a place nearby. Maybe he can could pasture it for us."



Rocío Zalumbide with Jaffe

"When I asked the guy how much of the horse he was riding, he said, *This horse is not for sale. But if you pay me five hundred sucres I'll sell it to you.* I rode the horse and knew right away this was the one. We bought the horse." Years passed. In search of greener pastures, Rocio and Javier kept relocating the horse in the direction of Cotapaxi never suspecting they were inching ever closer to their dream.

In 1993 while Rocio was out of the country Javier heard about a five acres property with a battered old house amid the ruins of a Jesuit settlement dating back to 1604. With only hours to make a decision, he mustered the money and closed the deal.

"When I returned home all he said was: *I bought a house. It's very high and it is very cold.* I was terribly sad because I had rheumatism and knew I could never live in such a cold place. My arms and legs would hurt so badly." Heartbroken, Rocio told her husband: "I don't want to even hear about the place because I can't live there. I'd never be able to sleep and be in constant pain."

On her first visit from Quito her perspective shifted. "What I saw was heaven! Beautiful land with mountains all around. Even though the ceiling had fallen and filled the kitchen with deep mud, walls had collapsed and water was pouring in from all sides - when I saw the house I said: I don't care if my arms and legs hurt... this is my dream. And you know what? My arms and legs never hurt. Here my body was happy. It was like this place was telling me: *Don't worry. Everything is going to be okay. We need you here.* It was as if the spirits of this place knew I was going to take care of it the way they wanted it to be cared for. I can't explain it but when I first arrived it was like I was being hugged by the entire property. Now the place I can't sleep is Quito."

Working tirelessly, Rocio and Javier reconstructed and expanded the house gathering the scattered stones that had once formed the centuries-old chapel. They built new walls, installed a giant fireplace, beautiful kitchen and exquisitely comfy rooms with heated floors. Decorative artifacts hearken back to the hacienda's Jesuit origins. Rich colors, lush textiles, burnished wood, deep shadows invite expansiveness and relaxation. Today the feeling transcends the *religious*. The space is simply *sacred*.

"The priests say these stones are *encarnadas*," explains Rocio. "They have absorbed so much peace that you when you spend time among them you can't help but feel it inside of yourself. That's really what I sell here. I sell peace. If you want to feel peace, come a visit. The music is soft. The fire is warm. Outside there is plenty of activity – climb the volcanoes, bicycle or ride the horses. Inside however... time stops."

"Everything starts with a dream," Rocio reminds us. "Let your mind dream. Let your soul dream. Let you dream grow till it is as large as you life. Next thing you know it has become your life. Then comes the best part - you get to live it."

You can reach Rocio Zalumbide and Hacienda Santa Ana de Cotopaxi at  
[sales@santaanacotopaxi.com](mailto:sales@santaanacotopaxi.com)  
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Photographs Courtesy of Cuenca Expats Magazine



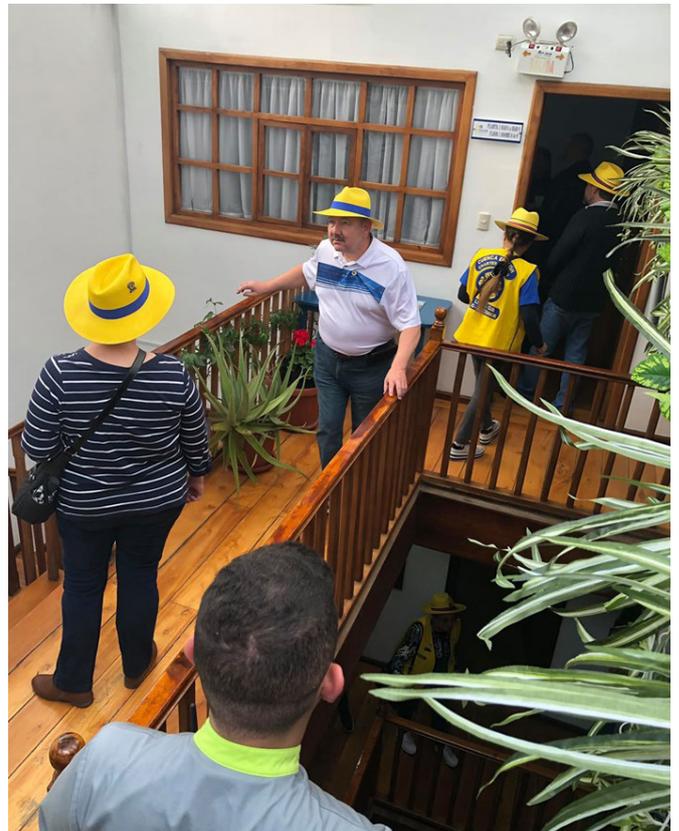
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Sharon showing extended-stay apartment



Sharon showing extended-stay apartment



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*Photographs Courtesy of Cuenca Expats Magazine*



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# Dolores Rodas

## Half-Century Expat

By Madelaine Barry - Photographs Courtesy of Dolores Rodas

You know how it is when you're introduced to a new person. After you've established names, the first question that comes to mind is "How long have you lived here?" Well, imagine my surprise when Dolores Rodas said, "Fifty two years. Yes, that's right, fifty two years!"



Dolores met her husband Edgar Rodas, Ecuador's former Minister of Health, when she was in nursing school in Miami Beach. As fate would have it, American doctors who were docked in Ecuador on the Ship Hope, a floating free surgical hospital, met Edgar. They were so impressed by Dr. Rodas that they offered him a yearlong scholarship to shadow them in the eight different hospitals of which they were affiliated. A chance meeting in Miami's Mt. Sinai Hospital's operating room and later eye contact in the cafeteria, sparked an attraction that would blossom into a romance, though long distance at times. Both sets of parents were very traditional, so Edgar and Dolores were concerned that this cross-cultural relationship would not be accepted, but that did not turn out to be the case at all.

Before they married in April 1967, nine doctor colleagues asked Edgar if he wanted to participate in starting a new clinic in Cuenca. He said, "Yes!", and that was the beginning of Hospital Santa Inés where three of the Rodas' children were born.

When Dolores and Edgar returned to the sandy runways of Cuenca Airport, they lived in a small apartment that Edgar's parents had added onto their home. She spoke no Spanish but Edgar's mother lovingly took on the task of acclimating her to the culture and the language. This was greatly appreciated since Dolores came to Cuenca

pregnant with their first child. Their daughter Diana came first, followed by Edgar, Christian, and finally, Paul.

Years later, Dolores would begin a 25 year career teaching English to medical students at the University of Cuenca. Meanwhile, Edgar's surgical practice was flourishing, but he had a dream to create something similar to the Ship Hope, a mobile surgical unit. After 15 years of securing the funding domestically and internationally, the Cinterandes Foundation was created. The 24-foot chassis of a Winnebago was retrofitted with an operating table and all the tools needed. Its home is on the grounds of the University of Cuenca where planned surgeries are performed on Tuesdays. Patients are meticulously pre-screened, and procedures are only on those deemed at low risk for complications. Those needing overnight recovery are transported across the street to Santa Inés. After the 2016 earthquake, the Cinterandes Foundation was there for support. Sometimes, Dolores explains, poor rural patients would pay in chickens, cheese, or eggs. There have been zero deaths in over 10,000 surgeries--a record of which to be proud!

Sadly, Edgar passed away three years ago.



Driving around Cuenca with Dolores was a treat as she explained all the changes she's seen in the past 50 years. Raymipampa Café-Restaurante in Parque Calderón, both cathedrals, the University of Cuenca, and Colegio Benigno Malo were here, but the majority of the town as we know it was farmland and swamps.

I do not know if I can call Dolores "The Town Historian," but she's surely seen it grow into the UNESCO site we now call home.

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## You Can't Beat a Healthy Heart Time for a Check-Up?

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# Introducing Samay Restaurant Cocina Nikkei & Sushi

By Hugh Prather - Photographs Courtesy of Ecuador Fine Dining

As you enter Restaurante Samay Cocina Nikkei & Sushi, one quickly realizes that the fine art of sushi isn't something to take lightly and is being taken to an extraordinary level in Cuenca, thanks to native Cuencano Eduardo Ronquillo and his wife from Spain, Christina. The word "samay" means "alma" or "love" and love is exactly what Eduardo and his wife Christina put into each of their culinary creations, taking care of all the details of taste, color and presentation. It's a love for perfection in creating their Nikkei Fusion cuisine.

At the age of 17, Eduardo knew he wanted to be a chef, and he attended the acclaimed gastronomic school CECAEM for 2 1/2 years. In 2008 Eduardo was offered the opportunity to work in Spain at the fine dining restaurant, La Trufa Negra. Then it was on to Madrid. In 2016, he worked 1 and 1/2 years as Sushi head Chef with Chef Luis Arevalo at Kena Restaurant which specializes in Nikkei cuisine.

Chef Eduardo learned how to deliver fusion dishes from the extensive restaurant's menu invented by Executive Chef, Alberto Chicote: fusion dishes such as pineapple ravioli in lemon verbena soup with coconut ice cream, confit quail with crispy artichokes, and traditional sushi and sashimi.

It was then off to Ibiza and the Ibiza Grand Hotel--the unique 5-star luxury hotel with its exclusive restaurant, La Gaia. La Gaia specializes in a dining experience of typical Japanese influences of the Kaiseki tradition and serves dinner in an authentic wraparound ceremony created to engulf all of your senses.

After the Grand Hotel, Eduardo was asked to work with the world known sushi Nobu Restaurant franchise in their Ibiza location. For two years as a sous chef, perfection was most impressed on Eduardo while serving up to 400 diners per night. When asked what he learned there, he had three words for me: "Perfection, Perfection, Perfection." Visit and become a part of the family. Restaurante Samay Cocina Nikkei & Sushi is open every day except Monday and is located at Luis Moreno Mora 3-71 Cuenca, Ecuador.



Owners Eduardo and Christina



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# Meet Your New Governor

Interview of the Honorable Xavier Martínez by Ed Lindquist,  
Managing Partner of Cuenca Expats Magazine



The Governor with Cuenca Expats Magazine's Maite Duran and Ed Lindquist

Governor Martínez is no stranger to the expat community having attended many past public events as the *Jefe Político del Cantón Cuenca* (regions head political officer) for over six months. Governor Martínez was born in Cuenca and is a law graduate of the University of Azuay. In Ecuador, the governor is appointed by the president and his primary duty is security of the province. Something Cuenca's expat community will be happy to hear is that the new governor is very supportive of the *Governor's Expat Humanitarian Award* and plans for the third event are scheduled for next May. We appreciated him taking time to talk with us at his office at Parque Calderon despite his very busy schedule, having just been appointed governor in early October. Here is a summary of our conversation.

### *What are the primary duties of a governor?*

Mainly, the function of the governor is to be the representative of the president of the republic, in this case, in the Province of Azuay, and to coordinate and discuss with the different institutions that belong and are managed by the government: the services, programs and projects. Also important, of course, is to have that political approach with the different authorities at the level of the province. One of our main objectives is to have channels of dialogue with the social sectors that help us to improve policies within Azuay.

At this time, we are working on different projects that are close to our citizens. One of them is with respect to security. We walk through the neighborhoods of the city of Cuenca, through the parishes, and we are also making constant visits to cantons--mainly the rural areas--to know if services are actually being provided (services for elderly adults, children, etc.). We, as a national government, have a "Whole Life" plan, with the specific purpose of protecting people from conception until their last years of life. Based on that, we are checking if the national government programs are being instated, and most importantly, if they are running well.

### *What are your top priorities as the new Governor?*

We have two specific points that we are working on: the first is security. We are very focused on dealing with some important problems as far as this topic is concerned. Cuenca, as well as the Province of Azuay, is in full development. The fact of being industrial and commercial has generated growth in the city; we could not say that Cuenca is the same as 30 or 40 years ago. To begin with, the number of inhabitants has doubled, which has also contributed to this growth, and social problems such as crime have come about as a result. Therefore, one of our objectives regarding security is to seek strategies together with the Department of National Police (and even jointly with the army and other security institutions) to achieve

lower rates of insecurity and violence. Up to now, we have made some important advances: We have managed to lower the rate of violent deaths compared to the period of the previous year. And this is significant because it is work that is being developed with the national police.

Also, we have a second objective, which is to verify if areas are effectively complying with the different programs. For example, we are looking into the CEDEI, the nurseries of children with vulnerability, and also the programs for older adults such as "My Best Years." Another of the projects is MIDUVI, which is "The House for All," basically, which provides homes for people in a state of vulnerability (elderly, disabled or in conditions of extreme poverty). In this specific program, an important survey has been achieved, and in two weeks we hope to begin the construction of houses throughout the Province of Azuay, a fact that is important to make known.

In addition, we also have other programs such as "The Doctor of the Neighborhood" whose function is personalized medical care at home for those people who for certain reasons cannot reach a medical center. In short, they are quite significant projects that need to be addressed. To sum up, my main priorities at the moment are security and these social sector projects.



### ***What are the greatest challenges you face as the new governor?***

The lack of a budget--the lack of financial resources. It has been a big problem because it has led us to make strong decisions as a national government. Many of the actions we have carried out have, of course, been with the help of the state, but also with the help of private institutions. So, it is good to point out that one of the objectives of the national government is precisely to avoid becoming more indebted and to use our resources. For example, with the elimination of the fuel subsidy, we would be able to invest in education, health, and security, which are areas where we need more of these economic resources.

Also, the idea is that we have a revival at the national agro level. In May we re-cultivate and sow. We want to turn it into a productive and positive activity for citizens.

### ***What do you want to say to the 10,000-member English-speaking expat community in Azuay?***

Well, we have indeed noticed that they are extremely important, and they are a welcomed contribution--all the people who have come from different countries, mainly from the United States, to reside here. I think it is important to have a magazine in which information can be provided, such as information about what is happening in the country, in our city, and in our province. Then, they could have real information of where to go, what to do, and how to get or perform different activities. It also seems important to me that through Cuenca Expats we can meet the expats that have made the important decision to come to live in our territory, and also to be able to have that closeness with them. Namely, that they see the important work we have been developing and support our efforts. We are also aware that the expats that have come to reside in Cuenca contribute financially, and not only that, but also support the city, the province and the people with their work. So it is very important to be able to reach those 10,000 expats to establish a positive relationship.

### ***Anything else we should have asked?***

I would like to thank Cuenca Expats Magazine for giving this space to the government in order to communicate with the expats that reside here in our beloved Province of Azuay, which offers many benefits. Also, something we are working on is promoting tourism in the province, an issue that is important for us. With the national police we have created a specialized unit: "The Tourism Police." It would support tourists who come to visit with information and also, of course, with protection, care, and security in all tourist areas of the city and the Province of Azuay.

It should be noted that tourism is fundamental, and in fact we have thought about changing our concept of tourism, since we have to be aware that the oil will gradually end. The idea is to exploit the natural wealth that we have in our country. We also have the four regions: sierra, costa, east, and of course our island region, Galapagos, recognized worldwide. So, I consider it very important to train personnel on this subject. This can even generate sources of employment (whether hotel, restaurant, or customer service). Then we would all have economic resources generated in a positive way.

Following this line, we are starting some projects that will support our artisans, i.e. people who generate products of the province so that they can be known. We also want one of the mandatory stops for tourists to be the Azuay Governorate as well as different cantons, since Cuenca is not the only tourist point. Each of these 15 cantons has its benefits and its attractiveness, its own characteristics; and it would be very nice if they could be recognized too.



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# Casa María Amor's Halloween Spooktacular

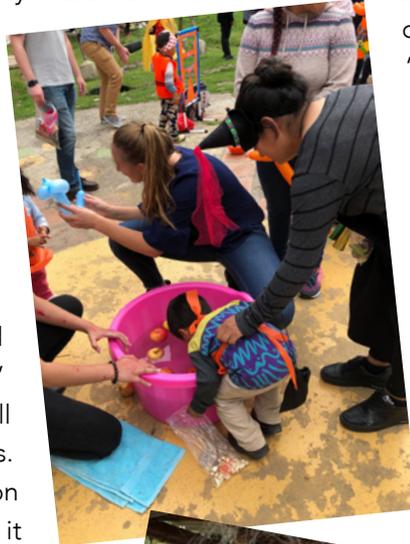
By Melody J. Crabb

Photographs Courtesy of Casa Maria Amor

Halloween has always been my favorite holiday. However, as a parent of a diabetic child, this holiday was also a challenge for my family. It was difficult to explain to a 6-year old why a holiday, celebrated primarily with candy and sweets, had to look different for her. It was then that I contacted the American Diabetes Association in my area and we hosted our own "Diabetic Halloween Festival" with games, prizes, and sweets, all appropriate for children with diabetes. They even played "Pin the Pancreas on the Skeleton." I am honored to say it has continued to be an annual event.

In 2018, over lunch, I shared this story with Susan McBride. As I was talking, I could see her eyes light up and her brain churning. It was then that I knew something great was about to happen. Susan, a big supporter and organizer for Casa Maria Amor/Mujeres Con Exito, explained to me that she has always wanted to have an American-style Halloween party for the children at the shelter. "The traumatized women and children of Casa Maria strive each day to bring normalcy into their lives. So, how do we bring smiles to sad faces with bitter memories?" After several brainstorming sessions, the first annual HALLOWEEN SPOOKTACULAR was developed!

Our goal was to create new memories and big smiles during a fun-filled day of games, dress-up and treats. Local businesses, organizations, and individuals all pitched in to help bring this amazing event to fruition. Creative expats made costumes for each child and mother (over 100+). Others created



decorations, cut out goodie bags, donated candy, organized games and built a spooky and "gross" haunted house. Special Halloween cookies were also made by the children. Overall, the children and moms were treated to a day of fun, filled with face painting, games, treats, and a Mother's Witches Race.

This year's HALLOWEEN SPOOKTACULAR was grander than the last, as committee members started meeting two months in advance to plan. More games were created, costumes sewn and decorations made. The Lions Club donated piñatas and candy. In addition, the students from Worcester Polytechnical Institute volunteered to help

run the various game stations. It was a day of smiles and laughter, allowing these families to put aside their ugly memories for a moment and enjoy a glimpse of happiness. In some small way, I hope that we were able to bring fun and joy to this group of brave women and children.

The only downfall is that we are not able to share with our community (for safety purposes) the memorable pictures of precious sticky faces, chocolate covered fingers, and bulging bags of treats being hugged by little pirates, angels, cowboys, princesses and butterflies. It was heartwarming and jubilant to watch!

If you are interested in seeing these endearing smiles yourself, Casa Maria Amor with Mujeres Con Exito is always looking for volunteers. The next big children's event will be the Easter Eggstravaganza, next spring. Yes, I shared another one of my stories with Susan McBride; thus another grand event for the mothers and children of Casa Maria Amor!

# Meet Gary Manners

## Britain's New Honorary Consul for Azuay and Cañar

By John Keeble

Photograph Courtesy of Gary Manners



With Ambassador Katherine Ward

Gary Manners, Britain's new Honorary Consul for Azuay and Cañar, immaculately dressed in a dark jacket and light shirt, stood back in his Cuenca home and said: "The adventure I was looking for in South America has taken off in many ways."

For although he is always ready to help with the kind of emergencies that arise with expats and tourists from time to time, he is making the most of life in Cuenca and Ecuador.

When I met him, he had just returned from a trip in the Amazon jungle in search of ancient artefacts--an interest that stems from his daily work managing the world's top Ancient Origins blog.

Another part of his life-changing adventure in Ecuador, and a firm anchor in Cuenca, was meeting and marrying Tatiana Coronel who showed him around the city on his first visit.

"I came to Cuenca for a day and it has turned into four years so far," he said.

The honorary consul position is voluntary but an integral part of Britain's diplomatic efforts to maintain its links with Ecuador and to look after the interests of Britons living or travelling in Ecuador.

Tatiana is also involved with Gary's honorary consul tasks. "I love being part of the team," she said.

Gary swings into action on behalf of the British mission in Quito when Britons hit a problem, such as a lost or stolen passport, for example, or an accident or illness.

"You need excellent people skills when dealing with people under stress," said Gary. His background and calm nature certainly help.

Gary is also working on increasing tourism and building a support group for Britons living in his area--a first move on the support group has been to create a Facebook page where Britons can link with him and each other.

There are about 1,500 Britons living in Ecuador, including around 45 families and individuals in Azuay and Cañar--plus many more Britons passing through as visitors.

Gary was appointed after a series of tough talks with the British embassy's top people in Quito: two virtual interviews and then a face-to-face meeting in Cuenca with Ambassador, Katherine Ward, Deputy Head of Mission, Piers Craven, and Vice-Consul, Verónica Ruiz.

"So far, no big surprises here," said Gary. "This region is pretty safe and we do not get many problems."

Last year, there were about 80 cases of loss, theft and injury affecting Britons in the whole of Ecuador. The highest number of accidents and illnesses arose in the Galapagos.

Like many expats, Gary came to South America looking for adventure. He visited Bolivia and Peru during an earlier trip and then, more than a decade later, decided to leave the UK for a life in South America. He spent time in Peru learning Spanish, travelled to Colombia, and then fell in love with Ecuador-- Cuenca in particular.

"Cuenca is a relaxed city," he said. Everything is central, it is easy to get around, and just minutes from the countryside.

"Tati and I walk and run together, and I also cycle," added Gary, whose other interests include kung fu and dancing (especially the tango).

Gary, aged 46, comes from Cheltenham in southwest England, has a degree in politics and philosophy, and has worked in marketing and in a charity's social services for offenders.

*For consular enquiries, please contact [quito.escalations@fco.gov.uk](mailto:quito.escalations@fco.gov.uk) or call +593 2397 2200. To be in contact with Gary and the British community in the south of Ecuador, join the Facebook group 'British in Cuenca'*

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\*Gabby graduated from Indian River State College in Florida with an Associate of Arts of Nursing. She has significant experience with Geriatrics, Pediatrics, Cardiology, Dementia & Alzheimer's, and Hospice care. Born in Ecuador, she is a dual U.S./Ecuador citizen and is fluent in both English and Spanish.





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