

CUENCA expats

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Hector Muñoz of El Maix

Tex-Mex Comes To Cuenca



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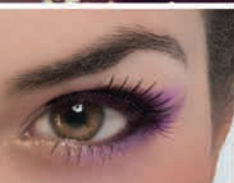
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CUENCA expats

magazine

ISSUE

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Practice Your Spanish

zumar (v. - zoom-bahr') - to buzz, to hum mono (adj. - moh'-noh) - cute, lovely ni (conj. - nee) - neither; nor; not even la bondad (n. - boh'n'-dahd) - goodness; kindness brotar (v. - broh'-tahr') - to sprout; to flow; to arise



It is nice to be back in Cuenca after almost 3 weeks of travel. My trip to California this time was a little different. This time I had a young Ecuadorean college student in tow with me. This was Ricardo's first visit to the United States. Thank you to Cuenca Expats Magazine and Gringo Visas for helping sponsor this trip. You were both a big help in getting this adventure off the ground.

I was sure this trip would be very educational for my friend, but the last thing I expected is how my perspective on certain subjects would be changed forever.

Here is what happened in just the first few hours after landing in the USA.

We were driving away from LAX in the rental car when Ricardo turned to me and said, "Wow, there are so many Latinos here."

Now I have heard that before, but it didn't sound negative when Ricardo said it. He had a big smile on his face. He said it made him proud to see so many Latin Americans in California. He felt that they must have worked hard to be able to afford cars and to be able to live in this beautiful country. His perspective was so very different from some of the others I have heard recently.

And after about an hour on Interstate 10 we pulled into a Denny's. This was his first experience in a greasy spoon. As our waitress approached he noticed that she was Latino. What I noticed was she wasn't smiling and looked like she just wanted to go home. What I saw next, happened about 10 more times over the next 19 days of travel. Ricardo asked the waitress if she spoke Spanish. Her eyes lit up and she smiled big. And then for the next couple of minutes they were talking like crazy people.

I just sat back and watched. They were both in native language heaven. Later during the trip, Ricardo told me that many of the working people he talked to had been instructed to speak only English while at work. All I know is whenever Ricardo spoke Spanish, the other person he was engaged with had a giant smile on their face.

Can you imagine... To be able to make someone smile just by speaking their native language. Wow, that is just one more reason for me to study a little bit harder.

I am now convinced that a second language is so much more important than before. And not just because I live in Ecuador, but because I live on this planet.

I am loving my life right now. Hoping all of you are doing the same.

George

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HECTOR MUÑOZ OF EL MAIX

Tex-Mex Comes To **Cuenca**

Story By Kristen Sawyer

Photos By Ruffolo Design Photography

“It’s not what you have. It’s about what you become.”

THIS QUOTE IS ONE OF MANY THAT HAVE HELPED GUIDE HECTOR MUÑOZ, OWNER OF EL MAIX TORTILLA FACTORY, ON HIS JOURNEY AROUND THE WORLD. FROM HIS CHILDHOOD HOME IN JIMÉNEZ, MEXICO TO THE BATTLEFIELDS OF IRAQ, FROM SECURITY WORK IN QATAR TO UNIVERSITY IN SOUTHERN TEXAS, FROM OIL FIELDS IN NORTH DAKOTA TO THE UPCOMING OPENING OF HIS NEW RESTAURANT IN CUENCA, HECTOR’S JOURNEY HAS BEEN MADE, AS ALL OF OURS ARE, STEP BY STEP...POCO A POCO.

Hector’s adventurous spirit may have started in his youth when he learned to meet challenges head on. Hector was born in Houston, TX, but was sent to live with his grandparents in the state of Tamaulipas in Mexico. There, he lived in a dirt road town of 1,500. His grandparents raised him. Hector’s aunt, Ofelia, owned a tortilla factory just two blocks away. In that day, Hector claims it was common for women to own their own tortilla factories. In this sleepy citadel, Hector grew up with the smells of fresh pressed corn drifting through open windows. But his world was soon changed, quickly and unexpectedly.

When he was six, Hector’s mother wanted him to return to the United States to attend school in Texas. He was transplanted into a classroom of English-speaking classmates while Spanish words sat heavy on his tongue. But he quickly learned how to build bridges between his two worlds. “I felt like I was neither from here, nor there,” he explains, when recounting the tension of identities. Every summer, until he was 17, he would return to Jiménez and work with his Aunt Ofelia in the tortilla factory. He also learned secret salsa recipes from his other aunt, Rosario, an amazing cook. These methods were memorized and tucked away, waiting for the day that they would rise to the surface again.

But before he could create a business of his own, he wanted to learn more. At 18, he sought community: an army of one. Much to the chagrin of his mother, Hector enlisted in the armed services



Team Maix.



Making over almost 3,000 tortillas a week.



the first month of his senior year, August 2001. One month later, everyone's world changed. He trained at Ft. Campbell and he was in Iraq for 11 months and 3 weeks. Upon his return, he was changed, same as many who fight for their countries. In Hector's case, however, the lingering fear was accompanied by gratitude. "I was different. I appreciate things in life more now, like water and air conditioning. The simple things."

The next few years passed in travel: briefly studying in Texas, doing security jobs in the Middle East. But his experiences hadn't prepared him for the next frontier: North Dakota. Close to the land of "Don't ya knows?" in Fargo, there is a town called Williston; its ground is saturated with the thick sledge of oil. Hector was

paid to work and live there for nearly two years. He worked 17-hour workdays. As months passed, his resolve deepened. "I didn't want to be working like a mule the rest of my life."

While he saved money, the idea of adventure grew again beyond the United States. He returned to Texas and focused his attention on what was next: ten country names went into a hat. Each week, he researched a country and his research eventually revealed the way. As one of the safest countries in South America, with Cuenca as the safest city, Ecuador was the winner.

"Are you crazy?" his brothers and father pleaded. "Why would you want to move to a country where you know no one and do something, like being an owner

of a business, that you haven't even tried yet?" Even though Hector didn't yet have a solid plan, he did have faith that things would work.

I notice that a lot of people are afraid to start; they don't even make the first step. Even though I had a lot to learn, you do your homework, you research, and you leap. You only live once. Don't be afraid to lose, but of course, always have in your mind that you're gonna win.

So he arrived in Ecuador February 2015 and after a month, he found himself lounging in a pool in Vilcabamba. There, he met a man from Guayaquil who had recently been to Texas and was in love with Mexican tortillas. "You know," the man said, "I've been all over but I haven't seen a tortilla factory in all of Ecuador."



The answer had come; Hector was listening and ready.

The next months were beautiful chaooses: He found a Mexican tortilla-making machine in Texas, purchased it and paid the requisite 40% import tax, found a location, and signed countless papers. Even though he can speak Spanish fluently, the bureaucratic processes of Ecuador are not simple. Finally, El Maix (the corn), opened in August 2015. He spells El Maix with with an 'x,' even though the correct spelling is with a 'z,' for his heritage: 'x' for Mexico.

Though the business is small, currently comprised of three others, it is a space where employees are respected and service is guaranteed. The corn tortilla is the heart of their products. To properly make a corn tortilla, you start with the kernels. When he was investigating potential vendors, Hector had samples from local markets. To tell if corn is saturated in chemicals, you only need time and the sun. He placed the corn outside. Two days later, one of the bags had attracted a crew of inquisitive insects: organic. Two weeks later, the other bag still remained insect-free: too many chemicals. He buys his organic corn from the original vendor,

who gets the kernels from the coast. Currently, El Maix goes through 80 lbs. of corn a day. He sells corn tortillas (4 in, 6 in and 8 in), tortilla chips and salsas at the store, but also to restaurants around Cuenca.

Each day, they wash the kernels in water and heap in an aunt-approved alkaline solution with mineral lime. Then, they wait. Limewater softens the corns and infuses it with vitamin B3 and amino acids. This infusion process also drastically increases the amount of iron, zinc, calcium and copper that is absorbed. After a day of soaking, they wash the kernels and grind them to dough, or "masa." The dough is aerated and sent through a tiered machine. Finally, the "masa" is flattened, sliced, baked, and then packaged by hand. As guacamole-lovers and Mexican food "aficionados" continue to wait eagerly for more chips and tortillas, Hector realized he had an opportunity to expand.

On April 15, Hector will be opening Tacos y Nachos de Maix, a fast-food taquería, close to 12 de Abril and Avenida Solano, serving up soft and hard shell tacos, tostadas, and platters of nachos. Prices range between \$0.75 for individual tacos to \$17.00 for a gigantic, 3-person

nacho platter. It will be a place to grab a quick bite, to relax and enjoy the Mexican-American flavor, or to joyously eat late-night tacos (open until 3AM Fri. and Sat.) Inside the restaurant, there is a sign that beautifully sums up one of Hector's beliefs: "Money doesn't buy happiness, but I've never seen a person eating tacos who wasn't happy."



Guacamole.



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Tacos.



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Pico de Gallo.

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Beef -	\$1.25
Veggy-	\$1.00

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Chicken-	\$4.00
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1 Taco 4"

Fish-	\$.75
Chicken-	\$.75
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Veggy-	\$.50

Combos of 3 Tacos w/drink

Fish-	\$2.50
Chicken-	\$2.50
Beef -	\$2.50
Veggy-	\$1.75

1 Taco 8"

Fish-	\$1.75
Chicken-	\$1.75
Beef -	\$1.75
Veggy-	\$1.25

Combos of 3 Tacos w/drink

Fish-	\$5.50
Chicken-	\$5.50
Beef -	\$5.50
Veggy-	\$4.00

1 Tostado

Fish-	\$1.50
Chicken-	\$1.50
Beef -	\$1.50
Veggy-	\$1.25

Combos of 3 Tostados w/drink

Fish-	\$4.50
Chicken-	\$4.50
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Veggy-	\$3.75

1 Taco Shell

Fish-	\$1.50
Chicken-	\$1.50
Beef -	\$1.50
Veggy-	\$1.25

Combos of 3 Tacos w/drink

Fish-	\$4.50
Chicken-	\$4.50
Beef -	\$4.50
Veggy-	\$3.75

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Cuenca City Tour 360° Adventure, Safety, Family

By Kristen Sawyer



Cotratudossa, a family-run transportation company here in Cuenca, started with a simple passion: be curious and travel. In 1994, Pablo Camposañó and a fellow guide friend launched one of the first tourism groups in Cuenca. He had always been a traveling man, and he wanted to bring his knowledge, tour guide skills, and love for Ecuador to other people. With only one van and guide, he could not have anticipated the growth his company would see over the next 25 years.

Cotratudossa, is typically known as Cuenca City Tour 360°. They are the company behind the yellow double decker buses in Parque Calderon. These buses leave every hour on the half hour, starting at 9:30. There are two routes: the north route stops at a Panama hat factory and the south route goes up to Turi. But these buses are only one part of Cotratudossa. The company has five types of vehicles for tourism, everything from trucks, for individual tours to 16 person Mercedes vans. Pablo doesn't believe in packaged trips; instead, they cater every experience to the individual or group. Wherever you want to go, they can take you there. Their guides are first-rate. Pablo knows English fluency is vitally important, and so he employs the highest-qualified guides. You can plan a trip anywhere in Ecuador and beyond, to Peru or Colombia. When it comes to tourism, Pablo has two important principals: safety and being the best.

"I am a person who likes to travel, who likes to copy the best. I have traveled to Europe and the United States to learn from the best. In this global world, you copy the best out there." That is exactly what he has done with his fleet of vehicles. He is constantly updating the vehicles with the latest equipment and safety gear, and he is proud that there has never been a bad accident in over 25 years of service. Safety is necessary when traveling the roads of Ecuador, and Pablo ensures that his vehicles are the highest in quality.

His investment in his company's performance is a personal matter. Cotratudossa, is first and foremost a family business. His wife, Susana, works as the head administrator. His daughter Paula is the yellow buses administrator. Pablo knows that his company provides the livelihood for countless individuals. "More than eighty families directly live from this business," he explains, when tallying up the guides, administrators, and drivers, not to mention all the mechanics that keep the vehicles up to date. It is a business that grew from love for travel, and will keep growing as tourism evolves, which it has been over the past seven years. Evening buses that capture the nightlife and private tours in RV campers are just a few of the ideas Pablo has when explaining his future vision. He ultimately wants tourists to know this city, any city, in an authentic, exciting way, and he is proud to offer Cotratudossa, services to the curious adventurers out there.

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MIGUEL ILLESCAS C. GALERÍA DE ARTE

A Manhattan-style art gallery here in Cuenca

Story By Dave Johnson



Sometimes, if you are very fortunate, a career chooses you as opposed to the other way around. Most people are destined to trading their time for money and working at a job to make ends meet. But, there are those, the very fortunate, who find their bliss in the most unlikely of ways. Such is the case with local artist, Miguel Illescas.

Miguel didn't begin life with a passion for art. He was very astute at math and he liked to work with his hands so his life seemed to be destined for a career in the industrial arts. To this end, he learned to weld at his uncle's workshop at the age of 14 and quickly began to hone his skills in an apprenticeship program. On the side, he made and played his own musical instruments. He made pan flutes like a Quena (a traditional flute of the Andes) and a Zampoña (a flute with multiple pipes). All in all, he plays 10 different musical instruments, wind and string.

From there he began to tinker with sculptures. One of his first projects was a sculpture of Jesus on a cross. He liked it so much he made two more that were very similar to the first. He started gaining confidence in his art when a man bought two of them for a small sum. Unknown to Miguel, the man turned around and sold one of them for a normal profit. Many years later, a chance encounter brought Miguel and this man together again, and he found out the man had been trying to find him since they first met. The man had kept one of the sculptures hanging in his house, until he sold it for a much larger sum of money. Although Miguel

had turned his career to art at that point, this boosted his confidence to take his work to the next level.

Miguel's art has evolved over the years. It can now be best described as mixed media. He blends wood, old pieces of metal, and paint into mesmerizing, almost life-like sculptures of people playing instruments, animals, iguanas and even blue-footed boobies. Unlike so many artists, Miguel's work has a very broad appeal and among his collection, there is something for just about everyone.

Recently Miguel was commissioned to make sculptures for several towns in Ecuador. For the city of Zamora, Miguel created a massive sculpture of a toucan that is representative of the area. It was placed prominently on the Cordillera del Condor Bridge for all who cross to see.

He has also fulfilled a lifetime dream, his opus if you will – opening a Manhattan-style art gallery here in Cuenca on Calle Larga. Although it has only been open for a short period of time, it has been given the distinction of being one of the best art galleries in the city. Currently, the art on display is called "testimonios, exposición colectiva" and is comprised of works from some of Miguel's favorite South American artists. Along with his own artwork, on display are pieces from Jorge Chalco and Jorge Erazo from Ecuador and Máximo Laura and Alberto Soriano from Perú.

Miguel is obviously a brilliant artist and his gallery is comparable to any fine-

Calle Larga 1-209 and Miguel A. Estrella

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www.miguelillescas.com.ec

arts gallery in the world, but he isn't ready to rest on his laurels. Although he just completed his largest project ever (a monument built in honor of the nations, nationalities and charms of the province of Zamora Chinchipe on the bridge over the river Jamboé in the Shuar community in the canton Martin Ujukam, 10 minutes away from Zamora City), he wants to do more projects like this that symbolize his philosophy of uniting communities. He has done Sculptures in Azuay and Zamora Chinchipe.

From a humble apprentice welding crucifixes to a world-renowned artist, this is a career most could only dream of. Miguel Illescas is living his passion and sharing it with the rest of the world through his art. If you asked him 25 years ago when he began this journey where he'd end up, no doubt his answer would be exactly where he is simply because his career chose him and he has, and will, continue to make the most of it.



Miguel shaping the sculpture of a toucan



Miguel standing next to sculptures that were part of his biggest project ever.



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YOU COULD BE THE NEXT WINNER!

Cuenca's Churches: A History of Spirituality

By Carolina Jaramillo Malo

As travelers or dwellers, we have all felt a city's heart beat in tune with ours. Breathing in a new place is a unique type of falling in love, an inner rapture with its rhythm and beauty. Every city gives off a singular scent, a singular sensation to whom may experience it; to describe such a thing poses a challenge for words, thankfully "wonderful" and "magical" come to our aid. Most central cities of our modern world are made up of globally-cultured people, free-thinkers believing in an array of Gods. It is in few places, apart from spiritual capitals, where we still see a city's culture revolve around a religion shared by most of its inhabitants. Cuenca, the city we now call home, is one of them, with its catholic spirituality intact and present everywhere from its buildings and art, to its moral values and catchphrases ("Dios mio", "Bendito sea Dios", "¡Virgen santa!"). This mystical land embraced by mountains and blessed with rivers and forests has venerated many different gods in its time: The Cañari culture praised the macaw bird and the snake, the Incas' god was Inti, the sun. Cuenca's current chief of belief, is the Roman Catholic God, alongside a strong faith in Jesus and the Virgin Mary. With the arrival of the Spanish conquerors in the year of 1557, came colonization and an imported God the new settlers imposed upon the old. Four hundred and fifty-eight years later, the Catholic culture in Cuenca is ever present, and in no place can you feel it transpire to its fullest as in its beautiful churches. Let us take an imaginary walk into the heart of Cuenca's sacred temples, all prized pieces of architectural heritage. In chronological order, the most beautiful and representative buildings constructed in the name of faith.

At the very end of the famous "Calle Larga" and Calle Alfonso Jerves, we arrive at:

1. 1557 - "Church of All Saints" - Once a ceremonial site of the Cañaris and Incas named "Ushno", this first religious site originally known as "San Marcos Chapel" was constructed provisionally to hold a mass in honor of the new Spanish city

in 1557. In 1885, "Todos Santos" became a parish. The current structure dates back to 1924, flaunting a recently restored gothic façade in white and a pastel-colored neoclassic interior. The emblematic cross that rests on the top of this church was once used to visualize the boundaries of the young city of Cuenca. We now head to Calle Bolívar and Luis Cordero, in the lovely central park.

2. 1567 - "Church of the Shrine" or commonly referred to as "The Old Cathedral of Cuenca". Ten years after the Spanish founding, the newly erected Cathedral became the main place of worship in colonial Cuenca. It upheld its status of Cuenca's only cathedral until 1967, year in which the New Cathedral was consecrated as such. Trademark baroque pastels and gilded details bring alive paintings of another era, along with a noteworthy life-size sculpture set of the last supper. It is now a Museum of Religious Art, charging a \$1 fee for locals and \$2 for visitors.

3 blocks away, in Calle Presidente Córdova and Padre Aguirre, we will experience:

3. 1582 - "San Francisco Church", The first Governor of Cuenca, Gil Ramirez Dávalos, conceded an entire block to the first Franciscan convent. Its construction ended in 1789, and since then has been administrated by the Jesuit and Salesian order, and currently the city's Archdiocesan Curia. Since colonial times until today, the church's outside areas remain lively common grounds for fine crafts, flower, and food vendors, as well as being the workplace of handymen. Up the road, 4 blocks lead to you to Calle Gran Colombia and Padre Aguirre:

4. 1604 - "Santo Domingo Church" is the name of the 2nd place winner for Cuenca's largest church. Twelve pillars sustain this beautiful building of eclectic style, while the "Virgen of the Rosary", nicknamed the "Morenica" for her curly, dark-colored hair, graces the golden altar. A 6-ton church bell, now retired, was called the "Hoarse Moreno" for its raspy call.



Calle Presidente Antonio Borrero and Presidente Córdova will take you to:

5. 1682 – “Church of Immaculate Conception – Museum of the Conceptas”, born in the year 1559 as the first order of cloistered monastery to be founded in Cuenca. Their only communication with the outside world was through the “torno”, a barred room for commerce and contact established in 1791. Today, it stands as a museum alive with a grand display of neoclassic paintings and unique sculptures, as well as figures and spaces reminiscent of their cloistered past.

The streets Calle Mariscal Sucre and Padre Aguirre will invite you inside the:

6. 1730 – “Carmen of Assumption Church”, where colonial art reigns supreme, surrounded by the traditional flower sale in its exterior. The “baroque front” with its solomonic columns carved in marble, frames the grand entrance, and gives way to an interior bursting in renaissance art, gilded frames, mural painting and a regal pulpit of gold. On your way out, be sure to ask for a customary refreshment prepared by the Carmelita nuns called “agua de pitimas”, a savory infusion of various garden-grown herbs, tea leaves and rose petals.

The last, but oh-so not least stop, is half a block away in Calle Benigno Malo and Mariscal Sucre. Prepare for an unforgettable step inside the most magnificent display of Cuenca’s faith:

7. 1885 – “The Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception – New Cathedral”, breaks ground in 1885, reaching completion after 90 years. The grandeur of Cuenca’s largest church begins in the marvelous mind of Juan B. Stiehle, the German reverend whose talents in the areas of construction and woodwork made possible a significant amount of Ecuador’s religious infrastructure. When the Cathedral was first constructed, 9,000 out of Cuenca’s 10,000 inhabitants could fit in the building. Olden styles such as the romantic, gothic and renaissance became one in the making of the Cuenca’s cathedral, scattering beauty in the rose windows of infinite color and detail, the pink floor made of Carrara marble, the colossal arches and the beautiful blue domes, now an iconic image of Cuenca. Due to faulty calculations, the original number of towers stumbled upon a limitation of structure, but not of beauty. A sacred place for believers or non-believers, the “New Cathedral” and all of its predecessors summarize the spiritual legacy of colonial Cuenca, inspiring awe in visitors from afar and pride in those born near.



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A FACE OF EL CAJAS

YOU HAVEN'T IMAGINED

The secrets of adaptation

Story and Photos By Caty Frenkel

Imagine yourself living in a place with extreme environmental conditions, where you can dehydrate very easily during the day or freeze because of low temperatures in very cold nights. Add tons of water in the soil, strong winds, and high UV rays...Did you already picture yourself there? What would you do to adapt to these difficult conditions to survive? Can you imagine how the plants and animals adapt to live in such an ecosystem? You have placed yourself in a páramo!

But, what is a páramo? It is a very unique ecosystem located above the continuous forest line and below the permanent snowline. In fact, the term Páramo refers specifically to its regional placement in the northern Andes of South America going until southern Central America. To do a comparison, the páramo is equivalent to the tundra in North America, which you probably know about.

The páramos are characterized by having adverse conditions, including big ranges of temperature change (which can produce the common frosts or "heladas"), high concentration of water, and lack of heat.

The páramo is one of the most interesting ecosystems of Ecuador. With high temperature fluctuations during the day, cold climate, and extreme environmental conditions. Plants and animals inhabiting there adapted to survive and flourish in such high altitudes.

In Ecuador, the páramo covers around 6% of the total area of the country, and can be found above 3700 m in the eastern Andes cordillera and above 3400 m in the western Andes Cordillera, but in Southern Ecuador, it starts at 2800 m.

The páramos have less species than tropical forests because few have adapted to such difficult conditions, but this is the reason why species present here are endemic, which means that they are not present anywhere else.

The páramo soil can absorb and retain huge quantities of water, and is very rich in nutrients because the low temperatures slow down leaf litter decomposition, producing a thick layer of nutrients and giving the soil this unique black coloration.

In Cuenca we have a wonderful example of a páramo ecosystem, The Cajas. It was created as a National Park in 1977, and is one of the most amazing páramo ecosystems of southern Ecuador. In 2013 the UNESCO declared the Macizo El Cajas a Biosphere Reserve, which includes Azuay, Cañar, El Oro, and Guayas provinces in an area of 974206 hectares of interandean valleys, mountain canyons, u-shaped valleys, Andean plateaus, coastal plains and mangroves. Its elevation

varies from 0 m to 4520 m, involving many ecosystem types, and a natural, cultural, and productive richness.

The Cajas National Park is now part of this Biosphere Reserve, and its páramo ecosystem represents a big area of it (29000 Ha). Among the 3150 m and 4440 m of páramo elevation range of El Cajas, there are almost 800 water spots or lagoons which are connected through many small rivers that join into bigger ones. The páramo works as a sponge capturing, storing and liberating water, giving to the city of Cuenca all of its potable water.

So, if you remember the beginning of this story, placing yourself in a venue with harsh conditions, now place yourself in the Cajas páramo. Are you cold yet? Are you wearing a hat to avoid the sun, and a jacket and gloves not to freeze? Are you drinking water not to dehydrate? Or getting close to your loved ones to get warm?

Having read until here, can you better imagine how do plants and animals adapt to live in such an ecosystem, not only to survive, but flourish?

Any idea? Here are some examples...

Plants in the páramos adapted themselves tolerating or evading extreme conditions, avoiding heat loss and therefore dehydration, and avoiding freezing.

By reducing leaf size, the surface exposed to the harsh conditions is also reduced, and dehydration is avoided. Some plants have elongated, linear thin leaves, such as grasses, while others have small thick leaves that retain the water captured inside the plant due to the difficult access of water in the soil.

To deal with freezing, some plants remain their dead leaves attached to the plant to protect the new leaves and the stem from the cold. Others have shiny leaves and many tiny "hairs" which reflect the strong UV ray and protect the plant from the cold.

Many plant species grow at ground level, like small shrubs, or in dense individual plants or groups to protect from the wind, heat and cold. Others have leaves with spiny tips or edges to protect them from herbivorous. Plants such as ferns have leaves with tips rolled-up to protect the weak growing structure.

In plants living at ground level, where could be less conspicuous and therefore less seen by pollinators, flowers are produced as few big colored flowers or many little ones to attract insects. Other plant species have colorful bracts (which are modified leaves) with small no colorful flowers.

Rosette plants are also very common in this ecosystem, where a rosette-shape helps rise the inner plant temperature, producing a more tolerable microclimate inside the plant and protecting the inner parts of the plant where new leaves and flowers are produced.

Rosettes and cushion-shaped plants have very small leaves, which grow very close to one another to keep a more stable temperature, and also retain dead leaves to generate humidity and heat.

An interesting fact about cushion plants is that they are soil producers, because they promote decomposition as a strategy to warm up, where the organic material in the soil liberates energy during decomposition. This strategy works best in swampy areas, this is the reason why cushions are found in waterlogged páramo areas.

So, what about animals? How are they adapted to the páramo?

Animals adapted in some amazing ways. Many use burrows, shelters under rocks or dense groups of plants to protect themselves from the cold and from predators. Some species have development stages underground taking advantage of the abiotic stable conditions. For example, you can find frog and lizard eggs underground or under a bunch of leaf litter.

While mammals have dense fur which helps conserve their body heat, lizards sun-bathe to rise their body temperature. Hummingbirds slow down their metabolism at night (a behavior called "torpor") to conserve energy, but makes them susceptible to predators. Insects tend to have dark colors (usually brown or black), which helps absorb the sun to warm their bodies.

Common mammals of the páramo are rabbits, mice, shrewmice, the Andean fox, and sometimes the spectacled bear and mountain tapirs, which sporadically use the páramo to feed. Birds as Andean seagulls, swifts, Andean lapwing, and caracaras are well adapted to fly in strong winds and some as the condor, and rapacious birds use air currents to save energy while flying. Aquatic birds like ducks, grebes, and gallinules are commonly seen at the páramo wetlands and lagoons.

Even the páramo is an extreme ecosystem, there are many species of plants and animals inhabiting there because they had the evolutionary ability to adapt, survive, and flourish in this amazing and cold ecosystem.

So next time you visit El Cajas you will also adapt yourself to avoid freezing and dehydration, like animals and plants do ... and see this wonderful place with very different eyes!

The Biologist Caty Frenkel. M.Sc. is the coordinator of PassifloraCourses, an educational initiative of nature, culture, and health courses in Cuenca. PassifloraCourses is directed to anybody who wants to learn and experience while learning, have fun, and meet new friends. If you want to learn more about these courses you can contact Caty at catyfrenkel@gmail.com, her cell phone: 0992520103 or go to: <https://www.facebook.com/PassifloraCourses/timeline>



Martyn Luberti

Since birth, Martyn has immigrated 3 times. He was born in The Netherlands to Dutch parents, moved to Canada at age 3, to the U.S.A. in 1997 and finally, Ecuador in 2013. He has dual American/Canadian citizenship, and plans to acquire Ecuadorian citizenship in 2016 because he has no plans to leave Cuenca. After getting citizenship he plans on indulging in a meal of Cuy to officially become a Cuencano.

WHERE WAS THE LAST PLACE YOU LIVED BEFORE MOVING TO CUENCA?

Madison, WI

WHY CUENCA?

I had decided to move to Ecuador and my research suggested I wouldn't like Quito or Guayaquil. I had checked out Vilcabamaba and although I like it, Cuenca had more amenities, more English was spoken here, and I could get a visa in Cuenca.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT LIVING IN CUENCA?

The friends I've made, followed by the weather, and the landscape.

WHAT WAS YOUR PROFESSION BEFORE YOU RETIRED?

Therapist/Energy Healer

IF YOU COULD GO BACK IN TIME, WOULD YOU DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT AND IF SO, WHAT?

Stop eating any form of sugar from a very early age. I would be much healthier.

WHAT'S THE MAGIC FORMULA FOR SUCCESS?

Get out of the way and let things unfold.

IF YOU WERE PRESIDENT, WHAT'S THE FIRST THING YOU'D DO?

Reverse Citizens United and take money, corporate interest, lobbyists, out of the political equation and return to government "of the people by the people".

WHO'S YOUR FAVORITE AUTHOR, WHY?

Michael Connolly, the LA based mystery writer. His story lines and character development are second to none.

WHAT'S THE MEANING OF LIFE?

Eat the last cookie.

HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN A GOOD MENTAL ATTITUDE?

My spiritual/consciousness belief is that we are living in a subjective world and nothing is really real. Vehemently disagree? Read Einstein's work. That is his hypothesis. We can shape our reality by our intentions, attitudes and choices we make. So I don't dwell on the negative for very long.

WHAT ARE YOU READING LATELY?

Books on intermittent fasting and self-healing.

DO YOU BELIEVE THERE IS INTELLIGENT LIFE ON OTHER PLANETS?

I am still searching for it on this planet.

DO YOU HAVE ANY BROTHERS OR SISTERS AND, AS A CHILD, DID YOU GET ALONG WITH THEM?

My sister and I got along fairly well. I left home when she was 13 and the bond was never, for various reasons, re-established.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE PIG-OUT FOOD?

It was mac and cheese, but recently I have given it up. Currently, it is the BBQ Bacon burger at Cafe San Sebas.





American Citizen Services Quick Tips

- **Stay Informed:** Register for free STEP - *Smart Traveler Enrollment Program* - at step.state.gov.
- **Vote:** Register and request your absentee ballot well in advance at fvap.gov
- **To find information:** To prepare for your visit to the Consulate General, go to our website (guayaquil.usconsulate.gov) to download the appropriate forms and ensure you have the necessary supporting documentation. Each passport application requires a completed application form (DS-11 or DS-82), a 5cm x 5cm photograph, and payment, along with your original passport and its photocopy. Note: There are additional requirements for children 16 and under.
- **In an emergency:** such as a victim of crime, a death, an arrest, or a medical emergency - call us 24/7 at 04-371-7000.

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- **Minors and adults with form DS-11:** By appointment (guayaquil.usconsulate.gov)
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- **Lost/Stolen Passports - Adults and Minors:** By appointment (guayaquil.usconsulate.gov). Email acsguayaquil@state.gov if there is urgent travel.
- **Passport Pick-up:** No appointment needed. Monday through Thursday from 8:00 to 11:00 AM, or from 3:00 to 4:00 PM (with the exception of the third Thursday of every month).

Consular Report of Birth Abroad:

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Social Security: No appointment needed. Monday through Wednesday 1:00 to 3:00 PM

Notarial Services: By appointment only (guayaquil.usconsulate.gov)

Questions? Concerns? E-mail us at acsquayaquil@state.gov
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AN IDYLIC INTERLUDE AT HACIENDA CHAN CHAN

Story By Mike Herron
Photos By Susan Herron



a view of the room



baby donkey



the fabulous breakfast we got each morning.



view of part of their property

My wife Susan and I were fortunate enough to spend four days and three nights recently at Hacienda Chan Chan, a combination bed and breakfast and family-run dairy farm. It is located just outside of Cuenca near the small, rural community of Chiquintad, reached by a forty-minute ride north from Cuenca on Bus 26.

We were met at the Centro Chiquintad bus stop by our hosts Julie and Luke Martin, together with their children Ivan, Sebastian, Gwen, Emmett and Thomas, and shuttled the five-kilometer drive to their farm.

Calling Hacienda Chan Chan a B&B is somewhat of a misnomer, because you can have not only breakfast but lunch and dinner as well – all at an extremely affordable rate.

Before I describe the accommodations and activities, let me say a few words about the meals. I mentioned that Hacienda Chan Chan is a working dairy farm, right? That means they have fresh milk daily, you remember – the kind with cream that rises to the top! Their cattle roam the 90 hectares (222 acres) of pasture and native forest, grazing on the abundant supply of natural grass that grows there. They also have a greenhouse in which

they grow fresh herbs and vegetables.

Sure, you can choose to bring your own supplies and prepare lunch and dinner, but why bother when you can have delicious meals prepared from the freshest of ingredients, served in the comfort of your own cabin, with a beautiful presentation to boot?

Our breakfast each morning consisted of: granola with fresh, thick and creamy homemade yogurt; fruit preserves for yet another cereal topping; a side of fresh fruit; a small loaf of warm, homemade cinnamon bread; butter; cream cheese; juice; and, coffee. Dinner the first night was a candlelight affair of salad, fresh bread and butter, slices of cucumber slathered with homemade cream cheese, and individual pizzas with the toppings of our choice. Lunch the next day was sandwiches on homemade bread with chips and lots of fresh vegetables and fruit. Dinner the second night was tuna steak with fresh mango salsa, brown rice with broccoli, cucumber slices with cream cheese and, of course, fresh bread and butter. Getting hungry yet?

Hacienda Chan Chan also makes their own cheese, made the

natural way without the assistance of artificial ingredients. After one taste of their products you'll never want to go back to store-bought again. In fact, the Martins are considering offering some of their products for sale in Cuenca. I, for one, hope they do, as I'll be a regular customer.

If you're the type of person who wants all the modern amenities, including elevators and big-screen TVs, Hacienda Chan Chan is probably not for you. Nor would it work well for people with mobility problems. If, however, you are a reasonably active person who enjoys rustic yet comfortable accommodations, doesn't mind walking outside your room via a covered walkway with nighttime lighting to your modern restroom with lots of hot water for showers, all while surrounded by natural beauty, then you will definitely enjoy your visit.

The cabin we stayed in has two bedrooms upstairs, with a large room downstairs for socializing and eating meals. The downstairs room contains benches and chairs for seating, a sink, wood stove for taking the chill off of the cool mountain nights, and a small refrigerator. Water, coffee and tea are provided, and wine, beer, soda and other beverages are available for purchase at inexpensive prices. While there is no TV, wi-fi and Internet access are available. The cabin provides a pleasant place to sit and relax if one of the occasional mountain showers occurs to interrupt your outdoor experience. There are a number of activities for you to enjoy. Hiking trails run throughout the property. From our cabin we walked down to the Chan Chan River, which is located at roughly 2,800 meters (9,186 feet) elevation. We also hiked up in the mountains to the upper portion of the farm. The property goes up to an elevation of roughly 3,350 meters (10,990 feet).

If you're a fisherman you can bring your equipment and try for

trout in the river. You can watch the daily milking of the cattle. It was especially fun to watch the calves being fed from bottles. You can enjoy looking at the abundance of farm animals (horses, cattle, donkeys, chickens, ducks, cats, dogs, etc.) from a bench on your front porch, or you can choose to retreat to the back porch and swing in a hammock with a good book for accompaniment. Regardless of what you choose to do, you can be sure you'll be doing it in peaceful and scenic surroundings. We also enjoyed getting to know our hosts. Julie and Luke originally hail from Wyoming and Montana, but their experience-rich lives have taken them to such diverse places as North Dakota, Washington DC, Slovakia (where Sebastian was born), Morocco, and now Ecuador (where Thomas was born).

I don't know how long Julie and Luke will keep these rates intact, but I urge you to take advantage of them while they last. They charge \$35 per couple per night for the bed and breakfast. Add in lunch (\$3 per person) and dinner (\$5 per person) and the cost is a whopping \$51 for lodging and 3 meals. That's for two persons! If that isn't a bargain I don't know what is in today's world, even by Ecuadorian standards. Additional persons (it's a two-bedroom cabin) are \$5 each per day plus lunch and dinner costs.

There's a list of suggested things to bring on their website (www.haciendachanchan.com) but make sure and leave room in your luggage to bring some of their fresh dairy products back with you.

Email them at haciendachanchan@gmail.com to check availability or request additional information.

They are working on expanding their facilities to accommodate more guests, so maybe we'll see you there on our next stay!



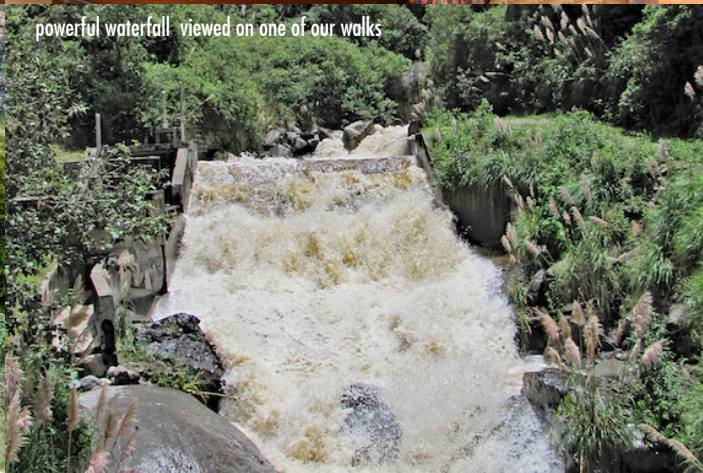
inside the living area



one of the 2 bedrooms



their cows grazing on the hillside



powerful waterfall viewed on one of our walks

"Strawberry Fields is anywhere you want to go."

- John Lennon

Story By Dave Johnson

Strawberries are, by far, my favorite fruit. I can still remember the absolute glee I felt when I saw an old Ecuadorian woman pushing around a wheelbarrow full of strawberries the size of my fist. Naturally I had to stop her and buy some – if only I spoke Spanish. I resolved, from that day forth, that if I learned no other Spanish than how to order strawberries, I would do just fine here in Ecuador. I went back to where I was staying and immediately learned the term for strawberry (fresa, pronounced "fray-sa"). From watching Taco Bell commercials back in the states, I already knew how to say "I want" (yo quiero), so the next time I saw someone selling strawberries all I needed to say was "yo quiero fresas, por favor." This is exactly what I did the next time I saw a wheelbarrow-pushing, strawberry-selling Ecuadorian. I was, once again, vexed when I was asked "¿Cuánto cuesta?" While I had no idea what the strawberry vendor was asking, I held out a \$10 bill and the non-verbal communication worked exactly the way I hoped it would and I walked away with a



gigantic bag of strawberries.

My wife's father had one of the largest pick-your-own strawberry farms in the State of Maine when I met her, and was meticulous about his crops. I was told that large strawberries weren't very tasty and that the perfect sweet strawberry was about the size of a walnut. Obviously he had never had Ecuadorian strawberries because the ones I purchased that day were outstanding. I

felt like a child as I ate them as fast as I could. Strawberry juice ran down my arm and all over my shirt but I didn't care – I was euphoric and felt like skipping through the streets singing at the top of my lungs – "I got some strawberries. I got some strawberries."

That was one of my first experiences here in Ecuador, one that I gladly share with anyone that will listen. Since then I have started cooking with these fist-sized strawberries. Here are a couple of my favorite recipes. Enjoy!

Grilled Chicken Salad with Strawberries and Feta Ingredients

- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 3 tablespoons white balsamic vinegar, divided
- 4 (6-ounce) skinless, boneless chicken breast halves
- 1/2 teaspoon salt, divided
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- Cooking spray
- 1/8 teaspoon sugar
- 2 cups halved strawberries
- 4 cups baby arugula (hard, but not impossible to find in Cuenca)
- 1/2 small red onion, very thinly sliced
- 1.5 ounces feta cheese, crumbled (about 1/3 cup)

Preparation

1. Combine 2 tablespoons of oil and 2 tablespoons of vinegar in a large zip-top plastic bag. Add chicken to bag; seal. Let stand 10 minutes, turning occasionally.
2. Heat a grill pan over medium-high heat. Remove chicken from marinade; discard marinade. Sprinkle chicken with 1/4 teaspoon of salt and 1/4 teaspoon of pepper. Coat pan with cooking spray. Add chicken to pan; grill 5 minutes on each side or until done. Cut into slices.
3. Combine remaining 1 tablespoon of oil, remaining 1 tablespoon of vinegar, remaining 1/4 teaspoon of salt, remaining 1/4 teaspoon of pepper, and sugar in a large bowl, stirring with a whisk. Add strawberries; toss to coat. Add arugula and onion to strawberry mixture; toss gently to combine. Sprinkle feta over salad. Divide salad among 4 plates; top evenly with sliced chicken. Add your favorite chopped nut for extra flavor.



Strawberry Coconut Milk Scones

Note: Baking at high altitude takes a little practice. I brought this recipe with me and it took me a couple of times to get it exactly right. My advice is keep an eye on them while they are baking. Depending on your oven, may take more or less time.

Ingredients

- 4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 4 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2/3 cup cold unsalted butter, coarsely grated
- 1 1/3 cup coconut milk (sold in the can at SuperMaxi)
- 2 cups diced strawberries, fresh
- zest of one lemon (or lime)

Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 205° celsius. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper.
2. Whisk together flour, sugar, baking powder, zest and salt in a large bowl.
3. Add in grated butter and with your hands mix until butter is all coated with flour and crumbly.
4. Add in coconut milk and berries, mix with a fork until the batter comes together. Do not over mix.
5. Using 2 tablespoons, scoop onto baking sheet making mounds about 1 inch high.
6. Bake until golden brown about 15-18 min, rotating sheets top to bottom and front to back half way through baking time.
7. Makes 18 large scones.

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JEFF AND CATHY RICKERT

By Susan Herron

Where and how did you two meet?

J: Cathy was from St. Paul, Minnesota and I was from Minneapolis, Minnesota.

C: We worked for the same company, Remington Rand Univac.

J: One night a group was out at a disco bar and Cathy came up to borrow a cigarette pretending not to know who I was.

C: I had noticed Jeff for a long time. He had that "Welcome Back Kotter" hair going for him. We hit it off and Jeff asked for my phone number. I wrote it on my deposit slip and told him he could put some money in my account if he wanted to.

Did you have a long courtship?

J: We dated for 3 years because we wanted to make sure it would work.

C: When we decided to get married, we wanted it to be on a cruise ship.

J: But we found out they don't marry people on the cruise ship, so we found a justice of the peace in Puerto Rico and got married there.

C: That was 40 years ago, including dating, so I'd say it worked!

Had you always wanted to live overseas in retirement?

J: No, I really wanted to move to Bend, OR.

C: And we talked about living in Arizona.

J: Yes, in fact, I sent her to Scottsdale to find a house for us but she came back empty handed.

C: He made me go back but this time he went with me to make sure we found one. We found a house in 2011, fixed it up and have been renting it ever since.

When did you start thinking about living overseas?

J: About two years ago we really started thinking about it.

C: I have a friend who writes for International Living and she went on and on and on about how wonderful Ecuador is and how we need to check it out.

J: We got all our paperwork done before heading to Ecuador in the event we liked it and wanted to stay.

C: We headed off to Cuenca with two suitcases not even knowing if we would like Ecuador.

What were you looking for in a home overseas?

J: We wanted to learn Spanish so it needed to be a Spanish speaking country.

C: We wanted to get in good physical shape and Cuenca offers us the ability with all the walking.

J: Like so many others expats, we had bills we wanted to pay off as we wanted to be debt free.

C: And the food, we wanted to have fresh fruits & vegetables.

Well, it seems as though Cuenca agrees with the two of you.

J: We have been here a year and still love life here.

C: I am glad we stayed downtown when we were looking for permanent lodging. I had always wanted to live downtown but soon got that out of my system with all the noise and pollution.

J: Now that we have our visas everything is fine.

C: Yes, I was beginning to wonder, though, if I would ever get mine. I have no fingerprints, and the main police station, here in Cuenca, that takes fingerprints and had to write a letter stating that I have no readable fingerprints.

What do you like to do in Cuenca?

J: First and foremost we enjoy meeting and talking with the taxi drivers and our Ecuadorian neighbors. We cannot put into words the beauty of these people.

C: We find the climate perfect to be outdoors almost all the time. We like to climb the stairs to Turi two to three times a week.

J: I love reading the old classics.

C: I was taking a class on Classical Realistic drawing with charcoal as the medium until I started with Spanish classes. When Spanish is over I will go back to drawing classes

What does Date Night look like for you?

J: We love to go to the jazz club.

C: We like classical guitar so have been there quite a bit.

J: We enjoy getting together with friends to play Rummy Cubes and Canasta.

C: Yes, we love Canasta! Anyone out there for a rousing game of Canasta? Hint, hint!



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CUENCA FROM ABOVE



the new cathedral with Parque Calderon in the foreground.

Never Before Seen Views of Cuenca's Landmarks

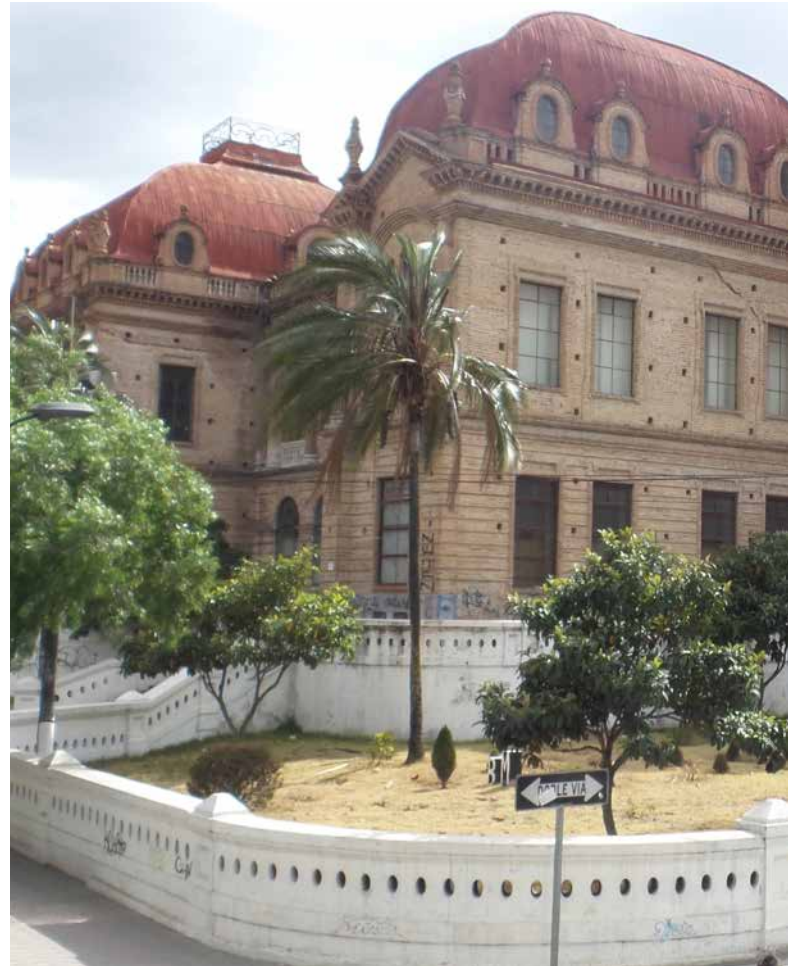
Starting with this Issue, we are showing a never before seen bird's eye view of Cuenca's historic landmarks. "Cuenca From Above" uses a state of the art video drone to show you Cuenca like you have never seen it before. Each month we will have a different landmark, a different view. We hope you enjoy this new feature. By the way, go to the online version of our magazine (www.cuencaexpatsmag.com), and click on the image to see the complete video.

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FROM THE **TOP** OF THE YELLOW BUS



I was talking to a friend the other day in El Centro and the Yellow Bus drove by. The conversation stopped for a minute and then he said, "Ya know...the city looks much different from the top of a bus." I agreed with him and, as you will see in this photo essay, it really does. These photos were taken from the top of the Yellow Bus. You can learn more about their company on page 12. If you haven't had the opportunity to see the city via the Yellow Bus, I would strongly urge you to do so.



PHOTOS BY
SHERRY B. JOHNSON

Fiddler's Green

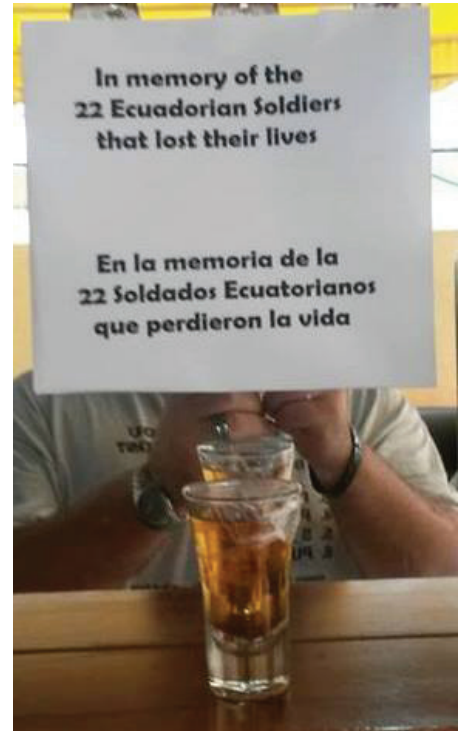
By James Currington

Editor's Note: While investigating the feasibility of a Coastal Expats Magazine, we stopped at one of the leading "Gringo Hangouts" in Salinas. Noticing the sign and shot glass above the bar, we asked DJ to tell us the story.

Fiddler's Green is named for the final resting place of US Army Cavalrymen. I spent most of my career in Cavalry units so this story is near and dear to my heart.

On 15 March 2016 at 14:30 local time, 22 Ecuadorian soldiers lost their lives in a plane crash. Nineteen soldiers who were on their way to Airborne (parachute) School

will be rang, once for each soldier who lost their lives. While they may not be American soldiers, I believe ANY Soldier who is willing to give their lives in defense of their homeland deserves to be remembered and honored. My wife and I now live in Ecuador, and I believe these men were willing to give their lives in order to defend my family and I.



The next time you visit the Coast, come over to Fiddler's Green and have a shot in memory of these brave men who gave their lives while training how to defend the lives of others. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." John 15:13 King James Bible.

James Currington (DJ) served 16 years in the United States Army working with various weapon systems and spending most of his career in the Aviation field. He was medically retired due to injuries received in the line of duty. He and his wife retired to Ecuador in 2013 and then opened Fiddler's Green, a restaurant, bar and hostel in Salinas in 2015.

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

- John 15:13 King James Bible.

along with 3 crew members (also soldiers) went down in the Amazon. There were no survivors.

A shot of whiskey (one of the preferred drinks of soldiers) has been sitting on the shelf at Fiddler's Green, in front of the sign you see in the photo. This is a military tradition from long past. The shot will sit for 22 days and every day at 6 pm, a bell

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