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Cuenca

44
ISSUE



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STEP INTO

Step into the enchanting world of Miguel Illescas Cabrera, a distinguished Ecuadorian artist whose creative journey spans over three decades. Within his vast portfolio, you'll be captivated by an array of sculptures and paintings crafted from metal, wood, and ceramics. His art mirrors the wonders of nature, delves into mysticism, and celebrates the tapestry of Latin American syncretism. Miguel's masterpieces grace collections worldwide, both in public spaces and private domains, bearing the unmistakable and personal chromatic brushstrokes of the artist.

At the Miguel Illescas C. Art Gallery, you'll not only discover Miguel's artistry but also a showcase of ceramic wonders by his wife, Sandra Pazan, alongside works by guest artists hailing from Ecuador and beyond. Embark on a journey where creativity knows no boundaries.



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SEASON'S Greetings!

As we step into the festive season, the entire Cuenca Expats Magazine team extends heartfelt wishes to you and your loved ones. We are privileged to feature Hospital Del Rio and Dr. Pablo Salamea accompanied by his accomplished partner Dr. Saine Touma as our cover story this issue. Dr. Pablo Salamea Molina Celebrates 10 Years and over 5,000 Successful Procedures as a Plastic Surgeon. Hospital Del Rio Readies for Its 15 Year Anniversary. In a significant milestone, Helping Kids in Ecuador (HKIE) will have provided free medical assistance to 1,000 children by the time you read this. Discover the impactful history of this noble cause in this issue.

Responding to your queries about Mansion Matilde from our previous edition, Jane Hiltbrand presents a concise history complemented by captivating photos.

For enthusiasts of Cuenca's dynamic art scene, explore the relocation and upcoming productions of Azuay Theater, as well as a captivating conclusion to our four-part series on the enchanting Galapagos Islands. Additionally, stay informed about Social Security updates for 2024. Read about the founding of Almacenes Juan Ejuri almost a century ago by expats. And, learn the importance of early intervention in treating hearing loss, a concern shared by many. Plus, the last of the Galapagos adventure series.

Lastly, we proudly share that Cuenca Expats Magazine, the only gringo-owned company among 65 recognized by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in Quito, has received the EMPRESA INCLUSIVA award for our commitment to inclusive employment practices.

Our sincere gratitude to our loyal readers and advertiser for contributing to this achievement.

Best wishes to all,



Contributors



Ashley, who is on the board of Helping Kids in Ecuador, is a former award-winning television and documentary film writer, producer and director from Los Angeles and NYC, who came to Ecuador in 2010 and founded Ecuador at Your Service, a boutique real estate agency. She has been the winner of Gringo Posts' "Best Real Estate Agent" for six consecutive years. She can be reached at Ashley@Ecuadoratyourservice.com



John Olson moved to Cuenca from Chicago in June 2022. He followed a long career in Chicago and Milwaukee advertising agencies by moving into arts marketing and publicity in 2010. A native of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, John holds an M.S. in advertising from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and a BA in journalism and mass communications from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.



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



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



Jane Hiltbrand. Moved to Cuenca from Santa Fe, NM in April 2017 after a career in real estate specializing in historic adobe homes. She fell in love with the history and architecture in Cuenca and found herself wishing she could get inside every building! In an effort to accomplish that, she started a blog, "A Guide to Cuenca Architecture." She has a goal of photographing and visiting all of the buildings and sites in Cuenca, which make it a UNESCO World Heritage Site. She also enjoys singing in the Cuenca International Choir.



Sofia Cedillo, GAES speech therapist and Juan José Chávez, GAES Marketing specialist.

Sofía has a degree in Speech Therapy from the University of Cuenca. She has extensive experience in comprehensive therapy in voice, swallowing, speech and language. Juan is a marketing specialist with significant experience in managerial and administrative management in this area, leading global brands such as Reebok and now **GAES**. Email: juan.chavez@amplifon.com



When **Jennifer** is not writing, she is wondering how to perfect her drawing and watercolor skills to produce picture books. She lives very happily in Cuenca in a renovated historical award-winning building in El Centro. She helps IdiomART as their Reservation Coordinator. <https://www.jenniferjhunter.com>

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HOSPITAL DEL RIO

Readies for Its 15 Year Anniversary

By: Ed Lindquist Managing Partner Cuenca Expats Magazine

This special issue highlights the upcoming 15th-anniversary celebration of Hospital Del Rio, where Dr. Pablo serves as the President and also showcases his remarkable journey in plastic surgery has reached new heights with over 10 years of dedicated service and an impressive record of 5,000 successful procedures.

As Dr. Pablo celebrates his milestone, Hospital Del Rio gears up for its 15th anniversary. With 253 doctors, including specialists and subspecialists, and over 70% English-speaking staff, the hospital is a beacon of medical excellence.

Dr. Pablo Salamea Molina Celebrates 10 Years and over 5,000 Successful Procedures as a Plastic Surgeon.

Photos: Courtesy of Hospital Del Rio

According to General Manager José Alfredo Borrero Maldonado, Hospital Del Rio stands out for its commitment to safety, quality standards, and the unique blend of quality and warmth in patient care.

Personal testimonies, such as the writer's own experience choosing Hospital Del Rio for medical treatment, attest to the superior patient care provided by the hospital.

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- Cardiology.



Dr. Pablo, the cover star of our magazine multiple times, shares this issue's cover with his talented wife, Dr. Saine Touma. Explore their inspiring stories and the evolution of Dr. Pablo's career by visiting expatsmags.com to download online issues 7, 17 and 31.

At the helm of Hospital Del Rio, Dr. Pablo has not only excelled in plastic surgery but has also made a significant impact in the expat community through his role as the Medical Director of the charity "Helping Kids in Ecuador."

This charity, championed by Todd and Mary Freeman, along with expat volunteers and donors, has positively impacted over 1,000 children's lives, with over 40% of life-changing procedures performed at Hospital Del Rio at discounted rates. (Read more about the inspiring work of "Helping Kids in Ecuador" in the side bar).

Dr. Pablo's journey began with his inaugural surgery on December 26, 2013, with his brother playing a crucial role in the surgical team. Since then, he has successfully completed over 5,000 surgical procedures and conducted more than 10,000 consultations, solidifying his reputation as a leading expert in the field.





In 2018, Dr. Pablo and Dr. Saine, specializing in aesthetic medicine, married and joined forces, working together in the same office suites to provide comprehensive patient care. Their collaborative philosophy combines surgical and non-surgical treatments, emphasizing patient well-being under one roof.

To schedule an appointment with Dr. Pablo Salamea Molina for Aesthetic and Reconstructive Plastic Surgery, Dr. Saine Touma for Aesthetic Medicine, or any other specialist at Hospital Del Rio, please call the number provided below.





Joining Efforts for Children's Health:

The Transformative Alliance between Hospital del Río and the Helping Kids in Ecuador Foundation

In a country where children's health is a constant challenge, the collaboration between Del Río Hospital and the Helping Kids in Ecuador Foundation has emerged as a beacon of hope.

This alliance provides medical care and specialized services to children who would otherwise lack access.

Founded in 2014, Helping Kids in Ecuador, a California-based non-profit, offers medical and nutritional services to minority children in Ecuador facing limited access to health treatment.

Del Río Hospital, known for its medical excellence and community commitment, has embraced this alliance aimed at helping the most vulnerable children. Its team of highly trained professionals works tirelessly to provide quality medical care, contributing to the well-being of Ecuadorian society.

This unique synergy between Hospital Del Río and the Helping Kids in Ecuador Foundation is not just about healing; it's about building a healthier future for generations.

The shared commitment to social responsibility has yielded tangible results, marking a milestone in children's medical care in Ecuador.

Since the collaboration's inception, hundreds of children have received transformative care, evident in the smiles that illuminate their faces and their families. This alliance exemplifies how solidarity and commitment can change lives, serving as an inspiring model for social change, bringing hope and health to those who need it most.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

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Azuay Community Theater launches a record six-show season in a new, permanent home in El Centro.

By: John Olson

Photos: Courtesy of Azuay Community Theater

ACT will for the first time present a six-show lineup of hits and lesser-known gems from Broadway and a staged radio play of one of Hollywood's most loved holiday films, all previously unproduced here and in a new, comfortable El Centro location. Cuenca's original, English-language theater company, Azuay Community Theatre, has announced that it will perform the six plays between **November 2023 and August 2024** in its new, stairless ground floor performance space at **Vega Muñoz 14-46 (between Esteves de Toral and Coronel Talbot)**. The company is presently preparing the space located just an eight-minute walk from Parque San Sebastián's many restaurants. And it is re-instituting its popular Social Hour Lounge with beverage service. **The company had performed for several years in a space on Ordoñez Lasso and staged two plays this past June and August in the Sala de Carrasco Theater of the Casa de la Cultura Building.**

The season kicks off with **The Cemetery Club**, a comedy-drama about older adults dealing with the loss of their spouses that was a Broadway play before being adapted as a film starring Ellen Burstyn and Olympia Dukakis.

For the holidays, ACT will present **Miracle on 34th Street**. This year, 2023, is its third year of a completely different, staged radio play version of a holiday classic.



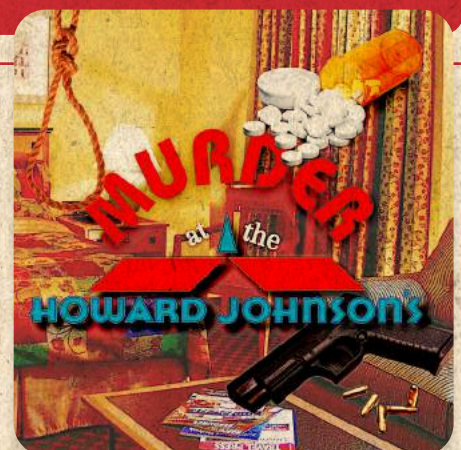
In February, the company will present **Neil Simon's The Prisoner of Second Avenue**, a comedy about the stresses of big city life. It will be followed by the classic comedy *Blithe Spirit*, by Britain's legendary writer and actor Noël Coward.

April's show will be the suspense comedy **Murder at the Howard Johnson's**, in which a married couple and an illicit lover consider murder as the solution to their love triangle problems.

The season will conclude with the Tony Award-winning play **The Waverly Gallery**, a poignant and often hilarious play about a family dealing with the onset of dementia, by the author of the films *Manchester by the Sea* and *You Can Count on Me*.

Individual tickets, priced at \$15, are available for **The Cemetery Club** at www.actseats.com

Those interested in participating onstage and backstage are encouraged to visit actseats.com/volunteer to learn about opportunities and register their interest.



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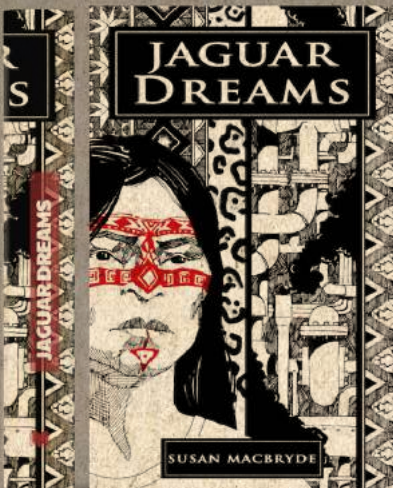
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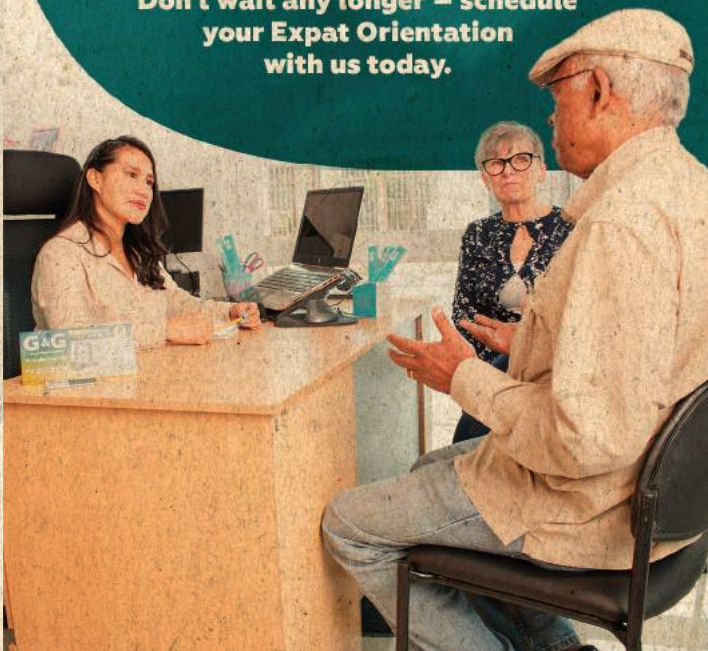


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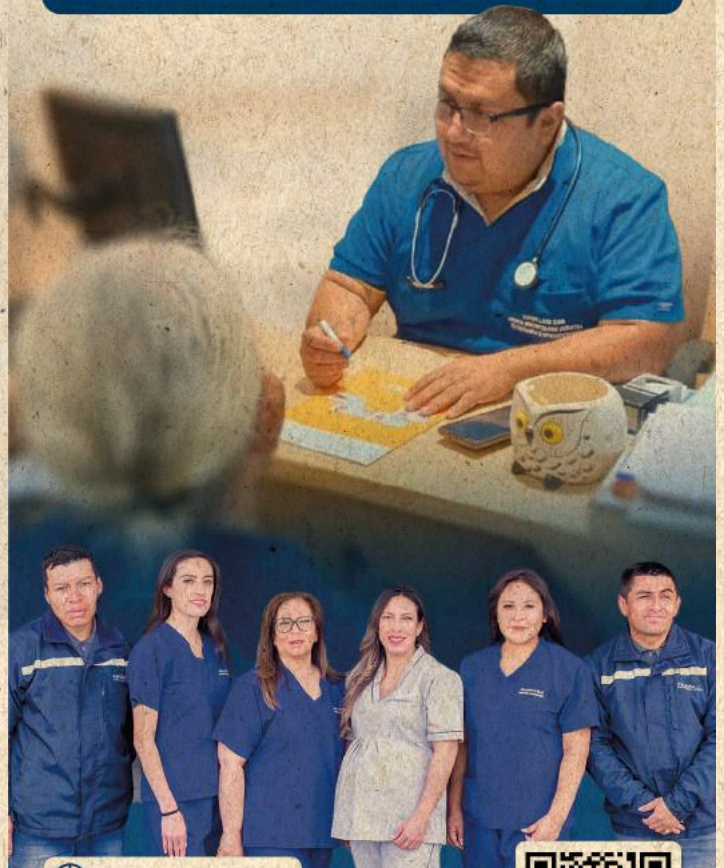


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Unlock Your Journey: Explore Ecuador and Beyond from Cuenca's Hidden Gem

By: Cuenca Expats Magazine Travel Enthusiast
Photos: Courtesy of CORPAC

Beneath the unassuming surface of Cuenca, a hidden treasure awaits, where adventure and convenience converge. Have you ever considered taking flight from Cuenca? If not, you absolutely should. This Ecuadorian gem is rewriting the travel script, and we've got the inside scoop to share. When you first set foot in Ecuador, you might be astounded by the grandeur of the bus terminals, dwarfing the airports. But if you're seeking to elevate your travel experience, Cuenca's Aeropuerto Mariscal La Mar is the answer.

The new Trainvia conveniently delivers you right to the terminal's doorstep. Built in 1941 and revamped in 2008, this airport, managed by CORPAC, provides a gateway to an unforgettable journey. With an impressive average of 40,000 passengers arriving and departing each month, it's a bustling hub connecting you to Ecuador's beauty and beyond. Cuenca's sky bridge is served by three airlines, each offering a unique window to the world:

LATAM Ecuador: With 25 weekly flights to Quito and 4 to Guayaquil, your choices are aplenty.

AVIANCA Ecuador: Offering 10 weekly flights to Quito, your escape is just a flight away.

AEROREGIONAL: With 8 to 10 weekly flights to Quito, your adventure begins at takeoff.

But that's not all! ECUACONDOR, a newcomer, is on the horizon, set to connect Cuenca with Quito and Guayaquil. This airline, with its intimate 50-passenger aircraft, anticipates taking flight in the latter half of 2023, promising even more travel options. Cuenca's airport has woven convenience into every nook and cranny for expat travelers:

On the second floor, a delightful food court tantalizes your taste buds. A bank and ATM ensure your financial needs are met. Coffee shops beckon in the main hall and pre-boarding area. Discover handcrafted treasures in the pre-boarding area and main hall. For the wanderers at heart, rent-a-car services open new avenues.



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The Food Court's transformation is already underway, featuring a broader array of culinary delights, a treat for your senses. A revamped VIP lounge promises to elevate your pre-flight moments, and the terminal's commercial area is getting a makeover to captivate your imagination. But the best part? You can now journey to various American cities without the hassle of collecting your luggage in Quito or Guayaquil. Picture this: checking your bags in Cuenca and having them delivered to your final destination in New York, Miami, Bogotá, or Lima. This is travel made easy! Already, flight options have expanded, with nearly a 20% increase in available seats. Brace yourself for 2024, as the airport gears up to introduce even more flights and connections. So, before your next adventure, remember to check out Aeropuerto Mariscal La Mar.

For all your flight information, head over to <http://www.aeropuertocuenca.ec/itinerarios-de-vuelo/> It's time to unlock the wonders of Cuenca and beyond. Fly high, dream big, and let your journey begin! **Top of Form**

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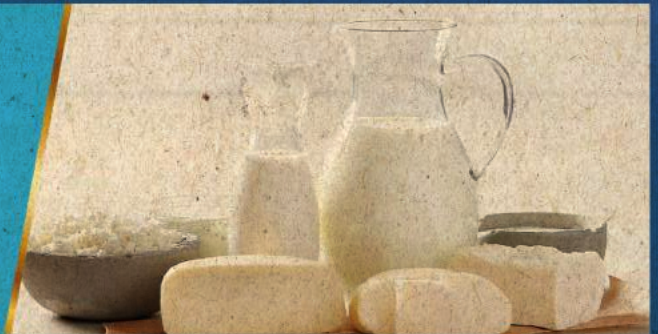
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The Benefits of addressing hearing loss early

By: Sofía Cedillo

Photos: Courtesy of GAES

Hearing loss often goes unnoticed because it generally occurs gradually and because, in certain cases, people refuse to address it in a timely manner. That is why it is important to raise awareness among the population about the importance of paying attention to hearing care in time. According to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), untreated hearing loss is the third most important cause of years lived with disability worldwide after osteoarthritis and high blood pressure. Paradoxically, despite its significance, 50% of the population has not yet experienced a hearing evaluation, highlighting the urgent need for awareness and action.

Approximately 15% of American adults (37.5 million) ages 18 and over report some trouble hearing, and about one in three people in the U.S. between the ages of 65 and 74 has hearing loss. Nearly half of those older than 75 have difficulty hearing.

This sensory deficit has been linked to a number of concerning comorbidities, including physical health problems, anxiety, depression, social isolation, cognitive decline and dementia. Studies have shown that addressing hearing loss not only improves the quality of life of those affected, but may also help prevent or reduce these related conditions. Therefore, attention to hearing health has become a fundamental aspect of the overall health of the aging population.



What are the main reasons to address hearing loss early?

- Protects self-esteem
- Decreases the risk of social isolation
- Prevents depression
- Improves quality of life
- Preserves interpersonal relationships
- Stimulates mental activity
- Facilitates communication in work environments
- Avoids stress and frustration
- Influences balance

What are the symptoms of hearing loss?

It is important to be attentive to the first symptoms of hearing loss. To do this, it is advisable to ask yourself certain questions, which can be answered with a simple 'Yes' or 'No,' to know if we are facing the beginning of hearing loss:

- Do people around me speak softly, as if murmuring?
- I don't understand the conversations of several people speaking at the same time?
- Do I ask people to repeat what they have said?
- Do I not hear well when there is noise?
- Do I answer questions wrong because I don't understand them?
- Can I hear well when talking on the phone?
- Does my family complain that I turn up the volume on the TV too much?
- Do I have ringing in my ears?
- Do some noises bother me a lot?

Our hearing health experts emphasize the importance of performing annual hearing checks as part of a preventive strategy and early detection of possible hearing problems. These checks are simple, precise, and painless procedures which can identify hearing loss within a matter of minutes.



Creative community by idiomART.

IdiomART's palette of art, culture, and magic.

By: Jennifer Hunter

Photos: Courtesy of idiomArt

One day, maybe 20 years ago, I passed by a house on my walkaround in Los Angeles. The house wasn't anything special. It sat on the corner next to a real estate company in a mixed neighborhood of businesses and apartments. But there was a big window on the second floor that overlooked a colorful garden, and I thought, "Wow, I want a window like that to look out of one day when I'm writing and painting." Do I need to say it? Thoughts become beliefs that define your life and your experience of it. Fast forward a few decades. My novel launched on April 30, 2020.

I had big windows in my place in LA, but they all turned away from the view of my garden and they weren't on the second floor. But the Universe had heard me and we were making tracks. Now with my first book published, it was time to learn to watercolor. I moved to Cuenca on August 17, 2020. The world may have been shut down, but I wasn't. On recommendation, one of the first places I went to was idiomART. It plunged me into the familiar and felt comfortable and right as soon as I walked in the door. I took as many classes idiomART offered back at the end of 2020. And then I met Alberto Soriano, master artist in watercolor, oil, and acrylic. I started taking month-long group and private watercolor classes with him.



At first, what I created was a dripping mess. You know, if all your colors run together in a pool of water, you really do get gray-brown blobs running down your paper. It's no wonder that writing felt so much easier in comparison. Obviously, I had forgotten about the buckets of tears I had shed.

Yet in due time, as Alberto happily reminded us, "¡Mas agua! ¡Mas agua!" we all came to feel more accomplished. IdiomART is the only intercultural, creative community space in Cuenca that exists to fully support local artists. So, whether you are exploring an art exhibit, enjoying a cultural road trip, crafting fantasy fairies, rocking the beat with musicians, whirling with the dervishes, tasting exotic wines, chanting, drumming, weaving textiles into stories, and yes, learning the art of watercolor, oil, or acrylic, this is where you come to stand shoulder to shoulder with the artists who understand your dreams—where together you can co-create anything.

The beauty, power, and boundless possibility of idiomART resides at the center point of your imagination. I've included a few samples of my drawings with their accompanied watercolors to show where a true artist guided me. These were all done within my first year of study with Maestro Alberto Soriano. And coming full magical circle, I live on the top floor of a beautifully renovated patrimonial home with a 38-foot window that reaches floor to ceiling. From my perch, I look down over a tiled courtyard with luscious plants and colorful flowers.



IdiomART is located at Mariscal Lamar
14-25 & Esteves de Toral at the 3 de
Noviembre transvia stop



A jar on a bar led to the formation of “Helping Kids In Ecuador”

By: Ashley Rogers

Photos: Courtesy of HKIE

It all started with a jar on a bar, according to Helping Kids in Ecuador’s co-founders, Tod and Mary Freeman. In 2011, in Salinas, Ecuador, a restaurateur was raising money for his employee’s 16-month-old girl, who was born without an anal track. With no prior experience, the Freemans started a small fundraising campaign. “We made raffle tickets out of cut paper,” says Mary, “and we, along with our co-founders, Peggy and Will Saunders, were able to get this child the surgery she needed. It was a great feeling and we decided, maybe, we can help some other kids.” And, they did! From these humble beginnings, a miraculous organization, Helping Kids in Ecuador (HKIE), was born and to date more than 1,000 children have been helped. HKIE is a US 501.c3 charity providing lifesaving and life-changing surgeries to underprivileged children throughout Ecuador. Surgeries range from heart defects, birth defects, cleft lip and web finger repairs to burn reconstruction and eye surgeries. They have also provided eye and leg prosthetics, wheelchairs, PT, leg braces, and temporary medicines. In 2013, the Freemans moved to Cuenca and had a chance meeting with Dr. Pablo Salamea, of Hospital del Rio, asking to help a child get a cochlear implant. Dr. Pablo was smitten, and is currently the Foundation’s Medical Director.



“He’s the best thing that ever happened to us,” according to Tod. “He’s personally donated his time for more than 200 surgeries, rallied other doctors to also donate their time (including his brothers Rafael, an anesthesiologist and Juan Carlos, a trauma surgeon). He also encouraged the administrators of Hospital del Rio to give us discounts. Without these surgeons and anesthesiologists donating their skill and time, HKIE would not be the success it is.” This trifecta of amazing doctors, hospitals and HKIE donors has, indeed, made this impossible mission exceed expectations. Not only have they helped 1,000 kids but HKIE is now also working with Hospital Metropolitano in Quito and Roberto Gilbert Hospital in Guayaquil.



One of HKIE’s most heart-wrenching and dramatic patients was Daniel, who was born with a heart defect. When HKIE learned of Daniel’s illness, he was 11 years old. His prognosis was that he would die within a couple of months. HKIE intervened and today Daniel is 21 years old and is studying to be an engineer. “You can’t imagine the feeling we get when we’re able to help a child and his family live a normal, healthy life,” says Mary. “And the parents can’t believe that strangers from another country are the ones who helped them. We will forever be grateful for Dr. Pablo, his team, the hospitals, and all the kind-hearted people who have given so generously over the years. It is the ultimate honor and it’s an honor we all share.”

For more information on HKIE or to donate to this charity, go to helpingkidsinecuador.org. For updates on children, see [Helping Kids in Ecuador on Facebook](#).

Casa del Parque:

Cuenca's Historic Gem Restored to Its Former Glory

By: Jane Hiltbrand

Photos: Mansion Matilde and Jane Hiltbrand

In the heart of Cuenca's Parque Calderón, a striking yellow house with a rich history stands as a symbol of the city's past and its promising future. Casa del Parque, previously shrouded in mystery, has been meticulously restored to its former glory, becoming a vibrant gastronomic and cultural center that has breathed life into the downtown area.



As the Tranvía construction caused turmoil in the downtown area, Casa del Parque's exterior restoration marked the first steps towards revitalization. By 2018, the interior rooms and decorative elements were being meticulously rejuvenated. The restoration work reached its culmination in January 2020, just before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and although the initial opening was brief, the house has since found its renaissance. This revitalization also catalyzed the restoration of downtown Cuenca. New businesses and restaurants, such as Negróni, Itza Hotel, Madame, and Casa Firenze, have added to the city's charm, making it a lively hub once more. Casa del Parque's restoration was a labor of love led by Esteban Espinoza, with the invaluable contribution of city historian Juan Cordero and a dedicated team. The municipality ensured that the historical significance of the house was preserved, respecting its role in Cuenca's story.

Once the residence of Hortensia Mata, known as "The First Lady of Cuenca," this architectural treasure is now a hub of historical significance and contemporary delight.

The house's captivating journey begins with its purchase by Mrs. Gladys Eljuri and her husband in the late 1990s. Back then, it was inhabited by Hortensia Mata, the granddaughter of the original owner, and was not accessible to the public. Her promise to stay in the house until her last days was upheld, and upon her passing, the transformation of Casa del Parque began in earnest in 2016.





During the recent restoration, the original yellow color was discovered through a meticulous paint study. This reaffirmed the city’s commitment to preserving the historical authenticity of the house, which stands as a testament to Cuenca’s evolving architectural styles. Casa del Parque is a house of many facets. It was divided in the past, with one side occupied by a general store. Mrs. Eljuri’s purchase brought both halves under her care, with one side transformed into delightful spaces. The Turquoise Tea Room, Bar 1880, and El Preferido de Matilde offer unique dining and drinking experiences, all with a view of Parque Calderón and the New Cathedral. The Treaties Hall and the Diplomatic Hall are versatile spaces for various events, and future plans include an Ecuadorian restaurant on the unoccupied side, promising even more of this stunning architectural beauty for Cuenca to savor.

Hortensia Mata’s life story intertwines with the house’s history. Married at a young age into the Ordóñez Lasso family, she and her husband became significant landowners, contributing to the prosperity of the region. The house was built in 1888 by French architects Rene Chaubert and Giuseppe Majon, under President Gabriel Garcia Moreno’s patronage. With her second husband, Hortensia Mata had a total of sixteen children, living in the most opulent residence of the time. The house’s legacy is further enriched by its architectural details, including original wallpaper, murals, and flooring. The exterior walls are adobe, while the structural walls are brick and bahareque, presenting a remarkable example of Republican-era architecture in Cuenca. Notably, the house was pivotal in introducing ornate ironwork to the region. It was also home to Cuenca’s first bathroom, a marvel of its time, amidst a city with canals running through its streets.



Almacenes Juan Eljuri: A Legacy of Quality and Savings Since 1925!

By: Cuenca Expats Magazine Bargain Hunter
Photos: Courtesy of Almacenes Juan Eljuri



Are you tired of hopping between stores to find the best prices? Look no further than Almacenes Juan Eljuri for a unique and fulfilling shopping experience. Conveniently located just a block away from the Tranvía stop at the Terminal Terrestre, this flagship store is a sprawling 4,000 sq. feet space offering over 30,000 products. As the sole importer of more than 100 international name brands, Almacenes Juan Eljuri ensures competitive pricing.



From construction equipment to coffee cups, world-class perfumes to a diverse DIY tool collection, this store is a fusion of Home Depot and Costco, providing everything you need under one roof.

A recent visitor likened the experience to being in a mall, emphasizing the store's commitment to delivering a comprehensive shopping experience. The layout is well-organized, making it easy to navigate through the diverse product range.

One standout feature is the exceptional customer service. Upon entering, you will be approached by a staff member offering assistance in English—an unusual and delightful touch in a big-box store. This emphasis on customer satisfaction sets Almacenes Juan Eljuri apart.

The roots of Almacenes Juan Eljuri trace back to 1925 when Gabriel and Juan Eljuri Chica opened a store in Cuenca. Initially specializing in fabrics, bicycles, and radios, the store evolved into a trusted distributor for renowned electronic brands like Hitachi, Yamaha, Honda, Lorus, and Jeanne Arthes. Apart from the flagship store, there are three smaller satellite locations in Cuenca, offering the same quality products and pricing. The outlet store on Av. Ordoñez Lasso is a treasure trove for bargain hunters, offering discounts of 40-70% on slightly imperfect or discontinued items. With additional stores in Machala, Naranjal, Milagro, Quito, Babahoyo, Playas, and Ibarra, Almacenes Juan Eljuri has become a go-to destination for quality goods across Ecuador. For those who prefer online shopping, take advantage of their user-friendly website, which accounts for 35% of total sales, offering the convenience of ordering from anywhere in the country.



In conclusion, if you're seeking a seamless shopping experience with unbeatable prices, make Almacenes Juan Eljuri your first choice. Your satisfaction is not just guaranteed; it's their tradition.
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Hopping Adventures

In the Galapagos Island

By: Ed Lindquist and Yenis Bejas

Photos: Courtesy of Metropolitan Touring and Cuenca Expats Magazine

Ed. Note: This is the fourth in a four-part series exploring the Galapagos Islands.

After setting sail during lunch, we arrived for our first exploration that afternoon at Dragon Hill on the north side of Santa Cruz Island. Only the south side of the island is populated. (The largest city in the Galapagos, Puerto Ayora, is located there). We gathered into our five groups and disembarked into five tenders that took us to shore. Each group was named after an iconic species (Our English-speaking group was the Bobbies.), and each had their own naturalist guide to give everyone personal attention.

Our guide was Fatima. She was born on the mainland but moved to the islands at 14. She had a college degree in the subject, and there was not one question on the fauna or flora she could not answer during the entire trip—the perfect guide for us. Each group landed at a different location, so our group of 13 explorers were the only other people we saw during the trip. We were able to see the land and marine iguanas, Galapagos sea lions, Blue-footed Boobies, and some frigate birds. Back on ship, we took a quick shower so we would not be late for the nightly half hour ECO Moment (Explore Conserve Observe) on various island subjects of interest.

Tonight's talk was on the octopus. After the ECO Moment and before dinner we were formally introduced to the captain, officers and expedition team accompanying us on the voyage. After a welcoming toast, we had another outstanding meal. We met a foodie influencer who was on the trip. He can explain the gastronomy much better than we can, so here's a link to his observations on eating aboard the Santa Cruz II.



The second day of adventure took us to the largest island in the Galapagos—Isabela Island. If you look on a map, it looks like a large sea horse. It is also one of the four islands Darwin explored. After the daily, appetizing, all-you-can-eat breakfast spread the chefs prepared, we had our first water activity. So, we gathered on the upper deck and got fitted with snorkeling gear (mask, fins, life jacket, and if you wished, you could use a wet suit.) You had a swim bag and kept this gear throughout the trip. We boarded our tender by group and set off for some fun to explore by water the coves of the island. Here we saw marine iguanas, numerous birds (including baby Boobies) in the cut of the cliffs, as well as sea lions. Then we returned to the ship for lunch while we sailed to the next island—Fernandina.





Around Fernandina Island, you had a choice of deep snorkeling, glass bottom boat (Yes, one was even stored on board.), or sight-seeing on the tender. There were eight of the Big 15 iconic species to be seen, plus all the underwater life. We were surprised at the speed of the swimming tortoises. On board again, we tried one of the two large hot tubs and relaxed a little before dinner. After a Corden Blu planned diner, and since it had been a long day, we got some sleep, which wasn't hard given the gentle movement of the ship as we sailed to our next destination. Speaking of movement, did anyone get sea sick? Not to our knowledge, as the ship was large enough to give smooth sailing.

That night we sailed back to Santa Cruz Island. This time to the south end and to the port of Puerto Ayora, the largest city on the four inhabited islands. Upon landing, we set off for the Charles Darwin Research Station and spent a couple of hours learning how they are protecting the different species of tortoises on the islands. During the era of whaling, it's estimated that over 200,000 tortoises were used as food for the ships and as many as four tortoise species became extinct. BTW, the saddle-back tortoise has longer legs and neck as they have to reach farther for low vegetation; the high land tortoises have shorter neck and legs as they reside in more dense areas. One could spend all day there looking at the exhibits, but we had plans to see the giant tortoises in their natural habitat.

We boarded a bus to the Rancho El Manzanillo, which had previously been a dairy farm in the highlands. For those wishing, we stopped to get mountain bikes and rode the four miles to the site. It wasn't a flat road, but one of many fairly steep hills that challenged those who have not ridden in a while. We all made it to the Rancho for a delicious buffet lunch. After lunch, we walked the property for a few hours looking at the 65 or so giant tortoises on this reserve. Some were over 200 pounds and estimated to be at least 100 years old. They didn't at all seem bothered by our presence, although we could get no closer than a couple of feet from them per regulations.



We then got back on the bus and drove for half an hour or so back to town. The two-lane highway was in excellent condition, and there was a lighted (by solar panels) pedestrian/bike path the total length of the highway. I wish we had the same in Cuenca! We had a couple of hours of free time, so we walked the main street. Back on the Santa Cruz II, we had a 2x1 cocktail party with yummy appetizers on the afterdeck.





We were treated with a beautiful sunset to the west, followed by a full moon to the east rising above the outlines of the islands, and listened to live chamber music to complete the evening—a very memorable time for all. It took no nudging to go off to bed and sleep soundly as we sailed to Floreana Island (also one of the islands Darwin visited).

Breakfast was the normal 7:30 am, and we boarded the tender around 9 am. We did a water landing and walked to what was one of the most amazing sites on the trip—the world's most unusual post office! During the whaling times in the 18th century, whaling ships might not return to their home port for 3-5 years. So, they devised a way of delivering mail home. Floreana was a popular spot to load provisions, so according to local legend, sailors took a wooden whisky barrel and left letters in it. By tradition, when a ship anchored, the sailors would pick through the letters and if their home port was close by, they agreed to hand deliver the letters to the recipients.

This Galapagos tradition lives on. Our group went through the letters and a couple of members said they lived close enough to deliver them and carry on the tradition. We saw one letter addressed to someone in Greenland—I wonder how long it will be to hand delivery that one? We boarded our tender and went to two other coves. Some in the group decided to shallow snorkel while some went to another cove to kayak. Yenis elected to kayak and she was glad she did as their group spotted four of the Galapagos penguins, the only time they were spotted on the trip, and yes, there are penguins on the equator. We awoke the next morning back to Baltra Island where our adventure started five days earlier. We disembarked for the last time.

As our tender passed the ship, the captain saluted us with a blast from the ship's foghorn, and a pod of dolphins swam by as if to say goodbye as well. Our adventure didn't end at the port of Baltra. We had heard awesome things about Metropolitan Touring's Finch Bay Hotel, so we decided to stay in the islands another day and take a look.

Located in Puerto Ayora on the island of Santa Cruz, this boutique hotel is right on the beach, beautifully landscaped and with a pool facing the ocean cove. Finch Bay has only 27 rooms, with outdoor and indoor dining. We arrived at lunch time, and after checking in, had a light meal and then were shown the facilities by the general manager. Finch Bay even has nestled in a grove of trees a fully equipped spa for relaxation, health care and self-healing. That night's meal was outstanding (as are the meals in all Metropolitan Touring operations). Relaxing at Finch Bay was the perfect end after a week's activity on the Santa Cruz II—the best of both worlds. We would have liked to have stayed longer, but the next morning we had to travel back to Baltra Island for our LATAM flight back to the mainland.

As we flew the hour and a half back to the mainland, we could not help but reflect on the fact not many people in the world have ever had the chance to visit the Galapagos Islands.



Thanks to Metropolitan Touring and LATAM Airlines, we were fortunate enough to do so. We hope you will have the chance to experience this life-changing journey as well.

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UNVEILING THE 2024 SOCIAL SECURITY COLA: WHAT BENEFICIARIES SHOULD KNOW

By Robert M. Ryerson

Change is a constant, especially when it comes to the financial sphere. With the turn of each year, those reliant on Social Security keenly await updates on the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA)—a vital tool that ensures beneficiaries are not left grappling with rising inflationary pressures. The Social Security Administration® (SSA) recently shed light on the adjustments for 2024, and there's both exciting news and essential information for beneficiaries.

For the uninitiated, COLA plays a pivotal role in ensuring that the purchasing power of Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits aren't eroded by inflation. Given the sizable base of 71 million beneficiaries, any adjustment, no matter how seemingly minuscule, can profoundly impact livelihoods. The SSA's COLA adjustment is tethered to the fluctuations observed in the Consumer Price Index (CPI-W). For the 2024 adjustment, the SSA considered the increase from the third quarter of 2022 up until the third quarter of 2023. This approach ensures that the adjustments are based on the most recent data, mirroring real-life inflationary pressures as closely as possible.

So, what does 2024 have in store for Social Security recipients? A 3.2% adjustment awaits beneficiaries starting January. At first glance, this might seem like a step down, especially when juxtaposed against the preceding year's more generous 8.7% hike. However, to put things into perspective, this year's adjustment still outpaces the two-decade average of 2.6%. It's a reminder that while yearly fluctuations are expected, the SSA continually endeavors to provide the best possible support to its beneficiaries.

When we translate this percentage into tangible monetary terms, the figures become even more salient. Come January, retirees are poised to see an average increase of \$59 in their monthly benefits. This augmentation means that the estimated average monthly benefit will hover around \$1,907. Such increments, when accumulated over a year, can provide much-needed relief, especially for those on fixed incomes.

Lastly, for those who are digitally inclined and have adapted to the world of online communications, the SSA has a handy update. Beneficiaries can conveniently access their COLA notices online. Starting December 2023, these will be available in the Message Center of the 'My Social Security' accounts. This digital initiative not only promises ease and accessibility but also expedites the dissemination of crucial information.

In closing, while adjustments like the COLA may seem mere routine financial updates, they hold significant sway in shaping the financial stability of millions. Beneficiaries must stay informed and use this information to craft an accurate financial blueprint for the upcoming year. 2024 beckons with new promises and, thanks to the SSA's adjustments, a bit more financial breathing space.

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