

An Ecuadorian non-profit NGO driven by the enthusiasm of its staff and volunteers to promote sustainable development in marginalized communities throughout Ecuador and to promote Cultural Exchange for mutual benefit in our increasingly globalized world

Stay up to date with all the news at Yanapuma and True Ecuador Travel!

A bimonthly newsletter

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Introduction

By now the new year is well underway and we are getting some idea of what this year 2017 might have in store for us!

Although in January the schools got off to a slightly slow start, things picked up with a mix of pre-registered students and walk-ins, in both the Quito and Cuenca schools. This kept the schools reasonably busy – not as in previous years, but still an acceptable level of activity.

We were pleased too that a good few students decided to purchase our new Galapagos land-based tours during this period, adding to those who had already purchased through the True Ecuador Travel website or agencies that are promoting our tours.

Our foundation was relieved to receive the final disbursement of funds for our co-funded project with the Inter American Foundation

Spanish for Children . . .

In both of our schools, in Quito and in Cuenca, we have received increasing numbers of children to take Spanish classes. With the youngest being only 3-years old, up to teenagers, our teachers have become experts at working with younger students of all ages.

To teach children requires a different modality, and we have invested in resources—games, books, and other play materials—that serve to maintain the interest of even the youngest student. Teachers have learned to gauge the energy cycles



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which will see us working until July, along with extra funding from the Alan and Nesta Ferguson Charitable Trust from the UK. This will allow us to continue our work promoting sustainable cacao production, reforestation, vegetable gardens and nutritional education with the Tsa'chila culture.

In addition, as the academic year comes to an end at the coast we are planning how to proceed with the scholarships that we offer each year to deserving students to allow them to study at high school.

We are also happy to announce that our annual report is now completed and can be accessed by following this link: <http://yanapuma.org/en/pdf/YanapumaAnnualReport2016.pdf>

of the younger students to be able to switch activities at the appropriate moment and return when they are ready to take up the challenge again. Thus the Spanish learning seeps in, almost as a by-product of their in-class activities with the teacher.

It's Carnival !



Carnaval in Ecuador!



On Monday and Tuesday 28 and 29 March the Spanish schools and offices were closed for the annual celebration known as “Carnaval.” Processions and cultural events around the country celebrated the occasion.

Although less wild than in previous years the events are still high-energy affairs. Fortunately one is less likely than before to be suddenly doused with cold water or worse, or have eggs broken over one's head or be dusted with flour when innocently walking along the street.

In small towns and villages throughout the country, the main squares are set up for local bands to play dance music until the wee hours of the morning, and beer and spirits animate the assembled crowds.

Students and volunteers were able to travel over the weekend and observe and participate in this annual madness in various forms.

Spanish School News . . .

As mentioned in the introduction, the Spanish schools have been reasonably busy for these two months, which has been a pleasant surprise for us. Students have ranged in age from 3 to 73, and have come from the US, Europe, Israel, Australia, Canada, Syria and more. Several families have passed through the school with children of different ages, from 3 to 16 years old.



At the same time, some of our teachers have been on the road with students, visiting different parts of the country on our "Study and Travel" programs. These are always popular, offering students the possibility of exploring the country while they learn Spanish, confident in being accompanied by a local person who can keep them safe and give them insights into the local cultures while they travel.



While some of these programs offer classes in one particular location for the whole week, such as an Amazon lodge or a cloud forest reserve, others involve more travel by local transport around the country, either exploring the more famous sites of Ecuador during a week of travel or visiting one or more of the indigenous communities that our foundation works with in different parts of the country.



Volunteers and Interns . . .

Our volunteer department, overseen by our volunteer counselor/coordinator Maria José Arellano, has been busy in these first two months of the year, both with individual volunteers and groups from the UK, US and Canada.

Individual volunteers come to learn Spanish and volunteer in Quito or Cuenca or just to volunteer at any of the more than 30 grass-roots and community projects that we support around Ecuador.

Currently we are hosting 6 volunteers through the German "Weltwärts" program. These volunteers are here for one year, which is plenty of time to contribute very meaningfully to one project. They are involved with projects in Quito at INEPE and Yachay Wasi schools, and in projects around the town of Macas in the Amazon – Selva Vida and Caballo Sendero.

In addition a group of 33 volunteers from the UK and US arrived through **the Leap**. After an orientation and introduction to Quito and Ecuador the group split into 2 with one group working in the Tsa'chila community of Bua while the other volunteered in the Agato community near Otavalo. Following that one group went to the Galapagos Islands to volunteer on San Cristóbal at the Hacienda Tranquila, removing invasive species and maintaining their organic farm. Once this group returned the other group set off for the Galapagos as well. In addition they spent a week traveling down the Andes to visit Quilotoa crater lake, the town of Baños for white-water rafting, Chimborazo volcano and the colonial town of Riobamba. Their last few days at the start of March will be spent at Gaia Amazon Lodge where they will get to explore the cultural and biological diversity of the Amazon region.

We were pleased to welcome back a group from the **Colège Edouard Montpetit** from Montreal in Canada. This group of 12 students with two teachers spent nearly two weeks working with the cacao growers in the community of Bua. This is the 8th year they have returned to the same project and their annual visits have been instrumental in encouraging the development of sustainable cacao production in Bua.

In addition the college is funding two scholarships for deserving youth in Bua to study at high school. These two students will finish college this year and we are now looking at how we can support them to go to university in Santo Domingo, the nearest city.

Project News . . .

At the start of the year we moved into the final semester of our project with the Tsa'chila to develop sustainable cacao production, create vegetable gardens and provide nutrition and diet education, and carry out a program of reforestation with native, edible and productive species. The project will finish officially on the 11th of July of this year.

Currently we do not have funding to continue the project beyond this date, but are actively seeking sponsors to allow us to extend the project. There is still a long way to go on all fronts. Cacao production has been especially complicated over the last year due to the ravages of a fungal disease called "monilla" which makes the cacao pods rot before they can be harvested. Through our local Tsa'chila promoters Wilson and Rafael we are seeking ways to minimize the negative effects of this ever present plague. It has become particularly disruptive recently due to a change in the climate, with slightly cooler temperatures and more humidity at a critical period when it is normally quite dry and warm.

The vegetable gardens have generally been very successful with a good number of families now totally independent and able to continue without supervision, harvesting when ready and saving seed for re-sowing for the next crop. We are hoping that just as the Tsa'chila learned the worst practices of their colonist neighbors as they learned to farm, other Tsa'chila will recognize the benefit of growing their own vegetables and learn from their Tsa'chila neighbors how to produce tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, lettuce, chard, spinach, cilantro, basil and more, including native edible species that once formed part of their forest habitat and which have been recovered as part of the process of this project.

The "edible forest" aspect of the project has been especially important as it promotes conservation through reforestation to protect the water courses, promotes biodiversity, offers additional food security, provides raw materials for crafts production and opens up the possibility of ecotourism in the renovated forest environment.

In Estero de Platano on the Pacific coast, interns from Union College, Jonathan Martin and Zibusiso Dhlamini have continued working with the scholarship recipients there as well as with the local women's group. As Johnny is a native Spanish speaker he has been able to understand in greater depth the dynamics of the community and the factors that impede their successful development.



Donation News . . .

The grand total that we raised towards the earthquake relief efforts in the small resort town of Canoa was \$4402.96. The funds went towards the Saman Project, run by the Cuenca NGO Hearts of Gold, a two-year transitional project to benefit 50 families in Canoa who lost their homes that were flattened by the tremors. More than just providing shelter, the project offers psychological support and skill-building workshops to rebuild livelihoods after their devastating losses. You can learn more about the project here: <http://www.proyectosaman.com> and see a video about the project here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bIidUq_8Vpc&t=75s

Scholarship Fund

The final total for this year's fundraising drive for scholarships for deserving youth to continue their studies at high schools was \$2150.00. Together with the \$25 registration fee from each Spanish student we can maintain the program for 2017 with between 10 and 14 students in total with scholarships.

Additional Donations

A \$100.00 donation was made by student James Latimer in January.

Maria Marone donated \$350.00 towards our scholarship fund in January.

A donation of a used laptop was made anonymously during January.

We offer our sincere thanks to all those who have donated over the last few months.

True Ecuador Travel . . .

January saw us officially launching our new land-based Galapagos tours. The 8 different programs that we have created, from 5 to 10 days in length, explore some of the best that the Galapagos archipelago has to offer. Visitors stay in local hotels on Santa Cruz, Isabela and San Cristóbal Islands, taking whole-day and half-day excursions to visit places of interest and other islands. These programs offer the most economical way of visiting the Galapagos on an organized program, guaranteeing that visitors can get to see the sites that they prefer. You can read about these new programs here: <https://www.true-ecuador-travel.org/land-based-galapagos.html>



In addition we have created an online app which clients can use on their tablets and smart phones to learn more about the Galapagos, review their trip details, see current local weather and find additional activities that they can do.



At the same time we continue to build up our database of tourism options throughout Ecuador, adding Amazon lodges and adventure tours, Andes Mountains activities, climbing and horseback adventures, and Pacific coast pleasures.

The process of creating a travel agency is a long one, with a great amount of information that has to be gathered and collated. It will probably take us another few months to get to where we feel that we have as much information as we need.



In January we visited **Yachay Wasi** school on the outskirts of Quito in a poor neighbourhood to drop off some donations of food and other items of general use donated by students and volunteers.

While there we had the opportunity to see their horticulture efforts, with maize, tomatoes and other vegetables grown by the different grades.



The school receives local children of indigenous and mestizo parents and is financed by their regular contributions. Yanapuma is seeking ways to help the poorest families contribute regularly to keep their children attending this school which provides an invaluable service to the local community.



Can you spot the mistake in this local lunch menu?