Introduction
First of all we wish all our supporters a very happy holiday season and all the best for 2017!

As we look back over the past 12 months, we can affirm that it has been a difficult year that has challenged our resilience. As a "social enterprise" this has been the first year since the beginning that we have not made a profit.

The principal factors have been a change in the pattern of visitors coming to Ecuador and wanting to study Spanish, the strength of the dollar which has made Ecuador relatively more expensive as a destination for non-dollar currencies, and the drastic fall of the pound sterling, losing around 20% over the course of the year.

All of the hotels and other tourist based businesses that we deal with have reported similar experiences. Fortunately we have had the reserves to cover the situation adequately and have been working to adapt and lay the groundwork to grow in 2017 and beyond. So overall we are quietly confident that 2017 will see a return to growth, and we are looking forward to the challenges ahead.

As our project co-funded by the Inter American Foundation to improve cacao production, create vegetable gardens, provide diet and nutrition education and reforestation, comes to an end in the summer of 2017 we have begun to look for new sources of co-funding to continue and build upon the foundations that we have created over the past few years with this project.

For our part, we will continue to develop the Spanish schools in Quito and Cuenca, and now in Cusco in Peru, along with our own travel agency – True Ecuador Travel, and the volunteer/study abroad/service learning projects that we have been offering for the past few years.

All of these activities form a coherent whole around the concept of educational travel and cultural exchange between members of developed and developing societies for the mutual benefit of both, which forms a core principal of Yanapuma Foundation.

We say a big “Thank You” to all those who have supported us with their presence and donations over the past year!

Christmas Fundraiser . . .

By the 31st of December we have received over $1700 towards our scholarship fund for the youth of Estero de Plátano and Bua to study at high school. Our $25 registration fees from the Spanish school will be added over the year to continue supporting these deserving youth.

It is still not too late to make your contribution to this fund. Please follow this link to learn more: http://www.yanapuma.org/en/EdePScholarships.php

Galapagos Land-Based Tours

Brand new for 2017, True Ecuador Travel has launched 8 programs to explore the wonders of the Galapagos Archipelago.

From 5—10 days in length, each program offers the visitor the chance to learn about and experience the unique ecology and geology of the islands.

Daily half-day and whole-day excursions visit different islands to explore the unique and incredible flora and fauna both above and below the waterline.

To learn more follow this link: https://true-ecuador-travel.org/land-based-galapagos.html

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Spanish School News . . .

As mentioned in the introduction, the Spanish market tightened considerably over the past year in Ecuador as tourism patterns have shifted. Relatively few backpackers arrive in Quito now looking for a week or two of classes. This market formed the core of Spanish school clientele over the past nearly 20 years, but now many prefer to backpack around Asia or go directly to Peru and Bolivia where costs are much lower.

Yanapuma has broadened its reach, now receiving more children with their parents as well as retired and older students taking career breaks. Thus our schools have a much wider range of ages than previously. Our teachers have adapted materials and methods to working with a broader range of students.

In addition we have found more students interested in choosing one or more of our “Study and Travel” programs as part of their study program. Being able to travel with a teacher who knows the country and culture well makes exploring Ecuador much less intimidating for many students.

Over these last two months of the year things have expectedly quietened down in the run up to the end of the year. The school in Cuenca has stayed busier overall as there are more students who are residents, and in general Cuenca seems more attractive to prospective students as a destination to learn Spanish.

As start the new year, both schools will fill up with a new intake in January and February, but then probably level off and decline until June before taking off for the summer months. That is the typical annual pattern that we have been used to all these years.

True Ecuador Travel News . . .

During 2016 we have worked hard to develop and promote True Ecuador Travel in addition to all our other obligations and responsibilities. It takes time for a new website to rise up in the search engine rankings, but we are happy to confirm that by the end of the year the site was beginning to produce inquiries for a variety of programs in Ecuador from both international organizations and individual travelers.

One of our major initiatives towards the end of the year was the development of our own Galapagos Land-Based Tours. We have put together 8 different packages from 5 to 10 days in length that allow visitors to explore much of what this unique archipelago has to offer at the most economical prices to be found.

We will be rolling out a web-based system so that clients can log in using smartphones or tablets to view all the details of their program along with our recommendations for free and low-cost activities that they can do to make the most of their time in the Galapagos Islands. At the end of the year we are looking for an additional staff member to help with bookings and reservations as the number of clients continues to grow.

Reviews:

One way that you can help us as an ex-student or volunteer is by adding a review to one of the websites that presents our programs. Customer reviews are an important factor for prospective students and volunteers in making a decision on where to study or volunteer.

Please consider taking a few minutes to add a review on one of these websites:

https://www.gooverseas.com/leave-a-review?uid=34908&tid=all
https://www.learn4good.com/reviews/ecuador/quito/language-schools-classes/383/reviews.htm
http://www.123teachme.com/language_schools/view_rating/1265
Project News . . .

Over the course of 2016 we have continued with the projects that we have been pursuing over the years, maintaining our commitments to the Tsa’chila culture, the community of Estero de Plátano, and other grassroots organizations and communities around Ecuador.

Last year we reduced the number of high-school scholarship recipients from 12 to 8 in Estero de Plátano due to fewer $25 registrations for Spanish classes which go straight to this fund along with the donations that we solicit each year end. We will be maintaining this number and hopefully even increasing slightly for 2017, depending on the donations that we receive this year.

Each year as we begin to look back over the progress that we have made during the previous 12 months the process gives us pause to reflect and draw lessons from the events that have taken place. This year the process was especially significant coming on the heels of our 10th birthday as an NGO.

We started in 2006 with enthusiasm and ideals and almost no experience at all, and launched ourselves into a process that was an intense learning experience. Since then dozens of interns and hundreds of volunteers have come and gone.

At times, coming from universities with one or other specific methodological focus, interns would tell us we were doing it all wrong, and we would ask for their help in orienting us to their approach, only to be told by the next interns that once again we had it all wrong!

We hope that many of them learned through their experience with us that practice in the field challenges the theories that professors may have developed through their own practice with different cultures, and that one has to remain open to adapting in the moment to the demands of the situation. The principal lesson for us over the years has been that any successful development work is based on open communication, a feeling of kinship and trust, and that it takes time for a relationship to develop that permits successful change.

For those interested to learn more we will provide a summary of the year’s activities in the annual report for 2016 which should be available by the end of March (if we can find enough time by then!!!)

We were pleased to receive a visit in November from Dra. Ventura Montserrat, a professor from Barcelona who carried out research with the Tsa’chila 30 years ago. Her book, “En el Cruce de los Caminos,” is one of the few studies that has been done about the Tsa’chila culture. After many years she returned to visit the Tsachila and was able to talk to us about the changes she has seen since her original research with them.

Intern Hallel Elnir was able to visit some of the most senior Tsa’chila with the help of Alfonso Aguavil, director of the Shinopi Bolón Cultural Center. They tend to be less visible as they seldom take part in cultural events. All of them were born into the traditional Tsa’chila life style as hunter-gatherers before the mass influx of colonists and mestizos who destroyed the rainforest from the 1960s onwards.

Hallel showing Tsa’chila children his photos of them on a cultural day at the Shinopi Bolón Cultural Center.

Three Tsa’chila elders from Bua, ranging from 86 to 103 years old!
Volunteer and Intern News . . .
At the end of December intern Hallel Elnir from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem left us to return home after 5 months spent working with the Tsa’chila in the comuna Bua. Hallel made a significant contribution during his time spent there, especially with the members of the Shinopi Bolón cultural center where he was able to teach them several basic skills in accounting and administration – things that we take for granted as part of our culture, but which are still mysterious and difficult for the Tsa’chila.

He also helped them work out costs and prices for the services that they can offer to visitors, creating spreadsheets and information sheets for future reference so they have criteria on which to base any decisions that they make. In addition he made a video to showcase the center which you can view here: http://yanapuma.ort/en/videos/shinopi.mp4

At the start of January intern Linda Dobson from the Inholland University of Applied Science, in Holland left us after spending 5 months working in our offices with the travel agency and the Spanish school. Linda worked on filling our database of travel options in Ecuador along with gathering information about the Galapagos Islands and the activities available there, before going to the Galapagos to gather data for her own study.

Zibusiso Dhlamini and Johnny Martin from Union College, New York, have also continued with their projects in Estero de Plátano, tutoring the scholarship students and working with groups in the community to move forward their various initiatives.

We are grateful to all of the above for their hard work and dedication in their respective fields and locations over the last 12 months.

Our 6 volunteers on the German government sponsored Weltarts programs who came to us via the German agency KulturLife have settled in well to their tasks in various communities, included with the INEPE school in Quito (see pictures below).

At the start of November two groups from the Leap were finishing up their projects—one group in the Galapagos Islands and the other in the Tsa’chila comuna of Bua, before heading off to the Gaia Amazon Center in the Amazonian province of Napo.

There they spent their last few days taking a well-earned rest and exploring the ecology and cultures of the Amazon rainforest.

Study Travel and Academic Programs . . .
With such stunning cultural, geographical and biological diversity in a country about the size of the state of Colorado, Ecuador has a huge amount to offer individual students and groups looking to squeeze a concentrated program into the time they have available.

We are always happy to offer ideas and draft itineraries to universities, high schools and other organizations looking to create meaningful and educational programs for their students or clients. Contact us to learn more!