

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

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

A bimonthly newsletter

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Happy New Year to all our supporters!

Another year has begun, and here at Yanapuma / True Ecuador Travel we are looking forward to a busy and productive year. We remain committed to our social enterprise model of development – supporting the work of Fundación Yanapuma through our own for-profit activities as well as seeking external funding to expand our work.

We continue to put effort into expanding the travel agency in light of the slow-down in the Spanish classes market, and also we are developing our online Spanish offerings to students all over the world who want or need to learn Spanish but do not have the time or funds to travel to Ecuador.

In December we began our fund drive once again to support our scholarship program for deserving youth to study at high school and beyond, and you can read more

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about this on the following pages.

January also saw the arrival of several volunteer groups to carry out work on projects that we are supporting. We are always happy to discuss the options for universities, high schools and other organizations to carry out service learning and global citizenship programs here in Ecuador.

Our extensive contacts with indigenous and marginalized communities and grass-roots projects around the country means we can organize meaningful interaction for groups, as well of course as organizing the other travel aspects of their travels around Ecuador through our travel



New Year celebrations in Quito

To see out the old year, Ecuadorians make or buy “monigotes”, characters from politics, TV or film made with paper maché and cardboard. These are burned at midnight in an act of cleansing ready for the new year.

At the same time, young men dress up as women and hold up traffic in the streets while they dance suggestively until the drivers give them some small change.



Find Us On Social Media . . .

For many years we have been remiss in our management of social media, often relying on interns to do a bit of this or that with Facebook or another social media channel. The result has been that we find ourselves with many accounts on many channels that have been entirely ignored for years and that we have no idea how to access!

But all that is changing now! We are consolidating our social media accounts and bringing together the various parts of our organization to present a coherent picture of ourselves and our activities.

We would like to ask you to help to get the word out, by:

- ⇒ Adding us to your circles
- ⇒ Posting a review
- ⇒ Liking and following us
- ⇒ Visit our webpages!



See the list on the right for some ideas of where to add us.

Social Media Channels . . .

Facebook (like and follow)
- Yanapuma Spanish & True Ecuador Travel

Instagram (like and post)
- Yanapuma_TrueEC

Twitter (follow and re-tweet)

Linkedin (follow us)

Lonely Planet (leave a review)

TripAdvisor (leave a review)

Spanish School News . . .

December was a quiet month for the Spanish school as is normal for that time of the year. Then in January things started to get busier again with an influx of new students in both the Quito and Cuenca schools.

In December our principal focus was on building up the materials for the online Spanish classes. As well as creating an online library of materials that teachers can access for their classes, we created a set of videos with transcriptions at various levels so that students can watch the video and read the transcription to improve their listening and comprehension skills.

The materials were uploaded to the website <https://fluento.com> – the site from which we now run our online Spanish classes. This site caters mostly to European students, particularly from Germany. To access the materials you can follow this link: <https://www.fluento.com/en/spanish-video-index>



Volunteers and Interns . . .

The first group to arrive in January was a new group for us, from US organization **Operation Groundswell**. They have 3 groups confirmed for this year so far, and the first arrived at the Tsa'chila community of Bua on 3 January to get involved in the “edible forest” project that we have been working on there. The group planted trees of the “Figu” variety, one that our local expert Cristina Calazacon has rescued by searching for seeds from the few remaining trees that exist in the region. They also helped to fertilize the plots that we have created over the last year or two.

We were also pleased to welcome back a group from the **Colège Edouard Montpetit** of Canada. This is the 9th year that they have come to work with the cacao growers in the Tsa'chila community of Bua. Their annual return has been instrumental in maintaining the project to improve the cacao grown there as each year for the first two or three years the group of cacao growers had reunited to welcome the group and continue with their project.

At the orientation we gave the group on arrival in Quito we reminded them that when the first groups came the Tsa'chila women were still afraid to interact with foreigners, let alone to welcome them into their homes. But now they eagerly await the arrival of groups like this one to stay with their families and share their culture and lives for a week or more.

The next group to arrive was from The Leap, a group of 18 youth, mostly from the UK. Unfortunately a couple of them got stranded for a few days in the US due to the terrible weather conditions on the east coast. The group's first stop was in the Andean community of Agato where they worked on infrastructure development and agriculture, staying with host families. They also got to explore the famous Otavalo Market on Saturdays as well as visit other sites around about such as Cuicocha Lake and Peguche Waterfall.

Following this the group set off on the Ruta de los Volcanes, traveling down the spine of the Andes to Quilotoa crater lake, Baños for white-water rafting and other excitement, Riobamba and Chimborazo volcano to hike to the glacier line. The next stop is the Tsa'chila community of Bua where they will be working on community projects there.

We were also pleased to welcome another group from The Leap to Arequipa in Peru to start the same program there. This group of 7 volunteers started with a week of Spanish classes and exploration of the beautiful city of Arequipa before heading off to a volunteer project in the village of Coporaque in Colca Canyon. At the end of their stay they got to hike into the canyon to the oasis of Sagalle as well as to hike on some of the amazing trails there.

Next the group goes on to Puno on the banks of Lake Titicaca to explore the unique Uros floating islands before continuing on to the Aymara community of Karina on a peninsula that juts into the lake.

The next stop is Cusco and the Sacred Valley to work with another indigenous community before setting off to Machu Picchu!





Project News . . .

Following the completion of our project co-funded by the Inter American Foundation we have helped our field team of 4 members to write a project proposal that will fund them to continue the work that we have been doing for the past five years with them in the Tsa'chila comunas Bua, El Poste, Peripa and Los Naranjos.

Our aim has always been to become redundant, so that this new proposal will see us take a step back, so that we can ensure that the project is going according to plan, but without being directly involved in the day-to-day running and record-keeping.

This strategy also allows us to devote a bit more time to developing our own sources of income to keep the foundation operational. With the decrease in the number of Spanish students coming to Ecuador and the fall of the pound sterling against the dollar, our income has suffered over the past couple of years and we are working to diversify into new areas to maintain ourselves.

This is a relatively slow process to get off the ground, but our travel agency and online Spanish classes are growing and beginning to show promise for the future.

In the meantime, we remain committed to our scholarship program for deserving youth to study at high school and beyond. We have also begun supporting children at the elementary level at the Yachay Wasi school on the outskirts of Quito. One of the students we support is Liliana (*below with her mother*).

Diagnosed with learning difficulties at age 6, with the extra help we were able to offer she has now become top of her class!



Staff and Interns . . .

At the end of December, intern Claire Masure from France left us to return home. Claire spent 6 months working with us at the school in Quito and in Cuenca. We thank her for all her hard work on our behalf!

We are delighted to introduce Ana Maria Carrera as our social media coordinator. We have been woefully behind in developing our social media presence. In the past we have relied on one or other intern doing something, followed by another doing something else until we found we had many social media accounts, all unattended and scattered across the internet in disarray! Ana Maria has been helping us get all this under control and has devised a strategy to push ahead in 2018 and beyond.

If any previous students, volunteers or clients are interested in contributing to our social media growth please contact us – promotion@yanapuma.org

We were also happy to welcome Cheryl Sterling as temporary student coordinator in our school in Cuenca, taking some of the load off our valiant administrator Carina Nicolalde.

We also welcomed from Belgium, Johan Rubin, who joined us as group leader to manage the group on their travels through Peru.

And we are pleased to welcome from the US, Charlotte Ford who returned to lead another Leap group on their various projects in Ecuador.

Donation News . . .

Our annual scholarship fund drive was launched just before Christmas. We also add the \$25 registration fees that we have received over the course of the year to this figure. This year we are happy to announce that we will have a total of around \$10,000 for the program.

Currently we are supporting 3 students in the coastal community of Estero de Plátano, 2 students from the Tsa'chila community of Bua who have graduated high school and gone on for diplomas in information technology and agriculture, 2 students at the Yachay Wasi elementary school.

We also took the decision to begin supporting a Tsa'chila teacher at the school in Bua to gain his teaching diploma. Currently he works as an elementary teacher, but as the local school is being expanded to include secondary levels, we realized that it will be important for the Tsa'chila to have at least one native Tsa'chila teacher capable of maintaining interest in their culture and incorporating these concepts into the secondary education.

If you would still like to donate to our scholarship fund you can do so by following this link: <http://www.yanapuma.org/en/EdePScholarships.php>

True Ecuador Travel . . .

We are looking forward to a busy year in the travel agency as it gradually continues to take off. It is a long process getting a website visible to potential clients, and in addition to working on this, we have begun a social media campaign with the expert guidance of our new social media coordinator, Ana Maria Carrera.

Our focus as a travel agency is on educational travel – travel for the inquiring mind. Thus we offer Spanish and cultural programs, study abroad and related programs, and tours to the Galapagos, Amazon and other regions for visitors to learn about these unique environments and the flora, fauna and cultures that exist there.

Our land-based Galapagos programs offer an economical means of exploring this unique archipelago. Whole-day and half-day excursions are combined with free time to relax or follow our options for free and low-cost activities that visitors can do on their own. Accommodation is in regular and comfortable tourist-class hotels, although we can offer upgrades to superior and luxury hotels as well.



However, we always observe that the programs are quite full and visitors will be out all day in the sun and fresh air, hiking, snorkelling and exploring, so that in the evening most are ready to just shower, eat and sleep ready for the next day's excitement starting around 6 or 7 am. So one may not get the most out of staying in a luxury hotel!



We can arrange programs for individual travelers as well as for groups with mixed programs that can include Spanish classes, cultural visits, rain forest and cloud forest tours, haciendas, adventure and mountain activities, and Galapagos tours by land or boat.



Students in Quito



Galapagos App!

Visitors to the Galapagos Islands on any of our land-based programs get access to our app that contains a wealth of information and advice for their trip.

In addition to being a place to receive and upload documents, the app has information about the Galapagos islands' environment and history, an annual calendar, advice on free and low cost activities, maps with places of interest marked, info on where to eat, and a 4-day weather forecast for different islands.

All of this will encourage you to get the most out of your once-in-a-lifetime visit to the Galapagos!

