

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

Thank you for checking out our latest newsletter, either as a regular reader or as a newcomer to Fundación Yanapuma, Yanapuma Spanish School and True Ecuador Travel!

February and March are reasonably busy months on all fronts, and this year is no different. The travel agency has been busy reserving and following up on our island-hopping Galapagos tours which are proving very popular both with our Spanish students and other visitors who only arrive in Ecuador to explore the wonders that this country has to offer within its diminutive footprint.

The Spanish schools have also been reasonably busy, especially the school in Cuenca where at times we have struggled to fit in late-arriving students. We expect things to quieten down somewhat in April

Social Media . . .

Since the start of the year we have been making a more determined effort to build up our social media presence.

We have pages for the Spanish school and the non-profit NGO—**"Yanapuma Be Sustainable"** on Facebook. We also have a Facebook page for **"True Ecuador Travel"**.

We post 3 times per week—Monday, Wednesday and Friday. If you have a Facebook page, please consider taking a minute to look us up and "Follow" or "Like" us, and help us to expand our reach.



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and May, before things take off again for the summer. July in the school in Cuenca is already full!

In the foundation, we have begun a new project to create around 2,500 saplings via the nursery at the Shinopi Bolon cultural center in the Tsa'chila community of Bua. We will purchase these from the nursery as part of our drive to develop a nursery microenterprise producing local species of trees.

These will be planted out in the summer months by international volunteers that will be staying in the community.

You can learn more about all of these activities on the following pages.



Alfonso Aguavil—founder of the Shinopi Bolon cultural center.

¡Carnaval!

El 4 y 5 de marzo se celebró Carnaval en Ecuador. En Quito y Cuenca hubo desfiles, pero la celebración más grande siempre es en el pueblo de Guaranda en la provincia de Bolívar. Allí, además del desfile, las calles se llenan con gente alegre lanzando agua, harina y espuma con mucho gusto!

Durante estos días del año los habitantes y los turistas quienes llegan de muchos países disfrutan de la fiesta más grande del Ecuador.



The Tsa'chila and Yanapuma

Yanapuma has worked with the Tsa'chila culture since our inception back in 2006.

We were invited by Alfonso to visit the community of Bua and the newly-created cultural center "Shinopi Bolón".

Since then we have carried out many projects together, and hundreds of volunteers have spent time working with the families of the cultural center and with other groups in the community to carry out projects that contribute to their development.

We remember that at first the Tsa'chila women were afraid to come out and meet the volunteers, hiding in the cabañas and peeking around the door frames at the first foreigners to spend any time in the comuna Bua.

Things have changed greatly since then and the Tsa'chila welcome foreigners to learn about their culture and history.

Spanish School News . . .

As mentioned in the introduction, the schools have been pretty busy in February and March, especially the school in Cuenca. Quito has been a bit quieter, as we have come to expect over the past few years as fewer visitors arrive, and thus fewer look for Spanish classes.

Inquiries for classes in the summer are good, especially from parents of families interested in a language-learning holiday for themselves and their children. The Spanish classes form part of an immersion experience for the adventurous family in Ecuador, in combination with weekend excursions, travel to the Amazon rainforest, and through the Andes Mountains, and to the Galapagos Islands.



Staff and Interns . . .

In February German student of tourism **Sebastian Wieczorek** joined us. Aside from general duties in the travel agency, Sebastian also became a volunteer group leader, taking over responsibility for the Leap group as they went to spend nearly three weeks with the Tsa'chila, working on maintenance and construction projects at the cultural center Shinopi Bolon. Sebastian will also be the group leader for the next group that arrives at the start of April.



We have also continued to develop our online Spanish classes as an option for students who perhaps cannot make it to Ecuador to take classes with us. Online Spanish classes are also a useful way for our students to keep up their Spanish once they return home, with a one-hour class two or three or four times per month to keep their Spanish fresh. They are especially useful for children to give them confidence that their classmates will lack.



We were also joined at the start of March by **Romy Vander Straeten** from Belgium, a third year tourism student from Thomas More University. Romy began working in Quito, gathering information for the web site and expanding our contact database, before moving to

Cuenca to work in the school.

Finally, at the end of March, Hanne de Kinder arrived to take over in Quito from Romy. In a few weeks they will swap around, with Romy returning to Quito and Hanne going to Cuenca to take over there.



Remember!

You don't have to be in Ecuador to take Spanish classes with us. You can take them online from the comfort of your own home at any time that suits your busy schedule. Online Spanish classes are ideal for children too who adapt quickly to the online learning platform.

Check it out here:

<http://yanapumaspanish.org/onlinespanish.html>

Volunteer & Project News . . .

In February we began to develop a new project, funded by Yanapuma Spanish School and True Ecuador Travel with additional funding from Sotogrande International School from Spain and Colége Edouard Montpetit from Canada. We will be growing 2,500 saplings for planting out as part of our ongoing “edible forest” project.

The Tsa’chila were a forest people, hunter-gatherers up until the 1960s when an influx of colonists moved in and began to fell the “unproductive” jungle to create pasture for cattle and agricultural production such as maize, yucca, pineapples, etc. The Tsa’chila, with no sense of land-ownership quickly lost nearly 50% of the lands ceded to them by the Ecuadorian state, and ended up renting out their lands to the colonists. These cleared and used the lands for a few years until it was largely exhausted, leaving the Tsa’chila with an environmental catastrophe that also affected their personal health.



While many Tsa’chila now practice agriculture themselves, mostly following the practices of their colonist neighbors, many are also interested in re-foresting with native species mixed with other introduced species that have economic and nutritional value to them. Thus, the edible forest project has proven popular, and the 16 plots we have already established are growing well, with locals observing the return of species of birds, insects and animals that have not been seen there for many years.

The saplings will be planted out in July by a group from Sotogrande International School as part of their volunteering activities in Bua.



We were happy to welcome a group from **Operation Groundswell** in February. The group came for an orientation at the offices in Quito before heading off to volunteer in the “edible forest” project in Bua de los Tsa’chila. It is especially important for us when a group comes for just a short time to volunteer and experience a different culture that we have everything ready for them to “hit the ground running” and be able to carry out their volunteer work and engage meaningfully with the community despite the short time frame.



The volunteer group from the Leap UK went to the Galapagos Islands in February for nearly 3 weeks of conservation work on San Cristóbal Island. They also helped out at a local center for children with motor skills difficulties, helping them to gain motor competence by riding horses.

The group then went to work with the Tsa’chila at the cultural center Shinopi Bolon. They worked on trail maintenance, maintenance of the cultural center buildings and preparing the nursery for sowing the seeds of local species of trees for our new “edible forest” project.

Our 7 German volunteers on the Weltwärts programs also continued their volunteering in their varied projects in schools in Quito, Agato community in the Andean sierra near Otavalo, the small town of Puyo in the Amazon region and the Selva Vida project also in the Ecuadorian Amazon region. Their commitment of 12 months volunteering at each site provides a valuable resource to these communities and projects as they continue to develop.

There is a constant and vital connection between the volunteers and interns, and the projects that Yanapuma funds and supports. As disadvantaged communities struggle to find ways to develop sustainably, the energy and resources that volunteers bring to their hosts is an important contribution.

Our aim is to make it a two-way flow, with volunteers learning directly about the challenges, and being able to reflect and gain insight on their own privileged situation.

True Ecuador Travel . . .

At the end of March we traveled to Denver, Colorado to take part in the **Forum on Education Abroad** conference. This event brings together Study Abroad professionals from all over the US to share experiences and learn about best practices in this expanding educational field.

Attending presentations and workshops over the 3 days provides opportunities to consider some of the many different aspects of creating successful Study Abroad programs, from the purely philosophical, the ethical, organizational and practical considerations.

The event also provides a great opportunity for networking as well as keeping up on developments in the field. We were able to meet up with existing contacts as well as to make some new contacts to discuss working out Study Abroad programs for their institutions.

True Ecuador Travel puts emphasis on the development of educational travel, and travel for the inquiring mind, not only for university and high school groups, but for any individual visitor, group or family that are keen to learn more about the environment and cultures of the world.

We have also been busy with a good number of individual clients as well as travel groups from far afield. While many have been focused on visiting the Galapagos Islands on our island-hopping tours, others have also included visits to the Amazon region as well as exploring the snow-capped volcanoes and mountains of the Andes.

We have been fortunate in February and March to count on the help of interns from Germany and Belgium, helping with a variety of tasks that you can learn about in the Intern and Staff section. The process of creating a travel agency involves the gathering and collation of large amounts of data, and once you have it you realize it is time to update it all! So it is very valuable for us to be able to count on extra hands to keep the work going.



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The Andes Mountains with its snow-capped volcanoes



The Amazon rain forest with its indigenous cultures



The Galapagos Islands with its unique flora and fauna

Donation News . . .

We were pleased to receive a donation of \$60 from Nightwatch BV in the Netherlands. This will be put to our general donation fund for small projects.

We welcome small donations from individuals and organizations, pledging 100% of such donations to direct project costs, providing our own admin and overhead costs.

Visit our website: <https://yanapuma.org>