A co-operatively run 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!

A bimonthly newsletter

Issue No. 50 Jan-Feb 2016

Introduction

As we move further into 2016 we wish all our supporters success for the rest of the year!

At Yanapuma and True Ecuador Travel we have been busy with visitors – students, volunteers, interns and other folks arriving in Ecuador to learn Spanish, volunteer and experience the immense cultural and biological diversity of this tiny Latin American country straddling the equator.

January is typically a busy month as people start to travel after the end of year holidays and festivities. But this year we actually noticed more people arriving in December than in previous years, many to escape the cold and dreary weather further north and enjoy the year-round temperate climate of the Andean sierra as well as the tropical heat of the Amazon, Pacific coast and Galapagos Islands.

For the foundation, January 11 marked the end of the 7th semester of our program co-funded by the Inter American Foundation, and time for the end-of-semester report on our activities and accomplishments during the previous 6 months.

This is always a good time to reflect back and see how we have progressed and adapt our methods and activities if necessary for the following semester. If you are interested in practicing your Spanish comprehension you can read the narrative report here: http://www.yanapuma.org/en/pdf/EC-425-InformeEnero2016.pdf

Online Spanish Classes with Yanapuma

Yanapuma continues to offer online Spanish classes to students all over the world – Europe, North America, Australia and Asia. Currently we have well over 100 students taking classes with us. Some of these are former students who have studied with us in Ecuador, who take an hour or two per week in order to not lose what they have learned. Others are interested in learning Spanish or improving their Spanish so that they can communicate better in their work environment.

We offer a free trial class with no obligation to those interested in seeing how the system works. Many are surprised at how effortless it is to communicate face-to-face via Skype or Google, and to be able to continue improving their Spanish. Children adapt especially well to this medium, and can benefit enormously by gaining in confidence and ability that sets them ahead of their peers in Spanish classes at school.

To set up your free trial class you can click here: www.timelybooking.com/yanapumasspanish.org

Carnaval in Ecuador!

On 8 and 9 February Ecuador celebrated Carnaval. While not nearly as big as the celebrations in Brazil, there were parades and special events in the biggest cities, along with smaller celebrations throughout the country. The town with the wildest Carnaval celebrations is Guaranda in the south of Ecuador where the streets fill up with people who throw all kinds of stuff at each other from water to flour, eggs and worse!

The roots of Carnaval are in pagan history, and it has always been considered a time for throwing off social control and being less inhibited. In more religious periods the revelers began to wear masks to disguise themselves, a practice which has grown to be a general facet of Carnaval in different countries as it allows people to behave more freely.

Carnaval has traditionally been a time to show disrespect for authorities and break free of rigid social controls by dowsing others with water and food such as flour, eggs and the likes.
As we have mentioned in previous newsletters, student numbers have declined noticeably over the past 3 years due to several factors that have affected the tourism market in Ecuador. A strong dollar that makes classes more expensive for non-US students and the growth of Asia as the backpacker destination of choice are the two principal factors. For this reason we have been working to change our market strategy, creating more packages with our travel agency, of which the Spanish classes are just one part.

The result has been that we have attracted more older students and families with children who want to study Spanish together and introduce their children to a new culture and way of life. Ecuador makes the perfect destination for that as it is a relatively safe, tranquil, and accessible country in comparison with other Latin American countries.

So our student population is now truly mixed, with a substantial number of retired and semi-retired older students, families with children as young as 4 years old, students in their 30s, and younger travellers exploring South America.

Our school in Cuenca has been particularly full these first two months of the year as Cuenca proves to be a very popular destination for students who prefer its tranquil, laid-back, colonial style to the busier and more fast-paced style of capital city Quito.

Meanwhile in Quito the school has been reasonably busy with both individual and small group classes with students from 4 years old up to retired and semi-retired persons.

Our travel agency continues to develop, although a shortage of staff to devote sufficient time to the tasks we need to accomplish means that it is going slower than we would like to see!

Through True Ecuador Travel we can offer our students and volunteers tours and travel to the Amazon rainforest, the haciendas of the Andean sierra, adventure on the Pacific coast or land-based tours and cruises of the Galapagos Islands.

The land-based tours are particularly popular because of their economical price and flexibility, and being able to sleep on dry land every night and have the freedom to roam around and connect more with the local culture.

Volunteer News

January and February have been busy months in the volunteer department. In addition to 13 individual volunteers we have received groups from The Leap and Thinking Beyond Borders. A group of 35 from the Leap was split into two groups, carrying out projects in the Andean community of Chilcapamba, the Ts'a'chila community of El Poste, and a conservation project on the Galapagos Islands.

Meanwhile, 16 students from Thinking Beyond Borders spent a month in February in the Cañari village of Caguanapamba in the Andes north of Cuenca, working on reforestation after forest fires destroyed large areas of woodland, and learning about the Cañar culture and way of life.

We were also pleased to receive once again the group from Colége Edouard Montpetit in Canada, as well as the group from the Harvard Forum on International Development, both of which worked with groups of Ts'a'chila cacao growers, one in comuna Bua and the other in El Poste.

Donation News

Our annual Christmas fundraiser to provide scholarships to the youth of the village of Estero de Plátano on the Pacific coast, raised a total of $2575.00. Together with the registration fees that we have received from the Spanish schools we will be able to offer a total of 11 scholarships for the next academic year.

In January and February we received donations for this fund from:

Maria Marone, David Russell

We were pleased to learn that we have received £10,000 from the Alan and Nesta Ferguson Charitable Trust for the continuation of our work with the Ts'a'chila. Our work in vegetable gardens was first enabled back in 2011 by a grant from Ferguson, the success of which laid the groundwork for the expansion of the project from one school to 3 schools and over 50 families.
Project News . . .

The Tsa’chila

As mentioned in the introduction, January saw us creating the report for the 7th semester of our project co-funded with the Inter American Foundation. To date, the respective contributions can be seen in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Project Total</th>
<th>Spent to 11/01/2016</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fund. Inter Americana</td>
<td>$ 211,350,00</td>
<td>$ 158,068,00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fund. Yanapuma</td>
<td>$ 90,600,00</td>
<td>$ 69,634,00</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The first two years of this project were particularly difficult for the field crew as they struggled to work with beneficiaries to whom everything was new and a great challenge. Especially in the area of the vegetable gardens there were quite a few families that dropped out at the start. But now, well into the 4th year of the project, we have a solid group of motivated and competent beneficiaries in cacao and the vegetable gardens, and their neighbors, seeing their success, are keen to get involved as well.

Thus, the day-to-day field visits to farmers with their plots of cacao has become more focused on the actual work of improving their cacao, which is now beginning to produce its first harvests, rather than on keeping them motivated while the saplings establish themselves and begin to grow. Some farmers have dropped out, while others have joined the project. Some of those who dropped out did so because they had debts they had to pay off by using the same land to sow a quicker yielding crop like yucca or maize.

With the vegetable gardens, a sizeable number of families are totally independent now, even to the extent of saving their own seeds. Gradually a culture of growing vegetables is beginning to become an accepted activity and not the huge challenge it first seemed to the beneficiaries. At the same time they have been educated about nutrition and diet and shown methods of incorporating their vegetable production into their regular meals. The families, by and large, react positively to these new tastes and dishes, making the continuation of the vegetable garden a desirable activity.

We have also continued in these first two months of the year to develop the “edible forest” project, sowing around 17 hectares with mixed species of mostly local varieties of trees, many of them producing fruits and nuts and other edible products. This project has proven to be extremely interesting to the Tsa’chila and we have more beneficiaries lined up if we can stretch the funding to incorporate them into the project.

For Yanapuma it offers the chance to create greater food security for the families in a way that is not tied to economic production, and which also increases the quality of life through improving the environment and recovering some of the biodiversity that has been lost.

The Tsa’chila themselves are seeking out the plants that their ancestors used to rely on, some of which are near extinction, to sow in a nursery and plant out to incorporate once more into their diet.

In the Tsa’chila community of Bua we have two youth who are receiving scholarships to study at high school. These are funded by the Collège Edouard Montpetit from Quebec, Canada. A group of students from the college comes down every year to work with the cacao growers and the college now also funds two scholarships. We are delighted too that the non-profit arm of Sotogrande International School, Kindred Spirit, will also be funding a scholarship for the next academic year, bringing us up to 3 students who will be able to finish high school.

Estero de Plátano

In Estero de Plátano, our two interns from Union College, Lacey and Gerardo, continue to work with the 8 students who receive scholarships from Yanapuma to study at high school. One will be graduating this year, and with the funds that we have raised in our annual fundraiser plus the registrations from the Spanish school we hope to be able to offer at least two more new scholarships for next year (the academic year begins in May at the coast).
