



MindStormPhoto
Ecuador
2012 pt 2

Burt and Evelyn Johnson

Ecuador 2012 pt 2

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Printer Repairs and Power Outages

Printer Repairs and Power Outages

The HP Pro 8000 printer I bought last week hasn't been working too well, so today I boxed it up and took it back to the HP store. I also put my Mac laptop in my backpack, just in case it was needed, hailed a cab and was off to Mall de Rio yet again.

When I got there, a family of four was looking at computers and making a purchase. Since there is only one salesperson in a store measuring maybe 15' X 12', I waited till they were done. I then tried to explain my problem in my limited Spanish. Neither the salesman, nor the family (which was now huddled around trying to help) spoke any English. I managed to communicate most of my problem, but some of it just didn't come across. For example, how do you say "problem with the printhead"? My attempt of "problemo con el imprimir cabeza" was just met with stares of confusion. Seems "print head" is not a good direct translation...:)

The salesman decided to install the print driver on a PC in the store, so I told him (in broken Spanish) that I would go eat lunch and return. I went over to the food court at the mall, and looked over the options. My vision has gotten terrible in recent weeks (I have LASIC surgery scheduled for January, as soon as I get home), so part of my decision was based on which menu board I could read... I decided to see what the local burger chain was like, and had a TropiBurger. The meal included a burger, fries, coleslaw, 2 chicken wings (??) and a soft drink, all for \$4.60. If you like Burger King (the next stall over), you might like this, but I won't be back. The chicken wasn't all that bad, but the burger was paper thin and tasteless.

Printer Repairs and Power Outages

Back to the HP store and the salesman asked me for my Mac laptop. Seems he had trouble getting the printer to work with his computer? Once the Mac was connected, I showed him the problem. He opened the printer, fiddled with the Magenta printhead (I had thought the Black head was the problem since my black text was printing badly), played with a few more controls, and viola! it all started working properly. Success!

I then discovered a nasty little HP secret. The printer did not come with standard ink cartridges. Rather it had "demo" cartridges only good for about 20 pages. I had to buy a new set of cartridges, having used up the initial ones in trying to get the printer to work properly. The set of 4 carts cost almost as much as the printer did, so I just spent twice what I had intended. Oh well, these carts are supposed to be good for 1000 pages, and it is not likely I will print anywhere near that in the next two months, so that should be the end of expenses for the printer, other than paper.

I returned home, hooked it up, saw everything was working properly, and started doing some software development for LeapFrog again. Why is it so dark in here, and why can't I access the LeapFrog network?? After a few seconds of confusion, I realized that the power had gone out, and so had the internet (we are dependent on a wireless router serving the apartment building).

For the next 6 hours, the power would come on for 5 minutes, then kick off again for half an hour or more. Around 5:00, the apartment manager came by with candles, told us the outage was city-wide, and was very unusual. Power and internet finally returned around 7:00 tonight, and (knock on wood) has been stable since then.

Printer Repairs and Power Outages

We have now been in Cuenca for about 4 weeks. 9 days back in February and almost 3 weeks so far on this trip. This is the first power outage we have had, though internet has been less reliable. For now, I am taking Javier's word on this being very unusual. We lose power back in Berkeley every year or so too, so this is not really a "third world issue" as far as I can see.

Haircut!

Evelyn has been after me for the last few years to let my hair grow longer. I decided this past summer to hold off on another haircut for a *long time* to see how it looked. As we approached this trip to Cuenca, I told Evelyn that I really needed a haircut. She talked me into waiting until we reached Cuenca -- while she went off to "the only hair stylist she trusted" back in Berkeley... !

For the past three weeks in Cuenca, we have walked past several barber shops. Some are fancy, but usually empty. One is a little hole-in-the-wall that only has one old man barber, but he almost always has a customer in his chair. Passing him over twenty times, I have only seen his shop empty twice. I decided this was the guy to go to. Of course, I noted to Evelyn that we only know that people go there. It is possible he only knows one type of haircut and those that like that cut go there, so all bets are off...



The barber shop is in that tiny door between the cabs across the street. Very loud from traffic, and tiny, but he was always busy!

Haircut!

A couple people at work said that I was starting to look like LBJ with long hair in his later years. Sure enough, when we Googled "LBJ long hair", I saw what they meant.



We were lucky when we arrived at the barber, as a customer was just checking himself in the mirror after finishing. The chair was empty and ready for me. I had prepared a few key words to say in Spanish, such as "Cut just over the shirt in back", "Taper the back", "sides short" and "top of the head long."

So much for planning ahead. The barber didn't understand a word I was saying. He was pleasant and friendly, but clearly I was speaking gibberish to him. The prior customer came back to the shop when he heard my bumbling my way through. He also didn't speak English, but between the three of us, I mostly communicated what I wanted.



Finally the smock went over me, and I was in a panic. What was he going to do to me?!

Haircut!



After half an hour of whacking, the floor around me looked like a jungle.



I checked myself in the mirror, and found I was right. This barber only knew one haircut, and I had just gotten it! Oh well, shorter than I hoped for, and he had no idea what the word "taper in back" (spoken in my best Spanish) meant, but I no longer feel like I need a band to tie a ponytail in back.

Haircut!



His price was \$3, and I added another \$1 as tip. I walked out with a pretty darn good haircut (though a bit shorter than I would have preferred), and another example of how friendly Cuencanas are to us expats, even more so if we at least put in a small effort to speak the local language.

I'm keeping the moustache for now. A TEDTalks presentation "[Healthier men, one moustache at a time](#)" gave one more reason to do so...

Market plus Jazz Society

This morning we went out looking for a new adventure... in getting a haircut. See the separate blog entry from earlier today on that excitement.

After my hair fit on my head again, we went looking for another almuerzos restaurant (it seems we could go to a new one every day and not run out on this trip!). This time we tried Moliendo Cafe, which offers Columbian fare.



6-24 Honorato Vasquez y Hermano Miguel

The lunch included a vegetable soup, banana, tree-tomato juice, your choice of chicken, beef or vegetable as a main course, plus rice, salad, and a slice of fried yucca. All for \$2.50.

Haircut!



This was Evelyn's lunch with beef.

Our next stop was the Mercado 8 de Octubre, which is on Hermano Miguel y Lamar. I would never buy any meat or fish at any of these mercados, as it all sits out in the open air for hours, and my California gut probably doesn't have the needed bacteria to cope with the spoilage that must certainly be there. However, the produce looked very good -- better than the other mercado on Calle Larga where I had purchased last week's food. We ended up buying a few fruits and veggies, because they looked too good to pass up.

Market plus Jazz Society



We then returned to the apartment to rest for a couple hours and pick up art and photography supplies for a planned afternoon at Sofy's Orchard. We had gone there 2 weeks ago for the Vampire's Bite modelling show (see earlier blog post on that session), and had been told there would be some ballet dancers there today. We had invited our neighbors [William and Ann](#) (click their name to go to their blog) to join us both at Sofy's and for a night of jazz later.

We met William and Ann that afternoon, only to find Sofy's closed and locked with nobody in sight. At some point we may discover if we had misunderstood, or if they had cancelled. Either way, it had started raining, so we walked a block hugging the walls, until we ducked into Cafe Austria for a drink. Evelyn had a glass of the house red wine and I had a glass of the house white wine. We have discovered that wine is a pretty unpredictable thing here in Cuenca, but both glasses were quite good, and only \$3.50 per glass.

Market plus Jazz Society

After a glass of wine, the rain had stopped, so we walked down to our dinner restaurant -- *Nectar*, at 10-42 Beniglo Malo y Lamar. This is a restaurant that is normally only open for breakfast and lunch. A few nights a week they rent it out to *The Jazz Society* for dinner and jazz.

I neglected to write down what we had for dinner, but it was quite good. Each of us had a full meal (rather than splitting a meal, which we tend to do back in Berkeley when we go out), and we shared a bottle of wine with Ann. We initially ordered a bottle of white wine, since Evelyn said she had tried it earlier. The wine proved way to sweet and and was not the same house wine as before. The owner graciously offered to change out the bottle (with 3 glasses already poured) for a bottle of red, which was far more pleasing. The cost for the two of us, including the wine came to \$23 plus tip.

The Jazz Society is run by a husband-wife team. He plays the keyboard, and used to own a jazz club in New York, before starting to travel, upon which time he met his wife. She is from the Philippines, and now acts as the (excellent!) cook for the dinner meals.

Their guitarist is from Cuba, and they were joined by a very pleasant female vocalist that is here for six months before planning on returning to Nashville. Next Thursday they will also have an improvisational dancer join the show. We already have table reservations...

Market plus Jazz Society



Skyfall and Mercado el Arenal

Last things first. We ended the day by watching *SkyFall* (the latest James Bond movie) at the local theater. We had a choice of watching it in Spanish or in English with Spanish subtitles. We chose the later. As the movie started, I whispered to Evelyn that it was horizontally squashed. It looked like the movie was showing in the wrong format? A few seconds later, a huge eye was briefly shown on the screen, then a hand, then the distortion disappeared. I think we just got a peek behind the Curtain of Oz and saw the projector fixing the problem...

Market plus Jazz Society

Spoiler Alert! In *SkyFall*, James Bond saves the world again! Oh? You say you guessed that might happen? Though the ending is never in doubt with James Bond, the route to reach there was as good as any of the series. This marks the 50th anniversary of our hero's cinema debut, and introduced some characters that will probably be with us for some time to come.

Yesterday I said that we had planned on going to Sofy's Orchard for another modelling session, but that it was closed and locked up. Today GringoTree (an English daily email newsletter with Cuenca announcements) announced that Sofy's was closed and moving, and to watch for a grand opening announcement in the future. They were stuck way in the back of a small retail enclave, with no front signage, so I'm guessing they decided to try a place with better visibility.

We actually started today by walking half an hour to Mercado el Arenal, also known locally as Feria Libre. It is the largest mercado in Cuenca, and Sunday is one of the busiest days. This is the only market in town where we have seen live animals for sale -- dogs, chickens, ducks, geese, guinea pigs (known locally as cuy, and raised for eating), rabbits, hamsters, parakeets and crabs.



Lots of animals, but still no cats to be found

Skyfall and Mercado el Arenal

There is a huge section selling seafood. The crabs are live, bundled into rectangular bricks of roughly 40 crabs each, with arms still writhing. There were many thousands of these crabs being sold, and we have been told that everything here is sold by the end of the day, with the price going lower as the day progresses. These crabs didn't look like they had much meat in them, so I have no idea how they would be cooked or used in a recipe.

Lots of other varieties of fish were for sale too. Piles of catfish, perch, trout, and many others I could not immediately identify. Also huge blocks cut from tuna and other larger fish available for sale by the pound.



All the fish are sitting in the open air with no refrigeration. Other than the live crabs, I don't think I would want to buy fish here...

Skyfall and Mercado el Arenal

The next area we came across was the produce section. There was a massive selection here, with the produce looking quite good at most stalls. Not particularly any better than at Mercado 8 de Octubre that we visited earlier though, and that one was a lot closer.



There are eight different varieties of apples alone in that one image, and produce is stacked in a way to make any American supermarket proud.

There is a section with dry goods, but we bypassed that area. Stacks of shoes, baseball hats, and trinkets don't hold much interest for us.

The last area we saw was the meat section. As with the fish, most of the meat is lying out on the counter with no refrigeration. Interestingly, several of the stalls do have standard meat refrigeration counters, but I could only feel one that was actually chilled. The others are just used as illuminated display cases, with most of the meat stacked on top.

Skyfall and Mercado el Arenal



We returned to our apartment just as the thunder started, and spent a quiet afternoon at home before going out to the cinema in the evening for *SkyFall*.

Random Walk Through Cuenca #2

We spent a quiet day mostly at home today. I caught up on some blog posts, did some Photoshop work on images I shot of *The Jazz Society* last Friday, went out to a new Spanish restaurant for some excellent paella, then ended with watching the new 2012 version of *Total Recall* (a surprisingly good remake).

I have been collecting more random notes, and figured this would be a good time for a second "Random Walk" of random thoughts about Cuenca

Skyfall and Mercado el Arenal

iPhone: We both brought our iPhones, thinking we would use them to stay in touch. Unfortunately, Verizon charges almost \$3 per minute, even with paying for the special international plan. We decided to buy local Claro burn phones instead, and pay 20 cents per minute. We therefore had our mobile numbers forwarded to our home land lines, then deactivated those phones for the duration of the trip. Our land lines are set to transcribe any calls and email the transcription to us, so we can still get calls -- we just can't respond directly.

I thought that would be the end of usefulness for the iPhones, but I was proved wrong. We now carry both our local Claro phone and the deactivated iPhones. Why? Because of the great translation apps available. The Spanish phrase books of decades past are gone, replaced by a much smaller iPhone. We use it whenever we are stuck in a store, or simply see a sign that we want to understand.

Welcome: We have traveled to roughly 50 countries over the past several decades (lost actual count long ago). We have found the people in some countries welcome Americans, and some less so. We have never been in a country that welcomed us as much as here in Cuenca, Ecuador. In the four weeks we have been here, I can only think of two people that were less than openly helpful and friendly. I cannot say that about America, or any other country we have visited.

Pollution: The busses are diesel and there are several lines that run through town, each on 5-6 minute intervals. That is a *lot* of smoke being poured into the narrow streets of town. If it hasn't rained for a few days, our eyes burn. Fortunately it rains a lot, which means it rarely gets too bad. Also fortunately, Cuenca is on a multi-year (I think it is 5 year, but not positive) program to convert all the busses to natural gas, which will solve that specific source of pollution eventually.

Random Walk Through Cuenca #2

Clean Streets: There is almost no litter anywhere in town. The streets are spotless. Part of this may be residents not dropping stuff. A very large part are the street cleaning crews that seen around the parks and after every procession / parade.

Slippery Walks: Whoever designed the parks and many of the newer sidewalks seemed more interested in making them pretty than making them safe. They are extremely slippery when wet -- and since it rains a lot here, that means they are very often slippery. I have to walk very carefully and more slowly to avoid ending up on my tail after a rain.

Cop Sirens to Get Gas: There is a gas station directly across the river and visible through our rear sliding glass door. A few times I have heard sirens, and looked up to see cop lights flashing... as they pulled into the gas station and up to the pumps?? No idea what that is all about...

Keyboards: I am working with a Mac laptop here in Cuenca, which is sitting on a kitchen table. My neck strain was making for sore muscles daily, so I now prop the computer on 3 rolls of toilet paper (I'm going native and "making do"!). I bought a cheap USB keyboard so I can type normally. It turns out all the extended keys (non-alpha and non-numeric) are in different places now. The Mac thinks it is talking to a "normal" keyboard, so all the key cap markings are wrong. I am a touch typist for letters, but not the others. It has taken some learning to figure out what the keys really produce, since the key caps are "wrong."

Addresses: All addresses here are given as cross streets. That is, an address is not "5-42 Malo", but rather "5-42 Malo y Sucre." Taxis know the cross streets, but not the "normal" address. Just something to keep in mind when telling a Taxi where you are going.

Random Walk Through Cuenca #2

Spring Weather: Before coming here, we heard blog after blog sing the praises of the "permanent Spring weather" in Cuenca. We find ourselves cold pretty much every night, while the days vary between balmy/warm and cloudy/chilly. I finally began to realize that those singing the praises of the weather are from Canada, Minnesota and Wisconsin. Yeah, it might be glorious for them, but for us spoiled Californians, it is a tad colder than I prefer (or consider Spring weather).

Pounds or Kilos? The country is mostly converted to the metric system of measurement. The mercados are only half there though. Sometimes they are quoting per pound and sometimes per kilo. Gotta stay on your toes to know what you are really getting...

Mall de Rio: Cuenca tends to have vendors one-after-another on the street or in markets selling the exact same thing. Makes no sense to me, but this is common in Latin America, and in the Far East. Mall de Rio, the largest mall in Cuenca, takes it to extremes. There are five separate Claro stores in the mall, and two KFC outlets. In the same mall?? That seems just crazy to me...

American Food Ain't: Some American food chains are down here, such as KFC, Burger King, Subway, etc. I find it is a bad idea to go to these, even if I like their food back home. My taste buds expect a specific result, and it just isn't the same here. Mostly spices are different (Ecuadorian food is pretty bland by our standards). The food isn't bad -- it just isn't what I expect when eating there. I find it better to stick with food for which I have no built-in trained expectation.

Another Notch on the Belt: My pants were hanging loose yesterday, so I tightened my belt a notch. That was when I realized I was on my last notch! We have only been here 3 weeks on this trip, and I have already gone in 3 notches. Wow!

I actually have several other observation notes, but I think that is enough for one day. I already have the start of next week's "Random Walk" though, so stay tuned...

Random Walk Through Cuenca #2

Tiestro & A Farewell Dinner

Today was pretty dreary weather all day, lightly raining most of the day, and pouring at times. I mostly stayed indoors and did some software development for LeapFrog. In the evening, we went with our neighbors, [William and Anne](#) (click for their blog), to *Tiestro's* for dinner. They are leaving tomorrow, heading to Panama for a month. We have enjoyed our limited time together, and have become avid readers of their [blog](#), giving their experiences here.

Over dinner, we discovered that they make their own wine in Chicago, and learned a lot about being in a wine-making club, with stories of their experiences over the years. Sounds interesting enough that I may look into it when we get home. After all, we are just an hour from Napa, so we should be able to get some decent grapes to work with. One interesting tidbit was that they make wine twice a year. While the Fall grapes come from Napa, the Winter grapes (Jan / Feb) come from Chile.

Tiestro's is a very high end restaurant, and the only one in Cuenca where we have had to make reservations. Good thing we did, as even at 6:30 on Tuesday night, the place was packed -- mostly by locals (which we always consider a good sign). The food here is quite expensive by Ecuador standards, but it is absolutely world-class cuisine.

They have several meals that are designed for 4 persons. There are multiple seafood, steak and chicken choices in that group. The waiter offered us the night's special of Surf and Turf, which was a combination of a Langostino and Loma Fina meal for 4, and we agreed. William took care of ordering wine -- we started off with a bottle of Sauvignon Blanc, and ended with a bottle of Cabernet. Both wines were quite good (though I liked the Cabernet better myself).

Random Walk Through Cuenca #2



The condiments for the bread were so numerous, I could only sample half the choices, and they were all good. The plates of langostino and loma fina looked as good as they tasted.

The food was amazingly flavorful, and the steak was the most tender I think I have ever tasted.



The meal also came with rice, cuscus, fried potato, baked potato, vegetables and salad.

Tiestro & A Farewell Dinner

It seemed like there was too much food to eat, but it was so delicious that we polished it all off... and then shared a desert too!



This is not a fancy plate -- the flower decorations are actually part of the desert...

For the 4 of us, the meal totalled \$160, which included the two bottles of wine and tip. Expensive by Ecuadorian standards, but easily half what we would have paid back home for a meal half as good.



At left, Anne is taking her own photos of the meal, while William waits to pounce on the food. At right, Anne poses with Juan Carlos, the chef.

Tiestro & A Farewell Dinner

Churches and Jazz Society

Evelyn has drawing art classes on Thursday mornings, so I walked the 3 blocks to take in the week's laundry. \$3.58 for same-day wash & fold for all I can carry is such a deal that I don't really want a washer/dryer in Cuenca! I decided to take a long route back home, exploring a part of the neighborhood I hadn't seen before... and got nicely lost... After about an hour I emerged back in Known Country near *ChocoCream* and decided to celebrate my salvation with a strawberry milkshake.

I then returned to the apartment, where I did some software development until 5:00, at which time I loaded up my cameras and headed to Park Calderon for some twilight photography of the churches near the park. Before coming, I had thought I might make a photo project of all 52 churches in Cuenca. I have been here nearly a month and hadn't even started yet.

As it turned out, such a project has a lot more problems than I expected. For one thing, the churches are mostly *big*, and they are facing very narrow streets. Even with my widest angle lens, I can't really cover many of them. For another, the weekly processions I keep hearing of seem to have no organized schedule that I can find. We just missed one last Sunday, discovering it only upon entering a church and seeing a sign announcing that it had been at 10:30 that morning (we saw the sign around 2PM).

Tiestro & A Farewell Dinner



Here are images from two churches from my first night photographing them.

At 7:00, we headed over to *Nectar Cafe* for another performance by *The Jazz Society* (we first saw them last Friday night). This time I came equipped with two flashes plus radio triggers for them. Last week I only had one on-camera flash, and was constantly blinding **William** -- our neighbor that came with us, because I pointed the flash backwards to avoid the dreaded "flash shadows" from direct flash. This time I positioned one of the flashes up on a shelf and the other in a corner on the floor. That gave a workable amount of light to shoot the performers with.

Churches and Jazz Society

Jim is the ring leader of The Jazz Society ([click here](#) for their facebook page), and plays the keyboard. I gave him 4 prints from the set I shot last week, and he welcomed me to place my strobes and shoot all evening. Jorge is the guitarist for the group, though he also played keyboard tonight. I had emailed him those same images before tonight, and he graciously gave me a copy of *excellent* jazz CD self-titled *Jorge Triana*. Unfortunately, it is neither on Amazon nor iTunes, but if you find a copy and enjoy jazz, grab a copy. I guarantee you will enjoy it!

Vivian is a vocalist from Nashville who joins in. Tonight there were also two improvisational dancers joining the group. Milena is a dance instructor at the local university, and Andre is one of her students.



, November 16, 2012

Churches and Jazz Society

Healing & Ballerinas

After a lazy morning, we went into town for a \$2.50 Almuerzos at Grecia, which consisted of vegetable soup, rice, fried banana, chicken and noodles. Evelyn liked it, though I found it a bit dry for my taste.

After lunch, we went to the *Rotary Centro Commercial* market. Every Tuesday and Friday, healers come to the market and you can see the Old Ways of healing being practiced. There were about a dozen old women healers under one long tent. Parents would bring their infants to their preferred healer, who would then swat the child repeatedly with a hand-held bunch of herbs and flowers. Most of the children just sat and accepted it, and clearly had been through the ritual before, though one tiny infant cried throughout. After a couple minutes of this "beating", the woman would take an egg and rub it over the child's body and head. When that was done, she would take a swig of (what appeared to be) water from a bottle, then spit it over the child.



Definitely not a standard medical practice back home...

Churches and Jazz Society

One thing that is very common around Cuenca are young children with their parents. Strollers are almost never seen, as parents carry children on their backs or in sacks held in front.



We walked around the rest of the market, and found they were mostly selling dry goods that were handmade.



Healing & Ballerinas



Shortly after I took that picture, my camera died with a message "battery is exhausted." Seems that my charger was not working the way I thought it had been, and I did not have a backup battery with me. So much for photographic preparedness...

We were planning on going to Sofy's Orchard for another modelling session next. (Check out the post on "Vampire's Bite" from late October for our first foray there). With my camera dead, I opted to bypass it and head back home. Evelyn went on alone for her drawing session. She also used her pocket camera for a couple of photographs of the models, so not all was lost...

Healing & Ballerinas



, November 17, 2012

Ecuador, Food, Travel

Healing & Ballerinas

Bad “Expat Day” & Good Pot Luck

This morning was the Second Annual Expat Day, in which the city of Cuenca holds a small festival (seems there is a festival every week here) for expats. The idea is to have expats meet local businesses, be welcomed to the city, etc. Unfortunately, whoever set it up is a moron...

Once the music started up, it was so extremely loud that it hurt eardrums, and made it completely impossible to hold any conversation at all. So here are expats with broken Spanish trying to speak to local businesses who spoke almost no English, and the music is blaring so loud that neither can hear the other.

I left within a minute of the noise starting, and I saw the place mostly empty out as almost all the expats got out of eardrum damage range.



These morons were more interested in being heard across town than in helping the cause they were supposed to be working for.

Healing & Ballerinas

When we were almost a block away, we happened to see Dave also leaving. We had seen him twice at the Jazz Society performances, and also at other places. He seemed to be everywhere, and we stopped and talked for awhile. Turns out he is a CPA from Florida who moved to Cuenca 16 months ago. While we were talking, just about every other expat that was fleeing the noise said hi to him by name. He is very active in the expat community and seemed to know just about everyone.

We had tasted a delicious Ecuadorian cognac the prior week and asked him if he knew about it. Nope, he didn't drink, but he snagged another passing friend, who knew exactly what we were talking about and where to get it. The afternoon was salvaged ironically by a successful trip to a tiny local liquor store.

Walking back we came across another impromptu performance. A rock band was playing on a local terrace while angel dancers performed on the street below.



Bad “Expat Day” & Good Pot Luck



Tonight we went to a potluck party with some of Evelyn's new art friends. The food was mostly quite tasty and served as a very nice alternate dinner. The home was stunning, and I fell instantly in love with it. We are going to check out the neighborhood in coming weeks, and may find ourselves there in the future ourselves...

, November 18, 2012

[Art](#), [Ecuador](#), [Event](#), [Festival](#), [Music](#), [Travel](#)

Failed Canar Animal Market Tour

Failed Canar Animal Market Tour

We had arranged for a tour driver to take us to Canar early this morning to see the Sunday Animal Market there, which is the supposed to be the largest in the region. Unfortunately, our driver did not understand what we were trying to photograph, and by the time we got there, it had pretty much concluded, leaving us nothing to photograph.

Enroute we stopped at the second largest Inca ruin in the region. Pretty small compared to Machu Picchu in Peru (which we saw a few years ago), but reasonably scenic.



We had multiple failed attempts to explain to our driver that we were looking for somewhere to photograph indigenous people dressed in their native garb, going about their daily lives. Finally we got him to simply stop on the side of a busy street, while we both positioned ourselves on strategic corners and photographed the people walking by. This didn't give us the level of interaction we had hoped for in a market setting, but we at least managed to salvage a few shots from the day.

Failed Canar Animal Market Tour



On the way back, our driver suggested roasted pig for lunch, so stopped at a roadside stand with a pig out front. The skin was a lot stiffer than I expected, but tasty. The pig arrived in both fried and boiled forms, both of which were also pretty good.

Failed Canar Animal Market Tour



, November 19, 2012

Ecuador, Event, Food, Travel

Pauline Arrives... sans Luggage

Pauline Arrives... sans Luggage

This past weekend we noted that we visited an art friend's home, and fell in love with it. We were wondering what the neighborhood would be like living in that part of town, so yesterday we took the Blue Bus for 25 cents to there and wandered the neighborhood. At first it appeared to be strictly residential, with very little to do or restaurants to walk to. Soon though, we hit the local commercial district, and found a nice variety of places. We stopped into Iberia restaurant, and had a very nice chicken plate lunch for \$2.50, and added an unexpectedly large plate of French fries for another \$1.



Pauline (Evelyn's sister) joined us today to start a two week visit. Since she was coming in on LAN airline, we went to their website, and also tried their iPhone app to see if the flight was on time. Every flight for LAN said "not yet departed" or "no information." Such is life in Ecuador, so we just headed out to the airport with no real idea if the flight was on time or not. When we arrived, we found the flight had actually landed a few minutes early. We waited outside baggage claim, and she finally emerged... the last person to come out...

Pauline Arrives... sans Luggage



She had a LAN airlines woman in tow, and wasn't carrying any luggage...? Seems that a mix-up in Quito left her baggage back at her airport-of-entry. Ah, the joys of international travel...! We spent the next couple hours at the airport while paperwork was filed, passports were copied, letters were faxed to Quito, and we were finally told they would call us with information later today.

While we were waiting in the airport, Pauline told us she had to wait 2 hours on the tarmac in Miami before taking off, and arrived in Quito well after midnight. She had not made hotel reservations, expecting to get in much earlier and simply grab a quick overnight room before hoping the flight in the morning to Cuenca. Her seat neighbor on the flight 'adopted' her, and the woman took Pauline home to sleep, and back to the airport in the morning. I've been crowing about how friendly Ecuadorians are, and Pauline got a first-hand experience within minutes of entering the country.

Pauline Arrives... sans Luggage

Once we were settled back in the apartment, we headed out for some exploration of Cuenca. First stop was Parque Calderon, the center of town from which everything else radiates. We then visited Plaza Flores, where you can buy a dozen roses for \$2.



Roses of just about any color can be bought here. The flowers are constantly culled of imperfect petals, with those petals saved for throwing at processions.

Next we walked over to the *Rotary Central Commercial Plaza* where the healers beat up the kids before spitting on them, in the name of driving out evil spirits. [See last Thursday's post for more information on that practice.]

Pauline Arrives... sans Luggage



Evelyn made a friend of a girl who had just been cleansed and had fun seeing her own photos on the camera LCD.

We followed that with a bus tour of Cuenca. For \$5, you get a two hour orientation to the city in a double-decker bus, including a trip to the church overlooking the city.



Pauline Arrives... sans Luggage

Evelyn on the bus, landmark church towers, and finally a panoramic view of Cuenca

We stopped in a local mercado for some fruit and vegies for home, plus a tour (*not* buying!) of the meat section, before catching a Blue Bus back to the apartment. After a couple hours rest, and a rather long phone call to LAN to determine when Pauline's luggage would arrive (answer finally received -- tomorrow afternoon), we headed out to dinner. Since Pauline only had about 3 hours sleep last night, and was running on adrenaline, we opted for a favorite restaurant of ours that is only about 2 blocks away -- *Vinoteca*. We split a filet mignon meal, a grilled salmon meal, a salmon & avocado tartar starter and a bottle of wine. All excellent and highly recommended, and coming to a total of just over \$60. High by Ecuadorian standards, but one fourth what it would have cost back in Berkeley.



Pauline Arrives... sans Luggage

Headed home, and after a few hours catch-up with Pauline, everyone is now asleep while I finish this post. Guess it is about time for me to head off to bed too... [Don't believe the post time shown here. It is giving California time rather than Ecuador -- 3 hours later.]

One Pig, One Woman

One Pig, One Woman

Today started off with routine. Breakfast at home, followed by taking laundry 3 blocks to our favorite Laundromat. We then walked a few blocks to make reservations for a van to take us to Guayaquil on Friday (first stop on our trip to Salinas). The van took a couple of stops, since the first couple wanted way too much money. Finally found one we felt would work out... through lots of broken Spanish and sign language, since nobody there speaks English, and our Spanish is still pretty basic.

We were pretty close to Mercado Arenal, so we visited it again. Pauline almost wore out her "oh... ah... how cute!" vocals as we passed stalls with puppies, kittens, bunnies, and all things cute to oohh over...



We did a double-take when we came across a food vendor that seemed to have a child in a cage for sale...!

One Pig, One Woman



After deciding this was a cheap baby-sitting arrangement rather than a kid-for-sale, we moved onto the seafood section. If these fish were on ice, I would be very tempted. As is, I think I will have to pass though. Nice photographs, but nothing I would want to take home and cook...

One Pig, One Woman



Moving on to the meat section, we again found chicken and beef sitting on a counter for hours without refrigeration, and thus no candidate for my personal fridge at home. Next was the series of counters with cooked pigs. And yes, I mean a whole roasted pig for display, much of which was already cut away as it was eaten. One woman was handing out free samples, and she won us over. We ordered a plate of delicious pig... I mean pork...

One Pig, One Woman



There were several woman and pigs in a row. Pauline said she thought they were working together. I told her no, that this was strictly *One Woman, One Pig*.

We then grabbed a taxi to the airport, so we could pick up Pauline's lost luggage. NOT!

We found the LAN office closed. Next we went to the LAN gate, where we were told that the flight we had been told the luggage would be on did not even fly today. Nobody will know anything until the office opens... at 5PM. Huh??? On Wednesdays, there is only one flight from Quito to Cuenca, and it arrives at 8PM, and so the luggage department does not open until 5PM.

After scratching our heads a bit on that, we decided to head to the Panama Hat factory just down the road from the airport. We had to wait until they returned from lunch at 2:30, but then had a rather interesting tour.

One Pig, One Woman



There was an amazing variety of straw Panama Hats made here. Pauline and Evelyn both try on berets, then a saleswoman talks to Pauline about the hat she eventually does buy.

We then decided to head over to Eucalyptus for dinner, since this was one of our favorite high-end restaurants we wanted to show Pauline. Wednesday is ladies night, and both women got two free drinks each. I won't go into how much fun it was to be with two slightly intoxicated women...

We shared two dishes (Sea Bass with mashed potatoes, and Pad Thai) plus a glass of Merlot for myself. The whole bill came to \$20. Hard to eat at home when we can get meals like this at top-notch restaurants for these prices!

One Pig, One Woman



After dinner, we called LAN again, for Pauline's luggage. A storm had come thorough the area, and it had been raining for a couple hours. The flight was Quito was delayed, and wouldn't arrive until sometime after 9PM.. but the LAN offices close at 9PM. Sorry... we will try again tomorrow...

We ain't in Kansas any more...

Luggage, Mercado de Animales & Thanksgiving

Luggage, Mercado de Animales & Thanksgiving

This was a pretty full day. Probably the biggest news for us was the final culmination of *The Great Luggage Journey*. We went out the airport this morning to get Pauline's luggage... only to be told it still wasn't here and "*will definitely be on the next flight from Quito.*" Since this was our 4th trip to the airport, each time being told the luggage would be there, we stayed around about an hour and harassed the staff until we thought we had a reasonable assurance it would really arrive, then went back to our day's activities.

We received a phone call just before 2:00 saying the luggage was there, but they were closing at 2:30. We quickly hailed a taxi... but it had just started to rain and we had to walk about 4 blocks to a place with more taxis. We got in and raced to the airport. Well... raced is such a strong word... We somehow hailed the only conservative taxi driver in Cuenca. He waited to let cars pass (unheard of!) and actually drove slowly (never happened before!). As we got to the airport at 2:32, Pauline jumped out of the cab and raced to the office, just in time to catch the last person leaving the office.



Luggage, Mercado de Animales & Thanksgiving

Pauline is all smiles as she finally reunites with her luggage

We actually started the day with catching a taxi and going out to the *Mercado de Animales* in Cuenca. When we failed to see the one in Canar (see post from last week), Evelyn's Spanish tutor told her there was one right here. Not many people seem to know about it, but it is huge, and was a great morning of mucking through the mud and sh** and photographing the people and animals.

The first area we saw was for the buying and selling of pigs. And I mean **thousands** of pigs of all sizes, from new piglets up to monsters that I could have ridden. The air was filled with the constant squeal of pigs complaining about being pulled, prodded, and loaded onto trucks.

Luggage, Mercado de Animales & Thanksgiving



The next section was filled with cattle. These were mostly meat cattle destined for a butcher shop. We noticed that most of the regulars here were wearing what I think of as "farm galoshes" -- the boots I wore as a kid slopping the pigs on a farm in Minnesota.

Luggage, Mercado de Animales & Thanksgiving



One truck even had a half dozen tiny goats for sale == presumably for the buyer to raise before milking or slaughtering.

As we have seen repeatedly in Cuenca, people here are extremely friendly. A couple of men stopped to talk to us, probably partly because we were the only gringos in the area. Dave spoke very little English, but wanted to talk to us. He was selling a medium-large pig and told us it would probably fetch about \$100, while the really big pigs would bring \$300 or even \$400.

Luggage, Mercado de Animales & Thanksgiving

George is a rancher on the outskirts of town with 400 acres of Holstein cows for milk, from which he makes cheese and sells at the market. He lived in Canada and Europe earlier, and his wife is British, so his English was quite good.



Moving further, we found a small section devoted to horses, then pockets of sheep, and even a pair of donkeys for sale.

Luggage, Mercado de Animales & Thanksgiving



Moving on, we came across stalls similar to those found at *Mercado de Arenas*, but with more variety and in larger numbers. We found goats, chickens, ducks, turkeys, bunnies, dogs, geese, etc. All kept in tiny cages, crowded to an extent that would probably evoke a PETA protest back home.

Luggage, Mercado de Animales & Thanksgiving



We then moved into the lunch area, where we saw where some of those pigs being sold ended up.



We had never seen a pig splayed out and roasted while looking like a blanket before...

The rest of the market was like most others, with lots of fruits, vegetables, then dry goods. To keep this post from running book-length, I am not going to detail that area, since it was largely a repeat of prior mercados.

Luggage, Mercado de Animales & Thanksgiving

After leaving the market, we went to the airport (the morning's failed attempt to retrieve luggage, as mentioned above), visited the friend's house where we had a potluck dinner last week, raced back to the airport a second time (success!), then rested back home till dinner.

We had heard several times about the fabulous meals that could be had at *Joe's Secret Garden*. This is a private home that is turned into a restaurant once a week. They had a thanksgiving dinner tonight, and we had reservations. It opened with a cocktail hour, to meet other gringos, then a sumptuous turkey dinner with all the trimmings. I have had many turkey dinners in the past that have disappointed me, but this was one of the best I have ever had. Definitely recommended restaurant, and we will probably return for another meal before leaving Cuenca.



Spa Day

Spa Day



Pauline on the left, and Evelyn on the right, enjoyed a day at Piedra de Agua in Bano de Cuenca

Today was spa day for Evelyn and her visiting sister. Since I am usually ready to go 15 minutes after arriving at places like this, I opted to stay home and let them enjoy themselves... which they managed quite nicely!

The two of them took the local Blue Bus for 25 cents each to Bano de Cuenca (the hot springs just outside of town). They decided to visit one of the most upscale spas, one that we had looked in on when we were in Bano a couple weeks ago. *Piedra de Agua* is one of the newest spas in town, opening only 4 years ago. It is beautifully landscaped, has a restaurant, bar, patio and multiple exterior pools. By buying the premium package for \$30, the women were each given a personal assistant to take them through the entire process, and they were also given access to a series of underground cavern pools.

Spa Day



Their assistant directed them to a steam room, rinse, then a dip in the red clay pool. When they came out of the clay pool, it looked as though they had forgotten sun screen, becoming completely red all over! A hot shower was encouraged to finish the process, which was then repeated in blue clay -- which made them come out looking like zombies. [This is why I stayed home...:]



Spa Day

They were then led to the subterranean hot springs down some candle lit steps. The cavern had 2 pools in a romantic setting. They alternated from hot to cold pools - 37c hot (99 F), 14c cold (57 F). Then a steam sauna, swim in the pool, and shower. Pauline described herself as "Gumbie" after all that.



After all that, they felt they had to try the restaurant to see if the food matched up to the spa experience - it did. To curb their hunger the waiter brought some sweet potato and red potato chips. They ordered a sanguchera tea, Cuenca egg soup, and a hot salad consisting of corn, carrots, olives, zucchini in a teriyaki dressing. Once they told the waiter they were celebrating Pauline's birthday, the waiter also brought a complimentary cheesecake. "Yum-oh" was the only description I got.

Spa Day - MindStormPhoto Blog and Gallery

Tonight we heard more rockets from the nearest church, so I went over to see if I could improve on last night's efforts (nope...). They opened with the same twirling tops in front of the church as before. These spin rapidly and climb into the sky. The last one snagged, then went flying horizontally directly at the building across the street, burned on the wall, climbed the wall while spinning, then sat burning on the (fortunately clay) roof...



Next up were more rockets, just as last night. This time the guy lighting them seemed rushed, putting up four rockets at a time instead of one or two, and setting up new ones seconds after the prior ones launched. There were kids playing on a playset not more than 10 feet from this rapid rocket launch. Safety is not even on the menu at these church fireworks...

Spa Day



Normally the spinners that led off yesterday's blog would come next. The guy that had been launching the rockets went over to the pile of them. He picked up the couple dozen that were on the ground ready to go, picked up his six foot pole, and with two other men went to the street, hailed a taxi and drove off with them.

What the ??? I asked a couple people "donde estan ellos yendo" (my best attempt at "where are they going?"). They all shrugged or spoke rapid Spanish that I could only understand to say they didn't know. A few minutes later the doors of the church closed, and within 10 minutes the square was mostly deserted. Figuring the show was over, I left.

About 3 hours later, we could see fireworks over the trees of our apartment. Seems the church resumed with "real fireworks" much later. They never last long enough for us to grab camera gear and hoof it there, so we also just shrugged and went back inside...

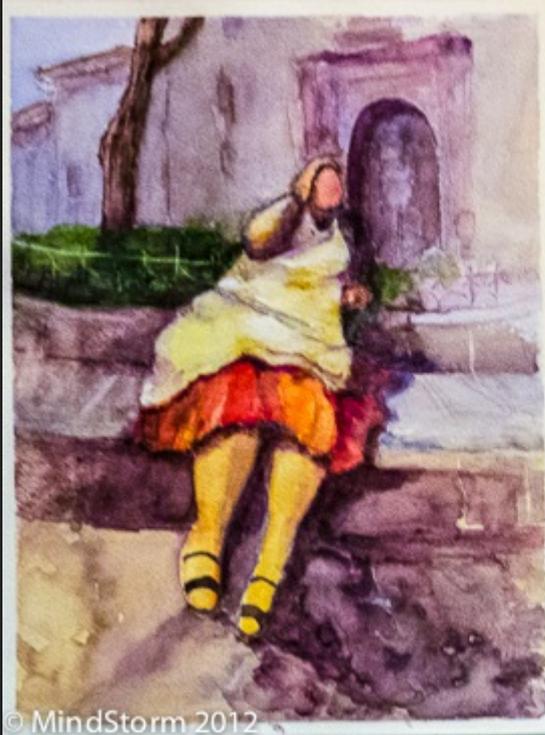
Art Class Completed

Art Class Completed

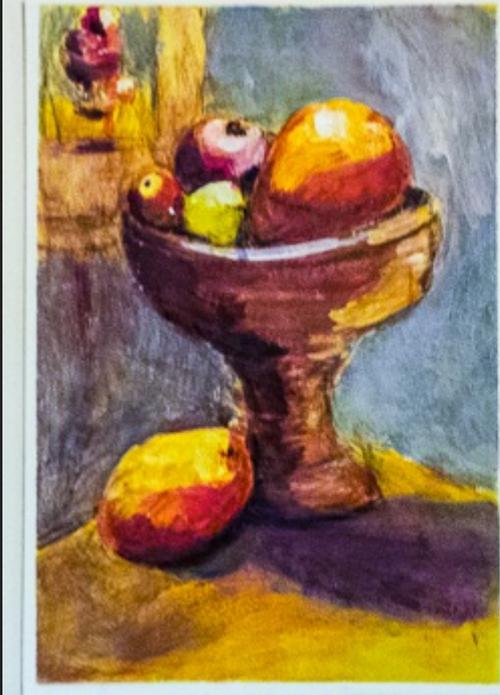


Evelyn has just completed a series of art classes taught by renown Santa Fe instructor, Gary Myers, in his home studio in El Centro. Because art materials and studio supplies are scarce in Cuenca, Gary and Arie have developed innovative tools to use. For student easels, he used wooden wedges that were being used as wheel ramps for moving goods from the street up to sidewalk level. Instead of mass-produced artist water containers, he used cut off liter soda bottles, and other found items. The class started with a series of basic concepts, from how to paint gradations, to demonstrating planes on still life, sketching faces from the society pages, to drawing live models, and ending with a class art show of the completed paintings.

Art Class Completed



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Art Class Completed

Gary has a gift for bringing out the best with every one of his students. On the last class, Evelyn's sister Pauline decided to try to draw her first live model, and her drawings show both Gary's skill as a teacher as well as Pauline's natural artistic talent. Evelyn highly recommends Gary's classes to those wanting to tackle a creative endeavor as well as meeting lots of interesting characters in a fun, non-threatening environment.

Here are Pauline's first figure drawings:



, December 1, 2012

[Art, Ecuador, Travel](#)

10,000 Types of Orchids Plus Guitars

10,000 Types of Orchids Plus Guitars

Gonna be a rather long post tonight, as this was a busy day with lots of stuff happening. I have attempted to add subtitles tonight, to let you tune in where desired, or skip areas you are not interested in.

Book Recommendation

We had three different people recommend *Angel Panchez* (phone: 0985899643, email: anhelp_68@yahoo.com) as a driver / guide, so we decided to try him today, and had him drive us to some of the cities surrounding Cuenca. His English is excellent (he worked in New York for 8 years), and he is the first truly courteous driver I have experienced in Ecuador... Rather than run down pedestrians as most drivers do, he actually stops and waves them to cross. He never passes cars unless it is safe, choosing instead to follow a slow car rather than zip around blind curves, like most other drivers seem to do. Towards the end of the day, his phone rang. To my amazement, he pulled over to the side of the road before answering it! I know quite a few drivers back home that could take lessons from Angel...

Additionally, he was very knowledgeable about the areas we wanted to visit, both knowing where to go and how to get in, and being able to add background (sometimes by acting as a translator to the local people). Needless to say, we heartily recommend Angel, and will be using him again ourselves.

Orchids

10,000 Types of Orchids Plus Guitars



When we were here in February, we were told the orchids were not in bloom, so we did not go to the orchid farm. Today they were definitely in bloom, and we had a fascinating tour of the *Ecuagenera Orquideas del Ecuador*. We were told that there **10,000 different orchids** grown by this company in various facilities throughout Ecuador, with 5,000 at this site alone. The orchids included the types we easily recognize and have at home. There are also orchids smaller than a fingernail, and others that I would not have even recognized as orchids. There are even orchids that act like Venus flytraps, and eat insects for nourishment. The range is phenomenal.

10,000 Types of Orchids Plus Guitars



We were given a tour of the facility. The plants start in a nursery inside a tiny bottle. Roughly 120 plants share that small bottle for 6 months to a year. They are tightly sealed and sterilized to avoid any fungus infections. They are then transferred to a nursery pack of the type we would see for seedlings at *Home Depot*. After another 6 months to a year, they are transferred again to individual pots, where they will then mature until they are large enough to sell.

10,000 Types of Orchids Plus Guitars



The nursery includes non-orchid varieties that are designed to keep the humidity high.

We were here last time in February, during Carnaval, and were told the guitar makers were closed. We took the opportunity today to visit the two most famous guitar makers in the area, in San Bartolome.

10,000 Types of Orchids Plus Guitars

Guitars



After watching the construction of the guitar, Pauline tries one out.

We visited two brothers with separate, competing guitar making businesses. The first was a lone man who makes 6 to 8 guitars per month. He sells them to stores in Cuenca for \$250-and-up, though he will sell it to a retail visitor at the same price. Good deal if we were in the market for a guitar, but alas we were not.

This lone man gives exquisite craftsmanship to each guitar, doing the entire process end-to-end, in a room roughly 10ft X 12ft. I had imagined a much larger and busier shop. This was an interesting and eye-opening stop.

We then drove a short ways along a dirt road needing a 4-wheel drive until we came to the other brother's shop.

10,000 Types of Orchids Plus Guitars



This one was a family business, with the father and son (pictured above right) leading much of the work. The wife and daughter were also helping out with making specific parts. The sound hole is decorated with tiny slices of colored wood, inlaid carefully by hand.

10,000 Types of Orchids Plus Guitars



Another son carefully waxes the face of an otherwise finished guitar.

10,000 Types of Orchids Plus Guitars

Lunch, Weaving & Jewelry



We also visited a weaver in Gualaceo. This was the same weaver we met in February, so apparently she is a standard stop for all suburb tours. Pauline had not seen this before, so it was interesting for her. They demonstrated the traditional ways of weaving they use, along with the all-natural dyes (mostly from berries and insects) used. Pauline avoided the temptation to buy anything, so we escaped with only a \$5 tip left in their box on the way out...

10,000 Types of Orchids Plus Guitars



We stopped by a small cafe for a delicious lunch of *Trucha Frita* (fried trout), caught locally in the nearby national *Parque Caja*. Then on to Chordeleg, where there is not much to see other than the numerous silver and gold jewelry stores. Pauline had the same reaction we did last February -- 15 minutes of browsing was enough to cap the town and the tour, so we headed home.

10,000 Types of Orchids Plus Guitars

Dinner at Tiestros



Tonight had a glorious sunset while we walked to dinner at Tiestro's

Tomorrow is Pauline's last night in Cuenca. We wanted to end on a high note, but Tiestro's is closed on Sunday, so we went there tonight. This was our third visit there. While it is easily the most expensive restaurant we have visited in town (\$80 for three of us, with no bottle of wine tonight), it also undoubtedly has the best food in town. Something for special occasions... like when Pauline is getting ready to return home!

10,000 Types of Orchids Plus Guitars



The meal always starts off with an array of six exotic spices brought to the table with the bread. We asked Juan Carlos (the owner and chef) to come up with something for the three of us. He presented us with a shrimp soup for the first course, with 8 huge shrimp (yeah, an oxymoron...) in a tasty broth. He followed that by chicken breast in a cheese sauce, plus lomo fina in a mushroom cream sauce. Each item was world-class and fabulous.

We were watching Juan Carlos painting something on a counter near us, and could not figure out what it was at first. When he carried by a desert plate and showed us before delivering it to another table, we figured it out -- he was painting the plates with raspberry and chocolate!

Rooftop Party As Pauline Leaves Cuenca

Rooftop Party As Pauline Leaves Cuenca



New Cathedral domes in the afternoon from neighboring rooftop

Rooftop Party As Pauline Leaves Cuenca



Santo Domingo church, as seen from the same rooftop

Rooftop Party As Pauline Leaves Cuenca



New Cathedral after sundown as seen from rooftop across the main square

This afternoon we went to a party thrown by Vivian Slade -- the jazz singer we have listened to several times from The Jazz Society. She recently moved into a 4th floor penthouse right on the main square of town, Parque Calderon. I took along my main camera and tripod, and had a ball photographing the people in the afternoon, and churches as the set was setting.



Rooftop Party As Pauline Leaves Cuenca

I was photographing the surrounding churches and waiting for the sun to set



Everyone was having a good time up on the roof, enjoying the view and the company

Today was Pauline's last day in Cuenca, so we went to Akelarre for lunch, before the party. On Sundays, they have a fabulous Paella Valencia, which is a seafood paella. We discovered on an earlier trip that it comes out of the oven at 1:00, so it is best to go shortly after that. Last time we went in the evening, and got the very last portion they had. It was good even then, but *much* better when it was fresh from the oven!



Rooftop Party As Pauline Leaves Cuenca

Vivian (jazz vocalist from *The Jazz Society*, and the host of today's party) has recently completed a children's book titled *The Dragon King*. Check out her bio at <http://www.thedragonking.com/author/>. There is a special until Dec 15, where if you buy the music from [iTunes](#) or [Amazon](#), you will also get the eBook for free. *Great stuff!*

, December 3, 2012

[Art](#), [Ecuador](#), [Food](#), [Travel](#)

Getting High in Quito

Getting High in Quito

We flew into Quito yesterday. Though only 1200 ft higher than Cuenca (9400 vs 8200), I felt the altitude almost immediately. Combined with a low grade illness I started earlier in the day, I have felt pretty miserable most of today. Combined with the *cold*, I will be glad to leave Quito tomorrow, soon after we see Pauline head home.

Our Quito hotel is a 120 year old converted home, tucked back, just half a block from the main square. It is charming and extremely convenient to everything, but the lack of heating in a climate like this leaves me asking for extra blankets at night.

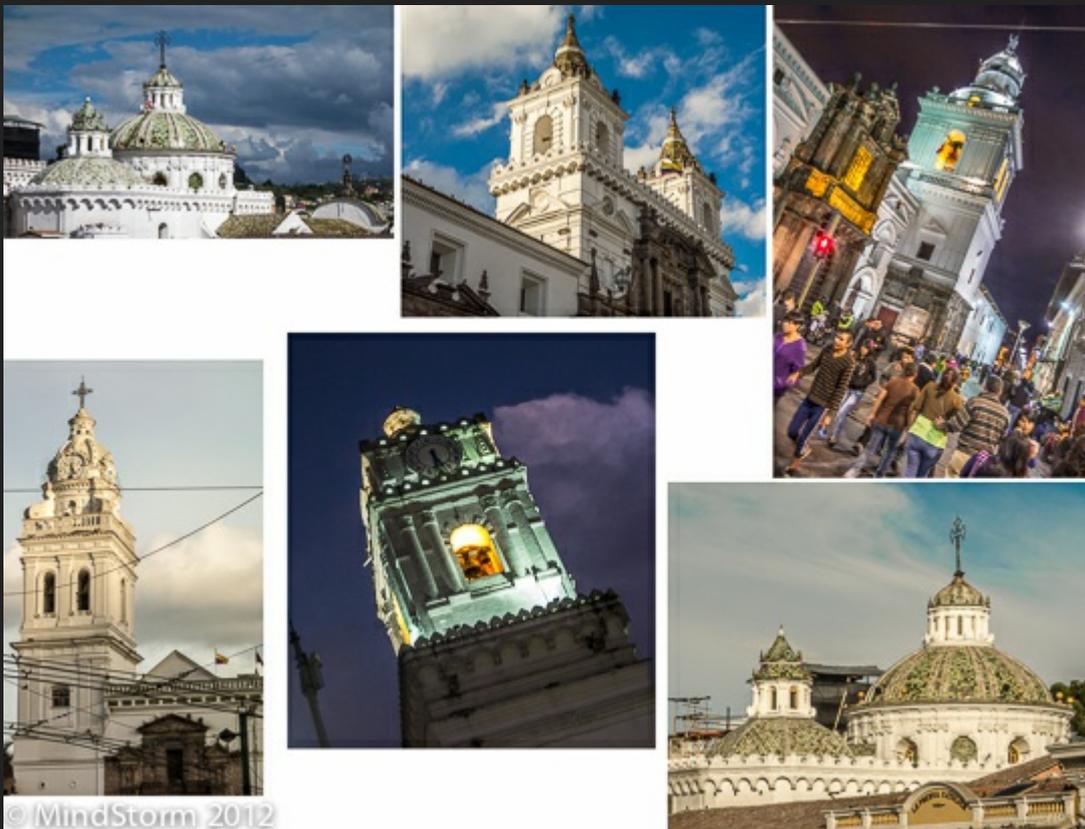


As soon as we unpacked, we headed out to explore. One of the very first things we saw was how many homeless there are here, along with beggars of all ages. In 5 weeks of Cuenca, I never once saw a homeless person and was only approached by beggars a couple of times. We saw more than that in our first hour here.

Getting High in Quito



The very next thing we noticed was the extreme number of churches in Quito. There are a lot of them in Cuenca, but here in Quito, I could count six churches within sight of the main square alone!



Getting High in Quito

The main square had a woman feeding pigeons, which meant they were in abundance. Kids were also everywhere. When you combine pigeons and kids, and you inevitably get the chase. I decided to sit and photograph them for awhile.



Evelyn and Pauline quickly tired of my sitting in one place, so I told them to go shopping. I suggested they stay around the square, and I would find them when the pigeons were exhausted. After about half an hour, I went looking for them, and came up blank? I called and asked Evelyn where she was. She said "just look for the yellow building with the white trim."

Getting High in Quito



Right! Yellow with white trim seems to be a predominant color scheme in town. I said I could see four such buildings from where I stood! They came back to the square and rescued me...

Quito is celebrating its Independence Day this week. In Ecuador, each city celebrates a separate independence day, since the country of Ecuador did not yet exist when the Spaniards were defeated. As with independence day in Cuenca, police presence is extremely high, in an effort to keep down crime against the celebrating tourists.



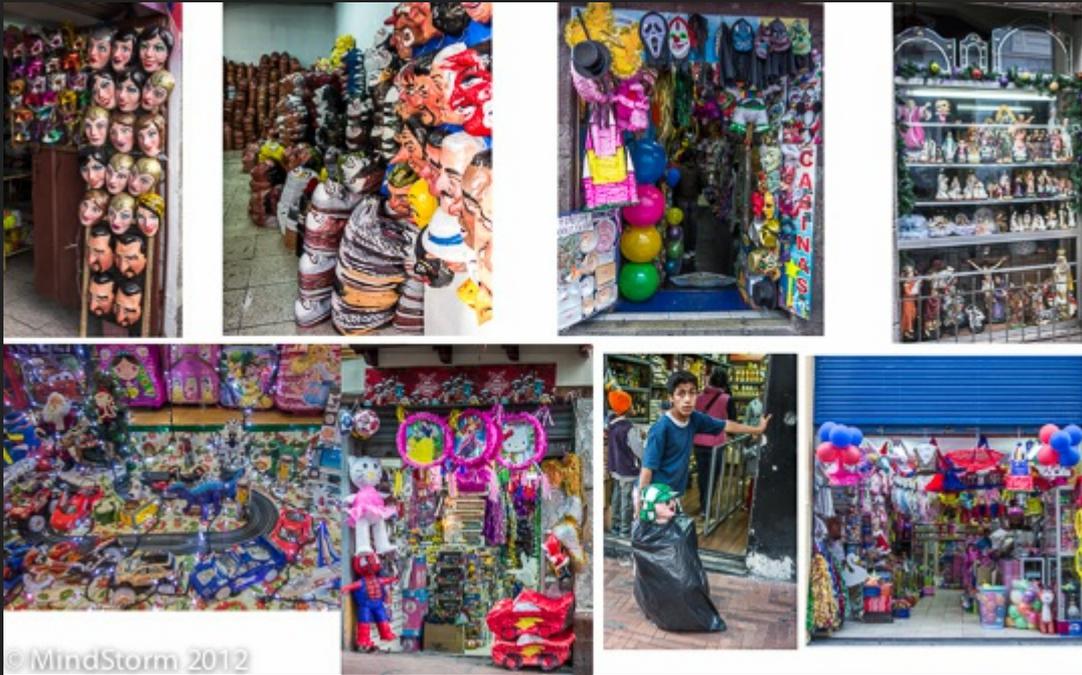
Getting High in Quito

We stopped in a small cafe for a hot chocolate, and heard what sounded like a funeral march. I looked outside and saw a procession with a statue of Jesus. I have been looking for these for 5 weeks in Cuenca without success, and here was one we stumbled on within a couple hours of arriving in Quito.



More wandering after our hot chocolate, and we found Party Central street. At least that is what it seemed like. Just a couple blocks off the main square was store after store selling party supplies.

Getting High in Quito



We also found many stores selling just one item, with dozens of variations.



Want a Swatch? There is a store just for that. Want some eggs. A store has only that, with stacks for 8, 9, 10 or 11 cents each. Vendors also walked the streets with a few of one item in their hand to sell. And some of the weirdest items at that. TV rabbit ears? Yep, two people selling that. Lottery tickets? Four of those. Cup holder rack? Hand whisk? Toothbrush? Cocoa tea? Yep, each had a person selling that single item, and several sold single items I couldn't even recognize.

Getting High in Quito

Today I mostly stayed in bed to recuperate, while Evelyn and Pauline took a city tour. Their great find was an artists street named La Ronda, filled with boutique shops, art galleries, cafes with live music, and their favorite chocolate cafe, Khipus Coffee-Choco Shop locate on La Ronda y Morales Oe 1-53. There's a special chocolate drink made from a jungle chocolate topped with meringue.

Around noon, I decided to go out and get lunch. I heard another funeral dirge, and saw flowers on the street outside our hotel. I followed the sound, and came across my second Jesus procession in as many days.



Getting High in Quito

