

MindStormPhoto Ecuador 2015 pt 1

Burt and Evelyn Johnson

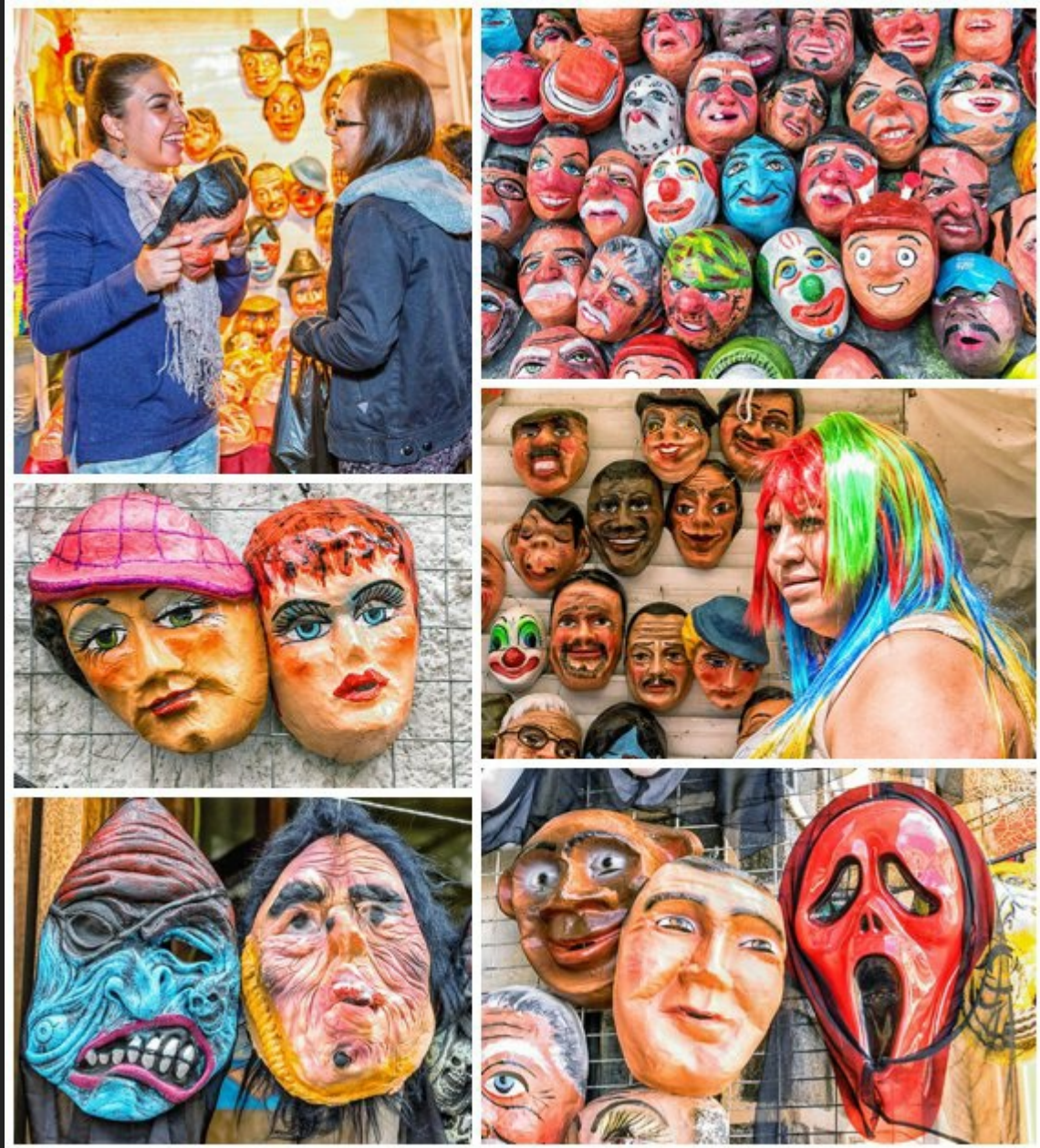
Ecuador 2015, pt 1

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Dante's Inferno Is Shrinking

Dante's Inferno Is Shrinking



Masks go on sale a few days before New Year's Eve and are popular with old and young alike.

Dante's Inferno Is Shrinking

New Year's Eve in Cuenca, Ecuador is like no other we have experienced around the world. This is our third NYE in Cuenca, and it seems to get smaller each year? You can see our blog posts from 2012 [here](#) and from 2013 [here](#). This is now the blog for 2014, so you are already there... 🤔 As before though, there are so many photos to show that I will limit the text to photo captions.



Dante's Inferno Is Shrinking

Many elaborate tableaux were created with monigotes (aka 'effigies'). 22 neighborhoods competed for the best display.



Several full sized monigotes represented various heroes or cartoons. The one in the lower right above won the prize as the best neighborhood monigote display.

Dante's Inferno Is Shrinking



People of all ages filled the streets from early afternoon past midnight

Dante's Inferno Is Shrinking



The judges for "Best Display" were dressed as clowns, while others dressed as clowns just to have fun

Another Inocente's Parade



At midnight the monigotes are set on fire, after pinning notes of what the burner wants to leave behind from the old year. Thus, the fires burn away the old, leaving room for a better New Year

Another Inocente's Parade



Globos are outlawed since one landed on a church roof and burned it down in 2012. Our neighbor family sent one up anyway -- lifting their hopes for the New Year into the sky

, January 1, 2015

[Art](#), [Ecuador](#), [Event](#), [Festival](#), [Fireworks](#)

Another Inocente's Parade

Another Inocente's Parade



Food vendors were the first to set up, and kept the audience fed all night.

This is our third year attending the "Día de Los Inocentes" Parade in Cuenca. It seemed this year was a bit more subdued than [last year \(2014\), which was our favorite so far](#). You can also see our [first year \(Jan 2013\) post here](#). You can read our [2014 entry](#) for info on what the parade is supposed to be about. The Cuenca parade has morphed into a combined fantasy, social statement and political satire event. In the past, it included more men dressed in drag.

Another Inocente's Parade

The political satire was much more subtle this year -- some say because of the anti-libel laws passed in 2014 and the general feeling that the Correa government is now censoring criticism. Unfortunately, my Spanish is not sufficient to ask these people directly, so I am left on the outside wondering why it was so tame this year?



Masks were on sale at several stands. Many looked like left-overs from New Year's Eve.

Another Inocente's Parade



Vendors were selling balloons, bubbles, fireworks, face painting and more.

Another Inocente's Parade



Amistad Club clowns were the official parade marshals, trying (and usually failing) to keep the audience back.



Many of the parade groups wore large cardboard or Styrofoam heads -- many of which I did not understand?

Another Inocente's Parade



Here are some of my favorite individual costumes in the parade.

Another Niño Parade



Many of the audience dressed up too, even if they were not in the parade.

As a description of the elements of the parade, perhaps it is best to end with a quote from [El Tiempo](#), the local Spanish language daily newspaper. Here is what they said about the parade, translated via Google Translate:

At 18:20 started the journey of the groups from the intersection of La República and Avenida Huayna Capac, with the parade of children of school NOVA. Then it was the turn Azuay District Scouts, who acted with the theme "Scary Movie Scout". Young people dressed as zombies, scythes and other characters from the underworld. Next, the students of the South American Technical Institute with his troupe "Chiripiolcas, garroteras and garrotzaos" where combined issues of national political events represented by the characters of comedian "Chespirito". For example, a very old ambulance logo YESS (We're Insurance Suffering) to the accompanying figures of the "Neighbourhood Chavo" injuries and ailments, parodied services Ecuadorian Institute of Social Security (IESS). Also, put the South American rhythm when nine "chilindrinas", performed a dance to the sound of batucada.

Another Niño Parade

Political satire could not miss with the participation of the family Vanegas presented "Mommy will be what you want the black" where the character of US President Barak Obama, dancing alongside Fidel Castro of Cuba and representatives of Latin America and Rafael Correa of Ecuador, Dilma Rousseff, Brazil; Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela; Cristina Fernandez and former President of Uruguay, José Mujica, accompanied the leaders in his Volkswagen Beetle. Also Pope Francisco and Che Guevara, with angel wings, accompanied politicians joked with the audience. Another of the groups that drew public attention was the University of Azuay (UDA), with its theme "Traditional Crafts of Cuenca". Two women dressed as policemen took the sign with the name of the troupe. Behind them a traditional village band sang popular rhythms to make way for the "seamstresses". Students developed a sewing machine old giant, whose pedals were driven through the hands of damsels with old dresses. An artifact students followed him disguised scissors, yarn skeins, reels, tapes, etc. Similarly, trades like selling ice cream cart, photographers Calderon Park, until the sale of the famous hot dog size "Mandingo" were represented in elaborate costumes. The competition continued with the parade of other groups, representatives of institutions and individual presentations.

Another Niño Parade



The parade was led by roughly 30 horses, most with children riding in costume.

Another Niño Parade

Christmas eve has the biggest *Pase de Niño* parade (click here for our [2012](#), [2013](#) and [2014](#) Christmas parade posts). Between then and Carnival though, there are a series of smaller Niño parades put on by various church congregations and neighborhoods. As we were walking back home after Sunday brunch today, we came across another one forming up, and decided to stop and watch.



The horses were followed by a couple dozen cars decorated as floats.

Another Niño Parade



Many of the floats had kids riding them in costume too.

Murals On Our First Anniversary



There were also a couple of bands, and a dancing group in the parade.

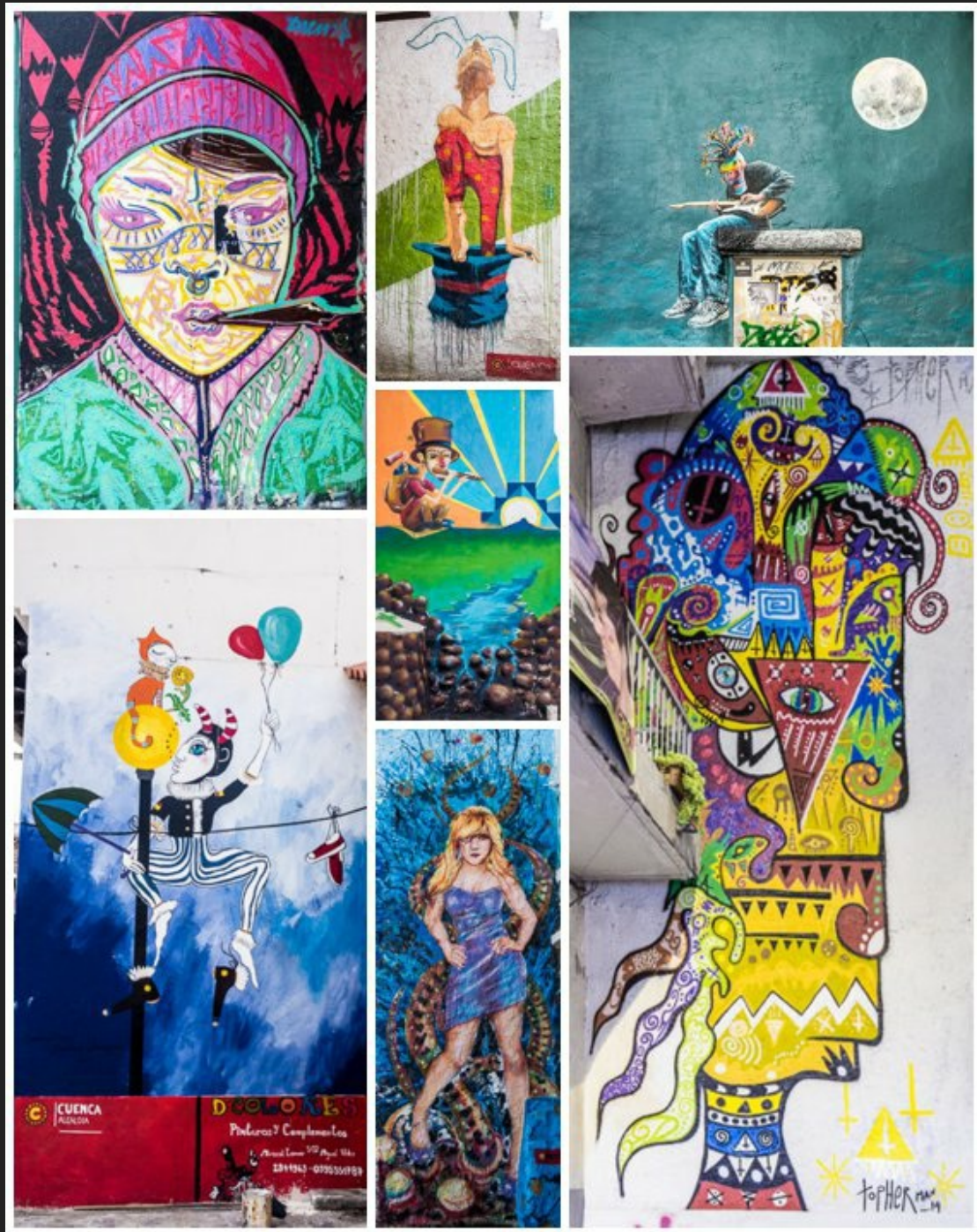
, January 11, 2015

Ecuador, Event, Festival

Murals On Our First Anniversary

Murals On Our First Anniversary

Murals On Our First Anniversary



Murals on walls near our home in Cuenca, Ecuador

One year ago today, in 2013, we received our Ecuadorian resident visa and became officially able to stay in Ecuador as long as we wish, albeit with certain travel restrictions. I was thinking what I should write on this auspicious date. I finally decided I would use this post to share some of the street art around Cuenca.

Murals On Our First Anniversary

I have said for years that culture and art are common themes in this city. One of the daily reminders of this is the array of murals found around the city. A few are actually commissioned by the city, but most are "street art" or possibly even "graffiti." This is distinct from the kids with black spray paint tagging walls. Unfortunately that happens too, but most taggers respect the true artist and do not deface their work.

So here are a few of the mural photographs I have collected of Cuenca over the past couple years. This is less than half the murals I have images of, and I definitely have images of far less than half of those in the city, so consider this only a small sampling.



These murals are on the sides of bus stops

Murals On Our First Anniversary



Some of the murals take on the form of cartoons

Murals On Our First Anniversary



Others are artistic pieces

Murals On Our First Anniversary



Even some businesses get in on the fun

, January 14, 2015

Art, Ecuador

Cuenca Almost Became Part of Peru

Cuenca Almost Became Part of Peru

Today marks the twenty year anniversary of the start of the most recent war between Ecuador and Peru in 1995.

Last weekend we drove to Girón to see the countryside, accompanied by six friends that were all visiting Ecuador. We had originally expected a trip to the waterfall in Girón to be the highlight, but instead we were treated with a fascinating history lesson of the wars between Ecuador and Peru. Our initial stop was at a monument commemorating the Battle of Tarqui, where troops from Peru and Gran Colombia fought in 1829. At the time, Ecuador was part of a triad with Colombia and Venezuela. Peru believed that Guayaquil and Cuenca both belonged to Peru, because their then-president (José de la Mar) was born in Cuenca. Gran Colombia emerged as victors and retook Guayaquil back from Peru. Otherwise parts of what is now the Azuay state in Ecuador would have been part of Peru. Ecuador emerged as a separate nation a year after the Battle of Tarqui.

We then stopped at the Casa de los Tratados Museo Histórico Militar, which is Girón's focal point, and where the peace treaty between Gran Colombia and Peru was signed after the Battle of Tarqui. The treaty of 1995, after the last Ecuador-Peru war was also signed here. Displayed were portraits of the war heroes, long muskets, pistols, army boots, and bayonets. What was surprising was seeing the graphic depiction of how the borders of Ecuador have shrunk over time.

Cuenca Almost Became Part of Peru



Vic was with us, and seemed such a good fit for the old Ecuadorian soldier's uniform that the museuym staff had him wear it and pose for photographs.

, January 26, 2015

Ecuador, Education, Police

Cooking New Orleans Style

Cooking New Orleans Style



I went to a cooking class today to learn New Orleans style menus. The class was taught by [Leslie Breen](#) in her home. Some of you might know her as the original creator and owner of Eucalyptus restaurant here in Cuenca -- one of the oldest high end restaurants in town. Though she is no longer affiliated with that restaurant, having sold it, her skills from such an establishment were very visible throughout the class. Click [here](#) to contact her for future classes.

When we started the class, I must admit that I had some reservations. She was in the kitchen doing the work, while we sat at the counter and watched. She started out by handing us a recipe sheet for "*Bread Pudding With Lemon Sauce.*" Though it sounded good, I was wondering if we were going to get a full class today...

I needn't have worried. As she completed that dish, she handed us the next recipe, which she completed, then handed us the next... and the next... and the next... At the end we had learned to cook five dishes -- far more than in any other cooking class I have attended where the students help prep the food. We were taught:

Cooking New Orleans Style

- Bread Pudding With Lemon Sauce
- Shrimp Romolade
- Chicken and Sausage Gumbo
- Paneed Chicken and Fettuccine
- Potato Salad With Green Onion Dressing

Each was delicious, and each was also presented well. Leslie now does catering for parties, and I am seriously thinking of maybe hiring her for our next big party and bypassing the kitchen for myself...



I don't think it would be fair to Leslie to just post her recipes here. Over the next few months, I will try them at home, make my own modifications (because what cook doesn't?), and publish them as blog entries when I am happy with my results. For now, contact Leslie either for her classes or for catering. She will make you glad you did!

Unfortunately, I missed her class earlier on the cuts of meat in Ecuador and how to map them to what we are used to in the States. I definitely want to take that class if it comes around again.

Carnaval La Merced

Carnaval La Merced



As usual, the kids were the center attraction of these parades

Today starts off Carnaval week in Latin America. Cuenca has always been a snoozefest in past years, but the government is now trying to encourage tourism and this year has some "first time" events planned.

We heard a band playing outside our condo this morning, and decided to go out and investigate. We stumbled upon a parade forming right outside our front door. This was another church "el nina" parade, where a statue of the baby Jesus is marched out of the church, with a variety of kids, horses, clowns, and food in attendance.

Carnaval La Merced



Kids love these parades and the extra treats they get



Carnaval La Merced

The baby Jesus doll is always carried by elder women



Carnaval meant there had to be clowns -- and the horses are also dressed up

, February 8, 2015

Event, Festival

Carnaval Ambato

Carnaval Ambato



Flambé dinner our first night in Ambato

It took us 12 hours of driving yesterday to end up at *Black Sheep Inn* -- an isolated vegetarian eco-lodge that had gotten rave reviews. Suffice it to say that our reviews were not as high, and that we left early to arrive in Ambato today... We have rented a car, using our new Ecuadorian drivers licenses, and are traveling with [Ann and William](#), friends from the US that we met here a couple years ago, and who return annually. We had an excellent dinner at the hotel where we are staying -- [The Roka Plaza](#).

After dinner, we walked over to the main square in town (the Parque Montalvo), where we heard lots of free music, and saw an amazing amount of art -- both in display galleries and on the street.

Carnaval Ambato



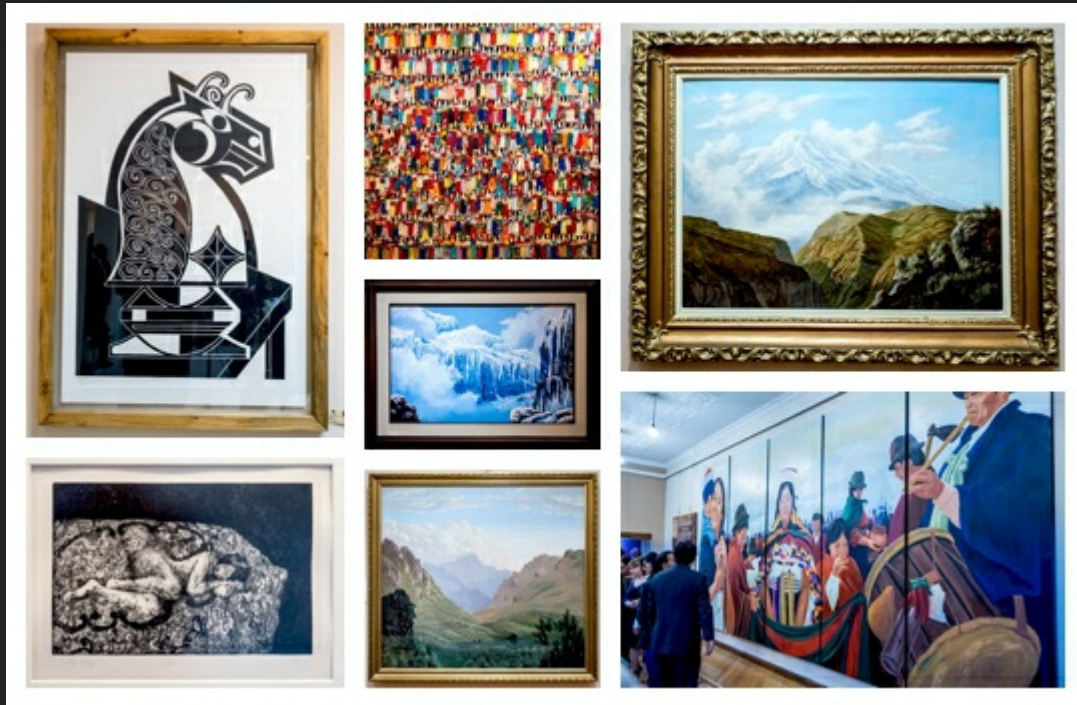
The church on the square is lit in blue, while free music was playing in the art galleries

Carnaval Ambato



The theme of Carnaval in Ambato is "Flowers and Fruits" so flowers abounded

Carnaval Ambato



The galleries were filled with fine art of several media

, February 12, 2015

Art, Event, Family, Festival

Ambato Prepares for Carnival Parade

Ambato Prepares for Carnival Parade



Ambato Prepares for Carnaval Parade

We spent today exploring Ambato, seeing the city prepare for the big parades of the next two days. We started up by having a taxi take us to "that big Ecuador flag up on the hill." We discovered that it is the "parque de la familia" and is an educational park intended to attract family, particularly those with kids. Along with the huge flag on the very top of the hill, and the sweeping panorama of Ambato below, the park is broken into two portions -- the 'active' and the 'passive.' Being more mature and a bit tired, we ended up only visiting the passive side... The active side apparently (from the park map) includes a motocross track, as well as other sports activity areas. The passive side included acres of orchards where visitors were invited to pick their own fruit (of dozens of varieties), plus numerous garden plots with different vegetables, and then a petting zoo with a dozen species of animals for the children to learn about. All in all, it seemed an excellent use of city land for educating city kids about farms and animals they would otherwise not have a chance to see.



Ambato Prepares for Carnival Parade

We then returned to the city square area, Parque Montalvo, which was alive with activity. The poor shoe shiner (shown above left) didn't have much business, as most people were dressed in casual party clothes. We were particularly impressed by the large number of on-the-spot portrait artists, both realistic and impressionist around the park, and the quality of their 5 minute sketches.



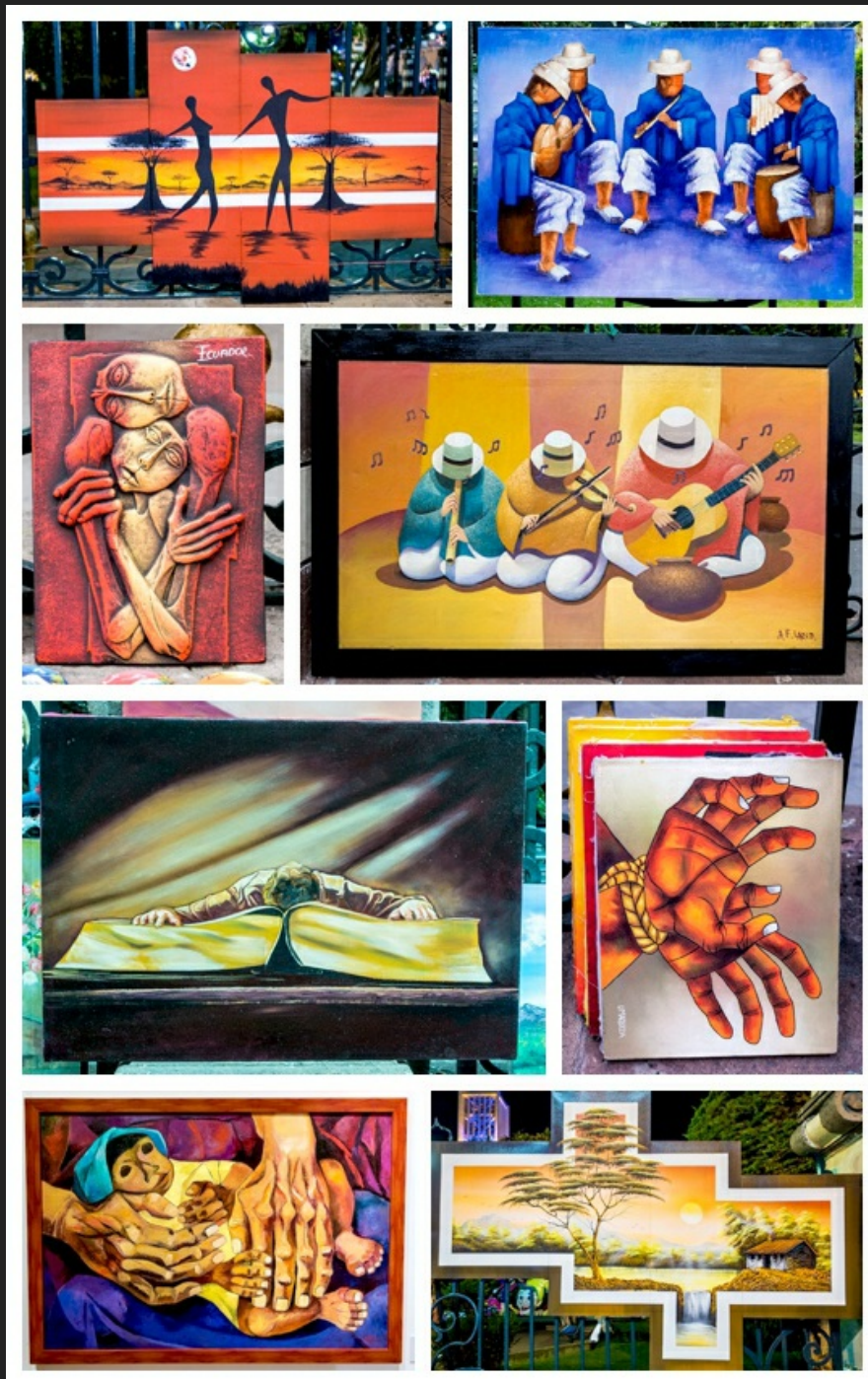
Before long the main square filled up with dancers and actors in exotic costumes. The next day we discovered these were all people and costumes for the parades on Sunday and Monday. Each group performed their country's traditional dances as well as posed for the cameras. And, the winning and runner up regional queens also welcomed the crowds.

Ambato Prepares for Carnival Parade



The main square (Parque Mantalvo) had several art galleries around it. To be honest, I am a bit hard to please when viewing paintings, and think much of the "modern art" is nothing but a con pulled on museums with too much money. That was not the case here though. We saw gallery after gallery of excellent art. I don't want all of it on my wall at home, but I have to admit that there is talent in the painting, and each artist did an excellent version of what they were attempting. As Evelyn will be the first to say, I don't give praise like that often...

Ambato Prepares for Carnival Parade



Toro!

Toro!



Toro!

For decades, we have wanted to see a bullfight. Not that I endorse cruelty to animals, but I do like seeing different cultures and their customs (the USA ain't the arbiter of morality to the world...). Though we have been in Mexico at least 50 times, plus to Spain and other Latin American countries, but there never seemed to be a bullfight in the city or time that we were there. Today in Ambato, we finally had a chance to see our first (and probably last...) bullfight.

There were 3 bullfighters and 7 bulls. In Ambato, they still kill the bulls in the fight. One of the bulls survived because it was stronger than the bullfighter and refused to be killed. When the 30 minute buzzer went off, the fighter left the ring in shame. It took another 25 minutes to convince the bull to go back into the pen. The auxiliary bullfighters tried to lasso him, but he shook it off. Finally he was coaxed into the pen, where he is now destined to live a life of luxury in a pasture somewhere (at least we can hope...).

Toro!



Toro!

The star of the show was Manuel Escribano, the sole Ecuadorian bullfighter of the day. He displayed a mastery of the bulls that was clearly above the others. He killed his first bull in a clean hit that laid the animal to rest in a few seconds, with minimal pain. The second bull he faced actually got control of him for a moment, tossing his cape and forcing him to run briefly from the animal. Manuel then returned to face down the bull, kneeling in front of him, then standing and putting his hand on the bull's head. The crowd went wild, waving white handkerchiefs, indicating that the bull should live. Manuel looked at the crowd, nodded his head, dropped his sword, raised his cape for one last charge, then slapped the bull on the spine with his hand as the bull passed. The crowd erupted with "Toro, toro, toro!" as Emanuel took his bow and the bull was led off to his pen (which took about 5 minutes this time, as the bull seemed to realize he had been granted a reprieve).

All in all, I am glad we finally got to see this sport that is enjoyed in most of the Latin world. Not sure that I want to go back and see it again though. We saw a master at work, and we saw a couple of bullfighters that were clearly not at the peak of their game. It was an interesting glimpse into this particular sport.

, February 14, 2015

[Animals](#), [Ecuador](#), [Event](#), [Festival](#), [Sports](#)

Ambato Carnaval Parade

Ambato Carnaval Parade



The numerous floats looked like they came out of the Rose Bowl Parade, created almost entirely of fresh flowers and fruits

We are spending the week in Ambato, Ecuador to see a different kind of Carnaval than we have had in Cuenca for the past couple years (where the week is a snoozefest punctuated by buckets of water thrown on us from balconies). Today was the big parade of the week.

Ambato Carnaval Parade

Carnaval is one of the most important festivals in Ecuador, and the celebration in Ambato is considered one of the most beautiful. The parade includes floats (like a miniature version of the Rose Parade in Pasadena) made with flowers and fruits, international dancers, and shows off their beauty pageant queens. The parade was organized by Ambato residents after an earthquake destroyed the city in 1949 (from wikipedia).

We discovered that parades in Ambato are run very differently from those in Cuenca. Parades in Cuenca have no real distinction between participants and audience. Spectators in Cuenca dress up and can often be confused with the official parade members. Also, there is no barricade between parade and audience, and the two mingle constantly throughout the parade. This allows photographers like myself to step right into the middle of the action for interesting angles, but it also means the streets are so crowded that the parade often has trouble moving forward, and it is hard to get photos that do not include unwanted spectators.

Both the Ambato parades we attended had the audience clearly confined to the sidewalks, much like in the States. Seats were sold by businesses who controlled the sidewalk in front of their establishment. Some areas had police barricades in front of the seats, though the street was narrow enough where we sat that those were not practical. We had a policeman standing right next to us the entire time though, assuring that no audience member left the sidewalk viewing area.

Ambato Carnaval Parade

Another difference between the two cities is that water and foam spray cans are outlawed in Ambato. We went the entire week and only got wet once from a 4 year-old with a squirt gun and second from a boy about the same age that got us while aiming at his sister. I only saw two cans of the foam spray until the very last night, while in Cuenca it is hard to walk anywhere during Carnaval week without being hit. After the [finishing night parade](#) was over and the police dispersed though, the foam cans came out and it was havoc on the streets -- we went up to the second floor windows of our hotel and could enjoy the mass foaming from a safe distance...

Ambato Carnaval Parade



Vendors roamed the streets to sell to the waiting crowd before the parade started

Ambato Carnival Parade



Police were plentiful to assure no trouble erupted. Military marched arm-in-arm to clear the streets of everyone in front of the start of the actual parade.

Ambato Carnaval Parade



We walked the streets prior to the actual start of the parade. Wherever I turned my camera, the audience hammed it up and waved.

Ambato Carnival Parade



The parade started with bands, with a few assorted clowns and characters



Dancing groups were spaced at intervals along the parade, each with a different theme

Ambato Carnaval Parade



People in various costumes were part of the parade entertainment, most of which stopped briefly and posed in front of our viewing area

Ambato Carnaval Parade



Our vantage point did not allow for any decent images of the floats, but every one was festooned with the winners of the beauty pageants (reinas) waving at the crowds

Carnaval Night Parade

Carnaval Night Parade



Music and Dance were again a major part of the night parade. The children and the congo line were new tonight

Carnaval Night Parade

We wound up our week in Ambato by watching the Monday night parade. We were surprised to discover there were two parades. [Yesterday's daytime parade](#), and then another one tonight, called Ronda Nocturnal. We were even more surprised to find that both parades were almost identical. All the groups from yesterday were also here tonight.

There were a few new groups added. Tonight added a couple children groups of bands and dancers, plus a group of visually handicapped, then one with hearing handicapped people. There was also a new section of tricked out cars with outrageous audio systems, named appropriately enough "Audio Fanatics."

Carnaval Night Parade



All the same floats ran tonight and many were lit, but we had gotten slightly better seats, where we were able to get some photos of them (yesterday a tree blocked our down-stream photo view)

Carnaval Night Parade



As before, every float had one or more beauty pageant winners waving at the crowd

, February 16, 2015

Ecuador, Festival

“Persona De La Tercera Edad” or “Person of Age”

“Persona De La Tercera Edad” or “Person of Age”



Burt earned the status today of “Tercera Edad”, also known as “Senior Citizen”. In Ecuador, seniors are revered and benefit from discounts when they reach the age of 65. Not only do they go to the front of the line at banks, Burt can now get 50% discount off all in-country transportation or flights initiated from Ecuador, pay half for movies and some utility bills. Bus rides now only cost 12-1/2 cents, instead of the standard 25 cents. AND, he can now sign up for Medicare.

“Persona De La Tercera Edad” or “Person of Age”

“Persona De La Tercera Edad” or “Person of Age”

To celebrate, we went to Tiesto’s with two other couples. It turns out that Mark and Burt share the same birthday, so we decided on a joint celebration. Tiesto’s is one of our favorite restaurants in Cuenca and Juan Carlos, the owner, recommended some scrumptious dishes for us. We started with eggplant and fish appetizers, a main course with langostino and lomo, then finished off with his hand-decorated dessert. Of course, Juan Carlos put on a candle with a flame that never dies, so Burt and Mark will never age.

Afterwards, we took the bus over to Mark and Evelyn’s for a second dessert at their light-filled apartment with amazing views. What a treat!

The next day, we decided to check out stunningly beautiful Restaurante Dos Chorreras near the Cajas for their fresh-water trout lunch. However, at 11,400 feet even with breath-taking views, we did not rush out to go horseback riding, sports fishing nor hiking.

, February 22, 2015

[Event](#), [Family](#), [Food](#)

Wooden Car Race

Wooden Car Race



Today, April 12, is Foundation Day in Cuenca, Ecuador. The city was founded 458 years ago, and there are celebrations of various types for the entire month. Last night we saw one of the largest fireworks displays from our apartment window that we have seen since arriving here.

Wooden Car Race

Today, there was a "Wooden Car Race" on Calle Larga, just half a block from our front door. Even though I am still recovering from the flu, this was so close and unique that I just had to go see.

The race was scheduled for 3:00. I got there about 3:15, knowing nothing ever starts "on time" in Ecuador. There were maybe 20 spectators on the street, and 9 cars at the starting line, all waiting for the signal to go. I waited around for something to happen, and thought it odd there were so few spectators. At 3:28, there were suddenly 200 or 300 spectators! Where the heck did they come from?? At 3:30, two police motorcycles took off, and the first two racers followed down the street. Turns out they were the only two "real wooden cars" in the race (bottom left image). They were gone and past me in less than 30 seconds, when we all turned to watch them head down the gently sloped cobblestone street.

About half an hour later, the two motorcycles came racing back at top speed, and skidded to a halt just in front of the other racers... and waited... Another 15 minutes went by with everyone standing around, and then suddenly -- without warning -- the two motorcycles took off again and the remaining cars (all metal frame) followed them at top speed.

Alberto Soriano Art Show

Alberto Soriano Art Show



Alberto Soriano has been Evelyn's painting instructor since we arrived in Ecuador. He is a well known painter, originally from Peru, who has exhibited throughout the world. Last month he and his wife were featured in an article in the local English language magazine, Zero Latitude (click [here](#) to read the article).

He opened a show this week called "*Universo Mágico*" in downtown Cuenca at the Galería de la Alcaldía (the Mayor's gallery), where we attended the opening reception. The images above are from his Manglares series -- one of three series of paintings that he showed off that night, plus some watercolor paintings.

Alberto Soriano Art Show



There was a sizable turnout for the reception, mostly composed of expats. Alberto has developed quite a following among that group, and half a dozen paintings were sold in the first hour.

Alberto Soriano Art Show



These paintings were also included, from his "Pre-Columbina" series

Alberto Soriano Art Show



Alberto's "Urbano" series was also represented by these paintings

, May 8, 2015

Art

Another Senior Moment

Another Senior Moment



Evelyn blows out the candle on her special dessert cake

Burt **turned 65 in February**. Evelyn caught up today, so she now qualifies for the Ecuadorian term of Tercera Edad or Anciano, meaning she is now in her Third Life (aka Senior Citizen). In Ecuador, that is a major milestone, which qualifies for half price on planes, trains, buses, theaters, parks, etc. Banks have special lines for senior citizens, and in theory you get to cut in line at the grocery store (though I have only seen one woman ever do that).

Another Senior Moment



As in February, we returned to Tiesto's for a special dinner with friends. When you tell Juan Carlos (the owner) that you have a birthday dinner, his wife paints the plate with edible fruit jellies, and Juan personally delivers a special birthday cake to your table. Since we had two birthdays at our table, we got two plates -- each with a different design painted on them.

Another Senior Moment



We will close with some family photos of Evelyn through her life. Only the first here was before we met. The second was in college shortly after we started dating in 1969, then continuing up to the last one, which was taken in Iceland this past November.

Museum Tour

Museum Tour



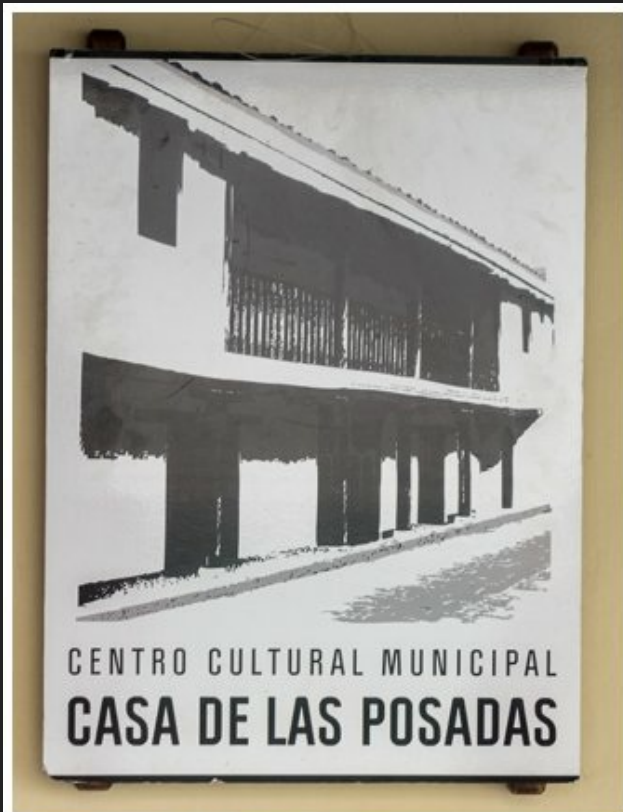
Our Spanish class went on a tour of four museums today, three of which I didn't even know existed in town. The first was Simon Bolivar's home, which has been converted into an art gallery, shown above.

Museum Tour



I knew of two Panama Hat museums in town, but we went to a third I had not seen before. This was actually a smaller museum, with fewer of the production steps shown than the one out by the airport. As with the other hat "museums" it was actually more of a hat store than museum... By the way, all "Panama Hats" **have always been made in Ecuador**. In the 19th century, hats from Ecuador were shipped to Panama, and then on to Europe. Because they arrived from Panama, they became known as Panama Hats.

Museum Tour



Third stop on our trip was at the oldest hostel in Cuenca. The museum guide (center man with white beard in top photo) was the best guide of the day, regaling us with stories of how the hostel was originally on the very edge of the city, and was used as a stop by those arriving from the Amazon after a four day trip. He also told us of the rumors of treasure still buried on the property, and how people prior to the 20th century did not have banks, so buried their gold coins or valuables -- and then often forgot where they had been stashed.

Museum Tour

I bailed before the group went on to the Modern Art Museum. I have seen that one three times, and each time thought someone conned the management to call that junk art... [At the next class the following Tuesday, I asked the other classmates what they thought of that museum, and they universally said it was a waste of time...]

, June 3, 2015

[Ecuador](#), [Education](#), [Spanish](#)

Corpus Christi Procession

Corpus Christi Procession



Corpus Christi started today, and not many places celebrate it as largely as Cuenca, Ecuador. Also known as Septenario, this was originally an indigenous celebration of the June Solstice, but was co-opted by the Catholic Church in the 1600's and turned into a Christian event. One of the highlights for many is the booths filled with sweets that line Parque Calderon in the center of town for the entire week. The booths do a steady business, as locals indulge in the huge variety of sugary candies. Personally I have tried them, but found them all way too sweet for my tastes, so I steer clear. By the third day, these booths will also be teeming with honey bees that will have found their way here for their own taste of sugar.

Corpus Christi Procession



The first day of Corpus Christi has a procession from Parque San Sebastian to Parque Calderon. Many of those living along the route place altars outside their homes.

Corpus Christi Procession



The procession is led by altar boys and priests from the local churches.

Corpus Christi Procession



A few hundred faithful also join the procession, carrying candles.

, June 4, 2015

Ecuador, Education, Event, Festival, Food

Corpus Christi Fireworks

Corpus Christi Fireworks



Today was the first day of Corpus Christi. It began with a procession, which I wrote about in a [separate blog entry](#). Tonight was the opening day fireworks. There will be fireworks and castles every night for seven days. Fireworks in Cuenca are nothing like in the States, where you must keep a "safe distance." Here you can get as close as you want. Fireworks explode overhead, with sparks streaming down on you. I made the mistake of wearing a nylon down jacket last year, and it was destroyed by those falling sparks. I now always wear an inexpensive cotton jacket when going to these events!

Corpus Christi Fireworks



The fireworks and castles are set off at irregular intervals, based on nothing more than the person with the match deciding "this is a good time." There is the needed time to construct the castles -- bamboo structures with four or five levels of fireworks -- but other fireworks go off almost at random. The audience is patient though, and hundreds crowd the square waiting for the next ignition.

Corpus Christi Fireworks



When the fireworks start, they only last a few seconds. A minute is a rather long burst. However, these bursts continue until nearly midnight at random intervals. Again, the timing is no more than the guy with the match deciding he wants to launch one now. After we got home, the fireworks continued off and on, so I put my camera in our living room window, and shot the two images above where the church domes can also be seen. For the others, I was pointing straight up, then dropping the lens quickly so the lens would not be covered in falling sparks.

Corpus Christi Fireworks



The castles are the fireworks highlight, and what draws us to the park, instead of just sitting in our warm home and watching from the window. Some builders will have the entire castle fire at once, while others fire one level at a time, to stretch out how long the structure lasts. They have fountains, spinners, whistlers, and are fun to stand a couple feet from and watch the world explode around you!

Symphonic Fly Fishing

Symphonic Fly Fishing



Symphonic Fly Fishing

I have fished exactly once in my life, in the 1970's using lures on the Deschutes river in Oregon. There is a story behind that one episode, but that would be a diversion here. For the last couple years in Cuenca, I have heard periodically about a local fishing guide that teaches fly fishing. I have toyed with the idea of trying this, and today finally took the plunge and went fishing with James Drummondo of [Fintastic Adventures de Ecuador](#).

He picked me up at a park about 5 blocks from our home at 8:00. One other man was given the class as a Father's Day gift and joined us. We then drove up to [Dos Chorreras sport fishing](#) lake, which is what they called stocked trout lakes here. You pay \$1.50 to enter (which was included in Fintastic's fee), are not allowed to throw any fish back, and pay \$2.20 per pound on the fish you catch.

Symphonic Fly Fishing

Within a few minutes I had caught my first 2 pound trout (center image). Another 20 minutes and I landed a 3 pounder (that is James holding my second trout middle-right). I figured two fish was my limit, so I returned to the restaurant to wait while Jerry caught one. (It was very cold, occasionally misting, and pretty windy all day up there at 11,200 ft in the Cajas!)

When everyone was happy with their take, we let the owner clean them for us. Tonight I baked the first of the two fish for our dinner.

If you have ever wanted to learn how to fly fish, I highly recommend Fintastic. James did an excellent job of teaching the basics, and has good equipment. He also has more advanced classes for those that already know the basics. For myself, it will probably be another 30 years before I go fishing again though. Personally I don't find the throwing of a line repeatedly to catch something I could purchase at the local mercado to be as calming as some people do...



Symphonic Fly Fishing

I have commented several times on the amount of free music available in Cuenca. Tonight launched the [Cuenca Opera Fest 2015](#), with a free performance by the University of Azuay symphony and chorus. Stephanie (the daughter of Evelyn's Spanish tutor, whom we have mentioned several times) was in the chorus (top row, left in the images above), so we decided to go. They were playing at a theater about 3 blocks from our home, which makes it particularly easy to attend.

The theater was packed, with the last few arrivals forced to stand in the back. This symphony is much smaller than the professional Cuenca symphony we have also heard several times (also free), but they had a very nice performance. There were also four opera singers that came on singly, in pairs, and as a group for various songs.

All in all, a rather long, but pleasant day in Cuenca, Ecuador...