

A close-up photograph of a young girl with long, dark hair. She has intricate face paint on her face, including a crown-like design on her forehead, dark eye makeup, and various colorful patterns. She is wearing a white, ruffled garment that looks like a mask or a decorative collar with some holes. Her expression is neutral as she looks directly at the camera. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people's hair and shoulders.

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Burt and Evelyn Johnson

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Gualaceo Carnaval 2017

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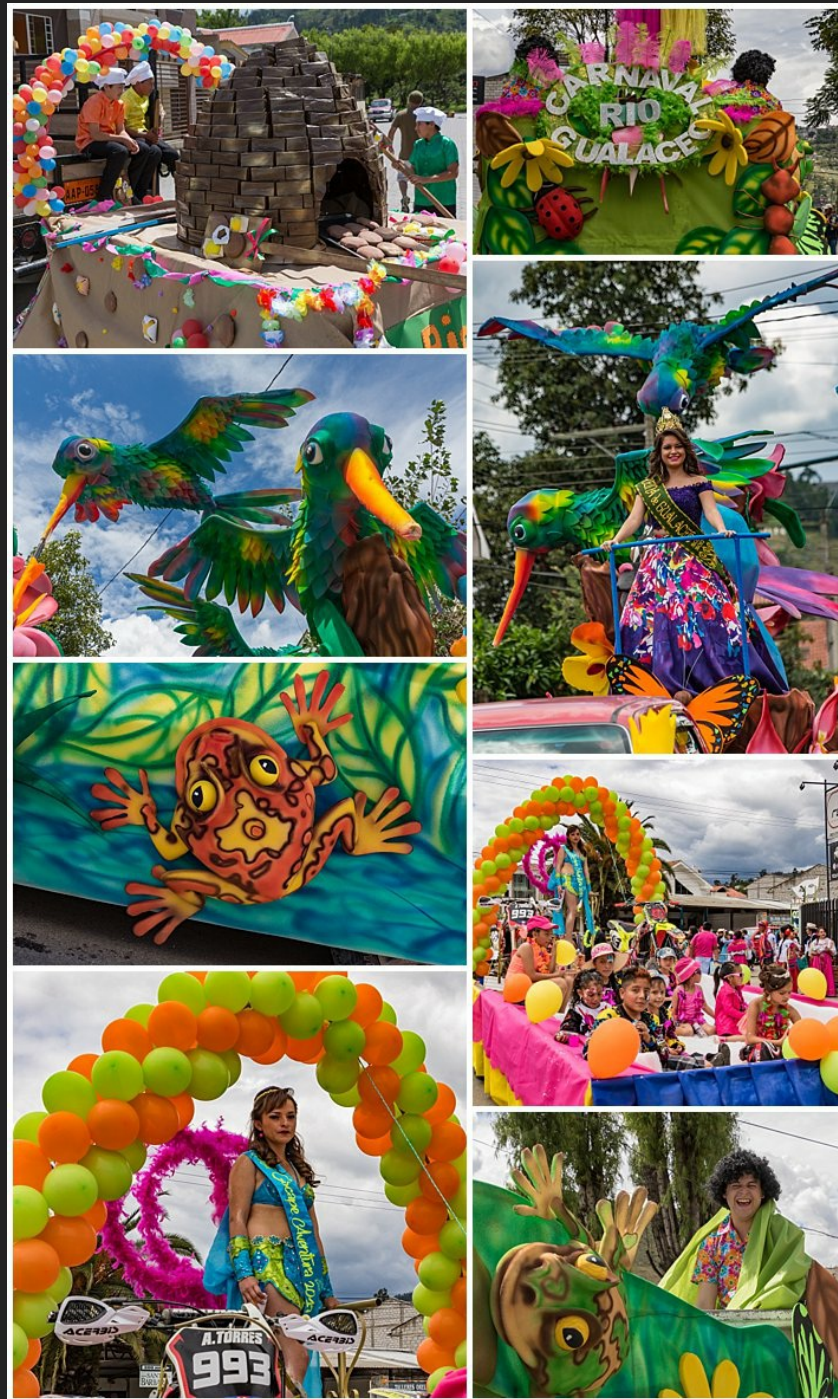


Vendors were selling food, cans of foam, and hats (including umbrella hats)

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Carnaval has traditionally been celebrated in various towns outside of Cuenca, so we decided to check out the Sunday parade in Gualaceo, about 45 minutes away. The parade was much larger than Cuenca's, with some elaborate floats, performances by dance groups. There were also food tents, a ferris wheel and merry-go-round along the Rio Gualaceo to celebrate after the parade. The vendors not only sold foam, squirt guns, umbrellas and hats; they also sold plastic buckets, and we saw kids soaked in their t-shirts with water.

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There were several elaborate floats in the parade.

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And plenty of marching bands...

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...along with many dance groups and schools.

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Kids were having a good time, whether eating ice cream or squirting foam

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Several beauty queens rode floats, while other masked characters were on horseback

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The crowds enjoyed the parade, while some doused passers-by with water from roof tops (upper row)

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After the parade, we went to the Gualaceo market, and had cuy (guinea pig) and hornado (pork) for lunch

[Gualaceo Carnaval Parade 2017](#) from [Burt Johnson](#) on [Vimeo](#).

, February 26, 2017

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

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Cuenca Carnaval – Orquídea Parade 2017

Orquídea Cuenca 2017 was dominated by dancing and foam (from [Burt Johnson](#) on [Vimeo](#)).

During our first Cuenca Carnaval in 2012, the city was practically deserted. In those days, Carnaval in Cuenca consisted solely of roving kids with squirt guns and occasional buckets of water from balconies overhead in El Centro. More events have been added each year, and this year there were parades and events going on every day. This was the second year of the *Carnaval Orquídea* parade starting from Parque San Blas, running to San Sebastián along Simón Bolívar, organized by the *Prefectura de Azuay* to promote tourism.

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Squirt guns have been largely replaced with cans of espuma (foam) in recent years. Last year's *Carnaval Orquídea* parade had a smattering of foam at the end, but this year the cans were out in full force from the very start.

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There were a few floats in the parade, including a double decker tourist bus.

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And lots of music

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Wherever there is a fiesta, kids are always in attendance

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Though many parade marchers tended to be older

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Thanks to the "blue army" (lower right) that follows every celebration, Cuenca is the cleanest city we have seen.

, February 24, 2017

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Ecuador, Event, Festival

Cuenca Carnaval–Foam Attack!



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In recent years, Cuenca has celebrated Godparent's Day with a foam party in Parque Calderon, in the center of town. Cans of foam ("espuma") come out at 5:00, and the entire park becomes a slip-and-slide zone within minutes. In past years, we walked over to the parque **later in the evening**, when teenagers were in abundance. We decided to go earlier this year, partially for better photography light. We discovered that the younger kids dominate the scene when the foam party first starts.

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The adults involved in this earlier time were mostly parents or grandparents of the kids. A few of them had foam cans of their own, but more were covered with foam as they watched the fun. And yep, that is me in the lower right. Taking any photographs in the war zone was a constant shoot-wipe-shoot cycle to keep the lens clean enough to use!

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Godparents had their own small parade. Whether they had their own cans of foam or not, they were quickly covered. Firemen were on hand (upper left), and the military provided music (upper right). Evelyn (lower right) managed to stay on the periphery and survived the evening with only minimal foam. Last year, Evelyn was carrying one of the humongous cans of espuma, and wondering why she was targeted by all of the kids and adults.

We have been amazed how the Carnaval celebration has evolved over the past few years in Cuenca -- 3 years ago, the entire city was a ghost town as all the inhabitants left for the coast, and now there's a huge party, parades and even some restaurants stay open for this holiday. The evening ended around 11:00 PM with the best choreographed fireworks we have seen in Ecuador.

[Carnaval Espuma Party Cuenca 2017](#) from [Burt Johnson](#) on [Vimeo](#).

, February 23, 2017

[Ecuador](#), [Festival](#)

Day of the Innocents Masquerade Parade 2017



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Every January 6, Cuenca celebrates the Day of the Innocents with a parade that combines satire, political and social commentary. It is variously called the Fools Parade, Inocentes Parade, or [Masquerades Parade](#). This was originally a religious event commemorating King Herod's death sentence for all new-born boys after the birth of Christ, though Cuenca's version has evolved into a fun-filled costume party combining April Fool's Day, Carnaval, and Halloween, with some politics thrown into the mix.

Our first time seeing this parade was in [2013](#), when we found it definitely unique among the festivities we had seen previously. [2014](#) followed with a large number of men dressed in drag. [2015](#) saw a definite subdued political satire, as President Correa had just put through a law making it illegal to make fun of political leaders, and most groups were clearly worried about crossing that line.

The local newspaper reported that there were three times as many entrants in the contest as in past years. However we only captured the first hour of the festivities starting at 6:00 PM, as the party continued well into the night with many arriving after 8:30 PM. This year, the [University of Cuenca won the Mascaradas 2017](#) contest prize of \$4,000. The \$3,000 second prize was awarded to the University of Azuay for their skit that included zombies dancing to Michael Jackson's song, Thriller, making fun of the obsessive use of electronic devices and social networks.

Every year there are groups that come through where we can recognize the parody... and then there are numerous ones where we just shrug our shoulders and wonder what the heck they are referring to. One repeating theme this year was Ruliman. Who is Ruliman, you ask? hmmm... I am still asking that too... I have since read several articles that talk about the Ecuadorian government creating a solidarity hero called Solimán. Ruliman is a character from a local voice impersonator named Santiago Illescas. The crowd cheered every time a float or group came by with the Ruliman theme, but I still don't understand why...

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There were numerous groups led by floats or banners. Sometimes we knew what they meant. For example, the upper left is complaining about the Tranvia light rail project in Cuenca that is running more than a year late and well over budget, partly due to political maneuvering and mismanagement. Lower right says "*Water is love and parties. Gold is death and the demon.*" This one is objecting to massive gold mines that have recently been opened in the Amazon. Upper right is telling people to "*never forget*" Cuenca traditions. Another skit with caskets reminded everyone of the many famous people who passed away the past year.

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Many groups traveled in costumes, all matching a single theme.

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Superheroes were in plentiful supply.

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Masks and elaborate face paint was common, and many were quite well done.

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As with all large parades like this, the police and Red Cross were on hand as needed. I have never seen any disturbances at any of these events.

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The audience is often as interesting as the parade itself, and tonight was no exception.

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Just a last few more images that I particularly liked tonight, as the Inocents enjoyed their party.

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Subdued New Year's Eve in Cuenca



As usual, politicians were mocked throughout the large neighborhood dioramas. Clinton, Obama and Trump were all represented from the States, plus an assortment of Ecuadorian political figures.

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This was our fifth New Year's Eve in Ecuador. Except for [2015 in Salinas](#), we have spent each of them in Cuenca. Our first was at the [end of 2012](#), and was easily the largest and most elaborate we have seen here. Each year since then has been smaller, and this year was much more subdued than any prior celebration. There were fewer elaborate dioramas, fewer manigotes (effigies), fewer fireworks, fewer cars decorated with their manigotes and fewer people walking around el Centro. There were supposedly 19 entries for the annual neighborhood Amistad Club contest, however with no map nor addresses published, people walked to their favorite spots looking lost and saying "nada".

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Given the vitriol that Trump spewed towards Latin Americans, it was not surprising that he was a major target of ridiculing.

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There were a smattering of other manigotes around town, some humorous, but most poking fun at various politicians.

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There were a few cars driving around with their manigotes tied to the roof or bumper, but far fewer than past years.

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As always, food was plentiful. There was even tripe (3rd row right) this year, and a manigote of a woman cooking cuy (2nd row left).

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There was the usual collection of characters and toll collectors having fun.

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Kids were enjoying themselves, whether climbing trees (middle left) or reading a tablet (upper right), or playing with sparklers.

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Many families started burning their own manigotes before midnight this year.

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Though the large neighborhood bonfires started at midnight, which has been the tradition. However, it did not feel like a war zone of numerous fires this year, as it has in the past.

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The smaller crowds enjoyed the ritual of burning bad thoughts from the past year, and starting the new year fresh.

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As we arrived home, our neighbors were preparing to launch their globo (paper sky lantern written with all the hopes they wished for in the new year, such as "salud, dinero, amistad, familia...") Though now formally discontinued in town, after 2 churches caught fire in 2013, this family has continued to launch one each New Year's Eve.