

THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES



After returning to Quito from the Galapagos Islands we once again rearranged our luggage for cooler climates and for bus travel this time.

We will head south from Quito along the Andes Mountains on the Pan American Highway.



In Cuenca we will leave the Pan American Highway and head west over the western ridge of the Andes Mountains to Guayaquil and an airplane flight back to Quito.



In retrospect of our Ecuador trip, it was one of the best guided tours in terms of the multitude of 'Ecuadorian' things we experienced. I feel we got a really good exposure to that country. Not necessarily the most interesting tour photographically or for a specific attraction, but just a great overall exposure to many aspects of Ecuador. I think primarily due to the guide(s), the free hand the tour company gives to the guides and the small size of our group, (14 people plus the guide and driver).

Our guides took us to places and experiences that could really not be planned ahead of time and were rather spontaneous due to a variety of circumstances. Certainly there were many 'standard' experiences that most people on tours would get, but we feel we saw many things that a large group tour just would not be able to see.

And, of course, Wendy and I had our own unique adventure and tour guided trip to a Quito urgent care facility for food poisoning. Wendy acquired the food poisoning at a catered private dinner we had at a Quito museum. Wendy was the only person to have the chicken option (and the only person to acquire food poisoning).

Having traveled on parts of the Pan American Highway in North, Central and South America, I asked Wendy if we should not consider traveling the entire length in our MoHo. We did all the historical routes of *The Mother Road* (Route 66) with maps and no GPS, how much harder could the entire 30,000 miles of the Pan American Highway be? Wendy was not so enthusiastic about it though.





THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES

QUITO

During our Ecuador travels we made Quito our base. That made for several adventures and experiences in and around Quito over the days we spent there.

Outside the hotel we stayed in we found one of those sights that indicates possible confusion and less than great communications.

Ecuadorian gargoyles would be turtles and iguanas of course!



THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES

QUITO



On one of our Quito street walks our guide recognized these two fellows as Venezuelan refugees. Due to the current difficult circumstances in Venezuela, Ecuador is a popular country Venezuelans flee to. As a consequence Ecuador has immigration issues similar to the Mexico / USA border issues and many unique to Venezuela and Ecuador. These two fellows had walked from Venezuela and were re-selling snacks (like a bag of chips and a soda) that they had purchased and put together in order to make enough money for a bed for the night, (\$10.00). When they could not accomplish that they slept on the streets. Our guide translated their story and circumstances and explained the various aspects of the Venezuelan refugee issues in Ecuador. This was the sort of spontaneous experience we were to have throughout this trip. All due to the guide being allowed the freedom, latitude and budget by the OAT offices. In the end, these two were from a Venezuelan middle class family that could no longer buy food, at any price! One had braces so I asked about how he could afford those based upon his current situation. He was able to afford braces sometime in the past, he had not had them tended to in many months and no prospect for doing so in the future.

While the guide paid them for sharing their story, it still took him some time and talking to convince them we had no ill intentions, we would not be turning them over to authorities and we just wanted to learn. By the time we had all reached into our pockets for something to give them as well, I think they were happy and had probably one of their best days in a long time.



THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES

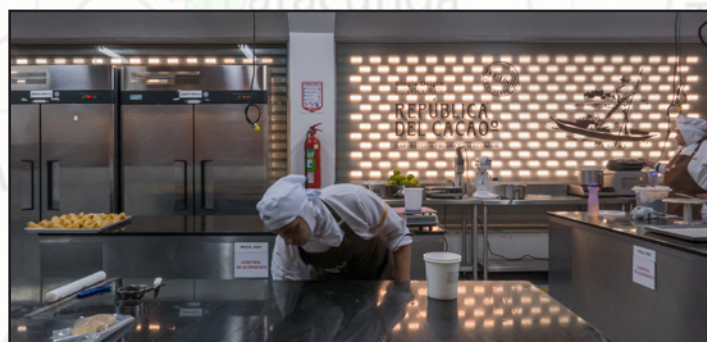
QUITO

Right away, on one of our first walks in the city of Quito we were introduced to Ecuadorian chocolate. Cocoa beans are deeply connected to the history of Ecuador. They were the world's largest exporter of cocoa until the beginning of the 20th Century when plant disease and the rise of production across Africa and Asia saw Ecuador lose its top spot.

Cocoa lost its appeal to farmers and was replaced by more lucrative crops like bananas and coffee. West Africa became the world's leader in cocoa production and exports, with a focus on so-called "bulk" or "ordinary" beans, used for processed chocolate-flavoured candies and sweets.

Much like wine, chocolate reflects the flavors of the region where cocoa beans are grown, and how they are dried and fermented. "Fine" or "flavor" beans, the top-quality varieties used in gourmet products because of their superior taste, account for only about 5% of the world's cocoa production, but demand is increasing.

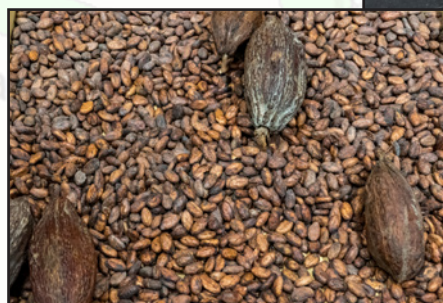
Ecuador has emerged as the pre-eminent exporter of fine beans. It is a favorite destination for chocolatiers in search of the best. Cocoa production has also become a sustainable source of income for Ecuador's farmers. Later on this trip, on our way from Cuenca to Guayaquil, we will stop at a cocoa farm, learn more about cocoa beans and make some of our own chocolate.



NATIVE ARRIBA PODS



CCN-51 HYBRID PODS



Native Arriba cocoa is considered the best "Fine" cocoa.

Compared to the somewhat controversial newer hybrid CCN-51 cocoa, Native Arriba cocoa is harder to grow, more susceptible to disease, more difficult to process.

In the end, the 'Fine' flavor of the Native Arriba cocoa seems a concern only for craft chocolate makers and small players. The rest of the market, made of big manufacturers, stopped worrying about flavor a long time ago. Quantity is queen, and it has found her loyal servant in something called CCN-51.

We were told the '51' was a nod to the number of attempts at a hybrid before they found success... the CCN-51.

THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES

QUITO



STREET VENDORS



OUR PARTY / CITY TOUR BUS FOR ONE EVENING



THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES

QUITO

One evening dinner was catered at a private showing and tour of the National Museum of Ecuador. Lots of artifacts and cultural information.

This was where Wendy chose to have the chicken entrée and the rest of us choose something different. The chicken entrée was also served with food poisoning which gave Wendy I and an OAT staffer a day at an Ecuadorian urgent care facility getting Wendy back on her feet.

While it was not a pleasant experience, Wendy was well taken care of with kindness, urgency, thorough testing, bountiful IV liquids, drugs to sooth her raging stomach and finally (and importantly) the okay to go the next day onto the Galapagos Islands.



Mujeres líderes
icas Valdivia 4000 a.C. - 1800 a.C.

I was not watching Wendy and what she touched going through this area, but she always likes to feel fabrics and clothing when shopping. Maybe she got too touchy / feely with this costume and it's spirit brought on her chicken dinner issues?



THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES

QUITO

We stopped and learned a bit about agave and this small part of local agave gathering culture this group of people are trying to preserve.



Some of our group participated in a bit of spiritual healing before we went onto the tequila education and tasting part of our experience.



They had several agave based products for sale as well as the various tequilas but after doing the tequila tasting I don't remember what they were...



THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES

QUITO

We stopped to see and hear the Sinamune Disabled Children's Orchestra play. The Sinamune school was founded by Maestro Edgar Palacios in 1993. He is considered Ecuador's finest trumpet player. The school teaches students with special needs to play musical instruments and to dance in addition to regular school subjects. In the photograph to the right, Edgar is the fellow sitting center, playing the trumpet, with a microphone and stand in front of him.



Some dance is also incorporated in their performances, (which have been worldwide).

There are videos available across the Internet of their performances and I believe they have a Facebook following as well:

Video links here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i7_ar0bXhKk

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i7_ar0bXhKk

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5KpjPXHLzz8>

At a restaurant we had lunch they had interesting place mats, re-used LP's.



THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES

QUITO

Another side trip was to the nearby equator.



Traffic was heavy and at times, a standstill.



A trip up into the Andes to the west of Quito gave us grand views of the city. The first panoramic photograph below is the northern stretch of Quito. The second panoramic photograph is the southern stretch of Quito, a huge long city strung out along a valley between west and east ridges of the Andes.



THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES

QUITO

A visit to a local market is a mandatory stop on any visit to any place. This one was no tourist stop Pike Place Market, no tourists except for ourselves.



Our guide explained several fruits and such to us, buying some and serving them up to us for a taste.

We also were given one US dollar and told to go somewhere in the market and buy something with that dollar that we thought our guide would not know what it was.

I think there was maybe one item that stumped him, but the most memorable one was a blood soup mix. The couple that purchased it was not even sure what it was.

Wendy & I purchased some herbs used for healing from a pharmacy specializing in natural herbs and such. It didn't fool our guide of course.



THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES

From Quito we headed south on the Pan American Highway. We did not get many chances to see any towering Andes mountains and when we did it was glimpses through the clouds.



Our guide called ahead to this famous fellow, Baltazar Ushca Tenesaca, to arrange a stop along the road to meet him and his wife. Baltazar Ushca Tenesaca is famous because he is the last 'Ice Merchant' that is harvesting ice from the glaciers of Mount Chimborazo.

He showed us some glacier ice, one of his donkeys, his technique for making rope from grasses in the field and posed for our photographs. His wife sold a few craft items as well.

Below are links to two different video shorts on him.

The first, by the NY Times, is here:
<https://youtu.be/PAeUC0-v5x4>

The second, by Great Big Story, is here:
https://youtu.be/z2eLl_WA7CQ



THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES

Near Cotopaxi we stopped for hot chocolate and empanadas at the 400 year old Hacienda La Cienega, one of the oldest colonial properties in Ecuador. It was turned into a hotel in 1982.





THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES

Once a week there is a huge local market held at a location along our route and we happened to be driving by on that day. It was a great stop with all manner of livestock and such being sold and traded. The areas were generally segregated into what was being sold; horses, pigs, cattle, donkeys, guinea pigs, chickens, etc., etc., etc.

The Horse Section



The horse above got a lot of attention for some reason.



The Donkey Section



THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES

The Sheep Section

It was a very crowded and exciting market. All the color was wonderful and as my friend Tom says, "photographically target rich". Again, we were the only tourists there, we were ignored (or at least tolerated) which made photography a pleasure. With all the hats, particularly fedoras, I felt a certain connection with this culture!



Not quite to the sheep section, but on the way...



THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES

The Chicken Section

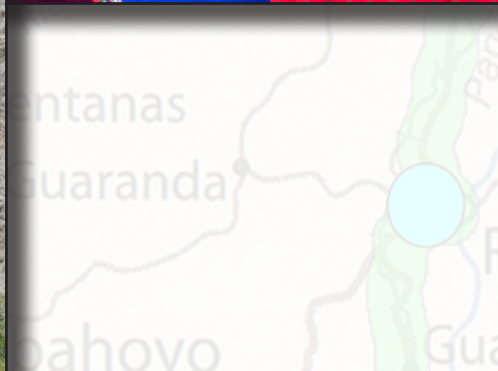


THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES





THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES





THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES

The Guinea Pig Section





THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES

The Pig Section



The Cattle Section

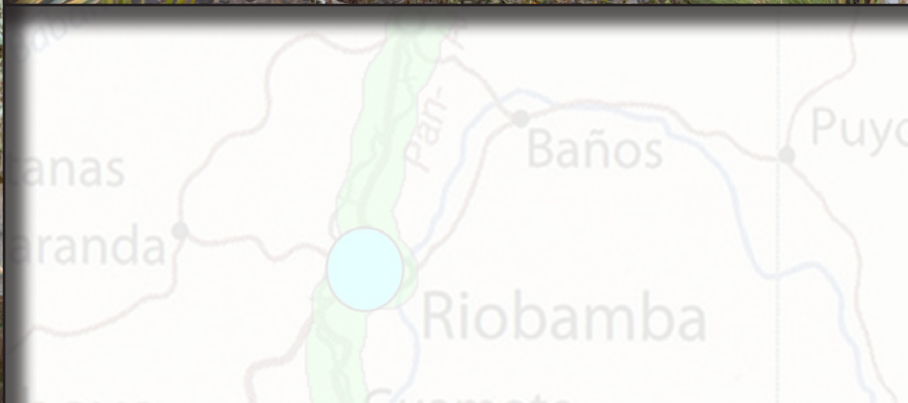




THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES

We stopped for lunch at this traditional home built by a journalist / artist and her husband. Her husband had passed away, but she has carried on in the home and accepted guests a couple times a year. She put on a great lunch and let us wander around her home at will, encouraging us to check out every nook and cranny... which we did.

She had done most of the art work and paintings in the home.



THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES





THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES



I am still only about half way through the images I took on the Andes portion of our Ecuador travels so I am going to end this issue of our travelogue and finish in the next issue.

END