

THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES PART II OF II

On one cold and wet afternoon we stopped at a roadside shop that made rugs and such. Although the spinning and manufacture of woolen items was interesting, I was more interested in the artifacts collected and displayed on the walls and shelves of the place.





ECUADOR ~ 2019

THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES

PART II OF II



Another stop had us on a cold, wet short walk around a lake in Parque Nacional Cajas. Everyone's Gore-Tex and rubber clothing was fully deployed. At over 10,000 feet in altitude I could feel the extra effort it took to get oxygen to my appropriate body parts.

The wonderful character below was our guide on this short walk.



THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES PART II OF II

We stopped at a facility that did in vitro reproduction of orchids. In the lab we saw many racks of containers, each having hundreds (or thousands... I don't remember for sure) of orchids in them.

Based upon the electrical connection to the lighting below, OSHA has not visited here, only practicality and convenience.



We got to tour through their gardens looking at and learning about various orchids.

For a short slide show movie of the digital art I did inspired by the orchids I photographed, click the image below. NOTE: The video is a big file, don't use cell data that will cost you.



THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES

PART II OF II



We got to visit artist Santiago Guillermo Llivisaca who is handicapped and paints holding his brushes with his mouth. He was just finishing the portrait commission of a little Italian fellow below. When I mentioned the little Italian fellow looked like a bit of a trouble maker, there was immediate consensus from Santiago.

If you click on the image of Santiago with painting below, there is a short video of him painting some of those finishing touches to the portrait.

NOTE: The video is a big file, don't use cell data that will cost you.







While we were at the market we were offered a unique folk medicine experience, a cleansing and ailment reading. There were a couple groups of practitioners and our guide picked out a couple to do their thing on those of us that wanted to experience it. I made a video of our guides cleansing and added a bit of explanation and voodoo music to it. You can see it by clicking on the photo of the practitioner on the right.

NOTE: The video is a big file, don't use cell data that will cost you.



THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES PART II OF II

We reloaded into our small bus once again in Cuenca to head over the western Andes ridge to Guayaquil and our flight back to Quito... and connect to our flights back to Seattle as well.

There were a couple of stops to make along the way though.

I made another photo slide show movie of the street scenes I saw out the bus window. You can click on the bus image to the right to see it.

NOTE: The video is a big file, don't use cell data that will cost you.



We stopped at the summit, put on some warmer gear and took a few photographs.



THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES PART II OF II

The Cocoa Planation

Our last stop was at a coca plantation where we learned a bit more about cocoa plants and chocolate.



The buds above grow into the pods to the right. The dark pods are the newer hybrid CCN-51, (Coleccion Castro Naranjal).

The plant CCN-51 was created in Ecuador by Homer Castro in the 1960s, but was not widely planted in the country until El Niño repercussions devastated the country's fine flavor Nacional crop in 1997/1998.

The CCN-51 cocoa plant has greater resistance to fungal diseases and produces higher yields compared to Latin America's fine flavor varieties.

The lighter pods to the right and below are the Nacional cocoa pods and will become a bright yellow when ready to be harvested.



THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES

PART II OF II



The CCN-51, becomes a bright red when ready to harvest,.

The pod has a rough, leathery rind filled with sweet, mucilaginous pulp (called baba de cacao in South America) enclosing 30 to 50 large seeds.

The pods are opened, the seeds are kept, and the empty pods are discarded and the pulp made into juice. The seeds are placed where they can ferment.



We watched and participated in roasting, hulling and grinding some beans.

After roasting there is a skin similar to what a peanut would have that is removed (lower right). One does this by just rubbing the hot beans between your fingers while wincing at the pain of the heat from the hot beans being transferred to your digits. All for the love of chocolate I was told.

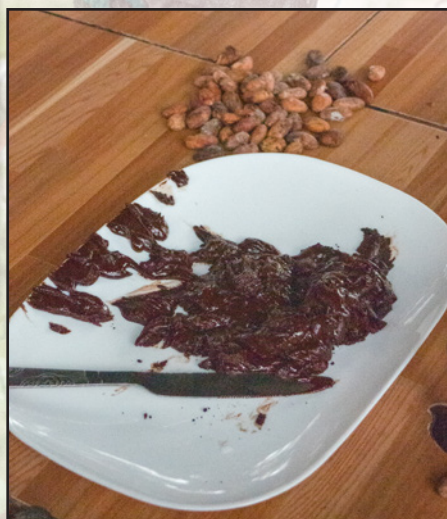


ECUADOR ~ 2019

THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES PART II OF II



The beans are then ground. Our guide to the right doing his best at a Tom Sawyer 'Help-Me-Paint-The-Fence ... This-Is-Fun' interpretation. I leaned at the shelling of the hot beans and declined. Besides, he really doesn't look like he is having THAT much fun. It was hard work based upon what I saw from those he DID convince to take part in the effort.



The ground bean paste (which tasted like baker's chocolate... very intense but not bitter) is then cooked and mixed with all manner of stuff like sugar, milk, and other flavorings as per the chef's desire.



Wendy approved of the results!



THE ANDES AND THE AVENUE OF VOLCANOES PART II OF II

After our cocoa plantation tour, lunch and chocolate making efforts, we piled back into the bus, headed on to Guayaquil, drove through town to drop off a few of our fellow travelers at a hotel, and then we were dropped off at the airport where we began our air travel back to Quito, Atlanta and then Seattle.

As I've mentioned before in a previous *Flying Pig Adventures* travelogue, we felt we got a very good overview and taste of Ecuador on this trip.



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