



# El Clima Magazine

*The Official Peace Corps Ecuador Volunteer Magazine*

Eating Ecuador Issue  
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Administrative Editor: Amanda Morales  
Copy Editors: Ava Hacker, Peter Amerkhanian  
Content Editor: Stephanie Fuentes  
Social Media/Recruitment: Sean Speckin  
Layout and Photography: Shekinah Davis

Contact Us To Get Involved:  
Email: [elclimamagazine@gmail.com](mailto:elclimamagazine@gmail.com)  
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/elclimamagazine/>

# Editor's Note

What we eat during service has more than just an impact on our waistlines. For some of us it's a crucial part of integration into our communities. Over a shared meal, volunteers have established relationships with counterparts, host families and community members.

For some volunteers, food serves as a reminder of home while they try to recreate favorite recipes with foreign ingredients. However, sharing a taste of home with members of your community is practically fulfilling the Peace Corps second goal: To help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served.

This issue is dedicated to every Ecuadorian who has pulled up a chair at the table for a volunteer to join them and to all of the host families who share a kitchen and beloved recipes with volunteers in the name of integration.

For me, food was how I came to bond with my host great aunt Soledad. She's the woman behind many of the baked goods at Café con Fe near the park in Nayon. One day, she let me into her kitchen to bake together and to teach her some new recipes.

I thought we'd start out small with standard chocolate chip cookies. As she showed me around her kitchen, a framed photo of Soledad or "Mami Sol" with what looked like a young Rafael Correa caught my eye. I asked her who she was with and she nonchalantly replied, "Oh that's the President." Turns out it was I who had much to learn from Mami Sol, a former baker for the president at the Palacio de Carondelet.

For the record she says his favorite was her maduro cake. Buen provecho!

-Amanda Morales, Administrative Editor



# How to kill a Cuy

by Virginia Cross, RPCV



Sí, yo sé matar un cuy.

Whenever I'd come to Quito during my Peace Corps service, this was the detail that came up most frequently when I'd try to describe the town of 2,800 where I lived. I was surely an oddity to Quito locals: an American who lived in Guamote who knew a little Kichwa and how to kill guinea pigs. Most quiteños I know have never eaten cuy, much less killed one.

During the time I lived in Guamote, I had the privilege to experience many traditions that urban Ecuadorians might only know through grandparents' stories or history books. While an eight year old in Quito might beg for pizza or a hamburger, four year olds in Guamote happily slurp down homemade yawarlocro, a tripe and organ soup with fried blood.

A celebratory luncheon in Guamote meant parents brought roasted cuy, killed and cooked in



their own homes. No matter which food, life in rural Ecuador taught me about that food in its whole cycle, from seed to harvest, birth to death.

The day I learned to kill cuy, we went to the backyard pen at my co-worker's house and picked out the cuyes. I had helped pick the alfalfa that the animals had eaten, and I could even tell you about the beautiful view that the alfalfa had of the Chimborazo and Los Altares volcanos.

I can see the wooden stool where the first stages of death occurred, and I remember the enormous pot where death became final. Until that day, I had never seen death occur for anything larger than a spider, but that day, I saw it all. After the cuy came out of the oven, the skin was crispy, the teeth still there, and I felt that I knew that cuy inside and out.

Backyard gardens aside, life in the U.S. rarely gives us the chance to see food as a start to finish process. We go to Trader Joes, grab a bag of Mandarin Orange Chicken, throw it in the microwave, and eat it while watching Scandal. We're lucky if we even glance down once to see what we are eating. Not all meals are like this, of course, but what stands out about the U.S. food system is that we tend not to have any idea of where our food came from, who helped bring that food to our table or the history behind the food.

Here in my post-Peace Corps apartment in an upscale neighborhood of Quito, I have a modern electric stove, an oven with shelves (Omni 115... concrete bricks no more!), and a washing machine. The



days of indoor wood-burning stoves and eucalyptus ovens seem far off, but at the same time that I am microwaving extra-butter popcorn, my students and their families are still stirring caldos in a charred room or cooking hornado in their backyard.

# For Friends: Just Add Chocolate

by Laurel Mittelman



My mom always told me that the best way to meet people and make them like you is to bring them baked goods, and that is something that I haven't forgotten and have found time and again to be true. Sharing my love for food, and in particular, for baking, has been one way for me to integrate deeper into my community and with my teachers.

When I wanted to get closer to my elementary school teachers but was having trouble getting into their cafecito clique (when they gathered together for coffee and snacks during recess), I baked them cookies. When I wanted to make friends with the other area teachers at my school, I brought in banana bread. When I wanted to be included in my colegio's monthly cafecitos, I brought in brownies.

Each of these things have helped me to form good relationships with all of my coworkers, and now they always ask when I'm bringing in my next baked goodie. They're always surprised when I tell that I did, in fact, bake everything by myself... and from scratch (can't afford boxed stuff on a volunteer budget)!

It's a novel idea in a country where baking is not a big part of the culture. In fact, many households don't even have an oven!

For me it has been so much more than just sharing some yummy treats to make connections and friends; it's a way for me to share my culture. It has also been a comfort for me when homesickness hits to be able to bake a taste of home. So now I share with you my Ecu-famous (and easy as hell) brownie recipe, in the hope that it will help you forge new relationships, or at the very least, stave off the homesickness a little. ¡Buen provecho!

## Easy-Peasy Brownies

Adapted from Blue Apron

Yield: 1 8x8 Pan (About 12 brownies)

Can double recipe for larger pan or thicker brownies

½ cup flour

1 cup sugar

Pinch of salt

½ cup butter, melted

⅓ cup baking chocolate, melted with a little butter

2 eggs

1 teaspoon vanilla

Preheat oven to 350 degrees fahrenheit (176 celsius).

In a medium bowl melt butter and cocoa together. Mix in eggs and vanilla. In a separate, large bowl mix together all the dry ingredients. Add the chocolate mixture to the dry ingredients and mix until smooth and incorporated.

Pour batter into a greased 8x8 pan. Bake for 25-35 minutes.

Brownies are done when a knife comes out clean.

# An Ode to Encebollado

*by Amanda Morales*



Eating a steaming bowl of soup in the Costa, a region known for heat, seems counterintuitive, but I've come to find a warm bowl of encebollado more than comforting. I crave it. Roughly translated, encebollado is “fish soup with onions.” Fish and onion soup for breakfast seems like an odd start to the day back home, but in the coast it's as common as scrambled eggs stateside. In fact, I've come to prefer it to my traditional—albeit bland—breakfast of oatmeal.

The exact origins of encebollado are unknown, but the city of Guayaquil claims it as its own. On any given day in the coastal region you can find Ecuadorians of all classes either at a sit-down restaurant or hunched over at a street vendor's cart slurping up a warm bowl. You're most likely to find encebollado served in the mornings on the coast.

Encebollado doesn't discriminate against class with its simple ingredients and informality. Depending on the province the recipe varies, but in general it's a broth-based soup with chunks of albacore tuna, boiled yucca or cassava, tomato, cilantro, cumin and its namesake: red onions.



Expert encebollado eaters know that it's the toppings that send this dish over the tempting edge. If your bowl doesn't resemble a Jackson Pollock abstract painting with splatters of color on the broth's surface, then you're doing it wrong. Lines of crimson red aji, bright yellow mustard, floating specks of black pepper and glistening oil add to the already colorful dish. Sprinkle fresh cilantro, diced tomatoes or extra onion if you're really feeling bold.



In the Sierra the soup might also be served with popcorn and maiz tostado. Meanwhile, costenos will scoff at the idea of using anything other than golden chifles to soak up the broth once you've fished out all of the tuna and yucca. Both will agree to a generous squeeze of fresh lime.

For some, encebollado is medicinal. The dish has long been hailed as a remedy for late nights of tossing back Pilsners, the beer of choice in Ecuador. Some Ecuadorians swear by its healing powers to cure "chuchaqui" or a hangover.



While the science is unclear, one thing is certain; encebollado is purely Ecuadorian and I can't get enough of it.



# Spice of Life

*by Jaime Rodriguez-Sosa*

When I first came to Ecuador I felt at home, given that the people were welcoming and the language was largely familiar. However, the difference in food quickly made things complicated for me.

For the past year I have been eating plenty of Ecuadorian food, and bonding with host country nationals because of my willingness to try everything and discuss the history, ingredients and importance of the food.

To me, food is inextricably intertwined with who you are and where you call home. Food is an extension of you, it is the city where you grew up, it is the dedicated grandmother asking you if you've eaten, it is your culture, it is an intimate personal history, it is survival; food is inseparable from all of these things.

Yet, what is home? To me, home has always been associated with family, with the music, the culture and the food. Home is a place where you can feel comfortable and where you have a place to be yourself. For the past year I learned to accept and cherish another culture through their food, but it is not truly mine, so I have not completely felt at home.





On a brief return to Los Angeles, I rekindled that feeling of home, that spark of belonging that we all seem to be seeking. It's different for everyone, but to me it's always tied with the taste of Mexico, with the vibrant spices and dozens of chilies in the sauces and freshly made salsas that my family generously pours on everything. To get to taste the food of my culture again was a wonderful experience that made me reminisce on years long past, to when I was a four years old and being taught how to cook by my abuelita.

Upon my return to Ecuador, I packed my bags with a lot of spices-- about 70 pounds of it to be exact. Why? Because for the past year I said yes to everything. I wanted to try everything and share in another culture. Now, I want to give back. The vibrancy of dozens of spices, the variety of dried red chilies, the bittersweet dark chocolates of Mexico, the nuanced thousand year sauces of Puebla and Oaxaca -- these are all things that I want to share with the friends and acquaintances that I have made here.

The flavors of growing up in a Mexican family is part of who I am, it's part of many immigrant families in the United States. As a volunteer, am I not compelled to share U.S. culture which in and of itself is a melting pot of cultures? I want to show that Mexican food is more than just tacos and burritos, that it is not easy to make and that if done correctly, it is delicious. Mexican cuisine for me is part of feeling at home, and despite being thousands of miles away, the food that I brought back will help me to get a taste of home.

# Ecuadorian “Baked Beans” *by Annie Hall*

This recipe is for home-style baked beans using ingredients you can find in Ecuador. Since I did the hard work of researching other people’s recipes and adapting them to what is available from Mi Comisariato and affordable on a PC budget, I’m going to take the credit.

You can adjust the quantities to your taste because we’re cooking here, not baking, so everything’s made up and the proportions don’t matter. The secret’s out: Ecuadorian baked beans aren’t baked at all.

## Ingredients:

250 g dried Panamitos  
100 g tocino (or however much bacon you can afford;  
there’s no such thing as too much)  
1 medium white onion  
2 garlic cloves  
¾ cup brown sugar  
1 small package ketchup, a.k.a. salsa de tomate or 4 to 5 tbsp  
3 tbsp maple-flavored syrup (or substitute with brown sugar)  
1 tsp mustard  
1 tbsp vinegar  
½ tsp basic bottled ají  
salt to taste  
garlic powder to taste  
ground black pepper to taste



Go ahead and soak your panamito beans for a full day. They definitely need to soak at least overnight, but who has time to make baked beans in the morning?

Pre-boil your beans on high heat for about 20 minutes. While your beans are boiling, chop your bacon into small squares, dice the onion, and mince the garlic. Drain your beans and set them aside. In your pot, fry the bacon over medium heat until it’s fully cooked. You can make this without bacon, but you will need to add about 2 tablespoons of your preferred fat to the recipe.

Add in the onions, garlic, and a pinch of salt (btw, Giada taught me this part is called “sweating” the onions). Then, throw your beans back in and add just enough water to cover them. Bring the water back up to a boil, add the brown sugar, ketchup, maple syrup, mustard and vinegar, and then lower to a simmer. Don’t cover.

Allow the beans to simmer for as long as it takes them to cook to the right consistency, stirring occasionally to avoid beans sticking to the bottom of the pot. Add the ají, garlic powder, pepper, and salt, adjusting for taste.

You may have to add water to the pot periodically as the water cooks out, but only half a cup at a time. Once your beans reach the right softness, lower the heat a bit and allow as much of the remaining water to cook out and the sauce to thicken, stirring regularly to prevent the beans from sticking or burning. When the sauce reaches the consistency of watered-down barbecue sauce, your baked beans are ready!



# Fritada vs Hornado

by Emma Tremblay



When I first arrived in Ecuador, I was, in a lot of ways, underwhelmed by the culinary offerings. The daughter of a chef, I grew up spoiled by a variety of good food – almost always homemade – and special favorites on Sunday nights. White rice with every meal made me miss cheesy potatoes, sweet corn, and egg noodles. No matter how hard I searched, I couldn't find peppercorns, curry powder, or any of the other familiar spices from home.

Fortunately for me, extended members of my host family owned a restaurant, and it wasn't long before my 9-year-old host brother dragged me along to get fritada: fried chunks of diced pork paired with llapingachos, fried mashed potato patties. I was hooked. I've always loved pork, but this was a rich and completely unhealthy way of eating it that I couldn't get over, even when I almost crunched a small piece of bone.

Then, towards the end of training, I had hornado, and the internal conflict over what is my true favorite Ecuadorian dish began. One morning, my host grandma and I walked all through town as part of a religious procession, throwing flower petals from her florist shop in front of a wooden statue of the Virgin and Child while a band played celebratory music. I helped carry the statue for a short stretch, discovered it was much heavier than I'd bargained for, and worked up an appetite.

After the service, we followed the band to the after-party, where they played music. My grandma and some of her friends danced and we all ate an enormous amount of mote, a soft-cooked popped kernel, and hornado, spit-roasted pig stretched flat and served like pulled pork.



Everyone got their own crunchy chunk of skin, I loved the flavorful and tender meat. Like fritada, it was slightly too salty on its own for my taste, but paired with a bland starch like potatoes or mote, it was heaven.

Fritada will always be my first love of Ecuadorian cuisine, but that morning, hornado showed me just how delicious it can be too. While I may be stationed in the mountain region, I'm looking forward to finding out what the coast has to rival it!



# The Final Countdown!

by Amanda Morales

Midservice Conference for Omnibus 117 was complete with new T-shirts and prom proses. Omnibus 117 is officially in countdown to close of service, COS. The group of more than 30 PCVs celebrated hitting the milestone of one year at site and 15 months in country with a 4-day conference, where it all began, at the Training Center in Monteserrin. With less than a year left, take a good look at these PCVs before they COS in April 2019.



# Wise Words from 115

After two years of service Omnibus 115 offers advice to PCVs. A great thanks to Omni 115 for their contributions to Peace Corps Ecuador and as stellar sitemates.

Collected by: Carolyn Fleder

“Bring your own toilet paper.”

— Emma Webley, Guayaquil

“LOVE YOURSELF! The Peace Corps experience is all yours so feel free to treat yo’ self when necessary, put your needs first before anyone else, before work, and definitely before Peace Corps’, and really take time out of the day to count your blessings and reflect on your time here. Don’t just scratch the surface but really reflect and find the good even in the hard days. Success isn’t always achieved through work. Sometimes it could mean you got a seat on the bus, got that yapa (free left-overs) of your favorite fruit, was able to connect with an unexpected student even for a second, or just finally were able to have time to watch that show on Netflix.

LOVE YOURSELF FIRST and the rest is a cakewalk.”

— Brittany Rojas, Machala

“Do not discount the steps you’ve taken to get where you are in any given moment. You will feel success as equally as failure. Be kind and forgiving to yourself in hard times.”

— Chrissy Wills, Cuenca

“Stick with your Omni because they will be your rock when you need it.”

— Leslie Alvarez, Guayaquil





# Wise Words from 115

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“Get \$100 in change from Banco de Guayaquil once you get to your site.”

— Moses Manning, Cañar

Decide what you want to achieve in your site and make sure you hold your counterparts to high standards.”

— Madison Laureen, Cuenca

“TEFL specific: Do a secondary project that you are interested in! (TEFL or CH and YF): Find volunteers in the same area as you to work on projects because it's easier working together.

Don't give up because it'll be worth it once you've finished.”

— Natasha Luther, Cañar

“Keep going when it gets hard. One day at a time. In the end it will be worth it.”

— Mattie Quigley, Nayón

“Don't take yourself too seriously, say yes, and every once in a while, log out of Netflix, change the password and hide the new password someplace you won't remember.”

— Audriana Anaya, Peguche

“Be easy on yourself. Use your first year to learn from your community and other PCVs, and do what you imagined during your second.”

— Brooke Hammer, Machala

“Get through the first year, cherish the second.”

— Haley Neary, Riobamba

“Don't let Peace Corps get in the way of your service.”

— Anonymous, Ecuador