

El Clima Magazine

December 2014 ~ Home

~ The Official Peace Corps Ecuador Volunteer Magazine ~

A Bahia Thanksgiving!



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From the Editors

Welcome to the winter edition of *El Clima*—your quarterly digital magazine written, organized, and published by Peace Corps Ecuador Volunteers for the greater Peace Corps Community.

As Peace Corps Volunteers, we spend months or even years away from what is typically thought of as home. Though we live and work with people who do eventually become our family and friends, Decem-

ber can still be a month that reminds us of the friends and family we left behind. Indeed, homesickness tends to strike hardest during the holidays.

We chose this month's theme—Home—to honor both the homes we leave and the homes we come to create here in Ecuador. Yet, "home" is difficult to define. To some, it is a place. To others, it is a person or group of people. To others still, home is an

abstract concept that they are still in the process of articulating and embracing.

Ultimately, the idea of home is as diverse as we are, and the diversity and depth of articles showcased in this issue reflects that. In the following pages, our writers touch on, in one way or another, what or who "home" means to them.

With gratitude,
El Clima E-Team

Cover Photos: Jennifer Leider, Bahia / Leah Gillett, Tena / Cuenca pumpkin pie / Pamela Martinez, La Entrada

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Take a Break, Find Your Place

Rachel Childs

Something funny happened when I woke up in the idyllic river province of Tigre, Argentina this past month.

The song “Home” by Edward Sharpe and The Magnetic Zeros played from my friend’s music player while I washed the previous night’s dishes from the traditional grilled meat dinner, or *parilla*.

Though the song is about love, I could not help but think of my own definition of home.

Before traveling to Argentina, I was in the site-

rat mentality, wherein the community of Morochos and canton Cotacachi were the borders of my life.

Peace Corps handed me this beautiful site, and the residents and I became close. We said hello in the street to each other. We learned languages together. We dug in the dirt at the tree nursery together. We celebrated *fiestas* together and pounded our hands into bread dough together.

Then, the sixth-month mark in site came. I felt like I needed a good reason for leaving site at this point or I would ruin all

the progress we had made.

So when one of my good friends from the U.S. wanted to visit, my gut reaction was to make an excuse not to go. But the option of being with someone from my old home was too good to pass up.

It took a long time to convince me to allow my friend to visit Ecuador, but it took longer to convince me to accompany her to Argentina where our other friend was living. But we booked the trip.

Before leaving the country, we spent a week in Ecuador exploring the humid cloud forests of Mindo and the overcast beach of Montañita.

The scenery was beautiful, and attractions such as the butterfly museum, boardwalks, chocolate factories, and waterfalls were all reminders of why I love Ecuador.

My friend enjoyed herself, aside from the 20 hours of bus rides.

In Mindo, we met a 23-year-old former biology student from Santa Barbara, California who left his home to travel. He had



A view from the plains of Morochos, Ecuador, near Rachel’s site

learned salsa dancing in Columbia and was juggling machetes on street corners in Mindo for money.

His story fascinated me. Why would a doctor's son leave a promising future to become a virtual vagabond in a developing nation?

It seemed bizarre to me. But then again, I left the States with little international knowledge to live for two years in a foreign country and speak a language I hadn't known aside from two courses in college.

This was my first glimpse of the search for home. He and I were similar in the sense that the U.S. could not provide us with what we seek. So we left to learn somewhere else.

When my friend and I got to Argentina, it was like college again. We talked about everything that we missed and reminisced about parties, exes, and how bizarre it was to be together abroad.

Our friend gave us the grand tour of Buenos Aires. We saw the president's home at Casa Rosada, the tango center in La Boca, Plaza de Mayo, the famed Obelisk, ritzy Recoleta,



Rachel and two friends on a drawbridge entering Colonia, Uruguay

Parque de la Independencia, San Telmo, rivertown Tigre. We even took a day trip to colonial Uruguay where we learned its history and climbed a lighthouse.

We saw live modern-art shows, ate at a food festival, and paddled in a canoe.

Argentina was great. My friends were great. But it was not home.

After my time in the

city, I missed the *campo*. I missed alpacas, pigs, and roosters. I missed natural views. I missed my hands in the dirt. I missed Ecuador.

When the *camioneta* (pickup truck) stopped in Morochos, it felt good. My hand on the front door felt good. The fact that my host-mother cleaned my room felt even better. And when I heard my name in the street, it felt like home.

Apples of the Earth

Monica Harmon

At this point in my service, I want nothing more than the comforts of home. I haven't visited home as some have. Granted, my father has come on two separate occasions to visit, but that wasn't home. That was Ecu-tinted family time sprinkled with translating and spending my dad's money.

What I really want is my father's curry or my step-mom's authentic New Mexican enchiladas. Is that so much to ask of the potato-obsessed culture that surrounds me?

I have been fighting quite the battle with *pommes de terre*, or apples of the earth. Every night potatoes are warm, soft and salty in my soup. But we eat said soup *every single night*. And while I have resented piles of french fries with rice, I have gorged myself on Chimborazo-sized mounds of mashed potatoes until I could not physically move. I have hated potatoes as a carbohydrate, yet loved them as a nutritious root vegetable.

My pride as a foodie had me skipping meals, refusing to eat, or sneaking food to the animals and so on. Quite the subject for a sociological study, really.

I eat my potatoes now though. I look for them in my soup. I now have such an expectation for them to be in all soup that I'm taken aback when I realize there aren't any. I savor

their unique flavor, some more earthy than others. Some, I thought, were *really* earthy, and then I learned that with *papas con cascara* (potatoes with the skins still on), Mami Trini doesn't always wash them well and that's why everyone else peels them as they eat them; meanwhile, I was eating dirt. But I appreciate potatoes



Monica's host-mom's aunt and nephew enjoy suckers while peeling *papas*

now. They are a life force for these people. And while I can guarantee I've eaten more potatoes than any other Peace Corps Volunteer, I have also had zero long-term *bichos* (knock on wood). Coincidence?

Potatoes are probably going to be a comfort food for me. Potatoes in the U.S. won't just remind me vaguely of my Irish heritage, but of my home in Ecuador. They will remind me of the comfort of sipping warm soup by a warm *tulpa*.

As traumatizing as this quantity of potatoes has been, I've embraced it and won't be looking back.

Potato Soup Recipe

1. Add about 2 cups of your choice of *avena* (oats), *arroz* (rice), *arroz cebada* (barley), *morocho* (cracked corn), or quinoa to a large pot.
 2. Fill pot to 4 inches below the brim with water. Noodles can be added too if you desire more carbohydrates. Bring to a boil.
 3. Chop one small carrot and one small bell pepper into insignificantly small pieces. Add to water.
 4. Peel potatoes and chop into slightly smaller than bite-sized pieces, until you have 5 or so handfuls. Add to boiling water. Add two heaping spoonfuls of salt.
 5. Add a palm-ish-sized chunk of *manteca*—in Kichwa, *wira*—if you desire. Whatever grease is handy.
 6. Boil until you can tell that the potatoes are cooked by putting your fingernails into a test piece (still not sure how they know the middle is cooked, but they're good like that).
 7. Take the pot off the heat and chop half a handful or so of cilantro as garnish.
- ¡Wicha como quieras!* Serve as you like!



Potato soup, a traditional dish in the *sierra*, made with carrots, bell pepper, and/or leeks

Halloween 2014

Pumpkins, trick-or-treating, orange and white candy corn—these are all the things that we think of when we imagine Halloween in the United States. When it came time for volunteers to celebrate Halloween here in Ecuador, their creativity in re-creating the holiday—from Babaco-Lanterns to handmade costumes—was on full display.



(A) PCVs enjoy a weekend celebrating Halloween with costumes and dancing

(B) An Ecuadorian teacher participates in a mask-making activity (C) Jack-O-Lantern (D) Gandolf on a cell phone



(A) Babaco-Lantern (B) Ecuadorian teachers showing off Halloween masks
(C) PCVs with creative costumes (D) Tooth cleaning (E) Colada morada, a famous fruit drink for All Soul's Day

Why Do You Run?

Chris Owen

“I run to keep from going totally crazy. If I’m upset, running calms me down. If I had a great day, running boosts my energy and self-esteem. I love running here in Ecuador because it is the one thing that I can control every day—regardless if something is cancelled, new meetings are scheduled, or I step in dog poop. Running in Ecuador is something that depends only on me, and to me that’s important.”

For Cathy Jackson—and several Ecuador Peace Corps Volunteers—the reasons for running in Ecua-

dor are many. Some run to build physical health and inner strength, others aim to set an example in their community or explore their sites, and many more simply enjoy the quiet personal time of putting one foot in front of the other.

“I think my favorite running experience so far has just been running in the places around my site. The scenery in all of Ecuador, my site included, is excellent. I love running down the never-ending dirt roads here in Yantza, surrounded by butterflies, fields of sugar cane, and jungle covered hills,” said Noah Smith.

Ecuador itself has a

long, rich history of running. Over 400 years ago, the Chaquis runners operated a relay system through the Andes of Ecuador and Peru on the Camino Real, or Royal

“I run because when it’s good, it’s really good.”
~ Sara Jane M.

Road. These runners could cover upwards of 240 kilometers in a single day, transporting information and valuable light-weight goods for the Incan Empire. Initially built by the pre-Incan Wari culture but later consolidated and reinforced by the Incans, the Camino Real road network extended from Colombia to Chile covering nearly 40,000 kilometers. With each runner being responsible for one section of the road—from one tambo, or rest station, to the next—it was possible for a message to travel from the northern capital of Quito to the southern capital of Cusco, Peru in less than a week.



PCV runners after completing the Guayaquil Marathon and Half Marathon

In more recent history, and concurrent with the 1970s U.S. running boom, Ecuador experienced its own running revolution. Highly trained indigenous Andean runners began to gain widespread recognition which inspired upper-class metropolitan areas in Ecuador to adopt the sport. Then in 1996, Jefferson Pérez brought international recognition to Ecuador by winning the Olympic gold medal for the 20-kilometer walk. Initially a runner, Perez switched to speed-walking as a teenager, finding immediate success. He concluded his career in 2008 with a silver medal at the Beijing Olympic Games and has since been active throughout Ecuador promoting running, walking, and healthy living at a variety of local athletic events.

Today, Ecuador hosts over 200 running races annually, ranging in distance and difficulty from local 5k's to marathons and ultra-marathons, from glow-in-the-dark fun-runs to off-road obstacle courses and jungle adventures. Most races in Ecuador are listed on the website www.CarrerasEcuador.com, but many more are



Runners from Omnibus 112 celebrate after the Quito Half Marathon/10K organized and promoted locally. To the delight of Ecuador Peace Corps Volunteers, almost all of the races use microchip timing and offer generous “race swag,” including T-shirts, medals, and raffle prizes.

“I run because slow runners make fast runners look good. You’re welcome!”

~ Bonnie J.

PCVs have competed in a variety of these events as individuals or as part of the unofficial “Peace Corps Running Team.” Races are a fraction of the price of similar events in the U.S. while offering a fun excuse to travel around Ecuador.

Volunteers have also found races to be an opportunity to promote the

culture-sharing goals of Peace Corps by inviting Ecua-friends to events or making new friends during races. After a recent event on the coast, Yajaira Hernandez said, “Racing was a great experience to have because it brought together my PC family and my Ecuadorian family. My host-mom loved having the volunteers around before the race. Most of them came over and spent the night at my house, which, after raiding my fridge, left PB&J, turkey sandwiches and *ceviche* for breakfast the next morning!”

Ultimately, while the reasons Peace Corps Volunteers run are many, the end result often remains the same: a better version of themselves and a richer Peace Corps experience.

Interested in participating in a running event? Events can be organized by anyone, and no official affiliation or permission is needed. Simply pick an event you would like to compete in and invite your friends!



Omnibus 111 volunteers get excited before an adventurous jungle run

Interested in great running resources or connecting with other PC/E runners? Simply join the “Peace Corps Ecuador Running Team” Facebook group!

Potential 2015 Events

- January – Trail of the Volcanoes 100k – Cotacachi – a two-day ultra-marathoning event circumnavigating the Volcán Cotacachi
- March – Franklin Párrales 30k/5k – Jipijapa – a quaint and inexpensive point-to-point race finishing at the Pacific Ocean
- April – Foundation Day 15k – Cuenca – a popular race through Cuenca’s historic district; huge crowds accompany the Foundation Day festivities
- July – Guayaquil Half-Marathon/10k – Guayaquil – a quality half-marathon and well-timed prep race for the Guayaquil Marathon in October
- July – Quito Marathon/21k/10k – Quito – a unique route through central Quito, at an altitude of 9,000 feet and the doorstep of Volcán Pichincha
- August – Ruta de Iglesias 10k – Quito – the most famous night race in Ecuador, attracting 10,000 runners and often selling out in just a few days
- October – Guayaquil Marathon/21k/10k – Guayaquil – a flat, fast course at sea level; well-organized and held during a cooler part of the coastal season
- October – Portoviejo Half-Marathon/10k/5k – Portoviejo – a final chance for your best half-marathon or 10k time to conclude the season

Running Resources

<http://carrerasecuador.com/> (races in Ecuador)

<http://www.runnersworld.com/> (for training)

<http://www.runningtimes.com/> (for training)

“I run only when being chased.”
~ Courtney F.



(A) Race swag (B) Before a Guayaquil race in June (C) Volunteers and Ecuadorians after a race on the coast

“ I run to take in the beautiful scenery of my site and spark interest within my community. ”
~ Merissa C.

“ I run because it makes me feel strong and strong is beautiful. ”
~ Erin F.

Pumpkin Curry Soup

Nicolina Trifunovski

“Soup is a lot like a family. Each ingredient enhances the others; each batch has its own characteristics; and it needs time to simmer to reach full flavor.”

~ Marge Kennedy



This sweet and delectable soup will warm your soul, especially during those chilly autumn days.

Vegetarian and gluten-free, just about anyone can enjoy this taste of home

Ingredients

- 2 cups pumpkin/squash
- 1/2 cup water
- 1 cup natural yogurt or milk
- 2 Tbsps honey or 1/4 cup panela/brown sugar (can use more if preferred)
- 2 tsps curry powder (can use more if preferred)
- Cinnamon to taste

Directions

1. Add the 1/2 cup of water to a pan. Cut up pumpkin/squash and cook on medium heat in pan until tender.
2. Smash pumpkin/squash using a potato masher or fork. If a smoother texture is desired, place pumpkin/squash into a blender and process until desired texture is reached.
3. Return to pan. Put heat on low, and bring to a low simmer. Add in the yogurt or milk, honey or panela/brown sugar, and curry powder.
4. Simmer and stir well until it is at the desired thickness.
5. Serve in dish and sprinkle cinnamon on top.
6. Eat and be amazed that such a gourmet dish can exist in your Ecuadorian kitchen.