

El Clima Magazine

The Official Peace Corps Ecuador Volunteer Magazine



June 2015: Adventure!



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From the Editors

It is with our June issue hitting the streets—and as the overzealous, water-gun-packing, Big-League-gum-smacking gang of story-chasers that we are—that *El Clima* rolls out a new chapter of our collective narrative here in Ecuador.

In this quarter's edition, *El Clima* brings you tales of Peace Corps adventure from across the country. We hope to light a match: a single flame, which, upon meeting other tendrils of wandering smoke, spreads and infuses a

greater spirit for adventure. May you reflect on your greatest adventure as you peruse all that is action-packed; from traversing the monstrous slopes of Cotopaxi with ice in your veins, to curling up for the night on Quilotoa's treacherous rim. May these authors' testimonies prove to readers of all shapes and sizes that, indeed, adventure is out there. All we must do is seek it.

And so our literary version of the Ron Burgundy legend carries on here at *El Clima*. As of this is-

sue, we happily initiate two new team members in the forms of Content Editor, Tori “Trees are people, too” Sims; and Photo Editor, Alex “Living for the present” Albanese.

Lastly, congratulations to Omnibus 113 for successfully swearing-in to service, and a big welcome to Omnibus 114, as they join us on the adventure of all adventures, more commonly referred to as Peace Corps Ecuador!

Sharing your Peace Corps story,
The *El Clima* E-Team

Cover Photos: Alex Tenney, Puyo / 112ers, celebrating Carnival in Guaranda / Guayaquil at sunset / Austin Broderick, climbing Illiniza Norte

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Taming Public Transport

Alex Albanese

You won't find a slow bus driver on the coast. Whoever assumes buses are too large, have too much weight, and are too bulky to go fast has it all wrong. They haven't felt the force of first gear and grappling onto any stationary object. They haven't shot into a pack of passengers like a bowling ball after being caught off guard. They haven't seen a bus pass taxis. They haven't seen buses race.

Although I liken these vehicular drivers to Ricky Bobby, Jeff Gordan, or your crazy 17-year-old cousin who just got his license, there is a rhyme and reason for the accelerated lifestyle. One reason lies in the music culture. Almost every bus has the "accelerated" thump of techno, salsa, reggeaton, and bachata. The rhythm fuels the need for speed hence the fast pace.

Surprisingly enough, the locals remain calm throughout this adventure. Me on the other hand, I am on edge, expecting the unexpected, and jiving to the music. So, if you are ready to make the leap physically and metaphorically to coastal public transportation, here is a comprehensive 8 step guide to success.

1. Wave

Each bus runs at about a 15 min-

ute interval. Once you have identified the desired bus, you must flag it down within one block, which is enough notice for the driver. The wave: stick hand out with palm down, wag hand furiously.

2. Run and jump or hold your ground

Running to catch a bus grants you not only the good graces of the driver but also the accreditation of being a local. Many people of the Peninsula of Santa Elena walk slowly in the heat of the sun, yet, when they see the bus, they turn their Latino jets on. They waggle towards the bus, grab the outer bar, and swing in.

The second choice is waiting for the bus to stop because you are

not ready for the local run down. In order to wait for buses, you must know the bus stop marked by a blue sign "*parada*." If there is no bus stop sign, you must wait after a street light.

3. Board the bus

Once you are successfully in the door, beware! First gear will



One of the coast's luxury provincial buses.



A typical type of coastal transport - mototaxi. Rides are usually fifty cents each.

punish those who don't prepare. People have fumbled branches of bananas. Passengers have been knocked to the ground banging into bus bars, armrests, or even elbowing seated passengers.

You must spread your legs decently while boarding the bus steps, and make sure one arm is always on a bar. If you lose your footing and know you're about to lift off, turn your back, cross arms, and ping pong off of the closest person standing in the crowd.

4. Prepare payment

Exact change of 25 cents is always recommended. If you are ahead of the game, use the Tarjeta de Recarga with the new scanner machines across Santa Elena.

5. Buy a Helmet?

"*Precaución de la cabeza!*" Quite often, the height of the aisle hand-rail only serves for the average Ecuadorian height. Don't be dis-



(Left) Author inside a local Santa Elena bus.

tracted by the driving, music, or crowds, because TVs, bars, and overhead storage provide possible hazards for the cranium.

6. Proceed to desired open seat or area

The first two seats are always reserved for the elderly, pregnant women, the handicapped, and kids.

Proceed to desired seat and feel free to brush others to arrive at destination with polite remarks such as "*con permiso,*" and "*perdón.*" When passengers bulk up in the front, there is a higher chance of obtaining a seat if you move towards the back.

If no seat is found, lean against a seat and spread your legs for lower center of gravity.

7. "Pare! Esquina! Gracias! Se queda!"

This is the fun part. Once you have reached your landmark, ap-



(Right) A look from inside a Guayaquil city bus.

Author and Pam Martinez in a mototaxi.



proach the driver one block before your stop and say, "*Gracias, déjame aquí.*" But, in the case you can't make it to the front in time, warn the driver at an audible level to stop. "*Se queda!*" "*Pare!*" "*La esquina!*"

8. Disembark

It's a 50/50 chance of jumping or walking off the bus. Be ready to jump and aim for a flat surface. Upon landing, you have successfully ridden coastal transport.

Each ride presents new discoveries of coastal Ecuador. After three months, I progressively find faster lines, new restaurants, or more stabilizing postures while riding. At first, I always allotted myself taxi fare as a Plan B, but I learned the lines as time passed. Local transport opened up the small comunidades between cities, and that brings me closer to living like a common *costeña*. I struggled to integrate in some ways, but yelling "STOP" in a full bus gives me a rush of adrenaline and the confidence to live among *Los Peninsulares*.

Adventures in Gastronomy

Rachel Childs

The clock strikes lunch time. Stomachs gurgle all over Ecuador for a hearty meal during work and after school.

In the U.S., the choices are usually tame, albeit fast, fat-filled, and usually covered in cheddar cheese. At least that is how I used to choose my meals.

A highland diet in Colorado was delivery pizza, burritos, barbecue, and a good heavy local beer.

Food festivals like Taste of Denver or Taste of Fort Collins boasted the best cuts of meat and most standard American grub. The only odd food out was the Rocky Mountain oysters, or bull's testicles.

Parachuting into another culture isn't easy. Food is integral to the feel of a country so much so that meals are trips on their own.

A *sierran* diet in Ecuador is less fast food and more home-grown dishes. The agricultural tradition means an array of farm-raised ingredients.

The one famous dish known internationally is *cuy*, or guinea pig. *Cuy* is a first plane ride of sorts. First, it seems impossible but, once you've finished, you realize it isn't anything too different than what you knew before takeoff. It isn't something to fear. But beef

other than burgers, ribs, or steaks are a different story. Initial tastes of heart or liver were like joining the Polar Bear Club, except after the chill of what I just ate subsided, I did not want to stay in those waters.

Fruits are a marathon with no preparation needed. The taste of soft *cherimoya* or juice of a *babaco* can awaken your taste buds. However, a bad batch of *tomate de arbol* can anyone swear off of picking from trees.

Indigenous campo snacks are familiar but prepared differently, much like a sleepover. Crunchy corn nuggets plain or covered in a squash salsa are so good that, after the first handful, later I craved them.

Take a luxury cruise-like vacation to a different town for artisanal coffee and cakes if the Sierran life is too overwhelming. Café Rio Intag in Cotacachi brews authentic beans for European espresso and iced lattes served in martini glasses. Then make a port



Traditional tostada and honey being made.



Cuy, or guinea pig, one of Ecuador's most famous dishes served at special events.

stop at Otavalo's Shenandoa Pie Shop for a slice of fruit covered in homemade crust.

The food festival equivalent is street food stations found all over the highlands. All the tastes of the highlands are in one place with minimal effort. Here, I sampled *cevichocos*, *empanadas*, coconut juice, and fig and cheese sandwiches.

Street food at its finest is *llapin-gachos*, little fried mashed potato

cakes usually covered in meat and eggs. Plates run small or as big as needed, but never disappoint.

Trips are, of course, a cultural exchange. I taught my host family wonders of banana bread and simple cake. The previous volunteer even left a legacy of great brick oven pizza that we recreated one summer night.

All trips make people nostalgic. Every food excursion is a tale to tell and I know I will tell them

with a twinge of regret that I myself never got to make half of the dishes—even the less appetizing ones.

Honestly, I will miss the fresh farm-to-table life even if it is a little fresher than I'm accustomed to. When I am at the stove in the U.S., I will always imagine it covered in a giant pot of *caldo de gal-lina* soup or roasting some pork *fritada*. But I might add some cheddar cheese.



Clockwise: *Fritada con tostados*, a meal at Café Intag, *pinchos* or meat sticks, babaco fruit which is usually made into juice

Term: “Posh Corps”

Erin Bohler

Definition: Peace Corps site placements that lack the stereotypical hardships of service. Sites with: running water, electricity, internet, washers and dryers, indoor plumbing, and/or hot water.

Among volunteers, this term can be loaded, implying that a volunteer is not suffering enough to earn real PCV status. The need of the countries we serve reflects the type of work and lifestyle that volunteers lead while they are abroad. I'd like to break the stereotype, without going too far into murky waters, which seems to be rooted in the nostalgia for the 1960s and reflects a paternalistic ideal of the world beyond U.S. borders.

As a volunteer in a middle-class community of educated professionals, I count myself among those who are in “posh corps” placements. At times, because of the idea that people have of “rough and tough” for Peace Corps, my middle-class lifestyle made me feel that I would let people at home down if they knew how much I was not suffering in Ecuador. Or that, frankly, my family would not support my being here if my placement were not “hard enough.” I signed up for worldwide service; yet here I am, working and enjoying some ame-

nities common to the U.S., just like the population of the teachers I work with. I am as guilty as anyone for believing my experience would be like the posters, something like a very rainy season on M*A*S*H with fewer martinis, and English teaching instead of surgery. It is nothing like I imagined, except for the teaching part. Also, there's a lot more rum and zhumir here than gin. This may be a sign that recruitment propaganda is in need of an overhaul.

Needless to say, I was uneducated about Ecuador and the TEFL program. That in itself is an important reason to come: to expel provincial ideas about the world that I unknowingly maintained. Volunteers live at the level

of the people in their community with the goal of integrating into that community. This allows us to better share our expertise with the host country nationals who request it. In the countryside, volunteers may have an outdoor toilet and live at home with the family for their entire service. It all depends on how the people



The garden at the Tumbaco Training Center.



A taste of home in Azogues - handmade pepperoni and spinach pizza.

they work with live, and the cultural expectations of the community. On the other hand, I live in an apartment in a mid-sized city. I continue to eat with my Ecuadorian family, but I have the option to eat at home. I have hot water and a bath tub. On weekdays, I go to work in heels and a suit jacket, just like I did in the US.

Among PCVs, enduring hardship during service comes in various forms and can be self-inflicted. There are volunteers who bathe in cold water though they have hot water available, or who do laundry by hand regardless of having access to a washing machine. The idea is that suffering is a requirement to be a dedicated volunteer. It's worth reflecting on why the notion exists that hardship is part and parcel to sharing information with the

people we live and work with. Though I worked with struggling communities in the U.S., I never once felt that I should hand wash my clothes or take a cold shower to better serve their needs. I ask, how would host nationals interpret this motivation to go abroad to endure hardship? If the shoe were on the other foot, how would I feel if someone came to visit me and decided to camp on my lawn because my house was nicer than expected?

In short or long, being a volunteer is about sharing skills with and learning new skills from our communities. There are difficulties inherent to integrating and working abroad; we are people from distinct cultures, languages, and ideologies, and it is work to build friendships and working relationships in spite of these differ-

A Cuencana makes a custom Panama hat.



A relaxing way to start the day or enjoy a *siesta* - local coffee with jam and bread.

ences. Yes, I've taken a few bucket baths when the water was out. I've done this at home in Colorado, too. Thankfully, the world is a different place than it was in the 1961 and the work we do has evolved according to the needs expressed by the countries who host volunteers. There aren't "posh corps volunteers" so much as there are volunteers who fulfill the requests for skills in a variety of communities, like we always have. The reality that we are serving in increasingly better-off communities may just mean that soon we'll be out of a job—just—as we hoped.

Camp Life in Ecuador

Yajaira Hernandez

Tents. Campfires. Sleeping bags. Peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. These are a few of the things I cherished most during the summer. Why? Well, in addition to not having to go to school anymore, my favorite thing about summer vacation was camp.

I remember my first summer camp. I was extremely nervous because I had no idea what I was getting myself into. Shy the first day, I stayed close to my friend. As our activities differed, I began to come out of my shell. By the end of the week, I had made endless memories and lifelong friends.

When I was offered the opportunity to do just that with Ecuadorian youth, I was thrilled. I knew most Ecuadorians had never been camping, and some really didn't understand it. Growing up in the Northwest, camping was a big part of my life. Through camp, I learned to be independent, responsible, and to dive into new experiences and friendships. As a counselor, I knew I would play a role in facilitating this for others.

The first camp I counseled was called Extreme Jungle Adventure in Mindo, and I knew the youth would have a once in a lifetime experience.

As we met up with the teens, we saw them carrying what was

probably more than necessary. With multiple blankets and pillows instead of sleeping bags, we were camping Ecuadorian style. As per usual, the campers initially stayed within their respective groups, but they were soon split up. By dinner time there was a bit more cheer amongst strangers.

Nothing compares to being a counselor for first-time-sleeping-in-a-tent campers, especially if it rains during the night. Surprisingly, the youth were troopers. After being here for a year and observing the constant cleanliness, via daily showers, it came to no surprise when the campers awoke at 5 am to take cold, outdoor showers. We counselors, all Peace Corps volunteers, were happy be-

ing smelly and dirty, roughing and toughing it.

That night, as the campers sang English songs around the campfire, I had a flashback of my first time at camp. Soon enough, we went from rapping to making "Down by The Bay" into an



Youth playing touch football during free time.



A tent village provides sleeping accommodations for nearly 200 youth during the camp.

English lesson, which they were more than thrilled to engage in. Their faces were filled with pure happiness as they bit into their first-ever s'mores and competed to make the tallest fire.

In addition to learning about the United States' culture throughout camp, the campers also had a language-learning focus because they were required to speak entirely in English. The campers were intrigued to learn more, firing endless questions at me. There is nothing better than having an hour-long conversation over dinner about books. And yet, even more astonishing, is when you meet a camper who was barely speaking, overrun by nervousness, but who, by the end, and won't stop talking. These teenagers motivate me to continue my work here in Ecuador because their passion for English is captivating.

By the end of camp, as most campers do, they made lifetime

friendships. Many had already befriended each other on Facebook and were sad to leave.

When approached to counsel another camp a few months later, I was ready at the drop of a hat. This time they were students from the coast coming to Ambato in the *sierra*. The chosen theme was sports, and we had the perfect location atop a mountain at Parque de la Familia. For some of the campers, it was their first time traveling to the *sierra* from the coast, in addition to it being their first time camping.

This time there were a few more sleeping bags and a lot more tents. The campers began with an intensive introduction to Ultimate Frisbee, and, despite being asked to take a break, many continued for another hour or two.

For many campers, the greatest challenge was being away from home. It is a total of 4-6 days away from family. For the first timers, there were days of crying

and endless phone calls from parents. After the first days, however, that ended. The campers were in the moment so missing their parents became bearable.

The campers learned to play many "American" sports such as baseball, volleyball, American football, capture the flag, and basketball. Despite very busy mornings filled with sports, the campers continued to play them during their spare time. Seeing them work on communication and teamwork by making a human pyramid was especially amusing.

These camps allow us, Peace Corps Volunteers, to engage in a rich cultural exchange. We are able to share traditions that were a huge part of our childhood. More importantly, though, the campers can start to develop independence, responsibility, and English language skills as they experience other cultures within their own country—and ultimately, as they explore themselves.



Youth show their excitement with major league baseball player, Elias (center), during the camp in Ambato.

She Smiles When She Runs

Nicolina Trifunovski

We come from different worlds, she and I. I am privileged because I have lighter skin, am a U.S. citizen, and come from a middle-class home. Here, too, in Ecuador your privileges give you status. They mean opportunity and determine whether you have a mere hill to climb or a mountain. But believe it or not, she knows something you don't.

As I observe her, I can see the years of struggle and hard work deeply ingrained in her face. A face with cheeks that are burnt from the *sierran* sun. Hair dark as night that is wrapped up tightly in an embroidered band, which goes all the way down the back. There is no point for the luxury of makeup in the vegetable fields and it is only an unnecessary expense. Her wrinkled eyes tell stories of hardship that I may never know as her Kichwa words and my broken Spanish get lost in translation. Her tattered clothes covered with earth and torn shoes mean that people may overlook her and her worth. But she is worthy.

On her back, bent-over from years of carrying heavy loads, is yet another sack of potatoes and herbs held together by some twine. The whole package is bigger than herself. She carries it all with her shawl made of Alpaca wool and dyed with a rich color of purple that is strategically fastened to her body with calloused hands and fingernails too dirty to clean. Most would have a hard time carrying this load.

I see her starting to run up a hill. It's almost like the pack is moving itself with a tiny human underneath. And as she runs, she smiles. I'm fascinated and perplexed. All my education and experience in the world around me cannot help me to understand what she knows. There is never enough time in the day to finish all her work and load after load can only be daunting. Yet, she smiles when she runs.

The lady in the *sierra* teaches me that I have much to learn. She is

rich in ways that I can only hope to obtain. From her, I gain a perspective about the world around me that my privileges don't allow me to learn. She teaches me the value of simplicity and that appreciation for the world around me can make a profound difference in my life. She teaches me that hard work is only hard if I make it that way because if I can handle whatever life gives me then I am doing just fine. I am grateful for that. I am grateful for her and that smile she has when she runs.



The strong afternoon sun beats down over the central *sierras* near the author's site.

Coastal children play one of the many games that PCVs have introduced to them.



Betsie Kalicos, Cuerpo de Baile

“ Since becoming a PCV in Ecuador, I now understand that I am never done learning Spanish, and that’s OK! ”

– Rae Sterrett, TEFL 113



Shrimp being sold at a fish market, La Libertad, Santa Elena.

Anniversary Adventure

Omnibus 111

In honor of our one year anniversary in site, some of us in OMN 111 wanted to celebrate with a bang. And what better way than to try and conquer Cotopaxi.

What is Cotopaxi you might ask? It's the second highest volcano in Ecuador, an astonishing 19,000 plus feet. Yup, that is how some of us decided to congratulate ourselves on such a milestone. After reflecting together on this once-in-a-lifetime experience, we decided to write this article.

The day before attempting to summit Cotopaxi, we had an acclimation climb: Illiniza Norte, a humble 16,000 footer with a short technical section. It was supposed to be an appetizer and a confidence booster. For some in our group, it was. For others, it was scary as hell. For others still, it was a wake-up call and a fair warning for the bigger climb ahead.

At 10:00pm, we awoke from sporadic naps and layered on clothing, all the time thinking: Am I going to freeze? Should I suck it up and carry extra layers? Am I going to be hot and sweaty from hiking with so many layers? One pair of socks or two?

Finally, dressed up and fueled up, we all piled into the car around 10:30PM. It was a gor-

geous, clear night. The car ride was a hodgepodge of emotions. Some sang. Some slept. Some just sat in silence and stared out the window in sheer awe of the mountain. With the moon reflecting off of its snow and gradually disappearing into clouds and darkness, the mountain appeared eerily monstrous, as if it had hidden its full size from us for the three days we had spent in its shadow.

We began our ascent, headlamps affixed and crampons on our backs, single file, heads down. It was pitch black besides the illumination of the stars. We could see nothing except where the headlamps were directed, which for most part was the back of the person in front of us or the foot-

prints they left in the snow. As we began our ascent, we were all in sync, being patient, waiting for one another, and showing each other great support and encouragement.

“As I kept walking, I could only think, I wish there was more light so I could see the breathtaking view of what I am hiking” (Yajaira Hernandez).



The sign-in book at the Cotopaxi hostel.



Austin Broderick, Cathy Jackson, and Rachel Childs begin the ascent of Illiniza Norte.

If endurance athletics have taught us anything, it is this: adapt. And immediately. Develop a specific strategy. Take deep, slow belly breaths. Fill the lungs with each breath. Make climbing a moving meditation. At least, this was the plan.

Right foot. Left foot. Inhale. Right foot. Left foot. Exhale. As all the what-ifs and doubts plagued our minds, we remembered the utmost importance of mental strength. At rest stops, it was time for retying shoes, sharing water and snacks, and offering encouragement to each other.

At some point, we lost track of time. It's hard not to. There's no sun. No watches. No landmarks. Just your feet and the feet in front of us. The only notable event was putting on our crampons, helmets, and harnesses as we prepared to take on the glacier in a new style of climbing. With nothing but gusty wind, a sky filled with stars, and a bright orange moon looming over our heads, we marched on.

We were roped together, two climbers per guide. We learned that it was crucial to keep our rope taut so that, in the event that we fell, the guide wouldn't be jolted. Footwork was even more important. It was more like sidestepping with a slight crossover to keep the ice axe facing the inside of the mountain, always. Mountains, and our bodies, are funny things. They have a way of humbling us, but also of making us wonder

about things we feel but don't see.

Midnight turned into the wee hours of morning. The altitude began to take its toll on our group. Two had to turn back due to slow progress and difficulty breathing. Then another two because of pure fatigue and early signs of altitude sickness. Three were left.

Adventures—true adventures—have a way of peeling back layers. They rub you down raw, until the only thing that is left is the very essence of yourself.

“When I fell to my knees, the only thought that I had was that I had no thoughts. I am empty. Purely empty. Some would call this Nirvana, others would call it death. And then, for no particular reason. I would stand up and begin taking another handful of slow, wobbly steps” (Erin Fischer).

Tears and hyperventilating ensued once we reached the top. Seeing just how high we really were and anticipating the sudden death that would follow any tiny slip of move off the path threw me into a tizzy.

It was actually the descent that revealed what we had accomplished and why: “the best part of Cotopaxi was enduring a personal challenge both physically and mentally but knowing that we were never alone” (Cathy Jackson). As we climbed lower, we moved below the clouds and into the light. The crevices we had only felt before were now in plain sight.

Like most trips we take, those

we bring along for the journey have a massive impact on the outcome of the adventure: the motivator and anchor of our group, Chris Owen; our leader by example, Erin; our entertainer, Shaun; our calm-inducer, Austin; our consummate surprise, Rachel; our caretaker, Cathy; and our idea creator, Yajaira. These people made the adventure not only possible, but victorious.

We are each on our own journey, no? And what may feel like a Sunday in the park to one person may feel like a test of survival to another. The key is to push yourself beyond your limits. Go beyond your comfort zone. Challenge your self-conceived limitations. That's the spirit of adventure. Live your story and going deeper.



Shaun Nesheim at the top of Cotopaxi.

The Omnibus 111 volunteers take a break before the final section of Illiniza Norte, refueling with chocolate, crackers, and water.



(A) Cathy Jackson (B) Erin Fischer



One of the many spectacular views from atop Illiniza Norte during the 8 hour climb.

Fresh Air and Silence

Chris Owen



A view of Quilotoa Lake's rim.

Sometimes Peace Corps volunteers just need some fresh air.

Aiming to escape the anarchy of Carnival—that is, water balloon wars, mud fights, and face-fulls of karaoke foam—I meandered my way up to Latacunga, disappearing into the Quilotoa backcountry for a four-day retreat.

Guidebooks say that the Quilotoa Loop is one of the most beautiful regions of the central *sierras*. It certainly didn't disappoint, with silent snow-capped volcanic peaks standing stoic in every direction.

Our bus chugged up, up, up, wearily twisting and turning as it hugged the hay-covered hillsides. We picked up indigenous locals along the way. Many were market-goers, who carried sacks of fresh, home-grown produce. Their clothes smelled earthy and organic, and their faces were deeply creased, having been carved like stone by the wind after years of

working the land. I felt foreign; not because I was tall and gringo, but because I wasn't an extension of the soil, like these locals. These people didn't walk the land—they were the land.

Our bus finally arrived in the small town of Zumbahua, the jumping off point for reaching Quilotoa Lake and the last chance to stock-up on supplies. Taxis take tourists the final ten kilometers, with price being determined on a sliding scale based on your level of Spanish: pure-bred gringos paid \$2.00, mediocre Spanish fetched you half that fare, and blood relatives of the driver paid fifty cents. I paired-up with some Chileans and received the Spanish-speaking discount.

The lake itself is actually the crater of an extinct volcano. Rainfall has filled it in over time, with rock minerals giving the water a greenish-tint. Locals say it has no bottom, though scientific estimates figure it's about 820 feet deep. Standing on the rim at the entrance made me believe the myth. The lake glistened every shade of deep, bluish-green as the sun and clouds danced above it—an eternal dance.

One of the most popular Quilotoa activities is to hike the ten kilometer rim. And it is *literally* a rim: barely two feet wide at points, the path winds its

way skillfully between drop offs on both sides. In no rush, I pit-stopped along the way for taking pictures and reading “The Agrarian Essays” by Wendell Berry. Lunchtime turned into mid-afternoon, and I found a nice camp spot perched on the opposite side of the lake. With barely enough room for one person to stand, I wedged my cocoon-like bivouac sack beneath a lone pine tree for protection from the rain—and from freefall.

I hadn't camped outside in over a year, which, by my family's standards, is an embarrassment. Excited, I wiggled into my wool socks and winter sweater, then set-up my handmade camp stove to boil water for some hot chocolate. Across the lake I could see the small shadows of tourists, each straining to climb out of the crater, eager to return to their hostels for dinner: a feat made much easier by the “Rent-A-Mule” enterprise organized by the local indigenous women.

As evening descended on distant peaks I had the rim to myself, shared only by fresh air and silence—welcomed companions. The sunset was then overtaken by stars, and the stars overtaken by... fireworks!

Well, I guess I couldn't escape *all* of Carnival's chaos.

Two PCVs pose for an underwater snapshot during a snorkeling adventure on the coast.



“ Since becoming a PCV in Ecuador I now understand the difference a shower makes after a week.”
 – Rachel Childs, NRC 111

Omnibus 112 PCVs on the Mindo tarabita.



Canyoning in the cloud-forests.

“ My favorite thing about Ecuador is the landscape diversity; there’s so much to explore!”
 – Shaun Nesheim, TEFL 111



Omnibus 113 volunteers enjoy a hike overlooking Quito during pre-service training.

Life Deep in the Campo

Julia Schiffman

It's probably 5:30am, and I can hear my host mom and dad moving around downstairs. Today, just like every day, is going to be a new adventure in my campo life. The smell of the hot bread and grilled *mortadella* makes its way up the stairs as my host mom finishes cooking breakfast. My host dad has the morning news on full blast. I'm never ready to wake up in the morning, but 3-2-1 "GUUUSTAAAVOOOO, DAAAN-IELAAA, JUUULIIIAAA," yells my host mom up the stairs, signifying that breakfast is ready and we have about ten minutes to get downstairs before she yells again.

It is officially morning in the campo, and staying in bed past 6 am is never an option here. In the States, you could never get me up before 10 am, and breakfast was not even a word in my vocabulary because the day usually started with lunch. My routine has changed drastically, and I have become surprisingly okay with it.

To me, the campo life is a simple life. There isn't a whole lot to do, you know everyone in the community, and they know everything about you. Your family is everything in the campo. It is your entertainment, friendship, religion, education, and sometimes job market. My host family in-

cludes my mom, dad, four sisters, and four brothers. Life would be really lonely if I did not get along with my host family. They have been my guide and strength during my integration.

There are three simple rules when it comes to social living in the campo: if you are a woman you only drink at parties, if you are a man you can drink whenever you want unless you don't work then you are just a drunk, and minors can never drink unless your mom decides to give you a taste when your dad isn't looking.

I always thought that Americans were crazy, then I got to the campo and I was proven wrong. Here they do not have parties, they have *parrilladas*. A party

is where no food is served only alcohol, and a *parrillada* is where both food and alcohol is served.

Parrilladas are better than parties because it is more socially acceptable to eat and drink than just drink. A *parrillada* is when the event starts at 3pm, but people arrive at 5pm because the food isn't served until 7 pm. However, while the alcohol is always readily available, the food runs out around 9pm but the event goes until 5-6am. The alcohol only seems to run out when there's no one sober enough to go buy more.

Don't worry if you don't drink, there is dancing. The dancing starts when the food runs out. Dancing is not optional, even if you don't know how because



Julia celebrates a birthday party with friends and family in her close-knit community.

someone is more than willing to teach you.

The first time I ever went to a *parrillada*, I was astonished at the liveliness and high pace of the event. My friend told me I had to be careful at *parrilladas* because of the overall social rule that beats out the others: “If someone is not drinking then they have to dance because if they don’t dance then they have to drink.” So I dance.

I am going to be completely honest and say that I never thought the campo life would be this awesome. Before I experienced being in site, I had bleak visions of how I would survive the campo for two years. The idea of taking cold showers and not having daily access to internet or electricity scared me. I can now say I would not change my Peace Corps experience for anything. Every

day is an adventure for me.

Most volunteers who have more urban living situations think the campo is an unfortunate place, and I am here to say I think they are wrong. I thank God every day for putting me in the coastal campo. The people are amazing and so gracious. There is always someone willing to sit and talk with you for hours. The laughing never ends here. There is never a dull moment. When you think you have seen it all, someone else surprises you. There’s old fashion clothes washing, chicken killing, fruit picking, card playing, soccer cheering, and we have time for talking, farm visiting, and *parrillada* dancing, which have all become a part of me. Like all things in life, this will end, but this adventure will always hold a special place in my life and heart.

“Peace requires the simple but powerful recognition that what we have in common as human beings is more important than what divides us.
– Sargent Shriver

“Slow down and enjoy life. It’s not only the scenery you miss by going too fast—you also miss the sense of where you are going and why.”
– Eddie Cantor



Julia and friends enjoying one of the many *parradillas*, a popular form of socializing in the campo.

A Hearty Yes! to Adventure

Anonymous

“Follow your bliss,
and the universe will
open doors where
there were only walls.”

– Joseph Campbell

More than six decades ago, the universe pushed me naked, but healthy, into my new life on Earth. One might suppose a colorful, detailed Adventure Map for Humans would have been tied to my big toe. Alas, it dawned on me as I grew in my new skin that I had to draw my own. The universe is so very clever. Though it provides general directions, markers, and tools of all sorts for the journey, it gives us the freedom to pick and choose those with which we will mold our lives.

We Peace Corps volunteers elected service abroad as a life adventure. Some of us came to Ecuador with specific goals and a clear vision; others, myself included, hadn't determined much more than “well, let's see what comes my way.” In either case, each of us has made adjustments (closing some doors and opening others) to continue this adventure.

My initial TEFL assignment at a high school in Cuenca proved less than satisfying from the start,

and I was discouraged by the prospect of two disappointing years ahead. Fortunately, María Dolores Chacón, the TEFL program leader, visited my site and bundled me off to a meeting with several University of Cuenca staff. She had long hoped to build alliances with Ecuadorian universities by providing them with qualified PCVs who could strengthen their English programs.

The meeting was cordial, and a few days later a plan emerged. The language department di-

rector asked for a volunteer to prepare a group of outstanding students, the Vanguardias, for the First Cambridge Exam (FCE), an English fluency test that is a step toward taking the more challenging TOEFL or IELTS exams. Could I start Monday? YES! (as I asked myself what in blazes was the FCE).

Teaching the first small group of Vanguardias made me giddy. Bright, eager students were just the crew I sought to launch my Ecuadorian ship. Working with



The new omnibus 113 TEFL volunteers recently arrived to their sites - a new adventure.

them was my chance to implement effective teaching methods and experiential learning techniques that are largely unknown to Ecuadorian teachers and, hence, their students. The students' shock and disbelief slowly gave way to enthusiasm and growing confidence in their abilities, both of which are critical to their goal to study abroad and return as strong proponents of higher education and experts in their fields.

My students now understand that “group hug” means form teams to tackle this project, and it no longer takes ten minutes to rearrange the desks. Their eyes don't reflect shyness or fear any-

more when asked to give peer reviews, though most still prefer to do so on paper and anonymously. We get constructive, insightful criticism when we review mind maps in teams. Baby steps!

There may be students who still believe I'm loony, not just eccentric or funny, but we have established a teacher-student relationship that is based on the concept that I'm approachable and I want to hear their opinions. I'm hopeful this will serve them well abroad; taking the initiative and not waiting to be spoon fed an education were essential to my college and post-graduate experiences.

This semester, I am teaching

my third class, TOEFL Prep and Test-taking Strategies, with the same group who took my Writing Academic English course last semester. The Vanguardia program offers amazing opportunities for studying abroad to motivated Ecuadorian students. I make almost everyone I meet here aware of it so that they, too, may do what they can to promote this or similar adventures to their students and families. The multiplier effect is phenomenal. This is where my adventure and joy is.

I found joy in an unplanned adventure. So, find joy in whatever you choose to do. The adventure map is not etched in stone. Stay sharp and be open so the fog doesn't obscure the route. Remember that, while you are on your journey, your guidance, mentoring, appreciation, generosity, determination, and kindness (insert here other traits or values that may float your boat) inspire and spark the imaginations of would-be and novice adventurers. Watching the wind fill their sails is its own reward.

“Adventures don't come calling like unexpected cousins calling from out of town. You have to go looking for them.”
— Anonymous



PCVs Lucy Krips and Dani Gradisher support a student during a school-wide presentation.

Our Journey into Rainbow Colored Closets

The importance and the hardships of returning to the closet for a LGBTQ volunteer in the Peace Corps

Spectrum

We've all been in the closet before because it's not so much a place as it is a feeling. Anytime we hide something about ourselves, we tear off that piece from our core, crinkle it into something as small as possible, and hide it in a dark corner behind our sternum. As we're questioned and we lie, it expands and pushes our insides around until all we feel is tightness. The bigger the secret, the bigger the feeling. It might be minimal, a little bead of pressure that's easy to ignore or it might be so large that it presses against our heart forcing it pump blood faster and harder.

In most cases, conversations move on and the feeling dissolves. But for some secrets, it's not that easy. When your secret is that you identify as a part of the LGBTQ community, it is a very different scenario. The feeling never really leaves. For some, it ebbs and flows in terms of presence and strength. For others, it hardens and drops down to our gut as added weight to carry. Regardless, it's a daily presence. We feel like our inherent actions and mannerisms are constantly being evaluated. The stress can be suffocating and we can feel lonely without anyone

else in the closet with us. Our self-esteem drops as the things we love most about ourselves stay in darkness.

And yet here we find ourselves, back in the closet. LGBTQ volunteers knew that this was most likely going to happen when we applied all that time ago. Most of us have been able to live outside the closet happily back in the States, yet we have elected to get to know the dark corners once more. We do so because of many reasons. We want to be a positive force of change in Ecuador, but unfortunately we also know that our community might not accept our differences, perhaps ever. This is even truer if we are working with children where incredibly negative stereotypes persist. At worst, it is a security risk. At best, we risk complicating our integration and working relationships within our community.

So, if you strive to be an ally to this community, what we ask is simple: help us keep our secret. When we out a volunteer prematurely, it is stressful for a volunteer for many reasons. There is a reason why they have their secret, maybe they are not ready to handle the damage control needed to reconcile it with their community. We are not in their community

and therefore cannot predict what will happen if word gets around. And even if our intent was not to out a volunteer the impact could be devastating. It's important to remember that gay, lesbian and homosexual are cognates in Spanish and host country nationals might understand our conversations. Help us by using code words or just avoid using those words.

Remember, not everyone feels the same way we do, even people we have grown to know, trust, and love in our sites may not be accepting of members of the LGBTQ community.

Our rainbow colored closets, as small and constricting as they may be, are the safest place for us. But we don't want to live there forever. So, as you keep our secret safe, strive to create safe spaces for the closeted volunteers you know.

Because every once in a while, all we need is to be able to leave our closets, dance around freely in open air, and feel whole again.

Omnibus 111 volunteers show off their muddy shoes after a local 5k run in the Amazon.



Garrett Fox, Mitad del Mundo.



Camille Smith and Katie Seehusen, Nayón.

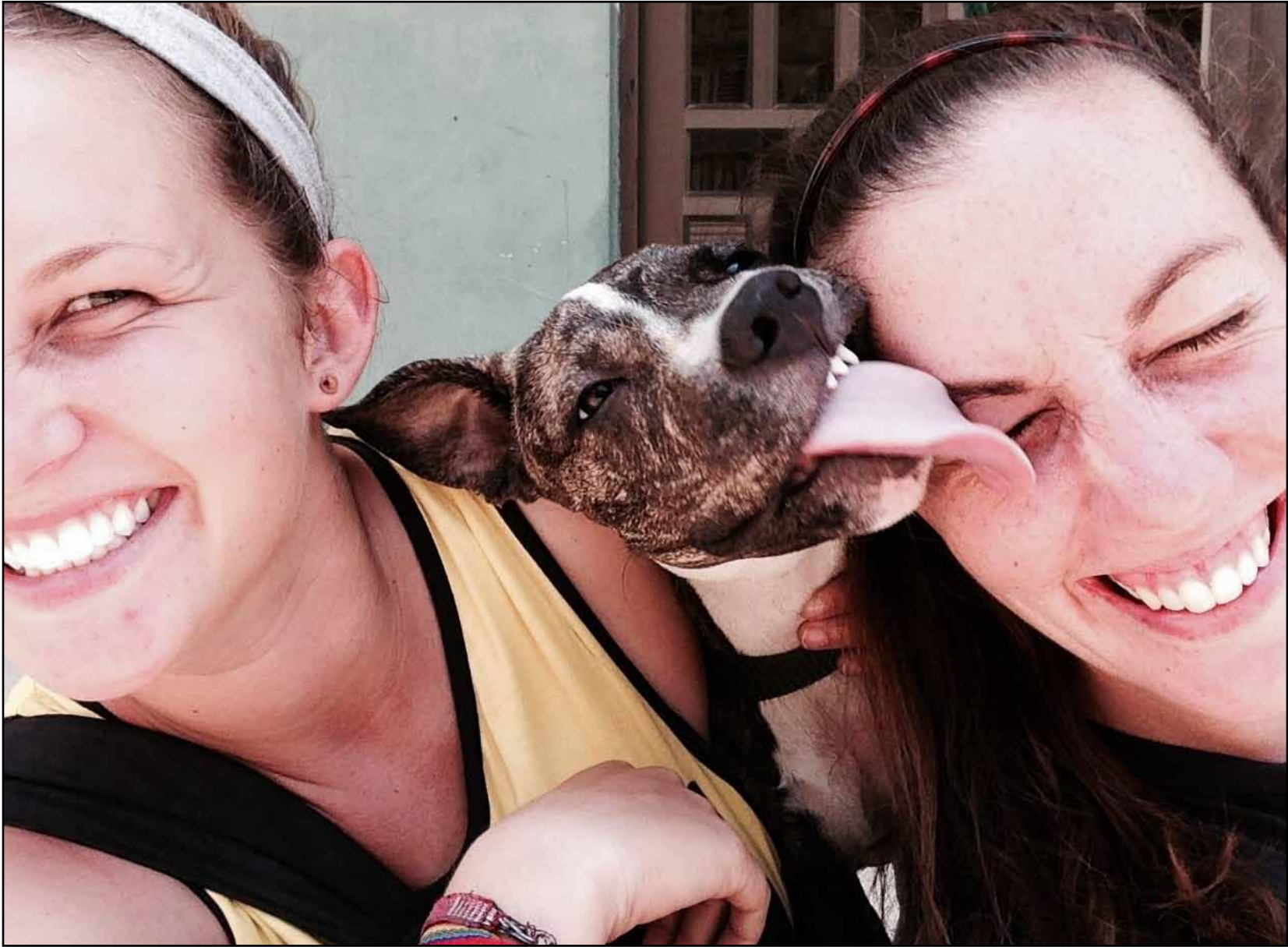
“ Since becoming a PCV in Ecuador, I now will argue you to death over a quarter difference. ”

– Nicolina Trifunovski, 110



Omnibus 113 PCVs Robert Jamieson and Margaux L'Herbette practice the crow yoga stance.

Parting Shot



Kathryn Smith and Hannah Moore receive a kiss from their dog, Cash.

“Before you know it you’ll be my age telling your own granddaughter the story of your life and you wanna make it an interesting one, don’t you? You wanna be able to tell her some adventures, some excitements, some something. How you live your life, little one, is a gift for those who come after you, a kind of inheritance.”

— Christina García, *I Wanna Live in Your Shoebox*

Suggestions or submissions? Email us at elclimamagazine@gmail.com. Thank you!