



# El Clima Magazine

The official Peace Corps Ecuador Volunteer Magazine



**The Weird Issue**  
August 2017

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Peace  
Corps



# Editor's Note

Some of you may be wondering, “Why a Weird issue?” Peace Corps Ecuador is often referred to as “Posh Corps” or “Cuerpo de Paseo” (roughly translated into traveling corps). Yes, we have luxuries like hot springs, beaches, and malls in the big cities; however, we also are located in one of the most bio-diverse countries that has a rich history of diverse cultures. Which often means we can find a McDonald’s in the nearest large city, but our host families in the Andes Mountains are more accustomed to feeding us tripe or cow foot soup. And while that fresh looking fish might look delicious, after sitting in the hot coastal sun, it might not be something your stomach can handle. It also means that the amount of creatures, animals, and bugs are innumerable so chances are during your Peace Corps service, you are bound to run into something that either makes you jump in fright or fall in love. From lengthy bus rides to quick, cold showers, Peace Corps Ecuador has taught us to expect the unexpected. And if you still think that we are “Posh,” after reading all of these personal and somewhat embarrassing stories, please accept our invitation to the most wonderful country in South America, the one we all call “Home.”

El Clima is a digital publication written, organized, and published by Peace Corps volunteers for the broader Peace Corps community.

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# Wormy Advice

By Bonnie Jean

I have always been fond of worms. When I was seven, I found two worms at Jeremy Hoffman's house down the street. I brought them home and put them safely in our compost pile in the back yard. Every night after dinner, I would go down, find my two worms (a hundred percent certain that they were the same worms) and give them my food scraps. I can recall around this time answering enthusiastically to anyone who asked, "Yes, I do have pets. I have two dogs, a goldfish, and two worms named Iggy and Skwiggy." Twenty years later, I still have love for worms. Even here in Ecuador I have had pet worms. Or, more precisely, you could say I have been a host to intestinal worms. So, as an expert host, here is my expert advice. Editor's note\* the author is in no way an expert, please consult your physician before changing any of your dietary habits.

## **Step one to digestive bliss: Talk to your friends, family, and loved ones about your poops.**

Peace Corps changes a person in many ways. One major change that is somehow overlooked is the volunteer's new openness and ability to talk about their bowel movements. In the last two years, I have gone from a person who was embarrassed to tell my doctor symptoms, instead opting to use euphemisms

such as "my stomach hurts," and "I have been to the bathroom frequently." The vagueness of these statements made diagnosis difficult to say the least. I am now a changed person; the last time I called my doctor was with a precise description of my symptoms and a request for the medicine by name. I see the change in other volunteers as well, most evident by the willingness to have these types of conversation over dinner.

## **Step two to gastric glory: Be educated about your poops.**

There is a government mandated schedule for training in which a large percentage of time is allotted to discussions about intestinal diseases. I remember wanting to skip the medical sections knowing that, if I had to hear the doctor describe in deep detail the different types of diarrhea one more time, I would lose my mind. Now I often find myself referring to those notes in search for advice. There are three types of common intestinal diseases volunteers suffer from: viral, bacterial, and parasitic. Each one will have slightly different symptoms and treatments. If you're wondering what parasites are like...Do you remember that commercial for Pepto-Bismol

where all the actors are in occupational costumes singing “Nausea, heartburn, indigestion, upset stomach, diarrhea HEY! Pepto Bismol”? That is exactly what you can expect from intestinal worms, all those symptoms at the same time, but without the costumes, dancing, and smiling. To those of you craving more detail about intestinal worms, Google knows all.

### Step three to abdominal magnificence: Enjoy all foods.

So how, you ask me, can we become educated while avoiding such pain and discomfort? Do you want the truth? You cannot avoid it. It is inevitable. But please, you beg, help us! Ok, here is my advice as a community health volunteer:

1. Wash your hands. Always, constantly wash your hands.
2. Wash your food, when you can. (Note: It might be difficult/impossible to wash ceviche or fritada)
3. Eat everything. But, you interject, even the street food!? ~~Yes, especially street food.~~

These diseases are unavoidable so enjoy the food the world has to offer. What a sad and vitamin deficient existence it would be if you only ate safe food such as rice, bread, and yogurt. Plus, you would miss out on so much, guinea pig in the Sierra, slugs from the Oriente, cow foot soup, and stewed cow intestines (both local favorites). *WOW, you exclaim, you’ve eaten all of that and have only had intestinal worms three times?! I know, I respond, I must be partially immune.*



Top: worms that are a typical dish in the jungle; bottom: cuy (guinea pig) which is a speciality dish in the mountain region of Ecuador



# Sambita

By Anna Sombrio

In early March my life changed all because of queso (cheese). I was in my house in Samborondon-Guayas trying to figure out what to cook since my host mom, the family cook, was out of town. All I came up with was patacones with queso (fried plantains with cheese), because it is extremely easy, super unhealthy and marvelously delicious. I was just missing the one of the two ingredients, the cheese. As I set out on my mission for the cheese, I got closer to the corner where my little neighbors came running out with something in their arms. They told me that someone had abandoned this tiny thing because she was a female. They handed me a little black and brown fur ball who looked up at me with the sweetest little eyes, and promptly put her two front paws on my cheeks and licked my nose.

She was a 4-5-week-old puppy with parasites, fleas, and ticks. I was a little worried about how I was going to, 1. Afford to take care of her on my Peace Corps budget, 2. Make time for her, and 3. What was I going to do when I finished my Peace Corps Service. However, with each day that passed, she stole a little bit more of my heart until it was too late. After a few days of hard thinking, I decided to name her “Samba/Sambita” for my site, Samborondon.

Since Sambita sauntered in my life, my life has gotten unbelievably more interesting. For example, I now spend the majority of time pulling ticks off in places that I had no idea even existed. Or if I am not finding ticks I am laying on the dirty floor, nose to nose with her, telling her how perfect she is. I think I can recall the day I realized we had already formed an unbreakable bond. It was 23 months into my Peace Corps Service and I was getting a site change because of a security issue. I was sitting on my host family’s couch crying because I didn’t want to leave, and Sambita walks over and climbs into







my lap, and once again puts her two front paws on my cheeks and licks my nose. It was that moment when my heart melted, and I knew that I would be fine.

Fast forward a few months and I am getting everything in order to go home and I keep getting asked the same question over and over again, “Are you going to bring Sambita with you?” OF COURSE! How could I leave my best friend behind, she has made my life better in so many ways.

- She lifts my mood and reduces my stress (Which I actually researched one rainy day, apparently playing with your animal increases your brain’s levels of dopamine and serotonin, which are associated with pleasure and tranquility).

- She increases my physical activity, I easily get my 10,000+ steps in.
- I am not traveling as much on the weekends because of her, thus helping me integrate into my community more.

- She makes me get out of the house and meet people in my new site (Everyone knows Sambita).

- Living by yourself can be lonely, and she helps with that.

- She knows when I need extra lovin’ and provides me with more than enough.

- She has even saved me from a potentially dangerous situation more than once.

- She has taught me to never underestimate the power of a sloppy kiss and a wet nose on a bad day.

I will be leaving Ecuador soon and I will be taking a little piece of Samborondon with me. Sambita, my four-legged, Ecuadorian keepsake. Because of her, I laugh a little harder, cry a little less, and smile a lot more.

P.S. I never did get that queso.



Previous page: Sambita taking a break from her exercises in the local park. Current page top: sambita as a puppy taking a nap; bottom left: Anna taking Sambita around Guayaquil; bottom right: Sambita making friends with a security guard at the park

# One fish, Two fish...

By Maryam Bientema

I've had a chicken killed in my honor. I was once accidentally serenaded in front of 500 people. Once, I even got chased by a very angry, wild alpaca.

However, despite all of the unimaginable culture shocks that happen to me on a daily basis in this beautiful country, only one left me bewildered but grateful.

The day after moving out of my host family's house into my own place, I heard a knock on the door. I opened it up to find the eight year old daughter of my neighbor, soaking wet from head to toe saying, "¿Hola, puedes cocinarlos para mi?" (Hello, can you cook these for me?). She thrust an open, mud covered bag of chifles at me and repeated her question.

With poor Spanish and absolutely no idea what was going on, I looked inside the bag to get a clue. She had just handed me a bag of live, wriggling fish. She repeated her question, this time with impatience.

A light bulb went off in my head. She wants me to cook her dinner. Then an alarm siren went off in my head. She wants me to kill, gut and then scale, these very much live fish for dinner.

I could see her getting upset that I was going to reject her gift, but I had no idea what to do. So I did the only thing I could say in Spanish at the time, "¿bueno?" (okay).

And thus over the course of the strangest afternoon of my life, this wacky little girl, haughtily yet patiently, taught me how to gut and scale a fish. Getting over my initial repugnance

at what I was doing, I learned how to not let the fish flop out of your hands and how to prevent the fish scales flying all over your clean walls and floors. And gradually, I learned all about her.

I learned her name was Samantha, that she was the youngest of six brothers and sisters, and that she hated school. I learned that she had snuck into our neighbor's fish pond, to steal the new vecina gringa (white neighbor) fish with her bare hands as the weirdest housewarming gift I will ever receive. Eventually, it got dark outside, and Samantha mercifully had her older sister cook the fish for our dinner so I wouldn't have to do it.

But that's how something that would never happen to me in the USA gave me my best friend at site. At a time when I was at my loneliest and most vulnerable, Samantha pulled me out of my funk. Every single day I lived in my beloved little concrete house, she would wait at my front door for me to come home from work so we could begin that day's adventure.

Sometimes towing along her brothers and sisters, la casa de la gringa (the white girl's house) quickly became the place to be. We would play, reenact Harry Potter, have mosquito killing competitions—and on the best of days, help la gringa clean her house.

Samantha quickly became the annoying little sister I never had. Even if no one else came with her, Samantha spent hours at my house every single day.

Samantha's favorite activities:

Using a machete (unsupervised) to cut down the



tall grasses outside my house  
Climbing over my fence (uninvited) to chase  
the neighbor's chickens out of my yard  
Waking me up from my (desperately needed)  
daily nap to play  
Even when I would tell her to go home  
because I needed a break—I'd hear a tapping  
on my door and there she was, with a soccer  
ball or a ripe mango as a peace offering and an  
invitation to play.  
Even though the 7.8 earthquake that shook  
Manabí last April separated us, there's no hug  
that I look forward to more when I come back  
to visit. Even if I can never look at fish the  
same way.



Top: Maryam with two girls in her community; Bottom:  
Maryam's favorite dish from Manabí

# I'm just a guest here

By Alander B. Rocha

I like to be over prepared before I delve into anything. The months before leaving the US for my Peace Corps service was spent researching anything possibly related to Ecuador. Well, reading about Ecuador indicated I would be serving in the world's most biodiverse ecosystems, but it most definitely didn't prepare me for what I was going to encounter at site. Maybe it was the insect half the size of my palm that I thought was so pretty (a cockroach), or the numerous spider webs in my apartment that I stopped fighting because, well, I can't win and at least they catch other insects, but due to my site's location on the foothills of the Andes on the Amazon basin with its tropical forest climate, I'm convinced the Oriente region accounts for Ecuador's #1 spot on the biodiversity contest.

It was probably in my first month at site that it really became clear that to thrive in the Amazonian region, I had to learn to cohabitate with the creatures around me. I was alone at home one evening as my host family was out. I was sitting on my bed reading, and as I moved around, I noticed a little white thing that I thought was a piece of rice. I was a little confused as to why rice would be on my bed, but nonetheless, I threw it away and kept reading. Two minutes later I find another white thing, then another, and another. For about

30 seconds, I'm freaking out trying to figure out where this is coming from... Then I looked up. My ceiling was black covered in black ants. Not the tiny black ants that eat your food if you leave it out too long, but huge killer black ants.

A million things go through my head,  
"Is this normal?"

"What is my host family going to say?"

"What are you going to do, Alander? Kill them!"

"No Alander don't kill them, what if they get angry?"

"I'm not even a dirty person! Why are they here?"

"I mean, sure, I eat Doritos some nights in bed watching Netflix, but I don't leave crumbs around!"

"Is there more around the house?"

I checked the other rooms and realized that my room was, in fact, the only room targeted by the killer ants. I thought, "Yup, Alander, the damn Doritos did it, but don't ever admit that to anyone! So embarrassing!" I decided to go outside and wait for my host family because they surely would know what to do. When my host dad arrived, I quickly ran over and greeted him with, "Heeey Don Carlos, buenas noches,



eh necesito su ayuda porque tengo un problemita....  
(Heeeey Carlos, good evening, um I need your help because I have a small problem....)" He immediately saw how distraught I looked and became worried, so I walked him into my room and began explaining that I had no idea where they came from and it's not my fault and... Then he was smiling. I stopped talking because surely he had an explanation, but all he said was, "Ahhh esas son las hormigas barredoras (Ohhh, those are sweeper ants)". I'm silent and confused, so he continues, "Ellas solo están de paso, no te preocupes. (They are only passing through; don't worry)" Naturally, I asked for more information, and he explained that they usually pass through, cleaning up insects, and when they are done, they leave. So really, they are nature's pest control. That night, I slept in my host brother's room waking up periodically to flash a light at the ceiling.

The next morning, I woke up and immediately went to check my room. To my surprise, they were all gone. My host dad was not only right, but he also taught me my first lesson about living in the jungle: I'm just a guest in this ecosystem. And just to clarify, the white things were not rice but insect eggs the ants took away, and Doritos did not, in fact, cause this event. It really was just something that nature had to do, and I had no business interfering in it. Since that night, I like to think I'm one with all the insects around. Sure, that's not always true in practice, but it's something to strive for as an ideal.

Left: a view from Alander's house of his community; Right: the sign to welcome people to Shell



# I'm so embarazada

By Carolyn Fleder

Although you may not believe from hearing me speak, I actually studied some Spanish before I came to Ecuador — 3 years in high school, and 4 semesters in college, all sadly to no avail. Before I arrived in country, I assumed that not only would the immersion unlock some dormant Spanish skills that had been resting quietly in my subconscious, while at the same time advancing my meager skills so rapidly, I figured I would be practically fluent by the time I left training. Obviously, that is not what happened, and I was shaken out of that daydream very quickly.

On our very first day we were introduced to our new host families and sent off into our new homes. My first evening with my new family was enough to burst my overconfident delusion of latent Spanish fluency. I could not understand anything that was going on and my sweet, welcoming host family did not speak a word of English. We sat around the table, and they tried their best to engage me in conversation that I

could not understand at all. We were all nervously giggling and smiling too widely to show each other how our intentions were only the very best, even if we couldn't actually communicate with words.

At some point I felt so awkward that I thought it would be fun and helpful to just start listing all of the Spanish vocabulary that I could remember, which genuinely seemed like a really great idea at the time and which I do not necessarily recommend as an icebreaker. I pointed at various objects and proudly showed off the vocabulary that I had meticulously studied in high school and college, which in retrospect, was almost entirely unhelpful. Mesa, I said, pointing at the table, and like the patient angels that they are, my host family smiled and nodded with what seemed like genuine pride. "Sí, que bueno!" (yes, how good!)

My sad vocabulary list was such an unexpected hit, I got a little over-confident and decided to



really step up my game by showing off my understanding of the most hilarious false cognate ever, embarazada. For those even worse at Spanish than me, the Spanish word for pregnant is embarazada, which of course, sounds temptingly similar to the English word embarrassed. It is such a comically easy mistake to make, and such an equally embarrassing one, it's almost like a linguistic practical joke. I thought sharing this little nugget with my host family would be a hilarious homerun and perhaps even our first family bonding moment. So, without pausing for the brief moment it would have taken to realize that I did not actually know the Spanish word for embarrassed (trust me, I do now), I blazed off into a deep sea of Spanish, from which I did not have the skills to escape. Without that crucial one-word rosetta stone, the whole hilarious joke didn't make any sense. Instead, I just ended up saying over and over again that I was pregnant. It was like I walked into my own trap. My host mother, to her enormous credit, did not convey even a flicker of surprise or judgement or confusion, she just smiled and said, "Sí, con bebé?" (oh yes, with a baby?) and then smiled kindly while I tried desperately to backtrack. Somehow we blazed through that entire first encounter without any real mutual understanding, and I retreated safely to my room for the night, where I immediately looked up how to say "embarrassed" in Spanish, which is how vergüenza became the first Spanish word I learned in Ecuador.



Carolyn with her host sister, nephew and niece.

Molly with other Peace Corps volunteers from her group that are visiting her in Guayaquil



# Hot shower mishap

By Molly Miller

Having volunteer friends who let you crash on their hotel futon has proved to be a great asset to my Peace Corps experience; however, it's also led to quite a crazy, yet memorable moment. During a cultural workshop in Guayaquil, some of my generous and fellow volunteers allowed me to stay on their futon in the hotel they were staying in for the week, due to how far I live from where we were meeting. I was thankful to be able to sleep in, reunite with friends, and enjoy a complimentary breakfast. Not to mention it saved me from the hour and a half bus ride. More importantly, I was excited to actually be able to enjoy a HOT shower for the first time in a month. After moving to site, one of the transitions I encountered was going from taking hot showers to cold showers. Many coastal volunteers don't have the luxury of hot showers, and although it was nice at first due to the heat and humidity, the enjoyment of cold showers quickly wore off for me. For those who are not familiar with electric shower heads, it is the most common way of having a hot shower here in Ecuador. The water is heated in the shower head rather than the traditional method of being fed

from a centralized hot water tank. The first time I stepped into a shower in Ecuador, I was shocked to see wires coming out of the shower head. I had always believed that electricity and water should never be mixed. I had also heard that electric shower heads had been given the nickname "widow maker", due to safety issues with the very first models that came out.

The first night there, I indulged in a long 30-minute hot shower, but noticed that the shower head was smoking above me, and that there were some wires sticking out from the shower head. I mentioned it to the other volunteers, who had not seemed to notice because it could have easily been mistaken for steam. We went on about our day and everyone successfully showered over the next 24 hours with no problems. As the next night approached, I let another volunteer shower before me while I tried to bum the free Wi-Fi until it was my turn. When the shower was finally open, I went to enjoy my second and final hot shower before I had to return to my host family's cold water the following day. As I was showering, I noticed that the shower head was still smoking



like the night before. Paying no attention to it because I thought it was normal, I continued with my shower.

I'm not sure if it was a sixth sense I felt, or maybe a strange noise I heard a second before, but all of the sudden the shower head sparked and caught fire above me. I screamed and jumped out just in time before it exploded and looked like a firework show going off above my head. The bathroom was filled with smoke as black ash fell down from the shower head. It looked like a scene from a comedy show as I opened the bathroom door with a towel wrapped around me, covered in soap, soaking wet, and smoke billowing out of the bathroom behind me, trying to explain to my friends what had just happened. One of them had seen the spark through the crack of the door light up in the bathroom. I am sure my scream made the other volunteers think that either the water had turned cold, I had dropped something, or I had encountered a cockroach in the shower. Looking back, I'd like to say it was any of those three things, but it wouldn't make for such an interesting story to tell. To top it off, the worker who was an older man, entered the room to check the shower as I stood there, still in my towel with soap all over me, and my heart still racing. The kind gentleman allowed me to walk down the hallway, STILL in my towel, to use another bathroom and finish my shower. Although it was scary in the moment, I now have a great story to tell and look back on and laugh. I'm thankful for hot showers every once in a while, but I think I'll stick to my cold showers for now. Besides, I guess that's how an electrical shower head deemed its nickname the "widow maker".



Top: Volunteers posing with the Guayaquil sign while visiting; middle two: pictures of Molly's electric shower head; bottom: Peace Corps volunteers visiting Guayaquil



# Practical jokes

By Logan Marx

Have you ever been the target of a harmless and silly prank? Growing up in a big family, I have been the butt of a fair share of my sibling's jokes. You can't help but learn to laugh along with the culprits; especially, when you fall right into their trap. Learning from my own foolishness was one of the smartest tactics I had to be able to fight against my siblings. Luckily, this "skill" transferred quite well to my Peace Corps service.

When I moved into my site, Naranjal, little did I know that my host mom was the queen of practical jokes. She loved hiding behind doors just to jump out and scare one of her kids or grandchildren. She always walked around with a smirk like she was up to something or like she knew something that we didn't. Turns out that even though I only knew her for a few short weeks, I wasn't off-limits to being the victim of one of her jokes.

One morning she told me that she was going to teach me how to make crabs for dinner. Naranjal is well known amongst the coast for having the best crab in Ecuador. It's situated only a few miles from the mangroves, so it's often on the menu for dinner. I love seafood and was thrilled at the opportunity to learn how to cook a traditional Ecuadorian coastal plate. We walked to the market where men were walking around with numerous wriggling crabs tied together and screaming prices at the customers. Once my mom found the perfect bunch, we walked back to the house eager to get started. I put the bundle of crabs in the sink and went to the living room to play with my host-nephew. Just as I started a little one-on-one game of soccer with him, my mom yells at me from the kitchen asking me to clean the crabs. As I got up and walked to the kitchen, she left giggling



through her teeth. I arrived at the sink and cut the crabs loose to clean them. That was my first mistake. Apparently, you are supposed to kill all of the crabs by putting a knife through their mouth before trying to clean them. As I began to scrub one, very much alive, crab, I looked over at the sink and realize there were only 9 including the one in my hand. When I started there were 12. Right then I hear my host-mom snorting from around the corner. I search the kitchen counter to find a crab on the blender, a crab on the tub of flour, and a crab that jumped on the floor and was heading under the counter. In the time it took me to wrangle up the 3 crabs, 5 more escaped the sink and were making a run for it. I look over my shoulder to see not just my host-mom... but my entire host-family in tears laughing at my inability to gather up the run-away crabs. Just then my host mom walked over to the counter, grabbed a knife and a crab, stabbed it in the face, threw it in the sink and said, "Ahora, sí. (Now, yes.)" Finally after cooking the crab, we all sat around the table giggling at what had just happened.

Left: Logan with his family from the US and his host family; Right: Logan at the swearing in ceremony with his host mom



# Night bus horrors

By Courtney Heptig

So in the fall of 2013, a few months after swearing in, I had my first night travel experience in Ecuador!

Back in those days, Peace Corps Ecuador had just recently started to allow the volunteers that were in the southernmost provinces to take night buses for official Peace Corps events. Since I basically lived FOREVER away from Quito, I decided to take my first night bus...

The trip started with all of the tickets being sold out in my site, so I traveled 3 ½ hours to the nearest big city to then catch a 12 hour night bus to Quito. Once I was on the bus they promptly closed all of the windows and turned off the air conditioning, which caused the bus to turn into a mobile sauna.

But for fear of using the bus bathroom, I decided to limit my water intake to nothing the entire journey. With the lack of fresh air, I then started thinking about all of the diseases I was probably contracting from my fellow passengers and giving myself a mini-panic attack. I was also next to the bathroom, and since I am a giant human, anytime I finally got to sleep, people tripped over me.

Then my iPod froze... heavy sigh... and THEN the bus got a flat tire...

Oh but it gets even better! Once we arrived at the terminal I had to get on a public bus that went about an hour outside of Quito to our training center at the time. There were no seats so I got to stand/flail around the bus with my giant hiking backpack on. Then all of a sudden I got extremely hot. Since I was fresh out of training, my mind immediately jumped to the worse possibility, and I was convinced that I had been drugged! This obviously didn't help the panic that was coming over me, and I quickly realized that I was about to faint! So then, in the middle of the crowded bus, I dropped my backpack and very casually threw myself onto the floor of the bus.

I ended up NOT actually fainting on the public bus and FINALLY made it to the training center. Upon further analysis, I realized that it was probably more likely that I had actually dehydrated myself and that I had definitely NOT been drugged.

However, even with that being the case, 4 years later, I STILL hate night buses.





Parting Shot:  
Welcome Omnibus  
118!

Picture: A group of volunteers from Omni 118 posing after their ceremony