

## Ecuador – Day 7

In a country where some of its citizens are willing to throw trash out the window and onto the ground, I am struck by the contrast between the country's natural beauty and the willingness of some to tarnish the landscape. We are told that the trash truck comes every day but as yet I have not seen one. I am also amazed by some Ecuadorians' misuse of their ability to pour concrete. Truly stunning are the contrasts we have seen in such a short period of time. This morning we woke early after a bitterly cold night in Urbina (12,000 ft) and ate breakfast at 5:30 AM at the foot of Chimborazu, a volcano with a peak at 20,700 feet. It is actually the tallest point as measured from the center of the earth, even farther away than Mt. Everest. Despite having slept at such high altitude, as a group we felt great, though a bit travel weary. Just prior to our 6:30 am departure we were treated to the sun shining on the volcano. Taking advantage of the soft early morning light we once again unfurled the Heathwood banner and Ecuador flag for a photo op. We even managed to include a llama in one of the photos without being spat on.

Saying good-bye to our friend Rodrigo, the owner of the climbers' hut in Urbina who regaled us last night with his stories of mountaineering throughout South America, we once again boarded the bus. This time our destination was Quito, but not without a stop on the way for a short train ride in Riobamba, a lunch of guinea pig, a much heralded stop for ice cream and later for fuel at \$1.08 for diesel. Yes, it has been a long day of traveling and we are all looking forward to checking in to the Rio Amazonas Hotel. I will say that it has truly been an educational adventure for us all, one that will be remembered for years to come. We have experienced much of the Andean culture, traversed its sometimes harrowing roadways, hiked to a crater lake, mountain biked down the Pan Am highway, challenged a river and seen how another part of the world lives and how they view us. We are all thankful to Heathwood for the chance to experience Ecuador.

We have benefited greatly from the experience of our guide Juan Carlos. He is remarkable in his knowledge of the history, culture, flora and fauna of Ecuador. He has become a true friend. Our bus driver Leo, who can drive a large bus better than most of can drive a much smaller car, has been a lot of fun to travel with. We are not looking forward to saying good bye to them tomorrow but we must as our adventure continues at the airport ....

Jamie Walker  
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