

Ecuador is a biologically diverse country. Although only the size of Nevada; Ecuador is home to ten percent of the world's species. With such convincing biological evidence to argue for conservation, it's a wonder that Ecuadorians have to fight at all for preservation. However, in the face of seemingly insurmountable debt, (\$15 billion) the Ecuadorian government is willing to make certain sacrifices. Even if these sacrifices come at the expense of the environment.

In the early 1970s massive reserves of oil were discovered in the Ecuadorian rainforest. For a country deep in debt, this seemed like the discovery of the century. Their problems were solved: money would pump into the country as the black gold flowed out. A pipeline was built to transport their new export to the coastal cities. Ecuador was looking to become a wealthy world power. Unfortunately this pipe dream burst. The problems only increased for Ecuador: inflation, poverty, and pollution were rampant. Finally, the government made the ultimate decision: build a new pipeline.

While traveling in Ecuador I was amazed to hear of the different views people had on the pipelines. Most saw them as a necessary evil, especially those in the Galapagos and Quito. Out of sight, out of mind. These people did not see the detrimental effects of the pipelines first-hand. In the Amazon, however, responses to the inevitable questions about oil pipelines were passionate, frank, and persuasive.

While in the Amazon, we visited Jatún Sacha, a biological preserve and education center. The director of Jatún Sacha, Alejandro Suarez, was particularly adamant in his objection to the new pipeline's construction. He reported that over 60 spills have occurred in the last 30 years on the old (SOTE) pipeline. Alejandro was being too kind. There have been 16.8 million barrels spilled in 68 reported breaks in the last 20 years

alone (Koenig, 3). As the SOTE pipeline has aged, breaks have become more frequent, 14 since 1998 (3). These accidents are tragic, but more brutal outrages exist.

Alejandro Suarez was particularly indignant at the oil company's cheap disregard for the people of the Amazon. He mentioned a particularly upsetting exchange with a group of indigenous farmers whose property was contaminated by a spill. The community of 7 families was forced to first clean up the area and then move to a new area. As compensation for their loss of land and homes each family was offered just \$180. The average income in Ecuador is \$253 dollars a month, however over fifty percent of the population, and most indigenous people, earn less than \$2 a day. Any way you cut it, \$180 is not reasonable compensation.

In the Amazon, people described environmental problems as the biggest crises facing Ecuador today. However, in Quito, people represented economic struggles as the largest problem in Ecuador.

When we were in Quito, Ana Maria Egas, a Saint Mary's alum ('89), met us for dinner. She offered some interesting insights into the changing face of Quito. Ana Maria lived in Quito before attending Saint Mary's, worked in Quito after graduation, and returned after a brief hiatus in the United States. Ana Maria believed that the biggest problem facing Ecuador was economic crisis caused by uncontrolled population growth.

She compared Quito to Las Vegas: the population is growing too fast for the city to accommodate the needs of the people. This results in overcrowding, poor sewage, water, electricity, and little environmental consideration. Schools, housing, and roadways are desperately needed, so construction projects are haphazard and often

rendered obsolete before they are completed. The overpopulation, Ana Maria said, is due in large part to the Catholic condemnation of artificial birth control.

I enjoyed talking to Ana Maria because she was quick to add her opinions on how to solve the economic problem in Ecuador. She believes that Ecuador's dependence on oil as its major source of income is very shortsighted. Ana Maria thinks that Ecuador, particularly the Quito area, should lay a better foundation for tourism in an attempt to diversify its economy. Ecuador's third largest source of income is tourism, after oil and money brought in from people working overseas. However, Ana Maria mentioned that Quito has no real museum infrastructure. By creating a museum-based tourist center in Quito, Ana Maria thinks Ecuador can reap more profit from the lucrative tourist business.

In the Amazon people had a contrary idea on how to benefit from tourism. Everywhere we went in the Amazon we saw eco-tourism at work. While we stayed at Cabanas Aliñahui, we really visited numerous privately owned properties. Our guide Pedro, employed by Aliñahui, took us to areas he knew were rich in diversity (such as the Hoatzin enclave) or that had a natural phenomenon (such as the property with the waterfall) or even had cultural significance (such as Salmuerta, the Quichua village). At each location, Pedro paid the owners for access to their land. He either gave them the money upfront, or in traditional Ecuadorian style said "pagaré mañana": "I'll pay you tomorrow."

While this may seem inefficient to have small groups going to different areas peppered all over the Amazon, it is really the most eco-friendly. By picking unique locations, the guides are effectively spreading the idea of conservation for profit. Indigenous people who receive additional income from letting tourists on their property

will feel incentive to conserve and maintain the natural, unadulterated land. This not only benefits the owner of the land, but the entire community. However, problems can arise when people become too greedy for tourist dollars.

Unchecked tourism growth can often have a detrimental effect on the environment. Casa Suica, a large eco-lodge in the Amazon, is a glaring reminder of surging tourism. Driving by in our canoe, I was appalled at what a stark, unnatural picture this huge lodge made against riverbank. It looked as if someone had clear-cut a swatch of land then airlifted in a Sheraton.

This increase in larger, more cost-efficient lodges, hotels, and tours is mirrored in the Galapagos. Despite continued efforts to limit the number of tour boats and the environmental damage caused by these boats, some Galapagos natives protest strict conservation laws. Local fishermen, Galapagos residents, recently took a group of scientists and tourists hostage at Darwin's Research Station (Galapagos, 2). They demanded that the conservation laws be decreased so that port towns could accept tourists from large boats, and also wanted a relaxation of fishing laws (2). Although this standoff ended peacefully, the need for both more income and strict conservation in the Galapagos causes difficulties. While walking down the beach at Rabida Island, I saw firsthand the grave effects of the tourist business on the environment and animals.

As I was meandering down the beach and taking in the glorious sights and sounds of the Galapagos, I saw a sea lion pop out of the waves and lumber onto the beach. He kept turning around and touching his nose to a pink spot on his back. Upon closer inspection, I discovered the spot was a circular gash on his hindquarters. At first, I thought that another animal had attacked the sea lion. However, the gash was perfectly

circular and had smooth edges so couldn't have come from a predator. Our guide, Hernan, explained that the propeller of a panga boat had made the wound.

This opened my eyes to the reality of the Galapagos Islands. These islands are not untouched bastions of natural selection. They are delicate ecosystems that are constantly combating the detrimental influence of man. The human population on the Galapagos Islands has risen to over four times what it was twenty years ago. In addition to people trying to cash in on the lucrative tourism business, the number of illegal fishermen has also grown. As the population increases, it will become more and more difficult to effectively monitor, patrol, and maintain the Galapagos Islands. With the number of people visiting and working in the Galapagos increasing every year, controlling illegal fishing and monitoring the movement of ships around the islands is becoming more difficult. In order to continue to profit from the Galapagos Islands, Ecuador must better enforce its environmental regulations.

My journey to Ecuador opened my eyes to the delicate balance between humans and the environment and to how this interaction affects views on different subjects. While in the Amazon and Galapagos I discovered people were much very concerned about conservation efforts. In the Galapagos, these views on conservation were dulled by a desire to increase income. In the Amazon, however, economic concerns seemed to be secondary to the environmental havoc surrounding the pipeline. The people of Quito, who saw poverty and overcrowding every day, were concerned with the economic crisis of the country and the efforts to control the population. I will always cherish my experiences in Ecuador both for their majesty and for the indelible change they have made on my perception of the intricate web of culture and environment.

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