



THE 2006 MITCHELL-ATKINSON REPORT

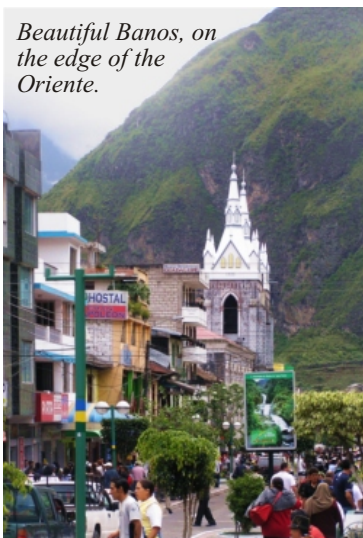
BEST WISDOMS FOR THE NEW YEAR



The view from our living room window, the Pichincha mountains in the background.



Quito Colonial



Beautiful Banos, on the edge of the Oriente.



Ambato: Ya don't mess with a gringo in his second childhood!

For us, 2006, or as we like to think of it... Yr. 2A.R. (Year 2 after retirement) was a fascinating year of exploration in Latin America.

First, two months in Ecuador... Brian returning after 25 years to where he once worked on designing a new airport for Quito. On a bright and sunny January 30th (just to let you easterners know that it is actually bright and sunny sometimes here in la la land), we left our Nanaimo condo overlooking the Newcastle Channel, rolled our suitcases downtown along the Harbourfront walkway to the passenger ferry to Vancouver. The following midnight we arrived at the old Quito airport, (the new one was never actually built), located in the heart of the city, in a 10,000 foot high valley surrounded by volcanic mountains. We were met by Jose, manager of the *Cristóbal Colon Spanish Language School*, our task master for the next 4 weeks of intensive language training. He dropped us off at *Apartamentos Modernos*, our new home away from home (the same place Brian stayed in 25 years ago thanks to the internet) conveniently located a short 50 cent bus ride from downtown Quito and with a magnificent view of the mountains and *Volcán Pichincha* reaching over 14,000 feet.

Even though we spent 4 grueling weeks, 4 hours a day with one-on-one Spanish teachers Pablo, Gaby, Alexandra and Berna, we did manage to do some traveling around Ecuador both the local way and the tourist way. On one trip we took a three hour bone crunching ride to the city of Ambato in a battered old bus that looked like it had been a run-down city bus in the 1950's. We went there for *Carnaval* since it is the only city in Ecuador where they don't celebrate it by throwing water at everyone (something to do with celebrating the arrival of piped water in Quito). In Ambato, it's the *Fiesta de Las Flores y Las Frutas* with lots of entertainment and an amazing parade. We got adopted by an Ambato family at one late night open air party and were plied with *mucho licores y bailando*, and awarded free t-shirts and CD's from the band just for being Canadian. Here, instead of water, everyone was carrying spray cans of *espuma* (like shaving cream) and Brian's second childhood got a great kick out of surprising people -- noone suspected the old gringo would have one. From Ambato, we took a short trip east to Baños to see the waterfalls, the hot springs and the Basilica (with its paintings of 21 miracles; e.g. people surviving buses plunging down mountainsides). We're now thankful the nearby *Volcán Tungurahua* didn't erupt when we were there as it has done since, forcing the temporary evacuation of the town.

Another bone crunching 6 hour bus trip took us to Tena east of Quito in the *Oriente* (Amazon basin) to visit the *Selva* (jungle) and go white water rafting. The rafting was a breeze --climbing down the 500 foot escarpment in the rain and muck to get there was not - at least for Nancy. This was not the time to tell them that she had already broken both her ankles! Our adventure in the *selva* also included a five hour walk through the jungle with Hugo explaining the medicinal benefits of the trees and plants; and a dinner of wonderful poached fish in palm leaves.

The luxury trip was a 5-day tour of the Galapagos Islands on the *Galapagos Legend* a bit of a deluxe ship and well worth it. Great guides, lots of trips to shore by Zodiac and opportunities for skin diving as well as good food and excellent company made it an outstanding trip. And the birds, and animals and scenery are undescrivable: Blue Footed Boobies, Frigates, Darwin Finches, Cormorants, Penguins, Iguanas, Sea Lions and Giant Tortoises made up the menagerie and all at your fingertips.



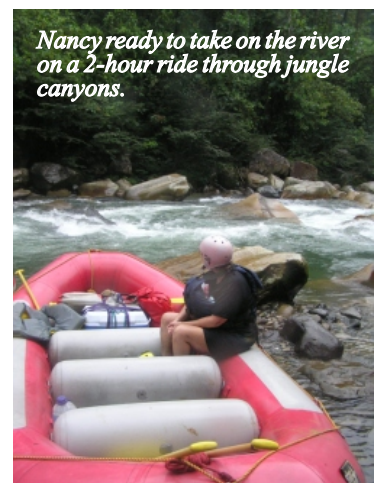
The Virgen de Quito overlooks the Old Town. However they tell me she got bored one night, came down into town and is no longer a virgin.



Shine meester, feefty cents?



Overlooking the city of Quito. 25 years ago Brian walked over (he says), this time we took the Teleférico (gondola ride).



Nancy ready to take on the river on a 2-hour ride through jungle canyons.



Roberto, Brian and Mago.
Corina, Ana and Nancy



Ambato: Would you believe an hour later the parade came down this street?



El Quinche, blessing the cars; pop the hood, open the trunk, and wind down the windows.



Gorgeous textiles at the Otavalo market, the home base of all those omnipresent Andean flute players.



We were also warmly welcomed by Brian's old airport planning friends, Mago and his wife Ana; Roberto and his wife Corina; and Amanda, Brian's first Spanish teacher. We spent many happy hours over dinner and drinks talking about old times and changes for Brian and new times, culture and politics for Nancy. Mago and Ana introduced us to the *San Agustin de Callo* Hacienda, a beautiful farm and restaurant owned by a former President of Ecuador complete with llamas and Incan ruins; *El Quinche*, a small town northeast of Quito, where the blessing of cars is a weekly Sunday ritual, to protect from the hazards of the mountain roads we presume; and to *lechón al horno*, fabulous oven-roasted pig. Roberto and Corina spent the day with us at the famous Otavalo Market north of Quito; *Las Cascadas de Peguche* near Otavalo; the *Volcán Cotacachi* crater which would have been higher than Mount Everest had it not blown itself apart; and ending with a fine dinner at *Hacienda Cusin* another restored 17th century country estate. And we explored every inch of Quito from the *El Panecillo* to Sunday soccer games and art markets in the parks. Our favourite spot was the *Vista Hermosa* bar on the roof of a building in the *Parte Colonial*, the Old Town, with fantastic views of the both night and day of the beautifully restored colonial architecture and magnificent churches. We also caught up with Ivan, another old friend of Brian's, who owns the best Tex-Mex restaurant in the Americas (both South and North).

Back in Nanaimo, it was wonderful to have Karen, Brian's daughter, visit in July. We did a little sightseeing and went to Victoria where we toured the incomparable Butchart Gardens and visited with Diana and Michael Butler, always a pleasant time. In August, Nancy, as Treasurer of the Nanaimo Blues Festival Society, was immersed in presenting the *Summertime Blues! 2006* concert series in downtown Nanaimo. Brian got to separate and count all the penny, nickel, dime and quarter proceeds in between bridge games. Our only other "short" trip was to Edmonton where we had a great visit with Nancy's sister Ann and partner Jane, in spite of the fact that it was motivated by a final visit with Nancy's Aunt Beryle.

In July, we took an introductory course in teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) at Malaspina University-College thinking it might be a way to spend more time in Latin America and get paid for it. So, armed with lots of information, but no experience, we travelled to Costa Rica in November to see what the possibilities were. Brian's younger daughter, Kiri, had visited Costa Rica in July and was extolling the virtues of the country and since it was always on the list of our places to see someday, there was no time like the present. We rented an apartment for a month in San Jose and walked the streets visiting potential language school employers. Since San Jose has no street signs this wasn't easy. We learned, like the *Ticos*, to get around the city "organically" by referring to local landmarks (e.g. 100 meters west of the McDonalds in Barrio Los Yoses). We also took time out for trips to the beach at Jaco on the Pacific Coast; to the *Volcans Arenal* and *Poás*; to *Tortuguero National Park* on the Caribbean coast, a labyrinth of canals and jungle, kind of like being in Venice only with trees; and for lunch with Nancy's mother's friend Zaira.

We arrived home greeted by old friend Judith Gibson as she and Roy Sage had finally moved to Nanaimo from Ottawa the very day we left for Costa Rica. It's been great visiting with them again; and we almost feel guilty running off for a second time as it appears we may have teaching jobs in Costa Rica starting in mid-January, however it's not at all certain at this time. So the grand adventure continues...stay tuned ... and if you are interested in coming to visit.... just email.

All the best in 2007!

Nancy & Brian

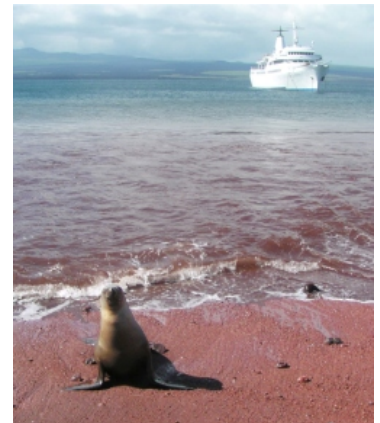
P.S. The bottom two pictures are of Costa Rica, but we ran out of space for any more.



The famous Blue-footed Boobies of Galapagos.



Galapagos: Lumbering through the forest from home in a 1000m high volcano down to the beach to lay their eggs.



Galapagos: snorkeling, animal and bird watching, dinner awaiting on the horizon,,, it's a tough life.



San Agustin de Callo Hacienda. Part Colonial, part Aztec

