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INSPIRING & INFORMING EXPATS

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Made in Ecuador

Editorial



by Mark Bradbury

Viva La Madre!!

Welcome to this month's edition of *Hi Expat Magazine!* Whether you just picked up this magazine for the first time or have been following us since our first issue in December, we hope that you will enjoy what we have in store for the month of May. Personally, I have enjoyed being one of the writers, and I am proud to be a part of this magazine. We hope that you will become a fan of what we are trying to do; speak for the expats both here in Ecuador, and for those who will be coming soon.

When I asked what my assignment was for this issue, I was told that this was a Mother's Day edition, and that I should do something appropriate. Normally, when I receive my subject suggestion for an article, I have no trouble getting started, but this one is a little different. So, I am going to try to keep it simple, and talk about what Mother's Day, "*El Día de las Madres*," is like here in Ecuador, and maybe a few other things.

I post a photo every morning in my expat group, *Manta and Manabi Expats and Amigos*, to wish everyone a good morning. Many of the members in my group enjoy the local photos and information; it has become a fixture in my daily repertoire. This morning I posted a photo of the Mother and Child statue that is a focal point of the Mother's Park, "*El Parque de la Madre*," located next to the Central Park area on Manta's Malecon. The park is a special area, just off the main Parque Central, that is dedicated to mothers and children.

It is usually a fun place to hang out and people watch, especially the kids who are running around enjoying the park's features. Even though the traffic of Manta's Malecon is whizzing by right behind you, the park offers a certain amount of tranquility, like an oasis in the center of all the noise. We have enjoyed our time there; you should check it out.

The statue has its own space in the park, and it is a nice example of local artwork. I was very impressed with it after seeing it for the first time. It is dedicated to the mothers and children of Manta and is worth visiting.

This morning, a member of my group asked a question about whether "El Dia de las Madres" was a "thing" here in Manta and Ecuador. I was a bit surprised by the question, since Mother's Day has always been celebrated everywhere I have ever lived. It certainly is here in Ecuador, but the person asking the question was from the US and was simply curious. I told him that Mother's Day is definitely a thing here, and that seemed to satisfy his curiosity.

My mother passed away almost nine years ago, and we all still miss her terribly. She was a good person, kind and generous, and always tried to keep the peace in our home. She was a calming factor when it came to escalating problems with the men of the family, and we all loved her for that. She was a tigress when she needed to be!

She would have fit in here nicely back in the day. The Ecuadorian mothers that I have met over my time here are fiercely protective of their children and will stand up and protect their kids whenever they need to. But they are also the mediators, the kindness givers, and the ones their children look to when they need support or help. My Mother, Latina style!

My partner Irina has a daughter Natasha who lives with us. We've all been together for almost two and a half years, and I have seen Irina be an incredibly good mother to her lucky daughter. She has nothing but love and kindness for her girl, and it pleases me to know that she will be the mother of our baby girl in a few months. I have nothing but faith that she will always take loving care of my little girl, because that is what Ecuadorian mothers do. She will nurture our baby and raise her to be a good woman, just like she has done for her daughter Natasha.

This is Ecuador, and here in this country, one of the most important things for everyone is family. "La Familia" is everything! Families take care of their own, and mothers are strong and protective, and kind and generous. They are all that, and more.

A few weeks ago, Natasha went to a big celebration in Charapoto, near San Clemente. It was the 60th Anniversary of her great-grandparent's

marriage. Irina was not feeling well, so Natasha went to represent them. Her great-grandmother had never even met the man she had been promised to when they were married, but raised six children with him, and stood by his side for sixty years! She is still a proud mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. She is the epitome of an Ecuadorian mother, a postcard for motherhood.

If you are currently living here, you may have experienced some of the same things that I have seen. If you have not come to Ecuador yet, then you will probably notice the things I'm talking about quite early in your travels. I have often said that this country reminds me of my growing up in the 50's and 60's in the United States. The similarities sometimes amaze me. Mothers and families, and the way they are here, remind me of the good old days of TV in the States; Ozzie & Harriet, Leave it to Beaver, Little House on the Prairie, and so many more!

Is Mother's Day a thing here? Yes, it is! Every single day!

Viva La Madre!





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by Guadalupe Llori

Mothers in Politics, Guadalupe Llori

As mothers working in politics, we are committed to leading the changes that our families, our children, and our society need. I have always believed that politics are too important to be left to politicians alone. For this reason, from a very young age I dedicated myself to action, in order to change my reality and the reality of the people around me. As an Amazonian woman, my fight was not free of struggles. I continually fought against the impositions of a society that traditionally preferred to place women and mothers in the sole role of caring for the home and children.

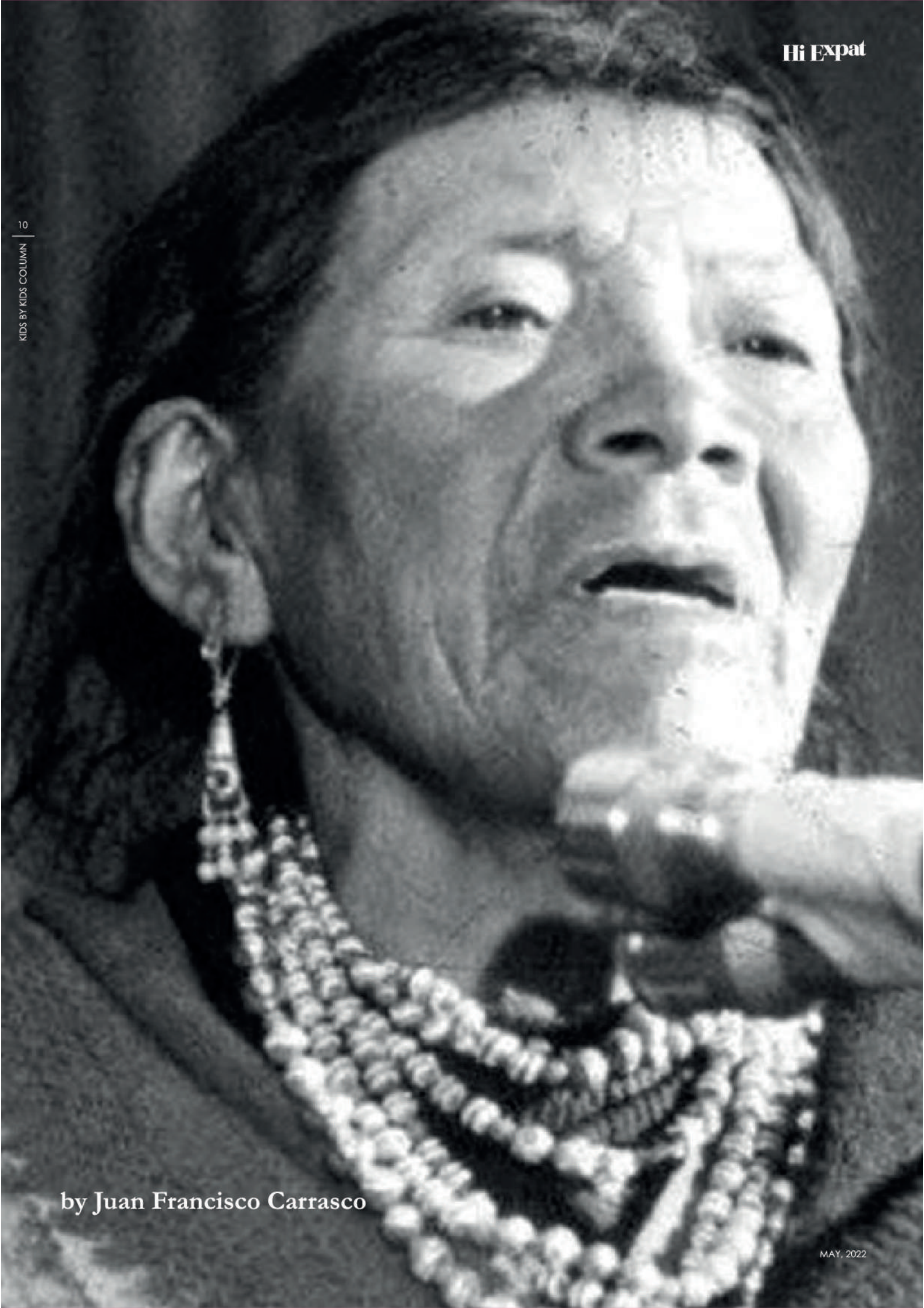


I am a woman who comes from a place where ancestral teachings and practices are the backbone of my people's culture. This is what has strengthened my character and forged my spirit of service. I formally started my career in politics as the Mayor of Francisco de Orellana, El Coca. Later I was elected twice as Prefect of Orellana in the Amazonian province and now I serve Ecuador as President of the National Assembly. I am the first Amazonian woman to do so, and who comes from below, from the social struggle, from the defense of human rights and nature.

Women's political leadership is not without sacrifice. I am a witness to that. As a result of the struggle to defend the rights of Dayuma, a canton in the Amazon, I suffered violent political persecution that unfairly landed me in jail.

For this reason, it is a personal mission of mine to create a reality where no other woman has to live through what I have lived through. I work tirelessly for gender equality, respect, and equity, so that these tenets can be the foundation of a democratic, responsible, diverse, and inclusive society.

As President of the National Assembly, I strive to foster the qualities that make us human throughout all of the Ecuadorian parliament. As a mother, a woman and a politician, I want to express my gratitude and praise to the mothers who carry the weight of their families everyday. As women we are capable of listening, we are sensitive, we are brave, we are inclusive, we are orderly, and we are efficient. Let us live out these qualities in every area of our life and rest assured that we will have made a lasting impact on our society.



by Juan Francisco Carrasco

Mamá Transito Amaguaña

When I was asked to write a special article for Mother's Day, the first thing that came to my mind was that this would be the perfect occasion to pay a small tribute to a woman I admire, Rosa Elena Tránsito Amaguaña Alba. As an activist she became a true mother for the indigenous people in Ecuador, that's why everyone knew her as Mamá Transito.

Traveling with my family around the country has allowed me to get to know many wonderful places, the different cultures and traditions of our country, and learn about the lives of people who have shaped our history. The story of Mamá Transito was unknown to me until 2020. One day, on one of our family trips we arrived at a small town in the parroquia of Olmedo, in Cayambe, called La Chimba.

La Chimba does not have great infrastructure nor any recreational activities, but there we found the “Centro Intercultural Transito Amaguaña,” a place where I had the opportunity to learn about the life and achievements of this great woman.

The story of Mama Transito is quite sad, from a very young age she witnessed the mistreatment that her parents received from their bosses on the farm where they worked as “huasipunguero” (indigenous people who were assigned a small piece of land to live and plant in exchange for agricultural work on the land of their employers). Her parents were victims of physical abuse by their bosses for a long time, and they did not receive a fair wage for their work. Instead of receiving money like any other worker, because they were indigenous, they only received a piece of land to plant and raise animals for their subsistence.

Transito Amaguaña went to school only for a very short period of time and when she was seven years old she began working in her parent's boss' farm house doing the cleaning. At the age of 14 they forced her to marry an older man with whom she had four children. After a few years she got divorced because her husband mistreated her.

Mama Transito was sure that indigenous people should have the same rights as other workers and that there were no reasons to be mistreated, that is why when she was very young she began working with indigenous communities, helping them understand their rights and defend them. By joining the Ecuadorian Communist Party she became one of the most important figures in indigenous trade unionism. She encouraged many indigenous communities to fight for their labor rights and to demand that owners hand over the lands that belonged to them. For this reason, she was imprisoned on several occasions, as she was accused of being a guerrilla.

Thanks to her leadership, in 1944 the President José María Velasco Ibarra officially recognized the Indigenous Peasant Organizations in Ecuador and in 1950 the first bilingual schools (Spanish-Quechua) were created to educate the indigenous peasant population. In 1964, the Agrarian Reform eliminated the *huasipungos* and the “*servicias*” (domestic exploitation system) and therefore the indigenous people gained equitable access to land for agricultural purposes and their labor rights were recognized.

Mama Transito passed away at the age of 100, leaving a legacy for the indigenous communities of Ecuador. She was like a mother that taught them to fight for their rights, make their voices be heard, and defend their lands.





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by Rolanda Stinson-Smiley

All About Plantains

Green plantains or “plátanos” are closely related to the banana. Ecuador is one of the top producers of both bananas and plantains. In the mid-1950s, Ecuador was the largest banana and plantain producer in the world. By 1960, those exports from Ecuador accounted for 25 percent of the world's production, outproducing all other South American countries. Green plantains are starchy and firmer than their yellow counterparts. They taste a lot like potatoes, are more difficult to peel, and must always be cooked before consumption. For health conscious folks, green plantains are considered a beneficial starch.

On the coast, particularly in Manta, green plantain is a staple part of almost every dish. Dining at any restaurant here, you are bound to find fried plantains (patacones) somewhere on the menu. Breakfast is my favorite

meal of the day and I've found green plantain to be the breakout hero. There are two popular breakfast dishes made from green plantains that I adore, Tigrillo and Bolón.

Tigrillo is originally from the town of Zaruma in the province of El Oro in the coastal region of Ecuador. It is an Ecuadorian casserole-style dish made with a combination of mashed green plantains and cheese. Queso fresco is one of the most popular choices for the cheese in this dish, and when served, tigrillo can be accompanied with a fried or poached egg on top. Sometimes it includes a serving of meat or seafood on the side with a nice sauce that you can pour on top. There are as many recipes as there are chefs, so some versions of tigrillo might also include milk, ají (a hot pepper sauce), or chicharrons (fried pork rinds) mixed in. This dish really reminds me of potato hash, which is a popular breakfast dish in the United States.

The second of these unique dishes is Bolón de Verde (which translates into big green ball). I've read that the origins of bolón de verde can be traced back to when African slaves were brought to Ecuador. Their English conquerors fed them a simple bolón of mashed green plantains and water. The basis of this dish has remained over time and evolved in ingredients and flavors. Through the slave trade, bolón de verde had a lasting impact not only on Ecuador, but throughout South America.

Bolón is mostly considered a breakfast dish made by cooking the plantains in boiling water (or frying them in oil), and then mashing them with a mortar and pestle while they are still hot. To this "dough," some salt, cheese, chicharrón (pork cracklings), or ground peanuts are added and mixed together to form a ball the size of a fist. Once the balls are formed, these bolones can be served immediately or fried in oil until the outside is golden and crisp. I prefer the fried bolón because it reminds me of a giant crispy round fritter.

Some variations of bolón include just queso or adding shrimp, sausage, chorizo, bacon, or herbs such as green onion and coriander to the mix before forming the ball. Some restaurants give you the option of trying it "mixto", which means you can have a combination of meats mixed in.

Bolón can also be prepared with ripe (maduro or sweet) plantains. Many restaurants serve bolón as a breakfast item with fried eggs on top or on the side, along with a glass of juice and a cup of coffee. Another variation is the size of the bolón. I've seen YouTube videos where the bolón was as big as my head. I've seen other places serve bite-sized fried bolones as a snack. It seems like this dish is not only a breakfast staple, but can be eaten anytime of the day as an appetizer or a side dish.

Fans of Bolón de Verde and Tigrillo will find variations of both dishes throughout different areas of Ecuador. On the coast seafood is king, so there's no surprise that you will find bolon and tigrillo sometimes paired with seafood. If in Manta, and looking to try either dish, some of the notable restaurants that I have found are Cafelito House, Dulce & Cremoso, and Mr. Bolón. These tasty treats are both abundant, inexpensive, and growing in variety, flavor, and texture. Bolón and Tigrillo both offer you a gastronomic taste of Ecuadorian culture.





by Carolina Segarra

The Alpha Mother and Her Role in Society Today

Today's society is highly demanding and requires that gender roles be set aside in order to create, innovate, and improve the world we live in. Formerly, the only job that women were allowed to have was that of being a mother. All other titles and roles were reserved for men or other women who chose not to pursue motherhood. But over the years and through multiple protests against the system that have kept women encaged, women and mothers have transformed into alpha mothers. These are women who inspire their children and the world, playing multiple roles as a mother, daughter, intellectual, and much more...all while making it look easy. Every day it is more common to find women who lead companies and their homes at the same time, without neglecting their femininity and leadership.

In Ecuador, a woman who becomes a mother usually quits their job and/or is forced to give up their passions in order to dedicate themselves completely to raising their child in the early years and beyond, which has triggered frustration, postpartum depression, anxiety, and fear of being

seen as "not enough." At the same time, these women have decided to change their destiny by being both mothers and entrepreneurs. **This is why Ecuador has the highest percentage of enterprises founded by women in Latin America.** These women seek to abandon social stereotypes and demonstrate that motherhood does not have to be a limitation, but a stage of life in which commitment from their partner and support from society only strengthens.

Women have shown that they are capable of great things, like Isabel Noboa, an Ecuadorian business owner, millionaire, and mother, who became the heiress to the Noboa fortune. She is now the head of the companies founded by her father, which has resulted in her becoming one of the most prosperous business women in Ecuador. She has led national and international markets and positioned herself as a brand of female empowerment by combining her passion for her family and for being successful, which has inspired many other women to be leaders as well.

Success for men has generally come to be defined by the economic capacity and the job hierarchy that he achieves throughout his life, while success for women is measured by home-making and childrearing, ensuring that the good behavior and morals of her children are in line with those of the family's. Female empowerment initiatives have now allowed these same women to achieve success as defined by their passions and priorities. Many of them embrace projects as their children, and others embrace being creators of life. Motherhood must always be a decision that strengthens the inner desires of each woman, which allows her to stay in a state of satisfaction as she grows into the person she is each day. This is how today's mothers have managed to make their way in a world led by men. Today we are no longer only mothers, pregnant women, or breastfeeding women, today we are alpha women, building each of our own realities. **We are alpha mothers of our projects, of our children, of our decisions, and we have given birth to a new concept of femininity which has abandoned our restrictive social patterns.** Today we lead the world into a better tomorrow. We look toward the future in hopes of one day receiving recognition without the thought of gender. We harbor the hope of a fairer society, in which we are recognized for being more than the best mother. We desire recognition for our work with equitable wages, job titles, and equal rights.

Today the world is ours, we are creators of life, we are part of a whole that manifests itself in us from our birth. **Today we are mothers and entrepreneurs at the same time and we choose who we want to be for our children.** We are the first hunters and gatherers who led our tribes, we are the ones who led an industrial revolution in pants, and who have kept the economy active for years. When they tried to erase our contributions to history we responded with force, pushing through everytime they tried to tell us "no." We fight for education, we fight for our place in politics and at the polls, and we fight to be unapologetically who we are.

Being a woman goes far beyond being a mother. But when that time in our life arrives, our abilities multiply, as do our efforts, and the untold story of alpha motherhood begins. When we find ourselves alone at dawn, nursing the future, and hesitantly observing the world of tomorrow, we hope only to see a less hostile place for the illuminated eyes sheltered between little hands and the faint whisper that screams, "mom." Today more than ever the world celebrates the creators of humanity. Today we can only feel pride in the fight we have given and that of the one that lays ahead.



**It`s
Something
Different**

@canoasuites



by Manuel Avilés



by Manuel Avilés



by Manuel Avilés

How is it Possible That Someone so Small Has Taught me so Much?

by Angie García

by Inés Arcentales



by Inés Arcentales

HiExpat: Thank you so much for your time Angie. In this Mother's Day special for HiExpat Magazine, we want to highlight the Ecuadorian mothers who work hard every day. You are a true example of this and we want to share a bit of your story with our North American expat readers. Since becoming a mother you have been able to combine your work responsibilities with your duties as a mother. But as if that were not enough, you have also been able to continue studying and are currently in the final stages of obtaining a master's degree in public policy. On a professional level, what goals have you set for yourself in the near future and how has your success influenced your son Lucas?

Angie: My son has been my greatest motivation to continue growing as a human being and as a professional. Being a young mother has been full of emotions. Inexperience can generate insecurities, but at the same time I am full of a lot of energy and desire to continue learning and evolving in my field. I strive to continue educating myself in order to achieve better opportunities and stability. I hope that I can offer my son a better quality of life and be an example for him to keep persevering until he reaches his goals.

HiExpat: Despite being a young mother, you have managed to juggle all your responsibilities quite well. Can you share with us what it was like becoming a mother for the first time? We can only imagine all the emotions and feelings that you experienced when seeing Lucas for the first time.

Angie: My transformation into motherhood was actually quite scary. At 26 weeks I experienced some complications with my pregnancy and my son was born with very little chance of surviving more than a few days. He was extremely premature, only weighing 1.7lbs and was diagnosed with respiratory distress syndrome. He was a very defenseless being, fragile, and exposed to many diseases, but he was full of courage and desire to live. He was hospitalized for 2 months and 5 days in neonatology. This was a fight that we only won by taking it one day at a time. We found strength in being together.

I always ask myself, **how is it possible that someone so small has taught me so much? He taught me to love unconditionally.** My son is my greatest act of faith and I feel so grateful to God and to life for giving him to me and for allowing me to see him grow. He is now a very happy, active, and intelligent six year old boy.

HiExpat: North American expatriates often choose to move to Ecuador due to the friendliness of its people. As a single mother, what has been your experience in terms of work, academic, and personal opportunities in Ecuadorian society?

Angie: Personally, I can say that I feel quite satisfied living in Ecuador. Despite being a single mother, I have been successful in my professional life and have been given many opportunities. These opportunities have allowed me to continue learning and growing as a person and mother.

HiExpat: Among our readers we have many women who wonder what it is like to live in Ecuador with their children. Many parents choose Ecuador to give their children the opportunity to learn new cultures and a new language. How do you view the educational system in Ecuador for Lucas? What do you think about how it has developed over the years? Just a few days ago, face-to-face classes began again in Ecuador after two years of the pandemic.

Angie: After having overcome the pandemic, the educational system in Ecuador is in a stage of recovery. I believe that with this recovery the system will be able to strengthen its capacity and potential in order to allow for students' success.

HiExpat: Finally, can you give us a message for parents with children of a similar age to Lucas who are considering Ecuador as their destination to live?

Angie: As parents consider making the move to Ecuador they should never consider their children as an obstacle. If anything, children are all the more reason to make the move in order to expose them to language, culture, good principles, and values for their future.

by Inés Arcentales



The Influential Mom

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by Paola Martens

by Inés Arcentales

HiExpat: Thank you very much for your time Pao. We have seen your work on social media and we know you are an exemplary mother, which inspires us to be able to share a bit of your life with our readers. HiExpat magazine is a magazine focused on inspiring and informing those North Americans who want to come to invest or retire in Ecuador. As a country, we have a lot to offer such as the climate, the quality of life, and especially the wonderful people. Can you share with us a little bit about how your work life changed after becoming a mother?

Pao: Before my work on social media, I felt as though everything in my life was more private. Once I started posting more about my makeup work and beauty tips, people became a little more interested in my personal life and I started showing that side a little more. People started to see my “mom side”, and realized that I was more than just make-up and beauty. They began to see me as a human and I began to show Naya on social media as well.

HiExpat: Your life is very active, but we see that you include your daughter a lot in your social media activities. You seem to have a beautiful mother-daughter relationship. What is the secret to this kind of relationship?

Pao: Thank you, but I don't think there is a “secret.” In my experience, and what has worked for me, is learning how to give her space and respect her desires. If she doesn't want something on social media, doesn't feel like going out, or is not in the mood for pictures and videos I never force her. I always want to do what makes her feel the most comfortable and this comfortability has changed throughout her life. When she was younger she liked to appear in my stories and videos a lot, she even asked me herself to be in them. But now that she has grown a little, she is at a stage where she wants more independence.

HiExpat: We know that your daughter has dual nationality and has been exposed to both Ecuadorian and North American culture. We have many readers who come to Ecuador with their children to give them the experience of another culture and to learn the language. What was Naya's experience like in regards to this?

Pao: Well... Naya grew up in an environment that was 80% English and 20% Spanish speaking. We always spoke English at home and in kindergarten she learned Spanish, so it was quite easy for her to learn a second language.

HiExpat: The quality of food in Ecuador is recognized worldwide and healthy living is important to many here. From your perspective, are you able to provide your daughter healthy food at a reasonable price here in Ecuador?

Pao: Yes, Naya's father is from Canada and we have visited there a few times. I believe that the quality of food here is much better than what is easily accessible in Canada. In my opinion food in Ecuador is less processed and we have access to fruit all year round, so children naturally grow up eating a more nutritious diet.

HiExpat: Finally, how do you feel about the quality of life in the city of Manta and in Manabí? Do you agree that it is possible to raise children in a healthy and loving environment here?

Pao: Manta is a wonderful city and Manabí is a very nice province to live in. My favorite part is the easily accessible beaches. You can spend the whole day on the beach, spending very little money, and the best thing is that the beach is super quiet for children. It is safe for them to swim too. Children here will experience healthy food, friendly people to help them grow, loving environments, and lots of places to play and explore!

by Inés Arcentales



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Why Should You Opt for a Supplementary Medical Plan in Ecuador?

Benefits and
Options in the
Ecuadorian Market

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by Carlos Ramírez

Both private and public health insurance in Ecuador can be easily combined with low-cost supplemental health plans which will cover specific needs such as outpatient medical care, emergency care, and coverage of medical tests. This type of basic coverage will be very useful if you have a health plan with IESS. IESS will provide you with medical assistance when you need it but you may experience long wait times when accessing your benefits, which is why we offer you the option of a supplementary plan.

A supplementary plan can be easily combined with any health plan you have contracted. **One of the primary problems that IESS affiliates run into is the time it takes to access a specialist or to undergo medical tests that could be considered urgent.** The problem lies in the number of members and the lack of medical centers that provide care. Hiring external medical providers has not met the desired expectations due to an unstable economy, which has left large debts to the establishments that provide this care. Access to the equipment located in the main hospitals of IESS would take approximately a month and a half in the best of cases. Additionally, a supplementary plan would benefit you if your medical insurance comes with a high deductible. The supplementary plan would cover the value of the deductible of a major expense policy and your final deductible would range between \$100 and \$180. This means that you would obtain the benefit of both policies at the same time and have some of the best coverage available in the Ecuadorian market.

The costs of a basic supplemental plan with coverage of up to \$12,000 is around \$49.25 per month, and it will perfectly compliment your IESS plan. With this plan you will have access to medical appointments, blood tests, imaging, and emergency care. Plan benefits such as dental coverage of \$100 per year and eyeglass coverage of \$80 per year among many other benefits are also included in your plan. We recommend this plan so that you use IESS medical care only in case of chronic diseases that require expensive, continuous treatments, such as chemotherapy sessions.

Currently, IESS as an institution has many shortcomings which force members to opt for other options. Wait times in emergencies and to obtain medical appointments can be exhausting. Language is another important aspect to consider, since you must always be accompanied by a translator to help you communicate with the staff. The combination of an supplementary plan to your IESS plan will allow you to enjoy different benefits and will guarantee you adequate medical attention in your language.

Combined plans are the most favored option today. These plans allow you to merge two different policies that, combined, provide you with the highest coverage possible and with friendly deductibles for your pocket. It is also important to be aware that some medical expenses are not covered by insurance companies and there are exceptions to coverage that are specified in the contracts acquired between you and insurance companies. Things that are not covered by insurance companies are excess fees, vitamins, sunscreens, moisturizing or hydrating creams, exams under normal parameters, and negative COVID tests. Insurance also does not cover podiatrists, chiropractors, acupuncturists, and doctors in general not authorized by SENECYT, as these doctors will not be able to obtain coverage from your insurance. For this reason, we recommend that before opting for any medical procedure, you get a second opinion in which you compare prices, benefits of the treatment, and corroborate that your doctor has a valid medical degree.

We have had cases in which a minor emergency which would normally cost \$800 to \$1,200 has cost members up to \$8,000 due to a doctor taking advantage of his professional ethics. In other words, members have been forced to pay excess fees applied by the doctor. The unfortunate thing in these cases is that the affected person cannot report these cases since there is no code, law, or regulation that regulates the price for medical fees. The only stated regulations, which are suggestions, are that of costs for care in operating rooms or emergency rooms, as well as the value for supplies and medications administered in hospitalization. Cases of members being taken advantage of are minimal but they do happen, which is why we always recommend a second medical opinion.

In Ecuador you can find different insurance plans, companies and brokers, but we recommend that before making a decision you always analyze the value of the deductible, the insurance company, the coverage of your medical plan, and its monthly payments. Once you have considered these points, analyze if keeping your insurance only with the IESS is the best option by trying to use your insurance, accessing medical appointments through the IESS, and evaluating the level of care. If after this you feel disappointed by the care you received, you can always opt for a supplementary plan. **If your budget is small, don't worry, there are plans from \$39.20 per month that could perfectly meet your medical needs while also using IESS for continuous medicine, care in case of pre-existing conditions, chemotherapy, or other ongoing needs.** The public health system will always be subject to the current government and its laws, while private insurance will maintain its coverage, regulations, and monthly payments regardless of the current government, which will guarantee you medical care on time and in the place of your choice.

The Stock Market: A Family Business

by Katiuska Viteri



HiExpat: Thank you very much Katisuka, it is an honor for us to have you as a guest in this edition of HiExpat Magazine. Your career in the stock market in Ecuador is possibly one of the most highly recognized. For almost 12 years as General Manager of the PLUSVALORES brokerage firm, you have been able to balance being a mother and CEO. Together with your daughter, you have both popularized the PLUSVALORES brand within this important economic sector of the country. From the perspective of a businesswoman, how do you see the current state of investments in the stock market in Ecuador?

Katisuka: Thank you very much for the interview. It is important to mention that the combination of being a mother and entrepreneur in a market primarily dominated by men has been very difficult but exciting. This wonderful adventure has allowed me to serve all kinds of clients and above all support my family. My job has given me many different experiences which has allowed me to open up new opportunities in different areas and countries. Currently, investments in Ecuador have grown mainly because they are safe investments. These investments are in secure currency and give more attractive returns than those offered by banks, giving investors greater growth in their assets with controlled risk.

HiExpat: When dealing with the stock market one must work to build solid trust with their clients. As you work with your daughter to instill this value within your business, how do you manage the demanding workload of your clients and family time?

Katisuka: I believe that the secret lies in defining work time and family time. My work schedule has always been set from 8:30 to 5:30 in the afternoon. I dedicate myself to work during those hours and afterwards is always time for my family, husband and daughters. I don't stop answering calls during this time, but I make it clear that during these hours I will not be able to address major issues. The support of two of my daughters within the company has been very important as well. It is important to mention that in addition to my daughters, my nephews and brother have also been involved in the business. My third daughter does not work with us as she is a biologist but we are all able to maintain work relationships at work and family relationships at home.

HiExpat: Dollarization has been fundamental for the political and economic stability of the country. Do you believe there is a connection between dollarization and how the stock market performs in Ecuador?

Katisuka: I believe that dollarization has given us economic stability. Unfortunately, political stability depends on other variables that, in my opinion, have not yet been resolved.

Dollarization has generated greater confidence for clients because they are no longer affected by currency devaluations.

HiExpat: A few months ago El Salvador adopted Bitcoin as the official payment currency for transactions, and on the streets you can see local businesses and street vendors indicating that they accept bitcoin payments. In the near future, do you think it will be considered as an alternative means of payment for transactions in Ecuador? How flexible do you think the market is to adapt to cryptocurrencies?

Katisuka: I believe that the cryptocurrency market, as long as it is a regulated market, can offer good conditions for investors. At the moment, as it is a platform that is not regulated, I think it generates too much risk and uncertainty for the investor.

HiExpat: What would you recommend for our readers who are considering investing in the stock market? Especially considering that the country's financial institutions pay between 5% and 10% annual interest for time deposits.

Katisuka: When a new person interested in investing approaches us for investment advice, the first thing they ask us is, "When is the best time to invest?" What I say is that it is always a good time to invest. It is important that we overcome our fear by seeking advice that will help us to invest with good risk management criteria.

Once we overcome our fear, the stock market offers very interesting investment options.





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by Manuel Avilés



by Manuel Avilés



by Manuel Avilés

by Peter Stromberg

Bird Tour

It's upon us, a special time of year. Sometime in May, generally, things change on the coast of Ecuador, the dry season begins. Off shore winds and the classic North swells that provide the waves for the surf season abide and are replaced by a consistent onshore wind. This wind over the eons has shaped and persuaded the sandy cliffs that tower out of the ocean like ancient walls protecting a lost city. As these magnificent golden towers jut out of the sand and water, you can see the delicate hand of the wind in shaping the landscape with her breathtaking way of expressing art through erosion. The seasonal winds are the paintbrush and the cliffs are the canvas of a landscape that changes and evolves into forever.

Because of these constant onshore winds and the cliffs that characterize the South American continent, a special combination called dynamic lift is created, and with that comes one of the great adventures and thrills in life...flying. More specifically what I mean is paragliding. The coast of Manabi is regarded internationally as one of the best paragliding destinations on the planet. Because of

our geographical location in the tropics we don't get hurricanes or other crazy storm conditions that come with the convergence of widely ranging temperatures in the air. Ecuador is in the tropics, so it stays pretty warm at the lower elevations of the coast which allows for safe and consistent flying conditions and breathtaking scenes.

When I came here in 2007 as a tourist, it was the first time I had witnessed paragliding. Maybe I had seen some skydiving on television but I had never seen anybody go flying without a motor. I didn't understand it or even think it was real. I remember seeing the brightly colored, empanada shaped parachute and the pilot playing around with the wind. It was love at first sight. I had never seen anything like it before, but my gut told me that I needed to do THAT.

Now, over fourteen years later, paragliding on the coast of Manabi is better than ever and growing steadily.

Starting on the southern coast around Montanita and ranging up to just north of Canoa you can find many places to fly. Wherever there is a cliff by the beach and a tourist scene; there is usually a tandem pilot there taking passengers on a real "bird tour." Not a tour where you walk around and look at birds, but a tour where you actually strap yourself in and get to fly with the birds, without the noise of a motor. You are the bird. There's something primal and nurturing in flying in silence with a flock of magnificent frigate birds as they cut through the air with grace and astonishing speed. It's so fun to bump the shy pelicans off their course as you see them coming in their V formations, trying to share the lift that the cliffs create.

Falcons and hawks are able to stop and hover, scanning the landscape for their next snack. Because they can stop mid-air, a paraglider can approach them from behind and sneak right up, close enough to make eye contact with the lizard hunters. As amazing as all of this sounds, and IT IS truly amazing flying with the different birds as they do, without the sound of a motor and just using the up drafts in the wind...it gets even better in July and August.

In July and August the hump-back whales make their yearly migration to visit their ancient nurseries and breeding grounds. Throughout the coast of Ecuador these gigantic creatures make their way back to their same “nesting spots” every year to have their babies and mate. During this time of year the male humpback whales will breach out of the water with their entire school bus sized bodies flying through the air. The airshow is a part of the courtship ritual that signals the mass of the male by the size of the splash. Bigger whale, bigger splash. I’ve yet to meet anyone that doesn’t stare with wonderment and slack the first time they see this spectacle of a giant monster breaching out of the water, it is something to behold.

The usual way to see the hump-back whales is by a tour-boat, and in Ecuador we are fortunate to even be able to see them from the land. It is so fun to be sitting at a restaurant in Manta for lunch and see the whales jump around while you eat. Anyway that you can see whales is great in my opinion but my favorite way to watch the whales is while paragliding. Flying with the whales.

The yearly migration of hump-back whales coincides with the best wind conditions of the entire season. During July and August the whales are here and they spend some time in this area, teaching the baby whales how to become whales. There are few things so burned in my memory as flying over the Pacific during a perfect sunset. A sunset with a staggering pallet of colors, from the most burning orange to the deepest blues, mixing the sky in with the greens of the Pacific Ocean. Just as one is thinking that this must be the most beautiful thing on earth and seriously contemplating if this is heaven... the whales started launching their enormous masses out of the water. One after the other flying through the air and slapping down on the water. It’s one of those times that you can experience the speed of sound. You can see these giants leap out of the water and crash back down to it with a great splash. The sound from the impact gets left behind as your eyes are somehow faster than your ears. Seconds later you can hear the sound of the crash and it dawns on you how big an animal must be to make a noise travel that far. You actually can hear them exploding back into the water.

Add paragliding to your Ecuador bucket list. Paragliding here has grown over the years and there is a surprising amount of locations that offer the sport in the mountains and on the coast. With the recent changes in technology, and growing popularity, the sport is becoming more safe and accessible to more people. It’s hard to describe the peaceful feeling of soaring with the birds, the only sound being the whispers of the winds and the crashing of the waves under a cotton candy sunset. Paragliding on the coast of Ecuador is something not to miss and if you’re lucky, and your timing is right, you might get a flight in with the whales.





TOPDENTAL

BY DR. VICTOR CARREÑO



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A Beautiful Multicultural Family

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ECUADOR LIVING COLUMN



by Ambar Quijije

HiExpat: Thank you so much for sitting down to do this interview with us. It really is a pleasure for us to have you in the special edition for Mother's Day. You have more than 10 years of experience working as media director for the government and as a political events consultant. Currently you are venturing into the real estate, marketing and advertising business as well, and as if this were not enough, you have formed a beautiful international family. Made up of your husband from the U.S. and your newborn girl who is half Ecuadorian and half American, how has the process of consolidating your international family and business in the city of Manta been?

Ambar: Consolidating our businesses has not been easy. Surely we have had the same struggles as any entrepreneurs in Manta, especially with jag.ec, our marketing agency, because technology is not as advanced as it is in the US. On the other hand though, it has been beneficial because we are the only ones who provide certain technological services and, above all, strategies that are not usual here. This is especially true for small and medium-sized companies. As for our family, our daughter has grounded us. We can no longer be the workaholics that we were before she was born. Thanks to the help of our team we have been able to devote all the time needed to focus on our daughter and watching her grow.

HiExpat: Among the main challenges that exist when having an international family are cultural differences, how do you balance North American customs combined with Ecuadorian culture in your family?

Ambar: Fortunately, my husband has always had an interest in Latin culture which helped a lot initially. From day one I got him used to having soup at lunch, even if it was 100 degrees fahrenheit. The truth is that I have also adapted certain basic customs and manners from his country, which are different from the ones I grew up with. And I've also learned that when we fight, a little Spanglish does not hurt the gringo.

HiExpat: As a mother and businesswoman, we're sure that your life changed once you became a mother. What world do you see your daughter growing up in, in terms of education, culture and health in Ecuador, 20 years from now?

Ambar: With two parents who are passionate about marketing and communications, I see my daughter taking advantage of every minute of her time. Wherever she wants to go in the world, she will learn to evolve and grow. Without a doubt she will embrace the qualities that make her, her, and love the two countries that made her, all the same.



HiExpat: For young couples coming from other countries, what should they expect when having a baby in the Ecuadorian health system?

Ambar: When it comes to the public health system, well, bureaucracy and poor customer service. I feel much safer with private health service. One can find bilingual doctors, new equipment, good service and, above all, excellent prices. To give you an example, a cesarean delivery costs around 1k, which in the U.S. could be 20k or more.

HiExpat: Many of our readers are curious about the expenses around raising a child in Ecuador. Can you tell us a bit about the pediatric care a baby needs and a final recommendation for those expats who would like to have babies in Ecuador?

Ambar: For a healthy baby, pediatric consultations with private, specialized and above all up-to-date doctors are necessary and valued between \$30-\$40 dollars. Vaccines are free at any health center.

Vitamins are also common and necessary for both mothers and children. They are cheap and valued around \$5-\$10.

However, in the case of an emergency or if any issues were to arise, I'd recommend obtaining a health insurance plan that costs between \$60 - \$100 dollars.




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Hi Expat

My Mom, The Perfect Companion

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by Juan Francisco Carrasco

Do you know where my adventurous spirit and my desire to know Ecuador come from? Well, those things come from my mom. Ever since I can remember, my mom has taken me all over Ecuador and if it wasn't for her I wouldn't know the millions of wonderful places around this beautiful country. Her adventurous spirit has allowed my family to have unforgettable moments and adventures. Thanks to her, my brother climbed his first mountain when he was only a month old. We have been to lakes located in volcano craters, underground waterfalls, lava caves, near volcano eruptions, and even in coral reefs in the middle of the ocean surrounded by sharks, all thanks to her. The fearless attitude of my mom has given us the opportunity to do things that other families I know have never done. Thanks to her passion to know Ecuador my adventurous spirit was born.

In this article, I would like to talk about my mom's favorite places in Ecuador and her love for this country. Something that I can't remember is how many times we have gone to Volcan Cotopaxi, because it's my mom's favorite volcano. I personally think that my mom has a special connection with this place because she is always happy when we go there. When the sky is clear, she could watch Cotopaxi from Laguna de Limpiopungo for hours with a smile on her face. If we are lucky and the snow is within our reach, we go up to the first shelter to enjoy the snow and the incredible landscape that Cotopaxi offers us.

Another thing that we never forget when we go there are the pictures. One of my mom's favorite activities is photography. She loves to take pictures of the landscape, and she could wait hours just to take the perfect picture of Cotopaxi.

Another place that my mom loves to go to is the Province of Imbabura. **My mother remembers all the times that her parents brought her to this province when she was only a child and her memories of the land is one of the main reasons we go there a lot.** She always tells us that when she was a child she loved to go to the bizcochos, cheese, and candles factories and enjoyed visiting the rose farms and the farmlands. Now she takes us to visit these places and I personally enjoy going there. During the pandemic, Imbabura became our most visited province because it was very close to us and offered us many awesome places to visit like the volcanoes of Imbabura, Cotacachi and Fuya Fuya. Also, Imbabura is known because of its great number of lakes. Some of these include the lakes of Cuicocha, Yahuarcocha, San Pablo, Mojanda, and Piñan.

Something that we usually do in Imbabura is visit Plaza de los Ponchos (The Otavalo Market). My mom enjoys looking at the handicrafts and other products from the community. Otavalo Market is a traditional craft market located in Otavalo and is known for its products that display our

culture in different ways. There you can find traditional clothing, jewelry, traditional embroideries, art pieces, musical instruments, handicrafts, wool products, and many other objects. When we go there my mom acts like a child and wants to buy everything she sees, from trinkets to blankets and even tableware, she would never pass up an opportunity to visit Otavalo Market.

Although my mom's favorite places are in the mountains, that doesn't mean that she doesn't love to visit the Ecuadorian Amazon and Coast. When we go to the beach she enjoys snorkeling because she gets to see all the things that are hidden below the water and finds all kinds of animals. My mom is a great swimmer and at the beach we always do swimming competitions and games to see who can find more fish. Also, my mom loves to sunbathe while hearing the waves crash on the shore. On the other hand, my mom's

favorite activity in the Ecuadorian Amazon is walking through the middle of the jungle. She prefers doing it while it rains, because when it rains we can hear the sounds of the frogs and toads while the little water drops hit the leaves of the jungle. My mom doesn't fear the little animals of the jungle, she is always searching behind the leaves and between the roots of the jungle floor with hopes of finding insects.

Now that I have the opportunity, I would like to thank my mother, not only because she inspired me to discover Ecuador and its wonderful places, but also for being the best mother in the world and a fearless adventuress that doesn't miss an opportunity to have a new adventure. She isn't like other mothers, she would bear the cold of the mountains, the rain of the forest, and even the coldest water in the ocean to give us the adventure of a lifetime.

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by Dr. Cristhian Vallejo

The Risk of Diabetes

The World Health Organization (WHO) is on alert, as diabetes is one of the most prevalent diseases worldwide. It is one of the main causes of dialysis, heart attacks, strokes, sexual dysfunction, blindness and other complications.

As physicians think about the best way to combat this disease, we have agreed that the first step is explaining the risks, complications, and causes to the public. In this article we will explore what diabetes is, prediabetes, the most common types of diabetes, how to diagnose it, and its complications.

What is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a clinical disease where there is a deficiency of a hormone called insulin, or a resistance to it. When someone has an absolute deficiency of insulin it means that they have low levels, whereas if one has a relative deficiency it means that even though they have enough insulin, the hormone cannot act correctly due to a resistance which does not allow it to function properly in our bodies.

Insulin allows sugar to enter our cells. Sugar or glucose is responsible for giving us energy, but it is not the only nutrient that does so. Lipids, ketone bodies, and other essentials in our body give us energy as well. However, when we have a low amount of insulin or it is not working properly, one will have high blood sugar levels and will also be persistently inflamed.

Most Frequent Types of Diabetes

Type I: This type is the one in which there is a deficiency of insulin in the body. It's generally autoimmune, which means that there are autoantibodies that attack the organ that produces insulin, the pancreas. In the pancreas there are cells called beta cells, these beta cells are the ones that have the capacity to produce insulin, and when these cells are attacked by antibodies (which means that our body recognizes these cells as foreign and destroys them), it causes an insulin deficiency. It is most commonly diagnosed in children, adolescents, or young adults.

Type II: In the case of type two, insulin resistance is the main cause, at first. Why? Mainly because of obesity, since when we are overweight there is a series of counterregulatory hormones which decrease the function of insulin. At first, our pancreas reacts by releasing more insulin, but we become more and more resistant and eventually the amount of insulin decreases. Over time, in addition to resistance, insulin deficiency usually occurs. The probability of developing type two diabetes is higher if you are 45 years of age or older, have a family history of diabetes or are overweight or obese.

Signs and Symptoms

Diabetes is generally a silent disease. This is why we recommend our readers get regular medical check-ups and always ask for testing of blood sugar levels. This is especially important for patients with metabolic diseases (obese, hypertensive, sedentary, etc). However, there are certain symptoms that are typical in diabetes, for instance:

- **Polyuria** - Excessive urination - When sugar levels exceed 180 mg/dl in our body, the kidney filters it and gets rid of it. Glucose takes water with it, so as we are filtering a lot of sugar, this sugar is accompanied by water, causing the patient to urinate a lot.
- **Polydipsia** - Excessive thirst - Many patients with excessive thirst drink soda, which increases the sugar intake again and causes a vicious circle.
- **Polyphagia** - Increased appetite - Due to the expulsion of sugar in the urine, the caloric uptake of sugar is lost and we quickly become hungry again.

Diagnosis: Do I Have Diabetes or Prediabetes?

Prediabetes: This condition means we have a higher risk of having diabetes in the next 3 to 5 years. How do you know if you're prediabetic? Through the following laboratory studies:

- **Fasting glucose: (100-125 mg/dl)** – Some guidelines take values from 110 to 125; however, the closer to 125 you are, the more likely you are to develop diabetes later.
- **Random: (140-199mg/dl)**
Glycosylated hemoglobin (HbA1C): (6-6.5) - This is a special type of hemoglobin that measures your blood glucose in the last three months. Some guidelines include values as low as 5.7.
- **Oral glucose tolerance test (OGTT): (140-199)** - This test allows us to get a head start, why? Because many times when fasting, your glucose is fine or at

the limit, but when we eat something with sugar it's altered. So for this test they make you eat something sugary and then take your blood sugar after 2 hours to see how your sugar levels have changed.

Complications

- **Diabetic retinopathy:** Damage to the retina that eventually leads to blindness or decreased visual acuity.
- **Diabetic neuropathy:** Very sharp pains in the lower limbs; in addition to vasculopathy (damage to blood vessels) - There are ulcers that become infected, don't heal, and these patients can end up as amputees.
- **Atherosclerosis:** Atheroma plaques form because the cells in the blood vessels (called endothelial cells) are usually inflamed. These plaques eventually begin to grow, obstructing the vessel, or rupture, causing heart attacks, strokes or vascular disease.

How do we avoid complications?

The best treatment to avoid complications is to change lifestyle habits and correctly follow pharmacological treatment. Exercise at least 3 to 5 times a week for at least 30 to 40 minutes a day. Any exercise is better than no exercise.

Get an appointment with your primary care physician as soon as possible. Remember that it is better to be safe than sorry!



by Marcos Chiluiza

Ecuador Digital Nomad Visa

In recent months, Ecuador has undergone important migratory and human mobility reforms. A new reform to the Organic Law of Human Mobility was issued on February 5, 2021, followed by the issuance of its respective regulations on February 18, 2022.

With this series of reforms, and the hope of a post-pandemic reality, the idea of implementing a so-called nomad visa was proposed by the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The so-called nomadic visa arises from the need to promote tourism, capital, consumption, and economic reactivation in the country after the pandemic.

It seeks to encourage foreign workers who are in the teleworking industry and who want to enjoy up to two years abroad, to come to Ecuador. Around two million tourists are projected in the next 3 years.

Currently 18 countries in the world offer this type of visa, Ecuador being the first to offer it in South America.

For access to this type of visa, the Ministry of Tourism released a list of countries that can apply for the visa. This list includes 183 countries, including the United States and Canada, which are the main countries of origin of the largest number of foreign residents in the country.

The aforementioned list can be found at the end of this article.

To access the nomadic visa, a series of requirements have been established. A minimum salary equivalent to \$1,275 per month, or savings in your bank account of at least \$30,600, as well as a contract with a foreign company on a telecommuting basis are required.

REQUIREMENTS

- Statement of account where it can be verified that during the last 3 months before the application the person received an income of more than \$1,275 or has savings equal to the amount of \$30,600.
- Proof that shows that the person provides services for a client that is outside of Ecuador, although it can also be applied if it justifies that he is the owner of a company created abroad.
- The nationality of the applicant appears on the list provided by the Ministry of Tourism.
- Health Insurance

For more information on this topic, you can request a free 15-minute appointment by clicking on the following link: <https://www.ecuaassist.com/contact-us-form> or emailing us at info@ecuaassist.com.

by Rick Cameron

I Should Have Done it 10 Years Ago

During the summer of 2019, after more than 20 years living in Woodstock, NY, the American political landscape and a desire for a totally different lifestyle persuaded me to sell my home and move out of the United States. Other than my ex-wife, who is perhaps my closest friend, I had no family tying me to any particular place.

As I thought about where I might go, ideas ranged from Bali to Thailand to Panama to Mexico to Costa Rica. All are places where I know a few people, but with the exception of Mexico, I had never been. As I began discussing my ideas with a good friend, she asked if I had thought about Cuenca. "What's a Cuenca?" said I. She proceeded to rave about this relatively small historic city with four beautiful rivers running through it, 8600 feet up in the Ecuadorian Andes. Conversations with a dozen or so other friends elicited similar sentiments, "You should go to Cuenca. You'll love it."

Although none of them had ever spent more than a week there on vacation, they were thoroughly captivated by Cuenca's beauty, history, architecture, and friendliness; a buddy in Santa Monica had actually lived in Cuenca...in 1968 with the Peace Corps, not exactly a source of current information, though his obvious love of the place and his affection and respect for Cuencanos were impressive. So encouraged, I devoted quite a bit of time studying Ecuador in general and Cuenca in particular.

Since, except for Mexico, I had not been to any of the countries on my list of possible destinations, Cuenca moved to the top of that list. Not being a sun-worshiping fan of heat and humidity (nor of snow and cold, for that matter), eliminating Bali, Thailand, and Panama was a no-brainer. That left Mexico and Costa Rica competing with Cuenca, and Cuenca, by and large, had almost everything I considered desirable: multiple

universities – which give a city a youthful vibe, lots of cultural activity and history, a friendly and welcoming population, a very reasonable cost of living by U.S. standards, and a climate described as 'spring all year round.' Truth be told, it's really 'autumn all year round'. Anyway, warm enough for me, and cool enough for the great loves of my life, Siberian Huskies. (Hey, that's really important!)

I have never been one to 'dip my toe' before diving in, and my move to Cuenca was no exception. I applied for and was granted a Temporary Residency Visa (for retirees in my case; different types of visas have different requirements). With the guidance of a very helpful and accommodating staff at the Consulate of Ecuador in Manhattan, I navigated the visa process without the need for any legal assistance. The process is, however, time consuming, exacting, and sometimes confusing and frustrating, but

is definitely manageable on one's own, if you have the time. Ecuador, as with most countries to which you might relocate, requires a variety of official documents, 'official' being the operative word. The most important of these will be proof of income documents. One or more documents to prove that you have a guaranteed monthly income that meets or exceeds [Ecuador's] income requirement, which amount varies with the type of visa you are applying for, along with an FBI Good Conduct Letter (to prove that your aka isn't Al Capone or Willie Sutton).

Documents must, by international convention, be 'apostilled', or certified as accurate and true by the highest relevant governmental authority, which so certifies this by affixing its seal to the document. This is where the confusion and frustration sets in. In my case, for example, my official government issued Social Security Benefits Letter had to be taken by me to a Social Security

Administration office (an hour's drive away) and authenticated with the signature of a titled officer of the SSA. This, with an application form to request apostille downloaded from the U.S. Dept. of State's website, along with a fee, had to be sent to the State Department. As to the Good Conduct Letter, the FBI is only allowed to use fingerprints to identify someone for a background check. I had my fingerprints taken by a company recommended by the FBI and sent the hardcopy, along with application form and fee, to the FBI (in West Virginia). A week or so later, I received a rejection email, informing me that my prints were unreadable and needed to be taken again. I spoke with the FBI in West Virginia, and it was suggested that just before being re-fingerprinted, I soak my fingers in Mexican hot sauce! Well, that didn't work. The FBI rejected my prints a second time. As a fallback, I got a "no criminal record" letter from the Woodstock, NY Police Department - proving, at least, that I was smart enough not to pee in my own backyard. This had to be notarized, taken to the County Clerk to certify that the notary's signature was authentic, and then sent to the NY Dept. of State to be apostilled.

I brought these documents, along with the two FBI rejection letters/emails, as well as high school, college, and graduate school diplomas, to the Consulate. Within hours, Dec. 30, 2019, I had my visa. (Proof of education is needed if you want to drive a car in Ecuador. I have now been here long enough to believe that, while proof of education may be needed for a driver's license, desire to drive in Cuenca is proof of insanity. Which, in and of itself, should disqualify any of us gringos from being allowed to drive. My first week here someone said "If you aren't quick on your feet, don't cross the street." Some advice should be heeded!)

Unfortunately, the pandemic delayed my arrival until November 2020, when I came to Cuenca for the first time. I spoke no more than a few words of Spanish, and moved here without friends or family. Brash as that might seem, I knew two things: that I did not intend to live in the United States again and, if not

happy with Cuenca, I could always pack my bags and go someplace else. My ex-wife came with me for a few weeks to 'keep me out of trouble' (how well our exes know us!). We shared a two bedroom duplex apartment in El Centro, the historic heart of Cuenca, and when she left, my expat experience really began: rarely had I felt so alone and depressed. In fact, when the car taking her back to Guayaquil for her flight to NY pulled away, my immediate thought was "Oh sh*t, what have I done? This doesn't feel anything like what I was expecting." I got lost walking around El Centro – this from a former geologist. I couldn't tell a cab driver where I wanted to go even if I knew where I wanted to go.

Without the help of iTranslate, I couldn't read the labels in Supermaxi - the 'A&P' for gringos who are terrified of the local mercados. I kept thinking "I don't have to stay here. I can always go to San Miguel...or Timbuktu."

Well, I'm now 18 months into the adventure of a lifetime. I'm sure that there are many places that I could have relocated to

where I would have eventually felt at home, as I now do in Ecuador. But I'm here, and **I am only sorry that I didn't do this a decade ago.** I'm writing this sitting at my desk on the tenth floor of the 11 story building I live in; other than the Cathedrals, very few buildings in Cuenca are more than 12 stories high, and 90% are no more than three stories. As I look up from the computer, I'm looking at mountains in Cajas, part of the Andes, at eucalyptus trees outside my building whose tops are above my eye level, and to my left, less than two hundred feet from the building, the magnificent Tomebamba River, bordered on both sides by beautiful greenways for walking, jogging, cycling, sun-bathing, or exercising with or without the outdoor equipment dotting one side of the river. It doesn't get much better. Do you know that Ecuador was the first country in the world to enshrine the Rights of Nature in its Constitution? Wow! And you can drink the water right out of the tap in Cuenca!

Moving to another country, with a different language and culture, I doubt is ever easy. To make the experience work, you need the

determination to make it work, patience, flexibility...and frankly, a really really laid back sense of humor. Absent any of these qualities, you're not going to be happy. If you come expecting locals to adjust to your way of thinking and doing, it ain't gonna happen. I have found Ecuadorians to be warm, friendly and generally very patient. Although loneliness was for me the biggest single hurdle* (being a "stranger in a strange land"), that has greatly diminished as I've acquired both U.S and Ecuadorian friends. I study Spanish every day, and absolutely love it. I never knew how fun and rewarding it would be to learn to write and speak in a second language. (I do, however, say "Sí" quite a lot in conversations with native Spanish speakers. Of course, sometimes "sí" is not the right answer. But what the heck, I'm a gringo).

***Obviously, if you relocate as a couple or family, as most expats do, the emotional support that that provides should make the transition a lot easier and less scary.**

by María Rodríguez

A Pursuit of Happiness

HiExpat: Thank you very much for your time Mrs. Maria. We know, from your stories, that you are an exemplary mother and you have been able to overcome a lot with your children despite the adversities that have arisen in your life. This is why we would like to share a bit about your role as a mother with our readers. HiExpat magazine is a magazine focused on inspiring and informing those North Americans who want to come to invest or retire in Ecuador. Can you tell us a bit about your life as a mother?

Mrs. María: Being a mother has been one of the most wonderful things that has happened to me in my life, my family is everything to me. I have four beautiful children and a grandson, as well as my husband who has been my biggest supporter in recent years. Arriving in Ecuador has been a very difficult and long process. Leaving everything from my country and starting from scratch was very hard, but with effort and sacrifice I was able to do it. With humility, faith, and hard work I have been able to succeed with my family by my side.

HiExpat: We know that you are from Colombia and made the move to Ecuador with your family. Can you tell us a little about the process of adapting to a new country and the challenges you had to face as a migrant mother?

Mrs. María: Initially, it was very hard for both my children and I to make the move. In Colombia we had all our comforts and everything that we were accustomed to. When coming to Ecuador we had to start from scratch and build the life we wanted here. It cost us a lot to make this move but it was worth it for our whole family.

HiExpat: Starting from scratch in a new place is quite a challenge, and even more so when you have to be the breadwinner of a family. Could you tell us a little about how you have combined your role as a mother and provider? What challenges have you had to face over time?

Mrs. María: I never thought I'd be a mother and a father at the same time. I always believed that I would have my husband by my side and never imagined going through this move alone, but my children have been my strength to continue fighting. They have been the reason I have preserved and gotten ahead even in the darkest of days. At first it was very hard to get a job. There were many days that I couldn't find work, but I never lost faith in myself and in the love I feel for my children. They have been my greatest joy and biggest blessing, giving me the strength to show many people that women alone can get ahead.

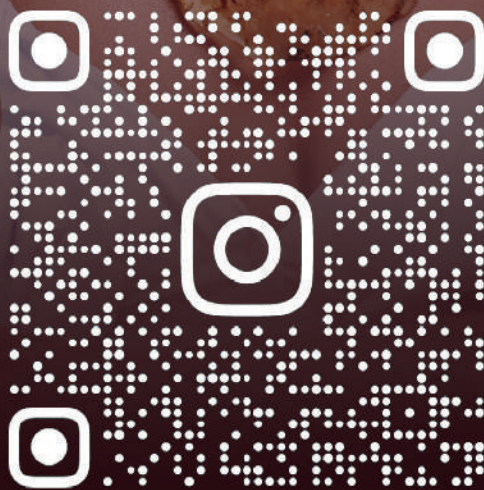
HiExpat: Based on your personal experience, what recommendation or advice would you give to all those mothers who are going through this process of change, of adapting to a new culture, a new start, in search of a better quality of life for their children?

Mrs. María: You arrive blind to a new country. You never know what you are going to have to go through, but you have to have confidence in yourself and have faith that you will be able to achieve what you set out to do. I think about giving my children a better life and that is what motivates me to continue. It is never too late to start from scratch in life.

HiExpat: Finally, could you give us a message for all our readers, from your point of view as a migrant mother, what are the benefits of raising children in a country as biodiverse as Ecuador?

Mrs. María: One of the main benefits of Ecuador is free education. There are many opportunities here, although some people may not see them or do not know how to take advantage of them. As a person who has come here from another country I see Ecuador as a gold mine of opportunities, for not only myself but for my children as well.





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by Rosita Saldarriaga

The Life of a Mom and Volunteer

Becoming the mother of a five-year-old girl changed my life. I began to see life differently, in fact, now I have a stronger reason to live. My reason's name is Alma and she calls me mom.

It has not been easy to fulfill this role, you are never prepared, even more so when you are 20 years old; however, my girl was a blessing to my family.

Discovering motherhood through her eyes has given me the best lessons and without a doubt has made me a better person. Motherhood has allowed me to understand the phrase "When you are a mother you will understand," which my mother used to tell me so much.

With Alma, in addition to a daughter, I have a companion and she surprises me every day. She is a wonderful, independent, and brave girl.

Being a young mother also multiplied my roles as a student, wife, friend, caretaker and as a social action volunteer for the Manta City Hall, where my husband is an employee of the Mayor.

**My days are crazy. Some days are more challenging than others, but as a team (Alma, Agustín and I) we are always able to accomplish what we set out to do. Of course not without the help of Alma's grandparents and friends as well though. Last Christmas we launched the Cheer-
ing Hearts campaign, which consisted of collecting the largest amount of candies and toys for the children in the neighborhoods of Manta.**

Those days were like running a marathon. We would get everything ready at home, go out to the neighborhoods, collect donations, put together the candy bags, then hand them out. In the middle of it all I was about to graduate as a lawyer, took care of chores in the house, and trained everyday. Sometimes Alma accompanied us, other days she couldn't and she stayed with my mother-in-law or my parents.

We would finish the marathon days at dawn and start the next day at the same pace. These were exhausting days but the best reward was getting to see the smiling faces of the little boys and girls who received their toys.

My biggest challenge in the midst of everything in motherhood is not missing important moments in my daughter's growth. Even though she has a thousand things going on we never want to miss a moment of her life. We strive to always be there for her because we live and work for her. As parents we want to leave a better city for her to live in just as we want for the children we serve in the City of Manta.







by Manuel Avilés

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