

Ecuador : Following one's dream, Traveling towards oneself

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Historic cities : the beginning of a dream

This trip to Ecuador started a few days before departure. On March 20, I was co-hosting a filmed debate called “What is happiness for you?”. **Happiness is not outside ourselves, but rather in our inner core.** Living one's life to the fullest, becoming fulfilled, being in harmony with one's needs, desires, values, aspirations and dreams. What drives me is sharing with other cultures. **One of my dreams was to go to Latin America.** I felt that it would be much more than a simple trip to discover a country and its culture. **It would also be a trip within myself.**

On March 22, despite air traffic strikes, I take off towards Quito. The capital city of Ecuador, at an altitude of 9,200 feet, surrounded by volcanoes culminating at 15,715 feet. I had picked an apartment in the Nuevo Centro, spacious and modern, with a great view of Quito. My host had prepared herb tea made with coca leaves, to stave off mountain sickness. The following day, **I discovered Quito, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.** A lively city, where urban Ecuadorians mingle with mountain people dressed in traditional garb.





Feeling the pulse of the city, of the culture

I was immediately touched by the kind looks, the smiles, the simple and joyful life that seemed to be present at every street corner. Walking throughout the city in search of its baroque churches, rococo palaces and hispanic houses, **I enjoyed losing myself in the paved alleys and letting myself be surprised by the street life.** Magical moments when friends meet, when street merchants hail passers-by. Running for shelter when the rain started falling. Stopping and watching. Feeling the pulse of the city, of the culture. Lunch in a local restaurant where the tables were only occupied by Ecuadorians. Everything was lively and animated. **I was already feeling in my whole being the sparkling joy of travel and of the discovery of others.**



On Saturday, **I flew to Cuenca, in the South-West of Ecuador,** to meet with the group with whom I was to spend time in the house of a Shuar Shaman. Cuenca, **a colonial gem that is also a World Heritage Site,** is 8,360 feet above sea level.



I was enchanted by the spirit surrounding Easter preparations there. **The flower market for offerings and ceremonies, the indigenous people come to sell their fruits and vegetables, the *palo santo* wood.** I sat and talked with them, I helped a merchant sell his bread loaves. I watched the teeming life in the park in front of the blue-spired, marble Cathedral, I danced a few steps with the local youths. **Joyous and genuine times which heralded the richness of the trip.**