

Travel poster comes to life. **Page 3-T**

San Cristobal offers cool relief. **Page 3-T**

Sunday Travel

Section **T**

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The Sunday Express-News

Ecuador small, fascinating country

by Edward I. Placidi

special to the Express-News

SOUTH AMERICA conjures up many images — the wilds of Amazonia, Indian cultures high in the Andes, the conquests of the Conquistadors, exotic creatures.

The continent brims with fascination, yet for travelers, its lures may appear prohibitively distant and far apart, costly and time-consuming to see, even dangerous. Not so.

A little bit of everything South American — and much of the best — is rolled into one inexpensive and compact destination — Ecuador. Even the forbidding in Ecuador is made accessible and safe on unique, well-organized tours.

Ecuador is a tiny country on the northwest coast of South America with diverse and striking topography.

It was here the Spanish built Quito, their most opulent city in the New World. Today's Quito, Ecuador's capital, possesses South America's largest assemblage of colonial art and architecture; the charming and elegant old center is still intact and deemed a protected World Heritage Site in its entirety by the United Nations.

Ecuador's Indians still flourish in their sanctuaries in the majestic Andes, which traverse the continent. Their weekly markets flow with handicrafts that have been widely recognized for beauty and workmanship.

Exploring the remote upper reaches of Amazonia by dugout canoes with experienced guides in Ecuador's El Oriente province is made easy and comfortable for tourists by a river boat called a "Flotel," a barge with a complete three-story hotel built on it.

You can walk, photograph and even swim among the wealth of strange creatures, many unknown anywhere else, that inhabit the Galapagos, Ecuadorian islands where

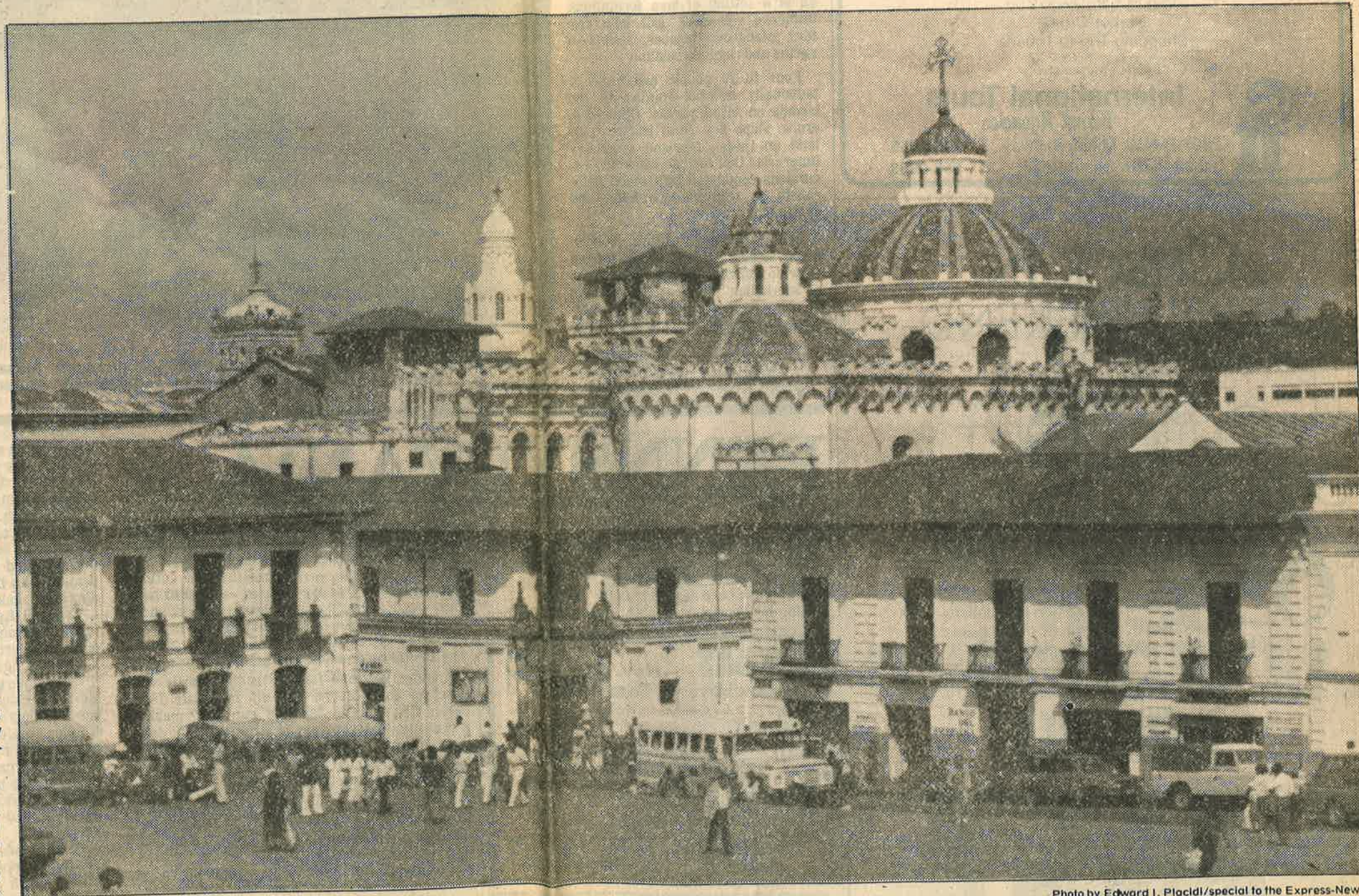


Photo by Edward I. Placidi/special to the Express-News

Quito's unparalleled Spanish colonial section has been designated in its entirety a World Heritage Site by the United Nations.

Indians in traditional attire descend on the market squares with their handicrafts and produce for a gala

Some 600 miles off the coast is

You can walk, photograph and even swim among the wealth of strange creatures, many unknown anywhere else, that inhabit the Galapagos, Ecuadorian islands where Charles Darwin conceived his theory on the evolution of the species.

QUITO is the gateway to the country, and Ecuatoriana and Eastern Airlines offer frequent, direct flights from New York, Los Angeles and Miami at rates comparable to roundtrip fares to Europe.

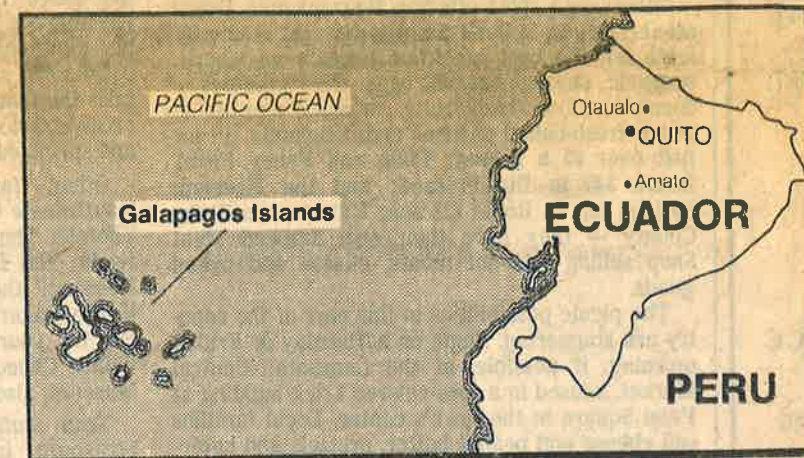
Once in Ecuador, however, prices are eye-opening bargains. For example, Quito's best hotel, the posh Colon, where OPEC held its last meeting, is only \$59 for a double.

At Rincon de Francia, among the top two or three restaurants in the city, a complete five-course gourmet meal with plenty of Chilean wine is about \$20 for two.

Almost directly on the equator but with a cool spring climate year-round on a high Andean plateau, Quito was lavished with gilded palaces, cathedrals, monasteries and broad squares by the Spaniards.

As in centuries past, the narrow cobblestone streets today are lined with traditional blue-trimmed, white-washed buildings with wrought iron balconies, heavy wooden doors and flowering and fountained courtyards.

The Spanish monks introduced European art forms to the skilled



Map by Tommy Richards/Sunday Express-News

Indian artists, and Quito's 57 churches are replete with their masterful creations. The Central Bank houses an impressive collection of 23,000 art objects, maps, artifacts and exhibits that trace Ecuador's history back thousands of years.

For some of the best Ecuadorian food in the country, try La Chozza Restaurant. Specialties include *ceviche*, or raw marinated fish, and *locro*, a rich potato soup topped with avocado. Don't underestimate the potent national cocktail, the traditional "pisco sour," made with locally-brewed, anise-flavored *aguardiente*, whipped egg whites, bitters and lime juice.

From Quito numerous overnights and day trips through

the Andes are possible down the dramatic, volcano-studded Pan American Highway, the "main street" of South America.

One of the most popular jaunts is to the equatorial monument an hour from Quito, where you can have your photo taken with one foot in each hemisphere. Two miles away are the hilltop ruins of Rumincococho, a 6th-century Indian fortification with an expansive vista of volcanoes and plunging chasms.

WITHIN a few hours drive of Quito are the colorful and bustling weekly Indian markets. Best bets are Otavalo on Saturday, Ambato — Ecuador's largest — on Monday and Pujili on Wednesday. Thousands of

Indians in traditional attire descend on the market squares with their handicrafts and produce for a gala weekly affair of haggling, gossip and food.

The most famous market is that of the Otavalo Indians, the ambitious and prosperous craftsmen/merchants who travel South America selling their belts, jewelry, beads and colorful panchos, sweaters and blankets made from the finest wool.

Bargaining is generally done silently by gesture here — with women in embroidered blouses, shawls, long skirts and blue and white head cloths — and the market is in full swing at mid-morning. Also, nearby is the wood-carving center of San Antonio de Ibarra and Calderon, home of the famous "bread dolls" made of dough painted in bright colors.

For an atmospheric overnigher, just outside Otavalo is Hosteria Chorlavi, a fully-restored, antique-filled, 150-year-old hacienda.

AFTER an hour's flight from the capital aboard a 32-seat Ecuadorian army plane, travelers arrive at the tiny, somnolent river port of Coca. Each year about 1,000 tourists board canoes fitted with twin outboard engines here and are transported down the Napo River to the Flotel.

The Amazon jaunt is three days of educational adventure in the jungles and rain forests — but padded by

Some 600 miles off the coast is Ecuador's living laboratory suspended in time, the Galapagos Islands.

the Flotel's good food, cozy cabins, well-stocked bar and sunbathing on deck. Well-versed guides lead expeditions by canoe to track monkeys and their antics high in the trees; to an eerie lagoon for piranha fishing, barbecue and a swim with piranha, electric eels and manta rays. While most passengers decline a dip, guides swim freely claiming there's no danger. The guides also lead expeditions to algae-filled lakes for the ultimate bird-watching extravaganza.

Treks into the forest are another highlight.

The high canopy of vegetation produces a world of shadows and mysterious dark corners below, emblazoned with scattered bright blossoms. Underfoot, the forest floor is squishy and wet, traversed by thick columns of leaf-cutter ants each carrying a piece of leaf 19 times its weight; a mixture of ornithic song and insect cacophony fills the air.

Guides pop open a plant pod inhabited by ants that protect the leaves from other insects, chop off

vines that provide fresh drinking water and shave down a 15-foot palm to offer a tasty treat the size of a small banana, a heart of palm.

It's the utmost nature tour but is not for everyone. The sun is fierce and, coupled with high humidity, can be trying, particularly after hours on hikes or in canoes.

Sometimes dark clouds abruptly swoop in and suddenly you are tossing in the canoes under a blinding overwhelming deluge. The temperature drops 20 degrees, winds pick up, thunder cracks viciously and the raindrops are so large they sting.

SOME 600 miles off the coast is Ecuador's living laboratory suspended in time, the Galapagos Islands. Ever since Charles Darwin visited the 10 islands in 1835 and subsequently published "The Origin of the Species," they have been renowned for their remarkable and

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ECUADOR

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mysterious flora and fauna. Today the islands are a tightly regulated and protected National Park of Ecuador, and tourism is limited to 12,000 people per year.

Visitors mingle with prehistoric red-and-green-trimmed marine iguanas; blue-footed boobies; 500-pound tortoises; sea lions that frolic with you as you snorkel; the flightless cormorant birds; lava lizards — an endless roster of creatures. And all in a setting of lava formations, immense volcanoes, salt lake craters, mangrove lagoons, stands of cactus and rugged coastline.

Four to 10 people can enjoy a personally tailored routing to the islands on hired yachts. Otherwise, cruise ships hop from island to island on three-, four- and seven-day itineraries that include hikes and excursions conducted by trained naturalists as well as swimming and snorkeling.

From strolling Quito's cobblestone streets to bargaining for an Otavalo poncho, fishing for piranha or snorkeling with sea lions, diverse Ecuador is the best of South America in a nutshell.

Edward I. Placidi is a free-lance writer from New York City.

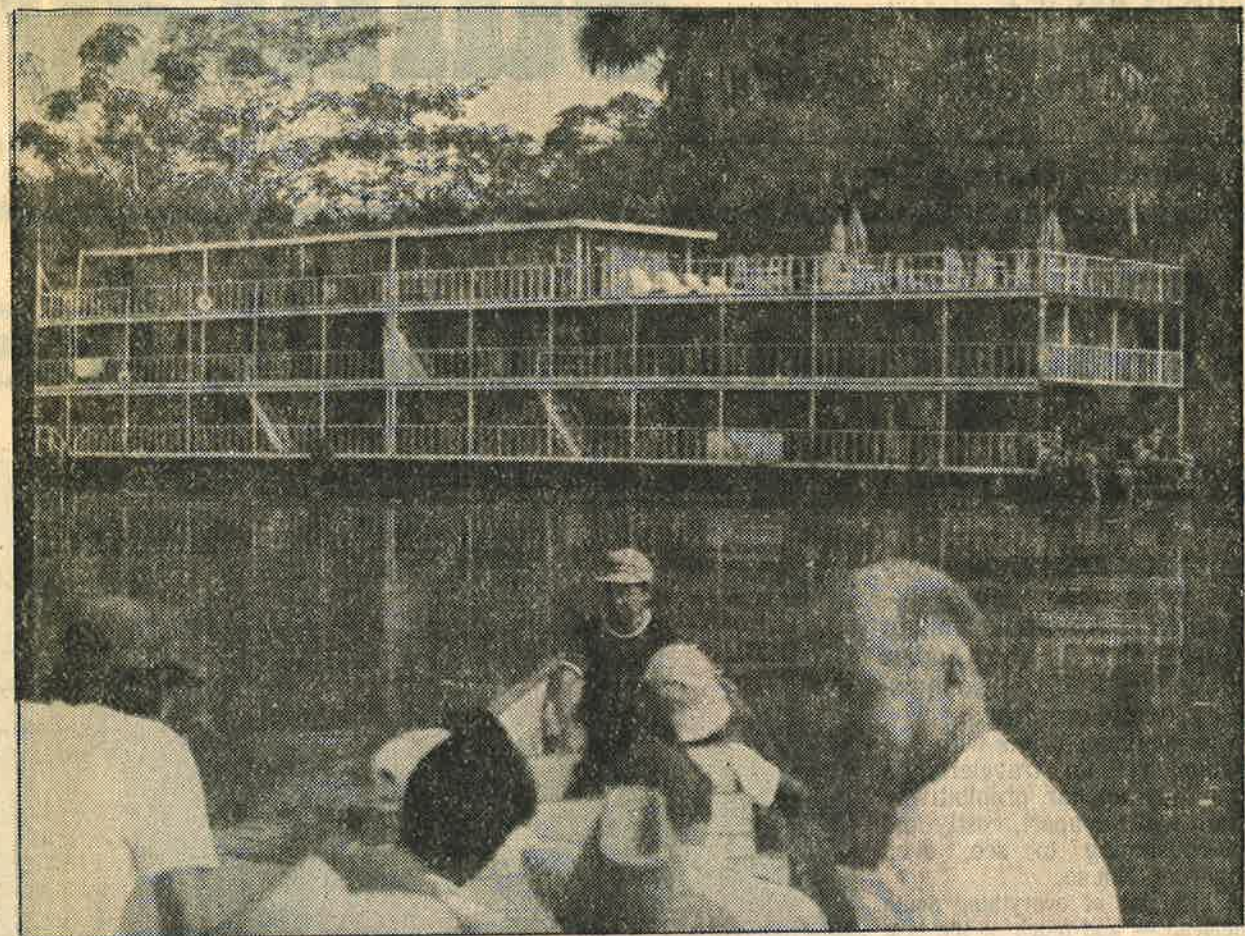


Photo by Edward I. Placidi/special to the Express-News

Adventurous tourists return by motorized canoe to a 'Flotel' after a day's adventure in

Ecuador's Amazon region. A 'Flotel' is a barge with a three-story hotel built on it.

PENNSYLVANIA

Continued from Page 1-T

chow chow, plus a couple of unlikely starters, cracker pudding with coconut and a chocolate cake with rich caramel icing. "Why wait till you're full to have dessert?" Betty says.

Hot beef-barley-vegetable soup follows, along

with green salad topped with warm bacon dressing, hot homemade bread and sweet farm butter; then rare roast beef, baked ham, Betty's own Chicken Stolz — saffron-flavored cream chicken on flaky pastry squares — mashed potatoes, fresh vegetables with brown butter, and a choice of desserts from hot apple pie to black raspberry crumb cake with vanilla ice cream. The Groffs recommend you bring your own wine.

Another longtime favorite is the Shartlesville Hotel in Shartlesville, just off Interstate 78 in Berks County. The "all you can eat" meal is served family-style from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily, except for a brief closing from Christmas through mid-January, for about \$8.50 a person, children under 10 eat for half-price.

Smiling, motherly waitresses bustle back and forth with heaping platters of chicken pot pie, sausages, ham, potato "filling" — mashed potatoes with onions and buttery bread cubes — baked beans, vegetables, the traditional "seven sweets and seven sour" relishes, shoofly pie, tapioca pudding and homemade applesauce. Beer and wine, as well as the non-alcoholic birch beer, are for sale by the glass.

ings. Special events at the farm museum include a Crafts Day the first weekend in June, Harvest Days the first weekend in October and old-fashioned Christmas celebrations in mid-December.

The Amish Farm and House on Route 30 just east of Lancaster is informational and engaging. Remember, however, not all "Amish" attractions are operated by the Amish, who usually avoid contact with the traveling public and who do not appreciate being photographed.

Tranquil Ephrate Cloister on Route 272 is an historical monument, and was once home for Seventh-day German Baptists who practiced celibacy and a rigorous lifestyle.

Other interesting stops include Flory's Mill at East Petersburg off Route 30 which still processes 13 flours and grains the old-fashioned way; Kitchen Kettle Village in Intercourse which sells homemade jams and jellies, cookies and breads, hand-dipped candles, bonnets, quilts and furniture made on the premises. The People's Place, also in Intercourse, is a museum and craft shop that interprets the Amish and Mennonite way of life for visitors.

Every Friday until 10 p.m., the famous Green Dragon Market and Auction takes place near Ephrata with acres of fresh produce and baked goods, meats and cheeses, flea market bargains and livestock auctions.

Sundays, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Adamstown is

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