

Hi

As most of you know, I usually like to keep a fairly low profile around here, particularly as I'm currently living very illegally in a volatile South American country, working very illegally in a very legitimate private primary-secondary school, and striving simultaneously to make a decent living and also to keep my nose relatively clean so that I can quietly continue these illicit activities for as long as I please; hopefully until December, at which time I will probably sneak across a border to the north or south somewhat illegally in the wee-est hours of the darkest night and begin life all over again quite happily and legally in another South American country. To this end, I completed my first ever business negotiations in Spanish this week. It was a notable achievement in another foreign language, and I felt very proud of myself. I guess it helps that I was dealing with an industry with which I am very familiar, having dealt with these types of things in the past; the offset printing industry...

Hmmm... I hear you wondering... What the hell is Roni doing meddling around in the offset printing industry in Ecuador? Well, you see, I had this little idea... Oh no! I hear you wail! Actually, I've had a lot of interesting little ideas lately... But my less-than-legal status has forced me to keep my tongue far away from my well-worn cheek, my nose pretty close to the ground, and my ass in the air. (these days my ass is smaller and way more inconspicuous!) Therefore, a new magazine called "Ecuabullshit" is not on my list of things to do in Ecuador. (YET!) However, under the guise of my familiar "Footprints" moniker, which I also used in Istanbul, I've begun a little touring business in cahoots with a family living in Monpiche. They have a hotel (Mama), a beach bar (Son 1; Casi Guapo) and a pizzeria on the waterfront (Son 3; Cerrano) and the cutest one (Son 2; Chavo) is also a surfing guru (read: surfing instructor, tour guide, beach acrobat and camp cook). So, we decided to see what we could do with a few nicely designed brochures and posters, with the help of a few friendly travel agencies and some well placed (and well written) travel pieces in the local English language press. Hence my recent visit to the printing house.

After two days of tough negotiations in which I demanded huge discounts and superior quality – and got them. We printed 1000 trifold brochures which I picked up less than 24hrs after I ordered them. I've left some of them around Quito in various locations; hotels, travel agencies, Spanish schools, dance schools and a few bars. I anticipate it will take about a month to run out of pretty brochures. So, am I crazy? Well, the definitive answer to that complicated question has been hotly debated all around the world by many people for many years. (Off the record, I can tell you the answer is a resounding HELL, YES! And I thoroughly enjoy it!) And of course, people who know me well know that this project isn't really about making money... it's about doing something interesting and having fun, being creative, learning new things, using the language I'm still learning, living in the moment... and, of course, taking risks... So, for the incredible investment sum of \$135USD in my short-term uncertain future (at a time when I'm kinda broke, as usual), I'm starting a new mini-business venture; *Footprints Ecuador*... Wish me (all of us) much luck!

Crossing the equator twice a week has become part of life... In keeping with this, I'm off to the beach again tomorrow night, but not before I bombard *La Mariscal* with my brightly colored brochures promoting the *Magical Beach Tour* in Esmeraldas. With plans to visit every backpacker hostel and hotel in the new (*La Mariscal*) and old (*Centro Historico*) quarters of the city and talk to as many travel agencies that I can interest in my venture, I will be busy for the next month or so. And since Quito is so walkable, I'll get a ton of exercise while I'm at it. There is nothing like breathing in freshly farted clouds of aromatic diesel fumes spewed from hundreds of city buses at 10,000 feet to make you feel alive and well... (Hello! Why do you think I spend three days a week on the coast!!!) I'll also arm-wrestle friendly tourists into carrying brochures to various other beach resorts, touristy towns and even the Galapagos Islands as they move around the country... I anticipate being everywhere within a couple of months (i.e.: The

Magical Beach Tour brochure will be everywhere)... And the hotel in Monpiche will be covered in tour posters too...

Then... there is the webpage to start thinking about... (with intermittent internet services and unreliable connections, I'm not quite there yet...) There is an irony in this as I would dearly love to vanish completely off the face of the planet and live in a grass-roofed bamboo hut on an isolated tropical beach/island without electricity and running water, grow my own organic fruits and vegetables, harvest free-range eggs, produce my own goat's cheese, make my own clothes from hemp, and totally forget about computers, mobile phones, i-pods, MP3 players and all the other mystical wonders of modern technology, and yet, this is the only connection – however feeble – I have to the rest of the world, family and friends, and to a reality other than my own... And it's incredibly important to me...

You know, after my last missive I was thinking that there are many other things I also like about living in Ecuador... One, that there are garbage bins in the streets. I haven't lived in a country that keeps garbage bins in its streets for a long time. Most cities are feebly trying to prevent some spineless coward from placing a scatter bomb in a bin and killing 100 innocent people. That does not seem to be an issue around here. I can eat my 100% natural *guanabana* (soursop) ice-cream/chicken shawarma/warm yucca bread and discard the wrappers in a bin on the street. After years of carting soggy, dripping garbage around in my pockets, it's nice. It's the littlest things that make the biggest differences... I also like that, despite the fact that I'm living in a city of over two million, people in the street – random strangers – smile and greet each other all the time; "good morning", "good afternoon", "good evening"... The openness of people, and their willingness to be friendly is great. Polite drivers stop to let people cross the streets... I like that too... These things give me a sense of kinship and belonging. I find I smile a lot, although walking around the street with a big shit-eating grin is not always wise! Way too many *Ecuadoriaños* tend to think they were created solely to become the "Latino Lover" of my dreams which is SOOO not true!!! (Well, it is true for a very select few, but not THAT many!) Maybe this particular "*mamacita rica*" needs to keep her "J-Lo" ass out of the air and closer to the ground too!

The new house is nice. It's enormous – a huge old rambling house that's kind of like a frat house filled with young students and just-starting-out professionals (It suits me; I'm always learning something, and forever starting new). The rent is \$60/mth – yes, I just said SIX, ZERO US dollars per *month*. Obviously, it has its inconveniences at this price... like a shared bathroom which is large and breezy and does not retain heat... But I'm usually only here three nights a week (and only two nights last week 'cos the weekend was a long weekend to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the independence of Quito. And I won't be here at all next week 'cos I'll be lazing on the beach for ten days! YAHOO!! It's the last chance I'll get to take a real break before school starts again).

The house is just four blocks from the old crazy house (which was \$150/mth) and I already feel like I live in a very different part of town. Four big goofy slobbery dogs greet me at the gate when I come home and escort me through the garden and up the stairs to my door, grinning, drooling, wagging their tails, and competing for scratches around the ears. The owner is deaf and can't hear a thing, so loud music and partying with friends is not a problem! At home I don't see much of the other inhabitants... I'm not even sure how many people live in this house! No one who lives here speaks a word of English... Actually, no one in Monpiche speaks English either, so these days about the only place I speak English is in the classroom at school... And my students always look shocked when I burst into song in Spanish during the breaks... (One of my favorites is a Reggaeton tune by Daddy Yankee – *Llamada de Emergencia* – which I know pretty well now). "*Ven y sana mi dolooooooooooooorrr! Tienes la cura de esta amooooooooooooorrr!*" :D

The new digs are also closer to the bus stop and even closer to the restaurants and nightclubs where I like to dance Salsa whenever I get the chance – i.e.: tonight! Yippee!! (Although I still have to "*cinderella it*" 'cos it's a school day tomorrow and I need to be

up at 6.30am to catch the bus.) I was supposed to cinderella last night too as my Jamaican friend Ramon and I teamed up again last night to win the Pub Quiz at Finn McCools -- with our diplomat and teacher team-mates in the team called "Leeza wants to sing again". It's great 'cos the pub is a three-minute walk from home.... Unfortunately, I turned into a pumpkin before I got there...

The only real downside is not having internet at home (more of that irony!), which means I'm only connected for about 20-30 minutes a day, four days a week while I'm at school (somewhere between 8am-12noon my time). It's enough to check email, but the totally wrong time zone to communicate with family... Sorry guys! (Unless, of course, you wanna stay up until around 12midnight-3am your time so we can talk!) Yeah, yeah, yeah... I KNOW!

Big love, big hugs, big luck!

Roni



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