

Hola!

Sitting with a plate of fresh sashimi in front of me, the fish just brought in from the boats a few minutes ago, sliced into thick fillets a few seconds later... prepared in the kitchen across the street just minutes after that... add a dot of wasabi, a squeeze of fresh lime, a splash of thick soy sauce and a dab of the local chili sauce; aji... there are not words to tell you how good it is... (not to mention that it cost only \$2 to make.) THIS is life! Although, I eat so much raw fish that I'm probably in danger of waking up one morning to discover I've turned into a sea lion...

So, as I consume a large bowl of raw albacora, thoughts about Christmas and the New Year whirl in my head. So far away from family and friends, and yet still feeling very connected. Filled with well-being and happiness, I've had a great year... starting off in Mexico in January where I was teaching English to rambunctious teenagers for six months, and then moving to Galapagos in July to teach, write, eat fish and dive. Even after all these months, the 7km walk to Tortuga Bay every day is still refreshing and rejuvenating. Standing barefoot on the warm, fine white sand, I always feel a wave of gratitude and appreciation that my privileged feet are planted on one of the most beautiful beaches in the world.

We (Jennifer, Laura May and me) spent Christmas Day stretched out on sarongs, sunning on the beach, swimming, napping, doing cartwheels and handstands, taking crazy photos of each other, and studying for the Emergency First Response and Rescue Diver exams that we passed yesterday with flying colors (see pic of Successful Students... the guys in the pic are the PADI Open Water students that passed the day before). Jennifer was our instructor and Laura May was my fellow student. Our classrooms have been Charles Darwin Beach and Tortuga Bay. I don't think I will ever be able to study anything again if I don't have knickers full of sand... I'm now qualified to save your life if you get into trouble while diving. Next step is the Nitrox course on 2-3 January, then hopefully a divemaster's course; which requires 60 dives to complete the qualification. I need to do another eighteen dives. Guess I'm still working on that...

Christmas in Ecuador is mostly celebrated on 24 December. We attended the Macarron's Scuba staff dinner at a local restaurant and exchanged Secret Santa gifts amidst raucous laughter and much cheering. It was a lot of fun. I ended up with a new pair of flipflops... finally! The old pair had a large hole in the sole and I just hadn't got around to getting new ones, even though hot road on my foot bothered me every time I walked anywhere. After dinner, we populated one of the local bars and danced until dawn – well, almost dawn! – shakin' our thang in the crowded pub. I don't think I've ever seen Limon Y Cafe quite so packed to the rafters before. It was one of the most unusual Christmases I've ever had, and also one of the most fun.

After our leisurely Christmas Day on the beach, Amy joined Jennifer, Laura May and me for dinner at Jen's house. We cooked prawns and tuna and made the biggest salad I've ever seen in my life, and then chilled on the roof for a while before heading into town to Bongo Bar to see other people and exchange Merry

Christmases with everyone. It seemed like the whole town was out and about, and people who had only said hi casually in passing before were kissing and hugging us and stopping to have a chat. It was nice. We all made some new friends over Christmas.

Last night we went to Jill and Xavier's wedding ceremony. They passed a ribbon around the deck at Angermeyer Point and everyone present hung onto it. Then, the rings were threaded through the ribbon and as they passed each person, blessings and messages were called out over the flute music. It was really nice. Jill was so happy, she cried. Xavier almost had to have the grin surgically removed from his face. We ate sushi and beef kebabs and danced the night away... again, until dawn!

I'm looking forward to seeing in a new year in Galapagos. I've heard all kinds of great things about the celebrations in the streets and have plenty of friends who are keen to go and enjoy all the festivities. I wish you all of the best for the coming new year, and hope that it brings you everything you need, want and desire.... as for me... I want simple things; to eat fish and dive!

Big love, big hugs, big bubbles,

Roni

PS: I had a request to PLEASE send pics of me that did NOT involve water... If you would like to see those pics, let me know and I'll send them...



[Successful Students.JPG](#)