

Hi,

Season's Greetings! I hope you're healthy and happy, and ready to face the fastapproaching silly season. Happy to report that there's not much evidence of Christmas around here, apart from a few decorated trees in public places and a few extra shops selling shiny bits and sparkley bobs for Christmas trees. Supermarkets are still normal places to shop where shoppers are not bombarded with corny Christmas Carols or overwhelmed by fancy glittering displays of seasonal frippery. It's almost like any other time of year in the city. On the coast, you wouldn't even know it's December if you didn't have a calender in the house! It's a bit hard to believe another year is almost gone; it seemed like such a short time. So much has happened this year it's hard to think about everything at once. I started the year in Galapagos, and will finish it on the beach. In the time between, I've learned once and for all that I'm not a city-girl... Only 14 sleeps to go until I leave the city to go and live on the coast... YIPEE!

It's over six months since I first discovered Mompiche kind of by accident while bumping around the coast of Esmeraldas looking for a decent beach to chill out on. I've been traveling from the city to the coast to be there almost every weekend since – a 10-hour journey. It's not something we often think about when buying a bus ticket, but I spend two nights a week squooshed into a metal tube on wheels with 43 other people, sleeping side by side with total strangers, squeezed closer together than most married couples, experiencing the ultimate in yogic contortions trying to get comfortable while speeding through the night to reach the coast by morning. Arriving more shattered, more stiff and sore, and in more desperate need of a massage every weekend, I'm looking forward to 24 December; the last trip to the coast (I'm treating myself to a plane ticket. Merry Christmas!).

This year I totally gobsnacked myself – as well as a few of my friends and some of my family – by buying a block of land on the coast. For the princely sum of \$6000USD, which I carried in three packets of 100 x \$20 notes in cash on the bus from Quito to Muisne to pay for the land, I bought 304.39m² (13m x 20.3m x 18.3m x 18.6m). That's just slightly less than \$20 per square meter of dirt – \$19.71; a gift. Conveyancing was done by the local public notary for \$90. The title deed issued by the local municipality will cost \$147.50 once the application is processed (it takes about a month). After a week's vacation, after celebrating Christmas and New Year on the coast, I'll begin the process to apply for permission to build my very first house in January 2010.

The house will be about 170m² spread over three levels with a 3m x 3m 'bird's nest', designed to view the sea, built into the roof at the top. Think hammocks, tropical plants, sea and river views from all four sides... It will be an 'artistic-looking' house of driftwood, trees, bamboo, bone, sea shells, recycled bottles, river rocks and a bit of cement to keep things in order... it will also be as environmentally friendly as I can make it; composting toilets, recycled water, lots of trees... etc. So far, I've planted two mango trees, an avocado tree and a pineapple, and have plans for many more fruit trees, shade trees and a thick jungle-type garden, but need to dig a well for the water supply. There is underground water, I just need a shovel! In the meantime, I've discovered there is a whole new list of the Spanish terminology I need to learn to build a house... If you're curious about the language needed to conduct all the transactions necessary to buy land in Ecuador, yes, I did everything in Spanish with little or no help!

The school performance of THRILLER is finally over! Thank goodness! After weeks of frustrating "rehearsals", we performed on Friday 4 December for the *Festival of Quito* with all the parents in attendance, most more curious about what the hippie-style Director of the English Department was doing than curious about how their kids have been doing at school. Now the all the scary masks and dirty, ripped clothes have been put away, I can live without screaming at 120 unimaginative, uncreative, unresponsive 'monsters' who still have no idea how to form a straight line, much less step in time... It was akin to herding feral cats, an occupation I'm very happy to leave to their parents from now on. And I'm very pleased to not have to listen to Michael Jackson again... Nearly one hundred times a day, the same song repeated over and over and over gets dull really fast!

Instead, I put my hand up for another project that will create more repetition in my life. After a year of putting his GACC ([Activists Against Contamination Group](#)) project together piece by piece, Alex is ready to rock both the Ecuadorian government and the industrial community next year with a series of mini-projects designed to create interest,

to educate and to raise awareness about the problem of garbage, not only in Muisne, but all over the coast and then the entire country. He asked me to write a short play to perform primarily at schools on the coast. So after a few weeks of wracking my brain for ideas, I wrote a 15-minute play – in Spanish – to rehearse and perform with 12 members of GACC. Naturally, it's about garbage. That will be my project for the next year, which will also include original music (some great songs about garbage) from the GACC Band; an improvisation group that makes magical music. Last month I built a *lagerphone* to add to their musical repertoire and I'm currently teaching them all how to use it – much less like herding feral cats, much more like teaching interested people. I'll be presenting the concept of my play at next week's GACC meeting. Until now it's been a bit of a secret between me and Alex, but we both think the response will be very good, and we believe the interest in performing at schools will be good too. We'll need to convince the Department of Education that it's a good idea (that will be our biggest challenge: wrestling with deadheads!) and we'll also have to do some workshops to make masks and costumes, and paint the backdrops, but that will be part of the process too... I'm looking forward to doing a real project with real people! We've been doing much the same for the preparations for New Year's Eve. In Latin America, the old year is represented by mannequins that are burned at midnight to leave space for the new year to come in. We've been stuffing old clothes with banana leaves to create the mannequins, and we'll put papermache heads on them this week. On the day they are set up in various poses with different conversations – painted onto coconuts – about garbage running around each mannequin in the group. Should be interesting. So, before it even started, the New Year brings some wonderful surprises I never imagined... A house! I never imagined owning a house... A play! I never imagined writing a play – and especially never in Spanish! And a huge breadbasket filled with more surprises, challenges and events as the year unfolds. I wish the same for you too... big love, big hugs, big surprises,
Roni
9-12-2009



Carving fruit bowls



Carving signs for the camping ground.



Painting signs.



Gorgeous



My 300 square metres of earth.