



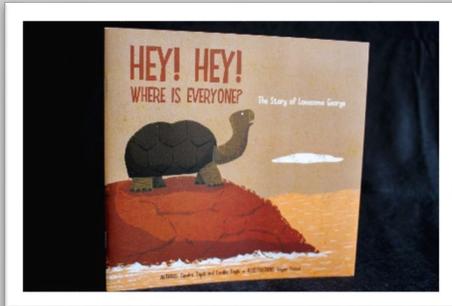
Institute for Regional
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UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Ecuador Discovery Box

Item & Photo

Description

Lonesome George book



The most famous denizen of the Galapagos Islands, Lonesome George was, until his death in 2012, the last surviving member of the [Pinta island sub-species](#) of giant tortoise. The islands were named for the giant tortoises that thrived in an environment with few predators; that is, until humans arrived and nearly hunted the various species of tortoises to extinction. Until 1971, it was thought that the Pinta sub-species was extinct, until George was found. Despite many [efforts to find him a mate](#), George died alone at an estimated age of 100. His story illustrates the fragility of the Galapagos Islands and their diverse ecosystems, and how recent efforts at conservation must struggle against the islands' history of exploitation.

Poncho & alpargatas shoes



Indigenous traditions are strong in Ecuador, and one of the places where this is most evident is the northern Sierra town of Otavalo. There, it is common to see men and women wearing traditional clothing. Women may [dress](#) in elegant white *camisas* (blouses), *rebozos* (shawls), tight black *anaku*s (skirts), and beaded *walkas* (necklaces) and *maki watana* (bracelets). Men in Otavalo commonly wear ponchos and white trousers, as well as felt hats. Men also [wear](#) colorful shoes made from cactus fiber, called *alpargatas*.

Apron with recipe for preparing Guinea pig



This apron features a recipe for preparing *cuy* (Guinea pig). Since the pre-Colombian era, Guinea pig has been a special dish for people living in the Andean highlands of Ecuador and nearby countries. Traditionally, Guinea pig was reserved for special occasions and eaten mostly by the elites of Incan and other indigenous societies. After the Spanish conquest, Guinea pig remained an important dish in the new *mestizo* (mixed) culture. Generally, guinea pig is seasoned with cumin and roasted over charcoal, although in certain regions it can be fried. Guinea pigs that are raised specifically to be eaten are fed a diet of alfalfa, and the meat is generally much leaner and more fibrous than chicken. Guinea pig continues to be an important dish that is served on special occasions, like baptisms or festivals like the *Inti Raymi*.

El Diabluma



El Diabluma is a contraction of the Spanish word *diablo* (devil) and the Quichua word *huma* (head), and is a mask traditionally worn during the festival of *Inti Raymi* (Festival of the Sun), celebrated in the northern Andean province of Imbabura in June. *Inti Raymi* is an indigenous festival inherited from the pre-Colombian Incas, who gave homage to the sun in hopes that it would not disappear and leave the world in darkness. *El Diabluma* has the mission of scaring away demons who might threaten crops. During the festival, the figure dances and plays wind instruments. Its continued popularity demonstrates the syncretism of Ecuadorian culture, blending indigenous festivities with the Catholic traditions of Spanish colonists.

Tagua nut necklace



The tagua (*ta-wa*) nut is also known as vegetable ivory, because its color and texture resemble the ivory of elephant tusks. It is the seed of a palm tree that is native to South America and found extensively in Ecuador's Amazon region. While this piece shows the natural color of the nut, it is regarded for its ability to absorb dye, which is why the nut is commonly used to create colorful jewelry. The nut is generally harvested in a way that the palm tree is not damaged, allowing for the preservation of rainforest habitats and providing a [source of income](#) for families and artisans.

Toquilla palm straw hat



Commonly known as the “Panama hat,” this woven straw hat actually originates in Ecuador. At the time it became famous worldwide, in the late 19th and early 20th century, many goods from South America were shipped across the globe through Panama. The place of sale, rather than production, stuck, and what is actually called the *sombrero fino de paja toquilla* (toquilla palm fine straw hat) became misnamed. The straw comes from the *toquilla* palm tree which grows around Montecristi, and through a [process](#) that includes boiling, weaving, washing, bleaching, shaping, and finally baking, its leaves are shaped into the hat. The highest quality hats make take six months to make. In 2012, UNESCO recognized Ecuador’s hat-making process in its list of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

El Cucurucho



Most people in Ecuador are Catholic, and as such Holy Week is one of the most important times of year. In Quito, Good Friday is celebrated with the procession of the figure of *Jesus del Gran Poder* (Jesus of the Great Power), which is carried by people dressed in purple robes with a tall, conical cap, known as *El Cucurucho* (The Pointed Cap). They represent penitents, and carry the image from the Church of San Francisco all throughout the historical center of Quito. Other people participate in the [procession](#), dressed to represent important figures from the Good Friday story, but the *Cucuruchos* are the most important. Aspirants have to go through a year-long process of spiritual reflection to be awarded a coveted purple robe and participate on Good Friday.

Chiva bus



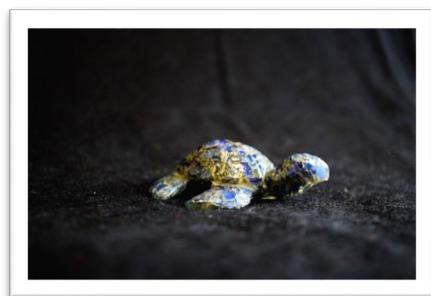
The *chiva* (goat) bus was an old form of transportation in the coastal regions of Ecuador and Colombia. This type of bus was especially common in rural agricultural regions, used by *campesinos* (peasant farmers) to get themselves and their goods from lightly populated areas to market. The bus usually had a ladder on the back, which allowed passengers to put their products on top and ride in the lower compartment. Much later, the *chiva* became a popular feature in Quito as part of celebrations of the city's founding. A traditional band would ride on the top of the bus, while people would ride below, dancing, singing, and drinking *el canelazo*, a cinnamon-spiced beverage.

Quichua ceramic bowl



The Quichua language group is the largest indigenous language group in Ecuador. This bowl is an example of traditional pottery as practiced by Quichua speakers in the region of Pastaza, in Ecuador's Amazon rainforest. The paintings on these bowls often represent important stories, either from the personal life of the artisan or traditional stories explaining the origin of natural phenomenon. In this [video](#), a Quichua artisan from Pastaza describes how a bowl she made represents the origin story of a constellation. The lines on this particular bowl likely represent a river of some importance to the artist.

Glass sea turtle



Another emblematic species from the Galapagos Islands is the Pacific Green Turtle. The only sea turtle that nests on the islands, they mate and lay eggs on beaches between November and February. They may weight over 300 points when fully grown, yet despite this are extremely graceful and powerful swimmers. Many efforts are made to conserve the islands' sea turtle population, for instance, by cordoning off areas on beaches where eggs may be laid. This turtle is made from recycled glass from the islands, molded with plastic. It is an example of efforts to turn one of the islands' major conservation challenges – dealing with human waste – into an opportunity for local artisans to make a living.
