



CHAPTER 3 SOUTH AMERICA

Flying into Quito, I marvelled at the 35-kilometre length of the city, and when I climbed the airport stairs I appreciated the 2918-metre (9574 ft) elevation. I found a backpackers' hostel and waited the few days for Amy to arrive. To pass the time, I updated my budget spreadsheet, a task I thoroughly enjoyed doing. It provided me a chance to keep close tabs on my finances and extrapolate how much time I could still travel. The results were not always encouraging. I was doing very well in keeping to my \$25-a-day goal, but the net amount of cash I had left only allowed for another two years of travel. The money was moving much quicker than I was.

Amy arrived on time and a little weary on June 1, and we spent our first days catching up on the last nine months. Drinking coffee, practicing Spanish, and walking through the old parts of Quito kept us occupied as we waited for Amy's bike to go through customs at the air cargo office.

Through a motorcycle website, we met Dan Walsh, a travelling journalist from the UK. The local pub culture was an important part of his writing research, so he was willing to meet there for a pint or two. He rode the same motorcycle as I did, although his looked like the bride of Frankenstein with its generous helpings of duct tape and road rash.

"I didn't do all that. I picked it up like that from the BMW Demo Fleet," he answered, without a hint of apology. He could not understand why, after only seeing each other five days in the last nine months, Amy and I would opt to sleep in the \$5-a-night dorm beds instead of getting a private room for \$14 a night. I explained that we had had the private room for three days of extravagance and now we were back to the dirtbag tour budget. Dan took pity on Amy and me and kindly bought us drinks all night, including a record number of "...just one more..." beers.

Quito offered glorious riding weather and as soon as the bikes were ready, we left the city. Amy quickly became familiar with oncoming cars overtaking each other in her lane, and other irregularities of driving in the developing world. Even though we were 20 kilometres from the equator, our altitude kept the temperature a pleasant 15-20C during the day, perfect for riding, and 10C at night, perfect for sleeping outside.

We crossed the equator to the famous Saturday market town of Otavalo and found our inaugural camping spot at a nearby lake. We had access to a small herb garden and we cobbled together a delicious soup with fresh, unknown vegetables picked up at the market. Amy had a great natural curiosity about food and enjoyed getting lost in the food markets. She discovered new and odd foods that looked cool but that we had no idea how to cook, including the local favourite, roasted guinea pig. While learning about new food was fascinating, it was also frustrating not to have a full