

## “NO HAY ESTAMPAS”

by

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It has been six months since we sailed on westwards from Puerto Ayora, but the images of that day remain. The sights, the sounds, and the heat still come to the senses, as sharp as sunlight, hot as lava sand.

Before dawn, on the last morning in the Galapagos, the heat was still over the horizon. In the pre-dawn darkness, day-trippers gathered at the Ninfa Restaurant. They were, as always, a bit nervous, a bit excited, and completely festooned with binoculars and cameras. The wind came up. Anticipation grew. Individuals merged into happy, chattering groups as they were ferried out to the waiting boats. A new adventure had begun; a new day had dawned in Puerto Ayora.

Those of you who have been to this small town on the island of Santa Cruz, and who fear the changes that time has wrought, may put your fears at ease. Change comes slowly in Puerto Ayora. It follows the timeless pace of the giant tortoises for which the islands are named. Change is slow, but life is punctuated by bursts of activity.

Dawn finds the town at work. A crowd bustles around the butcher shop. Coffee brews next door at La Garapata. Hammers, saws and planes are put to work on the tour boat under construction up the road. Workmen fit the final pieces into the cabin. The boat is a beauty — hand-hewn from the keel up, built to sleep twelve passengers, and as solid as the men who scramble over her decks.

There is other activity in the early morning. The fishermen arrive to offload their catch. Crowds gather, at the Ninfa and near the SolyMar, to see what the sea has provided. Men, women and children are joined by iguanas, pelicans, sea lions and lava gulls to inspect the day's catch. Some come to buy, some to clean, some to carry, and some to view for the leftovers. When the boats are empty, the frigatebirds dive to catch the last scraps. The boats go back to their moorings. The trucks suck their own dust clouds through the town, and the wharf is deserted.

In the wake of the trucks, the dust settles. It swirls again as a family of seven bounces by on a motorcycle. It settles again on the hats and bags of the tourists who stand in the morning heat, waiting for the bus. It settles outside the post office, where an amazed American has just learned the meaning of the Postmistress's words: “No hay estampas. Ese tarde, creo, hay estampas.” (There are no stamps. This afternoon, I believe, there will be stamps.)

The pace of change is slow, but change occurs. Before the founding of the Charles Darwin Research Station, before their classification as a National Park of Ecuador, the Galapagos Islands did not sustain a tourist industry. The quiet fishing village of Puerto Ayora lived from the sea. That has changed. Now, there is a road leading to the Baltra Channel and from there to the airport where daily flights from the mainland are filled to capacity with people from all over the world.

The airplanes also bring fresh produce for residents and visitors. A weekly freighter arrives to unload a huge cargo of supplies. Tiny barges ply the waters of Academy Bay, manned by skilled pilots who wind their loads of 50-gallon drums through a maze of yachts and tourboats to the dock.

There are new sights among the old. At the main wharf, newly planted trees and newly made benches frame a quiet park. There are new faces. But the old families are still in residence. Karl Angermeyer's iguanas still scramble over the roof of his house and studio. Miguel Giarno can still fix just about anything in his shop on the hill. Families of Andean Indians sit in quiet shops, selling their beautiful crafts to the tourists waiting for the bus. Life slows for a moment.

Then, it is time for the bus to depart. Passengers are crammed aboard. Those who can't fit are given a place in the auxilliary “bus”, a large dump truck. As the vehicles lurch down the main street, happy children follow in hot pursuit. The local dog population races in hot pursuit of the children.

When it is quiet again, and the dust has settled, the newly planted flowers in the park wear a coat of gray. The day grows hot. People and animals take shelter in the shade of the trees and buildings. Iguanas sun themselves, and the birds continue their activity, boobies diving offshore and frigatebirds soaring over the island.

From the vantage point of a six-week stay in the Galapagos, it appears that what is new in Puerto Ayora is

usually good, and usually strong. New people, who have moved there by choice from the Ecuadorean mainland, work hard to preserve the fundamental nature of their new home. New houses are built of the old materials, the lava and bamboo and wood of the island. New shops and restaurants are simply built and warmly staffed. To the visitor, it is a warm and friendly place.

Our lasting impressions are those of a place whose people move in the rhythm of their environment. Constant learning is fostered by the guide training programs and the Darwin Research Station. The encroachment of man into the protected islands is kept under tight rein. The land and sea and their inhabitants are respected.

The rhythm is a peaceful one, but the peace is often interrupted. Four laughing children race by on a bicycle. A film crew arrives to begin a documentary. A storm drops a deluge on running shoppers. Boatmen scramble to the shops as a fresh load of produce is delivered from Baltra. And another sailing family readies its boat for departure.

Our time is up. After six weeks, with our guides in the islands, and anchored in Academy Bay, it is time for "Cassiopeia" to leave.

And so we sailed away from Puerto Ayora. We carried our bunch of bananas down to the dinghy, said goodbye to our friends, and left the Customs dock for the last time.

We stowed the last provisions. A small boat carrying a late passenger raced by to catch "Poseidon II" as she steamed out towards San Cristóbal. We disentangled and hoisted the anchor. A film crew waved from the pilot-house of the Darwin Station's boat. We eased past "Isabela", "Tigress" and "Bronzewing", and headed out to sea.

We were gone, beginning a 3000-mile voyage to the next lands to the west. Puerto Ayora disappeared quickly as we rounded the point, but its image remains. Six months have not dimmed the memory of the sunlight, hot as lava, pouring down on all God's creations, in this town and in these islands of evolution.

