

Bocas on a Bus

By Karen Catchpole - January 21, 2014



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Since 2011, patrons of **Mobile Restaurant Casa 1028**, a rolling tour bus restaurant which plies the streets and sights of **Quito, Ecuador**, have been treated to regional snacks while being driven to some of the most iconic sights in this UNESCO World Heritage Site city.

It all takes place on a converted city bus which now sports larger windows, seating for up to 22 people at dining tables with custom Plexiglas tops made with cut outs that snugly hold the various dishes that are brought to you during the 2.5 hour experience.

There's carpet on the floor, flocked wallpaper, nice lighting and a sound system which plays a mix of modern jazz, Andean flute tunes and salsa. There's even an onboard bathroom and curtains which you can close if the "fishbowl" effect of being driven around town at night in a brightly lit bus gets to be too much.

Though it's billed as dinner, it's best to think of the meal as a series of excellent Ecuadorian snacks which are prepared elsewhere and kept warm on board in a kind of airplane style galley. The noshing began with some freshly toasted corn nuts and a small bowl of *locra*, a traditional Andean potato soup. It felt a bit like eating in the first class section of an airplane or in the back of a moving RV as the bus rolled and lurched through town.

In between snacks the Casa 1028 bus makes stops at three iconic Quito sites. This is a convenient way to get a glimpse of some of Quito's top attractions and a secure way to take photos at night in a city that's famous for its pick pockets.

First up was Quito's enormous Gothic Basilica where the Casa 1028 bilingual guide revealed mysterious design elements including the fact that the traditional Gothic gargoyles have been replaced with stone versions of animals indigenous to Ecuador.

Back on the bus, a second course of snacks was served which continued the focus on Andean influences including *humitas* (sweet young corn tamales) and vegetable chips with blessedly spicy *aji* pepper sauce. The stunner was a ball made from quinoa and smoky pork that was rich and satisfying and got me through the second stop at Plaza San Francisco in Quito's *Centro Historico*. Here I learned about the legend of Cantuña, an indigenous man who is said to have sold his soul to the devil (then ingeniously cheated him out of it) in order to get the stone niches built beneath the church that anchors the plaza.

I returned to my seat with the second course on deck. This platter of snacks was inspired by the coastal regions of Ecuador and included a bite-sized *pernil* (pork leg) sandwich and a dense empanada made from green bananas and stuffed with cheese. I savored these morsels as the bus continued through the *Centro Historico* to Independence Plaza, also known as Plaza Grande.

On our last stop of the night I learned the well-known local legend of Aurora and her fatal run in with a bull at the bullring that used to exist on this spot. The address where the young girl died, Casa 1028, is the inspiration for the name of the business. As a traditional dessert of chopped candied figs with small pieces of mild cheese was served I finally understood why this very mobile restaurant was named after a street address.

