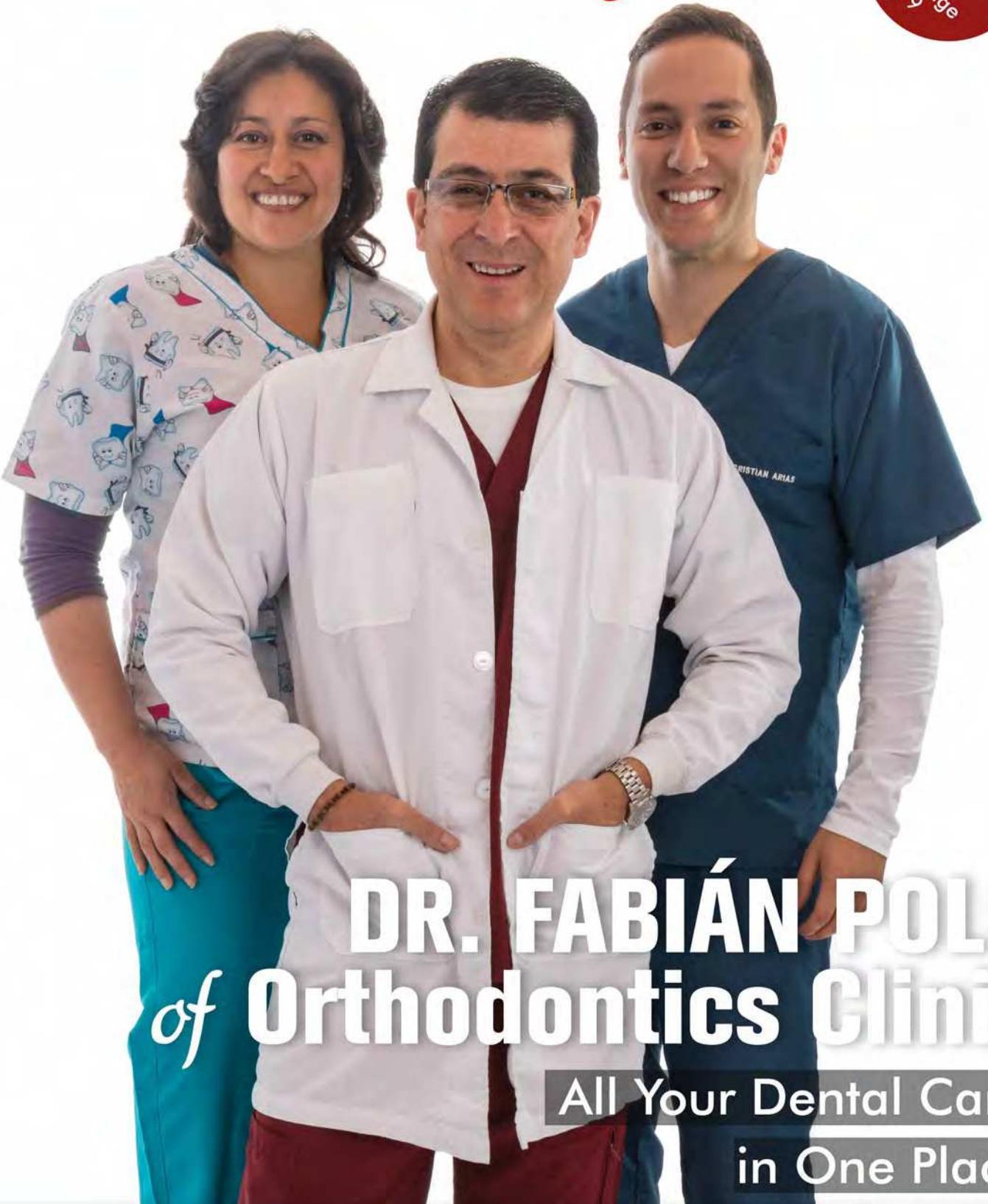


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The Cuenca Zoo

by Keith and Tina Paul - Photographs by Keith Paul

The Cuenca Zoo or more precisely, The Amaru Zoologico Bioparque is a unique zoo that is physically challenging but a most enjoyable experience.

I've been to many zoos all over the US including the San Diego and Cincinnati but never to one that is set up like the one in Cuenca. This is not your typical zoo because the cages are not so evident and the exhibits reside on a mountain side. Furthermore, the majority of the animals in the zoo were rescued and can't be returned to the wild. The bear, puma, and ocelot were either chained to a pole or locked up in a small room before being found. Located on a mountainside, means a lot of uphill walking. But if you just take your time, this is very doable for most. You don't need to be a world-class athlete, but if you're using a walker, cane or have bad knees, you might not get very far. Not only are the paths uphill, but you sometimes need to walk on boards to stay out of the mud and water. You can see my trail picture to judge for yourself. The zoo is pretty much all uphill and then when complete, a long walk back down. Unfortunately for us, we had a driver who was coming back in 2 hours to pick us up so that made the ending a little more rushed than we would have liked. I would allow 2 1/2 hours to do it all. That's taking pictures, reading the signs, etc. If you want to walk it slower and take rest breaks, give it 3 hours.

What's most interesting in this zoo is that many of the animals don't seem to be caged. The use of different kinds of fence and wire make them look a little less confined. Most if not all of the animals are indigenous to Ecuador, and many of the educational signs are in English. Towards the end, you'll find monkeys that are not caged (or rather they find you.) There are no signs, but they come out of the trees to meet you, most likely to see if you have food. In fact, one of them climbed on my wife's arm. Something I wished we did was take a picture of the park map at the entrance so that we could have some idea of where we were. They don't have any map pamphlets you can take with so we didn't know if we were half way done or close to the end. The trails are well marked on where to go except on the way down. Since the up and down trails overlap, the arrows can be a little confusing. Just keep on the downward path and you'll be okay.

The cost is only \$6 for adults and well worth it. Our two out of town guests enjoyed it tremendously. The Cuenca Zoo is one attraction that I can see us going back to with other guests in the future. The zoo is located on Carr 35, Cuenca, Ecuador, Phone: 7-421-3982 and is open every day except Monday from 9 to 5. Make sure your taxi driver will take you all the way to the top. I've heard some say they didn't want to drive up the long driveway.

