



Frequently Asked Questions for Ecuador Volunteers & Researchers

Ceiba Foundation for Tropical Conservation

What do I do when I arrive at to the airport in Quito?

The airport in Quito is small and straightforward. After deplaning, you will go through passport control and then get your baggage from the carousel. You will then go through customs, where your baggage may again be scanned or searched. Once at the exit of the terminal you may catch a taxi (yellow cars) to take you to your hotel. You should not be charged more than five to eight dollars.

How to I Get to the Ceiba office in Quito?

The Ceiba office in Quito is located on Calle Juan Ramírez N36-14 and Germán Alemán. It is 3 blocks uphill (east) from the Naciones Unidas stop on Quito's public transportation system, the "EcoVía", that runs north-south along Avenida 6 de Diciembre. The office is located between two well-known landmarks (that taxi drivers will easily recognize): the Estadio Olimpico and the Megamaxi supermarket.

Once you find Calle Juan Ramírez, our office is at street level, attached to the white house on the north-east corner of Germán Alemán street. Look for the signs for Ceiba and Fundación Tangaré with whom we share the space, in the doorway. A map to our office can be found on our website: <http://www.ceiba.org/contact.htm>

Where should I stay in Quito?

There are abundant good budget hotels, most of which are located in the bustling tourist district known as the "Mariscal". While there are some advantages to this part of town (abundant internet cafes, shops, and good food within ten square blocks), the area recently has seen an increase in crime, especially robbery. Be alert at all times in this area, choose populated streets when walking around, and do not walk at night - take taxis and call to have one dispatched to you instead of flagging one down whenever possible. We recommend several hostels: Hostal Eco Karmel (Italia 875 and Alemania), The Magic Bean (Foch No. 681 and Juan Leon Mera), Posada del Maple (Juan Rodriguez E8-49 and 6 de Diciembre), Crossroads (Foch 678 and Juan Leon Mera), and El Cafecito (Luis Cordero and Reina Victoria). There are many, other well-priced accommodations in the vicinity.

How do I get from Quito to my volunteer site?

You should rendezvous with Ceiba's volunteer coordinator, Carmen Játiva, at our office in Quito before traveling to your site. The office is open Monday – Thursday from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.; see above for directions on how to get there. The coordinator will know your volunteer start date, but it's a good idea to call or email ahead of time to coordinate an appointment (02 603-5904, cjativa@ceiba.org). She will provide orientation information and give you the most updated information to plan your transportation to your volunteer site.

The El Pahuma Orchid Reserve can be reached by bus from Quito in about 1 hour. There are numerous public buses to the Mitad del Mundo Equator monument, with stops on Avenida 10 de Agosto and on Avenida la Prensa (which passes by the airport). Get off the bus at the entrance to Mitad del Mundo. Wait alongside the traffic circle, and get on any bus going to Nanegalito or Mindo; these will pass El Pahuma in about 20 minutes. Tell the bus driver you want to get off at the El Pahuma reserve. You will see a sign and a restaurant on the right where you'll get off, about 10 minutes before the town of Nanegalito.

The Lalo Loor Dry Forest Reserve, located on the coast, requires a full day of travel. To get to Lalo Loor, start at the enormous "Cumandá" bus station in the south of Quito; getting there should cost about \$10 by taxi. From here you will take a bus to the coastal city of Pedernales. The most direct service (5 hours or so) is provided by the Trans Vencedores bus company. There are many bus companies working out of Cumandá, you will have to look around for the Vencedores office. We recommend traveling early; try to depart Quito not later than 9 am. Arrive at least one hour before departure to buy your ticket or purchase it the day before. Once you get to the Pedernales bus station, you must ask around for a local bus heading south. These leave about every hour, to destinations including Jama (pronounced HA-ma), Canoa, San Vicente, and Bahía de Caraquez; all these buses will pass by the entrance to the reserve. The ride takes about 25 minutes; ask the bus driver to let you off at the Reserva Lalo Loor just after the town of Tabuga. Upon leaving the town you will see a sign on the right indicating 1 km to the reserve; the entrance itself is on the left side of the road – look for the small, round thatched visitor center building.

What are accommodations like?

At both the El Pahuma Orchid Reserve and the Lalo Loor Dry Forest reserve, lodging is in shared dormitories with bunkbeds. Rooms hold from two to four people. The capacity is 10 people at El Pahuma and 24 at Lalo Loor. Although you may happen to be the only volunteer on-site, it is likely you will share the lodgings with other volunteers, students or researchers. We will place you in your own room as long as there is sufficient space available to house all people on-site. Bedding is provided, and at Lalo Loor each bunk is fitted with a mosquito net. There is no electricity within the station houses. At Pahuma, a generator provides electricity occasionally that can be used to charge electronic equipment. At Lalo Loor, there is electricity at the visitor center along the road where electronics can be charged. Electricity is 110V, same as in the U.S.

All volunteers are provided with three meals per day. At the Lalo Loor reserve, staff prepares food on Monday through Friday. Food is local and simple, but vegetarians can be accommodated; please notify us of any special dietary preferences in advance of your arrival (including lactose intolerance, etc.) so we can pass this information along to the cook at your volunteer site. If volunteers choose to remain on-site over the weekend, they must prepare their own food from supplies available at the station.

Can I drink the water in Ecuador?

You should never drink the tap water while in Ecuador, even while in Quito. Always have bottled or boiled water on hand, even for brushing your teeth. All boiled water needs to come to a rolling boil for at least 5 minutes. Hotels and restaurants usually provide bottled water to their guests. If you are ever uncertain about the water served to you, just ask them if it is purified ("Está purificado?"). Volunteer project sites will have purified water available for you.

How much money should I bring?

It depends on how much shopping you do! At minimum, you'll need to bring enough to pay your entire volunteer stay, the \$42 airport departure tax, transportation to and from your volunteer site, and some emergency money in case you need medical care. If you plan on traveling during your time in Ecuador, you will need to factor that money into your total budget. You may want to take day trips on weekends. Trips to the rainforest and Galapagos can cost up to \$1000 for just a few days (expensive but well worth it!). Most volunteers clean their clothes weekly at a laundromat, which costs \$0.50-1.50 per pound. Besides that, bring whatever spending money you think you'll want to purchase snacks or beverages outside of mealtimes (volunteer project sites provide three meals with beverages a day, and boiled drinking water at all times), buy personal items you'll need, and, of course, to purchase gifts at beautiful artisan crafts markets. Some volunteers have underestimated their personal spending and had subsequent difficulty obtaining cash (see below).

Should I bring cash or travelers checks? What about credit and ATM cards?

We recommend you bring cash in small bills and have an internationally accepted ATM card (one with the Visa, Cirrus or Plus logo) for obtaining additional cash as needed in Quito and other sizeable towns. The only place you can cash travelers checks is in larger cities like Quito or Guayaquil, and you will wait in lines at the bank and be charged a fee for the service. Most stores and vendors do not accept traveler's checks. Cash is the only thing accepted at artisan markets both in and out of Quito. Do not rely on ATM cards for all your funds as machines are often out of service.

How safe is Ecuador?

Ecuador is a relatively safe country, the most consistently peaceful country in South America. The biggest concern for all travelers is theft; Ecuador is a very poor country and if you leave valuable items unattended there is a good chance they will disappear. Minimize the risk of theft by not bringing valuable items, keeping your valuables stored securely in your hotel when you plan to walk around downtown, and keeping your money hidden in a variety of different places. Beware of pickpockets in crowded buses, trolleys, or in the touristed Mariscal area of Quito. Also, in markets, don't tempt people by showing big wads of bills or prominently wearing expensive-looking jewelry, cameras, or watches.

How much does it rain, and what type of raingear should I bring?

In Quito you will want to bring an umbrella with you most days, especially between October – May when it is their rainy season. Days begin sunny and clear but by mid afternoon and throughout the evening you can expect rain. Although the cloud forest at El Pahuma can get a lot of rain, there tends to be sunshine everyday, interspersed with afternoon showers. In the Lalo Loor Dry Forest, you only need to worry about getting wet during the rainy season between November – May. It's a good idea to take raingear along when you set out into the forest, even if it looks like a gorgeous cloudless day. There are many options for raingear, but I recommend a poncho. A poncho is cooler than a jacket, and they can be bought very cheaply. Full latex or Gore-Tex raingear can be uncomfortably hot, and lightweight nylon, though cooler, is not sufficiently waterproof in a tropical downpour. Also, you can easily carry your backpack under a poncho. Ponchos come in many forms, and I suggest avoiding the very thin clear plastic ones that will tear easily when you walk through vegetation. Get a heavier rubberized plastic one at your hardware or camping supply store.

What kind of clothing should I bring?

You'll need clothing for a wide range of temperatures. In Quito (10,000 feet) and higher, you'll be fine in pants (sometimes even shorts) and a T-shirt during the day, but be prepared to put on a sweater or jacket in the evening or on cool and cloudy days. Quito is usually in the 70's during the day and around 50 at night. Hotels are not heated. You may want to bring one nice set of clothes in which to go out to eat. In the cloud forest (El Pahuma Orchid Reserve), it is in the 70's during the day and cooler at night. Loose, lightweight pants (cotton is coolest) and a t-shirt and/or long-sleeve shirt are good when you're working. A pair of shorts is nice for relaxing on a warm day. In the early morning and evening, make sure you have a long-sleeve shirt to put on against mosquitoes! At night you will want to wear a heavy sweater or jacket. Also bring a swimsuit and one or two towels. Don't worry about fashion -- there'll be nothing but the forest around you, and you'll be getting dirty in the field! The dry forest (Lalo Loor Dry Forest Reserve) is much lower in elevation and it can get very hot especially in the dry season. From June-November, a light sweater or jacket is the most you will need to keep warm. At other times of year, no long sleeves are needed. As far as work shoes go, rubber boots are best for the forest, but hiking boots are also fine. Rubber boots can be purchase in Ecuador quite cheaply. Rubber sandals or flip-flops are nice for hanging around your station. Finally, a baseball hat or similar is useful for protecting your head against ticks and other bugs. Don't forget your swimsuit for taking a dip in the waterfalls or plunging into the Pacific Ocean!

What sort of luggage is best?

Duffel bags or backpacks are best. Avoid over-packing. Bring a hip pack or daypack for carrying into the field. I usually travel with a duffel bag, in which I can stuff all my extra gear and use as a "closet" at the volunteer site, a smaller daypack for one-day excursions, and a decent-size hip pack for daily use and field work. **A backpack rain cover also comes in handy for those unexpected showers.**

Aren't there a lot of bugs in the tropics?

There are many very fascinating insects in the tropical forest, but most of them won't bother you. In fact, there are far fewer mosquitoes and other biting insects in the tropical forest than there are on an August day in Minnesota! Only at dawn and dusks can mosquitoes become bothersome, but a long-sleeve shirt and lightweight pants is sufficient protection. Perhaps the bugs to be most cautious of are ants ... they can pack a painful little bite before you realize you're standing in them! Bring some hydrocortisone or insect bite relief to get some relief from annoying bites or stings. Please inform Ceiba if you have a medical allergy to bee, wasp or scorpion stings! Don't worry, scorpions in the tropics are seldom encountered and all are non-lethal (far less powerful than those in the western US), their sting is no worse than that of a wasp. But do take care to shake out your shoes before putting them on if you have left them lying on the ground.

Do I need to be concerned about contracting a weird disease?

The risk of contracting a serious illness while traveling in Ecuador is low, but it's wise to take some precautions. Developing countries in the tropics have a reputation for all sorts of nasty illnesses, but virtually all of these are caused by unsanitary living conditions (e.g., cholera, giardia) or contact with disease bearing insect vectors (malaria, yellow fever). Although some stomach upset is normal when traveling to any foreign country just because the food is different, you will minimize your chances of food borne illness by washing and peeling fresh fruits, cooking vegetables, drinking only bottled or properly boiled water, and avoiding food sold by carts on the street. Insect borne diseases are found mostly in the lowland tropics; wearing long sleeves and pants at times when insects are most active, and wearing insect repellent are the most effective preventive measures you can take. In areas where specific diseases are not uncommon, your best protection is to get vaccinated or, in the case of malaria, take anti-malarial pills. Your public health department will be able to make recommendations regarding what vaccines you need. There is no malaria at the El Pahuma Orchid Reserve, and the risk is very low at the Lalo Loor reserve, although if you plan to travel to other areas along the coast, malaria prophylaxis is a good idea.

Is it bad for me to get so many vaccines?

Not at all, in fact it is very good for you if it means you avoid contracting a potentially serious illness! Some vaccines produce very mild side effects in some people for a day or so after you get the vaccine (I've never noticed any). Anti-malarial pills may have some mildly unpleasant side effects, especially the day or so after you take your weekly dose. These include difficulty sleeping, vivid dreams, and sometimes moodiness. Again, these effects are transient.

What kind of insect repellent is best?

This is largely a matter of personal preference, but we suggest not bringing anything stronger than about 25% DEET. Sprays are more convenient than lotions because you do not have to get it on your hands. Skintastic and other non-DEET alternatives usually work fairly well. Be careful not to handle frogs (and other animals) if you have DEET on your hands; amphibians are especially vulnerable since the toxic chemical is absorbed directly into their moist skin!

What kinds of gifts & souvenirs can I bring back from Ecuador?

There is a great diversity of beautiful, colorful arts and crafts such as wool sweaters, textiles, Andean musical instruments, masks, hammocks, carvings, pottery, silver jewelry, leather goods and trinkets. In some shops you may see rainforest

products that are illegal to sell, buy and bring back to the U.S., such as animal pelts and bird feathers. It is also illegal to bring any plant or animal material back into the States.

What should I do if I'm a vegetarian?

Vegetarianism is a relatively new phenomenon in Ecuador; however, both the El Pahuma and Lalo Loor reserves are accustomed to having vegetarian visitors. If meals for other guests will include meat, the staff will prepare a vegetarian option for you. Please be sure to notify your site of your meal preferences, and give detailed information on whether you will eat eggs, dairy, fish, pork, chicken, and beef. This information is included in the volunteer application form.

Will I have access to email while in Ecuador?

Although there is no electricity at the station houses, there are internet cafés in most sizeable towns within an easy bus ride from your volunteer site. Make sure you have an email account that you can access from any computer connected to the internet. If you are stationed at El Pahuma, there is internet access in the nearby towns of Nanegalito and San Antonio; near the Lalo Loor reserve you can get connected in either Pedernales or Jama. At Lalo Loor there is electricity at the visitor center where you may charge your electronic equipment.

What about laundry?

There are no laundry facilities at your volunteer site -- clothing is washed by hand and hung out to dry. At El Pahuma it may take a few days for your clothes to dry, so having a second set of field clothes is often helpful. There are laundry services, however, in most sizeable towns within an easy bus ride from your volunteer site. These services can do your laundry in a few hours and charge per kilogram of clothing.

What Should I Bring?

- Rubber boots (available in Ecuador up to Men's size 11)
- Flashlight (headlamp is best)
- Water bottle
- Raingear
- Lightweight cotton pants and t-shirts for field work
- Lightweight long sleeve shirt for dawn and dusk
- Shorts
- Swimsuit and towel
- Biodegradable soap/shampoo
- Personal first-aid kit
- Insect repellent
- Sunscreen
- Sunglasses and hat
- Pocket knife
- Binoculars (for wildlife viewing)
- Camera, charger, and extra batteries
- Watch

When/How is Payment for my stay due?

The housing fee for BSSL is due in full prior to the start of your volunteership. You may pay the project coordinator in Ceiba's office in Quito (cash only), or mail a check or money order to Ceiba's office in Madison, WI. Checks mailed in the U.S. should be made payable to Ceiba Foundation.

How can I contact the project coordinator in Quito?

You may write to Carmen Jativa at cjativa@ceiba.org or call 593-2-603-5904.

Who should I contact in case of emergency?

Ecuador office:

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