

# GEARE Guide - Ecuador



This guide provides a brief overview of living in Ecuador, with some recommendations and advice on how to make the most of your experience.

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## Visas

Planned duration of stay	Steps
<90 days	You don't need to do anything; US citizens are allowed 90 days when you enter the country.
90-180 days	Enter with a tourist Visa and USFQ can help you renew for an additional 90 days with just your passport and \$120
>180 days	<p>You will need to apply for a Temporary Resident: Student Visa, start <b>ASAP</b> because this takes some time. Requirements vary by consulate so contact the one you plan on working with. You are more likely to get information if you call in Spanish. You will likely need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Form with a passport photo attached</li> <li>● Proof of international insurance (from Purdue after acceptance into the study abroad program)</li> <li>● A <b>FEDERAL</b> background check, translated and apostilled, this process takes about a month and a half in total.</li> <li>● Bank statement verifying you have at least \$1,500</li> <li>● A document from USFQ verifying your acceptance</li> </ul> <p>If you can't get it before leaving, don't worry, but make sure you bring all of the documents mentioned above with you. You can arrive and get the normal 90 day tourist visa, then inform Verónica that you are planning on getting the student visa. She will put you in contact with the university's lawyers; they will collect these documents from you and schedule an appointment with the municipality. Then they will go with you to the appointment and you will get the visa a few weeks later.</p> <p>The visa costs \$150 (\$50 for the application, \$100 for the visa).</p> <p>CALL (you likely won't get answers via any electronic methods) AND SPEAK SPANISH. You may need to call several times before you get anyone helpful on the phone, but keep calling and eventually you'll get to the right person.</p>

## USFQ

### Classes

- Assume all of your classes will be in Spanish, there are some English classes, but very few are for engineering students. Many textbooks will be in English or will sometimes be translated versions of English books so you can find the English textbook if that helps. Don't forget to ask your professor about turning in homework assignments and exams in English.



- Expect to be the only foreigner in your engineering classes, all of the other exchange students study things like International Relations, Spanish, Business, etc.
- If you ever have questions about **ANYTHING** contact Verónica Castelo ([vcastelo@usfq.edu.ec](mailto:vcastelo@usfq.edu.ec)) if she can't fix your problem, she knows someone that can.
- You probably won't have classes on Fridays, and the 3 day weekends are really nice for travelling, but don't be surprised if some last minute exams, field trips, and labs get scheduled on some Fridays.
- Labs do not have room numbers listed on the schedule and can be hard to find as the entrances are in underground parking lots. Ask classmates or email a professor to ask about finding the lab. Lab coats are required more often than safety glasses and for labs that may not use them here at Purdue (ex: soil mechanics).
- Some classes will try to follow a calendar, but many will not. Don't be surprised if you don't know about an exam until the week before.
- Consider taking non engineering and non major related classes like panaderia or one of the culture classes.

## Grading

- Scale is pretty much the same as here in terms of As, Bs, Cs, ...
- Just like at Purdue, it varies a lot by professor, so it's hard to predict until you've been in the class for a few weeks.
- Homework may be returned very late; a solution guide or even just the answers are unlikely to be given, and you may or may not go over problems as a class, so work on these with classmates and go to office hours if you don't understand how to do something.
- Overall there is often less homework than Purdue classes so exams are weighted more.

## Registration

- When getting classes approved with your advisor, get more approved than you think you plan on taking. Some of the classes you get approved may not be offered the semester you go, and you could start out in a class and realize a) you've already covered this material at Purdue or b) you don't have the background needed to take the class.
- Be aware, prerequisites for many classes are different than some of those here at Purdue. For example, Purdue hydraulics and thermodynamics are both split into two classes at USFQ.
- You will need to email your transcript to the appropriate person (Verónica sent an email a few weeks before registration) to get the overrides to register in all of your classes because it will look like you haven't taken any classes at all since USFQ doesn't have that information in their system.
  - **Do this as soon as Verónica sends the email;** some professors are slow to respond, and if the course name doesn't match up closely enough, you may have to track down the syllabus for classes you've already taken to show that you know the material.



- **Classes do fill up**, but if one does fill up, contact Verónica and she may be able to help.
- Registration for classes at USFQ happens around the same time it does here at Purdue.

## Ecuabuddies

There is a club at USFQ called Ecuabuddies that organizes events for exchange students and will partner you up with an Ecuadorian student (aka 'Ecuabuddy'). They usually schedule a sport once a week (often soccer, sometimes Ecuavolley) and some weekend trips throughout the semester. This can be a good way to get to know other international students as well as Ecuadorian students.

## Host families

When you apply to USFQ, you will be asked if you want to stay with a host family. If you want to, there is a quick survey to fill out about preferences like family type, pets, smoking, etc. This is a great way to practice your Spanish and learn a lot more about Ecuadorian culture. Cost is around \$3,000 for the whole semester. This includes 2 meals per day (breakfast and dinner) and laundry. Some students stayed in AirBnBs or similar places for a little cheaper but with a host family you are likely to be exposed to a lot more Spanish and a LOT more great Ecuadorian cooking.

## Transportation

There are no maps of public transportation routes in Ecuador, so when you are planning on going somewhere ask friends and your host family which bus station you need to go to to get to your destination.

## Taxis

Taxis are very cheap in Ecuador, costing about a dollar per mile. During the day, make sure your driver starts the 'taximetro' when you get in so they can't try to overcharge you. If you have more than 4 people some taxis will take all of you for an extra fee. However many will not. If you are walking in a large group trying to hail a taxi, they won't stop.

There have been reports in the past of fake taxis picking people up and robbing them (mostly in bigger cities like Quito). In our time none of us had this issue, however, to be safe there are some general guidelines for what official taxis should have. Of the following list, the first two points are the most important. After that, it is a plus, but not as crucial. (Smaller towns are safer and less likely to follow these exact guidelines, just use your best judgment here)

1. General appearance of a taxi (yellow, etc. Don't get into someone's minivan)
2. Blue sheet with registration number on front passenger door
3. Yellow license plate
4. Blue sheet with registration number in back and front windows
5. Name of the company on the back passenger door

## 6. Taxi 'hat'



^what a taxi should look like

General guidelines for what an official → taxi should have (older version)



## Uber

Uber is technically illegal in Ecuador, however, it is probably the best way to travel by car in Ecuador. This will likely be the cheapest and safest option for cars as price is regulated by uber and you can follow the path on your phone. Since it is illegal, Uber drivers prefer you have someone sit up front to lower their risk. Way better conversation than the taxi drivers. Will likely only be in big cities.

## Public Transport

Busses in Ecuador move fast and do not always fully stop to let you on or off, especially if you're a guy. Generally the cost is around 25 cents per ride in cities and \$1 per hour plus \$1-2 more when travelling between cities.

**Quito:** Bus routes are expansive but schedules and routes aren't really posted anywhere. Instead of having numbers each bus is labeled by the cooperative that operates it (i.e. Catar, Guadalajara). Your best luck with trying to determine which bus to take is to ask a few locals. There is also a BRT system called the Ecovía that runs along the street 6 de diciembre from the Río Coco bus terminal (where you can catch a bus from Quito to Cumbaya where USFQ is) to the South Bus Terminal. There are two similar lines called el Trole and Metrobus that go through other parts of town. The app MovilizateUIO has maps of the Ecovía, Trole, and Metrobus that can help you plan routes. To use the buses, you just pay to enter one of the many small stations around Quito. The machines only accept actual quarters, though you can get change from a teller just before. Once you've entered a station, you can technically ride the buses all day as long as you stay in the stations. If you're uncertain of a stop, just get out and get in a new one once you have your bearings. Pickpocketing can be an issue in the buses,



keep your belongings close and in sight. Even locals carry their backpacks on their front to prevent theft.

**Cuenca:** Buses are pretty easy to use and cheap as well, costing 25 cents per ride. Some of us rode them everyday to work. The app Moovit has the bus schedules and routes on it. Another app called Cuenca Bus Map has the offline routes on it. If you are riding this regularly the best thing to do is get a loadable card. You can get this at lots of pharmacies and corner stores and put however much money you want on them. They typically have signs out front if they sell them. The buses move real fast, and you need to assert yourself to hail them.

## Regional Buses

Buses around the country between cities are very cheap, about \$2 an hour. They are by far the best way to get around the country, and run everywhere. Finding schedules online is almost impossible, the best way to find them out is to go to the station a couple days in advance and ask around once there. The buses also have a luggage shipping option, called “servicio de encomiendas.” This is a cheap, easy way to ship your luggage across the country. They ship it and hold it at the final bus station for you free of charge. We did it, and it worked great. The intercity bus stop in every city is called Terminal Terrestre. On some buses it may be so crowded that you have to stand the whole way.

## Food and Dining

### Grocery Shopping

**Quito** - Markets are less common than grocery stores and minimercados (like convenience stores). Recommendations for cheaper grocery stores include Santa Maria and Aki, but the selection will be slightly limited compared to US grocery stores. For items you can't find in Aki, or for more obscure or American items, SuperMaxi will also function as another, more expensive option.

**Cuenca** - We recommend using food markets instead of grocery stores for day to day grocery shopping. Everything that is imported or processed will be significantly more expensive than fresh food you can buy at the market. Use the market to get meats, vegetables, fruits, and assorted grains/spices. Be careful though, as the merchants can make their own prices and might ask for more from you because you are a foreigner. The best markets we found were Mercado 3 de Noviembre, Mercado 10 de Agosto, and Mercado 9 de Octubre.

### Restaurants

There are many different types of restaurants throughout Ecuador at many different price ranges. Generally restaurants that look like a Western sit-down restaurant will have prices similar to the United States. Look for restaurants that look small, sometimes with their menu of the day posted outside. These places serve almuerzos which are usually cheap and great quality - more like a home cooked meal than any kind of restaurant here.



## Ecuadorian Cuisine to Try

Cuy- Guinea Pig

“Almuerzo”- A term used to describe a specific meal that includes meat, rice, and soup

Papi Pollo/Salchipapas- Fries and chicken/Sausage, typically can get at a restaurant for \$1-2

Canelazo- Cinnamon drink made with a local Ecuadorian alcohol called Zhumir

Hornado- Pork and potato dish, very traditional

Ceviche- Traditional seafood dish, similar to a fishy soup. Excellent in coastal cities

Fritada- Excellent roasted pork dish, very traditional and popular in Quito.

Empanadas- Ecuador has a ton of different kinds and they’re all delicious, try as many as you can.

Bolón- a fried plantain ball stuffed with cheese, chicharrón, or both, often eaten for breakfast with coffee.

Pristiño- fried dough topped with honey or panela (unprocessed sugar)

Encebollado- a seafood and yuca based soup with lots of onions and lime.

Llapingachos- delicious potato pancakes filled with cheese and often served with a fried egg on top

Pinchos- skewers of meat and potatoes sold on the street

Choclo con queso- choclo is a South American corn with very large kernels; grilled and topped with cheese

Michelada- beer typically with hot sauce and lime juice, with a salted rim. No one in our group loved it, but definitely worth the try

## Housing (not through USFQ)

Housing can depend on the situation. Joe and Francisco worked with us to setup housing prior to us arriving. In Cuenca, they set it up so that we all had apartments with each other before arriving. In Quito, many students choose to live on or near the campus of Universidad San Francisco Quito, but depending on where you work, it may not be the most convenient choice for you. Another option to the housing options recommended by Francisco and USFQ advisors is to live off campus and in the city. It is best to live in a gated neighborhood to ensure safety. Many options were available through Airbnb, but make sure to research the area beforehand before signing.

(From the student that chose Airbnb) - I searched for a family on long term Airbnb, and asked a few if we could work out meals for a little extra pay. I absolutely loved living with the family I lived with, though I see the benefits of choosing a homestay too. If you are interested in staying with the family I did, ask Joe or Francisco for my contact info.

## Communication

If you are a USFQ student, USFQ will provide you with a Claro chip with service through the semester. You will need to have an unlocked phone for this to work. If you decide to stay once



the semester ends, you can continue to pay \$15/month to USFQ and they will extend your plan for you. Data is more limited than the plan you might be used to in the US but WhatsApp (which is the most common form of communication) is free and unlimited.

If you have an unlocked phone, you can purchase a prepaid plan while there. The service is generally spotty, and most of the prepaid plans require you to recharge every few days. Keep an eye out for promotional deals, as these can save you lots of money. We managed to get along fine during the week just using wifi and no data, and would add money to our plan while going on trips. Many of us used Claro, which had issues but more or less did what we needed it to. Claro charges 1 dollar per day of data and lets you only pay for a few days at a time. Another option is Movistar, which has a 7 day plan with 300MB of data, 20 minutes, and free WhatsApp for \$3. You can search online to find a plan that suits your needs. If you are there for just the summer, note that 3 months is the minimum number of months on most prepaid plans. Movistar also has month long plans (minimum of three months) for \$20/month that included 2.50 GB, 100 texts, and an hour of talk.

Note: When purchasing a SIM card, you might be required to present your passport.

## Places to Visit

### In Quito

General note - most museums have a student discount or are free with a student card so always ask when you enter or buy your ticket.

#### **Capilla del Hombre**

This is a museum showcasing the work of Ecuadorian artist Guayasamin as well as his personal collection of art. This museum is converted from Guayasamin's personal house so it has a gorgeous view of the city and several interesting peices of art from Guayasamin and other famous artists around the world.

#### **Mindale Museo etnohistorico de artesanias del Ecuador**

Museum that focuses on the indigenous cultures of Ecuador and the region.

#### **Sabai**

Beer garden/brewery with artisanal beers near USFQ.

#### **Parque la Carolina (and botanic garden)**

This area is a large centralized park with athletic track and several athletics fields. Lot of open space and is directly adjacent to one of Quito's newest malls (Quicentro). There are also local sports league that operate here including Futbol, basketball, Ecuadorian Volleyball (Different than regular volleyball), and ultimate frisbee among others. Generally a safe place to be during





the day. At night be more cautious and stay in lit areas. This is also where most of the local street vendors congregate.

### **Parque Metropolitano Guangüiltagua**

This is a huge park near the center of Quito! It is a great place to visit during the day! It has some gorgeous views including an oversize “QUITO” sign! Great for photos! Lots of fun to walk around. They have several hiking paths that are lined with benches and statues. You could definitely spend a good portion of a day here if you wanted to. **DO NOT COME HERE AT NIGHT THOUGH.** Very sketchy area that my host family warned me about several times.

### **Museo de la Ciudad**

Museum that details the history of the Quito area and the people have lived there.

### **El Teleférico**

This is a cable car that will take you up to a viewing platform on Mount Pichincha (mountain adjacent to Quito). There is a restaurant up here and places to sit and observe the view. From here you are able to follow the path and hike up to the peak of the mountain if you choose. This hike takes about 4-5 hours. It is colder than expected and requires some light bouldering for the last 100 meters or so. Warmer jacket and gloves are recommended. Also try and pick a nice day with no clouds to come up here so you can have an amazing view!

### **Festival of Lights**

Absolutely incredible local festival if you are there around August 10th

### **Centro histórico**

#### **Plaza grande/de la independencia**

Regarded as the city center. The square has the Quito city government building and the Ecuadorian president’s mansion. Has several street vendors and shops. Many historical churches are on or near this square. This is also the center near where most of the museums mentioned above are found. Do be careful though this area is crowded during the day and has a lot of tourists so it is a common target location for pickpockets. They have some good local ice cream down these streets as well. Look for the ice cream made in the large copper bowls. That’s the traditional stuff.

#### **Compañía de Jesus**

This church is also known as the golden church! Fittingly the inside is covered in a layer of gold! It is a very historical church that has been part of the cities history since the mid-1500’s. It is near the historical city center and is popular to visit for tourists. Definitely a must see though.

#### **Basilica del voto nacional**

Large national basilica of Ecuador. Located a short walk from centro historico. Very historical inside. You have to pay to go to the inside and the tower separately but both



are well worth it! Tower is a little spooky if you're afraid of heights but has an amazing view at the top.

### **El Panecillo**

This is one of the most significant landmarks in Quito. This statue (a large obelisque madonna) sits on a large hill just south of central Quito. It was once a temple that was used to worship the sun before the arrival of the conquistadors. It has an amazing view so well worth the visit. There are food stands up here as well. If you wish you are also able to pay to go inside and climb up to the second level look out of the statue.

### **La Ronda**

The touristy bar district of Quito. This area is the place to be on the weekends. At night many more locals venture out this way too. They have several restaurants and clubs. The best drinks to get are the Canelazo de Mora and the Agua Loca. You can find these both for pretty cheap so don't just settle with the first place that has it on their menu. Good price for both is about a dollar per glass. The best place for agua loca is a small little shop that looks like it could hold maybe 10 people. Just inside the door there is a staircase to the right and in the center of the room is a (debatablely) gorgeous painting of a cabin on a lake! This area is very dead on monday and tuesday nights so I would not recommend coming on these nights.

## Near Quito

**Mitad del Mundo** - Just outside of Quito is the Latitude Zero line that divides the Northern and Southern hemispheres. At this site, there is a large monument and a small collection of shops and vendors. The Intiñan Museum (about 5 minutes north of the monument) is very cool and a cannot-miss place to visit to learn about the locals and watch cool demonstrations of the effects of the equator. This location is more highly recommended by locals due to its fun and interactive nature, as it is where the true equator lies.

**Mindo** - This is a tiny action sports town in the cloud forest about 2 hours outside of Quito by bus. Here, you can zipline, tube down a river, rent ATVs, rappel down waterfalls, and many other activities. Best of all, all activities are very cheap compared to the United States (\$20 gets you ziplining, floating, and a chocolate production farm). They also have lots of bird watching, butterfly gardens, an orchid garden, and even a hummingbird viewing spot that we 100% recommend even if you're not very into birds.

**Papallacta** - Volcanic natural hot springs about an hour outside of Quito. Can bus or take a taxi out to the springs and relax after a long week of work.

**Otavalo/Cotacachi** - The Otavalo market is one of the largest open air markets in South America and features local crafts and artisan woven works, especially made out of alpaca wool. The market is an every Saturday event. Barter your way into excellent quality goods for bargain prices. The market itself is about 3 hours north of Quito, so turn the trip into a weekend



adventure and bus another 15 minutes to Cotacachi after a day at the market for high quality leather goods and a hike around Laguna Cuicocha.

**Cotopaxi (not summiting) and Quilotoa** - If you enjoy hiking, these two destinations combine for an excellent weekend trip. You can bus or taxi out to Cotopaxi and hike all afternoon, then find a local hostel to stay the night in. Sunday morning, wake up early and head over to the nearby Quilotoa Loop for the scenic hike of a lifetime. Breathtaking views and a beautiful lake make for a truly unforgettable experience.

### **Cotopaxi (Summiting the World's Tallest Active Volcano)**

This trip is not for the faint of heart. 100% worth it to give is a shot but this trip will push even the most physically fit or regular hikers to the limit. If you are looking to submit you will need to know a few things right off the bat. First you need a guide. Any mountain over 5000 meters in Ecuador legally requires a guide to climb. For Cotopaxi one guide is limited to have 2 people with him/her. The pricing is expensive compared to most everything else in Ecuador but compared to mountaineering prices around the rest of the world this is a phenomenal choice. All in all if you go with a buddy the total price for the travel, equipment rental, housing food and guide will be about \$200-300. This trek will take two days. The first day you take transit or a taxi to the mountain and hike about an hour up to base camp. You will eat at around 6, go to bed at 7 and wake up at 11pm to prepare to leave so you can start your hike by midnight. The hike is entirely up hill and takes between 5.5 and 7 hours.

**Quilotoa Loop** - A multi-day hike. Typically a three day hike, but if you do enough research you can do it in two. During the three days, you hike by small mountain farms to end at the stunning Quilotoa crater lake, and spend each night at a hostel. The hostels along this route were my favorite in the whole country. Be prepared for the constantly changing paths. It is very easy to get off trail here. Also be prepared for the dogs. This is by/through many local peoples' yards or farms. There are many very aggressive and protective dogs throughout the hike. It is recommended to find a walking stick asap for some form of intimidation.

**Baños de Agua Santa** - Baños (about an hour outside of Ambato) is a small city but is a hot spot for tourists. Many high-thrill activities can be hired here through one of the many tourism companies in the city. Activities include rafting, canyoning, waterfall hiking, trips to the Amazon, paragliding, and swinging (there are swings located on top of a mountain at La Casa del Arbol). The waterfall bus or bike ride is not one to miss.

## In Cuenca

- Parque de La Madre: Large park full of recreational activities
- Parque el Paraiso: Very large park with tons of outdoor space and bodies of water
- Museo Pumapungo: Incan ruins within Cuenca City limits, free admission, often hosts local events
- Parque Calderon: Center of the city, contains Cuenca Cathedral (Catedral de la Inmaculada Concepcion). Street festivals occur here often.
- Iglesia Turi- Church on top of hill overlooking city. Great View of city.



- Calle Large: Street along the Tomebamba river with the majority of Cuenca's bars/clubs on it.

A few recommended bars and clubs: Nidia, Cervecería, El Sociedad, Fusión, La Cigale

## Near Cuenca

- Ingapirca - This is an old Incan ruin located about a 2 hour bus ride from Cuenca. It is their last remaining sun temple. Buses run directly there from Cuenca.
- Cajas - This is the national park located 30 minutes to an hour away from Cuenca. Take a bus from the terminal headed for Guayaquil through Cajas. You do not need a ticket to get on the bus and tell them you want to get off at Cajas. It's up in the mountains, about another kilometer higher than Cuenca. There are several different parts of it. We went through forests there, fished in a lagoon, and hiked to the top of some mountains. It can get cold and rainy there so go prepared and bring food. Hitchhiking back to Cuenca is most effective, but go in a group.
- Baños - There are two Baños in Ecuador, one by Cuenca and one about 8 hours away. The one near Cuenca is famous for its natural spas. There are several famous ones there that are all popular.
- El Chorro - 2 big waterfalls about an hour away from Cuenca. You can take a bus to Girón and then taxi to the base. We hiked up the first waterfall and then went up to the second but got lost along the way. So unless you want to go off trail to get to the water, make sure you get good directions up the trail. We also went ziplining here across the canyon.

## General Ecuador

**Montañita** - Great place to visit. It's a little beach town known for surfing and partying.

Saturday night is the best night to go out. Stay at the Sapa Inka, the owner Dani is a chill guy and they have lots of hammocks and cats. Make sure you go on the weekend rather than during the week. There weren't many people during the week but when we went for Saturday night it was packed. If you are trying to do an Isla de la Plata/whale tour, call way ahead. The ones from Montañita book up fast since they have to include a drive to Puerto Lopez.

**Guayaquil** - Guayaquil is a very modern city that is similar in appearance to Miami downtown. However, outside the downtown area, there is a lot of poverty. Although the city is located on the coast, the city is a port, so access to water activities is very limited and not recommended. While here, you can check out the historical city center in Santa Ana Hill, or check out Iguana park.

**Puerto Lopez** - A beach town about an hour north of Montanitas, it's a little larger and has a lot of stuff to do around it. Los Frailes was a beautiful beach a short taxi ride away from the town. The other main attraction here was Isla de la Plata, also known as the Poor Man's Galapagos. It was the best bang for our buck: for forty dollars, we went whale watching (in June-August), saw turtles, blue footed boobies, turtles, other birds, and crabs, while hiking on an island away



from all land. We also went snorkeling. If you have a larger group, you can barter them down on price.

**Nariz del Diablo (train)** - An engineering feat around a very pointed mountain. Train leaves out of Alausi, and is a little pricier, but worth it. Great views and fun activity.

**Tiputini Biodiversity Station** - USFQ owns and operates a research station in the Ecuador's Amazon rainforest right next to Yasuní national park; this area is known as one of the most biodiverse places on Earth. USFQ takes groups of students periodically to visit the station. These are normally 4 day, 3 night trips. It is pretty expensive at \$600 (can be \$400 if you take the bus to Coca instead of flying), but definitely worth it. If you have the option to do this trip, we 100% recommend spending the money. It is a challenge to get out there (two 2-hour boat rides and a rather bumpy, 2-hour bus ride) but is an incredible few days. We had a guide take us on hikes and teach us about the rainforest, showing us tasty ants, poisonous plants, squirrel monkeys, and so much more. We took night hikes and saw some terrifying insects, watched the sun set and rise in a canopy platform, floated down the river in life jackets, played in some quicksand, saw a crocodile on the shore of the river that we were just floating down, saw a huge amount of cool birds, saw some wild boars, played soccer with the staff at the research base.

**Galápagos** - First of all, know that this is not a cheap excursion. However, there is no place on Earth quite like it and there are ways you can make it cheaper. Flights to Galápagos leave only out of Quito or Guayaquil so if you're in Cuenca, I would recommend taking a bus to Guayaquil and a plane from there. Flights cost around \$200 but book ahead and you may be able to get a deal. You also have to spend \$100 in the airport as some kind of "visiting Galápagos fee" (if you have a student visa, it will be only \$25) as well as another \$5 and \$2 for the bus and ferry that leaves from the Baltra airport to the other side of the island. There are many ways to tackle Galápagos, a tour being the easiest. I went with Rebecca Travel and did a 6 day island hopping adventure. I visited 3 islands and it cost \$1,000 which included activities, transportation, guides, hotels, breakfast, and lunch. Last minute tours can be cheaper, but you need to be flexible. Another way to do the island is to go on your own and find last minute deals on the island. This is definitely possible, however I am not sure how cheap you can get it. An important reminder is to be really cautious when it comes to food and drink. I ended up sick from pasta at a local restaurant in Isla Isabela and I did not even drink the tap water. It is not worth risking the trip that you are spending so much on. Lastly, meet the locals. They definitely know the most beautiful spots on the island (you will see every star if you go to Concha Perla at night) and you can make friends to come back and visit.

## Work Culture

The work climate in Ecuador is very friendly. Coworkers take the time to greet each other by name almost every time they see each other throughout the day, and often engage in small talk about their personal lives. It is not unusual for coworkers to be friends outside the office and do things together during the evening/weekends. It is also typical for companies and departments to have traditions that they uphold on certain holidays/events. Your dress code will change



depending on your company and role, but be prepared to come dressed up in business casual at the least every day. Most companies provide lunch to employees every day, and this is a good time to get to know coworkers better, as Ecuadorians usually avoid talking about work or business during lunch.

## Safety

- Do not leave your valuables(Phone, Purse, Shoes, etc.) out of sight for any amount of time. This is especially true in tourist areas. Also be conscious of where you have your items - pickpocketers in these areas are not uncommon
- Be careful shipping anything of value from the US into Ecuador, you will likely pay a very large tariff upon its arrival.
- Foreign imports are heavily taxed, and sometimes the price does not appear on the price tag in the store. It is better to shop for local products while in Ecuador.
- Be careful eating uncooked foods like fruits and vegetables off the street because a lot of these may make you sick.
- Drinking unbottled water - if you do it, you will probably get sick. Host families have a water filter.

### While Traveling

- Sit in the front of busses if possible
- Don't put your stuff under the bus, or under your seat, even if you're traveling far/overnight

## Miscellaneous

One thing that took a little bit of getting used to was being the “gringos” everywhere we went. At a market one of the first days we were there, a 2 or 3 year old boy asked is dad, “son gringos?” I turned around and gave him a big smile and said “Si!” Everywhere we went, people definitely looked at us because we were a group of six, all white, and two were 6'3” and 6'7”. But after a week or so, it wasn't uncomfortable at all. We just got used to it. Our recommendation would just to be open and ready to the fact that you are going to be the foreigner and are likely not going to blend in.

Definitely do as much as you can while studying/working abroad. It will go by really fast and you'll be so much happier if you take advantage of the incredible opportunity you have living in a foreign country.

Bring your Ecuadorian student ID everywhere because a lot of museums and a few other places give student discounts. If you are just coming for work, ask Rafael if you can get one. He should be able to for no charge.

Ecuador uses the American dollar for currency; however, you will hardly see anyone use a \$50 bill because nothing really costs that much and most small vendors don't have change. Sometimes your debit card won't work in certain ATMs - don't freak out, just find another bank's



ATM. Also, get used to using cash for everything. Bonus: Banco Pichincha doesn't charge a fee to use their ATMs.

Try not to slam car doors. Ecuadorians are protective of their cars and sometimes slamming doors shut could hurt some of the older cars.

Maps.me is a an offline maps app that you can use when you're travelling. Another nice feature is that it has a good network of hiking trails to follow.

Random things to bring:

- Sunscreen! You will be at high altitude and burn easily, no matter what your complexion. And sunscreen in Ecuador costs triple or quadruple what it does in the US. If you need a little, bring some. If you will be a tomato without it, bring a lot.
- If you are a woman and use tampons, bring about how many you think you'll need. Ecuadorian women almost only use pads so that is all that you can find at most stores.