



COUNTRY

OVERVIEW

& PACKING

GUIDELINES

Ecuador: Development, Politics, and Languages

Fall 2021

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COUNTRY OVERVIEW

GENERAL INFORMATION

Ecuador marked 40 years of civilian governance in 2019, although the period has been marred by political instability. The emergence of the indigenous population as a politically organized constituency has added to the democratic volatility of the country in recent years.

Protests in Quito contributed to the mid-term departure of Ecuador's three democratically elected presidents. Former President Rafael Correa set out to boost economic growth and modernization. In an April 2007 referendum, voters overwhelmingly approved his call to rewrite the Constitution. In November 2007, a Constituent Assembly was established to elaborate this new Constitution (the 20th in Ecuadorian history) which has been regarded as the most progressive in the world. On April 2021, Guillermo Lasso was elected President, indicative of a more conservative regime for the next four years.



CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

Ecuador is situated on the equator and has four distinct geographical and climatic zones: the coastal plain with a tropical climate and rich agricultural land; the cool Andean highlands at about 8,000 to 10,000 feet above sea level; the humid eastern lowlands in the upper reaches of the Amazon basin where Ecuador's oil reserves are found; and the Galápagos Islands, 600 miles off the coast.

October, November, March, April, and May are usually the months with the heaviest rainfall, and it can be quite chilly in Quito. However, rainfall, and indeed the rainy season, varies according to the zone. Weather is very unpredictable, and in one day you might experience 50-degree temperatures, 90-degree temperatures, sunshine, and drenching rain

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Ecuador is a multicultural country; each of the four regions, the Coast, Andes, Amazon, and Galápagos, present a variety of customs, which gives Ecuador an exceptional cultural richness. Even within the regions, there are differences derived from rural or urban conditions; Quito, the eastern Rain Forest, and the central Pacific coast all present marked variations among them. These differences are analyzed during orientation week and throughout the semester in more detail.

However, there are a few aspects that remain constant, which need to be observed by students:

- **Greeting:** always greet with enthusiasm (not observing this rule is considered rude). Depending on the time of the day, saying *buenos días*, *buenas tardes*, or *buenas noches* is a must.
- **Informing your local associates at all times about where you are and respecting social norms.** This is also a must for any type of social interaction in Ecuador. Failing to do this is considered highly disrespectful and is a source of stress and discomfort for the local families.
- **Take responsibility for your own safety.** Like in any Latin American country, individuals need to be attentive at all times about their safety, especially in cities. Try to go out in groups (with other students, family members, etc.) whenever possible. Be aware of your personal belongings in crowded streets, buses, etc.
- **Restrict or avoid the use of alcohol.** Even though in Ecuador the use of alcohol is largely admitted and encouraged, students need to remember that they are not part of the culture, so they could face major risks (theft, injuries, or even sexual abuse). Most of the major problems at Study Abroad programs are related to the use of alcohol or other drugs.

DIET

SIT Study Abroad provides experiential learning opportunities where students become embedded in their host community. As such, we strive to accommodate serious food allergies where possible but simply cannot ensure that all dietary restrictions



or non-medically mandated diets can be accommodated.

Students are encouraged to participate in the local food culture as a central aspect of daily life. By trying to replicate your diet at home you may miss out on an important part of your host culture. Due to the unique living and learning community central to all SIT programs, we cannot separate food and eating communally (including with your host family) from the program experience. Please consider local diet seriously when selecting your program of choice. Your admissions counselor is a great resource in better understanding the local diet.

The typical Ecuadorian diet varies somewhat by region (for example, the coast depends more heavily on seafood and plantains) but typically consists of rice, potatoes, and red meat, chicken, or seafood. The diet includes many starches. Lunch is the main meal of the day and usually includes a soup, a *segundo* (second) of rice, meat, and maybe a vegetable, and fresh fruit juice. Some Ecuadorian specialties that you are sure to encounter include *locro de papa* (potato, cheese, and avocado soup), *llapingachos* (mashed potato and cheese patties), and *ceviche* (marinated seafood). Most students come to enjoy the food, especially the wonderful variety of fruits and juices.

Ecuadorians prefer to eat their meals at home whenever possible. Breakfasts consist of coffee, juice, bread, and perhaps eggs. Dinner might be similar to lunch but in smaller portions. There are numerous Ecuadorian and other South American restaurants in the larger cities, as well as many Chinese, Italian, and other cuisine options. Bottled water is readily available in most areas.

Students adhering to a vegan or kosher diet may have significant difficulty eating a balanced diet in

Ecuador, as many dairy/egg products are regularly consumed, and vegetables are not a staple. Vegetarians should be fine, especially if they are able to be flexible. Be aware that even non-meat dishes may be cooked with lard, beef broth, chicken broth, etc. Also, vegetarians should know that “vegetarian” in Latin America is usually assumed to mean avoidance of **red** meat; you may still be served fish and chicken unless you specify your preference.

Note: if you have special dietary needs, including allergies, please inform our office prior to the start of your program. We will advise you on realistic expectations about avoiding or incorporating certain foods within the program context.

SAFETY, SECURITY, AND HEALTH

Maintaining good health is critical to having a successful semester. To help you do that, we have provided [Health Guidelines and Requirements](#) for your program.

It is very important that you read the Health Guidelines and Requirements document as early as possible and examine it with your medical provider. The guidelines include recommended immunizations; a suggested calendar for immunizations and other prophylaxes; and valuable information on how to avoid exposure to common carriers of disease.

There are excellent healthcare facilities and pharmacies available in major cities in Ecuador as well as good private clinics in many smaller cities and towns. In general, private clinics and hospitals are better than state-owned healthcare facilities. The program staff has information concerning healthcare resources for most any need, including dental, vision, and mental health care.

Malaria is **not** found in areas of Ecuador above 1500 meters, including Quito. However, malaria does exist in coastal areas and some lowland rainforest. Prevention of malaria is possible with personal protective measures including prophylactic medication and minimizing exposure to mosquitoes. Please consult the [Health Guidelines and Requirements](#) for more information. You should consult your doctor to discuss malaria prophylaxis options. **Program excursions include a total of 5**

days in malarial areas. That includes two separate trips of 1 and 4 days each, with two weeks in between (Guayaquil and Rain Forest Excursions). If you think you might choose to conduct your ISP on the coast or in the jungle you should calculate 4 more weeks of exposure in a malarial area.

SIT will require COVID-19 vaccination for all U.S. students. Recognizing that not all international students will have access to vaccines by Fall 2021, SIT asks that international students who wish to travel in and who do not have access to a vaccine apply for an accommodation by emailing your admissions counselor.

The Health Guidelines and Requirements will also provide recommendations related to preventing the contraction and spread of COVID-19. Students will be provided with COVID-19 related information and requirements prior to your travel in order to provide you with the most up-to-date information. General information about SIT's response to COVID-19 can be found on our webpage here: <https://studyabroad.sit.edu/health-safety-and-well-being/risk-management/sit-health-and-safety-update-in-response-to-covid-19/>

Students are thoroughly briefed on safety considerations during in-country orientation and are updated throughout the semester if and when circumstances change. For information regarding safety and security, emergency communications, SIT policies, illness and accident insurance, and general program tips, please read the [Safety, Security, and Health](#) document and [Student Handbook](#).

Before departure, please make photocopies of all important documents and credit cards; leave one



copy at home (and tell someone where it is!) and bring one along with you kept separate from the originals. Bring a money belt or some other safe means to carry your walk-around money & valuables. Please avoid bringing flashy, expensive jewelry. The program has a safe place to store passports and other items.

ACCOMMODATIONS

To keep our homestay and communities safe, we have made the precautionary and difficult decision to omit the homestay component of this program. SIT is committed to protecting our homestay family partners while providing suitable accommodations for students during these times. While in Quito and during excursions, students will be housed in small hotels, hostels, and eco lodges. Some of them will offer kitchen facilities for occasional preparation of meals. There will still be opportunities to practice your language skills and build relationships with our community partners.

Housing options during your Independent Study Project will be accommodations will be arranged with the support of the program staff. Please note that ISP location may be limited due to COVID-19 precautions.

TRANSPORTATION

Most Ecuadorians travel around town and around the country by bus. Local city buses run very frequently and cost very little. Inter-provincial buses are also inexpensive and reliable. There are also numerous taxis, which — in Quito— usually have meters for daytime use. At night the price should be agreed upon before you get in the taxi.

Students typically travel on average 20 – 40 minutes to classes, and/or placement sites. Student travel by walking, bus, taxi and trolley bus.

COMMUNICATION

While you may want to be in regular communication with friends and family from home during the term abroad, please bear in mind that different time zones, unreliable phone lines, and changing program activities can complicate communication.

It's important to be clear with family and friends about your availability during the term. Many students recommend making an appointment to call home or to receive a call. You should also consider the impact of constant communication with friends and family at home on your cultural immersion.



PHONES AND E-MAIL

As part of SIT's commitment to student safety and security, all students are required to have a working smart phone capable of making and receiving both local and international calls throughout the duration of the program. For that purpose students are required to either (a) bring an open, unlocked smart phone from the U.S. to the program that is able to accept a local SIM card, and is compatible with and usable at the program location, (b) work with the academic director within the first week upon arrival in country to purchase a smart phone locally, or (c) bring a dual SIM smart phone. During orientation, with assistance from SIT Study Abroad staff, students will learn how to use their cellphone, how to purchase and use an appropriate local SIM card, and how to acquire minutes for calls and texting. SIT Study Abroad requires that each student have a local number for communication with local contacts and program staff.

While we recognize that alternative communication methods can be free or cheaper than cell service i.e. Facetime, Skype, WhatsApp, etc. those programs alone do not satisfy our need for regular communication with the local program staff and partners, nor do they meet our emergency communication needs. Therefore, local cellular

capacity on each student's phone is required for the duration of the program. Students are required to maintain a minimum amount of phone credits at all times for emergency calls. Full compliance with this policy is expected.

Since you will obtain a local phone number, do not purchase an international plan for your US phone number unless you have a dual SIM smart phone. A local SIM card and internet plan for your unlocked smartphone will cost approximately \$25 per month. Students will be responsible for renewing monthly plans on their phones. If you do not have an unlocked smartphone, a smartphone can be purchased locally and will cost upwards of \$120.

Net-to-phone service (approximately US\$.25 per minute to the US) is available at many Internet cafés, allowing you to make very inexpensive international phone calls. Most major calling cards (AT&T, Sprint, etc.) will work from any phone, though they cost a lot more. Dialing collect is very expensive. Host families generally prefer that you receive calls rather than make them.

Students will have access to internet while at the SIT program center.

MAILINGS

Unlike receiving a package here in the US, receiving a package at your program site is usually **expensive and problematic**. Customs agents must inspect all packages and you, as the recipient, are responsible for duty and storage fees. In addition, there are cases of items being lost in the mail or taking so long to reach the recipient that the recipient is nearly back in the US by the time the items are received. For these reasons, sending packages should be done only for emergency situations. Additionally, sending valuables is highly discouraged.

For this program, **DHL and FedEx services are available in country**. Despite cheaper prices, reliance on the US Postal Service is not advised due to delays and unreliability. When given the option, it's always a good idea to send packages certified and with a tracking number that allows the sender to track the package.

If it is necessary for someone to send you mail, then please inquire with local program staff PRIOR to any package being sent to Ecuador for specific instructions on how to do so.

MONEY

In addition to tuition, SIT Study Abroad program fees cover room and board throughout the program. When room and/or board are not taken with the group, students will be given a stipend to cover related expenses. SIT will cover daily commuting costs, if any, and excursions that are part of the normal program itinerary. During the ISP period, students will receive a stipend for basic room and board only, based on the cost of living at the program base. **Any domestic travel, interpretation services, or supplies necessary for the ISP are the students' responsibility.** Please plan accordingly.

The US Dollar is the official currency of Ecuador, so you will not need to convert money. You will notice that some locally-minted Ecuadorian coins circulate alongside US coins, but all banknotes will be US dollar bills.

We advise that you bring a couple hundred dollars in cash (in small bills) and leave the rest of your money accessible through an ATM card. Most students access funds from their US bank accounts using their VISA or MasterCard debit cards. Any debit card that is linked to the PLUS or CIRRUS networks should also work at ATMs in country. Credit cards (VISA, American Express, MasterCard) will work in many stores in Quito, although there may be a surcharge that can be up to 8%. However, even if you plan to use an ATM card you should also bring cash. It is very complex and expensive to wire money from the US to Ecuador, so bring and/or have access (via ATM card) to enough money for the entire semester. **Do not bring traveler's checks** as they are very difficult and problematic to exchange.

If using a debit and/or credit card, you should contact your bank and/or credit card companies regarding your travel plans. If you don't inform these companies that you will be away, they will often assume the card has been lost or stolen and will put an immediate hold on the card. You should also check on costs of withdrawal, as these costs vary and can sometimes be very expensive. Renewing and receiving reissued credit and debit cards while on the program will be an expensive and highly inconvenient process. Before you leave for your program, please check the expiration dates on your cards to ensure that they will not expire while you

are abroad. It is also very important that you make photocopies of all your debit/credit card information and leave them with someone you trust in case your card(s) is/are lost or stolen.

Following are suggestions for spending money during the program, including estimates for textbooks, ISP-related expenses, medical expenses, personal spending, and gifts. Figures are based on recent student evaluations, though individual spending habits vary widely and **these costs are averages.**

A suggested total amount of money to budget ranges from **US\$1,200 to \$1,700.** To determine where you might fall in this range, please examine your spending habits during a typical semester at your home school and consider any exceptional expenditures you may have on the program, including travel costs for your planned ISP or a specific personal expense.

Please budget approximately:

Personal spending (from past student suggestions):	\$750-1200
Books, printing, supplies:	\$40
Up-front medical costs:	\$50/visit
COVID-19 Entry Test(s) (may be required for entry; subject to	\$100-250
Potential ISP travel expenses:	\$200
Typical Internet café usage:	\$2/hour
Estimated total:	\$1,200-1,700

VISITORS AND FREE TIME

SIT strongly discourages and will not provide support for any visitors to students during the term, due to the rigorous nature of the program and the disruption that such visits cause in program flow and group dynamics. Students should be sure that relatives and friends are aware of this policy and that visits are scheduled for dates after the formal conclusion of the program. Students will not be excused from program components to attend to

visitors. See the Attendance and Participation section of the

Please note that any visitors during the course of the program must plan their own independent accommodations; SIT Study Abroad can accommodate only their assigned student and, due to cultural and contractual understandings with SIT, should not be asked to host students' guests.

During the program, students follow an intense schedule of classes and field-based learning assignments, even during the ISP. Free time for pursuing an independent interest or hobby during the program will be limited. Your admissions counselor can advise you about particular interests you may have. For example, if you must keep in shape for your next athletic season, or if you play a musical instrument and want to know whether to bring it, we can help you to understand your schedule and any concerns or limitations that may exist. Please note that you will not have a long break during the program, such as Thanksgiving or Spring Break.

Travel outside of Ecuador, particularly to Peru and Colombia, during the 15-week program (other than for medical or family emergencies) is strictly prohibited according to the [Conditions of Participation](#), which you signed. Your insurance coverage is not effective outside the country, and you always face the risk of not being allowed to return to Ecuador. Therefore, no student is

authorized to leave Ecuador before the final day of the program.

SIT has suspended independent travel for this program due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. SIT defines “independent travel” as travel that is independently organized by a student(s) and is unrelated to program activities; and involves an overnight stay.

ALUMNI CONTACTS

If you have further questions, please contact your admissions counselor and/or ask an alumni contact: <https://studyabroad.sit.edu/admissions-aid/application-process/contact-a-former-student/>.

Don't miss the Packing List on the next page!

These packing guidelines are based on suggestions from past students and your academic director.



PACKING GUIDELINES

LUGGAGE

Please pack lightly and include only necessary items. You should be able to carry all your luggage significant distances on your own. Try to minimize both the number of bags and weight of your bag(s) since you will likely be acquiring more belongings while abroad.

Many students find that a large internal frame backpack and a smaller daypack/duffel are the most convenient choices for luggage, however it is up to you. **You will need a medium sized backpack to use for excursions.** You can leave some of your belongings at the program office or with your host family if necessary.

If carrying prescription medications, you should carry a letter from your doctor to prevent any concerns at customs or in transit. (Please see the “General Health Tips” section in the [Safety, Security, and Health](#) pre-departure document.)

Please check the current requirements of the Transportation Security Administration (<http://www.tsa.gov>) as well as those of the airline on which you are flying for domestic and international baggage restrictions.

CLOTHING GUIDELINES

Students in the past have recommended bringing the same sort of clothes that you wear in college, including nice outfits for social events. Ecuadorians typically dress conservatively during the day. People will judge you based on how you look and what you are wearing. Ripped jeans, T-shirts with holes, spaghetti-strap tops, leggings, mini-skirts, shorts, and flip-flops (men or women) are NEVER proper attire for Quito.

Women, if you wear clothing that reveals a lot of skin you will draw unwanted attention from men, which will probably cause you to feel uncomfortable and harassed. Since your Ecuadorian host families feel that how you dress reflects on them, bring one more formal outfit in case you are invited to attend a wedding or other family gathering. Women in Quito wear pants most of the time because of the weather

(which is very changeable). They also usually wear boots to go out at night, or when it is raining. Medium length skirts or dresses are more common and accepted than ankle-length. Since the program includes travel to both warm and cool areas, you need to bring a variety of clothing. Dressing in layers is the best solution. You can also expect some mud and rain on our excursions.

COMPUTERS AND OTHER ELECTRONICS

It is recommended that you bring a laptop computer. If you bring a laptop, the computer will be your personal property and responsibility. It is recommended that you insure your computer, smartphone, or other valuables for full coverage. SIT is not responsible for any duty tax you may have to pay when you enter the country, theft, or loss.

Internet access is very good throughout Quito and smaller cities. Small towns and rural areas, however, do not have good access. The cost of renting time on a computer with high-speed Internet access is about US\$2 /hour in Internet cafés. In smaller cities, Internet access can cost up to US\$2.50 per hour.

It is recommended that you bring a laptop for word processing, or for Internet activities such as frequent emailing or Skype. You will be able to leave your laptops in Quito during the excursions. Past students have found it quite helpful to have a laptop for assignments and during the ISP period, but you must be prepared for the risk of damage or theft that carrying such expensive equipment involves.

Please see the following website for information about electricity, voltage and electrical adapters. <http://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/>. In Ecuador the voltage is 110V (same as in the US). Outlet adapters (3-prong to 2-prong) can easily be purchased in Ecuador if necessary.

GIFTS

You may want to consider bringing small gifts of gratitude for people with whom you develop a special connection to thank them for their hospitality and to share a part of your culture with them. Try to choose gifts that represent you or the part of the country and/or community you live in. Think about

what your city, state, or local artisans produce. Draw upon your personal interests or hobbies for ideas. Once you are on the program and learn more about the local culture, you will discover other ways to thank the community. Remember to bring pictures of your friends and family to share.

WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT OBTAIN IN COUNTRY

Many American brands of hygiene products and toiletries can be bought in Ecuador, though usually only in major cities, in large supermarkets or shopping malls. Imported items can be quite expensive but quality local brands are usually fine. Please note that typically only OB tampons are available. You can purchase some small items once you are here, such as toothpaste, deodorant, etc. Bring some to get you started, but you don't have to bring enough for the entire semester. School supplies are easy to find and inexpensive. You can find almost any item of clothing you need in Quito, or in the artisan markets, varying considerably in quality and cost.



PACKING LIST

GENERAL-CLOTHING

- 1 nice outfit suitable for a social event
- Lightweight clothes for Rain Forest and Guayaquil/Galapagos excursions (cotton, rayon or cotton/rayon blend) including pants, long-sleeved shirts, light T-shirts, opt. medium length skirt)
- 5–6 mixed long and short-sleeved t-shirts
- 2-3 nice shirts/button down/blouses
- 2-4 pairs light-weight pants and/or jeans
- Sweater
- 2 pairs of long shorts
- Underwear and both long and short socks (10-day supply)
- Warm pajamas or nightgown
- Slippers or flip flops (for use inside house and on excursions)
- 1 pair comfortable sneakers
- 1 pair sandals
- 1 pair nice shoes
- Rain gear (waterproof jacket, poncho, or umbrella)
- Jacket or fleece
- Bathing suit (not bikini)
- Optional – yoga pants/leggings and shorts for exercising only

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

- Passport
- Yellow WHO Card (see the [Safety, Security, and Health](#) document for more information)
- Proof of COVID-19 Vaccine
- 2 photocopies of your passport stored separately from your actual passport
- EIL Ecuador Invitation Letter
- Proof of health insurance (print summary of benefits found here <https://studyabroad.sit.edu/health-safety-and-well-being/student-insurance/>)

HEALTH/TOILETRIES

- Adequate supply of any medications you use regularly
- Small first aid kit (most supplies can be bought here)
- Extra eyeglasses and/or contact lenses
- Sunscreen (at least SPF 30)
- Sunglasses
- Wide-brimmed hat or baseball cap (sun protection)
- Insect repellent
- **Malaria prophylactic medication** for excursions (opt. a month more if you expect to do your ISP in the Rain Forest or on the Coast).

Malaria Medications

You will need to bring Malaria prophylactics (preventative medication) for our Guayaquil and our Rain Forest Excursions. This is a total of 5 days in a malarial area that includes two separate trips of 1 and 4 days each, with approximately two weeks in between. For most medications, you need to begin a couple of days before and continue anywhere from a few days to 1– 4 weeks afterwards. If you choose to do your ISP on the Coast or in the jungle, you will need 4 more weeks of medication. Please check with your doctor and bring the corresponding amount of medication. You do NOT need malaria prophylactics for the Cloud Forest Excursion, Galapagos Excursion or while you are in Quito. **Do not expect to purchase malaria preventive medication in country, as it is not available (particularly Malarone).**

To prevent the contraction and spread of COVID-19 students should come prepared with:

- At least 3 reusable masks* and gloves for personal protection (disposable masks will also be available)
- Hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol for use when soap and water is not readily available
- Anti-bacterial wipes or solution to wipe down high-touch surfaces, especially while traveling from the US

*Cover your mouth and nose with a mask when around others. Masks help reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19 both by close contact and by airborne transmission. Masks must have two or more layers of washable, breathable fabric. Do not wear face shields alone (evaluation of the effectiveness of face shields is ongoing but is unknown at this time).

OTHER IMPORTANT ITEMS

- An open, unlocked smart phone (see Phones section for more details)
- Medium-sized day pack (to pack clothes for 3–4 days for excursions)
- Small, quick-drying towel
- Flashlight
- **Latin American** Spanish/English dictionary
- Reusable water bottle
- Small luggage lock
- You do NOT NEED a sleeping bag or mosquito net

OPTIONAL

- Travel guide (particularly if you plan to do post-program travel)
- Small camera and film/batteries (*please insure valuable cameras*)
- Pocket knife (pack in *checked* luggage!)
- Laptop computer (*please insure it*)