



## Frequently Asked Questions for Ecuador Volunteers & Researchers

Ceiba Foundation for Tropical Conservation



### **Covid-19 Protocols**

During the Covid-19 pandemic, we recommend that you fly to Guayaquil or Manta. These cities have passed the peak of infection whereas Quito is currently a large source of contagion. We do not want you to get sick, nor have you bring the disease to vulnerable communities surrounding your volunteer site. To minimize risks, we recommend you avoid staying in larger cities, unnecessary traveling, and taking public transportation.

At the reserve, we have implemented several safety protocols at the Lalo Loor Dry Forest Reserve to help protect program participants, staff, and the community. Luckily, the coast has not been as hard-hit as large cities such as Quito, but we are continuously monitoring the situation and adjusting our protocols as needed. Masks are mandatory in public areas. The authorities will enforce the mask mandate and you can be fined \$100 if you are not wearing one in public. At the reserve, we require masks in all common areas whenever day-visitors are present. Make sure to practice good hygiene and wash your hands frequently and maintain a distance of 2 meters (6 feet) of others. Again, we also ask that you limit your travel to the surrounding areas and communities to help reduce the spread of the virus. If you do travel, make sure to wear a mask, practice social distancing, and wash your hands frequently.

### **What do I do when I arrive at to the airport?**

The airport in Guayaquil is straightforward. After deplaning, you will need to fill out some health forms and present your negative Covid-19 test; 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. There is currently a 7 day quarantine required and you will need to acquire another Covid-19 test in-country. Please note that these rules are constantly being revised so be sure to check with your embassy. If you arrive in the morning, we recommend that you travel to Manta for your orientation. If you arrive the late afternoon or at night, we recommend that you contact us to arrange a ride from the airport to your hotel in Guayaquil.

### **Where should I stay?**

If you prefer to stay in Guayaquil first, we recommend you stay at the [Hotel Plaza Monte Carlos](#).

In Manta, Ceiba's director, Carolina, will give you your orientation upon arrival and if it is too late to travel to the reserve, we recommend you stay at the [Airbnb](#) in her building.

### **How do I get from Guayaquil/Manta to my volunteer site?**

After you arrive in Ecuador and receive your orientation in Manta, you will travel to your volunteer the Lalo Loor Dry Forest Reserve.

We recommend that you reserve private transport, from Guayaquil to Manta it takes about 3-4 hours. Ivonne Chavez (+593 98 670 8587) is one of our reliable contacts for transport on this route. From Manta to the reserve, it takes another 3-4 hours and there are several options from shared taxi services to a private driver, Diego Salgado (+593 98 823 1518).

Private transport from Guayaquil to Manta costs \$100

Private transport from Manta to the reserve costs \$100, shared transport \$15

We can schedule private transport to the different locations. You must let our staff in Ecuador know at least one day in advance if you wish to hire transport.

### **What are accommodations like?**

At the Lalo Loor Dry Forest Reserve, lodging is in shared dormitories with bunk-beds. Rooms hold from two to four people. The reduced capacity because of Covid-19 is 7 people. We will place you in your own room to keep with social distancing protocols. Bedding is provided, and each bunk is fitted with a mosquito net. There is no electricity within the station house. There is electricity at the EcoCenter along the road where electronics can be charged. Electricity is 110V, same as in the U.S. We also have a secure dry box in the EcoCenter where computers and other electronics can be stored safely.

All volunteers are provided with three meals per day during weekdays. Staff prepares food on Monday through Friday. Food is local and simple, but vegetarians, vegans, and those with dietary restrictions 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 remain on-site over the weekend, they are responsible for purchasing their own food.

### **Can I drink the water in Ecuador?**

You should never drink the tap water while in Ecuador, even while in Guayaquil or Manta. 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 7 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 ("Es agua de bidón" or "Es agua hervida?"). 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 (if you do not prepay before arrival), 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 wash their clothes weekly at a laundromat, which costs \$1.00-1.50 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 purified drinking water at all times), buy personal items you'll need, and, of course, to purchase gifts at beautiful artisan craft 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 Guayaquil, Manta 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. Do not rely on ATM cards for all your funds as machines are often out of service. Pedernales has an ATM at the Banco Pichincha which accepts most ATM cards.

### **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 touristic areas in general. 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?**

Days begin sunny and clear but by midafternoon and throughout the evening, rain is not uncommon, especially during the rainy season (December through 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 we 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 but may still want to bring plastic bags or dry bags to keep your gear out of the rain and humidity. Ponchos come in many forms, and we 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?**

The dry forest (Lalo Loor Dry Forest Reserve) is located on the equator near sea level and it can get very hot especially in the dry season. From June to 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 when in town. Loose, lightweight pants (cotton is coolest) and a t-shirt and/or long-sleeve shirt are good when you're working. In the early morning and evening, make sure you have a long-sleeve shirt to put on against mosquitoes! As far as work shoes go, rubber boots are required for working in the forest. Rubber boots can be purchased in Ecuador quite cheaply. Rubber sandals or flip-flops are nice for hanging around the station. A pair of shorts is nice for relaxing on a warm day. 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!

If you decide to travel around Ecuador, you'll need clothing for a wide range of temperatures. In the highlands, it can get pretty cold, so be prepared to put on a sweater or jacket in the evening or on cool and cloudy days.

### **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. Duffel bags can also be used as a "closet" at the volunteer site. 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. 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. 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 (dengue, malaria, chikungunya, 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. Consult the CDC website and visit a travel doctor to get the most up to date recommendations regarding what vaccines and medications you need. There is a very low risk of malaria at the Lalo Loor Reserve but both dengue and chikungunya are present on the coast.

### **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. 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 and it is good to research different anti-malarial medications and discuss these options with your travel doctor.

### **What kind of insect repellent is best?**

This is largely a matter of personal preference, but we suggest not bringing anything stronger than 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 and 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 U.S.

### **What should I do if I'm a vegetarian/vegan?**

Vegetarianism and veganism are relatively new phenomena in Ecuador; however, the Lalo Llor Reserve is accustomed to having visitors with different diet requirements. If meals for other guests will include meat, the staff will prepare a vegetarian/vegan 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 application form.

### **Will I have access to email while in Ecuador?**

Although there is no electricity at the station house where you will be staying. The Visitor will be open during the day and you will have access to electricity and internet. At Lalo Llor there is electricity at the visitor center where you may charge your electronic equipment. We recommend that you bring your laptop computer. For projects that require data management; your own personal computer is **required**. We have a secure dry box located in the EcoCenter so there is no need to worry that your computer will be damaged by humidity.

Internet use, while available for volunteers, should never interfere with the normal work of the staff. Please understand that we are located in a very remote area. It is very difficult and therefore costly to maintain the equipment and we only have a limited amount of bandwidth that is not reliable due to the topography of the region. Ceiba staff reserves the right to prohibit non-staff use for any reason including volunteer misconduct or excessive data usage at the Lalo Llor Dry Forest Reserve. There is always the possibility of going to Pedernales to use internet or enjoy of the disconnection of the forest!!

### **What about laundry?**

There are no laundry facilities at your volunteer site so remember to bring a few sets of field clothes and plenty of socks and underwear. There is a laundry service in the nearby town of Tabuga and in most sizeable towns within an easy bus ride from your volunteer site. These services charge per kilogram of clothing, you will most likely need to drop it off and return the next day or so.

### **What should I bring?\***

Laptop Computer (**required** for some projects)  
USB Flash Drive  
Binoculars (**required** for monkey and avian surveys)  
Camera, extra batteries (rechargeable)

Watch  
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 shirts Shorts  
Swimsuit and towel Biodegradable soap/shampoo Personal first-aid kit  
Insect repellent Sunscreen Sunglasses and hat Pocket knife  
Masks (several)  
Hand sanitizer

\*Please note that this list is not exhaustive! These are just some of the essentials, any questions? Just ask!

### **When/how is payment for my stay due?**

The housing fee for the Lalo Loor Dry Forest Reserve is due in full prior to the start of your volunteership. You may pay the manager at the Lalo Loor Dry Forest Reserve if you are already in Ecuador (cash only), or mail a check to Ceiba's office in Madison, WI. Checks mailed in the U.S. should be made payable to Ceiba Foundation. You may also use our [online payment system](#), please indicate that you are paying for Bosque Seco Lalo Loor food and lodging fees if you prefer to pay online.

### **How can I contact the volunteer coordinator in Ecuador?**

You may write to Carolina Toapanta at [ctoapanta@ceiba.org](mailto:ctoapanta@ceiba.org) or call 593-99-168-7330 to schedule your orientation and arrange the logistics of your trip. For questions relating to your project, please contact Kelly Van Gils, the volunteer coordinator at [kvangils@ceiba.org](mailto:kvangils@ceiba.org) or call 593-99-861-5047.

### **Who should I contact in case of emergency?**

#### ***Ecuador office:***

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