



Frequently Asked Questions for Ecuador Volunteers & Researchers

Ceiba Foundation for Tropical Conservation



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

The airport in Quito is 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. We recommend that you contact us to arrange a ride from the airport to your hotel. You may also take a taxi. You should not be charged more than \$20 if you are going to the northern part of Quito and not more than \$30 if you are going to the southern part of Quito (La Mariscal). The drive can be anywhere from 1 to 2 hours, depending on traffic.

Where should I stay in Quito?

There are abundant good budget hotels, most of which are located in the bustling tourist district known as "La Mariscal." While there are some advantages to this part of town (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), El Cafecito (Luis Cordero and Reina Victoria), Hotel Bird Garden Guest House (Av Amazonas and Joaquin Pinto), and Hostal L'auberge Inn (Av. Gran Colombia and Yaguachi). There are many other well-priced accommodations in the vicinity.

How do I get from Quito to my volunteer site?

You must schedule a meeting with Ceiba's director, Carolina Toapanta, before traveling to your site. A meeting via Skype works best. She is available Monday to Friday from 9:00am – 5:00pm. The coordinator will know your volunteer start date, but please call or email ahead of time to coordinate an appointment (593-99-168-7330, ctoapanta@ceiba.org). She will provide orientation information and give you the most updated information to plan your transportation to your volunteer site.

The Lalo Loor Dry Forest Reserve, located on the coast, requires a full day of travel. To get to Lalo Loor by bus, start at the enormous "Quitumbe" bus station in the south of Quito; getting there should cost about \$13-14 by taxi. From here you will take a bus to the coastal city of Pedernales. The most direct service (6 hours or so) is provided by the Trans Vencedores bus company. There are many bus companies working out of Quitumbe, you will have to look around for the Vencedores office. We recommend traveling early. The buses from Quitumbe leave at 9:00 for Pedernales and cost \$9.00. Once you get to Pedernales, 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. There is also a bus that goes directly to Jama which will pass by the reserve. It leaves at 14:40 and costs \$10.00. Prices and schedules were last confirmed July 2019 and are subject to change. You should arrive at least one hour before departure to buy your ticket or purchase it the day before.

We can schedule private transport to the reserve for \$90. You must let our staff in Ecuador know at least one day in advance if you wish to hire transport. You may also contact Edwin Santos from the company Taxi Santo Domingo directly at 593-97-908-9902.

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 capacity is 24 people. Although you may happen to be the only volunteer on-site, it is likely that 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. During busier times, you will share a room with up to three people. 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 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 choose to 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 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 ("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, the \$45 airport departure tax (although most airlines now include this within the taxes and fees for your ticket), 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 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. 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 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 October through May when it is their rainy season. Days begin sunny and clear but by midafternoon and throughout the evening you can expect rain. 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. 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?

You'll need clothing for a wide range of temperatures. In Quito (10,000 feet) and higher, you'll be fine in pants 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.

The dry forest (Lalo Llor Dry Forest Reserve) is much lower in elevation 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!

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 (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, 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. 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?

Vegetarianism is a relatively new phenomenon in Ecuador; however, the Lalo Loor Reserve is 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 house, the best option is the Cyber Café in Tabuga, a 20 minute walk from the reserve. There are also various internet cafes 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. 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. 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. We have also set up wired internet (there is no WIFI) in the visitor center which is for **staff use only** but *may* be available for volunteers and interns who are staying long term. We charge \$2 an hour for internet use at the reserve. This fee is NOT included in your room and board fee. Please be aware that due to the location of the reserve it is very expensive to maintain the equipment and we have a limited amount of bandwidth. The topography of the region also makes it difficult to acquire and maintain a signal so the internet may go in and out and many sites may not work. Ceiba staff reserves the right to deny internet use to any person staying at the Lalo Loor Dry Forest Reserve.

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

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

Lightweight long sleeve shirts

Shorts

Swimsuit and towel

Biodegradable soap/shampoo

Personal first-aid kit

Insect repellent

Sunscreen

Sunglasses and hat

Pocket knife

When/how is payment for my stay due?

The housing fee for the Lalo Llor Dry Forest Reserve is due in full prior to the start of your volunteership. You may pay the manager at the Lalo Llor 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 Network for Good system but this incurs a 5% transaction fee, please indicate that you are paying for Bosque Seco Lalo Llor 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 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 or call 593-99-861-5047.

Who should I contact in case of emergency?***Ecuador office:***

Fundación Ceiba

Urbanización Punta Blanca, Casa 112

Jaramijó, Ecuador

Tel (Carolina): 593-99-168-7330

Email: ctoapanta@ceiba.org

U.S. office:

Ceiba Foundation for Tropical Conservation

301 S. Bedford St., Suite 7A

Madison, WI 53703

Tel: 608-230-5550

Email: mail@ceiba.org, volunteer@ceiba.org