

## Ceiba Foundation for Tropical Conservation Tropical Conservation Semester 2027 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

*We are so excited you will be joining a Ceiba Foundation expedition to the tropics! Below you will find answers to many of the most commonly asked questions. More information and up-to-date details can always be found on our website,*  
<https://ceiba.org/study-abroad/tropical-conservation-semester/>

### When should I arrive?

You will receive from Ceiba the recommended date/time for arrival in Ecuador in your acceptance letter. If you arrive on this date, you will be met at the airport by a member of the program's staff. If you "must" travel on a different date, please contact Ceiba as early as possible to make arrangements for your arrival and meeting a Ceiba staff member at the airport.

### What if my plane is early or late?

Most flights from the U.S. arrive in Quito in the evening or at night. We routinely check with all airlines before meeting students at the airport, so most likely we will know about any flight schedule changes before you arrive, but it is always a good idea to let us know (by email, WhatsApp, etc.) of your schedule changes as soon as you learn about them. If for any reason you do not encounter someone at the airport to meet you, go to the information desk in the airport and ask them to call the Ceiba program teaching assistant or instructor using the phone numbers on the Emergency Contact card you will receive prior to travel.

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

The airport in Quito is small and straightforward. After deplaning, you will go through passport control (migración) where you should indicate that you have a Residencia Temporal Estudiante Visa. Proceed to the baggage carousel to retrieve your luggage. You will then go through customs, where agents will check your baggage tags and may search your belongings. A USFQ or Ceiba program coordinator, most likely with a member of your host family, will meet you just inside the exit of the international terminal (there is only one exit). Since many international flights tend to arrive at the same time, the exit is usually crowded and bustling. Look for the person holding a sign with your name or USFQ / Ceiba on it. You will then be transported to your host family's home.

### Do I need a visa to study in Ecuador?

Yes. Students participating in the Tropical Conservation Semester will need to apply for an Ecuadorian **Temporary Residence Student Visa (Residencia Temporal Estudiante)**. The application requires several supporting documents, including items such as a passport, proof of financial means, and a background check. Ceiba will provide enrolled students with detailed, up-to-date instructions, deadlines, and guidance on completing the process after enrollment.

### How do I get to orientation?

You will receive a detailed orientation schedule and instructions about getting to orientation sometime before your arrival. Your host family will instruct you on the best way to get to USFQ (by bus, taxi, trolley and/or walking). Often, host families will bring you to USFQ themselves for the first day. It is your responsibility to arrive on time for orientation, so leave plenty of time for navigating the public transportation system on the first day!

### How can I communicate with my family and friends while away?

The hotels where we will be staying, as well as the universities and most restaurants and cafes will have wi-fi access. You can communicate using messaging or other apps such as WhatsApp, Snapchat, etc., and through email. You will have no problem finding access to email while in Quito. You or your family in the U.S. may also consider an international calling card for making calls back and forth; there are many providers of this service.

### How will I have cell phone service in Ecuador? Should I purchase a cell phone once I'm there?

No, you do not need to buy a new phone in Ecuador! Before you leave the US, make sure your current phone is **unlocked for international use** through your phone carrier. This will allow you to use the SIM card or eSIM provided by the university in Ecuador. Ask your cellular provider to make sure you can use an international carrier's SIM card (or eSIM) in your current phone (Claro and Movistar are the biggest providers in Ecuador). It also may be worth it to look into if your current plan already covers South America; certain select plans through carriers such as AT&T offer this service. Purchasing a cell phone in Ecuador is not the best approach as they are more expensive than in the U.S.

### Should I bring my laptop?

Students **should** bring a laptop for their semester in Ecuador. Many course assignments are online and it is nice to have the flexibility of having your own computer. There is Wifi at the University in Ecuador and in some of the cafes surrounding the school. It is also nice to have your own computer for assignments in places like the Tiputini Biodiversity Station, as there is limited computer availability there. Dry boxes and storage spaces will be provided for students at every location but some students choose to bring a waterproof case for their computers to keep them safe from the moisture and humidity of the Amazon Rainforest and other regions we visit.

### Will my electronic devices work in Ecuador?

Ecuador's national electric grid is 110 volts, just as in the U.S. and Canada. Thus, chargers for your camera, music player, computer, and other electronic devices will work just fine.

### How much money should I bring?

At minimum, you'll need to budget for snacks and lunch on campus during the periods when we hold class there, personal items, and some emergency money in case you need medical care. Lunch around the USFQ campus is typically about \$2.50. For transportation, USFQ's bus service is free for students, and there is also a public bus that costs about \$1.00 round trip. You may also choose to use Uber, which will typically cost around \$5 per day. Many students carpool if they live in the same area, and some may even be able to walk to campus.

Most students also set aside money for entertainment (cinema, sightseeing, etc.), snacks and beverages purchased outside of meal times, gifts, and any additional travel during holidays and Spring break. Ceiba also often helps arrange optional trips and excursions outside of the regular program schedule. These are not required and will be an additional cost, typically around \$30 per person for transportation for a day trip. **Many students underestimate their personal spending, so it is better to overestimate your cash needs. Consult the UW cost sheet for estimates of post-departure expenses.**

### Should I bring cash, credit, or debit cards?

The best way to access funds in Ecuador is with debit cards issued from a major bank. These can readily be used to obtain money in Quito and other major cities but beware that most banks charge an additional fee for international ATM withdrawals (usually about \$5). Be sure to advise your bank of your travel plans before departing for Ecuador. You may want to make sure you can use your debit card without the bank sending you text messages with security codes or other things of that nature. Cash is the only thing accepted at artisan markets both in and out of Quito, and anywhere once you are in more remote rural locations. We recommend bringing plenty of small bills, since oftentimes taxis and even shops are not able to provide change for bills over \$10. Credit and debit cards are accepted in more expensive shops and restaurants, although their use is increasingly widespread. Ecuador adopted the dollar as their official currency in 2000, so you do not need to exchange money!

### What sort of luggage is best?

Avoid over-packing—always easier said than done, but make your best effort! You can bring your clothing and personal items in whatever luggage is most convenient for you. However, since we will be doing a lot of traveling around Ecuador on trips ranging from a few days to several weeks, we strongly recommend bringing luggage of varying sizes for flexibility.

A daypack that can hold about 20–25 lbs. of gear will be especially useful for day trips and shorter excursions. It should be large enough to carry items such as raingear, a notebook, binoculars, a water bottle, lunch, and extra clothing or personal items. We may also take 2–4 night overnight trips, so it's helpful to have a backpack that can accommodate a short stay. A daypack can work well, especially if extra clothing or shoes can be strapped to the outside, and it can also double as a bag for carrying books and other materials to and from class.

A waist pack, purse, or money belt can also be useful for daily essentials. For longer trips to Tiputini and the Galápagos, a medium-sized duffel, suitcase, or similar bag should work well. Keep in mind that there is a 25 lb. weight limit for flights to the Amazon, so packing light is important.

### What kind of clothing should I bring?

You will need clothing for a wide range of temperatures throughout the semester. Consult the Tropical Conservation Semester Program Information Packet for descriptions of the sites we visit and for a detailed packing list, which will also be included in your orientation materials. In Quito (about 9,000 feet) and Cumbayá, you'll generally be comfortable in pants and a T-shirt during the day, but be prepared to add layers such as a sweater or jacket in the evening or on cloudy days. Daytime temperatures are usually in the 70s but can drop to around 45°F at night. The climate is generally dry, although scattered rain is not uncommon, so a compact umbrella can be useful. In general, young people in Quito and Cumbayá tend to dress more fashionably than in the U.S., especially when going out. Shorts are rarely worn in the city, and some businesses may not admit you in shorts, so you'll also want to bring a couple of dressier outfits for restaurants, events, and other outings.

When we visit the páramo, Andes, and high-elevation volcanoes and sites, we may reach elevations of 14,000 feet or more, where temperatures can fall below freezing at night—previous courses have even had snowball fights! Mountain weather is unpredictable, and conditions can range anywhere from 70°F and sunny to 25°F and snowing, so layering is the best approach. Bring warm layers, including a sweater or jacket, and consider bringing a hat and gloves if you are sensitive to the cold. You can also buy inexpensive wool sweaters, hats, and gloves in Quito markets.

In the lowlands, including the coast and Amazon, temperatures are generally in the 80s, and the Amazon is extremely humid. Loose, lightweight long pants—cotton can be especially comfortable—and a T-shirt and/or lightweight long-sleeve shirt are best for fieldwork. A thin, loose button-down shirt can also work well. You will need 4 pairs of field pants, which can often be found inexpensively at second-hand stores. These are useful for outdoor activities and help protect your legs from thorns, fuzzy caterpillars, stinging plants, insects, and other vegetation. In the Amazon, long pants should be worn during field activities and when visiting universities or villages. In the early morning and evening, make sure you have multiple long-sleeve shirts available for protection against mosquitoes.

On the coast and in the Galápagos, as well as when relaxing at the hotel or camp on a warm day, shorts are fine, but they should not be worn during field activities. Be sure to bring a swimsuit and towel as well. During field trips, you won't need to worry much about fashion, we'll often be surrounded by forests or oceans and getting sweaty and dirty!

For footwear, rubber boots are best for cloud forest and rainforest fieldwork and can usually be purchased inexpensively in Ecuador unless you wear approximately a men's size 10½–11 or larger. Sturdy trail shoes are appropriate for most other activities. Rubber sandals or flip-flops are also useful for walking around hotels and camp, as well as on boats and at the beach. Finally, a hat is essential for protecting your head from both the sun and insects.

### What other gear should I bring?

Please consult the required and recommended gear list that we will provide to you in the Tropical Conservation Semester Information packet in advance of your departure.

### Any other packing recommendations?

Quito is a cosmopolitan city, so most essentials can be purchased there. You do not need to pack a whole semester's supply of toothpaste, for example! You can also get run-of-the-mill school supplies like notebooks and pens in Ecuador. You can purchase lovely local arts and crafts, including jewelry, nice woven bags, sweaters, gloves, and hats, as well as leather bags and purses in Ecuador. There are a few things, however, that are much more expensive there than in the U.S., particularly imported items such as sunscreen and contact lens solution. You *can* get them there, but they will cost 2-3X more. Also, any specialty items, outdoor gear, books, and clothing (esp. socks!) are best brought with you from the U.S.

### Can I drink the water in Ecuador?

You should **never** drink the tap water while in Ecuador, even while in Quito; your intestinal health is one of our top concerns! Always have bottled water on hand, even for brushing your teeth. Hotels and restaurants usually provide bottled water to their guests. If you ever are uncertain about the water served to you, just ask them if it is purified ("Es purificada?") or ask your instructor or teaching assistant. At program field sites and during travel, purified water will always be available for drinking.

### What if I have special dietary restrictions?

First of all, please notify us of any special dietary preferences or food allergies, including lactose intolerance, in the space provided on your enrollment form. Your host family and program staff will do their best to accommodate your needs, but please be understanding that vegetarianism and other dietary restrictions may be less common in Ecuador, and occasional reminders may be helpful. We can also request vegetarian or other appropriate meals from the places where we will be eating, including field stations such as Tiputini, El Pahuma, and the Galápagos.

### What if I don't like my host family?

The program coordinator at USFQ will do their best to place you with a host family that matches your interests. All our host families are prescreened, and are used to hosting international students. Although some students feel apprehensive about staying with a host family, most find it a fun and rewarding experience that can lead to lifelong friendships. Nevertheless, interpersonal relationships sometimes are simply a matter of chemistry and are hard to predict. Of course, we hope you will exhibit maximum adaptability, flexibility, patience and courtesy with your new host family, and that you will be able to adjust to your new, and rather short-term living situation. If, however, you find you are having difficult personal problems or conflicts with your host family that can't be worked out, do not hesitate to discuss your problem with the program coordinator and she will work with you to resolve the problem or find another host family. You will receive the name and contact information for your host family prior to departure, and we encourage you to contact your host family directly to introduce yourself before you arrive. Some students have brought small gifts from the U.S. as an icebreaker for meeting their new hosts, but this is by no means required.

### 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 is wise to take some precautions. Developing countries in the tropics have a reputation for all sorts of illnesses, but virtually all of these are caused by unsanitary living conditions (e.g., cholera, hepatitis, giardia) or contact with disease-bearing insect vectors (e.g., malaria, dengue). 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 water, and avoiding food sold by carts on the street or in sketchy-looking restaurants.

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. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention can make recommendations regarding what vaccines you need, and you may also consult with your on-campus travel clinic.

It is not required, but it is recommended that you take anti-malarial pills for your trip to the Amazon, and during your internship if it takes place in a region where malaria is found. Malaria pills are no longer readily available in Ecuador, nor do they supply the most up-to-date prophylaxis, so it is strongly recommended that you bring a full course of medication with you from your home country. In our past experience, doctors frequently prescribe large doses of Doxycycline, but students with that medication very frequently suffer from nausea, so consider an alternative.

For the **Tropical Conservation Semester**, the **yellow fever vaccine is required** for travel to the Amazon and Tiputini Biodiversity Station. This disease is extremely uncommon in the Ecuadorian Amazon, but the vaccination is mandatory for travel to that region, so

make sure to obtain the vaccine in your home country **at least 10 days before your departure** and bring official proof of your vaccination date with you to Ecuador. Besides protecting you from a potentially deadly disease, the yellow fever vaccine provides long-lasting protection. You can receive this vaccine at the UW Travel Clinic or another travel clinic near you.

**Because each traveler's health needs and circumstances are different, we recommend speaking with a travel clinic or healthcare provider before departure. They can provide personalized guidance on vaccinations, medications, and other health precautions based on your individual needs and travel plans.**

### 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 mild side effects in some people for a day or so after you get the vaccine (most people do not feel anything). Some anti-malarial pills can have 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.

### How safe is Ecuador?

Ecuador is a relatively safe country, filled with friendly, family-oriented people. The country has enjoyed increasing economic and political stability over the past 20 years. **Unaware travelers make easier targets.** Tropical Conservation Semester students are typically together as a group during program activities, excursions, and travel; however, students will also have individual free time and may be exploring independently or in smaller groups. During these times, be especially mindful of your surroundings and follow the safety precautions outlined below.

The biggest concern for all travelers is theft. Ecuador is a poor country, and if you leave valuable items unattended or flaunt them, there is a good chance they will disappear. Minimize the risk of theft by not bringing valuable items, keeping your valuables concealed or firmly attached to you when walking through populated areas, in public places, or on public transportation, locking up valuables whenever possible, and keeping your money hidden in a variety of different places. In markets and other crowded places, including buses and trolleys, keep money and valuables safely tucked away, as pickpockets can target unwary foreigners.

Some areas of Quito, in particular the south neighborhoods and the popular "Mariscal," are simply not safe, especially at night. **Never walk alone after dark.** Even in groups, be alert and stay on lit streets where other people are around. Always call a taxi or Uber or have a friend take you home at night, even if it is only a block or two, and try to have a trip companion at all times.

Carry your emergency phone numbers, host family address and contact information, instructor and teaching assistant contact information and, if possible, a cell phone with you at all times. Do not carry your original passport; always carry copies of your visa and passport. They will be needed on various occasions during your stay in Ecuador.

In general, always be alert and use common sense, much as you would in any big city back home! Always heed the safety recommendations given to you during program orientation. We recommend you inform yourself on the latest safety and crime data for Ecuador that is available on the U.S. State Department website.

### How much does it rain in the rainforest, and what type of raingear should I bring?

Although the rainforest gets a lot of rain, there tends to be sunshine every day, interspersed with short hard downpours, usually in the afternoon and evening. It is a good idea to bring raingear along with you. There are many options for raingear but do consider a poncho. A poncho is cooler and can be bought rather cheaply. Full latex or plastic raingear can be uncomfortably hot, and a raincoat may allow your legs to get wet. A poncho protects your legs, and you can easily carry your backpack under it. Ponchos come in many forms, and I suggest avoiding the very thin plastic ones that will tear easily when you walk through vegetation. Get a heavier rubberized plastic one at your local camping or outdoor equipment store. A small folding umbrella can be useful for getting around both in the city and the field under the rain.

### Aren't there a lot of bugs in the rainforest?

There are many very fascinating insects in the rainforest, but most of them won't bother you. In fact, there are far fewer mosquitoes and other biting insects in the rainforest than there are on an August day in Minnesota! Nevertheless, mosquitoes can be vectors of lowland diseases like malaria and dengue, so you should come prepared with repellent (see below). Perhaps the bugs to be most cautious of are ants ... they can pack a painful bite before you realize you are standing in them! Bring some hydrocortisone or insect bite relief to get some relief from annoying bites or stings, and make sure you let program staff know if you are allergic to any insect stings.

### What kind of insect repellent is best?

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

### What conditions should I expect in the Galapagos?

Crystal-clear gentle seas, warm tropical sun, and abundant wildlife on land and in water! A visit to the Galapagos is truly an experience you'll remember for life. During your 8-day tour of the islands you will live aboard a motor yacht carrying a total of 16 passengers plus crew. Each day we visit another island, with travel between islands occurring overnight while you are sleeping so that you wake up in a new place each day! The islands themselves are teeming with wildlife, so you'll always want your camera with you. Conditions on the

islands are blazing hot and sunny – there is virtually no shade. Sunburn is nothing to be trifled with and sunscreen, sunglasses, water and a hat are essential items to have with you at all times. Shorts and a t-shirt are fine to wear – until you get sunburned! Many people wear long sleeves or pants for better protection against the tropical sun, and you'll need them during the cooler evenings. As far as footwear goes, supportive light hikers or sport sandals with ankle straps are fine for walking on the islands. Flip-flops do not offer sufficient stability on the sharp, unstable lava rock and sometimes slippery terrain.

We'll be doing quite a bit of snorkeling, so bring a mask and snorkel and fins. A good fitting mask, however, will be essential to your underwater experience, so I strongly recommend bringing one from your home country, and working with a diving professional at a Dive Shop to ensure a good fit. The Humboldt Current keeps ocean temperatures rather cool. If you're prone to getting cold, a thin "shorty" wetsuit, lycra bodysuit, rasher, or even a t-shirt can allow you to stay more comfortable in the water for longer periods. Some students like to wear a buff to keep hair out of their face and stay warm as well. While seas are relatively calm in Galapagos in the spring, we will be traveling across large expanses of open water so waves and swells are to be expected. If you're at all prone to motion sickness, it will be most pronounced during the first couple of days. Bring an adequate supply of motion sickness tablets (I recommend the "less drowsy" type).

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

There is a great diversity of beautiful, colorful arts and crafts such as wool sweaters, textiles, Andean musical instruments, masks, hammocks, carvings, pottery, silver jewelry, leather goods, and a multitude of other products. It is illegal to bring any plant or animal material back into the U.S. without special permits, so refrain from doing this. We will visit Otavalo, a town with a proud indigenous population that runs a famous artisan market. There, you can pick up gifts for friends and family.

**Don't hesitate to contact us with any other questions you may have.  
Have fun in your preparations, and we'll see you in Ecuador!**