

ECUADOR

The equator slices east-west through Ecuador, while the Andes—including Cotopaxi, the world's highest active volcano—run north-south. To the east, sparsely settled rainforests teem with 1,600 species of birds and 4,500 varieties of butterflies. Most Ecuadorians, however, live in central mountain towns or in plantations and ports along the western coast. The population is a mix of descendants from Spanish colonists, their African slaves and 14 indigenous peoples speaking more than 20 languages and dialects. This rich ethnic jumble is reflected in the juxtaposition of colonial architecture rising alongside outdoor markets filled with native crafts.

AFS & Your Experience

AFS Ecuador has been in existence since 1962. AFS volunteers in eight communities across the country work hard to provide you with the most satisfying intercultural experience possible. During the year AFS Ecuador hosts more than 140 students from as many as 14 countries.

AFS will be at your side throughout your intercultural exchange. Even before leaving your home country, you will participate in organized AFS orientations and have the assistance of experienced AFS volunteers. Once in your host country, you can rely on your local volunteer contact and other chapter volunteers to support you in your experience. Together we will ensure that you have an incredible experience abroad.

Landing in Ecuador

Your flight will arrive in Quito, the capital of Ecuador. Once the plane lands and you collect your baggage, you will pass through customs and be met by AFS Ecuador staff and volunteers.

Arrival Orientation

After you have spent many long and tiring hours on the airplane, a two-day arrival orientation will give you a chance to relax, get to know other AFSers in the program and learn about AFS Ecuador and Ecuadorian culture.

Living in Ecuador

Lifestyle and Family Living

Ecuadorians are open, affectionate and curious people who take friendships seriously. The extended family with grandparents, cousins, uncles and aunts is customary and an important element of society, providing both economic and moral support to its members. Families are close-knit and enjoy most activities together. Families take day trips to the mountains or to the beach; brothers and sisters attend social events together. Ecuadorians are very protective of their children; children are expected to show respect for their parents and elders. Teenage girls have more restrictions placed on them than teenage boys have. Parents expect to know when their children are going out and where they are going.

Ecuadorian host families, like all AFS host families worldwide, are not paid. They open their homes to students in order to share their community and culture as well as to enrich their own family lives.

Students are often placed in the mountain city of Quito. Others may be placed in coastal areas, especially Guayaquil, Ecuador's largest city, or in small towns throughout the country.

Dress and Appearance

Ecuadorian teenagers tend to be more fashion conscious than their counterparts in other cultures. They generally dress well and conservatively whenever in public. Jeans, T-shirts, and sneakers are popular but not acceptable at all times. Bring a light sweater for windy and cooler days. Students are encouraged to bring one or two nice outfits (dress shirts and ties for boys, dresses or skirts and blouses for girls) for special occasions.

Diet and Meals

People from the mountainous regions (including Quito) eat lots of corn and potatoes; people from the coastal area prefer rice, beans and bananas. *Caldos* (soups) are often served at breakfast. Other popular dishes include *lechón* (suckling pig), *llapingachos* (fried mashed potatoes), *seco-stew*, *tostados de maíz* (corn-fried pancakes) and cheese pancakes, often served with *fritada* (scraps of fried and roast pork).

It is considered inappropriate for individuals to request special foods, to prepare separate food for themselves or to raid the refrigerator. Vegetarians are difficult to place.

School

Schools are academically oriented and do not offer many extracurricular activities. Most placements are in public schools. There are different types of public schools including those that offer university preparation, business, accounting, secretarial, clerical, educational or technical training. All schools follow the same curriculum for the first three years. Academics are taken seriously and the work load is challenging. There are 13 required subjects including algebra, physiology, biology, foreign languages, geography, history and literature. Classes feature teacher dictation, copying from texts and reading aloud.

Sessions are from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday through Friday. Most schools are all boys or all girls. Schools cannot give transcripts, but AFS Ecuador can provide a letter of attendance listing subjects taken and indicating passing grades.

The school-year calendar differs between the coastal area and the highlands. On the coast (Esmeraldas, Manabí Los Ríos, El Oro, Guayas), the academic year begins in May and ends in mid-January. In the highlands, the academic year begins in October and ends in early July.

Teen Life

Most teenagers are involved with homework during the week. Weekends are the time for parties and socializing. Teens like to go out in groups, go to dances, play sports, go to movies, talk in a local café or just hang out in the town square.

You may also have the opportunity to get involved in various local community activities. These can include sports, music and crafts clubs. This is a great way to learn about your community and to make new friends.

AFS Activities

AFS volunteers will organize several activities for you during your stay. These may include informal get-togethers, weekend trips and picnics. In addition to the arrival orientation, there will be two mid-stay orientations. AFS organizes an optional trip to the Galapagos Islands, at an additional cost.

There is also the so-called "End-of-Stay". You will get together with other AFSers right before you return home. The "End-of-Stay" is about looking back at your exchange experience and sharing memories with other AFSers. It is also about thinking of the future.

AFS orientations are a chance for participants to meet (often for a weekend or for a few days) to talk about expectations for the future program and past experiences. Orientations involve participating in group activities and self-examination. Sessions usually provide new information and ways of looking at things while also allowing participants to share points of view. AFS orientations are social, interactive and educational, bringing together young people from many countries and helping them to better understand their own intercultural learning experiences.

Travel

Although it is natural for you to want to travel while in Ecuador, AFS is not designed as a tourist program. AFS offers the rare opportunity to be immersed in a culture and a country. It is likely, however, that you will have many opportunities to travel with your host family, school, community organization, local chapter or AFS Ecuador. We strongly discourage travelling on your own or with friends.

Spending Money

AFS recommends that US\$1,200 in traveller's checks should cover spending needs for an entire year. Host families are asked to pay only for ordinary family events in which you are expected to participate. When you do such things as shopping for yourself or going out with friends, the expenses are your responsibility. Spending more than your peers and family may create a distance between you and them.

Safety and Support

Ecuador is a relatively safe country. You should do well if you follow the normal precautions you would use in your home country.

During your stay, local AFS volunteers will be available to assist you as you learn to live as an Ecuadorian. In the event of an emergency, AFS staff can be reached 24 hours a day by you in your host country and by your natural family at home.

For the welfare of participants, AFS worldwide has two rules: no driving and no use of drugs for non-medical purposes. Any student who violates either of these rules will be automatically sent home. AFS Ecuador may have additional rules.

Health Precautions

In addition to the precautions mentioned above, AFS suggests that you discuss the health recommendations for Ecuador (which you can get from your government or easily find on the Internet) with your personal doctor, to determine what is best for you and your personal needs.

If you require any medical assistance during your stay, your host family or local volunteers will be ready to help find it. As an AFS participant your medical expenses are covered for illness or injuries incurred while on the program, exclusive of pre-existing, dental or visual aid expenses.

Documents

You must have a passport that will be valid for six months longer than your intended stay. In addition to your passport, you also need a visa to enter and reside in your host country. Visas are obtained through the consular offices in your region and requirements often vary from consulate to consulate.

Consulates charge fees for their services, and obtaining your visa can be a complicated and lengthy process requiring a great deal of paperwork, patience and persistence. It is your responsibility to obtain your visa and pay the fees. However, AFS will let you know how to proceed and will provide you with the documents you need to apply for the visa.

Program Prices

All participants are required to pay participation fee **and** do a mandatory fundraising. To get further information, please visit our website www.afscanada.org or contact us.

The program price covers the following: round-trip international travel with your AFS group; travel in the host country to your host family; travel from your host family to your international departure point; AFS's medical plan; placement with your host; orientation in your home country and your host country; 24 hour emergency assistance in your home and host countries; a global medical assistance organization to support extreme emergencies; a network of trained volunteers who support you throughout your experience.

In order to keep costs low and provide good service, AFS utilizes a network of volunteers and staff in 50+ countries around the world. Volunteers need training, support and assistance from professional staff in each country. Other expenses you will normally need to pay in addition to the program price: passport and visa fees, required inoculations, expenses for eyeglasses, contacts and dental care, school uniforms (where applicable) and personal spending money. Your housing and food are provided by your host family as part of their commitment to our program.

Country Information

Geography and Climate

Ecuador is located in South America straddling the Equator. It is bordered by Colombia to the north, by Peru to the south and east and by the Pacific Ocean to the west.

Ecuador is one of the smallest countries in this region; its size is about the same of New Zealand's and a little bigger than the United Kingdom's. It is home to more than 25,000 species of plants and approximately 3,800 of vertebrates.

Ecuador is divided into four geographical regions: the costal lowlands, the mountain highlands (*sierra*), the eastern jungle and the archipelago of Galapagos. The costal lowlands were once heavily forested, but today most have been converted to agriculture and shrimp farms. Down the center of the country, the Andean highlands form Ecuador's backbone. The highest peak is Chimborazzo (6,310 m – 20,700 ft), but the most famous is the Cotopaxi volcano. The jungle, which Ecuadorians call *oriente*, forms the upper basin of the Amazon jungle, with many virgin rainforest areas and a large Amazon River tributary, the *Rio Napo*, which cuts through them.

1,000 km (660 mil) away from the west coast there is the Galapagos archipelago, with 13 large islands, 6 smaller ones and 40 islets.

Ecuador's climate is varied. There are wet and dry seasons, and these seasons can vary depending upon where you are in the country. In general, from January to May, Ecuador is hot and rainy, with a daytime temperature around 30°C (86°F); from June to December the weather is a bit cooler and rain is uncommon.

Population

Ecuador's population numbers about 11.5 million. Fifty-five percent of Ecuadorians are mestizo (mixed Amerindian and Spanish), 25% are Amerindian, 10% Spanish and 10% black Africans.

Today's population is divided about equally between the mountainous central highland region and the coastal lowlands. Migration toward cities—particularly larger cities—in all regions has increased the urban population to about 55%.

Language

Spanish is the official language of Ecuador; the Indian language Quechua is widely spoken.

Government

The country has a democratic form of government. The president is elected by popular vote every four years. There is also a House of Representatives whose members are elected every four years.

Religion

The large majority of Ecuadorians are Roman Catholic.

Launching Your AFS Experience

Evaluations by previous participants support our belief that those students who prepare prior to leaving have the best experience. In order to get ready, first make every effort to learn some key Spanish words and phrases so that you arrive with at least some basic knowledge of the language.

To familiarize yourself further with life in Ecuador, make use of your local library and/or the Internet. A lot of general information is available about Ecuador and its culture.

Although each participant's experience is unique, we strongly suggest that you speak with a recent AFS participant to Ecuador. This person will be an excellent resource regarding living as an Ecuadorian. If you do not know any alumni, please contact your local volunteer or AFS Interculture Canada office. In addition, AFS Ecuador will provide you with a special packet of country-specific information. Ecuadorian people will be curious about your home community. You may be surprised to find out how much they

already know about your country. Therefore, it is also helpful to be as informed as possible about current events in your community and country.

Curiously Ecuadorian

10% of the world's vascular plant species are located in Ecuador, which covers just 0.02% of the Earth's surface.

How to Apply

You first have to fill out the Preliminary Application form that you can find on our website at www.afscanada.org. If you don't have access to Internet, call us at (514) 288-3282 or 1-800-361-7248 and we will send you the document by mail.

Quick Facts

| | | |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| Student age (upon arrival) | 16 years to 18 years | |
| Country data | Size | 283,560 km ² (109,454 mi ²) |
| | Population | 12,562,496 |
| | Official language | Spanish |
| | Government | Democracy |
| | Currency | 1 sucre (S/) = 100 centavos |
| Useful website | http://www.geographia.com/ecuador/ | |
| AFS Ecuador website | http://www.afsecuador.org/ | |