



Focus on ECUADOR

Community Service Program

Adult Program

“Before I came to Ecuador, I tried not to have any preconceived ideas of how I wanted things to be, because I would have expected far too much and would have wanted life to be similar to what I was used to... I must say that I have met some great people in Ecuador, who have been really friendly and hospitable. I have seen some extraordinary places which will stay with me for the rest of my life! And then there’s the language, which I have yet to conquer, but that is another story...”
(SMcs from GBR)

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.

Community Service Programs

AFS’s Community Service program gives you the opportunity to share in and contribute to the life of a community in Ecuador by living and working alongside its members in a community-based service organization. At the organization, you will be asked to pitch in and offer assistance in whatever capacity might be needed and to share the knowledge and experience you have gained from your home culture in the process. No one expects you to be an expert with all the answers to local problems or the ability to change local conditions. Rather, you are expected to be a willing participant in a process of mutual discovery. This experience will present you with innumerable learning opportunities both personally and professionally.

Worldwide, AFS Community Service program participants contribute their talents and energies to a variety of social programs that range from protecting the environment to teaching children or adults, from assisting the elderly and the disabled to defending human rights, from enhancing public health to helping local businesses become established.

Past participants in Ecuador have worked with children and the elderly, in orphanages and community health centers. However, all specifics—including assignments, orientations, logistics and activities—vary depending on the program cycle.

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. Each year, AFS Ecuador hosts more than 140 students and Community Service participants 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.

Arrival orientation

Upon arrival in Quito, participants are met by AFS Ecuador staff and volunteers and escorted to a weeklong cultural orientation and intensive language instruction. Upon completion, participants travel to their placement communities by airplane or bus.

Additional orientations

In addition to an orientation at your arrival, AFS Ecuador will provide you with several others. AFS orientations offer participants a chance to meet for several days and talk about expectations for the future program and past experiences. Orientations involve participating in group activities and self-examination. Sessions also provide language training as well as 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 people from many countries and helping them to better understand their own intercultural learning experiences while preparing them to handle their community service assignments.

Living in Ecuador

Living arrangements

Some participants in AFS Community Service programs live with local families, sharing their daily lives, their meals and perhaps a host sibling's bedroom. Other participants live where their community service organization conducts its business. Still others live in rooms provided elsewhere by their local service organizations.

Food

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 living with families to request special foods, to prepare separate food for themselves or to raid the refrigerator. Vegetarians are difficult to place.

Health

AFS suggests that you discuss the health recommendations for Ecuador (which you can get from your government or find easily on the Internet) with your doctor at home, 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.

Safety

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.

Travel

AFS's Community Service programs allow participants to travel on their own through their host countries, typically for a week or more, to explore and absorb each country's cultural diversity.

Program Prices

Please [contact the AFS office in your home country](#) for information about program price and scholarship possibilities and what the program price covers for the various program offerings. In most cases the program price covers the following: round-trip international travel with your AFS group; travel in the host country to your host community; travel from your host community to your international departure point; AFS's medical plan; placement with your host family or other placement arrangement; 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 are: 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.

Before You Go

Looking Forward

Evaluations by previous participants support our belief that if you prepare prior to leaving, you will have the best experience.

Make every effort to improve your Spanish language skills before departure. Then, to familiarize yourself with life in Ecuador, visit your local library or search the Internet.

AFS International's website, AFS.org, provides links to websites for each participating country.

Although every participant's experience is unique, we strongly suggest that you speak with a recent AFS participant to Ecuador. This veteran will be an excellent resource regarding living and working there. If you do not know a veteran, please contact your local AFS volunteer or your country's AFS office.

In addition, AFS will provide you with essential information about your host country to prepare you for immersion in a new and exciting culture.

Finally, Ecuadorians will be curious about your home community. You may be surprised how much they already know about your country's history and politics. Therefore, you will find it helpful to be informed about current events in your home community and country.

Documents

You must have a passport that will be valid for six months longer than your intended stay. In addition to your passport, you will need a visa to enter and reside in your host country. Visas are obtained through the consular offices of your host country, and requirements 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. AFS will help you obtain the visa and provide you with instructions regarding the required documents.

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

To become a participant in this country's Community Service Program, contact your nearest AFS office. To locate an AFS office, go to <http://www.afs.org/contact>

Country data	Size	283,560 km ² (109,454 mil ²)
	Population	12,562,496
	Official language	Spanish
	Government	Democracy
Currency	US Dollars	
Useful website	http://www.geographia.com/ecuador/	
AFS Ecuador website	http://www.afsecuador.org/	

AFS program destinations are not always available to residents of all countries. If a program interests you, please contact your nearest AFS office to find out if it is an option for you. You can locate your nearest AFS office at <http://www.afs.org/contact>