The Learning Abroad Center provides a full range of services from preliminary program advising to assistance with re-entry. Do not hesitate to contact any of the Learning Abroad Center staff with your questions. Prior to departure, please direct all questions to the Learning Abroad Center. Friends and family members should always contact the Learning Abroad Center, not the on-site staff, for assistance, even once you are overseas.

In the United States
Learning Abroad Center
University of Minnesota
230 Heller Hall
271 19th Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55455-0430
Phone: 612.626.9000
Fax: 612.626.8009
Toll Free: 888.700.UOFM
Email: UMabroad@umn.edu
Web: www.UMabroad.umn.edu

Molly Micheels, Associate Program Director
mollym@umn.edu, 612.624.3949
Cathy Huber, Program Director
chuber@umn.edu, 612.624.4525

Emergencies
In case of a serious emergency, contact the Learning Abroad Center at 612.626.9000. If it is after business hours, a recording will give you a number to call. The Learning Abroad Center has someone on call for emergencies and to contact the on-site administrators if needed. Once overseas, participants should contact their in-country program staff.

In Ecuador
Telephone Codes
011 International access code from the US. The code from other countries will probably be different.
593 Ecuador country code used for dialing from outside Ecuador.
2 Quito city code. Not necessary for calls from within Quito.

Time Differences
Ecuador is one hour ahead of Minnesota during the winter and on the same time as Minnesota during months when the United States is on Daylight Savings Time.

Addresses
NOTE: Please direct all pre departure questions to the Learning Abroad Center, not to the on-site staff.

Your Address in Ecuador
During your stay in Ecuador, mail should be sent to you at the following address:

Your name (clearly spelled out)
c/o Fundación Cimas del Ecuador
P.O. Box 17-21-942
Quito, Ecuador

Office
Fundación Cimas del Ecuador
P.O. Box 17.21.942 (mailing address)
Ave. Los Olivos E14-266 y Las Minas (street address)
San Isidro del Inca
Quito, Ecuador
Phones: +593.2.241.4153, 593.2.241.2496

Directors
José Suárez and Dolores López

US Embassy
For information on the local US Embassy in Ecuador, please visit the following website: ecuador.usembassy.gov.

Know Before You Go
Before you leave the country, make sure that you have read and understood the information in your Confirmation Checklist, Online Orientation, and the Learning Abroad Center’s policies (www.UMabroad.umn.edu/students/policies). These materials will guide you on a safe and successful learning abroad experience.

Friends and Family Resources
Valuable resources for your friends and family members can be found at www.UMabroad.umn.edu/parents. Topics such as health and safety, program prices, logistics, and travel are discussed.
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Intensive Spanish in Ecuador Program
Calendar

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Purpose of This Guide

This Program Guide provides an overview of your unique study abroad program. It contains information relevant to the program as well as specifics about the country. The Program Guide should be used in tandem with the Learning Abroad Center's online orientation and website for information regarding registration, credit, payment, refunds, academic policies, health, safety, insurance, and cultural adjustment.

Preparation & Planning

Documents

Passport
A valid passport is required to enter your country and to re-enter the US. You also need a passport in order to receive a visa. For information on applying for a passport see the Learning Abroad Center website: www.UMabroad.umn.edu/students/travel/passports.

Visa
The intensive language programs have different visa procedures. Students on the Senegal program must complete an on-line process on the Senegal embassy’s website. Refer to the Learning Abroad Center’s Senegal program website for detailed instructions. Students on the Ecuador program can enter on a tourist visa, which will be issued upon arrival in Ecuador. Students on the India or Kenya programs must utilize Perry International’s visa services described below.

Perry International Visa Services
Participants on the India and Kenya programs must use Perry International, based in Chicago, to process their student visa. Perry’s processing fee is included in your program fee; you only need to submit payment for the actual visa. Since you need special documents from our office, which we send to Perry International for all students, you must use Perry’s services for your visa. You must submit your passport to Perry International in order to receive the student visa. Always send your passport via express mail.

Visa information is located on the Learning Abroad Center’s website. Additional information can be found on Perry International’s website at www.perryvisa.com.

From Perry International’s website:

- click on “Visas”
- select your country
- select ‘MSID’ as your account
- print the student visa packet

Read the instructions carefully and return all requested forms and payment directly to Perry International. If you travel abroad on the wrong visa, you will be responsible for returning immediately to the US to correct your visa.

Applying for a visa can be a lengthy process. Do not delay in visiting Perry’s website to inform yourself about the visa process and begin the paperwork for your country.

If you are planning to arrive early or travel after the program, inquire with Perry International regarding any visa restrictions.

In-Country Process
Once in country, your on-site staff will give you advice about keeping your passport and visa secure. In some countries, you can carry a photocopy of the relevant pages and keep the documents themselves locked up. When you do need to carry your passport, always keep it in a money belt.

Your passport and visa are valuable documents. Do not lose them. You cannot leave your host country without them. It is always wise to have a copy of your passport and visa in a separate location and one copy at home in case your passport is lost or stolen. The process of replacing a passport is much easier if you have a copy of it. If your passport is lost or stolen, you should notify your local staff, the local police, and the US Consulate.

Travel & Visits
You are encouraged to travel during official program break periods, over holidays, or after the program is completed. During the program, travel on the weekends should be limited to nearby locations in order to ensure that you are able to maintain good rest, health, and timely completion of all coursework. Students are not permitted to travel during the program to countries currently under a US State Department Travel Warning. See http://travel.state.gov/ for the most up-to-date list. It also compromises the host family experience if you are away every weekend. Before traveling, complete the correct permission form with on-site staff and be aware of any relevant travel concerns or State Department advisories. It is important that you share with the on-site staff your travel plans, including dates, destinations, and information about how to reach you in case an emergency should arise.

If any friends or relatives wish to visit, they can only visit during official program breaks, not while classes are in session. Visits at other times interfere with your ability to focus on the program and host culture and are not allowed.

Packing
Packing is highly individual, and no single list will work for everyone. A packing list is provided in the county-specific section of this guide. The following considerations can help you pack wisely.
Packing Principles

Think about laundry. Lighter colors help you stay cool, but darker colors show dirt less; you might wish to strike a happy medium if you expect to be in hot areas. Stress lightweight fabrics that can be easily hand-washed, can hold up to repeated washing, and do not need ironing. A key question for choosing clothes: How long does it take to air dry?

Plan to be presentable. People dress nicely every day in all four countries, especially in the cities, and local students often dress well, as they are proud to be among the elite group attending university. Clean, fairly conservative western office-type apparel is appropriate. Include one or two dressy outfits for evening outings, for which people tend to dress up. Pack clothing that is relatively new, both to be sure it lasts through your time overseas and because you will feel uncomfortably out of place if you wear ripped, baggy, or faded clothes.

Be conservative. Some clothing that is common on a US campus would be considered provocative. If you wish to pack a running outfit, choose athletic pants or shorts that extend to the knee. Do not plan on using shorts except when you go to the beach. If you use tank tops, choose modest ones. Women tend to wear skirts in rural areas, and although you may wear pants without offending, in some rural settings you may look out of place.

Choose your luggage wisely. Most students prefer backpacks to suitcases. Buy a high quality backpack/daypack. Can your smaller backpack/suitcase nest inside a larger one? Will your carry-on double for weekend travel?

Anticipate possible delays (or even losses) in checked baggage when packing your carry-on. Pack in your carry-on anything that you would need during your first two or three days in country, including prescription drugs, as well as small items that are fragile, irreplaceable, or of significant monetary value. Do not take scissors, knives, etc., in your carry-on.

Remember you can buy things in country. You can purchase clothing in country, although you will not have time to devote to shopping for new items. If you have a strong brand preference, ask a returnee whether your brand is available in your country. Very tall students might find it hard to purchase clothing in country, although you will not have time to devote to shopping for new items. If you have a strong brand preference, ask a returnee whether your brand is available in your country. Very tall students might find it hard to purchase clothes of the right size.

You will find many clothing items to be cheaper in country than in the US. However, other products, such as batteries, personal hygiene, feminine products, etc. are often more expensive in these countries and not always readily available.

Don’t take the kitchen sink. The most consistent hindsight of returned students is “I took too much.” Be selective. No one will need all the things on the packing checklist in the Appendix. Decide what, and how much, is really essential to you. Try to get by with one large backpack and a carry-on. Many savvy travelers recommend that you pack once, try walking around the block with all your stuff, and then begin eliminating things until you can do it comfortably.

A Note on Electricity

In all four countries the supply of electricity tends to be erratic, with frequent blackouts and occasional power surges. You will need a good surge protector if you are taking a laptop computer or any other sensitive items, and if you are using a computer you should save documents frequently.

Electricity is very expensive Host families may want students to limit their use of electronic appliances in the home.

Health & Safety

Health

The website of the Centers for Disease Control, www.cdc.gov/travel, provides extensive information and advice on immunizations and on staying healthy in your country. Keep in mind that it is illegal to ship medication overseas, and any packages that are held at customs abroad will require payment of a high import tax before they are released. Bring all necessary medication (including such items as birth control) with you to your study abroad site.

Medical facilities and health conditions are significantly less advanced than in the US. It is important that you inform yourself prior to departure what precautions to take while living abroad.

Long before travel, consult with a health provider specializing in travel medicine; most general practitioners lack the requisite knowledge. Do this as early as possible, for some immunization series begin many months before departure.

Following consultation with a travel health specialist, you will need a number of immunizations. Ensure that these are recorded in your international immunization record, a yellow card that you should keep with your passport.

The program headquarter cities have good doctors and medical facilities, and care may be quite satisfactory in some other major cities as well. Only rudimentary levels of care, at best, tend to be available in villages and small towns.

A Few Additional Tips

- Avoid eating in restaurants with poor hygiene or buying food from street vendors. Assure yourself that food is well cooked. Avoid uncooked fruits or vegetables unless you can peel them yourself.
- Wash your hands frequently.
- Tap water is not recommended. Drink boiled or bottled water (either carbonated or non-carbonated). Soft drinks are usually okay, but beware of juices that may be diluted with water.
- Ice is as unsafe as water. Never add it to drinks unless it has been made from boiled or bottled water.
- Take your own medications with you.
- If you travel to high altitudes, avoid intense exercise until you have adapted. Drink lots of liquids and eat lots of...
carbohydrates. Monitor any symptoms of altitude sickness, which can include headaches and nausea.

• It is strongly recommended students bring a water purification filter.

Malaria Prevention
Malaria is a very serious illness. Your travel health specialist will recommend that you take a prophylactic (preventive) drug for malaria, possibly beginning before you are scheduled to arrive in country. Different medications are required for different countries so seek medical consultation. It is essential that you purchase and take the necessary medication. Without medication you will become very ill very quickly and may need hospitalization. While the medication cannot prevent you from contracting malaria, it significantly reduces the symptoms, allows you time to seek medical attention at a clinic in country, and facilitates a speedy recovery.

Speak with your US health care specialist about possible side effects and alternative anti-malarials if a change needs to be made overseas. Not all overseas physicians are aware of the different types of medications available so inform yourself before you leave. Should you experience side effects once overseas, speak with the on-site staff about possible alternative medications.

Students in the past have inquired about purchasing medication in country against malaria. In order to be protected, you must take the medication prior to your departure. Exposure to malaria-carrying mosquitoes could occur as soon as you arrive in country, and it is difficult to arrange clinic visits immediately upon arrival. Clinic visits are quite time-consuming, and medication in country can be unreliable. If you determine that your country-specific conditions require medication, purchase and take your medication while in the US.

Insect repellent with at least 21% DEET will additionally help ward against malaria-carrying mosquitoes. A new product, Ultrathon, manufactured by 3M contains 30% DEET and has been recommended by health professionals.

You should use insect repellent both during the day and especially at dusk and in the evenings. Mosquitoes carrying dengue fever are active in the day, and malaria-carrying mosquitoes are active at night.

Medication Overseas
Keep in mind that medication should not be shipped overseas and will likely be confiscated at customs. Students should bring any medication with them for the duration of their time abroad. CISI insurance can also assist in determining whether and how medication can be transported to another country, if necessary. Some medication and dosages that are legal in the US may not be available overseas.

Rabies Vaccination
Rabies vaccination is recommended but not required prior to departure. Although it is highly unlikely that you will encounter an infected animal, it is an added precaution to be protected prior to your arrival in country and will simplify medical treatment in country.

On-Site Safety
On-site staff receive all new or revised State Department travel advisories. The office in Minnesota forwards relevant bulletins to the in-country staff, who share them with students. Read them carefully. The most recent travel information for every country of the world is also posted at: http://travel.state.gov/. The on-site staff also keep in touch with the US Consulate in times of political unrest or natural disasters such as floods or earthquakes.

Be certain to keep electronics, such as cell phones and laptops, hidden in public to avoid theft.

Sexual Harassment & Sexual Assault
Do not tolerate behavior that feels threatening or disrespectful staff or faculty members, or homestay family members. When in any doubt, consult with an on-site staff or faculty member with whom you feel comfortable. Report any incidents of sexual harassment or sexual assault to on-site staff immediately.

Health Insurance
All students enrolled at the University of Minnesota are required to have US health insurance. This includes students registered for education abroad. For more details and specific process information for students with University of Minnesota Student Health Insurance through the Student Health Benefits Office, visit the Learning Abroad Center’s US Insurance webpage: www.UMabroad.umn.edu/students/healthsafety/intlhealthinsurance/ushealthinsurancerequirement.

In addition to your US health insurance, the University has contracted with Cultural Insurance Services International (CISI) to provide comprehensive international travel, health, and security insurance. This coverage is mandatory for all students and included in the program fee. You are covered by CISI only for the dates of the program. If you plan to travel before or after your program you should extend your CISI coverage or purchase your own insurance.

CISI does not include any preventative care, and individuals are advised to consult their medical providers for any check-ups or preventative care prior to departure.

Your CISI card and insurance policy will be emailed directly to you. Carry the card with you at all times. If you have any questions or need additional information about CISI, visit the Learning Abroad Center’s insurance webpage: www.UMabroad.umn.edu/students/healthsafety/intlhealthinsurance.

Coordinated Flight
Participants will receive flight information and booking instructions from Village Travel which handles flight
arrangements for the Learning Abroad Center. Students from the Twin Cities area fly in a group; students from elsewhere join that group in either a US or a European hub. Coordinated flight information will be available in mid-October for winter-break and in late April for summer. Visit Village Travel’s website at: www.villageinc.com. If you elect not to take the coordinated flight, you must arrive within six hours prior to the coordinated flight.

Always bring a copy of your itinerary and your electronic ticket number (NOT your confirmation number) with you. Some airlines and ticketing agents outside of the US will require you to show this at the airport check in.

If for any reason you choose not to book your flights through Village Travel, you must provide the Learning Abroad Center with a copy of your itinerary.

Staying after the Program

If you intend to stay after the program ends, you are responsible for your own housing and your transportation to the airport when you depart. It is not acceptable to remain in your homestay after the program, unless the on-site staff authorizes it. In all cases, you must pay for any lodging after the program ends.

For students departing on the official coordinated flight on the program end date, the on-site staff will arrange transportation to the airport for you.

Practical & Program Information

Housing Considerations

Homestays are an integral component of the learning experience. All students live and share most meals with one family. Do not ask to live independently.

Students take at least breakfast and the evening meal with their host families, and all three meals on weekends. Often distances preclude returning for the noon meal during the week. Although you generally will be expected to eat the same food as your family, we do ask the families to accommodate the dietary needs of students who have food allergies or are uncompromising vegetarians. Many students who are vegetarians in the US decide instead to relax their standards during their experience in order to minimize the inconvenience to non-vegetarian host families.

Students report that the homestays are among the richest and most challenging dimensions of the program. You will find that a tremendous amount of your language and cultural learning takes place while you are at home. Students constantly bring insights gained from their families into the academic program, and, similarly, the classroom learning helps provide tools for a successful homestay. students are placed with a variety of families in terms of family size, profession, ethnic background, etc. Not only do students speak in class about the differences among their families, but they also drop in on fellow students in their homes. Think of each visit as an important learning experience.

The stipend paid by the program to the host families is only a token gesture of appreciation for the time and expense of hosting you. The money in no way covers the cost of hosting a student nor compensates for the adjustment the family agrees to undertake in order to incorporate a student into their family.

Consult the country-specific section in this handbook for more detailed information on housing in your country.

Homestay Placement Process

The in-country staff strives to match students with families that meet as many of the characteristics as possible that students have requested on their forms. It is often not possible to find a family that meets all the criteria a student has listed.

You will receive basic information about your homestay family (name and address) approximately one week prior to the program start date, and we will send the information to your University of Minnesota email account. Last-minute changes occasionally occur.

Since you may not know much about your host family prior to departure, we encourage you to bring a range of generic gifts to give as gifts. Past students have recommended coffee table books from your home town/state, a board game, t-shirts, calendars, magnets, keychains and sweets such as jelly beans.

The in-country administrative staff will outline for you and the family your respective rights and responsibilities in the homestay. The family is told that for the most part your presence should not lead them to change their customs, operating rules, or food.

Tips for a Successful Homestay

The in-country staff seek families eager to incorporate US students into their lives. Host families are generally warm and welcoming and will want their students to participate in social events with friends and extended family. When you are placed with a family, you will probably get more than the family itself. You will get a wide range of friends, not to mention information, coaching, advice, and endless opportunities to practice your language skills. If you and the family are both willing to throw yourselves into making the experience a rich one, you are likely to look back on your homestay as a highlight of your time abroad.
A successful homestay requires consideration and cultural sensitivity. At times your cross-cultural skills and insights will be stretched to the limit. The country-specific section of this guide includes information and advice concerning homestays for your country. The in-country staff will supplement this with initial support and ongoing coaching to create a smooth linkage between students and their families. Staff are always available to assist and sort out cultural adjustment problems as they arise.

In most countries, the notion of private space and time is not as common as in the US. Spend plenty of time with your host family and do not seclude yourself in your room. This is often viewed as rude and may cause your host family to wonder if you are sick or unhappy.

You will find your homestay parents and siblings very concerned for your well-being. They will be good sources of information and advice about negotiating the transportation system, safety precautions, etc. At the same time, their concern might occasionally seem to border on over-protectiveness, especially if you are a woman. Understand that the family is not trying to control you but to fulfill its inescapable responsibilities for the welfare of its US daughter or son.

In most cases, your family will do your laundry. Since dryers are infrequent, have sufficient undergarments for the delay in receiving your items back. Keep in mind that you should rinse and clean any underwear that is soiled, as this is considered a very private matter.

Host families may not have internet access. Be aware the cost of electricity and internet use in homes can be very high. You may be asked by your host family to pay a fee for your internet use, and you should consult with the on-site staff about correct cultural protocol.

When you leave the house, it is important to let the family know where you expect to be and approximately what time you plan to return. Never stay overnight elsewhere without first notifying your family.

In case of minor illnesses, your family will help you seek medical attention. In the case of more serious problems, you and your family are expected to notify the administrative staff immediately in order to coordinate the best possible treatment.

Most families are conservative about relations between men and women. You are not allowed to have overnight guests of the opposite sex or to receive visitors in a closed bedroom.

Be judicious in your use of alcohol. Your host family and work colleagues will disapprove of substance abuse, and drunkenness could irreparably damage your relations with people who are important to you.

It is important not to abuse hospitality. Remember to ask the family for permission to bring friends, and be ready to cover extra expenses when inviting them.

Keep your room very neat and tidy and be respectful of the common spaces in the house. Since you are a guest in the home, your bedroom should be kept in a manner that shows your respect and appreciation. In most countries, the notion of personal and private space does not exist in the same manner as in the US, and your room in your host family is not the same as having your own room in the US. Do not leave your clothes strewn on the floor or leave personal belongings around the house. Do not put your shoes on furniture, including your own bed. Unfortunately, US students are often viewed as messy and disrespectful. Do your part to correct this image. Keep in mind that personal hygiene is also very important. You are a guest in their home and should present yourself with respect and cleanliness.

If you have questions about your homestay experience, speak to the on-site staff. As in the US, it is not acceptable for you to be asked, for example, to assist with caring for a host family member on a daily basis, be exposed to drunken or rude behavior, or tolerate any sexual advances. Although it is extremely rare for a host family experience to involve any of these, speak to the on-site staff if you have any concerns.

Before you go abroad it may be difficult to imagine the depth of the bonds that can develop between you and your host families. There is a special magic to friendships that cross deep cultural boundaries, and you may find the relationship with your family to be quite unlike other relationships you have experienced.

Farewells at the airport are often tear-filled on both sides. As your life becomes filled with the US hectic pace following your return, however, it can be all too easy not to take the time to keep in touch. An occasional letter, postcard, or email from you means a great deal to a family for whom you are as unforgettable as they for you. We ask you to take a few moments to write from time to time. Keep in mind, however, that host families should not be expected to host you after your experience or on future visits you may make to the host country.

Diversity & Host Country

Race & Ethnicity

Race can influence students’ perspectives on their host country. Past participants of color tell us that the differences between their experiences and those of Euro-Americans can include both advantages and disadvantages. Students of color often learn a great deal about their identity as a US citizen through an experience in a foreign country, and they sometimes find the new cultural context quite liberating. On the other hand, they occasionally encounter new forms of prejudice and discrimination. It is important that participants of all races avoid projecting American assumptions and attitudes about race onto the host culture. For example, definitions of racial categories, if they exist at all, may be very different from those in the US.
It is difficult to generalize about the overt and covert levels of racism that may or may not exist in any given culture, or to predict what a particular student’s personal experience will be. It can be said that any experience abroad will be a combination of circumstances, attitude, and coping skills. Some study abroad offices have put together resources for students of color who are preparing to study abroad. You should contact your own study abroad office or a member of the staff for additional information.

Students going to a location related to their ethnic heritage—for example, an African-American student to Kenya—might wish to examine critically their expectations in advance. If part of your reason for enrolling in this program is to explore your own identity, be careful not to romanticize what you might find. Students often discover that local people perceive them much more in terms of their American identity than their racial or ethnic background. You may gain rich insights into your roots, but do not expect members of the host society to treat you as a returning brother or sister.

Gender

Gender roles tend to be more rigidly defined in these countries, especially in rural areas, than they are today in the US. You may find that people respond quite differently to you depending on whether you are male or female. You may also observe a strongly gender-based division of labor in your homestay family or your agency. This sometimes challenges students’ cross-cultural understanding and skills. As in other areas, try to understand what is going on rather than to judge. It is all right to gently test the limits of gender roles—for example, if you are male to see what happens when you offer a couple of times to help with the dishes in your homestay, or if you are female to try to be more assertive than you observe among female colleagues in your agency—and be sensitive to the feedback you receive. Above all, resist any temptation to launch a one-person crusade to change things. For example, even if you feel that your homestay mother and sisters are “oppressed,” you will not be able to “liberate” them, and any attempt to do so could irreparably harm your relations with your family.

Many women experience “cat calls” and other forms of gender harassment while overseas. Be prepared in advance for this possibility and consider the following coping strategies: look straight ahead and keep walking; walk with a purpose and do not appear to be wandering without aim, walk quickly and with confidence; say “no” or “no, thank you” with conviction; consider wearing local attire to help you blend in (shawls, head scarves, etc. can reduce the possibility of intruders catching your eye and attention); develop a tough skin and do not take the matter personally; avoid walking alone or at night.

Cultural norms concerning relations between men and women, including dating, vary considerably among countries, and even from one region to another or between rural and urban settings. This topic will be included in your in-country orientation. When in doubt concerning what behavior is acceptable, consult with a trusted on-site staff or faculty member.

Sexual Orientation

Attitudes towards sexuality are very traditional. People are generally intolerant of different sexual preferences, and strict taboos and laws against such relationships exist. We encourage you to find out how different sexual preferences are viewed overseas and where your support may exist, so that your time overseas can be as enriching as possible. Consult with the Learning Abroad Center staff for more information on gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender issues if you have any questions.

For additional resources, you can contact the Office for Equity and Diversity at www.diversity.umn.edu.

Disabilities

In-country staff are more than willing to help locate personal assistance or arrange testing accommodations as needed, so long as they learn early enough of your needs. The level of physical accessibility varies from country to country. For example, wheelchair-accessible transportation or elevators may be non-existent in some sites. On the other hand, local people tend to be very supportive and will often assist you in gaining access to public transportation or buildings. It is important to consider your comfort level in asking for access assistance while abroad. For more information on access and available accommodations, contact the Learning Abroad Center.

Diversity among Participants

Whatever your own sexual orientation, gender, race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, or physical ability, keep in mind that you will be part of a diverse group. Some differences will be obvious or made known to you, others will not. Sensitivity to diversity within your own group will further enrich your experience abroad. Some of your most powerful learning experiences may revolve around differences within your group. Participants also come from extremely varied academic backgrounds. Majors range from the social sciences or humanities to fields such as engineering, business, or agriculture. All students are strong in some dimensions and weak in others. Be prepared to share your strengths and to draw on those of your classmates.
Academics

Hours of Student Effort

University of Minnesota policy specifies that each semester credit should reflect approximately 12.5 instructional contact hours of 60 minutes and twice that amount for out-of-classroom assignments.

Grades & Credit

All courses must be taken for A/F credit. S/N (pass/fail) registration is not permitted. The University of Minnesota's A/F grading scale includes grades of A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, and F.

All coursework is posted on a University of Minnesota transcript approximately eight weeks after the end of the program. For non-University of Minnesota students, the Learning Abroad Center sends a transcript of work completed on the program to the address the student has specified on the Transcript Release Form. Verify that this address is the correct one. Non-University of Minnesota students can order additional copies for a charge directly from the University of Minnesota's transcript office at: www.onestop.umn.edu/onestop/grades.html.

Incompletes

Incompletes are not allowed. Rare exceptions can be requested in cases such as serious health problems or family emergencies. These exceptions must be approved in advance by the on-site director.

Academic Rigor

Students will need to learn to function simultaneously in two cultural contexts. Local time as experienced in the village or the family may be more fluid and informal than “classroom time.” It is important to learn to flow with local time; it is equally important to retain enough structure and self-discipline in the academic part of life to avoid getting behind on assignments. Students who fail to attend class without prior permission from the on-site director will be dismissed from the program.

Grade Petitions

If you wish to question a grade issued for a particular course after the program is completed must provide evidence that the professor made an error in his/her grade calculation. The following are not reasonable grounds for grade appeal:

- Differences between US and host country educational systems
- Personal disappointment in the grade outcome
- Comparison with one’s own prior academic record/GPA
- Failure to complete one or more assignments
- Minimum grade requirement of college/department or home university (in the case of non-University of Minnesota participants)
- Health concerns/missed classes

Contact the Learning Abroad Center for a Grade Petition Form if you believe an error has occurred.

Student Grievances

Academic grievances are complaints brought by students regarding the provision of education and academic support services affecting their role as students. For grievances concerning University of Minnesota Learning Abroad Center or affiliated programs offered through the Learning Abroad Center, students should make inquiries and appeals to the appropriate University officials, in the following order: the program representative in the Learning Abroad Center, the Director of the Learning Abroad Center, the Student Dispute Resolution Center, and the Office of the General Counsel. For complaints concerning non-University of Minnesota programs, students should make appeals to the program sponsor.

FERPA

It is important to be aware that the Learning Abroad Center and the Office of Student Finance, in compliance with the Federal Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) and Regents policy, cannot share financial or academic information with a third party (including parents, spouse, guardians, etc.) without your written permission. You can download a Student Information Release Authorization at onestop.umn.edu. Complete the form and send it to OneStop Student Services, 200 Fraser Hall, 106 Pleasant St. SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455. The Learning Abroad Center must receive a copy of a notarized Power of Attorney form in order to share any program-specific information.
Coming Home

The Re-Entry Experience

The following tend to be among the biggest issues:

- **Poverty and affluence:** Students catch many glimpses of the meaning of real poverty. You will gain a new perspective on resource use as you observe the austerity of most people’s lives in your host country. Everything is used until it is worn out, then re-used by someone else who is still poorer. Your host family may discourage you from showering more than a minute or two per day in order to conserve water, or from reading late at night because of the energy that a light bulb consumes. Things you have always taken for granted may come to seem unimaginable luxuries. Then, when you return home, you may experience a profound sense of resentment at over-consumption and waste in the US. People in the US may seem to have far too much, and their dissatisfaction about still not having enough may seem incomprehensible.

- **US influence:** Living in another country, especially a poorer one, affords many opportunities to observe the economic, political, and cultural roles the US and its corporations play on the global stage. Especially when viewed from the perspective of the poor in your host country, those roles may seem less than constructive. Upon return to the US, you may feel resentful that such issues trouble your friends and family members so much less than you think they should.

- **Ignorance and distortion:** You may find yourself intensely resentful of the US media. Coverage of the rest of the world, when it exists at all, may seem shallow and ethnocentric, and the depths of American ignorance may appall you. Remember, though, that you were probably almost equally ignorant of your future host country a year ago.

- **Social justice:** The inequalities of your host society probably hit you daily throughout your experience. Now, upon return, you will likely be more attuned to see the inequalities in our own society. You will find yourself asking why so rich a country should have the most inequitable distribution of income and wealth anywhere in the industrialized world, and you may find it strange that others here can be so oblivious to injustice.

- **Values and pace:** The experience leads many students to reexamine their own values and lifestyle. Although the slow pace of life in your host society may have been frustrating initially, you finally did learn how to just “be,” rather than always needing to “do.” Now the hectic pace of US life may well feel disconcerting, even offensive. US society may seem obsessed with productivity, leaving little time for cultivating the human relationships you have found central to your host culture. Director and the program coordinator maintain frequent email communication with the staff in Minnesota.
Cultural Adjustment

The On-Site Experience

What happens when you suddenly lose clues and symbols that orient you to situations in everyday life? What happens when facial expressions, gestures, and words are unfamiliar? The psychological discomfort and adjustment period in a foreign country is commonly known as culture shock or cultural adjustment.

You will almost certainly experience some form of culture shock. It might hit you after two days, two weeks or two months—timing varies widely for different people. Six common phases of cultural adjustment are listed below. These may be out of order for you, one phase may last longer than another or you may skip a step entirely.

Initial Fascination: On arrival your surroundings seem glamorous and exotic, you feel like the focus of attention and activity.

Initial Culture Shock: The initial fascination and euphoria fade as you settle in and you enter an emotional decline.

Surface Adjustment: After the initial “down” (a few days to a few weeks for most), you begin to truly adjust and settle into your surroundings. Language skills begin to improve, and you’ll feel less fatigued. Often you’ll be forming a small group of friends at this stage as well.

Feelings of Isolation: Difficulties in your new culture seem to stubbornly remain and you grow frustrated with the process.

Integration/Acceptance: After continued effort you find yourself more at ease with language, friends, professional, and academic interests. The culture you are living in is more easily examined. Differences between yourself and the society you live in become understandable and you come to accept both the situation and yourself in it, allowing you to relax and feel at home.

Return Anxiety: Just when you feel at home in the new country it’s time to go. Thoughts of leaving new friends raise anxiety similar to those felt before departure. You sense that you’ve changed as a person and apprehension grows when you think about people at home that may not understand your new feelings and insights, yet you may feel guilty for wanting to stay.

A sense of isolation sets in. Boredom and a lack of motivation often follow. Unresolved personal issues often surface during this stage.

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When in any of the above phases you may experience: changes in sleeping habits, feelings of helplessness or hopelessness, loneliness, depression, unexplainable crying, placing blame for difficulties on the program or host culture, homesickness, getting angry easily, increase in physical ailments or pain, compulsive eating or lack of appetite.

Other symptoms may manifest themselves as well. It is important to understand these are part of a normal process of adjustment, however, if uncomfortable feelings persist for extended periods or seem unbearable, seek assistance from your programs onsite support staff.

Cultural Adjustment Curve

Adjusted from Oberg (1960) and Gallahorn (1963)
Intensive Spanish in Ecuador

On-Site Staff

At each site an on-site director and a program coordinator work closely as a team to manage the program. There is also a team of support staff to assist your daily life adjustments. Both the on-site director and the program coordinator maintain frequent email communication with the staff in Minnesota. The staff also have personal lives and should be contacted in the evenings and on weekends only in case of an emergency.

On-Site Director

The Ecuador program has two On-site Directors: Dr. José Suárez and Dolores (Loli) López. Dr. Suárez is Executive Director of Fundación Cimas del Ecuador, a development-focused nonprofit organization in Quito. Dr. Suárez received his MPH and Ph.D. degrees in public health from the University of Minnesota. A physician and epidemiologist with extensive community experience, he has authored research studies and books about health and environment in Ecuador, participated in many international and national committees, and served as a consultant to the Pan American Health Organization and Ecuador’s Ministry of Health. In addition to his extensive experience working with North American students and academic programs—including MSID since 1989—Dr. Suárez has taught at the University of Washington, Evergreen State University, and the Medical School of the Universidad Central del Ecuador.

Ms. López, who is President of Fundación Cimas, has Bachelor’s degrees in anthropology from the Universidad Católica del Ecuador and from Evergreen State College in Washington, and a Master’s degree in Ecuadorian Studies from the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO) in Quito and has a doctorate from the same university in Anthropology. She has conducted research on social and cultural population issues; gained practical experience in working in indigenous and peasant communities; and organized local, national, and international conferences. In recent years she has been deeply involved in the quest for local development alternatives based on community participation. She has long worked with US study abroad programs, including MSID since 1989.

Facilities

The Ecuador program is located at the Fundación Cimas del Ecuador (Cimas). Cimas draws program faculty from a variety of Ecuadorian institutions of higher education. The Cimas staff numbers around 15.

Cimas’ facilities include several classrooms; two conference rooms; a small library emphasizing environment, health, society, economy, and politics in Ecuador and Latin America; study space; offices; and two utility rooms used for social events and staff lunches. There is also a quiet area for students to rest, and one bedroom which students can use when feeling sick.

Computers

All of Cimas’ computers, including 14 set aside for students, are PCs (Macs are uncommon in Ecuador and receive little support). Cimas computers are for academic use only. Cimas has wireless internet access and also provides students with addresses and phone numbers of libraries in Quito. It can be helpful to bring along an inexpensive PC (not Mac) laptop to use for completing assignments, but keep in mind that laptops are easily stolen. Keep it well hidden when storing and traveling with it and ever put these kinds of valuables in your checked luggage.

Homestay Families

You will stay with a host family for the duration of the Intensive Spanish in Ecuador program.

Life with an Ecuadorian family can be a wonderful adventure if both parties understand and adapt to cultural differences. The homestay is an important venue for practicing Spanish and for gaining insights into Ecuadorian culture. Cimas will outline your rights and responsibilities in the homestay. Remember that for the most part you are expected to adapt to the family, not the family to you. Cimas tells the families that overall your presence should not lead them to change their customs, operating rules, or food; however, Cimas does ask the families to accommodate the dietary needs of students who are vegetarians or who have food allergies.

The Placement Process

Cimas has been arranging homestays for many years and follows a carefully designed process. First, an interested family fills out an application form, whose information is entered into a database. The Cimas homestay coordinator visits the house to assess the conditions. All families that clear these first stages of screening subsequently attend a meeting at Cimas to learn about how the system works, the responsibilities of the families and the students, etc. Here they also receive Cimas’s Family-Student Manual, which outlines the main aspects of the family-student relationship and terms of the homestay agreement. Following this orientation, families that reaffirm their interest become part of the pool of Cimas homestays.

Families host students for a variety of reasons. They are genuinely interested in the cross-cultural experience. Some may hope to practice their English. A few may hope you can help a son or daughter to study in the US. All welcome the small income supplement that the homestays represent.
**Homestay Conditions**

In terms of physical living conditions, all Quito homestays are expected to meet the following:

- The location should be relatively safe, as close as feasible to either Cimas or the student’s internship/research site, and accessible to public transportation.
- Only one student may be placed with each family.
- Student requests for a single room or a room shared with a family member will be accommodated.
- The home should be clean and orderly and offer adequate study space for the student.
- The home should have at least one bathroom, which should meet basic standards of sanitation.
- The family should be able to offer an adequate diet, quantitatively as well as qualitatively, with food handling that meets reasonable standards of hygiene.
- The kitchen should have at least a stove and a refrigerator.
- Adequate quantities of boiled or bottled water should always be available for the student’s use.
- Either the home should have a telephone or the student should have easy access to a neighbor’s.
- Either a washing machine should be available for student use (with soap provided by the family) or the family should arrange for weekly washing of the student’s clothes at the family’s expense, either by the family itself or by someone contracted to wash.
- When possible, Cimas prefers houses to apartments.

At our request, these standards are somewhat less demanding than those which Cimas uses for students in its other programs. We prefer less luxury to more. Nonetheless, understand that it is usually impossible to place students with really poor families, at least in Quito. Most poor families lack the space to take in an extra family member, and many also live in areas of the city that do not meet Cimas’s standards of safety. Cimas will do what it can to place students with families of modest circumstances, but rarely poorer than lower-middle class. You will take meals with your host family; however, weekday lunches are not covered. There are numerous cost effective lunch spots near Cimas. There is no refund for meals you miss (e.g., during travel).

**Living in Ecuador**

**Arrival**

Consult the coordinated flight section in the beginning of this handbook for general information regarding arrival. Below you will find country-specific instructions.

Students traveling to Ecuador may arrive early. Students arriving early to Ecuador are responsible for their own arrival transportation and lodging and must contact the Learning Abroad Center in advance to make arrangements to join the group at a specified time and place.

If you arrive with the coordinated flight, upon arrival to the airport, you will go through Customs. You will need your passport with the student visa stamped inside. After clearing Customs, you will be directed to pick up any checked luggage.

A person carrying a sign “Fundacion CIMAS” will wait for you as you depart from the luggage area. This person will take you to a hotel, where you will spend the first night. The hotel will provide you with breakfast, but students will have to pay for their other meals and any extras.

If for any reason you will not be arriving as planned and you are not able to communicate with Cimas or the University of Minnesota about this, or if you are not able to locate the Cimas person at the airport, take any of the yellow taxis at the exit of the airport (they are quite safe and reliable, although more expensive, six to eight dollars) and request to be transported to Cimas (see address in the front of this guide).

**Note:** If you do not arrive with the coordinated flight, you must arrive no more than six hours prior to the coordinated flight.

**You will not be able to call home upon your arrival.**

Telephones are not readily available, you will be exhausted, and orientation will begin quickly. Let your friends and family know that it will take several days for them to hear from you, and you are likely to contact them via email. The on-site staff will notify the Learning Abroad Center if a student does not arrive, and we will call the student’s emergency contact, as needed. **Remind friends and family members not to contact the on-site staff directly.** All contact should be through the Learning Abroad Center.

**Orientation In Country**

In Ecuador, you will stay as a group in a hotel the first night. This gives you some time to recover from the trip and to begin acquainting yourselves with each other. On the second day, your host family will come to your hotel or another gathering point (most likely Cimas) to pick you up and take you to your new home.
The in-country staff and faculty provide an orientation covering a wide variety of topics including the academic program and its courses; expectations of staff, faculty, and students; cultural differences; the homestays; health and safety; local transportation, communication systems; and other practical matters. It may also include a welcome reception or other social event, a tour of the city, and sometimes one or more additional field trips as well. Most of this orientation takes place during the first few days in Ecuador, but a few topics are deferred until students have had time to make the initial adjustment. An orientation and program schedule, as well as a handout for emergency needs, will be provided upon arrival.

Students will spend approximately 4-5 hours a day in the classroom. Assignments and activities outside of the classroom will also be incorporated.

For students who are staying in Ecuador to continue with the MSID Ecuador program, you will participate in the MSID orientation with all the other fall semester and/or academic year students. The on-site staff may ask you to facilitate or assist with different parts of orientation.

Let friends and family know that it will be difficult to reach you during this orientation period. Reassure them that you will be in touch via email as frequently as possible.

**Academics**

One language course is taught over a 3 ½ week period and awards 4 undergraduate credits. The Ecuador program offers Spanish 1004 or 3015. The syllabus focuses on language skill development and daily oral practice.

Excursions to locations of cultural interest in and around Ecuador are included in the program fee. More information will be shared during your orientation in Ecuador.

**Communication**

Students communicate with their friends and family members in the US through various means. Students are required to purchase cell phones in country, which allows for unlimited incoming calls, including from the US, text messages, and local calls.

Let family and friends in the US know that you will not be able to contact them immediately upon your arrival in country. It will usually be several days before you have the time to make contact, and students frequently correspond most easily by email.

Video calling is also an easy way to keep in touch. You will have wireless internet access at Cimas if you choose to bring your own laptop. Otherwise, computers at most internet cafés are set up with Skype or other video calling software.

**Email & Internet**

Internet cafés are readily available in Quito and other large cities at an average cost of $0.80 to $1.20 per hour. Guard against overuse of email and social media. It is easy to allow excessive communication with friends and family at home to get in the way of your integration into Ecuadorian culture.

**Social Media**

Not all countries share the same laws about freedom of expression that we have in the US. Students should keep in mind that derogatory comments, especially on social media, can result in legal claims and have extended legal implications even after a student has returned to the United States.

**Telephone**

All host families in Ecuador have telephone lines, including the host families for internship/research project sites. Students purchase cell phones in Ecuador to simplify communication and for their safety.

The Ecuador program requires all students to purchase and carry cell phones while on the program. This is not only a good safety precaution, it also facilitates communication between students and program staff. Ecuador on-site program staff will assist students with selecting and obtaining cell phones and service contracts. The cost of the cell phones are included in the program’s budget estimate. The service contract or minutes that are purchased by students are not included in the budget estimate.

Telephone services in Ecuador are very advanced and in fact cell phones have much greater signal strength than in most parts of the US. Cell phones cost as little as $45. Cell phone companies offer year-long plans as well as pay as you go plans for which you can buy top-up cards for $3 to approximately $35. International calls to cell phones almost always can be received, and calls to the US can be made from cell phones for a cost of around 30 cents. Telephone cabinas are located conveniently all over the city for local and national calls, although they are expensive for international calls.

**Mail**

If your family and friends would like to send you a package, please ask them not to declare any commercial value for the goods; otherwise you will have to pay custom taxes in Ecuador.

Airmail between the US and Quito usually takes from a few days to three weeks; other locations might be somewhat slower, as is mail from Quito to the US. Surface mail is slow and unpredictable, (it can easily take three months) and is best avoided.
Money Matters
Since January 2000, the national currency in Ecuador is the US dollar; therefore, there is no need to exchange money upon your arrival. The former currency denomination was the sucre, named for Field Marshal Antonio José de Sucre, the hero of the independence.

Credit Cards
Some students report that debit cards or check cards are the best way to access your money while in Ecuador. ATMs are available in all major cities, although not always reliable. Wiring money can be costly and risky. Keep a little money in ones and fives available in your money belt to use only in case of emergency. Most businesses will not accept bills larger than $10, so keep small bills and change on hand at all times. Students repeatedly report that traveler’s checks are difficult to cash and places that do accept them frequently charge a service fee.

It is strongly suggested that you carry a major credit card in your name, which you can use to charge items. Visa and Mastercard are most widely accepted. Your cards must be Cirrus or Plus compatible (look for the symbol on the back of the card). You should inform your bank in advance of your travel to let them know you will be using your card abroad and to inquire about the associated fees. You will need to know your PIN in order to access funds abroad. You will also likely be charged a foreign transaction fee of between 1% and 3%.

Credit cards are convenient and carry no risk, but they do carry a service fee. You should also take a separate amount in cash. Keep it in a money belt, which is worn under your clothes. You will need to know your PIN. In case you lose your cards, notify your bank and request replacement cards.

Although many establishments oriented to tourists or the Ecuadorian middle and upper classes accept credit cards, do not expect to use one for purchases as routinely as you might in the US. Street markets and the more inexpensive sorts of hotels, restaurants, and shops that students on a tight budget patronize typically do not accept credit cards. Make arrangements for someone to pay your credit card bill in the US while you are overseas.

Financial Planning
Consult the program budget sheets on the Intensive Spanish in Ecuador website for recommended spending amounts and plan to bring the appropriate amount. Review travel guides, such as Lonely Planet, for estimated daily expenses.

Two daily meals (breakfast and dinner) during the week and all three meals on the weekend are provided by your host family. You will need to budget for your weekday lunches, bottled water ($2–5 per day), local transportation, and other miscellaneous expenses.

Personal spending habits vary too greatly to predict exactly how much it will cost you to live in your country during the program. Expenses tend to be higher in major cities than in most other locations. But wherever you are, the amount you spend will depend on your lifestyle and your own personal goals. The big variables are optional activities such as nights out, music or dance lessons, gifts, and especially recreational travel. You should budget accordingly.

In the past, many students have found that they spent much more money than they had anticipated. When asked what they spent it on, however, most have said travel.

Climate and What to Wear
Pack for warm and cold conditions. Sweaters are often necessary in Quito, especially at night.

Ecuador’s climate is greatly varied in terms of both temperature and precipitation. The different environments support everything from desert to rainforest to permanent ice and snow.

Being on the equator—hence its name—Ecuador experiences only tiny seasonal variations in temperature. The difference in average temperatures between the warmest and coldest months is less than 5˚ F in Guayaquil and only 0.4˚ F in Quito. Ecuador experiences little of the day-to-day temperature variations that characterize mid-latitude climates. Although average temperatures in Ecuador can be higher than in Minnesota, the hottest days in Minnesota are actually warmer than the hottest in Ecuador. Because one day in the tropics is nearly the same as the next, Ecuador neither experiences the cold fronts that bring relief after a heat wave nor sweltering hot days.

Temperatures do vary a great deal with altitude: they decrease by an average of nearly 3˚ F for each thousand feet of rise in elevation. The Costa and Oriente are hot, with average temperatures around 76–80˚ F (24–26˚ C)—higher than Minneapolis in July. In contrast, sweaters are often needed in Quito, at over 9,000 feet elevation, which has an average annual temperature (average of daytime highs and nighttime
In most cases the staff counsels giving an article of some kind use the contribution for something that can really be used. Be, assess the needs of the agency or community, and try to contribute to your agency; you will want to speak with an Ecuador staff member about what that contribution should end and who might be offended through exclusion. Some gifts, especially when it is hard to know where the family ends and who might be offended through exclusion. Some symbolic remembrance from your home might be appropriate (e.g., a plate with something from your state, or a coffee table book or a calendar with nice photos). By all means do give appropriate gifts when the situation calls for it of Ecuadorians as well as you—for example, a birthday party for a child in your family.

Remember that the greatest gifts you can give are nonmaterial: your friendship, your empathy, your work. Part of such gifts should take the form of keeping in touch after your return home.

The program budget includes a line to underwrite a small contribution to your agency; you will want to speak with an Ecuador staff member about what that contribution should be, assess the needs of the agency or community, and try to use the contribution for something that can really be used. In most cases the staff counsels giving an article of some kind rather than cash. You and the Ecuador staff should together decide how this line might best be used.

Introduction to Ecuador

Ecuador is one of 18 Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America. The linguistic, cultural, and institutional heritage of centuries of Spanish rule gives these countries much in common. Yet each is highly distinct. Comparing economic and demographic indicators, Ecuador appears to be more “developed” than most of the Third World, but less than most of Latin America.

Although dwarfed by the populations of giants such as Brazil (188 million) or Mexico (107 million), Ecuador’s 13 million inhabitants place it eighth in population among Latin America’s 20 countries.

Economy

The economic cycles of the twentieth century were associated mainly with three products. The cacao boom began in the latter part of the nineteenth century and lasted until approximately 1925. Its bust cycle was associated with heightened political instability until the banana boom began in the 1940s. Although bananas were in decline by the 1960s, in the early 1970s the vast oil fields of the Oriente came into production. Ecuador joined the Organization of Petroleum-Exporting Countries (OPEC) and rode the high prices of the 1970s to a previously unknown level of prosperity. Then prices declined in the 1980s and the bottom fell out of the boom. Although petroleum is still the dominant product, it declined as a proportion of exports in the 1990s in favor of fish, shrimp, and traditional agricultural exports. Tourism has risen to become the third-largest source of foreign exchange.

Like many petroleum-producing countries, in the euphoria of the 1970s Ecuador borrowed heavily against future oil revenues. When prices declined, it found itself saddled with a crushing debt. Whereas some Latin American countries have overcome the worst of the region-wide debt crisis of the 1980s, Ecuador’s economy still has not recovered. The growth rate is slower than in much of the region, and so far no new product comparable to bananas or petroleum has appeared on the scene as a savior.

Since the early 1990s Ecuador has been in a period of what Latin Americans call neoliberalismo, a shorthand term for a collection of policies which generally include free trade, relatively unfettered foreign capital penetration, a reduction in government regulation of the economy, and privatization of selected enterprises formerly in the hands of the government. Under pressure from multinational corporations, international lending agencies, and Western governments, one Latin American country after another has embraced neoliberalism. Ecuador has done so more slowly than Chile or Argentina, but it is clearly moving in the same direction, especially in response to conditions set by

Precipitation is sufficient, and the dry season short enough, to make the Andes. In general, precipitation tends to be higher in the north than the south; the contrasts are greatest on the coast, where the climates range from a tropical rainforest regime near the Colombian border to a desert regime by the time you reach the Peruvian border.

You will need an umbrella and good raincoat during your stay in Ecuador.

A Cautionary Note on Gift-Giving

The Learning Abroad Center counsels restraint in gift-giving. You run the risk of seeming the condescending, rich American, of causing resentments over inequities in your giving, or of giving things of little use to the recipients. Never give gifts to strangers. Avoid giving expensive gifts; it is the thought that counts, not the value of the item. In general, a gift to a whole family or an agency is better than individual gifts, especially when it is hard to know where the family ends and who might be offended through exclusion. Some symbolic remembrance from your home might be appropriate (e.g., a plate with something from your state, or a coffee table book or a calendar with nice photos). By all means do give appropriate gifts when the situation calls for it of Ecuadorians as well as you—for example, a birthday party for a child in your family.

Remember that the greatest gifts you can give are nonmaterial: your friendship, your empathy, your work. Part of such gifts should take the form of keeping in touch after your return home.

The program budget includes a line to underwrite a small contribution to your agency; you will want to speak with an Ecuador staff member about what that contribution should be, assess the needs of the agency or community, and try to use the contribution for something that can really be used. In most cases the staff counsels giving an article of some kind rather than cash. You and the Ecuador staff should together decide how this line might best be used.
Living in Quito

Ecuador’s capital is located about three hours south of the Colombian border via the Pan American Highway. It lies within one of the series of highland basins described in the section on geography. This basin consists of an outer and an inner basin; Quito lies in the outer basin, which is higher than the inner basin to the east, separated from Quito by a ridge. The rise from the city to the top of the ridge is only a few hundred feet, but from there it is a drop of about 2,000 feet to the inner basin, which you can see from the ridge top.

As in all Latin American cities, social class contrasts are striking. In Quito you will see some of the country’s most obscene levels of wealth, as well as some of its most heart-wrenching poverty. On the whole, the portion of the city south of the colonial section and Panecillo tends to be poor, whereas the middle and upper classes live mostly in the north. Immediately north of the colonial section are some fine mansions from the earlier decades of the twentieth century. Farther north the city’s modern sections include large zones of high-rise apartment buildings.

Not all of the poor are in the south, nor all of the middle class in the north. Many poor neighborhoods are scattered here and there in the north, including squatter settlements on some of Pichincha’s slopes and larger expanses toward the far northern limits of the city. Similarly, the south does include some middle-class zones.

Lifestyles vary with social class. In the north are shopping centers and supermarkets, in the south, street markets and small shops. You could easily make most of your purchases in the north with a credit card (at a cost), whereas in the south you would find it almost useless. Multinational corporations are much more evident in the north than the south. In the north you are likely to hear rock music; in the south you will typically hear traditional Latin American music. Many people in the north are smartly dressed and look as if they could fit easily into any cosmopolitan city in the world; traditional indigenous clothing or inexpensive Western dress typify the south.

Apart from beggars and street vendors, at first glance Quito’s poverty is largely invisible. You will see few of the sorts of shantytowns that denote cities of other developing countries, both because the cold climate demands more substantial constructions and because the city has been quite successful in repressing squatter invasions. Thus, the poor neighborhoods look much less shocking than in Guayaquil, Lima, or Caracas. Instead, much of Quito’s poverty is hidden behind the walls of crowded multi-family houses. Some of the fine colonial structures in the old center have been converted into tenements which may house twenty, thirty, or even fifty or sixty separate families, each renting individual rooms while sharing facilities such as toilets and clothes washing basins. Owners sometimes add rental rooms onto houses until tenements develop, even in new neighborhoods. Quito has few alternatives to crowding, whereas in many Third World cities squatter invasions serve as a safety valve for poor populations living in crowded rental conditions.

Academic Considerations

Ecuadorian faculty tend to design their courses so as to stimulate group rather than individual work. Seminars, workshops, and small group field assignments are frequently used. Faculty usually call for questions and comments about the different topics discussed in class, so classes are expected to be dynamic and interactive. Cimas faculty urge you to ask questions if you do not understand a concept, so that the instructor and fellow students can help clarify it. As all courses are taught in Spanish, faculty need continuous feedback concerning students’ level of understanding.

All assignments should be typed and neat. Term papers are expected to follow specific guidelines that you will receive at the beginning of the program. Ecuadorian faculty consider a sloppy-looking project to reflect low pride in the student’s work.

Malaria

The Center for Disease Control states the following: there is risk for malaria in all areas at altitudes lower than 1,500 meters (4,921 feet). There is no risk in Guayaquil and Quito, the central highland tourist areas, and the Galápagos Islands. If you travel outside of these areas (i.e. the coast) you will be at risk for malaria and should take precautions as suggested by the Center for Disease Control.
A Note on Travel to Colombia

As long as Colombia remains on the US State Department Travel Warning list, Ecuador students are not permitted to travel to Colombia during the program.

Tips from Students

Past students have compiled the following list of additional information:

- Quito is at a high altitude, over 9000 feet. Take it easy when you first arrive in country.
- Ecuadorians are very polite people. Always greet people with a handshake (common between men) or a kiss on the cheek (common between women or between a man and a woman).
- If you need a cab at night, especially as a woman, call a cab company to your home (or wherever you are) rather than hail one on the street. This is the safest way. Also, if you must hail a cab at night, negotiate the price before accepting the ride, as the meters are turned off after dark and you could end up paying outrageous prices.
- “Ecuadorian” time is different than “American” time. Be patient and flexible. Do not expect people to be on time, or for events to occur when scheduled. It’s all part of integrating in to the culture.
- Things are less methodical/routine than in the US. For example, the buses don’t run on a schedule, and you may be asked to pay as you board, once you sit down, or as you leave, depending on the specific bus. Once again, be flexible.
- Packages sent to Ecuador should not have a declared value. If they do, it is difficult and expensive to receive the package.
- Don’t stick your bags under the seat of a bus—that’s how I got robbed.
- Seize every opportunity to practice your Spanish
- Always be aware of your surroundings
- Carrying spare change is helpful
- Always travel in groups, never alone.
- Be aware of public holidays.
### Temperature (°F) & Rainfall (inches) in Quito

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Appendix

Packing Checklist

The following is a list developed by past MSID students and in-country staff. Adapt it to suit your own style and priorities. You will not need all the items on the packing list, they are only suggestions.

Clothing
- 1 pair of comfortable walking shoes
- 1 pair of dress shoes
- Sandals, and/or flip flops (for shower/beach)
- 1 dress outfit
- 7 pairs of underwear, durable bras
- Lightweight socks
- T-shirts
- Tank tops
- Skirts/dresses that extend below the knee
- 2–3 pairs of pants (jeans, khakis, etc.)
- 1–2 long-sleeve lightweight shirts
- 2–3 short-sleeve shirts/t-shirts
- 1 pair Sweat pants or athletic pants (light-weight)
- 1 pair Shorts (hiking/sport style) for beach and sports wear
- Bathing suit
- Lightweight waterproof jacket
- 1 Fleece jacket or lining or lightweight sweater
- Lightweight long-sleeve, long-leg pajamas
- Sun hat/cap
- Scarf and knit hat for chilly weather

Household/Personal Items
- Money belt containing passport, international immunization record, credit card, cash card, traveler’s checks, any dollars you are taking in cash, etc.
- Umbrella
- Travel alarm
- Charger for US cell phone
- Camera with extra batteries or charger
- Cord to connect your camera to your computer
- Film or digital flashcards (most film/batteries/developing are available in country)
- Ziplock plastic baggies
- Flashlight
- 1 water bottle
- Wristwatch
- Music player
- Contact information of friends/family/academic contacts
- Guide book (e.g. Lonely Planet or Rough Guide)
- Photographs of friends and family, your house, your community, etc.
- Locks for luggage
- Zip/flash drive
- Bilingual dictionary
- Notarized copy of passport
- Original copy of visa
- Journal

Health Items & Toiletries
- A full supply of prescription drugs in original bottles (in case customs needs documentation); include one prescription for bacterial dysentery and directions for its use
- First aid kit
- Insect repellent (at least 21% DEET)
- Anti-itch gel for misquito bites
- Condoms, birth control
- Tampons (expensive or unavailable in country)
- Bladder infection medication, yeast infection medication
- Anti-diarrheal medicine
- Pepto Bismol or similar stomach settler
- Laxatives
- Small packages of tissue or toilet paper
- Pain medicines
- Sunscreen (high SPF)
- Aloe vera gel for sunburns
- Ear plugs
- Sunglasses
- Lip balm with sunscreen
- Vitamins
- Hand sanitizer
- All contact lens materials needed for your stay
- An extra pair of glasses and a copy of your prescription
- Sanitary moist wipes
- Toiletries: soap, deodorant, shampoo, and toothpaste are all easily available in country (but take enough for first few weeks); dental floss (take enough for your stay), nail clippers, toothbrush, hairbrush or comb, razor
- Granola bars
- Malaria medication