



Educational Tours

IN SUPPORT OF



SERVICE LEARNING IN ECUADOR

Facts, tips and local info

YOUR GUIDE TO ECUADOR

To prepare you for your upcoming Service Learning Tour, we've put together a list of everything you'll need to know about the country you'll be working in. Take some time to read all about the people and places you'll be visiting, as well as a bit of what you can expect once you're on the ground.

> ROUGH GUIDE

Capital: Quito

Language: Spanish

Dialing code: 593

Population: 15.2 million

Currency: U.S. Dollar

SERVICE LEARNING IN ECUADOR

Everything you need to know

PASSPORT AND TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

To enter Ecuador, you must have a passport that is valid for six months after your return date. You'll also need proof of return or onward journey—your e-ticket receipt will be fine. Entry visas are not required for U.S. citizens, but citizens of any other country should contact their embassies to find out what documentation is required for travel.

WEATHER

Ecuador has two main seasons: rainy and dry. While there is a lot of variation between the geographical regions, most days stay sunny into the afternoon. It will be warm in the capital of Quito and in the Amazon or Cloud Forest, and cooler in communities at higher altitudes in the Andes Mountains.

In the highlands (Quito, Cuenca, Otavalo), the temperature averages 70°F in the winter (December–April), and 50°F in the dry months (the remainder of the year). The coast (Guayaquil, Galápagos) has an average temperature of 84°F in the rainy season (November–May) and 86°F in the dry season (the remainder of the year). We suggest you use sunscreen at all times since Ecuador is located along the Equator. Please visit weather.com for your destinations and travel periods.

PACKING / DRESS

You will be outdoors and working hard during your tour, so please ensure that you bring clothing that you do not mind getting dirty. We strongly recommend that you bring long pants, work gloves and sturdy running shoes or hiking boots. Out of respect for the local culture, please dress conservatively during the tour. Avoid tight or revealing clothing, shorts above the knee, tank tops, leggings, or yoga clothes. Summer clothes are appropriate all throughout the year, including light t-shirts, shorts, a light jacket or windbreaker, comfortable walking shoes and sandals. You should also bring sunscreen, sunglasses, insect repellent and travel-size toilet paper.

If you are traveling to the Galápagos, note that no more than 44 pounds of luggage is allowed on the internal flights to the Galápagos Islands. Any additional luggage must be stored at your mainland hotel while you are visiting the islands, but bring your beach towel and bathing suit.

If motion sickness is a concern during boat excursions, consider packing some over-the-counter motion sickness medication.

CURRENCY

The Ecuadorian currency is the U.S. dollar. Dollar bills should be crisp; vendors will not accept them if they are worn or marked. We recommend bringing an ATM card or a credit card that can be used to withdraw cash from a bank or ATM.

You should notify your bank of travel plans to avoid service interruptions, and inquire about charges when withdrawing money abroad. While most shops accept credit cards, the phone lines are slow in Ecuador, making the use of credit cards time consuming. Traveler's checks are generally not accepted in Ecuador.

SPENDING MONEY

It's always a good idea to bring spending money for optional excursions, free time activities, souvenir shopping, lunches, and snacks. We recommend bringing \$30- \$60 per day. During your service days, very limited money is needed.

TIPPING

It's customary to tip your Field Director and bus drivers as a token of appreciation. We recommend:

- \$6 per person per day for the Field Director
- \$3 per person per day for the bus driver

All staff associated with Me to We and Free The Children are not able to receive gratuities.

We recommend using U.S. dollars for tipping and we suggest you present it to your Field Director/bus driver in the tip envelopes we will provide. We'll contact you with more details on tipping closer to your departure.

DONATIONS/GIFTS

Out of consideration for the whole community, we encourage you not to give gifts individually to local children or families. If you would like to donate something, we ask that you contact your Field Director who can provide guidance on if any supplies are useful to the community or partner organization at that time. Your Field Director will then properly distribute the items to Free The Children.

PHONE AND INTERNET

Your Field Director can help you find places to buy an international phone card. If you plan to use your personal mobile phone on tour, contact your wireless provider to see what fees you may incur for calling, texting or using data abroad. However, keep in mind that once your group arrives to your service community, there will be no access to phones or internet.

We strongly encourage travelers to focus on the tour and their immediate surroundings while they are abroad, rather than being distracted by things happening at home. In our experience we have found that disconnecting from the internet, phones, and tablets enhances the experiences. We also understand that keeping in touch is important, so upon arrival, EF/Me to We will send an email confirming arrival in-country to all contact emails listed on the emergency contact list. Within 24 hours of arrival and assuming internet connectivity, all travelers will have a chance to contact parents or guardians back home by email.

VACCINATIONS AND HEALTH PRECAUTIONS

For information on necessary vaccinations and potential malaria prevention, we recommend that you visit cdc.gov or consult your physician for the most updated information. You should be aware that this itinerary will visit places at high elevation and should therefore discuss the potential effects of high altitude with your physician (especially if you have a heart condition or high blood pressure).

SERVICE LEARNING IN ECUADOR

What to expect on tour

FIELD DIRECTOR

Your Field Director is responsible for all the logistics on tour and ensures that the travel experience goes smoothly. They are each professionally trained to anticipate the needs of travelers like you. They also have an extensive knowledge about the communities and projects. All Field Directors are trained in first aid.

SERVICE PROJECTS

EF works in collaboration with Free The Children, who has established partnerships with different communities. You will receive the exact name of the community you will interact with closer to your departure date.

During your time at the service sites in Ecuador, you can expect to be working on projects such as; digging foundation, mixing concrete, pouring concrete, making/laying bricks, raising walls, painting walls, building stair-cases, building ramps, creating gardens, sawing wood, shaping re-bar, tilling the ground for crops/garden, planting trees, smoothing and sanding walls or painting.

The work can be physically intense, and you will be outside for most of the day. On average you will spend 12–25 hours working in the community. While on the service site, your Field Director will give you thorough instructions on the use of equipment, show you what protective gear should be worn, help you with construction, provide support and schedule rest times. Some necessary gear will be provided on site, but you should also reference the packing list to make sure you bring the right clothes and shoes.

ACCOMMODATIONS

During your tour you will stay in standard hotels and dormitory style accommodations. In hotels, students under the age of 20 will share rooms with three to six other travelers of the same gender in rooms that contain single or shared double beds, or a combination of the two.

Students may share rooms with students in the tour group who are not from their own school. Adults will share bunk bed accommodations with other adults of the same gender, 2–3 per room. Adults may share rooms with adults in the tour group who are not from their own school. Groups may not all be roomed next to each other and may be on different floors. For the time spent in the service community, you will be staying in dormitory style accommodations with bunk beds and shared bathrooms and showers.

If you are traveling to the Galápagos, your hotel will be located on Santa Cruz Island.

TRANSPORTATION

Buses in Ecuador are comfortable and equipped with air conditioning. Some of the transfers are long and take place on winding roads. Please see the Tour Schedule for details.

If you are prone to motion sickness, bring preventative motion sickness pills. In order to reach the accommodations in the Amazon (Minga Lodge) a short boat ride is required.

If you are traveling to the Galapagos Islands, your internal flight information from Quito to the Galapagos will be given to you by your Field Director once you arrive in Ecuador. There are daily boat excursions to other islands while you are in the Galapagos on small motorboats that seat up to 20 passengers. Groups may be split between a few different motorboats. Each boat excursion will be a full day, lasting approximately from 8 a.m.–3 p.m. Note that volume and government regulations will determine the exact island visits while in the Galapagos. All itineraries are subject to change.

FOOD / WATER

In Ecuador, you'll enjoy traditional local cuisine, which includes beans, rice, meat, salads, soups and potatoes. It is not advisable to drink tap water or to eat food sold by street vendors. Bottled water is inexpensive (\$1–2) and easy to find in Ecuador.

While at the service sites, meals are prepared with great care by local cooks who are trained in proper food preparation. All meals are included during these days and you may receive boxed lunches at the site. Bottled or filtered drinking water will be readily available throughout the time at the service site. We strongly encourage you to bring a reusable water bottle.

In the Galápagos, fish is commonly served and lunches are included. You should buy water before starting your boat excursions; water is not available to purchase on board the boats or on the islands visited.

PHOTO POLICY

In order to ensure photos are not exploitive or disrespectful of the community, we ask that you only take photos of people who have a relationship with Free The Children, only after obtaining their permission.

Your Field Director will let you know when it is appropriate to have your camera out, and there will be plenty of opportunities for you to take photos and highlight key moments on your tour. We just want to ensure that wherever we go, we are treating people like people—not like scenery.

SAFETY

Always inform your Field Director if you should need to break away from the group at any point. Store valuables in hotel safe deposit boxes and refrain from carrying large sums of money or wearing valuable jewelry. Please be sure to read EF's Safety Handbook, EF's Rules of the Road and Me to We's Rules of the Road before going on tour.

During your stay in Galápagos, life jackets are always provided for all boat excursions.

SERVICE LEARNING GLOBAL AMBASSADOR CODE

In order to provide an enriching experience for student travelers, we ask that everyone adhere to a simple code of conduct.

Student travelers should act as global ambassadors for their country, their school, their home and their family. Throughout the EF Service Learning experience, they will be guests in a foreign community and culture, and should act accordingly to not only deepen their experience, but also make a positive impression on the host communities.

The code for student conduct reflects three significant priorities:

1. That volunteers stay safe and healthy.
2. That volunteers maintain and enhance the positive reputation our local partners have in the communities where we work.
3. That volunteers positively represent themselves and their home culture through their behavior and interactions with local community members.

To maintain the safety, health and respect of our volunteers and program, student travelers are asked to agree to:

- Not smoke
- Not drink alcoholic beverages
- Not swear or use foul language
- Not use recreational drugs
- Not be involved in romantic public displays of affection
- Respect the quiet time as set by the Field Director/Community Representative
- Not drive or ride on a motorized vehicle/motorcycle other than EF provided transportation
- Not give gifts or money directly to the children or people in the community without the involvement of the Field Director
- Abide by the EF dress code
- Follow the instructions of the Field Director and local support staff

By acting as global ambassadors, student travelers will not only leave a positive and lasting impact on the local community, but will return home having had a more meaningful experience, as well.

