

## **LIVING WITH YOUR HOST FAMILY IN ECUADOR CULTURAL AND PRACTICAL ADVICE**

Welcome to Cuenca Ecuador! We hope that your experience with us here in this incredible country is enjoyable and filled with lasting memories. Living with a host family is without a doubt the best way to immerse yourself in a new culture, and for many, it is the heart of their stay. You will have many opportunities to practice Spanish and to learn more about the Ecuadorian way of life. All host families provide a bedroom, 3 meals per day and laundry service. Most of our host families have hosted students before. Below are general advice and guidelines that we would like to share with you to help you make the most of your stay.

### **1. ALL HOST FAMILIES ARE DIFFERENT**

As in your own country, all families are different. Your host family will also be different from those of other students. Families may differ in the number of people in the home, whether or not there are children, whether they are single parents or not, the size of the house, the distance from CEDEI, whether they are outgoing or a little shy, how often they like to go out, whether or not they have a car, etc. Please keep in mind that it is not fair to compare families. Every family is unique and therefore every student's experience will be unique. All families are definitely interested in hosting you and having you join them as a member of their family.

### **2. COMMUNICATION**

- This is the most important point in building a successful relationship with your host family AND to help you adapt more quickly to the Ecuadorian culture. It is natural that at first, you may not be able to understand everything that your family is saying. However, it is important that you please try to communicate with them as much as possible. Your family will appreciate every effort you make to do this.
- Your family wants to get to know you. They want to know if you are doing okay, if you are comfortable, if you need something, how your classes are going, what you notice is different in Ecuador, etc. TALK to them!
- Remember that you are here to learn Spanish and about Ecuadorian culture. Time will fly by faster than you can imagine! Therefore, take advantage of every moment you are here and build a friendship with your family.
- If there is anything you do not understand, something you are not sure of, or if you have any doubts, questions or problems, please do not hesitate to ask and talk to your family to avoid a misunderstanding later on.

### **3. GREETING AND SAYING GOODBYE**

- In Ecuador it is very important that you always greet every person when you enter a room AND acknowledge each person again before you leave. This is not just done verbally. Men typically shake hands with each other. Between men and women, and between women, a light kiss on the person's right cheek is customary.

### **4. EXPRESSING EMOTIONS AND PHYSICAL DISTANCE**

- In general, Ecuadorian people are comfortable being expressive with their emotions. When conversing, you may see a lot of gestures and facial expressions used to display feelings and to emphasize a point.
- Ecuadorians are also comfortable standing very close to each other and their scope of private space may be different from your culture. When standing in line or walking down a crowded street, do not be surprised if people frequently brush past you without apologizing. During conversations, there may be a lot of eye contact and touching (hand on your shoulder or arm) between two people.

## **5. FAMILIES IN CUENCA ARE CONSERVATIVE**

- The Catholic religion has a lot of influence and is important here in Ecuador. You may notice certain Catholic rituals and prayer recitations that your family participates in. Most families also attend Mass during the weekend. You should respect these customs and you may participate if you would like.
- The way in which people dress in Cuenca is generally conservative. It is rare to see people wearing short pants in the city unless they are doing some form of exercise. Overly revealing or tight-fitting clothes would also not be appropriate to wear.
- Be respectful of your family's concerns for your safety and well-being. This is especially relevant with female students. Don't be surprised, therefore, if they ask you questions about your schedule, when you are planning to come home, how late you might be out until, if you are hungry, cold or comfortable, to remember to bring your sweater along, etc.

## **6. FOOD**

- It is common for all family members to eat their meals together. Meal time is considered family time in many households. Because of this, often the entire family will wait for every person to come home before they begin to eat. For this reason, it is VERY important to arrive home on time for all meals. The most common frustration expressed by host families is that their student has not let them know if he/she is running late or not coming home for a meal.
- Lunch is the largest and most important meal of the day in Ecuador. Again, you must call your host family ahead of time to let them know if you will not be making it home for a meal for some reason.
- In general, the kind of food you may expect at each meal may consist of the following:
  - Breakfast: Continental style with tea or coffee, juice, fruit, bread
  - Lunch: Two plates, first a bowl of soup, then a main dish of rice, vegetables and meat.
  - Dinner: Lighter than lunch with the same basic types of food
- Water- Families have been asked to serve you boiled or purified water. Outside of your home, drink bottled water only.

## **7. THE BATHROOM**

- The drainage system in the city is run down and clogs easily. Therefore, toilet paper may not be put in the toilet, but rather in a trash basket that is located near each toilet in the bathroom.
- Many families have showers which are run by electricity. These electric showers typically have a switch on the wall which has to be turned on before turning on the water. After taking a shower, the switch must be turned off. Ask your family to show you exactly how to use the shower in your house.

## **8. USING THE TELEPHONE**

- In Ecuador, there is a charge for all telephone calls made, even local calls within the city. You may use the telephone to make quick, local calls within Cuenca only. Please be respectful of the amount of time you spend on the phone since this can get expensive. Phone calls outside of Cuenca (national or international) may NOT be made from the host family's home. These calls can be made from the EMETEL or PACIFICTEL offices located on Benigno Malo, between Sucre and Córdova.

## **9. LAUNDRY**

- Your host parents will tell you on what days laundry is done, where you should put your dirty clothes, etc. Please note that only some families have washing machines, and very few have dryers. Instead, it is customary for the host mother or maid to wash the clothes by hand, hang them on a line outside to dry, and iron them. Because of this, keep in mind that it may take a few days to get back your clothes and you will need to plan accordingly.

## **10. DRESS IN THE HOUSE**

- It is not common to walk around the house in your pajamas. Therefore, please be sure you are always dressed outside your bedroom.
- It is also not appropriate to walk around the house in your barefeet. Shoes or slippers should always be worn.

## **11. MAIDS**

- Your family may have a maid who either lives with the family or comes to work on certain of the week to help with household chores. Her job might include cleaning the house, washing clothes, helping cook, taking care of the smaller children, etc. This is normal here. If you need her to do something for you, ask your host parents first.

## **12. INVITING FRIENDS TO VISIT YOUR HOME**

- It is fine to invite your friends to visit you, however you must first consult your host family in advance to ask if this is okay on the day and time you are planning. In Ecuador, when receiving visitors, it is generally the case that the visitor stay and visits in the living room or sitting room. It is not common for them to visit the bedrooms. If you would like to show your visitor the rest of the house, ask your host parents first if this would be okay.
- If a visitor of the opposite sex is in your room, never close the door during his/her visit. This would be inappropriate.

## **13. SPEAK ONLY SPANISH IN FRONT OF YOUR HOST FAMILY**

- When you are with your friends from your native country, please refrain from speaking English or any other language other than Spanish in front of your family. This is considered rude since they won't be able to understand what you are saying.

## **14. WHAT TO CALL YOUR HOST PARENTS**

- You can start out by calling them "Señor" and "Señora". This shows the most respect. However, don't be surprised if they then ask you to call them by their first names.

## **15. YOUR ROOM**

- Most Ecuadorian moms take pride in the fact that there house is neat and clean. Be sure to make your bed everyday and keep your room neat.

## 16. SAFETY AND AWARENESS

- Keep your valuables (money, passport, plane ticket, jewelry, etc.) at home in a safe place (locked in a drawer or in your suitcase, etc).
- When you are outside of your home, you must be careful with your belongings at ALL times. Keep valuables such as cameras, purses, watches, jewelry, wallets, and sunglasses in a safe place, secure, near your body and concealed if possible. Carry backpacks and bags in front of you if you are in a crowded place or riding public transportation. Remember, because you are a foreigner, you are considered rich, and therefore a target for thieves.
- Do NOT ever leave any of your belongings unattended in any place, not even for a minute.
- It is not safe to walk around the city at night. It is especially dangerous for women to walk at night alone. Stay away from the marketplace areas at night. Ask your family to show you on your map of Cuenca where some of the more dangerous areas and neighborhoods are.
- Take a taxi at night. Only travel in yellow taxis bearing their official registration seals. Ask what the fare is before you enter the cab.
- Carry your CEDEI Student Information Card with you at all times.
- Use the phone numbers listed on the back of your Student Information Card to help you at any time.

## 17. GENERAL ADVICE FOR A SUCCESSFUL STAY

Keep an open mind and be flexible.

Ask if you don't understand to avoid misunderstandings.

Let your family know what you need and what you like.

Observe and participate actively with your family and the culture.

Your host family has received an orientation and is prepared to welcome you into their home. Their first priority is to help you feel comfortable. Some other things that we have asked the host family to help you with includes: showing you how to get to/from CEDEI, giving you a house key, letting you know the meal times, explaining the laundry system, explaining other house and family rules, etc. If you have any doubts, please ask your family directly. If you have any other questions or problems, do not hesitate to talk to the Homestay Coordinator at CEDEI. In case of an emergency after hours, please call the cellular phone number listed on your CEDEI Student Information Card. We are here to support you and to help you have a successful stay. Have a great experience!