



PREPARING FOR YOUR TRIP TO THE ANDES

CENTERS FOR INTERAMERICAN STUDIES (CEDEI)

BAGGAGE

It is important to pack as lightly as possible for your trip to the Andes. You will be responsible for transporting your luggage everywhere we go; therefore, do not take more than you can carry yourself. In some places, there may be porters available, but you should not expect that this will be the case. You will probably buy gifts and souvenirs in Ecuador, so remember to leave extra space in your luggage for them.

Please limit yourself to **one** checked bag, weighing no more than 50 pounds, and **one** carry-on bag that will fit under the seat in front of you*. Latin American airlines are strict about luggage weight limits: overweight charges are high, and occasionally the carrier will hold a bag for a later flight or refuse it entirely.

You should take a suitcase or large duffel bag to check in and a day pack to carry on. The day pack, which should fit underneath the airline seat, serves a variety of purposes: carry-on bag, book bag, pack for weekend outings, etc.

* Please confirm baggage/weight restrictions with your airline prior to departure. These frequently are subject to change and differ between airlines.

CLIMATE

Even though Cuenca is located near the equator, do not expect tropical weather conditions for the majority of the program. Cuenca is located in the Andes at roughly 8400 feet above sea level.

Temperatures at that level are much cooler than at sea level: the afternoon high temperature is usually in the upper 60's or lower 70's; however, it generally feels substantially colder indoors.

Nighttime lows generally drop into the 40's. The climate in Quito is similar to Cuenca; the Costa and Oriente are tropical: hot (90's) and humid.

CLOTHING

Generally speaking, you can dress the same in Cuenca as you would in the United States, with one notable exception: shorts, which are seldom worn in Cuenca. They are acceptable attire for the beach or for playing soccer (and other sports), but **not for street wear**. Shorts can also be worn in Vilcabamba and Macas. Take comfortable clothing that washes easily and is wrinkle-resistant. Jeans are common and acceptable attire. It is easy to get dirty just by walking down the street, so clothing should not readily show soil. Since you will be walking a lot, a good comfortable pair of walking shoes is a must. You may also want to take a swimming suit for Baños de Ambato and Vilcabamba.

Since the temperature can vary greatly throughout the day (and between the shade and the sun), it is best to dress in layers, which will allow you to adapt easily to changing temperatures. You

should take a variety of clothing to allow layering: t-shirts, long-sleeve shirts, sweatshirts, and a warm jacket (preferably one that is waterproof). In places like Cajas and Ingapirca the weather can be quite cold (nighttime lows can drop below the freezing mark!) and rain is common.

Therefore, it is a good idea to pack thermal underwear, a warm waterproof hat, and an umbrella. If your jacket is not waterproof, you should also take a raincoat. If you are planning on hiking or camping, take a pair of waterproof hiking boots, a sleeping bag, and a water bottle (tents can be rented from Expediciones Apullacta, an eco-tour agency affiliated with CEDEI).

One final note about clothing: you may be invited to a wedding or other formal occasion, so you should take at least one formal or nice casual outfit.

DOCUMENTATION

In Ecuador you must carry proper documentation (i.e., your passport) with you at all times. Passports must be valid for at least 6 months from the date you enter Ecuador. If you do not have a valid passport or yours will expire soon, and have not yet applied for new one or a renewal, apply **immediately!** Please make several copies of your passport. Carry at least one copy with you, but in a separate place from your passport. Another copy should be left with your parents (or other emergency contact). As past participants can attest to, it is much easier to replace a lost/stolen passport if you have a photocopy. Do not carry your passport in your luggage; keep it in your money belt or another secure place on your person (we will have more advice on this during orientation in Ecuador). US and Canadian citizens will need a 90-day tourist visa, which is given free upon arrival. Do not throw away your copy of the visa! You must surrender your copy when you leave the country. If you plan to stay in Ecuador longer than 90 days, you will need a special intercultural exchange visa, which we can help you apply for. **If you are not a United States or Canadian citizen, you might be required to obtain a special entrance visa;** please check with the nearest Ecuadorian consulates. You should also carry your *International Certificate of Vaccination* (see Immunization Info packet for more information).

*** Visa requirements will change for each group. Please read additional CEDEI materials regarding which type of visa will be needed for your particular program as well as other forms of documentation (i.e ISIC cards).**

ELECTRICAL CURRENT

Electrical current in Ecuador is generally 110 volts, the same as in the United States. (We recommend that you do not take hair dryers or other electrical appliances.)

FAMILY LIFE

All of the host families working with the Program have gone through a careful screening process, and many have hosted students in the past. They are given a reasonable compensation to cover costs such as your food and resource consumption (water, electricity, etc.).

It is standard to take a gift for your family. It does not need to be something expensive; small souvenirs of your school or town (e.g., pennants, imprinted pen/pencils, stationery, etc.) are appreciated. A picture book or postcards from your hometown or state are other ideas. A popular idea used in the past is buying flowers for your host mother (flowers are very inexpensive in Cuenca, and there is a flower market located near the Centro). Your Ecuadorian host family will be interested in learning about the people they're filling in for during your time in Cuenca, so you may wish to take pictures of your family to show them.

It is impossible to list every detail of homestays, if for no other reason than sweeping generalizations often do not apply to specific individuals. Therefore, you should not assume that generalizations we make will be exact descriptions of your specific host family. Family habits can vary substantially in Ecuador, just like they do here. Generally speaking, however, the families are warm and friendly, and they will be happy to host you. Family living will be explained in more detail during orientation in Ecuador. In addition, you may wish to speak with past participants about their homestays (we'd be happy to provide some references). If you have any problems, misunderstandings, etc., with your host family, please consult with a staff member as soon as possible, so that the situation can be remedied. If, for any reason, the student and host family are not adequately suited for one another – and the situation cannot be resolved – we will switch you to a different family. Serious problems are rare, and for many past students, the homestays have been one of the most enjoyable aspects of the Program.

INSURANCE

CEDEI does offer a comprehensive insurance policy to all the students so it is not necessary to purchase additional coverage. We do not discourage additional international medical insurance and please contact us with any questions regarding our particular insurance plan.

MISCELLANEOUS DRUG STORE ITEMS

If you are taking prescription medicine with you, try to take enough to last you for the entire length of the program. If you are susceptible to colds or sinus infections, take your regular brand from home. Contact lens wearers who need solution should also take an adequate supply. If you wear contacts or glasses, you may want to take a copy of your lens prescription from your optometrist, in case you need to replace them. You will want to use a sunscreen with a high SPF, because the sun's rays are a lot stronger in the Andes than they are here in the United States. If you go to the Oriente or Costa, insect repellent is a must, preferably one that contains a high percentage of DEET (*Detán* is available in many pharmacies in Cuenca). You might also want to take along over-the-counter cold or anti-diarrheal medication (e.g., Imodium). (As with any medicine, please follow the directions for use.)

MONEY

We recommend budgeting approximately \$60 per week in spending money (students living with a host family can certainly get by with much less). This amount is based on how much students have spent in the past; however, depending on your resources and spending habits, you may want to adjust this amount accordingly. Regardless of how much money you take, **set a budget before you leave**, and stick to it as best as possible. Be sure to allow for unexpected expenses (e.g., medical bills, replacing a lost/stolen passport, etc.). Remember also that you are responsible for

- **meals** not taken with your host family (eg, on field trips and excursions);
- **personal expenses**, such as toiletries, gifts and souvenirs;
- **daily transportation** to and from classes (walking is always an option); and
- **recreational activities**, including meals at restaurants, entertainment, and any trips you may take on your own.

Carry your money in the form of traveler's checks issued by a well-known company (American Express, Visa, Thomas Cook, Citibank, etc.) or use an ATM card issued by your bank. The most common way to get money is through the use of the many ATM's here in Cuenca. Prior to leaving please advise your respective bank (s) and credit card companies that you will be making international withdrawals / purchases as to avoid any potential hold on your funds. For traveler's checks, the best denomination is \$20, but you may also want a

few \$50 checks. Be sure to record the numbers of your traveler's checks and keep those numbers separate from your checks (in case they are lost or stolen).

Most well-known credit cards (e.g., Visa, Mastercard, American Express, etc.) are accepted at more expensive restaurants and shops, although Visa is more widely accepted than Mastercard or American Express (in fact, some shops displaying "American Express Welcome Here" signs have actually refused to accept them). The Discover Card is **not** accepted in Ecuador or Peru. Some cash (\$50 in small bills (1's, 5's, 10's)) will be useful at the beginning of your trip, since you may not have a chance to cash traveler's checks right away (and some places do not take traveler's checks).

Getting money wired from home is possible (Western Union and American Express Moneygram have locations in Ecuador), but it can be very difficult and expensive. ATM cardholders may be able to withdraw money from their accounts at Mastercard/Cirrus and Visa/Plus ATMs in Ecuador and Peru (you may wish to consult the ATM Locators at www.mastercard.com and www.visa.com).

PHOTOGRAPHY

Film is slightly more expensive in Ecuador than it is in the USA; therefore, it is a good idea to bring what film you need with you. Don't bring an expensive camera unless it is covered under your household insurance policy (or unless you purchase short-term traveler's insurance).

VALUABLES

Leave your jewelry and other valuable articles at home. Remember this important rule of thumb:
If the loss of something would ruin your trip, don't take it.

PACKING TIPS AND REMINDERS

DO NOT PUT YOUR PASSPORT, AIRLINE TICKETS, OR OTHER DOCUMENTS IN YOUR CHECKED LUGGAGE! You should carry your money, passport, airline tickets, etc., in a money belt (Campmor offers a variety of money belts), so that your valuables are out of sight and reach. It is a good idea to carry essential toiletries and a change of clothing in your carry-on, just in case your luggage is delayed. Make sure that all your lotions, pastes, creams, and other liquids are in your carry-on or inside of a sealed plastic bag in your checked luggage. Luggage compartments are not pressurized, and caps and covers can come off quite easily.

Lock your luggage before you check it in at airline counters. Make sure you put your name and address clearly on luggage tags, and place them directly on your bags. Assume that one luggage tag is not enough; they can come off. You should also have identification on the inside. It is helpful to put some kind of distinctive sticker on your bag to make it easier to spot on luggage conveyors.

You can get by taking only a basic supply of toothpaste, shampoo, and other personal toiletries. Unless you have a favorite brand that you would "die without", you don't need to stock up on these items, because they are available at stores in Cuenca. Don't forget your pens & pencils, a notebook, and a good Spanish-English dictionary (e.g., University of Chicago or Harper-Collins) to start your classes.

HELP NEEDY ORPHANS

Each year, participants have a chance to volunteer at a local orphanage in Cuenca. For many participants, this has been a very rewarding experience: smiling children have proven that one person really can make a difference. Regardless of whether or not you volunteer during your time in Cuenca, there is something you can do to make a difference in these children's lives. The orphanages are in constant need of many items such as shampoo, notebooks, crayons, colored

pencils, toys, etc. Please consider a donation of any of the above items (or other items) to these needy children. You can take your donation from home, or you can purchase the items in Cuenca. We, and the children, thank you for your donations.

ATTITUDE

The single biggest factor in making or breaking your experience in Cuenca is **your own attitude**. An **open mind** is really all you need to make this your experience in Cuenca one of the most memorable of your life. People are basically the same all over the world. Latin Americans will respond to a smile and interest in their culture with friendship and patience; both you and the Latin Americans you meet will be seeking to understand, as well as to be understood.

