



Volunteer Handbook for Ecuador

Hola!

Welcome to our Volunteer Handbook for Ecuador.

While no person or book or website can give a new traveler to Ecuador a full understanding of its culture, we believe that this Handbook will go a long way in preparing you for your trip and the living experience there.

We have spent years revising this Handbook, based on the experiences of our volunteers and staff who have spent significant time in Ecuador. They have all have contributed their unique insights and advice to the information in this Handbook.

Although there is some overlap, our Volunteer Handbook for Ecuador does not try to duplicate all of the general travel information you will find in published guide books such as Lonely Planet, Frommers, and Insight Guide to Ecuador.

Our main focus in the Volunteer Handbook for Ecuador is on travel information that is specifically relevant to a volunteer like yourself who will serve others in Ecuador and become a member of the local community.

We encourage you to share the Volunteer Handbook for Ecuador with your family and friends and anyone else interested in your trip to Ecuador. We also recommend taking a copy with you on your trip.

As always, if you have any questions about the Volunteer Handbook for Ecuador or any other issues or concerns, please get in touch with us.

Regards,
Scott Burke
Founder & Director
Cosmic Volunteers
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania USA

BEFORE YOU GO

Passport

In order to enter Ecuador, you must have a passport that is valid for at least the next six months.

Visa

Citizens of most countries can stay in Ecuador for 90 days without a visa. For stays from 90-180 days: You will need to obtain your visa before leaving home from an Ecuadorian embassy or consulate in your own country. You must get the “VISA 12-IX” visa. Please visit this website for instructions and forms:

www.ecuador.org/nonimmigrantvisas.htm#tourism

Galapagos Volunteers Only

Flight to Galapagos:

The round-trip flight from Quito to the Galapagos is \$410 (set by the airlines). Volunteers pay the \$410 directly to Cosmic Volunteers. Our Coordinators in Quito then purchase the tickets about one month prior to the departure flight from Quito.

Galapagos Entrance Fee:

Upon arrival at the airport in the Galapagos, you must pay the mandatory National Park fee of \$110, payable in cash in US Dollars.

Health

Although Ecuador does not require any vaccinations in order to enter the country, We strongly recommend that participants consult with a travel doctor at least two months before arrival. The doctor should provide you with information about immunizations and advice on how to stay healthy while traveling. Cosmic Volunteers does not provide health insurance to participants, but we do recommend that you obtain coverage for your entire stay in Ecuador. There are many reputable companies that offer coverage at reasonable rates. For online travelers health information, a decent place to start is the Centers For Disease Control at <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/destinationEcuador.aspx>

Photocopy Important Documents

Before you leave home, make two sets of photocopies of all important documents. Put one set of copies in your checked luggage, and leave a set of copies at home with your family/friends. Keep your original documents in your carry-on bag while you are traveling to Ecuador.

Documents to Photocopy:

- Passport ID page
- Plane Ticket
- Contact information (see section above)
- Contact Information for family/friends at home
- Travel Insurance Policy
- Credit card(s)
- Travelers Checks (if you have them)
- Power-of-Attorney (if you have one)

Contact Information

Before you leave home, we will send you the mobile numbers of your Coordinators in Ghana and the US. **They will be your 24 hour contacts during your program.** Please carry their contact numbers on your person (not your bags) while en-route to and in Ghana.

If your flight(s) to Ghana is delayed for any reason, please first call your Ghana Coordinator 24 hours to let them know of the delay. If you cannot reach him/her for whatever reason, please call your US Coordinator 24 hours.

For non-emergencies, please contact us at our regular office phone at 1-215-609-4196 or by email at team@cosmicvolunteers.org. Our office hours are Monday-Friday from 9am to 5pm EST. We monitor emails and voice mails on weekday evenings and weekends.

What to PackCarry-On Bag:

- Passport
- Plane Ticket
- Contact information of Ecuador Coordinator
- Contact Information for Cosmic's office in USA
- Contact Information for home (family, friends)
- Travel Insurance Policy
- Cash (at least \$100 USD or equivalent)
- Credit card(s)
- Travelers Checks (if you have them)
- Any prescription medicine
- Any electronic equipment (laptops, mobile phone, camera, mp3 player)
- Toiletries (Toothbrush/paste, contact lens solution/case, feminine products)
- Reading materials
- Pen(s)

Checked Baggage

Don't overdo it. pack lightly so you can travel more easily and store your bag in small places. Think in terms of a backpack, duffel bag, or moderate-sized suitcase and a day pack. Bring lots of lightweight clothes. For men and women, it is better to dress conservatively.

Clothing:

- 4-6 pairs khaki pants (or jeans but jeans can be hot)
- 1-2 pairs shorts (for around the house and sports)
- 7-10 short-sleeved tops/t-shirts
- 2-3 long-sleeved shirts/tops
- Sturdy sneakers or shoes
- Sandals or flip-flops
- Cotton socks
- Sleepwear
- Light jacket or windbreaker
- A nice outfit(s) and shoes(s) for special occasions
- Women may want to bring a longer skirts instead of shorts and short dresses since it is more respectful of the culture

Health and Hygiene:

- Handiwipes and anti-bacterial hand lotion
- Over-the-counter medications for pain relief, fever, diarrhea
- Sunscreen (stronger-the-better)
- Toiletries (soap, shampoo)

Miscellaneous:

- Notebooks, pens, paper
- Glasses, contacts/solution - and bring a copy of your prescription
- Small travel pack/day pack
- Lightweight, quick-dry towel

Register Your Trip with your Home Government

An optional but highly recommended pre-trip step is to register your travel plans to Ecuador with your home country's government. Doing this can be helpful if you lose your passport in Ecuador or if there is a country-wide emergency and you need your embassy's help. You can register with your respective government online at the following websites:

USA Citizens:

<https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui>

UK Citizens: <http://www.britishhighcommission.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1089125546964>

Canadian Citizens:

<http://www.voyage.gc.ca/main/sos/rocapage-en.asp>

Australian Citizens: [https://www.orao.dfat.gov.au/orao/weborao.nsf/homepage?](https://www.orao.dfat.gov.au/orao/weborao.nsf/homepage?Openpage)

[Openpage](#)

Power-of-Attorney

Another optional but recommended pre-trip step is to consider creating a Power-of-Attorney document (POA) which lets you appoint someone at home to manage important financial and legal matters on your behalf while you are in Ecuador. This is a particularly smart thing to do if you will be staying in Ecuador for an extended period of time. You can create a custom POA document for \$35 USD online with Legal Zoom (which Cosmic staff uses when traveling). Legal Zoom's website is <http://www.legalzoom.com/power-of-attorney/power-of-attorney-overview.html>. You must get the document notarized by a notary public before the document can take effect.

Travel Tip 1

During air travel, some travelers prefer putting their passport, cash, credit cards etc. in a money pouch that is concealed under their clothes for security. We've found that it's just as safe and convenient to put your cash and credit cards in a front pants pocket, and keep your passport in a front shirt pocket.

Travel Tip 2

While in Ecuador, we always keep our passports in a sealable plastic baggie (the kind used for sandwiches). This protects the passport from moisture in the hot climate where your passport can become soggy, especially if it's in your pocket while you're traveling around the country.

Gifts and Donations

We are often asked by volunteers about this topic. We have a detailed article on the subject on our website

(http://www.cosmicvolunteers.org/articles_donations.html). It's based originally on my experiences in Ghana over the years, but it applies to so many other countries that I wanted to post something for future volunteers. Basically, I am not a fan of bringing items from home – I've found it's better to buy any items in the host country. I can't tell you how many orphanages, schools, and AIDS organizations I've visited around the world that had rooms full of donated stuff they couldn't use – cold-weather clothes, expired medicines, books the kids didn't understand or found boring because of cultural difference, etc.

ARRIVING IN ECUADOR

This section describes the normal schedule and activities for volunteers during their first several days in Ecuador. The major points will include the airport arrival, travel to the volunteer location, and introduction to the culture, host family, and volunteer work. Your actual schedule might vary from what is described below, depending on your arrival day and time as well as your volunteer location.

Arriving at the Airport in Quito

- When your plane lands in Quito, you will be directed inside the airport's main building.
- You will be directed to the **Immigration counters**. Have your passport and disembarkation card ready (you receive the card during the flight). The immigration officer might ask basic questions such as "How long are you staying in Ecuador?" or "Is this your first time to Ecuador?".
- After the Immigration officer stamps your passport, walk to **baggage claim**. Grab your luggage, then walk through the **Customs** lines and towards the exit doors.
- Before you exit the airport, the staff might ask you to show your **luggage tags** given to you by the airport check-in staff before you boarded your flight.
- When you walk through the airport's **exit doors**, look for our Coordinator who will be holding a sign with your name on it.
- If your **luggage is late**, please go outside and find our Coordinator to tell them the situation, so that he at least knows you have arrived. The luggage could take 1-2 hours to arrive in the baggage claim area, so be patient.
- There are usually **big crowds** waiting outside the airport exit door. The scene can look chaotic and intimidating. Try to look calm (even if you're not) and smile and scan the crowd for our Coordinator.
- Our Coordinator will take you from the airport to a host family in Quito for your first night's stay.
- If you arrive during the day, one of our Coordinators will call you at your host family's place to arrange to meet you and begin your orientation; If you arrive at night, they will call you the next morning to let you know when they will pick you up for the orientation.
- Please consider **contacting someone back home** to let them know that you arrived in Ecuador safely. Our Coordinators can take you to an Internet café to make a call.

If You Do Not Find our Coordinator at the Airport

There might be a very unusual situation where you do not meet our Coordinator at the airport in Quito, such as a very late flight arrival. In this situation, speak to an airport representative and ask for help in making a telephone call to our Program Coordinator's Assistant in Quito (Most airport personnel and taxi drivers speak English). If you cannot reach the Program Coordinator in Quito, call Cosmic Volunteers' Coordinator in the US 24 hours, Scott Burke. He will arrange as quickly as possible for another Coordinator to pick you up at the airport, or he will direct you to take a taxi on your own to a hotel. (We will reimburse you for all costs: transport, hotel, phone, food.)

Galapagos Volunteers Only

When you fly from home and arrive in Quito, **our Coordinator** will meet you at the airport then take you immediately to a host family. If there is time in the day, our Coordinators will take you around to some of the major cultural sites of Quito. All of these accommodations, meals, and activities are included in program fee. The next day, we will drop you at the airport for the flight to the Galapagos.

Introduction to Ecuador

On your first full day in Quito, one of our Program Coordinators will pick you up and provide you with an **Introduction to Ecuador**. The Program Coordinator taking you around town to see life on the streets. This normally includes visits to local markets and cultural sites. They will also go over the major points in this Volunteer Handbook to make sure that you understand about staying healthy, safety, street smarts, living with your host family, the volunteer work, contact information, etc.

We also recommend that you take care of any practical errands such as:

- Buying a mobile phone / SIM card / phone credit
- Exchanging money / travelers checks
- Using an ATM machine
- Buying electrical adapters
- Buy any toiletries
- Buying a small flashlight

Travel to the Volunteer Location

Quito:

If your volunteer **program location is in Quito**, your Program Coordinator will travel with you to the volunteer job on the first day. They will introduce you to the staff and make sure you know how to travel between your host family and the volunteer job.

Outside Quito on Mainland:

If your volunteer **program location is outside Quito on the mainland**, you will travel alone by bus. Your Program Coordinator will take you to the bus station in Quito, help you buy the ticket, and make sure you get on the correct bus. Depending on your volunteer location, the bus ride could be a 1-hour journey to the outskirts of Quito OR an exhausting 10-hour bus ride to the coast. When you arrive at the destination bus stop, your host family will be there to meet you, so you can become acquainted with them right away. They will take you to the volunteer job and introduce you to the staff, and make sure you know how to travel between your host family and the volunteer job.

Enjoy the Scenery!

Starting with your taxi ride from the airport in Quito, your road travel in Ecuador can really provide you with an unparalleled insight into the people, the sights, sounds, and smells(!) of Ecuador – all from the relatively insulated environment of your vehicle. So watch, listen, smile, ask questions, and just try to soak it in.

As Verge Magazine says:

"Fifteen minutes on a bus usually teaches you more about a country's social, political, and economic conditions than three hours studying a guidebook."

Jet Lag

If you are flying across multiple time zones to reach Ecuador, keep in mind that you may experience “jet lag” because your travel is disrupting your body’s circadian rhythm.

Symptoms often include insomnia, waking early, excessive sleepiness, headaches, irritability, digestive problems like constipation or diarrhea, muscle aches, and difficulty concentrating. Younger travelers and female travelers are more susceptible to jet lag, while some travelers are not affected much.

As a general guideline, the recovery rate from jet lag is one day per time zone traveled. So if you live in London (five hours behind Ecuador), it will take you about five days to recover from the jet lag.

To recover from jet lag:

- Drink plenty of water before, during and after your flight
- Try to sleep on the plane if it's nighttime in Ecuador
- Adjust to the local day/night schedule immediately
- Try not to sleep until nighttime in Ecuador, no matter how tired you are
- Exercise daily (during daylight hours, especially early morning)
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol

Altitude Sickness

As a traveler flying into Ecuador's capitol city Quito, you must be aware that you are at risk for altitude sickness. Quito is a high-altitude city at approximately 9,500 feet (3,000 meters) above sea-level.

Travelers vary considerably in their susceptibility to altitude illness, and no screening tests are available to predict someone’s risk for altitude illness. Susceptibility to altitude illness appears to be inherent in some way and is not affected by training or physical fitness.

Symptoms of altitude sickness resemble those of an alcohol hangover:

- Headache
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Vomiting (occasionally)

If you experience symptoms of altitude sickness, **drink lots of water**, **rest** as much as possible, and take over-the-counter **pain medications** such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) or Paracetamol. If you experience severe headaches or respiratory problems (including acute shortness of breath), you must consult a doctor immediately.

Three medications that can be useful in the prevention and treatment of altitude illness are:

- Diamox
- Dexamethasone
- Nifedipine

CDC's website for Altitude Sickness:

<http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/yellowBookCh6-AltitudeIllness.aspx>

WHILE IN ECUADOR

Staying Healthy and Safe

The top causes of injury and death for travelers abroad are road accidents and drowning. This comes as a surprise to many, because the media tends to focus on terrorism, political strife, and infectious diseases as the most likely dangers for travelers abroad.

If you become ill or injured in Ecuador, please seek medical treatment immediately. Then as soon as possible, inform your host family and local Program Coordinator. They will contact our staff in the US so that we can assist in any way we can, such as notifying your family back home.

Symptoms which you should NOT ignore include fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea (especially if diarrhea lasts more than two days).

There are both government and private health facilities near all of our volunteer areas, with emergency and outpatient care available. There are also pharmacies (“drugstores”) throughout the country where you can buy medications. A doctor’s prescription is often required.

Water/Food

Water

The number one rule is: Do not drink tap water. Only drink water that is bottled, boiled, or purified with iodine tablets (Your host family will gladly boil water for you). Use bottled water sparingly, as the empty plastic bottles are an environmental problem.

Food

You will be given more information during your orientation about foods that your host family will serve you. Your family will have lots of fresh fruits and vegetables – in fact, with many of these, you’ll likely be encountering them for the first time. The sheer variety of fresh food available in Ecuador will likely amaze you. By the same token, we will also advise you in Ecuador about what foods you may wish to avoid. It is very common to get diarrhea early in one’s stay in Ecuador, as the stomach becomes accustomed to different foods and the environment. You should always take as much liquid as you lose, as the greatest danger with diarrhea is dehydration.

Health

The best way to stay healthy in Ecuador is to be careful about water and food (as discussed above) and to wash your hands often with soap and hot water. There have been no serious illnesses suffered by our volunteers. The most serious have involved stomach upsets caused by drinking contaminated water or food (water and meat are usually to blame).

There is a very small risk of malaria in some rural areas, and some volunteers do take malaria medication. Check with your travel doctor to determine if you should be taking preventative medicines of any kind. We recommend using insect repellent, long-sleeved clothing, and mosquito nets to avoid mosquito bites in some of the rural areas.

If you have a travel insurance policy that covers your medical expenses in Ecuador, please be aware that **most insurance plans require you to pay up-front for all of your medical care**, then submit forms later to get reimbursed by the insurance company. So when you walk into a clinic, have cash and/or credit cards with you so that you can pay.

Climate

In Ecuador the seasons are the reverse of those in the northern hemisphere. In May and June, autumn brings warm days and cool nights. Some say the climate is at its best at this time of year in most parts of the country. July marks the beginning of winter in Ecuador. Temperatures vary from, for example, 36 degrees Fahrenheit overnight to 70-80 degrees in mid-day over this period.

Transportation

You will be able to walk most places in your community, but you should not walk at night, especially alone. Please inform your host family and Program Coordinator when you make plans to travel. The bus system is very good in Ecuador. Try to avoid overnight buses for due to driving safety. Otherwise they are safe from thievery. In cities, taxis are everywhere and they're inexpensive. In rural areas, there is an informal system of pickup truck "taxis" that you can use, but it's better not to use them, for safety reasons.

Living With Your Host Family

One of the most rewarding, challenging, and meaningful experiences of your time in Ecuador is likely to be the time you spend living with your host family. You are encouraged to cultivate the habit of listening and observing, rather than merely hearing and seeing. Be sensitive to the feelings of others and enjoy the company of people with different life experiences! Here are few more tips to help you prepare for your Ecuadorian living experience.

- Our host families will treat you as another member of the family, which means you will pick up after yourself, keep your area neat, and help out with the cooking and cleaning when appropriate.
- Many Ecuadorian families consist of single mothers and their children. It is not uncommon for several generations to live in the same household. Children in Ecuador, like children anywhere, can be both adorable and a handful, so try to maintain your patience with them in order to integrate smoothly in the household.
- Please advise your family before you invite anyone to the house. Your family will really appreciate your courtesy.
- If you make plans to go out for an evening, please advise your family and make arrangements to get home and back into the house. They may express some worry that you're going out at night. Try not to be offended, they are just concerned about your safety. They will likewise encourage you to go out with family members, co-workers, or friends, so that you are not out alone at night.
- If you make plans to travel out of town, please let your family know where and for how long. If possible, give them a contact name, address, and phone number.
- Keep items of value, such as cameras, cash, and passport locked in your luggage.
- You will use your own toiletries and towels.
- Many Ecuadorians are interested in foreigner's life and you are encouraged to share pictures of your family and stories of your life at home. But you will learn a great deal if you spend more of your time listening, asking questions, and sharing your thoughts about the issues that concern your host family and Ecuadorian friends.
- Practice your Spanish!! Your family will absolutely love to help you practice your Spanish, especially the children. Don't feel shy – they will totally appreciate your willingness to learn and speak their language.
- Laundry is often done by hand in Ecuador. Some families might offer to help with your laundry, but **you should expect to do your own laundry**. There are laundries all over Ecuador, in small villages and big towns.

Money

The US dollar is the legal currency of Ecuador.

Ecuador is mostly a cash-based society, so **expect to pay cash for everything**.

We recommend that you **bring from home at least \$150 USD** (or equivalent currency) in cash. Do not bring bills larger than \$20, because money exchangers might consider them to be counterfeit (there's only a small chance of this, but it's one less hassle you can easily avoid).

For **spending money** during your trip, count on spending \$5-\$10 per day. The actual amount can vary considerably, depending on factors such as:

- Your daily commuting costs between your host family and volunteer job
- How often you buy meals outside your host family
- Whether you buy / use a mobile phone
- Extra sightseeing you choose to do
- Shopping for clothes, toiletries, souvenirs

While in Ecuador, the best way to get cash is to use an **ATM machine**. ATM's dispense money in US Dollars. There are ATM's in most towns even in rural areas.

If you need **fast cash from home**, your family can send you instant cash using services like Moneygram (www.moneygram.com) or Western Union (www.westernunion.com), with Moneygram by far the cheaper option. If you do not need the money in a timely manner, have your family make a deposit at your bank account back home, then you can withdraw the money in cash using your ATM card.

News

Ecuador Radio broadcasts national and international news reports in English daily in the mornings and evenings. There are also several English-language daily newspapers in Ecuador. A good online source for news in Spanish is La Hora newspaper: <http://www.lahora.com.ec/frontEnd/main.php?idRegional=1>.

Email

This is widely available in Ecuador in Internet cafes, especially in or near the cities. Please consider creating a new email address (like Yahoo or Hotmail) to be used only during your trip. The reason is security - since you'll be using public computers during your stay, you don't want anyone gaining access to your true

personal email account. This may sound a bit paranoid, but it does happen to international travelers.

Telephone Contact

Your host family will have a landline phone which your family back home can call you on. Incoming calls are free on the landline.

You can make long distance calls at Internet cafes. There are direct numbers to call AT&T, Sprint, and MCI to make calling card or collect calls to the US or any other country. You should not make long distance calls from your family or workplace phones. Phone communication is often interrupted by bad weather, local technicalities, or overloaded circuits. Often lines are cut in the middle of a call. Please make sure you friends and families are aware of this.

We encourage you to have a mobile phone in Ecuador. This can be a phone you bring from home or one you purchase in Ecuador. Some information about mobile phones in Ecuador.

- You can bring a phone from home, but the phone must be “unlocked.”
- Most mobile phones from America are purposely locked by the carriers and will not work in Ecuador
- Only mobile phones on the 850Mhz frequency work in Ecuador
- With an unlocked phone, you just need to buy a SIM card in Ecuador for about \$8 USD. The SIM card will have a local Ecuador telephone number
- New mobile phones in Ecuador start at around \$60
- Mobile phone usage in Ecuador is mostly pay-as-you-go
- You buy phone credits from street vendors and phone shops
- Incoming calls are free – including incoming international calls
- The best mobile company is PORTA, as it works best in rural areas as well as in Galapagos

Family and Friends Calling You from Home

Your folks back home will be able to call you either on your host family’s landline or on your mobile phone. They can use their own landline phone to direct dial your Ecuador number. However unless they have an “international” phone service plan, direct-dialing can get very expensive. We recommend instead that they buy prepaid phone cards from a company like Nobelcom. Another option – one that we recommend – is for them to call you using an Internet phone service like Skype or Yahoo. The connections are much clearer this way, and it's usually slightly cheaper than calling from landline phones.

Parcels/Letters

You can also send and receive parcels and letters via the post office – please see the mailing address in the Contact Information section. Parcels/letters usually take 7-14 days to reach Ecuador. When sending parcels/letters from Ecuador, do not use Ecuador's postal system – use an international carrier instead like DHL or UPS because it's safer. Also, take the parcel to the office unsealed, as the customs officer may want to inspect the contents. **Caution:** Your family/friends should NOT send anything valuable by post. Theft is a common problem with Ecuador's postal system.

For Women Travelers

As a female visitor in Ecuador, you are likely to experience unwanted attention from men. The sexual attention will usually amount to “come-ons” and inappropriate comments. Very rarely will there be inappropriate touching or actual assault.

Keep in mind that you are not at home and that different rules apply. Women generally play a submissive role to men in Ecuador. A woman who acts like a man will not be respected. Men you meet may misinterpret your appearance, body language, or simple presence as invitations to approach you. Even a smile to a stranger may be misunderstood. You will need to modify your behavior in order to avoid unwanted attention.

Here are some tips on avoiding unwanted attention:

- Do not wear skimpy clothes
- Wear a “wedding ring” and say you are married
- Never admit that you’re traveling alone. Tell people that your boyfriend or husband will be along shortly to join you
- Steer the conversation in another direction by asking questions – about local culture, politics, news
- Use humor to diffuse the situation
- If the man persists, be very direct and firmly tell him to stop, and be specific
- Walk in a group at night
- If you go to nightclubs, go with a group of friends
- Do not go to a secluded area or hotel/apartment with a man you do not know well

At the End of Your Program

At the end of their programs, our volunteers sometimes take time to travel around Ecuador for extra sightseeing. Otherwise, they travel back to Quito for their departing flight.

You as the volunteer are responsible for the cost of your return transport to Quito, your accommodations there, and your taxi to the airport. However, your Program Coordinator will be happy to give you advice on arranging the above.

Airport Tax: There is a mandatory airport “tax” at the airport in Quito when flying from Ecuador. The fee is \$44, payable in cash in US Dollars. We mention this now so that you do not forget to bring cash with you to the airport at the end of your program.

If you wish to extend your stay with your host family, please discuss this directly with our Coordinators in Ecuador who will discuss how much you would have to pay the family.

Returning Home

When you return home from your trip, the “reverse culture shock” can be just as significant as the culture shock when you arrived in Ecuador.

- Returning home is often not a predictable process and can be more stressful than you anticipate.
- You might find yourself different than you were before you left home.
- You might feel like a “stranger” even among friends and family.
- You might get frustrated because it is difficult for others to know what your experiences have meant to you and how you might have changed.
- You may need significant time to return to your old roles and relationships.
- Be aware that things at home may have changed while you were away, both in the society and among friends and family. Even if you have heard about these events, the impact at home may not have been obvious.
- Your friends and family might notice that you have different patterns of behavior, speech, or new attitudes.
- Strange as it may seem to others, returnees often grieve for what they have left behind. You might be missing overseas friends, a stimulating environment, the feeling of being special, experiencing greater freedoms or responsibilities, or special privileges.

Some strategies for coping with returning home:

- Make contact with other volunteers who have successfully gone through the experience of returning home from abroad. This can help you through a difficult period of re-adaptation.
- Maintain personal and professional contacts with friends and institutions in Ecuador.
- Write and reflect about your experiences in a journal. This can be private or can be shared with friends, family, or the world (via a blog).
- Tell others your stories, show them your photos and videos.
- On a medical note: If you become ill with a fever or flu-like illness up to one year after returning from Ecuador, seek immediate medical care and tell them you were in Ecuador.

AND FINALLY . . .

The following was written by a seasoned world traveler and friend of Cosmic Volunteers. The advice for volunteers is inspiring. Take a look...

Make the most of every moment. Explore side streets. Take miracle walks. Perform random acts of kindness: buy fruit and share it, give flowers, pass out pens, coins and other useful and interesting things. Say hello. Smile. Take pictures. Share them. Learn about the depth of poverty. Count your blessings. Refuse to take things for granted. Give presents carefully. Play with everything. Share your toys. Blow bubbles. Spread laughter. Be kind to animals. Offer to help. Clean up your own mess without being asked. Clean up someone else's mess too. Ask questions. Answer questions. Collect addresses of people you meet. Send them postcards and email from home. Be aware that you are foreign and exotic. Hold babies. Giggle with children. Listen to old people. Be brave. Invite a dangerous stranger to dinner. Pay the bill. Learn to say thank you in the local language. Sing out loud, songs you sang as a child and songs children will teach you. Try something totally new. Don't just sight-see, sight-think. Donate energy. Spend time. Give hugs. Be thoughtful about donating, spending, and giving money. Support good work done by local people, buy a man a bike, pay a child's school tuition, offer a mother seed money and supplies to start a small business out of her home. Teach. Learn. Explore your own cultural perspective. Be subjectively aware. Touch the world. Allow the world to touch you. Come home safely . . . And remember, a true gift of seeing the world is to return where you started and see your place for the first time.