

ECUADOR IMMERSION

Parent/Guardian Manual



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¡BIENVENIDOS!

Cheveré as they say in Ecuador! Welcome to the Ecuador high school Spanish immersion program! We are honored you chose Common Ground International to help your student gain Spanish proficiency and cultural awareness, and step out of their comfort zone to be challenged! We are highly committed to the learning, fun and safety of your teen. Thank you for the opportunity!

Common Ground International is a small, family run business based out of Denver, Colorado. Year round we work with professionals and students, preparing them for their current or future bilingual work environments and challenging them on many levels. Since 2001, we have run Spanish immersion programs for teens that are ready to take their Spanish communication skills to the next level, gain cultural understanding, have an adventure of a lifetime, experience personal growth and be challenged.

Our Ecuador trip is more than just educational travel and Spanish summer camp. This program was designed by Spanish teachers with four primary components to maximize language and cultural learning, personal growth, and independence.

- o Small & intensive Spanish classes
- o Exceptional host family experience
- o Meaningful & educational cultural opportunities
- o Adventure travel and physical challenge

Our goals for participants on this program is that they end their program with higher Spanish proficiency, important cultural observations, and personal growth. Most often this experience is the stepping-stone to many more international experiences in their lifetime.

In addition to language growth, our participants walk away from this experience having had numerous opportunities to reflect on their host and home cultures and partake in conversations comparing and contrasting the two. They take with them experiences that open their mind to new ways of living, adventures, as well as daily occurrences that push them to test their limits and step outside of their personal comfort zones.



Important Contact Information

UNITED STATES

Common Ground International

PO Box 174

Lafayette, CO 80026

Tel: (303) 684-5557

Fax. (303) 684-5558

info@commongroundinternational.com

Program Leaders

You will be able to communicate with Leslie and Lisa via WhatsApp. Be sure to download this app today.

- Leslie Foster: What'sApp # + 303-638-9270
- Lisa Lowrance: What'sApp # +919- 522-7169

Cuenca Language School:

- WhatsApp +593 95 9257437
- Email: info@amauta.edu.ec
- School: Hermano Miguel 7-48, btwn Sucre & Presidente Córdova, Cuenca, Ecuador

Reserva Alto Coca: There is very limited cell service while on our backpacking trip. However, our guides name is Mark Thurber and his phone number is: +593-98-481-4896

Common Ground Mission Statement, Goals and Objectives:

Common Ground International aims to provide its Spanish Immersion participants with varied experiences that will help them acquire the Spanish language and learn about the culture and country.

The opportunities that we provide will help participants develop their oral and intercultural communication skills, and genuinely experience the culture such that they may effectively communicate with native Spanish speakers in a variety of settings.

We also believe that an immersion experience can be a life-changing opportunity that challenges comfort zones, preconceived ideas and stereotypes, breaks down barriers and can result in tremendous personal growth.

Our mission is to help participants meet their language goals and cultural understanding as well as experience personal growth in areas of their life through a combination of: pre-departure preparation, exceptional host family stay, small and intensive Spanish classes, cultural learning opportunities and adventure.

Realities of a Language Immersion Program

What does immersion mean?

We believe that just traveling or studying abroad isn't necessarily immersion. Immersion is an experience, intentionally designed, to fully expose you to the host language and culture through a variety of genuine, day-to-day life experiences in the host culture. In addition to Spanish classes, this also includes; specific cultural activities, exploring the country and living amongst the locals.

What are the results of this?

Participants are given the chance, through immersion, to learn and put to use language skills, all while observing and living the culture. It gives participants opportunities to reflect on their own reality, and make comparisons between their host and home cultures.

Our trip leaders also take the time to talk with and check in on the students on a regular, day to day basis during their immersion experience, to give the students a space to share their observations and digest what they are learning, on a language and also on a cultural level. This is also done through intentional reflection activities, alone and in the group setting.

Action Items to Do Now

Pre-departure Paperwork:

Please sit down with your participant and read, sign, and submit the following documents:

STEP 1: Complete [Online Registration](#) Form

STEP 3: Submit a copy of your teen's passport

STEP 2: [Download, sign & submit your Pre-departure Paperwork](#), which include:

- Travel Contract
- Liability Waiver
- Behavior Contract
- Authorization of Foreign Travel with a Minor
- Media Consent and Release
- Doctor's letter if participant has a prescription for medication
- Reserva Alto Coca Release

These documents are located on our website here:

<https://commongroundinternational.com/spanish-immersion/high-school-spanish-immersion/welcome-to-you-r-spanish-immersion-program/>

Your student will not travel with us if we do not have your documents on file at least a month before departure.

Submit these important documents in one of the following two ways:

1. Scan and email them back to us at support@commongroundinternational.com
2. Mail them to our office at:

Common Ground International
PO Box 174
Lafayette, CO 80026

STEP 4: Participants must complete their pre-departure course online as well as attend 3 spring meetings.

Parents need to read the entirety of this manual.

It is essential your teen prepares for their trip before they embark on this adventure! Your trip leaders and Common Ground International offer you intentional pre-departure preparation activities so that you can hit the ground running when you begin your program. Those activities include:

- Teacher lead meetings at school
- Pre-Departure Online Course.
- Link to Online Pre-departure Course:
<https://commongroundinternational.com/courses/amazon-adventure/>.

Objectives of Pre-Departure Preparation:

Student will learn of program expectations specifically relating to:

- Passport requirements & Center for Disease Control Recommendations
- Host Family Expectations & tips for communicating with them
- Language School Expectations & how to maximize your learning
- All about the backpacking adventure
- Background information about Ecuador
- 5 Stages of Cultural Adjustment and how it might affect YOU - Get prepared
- Safety Tips and Precautions

Hi Leslie Foster



Your Progress in this course

83% COMPLETE
Last activity on January 16, 2020 3:34 pm

Lessons in this course

[Course Home](#)

- ☒ Meet & Greet Middle / High School Spanish Immersion
- ☐ Passports, Health & Travel Contracts: Middle / High School Spanish Immersion
- ☒ Overview of Ecuador
- ☒ Ecuador Program - 2 Partes
- ☒ Ecuador Host Family & Class Expectations
- ☒ Backpacking - Reserva Alto Coca
- ☒ Immersion Trip Expectations | High School Immersion
- ☒ What is Culture Shock?
- ☒ Personal Safety & Street Dogs!
- ☒ How to pack for this trip?
- ☒ Spanish Immersion Placement Test
- ☐ Host Family Assignments

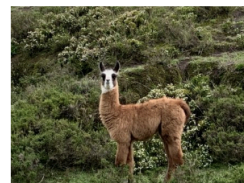
High School Amazon Adventure

83% COMPLETE
Last activity on January 16, 2020 3:34 pm

IN PROGRESS

¡Bienvenidos al programa de inmersión a Ecuador! Learn all about your upcoming Spanish immersion trip here! This is the required pre-departure course for your program.

We are sooo excited to begin this adventure with you! This is roughly a 8hr course. Please budget your time appropriately...**And Don't Wait Until The Last Minute To Get Started* Get started today!*



Course Content

- ☒ Meet & Greet Middle / High School Spanish Immersion
- ☐ Passports, Health & Travel Contracts: Middle / High School Spanish Immersion
- ☒ Overview of Ecuador
- ☒ Ecuador Program - 2 Partes
- ☒ Ecuador Host Family & Class Expectations
- ☒ Backpacking - Reserva Alto Coca
- ☒ Immersion Trip Expectations | High School Immersion
- ☒ What is Culture Shock?
- ☒ Personal Safety & Street Dogs!
- ☒ How to pack for this trip?

Passport Information

Passport Information / Entry requirements: For entry into Ecuador, you must present two documents:

- A valid passport book that will not expire for at least 6 months after the duration of your trip.
- An airline ticket, proof of a departing ticket proving your exit from the country within 90 days of arrival.

If you already have a passport, **please check the expiration date TODAY**. Other notes:

- If your passport expires within 6 months of your return to the USA, it may be INVALID and airlines may not allow you to board your flight to Ecuador. The most prudent thing to do is apply for another passport right away.
- Because of possible fines levied by Immigration, many airlines will not permit passengers to fly to Ecuador without proof of some sort of ticket leaving the country (bus, air, etc) – unless of course they have national citizenship, residency or work visa.
- If you are traveling with a non-US passport please let us know ASAP as there might be different entry requirements for you to comply with.
- For Ecuador passport and entry requirements go to:
<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/International-Travel-Country-Information-Pages/Ecuador.html>

Health Information for Ecuador

For travel to Ecuador, the CDC recommends that your Hepatitis A, Typhoid, COVID 19, and routine vaccinations are current. If you are not up to date on your routine immunizations and your Hepatitis A or Typhoid, please make an appointment with your healthcare provider.

It is a good idea to see your healthcare provider at least 4 to 6 weeks before you travel.

Some additional observations from the CDC webpage:

- Malaria is present in Ecuador. The good news is that there are few mosquitos at the altitudes we'll be traveling in Ecuador. However, protecting yourself against mosquito bites is always a smart idea. So be sure to bring long sleeves, pants and bug repellent.
- See specific CDC recommendations for Ecuador:
 - [CDC Page for Ecuador](#)
- The CDC recommends a vaccination against typhoid and Hepatitis A when traveling to Ecuador. You can get typhoid through contaminated food or water. CDC recommends this vaccine for most travelers, especially if you are staying with friends or relatives, visiting smaller cities or rural areas, or if you are an adventurous eater.

Phone Service in Latin America

How will you get coverage in Ecuador? You have some options...

- You can keep your phone on airplane mode for the duration of your trip and just access messages, emails, etc. using WIFI. WIFI is available at your host family and at language school.
- You may purchase an international e-sim through e-sim companies such as [Airalto](#). This is an economical solution to have data while you travel. This does not give you a local number, so you will not be able to make local calls, but you can make calls through WhatsApp.
- Buy a local, physical sim card (unlocked phones) through local providers such as Kolbi, Claro, Movistar
- Check your cell phone provider's international plans before you depart.

Here's how:

1. Before you leave the US:

- Call your service provider to check if your phone is unlocked for international SIM card use while traveling. Be sure to emphasize that you only need it unlocked for international use, not domestic use – this may put your provider at ease.
- Make sure that your phone can use a GSM network. CDMA and LTE networks are not common.
- If your provider won't unlock your phone, you can Google "cell phone unlock codes" and find ample services willing to help you unlock your phone.

2. Getting the right chip & activating your new line:

- In Ecuador, you have options with several carriers: Claro, Movistar & CNT. We've only ever used Claro, and it worked just fine.
- You want to ask for a "*chip de nueva linea*" and mention "*pre-pago*" or pre-paid.
- Show the person in the shop the phone you will be using. Ask them if it will work fine for your phone: ***¿Ese chip funciona bien para mi teléfono?***
- Make sure the shop attendant writes the number of your new line on the card, and save that card. It will also have your "PIN" number on it, which you will need to enter each time your phone dies or is shut off and back on. Memorize it or store it in a place you can easily access it if needed.
- If the attendant hasn't set up your chip yet, you can ask them for help: ***¿Me ayuda insertar el chip y activar la línea?***

YOU DO NOT NEED TO WORRY ABOUT INCURRING ANY CHARGES WITH YOUR HOME SERVICE PROVIDER WHEN YOUR NEW CHIP IS IN YOUR PHONE.

3. Reloading your pre-paid line:

- You can buy more minutes and data at many supermarkets. You can either ask the cashier to

charge your number directly or by purchasing a phone card.

- In the case of the cashier reloading your card electronically, you need only to pay an amount greater than the equivalent of \$1, and it should be recharged as soon as s/he enters your phone number
- After any successful recharge, you will receive a text message with the amount you added to your line, and your line's total current amount.
- Most cards offer a way to check your balance through your phone. Every service is a little different, but it's either a text message sent to a number or calling a specific phone # to get your balance.

Apps to download on your phone

Before you depart on your program and while you are on program make sure you have these apps downloaded on your phone AND you know how to access them and use them:

- **WhatsApp:** We use this app for our group chat, to communicate with program leaders and you can use this to communicate with your host family too!
- **Google Docs:** We use many different google docs while on program. Your volunteer project, program itinerary, flight pick-up information and other documents will be shared via google docs.
- **Google Maps or Waze:** are the two best maps to locate locations in Ecuador. While Apple maps works, it is not as accurate as Google Maps or Waze. We will share your host family location with you via a google map point.

Currency in Ecuador

- Ecuador uses the dollar! You lucked out!!!
- Ecuador is more of a cash-based economy, so it's good to always have some cash with you.
- Also, it's nice to pay with the smallest bill or coin possible, since it might be difficult for some vendors to break larger bills and make change.
- Credit cards are accepted by most businesses, but you generally incur an additional charge. Many businesses now accept ApplePay.
- Avoid travelers' checks, Mastercard, and relying on US dollars in Costa Rica; they are a burden to exchange.
- The easiest option is to use local ATMs to get *dollars* for spending money. Just make sure that you tell your bank and credit card companies when you'll be in Ecuador so that they don't flag your account for identity theft or fraud and disable your card.

Overview of Ecuador

Ecuador is in South America between Colombia and Peru. It is the second smallest country in South America. It straddles the equator, hence the name Ecuador which means equator. It is known for its diverse landscapes: Andes mountains, Amazon rain and cloud forest, Galapagos islands, and rich Incan history and indigenous culture.

What it's known for

- Environmental sciences and biodiversity
- Rich cultural heritage - part of the Incan empire
- Diverse micro-systems and landscapes from Galapagos islands to 20,000 foot glaciated peaks
- Exportation of oil and the panama hats (not from Panama)
- 1 million Indian language speakers
- Recognized languages: Spanish Quichua, Shuar, and more than 10 indigenous languages exist



Ecuador is divided into 3 regions

- Costa = Coastal region
- Sierra = Highlands region (this is where the immersion will be located).
- Oriente = Eastern region

Currency

- The currency in Ecuador is the DOLLAR! You don't have to worry about exchange rates and converting money.

Water → **You cannot drink the water from the tap in Ecuador**

- Non-potable water - you cannot drink the water out of the tap
- Host families will have filtered water
- Buy bottled water
- At the Amazon reserve we will have treated / filtered water

Check out these Ecuador links to learn more about the country

1. NatGeo
2. Encyclopedia Britannica

Summary of Ecuador Immersion Program

This program is for teens who:

- Love challenges, adventures and want to GROW
- Enjoy Spanish, want to improve and learn about a new culture
- Love the outdoors and physical challenges
- Enjoy wildlife and science in their natural habitats

This is the ultimate adventure combining Spanish Immersion and an Amazon backpacking trip with local scientists and mountaineers.

Program Objectives:

1. Spanish Immersion - being fully immersed in the Spanish language while experiencing the outdoor adventure in the Amazon and typical life in the city
2. Biology/Ecology/Geology en español - experiencing the Amazon ecosystem, flora, fauna and unique geology of the Amazon cloud forest with a local Ecuadorian scientist
3. To be physically challenged while backpacking in the Amazon
4. Gain cultural understanding when participating in unique cultural activities from cooking classes, to pre-columbian sites, famous inca artisan markets to dance classes
5. Gain independence and maturity as you experience life through another cultural perspective.
6. Stretch outside of your comfort zone while traveling in a safe setting

Program is divided into two parts:

Spanish Classes and Cultural immersion

- 2 weeks of Spanish classes and living with a local host family
- Cultural activities
- Straddle the equator at "Mitad del Mundo"
- Learn about indigenous history and artisan crafts at the largest indigenous market in South America
- Hike in Cajas National Park
- Visit the 2nd largest Incan site after Machu Picchu
- Tour coffee plantations, visit local markets, museums, cooking class and mucho más



The town we will be in is Cuenca.

- Locally called "Cuenca of the Andes" or "Athens of Ecuador"
- Province is Azuay
- Population is 596,101

- Elevation is 8,400 ft
- Is known for:
 - Historic Cuenca is by far the most impressive and beautiful part of the city. With plenty of gorgeous churches, cobblestone streets, plazas, and historic buildings.
 - It has been recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.
 - Cajas National Park, with a stunning and totally unique landscape.
 - Ingapirca: Ecuador's most impressive indigenous ruins , a site inhabited by both the Incas and the local Cañari indigenous populations.
 - Mirador de Turi, a popular destination with a great view of the city.

Private Amazon Reserve→ Reserva Alto Coca (RAC)

RAC is one of the first private Amazon reserves in Ecuador dedicated to conservation, investigation and learning about the untouched ecosystem!

- Reventor Volcano
- Cloud forest ecosystem
- Trails in primary rainforest
- Steams and canyons
- Outdoor Science classroom

RAC is in 3 hours East of Quito

- RAC is in the Amazon Cloud Forest
- Province is Napo
- Elevation is between 6,000 - 8,000 ft

RAC Overview

- Day 1: transition day, gear check, orientation, and get packs packed
- Day 2: 5- 6 hour hike up to our basecamp and get settled
- Day 3: Science class, experiments and day hikes
- Day 4: Science class, experiments and day hikes
- Day 5: Close down basecamp, hike down, soak in volcanic hot springs



Class Expectations & Ecuador Host Family

A CGI student is committed

- We stick to Spanish as much as possible, all the time.
- Because this program is made up of participants at various levels of language proficiency, it is your right and your responsibility to find conversation partners at a similar level as you so that you can practice at a level that benefits you. This is how you are going to maximize your language learning even when you are not in class.
- We honor the fact that everyone is a learner, and needs to learn via the method that best suits them. Class will include lessons and activities that are oral, visual, kinesthetic and tactile. You may or may not appreciate each of these modalities for your personal learning style, but recognize that others may need them.

Daily Spanish Classes

- Interactive Spanish classes with native Spanish teachers
- Small class sizes: 4-6 students
- Classes held Monday through Friday, 3 hours a day
- Brief oral and written placement test to evaluate and place students in correct level

Host Family Expectations

Participants will:

- Spend 2 weeks with their host family
- Share host family with 1 other participant in our group
- Eat breakfast and dinner with host families and possibly lunch depending on the afternoon timing of activities.
- Families are middle, upper middle class working families
- They will walk to and from language school with participants (about 20 minute walk)

Host Families Casa Expectations:

- It will be upper/middle class residence
- Probably smaller, tighter spaces than you're used to
- Clean
- You'll have a private bedroom to share with your roommate
- You'll likely share a bathroom with other members of the family
- You'll have breakfast and dinner with your host family, lunch is with the group
- You cannot drink the water from the tap; they will have filtered water for you
- Your family will do laundry for you one time while you are there
- Please bring a "thank you" gift to show your gratitude for welcoming you into their home

Amazon Backpacking - Reserva Alto Coca (RAC)

RAC is one of the first private Amazon reserves in Ecuador dedicated to conservation, investigation and learning about the untouched ecosystem! Some well known features in this area are:

- Reventor Volcano
- Cloud forest ecosystem
- Trails in primary rainforest
- Steams, canyons, waterfalls
- Outdoor Science classroom

RAC is 3 hours East of Quito. The closest town to the RAC trailhead is calles El Chaco and it is about 40 minutes away. RAC is smashed between The Parque Nacional Cayambe Coco y Sumaco Galeras.

- RAC is in the Amazon Cloud Forest
- Province is Napo
- Elevation is 8,000 ft

RAC Overview of Activities

- Day 1: transition day, gear check, orientation, and get packs packed
- Day 2: 5-6 hour hike up to our basecamp and get settled
- Day 3: Science class, experiments and day hikes
- Day 4: Science class, experiments and day hikes
- Day 5: Close down basecamp, hike down, soak in hot springs

Getting up to Basecamp

- It's a really wet hike
- You don't need to pack hiking boots, you'll get rubber boots (send boot size to Leslie to make sure you will have a pair of rubber boots)
- Pack quick-dry, long pants and shirts. [See packing list](#)
- **Must have trekking poles!!!**

At Basecamp

- Not traditional camping
- There are 2 bunk rooms (one for girls and one for boys) with mattresses and sleeping bags
- Pack a sleeping bag liner (you do not need to pack a sleeping bag and sleeping pad)

During this portion of the trip we'll be traveling with our guide, and a local ecologist / biologist. Some examples of the science and research we will be doing out on trail are:

- Learning about the geomorphology of the area from our local mountaineering guide who is also a geologist
- Learning about Pre-colombian historical sites and looking for original pottery shards
- Ecology: Cloud Forest Fauna and Flora, taught by our biologist
- Tracks and Scat
- Game camera identification

Tips for RAC

- See packing list in this handbook to see what else is recommended
- No hiking boots, we will hike in rubber boots (if you are larger than a size 12 you will need to bring your own boots)
- Participants will get very wet - quick dry clothing is essential
- Dry bags/zip lock bags / waterproof backpack cover are also essential to pack your clothing to keep them dry
- Headlamp
- Retractable hiking poles

Immersion Trip Expectations

What is an immersion program?

By definition, an immersion program is an experience designed to expose you fully to the host language and culture by having you live within it. The completeness of this exposure is aptly illustrated by the metaphor of submerging oneself in water; for better or worse, no part of you remains untouched by the new environment.

By having to complete everything from the most basic daily activities to more complex educational objectives within this context, you realize quickly that language and culture affect every aspect of our lives, and determine many of our reference points of “normal” and “right.” Living and working within someone else’s reference points is at once exciting and disorienting, eye-opening and challenging.

Immersion is uncomfortable at times, and it is by allowing yourself to fully “be” in those difficult moments, as much as the enjoyable moments, that you can bring depth to your experience and learning. As you face personal challenges, it is useful to reflect on why a given situation is stressing you out or rubbing you the wrong way. What part of you is being offended or frustrated? Perhaps it’s your sense of what’s right, what’s logical, what’s safe, what’s important, what’s humane, what’s healthy, what’s funny or what’s fair.

The gift that cultural immersion gives participants is the chance to examine their own assumptions and begin to understand their own perspective by clashing with the parts of them that are so deeply ingrained that they’re not even aware of them. If you can begin to see that your own perspective, judgments, and assumptions are just as arbitrary and culturally bound as those of your hosts, you will take the first step in being able to interact with people who are different from you in a way that is respectful, objective and free of judgment. This is because, bit by bit, you will be less inclined to use your own cultural norms as an unconscious measuring stick of the “right” way to live, but instead see them as just one of an infinite number of ways to live life. This is the learning that we hope will take place.

What this program IS:

- An educational experience for you.
- First and foremost, a language / leadership program. It’s a chance to grow as a Spanish speaker by pushing yourself to think and speak in Spanish at all times and grow as a leader in various foreign contexts.
- A chance for you to move outside your comfort zone and understand your own perspective by observing how you react to the host country, culture and language.

- An opportunity for you to share your stories and culture.

What this program IS NOT:

- An exotic vacation.
- A charity mission, in which you will “save” the underserved by offering short-term volunteer work in a vacuum.

Realities of a Language Immersion Program

What is language immersion?

- An experience intentionally designed to fully expose you to the host language and culture by inserting you into it as much as possible.
- It allows for little, if any, escape from the host language and culture.
- The deeper you go, the more uncomfortable it can get...

What does immersion do to you?

- Gives you an amazing chance to learn the language and experience the culture
- Give you ample opportunities to reflect on your own culture and what you value
- Throws you off guard - even mundane tasks can become challenging
- Can make you tired or frustrated with your own abilities
- Might trigger your fight/flight instincts
- Makes you second-guess yourself
- It's all part of the growth opportunity

What can I do?

- Recognize the urgency and focus of what you're doing
 - Don't let opportunity pass you by
 - Resist the urge to escape
 - Keep smiling (even when it hurts)
- Remember that immersion truly is the best way to improve your Spanish
- Tell us what you're going through and ask us for help

What is Culture Shock?

What is Cultural adjustment?

- Adapting to a new environment takes time and the pace of transition varies from person to person.
- The typical pattern of cultural adjustment often consists of distinct phases:
 - Stage 1: Honeymoon
 - Stage 2: Culture Shock
 - Stage 3: Gradual Adjustment
 - Stage 4: "Feeling at Home"
- This cycle is then often repeated upon re-entry to one's home country or culture of origin.

Please note....

- It is not very likely that participants on this Ecuador Immersion are going to experience all stages of culture shock. Actually, they may not get out of the honeymoon stage. However, it is still good to be aware of this process and acknowledge that if they do feel frustrated at times, homesick, anxious, these feelings are all normal and a natural part of being immersed in a foreign language and culture.

Common Stages of Cultural Adjustment

Everyone deals with immersion in a new culture differently. However, there are four very common stages of cultural adjustment that many people experience (in their own time). You may experience a few or none of these stages during your time in Ecuador, but it's helpful to be aware of them:

Stage 1: Honeymoon

- The Honeymoon- Initial euphoria and excitement; you feel able to handle anything!
- Excited about new sights, sounds, smells
- Intrigued by similarities and differences in culture
- Motivated to learn
- Eager to please
- Can last a few days to several weeks

Stage 2: Culture Shock

- Culture Shock- Irritation and hostility; the novelty of the new culture has worn off
- Focus on differences (and find them annoying!)
- Stereotypes and prejudices surface
- Small problems/differences → BIG problems/differences
- Homesickness

Stage 3: Gradual Adjustment

- Gradual Adjustment- finding humor and perspective; making the most of your experience
- Increased familiarity
- More highs than lows
- Laugh at mistakes
- Appreciate parts of host culture
- Deeper learning

Stage 4: “Feeling at Home”

- “Feeling at Home”- Adaptation and Biculturalism; you now appreciate certain aspects of foreign culture and critique others more objectively
- Become a part of both worlds
- No longer negatively affected by differences between cultures
- May hit students as the trip is coming to an end

It is important to be aware of all these stages and know that your child may or may not experience each of them at various times throughout the trip. And it is OK and normal to experience these stages!

HOW IS YOUR CHILD GOING TO COPE?

- Ways of thinking and feeling
 - Understand the stages of cultural adjustment
 - Analyze the situations and reactions
 - Identify what helps them manage stress
 - Think positively!
 - Investigate real facts
 - Journal
- Physical supports:
 - Eat healthy foods and get lots of rest
 - Get fresh air and exercise
 - Identify any physical weakness and make plans to manage them
- In our experience, the best way to deal with these difficulties is to recognize them for what they are- an expected and important part of immersion- and take the most positive approach to either resolving or accepting each situation.
- Our trip leaders plan weekly discussion about these stages and check in with everyone
- If we notice that a participant is having a hard time, we sit down and talk through the challenges. Together, we create a support plan. Most times, just acknowledging the issue helps resolve the frustration.

We always remind our students of our mantra, “Sacar el jugo”, this expression figuratively means, “to make the most out of every experience” and literally means to extract every last bit of juice out of the fruit and pulp! We encourage our students to do this on every aspect of this trip, stepping many times out of comfort zones or in uncomfortable situations that test their limits – live in the moment and make the most of it!

Personal Safety!

Nothing ruins a travel experience like an unfortunate event that could have been prevented.

Personal safety is extremely important for you to be intentional about. We run Spanish immersion programs in Latin America several times a year for adults and high school students and we often see a disconnect between “street smarts” in Central and South America and “street smarts” in the USA. It’s definitely not hard to stay safe during your travels, but it does require a little extra effort and a drastic perspective shift to make sure that you don’t open any doors for someone to commit a crime against you.

Our high school immersion participants will never go anywhere alone during the day or night. They will always be with group leaders, other participants, or their host families.

Street Smarts in Latin America

It’s your responsibility to limit the “opportunities” for a crime to happen against you. It’s important to know how the locals think about safety and street smarts. Here are some general views of crime through the eyes of someone living in Latin America:

- No one can be trusted until they prove their trustworthiness
- Petty theft happens because person don’t guard their belongings well enough
- It is inherently more dangerous after dark, when there’s more isolation, or distraction
- “North Americans” are wealthy, and have the means to replace whatever they lose - it’s not really that big of a deal to steal from them.

In order to limit petty theft from happening, it is necessary to sacrifice some freedoms that you might take for granted in the United States:

- Participants will not have as much independence as they are used to in their home communities
- Participants will always walk in groups and never at night
- Wear conservative clothing
- Exercise without earbuds
- Don't be distracted by phone calls or texting while walking through towns/ cities
- Keep a firm grip on your tech when you have it out
- Leave things of value at home

Discern cultural norms vs inappropriateness

Speaking in general terms, the personal bubble or space that Latin Americans are accustomed to is much smaller than what North Americans are used to and sometimes comfortable with. For example, when I'm in the US and am standing next to a friend, we might have 18 inches to 2 feet between us. The bubble shrinks considerably when I'm next to my Ecuadorian friends - maybe 8 to 12 inches:). In general people tend to be more "touchy" and "huggy" - but what are the lines that you and others shouldn't cross?

- Kisses on cheek and hugs are normal for greetings
- Touches on arms and shoulders are normal
- Touches on legs, abdomen are advances, and someone might be testing their limits with you
 - Respond with words and body language to communicate disapproval
 - These touches are probably not dangerous, but you need to be clear with your disapproval: turn away, create distance
 - Immediately tell your trip leader
- Touches to private areas are definitely not acceptable
 - Use body language and words to communicate your disapproval
 - Immediately tell your trip leader

What is conservative dress?

It's a good idea to dress more conservatively than normal - for example

- Wear capris, long skirts, or jeans instead of shorts
- Wear blouses instead of spaghetti strap tops
- Keep your midriff covered
- Keep your super short running shorts and exercise shorts at home. They're definitely not appropriate for classes or volunteer work. When exercising, try to use shorts that get to mid-thigh or exercise tights / pants.

Walking around Towns and Cities

- Heighten your awareness. Know who is around you and look behind if you feel someone following closely
- Keep backpacks, purses on the inside shoulder, not the street-side shoulder
- Walk on the building side of sidewalk, not on the street side

What about money and valuables?

- Keep cameras, phones, tablets, etc in bags - especially in crowded areas
- Don't leave valuables out in the open at your hotel, restaurant
- Keep the amount of money you're carrying on you a secret - don't show all your bills out in the open (at ATM, paying for things, etc)

- Keep your flashy jewelry at home (rings, watches, necklaces, etc)
- Don't hang purses, backpacks, bags, etc hanging on the back of the chair at the restaurants - put them on your lap or at your feet under the table

Passport and Credit Cards

- Don't carry around your passport as a general habit, keep it stored in a safe place (out of sight) at your host family.
- You'll want to make sure that you have a legible copy of your passport on you at all times just in case a business needs to see a legitimate ID.
- Only carry the money and cards that you need for the day. You'll want enough to cover things like:
 - Meals
 - Bus/taxi fares
 - Little extra

Have fun!

It is important to know how the locals think about securing possessions and staying physically safe.

- It doesn't mean that you're going to a dangerous place - it just means that you need to think and act differently
- You may feel confined by not being able to go out alone after dark, but you should heed local customs and norms
- You might get frustrated by dressing differently, but your goal is to not draw attention more to yourself than you already do

Is it a pet, guard dog or street dog?

- Dogs are seen more as guard dogs than pets
- Big dogs are left outside at night to guard the house
- It is normal to see a lot of dogs on the street - don't pet or touch street dogs
- Dogs are there for a reason - they are taken care of and are used as guard dogs

How to pack for this trip?

When packing, it's important to consider the different climates we will be in and the variety of activities we will be doing.

Cuenca, Ecuador:

- Subtropical Mountain Climate
- 8,400 feet
- 55-65°F during the day
- 45°F at night
- Expect rain

Amazon cloud forest - Reserva Alto Coca:

- Amazon Cloud Forest
- Humid and rainy
- 4,000-6,800 feet
- 60's - 80's during the day
- 50's at night
- Expect to get wet and muddy

Packing Considerations

- Packing with layers is key! Dynamic clothing, zippers, buttons
- Quick - dry clothing
- Lightweight fleece/puffy jacket for evenings
- In homestays, no air conditioning nor heat, pack warm jammies, house socks or slippers
- No laundry dryers
- Electrical outlets are the same but most are two pronged instead of three

Ecuador Packing List

This list is divided into 2 parts:

1. Primera parte→ Amazon backpacking
2. Segunda parte→ Cuenca, Spanish classes, host family living, volunteer work, etc.

Keep In Mind:

- Where we will be based in Ecuador is a temperate/ cool climate. For example during the day it will be in the 60's and at night it will drop into the 50's or 40's.
- Temperatures fluctuate greatly throughout the day--Plan to dress in layers! From 50's to 60's
- Your homestay will not have heat or air conditioning so be sure to pack layers and warm pajamas.
- Bring a day bag that can hold a water bottle, a sack lunch if necessary, your school supplies, a rain jacket, and a few notebooks /other materials. On excursions it should be able to hold a water bottle, sunscreen, bug spray and a towel. While studying at the language school and cultural activities, modest and respectful, semi-professional clothing is necessary.

CUENCA part of trip

- Day bag: for Spanish classes materials, water bottle, snacks, rain jacket, etc.
- 3 short sleeve shirts / blouses (think thin layers, and fast drying) that you can put a cardigan, sweater layer over (no strapless or spaghetti straps)
- Ladies: 2 pair of pants, capris, long skirts, modest clothing
- Gentlemen: nice jeans, or khakis & Polo shirts
- Shorts for excursions (optional)
- Socks and undergarments
- Modest pajamas for cooler climate
- Comfortable athletic shoes for light hikes and/or early morning runs, walking around town
- One pair of teva or chaco sandals (something that will stay on your feet in water and hold up to mud)
- House shoes, slippers or flip flops
- Hat for sun protection
- Sunglasses
- Lightweight rain jacket
- Lightweight puffy jacket / fleece
- Swimsuit/coverup for outings
- Conservative athletic clothing if you choose to work out on your trip *Please NO short athletic shorts*

AMAZON CLOUD FOREST

- Medium backpacking backpack with good waist belt (35 liters)
- Waterproof backpack cover & plastic trash bags to keep your clothes dry
- Ziplocks or dry bags for clothings and critical items, such as camera, journal
- Retractable Trekking poles
- Crocs, sandals or tennis shoes for getting around camp, lightweight.
- 3 Pairs hiking socks (avoid cotton), calf length to prevent against boot chafing
- 2 Long sleeve shirts (quick dry recommended)
- 2 T-shirts short sleeves (preferably not cotton)
- 2 pairs of quick dry, synthetic pants
- 1 pair of shorts.
- Swimming suit
- 1 Hiking/running tights OR Long underwear or medium weight fleece pants (preferably not cotton) for around camp and sleeping
- 1-2 Medium/heavy weight fleece sweater (synthetic not wool or cotton) for around camp
- 1 Lightweight raincoat, loose if possible for breathability, but no ponchos
- 1 Headlamp with set of extra batteries
- Personal toiletries and medication (only small containers to reduce weight)
- Small bottle of hand sanitizer
- 1 Water bottle (1 liter) and optional camelbak bladder to fit in backpack
- Small whistle on string to wear (mandatory!)
- Quick dry towel (small) for rainwater showers
- Insect repellent (2-4 ounces)
- Sunblock / Sunglasses

Recommended but Optional for Hike to RAC

- Sleeping bag liner. Bags are washed frequently, but a light liner could be used
- Journal, pen, pencil
- Camera and batteries
- Pocket knife (small)
- 1 Baseball cap (lightweight, better if synthetic)
- 1 Beanie or BUFF
- Package of hand wipes
- 1 meter of duct tape for repairs, can be wrapped on water bottle

Provided at RAC (DO NOT PACK)

- Light Sleeping bag (provided at RAC, do not need to carry)
- Blankets
- Sleeping pad (provided in RAC)
- Mosquito net in sleeping areas
- Cotton gloves for protection from mud, cuts, spiny or stinging plants on hikes.
- Rubber boots (provided before hike, need European size) **IF YOU ARE A SIZE 12 OR ABOVE MENS, THERE IS LIMITED SUPPLY. CHECK WITH US TO SEE IF WE HAVE ANY**
- Food
- Water Treatment
- Complete First Aid Kit (with leader and at RAC)

Toiletries:

- Shampoo and Conditioner
 - 2-in-1 recommended for quick showers
- Toothbrush and paste
- Body & face wash
- Deodorant
- Hair brush/comb
- Sunscreen
- Insect repellent (CDC recommendation is 30-35% DEET, giving you at least 5 hours of protection before reapplication is necessary. See www.cdc.gov for a complete list.)
- Alcohol Gel (small, portable bottles)
- Tissue packs, antibacterial wipes
- Extra pair of contact lenses/solution (if applicable)
- Personal medications/vitamins if applicable, plus a copy of any prescription medications
- Customs official may need to verify that a medication matches its label, so please carry medication in its original container
 - Some recommended medications to pack: imodium, pepto bismol, ibuprofen, benadryl (cream and/or tablets)

Documents:

- Valid Passport: Two copies of your passport
- Your flight itinerary: printed (in and out of country) to show at customs
- Proof of insurance - Your travel insurance ticket and bag tags
- Other forms of identification (Driver's License or School ID)
- Proof of vaccinations

Money:

- ATM Card for cash needs (we suggest Visa)
- Credit Card for other expenses that you don't want to pay in cash (we suggest Visa)
 - Call your bank in advance and let them know the dates that your cards will be used internationally

Miscellaneous:

- Necessary chargers (portable cell phone battery recommended)
- Travel purse/wallet
- Small travel alarm clock/watch
- Ear plugs if you are a light sleeper
- It is safe to bring your cell phone, tablet, etc., as long as it won't distract you from your immersion experience
- Gift for your host family
 - Some ideas: a packaged food item famous in your home city, game to play with your family, paraphernalia from local sports team, book of pictures of home city, decorative home item from home city (like a picture frame)

Spanish Immersion Placement Test

Students will take a placement test to streamline their placement into an adequate Spanish class for their trip.

It's important that they **do not study** for the test or use any materials. They need to show us their raw knowledge so we can get them in the right class. This is one test that is okay to not study for and to fail!

Important things to remember:

- This is just the written portion of their class placement process. They will also take an oral test when they get onsite.
- We need to see what they can do with Spanish right now. We want to know what they know. We're not interested in what they're able to research, get translated, answer with help, etc.

Here's the link to the immersion placement test:

<https://commongroundinternational.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Test-Ecuador-2023-fillable-pdf-1.pdf>

Host Family Assignments

You are probably anxious to find out more about the family who will be hosting you during your upcoming trip! You will get your host family assignment 2 weeks before departure, host family assignments will be uploaded to the pre-departure course and emailed to you.

For pointers on preparing a bit culturally for your homestay experience, take a look at our blog posts [Must Know Items when Staying with a Host Family](#) and [8 Surefire Tips to Have an Amazing Host Family Experience](#) in the pre-departure course.

Some host families may see a towel as a personal item and bringing your own may be a good option, although if you don't bring your own you will of course be provided a towel by your family. We also suggest bringing a small gift for your family as a token of your appreciation for their hosting you. This does not have to be a big or expensive gift, rather something thoughtful and possibly a conversation starter. For example, if I'm from the Northeastern US I might like to bring my host family a small bottle of maple syrup to try, or if I love my hometown sports team, a gift reflecting that could be a great conversation starter.

In addition to the gift, we suggest you think about an interactive activity that you would enjoy sharing with your family in your free time with them. Perhaps you could bring a small photo album of your family members, or if you have a favorite card game you could plan to teach them how to play with you! These are all fun ways to get the most out of your experience.

Conclusion

Common Ground International thanks you for entrusting us with your teen. While safety, growth, fun and language development are our main priorities, your student will walk away with so much more. This summer you can expect your teen to become more proficient and confident in their Spanish communication skills, gain cultural understanding, experience personal growth and have fun! Here are the 4 major benefits that they will take away from this summer experience:

1. Increased Spanish proficiency and communication skills, accomplished by:
 - interactive, dynamic and fun Spanish classes taught by native Spanish teachers.
2. Cultural learning accomplished through truly integrative community connections:
 - Through their host family stay in a small beach town then in a small, typical, non-touristy town.
 - Intentional cultural learning activities
3. Grow as a global citizen through:
 - Intentional cultural comparison and analysis activities
 - Reflection activities led by our trip leaders
 - Being stretched outside comfort zones
 - Gaining independence
 - Learning to appreciate where they come from and what they have
4. Have fun while adventuring and learning Spanish:
 - On our adventures lead by local guides & scientists, keeping these excursions in Spanish.

We created this manual with you in mind. We have included our own experience over years of travel and coordinating groups on immersion, as well as combined previous parent's own experiences and input to help shape this information to be the most effective for your preparation for this trip.

After your teen's trip, we encourage you to openly give us feedback through the evaluations we will email to you after your child has returned, and any additional information that you think we should consider including in this manual for the parent, in order to help future parent's prepare for their teen's trip.

In the meantime, before your teen departs for their adventure, please feel free to reach out with any additional questions you may have, as we understand sending your child abroad is an exciting experience and we are happy to share as much information as we can with you in advance.

While your child is on the trip, be sure to follow us on [Facebook](#) to see updates and photos as they are happening!

Adventure on...

The Common Ground Team