



**Northern Highlands  
Ecuador Missions Team Orientation Packet  
2024**



*We are excited to welcome you to the Northern Highlands of Ecuador in the Imbabura Province! We're looking forward to working with you and your team and are confident that you will have a wonderful trip.*

## **Purpose**

- To impact the Northern Highlands of Ecuador, with the Good News through the participation of short-term teams.
- To give team members a positive missions experience and develop a heart for missions.
- To provide team members exposure to missions and an entrance into missionary service.

## **Our Goal**

- To host teams that assist our missionary team in advancing and completing various projects as we plant churches to unreached indigenous peoples of the Highlands.

## **Trip Details**

Teams should arrive in Quito (UIO). Travel from Quito to Otavalo/Cotacachi is approximately a 2 hours and 30 minutes via private bus ride that we arrange (is included in the per diem).

- Money can be brought in cash with you and given to the missionary team upon arrival in bill denominations **no greater than \$20.**

### **Ministry Activities**

- Depending on the nature of the team and what type of ministry is planned, activities may include: evangelism, construction, medical, kids' workshops, literature distribution, VBS/Kids Crusades, youth services.
- Our missionary team will develop a ministry plan according to the gifting of each team.

### **Cultural Experience/Free Day**

Options may include visit to local waterfall, volcanic lagoon with possible boat ride, visit to Otavalo famous Mercado de Ponchos, Hot springs near our Urcuquí church, shopping in Cotacachi which is famous for their many handmade leather goods, Termas Papallactas (hot springs an hour from airport), etc.

### **What To Expect When You Come To Ecuador**

#### **Visa Requirements and Other Documents**

- A visa is not required for short-term travel to Ecuador. **You must carry a passport that is valid for at least six months beyond your travel dates.**
- Carry a copy of all your travel documents: passport, airline tickets (arrival and departure), and itinerary. This also applies for medical prescriptions.

#### **Currency**

- The U.S. Dollar is our national currency (No exchanges needed).
- Credit cards (Visa and MasterCard) are accepted in major stores all over Ecuador, but many stores and restaurants accept cash only. You can use your credit card/debit card to withdraw money from ATM machines, and all international cards are compatible.
- Bills higher than \$20 are **NOT** accepted in most places other than hotels in Ecuador, so please be sure to carry smaller bills. Be mindful not to carry large amounts of cash on your person, as pickpocketing is common and tourists are primary targets.

## **Taxes**

The government tax is 12% (IVA) and applies on most in-country purchases. An extra 10% service charge applies at hotels and some restaurants.

## **Languages**

Spanish and Quichua are the national languages, but many other dialects are spoken among the indigenous populations. Most people are very helpful and if you can remember a few basic Spanish phrases, you will find you can go a long way.

## **Climate**

Due to our location in the middle of the world, we have no marked seasons. Temperatures vary between 50°F- 80°F, and there is always a chance of rain. Remember to always carry a rain jacket.

## **Health**

- Please check with the US State Department or CDC to see what vaccinations are required to enter Ecuador. Consulting with your doctor prior to traveling is also recommended. Yellow Fever is only required for trips to the Amazon River Basin. Most of our teams are in the Highlands and do not require Yellow Fever. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.
- Please note that if you require special medical treatment or you are being treated with certain medications, you must bring supplies with you as they may not be available in Ecuador or may be made by a different manufacturer with varying names and strengths, making supplies difficult to find. Please make us aware of this when sending in your team roster.

## **Food**

Avoid buying food on the street unless it is packaged and sealed, even if it looks clean and safe to eat. You can buy a wide variety of fresh fruit year-round, though it is recommended to peel and wash fruit before eating. Avoid drinking water from the faucet. Always drink bottled water, even in restaurants. It is safe to shower and brush your teeth with the water, just don't ingest it. Bottled water will be provided in your rooms and throughout the week.

## **Electricity**

Ecuador uses 110/120 AC 60 Hertz (same as U.S.).

## **Altitude Sickness**

Quito is at 2,800 meters (9,200 feet) above sea level, and it's not uncommon to feel short of breath or have a mild headache when you first arrive. Symptoms of altitude sickness can become worse as you head higher up into the Andes. Be sure to drink more water than normal and we suggest taking some form of ibuprofen at 600mg every 6 hours the first several days to help. Also, chamomile (manzanilla) tea can help to ease symptoms.

## **Sanitation**

- The plumbing system here in Ecuador is not like that in the U.S. Here you must put all toilet paper and feminine products in the trashcans located next to the toilets. We also suggest carrying travel size toilet paper around with you, or small tissue packs because many public places do not provide toilet paper in the stalls.
- It is a good idea to carry disinfecting wipes or hand sanitizer with you (soap is also not common in restrooms).
- Keep your purse on your person at all times. A crossover strap is perfect to keep your belongings secure. Be discreet in taking money out of wallets or purses.

## **Safety**

- Do not go anywhere by yourself or without communicating with the host missionaries. Use the buddy system!

## **Cultural Awareness**

- Food touches the hearts of Ecuadorians. They will always ask you if you like the food. You will put up barriers with Ecuadorians if you don't try the food. Eating their food will set you apart to them from other missions teams.
- Greeting's and Goodbye's are everything. You need to greet them and say goodbye super warm! Big hug, express your excitement. Show them a ton of love, even if you think they don't like you. Break that barrier with love.

## Recommended Packing List

### Clothing

- Shirts (7-10)
- Jeans and/or Khakis (3-4 pairs)
- Socks and Underwear (8-10 pairs of each)
- 1-2 Sweatshirts/jackets
- Rain Jacket
- Sleepwear
- Swimsuit and Cover-up (one piece)
- Belt
- Nice pair of Jeans (no holes or frayed hems)
- Sneakers
- Shower Flip Flops/Water shoes for swimming
- A Couple of Dress Outfits  
Guys: slacks and collared button down shirt  
Girls: dress, or skirt and blouse (must be knee length at least)

### Toiletries

- Shampoo/Conditioner
- Body Wash
- Lightweight Towel/washcloth
- Soap/Body Wash
- Toothbrush/Toothpaste
- Wipes and Hand sanitizer
- Deodorant
- Other personal hygiene items you may need
- Contact solution/extra contacts/glasses

### Gear/Other Necessities

- Bible
- Journal
- Sunscreen
- Hat/Sunglasses
- Bug Repellent
- Flash Light and Extra Batteries
- Passport!!**
- Personal Spending Money for Souvenirs (U.S. \$, nothing over \$20 bills, we recommend about \$100)
- Plane Tickets
- Any Medications you take daily

### Optional Items We Suggest

- Ziplock Bags for wet items, etc.
- Small Trash Bags for Dirty Laundry
- Small Battery Powered Fan (with extra batteries)
- Camera
- iPod for music
- Travel size toilet paper/tissue packs
- Small First Aid Kit to carry with you
- Backpack or small cross body bag for carrying essentials with you
- Ibuprofen (for altitude sickness)
- Daytime Dramamine (for motion sickness)
- Laundry Detergent (sink packs)



## Ecuador

**POPULATION** 16,385,000

**Population of Quito alone:** 4,500,000

Nestled on the equator (from which the country takes its name) in South America, the Republic of Ecuador is bounded by the Pacific Ocean on the west, Colombia on the north, and Peru on the east and south. It contains some of the highest mountains on Earth. The Sierra, one of the country's three regions, is composed of the high plateaus and valleys between the massive twin mountain ranges of the Andes. This area was the core of ancient civilization in South America and was one of the centers of the Inca Empire (fifteenth–sixteenth centuries C.E.). The other two regions are the coastal lowlands (known for plantation agriculture, especially bananas) and the Amazon lowlands (known for oil production and various forms of subsistence horticulture).

Ecuador claims one of the largest percentages of Indians of countries in the Americas. A strong Indian movement has been influential in Ecuadorian politics, social policy, and culture. Many Ecuadorians claim affiliation with the Roman Catholic Church; however, they observe a form of syncretism that blends Catholic beliefs and the beliefs and practices of indigenous religions. The Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses have also established a greater presence in the country.



## **Brief History**

Once a center of an indigenous state, part of the area that is now Ecuador was conquered in the fifteenth century C.E. by the Incas, who established their state religion of the Sun God. In the early sixteenth century the Spanish conquered the Incas and the indigenous people and took Catholicism to Ecuador. By the end of the colonial period the Catholic church had acquired enormous wealth—much if not most of it gained through coerced labor performed by indigenous people and Africans imported as slaves.

The region, as part of Gran Colombia, won independence from Spain in 1822; it split from Colombia to become the Republic of Ecuador in 1830. Ecuador's early republican period was marked by struggles between liberals and conservatives over the place of the church in civic life. By the end of the nineteenth century the liberals had obtained the upper hand. Religious pluralism was guaranteed in Ecuador, and the relationship of the church to the state was severely limited. The state abolished tithing (taxing to support the church) and established a system of secular public schools.

## **Other Religions**

It was realized that, although majority of the population considers themselves Catholic, most of them don't practice their religion in any way. Many of the Indian tribes, like the Sierra Indians, took on Catholic rites and mixed them with their own traditional, indigenous beliefs, creating a form of worship called Folk Catholicism. Others feel strongly about the outside influence that came with the Spanish invasion and today have gone back to their native belief-systems as a way to re-identify themselves as indigenous people living in Ecuador. One of these native beliefs or 'religions' is the 'Pacha mama', which means Mother Earth and views co-existing with nature as being vital.

Indigenous religiosity is an important part of Ecuador's religious life. While much of it—particularly in the case of highland Indians—has been embedded within Catholicism, it also maintains a recognizable indigenous form. With the development of a strong Indian movement (beginning in 1964 with the establishment of the Shuar Federation), there has been pressure to organize an Indian religion separate from Christianity.



A resurgence of indigenous-based forms of religiosity has converged with the Ecuadorian indigenous political movement. Indigenous religiosity of the highlands emphasizes a notion that people are related to the landscape and the elements of nature, such as the earth, sky, sun, moon, and stars. The mountains, for example, are thought to contain the principles of life and to be greater than human beings. As a result, offerings are often made to each mountain to bring it into a social relationship and to guarantee its goodwill toward people. The best known of these mountains is perhaps Mount Imbabura in northern Ecuador, which is believed to have the power to impregnate women who travel alone and unprotected in its flanks.

Dreaming is important as a means of divining the immediate future and the conjunction of forces in the world around an individual. The world is seen as filled with omens, some portentous and some beneficent. Religious specialists and healers (also known as Shamans) are contracted to divine and transform the balance of forces in the world for the benefit of individuals, families, and communities.

While the majority of Ecuador's Indians reside in the highlands and speak one form or another of Quichua (a type of Quechua, of which there are many versions throughout the Andes), there is also a significant and different population of Indians in the eastern lowlands (such as the Shuar, the Achuar, and the Huaorani) and smaller groups of indigenous peoples (such as the Tsáchila and Chachi) in the western Andean foothills and Pacific coastal area. These groups maintain a distinctive cosmology related to that of other Amazonian peoples. An important part of their religious life involves shamans who often ingest hallucinogens, such as *ayahuasca* (a drink produced from the vine *Banisteriopsis caapi*), as part of their shamanic journey to confront the universe and to bring order to human lives.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has also substantially grown in Ecuador, developing a notable presence among the Otavalo Indians of the Imbabura province. Ecuador's Jewish community is mainly concentrated in Quito. Small numbers of people in Ecuador are Baha'i, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu as well.

## **Shamanism in Ecuador**

Virtually every Ecuadorian community has a man or woman who knows the healing properties of various plants, or who can diagnose and cure by correcting spiritual imbalances or undoing spells.

Healers are known by various Spanish names: curanderos (curers), brujos (witches), or hechiceros (sorcerers, witches). In the Sierra, people might go to a local healer for a number of reasons: it might be because they have intestinal parasites, or because they believe an envious neighbor has cast a spell on them, or because they are looking for success in love or business. In addition, many people in the highlands have combined the Quichua belief in an inner and outer body, which must be kept in balance.

## **Unreached People Groups of Ecuador:**

- There are 2.1 million unreached Quichua people in Ecuador.
  - Unreached Highland Quichua ~ 603,000
  - Unreached Canari Quichua ~ 181,000
- There are 10,500 unreached Chachi
- There are 84,000 unreached Shuar
- There are 13,630 unreached Achuar-Jivaro
- There are 621,000 unreached Afro-Ecuadoreans
- There are 207,000 unreached deaf people
- There are 14,000 unreached Chinese immigrants
- There are 2,500 unreached Muslim Syro-Lybanese immigrants
- There are also small numbers of unreached Jews, Baha'is, Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus throughout Ecuador.