



**Don't let its size fool you; Ecuador has so much to offer. To the east lies vast stretches of rainforest jungle - part of the Amazon Basin and home to so many of Ecuador's indigenous people. In the central highlands are the mighty Andes, where half the country's population lives. And in the west the Pacific coastal region offers everything you would expect - sun, sand and relaxation, not forgetting Ecuador's most famous natural attraction - the Galapagos Islands!** Volunteering in Ecuador with AV gives you the chance to experience life in a community, high up in the cloud forest and gain an understanding of the challenges they face. Our gap year projects and volunteering opportunities in Ecuador balance improving your Spanish with living and working at Santa Lucia whilst making the most of all that Ecuador has to offer. Working in partnership with Rainforest Concern, your time will be spent supporting the efforts to conserve the cloud forest in a truly breathtaking country!

## Project Summary

**Departs:** February

**How long?** 11 Weeks

**Accommodation:** Homestay families / catered lodge

**Project Work:** Spanish, Eco-tourism, Trail building / maintenance, Sugar production

**Explore Further:** Beaches, Trekking, Surfing, Wildlife



## Project Overview

<b>Orientation + Briefing (3 weeks)</b>	Orientation and Spanish lessons at the Andean Study Spanish school. A chance to get to know your AV group whilst improving your Spanish and attending briefings on Ecuadorian culture, history, safety and the work of Rainforest Concern to conserve the Cloud Forest.
<b>Project Work (Approx 4 weeks)</b>	Volunteering in the cloud forest at Santa Lucia – creating or maintaining pathways through the forest, making panela (sugar), organic gardening, and making coffee.
<b>Independent Travel (4 weeks)</b>	Explore Ecuador further using the confidence and local knowledge gained on your project to make the most of your travels. Head to the coast to relax on the beaches or surf; visit the Cotopaxi National Park and trek up the volcano itself or travel to the famous Galapagos Islands. You choose what you do, but we are still on hand to help.

## Detailed Itinerary

### ARRIVING IN ECUADOR

The group flight departs from London Heathrow and will be seen off by one of the AV team. You will fly into Ecuador's capital, Quito, arriving in the late afternoon/early evening, and be met by our representative. The first night will be spent at the Hotel Casa Foch in the Mariscal area of the city, this is the AV base in Quito and is situated opposite the Spanish school where you will be studying.

After breakfast the following morning you will have your first briefing with the AV representative. This will cover the essentials, a guide to the area you will be living in and what will be happening over the next few days. At the end of this briefing your homestay families will arrive to collect you. All the families have been carefully selected and offer a warm welcome to AV volunteers. You will spend the weekend getting to know them and settling into your new home before returning to the Spanish school for the start of lessons on Monday morning.

### BRIEFING AND ORIENTATION

In South America a basic grasp of Spanish goes a long way, not only when travelling but it will also be useful when living in the lodge at Santa Lucia. To help you the first three weeks of the project are spent living with homestay families in Quito and attending Spanish school each day. The orientation course will run alongside your Spanish lessons, with briefings on Ecuadorian history and culture, safety and options for the independent travel phase of the venture.

You will stay as an individual with a family and immerse yourself deep into the life (and language!) of the Ecuadoreans. From Monday to Friday, by day, you will join the others in your group and attend three to four hours of Spanish at the level appropriate to you - absolute beginner to advanced. The rest of the teaching days are spent in the city doing some practical exercises, designed to bring on your confidence, and your evenings will be spent with your family or out on the town with the other AV volunteers and friends you will make.

At the weekends there will be a chance to visit Otavalo – the largest indigenous market in South America; or a trip to the town of Banos at the foot of the Tungurahua volcano, which offers adventure activities or relaxation in the thermal mineral pools.

### THE PROJECT

At the end of the Spanish course you will start the volunteer phase of the venture up in the Cloud Forest. AV has joined forces to work in partnership with *Rainforest Concern*, supporting their efforts to save the cloud forest in Santa Lucia as part of the Choco-Andean Corridor project. During your volunteer project you will work on a number of different projects, which support the cooperative that protects the forest.

You will leave Quito embark on a 3½-hour coach journey through the suburbs and out to the Andean foothills, valleys and cloud forests northwest of the city. You will disembark at the bottom of the mountain at the Santa Lucia head office, near the town of Nanigal. Your bags and equipment will be

loaded onto mules which will accompany you on the two hour climb that will take you to your home in the cloud forest for the next four weeks – the Santa Lucia lodge!

Situated high up, overlooking the cloud forest the views from the Lodge are a breathtaking sight that you will not tire of; constantly changing with the time of day and movement of the clouds. The first day will be spent on induction, where you will learn about the Santa Lucia Co-operative - a community-based organisation dedicated to conservation and sustainable development. Their aim is to make a modest living whilst conserving their remaining cloud forest through projects such as ecotourism, reforestation, small agro forestry plantations and environmental education. The community owns 780 hectares of montane cloud forest, of which about 80% is still in its prime, virgin state, and the reserve has been declared a Bosque Protector (Protected Forest).

One of the strengths of the volunteer programme is that you work alongside members of the Reserve and you will gain a real insight into daily life in a rural community. Whilst volunteering in on the Reserve at Santa Lucia your main tasks (some are seasonal) could include:

- Organic gardening - the garden supplies the lodge with fresh produce
- Trail maintenance - essential to ensure that the trails don't cause erosion and that they are safe to hike
- Agro forestry - maintaining the forests organic coffee, sugar cane and bananas and making panela (sugar) and coffee the traditional way
- Orchid Garden - help is needed to maintain and enlarge the orchidarium

People on the Reserve are always ready for a game of football or you can spend your free time hiking, birding, swimming, visiting waterfalls and enjoying the fiestas and dances in the nearby towns. We encourage volunteers to get to know the local community and experience the real Ecuador.

To find out what a typical day on project might be like take a look at our ['Day in the life of an AV'](#) feature, written by AVs who have been there and done it themselves!

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## Food + Accommodation

### In Quito

In Quito you will live with a home stay family. We take great care in placing you in a welcoming and friendly family who will look after you throughout your time in Quito. You will be asked to complete a short questionnaire after your place on the AV scheme is confirmed, this information will then be used to help select your homestay. You will stay as an individual with a family and immerse yourself deep into the life (and language!) of the Ecuadoreans but AV volunteers from your group will be living with families nearby. A member of the family will accompany you on the journey to the Spanish school for the first couple of days until you know your way. You will have your own bedroom and in most cases a separate bathroom too. You will eat all of your meals with the family and help with the preparation of the food where possible, picking up some Ecuadorian cooking tips as you go!

### At Santa Lucia

Santa Lucía eco-lodge and cabanas are in the heart of the cloud forest on a mountain peak at 1900 metres. You will be accommodated in the lodge dorm rooms. Bathrooms are shared and in addition to flush toilets the lodge has compost toilets to minimise contamination. There are solar panels that

provide limited electricity in the lodge only. Meals combine traditional Ecuadorian and international recipes and where possible organic produce is used from the Lodge garden. Volunteers are always welcome to lend a hand in the garden and kitchen.

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## Independent Travel

As your project comes to an end it is not quite time to say goodbye... AV includes approximately four weeks of independent travel at the end of the venture, to ensure a good balance of volunteering and adventure. Ecuador and the surrounding countries have lots of exciting and beautiful places to explore which you won't get a chance to do in your weekends alone. Many AVs want to stay on and travel but don't know if others on the project will too. Therefore we include this extra time to ensure that you experience as much as possible and know that you will have people to travel with. From our experience, travelling is often when problems occur, from lost passports to getting ill – that's why we have the motto, 'Once an AV, always an AV' - we'll still be there to help you, even though your project has finished.

Different travel options Ecuador AVs have done in the past include: visiting the Galapagos Islands; trekking in the Cotopaxi National Park or relaxing on the beaches of the Pacific coast. There is plenty to see and do – the only rule is that you do not travel alone.

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## Dates + Costs

For current AV departure dates + costs please visit the website – [www.aventure.co.uk](http://www.aventure.co.uk)

### AV PROJECT COSTS INCLUDE:

#### Before departure:

- Pre-departure information, support and advice
- A nominated member of the UK volunteer support team
- One-to-one face to face briefing for UK applicants
- Telephone briefing for non-UK applicants
- References taken up
- Comprehensive online health check
- Advice on group flight booking or individual flight arrangements
- Briefing for group departure from London airport

#### In-country:

- In-country representative
- 24/7 in-country backup
- Meet and greet at airport (if arriving with the group)
- Airport transfer (if arriving with group)
- In-country induction course

- Transfer from induction course to school/project
- Accommodation (except during independent travel)
- Food allowance (except during independent travel)
- Management of emergencies, including lost passport, illness, etc. whilst in-country
- Language school accommodation
- Spanish lessons

Upon returning home:

- Returning home advice
- Full telephone debriefing

**AV PROJECT COSTS DO NOT INCLUDE**

- Flights
- Travel Insurance
- Country visas
- Meeting of non-group arrivals
- Accommodation for early/late arrivals
- Medical expenses, e.g. inoculations, malaria prophylactics
- In-country medical expenses
- Drinks
- Tips/gratuities - No tips/gratuities for AV staff are necessary or expected
- Spending money
- Extra activities that you choose to do
- Food, transport and accommodation on independent travel
- Bus fares to and from the language school

**Still got questions?** We're here to answer them and remember if you want to talk to an AV volunteer who has been there and done it just let us know and we'd be happy to put you in touch! Contact the AV office on +44(0)1380 729009 or [info@aventure.co.uk](mailto:info@aventure.co.uk)