

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Here you will find the most frequently asked questions about the Shoulder to Shoulder brigades. We recommend that you read them thoroughly before going to the brigade. Please follow STSG media to keep up to date with your brigade. If you have any other questions, please direct them to the program coordinator Craig Borie at craig.borie@uky.edu or stop by our office at 102 Bradley Hall, Lexington KY 40506.

PRE-BRIGADE



PACKING ESSENTIALS

HOW MUCH MONEY SHOULD I BRING?

Travel, lodging and most meals are included in the \$1100 brigade fee. Plan on extra cash to cover the price of any souvenirs, going to bars or 'discotecas,' and extra adventure tourism like zip-lining or cable car. Prices in Ecuador are cheaper than most travel destinations, so \$300 should be enough to cover your expenses. However \$100 could be enough, if you're frugal. ATMs are available, so you do not have to carry cash with you at all times.

Note: Make sure to notify your bank before arriving in Ecuador, if you plan to use your ATM card while on the brigade experience, otherwise your card may not work.

WHAT KIND OF CLOTHES SHOULD I PACK?

We will be in Quito, where it can get cool, especially at night and early morning, however, most of the brigade will be in the more humid, lower altitude area of Santo Domingo. You will need both light and warmer clothing. Usually a good fleece jacket, or equivalent, is enough for the cold. You will not need any dressy outfits, but we do have one dinner with the Santo Domingo team and partners at a nice restaurant. Scrubs are a great choice for our work at the clinic site, Centro Medico Hombro a Hombro.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD I PACK?

Packing light is always a good idea, however you may need to pack some additional items, such as a flashlight, Swiss army knife, small roll of toilet paper (you can find travel rolls at Kmart, Walgreens, etc), hand sanitizer, mosquito repellent, sunscreen (when it is sunny, the sun is strong, remember we will be at the Equator) and toiletries (shampoo is not provided).

Make sure to bring a thin or quick-drying towel. If you use a hairdryer, bring your own (or arrange to share with other travelers). Other suggestions are ear-plugs (if you are a light sleeper) and any medications that you normally take (make sure to check to see if they will be allowed in Ecuador and bring the prescription with you).

Note: We strongly advise you to bring photocopies of your passport, and keep them in a different location from your passport. It is also a good idea to scan the picture page and email it to yourself so you can retrieve it from any internet café or hotel.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS

ARE THERE VEGETARIAN FOOD OPTIONS?

Yes. If you are a vegetarian please let us know and we will make arrangements.

WHERE DO I BUY MY AIRPLANE TICKET?

A number of airlines travel to Quito (UIO): Delta, American, Continental, and out of Miami LAN and COPA. You can use a travel agent but they will charge around \$35. You can book directly with the airline or through sites like expedia.com, orbitz.com, studentuniverse.com, and Google Flights.

For cheaper options, make sure to check flights out of Lexington (LEX), Louisville (SDF), or Cincinnati (CVG). If you choose LAN or COPA, you will have to find a flight to Miami, but often on Expedia or Orbitz will offer you a package with combinations with other airlines.

Other popular/cheaper options found in the past is to fly out of Washington D.C. or Atlanta. If you have flexibility in your schedule, also look at fares leaving a day earlier and/or returning a day later (Thursday nights are sometimes cheaper than weekend).

WHAT VACCINES DO I NEED?

Please go to the CDC's website (<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/ecuador>) to view recommended vaccinations: and/or discuss with your physician or the travel clinic. You should definitely have an updated tetanus, Hepatitis B and consider Hepatitis A. Others to consider are typhoid fever and yellow fever, and a malaria prophylaxis.

Note: You will be in the highlands and Coastal lowlands. You WILL NOT be in the Amazon in regards to your brigade itinerary.

QUITO IS AT A HIGH ALTITUDE, WHAT CAN I EXPECT IF I HAVE ALTITUDE SICKNESS?

If you travel to Quito (close to 9,400 feet) or other highland areas, you will typically require some time to adjust to the altitude, which can adversely affect your blood pressure, digestion, and energy level. For most people, the altitude in Quito, which is a part of the Sierra, is not an issue; you just need to be aware of it for the first day or two. Consult with your personal health care providers before undertaking high-altitude travel. If you have heart or lung problems or the sickle cell trait, you may develop serious health complications at high altitudes.

WILL THERE BE SOMEONE TO PICK ME UP FROM THE AIRPORT?

Yes. All health brigade participants must make their own travel arrangements. Once your plans are finalized, you will e-mail STSG's program Coordinator Craig Borie with that information. STSG personnel will be at the airport to pick you up and take you to the brigade rally point. If you arrive on a different date, we will inform you of how to meet up with the group and/or help you make arrangements.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT DO I NEED TO GET THROUGH CUSTOMS?

All you need is your passport, and you will have to fill out some forms that you will receive on the flight to Quito. You will also receive a letter from the Ecuadorian Ministry of Health just before your departure to Ecuador that you can print out and carry with you, just in case you have any difficulties.

DURING BRIGADE



HOW MUCH AND WHEN SHOULD I TIP?

Tipping is not as 'mandatory' as it is in the U.S. for restaurants, but generally a 5-10% is adequate. Sometimes the bill will show a 10% service fee, but this is not generally considered the tip as it doesn't necessarily go to the servers. In other situations, such as hairdressers, it is not expected but \$1 is courteous. Taxi drivers are generally not tipped, unless there is an extra service provided, such as loading/unloading your luggage (an extra \$0.50-1.00 is fine).

WHEN SHOULD I NEGOTIATE PRICES?

When you are shopping at any open market, you will be expected to negotiate the price, which can sometimes go significantly down during the negotiations. At most stores, the prices are fixed.

SHOULD I GIVE MONEY TO THE UNDERPRIVILEGED IF THEY APPROACH ME?

Probably best not to. At the STSG clinic in Santo Domingo, we have clinic staff that know the families in most need. You can discuss donations with them or donate to STSG to designate support of families in most need.

WHAT TYPE OF CURRENCY DOES ECUADOR USE?

Currently, the U.S. dollar is the currency, so you can use U.S. bills and coins (although sometimes you might get Ecuadorean coins for change). The currency was the sucre until 2000, when the country switched to U.S. dollar.



IF I BRING VALUABLES, IS THERE A PLACE TO SAFELY STORE THEM?

We regard the places where we stay to be safe in terms of leaving these things in your room. However, it is also advisable to carry a small lock so that you can leave these and other valuables (such as jewelry and cash) in a locked bag. In terms of jewelry, however, it is best not to wear anything valuable, or that even appears valuable. Regardless of any valuable that you are thinking about taking, whether a phone, laptop, nice camera, etc., be aware that we will be in poor areas and it's best to blend in with the local standard as much as possible.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

ARE TAXIS SAFE?

It is preferable if you can call a 'radio taxi', but you need to have a company's number, and specify the location where you are to be picked up. If you must hail a taxi on the street, increase your security by seeking out taxis that are officially registered and in good repair. Registered taxis in Ecuador are usually yellow, display matching unit numbers on the windshields and the side doors (each printed on an orange placard), feature a taxi co-operative name on the side, and an orange license plate. There are "un"official taxis that do not meet these standards, and should be avoided.

AM I ALLOWED TO EXPLORE ON MY OWN?

Yes, but for safety reasons we strongly suggest that you explore in groups, or in pairs.

IS THE WATER SAFE TO DRINK? IS THE FOOD SAFE TO EAT?

Follow these tips for safe eating and drinking: Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially before eating. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand gel (with at least 60% alcohol). Drink only purified, bottled or boiled water, or carbonated (bubbly) drinks in cans or bottles. Avoid tap water, fountain drinks, and ice cubes.

Do not eat food from street vendors. Avoid dairy products, unless you know they have been pasteurized. Avoid uncooked vegetables and unpeeled fruit, unless you are certain it is safe to eat them (e.g. at restaurants where we eat as a group). Diseases from food and water often cause vomiting and diarrhea. As a precautionary note, it is well advised to bring diarrhea remedies.



WHAT DO I DO IF I LOSE MY PASSPORT?

If you have a U.S. passport and it is lost or stolen in Ecuador, you must obtain a police report ("denuncia") of the loss or theft to obtain a new passport at the U.S. Embassy in Quito or the U.S. Consulate General in Guayaquil. After losing your passport and before departing Ecuador, you will need to obtain an official record of your arrival and legal status in Ecuador. You can do this by presenting both your replacement passport and the police report to the main immigration office in either Quito or Guayaquil. If you are not an American citizen, you may want to contact your embassy to find out what procedure you need to follow in order to obtain a temporary replacement.

HOW CAN I CONTACT MY LOVED ONE, OR HOW CAN THEY CONTACT ME?

The team leaders have Ecuadorian cell phones that can be used in an emergency to call the U.S. and the numbers will be given to you in your information pack, as well as the numbers for the hotels/hostels where we will stay for sharing with your emergency contacts in the U.S.

WHAT IF I GET SICK?

Fortunately you will be with a medical team and we have partners connected with medical facilities. Travel Medical Insurance is also included in your brigade fees during the scheduled dates of your brigade. Also, it is advised to bring your own medicine with you so that you can treat mild cases yourself.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



LOGISTICS

WILL I HAVE INTERNET ACCESS?

Yes, but not all the time. Sometimes the service is a bit unreliable. You will receive the phone number of our coordinator in Ecuador in your information packet in case your family has an emergency and needs to contact you in a hurry.

WHAT TYPE OF TRANSPORTATION SHOULD I EXPECT DURING MY BRIGADE?

We will have buses that stay with us the entire trip.

WILL I HAVE TIME FOR SIGHTSEEING?

The STSG brigade experience includes some cultural/tourist activities and some recreation time at the end of the work week.

WHAT TYPE OF ROOM OR SLEEPING ARRANGEMENT SHOULD I EXPECT?

We generally share rooms with other travelers (in groups of 2, 3, or 4). If you are traveling with someone you know you want to room with (e.g. significant other, child, etc), just let us know and we will make arrangements for you. If you have any other special needs for accommodations, please e-mail the program coordinator Craig Borie before departure. Our sleeping arrangements always include bed and bedding, so you don't have to take sheets, blankets, etc. Rooms generally have private bathrooms, with showers.



ECUADOR FACTS

ARE THERE ANY MAJOR CULTURAL PRACTICES I SHOULD KNOW ABOUT?

As in most of Latin America, it is quite common for people who are friends, or friendly, to kiss on the cheek as a greeting (hello and goodbye). Ecuador is a very diverse country, with different ethnic, indigenous groups (i.e. Kichwa, Tsáchila, and Afro-Ecuadorians). It is important that you pay attention and respect the many diverse customs that you may encounter in foreign locations. This is part of what adds to the rich value of the experience.

WHAT RELIGION DO ECUADORIANS PRACTICE?

Since the Spanish colonization, Ecuador became a Roman Catholic country. Currently, the Catholic Church has an important place in the Ecuadorian government and society. The constitution provides freedom of religion, and the government generally respects this right in practice. The Catholic Episcopal Conference estimated that 85 percent of the population was Roman Catholic, with 35 percent of Catholics actively practicing.

Some groups, particularly indigenous people who lived in the mountains, followed a syncretic form of Catholicism that combined indigenous beliefs with orthodox Catholic doctrine. Saints often were venerated in ways similar to indigenous deities. In the Amazonian jungle region, Catholic practices were often combined with elements of Shamanism.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT TYPE OF CLIMATE SHOULD I EXPECT?

The weather will vary depending on the place where we are in Ecuador, and on the time of the year. Generally in Quito, like the Sierra in general, it can get cool at night and in the early morning, but not likely to be below 50°F. In Santo Domingo it will be hotter and humid, with highs commonly reaching into the upper 80s.

WHAT WATTAGE IS USED IN ECUADOR?

Ecuador has the same wattage as we have in the U.S. (110W). However, the wall outlets may only have the two sockets so if you have something with a ground prong (e.g. a computer cable) make sure to pack an adaptor.

ARE THE MOSQUITOES BAD?

Actually mosquitoes are not too bad. In Quito and the highlands they are not an issue. In Santo Domingo there are mosquitoes and some small risk for malaria (CDC recommends prophylaxis) and dengue fever. To better protect yourself, bring repellent with DEET, and wear long sleeves and long pants.

POST-BRIGADE



CAN I STAY LONGER / ARRIVE EARLIER / AFTER MY BRIGADE?

Yes. If you plan to arrive early or if leave a couple of days later, please let us know ahead of time in order to better accommodate your travel schedule. For periods longer than a couple of days, we may be able to help you with your travel plans by making recommendations on travel destinations, or making lodging reservations. Traveling on your own before or after the brigade is possible, and we will do our best to assist you in your exploration.

If you decide to arrive before the brigade or stay in Ecuador past the brigade dates, there are typically other brigade members who are also staying extra and you can discuss traveling around with them. Quito has several interesting sites and is worth a little bit of extra time to get to know.