

Ellie H's IE3 Final Report
CFHI Ecuador Community Medicine: From Rainforest to Coast

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Weeks 1 and 2

What are your initial impressions of the organization and an overview and thoughts about the kind of work you've started doing; how does the work match your expectations, how does it match your goals?

My goals going into the program were to familiarize myself with medicine and my interests within the field as well as get a better understanding of the public health challenges facing the country and what kind of efforts the small country is pursuing to realize their goals. I also wanted to improve my Spanish and be able to converse more easily with locals and with patients. So far, I have not worked in a clinic or hospital yet, but I did work with the Ministerio de Salud Pública and the Ministerio de Inclusion Social y Economica for three days. Through this position I learned about where Ecuador chooses to invest it's money that it accumulates from oil exports. With the money it made, the country was able to open four schools in different parts of the city of Guayaquil for disadvantaged children aged 1-5 to go to for free, where they are given care, 4 meals a day, and public health interventions that monitor their growth and teach them about taking care of themselves. The initial profits they made from oil were enough to build these schools and now the city pays to sustain them through inhabitants tax money. To qualify for the school, children must be between the ages 1-5 and be from poor families or live with single mothers or their grandparents. This program ensures that children from disadvantaged families are given the opportunity to have an upbringing they otherwise might not have that would allow them to learn to take care of themselves so that they would be fully integrated and included once they entered into larger schools with other students. While I was there, I observed how early childhood interventions can serve populations that might not have access to health care, adequate nutrition and also gives the parents an opportunity to work and earn money while their children are cared for. During my time working, dentists came in and taught the children during lunchtime about their teeth and how to brush them properly. After this, all the children were checked for cavities one-by-one and given government payed dental care if needed. The school itself was a beautifully architected building that had classrooms bordering a play area that was outdoors for the kids, and protected from anyone on the outside.

Overall, this position did not align exactly with the kind of work I wanted to do, but it was worth it as I learned so much about the benefits of intervening at a young age and teaching kids from poorer and disadvantaged communities to better equip them for the transition to larger schools and bridge the developmental gap between them and children from more affluent households.

What stood out to you the most regarding your arrival?

The first thing I noticed upon walking out of the airport was the climate difference—Guayaquil is much more humid and hot than Portland and this took some time to adjust to. Upon my initial arrival, there were many things that surprised me about Guayaquil, Ecuador. Firstly, I was shocked by the amount of security protecting the house I stayed at. Driving from the airport and into the house for the first time meant going through two security checkpoints that bordered the house. My host family explained

to me that they previously lived in a house that didn't have this security and they often encountered problems with house robberies. The following day when we left the house for the first day of classes, we left the gated security and took a right turn into the crowded motorway, where it immediately became clear that the driving was very different to that in Portland, Oregon. The freeway appeared to be a free-for-all with very little organization or adherence to road lines. Everybody was trying to get to their destinations and if anything or anyone was in their way, they would simply honk. This seemed fine when I was being driven around, but on the first day of classes, I chose to take the bus instead of the taxi and ended up taking it in the wrong direction. Instead of going to the north part of the city where my homestay family lived I went all the way to the south part of the city which was more than an hours distance away in car. Returning during rush hour in a crowded bus that was stuck in traffic was not my idea of a great first day, but it served as a learning opportunity for just how big the city is and how carefully I needed to plan my bus trips.

What was your greatest anxiety prior to departing and how do you feel about that now that you have arrived?

My greatest anxiety before departing was meeting my homestay family and being able to converse with them in Spanish. I now feel very comfortable with them, and am amazed at how little time it has taken for me to feel like family. I think it can sometimes be stressful to wonder how personalities will mesh especially when you know that you are going to be spending a lot of time with people. I am also always nervous to see how I will fit into another family's dynamic. But my host mom is very friendly and it is interesting to talk to her and the rest of the family about their way of life. With my homestay family I find that there is always something interesting to talk about because of the cultural differences.

Weeks 3 and 4

How are things going at work now that you have settled in for a bit? How does this align with your professional goals that you set for yourself? What would you like to achieve in the next half of your internship?

My professional goals going into the program were to obtain primary care experience, different medical specialty experience, and public health knowledge. I would not say that I have settled in the work yet, as I have been rotating through different health centers and things have changed quite a bit from week to week. The first Centro de Salud that I worked at was in a very rural town called Pitirishka. On the first day of clinical rotations I sat with a doctor and listened to what she prescribed to people and also talked to her about what kind of problems they were seeing. The clinic itself is in a small town called Pitirishka, which is at the door of the Amazon with a very small population of indigenous inhabitants. I watched as the clinic filled up in the Monday morning--everyone waited their turn for attention, unlike in the USA where there are always appointments and organized times to meet with a doctor. I shadowed a doctor and helped her check breathing and heart rate. The doctor got through 10-15 patients every hour which surprised me as that is usually the time an American doctor gets through 4-5 patients. About half-way through the day, a man accompanied by an older man who carried a book with him came in and asked the doctor about how they could bring their daughter back from Guayaquil. She had had a baby with microcephaly and it had died a month later and now she was stuck at the larger hospital that she was transferred to 8 hours away and her family did not have the money to bring her back. This was really sad to see and I could see the pain in their eyes as they explained their story to the doctor. I also shadowed a nurse and saw her routine check ups. These included getting heights and weights, checking their head sizes and listening to their concerns. We also began to fold necessary gauze patches and covered mouth checking sticks with

sanitary paper for future use. This part was more monotonous and not as interesting but it gave us a chance to listen to the conversations of the nurse and doctor. Much of their conversation were regarding their frustrations with patients--namely pregnant women, who did not attend their pregnancy check-ups at the centro de Salud.

On Wednesday, I was left alone as another girl from the United States went to Puyo to get her yellow fever vaccination. I was able to shadow the doctor for most of the day and I saw several things that surprised me, namely getting to check the breathing of a girl with pneumonia which sounded so different to that of patients with healthy lungs and getting to examine a man's leg tumor. Later that day the president of Pitirishka came and tried to challenge the doctors healthcare practices. This was a little but unsettling because he had the interests of the whole village at hand and he came to let the doctor know that some of the women were unhappy with their birthing practices. Some were unhappy with the ways that the umbilical cord were removed, others simply didn't want doctors to interfere with the birth of their child. This posed great frustrations for the medical team because they are supposed to carry out medical practices in the safest ways possible, which means in a sterile environment and not in the women's homes. Listening to the arguments between the two sides was very interesting for me because the indigenous Shuar had many reservations about the modern western medicine being used in their village which was understandable. But the medical team tried to clarify that the medicine was there for their use and mandated by the government and that nobody was obligated to use it, but that they had ethical rights in protecting the health of children who could be subjected to unhealthy treatment.

On Thursday, I ended up getting sick on the bus ride to the centro de salud. I threw up every thirty minutes for four hours afterwards and ended up sitting outside behind the building where the medical treatments were being given so that nobody could see me while I was sick. I think I had eaten something that didn't sit with me well that morning cause around 12pm I felt fine and assumed that whatever it was that had affected me was out of my system after having washed my hands very thoroughly I returned to my clinical rotations.

Friday was the last day in Pitirishka and it started by preparing for an inspection. We cleaned and disinfected the entire building to prepare for his arrival. There was also a young boy that came in after having been bit in the face by a dog. This was one of the most immediately intense situations as he had not had his rabies vaccination and there was blood all over his face as well as his mother's clothes. I watched as the doctor kept her calm and put on gloves to disinfect the boys wounds with disinfectant. After he was cleaned up she gave him some antibiotics to kill any pathogens that may have entered his body.

In regards to my professional goals, I have definitely experienced primary care in rural settings, as well as a variety of different medical specialties--as this rural clinic dealt with everything they encountered and did not have the option to send all of their patients to specialized clinics. My encounters with Ecuador's public health system have left me feeling amazed. They have free public health clinics all over the country--even in very rural places deep in the Amazon forest. These clinics are run by the Ministerio de Salud Publica and staffed by medical student graduates who are mandated to work one year in a rural clinic before they can officially begin practicing in their hometowns--similar to residencies in the United States, except in poor rural communities. I think this is a very intelligent way of making sure that nobody lacks access to free care and medical students learn that not everyone is as privileged in terms of the medical technology they have access to. In the next half of my internship I hope to be able to compare this rural health care that I have seen, to both indigenous practices of the Shuar community which I will visit next week, and then also more urban health care in Quito in the following two weeks.

How are things going relative to your personal goals? In which areas have you made progress and where do you still have some room to expand? What do you want to make sure you address before you leave?

My personal goals were to make connections, become more self-sufficient and to have as many new experiences as I could. So far, I am really proud of the progress I've made in terms of these goals. I have made so many connections, both with the large family I am staying with, but also with the medical staff that I work with and people I meet daily. I find that I am learning so much from all the people I meet and am excited to make more connections. As far as becoming more self-sufficient, I definitely feel as though I progressed at the beginning because I was alone and so I planned trips by myself. Now that I am living with another girl from the United States, we have been doing things together, so I am not as independent but it is also nice to have company. And as far as experience goes, I am doing lots of new things daily, whether it be taking a new route back to the homestay house, or climbing a new mountain!

Before I leave, I hope to plan a trip to Peru, because I have always wanted to visit Machu Picchu. I know this will be challenging, especially as I plan to go alone. However, the transportation in Ecuador and Peru seems to be very well organized, and I trust that I will be able to find good accommodations.

How are things going relative to your cross-cultural goals? What kinds of experiences have stood out to you so far? What do you want to ensure to experience before you leave?

My cross cultural goals were to improve my Spanish language, get a better understanding of the public health challenges that Ecuador faces, and to obtain more knowledge about the cultural differences between Ecuador and the United States. So far, the language has been more challenging, but I am assuming that this is a sign that I am improving a lot. Learning how to converse about medical issues in Spanish was a big goal of mine, and it has definitely been the root of some misunderstandings and language barriers, but I am grateful that I get to be a part of such a great immersive experience. Also, I am glad that the medical staff I have been working with has been so patient and kind in terms of the language barrier. I am also glad I brought my pocket Spanish dictionary!

The experiences that have stood out to me so far have been climbing Mt. Chimborazo, which is the closest terrestrial point to the stars and working in Pitirishka. However, next week I will be living with a Shuar family in the middle of the Amazon, and I have a feeling this will be a huge learning opportunity for me.

Before I leave, I want to visit Peru as well as Machu Picchu. I know that planning this trip will be a challenge, but I have always wanted to visit this location and so am going to make the most of it while I am here.

Weeks 5 and 6

Describe a day in your life – what is your work schedule like, what do you do after work, how do you balance your time between work and exploring life outside of work?

Work every week has been different. The first week I worked at a school for young children that was run by the Ministry of Public Health in Guayaquil, the third and fourth weeks I worked at small rural health clinics in very small towns, the fifth week I lived with a Shuar family, and my sixth week I worked in the first district hospital in Quito's historical district. My days usually require my waking up early and a commute--which varies in different places. I will then work until around 1:30-2pm and then get lunch and then go and explore wherever I am. Every weekend I take short trips to towns that

are not very far by bus. The first week I was in Guayaquil, so on the weekend I took a short bus trip to a beach town called Salinas. The next three weeks I was in Puyo so I went to explore Banos and Riobamba (Mt. Chimborazo), and I even returned to Banos the next weekend because I loved it so much. The next week I went to Quito and decided to travel to Latacunga for the weekend to explore Quilatoa and Volcan Cotopaxi. When I return to Guayaquil I plan to follow the same work routine, and on the weekends I want to visit Cuenca and Montanitas. In terms of balancing my time, I have found that this routine has helped to allow me to see a lot and also have a steady work schedule despite all the change in location and workplace.

Housing: What is your living situation like? Knowing what you know now, are there other options you would have chosen instead? If you can provide some resources for future interns, that would be most helpful.

In terms of housing, I have loved all the families I have stayed with so far. The houses I stayed in in Puyo and Guayaquil were both very nice and big. The house in Quito is smaller but is also in the historical district of Quito. I wouldn't have chosen another option because I love getting to know the families that I stay with as well as their way of life. I think that I would have liked to live alone but I would not have learned as much or made the same connections that I have living with other families. I would recommend that anyone stay with a host family to make the most of their internship.

Finances: How is your budget working out for you? Are you spending more or less than what you expected? How much do you typically spend on food, recreation, travel, etc.? What would you do differently knowing what you know now?

I have not had the most streamlined experience with money during my time in Ecuador. During the first week I tried to use my Discover card and the bank would not accept it. The magnetic strip supposedly was not functioning and I needed to order another one which would have taken 4 weeks to arrive. I decided this was too long and I needed to figure out another option. This really threw me off guard as I only had brought enough money for the first week and had run out and needed money while in another city. I had no other card or way of pulling out money. My mom decided to send money thru Zoom which supposedly was a similar company to Western Union, however after numerous trips to various banks and a lot of time spent waiting in line I realized that I would need an Ecuadorian ID to pull out the money that she sent through this organization. Finally, my mom sent money thru Western Union and this worked, and has been what we have stuck with for the entirety of the trip. I have found that I spend about \$300 every 2-3 weeks. I generally spend most of what I have on my weekend trips and on food during the week. I will probably spend more towards the end of my trip as I begin to buy gifts for other people. Knowing what I know now, I would have brought multiple forms of getting cash out and I would have made sure that my card worked before leaving. I regret not doing either of these things, but I am glad that things have worked out with Western Union.

Travel and Transportation: How do you typically get around town and to work? Are you satisfied with that choice? Would you recommend other options? Do you have time to explore the surrounding area on time off? How do you manage that? What do you recommend for travel options? Where do you recommend exploring?

I have travelled everywhere in Ecuador by bus. The transport system here is quite frankly the best I have ever experienced. There are cheap and frequent buses all over the country, and almost all cities seem to have terminals that are very easy to navigate. I am very satisfied by how little money I have to spend on getting around. A bus ride that would cost \$40 round trip in the U.S, costs a mere \$2 here. Not only are the buses cheap, but they are also really nice! I have also taken a fair number of

taxi's but only for short distances as they are more expensive. Usually if I have a specific location that I need to get to in a city and don't know exactly how to get there by bus or walking I will take a taxi. However, relatively speaking taxi's are also very inexpensive when compared to those in the U.S.A. In general, the transportation system in Ecuador has allowed me to travel all over and not spend a lot. My favorite places I have been to have been Quito, Banos, Quilotoa, Mt. Chimborazo and I am excited to explore Montanitas and Cuenca! I think that anyone who decides to travel in Ecuador will learn to navigate the bus system very quickly easily--just make sure when asking for directions to be very specific. After being here I think I have begun to take the transportation system for granted--when I head back to the States I will have forgotten how much harder it is to get places!

Weeks 7 and 8

Professional: How well did your coursework prepare you for your internship? What knowledge of your field has been most important so far?

My coursework in public health prepared me by giving me some background to the infectious diseases that present themselves most often in Ecuador, including Malaria, Dengue, Chikungunya, and Zika virus. This was helpful as it gave me a preview of what I would be learning while doing vector control for waterborne diseases. My global health and development class taught me about the social gradient of health and how social class can be a major precursor to public health problems. I saw this present itself in Guayaquil, where the poorer parts of the cities were the parts with the most occurrences of these diseases. The Epidemiological Transition Theory which hypothesizes that shifts in global burden of disease from infectious to chronic diseases follows a country's development trajectory also presented itself through the presence of more long-term (cancer, diabetes) diseases presenting themselves in Quito's historical district health center which is an urban and fairly prosperous place. In turn, the poorer areas of Puyo and Guayaquil were presenting more infectious diseases and viruses such as stomach parasites and water-borne illnesses. I was shocked by the fact that fifteen minutes from fairly developed areas of central Guayaquil were areas of such poverty where people were living in houses made of scraps of wood and tin roof held together in very resourceful and delicate assemblies. It was clear that the country is in the midst of development with it's wealth concentrated in different places. It was also clear that there was a decline in death rates due to improvement in living standards in more wealthy urban areas. In Pitarishka, the Shuar woman that I worked with had seen her mother and aunt's deaths due to childbirth--something that is not at all common in urban cities. The limits to a magic bullet approach to global health were also clear during my internship. Magic bullet refers to a delivery of technology regardless of health care infrastructure. This system in many ways is good and evident in Ecuador through the free and public health care services but also lacked in some ways. For example, because the health care was all funded for by the government, it was very hard for people to make appointments because everything was so booked up. Also, the health centers in more rural areas sometimes lacked the necessary medications for their patients as they had not been stocked up recently. In turn, people would have to wait months before getting their medications. However, in some cases instead of just distributing drugs, they set up programs and living situations so that health issues could be prevented before getting to the point of needing to be medicated so that people could continue to live a healthy and valuable life. This was clear through the number of nutritionists at the health center in Quito who were paid just like other medical staff to teach people about proper diet and lifestyle before to address the issue of obesity and diabetes.

Describe an event where you misunderstood something due to cultural differences. What did you do? What would you do next time?

I've misunderstood many things due to cultural differences during my time in Ecuador. Luckily, I've found that many people that I'm around are understanding and open-minded about the fact that there may be cultural differences or language barriers present. The most common things that have

happened have been language errors. Usually the people I'm with laugh if I make a mistake using Spanish--this may be as a result of the culture that I'm in though. The most obvious mistake that I made while being in Ecuador was actually on the first day and was a result of language barriers. I wanted to take the bus back to my house from the school where I am taking Spanish classes and so my host mom told me the directions by bus. She told me to take the number 65 bus 'en frente' from the school. 'En frente' literally translates to 'in front' in English, so I assumed that she meant the bus on the street closest to the school and not directly across. However, as I would soon find out 'en frente' actually means on the street opposite from the street directly in front, and 'al pie' which translates literally to at the foot, means the street directly in front. Needless to say, I took the wrong bus that went to the far south side of the city, and ended up being an almost 2 hour trip, and then only to realize I took the bus in the wrong direction. I then had to take the bus back to the other side in rush hour traffic which took about 3 hours in Guayaquil. This experience was a bit scary at the time and especially for my first day. It was also very frustrating because I had not wanted to spend that much time on a bus. Since then though, I have made sure to be very clear about directions, so that I can avoid getting lost or ending up in the wrong place at all costs.

What are the most important things you have learned about yourself thus far through this experience? What has been the greatest personal challenge? What has been the greatest reward?

I think that there is always a learning component to travelling--whether it be about the culture and the language or about oneself. I've learned many things about myself during my time in Ecuador that I never had thought about when going about my daily routine in the United States where I was not challenged and out of my comfort-zone. I think the biggest things that I have learned about myself that pertain to everyday life are that I am a very organized person and I enjoy have plans and structured time. I learned this in Quito, where I stayed with a family whose house felt very disorganized and chaotic. There were no doors in the house and therefore no privacy. Also, the house was very dirty and untidy and it was very easy to lose my things. The woman I stayed with in this house was a total sweetheart and she has probably been one of my favorite people that I have met during my internship, but she does not stick to plans very well. This was a little frustrating for me at times because I like to communicate and have a solid plan for the day, and the woman I stayed with was very last minute about letting me know what was happening. This was a very good thing for me to experience as it gave me a chance to live with someone who's culture and home environment were very different to my own and gave me the opportunity to learn and adapt. Sometimes I am bad at being spontaneous and flexible--this experience forced me to be these things.

In terms of volunteering, I have learned that I enjoy working in fast-paced environments. In my experience so far, my favorite work environment was the emergency room. I found the problems people were coming in with very interesting to observe and watch the doctor treat and diagnose. Patients generally came in for flu or stomach aches, however, there were also people with broken bones that I got to observe under the x-ray. I also got to see a terrible case of bed sores that an older bed-bound man had and a woman have a bad reaction to penicillin. Overall, emergency room keeps you on your toes and can be unsettling, exciting and rewarding all at once. I've learned that I value these things in a job and work environment.

The greatest personal challenge that I have had on this trip has been living with someone who is very different to me for 8 weeks and also struggling with homesickness. I am doing the program with another girl from the U.S., who I have really enjoyed getting to know and spending time with, however, we have quite literally done everything together and it can sometimes be challenging to be around the same person for so long. This was challenging as we sometimes had communication problems, for example we did not plan well on Mt. Chimborazo and ended up losing each other for 4 hours. We also have had some problems with picking places to eat and sleep on our weekend trips, as we have slightly different

budgets. Luckily, we have been able to adapt and learned from each other--notably that we both need space and alone-time for periods in order to thrive. We also have similar interests and therefore enjoy doing many of the same things which helps a lot. We have spent every weekend visiting different places, and have worked together on the weekdays too. I am sad that this will be the last week working with her but I know that we will stay in touch afterwards.

I have also felt homesick a number of times, and I do realize that this is very normal. I usually fall into negative thought spirals and will begin to think about what I miss about home. Usually though, I am able to keep a clear head and remind myself that I am gaining great volunteer experience and travelling to cool places all over Ecuador, and can pretty quickly snap out of it.

Weeks 9 and 10

Upon reflecting on your internship experience, are you more or less committed to a career in this field? What experiences have contributed to this?

After my internship experience I am more committed to a career in medicine. I initially wanted to do this internship to experience health care in many different settings--something that can be hard to do in the United States. I liked this internship because ethically I felt like it was good because I was only observing and not practicing any medical procedures and this is important because I am not qualified yet in the US. I got to observe doctors and nurses in both urban and rural settings in many parts of Ecuador. Seeing the contrasts between health services in very rural poor settings and urban poverty was very interesting. I learned from these experiences that not only environmental factors, such as the climate and the quality of the health services contribute to a public health problems but also the population's own knowledge of the problem's that people in their area face. Social issues are things that can often be ameliorated by education and in the case of public health problems such as vector-borne diseases in Guayaquil, educating the population was vital in order to combat these diseases from spreading. I worked with a vector-control brigade in one of the poorest districts of Guayaquil and assessed people's living situations and likelihood of *Aedes-Aegypti* mosquito larvae development. This included teaching people about the many ways they can avoid attracting larvae in their home, such as covering any open water sources, and cleaning out dry damp spaces. We would then provide them with a powder formula that would control the larvae development in their drinking water for up to 6 months. Several people would not be trusting of the Health Ministry's advice and several wouldn't even allow us into their houses. This provoked anxiety within the ministry as when the rainy season begins, vector-borne diseases such as Dengue, Zika, and Chikungunya can spread very rapidly. This experience taught be about the importance of public health organizations and the role of education as well. I also experienced the resistance that these organizations face and how it can be difficult when their resistance could put a whole surrounding population in danger.

I also worked with doctors in the Amazon jungle that experienced similar resistance but in their case it was the product of cultural differences. The towns where they worked comprised primarily of the Shuar indigenous group who have many of their own beliefs regarding health and healing. We got to see this through living with a Shuar family in the Amazon for a week. Much of their healing involves using plant-remedies and more traditional healing practices. Tension arose in the health center near their town, and I even got to see the Shuar president come and challenge the doctors regarding their birthing practices. These tensions were a great example of the merging of western medicine (the doctors were all graduates of urban colleges completing their mandatory rural years) and traditional medicine and reinforced my belief that both are very important and necessary in order to heal a whole person. It frustrated me to see the doctors being dismissive of the Shuar ideas of healing and vice-versa and motivated me to be culturally sensitive when working with any patient in my own practice. Furthermore, we worked with a variety of different doctors in urban settings, where we saw less infectious diseases and more long term chronic diseases, such as cancer, diabetes and

obesity which nonetheless are also serious public health problems. Quite obviously this distinction arose out of the differences in lifestyle and living standards. After coming back to my home city of Portland in the United States, I have visited various doctors for medical appointments and been amazed at the quality of health centers here in the United States. Despite this, I was very impressed with most of the health centers in Ecuador, and was even more taken aback by the money that they allocate into health services which ultimately makes visiting a doctor free for everyone.

In all this internship broadened my horizons and knowledge of public health and the issues that contribute to health problems in urban and rural cities areas in Ecuador. Much of my experiences were positive ones, where I was introduced to the varying lifestyles of doctors in different areas and their different manners and ways of interacting with their patients. I learned so much from my experiences, and these experiences with undoubtedly help me in my own practice and career pursuits in medicine and life.

What words of advice do you have for future interns as they prepare for this internship and living in your host country/culture?

My advice to future interns would be to go into this internship with a very open mind and be prepared to go-with-the-flow. You are going to meet so many new people and have so many new experiences and some may not be your favorite, but most of them you will look back and think, 'I can't believe I did that. That's so cool.'

In terms of more logistical and planning advice, I would recommend bringing two pairs of scrubs--I always wore scrubs during the rotations and I always seemed to have a clean pair. A white coat was not necessary even though it says on the packing guide to bring one.

I would recommend wearing long pants during the week in the Amazon. I wore shorts for the hike and got SO MANY mosquito bites. In general, however, when you are staying in Ecuador, I would recommend wearing modest attire as in general you will probably be getting more attention as a foreigner there, than you would be in the US.

I only brought a two piece swimsuit and was perfectly okay and comfortable. Most of the pools we went to were private and when we went to the beach, it seemed as though all the women were wearing two-pieces. However, it does depend on your own comfort.

I bought an old laptop that I didn't care about (it actually broke while I was there) and found it helpful for sending e-mails but if you have a smaller device like an iPad or tablet you could bring that too. I spent an extra week in Cusco, Peru and decided to bring all my luggage which was in a backpacking backpack and smaller backpack as my carry-on. I ended up buying quite a few gifts in Peru and so I bought a wheeled luggage bag while I was there to use as my carry-on and just put my other backpack inside of it. I would also recommend packing lighter than what the list recommends because I felt like I had too much stuff with me.

I took antimalarials (mefloquine) for the initial part of my trip while I was in Puyo and then stopped taking them after I got back from Quito because Dr. Torres said that it wasn't necessary. The house that you will be staying in in Guayaquil is very safe as it is protected with a lot of security so you shouldn't have to worry there. The city of Guayaquil isn't the safest so I would recommend wearing your bag on your front side and watching it closely. I was very vigilant during the whole trip and had nothing stolen.

While I was traveling on the weekends, I usually brought around \$200-\$300 just to be on the safe side. However, I also had complications with my credit card and wasn't able to use it for the whole trip, so you could probably take less if you have a card. The amount of money I carried with me usually depended on where I traveled to and whether or not I was going to buy drinks or gifts or

something. Aside from cash, I usually also brought a copy of my passport (most hotels will ask for your passport number).

Finally, make sure that your credit card works before leaving the US. I started a new card with Discover before leaving, and did not realize before arriving in Ecuador that it was a defective card and the metal strip didn't work. Finding yourself in another country with no access to money is very unsettling and I panicked. Luckily, my friend told me about Western Union and my mom was able to send me money every two weeks. This was not ideal though as I had to carry a lot of cash around with me and would sometimes run out before finding another Western Union. In my experience, money was the one issue I had and something that I was not prepared enough for, so I would recommend planning this one ahead of time.

In general, make sure to keep a positive attitude and go in with a growth-mindset. You will learn so much at the time of being there that you may not realize how much you are growing but when you get back home and reflect you will realize how amazing all the experiences and new people you met were and how you have grown from your experience.