

## Ecuador – Quito, Universidad San Francisco

September-October 2024

### IAESTE

Among the many possible travel destinations, I was particularly drawn to South America due to my strong interest in learning Spanish. With IAESTE, I found an ideal opportunity to combine this goal with a practical experience aligned with my studies in environmental sciences. This opportunity allowed me to engage in substantial fieldwork while also exploring the diverse natural landscapes of the country I would be visiting. I was fortunate to be nominated for my first-choice internship, which closely aligned with the theme of my Master's thesis, enabling me to apply my knowledge in a new setting.

Upon arrival at the airport, I was warmly welcomed by my host mother, who brought me to her home. I stayed with her and her dog, and I lived near another IAESTE intern, so we often walked together to the University. I arrived a few days before the start of my internship, which gave me a chance to participate in some activities organized by IAESTE Ecuador with other IAESTE interns. During the second month of my internship, the country experienced frequent, extended power cuts—known as *cortes de luz*—due to water scarcity. However, my colleagues and friends from IAESTE and I organized dinners and game nights so that we wouldn't be alone in the darkness.

### Experience of being abroad

Honestly, I felt a bit nervous before the internship began, especially because of news reports I had heard in Europe about Ecuador. But after arriving, I realized it was entirely possible to navigate everything safely. I would highly recommend this experience to anyone, as it pushes you to step out of your comfort zone. Personally, I adopt a “sponge” mindset whenever I travel, trying to learn as much as I can from the local people. Ecuador offers incredible natural diversity, including the Andes—where I spent most of my time—the coastal region, the Amazon rainforest, and the Galapagos Islands. This diversity also extends to people from different regions, especially among Indigenous communities.

One of the restoration projects I worked on involved collaboration with a small village, where I co-worked with an Indigenous community from the Andes. It was an invaluable experience to be part of a project addressing water scarcity issues related to wetlands directly impacting a community and working directly with them to address the issue. I also had the opportunity to hear Kichwa, one of the most widely spoken Indigenous languages in Ecuador and Peru.

### Experience at work

Since I'm studying environmental sciences, my internship here was directly related to my field of study. I worked with Professor Esteban Suarez and contributed to restoration projects focused on the wetlands in the Ecuadorian *páramo*. My main responsibilities involved measuring greenhouse gas emissions and analyzing soil samples from these ecosystems. This hands-on experience was unique, allowing me to work in the field frequently, witness the beauty of the *páramo*, and learn extensively about Ecuadorian wetlands.

My time at Universidad San Francisco de Quito (USFQ) has been rewarding. I was part of the aquatic ecology group, and my colleagues were amazing. We spent a lot of time together, and on Mondays, we held a “Lunch Bunch de *Biosfera*,” where each week, a group member presented the latest developments in their research. It was always fascinating to learn about various new topics in environmental science.

Overall, this experience has been profoundly educational and enriching, both professionally and personally.