

Final Reports are completed by each IRSEP student at the completion of their time abroad. Finals reports are meant to serve as an overview of the program and to orient the future IRSEP student. The information in this report is subject to change and is the experience of one person.

IRSEP FINAL REPORT

For: Katie Pietig, La Universidad San Francisco de Quito, piet0133@umn.edu

1. **Obtaining a visa/residence permit:** To study in Ecuador a 12-VIII (Intercambio Cultural) visa is required. It is best obtained from the Consulate in Chicago. A complete list of requirements is available online and on the USFQ website. Obtaining a visa costs \$80 and it is recommended to begin the process two months before the expected departure date in case of any problems.

Chicago Consulate
30 S Michigan Ave
Chicago, IL 60603-3211, United States
+1 312-338-1002

2. **Materials:** A few months after being accepted to the IRSEP program you will receive a letter of admission from USFQ with necessary materials for the visa application. All other correspondence will be via email. The U of M student will be assigned to live with the family of the USFQ participant and will receive information about their family about 1 month before departure. All other information is available on USFQ's webpage for international students.

3. **Arrival:** Your host family will pick you up at the airport upon arrival and bring you to your new home. They will also bring you to the university for the orientation so you know how to arrive on your own.

4. **Health issues:** There are several reputable medical facilities in Quito. Ask your family for their recommendation as quality does vary. The IRSEP program provides CISI international insurance for the duration of your program, however payment is usually required when medical attention is received and you will later be reimbursed by the insurance company. Most routine medical procedures and attention are relatively cheap, but it is always a good idea to have a credit card in case of emergencies. Fortunately, I never needed to use the medical insurance; however, most students do use it especially for stomach issues. Hospital Metropolitana and Clinica Pichincha are highly recommended.

5. **Money Matters:** I would recommend that you budget \$500 or \$600 per month. I (and most of my friends) spent more than that. Most people simply use

ATMs to withdraw money from their US account. International fees as high as \$5 per transaction do apply with some banks. Check with your bank before leaving and maybe shop around to see if you can find a bank that has lower fees. No one I know opened a bank account in Ecuador and I don't think it is necessary. It is highly recommended to get extra debit and credit cards before leaving in case of loss or theft as it can take several weeks to receive your new card via mail. I never used traveler's checks as I think they are an inconvenience.

6. Stipend/Scholarship: The IRSEP Ecuador program is scholarship based not stipend based. Therefore, you simply do not pay tuition, housing (2 meals included) or insurance. All other costs are covered by the student.

Average Monthly Budget

IRSEP Ecuador

Item	Amount	Comments
rent	0	covered by scholarship
utilities	0	covered by scholarship
food	\$150	Includes lunches at restaurants around campus and occasional diners out with friends
transportation	\$75	figure based on bus rates, taxis, and some short distance travel.
entertainment	\$100	figure includes some dinners out and drinking at bars / clubs, taxi home
books (per term) photocopies/school supplies	\$40	Photocopies of most books are sold in the book store rather than the actual book
TOTAL	\$365	My estimates are actually less than what I spent, but I did go out to bars and restaurants often and traveled considerably.

7. University/Campus: USFQ has an absolutely beautiful campus located about 20 minutes outside Quito in Cumbaya. Cumbaya is about 1,000 feet lower than Quito and is usually sunny and very pleasant. USFQ has 4,000 students of which about 150 to 200 are international each semester.

Computer labs are available but the internet is slow and it is kind of a hassle. I lived in Cumbaya and took a taxi to school every day, therefore I was able to bring

my laptop whenever I wanted. That is much more convenient however it is not recommended to bring your laptop often when traveling by bus from Quito.

There are many student services and campus groups available on campus. Get involved! It's a great way to meet people and explore your interests. I took Salsa classes and was in Salsa club. If you have any problems or questions the International Students Office is always available.

Because there are so many international students (mostly American) at USFQ it is easy to stay within your gringo circles. I highly recommend making a special effort to make Ecuadorian friends. I have lots of Ecuadorian friends and have to say that it really does make a difference and it makes the experience that much more special.

8. University Calendar: USFQ is on the North American schedule which we are used to at the U of M. Fall semester classes at USFQ begin the last week of August and end a few days before Christmas. This year second semester began January 7th and ended May 18th. International students will arrive to Ecuador a few days before classes begin. The university will hold an orientation for international students a few days prior to the beginning of classes and there will also be a party at a local bar for international students to get to know each other before classes begin. The two main vacations are Christmas (approximately 2 weeks) and Semana Santa in April (one week). Final exams are conducted similar to the US. Classes end one week and finals begin the next.

9. Academic Issues: Classes are generally similar to classes in the US. There is an average of 20 to 30 students per class and they are conducted on a typical US schedule. Quality of classes varies as with anywhere. The majority of classes are conducted in Spanish but many are available in English as well. Class credits are pretty much the same as the U of M and most classes are 3 or 4 credits. Before beginning classes students will take a test to determine Spanish fluency. The score of this test will tell you which classes you may enroll in. Higher level Spanish speakers will be able to enroll in all courses at USFQ. I took mostly International Relations and Administration courses, some in English, some in Spanish.

Notable courses:

International Negotiation with Nicole Bibbins- Excellent course

Temas de America Latina with Jose Julio Cesar- Good course

Politica Ecuatoriana y Pensamiento with Claudio Creamer- Very difficult for int'l students

Operations Management with Gerald Finch- Good course

I'm going for a Bachelor's of Individual Studies, so I was able to write my major to include the courses I was taking at USFQ. Therefore, I don't really know how well classes transfer for traditional majors.

10. Language Courses: I never took any special language courses, but Spanish classes are offered at USFQ just like any other course.

11. Volunteer/Internships: If you wish to find volunteer work, it's always available. There is a list of organizations that accept volunteers in an office above the international students office. I stayed for the summer after the school year ended to do an internship. Again, they are available you just have to do some digging.

12. Housing: With this program you will live with the family of the USFQ student who goes to the U of M. In exceptional circumstances a different family could be assigned. Being that you live with a family, nothing is really needed as far as household items and you don't pay for housing. 2 meals per day are included.

13. Eating & Entertainment: I usually ate breakfast and dinner with my family. In most families the maid/s will do all of the cooking and cleaning. I recommend trying anything your family gives you to eat, although some of it can be tough. I often got served cow's stomach, chicken's feet, tongue, liver, guinea pig, intestine and lots of other goodies. Give it a shot, it's not all bad. For lunch, I ate with friends at various restaurants around the university. On the weekends most students head to La Mariscal in Quito.

14. Transportation: Most of the time I got around by bus and taxi. Buses are cheap and go everywhere. Taxis are also cheap and convenient.

15. Communication: To keep in touch with my family and friends back home, I always used Skype. I think it is essential. I actually had wireless internet in my house, so I could call home whenever I wanted. Many other families don't have wireless internet. Then the best way to communicate is by using internet cafes. To talk to local friends I use my cell phone. Cell phones are essential. Luckily, you don't have to sign a contract; you just buy a phone and then buy minutes as you go.

16. Background information on country/city: Quito is located in the middle of Ecuador at 10,000ft in the Andes mountains. It sits on the equator but because of the altitude isn't really that hot. Quito is often cloudy and 70's during the day 50's or 60's at night. To travel to the coast or rainforest, it usually takes 6 to 10 hours by bus.

17. Safety: Unfortunately, you really have to stay on your toes in Quito and Ecuador in general. Pickpocketing is extremely common, especially on buses and other crowded areas. Unfortunately, muggings are also relatively common. I've gotten lucky and haven't been mugged but most of my friends have. It is just part of it. Luckily, this danger can easily be avoided by never walking anywhere at night and always following your instincts. Be cautious, not brave. Never carry more than you need. Also, when traveling outside Quito by bus, be very careful with your belongings. Never put them over your head or under your seat. I recommend bringing a small bag and leaving it in your lap and putting the rest of your stuff under the bus.

18. Packing: Clothes: most of the time I dress pretty casually, but I do recommend bringing a few nice things for special events. Make sure to bring a few sweaters or hoodies as Quito can get pretty cold, especially at night. A light jacket is also pretty useful. Pretty much all toiletries are available here, but will be more expensive. If you have a specific brand you want, bring it from home. I just brought 2 suitcases and my school back pack and didn't ship anything ahead of time. I felt like I had plenty with that. And of course, don't over pack, you'll want space for the stuff you buy here. I also recommend bringing a laptop, I can't imagine not having mine here.

19. Resources: If you have any questions feel free to contact me.

20. IRSEP Requirements: As part of IRSEP, we were required to take an online cultural course to maximize your time abroad. It is as much work as you put into it. You also write about 5 email assignments that you then send to the other IRSEP students. That was fun to read about everyone else's experiences. I also did meet with the U of M Vice President and Provost when they came to visit. I am the first IRSEP Ecuador student so I didn't have contact with any prior participant but I did have quite a bit of contact with the future Ecuadorian IRSEP student; he is a good friend of mine.

21. **Overall Assessment:** IRSEP Ecuador was an absolutely wonderful experience. I have grown and learned so much over the past year. I have made some of the best friends of my life and I will always look back on this year with love and affinity. Ecuador is not perfect but I love it with all my heart. I wouldn't trade this year for anything in the world.