YOUR JOURNEY STARTS HERE
SITE HANDBOOK
#ECUADOR
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> Introduction
This handbook was written to provide you with useful information regarding your participation in an Amizade sponsored program. It answers many of the frequently asked questions by previous participants. Read this entire handbook carefully and contact our office if you have any questions. Please note that the best resource for you during your pre-departure planning is our website, which can be found at amizade.org

> Amizade’s Mission & Vision
Amizade inspires empathy, catalyzes social action, and links diverse communities through Fair Trade Learning. We want to create a world where diverse communities connect freely, forge lasting relationships, and build a more just world together.

> Amizade’s Commitment
At the heart of Amizade is the sincere belief that intercultural understanding and the development of global citizens is essential to our increasingly connected global world. We are committed to providing you with an intercultural experience that allows you to make concrete contributions to a community resulting in a deeper understanding of your role in the global community.
1. Approach to Service

Ethic of Service
Amizade strives to promote an “ethic of service” on all our programs. This means that we envision the entire experience as one of service to our fellow human beings. There will be scheduled time for completing service projects on each program, but we also encourage you to carry your ethic of service with you throughout the program. You can do this by volunteering to help with food preparation, cleaning, or various other daily tasks.
As guests in the host community, Amizade volunteers are encouraged to act respectfully in all community interactions. The service experience provides a unique opportunity to learn from a new community. Since most Amizade volunteers arrive at service under the Amizade umbrella, they are often seen as “ambassadors” representing Amizade, your school, state and/or home community.

Volunteer Opportunities
While in Ecuador, volunteers’ service will vary depending on the program type. Volunteers may help local organization’s programming or work with local community members in construction, farm maintenance, or social program projects. Please note that the current needs of the community will determine the service project. As such, the specifics regarding your volunteer work will be provided to you upon arrival.

2. The On-Site Experience

The Amizade Experience
The time that you spend in Ecuador is sure to be one filled with many new experiences: new outlooks, new cultures and new situations. Therefore, the Amizade experience is enhanced by looking at some of the things that have been written in relation to the country and the issues over the last several years, getting a rough idea of what’s happening, and going with an informed set of questions in mind. It will allow you to connect with new friends, raise difficult issues, foster critical reflection, generate momentum towards creating change and begin to understand an entirely different experience and place. That’s a lot to accomplish in such a short amount of time, yet much of it will happen. This experience is about immersing yourself deeply into the complexity of the culture and history of Ecuador —so much so that you realize that your time on the program can’t possibly suffice to see and understand all of it.
All of this will take place in the context of a relatively unpredictable environment. Unpredictable does not mean that it is unsafe. All programs work through our partner individuals and community organizations. Unpredictable simply describes the “climate” of Amizade programs in a new environment.
That means it is characterized by something called a “lack of redundancy.” Lack of redundancy refers to an absence of continuously present and reliable systems and products. With transportation, it means buses may be delayed. All of this relates to an absolutely essential ongoing Amizade motto, which is:

"OK, GOOD."

“Okay, good” refers to moments when we show up for transit at the right time, yet quickly learn that transit will not be arriving for eight hours. “Okay, good,” we have an opportunity to hang out in Ecuador. “Okay, good” refers to moments when we long for some familiar comfort foods, but instead we have another helping of the same local foods. “Okay, good,” we have a great deal more of this local food than most of those around us. “Okay, good” refers to times when we’re crammed into transportation (cars, vans, trains) in a way that we did not previously believe was possible. “Okay, good,” we have transportation and are moving to our desired destination more easily than most people in the area. “Okay, good” is about remembering – even when we feel that we are struggling – that we are fortunate for the opportunities to travel and serve; that we are still in amazing places with incredible people; and that life will go on even though (unlike in our local environment) the day-to-day life is just not all that predictable. Of course, “Okay, good” is also useful when the last leg of the return flight home doesn’t connect at the right time!

> Amizade Staff
Amizade programs are staffed by a variety of motivated, trained people. We encourage you to get to know the staff members that will be coordinating your volunteer program. Any concerns or questions during the program should be directed to the appropriate Amizade staff.

> Site Director
The Site Director is the primary program contact responsible for coordinating volunteers. The Site Director is responsible for coordination of logistics such as greeting volunteers, arranging housing and meals, setting up cultural experiences with local community members, and often leading reflection discussions. Coordination also involves setting up the service project, arranging transportation to and from various locations, partnering with local experts to determine appropriate donations and any other related planning. The Site Director will work closely with you when you first arrive to help arrange everything. It is essential that all concerns and specialized requests during your program be directed specifically to the Amizade Site Director who will work in conjunction with our community partners and contractors.

> On-Site Orientation
Upon arrival in Ecuador Amizade will hold a program orientation for all volunteers. Many issues such as health, safety, and security will be addressed as well as site logistics, standard procedures, and other important information that will benefit each volunteer to know.

> Group Living
Amizade programs generally have a strong core element built around group living. For many people, living, volunteering, studying, completing projects, and spending leisure time in a group may be new. Therefore we ask all Amizade volunteers to approach group interaction with flexibility, openness, and constructive communication. We strive to respect each other’s space and needs while also supporting each other to achieve personal goals on the program.
> **Flexibility**

Flexibility is the most important element on an Amizade program. Itineraries may change at the last minute for health, safety, and security reasons, in order to meet current community needs, or to participate in unexpected opportunities for recreational, educational, or cultural exploration. Many aspects of traveling are unpredictable and time-consuming, so be prepared to enjoy the unexpected surprises and embrace the opportunities they provide!

> **Housing**

Housing ranges from group hostels to homestays to 3-star hotels, depending on what is appropriate in the area and for your group. You will get more information about your group's specific type of housing during the pre-departure orientation. No matter what type of housing you're in, please observe the behaviors of the people around you, be aware of your surroundings, and remember that you are a guest in this area. Try your best to adapt and learn what's around you.

> **Transportation on Site**

For our volunteers, transportation will be arranged for the duration of the program. However, for all excursions that are not included in the program itinerary and for individual volunteers, each volunteer will be responsible for the transportation costs of taking a bus or taxi.

> **Meals**

Eating abroad is an adventure of new tastes, smells, and meals! Since you are living as part of the community, you will have the opportunity to try genuine local dishes. In the countryside of Ecuador, lunch and breakfast are typically large meals. Dinner tends to be much simpler.

You will get more information about your group's specific meal plan, including meals that are not included (if any), during the pre-departure orientation. Meals will address the dietary restrictions and/or allergies of the group. Some snacks will be provided between meals, but you may also bring or purchase your own snacks.

> **Note to Vegetarians and Vegans**

Amizade will make every effort to provide vegetarian and vegan options, but sometimes they will need to be supplemented with further protein and vitamins. We encourage you to bring healthy snacks and vitamins with you. Please indicate your dietary needs and restrictions on your Amizade Participant Information Form.

> **Laundry**

Amizade encourages volunteers to pack enough clothes for your journey and to bring clothing that can be easily washed in a sink and hung to dry. Laundry service will be available during your program in Los Bancos at a local laundromat. For group programs, you usually will get your clothes back within 1 day. Cost is determined by weight or the number of clothing items. Underwear should not be sent to the laundry service.
> 3. Local Considerations

For more information on the region and our partners, please visit:

- Nido de Vida
  - Nido de Vida's Facebook
- Region info
  - Lonely Planet | Ecuador

> 4. Preparing for Your Program

> Download the Vamoos App

We ask that you download the app before your program begins. Enter the user ID and passcode shared by your group leader to find your program. Vamoos is a convenient way to access information about your program, including maps, itineraries, and important documents. Find it on your phone's app store.

> Transportation to Site

Volunteers and groups are responsible for arranging transportation to Ecuador. An Amizade staff member will be available to meet you upon arrival.

> Travel Documents

The following information is for US citizens going abroad. If you are a non-US citizen, you must check with the consulate in your country regarding travel documents including passport and visa requirements.

A valid US passport is required to enter and depart Ecuador (must be valid for at least 6 months). US citizens whose passports are lost or stolen in Ecuador must obtain a new passport and present it, together with a police report of the loss or theft, to the Ecuadorian government immigration office at the Quito airport in order to obtain permission to depart.

**COVID-19 Vaccination cards**

Travel with your vaccination card. You will be required to show it prior to departing the U.S., as well as upon arrival in Ecuador. Certain businesses will ask to see vaccination cards prior to entry.

If you are a non-US citizen, you must check with the consulate in your country regarding travel documents including passport and visa requirements.

If you need to obtain a visa to the United States, you can visit the US consular site for further information at:

[http://www.travel.state.gov/](http://www.travel.state.gov/)
5. Health and Safety

> Safety Information
- While volunteers are on site for the service project, it is essential that volunteers adhere to all safety requirements and guidelines as determined by the service project supervisor and their staff.
- An on-site Amizade staff member will have a first aid kit and information on local medical facilities.
- As a volunteer in the community you will have local companions and friends. Volunteers should observe and imitate local customs regarding safety. Regardless of where you are it is best to travel in pairs, especially at night. Be cautious with your money and make sure you store it in a safe place or money belt. If you have any concerns about traveling at night, especially, Amizade recommends you take a taxi or ridesharing service.
- COVID-19 mitigation is very important to ensuring a safe and healthy experience, not only for you, but for the community as well. In addition to mandatory vaccination, we ask that you adhere to standard social distancing and hygiene best practices, including mask wearing, hand-washing, and maintaining distance in closed spaces.

> Drug Use
We adhere to a drug-free policy for all of our programs. We ask that all volunteers please respect this as a rule of Amizade. Failure to comply with this rule is grounds for removal from the program.

> Prescription Medicines
If you have prescription medicines, bring them in the original prescription bottles with your name on them and bring an ample supply for the duration of your program. Always ensure they are legal in the community you are visiting.

> The Best Medicine is Preventative Medicine
Throughout the program, please rest and drink plenty of water. While on the program, let the Amizade staff know if you have any concerns about your health and contact them immediately if you experience a health emergency.

6. Money Matters

> Accessing Money
We recommend that you travel with some cash. However, if a volunteer finds that they need additional cash, ATMs are available in Los Bancos.

> Spending Money
The majority of the costs of your program are included in the program fees for Amizade, so keep this in mind when you plan the amount of money that you would like to bring from home. You’ll want to have some spending money for souvenirs and for costs beyond those covered by the Amizade fee, such as snacks you buy in town.
7. General Packing List

>> PLEASE PACK LIGHTLY!
You should bring a maximum of two bags. Ideally, this includes one medium-sized suitcase/duffel/backpackers bag and a smaller daypack for daily activities. You should be able to carry your luggage comfortably by yourself. Please use your best judgment regarding valuables. Amizade does not recommend that volunteers bring expensive jewelry or electronics. Amizade is not liable for lost, stolen, or damaged articles.

> Recommended packing list
- Documents: health insurance card, passport and/or ID, vaccination cards
- Backup digital copies of all important documents
- Money: ATM/credit cards (set travel alert with bank), US cash ($100 or less)
- Cell phone and charger (check roaming rates)
- Universal travel outlet adapter (when applicable/from US not necessary)
- Water bottle
- Masks, hand sanitizer, and other PPE
- Notebook or journal and pens
- Towel and washcloth
- Toiletries – just the basics such as toothbrush, toothpaste, travel-size shampoo, soap, menstrual products
- Sun protection - Hat, sunscreen (reef-safe recommended, sunglasses
- Bug repellant
- Prescriptions in original bottles (be sure to bring enough for the entire program and verify that your medicine is legal in destination)
- Over-the-counter medications (headache, stomach, band-aids, anti-itch cream)
- Preferred snacks (like granola or protein bars)

Amizade will remind you about specific items to pack for Ecuador and answer any questions about clothing during your pre-departure orientation. Please remember to check the weather and your itinerary as you pack.

> Gifts
You may choose to bring small gifts or thank you cards for community members. Ideal gifts include those that reflect who you are and where you are from. For example, you may bring pens, flags, or t-shirts with your institution’s logo, or magnets with a picture of your city.
> 8. While You’re Away

> Cultural Adjustment
Cultural adjustment is a term used to describe the variety of reactions including stress, excitement, or frustration that can occur when you travel to a new culture. People sometimes feel unsure about what is appropriate in the new culture, confused about how to manage daily tasks, amazed by a new cultural practice, frustrated with managing language and cultural barriers, and/or generally vulnerable. This is normal and affects people at different times throughout a cultural immersion program. It is possible to experience cultural adjustment even if you’re traveling within your home country – no two communities are exactly alike! Remember to rest, eat, and take care of your physical and emotional needs in order to function at your best! Don’t be afraid to communicate how you’re feeling.

> Reverse Cultural Adjustment
Many volunteers find that they encounter difficulties when transitioning home. Volunteers will be happy to return home and visit with family and friends, but after the initial reunions take place, they often find that they experience problems when trying to communicate the experience that they had in the community they visited. Many people feel alienated, knowing that they have grown while many of those around them remain the same. This is also a normal reaction. It may help to connect with others who have had similar travel experiences, as they understand the need to talk about the experience in greater detail. If you would like to be connected with past volunteers from an Amizade program, please let an Amizade staff member know and we will connect you.

> AMIZADE CONTACT INFORMATION
If someone from home needs to contact a volunteer with an emergency message and can’t reach them directly, they can phone the Amizade US office to relay a message.

- **Amizade US Office Phone**: 412-586-4986.
- Have the person leave:
  - Their name
  - Your name
  - Their phone number
  - The message to be relayed

*For non-emergencies, please try to limit phone calls to Amizade’s business hours: 9 am – 4 pm EST from Monday - Friday.*

- **Amizade Emergency Phone #**: 412-586-4986.
  In an emergency, call the Amizade office phone number at any time. The line is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week during volunteer programs.

Your journey has now started!

See you in Ecuador.