

During the fall of 2024, I had the incredible opportunity to study abroad in Ecuador, a life changing experience that significantly enriched both my academic and personal growth. As a student pursuing a major in Languages and International Business at Clemson University, I completed three Spanish language courses while abroad, all of which transferred over and satisfied key degree requirements. More importantly, the immersive environment in Ecuador allowed me to develop a deeper cultural understanding and appreciation that extended far beyond the classroom.

Living and studying in a Latin American environment brought the Spanish language to life in a way that no textbook ever could. In Quito, Ecuador's vibrant capital, I attended classes alongside other students, which gave me daily exposure to the language in both academic and social settings. Beyond improving my Spanish fluency, I also gained a strong understanding of Ecuadorian social norms, values, and traditions. Everything from casual conversations at local cafés to in-depth class discussions helped me absorb the nuances of the language and culture.

A defining aspect of my time abroad was living with a host family. This experience provided me with a firsthand look into Ecuadorian family dynamics and day-to-day life. Sharing meals, participating in family celebrations, and simply spending time with my host parents and siblings helped me understand the importance of community, hospitality, and connection in Ecuadorian culture. Their kindness and generosity left a lasting impression on me, and I truly felt like part of the family.

Outside of academics and family life, I also took full advantage of exploring Ecuador's breathtaking landscapes and historical sites, particularly in the Andes region. Quito itself is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, rich in colonial architecture, bustling markets, and panoramic views from landmarks like El Panecillo and Teleférico. Just north of the city, I visited the Mitad del Mundo, where I had the surreal experience of standing directly on the equator.

Beyond Quito, I explored several iconic Andean destinations. One highlight was Otavalo, home to one of the largest and most famous indigenous markets in South America, where I admired intricate handmade textiles and crafts. I also visited Cotopaxi National Park, where I marveled at the snow-capped Cotopaxi Volcano. Another unforgettable destination was Quilotoa, a volcanic crater lake with mesmerizing turquoise waters, surrounded by rugged cliffs and scenic trails. Further south, I ventured to Baños, a small town known for its waterfalls, hot springs, and adventurous activities like zip lining and hiking to the "Swing at the End of the World." Each destination offered a unique glimpse into Ecuador's natural beauty and cultural diversity.

Throughout my time in Ecuador, I met a variety of people who enriched my experience in countless ways. From fellow students to local residents, I formed meaningful connections

that have continued even after returning home. These friendships, built on shared experiences and cultural exchange, have become one of the most valuable outcomes of my study abroad journey.

In reflecting on my semester in Ecuador, I am grateful not only for the academic progress I made but also for the deep personal growth I experienced. The combination of language immersion, cultural exploration, and human connection has left an indelible mark on me. My time abroad has enhanced my global perspective, strengthened my adaptability, and affirmed my passion for international business and cross cultural communication.