



Usman

From Burlington to Ecuador

Amazon, Andes, Ocean, Volcanoes, Ecuador has it all!

Hola!

Ecuador, el pequeño país en el mitad del mundo. Ecuador, the only place in the world, where you can start from the tropically diverse Amazon rainforest to the breathtaking, marvellous Andes mountains and finish off at the Equatorial sun drenched coast all in one day. Ecuador, the place where dance is the universal language and Ecuador where the people are nicer then the heavenly landscape you see every day. It has been almost three months; and already I have learned so much and seen so much. From climbing a snow covered volcano, swimming in the pacific, experiencing a South American professional soccer match, dancing until dawn and so much more! These three months have been unlike any other with stories, events and people that I will never forget.

August 17th was the day, a day that had many different feelings, thoughts and emotions for me. At the airport, saying goodbye to my family was difficult, and entering into customs I had every emotion rushing through me possible. Arriving in Quito (the capital), I was exhausted, anxious but excited. Knowing barely any Spanish, I was luckily able to find my host family and my counselors. Driving through Quito to my house which is located right outside Quito in a place called Valle de Los Chillos was about a 20 minute drive. Staring out the window, I could notice that this wasn't Burlington anymore because I was surrounded by an endless view of mountains.

About a week later, I started school. School here is very different than school at home. The first big difference in the schools is discipline. The school I attend is very strict, by far the strictest school I have ever been to in my life. We have two uniforms (

a formal and informal one), that is to be worn and kept clean, we have multiple rules on hygiene and attending classes. School starts at 7:45 and ends at 1:45. I am in the final course referred to as Sexto curso (sixth course), here they have different fields of education, physics/math, chem/bio or socials. My host parents and along with me decided that it would be better to go into socials to improve my Spanish. As far as other students in my school, they are super friendly and kind. Being an exchange student also helps because most people ask about your life back home or in Ecuador. Although I love my school, I miss my high school back home in Canada too and feel extremely lucky to go to such a great school.

My family here is super nice and fairly easy going. Our house has a lot of people around usually, either other family members or friends which is always nice as we're always joking around with each other. My host dad here works as for the City of Quito and my host mom is saleswomen for a mattress company. I have a brother here, age 14, same age as my brother at home. My brother is an extremely talented soccer player and he is great as a person, he is a bit wild at times, but I always enjoy talking to him and spending time with him. As a family, we have gone to a lot of cool places like the high city of Ambato and to even climbing volcanoes. When January comes, I think I will have a very difficult time switching families because right now I have a great relationship with my family and it will be so difficult moving on!!

Spanish, coming to Ecuador, I knew just a few words (hola, me llamo usman, gracias?...) The first few weeks were difficult, I didn't really understand much, and trying to learn as fast as I can was hard. But almost 3 months later, I can safely say, I understand the majority of what is being spoken around me. Speaking wise, I can pretty much say what I want without many problems either. The tricky parts in Spanish are the complicated tenses and conjugations of verbs. Spanish is a language that is very unique and worldwide, having a larger amount of native speakers than English. It is famous for its rolling of the "rr" and the similarities to the other romantic languages of French, Portuguese and Italian.

Before I go into talk about other stuff, I think it is worth noting the scenery and landscape of Ecuador. It is indescribable! And just straight up awesome. I happen to live in the Sierras of Ecuador, and every day, I wake up and walk outside and I'm in awe of the mountains. Heck, even as I write this, I'm looking out my window, across the valley and I can literally point out 2 or 3 volcanoes, it is just unbelievable. The weather in the sierras, as I should point out is just plain unpredictable. Normally, it is usually sunny and hot in the morning (around 25 degrees) and most of the afternoon, then it is followed by quick monsoon like showers sometime in the day and finally the temperature drops down to about 15 or 10 at night. It is extremely unpredictable and it can change in a flash, in one case it has actually caused me to catch a cold! I have also had the lucky opportunity to go to the coast as well, and it is definitely just as

beautiful, staring out at the bright blue ocean. Driving from the sierras to the coast is extremely beautiful because you are literally winding through the mountains and it definitely brings up some spectacular views. In general, Ecuador is one of the most naturally beautiful countries around, and the Ecuadorians take great pride in it.

Some things I have done so far, I have travelled to two volcanoes, Pichincha and Cotopaxi (both active). Pichincha is a volcano that shadows the city of Quito, I was able to go up on the teleferico and it gave an amazing view of the city and the valleys surrounding it. The second volcano was Cotopaxi, it is much higher and I actually had to climb it. It had an altitude of about 22,000 feet above sea level. Climbing volcanoes is not as easy as it sounds! The altitude really gets to you, and the harder you start working, the harder it is to breathe as well... Another fun adventure I had here was going to a world cup qualifier match of Ecuador and Venezuela. MY first soccer game ever and it was a huge one. Going in, I didn't know what to expect, but the one word I can use to describe it is "Loco" (crazy!!). As soon as the opposing team came out, the amount of Spanish profanity I learned in that one day, just wow. I went with my host family and they pointed out that yes this is South America, and in South American futbol which is a way of life here, anything goes! In the end Ecuador won convincingly 2-0 and started off strong their qualifying campaign for Brasil 2014. Also a few weeks prior, I had the opportunity to go to an Aerosmith concert. I only heard about it a week before hand, but in honesty, I am really a borderline casual fan. But! The motto here for every exchange student here is "Hey, it is Ecuador, when am I ever going to do this again and it's a bunch of crazy exchange students, VAMOS!" The concert turned out to be better than I expected, and I can safely say that the first real concert I went to in my life was an Aerosmith concert and in Ecuador. Now that's a story!

In these past 3 months I have had the opportunity to go on two Rotary trips, both to the coast. The first trip was my Spanish camp; at one of the best beach resorts in Ecuador. Located at Mumpiche, Esmeraldas the whole camp was 5 days of fun with about 70 exchange students. Exchange students from the cities of Quito and Ambato areas mainly. I would say the Spanish classes were fairly easy but the best part was just being around the other exchange students, 5 days of beach, unlimited food and dancing, A LOT OF DANCING! It is worth noting, that in Ecuador, everyone dances, everyone.. At parties, or any social event, it is a form of expression. Some days I honestly think that there are no other people in the world that dances as much as Ecuadorians, salsa, rumba, samba, reggatone and so forth. My second trip was also to the coast but it was to the Sunny Coast of Manabi. This trip was with all the 140 exchange students in Ecuador. These five days had to be some of the best I've had here, and I won't ever forget them. We went to different beaches and cities such as Manta, Crucita, La Boca and Portoviejo. We had many activities such as beach sports, a talent show, city parade, visiting the historical museums and a chiva! A chiva is pretty much

a party bus, very typical of Ecuador; it is a bus that travels around the city with loud music and a bunch of people. On the final night, we had three chivas with 140 wild exchange students, driving through the city of Portoviejo, with loud music and a lot of dancing. I can literally say, that the chiva was one of the most fun things I've ever done, because everyone in the city came to meet us, high five us and it was just a huge dance party. We danced a lot at Manabi too, practically every night, its just the Ecuadorian way. After my first two trips, I look extremely forward to the next ones- Amazon, Galapagos Islands and The Cross Ecuador trip.

As far as thoughts on my experience and what I have learned here, it's that a lot of it has been the little things. Patience is definitely important, because during the first few weeks or month it is hard, the language is difficult and confusing and school can be frustrating too. But I think just having patience and knowing that things will get better, really helped me adjust fast and now I can say, things are a lot easier. Another thing I would say is that it is important to understand the different culture and way of living. Living in Ecuador, and in South America, it is quite different from Canada, it is a bit more hectic and crazy here and people tend to behave differently. The people here in Ecuador, are much more touchy feely and the majority are extremely friendly (which I love) then in Canada where we are more reserved. One big example are the greetings, here in order to greet all women of all ages, it is always a semi hug and a kiss on the cheek, at first this was difficult and I felt awkward doing this because at home, it is usually a wave or handshake. Over time, I started getting more and more used to it and now it's natural. Realizing that things are different here than at home and just having patience with them is really important and I think it's something that has really helped me adjust quickly here.

In a short three months, I have seriously been through a lot and seen a lot. A year ago, I would have never believed I would be where I am today. This place has really taught me a lot about others and also myself. I can honestly say I have connections almost anywhere in the world today from Brazil, Germany, Taiwan, USA, France, Iceland, Denmark, Switzerland and soo many more places. These last three months have flown by so fast, but it's only just the beginning, there is so much more to see and explore here! I want to thank Rotary District 7080 and especially my rotary clubs at home and here for giving me this incredible opportunity and helping me discover such an amazing country!

Chao y Cuidate,

Usman,

Ecuador