

Volunteering and Interning with CRACYP for Progreso Verde (“Green Progress”) Costa Region



Location



You will be based in the picturesque little village of Jilimbí in Bolívar Province, close to the border with Cotopaxi Province, in the subtropical western foothills of the Andes Mountains in Ecuador. The region is known as the “costa”, though is far from the coast. It’s a rural area with very little infrastructure but lots of biodiversity. The nearest town you might find on a map is Moraspungo, about an hour’s journey up into the mountains from the main road between Quevedo and Ventanas. You may work in Jilimbí itself or in any of several nearby villages or member communities of the CADO organic sugar cane project.

Most people here work in agriculture – sugar cane is grown in large quantities. There are very few salaried jobs in this area. Apart from the teachers in the village schools, almost everyone either works on their own land, works someone else’s land as a day labourer, or has their own small business, such as a shop or a truck for hire.

The climate in Jilimbí is usually comfortably warm to hot in the dry season, slightly cooler in the wet season and occasionally cold. At times you may be working or camping in communities at higher altitudes where it is cooler and can be quite chilly at night, so you should be prepared for all eventualities. There are a few remaining fragments of native forest in the area and the sugarcane farmers, who need running water to distill their alcohol, are conscious of the need to conserve and extend the forested areas and water sources.



The area is rich in luxuriant vegetation and wildlife. Birdwatchers should definitely bring binoculars. Insect life is also abundant and a wide range of weird and wonderful moths are attracted to the lights in the volunteer house, perhaps hoping to be named “Bug of the Night” and appear in various volunteer blogs. Local crops include sugar cane, oranges, bananas, cacao (chocolate), yuca and papayas.

The program location is fairly remote and you will not be easily contactable, other than in cases of emergency. There are mobile phones in the local communities (though no signal in the volunteer house itself) but few fixed phone lines, other than in Moraspungo. There is (slow) internet access available in Moraspungo, which is reached by a 45 minute walk followed by a short bus ride. There is a bus from Jilimbí to Moraspungo on Saturdays (market day). Other days, you’ll be walking! You need to be fit enough to walk under warm, humid conditions.



When is the best time to intern or volunteer in the costa?



Our work continues almost all year round and there is always something to do. The dry season in this area is usually from around June to December, although this varies from year to year. The wet season, from around January to late May, can cause travel delays at times, but there is always some indoor or sheltered work to do such as project planning, training, teaching or implementing indoor projects. The project is closed from mid December to late January, to allow for staff vacations and avoid the worst of the rainy season. University holidays book up quite early, so do apply as soon as possible.



Accommodation



Accommodation is usually in a shared house in the village of Jilimbí. The house is basic but has everything we need, with two shared bedrooms, a living room and kitchen. The indoor bathroom has a flush toilet and (cold) shower. (The weather is usually warm, so a cold shower is refreshing!) We grow some of our own food in the backyard. At times you may camp out if you are working in a different community for a few days. At times interns may stay with a local family if required by CRACYP. Our friendly cat, Namibia, is in charge of insect control, a task she approaches with enthusiasm.

Intern and volunteer coordinator

Our sustainable development coordinator, Nick Ohde, will supervise your time with us. Nick's first degree was in journalism, giving him a solid grounding in effective communication. He then did a master's at Iowa State University on water quality and soil erosion in agriculture. He has worked at Iowa State University conducting research on perennial grass for biofuels, teaching ecology & watershed management, and coordinating professional development workshops for high school and community college teachers on the subject of renewable energy and agriculture.



Nick has spent time travelling in Ecuador, and also lived in Costa Rica. While leading American graduate students in Uganda, Nick coordinated with local NGOs and international universities to achieve the required development objectives. His communication skills and experience in community development, agriculture and the link between them, serve him well in this rural, agricultural village here. He loves to cook and enjoys using local ingredients to make tasty healthy food. His hobbies include gardening, yoga and basketball as well as taking any chance to travel.

Interns will have a formal meeting with Nick each week to report on progress and discuss issues, challenges, learning points and goals for the coming week. You are expected to prepare for these meetings so that Nick can most effectively mentor your progress. He can introduce you to relevant people and help you navigate local culture and an unfamiliar way of doing things. He is not a trained language teacher, but can offer help with Spanish vocabulary, grammar, etc. in the context of your project.



What's it like?



Projects here generally involve sugarcane and related products, along with fair trade and organic agriculture, or community education and conservation. You might be working with the village school, the organic sugarcane cooperative or the new women's group. In your free time, you could grind cacao beans to make chocolate, chat with local people at the village store, trek in the Andean forest or just snooze in a hammock. In this warm, humid climate, life has a relaxed pace and is mostly lived outdoors – we are part of the ecosystem. Costeños are friendly, the culture vibrant and most people work on the land. Vegetation is large, lush and abundant. Brightly-coloured butterflies and dragonflies abound, and birdwatchers will enjoy the sight of parrots, toucans and hummingbirds.



Phoros thanks to Sarah Clifford, Corentin Denys, Tanya Conover & Margot Conover.

