



Volunteer and Internships Programs ECUADOR

Equilibrio Azul is a non-for profit organization created in 2005 to protect the marine resources of Ecuador. Our mission is to integrate local communities, governmental organizations and other institutions into a participative management of the Ocean.

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WORK AREA

Currently our bigger conservations efforts are concentrated at the Machalilla National Park. This region area has many unique features that make it one of the most important protected areas of Ecuador. Machalilla has an important marine area for coastal Ecuador. However, lack of resources and knowledge has prevented a sustainable management of the area.

Isla de la Plata (La Plata island) is perhaps the most representative area inside the Marine Reserve. Due to its characteristics and its ecological importance this area has been chosen as Equilibrio Azul's main conservation objective.

JOB DESCRIPTION

All interns, students and volunteers will spend most of their time in the field helping the organization with different projects. Every person that joins us receives our direct guidance and orientation since their arrival. During the orientation volunteers will receive detailed information about Ecuador and the area where they will be working at. Students can be involved in more than one project depending on their interest and availability.

We eagerly try to make Ecuadorian and international students work together as the best way to learn from each other and as a way to promote cultural exchange. To our organization security is one of the most important parts of the program. Therefore, before starting any project all safety issues will be discussed in detail.

SCUBA DIVING

SCUBA diving is a big part of the activities Equilibrio Azul does. Not only used for recreation and research, diving is considered a big educational tool. Our organization thinks of diving as the best way to constantly assess the status of the marine resources, but also as the way to promote, love and care for the Oceans.

We strongly recommend our volunteers to experiment SCUBA diving in Ecuador. For those who are already divers, our projects offer a big opportunity to expand their experience and knowledge while helping. They can also increase their certification level.

For those that want to start diving with us, Equilibrio Azul PADI professional diving instructors would provide all the means to do it as soon as they arrive to Ecuador. Depending on students diving interest they can become professional divers with us while helping (extra costs apply for SCUBA diving).

CONSERVATION PROJECTS



CORAL PROJECT:

Coral reefs are among the most productive and biodiverse ecosystems on the Planet. Machalilla National Park protects the areas with the highest abundance of corals on the coast of Ecuador. Despite the importance of the coral reef ecosystems very little is known about their status in our country and corals are constantly threatened by human activities. Equilibrio Azul along with the National Park authority is constantly looking for conservation alternatives for the reefs.

A mooring buoy program to avoid the use of anchors over the corals has started and several structures have been set as an artificial reef pilot project in this area. Equilibrio Azul's coral mapping program's objective is to provide data to create a map with the location and characteristics of the corals of Machalilla. The coral reef project requires long hours on boats and in the water. In 2008 we started a coral restoration project trying to reset broken corals into the reef.

Volunteers will help building buoys and artificial coral structures. They will also participate setting buoys and restoring coral reefs. Please notice this does not mean diving everyday. **(Please look at Extra Diving costs if you want to join this project)**

Beach and underwater clean-up: debris in beaches, reefs and other marine environments jeopardize the life on many species. As another alternative to protect our reefs all our volunteers will help us with our clean-up project in beaches and underwater. This initiative aims to prevent marine life getting hurt by human waste and also provide us with information of the major sources of pollution of the area.

Requirements: Open water diver certification: can be obtained with us **(Please look at Extra Diving costs)**



FISHERIES PROJECT:

Shifting Ecuador's Baselines: Not knowing the past of our marine resources makes very hard to establish the right policy of management because we do not know where we want to drive our resources today. Therefore this project will –using proven techniques- interview old fishermen to recreate the status of past Ecuador marine resources. Local students will be participating with international students.

Fishermen's children education.- This year we want to bring fishermen's children to the Machalilla National Park Marine area. Even though it is so close to their homes many of them have never visited the

area. We hope that they will value these resources more if they feel that they belong to them. Depending on the age of the students this project will involve games and costumes.



MANTARAY PROJECT:

Since 2004 Equilibrio Azul runs a photoidentification project of the Giant Manta Ray that annually migrates to La Plata Island. This year we are hoping to get images not only from Machalilla, but from other areas of Ecuador to compare them and create a catalog for international sharing. This project requires long hours on boats and in the water. All dives will be carried with a professional diver and photographer.

Requirements: Advanced open water diver certification (can be obtained while diving) **(Please look at Extra Diving Costs)**



SHARK PROJECT:

Fishery monitoring program.- Shark populations are diminishing around the world. This project obtains data about shark landings in an artisanal fishery port. This information is very useful towards a population assessment of sharks and rays in Ecuador. Students will visit fishing ports everyday and learn how to identify sharks and how to obtain different types of data. Volunteers will be working with local students and a permanent supervisor in the project.

Boat observer program: In 2008 we coordinated with fishermen to go out fishing. The objective of this practice is to understand where, how and what are they fishing. This information is very limited for Ecuador's waters, which makes shark conservation very difficult. Interested volunteers will join the crew of these small vessels armed with a GPS, Cell phone, VHF radio, Waterproof clothes, and many data sheets. A permanent supervisor will coordinate this activity all the time.



SEA TURTLE PROJECT:

Monitoring nesting beaches monitoring and tagging.- Machalilla National Park beaches are considered some of the last nesting areas for sea turtles in Ecuador. Even though the number of sea turtle that arrive yearly to the coast is low compared to other areas of the world, it is very important to

evaluate and protect the nests. Nesting season starts by the end of January. Students will develop daily visits to the main beaches of the area in order to identify nests and protect them.

Sea turtles nesting in the area should be tagged with tags provided by NOAA La Jolla (Tagging will be supervised every time). International students will work with local students in this project. Once the nesting season is over we start diving to observe sea turtles try to identify marks, and hope for new tag deployment. Around our main islands sea turtles gathered for unknown reasons. Using tested methods we will capture them to collect measurements, samples and to apply a fin tag.

Please notice that nest numbers are low in this area. However, surveys must be developed everyday to protect every single nest.



WHALE PROJECT:

Humpback whales photoidentification.- Pictures of whale tails are used as finger prints to identify individuals. During whale season Equilibrio Azul usually help other organizations with this task. Volunteers are required to join tourist boats and take pictures of whale tails. This activity is coordinated with other organizations, therefore depends on availability.

OTHER PROJECTS:

Some of our volunteers or interns are interested in developing some new projects while working with us. We are very open to receiving ideas that can be integrated to our work.

IN CASE YOU ARE A STUDENT OR A GRAD STUDENT INTERESTED IN DEVELOPING YOUR RESEARCH IN ECUADOR. PLEASE CONTACT US IMMEDIATLY.

GENERALITIES

MINIMUM WORKING TIME

Considering the amount of effort required to coordinate our volunteer program our minimum time in the field is one month. However, we are always looking for volunteers willing to stay for longer periods. This will no only increase their input in the projects, but also their living and working experience in Ecuador.

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY:

Many of our projects will not require a direct interaction with local communities since research is the main goal. Additionally, most groups will be accompanied by local students and supervisors; therefore, limitations in the language should not be taken as a major deficiency for this program. However, we recommend students this trip to Ecuador as the best way to improve their Spanish in a short period of time. A basic level of Spanish will definitely increase the experience of the students throughout the program.

EQUIPMENT:

Our organization will provide the basic gear for research. We recommend a small digital camera as very handy to document the projects and experiences. All students must have their basic camping gear (sleeping bag, flashlight, binoculars, personal medication, hand-knife). For students joining our diving projects we will be providing them with all the SCUBA gear, but a personal mask and snorkel is

recommended. For volunteers that rather wish to purchase this material or any SCUBA gear in Ecuador, Equilibrio Azul can help them in a very convenient way, applying our volunteer discounts all the time. Ask us we can definitely surprise you.

COSTS

WHY PAYING FOR OUR VOLUNTEER PROGRAM?

In the past we were able to cover most of our volunteer expenses. However, we realize this heavily limited the scope of our projects, volunteers' activities and the possibility to include local personal with no charges. We recognize it does not sound right "paying for work". But what we do is charge a fee to cover for your basic needs: housing and food. Considering most volunteers are in a very limited budget, as you will observe our cost have reduced as much as possible. Equilibrio Azul is a non-profit organization. All the incomes we received from our volunteers will go directly to cover their expenses, increase our projects goals and add local volunteers in the program. The money is never used for salaries. Additionally, we try to get back this small investment to our volunteers in their working experience and SCUBA discounts.

COSTS: 450 USD (per month)

Monthly cost includes:

- A supervisor who will follow work progress throughout the entire process
- Information to prepare you about the projects. This includes orientation and training for your specific project (Includes field material)
- Cell phone access all the time in the field
- One pick-up from the airport
- Monthly meetings with Equilibrio Azul team
- A supervisor for the field.
- Free internet access in Quito's office.
- A certificate at the end of period with us.
- Prices include 3 daily meals.
- Equilibrio Azul T-shirt.
- Accommodations in the field (usually shared with other volunteers if there are not special requests)
- Security issues and details of the working area will be provided along with a list of emergency phone numbers.

Cost do not include:

- We will pick you up from the airport and offer you several options for staying in the City before going to the field. You will pay this directly with the place you chose. But we will take you there!
- Traveling within Ecuador
- Insurance (only while scuba diving in our courses)
- Diving courses and gear (ask us if you are interested)

Diving projects: there is an extra cost for equipment maintenance and tanks air fill during the project. This will depend in the number of dives you will be able to develop. However, we will try to keep you in the water as much as possible, as cheap as possible.