



### Testimony

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**VDO Volunteer from Scotland**

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I arrived in the VDO office in Ambato feeling slightly shell-shocked, suffering from mild altitude sickness and extremely tired after the journey from Spain. The welcome that I received from the VDO directors, Maria Teresa and Gonzalo, was the perfect remedy! After being shown round some of the local schools, I was able to choose whether I'd like to stay with a local family or live on my own in one of the villages. I opted to stay with the family as I wanted to maximise the opportunities to improve my Spanish and learn more about the way of life in the mountains here.

My first day teaching in El Porvenir de Mocha was a real joy. In contrast to the kids back in Britain, the children here were full of enthusiasm and actually enjoyed learning. I taught English and Computers in El Porvenir de Mocha and Yanayacu, 2 of the 3 schools with Andrew Finch Computer centres. The kids love learning with computers and it sets them in much better stead for continuing their education to secondary level. I was really impressed with their abilities, especially their knack for finding games on the computers - it was always a bit of a struggle to get the kids out the computer centres at the end of the class! The level of English in the schools here is very basic since apart from when there are volunteers here they don't receive English classes. But even being able to speak very basic English means the children who want to continue their education have a better chance of obtaining a place in secondary school. The kids are very loving and frequently it was difficult to cross the playground without several kids attaching themselves like limpets. I really felt that the work that I was doing was appreciated, not just by the kids and teachers but by the community as a whole.

The school day finishes between 12 and 1pm, meaning that I had most afternoons as well as weekends free to go exploring Ecuador with the other volunteers. There are so many interesting places to visit and no shortage of buses flying along the Panamerica willing to squash in another few passengers that travelling was easy. There are also a lot of hiking opportunities in the area and the nearest city, Ambato is within easy reach for phoning home and for internet access.

The highlights of my time here have been:

- Walking to the school in Yanayacu with a perfectly clear view of Chimborazo, Ecuador's highest mountain.

## Voluntarios de Occidente

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- Sport's day with the kids from Yanayacu - sitting with the other teachers and families in the pouring rain watching our football team beat another school 7-1.
- Travelling at the weekends - cycling from the mountains to the edge of the jungle, walking in the volcanic crater in Quilotoa, sitting in the hot baths in Baños and travelling on the top of a train through the beautiful countryside south of Riobamba.
- Going to a family baptism and fiesta afterwards with cuy (grilled guinea pig), rather odd tasting local spirit and compulsory dancing. Ecuadorian men really can dance!
- Learning how to make some of the local artesanía with a group of women in one of the nearby villages.
- Watching Tungurahua, one of Ecuador's active volcanoes, from my bedroom window, spouting smoke and ash. Beautiful, if a bit unsettling!

Before I arrived I had few preconceptions about the set-up that I'd be coming to. However, I'd not anticipated being so cold! The high altitude location of the schools means that when the sun is not burning it can get rather chilly. For future volunteers I'd recommend bringing at least 2 jumpers and a warm sleeping bag as well as suncream and sunhat. Also, be prepared to eat a lot of soup, potatoes and rice. Before I came, I had read about the problems with the governments here and while I was here there was a nationwide strike with all roads blocked off. But because of the support that the volunteers receive from the organisation and the local families in the communities, I never once felt unsafe.

My time here has truly been a fantastic experience and I would thoroughly recommend coming here!



at Quilotoa lake



at school.  
Tungurahua volcano in the background