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Ecuador

### **Ecuador 2006 Reflection**

If someone told me I would be going to the Amazon rain forest, the Galapagos Islands, and the Cloud Forests of the Andes Mountains a year ago today I do not think I would have truly believed them. Deciding to go to Ecuador was a bit rushed and I felt as if that was the momentum throughout the entire program. Despite the slightly hurried atmosphere, the experiences I had this program gave me were unique, enlightening, and will stay with me forever.

I have had the pleasure to participate in two other study abroad programs offered by Saint Mary's College, the 2004-2005 Rome program and the spring 2006 Jamaica program. There has never been anything negative I could point out about my abroad experiences until I took part in the summer 2006 Ecuador program. The main culprit for this disappointment was the combination of so much packed into too little of a time. Ecuador has such a vast amount to offer biologically, not to mention the environmental and cultural aspects as well. It makes sense to give the students as much exposure to as many interesting features of Ecuador as possible while still keeping the price and trip manageable.

The Ecuador program did not have any difficulties in delivering as much as it could while still maintaining a wide variety prior to trip as well as during. The problems existed in the limited number of classes in which to cover a huge amount of information that really is needed prior to arriving in Ecuador in order to get the most out of every experience. Although I do understand the number of issues that would arise in turning

this summer program into a class offered during the Fall-Spring Semesters I feel that there is enough interesting and relevant information for the Biology Department to offer this as a field course. Doing so would allow a much more adequate and thorough overview of the unique aspects present in Ecuador which would heighten the experiences had in Ecuador thereby leaving the students even more deeply and fully affected by the program.

Also extending the amount of time in preparation of the trip reduces the undue overwhelming sensations felt during the time spent in Ecuador. Feeling a bit overwhelmed due to the shock of such a different environment cannot be avoided and is part of an experience such as this; feeling a bit overwhelmed due to schedule of events each day is something that must be anticipated and accepted by each student because it is the only way to be cost effective; the feeling of overwhelm from trying to remember so much at once which was briefly covered is something I was unable to cope with. Maybe participating in the Jamaica Program left me with false expectations from the thorough coverage of the material we focused on during the trip. The Jamaica program really left me feeling satisfied that I extracted as much out of my experience as was possible whereas in the Ecuador program I feel I had experienced more aspects of Ecuador but was always left wanting more.

In reflection of what I did gain from the Ecuador program the thing that changed my perception of the world the most was the Amazon rain forest. I was aware of some of the issues aiding in the endangerment of Amazon rain forest, but I never realized how harshly it has disrupted the ecosystem along with the other stresses that the rainforest is suffering from the increase in population and standard of living of the natives living in

the rainforest. I feel much more educated and aware of the state of the Amazon Rain Forest.

Overall I am very glad I decided to participate in the summer 2006 Ecuador program. With improvements in the layout of the program I feel that this could be an experience of a lifetime.