kaya
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Anglia Ruskin University

Permaculture and Edible Plants in the Cloud Forest

Programmes in Ecuador 2026

Introduction

ABOUT KAYA RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

We are a responsible travel organization that specializes in providing meaningful and ethical international experiences for individuals and groups.

Our mission is to promote sustainable social, environmental and economic development, empower communities and cultivate educated, compassionate global citizens through responsible travel. We do this by offering a wide range of academic and community engagement programmes in varying environments across 28 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

WHY KAYA?

We are recognized leaders in ethical travel with expertise in developing countries. We provide hands-on experiences that deliver cultural immersion, positive impact on local communities and activities relevant to your goals – allowing you to travel and grow as responsible, educated, global citizens.

At Kaya, we pride ourselves on delivering only what is best for our participants and host communities. We work closely with everyone involved to ensure mutual benefit and meaningful cross-cultural exchange.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION & ACCESSIBILITY

Kaya is committed to creating safe and transformative spaces for all who seek to engage in cross-cultural experiences abroad. We support all participants by providing additional resources when needed in areas of mental health and medical or physical needs, those in the LGBTQ+ community or any marginalized community, and travelers with concerns around their identities abroad.

Our experiential programmes may expose our participants to difficult topics such as societal and racial inequities, cultural differences, environmental concerns, economic disparities, and community trauma. We provide support in order to facilitate productive dialogues between diverse perspectives and cultures. We believe these dialogues are essential for personal and community growth.

"Traveling as a volunteer you can contribute by working on local problems, while as a tourist you are just a spectator."

Matteo Bertoletti

Cost Overview and Inclusions

ECUADOR

COSTS

2 weeks £1,398 per person
Extra week £201

INCLUDED

- Accommodation for the duration of your programme
- 3 meals Monday to Friday + breakfast on Saturday
- Local on-site project supervisor
- Local on-site support available 24/7 in case of emergency
- Transfers from/to airport
- Transfer from Quito to the project site
- Welcome Orientation
- Excursion and entrance fees for Quito's historical centre

NOT INCLUDED

- Flights to Quito, Ecuador
- Travel insurance (with ARU)
- Meals on Saturday & Sunday
- Transfer from the project site to Quito
- Recommended and/or required vaccinations and medicines
- Visas (not required for UK Citizens if staying less than 180 days)
- Police background check
- Tips and gratuities
- Personal expenses, such as snacks, souvenirs, laundry, free time activities, transportation outside of itinerary & baggage fees

Summer 2026 Programme Start Dates:

- 08 May 2026
- 05 June 2026
- 03 July 2026
- 31 July 2026

Programmes end on Saturdays

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Programme Information: **Permaculture and Edible Plants in the Cloud Forest**

ECUADOR

LOCATION

Cloud forest, Pichincha

The reserve is located at 550 meters above sea level in the heart of the Andean Chocó rainforest, one of the most biodiverse regions in the world. Despite its natural splendor, this area has faced significant threats from intensive cattle ranching, monoculture, metal mining, and other harmful practices over the past 40 years, severely impacting the native ecosystem.

The reserve boasts a regenerating secondary forest, where guests can explore the fascinating stages of ecological succession. It also features pristine springs and streams, perfect for learning about local fish species and a wide variety of aquatic life.

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

Permaculture, edible forests and forests regeneration

This programme focuses on different techniques to regenerate forests in a sustainable way, allowing communities to benefit from them, such as through their edible fruits, without the need to cut them down. Edible forest techniques enable less investment in labor and maintenance in the medium and long term, while also preventing soil erosion. The programme also works on permaculture techniques in gardens and greenhouses, as well as on education and nutrition programmes for both children and adults.

The project has successfully restored 6 to 7 hectares of degraded land, once used as cattle pastures, transforming them into vibrant forest gardens that yield an increasing variety of food each year. Various innovative restoration techniques have been employed, with a special focus on "analog forestry," aiming to replicate the natural structure and function of the native forest using species that are beneficial for daily life

Areas of Work

ECUADOR

Students will work across these areas as needed. No Spanish language is required unless specified (but if you learn a few words before you go - your efforts are always well received!)

Permaculture and edible forests

This project aims to regenerate areas previously used for livestock, cattle grazing, or monoculture, converting them into forested areas with functional species for human use. The objective is to ensure that most processes function naturally, reducing the need for additional manpower for maintenance.

Activities:

- Theoretical classes on forest regeneration, permaculture, and edible forests.
- Planting and harvesting of edible and timber forest species.
- Maintenance of forest areas and systems.

Education

The project facilitates people's connection to nature and creates conditions that foster curiosity and motivation for knowledge. It aims to promote living in harmony with nature and encourages critical thinking regarding current development models. This approach allows students to form their own vision of society and the environment, food production, soil conservation, and biodiversity.

Activities:

- Create workshops for children, adolescents, and adults on the aforementioned topics.
- Support activities with the participants of the workshops.

Design and communications

This aspect of the project focuses on effectively communicating its vision to foreign citizens regarding its various programmes, workshops, services, and opportunities, aligning them with their own realities and capabilities.

Activities:

- Generate educational and promotional content for social media.
- Create content for the website.
- Take photographs for social media.

Additional Information

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ACCOMMODATION

The project features a volunteer house within the reserve, with rooms typically shared between two or three people. Bathrooms and showers are also shared. There is a communal kitchen equipped with all necessary appliances and several areas designated for recreation and relaxation. The reserve is located just a five-minute walk from the nearest town, where small grocery stores and a spa with a beautiful river for swimming can be found.

LOCAL FOOD

All meals and ingredients provided during the project stay are healthy and usually sourced from the edible forest itself or from neighbors in the local community. Breakfast and dinner will be prepared personally by the volunteers and interns, with the project supplying everything necessary for these meals, while lunch will be cooked in collaboration with the staff. Some of the ingredients that are typically available include:

- Green plantain
- Yucca
- Sweet plantain
- Lentils
- Chickpeas
- Beans
- Eggs
- Local fruits

The organization has a "zero processed food" protocol within the reserve to align with its commitment to sustainability and the promotion of healthy, organic food. Meals are mostly vegetarian in line with this, and we can accomodate most dietary needs.

COMMUNICATIONS AND ACCESSIBILITY

There is no cell phone service in the area, however there is Wifi in the main house of the reserve. Wifi is not available in the volunteer house because we want to keep this space as a disconnection area. There are radios for communication in case of emergency. The reserve is not wheelchair accessible.

Packing information

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ESSENTIALS

Clothing

- Lightweight, breathable long-sleeved shirts and pants (for protection against insects and the sun)
- Comfortable, quick-dry t-shirts and shorts
- A light rain jacket or poncho
- Sturdy, waterproof hiking boots or shoes
- Sandals or flip-flops for relaxing
- Socks (preferably moisture-wicking)
- Hat and sunglasses (for sun protection)
- Swimwear (for rivers or streams)

Health & Safety

- Insect repellent (with DEET or a natural alternative)
- Sunscreen (high SPF)
- Reusable water bottle (staying hydrated is key in the humid climate)
- Personal first-aid kit (including any prescription medications)
- Hand sanitizer
- Basic toiletries (biodegradable soap/shampoo recommended)

Work-Specific Items

- Notebook and pens (for taking notes on health practices)
- Appropriate clothing for agricultural-related work

Miscellaneous:

- Headlamp or flashlight (with extra batteries)
- Portable charger or solar charger
- Small daypack and reusable shopping bag (for excursions)
- Earplugs (for night new noises of the jungle)

NON ESSENTIALS (but useful)

Comfort Items:

- Lightweight travel towel
- Pillowcase or small travel pillow
- Books or e-reader (for downtime)
- Camera (to capture memories, be respectful when taking photos)
- Snacks from home (if you're particular about comfort food)

Cultural Engagement:

- Spanish phrasebook or language learning app (knowing basic Spanish or local phrases can enhance your experience)
- Journal (to document your experiences)

Gifts or Donations (Optional):

- Health or hygiene items (such as soap, toothbrushes, or vitamins)
- Educational materials
- Small tokens from your home country (for cultural exchange)

For the Climate:

- Waterproof dry bags (for keeping electronics and valuables safe in the humid environment)
- Bandanas or buffs (for extra sun protection or to wipe away sweat)

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The Kaya Staff

Heilwig Jones
Founder and Director
Heilwig (known as "H") founded Kaya in 2009, combining her experience as an international student at UC Denver and her work in international development. A leading voice in the field on issues of ethics and best practices in service programming, H is passionate about cultural immersion and equity in community experiential initiatives.

Diana Balarezo
Ecuador's Site Director
Diana joined the team in 2013, bringing a wealth of experience from her master's degree in Social and Environmental Studies and her time as an international student in the US and Spain. At Kaya, she integrates her passion for teaching, research, and sustainable development with her deep love for her country, striving to share its beauty and culture with others.

Javier Remache
Programme Advisor
Javier works with applicants to help identify the best programme fit for their skills and interests.

"Do not follow where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

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For more information on the programme content, please contact Kaya advisors on **info@kayaresponsibletravel.com**. For information on available funding support, please contact the ARU Global Opportunities team on **go@aru.ac.uk**.

www.KayaVolunteer.com