Laura Aprill

Laura’s Majors: Environmental Studies, Botany

Program: Ceiba Tropical Ecosystems: Andes, Amazon, Pacific Coast, Summer

Academic Life: This month-long course was taught by Dr. Joe Meisel and T.A. Amy Janik. We had around 5 lectures a week with topics including plant and animal groups/interactions, characteristics of each tropical ecosystem we visited, and useful field tools like GIS. Labs, research projects, and teaching hikes were conducted in the field where we could apply our lecture knowledge and record specific details in our field notebooks. The class size was 11, making it very easy to get to know everyone. Other optional educational activities included bird watching early in the morning, night hikes, and mist-netting. Joe and Amy did an amazing job making sure everyone had the best-possible experience.

Housing: This program took us on a journey all around northern Ecuador where we lived in a variety of situations. At Pahuma Orchid Reserve we stayed in a simple cabin at the top of a mountain. Our second destination found us in a rustic biological research station in the Lalo Loor Dry Forest Reserve, though one weekend was spent camping on the beach! Finally, we stayed in cabins for one week at Tiputini Biodiversity Station in the Amazon Rain Forest. Our home base in Ecuador was a hostel where we could access the internet and do laundry.

Advice for Someone Considering This Program: Definitely go for it! If I could, I would do it a thousand times over! I was on the fence on whether or not I actually wanted to study abroad. I continued to research the program, attended the study abroad fair, and eventually decided to take a leap. This program was more than I ever expected: I learned so much, saw some crazy things, and made friends with amazing people. This program is also perfect if you are worried about missing things during the school year since it takes place for a month during the summer.

“If you are nervous about studying abroad, just jump in with a positive and open mind!”