



## FAQ's: Colombia / ECA

### Before Coming Down

Q: What about **visa requirements**?

A: See our [Visa Information](#) document on our website.

Q: What is an **Apostille**?

A: An Apostille is a seal/stamp that the Secretary of State places on a notarized document to validate for international purposes that the notary's registration is valid and current. You will only need to get documents Apostille-sealed if you apply at a consulate in the U.S., have a marriage certificate, or are bringing children – for which you need original birth certificates. Certificates need to be notarized originals, with Apostille-seals. There is more information in the [Visa Information](#) document.

Notaries are registered by state, so any document needing an Apostille seal must be sent to the state under which the notary is registered. You pay a fee for each document needing authentication; any original and its translation are considered one document. You can mail in your request with the notarized document, or some states receive walk-in requests. You typically leave your document for 1-2 business days and can either pick it up or have it mailed, if you provide the envelope and stamp. Some offices process your request while you wait.

Q: What is the purpose and benefits of a **Mission Organization**?

A: The mission helps with raising support, financial management of donations and expenses, guidance with tax forms, insurance, etc. These services make it easier for teachers to work at Christian schools around the world. Links to the 3 most popular missions for our staff can be found on our website under Get Involved / Potential Teachers.

Our foreign faculty and staff are salaried employees with a minimal wage and all the normal employee benefits. We expect them to come down as missionaries and raise most of their support.

Q: What are some suggestions for **raising support**?

A: Support letters, a blog, prayer cards, speaking at your church, word of mouth, being willing to share, etc., are some ways to let people know what you will be doing and to ask them to consider donating. Think of it more as raising a prayer-team – everyone needs prayer. For fundraising training and resources, see our document [Fundraising Resources](#).

Q: What about **college debt**?

A: That is not a deterrent to serving at ECA from our perspective, but we encourage good stewardship and responsibility. Here are strategies some of our teachers have used:

1. Earn as much as possible before coming down and/or during summers, and use that money not only to lower the debt, but to have payments ready to go ahead of time. Usually payments start 6-8 months after graduation.
2. Budget monthly debt payments into your support needs. Some supporters specifically target paying off a college debt, rather than living expenses.
3. Check out deferment options.

Q: Start and ending **dates**?

A: Check out our [Dates and Flights](#) document for the year in question. School starts on August 7 every year. It's a national holiday and we have an all-school picnic with students and their families. New teachers are expected to arrive about 2 weeks prior for orientation and getting settled. The school year usually ends within the first week of June, and teachers need to stay through the Year-End Celebrations after the last day of school.

Q: Should I buy a 1-way or **round-trip** ticket?

A: See the document [Visa Information](#). For your initial trip to Bogotá, you must have a roundtrip or continuing ticket to leave the country, or you will have problems in the airport leaving your home country. Once you have your visa, you can buy 1-way tickets to Colombia.

Q: **Christmas break**: stay in Colombia or go home?

A: If you choose to go home for Christmas, you have over 2 weeks. However, there are staff members and families who do not leave Colombia, so you would not be alone for the holidays if you decide to stay. Our families take good care of those who stay, if they know you're here. Also, it is a nice time to see the country and enjoy a much calmer Bogotá – traffic is substantially less.

Q: What **personal items** should I bring with me?

A: Anything you can't live without. There are many stores and options. You can find just about everything here and for a decent price. See the list in [Items Typically Brought from the States](#) for items people usually don't get here. Once you've been accepted you'll be invited to our Facebook page for new missionaries, and you can ask there about other specific items you are unsure of.

Q: What kind of materials does the school have accessible? What **teaching materials** should I bring?

A: We have over 20,000 items in our library, a great computer system with 24-hour high-speed internet, video beams and/or mounted flat screen TV's with DVD players in all classrooms, a teacher office with 6-8 computers for teachers only, a computer lab for students/staff, etc. We have several photocopiers and other

miscellaneous equipment and materials. We store basic office supplies and class art project supplies. If there are certain supplies you really like, bring them or ask us if they are available here. Check out our document [Technology Available for Teachers](#).

Q. What is the **cell phone** situation?

A: ECA provides a very basic cell phone on loan to all missionary staff. It comes charged with **\$10.000** (about \$3 USD) worth of minutes, and has several staff phone numbers already programmed. You need to add minutes, either signing up for a plan or pre-paying minutes every 30 days or as needed. Many prefer to bring/buy their own smartphone to have more options, but you need to be careful about whether a phones can be unlocked for use here.

Q: What is the best/cheapest way to **contact friends** and family in the U.S. from Colombia?

A: Vonage, Lingo, and magicJack phones have been popular among teachers. They have to be purchased in the States, need a credit card payment of about **\$20-25/month** (Vonage / Lingo) or **\$30/year** (magicJack) for unlimited calls to the U.S., and require a high-speed connection to the Internet. Teachers also use the Internet for video calls through Skype, email, instant messenger, etc.

## [What to Expect in Bogotá](#)

Q: What are **living** arrangements for teachers?

A: You can live on your own (not recommended), with other teachers, or with a Colombian family. ECA rents apartments that are then sublet to teachers, most within about 10-15 minutes from school (when there's little traffic).

Q: What should I expect to **pay for housing**?

A: Many teachers share an apartment with 1-3 roommates to help with costs. Apartments and houses range in price depending on the neighborhood but generally run around **\$400-700/month**. If you live with a Colombian family, you usually pay at least **\$300/month** for room and board (up to 2 meals/day).

Q: What are the **apartments** like?

A: Normally, the apartments are middle-class and modern, but not very large. Most apartments have natural gas for heating water and cooking, and wireless Internet, with cable TV available.

Q: Are they **furnished**?

A: All ECA sublet apartments come with a washer, refrigerator, and beds for each tenant. ECA families have donated other furniture and furnishings, so many apartments are almost complete. They also often help out with finding and

providing additional necessities. Teachers should expect to have some start-up expenses, but we try to keep them minimal. See our [Budget for Foreign Staff](#) document.

Q: What would I need to bring or buy (**bedding**, appliances, etc.)?

A: The school has some bedding, pillows, and towels to lend teachers but some teachers choose to purchase or bring their own. Some feel the quality of bedding from the States is better. We also have a few appliances such as microwaves available. The school tries to help find the more costly appliances.

Q: What is the suggested **living budget**?

A: We suggest aiming at raising **\$1,000** a month for living expenses, plus whatever your mission organization has told you for health insurance, social security, etc. **\$1,000** a month is a bit on the comfortable side, but it is better to be on the conservative side in case the exchange rate varies significantly. See the [Budget for Foreign Staff](#) document for more detailed information.

Q: Is there any type of staff **training/retreat** to start the year off?

A: New Teacher Orientation starts about 2 weeks before school starts on August 7. All Teacher Orientation starts 3 days later. There is lots of training during Orientation while we help new teachers get to know the school, staff, procedures, and a bit of Bogotá. Then the first weekend of September there is a 2-night staff retreat outside of Bogotá.

Q: Can **regular mail** be sent down to us at ECA?

A: Yes, though it naturally takes longer and may incur taxes and/or fees. Friends and family can send mail and packages to:

El Camino Academy  
Atn: *(your name)*  
Calle 221 #52-30  
Bogotá COLOMBIA 111166  
S. America

To send personal letters to the U.S., leave your stamped letters with a U.S. return address in the front office, and the next willing traveler to the States will mail them when they're stateside. You can buy U.S. stamps from the front office, or you may want to bring some down with you.

Q: What do teachers typically wear to work each day? What does **professional attire** mean at ECA?

A: See the document [Dress for the Profession](#). The expectations for dress go with the position. Professional dress means business clothing (suit, jacket, black pants, nice shirt, khakis, etc.). More casual is fine as long as it's not jeans. We have teacher jeans days usually at least once a month.

Q: What is the **weather** like in Bogotá?

A: Weather in Bogotá is typically a sunny 65 degrees during the afternoon and pretty chilly (40's) at night. However, buildings have no heat, so inside it is cooler. Temps can drop significantly when it rains. Being near the equator, we are closer to the sun and it's easier to get sunburned. There is also no air conditioning – nor is it needed, except down the mountain in “hot country.”

Q: **Clothing** needed in Bogota?

A: We recommend layers and warmer clothing. That way during the day you can take off a layer in the sun and add a layer when it's cooler. Pack clothes for 60-degree weather (for Bogotá), warm pajamas, some summer clothes (for trips to hot country), dress shoes, and comfortable but nice-looking walking shoes. Generally speaking, Colombians dress up more than North Americans, and clean shoes are a particular focus. Pants are more common than skirts. Rain usually comes unexpectedly and for short periods of time, so it is good to always have an umbrella or rain jacket with you.

Q: **Clothing** needed for travel outside of Bogotá?

A: Leaving Bogotá usually means warmer weather because the temperature rises as you go down the mountain, being so close to the equator. Bring a modest bathing suit, shorts, T-shirts, and summer clothing for the occasional weekend getaway.

Q: **Jewelry**: Do people replace/not wear their **wedding rings**?

A: It is wise to wear a cheap replacement while you're here. The general rule is not to wear jewelry while out and about / on the street. I've witnessed a thief grab a gold chain necklace and run, and if you see someone with a slit in her ear it's probably where someone grabbed her earring and ran. It's just prudent not to tempt people.

Feel free to send questions to [communication@eca.edu.co](mailto:communication@eca.edu.co). We look forward to hearing from you!