

Montesueños

Frequently Asked Questions

www.montesuenos.org

1. What is Montesueños?

Montesueños (moan-tay-**swain**-yoass, or mountain dreams) opened to guests in 2008. We are a growing and evolving retreat conference center and B&B operating year round and dedicated to the values of peace, sustainability and the creativity of art and new science. In 2004, we (Meredith Miller and Brian O'Leary) purchased one hectare of land in the Andes of southern Ecuador overlooking the village of Vilcabamba.

Initially, we lived in a one-room cottage on the property that later expanded into a guest house. A nearby old farmhouse, outhouse and open courtyard/small bedroom eventually become part of the main house and conference center. As of early 2011, we now have ten bedrooms each with a private bathroom, conference and dining space for up to 100, plenty of nooks and crannies and library for breakouts, two modern kitchens, an art studio, meditation tower, wireless Internet, nature trails through lush tropical gardens, waterfall, scattered outdoor tables, tiki huts, ceremonial sites, and breathtaking views everywhere.

Over the past three years, the inspiring, artistic and tranquil setting has attracted hundreds of overnight guests. Many of these turn out to be kindred spirits ranging from students and teachers of the arts, new science, deep ecology and environmental activism to ones who seek to lead a more peaceful and sustainable lifestyle free from the pressures of the global North. Our website www.montesuenos.org gives further details and updates about our ongoing activities.



2. How do I get there?

Your international flight should arrive in either Quito or Guayaquil. There are several daily nonstop flights from cities in the U.S., South America and Europe. You'd then connect on a domestic flight to our closest city Loja, sometimes overnighting in Quito or Guayaquil. Prices for hotels and taxis are reasonable. The flights from Quito are on comfortable jets operated by Tame airlines. Reservations should be made on www.tame.com.ec or through the Miami travel agent Gabriele Proaño gaby@gttours.com. It's best to make prior reservations for domestic flights in case your preferred flight is full.

On weekdays Tame has three flights, at 5:45 and 8:40 am and 4:30 pm and two daily flights on the weekends (subject to change). From Guayaquil, Saereo airlines has morning and afternoon flights to Loja during weekdays and only Saturday morning and Sunday afternoon on weekends.

Write us at info@montesuenos.org to make your 5 day package reservation (see paragraph 9 below). When you've purchased your domestic air tickets write us again and we'll send out a taxi to pick you up at Loja baggage claim for the ninety-minute \$35 scenic ride to here through the Andes. The driver will be holding a Montesueños sign probably with your name on it. We recommend you use these prearranged Vilcabamba taxis because they are bigger, safer and lower cost...and they know where we are.

3. I've heard rumors that the Loja airport might be closed starting sometime later in 2011. If or when that happens, how can I get to Montesueños?

The possible upgrade of the Loja airport means that you fly into Cuenca instead. Cuenca has many flights daily from Quito and Guayaquil and is a four-hour ride from Montesueños on an excellent new highway over the Andes. There's a \$12, 3-hour van service three times daily from Cuenca to Loja. Cuenca is a beautiful old colonial city well worth seeing.

4. Should I wait and come for a conference or workshop?

No, it's not necessary. Presently we have about four planned retreat gatherings per year on different topics. They're generally announced on www.montesuenos.org about three months in advance. But you don't need to wait; our year round B&B service almost always includes breakfast sessions among the guests and ourselves. Occasionally we have impromptu gatherings, ceremonies and video shoots on a wide range of topics such as saving the rainforest through sustainable and innovative practices. These sessions often occur when some guests happen to be teachers who themselves are on retreat. Our spontaneous gatherings, like the architecture and landscaping, grow organically and provide inspiration to most everybody who comes here any time.

5. Is it better to connect in Quito or Guayaquil?

It's your choice. All other things being about equal, we prefer Quito, the connections are better and it's generally safer downtown. Quito has an interesting historic area and is nestled in a scenic green Andean valley. The altitude is about 9000 ft. (just under 3000 meters) so we suggest taking it easy if you're sensitive to altitude. It's a bit cooler in Quito than here, with no indoor heating so we recommend you bring a sweater, jacket and long pants, which will be useful here as well.

6. Do I need any vaccinations or special visas to enter Ecuador?

No, a passport is all you'll need. Entering Ecuador is easy, immigration and customs are almost always rapid. You'll receive a 90-day visa stamped in your passport. Vaccinations aren't recommended for Quito, Guayaquil or here because we're not in the jungle and you won't find any disease-borne mosquitos.

7. Is the timing within the day of my arrival important?

Not really, it depends on your own rhythms. If you come in on the early morning flight, we suggest you stop for breakfast so we can get your room ready. All the other times would work for a direct trip here from the airport. The late afternoon

flight would connect you to Montesueños around 7:30, which is a good time for us to greet you, but after 8, we may not be around. This is particularly true during the weekends, when we're short-staffed. Also it's best that you have an afternoon meal before boarding your flight to Loja if you come straight here from the airport.

If you're not coming in from the airport but by road (e.g., from Cuenca), give us your estimated time of arrival. Daylight arrivals are easier all around because it's difficult to find Montesueños in the dark. When you get to town, all the taxi drivers in the Vilcabamba town square know who and where we are (we don't have a street address but are just beyond the village of San Jose). They can give you or your driver instructions about how to get here...or you could transfer to a taxi to take you up the hill for a \$3 ride to here.

8. What should I bring with me?

Clothes are casual here. We recommend you bring lightweight long pants and walking shoes for during the day and a sweater, jacket, flashlight and warmer pants for the evenings; and the usual toiletries, health products, and any food you might want to use in our kitchen just after you arrive (good food is also available in town after you've settled).

We also welcome in our library books, DVDs and anything else of educational value and we're always interested in healthy food and snacks, incense, sage, split peas, sesame oil and any other items that are unavailable in Ecuador.

9. How much do I pay for my room?

Accommodation at Montesueños is limited, and is on a first-come-first-served basis. Please contact Brian at info@montesuenos.org for his 5 day 25-30 June package: cost \$425 per person for a shared room, including the seminar, a beautiful breakfast every day, the two gourmet lunches on the seminar days, wireless internet, and taxi arranged to meet you at Loja.

10. How do I make my payment?

In this case, please make your payment in cash when you arrive here, in US dollars (which is also the currency in Ecuador). No credit cards, checks or travelers checks can be accepted. If you don't have enough cash with you upon your international arrival, there are several ATM machines along your way at both the Quito and Guayaquil airports and in Loja en route from the airport to here about halfway on your journey. There's also an ATM machine in Vilcabamba, but it can run out of cash and/or have low limits for withdrawals, so we recommend you come with cash, which will also be needed to buy food and trinkets and eat out while you're here.

When you leave Ecuador, be prepared to pay the airport tax of \$40 in cash.

11. Where does the money go?

Approximately 80-90% of our income goes to supporting our local Ecuadorian staff and other operating and overhead costs.

12. How far are we from Vilcabamba?

We are a 25 to 30 minute walk down the hill to town and a \$3 taxi ride back up. The last taxis run at about 9 pm. Vilcabamba village is about a mile and a half away from us and has many restaurants, food stores, shops, Internet cafes, etc.. If needed, we can call a cab for you to take you wherever you need to go from here, including your return ride to the airport.

13. What can I do in and around Vilcabamba?

There are many things to do here. It's a mecca for getting into nature. While you get to experience all this right here at Montesueños, there are numerous trails going through the river valleys and up the nearby peaks, either on foot or by horseback. Those arrangements can be made after you get here along with any other plans for touring, your return taxi to the airport, etc.

There's also an active growing gringo community in Vilcabamba with lots of activities and spontaneous friendly gatherings at the cafes and parks.

One can also take excursions to the high jungle near Zamora about two and a half hours' drive away from us with good overnight accommodations.

Cuenca is a beautiful historic city 4-5 hours drive on an excellent highway going to the north of here. Some of our guests go there for a few days either before or after they visit Montesueños. There is frequent air service between Cuenca and Quito or Guayaquil.

14. How about real estate?

For a number of reasons, we are not giving recommendations other than to say "let the buyer beware." Even though we ourselves instantly bought our property when we saw it in 2004, there were only a handful of gringos seeking property at that time. Now there are quite a few wanting to live here, and we recommend not rushing to buy but renting first while searching carefully. Montesueños is a great initial landing pod for those seeking residency, seasonal stays, and educational vision quests as well as a relaxing retreat to get away from it all. As such, we're quite independent from any commercial interests although we could talk about it after you get here.

15. How is the weather here?

At about a one mile (1700 meter) elevation, we enjoy an ideal year-round climate with about 70-80 degrees by day and going down to about 60-65 degrees by night. The drier season is August to November the wettest season is February through April, but varies from year to year. We love the rainy season because everything is so green, fresh and springlike. Almost every day has some sunshine with rain only in the afternoons and/or nighttime and picturesque misty mountains in the mornings, a haze that lifts to make way for later sunshine.

We have many microclimates in the region. To our East is the continental divide of the Andes with cloud forests, descending further East into one of the most

biodiverse rainforests of the Amazon basin. To our West is the sacred mountain Mandango, beyond which there are deserts and more mountains and valleys. Montesueños sunsets can be a photographer's paradise, especially when rainbows appear over Podocarpus National Park toward the rainy East. We have about twice the amount of rain here than the other side of the village and our fireplaces in both houses are sometimes lit for cool, cozy evenings. We are very blessed to be at such a special spot on Earth, always comfortable and with no special requirements to "brave the elements" or to prove anything besides to enjoy the unique ambiance of Montesueños.

16. What about mosquitoes and other insects?

We are blessed by being virtually mosquito-free, although we do have mosquito netting on most of the beds for those times the occasional one is around.

17. What kinds of conferences and workshops are held at Montesueños?

Since 2008, we've had about ten conferences and workshops and dozens more smaller salons, concerts and video shoots. They've all been unique experiments in designing a sustainable and just future and/or expressing the arts. Some events have been open to the public with well-recognized presenters while others have been closed workshops, think-tanks and groups who have traveled together. The first conference we hosted was the Phoenix Gathering in June 2008. This week-long dynamically-facilitated event drew 27 visionaries from all over the world to address the simple question, how can we create a sustainable future for humankind? One of the threads of the conference, besides a strong advocacy of re-localization of governance and monetary systems, was a commitment by one of our participants, Leonardo Wild, to create, a film **Yasuni: Two Seconds of Life**, about the threatened biodiverse Ecuadorian rainforest to oil drilling. This discussion included the co-creation of the concept of protected "innovation sanctuaries" supporting R&D to bring forward innovations in clean and sustainable energy, water, agriculture and forestry. This kind of initiative, when liberated from its suppression by the powers-that-be, could provide Ecuador the other Andean and Amazon nations with economic sovereignty while leaving the rainforest and its voluntarily isolated

indigenous people alone. Radical innovation will become necessary if humankind and nature are to have any chance to survive.

Starting in January 2009, we've hosted a series of conferences tracking the theme "Crisis and Opportunity." The first such conference involved the outside-the-box presentations by Bill Ryan and Kerry Cassidy, founders of Project Camelot, George Green and myself. In 2010 we convened a think-tank of seven world-renowned innovators who co-founded the Global Innovation Alliance. We've also held conferences on new science and consciousness, free energy, and local systems of energy, water and waste management systems, often bringing in eminent spokespeople from all over the world by Skype. In addition, we've had week-long intensive workshops combining personal growth with planetary transformation so we can become more effective agents of change.

All our conferences have been videoed, and we're also beginning to produce videos of conversations with some of the special guests who've stayed at our B&B. Most interviews address transcendent solutions to the global crisis. We are seeking assistance of a video editor to bring the information forward to larger audiences through the Internet.

In all, we expect to have more and more guests coming here for transformational education far, far away from the crazy world up North. Keep checking www.montesuenos.org for announcements of future conferences, workshops and think tanks. Let's hope we all can team up and co-create a peaceful, sustainable and just new world through innovation and compassion for all of nature and humanity.

18. What is our carbon footprint here?

We have one of the lowest carbon footprints on the planet—no need to heat or cool and almost all the labor, food and materials are local.

19. How did Montesueños grow into what it is?

In 2004 Meredith and Brian were ready to move South, having reached "retirement" age. But hardly retired we became...when we looked at the property which was to

become Montesueños, we were awestruck with the views everywhere and the fertile tropical mountainside grounds. It only took us a few days to conclude the deal. At that time there were only about ten gringos scattered around the Vilcabamba area, now there are close to a thousand, mostly very good folks seeking alternative lifestyles and making a fresh start. We started out with a simple one-room cottage with a rickety loft sleeping space, with a total living space of about 500 square feet. Now we're up to about 6000 square feet comprising the main house and expanded cottage which is now our guest house, artistically sprouting in all directions.

This project has been guided from the start. We were never premature in designing our buildings, gardens and programs. We let them evolve. With no requirement for building permits, we let the architecture evolve organically, and the process continues. As architects and designers, we learned that it was important not to have any rigid structures or business plans. Our intention has always been to co-create and share this beautiful space with others. We are grateful we've been blessed with a perfect year-round climate, storybook surroundings, kindred local Ecuadorian staff who walk to work and our many fascinating guests who have become our friends.

Our intention to create Montesueños came to us in 2005 when we came back from a trip shocked with an architectural "mistake" coming from a confusion in which the builders constructed an unplanned enormous roof enveloping some old decaying buildings on the property. We looked at each other and almost simultaneously declared, "This place is bigger than we are!" The roof was no mistake: it now sits above now the living-and-conference room of the main house.

Synchronicities happen here all the time. To the degree we set our own egos aside and let the peaceful energy here flow is the degree to which the magic can happen.

How did we plan the design of what you now see?

The design evolved from the start, we almost never envisioned the final plans until the last possible moments along the way, always seeking improvements.

Throughout the process, we feel all the important stages of this project have been synchronistically guided and blessed from a higher source of creativity and intelligence. We hope you can come and share this special experience of a visit to Montesueños, the Andes and the sacred valley below.