[Music playing] In January 2015, 8 students from MSU headed down south to Quito, Ecuador to begin their once in a lifetime journey through one of South America's smaller but more diverse countries. [Globe highlighting Ecuador] These students would get the chance to travel to all four of Ecuador's regions. [Photo of students in truck] These four regions include the Andes Mountains, where their new home and the capital city Quito is located 9,350 feet above sea level, the other regions are the coast, the Amazon Rainforest as well as the famous Galápagos Islands. [Photo of street in Quito] The Universidad de San Francisco, Quito is the best in Ecuador, and a popular place to study abroad for students from various universities all across the United States. [Photo of view of Quito] The university is used to welcoming foreign students and offers a program that pairs Ecuadorean students with international students so they get a chance to interact with the Ecuadorean students, instead of falling into the trap of only speaking English with other American friends. The university also offers a city tour for the students, giving them the chance to explore the historic center, getting the chance to see some of Quito’s beautiful churches and understanding why they are voted a UNESCO world heritage site. [Photo of woman sitting in grass looking at city below] International students are able to take a wide variety of classes; some geared only towards international students as well as regular classes with other Ecuadorean students. Since Ecuador is such a small country, students find it easy to travel almost anywhere in the country on weekends. [Photo of mountain and city] Long bus rides become a reoccurring normality in the lives of the international students. [Photo of mountain] But Quito also offers a few attractions within an hour from the city itself. Besides many beautiful parks and volcanoes to hike, those interested in geography can visit the small city just north of Quito called Mitad del Mundo, where you can find the equatorial line. Here you can find some museums and science experiments to show the differences between the northern and southern hemispheres. Another popular attraction is the volcano Pichincha, overlooking Quito. A challenging hike, especially for those who have not yet been accustomed to the altitude, gives rewarding views overlooking Quito once you reach the summit at 15,406 feet above sea level. [Photo of bird on rock in water] Quito also has many other volcanoes nearby; some are still active while others are extinct. Students also use their weekends to get a chance to see some of Ecuador's most beautiful attractions. One of these is Baños, a popular city for tourists looking to participate in adventure sports such as white water rafting, canyoning and bungee jumping. [Photo of woman on rickety wooden bridge with a strap] As well as the “swing at the end of the world” which gives you an adrenaline rush as you soar over a ravine. It is also the home to many large waterfalls that allow you to get closer than any US national park would ever allow. MSU's included trip takes you to Tiputini in the heart of Ecuador's Amazon Rainforest. During this trip students get to learn about the rainforest while
climbing above the canopy, [[Photo looking down to rocks and forest with rainbow] swimming in the Tiputini River, [Photo of two women in rocks climbing stairs] seeing many unique flora and fauna [Photo of trail between rocks and plants] and even getting the chance to eat ants! One [Photo of flamingos standing in water] of the most popular places to visit in Ecuador are the beautiful Galapagos Islands. [Photo of sign with words Estacion Cientifica Charles Darwin] Getting to walk in the footsteps of Charles Darwin, learning about his research there and being able to see giant tortoises [Photo of giant tortoise on grass], iguanas, [Photo of iguanas on beach] penguins,[Photo of birds swimming in water] blue footed boobies, [Photo of birds standing on rocks in water] seals, [Photo of seals on sand] on finches and more. [Photo of seal on beach] This opportunity is sure to leave you breathless while educating you more about Darwin’s evolutionary theory. [Photo of many giant tortoises in shady area] The beautiful Quilotoa [[Photo of woman jumping in foreground with crater lake in background] Crater Lake inside an extinct volcano provides another strenuous hike [Photo of alpacas grazing along the mountain side] to see this incredible and hidden lake. The pigments in the water [Photo of crater lake] create unique colors that give stunning views. All the incredible places to visit in Ecuador [Photo of mountains] create an extremely diverse and exceptional [Photo of woman swinging in air with mountain in background] study abroad experience. The Ecuadorean culture [Photo of stained glass ceiling in church] is welcoming to foreigners and gives students a chance to take classes, [Photo of woman with a multi-legged insect crawling up her arm] improve their Spanish [Photo of mountains] and travel through one of the world’s most beautiful countries. [Written by Lauryn Boag & Narrated by Joy Whitten][Graphic of western hemisphere. ->>For more information visit latinamerica.isp.msu.edu] [Western hemisphere graphic. Edited by Jessica Lundquist]