



‘We don’t want the American Dream for our kids’: Why this couple left the US for Ecuador with their children four years ago

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Published 6:00 AM EDT, Fri March 28, 2025



Brittany and Blake Bowen, both from the United States, moved to Ecuador in 2021 with their four children, who were aged between 11 and six at the time. Courtesy Brittany Bowen

They’d never even visited Ecuador before, but Brittany and Blake Bowen, from the United States, decided to move to the South American country in 2021 to give their four children a completely different upbringing.

The Bowens, who were previously based in the state of Washington, have been living in Loja, a small city based in the southern section of the Andes Mountains, ever since, and say that they are in it for the long haul.

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“We love this little country,” Brittany tells CNN Travel. “We hope that maybe we’ll have grandkids here one day.”

Big decision



The Bowen's adapted to life in Ecuador quickly and are thriving in the South American country.
Brittany Bowen

Before the move, the couple, who’ve been married for nearly 17 years, say that they were becoming increasingly concerned about the pressures placed on children by “modern American society” and wanted to try something new.

“We did not like what we’d seen develop over the course of the last couple decades...” adds Brittany, explaining that they felt that young people in the United States were becoming “more isolated.”

“We weren’t confident that our kids would enjoy the same sort of potential trajectory that previous generations had shared.

“And the more we considered things like that, the more we wondered, ‘Is that even what we want? Do we even want them to be on a fast track to the American Dream?’”

The couple were also frustrated with living what they describe as the “standard American life.”

“Long commutes and never enough money,” says Blake. “All those usual problems... I was working in a career that was very time consuming, and took me away from home a lot. So we didn’t want that anymore.”

So why did they choose Ecuador as their “new home”?

“We’d always had South America on the mind,” explains Brittany, who is fluent in Spanish and previously studied in Argentina.

“And talked about it off and on since we met. Always wondering when and if the door was going to open.”

The couple, who previously worked in disaster management, go on to explain that they’d been discussing the prospect of relocating for around 15 years, but it wasn’t until the Covid-19 pandemic hit in 2020 that they finally made the decision.

“Everything fell into place very seamlessly for our move abroad at that point,” says Brittany, adding that they finally felt financially comfortable enough to relocate.

They’d initially been looking into a move to Chile, but after doing some research, the couple decided that Ecuador would be a better fit.

“Ecuador had always kind of been on the back burner, not really on the forefront,” says Blake, pointing out that Chile’s borders were still closed to international travelers due to the restrictions brought about by Covid.

“So, slowly but surely, as we did more and more research, I was like, ‘Oh my gosh, this is an amazing little country.’ And there were a lot more benefits to being here.”

Among these benefits were the fact that Ecuador was just a four-hour flight from Miami, used the US dollar as its official currency, and the cost of living was “quite low.”

“It made a lot of sense on a practical level as well,” adds Blake, noting that the year-round temperate climate also played a part in their decision.

The couple then began the process of applying for “professional visas,” which are available to applicants with a university degree (or higher) and is valid for two years.

Huge benefits



The Bowens say they have taken to life in Ecuador, but have faced various challenges since relocating. Brittany Bowen

The couple opted to hire an immigration lawyer to help them navigate their way through the proceedings.

“Since we bought property here, we also could have qualified for an investors visa,” adds Brittany.

In late 2021, the Bowens set off from Washington with their four children, Aurora, Sebastian, Conrad, and Truett, who were aged between 11 and six at the time, for their new life in Ecuador.

“We had told our families the end of March, and we got here in September,” says Brittany “So it was a very quick process.”

The Bowens say they felt at home in the country almost immediately.

“After landing it was like, ‘OK, this is where we’re supposed to be,’” recounts Blake.

After spending a lot of time researching the different areas of the country, they opted to base themselves in Loja, which has a closeknit community and is one of Ecuador’s oldest cities.

They went on to purchase a five-acre parcel of land filled with fruit trees and coffee plants, on the side of a mountain, which they found on Facebook marketplace.

“Ecuadorians use Facebook for everything,” says Brittany. “So we’ve had to up our Facebook game since moving here.”

The Bowens, who have been chronicling their experiences on their YouTube account [Average Family Abroad](#), spent their first year in the country focusing on building their three-bedroom home and getting to know the local community.

“We had savings,” explains Brittany. “So we built the house and got used to life. And I’m really glad we did, because that was a really precious time.”

The couple say they spent around \$100,000 on the land and roughly \$55,000 on constructing their three-bedroom home, which has a balcony and a terrace.

“The view is spectacular,” says Blake. “We stepped out the door and said, ‘This is a multi-million-dollar view.’”

The Bowens say they were welcomed into the community with open arms.

“We could go on forever about the Ecuadorian people and how they’re just the most compelling people we’ve ever spent time with,” says Brittany.



“And we’ve traveled a lot in Latin America, and just have a deep love for Latin America, South America, specifically.”

Brittany, who was the only fluent Spanish speaker in the family when they first moved, was particularly thrilled to find that her “jokes were understood.”

“Humor doesn’t always translate,” she points out. “Like, I can understand what someone said, but I don’t know why everyone’s laughing.”

“But that’s not the case here. I can make a joke and it’s received as a joke. People get it, and they’re laughing with me. That was a really delightful discovery.”

One of the things they admire most about Ecuadorians is the sense of pride many seem to have in their country, and Brittany and Blake have noticed that no one seems surprised that they chose to move there. In fact, they are often congratulated on the decision.

“There’s so much we love about our life here,” says Brittany. “I’m actually a little surprised by how much the weather makes a difference in quality of life.”

“Our part of Ecuador is known as the ‘Valley of Eternal Spring,’ and living in constant spring is pretty fantastic.”

The Bowens spend a lot of time tending to their farm, and have been surprised to find that their fruit trees continue to produce year-round.

“We never imagined that we’d be picking our own dragonfruits and pineapples, much less drinking our homegrown coffee,” says Brittany, before admitting that she and Blake have become “coffee snobs” as a result.

“Now we drink a lot of US coffee, and we’re just horrified.”

Brittany and Blake say they hope to one day be able to advance their homegrown coffee and perhaps look into importing to other countries.

“Our region of Ecuador is famous for its coffee,” says Brittany. “It’s just outstanding quality.”

Closeknit community



The family spend a lot of time tending to their five-acre farm. Brittany Bowen While their children were homeschooled in the US, the Bowens opted to enrol them in school in Ecuador.

“No one in Ecuador homeschools,” explains Brittany. “So we could have continued to do that, and we always would have been outsiders... It would be a barrier. And we wanted to assimilate.”

This has ultimately proved to be a successful decision for the family, and the couple say that being “fellow school parents and participants in town life” has made them feel very much part of the community.

“That’s been a big joy,” says Brittany. “And it’s also really good for things like security, because everyone watches out for you.”

However, Brittany and Blake, who’ve both found remote work since moving, admit that adjusting to the Ecuadorian school system has been as tricky for them as it has been for their kids.

“It’s interesting because they’re learning Ecuadorian history, not US history. And we’re not able to help them with that,” explains Brittany

They also note that “soccer is a really big thing here,” and their kids had “never kicked a ball in their life before moving.”



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“So our poor 13-year-old son is at a disadvantage, because his classmates have been playing since they could walk,” adds Brittany.

“They play soccer on the little team in the town, but he’ll never catch up to his peers. It’s just for fun. Thankfully, kids are nice here.”

All four of the children now speak Spanish fluently, which is something the couple are hugely proud of.

“We consider bilingualism to be a tremendous gift we can give our children,” says Brittany.

“And biculturalism, being able to function and just appreciate another way of doing things, we think is really important.”

The couple say they’d advise anyone considering moving to a country like Ecuador to get to know the destination first and avoid being “rigid.”

“We’ve encountered quite a few kind of cranky expats who don’t seem to love or appreciate Ecuador or Ecuadorians,” says Brittany. “And that’s sort of heartbreaking, and kind of gives foreigners a bad name.”

Reflecting on her upbringing in the US, Brittany admits that she sees things with a different lens having gone through the experience of moving to a foreign country.

“I really wish I had reached out more to the immigrant kids at school and their families,” she says.

“Because we’re benefiting from people reaching out to us. And it’s just that realization that I could have done better.”

While the family have taken to life in Ecuador tremendously, they’ve faced various challenges since moving there, including flooding in their town.

Safety factor



Aurora, Sebastian, Conrad, and Truett Bowen at Ingapirca in Ecuador's Cañar province.
Brittany Bowen

And in 2024, Ecuador was plunged into a nationwide [state of emergency](#) when one of its most powerful drug lords escaped from prison and an “internal armed conflict” broke out. Various new state of emergencies have been announced since then, the most recent was renewed earlier this month.

The [US State Department](#) currently advises US citizens to “exercise increased caution in Ecuador due to civil unrest, crime, and kidnapping,” and avoid traveling to five areas of the country, including Guayaquil, “due to crime.”

The Bowens say they’ve been keeping an eye on the situation, and while it’s a “concern,” it hasn’t affected them so far.

“Statistically speaking, up until these last couple of years, Ecuador actually has been one of the safest countries in South America, generally,” says Blake. “Even our province, the statistics are always incredibly low.

“It’s a very safe area. And then we moved here, of course, and things start to ramp up post-pandemic.”

The couple say they’ve found that the “current struggles” are isolated to “a couple of pockets on the coast” admitting that if they didn’t watch the news, they’d likely have no idea that anything was wrong.

However, Brittany and Blake are very aware that things can change at any moment.

“In South America, there’s always a volatility,” says Brittany. “I think that goes with the region... And you accept that...”

“So we don’t know what’s going to happen. And we have plans. We’re prudent. But we also don’t live in fear...



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“One thing we do say is that in the United States, we would watch for exits in grocery stores. You look for hiding places.

“Crime is random, and that scares us. Whereas here, it’s kind of a jaded statement, but there’s a logic behind the crime.”

Although they have no plans to leave Ecuador, Brittany and Blake say they’ll continue to keep a watch “on the stability of the country,” and make any decisions if or when they have to.

“We’re here to support Ecuador through the hard times too,” says Brittany. “But if we ever had to leave for a period of time with intent on coming back, we would go somewhere else in Latin America. The US wouldn’t even be on our radar.”

After living outside of the country nearly four years, Brittany and Blake can’t ever envision themselves living in the US again, explaining that they don’t feel as though they’d be able to maintain a lifestyle even close to what they have there.

“I mean, it’s expensive,” says Brittany, adding that their family can live comfortably in Ecuador for around \$1,500 per month.

“And people are angry there. We don’t like the divide. How people can’t be kind to each other. That’s very unappealing.”

The couple acknowledge that their children could potentially choose to return to the US for college in the future, but say that it’s not something that they necessarily want for them.

“We feel like we kind of said ‘goodbye’ to that when we moved here,” says Brittany. “We don’t want the American Dream for our kids.

”That doesn’t say they won’t pursue that on their own, and we support them whatever they choose to do.

“But we’ve chosen a different way of life and a different future for our family... And we do think they will be super well equipped for whatever is in store for them.”

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