CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN MALE/FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS IN ECUADOR

This section is to discuss one of the biggest dangers that North American women face when they travel to Ecuador, and what to do to be safe. There are major differences in attitudes and behaviors involving relations between men and women in the two cultures. Some men in Ecuador follow a very macho culture. In this culture the man practically owns "his woman" and can do with her what he wants. Before 1991 it was legal in Ecuador for a man to beat his wife. It was his right and privilege. The law has changed, but in many cases the attitude has not. One of the results of this attitude is that, in what a North American woman might consider a normal "dating encounter," the Ecuadorian man may consider the woman "his" to do with as he wants.

While an Ecuadorian woman may be very reluctant to be alone with her date unless she was willing to do whatever the man may want to do, an American woman may not fear the same situation, feeling that she was an equal partner in deciding how intimate she wanted to be. The concept of date rape in some segments of Ecuadorian culture almost doesn't exist. Their attitude often is "Well, if she allowed the two of them to be alone together, un-chaperoned, she clearly was giving him permission to do what he wanted." At the same time in certain circles Ecuadorian men are expected to be sexually active. "That is what men do." But women are considered cheap and trashy if they're not completely moral. All that most Ecuadorian men know about American women is what they see in our prime time TV and our Hollywood movies. They therefore think all American women have loose morals and are easy. This perception is also reinforced by many young American tourists. Many Ecuadorian men feel that if an American woman is your friend that means she'll be willing to have sex with you. This makes many guys very interested in becoming "friends" with our volunteers. As a result of these differences, romantic or dating relationships can be very dangerous for North American women in Ecuador. This is why we have a rule that prohibits dating or anything that may even resemble a romantic-type relationship.

For a North American woman (you) to be safe in Ecuador she (you) needs to behave like a proper Ecuadorian woman. You cannot rely on what you would feel comfortable with in your home town. You cannot make eye contact with, smile at or talk to men you do not know. When walking on the street you need to be aware of what is going on around you, but you should not make eye contact with men or respond to their friendly or catcall-type comments. Safety is OSSO's number one concern, and we believe that if you'll follow this advice you can have a wonderful and safe experience in Ecuador.