

International Training Programme 2025 at the British Museum

FINAL REPORT

Fernando Astudillo, PhD.

Associate Professor of Anthropology, Universidad San Francisco de Quito (Ecuador).

During July and August 2025, I had the privilege of attending the International Training Programme (ITP) at the British Museum in London. This was a once-in-a-lifetime personal and professional experience that will continue to shape my career in ways I am only beginning to realise. My time on the ITP will bring lasting benefits to my professional development and meaningful changes to my personal life. After completing this six-week programme in the UK, I am convinced that I have become both a more informed professional and a more reflective person.

I am an archaeologist dedicated to academic research. Until now, my relationship with museums and heritage collections had been complementary to my main activities as a professor of anthropology. While working with heritage collections has always been one of my central interests, my focus in recent years has been on teaching and archaeological research. However, attending ITP 2025 and experiencing first-hand the heart and roots of the British Museum and other UK museums, has renewed and deepened my commitment to engaging with heritage collections, this time with a stronger emphasis on working with and for the general public.

As the first Ecuadorian scholar to attend the programme, I can already see its immediate impact on my career. I have gained a new perspective that challenges some of my previous assumptions about heritage management in the UK. Instead of stereotypes, I now hold a more informed and contextualised understanding of the importance of protecting material heritage, the profound impact of collaboration with the public, and the essential role of safeguarding public institutions that preserve cultural heritage.

In this report, I will summarise the main contributions and benefits of attending the ITP 2025 programme, highlighting both personal and professional dimensions. My immediate

objective in Ecuador is to share the knowledge and experiences I gained with my colleagues, students, and local communities.



Portraits from our first week at the British Museum. This life-changing experience gave me new technical skills and helped me build a strong network of colleagues from across the Global South (7–8 July 2025).

Personal growth

I believe that one of the greatest benefits of attending the ITP 2025 is the network of colleagues I gained during our time in London. All of us built new professional and personal ties with colleagues from across the Global South, with whom we share similar challenges and can exchange ideas and strategies for heritage protection and conservation.

Learning about new cultures and languages was also invaluable. For scholars like me, it is essential to understand how heritage protection programmes operate in different countries, especially those with political contexts similar to Ecuador. At the same time, experiencing local culture in both London and Newcastle expanded my respect for cultural diversity.

Sharing time, conversations, and professional experiences with experts from so many backgrounds brought immeasurable value to my personal life.

My placement in the AOA Department and the SDCELAR Centre made me feel truly at home. It inspired me to think of myself as a more holistic professional, without losing sight of the human dimension that gives meaning to our work. At SDCELAR, we formed strong friendships and a sense of community that I believe will last for years. Similarly, my time with the North East Museums in Newcastle supported my personal interest in 20th-century archaeology and strengthened my current commitment to public archaeology and community museums. My experience at the Discovery Museum, in particular, expanded my curiosity about how material culture and memory are preserved in smaller urban contexts.



During ITP 2025, the field trips and museum visits expanded my interest in combining anthropology, archaeology, heritage conservation, and visual and digital arts (Field trip to Stonehenge, 11 July 2025).

Professional development

It is difficult to mention every single professional benefit that the ITP has brought me. However, I see that the most immediate ones are connected to four main areas: the conservation of material heritage and memory, education, research collaboration, and art exhibitions.

Conservation of Material Heritage and Memory

The ITP programme provided me with new and updated skills in conservation techniques, restoration, managing, cleaning, and cataloguing of material culture. The lectures I attended, the hands-on exercises, and the visits to conservation and research laboratories prepared me with excellent technical tools that I am already applying at our local archaeological reserve.

Visiting several museums in London and Newcastle also showed me the importance of conserving material culture as a way of preserving and reinforcing local identity. Roman remains and objects associated with Hadrian's Wall, preserved in museums such as Segedunum Roman Fort and Arbeia Roman Fort, highlight how crucial this period is to modern British identity. Learning about the influence and legacy of the Roman period in shaping British identity was new to me and helped me understand the complex processes of identity creation in European countries. This is an aspect that I would like to expand in my future research.

Another valuable aspect was discovering the importance of community programmes and volunteer opportunities for both young people and senior citizens. These strategies, implemented in many of the museums we visited, are essential for connecting different generations and keeping museums relevant and active. I plan to adapt some of these strategies in my undergraduate courses in Ecuador, particularly in the use of social media and event programming to better communicate with younger audiences.



The visit to Arbeia Roman Fort, as part of our visit to North East Museums in Newcastle, was unforgettable, it offered me a unique opportunity to reflect on the influence of Roman culture on modern British identity (31 July 2025).

One of my favourite activities during ITP 2025 was visiting and working with historical archives. At the Tyne & Wear Archives, the Newcastle University Library, and the British Library, we discussed the significance of preserving well-organized archives to safeguard community and national memory. The scale of the British Library's infrastructure and the unique documents at the Tyne & Wear Archives (such as prison records, shipbuilding plans, and engineering blueprints) made me both envious and hopeful, hopeful that one day similar projects could exist in my home country.

A life-changing experience was the visit to the Royal Botanic Gardens' reserve in London. This institution preserves not only living plant species from around the world, but also historical records and objects made from plants. It was my first time seeing a collection focused exclusively on botanical materials, which gave me new insights into the challenges of preserving organic artifacts. This visit transformed my understanding of museums and reserves, reinforcing my conviction that collections must be presented while also acknowledging the colonial origins of many institutions.



During the ITP 2025 I also had the privilege of exploring Ecuadorian archaeological objects currently housed in the BM reserves. This opened possibilities for future collaborative research. In this picture, I am showing characteristics of diagnostic ceramic fragments from the Formative Period in southern Ecuador (8 August 2025).

The visits to UK museums also gave me strong evidence to advocate for the immense importance of funding and supporting public institutions that safeguard national memory. Most museums in the UK are funded with public money, providing a global example of how a state agenda for heritage conservation can educate future local and international generations, something especially critical in today's global context.

Back at my home institution, I have already begun implementing some of the lessons learned during ITP 2025. First, I have started designing and programming a new catalogue for our archaeological collection. Second, I am contributing to the creation of a general collections database at the university that will integrate heritage collections, herbarium specimens, geological materials, and historical documents. Looking forward, my goal is to consolidate these collections into a single repository and to help design a digital archive. All these actions are aimed at protecting funding and ensuring the long-term conservation and management of our collections.

Finally, after spending six weeks at the BM, I came to fully appreciate the challenges of maintaining proper museum infrastructure in relation to climate and environmental factors. Achieving ideal temperature, humidity, lighting, airflow, pest control, and security is no small task. Inspired by what I observed in the UK, I plan to evaluate the current conditions of our reserve room and make improvements to align more closely with the standards I experienced there.

Education

Attending the ITP programme as an academic scholar brought me valuable reflections on the essential collaborations between museums, reserves, and the classroom. I will now permanently incorporate both the conceptual strategies and the technical aspects of conservation into my lectures and laboratory sessions. Our visits to the Cambridge Anthropology Museum, the British Library, the Newcastle University Library, the ESCALA Collection at Essex University, and the Hatton Gallery at Newcastle University inspired me to design new courses that foster intensive collaboration between anthropology students and the science and art departments at my home university.

In this regard, some of my current actions to connect heritage conservation with education include: 1) Incorporating laboratory exercises on conservation and cataloguing of material culture into existing anthropology courses. 2) Using collections as teaching tools to spark theoretical discussions on archaeological interpretation, material and memory conservation, history, economics, and local and global politics.

Looking ahead, I am planning to design new undergraduate courses focused on museums, heritage, conservation, data cataloguing, and communication with the general public. The aim of these courses is to encourage student involvement in ongoing projects while also inspiring them to contribute to the development of public policies that protect cultural heritage in Ecuador.



Our visits to academic institutions fostered new alliances between the UK and Ecuador to conserve and research Latin American cultural heritage. This picture was taken during our visit to the Anthropology Department at the University of Cambridge, organised by the SDCELAR Centre (17 July 2025).

Research collaboration

During my time at the British Museum, I had the opportunity to briefly explore two important collections of archaeological and ethnographic objects from Ecuador. The first is a collection of archaeological material excavated in Ecuador during the 1970s by the British archaeologist Elizabeth M. Carmichael, complemented by an ethnographic collection from southern Ecuador. The second is a group of ethnographic and archaeological objects collected by the British mountaineer and explorer Edward Whymper during his visit to Ecuador in the late 19th century.

These collections need to be studied in greater depth, particularly through new ceramic analyses, iconographic studies, provenance research, and assessments of their exhibition potential. In this regard, we are currently exploring possible research collaborations with the AOA Department at the British Museum to design projects that investigate both the

history of British archaeological research in Ecuador and the viability of future international exhibitions.

Another objective of my visit to London was to explore historical documents related to British whaling activities in the South American Pacific during the 18th century. I was fortunate to read William Hacke's 1685 book *A Description of the Islands of Galapagos, Delineated Exactly According to the Prescription of Mr. William Ambrose Cowley*, a work directly connected to my current research interests. This act sparked a mutual interest in developing future collaborations with the British Library, focusing on historical documents that reference the Galápagos Islands and Ecuador.

Exhibits and Art Galleries

Participating in ITP 2025 renewed my interest in creating collaborations between archaeological and anthropological academic research and art exhibitions in Ecuador. During our visits to art museums and university galleries (in Essex and Newcastle), I had the chance to discuss and learn about current academic programmes that connect undergraduate students with university art spaces.

In the near future, I plan to adopt some of these ideas by focusing on exhibitions of heritage material culture through visual and digital arts perspectives. This has long been one of my career goals, but after experiencing the inspiring work at UK institutions such as Tate Modern, the V&A East, and the Young V&A, I am even more motivated. Back in Ecuador, I aim to expand the collaborations already underway between the Department of Anthropology and the Department of Art at my university to develop interdisciplinary exhibitions on both ancient and modern material culture.

The *Object in focus* project was an excellent opportunity to combine the concepts learned during the ITP, my theoretical background in anthropological and historical research in Latin America, and new ideas about exhibition design and public communication in a museum setting. Working with an authentic object collected in Suriname from Indigenous communities during the 17th century gave us the responsibility to contextualize it accurately while also proposing a new interpretation for the general public.



The Object in focus exercise was an excellent opportunity to design an exhibition concept for a single object from the British Museum. Our team, composed of fellows Daniel Oliveira Lira, Fernando Astudillo, and Julián Roa Trina, presented concepts for the exhibition of a Queyu (Arawak language) / Mosa or Motsa (Arawaio and Pemón languages) / Tanga (Kimbundu language) / Apron (British interpretation) (14 August 2025).

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