

Canoe the Amazon: the Cuyabeno River



Highlights

Spend 5 days in the Amazon, exploring the Cuyabeno River in North East Ecuador. Hike in the jungle, paddle through flooded forests and visit local indigenous communities on a tour that will blow your socks off!

The Cuyabeno Wildlife Reserve in Ecuador is a protected area of Amazonian tropical rainforest. The reserve is a complex of rivers, lagoons and floating forest, characterised by intense biodiversity and navigable waterways. The area encompasses 604,000 hectares of primary rainforest and boasts river dolphin, tapirs, caimans, anacondas, ocelot and piranha as well as 515 species of bird. Cuyabeno is the ancestral homeland of the Sionas, the Cofanes and Secoyas, three indigenous tribes who live in small homesteads deep with the Amazon. These people follow a traditional way of life in symbiosis with the forest.

You will explore flooded forests and the Cuyabeno River by canoe, spotting birds and wildlife as you paddle. On dry land, you will have the opportunity to explore the jungle on foot, hiking through the primary forest with your guide who will teach you about how the plants of the forest are used in everyday life by indigenous people. You then have the privilege of visiting a local community where you will gain an insight into how these secret people live now and discover what conflicts they face with the encroachment of the modern world.

Guides are on hand to spot and explain the incredible flora and fauna of the rainforest. They are professional licensed guides who speak English and have a biology background. They will explain the uses and applications of traditional plants as well as offer insider knowledge on how best to catch a piranha when you go fishing or where to tread during a night walk in search of caiman.

Is it for me?

This tour is for those who have a passion for the environment and a love of adventure. You will discover this wild and fascinating world in the most natural and rewarding way, by canoe and on foot. If you have a fascination with the Amazon and want to go further than a limited tourist cruise then five days on a canoe along this beautiful reserve's waterways is just for you. The pace is light and paddling often turns to pleasant drifting as you take in the sounds and smells of the rainforest.

The accommodation is a mixture of tent and hut, the latter with showers. The 5-day tour is perfect for the more intrepid family. Children aged 10 and above are welcome. Group sizes are a minimum of 2 people and a maximum of 10.

Accommodation

Most nights of the 5-day trip are spent in traditional wooden huts that have both single and double rooms, each with private bathroom, shower and mosquito nets. There are hammocks waiting for weary bodies to relax in and the setting on the banks of the Cuyabeno River is stunning. On the first night you may be camping in tents in a lovely spot in the heart of the forest.

The food is of a high standard and ranges from international cuisine to local Ecuadorian specialities, such as: fried plantain, encebollado (a special tomato salad) and menestras (lentil stews). All meals are carefully prepared by trained cooks. Drinking and cooking water is pure bottled water and vegetarian meals are available

Prices from

216 GBP (5 days) per person

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Itinerary

Day One: Cuabeno River - Tiger Pass Campsite

Leave Lago Agrio in the morning and travel to the Cuyabeno River bridge (the Park entrance) in private transport (3 hours). From the bridge you paddle by canoe down the Cuyabeno River to the Tiger Pass campsite, a beautiful spot in the midst of lush forest (3 hours). On the way, you will see the wide range of flora and fauna that live in the primary forest. Finish the day with a night walk in search of nocturnal creatures and spend the night camping out in tents.

Day Two: Laguna Grande Lake - Magic River Camp

Continue paddling downstream to the River Camp located on the banks of Cuyabeno River (3.5 - 5 hours). The facility consists of rustic jungle huts providing double rooms with beds, private bathroom and showers. In the afternoon you will explore the flooded forest of the Laguna Grande Lake, take a refreshing dip in the lake and watch the sunset.

Day Three: Cuyabeno River

In the morning you will take a longer walk on a small path through primary forest (3 hours). Your guide will explain the uses and applications of plants, those which are medicinal, edible, poisonous or hallucinogenic, and those that are used to build houses and canoes, or to make hammocks and baskets. Later you'll head back to the camp for a rest. In the evening paddle downstream on the Cuyabeno River by canoe. There are good chances of fishing for the notorious piranha on our way. After dark take a night excursion in search of caimans.

Day Four: Tarapuy - Cuyabeno River

Today visit the cultural center of Tarapuy, the indigenous community of the Siona. Travel by motorized dugout canoe downstream on the Cuyabeno River and have a short hike, for about 2 hours, until you reach the community. Here you get an insight into the Siona culture and their current lifestyle. You will help to make bread from manioc root in a family home. On your way back to the lodge, you pass a gigantic kapoc tree with its immense buttress roots, believed to be about 100 years old.

Day Five: Cuyabeno River - Lago Agrio

Before sunrise you head out in the canoes, paddling along the Cuyabeno River to spot birds. Return to the camp for breakfast. During the morning you take the trip back in the motor canoe. Again there are chances of spotting wildlife on our way to the Cuyabeno River bridge. Your private transport will be waiting to take you back to Lago Agrio, where you arrive in the late afternoon.

Details

Getting there

Flying from the UK...Major airlines flying to Ecuador are Iberia, Intercontinental, British Airways and LAN Ecuador. Most flights from the UK require a stopover in Madrid and maybe another in Houston. Fly to Mariscal Sucre International Airport - Quito (UIO) or José Joaquín de Olmedo International Airport - Guayaquil (GYE).

The operator can then arrange bus/plane transfers onwards to Lago Agrio, 274km to the east. There are two airlines flying from Quito to Lago Agrio: **Tame** and **VIP** and the 30 minute flight costs around \$120 return. The tour is arranged to coincide with flights coming in to Lago Agria, so booking accommodation there is not necessary.

Price includes

Transport to and from Lago Agrio to Cuyabeno or Aguas Negras; full catering; English speaking & naturalist guide; full camping and canoeing equipment; accommodation in tents and rustic camps; entrance fees to communities; hotel reservations and airport transfers in Lago Agrio.

Not included

Your transport to and from Quito to Lago Agrio; accommodation in Lago Agrio; the park entrance fee of US\$ 20 (foreigners) or US\$ 5 (residents).

When is best

Minimum group size of 2 people is required for this tour to run.

The Amazon rainy season is December to June, with temperatures ranging between 23 °C to 30 °C. There are frequent showers in April and May. The dry season is from July to November, with temperatures between 26 °C to 40 °C. The weather in Ecuador is changeable and it is always a good idea to know what weather is predicted for your visit.

Comfort level

Down to earth (hostels, camping, huts)

Experience required

A reasonable level of fitness and interest is all that is needed

Travellers should bring

The only things you need to bring are some light clothes, your personal belongings and a flashlight with spare batteries. You will be provided with: quality Canadian canoes; paddles; life vests; rain ponchos; boots (up to European size 47); dry bags for your luggage (from 5 to 115 litres); tents; air-sleeping pads; light sleeping-bags; sheet liners and mosquito nets.

