

Canoe the Amazon: the Aguas Negras River



Highlights

Explore the Amazon rainforest of Ecuador by canoe, paddling deep into the heart of the Cuyabeno reserve on the Aguas Negras river. Spend 8 days exploring these remote waterways, spotting wildlife and visiting a local indigenous community on this unforgettable adventure!

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.

Starting your 8 day trip up on the remote Aguas Negras River, you will alternate between exploring the water by canoe and entering the forest on foot along hidden pathways. Night-time hikes looking for the jungle's nocturnal residents and a climb up an observation tower also lend themselves to the experience. You then swap your paddles for a motorized canoe as you visit an indigenous village of the Cofán tribe and travel upriver to the Cuyabeno lake system to visit a shaman.

Guides are on hand to spot and explain the incredible flora and fauna of the rainforest. They are experienced local tribesmen, certified by the Ministry of Tourism, who will explain the uses and applications of traditional plants. They will also give insider knowledge on medicinal plants, 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 is an expedition in the best sense of the word. It is a canoeing holiday and as such includes water, insects and exercise. The 8-day tour is designed for people who want to explore more remote areas of the rainforest away from the typical routes that are offered by most tour operators. It would suit canoeists and/or wildlife enthusiasts who prefer small rivers with more chances of spotting wildlife. Group sizes are a maximum of 8. Families and children (10 years+) are welcome. If 8 days is too long or you would like to try something gentler you might be interested in the 5-day trip on the [Cuyabeno River](#).

During the first 4 days of the tour all equipment has to be carried in the paddling canoes. Camps will be set up on the river bank, where you stay in tents. Shower facilities are available in one or two huts and there is a camping shower but washing is more often done in Nature's Bathroom (i.e. the river).

Accommodation

The accommodation on this trip is rustic and close to nature. The first few nights are spent in tents on the river banks. Later on in the week nights are spent in tents pitched inside simple huts. The final night you might stay in Magic River Camp, a simple hut with bathroom facilities.

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

Prices from

524 GBP (8 days) per person

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prepared by trained cooks. Drinking and cooking water is pure bottled water and vegetarian meals are available on request.

Itinerary

Days One-Four: Aguas Negras River

Today you will be taken from Lago Agrio to the Aguas Negras River. During the next four days, you will paddle downstream on this small blackwater river. Canoeing will be combined with a variety of daytime hikes through the jungle. On the evening of the fourth day, you will join the Cuyabeno River, which is three times bigger than the Aguas Negras River. You will paddle to a rustic hut that belongs to the Kichwa community of Playas de Cuyabeno. This is your stop for the night.

Day Five: Jungle hiking - observation tower

In this area you have the opportunity to go on hikes along small jungle paths through primary forest, visit the seven-storey high observation tower with a spectacular view over the rainforest and observe river dolphins. The day finishes with a night walk in search of nocturnal creatures. Night camp is at the Kichwa hut.

Day Six: Cofán community visit

You reach the confluence of the Cuyabeno and Aguarico rivers by motor canoe within an hour. Travel downstream until you reach the village of Sábalo, an indigenous community of the Cofán. You can visit this typical village accompanied by a Cofán guide and take a walk on a circular trail, getting to know a variety of medicinal plants used by the Cofán. On the walk you will see an old giant kapok tree with immense buttress roots. In the afternoon you return to the Cuyabeno River and paddle back to camp.

Day Seven: Cuyabeno River - shaman visit

Today you travel in a motorized dugout canoe upstream on the Cuyabeno River until you reach the Magic River Camp in the Cuyabeno lake system. On the way you may visit the shaman of a nearby village and learn about medicinal plants and healing practices. In the afternoon there will be time to explore the flooded forest of Laguna Grande, paddling by canoe until dark.

Day Eight: Lago Agrio

This morning you rise early for some Amazon birdwatching. Later you can paddle to various smaller lakes in the area. After lunch you will return by motor canoe to the park entrance. From here you'll reach Lago Agrio within 3 hours by private transport. You will arrive in Lago Agrio at approximately 6:00 pm.

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 and indigenous 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

This tour departs from March to the end of July and mid-September to the end of November. August is not possible because of the dry season. Minimum group size of 4 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 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.

