

Stay in a Huaorani Amazon Eco Lodge!



Highlights

In the foothills of the Ecuadorian Andes is the planet's largest remaining expanse of tropical rainforest, home to 20% of the world's freshwater, a tenth of all animal species and one very special indigenous population: the Huaorani. Part of a unique project of sustainable tourism, this five-day tour takes you to the heart of their territory for a fascinating insight into daily life whilst staying in a beautiful Amazon Eco Lodge.

It may be the second smallest country in South America, but what Ecuador lacks in size it more than makes up for in natural and cultural diversity! Straddling the equator on the northwest coast of the continent, Ecuador is a land of ancient cities, lush cloud forest, volcanic highlands and palm-fringed coastline. In a single day it's possible to travel through all these landscapes and more, making Ecuador (pound-for-pound) the most diverse nation on Earth! One of 17 megadiverse countries, with 15% of the world's known bird species as well as 250 endemic reptiles and amphibians, the "Republic of the Equator" is also home to four UNESCO World Heritage Sites, including its capital, Quito, and the Galapagos archipelago, the lost world that inspired Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection. Small wonder, then, that Ecuador is a traveller's dream!

Deep in the Ecuadorian Amazon, the territory of the Huaorani people is famed for its extraordinary flora and fauna and dramatic jungle river-scapes! This five-day tour offers a unique introduction to the region and its inhabitants. From your base at the picturesque eco-lodge, you'll discover the rainforest by both foot and canoe, with day and night treks (and paddles!) promising thrilling encounters with some of the Amazon's most charismatic creatures. Caimans, anacondas and capybaras (the world's largest rodent) are among the many species you'll come across with your Huaorani guides, and there's also the chance to hunt and fish using traditional technologies like blowguns and traps! Best of all, you'll spend time in the Huaorani settlements themselves, exploring the gardens, learning the art of building fires and shelters and perhaps enjoying a bowl of some sweet chucula (fresh banana drink) with one of the local families.

Is it for me?

This trip is for people who care about the natural world and the tribal cultures that still manage to survive in small pockets across the globe. You need to have a sense of social responsibility and to be able to empathise with the people you will meet. You'll get most from your stay if you're willing to really get involved, whether that's learning about local livelihoods, trying your hand at some Huaorani crafts or joining the local kids at play in the swimming hole.

You need a decent level of physical fitness for this trip. The lodge has 5 cabins and can cater for a maximum of 10 people.

Accommodation

The Huaorani eco-lodge is a truly magical place to spend a few days. Designed in perfect sympathy with its environment, the palm-thatched lodge comprises five traditionally built cabins complete with showers, flushing toilets and hot water (courtesy of rooftop solar panels). It also has the obligatory porch and hammock! The final night of the trip will be spent in a campsite in Nenkepare.

Prices from

491 GBP (5 days) per person

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The eco-lodge has a restaurant serving up tasty, nutritionally balanced dishes, making special use of fresh local ingredients: meat, fish, tropical fruit and vegetables. There is also a bar with a good range of beers, wines and soft drinks. This is the perfect spot to relax post-hike and take in the sights, scents and sounds of the balmy jungle night!

Itinerary

You can choose 4, 5 or 6 days on this trip. Itineraries will be adapted accordingly. Below is a sample itinerary:

Day One: Quito - Andes - Amazon

You will be picked up from your hotel in Quito and head south to the frontier between the Andes proper and the Ecuadorian Amazon. A light aircraft flight north-east over the jungle will take you to Huaorani Ec lodge to settle in, listen to an introductory briefing about the Huaorani and their relationship with the rainforest, and have dinner.

Day Two: Shiripuno River

After breakfast, you will have a 3 hour hike traversing terra firme and varzea - earth that is prone to flooding. After lunch at the Lodge, you will head to an oxbow lake formed by the Shiripuno River (Cocha Pequeña). You may catch a glimpse of the extraordinary Hoatzin (one of the few birds that feeds almost exclusively on leaves), as well as anacondas, capybaras and caimans. You will have a nighttime walk back to the lodge. This is your best opportunity to see and hear elusive rainforest creatures out on the beat; insects, bats, and other animals whose reflecting eyes reveal their watching presence.

Day Three: Rainforest

After breakfast, you will go hiking with a Huaorani hunter. You will learn firsthand about the secrets of survival in the rainforest. You will learn how to set traps, make fire without matches, build a shelter in minutes, use a blowgun, practice the perfect swing of the machete, and catch fish in small creeks. Your guide may also show you edible insects, medicinal plants, the right clay to make pottery, and honey produced by stingless bees. You will return to the lodge by canoe. After dinner you can listen to a talk (charla) from a naturalist guide.

Day Four: Rainforest

Today is a full day-trip away from the lodge to visit a large oxbow lake called Cocha Grande. You will search for birds and monkeys before lunch at the lookout point. You might feel like a siesta on the trip back upstream, although a quick swim should wake you up for late afternoon birding before arriving at the Lodge.

Day Five: Coca - Quito

After breakfast, you will continue downstream towards the border between traditional Huaorani territory and that of the petroleum companies (although it all used to be Huaorani territory). Here, you will witness the crude reality of our collective thirst for oil as you ride alongside the miles of pipelines, which go from the Huaorani community of Tihuino to Lago Agrio, the oil hub of el Oriente, to be pumped across the Andes to the port of Esmeraldas. This brief journey through oil territory illustrates the reality of the threat facing the rainforest and the Huaorani people. After a 2.5 hour ride, you reach the banks of the Rio Napo and the town of Coca, where you will catch your flight to Quito.

Details

Getting there

Flying from the UK...Major airlines flying to Ecuador are Iberia, Intercontinental, British Airways and LAN Ecuador. All flights require at least one stop over in José Joaquín de Olmedo International Airport - Guayaquil (GYE), and often two, possibly in Madrid or Houston.

You will be picked up from your hotel in Quito at the start of your trip.

Price includes

Accommodation; food; activities; guide; camping gear

Transport to and from the eco lodge is not included and will cost an additional \$270. This price includes: journey by mini bus from Quito through the valley of the volcanoes to Shell; flight in small plane from Shell to the Huaorani Amazon Eco lodge; bus from the Shiripuno River Bridge to Coca and commercial flight from Coca to Quito.

Departure days for this trip are Thursdays and Mondays.

When is best

The weather is by nature very changeable in Ecuador - so be aware of what is forecast for your visit and be sure to pack accordingly. The weather in this part of the Amazon rainforest is warm and humid, with temperatures ranging from 18 to 36°C.

Comfort level

Down to earth (hostels, camping, huts)

Experience required

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