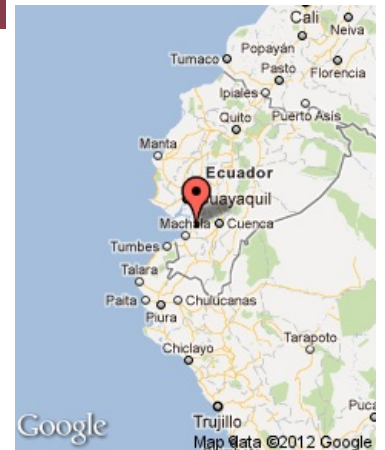


Kayaking the Amazon in Ecuador



Highlights

Spend 6 days kayaking the Amazon deep into the rainforest to visit a local Huaorani community. Paddling through flooded forests, local guides will introduce you to the Amazon's magnificent plants and wildlife as well as teaching you about their exceptional heritage.

The Huaorani communities of Ecuador are dotted along the tributaries of the Amazon as it leaves the Andes mountains and its course flattens into tropical primary forest. The tribal groups that make up the 1200-strong Huaorani, live in Ecuador's largest national park and had no contact with the outside world until the late 1950s.

There are caiman, monkeys, snakes and over 100 species of tropical birds living in flooded forests that in parts are made up of Ceibo trees up to 500-years old. Masters of their environment, the Huaorani make full use of the Amazon jungle's diverse ecosystem. Formerly hunter/gatherers most now live in villages, though one clan continues to shun all outside contact.

On this 6-day trip, you will be kayaking the Amazon through primary rainforest to get nearer to wildlife you would otherwise spook with outboard engines. Your bilingual Huaorani guide will navigate your way through waterways and flooded forest lakes. Back on dry land, you will also be taken along forest trails, learning the medicinal properties of plants and spotting monkeys, snakes, tropical birds and giant ant colonies.

You will also have the chance to meet a tribal family and discuss their world and version of Creation as well as their day-to-day activities like hunting and weaving, before heading off for a night-walk in search of nocturnal wildlife like the area's once-endangered black caiman. Once you've learnt how to feed yourself with a blow-dart lesson, you can finish your days camping wild and soaking up the sounds of a jungle night the Huaorani way.

Is it for me?

If you are an intrepid traveller and watched Bruce Parry's 'Tribe' TV series, wishing you could do it, then this is for you. This 6-day trip is designed 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.

The length of this tour would fit in well with a longer stay in Ecuador or South America in general. This trip is for keen explorers, as the days are long and physical. Be aware also that you are venturing into an undeveloped and remote area. Any hazards associated with hiking and kayaking may therefore be greater than normal.

Accommodation

On this trip, your accommodation will be in well-appointed and safely located camp sites which all have separate kitchens, social and bathroom tents. There are two evenings in a remote jungle lodge complete with communal area and hammocks after a long day's trail-beating. On your last night before flying home, a comfortable hotel awaits you, along with the modern comforts of hot running water and a restaurant!

Your food is included on the tour and is cooked by your guides with ingredients for the most part brought in from Quito. Breakfasts are a good spread with choices varying from granola to fresh bread to eggs, lunches are boxed picnics, while dinners are gourmet affairs and may even be accompanied by wine. At some point during your stay be sure to try the local delicacy, 'yuca' (also known as cassava), a starchy tuberous root which is a

Prices from
1,303 GBP (6 days) per person

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major source of carbohydrate for the Huaorani.

Itinerary

Day One: The Amazon

This morning you take a short and scenic flight from Quito to Coca, an Amazon frontier town. You will drive for 2 hours through magnificent jungle scenery until you reach the Shiripuno River. After a safety briefing and lunch, begin your journey paddling down the river. The naturalist guide will introduce you to the incredible bird, plant, and wildlife that surround you. When you arrive at your campsite in the late afternoon, you will receive a visit from a Huaorani family of the nearby Noneno Community. You can hear Huaorani stories about creation and how the Huaorani people view themselves. You can then learn some traditional Huaorani chants detailing the creation of the mountains and the jungle. In the evening, your guides prepare a fresh gourmet dinner for you. (L, D)

Day Two: Shiripuno River

This morning visit a Huaorani settlement (Noneno community) after breakfast. This settlement is comprised of both wooden houses and traditional thatch huts. Learn more about Huaorani customs and ways of life. After exchanging gifts, the Huaorani will teach you to shoot blow guns and throw spears – hunting is the traditional way of life for the Huaorani. You can also practice weaving with a palm tree fiber called chambira. Continue down the Shiripuno by kayaks. As you move downstream, the Shiripuno widens and you will be enchanted by the sights and sounds of the forest. Exotic trees and flowers provide ample cover for monkeys, birds, and other wildlife, but your guides are so skilled that you will have no problem spotting a wide variety of species. They will show you how to use any medicinal plants you come across. After a long day arrive at your fully-equipped campsite and share the day's stories over a delicious dinner. (B, L, D)

Day Three: Shiripuno Lodge

Today continue kayaking further down the Shiripuno, delving even deeper into the heart of the rainforest. Your skilled naturalist guide will help to spot more wildlife in this highly biodiverse section of the Amazon. Take time to explore the giant 500 year old Ceiba trees and their micro-ecosystems. Arrive at the Shiripuno Lodge, which provides comfortable accommodation, a hammock-filled social area and a wooden observation deck. This evening embark on a short night hike in search of owls, snakes, rodents, spiders, bats, and frogs. (B, L, D)

Day Four: The Flooded Forest

This morning take canoes to a nearby trailhead and embark on a 4 hour rainforest hike. Explore old growth forest, including flooded (varzea) forest and terra firme forest. Observe a wide variety of interesting plant life common to the area such as Ficus, Ceiba, and Parkia trees. Among the mammals you might spot are white-lipped peccaries and woolly monkeys. It is often possible to find jaguar tracks in the earth. However, you will likely be most impressed by the multitude of exotic bird species you encounter. Your hike leads to a hill overlooking the rainforest allowing you to admire the endless green canopy below. Your guides will show you numerous medicinal plants, helping you to understand the Huaorani's practical, medicinal, and spiritual bond with the forest. In the afternoon, after lunch at the lodge, hike to a cluster of small lakes to explore the flooded forest ecosystem (also a popular fishing site among the Huaorani). Here you have a good chance to see Black Caimans (a once endangered crocodilian species) and many birds, including the Hoatzin - a prehistoric bird unique to this area. With a little luck, it is also possible to spot tapirs – the largest land mammal in South America. Your guides will explain the fascinating social structure of leaf-cutter ants as you view a giant colony. In the evening, relax and enjoy your final sunset in the rainforest. (B, L, D)

Day Five: Coca

This morning take motorized canoes back towards Coca. Take ample time to stop and observe wildlife along the way - especially monkeys such as spider monkeys, woolly monkeys, and red howler monkeys. You will often pass by Huaorani families cooking; sometimes they might even invite you to eat yucca with them. Make your way back to the Shiripuno River Bridge, where the truck will be waiting to drive you back to the Coca. Stay the night in a hotel and enjoy one last evening in this frontier town before returning to Quito tomorrow. (B, L, D)

Day Six: Quito/Onwards

Head to the Coca airport after breakfast to catch your flight back to Quito. (B)

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. Fly to Mariscal Sucre International Airport - Quito (SEQU).

From Quito it is a 30 minute flight and two-hour drive to the river departure point.

Price includes

The price quoted above is based on a private departure for 2 people priced per person. Please note that you will also need to arrange flights from Coca to Quito. These cost in the region of \$120 each. Price includes road and river transportation to and from Coca; all camping gear, including sleeping bags, kitchen, social and bathroom tents. All meals as described; expedition kayaks and safety gear. Certified professional bilingual guide and indigenous Huaorani guide; entrance fee to Huaorani Territory; two nights camping, two nights basic lodge; and one night tourist class accommodations in Coca.

When is best

Quito is 2,820m above sea level. The altitude causes cold temperatures (despite being on the equator) and more intense UV radiation. Average temperatures in Quito are 15°C, with highs reaching 26°C and lows 7°C. The wet

season is from October to May, while the dry season is from June to September. 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.

Comfort level

Down to earth (hostels, camping, huts)

Experience required

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