

Rafting the Amazon in Ecuador



Highlights

Experience the Amazon on a 3-day rafting trip. World-class whitewater awaits you, as do jungle canyons, thermal pools and a visit to a local indigenous community. Spend your Amazonian evenings relaxing in a riverside jungle lodge surrounded by the wildlife you normally only see in National Geographic.

The canyons of the Jatunyacu and other tributaries surge through Andean valleys and jaw-dropping canyon scenery to descend into the Amazon basin. The eastern Andes are home to tropical nature reserves that make up part of a UN designated biosphere zone. There are abundant species in the area's lush forests, including the spectacled bear, splendid kingfishers, yellow-rumped caciques, and brilliant blue and green tangaras.

As well as world-class rafting there are natural thermal pools served by geothermal springs, where massages and aromatherapy are available. The local Kichwa people live in settlements along the river. They are accommodating towards visitors and will often talk about their customs and jungle world.

You will raft two of Ecuador's best 1-day runs that set a benchmark for picturesque descents. In the early morning, you have time for a pleasant swim in calm pools before tackling big waves and fun play-holes. The setting is stunning; all around you are high canyon walls covered in verdant green forest and the river is fed by shining waterfalls. At intervals above you will see the Kichwa's wooden bridges spanning the canyon.

On the final day you'll visit the thermal pools nearby where you can arrange for massages and aromatherapy in advance. On the drive back to Quito you will also stop in a village to meet the 'Wind Dancers', members of the region's Kichwa people, and learn more about their culture and customs.

Is it for me?

This is definitely one for the thrill-seekers. Nature-enthusiasts won't have the time they'd ideally want to take in all the wildlife around the river because of the concentration needed, but flatter sections offer chances for wildlife spotting.

Poor swimmers should not attempt this trip, no matter how good the safety jackets may be! A good level of fitness is suggested and those looking to avoid campsites will be pleased by the excellent quality of accommodation for the two nights. Perfect for young to middle age groups and families with older children.

Accommodation

Your accommodation is for two nights - the final night in Quito is not included. The jungle lodge bungalows where you will stay for both nights are located on the river bank with great views of the jungle scenery.

Breakfast and dinner are served at the lodge's restaurant - a fusion of continental and local menus. There is a bar and a lounge area with a fire to relax around. All social areas are well-decorated and hammocks hang in the social area.

Itinerary

Day One: Jungle hike and Jatunyacu river rafting (Class III+)

Prices from

433 GBP (3 days) per person

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You will head off in the early morning through the Inter-Andean valleys, gaining elevation through stunning canyon scenery until you reach the Atlantic - Pacific continental divide at 4,100 meters. From this point you will begin a scenic downhill ride towards the Amazon Basin. The eastern Andes are home to stunning nature reserves which are part of a larger United Nations biosphere zone. At the 700m level you will begin to see many of the Kichwa communities that live in this area. You will enter the Llanganates National Park. Before you start your rafting adventure you can hike to nearby naturally-formed river pools. Here you can jump, slide and swim in these incredible rock formations. From here you will head to the Jatunyacu River, which means "Big Water" and is considered one of Ecuador's best one-day river runs. It has lots of big waves and fun play holes. The river is flanked by spectacular jungle scenery, birdlife, and Kichwa Indian families that live along the shores in small bamboo and wood houses. The evening will be spent in a river-front lodge surrounded by jungle sounds.

Day Two: Jondachi & Hollin rafting (Class III - IV)

In the morning you will drive towards the Jondachi River to experience Ecuador's newest whitewater attraction. It combines a technical section of the Jondachi with the big volume waves in the Hollin. You will hike for 30 minutes to access the river. Before getting into your rafts you can visit a hidden canyon where you can play and plunge into the deep pools. Return to the river to begin an epic 38 km run through a remote and pristine jungle canyon. The Jondachi section is tighter and requires careful maneuvering through the channeled rapids among granite boulders. When the Jondachi joins the Hollin water volume increases significantly creating big waves and demanding a more aggressive paddling style. The high-rising canyon walls that frame the river are covered in verdant green forest and decorated with multiple crystal clear waterfalls. There is plenty of time to appreciate the rainforest scenery and birdlife around you. You can see kingfishers, egrets, yellow-rumped caciques, and brilliant blue and green tangaras during your descent. Suspended above the canyon are occasional wooden foot bridges used by the Kichwa people to access their deep jungle territories. You will get out near the town of Archidona and return to your jungle lodge for another serene jungle evening.

Day Three: Kichwa encounter and Papallacta hot springs

In the morning you will begin your return trip back through the Andes. You will stop to meet and learn from the Waira Churis, also known as the "Wind Dancers". They are an extended Kichwa family, guardians of vast botanical knowledge and traditional music lore. Through their music and dance they express the harmonious balance between human and earth. Many of these nearly forgotten songs are played with animal and plant instruments. You will continue your journey up the Andes as you enjoy fantastic vistas of tropical valleys, natural waterfalls, and lush green landscapes. You will arrive at the Papallacta Hot Springs Resort where you can choose to relax in any of nine different thermal pools, ranging in temperature from 97°F to 104°F (36°C to 40°C). The pools are surrounded by cloud forest mountains and an occasional snow capped volcano. The mineral rich Papallacta water comes from underground geothermal springs. Spa services such as massages, aromatherapy, and other treatments can be provided at an additional cost when arranged in advance. You will arrive in Quito in the afternoon.

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).

The trip departs from Quito.

Price includes

Price is per person for a private tour for two people (price reduces for larger groups). Includes private ground transportation; rafting and related safety equipment; jungle lodge accommodation; all meals as indicated in itinerary; professional certified rafting and nature guide(s).

When is best

This trip does not depart in June.

Quito is 2,820m above sea level. The altitude of the Andes 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

Reasonably comfortable (Inns, B&Bs, luxury camping etc.)

Experience required

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

Travellers should bring

Waterproof sandals; flashlight; sunblock; swimming costume and mosquito repellent.