



## Research rare species, help the conservation of the rain-forest and volunteer on community projects on this remote and pioneering Amazon expedition in South America

### Översikt

The Amazon rainforest is one of the planet's most diverse ecosystems, being the home to 30% of all known plant and animal species, as well as a variety of indigenous cultures and settlers who make their living in this seemingly inhospitable terrain. Joining this GVI Amazon adventure in Ecuador takes you into the heart of this lush and remote part of the world to help protect the precious rainforest and aid community development initiatives. Volunteers support wildlife conservation by conducting research and scientific investigation work, and work on community projects, including facilitating the learning of English as a foreign language. In addition, the project runs a number of exciting adventure side trips that give volunteers the chance to further explore and experience this thrilling part of Ecuador.

### Expeditionen

The rainforests of the world are home to two-thirds of all the living and animal species of the planet, absorb large quantities of carbon dioxide, and are often referred to as the 'world's largest pharmacy' because of the amazing natural medicines they hold. Yet these precious and invaluable natural resources are under threat from mankind. The Ecuadorian Amazonia is listed by the IUCN and WWF as one of the world's 'Centres of Plant Diversity' – the most important global sites for conservation (CPD 1998), but in the last 35 years the Amazon rainforest has been reduced by two-fifths. By joining this GVI wildlife conservation expedition to work alongside young people from various indigenous and colonist (settler) communities in 1,800 hectares of mostly primary rainforest, you will help to reduce the effects mankind has on the Ecuadorian rainforest. This field research and community education project aims to help students from local, agricultural and disadvantaged communities to build a sustainable source of income from ecotourism, conservation and sustainable agriculture. This provides an alternative to the highly destructive practices of forestry or petroleum production, increasing the conservation value of the area and enabling local capacity building for future management.

The field research program involves creating species-lists of targeted animal groups, such as mammals, birds and amphibians, and determining the distribution and abundance of these groups. There are numerous plant and animal species in the Amazon rainforest, the identification of which provides a strong basis for the conservation and preservation of local forests. The number of species is also overwhelming, for example over 420 species of bird have been identified in previous years of research. The Amazon is also home to river turtles, caiman, a number of snakes, and a great variety of monkeys, macaws and butterflies. The region has the highest plant diversity in the world, and many new species have been found during the course of previous research.

Through scientific research and community projects, GVI will greatly enhance learning opportunities for students who may go on to work in the fields of ecotourism, sustainable agriculture and conservation, in addition to providing them with an invaluable opportunity to practice their developing English language skills and work alongside foreign visitors. In exchange, the students, their teachers and members from local communities offer a wealth of knowledge about their culture, traditions and medicinal plants, as well as offering you the opportunity to learn Spanish.

## **Expedition Aims**

Some 50% of Ecuador's tropical rainforests have been lost to destructive industrial practices, including oil and gas drilling, mining, farming and forestry. This environmental degradation, along with poverty, disease and a poor quality of public education, are all inextricably linked together. To address these issues, GVI's expedition works towards achieving the following aims:

- \* Managing a permanent, full-time biological field station at Yachana to conduct scientific research and generate national and international conservation interest
- \* Identifying and cataloguing local bird, mammal, reptile, amphibian and plant species
- \* Supporting the creation of a legally designated rainforest reserve
- \* Providing project support in the areas of conservation, ecotourism and sustainable agriculture
- \* Facilitating learning of English as a Foreign Language through TEFL projects including classroom teaching and informal conversation practice
- \* Supporting small-scale infrastructure development projects
- \* Facilitating cultural exchange between volunteers and students
- \* Establishing relationships with leading scientific and development agencies and universities, nationally and internationally.

## **The Yachana Community**

Yachana is a Quichua Indian word meaning 'place of learning'. With over 20 years of experience in community development projects along the upper Napo River, the concept of meaningful education provides a cornerstone of GVI's and our partners' philosophy. Students from indigenous and colonist communities from as near as five minutes and as far as five hours by canoe, attend the Yachana High School and form a 'community' of interests. However, the training they receive and skills they learn have much broader impacts for the communities they represent by providing alternatives in sustainable means of living. In this way, GVI's work, and that of its volunteers, reaches the much broader Amazonian community of inhabitants whose way of life is increasingly under threat.

## Mera om expeditionen

Volunteers will spend the majority of time working on the various scientific research projects to collect and collate scientific data. You will also be involved in working directly with students and teachers on education (environmental and teaching English) and construction projects. The initial couple of weeks will be hard as you will have to adapt to the change in environment and learn the different skills needed to do research. The expedition is in a remote location, so all volunteers will participate in first aid training and team-building activities to ensure everyone is safe and secure in their new environment. This training information must be thoroughly understood as the environment is challenging. It must be stressed that volunteers will not have the opportunity to be alone at any time in the forest, as it is a harsh environment in which you can get lost very easily. You will be prepared thoroughly for any eventuality and be tested on your skills on a continual basis.

The days are long, beginning at first light to take advantage of the early wildlife activity and continuing to work throughout the day. Night surveys are also conducted regularly throughout the expedition. You have the opportunity to join several mini-expeditions, which involves going on a hike through the forest to a satellite camp location where we will camp for a night or two. Be warned that you will get very hot and sweaty during the day's activities, so ensure you come prepared! In assisting in these tasks you will have the opportunity to:

- \* Live in a remote and beautiful part of the tropics, surrounded by pristine rainforest which is inhabited by extraordinary wildlife
- \* Live and work with members from various indigenous and colonist communities, learning about the diversity of the rainforest and the culture of the people who have lived there for hundreds of years
- \* Learn about living on a remote expedition (no electricity or running water) and the methods used to conduct a biodiversity research program in a lowland rainforest environment, with activities including: humane small mammal trapping and releasing, bat netting, mist netting for birds, recording bird song for identification, conducting amphibian and reptile surveys, and going on mammal walks to identify the larger mammal species of the area
- \* Learn Spanish in a fun and natural way by preparing food for the whole group or spotting monkeys in the forest
- \* Canoe down remote jungle waterways during field trips, camping in the forest away from base camp (satellite camps) and catching your own dinner
- \* Teach English and work with students on environmental education issues
- \* Have an experience you will never forget seeing the jungle and the river under the stars, spotting caiman as well as other nocturnal species
- \* Relax back at camp, getting your volleyball skills up to scratch and chilling out in hammocks
- \* Enjoy a well deserved rest and self-made entertainment on Saturday nights!

## Tidigare volontärer berättar

"Today we went with Piter Silveira to visit his home community. Piter is one of the students from Yachana High School who spent a week with us. He took us for a walk to a swamp complete with caimans and birds. Piter also showed us how they harvest coconuts and how to make a dessert with them. He showed us how to make chocolate from the Cocoa beans, how they harvest rice and how they make the jungle jewelry.

A watermelon farmer rescued us from the blistering heat with two wonderful melons. Best melons I ever had. We then went to Piter's home, where his Mum (45 years and 11 kids age range 4-27, oh my goodness ! ) had put an amazing spread. Plantain chips, traditional soup, rice, chicken and salad followed by sugary coconut craziness and fresh lemon juice. To wash it down we had a chocolate drink using the chocolate we just roasted in the garden.

Piter's family house was a wooden house on stilts with a lovely kitchen. Inside it was lovely and homely with family photographs on the walls. It was a great day with a wonderfully kind community. We even signed a guest book Piter keeps. Definitely a highlight of the trip, and very interesting to see the home life of a student we have spent so much time with."

Becky Peters-Jones

"The day started with my first experience of trail maintenance on the Cascada Trail. My favorite trail. Having sneakily avoided having to carry a machete until now, I was shocked when I realized I WAS BORN TO WIELD A MACHETE !!

I was in charge of demolishing any large tree fall across our path. This was very satisfying but also tiring and I got two blisters. I like the Cascada Trail because it has a lot of exciting variety – open, towering primary rainforest, claustrophobic secondary rainforest, the glimmering gem of the trail; the waterfall and then a nice flat walk home through a thicket of beautiful palms.

After completing the hard physical work we rested at the waterfall, ate apples and biscuits and had a little dip to wash the sweat and mud off. As we set off home on the lovely Agua Santa Trail, we came across my favourite insect ,the bright green knobly one. He saw us coming and got into his defensive position which involved standing on his back legs in a kind of delicate-kung-fu-balance both front limbs held high above his head, ready to chop.

As we set off again I felt a sudden moment of rapture as I realized that it was nearly noon; I was really hungry and we were heading back to camp for lunch."

Ariane Jackson

## **Vilken skillnad gör denna expedition?**

GVI is making a difference in Ecuador's Amazon by supporting the Yachana Foundation and local efforts to preserve the rainforest and its extraordinary diversity of plants and animals. These efforts include promoting sustainable economic and agricultural alternatives for its inhabitants, many of whom are from poor, indigenous communities. Volunteers have been compiling valuable species lists of animal life found within Yachana's private land reserve. This has resulted in the discovery of a rare species of glass frog, which further strengthens the documented conservation value of the area.

## **Höjdpunkter**

Enjoying the intensive in-camp training to gain basic knowledge of the environment; experiencing the sights and sounds of the tropical rainforest; spending nights camping out in the rainforest; setting photo-trapping equipment to see what you can catch on film; enjoying wildlife observation from the river; experiencing the rainforest at night on nocturnal frog and mammal surveys; discovering rare and possibly new species; learning bush skills and rainforest ecology; exploring different parts of the Amazon; working with and training local students and the local community and learning how to navigate in the forest.

## **Plats**

You will be based on 1,800 hectares of (mainly) primary rainforest on lands neighbouring the tiny village of Mondaña, located on the Napo River between the cities of Tena and Coca, in the eastern part of Ecuador. On the south side of the river is Yachana Eco-Lodge (an internationally-recognised, award-winning ecotourism lodge) and Yachana High School. GVI's expedition site is located on the north side of the river and is reached via a combination of bus and motorised canoe.

## **Ute i fält**

The expedition base camp is located adjacent to the Napo River in a cleared area within the rainforest. It contains a dormitory-style residence that has cooking facilities, showers and toilets, and provides volunteers with all the basic conditions for sleeping, eating, working and relaxing.

## **Kvalifikationer du får**

Tropical forest ecology, Forest biodiversity survey techniques, Identification skills, BTEC in Biological Survey Techniques (optional), Specimen preparation and preservation (depending on availability), Introduction to Ethno-botany (depending on availability), Jungle crafts, Introduction to TEFL, First Aid & CPR training (certification optional), Kichwa culture and language, Introductory Spanish, Vegetation/habitat mapping, Interpersonal skills.

## Utbildning och kvalifikationer

Volunteers receive a continuous comprehensive training program that encompasses theory lectures, group study and field practice. This will give you with a base, holistic understanding of all aspects of the rainforest on which to build throughout your stay. Subjects included in the training are as follows: conservation, rainforest ecology, bird and mammal identification, bird call identification, amphibian and reptile studies, teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) and emergency first aid.

## Förkunskaper

Volunteers must be aware that because of the remoteness of the expedition site, transport is by motorized dugout canoe. All volunteers must be strong swimmers who are able to swim 300m. Knowing Spanish is not essential for this expedition, but participants will benefit much more by knowing some basic phrases, as you can interact with the community to immerse yourself in the culture of the area. Therefore why not book a couple of weeks of Spanish lessons through GVI before the start of the expedition?

All volunteers should be physically fit as the environment is demanding. You should also be enthusiastic, adventurous, self-motivated and have a good sense of humour. Volunteers are often role models who provide a valuable cultural experience to the students with whom you work, and therefore it is important to maintain a good personal comportment throughout the expedition. On arrival at the expedition site, we will run through program expectations and the cultural sensitivities which you must respect and adhere to. You must understand that the expedition has specific long-term aims in conjunction with the local community to which you will contribute by facilitating in a learning environment, collecting and analyzing data and taking part in community projects. All volunteers must be team players who are happy and willing to assist each other and the staff in the daily tasks.

## Foton från expeditionen



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