

### **Sustainability Guidelines: Ecuador**

You are about to embark on a wonderful trip to the South American country of Ecuador, known for its stunning natural beauty and wildlife. Your trip will show you all that Ecuador has to offer, leaving you with a great appreciation for this country.

#### **Environmental Issues:**

Ecuador's natural beauty is, however, threatened by environmental challenges. The main environmental struggles that Ecuador faces are:

- Deforestation leading to soil erosion. Ecuador has the highest rate of deforestation of any of the Amazonian countries.
- Desertification caused by clearing of large forest areas which sustain the natural ecosystem. Without these forests, native streams cease to exist and rainfall drastically decreases.
- Water pollution: pollution from oil production wastes in ecologically sensitive areas of the Amazon Basin and Galapagos Islands
- Threat to biodiversity due to all of the above mentioned factors.

#### **Environmental Initiatives:**

While it seems as though the environmental issues are overwhelming, Ecuador, on many levels has taken steps to reverse these environmental perils.

*The Yachana Foundation* has generated and invested approximately \$5.2 million in the Ecuadorian Amazon. The foundation is involved in geotourism, education, agriculture, health, income generation, and technical assistance.

- In 2005 Yachana Foundation opened the Yachana Technical High School to benefit high school age indigenous students who live in remote rural areas in Ecuador's Amazon region. The foundation believes that a meaningful education is the key to reversing generations of poverty, raising environmental awareness, and ensuring sustainable use of natural resources.
- Since 1994 Yachana has purchased and protected over 4,300 acres of primary and secondary rainforest. This has led to further protection of the rainforest including designating the land as a UNESCO site and Biosphere Reserve. The total number of square feet of rainforest bought for conservation (last updated on October 9, 2007) is 187,308,00 acres.
- The Foundation in partnership with the Yachana Technical High School is providing young people from four Amazon provinces with the skills to be entrepreneurs and leaders in their communities. The school is also working towards the goal of being self-sufficient through its own micro-enterprise projects and after only two years of operation, the school is generating 16% of its operating expenses.

On a smaller scale, **Leonardo Cerda** is an Ecuadorian youth climate, energy and sustainability activist studying in Quito, involved in resistance movements against the oil industry in Ecuador. He is working on issues related to environmental protection, people's sovereignty over land, coal mining, and indigenous resistance, organic products cooperative and environmental education. He has started up an organization called ***Marea Crecient/Rising Tide*** that focuses on all of the aspects listed above. The organization is focused on community activism in order to stop foreign oil companies from coming into Ecuador. Cerda's work and organization focuses on rural communities in the Ecuadorian Amazon.

As a visitor to this small but incredibly rich country, you can take steps to help mitigate the environmental struggles. Be mindful of your water usage while staying in Ecuador. Pure, clean drinking water is a precious commodity so use it sparingly. When visiting the Ecuadorian Amazon Rainforest observe the incredibly diverse species with respect and understand that you are in their home. As a guest with Elevate Destinations, you have the opportunity to stay in state-of-the-art eco-lodges that are committed to preserving Ecuador, so take the time to educate yourself on the efforts that your hotels are taking to be more sustainable.

### **Guide to Eco-Lodges in Ecuador**

**Patio Andaluz** is a hotel committed to sustainable tourism. The hotel wants to provide the maximum comfort but also with minimal environmental effect. Patio Andaluz focuses on water preservation, energy conservation, reduction of the amount of waste, recycling, support of environmental projects in the local community, and work with the local community to aid its improvement.

**Kapawi Lodge** is located in one of the most remote and well protected parts of the Ecuadorian Amazon. The Lodge is an award winning eco-lodge noted for its comfort and quality of service, for its ecological design and sensitivity, and for its abundance of wildlife and rich biodiversity. Lodgings are constructed in traditional Achuar architecture and raised up on stilts above a lagoon brimming with hundreds of plant and bird species. The hot water provided in the rooms is solar heated and the electricity in the rooms is provided by solar panels as well. The meals served in the dining room are composed of local rainforest food products. In addition, the Lodge also provides a wealth of activities that foster interaction and appreciation of the natural landscape and indigenous people. The activities range from bird watching, visiting local communities, self guided trail walks, hiking (day and night), camping, and canoeing. The Lodge is only accessible by air, no roads reach Kapawi and the lands are untouched by logging or oil exploitation. The property consists of 1,683.326 acres, 64 indigenous communities, and over 570 bird species. The Kawpai Lodge is located in an unparalleled pristine protected landscape, and as a visitor you have the opportunity to experience untouched rainforests while also enjoying the luxury of the Lodge.