



THE LOST FOOD OF THE AMAZON YACHANA CULINARY TOUR



Yachana Lodge is unique because of its emphasis and infrastructure related to culinary arts. In part this is because our awareness was raised as the recipients of a major grant from the **National Geographic Conservation Trust** for a project on the “**Lost Foods of the Amazon**”. The Amazon has one of the richest varieties of foods available due to its tropical climate. We have taken the traditional indigenous knowledge of preparation of many different kinds of foods and combined them with world class culinary techniques to produce a medley of foods and flavors not found outside the area.

Each day of your stay at Yachana Lodge will have different meals or preparations between meals of local foods where all of the participants can be directly involved, not just a bystander. Variations will occur depending on the time of year and what products are in season.

Cacao is what chocolate is made from. If it is harvest time for cacao, you will visit a cacao collection center and learn all of the aspects of the harvesting, fermenting of the beans, drying and classifying of the beans. We will then take some of the well fermented beans back to Yachana to prepare chocolate one day.

If **corn** is in the right phase, you can harvest the tender ears and take them back to the kitchen in the training center to husk, grind and prepare humitas.

For **coffee** to really be first quality, only the red beans can be harvested. You will participate in the entire process from the dehusking of the beans, having other beans that are already dried and then roast them in a traditional manner. We use a clay “skillet type” pan over a wood fire and constantly move the roasting beans with a wooden spoon. Roasting in clay is very different than in a metal, traditional roaster. Clay “breathes” when roasting which gives the coffee a mellower flavor; and when cooked over a wood fire, a very slight hint of a smoked taste.

You will visit a traditional Kichwa family. The staple diet for millennia of all of the Amazon indigenous tribes has been chicha. Chicha is made from **yuca**, a tuber that grows the year around. It is a starch but in the fermentation process converts to a sugar. In this form it is both a food and an “energy drink”. This is then cooked and mashed in a wooden bowl. During the mashing process women take handfuls of the mashed yuca and put it in their mouths to chew up. They then spit the yuca back into the bowl. The bacteria in the mouth helps to start the fermentation process of the chicha. You will be able to see the process and try some chichi, if you like (it really is quite good, sort of a cross between beer and yogurt).



You will spend one entire morning on a local farm harvesting **heart of palm**, yuca, a fruit called **borojo**, stinging nettles and many other **fruits** and **vegetables**. These will then be taken back to the Lodge kitchen for you to participate in their preparation.

In addition, you will be involved in a traditional method of cooking called **maito**. It involves wrapping a meat in a special leaf and cooking it in the coals of a wood fire. The only thing that is added is salt. The flavor is incredible. You will participate in the entire process of cooking with maito, the other fruits and vegetables and then relish a traditional meal with a local Amazonian tea called **guayusa**.

Depending on what is available, you will harvest and savor many different ways to cook plantains (cooking **bananas**), "little gold" regular eating bananas, and much more. You will also see how we are incorporating techniques of Permaculture into our farming program. The bananas and **plantains** will be harvested from our "banana circles".

One of the specialties of the Amazon is called **Chontacura**. This is a grub that grows in chonta palm trunks that have fallen on the ground. It takes them a couple of months to get to the adult size, about two inches long. They are not very attractive alive, undulating along semi-transparent. But cooked, they taste like bacon and are highly prized among the locals. One can also eat them live and raw, but that is a more acquired taste! If we can find a trunk that has them in it, then we can cut it open and harvest a number to take back and cook.

These are just a few of the options available in the Yachana Lodge Culinary program. Our program is participatory; you will be involved in all aspects of the harvest to the preparation of different foods. This is a program that no other lodge in the Amazon of Ecuador is offering and we hope you will be involved!

<http://www.yachana.com>