

This week's dream: a tribal view of the Amazon rainforest

Contact with outsiders often spells doom for isolated tribal peoples, and recent history shows that those of Ecuador's Amazon rainforest are no exception. Now one of the tribes, the Huaorani, has turned to "small-scale tourism" to bolster its culture's chances of survival, says Stanley Stewart in *Condé Nast Traveller*. Faced with missionaries' attacks on their way of life, and a corrosive "culture of dependency" on the oil companies drilling on their ancestral land, they have founded a new lodge to provide an independent source of revenue; this will enable them to remain in the forest, living more or less as they always have.

The Huaorani are just 3,000 strong, and until the 1960s they lived a Stone Age existence so isolated that their language bears no relation to any other on Earth. Five missionaries who contacted them in 1956 were beheaded; but others followed and proceeded to "discredit" their life of "hunting and gathering, chanting and forest spirits". It's this life,



Two Huaorani boys shelter from the rain

however, that guides at the Huaorani Ecolodge are keen to share as they lead you around a remote jungle region as rich in wildlife as any in Amazonia. The lodge itself consists of five "comfortable" wooden cabins hidden in "exuberant greenery" beside the Shiripuno River, a 40-minute flight in a six-seater plane from the oil town of Shell.

Kayaking down the river, you might see turtles and tamarin monkeys, capybaras and scarlet macaws. And on forest walks, you learn the medicinal qualities of plants; or how to track and spear a peccary; or make darts from palm reeds, prepare the poison for their tips, and shoot them from a blowpipe so they split a leaf-stem 30 yards away. Most striking, however, is the

manner of the guides. The Huaorani look uneasy in the oil towns; here, at the centre of their world, they are full of "grace and confidence", each one "entirely himself". *The Ultimate Travel Company* (020-7386 4646, www.theultimatetravelcompany.co.uk) has a 15-day Ecuador trip from £3,895pp, incl. flights.

Hotel of the week



citizenM, London

A Dutch start-up launched in 2008, citizenM has created "a new business model" for hotels, emphasising "affordable luxury". Its new London property "works brilliantly", says Tom Robbins in the FT. The rooms – prefabricated and then "stacked together like Lego" – are small (14m²), but "comfortable" and "stylish", with Frette linen, and "powerful showers" located with the loos in frosted-glass pods. The idea is that guests spend more time in the "funky" lobby, with its many "zones" (including an "office" and a "help-yourself canteen"). The location, near Tate Modern, is "great"; and the room rate "seems like a giveaway".

Doubles from £99. 020-3519 1111, www.citizenm.com

Getting the flavour of...

Munch's Oslo

If Tate Modern's Edvard Munch exhibition awakens your curiosity about the artist's life, chances are you'd find a trip to Oslo rewarding, says Nick Trend in *The Daily Telegraph*. The great Norwegian painter lived for years in the city, and many of his haunts are little changed since his death in 1944. Among them are Oslo's oldest café, the Engbret, from which he was once ejected for drunkenness; another café, the Grand, where he was a regular; and a particular, unmissable spot beside the Oslofjord in Ekeberg, where he was inspired to paint *The Scream* in 1893. Next year is the 150th anniversary of his birth; his studio will be open to visitors, and there will be major exhibitions of his work. *Original Travel* (020-7978 7333, www.originaltravel.co.uk) has a 4-night Oslo trip from £800pp, incl. b&b accommodation at the Grand Hotel, flights and transfers.

A French mountain retreat

The Cantal mountains are as close as you can get to the wild heart of France, says Nell Card in *The Guardian* – a verdant corner of the Parc des Volcans d'Auvergne and one of the least populated regions of Europe. To immerse yourself completely in this peaceful world of buzzards and wildflowers, "cattle bells and waterfalls", book a few nights at Niercombe, a converted *buron* (stone-walled

cheesemaker's hut) that lies a 90-minute walk from the nearest farm. Recently restored by local craftsmen, it has no electricity, WiFi or phone signal; but there is hot water, and a larder stocked from the market in nearby Aurillac. The nearest peak is le Col de la Chèvre, at 1,618m; but there's wonderful walking in every direction. *Niercombe* (www.un-jour-en-auvergne.com) sleeps six (two in an outhouse). Two nights cost €950; food, €150.

Summer in the Shetlands

In their "tranquillity" and "wild beauty", the Shetland Islands are "a world away" from mainland Britain, says Richard Webber in *The Sunday Telegraph*. There's a landscape of "wide open spaces" – peat bogs, heather-clad hills and freshwater lochs – punctuated by hamlets of "brightly coloured houses" (a sign of Scandinavian influence) and fringed by "towering cliffs" and "deserted, sandy beaches". They are also a "naturalist's heaven": on Unst, for instance, seals swim below cliffs that echo with the "shrieks" of 100,000 breeding sea birds in summer. But there's much else to see here, including major archaeological sites such as Jarlshof, where 4,000-year-old roundhouses were uncovered by a storm in the 1890s. *Brightwater Holidays* (01334-657155, www.brightwaterholidays.com) has a five-day trip from £654, half-board.

Last-minute offers from top travel companies

Glamping in Wiltshire

Mill Farm's luxury safari-style 3-bed (4 adults, 2 children) canvas lodges are available for a 3-night, midweek stay from £360. 01380-828351, www.millfarmglamping.co.uk. 10 September to 10 November.

Cuisine in the Pyrénées

Situated at Avajan, the chalet L'Ancienne Poste offers a week's stay incl. evening meals from €550pp (2 people sharing). 00 33 6094 97380, www.ancienneposteavajan.com. Until end of September.

Sailing break in the South

Cottage Lodge, a 5-star b&cb in Brockenhurst, offers a 2-night stay incl. a sailing cruise to the Isle of Wight from £198pp b&cb. 01590-622296, www.cottagelodge.co.uk. Until end of September.

Siena's Palio horse race

Podere Fulvia, a wing of a Tuscan farmhouse (sleeps 4), is a great base for visiting the famous race on 16 August. From £652 per week. 020-8444 9500, www.invitationto.tuscany.com Until end of Aug.