

TRAVEL

Rain forest vacation proves to be a wild adventure for pair

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SPECIAL WRITERS

Kapawi Ecotourism and Reserve is a very classy act, considering it is situated in the most remote part of the rain forest and run primarily by the Achuar, indigenous people who had no contact with the outside world before 1969. They were the last native people to associate with Westerners, leaving their culture and language largely intact.

The exquisite cuisine was prepared for the Western palate with an intriguing array of exotic produce. Try any fruits and vegetables offered, they're "safe."

Guests are housed in individual thatched cabanas with large screened windows and a private balcony. Each room has a private bathroom with all amenities, electric lights (thanks to solar power) and comfy beds with mosquito netting.

Kapawi is run by the Achuar people in a unique partnership with Canudos S.A. The Kapawi Project represents a new model in the implementation of sustainable ecotourism. Canudos leases this piece of land, shares the benefits, and passes on the know-how of running this operation. In 2011, the project will be wholly owned and managed by the Achuar. The ecotourism allows the Achuar to manage their integration with the modern world on their own terms, and to defend their land against encroachment and exploitation. In short, your visit contributes directly to saving the rain forest.

Sea of green

All you'll see flying over the rain forest is "massive broccoli tops", disturbed only by small snake-like rivers, as far as the eye can see. Enormous leaves, the size of single beds, desks and couch cushions gently nod under the variable tapping of the raindrops. Sounds, often overlooked in our vision-

ented world, cannot be ignored. Steady rain falling on the thatched roof and lake below make a relaxing backdrop for the sweet, lyrical, and enchanting songs of innumerable unseen birds. A howler monkey exchange is akin to a jet taking off at a distant airport. The nocturnal "green music" of frogs and insects can be quite loud.

Animal sightings are scarce in the rain forest, which is teeming with life and death struggles of the hunted and the hunter. This environment creates cautious critics. They may be there, but you will likely not see them, or even be frightened by anything in the rain forest.

The air is warm, humid and still - 24 hours a day. Sometimes it rains and sometimes you just wish it would. Dry things (like paper) get limp and mushy, and wet things take forever to dry. Pack everything clothes, toiletries, and books in resealable bags to keep moisture and bugs to a minimum.

Safeguards

I used Ultrathon, found in angler's shops. It was developed by 3M for soldiers in Desert Storm. It lasts for 12 hours and I applied it twice daily. To its credit, I only had one mosquito bite, whereas my companions were covered. I brought Bendaryl anti-itch stick, and was a hero with campmates and workers alike. I also took the precaution of taking Malarone, an anti-malarial with very minimal side effects - and used the mosquito netting at night.

Buy Pyrethrin at any sporting goods store and spray the inside of your luggage. This will keep anything that crawls or flies from stowing away in your bag. I used an angler's waterproof vinyl-bottomed duffel bag by JW Outfitters to insure everything stayed dry during our canoe ride into camp.

We hiked on soft forest trails, canoed on swollen rivers, and visit-



Quite a catch: In the Amazon rain forest, a young visitor studies an Achuar Indian's child-sized catch.

ed an Achuar community. Our Achuar guide had the uncanny ability to hear and see things that would've gone unnoticed. We saw tapir tracks, massive termite mounds, identified birds, and heard countless stories of plant uses for many medical maladies, translated by a biologist.

The biggest surprise was when he asked us if the war with Afghanistan was still going on! We were in the remotest corner of the rain forest, sitting under the thatched "porch" of his dirt-floored hut. No running water, electricity, phones, roads, toilets. I'm not sure how he got his news, but it was at least somewhat current.

He said he only needed to hunt a couple times a week to support his family. The rest of his time is his own. Sounds almost idyllic. He seemed perplexed by the single status of his guests, and their lack of knowledge of what animals were

available to be hunted where we lived.

Everything about this trip was different, thought provoking, and humbling. I recommend it to even the biggest chickens. From one "nervous" to another, I was remarkably fearless, comfortable and at ease in this far away land. I'm very happy I went. Don't miss an opportunity to actually help the planet while you explore a land few have seen.

Norma and her daughter Wendy Schonwetter enjoy globe trotting together. Norma is a Farmington resident. Tell us about your travels. Send stories and photos for consideration on our Travel page to Keely Kaleski Wygonik, Assistant Managing Editor of Features, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150. E-mail information as a text file, or copy and paste into e-mail to kwygonik@ec.home.com.net

Cruising vacation fun for the whole family

PRNewswire - Choosing the perfect family vacation means pleasing young, old and in between; creating memorable experiences for everyone; and still keeping within budget. A cruise offers the solution to this vacation dilemma for more families every year.

Reflecting this, the number of children on cruises has been steadily on the rise, reaching more than 700,000 in 2001, according to Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), a member of the Cruise Line Coalition. The number has grown 40 percent since 1998, when it was estimated that 600,000 children cruised.

With an extensive selection of programs for all ages, the all-inclusive nature of a cruise and the deals that are regularly available - including "children sail free" specials - families are realizing that cruising is an affordable way to make everyone happy.

"Cruises have long been known for catering to passengers, and that includes the younger set," said James G. Godeman, president of CLIA. "The youngest cruisers have their own activities, parties and kid-friendly menus."

Mom and dad don't have to worry about the kids, either. Highly trained youth counselors supervise youngsters ages three months to 17 years (depending on the line and the itinerary) through age-appropriate activities. In addition, several lines provide babysitting services. Either way, parents can enjoy their time knowing the children are enjoying themselves in a safe and secure environment.

Fun is the operative word for all ages on a cruise. Activities include treasure hunts, face painting, pool parties, chil-

dren's films and cartoons, pizza parties, karaoke, talent shows, arts and crafts, video games and computer fun, mini-Olympic-style events and sporting tournaments.

Programs are designed to make education fun through hands-on activities and entertainment focusing on the destination's nature, heritage and the international experience. Young cruisers can go stargazing with an expert astronomer, draw with a famous animator, dive in to wacky water activities, learn the art of hula dancing or study the habits of the region's wildlife.

Supervised shore activities range from beach parties and sand castle building to tours designed with youngsters in mind.

While their parents are enjoying the ship's nightlife, youngsters can party at a teen coffee shop, special disco or "cocktail" party.

A cruise also is a great opportunity to share some "quality" family time. After spending the day doing what interests them individually, family members can reunite at dinner to share their experiences and enjoy a family show or film. Some lines feature programs that enable children and parents to play and learn together.

"A cruise is a great multi-generational family vacation," says Godeman. "There's something for everyone - and plenty to share. It is truly a special experience."

To learn more about family cruise activities and fares, visit CLIA's Web site, www.cruising.org, or visit a CLIA-affiliated agency. To find one, use the Cruise Expert Locator on CLIA's Web site, or check the local yellow pages.

You go
For information: About Kapawi Ecotourism and Reserve visit www.canudos.com/kapawi/
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