

“If you are coming to help us, you are wasting your time.
If you are coming because you know your liberation is bound up with ours,
then let us work together.”

Indigenous Elders

This was the invitation that I responded to as I embarked on my second journey to Ecuador. After going there last winter and seeing the oil damage first hand, I had decided to return: to go deeper into the rainforest. This time I was part of a joint venture organized by Amazon Watch and Pachamama Alliance. They called our trip Leading With Wisdom and our intention was to show up with open hearts, leaving our western minds at home.

Our group of intrepid travelers was diverse in age and occupation but leaning towards people in their mid lives. Many were social entrepreneurs who owned their companies.

We began our journey in Quito where we met with Foundation Pachamama. This group is a sister organization to Pachamama Alliance. They work on the ground with the indigenous people in Ecuador and Peru.... That day we were graced by a visit by Carlos... a professor of ...from the University of San Francisco in Quito. This man is extremely knowledgeable about the economics of oil. We learned that, since Ecuador began to export oil in 1972, the poverty of the country has increased exponentially. We also discovered that, similar to Costa Rica, Ecuador has a huge advantage in being able to capitalize on its natural resources through ecotourism. It also has many opportunities to pursue alternative energy sources. And the really good news is that 70 – 80% of the Amazon is still unspoiled! The Ecuadorian rainforest is incredibly important having more bio-diversity per hectare than any other place on earth.

Three days later we all were aboard two little 10 seat planes flying over miles and miles of un-roaded Amazon forest. Our group had the incredible good fortune to be invited into the Achuar region of Sarayaku. In July the Inter American Court of Human Rights ruled that these indigenous people should have been consulted and their permission given before any exploratory oil drilling was allowed on their lands. This ruling sets a huge precedent! Leaders from tribes all over the area were convening to strategize and celebrate and we were there to witness and participate.

For all of us this was the highlight of the trip. To experience the passion and commitment of these people to protect their lands, the forests and their way of life was beyond inspiring! And they are not at all primitive in their approach. The Achuar possess a high level of sophistication; knowing exactly what they want to take and to leave from our western cultural model. They have watched what oil extraction has done to other areas of the rainforest and have seen the corroded communities that came in its wake.

We spent 3 days in this community and were all very moved by the beauty of the Achuar culture. Everyone was living and working in harmony with the natural world. There was no money exchanged – all share the intention of Somakawsa: well being for everyone. It wasn't until our last night when I heard a newborn baby cry that I realized I had not seen a single unhappy person the entire time that we were in Sarayaku.

It took us all two days to leave this village because, in the jungle, planes don't fly during inclement weather. And the morning that we were all due to depart, it was pouring. Our plane found a window and slid out between storms. The rest of our group didn't arrive until the next day. We were destined for Kapawi an Achuar eco-lodge even deeper in the rainforest.

So while 10 of us rested in linen sheets being lulled by the sounds of a lagoon at night, the others were treated to stories of the Shuar (also detained by rain): a tribe, known for their ferocity, who a mere 15 or 20 years ago were shrinking the heads of their enemies.

Kapawi was lovely. It was there that we navigated theRiver in motorized dugout canoes getting to see the rare pink dolphins, cinnamon howler monkeys and many kinds of birds of paradise. In fact the waterways are the lifeblood of the rainforest for people and animals alike. On our final day, we awoke at 3 to catch our boat in time to be in the village for their daily dream ritual. The Achuar are a dream culture and every morning the whole village awakes to share dreams. This is really key to their lives as they believe that dreams predict the future – immediate and far off. And the most interesting part of this cosmology is that they also believe that if the dreams aren't good then they can re-dream them until they are.

Back in Quito we had to readjust to the busy city with all its human noise. But we had an opportunity the last night to meet with Lynn Twist and John Perkins (well known for his past life as an *Economic Hitman*) the other co-founder of Pachamama Alliance. Together we all talked about how to proceed from here. In this particular time, Ecuador is in an amazing position. It is ripe for making some huge changes

This is not just my story. It's theirs, yours – all of ours. It's a story of hope: of re-dreaming the way we live in this modern world. By honoring the rights of nature and our inextricable relationship to it, we can find a successful way to change the course that we are on.

To quote Lynn Twist (co- founder of the Pachamama Alliance) “Changing the dream may really mean to see the world completely differently – as indigenous people do. They see a world that is totally sufficient, animated with spirit, intelligent, mystical, responsive, and creative – constantly generating and regenerating itself in harmony with the great diversity

of resources that support and collaborate with one another through the mystery of life. They see human beings as part that great mystery, each human being having an infinite capacity to create, collaborate and contribute.”