Andes to Amazon: Venture to the heart of South America with EPI - from the central highlands of Quito, across the Andes mountains, down into Ecuador’s Amazon basin, and back again. Experience a diversity of climates, ecosystems, and altitudes as you study some of the unique creatures that dwell in this land of extremes. You’ll see firsthand how different tropical landscapes shape the identity of the Ecuadorian people, who are known for their warm hospitality and their strong indigenous traditions.

Your Field Work: Your primary research will be tracking and monitoring spectacled bears and mountain tapirs using radio telemetry. These rare mammals dwell in the cloud forests and sub-alpine tundra of the Andes, also known as the páramo. You’ll need to adjust to the altitude gradually, so your field work will start at lower elevations in the Amazon rainforest. At your research station along the banks of the Napo River, a major tributary of the Amazon, you’ll help maintain a native plant nursery and learn about sustainable forest resource management. You’ll also visit a local animal rescue center that works to rehabilitate injured Amazonian wildlife.

A History of Tradition: Ecuador is world-renowned for its vibrant and colorful indigenous Kichwa culture, and you’ll spend a day at a community in the Amazon. You’ll visit a local school and a community craft market, and you’ll hike through the forest with a Kichwa guide to learn about medicinal plants and traditional livelihoods.

Highlights

- Monitor spectacled bears in the Andes
- Raft the headwaters of the Amazon
- Visit an indigenous Kichwa community

Length | Research Hours | Coursework | Focus
---|---|---|---
12 days | 8+ | 40+ hours | highland and rainforest ecology, conservation
Sample Itinerary

Day 1: Arrive in Quito
- Meet your EPI instructor team & get oriented
- Transfer to a nearby hotel for the night

Days 2-4: Into the Amazon Rainforest
- Travel overland to one of the most biodiverse ecosystems on the planet
- Head out on Amazon forest hikes (including a night hike) to identify plants, invertebrates and other wildlife
- Volunteer in a botanical garden for native plants

Days 5-7: Adventure & Cultural Exchange
- Ride a canoe downriver to visit an animal rescue center
- Visit an indigenous Kichwa community center for a hike
- Make chocolate at an Amazon community center
- Spend a day surrounded by birds in the cloud forest, and a full day rafting the headwaters of the Amazon River

Days 8-11: Spectacled Bears & Mountain Tapirs
- Travel to a small village - meet your spectacled bear research team and learn their methods
- Hike through high-elevation tundra to track and monitor bears & tapirs
- Soak in Andean hot springs

Day 12: Quito City Tour & Depart for Home
- Explore this high-elevation capital’s historic center - Earth’s first World Cultural Heritage city - before flying home