

KEEPING UP WITH THE (INDIANA) JONESES

Always wanted to see the rain forest? Here are five outfits that can take you there and get you back alive

AMAZONIA EXPEDITIONS. This is the only company with a lodge in the Tamshiyacu-Tahuayo Reserve, the area identified by scientists as having the greatest abundance and diversity of mammal life in the Amazon. They're also one of the few tour operators that guide camping excursions in the Amazon. Land costs: \$1,100. Contact: Amazonia Expeditions, 18500 Gulf Boulevard, Suite 201, Indian Shores, FL 33785; (800) 262-9669, fax: (813) 593-1549.

EARTHWATCH. EarthWatch is a nonprofit organization that funds scientific research around the world. Participants spend two weeks in the field helping scientists do their research. Last summer, travelers lived in base camps in the Amazon basin and helped Dr. David Nickle of the Smithsonian Institution's Museum of Natural History track down katydids, the camouflage artists of the rain forest. A tax-deductible contribution of \$1,745 covers land costs in Peru. Contact: EarthWatch, 680 Mt. Auburn Street., P.O. Box 9104, Watertown, MA 02272-9104; (800) 776-0188, fax: (617) 926-8532; E-mail: info@earthwatch.org

INTERNATIONAL EXPEDITIONS. With the most extensive rain forest travel and education program in the United States, International Expeditions has something for everyone. The workshop that Mark Jenkins, the author of the accompanying piece, attended was "Pharmacy from the Rainforest," but there are also workshops on travel medicine, oncology, international health, ecology, therapeutics and half a dozen more, all held in Costa Rica, the Amazon, Belize, Peru and Africa. They're staffed by the top scien-

tists in the field, so you'll learn more than you can imagine. Cost, which includes transportation; \$2,000 and up. Contact: International Expeditions, One Environs Park, Helena AL 35080; (800) 633-4734, fax: (205) 428-1714; E-mail: intlexp@aol.com
MOUNTAIN TRAVEL/SOBEK. The oldest and most venerable adventure travel organization in America, this company sets the standard for exotic journeys. Their catalog of annual destinations is thicker than this magazine, and the pictures will make you want to ditch the office and never come back. Mountain Travel/Sobek has several journeys into the rain forests of Ecuador, Costa Rica, and Asia. Prices vary. Land cost: \$1,500. Contact: Mountain Travel/Sobek, 6420 Fairmount Avenue, El Cerrito, CA 94530; (800) 227-2384, fax: (510) 525-7710; E-mail: info@mtsobek.com.

UNIVERSITY RESEARCH EXPEDITIONS PROGRAM. Similar to the EarthWatch program, UREP is a nonprofit arm of the University of California that sponsors scientific research around the world. UREP programs often focus on the relationship between human inhabitants and their environment, helping small communities develop sustainable, ecologically sound economies. They currently have a forest conservation program in Ecuador; participants help scientists search for financially rewarding alternatives to logging. Land cost: \$1,285. Contact: University Research Expeditions Program, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720-7050; (510) 642-6586; fax: (510) 642-6791; E-mail: urep@uclink.berkeley.edu.

Don Antonio looks like a shaman. He resembles Colonel Sanders at a Jimmy Buffet concert—white hair, white mustache, beer belly, shorts—a barefoot insurgent.

Duke stops on the path, pulls two leaves from his pocket and holds them in a beam of sunshine.

"Know what these are?"

We shake our heads. The two leaves look identical.

"One is the true coca leaf, the other an imposter," he says. "Indians throughout South America have used the coca leaf for thousands of years to alleviate fatigue and hunger. In its concentrated form, cocaine is the bane of police across America. In its synthetic form, it is a

major anesthetic, procaine."

Duke points out the subtle difference between the two leaves. The real coca leaf has a barely visible vertical stripe on either side of the spine. He pops it into his mouth and we continue.

"Ah ha!" Duke says suddenly, stopping again. He pulls down a brown vine hidden in the penumbra above our heads. "Moonseed liana, *Chondrodendron tomentosum*, better known as *curare*. Now here's a story about rain forest medicine!"

In 1493, one of Columbus's sailors collapsed and died for no apparent reason—the only mark on him was a tiny, mysterious dart in his back. A few years later, Magellan was in Patagonia and one of his men died from a superficial arrow wound. In 1541, Francisco Orellana hightailed it back down the river he named the Amazonas, his men dropping left and right from darts flying from the shadows.

In 1595, Sir Walter Raleigh was fighting Indians on the Orinoco and took casualties. The injured men endured "the most insufferable torments in the wound," Raleigh wrote, "and abideth a most ugly and lamentable death, sometimes dying stark mad, sometimes their bowels breaking out of their bellies, which are presently discoloured and blacke as pitch."

In 1799, von Humboldt followed a shaman deep into the rain forest and tracked down the secret. The poison was made from a vine. A half dozen more explorers and nearly two centuries later, the vine has become a major American drug, a surgical muscle relaxant. First tested on mental patients undergoing electroshock therapy—it prevented them from breaking bones during convulsions—it is now used in many hospitals.

"*D-Tubocurarine*," Duke explains. "Teamed with various anesthetics, it's used in thousands of cases where tense muscles need to be relaxed—cervical lesions, deliveries, eye surgery, open-heart surgery, rectal surgery, tonsillectomies."

For a full week we learn about the forgotten links between plants and medicines. How taxol, a drug developed from the bark of the yew tree, is the most successful treatment for ovarian cancer, having already saved hundreds of lives. How an extract from the berries of the saw palmetto, a small palm tree, is far