This brochure offers a panoramic view of the biological and cultural diversity of Cayambe Coca National Park (CCNP), as well as practical information for the visitor: a geographic and a tourist map, must-see sites, outstanding tourist activities, some useful recommendations for your trip, and a directory of services.

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- 7. SANTA CLARA ISLAND WILDLIFE REFUGE
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- 20. PAMBILAR WILDLIFE REFUGE
- 21. LOS SAMANES NATIONAL RECREATION AREA
- 22. PLAYAS DE VILLAMIL NATIONAL RECREATION AREA
- 23. EL PELADO MARINE RESERVE
- 24. LOS ILINIZAS ECOLOGICAL RESERVE
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- 27. PASOCHOA WILDLIFE RESERVE
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- 30. EL BOULCHE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA
- 31. COTOPAXI NATIONAL PARK
- 32. CHIMBORAZO FAUNA PRODUCTION RESERVE
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**MAP of NATURAL HERITAGE SITES**

Patrimonio de Áreas Naturales del Estado, PANE
The Andean mountain range in Ecuador creates a mosaic of landscapes with surprising biological and cultural diversity. One example of this diversity is Cayambe Coca National Park (CCNP): a snowy volcano on the equator, mega-diverse páramos only an hour from Quito, cloud forests, and tropical jungles. Even its name points to the Park’s diversity: Cayambe is its highest mountain and Coca is one of the large rivers that flows toward the Amazon.

The highland slopes of the Park’s land area are home to the Kayambi culture, an indigenous people of great historical and political significance. Farther east is Oyacachi, a village in the páramos without automobile access until recently, but once a hub on the traditional trade routes between the Andes and the Amazon; to the south and east of the Park, hot baths in Papallacta, boating in Baeza and El Chaco, and the awe-inspiring sight of San Rafael Falls. Below, in the mystical jungle atmosphere, sits the Cofán village Sinanqué above the Aguarico River, a gate to the Amazon.

This area has only been a national park since 2010, as Cayambe Coca was an ecological reserve up until then. The topography in the higher altitudes is very rough, dominated by Cayambe (5,790 masl) and other mountains such as Saraúrco (4,725 masl) and Puntas (4,452 masl). Toward the east, the south and east of the Park, hot baths in Papallacta, boating in Baeza and El Chaco, and the awe-inspiring sight of San Rafael Falls. Below, in the mystical jungle atmosphere, sits the Cofán village Sinanqué above the Aguarico River, a gate to the Amazon.

### Biodiversity and endemic species in CCNP*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CCNP no. of species</th>
<th>% endemism</th>
<th>Ecuador / no. of species</th>
<th>% of national total</th>
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<td>464</td>
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</table>

* These figures are, of necessity, estimates and subject to change.

Biodiversity and endemic species in CCNP*
the topography is less rugged, although it includes El Reventador (3,482 masl), an isolated volcano that erupts almost continuously.

More than eighty lagoons sprinkle the páramos among the mountains, most of them in the Ñucanchi Turupamba area, near Papallacta. There and in Oyacachi, the hot baths testify to the region's volcanic soul.

The area's biodiversity is not only immense (900 species of birds!) but also unique: 100 endemic plant species and various frogs of the genera *Eleutherodactylus* and *Hyloxalus* abound in the Park and its surrounding regions. In terms of variety of ecosystems—several types of páramos, Andean forests, and high Amazon jungles—perhaps only Sangay National Park, farther south, can compete.

The area can be accessed from two points: in the Andes, the Pan-American Highway stretches from the city of Cayambe to the volcano of the same name, to San Marcos Lagoon, and to Oyacachi. From the south, there are various points of access from the Interoceanic Highway between Quito and the Amazon, such as La Virgen, Papallacta, Baeza, or El Chaco. This enormous territory offers innumerable experiences for those who choose to visit.

### The Ecosystems of Cayambe Coca National Park

**Grassy páramo:** the most common páramo, dominated by course grass but spotted with shrubs and soft grasses, located on the west side (ex. outskirts of Cayambe);

**marshy páramo:** in the eastern foothills, swampy areas with species such as *Neurolepis* and *Cortaderia* (ex. Oyacachi);

**high-mountain evergreen forest:** also known as low páramo, dominated by shrubs and small trees;

**high-mountain humid thicket:** lower region of the marshy páramo, with more shrub species (ex. remnants in Papallacta);

**cloud forest:** many twisting trees and frequent fog (ex. *Polyepis* forests along the ascent to Papallacta);

**low-mountain evergreen forest:** taller trees with larger leaves;

**mountain-base evergreen forest:** region above the Amazon forests with very tall trees (up to 40 meters) and many palms (ex. Sinangüé).

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**CAYAMBE COCA IN BRIEF**

**Location:** El Chaco county (Napo province), Gonzalo Pizarro county (Sucumbíos), Cayambe county (Pichincha), and Pimampiro county (Imbabura)

**Area:** 403,103 hectares

**Altitude range:** 600 to 5,790 masl

**Climate:** 5 to 25 °C

**Nearby settlements:** Baeza, El Chaco, Papallacta (Napo), Lumbaqui (Sucumbíos), Cayambe, El Quinche, Olmedo (Pichincha), Ibarra, Mariano Acosta (Imbabura)

**Established in:** 1970 (changed to national park status in 2010)

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Glaciers on the volcano of Cayambe are the only ones that sit atop the equator. Here, both the latitude and the temperature are zero.

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The Aguarico River, one of the largest waterways of the Ecuadorian Amazon, has its source in CCNP.
History tells us that, in pre-Columbian times, the heart of what is today the national park was then densely populated. The inhabitants were the Quijos, cultural and commercial intermediaries between the Amazon plains and the Andes. During the period of colonization, these populations were decimated, and a space that was once a center of activity became marginalized.

There has, however, been continuity in the occupation of the more western and eastern regions. The Kayambi people have dwelt in the inter-Andean range since at least 2500 B.C., according to archaeological evidence such as that from Puntiatzil, in the urban area of Cayambe. Kayambi traditions and festivals are in many cases connected to sun worship and to the peculiarity of the community’s proximity to the equator (which crosses through the Park). During the Festival of the Sun or Inti Raymi, which takes place in Cayambe around the summer solstice (from June 16th to July 2nd), they give thanks for the year’s harvest. The festivals of San Pedro and San Pablo, June 29th throughout the region, seem to have a similar origin, as well as Octavas, which is celebrated in Juan Montalvo with bulls and dancing at the end of July.

At the other extreme of the Park, the community of Sinangüé on the shores of the Aguarico River heralds the beginning of the Cofán territory. In fact, Sinangüé, which today is this people’s westernmost community, marks what was once their original territory. The current distribution of their other communities, lower in the Amazon, is a result of displacement by oil drilling in the 1970s.

Cayambe Coca sits in a region that has for centuries enabled dialogue between human beings and nature, a focal point of the dynamics of interchange between the Andes and the Amazon.
Diversely flavored food: corn, trout, and fava beans with cheese in the Andes; peach palm, chucula (fresh plaintains), and maito (wrapped fish) in the east.

The a’, or “true people” as they call themselves, are known throughout the jungle for their shamans’ knowledge of the medicinal uses of native plants (in contrast with other ethnic groups, who stand out for their command of magic powers). Their traditional dress includes striking headbands made with bird feathers and the cushma, a long garment inherited from the missionaries of the 18th century.

Perhaps the group that best embodies the shared nature of the Quijos is the indigenous community of Oyacachi, resting in a hidden pocket between the Quito basin and the Quijos River valley in the Amazon.

The legend of the community’s origin tells of a Kayambi and a Cofán family who met there and adopted Kichwa as their common language. Up until 1995, the only way to get to the town was on foot. After the construction of a highway, the region has become well-known for its landscape, thermal baths, handicrafts, and curious history.

Oyacachi has many tales related to native wildlife, such as those that tell of the worship of bear and tapir heads. For these practices, the church punished the population by moving the Virgen del Quinche, originally situated in Oyacachi, to its current sanctuary, recently declared one of the “seven wonders of Quito.” Another tradition is crafting utensils and notable wildlife sculptures from alder wood. These can be seen in the Expoferia, which occurs once a year on a flexible date, and which also offers natural products and local dishes such as guinea pig and maito (trout cooked in pompano leaves). Activities also occur every January 28th for the Festival of the Virgen.
Oyacachi

Hot baths and bears in the mist

Oyacachi is an indigenous community within the Park, situated 3,200 meters above sea level in a valley that opens toward the Amazon. For centuries, the people of Oyacachi have connected and shared their culture with many other eastern Andean communities by traveling on foot. Today, visitors can arrive via a road from Guachalá, next to the Pan-American Highway, crossing through the páramos of Cangahua. Oyacachi has a spectacled bear conservation program and a community tourism project (telephone: 0985071925) that offers hikes, lodging, and meals. Visitors can hike the trail to El Chaco, which takes two to three days. The thermal baths (entrance fee of US$ 3) retain their natural atmosphere by being located near the river.

San Marcos Lagoon

Sacred waters that irrigate the fields

From the town of Olmedo toward snowy Cayambe lie fields that are watered by ancient irrigation systems. They are lands that once belonged to large estates of the past but now are the property of indigenous communities. Near the community of La Chimba—where the pioneering indigenous leader Tránsito Amaguaña was born—is the San Marcos Lagoon, still within the Park. It’s the most easily accessible of the many lagoons and marshes surrounding the great mountain. In San Marcos, 3,400 meters in altitude and formed by thawing waters from Cayambe, visitors can observe ducks, condors, carunculated caracaras, black-chested buzzard-eagles, and hummingbirds. There are good sites for camping and a trail between the high Andean forests and the páramos, whose agricultural and suburban valleys give way to Andean forests and páramos speckled with lagoons. The largest of these is Papallacta, where some of the water consumed in Quito comes from. After crossing seemingly enchanted forests of polylepis (“paper trees”), myrtle, and asters, one arrives in the town of Papallacta, where there are thermal pool options for all budgets and tastes. These pools, with temperatures between 36 and 40 °C, are known to cure intestinal, muscular, respiratory, and nervous maladies. On clear days, the volcano Antisana makes the landscape even more breathtaking.

Thermal baths in Papallacta

Lagoons and forests an hour and a half from Quito

Moving along the Interoceanic Highway toward Cayambe Coca National Park,
difficulty varies with the moisture and the season (drier between July and September and at the beginning of the calendar year).

San Rafael Falls

An Amazon flow plunging 160 meters

At the point where the provinces of Napo and Sucumbíos meet, 50 kilometers below El Chaco, we find this site where water from the Quijos River forms three waterfalls and explodes into mist in the middle of a forest full of birds, to then continue its course with the name Coca. Cocks-of-the-rock can be spotted with some ease, although one must take a special hike to observe their mating dance. Other iconic birds are the Ecuadorian piedtail, the blue-gray tanager, and the Amazon umbrellabird. To observe the waterfall, walk 600 meters from the road to the Environmental Ministry’s guard station in San Rafael and then two more kilometers to the observation point.

Sinangüé

Coexisting with nature on the banks of the Aguarico River

This Cofán community is in the lowest region of the Park, at 600 meters of altitude. Here, visitors can learn something of this people’s worldview, sharing with them shaman ceremonies, preparation of traditional foods and crafts, and celebrations. Walking forest trails with an indigenous guide is an amazing and entertaining way of learning about the Park’s flora and fauna and the ways in which the natives make use of them. To get there, travel toward La Bonita on the Quito-Lago Agrio road. Buses leave from Lago Agrio and can also be picked up on the bridge above the Aguarico.
Visit and climb Cayambe

Cayambe’s bulk is divided between the Northern and Southern Hemispheres, as the equator lies close to its peak (5,790 masl). From the city of Cayambe, one can reach the comfortable Ruales Oleas Berge refuge, which is close to the Hermoso glacier (4,700 masl) and has the capacity to sleep up to 80 people. From there, climbers begin their ascent to the top, with specialized guides only. The climb is of medium difficulty, but there are stretches of seracs (places where the glacier becomes brittle and breaks) that require technical knowledge and caution. From the refuge, one can enjoy this paradoxically icy landscape above the tropics.

There is a road for four-wheel-drive vehicles from Cayambe. From there, transport can be hired for US$ 50.

Mountaineering Group of San Gabriel High School: http://cotopaxi.8m.com
Climbs: between US$ 300 and 500 per person.

Ascend El Reventador

El Reventador is an isolated, smoking cone to the east of Ecuador’s eastern mountain range. On a good day, one can glimpse from its peak a magnificent view of volcanoes and the Amazonian plains. Its last forceful eruption occurred in 2002, when ash covered the surrounding area all the way to Quito. Climbing the volcano isn’t difficult in technical terms, but hikers must cross muddy zones carrying their backpacks. It’s necessary to go with an authorized tour operator and to investigate the probability of an eruption (climbing can sometimes be prohibited). Getting to the peak requires two days and one night of camping. Hikers cross forests with many orchids and birds before reaching the summit.

The climb starts at San Rafael Falls (see above).
Cayambe Coca NP: (06) 301 9208 / Quijos County Council: (06) 232 0112

Hiking through the high Andes

The páramos and forests of the Park offer hiking and trekking options for the day (La Virgen to Sucus lagoon and Oyacachi to Papallacta) or for multiple days (Oyacachi to El Chaco and El Cóndor). The eight kilometers (three hours) from La Virgen to the glacial lagoon of Sucus is an ideal trek for beginning hikers. Oyacachi to Papallacta is a trail of 36 kilometers through waterfalls and páramo lagoons (one or two days). From Oyacachi, it’s also possible to descend to El Chaco on a path that local people use to travel east. The path stretches 42 kilometers (three to five days) through a canyon with forested slopes, one of the most interesting routes within the Park. Another captivating trek begins along the southern edge of the Park, in El Tambo, next to the lagoon of Papallacta, and crosses 60 kilometers (three to five days) through the Antisana Reserve until arriving at Limpiopungo in Cotopaxi National Park.

Hikes should be taken only with accredited guides.
See Directory, Cayambe Coca N.P.: (02) 211 0370
Starting at US$ 65 per person.
Bird watching

Ecuador is famous for its diversity of birds, and Cayambe Coca offers a sensational sample: from condors, carunculated caracaras, and ibises in the high altitudes, to parrots and toucans in the Amazon. Almost any site in the Park is exceptional for bird watching. San Rafael Falls has already been mentioned, with its eastern subspecies of the cock-of-the-rock. Hummingbirds such as the sword-billed hummingbird, the tourmaline sunangel, the chestnut-breasted coronet, and the gorgeted woodstar are only four of the many species that can easily be observed from the eastern hills. The San Marcos Lagoon is a highly regarded spot for seeing high Andean birds, and Sinangüé is valued for seeing tropical birds. Various places in the area of Quijos are well-known destinations for special tours.

See Directory

Water sports in El Quijos

Bordering the Park to the south, the Quijos River offers particularly good conditions for Class IV (very difficult) white-water sports; important international rafting events have taken place here, including the world championship of 2005, and, every year at the beginning of November, there is a national rafting and kayaking competition. Trips should be taken with qualified tour guides.

⇒ Tours generally include transportation from Quito; the Quijos River is entered from the Interoceanic Highway on the second Quijos bridge, from the bypass or from the parish of Borja.

 Quijos County Council: (06) 232 0112

$ From US$ 150 to 400 per person.

Rock climbing

Five minutes from Pifo toward Papallacta is Sigsipamba, the location of the Machuco climbing rock. Another interesting destination is Cuyuja, between Papallacta and Baeza. This spot has become a mecca for climbers. The vertical rock, up to 75 meters high, is first-class and offers many routes and variations. Specialized equipment should be used.

⇒ Cuyuja is 16.4 kilometers to the east of Papallacta on the Interoceanic Highway. To reach the wall, cross the Papallacta River.

monodedo.com/web/paginas/topos/cuyuja.html

$ Use of the climbing wall is free.
Transportation

- To get to the city of Cayambe, take a bus that leaves from Quito (US$ 1.25) from the Carcelén or the Ofelia terminal (Cooperative Flor del Valle). From Ibarra, the fares are the same in the opposite direction.
- From Cayambe, take a Cayambe company bus to La Chimba (US$ 0.60) to get to the San Marcos Lagoon. From there, one can rent a pickup truck to the lagoon (≈US$ 5); passengers should request that the driver wait at the site for the ride back. A pickup truck to the lagoon can also be rented from Cayambe (US$ 15).
- To get to the refuge from Cayambe, one can rent a pickup truck, but the road is sometimes impassable. Trucks can take up to 10 people (≈US$ 50). The chauffeur must also be contracted for the return trip.
- For the Amazon zone, Lago Agrio is a good base from which to continue to the Park. TAME (02 396 3239) and Aerogal (1 800 AERO GAL) fly from Quito to Lago Agrio every day between 7:00 am and 4:00 pm (≈US$ 160 round trip, discounts for minors and senior citizens).
- Certain bus cooperatives (Baños, Loja, Occidental, Putumayo, Transesmeraldas, among others) travel every day at various times from Quito’s main bus terminal to Lago Agrio (US$ 8). It’s possible to disembark at any of the intermediate points: Baeza, El Chaco, San Rafael Falls, El Reventador, La Bonita (to go to Sinangüe), and Cascales.

Security and health

In the higher zones

- Take precautions against the cold and the altitude, especially when mountain climbing.
- Lemon balm tea can ease the effects of altitude sickness.
- Hikers must be prepared with warm clothing, including hats and gloves, but should also be prepared to shed some layers; at certain times of day, the highland heat can be intense. Visitors should use goggles in the snow and hiking books on irregular surfaces.
- Because of the intensity of ultraviolet rays even on cloudy days, it is essential to use sunblock.
- While there are no pests or dangerous plants in the páramo, visitors should always take care not to eat unfamiliar wild fruits or hurt themselves on sharp or spiky leaves.
- It is recommended that visitors carry durable bottles or canteens with plenty of water and avoid using disposable plastic bottles.

In the lower zones

- Use tall rubber boots to protect yourself from mud, from thorns and branches, and from possible stings.
- Visitors should use insect repellent and, while sleeping, a mosquito net (malaria has been reported in certain areas).
- For water sports, it’s necessary to be familiar with the difficulty of the passages you want to traverse and to be aware of possible flooding.

When to visit

Even though traditional weather cycles have changed in the last decades, the least rainy season continues to be between June and September and near the beginning of the calendar year. This is true both for the páramos and the Andean forests, as well as for the lower regions. Nevertheless, one can visit at any time of year. To predict rain in the short term, it’s useful to know that winds carry water from the Amazon, and as such storms from the east signal potential bad weather. Other criteria for planning a visit are local festival dates.

Sustainable tourism practices

- The páramos and the Andean forest are fragile ecosystems where one must be very cautious; walk only on marked trails, always collect trash, and put out fires completely (if it’s permitted to build one). We shouldn’t leave any signs of our presence.
- We may not remove anything from the Park except for crafts or foods that we find in the communities.
- Various communities throughout the Park have started sustainable tourism projects that help to improve their livelihoods and, at the same time, make visitors more aware of the necessity of conserving this irreplaceable environment. Choosing these options is recommended.
- Indigenous communities like Oyacachi and Sinangüe are experiencing rapid cultural changes due to the recent appearance of highways. It’s of utmost importance that visitors be respectful of and sensitive to this reality.

Important contact information

- 1 800 TURISMO (1 800 887 4766)
- Cayambe Coca N.P.: (02) 211 0370
- San Rafael guard station: (06) 301 9208
- El Chaco guard station: (06) 232 9743
- Quijos County Council: (06) 232 0112 (06) 232 0002
- Baeza Hospital: (06) 232 0117
- Cayambe Hospital: (02) 236 1150
- Baeza Police: (06) 232 0430
- Cayambe Police: (02) 278 4071

Entrance to all PANE continental protected areas is free for residents and foreigners.
### Activities

1. Thermal baths  
2. Horseback riding  
3. Guided tours  
4. Cycling  
5. Tree climbing  
6. Mountaineering  
7. River boating  
8. Rafting and kayaking  
9. Cultural tours  
10. Community tourism

### Lodging

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<td><strong>CAYAMBE</strong></td>
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| Hostal Mitad del Mundo | Natalia Jarrín S57-74 and Córdova Galarza  
S $7.50 (breakfast not included, shared bathroom)  
(02) 236 0226 | second |
| Hostal Imperial | Ascacubi 62 and pasaje La Libertad  
S $9.50 (breakfast not included)  
(02) 236 4417 | second |
| Hostal Miraflores de Yasnan | Pan-American Highway South and Rosalia Arteaga, Miraflores sector  
S $10 (breakfast not included)  
099 990 5854 | third |
| **QUIJOS** | | | |
| Hostel Coturpa | Papallacta  
S 10 | second |
| Hostería La Campiña del Quijos | Interoceanic Highway, Atanasio Minda Street  
(06) 232 9090  
(06) 232 9071  
(06) 232 9070 | first |
| Hostería Termas de Papallacta | Papallacta  
S 139 (three-person room, breakfast not included)  
Entrance to thermal baths: US$ 7 adults; 3.50 children  
(02) 256 8999 / (06) 289 5060  
termasuedo@termaspapallacta.com  
www.papallacta.com.ec | first |
| Hostería Guango Lodge | Pifo-Baeza road, kilometer 53  
S 140.30 (includes three meals)  
(02) 382 2310 / (06) 399 358 1250  
info@cabanasanisidro.com  
www.cabanasanisidro.com | second |

Prices are per guest and include taxes but not breakfast, unless otherwise indicated.
Below is a short **list of some outstanding wildlife** found in Cayambe Coca. Given the extraordinary diversity in this area, it is, of necessity, an incomplete list. Enjoy filling it in!

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andes parakeet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black-chested buzzard-eagle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sickle-winged guan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chamaepetes goudoti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speckled chachalaca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ortalis guttata</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amphibians and reptiles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peter's stubfoot toad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cosanga rocket frog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretty torrentcicada frog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glass cochin frog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napo plump toad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Various species</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spectacled caiman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow-spotted river turtle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podocnemis unifilis</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arutus aucionata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burret*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Astrocyrum ursochys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peach palm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bactris gasipaes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myrtle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myrcianthes rhopaloides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polyplepis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polyplepis incana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pampas grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curtandia spp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South American bamboo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroplepis spp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papamano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caliathra lutea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aster*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gynoxys hallii</td>
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<td>This document may be cited as: Ecuador Terrá Incognita, 2012. Informative brochure for sustainable tourism in Cayambe Coca National Park. Ministry of Tourism / Ministry of the Environment, Quito</td>
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<td>© Ministry of Tourism of Ecuador, 2012</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* species endemic to Ecuador

† possibly extinct
Conscious tourism is a life-transforming experience that leads to personal growth, making us better human beings.

This new concept is based on principles of sustainability and ethics, and promotes peace, friendship, respect, and love for life as the essence of tourism.

It is a pact to live together in a responsible, mutually respectful fashion, in communion with tour agents from sending and receiving communities, the tourist, and the natural and cultural heritage.

Conscious tourism is a living, dynamic concept in constant development. It is an experience in giving and receiving.