

# Juvaro indians

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The Jivaro is a tribe of people from the Andes Mountains located in Ecuador. The name Jivaro was given to this group of people by Spanish conquerors. The Jivaro tribe consists of five sub tribes Shuar, Huambisa, Aguaruna, Achuar and Shiviari. These tribes share a common language however there are slight variations in the dialect that each tribe uses. Of these five sub tribes, this report will focus mainly on the Shuar. The Shuar are most notably known for being fierce warriors. The Shuar fought and fended off not only the Inca, but the Spanish Conquistadors as well.

Today the Shuar are still battling, however, now it is the modern society and missionaries that come to try and convert and change their way of life. Though most of the Shuar remain isolated from modern/western society, some Shuar are moving to urban areas, adapting to contemporary life in South America, forgetting their traditional way of life and the culture they once came from. The Shuar live on the eastern slopes of the Andes where mountain ranges meet the Amazon River headwaters. This tropical forest region is characterized by frequent, heavy rainfall and dense tropical vegetation.

The Shuar are mainly concentrated in Ecuador. Currently the Jivaro tribe as a whole occupies nearly seven-and-a-half million acres of jungle land along the Peru-Ecuador border. The Shuar, alone, have a population of about seventy-three thousand, occupying the basins of the Santiago, Yaupi, Zamora, and Morona rivers. Gender roles in the Shuar society generally designate that the men protect, hunt, fish, clear forest, and cut wood. Women cultivate the land, cook, make beer, and care for the children and animals.

When the Shuar build a house they have two separate entrances that are gender specific, and the woman will only enter the men's side when she is serving the food. The roles of males and females in Shuar society are clearly defined and are tied to religious beliefs. The division of labor is partly the result of the belief that most things have either male or female souls. For example, the manioc is thought to be female, so all tasks related to the planting, reaping, and processing of manioc is the domain of women. Planting and reaping of corn, which has a male soul, are the responsibility of men.

There are three main sources from which the Shuar derive their subsistence; farming, hunting and fishing, and gathering various species of insects, fruits and plants. The Shuar are also known to keep domestic animals such as chickens, ducks, and pigs. These are kept in case they host a large number of guests, or in the event that there is no game on hand. Common crops grown by households are sweet manioc, sweet potato, white maize, squash, gold peanuts, sugar cane, and cotton. Some Shuar also cultivate medicinal and hallucinogenic drugs.

Manioc is by far grown in the largest quantity as it constitutes a major portion of the Shuar diet. It is used to make beer and is prepared by the women in large quantities. On average, an adult male will consume three to four gallons of manioc beer per day. His wife will drink one to two gallons, and their children will drink about a half-gallon each of this brew. Shuar men usually do not travel any further than a day's walk, about eight miles, to search for game. Common preys that the Shuar hunt are anacondas, toucans, monkeys, peccary and armadillos.

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They use blowguns and well as rifles to catch their prey. Blowguns are seven feet long and contain darts poisoned with curare. The rifles have been obtained though trade with other tribes and contact with white men. The Shuar will go to local streams and rivers to fish, and use methods such as bare-handed fishing, hook-and-line fishing and a complex system of river poisoning. Insects in particular are a savory food relished by the Shuar; they collect many different species including grubs, larvae, ants and grasshoppers. They collect fruits and will specifically seek out plants that are medicinally useful.

Though the Shuar are known as fierce warriors, they are also a very sociable people. When visiting a neighbor or relative's house, guests enjoy a hospitable welcome. Beer made from manioc root is offered, and the family meal is shared. Often, if the distances traveled are great, guests are invited to stay for several days. Banana leaves laid on the dirt floor serve as beds for visitors. These visits also provide an opportunity for men to seek new wives. In contrast to Western cultures, it is the Shuar men who are fussy about their appearance.

A man may spend hours before a visit or party painting his face and putting decorative adornments on his clothes and in his hair. On special occasions, complex geometric designs are painted on the nose and cheekbones. Parrot feathers adorn the hair, and ear sticks are placed through holes in the ear. Gift-giving is also important among the Shuar. The fangs of a boa constrictor, thought to bring good luck, are a common gift for a potential bride. If she returns the gestures of affection to her suitor, he may begin negotiations with the woman's father to marry her.

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Romantic love and mutual attraction are very important in the selection of a spouse. In addition, women seek good hunters and warriors as husbands, while men desire good gardeners and potters. The husband is obligated to pay a bride price (a payment to her family) or perform services for the wife's father. There are two types of shamans for the Shuar, the wawek, which are bewitching shamans and the wishinu which cure. Both may derive their power in many different ways. Generally shamans are the wealthiest people in their tribe and any Jivaro, male or female, may become one.

It is said that one out of four Jivaro men are active shamans, but they are judged based on their ability to cure, in the case of the wishinu or based on the effectiveness of their harming witchcraft for a wawek. They believe in a system of magic darts, and that a curing shaman can essentially rid a person of evil by removing the darts which may have been cast by a bewitching shaman. In the process of curing or bewitching, both shamans drink natema, which will give them the ability to enter into the supernatural world.

A variety of ancient myths have been passed down through the generations to explain the origins of the Shuar people. In one story, the Andean foothills were subject to a severe flood, killing all but two brothers. When the waters receded and the brothers returned to their shelter, they found dishes of food laid out for them by two parrots. One of the brothers caught one of the gift-bearing parrots and married her. This marriage produced three girls and three boys, whose descendants became the Shuar people. The Shuar believe that spiritual forces are responsible for real-world occurrences.

They believe spirits inhabit animals, plants, and objects. Many daily customs and behaviors are guided by their desire for spiritual power or to avoid evil spirits. Fearful of witchcraft, the Shuar often attribute sickness or death to the power of their enemies to cast curses. Though the Shuar have been contacted by missionaries and some have been influenced and converted to Christianity, many more Shuar worship many deities, or gods. Nungui, or Earth Mother, is believed to have the power to make plants grow. Living deep underground, she emerges at night to dance in the garden.

Women sing to Nungui to ask her to protect the garden, and they carefully weed the garden daily to appease her. Shuar believe in a protective spirit that comes to them in a vision. This spirit, known as arutam, is thought to protect them from injury, disease, and death. Finally the Shuar are best known for their practice of head-hunting and their ability to shrink heads. Today the practice is limited. The process of shrinking a head may take up to six days, where the head is reduced to the size of a man's fist.

#### Reference

<http://www.head-hunter.com/ng.html>

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