

NEW HORIZONS

Relaxation is one thing, but sometimes you want more from your holiday. Two writers share the trips they took to reshape mind and body, and we book into 'reboot camp' – who doesn't want some of that?

MIND

RAINFOREST THERAPY

Finding herself in a real-life rut, Jane Lovatt pushed her boundaries and reclaimed her mojo on a trip to Ecuador

Earlier this year I realised I was feeling flat and anxious. Life in my adopted home of Valencia was pleasant and easy, so why was I so lifeless? As I sat on my balcony, I realised I rarely did anything that didn't suit me – even the smallest inconvenience became a problem. So rather than plan my usual beach holiday, I booked a trip to Ecuador's rainforest and cloud-forest regions. Surely that would wake me up a bit?

I was excited but apprehensive. Was I fit enough? What about altitude sickness, yellow fever? I would be travelling in rainy season and even that sounded daunting after sunny Spain.

When I arrived at Mashpi Lodge, set high in the cloud forest, it was tempting to watch the rain from inside. But that's not what I came on a trip like this for. Reluctantly, I headed down the steep slope to a beautiful waterfall.

It's forbidden to explore the forest alone, so my guide Paul led the way. As I slipped in the »

The perfectly serene Napo River in the Amazon

mud, my rain-soaked hair in my eyes, I could barely see the scenic splendour. I returned to the lodge soaked but, as I sipped a hot chocolate, I felt proud for pushing ahead.

Leaving my comfort zone became a recurring theme. On the sky bike, I made eye contact with treetop birds, and walking in the forest at night was enthralling but scary – grip the wrong tree and you can disturb its colony of giant ants. But it was worth the ordeal to witness the nocturnal world of frogs, tarantulas and darting fireflies. My survival skills were emerging, making me feel more capable.

Filled with vitality, I set off for the rainforest, feeling intrepid as I travelled along the Napo River by canoe.

At La Selva Lodge, I took a dip in Heron Lake, knowing piranhas were lurking beneath. As I cut through the water, I realised there are dangers everywhere in life but sometimes you have to jump in and ignore them.

Dan, my expert guide, paddled me across the lake in a canoe. He showed me a giant anaconda, capuchin monkeys scampering in the trees, and I heard the haunting lament of the howler monkeys. Dan pointed out life-saving plants that grow in the 'world's biggest pharmacy' and stressed the importance of recycling to minimise tree clearances.

The significance of the rainforest was staring me in the face, making me determined to change my life – no more plastic bags, no more takeaway coffees in plastic cups.

I boarded the Manatee Amazon Explorer for the last stage of my odyssey and set off to the Yasuni National Park. Here, shy Kichwa women roasted fish and corn for our lunch and explained the crop cultivation necessary for their survival. Our translator Ramon also told us they badly needed English speakers to teach in their school.

I resolved to break out of my cosy world and put my anxieties aside. In this extraordinary setting, I realised my 'fears' didn't amount to much.

Back in Valencia, I've signed up for more Spanish classes and maybe next year I'll be good enough to return to Ecuador and make myself useful in a place where it matters. »

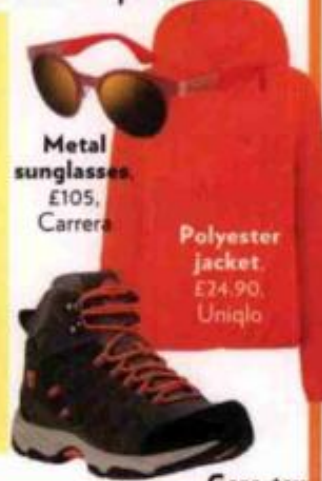


Jane's walk on the wild side has shown her a new path in life

TRIP NOTES

Rainbow Tours Latin America offers nine nights in Ecuador, including flights, accommodation, transfers, excursions and some meals, from £3,075; 020 7666 1250, rainbowtours.co.uk. See thetrundlers.com for more on Jane's travels in South America

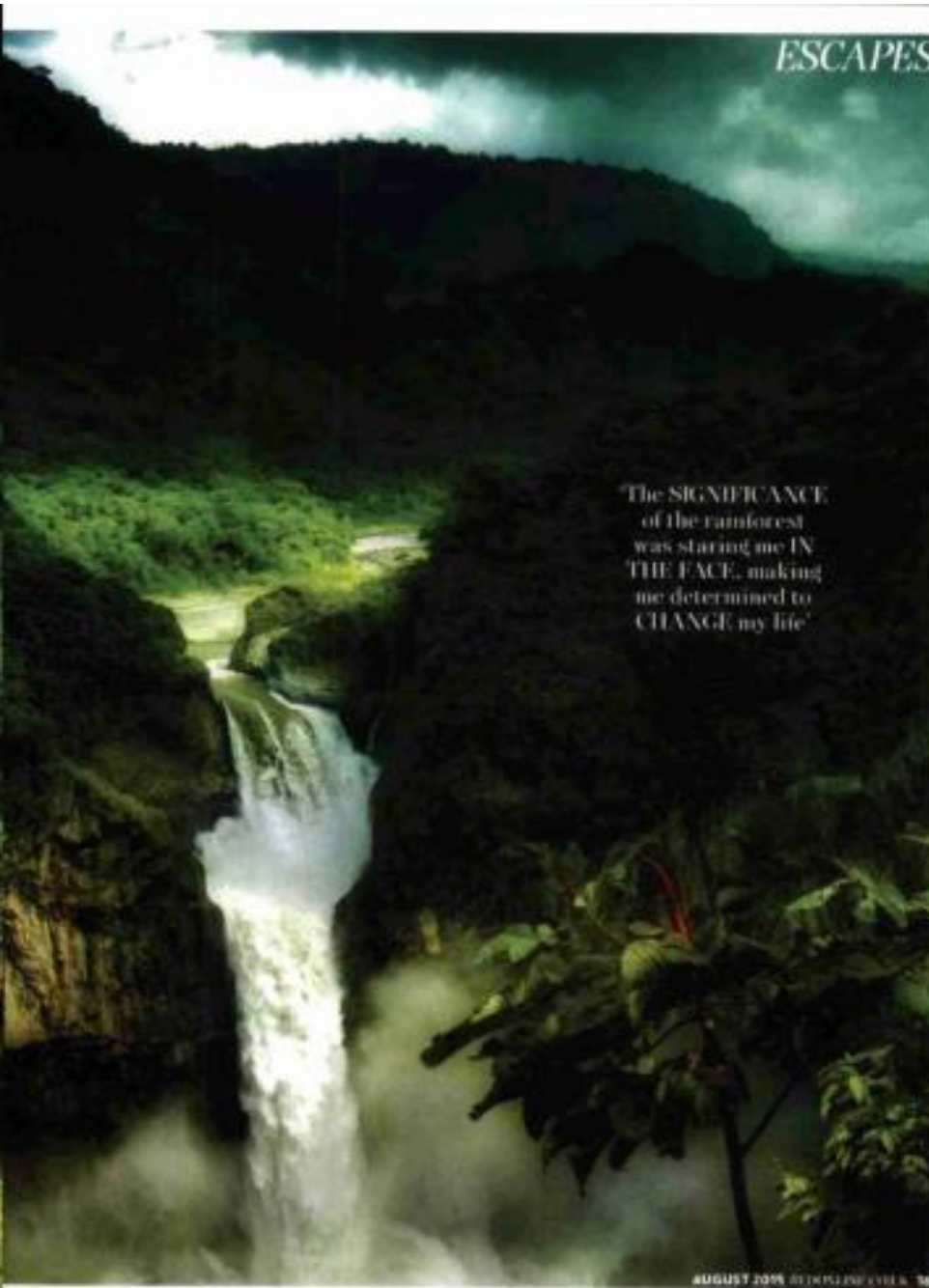
What to pack



Metal sunglasses. £105, Carrera

Polyester jacket. £74.90, Uniqlo

Gore-tex boots. £95, Timberland



ESCAPES

Ecuador's
breathtaking
San Rafael
waterfall

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