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Rainforest Expeditions: Planning for the Future

The year 2004 marked the 15th anniversary of the founding of the ecotourism company Rainforest Expeditions (RFE). A decade and a half of experience led the company's cofounders, Eduardo Nycander and Kurt Holle, to gain international exposure and praise for their environmentally and socially responsible business practices in the heart of the Peruvian Amazon. Most notable among their socially responsible endeavors was the Ese'ija Ecotourism Project, an agreement signed by RFE and Peru's native Ese'ija people of the Infierno community in 1997. The agreement included construction and operation of RFE's flagship tourist lodge, Albergue¹ Posada Amazonica (APA), and a profit-sharing agreement awarding the Ese'ija people 60% of APA's profit.

The Ese'ija Ecotourism Project agreement is to expire in 2017, giving the Infierno community and Rainforest Expeditions the option to discontinue their partnership, enabling the community to assume full operational responsibilities of the lodge. To Nycander and Holle, expiration of the contract could mean losing access to the most profitable lodge associated with their company. The two had to explore alternative lodging options and offerings in anticipation of 2017.

Company Snapshot

Rainforest Expeditions, headquartered in Puerto Maldonado, Peru, was founded in 1989. RFE owned and operated the Tambopata Research Center (TRC) as well as operating Albergue Posada Amazonica (APA). Both ecotourism lodges were located in the Madre de Dios region of the Amazon rainforest in southeastern Peru. (See **Figure 1** for a map of Peru and the Madre de Dios region.) Nycander and Holle founded RFE by turning the site of the world's largest natural clay lick and macaw research and restoration center -- TRC -- into one of the most extraordinary and authentic ecotourism experiences in South America.

Located eight hours southwest of Puerto Maldonado² by boat, and on the shores of the Tambopata River, TRC was a rustic and remote lodge site. APA was a shorter distance from Puerto Maldonado, just 3.5 boating-hours southwest of town. APA offered a less rustic alternative for RFE's clients while serving as a midway point for the more adventurous travelers headed to TRC. In addition to remote nature experiences, RFE offered cultural and archaeological tours in the Cuzco region, including the mystical Machu Picchu. RFE field staff and tour guides were located in its Tambopata-based lodges, in offices in Puerto Maldonado and around Cuzco.



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