

Connecting: the Aspiring Trans-National Park of Carchi, Ecuador, Department of Nariño, Colombia

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The bid for a trans-national geo-park between Carchi in Zone 1 in Ecuador (the same zone to which Imbabura belongs) and Nariño in Colombia is a bid for peace in an area subject to many UNDP (ART) initiatives, including UN-WOMEN empowerment projects, as a result of the long-standing conflict (due to FARC activities etc.) in the region. It also responds to an initiative for a geo-park that reflects a geographic and geological unity, although geo-political frontiers have been traced to divide two cultures and two regions that share so much in common. Both regions share, therefore, the same problems in eradicating poverty and creating employment, producing peace through welfare. This bid is in its first steps since it involves extensive negotiation between both sides and should, by all rights, be presented by Colombia, who are the instigators although the Ecuadorian side, at present immersed in local elections, is well-disposed towards pursuing the same as of March. Both areas are active in the RECINATUR network (and, thus, this bid is to be considered together with Imbabura and Huasteca Potosina).

The region of Carchi is divided into six cantons: Bolívar, Espejo, Tulcán, Montúfar, San Pedro de Huasca and Mira. Mira in particular is famous for having been the centre for the studies of the French Geodesic Mission in 1766. The province is located in Ecuador on the northern border with Colombia, bordering the southern Colombian department of Nariño. Only 8% or so of the whole province is flat. The most important elevations are the Chiles volcano (at 4,270 metres), El Pelado (at 4,149 metres), Chiltazan (3,967 metres), Mirador (3,831 metres) and Cerro Negro (3,674 metres). The upper part of the province is mild with a cold-damp climate but with a hot area in the South in the Valley of Chota. Areas such as El Ángel ecological reserve are extremely cool, with temperatures dropping below 10°C. The Reserve is an extensive system of moorland and wetlands with a forest of ancient Espeletia pycnophylla (Frailejones) some up to 10 metres tall. In San Gabriel, there is a 16 hectare-forest of arrayanes, a rare tree with legendary magic properties whose bark is cinnamon in colour. In Bolívar, there have been the remains of a mammoth found. The province is also home to the Lagunas Verdes, three sulphur-water lakes of volcanic origins and the Tufiño hot water springs. The Guanderas scientific station at Huaca carries out biological research.

The bordering Colombian Department of Nariño is participating through the international relations of Pasto municipality in promoting the area surrounding the South-West skirts of the volcano Galeras, known as El Santuario, which includes seven municipalities: Pasto, Nariño, La Florida, Sandoná, Consacá, Yacuanquer y Tangua, some 8,886 hectares with altitudes ranging between 1,950 and 4,276 metres and temperatures of, on average, between 3 and 13°C. The ecosystems of this protected area are similar to Carchi's and are volcanic in nature due to the proximity to the Galeras volcano, one of the most active in Latin America.

The Sanctuary is home to many of the descendents of the original tribes, the Quillacingas: Agua Pamba, Chargualyaco, Mapachico and San Cayetano still maintain the ethnic and cultural traditions of their forefathers and work the land according to the ancestral customs and ways. The area is famous for its New Year celebrations (Blancos y Negros) and for the Carnivals.

The areas share many geological features and, thus, it is important for them to work together to strive to promote wealth and welfare for the local people through responsible tourism in a climate of peaceful co-habitation.

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