

Zen Commando



Ayahuasca

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1.0 Introduction

The Zen Commando Ayahuasca Retreat offers a journey of seeking, healing, and recovery. We provide a safe and secure environment where you can safely detach from the world and immerse yourself in Nature while learning about your true identity. During the retreat, you will gain a deeper understanding of the relationship you have with the environment, others, and your “*shadow self*.”¹ The retreat is designed to help you rebalance, cleanse, and learn. This is not always an easy process. Our goal is to set you up for success by providing you with the information, tools, and environment to ensure you have a safe, secure, and enlightening experience.

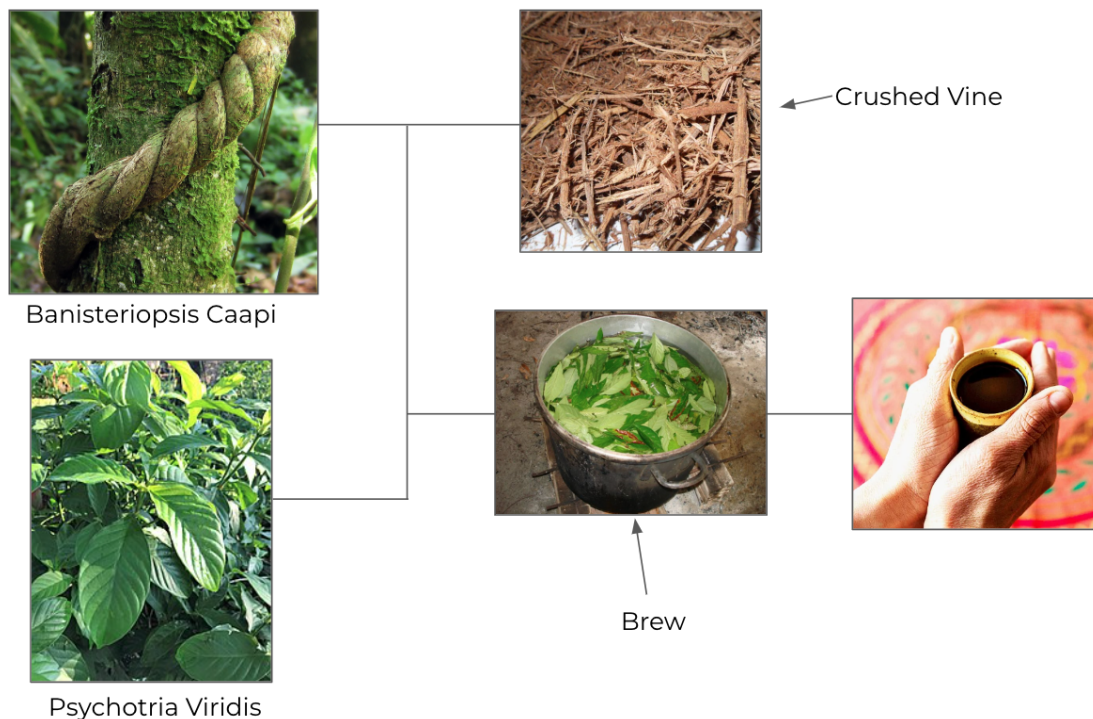
“Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.” ~ Rumi

2.0 What is Ayahuasca?

Ayahuasca — also known as the tea, the vine, and la purga — is a brew made from the leaves of the Psychotria Viridis shrub along with the stalks of the Banisteriopsis Caapi vine, though other plants and ingredients can be added as well.² This drink was used for spiritual and religious purposes by ancient Amazonian tribes and is still used as a sacred beverage by some religious communities in Brazil and North America, including the Santo Daime. Traditionally, a shaman or curandero — an experienced healer who leads Ayahuasca ceremonies — prepares the brew by boiling torn leaves of the Psychotria Viridis shrub and stalks of the Banisteriopsis Caapi vine in water. The Banisteriopsis Caapi vine is cleaned and smashed before being boiled to increase the extraction of its medicinal compounds. When the brew has been reduced to the shaman’s liking, the water is removed and reserved, leaving behind the plant material. This process is repeated until a highly concentrated liquid is produced. Once cooled, the brew is strained to remove impurities.

¹ The “shadow self” is a concept first coined by Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung that describes those aspects of the personality that we choose to reject and repress. For one reason or another, we all have parts of ourselves that we don’t like—or that we think society won’t like—so we push those parts down into our unconscious psyches. It is this collection of repressed aspects of our identity that Jung referred to as our shadow self.

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5532431/>



3.0 How Does it Work?

The main ingredients of Ayahuasca — *Banisteriopsis Caapi* and *Psychotria Viridis* — both have hallucinogenic properties.³ *Psychotria Viridis* contains N, N-dimethyltryptamine (DMT), a psychedelic substance that occurs naturally in the plant. DMT is a powerful hallucinogenic chemical. However, it has low bioavailability, as it gets rapidly broken down by enzymes called monoamine oxidases (MAOs) in your liver and gastrointestinal tract.⁴ For this reason, DMT must be combined with something containing MAO inhibitors (MAOIs), which allow DMT to take effect. *Banisteriopsis Caapi* contains potent MAOIs called β -carbolines, which also have psychoactive effects of their own.⁵ When combined, these two plants form a powerful psychedelic brew that affects the central nervous system, leading to an altered state of consciousness that can include hallucinations, out-of-body experiences, and euphoria.

³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6007657/>

⁴ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6007657/>

⁵ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30127713/>

4.0 How is it Used?

Though Ayahuasca was traditionally used for religious and spiritual purposes by specific populations, it has become popular worldwide among those who seek a way to open their minds, heal from past traumas, or simply experience an Ayahuasca journey.

It's strongly recommended that Ayahuasca only be taken when supervised by an experienced shaman, as those who take it need to be looked after carefully, as an Ayahuasca trip leads to an altered state of consciousness that lasts for many hours.

Many people travel to countries like Peru, Costa Rica, and Brazil, where multi-day Ayahuasca retreats are offered. They're led by experienced shamans, who prepare the brew and monitor participants for safety. Before partaking in an Ayahuasca ceremony, it's recommended that participants abstain from cigarettes, drugs, alcohol, sex, and caffeine to purify their bodies. It's also often suggested to follow various diets, such as vegetarianism or veganism, for 2–4 weeks prior to the experience. This is claimed to free the body of toxins.

5.0 Ceremonies

Ayahuasca ceremonies are usually held at night and last until the effects of Ayahuasca have worn off. After the space is prepared and blessed by the shaman leading the ceremony, Ayahuasca is offered to participants, sometimes split into several doses.

After consuming Ayahuasca, most people start to feel its effects within 20–60 minutes. The effects are dose-dependent, and the trip can last 2–6 hours.⁶

Those who take Ayahuasca can experience symptoms such as vomiting, diarrhea, feelings of euphoria, strong visual and auditory hallucinations, mind-altering psychedelic effects, fear, and paranoia.⁷

It should be noted that some of the adverse effects, such as vomiting and diarrhea, are considered a normal part of the cleansing experience.

⁶ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5771051/>

⁷ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5771051/>

People react to Ayahuasca differently. Some experience euphoria and a feeling of enlightenment, while others go through severe anxiety and panic. It's not uncommon for those taking Ayahuasca to experience both positive and negative effects from the brew.

The shaman and others who are experienced in Ayahuasca offer spiritual guidance to participants throughout the Ayahuasca experience and monitor participants for safety. Some retreats have medical staff on hand as well, in case of emergencies.

These ceremonies are sometimes conducted consecutively, with participants consuming Ayahuasca a few nights in a row. Every time you take Ayahuasca, it results in a different experience.

6.0 Potential Benefits of Ayahuasca

Many people who have taken Ayahuasca claim that the experience led to positive, long-term, life-altering changes. This may be due to the effects of Ayahuasca on the neurological system.

Recent research has shown that Ayahuasca may benefit health — particularly brain health — in a number of ways.

It May Benefit Brain Health

The main active ingredients in Ayahuasca — DMT, and β -carbolines — have been shown to exhibit neuroprotective and neurorestorative qualities in some studies. DMT activates the sigma-1 receptor (Sig-1R), a protein that blocks neurodegeneration and regulates the production of antioxidant compounds that help protect your brain cells.⁸ A test-tube study indicated that DMT protected human brain cells from damage caused by lack of oxygen and increased cell survival.⁹ Harimine, the main β -carboline in Ayahuasca, has been found to have anti-inflammatory, neuroprotective, and memory-boosting effects in test-tube and animal studies.^{10, 11}

It has also been observed to increase levels of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), a protein that plays an important role in nerve cell growth and

⁸ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5021697/>

⁹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5021697/>

¹⁰ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27918874/>

¹¹ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28706205/>

promotes nerve cell survival.¹² Additionally, a test-tube study demonstrated that exposure to harmine increased the growth of human neural progenitor cells by over 70% in 4 days. These cells generate the growth of new neural cells in your brain.¹³

May Improve Psychological Well-Being

Research has shown that taking Ayahuasca may increase the mindfulness capacity of your brain and improve your overall psychological well-being. A study of 20 people indicated that consuming Ayahuasca once weekly for 4 weeks was as effective as an 8-week mindfulness program at increasing acceptance — a component of mindfulness that plays a fundamental role in psychological health.¹⁴ Other studies have found similar results, noting that Ayahuasca may improve mindfulness, mood, and emotional regulation.¹⁵ A study of 57 people demonstrated that ratings of depression and stress significantly decreased immediately after the participants consumed Ayahuasca. These effects were still significant 4 weeks following the Ayahuasca consumption.¹⁶ They're mostly attributed to the DMT and β -carbolines in Ayahuasca.¹⁷

Other Potential Benefits

It May help treat addiction, anxiety, treatment-resistant depression, and PTSD
Some research suggests that Ayahuasca may benefit those with depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and addiction disorders.

A study in 29 people with treatment-resistant depression showed that a single dose of Ayahuasca led to significant improvements in depression severity compared with a placebo. Other studies report rapid antidepressant effects of Ayahuasca as well.^{18,19} Additionally, a review of six studies concluded that Ayahuasca showed beneficial effects in treating depression, anxiety, mood disorders, and drug dependence.²⁰ Several studies have focused on the effects of Ayahuasca on addiction disorders, including addictions to crack

¹² <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27918874/>

¹³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5144684/>

¹⁴ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5869920/>

¹⁵ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26612618/>

¹⁶ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6182612/>

¹⁷ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26976063/>

¹⁸ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29903051/>

¹⁹ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29867608/>

²⁰ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4910400/>

cocaine, alcohol, and nicotine — with promising results.²¹ In one study, 12 people with severe psychological and behavioral issues related to substance abuse participated in a 4-day treatment program that included 2 Ayahuasca ceremonies.

At a 6-month follow-up, they demonstrated significant improvements in mindfulness, hopefulness, empowerment, and overall quality of life. Plus, self-reported use of tobacco, cocaine, and alcohol significantly declined.²² Researchers hypothesize that Ayahuasca may help those with PTSD as well, though more research in this area is needed.²³

7.0 Considerations and Potential Side Effects

While taking part in an Ayahuasca ceremony may seem alluring, consuming this psychedelic brew can lead to serious, even deadly, side effects. First, even though many of the unpleasant side effects that are usually experienced during an Ayahuasca trip, such as vomiting, diarrhea, paranoia, and panic, are considered normal and only temporary, they can be extremely distressing. Some people report having miserable Ayahuasca experiences, and there is no guarantee that you will react favorably to the concoction.

What's more, ayahuasca can interact dangerously with many medications, including antidepressants, psychiatric medications, drugs used to control Parkinson's disease, cough medicines, weight loss medications, and more.²⁴ Those with a history of psychiatric disorders, such as schizophrenia, should avoid Ayahuasca, as taking it could worsen their psychiatric symptoms and result in mania.²⁵ Additionally, taking Ayahuasca can increase your heart rate and blood pressure, which may result in dangerous side effects if you have a heart condition.²⁶ There have been several reported deaths due to Ayahuasca consumption, but they may be due to the addition of other ingredients or dosing issues. Death has never been reported in a clinical trial on Ayahuasca.²⁷ Aside from these dangers, participating in an Ayahuasca ceremony means

²¹ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24830187/>

²² <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23627784/>

²³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5895707/>

²⁴ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6007657/>

²⁵ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5848100/>

²⁶ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12660312/>

²⁷ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6007657/>

putting your life in the shaman's hands, as they're in charge of the ingredients added to the brew, as well as determining proper dosing and monitoring you for potentially life-threatening side effects. There have been reports of Ayahuasca retreats being offered by untrained individuals, who are not well-versed in the preparation, dosing, or side effects of Ayahuasca, putting participants in danger.

Moreover, though there have been promising findings related to the health benefits of Ayahuasca, these benefits were mostly related to clinical studies in which the preparation and dosing of the concoction were carefully controlled.

Treatment for psychological disorders, such as depression and PTSD, should only be offered by medical professionals, and those living with these conditions should not seek symptom relief by participating in Ayahuasca ceremonies.

Overall, more research is needed to determine whether Ayahuasca can be used as a potential treatment for certain medical conditions by doctors in the future.

8.0 The Zen Commando Ayahuasca Retreat

The Zen Commando Ayahuasca Retreat consists of four phases: *Preparation, Ceremony, Integration, and Follow-Up*

I. Preparation

This is probably the most important phase because your overall experience will be dependent on how you mentally and physiologically prepare for the retreat. It's crucial you adhere to the preparation guidelines to ensure you receive as much as possible from the ceremony.

1. Mental Preparation Considerations

"Getting your mind right" is the first step of your retreat. "Mental Prep" begins now! Begin by thinking of your purpose and intention for wanting to sit with Ayahuasca. What is it you want to accomplish by sitting with Ayahuasca? Remember to approach this from a sacred stance and not from a position of just wanting to take a "magic carpet ride in the jungle." It's imperative you approach this with the proper intention to receive the true benefits of

Ayahuasca. While preparing for the retreat, take the time to journal and write down those things you want to accomplish and uncover within yourself.

2. Dietary Considerations Before Ceremony

Following the dietary requirements in preparation for your retreat helps to lay the groundwork for the medicine experience, demonstrates respect for the process and commitment to your healing, and prepares your body to receive the medicine. It can also reduce the amount of cleansing needed to be done in the ceremony, in order to allow the healing work to unfold more easily. Simply stated, eat basic, bland foods without red meat (including pork) and dairy for at least two weeks or more prior to the ceremony and immediately afterward. Eat no less than four hours before the start of the ceremony, and even then it is best to eat soft foods and vegetable broths to be gentle on the stomach.

3. Medical Considerations Before Ceremony

It is recommended to stop most medications four weeks before your retreat. Please discuss with your doctor any and all medications you are taking and their interactions with MAO inhibitors, particularly if you are taking any medications that would pose a health risk to discontinue. It's not always necessary to discontinue medications, but it's very important to discuss this with your primary doctor as well as our team when filling out your medical intake questionnaire prior to booking your flights. Some medications are contraindicated with ayahuasca medicine. Unlike food interactions, whose consequences are usually unlikely to be serious, interaction with pharmaceutical drugs and medications (including some over-the-counter drugs and certain herbs) can be potentially life-threatening.

II. Ceremony

During the Execution Phase, you will "sit" with Ayahuasca two times. The first time will be Monday evening and the second time will be Tuesday evening. Prior to the ceremonies, you will spend time relaxing and preparing for your sitting.

The ceremony will be led by our appointed shaman who will ensure the environment is safe and secure. Facilitators will be co-located to assist and to ensure your needs are met in a safe.

After the first ceremony, adequate time will be provided to rest and prepare for the next sitting on Tuesday evening. You will also be offered the option to participate in a Kambo Ceremony on Tuesday and Wednesday morning.

III. Integration

The Integration Phase is the most important phase of the retreat. During the integration phase, you will be reflecting on your experience through meditation, breathwork, nature immersion (river walks, jungle hikes, waterfall visits, swimming), journaling, and sharing your experiences with others. The integration phase lasts three days... Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. On the last day, time will be provided to visit Dominical, the nearest town to Camp Zen Commando. In Dominical, you can spend time shopping, sightseeing, or just relaxing at the beach in a hammock.

IV. Follow-Up

Upon your departure from Camp Zen Commando, we will follow up with you after 30 days and again at six months. We are accessible at any time for any questions or concerns you may have.

Itinerary

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Arrive	Ceremony 1	Ceremony 2	Integration	Integration	Integration	Depart

9.0 Safety Protocols

Safety for our guests is our number one priority at Camp Zen Commando. Protocols for handling emergencies and any contingency that may arise are in place and have been rehearsed by staff members.

- An initial orientation brief will be provided to all guests
- A safety brief will be provided prior to each event
- First aid kits are located throughout the facility
- Positive communications with outside agencies are maintained
- Local medical clinics, pharmacies, and hospitals are all within 30 to 45 minutes in case of a medical issue or another emergency
- Dedicated 4x4 safety vehicle is on-site
- Travel insurance is highly recommended
- Completion of a medical screening questionnaire is required prior to arriving and participating

10. Pre-Ceremony Checklist

Dietary and Medical Guidelines Prior to Ceremony

At least 6 weeks before

- Stop any medication that has an effect on the serotonin system, including Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs) and MAOI drugs, which should be cleared from your body through a slow weaning process with your doctor.

At least 4 weeks before

- Eliminate pharmaceutical drugs (prescription & over-the-counter). This includes allergy pills, hormonal supplements, NSAIDs, and more. Again, always consult with a medical professional.

At least 2 weeks before, eliminate:

- Sex of any sort, including self-pleasure or erotic fantasizing
- Alcohol
- Cannabis
- Violent or disturbing media
- Recreational drugs of any kind, especially synthetic DMT or other psychoactive substances
- Salt and salty foods
- Spicy food
- Processed foods
- Pork, red meat, cured meats
- Cheese

At least 1 week before, eliminate:

- Sugar, natural or artificial sweeteners
- Fermented foods
- Fried foods
- Yeast or yeast products
- Vinegar or pickled foods
- Caffeine (coffee, caffeinated tea, synthetic energy drinks)
- Dairy products, especially yogurt
- Animal fats, including butter
- Nutritional supplements like protein powders that may contain tyramines
- Sweets and chocolate
- Synthetic soaps, perfumes, toiletries, etc.

Do eat:

- Unsalted vegetables and vegetable broths
- Well-cooked whole grains
- Organic chicken or turkey
- Low-sugar fruits
- Coconut or olive oil, sparingly
- Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated