

## EATING TURTLE EGGS & DRINKING BEER

Last year at about this same time of the year my Peruvian wife, my Peruvian mother or Mamita, and I left our house and rode the motor-carts down to the embarcadero along the banks of the Nanay River just upstream from where it dumps into the Amazon River. The area is known to the locals as just Nanay, and is a location in the evening hours that very few outsiders are seen. After the sun goes down and the tropical air cools somewhat is when the locals come out to eat, drink and socialize. We made our way to one of our favorite little open air restaurant just off the banks of the river. The three of us sat down at a rickety table and were immediately served by a heavy set older woman who knew my Mamita. The woman slid three plates out in front of us and sat a small dish of coarsely ground salt in the center of the table. The natural salt came from salt mines high in the Andes Mountains where it has been dug for century going back even further than the great Inca Civilization.

Pile of freshly boiled turtle eggs right out of the river were heaped on our plate. Charcoaled plantains were piled on another plate in the center of the table along with a few hot peppers, and some purple onions per my request. One thing about eating boiled turtle eggs or turtle eggs fixed in any manner you need to have somewhat of a strong stomach. Turtle eggs are somewhat pungent to the palate in my opinion, and, many just flat out dislike the strong taste of these eggs. There are just a little smaller than ping-pong ball with a pliable leathery shell when boiled. Once you get the soft-leathery shell torn open you can peel the hard-boiled egg out with your thumbs, finger, or just squish them or pop them directly into your mouth. I have eaten some disgusting items that have been disguised as food. I once sat on a riverbank with a half dozen Jivaro Indians in the Ecuadorian rainforest and ate monkey meat fresh off the fire. If you still have an appetite after watching you monkey being thrown on a fire, and worst off smell him roast until the entrails burst - - - Well few things will effect you. I have eaten rat meat, dogs, cats, pigs, mountain oysters from bulls, hogs, and buffalos, Moose tongue, maggots, whale, Suri worms, grasshoppers, horse meat, armadillos, chickens, cows, calves, snakes, insects, turtles, half-rotten eggs with steamed with whole chicken embryos inside, seals, walrus, MREs, fishes of all kind, deep fried crickets, giant snails, little bitty snails, mussels & clams from lakes, streams, and the ocean. I have endured an assortment of other disgusting gastronomical items unless you were a vulture, not all of which were served up by good meaning peoples in utensils so dirty that most would not pass for a urinal in a civilized society. Most is given to you with the best of intentions and we smiled while eating it, and depending on how long it had been since you last ate, its good. Some of these delicacy could be considered just out and out repulsive. I found out a long time ago however sometimes it all depends on just how hunger your are. Boiled turtle eggs though go best with plenty of cold beer, and a liberal dash of hot sauce. The total cost for the three of us to eat was about two dollars and fifty cents in U.S.Ds.

Those were good times, and I was there with family. Just thinking about it leaves me with some great memories. Those few hours that night will never leave me, and like I have said more than once, *"you will forget many places and times in your life, but this will not be one of them."* This is not a area that the tourist bus drops off the herd, but it is where the locals who know about these wonderful out of the way places gather to eat, and enjoy life, family, friends, and just have fun.

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