

VISIT TO SIEKOPAI COMMUNITY AT PUERTO ESTRELLA

Diego: *Ba'iquë yicajei!*

"Ba'iquë" means "hi", "yicajei" means "my friend" (for male). For women it is "cajeo". They speak Paicoca language, which is one of our jungle languages. This community has changed a lot, now they have electricity from solar panels, TV, and a water system (they collect water from the rain using filters). Here we are in the Peruvian territory of the Amazon, and the first thing we are going to do is go to see where they have the cassava plantation.

Diego talks to Paikoka man: "*Naso*"

Siekopai man: We don't have anymore

Diego: "*Naso*"? "*A'so*"?

Siekopai man: Ahh, *A'so*

Diego: "*A'so*" is the name of cassava, "*Naso*" is the name of the wooly monkey. When I asked him about the cassava, I pronounced it in the wrong way and instead I asked about the monkey, and they don't have that monkey here, it died many years ago, that's why he said that they don't have anymore.

When you change the accent a little bit, it means something different. For example: machete is "*hua'ti*" and devil is "*cuati*" (couldn't find the correct word for devil, so I am writing how it was pronounced).

Now we start walking to the cassava plantation to observe how the cassava is extracted, Celia and Mariela, members of the Siekopai community, went with us to show us the process.

Diego: For this activity, it is better if we work together. After extracting the yucca root, we have to peel it (the word in Paicoca for the verb "to peel" is "huahuija"). Before proceeding with peeling the yucca, we are going to see how the yucca is planted (Diego showed us what the Siekopai people call the "eye" of the yucca plant, which is from where the new yucca starts to grow). As you can see, they take the root of the yuca and then they plant the rest of the plant in the hole again. In about 6 months, the yucca is ready to be extracted again. Yucca can also grow if you plant the seed directly into the soil, but it is better to replant the stem, and from one stem you can get 10- 20 extra yuccas.

After peeling the cassava we proceed to leave it in a basket called "*do'rohuë*", which is made of a plant called "*tanchi*". The next step is to wash the root. Now we start to prepare the cassava bread, typically known as "*A'o*". To make the yucca flour for the bread, we begin by grating the cassava. When done, the flour is squeezed with a special device called a "*sënyoro*" to remove all of the moisture. Following drying, the residual cassava bits in the flour are separated using a device known as a "*ji' jepë*", and then they are pressed into a circular form in hot ceramic pots. We also got the chance to prepare "*Piu' ri*", another yucca- based typical bread, but in this one, rotten plantain (plátano maduro) is added while cooking. Following the preparation of the bread, the family gave us "neapia" (a typical spicy-hot sauce) and chocolate to go with it. Additionally, they shared two traditional beverages with us: "*A' so cono*" (Chicha de yuca) and "*Huea cono*" (Chicha de maiz).

Other random facts learnt during our visit to the community:

- The decoration in the face of the Siekopai people is made of "Achiote", the color is specifically extracted from the seed of the plant, which is also used for making oil. They use the patterns of the painting as protection against bad spirits, this is also the way they connect with special energies from the forest.
- Beautiful in Paicoca language is "*deoki*" for male and "*deoko*" for female.
- The Siekopai people's traditional houses were built directly in the ground, but now they have adopted the Kichwa architectural style. When they first began to establish settlements, they had to adapt the ways of other cultures to build their houses, so they began to build them to the high so the water wouldn't flood the house when it rained or when the water of the river rose. Initially, they lived in a nomad style, so they didn't need a house that lasted a long time.
- Kichwa and Cofan people tend to build high level houses. Siekopai, Sionas, and Shuar used to build low level houses.
- When a Siekopai family makes the *A'so* bread, it is usually a "family event", so they spend almost all day working together to make the bread.
- The chicha beverage is usually drink as an energetic drink, the local people like it to be very strong (+ fermentation)
- Sometimes they add sweet potato to the chicha to make it sweet.
- "*Yocco*" is a vine used by local people to make another type of energetic drink.
- "*A'so cono*" is typical of the Kichwa people, "*Huea cono*" is typical from the Siekopai people.
- "*Chambira*" palm fiber is used to make bracelets and other crafts.
- "*Piu' ri*" is a bread created with the yucca starch adding rotten plantain (plátano maduro).
- The sap of the "Copal" tree is used to make fire for the kitchen.
- The common name for the Pygmy Marmoset is "little lion" and in local Paicoca language is "*Ñunkuasisi*"
- "*Chakra*" is the place where they have the cassava and other small plantations (like a garden (?))
- "*Saye*" means "goodbye"