

Jessica Bertram, 46 years old

Born and raised in Germany, I had my first trip to Peru in 1991 and moved there permanently in 1994 when I married an Andean highland farmer and had two children. I have lived in Cusco and Puerto Maldonado (Peruvian Amazon) for the last 20 years and currently speak Spanish, German, English, and Quechua fluently and am proficient in Shipibo, Harakmbut, and Matsigenka. Up to the time that I moved to Peru, my life in Germany was always marked by a longstanding interest in plants, animals, and indigenous languages/cultures. When I was 15, I was faced with the death of my mother and subsequent adoption into a foster family. My anthropological inclinations were discouraged, but while apprenticing to become a dental technician, I travelled to Peru twice to have an intimate and non-touristic immersion into Andean Quechua culture.

Subsequently, Peru became my home country. Initially, I started a dental laboratory, worked as a German teacher, and occasionally interpreted for German tour groups in the rainforests. In 1997, I became a freelance naturalist guide of Manu National Park for prestigious tour operators like Pantiacolla Tours, Manu Expeditions and Inka Natura. I also served as an honorary consultant for Manu's indigenous Harakmbut and Matsigenka people on eco-tourism, plant use, and social issues in native communities. My ever deepening friendships with community people allowed me to immerse myself deeply in their cultures and everyday lives. My personal focus has been on the Harakmbut people and their history. I collected scarce ethnographic materials over a ten-year period, and later made it available to the remaining families of the individuals described in the first anthropological and other publications and depicted in the photos, in an attempt to re-awaken people's interest in their own history.

In 2001, the healing of a life-threatening health condition by traditional Amazonian medicine initiated my strictly traditional Shipibo apprenticeship for becoming an Ayahuasca healer. I dieted on "plant teachers" and learned healing techniques. For the first 7 years, I performed traditional healing ceremonies with only local indigenous members. My first experience being in ceremony with non-indigenous peoples was in 2008 at an Iquitos conference on Amazonian shamanism. In the same year I served as a cultural facilitator for an aboriginal youth group from Nunavut (Canada) and their teachers during their stay in Manu National Park and cultural interchange with local indigenous Harakmbut community people. For the whole of 2010 I worked for the Native Federation of the Madre de Dios region for the defence of the Amarakaeri Communal Reserve from foreign oil development. In the same year I served as a facilitator on the ground for the filming of David Suzuki's (CBC) documentary "The Real Avatar". Thereafter, I fully dedicated myself to healing work, specifically to what I refer to as "culturally adapted and transculturally applied transpersonal ethnopsychology".

My unpublished works include: an ethnobotanical dictionary for the Manu area, Spanish translation of an English novel containing unique historical information on the Harakmbut people, and a growing collection of Harakmbut songs, stories, and other unpublished ethnographic material. My personal commitment, passionate research and subsequent studies in anthropology, ethnobotany, Amazonian shamanism, ethnopsychology, transpersonal psychology and quantum physics have made me an expert practitioner using indigenous Amazonian tools for integral healing and personal transformation, for both indigenous people and Westerners alike.

Currently, besides being a busy single mother, I support the Harakmbut, Yine, Matsigenka Council (COHARYIMA) and the administrative body of the Amarakaeri Communal Reserve ECA-RCA, and, as an active advisory board member, the Escuela Superior de Medicina Tradicional Shipibo in Pucallpa (where I was officially certified), which is the first school of its kind in traditional Shipibo medicine.

Between 2010 and 2016, I have been travelling to Canada where my unique transcultural application of Amazonian plant medicine in ceremony had been increasingly requested and appreciated by Westerners and First Nations People alike. It is part of my dream to make my skills increasingly available to Northern First Nations People to show that it is indeed possible to retrieve apparently “lost” ancestral knowledge, which can then help them confront the impacts of historical trauma and deal with them more efficiently in a culturally appropriate way. Additionally I would like to serve as a bridge to bring their collective historical experience to the Amazon with the goal of broadening Amazonian Native People’s understanding of the historic impacts of colonization and to increase indigenous self-awareness.

Since 2015 I work as a retreat and ceremony leader, practitioner of traditional medicine, cultural facilitator and rainforest guide for Parign Hak (Grandma’s Home in the Harakmbut language), a native founded and owned family home and small retreat center on the lands of the native community of Shintuya, on the Upper Madre de Dios river, located in the buffer zone of the Manu Biosphere Reserve and the Amarakaeri Communal Reserve in Southeastern Amazonian Peru.