

The Amazon



Every traveler has fantasized about a trip to the Amazon. Just the name alone evokes images of dense rain forest, indigenous tribes, and abundant wildlife.

The numbers are certainly mind-boggling: the Amazon Basin is twice the size of India, and spans eight countries. At its height, the river can measure 40km across and dump 300 million liters of freshwater into the ocean per second. That's more than the next eight largest rivers combined. Yet many travelers leave the Amazon underwhelmed, having come expecting a Discovery Channel-like encounter with jaguars, anacondas, and spear-toting tribes. That simply doesn't happen – surprise, surprise – much less on the schedule or budget of most travelers.

The Amazon's quintessential experiences are more sublime than they are superlative: canoeing through a flooded forest, dozing in a hammock on a boat chugging upriver, waking up in the jungle to the call of a thousand birds or the otherworldly cry of howler monkeys.

It's only in the halogen glare of unreasonable expectations (or too short a visit) that a trip to the Amazon will feel disappointing. The river itself is massive and unrelenting, as much a living thing as the plants and animals that depend on it. Wildlife is hard to see, but that much more special when you do; the rain forest is everywhere and awesome. Indigenous tribes are extremely reclusive, but the Caboclo (mixed indigenous and European) communities that populate the riverbanks are vital and compelling.

On a river whose size is legendary, it's actually the little things that make it special. Give it some time, forget your expectations, and the Amazon cannot fail to impress.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Glide through the flooded forest at **Mamirauá Reserve** (p662), in search of the shaggy-coated uakari monkey
- Soak up night sounds and river life on **jungle tours** (p655) outside Manaus
- Rough it with rubber-tappers in **Floresta Nacional do Tapajós** (p627) outside Santarém
- Become a beach bum at **Alter do Chão** (p629), the Caribbean of the Amazon
- Ply the windy Atlantic beaches at **Ilha de Marajó** (p620) – but steer clear of the buffalos!



■ POPULATION: 15.25 MILLION

■ AREA: 3.85 MILLION SQ KM

