



Amazon Basin

Includes →

Villa Tunari.....	280
Parque Nacional Carrasco	282
Rurrenabaque.....	284
Parque Nacional Madidi	290
Reserva Biosférica del Beni	292
San Ignacio de Moxos	293
Trinidad	295
Los Lagos.....	303
Guayaramerín.....	304
Riberalta	306
Cobija.....	307

Best Places to Eat

- Churrasquería La Estancia (p299)
- Los Faroles (p299)
- Tropical (p306)
- La Perla de Rurre (p288)

Best Places to Stay

- Sadiri (p291)
- Chalalán Ecodge (p290)
- Los Lagos Lodge (p304)
- Hotel de Selva El Puente (p281)

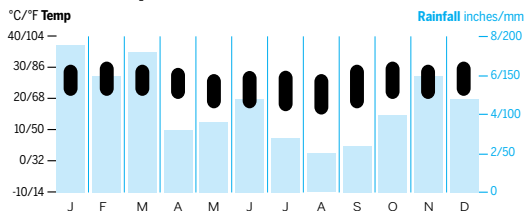
Why Go?

The Amazon Basin is one of Bolivia's largest and most mesmerizing regions. The rainforest is raucous with wildlife and spending a few days roaming the sweaty jungle is an experience you're unlikely to forget. But it's not only the forests that are enchanting: it's also the richness of the indigenous cultures, traditions and languages that exist throughout the region.

Mossy hills peak around the town of Rurrenabaque, most people's first point of entry into the region and the main base camp for visits to the fascinating Parque Nacional Madidi. This is home to a growing ethno-ecotourism industry established to help local communities. The village of San Ignacio de Moxos is famous for its wild July fiesta and Trinidad, the region's biggest settlement and an active cattle-ranching center, is the transit point toward Santa Cruz. North of here the frontier towns of Riberalta and Cobija are in remote regions where few travelers dare to tread.

When to Go

Rurrenabaque



May–Oct Make travel a whole lot easier by avoiding the rain.

Mid-Jun Bull-running and mayhem at the Fiesta de la Santísima Trinidad.

Jul The village goes wild during the San Ignacio de Moxos fiesta.

History

The Bolivian Amazon has always oozed mystery. The Incas believed that a powerful civilization lived in the great rainforest, and tried to conquer the area in the 15th century. Legend has it that the indigenous peoples of the western Bolivian Amazon, mainly the Moxos tribe, offered such a mighty resistance to the invading army that, once they realized they were unable to beat them, the Incas sought an alliance and settled among the Moxos.

The tale of the Incas' experience fired the imagination of the Spanish conquerors a century later – they were chasing their own legend: the kingdom of El Dorado (the Golden One) which they thought lay somewhere east of the Andean Cordillera, near the source of the Río Paraguay. The Spanish spent the entire 16th century trying to find the elusive kingdom, but found nothing but death and disease. By the 17th century they moved their search elsewhere.

Though the Spanish were disappointed with their search in the Moxos region, the Jesuits saw their opportunity to 'spread the word' to the highly spiritual *moxeños*. The hardy missionaries were the first Europeans to significantly venture into the lowlands. They founded their first mission at Loreto in 1675. While they imposed Christianity and European ways, the Jesuits also recognized the indigenous peoples' expertise in woodwork, which eventually produced the brilliant carvings now characteristic of the missions. The region is now under increasing pressure from the expansion of the agricultural frontier, as vast tracts of forest are converted into ranch land.

Following the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767, the Franciscan and Dominican missionaries, as well as the opportunistic settlers who followed, brought mainly slavery and disease. Otherwise, the vast, steamy forests and plains of northern Bolivia saw little activity for decades.

More recently, finding a way to sustainably exploit the natural resources of the region has become an increasingly hot potato. A proposed 300km road that would link Villa Tunari with San Ignacio de Moxos was canceled following demonstrations by indigenous groups and environmentalists who complained that the route would bisect the Tipnis Reserve (Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécuré).

Representatives of the 50-plus indigenous communities marched to La Paz in opposition and were met with some violence (four deaths) in 2011. This inspired a counter-march in 2012 by indigenous groups from the Moxos and Tunari areas who insisted that the road was vital for the economic development of their isolated homeland.

In 2014, the project was put on hold as the government promised to address regional poverty, but Supreme Decree 2366 in May 2015 opened the national parks to oil and gas exploration, and the road was on again. Its future remains unwritten.

National Parks & Reserves

The Bolivian Amazon is part of the most biodiverse biome on earth, and the country's best-known national parks and reserves are located here: a paradise for bird-watchers, monkey lovers and jaguar seekers. You can choose between the jungles and wild rivers of lush Parque Nacional Madidi; the less-frequented *cerrado* savannas of Reserva Biosférica del Beni; the Barba Azul Reserve, home to one of the world's rarest parrots; and the virtually unexplored 'lost world' of Parque Nacional Noel Kempff Mercado. Conservation International (www.conservation.org) is attempting to raise awareness of the need for protection of the headwaters of several major Amazon tributaries with its ambitious Vilcabamba-Amboró Conservation Corridor initiative, which aims to link Madidi with Manu National Park in Peru.

i Getting There & Around

Rurrenabaque in the west and Trinidad in the east are the main access towns to the region. Though it's easy enough to get to Trinidad from Santa Cruz, delving deeper into the region either involves flying (if you are smart) or uncomfortably long bus rides on unpaved roads (get ready to push if it rains!). If there is even a hint of a shower you'll need a 4WD to get where you are going, or bank on your bus taking at least twice as long as the ticket salesman tells you. Particularly tedious is the route from La Paz to Rurrenabaque. Many people decide to wing it (or take a faster 4WD) after surviving the initial bus ride.

The main airlines all fly to the region, with BOA and EcoJet specializing in the more remote destinations. Though handy, flights are frequently canceled during inclement weather (or because of 'maintenance'). When flying from La Paz to Rurrenabaque, watch the landscape change from desolate, rugged highlands to lush, forested lowlands.