

Experience an adventurous mysterious world not yet reached by tourism: from the steaming Amazon basin of the Manu-, Tambopata & Amarakeiri National Parks in Peru through the remote jungle of Bolivia and on a jaguar safari with the Kamauua's Indians down to the Amazon Metropolis of Manaus in Brazil... Quem já tomou a aqua da Amazônia volta sempre! (Who has tried the water of Amazonia once, will always come back.)



AMAZONIA - REISEINFOS A-Z

Arrival

Please check the current entry and visa requirements with your embassy.

Climate

Summer & winter are things unknown in the Amazon basin – there are only rainy and dry seasons. The rainy season's advantage is that there everything grows more abundantly and is still intensively greener. Its disadvantage are the daily 1-2-hour rainfalls in the afternoons. But also a (warm) rain shower can be excitingly refreshing! There are also frequent night rain showers, which usually last between 3 and 6 hours. One last word concerning the "best time" for travels: It is impossible to forecast the weather in Amazonia. It may well be that a heavy rain shower occurs during the dry season (May through November) or wonderful sunshine brightens up the afternoons in the rainy season (December through April). Up-to-date weather reports are available on the internet at http://www.klimadiagramme.de/index_5.html

Communications

Mail: While in Peru and Bolivia it is simply a matter of luck whether mails reach their destinations, postal services in Brazil and Ecuador are surprisingly efficient. Letters by airmail generally arrive within 1 - 2 weeks. Unfortunately, in Peru it may happen in Peru (but also in Brazil) that stamps are nowhere to be found – they are sold out quite often!

Telephone: Phone calls abroad are expensive from Ecuador, Peru & Brazil. You should consider approx. \$ 2 per minute for a call to Europe or North America. However, from larger cities one can frequently call overseas considerably cheaper over the internet. Frequently it is rather a rather venturesome undertaking to get along with local telephone cards.

Internet: Internet cafés can be found all over Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru and Brazil, but only in larger cities. Frequently, connections are very slow and cost 1 - 2 USD / hour.

Currency

Ecuador's legal tender is the U.S. Dollar, in Peru it is the "Nuevo Sol", in Bolivia the "Boliviano" and in Brazil the "Real". It is best to carry some Dollars in cash and low denominations (not exceeding 20 USD!) and a credit card (Visa or Mastercard), in order to withdraw cash at ATMs in larger cities. Traveler checks are not advisable, since they are rarely accepted for exchange by the banks. Your expedition guide knows where to locally exchange money from your currency into the respective country's (exchange offices or banks).

Customs

Animal and plant protection rules: Brazil has strict laws and penalties in place to protect its flora and fauna. Offences are enforced consequently by the Brazilian authorities and punished even with prison. Especially strictly punished are attempts to take freely living plants and animals out of Brazil. This is true for almost all kinds of ornamental fish from the Amazon basin, for plant cuttings or seeds, as well as insects and spiders (tarantulas!). Even the transport of protected plant or animal species from one Brazilian federal state to another is punishable, unless you have an official permit expressly authorizing it. Given the ample and consequently unclear catalog of the plants and animals protected in Brazil, travelers are advised not to buy, collect or export any animals or plants in Brazil. Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia have similarly strict export regulations. Independently from these rules you should be aware that probably also your home country forbids the import of those animals and plants protected by the Washington Convention (CITES) or requires the presentation of the corresponding import permits. For further information, please refer to your respective local authorities.

Electric Power

Voltage is either 110 V or 220 V. Travelers should be aware that partially there will be no availability of electric power in order to connect any devices. Also be aware to bring along adapters and transformers. The internet provides a table of voltages and plug types according to countries under <http://www.kropla.com/electric2.htm> (Plug and Voltage Guide).

Flora & Fauna

Roughly spoken, three types of vegetations may be found in the Amazon basin: the jungle properly such, with tree altitudes of 30-60 m; it is so dense and impenetrable that even animals only can live in the canopy. The varzeas areas, which remain flooded during months; they have less abundant vegetation, among them is the famous hevea brasiliensis (gum tree). And finally areas permanently flooded with trees of a maximum height of 20 m and dense underwood.

This latter is the endemic habitat of some 1,500 fish species, among them the notorious Piranhas; some 2,000 bird, 250 mammal and 2,500 different plant species. Its very diverse fauna hosts many curious animals such as the giant anteater, the tapir - a rather unattractive compromise between a horse and a rhino -, the manatee, snakes of the most diverse kinds (boas, anacondas, etc.) and crocodiles (called Jacarés). And another original inhabitant of the rivers shall be named, one emitting discharges toward the river bank vegetation for hunting and self-defense: "electric fish" (e. g. eels). Among the jungle giants one finds macaws, toucans, monkeys and sloths, and butterflies in the brightest of colors. Also, let's not forget the countless insects making us shiver: fearsome tarantulas, red giant ants...

Note: Snakes and spiders are very shy animals, they are very early aware of human beings and disappear. Besides, toxic animals are very rare in the wild and mostly not aggressive. Just as our city traffic requires us to respect some basic rules, little tricks help reduce the accident risks in the jungle to an absolute minimum.

Food & Drinking

Food: Peruvians usually have light breakfasts and not too abundant lunches. They have their main meal in the evenings (typically soup, meat, fish or sea food and a dessert). One of the country's sweet specialties is chorisos (a kind of donut filled with sweet cream and sprinkled with sugar).

Especially in the Amazon region, Schava (tapir meat) is grilled in the open fire or barbecued on charcoal grills. Picadillos de Paiche is a typical Amazonian dish made of fish, tomatoes, onions and roasted potatoes, as well as rice.

Among the typical dishes of Bolivia are Empanada Salteña, Picante de Pollo, Chuño and Lechón al Horno. Also Brazilians use to have a light breakfast, typically consisting of coffee, hot milk, fruits, pastry or bread and sometimes some sausage and cheese. The most important ingredients of their main dishes are rice, black beans and farofel (flour from a manioc root), accompanied with meat, chicken or fish.

Local Ecuadorian specialties are ceviche (seafood with lemon juice and onions), lechón (pigling), llapingachos (potato cakes with cheese) and locro (soup made of potatoes and corn with avocado and cheese). Cuy is an old Incan specialty which however is not to the delight everybody: it's roasted guinea pig.

Drinking: Beer is the favorite drink of Ecuadorians and Peruvians. In Peru, another appreciated drink is Pisco Sour (grape liquor similar to grappa mixed with egg-white, lemon juice, sugar and ice). A beverage especially recommendable for those suffering from altitude disease is coca tea, made of the leaves of the coca bush. Not only will it quench your thirst, it also has a calming effect.

Bolivia's national beverage is Chicha, quite strong liquor made of fermented wheat and corn. But also the domestic beer brand Cruzena is appreciated.

Caipirinha is Brazil's national drink. Apart from that, Bier and Aguardiente are frequent alcoholic beverages. Especially tasty are the fresh fruit juices offered anywhere and in many tastes.

Geography

The Amazon basin covers a surface equaling one third of all Europe (however, 60 % of the entire surface of Brazil is inhabited by no more than 4 % of its total population). A giant jungle area still (unfortunately we have to say "still") covers 70 % of Amazonia and by itself alone renews half of our planet's oxygen.

With its 6,300 km of length, the Amazon is the longest river on earth. It hosts 20 % of the planet's fresh water - fed by thousands of affluent streams and rivers. During floods, at some sites it may be up to 20 km wide. It has been said that its name resulted from the fantasy of Portuguese adventurers who in 1539 during an expedition to explore the river had met Indian tribes at the command of "frightening women" (Amazons). A priest, a member of the expedition, relates the event in these words: "We saw them, they fought before the eyes of the Indians as if they were their commanders and were so brave that the Indians did not dare even to turn their back on them. They would kill those who fled from us with crushing blows... The women were astonishingly white and quite tall; they are muscular and completely naked; holding bow and arrows in their hand, they fight like ten Indians in one."

We suspect that the bearded conquerors dealt with completely beardless Indians. There is both fascination and shock in the report - caused by the endless rainforest, the stream and its inhabitants - and these first travelers rapidly established a connection with their vague memories of the Amazons, the female warriors of Greek mythology. In any case, the report reveals the special, fantastic and miraculous reality of this part of the world. The Amazon is hence the "River of the Amazons"...

Language

The official language of Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia is Spanish. But also Quechua and other Indian language are widespread. Partly also English is spoken (e. g. in tourist areas). Brazil's official language is Portuguese, English and Spanish are spoken only occasionally and there are some 180 Indian languages there as well.

Photografing & Filming

Generally, Peruvians and Brazilians are anything but camera-shy. Mostly Brazilians even enjoy being photographed; readily they pose for tourists. Distrust or inhibitions are rare things to find.

In Peru, sometimes also a "tip" is expected in return for a photograph, especially in the heavily visited region of Cuzco.

Note: In all countries photographing people is something that requires sensitiveness: Those recklessly invading with their cameras the private sphere of others, maybe even picturing the misery of others without any inhibitions, disrespect the dignity and feelings of these human beings. As a basic principle, always make sure you get the permission of the people you photograph, before you shoot. Where photographs are denied for religious or other reasons, it is paramount to respect that desire. It is not advisable to photograph military facilities. Likewise, police officers do not like being photographed while carrying out official actions. Apart from that always take good care of your photo equipment. Those proudly exhibiting their cameras in front of their bellies in the streets actually provoke thefts. It is much more advisable to discretely carry your camera in an inconspicuous bag, e. g. a plastic bag and not a camera case.

Population

The actual "owners" of Amazonia – the Indians – are nowadays "protected" by the Governments. The majority of the Amazon people are the result of quite a mixture of races that has taken place for centuries between the settlers from very different parts and the Indians. As a consequence, some characteristic features emerged: The people in Amazonia are marked by an Indian mentality, they are quiet, friendly but reserved and relaxed. We recommend the participants of our expeditions a sensitively reserved attitude, especially where photographing is concerned. Those who show respect toward the Amazonians and let them time for mutual acquaintance will certainly find good friends among these very pleasant people.

Time zones

Time difference to GMT in Ecuador and Peru is -5 hours, in Bolivia, it is -4 hours, and there is no daylight saving time. The areas in Brazil visited by us are 4 hours behind GMT.

Tips

Bolivia: Customary are 5-10% in hotels and restaurants, although already 25% are included for service in bills. Also porters expect tips.

Brazil: 10-15% are adequate. Sometimes service fees are already included in bills.

Ecuador: Tips are expected by tour guides, doormen, porters and other personnel in tourism, however not by taxi drivers. Quality restaurants add tax (12%) and a service fee (10%) to their bills; cheaper restaurants usually do not. If you want to tip service personnel, you should do so directly and not simply leave money on the table.

Peru: Usually bills include a service surcharge of 15% for service personnel. Additional tips of 5% are expected. Taxi drivers do not expect tips.

Throughout South America tips are basic and expected provided the client was satisfied with the service received. In any case, we suggest you decide individually how much you wish to give.

Vaccines

For a trip to Amazonia, we recommend vaccination against Tetanus, Diphtheria, Polio, Typhoid and Hepatitis A and B. In cases of particular exposition (inland stays, hunting, jogging, et al.) vaccination against rabies may make sense. Yellow fever vaccination is bindingly required when entering Brazil from Bolivia, Peru and / or Ecuador.

Malaria is a typical disease of the Amazon basin. Therefore Malaria prophylaxis is strongly advised for travels to the region. For Malaria prophylaxis, several prescription medicines are commercially available (e. g. Malarone, Doxycycline, Lariam).