

Amazon adventures

No Peru itinerary would be complete without a visit to the Amazon, says Andy Hoskins, who explores the options on both land and water

The Amazon rainforest covers more than half of Peru, rising on the eastern slopes of the Andes and stretching right across South America to Brazil's Atlantic coast.

It is the streams and rivers of the Peruvian Andes that converge in this mighty river system, a region blessed with rich animal, bird and plantlife. The Amazon's superlatives are too many to mention, but are exactly what draws visitors to set foot in this steamy jungle for themselves.

For many first-time visitors, Peru's appeal lies in its fascinating Inca history and iconic citadel of Machu Picchu, but it's not unusual to add a few days in the Amazon to complete a diverse and well-rounded itinerary.

"The area around Puerto Maldonado is easily accessible by flight from either Lima or Cuzco," says Amanda Sweeney, Latin America Product Manager at Rainbow Tours.

"This makes it easy for us to start in an Amazon lodge stay either at the start or end of a trip, depending on the route they are taking in the highlands."

Puerto Maldonado is also accessible by road, giving it an advantage over Iquitos, in northern Peru, which is the other principal base from which to explore the Amazon, but can only be accessed by air. In its favour, however, is that those with bigger budgets can join a river cruise with the likes of Aqua Expeditions and Detlin Amazon Cruises.

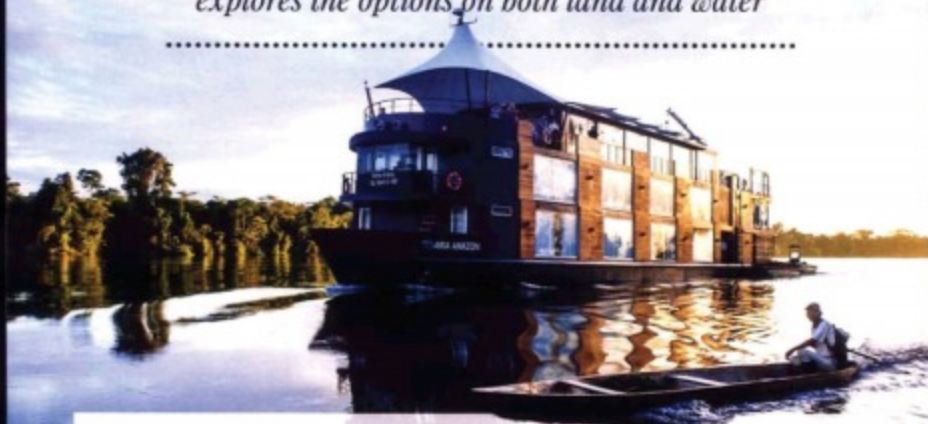
"Travelers cover a much larger area than when they stay in a lodge," says Detlin's Vanessa Pacheco. "Imagine seeing pink river dolphins swimming alongside the ship while you rest in your bed, or a flock of egrets flying by while you sip a Pisco Sour," she adds, before highlighting the gourmet dining and onboard comforts that passengers can expect.

But, warns Sweeney, "The price point for Amazon cruises is a lot higher than the lodges and travel to/from Iquitos usually involves a night before or after in Lima."

Both options typically include full board and daily excursions, which range from jungle walks and bird-watching to meeting local indigenous communities, kayaking and much more.

Visitors can also expect to see manatees, river dolphins, caiman, giant river turtles, monkeys, giant otters, anacondas and even jaguars, not to mention over 1,000 bird and butterfly species. UK operators typically sell Amazon add-ons year-round.

The wet season (December-May) is cooler and brings higher waters, therefore enabling access to more tributaries and lakes. Meanwhile, the dry season (June-November, though there is still rain) means lower water levels and the rainforest is more accessible on foot.



Tourism talk

"LATA is thrilled with the news that British Airways is introducing direct flights to Peru from the UK. This is evidence of the growth and popularity of the Latin America region as a tourism destination. Peru remains one of the top destinations for first-time travellers to Latin America."

Byron Shiro, Latin American Travel Association

The basics

- 1 Year-round:** You can visit the Amazon at any time of the year as each season has its own distinct advantages.
- 2 Two hubs:** There are two main destinations from which to explore the Peruvian Amazon: Iquitos in the north of the country and Puerto Maldonado in the south.
- 3 Access options:** Iquitos can be reached only by air or boat; Puerto Maldonado is accessible by air and also by road from Cuzco.
- 4 Land or water:** Visitors can explore from the comfort of rainforest lodges or high-end river cruise vessels.
- 5 Cruise control:** Cruise vessels operate in the northern Peruvian Amazon and come at a higher cost than lodge-based itineraries.
- 6 Rainforest outings:** Expect excursions such as walking trails, wildlife watching, kayaking, fishing and birdwatching.
- 7 Biodiversity:** The Manu Biosphere Reserve is the largest park in Peru and one of the most biodiverse regions in the world.
- 8 All-inclusive options:** Many lodges and most river cruises are sold fully inclusive of board and excursions.
- 9 Top guides:** Most lodges and vessels have excellent and knowledgeable guides to ensure guests get the most from their stay.
- 10 Taking flight:** Around 800 bird species inhabit the Peruvian Amazon, making it popular with serious 'twitchers'.



Left: Aqua Expeditions' Aria Amazon. Above: wildlife-watching with the crees foundation. Top: Manu Biosphere Reserve. Next page: paddle power; onboard the Aria Amazon



"Travellers cover a much larger area on a river cruise than when they stay in a lodge. Imagine seeing pink river dolphins swimming alongside the ship, or a flock of egrets flying by while you sip a Pisco Sour"

VANESSA PACHECO
OPERATIONS COORDINATOR
DELFIN AMAZON CRUISES

What's new

K Airlines: The big news this summer came from British Airways (ba.com), which announced it will introduce non-stop flights from London Gatwick to Lima next year. The three-times-weekly operation commences on May 4 2016 with fares starting from £767pp return including taxes and charges.

Lynne Embleton, British Airways' managing director at Gatwick says: "It is great to be the only airline to offer direct services between London and Peru. Lima is a fantastic gateway to some of the most dramatic places to visit in South America."

↓ Cruising: Aqua Expeditions (aquaexpeditions.com) has relaunched its two vessels following major refurbishments. Both the Aqua Amazon's 12-suites and the Aria Amazon's 16-suites have been updated with new furniture and amenities and a complete redesign of the ensuite bathrooms.

Communal areas, including the lounges, bars and dining rooms, have also been overhauled. The company is also adding new 10-seater skiffs for each vessel for more comfortable excursions

deeper into the rainforest. "As our travellers' needs and expectations evolve so must our products," says Francesco Galli Zugaro, CEO and Founder of Aqua Expeditions.

"Both boats have a new refreshed elegant look about them that is indicative of our vision to provide a unique world-class experience."

A Operators: Not-for-profit organisation crees (crees-manu.org) is offering a new Peruvian cooking experience in Manu Biosphere Reserve.

The five-day Flavours of Manu tour includes foraging for foods, cultivating and picking home-grown produce and cooking a range of local dishes. It will also give visitors the opportunity to see how the crees foundation's projects are helping the local people of Manu.

Accommodation includes three nights at the Manu Learning Centre – the hub of the operation – and one night at Cock of the Rock lodge. The tour will be available through a number of UK operators and costs from £750pp.

A Accommodation: Four Inkaterra (inkaterra.com) properties have been classified National Geographic Unique Lodges of the World, including Hacienda Concepcion in the Amazon ▶



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AMANDA SWEENEY
LATIN AMERICA PRODUCT MANAGER
RAINBOW TOURS

► *Where to book it*

📞 JOURNEY LATIN AMERICA - 020 8600 1881

A 14-day itinerary visiting Machu Picchu, the Sacred Valley, Cusco and the Amazon starts from £7,649pp. The price includes first-class accommodation, flights with British Airways, excursions, breakfast and luxury four-night Amazon cruise with full board.

journeylatinamerica.co.uk

📞 SELECT LATIN AMERICA - 020 7407 1478

The operator offers add-on Amazon cruises in the Pacaya Samiria Reserve with *Delfin I* and *Delfin II*. Rates start from £2,320 for a three-night programme or £2,899pp for four nights on the exclusive, four-suite *Delfin I*, and from £1,522 for three nights or £1,957pp for four nights onboard on *Delfin II*. All rates are for full board.

selectlatinamerica.co.uk

📞 RAINBOW TOURS - 0203 131 9304

The 11-day Gourmet Peru and Amazon in style tour starts from £4,935pp including flights. It visits Lima, the Sacred Valley, Machu Picchu and Cuzco, before heading north to Iquitos and three nights cruising in the Amazon.

rainbowtours.co.uk

📞 AUDLEY TRAVEL - 01993 838620

A 13-day Amazon, Incas and Lake Titicaca trip includes three days and nights at Hacienda Concepcion - a 35-minute boat ride from Puerto Maldonado - before moving on to Cusco, Machu Picchu and Lake Titicaca. It costs from £3,705pp including flights.

audleytravel.com

WHO FLIES THERE

ba.com; aireuropa.com; iberia.com; airfrance.com

