

## Sample Itinerary for 10-Day Amazon Cruise

Thank you for letting us take you on a wonderful tour of the Amazon. Below is a sample itinerary that details many of the activities you *may* experience on your trip. We cannot guarantee that you will do everything mentioned below or that you are limited to experience only what we've outlined. The Amazon is a living, breathing creature that is often unpredictable (e.g. water levels fluctuate, rain may cause delays, the boat may stop to observe rare animals, etc...), but SAFE. We just urge you to have a flexible and open mind, so when thoughts like “are we on schedule?” or “what are we doing today?” cross your mind, you will think to yourself: “I don’t know, but I do know today will be an adventure and that our guides are gonna make it fun, educational, and safe.” Nevertheless, the detailed itinerary below will give you a general sense of what to expect.

### Sample Daily Schedule

Before 6:00 AM	Leisure (e.g. catch the sunrise, relax on the observation deck, etc.)
6:00 AM	Wakeup call
6:15-7:15 AM	Breakfast
7:30-12:00 PM	Tour (e.g. explore rivers and lakes, visit local towns, fish for pirahna, etc.)
12:00-1:00 PM	Lunch (then nap if needed)
2:00-6:00 PM	Tour (e.g. trek through the jungle, relax on the beach, visit local people, etc.)
7:00-8:00 PM	Dinner
8:30-10:30 PM	Tour (e.g. night canoe trips to observe nightlife, multi-media presentations, fishing etc.)
After 11:00 PM	Leisure (e.g. observe the starry night, have a drink from the bar, etc.)

We pack a lot of activity into each day, and we encourage you to attend as much as possible. However, you may choose to do your own thing. Some activities you may choose to do on your own include: staying on the riverboat to do some fishing, relaxing on the observation deck, catching up on needed sleep, exploring local beach and jungle areas, venturing out and about local towns, reading a book etc. This is *your* vacation, and our goal is to show you what the Amazon is about by giving you the opportunity to engage in a wide range of activities. All group tour activities will be lead by our expert scientists and/or professional local guides.

## **Day 1: Arrive and Visit the “Encontra das Aquas”**

You will arrive Manaus International Airport, get picked up and transported to the riverside dock at the Manaus Triopical Hotel and board the boat. Once everyone is settled in their assigned cabins, we sail to the “Encontra das Aquas” (the Wedding of the Waters), where the Rio Negro (black water) meets the Rio Solimões (white water) to form the mighty Amazon River.

In the late afternoon, we will cruise through the *Furo Grande* channel back to the *Rio Solimoes*. *Furo Grande* is a very narrow channel, allowing only a few meters between the flooded forest and each side of our boat. Friendly families living in floating houses are scattered along the shorelines. The top observation deck is a great place to get a close glimpse of birds, exotic flowers, and a variety of wildlife and vegetation.

*What is the Wedding of the Waters?* This is where the two largest tributaries of the Amazon meet. Both rivers have different chemical compositions: the tea colored Rio Negro water is virtually mosquito free thanks to its acidity (pH 4.5-5.50). On the other hand, the sediment rich Rio Solimões breeds plenty of insects and has a neutral pH. Due to these different chemical properties, the two rivers flow side by side without merging and you can see the contrasting colors for miles.

We arrive at *Januari* (January) lake in the evening. After dinner, we will take the outboard powered canoes to explore the lake. You will see various floating sheds built by the region’s inhabitants, the *caboclos*); you will experience the excitement of seeing the red, shining eyes of the *caiman* ( Amazon crocodiles); and you will see startled fish leap into the canoes and flop around noisily. When we return to the mother boat, as with every evening on the Amazon, you will have the opportunity to enjoy an awe inspiring starlit sky.

## **Day 2: White Water Lakes**

Wake up call before sunrise, approx. 6:00AM. After a delicious breakfast consisting of exotic fruits, tapioca pancakes, and scrambled eggs and ham, we head out in the canoes to explore the flood plain lake (or *Várzea*) and look for the giant Queen Lillies (*Vitoria amazonica*); along the way, we observe beautiful birds, wild flowers and other shoreline plants and creatures. Enjoy the ride on the outboard canoe as you glide through the narrow channels and paddle under tree branches teeming with wildlife, and pass through masses of floating grass and plants.

We return to the mother boat for a lunch of regional cuisine and a nap. In the afternoon, we head out in the canoes to fish for piranhas and other exotic fishes. Due to the nutrient rich white water, the area is full of fish, and you should be able to catch some. We return by sunset for you to relax on the observation deck, perhaps with a glass of caipirinha (a combination of cachaça, a Brazilian liquor distilled from sugarcane, freshly squeezed lime juice, sugar, and crushed ice). Enjoy the views, sounds, and feelings of the forest lake at twilight; watch pairs of parrots bicker noisily as they fly across the river to their nests; witness the sunset and moonrise as you have never seen before. Then come down to the galley for dinner around 7:30-8:00 pm.

At night we head out in canoes again to scout for wildlife along the riverbanks.. Some animals retire at night but some swing to action. The experienced crew can spot and sense the motion of wildlife in pitch darkness, and then temporarily blind them with spotlights causing them to stay still for our observation. The guides will catch small *caimans* and giant iguanas for you to touch and feel, and take pictures. All caught creatures are returned to their natural habitats. If we are lucky, we might even see a three-toed sloth hanging on top of tree branches.

### **Day 3: Rio Negro**

In the morning we move to another nutrient-rich flood plain lake (or *Várzea*) and explore as we go. We may stop by a village along the river bank and donate school supplies. In the afternoon, we will cruise through the *Furo Grande* channel again back to the *Rio Negro*. It is always great to return to the Rio Negro where the water is clear and mosquitoes are rare. At this point, you may enjoy a jump overboard into the black water for a relaxing swim. We spend the night not far from Manaus. You may want to catch up with your diary, watch a documentary film about the Amazon from the boat's library, and/or listen to a presentation about the Amazon by the scientist guides.

### **Day 4: Manaus City tour**

After breakfast, we dock by the Manaus municipal market for a half-day city tour. The marketplace is the most vibrating bazaar of Manaus. Stacks of meats, gigantic fishes, dry goods, fresh vegetables, fruits, hardware, rare medicinal plants, and souvenirs are in full view all over the market. You will be surrounded by noisy vendors hustling for customers, sweating caboclos carrying bags of their monthly supply of foods and fishing gear, and women dragging their children along happily shopping for clothes and domestic goods. It is a bustling scene with loud music, steaming heat and an energetic crowd.

The municipal market has a colonial European architecture, for it was designed by Eiffel and built with cast iron bars molded in England. We will also visit the famous Amazon opera house, which was built with materials shipped from Italy. The classic beauty of these buildings and others in downtown Manaus reflect the bigone rubber boom era of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

We will have lunch at a downtown *Churrascaria*, where they serve the famous Brazilian BBQ. The fare consists of a variety of beef, pork, chicken, garlic bread, and even pineapple that is roasted over a fire pit. The waiters serve the BBQ sizzling hot from large swordlike skewers by skillfully slicing the pieces from the swords to your plate. The meal also includes a great salad bar with various local delicacies and desserts.

After lunch, we walk back to the boat and slowly recover from our food coma. We depart Manaus and journey upstream to the Rio Negro. Along the way, you will see the *palafitas* (houses on stilts), which are built in anticipation of rising of the water. We might see a few *barcos de linha* (passenger boats) that carry hundreds of people and cargo from Manaus to river villages along the Amazon. Dinner will be served as the boat cruises towards the Rio Cueiras.

### **Day 5: Rio Cueiras**

After breakfast, we will take the canoes to explore a series of spectacular waterfalls and rapids. Be prepared to get wet. Some visitors will be courageous or foolish enough to tumble down the rapids on the rubber inner tubes we provide for you. We will return to the boat for a late lunch. In the afternoon, we will trek deep into the jungle to observe different species of wild flowers, trees, orchids, bromeliads, insects, birds, monkeys and other rainforest wildlife. You will learn about various medicinal plants and survival techniques used by native indians. We may persuade the crew to teach us how to climb branchless trees using a harness made of tree bark. We may even take a swing among trees by hanging on a vine like Tarzan.

After the jungle walk, we return to the open water to watch the sunset and moonrise, and rinse off in the refreshing waters of the Rio Negro. A dinner party will be held on shore, where the crew will play guitar and sing, and together with some local settlers, we will dance and sing into the night.

The boat will proceed upriver towards Novo Airão during the night. Novo Airão is a small town along the Amazon river bank with about 6,000 inhabitants. It was originally an Indian village, but now the the town has electricity, telephone service, satellite TV, and even a cyber café!

### **Day 6: Novo Airão**

After breakfast, we begin touring the town of *Novo Airão*. First, we visit the ship builders, where some of the over 30,000 wooden Amazon river boats are made. The boats are made of Amazon hard woods like mahogany, and builders use techniques brought by the Spaniards and Portuguese, the pioneers of the area. We will walk through the streets and visit the *Almerinda Malaquias* Foundation: a nonprofit organization that teaches young *caboclos* woodcarving skills. They learn to carve Amazon animals from dead trees, driftwood and scraps from the local boat industries. This is an opportunity to buy top quality souvenirs made by locals. You may choose to take a motorcycle taxi to explore the town further if you get tired of walking. The local people are humble and kind, and enjoy meeting tourists.

Next we will go to a floating lodge, where you have the opportunity to swim with the *boto* or pink dolphin. A village girl, Maria, developed a special bond with the pink dolphins in the area and tamed them to be friendly towards people. Only she can call the pink dolphins from afar to greet visitors. You can buy fishes from Maria to feed the dolphins and swim in the water with them. Maria's relationship with the dolphins began a few years ago when she would fish in the river, and the dolphins kept stealing the fishes from her lines. She constantly fought them off; gradually it became a game between Maria and the herd of dolphins. She started to swim with them and now the dolphins help provide income for her and her family.

After lunch, we head to a beautiful white-sand beach for the rest of the afternoon and evening to relax. You can take a dip in the in the warm and clean water; take a walk along the beaches; play beach soccer with the crew; and relax with a book. A dinner feast will be served on the beach followed by *samba* lessons and dancing on the cool sand under the moon light .

## Day 7: Agua Boa

After travelling through the night, you will wake up at a lake near *Agua Boa* (Good water). This is a great day to swim in clear water and go snorkeling to observe small tropical fishes typically seen in aquariums. On this day wake up call is 5:30 AM; you will appreciate the effects of a cup strong Brazilian coffee at this hour as we head out in the canoes to experience a waking rainforest. You will see colonies of Japim birds and their beautifully woven stocking-shaped nests along the lake; kingfishers as they noisily protest our presence in the silent and cool forest streams; and trace bands of monkeys leaping from tree to tree.

After breakfast, we will explore a pristine lake that is purified by aquatic plants (*Cabomba, etc.*); they act as a natural water-treatment facility to keep the water crystal clean. Plants colloquially called “fire sponge balls” that grow on tree branches like large grape fruits are an exquisite scene in this area. Put on your mask and snorkel, get into the warm water with a floating seat cushion from the canoe, and watch the beautiful tropical fishes swimming by you. Keep your ears open, you might be able to hear the roar of howler monkeys in the forest. We will have lunch in the dry forest margin by the lake.

This area has plenty of wildlife. At night, caimans are easy to spot. Small tree boas sometimes are found hanging above trees. Sometimes you can see a snake sneaking behind a sleeping bird or swallowing a tree frog. Fish will collectively jump from the lake in and out of the canoes like the up-and-down notes of a symphony.

## Day 8: Igarapé Mariri

You will wake up at another isolated lake. A dozen or so families live near by, and they often come over to greet us in the morning. We will visit the local one-room schoolhouse and bring some school supplies and toys for the children. We will canoe to the Igarapé Mariri to explore shrub-covered streams of flat bedrock and streams deep in the forest with bolder rocks. You will encounter water as dark as Guinness beer with white foam and water as red as ruby. It is a very lovely place to dipnet small fishes. Recently, we found a new population of cardinal tetra in these streams.

While you are busy enjoying yourselves, the crew prepares lunch by the waterfall. They use machetes to chop off tree branches and large leaves to make impromptu dining tables, table cloths, and benches. They build a fire to disperse fire-ants and most importantly to cook the meal. Huge pots of both chicken and fish stews are prepared and served over rice in no time.

In the afternoon we will fish for piranhas, big characins (South American trout) and peacock bass. We always return to the boat by evening to watch sunsets, moonrises, star-filled sky and if we are lucky, thunder and lightening from distant storms in a wide open sky line. This evening, we will also swap digital photos with each other, and participate in a slide presentation on *Projecto Piaba*. Project Piaba is a community-based research program to safeguard a sustainable ornamental fishery in Barcelos, a rural town in the middle reach of Rio Negro. We will enjoy a pleasant night with sweet breeze on the top deck. The boat will proceed through the night back down the river towards Manaus.

## **Day 9: Back to Manaus: Hotel Tropical**

The boat will dock by an island in the *Anavilhanas* Archipelago, which has more than four hundred islands during the dry season. It is one of the largest fresh water archipelagos in the world. A morning walk or dip in the water is quite refreshing. Some may prefer fishing or bird watching at dawn. After breakfast, the boat will sail down the Rio Negro. We will stop to visit interesting places and people, like the children that paddle out in their canoes to bring animals to show us. Lunch will include piranhas and other fishes caught by the group.

This is a good time to start packing up. Feel free to leave behind clothes and equipment that you do not care to bring home; we will donate them to the local community. The boat will arrive in Manaus and dock at the Tropical Hotel in the afternoon. The crew will help transport your luggage to the Hotel for check in. You will recuperate well at this 5-star hotel with 588 air-conditioned rooms, a large swimming pool (with man-made waves), a mini shopping center and a small zoo (that keeps some exotic animals from the Amazon). Several gift shops in the Hotel offer fine souvenirs and uniquely designed jewelries made of Brazilian precious stones and 18-K gold. The hotel was constructed by countless large, solid, hard woods from the Amazon. The architecture is charming and unique. After one-night rest in the Hotel Tropical, you will find yourself quite refreshed and ready for a long journey home, particularly for those from Asia.

We will have dinner at the Torro Loco (Crazy Bull) restaurant, which offers all kinds of international and Brazilian food. After dinner, you can walk along the Pont Negro for some nightlife entertainment; sit by the bar and watch a show of “Boi” (cow) dance. The dance relates to Amazon folklore about two bulls, a black and a white, competing with each other for a mate. The dance is a combination of Indigenous and African moves with live music.

## **Day 10: Departure at Noon.**

Get up early in the morning and enjoy a memorable breakfast in the most pleasant ambience before you go home. It promises all the Amazon delicacies, fruits, coffee and specialties. After breakfast, you can do some last minute shopping in the hotel shops or simply relax by the pool.

We will take you to the airport around noon for the early afternoon flights to your next destination. We encourage all travel groups to keep in touch with each other and with us so we can share the memories/pictures/videos of our trip and plan future trips together.

Here is a map of the places we will visit:

