



Amacayacu Natural Park in the Amazon jungle

We glide through the night, beneath a canopy of stars, listening to the sounds of the forest. We are deep in the [Amazon jungle](#) and engulfed in a moonlight sonata.

In the distance, the red glowing specks of light are not those of a radio beacon, but the reflection from the eyes of an ancient predator. “It is at night when the jungle comes alive,” says Luis, our guide, as we navigate through the darkness of the Tarapoto lagoon looking for the elusive Amazonian caiman.

Nestled between Peru and Brazil, Leticia is always a hive of activity

More than a place, the Amazon is a promise. For our English-speaking guide, a chance to charm tourists with the sights and sounds of a jungle he has explored for half a century. For my traveling companions, an opportunity to travel to the edge of imagination and be humbled by the immensity of it all.

Flowing 6,800 kilometers from the snow-capped Peruvian Andes to the southern Atlantic Ocean, the Amazon River unites countries and is a vital lifeline of the continent. Ever since the Spanish conquistadores chartered its waters five centuries ago in search of gold and spices, the rainforest has remained a frontier on both the physical and mental maps.



Macaws of the Colombian Amazon

Leticia: Gateway to the Colombian Amazon jungle

Our journey up the majestic river starts on the southernmost tip of Colombia and one of the gateways to the Amazon: Leticia. This community of 40,000 inhabitants is the capital of the

Amazonia department and an obligatory stop for the jungle adventure. Its palm-lined streets and shops offer all the amenities to the traveler, and there are several charming restaurants in town, such as the Tierra Amazonica, with its fish specialties of dorado and pirarucú.

Its port, easily accessible by foot from the center of town, offers tourists the possibility of being in several countries on a single day. Tabatinga in Brazil is connected to Colombia by road, and the open border makes the shopping experience unique. Look for the chocolate shops with pure cacao or wander into one of the many supermarkets stocked to the ceiling with the bottles of the premium liqueur cachasa for mixing 'caipirinhas' while you sit back in your jungle lodge and soak in the sugarcane and splendid Amazonian sunsets.

Our journey takes us into Peru and the Yuvari-Tucano nature reserve. After simple passport formalities in Santa Rosa, across from Leticia, we ride in a comfortable riverboat, with the sun beating at our brows. Wherever we look we are surrounded by water, that great brown god that is the Amazon. Boats pass us in all sizes, some hauling lumber, cattle and petrol, others putting along near the water's edge, laden with fruits and umbrella wielding passengers. There is civility here, among this kingdom of green. People wave to us from the curling waves.



Leticia, capital of the department of Amazonas

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The Yuvari-Tucano is just one of many lodges which have sprouted up in the Amazon and offer the tourist not only exciting nature walks but canoe excursions to fish for piranhas and see the river dolphins at play.

Near Leticia, on the Peruvian bank of the river, operates the Marasha nature reserve, which is situated on a pristine lagoon, has a two-tier deck for bird watching and a chef, which cooks some of the best dishes, such as lomo salteado, this side of Lima. The hour walk from the landing pier through the tropical rainforest to the lodge is spectacular, and guides will help carry your backpack so you can take in the sights and sounds of the jungle.

Although many tourists are under the impression that heading to the Amazon means roughing it in the bush, nothing could be further from the truth, if you make plans with a reputable tour operator. Although nature does have a way of seeping into one's hiking boots or climbing into one's dugout canoe in the form of a monkey, most of the accommodations offer a reasonable degree of comfort and keep the wild life at arms length.

Parque Natural Amacayacu

On the Colombian side of the Amazon, just an hour from Leticia exists one of the jewels in the crown of this country's National Park (PNN) system, the [Amacayacu](#) . Situated on an expanse of untouched rainforest, the Amacayacu is a must for anyone visiting Colombia. Here, one can walk at leisure through the forest from the vantage point of a boardwalk and pass giant hundred-year-old canopy trees. Other activities include canoeing and climbing lookout towers for incredible views of the river.

The Amacayacu also has comfortable rooms, which can be booked through one of the country's leading travel operators, Aviatur. For those who would rather stay within reach of the water and ride the river, Aviatur also rents a floating house, which can accommodate up to eight people and comes with its own crew.



Amazon River

No trip to the Colombian Amazon is complete without a stop at Puerto Nariño. Located just twenty minutes up river from the Amacayacu, this pristine community has several good but modest hotels. It is also home to the Nututama Foundation, which works closely with the local Ticuna Indian population on conservation projects for endangered species such as, river turtles and the pink dolphin.

After five days in the rainforest it is time to return to the concrete jungle. Although Bogotá is less than two hours flying time from Leticia and serviced daily with flights, it is a world away. As the Amazon fades into memory, it leaves an indelible mark.

The Amazon could be one of the world's seven natural wonders

The Amazon is part of the group of 261 places nominated in the campaign for electing the [New Seven Natural Wonders of the World](#)

Visit www.new7wonders.com . And support this nomination with your vote. The ranking of finalists changes weekly according to the number of votes cast.

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