

# **AMAZON JUNGLE MANU 2017**

**More than half of Peru consists of Amazon jungle. Included within this wilderness is Manu National Park, the largest tropical rainforest biosphere reserve left on earth.**

**Following my hike to Machu Picchu, I did a one week tour of Manu. Included in our entourage was my good friend, Larry Ring, two guides, two boatman, and our own personal cook.**

**We started our adventure by leaving Cusco in a minibus, and driving a day and a half up, and then down the eastern slopes of the Andes, from 13,000 feet elevation to less than 1000 feet. We descended from the Puna grasslands of the Andean highlands into cloud forest with thick vegetation.**





**Along the way we stopped at a bird observation area to see the bright, orange colored Cock-of-the-Rock, the national bird of Peru.**





**Our first night was spent at 'Bamboo' lodge. Cabins had all the desired amenities, including mosquito netting over the beds. The next morning, hummingbirds, tanagers, and other small passerines were flirting all about, at feeding stations set up by the local staff. The surrounding forest was dense and tropical at 3000 feet elevation.**





**The tract through the forested mountains was a one lane, gravel road. Drop-offs were precipitous, and it was nerve-racking when oncoming vehicles approached. We are all looking down and photographing a large weasel, known as a Tayra, hunting for fish in the river below.**





**We saw many colorful insects, including this Owl butterfly which are known for their huge eyespots. The under wing pattern is highly cryptic and the eye pattern is a generalized form of mimicry.**



**Oropendola A crow-sized bird that was common in the rainforest. They are very vocal with a wide range of songs and calls. They are colony breeders and construct long woven basket**

**nests that hang from branches high up in the trees.**





**We finally arrived at our destination..the river Madre de Dios (Mother of God). This is one of several large rivers that will eventually converge to form the Amazon River.**



**Our river transportation was a 40' long wooden boat outfitted with comfortable seats and a canopy overhead. However one had to literally 'walk the plank' to get in and out. The boat was motorized and came with a crew of two. Much of the tour was by boat. From the Madre de Dios, we eventually arrived at the slightly smaller Manu river. Each afternoon we arrived at a different lodge.**







**When you're on an African Safari, if you see a large animal, you can often just drive right up to it. Plus there are few trees to obscure the view. The jungle, on the other hand, is so dense that you can hardly see anything. You can hear birds but it's hard to get a clear view. As such, it's easier to see things along the riverbanks.**

**Each lodge had a set of trails. Most evenings after dark, the guides would take us out for a night walk with flashlights, to see what we could find...spiders, insects, reptiles, and small mammals.**



**Scorpion Spider**



**Stinkhorn mushroom with a lacy skirt that extends from the cap to the ground. True to its name, this fungus produced a foul-smelling odor.**





**Cassava** A woody shrub native to South America. The starchy, tuberous root is edible. It is the third largest source of carbohydrates after rice and corn. It is a major food staple in the tropics. Often referred to as

**Yucca** (although it is slightly different). Our cook dug up these roots. They were skinned, cut in sections, washed, and boiled. It reminded me of a tasteless potato...but I liked it. It was a daily staple.



I purchased this bunch of 'finger' bananas from a local villager for 30 cents. I ate a lot of papaya (see above) and other fruits. Chicken, fish, rice, potatoes, and beans were commonly prepared and served on our trip.





## SHORE BIRDS

Skimmers

Blue Heron

Razorbilled-  
Curassow

Horned  
Screamers







## **REPTILES**

**Caiman... South  
American  
Crocodilian**

**Yellow-spotted  
River turtle**

**I saw no snakes**





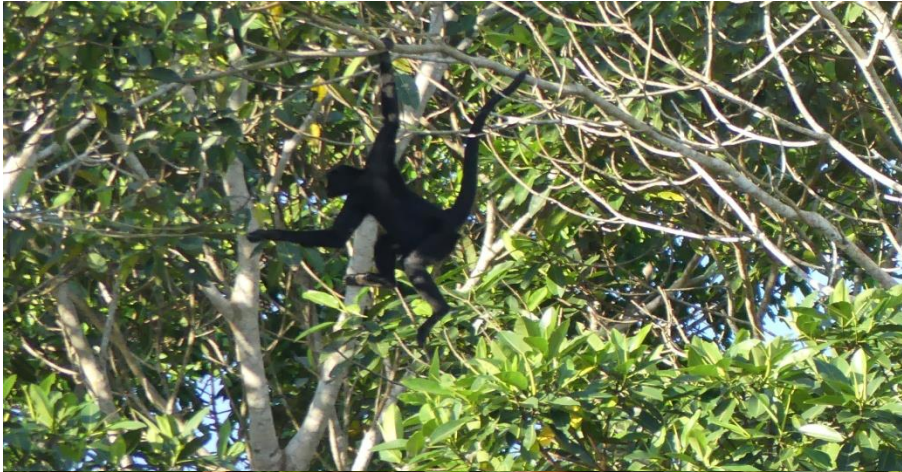
**Capybara...the largest rodent in the world, up to 100 lbs. They frequent swampy grasslands by rivers and ponds. The guides said they don't taste good when eaten.**



**Giant River Otter  
Largest mustelid  
reaching 6 feet in  
length. Very social  
and entertaining!  
An endangered  
species.**



**We hoped to see a Jaguar or a Tapir, but we did not. However there were monkeys in the trees! Thirteen species live in Manu**



**Spider Monkey**

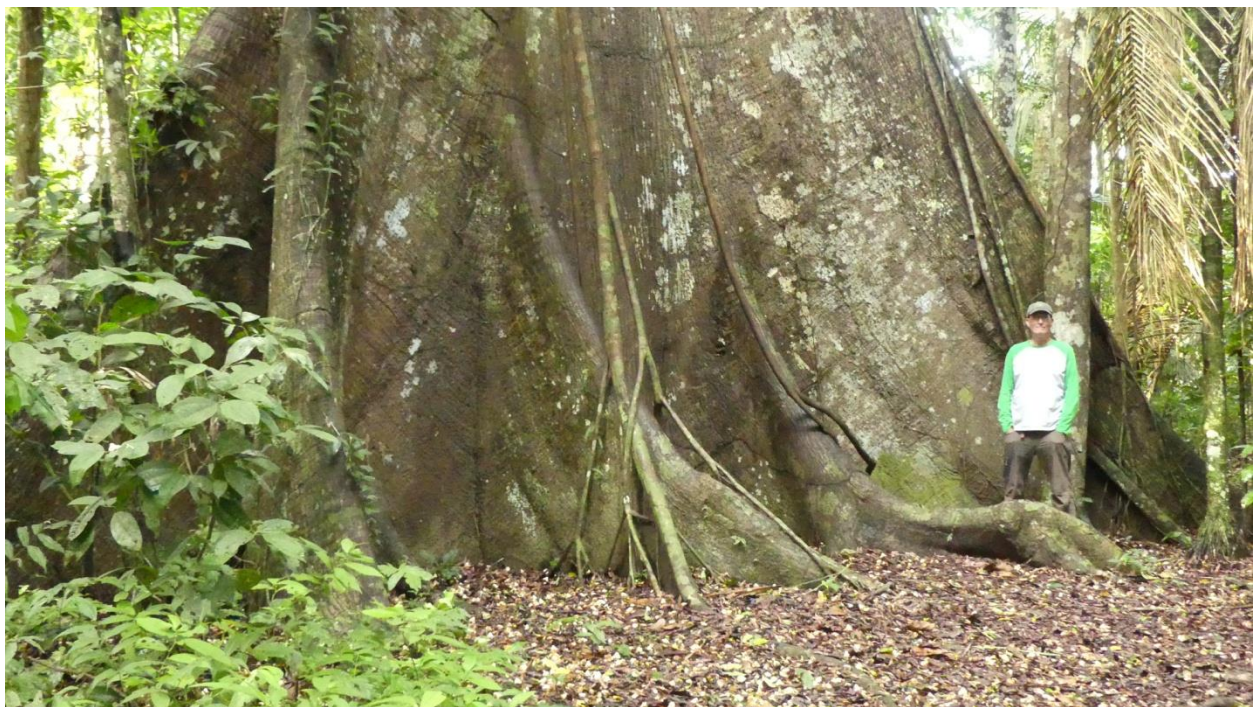


**Squirrel Monkey**



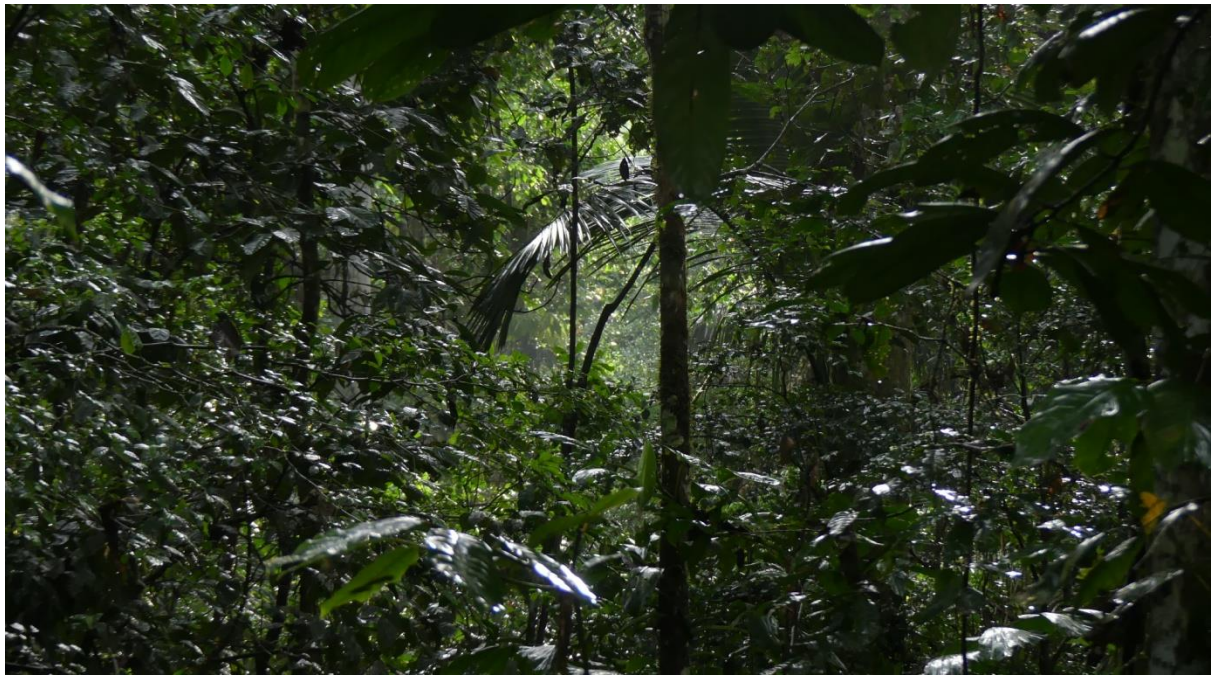
**Red Howler  
Monkey**





**Many of the tallest trees in the rainforest have what are called buttress roots, which extent out from the trunk to help support the tree. I'm standing next to the largest tree in Manu.**





**We're walking on a path to visit a canopy tower in the jungle. As you can see from the second picture, you literally cannot walk off of the path without great difficulty and without the aid of a machete. It is that dense! We were constantly warned to never place our hand (for support) on any tree without looking first. Almost every species of**



**ant bites...especially bullet ants. These can be up to an inch in length and are named because they deliver a potent, extremely painful sting that can last for more than a day. Also poisonous snakes might be coiled and hidden in low hanging tree branches, especially the Fer de Lance, one of the most dangerous and highly venomous pit vipers in Manu. It's bite is usually fatal.**



**Climbing this 200 foot scaffolding tower to the canopy platform was a bit disconcerting but I made it. I'm pictured here with Marco our head guide**

**and Larry Ring. Unfortunately there was no wildlife to be seen from the top on this day.**





**Casa Matsiguenka Jungle Lodge...where we stayed two nights. Owned and managed by local community groups that live in Manu. This lodge is an initiative in which locals can share in the business of ecotourism, including teaching us the**

**ways of their culture. For example, here is one of the natives digging out large beetle maggots from a dead tree. They were eating them whole...they asked if I'd like one...but I declined.**



**They also insert the smallest maggots in their ear canal to clean out wax. In this picture, our boatman had one put in his ear. When there is no wax left, they fall out. I declined this as well!**





**The highlight of my jungle adventure was the trip to the Tambo Blanquillo Macaw Clay Lick. Hidden a half of mile down a small tributary, off of the main river, was a 20 foot high exposed clay bank.**







**A camouflaged, observation platform sits 150 feet back from the clay lick. We gathered there very early in the morning, which is the time most parrots arrive.**



**The first type of parrot we saw was Blue-headed Pionus. There was over a hundred of them.**





**These were followed by Cobalt-winged parakeets (genus *Brotogeris*).**

**Then the Green-winged macaws came...not in flocks, but in groups of two or three birds. There was about 15 total this day.**



**They stayed in the trees for over an hour...watching and waiting until a few lingering hawks finally left. Finally they came down.**





**What a magnificent sight! Why do these birds eat the clay? Some think it's to help detoxify tannins and other plant toxins. But experts from the Tambopata Macaw Project in Peru think it's more likely to augment a sodium-poor diet. These clay licks are also known as salt licks. The belief is that there is a connection between clay-eating and the fact that the western Amazon basin is lacking in salt.**





**My trip to Manu was a fascinating experience. I wanted to see parrots in the Amazon jungle and I was not disappointed. I would highly recommend our tour company, Culturas Peru Travel and Services. They are based in Cusco, Peru. [www.culturasperu.com](http://www.culturasperu.com) Thanks also to Larry Ring, who takes better pictures than me and who took a number of these photos.**