

Amazon River and Rainforest Facts and Information

The Amazon in all of its superlative magnificence: seas of green forest and oceans of rivers pulsing with life. Float through mysterious flooded forests and relax on marvelous river beaches. The sheer diversity of life in the Amazon is well known, but only when you see such animals as a striking white uakari, a strange hoatzin, lovely pink dolphins, a giant pirarucu or a hairy tarantula, do you start to grasp the power of nature. More than one-third of all wildlife species in the world live in the Amazon Rainforest

The Amazon River runs through Guyana, Ecuador, Venezuela, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia and Peru. It has been measured by different geographers as being anywhere between 6,259 and 6,800 kilometres (3,889 and 4,200 mi) long. The width of the Amazon varies between 1.6 and 10 kilometres (0.99 and 6.2 mi) at low stage, but expands during the wet season to 48 kilometres (30 mi) or more (Every year the river rises more than 9 metres (30 ft), flooding the surrounding forests). The river enters the Atlantic Ocean in a broad estuary about 240 kilometres (150 mi) wide. The mouth of the main stem is 80 kilometres (50 mi). A full 20 percent of the water that pours out of the planet's rivers into the oceans comes from the Amazon. The Amazon collects water from 40 percent of the continent, in the form of thousands of tributaries, many of which are themselves more than 1000 miles long. The quantity of water released by the Amazon to the Atlantic Ocean is enormous: up to 300,000 cubic metres per second (11,000,000 cu ft/s) in the rainy season, with an average of 209,000 cubic metres per second (7,400,000 cu ft/s) from 1973 to 1990.[10] The Amazon is responsible for about 20% of the Earth's freshwater entering the ocean. The river pushes a vast plume of freshwater into the ocean. The plume is about 400 kilometres (250 mi) long and between 100 and 200 kilometres (62 and 120 mi) wide.

The main river is navigable for large ocean steamers to Manaus, 1,500 kilometres (930 mi) upriver from the mouth. Smaller ocean vessels of 3,000 tons or 9,000 tons[4] and 5.5 metres (18 ft) draft can reach as far as Iquitos, Peru, 3,600 kilometres (2,200 mi) from the sea.

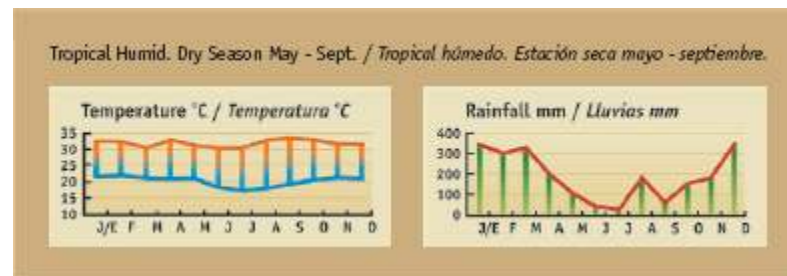
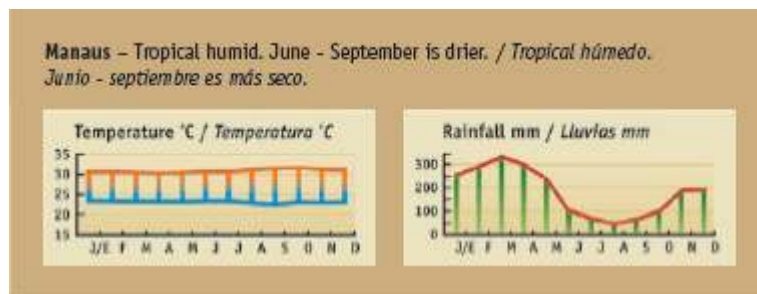
On paper a significant part of the Amazon Basin is protected and Brazil's largest national parks are found here. Sustainable development reserves, extractive reserves and indian lands all try to contribute to making sensible use of the vast but fragile natural resources. In the middle of the Basin, is a World Heritage Site: the Central Amazonian Complex joins the Sustainable Development Reserves of Mamiraua and Amanã with the Jaú National Park. Brazil's highest mountain, the aptly named Pico de Neblina (Misty Mountain) is one of the striking tepuis that rise to the north in the Guianan highlands.

The rivers meet at Manaus, gateway to many jungle lodges. On to Silves and then Parintins (Folkloric Festival) and Santarem, with spectacular river beaches and Monte Alegre prehistoric caves. The Amazon "roars" at its mouth, when the Pororoca, a tidal bore, rolls up the rivers in and around the Amazon Delta. Culture and nature come together in Belém, home of the impressive Cirio de Nazaré procession and fascinating Ver-O-Peso market

.In the Southwest Amazon, the forest grows over the Brazilian Shield and the headwaters of some of its main rivers are outside the rainforest: their source is in the Cerrado. This is the "soft underbelly" of the Amazon: a large part of this area is threatened by Brazil's advancing agricultural frontiers. But conservationists are working hard to establish protected corridors in this area which is both diverse in landscapes and species.

Cristalino has become a mecca for birdwatchers because of a combination of protected areas a very good lodge (with canopy tower and good trails) and a birdlist that now tops 550. The opportunities for soft adventure and fauna observation are also excellent. The Guaporé river nearly connects the Pantanal with the Amazon. A mosaic of conservation units (and ecosystems) on both sides of the river form an ecological corridor of 23 million ha. This area has some nice lodges and community tourism.

The region is also a place to witness the results of the struggles and dreams “to conquer the Amazon”, which includes escaped slaves, Caribbean workers, rubber tappers and persecuted indians. Visit colonial outposts like Vila Bela de Santissima Trindade, the Principe da Beira Fort or follow the tracks of the infamous Madeira-Mamoré railroad into the jungle to find rusty locomotives that were only used a short time. Though you can get to many places by road, distances are large and if you have little time, flying is recommended.



Most text courtesy of Roberto Mourão and Ariane Janér of EcoBrasil