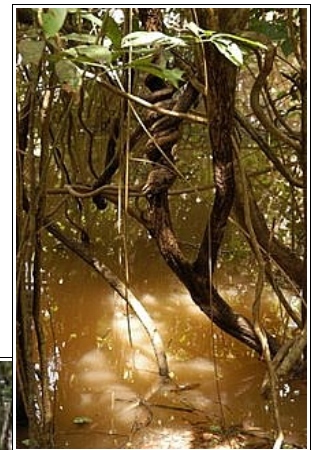


Amazonien 8.-17.2.09

Iquitos, Peru, Amazonas

Iquitos in Peru is situated upriver of the Amazon. The Amazon starts in Arequipa, where we were at the Colca Canyon in 3-4000m. But the philosophical question remains of which is IT? There are so many rivers! In Iquitos it is already some km wide and a depth of more than 25m. During the rainy season (winter – now!) the river level rises around 6-8m. As the land is very flat, not only the rivers rise, but it becomes a world of water.



In Manaus they built a harbour that can cope with up to 14m of fluctuations in the water level. There the Rio Negro, flows into the Amazon and is 8km wide. There are so-called black and brown rivers. Black water is boggy, contains a lot of humus acid and is lower in life. The brown rivers contain a lot of sediment, nutrients and life. The convergence of these two is spectacular.



After the winter (rainy season) the waters retreat from the flooded lands leaving flood plains rich in fertile mud which is then used to sow rice into the fresh mud on the banks. It is a constant natural fertilization. When trees are cut at the banks to have fields the banks become unstable and much of the once secure lands is washed into the river the next winter.

Due to the enormous biomass that the humid heat generates, the rotting leaves in the retreating rivers (especially the black waters) use up all the oxygen and many fish die. Asphyxiated fish swim on the surface, easy to catch and give lots of food for all.

The Amazonas flows 6800km from Arequipa to Belem, where it flows into the Atlantic. In Iquitos it has only a little bit more than 100m high. From then on it flows slowly.

Iquitos can only be reached by boat or plane. Therefore it belongs to Motorcycles and Motor Tricycles which serve as taxis and transport for nearly everything. There are hardly any trucks or cars. The noise level is incredibly high and crossing streets becomes an adventure in this mobile flowing streets with not only one or two cars parallel but many motorcycles. Prices for taxis are low (about 0,50\$) so they are widely used and abundant. Of course there is a lot of garbage, especially towards the river. Like often I would like to sue and fine the producers of plastic bottles for all kinds of drinks, first of all the Coca Cola company to make them clean up and retrieve their bottles all over this earth. I think they have the responsibility.



Iquitos is big. It stretches along the road towards Nauta in the South.

This road is there since 3 years. We drove there with a car for 1,5 hours from Iquitos to Nauta. Before 3 years the travel took 8-9h by boat only. All along the road are houses and farms and fields for cattle. The virgin forest that was there until three years ... is gone. Is gone on both sides about 3h into the forest. A new road always brings the end of the forest.

Poverty, need, ignorance and greed kill it more and more. It is very sad to see how it is where only some years before was one of the richest biospheres of the planet. Responsibility lies with us in Europe and the US at least as much as with the governments and people here and with the church for fighting birth control!

Like everywhere the normal picture is poor children in the streets working. I think they start working and earning some money as soon as they are 7 or 8 years old. On the harbour they carry suitcases for tourists for a tip, sell drinks and chicles (chewing gums).



There are so many rivers! It is a world of rivers and water. It is a world of warm water. Only some of the black rivers are a little bit colder when they come from the deep forest. During the rainy season the forest is flooded in wide areas. For 4 months the trees stanin water and most villages have no streets anymore and neighbours can only visit with a canoe. A simple small canoe is made from one tree with axes and fire. It will take about a week to build. Green wood is used.



Camp Dolphin

After bad experiences with guides who might know a lot, but do not share it and do not explain things, we followed a recommendation in Iquitos. We took a tour with Alex

(<http://www.amazonjungleadventuretoursperu.com/>). His guide is Wilbert, nicknamed "Falcon" on the Dolphin Camp. After 1,5h to Nauta and 2h on the river we arrived there. The river was brown, but good to swim. No danger from Piranhas, unlike in the Nature Park nearby. Surprised I asked and the answer was, that here people catch Piranhas to eat and numbers are down.

To me the jungle seemed far less dangerous than I had imagined before. Still it was good to enjoy the company of a great guy. We enjoyed it a lot to be on a canoe on the water. And it felt great to escape the Mosquitos for a while.



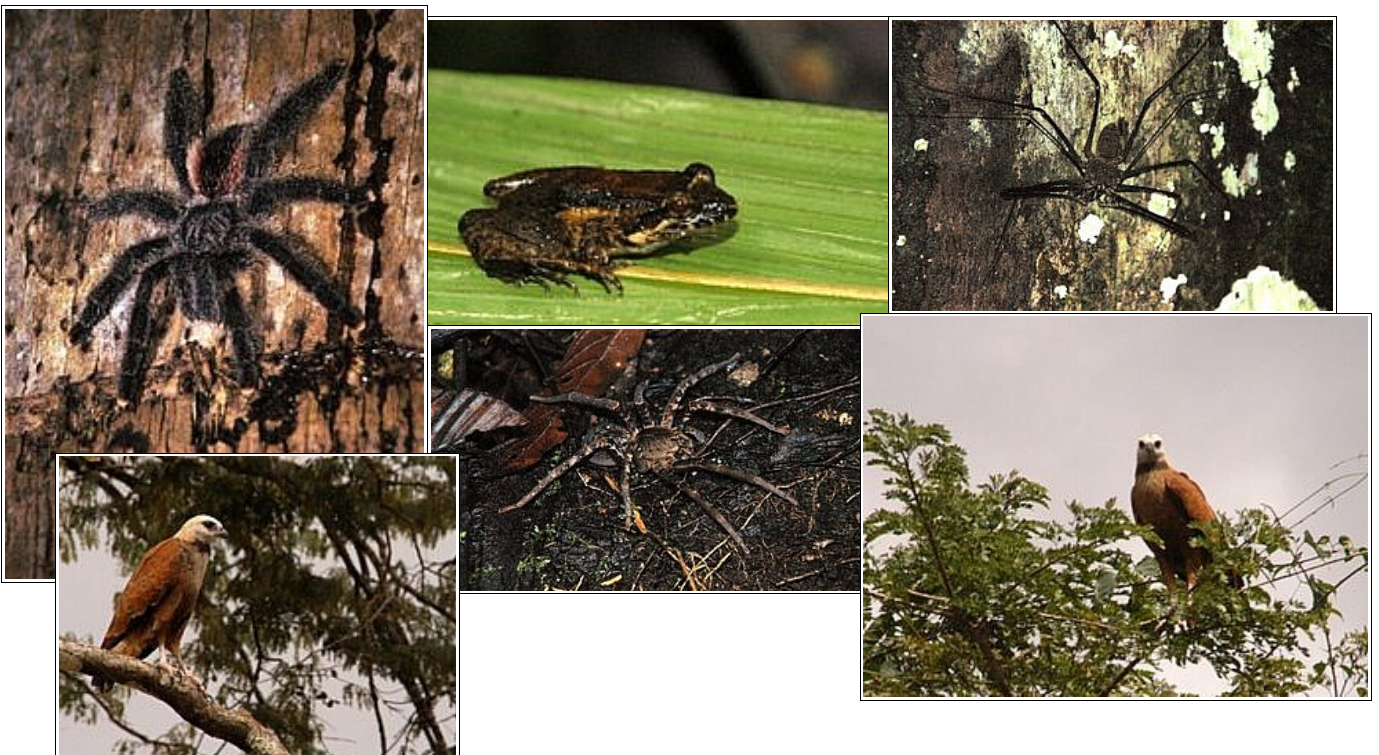
Pirania

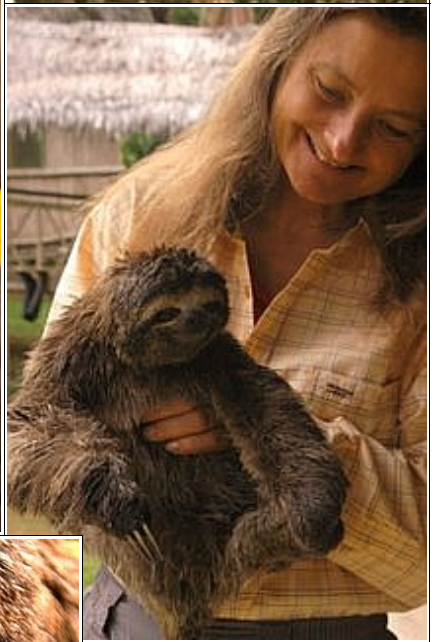
When we arrived we were greeted by two guides and a cook. Ina and me turned out to be the only guests. We were also welcomed by swarms of Mosquitos all abouts. The only fairly safe place was the matras on the floor with Mosquito netting.

About ten minutes downriver there were two small villages. Each had two churches, a catholic which was the majority, and a new evangelical (from the US!). The mission and conquista seem to go on.

Here they distinguish two forms of rain: Lluvia mujer (woman rain), which is weak and can last the whole day, and Lluvia varon (man rain), which is strong and short.

During the following days we made tours into the forest and by canoe on the many rivers to see the two species of the amazon dolphins (one of them is pink), many birds and eagles, many insects, looked for caimans, found monkeys and a peresoso. The following pictures are meant to show some of that variety.







In the forest there are trees that give a milky sap that heals wounds and bites, some one can use the sap to glue together the rims of a wound with a leaf, some whoes sap splashes when wounded and one tiny drop on the skin can burn it, one splash in the water of a river kills fish (a form of fishing), a bit on an arrow kills a monkey.



There are many trees whoes mostly deep red bark heals diabetis, cancer, infertility, athritis, allergies, sore muscles etc. One remedy with alcohol, forest honey (Colmena) and seven barks is called "siete raices" and is renowned and widespread. It contains bark of: Chuchuazi, Huacapurana, Cumaceba, Uvos, Cacao, Unia de Gato (another vine), Zanango. Wilbert prepared a whole bottle

of this "Calentativo" (warmer) for us. Now we drink it every morning. It tastes like a herb bitter and feels very strong. There is a prickly palm tree with red roots which will heal malaria. You soak the roots for 6-8 hours in water. The water will turn yellow. There are tiny "fire" ants on a special type of prickly stem, that give you fever when they bite you, and 2 to 3 cm big ones that hurt like hornets. There are termites that eat poisonous leaves and that are squashed and used as a natural repellent. A vine that grows high into the trees and smells like garlic. Balsa wood which grows with great big leaves.

Ayahuasca (survived nightmare)

Our first experience with it we had in a nice ceremony with a Quechua tribe in Ecuador. The spiritual dimension was very hard to see then. It did not match reports we had before of a "life changing experience" with the great healer "Grandmother Ayahuasca".

When we had the chance here in the Amazon to do another ritual, we thought to give it another try. The shaman there said that the Ayahuasca he uses was stronger and we could ask more, if it was too weak. So we agreed to do it again on our last night. All the day before the shaman was there already. We only had breakfast in the morning and nothing more until we took the Ayahuasca at the evening.



First nothing happened for a while, then the humming sound that I had heard before and then it struck all of a sudden. I was prepared, that it would not be pleasant. But what followed for us the next 2 to 3 hours was physically very demanding.

Shamans call it cleaning process of the body, I call it vomiting, cold sweat and sometimes diarrhoea. It went on for many hours until I felt to weak to do anything. Inwardly it felt like coming to a point where I was forced to surrender. It felt like healing. I was led to see things in my life that were unpleasant. Every time I did not want to see more, I felt nausea. Internally it was a very deep and eye opening experience. It was physical and spiritual healing beyond my will and imagination. Tears and sweat kept dripping from my face and body. On the pure physical plane it felt like hell and darkness.

The next morning the shaman (on the photo cutting a palm leaf) explained that the dosis we took was strong to open the door for the substance. The next time it would be easier and less unpleasant. We would need less of Ayahuasca and the spiritual dimension would be stronger every time as we learn to walk with it. He was very convinced that it was a remedy for all sorts of diseases and age. He himself was at the age of 67 an example how healthy people are that use to take it on a regular basis.

We do not know if we will try again, even though the aspect that it might be easier next time is tempting. But our experience of physical hardship was very strong and still is prevalent this time.

Lancha rapida

After it was clear that we either had the time to see the jungle or take a slow boat down to Manaus, which takes a week and does not leave every day, we took a speedboat, which was a good decision. It was a comfortable and smooth ride down the Amazon and we saw, that from the river, which gets wider and wider, you do not see much interesting things but brown water and a slim

strip of green secondary forest on the rims interspersed with houses on studs.



Slow version in hammocks on river boats

Greetings from the Amazon Jungle

Achim and Ina

