



PACAYA SAMIRIA

A Living World: Observed from the River

You are floating through one of the most extraordinary places on Earth.

Beyond the windows of Delfin, the Pacaya Samiria National Reserve breathes: slowly, abundantly, in rhythms older than memory. This document is an invitation to know this world more deeply: its waters, its creatures, its peoples, and the quiet intelligence woven through every root, every current, every dawn.



I. THE PERUVIAN AMAZON RAINFOREST

Scale & Presence

The Peruvian Amazon covers approximately 60% of the country's total territory: roughly 782,000 square kilometers: yet fewer than 5% of Peru's population calls it home. It is a vast, living interior, where the forest stretches beyond any horizon and the sky is visible only in narrow ribbons above the canopy.

Peru holds the second-largest extension of Amazon rainforest in the world after Brazil, making it one of the planet's most significant repositories of biodiversity and ecological resilience.

Biodiversity: A World unto Itself

The Amazon basin contains roughly 10% of all species on Earth. Within it, the numbers grow extraordinary: more than 40,000 plant species, over 1,300 bird species, 3,000 freshwater fish species, 430 species of mammals, 1,000 amphibian species, and an estimated 2.5 million species of insects. Science continues to discover new life here: dozens of new species are documented each year.

A single hectare of Amazonian forest may shelter more than 480 species of trees. One bush may carry more species of ants than the entire British Isles. These are not isolated curiosities: they are signs of an ecosystem of profound interconnection, where every organism plays a role in a web that has taken millennia to weave.

Peru alone holds the largest number of bird species in the world: over 1,800 documented species: and the third-largest number of mammal species on the planet. For the naturalist, the ornithologist, and the curious traveler, the Peruvian Amazon is without equal.

"The rainforests hold answers to questions we have yet to ask."

Mark Plotkin

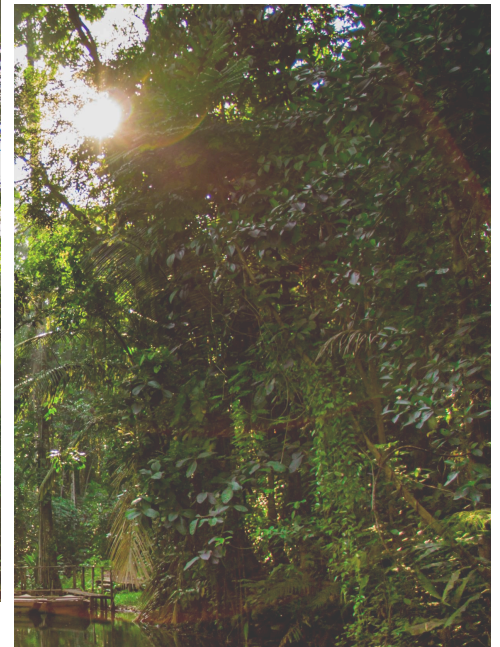
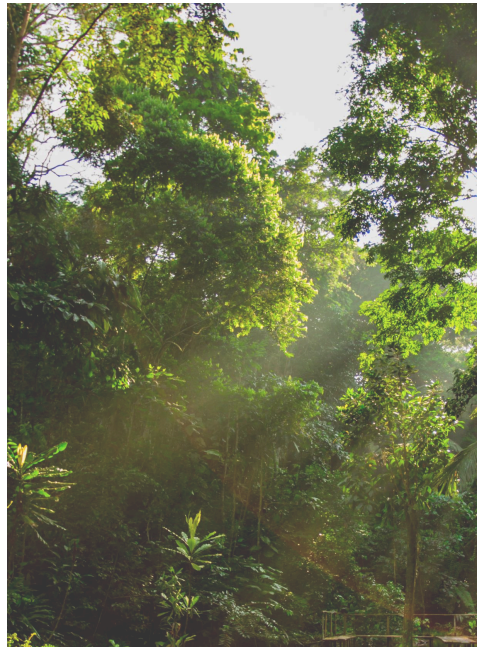


The Amazon as Climate Keeper

The Amazon is not merely a forest: it is a planetary system. It stores an estimated 150 to 200 billion metric tons of carbon in its trees, soils, and roots, making it one of the world's most critical buffers against climate change. Its destruction would release carbon on a scale that would accelerate global warming dramatically.

The forest generates its own rainfall through a process known as biotic pumping: trees release water vapor that forms clouds and drives rainfall across the continent. The Amazon is, in effect, a rain machine: it produces approximately 20 billion tonnes of water vapor per day, influencing weather patterns as far south as Patagonia and as far north as Central America.

It has been estimated that the Amazon produces between 20% and 30% of the oxygen in Earth's atmosphere through photosynthesis: earning its name as the lungs of the planet, though more precisely, it is both lung and heart: breathing and circulating the moisture that sustains life across an entire hemisphere.



II. THE AMAZON RIVER

The Life Force

The Amazon River takes its name not from the forest, but from the forest from its river: and it is easy to understand why. The river is the artery of everything: the pulse, the passage, the source of all nourishment. It begins high in the Andes of Peru, born from snowmelt and rainfall, and travels approximately 6,440 kilometers (4,000 miles) east to meet the Atlantic Ocean at Belém, Brazil.

The Amazon accounts for one-fifth of all freshwater discharged into the world's oceans. Every minute, 28 billion gallons of water flow into the Atlantic: enough to dilute ocean salinity for over 100 miles offshore. During the high-water season, the river discharges enough fresh water in a single day to supply New York City for nine years.

Volume & Power

The Amazon carries more water than the next ten largest rivers on Earth combined. It carries five times the volume of the Congo River and twelve times that of the Mississippi. With over 1,100 tributaries: seventeen of them nearly 1,000 miles long: the river system is less a single channel than a vast, interconnected world of water.

Its deepest point, near the Atlantic, reaches approximately 37 meters (121 feet). The river's channel can widen to over 48 kilometers during flood season. The suspended sediment carried down from the Andes gives its waters the distinctive milky, turbid quality that scientists call white water: rich in nutrients, full of the minerals that sustain the forests and fish of the floodplain.

The Rhythm of High and Low Water

The Amazon does not flow at a constant level: it breathes. Between the dry season and the wet season, water levels can rise and fall by 10 to 15 meters (30 to 50 feet). This annual flood pulse is the heartbeat of the entire ecosystem. As waters rise, the forest floods, and fish swim among the treetops to feed on fruits and seeds. As waters recede, beaches emerge, birds nest, and giant river turtles lay their eggs in warm sand.

To navigate the Amazon with the seasons is to understand that time here moves differently: not in hours, but in water. On Delfin, you experience this rhythm directly: the color of the river at dawn, the height of the forest reflected on still water, the slow generosity of a world measured in flow, not speed.



"Here, time stretches like the river slow, generous, infinite."

III. THE PACAYA SAMIRIA NATIONAL RESERVE

The Flooded Forest: A World Between Water and Sky

The Pacaya Samiria National Reserve is one of the great protected wilderness areas on Earth. Spanning approximately 20,800 square kilometers: larger than El Salvador: it is the largest protected flooded forest in the world, and the second-largest protected natural area in Peru. It is the only place in the world where Delfin sails.

The reserve takes its name from three river basins within its boundaries: the Pacaya, the Samiria, and the Yanayacu-Pucate. Together, these waterways form a labyrinth of blackwater creeks, oxbow lakes, and seasonally flooded forest: a landscape that functions less like a conventional rainforest and more like an aquatic world that the forest has chosen to inhabit.

Extraordinary Biodiversity

Within Pacaya Samiria alone, scientists have documented: 132 species of mammals, 527 species of birds, 120 species of reptiles, 250 species of freshwater fish, and over 1,024 types of wild and cultivated plants grouped in 118 botanical families, including 22 species of orchids. These are not approximations: they are the result of decades of careful scientific observation, much of it ongoing.

Flagship Species

Pink River Dolphin (Inia geoffrensis)

The bufeo colorado is the largest freshwater dolphin in the world, reaching up to 2.5 meters in length. Highly intelligent and ecologically essential, it is considered a keystone species and a guardian of river health. Delfin Amazon Cruises supports long-term research on these dolphins in partnership with ProDelphinus: a collaboration in which our vessels serve as floating research platforms and guests participate as citizen scientists.

Amazonian Manatee (Trichechus inunguis)

Shy, slow-moving, and deeply gentle, the Amazonian manatee is the only fully freshwater manatee in the world. Feeding on aquatic vegetation and grasses, it plays a vital role in shaping the riverine ecosystem. Sightings require patience and silence: qualities the Amazon rewards.



Pink River Dolphin

Black Caiman (*Melanosuchus niger*)

The largest predator in the Amazon, reaching up to 5 meters in length. Once hunted to near-extinction for its skin, the black caiman has recovered significantly in Pacaya Samiria, where it serves as an apex regulator of fish and mammal populations. To see one resting on a riverbank at dusk is to witness the reserve's recovery in action.

Hoatzin (*Opisthocomus hoazin*)

Ancient, eccentric, and unmistakable: the hoatzin is one of the Amazon's most prehistoric birds. It digests its leafy diet through bacterial fermentation, producing a characteristic odor that has earned it the local nickname shansho. Its chicks hatch with clawed wings, a vestige of its dinosaur-era ancestors. It is a living reminder that the Amazon contains time.

Victoria Amazónica: The Giant Water Lily

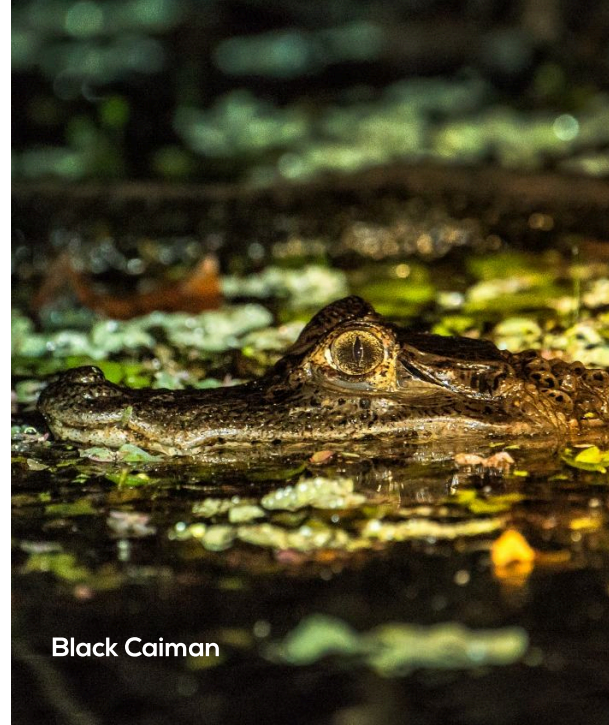
The largest water lily in the world, with pads reaching up to 3 meters in diameter. Strong enough to support the weight of a child, they flower for just two nights each year: white on the first night, pink on the second: each cycle timed precisely with the beetles that pollinate them. It is one of the Amazon's most precise and poetic collaborations.

Pale-throated Three-toed Sloth (*Bradypus tridactylus*)

The living argument against urgency. Sloths move so slowly that algae colonize their fur, turning it faintly green, a camouflage so effective it took evolution millions of years to perfect. In the Peruvian Amazon, they spend nearly twenty hours a day suspended from cecropia branches, descending to the forest floor just once a week to do what the rest of the animal kingdom considers routine. To spot one in the canopy is less a wildlife sighting than a meditation: you have to slow down to see them at all.

Conservation Significance

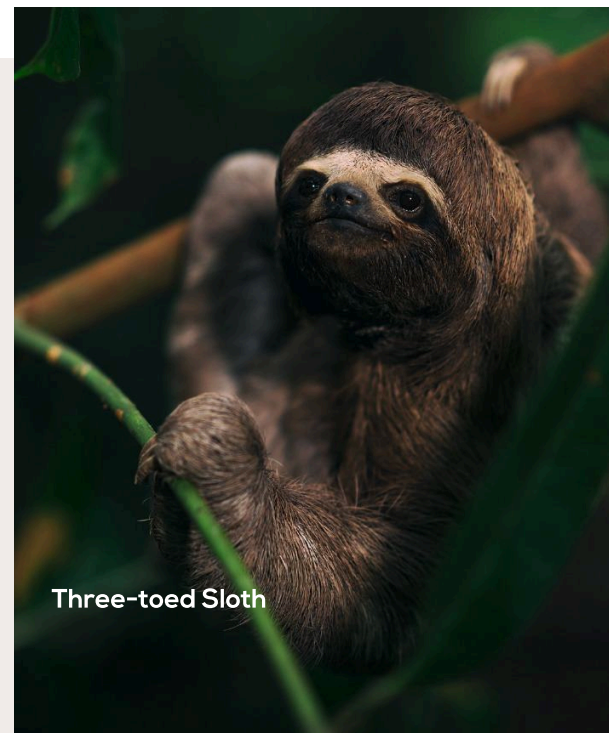
Pacaya Samiria is not only a refuge for wildlife: it is a living laboratory. Within its boundaries, Delfin's BioRest program conducts biological baseline inventories of birds and botany, supports butterfly diversity research in riverside communities, and contributes wildlife observations to SERNANP and international databases including eBird and iNaturalist. Every voyage adds to the scientific record of this place.



Black Caiman



Victoria Amazónica



Three-toed Sloth

IV. THE PEOPLE OF THE AMAZON

Thousands of Years of Belonging

The Amazon has been home to human beings for at least 11,000 years. Long before the modern concept of conservation existed, the indigenous nations of the Amazon had developed sophisticated ways of living within: not extracting from: the forest. Their knowledge of medicinal plants, seasonal patterns, animal behavior, and river navigation represents one of the most complex bodies of ecological intelligence in human history.

In the Pacaya Samiria region, the primary communities include the Cocama-Cocamilla, Kukama-Kukamiria, and groups related to the Shipibo-Konibo people: whose extraordinary artistic tradition, known as kene, encodes cosmological knowledge in intricate geometric patterns woven into textiles, painted on bodies and ceramics, and carried through generations of women who are simultaneously artists, healers, and storytellers.

Contrary to some assumptions, the presence of indigenous communities in the forest does not diminish it: it sustains it. Studies consistently show that indigenous-managed territories in the Amazon suffer significantly lower rates of deforestation than unprotected areas. Their continued presence is among the most effective conservation strategies known.



Living Culture, Living Knowledge

Daily life in the river communities of Pacaya Samiria is organized around the rhythms of the Amazon: fishing during high water when fish move into the flooded forest, small-scale cultivation in cleared patches called chacras, gathering of forest fruits, resins, and medicinal plants, and the careful maintenance of ecological knowledge passed from elders to children.

Delfin has worked alongside these communities since 2006: not as a patron, but as a partner. From the artisans of the Delfin Boutique, whose crafts are woven from palm fiber and naturally dyed with pigments from roots, fruits, and bark, to the guides who grew up navigating these waters, our journey is inseparable from the people who call this place home.

A NOTE FROM DELFÍN

For twenty years, Delfín Amazon Cruises has navigated these waters as Peru's first and only Relais & Châteaux river cruise line: not simply as a hospitality company, but as a committed guardian of the ecosystem we call our second home. Our founders, Aldo Macchiavello and Lissy Urteaga, began this journey with a conviction that the most meaningful travel creates not only beautiful experiences, but lasting connections between guests, communities, and the living world.

Every excursion you take contributes to research. Every craft you bring home supports an artisan's livelihood. Every moment of stillness you allow yourself on the river adds to your own understanding of what it means to belong: not to a place, but within it.

We are grateful you are here.

