

# Peru



## Matzés Indians expedition

Oct-Nov 2021



### ...Quick stop-over in Lima

In the middle of the night at 01:30 AM we checked out from the hotel in La Paz, Bolivia, and were transferred to the airport from where our plane left at 05:30 AM. We arrived 2 hours later at **Lima and our Luxury Inkari Hotel in the nice Miraflores district.**

Still exhausted from our many activities in Bolivia and a night without much sleep, we just had a shower and rested in our rooms for a while. Later, we had lunch, a sauna, and a swim in the hotel pool.

In Lima our Bolivian team of three met up with five more friends that subsequently joined the team. Five of us went to **the famous restaurant Le Central** that was rated in 4<sup>th</sup> place in a world restaurant guide. Our booking was made on rather a short notice but fortunately they could still accommodate us. We treated ourselves to 14 (!) dishes in total. Most of them were small, still it was more than enough. We all agreed that the food was delicious food and that the presentation of the dishes was fantastic. The cost of this extravagant meal was only about 150 EUR per person. Back to the hotel quite late and directly to bed.



## Iquitos, capitol of the Amazon

The next day after breakfast we caught a two-hour domestic flight heading north-east from Lima at the Pacific coast over the Andean Mountain range into up to Iquitos in the heart of the Peruvian Amazonas and on the banks of the Amazon River itself. Iquitos is said to be the largest Amazonian city without any road access. You can only get there by plane or boat.

At Iquitos airport we were received and transported in a cool semi-open old city-bus to **our hotel – Casa Moray** – that turned out to be a lovely colonial style building with magnificent and very spacious rooms.

After check-in and a shower, we met our guide José, paid him our balance and took off for a first taste of the Amazonas. After an hour's boat ride upriver on the Nanay river we arrived at an animal shelter where we saw and interacted with an anaconda, a couple of sloths and some parrots.

For dinner we just went across the street for just any **restaurant (Trattoria Itaya)**. To our surprise, it happened to be owned by a Swede – Mr. Hans Järlind! He had not seen any Swedes or spoken Swedish for over four years he said and was almost tear-eyed having not only one but six Swedes to talk to this evening. It ended up with him joining us at the table and serving us a couple of rounds on the house. He had led a very interesting life as an expat in various locations across the world and had even written a book about his life.



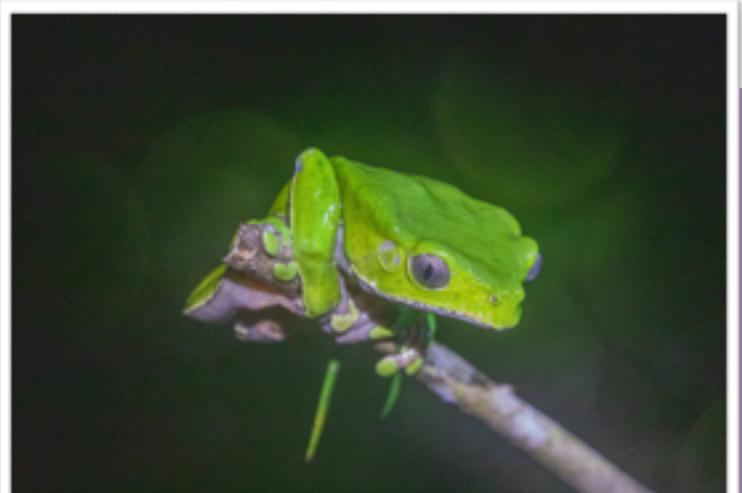


## Iquitos to Angamos

We left the hotel for the airport planning to leave just after noon. After various delays and a complete lack of information, our flight finally turned up. We were told it had been on a recognition flight to our final destination to ensure it was possible to land on the grass runway. We are not so sure about that explanation. Especially since the pilots told us a different story.

We embarked into the 12-seater propeller plane which we had chartered for our group of eight travelers and four staff in total. Our guide José was accompanied by the chef Janina and two boatmen and assistants named Kenneth and Celso (another guy – Emilio – would join us later). One of us had by mistake packed his knife in the cabin luggage. Security discovered the knife in X-ray but gave it to the pilot who returned the knife at the destination. This wouldn't happen in a larger airport.

After a 45-minute flight we safely **we touched down on the grass landing strip in the village of Colonia Angamos by the Javari River** and Brazil on the opposite banks. We were received by the border police and some local people and after a 20-minute walk we reached the small community itself, populated with a few hundreds of mestizos and indigenous people. We had a couple of cold beer and some food prepared by Janina before getting ready for bed. José had told us to watch out carefully for our belongings, so I was shocked when I discovered my iPhone was gone. I even promised a reward for getting it back. We were accommodated in a very simple house which they apparently referred to as a "hotel". There were only four rooms available, so we had to share beds – two-and-two - except the lady on our team who got her own room and another team member who chose to sleep with the staff in a hut. It was terribly hot and humid with lots of mosquitos and bugs eager to bite us during the night.





## Angamos to Remoyacu

At breakfast a fellow traveler found my iPhone in his backpack that had stood next to mine the evening before in the bar. I had put it in his bag instead of mine. My phone hadn't been stolen, after all. What a relief!

After registration with the border police, we embarked on our boats. We had one larger pirogue boat with some makeshift plastic cover as a roof and a smaller pirogue for the staff and all of our equipment and food for a week. We soon left the Javari River for its tributary the Galvez River and after a **9½ hour up-stream we arrived at the small village of Remayacu**. The last couple of hours we traveled in pouring rain and darkness. Kenneth – had to stand up front with a torch guiding Celso, who was driving the boat, directing him to turn in time as he negotiated the snaking river and cautioning him to avoid branches and other debris in the river.

Dinner was prepared by Janina and then we had time to go and explore a little bit with Kenneth. Not far from the village, he climbed a tree and managed to shake down a large poisonous green frog (phyllo medusa bicolor) called kambo in the local language. The plan was to show us how the frog poison is extracted (the process is called "sapo"), however the frog dried out overnight and did not make it. We all slept close together in a wooden shack on mattresses with mosquito nets properly arranged around us.





## Remoyacu and Buen Perú

In the dead of the night one of the team staff-members went out to search for an anaconda. Some hunters had told him they stumbled on one quite far out. It had recently killed and swallowed some large animal, which meant that it would now be resting and digesting a few days. After breakfast half of our group went up-stream with the smaller pirogue to search for the place where it was spotted. Fortunately, they found the snake and returned very excited about the experience and the photos taken, the rest of the group had just relaxed throughout the day and also made a small visit to Buen Perú to see and interact with a semi-domesticated juvenile tapir. The heat and humidity necessitated several refreshing swims into the Galves river.





## Finding a 6-meter long Anakonda

Today we split up. The group who went to see the snake yesterday went in the bigger boat directly to the Maloca camp and the Matzés indigenous community, whereas I went with the rest of the group to look for the anaconda.

**After a 2-hour boat ride and 1-hour hike through the jungle our snake-spotter Kenneth located the huge reptile that had moved some 20 meters from where it was yesterday. We estimated the snake to be around 5-6 meters long. It had devoured a large animal like a pig or a deer which distended a section of the snake. Kenneth made a rope of material he found in the forest with which he immobilized the head and the neck of the snake. Subsequently, I climbed down in the pit where the snake was resting. Kenneth pulled the head, and I lifted the body and this way we managed to pull it halfway up from the pit, but alas the rope broke so I had to quickly jump back up again to avoid the snake catching me. We took turns taking photos but tried not to get too close. One friend, however, put a foot on the snake, while posing, but had to jump away as the snake tried at his leg. Understandably, the reptile was a bit annoyed after two subsequent days with groups of visitors that messed with it in different ways. Happy and excited after our anaconda encounter, we made it back to our boat and then had a 3-4-hour boat ride to the Matzés site. Another long and sweaty day!**

We arrived at the Matzés place late afternoon and were directed to the basic shack that would serve as our home the next couple of days. We put our mattresses on the floor and organized our mosquito nets. We had agreed with José not to take any pictures the first day, wanting to show respect and ask for permission after first "breaking the ice". The site was small as it only consisted of one maloca (hut) housing six adults, one teenager and a few kids. The chief was named Samuel and his deputy was Segundo Tomi. There were four adult women. We sat on a tree-trunk in the square outside the maloca and made our introductions. We had brought gifts for the Matzés such as machetes, fishing gear, knives, torches, clothes and more.



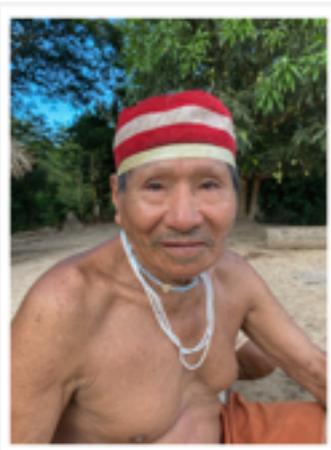


## The Matzés and the Maloka

We had five days and four nights in total at the Matzés' Maloka. All the time we were busy with various activities or excursions. See below, for some examples:

**Jungle excursion collecting copal for candle making.** After a short hike in the jungle, we were shown how the Matzés collect resin from certain trees in order to make candles. The resin is put between several layers of leaves and the corn "look-alike" finished product is then needed heated for a long period over the fire to dry. These items were then used as candles or torches inside the maloka. We saw the Matzés use them indoors at night and they burned very slowly, lasting for a long time so it all seemed to work very well.

**Jungle excursion finding material for making fishing rods.** We were taught to look for the right type of tree and cut down its sticks to be used later for fishing rods back at the Maloka. To improve the flexibility of the rod we heated the rod over the glow at the fire. The rods were then equipped with a thread and a hook. The female Matzés caught small fish with nets which were used for bait on our hooks. The fishing was arduous as it was made on the banks of a lake framed by muddy swamps and trees with sharp thorns on trunks and branches, both leading to some minor incidents. We weren't really successful, but the experience was interesting.





**Bird hunting trip.** Kenneth and Emilio brought four of us to go looking for birds. We took the pirogue upriver again and then hiked into the jungle for a bit. It was pitch dark and beyond my understanding how they could locate a bird high up in the trees, but sure enough – they succeeded again. We had located a large bird (not sure of the species). Then Emilio loaded the gun, aimed, shot and killed the bird. Success again! We made it back to the others with the bird which was later prepared and eaten for dinner.

**Trap making.** Segundo Tomi took the whole group into the jungle to show us how to set different traps using only material from the jungle, of course. He prepared a bird-trap (paradise bird), a larger agouti-trap as well as an even larger tapir-trap (tapir = tachanaka). After arranging the traps, he also demonstrated to us how they worked when an animal (or bird) entered the respective trap. This was, very impressive indeed.

**Sapo frog poison procedure on human.** One night two poisonous frogs were caught to be used for extracting their poison the following day. To this end, Segundo Tomi arranged four sticks that were placed in the ground some 30 centimeters apart. Then, the frog was tied up and its limbs were stretched between the sticks. Segundo then massaged the frog's feet and hands and collected the poisonous mucus that was produced by this maneuver. The mucus was collected with a special stick and process was repeated over and over until we had enough.

Segundo Tomi asked us for a volunteer to try the poison, but no one was too eager to step forward. Especially after he had explained the side-effects of the poison, such as nausea and vomiting. Instead, Cynthia, (16 years old) was selected for the procedure that started by making four burn wounds on her upper arm on which some of the frog poison was applied. The poison then very quickly spread throughout her body with the blood. We were told the positive effect of this procedure is to sharpen the senses which is especially good when hunting. Cynthia immediately walked away to vomit for a good half hour and then had to rest for another hour or two. To our knowledge, she didn't go hunting.





## The Matzés and the Maloka

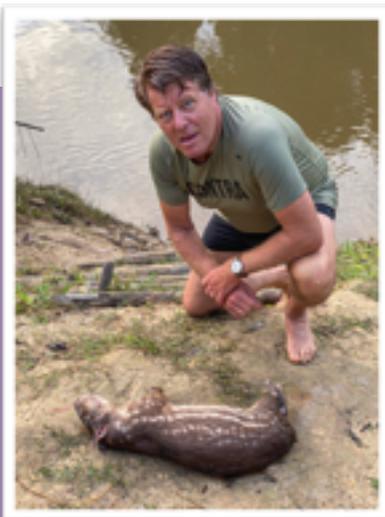
**Preparation of a large rodent.** During the night Kenneth also hunted and killed a Paka, i.e., a large rodent of possibly 8-10 kg. The women showed us how to remove the fur and then how to collect the meat and whatever other edible parts there were. This rodent also ended up on our menu.

**Wild Boar hunting.** We had all lined up neatly and started to take group pictures with the Matzés outside their maloka, when all of a sudden one, two and then all of the Matzés started to yell and ran off into the jungle.

It turned out they had noticed wild boars passing by. Next thing we knew, the hunt was on. The dogs very quickly started to chase the pigs towards the waterfront to cut them off. We followed the Matzés, and our approach was a bit more careful of course. The women had already caught the two piglets alive. One of the larger pigs had been wounded by the dogs, as had some the dogs by the pig's tusks. Kenneth managed to injure the pig with his rifle, but it wasn't dead. Finally, we were only a few meters from the boar that couldn't move its hind legs but still defended itself against the four dogs that, eventually, finished the kill.

Two adult boars and two piglets would provide the Matzés with food for a long time. Unfortunately, we were leaving the following morning, so we never had a chance to try it. Everyone was very happy though with this genuine and totally unexpected event. We were told that the piglets were going to be kept alive to put on more weight for several months before being eaten.

**Food.** Janina cooked all meals for us throughout our tour of total 9-10 days. Not easy considering that we were moving around and staying at least four different locations. Also, it's quite a task to keep the food fresh, as no refrigeration was possible. As already mentioned, Janina's food was supplemented with some of the catch from our hunting & fishing trips with the Matzés. We had rice with almost every meal, but at times also pasta, vegetables or eggs in all forms as well as scores of fresh fruit, coffee and tea.





## Back to Angamos – leaving the Matzés

We said farewell to the Matzés and boarded our two boats for the journey downstream back to Colonia Angamos. Moving with the current this time we managed to do the trip in 9 ½ hours instead of 15 hours going upstream. It's still a challenge to sit on hard wooden plank for such a long time. So, we were very happy to return to Angamos and the civilization, although still this is a very small and isolated village. We spent two nights here waiting for our flight.

With a full day all open to activities, we decided to go upstream to the municipality of Palmeiras do Javari on the Brazilian side of the river. To be on the safe side, we with the Peruvian border guards, who told us we needed nothing but our passports. After only an hour's boat ride from Angamos we arrived and were intercepted by the Brazilian border guards. We left our passports with them, and they told us that we only were allowed to stay for three hours.

The village of Palmeiras seemed of similar size as that of Angamos, but as we arrived just around noon nothing was open. No restaurants or bars. However, we found a guy who walked us through the village to a that he opened for us. Fortunately, they had some cold caipirinhas as well as lots of beer. So, what do you do when you need to kill a few hours and there is nothing to see or do? Absolutely right. We started to order rounds after rounds of caipirinhas and beer. The bar owner had also turned the music on, so our little group might have appeared a little bit rowdy by lunch time. Finally, the young commander of the Brazilian soldiers came and told us we had five minutes to pack up and leave Brazil.

Hence, we were marched off back to their small office. Now, they claimed we had not come downstream, but rather upstream to Palmerias and therefore had to fill out a long entry form and have our pictures taken – ouch! However, we were allowed to take a group picture with them before we left, so they couldn't have been too upset with us anyway. Back in Angamos, we took a nap to sleep off our drinks.





## Angamos to Iquitos

Time to go back to the real civilization! This time with a morning hydroplane, landing and taking off on the Galvez River. Well before lunch we landed on the mighty Amazon River in Iquitos. We were all looking forward to two nights at the lovely old Casa Moray. It was really nice to be back and to be able to have a good shower and breakfast.

We made a short excursion also to another animal reserve which had butterflies, various monkeys, ocelots a jaguar and other animals returned from captivity from poachers or from people who had kept them as pets. They did not seem to have the funds to look after the animals properly, however.

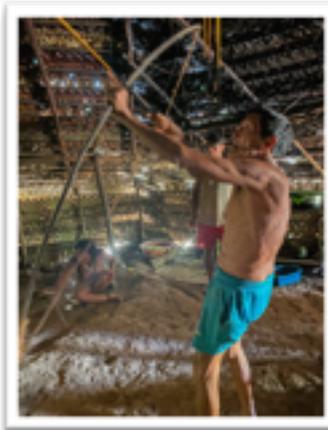
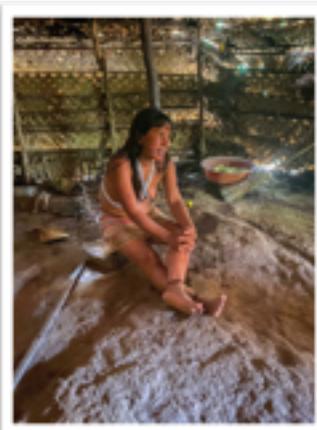
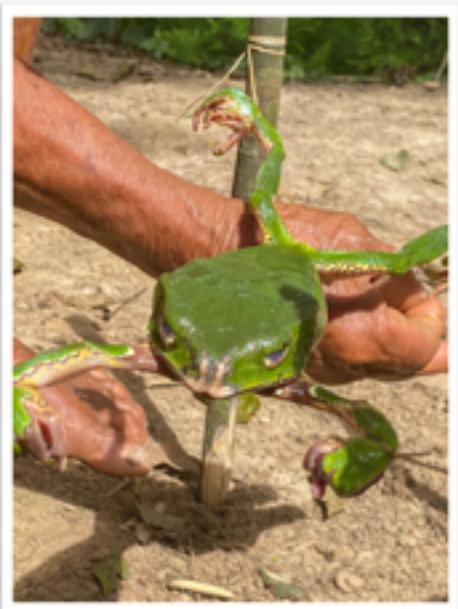
In Iquitos, we tried a few restaurants, such as the Ikiitu for ceviche, the Ari's for hamburgers and the famous Casa de Fierro (an Iron building from 1890). On the last evening we went back to trattoria Itaya, the place owned by the Swede Hans whom we met before setting out on our jungle trip. He was very happy to have us back and joined us for pizzas, beers and wine. That night also had live music, a Polish girl, now living in Iquitos, playing the fiddle.

**The Matzés.** The word Matzés comes from the word for "people" in the Matzés language. They are also known as the Mayoruna. That name comes from the Quechua (Inka) language and means "river people". In Brazil the Matzés are generally referred to as Mayorunas, while in Peru they are usually called Matzés.

The Matzés have an elaborate knowledge of the plant and animal life of the surrounding rain forest. Traditionally, they hunt with bow and arrows, but today also use rifles. They set their own traps. Historically they also used blowguns but have recently abandoned this weapon in favor of bows and arrows as well as guns. Matzés families often practice polygamy. Cross-cousin marriages are most common. Marriages are primarily arranged between cousins, with a man marrying the daughter of his father's sister (his aunt).

The Matzés made their first permanent contact with the outside world as late as in 1969 when they accepted missionaries into their communities. Before that, they were effectively at war with the Peruvian government, which had bombed their villages with napalm and sent the army to their communities. The Matzés had, at the time, made raids on villages to kidnap women for the tribe. At present, relations between the Matzés and the Peruvian government are peaceful. The Matzés dispose a vast land area set aside as an indigenous reserve in 1998. This reserve measures some 457.000 ha.





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