

EARLY DECEMBER AMAZON TRIP REPORT

- The Peacock Bass is a great sport fish and will eat a fly. It's an aggressive, tough, beautiful fish and attains a weight of over 20# - ten-plus pounders are fairly common. The arowana is a "baby tarpon type fish" that is a surface and shallow water cruiser and is fun to sight-fish from a poled skiff.
- The Royal Amazon Lodge, just four years old, is owned by a highly respected Brazilian doctor who also operates a hospital in the town of Boa Vista in the northern state of Roraima. The lodge is located on a unique clear-water river (the Agua Boa) that is a smaller branch of the Branco River and flows through an area that is one of the largest remaining tracks of uncut and uninhabited rainforest. It's accessible via a 90 minute charter flight north from the Amazon gateway city of Manaus, landing on the lodge's private air strip. The lodge hosts a maximum of 12 guests a week – six individual air conditioned cottages which were basic, but spacious, clean and comfortable. The staff and guides were "eager to please" and were a plus. The guides spoke "fishing English" – the native language is Portuguese. In addition to the main lodge, they also operate upriver an air conditioned houseboat that can fish six. This is the finest operation in the realm of peacock bass fishing and its clear waters make it the best place in Amazonia to use a fly rod – in fact, the only fly fishing lodge in the Amazon!
- The river is located in a nature preserve and can only be fished by guests of this particular lodge. The river is protected by law from any native netting activities. This is an extremely important element in any "third world fishery" where subsistence or commercial netting is usually the number one enemy of quality sport fishing.
- The season starts in November and extends through March. The early part of the season can be susceptible to heavy rains which can raise the water levels and flood the surrounding rain forest, making the fish harder to access as many of them literally "feed in the forest." The later part of the season usually finds the lowest water levels with the fish more concentrated in channels making sight-fishing a larger part of the experience. However, in these low water conditions, the fish can become more spooky and harder to fool. As is the case in most "world class" fisheries, there are no "sure-fire" best answers – upsides and downsides to each time of year are the rule.
- The fishing is a combination of sight casting and blind casting. The amount of sight casting vs. blind casting will depend on the species you're pursuing, your timing (water levels), and how many numbers you're willing to give up. Our fishing for arowana's was all sight casting, either to cruising fish or fish swirling on the surface chasing food. The peacocks were a combination of efforts, depending on where we were and the water depth and level. Low water levels allow for more sight casting, even wading. If you're willing to keep casting, regardless of method, you're going to catch more and bigger fish simply because your fly is in the water for greater periods of time.
- The group that was at the lodge the week before Thanksgiving (two weeks before we were there) had a banner week with over 3000 fish taken. The week before we arrived, there were some heavy rains, raising the water levels somewhat. The lodge was full the week we were there (as it usually is) and I think all of our group would agree that, even though we probably took somewhere around half of the 3000 fish of the previous group, we found the fishing productive and downright electrifying at times. We did manage to release over 50 Peacocks that topped ten pounds with a pair of 18 pounders being the largest. Note that Scott and I only contributed one of those ten pounders (although many 7 to 9 pounders) – either bad luck or we're lousy Amazon anglers or a combination of both. We did have some great moments including one 45 minute period when we released over 30 fish to 7 pounds. Also, Scott had an exciting "short 90 minute session" on arrival day where he sight cast to fish in clear water over white/tan sand and took two 7-pounders and had two larger fish run into the forest and break him off.
- The Amazon wildlife is a definite attraction. The Amazon version of a crocodile (called a caiman – we saw them up to 18 feet long), was the main performer creating many exciting moments. In one instance, an angler was fighting a peacock and a ten footer grabbed the fish and headed for the forest. While trying to stop the caiman, the fly line broke and the caiman swam into the forest. A short time later, he reappeared towing 20 feet of fly line. The Amazon has a unique array of bird and animal life, in addition to being the fishiest place I've ever witnessed in all my globe-hopping.
- Water, water everywhere! The Amazon rain forest is an immense place (larger than the country of India) and is full of water – over 10% of the world's freshwater is located here. The Amazon River itself is over four miles wide in many places and averages 75 meters deep during normal flows. The river we stayed on, while generally over 40 meters wide with a substantial flow, is not significant enough in size to be noted by name on most maps of the Amazon. We also fished several secluded lagoons which, in some cases, required a walk in the forest to reach. The lodge keeps boats on these lagoons for their guides to use when accessing on foot.
- Bugs. We were amazed to find there are no mosquitoes in the Agua Boa system due to certain acids in the water. However, there were other biting bugs, the worst of which were the tiny no see ums which were active very early and late in the day. After making a few thoughtless preparatory mistakes my first few days and getting several no see um bites, I used more caution the remainder of the week and stayed "bite free" the last two-thirds of the trip. My insect weapon of choice was Avon Skin-So-Soft bath oil which smells a lot better than deet and was very effective. I applied four times daily.

- Couples trip? If your significant other likes being on the water and fishing at least some of the time, the answer is “yes,” this is a good couples experience. However, besides taking guided walks in the rainforest and relaxing around the pool or in your cottage, there isn’t much to do for a non-fly fisher.
- Price is \$4,400 per week from Manaus. It includes your seven night stay and the charter flight from Manaus. Wine, beer, and the pre-dinner cocktail hour are also included. Not included are tips, fishing equipment, round-trip air to Manaus, and any hotel stays enroute.
- Logistics – you must arrive in Miami on Friday evening in time to catch a 9:00pm Lloyd Aereo Bolivia (LAB) non-stop flight to Manaus (apprx \$1100 coach fare – first class available). Surprisingly, this is just a 5 hour flight! It took us longer to fly from San Francisco to Miami than Miami to Manaus. Upon arrival, you are met at the terminal and transported to the private air terminal where you catch your charter. On the return, you arrive back in Manaus in the late morning on Saturday and are met and transferred to a comfortable hotel. From there, you can tour Manaus or just relax – we did have a wonderful Brazilian dining experience that evening that I would highly recommend. On Sunday, the scheduled LAB flight to Miami leaves Manaus at noon and arrives in Miami at 4:00pm – if it’s on time, a sometime occurrence.
- Availability: For anyone considering a trip this season, the lodge is full from now through the end of January, almost all repeat clients from last year. February and March do have a few open dates still remaining. We are planning on hosting a Leland shop trip for the ‘06/07 season, possibly two weeks.
- Options: A week in the Amazon can be combined with a Patagonian rainbow/brown trout trip. Other possibilities can be a visit to Tierra del Fuego for the giant sea-run browns or the easy add-on for a Patagonia trip, the Chilean fjords, an experience we’re very familiar with. Also, dorado fishing in northern Argentina or a visit to Los Roques for bonefish can be arranged while in South America.
- Summary – one of the fly fishers with the group was Wray Lertora, Director of Operations for Sage Fly Rods. Obviously, Wray is a very well traveled fly fisher with lots of experiences with which to compare new fly fishing adventures. Wray pretty much summed up the overall feelings of our group with this comment: “Given the quality of the operation for a remote, tropical lodge coupled with the unique wildlife and the size and aggressiveness of the fish, this was as good a fishing trip as I’ve ever been on.”

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