

Experiencing the Amazon By Tripp Bell

When I made the decision to study abroad, I wanted to choose a place in the world that I would never have the opportunity to travel to later in life. The tropical trips or Europe are both key travel places in the world today. These are places that are such touristy areas that it can sometimes take away from the true culture of the country in which you are visiting. Brazil, on the other hand, will leave you blindsided by the experiences that you will encounter.

I have always been interested in pharmaceuticals. It was one of the majors that I explored while trying to figure out what I wanted to do. I learned that most of the cures for today's medicines come from the plant life in the rainforests. It is not just a scientist that mixes different elements to create Advil. Different plants have been used for thousands of years to cure simple symptoms of different diseases. They have been applied to wounds to reduce bleeding and ease pain. Because of this passion, I felt that Brazil and the Amazon would be an interesting place to experience on a first hand basis.

Upon arriving in the rainforest, the Amazon was not quite what I would have expected. At first, it did not have that wild feel to it like I had originally expected to find. Hollywood has hyped it up for the movies to be something that it is not. I did find that just because the dangers were not 300 pounds and running thirty miles per hour, did not mean that they were not there.

As our guides took us through the Amazon we found that the things that were the most dangerous to us were smaller than the size of our hand. One guide showed our group just how dangerous the colonies of ants were and how easily they could be agitated. It was incredible to see them work together to ward off anything that threatened the colony.



I would have to say that one of the most memorable tours that I took part in was the canoe ride after dark. We were able to see and hear all of the creatures that were not visible during the day. The canoe itself was only about an inch and a half above the surface of the water. Throughout the tour there were branches that we could not see rubbing and scratching against us. The entire time that this was going on, the tour guide was pointing out reptiles and spiders and explaining how dangerous they were. At any moment they could have jumped onto our boat.

I was amazed at how calm the guides were with the activities in which we were participating. Due to the laid-back attitude of the culture of the country, we were able to participate in activities that I would not have dreamed of in the United States. One such activity was learning how to lose our scent if one were hunting in the Amazon. This

activity involved beating on a tree causing millions of small ants to swarm. One would then place his or her arm on the tree allowing the ants to crawl all over it. They would then rub their arms killing all of them and smearing them all over one's arms. This all took place before the ants began to bite. The mint smell that resulted kept other animals from picking up that person's scent.



As I stated before, I had this idea that the Amazon would be a place with snakes in the trees and jaguars running through the woods. The dangers that we faced were completely the opposite. The pit vipers that we saw were curled up on a log and were no bigger than the spread of my palm. Yet, the guides would not allow us within four feet of them. I would have to say that I have never avoided ants in such a way in my life. You would have thought that I was going to be eaten alive. I felt like every frog that we saw was dangerous in some way or form and was brightly colored to represent this.

I would have to say that I went to Brazil not knowing what to expect. I was able to learn so much just by being around the culture for the short period that I was there. I did feel very fortunate to be around a culture that was so accepting and friendly. Knowing as little Portuguese as I did, I still felt very comfortable trying to communicate. Overall, Brazil was an amazing experience that I could not compare to anything else. It is a place where you need to go with an open mind because you will come out of it with so much more.