

Going With The Flow:

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Amazon, Brazil 2023

Wed May 31 Alaska Air Flight 516 to Fort Lauderdale FLL. Grant drove me. Spot Saver = no security line. Bagel at Starbucks \$4.85. Toasted... Long wait. Cream cheese in little tub. Backpack breakfast: granola, powdered milk, cranberries in ziplock bag. Add water & voilà. Long taxi. Half full flight. Heavy daypack gave me neckache (no waist strap). Also brought ukulele. No fanny pack, which could count as a carryon. Airborn at 8:36 (left gate 8:15). 5:37 flight duration. No entertainment on flight (system broken) so I enabled Netflix for a month & downloaded a few things. Guy kiddy corner is watching some kind of animated fights. 737-9max. 6 seats across. I'm 12C. Complementary beverages & biscotti. Middle seat empty. Pretzels arrived just after I ate my bagel.

I ate them too! Headache, so I can't read or watch shows. Dozing off & on. Woman next to me has already had to get up three times. Land at 5:35. Raining, cloudy, 80°.

\$12.99 Caesar salad takeout in FLL. Locking chairs by a window with view of a double rainbow.

Lightning storm delayed many flights, but ours not affected. Only way to get from terminal 1 to 3 is to exit security perimeter and walk outside. Not too far, but it would be nice if you could stay inside security.

Flight to Manaus boarded early. Middle seat empty. No problem getting backpack + uke carried on. They checked my Covid vax card - glad I brought it! Started meeting people on trip - I am not the youngest! 5 hour flight, left 11:30 landed 4:30, I was able to sleep for most of the flight. They

fed us a meal in the middle of the night. The cheesecake was heavenly but I really didn't need or want the sandwich.

^{no visa required.} Took about an hour to get through customs & ^{Airport quiet.} baggage control. Our guide, Mo, met us with a small tour bus. It got light around 6 am. Warm & humid.

Drove 12 km to the boat, past dense jungle with palms & banana trees. One piece of baggage didn't make it. Glad I didn't check a bag.

Manaus is a sprawling city with traffic. Rubber boom town with a port. The boatyard a tangle of hulks on land and a few seaworthy tour boats like ours.

I'm sharing a cabin with Cindy. It's small but comfortable and has a bathroom with shower (the toilet is in the shower stall).

Bunches of small sweet bananas hanging on deck.

There are 8 crew members. We met them but they aren't wearing name tags, so it will take a while to learn their names.

Breakfast was fruit (dragon, papaya, pineapple, etc.) plus eggs, cheese, manioc rolls with tucuman filling, bread-cheese casserole, "cheese" puffs, cake, plantain chips.

7:45 leave dock, sail past downtown Manaus (opera house dome, German brauhaus, crumbling cement high rise apartments, port cranes). Lovely breeze when moving. We're on top deck. The woodwork is gorgeous, dark & shiny.

It took about an hour to get to the "meeting of the waters", where the Rio Negro joins the Amazon. Manaus is on the Negro, which is rootbeer colored. The Amazon is silty and milk-chocolate colored. ~~boat~~ Big boats haul locals

up & down the river. People hang hammocks for sleeping. Sewage goes in the river.

Mo just turned 80. He's retired but agreed to lead this trip. He speaks 8 languages, and has been in nature documentaries.

Brief glimpses of grey dolphins at meeting of waters. Apparently fish get confused here and the dolphins take advantage.

We climbed into three canoes and explored the flooded forest near the confluence. The roar of chainsaws as people milled lumber out of enormous ~~trunks~~ trunks. Houses floating on big logs, accessed by boat, with dogs to guard them.

Saw yellow-headed caracara, termite nests, purple-flowering trees, squirrel monkeys, eagles, black vultures, fork-tailed flycatcher, a noisy but well-camouflaged flock of parakeets, a great sighting of a

Great Potoo (awake during the day, which is unusual), a sloth (I couldn't see it), and a big green iguana (when it got scared it jumped into the water). Hot in the sun, lovely ~~in~~ in the shade. We made our way through flooded forests, using the motor sometimes, but often Maneo paddled. He also hacked through brush with a machete, and pushed submerged logs out of the way.

Lunch at 1 pm. Another feast with roast veggies, salad, rice, toasted manioc, fish, and the best flan I've ever had.

Nice breeze up on top deck.

At 4 we went out in the canoes for 2.5 hours, to explore the flooded forest. Saw yellow-rumped caciques & nests; a flock of oropendulas, black with yellow tails; Greater anis (look like blue grackles); macaws; hoatzin; jacanas (also called butterfly birds);

black-collared hawks with gorgeous russet plumage; wood creepers; and giant water lilies, like flat round trays with turned-up rims. A boat carrying school kids came past, like a school bus. We saw lots of red howler monkeys, including a female with a baby on her back. Mo said there wouldn't be any mosquitoes, but I did get one bite. Toward dusk we came upon a black-necked aricari feeding a large baby, and half a dozen white-throated toucans calling to each other loudly & melodically. A nearly-full moon made an amazing backdrop. On our way back to the boat we heard howler monkeys calling with their deep, eerie howls. It was a beautiful red sunset, and pitch black by the time we got back to the boat. Dinner isn't until 8:00... 89° today and humid.

Fri June 2

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Slept like a rock. AC almost too cold. Mo has a great sense of humor and woke us up at 5:30 am with La Traviata. He loves to tell stories and to whistle. Sunrise a little before 5:30. 6:15-9:15 canoe trip into flooded forest near Salgada. No bugs. Seen today: rufescent tiger heron standing on branch; several potoo, one as big and tawny as a great horned owl, with an errant feather protruding from its rump like a rudder; half a dozen hoatzin, including two on nests; a huge flock of cormorants; a small hummingbird; two large green iguanas; green parrots; yellow-rumped caciques; scissor-tailed tern; numerous small birds; great, cattle, and snowy egrets (the latter have yellow feet (golden slippers)); cooi heron; black-bellied whistling ducks; four sloths (brown-throated three toed) moving languidly through the trees. The males have a visible yellow scent gland on their backs.

The warm humid air has made my hair go frizzy.

My neck gets very sore looking up at things in trees. I got a headache, maybe motion sickness? The flooded forests are magical. You have to pay attention going through brushy places, ducking under branches, ~~and~~ checking for insects and spiders, and watching for thorns. This morning we explored Lago Janauacá and Rio Solimões.

Boats are cars here. Saw families passing by. One mom was breastfeeding her baby, another was brushing her daughter's hair. Everyone smiles + is friendly. We're the only tourists we've seen. Many of the boats have a small + very shrill, loud motor, with a long shaft for the propellor.

There are many nice houses + litte farms with chickens, ducks, cattle. People grow manioc, among other crops. Power lines snake through the trees.

Haven't seen any solar power. Fishermen out in boats, some with floating nets. We stopped to pick green guord-shaped fruits about 8" long.

Breakfast at 9:30. Delicious wheat porridge, fruits globe including tart "snot fruits" like we tried in Mexico, fish casserole (no thank you). (actually passionfruit)

Most people went out fishing. Four of us stayed behind to journal, draw, and enjoy this incredibly beautiful place. Very warm on the top deck when the breeze stops. Brilliant black & orange Oriole Blackbird. Fawn-breasted tanager with red head.

The sky grew overcast & it sprinkled lightly. The staff rolled down side covers, squeegeed the deck and wiped down the railings. Lunch was another fabulous feast with lots of veggies, chunks of flavorful breaded fish, and creamy coconut pudding.

After lunch it rained for

about an hour. Alex, Carmen, Sky, & I jammed. Alex is a phenomenal player with a beautiful voice. He brought a mandolin from home and a guitar he borrowed from a luthier in Manaus. He couldn't find a cheap guitar to buy, so he asked the luthier if he could rent one. After the guy heard Alex play and realized how good he was, he told him he could borrow the ~~car~~ guitar! For two weeks! No collateral! Can you imagine that much trust and generosity?

~~I forgot to mention that~~ Carmen plays ukulele and has a beautiful voice too, with Sky on harmonicas and me on my baritone uke we had a blast playing bluegrass traditionals.

At 4 pm we went out to look for sloths. We saw cute small striated herons, two boa constrictors, a brown rat hiding in a tree hollow (avoiding the boas), tiny squirrel monkeys surriving through the trees, a jacana-like bird called "frango

-gallinule

d'agua, and a cacique nest (pendulous) side by side with a wasp nest.

They say the birds feel protected being near the wasps, and the wasps don't hurt the birds.

I had a blast practicing Portuguese with our pilot, Josenias. He is 33, same age as my son, no kids, studying English on Duolingo.

Oh, and we did see some sloths!

Up on deck before dinner I was happy to see the southern cross.

We are getting minimal exercise, and my butt is really sore from the hard seats in the canoe (we sit on flotation cushions).

Dinner at 7:45. Big platters of fresh vegetables, lots of starches (rice, noodles, mashed potatoes, manioc), meatballs, fried fish, and the fried piranha caught today. I didn't try it but people said it had a nice flavor. Dessert was a delicious mango mousse in a crust with passionfruit glaze.

The generator is misbehaving so we will go to Manaus a day early.

Night excursion from 9-10:30. Full moon illuminating the water. The guides held bright flashlights and scanned for glowing eyes. Lots of nightjars (nocturnal insect eaters) and a few baby alligators (caiman?), most were elusive, but Pedro caught one and let several people hold it before it jerked hard and slithered out of Carolyn's surprised hands and back into the water.

Saw several frogs jumping and heard lots of animal noises and frog chittering. Saw an awake potoo.

Tried to get a better view of the boas, but they were too hard to see. (This afternoon I had gotten a good look at one of their faces.) No bugs tonight and the air was a lovely temp.

To bed at 11:20, very tired! Three canoe trips in one day was too much.

Sat June 3

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Up at 6 am to the daily strains of La Traviata. Short night. The shirt I hung in the hall, thinking it would dry in the breeze, was quite damp. Loud engine noise all night but it didn't keep me awake!

We docked at the marina right downtown. Fishermen are selling their catch on the docks, which are a colorful sea of people. Breakfast was another spread of fruits, eggs, cheeses, cheese puffs, breads, and cake.

Just as we were getting ready to walk into town the skies opened up, so we delayed an hour. We played music. Alex & Carmen are so good that it's hard to join in, especially if I don't have the chords or lyrics.

At 8:30 we did a walking tour of town: the bustling docks, boats leaving for places up or down river, the piles of fresh-caught fish; the mercado municipal with dozens

of vendors selling a huge variety of fish. The smaller fish were deeply scored to make them cook faster I think. There were a lot of touristy crafts for sale, most looked mass produced, but there were some beautiful baskets. The market buildings themselves were built during the rubber boom years in the 1880s, designed in part by Gustav Eiffel.

On the way to the Opera House we stopped at a hammock shop. I bought a meter of bird-patterned oilcloth across the street.

It's about a one-mile walk to the Opera House, gently uphill. The streets & sidewalks are treacherous, with gaping holes, discontinuities, and garbage. The old buildings are grimy and many buildings appear to be covered in mold from the humid air. I don't love being part of a big group. There was a lot of standing around, which kills my back.

There's a lovely patterned plaza in front of the Opera House. It's a stately

pink building built in 1896 and restored in 1974. Entry cost 10 reales each, or \$2. We ogled the theater itself, the marble-columned ballroom and balcony, and the box seating areas. Two movies were filmed of the ballroom: a German film called "Fitzcaraldo" and a Netflix film called "Ricos de Amor." Rubber cobblestones in front of the building muffled the sound of late-arriving carriages.

A young woman in a voluminous sparkly red dress was doing a photo shoot in the park, probably for her quinceañera.

By the time we reached the Opera House we were hot, sweaty, + tired of standing. It was bliss to sit in the air conditioned Opera House seats.

It's Saturday and very busy in town. Traffic looked very slow. On the way back we stopped at a self-serve ice cream shop with about 30 flavors. I got a small cup of doce de leite for 5R (\$1). Many people had açaí, a local fruit, and said it was very good.

lots of Brazil nuts for sale on street carts.

Back to the boat at 1pm and we started driving up the Rio Negro. Lunch was veggie platters, boiled eggs, rice, noodles, manioc, fish, and a strawberry layered mousse that was beautiful. It's frustrating that I can't eat tomatoes or potatoes, as they are served at most meals.

We passed under the 9-year-old Rio Negro bridge, the only bridge over the Amazon. It's 4 km long.

Mo can be hard to understand and there has been a lot of confusion about what we are doing and when. It can be hard to hear the PA announcements in our cabins. I'm enjoying some rare down time after lunch, journaling & napping. The boat vibration is conducive to slumber!

86° at 3 pm. Feels like 96° due to humidity, but quite pleasant with shade & breeze (or AC in cabin).

At 4 pm we arrived at a wooden structure on the river shore. A man with a painted face and a feather headdress was waiting for us. He is the chief of the Tuyucas, or Tucanos. We sat on low wooden benches on either side of an A-frame structure with a sand ~~flower~~ floor. A dozen-plus men, women, and children performed traditional dances with instruments such as pipes and hollow wooden trunks. They sang in their language, Tuyuca. It was really wonderful. The chief also told us about their culture. The men wore ankle rattles made of large seeds. I loved watching the small children learning to dance. At the end they pulled us into the dance, swirling us around the circle, then back and forward. They posed for pictures. Mo paid about \$5 for each of us, which goes on our bar tab.

Each family had items for sale,

including jewelry made with stones and seeds, feather earrings, dream catchers, instruments. I bought a caraimon tooth necklace with red & black stones. \$10

They also brought out food for us to try: manioc "pancakes" to dip in hot pepper broth (otherwise they are quite dry), fried ants (crunchy, salted, chitonous), a tomato-like fruit, cubes of sugar cane, and long pods with white flesh inside that is sweet & juicy; you don't eat the large shiny black seeds.

The children were adorable and I was really moved by the music and dancing.

Back on the boat we motored along, watching lightning in the distance, singing, and talking. Delightful temperature with the breeze.

Dinner included chicken & veggies, beef in a creamy stroganoff sauce, and a to-die-for lime mousse that tasted like clouds made of cream.

I skipped the night excursion and sat on deck in the moonlight with a few others. The silence was magical but then they turned on the generator. Too soon to lie down but I'll try to read.

After our outing to the dancers our shoes were sandy. They told us to leave them in the boats, and a short while later they were clean and neatly lined up on shoe racks.

Sunday June 4

Rained in the night but I never heard.

Happy 85th birthday to my mom!

Slept great with earplugs. Woke with sore throat on one side - reflux from lying down too soon after eating? on deck at 5 pm. Tai chi and watch the light slowly arriving. Dozens of Nighthawks darting & swooping after bugs, stocking up on snacks before snoozing for the day. Cows mooing. Generator off so we could hear

bird sounds. One a descending 6-note trill that sounded like laughter. muggy.

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At 6 we climbed into the canoes. The forest being flooded means we are floating up near the canopy. No mosquitoes. We saw: Roadside Hawk, dolphin ripples, heard Howlers, Scarlet Macaws, Parrots, Jacararas, heard Wood Creepers, saw an alligator tail that looked like a piece of carved wood, social flycatchers, Parrakeets, yellow woodpeckers.

At an abandoned hotel complex where they used to feed the monkeys, a white-faced Capuchin came running when he saw us, and we hand fed him banana chunks. He made adorable squeaking noises.

A little farther down the river a group of squirrel monkeys came running. They were so cute & tiny! Many of them had babies clinging to their backs. The Capuchin had stayed in the bushes, but the squirrels jumped right onto the boats and gobbled banana chunks. Although feeding wild animals isn't great, it sure was an amazing experience!

We wove our way into the forest and began to see the eerie remnants of the hotel complex. It was abandoned eight years ago. The carcasses of concrete towers rose like apocalyptic ~~ruins~~ ^{ruins} from the flooded forest. Crumbling concrete boardwalks used to connect a series of casitas, now also empty hulks. People have stripped away anything of value, but there is old garbage floating in the water. We saw Greenbills, Green-backed Trogon, and heard the call of a Horned Screamer.

Back to the boat at 9 for breakfast. At 10 we put on our bathing suits and canoed to a wooden building on the shore. It had ~~had~~ a small sandy beach and a palapa. The pink dolphins come here looking for food. We brought fish and the guy who lives here (a friend of mo's son) fed the dolphins, who rose out of the water to get the fish. There were six dolphins. They swirled around our feet in the warm, shallow water and let us

pet them. If they hit you with their tails it bruises your skins; they are muscular animals. They don't turn pink until they are two. At this point they rub their skin on underwater tree trunks, which rubs off their grey coloring.

Sunday is family day and a boat arrived with families to see the dolphins swim, and picnic. The little kids were having a blast.

Back to the boat at 11:30, lunch at 12:30. Crema de Gaviola (a kind of fruit) for ~~break~~^{dessert}. Then three hours of down time! Upper deck, breeze, music, macaws cawing noisily and flying along near the boat. Dolphins, white-winged swallows.

Bad reflux today (sore throat). I think I need to start eating less!

Not a single smoker on this boat, including staff. (Except Pedro.)

At 4:30 we went out exploring. Saw howlers and heard them howling in the distance. Also saw: nunbirds, puff bird, toucan, kingfishers. My boat only

had three people plus Josenias, so I got to do lots of Portuguese practice. We made a special visit to an enormous tree that looked like Avatar. It had wide buttresses, but Mo said it is a fast-growing softwood tree with shallow roots, & tips over easily in storms.

Mo's hearing doesn't seem great, so if you're not in his boat it's hard to ask questions.

One person is sick with a cold and two other people may have caught it. Fingers crossed that no one else gets ~~sick~~ sick.

Back to the boat at six and we started driving. Mo said we'd go 100 kms tonight. We've been in Paricatuba today. There are a few mosquitoes on deck, even with the breeze. I skipped dinner so I could lie down earlier (dinner wasn't until 8). Lots of pre-dinner drinking going on, but no one is getting too loud or obnoxious.

Mon June 5

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Woke up at 5 this morning with a sore throat - dang! Pre-breakfast canoe ride at 6. We took a "shortcut" to the Cuieiras River. We were supposed to be back for breakfast at 9:15, but we got back at 10:15. At one point we ~~seem~~ seemed a bit lost, but our guides eventually found the way. Joserias had a good map app that showed the water trail, but his phone was dying. Luckily I had my portable charger.

We didn't see a lot of wildlife, but we heard the strident musical calls of Screaming Pihas. We also saw tiny bats about 3" long, clinging to tree trunks. I spotted a nunbird, and thunder rumbled nearby.

We stopped at a small family compound. They make money selling brazil nuts they harvest, and medicinal angiroba oil (topical for pain; \$5 for 250 ml). There were two men, a young woman, and an 18-month-old little boy. They had a pet toucan. They showed us how Brazil nuts

grow in round pods containing up to 30 nuts. The nuts have to be peeled with a strong knife. They were delicious! They invited us to see their house, which had solar panels, a 4-burner propane stove, and a TV playing cartoons.

Mo is not a great time manager.

At our supposed breakfast time we were only halfway through our route. We entered dense jungle and we all began to wonder if there really was a trail.

The Gilligan's Island theme song began going through our heads ("a 3-hour cruise...").

The boats in the rear breathe smoke. Many houses have satellite dishes.

Back at 10:15 after over 4 hours in the canoes. My bladder was very full! I was also very ready for breakfast. The oatmeal was delicious.

We were going to visit a village but it started pouring rain, so we'll go another day. I took a nice sit-up nap.

At 1:30 we went ashore (we had motored to some property Mo ~~uses~~ uses.

way up the Rio Cuieiras). We walked for about an hour & a half on a trail through the forest. We started out in ponchos, but the rain soon stopped. The soil is sandy, so there was no mud or puddles. It felt so good to walk after not getting much exercise for the past 5 days!

We saw two kinds of showy red bromeliad blossoms, a shelf fungus about 2 ft. in diameter, a sandy area where turtles lay their eggs in the fall (Sept/Oct), fluffy clumps of grey-green lichen strewn over the ground, and heard the call of white-throated toucans. Mo said the sand is 4 meters deep. This area is higher ground that never floods.

It was overcast, with no bugs, and no need for hats or sunscreen or sunglasses.

Back to the boat at 3:20. Light lunch. Several of us aren't feeling well, so we're wearing masks and eating up top.

I took another sitting up nap and when I woke up at 5:20, the staff

had set up tables, chairs, hammocks, a fire, candles, and torches made out of empty beer cans, lampoil, and rags, on shore. A gangplank from the boat allowed us to walk right onto the beach.

Mo says he doesn't own this land, he just uses it. He built a large covered platform for hammocks, a covered meat-grilling metal cooker, and a retaining wall. Some orchids were blooming on the trees. I had a lovely chat with Carolyn, who is a wise and articulate soul.

I went back to the boat about 7:30 to rinse off, journal, read. Didn't feel well enough to socialize. Dinner had not yet been cooked. It's warm in the room because the generator (and thus AC) are off. They finally served dinner at 8:30.

I got a lot of sleep but woke up feeling worse. Throat isn't as sore, but mild congestion, and very tired. Fruit & juice for breakfast - not

Tues June 6

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hungry. Food scraps go over the side to feed the fish.

Decided to skip morning canoe ride - too tired to sit up for so long. It's a misty, cool morning, really lovely. In many places only the treetops are sticking out of the water.

The top bunk is a bit tricky to climb into, as there is no bottom rung. I can almost, but not quite, sit up straight.

Stopped about noon for a swim. Bliss! The water is somehow buoyant plus they had pool noodles (also called noodles - macaron - in Portuguese). The water was perfect, with spots of warm & cool. The dissolved tannins in the water make your skin look yellow under the surface of the river.

About 2 pm we stopped at the village of Nova Esperança, way up the Cuiçera River. Dona Ugalina, a diminutive

woman of about 50, greeted us warmly and showed us around the village.

Acai berries growing on palm trees, a wood shop where they make beautiful stingrays, dolphins, platters, spoons.

Dona is the village chief; not many women are chiefs. Her husband died about a year ago, and I don't know if she took over. There are 117 people in the village. They grow a lot of manioc, a hardy tuber grown all over the world and a starchy staple for many people.

They also grow onions & herbs in raised beds made of carved wooden canoes. They also raise chickens, and there were a few dogs and cats running around.

The health center has a sign saying it was donated by the international ~~academy~~ academy of trial lawyers. The government has provided solar panels and people pay a reasonable monthly fee for electricity. The village also has a library, restaurant, and snack bar! I'm not sure if the latter are frequented by villagers.

or tourists. We've only seen a couple of tour boats. It was willingly hot, even in the shade.

Dona Ugulina has 38 great grand children.

The villagers set up a shop with beautifully made and highly polished wood items, woven fans, macrame from palm frond fibers, and necklaces and earrings made from dyed acai berries, polished jarina seeds in many colors, + bird feathers. I bought an acai berry necklace for Alex and a bracelet for Colin. R10 (#2) for the necklace and R5 (#1) for the bracelet.

Back on the boat I was able to socialize up top for a bit, then napped. Back on deck I had a banana from the bunches they hang to ripen. They have a wonderful sweet flavor. Lightning tearing across the sky up ahead, and while I was sleeping they saw a funnel cloud descending from the sky.

Before dinner Cleide brought us hot

buttery, salty popcorn. I wasn't planning to eat dinner but they had soup, so I had a small cup of the broth, which felt great on my raw throat. I've now got a lot of congestion and am starting to cough. Everyone else has tested negative for Covid, so I assume I don't have it, but will test soon to be sure.

Joseras says he doesn't have a girlfriend because it's too complicated with his work schedule.

I was hoping to go out on the night boat but I'm feeling really crummy. I forgot to bring decongestant but thankfully Carmen had nighttime cold medicine. Grateful.

Wed June 7

Slept from 8 to 8 and skipped the Le am canoe trip. They saw scarlet macaws & blue morpho butterflies. Feeling woozy & weak but cough & congestion have subsided due to medicine. Woozy might be from the antihistamine. And it might be ~~because~~ because ... I have Covid! yep, after dodging it for three years. Even though everyone agreed to wear masks in the airports and on flights, not everyone did, so now about half of us have it.

I was well enough to go on the 9:30 canoe trip. We floated in a shady grove until we saw Wire-tailed Manakins. Small birds with striking yellow, red, and black coloring. They dance for the females. We saw a tarantula tucked in a fold in a tree, and got brief glimpses of a trogon and a woodpecker. The air was still and ~~quiet~~ ^{quiet} and quite sweaty under my mask.

We're now about halfway between Castanheira and Taucapeçacu. Back

to boat at 11:15. Enjoyed a cool breeze in a swinging hammock on the top deck. Then we had a group Covid meeting and agreed on how to minimize exposure for those who haven't tested positive. Positives will serve themselves last and eat on the top deck. Chicken, rice, and watermelon for lunch. Mo calls the dining room "The Rainbow Restaurant" when he announces a meal. He has a lovely sense of humor.

Cindy moved to her own room, since she tested negative, and it's really nice to have my own room.

We pulled into the town of Novo Airão, and the well people made a pharmacy run for Paracetamol, etc. Cell signal here, so we're all checking email.

We left Novo about 5:30 and continued motoring up the Rio Negro.

I passed on the 8pm dinner but did try a few bites of the delicious passion fruit pudding. Lightning cracking through the sky behind us. A beautiful sunset.

A large brown moth fluttering around the light. I'm not feeling super social due to being sick and low energy, plus a sore throat makes it hard to talk over the boat noise.

Thurs June 8

Day 5 of Covid. Coughing fit before I fell asleep but then slept well.

Up at 5. mild diarrhea. 5:30 La Traviata. Breakfast at 6. I ate bananas. A light rain ended before we climbed in the boats at 6:40. Clouds of tiny sweat (?) bees swarming the boat. Clouds tendrils drifting down like jellyfish tentacles. Birds singing all around us.

Good view of two bright yellow-faced Parrots. white-throated toucans Long-billed wood creeper, some kind of Trogon that kept its back to us.

Two gorgeous kestrel-like Bat falcons in a snag. Best sighting of the day: a Spangled Cotinga, turquoise blue with a purple throat.

Clusters of *Oropendola* nests hanging from trees, like threadbare socks. A Roadside Hawk.

At 8:45 we went ashore for a half-hour walk through the jungle. Mo cut pieces of a vine that's full of water. You hold the cut end over your mouth and water pours out. It tastes clean and neutral. I began to feel dizzy and weak and was glad to get back to the boat and sit.

At 11 we began to see swirls of white foam on the water. Then gentle rapids appeared. They become a waterfall when the water level drops. Mo said the water was higher than usual so the beach was gone. The serving table fashioned from branches and lianas was standing in water. The crew built a

fire and fashioned a pot holder out of forked branches, then hung a big pot of chicken soup. Meanwhile we all put on our bathing suits and went in the water. Amazingly, the rocks weren't slippery, and even though the current was strong, your feet stuck to the rocks. The water was rootbeer-colored, with lots of white foam.

Apparently Mo put alcohol in the bowls to disinfect them, and then lit the alcohol on fire to burn it off. He must have missed mine, and I couldn't eat my soup because it tasted so bitter. Luckily I figured it out and was able to get seconds with a clean bowl. The rice and broth really hit the spot on my empty stomach.

When we arrived they offered us cold beverages from a big cooler. I had a lemonade, hoping it would give me some electrolytes and settle my stomach. It was nice, and not too lemony or sweet.

The water here was nice & cool. I sat waist-deep for a while and it felt like a massage on my back.

I felt bad that Joseviás had to work hard paddling us around in the hot sun when he's sick too.

The place is called Rio Aturiá.

For dessert they had chunks of guava jelly with cream - delicious - and pineapple that had been roasted whole in the coals. I didn't have any, but everyone said it was sweet and juicy.

At 1 pm we packed up. It was very hot in the sun. I was feeling weak and miserable. At one point I laid in the bottom of the canoe. I was worried about getting heat stroke.

Occasional clouds were a huge relief.

When we got back to the boat at 2:15

I took a shower and crashed. After

a couple hours I tried going up to the

top deck, but my stomach is so sore I

can barely walk. Janet, a retired

nurse, gave me Smecta, a loperamide alternative that doesn't stop you up. Needless to say I passed on the night boat trip!

Fri June 9

Slept well, felt much better this morning, stomach pain gone. More people have diarrhea. We're wondering if it's from Covid or just poor hygiene. There's no handwashing requirement before meals like we did in Africa.

Up on deck the howler monkeys serenaded a glowing red sunrise. Gruel for breakfast to see how my stomach is doing.

6:30 canoe ride into Agua Boa de Cutia. Only 11 out of 19 felt well enough to come. So many bird sounds all around us as we floated in the treetops. I keep my binocs and camera

on my lap, since I'm sitting, instead of around my neck. Much easier on the neck.

Birds are often backlit but you start to recognize them by shape.

Macaws, usually in pairs, with long tails & wide wings. Parrots in clusters, rounded shapes with stubby wings; ducks with their almost frantic wing flutter; ibis with drooping bills.

Saw chestnut-fronted macaws; great egrets; clouds of swallows; anis; that beautiful bird from the other day with red head, black back, and white front, robin-sized; ^{red-capped cardinal} magenta orchids; and the grey tucuxi dolphins, their sleek backs and dorsal fins rising like mist from the still water.

The early morning breeze and cool air were lovely. Then my stomach began to gurgle ominously. I asked if I could go back to the boat. It was only Mary and me in the canoe, so she moved to another canoe and Joseias

took me back to the big boat, the Dorinha (named for mo's wife). (mo's full name is moises.) On the way back we took a wrong turn and saw a house and boat and family. I'm so curious what it's like for them living out here so isolated.

We retraced our steps and arrived back at 8:30; the others returned at 9. Staying in my room, close to the bathroom, listening to the crew busily cooking and cleaning, and Cris's musical laughter. They lightly clean our cabins most days, emptying garbage, restocking water & t.p., folding the light blanket.

We all marvel at mo's energy. He's 80 years old and can go for hours without even seeming tired.

The falcon we saw this morning turned out to be a laughing falcon.

Some people with diarrhea don't have Covid, so it's a hygiene issue? I miss hearing Godfrey on my Africa trip call out "Hand wash" before every

meal.

Gray dolphins frolicking around the boat.

10:00 canoe trip. An umbrella really helped with the sun. Then we dove into the underbrush, heading for a huge tree containing a harpy eagle nest. It was nice being in the shade. Hacking our way through the brush, things were falling into and onto the boat: leaves, sticks, ants, spiders, lizards, branches, and even tree trunks.

At last the tree came into view, and it was enormous, with buttresses 4 feet wide. We could see the nest way up high. It was big even from 40 feet away. We could hear the screams of the eagle, and then we saw it!

She was sitting a branch staring down at us. Magnificent! We saw her spread her wings and fly. I never imagined I would see one.

We hacked our way out by a different route. The guides were

pushing and paddling and jumping into the water to pull, while we ducked under branches and dodged spines, thorns, and falling debris.

Back at the boat I finally felt hungry and enjoyed chicken, rice, beans, and cucumbers. So far so good, and I will be doing a lot more handwashing!

Osprey on a snag. Very hot.

Mo picked up a local guide to help Josebias. He's a tiny bowlegged Indian man named Parazinu.

Canoe trip at 4 pm. Great time to go out - lots of bird activity and good light. Great views of parrots, including blue-green; several kinds of macaws, incl. blue-and-yellow macaws; a large woodpecker, probably Crimson-crested.

The front boat hit a bee nest and Alex got stung about 20 times, but he said it didn't hurt that much. A blocky-headed lizard about 6 inches long on a tree. Squirrel monkeys leaping about. A Slate-colored Hawk with a red face.

Howlers - the soundtrack of the Amazon

My butt is finally toughening up and I can sit in the canoe for a couple hours fairly comfortably. The canoes are very stable. Back to the boat at 6:20.

Boat at 8 pm. Pitch black. Stars fill the sky. Lightning flashing around the horizon. Thousands of frogs croaking. Cool air, silence, no bugs. Venus as bright as a lightbulb. We were able to get up very close to a roosting nightjar, right at eye level. It made a soft noise kind of halfway ~~betw~~ between a rumble and a croak.

I do have a few bug bites but haven't seen any biting bugs.

Back to the boat at 9:15, ^{Another spectacular} solar sunset.

Too warm in the cabin without AC, too cold with. Woke up sweaty. Headache from stiff neck. Still feeling weak. No energy for Qigong, let alone exercise bike on deck!

Sat June 10

45

Beautiful sky this morning, cloud rainbows, bird chatter, parrots + terns. Decided not to go on the morning hike. Enjoying sitting on deck with a few other people. Pink dolphins fishing around the boat! Cara caras perched nearby. Lots of people unwell. Carmen has a skin inflammation around her eye. I still have diarrhea so I took a dose of azythromycin.

Too warm on deck, so I am in my cabin with AC. Slept some. Skipped the 9:15 boat trip. Those who went fishing returned with about 4 dozen piranhas of all sizes.

At 12:45 the boat unmoored and continued up the river. The breeze was most welcome. About 3 pm we made it to the mouth of the Rio Branco, our turnaround point. At 3:30 we stopped at a sand bank to swim in the rain. The water was 28°C - cool at first, then perfect. The tannic water leaves

your skin soft. The rain + clouds = cooler air + no sunscreen. Thunder rumbling not too far off.

The crew wipes down the deck after every rain.

When we're all up on deck together it's a very energetic vibe! Funny card games, drinks, + lots of laughter. Around the edges people are trying to journal, read, process photos, chat.

We pulled into a stilt village on a side channel. A few dozen wooden houses on pilings about 4 feet above the water. A small store, what appeared to be a restaurant, two churches. Power poles half submerged, satellite dishes, a TV visible through a window.

Our three canoes pulled up to the store and a friendly man came down the stairs and waded into the water to deliver the beers we ordered. Cute kids watching us from doors and windows.

When the river subsides the village

sits on a bank eight feet above the ~~river~~ water.

Mo cut slashes in a rubber tree to show us the white liquid. He says the more you cut the trees the more they produce.

Two domesticated parrots landed on a canoe and played with the mooring ropes. A Harpy Eagle landed in a distant tree.

Back at the boat, dinner at 7:30 I had a small bowl of flavorful soup with rice and a tiny piece of the birthday cake Lily made for Brad. It was cold on the top deck so the "sickos" ate in the dining room.

Tonight I'll try sleeping with the window open to see if it's a more comfortable temperature. The boat is moving down river. The motor is louder with the windows open, but with ear plugs it's a low soporific rumble.

Sun June 11

48

I slept much better with the window open - none of the AC temperature swings from sweltering to freezing.

I dreamed about my dad last night. He was young and handsome in his work suit. He was looking for his Boeing travel pictures so he could prepare for a business trip. He was patient when I couldn't find them, and understanding when he found them, saying he was the one who had misplaced them, not me. It was a lovely dream.

We traveled nine hours last night, with Frajola, Josenias, and Pedro each taking a 3-hour shift.

I waltzed with Lily to La Traviata. She is very sweet but doesn't smile much. Shy maybe.

Toast, jam, milk tiny breakfast then out in the boats at 6. Saw Blue-and-yellow Macaws in the top of a tree,

preening each other. Their cawing sounds like ravens. Iguana in top of tree, his belly hanging down between branches. Lianas like harp strings. Great views of Black-throated and green-backed Trogons. Tiny Antbird (Dusky?), all black. A chubby squirrel dived into a tree cavity. Red-capped Cardinal. Gorgeous colorful Olive Oropendulas.

At last we got to meet mo's son, Junior, with his entourage of three cawes, filled with mostly older-looking clients. (Like us!)

A two-toed sloth, Manco climbed a tree to encourage it to move so we could get a better look and see how much faster it moves than a 3-toed.

By now it was 9:15. Breakfast was supposed to be at 9. It was hot, we had to pee. We asked to go back to the boat. mo just wanted to see "one more thing." He has amazing energy! He showed us a passionflower blossom - it

was gorgeous and smelled great.

Back to boat at 9:30. I had a headache. Breakfast, Black Hawk Eagle sighting, then to my cabin. Hoping my headache will abate. After about an hour the boat stopped so we could go look for Moon Flowers, but my head hurt too much.

We pulled into Novo Airão about 3pm. 85° felt like 100+ in the sun. After catching up on email + messages, I walked into town. It's Sunday, so almost everything was closed. There were dozens of kids playing in the water. I sat in the shade and watched and enjoyed a small tapioca "picole" popsicle for R2 (40¢). One side of the water was little kids and early teens. The older teens swam and dove from the main pier, flirting and shrieking like teens anywhere. Thunder rumbled, clouds covered the sky, it rained a bit, and the temperature dropped. I loved just sitting and observing -

everyone ignored me. Then I walked up the hill (on a nice sidewalk) to see colorful ~~stucco~~ stucco houses with tile decorations, guest houses, a few stores selling basic food items, some closed shops, and signs about Anavilhanas National Park. This town, accessible by car from Manaus (as well as by boat) appears to be the gateway to the park.

At 5:15 we canoed to "Amazonia Park & Suites", a land lodge owned by mo's family. En route we drove past many house boats, hotels, and simple wooden houses along the shore. The canoes dropped us off and we climbed a hill to the lodge grounds. A lovely compound with a small swimming pool and restaurant. We swam for a while, then walked the grounds to meet the resident tarantulas. They live in the palm trees and all have names.

On the way in the canoes we saw many cacique birds building nests and making charming burbling noises.

We met Mo's wife, Darinha, his daughter, and other family members. Finally, at 8pm, we had a buffet dinner of salad, fish, stroganoff, and chocolate-passionfruit mousse. The food was excellent. We paid an extra \$15 each. After a short walk to look for an elusive pygmy owl we piled into the canoes and got back to the boat at 9:30.

Mo loves opera and played several short videos before dinner. Can't say it's growing on me.

I was regretting not bringing a hand fan, but today they showed us some rubbery leaves that work great. I picked one and have been keeping it handy.

Mon June 12

53

I dreamed about dad again. I was connecting him with an old friend of his who was eager to see him.

Today we were awoken by Pavarotti singing Moon River. Such a great song. It's been swirling through my head all day.

Saw a Gray-lined Hawk perched on a snag. Tantalizing glimpse of a hummingbird with an iridescent blue-green back. Great view of an adorable Paradise Jacamar.

We went back to the andiroba oil family's house. The baby's name is Josue. We picked up the dad, who took us on an adventure through the flooded forest to look for giant palm trees. A thin water trail weaves through the forest, no hacking needed. I was sad to see an oil sheen on the surface of the water, from boat motors.

It was 9:15 when we saw the first giant palms. At this point the

vegetation grew tangled. Mo reluctantly agreed to turn around, even though he deeply wanted to "get lost among the giant palms." We retraced our path and got back to the boat at 10:15. Breakfast! Lily made a beautiful watermelon fruit carved basket. Bruce's GPS said we went 7 miles in 4 hours. Poor Josenias only got 2 hours of sleep last night because Frajola was sick and someone needed to drive the boat.

The people in the rear boats were coughing from breathing motor smoke. The guide, Betu, was in our ^{lead} boat so we had no idea how everyone else was suffering. By the time we got back my tailbone was screaming. But it was so beautiful in the forest. Primordial and magical.

Sky got accidentally kicked in the rib in the swimming pool yesterday and thinks his rib might be broken.

Lots of pain.

The family today had a pet white-throated toucan hopping around uncaged.

I napped til 12:30, then lunch at 1:00 (in mo's charming meal announcements he calls the dining area the Rainbow Restaurant). Nice cooked veggie platter plus rice, beans, chicken, watermelon.

Suddenly I have a bunch of bug bites. 89° at 2 pm. Strong breeze on deck kept it tolerable. We docked at 3 pm in Manaus. Still a light breeze on deck but too hot. AC in dining room. Not sure what we're going to do here for 24 hours.

About 7 people left to spend the night in a hotel. We each paid a \$200 tip (10%), and \$30 to cover last night's dinner plus the dolphin & Indian dance visits.

Mary Z's mom is dying and Mary was so happy to get to talk to her mom by video today.

Kids flying paper kites on the docks
Soup and toast for dinner at 7:30. Mo
has pretty much disconnected, and it
was hard to figure out what's going
to happen tomorrow. A shower felt great.

Wed June 13

77° at 6 am. Light breakfast at
8. Cindy, Cathy, and I took an Uber to
town for a break from the boat. They
wanted to buy a few more gifts. I bought
a colorful wooden trivet for R20 (\$4).

It was nice to have time to peruse. Many
beautiful baskets and other handmade
items. We were the only tourists in sight.
We walked to the waterfront to look at
the fish, then to the fish market.
Then we explored the food market.
Many interesting fruits and tubers.
Too hot to walk much. A lot of homeless
people sleeping on cardboard. Really sad.

85° feels like 96°. Cindy bought some beer for the crew, then we caught an Uber and were back at the boat at 11.

Lunch at noon: fish, rice, veggies, and flan.

Tearful goodbyes to the staff. Cris was especially choked up. It's her first trip and she isn't used to ^{goodbyes} ~~the~~ like the rest of the staff probably are. On the shuttle before 2 pm. I'm ready to leave this sticky heat!

We passed some fancy supermarkets. There must be wealthy people in this city and I'd be curious to see their homes and neighborhoods. The parts of the city we saw were rundown and economically struggling. Gas \$5 a gallon.

Arrived airport 2:30. No security line. They didn't flag my water. Interesting to people watching. A Brazilian National Soccer team is here. Some expensive souvenir shops.

I noticed a lot of people with tattoos in Manaus. One of our crew members is

tattooed. It was three hours on a regional jet with hard seats to São Paulo.

I watched two movies. They served tasty whole-grain cookies.

It was a long walk to our gate, which felt great after so much sitting. We had to go through security again, since we were transferring from domestic to international.

We lifted off for Fort Lauderdale around midnight. I had an aisle seat with no one next to me. I slept for most of the 8-hour trip, waking for the tasty dinner (beef, rice, veggies, salad, dessert), and breakfast (warm cheese pastry, peach yogurt, muffin).

Customs was a breeze for us citizens - no line. Since I didn't check bags I was out of there in 20 mins. I waited for Mary & Cindy, since we are all catching the same flight. We took the shuttle to Terminal 1, but the ~~at~~ check-in desk wasn't open. So we walked back to Terminal 3 (you have to go outside -

there are no indoor connections between the 4 terminals) to an Escape lounge.

A \$45 day pass includes food, drinks, wifi, couches, and mellow music. I was thrilled to get fruit, yogurt, and granola for breakfast! We got here about 9:30. They also have a shower. →

Notes for this trip:

- Long hours between meals; consider bringing a stash of granola bars
- The canoe pads are hard; consider an inflatable cushion
- Umbrella is great for sun in canoes
- I took motion sickness pills every day
- Cabins are small, so pack light
- Clotheslines on top deck with pins
- Exercise bike on deck, but it's hot. Other than climbing boat stairs, there is very little exercise.

Lunch included taco^{salad}, bar, vegan meatballs, salad with kalamatas + blue cheese, chips, beans. The food is good. Half a dozen workers are bussing dishes and cleaning tables + floors. The lounge holds 318 people.

Not a single flight delay on this whole trip. Aisle seat 33D. Flight arrived 45 minutes early at 9:20. Home by 10:30.

People on trip

Sky - organizer, native flute, harmonica
Kanab UT

Jolynn - Mexico, 76, partner not on trip,
Ensenada, Mulege. Son died brain cancer
11 yrs ago. Daughter P.D. 10 kids estranged.
Mandala art. Birds.

Kathy - Beaverton, friend of Mary,
once married a Mormon

Carolyn - German, lives in ^{Eugene} Oregon,
married to Helen's son ^{Christopher}, homesteader,
herbalist, bread baker, tattoos, piercings,
long red hair, hash business

Helen - mystic CT, 64, heel cancer,
brain tumor affects motor skills, ^{tremor}
retired corporate exec, cannabis activist,
music organizer, husband bladder cancer,

→ Alex ^{Chisholm} - 63, professional musician, festival organizer, inner city community center program manager Vancouver CA

→ Carmen ^{Rosen} - 63, artist, musician, Vancouver CA

Cindy ^{Blue} - widowed 20 yrs, one son, two grandsons, Medford OR

→ Bruce - Tucson, retired Microsoft, RAM Promaster

→ Julianne (Juli) -

→ Pat DeGraaf
Michigan

→ Rick DeGraaf
~~Brad~~ -

Janet Arnold - widowed 10 years, from CA,
RV full time, big wave surf watcher,
retired nurse, heel pain

→ Cathy McKenzie - Son given up for adoption
found her when he was 50, has daughter,
successful back cyst surgery
Kanab, prev. Seattle

→ Brad - They met 1.5 yrs ago when she
sold him her car. Retired Air Force videographer
Kanab. outdoorsperson.

Colin Brown - IT, Nola, 19yo son, single many years, wicked sense of humor, loud life of party, story teller, drinker

Sid Weiss - Retired naturopath, Buddhist, does Chi Gong and meditates

Staff

Cris - ^{soys}chef; tiny wide jolly woman; she was so excited to see the Indigenous people and said it was her first time. This is her first trip on the boat

Lily - pastry chef

Valder - 13 yrs on boat; up to 28 days at a time

(Antonio)

Frajola - Pilot, has a bed in the wheelhouse
6 yrs on this boat, speaks Spanish

Josenias (Joe-zeh-nee-us) - 33 yrs old,
6 years on the boat, lives alone in Manaus
2nd oldest of 6 boys, has boat pilot license, loves
his job

Pedro - 15 years on boat

Manoel (Maneo) - 26 years old, 3rd trip
on boat

Cleide - bartender, runs dining room
10 yrs on boat

Parazinu - for June 9