

GENTRY DESTINATIONS

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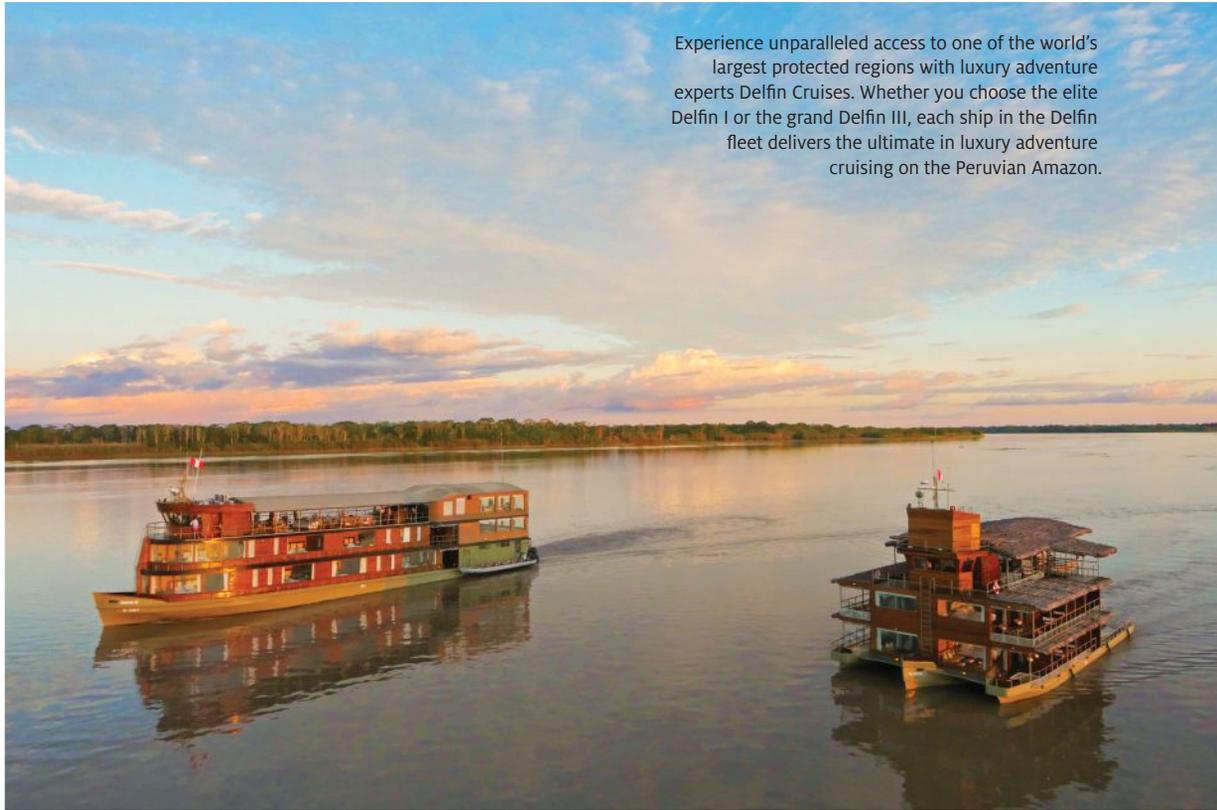


WELCOME TO THE

STORY BY CORRY COOK

JUNGLE

Unforgettable days in a world seldom seen.



Experience unparalleled access to one of the world's largest protected regions with luxury adventure experts Delfin Cruises. Whether you choose the elite Delfin I or the grand Delfin III, each ship in the Delfin fleet delivers the ultimate in luxury adventure cruising on the Peruvian Amazon.

There it is, I thought, that wonderful little tug on the line that brightens every fisherman's heart. "I got one!" I exclaimed in triumph. Yet, as I began to pull my catch up from below the water's surface, a spark of fear flushed my cheeks. It suddenly occurred to me that catch-and-release might actually be a bad thing when you're fishing for piranhas in the Amazon River. But first, some context: The kids made me do it.

When it comes to luxury travel, I love changing my personality. Life is about evolution and the beauty of transformation. Whether natural and subtle, or sudden and unexpected, change is good. No doubt my stepsons would be horrified to hear tales of my days spent sunbathing topless in France, dancing on tables in Greece, and living on limoncello and Gucci in Italy. But these are travel personalities of the past, and now we look to the future together.

As we pore over my trusty world map, with its hard creases and torn corners, the boys make the world seem almost new, filled with endless majesty and hidden adventures that remain unexplored. Through their eyes, the world is electrified with endless beauty, exciting new faces, and undiscovered knowledge. Young and unstoppable, they want it all. That includes a hint of mystery, or even danger, that sparks the senses and causes the heart to flutter at the sight of something entirely unique.

The stories I brought home from a recent assignment for *Gentry Destinations* involving plenty of glamour at the legendary Country Club Hotel Lima and thrills on Delfin Cruises' most luxurious Amazon river voyage, elevated my status with my stepsons from a mild-mannered globetrotter to an exotic adventure legend. Welcome to the jungle . . .

STYLISH AND IRRESISTIBLE LIMA

The main gateway to Peru, Lima is a city bustling with living history and movement. Founded in 1532 by the conquistador Francisco Pizarro, this ethnic melting pot features pre-Hispanic, colonial, and modern elements. Home to almost one-third of Peru's total population, Lima is the seat of the national government and the financial, industrial, and commercial center of the country. Its various quarters combined make a city of more than 8 million souls with an active nightlife and a well-endowed cultural scene.

Perfectly situated in the lively center of San Isidro, The Country Club Lima Hotel is just a 10-minute walk from the ocean and faces the Lima Golf Club. A regal fixture in the San Isidro embassy district, the Country Club Lima Hotel claims distinction as Peru's only hotel and national monument. First built in 1927, the hotel underwent a 15-month room redesign led by designer Francisco López Bustos in 2017. The hotel's history is linked intimately with the development and splendor of Lima. It was a popular polo and golf destination for British viceroys and aristocracy, including the former Duke of Windsor, Edward VIII.

Today, Country Club Lima continues as one of the city's most exclusive hotels, renowned for its excellent service and a favorite of international travelers and the region's high society and celebrities. Each guest is met with white-gloved attention and expert care as attendants adroitly glide them in and out of their cars with unflinching attention to detail and decorum. Arriving at the hotel is a see-and-be-seen moment, so be sure to dress the part.

With open wood-beam ceilings and design elements that respect the hotel's admired architecture and international status for comfort and elegance, guests step into a true South American palace. Distinguished by its innovative style and sophisticated ambiance, the hotel boasts 83 guestrooms and suites decorated



with a mix of classical and Peruvian artworks. Murals serve as the focal point of each room and were crafted by Peruvian artist Gihan Tubbeh. These new designs join the more than 300 pieces of art on loan from the Pedro de Osma Museum displayed throughout the hotel in public spaces and guestrooms.

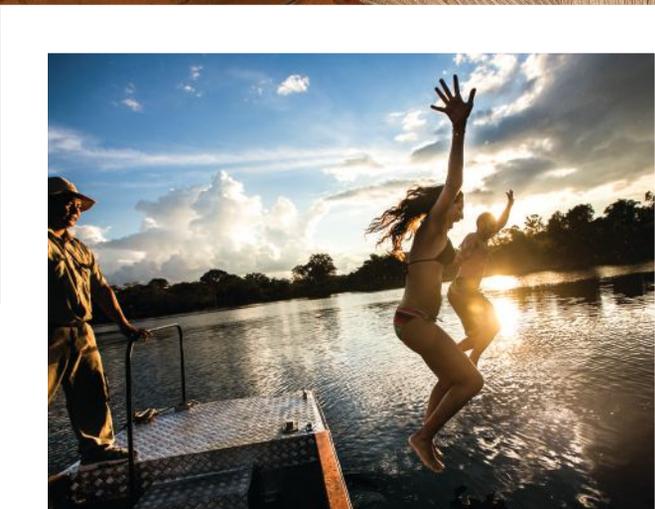
A note for Orchidists: Peru has an estimated 3,500 varieties of orchids, and when I visited the stunning lobby at the Country Club Lima Hotel, it was adorned with the most incredible selection of the gorgeous flower.

A WARM AND WILD PERUVIAN AMAZON RIVER

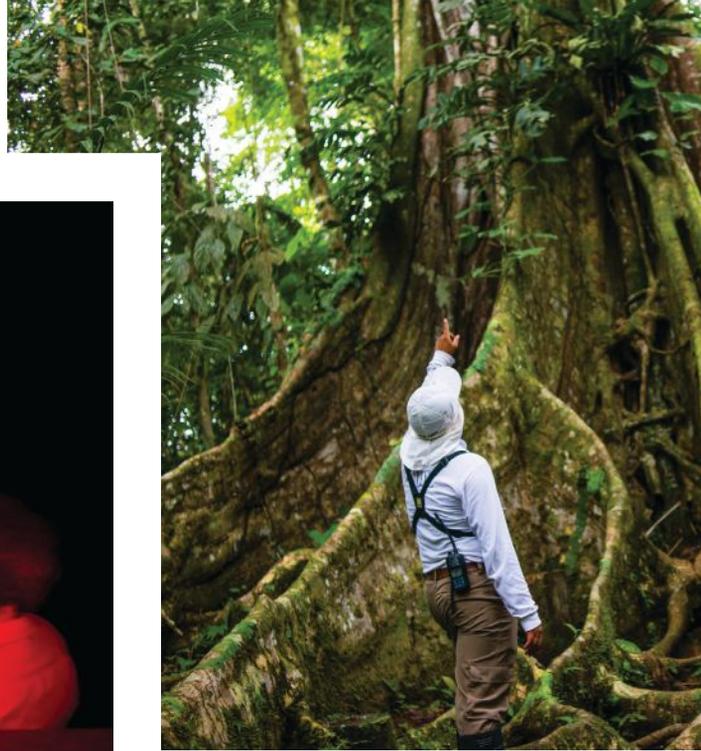
After a short flight from Lima to Iquitos, my fellow passengers and I made our way towards the Amazon River with great excitement to begin our first-class journey with Delfin Amazon Cruises. Already the second-longest river in the world (after the Nile), nowadays the Amazon is the world's largest river by water flow, pouring out an astonishing 12,540,000 cubic meters of water every minute. At Nauta, a small riverside town on the banks of the Marañón River, I took my first look at the Delfin I and beamed with delight.

Thankfully, despite being miles away from civilization, it is actually possible to travel like a king in the middle of the Amazon. The vessel has been tastefully and beautifully appointed in sustainable hard woods, colorful, handmade Peruvian textiles, and ancient tools and artwork from local villages. The ship has been exquisitely finished with the finest details, hardwood floors, designer furniture, and handmade Peruvian artifacts. At 170 feet, this intimate yet spacious river-ship is uniquely capable of providing an unforgettable Amazon River experience.





The newly renovated Country Club Lima Hotel embodies the rich history and traditions of Peru perfectly complemented by exceptional suites, amenities, and dining. Just an hour's flight away, your Delfin Cruise ship awaits. Nature has never been more beautiful from the Delfin's stunning suites, including your terrace views, and your own private indoor/outdoor jacuzzis.



Delfin Cruises provides epic access to the wonders of the Pacaya Samaria National Reserve, one of the world's largest protected forests, by boat and on foot through delightfully customized itineraries. Things to do and see include paddle boarding, night safaris, nature hikes and wild-life spotting. For the truly brave, fishing for the infamous red belly piranha is not to be missed.



The third deck features an entertainment center and a well-equipped bar. Sip your beverage as you take in the beautiful Amazonian afternoons or, in-between evening dips in the ship's glorious outdoor Jacuzzi, with the sweet breeze and the sounds and smells of the rainforest.

That night, not long after the ship's engine began to churn, we stopped for a glorious Delfin tradition. Our hosts invited us for an evening adventure, so we went out on skiffs to witness the "Unión de los Ríos," the magical merging of the Ucayali River with the Marañón River to form what countries other than Brazil consider to be the main stem of the Amazon River. As the sun dropped below the horizon, our hosts played guitars and we toasted over glorious pisco. Peru is warm and welcoming, just like its people, and the Delfin Cruises team is incredibly attentive and generous to visitors, with their knowledge, culinary skills, big smiles, and many celebrations. I could live a lifetime and never forget my first Amazon River Cruise sunset.



FISHING FOR PIRANHAS

Neither will I forget my first Amazon River fishing experience.

With a piece of driftwood serving as a makeshift pole, I took the raw meat from my guide and attached it to crude hook. As I lowered my pole into the water, I saw piranhas grabbing for the meat, swimming around the bait hard, and flicking their bodies against each other to muscle out other competitors. After each catch was pulled from the water, the bravest naturalist heroes I've ever met plucked the keepers off for the cooler and tossed furiously snapping little ones back into the water, their hands clearly weathered from doing this daring work daily.

The Amazon rainforest is an immense ecosystem, providing a habitat for creatures as drop-dead gorgeous as the jaguar, as bizarre as the poison dart frog, and as downright frightening as the green anaconda snake. But it's home to more than just the animals that prowl, swing, and slither on land. In the depths of the Amazon River, there are live creatures equal parts astounding and terrifying, such as the giant centipede, bull shark, and a type of electric eel that is capable of generating up to 600 volts through its electrocyte cells (that's five times more electricity than in the standard wall socket).

Thankfully, piranhas are not the insane devouring savages they've been made out to be. Visions of bad old movies with piranhas savagely ripping flesh down to the bone

within seconds were false. In reality, unless there are 1,000 of them and they haven't eaten for days, an encounter will feel more like a nip here and there, rather than certain death. Mosquitos, however, mean business, so it's important to cover every bit of skin in lightweight clothing and slather DEET at every opportunity.

WRESTLING ALLIGATORS IN THE DARK

In between wonderful meals, drinks at the bar, and dips in the Delfin I's outdoor hot tub, luxury adventure travelers will trek along ancient paths that wind through different ecosystems and observe



out-of-this-world flora and fauna of indescribable beauty. In a country that is home to more than 500 species of mammals, of which 70 are endemic and close to 100 are threatened, vulnerable, or endangered, a gorgeous creature is close at hand at all times.

Delfin's team of guides and naturalists are adept at satisfying every desire when it comes to wildlife spotting, including a vast array of gorgeous birds, Amazon monkeys, three-toed sloths, technicolor avians, giant otters, and much more.



In the blackest night you can imagine, my fellow passengers and I boldly agreed to more time in our skiff for a night safari cruise. As our guides expertly maneuvered us further into the Pacaya Samiria National Reserve, one of the world's largest protected flooded forests, our fear and exhilaration surged in equal measure. As our slender metal skiff

glided quietly through the water, we absorbed a nature lover's paradise through our ears, with endless sounds of the rugged jungle in every direction.

"We are looking for alligators," our guide Rico explained. "What?!" I asked, being quite sure I heard him wrong. Then he reached over the boat, and in complete darkness, he wrangled a small alligator (3 feet) out of the water with his bare hands. "Go ahead, touch it," he said with great confidence. As it flipped and struggled trying to free itself, the alligator's eyes glowed with the small light of our boat. Thankfully this was a baby, but where was its mother? A black caiman is basically an alligator on steroids. Oh, and yes, they totally attack humans.

BEAUTY ABOVE AND BELOW

Our nighttime adventure over—with no sightings of mama alligator—we embarked on a day of river outings that will be forever locked in my mind. Led by guides Kato and Marco, we made our way to one of the mainstream flood plains where the Giant Amazon water lily resides. Every inch of this marvelous plant except the surface of the pad and the flower petals themselves is covered with sharp spines—a defense against aquatic grazers.

Among the many beautiful animals to spot in the Amazon is the highly protected boto, or the Pink River Dolphin, as it is more commonly known. These creatures can be found frolicking in the Amazon basins in Bolivia and Peru. Shrouded in mystery and legend, the Pink River Dolphins have escaped much hunting due to a local superstitious belief that they possess supernatural powers. At first glance, the boto appears light grey in color, yet when it gets excited it blushes a soft hue of pink. As luck would have it,

these stupendous creatures were close enough to touch more than once during my journey.

Activities later that day included hiking on the Fundo Casual Jungle Trail and a stop at Amazon Park, home to the heart-pounding Canopy Walkway. Suspended between 14 of the area's largest rainforest trees, the walkway is one of the longest in the world. At a height of over 85 feet and extending nearly a mile, it provides a view of the rainforest from the treetops, the best vantage points for observing Amazon wildlife and vegetation.

THE WORLD'S GREATEST BUBBLES

Back at the Country Club Lima Hotel, I was bathing, literally, in the lap of luxury. Created in collaboration with the world's most prestigious bubbly, the exclusive Dom Pérignon Suite experience practically bubbles over with exquisite details, including views overlooking San Isidro Golf Club, a large outdoor terrace, and interior space with living room, dining room, walk-in closet, two marble *en suite* bathrooms with Jacuzzis, and a master bedroom with a king-size bed.

After conquering the Amazon, I have to admit that the complimentary VIP services fit like a glove, including luxury airport transfer, private in-room check-in and check-out experience, welcome caviar upon arrival, butler service upon request, and one bottle of Dom Pérignon 2009 every night during the stay. Never have I appreciated a Jacuzzi bath this much.

At the hotel's English Bar, award-winning pisco sour is the drink of choice. Triumphant and glowing, I took a seat at the gorgeous mahogany bar for excellent people watching, one of these glorious libations, and my third *ceviche* of the day for dessert.

Upon its arrival in 1927, the English Bar was a favorite celebrity haunt, frequented by famed literary luminaries Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner and Peruvian writer Alfredo Bryce Echenique, as well as stars such as John Wayne, Ava Gardner, and more. Today, that tradition continues, with the rich and famous enjoying free-flowing pisco sours and outstanding Peruvian cuisine known for both its incredible flavoring as well as its variety. The *ceviche* is not to be missed: bite-size pieces of raw fish marinated in lemon juice, onion, and ajichili pepper, garnished with corn on the cob and sweet potato.

It came as no surprise to me when my bartender, Raquel, told me that the ancient Peruvians would often bury food with their dead, believing that it would help sustain them on their journey to the next life. When I go, I'd want to take some for the road, too. ♦





After a final day of giant lily pads and wildlife close encounters on the Peruvian Amazon River, the stylish and fashionable Country Club Lima Hotel and its new Dom Pérignon Suite awaits. Enjoy the bubbles and views before one last special meal. No trip to Lima is complete without ceviche and Pisco Sour in the Bar Ingles.

