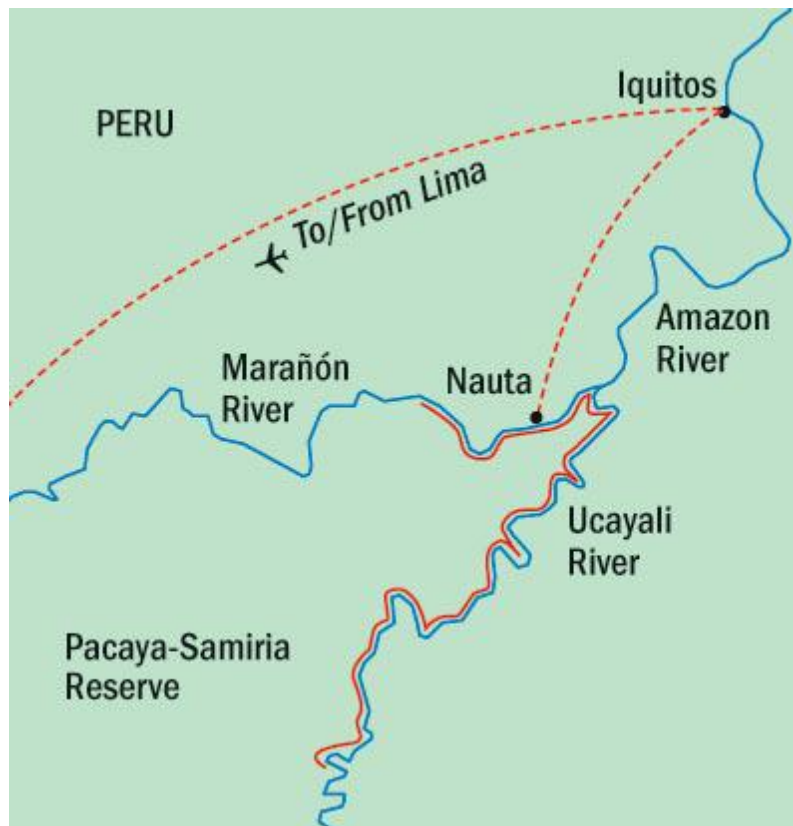


## Upper Amazon River

*Most of the photos in this document were taken by Lynn Sunstein-Fox. In addition, several of the photos were provided through the generosity of our fellow explorers on the Delfin II, Jon and Kat Dailey of Montgomery, Alabama.*

From May 12, 2012 through May 20, 2012, Lynn and I were part of an expedition in Peru exploring parts of the upper Amazon River rainforest. This region is bounded by the Marañón and Ucayali Rivers, the confluence of which form the Amazon River proper near Iquitos, Peru. Much of the area comprises the Pacaya-Samiria National Reserve, the second largest reserve in Peru. The expedition was organized by Lindblad/National Geographic and had 26 participants, mostly from the United States.



In July of 2005 Lynn, my brother Tom and I went on the Lindblad expedition to the Galapagos Islands off the coast of Ecuador. That trip was aboard the Polaris, a functional, but not too comfortable ship, serving food that was just

palatable. The trip was characterized by the fantastic animals and the alien volcanic setting of the islands. The recent Amazon trip was aboard the Delfin II, a sumptuously comfortable ship that served gourmet Peruvian meals. Nevertheless, for me the highlights were the skiff rides into the rainforest that occurred three times a day. The skiffs are motor powered and have 5 rows of two seats each. With three skiffs, and usually a few non-participants, we had plenty of room to take along our cameras, binoculars, backpacks, life vests and guides.

May is the time of year when the rainy season has just ended and the vast flooded forests begin to drain. About three weeks prior to our trip the rainy season water depths peaked and when we were there one could easily see that water levels had only receded by 2-3 feet. This still left from 6 to over 50 feet to go for various locales. That's a lot of water and it is manifested by the fact that the Amazon River accounts for 20 % of all the fresh water in the world. There is some debate over whether the Nile River or the Amazon River is longer, both being close to 4,000 miles long. However if you add on the Ucayali and Apurimac rivers to the the Amazon River proper you get a length over 4,345 miles whereas adding the Kagera to the Nile only gives 4,258 miles, and in any case the volume of water in the Amazon dwarfs that in the Nile. Both the Ucayali and the Marañon are large rivers in themselves.

There is some debate too about the origin of the name, Amazon. In ancient Greek times there was a warrior class of female archers who lopped off their right breasts in order to draw their bows and shoot arrows with precision. In Greek they were *a-mazon*, "without a breast." Early Spanish explorers of Peru encountered fierce native warriors. In 1542 Francisco de Orellana, a lieutenant of Gonzalo Pizarro, explored the region and later reported the defeat of the Spanish invaders by the Icamiba "women." Our native guides aboard the Delfin II told us that they believe the warriors met by the Spanish were Yagua Indians who used vegetation to make "grass" dresses and jerseys and "grass" headwear that looked like long hair. They could easily have been mistaken for women, indeed in profile as *a-mazon* women. Their preferred weapon was the blowgun with which they were very adept.

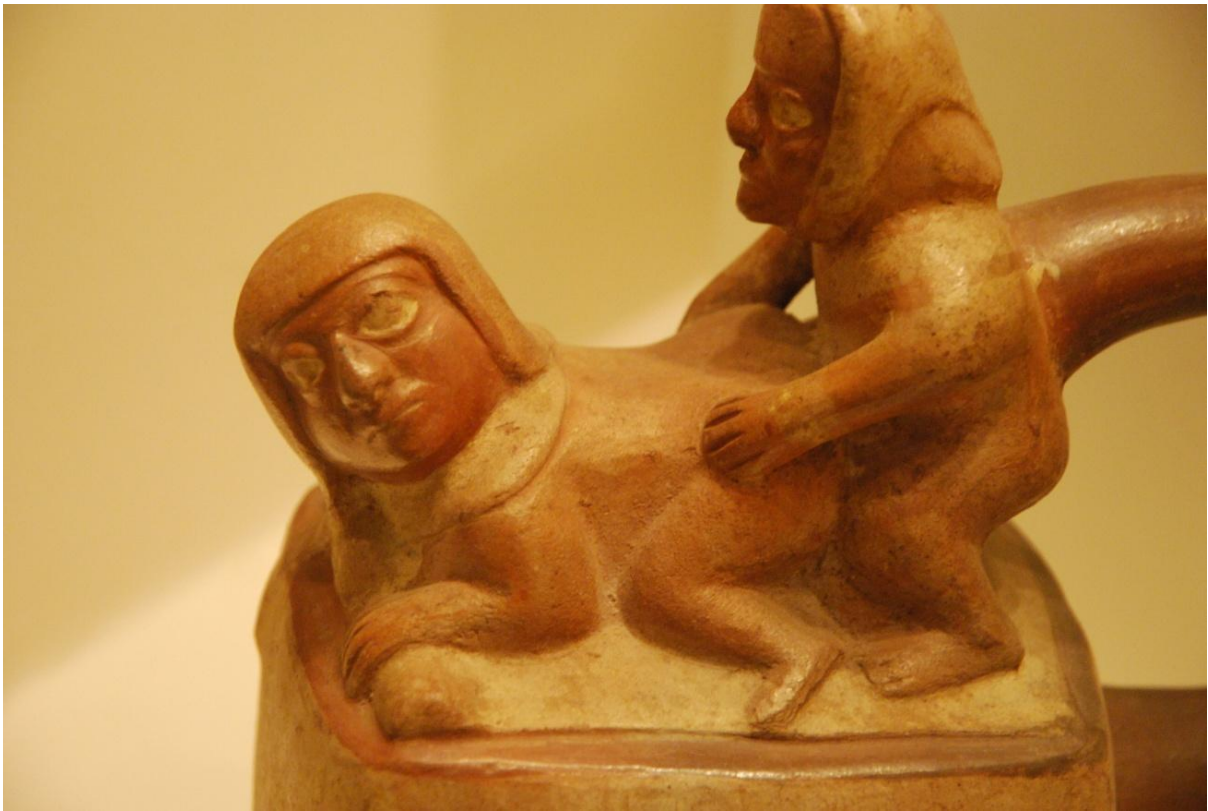
Our trip began on May 12 when we flew to Lima by way of Miami. Lima is the capital city of Peru with over 10 million persons in the greater metropolitan area. It is [densely](#) populated with over 3,000 persons per square kilometer. Its elevation is from sea level up to just under one mile high, which exhibits how rapidly the Andes Mountains rise up from the Pacific Ocean coastline. We got to Lima in the evening and very conveniently spent the night at the Ramada Hotel across the street from the airport international arrival center.

Sunday, May 13 was *Dias de las Madres*. This turns out to be a good excuse for the men to drink alcoholic beverages. We did a bus tour of a small bit of Lima, which was possible because that morning there was little traffic, rather than the usual gridlock. We visited a house owned by direct descendants of a conquistador. From the street you would not have guessed the magnificence inside the house. Beautiful mahogany, cedar and oak furniture, walling, staircases and other accessories were in every room. All the wood was from Central American even though it could have come from Peru.



Next we visited the Larco Museum of pre-Columbian Art. This private museum houses perhaps the finest collection of Moche pottery anywhere on Earth, as well as fabrics, metal works in gold and silver and other artifacts. The Moche culture lasted over 600 years (AD 100-750). The pottery is more like sculpture rather than cylindrically symmetric pottery made on a spinning wheel. It is highly refined and exquisitely executed in detail. Having no written records, these ceramics sometimes served as instructional material. This fact was made very apparent in the *Sala Erotica*. In this room a *Kama Sutra* of positions was exhibited, as well as many other configurations such as medical conditions related to child birth, venereal disease, auto-eroticism, and how to make babies. This information extended to other species, such as monkeys and mice, all in the form of ceramics. I have been a fan of Moche pottery since the mid 60s.









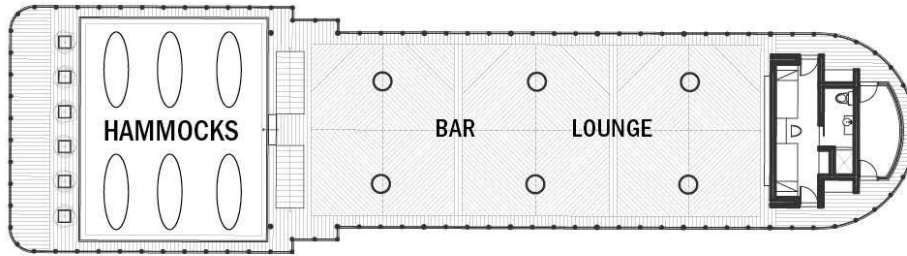
We flew north by northeast over the Andes to Iquitos, near the confluence of the Marañón and the Ucayali rivers, and then rode a bus to Nauta, a city of order 20,000 on the Marañón. The vehicle of choice in these parts is the gas powered tricycle with a roof. Besides the road between Iquitos and Nauta there are no other roads into or out of the region. The highways here are the rivers. By 7 pm we were boarding the Delfin II. Our cabin was spacious with a comfortable large bed, a bathroom, a closet and personally controlled air conditioning. The shower was based on the tankless hot water strategy which meant you had sole usage of your own hot water and the boat had a very modern water purification system so that river water provided an endless supply of water. The toilets were standard flush toilets but the piping was narrow and prompted the staff to leave a printed card on top of a roll of toilet paper which contained the sentence: “Please discard all toilet paper & waste in the bin next to the toilet.” At first the word, waste, threw me. Was I to fish out #2 from the toilet bowl and throw it in the bin? Surely they had in mind chewing gum wrappers and the like. The Spanish version read: “*No botar el papel higiénico en el inodoro.*” This was unambiguous. We were in bed early so we would be well rested for the 6 am wakeup knock tomorrow (knock, not call;



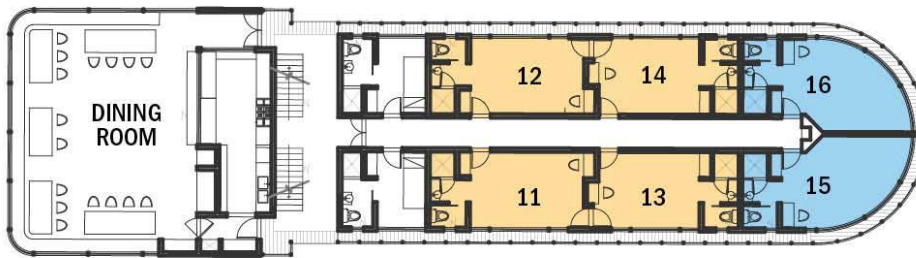
there were no telephones). The first skiff ride would be at 6:30 am so we could see and hear the birds getting fully active.



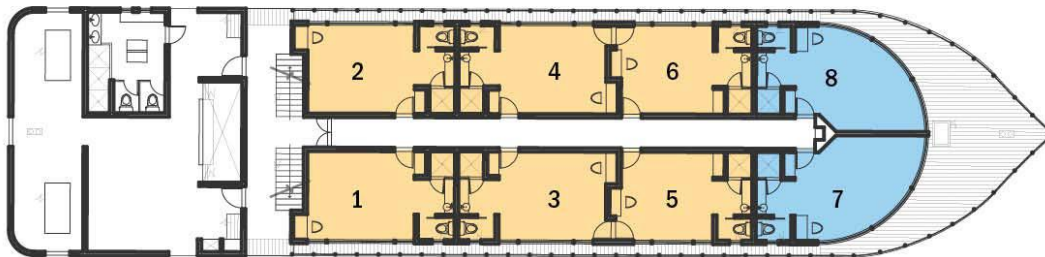
Our cabin is number 6 on the first deck. In the picture above, our window is just above and to the left of the head of the man tying up a skiff. A schematic of the entire boat is shown below.



**TOP DECK**



**UPPER DECK**



**MAIN DECK**

Monday, May 14 was our first full day of exploration. At 6:30 am we boarded the skiffs to explore one of the cañons, a small black water creek. Black water is clear but loaded with tannins from the trees so that it looks like dark tea or coca cola. Its counterpart is called white water, but has nothing to do with the white water rapids familiar to river rafters. Instead, here white water is muddy water looking very much like coffee and cream. Moreover all of the water we were to encounter was smooth and often glassy, reflecting like a mirror, except for a bit of very small turbulence in the center of the big rivers.