

Greetings from Copa- Copacabana! Lots to say about this place- but before I do, I thought I'd catch you up on the jungle junket first.

My four days off the grid were amazing. It reminded me of my travels pre-texting, email, internet and Facebook. A place in time when you just couldn't google shit- you had to be resourceful and figure things out on your own! That is a skill worth having and I hope never to lose.

So, first, some facts about the Amazon. The Amazon River Basin has more water than the next eight largest rivers combined, is twice the area of India, and spans eight countries. It is 4000 miles long and yet, there is not one bridge that crosses it. The Amazon also produces a whopping 20% of all total oxygen on earth!

There is something special and unique about being in a place that is so simple and authentic and yet incredibly exotic at the same time. The Dolphin Amazon lodge itself was comfortable, rustic and adventurous, but what really contributed to the great experience were the people – not just the local women who proudly prepared their best creations for our Christmas Eve dinner, or the guy who joyfully squeezed and muddled dozens of limes for our daily (\$1.50) caipirinhas...or the guides who intensely scoured the tree-lines for sloths and birds to point out, but also the other guests. In a small place like this, especially if you are like me traveling solo, the other guests can have a huge impact on your experience....and often not a good one! This group however was super cool, interesting and fun. There was one family of four from Tennessee- their first time out of the country- the lodge was a stopover on their way to see a cousin that was in Manaus doing missionary work. The 15-year-old boy had a geeky MacGyver meets Rambo kind of enthusiastic vibe and the 13-year-old girl was sweet with a calm curiosity. There were two other solo travelers- Luciano- an Italian architect living in Switzerland and Flavia- a young woman from Sao Paulo. Rounding out the group were six post- graduate mates from Europe- half of whom were Italian...all having recently finished their Ph.D.'s in subject of things way beyond my understanding...like biological neurology! But they were energetic, happy and very funny. Yes, I was the eldest person there by probably a good decade- but 30-year-old bohemian soul felt right at home!

Each day we had a morning and afternoon excursion either riding in the boats or trekking through the jungle. I saw a lot of birds including parrots and parakeets, three different kinds of monkeys, caiman (which are like alligators) and the illusive pink river dolphins...yes- dolphins- who knew they swam in the Amazon basin and were pink! We also kayaked and swam in the river- a little nervously I must admit- knowing there were caiman, piranhas and anacondas mucking about! Click on the pictures for more comments.

Brasilia

I have never been one for spending too much time in the cities when I travel- I'd much prefer to be outside doing something adventurous, but since I usually have to fly in and out of the cities, I tend to do some exploring. Brasilia is about halfway from Manaus (the jungle area) to Rio. I decided to stop there as it is a UNESCO world heritage site. For those of you unfamiliar- UNESCO is a UN-related organization that designates sites (natural or manmade) as having cultural, historical, scientific or other form of significance, and is legally protected by international treaties. The sites are judged important to the collective interests of humanity. 1,092 World Heritage Sites exist across 167 countries. I believe Brasilia is the only city built since the 20th century to receive the designation. It was chosen because of its unique urban planning and modern architecture. The city was built from scratch from 1956-1961 at the orders of Brazil's newly elected president, Juscelino Kubitschek, who wanted to move the capital from Rio to the center of the country. If you google Brasilia, you can read a lot more about the design of the city - it's quite interesting. What's more interesting however is the architecture- practically all the major buildings were designed by Oscar Niemeyer, (architect of the UN building in NYC). The city looks straight out of the Jetsons and super cool.

When I arrived in Brasilia, my number one priority was to get to a computer shop as for some reason, mine would not start. I located a repair shop and called an Uber who took me to the other side of town. The guy did not speak very much English- but he offered to take me around for a tour for \$20 for two hours- and he just happened to be part of the newly elected Brazil's president's secret service (the Trump of the Tropics he's called). Because of this, we got to drive a little closer to some monuments that were closed off due to the president's upcoming inauguration January 1. It's also possible he knew I was SALT- and thought it best to keep an eye on me! Ricardo ended up

spending half the day with me then and taking me back to get my computer and to the airport again the day after. He says he makes almost as much money moonlighting on Uber as he does his main job. I am not a huge architect buff- but I did enjoy seeing these unique buildings and getting to stay in one as my hotel was also built by Niemeyer.

Rio

Rio is complex. The beaches and scenery alone are beautiful and the esplanade along them rival those of the south of France, but here, it's interlaced with a veneer of dirty grit that makes it hard to really fully appreciate it. It's noisy. Everywhere- all the time. The beaches are extremely crowded- and there are vendors haggling everything from sunglasses and sarongs, to beer and burgers. There is no modesty when it comes to bathing suit- men walk around in unlined skimpy bottoms and neither age, weight nor cellulite are a barrier to wearing the butt floss bikini bottoms! There is a lot of homelessness and in the 90 degree heat, the sidewalks stink of urine. Under every shady spot- (of which there are few) you'll find people sleeping at all times of day- just all splayed out often using their flipflops as pillows. Like many Latin-based cultures, the people are happy and energetic and music is always blaring somewhere. I really only had two days here so I know there is a lot more to this city by sea than what I've seen....but I'd honestly have to say I didn't really have much of an interest- I think my heart is still in the jungle! I would say if you are in the area and can stop in Rio for a day or two you should do it; but, I wouldn't recommend it as a holiday destination- especially given all the crime here which is still on the rise. A lady in the elevator this morning told me her small gold necklace was snatched off her neck last night on the beach. But overall, I'd say it was a good and interesting trip- even though it is the only country I've ever been to that won't give guests an iron in their hotel room for "safety" reasons! If you want something ironed you have to use the hotel laundry service and submit your clothing items in the morning- ANNOYING- especially for a backpacker whose clothes are always wrinkled! Anyway- a few final pictures- including Netanyahu's motorcade- he was staying in the hotel next to me and down the road was Bolsanaro and Mike Pompei #SALT briefings LOL!

