

The River Amazon



The Amazon is the world's second longest river and the chief river of South America. It is 4,000 miles long. At many points along its course the Amazon is so wide that you can stand on one shore and not see the other. The river ranges from 1 to 6 miles wide during most of its course. At its mouth it is about 90 miles wide.

The area around the river, called the Amazon Basin, makes up the world's largest tropical rain forest. This region is approximately two-thirds as large as the United States of America. The temperature in the basin averages about 85° F (29° C) and varies little throughout the year. Throughout most of the river basin, the air is very humid (this means it is very damp). These conditions are ideal for many unique plants and animals.

Large ships can sail about 2,300 miles up the Amazon to Iquitos in Peru. Brazilian ports along the Amazon include Belém, at the mouth of the river, and Manaus, 1,000 miles upstream. Ships bring in clothing, food, tools and other products. They pick up raw materials such as animal skins, Brazil nuts, timber and rubber. The ships also take aboard live birds, fish and other animals bought by pet shops and zoos.

Many kinds of fish live in the Amazon River including the fierce, flesh-eating piranha. The Amazon Basin is home to animals such as alligators, anacondas, monkeys, parrots, sloths and many species of insects. The forest has a great variety of plant life. Over 3,000 species of plants have been found in one square mile there. The

trees stand as tall as 61 metres. Their tops grow so close together that only a little sunlight can reach the ground.

A few isolated tribes still exist in the remoter parts and live in the same way as their ancestors did many generations ago. They can be seen paddling long canoes that have been dug out of solid tree trunks. On the banks there are native villages built of mud and logs. Some of the huts are on poles above the water, and on the platforms outside are families with naked children.

South American Indians lived in the Amazon River basin long before Europeans first came to the area. Vincente Pinzón, a Spanish explorer, was probably the first European to see the Amazon. In 1500, he sailed to the coast of what is now Brazil. In 1541, another Spaniard, Francisco de Orellana, led the first exploration of the river by a European. His expedition followed the Amazon from the mouth of the Negro River in Peru to the Atlantic. During Orellana's journey, his group was attacked by what appeared to be female Indian warriors. The Spaniards called their attackers Amazons, after the female warriors in Greek mythology. The name was later given to the river and the surrounding area.

In recent decades tree fellers, farmers, miners and road builders have developed the region. Between them they have destroyed more than 200,000 square miles of forest. Despite such development much of the Amazon Basin region remains a wilderness. It is still possible to fly for hours over the region and see no sign of human settlement.

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Section A

Choose the best word or group of words to fit the passage and put a ring around your choice.

The Amazon is the world's

1 **third** **fifth** **second** **fourth**

longest river. The area around the river makes up the world's largest tropical

2 **marsh land.** **wood land.** **farm land.** **rain forest.**

The area is very humid which means it is very

3 **dry.** **damp.** **wet.** **boggy.**

Large ships sail to ports such as

4 **London** **Manaus** **Liverpool** **Rotterdam**

and Iquitos. The Amazon Basin is home to animals such as

5 **monkeys** **crocodiles** **kangaroo** **budgies**

and sloths. A few tribes still live in the remote parts of the forest. Their homes are built from mud and

6 **sticks.** **logs.** **bricks.** **cement.**

In recent years more than 200,000 square miles of forest have been destroyed.

Section B

1 Complete the table below:

Length of river		Number of plant species	
Average temperature		Height of trees	
Distance ships can sail up the Amazon		Area of forest recently destroyed	

2 How did the Amazon River get its name?

3 Ships 'trade' up and down the river. What sorts of things are brought into the Amazon ports?

4 What sorts of things are taken away from the Amazon ports by ship?

5 What do you think about wild animals from the Amazon Rain Forest being brought to zoos or pet shops in this country?

6 'In recent decades tree fellers, farmers, miners and road builders have developed the region.' What does this mean? Do you think this is a good or a bad thing? Give reasons for your answer.

7 'Despite such development, much of the Amazon Basin region remains a wilderness.' Why is this the case?

Section C

A few isolated tribes still exist in the Amazon Rain Forest. Imagine a child your age from such a family becomes your new pen pal. Write a letter telling them about some of the things you like to do in your home. Remember, they have no experience of anything electrical!