

TATLER

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a red beret with a white anchor emblem, a white sleeveless top with a black ruffled collar, and a white skirt with red and black horizontal stripes and a black belt. She is saluting with her right hand. She is wearing a large, ornate bracelet on her right wrist and large, tassel earrings. The background is plain white.

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summer
fashion

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by your children?

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Amazon
without
a paddle

Funky
house

The sexy
DJ who
inherited
a stately

Pixie Geldof

The coolest girl in town

forest gumps

The Amazon
rainforest

Carry on up the
Amazon with
Richard Dennen
and entourage

Peru had never been on my list of Most Wanted Places to Visit. I'd always been more up for a stroll in the Argentinian pampas or hitting up the hotness on Ipanema Beach. For me, it was that chunk of South America famous only for Paddington Bear (well, the deepest, darkest bit) and the backpacking haunt Machu Picchu. And I've never been a fan of bears or backpacking. But London was getting cold, Boujis seemed empty (Will and Kate were in Klosters) and my best friend, Edouard-Henri Desforges, was on the run from the five girls whose hearts he'd been toying with. It suddenly seemed like a good idea for us to escape to somewhere far, far away. Paddington had, it turned

out, always been a hero of his. They share a passion for marmalade sandwiches.

So Edouard's neighbour Willa Keswick threw a leaving dinner for us, Fred Bristol gave a farewell speech involving a rather bad joke about us being eaten by an anaconda – and we headed to the Amazon. I was going to be a Phileas Fogg-type of adventurer with my suitably Belgian Passepartout of a sidekick. Or a young Indiana Jones, bound to discover a lost city of Inca gold.

'You two are dressed for St Tropez, not the Amazon rainforest,' said a fellow passenger snootily as we landed in Iquitos. Edouard was appalled that anyone could be as much of a fashion philistine to think Vilebrequin



swimming trunks were not appropriate for all water-related holidays. Not that I cared – I was too busy stuffing packets of Marlboro Lights into my safari shorts and checking that the Mulberry suitcase, dedicated solely to mosquito repellent, was intact.

Friends who'd anticipated discomfort were to be disappointed. The *M/V Aqua* – the vessel we were on for the next five days – was 130 feet of floating five-star hotel. If you got a little hot and bothered on the sundeck, you just slipped onto the sofas in the bar and ordered a Pisco Sour (obviously we had lots). Or kicked back in the massive cabin (there are only 12) watching the world's biggest river through a 15-foot panoramic window. Dinner was four extravagant courses cooked by two chefs (and there was a pastry chef who made a mean croissant).

Our days were spent cruising the Ucayali and Dorado tributaries

in a quietly motored but super-speedy wooden skiff, checking out the exotic wildlife. It soon became apparent I had no interest in wildlife whatsoever. Our guide Manuel grew increasingly worried that I wasn't jostling for the binoculars and instead sat engrossed in *A Handful of Dust*. He was my hero, though, because he laughed at my jokes and also because of his general eco-Zen-ness and anti-urban ways of thinking – a sort of Dr Dolittle who couldn't actually speak to the animals. Luckily, Edouard does like animals and spent hours filming, David Attenborough-style, anything we saw: lots of different monkeys (the coolest being the howlers – I forget what the others were called), three-toed sloths, dolphins et al. Manuel suggested that if any of us spotted a animal, we'd get 10 points. It was a nice way of keeping me interested, but a fatal thing to say in front of Edouard, who now constantly scanned the area. Every quarter of an hour, the peace of the Amazon would be destroyed with his cry: 'A parrot! 10 points!' No one else was really playing...

But the vastness and isolation one experiences

on the Amazon is awe-inspiring. I felt like I was adrift at sea, like Noah. When I think of a river, I think of the Thames. But during the rainy season, this monster stretches 28 miles wide, and at its mouth is wider than the Thames is long. Forget *Wind in the Willows* – this is on a biblical scale. There was no riverbank, just trees sticking out – it was primordial and post-apocalyptic, magical and otherworldly. We sailed up 250 miles of it. Saw no other tourists. One night we sailed back in pitch rainforest blackness, dense clouds of bugs and mosquitoes surrounding us, punctuated by the rumbles of a terrifying electrical storm in the distance and with only a torch to shine on the odd tarantula climbing a tree. Amazing to think that a third of all species in the world hang tough in the Amazon rainforest.

Manuel had been talking about ayahuasca, the drug made from Amazon plants. He spoke of how he'd taken it with a couple of friends, of how he'd transformed into a jaguar, of how he'd seen a vision of his future wife. So when we headed back to the capital, Lima, and checked into the Miraflores Park Hotel there was nothing else on our minds. We had to find a shaman. (But first we had to have a swim on the rooftop pool and a good dinner.)

Our city guide, Geraldine, had told us that morning that the Larcomar area was without question the coolest place to hang out. It turned out to be a large shopping centre overlooking the Pacific with one bar and a lot of men handing out ads for strip clubs. Edouard collected some – he likes to stick that sort of thing on his fridge in South Kensington.

Before we knew it, we were having tequila shots and the barman was drawing Edouard a map. A map showing us the way to find a shaman, he said. We followed it for half an hour through downtown Lima – probably not the wisest move, but I was wearing my new white Dolce & Gabbana jacket, so who cared? The map led us to a small park. There were a lot of hookers in the park. But no shaman.

Dawn was breaking over Lima. And we had a flight to catch to the southern jungle, to Puerto Maldonado, and a boat down the Madre de Dios to a remote lodge. Inkaterra Reserva Amazonica. More wildlife. An amazing canopy bridge walk over the forest. Edouard was even allowed to chop down a tree. (I was made to film it.) I finished

A Handful of Dust. The great thing about hanging out near the Amazon is that even if you sit in the shade, you still get a tan. □
Book an Amazon trip through Cazenove+Lloyd (tel: 020 7384 2332; cazloyd.com).

One thing
on our
minds was
finding
a shaman



Scarlet
macaws

A villager with
our supper



Richard and
Edouard
on the skiff