

EXPLORING THE AMAZIN' AMAZON

**Luxury liner trip unveils
the mysteries of Brazil's
jungle region** BY HARRY RYAN

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A CITY IN the middle of the Amazon jungle seemed an odd place to begin a luxury liner cruise. But there we were on a bus at 5 a.m. headed from the airport in Manaus, Brazil, to the downtown pier where the 18,000-ton Stella Solaris awaited.

We had flown in from Miami to board the freshly-painted pride of the Greek-flag Sun Line fleet for the return leg of her inaugural cruise on the Amazon River, one of the world's longest waterways and one that few pleasure travelers ever get to see.

Approximately 485 passengers had signed on for the 14-day voyage that would take the Solaris 1,200 miles down the Amazon to the Atlantic Ocean and then through the Caribbean to Curacao, calling at eight ports en route. The group of travel writers I was with would be aboard for nine nights, until the ship reached Barbados, the first Caribbean port of call. We all had seen islands before; the lure of this trip was the mighty Amazon.

More than a desire to escape the tropical sun, what seemed to draw the bulk of the passengers inside most often was the excellent lecture program that came as part of the cruise package. Loren McIntyre, a former U.S. Navy captain and adventurer who first sailed the Amazon in 1935 at age 18 and has spent at least part of every year since 1947 in South America, was aboard to show and tell us how in 1971 he had journeyed high into the Peruvian Andes to discover the most distant source of the 4,000-mile-long Amazon.

An expert photographer whose work has appeared many times in National Geographic, McIntyre used his own slides to illustrate lectures on life in remote Indian villages, the ecology of the Amazon basin, its history and prospects for future development. Not heavy stuff at all, simply fascinating.

Adm. Stansfield Turner, head of the CIA during the Carter administration, also lectured several times in the course of the cruise, giving us the lowdown on the spying business (at least the unclassified part) as well as his insights on current affairs.

We even had a resident star-gazer, college professor Ted Pedas, who gave early-morning and late-evening deck talks on the stars that shone so brightly above (now I know that the Big Dipper appears *upside down* in the Southern Hemisphere sky, but don't ask me why).

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