Interpreting in the Colombian Amazon

Samantha Vila, T&I 2019
Located in Puerto Nariño, Amazonas Jungle Tours Operator is a tourism agency offering 1-4 day tours in the Colombian Amazon. The company is run by Daniel and Sergio Rojas, father and son. They have ten local guides on staff.

You can find out more about Amazonas Jungle Tours Operator at the following link:
http://amazonasjungletours.com/

Depending on length, tours may include the following activities:

- Day and night jungle walks
- Visits to nature reserves
- Dolphin sighing
- Visits to local indigenous communities
- Piranha fishing
- Visits to local museums in Puerto Nariño

Loretoyaco River, Amazonas, Colombia
View of Puerto Nariño from the town viewpoint
As an interpreter, I would accompany tour groups during the whole duration of their trip.

Interpretation usually started at 8 am, when tour groups and guides would meet for breakfast at a local restaurant in Puerto Nariño. Afterwards, we would head out to hike, take a boat ride on the river, or engage in another activity. The day would usually come to an end around 7 or 8 pm.

Interpreting during the activities had its challenges, such as making sure I could hear the guide during a jungle walk or yelling instructions from the boat to my group while they kayak. Overall, this experience was incredibly rewarding and a real adventure!
Local guide from the Community of Santa Teresita contemplating the view after a jungle walk
In order to prep for my experience as an interpreter in the Amazon, I reviewed vocabulary relating to flora and fauna in the region.
Local Culture

Once I started interpreting, I quickly started to learn about the three main ethnic groups in the region and local customs.

In the photograph above, we can see a local man from San Antonio de Cacao making fariña. Fariña is a yucca flour that accompanies most meals in the Amazon.
From left to right: Brandon (guide), Andy, Samantha (interpreter) and Sally. Andy and Sally, a lovely couple from the UK, were my first tour group.
Thank you!

My experience as an interpreter for Amazonas Jungle Tours Operator was extremely rewarding.

I had set out to have an experience outside the controlled classroom space, and I ended up achieving that and so much more. I was able to interpret a lot, helping tourists and guides to bridge language and culture gaps and understand each other as we explored the Colombian Amazon.

I learned so much about the area, and I can’t wait for the opportunity to go back.

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