



A thousand miles
along the
AMAZON

Island hopping through the Caribbean
and down into the sultry latitudes along the equator

Watercolors done on location by Michael Killelea © 2020

Locals along the Amazon River rely heavily on watercraft for transportation in place of non-existent highways.

The Voyage

Cruising southeast from Puerto Rico in the Caribbean, the views are of tropical seas and skies, but sun and humidity increasingly become major players. Approaching the mouth of the Amazon River at the equator may only amplify that. But this trip was filled with adventure and the promise of colorful new places...along with some shade.



SAN JUAN Puerto Rico

For many Americans, the Caribbean starts in Old San Juan. The city, first settled in 1526, was eventually protected by thick defensive walls, most of which remain today.

Sentry boxes, called garitas in Spanish, were added at regular intervals along the walls. They have gradually grown to become recognizable symbols of the city itself.



BRIDGETOWN Barbados



The English came to Barbados for the sugar cane and the substantial wealth it brought them. There's not much sugar cane today but British influence remains as strong as ever.

The Chamberlain Bridge in Bridgetown crosses Constitution River in the heart of this capital city. It's also a major stop for Caribbean cruising yachts.

French Guiana **DEVIL'S ISLAND**

Devil's Island is one of three adjacent islands known as 'Iles du Salut', or 'Salvation Islands' lying six miles off the coast of French Guiana. For 100 years starting in 1852 they were the site of France's most notorious prisons. The movie 'Papillon' renewed their infamy.

Today the prison cells welcome agouti, monkeys, chickens and tourists. But the tropical beauty and azure waters can't totally hide their brutal history.



SANTARÉM Brazil



Santarém is a small lively city on the banks of the Amazon, near where it joins the Rio Tapajós. It was founded as a Jesuit mission in 1661 and the heat and humidity probably haven't changed much since.

However, it has shady parks, a large marketplace by the river promenade, and an impressive Cathedral that points to the deep faith of the local population. The adjacent waterfront is crammed with boats of all kinds plying the river with freight and passengers.

PARINTINS Brazil

This sleepy town on an island in the Amazon grew when the river divided the island into four parts.

The church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the marketplace in town are the center of activities, except when it's time for the extravagant Boi Bumba Festival, a frenzied blur of dancing, noise and some very colorful costumes.



MANAUS Brazil

Manaus, the biggest city on the Amazon, is surrounded by jungle. Its fortune came from the abundant rubber trees in local forests and the European expats who came to cash in on the milky white latex they could get from those trees. The remains of the rubber baron culture are still visible in places, despite the rough and even dangerous edges to the city. Time and a decline in the supply of natural rubber have not been kind to the city or its residents, although manufacturing has recently made up for some of that loss. The rusting rubber storage warehouses lining the water's edges are a testament to the faded glory that once was Manaus.

The biggest attraction may still be the surrounding Amazon jungle and its enormous natural assets.



BELÉM Brazil

Belém is a major booming city near the mouth of the Amazon. Its port is sometimes so crowded that ships have to put in at Icoaraci (right), some distance away. But music, festivals and a flotilla of beached river boats are waiting when passengers finally get ashore at Icoaraci.

Belém itself has plenty of culture, industry and a lot of very heavy traffic.



SCARBOROUGH Tobago

On Sangsters Hill, above the port of Scarborough, the view is cool and refreshing. A local man allowed me to paint on his shady porch, an experience that got even better when I met his wife and son.

The island itself is replete with beaches, tropical forests, old British forts and plenty of smiles to go around.

CASTRIES

St. Lucia

The view across Vigie Cove just outside Castries is a beautiful setting for the fine restaurants and big yachts docked there.

While painting the scene from a picnic table outside Antillia's waterfront bar, I got to enjoy some of the local high spirits inside.



ST. JOHN'S Antigua

Cruise ships docked in St. John's loom above the city crowded with locals going about their normal business, and the hoards of tourists shopping for souvenirs.

By contrast, the Anglican Cathedral of St. John the Divine dominates the city skyline on a hilltop considerably higher than the ships docked below.



CHARLOTTE AMALIE St. Thomas, USVI



In many ways, St. Thomas can seem like Coney Island. There are indeed beautiful beaches, aqua water and verdant hillsides, but these can be overlooked by brash day trippers, most interested in shopping.



Michael Killelea is a watercolor artist who relishes the chance to paint anywhere he can go, pantomiming in whatever dialect the locals may speak. Links to his artwork and email are at his website <http://www.killeleart.com> and his newest work is posted weekly on the *Killeleart* Facebook page.