

Course Description

Semester in the Amazon

Features Of This Course:

- Elevations of sea level to 10,000 ft. (3,000m)
- Average elevation is between sea level and 500 meters
- Travel on/off trails and through dense forests and dry scrubland and savannah
- Average temperatures range from 20 degrees C to 38 degrees C (60 -100 degrees F)
- Humidity: 80-90%
- Abundant bird and wildlife
- Average Group Ratio: 4 Students / 1 Instructor
- Minimum Age: 18
- Jungle camping in hammocks and/or tents
- Natural history interpretation and tropical medicine considerations and precautions
- Strong inter-cultural aspect: interactions with ranchers, rubber tappers, and *garimpeiros*
- Multi-day river-boat travel between sections is usually part of the expedition
- Hiking Route: ~ 50-80 miles
- Average Pack Weight: 40-60 lbs.

Join NOLS for an expedition into a place of wonder: more different species of animals and plants, and more free-flowing freshwater than anywhere else on earth. Brazil's Amazon includes the largest intact areas of rain forest left in the world. NOLS Brazil is an exploratory program; students must be ready to adjust their expectations to the realities of the Brazilian Amazon.

Here in the rainforest you'll see trees in all different shapes and sizes, vines wrapping themselves through the forest, colorful orchids and bromeliads, as well as monkeys crashing through the treetops, snakes and tortoise on the forest floor, sloths, toucans, and bright red macaws, and lots and lots of insects. The Amazon Rainforest is vast—and you'll have an entire semester to experience it.

The Amazon has more species than many other countries—most of that biodiversity is concentrated in the vast Amazon river basin. Brazil is home for more than 40% of the remaining Amazon Rainforest. Its rivers converge to produce the highest-volume river in the world (only the Nile is longer). We'll explore the Amazon's rivers and rainforest, visiting some areas where only a few local people live and travel. As part of the expedition we stay with a local community for a few days; travel in between areas takes almost a week in riverboat sometimes: distance, delays, and cultural opportunities await as we immerse ourselves in the river culture that defines the Amazon. Another section explores the *Chapada* area, the highlands canyon and river area that forms part of the basin separating it from other regions. The Chapada area consists of open savannah, dry tropical forest, and dramatic canyons.

You'll also get a chance to meet and interact with the Amazon's inhabitants, including rubber tappers and *garimpeiros* (miner/frontiers people). Sections include hiking, an Amazon river expedition in canoes and a cultural section.

Your experience living in the Brazilian backcountry will be both challenging and rewarding. To best explore this immense territory, we'll employ local transport options to move around the region. These options sometimes entail unforeseen delays. Sometimes we'll travel for several days from one area to another by riverboat, which is the only way to get around in a region where the rainy season makes road travel difficult or impossible.

The Expedition

A semester spent in the outdoors constitutes almost three months camping out, moving from area to area in various forms of transport, and exploring the wonders of the Brazilian Amazon, and *cerrado* (savannah) areas all while developing leadership and technical outdoor skills, meeting people, pushing yourself physically and emotionally, and having fun. Your course will take you from the elevations of the Brazilian or Guiana Highlands to the Amazon River basin. You'll sleep in hammocks and tents in the rainforests, in ancient canyons, and on river beaches. You may train binoculars on wildlife on an early morning float, or work hard to portage canoes around a rapid and then sling up a hammock at the end of a weary day. You'll work hard hiking with all of your gear on your back through tropical forest to enjoy the sounds of the rainforest at night from your hammock.



These semesters are remote expeditions in the tropics. They are learning adventures designed to inspire you with the skills and experience necessary to travel internationally and set up your own expeditions in the wilderness long after the end of your course. Keep in mind that the semester is challenging: hot and humid weather, bugs at certain times of day and dense tropical forest to travel through. The challenge is not always an intensely physical one and each participant will be different; the principal challenge of a tropical expedition is a mental and emotional one. All of this makes the Amazon Semester a unique and rewarding experience.

You'll be participating in a self-sufficient expedition to remote tropical areas. Students will be expected to participate in all aspects of the expedition from the preparatory stages to being fully involved in expedition leadership. Students must assume a high level of responsibility in their own self-care and in interacting in a different culture. **Students must adjust their expectations to the realities of Brazil and the Amazon.** *Logistical delays are common and part of the landscape in an area with little infrastructure.* This semester is not for students looking for a relaxing break—it's for people looking to explore and learn in a challenging environment in the Neotropics.

While you are in the field, you'll live with two or three other students in a "tent group." Your tent group will have its own stove, food, and tent. In the rainforest you'll use individual hammocks to sleep in and sometimes, individual tents, depending on the area. The tent groups camp near each other, but each group prepares its own meals and handles its own camp chores. Periodically during the semester, tent mates are changed so that you get to live and camp with all the students on the course. When canoeing, we'll travel as a large group on the river, navigating rapids and river miles during the day and camping on the riverside or on rock islands at night. When backpacking we'll hike in small hiking groups of four to six people. One of the focuses of the semester program is wilderness risk management, which includes learning how to avoid injury by understanding the hazards that are encountered and avoid illness by practicing good hygiene self-care. All semesters feature first aid training and precautions specific to tropical wilderness situations.

The field segment of each section will end with course evaluations.

Student Independence

On all NOLS courses, students will be independent (unaccompanied by instructors) at various times. This will include time in and around camp while cooking or performing camp chores. Instructors may allow students to travel unsupervised a short distance from camp. There will be the option on some sections to travel independently of instructors overnight.

Weather And Other Challenges

There are seasonal variations in the Neotropics that have more to do with rainfall than any great variance in temperatures. The rainy season varies within the vast Amazon basin, which straddles the Equator, but we try to concentrate the semester during the dry season, although this does not preclude experiencing rain. Days are generally uniform in length (12 hours of daylight from roughly 6 a.m.-6 p.m.) throughout the year. In the Neotropics temperatures and humidity can be very high during the day (up to 100 degrees F and 80-90% humidity) and you will have to protect yourself from sunburn and dehydration.

You should also be prepared for the demands of the rainforest. Insects are a major part of the Neotropics; there are mosquitoes, small flies, sweat bees, wasps, ticks and ants. On some courses some students have even experienced botfly larvae hitching a ride in their bodies. Although their reputation is often worse than the reality, they are creatures of the rainforest and travelers inevitably come into contact with them. Anyone with previous **severe** anaphylactic allergic reactions (compromised airway) in their medical history is asked to not apply for this semester as the possibility of some insect bite during the semester is high.

Students should also be aware of the presence of malaria, rabies, yellow fever, dengue, leishmaniasis, and other less known diseases in the Brazilian Amazon course area. We will be taking precautions to prevent disease transmission, however there is always a risk of contracting some of these diseases. **A Yellow Fever vaccine is required before arriving in Brazil to start the semester; these vaccinations are good for 10 years. We will also be using prophylactic anti-malarial medications.** More information is provided in the Travel and Logistics document for this course.



Throughout the semester, we can be miles from the amenities of civilization. Our remoteness also means evacuation to a medical facility can take up to two or more days. Telephones, ambulances, and hospitals may be several days away. We do carry satellite phones on courses, but this does not guarantee prompt communication or transport. You can sometimes be a few days from outside help. Learning to manage risks and to assume responsibility for yourself and your colleagues will help make your expedition in these wild places challenging and rewarding.

River Expedition Section

On this section, we'll explore a tributary of the Amazon River in canoes. Typically a month in duration, the expedition will descend one of the hundreds of tributaries of the Amazon River. Daily activities vary from working all day to get around one rapid by carrying all the equipment through the rainforest, to lining canoes through rock channels and over boulders, to paddling 25-30 miles on calmer waters. We camp on either riverside beaches, on rock and sand islands, or in the rainforest. We'll be taking bug bite preventative measures, which means using repellent, long pants and shirts, and staying under bug nets at night when the bugs are more active. NOLS has explored various rivers in the Amazon Basin. Exactly which river we will use for your course will be decided prior to the course start. In some cases we may use a river we have not scouted, but it will be very similar to the ones we know. Some days might be spent laying over in the same camp, exploring the surrounding area, visiting with local rubber tappers, or practicing paddling skills at a rapid. Fishing is a possible activity as well, depending on the river area. The Tucunaré (peacock bass), piranhas, and catfish are all edible and abundant in some areas of the Amazon.

Hiking Section

There will be potentially two hiking sections: both will include a ten day - to three-week section hiking in the basin. Anywhere from the Brazilian or Guiana Highlands to other remote ranges within the rainforest are all possibilities. Some areas are *cerrado*, open and savannah-like, others are dense forest. The other area will include the Brazil Highlands and Chapada areas of Brazil, which are forested canyon-like areas ringing the Basin. Natural history, cultural interactions, route finding, GPS, compass, and some map use are covered (where maps of the area exist). In some areas, local guides will accompany the course, and there is the possibility of interaction with locals like, rubber tappers and *garimpeiros*.

Cultural Section

You will be exposed to cultural opportunities throughout your semester. Knowing a bit of the language (Portuguese) before you arrive in Brazil or trying to arrive earlier in Brazil to study Portuguese will greatly enhance your experience. Previous students highly emphasize this point. Contact NOLS Brazil (jon_kempsey@nols.edu) for more information on possibilities. We will have cultural opportunities on most of the semester sections, especially the river section. We will stay for a few (3-5) days in a ribeirinho community where students divide into pairs and live with a local family in their daily lives. To facilitate greater cultural interchange we ask that all students bring a small **photo album** that shows some basic aspects of your life (family, friends, home, city, pets, favorite activities) Other opportunities include riverboat travel, community projects, and scientific research. Due to cultural issues we will be limited in our abilities to take photos at some areas. Some cultural sections are included within the river or hike section.

Wilderness First Aid Course (WFR) With CPR

An emphasis of this course is the development of skills that permit you to be self-sufficient in remote backcountry areas. Our teaching progression for accomplishing this is carefully planned and executed. You will cover all the basics of wilderness first aid in this 20-40 hour course as well as CPR certification. We teach this course in the beginning of the semester.



General Course Objectives

Each course is unique due to variables such as route, group dynamics, fitness levels, and environmental conditions. Working with these variables, it is our intent to see each student accomplish the following:

Risk Management and Judgment

- Demonstrate knowledge of the hazards in the Amazon River, forest, and other environments encountered and practices that diminish the likelihood of injury due to those hazards.
- Display an awareness of animal and disease risks specific to the Amazon and how to minimize those risks.
- Demonstrate sound judgment and decision-making skills based on knowledge of equipment, the wilderness environment, other expedition members, and one's own limits.
- Display an ability to prevent, evaluate, and care for medical problems in a wilderness setting.
- Understand the connection between hygiene and health in a tropical environment and practice methods to promote good health and hygiene.
- Formulate and show the ability to implement contingency plans for groups in the outdoors and in remote areas.

Leadership and Teamwork

- Assume leadership responsibilities in day-to-day logistics and organization of the course.
- Accurately identify personal strengths and skills and areas for growth in developing leadership styles.
- Take initiative in helping to plan your course, teach classes, facilitate discussions, and conduct group meetings.
- Develop the ability to plan and carry out responsible and environmentally sound expeditions while also considering cultural sensitivity.
- Initiate resolution of interpersonal conflicts.
- Practice high standards of expedition behavior; display a positive attitude despite hardship.
- Make efforts to communicate with all expedition members and develop an atmosphere of mutual respect despite differences.

Outdoor Skills and Travel

- Travel competently in Amazon river, forest and Cerrado terrain, learning to camp, cook, and prepare for varied environmental conditions.
- Use GPS and compass to travel responsibly in challenging rainforest, tropical river, and savanna terrain.
- Take responsibility for the care and organization of personal and group equipment.
- Be familiar with sources of information on international travel and be able to plan an expedition.
- Be aware of the hazards of traveling in a developing country and how to minimize these hazards.
- Learn and apply basic wilderness first aid skills, hygiene considerations, and self care.
- Consistently demonstrate sound minimum impact living and travel skills on personal and group levels and be able to apply this knowledge to varied settings.

Environment and Cultural Studies

- Become familiar with the different cultures of people encountered during the course.
- Show an understanding, appreciation and respect for the natural world; identify typical fauna and flora of the Amazon basin's eco-regions.
- Develop an understanding of land management in Brazil and the problems arising from population and resource pressures on wilderness areas.
- Demonstrate familiarity with the geographical and cultural diversity of Brazil.
- Consistently be aware of and practice environmental and cultural minimum impact.

River Expedition Skills

- Learn and practice hazard identification and avoidance in moving water and whitewater.
- Learn basic and advanced tandem canoe strokes and maneuvering techniques.
- Learn basic river rescue techniques; and basic and intermediate whitewater skills.
- Learn to manage and implement canoe expedition techniques: lining, walking and portaging canoes.
- Learn to care for, pack, maintain and repair collapsible canoes.

