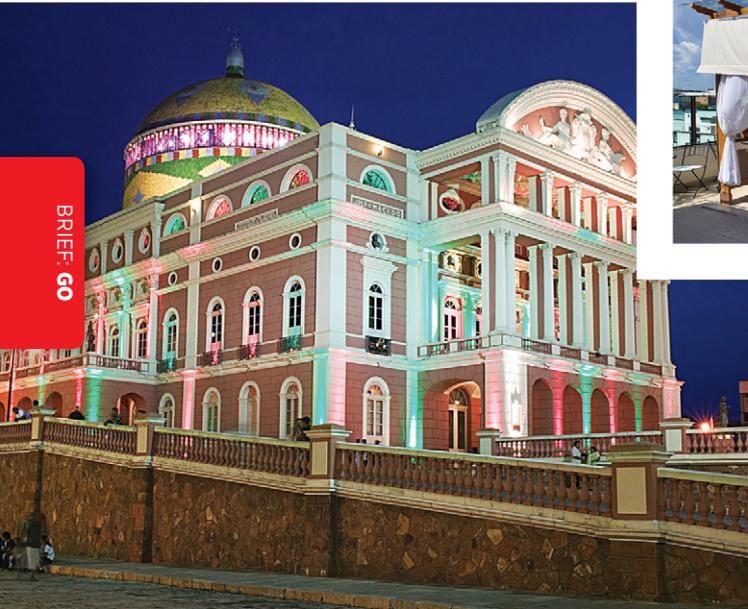


BRIEF: GO



FROM LEFT: Teatro Amazonas; Casa Teatro; the wavy black-and-white tile work in front of Teatro Amazonas; a boat on a tributary to the Amazon River; a view of Manaus from the water; a dish from Banzeiro



A Weekend in ... Manaus, Brazil

An enigmatic destination with a robust history, this **booming jungle metropolis** proves it can hold its own as more than just a gateway to the Amazon.

IT WOULD BE easy to write off Manaus, Brazil, as a mere pit stop on the way to the goggle of riverside lodges that lure intrigued travelers into the world's largest rain forest — many people do. But a closer look reveals that the capital of the Amazonas state is a thriving, modern city with a rich heritage and a population of 1.8 million people. Here, the translucent-red Rio Negro — some 4 kilometers wide along the city's riverbanks — meets the murky, tea-colored Rio Solimões to form the mighty Rio Amazonas, an awesome backdrop to sporadic colonial

architecture peppered amid jungle flora, modern high-rises and stilted *palafita* (water house) architecture.

STAY The newish **Caesar Business Hotel** is the city's most luxurious, but it doesn't shirk sleek amenities and service for a sense of place: A towering rain forest wall of bromeliads and ferns forms the centerpiece of the lobby. **Park Suites Manaus** in Ponta Negra, Manaus' pricey northwestern suburb, offers guests shock-and-awe views of the Rio Negro from its businesslike suites. And, in the center of town, steps from Teatro Amazonas, is **Casa Teatro**, which brims with local color courtesy of coconut-wood coffee tables, Romero Britto paintings and meticulously curated handicrafts. Rooms are literally as tiny as a train compartment, but there is more character and charm here than anywhere in town.

EAT & DRINK Banzeiro is a local colloquialism meaning "river wave," but chef Felipe Schaedler is making

waves of a different kind as head of one of Manaus' most creative kitchens. He marries indigenous ingredients and French technique with stunning results: Meat slides off the bone like a culinary genuflection in his award-winning ribs of tambaqui, a tasty river fish. **Choupana** serves excellent freshwater fish as well as tasty tacacá, a soup made from jambú (an indigenous herb), tucupi (a manioc broth) and dried shrimp. For simpler fare, **Waku Sese** is a great outdoor café serving up one of Brazil's tastiest treats: açaí. This cold, soupy bowl of sorbetlike fruit is served in the Amazon alongside tapioca kernels for texture.

DO Manaus' landmark attraction is its gorgeous opera house, **Teatro Amazonas**, an out-of-place neo-classical remnant of rubber-boom opulence that originally opened in 1896. Also, several of the city's best-preserved palaces have been turned into cultural centers, including the **Palácio Rio Negro** (1903) and the **Palácio da Justiça** (1900). Don't

miss getting out on the river, either. The meeting point of the Negro and Solimões rivers makes an easy excursion — and the stubborn refusal of these two rivers to mix is said to be the inspiration for the wavy black-and-white tile work in the plaza in front of Teatro Amazonas, reproduced more famously along Rio de Janeiro's beach promenade.

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CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: NIGEL HICKS/GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY CASA TEATRO; ANDY CAULFIELD/GETTY IMAGES; ATRENDOTRAVEL/GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY BANZEIRO; NICO TONDI/GETTY IMAGES