Some Books about the Amazon

Tree of Rivers: The Story of the Amazon by John Hemming (2008)

A history of colonial exploitation of the Amazon and it's indigenous people. Spoiler alert, They were not treated very well.

River of Darkness: Francisco Orellana's Legendary Voyage of Death and Discovery Down the Amazon by Buddy Levy (2011)

A popular history and thriller-style account tracing Orellana and Gonzalo Pizarro's 1541–1542 expedition from Quito across the Andes and down the entire length of the Amazon River. Orellana survived and was the first European to travel down most of the Amazon. Not a good trip.

The Mapmaker's Wife by Robert Whitaker (2004)

This is really two true stories in one book. The first is that in the mid-18th century the French Royal Academy sent a team of astronomers and a mapmaker to what is now Ecuador to obtain evidence for the shape of the earth; the English Newton favored an earth that bulged at the equator and was flattened at the poles, while the French Huygens favored an earth that was elongated at the poles, sort of like a top. Spoiler alert – Newton was correct. The second story is the story of the probably indigenous Ecuadoran woman who married the French mapmaker. Due to the Napoleonic wars he had to leave what was Spanish Ecuador but she had to stay home. After the war she decided to descend the Amazon and get back together with him. Not a good trip.

Running the Amazon by Joe Kane (1990)

A modern trip down the Amazon. A better trip.

One River: Explorations and Discoveries in the Amazon Rain Forest by Wade Davis (1995)

In 1941 Harvard Professor Richard Evans Schultes took leave of absence from Harvard and founded the science of ethnobotany, discovering new rivers, plants, and tribes. In the late 70's he sent two students, one of whom is this book's author, to discover the botanical secrets of coca and the wild source of cocaine. Several amazing 'trips'.

Some Brazilian literature that I have enjoyed:

Not so much about the Amazon, but about Brazil, are several books by Jorge Amado. Amado was an author in the style of John Steinbeck, with many sympathies for the poor laboring classes of Brazil, and a penchant for magical realism. I particularly enjoyed

Gabriella, Clove and Cinnamon

Doña Flor and Her Two Husbands

The War of the Saints

Rather than e copying some commentary about these novels, check them out on the web. There are good short summaries readily available. They are out of print in English, but used copies are not hard to find and might even be in your library!