

The Matsigenka and 'Mark and Olly': background briefing

The series claims the Matsigenka are 'the most mysterious tribe in the Amazon jungle'

In fact, they have had contact with missionaries for 300 years; anthropologists have studied them since the 1950s; and scores of ethnographic studies have been written about them.

They also claim they 'live in isolation'

Most Matsigenka live along the Urubamba river, which is one of the largest in the Amazon, and used by thousands of people every day. The style of huts in the series is modern and influenced by outsiders. Most Matsigenka men speak Spanish, and several have been to university.

"They're wary and hostile to outsiders"

Countless outsiders have visited or lived with the Matsigenka over the course of several centuries. They interact with outsiders all the time, and are both peaceful and welcoming.

One of the presenters says about the Matsigenka that, 'Someone smoked in front of them, and ...they were killed'

As the Matsigenka traditionally smoke tobacco in their own handmade pipes this is difficult to believe!

Examples of mistranslations, from Shepard and Snell:

From Snell:

Matsigenka: *"If you don't get off our land we'll kill you"*

Snell: I heard no reference to land nor a threat to kill.

Matsigenka: *"We are worried that you might become homosexuals if you stay a long time. You are here for a long time and you don't have your wives. If you decide to stay I hope you are telling me the truth. I will stick red hot chili peppers up your asses"*

Snell: I certainly heard nothing of the supposed time factor, wives, telling the truth, chilli peppers, or asses.

From Shepard:

An Indian who surprised Mark and Olly in his garden at night and "thought they were a herd of boar" is translated as, *"If you were colonists, he would have tied you up and cut off all your skin."*

"You come from far away where lots of gringos live" is translated as, *"We use arrows to kill outsiders who threaten us."*

(After 'subjecting a Matsigenka man to an embarrassing interview about his sex life'), "I will have sex another day" is translated as, *"I have sex every day."*

Shepard also says, 'The Matsigenka are generous hosts. It is inconceivable they would subject foreign visitors to the initiation trials portrayed in the show, forcing Olly to sleep outside for laziness, making them *"gather food for the tribe,"* sending them to search for a lost child, insisting they take a psychoactive brew before embarking on a phony pilgrimage, abandoning them on a raft in rapids, making them compete with a third suitor for a young bride, and otherwise testing their *"manliness."*