

Special Private Manu National Park Photo Safari with Tapir Clay

Lick & Macaw Clay Lick Project

Out Colorado – Puerto Maldonado

Manu Cloud forest, Manu National Park and Manu Wildlife Center

Duration 12D/11N

This is one of the most fascinating nature trips in the world. Our overland route crosses an extraordinary range of life zones from highlands to lowlands, taking us through an array of ecosystems found nowhere else on the planet in such close proximity. We see high altitude farming valleys and traverse stark highland *puna*, plunge through layers of grassland, elfin forest, layers of lush, ever-changing cloud forest, and then lowland tropical valleys where farmers cultivate coca and exotic fruits. All the way we traverse the habitat of innumerable bird species. Then our journey winds its way by river through lowland rainforest, taking us to a remote jungle village, then to a tented camp in the heart of Manu, the Upper Amazon basin's greatest national park. In Manu we navigate the waters of an isolated oxbow lake, home to giant otters, caimans, monkeys and an endless variety of birds. Our trip ends downriver with the Amazon's finest wildlife viewing opportunities, at Manu Wildlife Center. This lodge offers the finest Tapir viewing in ALL the Amazon, as Tapirs are nightly visitors to the lodge's mud wallow. The mornings feature macaw clay lick project and fruiting trees teeming with macaws. The network of trails, tower for forest canopy viewing, and two adjacent pristine lakes round out the perfect rainforest experience. After a short canoe journey we return to Cusco aboard a modern, commercial airplane.

Itinerary

Day 1: Cusco - Cock of the Rock Lodge. Our overland journey begins at 3,400m/11,150 ft, with an early departure from the highland city of Cusco. Today's destination is the lush cloud forest region where the Andes fall away to the Amazon basin. This is a day of scenic drama and striking contrasts. We first visit a mountain wetland habitat teeming with migrant and local waterfowl, before crossing two mountain ranges between the Cusco valley and the Paucartambo valley, to a maximum altitude of 3,900m/12,790ft. Finally we follow a sinuous ribbon of highway on its plunge through an extraordinary world of forested cliffs, waterfalls and gorges. We take leisurely stops to see mountain villages, a hilltop necropolis of *chullpas* (pre-Inca burial chambers), and the abrupt ridge top of Ajanaco, which marks the final high point where the Andes begin their swoop into the Amazon basin. In clear weather we will see a breathtaking panorama of cloud forest and mountain giving way to the lowland rainforest plains far below us.

After a picnic lunch near here we descend through the startling and rapid environmental transformations characteristic of the tropical Andes, passing from grassland and stunted trees through elfin forest, until we wind through a lush and magical world of overhanging trees, giant ferns, monster begonias, countless orchids and bromeliads, and a diverse and teeming birdlife.

We make frequent spontaneous stops, perhaps spotting a brilliantly feathered quetzal, a trogon, or the wild turkey-like Guan. We reach the comfortable Cock-of-the-Rock Lodge in the late afternoon, the best hour to visit the nearby viewing platform for the display ground, or "lek". This is usually the highlight of a long, full day, a chance to see Peru's dazzling national bird, the Cock-of-the-Rock (*Rupicola*) in full, raucous courting display. **(Box Lunch,D)**

Day 2: Cock of the Rock Lodge – Road up and trail system. We take again the van or bus up-road to explore more deep the beautiful scenery of the cloud forest, this is the another good chance to try our luck and see Woolly Monkeys, Emerald Toucanet, Golden-headed Quetzal, Gray-breasted Mountain Toucan, Umbrella bird, Blue-banded Toucanet, Fruit-eating Tanagers, Red-crested Cotinga, Banded tail fruit-eater, flycatchers and the Blue-crowned Mot-Mot. This forest which starts from 11,000 feet and continue down to about 5,000 feet of elevation, cover the eastern slopes of the Andes, before yielding to the vast lowland forest of the Amazon. This is a kingdom of moss, lichens and orchids. In the afternoon you could relax or walk by yourself around the lodge area. **(B,L,D)**

Day 3: Cock of the Rock Lodge to Manu Learning Center. After early breakfast we continue our drive, as mountains give way to low rolling hills and farmland. At Patria we visit a plantation of coca grown legitimately for the Peruvian coca leaf market. At midday we reach Atalaya, a tiny port where the Piñipiñi River meets the Alto Madre de Dios. Now the lowland rainforest part of our journey begins. Rivers are the highways of the rainforest, and henceforth we will travel in large, comfortable dugout canoes shaded by canopy roofs and driven by powerful outboard motors.

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During normal river conditions we arrive at Amazonia lodge in time for exploration and wildlife viewing – which may include toucans, kingfishers, a rare endemic hummingbird and a multitude of butterflies -- along one of its many forest trails. **(B,Box Lunch,D)**

Day 4: Manu Learning Center. We will start our activities very early in the morning, this lodge has an excellent trail system to explore the rainforest, and this lodge located at the pre-mountain zone allows us to spot different species of birds very different than the cloud forest zone, feeders at the lodge will be valuable help to see more hummingbirds (Golden tailed sapphire, Sapphire Spangle Emerald, Rufus Crested Coquette, Violet Headed Hummingbird, Gould's jewelfront, Blue-Tailed Emerald, Fork-Tailed Woodnymph, Gray-Breasted Sabrewing, White Necked Jacobin).

In the afternoon after lunch we'll take one trail to search for some mammals such as the howler monkey, spider monkey, squirrel monkey and more, also we have the option to go to the canopy tower. **(B,L,D)**

Day 5: Manu Learning Center to Romero Rainforest Lodge. After breakfast we'll take our motorized boat downstream the Alto Madre de Dios River on the route past the last foothills of the Andes, our ever-changing route offers sightings of new birds -- terns, cormorants, White-winged Swallows, and flocks of nighthawks flushed from their daytime lairs by the sound of our engine. Now we turn northward up the chocolate-brown waters of the Manu River into the lake-rich lower Manu National Park. The pristine quality of the forest is instantly apparent, with abundant birdlife and no signs of outside development.

We check into the park at Limonal ranger station and then proceed upstream, as our boat driver steers skillfully through shallows and driftwood snags. Orinoco Goose and Horned Screamers strut on the beaches, Capped and White-necked Herons patrol the shoreline, and countless sunbathing turtles dive off their log perches as we approach.

Overnight at Romero Rainforest Lodge, **(B,Box Lunch,D)**

Day 6: Romero Rainforest Lodge to Manu National Park (Manu Wildlife Tented Camp). After an early breakfast we will take a path towards one small oxbow lake, then we continue our journey by boat, after some 4 hours on the river we reach Manu Tented Camp, a simple but comfortable low-impact lodge nestled almost invisibly in the forest.

Time permitting, we will take a short walk before dinner to stretch our legs and enjoy our first encounter with virgin rainforest. **(B,Box Lunch,D)**

Day 7: Manu National Park (Manu Wildlife Tented Camp): Cocha Salvador & Cocha Otorongo. Today we visit two lakes near our camp. Park authorities determine the time of our visit to Cocha (Lake) Salvador; depending on this schedule, we will visit Cocha Otorongo earlier or later in the day.

Our trail to Cocha Otorongo begins some 30 minutes downstream from the camp. This brief river journey to the trailhead can always offer the chance of a thrilling wildlife sighting. Perhaps we will spot a family of Capybaras, the

world's largest rodent, browsing on the riverbank, or if we are very lucky, a solitary Jaguar might stalk slowly off an open beach into the forest, flicking its tail in annoyance at our intrusion.

On the short trail to the lake we may spy one or more of the park's 13 monkey species leaping through the canopy high above. And some of the trees which form that canopy -- such as kapok, ironwood and figs, will astound us with the vast size of their trunks and buttressed root systems.

These are oxbow lakes, formed when the river changed course, leaving a landlocked channel behind. The lakes are abundant in fish and wildlife, and provide optimum habitat for caimans and the Giant Otter (*Pteronura brasiliensis*), one of the Amazon's most endangered mammal species.

This lake enjoys maximum protection, and boats are not allowed. However, it features two dock platforms and a 50ft tower from which to scan the trees and marshy shoreline for monkeys, kingfishers, Anhinga (a large, long-necked waterbird), and countless other species. We have a good chance of sighting the resident Giant Otter family as they dive for the 4Kg. of fish that each individual consumes daily.

Cocha Salvador is the largest of the area's lakes, at 3.5 Km, or some two miles long. It is also home to a family of Giant Otters. We cruise the lake on a floating catamaran platform, which offers superb new perspectives of lake and forest. The lakeside trees are often alive with monkeys; Scarlet, Chesnut-fronted and Blue-and-gold macaws beat a path overhead; a variety of herons and egrets scout the water's edge; and the reptilian eyes and snouts of caimans, motionless as logs, may be spied beneath the branches. Somewhere on the open water or in among toppled bankside trees, we may spot the sleek heads of the shy Giant Otters. These social animals play and fish together, and we may see them sprawled on a fallen tree trunk, dozing or gnawing on a fish. **(B,L,D)**

Day 8: Manu National Park (Manu Wildlife Tented Camp). Very early departure in the morning we will leave our Manu Tented Camp, we reach upstream the Manu River until to Pakitza guard post during about 2 hours, We'll explore the pristine nature around Pakitza's track, also looking for more wildlife doing some activities such as boat rides looking for caimans, birds., we'll explore the forest looking for some monkeys and more mammals as well, but basically we will spend this day searching some jaguars (if we are lucky), overnight at Manu Tented Camp. **(B, box lunch, D)**

Day 9: Manu National Park (Manu Wildlife Tented Camp) to Manu Wildlife Center. We set off downriver at dawn. At this hour chances of wildlife encounters are excellent. We return to the Limonal park station, to file our wildlife report before leaving the park. After reaching the turbulent union of the Alto Madre de Dios and Manu rivers and then the village of Boca Manu, after ninety more minutes downstream we arrive at Manu Wildlife Center -- the exciting final stop of our journey -- in time for lunch.

The lodge is famous for its abundant and varied wildlife, with its own Tapir clay lick, a nearby macaw clay lick project, two nearby oxbow lakes and two tall canopy viewing towers among its impressive highlights. We will have chance to explore some of the 30 miles of forest trails that surround the lodge. We have an excellent chance of encountering some of the 12 species of monkeys, including the Spider Monkey and Emperor Tamarin, which inhabit the surrounding forest.

After dinner there will be an enchanting night walk along the trails, in search of the nocturnal birds and animals of the rainforest. **(B, Box Lunch, D)**

Day 10: Manu Wildlife Center: the Macaw Clay lick project, Canopy Tower & Tapir Clay lick.

After a delicious breakfast we make our first acquaintance with the rainforest, exploring some of the 30 miles of forest trails that surround the lodge. We have an excellent chance of encountering some of the 12 species of monkeys, including the Spider Monkey and Emperor Tamarin, which inhabit the surrounding forest.

We walk through the forest some minutes, where we find the Macaw Lick project. The hide provided with individual chairs and a convenient place for cameras and binoculars to a distance of 15 meters. In groups of two and three the scarlet Macaws come flapping in, landing in the treetops as they eye the main stage below. After this we continue walking and exploring on the network of trails surrounding the lodge then we return to the lodge for lunch.

Later, we continue to explore and discover the rainforest, its lore and plant life, on the network of trails surrounding the lodge, arriving in the late afternoon at our 34m/112ft. Canopy Tower. On its platform we witness the frantic rush-hour activity of twilight in the rainforest canopy, before night closes in. Then we set off along the “collpa trail”, which will take us to the lodge’s famous Tapir Clay lick. Here at the most active tapir lick known in the entire Amazon, our research has identified from 8-12 individual 600-pound Tapirs who come to this lick to eat clay from under the tree roots around the edge. This unlikely snack absorbs and neutralizes toxins in the vegetarian diet of the Tapir, the largest land animal of Latin America. The lick features a roomy, elevated observation platform 5m/17ft above the forest floor. The platform is equipped with freshly made up mattresses with pillows. Each mattress is covered by a roomy mosquito net. The 10-m-long, elevated walkway to the platform is covered with sound-absorbing padding to prevent our footsteps from making noise. This Tapir Experience is unique and exciting because these normally very shy creatures are visible up close, and flash photography is not just permitted, but encouraged. The hard part for modern city dwellers is to remain still and silent anywhere from 30 minutes to two or more hours. Many prefer to nap until the first Tapir arrives, at which point your guide gently awakens you to watch the Tapir 10-20m/33-66ft) away below the platform. Most people feel that the wait is well worth it in order to have such a high probability of observing the rare and elusive Tapir in its rainforest home. **(B,L,D)**

Day 11: Manu Wildlife Center: Hike to an Oxbow Lake and the Wildlife Trails. We set off early for an old oxbow lake full of water lilies (*Nuphar lutea*) and sunken logs. As we circle the lake on our catamaran we might encounter the resident Giant Otter family on a fishing expedition, or troops of monkeys crashing noisily through the trees. Wattled Jacanas step lightly on the lily pads, dainty Sun Grebes paddle across the water, supple-necked Anhingas air-dry their wide, black wings, and perhaps an Osprey scans for fish from a high branch. Among the bushes near the waterline, Hoatzins, which look like rust-colored, punk chickens, announce their presence with distinctive, bizarre wheezing and grunts. Woodpeckers, tanagers, macaws, toucans and parakeets all finally come swooping in to trees surrounding the lake. Many of them roost around the lake for the night.

After lunch at the lodge our guide is available to lead us on freewheeling expeditions in search of further wildlife encounters, or we may take one of the lodge’s many trails on private and personal excursions to commune with the spirits of the rainforest. This evening, from the late afternoon until after Dinner, we offer an opportunity to search for caiman and other nocturnal life along the riverbank by boat **(If the level of river allows it) (B,L,D)**

Day 12: Manu Wildlife Center to Cusco or Lima – Departure day. We leave our lodge very early on the two hour and half return boat trip downstream to the Colorado Village, the breakfast will be serve on the boat while you enjoying early morning wildlife activity as we go, of course this is a perfect time to take advantage of valuable early morning wildlife activity along the river, in additions this journey allows us to see several lowland native settlements and gold miners digging and panning gold along the banks of the Madre de Dios River. We will stop in the far-west type gold-mining town of Colorado to start our overland journey to Puerto Carlos for 45 minutes, then you will cross the Inambari River for 15 minutes boat trip to Santa Rosa, finally a van or bus will drive us in approximately two-hours and half to the airport in Puerto Maldonado City, here you fly by a commercial airplane to Cusco or Lima, with this assistance your jungle adventure ends... **(B)**

Important notes;

- Please note that the program may vary slightly so as to maximize your wildlife sightings, depending on the reports of our researchers and experienced naturalist guides based at the lodge.
- We strongly recommend read your **PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION for Manu National Park program.**