

Explore Manu National Park in Peru



Highlights

Explore the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Manu National Park in Peru. This guided tour will take you deep into the reserved zone - an area of the jungle with restricted access for tourists. You'll get up close to nature and wildlife, explore rivers and lakes, and stay in traditional wooden lodges.

First it was the Incas. Then it was the Spanish. For years man has tried to conquer Peru, but there was no beating the land itself. A cursory glance at a map of this fascinating country should make anyone think twice before attempting to conquer it. Raging rivers, towering peaks, rainforests where the mercury soars and coastal deserts that stretch for miles, all add to Peru's make-up. It is as impressive as it sounds. In acknowledgement of this fact UNESCO has named the particular spot this tour takes place - the Manu National Park - a World Heritage Site. Whilst most travellers head for the more accessible Tambopata Reserve, Manu biosphere reserve is far more removed from civilisation and offers a real wilderness rainforest experience.

As your bus takes you high over The Andes on your first day, you'll be granted views most people only dream of. Further into the jungle of Manu National Park, your days will be spent trekking through rainforests, floating along the Alto Madre de Dios River and seeking out the spectacular wildlife. You'll see hundreds of macaws, parrots and parakeets feasting on clay at macaw licks along riverbanks. You'll see all manner of different monkeys, and spot a few sunbathing caimans, too. And because you'll be camping and staying in traditional wooden lodges in Manu the wonders of the rainforest will only ever be a few footsteps away. This is getting-back-to-nature at its best.

Is it for me?

Manu is a precious rain forest that has remained as untouched as it is because of its remote location. This means there is a lot of traveling involved in these trips, both by bus and boat. However, in compensation for this, you will find yourself in an unequalled rain forest with its entire flora and fauna intact.

This tour is for people interested in wildlife and the rainforest. It involves hiking each day and requires a good level of fitness. The aim is to spot birds and wild animals and you must be comfortable with the thought of coming into contact with caimans, insects and innumerable other creatures of the rainforests. You should also be comfortable travelling in a group and be happy falling asleep in tents or in budget accommodation. And don't forget the DEET.

Accommodation

You will spend most nights in basic lodges: two nights in huts (with normal beds) and maybe one night camping (depending on lodge availability.) The accommodation you'll be staying in will be clean and comfy. You might stay in the Pantiacolla lodge (with 11 rooms), the Posada San Pedro lodge (complete with hot showers) or the Tambo Blanquillo jungle lodge built in the traditional style with palm thatched roofs. The Tambo Blanquillo lodge has 40 beds set across 16 rooms, and each two beds are divided by a cement bamboo wall to allow you some privacy. The lodges are fairly basic but their beautiful locations more than make up for their lack of wealth.

In terms of food expect simple Peruvian dishes - you'll get all your breakfasts, lunches and evening meals including snacks. Soft drinks and alcohol are not included so make sure you budget extra for this.

Prices from

453 GBP (9 days) per person

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Itinerary

This can be a 5, 7 or 9 day itinerary, depending on your plans.

FIVE DAY

DAY 1: Cusco-Cloud Forest

Leaving Cusco early in the morning, we begin an 8-hour journey over the Andes by bus, stopping for breakfast at the beautiful colonial village of Paucartambo. Continuing, we climb to the highpoint of the Manu Biosphere at about 4000 m before descending to the cloud forest. In these mysterious surroundings we take a hike to the lek of the incredible cock-of-the-rock, to see the 'performance' of the males right under our eyes. We spend our first night in the rustic lodge Posada San Pedro (appr. 1,600 m).

DAY 2: Cloud Forest-Cocha Machuhuasi-Pantiacolla Lodge

At daybreak we continue by bus to tropical lowland rainforest. Here at the small village Atalaya at 650 m, we change into a motorized canoe to navigate some 2 hours down the turbulent Alto Madre de Dios River. From here we get great views of the Andes. We stop for a visit of one of the very view lakes on the Alto Madre de Dios River, where you can go around on small traditional rafts. For the next two nights we stay at the Pantiacolla lodge, right at the foot of the Pantiacolla Mountain Range. The forest of Pantiacolla Lodge is a very special rainforest: this is where the Andes and the lowland tropical rainforest meet and provides the visitor with a chance to see a good selection of birds and plants from both zones as well as endemics to the area. Your first hike will be on the lowland trails, at 400m above sea level. Also at night, we explore the forest by torchlight looking for insects, snakes and the uniquely nocturnal night-monkey or 'douricouli'. We spend the night in Pantiacolla Lodge.

DAY 3: Clay lick for parrots-Excursion to the Petroleo stream

Early in the morning the boat takes you to a nearby clay lick for parrots and the rare blue-headed macaw. Their spectacle is both impressive to see and to hear! From there we visit the higher trails of the Pantiacolla Mountains: it's 'Oil' stream with small hot springs, oil wells and natural swimming pools. At night we visit Ranacocha, Frog Lake. Overnight in Pantiacolla Lodge.

DAY 4: Hot springs-Cloud Forest

After a last morning hike in Pantiacolla, the boat takes us to the hot springs of Shintuya for a relaxing mineral bath, before continuing further up to Atalaya. From here we turn back up the Andes by car. We visit a local orchid "sanctuary" along the way. We spend the last night in Posada San Pedro.

DAY 5: Huatocto, Cusco

We hike through the cloud forest till our car picks us up to take us to Huatocto, near Paucartambo. This is a traditional Andean Community where there used to be a big hacienda in colonial times. Of course the hacienda was built on top of Inka ruins! From here we travel by car to Cusco, where we arrive in the late afternoon.

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SEVEN DAYS

DAY 1: Cusco-Cloud Forest

Leaving Cusco early in the morning, we begin an 8-hour journey over the Andes by bus, stopping for breakfast at the beautiful colonial village of Paucartambo. Continuing, we climb to the highpoint of the Manu Biosphere at about 4000 m before descending to the cloud forest. In these mysterious surroundings we take a hike to the lek of the incredible cock-of-the-rock, to see the 'performance' of the males right under our eyes. We spend our first night in the rustic lodge Posada San Pedro (appr. 1,600 m).

DAY 2: Cloud Forest-Atalaya-Manu River

At daybreak we continue by bus to tropical lowland rainforest. Here at the small village Atalaya at 650 m, we change into a motorized canoe to navigate some 5 hours down the turbulent Alto Madre de Dios River to Boca Manu. After about 2 hours, we collect the people doing the 9-day tour from Pantiacolla Lodge to join us for the rest of the tour. You spend the night at Yine Lodge -a small eco-lodge which is part of a project of Pantiacolla with the Yine indians.

DAY 3 & 4: Lake Salvador and Lake Otorongo

On the morning of the third day we turn up the Manu River for a 6-hour ride into the heart of Manu's Reserved Zone. From this vantage point we will have great views of riverside birds, sunbathing caiman, and the enormous aquatic guinea pig, the capybara. We reach our Camping Huts deep inside Manu in the afternoon. This will be our base for this and the next day. During this time, we will hike through virgin forest and explore one of the most beautiful lakes of the Manu basin, Lake Salvador, by catamaran. There is a chance to see a huge variety of colourful birds, numerous species of monkey and with luck, a family of giant otters. There is another hike in this habitat-rich forest that ends in Lake Otorongo and a 20 meter-high observation platform overlooking the lake. At night we can explore the forest by torchlight or go moonlight caiman-spotting on the lake.

DAY 5: Lake Salvador-Macaw Lick

After a final walk through the forest surrounding Lake Salvador, we return back down the Manu River. Joining the Madre de Dios River we arrive at Blanquillo, near the claylick for macaws, where we spend the night in the jungle lodge Tambo Blanquillo.

DAY 6: Macaw Lick

At first light we head to the macaw lick to watch the dazzling spectacle of hundreds of parakeets, parrots and big macaws eating clay. In the afternoon we visit another one of Manu's beautiful oxbow lakes or visit a 42-meter high canopy tower. We spend the night again in the jungle lodge Tambo Blanquillo.

DAY 7: Blanquillo-Boca Colorado-Cusco

Back on the boat early in the morning, we head downstream to the small mining village Boca Colorado. Here and in Mazuco later on, you can see the negative effects of certain human activities on the delicate ecological balance of the rainforest. We take local transportation till crossing the Inambari River. On the other side, our bus is waiting to take you over a newly paved road, through beautiful cloud and elfin forest. Near Cusco, you have stunning views of the Ausangate Mountain. Cusco is reached in the early evening.

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NINE DAYS

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DAY 3: Clay lick for parrots-Excursion to the Petroleo stream

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DAY 4: Pantiacolla Lodge-Yine Lodge

In the morning we take another hike on one of the lodge's many trails. At midday we join the people doing the 7-day tour going down the Alto Madre de Dios River to Yine Lodge -a small eco-lodge which is part of a project of Pantiacolla with the Yine Indians.

DAY 5 & 6: Lake Salvador and Lake Otorongo

In the morning we turn up the Manu River for a 6-hour ride into the heart of Manu's Reserved Zone. From this vantage point we will have great views of riverside birds, sunbathing caiman, and the enormous aquatic guinea pig, the capybara. We reach our Camping Huts deep inside Manu in the afternoon. This will be our base for this and the next day. During this time, we will hike through virgin forest and explore one of the most beautiful lakes of the Manu basin, Lake Salvador, by catamaran. There is a chance to see a huge variety of colourful birds, numerous species of monkey and with luck, a family of giant otters. There is another hike in this habitat-rich forest that ends in Lake Otorongo and a 20 meter-high observation platform overlooking the lake. At night we can explore the forest by torchlight or go moonlight caiman-spotting on the lake.

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Details

Getting there

The nearest international airport is Lima, Peru. From here you can connect to Cusco by either plane or bus. In Europe, there are direct flights to Lima from Amsterdam and Madrid, or you could fly into New York and then take a connecting flight to Lima.

Price includes

English and Spanish-speaking tour guide; transportation by private bus between Cusco and Manu National Park; all excursions mentioned in the programme; overnights in lodges and camping huts; all meals served with water and hot drinks; entrance fees to the reserved zone; light aircraft flight (plus airport taxes) back to Cusco (only applicable for 5 & 7 day tours); guidebook to rainforest.

Not included: soft drinks and alcohol

Comfort level

Down to earth (hostels, camping, huts)

Experience required

A reasonable level of fitness and interest is all that is needed

Travellers should bring

Recommended kit list

Binoculars (imperative); Flashlight with spare bulbs and extra batteries; Day pack; Long pants and long-sleeved shirts; T-shirts; Shorts/Bathing suit; Towel; Sweater or light jacket; 1 pair of hiking boots and 1 pair of light shoes or sandals; Long socks; Rain gear; Sun hat, sunglasses, sun block; Insect repellent (with at least 25% 'deet') and after bite; Toilet-paper; Plastic bags (to keep everything dry); Water bottle (with water for the bus ride into Manu); Copy of a valid passport; Copy of yellow fever and tetanus vaccinations; Money for soft drinks or beers, and handicrafts at the Boca Manu landings strip.