

The Best of Bolivia

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Days 1 – 2	<u>Depart London, fly Santa Cruz</u>
Day 3	<u>Santa Cruz</u>
Days 4 – 5	<u>Samaipata</u>
Days 6 – 7	<u>Red-fronted Macaw Reserve</u>
Days 8 – 10	<u>Sucre</u>
Days 11 – 15	<u>Uyuni/High Andes</u>
Days 16 – 18	<u>La Paz and surroundings</u>
Days 19 – 20	<u>Depart La Paz, fly London</u>

Post-tour Amazon Extension

Day 19	<u>La Paz to Madidi National Park</u>
Days 20 – 21	<u>Madidi National Park</u>
Day 22	<u>Pampas del Yacuma</u>
Day 23	<u>Return to La Paz</u>
Days 24 – 25	<u>Depart La Paz, fly London</u>

Departs

February to July – September to December

Focus

Birds, other wildlife, culture and landscapes

Grading

Grade B – A traditional wildlife tour involving some early starts and late finishes

Dates & Prices

See website (tour code BOL03)



From Top: Red-fronted Macaws, Laguna Colorada, Lake Titicaca



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NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Itinerary

Day 1

Depart London

For those taking the group flights, we will depart London on a service that includes one connection – most likely in Madrid, São Paulo or Bogotá, but not in the United States.

Day 2

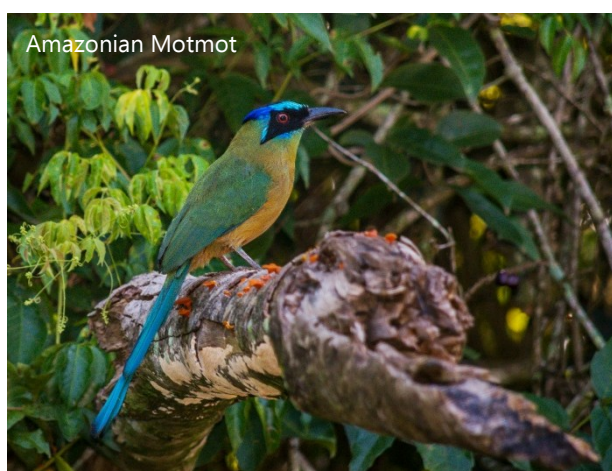
Arrival in Santa Cruz

We arrive at Viru Viru Airport in Santa Cruz the following day. Santa Cruz is Bolivia's largest and most dynamic city, set within the tropical lowlands of the east and serving as the gateway to the Chiquitania, Chaco and Amazonian ecosystems. Time permitting, we will enjoy some relaxed birdwatching close to the airport, an excellent area for sightings of the impressive Greater Rhea. In the evening, we will meet for a welcome dinner at our hotel.

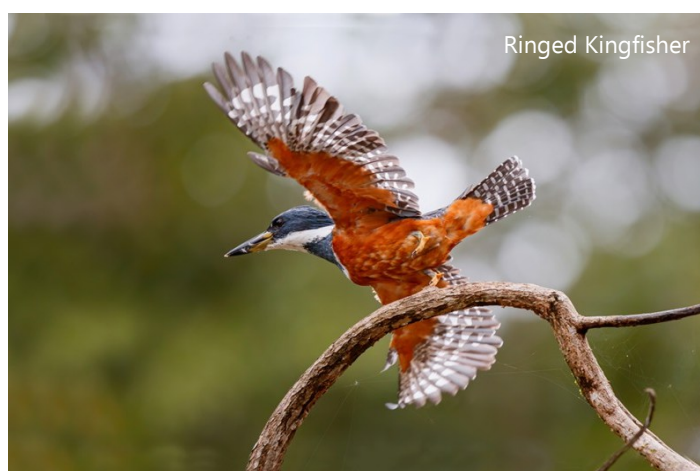
Overnight: Santa Cruz

Day 3

Santa Cruz



Amazonian Motmot



Ringed Kingfisher

We begin our first full day with a visit to the historic centre of Santa Cruz, taking in the 24 de Septiembre Square and the Cathedral Basilica of San Lorenzo. In the afternoon we will explore the Botanical Garden, a 220-hectare remnant of urban forest representing the Chiquitano Dry Forest and supporting a rich variety of wildlife, including monkeys, sloths, capybaras, caimans and turtles. It is also an excellent birdwatching site, where we will look for Bare-faced Ibis, Ringed Kingfisher, Bolivian Slaty Antshrike, Yellow-tufted Woodpecker and Amazonian Motmot.

Overnight: Santa Cruz

Days 4 – 5

Samaipata

Today we travel to the picturesque town of Samaipata, a place rich in both culture and natural beauty. We begin with a morning visit to El Fuerte de Samaipata, an important archaeological and UNESCO World Heritage Site. This remarkable location features a vast carved rock covered with pre-Columbian ceremonial and astronomical engravings, reflecting Amazonian, Andean and Inca influences across Bolivia's eastern Andes.

In the afternoon we will visit Refugio de los Colibríes, a small yet outstanding birding hotspot situated between the Inter-Andean Dry Valleys and the Chaco Serrano. Here we can expect close views of hummingbirds such as White-bellied Hummingbird, Fork-tailed Woodnymph, Planalto Hermit and White-vented Violetear, as well as Rusty Flowerpiercer, Sooty-fronted Spinetail, Variable Antshrike, Ocellated Piculet, Large-tailed Dove and Green-winged Saltator. We then return to our hotel for a comfortable night's rest.



El Fuerte de Samaipata

At this latitude, the Yungas forests divide into distinct northern and southern ecoregions, each with its own characteristic vegetation and wildlife. In the morning we will visit the Tucumán Parrot Reserve, located within the southern zone. This area is shaped by subtropical conditions with slightly lower rainfall and is characterised by Mountain Pine and Alder. A major highlight here is the Tucumán Amazon, a species restricted to this ecoregion. Other species we will look for include Brown Tinamou, Yungas Guan, White-throated Antpitta, Green-cheeked Parakeet, Cream-backed Woodcreeper, Red-tailed Comet, Black-capped and Black-and-chestnut Warbling Finch, and Mottled-cheeked Tyrannulet.

In the afternoon we will have time to explore the museum, local market and main square, appreciating the cultural diversity and relaxed atmosphere of this small town, before returning once again to our hotel.

Overnights: Samaipata

Days 6 – 7

Samaipata to Red-fronted Macaw Reserve

Today we travel to the Red-fronted Macaw Reserve, passing through the Inter-Andean Dry Valleys and the Chaco Serrano, with opportunities for birding from the road and at selected stops. As we cross mid-elevation zones of arid, open habitat, we will scan small canyons, the Jardín de las Cactáceas area and Laguna Pailones for Andean Condor, Bolivian Earthcreeper, Stripe-crowned Spinetail, Rufous-capped Antshrike, Black-and-chestnut Warbling Finch, Band-tailed Sierra Finch, Green-barred Woodpecker, Ultramarine Grosbeak and Moss-backed Sparrow. By nightfall we will arrive at the Red-fronted Macaw Lodge, where we will enjoy dinner.

After a good night's rest, we wake in the heart of one of Bolivia's premier birding hotspots, with no long drives required. The community-managed Red-fronted Macaw Reserve lies at 1,500 metres along the Mizque River in the Inter-Andean Dry Valleys, with an impressive cliff face directly opposite the ecolodge where the endemic Red-fronted Macaw nests. From the lodge garden we will enjoy superb views of this remarkable species, and we will explore the surrounding area for Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle, Monk Parakeet, Spot-backed Puffbird, Striped Woodpecker, White-tipped Plantcutter, White-crested Tyrannulet, Ringed Warbling Finch, Grey-crested Finch and the endemic Bolivian Blackbird.



Overnights: Red-fronted Macaw Reserve

Days 8 – 10

Sucre

Today we continue our journey towards Bolivia's constitutional capital, Sucre – a peaceful city of well-preserved colonial architecture and elegant whitewashed buildings, recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In the afternoon we will take a gentle stroll through the city, visiting the House of Freedom, the ASUR Museum, the Convent of San Felipe de Neri and Bolívar Park, gaining a fascinating introduction to Bolivia's history and cultural heritage. This evening we will enjoy a folkloric dinner show featuring local cuisine, traditional music and regional dances.

The following morning we visit Tarabuco, a charming Yampará village famed for its Sunday Market and distinctive textiles. A walk through the market offers opportunities to purchase tapestries, bags and shawls, while observing the Yampará people in their striking traditional attire – leather monteras, multicoloured ponchos and chuspas for coca leaves – providing an authentic insight into Bolivia's living traditions. On our return to Sucre, we may make a brief stop in the Yotala area for some light birdwatching or simply spend more time at leisure in the city.

Before leaving Sucre, we will visit its Chocolate Museum to learn about the history of this celebrated delicacy and enjoy tasting some of the region's finest chocolates. After our visit, we travel onward to Potosí, one of the world's highest cities and a UNESCO World Heritage Site renowned for Cerro Rico, once the richest silver mine on Earth. Its colonial architecture played a major role in shaping both Bolivian and wider South American history. In the afternoon we explore 10 de Noviembre Square, the Church of San Francisco, the historic centre and the National Mint (Casa Nacional de Moneda), gaining a vivid impression of this remarkable city.

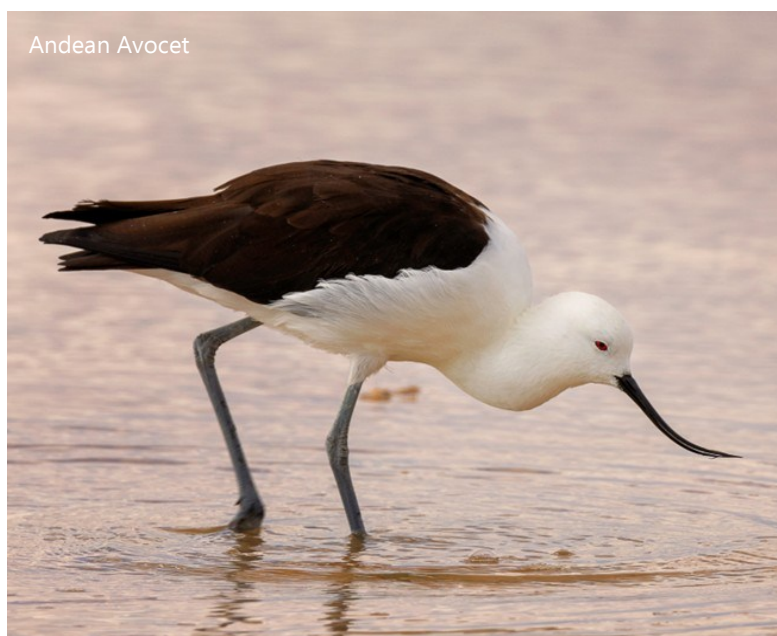
Overnights: Sucre and Potosí

Days 11 – 15

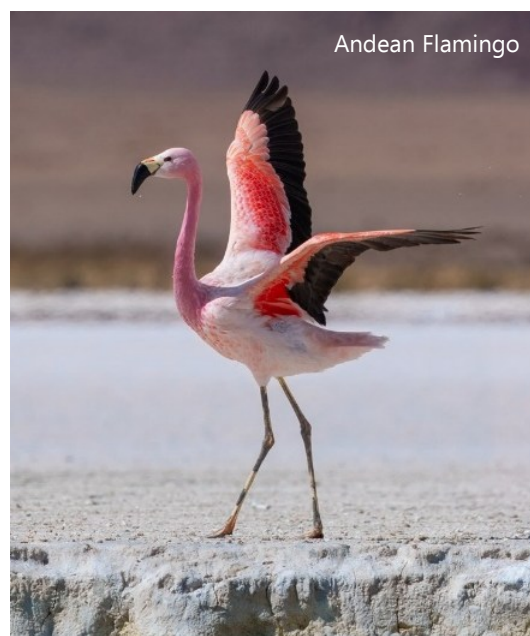
Uyuni/High Andes

Today we travel to Uyuni, gateway to the world's largest salt flat. This is a long journey, but we will make strategic stops across the vast Altiplano to scan for birds and enjoy the extraordinary scenery. Many of our stops will be at wetlands and high-Andean bogs (bofedales), where life persists in these harsh, high-elevation landscapes. Along the way we will also visit the ghost town of Pulacayo, once the site of a major Bolivian silver mine and now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Pulacayo Mine still preserves a locomotive famously robbed by the American outlaws Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.

The Bolivian Altiplano is a high-elevation ecosystem of global significance. Shaped by aridity, intense solar radiation and large daily temperature swings, it encompasses an exceptional range of habitats, from hypersaline salt flats and dormant volcanoes to nutrient-rich wetlands and vividly coloured lagoons. Today we will visit the Villa Alota bogs in search of Puna Miner, Rufous-banded Miner, Plumbeous Sierra Finch, Red-backed Sierra Finch, Black Siskin, Greenish Yellow-Finch and Golden-spotted Ground Dove. We will then pass the Turquiri and Pastos Grandes lagoons, home to Giant Coot, Andean Avocet, Andean and James's Flamingoes, Andean Negrito and White-winged Cinclodes. We will spend the night near Laguna Hedionda.



Andean Avocet



Andean Flamingo

We begin the next day with a visit to Laguna Hedionda, one of the most striking lagoons on this circuit. Rich in minerals such as sulphur, it is known for both its distinctive smell and its name. Throughout the day we will explore several lagoons, including Cachi and Kara, each with its own character and vivid colours. We also visit the Siloli Desert, famous for its wind-carved rock formations whose unusual shapes create a truly unique landscape. Wildlife we may encounter today includes Common Mountain Vizcacha, Culpeo (Andean Fox), Andean Swallow, White-browed and Ochre-naped Ground-Tyrants, Mourning Sierra Finch, Cordilleran Canastero, Brown-backed Mockingbird, Rufous-breasted Earthcreeper and Straight-billed Earthcreeper. We end the day at Laguna Colorada, the most important birding hotspot in this region, situated within the Eduardo Abaroa Andean Fauna National Reserve. We will spend the night at a local hotel.

Waking up within the National Reserve, we can devote the day to exploring Laguna Colorada, one of the most important water bodies on the continent for breeding flamingoes and numerous high-Andean waterbirds. According to Andean mythology, the lake's deep crimson colour represents the spilled blood of the gods; in reality, its hue is produced by microscopic algae and mineral sediments. We will search for Andean, James's and Chilean Flamingoes, Andean Avocet, Grey-breasted Seedsnipe and Puna Miner, as well as mammals such as Highland Yellow-toothed Cavy, Coypu and Culpeo. Later in the day we return to Uyuni, scanning en route for Lesser Rhea, Puna Yellow-Finch and Black-winged Ground Dove.



Salar de Uyuni

For our final day in this high-Andean region, we visit Bolivia's most iconic natural landmark: the Salar de Uyuni. Formed by the evaporation of prehistoric lakes, this is the world's largest salt flat, covering more than 1,060,000 hectares. The salar contains extraordinary geological features; in some places the salt crust reaches depths of up to 120 metres, composed of overlapping layers of brine and ancient lake sediments. Across its 150-kilometre width, the elevation varies by barely 40 centimetres, making it the flattest place on Earth. The salar also holds the world's largest known lithium reserves, though extraction remains difficult due to the extreme scarcity of water. This high-altitude desert receives annual rainfall of barely 100 millimetres, making water a fragile and non-renewable resource.

Scattered across this 'sea of salt' are around 80 islands and rocky outcrops that rise from the brilliant white surface. These isolated habitats support surprising life, including ancient giant cacti such as *Echinopsis atacamensis* and high-Andean hummingbirds such as the Andean Hillstar.

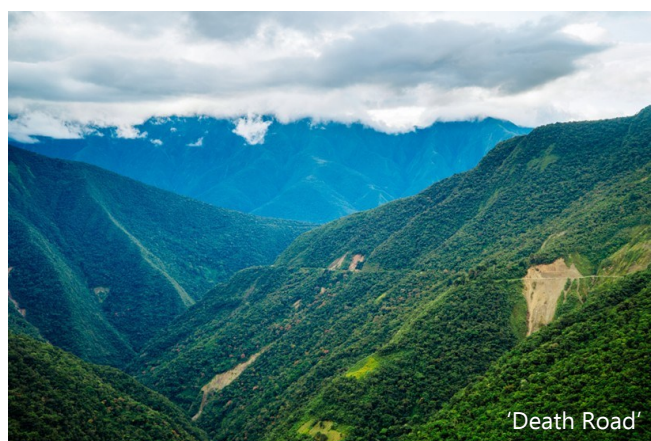
Overnights: Uyuni region

Days 16 – 18

La Paz & Surroundings

After an unforgettable experience in one of the world's most extraordinary landscapes, we fly to El Alto and descend into La Paz, the 'City of the Sky', set beneath the towering, snow-capped Illimani. A vibrant and culturally rich city, La Paz is best appreciated from above, and we will explore it via its impressive cable-car network, visiting key landmarks such as Plaza Murillo, Calle Jaén and the famous Witches' Street.

The following day we cross the Altiplano, travelling over the mountains of the Cordillera Real towards the Sorata Valley. With a little luck, we may encounter two highly sought-after endemics: Black-hooded Sunbeam and Berlepsch's Canastero, both notable highlights of the day. From here we continue to Lake Titicaca, world-renowned for its vast size and remarkable altitude at 12,500 feet above sea level. A small traditional boat will be waiting to take us onto the lake in search of its emblematic species, the Titicaca Grebe. We will navigate slowly through the reedbeds, enjoying the serenity of the lake and close encounters with its wildlife.



For our final full day in this remarkable country, we begin by birding at 15,400 feet above sea level in the Humid Puna wetlands at the entrance to Cotapata National Park. Here we will search for Giant Coot, Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe, Slender-billed Miner, White-fronted and Cinnamon-bellied Ground-Tyrants, Glacier Finch and Plumbeous Sierra Finch.

From this high-Andean environment we make a dramatic descent into an entirely different landscape as we travel down the infamous 'Death Road'. Within only a few kilometres, the scenery shifts from thick cloudforest mist to warm, lush rainforest – part of the Northern Yungas of La Paz. In these rich montane forests we will look for Great Sapphirewing, Long-tailed Sylph, Blue-mantled Thornbill, Montane Foliage-gleaner, Fulvous Wren, Andean Solitaire, White-banded Tyrannulet, Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant, White-browed Conebill, Hazel-fronted Pygmy-Tyrant and Scimitar-winged Piha. Other highlights may include Diademed Tapaculo, Orange-browed, Black-eared and Three-striped Hemispinguses, Golden-collared Tanager, Orange-bellied Euphonia, Swallow Tanager and Citrine Warbler.

After an exceptional day covering a spectacular range of elevations and habitats, we return to La Paz for our final night before tomorrow's return flight.

Overnights: La Paz

Days 19 – 20

Depart La Paz, arrive London

Today we depart La Paz, taking a connecting flight to Santa Cruz before boarding our overnight flights back to London.

Post-tour Amazon Extension

Day 19

La Paz to Madidi National Park

For those joining the Amazon Extension, while the rest of the group flies home, we will take a flight to Rurrenabaque, Bolivia's ecotourism capital and the gateway to Madidi National Park. On arrival, we transfer by boat to Madidi Jungle Ecolodge, where we will spend the next three nights. During this three-hour journey we will scan the Beni and Tuichi Rivers for Red-and-green and Chestnut-fronted Macaws, Black-tailed Trogon, Black-capped Donacobius, Black Caiman and Greater Capybara.

Overnight: Madidi Jungle Ecolodge

Days 20 – 21

Madidi National Park



We wake to the deep, resonant calls of Howler Monkeys in the heart of Madidi National Park – the most bird-diverse national park on Earth, with over 1,000 recorded species. We will explore the surrounding rainforest in search of Hoatzin, Ringed Woodpecker, Black and Red-throated Caracaras, White-necked Puffbird, Black-faced and Chestnut-tailed Antbirds, Spix's Guan, Rufous-breasted Hermit, Razor-billed Curassow, Agami Heron, White-throated Toucan, Cobalt-winged Parakeet, White-fronted Nunbird, Fasciated Antshrike, Round-tailed and Blue-capped Manakins and Crested Owl.

Madidi is equally remarkable for its non-avian wildlife. Notable mammals and reptiles here include Spectactled Bear, Jaguar, Giant River Otter, Marsh Deer, Black-faced Spider Monkey, Grey Woolly Monkey, the park-endemic Madidi Titi Monkey, and the impressive Black Caiman, among many others. Over the next two full days we will explore up to 50 kilometres of forest trails and navigate the calm waters, gaining a deeper appreciation of the region's exceptional biodiversity.

Overnight: Madidi Jungle Ecolodge

Days 22

Pampas del Yacuma

Today we return by boat to Rurrenabaque. The journey downstream is considerably shorter, aided by the current. From here, a two-hour drive followed by a 20-minute boat ride brings us to the Pampas del Yacuma Nature Reserve. This reserve lies along the tea-coloured Yacuma River which, unlike the rivers we have explored so far, originates in the savannah. As it travels, it gathers organic matter that gives the water its distinctive hue.



We will spend the following day exploring the wildlife-rich Yacuma River in search of Southern Spectacled Caiman, Black Caiman, Amazon River Dolphin, Capybara, Black-capped (Bolivian) Squirrel Monkey, Guianan Brown Capuchin and Bolivian Red Howler. Birdlife is equally impressive, with regular sightings of Hoatzin, Black-collared Hawk, Red-capped Cardinal, Ringed Kingfisher and Anhinga. Wildlife-viewing along this river is remarkably easy, offering exceptional opportunities for photographers to capture close-up images of an outstanding diversity of birds, mammals and reptiles.

Overnight: Rurrenabaque

Day 23

Return to La Paz

This morning we fly back to La Paz. If time allows, in the afternoon we will visit the Auquisamaña Reserve, located in the surrounding valleys, where we will search for Andean Swift, Red-tailed Comet, Giant Hummingbird, Rock Earthcreeper, Plain-mantled Tit-Spinetail, Streak-fronted Thornbird, White-browed Chat-Tyrant, Brown-backed Mockingbird and Greenish Yellow-Finch.

In the evening we gather for a farewell dinner, reflecting on the highlights of our Bolivian adventure.

Overnight: La Paz

Days 24 – 25

Depart La Paz, arrive London

Today we depart La Paz, taking a connecting flight to Santa Cruz before boarding our overnight flights back to London.



Siloli Desert

Tour Grading & Focus

A traditional wildlife tour involving some early starts and late finishes. As with many South American itineraries that venture off the beaten track, participants should be prepared at times for long drives on rough roads, simple accommodation, and plenty of time spent on foot, occasionally on steep or uneven trails.

This is also a tour which spends much time above 3,500m. Our pre-departure information talks in more depth about altitude sickness and how the effects may be countered.

You will need to appreciate that neotropical mammals and reptiles are largely shy and retiring, present in low densities and often crepuscular or nocturnal in nature. Although this tour spends time and effort in looking for exciting mammal and reptile species, potential participants should be aware that these will be on view for only a small percentage of our time in the field. Anybody wishing for and expecting a safari-type experience full of animals should consider carefully whether this is the holiday for them. Time between mammal encounters will be spent largely birdwatching (alert to mammals at all times of course), as birds are the most conspicuous members of the local fauna.

Weather

This tour covers a wide range of elevations and habitats, and as a result you should be prepared for a variety of weather conditions.

In the lowland regions, particularly around Santa Cruz and the Amazon Basin, the climate is typically hot, humid and tropical. Daytime temperatures can feel intense, especially in exposed areas, and brief but heavy showers are possible throughout the year.

In the cloudforest and Yungas, conditions are generally cooler and more variable. Mist and low cloud are common, and heavy rain can occur at any time, especially in the afternoons. Waterproof clothing and protection for cameras and optics are essential.

At higher elevations on the Altiplano and in the high Andes, the weather is notably more extreme. Even under strong sunshine, temperatures remain cool to cold, and at night they may fall close to or below freezing. Wind chill can also be significant.

When visiting the Salar de Uyuni and surrounding desert regions, expect strong sun, cold nights, and very dry air. Ultraviolet levels are high at altitude, so sun protection is vital.

Overall, guests should be ready for conditions ranging from hot and humid to cold and windy, with the possibility of rain, mist or intense sunshine depending on the location and altitude on any given day.

Food & Accommodation Included in the Price

All accommodation and meals (and mineral water) are included, starting with dinner on Day 2 and ending with breakfast on Day 19.

Although you can expect clean and comfortable accommodation during the main tour, those opting for the Madidi extension should be accepting of slightly more basic lodging, a bumpy drive, hot temperatures and walking on steep/uneven trails.

Extra Expenses

Please note that the cost of this holiday does not include:

- Any items of a personal nature, such as laundry
- Drinks
- Travel insurance (mandatory for all participants)
- Optional excursions or activities not included in the main programme
- Tips for tour leaders, drivers, lodge staff or local guides
- Personal medical expenses.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

