**Peru - Macaws & Machu Picchu**

Non-trekking departure

**Naturetrek Tour Dossier**

### Outline itinerary

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**Departs**

September/October

**Focus**

Birds (primarily), mammals and culture

**Grading**

Grade A. Easy day walks only

**Dates and Prices**

See website (tour code PER06) or brochure

**Highlights**

- Thousands of Humboldt Current seabirds and Southern Sea Lions
- The world’s biggest Macaw clay-lick, surrounded by pristine upper Amazonian rainforest
- A sprinkling of exciting mammals including an outside chance of Jaguar or Tapir
- An opportunity for serious birdwatching along the Manu Road
- Condor, Cock-of-the-Rock and Sunbittern avian highlights.
NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & 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.

Introduction

Peru: The most evocative of South American destinations and that which offers birdwatchers and aficionados of mountain scenery, lost worlds and ancient cultures the experience of a lifetime. The magnificent scenery of the high Andes, the ruined cities of the Incas and the great rainforests of Amazonia, images of condors sailing past icy peaks, packed masses of seabirds on guano islands, toucans and macaws eating ripened fruit in the rainforest canopy and the Archaeopteryx-like Hoatzin clambering through marshy swamps only enhance the dream of a visit to this fantastic country.

Thanks to its uniquely diverse topography and geography, harbouring wonderfully varied ecosystems, Peru has the richest avifauna in the world with over 1,700 species described.

During this holiday we will explore the highlights of southern Peru. The islands of Peru’s most important marine nature reserve at Paracas, the richness of the Amazon Basin in Tambopata and the cloudforest along the Manu Road (“the best birdwatching route on the planet,”) and finishing with a visit to the best known and most spectacular archaeological site in the Americas, Machu Picchu.

Day 1

We depart from the UK this morning (usually KLM via Amsterdam*) and connect with a non-stop service to the Peruvian capital of Lima, arriving at Jorge Chávez International Airport during the evening. From here we will transfer across the city to the pleasant district of Miraflores and a comfortable hotel for the night.

* Regional flights with KLM are also generally available from Bristol, Birmingham, Manchester, Newcastle and Norwich. Please state your preference upon booking. The supplement is usually £60pp.

Day 2

We will spend a portion of our first full day in Peru on a boat trip out to the Palominos Islands, a small archipelago that lies just a few miles offshore. While not as dramatic as the Ballestas Islands further south, the Palominos nevertheless support a very healthy population of Humboldt Current seabirds including Guanay Cormorants, Peruvian Boobies, Peruvian Pelicans and the strikingly attractive Inca Tern. Additionally, the Palominos are noted for their population of Southern Sea Lions and we are likely to enjoy some close encounters with these large and impressive marine mammals both in the water and
hauled out on the rocks. This exciting excursion will provide a great start to our action-packed trip.

Back on dry land, we'll have the opportunity to grab some lunch before driving south through Lima towards Pantanos de Villa marshes. This small wetland is very attractive to birds and a good selection of species should be present, including Great Grebe, Pied-billed Grebe, various ducks, herons and waders, Wren-like Rushbird, Many-coloured Rush-tyrant and Peruvian Red-breasted Meadowlark.

We overnight again at our comfortable hotel.

Day 3

After an early morning transfer we will board a domestic flight bound for Puerto Maldonado in the Amazonian lowlands. Stepping from the plane we will be hit with a wall of hot, humid jungle air as we make our way to the baggage collection.

Founded at the turn of the century, Maldonado has been important as a rubber boom town, a logging centre and more recently as a centre for gold and oil prospectors. It is also important for jungle crops such as Brazil nuts and coffee. The various commercial enterprises centred on Puerto Maldonado have made it the most important port and the capital of the department (county) of Madre de Dios. It is a fast-growing town with a busy frontier feel and a population of about 25,000, depending on the season. It will be interesting to experience this boom town atmosphere but we will try to pass through the town fairly quickly and down to the port on the Río Tambopata. The port is just upstream of the river’s confluence with the great Rio Madre de Dios, southeastern Peru’s principal Amazon tributary.

The Tambopata-Candamo Reserved Zone encompasses most of the drainage basin of the Tambopata River and, at almost 1.5 million hectares, is one of the largest protected areas in the country. The zone was created in 1990. In 1996, the upper reaches, Bahuaja-Sonene, were elevated to National Park status. However, Tambopata has seen bitter battles between environmentalists and the multi-national petroleum companies throughout the nineties and until the future of the Amazon Rainforest as a whole becomes clearer, Tambopata is likely to continue to be a mini showcase of the conflicts affecting one of the most diverse and important ecosystems on earth.
Having boarded our covered motorised canoe we will head upstream and out into primary rainforest towards our accommodation for the night. As we pass the small villages and chacras (small farms) lining the banks of the river, we will be keeping an eye out for Spectacled Caiman on the sandy beaches and, if we are lucky, a family of Capybara, the world’s largest rodent. Birds to look out for on the river journey include herons, vultures, Black Caracara, Great Black Hawk, Large-billed and Yellow-billed Terns, Black Skimmer, kingfishers, macaws, parrots, White-throated Toucan, swallows and flycatchers.

The journey will last around two hours depending on the river level. After a welcome drink there should be time for some birdwatching or an introductory walk around the lodge trails before dusk. After a meal in the dining area we will retire to comfortable cabins with the sounds of the rainforest echoing all around us.

Day 4

Tambopata Research Centre

After a crack-of-dawn start and a loading of baggage we’ll visit the Tres Chimbadas oxbow lake. This involves a short boat ride back on the Tambopata and a very enjoyable walk (look out for Squirrel and Brown Capuchin Monkeys) to the lake, where we board our wooden catamaran. Here our local guides will paddle us around quietly, looking out for Giant River Otters. We may be lucky enough to see the resident family fishing around the lake and possibly even hauled out onto some logs.

Bird-wise we hope to enjoy good views of the bizarre looking Hoatzins, as well as Wattled Jacanas, the strange and difficult-to-see Sungrebe, White-throated Toucans, Green- and Rufous Kingfishers, Red-capped Cardinals, and several flyby parrots and macaws. Huge Black Caiman reside in the lake as do countless piranhas, which our guides may try to catch to show off their impressive teeth.

Next we again take to our motorised canoe and head upstream towards the headwaters of the Tambopata and the macaw clay lick.

Three hours or so into the journey we pass the confluence of the River Malinowski after which we enter the National Park and see the last signs of human habitation. As the mud substrate is gradually replaced by rocks, the river becomes branched and the current moves more swiftly. We will start to look for Capped Heron, Orinoco Goose, Jabiru and increasing numbers of the big macaws flying overhead. We will stop occasionally on the beaches to look for the prints of caiman, Capybara and possibly even Tapir or Jaguar. The sun is hot and strong and the biting insects numerous but the area is stunningly remote and beautiful.
Eventually we shall catch a glimpse of the Andean foothills and arrive at the research station, which nestles in primary forest behind the clay cliff, in the early evening. The Tambopata clay lick only became known to western man in the late 1980’s. Today, biologists have counted 18 major licks in south-eastern Peru and the region’s native people report of at least 15 others. There are undoubtedly more yet to be discovered in the inaccessible regions of this steaming wilderness, arguably the most biologically diverse and intact rainforest in the world. Sixteen species of macaws inhabit tropical forests from central Mexico to northern Argentina, distinguished among the world’s 340 parrot species by their long tails and huge beaks. Nine of the macaws are endangered or threatened and their intelligence ranks them among birds as chimpanzees rank amongst primates.

Fortunately, this wilderness east of the Andes has in the past been too remote to have fallen under many of the pressures evident elsewhere in the Amazon. But as gold miners were pushing into tributaries of the Tambopata and the region’s virgin stands of timber were luring commercial loggers, appreciation of the value of macaws as a magnet for eco-tourists contributed to Peru’s mid-1990’s proposal to create a 1.8 million-acre national park (Bahuaja-Sonene) in the Tambopata-Candamo Reserved Zone. Macaws – elegant, rambunctious, always captivating – have become Peru’s rainforest ambassadors.

After settling into our accommodation at the research centre, we will split into smaller groups to walk some of the rainforest trails which branch out behind the research station. (Usually we split into two groups, with the keener birders in one group with the Naturetrek tour leader and the more general interest/ ecology/mammal spotters in a different group with the excellent local guides).

After dusk we will eat and settle down for the first of three nights at this wonderfully remote base.

Day 5-6

Tambopata Research Centre

Before dawn we arise with a tea or coffee and wait for the first rays of dawn. As the sun clears the tree line and strikes the clay cliff opposite, we will start to witness one of the world’s most dazzling wildlife spectacles. Macaws mate for life and they will start to arrive in discreet pairs and small groups. We will expect to see Scarlet, Blue and Yellow, Red and Green and Chestnut-fronted Macaws, Yellow-headed, Blue-headed and Orange-cheeked Parrots and Dusky-headed, White-eyed and Cobalt-winged Parakeets. Before long, hundreds of macaws and parrots will be fighting and squawking over the choice spots to grab a beakful of clay, a vital but mysterious part of their diet. In a forest of maybe 2,000 species of flowering or

Hoatzin

Macaws at a clay lick
fruiting trees, plants and vines, it would appear that the birds have no lack of food. Why, then, are they also eating riverbank clay? It was found that the clay is high in salts and minerals that the birds may not get from their primarily vegetarian diet. More intriguing still, many of the commonly-eaten seeds contain toxic chemical compounds. It is likely that macaws take almost daily doses of clay to de-toxify themselves. Most years macaws eat less clay during May and June, at the start of the dry season, when many plants are flowering. By late July the licks are active again and the macaw crowds peak in August and September, the driest time of year. As food sources dwindle, macaws may have to fall back on more toxic seeds.

The birds will begin to disperse back into the forest from 8.00 a.m. onwards which will be our signal to eat some breakfast! During our two full days in the area of the lick we will make full use of the superb and varied trails branching out from the research station to search for monkeys and inner forest birds. The endangered Black Spider Monkey is present but will require some luck to find while Squirrel, Brown Capuchin, Dusky Titi and Red Howler Monkeys all present easier targets. The birding is superb but immensely challenging. Tambopata is noted for the quality of the specialist antbird flocks. "Professional" antbirds are those species that make a living from following the huge army ant swarms over the forest floor, plucking fleeing invertebrates from the leading edge of the advancing ants. Over 500 species have been recorded in this area, making it one of the richest on the planet. The world 24-hour birding record was set nearby in Manu National Park by the late Ted Parker, a record only recently broken with the use of helicopters in eastern Africa! Flycatchers, antbirds, tanagers, woodpeckers, ovenbirds, barbets and motmots all abound. The time here will be a marvellous opportunity to bird the trails and learn about the rainforest ecosystem. On infrequent occasions over the years our groups have even been lucky enough to see a Jaguar on the Tambopata river!

Day 7

Cusco

We will pack up early this morning and motor all the way back downstream to Puerto Maldonado in time for a quick bite to eat before boarding our flight to Cusco.

Cusco is the ancient hub of the South American travel network and, in this respect, is reminiscent of Kathmandu in Nepal. Both cities attract thousands of travellers who come not just to visit a unique destination but also to experience an age-old culture and a city steeped in history, tradition and legend.
Cusco is the archaeological capital of the Americas and the continent’s oldest continually inhabited city. Massive Inca-built stone walls line most of Cusco’s central streets and form the foundations of colonial and modern buildings. The streets are often stepped and narrow and thronged with Quechua-speaking descendants of the Incas. The city is the capital of its department and has a population of about 300,000. Set at an altitude of over 3,300 metres, we will take things very easily during our first day, eating lightly and avoiding alcohol, however tempting the Pisco Sour and Cusqueña (the local beer) may be!

Our flight is due to land in Cusco around mid-afternoon. After checking in at the hotel, there will be time for a quick wander around the colonial city to get our bearings before dinner. Our comfortable and centrally-located hotel is in an ideal position, allowing easy access to restaurants, shops and the magnificent central plaza. After our city tour, we will be free either to relax in the hotel or try some of the varied restaurants (clay oven-fired pizza and spit-roasted chicken are specialities here!) and possibly listen to some live Andean music.

Day 8

We have a day at leisure today to recharge batteries and to explore Cusco, acclimatizing as we gently go.

Day 9

Today we head south from Cusco to the small village of Huacarpay and the associated lakes. The morning will be spent birding the area for Cinnamon, Speckled and Puna Teal, Andean Negrito, Yellow-winged Blackbird, a variety of ground-tyrants and chat-tyrants, Giant Hummingbird, Streak-fronted Thornbird, Cinereous Harrier, saltators, seedeaters and finches.

In the late morning we will continue down via the Huambutio road to Pisac and the Urubamba Valley. El Valle Sagrado, or the Sacred Valley as it is normally known, is 15 kilometres north of Cusco and, at 600 metres lower than the city, has a pleasant climate. The turbulent Urubamba is a favourite haunt of white water rafters. The Pisac ruins high above the village are magnificent and a wonderful site for our picnic lunch. We found a fantastic gully here in September 2000 containing some excellent birds including the impressive Bearded Mountaineer hummingbird, a Peruvian endemic.
Arriving back in Cusco we should have time for a quick visit to the famous ruins of Saqsaywaman and the local shops containing a variety of fabrics and other handicrafts. Our attention will then firmly focus on a good nights' sleep for tomorrow we have the long journey to Manu ahead of us.

Day 10

This morning we set off early for the Andean Cock-of-the-Rock Lodge (CORL) located in subtropical forest on the east slope of the Andes. This part of our trip encompasses fantastic birding, breathtaking scenery and rich Andean culture. Leaving Cusco at dawn we will make planned stops at several patches of scrub where Sparkling Violetear, Creamy-crested Spinetail, White-browed Chat-Tyrant, Black-throated Flower-Piercer, Cinereus Conebill and perhaps Aplomado Falcon can be seen. We will eventually arrive at the puna grassland at Acjanaco, the southwest boundary of Manu National Park. At this elevation we should be able to see Junin Canastero, Sedge Wren, Black-billed Shrike-Tyrant, Mountain Caracara, Plumbeous Sierra Finch, and Plain-colored Seedeaters. Here we will try to lure the commonly heard Andean Tapaculo into view. In the transition zone from grassland to temperate forest, White-browed Chat-Tyrant is replaced by Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant. This remarkable change in habitats virtually within a walking distance is also habitat to a strikingly different bird community. Here flocks of colorful tanagers, flower-piercers, conebills, and the sounds of antpittas and tapaculos are features of the habitat. We will establish our base at Cock-of-the-Rock Lodge for three consecutive nights.

Note that the journey today is a long one over a winding mountain road. The route can be driven in around 8 hours but we are likely to take up to 12 hours + with birding stops.

Day 11

In addition to the obviously spectacular Cocks-of-the-Rock, this luxuriant valley reserve protects healthy populations of Woolly Monkeys and the endangered Spectacled Bears, the two most impressive mammals of Andean forests.

From the lodge we will make early departures to bird the Andean gradient at various elevations. Birding at various elevations is essential since Andean birds are generally distributed in narrow altitudinal ranges with a high turnover rate along the gradient. During our first morning in the CORL we will set off for the temperate forest at about 3,400 m. From here we will bird down a seldom used road. At this elevation, the brightly colored Blue-and-black, Grass-green, and Blue-headed Tanagers as well as Scarlet-bellied and Hooded Mountain-Tanagers roam the humid temperate forest in noisy flocks. Other flock members include White-throated and White-banded Tyrannulets, Streaked Tuftedcheek and the handsome Barred Becard. More secretive, nevertheless equally rewarding species at this elevation include Marcapata Spinetail, Yellow-scarfed Tanager, Stripe-headed Brush-Finch, Rusty-breasted Antpitta and Citrine Warbler. Birds
here can be often be seen at eye level as busy flocks either ascend or descend the mountain range. Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucan and Collared Jay are also seen at this elevation.

Day 12

Cock-of-the-Rock Lodge is strategically located at the lower end of the subtropical zone at 1,600 m. In this zone several lower-elevation species converge with the lowest altitudinal range of higher-elevation species, creating a remarkably high species diversity. Golden-headed and Crested Quetzals, Golden, Orange-eared, Blue-necked, Beryl-spangled, Bay-headed, Paradise, White-winged and Golden-collared Tanagers can often be seen from above as they forage in the canopy of trees below the trails. Other colorful species not often in flocks are Green Jays, Yungas and Cerulean-capped Manakin and perhaps Black and Chestnut and Solitary Eagle. Hummingbird feeders at the lodge assure great looks at Violet-fronted Brilliant and other hummingbirds that otherwise are difficult to see. As if this were enough birding, the area guarantees superb views of displaying Andean Cock-of-the-Rocks as they meet every morning at a lek located just a 10 minute-walk from the lodge! At dusk we will also look for Lyre-tailed Nightjar that often flies across the clearing at the lodge.

Day 13

Today we must sadly say goodbye to COTRL and make our way back to Cusco. We will make every use of our time in this magnificent habitat and look to pick up species that we may have missed thus far. We will have a late dinner in the hotel on arrival in Cusco.

Day 14

We depart by train early morning today to Machu Picchu. Torrent Duck is common in the turbulent Urubamba River and a glance skywards may reveal Black-chested Eagle or even Andean Condor. Our train is due to arrive in Aguas Calientes mid-morning from where we transfer by bus up to the historical site of Machu Picchu.

We have arranged accommodation for the night at the Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel, the best hotel in the vicinity. The lodge is very comfortable and has hummingbird feeders scattered around in the beautiful gardens. We have lunch there before enjoying our guided tour of the site.
tour of the ruins with our expert guide. The day-trippers will start to filter back to Cusco from early afternoon onwards and during the late afternoon and evening we will have the ruins virtually to ourselves. Machu Picchu is so well known from the numerous photographs and articles that feature this ancient Inca city that it seems almost unnecessary to describe its dramatic setting amongst the mountains. The ruins are perched on a narrow ridge high above the Urubamba River. Surrounded by precipitous slopes, one can easily appreciate why it remained undiscovered for so many years.

Day 15

We will have the option this morning of a repeat visit to the ruins (which should be pre-booked), or a day’s birding with your tour leader. The grounds of the El Pueblo Hotel have numerous hummingbird feeders scattered around, and over a dozen species can be seen coming to take sugar water, including Booted Racket-tail, Violet-tailed Sylph and Gould’s Inca. Staff also place bowls of fruit out for tanagers, and our past groups here have seen Cock of the Rock and Golden-headed Quetzal in the tree next to the restaurant window! Later we may choose to bird the railway track down towards the Mandor Valley where an exciting walk is in prospect as new species start to make an appearance at lower altitudes.

During the afternoon we have to make our way back to the train station at Aguas Calientes to board our Pullman carriage for the journey back along the Urubamba Valley to Cusco and the Inca Tambo.

Day 16

We sadly depart Cusco late this morning for an hour’s flight back over the Andes to Lima. After a late lunch and maybe a touch of sight-seeing we transfer to the airport to check in for our flight back to Europe.

Day 17

We will arrive back at Heathrow or regional airports in the early evening.

Tour Grading

This is primarily a birdwatching tour but the diverse nature of the scenery and the historical and cultural interest, allied to the fact that Peru is often quoted as a “must visit”, will make the tour suitable and enjoyable for a wide range of interests. The tour is comprised of easy short and half-day walks.
Overall the entire trip is a hugely rich and rewarding experience, but it is quite strenuous with not a great deal of relaxation time. The itinerary can be tailored on a private basis for small groups or families to create more free time – please contact us for details.

Weather

By timing this tour in September/October we have given ourselves a good opportunity to watch as many macaws as possible on the Tambopata clay lick. The weather will be hot and humid with the possibility of a heavy shower at any time. The rainy season generally does not hit the rainforest until early November. In the highlands we should enjoy bright and dry weather with chilly nights, and October is the best month in the year to watch Cocks of the Rock lekking. Lima and the coastal areas are likely to be covered by the grey coastal mist, garúa, at this time of year. The garúa is caused by the cold Humboldt current from the south Pacific moving up the coast and causing what little moisture there is to condense.

Clothing

Please inspect the separate clothing list, sent to you on booking, thoroughly.

Extra expenses

We do not include items of a personal nature: tipping of local guides ($100 or so), telephone, laundry, drinks etc.

Should you wish to re-visit the ruins at Machu Picchu on day 15 it will be necessary for you to purchase an additional ticket and the bus fare up and down from Aguas Calientes for about $55-$60, depending on the exchange rate between the dollar and sol. The amount of money to take on the holiday will depend on how much you like to drink, and what souvenirs you buy. $400 is usually ample.

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.