

Birding the Peruvian Amazon

Bargain Birding Tour

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Depart UK for Lima
Day 2	Fly P. Maldonado and transfer to the Amazon rainforest conservation centre (ARCC)
Day 3/7	5 full days at ARCC lodge
Day 8	Fly Lima and depart, unless continuing on extension
Day 9	Arrive UK

Departs

November

Focus

Birding

Grading

Grade A/B. Easy day walks but humid conditions

Dates and prices

See website (tour code PER10)

Highlights

- Giant River Otter, Black Spider Monkey & Red Howler Monkey
- Pale-winged Trumpeter, Striated Antthrush, Banded Antbird along lodge's trails
- Bamboo Antshrike & Peruvian Recurvebill live amongst stands of *Guadua* bamboo



Giant River Otter



Sunbittern



Blue-and-Yellow Macaws



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

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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.

Introduction

Peru harbours some of the richest rainforests in the world, and its most southern Amazonian state, Madre de Dios, boasts many biodiversity world records. In Puerto Maldonado, the capital of Madre de Dios, the river Las Piedras is well known for its abundant fauna and has recently been scientifically proven to harbour over double the mammal densities of surrounding rainforest reserves. Las Piedras is also the longest and remotest river in Madre de Dios, meandering 440 miles from distant headwaters to its confluence with the Madre de Dios at Puerto Maldonado. It is so remote, in fact, that on its upper reaches one can still find uncontacted tribes, which have become vanishingly rare in our increasingly globalised world. These small groups of Mashco-Piros still wander naked, hunting with longbow, collecting fruit, nuts and turtle eggs, whilst living in simple palm-leaf shelters.

In 2002 the Alto Purus Indigenous Reserve was extended to protect the entire upper Las Piedras basin beyond the indigenous village of Monte Salvado, 220 miles upstream from the river's mouth. Half-way between Puerto Maldonado and the Alto Purus Indigenous Reserve, the locally owned Amazon Rainforest Conservation Centre, ARCC for short, was built in 2002 to protect 17,000 acres of pristine old-growth rainforest surrounding the wildlife-rich Lake Soledad. Our tour will be based at the comfortable Lake Soledad Lodge, where we will follow our birding guide on a variety of exciting excursions.

This single-centre tour (aside from one night in Lima) offers high quality birdwatching from a delightful and well-appointed lodge. Lago Soledad Lodge (formerly known as ARCC) sits near the banks of Las Piedras River, in south-eastern Peru. During our six nights at the lodge, we'll explore its trails in search of such sought-after birds as Rufous-fronted Antthrush, plus many other antbirds and furnarids. Rufous-headed Woodpecker, the recently described Rufous Twistwing, Sulphur-bellied Tyrant-Manakin, and Humaita Antbird can be found amongst *Guadua* bamboo. Paradise, Green-and-Gold, White-shouldered, Turquoise, Opal-crowned and Masked Crimson Tanagers as well as other species can be seen passing close to the lodge's 35-metre high canopy tower and there are four nearby clay-licks offering superb opportunities for photography.

Day 1

Lima

Early this morning, we depart from the UK (usually on KLM or Iberia*) bound for the Peruvian capital of Lima, via Amsterdam or Madrid. We arrive in Peru in the early evening (local time), and we'll transfer to a nearby hotel for a good nights' sleep.

* It may also be possible to fly to Peru on Avianca on the evening before, flying overnight to South America. This route brings you into Cusco on day 1 of the holiday, and you'd overnight here rather than in Lima.

Day 2

ARCC

After an early morning transfer, we will board a domestic flight bound for Puerto Maldonado in the Amazonian lowlands. On this flight we will soar up through the coastal mist and out over the stunning snow-capped Andes. Flying west-east in Peru you quickly get an idea of the vastness of this country, and of the complex and inhospitable topography below. We usually touch down in Cusco before taking off again and over the precipitous cloud-forest, then out over the immense reaches of the Amazon Rainforest.

Our local naturalist guides will meet us at the airport, from where we will take a 2 hour or so bus ride along part of the newly-paved trans-Amazonian highway, before turning left and down towards the small port town of Lucerna. If timing allows, we might bird the open pastureland and terra firma forest along the way. This is an excellent chance to increase our bird list for the trip, as species such as Pearl Kite, Southern Caracara and Burrowing Owl cannot be found anywhere else on the trip. We'll also look for Ruddy Spinetail, Hairy-crested Antbird and Slaty-capped Shrike-Vireo. Shortly after arrival in Lucerna we will embark upon the journey up the Las Piedras River from where it is a 2 hour or so boat journey upstream to ARCC.

Depending on the height of the river (the lower the river, the longer the journey; generally the river is lowest at the end of the dry season in September), we have plenty of opportunity to sit back and relax and enjoy the beautiful Las Piedras scenery; huge river-cliffs, tight meanders with river beaches, tumbling waterfalls and towering pristine rainforest.

On the banks of Las Piedras we might see Spectacled Caimans, Side-necked Turtles, Squirrel, Brown Capuchin or Red-Howler Monkeys or possibly even Capybaras or a Tayra. Capybara are the favourite prey of the Jaguar, which are sporadically sighted on a beach or exposed log. Approximately 30 minutes into the journey, we will pass a clay lick on the river bank which is often frequented by Red and Green Macaws. Birding along the remainder of the river is exciting and diverse, with likely species including Wood Stork, Sunbittern, Black Skimmer, Horned Screamer, Capped Heron, Great Black-Hawk, Pied Lapwing, Violaceous Jay, Amazon Kingfisher and Russet-backed Oropendula, to name but a few.



We will arrive at ARCC's river dock in the early evening, where we will follow a 200 metre trail through tall rainforest to the lodge itself. ARCC is set amongst natural tropical gardens hidden in clearings surrounded by giant rainforest trees. A few steps away is Lake Soledad, separated from the lodge by a narrow band of woodland essential for the transit of lakeside birds and mammals. The ARCC is an exclusive lodge with just 8 air-conditioned bungalows and we usually have it all to ourselves! Each hexagonal bungalow has its own private garden, balcony and bathroom; finished with polished hardwood, palm thatch and bathroom tiles. Our bungalows boast soft electric lighting, hot-water showers, insect screening, lowering mosquito nets, battery recharging points and a beautiful rainforest view!

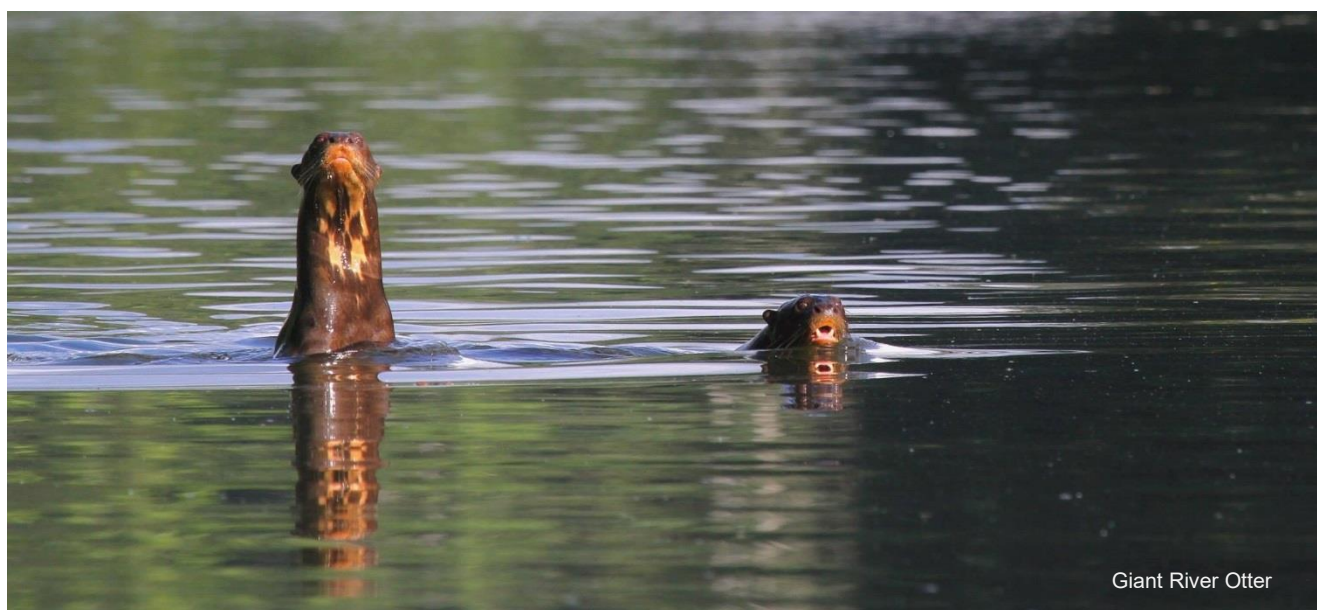
Meals will be served in the spacious dining hall. The lounge bar has some comfortable seating, hammocks and a well-stocked bar, serving chilled beer, soft drinks, wine and spirits. This idyllic location is our remote rainforest base for the next 6 nights!

Day 3-7

Amazon Rainforest Conservation Centre

We have five full days at this secluded lodge to enjoy its wonderful rainforest birdlife. Most days will follow a similar structure; an early morning activity, followed by a leisurely breakfast and another activity such as walking the forest trails. After lunch there will be a siesta time before the afternoon activity and then dinner with occasional night excursions. The varied program will include the following:

Trails branching out from the lodge cover a variety of habitats from rich floodplain forests to stands of bamboo, giving us a broad introduction to the extraordinary biodiversity of the rainforest. The ARCC clearing is ideal for leisurely bird watching and we may well enjoy our first dawn in this location, with Long-billed Woodcreeper, Yellow-tufted, Crimson-crested and Cream-coloured Woodpeckers, White-throated Toucan, Chestnut-eared Aracaris, White-bellied Parrot, Masked Crimson and Swallow Tanagers, White-vented Euphonia, Blue Dacnis, Gilded Barbet, Bluish-fronted Jacamar, Striated Puffbird, Blue-crowned Motmot and many, many more. Nearby trails hold Pale-winged Trumpeter, Blue-throated Piping-Guan, Semi-collared Puffbird, Striated Antthrush, Curl-crested Aracari, Banded Antbird and, of particular interest, the rare and local Rufous-fronted Antthrush.



Giant River Otter

After breakfast, a popular first-day activity is a catamaran tour of Lake Soledad. Here we use a catamaran canoe with comfortable chairs, powered by two local paddlers who keep a lookout for the resident Giant Otter family and other wildlife on the lake. Excursions depart from the boat jetty close to the lodge and last 1-3 hours. The catamaran provides an excellent mobile viewing platform, stable enough for photography and telescopes. Lake excursions will normally leave early in the morning or late afternoon. Guests of ARCC often opt to have several lake trips during their stay, as it is a relaxing way to get good observations of wildlife on the lake and the surrounding forest. Lake Soledad holds good fish stocks, including piranha and

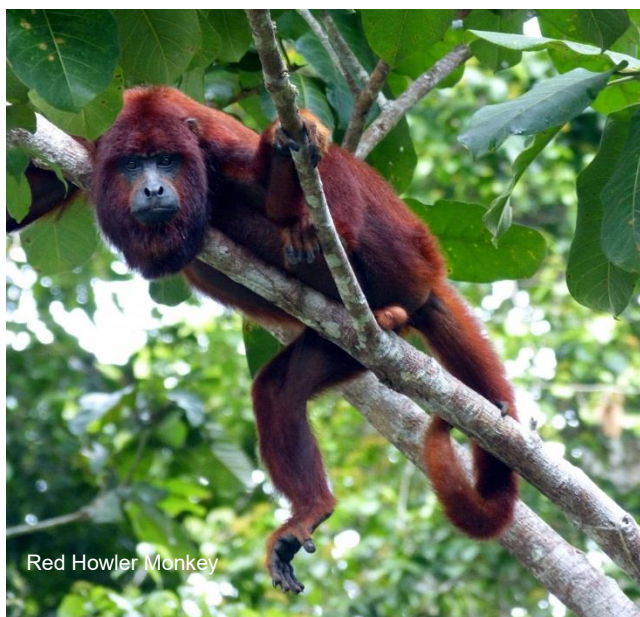
catfish. These stocks sustain a family of Giant Otters, a regular highlight of lake trips. Bird life on the lake is plentiful; it attracts many species including Blue-and-Yellow Macaw, Grey-necked Wood-Rail, Rufescent Tiger-Heron, Wattled Jacana, Amazon, Ringed and Pygmy Kingfishers, Green Ibis, Snail Kite, Hoatzin, Black-capped Donacobius, Red-capped Cardinal, Silvered Antbird and Yellow-rumped Cacique. Special birds include Agami Heron and Sungrebe. Ornate Hawk-Eagles are sometimes sighted from the lake, especially in the late morning when they soar high so that their calls travel further.

Stands of *Guadua* bamboo are accessible on the ARCC trail system, a short walk from the lodge. They hold a number of rare and sought-after species, exclusively found in such habitat. These 'bamboo specialists' include Bamboo Antshrike, Peruvian Recurvebill, Rufous-headed Woodpecker, Ihering's Antwren, the recently described Rufous Twistwing, Sulphur-bellied Tyrant-Manakin, White-lined and Goeldi's Antbirds, Humaita Antbird, Violaceous Quail-Dove and Fulvous-chinned Nunlet.



Striated Antbird

Visitors to ARCC are regularly afforded good observations of Black Spider Monkeys, a species sensitive to human disturbance and absent from locations closer to more populated areas. At ARCC, large troops are



Red Howler Monkey



Black Spider Monkey

often seen in the forest immediately surrounding the lodge clearing or just a short walk from the lodge. Other primate species at ARCC are Red Howler Monkey, Brown Capuchin, White-fronted Capuchin, Squirrel Monkey, Night Monkeys, Dusky Titi-Monkey and Saddle-backed Tamarin. The rich fruit-laden floodplain forests surrounding Lake Soledad support high mammal densities. Other mammals commonly found here include White-lipped Peccary, sometimes in huge groups passing through the forest, Tayra and Brown Agouti. Animal tracks indicate the presence of harder-to-see species such as Brazilian Tapir, Jaguar, Puma, Red and Grey Brocket Deer, Nine-banded Long-nosed Armadillo, Giant Armadillo, Giant Anteater and Paca.



Clown Treefrog



Tiger-Striped Monkey-Frog

Evenings provide the opportunity for night walks. A short excursion into the forest after dark is a completely different experience to a daytime walk. Accompanied by your guide, you experience the sounds and sights of the rainforest at night, with the chance to see elusive nocturnal creatures. A good torch is essential, the brighter the beam the better your chances of a sighting. There is the chance to see Night Monkeys, armadillos, porcupines, brocket deer and tree frogs. Owl targets are Crested and Spectacled. At night an incredible cacophony of noises emanate from all directions, crickets chirp, the lake resonates with the croaking of frogs, owls hoot, roosting hoatzins 'cough', large caimans give out loud 'belches'; and you might even hear the occasional roaring of a Jaguar from your bungalow!

A night-time catamaran tour after is another great opportunity to experience a different side to the lake and forest. On cloudless nights we can marvel at the Milky Way, which is clearly visible due to the lack of light pollution. Flashlights can pick out the eye shine of the otherwise difficult to see Black

Caiman, and other nocturnal species. Bird species possible at night include Great and Common Potoos, Boat-billed Heron, Pauraque and Ladder-tailed Nightjar, as well as the many other residents that roost on the lake edge.

The ARCC tree platform is a sturdily built wooden structure, 35m (120 ft.) up an Ironwood Tree at the edge of Lake Soledad, giving impressive views of the forest canopy and the lake below. Ascent is achieved by a stable metal tower with a wooden staircase, allowing any guest with a head for heights to enjoy a rarely seen view of the rainforest canopy. Once up on the platform you are free to enjoy the view and the chance to see canopy wildlife at eye-level. Ascents at dawn and dusk are popular, but the platform can be enjoyed at any time of day. The undisputed highlights here are the colourful mixed-species flocks of tanagers and other birds which pass close by the platform. Mixed flocks include Blue Dacnis,



View from the tower

Plum-throated Cotinga, Paradise, Green-and-Gold, White-shouldered, Turquoise, Opal-crowned and Masked Crimson Tanagers. Other species include aracaris, tityras, Scarlet Macaw, Bare-necked Fruitcrows and Swallow-wing. Monkeys can also be seen; the acrobatic Spider Monkey is often sighted swinging through the trees in search of fruit, or the passive Howler Monkey just laid out on a branch. Looking down from the 35m (120 ft.) high platform you are undetected by the lake wildlife- the otters are regularly seen from here, and occasionally the rare and elusive Black Caiman can also be sighted. One resident individual of Lake Soledad is almost 5m long, and makes an impressive sight when it surfaces and reveals its full size, before subsiding sluggishly back into the depths.



Red and Green Macaws on a clay lick

There are 4 macaw clay licks accessible from ARCC, the most impressive is just 20 minutes by boat up river from the lodge. A hide (blind) on top of the cliff just 25m (80 ft.) from the clay lick affords excellent opportunities for observations and photography. Macaw clay licks are best experienced early in the morning before the birds disperse back off into the forest to feed, so tours usually leave the lodge pre-dawn to catch the best action of the day. Species regularly visiting this clay lick include Red-and-green Macaw, Mealy Amazon and Yellow-crowned Amazon as well as large numbers of Dusky-headed Parakeet and Cobalt-winged Parakeet. Less common species include Chestnut-fronted and Red-bellied Macaws, Mealy, Blue-headed Parrots, White-eyed Parakeets, Orange-cheeked Parrots, White-bellied Parrots, Scarlet Macaws, Blue and Yellow Macaws, Blue-throated Piping Guans, and Speckled Chachalaca.

On the inaugural 2018 departure, clients were taken to a Harpy Eagle nest, where a 1-year old Harpy Eagle was watched for around 15 minutes. Unless their natal tree is unsuitable, Harpy Eagles generally return to the same nest during each breeding cycle. Depending on your departure date, there may be a good chance of Harpy Eagle. If you wish to find out more information regarding a specific departure, please get in touch.

The food at ARCC is delicious - the very best of local cuisine is served daily. Specialities of the chef include pescado a la paca – steamed catfish in bamboo, ceviche de corvina - fresh fish marinated in lime juice, Juanes - chicken with rice and vegetables steamed in a banana leaf, pumpkin soup, catfish stuffed with asparagus, and heart of palm salad. All meals are freshly prepared and served with chilled tropical fruit juices.



Harpy Eagle

Day 8

Puerto Maldonado

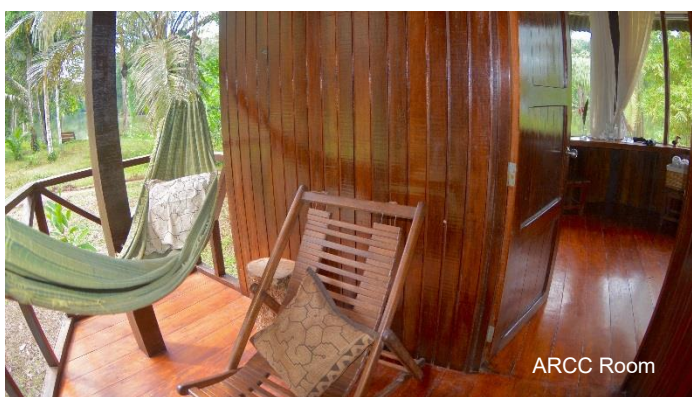
Rising at dawn we leave after an early breakfast to journey downstream to our bus rendez-vous and then on to Puerto Maldonado. Early morning on the river is a great time for watching birds and we will enjoy our last views of kingfishers, egrets, parrots, waders, oropendulas and raptors as we speed down river. Arriving in Puerto Maldonado we will head to the airport to check-in and enjoy some refreshments. We will then board our morning flight for Cusco or Lima. If the weather permits, you will see the immense green carpet of the Amazon Rainforest stretch out in all directions, with slow rivers meandering through the lowlands and oxbow lakes marking the rivers' original course. The terrain then rises up to cloud forests followed by icy Andean peaks. We will touch down in Cusco, situated in the high Andes, then finally on to the sandy coastal hills of Lima.

We're unlikely to have much time between the arrival of our domestic flight and check-in for our international departure, but if there is any available we'll likely head down to the Chorrillos harbour to see the Pacific and watch some of the seabirds including Peruvian Pelicans, boobies and the beautiful Inca Tern.

Day 9

In Flight

We will arrive back in the UK late this afternoon after a flight back across the Atlantic.



Machu Picchu Extension

We offer the chance to extend this holiday with a cultural visit to Cusco, the ancient Inca capital and Machu Picchu, the famed "Lost City of the Incas".

Day 8

Cusco

We will bid farewell to the Lima-bound members of our group upon touch-down in Cusco.

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, thronged with Quechua-speaking descendants of the Incas. The city is the capital of its region and has a population of about 300,000. Set at an altitude of over 3,300 metres, we will take it easy during our first day, eating lightly, drink plenty of liquid – including coca tea, which helps, but avoiding alcohol, however tempting the Pisco Sour and Cusqueña (the local beer) may be!

We will first transfer to a comfortable, centrally-located hotel. After your guide has introduced Cusco, you will have the afternoon to either relax, or explore the ancient Inca capital. Most people will want to explore the area around the plaza for its historical sites, great handicraft shopping and cafés with old colonial balconies.

In the evening you will be able to relax, or maybe eat out; the cuisine is both tasty and varied, you will notice both alpaca and guinea-pig on the menu or you may choose to visit one of Cusco's famed clay-oven pizzerias!

Day 9

Sacred Valley

After a buffet breakfast we head south from Cusco to the lakes of Huacarpay, which amongst magnificent scenery offer some very good birdwatching with noticeably distinct species to those in the rainforest: Cinnamon, Speckled and Puna Teals, Yellow-winged Blackbird, a variety of ground-tyrants and chat-tyrants, Giant Hummingbird, Cinereous Harrier, saltators, seedeaters, finches and the endemic Rusty-fronted Canastero.

From Huacarpay we will continue down the Huambutio road to the upper Urubamba/Sacred Valley to the Incan ruins of Pisac, situated 600 metres above its eponymous town. Before we get to the ruins, we will pull off to a lunch site with a spectacular view of the Pisac terraces, where we will enjoy a packed lunch. From here we will drive up to the archaeological site, which is in a magnificent setting, sitting on a hill top with a gorge on either side. Particularly good examples of agricultural terracing can be found and the ruins have elements of both fortress and temple structures. Birds such as the impressive Bearded Mountaineer hummingbird, another Peruvian endemic, can also be seen here, as well as the stunningly iridescent Green-tailed Trainbearer.

In the afternoon we will return over the hills to Cusco, with the option of stopping at more Inca ruins, or at other birdwatching locations along the way.

Day 10

Machu Picchu

This morning we will be transferred to the Cusco railway station to board the Machu Picchu train for the scenic ride along the Sacred Valley to the mystical ruins of Machu Picchu. The recently upgraded trains offer a comfortable ride through small Andean villages, farmland and spectacular mountain scenery. Arriving in the small town of Aguas Calientes, the gateway to Machu Picchu, we will leave our overnight-bags with our hotel's porters before heading up to the Machu Picchu ruins with our guide. Machu Picchu is not only fascinating for its mysterious history, but was built in the most spectacular setting imaginable. Our guide will explain the many theories that still struggle to explain the mysterious existence of Machu Picchu. The afternoon offers beautiful lighting and peace after the crowds have left to catch their return trains to Cusco. Inca Wren, a



Ruins of Machu Picchu

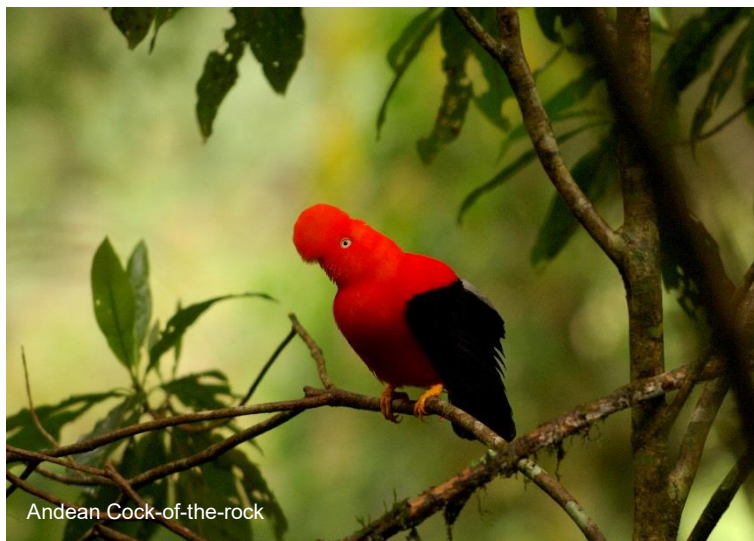
Peruvian endemic, can be seen with luck in the bamboo around the ruins. Returning to Aguas Calientes on the bus, we shall check into the beautiful Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel, the best hotel in the vicinity. The hotel, which is more of a lodge, is set amongst beautiful gardens and cloud-forest, excellent for birdwatching and orchids too.

Day 11

Cusco

We have a choice this morning of returning to Machu Picchu or exploring trails in the valley to appreciate the scenery, birds and orchids. The hotel has a small trail network set in cloud-forest and has registered 350 species of orchid. The hotel offers guided orchid walks at a small charge. The birdwatching in the hotel's gardens and forest is excellent, with good opportunities to see Andean Cock of the Rock, Peru's national bird. This spectacular Jackdaw-sized, crimson-coloured bird, appears like a fireball, even on a cloudy day, and is seen regularly in the hotel gardens. Torrent Duck, White-capped Dipper, Azara's Spinetail, Highland Motmot, Mitred Parakeet and even Golden-headed Quetzal can also be seen.

Photography of hummingbirds around the hotel's numerous feeders couldn't be better, with a possible 20 species vying for a place to feed. The most common species include Chestnut-breasted Coronet, Collared Inca, Green Violetear, Green and White Hummingbird, Long-tailed Sylph and Booted Racket-tail.



After a superb lunch in the hotel, we shall take the early train back up to the village of Ollantaytambo, where we shall transfer to our bus and visit the village's impressive Inca ruins, which afford spectacular views up and down the sacred valley. The road back to Cusco provides views of spectacular Andean scenery and good birdwatching, with species likely to include Puna Ibis, Yellow-billed Pintail, Cinnamon Teal, White-tufted Grebe, Andean Lapwing, American Kestrel and Mountain Caracara. We will arrive back in our Cusco hotel as night draws in, with time to relax and get ready to go out for a farewell

dinner. Many of the nice restaurants around the main Plaza offer typical Andean music and dancing whilst you dine.

Day 12

Lima

After our buffet breakfast we will return to Cusco airport for our return flight over the Andes to Lima and onward flights to Europe.

Day 13

In Flight

We will arrive back in the UK late this afternoon.

Grading

This is a tour with relatively gentle walks, although some trails may undulate and be muddy at times. The high humidity can make the tour more strenuous than it otherwise would be. The Machu Picchu extension involves easy walks only, although one should always remain respectful of the high altitude in Cusco (10,000 feet).

Weather

The climate in Peru varies enormously, depending on the region and the altitude. There is a possibility of heavy rain at any time, but hopefully not to the extent that it will spoil your enjoyment.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All accommodation and meals are included except for lunch and evening meals in Lima. The Machu Picchu extension is costed on a B&B basis only.

Extra expenses

Please note that we do not include all items of a more personal nature such as drinks (although drinking water, fruit juices and hot drinks will be provided), laundry, souvenirs and tips.

On the Machu Picchu extension all activities, entrance tickets, transfers and accommodation are included. If you want a repeat visit to Machu Picchu on the second day, then you will need to purchase the bus ride between Aguas Calientes and Machu Picchu and the entrance ticket locally.

Other extensions

Peru offers a plethora of diverse and exciting destinations to visit; Arequipa and the Colca Canyon in the south, Chaparri Lodge in the north, or something as simple as an extra day in Lima at the start to recover from the long flight are all possible add-ons. Please contact us to discuss.

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.