

Peruvian Amazon

Mammal Watching

A Greentours itinerary

The Blackwater Flooded Forests of the Peruvian Amazon are amongst the most biodiverse habitats on Earth. Close to Iquitos lies the Tamshiyacu-Tahuayo Reserve protecting two and a half thousand square kilometres of varied habitats in the headwaters of the eponymous rivers. The reserve was set up to protect the habitat of the iconic Bald Red Uakari Monkey but has since been found to harbour populations of at least fifteen other species of Primate making it home to more species of primate than any similar sized area on the planet. The owners of the two lodges we'll stay at were instrumental in the reserve's foundation and these two lodges have unique access to the reserve's trails and waterways.

We'll stay at two lodges only fifteen kilometres apart but importantly they each offer a very different mammal-watching experience. Equally pertinent is the timing of the tour. Mammals, primates as well as more terrestrial species, are much easier to find when the forest is under water. They are significantly easier to spot and easier to approach isolated in emergent tree canopies. It is rather like floating around in a magic carpet that you can direct into the tree tops to see what normally remains hidden to humankind stuck on terra firma below.

Day 1

To Iquitos

Our journey to Iquitos takes the whole day, and necessitates changing flights in both Madrid and Lima, so having taken off early in the morning we won't arrive until late evening on Day 1. Once there though we can settle into the Hilton nicely situated just 200 metres away from the Belén, the tributary of the Amazon that forms the eastern edge of the city of Iquitos.

Days 2 – 7

Tamshiyacu-Tahuayo Reserve - Tahuayo Lodge

The next morning we'll board a speedboat and head up the Amazon River, then the Tahuayo tributary to Tahuayo Lodge. The journey takes around four hours so we'll be there in time for lunch.

From Tahuayo Lodge we will explore tahuampa (or flooded forest); terra firme forest and remnant oxbow lakes in various stages of ecological succession. Here are Howler Monkeys, Black-fronted Tamarins, Pygmy Marmosets, Neotropical River Otters, as well as Harlequin Toads and Poison Dart Frogs. Nancy Ma Night Monkeys sleep in tree cavities near the main lodge. Much of our exploration will be boat. We'll drift through a unique forest with alternating acidic water flooding (from the

upper Tahuayo River) with alkaline water flooding (from the nearby Ucayali) the half-drowned trees full of beautiful birds. This will be a good opportunity to get up close to primates, particularly Pygmy Marmosets, Night Monkeys, Howler Monkeys, and Brown throated Three-toed Sloth, which in May are looking for mates and are very visible. We'll explore oxbow lakes searching for the incredible Amazon Pink River Dolphins as well as the Grey River Dolphin (Tucuxi)

The Tahuampa has more or less permanently flooded forest around Tabano Lake and Traves Lakes and these are home to many mammals as well as Black Caiman, Horned Screamers, Wattled Jacana, Giant Fishing Spiders, giant fig trees and much more.

The Tamshiyacu-Tahuayo Reserve will continue to reveal its astounding array of primates. There's the butch but cuddly Equatorial Saki and the Common Woolly Monkey, deserving of a better name, though it does describe the incredibly luxuriant soft pelage to some degree. The Large-headed Capuchin is not a great beauty, whereas Humboldt's (or Common) Squirrel Monkey is an altogether more attractive animal, while its cousin, the Black-capped Squirrel Monkey, looks like it has been raiding a coal-scuttle head-first. Two rarer species we might connect with if we are prepared to hike some distance are Black Spider Monkey and Red Howler Monkey. Amongst a host of species that are less easily visible but at least one or more we should see during the tour are Agouti, Paca, Collared Peccary, White-lipped Peccary and Brocket Deer.

Days 8 – 12

Tamshiyacu-Tahuayo Reserve - Amazon Research Center

The Amazon Research Centre's Lodge is in primary habitats altogether more remote. Here we'll explore high and low restinga forest, bajial forest, aguajal (palm swamp), as well as different kind of terra firme forest.

The ARC has the largest scientific trail system offered in the Amazon (there's more than 75 kilometres!) accessing four different ecosystems, and due to its secluded location in fine primary habitats it is here that we will have a greater chance of seeing some of the rare and shy species.

Here our sights are set on Giant River Otters, Monk Saki, White-fronted Capuchin, Poepig's Woolly Monkey, Coppery Titi Monkey and Southern Tamandua. In oxbows we'll find Large Caiman, Anacondas, whilst Blue and Yellow Macaws nest. Giant Anteater are often encountered along the ARCs trails. Here we hope to find the rare Bald Red Uakari Monkeys, one of the World's most distinctive and easily recognised monkeys. Greater Fishing Bats swoop low over the waters as we watch the enigmatic Grey River Dolphin or Tucuxi which are tolerably common in the area. Even in daylight we can find Kinkajou and Bicolored spined Porcupine holed up in the emergent trees and at night we'll search for various Opossums

including the cute Bushy-tailed Opossum and hope for a cat or two! Data collected from camera traps reveals a high density of Jaguar and other predators including Jaguarundi, Ocelot and Margay, but these are rarely seen. Tayra and Southern Tamandua are relatively easy to see, even in daylight. Yet more primates include Spix's Night Monkey, Large-headed Capuchin, and the graceful Moustached Tamarin.

During the afternoon of Day 12 our speedboat will return us to Iquitos.

Days 13 – 15(am)

Allpahuayo-Mishana Terra Firme Forest

South of Iquitos lies the Allpahuayo-Mishana Terra Firme Forest, a low-terrace broadleaf tropical rainforest that does not have season flooding. It is reached by an asphalt road from Iquitos.

A number of the primates we'll encounter in this forest we'll already have seen in the Tamshiyacu-Tahuayo Reserve. Here though we can also find Goeldi's Marmoset, a species that prefers the non-flooding forests. We'll try and find either or both of Red-mantle Saddle-back Tamarin and Geoffroy's Saddle-back Tamarin, both on the edge of the range here. We may even come across the Black-capped Squirrel Monkey and rare and little-known Isabel's Saki.

There's a bewildering array of marsupials here. Most notable is the distinctive and strikingly marked Water Opossum. Amongst more than a dozen species known from these Terra Firme Forest are Anderson's Four-eyed Opossum and Gray Four-eyed Opossum, Waterhouse's Mouse Opossum and Northeastern Woolly Mouse Opossum. Needless to say encountering these in daylight would be lucky, so we'll spend some hours each night after dark here in an effort to tease out Sepia Short-tailed Opossum, or perhaps even White-bellied Slender Opossum and Bishop's Slender Opossum.

Back in daylight we've a good chance of Tayra which can often be seen running along fallen logs. The Grison is also here but is uncommon and more likely at night. Kinkajous are certainly common and we may well come across an Olingo or two. More in the hoped for category is the Crab-eating Raccoon!

Day 15 (pm)

Departure

An evening departure from Iquitos.

Day 16

Arrival Europe

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