

Ecuador

Bargain Mammal Tour

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

- Day 1** Fly Quito
Day 2/6 Napo Wildlife Centre
Day 7 Quito
Day 8 Yanacocha or Guango
Day 9 Arrive UK

Departs

October/November – see website

Focus

Mammals and Birds

Grading

To enjoy the trip to the full you should be reasonably fit as we will be spending the majority of each day on foot. The trails around NWC are undulating in places and can be muddy, although rest days can be spent at the lodge – all excursions are optional!

Dates and prices

See website (tour code ECU02) or brochure



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Napó Wildlife Centre Parrots by Ecotours Ecuador TA



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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.

Day 1

Fly Quito

We leave London Heathrow in the morning, usually on KLM's or Iberia's service to Quito. Changing planes in Amsterdam or Madrid, we will arrive in Quito in the evening and transfer to our hotel. Although we will not have much opportunity to see the city, Quito is probably the most attractive of all the colonial capitals of South America. The city is located in a hollow at the foot of the volcano Pichincha. On a clear day Andean peaks tower around and the sun is bright and strong. The climate is delightful: the name means "Eternal Spring" in the ancient language of Quechua. Standing at 2,850 meters, Quito is the second highest capital in the world. It is a small capital by South American standards and it is relatively easy to wander around the streets of the colonial city without getting hopelessly lost or put off by the distances involved.

Day 2

Napó Wildlife Centre

A 45-minute flight takes us over the Andes and down to the port town of Coca, properly named Puerto Francisco de Orellana, after the discoverer of the Ecuadorian Amazon. The warm, humid jungle air will hit us as we step from the plane and we will be taken down to the river where we board a covered motorized canoe for the 2½ hour, 50 mile journey downstream to NWC. The River Napo is Ecuador's principal Amazonian tributary and at this point is about 1/3 of a mile wide. Its waters are sediment-rich and during the dry season huge sandy beaches are exposed. We will look for various herons, kingfishers and birds of prey as we continue downstream.

Upon arrival at the entrance to the NWC Reserve, we switch to smaller, dugout canoes which our local guides paddle up the black water creek to the lake and lodge (no motorised transport is permitted on the creek or lake so as not to disturb wildlife). This paddle can take anywhere from one to three hours, depending what we see en-route. Giant Otters, potoos, kingfishers, Hoatzins, jacamars, hawks and monkeys are all possibilities. We will eat lunch en route and arrive at the lodge by late afternoon.

Napo Wildlife Center, or NWC, is a comfortable rainforest lodge within the Yasuni National Park, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve; the largest, best conserved and most diverse tract of Amazon rainforest in Ecuador. Built on the shore of tranquil Añagu Lake, NWC is a conservation project which supports a unique 82 square-mile (22,000 hectare) private nature reserve within the park, an ancestral territory of the Añangu community who co-own the centre. Wildlife viewing possibilities abound in the vicinity of the lodge, with amazing parrot and mammal clay licks, active lake wildlife guarded by the resident family of Giant Otters, stunning endemic monkeys and a huge list of over 565 bird species. The lodge also boasts two solid canopy towers which transport us into the rainforest canopy at dawn to witness flocks of colourful tanagers and other species which are difficult to see from the rainforest floor.

Days 3-6

Napo Wildlife Centre

We have four full days to explore this fabulous habitat. Depending on our party size, we will divide into two or more sub-groups, and be assigned a native Añangu guide, who doubles up as an official Yasuni Park Ranger. All of the local guides at NWC are a wealth of information on the forest's medicinal plants and other useful items of the rain forest. Each group will also have the company of an experienced bilingual naturalist guide with a great deal of knowledge on tropical forest biology.

We will be sure to take advantage of the highest peaks of activity, together with prevailing weather conditions, with early morning excursions scheduled for dawn and sunrise. After break for lunch and a siesta, further outings will take place in the afternoon and evening and, for those who want to, after dark, when the forest really does come alive and when an overwhelming concert of natural sounds floods the atmosphere!

Expert bird guides are also available for those preferring a "hard core" birding experience. Please state your preference upon booking. The birding is fantastic with many species occurring here but not on the better-known north bank of the river. Over 560 species of birds have been recorded at the Napo Wildlife Center, more than 1/3 of all of Ecuador's birds. Both Agami and Zigzag herons are found near the lake and creeks, along with all 5 kingfishers. Rare and majestic raptors like Harpy and Crested Eagles find healthy populations of mammalian prey around NWC. Antbird flocks are a highlight of the forest here, and may include White-plumed Antbird. Other highlights might include Rufous-capped Antthrush, Ocellated Poorwill, Ecuadorian and Red-rumped Caciques, Brown Nunlet and Fulvous Shrike-tanager, among many others.

Parrot Clay Licks

One of the highlights at NWC is an early morning excursion to two of Ecuador's most accessible parrot clay licks. These parrot clay licks are part of the reserve and lodge territory, which has in total a dozen clay licks, some of which are only used seasonally. The parrot clay licks are located near the banks of the River Napo and can be reached by following the Giant Otter creek downstream by dugout canoe. The Napo Wildlife Center, in conjunction with the local community, have constructed sturdy and comfortable hides beside each parrot lick in order to provide visitors with the best viewing and high quality photo/video opportunities.

Activity kicks off at the main lick between 0700 and 0800 and at the second lick after midday. Species include Mealy, Blue headed, Yellow-crowned, Orange-winged and Orange-cheeked Parrots, Cobalt winged, Dusky headed, Maroon-tailed and White-eyed Parakeets, along with occasional rarities like Scarlet-shouldered Parrotlet and Scarlet Macaw. In ideal weather conditions (dry and sunny) at least 800 individual birds of different species can be spotted whilst on rainy days a couple of dozen birds might be present. One possibility could be a full day excursion visiting both blinds and equipped with a nice freshly made packed lunch. Alternatively a half day visiting the main lick and returning for a sit down lunch at the lodge. One thing's for sure – we won't want to miss out on this superb natural event full of unique sounds and brightly colored plumages!!

Dining Room Tower

There is a 19 metre (60 foot) observation tower on top of a small hill in the vicinity of the lodge. This protrudes sufficiently from the surrounding foliage to give great views of the lake and lodge. Nearby, the active resident birds can be seen nesting and feeding within the lodge grounds, while a family group of the rare and enchanting Golden-mantled Tamarin monkey often forage close by.

Main Canopy Tower

This magnificent structure, 35 minutes walk from the lodge and over 125 feet tall, stands adjacent to a giant Kapok tree where an ample platform provides space for over 15 guests and their cameras, 'scopes, tripods and other gear. A dawn ascent is a must during your stay at NWC; the birding is outstanding and for the mammal enthusiasts we will keep an eye out for possible troops of Red Howler Monkey, White fronted Capuchins, Monk Sakis or Black Spider Monkeys in the surrounding forest. On a clear day, views stretch to the high Andes and Volcanos Sumaco, Antisana and Cayambe (the latter two snow-capped). Gazing up at snow-capped, 6,000 meter (20,000 foot) Andean peaks whilst standing in humid lowland forest is an uplifting and awe-inspiring experience!

Active feeding bird flocks of mixed passerines forage in the vicinity of "our" tree. With fruiting trees in the area, red letter days can provide single morning lists of upwards of 100 species – without moving more than a couple of steps! Possibilities are endless: toucans, macaws, colourful tanagers, raptors, flycatchers, or maybe a quiet and lichen-covered Three Toed Sloth.

Lake and Creeks

NWC has a large lake with two streams that can be easily explored quietly while sitting on a dugout canoe paddled by our expert guides and staff eager to spot and show you wildlife. A quiet paddle down one of the streams is an ideal way to locate troops of other species of monkeys like Squirrel Monkey, Saddle-backed Tamarin and White-fronted Capuchin Monkeys. Rarer species, or those that by natural distribution only occur on the south side of the Napo, include Monk Saki, Spider, Woolly and Golden-mantled Tamarin Monkeys. NWC is home to a total of 11 species of monkeys, and you can hope to see the majority of these during your stay.

All four species of native caiman are found at NWC. The main lake provides a home for Black Caiman, the largest of the four. Largely nocturnal, these animals can best be seen during night-time canoe rides when torch light is reflected in their eyes.

The creeks also present a good chance of tracking down the resident family of Giant River Otters. It is impossible to say what might be hiding around the next meander; a magnificent Anaconda in an area of flooded forest, or perhaps a White-lipped Peccary (wild pig) taking a drink, or possibly a serene Three-toed Sloth.

Forest Trails & Hikes

Visits to a variety of forest ecosystems are possible by walking different trails branching out from the lodge. The forest does not reveal its secrets easily, but by careful exploration we will see bizarre and well camouflaged insects. Monkeys, lizards, tortoises, frogs, army and leafcutter ants will all be appreciated in addition to an array of birds. It is here in the terra firma forest that bird diversity is highest. This is also some of the most challenging birding on the planet! Many of the antbirds and furnarids (ovenbirds) are cryptically coloured and shy. We will need all the expertise of our local guides to recognize them by call and see them. Should we happen to encounter an ant swarm, we will see many of the attendant specialist antbirds which can be a mind-boggling experience!

The largest and most exciting neotropical mammals like Jaguar, Puma, Brazilian Tapir, Giant Anteater and Giant Armadillo have all been recorded in this area, although all are rare, naturally shy or nocturnal. Night walks are possible at NWC, and can lead to unexpected highlights!!

The Añangu Community

Añangu has been the ancestral territory of a Quichua indigenous community that has the same name. Añangu people are active participants of the conservation and management of a large territory within the park as well as our partners in ecotourism. They would like to invite us see the community that had this dream to help manage this vast rain forest territory by establishing their own lodge. Aided by EcoEcuador Foundation, part of the Tropical Nature Conservation System, a leading group of ongoing ecotourism projects, all now collaborate in one nature tourism company. You can join some families on their daily activities when harvesting bananas, coco, manioc (a starchy jungle root, often known as yucca) which is a staple food for Amazonian people), or maybe helping preparing chicha, a traditional drink based on cooked and fermenting manioc.

Day 7

Quito

One final paddle through the flooded palm forest will bring us back out to the River Napo for our journey upstream to Coca. Our flight to Quito will depart in the late morning and we should be back at our hotel in Quito by early afternoon. The rest of the afternoon will be spent at leisure in Quito.

Day 8

Hummingbirds in the Andes

After an early coffee and breakfast in the hotel and an analysis of the weather by our guide, we will drive up out of Quito to enjoy a day surrounded by hummingbirds. Yanacocha, an area of moss-clad temperate forest on the slopes of Volcano Pichincha is one option. Hummingbirds will be especially active during the early morning, and possible species include Sapphire-vented Puffleg, Shining Sunbeam, Tyrian Metaltail, Great Sapphirewing and, with a good deal of luck, the very rare and local Black-breasted Puffleg.

Similar species are possible if we instead decide to climb up east out of Quito to the Papallacta Pass and on to Guango Lodge. After lunch and some great photographic opportunities, we'll head back to the airport in time to check in for our evening flight back to Europe.

Day 9

Arrive UK

We are due to arrive back in the UK early this evening.

Tour Grading & Focus

The mammals, birds and wildlife of the Ecuadorian Amazon. Whilst mammals will be on view for a very small percentage of our time in the field on this holiday, patience will be rewarded with several primate species and perhaps other mammals, including otters (Giant River and Neotropical both possible). While mammal-watching proves quiet, a wealth of birds, insects, amphibians and other wildlife will keep us entertained.

Weather

The climate in Ecuador varies enormously, depending on the region and the altitude. Quito is mild and temperate with chilly nights; like a spring day in England. The Amazon is hot and humid. There is a possibility of heavy rain at any time, but hopefully not to the extent that it will spoil your enjoyment.

Clothing

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

Food & accommodation included in the price

All accommodation and meals are included, except for evening meals in Quito (£50 should be more than enough for these).

Extra expenses

Please note that we do not include the following in the cost of this holiday: all items of a more personal nature such as drinks, tips laundry and souvenirs.

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.