Full Detailed Itinerary - Peru: Manu and Machu Picchu

Day 1: Arrival in Cusco

The tour begins this evening in the ancient Incan city of Cusco. A transfer will be provided to our hotel in the city center.

Day 2: Piuray Lake and Ensifera Camp

Laguna Piuray and it surroundings are home to a variety of high Andean species such as Puna Teal, Yellow-billed Pintail, Plumbeous Rail, Silvery Grebe, the exquisite Many-colored Rush-Tyrant, Andean Negrito, Rusty-fronted Canastero, Golden-billed Saltator, and more. Along the way to Ollantaytambo, we'll check out the feeders at Ensifera Camp for some spectacular hummingbirds. Possibilities include Sword-billed Hummingbird, Black and Green-tailed Trainbearers, Shining and White-tufted Sunbeam, Great Sapphirewing, among others. We'll then descent into the Sacred Valley and spend two nights in Ollantaytambo.

Day 3: Abra Málaga

We need an early start as we drive over a very high pass at 14,000 ft (4,300 m) and then down to some beautiful temperate forest in the shadow of the imposing 19,000 ft (5700 m.) Veronica Peak. We'll start by looking for Inca Wren, Puna Thistletail, Three-striped and Parodi's Hemispinguses, Scaled Metaltail, Marcapata Spinetail and others, before returning to the pass for a tough hike to some groves of Polylepis woodland with several globally threatened species such as Ash-breasted Tit-Tyrant, White-browed Tit-Spinetail, and if we are really lucky, maybe a Royal Cinclodes. Later in the afternoon, we'll have another change to see the endemic White-tufted Sunbeam (if we missed it yesterday) before returning to Ollantaytambo.

Day 4: Machu Picchu

Depending on the rail schedule, there may be time to check the grounds of the hotel for White-bellied Hummingbird and a few other birds before taking the train to Aguas Calientes at the base of Machu Picchu. The rest of the day we will have free to explore the beautiful and fascinating ancient Inca ruins. We will have a local guide to give us a walking tour of the ruins, or you may choose to explore on your own. There aren't too many birds to be seen in the ruins, but we might encounter the endemic Green-and-white Hummingbird, and can look for Inca Wren if we missed it yesterday. After visiting the ruins, there may be a chance for birding on the way back to the hotel We spend one night in Aguas Calientes. (NOTE: luggage is strictly limited on the train. Therefore it will be necessary to leave most of our luggage with our driver in Ollantaytambo. We will reconnect with the luggage again tomorrow).

Day 5: Aguas Calientes and return to Ollantaytambo

The train usually doesn't leave until after lunch (though schedules may change), so we should have a full morning to bird the subtropical cloudforest around Aguas Calientes. This area is good for species like Masked Fruiteater, Variable Antshrike, Rust-and-yellow Tanager, Silver-backed Tanager, Gould's Inca, and Sclater's Tyrannulet – birds that we probably will not see along the Manu road. After taking the train back to

Ollantaytambo, we'll reconnect with our luggage and check into our hotel.

Day 6: Sacred Valley to Manu

Today we will leave very early, first driving several hours on a rough road through scenic intermontane valleys. We will make selected stops for two smart endemics: Creamy-crested Spinetail and Chestnut-breasted Mountain-Finch, and stop for anything else we might encounter along the way. We'll reach the 11,500 ft (3,500 m) Ajacnaco Pass by around lunch time, and spend the afternoon birding temperate forest downhill towards our lodge, hoping to run into mixed species flocks that could have dozens of brilliant birds like Golden-collared and Grass-green Tanagers, Mountain Cacique, White-collared Jay, Black-capped and Superciliaried, Hemispinguses, Pearled Treerunner, Citrine Warbler, and more. We'll spend the night in the Wayqecha Cloudforest Research Center, located in pristine elfin forest high in the Andes. It makes a perfect stopover to break up the long trip down the Manu Road, and allows us better coverage of the higher elevations.

Day 7: The Upper Manu Road

It's hard not to be awed by the steep slopes blanketed with cloudforest as far as the eye can see. Beautiful hummingbirds like Violet-throated Starfrontlet and Amethyst-throated Sunangel flit through the roadside vegetation, and he have a great chance to see Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucan. We'll target some tough birds like Red-and-white Antpitta, and jump out of the bus at the first sign of a mixed-species flock, and may see such gems as Barred and Band-tailed Fruiteaters, White-browed Conebill, Chestnut-bellied Mountain-Tanager, Fulvous Wren, and White-banded Tyrannulet. We'll spend two nights in Cock-of-the-rock Lodge. Hummingbird feeders here bring in several species including Green Hermit, Violet-fronted Brilliant, and Rufous-booted Racket-tail.

Day 8: Cock-of-the-rock Lodge

Just a few minutes drive from our lodge is a spectacular Cock-of-the-Rock lek furnished with comfortable blinds to observe the amazing males during their mating rituals. Along the trail system we can explore the mossy cloud forest, searching for the likes of Moustached Wren, Slaty Gnateater, and Chestnut-breasted Wren. Birding up and down the road we will quickly build up a list of mid-elevation birds, and possibilities include Solitary Eagle, Golden-headed and Crested Quetzals, White-eared Solitaire, Blue-banded Toucanet, Amazonian Umbrellabird, Yungas Manakin, and a dazzling array of tanagers.

Days 9-11: Lower Manu road & Manu Bio Lodge

After a final morning in the birdy cloudforests we will descend farther down the Manu road, targeting foothill forest species like Chestnut-backed Antshrike, Two-banded and Golden-bellied Warblers, Ornate Flycatcher, and Peruvian Piedtail. In the afternoon we arrive to an excellent lodge in the foothills, Manu Bio Lodge (formerly named Villa Carmen), where we spend three nights. We will arrive in time for some afternoon birding in the lush rainforest, which is swathed in large stands of bamboo that is home to special birds like Rufous-headed Woodpecker, Rufous-breasted Piculet, Striated Antbird, Bamboo Antshrike, Dusky-tailed Flatbill, and the stunning White-cheeked Tody-Flycatcher. We will also be on the lookout for Blue-headed Macaw, Scarlet-hooded Barbet, Round-tailed and Fiery-capped Manakins, among many other species. Hummingbird and tanager feeders not far from the lodge are well worth a visit and should give us great views of several stunning species, possibly including Koepcke's Hermit, Buff-tailed Sicklebill, Blue-fronted Lancebill, Gould's Jewelfront, Sapphire-spanged Emerald, Rufous-crested Coquette, and more.

Day 12: River Trip

After a few more hours of birding at Manu Bio Lodge, we will drive to the end of the road and board a motorized canoe that will take us down the Madre de Dios to Manu Birding Lodge. It takes several hours, but the boat will make a couple of rest stops, and we usually see some cool stuff along the way, like Fasciated Tiger-Heron, Yellow-billed Tern, Pied Lapwing, a variety of herons, Bat Falcon, Black Skimmer, Wood Stork, Orinoco Goose, and Horned Screamer. We plan to arrive at the lodge before dark, and we'll spend two nights there.

Days 13-15: Lowlands of Manu

We'll have three full days in this amazing area. Diversity is spectacular, and we'll bird trails, towers, and oxbow lakes. Large stands of bamboo hold many local and sought-after species, and the extensive terra firme and transitional floodplain forest hold a mind-boggling variety of bird-life. A canopy observation tower gives us a chance to see the canopy birds at close range, including many species of toucans, aracaris, tanagers, euphonias, woodpeckers, parrots, oropendolas, and others. Some of the more interesting species we will be searching for in the bamboo include Manu Antbird, White-cheeked Tody-Flycatcher, and Peruvian Recurvebill. We also look for the near-endemic Rufous-fronted Antthrush, Razor-billed Curassow, Pale-winged Trumpeter, Pavonine Quetzal, Purus Jacamar, Western Striolated-Puffbird, and Rufous-capped Nunlet, to name but a few. Great mammal sightings are also possible including monkeys, Giant Otters, tapirs, peccaries and on very rare occasions even a Jaguar. The night of day 13 will be spent in Manu Wildife Center, and the nights of days 14 and 15 will be in Tambo Blanquillo lodge.

Day 16: Macaw Lick and travel to Puerto Maldonado

We need to leave early in order to reach the clay lick, which only allows entry at dawn to avoid disturbing the birds. Activity varies from day to day, but usually hundreds of parrots and macaws are visible from the blinds. Red-and-green Macaw is a highlight and the beautiful Orange-cheeked Parrot is a regular visitor here. We'll spend the rest of the day traveling, first by boat and then by pickup trucks, to Puerto Maldonado, where we spend one night.

Day 17: Puerto Maldonado to Lima

We'll morning birding near Puerto Maldonado, where there are some stakeouts for the localized White-throated Jacamar and several other species we may not have seen up until now. We'll then catch a flight to Lima, where we'll spend the night in a hotel next to the airport.

Day 18: Pucusana and Pantanos de Villa

After breakfast, we'll head south to the fishing village of Pucusana, where the harbor is jam packed with Inca Terns, Belcher's, Gray-hooded, and Gray Gulls, Guanay and Red-legged Cormorants, and more. We'll take a short boat ride to look for Humboldt Penguin and Surf Cinclodes (bring seasickness pills if you are susceptible). Making our way back to Lima, we can target Peruvian Thick-knee and Short-tailed Field Tyrant, and check the Pantanos de Villa wetlands for more waterbirds. The tour ends this evening with international flights back home from Lima.

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