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Perú, a natural paradise

Ranked by the World Resources Institute among the select group of eight mega-diverse countries, Peru contains 84 out of 104 eco-systems found in the world today. This has sparked a series of world records that would astonish even the most skeptical researcher: Peru is home to almost 10% of all mammals and reptiles living on the planet, more than 20% of the Earth's birds, and between 40.000 and 50.000 of its vascular plants (the most highly evolved ones), of which only half have been classified.

Insects deserve special mention. On one single tree in the Tambopata jungle in Peru's southeast, scientists identified over 5.000 different species, including more ant species than can be found in all the British isles.

Peru's complex and irregular geography, divided lengthwise from north to south by the Andes, is undoubtedly the main reason for the astonishing diversity of this extraordinarily beautiful land. The mountains, split into endless intervalleys, have produced a unique climate that makes Peru a region riddled with remarkable contrasts: arid deserts and exuberant jungles; glaciers and savannas, flower-filled valleys and white sandy beaches.

Thanks to its natural and biogenetic wealth and diversity, throughout its history Peru has helped to improve mankind's living standards. Its contributions, to mention only a few of the most important ones, cover fields as diverse as pharmaceuticals (from quinine to fight malaria at the turn of the century, to 'cat's claw' to treat modern immunological deficiency); medicine (with effective wound healers, tonics, antibiotics and cancer drugs); textiles (with Tangüis, the world's best quality cotton); and food (with potatoes, tomatoes or hot chili peppers, and endless Andean crops of high nutritional value –like maca and amaranth– used as a food supplement for astronauts).

Some of Peru's natural areas have gained worldwide recognition, like Paracas, where huge flocks of migratory birds, sea-lion colonies, Humboldt penguins, adapted to areas beyond the Antarctic, and an astonishing variety of fish share the coast with ruins dating back to the pre-Hispanic cultures that evolved between the desert and the sea. Or like Lachay, an unexpected green oasis, in the middle of the sands, that blossoms, once a year, under a blanket of fog.

On the high Andean plateau, at over 4.000 masl (more than 12.000 ft.) vicuñas roam the Pampa Galeras, ever-watchful of the puma or Andean cougar lurking nearby. And in Lake Titicaca, the highest navigable body of water on the planet, rafts made of totora reeds sail the cold waters that are home to the Uros.

The Andes are also home to the highest tropical peaks in the world and in particular the Huascarán snow-capped mountain, a paradise of eternal snows and crystal-clear streams, condors and deer; of emerald-green lakes, queñual trees and an incredibly blue sky, that every year lures thousands of visitors. Cloud forests that skirt the Andes' eastern slopes, cover the testimony of long-last ancient cultures that have yet to be discovered.

Hidden in the magical Amazon rain forest are the Manu and Pacaya–Samiria territories, true natural paradises, home to macaws and hidden waterfalls.

There, in the enormity of the planet's most pristine region, time seems to have stopped and rivers meander unhurried bringing sustenance to huge trees and the most delicate of orchids. There, jaguars, eagles, caimans and anacondas share the forest with indigenous tribes who know it better than anyone. Come visit timeless, magical Peru, mankind's reserve of biodiversity.

Natural Ecoregions

Natural Ecoregions

For a long time specialists divided Peru in just three large natural regions, namely the coast, the mountains and the jungle. Although this simple classification reflects a preliminary general appearance of Peru's geography, reality is considerably more complex.

Special conditions such as the presence of high massifs, winds that blow from far regions or the proximity of large bodies of water, made nature adopt peculiar characteristics turning some of the country's regions into unique and well-differentiated habitats that require further investigation.

Antonio Brack, a biogeography specialist, has identified 11 ecoregions in Peru, ranging from the ocean zones to mountains and tropical jungles, going through deserts and valleys, swamplands and high forests.

Seen individually, some of these zones may be considered as lacking great diversity but altogether they are a true wonder of nature. The abundance found in Peru's nature is based on the amazing diversity of its environments and living creatures.

The Tropical Sea

A warm current or tropical sea is present off a small section of Peru's northern coast. Waters that are considerably warmer than in the rest of Peru's seas give rise to large clouds that dump rain on the coast off Tumbes and part of Piura, two departments where vegetation thrives, even in the desert beside the sea.

Warm water flora and fauna are different from the animals and plants that dwell in cold seas. Mangroves, one of the world's most beautiful ecosystems, are made possible thanks to the proximity of the tropical sea. Created by the mix of fresh, silt-loaded river water, and the sea's salt water, mangroves grow on the very shores of the ocean to form a tight jungle teeming with life that shelters hundreds of animal and plant species, some extremely rare such as the mangrove raccoon and the American alligator.

Usual dwellers of this zone are magnificent frigate birds, the blue-footed booby known as camanay,

tropical birds, several types of tortoises and even a type of marine snake. Fish are plentiful and varied, ranging from sharks and tuna to large conger eels, groupers and marlins.

Mollusks and crustaceans deserve a special mention: dozens of varieties of sea-shells, clams and crabs, besides lobsters and shrimp that can only survive in warm waters are found here.

The Cold Sea

The Peruvian or Humboldt Current runs parallel to Peru's coastline from Tacna on the Chilean border to Punta Pariñas in the northern department of Piura. Its cold waters flow northwards from South America's southern tip and the Antarctic.

The influence of the Peruvian Current on this part of the subcontinent is strong enough to prevent rainfall over the coast, helping to form a winter fog. However, its waters are so rich that scientists dub it "plankton soup." In addition to deep water upwells, this phenomenon has created the conditions for varied animal and plant life made up of many types of algae, large mammals like whales, sperm whales and dolphins, two types of seals, and a rare sea otter locally known as chingungo.

Together with these large sea animals lives a legion of sea birds (including guano birds) and over 300 varieties of fish, especially anchovies and sardines that have given rise to one of Peru's most important industries.

The Pacific Coast Desert

The largest natural formation on the Peruvian coast, the Pacific desert stretches from Piura in the north to Tacna in the southern tip of Peru. The weather is warm in summer and humid in winter, when mist and a thick cloud cover block out sunlight.

In some areas where fogs blow against the mountain slopes, a peculiar phenomenon known as lomas occurs: oases that shelter plentiful and diverse animal and plant wildlife. Winds, also important in this region, reach their maximum intensity in the department of Ica, where they are known as paracas.

Deserts are mostly flat lands of vast pampas, dunes and hills that rarely run over 700 meters of altitude. Animal and plant life in this area is scarce. However, the monotonous sand and rock pampas are regularly split by the fertile valleys of the coastal strip. A total of 52 rivers cross the Pacific desert and pour into the ocean, fostering life to the lands they flow through. There, plant life is represented by the carob tree, huarangos, cacti, and tillandsias. Typical animals include the gray coastal fox, the guanaco (one of two varieties of wild South American camelids living in Peru), and several dozen varieties of birds. Coastal rivers are lavish in shrimp and a wide variety of fishes.

The Equatorial Dry Forest

A typical natural formation of the northern coast with a predominance of plant species adapted to the harsh desert conditions including carob and ceibo trees. These species are common in the Tumbes, Piura and Lambayeque departments where they ensure the livelihood of the local population and are a source of animal fodder, construction materials, medicaments, alcoholic beverages and food products.

Summer rainfall in an otherwise warm and dry climate ensures the growth of plentiful and unique plant life in the dry forest, which stretches from the seashore to 100 or 150 km inland. A generally flat relief of vast plains and low rolling hills on the coastal seaboard rises to form small mountain chains in the interior.

This is the land of potbellied ceibos that store water in their thick trunks, and of hard, fine wood trees like hualtaco and guayacan. It is the land of white-tailed deer, coastal foxes, white-winged guans, tamandua ant-eaters, and white-neck squirrels who share the dry forest with huge flocks of Pacific parrakeets and red-fronted parrots.

The Pacific Tropical Forest

A special enclave in the heart of Tumbes department and unusually close to the seashore, the Pacific tropical forest is a small area which features huge trees and exuberant jungles home to jaguars, crocodiles and howler monkeys.

A characteristically humid climate with a marked rainy season from December to March and a long dry season during the rest of the year, this coastal region gets more rainfall than any other along the Peruvian coast, thus allowing the growth of plentiful plant life.

Many of its inhabitants come from other natural regions such as the jaguar, sloths and red brocket that come from the Amazon, or the coastal fox and white-tailed deer which also dwell in the dry Equatorial desert.

Other species, however are native to this peculiar environment and cannot be found anywhere else in Peru, such as the coto or howler monkey typical of Tumbes, the northeastern otter, the bronze-winged parrot and many others. The area also features numerous orchids and huge ceibo trees, bearded trees that are festooned with long strips of salvajina vines.

The Highland Steppes

This eco-system covers the western slopes of the Andes and is located at 1.000 masl, slightly above the almost permanent coastal cloud cover. It is a region of soaring mountains and cliffs, fertile valleys and fast-flowing rivers that have shaped the area's landscape for millions of years forging deep canyons. Dry and sunny weather in the daytime gives way to chilly nights. As we climb towards the higher areas, closer to the high plateau or puna, rain becomes more frequent, before diminishing as we descend towards the desert. Several types of cacti and some bushes dotted with colorful flowers - like chinchircuma and the cantuta flower, Peru's national flower - are a common sight in these mountains.

The Highland Steppes are also home to the puma and the gray deer, the guanaco and the wild cat, the viscacha rodent and the skunk or añás, and the Andean fox. Skies are populated by hundreds of bird species, including hummingbirds, eagles and falcons, parrots and parrakeets, and a huge variety of smaller seed-eating birds.

The High Andean Plain (Puna Grasslands)

Above 3.800 masl one finds the puna, where extreme temperature changes are characteristic of a remarkably harsh climate, in which intensely cold nights are succeeded by hot days. The rainy season or "winter," as it is known in the Sierra, starts in December and lasts into March although scattered showers are not uncommon.

In the puna, mostly flat, extensive plains or pampas are flanked by steep ranges of towering glaciers and snow-capped mountains, imposing peaks that frequently rise above 6.000 meters. Here one can find blue-green lakes, salt marshes and the

headwaters of the many rivers that crisscross Peru.

But above all, the puna is a land of extremes, a place where the ruthless climate and lack of oxygen have hampered the evolution of life. A place where only a handful of species, adapted to the intense cold, can survive on the scarce resources provided by their environment, principally the kolle and queñual trees that thrive in the world's highest forests; the marshes and tota forests, the vast ichu grasslands and the clumps of puya Raymondi. This is the kingdom of the majestic Andean condor and Andean flamingoes, of graceful vicuñas and powerful pumas, of playful viscachas—a rodent related to the rabbit—and the beautiful taruca, the largest deer in the Andes.

The High Plateau Paramo

A sort of humid puna, the paramo is a land of cold and damp climate generally covered by a veil of fog and haze that lends it an air of mystery. Found only in a few areas of Peru, the Andean steppe is typical of Cajamarca department and the mountains of Piura in northern Peru.

At over 3.000 meters above sea level, where the air is usually chilly, the endless grasslands alternate with curious miniature forests where the twisted tree trunks are covered with a thick coat of moss that shelters a variety of peculiar creatures. One of them is the pudu or sachacabra, a deer species barely 30 centimeters tall.

Also living in this area are the rare hairy tapir or pinchaque, several species of bats, the spectacled bear or ucumari, the steppe deer, and a small kind of shrew that only recently has been identified by science, and which is Peru's only insect-eating mammal.

The High Jungle (Cloud Forest)

Also known as yunga in the Quechua language, the high jungle stretches along the eastern slopes of the Andes just above the Amazon plain. Its warm and very humid weather becomes colder as we move up the Andean heights. More rain falls here than anywhere else in Peru (up to 5.000mm a year) thus originating torrents and cascades of crystal-clear water.

The abrupt and complex relief of narrow valleys and deep gullies is covered by impenetrable forests. Mist-shrouded forests are found in the region's

upper reaches, generally enveloped by haze and drizzle, while the lower foothills create the low-land jungle.

Yunga vegetation is the most exuberant in the tropics and features orchids, giant begonias and ferns. The region is also home to the Andean cock of the rocks, Peru's national bird, the spectacled bear—the only South American bear species—the yellow-tailed woolly monkey (thought to be extinct until not very long ago), quetzals, torrent ducks, more than twenty varieties of hummingbirds, and several dozen species of fruit-birds.

The Low Jungle (Tropical Rain Forest)

Also known as the Amazon rain forest, this is the planet's most diverse life zone and covers two-thirds of Peru's land surface. Most of the world's animal and plant species live here in a hot and extremely humid environment where rain is constant from December to March, and heavy showers are frequent throughout the year. Here, large rivers like the Amazon, Ucayali and Madre de Dios dominate the landscape and are a source of food and a means of communication for the local population. Numerous cochas or oxbow lakes, as well as marshes spot the scenery.

The region's flora comprises more than 20.000 plant species ranging from fine wood trees and useful fruits to medicinal species. Wild animal life is amazingly rich and varied.

The region's inhabitants include the spider and howler monkeys; felines like the ocelot, puma and jaguar; the sachavaca or tapir, and the world's largest rodent, the ronsoco or capybara. Its waters teem with large fishes like the paiche and the giant catfish, two kinds of river dolphins and several types of terrapins or river tortoises.

Home to more than a thousand varieties of birds, the low jungle shelters the harpy eagle and a myriad minuscule hummingbirds; as well as huge reptiles like the black cayman and the anaconda all the way down to frogs, spiders and insects, many of which have yet to be identified.

The Palm Tree Savanna

In the southeastern tip of the department of Madre de Dios, on the border with Bolivia, this region of very peculiar characteristics features tall grasses and palm trees that stand out amidst the tropical jungle. Known as the "Pampas del Heath," it de-

rives its name from the river that runs across them and which outlines the border between the two nations.

Hot and humid, with a marked rainy season in summer, the area sometimes gets so much rainfall that large portions of the flooded savanna turn into a giant lake where only the tops of palm trees and termite nests provide shelter to smaller creatures.

Many of the plants and animals that thrive in this region are unique and have especially adapted themselves to survive in the vast grasslands.

They include the marsh deer, Peru's largest, the rare, maned-wolf that resembles a long-legged canine, the yellow-billed toucan (also Peru's biggest), and the elusive white woodpecker. Tapirs, jaguars, giant anteaters, and colorful macaws all share this life zone.

Protected Natural Areas

Peru spreads over a surface of approximately 1.285.215 square km and has sovereign territorial rights over 60 million hectares in the Antarctic.

In a bid to conserve representative samples of its flora, fauna and landscapes, Peru has introduced a number of legal and social mechanisms to protect its biological diversity.

These efforts are channeled through the National System of Natural Areas under State Protection (SINANPE) created in 1990 within the General Bureau of Natural Protected Areas and Wildlife as a division of the National Institute of Natural Resources (INRENA). To date, SINANPE monitors a total of 50 natural areas or conservation units that comprise approximately 10% of the national territory.

In turn, these areas are classified by category of use, including national parks, reserves and sanctuaries, historical and national sanctuaries, reserved zones, game reserves, protection forests and communal reserves. Of these, the first five are the most significant. Following is a representative sample of each area.

Note: To calculate Fahrenheit temperatures: $9/5$ (°C) + 32.

National Parks

These are areas designated as intangible for the absolute protection and preservation of the animal and plant wildlife associations they shelter and the beauty of the scenery surrounding them. Both the direct use of natural resources and human settlements are strictly forbidden in National Parks. Only visitors pursuing scientific, educational, recreational and cultural (tourism) objectives are allowed to visit these conservation units under special conditions and control. The existing seven national parks give protection to 1,85% of the national territory.

Manu

Located in the rain forests of the Cusco and Madre de Dios departments, the Manu National Park is Peru's greatest natural treasure and a trove for the number of species it shelters and the diversity of the ecosystems it features. Established in 1973



*Tourists, Tambopata Jungle, Madre de Dios
Anibal Solimano / PromPerú*

over a land surface of 1.532.806 hectares, it was included in UNESCO's list of Mankind's Natural Heritage in 1987. It comprises the whole of the Manu river basin as well as an extraordinary cross-section of altitudes ranging from 4.300 masl in the Andean High Plateau to 200 masl in the Amazon floodplain. It is home to several ethnic groups including the Amahuaca, Huachipaire, Machiguenga, Piro, Yora and Yaminagua, as well as others who still have not made contact with the modern world. The park is the natural environment for over 20.000 vascular plants, 1.200 species of butterflies, 1.000 types of birds, 200 kinds of mammals and an unknown number of reptiles, amphibians and insects.

Climate: A well-marked rainy season stretches from December to March although heavy showers are not unusual throughout the year. It is best to visit from May to August, when temperatures exceed 30 °C.

Access and Services: A gravel road from Cusco leads to the towns of Atalaya and Shintuya (9 and 12 hours away, respectively), a 5-to-6 hour boat trip. It is also possible to fly a light plane from Cusco to Boca Manu (30 minutes) then continue by river boat (4 to 6 hours). Tourists are allowed only in the Reserve Zone and are permitted to book services with one of the licensed operators. Tourist infrastructure is rustic and simple and camping is allowed within the premises.

Length of Stay: Ideally, a stay of 7 to 8 days will provide sufficient time to observe a representative sample of the area's wildlife.

Huascarán

Located in the department of Ancash, the Huascarán National Park is wedged in the Cordillera Blanca, the world's highest tropical mountain chain. It was created in 1975 over a surface of 340.000 hectares and included in UNESCO's list of Mankind's Natural Heritage in 1985. The park protects one of the world's most surprising high-mountain ecosystems, featuring 663 glaciers, 269 lakes and 41 rivers, as well as dozens of mountains, 26 of which tower above 6.000 meters. It is home to plentiful and diverse plant and animal wildlife including some 800 plant species and several dozen types of animals. Additionally, the park includes 33 pre-Inca archaeological sites like Wilcaguaín and is home to dozens of Quechua-speaking peasant communities that still practice their traditional farming and livestock herding techniques.

Climate: The Andean mountain climate depends heavily on 2 critical factors: humid and warm winds from the Amazon basin that originate heavy rainfall from December to March, and sudden changes in temperature. In the dry season from



*Llanganuco lagoon, Ancash
Anibal Solimano / PromPerú*

May to October, the temperature on a sunny day can rise to 25 °C, followed by intensely cold nights with temperatures plunging below freezing.

Access and Services: The best way to the Callejón de Huaylas is to take the road off Pativilca (kilometer 210 of the North Pan-American Highway) and head east for the mountains to the lake Conococha, headwaters of the Santa river. The steep climb means travelers should take precautions against altitude sickness. The trip takes six to eight hours to cover 410 km (approximately 260 miles) over a winding road in good condition. Chartered light airplanes may land at the small local airport.

Length of Stay: At least three to four days are required for a leisurely visit to the park's main areas.

Cerros de Amotape

Located in the departments of Piura and Tumbes over a land surface of 91.300 hectares of Equatorial dry forests, the Cerros de Amotape, or Amotape Hills, provide shelter to a wide and unique collection of plant and animal wildlife. It was created in 1975 to protect the vast forests of the Amotape Cordillera and the neighboring valleys, subject to intense lumbering activity due to the valuable hard woods that grow there like hualtaco and guayacán.

The American crocodile and the northeastern otter are some of the animals that find shelter in this ecosystem. Both are endangered species on the verge of extinction. Other residents of the dry forest are the Tumbes howler monkey, white-tailed deer, ocelots and more than 100 bird species, many of which are endemic, like the white-winged guan and the northern magpie.

Climate: Dry and extremely hot most of the year with temperatures ranging above 28° C. Rainfall increases markedly when the El Niño weather anomaly occurs in the area. April to September are ideal for visiting.

Access and Services: Several gravel roads lead into the forest from the cities of Piura and Tumbes which can in turn be reached regularly by air or along the North Pan-American Highway. 4WD vehicles, a local tour guide and an ample supply of water and food are advised.

Length of Stay: A 3-to-4 day stay is recommended, equally divided between the park's south and north sections.

Bahuaja-Sonene

A recently created park in the jungle territories of the Puno and Madre de Dios departments, the Bahuaja-Sonene National Park (names given by the Ese'ija ethnic group to the Tambopata and Ene rivers, respectively) serves to protect what are probably the last inhabited tropical forests of the world. Its 537.053 hectares of rain forests adjoining the Madidi National Park of Bolivia have been expanded with a small area of palm tree savanna (previously protected as part of the Pampas del Heath Sanctuary) to form one of the most biodiverse corners of the planet.

Charles Munn, member of the Zoological Society of New York and ranked by Time Magazine as one of the 100 most influential personalities of the coming century, claims that the forests in this park shelter more plant and animal species that elsewhere in the world: over 20.000 plant species, a thousand bird species and hundreds of mammals, reptiles and fish. These are the ancestral lands of the Ese'ija, a tribe on the verge of extinction that was decimated during the "rubber boom" at the turn of the century.

Climate: A marked rainy season runs from December to March though showers are also frequent out of the wet season. May through August are recommended for visiting, despite temperatures above 32 °C.

Access and Services: A rental boat will take travelers up the Tambopata river from Puerto Maldonado which can also be reached by regular commercial air service. Rustic accommodation is available at some local inns providing basic services for travelers.

Length of Stay: Four or five days are enough to tour this easy-to-reach area.

National Reserves

These are natural areas devoted to the protection and propagation of animal wildlife whose conservation has been declared of national interest. Animal wildlife resources in national reserves may be used solely by the State, and only under special conditions. At present, eight national reserves pro-

tect about 2.3% of the national territory.

Paracas

Established in 1975 on 335.000 hectares, Paracas is the only SINANPE natural area protecting the Peruvian portion of the cold Humboldt current. Located on the coastal desert strip, this unique life zone comprises one of the world's richest seas, a condition made possible by the upwelling of huge masses of marine plankton that provide vital nourishment to innumerable fish species. Paracas is the land of the guano birds and vast colonies of seals. It provides a stopover for tens of species of migratory birds and is the final refuge for many endemic and endangered species, including the marine otter or chingungo, the Humboldt penguin and the common flamingoes. Paracas was home to a major pre-Columbian civilization who left a superb legacy of spectacular textiles and pottery.

Climate: Typical sunny desert weather with temperatures above 30 °C from December to March. However, this balmy weather continues during most of the winter season as well, even if temperatures can fall to 10 °C at nights. Strong paracas winds often blow in the afternoon.

Access and Services: Paracas can be easily reached from Lima down the South Pan-American Highway. After arriving in Pisco, 240 km (150 miles) south of Lima, a paved road leads to the reserve, where a network of roads provides access to the reserve's beaches and main attractions and interests.

Length of Stay: We recommend 2-3 days and camping on the beach for a closer contact with nature.

Lomas de Lachay

A burst of greenery amidst the barren Peruvian coastal desert, the Lomas de Lachay - or Lachay foothills - are a unique natural life zone created by the condensed winter haze that shrouds the western Andean mountain slopes. On specific spots along the coast, the humidity carried to the mountains by the trade winds is deposited on the desert sand as drops of water that nurture a wide range of seasonal plants and associated animal wildlife.

The most common plant species include sturdy tara and palillo trees as well as flowers, cacti and numerous fast-growth bushes like the stinging nettle and wild tobacco. Almost 60 bird species, the

coastal fox, the (recently reintroduced) white-tailed deer, skunks and several types of rodents and lizards also are at home in the park. The coastal lomas have been visited and used by Peruvians since the dawn of time. Nomadic hunters and gatherers have left vestiges of their presence in rock carvings in the area.

Climate: Two marked seasons are characteristic. Winter, from August to December, when the lomas are in full bloom, is the ideal time for visiting. Drought is typical during the rest of the year. A jacket and raincoat are advisable. The temperature in Lachay rarely falls below 12 °C in winter and climbs to 25 °C in summer.

Access and Services: The Lomas de Lachay can be easily reached along a 3-km detour road off kilometer 105 in the North Pan-American Highway. Trekking paths, camping and BBQ areas, toilets and a conservation information center are found within park premises.

Length of Stay: One full day.

Lake Titicaca

Since 1978, this reserve has helped to conserve the region's plant and animal wildlife as well as its scenic beauties while promoting the rational use of resources. The Titicaca Reserve's 36.180 hectares spread almost totally over the highest navigable lake in the world. The reserve is divided into two separate sectors. The first, surrounding and including the Bay of Puno, aims to protect the totora reed fields that provide sustenance to the Uros-Chulluni communities, while the second, in the Huanané area, preserves less frequently visited totora fields that may nevertheless be just as rich and interesting. More than 60 varieties of birds, including the endemic Titicaca flightless gull have been identified in the lake's surroundings. Other species include 14 types of native fish species and 18 kinds of amphibians, among which are the giant Titicaca frog and a type of aquatic frog.

Climate: Extreme weather is characteristic of the area with dramatic temperature changes between day and night. Winter stretches from May to December, featuring bright days, infrequent rainfall and daytime temperatures as high as 25 °C. This is the perfect travel season. Nights, however, are always cold though rarely colder than 0 °C. Sunblock, a coat and precautions against altitude sickness are strongly recommended.

Access and Services: Regular flights arrive in Juliaca - one hour by road from Puno. From the port of Puno boats take travelers to the lake's islands. Accommodation of all sorts is available around the lake.

Length of Stay: At least three days are required, with a stay of at least one day on one of the lake's islands (Taquile or Amantani).

Pampa Galeras

A stronghold of the wild vicuña in Peru, Pampa Galeras is part of an aggressive campaign for the recovery of this endangered species. Created in 1967 on 6.500 hectares on the high plateau plains of the Lucanas community in the department of Ayacucho, the reserve is part of a plan to preserve this endangered species. In recent years, thanks to progress made by implementing an adequate regulatory framework, the national vicuña population grew from 5.000 to 70.000 individuals. Pampa Galeras also shelters other species of typical puna animal wildlife, including Andean condors, pumas, tarucas or Andean deer, the white-tailed deer, skunks called añás, viscachas and the Andean fox. In April 1993, the original name of the reserve was modified to Pampa Galeras - Barbara D'Achille, to honor the renowned environmental journalist.

Climate: Typical puna climate with a rainy season stretching from December to March. The dry season, erroneously called "summer", runs from May to October, and is the best time to visit the reserve. At 3.800 masl, Pampa Galeras can be extremely cold at night, with temperatures frequently plunging below freezing.

Access and Services: The reserve can be reached along a recently resurfaced road that climbs from the city of Nazca (450 km south of Lima) to the town of Puquio in about two hours. No services are available in the Reserve.

Length of Stay: One full day. Overnight stays are possible in the nearby town of Puquio for a morning visit to the Reserve.

Pacaya - Samiria

Spreading over 2.080.000 hectares, the crown jewel of Peru's northern Amazon region natural reserves, Pacaya-Samiria is also the nation's largest. It was created in 1982 to conserve the region's exuberant and diverse animal wildlife, including its huge



*Otorongo, Madre de Dios
Aníbal Solimano / PromPerú*

variety of fish species that are the main source of protein for the local population. Its countless lakes, swamps and flood plains are home to 130 types of mammals, 330 bird species, and countless numbers of amphibians and reptiles. Among its main attractions are the giant charapa turtles, manatees, dolphins, giant otters, black caymans, and paiche –the world's largest fresh-water fish–, all of which are endangered species.

Climate: Hot and extremely humid, the Reserve's climate is typical of the tropical forest. Temperatures often top 34 °C. The "dry" season that runs from May to October provides the perfect climate for a visit. The area sees torrential downpours from December to March.

Access and Services: The area can only be reached by river. The trip starts in Iquitos, which is linked by regular commercial flights; followed by a 3-to-4 hour outboard motorboat trip that takes the traveler upstream to Nauta. From there, the Marañón river runs to the Pacaya river after crossing the Puinahua channel (another four to six hours). No accommodation for tourists is available. Hiring a local tour guide is recommended.

Length of Stay: At least six to seven days are needed, three of which are required just to access and exit the area.

National Sanctuaries

They are designated to protect a species or an animal or plant community by declaring it intangible, and to preserve natural formations that are of scientific or scenic interest. At present, six national sanctuaries protect 0,11% of Peru's land.

Manglares de Tumbes

Located on the northernmost tip of Peru's coastal strip, the Tumbes mangroves are the southern limit for many animal and plant wildlife species related to this unique ecosystem. The sanctuary was created in 1988 on 2.972 hectares to protect the largest mangrove forests of Peru and particularly the large and varied animal community that they sustain. Invertebrates stand out here, in particular the wide variety of mollusks –including black clams, 34 species of crustaceans, 33 types of snails and over 100 kinds of fish. Additionally, the sanctuary is a key spot for breeding marine species with commercial value like lobster. Both migratory and resident birds, the endangered American alligator as well as the mangrove raccoon are some of the Reserve's most interesting residents.

Climate: Tropical and sunny most of the year with yearly average temperatures of around 25 °C. Sporadic downpours from December to March become more intense with the arrival of the El Niño weather oscillation.

Access and Services: From Tumbes, which can be reached on regular flights, or by the North Pan-American Highway. The sanctuary lies 24 km from the city down the road to the Ecuadorian border. Boats take visitors on guided tours. Sunblock and repellent are recommended, as well as information about tide schedules, especially if camping is planned.

Length of Stay: One full day. The park can be easily reached from the city of Tumbes.

Ampay

Established in 1987 on 3.635 hectares to protect the intimpa forests of the Peruvian Sierra. Intimpa is Peru's only native conifer and thrives in dense forests that provide shelter for unique and diverse animal wildlife, made up principally by bird species. A number of glaciated lakes and crystal-clear streams flow down Ampay, a snow-capped peak that towers over the region and gives its name to the protected area.

Climate: Sunny and dry from May to October, though nights are extremely cold (when frosts and -5 °C temperatures are not unusual). Rainy from December to March.

Access and Services: The sanctuary can be reached by taking one of many horse trails that leave the village of Tamburco, on the outskirts of the city of Abancay, which in turn is reached by road from Cusco (six hours away) or from Andahuaylas (a three-hour trip). No accommodation for tourists is available. For this reason, travelers are strongly encouraged to hire a local tourist guide and buy water and food in Abancay.

Length of Stay: At least a three-day stay to camp out by the Sanctuary's lakes is recommended.

Historical Sanctuaries

These areas award intangible status to natural areas that are also historical landmarks. At present, three sites have been designated as historical sanctuaries that protect 0,03% of Peru's land area.

Machu Picchu

Much of the beauty and charm that envelopes Machu Picchu –Peru's most important tourist attraction– comes from the spectacular mountain forest backdrop. The sanctuary was established in 1981 on 32.592 hectares to preserve the unique flora and fauna, the scenic beauty of the surrounding forests, and the area's archaeological remains. Machu Picchu is home to some spectacular wild life, like the Andean cock of the rocks, Peru's national bird, and the spectacled bear or ucumari, South America's only native bear. Rare dwarf deer or sachacabra, the tanca taruca or Huemal deer and more than 300 types of birds also live in the area. An especially diverse and interesting flora can be found in the park and more than 200 registered species of orchids, many of which are in imminent danger of extinction due to annual forest burning for farming and illegal trade. Venerated by the local population as their Apu or guardian mountain god, the imposing Salkantay, the region's tallest glacier, towers over the area.

Climate: Rainy during summer months (December to March) and sunny from May to September, with an occasional rain shower. Maximum temperatures normally reach 27 °C while the minimum rarely falls below 11 °C.

Access and Services: A morning train departing Cusco runs to Machu Picchu on a beautiful trip of approximately four hours (through the Sacred

Valley of the Incas). Also available are half-hour helicopter flights from Cusco.

Length of Stay: Travelers should bear in mind that almost one full day is required to enter and exit this world-class natural and historical area.

Reserved Areas

These are areas granted temporary protection, while surveys to determine the most appropriate way to address their specific conservation needs, in compliance with the corresponding zoning regulations are carried out. So far, eleven reserved zones have been proclaimed in Peru, usually on large swaths of territory where there are various ways of using available resources. These areas are characterized by a distinctive environmental feature.

Pantanos de Villa (c)

Lima's only protected natural area, the Villa wetlands are made up of extensive totora reed paddies, pools and grasslands fed by upwellings from the Rimac river basin. Given their strategic location on the subcontinent's western Pacific coast, the wetlands provide a vital haven to birds. More than 150 bird species have been identified in this reserve, with 30 migratory species from remote places such as the Arctic, the Caribbean and Patagonia.

Climate: Its typical coastal weather features overcast winter skies, high humidity and a soft drizzle from May to September, and a warm, summer season running from December to March.

Access and Services: Villa is located only 18 km south of Lima (a 15-minute car ride) along the Huaylas Avenue. The Reserve provides visitors with appropriate facilities, such as marked paths, bird-watching points and a conservation information center.

Length of Stay: A full tour of the swamps can be done in two or three hours.

Other Categories

National forests: Appropriate for lumbering and other forest and animal wildlife extraction activities. Commercial and industrial activities in these areas can only be undertaken by the government and exceptionally by private companies granted a

special, non-transferable lumbering license. Peru has four national forests.

Protection forests: Due to their characteristics and location, these forests are mainly devoted to soil and water conservation. Peru has six protection forests.

Game reserves: In these areas animal wildlife is managed for game hunting on public or private land. There are two game reserves in Peru.

Communal reserves: Wildlife is protected in these areas for the benefit of neighboring communities (native and peasant communities in the Andes, and the high and lower jungle). Two such communal reserves exist in Peru.

Biosphere reserves: A comprehensive approach to natural area management that is part of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Program (MAB) to promote comprehensive, cross-disciplinary work to guide long-term sustainable use and management of natural resources. This category includes strictly protected areas (core areas, generally a national park), under rational management (buffer areas) and areas of intensive resource use (cultural areas). Since 1977 UNESCO has recognized three Biosphere Reserves in Peru: Northeast, Huascarán and Manu. The core zones of each one are national parks.

Recommendations

Always look for a park guard or a local guide. Usually inexpensive, their services will allow travelers to benefit from their knowledge and the well-known hospitality of the local population. INRENA's central or local office authorizations must be obtained. Hiring the services of an experienced tour operator or organizing a camping ex-



Sunset in the Marsh of Villa, Lima
Carlos Sala / PromPerú

pedition are options to be considered, given that accommodation for tourists is minimal in natural protected areas.

On the Coastal Plain...

Dry and arid, there are however frequent showers and fog from April to October. Nights are cold. Summer months (December to March) are the perfect season for traveling on the coastal strip. Sunblock and water must be kept handy at all times.

In the Mountains...

Rainy from November to March. Travel is advised from April to October. Sunblock and warm clothes are essential. Altitude sickness hits above 2.500 meters. Precautions include resting upon arrival, drinking plenty of liquid, and avoiding heavy meals.

In the Jungle...

Rainy from November to March. The best time to visit is from April to October. Always carry insect repellent, a raincoat and sunblock. Long sleeved shirts and pants will help to prevent insect bites. Yellow fever vaccines are compulsory. Also recommended are vaccines against malaria, tetanus and hepatitis A and B. Ambulatory treatment for "leishmaniasis" (locally known as uta) and malaria is available.

Admission

Information about admission to protected national areas is available from the General Bureau of Natural Protected Areas and Animal Wildlife (DGANPE) at the National Resources Institute (INRENA). When required, permits to visit protected areas are obtained by specialized tour operators. If no agent offers tours to a given area, a form must be filled in attaching the corresponding documentation and the appropriate admission fee (ranging from free admission to US\$15 a day). Admission fees can also often be paid when entering the area.

Some areas are open only to researchers who must attach a copy of their project proposal to their admission form. Travelers are encouraged to specify clearly the reasons for travel, because additional charges for professional filming and photography equipment may apply. In other cases, either no special permit is required, or the admission authorization will be granted on site.

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