

Cloud Forest & Mitad del Mundo Tour Packages



2days/1night TOUR

CLOUD FOREST OF TANDAYAPA, MINDO'S COCK-OF-THE-ROCK & MITAD DEL MUNDO

This tour provides an irresistible combination of a rich experience of the natural world, in extensive cloud forest just a short ride from Ecuador's capital Quito, with a visit to the equator line museum Intiñan, one of the country's most visited tourist attractions. On our two-day tour we add a visit to a small private reserve, near Mindo where a local farmer, turned conservationist, Angel Paz, has managed to habituate a number of shy birds and feeds them at close range. He also boasts a display site for one of the most dramatic birds on all of South America: Andean Cock-of-the-rock; and our visit will be timed as to when the males are in the full throes of their display.

SCHEDULE:

DAY 1

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| 7am: | Departure from Quito |
| 9am: | Arrival at Tandayapa Bird Lodge |
| 9:30am : | Guided naturalist inside the cloud forest |
| 12:30pm: | Traditional lunch at Tandayapa |
| From 1:00pm: | Free time - visit to a forest blind |
| 7:00pm: | Dinner |

DAY 2

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| 4:45am: | Departure from lodge with boxed breakfast |
| 5:45am: | Visit to Andean Cock-of-the-rock display site |
| 6:30am: | Visit to Refugio Paz de Aves |
| 9:30am: | Brunch of traditional Ecuadorian food on site |
| 11:00am: | Return to Tandayapa Bird Lodge |
| 12:30am: | Lunch at Tandayapa Bird Lodge |
| 2:30pm: | Departure from Tandayapa for Mitad del Mundo |
| 3:30pm: | Visit to Mitad del Mundo & Equator Museum |
| 5:15pm: | Departure from Mitad del Mundo for Quito |
| 6pm: | Arrival back in Quito/End of tour |

DETAILED DESCRIPTION:

Pick-up from Quito hotel at 07:00am; drive out of the city of Quito and west across the equator. We will emerge out of the dry central valley of Ecuador (where Quito is located), as we continue west; and will notice a dramatic change in the landscape, as the dusty, semi-arid valley gives way to steep slopes covered in lush cloud forest. An hour and a half from Quito we will arrive at the base of the Tandayapa Valley, a tiny valley with extraordinary richness of species, especially for birds and plant life.

The valley is only two and half kilometers long, but is packed with tanagers, hummingbirds, trogons and other colorful birdlife. While the valley has received worldwide fame for this diversity of birds, there are still precious few lodges in the valley, which remains largely pristine, and swathed in dense forest. The wet conditions here are in sharp contrast to the dry environment of Ecuador's capital, and the cloud forest trees are covered in a community of plant life of their own, bromeliads seemingly draped across every available perch.

After passing through the tiny village of Tandayapa, where village life has remained unchanged for decades, we will arrive at the lodge where we will refresh ourselves with a cup of shade-grown coffee. The lodge was built in 2000, and encompasses a private reserve containing both primary and secondary forest. This forest shows almost every trunk and every branch covered on moss which co-exists with hundreds of bromeliads and epiphytic orchids, giving these woods a mystical appearance.

We will hike through the cloud forest surrounding the lodge, with a local naturalist guide, who will talk us through the natural history of the Andean Cloud Forests of the Choco Bio-region, emphasizing on the relationships between the various species that coevolved here. We will show our replanting program, where shade grown coffee is grown, and point out the myriad plant life cloaking the hills surrounding the lodge.

After several hours walking the narrow forest trails through the cloud forest we will return to the lodge for lunch in their restaurant overlooking their fruit feeders, which can attract tanagers and even toucans for the juicy papaya laid out for them. Lunch will include local Ecuadorian food, with a hearty soup to start, typical of the country culture, and involve three courses. After lunch participants will have the remainder of the afternoon to explore the area on their own pace, and enjoy the lodge's centerpiece: a "Hummingbird Veranda", where literally hundreds of hummingbirds visit every day to enjoy the ring of hummingbird feeders.



There will also be a resident volunteer naturalist guide on hand should anyone wish to take further walks in the cloud forest, or would like to visit a blind hidden within the forest, where late afternoon visits can produce close-ups of shy forest birds. The night and dinner will be taken at Tandayapa Bird Lodge, where the peace and tranquility at night will ensure a good night's sleep.

On the second day, before dawn, we will depart for one of the most dramatic nature experiences in the Andes; to watch the displays of the amazing cock-of-the-rock. Bright scarlet birds gather each morning to perform their cloud forest dances in the hope of attracting a female to come mate with them. A specially built blind in the forest will allow us to get unrivaled views of these extraordinary birds, at one of the very best sites to see this bird in the world.



This so called Lek, or display ground, sits on the land of this local farmer, who has recently turned his attentions to conservation; leaving the forested parts of his land untouched, and gaining an intimate knowledge of the birdlife on his land. Angel and his brother Rodrigo will guide us through their forest, where they have learned to habituate a number of shy forest birds, such as Giant and Yellow-breasted Antpittas which can then be seen at extremely close range. Fruit feeders on site may also offer us close ups of more colorful forest birds such as toucans and tanagers. Mid-morning we will head back up the trail and view the hummingbird feeders that the Paz family have erected on site, which attract some of the most beautiful hummingbirds in the Andes. We will spend some time enjoying these jewels of the Andes before retiring to the on site café where we will feast on traditional Ecuadorian bolones and empanadas.

After brunch we will return to Tandayapa Bird Lodge for lunch, some final time with the best hummingbird feeders on Earth, and a few hours rest before we head east back to Quito at 2h30pm. We will stop on the way back at Mitad del Mundo Intiñan Museum, overlooking the equator monument, which is one of the most popular of all the tourist attractions in Ecuador. Here a local guide would take you along the "real" equator line and walk you through an onsite museum which outlines many well-known, and many little known facts regarding the equator, and the indigenous cultures that lived in Ecuador long time before western civilization took over. We will arrive back in Quito for 6pm, where the tour finishes.

