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Puerto Maldonado: Gateway To The Rainforest

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Puerto Maldonado: Gateway To The Rainforest

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Puerto Maldonado is the gateway to the biodiverse Tambopata region of the Peruvian Amazon Rainforest. So if you've decided to visit this amazing destination, welcome to our travel blog! We'll go over what a 4-day Puerto Maldonado itinerary could look like, what types of wildlife you'll see and what type of accommodations you can expect. And if you're just stumbling upon this blog and haven't yet decided to book your trip to Puerto Maldonado, book it immediately! It was simultaneously the most adventurous and the most relaxing trip we've ever taken. What? How can those two adjectives describe the same vacation? Keep reading to find out what made Puerto Maldonado such an amazing vacation destination.

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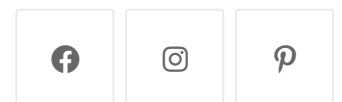
About Us



PAULA & SCOTT

We've been traveling together since 2005. We call the Midwest our home but we have a passion for finding time to see the world together. Explore with us today.

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Why Visit Puerto Maldonado?

Still unsure if Puerto Maldonado is the place for you? Let me paint the picture. Misty mornings waking up to the dinosaur-like roar of howler monkeys followed by the dozens of different birdsongs and frog chirps. Canoeing over the Madre de Dios River looking for jaguars, capybaras and sloths. Hiking around oxbow lakes hoping to spot a giant river otter. Then, nap time. Or skipping nap time to reptile and bird spot from your lodge. Some of the freshest farm-to-table food you can find for every meal. Late nights spent in canoes looking for caimans. Walks through the jungle spotting insects you've only seen in documentaries. That's a trip to the Peruvian Amazon – wild, relaxing, connected to nature and adventurous all at once.

Seriously! Book your tickets and stay now!

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Puerto Maldonado - and the only jaguars we saw

When To Visit Puerto Maldonado?

Let's start with the, hopefully, obvious. The rainforest is hot and humid year-round. You will be sweaty regardless of when you visit. It rains in the rainforest year-round. You will get rained on during your stay regardless of when you visit.

However, what you can influence by when you choose to visit is how high or low the rivers are. The dry season, April-October, is considered the best time to visit the Peruvian Amazon. This is because you can expect lower water levels. These low water levels make jungle hikes easier. It also makes spotting animals along the riverside easier because there are more exposed river banks.



Puerto Maldonado from air

Getting To Puerto Maldonado

Because of frequent flights to and from both Lima and Cusco, Puerto Maldonado is the Peruvian Rainforest region that we recommend for first time visitors. It's relatively easy to get to AND extremely biodiverse. This gives you the biggest bang for your buck in terms of ratio of animals spotted compared with travel time (yes, I'm a math nerd and there may be an Excel spreadsheet related to this somewhere on my computer).

You'll arrive in Puerto Maldonado via short flight from Lima or Cusco. Flights occur throughout the day but you'll want to grab an early flight if you're staying farther from town – most lodges up or down river will have a cutoff time by which you have to arrive at the airport in order for them to get you to your hotel room before dark. Flights are around \$100 USD. LATAM airlines was recommended to us by our travel agent as they are more frequently on time. We flew with LATAM several times in South America and they were 75% on time.

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If you are fitting Puerto Maldonado into a larger Peruvian itinerary, we recommend starting your vacation here right after [a quick stop in Lima](https://acoupledaystravel.com/one-day-in-lima-itinerary/) (<https://acoupledaystravel.com/one-day-in-lima-itinerary/>) and then going on to Cusco and Machu Picchu afterwards. Cusco is at a higher altitude and you may get altitude sickness which has side effects (ehmm- diarrhea) that may last for a few days after you're back at a lower altitude. You don't want to be experiencing those side effects in a jungle with less modern plumbing.

Getting Around The Rainforest

Getting around Puerto Maldonado is easy! You let your tour guides drive you about 😊 Okay seriously though. We are normally not tour people. But you cannot and should not explore the Amazon Rainforest without an official and trained guide – it's dangerous. So whether you stay in a hostel and do group tours or whether you stay in an all inclusive resort with a private guide, your guides will pick you up, help you explore and then drop you off back at your door. Transportation is always included in tour prices.



Getting To Your Lodge

If you are staying at a lodge outside of the city of Puerto Maldonado, expect a journey there to take a few hours. First, you'll get picked up at the airport by folks decked out in official lodge gear, generally holding a sign with your lodge name on it. They'll grab your gear and ask if it's coming to the lodge or staying at the storage office. Most lodges have a gear size limit so make sure your pack is at or under weight – a carryon sized bag and a daypack is generally the limit. If you had to check it at the airport, you'll probably have to store it. Next, you'll board a bus. Don't be surprised if you're grouped together with other lodges – they all seem to coordinate transportation together to limit unnecessary trips.

Next, you drive through town, dropping off larger suitcases at a storage area, and then go on to the riverbank. Here, you'll board a boat – yes boat. Scott for some reason thought we would be driving through the rainforest to our lodge – but it's a boat. Then you'll take a boat ride to your lodge. From your lodge, your future transportation will be entirely by boat or on foot.



hoatzin

Wildlife To See In Puerto Maldonado

I hesitate to write this section. Why? Because I think the best way to experience any wildlife-centric vacation is to have ZERO expectations about what you will see. Because wildlife is wild. Nature is natural. And having expectations may mean that your vacation falls short of expectations when you don't spot everything on "The List". I like to just be pleasantly surprised by everything I see and add things to "My List" when I see them, rather than checking them off some mental list. However, everyone is different so I did create the list below of things you may see and the likelihood of you seeing them.

- Howler Monkeys – likely
- Capuchins – likely
- Squirrel Monkeys – likely
- Titi Monkeys – moderate chance
- Spider Monkeys – moderate chance
- White caimans – likely
- Black caimans – unlikely
- Capybara – moderate chance
- Giant River Otters – moderate chance, at oxbow lakes
- Jaguar – unlikely
- Anaconda – unlikely
- Sloths – moderate chance (those dudes are hard to spot!)
- Birds – extremely likely 😊
 - Horned screamers – likely
 - Herons & Ibis – likely
 - Macaws – likely, at clay licks, moderate chance elsewhere
 - Kissadees – likely
 - Jacamars – moderate chance
 - Kingfishers – moderate chance
 - Tanagers – likely
 - Hummingbirds – likely (but good luck identifying them – they're fast)



Where To Stay In Puerto Maldonado

You could stay in Puerto Maldonado and take day trips into the rainforest. You could – but you shouldn't.

Instead, choose an ALL INCLUSIVE ecolodge that is nestled into the rainforest.

You'll want something tucked into the rainforest because when you're not on a tour, there really isn't anything to do. You could go to a spa (not our thing), take a nap or spot nature. We choose to spend all of our free time spotting nature around the lodge – and we saw a ton just from our room! Staying at a lodge deep within nature allowed us to have lots of wildlife to spot from our room.

You'll want an all inclusive ecolodge because – again – there isn't much to do when you're not on tour. Our all inclusive experience was amazing as we were told when to show up to start our next tour – it was great having someone else heard us like lemmings, which is normally my job 😊 We went on all of the excursions. Some people at our resort didn't. Either way, I think all inclusive is important and it eliminates the planning time you'll spend at resorts with "optional" excursions.

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Inkaterra Hacienda Concepcion
(<https://expedia.com/affiliates/tambopata-hotels-inkaterra-hacienda-concepcion.QLKU78V>)

All inclusive ecolodge that we stayed at and loved!

(<https://expedia.com/affiliates/tambopata-hotels-inkaterra-hacienda-concepcion.QLKU78V>) Best place we've stayed in the world.



Posada Amazonas
(<https://expedia.com/affiliates/tambopata-hotels-posada-amazonas.i2Ezp85>)

Highly rated by guests. All inclusive ecolodge with high end touches closer to parrot clay licks.

(<https://expedia.com/affiliates/tambopata->

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Tambopata Research Center (<https://expedia.com/affiliates/inambari-hotels-tambopata-research-center.0oKGMSc>)

All inclusive lodge farther from town. More money, more travel time, more likely to see a jaguar.

(<https://expedia.com/affiliates/inambari-hotels-tambopata-research-center.0oKGMSc>)

We stayed at **Inkaterra** Hacienda Concepcion

(<https://expedia.com/affiliates/tambopata-hotels-inkaterra-hacienda-concepcion.n0Lxkxn>), a full review below. We also had a few runners up here to share with you. Prices are similar as they are all all-inclusive. When making your decision, the biggest factor should be the excursions they offer. While they're similar, excursions will vary a bit depending on where the lodge is located.



Review Of **Inkaterra** Hacienda Concepción

This was the most amazing all inclusive experience we have ever had! We normally are not all-inclusive people – I always leave thinking I could have done it cheaper planning it myself. However, a stay at the **Inkaterra** Hacienda Concepción (<https://expedia.com/affiliates/tambopata-hotels-inkaterra-hacienda-concepcion.n0Lxkxn>) was the most perfectly curated experience of my life. While the accommodations were definitely that of a rustic jungle lodge, every detail within the control of staff felt completely luxurious. After 2 weeks in Peru, I can safely say this was the best place we stayed (maybe in the whole world) and my only trip regret was that we didn't stay longer.

PS: I was paid \$0 for this review. I just liked them so much I can't help but tell you about it.



Animal spotting at [Inkaterra](#) Hacienda Concepcion

Arrival

Upon arrival, we were greeted with hot towels and a welcome drink. One of the receptionists took down all of our checkin information, provided us with maps and gave us a time to meet back with our tour guide. We got to our room where our bags were waiting and we were completely surprised with how luxurious the room felt. The bed was lush, the shower spacious and there was even a couch facing out the windows (which are not windows but screens). And that view! We were immediately glued to the window and within 30 minutes had spotted over 20 birds and a handful of caiman.

IF YOU STAY HERE AND ARE A ANIMAL LOVER, ASK FOR ROOM #10, #11, #15 OR #16! These rooms face an oxbow lake or "Cocha" with way better views for animal spotting. If you plan on napping in your room or hanging out at the bar or spa, don't ask for these rooms. Save them for people like us who spent every available moment glued to our window with our binocs. We were given room #11 by some stroke of good luck and took full advantage of it – thank you concierge!



canoes used for oxbow lake excursions

Excursions

After unpacking in our room and doing some laundry in the sink (yes it did dry even in the humidity!) we met with our guide, Frank. He was great and he gave us a complete understanding of what the base plan was for the trip. He also explained some facts about the wildlife. Lastly, he very clearly explained that while this was the plan, it would be weather dependent and it would change based on weather.

PS: We had amazing weather and were able to stick to the plan but the people who arrived the day before us got a horrible storm and had to spend their whole first day in their rooms. Read more about the excursions in the itinerary section below.

For excursions, Frank would let us know what time to meet for the next excursion. You could meet or you could stay at the resort, the choice was yours. We did *literally* every excursion offered! You are typically grouped with the people who arrived the same day as you. We had 6-8 people in our group, depending on who showed up. Another group had 3 people. Another group had 10 people, all family members. Groups are just luck of the draw but I did find a lot of like-minded individuals so we enjoyed our group mates. Boring people don't tend to visit the Amazon Rainforest -they're Instagramming in Paris.

Food

When I read that the food was farm to table, prepared at a resort with limited access to solar power, I had mid-level expectations. I figured I would get a lot of local food and it may or may not be to my taste. What I was not expecting was to receive a menu at lunch and dinner and be given options for both starters and mains. What I was additionally not expecting was when our waiter returned with a menu with options for desert. Choices ranged from traditional Peruvian food to common "international" foods like pasta and hamburgers. There really was something for everyone to enjoy and the menu varied from day to day.

Food was delicious, well-prepared, well-plated and perfectly portioned. I was never hungry. Nor was I ever overstuffed and miserable on my next excursion. Water was included with dinner. You could purchase other beverages for an additional cost, including alcoholic beverages.

Breakfast was buffet style and also amazing and varied enough for people from around the world to find something to eat. Juice, coffee and tea was included with breakfast.

Sample Four Day Puerto Maldonado Itinerary

Keep in mind, your Puerto Maldonado itinerary will vary depending on where you stay. However, here is what our itinerary looked like and it gives you a good idea of what days will look like regardless of where you stay.



Day 1 – Arrival and Intro Wildlife Spotting

AM – Arrival

We arrived in Puerto Maldonado in the late morning. Resort staff met us at the airport and we embarked on a several hour journey to the lodge. Don't forget to keep an eye on the riverbanks and your boat ride to the lodge is the first time to start spotting Amazon Rainforest wildlife! We spotted lots of new birds on this first boat ride.



anhinga

We checked in to our hotel and got unpacked. Our eyes were immediately drawn outside where we saw caimans and at least 20 bird species before lunch. Next, we had an amazing sit-down lunch that let us know we were in for a truly luxurious stay at **Inkaterra** Hacienda Concepción.

PM-Rainforest Walk

Next, we met our guide, got an intro to the resort and a lecture on rainforest ecosystems. Our guide, Frank, explained our plan for the next few days so we knew what to expect.



Howler monkeys

We started with a rainforest walk. Because of recent rains, trails were very soggy and we had to be outfitted in knee high rain boots. Our guide took us into the rainforest and showed us plant species, including a cool rubber tree. We also saw our first monkey species, howlers, on our walk. Spotting our first monkeys was exciting – less exciting when they scared the poo out of us early the next morning 😊 iykyk

capybara

After Dark – Riverboat Ride

Next, we had a short break before our next excursion which was a nighttime boat ride. This was probably the excursion that we saw the most wildlife on. We saw our next monkey species, owl monkeys, on the way to the boat – always a good start! On the boat ride we watched the sun set as we saw several bird species. Once the sun was down, we got to use our flashlights to look for reflective eyes. We saw a TON of white caiman! We also saw capybara, snakes, nocturnal birds and bats. This was clearly a very good night as our guide was pumped to see so many animals, especially the capybara.

We got back to [our lodge \(https://expedia.com/affiliates/tambopata-hotels-inkaterra-hacienda-concepcion.n0Lxkxn\)](https://expedia.com/affiliates/tambopata-hotels-inkaterra-hacienda-concepcion.n0Lxkxn) and it looked beautiful at nighttime! They had oil lanterns lit on the porches of each cabana. We went straight to a delicious dinner to come back to our room to find that they had done a turn down and lit oil lanterns in our room as well. It was so beautiful and definitely added to the ambiance. I should also mention that the oil lanterns were necessary as there was no power at our resort at night – so the oil lantern in the bathroom was a necessity.

Day 2 – Lake Sandoval

AM – Lake Sandoval

Lake Sandoval is a popular activity in the region and most lodges visit it as you have about a 50% chance of spotting a giant river otter. After a delicious breakfast we boarded a boat that took us to the entrance to Tambopata National Reserve, which is the protected region around this lake.

After hiking for just under an hour, mostly along a boardwalk, we got to wooden canoes. We boarded the canoes and our guide paddled us onto the lake.

Lake Sandoval is an oxbow lake, meaning it was once part of the river before the river changed paths and landlocked the lake. We paddled around the lake and spotted 20-30 bird species, including macaws. We also spotted the endangered black caiman – our guide was super excited about that as it had been a while since he'd seen one. But we did not get lucky and spot the otters. We were there on a really sunny day and our guide said they typically came out of their living area to fish when it was cloudy or cooler – bummer, but still a great experience. The canoes are not allowed in the areas where they know the otters live.



agouti



green ibis

PM – Rainforest Canopy Walk

We headed back to the resort for another delicious lunch. After lunch, it's super hot so there generally are no activities. We took that opportunity to wander around the resort where we spotted even more birds, more white caiman, a 2' lizard eating another lizard, an agouti or 10, some squirrel monkeys, some frogs/toads and lots of bugs. Other people took naps.



Next, we took another boat ride to a nearby treetop walkway. This walkway was created using hanging bridges in the treetop canopy. I thought we'd see a lot up in the rainforest canopy. However, we didn't see much. the birds up here are smaller and faster, so harder to spot. And the sloths are great at blending in! But exploring the treetops was still fun.

tarantula with babies

After Dark – Rainforest Walk

Next, we took a dusk and nighttime walk through the rainforest. We were on the lookout for jaguars and tapir – both extremely rare to see. Neither of which we saw. What we did see was a ton of bugs. We saw tarantulas, including a mama with babies. Lots of millipedes, frogs, leaf cutter ants, bullet ants, scorpions, owl monkeys and more.

scorpion

Pro tip for nighttime walks: I'm terrified of spiders, centipedes and millipedes. Lots of therapy has helped me to not have panic attacks just seeing them. However, I don't think I could stop myself from full freakout if one touched me. So for those scared of being touched by bugs, I have a solution. Full pants tucked in to high socks. Long-sleeved shirt tucked into gloves. Hat covered by full head net. Not an inch of my skin was exposed to those creepy crawlies. Scott's not afraid of bugs and even he followed my fashion trend because anything touching you in the dark rainforest is scary – regardless of what you're scared of.

Day 3 – Clay Lick and Departure

Before Sunrise – Clay Lick

Our resort really wanted us to get to the airport 2 hours early – which given the size of the airport is completely unnecessary. However, I get it, they didn't want to be responsible for us missing our flight. For this reason, we had to pay extra for a VERY early morning excursion to the clay licks. We were up and on a boat before sunrise. We took our longest boat trip to the Cachuela clay lick. This clay lick is actually very close to the town of Puerto Maldonado. Our guide was amazing and he got us there before every other boat – there were probably 5 by the time the sun came up. We watched the sun come up and the parrots and macaws gravitate to the clay lick repeatedly.



We had breakfast on the boat on our way back to our lodge. I was expecting muffins or something and once again I was pleasantly surprised with sandwiches, pastries, fruit, eggs and breakfast beers!

AM – Departure

We got back to the resort in time to sit and bird watch from our room some more before checking out and heading back to the airport with plenty of time to spare.



Want to Adjust The Itinerary

I cannot stress enough how you should add an extra day. While I feel like we saw everything we came to see, I also feel like we could have stayed here forever and never see it all. Adding an extra day allows you time to repeat some activities you love or visit locals to learn about their ways of life. It also allows you to have a buffer day in case you have bad weather.



What To Budget For Puerto Maldonado

You will spend, comparably, a lot on a visit to Puerto Maldonado. Most Peru destinations are inexpensive. However, because of the remote nature of the destination and the necessity of a guide for all “excursions” you’ll rack up the expenses.

Expect to budget around \$400-600/night for an all inclusive rainforest lodge. Additionally, expect approximately \$100/person for a plane ticket from either Cusco or Lima. Beyond that, you don’t need to budget a single extra cent. Pretty much all rainforest lodges include rooms, food, and water. Ours also included tips and excursions. Try to get one that also includes excursions or that at least provides their own excursions. Rarely, packages will include alcohol or non-water beverages. Expect to pay high prices for beverages not included in your package.

Search for resorts below using “Tambopata” as your location if you’re specifically looking for rainforest lodges, which we highly recommend.

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What To Pack For Puerto Maldonado?

So I started to write this all down here and there is just so much specialized stuff you'll need to visit the rainforest that [I made an entirely separate post about that here](#). [Click here for the full checklist](#).

(<https://acoupledaystravel.com/amazon-rainforest-packing-list/>)

If you skipped over that link and did not click on it – I am warning you – pack layers. Scroll up and click on that link to learn why.



Safety In The Rainforest

The Amazon Rainforest seems like a really scary place. I mean is there anything there that hasn't evolved to kill you? However, stick with your guide and listen to them – they know what they are doing. And make sure to stay with the group. There is no cell service so if you find yourself alone, you're in trouble.

Additionally, check the [CDC's yellow book \(https://www.cdc.gov/yellow-book/hcp/americas-caribbean/peru.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/yellow-book/hcp/americas-caribbean/peru.html) for recommended vaccines or malaria medicine. We got a yellow fever shot before the trip. We also brought malaria medicine with us for our visit to Iquitos but we didn't need to take it for Puerto Maldonado because malaria hadn't been reported there for years. However, do your own research and consult with your doctor -it's better safe than sorry.

Make sure to drink plenty of water and eat plenty of food. The work you'll be doing just to regulate your body temperature is a lot. Make sure your body has the tools it needs to power you through your adventure.

We hope this has helped you to plan your own perfect Puerto Maldonado vacation. We absolutely loved our time there and could not recommend the hotel we stayed at more! If you have any questions or comments on your own experience, please leave them in the comments section below and we'd be happy to help! Or check out our full [Peru vacation posts here. \(https://acoupledtravel.com/peru-travel-guide/\)](https://acoupledtravel.com/peru-travel-guide/)

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