



Sandoval Lake Lodge with the Macaw clay lick (5D/4N, 3N Heath SLL 1N)

On this trip to Heath River and Sandoval Lake you'll find pristine rainforest and the most comfortable wildlife lodges in the Upper Amazon Basin. They offer a combination of distance and accessibility by airport and then through the local river system.

Our two lodges are within the reserves of Tambopata and Madidi, between Peru and Bolivia. Madidi National Park in Bolivia has a total of 18,900 km² (7,297 mi²), while reserves adjacent, Candamo and Bahuaja Sonene across the border, account for more than 13,700 km² (5,290 mi²). Together they form the second largest area of nature conservation and by far the most biologically diverse of all South America.

In the Heath River Wildlife Center we witness one of the most exciting sights of nature; a tumultuous gathering of brightly colored macaws and parrots on a clay lick along the Heath River. The area offers numerous activities to occupy yourself during your visit. You can admire wildlife along the trails in this remote jungle, and perhaps view the mammal clay lick and the elusive Tapir, the largest mammal in the Amazon. There is an amazing diversity of environments that can be experienced in the short walk from the river to the Pampas of Heath; a trip that passes through a nesting place for the Blue and Yellow Macaw.

At Sandoval Lake you can enjoy a more relaxing experience, through a short hike on the trails or a pleasant boat ride around the lake; which is extraordinarily beautiful and rich in wildlife. Sandoval Lake is a large body of water that is home to a family of giant otters, numerous monkey troops, and a variety of birds.

Itinerary

Day 1: Puerto Maldonado to Heath River Wildlife Center. Our staff will welcome you at the airport in Puerto Maldonado and drive you through the city to the boat dock on the Tambopata River. Here we board a motorized canoe and head towards the nearby confluence of the mighty Madre de Dios River to the mouth of the Heath River, which is the natural border of Peru and Bolivia. In the haven of this important Amazonian tributary we have a vision of the diversity of the riverside environment; cliffs of red earth with outreaching forest are interspersed with thick banks of *Cecropia* trees and couch grass. After brief formalities at border crossings, we take the boat through the narrow waters for a couple of hours, enjoying the intimacy of the mysterious forest on both sides. Occasional sightings of native children splashing along the banks are interspersed with long, silent stretches where we can locate herons, hawks, cormorants, geese, orinoco, and perhaps a family of Capybaras, which is the world's largest rodent can weigh up to 55Kg. After this interesting trip we arrive at our simple,

but comfortable accommodation of the Heath River Wildlife Center, just in time for dinner.
(Box Lunch, D)

Day 2: Heath River Wildlife Center. Today we start very early to visit the most spectacular attraction of this area: the parrot and macaw clay lick along the river. Here these colorful birds gather to eat the clay in the cliffs on the riverbanks to neutralize certain toxins in their daily diet (poisonous berries and hallucinogenic plants). Sometimes they congregate in the hundreds, pushing and squabbling over the best place to eat. This noisy and unforgettable show can go on for two or three hours, and can gather many varieties of parrots, parakeets, Chestnut Fronted Macaws and their larger cousins, the Red and Green Macaw. This extraordinary display occurs in only a handful of places in the Upper Amazon Basin. Our floating platform provides us with comfort and is completely hidden, so here we will enjoy a full breakfast during the show.

We make land back down the river will walk back along a section of the extensive jungle trails. Here we will find huge Chestnut, Kapok and fig trees; along with the dark strangler fig whose strategy of life is as sinister as its name implies. Our guide will point out and explain the medicinal use and trade of dozens of plants and trees, while keeping eyes and ears open for birds or one of the eight species of monkeys found in this region. We could run into a small herd of the two species of wild pigs that are common in this area. In order to mark their territory they use scent glands so powerful that they can be smelt long before being seen.

After lunch we hike along the trail leading to the point where the forest abruptly gives way to the vast plains of the Pampas of Heath. This unique land is a result of poor soil and extreme climatic cycles of droughts and floods. It is the largest intact tropical savanna in the Amazon is the habitat of endemic birds and mammals, such as the Fork-Tailed Hummingbird and the Manned Wolf. Just beyond the edge of the forest you can climb to an elevated platform that allows for a great view of this vast expanse of grasslands and shrubs, dotted with palm trees.

The palm tree *Mauritia Flexuosa* produces nuts rich in palm oil and dry hollow stems that provide vital food and shelter for nesting pairs of Red Bellied Macaws and the rare Blue and Yellow Macaws. We aim to arrive around sunset, when the parrots are returning from their daily search for food to gather in this place.

We return to the lodge at night using headlamps and flashlights, and perhaps stopping here and there in total darkness to listen to the ever-changing sounds of frogs, insects, and other animals; the magic of the jungle at night. We may run into frogs the size of small rabbits, homes of hairy tarantulas or night monkeys hanging from the trees; there is a huge and unpredictable collection of nocturnal creatures in the night. After dinner some guests may choose to visit the lick of mammals, with the hope of seeing the Lowland Tapir, the largest mammal in the jungle. **(B/L/D)**

Day 3: Heath River Wildlife Center. On our second full day in at the lodge we can choose from a wide range of activities available in this diverse and unique tropical environment. Many people choose to make a second visit to the macaw clay lick or spend more time on the trails.

Later we can take a canoe tour around the Cocha Guacamayo, an oxbow lake that is home of a family of giant otters. The lake is located inside the Bahuaja Sonene National Park, a short distance by boat from the lodge.

We return by boat after dusk looking for caimans; a crocodile cousin that lives in the Amazon. This region is home to the Black Caiman, which is endangered, and almost always distinguishable along the river's edge with its glowing orange eyes. **(B/L/D)**

Day 4: Heath River Wildlife Center to Sandoval Lake Lodge. We leave at dawn for the return journey downstream. The mornings are the peak of wildlife activity, so keep a sharp eye on the banks of the river where we may see families of Capybaras and maybe be rewarded with a rare glimpse of Jaguar or Tapir swimming through the stream.

We arrive at Port Sandoval where we will walk to Sandoval Lake, which is protected by Tambopata National Reserve. Along the trail there are birds and butterflies; and after 3km (2 mi) the trail leads to a narrow canal lined boats. This flooded forest leads to the open waters of Sandoval Lake. In the golden light of afternoon our crew will row the boats across to the lodge (motors are banned here). We can see the appearance of turbid lake while a huge Paiche breaks the surface (an Amazonian fish that can weigh up to 100Kg (220 lbs.). Or you may hear strange and unsettling screams and see heads peering from the surface of the lake, which will mark our encounter with *Pteronura brasiliensis*, the Giant Otter of the Amazon. After dinner we can finish the day with a short night walk, spotting some nocturnal creatures along one of the trails near the lodge. **(B/L/D)**

Day 5: Sandoval Lake to Cusco. After breakfast at dawn we cross the lake, perhaps finding a family of macaws leaving their roost or a troop of monkeys waking in the morning light. We will walk back to the river where our motorized canoe quickly leads upstream to the boat dock in Puerto Maldonado, and then on to the airport. **(B)**

Please note all itineraries may vary slightly to maximize wildlife viewing. This will depend on the reports of our researchers and experienced naturalist guides.

Please note that the Heath Lodge is located on the Bolivian side of the Heath River so passports will be required to pass the Bolivian control of documents.