Tambopata vs Manu vs Pacaya Samiria

Which Peruvian Amazon trip fits you · official SERNANP data

The 30-second answer: 3–4 days and coming from Cusco → **Tambopata**. 6–8 days and wildlife is your priority → **Manu**. You want the Amazon River itself, pink dolphins and flooded forest → **Pacaya Samiria**.

	Tambopata The easy, rewarding Amazon	**Manu** The Andes-to-Amazon journey	**Pacaya Samiria** The Jungle of Mirrors
Protected area	Tambopata National Reserve, 274,690 ha (2000)	Manu National Park, 1.7 million ha (1973), UNESCO World Heritage	Pacaya Samiria National Reserve, ≈2.08 million ha (1982), Peru's largest national reserve
Gateway	Puerto Maldonado	Cusco, overland	Iquitos, then Nauta
From Cusco	≈55 min flight or ≈10 h overnight bus	Road over the eastern Andes and down through cloud forest	Flight via Lima; no road to Iquitos
Minimum days	3	3–5 (Cultural Zone) · 6–8 (Reserved Zone)	4
Signature wildlife	Macaw clay licks; giant otters at Lake Sandoval; ≈600 bird species	Cock-of-the-rock, oxbow lakes; ≈1,000 bird species	Pink and grey river dolphins; 449 bird species
Best for	First Amazon trip, 3–5 days, combining with Cusco	Wildlife lovers and birders with a week	River lovers who have already seen Cusco

Areas, creation dates and species counts: SERNANP. The core of Manu is closed to tourism (Indigenous peoples, including groups in voluntary isolation); the Reserved Zone is visited only with authorized operators.

When to go

Months	Tambopata	Manu	Pacaya Samiria
Dec–Mar	Wet; clay licks very active	Wet; some roads and trails harder	High water: boats deep into flooded forest
Apr–May	Transition	Season opens (SERNANP: Apr–Nov)	High water starts to drop
Jun–Sep	Dry: best trails; cool "friaje" days possible	Dry: best overall conditions	Low water; beaches closed Jul–Sep for turtle nesting
Oct–Nov	Clay-lick peak begins	Cock-of-the-rock display peak	Fish and dolphins concentrated in channels

Clay-lick seasonality from the Tambopata Macaw Project (Texas A&M). Water levels vary from year to year.

SERNANP entrance fees (foreign visitors)

S/30
1 day

S/60
2–3 days

S/150
4–30 days

Same bands in all three areas. Our Tambopata and Manu tours include the entrance; fees can change each year.

With Machu Picchu: Tambopata fits best (fly Cusco–Puerto Maldonado after the Inca Trail). Manu needs at least a week more. For Pacaya Samiria, plan your route via Lima.

Health

- **Yellow fever:** the US CDC recommends the vaccine (9 months+) for the Amazon regions. Not required to enter Peru, but some operators and parks ask for it; SERNANP requests it in Manu.
- **Malaria:** risk in the lowlands (Puerto Maldonado, Manu, Loreto). Ask a travel clinic about prophylaxis.
- **No risk** in Cusco, the Sacred Valley or Machu Picchu.
- See a travel clinic 4–6 weeks before; bring repellent, long sleeves and light rain gear.

→ Full Amazon comparison
terraquechuaperu.com/blog/tambopata-vs-manu-vs-pacaya-samiria/

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