

Indigenous Wisdom and Visionary Protection: Manu National Park

Global region

Amazon Rainforest, South America

Domestic region

Provinces of Cusco and Madre de Dios, Peru

Internationally Designated Areas

Manu National Park Biosphere Reserve

1977

Manú National Park World Heritage Site

1987

Visionary in its protection of natural treasures, Peru established Manu National Park in 1973. Following an extension in 2009, it now spans 1,700,000 hectares of tropical forests, snow-capped peaks, winding rivers, and wetlands ranging from 150 to 4,200 meters in altitude. The park's vertical tiers of vegetation create one of the planet's richest reservoirs of biodiversity. Approximately 228 mammal species, 1,030 birds, and 4,212 plants, including many endemic and endangered, flourish in this MIDA. The lowland tropical forests teem with life, from jaguars and giant otters to giant armadillos, while more than 850 bird species bring the rainforest canopy alive with color and song.

Recognized as a Biosphere Reserve in 1977, Manu National Park forms its core. The reserve now covers 2,300,000 hectares after the addition of the Amarakaeri Communal Reserve and buffer zones. Among the world's largest rainforest reserves, it is governed by Peru's National Park Authority (SERNANP), which integrates local Indigenous communities in management. Inscribed as a World Heritage Site in 1987, and extended in 2009, the park employs a complex zoning system that balances conservation with usage through strictly protected forest cores and cultural, recreational, and sustainable use areas.

The park's global significance stems from its staggering biodiversity, vast size, and exceptional state of preservation. Positioned where the Tropical Andes meet the Amazonian lowlands, Manu encompasses extreme altitudinal gradients, creating a mosaic of ecological niches from lowland rainforest to pristine montane cloud forests and high Andean grasslands. Isolation and topography have allowed life to evolve in near-untouched conditions, producing extraordinary diversity and a high degree of endemism.

Manu is also a living cultural landscape that provides a home to many Indigenous communities and helps to maintain ancestral knowledge, sacred sites, and traditional practices. Their coexistence with the forest enhances conservation, ensuring that ecosystems continue to provide critical services essential for the survival of both people and wildlife, such as clean water, fertile soil, and food resources. These communities embody centuries of Indigenous wisdom, showing how humans can live sustainably with nature.

Sustainability initiatives extend this vision. The Manu Biosphere Reserve participates in the Amazon Biosphere Reserve Project, fostering community-led conservation and development. Local producers and farmers receive support to brand and market products at regional fairs, while bamboo

cultivation and ecological restoration projects strengthen livelihoods and habitats. Technological support for tilapia and trout farming helps communities adapt to climate change sustainably, ensuring that tourism, culture, and biodiversity continue to thrive together.

Manu National Park is more than a protected area, it is a sanctuary of life, a cradle of biodiversity, and a home to Indigenous cultures that have lived in rhythm with the rainforest for centuries. Ecotourism, ancestral knowledge, and conservation converge in this MIDA, offering visitors an unforgettable encounter with one of the world's most extraordinary natural and cultural landscapes.