Discovering Our Planet Together



Monarch Butterfly Photo Expedition

Capture Wondrous Images of One of Earth's Most Amazing Migrations!

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Trip Details:

Days
6 Days / Jan–Feb

Price
From $6495

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One of the world's most astounding wildlife photography opportunities features one of its tiniest creatures, the delicate monarch butterfly. While monarchs may be familiar sights during a New England or California summer, nothing prepares you for the marvel of their migration, when they congregate by the millions in Mexico's Central Highlands each winter. Entering a grove of fir trees on a remote mountaintop, we see trunks and branches that appear to be blanketed with rusty autumn leaves. A closer look reveals they're quivering. Then, as the sun emerges from behind a cloud to warm them, our cameras capture hundreds of thousands of monarch butterflies as they take flight—so many that we actually hear the beating of their wings, which glow translucent orange against the blue sky as they flutter overhead. Sometimes, they even float down to alight on our hats and cameras. Guided by our Expedition Leader, who is both an expert naturalist and photographer, learn to capture amazing images of this moving phenomenon.

Trip Highlights

Varied Photography Settings in Two Migration Groves

On foot and horseback in the fir forests of Central Mexico, enter protected sanctuaries to photograph millions of monarchs that roost here each winter

Listen to the Hum of Gossamer Butterfly Wings

When the air warms, photograph hundreds of thousands of monarchs taking flight, with sheer wings that look like orange stained glass backlit by the sun.

Authentic Cultural Photo Encounters

Photograph scenes of traditional mountain villages, soak in healing mineral springs, and witness the benefits of butterfly ecotourism for local communities

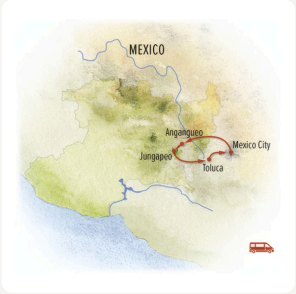


Monarch Butterfly Photo Expedition Itinerary

Capture Wondrous Images of One of Earth's Most Amazing Migrations!

Itinerary at a Glance

Day 1	Mexico City
Day 2	Angangueo
Day 3	Chincua Sanctuary
Day 4	Angangueo / Jungapeo
Day 5	Jungapeo / Toluca / Mexico City
Day 6	Mexico City



Ready to Book? Call an Adventure Specialist at 800-543-8917

Day 1

Mexico City

Begin your journey into the kingdom of the monarchs

- Arrive in Mexico City before venturing to the monarchs' wintering grounds
- Join your Expedition Leaders and fellow photographers for a welcome dinner

Our monarch butterfly photo tour begins on arrival in Mexico City with a transfer to our hotel in the upscale Polanco district. Gather this evening for a welcome dinner with our Expedition Leaders, followed by an introduction to the exciting photo opportunities that lie ahead. During this orientation, get an overview of the best approaches for capturing stunning monarch images from our guides, whose experience and expertise will inform our shoots throughout the adventure. Each fall, tens of millions of monarchs set flight on a 3,000-mile journey from the northeastern U.S. and Canada to their ancestral wintering grounds in Mexico's volcanic Central Highlands. The location of their breeding grounds remained a mystery to the scientific community until researchers found it with the help of local people in 1977. How an infant generation of butterflies finds this spot anew each year is still an enigma. Filled with anticipation, we look forward to tomorrow's photography foray into the mystical kingdom of the monarchs.

Day 2

Angangueo

Capture clouds of monarchs lifting from the oyamel firs

- Drive into the Central Highlands past snow-capped Nevado de Toluca and pine forests
- Ride small Mexican horses up forest trails to the butterfly colony
- Photograph oyamel firs bending beneath a quivering blanket of orange butterflies

From Mexico City, we drive northwest into the Central Highlands, passing dramatic vistas of snow-capped volcano Nevado de Toluca towering over the pine forests. During the journey, our Expedition Leaders provide background on the monarchs and their migratory phenomenon, beginning to share tips and advice for photographing this sometimes tricky subject. You'll get personalized coaching throughout the trip, with insight into camera settings, positioning and image composition.

Our destination is the mountain village of Angangueo, a tumble of pastel buildings set along narrow cobblestone streets that hug the steep slopes. Once a silver and copper mining town, Angangueo today thrives on butterfly tourism and local agriculture. We enjoy a traditional lunch of homemade Mexican fare before making our first foray into the monarch kingdom. With cameras ready, we arrive in an open-back truck at El Rosario Butterfly Sanctuary. A few butterflies flit about overhead, a hint of what awaits. Riding small Mexican horses provided by the local community (and led by your own wrangler, so no horse experience necessary), we ascend the trail through the forest. Hummingbirds and red warblers accompany us en route to the heart of the monarchs' migratory breeding grounds.

What we find is almost surreal: millions of butterflies cover the oyamel fir trees in a delicate, quivering blanket of black and orange, at first glance resembling autumn leaves. Boughs bend beneath their numbers, though each weighs less than half an ounce. When the sun warms their parchment-thin wings, the butterflies take to the air in a fluttering cloud of color, so many that the air hums with the sound of their beating wings. The beauty of the *mariposas* is so ethereal that many Mexicans still hold the Aztec belief that the souls of the dead are reborn as monarchs.

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Day 3

Chincua Sanctuary

Photograph backlit monarchs glowing transparent orange at Chincua Sanctuary

- Watch monarchs descend to drink until the forest stream runs orange
- Tour Angangueo's bright village murals celebrating the monarchs in local life and tradition
- Learn how visiting these sanctuaries helps protect the monarchs' fragile forest from logging

An optional pre-breakfast workshop offers the opportunity to review yesterday's shots and receive expert feedback from your Expedition Leaders as you prepare for more monarch photography today. Part of an ongoing conversation with your photo pro guides, this workshop helps photographers integrate constructive feedback and builds excitement for another day of extraordinary photo opportunities.

After breakfast, we drive to Chincua Butterfly Sanctuary for our second magical encounter with the monarchs. Here, we board horses to ride most of the way over the steep mountain terrain, hiking in the last bit to reach the densest concentration of butterflies. Backlit by the sun, their wings in flight glow transparent orange, making for striking photos. Sometimes the stream along the forest floor is covered in orange as the butterflies descend to drink. As Mexican butterfly conservationist Carlos Gottfried said, "When you stand in a monarch sanctuary, your soul is shaken and your life is changed." At every turn, our Expedition Leaders help us get amazing shots, though nothing truly captures the wonder of standing among millions of moving butterflies.

As we hear about efforts to preserve the fragile forest ecosystem that is essential to the monarchs' survival, we learn that our visit is one way to assist, demonstrating to the local people that ecotourism can be as viable a source of economic sustenance as logging. This afternoon, we take a walking tour of the village of Angangueo, admiring the many bright murals the townspeople have created to honor the role of the monarchs in their lives, traditions and economy. Wrap up the day with an informal lecture by our Expedition Leader on the biology, migration and conservation status of monarch butterflies, knitting together the wondrous experiences we have had so far.

Day 4

Angangueo / Jungapeo

Return to El Rosario to photograph the monarchs at first light

- Watch monarchs take flight as the sun warms their wings
- Continue to an ecolodge and spa set high in the mountains of Michoacan
- Relax in mineral hot springs while tropical birds fill the surrounding grounds

Return to El Rosario sanctuary at the start of the day to observe the butterflies in the early morning light. In contrast to our previous afternoon visit, we'll witness the monarchs as they awaken for the day, hoping the sun will shine and warm their wings, prompting lively activity. As the butterflies take flight, we may see them float down to drink nectar from flowers or even alight on your arm or shoulder. The largest of the monarch sanctuaries in the region, El Rosario offers the best opportunity to view large numbers of monarchs in one location. After lunch, continue to Jungapeo to reach our ecolodge and spa, tucked into the mountains of Michoacan. Renowned for its mineral thermal springs and soaking pools, our hotel's lush grounds are home to myriad species of tropical birds. Spend the afternoon soaking it all in. Dip in the legendary springs, or scout for birds across the verdant grounds. Hike to a nearby waterfall, book a spa treatment, or simply relax.

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Day 5

Jungapeo / Toluca / Mexico City

Share Mazahua food and cultural traditions

- Wake to a chorus of tropical birdsong before an optional photo-editing workshop
- Savor a traditional lunch showcasing regional flavors at La Casa de la Cultura Mazahua
- Learn about the art and cultural traditions of the Mazahua, one of central Mexico's largest Indigenous communities

Awaken to a chorus of tropical birdsong from the forest and gardens as we enjoy a peaceful morning at our eco-resort. An optional workshop is offered on basic photo editing techniques, covering some of the different editing programs available and successful strategies to sort, select and edit images. Those who might prefer to explore the grounds, hike to the waterfalls, search for birds, or soak in the thermal springs are welcome to do so. After departing Jungapeo, we stop at La Casa de la Cultura Mazahua for a traditional lunch showcasing regional flavors. Explore the cultural center's gallery, courtyard and colorful murals while learning about the artistic traditions and cultural heritage of the Mazahua people, one of central Mexico's largest Indigenous communities. We then continue to Mexico City, where we gather for a farewell dinner before a late check-in at our hotel.

Day 6

Mexico City

Farewell to Mexico and the monarchs' winter kingdom

- Transfer to Mexico City for homeward flights

Our monarch butterfly photo expedition comes to a close today. Transfer to the Mexico City airport for flights home.

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Monarch Butterfly Photo Expedition Accommodations

Capture Wondrous Images of One of Earth's Most Amazing Migrations!



Plaza Don Gabino Hotel

This small and simple family-operated hotel offers clean, colorful rooms, homecooked local fare in the dining room, and warm hospitality -- all with easy access to the monarch sanctuaries.



Agua Blanca

Tucked within the mountains of Michoacan, Hotel Agua Blanca is a secluded ecolodge renowned for its mineral hot springs and natural surroundings.



Hotel La Margarita

This small hotel near the center of the historic silver mining town of Anguangeo provides clean, colorful rooms with modest amenities, and is an ideal base for visiting the monarch colonies.



Grand Fiesta Americana Hotel

The 4-star Grand Fiesta Americana Chapultepec is one of Mexico City's finest hotels, enjoying an ideal location facing the verdant expanse of Chapultepec Park, with proximity to all the buzz of cosmopolitan Mexico City.

For detailed descriptions, visit nathab.com/central-america/monarch-butterfly-photo-expedition/accommodations.

Our Monarchs Photo Expedition is a Nat Hab Exclusive!

Monarch Butterfly Photo Expedition

For nature photographers, few spectacles are more dazzling than the sight of millions of monarch butterflies massed together in their winter roosting grounds in Central Mexico. And when you're after amazing images of this phenomenon, you'll want to spend as much time among them as possible, with excellent guidance to attain the best shots. To our knowledge, no one else offers a specialized photography tour to the Kingdom of the Monarchs!

1 **Photograph *More* Butterflies on *More* Excursions into Monarch Habitat**

While other companies may offer day visits to a single monarch sanctuary, our in-depth itinerary includes three excursions into two different butterfly sanctuaries, to maximize an assortment of settings and lighting situations. Catch them as they take to the air in a cloud of fluttering wings, backlit by the sun, or snap thousands of monarchs in one shot, as they upholster the tree branches like autumn leaves—then focus on a single butterfly for a perfect close-up.

2 **A Small Group for Personalized Photography Coaching**

Because we limit this trip to just 12 guests, guided by two Expedition Leaders, you'll get exceptional personal attention and coaching. Ask all the questions you want, and get detailed advice for improving your photos. Fewer people also means quieter photo encounters, as well as the flexibility to remain at a site longer if it shows a lot of photographic potential, or to move on to a new location if it doesn't. Our 1:6 guide-to-guest ratio is a key element of your photography success!

3 **Cultural Experiences Round Out Your Trip**

Unlike most butterfly tours, we also visit several cultural sites that invite photography. Among them are Toluca, originally a 13th-century Indigenous settlement, where we photograph the Cosmovitral Botanic Gardens and the conservatory's famous stained glass panels. Anguangeo, filled with charming architecture and brightly painted murals, is another highlight: the village got its start as a silver-mining town and today is primarily devoted to butterfly tourism.

4 **Authentically Mexican Lodgings & Cuisine**

From a cozy inn in the small mountain hamlet of Anguangeo to a family-owned spa and wellness hotel known for its thermal springs, our accommodations are chosen for their setting, atmosphere and access to nature. We also enjoy home-cooked meals sourced from fresh local food that reflects the cultural heritage of the places we visit.

5 **Expert Naturalist Guides Who Are Also Accomplished Photographers**

Nat Hab is internationally lauded for employing the highest-quality Expedition Leaders in the industry, with additional training and resources provided by WWF's top scientists. On this tour, your guides are butterfly naturalists and expert photographers adept at helping you capture outstanding images of the butterflies. **See Expedition Leader bios** with traveler comments regarding the quality of our leaders.

6 **Your Presence Makes a Difference for the Future of Monarchs**

Your experience is enhanced by knowing that our presence is essential to the butterflies' continued survival: visitors demonstrate to locals that ecotourism can be a more viable and sustainable source of economic well-being than resource exploitation.

7 **Our Quality-Value Guarantee Ensures Your Outstanding Photo Tour**

Natural Habitat Adventures offers an exclusive guarantee that clearly states that we will meet the high expectations we set forth in our promotional materials. To our knowledge, this is the most ambitious guarantee made by any adventure travel company. **Read our important promise.**

8 **Feel Good About the Way You Travel**

We all care about the planet, and you can travel with us knowing that the emissions from your trip are 100-percent carbon-offset. Natural Habitat Adventures is the world's first carbon-neutral travel company, a feature that is especially critical when considering that many of the species and habitats we visit are under substantial threat from our planet's warming temperatures.

9 **Natural Habitat Adventures Is World Wildlife Fund's Travel Partner**

Because of our commitment to environmentally friendly travel, as well as the exceptional quality of our small-group nature adventures, World Wildlife Fund—the planet's leading conservation organization—has named Natural Habitat its worldwide travel partner — a designation that makes us exceedingly proud!



Dates & Pricing Summary:

Price
From $6495

Group Size
Limited to 12 Travelers

Monarch Butterfly Photo Expedition Dates, Pricing & Info

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2027 Departures

Departure – Return	Pricing	Notes
Jan 11 - Jan 16, 2027	$6595	
Jan 18 - Jan 23, 2027	$6595	
Jan 23 - Jan 28, 2027	$6595	
Feb 8 - Feb 13, 2027	$6595	
Feb 13 - Feb 18, 2027	$6595	

2028 Departures

Departure – Return	Pricing	Notes
Dates not confirmed for 2028		
Jan 10 - Jan 15, 2028	$6495	
Jan 17 - Jan 22, 2028	$6495	
Jan 22 - Jan 27, 2028	$6495	
Feb 7 - Feb 12, 2028	$6495	

Departure – Return	Pricing	Notes
Dates not confirmed for 2028		
Feb 12 - Feb 17, 2028	**$6495**	

See https://www.nathab.com/central-america/monarch-butterfly-photo-expedition/dates-fees for the latest pricing details.

Included

Accommodations, services of Nat Hab's professional Photography Expedition Leader(s), all meals from dinner on Day 1 through breakfast on final day, some alcoholic beverages, most gratuities, airport transfers on Day 1 and final day, all activities and entrance fees, all taxes, permits and service fees.

Not Included

Travel to and from the start and end point of your trip, some alcoholic beverages, some gratuities, passport and visa fees (if any), optional activities, items of a personal nature (phone calls, laundry, etc.), airline baggage fees, airport and departure taxes (if any), required medical evacuation insurance, optional travel protection insurance.

Important Information About This Trip

The monarch butterfly sanctuaries in Mexico's Central Highlands are a marvel no nature lover should miss! Observing millions of monarchs clustering and moving together is a wondrous experience. This trip can be more strenuous than most, however, so please read carefully the section on Physical Requirements.

Mandatory Insurance

Since the areas we travel to on this trip are remote and wild (that's why we go there!), we require medical evacuation insurance for our guests' safety. If you decline the medical evacuation insurance coverage offered by Natural Habitat, we request that you send us documentation of the independent coverage you have selected. We will add the cost of a medical evacuation policy to your tour invoice until you provide our office with proof of coverage, including your insurance company's name, contact number and your individual policy number. Thank you for understanding that our policy exists exclusively in the interest of our guests' safety.

Getting There & Getting Home

This trip begins and ends in Mexico City. **You must arrive in Mexico City no later than 5:30 pm on Day 1** in order to attend a group welcome dinner and orientation at 7 pm. For guests who come in early, recommended hotels will be included in your pre-departure materials.

You may depart Mexico City at any time on the final day.

Our Natural Habitat Adventures Travel Desk can best assist with your travel reservations, as our staff is familiar with the specific requirements of this program and can help arrange the most efficient itinerary. Please call us at 800-543-8917. While we offer the best available rates to us on airfare and additional nights accommodations, you may occasionally find special web rates or lower fares online.

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Monarch Butterfly Photo Expedition Extensions

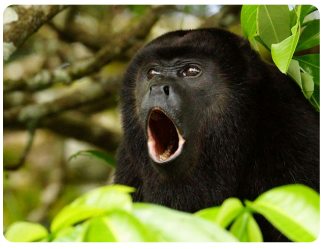
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The Great Gray Whales of Baja

On skiff excursions from our shorefront whale camp, come within arm's length of amiable gray whales and their calves, as these gentle giants birth and nurture their young in the warm Pacific waters of San Ignacio Lagoon.

$6995



Costa Rica Wilderness Explorer

See another side of Costa Rica on this adventure into rainforests, mist-shrouded mountains and coastlines well off the typical tourist track, and enjoy remote and authentic ecolodges en route.

$8795 (+air)



Natural Jewels of Costa Rica

An all-encompassing nature expedition through the jungle canals of Tortuguero to the misty cloud forests of Monteverde and Corcovado's wild beaches—discover Costa Rica's exceptional biodiversity.

$11495 (+air)

Natural Habitat & WWF: Discovering Our Planet Together

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WWF's membership travel program is operated by Natural Habitat Adventures (Nat Hab). To date, Nat Hab has provided more than $6 million in support of WWF's mission and will continue to give 1% of gross sales plus $175,000 annually through 2028. WWF® and ©1986 Panda Symbol are owned by WWF. All rights reserved.