

Understory Explorer Tarapoto Tour

November 2017

Maximum capacity 6 people (*double occupancy only*).

All-inclusive for one week starting from Tarapoto. Transportation, lodging and three meals a day are included in the price of \$1685 **US Funds**.

If you have ever want to explore the rainforest and search for exotic frogs, insects, plants and immerse yourself in one of the most biodiverse regions on the planet, then perhaps this trip is for you.

Join us for one week and explore the Tarapoto region of Peru, renowned for not only being home to the most diverse assemblage of poison frogs on the planet but also for the overall diversity and amazing beauty of the forests. Easily accessible from Tarapoto are the Montane forests of the Cordillera Escalera, lush montane forests, Lowland rainforests and even semi dry forests, all beautiful and all home to vastly different and uniquely wonderful floral and faunal assemblages. Each day we will explore different areas all accessible with relatively brief rides from our “basecamp”. Accommodations will be at the private Casa Understory which we just completed in July of this year. The house is built upon a mountain ridge offering a spectacular view of the forests of the Cordillera Escalera as well as the Tarapoto valley below. When not on excursion guests are free to explore the forest on the property, or relax in the pool. The house is modern designed with each room offering spectacular views of the surroundings. The house is located just 6 km from the city of Tarapoto allowing guests easy access to the city of Tarapoto to enjoy dinners and other perks and curiosities that a city like Tarapoto has to offer.

Proposed Itinerary – we say proposed because the itinerary is subject to change due to road conditions or weather conditions in any given area. Rest assured if we can’t reach one location, we will have another in mind.

Day One – Fly to Lima. Because most flight arrive in Lima late in the evening or early morning it is not possible to get to Tarapoto on the day you leave home.

Day two – Arrival in Tarapoto. Most flights from Lima to Tarapoto arrive midmorning to early afternoon. Since many guests will arrive tired we leave this first afternoon somewhat open to get situated in accommodations. Guests can explore the forests on the property, relax by the pool or take a nap and recover from the long flights to get here. We will head down into the City in late afternoon for a nice dinner. Following dinner, for those who wish we will go on a brief nocturnal excursion to look for glass frogs, tree frogs and other nocturnal creatures. Make sure to bring your own flashlight and/or headlamp.

Day Three – After an early breakfast we will head out over the Cordillera Escalera stopping sporadically along the way to explore the forests in these beautiful mountains. These are the same forests where Rainer Schulte did much of his pioneering work several decades ago. Species of Poison Frogs such as *Ranitomeya imitator* and *variabilis*. *Ameerega trivittata*, *bassleri*, and *altamazonica* are all common here. With a little more luck *Ranitomeya fantastica* might make an appearance. Many waterfalls are accessible in this area, (Much of which is now a Communal Reserve.) and these all make for wonderful photo ops and really are quite spectacular to behold. We will have lunch in Pongo de Caynarachi at a typical restaurant. Pongo De Caynarachi is a nice town located at the eastern most feet of the Escalera Mountains. Pongo is the Gateway way to the Yurimaguas lowlands and the vast expanses of lowlands which span the entirety of eastern Peru. After lunch we will make our way back over the mountains arriving more or less at midafternoon at the base allowing guests plenty of time for a shower, a nap and or a swim before heading into Tarapoto for dinner.

Day 4 – On this day we will leave early and travel nearly two hours to the village of Chazuta, which is located on the banks of the Huallaga River. The drive is quite scenic and we will make a few stops for pictures and exploration to hopefully scare up a few frogs before we even arrive in the town. From the town we will hike up to our reserve in the forested hills above the town. The hike will take us through many plantations, including Cacao (chocolate) coffee and banana. There is one large hill which can be challenging depending on trail conditions, but fear not, we will take our time

and rest as needed. Once in the forests at the reserve we can easily find many specimens of the incredibly variable populations of *Chazuta R. imitator*. Looking a little closer and we should be able to find some of the broad banded *Ranitomeya summersi*. There is a nice green form of *variabilis* present here, but finding them requires a little luck as they usually reside high in the bromelia growing overhead in the canopy. Here will likely be the first encounters we will have with the beautiful *Ameerega caynarachi*. *Trivittata* and *bassleri* are also abundant here, as are the cryptic local population of *Ameerega altamazonica*. Following the hike down we will have a late lunch cooked by a local family in the traditional Peruvian style. We will then board some small boats and take a brief ride down the Huallaga River. This course of the Huallaga runs through the habitat of about two thirds of the species of Peruvian poison frogs. In fact this iconic river drains some of the most spectacular and biodiverse areas on earth. After this we will say goodbye to Chazuta with a stop at a wonderful chocolate co-operative called Misky. Here local ladies turn the raw cacao product into world class chocolate. Feel free to buy as much as you like. Nobody is judging 😊 Depending on arrival time back in Tarapoto we will either have dinner delivered to the house, head back down to the town for dinner, or just go eat in our field clothes. Sometimes you just have to go with the flow.

Day 5. Another early morning departure (7 am more or less, nothing crazy); we are going to head out back over the Escalera Mountains and explore the Yurimaguas lowlands in two locations. Before getting too far along, we are going to take breakfast at a local landmark. El Mono Y Gato Restaurant. A typical Peruvian breakfast can be an interesting combination of foods. The menu is pretty long, and the view from the restaurant is breathtaking. Our first stop will be in a small expanse of forest that remains not far from Pongo De Caynarachi. This is a special forest in that it is home to one of the few remaining populations of *lowland fantastica*. As you will see the lowlands in this area has been converted en masse to oil palm plantations. Witnessing this is a sobering reminder of the threats that truly endanger these frogs. Near Pongo we have the chance to find two really elusive species. The first being *Ameerega pongoensis*, and the

second is *Hyloxalus azureiventris*. I can almost guarantee finding tadpoles of the *azureiventris* but the frogs themselves are unbelievably elusive. In 14 years I might have ever found 5 individuals, yet we regularly find their tadpoles. Following this excursion, we will head out towards Yurimaguas. Not far from Yurimaguas we will stop and search for the true nominal *fantastica* in its highly fragmented habitat and again bear witness to the scourge of *Palma africana*. After this stop we will have dinner in Yurimaguas. Yurimaguas is an old town and quite interesting. It has a busy port and is a vital hub connecting trade and commerce from the coast to Iquitos which is land locked a couple days further down River.

On the drive back to base we can, if the group decides to take advantage of the nocturnal mountain crossing, stop at a few spots where we have previously been successful in finding glass frogs. This will make for a long, but surely very rewarding day.

Day 6 - Sauce. Today we will head out to visit the famous Laguna Azul at the town of Sauce. In forested fragments that flank streams which feed the lake we can find amazing populations of *R. summersi* and its mimic *R. imitator*. The mimicry here is so accurate that we are certain friendly arguments will develop over which frog is which. These small stream valleys are also home to very cryptic populations of *A. bassleri* and *A. caynarachi*, so keep your eyes peeled. We will have a nice lakeside lunch. Following lunch we have two options and guests are free to choose either one. One option is to stay and relax by the lake and maybe take a swim or have a drink or two. Option two is to head further into the mountains to a remote location where we hope to find a really beautiful form of *Ameerega bassleri* that we have only seen once, but have never actually photographed. Either option can be accommodated and each guest can feel free to make their own choice. We will depart late afternoon for Tarapoto so that we can be showered and down to the city for a nice fashionably late dinner.

Day 7. Today we will go on the western side of the Tarapoto valley. Here the climate is much drier and the hills more extensively deforested. We are heading to the town of Sisa where we scramble up some dry creek beds in the hopes of finding what I consider to be one of the most beautiful and also one of the rarest dart frogs in Peru, the blue/chrome green or simply the "sisa" *Amereega bassleri*. Also present are *Amereega altamazonica* and a population of *Ranitomeya variabilis* that looks nearly indistinguishable from the "Southern" *variabilis*, except for its smaller size.

Day 8. Staying close to home on our last morning in Tarapoto, we will head to San Antonio where we will take an easy hike to see some unbelievably beautiful *Ameerega caynarachi*, *trivitatta* and *altamazonica*. Also abundant at this site are beautiful imitators that strongly resemble the morph known as Tarapoto. Also present but incredibly rare at this locality are *R. variabilis* and *R. fantastica*.

TOUR ENDS (*from the time we depart from Tarapoto, all expenses are the responsibility of the individual tour participant*)

Afternoon flights to Lima wrap up the tour. On this trip I (Mark) will accompany to Lima those returning home. If time provides we can do a bit of site seeing and eat at one of Lima's many fantastic restaurants.

Day 9. Flight Home ☹️

If interested please contact Understory Enterprises
(info@understoryenterprises.com)

A \$200 **US funds** non-refundable deposit now will hold the tour space for you.

Payment in full will be required 3 weeks prior to departure.

Tour spaces will be filled on a "first come/first served" basis.