

Mexico | Migration of the Monarch Butterflies

About this trip

One of the most amazing phenomena in nature is the annual migration of millions of Monarch butterflies (*Danaus plexippus*) southward from their breeding grounds in the United States and Canada to overwintering sites high in the mountains of southern Mexico. Hundreds of millions of Monarchs fly along the Gulf Coast, or across the Gulf of Mexico, to eventually reach the belt of mountains which stretches across the southern end of the central Mexican plateau.

Join us for this special opportunity to see Monarchs packed in the countless millions on the roosts, feeding on wildflowers, and watering streams. The beauty of their rustling wings clearly audible at times of mass flight, the sprinkling of orange Monarch scales drifting down through the green fir tree boughs, and sheer magnitude of the numbers seen, all combine to make this one of the most amazing experiences imaginable.

Highlights

- Discover the annual migration of monarchs at Sierra Chincua and El Rosario Reserves.
- Photograph the dramatic colors of the butterflies as they hang in clusters from the trees, drink from streams, feed on wildflowers, and soar in the air above.
- Visit the pyramids at Teotihuacán, one of the most architecturally significant Mesoamerican sites of pre-Columbian times.
- Spend time exploring colonial Angangueo, which was once a mining town but now derives most of its livelihood from butterfly ecotourism and agriculture.

Activity Level 4: Moderate-Strenuous

This journey is for fit and active nature enthusiasts. Daily activities last for 5 or more hours. There are challenging excursions to butterfly colonies that may require walking for approximately 2 miles at altitudes of up to 10,660 feet on some trails that are narrow and rugged. These may involve both steep uphill and downhill hikes of 30 minutes or more (hiking at your own pace), and require horseback riding for part of the way; please note there is a maximum weight limit of approximately 260 lbs to ride the horses. Restrooms are only available at the base of the mountain. Weather in the Central Highlands during the migration is typically cool and dry with average temperatures in the 50s. Though days are typically sunny, there can be some windy conditions, and nights occasionally drop below 30°F. Also included are walking tours in provincial towns and in Mexico City. Here, at the Teotihuacán archaeological site, you can choose to climb two pyramids: the largest is over 200 feet high with 248 steep steps.

Additional Notes

During site visits, the days entail walking around the butterfly sites on your own and photographing and watching butterflies. Please be prepared to be independent during butterfly watching.

Please also see the information about Safety & Risk Management under the Travel Info tab.

Mexico City

Feb 8, 2025

Upon arrival in Mexico City, you will be met in the airport and transported to your hotel, situated in the historic district on the Zócalo. The Zócalo is the largest plaza in Latin America, and it is surrounded by the National Palace, Metropolitan Cathedral, Templo Mayor, and many restaurants and historical architecture. This evening, meet in the hotel lobby at 7 pm for a welcome dinner and program orientation at a nearby restaurant. Check-in starts at 3 pm.



Dinner included



Overnight at Zocalo Central Hotel

Angangueo

Feb 9, 2025

Begin today with a short exploration of Mexico City during a brief walking tour of the Zócalo—the largest plaza in Latin America—and the surrounding Metropolitan Cathedral, and Templo Mayor; a boxed lunch will be provided. Depart for the colonial town of Angangueo, high in the mountains in the state of Michoacán, about 100 miles west of Mexico City. Check in at Hotel Don Bruno. After dinner, the museum leader will present a brief orientation lecture on the monarch sites and our activities over the next several days. Elevation at Hotel Don Bruno is 8,460 feet. Please note that it can get cold at night and in the early morning, and most rooms do not have heat. It is recommended that you bring warm sleeping clothes.



Breakfast-Lunch-Dinner included



Overnight at Hotel Don Bruno

Angangueo

Feb 10, 2025

Spend today at Sierra Chincua Monarch Butterfly Sanctuary. This is one of several nearby monarch sites and is more isolated than El Rosario, which you will visit tomorrow. The journey starts with a hike up the mountain to about 10,000 feet. Horses are available to rent for a portion of the trail. (approximately 150-200 Mexican pesos each way, cash only). Some uphill walking will be required, but it can be done at your own pace and with stops and rest as needed. Once at the site, you have the day to walk around on your own and watch and photograph the spectacular colony independently. The museum leader will be available to answer questions. A boxed lunch will be provided to eat at your leisure. Please note that restrooms are located at the base of the mountain and can be reached by walking or renting a horse. There are also vendors at the base selling food, beverages, and local crafts. The site is typically shaded, so remember to dress in layers due to changes in temperature and elevation. Late in the afternoon, return to Hotel Don Bruno for dinner. The museum leader will host an evening lecture and discussion on the monarchs, their biology, ecology, and conservation.



Breakfast-Lunch-Dinner included



Overnight at Hotel Don Bruno

Anganguero

Feb 11, 2025

Today visit the monarch sanctuary of El Rosario, the largest overwintering site. The colony normally contains well over 100 million adult monarchs. An excellent trail system winds through the fir-covered slopes on which the colony is located. Additionally, there is a nearby stream where the butterflies may fly at midday to drink water. At this time of year, they may take flight for an hour or more to secure water, nectar, etc., before returning to their roost on the tree limbs or trunks. The hike to reach the colony may again reach up to 10,000 feet and will require hiking up the mountain. The hike is at your own pace, and birding can be done along the way. A portion of the hike can again be done by horseback rental. Once at the site, the day will be spent enjoying the colony and watching the butterflies go through their daily cycle of activities. Please be prepared to be independent again today during butterfly watching. The museum leader will also be available to answer questions. A simple picnic lunch will be provided, to be eaten at your leisure. Restrooms are located at the bottom of the mountain and not in the reserve. In the late afternoon, return from the mountains to Anganguero. You will have free time to enjoy the hotel gardens, walk the town's cobblestone streets and take photos, or to just relax. The museum leader will give another evening lecture on the monarchs, with emphasis on their migration, orientation, and navigation abilities.



Breakfast-Lunch-Dinner included



Overnight at Hotel Don Bruno

Mexico City

Feb 12, 2025

Depart for the Mexico City area and the pyramids at San Juan Teotihuacán. We'll have the afternoon to explore this world-famous archaeological site, which covers 32 square miles and contains many structures, including two large pyramids. A must see spot is the Quetzpapalotl Palace or "Palace of the Butterflies" on the site. The Pyramid of the Sun, at a height of more than 200 feet, is one of the largest known pre-Columbian structures in the Americas. After time to explore the ruins on your own, we return to our hotel on the Zócalo for a farewell dinner.



Breakfast-Lunch-Dinner included



Overnight at Zocalo Central Hotel

Departure

Feb 13, 2025

This morning, you will be transferred to the airport for your flight home. Breakfast will be included depending on your departure time. Please be aware that you need to be at the airport three hours ahead of your scheduled departure flight time. (This goes for the flight to Mexico as well as on the way back.) Please pay careful attention when you book your return flight, as a 7 am departure from Mexico City means that you will need to wake up at 3:30 am to get to the airport by 4 am. If you choose to make an early morning booking, there is no problem in terms of getting you to the airport on time, but we want you to be aware of the three-hour check-in time.



Breakfast- included
