



## **MEXICO'S MAGICAL MIGRATIONS** *Monarch Butterflies & Humpback Whales*

**January 10 – 19, 2022**

**10-Day Natural History Trip to Observe Mexico's Wintering Monarch Butterflies & Humpback Whales**

**Cost: \$4,455.00/person + international airfare**

EcoQuest Travel is proud to partner with the Friends of the North Carolina Maritime Museum, Beaufort on an exciting trip to witness two of nature's greatest spectacles – the wintering Monarch Butterflies and Humpback Whales in Mexico. Each year one of the world's greatest migrations takes place as millions of monarch butterflies from the US and Canada travel south to the forested Mexican highlands. Once they arrive they begin a period of winter hibernation by clustering together in huge numbers blanketing the surrounding vegetation. This tapestry of color is breathtaking and if we have a warm day thousands could take wing in order to find water only to settle once again as the chill of evening descends. As the butterflies are arriving in Mexico so too are Humpback Whales. Concluding their own incredible migration from their feeding waters off Alaska, large numbers of Humpback Whales gather off Mexico's Pacific coast. They come to these warmer waters to give birth and to breed.

Although the majority of this trip is designed to explore some of Mexico's unique natural history, we will also visit the exquisite pre-Aztec ruins of Teotihuacán. EcoQuest Travel, the Friends of the North Carolina Maritime Museum, Beaufort and JoAnne Powell invite you to join us as we discover the natural wonders, cultural sites and magical migrations of Mexico.

### **Itinerary**

#### **Day 1 – Monday, January 10: Home Cities to Our US Gateway City to Mexico City**

We will depart early this morning from our home cities to our US gateway city (likely Houston, Dallas or Atlanta) and from there we will connect to our flight to Mexico City. Please plan to arrive at your home airport no later than two hours prior to your scheduled departure time. Once we arrive in Mexico, and clear customs and immigration, we will

travel to the arid lowlands north of Mexico City. Our destination is the town of San Juan Teotihuacán gateway to the fabulous pre-Aztec ruins of Teotihuacán. Upon our arrival we will settle into our accommodations at the Hotel Teotihuacán. The hotel is located within walking distance of the ancient city and provide cozy well-appointed rooms. There is also a good restaurant and nice gardens. We will have dinner at the hotel restaurant tonight. (D)



## **Day 2 – Tuesday, January 11: The Ruins of Teotihuacán and on to the Mountains**

This morning we will be privileged to visit the awesome ruins of Mexico’s largest ancient city. Teotihuacán is a breathtaking assemblage of temples, vast plazas and gigantic pyramids. We will begin our explorations after breakfast with a visit to the Citadel which is thought to have been the residence of the city’s supreme ruler. The most interesting feature of the Citadel is the Temple of Quetzalcoatl with its impressive carvings. From the Citadel we will work our way north along the Avenue of the Dead to the Site Museum containing displays of artifacts found throughout the ruins. Next to the Site Museum is the world’s third largest pyramid, the Pyramid of the Sun. The view of the ancient city from the top of this incredible structure is amazing. We should also have a chance to visit the northern section of the ruins which contain the Tepantitla (priest’s residence) and its famous frescos; the pyramid of the moon; the Palace of the Quetzal Butterfly; the Jaguar Palace and the Temple of the Plumed Conch Shells. We will take a break for lunch at the nearby Restaurant Techinanco which serves excellent local fare. After visiting the ruins we will travel between two and three hours to the Mexican highlands and the comfort of our accommodations at Agua Blanca. Agua Blanca is a charming hotel/resort set among lush gardens. It has comfortable rooms and excellent service. It is also located close to the Monarch Butterfly Sanctuaries, making Agua Blanca the perfect base from which to explore as well as a welcome retreat after a long day in the field. (B,L,D)

### **Day 3 – Wednesday, January 12: Chincua Monarch Butterfly Reserve**



This morning after breakfast we will witness one of nature's greatest spectacles as we travel to see, literally, millions of wintering monarch butterflies as they festoon the fir trees in a carpet of shimmering orange and black. There are several reserves that are open to visitation within the Monarch Butterfly Sanctuary. We have chosen to visit two of the best reserves during this trip. Today we will observe the butterflies in a reserve called Chincua. We will begin our journey to this magical place by traveling to the scenic mining town of Angangueo. Angangueo is the gateway to both monarch reserves we will visit and the trailhead to Chincua. From the trailhead we will mount horses for the steep climb up to 10,000 feet to see the butterflies. We will take a packed lunch with us as we plan to spend the majority of the day observing and photographing the butterflies. In the cool of the morning the monarchs will be draped all over the trees and if we have a warm day the

butterflies will take wing in the late morning and early afternoon in search of water. There will be so many butterflies that we will be able to hear the flutter of their collective wings which sounds like a whisper of wind through the trees. Both butterfly reserves are home to more than just butterflies and we will also be on the lookout for other wildlife including many unique species of birds including Blue-throated Hummingbird, Strickland's Woodpecker, Buff-breasted Flycatcher, Grey-breasted Jay, Mexican Chickadee, Blue Mockingbird, Red and Olive Warblers and Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer. After a full day in this remarkable place we will descend and have dinner and overnight at Agua Blanca. (B,L,D)

### **Day 4 – Thursday, January 13: El Rosario Monarch Butterfly Reserve**

We will depart early this morning for the El Rosario Reserve. El Rosario is the best known, and most popular, reserve, but it also has been the most affected by illegal logging. It will be interesting to compare and contrast the environment at El Rosario with that of Chincua. Despite the disturbance, the sheer number of Monarchs at El Rosario can be mindboggling. To get to the

butterflies at El Rosario requires a steep ascent of between 3 and 4 kilometers so we will once again use horses for the trip up. However, unlike Chincua, we will hike down out of the reserve after our visit. We will take a picnic lunch with us and after a full day at El Rosario we will return to Agua Blanca for dinner and overnight. After using horses for two days we may be ready for a





good soak in the thermal pools at Agua Blanca! (B,L,D)

### **Day 5 – Friday, January 14: Anganguero to Toluca and Fly to Puerto Vallarta**

After breakfast we will begin a day of travel as we drive to the city of Toluca for our flight to Puerto Vallarta. Sun-splashed Puerto Vallarta lies on the Pacific Coast which is home to its own magical migration. Each year the secluded bays along this coastline host a gathering of giants as Humpback Whales, who have wintered in Alaskan waters, come here to breed and give birth. Once we arrive in Puerto Vallarta we will transfer to the Los Flamingos Hotel and have the rest of the day free to shop, walk the beach or just relax before dinner. (B,L,D)

### **Day 6 – Saturday, January 15: Humpback Whales**

This morning we will have our first encounter with Humpback Whales. After a lecture about the whales we will board our specially designed boat for three full hours of whale watching. This time of year Humpback Whales are breeding and giving birth so we hope to observe a great deal of social interaction which could include breaching and slapping their flukes on the water – both designed to show dominance. We could also witness play behavior and hopefully see new calves. This



is also the time of year when Humpbacks sing and we will use a hydrophone to listen to their unique and amazing songs. Although the whales will be the main attraction we could also see some seabirds including Brown and Blue-footed Boobies, Elegant Terns, Magnificent Frigatebirds and both Heermann's and Bonaparte's Gulls. After a full morning we will return to Puerto Vallarta and have lunch. After lunch we will seek birds and other wildlife in the Puerto Vallarta area before dinner and our overnight once again at the Los Flamingos Hotel. (B,L,D)

### **Day 7 – Sunday, January 16: Humpback Whales and Transfer to San Blas**

We will have a second morning to encounter Humpback Whales. Having two chances to observe the whales should provide excellent opportunities for photographs and enhance our chances to witness their complex behavior and social lives. It also will increase our opportunities to see other marine life perhaps including dolphins and manta rays. After our whale watching excursion we will have lunch and then transfer north along the coast to San Blas. Once we arrive in San Blas we will briefly visit San Blas's famous fortress before visiting some shrimp ponds in the afternoon to look for birds. The shrimp ponds should be full of waterbirds like Wood Stork, Roseate Spoonbill, Collared Plover and Clapper Rail. Raptors are also common around the ponds and in the surrounding agricultural areas and could include Harris's Hawk, White-tailed Hawk and Peregrine

Falcon. Both Green and Ringed Kingfishers fish the ponds and we may catch a glimpse of some local specialties like Black-throated Magpie-Jay, Masked Tityra, Mangrove Vireo, Grey-crowned Yellowthroat and Yellow-winged Cacique. After a full day we will overnight at the Hotel Garza Canela. (B,L,D)

### **Day 8 – Monday, January 17: Birding San Blas and the La Tovara Mangroves**

We will begin early this morning as we travel a short distance inland from San Blas to a



small village called Singayta. Singayta offers a variety of habitat types including dry scrub, marshes and tropical palm/deciduous forests all of which draw a rich assemblage of birds. We'll be on the lookout for Hook-billed Kite, Zone-tailed Hawk, Laughing Falcon, Elegant Quail, Rufous-bellied Chachalaca, Mexican Parrotlet, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Plain-capped Starthroat, both Elegant and Citreoline Trogons, Russet-crowned Motmot, Lineated and Pale-billed Woodpeckers, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Black-capped Vireo, Fan-tailed Warbler, Red-breasted Chat and Blue Bunting. In the fields above Singayta we could see Rusty-crowned Ground-Sparrow and both San Blas and Purplish-backed Jays. After a full morning we will have lunch before we take a fantastic boat trip along the San Cristobal River to the Tovara Mangroves.

This relaxing trip will provide excellent chances to see Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Boat-billed Heron, Snail Kite, Bat Falcon, Muscovy Duck, Purple Gallinule, Mangrove Cuckoo and hopefully the weird nocturnal Common Potoo. We could also see American Crocodiles, iguanas and other wildlife. We will once again overnight at Hotel Garza Canela. (B,L,D)

### **Day 9 – Tuesday, January 18: Birding Tecuitata Reserve and Coffee Plantation**

Today we will explore the Tecuitata Reserve and its shade coffee plantations. This reserve, south of San Blas, has a number of species not found in San Blas including Crested Guan, Colima Pygmy-Owl, Mexican Hermit, Mexican Woodnymph, Gray-crowned Woodpecker, Brown-backed Solitaire and Golden Vireo. We will also search for Lilac-crowned Parrot, Golden-crowned Emerald, Sparkling-tailed Woodstar, San Blas Jay, Happy and Sinaloa Wrens, Rufous-backed Thrush, Blue Mockingbird and Grey Silky Flycatcher. After a full day of birding, and looking for other wildlife, we will return to the Hotel Garza Canela, have dinner and prepare for the journey home. (B,L,D)

### **Day 10 – Wednesday, January 19: Transfer to Puerto Vallarta for the Flights Home**

We will have breakfast at the hotel this morning before we travel back to Puerto Vallarta airport for our afternoon flight back to our US gateway city. Once at our gateway city we will clear immigration and customs before transferring to our flights home. (B)

\* Please note that EcoQuest Travel, Inc. will make every effort to adhere to this itinerary, but dates, times, activities and prices are subject to change depending on scheduling and availability.

**Cost:**

\$4,305.00/person all-inclusive ground package

\$ 150.00/person estimated domestic airfare in Mexico (see airline ticketing info below)

\$4,455.00/person

**Airline Ticketing:**

International airline tickets are not included in the above costs. EcoQuest Travel is a full service tour operator and we will gladly assist you with your flights for this tour. We do not charge a service fee for this assistance to clients who book a tour with us. We are aware, however, that clients often prefer to use frequent flyer miles, or points, to purchase tickets or to shop online. Regardless of which method you choose EcoQuest Travel will be happy to help you with ticket prices, scheduling and ticket purchase. If you decide to obtain airline tickets on your own please make sure to check with EcoQuest Travel prior to purchasing your ticket to make sure the flights you have chosen will work with the tour itinerary and that the tour has sufficient participation to operate. Please be aware that once purchased, most airline tickets are non-refundable and carry a financial penalty for any changes. Also, it is essential that we receive a copy of your flight itinerary so that we may track you in case of missed connections, flight delays or other mishaps that might impact your arrival.

Domestic airline tickets within Mexico have been included in the above costs. Please understand that the budgeted amount for our domestic airline tickets is an estimate and the actual cost may vary until we actually book the tickets. If ticket prices at the time of booking are lower than our estimates the savings will be passed on to you. If ticket prices are higher you will be invoiced the difference.

**What's Included:**

- Land, air and boat transportation within Mexico (please see the above section regarding our domestic flight within Mexico)
- All accommodations – based upon double occupancy (single supplement is available for an additional \$334.00)
- All tours within the scheduled itinerary
- Meals are included throughout the trip (except while we are in transit)
- Two sodas are included with meals and bottled water will be available on the bus and where appropriate
- Permits, entrance fees and guides
- All tipping is included
- The leadership services of EcoQuest Travel professionals



**What's Not Included:**

- Airfare from your home city to Mexico City and return from Puerto Vallarta – please see the Airline Ticketing information above
- Drinks during meals – other than what is listed above
- Fees associated with obtaining a passport
- Travel insurance (please see the Travel Insurance Section below)
- Costs associated with pre-trip medical planning (such as vaccines)
- Gifts and personal items or expenses

**Travel Documents:**

A passport valid for at least 6 months after our arrival is required for travel in Mexico. An entry visa is not required for US citizens.

**Group Size:**

The trip cost is based on a minimum number of participants – 10 people. Although 10 participants are required in order to make this trip a reality; we are able to accommodate up to a maximum of 12.

**Health Requirements:**

The Mexican Government does not require any vaccinations for entry into the country; however, there are a couple of vaccines that would be prudent to consider prior to traveling to tropical Mexico. These include Hepatitis A, Typhoid and making sure your routine vaccines such as Measles and Tetanus/Diphtheria are up to date. Malaria is present in Mexico, but rare in the areas we will visit. The CDC does not recommend the use of anti-malarial drugs given the low risk. Information on travel-related diseases and vaccines to prevent them can be found on the Centers for Disease Control website at:



[www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel)

If you require prescription medication you should bring an adequate supply with you as it is unlikely to be available in Mexico. We highly recommend discussing all medical issues related to travel with your doctor well in advance of the proposed travel date.

**Payments and Reservations:**

A deposit of \$1,500.00 per person is required along with your reservation form in order to reserve space on the trip. This will help insure airline seating space and necessary early deposits during this busy time of year. We encourage you to send the deposit well in advance of the date the first payment is due, as paying the deposit is the only way to secure your spot. The reservation form is available on our website:

[www.ecoquesttravel.net](http://www.ecoquesttravel.net) and can be filled out online and submitted via email, or downloaded and mailed. Personal checks, money orders and credit cards are accepted. If



paying by personal check it should be made payable to EcoQuest Travel, Inc. and on the memo line please indicate: For Mexico Trip 2022. If paying by credit card please go to our website ([www.ecoquesttravel.net](http://www.ecoquesttravel.net)) and on the reservations page there is PayPal button in the left column. Enter the amount of your deposit (\$1,500.00/person) from the dropdown menu; enter your email address; and click the “Pay Now” button which will direct you to PayPal’s secure site. Once there you will enter your credit card details. EcoQuest Travel will send you invoices through PayPal for subsequent trip payments according to the schedule listed below:

- A payment of at least \$1,477.00 is required on, or before, June 1, 2021.
- The remainder of the trip expense (\$1,478.00) will be due on, or before, October 7, 2021.

### **Cancellation:**

The initial deposit, as well as subsequent payments, will be used to purchase airline tickets and pay deposits for accommodations, travel arrangements, etc. in Mexico. Therefore, if you must withdraw from the trip, irrespective of reason, a refund will not be possible. We strongly suggest that you protect yourself with the purchase of trip cancellation insurance. We will try to retain a wait list for this trip and it is possible that if you end up not being able to participate we will attempt to find a replacement for you; however, it is your responsibility to find a replacement or to have insurance.

- Please note that in the event EcoQuest Travel, Inc. cancels this trip, due to circumstances beyond our control or low trip participant numbers, a refund of the initial deposit and any payments made will be issued.

### **Travel Insurance:**

EcoQuest Travel, Inc. partners with Allianz Global Assistance (formerly – Access America) to provide the best possible travel insurance for our clients. They offer trip cancellation and worldwide emergency services (such as emergency evacuation and emergency medical services) as well as a host of other benefits. You can find more information on Allianz’s website ([www.allianzassistance.com](http://www.allianzassistance.com)) including how to get quotes and sign up. You do not have to use Allianz Global Assistance and may choose to use another company. In either case, EcoQuest Travel, Inc. strongly suggests the purchase of trip cancellation/medical insurance. If you do decide to purchase travel insurance from Allianz Global Assistance please give them the following EcoQuest Travel vendor (or ACCAM) number: F031120. This number identifies that you are working with an Allianz Global Assistance partner.

Note: Pre-existing conditions will be waived by Allianz Global Assistance if you purchase travel insurance within 14 calendar days of your initial trip deposit. For more information please see their website.

### **General Information:**

Upon receiving your deposit and reservation form you will be sent an information packet containing flight information, baggage requirements, hints on what to bring and other useful information. The climate will range from cool and dry at elevation to hot and dry in the lowlands. More information on trip conditions will be provided in the final packet.



You will want to bring a camera and binoculars. Again, a more exhaustive list will be provided after you are registered for the trip.

**Trip Leaders:**

Dave Davenport: Zoologist and President of EcoQuest Travel, Inc.

JoAnne Powell: Former Curator of Education for the NC Maritime Museum