



WWF INSIDER JOURNEYS

KINGDOM OF THE MONARCHS

TRIP ITINERARY

A Journey through Mexico's Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve
with Monica Echeverria, WWF Director for Media and External Affairs for Latin America

February 18–23, 2025

Join us in Mexico to experience one of the most astounding natural events on Earth, featuring an unlikely creature: the delicate monarch butterfly. Every year, at the end of the summer, millions of monarchs take flight on a remarkable 3,000-mile journey, from the Northeast United States and Southeast Canada to their ancestral wintering grounds in the volcanic mountains of central Mexico. Journey with WWF-Mexico's Pollinator Officer for Terrestrial Ecosystems Programs



Adriana Valera, to central Mexico's Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve for a unique chance to get up close to these amazing creatures. Immerse yourself in the monarchs' fascinating world and learn directly from WWF experts and local communities about our work with the Mexican government, local communities, and partners to protect monarch hibernation grounds and to support sustainable projects that provide an economic alternative to the people who live in the monarch region.

ITINERARY AT A GLANCE 6 Days

Day	Date	Location	Accommodation
1	February 18	Mexico City, Mexico	Grand Fiesta Americana Hotel
2	February 19	Angangueo—El Rosario Sanctuary	Hotel La Margarita or similar
3	February 20	Angangueo—Chincua Sanctuary	Hotel La Margarita or similar
4	February 21	Angangueo—El Rosario Sanctuary / Jungapeo	Hotel Agua Blanca
5	February 22	Valle de Bravo / Toluca / Mexico City	Grand Fiesta Americana Hotel
6	February 23	Mexico City / Depart	

ITINERARY IN DETAIL

Day 1, February 18: Mexico City, Mexico

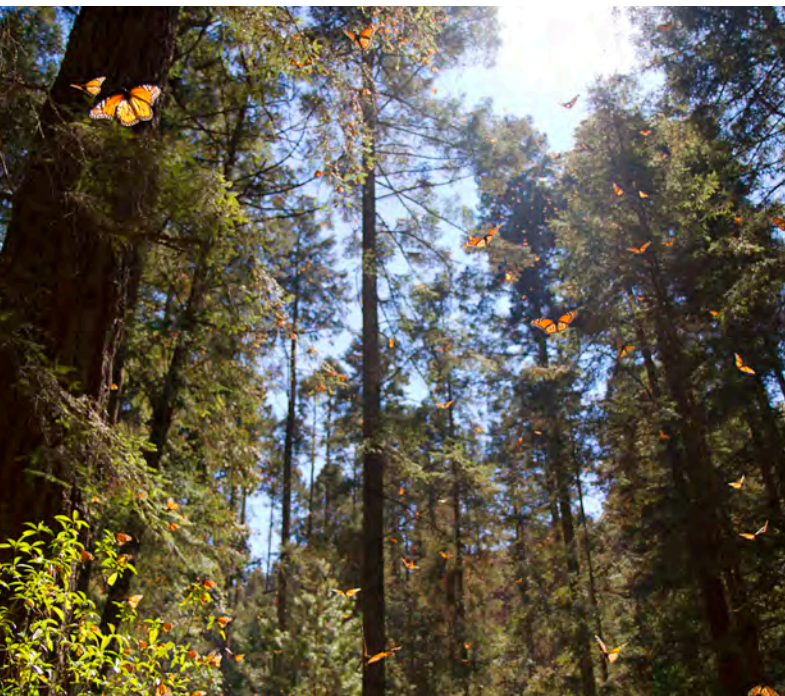
Our monarch butterfly tour begins on arrival in Mexico City, with a transfer from the airport to our downtown hotel in the upscale Polanco district. Gather this evening for a welcome dinner with representatives from WWF-Mexico followed by an orientation to the wonders that lie ahead. One of the world's most astounding natural events occurs each year in North America, featuring one of its most unlikely creatures: the delicate monarch butterfly. Every autumn, tens of millions of monarchs set flight on a remarkable 3,000-mile journey from the northeastern US and Canada to their ancestral wintering grounds in the volcanic mountains of central Mexico. The location of their breeding grounds remained a mystery until 1977, and how an infant generation of butterflies finds it anew each year is still an enigma. Filled with anticipation, we look forward to tomorrow's journey into the mysterious kingdom of the monarchs.

Overnight Grand Fiesta Americana Hotel (D)



Day 2, February 19: Angangueo / El Rosario Butterfly Sanctuary

Leaving Mexico City, we drive into the Central Highlands past vistas of the snowcapped Nevado de Toluca volcano, bound for the small mountain town of Angangueo. Once a copper and silver mining town, Angangueo today thrives on butterfly tourism and local agriculture. The village is very picturesque, a tumble of pastel buildings set along narrow



cobblestone streets that hug the steep mountain slopes. Enjoy a hearty lunch of homemade Mexican fare before making our first foray into the monarch kingdom at El Rosario Butterfly Sanctuary, one of 12 sanctuaries that comprise the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve.

As we drive high into the hills in an open-topped truck, a few butterflies flit about, offering a hint of what awaits ahead. Riding small Mexican horses provided by the local community (and led by your own caballero, so no horse experience is necessary), we ascend the trail through the forest as hummingbirds and red warblers accompany us to

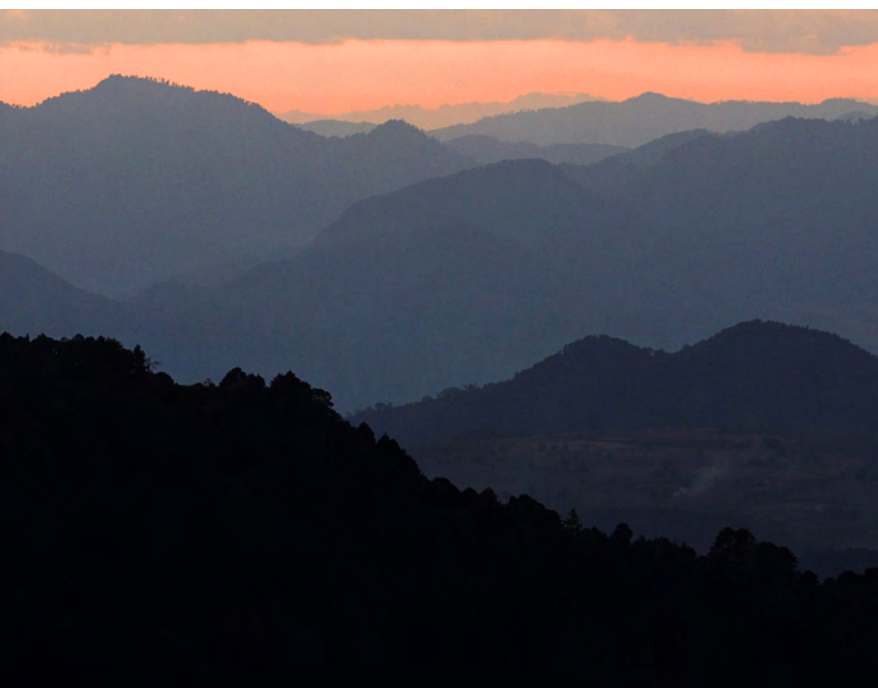
the heart of the monarchs' migration site. What we find is an almost surreal sight. At first glance, they look like autumn leaves, but we soon realize we are looking at millions of butterflies, covering the oyamel fir trees in a delicate, quivering blanket of black and orange. Boughs bend beneath their numbers, though each monarch weighs less than half an ounce. Massed together in a colony, they cling to the trees in huge clusters to survive the cool winter temperatures. When the sun warms their parchment-thin wings, the monarchs take to the sky in a fluttering cloud of orange—so many that the air hums with their movement. Mexico's sanctuaries are the only place in the world where you can actually hear butterflies' wings beating. Their beauty is so ethereal that many Mexicans still hold the Aztec belief that the souls of the dead are reborn as monarchs.

Overnight Hotel La Margarita or similar (B, L, D)



Day 3, February 20: Angangueo—Chincua Sanctuary

At Chincua Butterfly Sanctuary, another magical encounter with the monarchs awaits. Riding horses along the established trail most of the way, we hike the last bit to reach the butterflies. Sometimes the stream along the forest floor appears to flow orange, covered



completely by butterflies as they 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." During our visit, we hear about efforts to preserve this fragile forest ecosystem that is the key to the monarchs' survival, learning about what WWF–Mexico is doing in conjunction with local communities to protect the butterflies' habitat. Our visit is one way to assist, demonstrating to the local people that ecotourism can be a

more viable and sustainable source of economic sustenance than logging. Later this afternoon, there's time to discover more of the village of Angangueo, known for its magnificent murals celebrating the importance of monarchs to the community.

Overnight Hotel La Margarita or similar (B, L, D)

Day 4, February 21: Angangueo—El Rosario Sanctuary / Jungapeo

This morning partners from WWF-Mexico's Monarch Butterfly Program, will join us for our morning excursion to the El Rosario Monarch Butterfly Reserve, where they have worked for some 20 years. The largest of the monarch sanctuaries in the region, El Rosario spans 138,379 acres and offers an unparalleled opportunity to view great numbers of monarchs in one location. It is also a World Heritage Site. Observe the butterflies' fascinating winter behavior as they hang onto large fir trees and learn how WWF surveys Mexico's annual butterfly population by tagging and counting the monarchs.



While at El Rosario, we'll take a behind-the-scenes look at their reforestation efforts and walk through their oyamel fir tree farm, where thousands of saplings grow. In addition to other tree nurseries in the area, WWF has helped plant over 13 million trees in an area that has been heavily impacted by illegal deforestation activities. While WWF forest engineers help with the work of growing trees, the program also creates a number of local jobs. After lunch, we travel to Jungapeo to reach our ecolodge and spa, tucked into the mountains of Michoacan. Renowned for its mineral hot 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.

Overnight Hotel Agua Blanco (B, L, D)



Day 5, February 22: Jungapeo / Toluca / Mexico City

Awaken to a symphony of tropical bird-song emanating from surrounding trees and bushes as we enjoy a peaceful morning at our eco-resort. After lunch we begin our return journey to Mexico City, stopping en route in Toluca, originally a 13th-century indigenous settlement, to visit Cosmovitral Botanical Garden. The building's interior, which houses 500 plant species from Mexico and around the world, glows with the ethereal light of stained-glass panels created by Tolucan



artist Leopoldo Flores. Say farewell over a classic Mexican feast before returning to the capital this evening for a late check-in at our hotel.

Grand Fiesta Americana Hotel (B, L, D)

Day 6, February 23: Mexico City / Depart

After breakfast on the final day, our monarch butterfly tour concludes with a transfer to the airport for flights home.

(B)

Please note: The itinerary provided is meant as a guideline and is subject to change without notice. On rare occasions, it may be necessary to deviate from our regular itinerary for reasons beyond our control. In these instances, we will provide the best available alternative.

Meet Our Expert



Monica Echeverria, WWF Director, Media and External Affairs

Originally from Mexico City, Monica is WWF's Director for Latin America and Hispanic Outreach, at the Media and External Affairs Department. Monica has had the chance to unveil the wonders of the Monarch Butterflies' world and share the story of WWF's work to protect them with science reporters, TVs, WWF supporters, and others from around the world. She joined our special 2018 and 2023 monarch butterfly adventure exclusively for WWF's Partners in Conservation and Legacy Circle members, and she is thrilled to have

another opportunity to spend time with WWF's closest supporters and to share her intimate knowledge of monarch butterflies. Monica joined WWF in 2001, after working at the World Bank, The Inter-American Development Bank, and the Mexican Embassy in Washington DC. Monica earned her BA in Social Sciences from ITAM in Mexico, and her master's in International Public Policy from Johns Hopkins University.

What to Expect and Physical Requirements

Visiting the butterfly sanctuaries requires walking through the forest for approximately 3 to 4 miles round-trip, at altitudes that could reach up to 10,660 feet. Because the location of the butterflies within the sanctuaries changes throughout the season and from year to year, exact hiking distances on each departure can vary. At times, the terrain can be rough and rocky, and we may have to traverse uneven ground and step over or around sticks and branches. Uneven, steep inclines may require us to maintain balance as we watch the butterflies. The effects of altitude should not be underestimated. While we rate this trip "moderate," the physical exertion involved can be considered strenuous for people who are less active.

The entrance to El Rosario butterfly sanctuary can only be accessed via a 30-minute, open-bed truck ride over cobblestone roads, which can make for a somewhat bumpy ride and may be considered uncomfortable for travelers with back or neck issues. Once inside the sanctuaries, horses are available to ride uphill to reach the butterfly colonies, but not down. When riding the horses, we will be led by a local guide through trails that can, at times, be narrow and rugged, so riders must be alert and maintain balance. Travelers should expect to spend 30-45 minutes on horseback at a time. Due to the diminutive stature of the local horses, the maximum rider weight each horse can carry is 260 pounds.

It is important to note that even with the option to ride horses, there will still be some hiking involved while going up to the colonies, as the horses cannot travel the entire length of the trail.

After dismounting, travelers will be required to walk a final 1/4 to 1/2 mile up a gentle slope to reach the butterfly colonies. Anyone who opts not to ride horses will have an approximately 3-mile uphill hike with significant elevation gain. All travelers must hike downhill back to the sanctuary entrance, descending at least 600 steps over approximately 3 miles, with an elevation change of about 1,000 feet.

Please note: Monarchs cluster for warmth on endemic oyamel fir trees—a rare and beautiful sight to see. They don't fly unless the air reaches a certain temperature, so on cold, rainy, windy or overcast days, we may not see the monarchs take flight. While our trips include three visits to the sanctuaries to maximize our chances for the perfect weather, we cannot guarantee a monarch sighting.

Accommodations



Grand Fiesta Americana Hotel

Fully renovated in 2020, the 4-star Grand Fiesta Americana Chapultepec is one of Mexico City's finest hotels. Enjoying an ideal location facing the Bosque de Chapultepec, one of the largest city parks in the Western Hemisphere, it offers the best of both worlds: proximity to the buzz of cosmopolitan Mexico City and a verdant nature sanctuary just out the door. The hotel is conveniently located just 7 miles from Benito Juárez International Airport (a quick 15-minute drive), near the Auditorio Nacional and famed Paseo de la Reforma. Most of the rooms in this highrise tower offer panoramic views, including of the adjacent Castle of Chapultepec. Standard amenities in spacious 366-square-foot rooms include air conditioning, complimentary Wi-Fi, plush bedding and linens, deluxe robes, a refrigerator, stocked mini bar, and a flat-screen TV with cable.



Hotel La Margarita or similar

La Margarita is a simple local hotel located near the center of the small historic mining town of Anguango. While its amenities are modest, rooms are clean and colorful and provide a base steeped in local atmosphere for our nearby butterfly activities. Spacious rooms have en suite bathrooms, free Wi-Fi and cable TV. Like all accommodations in this remote mountain village, the hotel is not heated. However, rooms have wood-burning fireplaces, which take the evening chill off while adding rustic ambience. Extra blankets are also available. We base our butterfly trips in Anguango for the special local atmosphere, the town's involvement in monarch conservation, and its close access to Rosario butterfly sanctuary.



Hotel Agua Blanca

Tucked into the lush mountains of Michoacan, Hotel Agua Blanca is a secluded eco-resort renowned for its legendary mineral hot springs, stunning natural beauty, and restaurant serving organic, traditional Mexican cuisine. A lively river runs through the property's 75 acres, and guests can explore the verdant forests, colorful gardens and aromatic bushes—all home to a panoply of tropical birds—on a network of trails.

With just 21 guest rooms, Hotel Agua Blanca offers an intimate experience. Simple rooms are quaint and comfortable, with white walls and exposed wooden beams. Colorful painted accents brighten the dark wooden furniture, and beds are dressed in crisp linens and vibrant blankets. Some rooms have two double beds while others one king, and all have views of the gardens. En suite bathrooms feature solar-heated hot water, stand-alone showers and refillable toiletries (no hair dryers). Although rooms do not have televisions—the owners prefer to keep the focus on nature—Wi-Fi and cell service are available throughout the hotel.

About WWF Insider Journeys

WWF Insider Journeys is a special conservation travel program for our closest supporters to see first-hand the positive impact World Wildlife Fund is making. Each of these curated journeys is accompanied by WWF experts and offers exclusive opportunities to discover the wildlife and ecosystems we protect; meet community members whose lives are being improved because of our work; and immerse yourself in the worlds of our staff and partners on the ground. Come explore the best of the natural world alongside other WWF supporters and see how together we are making a difference for our planet.

About Our Travel Partner



This journey is being arranged by Natural Habitat Adventures of Boulder, Colorado. For more than a decade, WWF has partnered with Nat Hab to take travelers to view nature's greatest sights. WWF selected Natural Habitat as its partner because of its long-standing commitment to conservation and the exceptional quality of its adventures.

Reservation Information & Trip Details

For reservations and additional information, please contact Aly Jacobsen at Natural Habitat Adventures (888) 993-8687 or alyj@nathab.com.

DATES: February 18–23, 2025
GROUP SIZE: Limited to approximately 14 guests
LAND COST: \$5,195 per person, double occupancy
Single supplement: \$1,195

INCLUDED: Accommodations, services of Nat Hab's professional Expedition Leader(s), travel costs for your WWF Expert, 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 and internet, etc.), airline baggage fees, airport and departure taxes (if any), required medical evacuation insurance, optional travel protection insurance.

PAYMENTS: A deposit of \$500 confirms your space. Payments are accepted by credit card or by check made out to Natural Habitat.

CANCELLATIONS & REFUNDS: Cancellations must be received in writing at Natural Habitat Adventures by US mail, email or fax. At the time Natural Habitat Adventures receives your written cancellation, the following per person penalties apply: On or before 120 days before the trip: Full refund minus \$100. On or before 60 days before the trip: Forfeit 50% of tour cost. After 60 days before the trip: No refund.

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.

To protect your investment and to provide peace of mind while you travel, we also strongly recommend purchasing comprehensive travel insurance. Plans may cover everything from medical treatment to trip cancellations and delays and lost luggage. Please contact our office if you would like more information about the medical evacuation and comprehensive travel insurance policies we offer by calling 800-543-8917.

GETTING THERE & GETTING HOME: Plan to arrive in Mexico City no later than 5:30 pm on Day 1 of the adventure, as there is a group welcome dinner and orientation at 7 pm. You are free to depart

anytime on the final day. We can best serve you if our Natural Habitat Adventures Travel Desk makes your reservations, as we are intimately familiar with the special requirements of this program and can arrange the most efficient travel. Please call us at 800-543-8917. Note that while we offer you the best possible rates available to us on airfare and additional nights' accommodations, you may find special web rates or better fares online.

While WWF Insider Journeys are intended for WWF's closest supporters and enhanced with WWF Experts, exclusive site visits, and enriched content, a minimum number of guests is required to run each trip. To avoid canceling, WWF and Nat Hab may fill remaining available spots with WWF and non-WWF members.