



Natural Selections

BIRDING, WILDLIFE, AND PHOTO TOURS



Flame-faced Tanager

Ecuador's Central Highlands; Eastern and Western Cloud Forests

10 Nights/11 Days

This bird-rich itinerary focuses on birding the eastern and western slopes of the Ecuadorean Andes and the central highlands. The chosen locations are included based on the conservation efforts in place, especially where these involve restoration and reforestation projects led by community-based organizations. Your trip contributes to a continued transition into more sustainable economic activities that allow protection of the forest and the birds and wildlife that live there.

The entire tour is led by knowledgeable and experienced local women who will ensure that you enjoy some of the best birding in the Americas while contributing to the preservation of the fragile cloud forest ecosystems we will visit.

Main Tour Overview

Day 1: Arrive Mariscal Sucre Quito International Airport (UIO)

Day 2: Antisana Reserve

Day 3: Yanacocha

Day 4: Papallacta Pass & Eastern Foothills

Day 5: Guango

Day 6: The Quijos Valley

Day 7: The Owl's Temple & The Cock of the Rock Lek

Day 8: The northwest & Mindo

Day 9: Refugio Paz de las Aves

Day 10: Milpe to Quito

Day 11: Departure from Mariscal Sucre Quito International Airport (UIO).

10 Night/11 Days Itinerary

Day 1, International Arrivals to Quito:

After arrivals, immigrations and customs, we'll be met at the airport by our guide and tour leader and transferred to our hotel east of Quito.

Meals: Dinner

Lodging at Puembo Birding Garden

Day 2, Antisana Reserve:

The Antisana Reserve is one of the top spots if you want to access Ecuador's paramo at its best. Aside from some magnificent scenery, (picture snow-capped Antisana Volcano towering above the páramo plains), classic Andean bird species that we often see here include Silvery Grebe, Black-faced Ibis, Andean Condor and Chimborazo Hillstar.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Lodging at Puembo Birding Garden

Day 3, Yanacocha:

We'll start with a specially arranged early breakfast in the restaurant, hoping to depart for the day as soon as possible after breakfast. Some of the target bird at this elevation are Giant Conebill, Tawny Antpitta, Golden-eyed Flowerpiercer, Ocellated Tapaculo, Swordbilled Hummingbird and some of the more colorful mountain Tanagers such as Buff-breasted Mountain Tanager.

We'll take a box lunch with us to nearby Yanacocha. Our birding will be primarily on foot, walking along a road that narrows into a trail through lovely treeline forest around 10,000-11,500 feet (3000-3500 m). We'll be moving slowly at these high elevations, where the

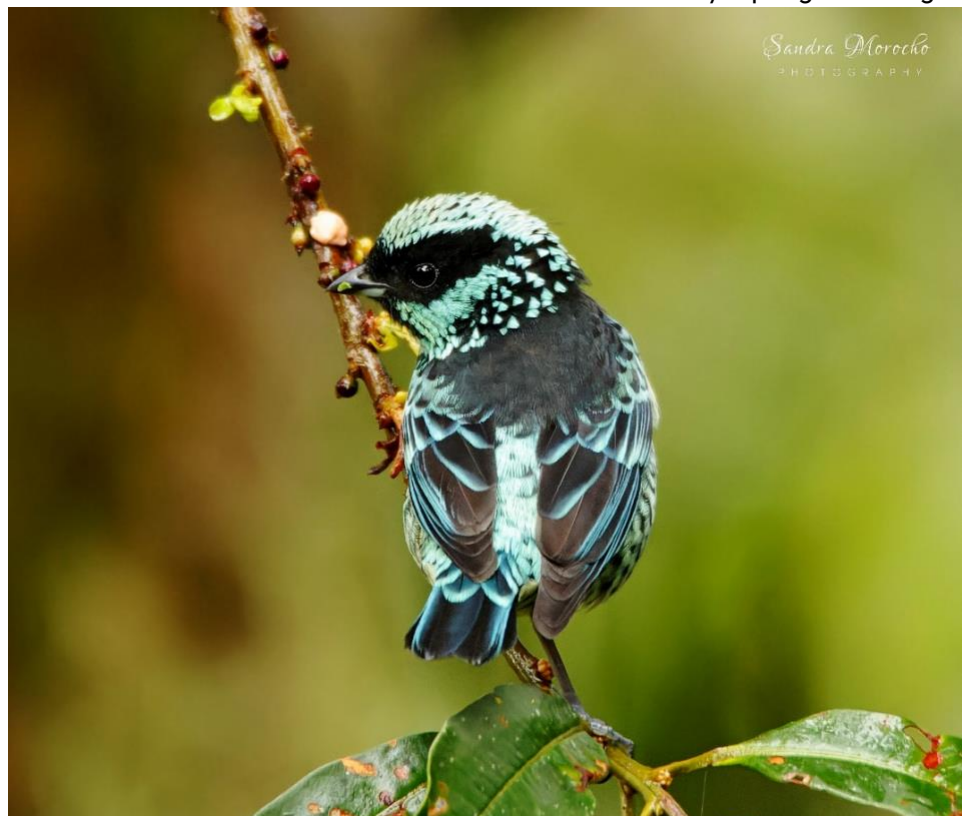
weather can vary from cloudy and cold to sunny and warm, so layer up and bring raingear (rubber boots are not necessary here but could be advisable if it is raining when you awaken). You'll also want water with you (to sip frequently), as one dehydrates easily at these high climes. After our picnic lunch, we'll bird on our way back to Quito.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Puembo Birding Garden

Day 4, Papallacta Pass & Eastern Foothills:

After an early breakfast at our hotel, we will head east out of Quito into the central valley before our ascent to the high paramos. Depending on the weather, we may make a stop or two in the arid intermontane valley for some "warm-up" birding. Here the climate is agreeable, and we will have a

Beryl Spangled Tanager





Gray-breasted Mountain Toucan

chance to see many of the birds typical of the intermontane Andean valleys. Our main targets will be Western Emerald (a recent split from Blue-tailed), Rusty Flowerpiercer, Scrub and Blue-and-yellow tanagers, and Golden Grosbeak. As we start to climb up the eastern cordillera towards the windswept paramo, the forest becomes a bit more humid. Here the bird possibilities start to change, and we get into prime habitat for Shining Sunbeam, Black-billed Shrike-Tyrant, Red-crested Cotinga, Band-tailed Seedeater, and Ash-breasted Sierra-Finch. By the time we finish here, we will want to start layering up!

The continental divide is our next stop, and temperatures are sure to plummet unless we luck out and have a cloudless calm day. We will spend the remainder of the day birding the bizarre treeless paramo zone and strange stunted elfin woodlands near Papallacta Pass

before our arrival at Guango Lodge. Speckled (Andean) Teal, Andean (Ruddy) Duck, Andean Condor, Variable (Puna) Hawk, Carunculated Caracara, Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe, Andean and/or Noble snipe, Chimborazo Hillstar, White-chinned Thistletail, Andean Tit Spinetail, Tawny Antpitta, Plain-capped Ground-Tyrant, Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant, and Scarlet-bellied and Buff-breasted mountain-tanagers are all on our hit list. We may even get lucky with a couple of rare mountain-tanagers: the Masked and Black-chested if the weather cooperates, and providing we can find the right flock. If clear we will enjoy breathtaking views of snow-capped, Antisana Volcano.

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Guango Lodge*

Day 5, Guango:

The major advantage of staying at Guango Lodge for a night is to rise early and be right in the middle of temperate forest habitat at first light— something that is hard to do when starting from Quito. We may spend good part of our morning on the grounds of the lodge working the flocks as well as trying out a willing antpitta or tapaculo, or decide to head back up to the higher elevations for another go depending on our luck the previous day and the weather.

The target birds are many, but a good morning can be rewarding. Sword-billed hummingbird, Tourmaline Sunangel, White Capped Dipper, Torrent Duck, Chestnut-crowned Antpitta, and Turquoise Jay are right outside our doorstep.

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Guango Lodge*

Day 6, The Quijos Valley:

Early in the morning we will probably have a last look around the grounds of Guango, and then want to start our descent down slope towards the heart of the Quijos Valley. On the way there we will stop of one of the neighbor natural reserves to search for the mythical (Andean Eagle) – Black and chestnut eagle. Luckily one of the local leaders is preserving one of the territories where this specie nest for 3rd year at Finca Los Nogales. So, there are good chances to encounter this creature.

We will arrive at Quijos Ecolodge for lunch, which offers delicious homestyle meals between birding forays. Set in a forested garden, the cabañas are within sight of displays of the Green Backed Hillstar, Brown violetear, Gorgeted Woodstar and more, and minutes away from some tremendous east-slope, subtropical birding. This is the perfect set up for our afternoon birding session.

In the late afternoon we will go across the Quijos River to visit one of the local farms “Finca El Madrigal” to watch the Ladder Tail Nightjar that perch and nest on these grounds.

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Rio Quijos Ecolodge*

Day 7, The Owl’s Temple & The Cock of the Rock Lek:

We’ll coordinate our time depending on the weather, but our general plan is to devote our time to birding the forest trails at The Owl’s Temple; a local farm that incorporates birdwatching to protect the remaining forest. This territory list here is now over 300 species, and many of them are some of the most sought-after birds in the Andes. White-capped Tanager, Green Fronted Lancebill, and Andean Motmot are among the species that make this place so special.

What makes the Quijos Valley such a great place for birding, besides the comfortable accommodations and wonderful hospitality, are that all the chosen birding spots are owned and managed by local



Andean Cock-of-the-rock

farmers transitioning into more sustainable alternatives. We will be spending very little time in our vehicle and will do most birding from the lodge on foot or only a short drive from the lodge itself.

The final part of the day we will explore the Borja River looking for Golden-headed and Crested Quetzals, and in particular to see the action at the Andean Cock-of-the-Rock lek. Truly one of the jewels of the cloud forest this species is one of the symbols of conservation in the region.

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Rio Quijos Ecolodge*

Day 8, Day trip to the Northwest & Mindo:

We’ll start with an early breakfast and last opportunity for photos on the east side, and then travel throughout the day with strategic stops on our way to the Tandayapa Valley located in the northwest of Ecuador.

This area will be our base for the next few days, as we explore

different locations every day and plan our activities according to what we still hope to see and the daily weather conditions, at 1700 m (5500 ft) elevation offers a perfect place from which to access our birding spots.

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Tandayapa Lodge*

Day 9, Refugio Paz de las Aves:

We’ll go early to what has become one of Ecuador’s most popular birding destinations: Refugio Paz de las Aves, the reserve of “the Antpitta Whisperer.” We’ll hope to see the fantastic antpitta show, but even if the antpitta activity is slow, there are usually many other great birds to watch for as well. Here we will visit a lek where male Andean Cocks-of-the-rock (which are red west of the Andes) gather almost daily to display, promising a marvelous show for those able to get up at around dawn. On our way back from the blind at the lek (assuming good weather), we’ll hope to see Dark-backed Wood-Quail and as many as four species of antpittas—Ochre-breasted,



Masked Trogon

Yellow-breasted, Moustached, and Giant—all of which have been habituated to coming out for earthworms offered by Angel and (his brother) Rodrigo Paz! If it has not been too rainy and the antpittas are responding, it's quite a show to behold. Even if the antpittas are otherwise occupied, there are sure to be some good birds at the Paz fruit feeders: such knockouts as Toucan Barbet, Crimson-rumped Toucanet, and Blue-winged and Black-chinned mountain-tanagers. With luck we could see a shy Sickle-winged Guan or White-throated Quail-Dove, a pair of Olivaceous Pihas, an Orange-breasted Fruiteater, or even the rare and aberrant White-faced Nunbird. Angel usually has a surprise or two in store. One year it was an Ocellated Tapaculo that he coaxed into view! This is truly a fabulous place!

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Tandayapa Lodge*

Day 10, Milpe to Quito:

We will spend time birding around the gardens of Milpe which is a good place to spend at least an hour, as many tanagers and hummingbirds come to the feeders and many insect-eaters come to the gardens for moths. Some of the hummingbirds are Choco endemics; Velvet-purple Coronet,

Empress Brilliant, and Purple-bibbed Whitetip are examples. Later that morning we will visit the newly enlarged Milpe Bird Sanctuary, about a half-hour away, where the mossy forest supports such specialties as Barred Puffbird, Striped Woodhaunter (of the race *assimilis*), Pacific Tufted-cheek, Mossbacked and Rufous-throated tanagers, and display leks of the fabulous Club-winged and Golden-winged manakins.

After a wonderful time, we'll slowly make our way back to Quito, arriving in time for relaxing and organizing before enjoying a celebratory dinner at our hotel.

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at airport hotel*

Day 11, departure:

Breakfast if time allows, and transfer to Quito's Mariscal Sucre Quito International Airport (UIO) for your international flights home.

Meals: Breakfast

Included in this itinerary:

Professional bilingual birding guide, private - group Land transfer airport – hotel – airport, private transportation from day 2 until day 10, all meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 11, entry fees to all the natural reserves listed in the itinerary, all lodging from nights 1 to 10, rubber boots up to U.S. size 10.

Not Included:

International Flights, airport taxes, visa fees, any checked or carry-on baggage charges imposed by the airlines, alcoholic beverages, optional tips to local drivers/guides, phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature.

Travel insurance:

We highly recommend purchasing travel insurance. In the event that you need to cancel your trip due to medical or other reasons, this insurance will protect you.



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BIRDING, WILDLIFE, AND PHOTO TOURS

109 Eaglewood Way, Athens, Georgia 30606

Tel: +1 (504) 9563-9689

info@naturalselectionstours.com

www.naturalselectionstours.com