

Best of the Lesser Antilles Itinerary

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Tour Overview

The Lesser Antilles form a chain of small intriguing islands of the West Indies, geographically separating the Atlantic Ocean from the Caribbean Sea. Our birding tour will concentrate on three of the best, Dominica, St. Vincent and St. Lucia; each island has its own unique character and charm, and each has its own special complement of wildlife.

Dominica, discovered by Columbus on a Sunday in 1493 (hence its name), is renowned as the nature island of the Antilles, as it is still supports large tracts of native forest covering mountainsides that rise to almost 5000 feet. Here we target the island endemics - the two species of parrots, Red-necked and Imperial, as well as Forest and Red-legged Thrushes, Lesser Antillean Swift, Blue-headed Hummingbird, Lesser Antillean Pewee, Lesser Antillean Flycatcher, Rufous-throated Solitaire, Dominica Wren (subspecifically distinct from Southern House Wren and a Dominican endemic), Scaly-breasted Thrasher, Southern Brown Tumbler, Antillean Euphonia (here of the green-backed form), and Plumbeous Warbler. Overhead might be Black Swifts, and along the coast we look for White-tailed Tropicbird, Royal and Bridled Terns, Brown Booby, and Caribbean Martin.

The small mountainous island of St Vincent lies south of St Lucia and west of Barbados and still retains extensive forests in the interior of the island. We spend most of our time in the superb Vermont Forest Reserve in the south-central part of the island. Here we look for the island's two endemic species, the striking St Vincent Parrot and the delightful, common and noisy Whistling Warbler. We also look for two species found only on St Vincent and Grenada - Grenada Flycatcher and Lesser Antillean Tanager, as well as the endemic form of the House Wren, plus Common Black-Hawk and the odd-looking black morph of the Bananaquit. Along the coast are White-tailed Tropicbirds and Red-footed Boobies, and in the evening we may look for the local form of a *Tyto* owl, a race of Barn Owl or possibly of Ashy-faced Owl, or even a separate species.

St. Lucia is an idyllic tourist location, all the more scenic owing to its spectacular conical volcanic peaks rising from the sea (Gros Piton and Petit Piton); it also supports a rich avifauna, including seven endemic species and many Lesser Antillean endemics. In nature reserves, we look for endemics whose name starts with St. Lucia - Parrot, Pewee, Warbler, Black Finch and Oriole. Further endemics are the St Lucia Wren (split from Southern House Wren) and St Lucia Nightjar (specifically distinct from Rufous Nightjar). Other goodies include Gray Tumbler, Ruddy and Bridled Quail-Doves, Spectacled/Bare-eyed Thrush, and the very rare White-breasted Thrasher.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival, St. Vincent



Our “Best of the Lesser Antilles” birding tour starts with a welcome dinner at our lodgings on the beautiful island of St. Vincent. We should encounter our first birds of the tour around our lodgings, perhaps Common Black-Hawk, Eared Dove, Zenaida Dove, Common Ground-Dove, the ubiquitous Tropical Mockingbird, Smooth-billed Ani, Cocoa Thrush, Carib Grackle and Gray Kingbird. plus the strange-looking black morph of the Bananaquit (which predominates here and on Grenada). Overnight on St. Vincent.

Day 2: St. Vincent



The small mountainous island of St Vincent lies south of St Lucia and west of Barbados and still retains extensive forests in the interior of the island. We spend most of our time in the superb Vermont Forest Reserve in the south-central part of the island. Here we look for the island’s two endemic species, the impressive St Vincent Parrot and the delightful, striking and noisy Whistling Warbler. We also look for two species found only on St Vincent and Grenada - Grenada Flycatcher and Lesser Antillean Tanager, as well as Scaly-naped Pigeon, three species of hummingbirds - Purple-throated and Green-throated Caribs, and the widespread Antillean Crested Hummingbird, and the endemic form of the House Wren. Along the coast are Brown and Red-footed Boobies, Magnificent Frigatebird and Laughing Gull. In the evening, time permitting, we may look for the local form of a Tyto owl, possibly a race of Barn Owl or even of Ashy-faced Owl, or maybe a separate species. Overnight on St. Vincent.

Days 3 - 5: Dominica endemics and Caribbean near-endemics



Near midday, we catch a flight to Dominica (Domineeka!) - the "nature island" - discovered by Columbus in 1493 on a Sunday, hence its name. Dominica is among the most important of the Lesser Antilles, as it still preserves large expanses of luxuriant native forest in mountain and rain forest scenery and the island is renowned for its rich land and marine fauna. During our stay here, we explore most of the island, and we have time for relaxing and taking things easy. On one or more days, depending on our rate of success, we head to the Northern Forest Reserve, on the flanks of Morne Diablotin, at 1450m (4750ft) the island's highest peak and the highest mountain in the Lesser Antilles. Our targets here are two endemic parrots: the widespread gaudy Red-necked and the critically endangered Imperial, the latter the largest of the genus *Amazona*. We leave our lodgings early, to reach the look-out in time to watch the parrots leave their overnight roost and fly to foraging areas in the lowlands. We should obtain excellent views of Red-necked Parrots as they fly overhead or sit perched at the tops of trees catching the early morning sun. Imperial Parrots are much scarcer and we will spend considerable time watching and waiting for the species to appear as we give ourselves plenty of time to find this highly sought-after endemic. We explore rain forests in the Northern Forest Reserve and in Cabrits National Park, searching for such goodies as Forest Thrush, a difficult to find range-restricted species, plus many other Lesser Antillean endemics such as Lesser Antillean Swift, Blue-headed Hummingbird (only found here and on Martinique), Lesser Antillean Pewee, Lesser Antillean Flycatcher, Dominica Wren (a distinct subspecies of Southern House Wren and a Dominican endemic), Scaly-breasted Thrasher, Southern Brown Trembler, Lesser Antillean Saltator and Plumbeous Warbler (only found here and on Guadeloupe). On top of the Dominican and the Lesser Antilles endemics are a group of Caribbean endemics which include Caribbean Elaenia, Rufous-throated Solitaire (a superb singer), Red-legged Thrush (Dominica is the only island of the Lesser Antilles where this fine thrush is found, possibly a recent introduction), Pearly-eyed Thrasher, Black-faced Grassquit, Lesser Antillean Bullfinch and Antillean Euphonia (the green-backed form). Overhead we might be fortunate to find cruising Black Swifts, recently arrived from wintering grounds in South America. Other species include Broad-winged Hawk, the widespread Ruddy Quail-Dove, Green-throated and Purple-throated Caribs, Antillean Crested Hummingbird, Mangrove Cuckoo, Black-whiskered Vireo, Golden (Yellow) Warbler and Caribbean Martin. Along the coast we look for White-tailed Tropicbird, Magnificent Frigatebird, Royal Tern and Brown Booby. Nights in Roseau.

Day 6: Transfer to St. Lucia



In the morning, we catch a flight from Dominica to St. Lucia, one of the most scenic islands in the Lesser Antilles, with its spectacular conical volcanic peaks of Gros Piton and Petit Piton rising from the sea. St. Lucia is the richest island for birds, holding seven endemic species and many Lesser Antillean endemics. Overnight near Castries.

Days 7 - 8: St Lucia



We spend a day in the Millet Nature Reserve in central St Lucia where we target in particular the St Lucia endemics: St Lucia Parrot, St Lucia Pewee, St Lucia Warbler, St Lucia Black Finch and St Lucia Oriole. The sixth endemic, St Lucia Wren (split from Southern House Wren) is very different from the wren on Dominica and we will make a special effort to find it during our stay. At dusk we may search for the seventh endemic, the St Lucia Nightjar (specifically distinct from the Rufous Nightjar of South America). St Lucia once had an eighth endemic species, Semper's Warbler, but this ground-foraging warbler is now thought to be extinct, possibly a result of predation by introduced mongooses. On a second day, we will be met at our hotel by our guide and then travel in an open-backed safari truck to the north-east part of the island, the dry forest at Grande Anse. Goodies here include Gray Trembler, Scaly-naped Pigeon, Ruddy and Bridled Quail-Doves, and the very rare White-breasted Thrasher. Lesser Antillean and Caribbean endemics which we missed on Dominica will be searched for on St. Lucia, perhaps Scaly-breasted Thrasher, Spectacled/Bare-eyed Thrush and Black-whiskered Vireo. We will also target the very distinctive form of the Lesser Antillean Pewee, possibly a future split. Nights near Castries.

Day 9: Departure, St. Lucia



Our delightful Best of the Lesser Antilles birding tour ends today. We will arrange for a transfer to the international airport in the morning, but you are welcome to leave at another time, but you will be responsible for paying for transportation if you do not travel with the group.

What to Expect

Our daily itinerary varies somewhat according to weather and habitat, but the general pattern will

be to go for a short walk before breakfast. We concentrate on “edge” birding until the light is good enough to enter forest trails. Most birding will be from quiet roads and wide trails. Driving will be limited to either small or moderate stretches. We return for lunch, followed by a siesta - time to relax and enjoy our accommodations. Then we go out for an afternoon visit to another birding hot-spot, followed by supper and the evening review of birds and other wildlife that we have seen and heard, and prepare for the next day’s itinerary.

Walking conditions will be relatively easy, occasionally moderate. It may rain, so a light rain-jacket and waterproof hat would come in useful. Stout, waterproof footwear is an advantage and a small umbrella is also very useful. Mosquitoes and other biting insects should not be a problem on this tour, but it is advisable to bring insect repellent. It will be warm in the mornings and hot in mid-afternoon (siesta time), sometimes humid, and pleasantly warm at higher altitudes.

We are accompanied by excellent local birding guides. All of our accommodations are clean and comfortable and there will be lots of down-time to relax, perhaps to take in some snorkelling. Our vehicles will be more than adequate, and include an open-backed safari truck as we access the north-east part of the island, the dry forest at Grande Anse.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes

- All meals
- All accommodations
- Internal flights from St. Vincent to Dominica and Dominica to St. Lucia
- Transportation from the hotel to the St Lucia (UVF) airport on day 8 on our group shuttle
- One guide with 4 - 8 pax, two guides with 9 - 12 pax plus local guides
- Park entry fees
- Gratuities to local guides

Tour Price Does Not Include

- Flights to and from start/end location
 - Transport from the St. Vincent airport to our lodgings on the first night (~\$30)
 - Transport from the hotel to the St Lucia airport if you are not on our group shuttle (~\$100)
 - Items of a personal nature
 - Travel Insurance
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