Eagle-Eye Tours

Colombia Itinerary

Link: Colombia

Tour Overview

Colombia! The richest area for birds on the planet! Close to 1900 species have been recorded in this amazing country, with no fewer than 73 endemics.

Our Colombia birding tour covers central and western Colombia, from Bogota and its high altitude specialties north through the Magdalena Valley and its very bird-rich reserves, to the western Andes near Manizales, Pueblo Rico/Montezuma and Cali. We will encounter a host of exciting species – trogons, tanagers, wrens, toucans, and more – the list seems endless.

Colombia has now opened her doors to tourists and naturalists alike; where we go is safe, somewhat rugged, but exciting. We stay primarily in or near reserves, where new accommodations facilitate birding groups, birding can be astounding, and the reserves often protect the last remaining habitats of several range-restricted, endangered birds.

We also offer a Colombia: Santa Marta birding tour. Save $225 USD ($300 CAD) when you book on both Colombia tours.

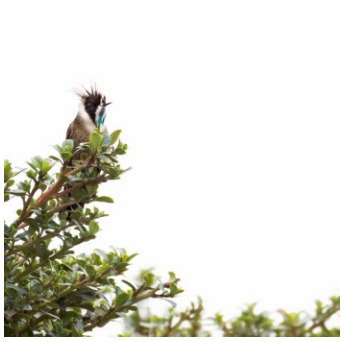
Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Bogotá



Our Colombia birding tour starts with a welcome dinner at our hotel in Bogotá, the capital of Colombia. If you are joining from our Colombia: Santa Marta birding tour, welcome to Bogotá! If you are just arriving, welcome to Colombia! Night in Bogotá.

Day 2: Sumapaz National Natural Park



We concentrate on the Eastern Andes south of Bogotá today, departing before dawn for a full day birding the high-elevation forests and páramo of Sumapaz National Natural Park. We also visit Chiguaza Reserve, where hummingbird feeders provide further opportunities to observe the region's birds. This will be a fine introduction to the birds of the páramo. The spectacular Green-bearded Helmetcrest is a species we really hope to find in this habitat. We may also encounter Andean Condor soaring over the peaks and the endangered Apolinar's Wren. We will also be looking for Bronze-tailed Thornbill, Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle and Boyacá Antpitta, among many other possibilities. Night in Bogotá.

Day 3: Birding from Bogotá to Cantos del Río



We depart in the morning and our first stop is on the outskirts of the city. La Florida Park is an important wetland for resident and migratory birds, including Spot-flanked Gallinule, Yellow-hooded Blackbird, and the endemics Bogotá Rail and Silvery-throated Spinetail. We then travel southwest to Campo Tangara, a site with feeders for hummingbirds and tanagers. There are a number of exciting hummingbirds that are possible here, including Tourmaline Sunangel, Collared Inca, Golden-bellied Starfrontlet and Gorgeted Woodstar. From there we cross the inter-Andean valley to the eastern slope of the Central Andes for a whole new suite of birds. This drive will take most of the afternoon. Night at Cantos del Río Ecohotel.

Day 4: Retorno del Colibrí and Yellow-eared Parrot Reserve



Today we explore the Tolima region near Cajamarca and Ibagué, where humid foothill forests, river canyon edges and regenerating woodlands support a mix of Magdalena Valley and montane forest birds. The varied habitats reflect both highland and valley influences, with dramatic Andean scenery around the Anaime and Cocora river valleys. We visit Reserva Natural Retorno del Colibrí, with its flowering gardens, forest edge and nearby cloud forest. Hummingbird possibilities include Indigo-capped Hummingbird and Lazuline Sabrewing, while mixed flocks may bring tanagers, flycatchers and woodcreepers through the surrounding vegetation. We also use 4WD vehicles to visit the Yellow-eared Parrot reserve. This Andean specialty is strongly associated with mature wax palms and montane cloud-forest slopes. Other birds we will look for in the area include Tolima Dove, Tolima Blossomcrown and Yellow-headed Brushfinch. Afterwards, we continue towards Pereira on the western slope of the Central Andes, crossing the Alto de la Línea pass. The highland scenery and changing vegetation provide a further introduction to the diversity of this mountain range. Night near Pereira.

Day 5: Otún Quimbaya Area to Hacienda El Bosque



This morning we explore the Otún Quimbaya area on the western slope of the Central Andes, using 4WD vehicles to reach the forest. Native and regenerating forests protect the watershed here and continue into the adjacent Ucumarí area. Our birding focuses on forest roads and trails rather than feeding stations. Birds we will look for include the endemic Crested Ant-Tanager and the vulnerable Cauca Guan, along with Red-ruffed Fruitcrow. Mixed flocks, forest edges and clearings may also produce Streak-capped Treehunter, Rufous-breasted Flycatcher, Variegated and Marble-faced Bristle-Tyrants, Northern Chestnut-breasted Wren and Multicolored Tanager. In the afternoon, we continue to Hacienda El Bosque, a working ranch where patches of original cloud forest remain among pastures and cultivated land. Hummingbird, antpitta and mountain-toucan feeding stations provide another way to explore the highland bird community. Possibilities include Crescent-faced Antpitta, Equatorial Antpitta, Gray-browed Brushfinch and Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucan. Night at Hacienda El Bosque.

Day 6: Hacienda El Bosque, Los Nevados and Termales del Ruiz



We spend a full day exploring the highland habitats around Hacienda El Bosque, Los Nevados National Park and Termales del Ruiz. High Andean forest gives way to stunted vegetation and open páramo, with the day’s birding arranged around local conditions and feeding-station schedules. The páramo is dotted with striking Espeletia plants, similar to those at Sumapaz. Here we will look for Buffy Helmetcrest, Viridian Metaltail, White-chinned Thistletail, Stout-billed Cinclodes, Plain-colored Seedeater, Plumbeous Sierra Finch and Tawny Antpitta. The stunted forest nearby offers possibilities including Rufous-fronted Parakeet, Páramo Tapaculo, White-banded Tyrannulet, Buff-breasted Mountain-Tanager and Black-backed Bush Tanager. Nearby ponds give us a chance to look for Andean Duck and Andean Teal. At Termales del Ruiz, feeding stations offer further opportunities for highland birds, including Golden-breasted Puffleg, Hooded Mountain-Tanager and Scarlet-bellied Mountain-Tanager. Night at Hacienda El Bosque.

Day 7: Río Blanco Reserve



Today we visit Río Blanco Reserve, where cool cloud forest supports a varied community of montane birds. Hummingbird feeders and flowering hedges attract species such as Speckled Hummingbird, Fawn-breasted Brilliant, Buff-tailed Coronet, Bronzy and Collared Incas, Tourmaline Sunangel, Long-tailed Sylph, White-throated Daggerbill and White-bellied Woodstar. Along the forest tracks, we have a chance to find Golden-plumed Parakeet, Crimson-mantled Woodpecker, Black-billed Mountain-Toucan, Rufous Spinetail, Montane Foliage-gleaner, Pearled Treerunner, Streaked Tuftedcheek and Flammulated Treehunter. Blackish, Ash-colored and Spillmann's Tapaculos are further possibilities. Río Blanco is particularly well known for its antpitta feeding stations. We will look for Bicolored, Chestnut-crowned, Slate-crowned and Brown-banded Antpittas, with opportunities depending on which birds visit the feeders. Night at El Paraíso.

Day 8: Guásimo and the Cauca Valley to Montezuma



Today we explore tropical dry forest in the Cauca Valley, where a different habitat brings another community of birds. Dry forest has been extensively cleared for agriculture, cattle ranching and settlement, making the remaining patches important places for the valley's birds. At Guásimo, possibilities include Apical Flycatcher, a Colombian endemic, and Golden-collared Manakin. We then continue towards the Western Andes, our third Andean mountain range of the tour. Near Pueblo Rico, we continue by 4WD to Montezuma Rainforest Ecolodge, where we will spend the next three nights. Montezuma lies beside the forested road climbing towards Tatamá National Park, providing access to a succession of foothill and cloud-forest habitats. After settling in, any remaining birding time can be spent around the lodge and its feeders. Night at Montezuma Rainforest Ecolodge.

Day 9 & 10: Montezuma Nature Reserve



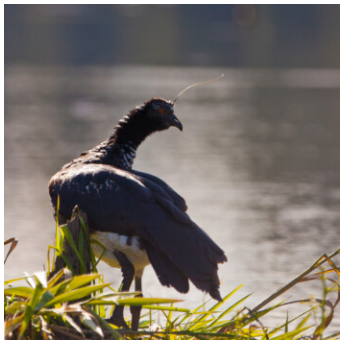
We have two full days to explore the Montezuma road, which climbs through foothill rainforest and cloud forest towards Tatamá National Park. The transition between the Western Andes and the Chocó biogeographic region supports a rich variety of birds, including many endemic and range-restricted species. Birds we will particularly look for include the endemic Black-and-gold and Gold-ringed Tanagers, Munchique Wood-Wren, Chestnut-bellied Flowerpiercer and Tatama Tapaculo. Other possibilities include Velvet-purple Coronet, Empress Brilliant, Western Emerald, Rufous-gaped Hillstar, Barred Hawk, Toucan Barbet, White-faced Nunbird, Lanceolated Monklet and Golden-headed Quetzal. Mixed flocks and quieter stretches of forest may produce Fulvous-dotted Treerunner, Yellow-breasted Antpitta, Choco and Nariño Tapaculos, Beautiful Jay, Black Solitaire, Tanager Finch, Scaled and Orange-breasted Fruiteaters, Olivaceous Piha and Chestnut-breasted Chlorophonia. Chocó Vireo is another possibility. The lodge's hummingbird feeders provide further birding opportunities when we are back at our accommodation. The surrounding forests also support a variety of orchids, adding to the interest of our outings. Nights at Montezuma Rainforest Ecolodge.

Day 11: Montezuma and El Diamante



We spend a final morning birding the lower stretches of the Montezuma road. We spend the afternoon driving towards Buga and Ecohotel Hacienda El Diamante. Depending on our arrival time, we may have an opportunity to look for birds around the grounds. Night at Ecohotel Hacienda El Diamante.

Day 12: El Diamante and Laguna de Sonso



This morning we explore around El Diamante and the Laguna de Sonso wetland complex. Wetlands, wooded margins and surrounding tropical dry forest bring a different bird community from the Andean forests. We walk a trail and take a boat excursion through the wetlands to look for waterbirds and other lowland species. Possibilities in the lagoon and surrounding habitats include Grayish Piculet, Horned Screamer, Jet Antbird, Dwarf Cuckoo, Yellow Oriole and Snail Kite. We then continue south and return to the Western Andes, where Araucana Lodge will be our base for the next two nights. Night at Araucana Lodge.

Day 13: Doña Dora and the Western Andes



Today we visit Doña Dora near Queremal, on the western side of the Western Andes. Here, the influence of the Chocó biogeographic region brings another distinctive community of birds to the forest and surrounding slopes. We plan to visit an Andean Cock-of-the-rock lek, where displaying males may gather in the forest. Reaching the lek involves a demanding descent and return climb. Doña Dora's hummingbird and tanager feeders provide opportunities to observe forest birds at close range. Hummingbird possibilities include Empress Brilliant, White-whiskered Hermit, Green Thorntail, White-booted Racket-tail, Violet-tailed Sylph and Velvet-purple Coronet. We will also look for Toucan Barbet, Red-headed Barbet, Silvery-throated Tanager, Rufous-throated Tanager, Glistening-green Tanager and Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager, with further birding around the forest edges and feeding areas. Night at Araucana Lodge.

Day 14: La Florida Bosque de las Aves and Flight to Bogotá



On our final birding day, we visit La Florida Bosque de las Aves, in the cloud forest and forest edge above Cali. Feeding stations provide opportunities to look for some of the Western Andes' distinctive birds, including the endemic Multicolored Tanager and Chestnut Wood-Quail. Other possibilities include Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager, Colombian Chachalaca, Golden-naped Tanager and Saffron-crowned Tanager. We will spend time watching the feeders and exploring the surrounding birding areas before leaving for the airport. In the afternoon, we fly from Cali to Bogotá, where we gather for our farewell dinner and reflect on our journey through Colombia's three Andean ranges and their contrasting bird communities. Night in Bogotá.

Day 15: Departure

Our Colombia birding tour ends today. Participants can depart anytime.

What to Expect

Overview

This is a fast-paced tour for dedicated birders, with early starts and long days in the field. We typically begin birding before breakfast, and some outings occupy most of the day. We explore a wide range of habitats and elevations, from warm valley wetlands and dry forest to cool cloud forest and high-altitude páramo.

Food

Breakfast arrangements vary with the day's activities: we may eat before birding, take a packed breakfast or stop for breakfast en route. We take most of our meals at the various lodges' dining facilities, but some days we will have a picnic lunch in the field, or visit a local eatery. Dinner is usually at the lodge or a nearby restaurant. Each evening after dinner we compile the day's

checklist, review the day's activities, birds, mammals and other observations, and plan the next day's activities.

Accommodation

We stay in a mix of hotels and lodges, ranging from simpler accommodation to more comfortable properties in attractive surroundings, close to good birding.

Walking

The walking on this tour is rated as moderate, with one particularly challenging hike. We generally walk no more than 5 km (3 miles), at a slow pace with frequent stops, but uneven terrain, humidity and elevation can make it harder work. Birding mainly takes place along quiet roads and forest trails. At higher elevations, we bird along roadsides a short distance from the vehicle.

The most demanding walk is to the Andean Cock-of-the-rock lek at Doña Dora. The trail descends approximately 1 km (0.6 miles), dropping about 300 metres (1,000 feet), followed by a steep sustained uphill return. The descent generally takes 30–40 minutes, while the climb back takes about an hour, including short rests. The route follows dirt paths with stairs and some sections surfaced with small stones. We start at approximately 5:30 a.m., so headlamps are needed. Participants should be prepared for a challenging return climb.

Elevation

Several birding outings take place above 2,500 metres (8,200 feet), including visits to Sumapaz, Hacienda El Bosque, Termales del Ruiz, Los Nevados and the upper Montezuma road. Birding at Sumapaz takes place at approximately 2,800–3,200 metres (9,200–10,500 feet). Our highest outing is around Los Nevados, where we expect to reach approximately 4,100 metres (13,450 feet).

Overnight stays above 2,000 metres (6,600 feet) include Bogotá at approximately 2,600 metres (8,500 feet), Cantos del Río Ecohotel at approximately 2,300 metres (7,500 feet), and two nights at Hacienda El Bosque at approximately 3,100 metres (10,200 feet).

High elevations can affect anyone, regardless of fitness. We recommend discussing the tour's elevations and physical demands with your doctor before booking, particularly if you have a heart or lung condition, other relevant health concerns, or a history of altitude illness.

Driving

Most days have a small to moderate amount of driving, but there will be some longer drives of up to several hours, as we transfer from one destination to the next. Some locations will require 4WD vehicles and the roads can be very bumpy.

Climate

Weather varies greatly with elevation, and we should be prepared for temperatures ranging from a cold 4°C (40°F) to 30°C (86°F). Expect cold or cool nights and mornings at higher elevations. Mountain weather can be variable, so pack warm layers and a rain jacket. At all altitudes, remember to have adequate protection from the sun. Bring insect repellent for mosquitoes and other biting insects, particularly in warmer areas.

Boat Trips

We take an approximately one-hour boat excursion through the wetlands at Laguna de Sonso to look for waterbirds and other lowland species. We use a covered, motorized boat accommodating eight people, with additional boats provided according to group size.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes

• All accommodations (Generally good and modern, some more simple and basic)
• All meals and soft drinks
• Airport Transportation
• Ground transportation (bus or van with driver)
• EET guide and local guide with 5 - 10 participants
• Park entry / tour fees
• Gratuities to local guides and drivers

Tour Price Does Not Include

• Flights to and from start/end location
• Travel Insurance
• Items of a personal nature
• Alcoholic Beverages
