

Colombia: Santa Marta Itinerary

[Link: Colombia: Santa Marta](#)

Tour Overview

The Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta is an isolated mountain range with snow-capped peaks within sight of the sea, and is among the most endemic-rich areas in the world. Our comfortable lodge at ProAves' Reserva Natural de las Aves ("RNA") El Dorado is situated on a private reserve at 1950 m on an outlying ridge of the San Lorenzo Ridge with marvelous views of the valleys and the Caribbean beyond. The area supports a range of habitats from 900m to 2600m, including evergreen forests, bamboo thickets and upper-level stunted forests, with scattered clearings and disturbed areas, and many endemic birds (about 15) and specialties occur here including Santa Marta Antpitta, White-tipped Quetzal, Santa Marta Sabrewing (very rare), White-tailed Starfrontlet, Santa Marta Warbler, Santa Marta Parakeet, Santa Marta Mountain-Tanager, Yellow-crowned Redstart, Santa Marta Bush-Tyrant, Santa Marta Brush-Finch, Santa Marta Blossomcrown, Santa Marta Foliage-gleaner, and Santa Marta Antpitta. Other goodies include Brown-rumped Tapaculo, Rusty-headed Spinetail, Band-tailed Guan, Golden-breasted Fruiteater, Yellow-legged and Black-hooded Thrushes, Black-headed Tanager - the list seems endless!! Furthermore a recently-described (2017) species of screech-owl has been found near the lodge.

The more mesic areas near Barranquilla and Minca have a different avifauna, including Chestnut-winged Chachalaca, Zone-tailed Hawk, Red-billed and Coppery Emeralds, Black-backed Antshrike, Rusty-breasted Antpitta, Santa Marta Tapaculo, Venezuelan and Brown-capped Tyrannulets, Golden-fronted Greenlet, Rosy Thrush-Tanager, Swallow Tanager, and Golden-winged Sparrow. We will find another different avifauna at Los Flamencos, where the xerophytic (dry) scrub supports Green-rumped Parrotlet, Buffy Hummingbird, Black-crested Antshrike, White-whiskered Spinetail, Slender-billed Inezia, Vermilion Cardinal, Orinocan Saltator, Pileated Finch, and Tocuyo Sparrow, as well as several lagoons used seasonally by large concentrations of Greater Flamingos.

Our Santa Marta birding tour is an extension to our longer [Colombia birding tour](#). Save \$225 USD (\$300 CAD) when you book on both Colombia tours.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival and Orientation

Our Colombia: Santa Marta birding tour starts in Barranquilla, a port city along the Caribbean coast and readily accessible from North American airports. We meet for dinner at our hotel to discuss the adventure ahead. Night in Barranquilla.

Day 2: Drive to Minca



We will leave our hotel just before dawn, taking a box breakfast with us. After looking for Chestnut-winged Chachalaca, Bicolored Wren and other goodies in a patch of tropical dry forest in a suburb of Barranquilla, we will drive east parallel to the coast, stopping at Isla de Salamanca National Park (the main target, though the chance that we will see it is not high, is the Critically Endangered Sapphire-bellied Hummingbird), and we will also stop at a few other places including one or two roadside ponds. We will have lunch in a restaurant prior to heading inland to Minca, which is in the lower foothills of the Santa Marta range. Night in Minca.

Days 3: Birding and transfer to Santa Marta Mountains



At Minca we will bird around 700 meter elevation in tropical dry forest. We are likely to see several dozen species as we search for Black-backed Antshrike as well as the spectacular Golden-winged Sparrow and Rosy Thrush-Tanager. Aboard 4-wheel drive jeeps we will start driving up the Santa Marta Mountains to our lodge located at 1950m on the San Lorenzo ridge. We will be stopping along the way in several spots in submontane forest and coffee plantations and we will find our first Santa Marta endemics, hopefully including Santa Marta Antbird and Santa Marta Blossomcrown. Night at Mountain House.

Days 4 & 5: Santa Marta Mountains



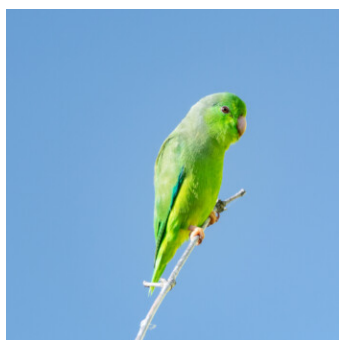
In the gardens at our lodge, hummingbird feeders attract many hummingbirds including White-tailed Starfrontlet, Santa Marta Woodstar and hopefully Lazuline Sabrewing; fruit feeders bring in Blue-naped Chlorophonia and Black-capped Tanager; both Santa Marta and Sierra Nevada Brush-Finches should be in the underbrush; and possibly the endemic Black-fronted Wood-Quail will be present. Santa Marta Screech-owls may call at night. We will also board the jeeps and explore the forests above and below the lodge, paying particular attention to the many endemics and unique subspecies of the region. Higher elevations support a host of "Santa Marta" specialties - Santa Marta Parakeet, Santa Marta Antpitta, Santa Marta Foliage-Gleaner, Santa Marta Bush-Tyrant, Santa Marta Warbler, Santa Marta Mountain-Tanager, and Hermit Wood-Wren, as well as White-tipped Quetzal, Sierra Nevada Antpitta, Rusty-headed and Streak-capped Spinetails, Golden-breasted Fruiteater, White-lored Warbler and Yellow-crowned Redstart. If we are fortunate, we could find the very rare Black-backed Thornbill and/or Santa Marta Sabrewing. Below the lodge the birding is equally exciting - Band-tailed and Sickle-winged Guans, White-tipped Quetzal, Santa Marta Blossomcrown, Masked Trogon, Montane and Strong-billed Woodcreepers, Emerald and Groove-billed Toucanets, Cinnamon Flycatcher, Swallow Tanager, and Yellow-legged and Black-hooded Thrushes. Nights at Mountain House.

Day 6: To Minca and Riohacha



In the morning, we will continue to bird the forests of Santa Marta, specifically looking for any of the specialty species we may not have seen yet. After midday we will drive to Minca and then head east, driving for 3 to 4 hours to Riohacha. Night in Riohacha.

Day 7: Flight to Bogotá and connection to main tour



Before our flight to Bogotá, we have a morning of birding around Riohacha. This will allow us to sample xerophytic scrub and desert habitats and the Los Flamencos Reserve, where specialties include Green-rumped Parrotlet, Buffy Hummingbird, Black-crested Antshrike, White-whiskered Spinetail, Slender-billed Inezia, Vermilion Cardinal, Orinocan Saltator, and Tocuyo Sparrow. Los Flamencos is a national reserve designed to protect several lagoons used seasonally by large concentrations of Greater Flamingos. Among the flamingos occur several other waterbirds, including Roseate Spoonbill, Reddish Egret, Scarlet and White Ibis. Further possibilities include Russet-throated Puffbird, and Chestnut Piculet. This area becomes warm fairly early, so this morning we will have to leave before dawn with a box breakfast to eat on the road. We have a midday flight from Riohacha to Bogotá, arriving in the mid to late afternoon. We gather for a final dinner to discuss our great adventure. Night near the Bogotá airport.

Day 8: Departure or connection to the main tour

Our Colombia: Santa Marta birding tour ends today and you can depart anytime. If you are connecting to our main Colombia birding tour, you will be in the evening after a day to enjoy Bogotá.

What to Expect

Overview

The Colombia Santa Marta tour is a very fast paced birding tour, for the dedicated birder! We typically begin birding before breakfast, as everywhere in the tropics it is desirable to be in good habitat by daybreak when bird activity and song are at their peak. There will be long days out in the field, as we focus on finding those rare endemics. The second morning on the Ridge is factored into the trip to make up for any “rain days”.

Food

Often we are out birding before breakfast and come back to eat. We take most of our meals at the various lodge's 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

Accommodations vary from basic lodges to modern hotels. Please note that due to the remote location of some lodges, internet access may be limited or unreliable.

Walking

The walking on this tour is rated as easy to moderate. We generally do not walk for further than 5 km (3 miles) in length, at a slow pace, but the uneven terrain and heat/humidity can make it harder work. Birding will mainly take place along quiet roads, with forest trails being on relatively wide and easy-to-follow trails.

Driving

Most days have a small to moderate amount of driving, but there will be some longer drives of up to 4 hours as we go from one destination to the next. The Ridge excursion requires 4WD vehicles to get to the trailhead and the road can be very bumpy.

Climate

At higher elevations you can expect cooler temperatures and may need a sweater. Most days will be rainy. Some days it will be hot. Weather above Minca will be hot, but not as sweltering as in the lowlands

Internal Flights

The tour includes 1 in-country flight from Riohacha to Bogota.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes

- All meals and soft drinks
- Excellent accommodation
- 5 - 10 Participants will be guided by one EET guide and 1 local guide
- Park entry/ tour fees
- Ground transportation (bus or van with driver)
- Flight from Riohacha to Bogota at the end of the tour

Tour Price Does Not Include

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