Eagle-Eye Tours

Ecuador Bird Photography Itinerary

Link: Ecuador Bird Photography

Tour Overview

Bird photography opportunities like nowhere else: Ecuador is widely considered to be the best country on Earth for bird photography. The beauty of the birds that are found in the region speaks for itself, but Ecuador uniquely provides incredible infrastructure for visiting bird, wildlife and photography enthusiasts. The lodges here are relatively easy to get to, and perfectly designed for observing and photographing avian life. During this trip, we'll spend time photographing birds at feeding stations set up for photography, as well as in natural forest settings.

Hummingbirds galore: At many of the lodges where we stay, dozens of hummingbirds are continuous visitors to feeders and flowers, where they exhibit no fear of humans. It's a photographer's dream! Their behaviour here makes it so much easier to capture amazing images, and work on photographic technique. From sylphs, to violetears, to sunangles, to woodstars, the Andes boasts incredible diversity of hummingbirds, with equally incredible names. About 40% of all hummingbird species on Earth can be found in Ecuador, and over 40 hummingbird species may be encountered on this trip.

Incredible biodiversity from the Amazon to the Andes: Experiencing the Amazon Rainforest is often considered the top "bucket list" item for nature lovers, and it's easy to see why. With the highest biodiversity on the entire planet, we are sure to encounter a multitude of spectacular bird species, as well as amazing wildlife: monkeys, reptiles, amphibians, and more, all in some of the most spectacularly lush rainforest imaginable. This itinerary combines the Amazon with the adjacent Andes mountains, another "must visit" destination for nature lovers. Here, breathtaking mountain scenery is combined with spectacular bird life that often has little to no fear of people.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Quito



Our workshop begins in Quito, the beautiful and historic capital city of Ecuador, where we'll have an evening orientation and dinner. Night in Quito.

Days 2-5: The Amazon



Our trip begins with a journey into the most biodiverse place on Earth: the Amazon Rainforest. After a short regional flight to the town of Coca, we'll travel by boat downriver into the vicinity of Yasuni National Park, where we'll be based at an amazing and comfortable lodge for four nights. This region is home to an incredible array of birds, with over 600 species recorded in the near vicinity—similar to the number of species recorded in the entire country of Canada! During our stay, we'll visit an impressive canopy tower, providing a unique perspective on canopy-dwelling birds, and a clay lick where parakeets, parrots, and macaws gather to ingest minerals from the soil. We'll also explore the rainforest by canoe at dawn and dusk, photograph birds around the lodge grounds, and visit the local Kichwa community for a traditional lunch. In addition to an incredible diversity of birds, we may also encounter monkeys, caimans, and a variety of reptiles and amphibians as we explore the waterways and forest trails.

Days 6-7: The East Slope



After our time in the Amazon, we'll head west to the eastern slopes of the Andes, where Cabañas San Isidro will be our base for two nights. Here, we'll begin to experience the spectacular hummingbird diversity of the Andes, with species such as the breathtaking Long-tailed Sylph and Chestnut-breasted Coronet regularly visiting the lodge grounds. Early mornings provide outstanding photography opportunities as birds gather to feed on insects attracted to the lodge lights overnight. We'll also visit several nearby reserves, including an active Andean Cock-of-the-Rock lek, where males perform their remarkable courtship displays. The San Isidro Black-banded Owl is often encountered here, and after dark we'll also watch for Mountain Tapir and other nocturnal wildlife.

Days 8-9: The High Andes



On days 8–9, we'll make our way to the higher slopes of the Andes. This region is particularly spectacular, with jaw-dropping mountain scenery, rushing rivers, waterfalls, and expansive páramo landscapes. Our base for these two nights will be the lovely Guango Lodge, just downslope from Papallacta Pass. At this beautiful cloud forest hideaway, we'll be surrounded by hummingbirds, including several new species for the trip. In the mornings, insects attracted to lights near the lodge draw a variety of cloud forest birds onto close-up perches, including flocks of beautiful Turquoise Jays and many others. A short walk from the lodge leads us into the habitat of Torrent Ducks, White-capped Dippers, Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucans, and other cloud forest specialties. We'll also explore the nearby high-Andean páramo in search of alpine specialists such as Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe, Chestnut-winged Cinclodes, Many-striped Canastero, Carunculated Caracara, Andean Condor, and other high-elevation birds.

Days 10-13: Tandayapa Valley and Mindo area



On days 10–13, we travel west of Quito to visit what is arguably the hummingbird photography capital of the world: the Tandayapa Valley. Well over a dozen hummingbird species regularly visit the feeders at our base, Tandayapa Bird Lodge, where they have little fear of people. Tanagers, Rufous Motmots, Crimson-rumped Toucanets, and Toucan Barbets are also frequent visitors to the fruit feeders. While at the lodge, we'll practice photography and lighting techniques using professional photography setups at the feeding stations. We'll also visit several renowned reserves in the region, including Refugio Paz de las Aves, where we'll enjoy exceptional opportunities to photograph Giant and Yellow-breasted Antpittas, visit another spectacular Andean Cock-of-the-Rock lek, and search for specialties such as Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan and Sword-billed Hummingbird. Before returning to Quito, we'll make one final birding stop on the slopes of Pichincha Volcano, where a final array of hummingbirds and other Andean specialties provides a fitting conclusion to our journey.

Day 14: Departure from Quito

The morning provides one final opportunity to reminisce over breakfast before our Ecuador bird photography adventure comes to a close.

What to Expect

Overview

Ecuador Bird Photography is designed for travelers who want time to create standout images. Each day offers rich opportunities to photograph birds up close—often at feeders or along forest edges at first light—along with chances to capture landscapes and other wildlife. We prioritize quality over quantity, spending longer periods with key subjects rather than rushing to build a species list.

After breakfast, we continue with dedicated photography sessions either on the lodge grounds or at nearby reserves, including early-morning visits to special sites like the Andean Cock-of-the-Rock lek. Evenings bring us back to comfortable lodges for dinner, optional technique workshops, and occasional nocturnal walks to explore Ecuador's fascinating night-active creatures.
This is an ideal tour for photographers who enjoy a relaxed, immersive approach. This trip is focused on quality of birds and photography opportunities, rather than quantity of species. For those looking to add as many species as possible to their life list, we suggest our Grand Ecuador tour.

Food

We enjoy excellent meals provided by the various lodges' dining facilities. Some lunches will be a lunch box in a nice setting, or occasionally we will dine at a local eatery. Most dinners will be taken at the accommodation or a nearby restaurant.

Accommodation

The accommodations on this tour range from basic to comfortable, but they all provide fantastic opportunities for bird and wildlife photography in their immediate vicinity.

Walking

While the majority of photography activities on this trip won't require extensive physical activity, some of the sites we visit will require short hikes (2km, ~ 1 mile roundtrip) on uneven terrain. At one lodge (Tandayapa Lodge) there is a 100 meter staircase leading to the entrance. We will also climb stairs at the canopy observation tower at the Sani Lodge. The walk to the Antpitta Refugio Paz De Las Aves is the most challenging walk on some tougher terrain, including hills.

Good footwear for muddy and uneven trail conditions is recommended in order to explore the rainforest by foot. All activities are optional, and incredible photography opportunities can be found in the immediate vicinity of all of our lodges. So, there is much to keep one entertained if you wish to opt-out of any hiking activities in favour of more relaxed photography opportunities.

Elevation

This tour includes several nights and photography excursions at significant elevations. We spend approximately five nights above 2,000 m (6,560 ft), including one night near Quito at about 2,400 m (7,900 ft), two nights at San Isidro at approximately 2,050 m (6,700 ft), and two nights at Guango Lodge, our highest overnight location, at approximately 2,700 m (8,900 ft).

On several daytime excursions, we travel considerably higher. Our high-Andean photography excursions around Papallacta Pass may take us above 4,000 m (13,100 ft). Near the end of the tour, we also visit the slopes of Pichincha Volcano, where elevations may exceed 3,000 m (9,840 ft). These higher elevations are daytime visits, and we descend to lower elevations to sleep.

The effects of altitude vary considerably between individuals. Anyone with concerns about travelling at altitude, particularly those with heart or lung conditions, should discuss this itinerary with their physician before booking.

Climate

Weather varies greatly with elevation, and we should be prepared for a range of temperatures from chilliest thirties to hottest nineties. At all altitudes, we should remember to have adequate protection from the sun. Drizzle and rain are likely, Mosquitoes and other biting insects should not be a

problem on this tour

Driving

Most days have a small to moderate amount of driving. There will be two longer drives, but we make several stops along the way.

Boat Trips

This tour includes a 3 hour motorized canoe ride from Coca to Sani, followed by a 5 minute walk through the jungle up to the Chawllayacu river for a final short paddle canoe ride to Sani Lodge. There are bathrooms at the departure and arrival docks, but none on board. The same trip is taken in reverse when leaving the Sani Lodge.

Participants should also be comfortable getting in and out of a canoe, as we will use this mode of transportation in the Amazon Lowlands.

In Country Flights

This tour includes one short (40 min) in-country flight from Coca to Quito. These will be organised by us and included in the tour price. Each participant is allowed one 10kg carry-on bag and one 23kg checked bag.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes
• All accommodation
• All meals & soft drinks
• 4 - 6 participants with an EET guide
• All transportation between locations during the tour
• Entry fees into reserves
• Gratuities to local guides and drivers
• Ground transportation
• Airport transfer

Tour Price Does Not Include
• Flights to and from the trip start/end point (Quito)
• Travel insurance
• Items of a personal nature
• Alcoholic beverages
