

## Grand Ecuador Itinerary

[Link: Grand Ecuador](#)

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### Tour Overview

Imagine dazzling flocks of multicolored Tanagers flitting through the mists of an east slope cloud forest. Envision a family of Torrent Ducks battling the rush of a sparkling mountain stream and the unforgettable sound of a lek of Screaming Pihás in the steaming lowlands of Amazonia. Imagine seeing three species of the notoriously secretive antpittas at a special feeding station! Just a few of the unique experiences that await you in Ecuador.

Although Ecuador is one of the smaller countries in South America, it boasts an incredible diversity of habitats which support a wonderful array of wildlife. With a list of more than 1500 species of birds, many of which are shared only with adjacent Colombia or Peru, it is difficult to imagine a more exciting birding destination. This amazing variety, together with an excellent network of national parks and naturalist lodges, ensure a never-to-be-forgotten experience.

We explore some of the most famous birding sites in the country on our Grand Ecuador Birding Tour: Mindo and Yanacocha; the windswept Paramo grassland of the high Andes at Papallacta Pass; mid-elevation communities at Guango Lodge, San Isidro, the marvelous Wildsumaco Lodge and the Loreto Road, and the incredible bird-rich Western Amazonia—quite a trip! The variety of birds we have the potential to see is remarkable!

Throughout the tour we become acutely aware of the complexities of tropical bird distribution and we appreciate how much of a barrier are the high peaks of the Andes. We see plenty of birds that are wide-ranging in South America and many others that are restricted to a single habitat. For many, the highlight of the trip is our stay at our jungle retreat in Amazonia. We travel by motorized canoe downstream to our lodge. We have ample time to explore the well-maintained trails as we search for some of the most exciting birds in Western Amazonia. The bird list for this area now stands at well over 500 species and includes some of the rarest and least-known Amazonian species. We hope to encounter such rarities as Long-tailed and Rufous Potoos, Cocha Antshrike, Varzea Schiffornis and even Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoo.

Ecuador has something to please everyone—as you will find out on this exceptional birdwatching tour.

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### Itinerary

## Day 1: Arrival In Quito



Our Grand Ecuador birding tour begins with an evening orientation at our hotel. Night in Quito.

## Day 2: Yanacocha and Tandayapa



We begin our tour by visiting Yanacocha in the morning. On the backside of the Pichincha volcano, Yanacocha is a superb birding area that offers species such as Andean Guan, Stout-billed Cinclodes and Golden-crowned Tanager. Yanacocha is also a hummingbirder's delight, with more than 10 species likely, including Buff-winged Starfrontlet, Golden-breasted Puffleg, Rainbow-bearded Thornbill and Tyrian Metaltail. The Black-breasted Puffleg, a rare endemic known only in this area, is occasionally found here. We travel on to Tandayapa Lodge for lunch, taking in the multitude of hummingbird species and individuals which should be visiting the hummingbird feeders there, and then head to the cloud forest near Bellavista Lodge hoping to add yet one more hummingbird species to this hummingbird-filled day: Gorgeted Sunangel. Finally, we head to Sachatamia Lodge for a three night stay. Night at Sachatamia Lodge.

## Days 3 and 4: Nono - Mindo area: Rio Silanche and Milpe Bird Sanctuary



Over the next 2 days, we will bird the Rio Silanche area, Milpe Bird Sanctuary and the area near Bellavista. There are a number of very special birds to be found and we devote most of the day to sampling the tremendous diversity of this region. Some special birds that we hope to see include Black-and-chestnut Eagle, Golden-headed and Crested Quetzals, Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan and Grass-green Tanager. Night at Sachatamia Lodge.

## Days 5: Nono - Mindo area: Paz de las Aves and on to Guango Lodge



The entire morning will be spent at Paz de las Aves, the private reserve owned by the man who invented the revolutionary concept of feeding antpittas to make them less elusive. The forested areas are home to an incredible diversity of Pacific slope birds including Andean Cock-of-the-Rock, Black-chinned Mountain-Tanager, Toucan Barbet and Black-winged Saltator. In recent years three species of antpitta - Giant, Yellow-breasted and Moustached - have been coming to feeding spots where earthworms are provided and we have an excellent chance of seeing these very elusive species. We wind our way up the slopes east of Quito to Papallacta Pass, where the 4000 meter high páramo holds a fascinating group of high-altitude species. We hope to see, among others, Many-striped Canastero, Tawny Antpitta, and with a lot of luck perhaps, Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe, Ecuadorian Hillstar and an Andean Condor or two (we depend on there being clear conditions with no mist up at the pass). At Guango Lodge we will look for the spectacular Sword-billed Hummingbird, Tourmaline Sunangel, and perhaps Gorgeted Woodstar and with incredible luck maybe even Mountain Avocetbill. Night in Guango Lodge.

## Day 6: Guango Lodge



At and near Guango Lodge, we should be looking for a host of new species - Slaty Brush-Finch, Masked Trogon, Andean Guan, Rufous-breasted Chat-Tyrant, Smoky Bush-Tyrant, Turquoise and Inca Jays, Mountain Cacique, Dusky Piha, Glowing Puffleg and, with luck, a real prize, Mountain Avocetbill. If we were unable to visit Papallacta Pass yesterday, we will have a second opportunity today. Night in Guango Lodge.

## Days 7 - 8: San Isidro



We leave Guango and travel further down the eastern slopes to the superb Cabañas San Isidro. Hummingbirds are well represented, including Chestnut-breasted Coronet and Long-tailed Sylph. Mixed-species flocks pass through the forest, quetzals call from the canopy, army ants attract a host of followers. The mystery owl is still present - it looks much like a Black-banded Owl, but not quite right! The list of goodies seems endless and includes Green-and-black Fruiteater, White-capped Parrot, Tyrannine Woodcreeper, Black-billed Peppershrike, and Golden-eyed Flowerpiercer. We spend two nights here exploring this area and enjoying this wonderful lodge. Nights at San Isidro Lodge.

## Day 9: San Isidro to Wildsumaco Lodge

We bird the Guacamayos Ridge near San Isidro and then head downslope to Parque Nacional Sumaco for a picnic lunch, before traveling on to Wildsumaco Lodge for a three night stay. The hummingbird feeders at Wildsumaco Lodge are spectacular and host yet another set of species that will add to our growing hummingbird list for the tour. Night at Wildsumaco Lodge.

## Days 10 - 11: Wildsumaco Lodge



Wildsumaco Lodge has gained a reputation for its tremendous birding potential. Some of the great birds we look for include Amazonian Umbrellabird, Coppery-chested Jacamar, Ecuadorian Piedtail, Lemon-browed Flycatcher, Bronze-green Euphonia, Wire-crested Thorntail, Golden-collared Honeycreeper, Orange-eared Tanager and much more. The birdlist at the lodge is well over 400 species, an incredibly rich avifauna. Whilst here we visit the Antpitta and Face Trails, and forest hummingbird feeders. Nights at Wildsumaco Lodge.

## Day 12: Travel to Amazon Lowlands



After breakfast at Wildsumaco, we head to Coca, with a few short birding stops on the way. Arriving at Coca, we take a motorized canoe ride down the Napo River. The rainforests here are among the most complex of biological communities, and the many different habitats collectively boast over 500 bird species. This region, on the eastern slope of the Andes, is in the tropical lowlands of Western Amazonia. Our lodge lies in the heart of this wilderness, deep within the Ecuadorian Amazon and alongside a small lake, where floating water hyacinths and grasses obscure the shores. To the north lies the Cuyabeno Reserve and along the southern border stretches vast Yasuni National Park. In the corridor between, located on 40,000 hectares (100,000 acres) of untouched rainforest lies our lodge, home to 1,500 species of trees, hundreds of climbing vines, and exotic flowers, as well as over 500 species of birds, 13 species of monkeys and 1,000 species of butterflies. As we travel the river, zigzagging our way around the many sandbars, we look for some of the river birds such as Black Skimmer, Yellow-billed Tern and Black Caracara. There is also an observation tower that will give you a bird's eye view across the thousands of shades of green and a chance to see a host of new birds. Night at our Amazonian lodge.

## Days 13 - 15: Amazon Lowlands



During our stay, which for many will be the highlight of our trip, we take daily hikes and canoe trips to trails along the lake and river. These excursions will give us a chance to observe a wide variety of birds and mammal species. There are a number of very rare and localized birds to be found here such as White-lored Antpitta, Long-tailed and Rufous Potoos, Cocha Antshrike, Varzea Schiffornis, Parker's Spinetail, Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoo, and much more. Mammals are well represented, and include such choice species as Brazilian Tapir, Giant River Otter and even Jaguar. Nights at our Amazonian lodge.

## Day 16: Return to Quito

In the morning, we take motorized canoes back to Coca and our return flight to Quito, arriving around noontime. In the afternoon, we will drive to Tambo Condor for lunch and bird Antisana National Park. Night in Quito.

## Day 17: Departure, Quito

Our Grand Ecuador birding tour ends today as we make our flight connections home.

# What to Expect

## Overview

The Grand Ecuador tour is a fast-paced birding tour. We usually start the day early with a pre-breakfast walk (5am). In forest regions, we concentrate on "edge" birding until light is sufficient to enter forest trails. Often bird activity slackens off by noon and we may return to our hotel for lunch and a short siesta, after which we bird again in the coolness of the late afternoon. We may schedule optional night walks for nocturnal species, spotlighting in the forest at night.

## Food

We enjoy excellent meals provided by the various lodges' dining facilities. Some lunches will be a lunch box in a nice setting, or occasional at a local eatery. Most dinners will be taken at the accommodation or a nearby restaurant. 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 to modern, and all will be comfortable with hot water, but without AC.

## Walking

Birding will be mainly along quiet roads, and we enter forest areas on relatively wide and easy-to-follow trails. Our longest walk will be 3 kms (2 miles) long taking 2 hours. The tour takes in the Pacific slope forests at mid-elevation, which are renowned for their diversity. At higher elevation, we

bird along the roadside a short distance from the vehicle. Altitude sickness is not a trivial matter; anyone with concerns—especially those with heart or respiratory conditions—should consult a medical professional.

## **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.

## **Climate**

April is an excellent time to visit Ecuador, though participants should expect a wide range of weather conditions due to the dramatic elevation changes throughout the tour. In the high Andes around Quito, Papallacta Pass, and Antisana National Park (2,800–4,200 m / 9,200–13,800 ft), mornings and evenings can be cold, with temperatures typically ranging from 0–15°C (32–59°F). Days are often sunny with intense equatorial sunlight, but wind, fog, drizzle, and occasional rain showers are common at higher elevations. Mid-elevation cloud forests such as Tandayapa, Mindo, San Isidro, and Wildsumaco (1,200–2,200 m / 3,900–7,200 ft) are generally mild and humid, with temperatures usually between 15–25°C (59–77°F). These regions frequently experience mist, cloud cover, and afternoon rain showers, with humidity often ranging from 70–100%. In the Amazon lowlands near Coca and the Napo River (200–300 m / 650–1,000 ft), conditions are tropical: hot, humid, and often wet, with temperatures commonly between 24–32°C (75–90°F) and humidity regularly exceeding 85%. Overall, travelers should be prepared for rapidly changing mountain weather, muddy trails, cool high-altitude mornings, warm humid forests, and regular rain at almost any point during the trip.

## **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.

## **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.

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# **What's Included**

### **Tour Price Includes**

- All accommodations - generally good and modern
- All meals & soft drinks
- Guides - 1 guide with 4 - 8 pax, 2 guides with 9 - 12 pax
- Ground transportation
- Includes one in-country flight Coca - Quito
- Park entry/ tour fees
- Gratuities to local driver

### **Tour Price Does Not Include**

- Flights to and from Quito
- Travel Insurance
- Items of a personal nature
- Alcoholic beverages

