

Grand Ecuador Itinerary

[Link: Grand Ecuador](#)

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 Columbia 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.

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 hummingbird'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. The afternoon is free for sightseeing in Quito or exploring areas near the capital. Night in Quito.

Day 17: Departure, Quito

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

What to Expect

On our Ecuador birding tour, a typical day, begins with 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. We concentrate on "edge" birding until light is good enough to enter forest trails. On a couple of travel days, we rise very early to give ourselves plenty of time to reach our destinations. After lunch we may have time for a siesta or enjoy watching hummingbirds at feeders at the lodges. In the late afternoon we venture again to the forest. We may schedule optional night walks for nocturnal species. spotlighting in the forest at night.

Trails may be muddy, therefore good walking footwear is always recommended. Our 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; those with heart or respiratory conditions should consult their physician.

Our tour includes one in-country flight and day-trips of several hours duration. On most days we travel short distances with most time being spent outdoors. Birding will be mainly along quiet roads, and we enter forest areas on relatively wide and easy-to-follow trails. Accommodations vary from basic to modern, and all will be comfortable. Weather varies greatly with elevation, and we should be prepared for a range of temperatures from chilliest thirties to hottest nineties. Layers and a windbreaker are the solution in the mountains. At all altitudes, we should remember to have adequate protection from the sun. Drizzle and rain are likely, therefore stout, waterproof footwear, a light rain jacket and waterproof hat are recommended. Mosquitoes and other biting insects should not be a problem on this tour; however, bring insect repellent.

We enjoy excellent meals provided by the various lodges' dining facility. Some lunches will be a lunch box in a nice setting; occasionally we dine in local eateries. In the evening, after dinner, we discuss the day's events and sightings and list birds and other wildlife seen.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes

- All accommodations - generally good and modern
- All meals
- 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
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