



BIRDING MAN

A D V E N T U R E S

Ecuador: Mountains of Magic

September 21st – 30th, 2025



A Giant Antpitta at Paz de las Aves bird sanctuary



Trip Summary

I had the great fortune of spending two years in Ecuador as a Peace Corps volunteer from 2008-2010. During my time there, I fell in love with its people, culture, and landscapes. Ecuador is a country of astounding biological and cultural diversity, encompassing an area smaller than the state of Colorado yet harboring more species of birds than the entirety of North America. For nature lovers like me, Ecuador is little different from a dream, brimming with exotic orchids, bizarre jungle plants, windswept *páramo* (Andean grasslands), and 14 different vibrant indigenous nationalities. In terms of birdlife, Ecuador is home to 1659 confirmed species of birds, ranking 5th in the world in bird species richness. Every time you turn around or move to a different altitude, there are new ecosystems to explore and new birds to find!

This carefully crafted trip will take you through the most breathtaking and diverse montane habitats Ecuador has to offer. Renowned for its abundance of colorful tanagers, hummingbirds, toucans, and elusive antpittas, Ecuador's northern Andes is a birdwatcher's paradise. On our journey, we will explore high *páramo* grasslands of the central highlands, misty cloud forests and montane rainforests of both western and eastern Andean slopes.

During my Peace Corps service, I met Sandra Morocho, a charismatic Quichua woman from San Francisco de Borja, a town in the Andean foothills bordering the Amazon basin. Sandra founded Birdwatchers Valle del Quijos, a community-based organization comprised of over 15 families who have reforested parts of their farms to support birdwatching tourism within buffer zones of the Sumaco Biosphere Reserve. Your participation on this trip contributes directly to landscape restoration efforts being led by Sandra and Birdwatchers Valle del Quijos.

Our trip will be led by Sandra and other local bilingual birding guides. We will stay in full-service local lodges complete with a wide array of amenities and easy access to world class birding. Safety is of utmost importance and has been fully considered for all regions of the tour. Birding Man Adventures is committed to making your experience in Ecuador one you will remember fondly for the rest of your life. Not only can you add hundreds of species to your life list, but you can do so in a way that leaves a positive mark on local communities while helping to preserve Ecuador's threatened ecosystems.

We look forward to showing you the best Ecuador has to offer!

Itinerary in Brief

Day	Activities	Food	Lodging
1	Arrival to Quito Transfer to Puembo Birding Garden	D	Quito
2	Chakana Condor Reserve Antisana Reserve Return to Puembo Birding Garden	BLD	Quito
3	Papallacta Pass Guango Lodge Transfer to Rio Quijos	BLD	El Chaco
4	Birding Rio Quijos farms Templo del Buho Return to Rio Quijos	BLD	El Chaco
5	Birding Rio Quijos farms Vida del Kinde Return to Rio Quijos	BLD	El Chaco
6	Cosanga and Guacamayos Ridge Transfer to Papallacta Hot Springs	BLD	Papallacta
7	Yanacocha Reserve Balcon Tumpiki Transfer to Mindo	BL	Mindo
8	Optional Rest Day in Mindo Tandayapa Lodge Bellavista Lodge Return to Mindo	BL	Mindo
9	Recinto 23 de Junio Milpe Bird Reserve Return to Mindo	BL	Mindo
10	Paz de las Aves Maraksasha Bird Reserve Transfer to Quito	BLD	Quito
11	Breakfast at hotel Transfer to airport Departure	B	None



Destinations for the proposed 11-day itinerary showing sites with a wide range of altitudes on both slopes



Your guide will greet you at the airport in Quito, Ecuador

Itinerary

Day 1: Home | Quito, Ecuador

- Arrival to Quito Mariscal International Airport
- Transfer to Puembo Birding Garden (30 min; 19.5 km)
- Relax at hotel with optional birding in the garden
 - **Target Birds:**
 - *Western Emerald*
 - *Scrub Tanager*
 - *Blue and Yellow Tanager*
 - *Croaking Ground Dove*
 - *Vermillion Flycatcher*
- Welcome Dinner at hotel
- Overview of Trip

Lodging: [Puembo Birding Garden](#)

Meals included: D



The Scrub Tanager is a specialist of arid intermountain Andean valleys. They are regularly spotted at Puembo Birding Garden



Puembo Birding Garden is a quiet oasis near the city of Quito, Ecuador



The majestic Andean Condor will be our first target as we peruse the cliffs near Chakana Birding Reserve outside of Quito

Day 2: Quito | Chakana Birding Reserve | Antisana Reserve | Quito

- Breakfast at hotel
- Transfer to Chakana Birding Reserve (1 ½ hrs; 46.9 km)
 - **Target Birds:**
 - *Andean Condor*
 - *Giant Hummingbird*
 - *Black-tailed Trainbearer*
 - *Black-crested Warbler*
 - *Spectacled Redstart*
 - **Target Mammals:**
 - *Spectacled Bear (Andean Bear)*
- Transfer to Antisana Reserve (30 min; 18 km)
 - **Target Birds:**
 - *Ecuadorian Hillstar*

- *Black-faced Ibis*
- *Silvery Grebe*
- *Carunculate Caracara*
- *Andean Lapwing*
- *Andean Gull*
- *Chestnut-winged and Stout-billed Cinclodes*
- *Many-striped Canastero*
- *Tawny Antpitta*
- Return to Puembo Birding Garden

Lodging: [Puembo Birding Garden](#)

Meals included: B, L, D



High altitude grassland (paramo) is backed by the snow-covered Antisana volcano. You might be on the equator, but it can still be downright chilly. Make sure to dress in warm layers and drink plenty of water. Elevations explored will range from 9100 to 12800 feet and it is often humid and wet



The Carunculated Caracara (left) is a falcon often seen on the ground chasing insects and pulling up worms from the soil. The Ecuadorian Hillstar (right) is one of my favorite hummingbirds in Ecuador, often found around chuquiraga plants in the highest páramo



You are likely to hear the Tawny Antpitta before you see it. Wait long enough and it is sure to jump out for the perfect photo opportunity

Day 3: Quito | Papallacta Pass | Guango Lodge | Rio Quijos Eco Lodge

- Early Breakfast
- Transfer to Papallacta Pass (45 min; 35.5 km)
Altitude (14,700 ft – highest point of trip)
 - **Target Birds:**
 - *Shining Sunbeam*
 - *Black-billed Shrike Tyrant*
 - *Red-crested Cotinga*
 - *Cineros Conebill*
 - *Tufted Tit-Tyrant*
 - *Buff-breasted Mountain Tanager*
 - *Red-rumped Bush-Tyrant*
 - *Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe*
- Transfer to Guango Lodge (30 min; 25.7 km)
- Lunch
 - **Target Birds:**
 - *Tourmaline Sunangel*
 - *White-bellied Woodstar*
 - *Sword-billed Hummingbird*
 - *Grey-breasted Mountain Toucan*
 - *Cinnamon Flycatcher*
 - *Torrent Duck*
 - *Turquoise Jay*
 - *Scarlet-bellied Mountain Tanager*
 - *Mountain Cacique*
- Transfer to El Chaco



A Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe near Papallacta Pass

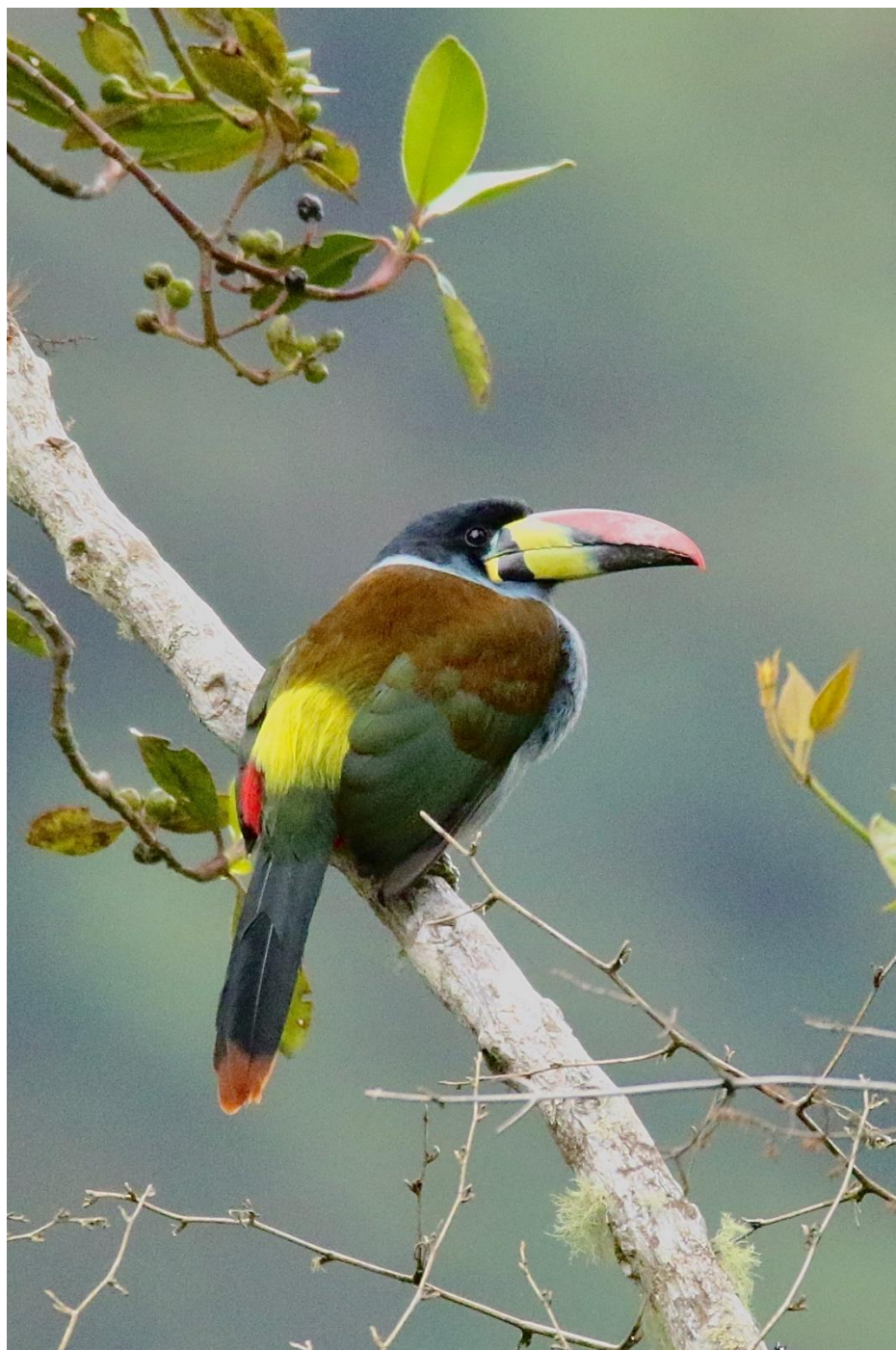


A Hooded Mountain Tanager near Guango Lodge

Lodging: [Rio Quijos Eco Lodge](#)

Meals included: B, L, D

Altitude 5,000 ft.



The Gray-breasted Mountain Toucan is an absolute showstopper and can be found in the cloud forests near Guango Lodge. This mountain toucan occupies a similar niche to the Plate-billed Mountain Toucan on the western slope, which we will find later in the tour



The Rio Quijos Eco Lodge in El Chaco, Ecuador



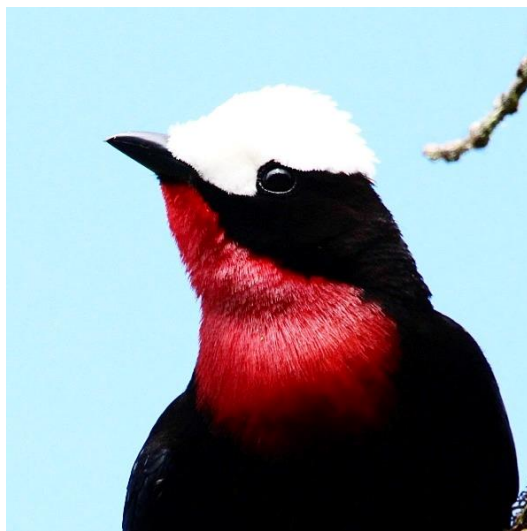
Standard bedroom at Rio Quijos

Day 4: El Chaco | Templo del Buho | El Chaco

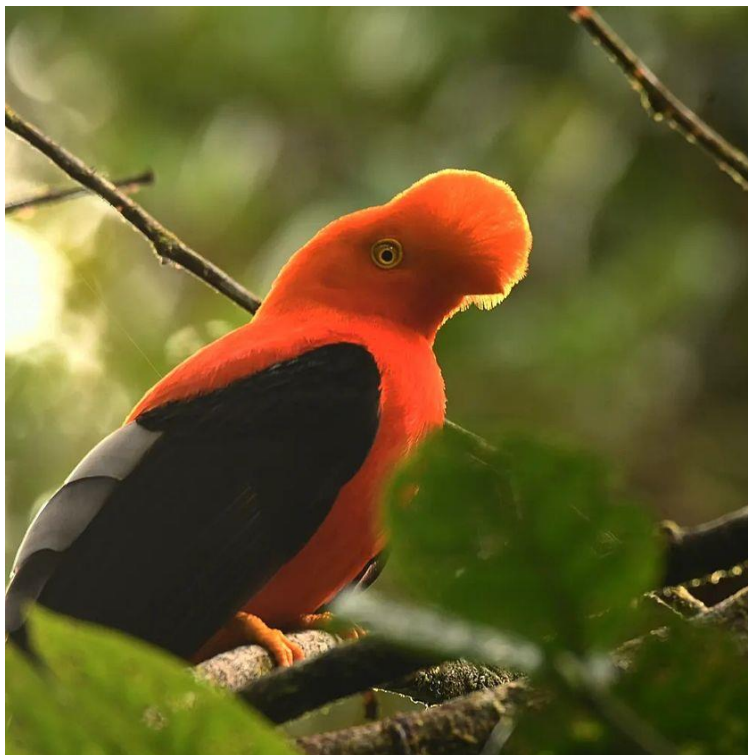
- Breakfast
- Transfer to Templo del Buho (8 min; 4.5 km)
 - **Target Birds:**
 - *White-capped Tanager*
 - *Green-fronted Lancebill*
 - *Andean Motmot*
 - *Red-billed Parrot*
 - *Long-tailed Tapaculo*
 - *Saffron-crowned Tanager*
 - *Torrent Duck*
 - *Giant Cowbird*
- Borja River (20 min; 12.4 km)
 - Target Birds:
 - *Golden-headed Quetzal*
 - *Crested Quetzal*
 - *Cock-of-the-Rock lek*
- Return to Rio Quijos Eco Lodge

Lodging: [Rio Quijos Eco Lodge](#)

Meals included: B, L, D



Birdwatchers Rio Quijos have chosen the White-capped Tanager as their emblem. This species can be found in many of the farms in the Rio Quijos region, nestled in the eastern Andes between 1600 – 3200 meters in altitude (Photo: Manuel Omar Muñoz Guerrero)



The Andean Cock of the Rock is a bizarre bird that is known for its treetop courtship displays on communal leks. We will visit a known lek near Rio Quijos (Photo: Manuel Omar Muñoz Guerrero)

Day 5: El Chaco | Finca “Vida del Kinde” | Finca “El Madrigal” | El Chaco

- Early breakfast at hotel
- Transfer to finca “Vida del Kinde” (30 min)
 - **Target Birds:**
 - Wire-crested Thorntail
 - Black-throated Mango
 - Gorgeted Woodstar
- Transfer to finca “El Madrigal”
 - **Target Birds:**
 - Ladder-tailed Nightjar
 - Sunbittern
- Return to Rio Quijos Eco Lodge



A Wire-crested Thorntail at finca Vida del Kinde

Lodging: [Rio Quijos Eco Lodge](#)

Meals included: B, L, D



Birdwatchers Valle Rio Quijos guide Manuel Omar Muñoz Guerrero

Day 6: El Chaco | Guacamayos Ridge | Papallacta Hot Springs

- 7:00 am breakfast at hotel
- Transfer to Guacamayos Ridge (50 min; 42.2 km)
 - **Target Birds:**
 - *Black-billed Mountain Toucan*
 - *Greater Scythebill*
 - *Dusky Piha*
 - *Green and Black Fruiteater*
 - *Rufous-headed Pygmy-Tyrant*
 - *Yellow-bellied Chat Tyrant*
 - *Rufous Wren*
 - *Grass-green Tanager*
 - *Hooded Mountain Tanager*
- Transfer to Papallacta (1 hr 45 min)
- Optional soaking at Papallacta Hot Springs
- Optional afternoon hike on your own
- Dinner

Lodging: [Hosteria Pampallacta Termales](#)

Meals included: B, L, D



The hot springs resort at Papallacta provides an incredibly relaxing setting for soaking. You likely will see hummingbirds like Shining Sunbeam and Green Trainbearer in the vegetation nearby



Enjoy an afternoon and an evening at the Hosteria Pampa Llacta. Each room has its own private fireplace and jacuzzi and the hotel grounds have several hot spring pools



The typical landscapes where farms and forest meet near Rio Quijos



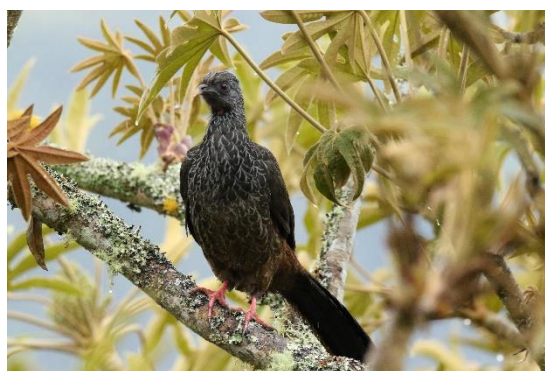
The Rufous Motmot (left) and Cinnamon Flycatcher (right) are two fairly common birds of submontane rainforests of Ecuador

Day 7: Papallacta | Zuroloma | Mindo

- Early departure from hotel
- Transfer to Zuroloma Preserve (2 hrs 15 min; 102 km)
- **Zuroloma Preserve** (11,500 – 12,150 ft) – Zuroloma directly abuts the Yanacocha Preserve, managed by the Jocotoco Foundation, a conservation NGO that has helped purchase large tracts of land in Ecuador for biodiversity protection. Zuroloma protects high elevation cloud forest, polylepis forest, and elfin forest on the northwest slope of Volcan Pichincha. It is connected to other protected areas downslope.
 - **Target Birds:**
 - *Giant Conebill*
 - *Andean Pygmy Owl*
 - *Golden-breasted Puffleg*
 - *Sapphire-vented Puffleg*
 - *Great Sapphirewing*
 - *Sword-billed Hummingbird*
 - *Buff-winged Starfrontlet*
 - *Golden-eyed flowerpiercer*
 - *Equatorial Antpitta*
 - *Undulated Antpitta*
 - *Rufous Antpitta*
 - *Imperial Snipe*
 - *Scarlet-bellied Mountain Tanager*
 - *Golden-crowned Tanager*
 - *Barred Fruiteater*
 - *Spillman's Tapaculo*
 - *Ocellated Tapaculo*
 - *Crowned Chat-tyrant*
 - *Andean Guan*
- Lunch at Mirador Guaycapi
 - **Target Birds:**
 - *White-booted Racket-tail*
 - *Purple-throated woodstar*
 - *Bay-headed Tanager*
 - *Black-capped Tanager*
 - *Blue-necked Tanager*
 - *Russet-backed Oropendola*
- Transfer to Balcon Tumpiki



A Sword-billed Hummingbird at Zuro Loma



The Andean Guan may be spotted at Zuroloma

- **Target Birds:**
 - *Violet-tailed Sylph*
 - *Plate-billed Mountain Toucan*
 - *Crimson-rumped Toucanet*
 - *Toucan Barbet*
 - *Blue-winged Mountain Tanager*
 - *Black-chinned Mountain Tanager*
- Return to Mindo
- Independent dinner

Lodging: [Casa de Vista Alta](#)

Meals included: B, L



The Plate-billed Mountain Toucan is my favorite bird in Ecuador. These charismatic blue toucans live in high elevation cloud forests and can be found regularly at Balcon Tumpiki near Mindo



The Toucan Barbet is another gorgeous bird we will find on the grounds of Balcon Tumpiki



The Long-wattled Umbrellabird may be the most bizarre bird I have ever seen. It is a member of the Cotinga family and is known to gather on mating leks, much like Cock-of-the-Rocks. The rainforests outside of the small community of Recinto 23 de Junio is one of the best places to find them

Day 8: Mindo | Tandayapa | Bellavista | Mindo

- Optional rest day in Mindo
 - Several fun activities are available in the area, including hikes to waterfalls, chocolate tours, butterfly gardens, and zip lining. These activities are optional and are not included in the cost of the tour.
- Those interested in birding today, will transfer to **Tandayapa Bird Lodge** (1 hr 3 min; 41.6 km)
 - **Target Birds:**
 - *White-booted Racket-tail*
 - *Black-capped Tanager*
 - *Red-billed Parrot*
 - *Russet-backed Oropendola*
 - *Emerald Tanager*
 - *Golden-winged Manakin*
- Picnic lunch on the Nono-Mindo Road
- Transfer to **Bellavista Cloud Forest Reserve** (19 min; 6.1 km)
 - **Target Birds:**
 - *Toucan Barbet*
 - *Green-and-Black Fruiteater*
 - *Russet-crowned Warbler*
 - *Gorgeted Sunangel*
 - *Empress Brilliant*
 - *Plate-billed Mountain Toucan*
 - *Brown Inca*
 - *Violet-tailed Sylph*
 - *Grass Green Tanager*
 - *Blue-and-Black Tanager*
 - *Beryl-spangled Tanager*
 - *Tanager Finch*
- Return to Mindo (51 min; 22.9 km)
- Independent dinner



The White-booted Racket-tail is a charismatic hummingbird you will not forget

Lodging: [Casa de Vista Alta](#)

Meals included: B, L



Breakfast with a view at Casa de Vista Alta in Mindo



Mystical scenes from the western Cordillera near Mindo

Day 9: Mindo | Recinto 23 de Junio | Milpe | Mindo

- Optional rest day in Mindo
 - Several fun activities are available in the area, including hikes to waterfalls, chocolate tours, butterfly gardens, and zip lining. These activities are optional and are not included in the cost of the tour.
- Those interested in birding today, will transfer to the village of 23 de Junio (56 min; 38.4 km)
 - **Target Birds:**
 - *Long-wattled Umbrellabird*
 - *Choco Toucan*
 - *Collared Aracari*
 - *Crimson-bellied Woodpecker*
 - *Bat Falcon*
 - *Ornate flycatcher*
- Lunch in Los Bancos
- Transfer to **Milpe Bird Sanctuary** (37 min; 19.3 km) – This 65-hectare reserve protects one of the most important remnants of forest in the Choco Endemic Area of Ecuador. Because the reserve is some 500 m lower than Mindo, it harbors many endemic species not found in the Mindo Valley.
 - **Target Birds:**
 - *Velvet-purple Coronet*
 - *Empress Brilliant*
 - *Purple-bibbed Whitetip*
 - *Wedge-billed Hummingbird*
 - *Barred Puffbird*
 - *Striped Woodhaunter*
 - *Pacific Tuftedcheek*
 - *Moss-backed Tanager*
 - *Glistening-green Tanager*
 - *Choco Warbler*
 - *Club-winged Manakin*
 - *Golden-winged Manakin*
- Return to Mindo
- Independent dinner



Posing with Don Luis Antija on our way back from the Long-wattled Umbrellabird lek on his farm

Lodging: [Casa de Vista Alta](#)

Meals included: B, L

Day 10: Mindo | Refugio Paz de las Aves | Maraksacha Reserve | Quito

- Early morning start
- Transfer to **Refugio Paz de las Aves** (42 min; 32.3 km)
- Refugio Paz de las Aves may be the most popular mom and pop birding destination in Ecuador. Angel Paz and his brother Rodrigo have habituated secretive Antpittas to feed on grubs that they provide them along the trails. The Paz brothers' business has provided them a means to protect the surrounding forest on the farm.
 - **Target Birds:**
 - *Andean Cock-of-the-Rock (western subspecies is red)*
 - *Giant Antpitta*
 - *Ochre-breasted Antpitta*
 - *Yellow-breasted Antpitta*
 - *Moustached Antpitta*
 - *Chestnut-crowned Antpitta*
 - *White-throated Quail-Dove*
 - *Orange-breasted fruit eater*
 - *Sickle-winged Guan*
- Transfer to **Maraksacha Reserve** (51 min; 39.3 km)
- Maraksacha Reserve connects inter-Andean forest with the cloud forest above it. It was created to protect the high cloud forest, one of the most threatened ecosystems in Ecuador due to cattle ranching and deforestation. Maraksacha seeks to create a model of sustainable living and includes a model organic farm.
 - **Target Birds:**
 - White-bellied Woodstar
 - White-winged Brushfinch
 - Golden Grosbeak
 - Rufous-chested Tanager
 - Buff-breasted Tanager
- Transfer to hotel near airport in Quito
- Final group dinner
- Summary of Trip and Celebration

Lodging: TBD

Meals included: B, L, D



Angel Paz on the trail with several curious Giant Antpittas

Day 10: Quito | Home

- Breakfast at hotel
- Transfer to airport (30 min; 19.5 km)
- Departure

Lodging: None

Meals included: B



Ecuador: Mountains of Magic tour in October 2024 at Zuro Loma Reserve west of Quito.



Price per person: \$3,000 per person, single supplement \$600

Includes:

- ✓ Driver and professional bilingual guide throughout the tour
- ✓ Ground transportation
- ✓ All hotels
- ✓ Meals listed on itinerary (note that 3 dinners - in Mindo - will be independent)
- ✓ All fees and permits
- ✓ Water and snacks throughout the trip
- ✓ General Liability insurance and auto insurance
- ✓ 24-hour assistance in case of emergency
- ✓ Rubber boots

Does not include:

- × Flight
- × Medical insurance
- × Travel insurance
- × Evacuation costs
- × Alcoholic beverages
- × Personal expenses
- × Activities and food not included on the itinerary
- × Optional tips to local drivers and guides
- × Laundry and other items of personal nature

Please note that this itinerary cannot be 100% guaranteed, as it is only a rough guide and can be changed due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors.



What You Need to Know

Tour Pace:

The tour pace is moderate. Birding will take place in the mornings and late afternoons and we will occasionally provide optional alternatives to birding, in case rest is preferred. Some days will involve several hours of driving. We will make sure to include ample restroom breaks and stops for birding on durable surfaces and trails between destinations. We will make sure to include time for bird photography. In general, breakfasts and lunches will be quick and dinners will be longer and more relaxing.

Transportation:

You will be traveling in a 20-passenger coaster bus with windows. There will be sufficient room for personal baggage.

Lodging:

You will be staying at a combination of 2- and 3-star hotels and lodges throughout the tour. Each accommodation has been diligently vetted for quality and assurance. Please see websites at hyperlinks above.

ATM Machines and Payment Methods:

ATMs are quite limited on this tour. The most convenient place to withdraw money (Ecuador's official currency is US dollars) is at the Quito Airport, before the start of the tour. There is an ATM in Los Bancos, near Mindo, which will be visited on Day 9, however, we have had instances where it does not work. Please see websites at hyperlinks above. Most of the places we will be going to accept major credit cards, but it is good to have cash on hand just in case the systems are down.

Altitude:

Quito is located at 9,350 ft; 2,850 m above sea level). Highest elevations will be reached at Papallacta Pass (14,700 ft; 5400 m above sea level) on Day 3. Please consult with your doctor if you have medical conditions that may be exacerbated at high elevations. You may experience some minor irritations such as a slight headache and mild dizziness, but symptoms should disappear as we descend to lower elevations. You may consider taking Diamox (Acetazolamide) and/or Acetaminophen before traveling to



higher elevations, but please consult your doctor. Eat a lighter meal before heading to higher altitude, stay well-hydrated, and try to avoid caffeine and alcohol.

Weather:

You should be prepared for all kinds of weather on this trip. The Chocó forests, below Mindo, are humid and warm, reaching a maximum of 82 °F (28 °C) and a minimum of 59 °F (15 °C) at night. Chocó forests are probably one of the most humid areas of the world, and during our stay there, we will likely experience some rain, which should not impact our birding. Quito can feel quite cold, reaching temperature lows of 57 °F (14 °C) and humid. The eastern slope of the Andes has areas that are cold at night. The coldest region we will be visiting are the highlands of Antisana and Papallacta Pass, where temperatures can fall to 41 °F (5 °C).

Safety:

Ecuador is generally a safe country to visit. However, it has recently received bad press due to increased gang-related activity near Guayaquil and several coastal cities. The US Department of State currently designates Ecuador as Level 2: Exercise increased caution. We have been actively communicating with Ecuadorian residents and friends currently living in Ecuador are confident that the areas we will visit on this trip remain safe. We continue to be vigilant regarding safety, as it is our utmost priority, and if at any point in time safety conditions change and we deem them to be unsafe in the areas we will travel to, we will cancel the trip immediately. Please read our cancellation policy below and on our [Terms and Conditions](#) page.

Laundry:

Laundry services are available at all lodges on this trip, however, please note that laundry fees are not included in the tour pricing.

Internet:

Wi-Fi is available in Quito, Mindo, and Papallacta, while internet is limited or non-existent in Rio Quijos. You might consider purchasing a SIM card at Quito airport on the day of your arrival. Your guide will be meeting you at the airport and can help you with this.



Photography:

When photographing at humming and/or antpitta feeders, we are not permitted to alter the environment in any way – though you may want to create a more natural environment for photography.

Meals:

Most of the meals will be fixed menu options where you will always have a vegetarian option. There will be three nights where you are free to get meals on your own in Mindo. Please inform of us of any dietary preferences or restrictions in advance.

Travel Insurance:

We do not provide travel (or medical) insurance. We strongly advise that you purchase a travel insurance package. Please read our **cancellation policy** below and on our [Terms and Conditions Page](#).

READY TO BOOK THIS TOUR?

Registration and Payment Information:

Registration and all payments, including initial deposit, should be made through our trip portal on [We Travel](#). We do accept credit cards for an additional 2.9% fee, but you may also pay by bank transfer or check. We request a \$1,000 initial deposit upon registration. **Full payment is due 90 days prior to tour departure.**

CANCELLATIONS: If we cancel a tour due to low attendance, severe weather, COVID-19, or other unforeseen event, participants may either move their payments to another trip of their choice or receive a full refund. If you cancel your spot on a tour we intend to operate more than 90 days from departure, you will be eligible for a full refund. If cancelled within 90 days of departure, no refund will be given **UNLESS** we are able to fill your spot(s) with another participant(s). In that situation, \$250 will be withheld for administrative purposes, but the remainder of your payment will be refunded. We highly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to cover your investment in case of injury or illness to you or a family member prior to or during a trip.