

ECUADOR: Mindo and the Western Andes

Saturday 23 January to Sunday 31 January , 2010

Guided by Gary Rosenberg

Price: \$2300

Short one week tour (Saturday to Sunday) designed to stay at one comfortable Septimo Paraiso for the entire time. Concentrates on west slope of the Ecuadorian Andes. Visits Yanacocha, Tandayapa, Mindo, Paz de las Aves, Milpe, and Rio Silanche. Incredible hummingbird watching with 40+ species. Andean Cock-of-the-Rock lek. Nice variety of Choco specialties.

The Andes of Western Ecuador has become one of the most popular birding destinations in Ecuador, with several now-famous sites such as Tandayapa, Mindo, Paz de las Aves, Milpe, and the Rio Silanche, all within a two hour drive of the capital Quito. Our short tour will be based out of a very comfortable lodge near Mindo, where we will stay for six nights, and have access to many different private reserves which have become the hallmark of the Mindo area.

One of the nicer aspects of this tour is the amazing diversity of hummingbirds we have a chance of seeing. If you like hummingbirds, this is the tour for you. Virtually every location we visit has hummingbird feeders, which allows us numerous opportunities to leisurely study and photograph up to 40 species during the tour. Many of the species were once considered rare and local before the lodges and private reserves started putting up feeders. Some of the more spectacular species we will see includes Sword-billed Hummingbird, Buff-winged Starfrontlet, Booted Racket-tail, Violet-tailed Sylph, Brown Inca, Empress Brilliant, and Purple-bibbed White-tip, just to name a few.

We'll visit the high elevation cloud-forest at Yanacocha where we'll look for spectacular tanagers such as Black-chested, Hooded, and Scarlet-bellied Mountain-Tanagers. Near Tandayapa we'll bird the lush montane forest home to incredible birds such as Ocellated Tapaculo, Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan. We'll visit the wonderful property of "Angel Paz" where we hope to see an active Andean Cock-or-the-Rock Lek, and the incredible Giant Antpitta that he has "trained" to feed on worms! At the middle elevations near Milpe, we'll search for a number of "Choco" endemics such as Choco Toucan, Club-winged Manakin, and numerous stunning tanagers including Rufous-throated and Gray-and-gold. We will also spend one day at lower elevation at the Rio Silanche where even more Choco specialties can be found, such as Slate-throated Gnatcatcher and Blue-whiskered Tanager.

Our tour will see about 300 species during the week, many of which are restricted to this region of Ecuador

Our Mindo tour can be taken in conjunction with our tour, Ecuador: Cabañas San Isidro and Wildsumaco Lodge tour.

Day by Day Itinerary

Day 1: The tour begins this evening in Quito. Night in Quito.

Day 2: After a early breakfast at our Quito Hotel, we'll depart for the short drive to the Yanacocha Reserve on the slopes Pinchincha Volcano. This reserve is one of several owned and operated by the Jocotoco Foundation. On the way up to the reserve we'll pass through pasture land with hedgerows where we will likely see species such as Streak-throated Bush-Tyrant, Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant, black-tailed Trainbearer, Southern Yellow-Grosbeak, Rufous-naped Brush-Finch, and Black Flower-Piercer. At the reserve we will walk a relatively flat track (along the Inca Ditch) through lush cloudforest, and if it is clear, we will have a wonderfully scenic view of the volcano! Our destination will be a set of hummingbird feeders at the end of the trail that host a number of incredible hummingbirds, including the amazing Sword-billed Hummingbird, Sapphire-vented Puffleg, Golden-breasted Puffleg, Buff-winged Starfrontlet and Rainbow-bearded Thornbill. There are lots of other high-elevation species to search for, many of which move together in large mixed-species flocks. Tanagers are prevalent at this elevation and we'll hope to find such mountain-tanagers as Hooded, Black-chested, Scarlet-bellied, and Buff-breasted. After an early lunch, we'll drive the "old" Nono – Tandayapa road through relatively pristine temperate and subtropical forest. Here we'll look for Smoky Bush-Tyrant, White-banded Tyrannulet, Tawny-rumped Tyrannulet, Plain-tailed Wren, Rufous-chested Tanager and both Rufous-naped and White-winged Brush-Finches at the higher elevations. Lower down along the road to Tandayapa, the species diversity increases, and we'll have our first chance for some of the more spectacular birds found in these mountains, including Andean Cock-of-the-Rock, Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan and Toucan Barbet as well as a number of gaudy tanagers including Grass-green and Blue-and-black and Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager. The road follows a mountain stream where we have seen White-capped Dipper and even Torrent Duck in the past. Later in the afternoon we'll visit a private residence near Tandayapa, where we once saw 23 species of hummingbirds in one hour! This will be our first chance to be totally overwhelmed by hundreds of hummingbirds! We'll arrive at our Lodge before dinner, our base of operations for the next six nights. **Night at Septimo Paraiso.**

Hotel: Septimo Paraiso

Days 3-7: For the next five full days we'll explore the many birding locations close to Mindo. Our lodge is well-situated in the forested valley above Mindo, and has an extensive trail system right on the grounds. Even better, our lodge has an extensive set of hummingbird feeders that attract some of western Ecuador's rarest and fanciest hummer species, including Velvet-Purple Coronet, Brown Inca, Violet-tailed Sylph, Fawn-breasted and Empress Brilliants, Crowned Woodnymph, Purple-throated Woodstar, and Brown Violet-ear. Our days will be varied. On some days we will bird locally near our lodge, or within a short drive. Most of the birding will be along roads that pass through protected patches of middle-elevation forest. On these days we will return to the lodge for lunch, and likely a short siesta, before heading out again during the afternoon. On other days we will venture farther a field, usually taking a picnic lunch.

One of our excursions will involve a very early morning pre-dawn departure in order to visit a spectacular Cock-of-the-Rock lek. This will be one of the true highlights of the tour – watching it get light as these bizarre cotingas start displaying. They will appear at first

as strange (and noisy) apparitions, and as it gets lighter, we'll get wonderful views of this amazing bird! If it can be arranged, we'll also visit the trails near the lek and be guided by the reserve's owner, Angel Paz. Angel developed the rather unbelievable technique of feeding antpittas. The number of species that come out and take his nicely-washed worms varies, but we have an excellent chance for Giant Antpitta, with an outside chance for other species including Mustached, Yellow-breasted, and Ochre-breasted Antpittas - a truly amazing spectacle! The birding along his trails are also quite productive, and we have the chance of seeing some very rare species, such as Orange-breasted Fruiteater, Scaled Fruiteater, Olivaceous Piha, Golden-headed Quetzal, Crimson-rumped Toucanet, and Toucan Barbet. At the end of our visit, Angel's wife will feed us homemade empanadas and coffee.

We'll visit the ridge between Tandayapa and Mindo, known as the Tandayapa Valley. We'll leisurely stroll along the road in search of mixed species flocks that contain lots of tanagers and flycatchers. Birding along the road can be exhilarating, and we'll look again for Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan and Toucan Barbet. Other specialties we'll search for might include Gorgeted Sunangel, Masked Trogon, Powerful, Crimson-mantled, and Yellow-vented Woodpeckers, Ocellated Tapaculo, Turquoise and Beautiful Jays, Streak-capped and Striped Treehunters, Cinnamon Flycatcher, White-tailed Tyrannulet, Yellow-bellied Chat-Tyrant, Plain-tailed Wren, Black-crested and Russet-crowned Warblers, Spectacled Redstart, Grass Green Tanager, Blue-winged and Black-chinned Mountain-Tanagers, and possibly the very rare Tanager Finch. We'll revisit hummingbird feeders, looking once again for specialties such as Violet-tailed Sylph, Collared and Brown Incas, Purple-bibbed Whitetip, Fawn-breasted and Empress Brilliants and Buff-tailed Coronet

At lower elevations we'll visit another set of private reserves at Milpe and the Rio Silanche. The birding at both these locations is excellent, and we'll search for a number of "Choco" specialties (the Choco is that region in extreme sw. Colombia and nw. Ecuador). The birding will be along roads, on forest trails, and again at hummingbird feeders. The potential list of interesting birds is quite impressive at the lower elevations, and includes specialties such as Bronze-winged Parrot, Purple-chested Hummingbird, Choco Toucan, Pale-mandibled Aracari, Guayaquil Woodpecker, Spotted Woodcreeper, Buffy (Pacific) Tuftedcheek, Western Slaty-Antshrike, Pacific Antwren, Chestnut-backed and Esmeraldas Antbirds, Black-headed Anthrush, Nariño Tapaculo, Ornate Flycatcher, Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant, Club-winged, White-bearded, and Golden-winged Manakins, Bay and Whiskered Wrens, Slate-throated Gnatcatcher, Choco (Golden-bellied) Warbler, Moss-backed, Rufous-throated, Gray-and-gold, Blue-whiskered, and Scarlet-browed Tanagers, and many others. The birding at these locations will be fantastic. **Nights at Septimo Paraiso.**

Hotel: Septimo Paraiso

Day 8: We'll have virtually the entire day to look for anything special we may have missed, perhaps visiting yet another set of hummingbird feeders. After lunch we'll begin working our way back to Quito, with birding stops at high elevations above the city to search for White-tailed Shrike-Tyrant, one of the rarest flycatchers in the Andes. Other birds at this site will include Ash-breasted Sierra-Finch, Band-tailed Seedeater, Tufted Tit-Tyrant and Sparkling Violet-ear. We'll arrive back at our Quito hotel in the late afternoon in time for some last-minute shopping and a delicious farewell dinner. **Night in Quito.**

Hotel: Hotel Sebastian in Quito

Day 9: The trip ends this morning in Quito.

Maximum size of group: The maximum group size for our Ecuador: Mindo and the Western Andes tour is nine.

Tour Leader for your Ecuador Tour: Gary Rosenberg

Gary Rosenberg lives in Tucson, where he has designed and led about 50 birding tours to Ecuador during the past 25 years. He has spent nearly two years of his life (in terms of number of days in the field) birding in Amazonia, and has visited Septimo Paraiso and other lodges in Western Ecuador nearly 20 times. He has been birding since early childhood, studied Ornithology for a Master's degree at Louisiana State University, and is the author or co-author of numerous scientific and popular articles on bird identification and behavior. Gary is also a passionate photographer, and has had numerous bird photos published in magazines and books. He is currently the secretary of the Arizona Bird Committee, which evaluates rare bird reports within Arizona. His current areas of expertise, apart from Ecuador, include most areas in North America, in particular Arizona, Florida, and Alaska, as well as Costa Rica, Panama, and Peru.

Pace of the tour: The pace of this tour is Easy to Moderate. Most of the birding will be done from roads, and along reasonably level forest trails. The trails are generally well-maintained, but a little hilly at times. The best birding in the Neotropics is done in the early mornings, so one should expect relatively early breakfasts (5:30). We will try and schedule mid-day siestas during the hottest part of the day. On one day we will leave the hotel pre-dawn to visit an Andean Cock-of-the-Rock lek at dawn. On another morning when we visit the Rio Silanche, we'll also leave the hotel early. On at least a few nights, there will be before-dinner owling excursions that may prevent our normal break between birding and dinner.

Tour Price: \$2300. The cost of the tour includes all accommodations, food, within-tour transportation, baggage handling (when needed), entrance fees, water during the day's tour activities, and guide services, as indicated by the itinerary. In general the hotels and lodges we use on the tours are nice and comfortable, and often the best-available in the more remote areas we visit. In the cities we stay in above average (but not necessarily the most expensive) hotels. Meals are typically taken in local restaurants near the hotels and lodges.

The following items are not included in the tour price: travel to and from the location the tour begins and ends, laundry, alcoholic beverages, phone calls, and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement = \$126

Deposit policy: At the time of booking a tour, a \$300 deposit is required to secure a space on the tour. This deposit is refundable or transferable up until 120 days prior to the departure date of the tour. The deposit must be received within 14 days of booking, or the reserved space will be released. Up to the 120 day prior to departure date, a deposit may be transferred to another Avian Journeys tour without penalty. Between 119 and 90 days prior to tour departure, cancellation of a reservation will result in forfeit of 50% of the \$300 deposit. Cancellation of a reservation within 90 days of the tour departure date will result in forfeit of the deposit.

Tour Registration: To register for this Ecuador tour, please first contact Avian Journeys by email or phone to check on availability. Once we have confirmed that there is space on the tour, please fill out the registration form, which is available on the “Register for a tour” page, and mail it to Avian Journeys. It is very important that you read all the information in this document, and then make sure you sign and date the waiver at the end of the registration form. A \$300 deposit is necessary to secure a space on the trip. Full payment for the tour will be invoiced 100 days prior to the departure date, and must be received within 90 days of departure.

Cancellation policy: Cancellation by a tour participant greater than or equal to 90 days prior to the departure date will result in full refund of payments to Avian Journeys (minus 50% of the deposit if the cancellation occurs between 119 and 90 days prior to the tour departure). Cancellation by a tour participant within 90 days of a tour will result in a refund of amounts we are able to recover from our hotels and ground agents. Fixed cost amounts can not be refunded. In general, the amount we can potentially refund may be as low as 50% or 25% of the cost of the tour.

Trip insurance. At the time of payment of your deposit for the tour, we highly recommend purchasing travel insurance. The following companies offer trip insurance, and/or emergency medical insurance: <http://www.travelinsured.com>, <http://www.accessamerica.com>, www.aaa.com. One never knows when personal illness, or an illness in the family is going to strike. Given that a cancellation by a participant within 90 days of departure might result in a loss of most, if not all of the cost of a tour, trip insurance is a good idea. Furthermore, insurance is recommended in case of an illness on a tour, and in a worse case scenario, the need for an emergency medical evacuation, which can be prohibitively expensive. Purchasing insurance is a personal choice, and Avian Journeys does not recommend one company over another.

Travel to Ecuador

Once the tour is confirmed, you will need to purchase your airline ticket to Ecuador. Several major airlines, such as American, Continental, and Iberia Airlines service both Quito and Guayaquil. Please note in the detailed itinerary which city your tour begins at (all of our Ecuador tours begin and end in Quito **EXCEPT** our Southern Ecuador tour which begins and ends in Guayaquil). We strongly suggest planning your arrival in time for the Introductory Meeting on Day 1. If you are unable to arrive early on Day 1, please be aware that we often leave very early on Day 2, and there is the possibility that you will

get very little sleep. An additional issue is that occasionally the weather in Quito can close the airport, resulting in the diversion of flights to Guayaquil. If this happens, there is the likelihood that you will miss our departure from Quito, and you will be responsible for the cost in catching up to the group. If you decide to arrive a day early, we would be happy to arrange for an extra night's hotel in Quito.

In this age of the Internet, booking a flight online is easy! Each individual airline has their own web site for booking flights, such as www.AA.com for American Airlines, and www.continentalairlines.com for Continental Airlines. Alternatively, one can visit sites such as www.orbitz.com or www.expedia.com which list multiple airline options.

IMPORTANT. You will need a valid passport to enter Ecuador. The passport needs to be valid for at least six months beyond your date of entry. A visa is not needed to enter Ecuador – you will need to fill out an entry form provided to you by the airlines and present this along with your passport to immigration. You will also be asked to fill out a customs declaration.

Entering Ecuador

Entering Ecuador is easy and should be stress free. When you deplane, follow the crowd to immigration. Hopefully your line will not be long, although there is a chance that multiple planes arrive simultaneously, and the immigration line can be long. Patience is a virtue! The immigration process is quick and professional. You will be handed back a small portion of your entry form. Please keep this piece of paper in your passport and try not to lose it. Don't worry though, if you do lose the paper, you will simply be asked to fill out a "new" one when you leave the country. Once through immigration you will arrive at the baggage claim area. Locate your carousel and retrieve your bags. You will next hand your customs declaration to a uniformed customs agent and likely be asked to pass your luggage through an x-ray machine. This is just a formality, and it is unlikely that they will ask you to open any bags.

Once through immigration and customs, you will pass through a door and be engulfed by a crowd of agents and loved ones meeting the flight. There will be a person with a sign with YOUR NAME on it, and/or AVIAN JOURNEYS. Our ground agent in Ecuador is BIRD ECUADOR. One, two, or all three of these should be on the sign. The person making the transfer usually speaks English and will help you with your luggage. They will transfer you to the hotel.

The language of Ecuador is Spanish. While many Ecuadorians speak some English, please be aware that English is a second language. Typically the persons making the transfer, and those at the reception at the hotel speak some English. Learning a few important words, such as the Spanish word for "beer" is recommended.

The currency of Ecuador is the US dollar. All hotels accept cash or the major credit cards. We do not recommend bringing Travelers Checks – these have become more difficult to cash in recent years. ATM machines are usually available in the major cities.

Be aware that Quito is at nearly 9000 feet elevation, and if you are arriving in the evening, or if the weather is rainy, the temperature will be cool (not cold). A light jacket or sweater is advised.

Health Issues

We recommend checking with the CDC at www.cdc.com for recent warnings and recommendations for preventive medications and/or inoculations required (or suggested) for the areas you will be visiting in Ecuador. Be prepared that they will likely suggest a preventative for both Yellow Fever and Malaria.

In general we believe you will probably be surprised by the lack of biting insects. While some areas might have some mosquitoes, and small biting flies (no-see-ums), they usually don't present much of a problem. Chiggers are also occasionally present. We do recommend a relatively strong insect repellent that contains "DEET".

Hotels and Food

Avian Journeys and Bird Ecuador (our ground agent in Ecuador) have many years experience organizing tours in Ecuador. The hotels and lodges we have selected are both comfortable and well-situated for the birding. All hotels and lodges provide rooms with private bathrooms (unless specifically indicated in the itinerary). Our hotel in Quito can store extra baggage if needed. Most of the hotels and lodges provide laundry service.

The food in Ecuador varies from standard international food (meat, chicken, fish) at the larger hotels, to relatively gourmet food at some of the lodges (such as San Isidro and La Selva). Most of the hotels and lodges we stay at cater to birders and provide early breakfasts for our groups. Lunches are either taken at the hotel and lodges, or we have box lunches provided by them. All dinners will be at the hotels and lodges. A non-alcoholic beverage will be provided with all meals – bottled water is available everywhere. Beer and wine is available everywhere. Please note that alcoholic beverages are not included in the price of the tour.

Septimo Paraiso Lodge

For many years we had been looking for the ideal lodge to operate a tour to the Mindo area from, and we believe Septimo Paraiso is such a lodge. It is like a very large house with private bedrooms (all with private bath), but with the charm of its own. The food is excellent, and the service can't be beat. The management understands and caters to birdwatchers. There is also an excellent hummingbird garden to occupy ourselves during siestas, and there is an extensive trail system on their forested property.

Electricity

Ecuador has the same electric current as the United States – 110 volts. If you are from a country that uses 220 volts, please make certain that any charger you plan on using can function at 110 volts. Most chargers today have a voltage range of 100-240 volts.

Meeting the Group

There will be a meeting in the lobby of the hotel at 7:00 pm on Day 1. This meeting is designed to “get acquainted” with the other participants on the tour, and to meet the leader. Immediately following the meeting we will have dinner. Again, we recommend trying very hard to arrive in time for this meeting.

What to Bring

Clothing – Over the years we have discovered that “everyone” has their own tastes regarding clothes. We will suggest that you consider quick-drying pants and shirts, particularly if you plan on doing your own laundry. Many of the higher quality field clothes available from companies such as “Ex Oficio” or “REI” also offer protection from UV rays. We also recommend clothes with “neutral” colors, such as browns, tans, and greens that blend with the natural environment, which is less threatening to forest birds. Bright reds and pinks should please be avoided.

Footwear – Comfortable footwear is perhaps the most important item to consider, as we are on our feet most of the day, every day! We suggest lightweight hiking boots, preferably waterproof to a certain degree. “Goretex” type boots are an excellent choice. Rubber boots are sometimes useful for very muddy trails, but we understand that many simply don’t like walking around in rubber boots all day. If you are considering rubber boots, we recommend a particular brand called “Extra Tuff,” available online at <http://www.xtratuffboots.com/>.

The following items are important:

- Binoculars (waterproof)
- Camera (optional)
- Hat
- Rain Jacket (lightweight)
- Small Umbrella (ESSENTIAL!!)
- Small Flashlight w/ replacement batteries
- Small LED Headlamp (useful at poorly lit lodges)
- Alarm Clock
- Plastic Bags (to protect equipment)
- Insect Repellant
- Sunscreen
- Water Bottle
- Small backpack
- Ear Plugs (optional)

Photography: Our leaders are typically very interested in photography, in particular “digiscoping”, and within the context of the tour, photography is encouraged. Certain sensible guidelines will be adhered to, such as not approaching a bird for photos until all in the group has had a satisfying look, and we will avoid unnecessary disturbance of a bird, particularly if it is nesting. At the end of the tour the leader will share his or her photo highlights, making them available on CD, or downloadable from a social network web site.

Field Guides and References. All books listed below are available from **Amazon.com**.

Dunning, John S. 1989. *South American Birds: A Photographic Aid to Identification*. Harrowood Books, Newtown Square, Pennsylvania, USA.

Fjeldså, Jon and N. Krabbe. 1990. *Birds of the High Andes: A Manual to the Birds of the Temperate Zone of the Andes and Patagonia, South America*. Apollo, Denmark.

Forsyth, Adrian and Ken Miyata. 1984. *Tropical Nature*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. A superb and very readable introduction to the ecology of tropical rain forests. Recommended.

Green, Clive. 1996. *Birding Ecuador*. Second edition.

Hilty, S.L. 1994. *Birds of Tropical America*. Chapters Publishing, Ltd., Shelburne, CT.

Hilty, S.L. and W.L. Brown. 1986. *A Guide to the Birds of Colombia*. Princeton University Press.

Kricher, J.C. 1989. *A Neotropical Companion*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Ortiz, Fernando, Paul Greenfield and Juan Carlos Matheus. 1990. *Birds of Ecuador: locational checklist*. Feprotours, Quito, Ecuador.

Pearson, David et al. 1997. *New Key to Ecuador and the Galapagos (New Key Guides)*. Soho Press. ISBN 1569750750.

Ridgely, Robert S. and Paul J. Greenfield. 2001. *The Birds of Ecuador*. Comstock Publishing Associates, Cornell University Press, Ithaca NY. **This is the recommended field guide for the tour.**

Ridgely, Robert S. and Paul J. Greenfield. 2001. *The Birds of Ecuador: Status, Distribution and Taxonomy*. Cornell University Press. This is the companion book to the field guide listed above.

Ridgely, R. S. and G. Tudor. 1989. *The Birds of South America Volume 1: The Oscine Passerines*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Ridgely, R. S. and G. Tudor. 1994. *The Birds of South America Volume 2: The Suboscine Passerines*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

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