Mexico: Birding Oaxaca
January 18 – 29, 2017

Discover Mexico’s southern state of Oaxaca, where varied biogeographic regions converge, fostering outstanding diversity and endemism in nature, birds, and humanity. The broad, one hundred-mile long, 5,000 foot-high Valley of Oaxaca has been a melting pot for Mesoamerican cultures for over 5,000 years, with Olmec and Aztec to the north and Maya to the south.

Search for birds and enjoy nature in cool evergreen and tropical deciduous forests, arid cactus scrub, and mangrovelined lagoons and beaches, within the Valley, the bordering Sierra Madre del Sur, and along the Pacific coast, respectively. Spectacular species include Red Warbler, Dwarf and White-throated Magpie Jays, Bumblebee Hummingbird, Chestnut-sided Shrike-vireo, Slaty and Dwarf Vireos, Ocellated Thrasher, Gray-breasted Woodpecker, Citreoline and Mountain Trogons, Lesser Ground Cuckoo, Emerald Toucanet, Russet-crowned Motmot, ten different orioles, including Spot-breasted and Black-vented, and Orange-breasted Bunting. Wow!

Tour Highlights

- Enjoy five nights at a delightful Oaxaca City hotel, complete with great views
- Take time to browse the markets in Oaxaca City, immersed in the sights, sounds, and smells (yum!)
- Search for Ocellated Thrasher, West-Mexican Chachalaca, Boucard's Wren, and Bridled and Oaxaca Sparrows in the hills above Teotitlan del Valle
- Bird at 8000 ft. in Cerro San Felipe in fir, pines, and oak forests dotted with epiphytic bromeliads, lichens, ferns, and orchids
- Discover the famed Zapotec Monte Alban palace and pyramid ruins with a local historian
- Take a cooking class at the home of Yolanda Giron, our Monte Alban guide
- Spend a cozy night at San Jose del Pacifico; each room has its own fireplace!
- Dive in to pristine Pacific waters, enjoying ample swim time along the Puerto Angel Coast
- Take an optional morning excursion to lush, shade-grown coffee plantations in search of local birds like Golden-crowned Emerald, Wagler's Toucanet, and Masked Tityra

Tour Summary

12-Day / 11-Night Oaxacan Birding & Nature Tour with Mark Smith
$3250 from Oaxaca City, departing Huatulco
Airport is Xoxocotlán International (OAX), Bahías de Huatulco
International Airport (HUX)
**Wed., Jan. 18  Oaxaca City**

Travelers generally depart various US gateways early this morning and arrive this evening at the Oaxaca City airport, where they take a taxi or arranged van to the Hotel Azucenas, about 20 minutes away. This attractive hotel is perfectly situated in a fairly quiet neighborhood about 5 blocks (a 5 – 10 minute walk) from the bustling zocalo (central plaza) and restaurants, and serves as a comfortable base from which to explore the Oaxaca City region. Keep in mind that the Azucenas is an intimate place and that during our early breakfasts (specially done for us), and after 10:00 PM, we ask for quiet so we do not disturb other guests.

*Accommodations at Hotel Azucenas (B,L,D)*

**Thurs., Jan. 19  Oaxaca City, Cultural Day**

This morning we have a bit of a later start, so enjoy some extra sleep, or take your time as you enjoy breakfast. We depart at 9:00 AM for the nearby Mercado Abastos, a vast market where cultural guide Yolanda Giron teaches us about local vegetables, herbs, traditions, and cuisine. Evocative colors, scents, tastes, and sounds, and vibrant activity abound at the market. We lunch while sampling local foods. This afternoon, within walking distance of the hotel, are the attractive and bustling central plaza and the Museum of Archaeology. The Museum’s small garden attracts birds to drink and bathe — quite a treat in the middle of the city.

Those that wish may visit the nearby Cerro San Felipe foothills for gentle hikes and more birding along creeks and on brushy slopes.

*Accommodations at Hotel Azucenas (B,L,D)*

**Fri., Jan. 20  Oaxaca City / Teotitlan del Valle**

After an early breakfast, we head east to the weaving town of Teotitlan del Valle, 40 minutes away. Here the habitat is oddly reminiscent of the grasslands and desert scrub of southeast Arizona, with some of the same plants. The avifauna also shares similarities, but with a few interesting twists. Instead of Gila Woodpecker, we look for its cousin, the endemic Gray-breasted Woodpecker, and instead of Canyon Towhee, here it's White-throated Towhee. Just above town is a small reservoir that, like other open bodies of water in arid areas, can be attractive to grebes, herons, ducks, shorebirds, and a variety of passerines.
A grove of coral bean trees should be in peak flower, with the crimson blooms hosting hummingbirds like Dusky, Beryline, Ruby-throated, and Green-fronted, as well as orioles, including Black-vented.

The hills above town harbor several Oaxaca Valley specialties, including Ocellated Thrasher, West-Mexican Chachalaca, Boucard's Wren, and Bridled and Oaxaca Sparrows. Also in the area are Blue Mockingbird, Golden Vireo, wintering sparrows and warblers, and various flycatchers. In the oaks and pines we look for Rufous-capped Brushfinch, Green Violet-ear and Red Warbler.

After our morning in the foothills, we return to Teotitlan del Valle for lunch, then visit Isaac Vasquez Garcia, a master Zapotec weaver who demonstrates how local artisans spin wool, use natural dyes, and create finely woven products. If you're interested in purchasing a carpet or other weaving, this is an excellent place. En route to Oaxaca City, at Santa Maria del Tule, we find the "biggest" tree on Earth, a Montezuma cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) with a circumference of about 50 meters and a footprint of about 2000 square feet. Tonight we enjoy dinner in town.

**Accommodations at Hotel Azucenas (B,L,D)**

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**Sat., Jan. 21  Oaxaca City / Cerro San Felipe**

After breakfast on the rooftop patio, we depart for Cerro San Felipe in the Sierra Juarez (sometimes called the Sierra Aloapanec), about 45 minutes north of the city. We spend most of the day at around 8000 ft., in forests where firs, pines, and oaks are dotted with epiphytic bromeliads, lichens, ferns, and orchids. The area is lush and excellent for birds, with the forests protected by local communities.

Mixed flocks, which may be more common when the weather is cool and foggy, are of two general types. One is led by noisy Steller's Jay and Gray-barred Wren amongst which may be inconspicuous Dwarf Jay (endemic to the mountain range); the other type includes smaller songbirds such as warblers (Townsend's, Hermit, Red, Crescent-chested), Pale-billed Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Hutton's Vireo, Chestnut-sided Shrike-vireo, and Spot-crowned Woodcreeper. The understory is punctuated with fine wildflower blooms. Hummers include Green Violet-ear, Amethyst-throated (a cousin of the Blue-throated), Bumblebee, and White-eared, and Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer occur, too.

We take our lunch at a mountaintop restaurant, and in the afternoon we explore another mountain road. We make time to relax at the hotel before dinner. Due to the altitude on Cerro San Felipe, temperatures are colder than Oaxaca City — layers are important.

**Accommodations at Hotel Azucenas (B,L,D)**
Sun., Jan. 22  Oaxaca City / Monte Alban / Cooking Class

After breakfast we spend the morning at the nearby Monte Alban ruins. Prior to our guided tour with Yolanda Giron, we walk the nearby trails and search for some of the same birds that are in the Teotitlan del Valle area: Ocellated Thrasher, Boucard’s Wren, and Beautiful and Dusky Hummingbirds, as well as others, including the rare Pileated Flycatcher and the hard-to-find Dwarf Vireo.

Monte Alban (a Spanish name given to the Zapotec site of Danni Dipaa) is a major site that dominated this region between Teotihuacan (in the Valley of Mexico to the north) and the great Mayan sites to the south for about 1,200 years. During its peak, from 500 B.C. to 750 A.D., corn, beans, squash, chilies, and fruit cultivated in the surrounding hills and valleys sustained about 40,000 people. Fine architecture, carvings, pottery, and elaborate mythology reflect the extremely rich culture. After lunch at Monte Alban, we return to the hotel for a break.

This afternoon we visit Yolanda’s home for a cooking class, preparing some of Oaxaca’s rich cuisine, and eventually savoring the fruits of our labor in a sumptuous repast.

Those that wish may return to the nearby Cerro San Felipe foothills for gentle hikes and more birding along creeks and on brushy slopes.

*Accommodations at Hotel Azucenas (B,L,D)*

Mon., Jan. 23  Ocotlan / San José del Pacifico

Today we meander 60 miles south through the Valley of Oaxaca, enjoying sights of villages and agriculture, and visiting the workshops and galleries of well-known Oaxacan potters (black and glossy) and wood carvers (the alebrijes are fanciful and colorful animal figures). We watch them at their craft and have the opportunity to buy beautiful items at good prices; these products are shipped to galleries all over the world.

At Ocotlan we have free time to explore markets, shops, and churches, then have lunch overlooking the attractive plaza.

We continue south across savanna, watching for Aplomado Falcon and White-tailed Hawk until we reach the base of the Sierra Miahuatlan. We climb gradually for about an hour to the ridgetop town of San José del Pacifico and the Hotel Puesta del Sol. In flower thickets on the hotel grounds we look for Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer, Hooded Yellowthroat, and hummingbirds such as Bumblebee, Garnet-throated, Beryline, Rufous, and Blue-throated. Madrean birds such as Greater Pewee, Hepatic Tanager, and Chestnut-sided Shrike-vireo are also possible. Fruiting trees attract Gray Silky Flycatcher, White-throated Robin, Russet Nightingale-thrush, and Brown-backed Solitaire. We have dinner at the hotel restaurant.
Due to the altitude at the Puesta del Sol, the temperature is colder than in Oaxaca City. The rooms all have fireplaces, extra blankets, and a good supply of wood — enjoy!

**Accommodations at Hotel Puesta del Sol (B,L,D)**

**Tues., Jan. 24  San José del Pacifico / Puerto Angel Beaches**

We begin the day with an optional pre-breakfast walk around the hotel grounds at 7:00 AM. After breakfast, we embark on the gradual descent to the coast. We make several stops en route on quiet side roads to enjoy the forests, which transition from mixed conifer to tropical evergreen (with shade-grown coffee in the understory) to tropical deciduous on the coast.

Birds and butterflies are numerous, and likely include the diminutive Bumblebee Hummingbird and the highly endemic Blue-capped Hummingbird. With luck we find standouts like Wagler's Toucanet or perhaps mixed flocks with Red-headed Tanager, Golden and Slaty Vireos, Common Bush Tanager, Gray-crowned Woodpecker, and others. We travel about 75 miles, arriving at our lodge and cabins overlooking the Pacific by late afternoon, with time for an optional swim in the warm Pacific.

**Accommodations in the Puerto Angel area (B,L,D)**

**Wed., Jan. 25 – Fri., Jan. 27  The Puerto Angel Coast**

Near our hotel are many trails and roads through hilly dry forest and around lagoons, bays, and beaches. Lesser Ground-cuckoo, Russet-crowned Motmot, Orange-breasted, Blue, and Painted Buntings, Banded Wren, White-throated Magpie Jay, Yellow-winged Cacique, West-Mexican Chachalaca, Citreoline Trogon, and White-lored Gnatcatcher are regularly seen.

Before breakfast, nearby trails can be extremely productive, with Altamira, Streak-backed, and Spot-breasted Orioles, as well as Olive Sparrow, Red-breasted Chat, Colima Pygmy Owl, and Happy Wren. One morning we take a boat to offshore rocks with nesting Magnificent Frigatebird, Red-billed Tropicbird, and Brown and often Blue-footed Boobies.

On our third day we have an optional early morning trip back up Highway 175 into the broadleaf evergreen forest, about an hour away. In the lush shade-grown coffee plantations we look for Golden-crowned Emerald, Wagler's Toucanet, Masked Tityra, Audubon's Oriole, Golden Vireo, Cinnamon Hummingbird, Fan-tailed Warbler, Rose-throated Becard, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Pale-billed and Lineated Woodpeckers, and many others. We have lunch and take a tour at Finca el Pacifico, the first certified-organic shade-grown coffee plantation in Oaxaca, before returning to the coast.
The weather is much warmer on the coast, and after our busy week in the Oaxaca valley and mountains, we make ample time to relax and swim. We bring a small library with us, or you may want to bring a good book of your own.

**Accommodations in the Puerto Angel area (B,L,D)**

**Sat., Jan. 28  Puerto Angel to Puerto Escondido**

On our final morning near Puerto Angel, we return to favorite side roads before a late breakfast, and then continue west to Puerto Escondido and the Hotel Santa Fe. We enjoy a late afternoon visit to the Rio Colotepec and its rich river mouth where American Crocodile, herons, shorebirds, terns, and gulls, and hopefully the Collared Plover, may be found. The nearby scrub can be good for White-collared and Ruddy-breasted Seedeaters.

This evening we celebrate our journey with a final banquet at the hotel’s excellent restaurant.

**Accommodations at the Hotel Santa Fe (B,L,D)**

**Sun., Jan. 29  Escondido / Huatulco / Departures**

After an early breakfast, we drive 30 minutes west to Laguna Manialtepec, a beautiful estuary lined with tall red mangroves, which we tour by boat. Both water and forest birds are found in and around the lagoon, including Bare-throated Tiger Heron and Boat-billed Heron, waterfowl, shorebirds, gulls, terns, and songbirds like Mangrove Vireo and Ruddy-breasted Seedeater. With luck, West-Mexican Chachalaca may be found.

We return to the hotel by 10:30 AM to check out and drive to Huatulco for our flights home, typically starting from 2:30 PM onward. Please contact us when planning flights, to check on recommended flight times for this return before booking. (B)

**PLAN AHEAD!**

Protect yourself with [Allianz Travel Insurance](#). Offset your [Carbon Footprint](#). Show us the receipt from any one of the online programs for carbon offset, and we’ll take 50% - up to $50.00 - of your carbon offset fee off your final payment.

**COST OF THE JOURNEY**

- Cost of the tour is $3250 DBL occupancy; $3825 SGL. The tour price includes all meals, lodging, boat trips, entrance fees, hotel and restaurant tips, transportation in one van from Oaxaca City, and one drink per person per meal. This includes sodas, lemonade, beer, etc., but doesn't include the more expensive mixed drinks like margaritas. Hotel and restaurant tips are covered in the trip cost, but if you feel that someone has provided exceptional service, feel free to add a tip of your own. The cost does not
include airfare to Oaxaca and from Huatulco.

- Cost of the journey does not include airfare from your home to Oaxaca, Mexico, or from Huatulco, Mexico to your home. The tour price also does not include items of a personal nature, such as porterage, drinks from the bar, telephone, and local guide gratuities (at your discretion, we will give some guidelines).

**TRAVEL INFORMATION**

- **Arrivals:** Plan to arrive in Oaxaca at a time convenient for you on January 18. It is a twenty-minute taxi or arranged shuttle into our hotel, so you can arrive at a time convenient for you and plan to use that transport to meet up with the group at the hotel.

- **Departures:** Plan to depart from Huatulco, which offers International flights. We plan to arrive at the airport by Noon for flights out after 2:30 PM.

- **Trip Difficulty:** The walks in the mountains outside of Oaxaca City are fairly short, about a mile in length. Surfaces are mostly level with a few mild inclines. If you can comfortably walk two miles with some gentle inclines at an easy pace, you'll be fine. We will be taking our time and stopping frequently to enjoy flora and fauna, and we'll have afternoon breaks most days, as well as relaxation time on the coast.

This will be a popular tour, register today! A $500 deposit, and completed registration form are required to secure your space; please check with us for availability.

*Naturalist Journeys, LLC is an equal opportunity service provider and committed to the goal of ensuring equal opportunity for all in employment and program delivery.*

**Photo Credits:** Pg. 1: Boat-billed Heron, Tom Dove (TD), Hotel Azucenas room, courtesy of the hotel [www.hotelazucenas.com](http://www.hotelazucenas.com). Pg. 2: Hotel Azucenas garden, courtesy of hotel; Common Black Hawk, Greg Smith (GS). Pg. 3: Green Violetear, Don Burns; Pale-billed Woodpecker, TD; Banded Peacock, Peg Abbott (PA); Hotel Azucenas room, courtesy of hotel; Green Jay, TD. Pg. 5: Coffee, Buck Snelson; Altamira Oriole, TD; Clearwing Butterfly, Steve Wylie. Pg. 6: Snowy Egret, Rob Coyler (RC); Wood Stork, PA. Pg. 7: Great Kiskadee, Bud Ferguson; Anhinga, RC.