

Dominican Republic: Birding & Nature With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



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Join Naturalist Journeys on a tour that explores the Caribbean island of the Dominican Republic. On an optional pre-tour extension, enjoy searching for Puerto Rico's 17 endemic birds and a number of other species limited to the Greater Antilles. Then the main tour begins on to the Dominican Republic for an in-depth look at this fascinating island.

Situated between Cuba and Jamaica to the west, and Puerto Rico to the east, the island of Hispaniola is comprised of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Together, these four West Indian islands make up the Greater Antilles.



Like the Galapagos, the Greater Antilles serve as an outdoor classroom, attracting some of the world's most famous evolutionary biologists. Each of the Greater Antilles hosts a wealth of endemic birds; some 95 species in all. Among them, the island of Hispaniola stands out with 32 unique birds, many of which are localized and highly endangered. With habitats, roads, and lodging far superior to those found in Haiti (a country largely cleared for agriculture), the Dominican Republic also boasts an endemic family (the Palmchat), five endemic avian genera, and two of the five todies — a family of tiny, colorful birds endemic to the Greater Antilles.



Occupying habitats from palm-fringed sandy beaches to cactus/thorn scrub deserts to humid cloud forests are a stunning diversity of reptiles and amphibians including fingernail-sized frogs and some 80 species of lizards, many of which are eaten by the island's two large and endemic lizard-cuckoos. Beyond its biological superlatives, the island boasts Santo Domingo, the oldest city in the New World and the largest in the Caribbean; Pico Duarte, the highest summit in the Caribbean (10,417 ft.); and salty Lago Enriquillo, the lowest point on a Caribbean island.

Of particular interest are the islands' geological and biological history: What were the tectonic events that spawned a naked volcanic island in what is now the Pacific Ocean? How did it end up in the Caribbean Sea crowned with lush cloud forest? What caused it to be inhabited by crossbills from North America, sparrows from South America, and unique representatives of many tropical American families?

Spot amazing species alongside your guide, the infectious enthusiastic Gabriel Lugo, President of the Puerto Rican Ornithological Society.

Tour Highlights

- Explore the Sierra de Bahoruco where 30 of the Dominican Republic's 32 endemic birds are found
- Search for the critically endangered Ridgeway's Hawk



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- Relax amid palm trees on white coral sand beaches at several different seaside eco-lodges
- Search for the very rare and endangered La Selle Thrush in cloud forest at Zapotén
- Photograph frogs, lizards, and butterflies found nowhere else in the world
- Savor tasty fish caught that day just offshore from your hotel

Tour Summary

8-Day / 7-Night Caribbean Birding & Nature Tour with Gabriel Lugo & Greg Smith

\$TBD, from Santo Domingo

Airport is Las Américas International (SDQ)



Pre-Tour Puerto Rican Extension

Wed., Mar. 7 Arrivals in San Juan, Puerto Rico / Coastal Birding

Welcome to the Caribbean! We begin birding right after you are picked up at the airport in San Juan, so be sure to have your binoculars at the ready. From the airport we drive west to a few of the smaller birding stops on the island: at Cambalache Forest we search for Puerto Rican Vireo, Puerto Rican Tody, and Puerto Rican Flycatcher; at Laguna Tortuguero we watch for Green Mango, Key West Quail-dove, and Pearly-eyed Thrasher; and finally at Camuy Ponds we look for Flamingo. We think this is a great way to start the tour, followed by a welcome dinner.

Accommodations at the Hyatt in Manati (D)

Thurs., Mar. 8 & Fri. Mar. 9 Puerto Rico: Maracao Forest & the Southwest

Early morning starts allows us good time in the forests of Maracao, looking for Elfin-woods Warbler, Puerto Rican Tanager, Puerto Rican Emerald, and more, before turning southwest toward La Parguera. We visit Laguna Cartagena in search of West Indian Whistling Duck and possibly stop at Cabo Rojo for Troupial and other introduced species. We then drive east to Guanica Forest in the evening for a bit of night birding, hoping to see Puerto Rican Screech Owl and Puerto Rican Nightjar.

Accommodation at La Parguera at Villa Parguera (B,L,D)

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Sat., Mar. 10 Puerto Rico: Rio Abajo / Birding at the Reserve | Dominican Republic: Flight to Santo Domingo

We start early this morning to look for anything we may have missed the day before, then head north to Rio Abajo for the Puerto Rican Parrot (Wildside, our operator, is the only company with permission to visit this prime location).

We then drive to San Juan to depart for the Dominican Republic.

A short flight takes us from Puerto Rico to the Las Américas International Airport in Santo Domingo. Our drivers pick us up for a short drive to our airport hotel, where tomorrow we meet up with the main tour.

Accommodations near the airport in Santo Domingo (B,L,D)



Itinerary

Sun., Mar. 11 Dominican Republic / Los Haities National Park

Welcome to the Dominican Republic! After meeting at the airport, we drive northeast to Cano Hondo on the edge of the Los Haities National Park on the remote northeast coast. Protected since 1976 and enlarged several times, the park and its humid subtropical forests hold many fascinating species. Along the way, we watch for a terrestrial shorebird, the curious Double-striped Thick-knee, and Grasshopper Sparrows of the subspecies *intricatus* — endemic to Hispaniola.

After dinner we have an excursion to search nearby for the endemic Ashy-faced Owl, one of the only two members of the barn owl family inhabiting the New World.

Lodging Paraiso Caño Hondo or similar (D)



Mon., Mar. 12 Santo Domingo Botanical Gardens

This morning, we hike to look for Ridgway's Hawk, one of the world's most critically endangered raptors. The species' range is limited to a small part of the Dominican Republic where perhaps no more than 80 – 120 pairs persist. We also watch for White-necked Crow, the largest of the four Caribbean



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crows and is now apparently absent from Puerto Rico and found only on Hispaniola.

At noon we drive southwest to the National Botanical Garden, a square mile of lush habitat in the heart of Santo Domingo. Among the Royal Palms, we find a favorite haunt of the common, but endemic Palmchat. There is a native plant section to the garden, and birding here is excellent. Under palm fronds, look for nesting Antillean Swift. Limpkin may be found walking the trails, and in water courses Green Heron and Snowy Egret can be found, along with West Indian Whistling-Duck.

Among native and other tropical flowers, we search for Vervain Hummingbird, one of the smallest hummingbirds, Antillean Mango, the decidedly local Hispaniolan Parakeet, and more widespread birds such as Hispaniolan Lizard-Cuckoo, Hispaniolan Woodpecker, and Palmchat. The latter is the sole representative of a curious family restricted to the island of Hispaniola, and is the Dominican Republic's National Bird.

Lodging Hotel BQ in Santo Domingo (B,L,D)

Tues., Mar. 13 Sierra de Bahoruco

Today, we head west towards the north slope of the Sierra de Bahoruco. This mountain area supports the largest population of Hispaniolan Crossbill, an Endangered Species. All but two of the Dominican Republic's 32 endemic species can be found in this region. Our lodge is situated in the cool of lush forest at just over 1300 ft. elevation. Mid-elevation birds are abundant along the famous Rabo de Gato Road including White-fronted Quail-Dove, Bay-breasted Cuckoo, Hispaniolan Trogon, Hispaniolan Oriole, Hispaniolan Pewee, both Broad-billed and Narrow-billed todies, Flat-billed Vireo, Antillean Siskin, and Antillean Euphonia.

Tonight, enjoy the rustic charm of the Villa Barrancolí, a six cabin ecolodge owned by Kate Wallace, a conservationist, and tour leader, who was formerly a Peace Corps volunteer and naturalist with Massachusetts



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Audubon Society. This is a popular stop on the Caribbean Birding Trail. There is hot water in a central bath house, cabins have twin beds with mosquito netting, and dinner is prepared by local women, delicious fare enjoyed in the covered, open-air dining room.

From the Villa Barrancolí, the road leads on the Haitian border where lush pine forests give way to bare hillsides. This road to the small settlement of Aguacate, giving us access to the cloud forests of Zapotén.

There is some nice walking and birding right at the lodge. The Rabo de Gato trail begins at the lodge; along this fairly level trail through riparian woodland, we can look for both todies, Hispaniolan Lizard-Cuckoo, Bay-breasted Cuckoo, Antillean Piculet, Hispaniolan Trogon, Hispaniolan Pewee, Stolid Flycatcher, White-necked Crow, Hispaniolan Oriole, and Antillean Euphonia.



In March, a variety of migrants should be present including Louisiana Waterthrush and Prairie, Cape May, and Black-throated Blue warblers.

Lodging Villa Barrancolí (B,L,D)

Photo courtesy Caribbean Birding Trail website

Wed., Mar. 14 Continue on Sierra de Bahoruco

Today's birding will require an early start, as we ascend the rough road toward the highland cloud forest at Zapotén on the north slope of Sierra de Bahoruco. We target the rare and endangered La Selle Thrush, most easily seen in early morning as it forages along the roadside.



We will also search for several other very range restricted birds including Hispaniolan Highland-Tanager (formerly White-winged Warbler), Green-tailed Ground-Tanager (formerly Green-tailed Warbler), Black-crowned Palm Tanager, and Western Chat-Tanager, whose genetic differences from the Eastern Chat Tanager suggest that the island of Hispaniola may be composed of two smaller islands that drifted together after these birds diverged.

Next, we travel to the Nieba Valley and Lago Enriquillo, the lowest island point in the Caribbean. This brackish lake is some 44 meters below sea level and was formerly a strait of the Caribbean Sea. The dry cactus thornscrub around the lagoon's margin hosts such specialties as Hispaniolan Palm Crow, White-necked Crow, Hispaniolan Oriole, Antillean Piculet, and Broad-billed Tody. The expansive lagoon, some four times saltier than the nearby Caribbean, is home to American Flamingo, attracting as well various species of herons, egrets, shorebirds, terns, and waterfowl.



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Tonight, our accommodations are at the Hotel la Saladilla Beach Club, a quiet, modern hotel overlooking the Caribbean just south of the town of Barahona. Enjoy a swim and some time to relax at day's end.

Lodging Hotel la Saladilla Beach Club (B,L,D)

Thurs., Mar. 15 Drive to Pedernales / Explore the Wetlands at Cabo Rojo

First, driving west towards the town of Pedernales, we explore the wetlands at Cabo Rojo watching offshore for Brown Booby, White-tailed Tropicbird, Brown Pelican and various terns, and in the marshy area closer in for Clapper Rail, Caribbean Martin, Caribbean Coot, herons, egrets, White Ibis, and a variety of shorebirds.

Then, bird the southern slope of the Sierra de Bahoruco, where we spend the afternoon seeking out Golden Swallow (apparently now restricted to the Dominican Republic), Hispaniolan Crossbill, Antillean Siskin, Palm Crow, the endemic subspecies of Pine Warbler, Flat-billed Vireo, both todies, Antillean Piculet, and Hispaniolan Parrot.

This evening, we arrive at the comfortable and colorful Hostal Dona Chava, a simple family run inn in the town Pedernales. Enjoy hospitality on the outdoor patio.

Lodging at Hostal Doña Chava (B,L,D)

Fri., Mar. 16 Return to Sierra de Bahoruco



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After breakfast we return to the southern slope of Sierra de Bahoruco to look for birds we may have missed. This is rugged country, and takes some time to explore.

After birding, we continue on to the Casa Bonita Tropical Lodge, a truly luxurious beachfront hotel in the town of Barahona. We eat lunch here, enjoying an abundance of fresh local fish, organic fruits, and more. House specialties include the baked cheese, fresh fish ceviche, and chillo (red snapper) Bahoruco style.

Take a few hours for yourself this afternoon and then enjoy night birding nearby to look for Least Pauraque and Northern Potoo.

This lodge began as a family home, and has grown graciously over subsequent decades.

Lodging at Casa Bonita Tropical Lodge (B,L,D)

<http://casabonitadr.com/index.php/our-story.html>



Saturday, Mar. 17 Great Day of Birding Sierra de Bahoruco / Return to Santo Domingo

We get an early start to drive nearby into the broadleaf forest of the eastern slope of the Sierra de Baroruco to look for the last of our endemics, Eastern Chat-Tanager at daybreak. After a day of exploring, you may plan your flights out this evening, or you can look for flights out tomorrow and have a leisurely start to your day.

Accommodations near the airport (B,L,D)

Sun., Mar. 18 Departures at Leisure

Flights can be arranged at your convenience today. Some may wish to stay on and explore the city; we are happy to help make recommendations if you'd like to extend your time. (B)

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Cost of the Journey

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Offset your carbon footprint on one of the many online programs. Show us the receipt 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 main journey with our operator in the Dominican Republic is \$TBD per person, based on double occupancy, from Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. Cost of the Puerto Rico pre-tour extension is \$TBD.

This tour cost includes: accommodations for 7 nights, all meals as specified in the itinerary (B=breakfast, L=lunch, D=dinner), airport welcome and transfer or hotel shuttle, land transportation during the journey, professional guide services, park and other entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses.

The tour cost does not include: round-trip airfare to and from Santo Domingo, items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone, drinks from the bar, or gratuities for luggage handling or personal services. The tour is priced for a group of 6 persons, and with a group of 7 or more an additional guide will be added. With fewer than 6 participants, we will give you the option to confirm your plans for a small additional cost.

Group Size

This tour is planned for a small group of 6 – 8 persons, plus your guides.

Travel Planning

Plan to arrive in Santo Domingo, by 2:00 PM on March 11, 2018. Departures are planned at your convenience, either a red-eye flight after 8:00 PM on March 17, or at any time on March 18. If you plan to do the Puerto Rican extension, please plan to arrive at the San Juan airport by 2:00 PM on March 7.

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

Hispaniolan Parrots, Adrian Binns (AB); Casa Bonito Tropical Lodge, courtesy of the hotel; Green Iguana, Helen Gigliotti; Spindalis, Peg Abbott (PA); Greater Antillean Bullfinch, AB; Pelican, Naturalist Journeys Stock; Hispaniolan Lizard Cuckoo, AB; Antillean Mango, AB; Hispaniolan Spindalis, AB; Coastal Birding, PA; Santo Domingo, Wikipedia; Ashy-faced Owl, AB; Red-legged Thrush, AB; Orion Butterfly, AB; Botanic Gardens, AB; Palmchat, AB; Green Heron, Rob Colyer (RC); Hispaniolan Crossbill, AB; Birders at Bahoruco, AB; Hispaniolan Trogon, AB; Villa Barrancoli, courtesy of the hotel; Narrow-billed Tody, AB; Flat-billed Vireo, AB; Saladilla Beach Club, courtesy of the hotel; White Ibis, RC; Dona Chava Hotel, courtesy of the hotel; Casa Bonita Tropical Lodge, courtesy of the hotel; Common Potoo, Mike Boyce; High Desert Gecko, AB.