

Guatemala: Birding, Nature & Culture With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



March 26 – April 6, 2018

With Tikal extension Apr. 6 – 9

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Join Peg Abbott and colleagues Keith Hansen and Patricia Briceño to explore Guatemala on Naturalist Journeys' NEW birding, nature, and culture tour! Guatemala is a spectacular birding destination with more than 700 bird species, from which at least 40 are regional endemics. On the cultural side there are colorful markets, luscious fabrics, significant Mayan and Spanish colonial historic sites, and delicious local foods. During this Guatemala tour, we visit a market on Easter morning, take time to explore historic Antigua and have great fun at a cooking demo during our final day.

With its spectacular volcanoes, famed Lake Atitlán, and other highland lakes, Guatemala has much to offer. Witness beauty in the scenery, wildlife, birds, and landscapes. See it for yourself, and have a chance to examine Guatemala's many contrasts, colonial cities, jungles, volcanoes, archaeological sites, and more. It is such a magical place! And, Guatemala has great, shade-grown coffee!

Guatemala's birds are shared with neighboring countries of the Mayan realm, several rare and local species are shared with Mexico, El Salvador, and remote parts of Honduras. This is a great trip to find specialties with local expert guides, while enjoy landscapes and history ... keep reading to find out more about this Guatemala birding tour.



Highlights

- Witness Resplendent Quetzal at El Biotop Reserve, protected land since 1977
- Explore Las Nubes Reserve for specialties like Stripe-tailed and Scaly-breasted Hummingbirds
- Travel the "route of volcanoes, mountains, and beaches" to Los Tarrales Reserve
- Spend time at the beautiful Lake Atitlán and see some of the local Indian villages
- Take in the Easter Sunday market and 400-year old Church of Santo Tomás at Chichicastenango
- Climb the San Pedro Volcano in search of the prized Horned Guan
- Indulge on a gastronomic tour in Antigua Guatemala, a UNESCO World Heritage Site
- Opt for an extension to Tikal to explore and bird amongst the stunning Mayan ruins

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Tour Summary

12-Day / 11-Night Guatemala Birding & Nature Tour w/ Keith Hansen, Patricia Briceño & Peg Abbott
\$3995, from Guatemala City
Airport is La Aurora International (GUA)
4-Day / 3-Night Tikal Extension
\$1395, from Guatemala City (flight included)

Itinerary

Mon., Mar. 26 Arrival in Guatemala City

Welcome to Guatemala! Arrive today at La Aurora International Airport. You may travel to Guatemala independently or we are happy to suggest convenient flights where you may join others from the group.

It is about a three-hour flight from most USA gateway cities to Guatemala. Upon arrival, you are met at the airport for the transfer to our first hotel in the city, a short 10-minute drive from the airport. For those arriving one or more days early, your transfer is coordinated with the regular hotel shuttle.

The group officially gets together today at 7:00 PM in the hotel lobby to go to a welcome dinner where we meet our guides and fellow travelers, and enjoy an overview of this birding, nature, and cultural tour of Guatemala.

Accommodation at the Clarion Suites Hotel, Guatemala City (D)

Tues., Mar. 27 Las Verapaces

This morning we enjoy breakfast at the hotel restaurant before departing for El Biotop. We travel through the departments of El Progreso and Baja Verapaz to reach this protected area, home to Guatemala's national bird, the Resplendent Quetzal, which we have an excellent chance to see. El Biotop reserve has been a protected area since 1977 and covers 2800+ acres of primary cloud forest, ranging in altitude from 4900 – 7500 feet above sea level. Loop trails are available in the reserve, providing access to the cloud forest.



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At the beginning of our walk we find a small orchid nursery with a wide variety of plants. El Biotope has more than 50 species of trees, many of the which reach up 130 feet overhead. Lush ferns and tree ferns are rich in diversity in the understory, creating a magical feel and lush habitat for both Spotted and Black-headed Nightingale Thrushes, Tawny-throated Leaf-tosser, and Scaly-throated Foliage-gleaner. Colorful tanagers move through the trees and flocks contain other beauties such as Blue-crowned Chlorophonia and Shining Honeycreeper. Hummingbirds include Green-throated Mountain Gem and Violet Sabrewing.

We have the opportunity to enjoy the food here over lunch, and of course this wonderful rainforest where nature is the queen of the scene. Along the trails there are a couple of beautiful waterfalls and streams.

We then depart in the afternoon for Coban, the main city of the Alta Verapaz department. The area is characterized by lush forest habitat. It is here that the Monja Blanca orchid grows — the national flower of Guatemala. This is one of the regions with the highest density of indigenous people, mainly Q'echi. The beauty of the fabrics, the ceramics, and the quality of the coffee make this region famous.



Accommodations at the Hotel La Posada (B,L,D)

Wed. Mar. 28 Las Nubes Reserve

After breakfast we drive the short distance to Las Nubes Reserve. We enjoy a full day of exploration here, adventuring and bird watching in the reserve that is on private land, primarily dedicated to the harvesting of pine and cardamom. Coffee has been grown here for over 100 years! The habitat is Humid Rain Forest, and is very special. Located in the foothills of the central highlands, it touches the lowlands spanning an elevation from 3280 to 4265 feet.

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Numerous highland bird species overlap with lowland species here, so we can find cloud forest specialists like the Slate-colored Solitaire in the same area with Pale-billed Woodpecker, a low land rainforest bird. It is one of the only areas in Guatemala where you can find foothill specialties like Stripe-tailed and Scaly-breasted Hummingbirds, White-vented Euphonia, Orange-billed Sparrow, Nightingale Wren, Thick-billed Seedfinch, and many others.

Our birding starts at the farm entrance, where you can tally more than 50 species in just half an hour! After a great tally at the entrance, we climb 1.25 miles up the mountain in a 4x4 to the beginning of the trail. On the way are some stops to look for Green Jay, Plain Chachalaca, Yellow-tailed Oriole, Passerini`s Tanager, and Shining Honeycreeper. Once we reach the top of the road the 2.5-mile trail begins. While the trail is flat and comfortable, it's typically muddy since it is always humid. In this forest, a lodge is being built with feeders and nice accommodation. Here, avid birders can tally more than 90 species in a morning! In addition to Resplendent Quetzal, other cloudforest treats may be finding Sot-crowned Woodcreeper, Green-throated Mountain Gem, the elusive Spotted Nightingale Thrush, or a soaring Ornate Hawk-Eagle overhead.

Accommodation at Hotel La Posada (B,L,D)



Thurs., Mar. 29 Los Tarrales Reserve

Today is a travel day as we head towards Los Tarrales. We leave the Alta Verapaz department to continue towards the Pacific Boca Costa. This route is known as the "route of volcanoes, mountains, and beaches." It is characterized by an agricultural landscape of coffee and sugar cane. Framed majestically by the central volcanic chain, it combines important jungle with savanna habitat. We plan to stop for lunch en route, where we enjoy the scenery and keeps our eyes peeled for birds as we eat.



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Los Tarrales is a biome of high, humid, subtropical forest located in the middle of the southwest volcanic range. The forest hosts over 400 species of birds and 99 mammals — wow! Spanning over 1900 acres of preserved woodland, the range of altitude within the reserve ranges between 2500 and 8200 feet.

This private reserve is home to both Horned and Highland Guans, impressive hummingbirds like the Rufous Saberwing, and show-stoppers such as Long-tailed Manakin and Blue-throated Motmot. This location holds our best chance to spot the lovely and rare Azure-rumped Tanager. Another gem here is the tiny Tody Motmot.

Accommodations at the Los Tarrales Eco Lodge (B,L,D)



Fri., Mar. 30 Los Tarrales Reserve / First Quest for Horned Guan

We rise early today for breakfast and to meet our local guide for a private, full-day hike into the forests at Los Tarrales. Los Tarrales Reserve is located on the southeastern slope of Atitlán Volcano. The reserve is part of the Atitlán Important Bird Area (IBA), designated by BirdLife International. Natural forest is interspersed with shade coffee plantations from 2300 to 5200 feet.



Finding the mountain specialty birds takes time, so plan on some walking today on trails of the reserve. We start at the lodge, and explore higher in elevation. Rewards of the walk may include Azure-rumped Tanager, White-winged Tanager, Blue Seedeater, Bar-winged Orioles, the beautiful Blue-crowned Chlorophonia, and more. Those not up for the walk can enjoy this delightful lodge, and the nearby coffee plantation, with chances to watch Blue-tailed Hummingbird, Long-billed Starthroat, White-bellied Chachalaca, Turquoise-browed Motmot, Spot-breasted Oriole, White-throated Magpie Jay, Barred Antshrike, perhaps Prevost's Ground Sparrow, and other species.

Accommodations at Los Tarrales Eco Lodge (B,L,D)



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Sat., Mar. 31 Lake Atitlán

We enjoy breakfast at the lodge this morning, watching the birds as they busily go about their morning.

After breakfast we travel to the community of Panajachel at Lake Atitlán. Few places in the world can match the spectacular beauty of this lake, one of Guatemala's most prized natural treasures. Geologists state its origin is due to a large volcanic blast, millions of years ago. Pockets of broad-leaf and mixed pine-oak forests occur in this region. While birding at a private reserve, we have a chance to see Chestnut-sided Shrike Vireo, and with luck a good number of bright-plumaged warblers getting ready to migrate north, including the famed Golden-cheeked Warbler of Texas Hill Country fame. We should see a great number of birds today, among them three species of orioles: Yellow-backed, Black-vented, and Bar-winged. Difficult to see, but we give it a try, is the Belted Flycatcher, also possible here.

For many centuries, several native groups of Mayan origin have lived on the shores of Lake Atitlán and have shared a relationship of absolute complicity. Divided among numerous small townships, the two main groups that share the lake are the T'zutujiles and Kaqchiqeles. We see several local villages. This evening we enjoy dinner at our lodge.

Accommodations at the Posada de Don Rodrigo Hotel, Lake Atitlán (B,L,D)

Sun., Apr. 1 (Easter Sunday) Market Day in Chichicastenango

After breakfast, we depart to visit Chichicastenango, the most colorful and picturesque Indian open-air market in the country. Hundreds of Indians from the surrounding countryside gather to barter their goods and products here.



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We also witness the captivating religious ceremonies held on the steps of and inside the 400-year old Church of Santo Tomás. (Please note: No shorts, bathing suits, or photography are allowed inside the church — this is important and is enforced.) At the end of the visit, we have lunch at the Hotel Mayan Inn, a traditional place.

Dinner tonight is at a local Panajachel restaurant.

Accommodations Hotel Posada de Don Rodrigo-Panajachel (B,L,D)



Mon., Apr. 2 **San Pedro Volcano**

San Pedro volcano is one of the three volcanoes that frame beautiful Atitlán Lake. Located at an elevation between 5250 and 9800 feet, it spans over 9400 acres of land. At dawn, we take a boat across Lake Atitlán to San Pedro La Laguna village.

After our boat ride, we search for the exceptional Horned Guan as we climb the San Pedro volcano. This is a quest, a difficult but rewarding hike, to see one of Central America's most coveted species. They only live in cloudforest on the large volcanos of this area extending over to Mexico's Chiapas. We observe the changes in vegetation as we pass through corn crops and old coffee plantations. As we climb higher, we walk through mountain woodland that is rich in biodiversity, until we ascend high into the cloud forest where we stop for lunch on the trail. Other birds we may see include the Emerald Toucanet, Blue-and-white Mockingbird, and Bushy-crested Jay. Listen for Brown-backed Solitaire.



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Alternatively, those in the group who do not wish to try the hike can experience the Tz'utujil culture and customs. You ride by boat to the picturesque Indian village of San Juan La Laguna, one of the twelve lake-shore villages surrounding the lake. Here you have the chance to enjoy this bustling Indian community, where weavers work their colorful textiles. Lunch is attended by women from the community, followed by an afternoon return to Panajachel.

Accommodations at Hotel Posada de Don Rodrigo-Panajachel (B,L,D)

Tues., Apr. 3 Tecpan / Antigua Guatemala

After breakfast at the hotel, we check out and travel to Antigua Guatemala, stopping en route at Finca Chichavac, located in Tecpan. Finca Chichavac is in the mountain forest biome of Sierra de Tecpan, 30 miles from La Antigua Guatemala at an altitude of 8200 feet. Today we look for the Pink-headed Warbler, easily observed in this pine-oak forest. This beautiful warbler occurs in the same forest type where we may find Tufted Flycatcher, Olive Warbler, Gray Silky-flycatcher, Band-backed Wren, Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer, Hooded Grosbeak, and possibly the rare Black-capped Siskin. As well as a few friends we know from back home, Steller's Jay and Spotted Towhee. Warblers are here in good number and species may include: Red-faced, Rufous-capped (a local form), Golden-browed, Townsend's, and Hermit.



After lunch, we continue to bird nearby, then start making our way to Antigua Guatemala. We have dinner at the hotel and spend the night in this beautiful city.

Accommodation at Posada de Don Rodrigo, Antigua (B,L,D)

Wed., Apr. 4

Gastronomic Tour / Time to Explore the City or Bird at El Pilar

We meet our local guide in the lobby of our hotel after breakfast and from there we start the gastronomic tour. Today offers a peek into the precious elements of Guatemala's culinary heritage, including the ancient techniques of preparation, amazing ingredients, the source of recipes, and related cultural aspects.

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This afternoon is free so that you can enjoy and explore more of Antigua. Those that prefer to keep birding can visit an excellent site close to the city at El Pilar. Patches of good bird habitat occur quite close to the city; El Pilar is a nature reserve and shade-grown coffee plantation only 15 minutes from the city. Here we may find Black-capped Swallow, Bushy-crested Jay, Rose-throated Becard, Crescent-chested Warbler, and with luck, Pacific Parakeet. Hummingbird feeders attract numerous species such as Berylline, Magnificent, Blue-tailed, Azure-crowned, and both Rufous and Violet Saberwing.

Tonight, since our Tikal extension folks part ways with the group tomorrow, we enjoy a farewell dinner at our hotel to celebrate all the beauty and fun of this inaugural Guatemala tour!

Accommodation at Posada de Don Rodrigo (B,L,D)

Thurs., Apr. 5

Antigua City Tour / Return to Guatemala City

After breakfast we enjoy a morning visit to the city of Antigua Guatemala. Antigua is a UNESCO World Heritage Site due to its incredibly well kept 17th Century Spanish Colonial environment. Founded in 1542 and partially destroyed by an earthquake in 1776, it was once the third largest city in the Americas, after Mexico City and Lima. We explore the city's plazas, palaces, churches, and convents. We then have a traditional lunch at a local restaurant in the city before returning to Guatemala City where we spend our last night in a comfortable city hotel.

Upon return to Guatemala City, those going on to Tikal make the flight to Flores this afternoon. Depending on timing, you may do some birding en route to lodgings there. This gives you two full days in the Tikal area. The extension description is below.

Accommodations for those on Main Tour only at Tikal Futura Hotel, Guatemala City (B,L,D)

Accommodations for those on Tikal Extension, Jungle Lodge at Tikal (B,L,D)

Fri., Apr. 6 Departures for Main Tour

Our main tour ends this morning after breakfast and your transfer to the international airport for flights home. (B)



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Mayan Treasures Extension to Tikal

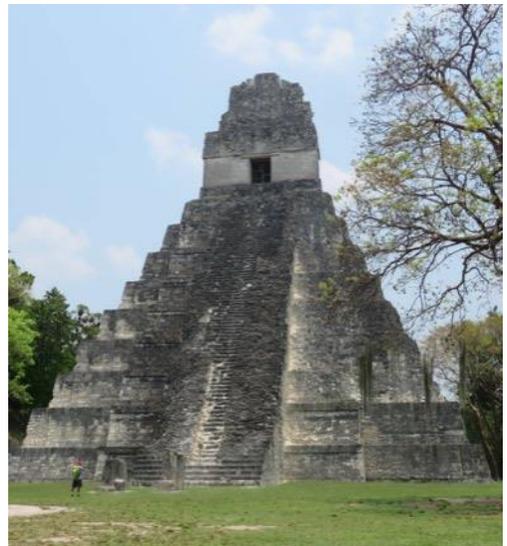


Fri., Apr. 6 & Sat., Apr. 7 **Tikal National Park**

Tikal is located within the Maya Biosphere Reserve and it is the best example of the Mayan Classic time period. With towering pyramids that reach more than 240 feet, one cannot understand how impressive it is without a personal view. Tikal is one of the few UNESCO World Heritage Sites that is recognized both for its historical heritage and its natural protected setting. While walking through the forest, visiting the different archaeological groups with plazas, pyramids, and palaces; Howler and Spider Monkeys, and showy birds like Squirrel Cuckoo, Keel-billed Toucan, and Ocellated Turkey are also moving around. We enjoy lunch at a local restaurant inside the park, and then you have the option to continue exploring. If you find yourself tired, our hotel is just outside the gate! These days are to wander through the jungle among the famous ruins, learning about Mayan history with time for some birding. The archeological zone of Tikal is large, magnificent, and worthy of additional exploration. Birds are present in mixed flocks, and we watch for raptors above. Lunch is in a restaurant inside the park.

Accommodations at Jungle Lodge, Tikal National Park (B,L,D)

Sun., Apr. 8 Archaeological Site of Yaxha / Guatemala City



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This morning, after breakfast and a last look at Tikal, which is just out our door, we do some birding en route to the Flores Airport. We visit the beautiful Yaxha area, located 60 kilometers away (40 miles) from the airport. Yaxha, always an ally of Tikal, has imposing pyramids and is all connected with causeways. It is also within the Maya Biosphere Reserve and located by the Yaxha Lake. The site is part of the National Park Yaxhá-Nakúm-Naranjo, which protects lowland rainforest.

We have scheduled an afternoon transfer to Flores Airport for the 45-minute flight back to Guatemala City, where we spend our last night in the same comfortable city hotel. This evening we have time to pack, get organized for your trip home, and relax during a final evening with friends.

Accommodations at Clarion Suites Hotel (B,L,D)

Mon., Apr. 9 Departures

Depart at your convenience from La Aurora International airport. Keep in mind when booking flights that you need to be there approximately three hours ahead of your flight, so mid- to late-morning is far more comfortable than an early morning flight. Breakfast for those on a schedule that allows, is in the hotel. The tour ends this morning with the transfer to the international airport. *(B)*

Cost of the Journey

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with [Allianz Travel Insurance](#). Their website will show a grid of tour cost and your age category for you to make selections. As of January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Cost of the Journey

The cost of this journey is \$3995 DBL / \$4470 SGL, per person, from Guatemala City. This cost is based on double occupancy and includes all accommodations; meals as specified in the itinerary, group airport transfers, professional guide services, local park and other area entrance fees, and miscellaneous

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program expenses. Cost of the Tikal extension is \$1395 DBL / \$1595 SGL, per person, and includes the round-trip flight to Flores, Guatemala.

The cost does not include transportation to or from your home to Guatemala, or items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone charges, portage, maid gratuities, or beverages from the bar.

Travel Information

Please plan to arrive on March 26 by mid-afternoon; we formally start the tour with a 7:00 PM dinner on this day. Plan to depart mid- to late-morning on April 6 or April 9, depending on if you are participating in the extension. Please note that you need to be at the airport three hours before your flight, so a mid- to late morning flight time is most comfortable.

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Photo Credits

Resplendent Quetzal, Greg Smith; Turquoise-browed Motmot, Luis Búrbano, courtesy Operador Latino (OL); Ocellated Turkey, Peg Abbott (PA); Woman at Market, Irene Rodriguez (IR), courtesy OL; Montezuma Oropendola, Alex Navarro, courtesy OL; Lake Atitlán, IR, courtesy OL; Flame-colored Tanager, Ted Beedy; Market, Keith Hansen (KH); Artisan Work, KH; Resplendent Quetzal, IR, courtesy OL; Blue-crowned Cholorophina, Robert Gallardo; Las Verapaces Reserve, IR, courtesy OL; Green Jay, Tom Dove, (TD); Plain Chachalaca, TD; Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Naturalist Journeys Stock (NJS); Azure-rumped Tanager, Majo Lou, courtesy OL; Tody Motmot, PA; Barred Antshrike, PA; Lake Atitlán, KH; Volcan Tacana, Lori Conrad (LC); Emerald Toucanet, NJS; Keel-billed Toucan, PA; Pink-headed Warbler, LC; Olive Warbler, PA; Culinary Demonstration, IR, courtesy, OL; Antigua Guatemala, IR, courtesy OL; Long-billed Starthroat, NJS; Tikal x2, LC; Central American Spider Monkey, PA; Squirell Cuckoo, OL; White-necked Jacobins, Ted Beedy.



Ted Beedy