

Southeast Arizona: Sky Island Fall Sampler With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



November 4 - 10, 2019

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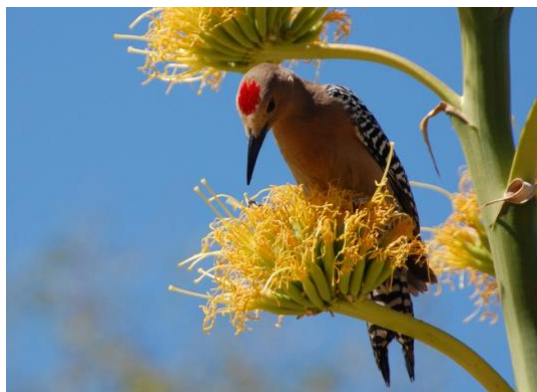
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Fall is a stunning time to visit Southeast Arizona's Sky Island mountain ranges, when fall color decorates the stunning Chiricahua and Huachuca Mountains' canyons. As other parts of the continent turn towards winter, November here still boasts warm days as maples turn red, cottonwoods yellow, and sycamores shine burnt sienna. Nights are crisp and host dark skies with inspiring star views.

Southeast Arizona is home terrain for Naturalist Journeys and we're excited to share our favorite places. This is also an emerging wine region, so you may want to try some local varietals that complement our blend of Southwestern birding, geology, history, hiking, archeology, and more!

This is a relaxing, week-long trip based out of two lodges. We offer morning and afternoon activities that include birding, hiking, or visiting local historic sites — do as much or as little as you wish!

We pace this tour to show off the region. Options include visiting the Amerind Foundation, Chiricahua National Monument, Fort Bowie, Coronado Memorial, and Kartchner Caverns State Park. Color surrounds us on hikes and birding excursions up Cave Creek, Ramsey, and Miller Canyons. Hummingbirds still linger at several popular feeder sites — let the birds come to you! Wintering Sandhill Cranes number in the tens of thousands; we watch them fly-in at sunset after finding good numbers and a variety of wintering raptors in the Sulphur Springs Valley at Whitewater Draw. Relax over lunch breaks and enjoy the chance to shop or see the Smithsonian-affiliated museum in Bisbee, a colorful, historic mining town. Throughout our travels, we enjoy delicious, catered meals and dining at our favorite local restaurants.

Tour Highlights

- ✓ Visit hotspots like Ramsey and Miller Canyons, the feeders at Ash Canyon, the San Pedro River, and more
- ✓ Marvel at the spectacle of tens of thousands of overwintering Sandhill Cranes! Watch them fly-in to roost at sunset and also observe them feeding during the day
- ✓ Experience prime time for finding a good number and variety of wintering raptors in the Sulphur Springs Valley around Whitewater Draw. Sparrows abound; last year a small pond had three species of longspurs!
- ✓ Enjoy scenic trails that average three to four miles at Coronado Memorial, area canyons, and the Arizona Trail
- ✓ Explore Bisbee, a colorful, historic mining town; enjoy lunch and the chance to shop or check out the Smithsonian-affiliated museum
- ✓ Learn something new! History buffs can enjoy the museum at Fort Huachuca; those with a curious mind might want to venture underground to see stunning (and safe!) cave features at Kartchner Caverns State Park
- ✓ Find camaraderie at catered meals and dining at our favorite local restaurants (if you have room after homemade pie at the Casa)

Tour Summary

7-Day / 6-Night Arizona Nature Tour
with Michael Marsden
\$2490 from Tucson
Airport is Tucson International (TUS)

Itinerary



Mon., Nov. 4 Arrival in Tucson | Amerind Foundation | Fort Bowie

Our tour starts at 9:00 AM in Tucson, where we can pick you up at the airport or a nearby airport hotel. We head east, leaving the city behind, and the shapes of multiple Sky Islands immediately appear — we are surrounded by a series of small but fascinating mountain ranges. The rounded boulders of Texas Canyon are impressive as we turn south at Dragoon. Enjoy exhibits at the Amerind Foundation, a private museum and research facility dedicated to Native American cultures.

We take the backroads from Amerind and stop for lunch at a delightful café.

After lunch we head out on a dirt road over Apache Pass. From here we hike into Fort Bowie National Historic Site, a three mile loop walk on a well-maintained trail that starts at Apache Pass. Our first walk takes us back in time with interpretive signage, and in the mid-section, an impressively restored frontier fort. This is a relatively unknown site for many travelers and a sense of remoteness and history abound. Remembering the Battle of Apache Pass, we learn how the dreams and desires of Apaches and white settlers could only collide. We're out about three hours, and once back at the vans, head on to Portal, Arizona.

Tonight we enjoy a catered dinner at our lodgings, with time to relax and settle in.

Accommodations at Cave Creek Ranch, Portal (L,D)

Tues., Nov. 5 Chiricahua Mountains | Cave Creek Canyon

Situated adjacent to the small village of Portal, population 300, Cave Creek presents a magical realm of massive, colorful cliffs that rise over 1,000 feet. Its vegetation is rich and diverse — here yuccas mix with pine. Thick stands of maple decorate the stream, while shrubs turn colors of the rainbow. Hummingbirds linger, some for the winter, and we may find late-season flowers, raccoon-like Coatimundi, or a herd of curious Javelina.

This morning we take a scenic ramble up South Fork, one of the Chiricahuas' most spectacular canyons. You may want to linger along the creek reveling in the maples' fall colors while others may want to ascend the trail to reach outstanding vistas.

After a catered lunch back at our delightful lodgings, we take a siesta, then take a back road over to Paradise, a former mining town, for a touch of history and a chance to visit very active local bird feeders. We also stroll the main street of a simple walk with stunning vistas, bird feeding stations, and a picturesque library and post office.

After dinner at the Portal Café, we return to Cave Creek Ranch where our casitas stand among the shadows cast by the imposing, colorful rhyolite cliffs.

Accommodations at Cave Creek Ranch, Portal (B,L,D)



Wed., Nov. 6

Chiricahua High Country | Chiricahua National Monument | Casa de San Pedro

Today we discover a wonderland of rock at Chiricahua National Monument. We reach the high country by crossing the spine of the range on a winding road with spectacular views amid patches of fir, spruce, and Ponderosa Pine. This is the realm of the Mexican Chickadee, Yellow-eyed Junco, and other bird specialties. Listen for raucous Steller's Jay and look for the small resident Coue's Whitetail Deer.

On the other side of the mountain, we enter the Monument's rugged terrain, where the Apache leaders Cochise and Geronimo took their last stand until the late 1800s, when cattle ranching became a way of life. Today we gawk at huge pillars of rock in the realm of Rock and Canyon Wrens, a jagged rock landscape that was born of explosive volcanic activity. We have a picnic lunch near the visitor center, then you can choose to do a loop walk through the wonderland of rock or to visit the historic Faraway Ranch and do some birding.

We then head back across the grasslands, watching for flocks of longspurs, wintering Lark Bunting, Horned Lark, and various sparrows, as well as raptors as we drive.

In the late afternoon we arrive at the Casa de San Pedro — a delightful B&B on the west bank of the San Pedro River. The Casa de San Pedro is a nationally acclaimed inn, described as “90 miles from Tucson and inches from heaven.” Guests have labeled it the most upscale bed and breakfast in Southeast Arizona. We find it the ideal location for our group, with meeting space, incredible hospitality, active bird feeders, a pond, and the San Pedro River right outside our door. From the Casa we can explore cottonwoods that fringe the river, perhaps flaunting a little fall color, as well as surrounding grasslands and tall peaks of the nearby Huachuca Mountains, a mecca for hummingbird enthusiasts. You soon find out why so many guests return here again and again.

Dinner tonight is catered at the inn.

Accommodations at [Casa de San Pedro](#), Hereford (B,L,D)

Thurs., Nov. 7

Miller Canyon | Fort Huachuca: Colorful Canyons & Military History

Today we have two options — birding or hiking — both in the morning and afternoon. In the morning we head to Miller Canyon, a place of great fall color and always a birding favorite. This is a major drainage of the



Huachucas, sitting directly under Miller Peak, highest in the range. Set your pace to hike on up the trail, or go at a birder's pace after some time at the hummingbird feeders. Our hikers (or birders that hike about 1.5 miles) have a good chance to see Mexican Spotted Owl.

We return to the Casa for lunch and a break. In the afternoon, those that wish to can visit Fort Huachuca for a chance to learn local military history and to walk up a colorful canyon or do some local birding. You do need to pass a security clearance to access this site. Constructed in 1877, the fort was one of a chain established to guard southern Arizona against the Chiricahua Apaches, led by Geronimo. The fort was also the headquarters of the famed 10th Cavalry, the "Buffalo Soldiers," one of the Army's elite black cavalry corps. Today the fort is still an active Army post specializing in military intelligence training. It covers more than 70,000 acres, 110 of which are the "Old Post Area."

The fort's historic district contains many notable buildings. Among these are the Pershing House, an adobe structure built in 1884 and traditionally the Post Commander's quarters; the "Old Post" Barracks, built c. 1882 – 1883; Leonard Wood Hall, a large two-story building used as the hospital; and the Fort Huachuca Historical Museum, an adobe and stone building originally used as the post chapel.

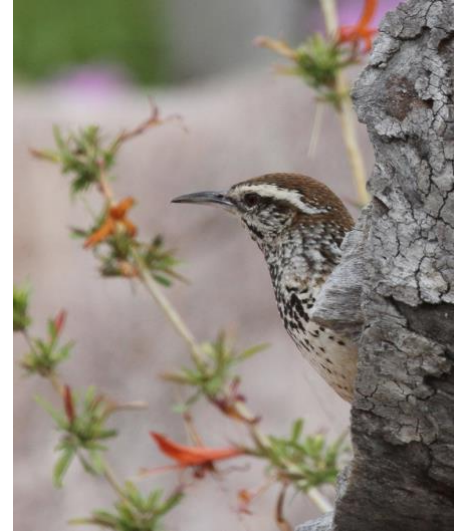
After seeing the museum we can take a short walk up either Garden or Huachuca Canyons, both great spots for colorful maples. Driving out, we watch for raptors.

Dinner tonight is either at the Inn or at a nearby favorite local restaurant.
Accommodations at the Casa de San Pedro (B,L,D)

Fri., Nov. 8

Whitewater Draw | Sulphur Springs Valley & Sandhill Cranes | Bisbee

This morning, after a scrumptious Casa de San Pedro breakfast, those that enjoy birding can head out to Whitewater Draw Wildlife Area. Many of the wintering Sandhill Cranes have arrived (numbering some 35,000 birds at the peak of winter!), and we look for them in ponds and in farm fields where they feed on corn. Depending on water levels, Whitewater may be one of the only local sites hosting shorebirds and with luck we see the area's resident Great-Horned Owl. The entire valley is a major wintering group for raptors and some of the northern species, like Ferruginous Hawk, can be found.



Birders can enjoy this and some other local hotspots for the morning and then head into Bisbee to join the others for some lunch and free time. Those that chose to relax at the inn for the morning can meet us mid-day in town. Bisbee has an excellent museum, and if you are interested you can plan ahead to join a tour of the underground mines.

It's easy to spend time exploring Bisbee and several of the group may want to remain in town. Our birders can go back into the valley after lunch, driving a series of dirt back roads where raptors congregate. In previous years, we have seen four species of falcons this day: Prairie, Peregrine, Merlin, and American Kestrel. In some years, acrobatic White-tailed Kite can be around. The surrounding shrubby flats are home to Bendire's Thrasher, Black-throated Sparrow, Cactus Wren, Scaled and Gambel's Quails, Roadrunner, and Pyrrhuloxia. We also watch for Lark, Brewer's, and Vesper Sparrows.

We plan to watch the Sandhill Cranes come in to roost; this is typically active from about 4 to 5:30 PM. We then go to dinner in Bisbee, at the wonderful Café Roka.

Accommodations at Casa de San Pedro, Hereford (B,L,D)

Sat., Nov. 9 Ramsey Canyon | Kartchner Caverns or Local Birding

Our early birds can check the Casa's backyard of riparian cottonwoods and mesquite grassland for species such as Scaled Quail, Lucy's Warbler, and Abert's Towhee, while others may enjoy a more leisurely lie-in.

We have breakfast at 8:00 AM, then head off to The Nature Conservancy Preserve at Ramsey Canyon — one of the first well-known birding sites in Southeast Arizona. Here, Ramsey Creek descends through oak woodlands, its banks lined with massive sculptured trunks of Arizona Sycamores. We hope to see Wild Turkey, Painted Redstart, Black-throated Gray Warbler, and a variety of colorful hummingbirds at close range. Walk the trails, browse the bookstore and gift shop, or park yourself under a tall, bending sycamore to wait for the birds to come to you! This is one of the best canyons for fall color in the region.

Lunch today is a picnic. You can then return to the Casa for a free afternoon, enjoy some local birding, or let us know in advance (so we can reserve tickets) that you want to turn your attention to geology this afternoon and see what happens when water meets limestone over a period of 330 million years. Our plan is to head underground to tour a living cave at Kartchner Caverns. This is a very comfortable cave to visit, not cold, well-lit, and on a well-surfaced walking trail. It has fabulous formations, state of the art interpretation — and an inspiring story of a well-kept secret when it was first found. Tonight enjoy dinner tonight in the event center at the Flying Leap winery in Bisbee.

Accommodations at Casa de San Pedro, Hereford (B,L,D)

Sun., Nov. 10 Departures from Tucson

After a final delicious breakfast, we head to the airport, with plans to arrive by 10:30 AM for flights out after 12:00 PM. (B)



Guide Michael Marsden

Michael has been an avid birder since childhood in England but decided, for reasons that now escape him, on a career in law. Meeting Donna Knox on a birding trip, however, changed all that and, in 1996, he gave up his work as solicitor general to the Cayman Islands Government to start a new venture as a birding guide. Michael and Donna initially moved to Cayman House in Rockport, then to the San Pedro River Inn and the Paton Birders' Haven in S.E. Arizona, and are now happily back in Texas: this time in San Benito, an ideal base for Michael's interest in the wildlife and history of South Texas. As well as regular tours in the U.S./Mexico borderlands, Michael has guided birding trips to Cuba, Belize, Costa Rica, and Panama and has travelled extensively in Europe and the Americas. He met Peg Abbott being very gracious to Naturalist Journeys groups along Arizona's San Pedro River. He now shares his

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.

Group Size

Maximum of 12, minimum four participants.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is **\$2,490 DBL / \$2,890 SGL** from Tucson, AZ. This cost includes accommodations for six nights, meals as specified in the itinerary (B=breakfast, L=lunch and D=dinner), professional guide services, other park and program entrance fees and miscellaneous program expenses.

Cost does not include: round-trip airfare to and from Tucson, items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone, drinks from the bar, or gratuities for luggage handling or personal services.

Travel Information

The airport for this tour is Tucson International (TUS). Our tour starts 9:00 AM; we can pick you up at any of the airport hotels if you have opted to come in early, or we will pick you up at the airport. On our final day we plan to have a nice breakfast, then head to the airport arriving there by 10:30 AM for flights out after noon.

Photo Credits

Cave Creek Canyon, Steve Wolfe (SW); Rivoli's (Magnificent) Hummingbird; Greg Smith (GS); Gambel's Quail, Peg Abbott (PA); Gila Woodpecker, Janice Petko, Gila Monster, John Roser; Burrowing Owl, GS; Sandhill Cranes & Snow Geese, PA; Chiricahua Mountains, SW; Casa de San Pedro, PA; Broad-billed Hummingbird, Evelyn Earlougher (EE); Harris's Hawk, PA; Roadrunner, EE; Montezuma Quail, PA; Black-throated Gray Warbler, PA; Group, Naturalist Journeys Stock (NJS); Grassland Hike, NJS; Vermilion Flycatcher, SW; Coati, PA; Black-throated Sparrow, PA; Crested Caracara, PA; Cactus Wren, PA; Saguaro Scenic, NJS.