

Southeast Arizona: Christmas at the Casa de San Pedro With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



December 22 – 28, 2020

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Christmas is a magical time to visit Southeast Arizona's Sky Island mountain ranges, and to be at one of our all-time favorite lodges, the Casa de San Pedro. Tuck in and enjoy fabulous hospitality, homemade pie, the fun of fellow travelers, and views of sunsets over the Huachuca Mountains. Winter days are typically sunny and a comfortable 60+ degrees, great for walking and birding. 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 Christmas season. This is also an emerging wine region, so you may want to try some local varietals as we feast in complement to our blend of Southwestern birding, geology, history, hiking, archeology, and more!

This holiday week-long birding trip based mainly out of one of our favorite lodges, with a final night in Tucson to let us bird among the sunshine and saguaros our final day. Our aim is to provide a relaxed pace option to let you savor the holidays with merriment and birding! Christmas day is designed as a relaxing one, with local walks and a traditional prime rib dinner (fish or vegetarian options upon request), complimentary wine, champagne, and camaraderie. Christmas Eve is spent with Sandhill Cranes coming in to roost before a wonderful dinner in Bisbee.

Several local residents have set up wonderful feeders, where a constant stream of Gambel's Quail, Canyon Towhee, Arizona Woodpecker, and Woodhouse's Scrub Jay can be seen or photographed at close range. Enjoy walking and birding excursions up Ramsey and Miller Canyons. Hummingbirds still linger at several popular feeder sites such as Ash Canyon—let the birds come to you!

Why choose the holiday tour? Winter birding in Southeast Arizona can be terrific! Wintering Sandhill Crane number in the tens of thousands; we watch them fly-in at sunset after finding good numbers and a variety of wintering raptors,

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!
- ✓ Explore extensive grasslands in Arizona's emerging wine country, in search of longspurs, sparrows, and pipits
- ✓ Find winter hummingbirds, Vermilion Flycatcher, and several species of quail
- ✓ Explore Bisbee, a colorful, historic mining town; enjoy lunch and the chance to shop or check out the Smithsonian-affiliated museum
- ✓ Enjoy camaraderie at holiday 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 Expert Local Guides
\$2490 from Tucson
Airport is Tucson International (TUS)



including the massive Ferruginous Hawk, feed in agricultural fields of the Sulphur Springs Valley at Whitewater Draw. Sparrows and allies winter in profusion, many from the Great Plains region. Specialties we look for include Baird's Sparrow, Chestnut-collared Longspur, and Sprague's Pipit. Raptors abound: Red-tailed Hawk of varied color phases, Ferruginous Hawk, Prairie Falcon, Peregrine, Merlin, and more.

Throughout our travels, we enjoy delicious, catered meals and dining at our favorite local restaurants.

Itinerary

Tues., Dec. 22 Arrivals in Tucson | Amerind Foundation

Arrive no later than 1:00 PM in Tucson, where we can pick you up at the airport or at 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 Dripping Spring. Enjoy exhibits at the Amerind Foundation, a private museum and research facility dedicated to Native American cultures. You may want to buy yourself a Christmas present in their wonderful gift store that features Native American art, pottery, basketry, and jewelry. Watch for Western Bluebird, Rock Wren, and Prairie Falcon on the grounds as we explore.

We then head south to the San Pedro River and the delightful Casa de San Pedro, our home for the next five nights. The "Casa" is located on the west bank of the San Pedro River south of the city of Sierra Vista. 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.

Tonight we enjoy a catered dinner at our lodgings, with time to relax and settle in.
Accommodations at Casa de San Pedro (D)

Wed., Dec. 23 Ramsey Canyon | Ash Canyon



This morning enjoy optional birding close to the Casa or a sleep in. We have breakfast at 8:00 AM, then head out at 9:00 AM for Ramsey Canyon, an important conservation property of The Nature Conservancy. There are trails to walk, good birding in a mix of oak woodland and riparian habitat, and a visitor center.

We then visit a local feeder site and have our lunch. Seeing hummingbirds in December is always a thrill, and chances to photograph abound.

We visit our friends at Pollination Corridor to learn about their projects and take in the action at their feeders while enjoying lunch. In the afternoon, those that wish can visit local feeder sites, where hummingbirds linger through the winter. Often we find Arizona Woodpecker, Woodhouse's Scrub Jay, possibly Wild Turkey, and a host of resident species. Or, return to the Casa for some R and R.

Dinner tonight is at a nearby favorite local restaurant.

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

Thurs., Dec. 24 Christmas Eve with Cranes 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. Peg Abbott of Naturalist Journeys joins you today and stays through Christmas.

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.

Mid-day, we spend time exploring Bisbee. Then, we go back into the valley, 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 evening; this is typically active from about 4 to 5:30 PM. We then go to dinner in Bisbee at a local restaurant serving a special dinner for Christmas Eve.
Accommodations at Casa de San Pedro, Hereford (B,L,D)

Fri., Dec. 25 Christmas at the Casa

It's Christmas morning! Enjoy a leisurely breakfast and watching birds at the feeder. Those that wish to stretch their legs can enjoy a hike with Peg Abbott along the river or perhaps if some of us are feeling enthusiastic, at a local canyon. Enjoy all the gifts that nature provides so readily—fresh air, scenic beauty, and a bounty of birds.

We keep lunch light to have room for a festive dinner; if you wish we can take an afternoon scenic drive.

Gather for sunset cheer, then get ready for a traditional prime rib feast (with fish or vegetarian options available) for the evening meal.

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

Sat., Dec. 26 Sonoita Grasslands | Patagonia

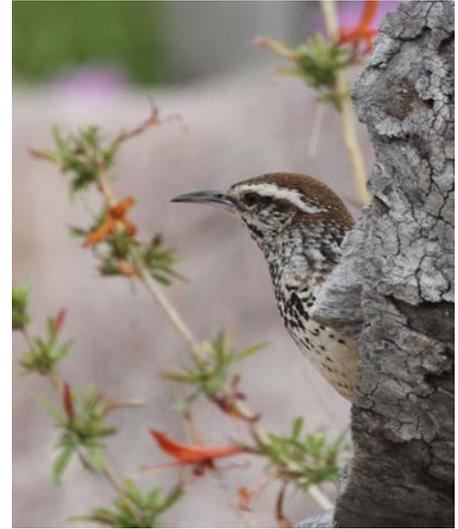
Our early birds can check the Casa's backyard of riparian cottonwoods and mesquite grassland for species such as Scaled Quail, Greater Roadrunner, and Abert's Towhee, while others may enjoy a more leisurely lie-in.

We drive west this morning to a grassland area that is usually very productive. Following local sightings from previous weeks, we plan our route. A dedicated following of local birders is always on the lookout for Sprague's Pipit and three species of longspurs and our guides are in the know for recent news.

Enjoy lunch in the small town of Patagonia, followed by a visit the popular feeders at the Patton's former home, now run by the Tucson Audubon Society. Violet-crowned Hummingbird often linger year-round here. Adjacent to the feeder area is The Nature Conservancy's Sonoita Creek Preserve, where tall trees line Sonoita Creek providing habitat for a variety of species. Depending on recent sightings we work our way back, passing through wine country near Elgin, continuing the quest for grassland species. With luck we should find Pronghorn as well as wintering meadowlarks, Horned Lark, Chihuahuan Raven, and raptors.

Return to the Casa for a last relaxing evening and dinner.

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



Sun., Dec. 27 Sunshine & Saguaros

We depart the Casa after breakfast, heading to lower elevation desert near Tucson, where winter birding among the saguaros brings us a host of other species. We look for Gilded Flicker, Harris' Hawk, abundant wintering waterfowl, and more.

Some of you may want to linger longer in the sun and Tucson is a great city with cultural variety to enjoy. It's also surrounded by some excellent birding and we can connect you with local guides if you wish to do more while in the area. Our final dinner is at a favorite local restaurant as we recount highlights of our holiday adventures.

Accommodations in Tucson (B,L,D)

Mon., Dec. 28 Departures from Tucson

After breakfast, we head to the airport, with plans to arrive by 9:30 AM for flights out after 11:00 AM. If you need an earlier flight, we can help arrange a shuttle or taxi for you. If you are not in a hurry and have flights out after 1:00 PM, we can make a swing by the beautiful San Xavier del Bac mission church, still active and festive at this time of year, with trees and plantings also attractive to birds. (B)

Guides

Enjoy exploring with local experts and also a holiday visit by Peg Abbott, owner of Naturalist Journeys.

Cost of the Journey

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. 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 / \$2925 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 1:00 PM on Tues., December 22; 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 Mon., December 28, we plan to have a nice breakfast, then head to the airport, arriving there by 9:30 AM for flights out after 11:00 AM.

Photo Credits

Cave Creek Canyon, Steve Wolfe (SW); Rivolli'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; Bob Behrstock, Karen LeMay; Peg Abbott, Bud Ferguson.

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