

Guatemala: Birding & Nature

With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



March 18 - 25, 2021

With Tikal / Petén Region

Pre-tour extension March 13 - 18

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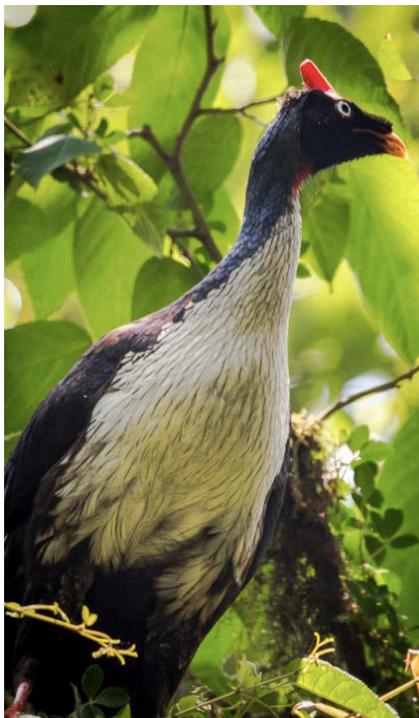
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Naturalist Journeys, LLC





NEW! We have added a different Guatemala tour in 2021, this one with a focus on birds and natural history. We have shortened the main trip but with less travel increase time at two prime birding areas—more field time and a great mix of species. Guatemala is a spectacular birding destination, home to more than 700 bird species, from which at least 40 are regional endemics shared only with southern Mexico and Honduras. Combined with our expanded Tikal/Las Guacamayas Biological Station extension you find a fabulous sample of Central American birds!

The main part of the tour focuses on the highlands of interior Guatemala, a rugged chain of mountains formed by the interaction of the North American and Caribbean tectonic plates. This complex and jagged landscape of lush mountains, dry intermontane valleys, scenic lakes, and spectacular volcanoes creates a diversity of microclimates and habitats for many unique bird species found nowhere else in the world: Horned Guan, Bushy-crested Jay, Wine-throated Hummingbird, Pink-headed Warbler, and so many more. This diversity also means that Guatemala produces some of the world's greatest shade-grown coffees with no less than eight distinct coffee-growing regions, each with its distinct quality and flavor. See (and taste!) it for yourself. It is simply a magical place.

This is a great trip to find specialties with local expert guides while enjoying beautiful landscapes and abundant natural history. We have purposely kept it to a week, so some may be able to add on our species-rich Tikal / Las Guacamayas Petén Birding extension.

Tour Highlights

- ✓ Discover one of the best eco-lodges in Central America, Los Tarrales Reserve, offering bird lovers and coffee lovers an unforgettable experience!
- ✓ Find overwintering warblers in mixed flocks with resident species, including the iconic Pink-headed Warbler and stunning Golden-cheeked Warbler
- ✓ Climb a volcano in search of the prized Horned Guan, a unicorn among tropical birds, as an option for our hikers in the group
- ✓ See owls, nightjars, small mammals and frogs at night around the lodge
- ✓ From Antigua, bird at El Pilar, replete with colorful and regionally special bird species such as Bar-winged Oriole, Green-throated Mountain-gem, and Blue-throated Motmot
- ✓ Explore and dine in Antigua Guatemala, a UNESCO World Heritage Site
- ✓ Opt for a pre-tour extension to the famous Mayan ruins at Tikal and the pristine reserve of Las Guacamayas, Biological Station - highly recommended!

Tour Summary

8-Day / 7-Night Guatemala Birding w/ Rick Weiman
\$2790, from Guatemala City

Airport is La Aurora International (GUA) | Pairs perfectly with our Tikal/Las Guacamayas Petén Birding Extension



Itinerary

Thurs., March 18 Arrival in Guatemala City

Welcome to Guatemala! Arrive today at La Aurora International Airport. 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 6:30 PM in the hotel lobby to enjoy a welcome dinner where we meet our guides and fellow travelers and enjoy an overview of our birding adventure in of Guatemala. If you arrive early and want to see some of the city, our local operator can help.

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

Fri., March 19 Travel to Los Tarrales

After a wonderful breakfast we start with some birding on the grounds of the Museo Ixchel, Guatemala City's excellent textile museum. Named after the Mayan goddess of the moon, women, and textiles, exhibits of indigenous costumes and other crafts show the incredible richness of traditional arts in Guatemala's highland towns. There will be time after birding to see the exhibits. Then, we drive to Los Tarrales Reserve, Guatemala's premier birding site. We travel along a route known as the 'route of volcanoes, mountains, and beaches,' characterized by an agricultural landscape of shade-grown coffee interspersed with natural forest.

Los Tarrales Reserve itself protects humid, subtropical forest 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. It is incredibly scenic and the varied elevation gives us a great variety of birds. The reserve hosts over 400 species of birds and 99 mammals—wow! It is one of Guatemala's richest birding areas.

Situated at a lower elevation, your comfortable lodge immerses you in nature with splendid scenery and birdy surroundings with shade-grown coffee plantations. Some of the highlights we may see right around the lodge



include Yellow-naped Parrot, White-bellied Chachalaca, White-throated Magpie-Jay, Turquoise-browed Motmot, Pacific Parakeet, and Yellow-winged Tanager. Meals are served family style in the cozy dining room. Hummingbirds hover in the hedgerows of flowers on your walk to get there from comfortable casitas. *Accommodations at the Los Tarrales Eco Lodge (B,L,D)*

Sat., March 20 Los Tarrales Reserve

We rise early today for breakfast before meeting our local guide to bird a different area of the reserve. We drive part way up the mountain in four-wheel drive vehicles to a higher area of the forest, where a viewpoint affords splendid views of a lush landscape as far as the eye can see. Finding the mountain specialty birds takes time, so plan on spending much of the day walking the road with scenic views all along the way. Avian treasures we may observe on this walk include Azure-rumped Tanager, White-winged Tanager, Blue Seedeater, Bar-winged Oriole, Blue-crowned Chlorophonia, and so much more. Returning to the lodge, we check a secretive pond area that is often highly productive.

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, Roadside Hawk, and other species.

Dinner is at the lodge tonight and we may go out to listen for owls and nightjars. *Accommodations at Los Tarrales Eco Lodge (B,L,D)*

Sun., March 21 Full Day at Tarrales / Option to Search for Horned Guan

Those that wish can greet the dawn beside the lodge, scanning the mature trees that grow along an open soccer field for a variety of species such as Yellow-naped Parrot and Pacific Parakeet – these parrots may provide great scope views as they perch and socialize in the early morning light. We then enjoy breakfast, watching the birds as they busily go about their morning. Hummingbirds love the blooming hedgerow next to the building, putting on an energetic show.



Hikers can opt today to join a local guide on a quest to see Horned Guan, a rare and stunning large species found at high elevation. You can get a start on some of the elevation by vehicle, then proceed on foot. Birding all the way, we keep a pace that many can do. Lush bromeliads and other vegetation decorate the Horned Guans realm. We may wait some time at the top to hear them call and then locate them, or with luck, we find them readily at a fruiting tree.

Another group will bird areas closer to the lodge, from gardens at the edge of the village to a small pond, and some agricultural fields. We can do two half day outings, with lunch and a siesta area between excursions.

Dinner is a fun time to meet back up and recount our various sightings and adventures.

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

Mon., March 22 Pink-headed Warblers at 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 that dominates much of the interior highlands of Guatemala. 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. We may also see a few friends we know from back home: Steller's Jay, Acorn Woodpecker, Hutton's Vireo, 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, and then start making our way to Antigua Guatemala. Enjoy some free time to look around the city from our well-situated and delightful lodgings. We have dinner at the hotel and spend the night in this beautiful city. Take an after-dinner stroll to admire the lights and historic buildings.

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

Tues., March 23 Antigua Birding at El Pilar | Free Time or a City-tour in Antigua

In the morning, we head to an excellent reserve at Finca El Pilar. This site features a mixture of shade-grown coffee plantations and oak-pine forest. Patches of good bird habitat occur at the nature reserve and shade-



grown coffee plantation. Here, we may find a fantastic and stunning variety of regional highland endemics such as Black-capped Swallow, Bushy-crested Jay, Highland Guan, Blue-throated Motmot, Rufous-collared Robn, and Blue-and-white Mockingbird. Other species we may observe include Singing Quail, Northern Emerald-Toucanet, Pacific Parakeet, Chestnut-sided Shrike-vireo, Brown-backed Solitaire, and Gray Silky-flycatcher. Hummingbird feeders attract numerous species such as Green-throated Mountain-gem, Rufous Sabrewing, Azure-crowned Hummingbird, Berylline Hummingbird, and White-eared Hummingbird.

Enjoy a free afternoon or a city tour in Antigua. Those on the city tour meet our local guide in the lobby of our hotel. From there, we start a walking tour of the city. There is much to learn as you take a peek into the precious elements of Guatemala's history, architecture, culinary arts, and other cultural aspects. Antigua Guatemala is a UNESCO World Heritage Site due to its incredibly well-preserved 17th Century Spanish colonial architecture. 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. It was also the colonial capital of the Kingdom of Guatemala, which at that time extended from Costa Rica into southern Mexico. We explore the city's plazas, palaces, churches, and convents. Dinner is at a favorite local restaurant.

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

Weds., March 24 Travel to Guatemala City

This morning is guide's choice, we may return to El Pilar after an early breakfast. With its mix of extensive dry tropical forest and a lush riparian corridor, we can hope for some good final views of Guatemalan birds. We could visit some local wetlands, or we may even return to Tecpan if we missed any species there.

After lunch, we will continue to bird some local hotspots between Antigua and Guatemala City, the selection for that based on what species we still hope to find. These are in route as we make our way back to Guatemala City, planning to arrive by sunset.

Tonight, we enjoy a farewell dinner at a favorite local restaurant to celebrate all the beauty and fun of our Guatemala tour!

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

Thurs., March 25 Departures

Our main tour ends this morning with a transfer to the international airport for flights today. (B)

Tikal / Las Guacamayas Biological Station Pre-tour Extension



Fri., March 12 Arrival in Guatemala

Our extension officially begins tomorrow morning, you will need to arrive the night before. We can book a hotel for you at the Clarion Suites, which has a complimentary airport shuttle, full bar and restaurant, or restaurants of your choice nearby.

Sat., March 13 Flight to Flores | Tikal

This morning we return to the airport for a short domestic flight to Flores, where we meet up with our local guide and start this birding adventure. We also meet any travelers coming by road from our Belize tour as they may select this extension as well.

En route to Jungle Lodge, our lodgings on the edge of the ruins, we visit the beautiful Yaxha area, located 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 near the Yaxha Lake. The site is part of the National Park Yaxhá-Nakúm-Naranjo, which protects lowland rainforest. It is birdy here, as well as fascinating from a cultural perspective—a good start to seeing a host of new species in this lush habitat. Birds we might see include Slaty-tailed and Gartered Trogon, Red-lored and White-fronted Parrot, Blue Bunting and Keel-billed Toucan – our first taste of birding in the wet Central American lowlands.



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

Sun., March 14 Tikal National Park

Protected as a national park in 1955, Tikal preserves the most magnificent example of pyramids, plazas, and temples of the ancient Mayan culture. With towering pyramids that reach more than 240 feet, one cannot understand how impressive they are without being in their presence. Once the epicenter of Mayan commerce and trade, Tikal's towering pyramids stretch towards the heaven and beyond the highest jungle canopy, providing a mystical view of the area's rich flora and fauna.

In addition to its rich architecture and archeology, Tikal encompasses more than 3 million acres of rainforest in northern Guatemala's Mayan Biosphere Reserve. In fact, UNESCO designates Tikal as a World Heritage Site based on both its incredible biodiversity as well as its historical heritage. More than 400 species of birds have been found within Tikal National Park, including exceptional numbers of parrots and raptors. 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 wanting a siesta, our hotel is just outside the gate! We spend the day wandering through the jungle among the famous ruins, learning about Mayan history with time for birding. The archeological zone of Tikal is large, magnificent, and worthy of additional exploration. Mornings and evenings can be very active with the cacophony of commuting parrots, including Brown-hooded, White-crowned, Red-ored, White-fronted, and Mealy Parrot. We also pay attention to what is soaring above us, and we may see Hook-billed, Plumbeous, and Swallow-tailed Kite, perhaps even Ornate or Black Hawk-Eagle!

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

Mon., March 15 Transfer to Las Guacamayas

We begin our journey to the remote El Tigre National Park and Las Guacamayas Biological Station today. The dirt road we travel passes through wetlands and several villages until we reach the last village, Paso Caballos; these villages and wetlands are often fantastic for a variety of birds of secondary habitats. White-tailed Kite, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Vermilion Flycatcher, Purple Gallinule, Northern Jacana, Limpkin, Snail Kite, and more are all possible. From this community, we take a 25-minute boat ride along the San Pedro River to Las Guacamayas Biological Station. Upon arrival, we receive a presentation on the conservation, environmental, and social programs offered by the biological station.



Although one might expect a research station to be quite basic, this wonderful gem offers great accommodations and excellent food. After a flavorful lunch, we enjoy free time in the garden to observe and photograph wildlife. The hummingbird feeders often attract Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, White-bellied Emerald, and Wedge-tailed Sabrewing. In the late afternoon, we travel along the scenic Sacluc River in search of Agami Heron, American Pygmy Kingfisher, and Sungrebe along its forested banks. For those that choose to attend the night boat excursion, we have an excellent chance of seeing Morelet's Crocodile, Northern Potoo, Boat-billed Heron, and Mottled Owl.

Accommodations at Las Guacamayas Biological Station (B,L,D)

Tues., March 16 Las Guacamayas Biological Station

After coffee and a light breakfast, we bird and explore by boat up to the Waka' Perú Archaeological Site. Sitting atop an escarpment in El Tigre National Park, this site was once the capital of a Maya city-state and a major trading center between 500 and 800 AD. Today, the area hosts an important population of Scarlet Macaw. A relatively flat trail goes through Mayan rainforest, along which we hope to see various forest species such as Black-headed Trogon, Tody Motmot, White-whiskered Puffbird, Chestnut-colored Woodpecker, White-collared Manakin, and Black-throated Shrike-Tanager.

We head back to the station for a delicious lunch and some down time before heading back out again to look for birds around the lodge and a nearby lookout tower. Green-backed Sparrow, Red-capped Manakin, Yellow-winged Tanager, Black-faced (Mayan) Antthrush, and Yellow-tailed Oriole are just a few of the possibilities!

Accommodations at Las Guacamayas Biological Station (B,L,D)

Weds., March 17 Flores

After breakfast, we travel along the Sacluc River near sunrise today, exploring the riverside rainforest and oak savannahs for birds we may have not yet seen (or wish to see better). Parrots like Brown-hooded, White-crowned, Red-lored, and White-fronted should be very active overhead. By traveling along the river in the early morning, we maximize our chances to see secretive wetland birds like Sungrebe and Agami Heron. In areas where there are oaks, the colorful and inquisitive Yucatan Jay is often present.

After one last lunch at the biological station, we transfer back to Flores for the night to position ourselves for tomorrow's flight.

Accommodations in Flores (B,L,D)

Thurs., March 18 Travel to Guatemala City

For our Guatemala tour this is a pre-tour extension, so you can enjoy the morning in Flores before boarding the afternoon time for your short 45-minute flight back to Guatemala City, in time to meet the group at 6:30pm in the hotel lobby.

Our Belize travelers can book flights that best work to your connecting flights home. These can be to Belize City for our Belize travelers, or Guatemala City for Guatemala travelers. Or, anyone can book an open-jaw or multi-city ticket if times work better for that. Our travel agent, Pam Davis, can help and we pay your ticket fee.

Guide Rick Weiman



Rick lives in Oakland, NJ with his wife Patricia and two teenage children, Jack and Annabel. Rick has led birding trips for a number of years as a volunteer associate naturalist for NJ Audubon and a preserve monitor for The Nature Conservancy. He just completed his 30th world series of birding event, raising dollars for endangered species recovery efforts. His passion for conservation started during his college years at Rutgers where he majored in Biology and he has been a trustee of the Conserve Wildlife Foundation of NJ since 2000. More recently his volunteer and fundraising efforts for The Raptor Trust, the largest wild bird rehabilitation center on the east coast, resulted in his recent addition to their board of trustees in 2018. In his spare time besides birding, Rick enjoys playing tennis, street hockey, and is also a youth hockey coach.

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.

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.

Travel Information

Please plan to arrive on March 18 for the main tour. If you plan on joining us for the highly recommended pre-tour extension to Tikal, please arrive by mid-afternoon on March 12; we start the tour and the extension with a 7:00 PM dinner on this day. Please note that you need to be at the airport three hours before your return flight on March 25, so a mid- to late-morning flight time is most comfortable. The hotel runs a convenient shuttle.

Cost of the Journey

The cost of this journey is \$2790 DBL / \$3035 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 program expenses. Cost of the Tikal extension is \$2265 DBL / \$2490 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.

Photo Credits

Resplendent Quetzal, Greg Smith (GS); Horned Guan, courtesy elbambu.com; Brown-backed Solitaire, Paul Roberts (PR); Montezuma Oropendola, Alex Navarro, courtesy OL; White-eared Hummingbird, GS; Long-tailed Manakin, Peg Abbott (PA); Pygmy Kingfisher, PA; Highland Guans, Robert Gallardo (RG); Unicolored Jay, Irene Rodriguez, courtesy OL; Lake Atitlan, PA; White-throated Magpie-Jay, RG; Wine-throated Hummingbird Luis Burbano, courtesy OL; Pink-headed Warbler, Majo Lou, courtesy OL; Horned Guan, PA; Spot-breasted Oriole, PR; Blue-crowned Chlorophonia, RG; Azure-rumped Tanager Majo Lou, courtesy OL; Tikal x2, Lori Conrad; Central American Spider Monkey, PA; Keel-billed Toucan, Doug Greenberg; Squirrel Cuckoo, courtesy OL.