

# Oaxaca Valley: Birds, Culture & Crafts With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



October 20 – 26, 2021

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## Tour Summary

7-Day / 6-Night Tour

\$3790, from Oaxaca City

Airport is the Oaxaca International Airport (OAX)

## Tour Highlights

- ✓ Enjoy outstanding birding in and around the Oaxaca Valley
- ✓ Sample flavorful and customary Oaxacan and Mexican foods
- ✓ Visit the famous Zapotec ruins of Monte Alban and local museums
- ✓ Examine an array of habitats on an elevation gradient from Oaxaca's valley to the surrounding mountains
- ✓ Explore the city's botanical gardens and shop handmade crafts

This great NEW! trip fits so well with our Naturalist Journeys style—great field time blended with enjoyment of local foods and culture, enhanced by the sharing of knowledge that brings a strong sense of place. Time in Oaxaca itself is great fun, but the varied habitats we can easily access from there may come as a surprise to many birders. Many of the specialty birds can be found at such significant archeological sites like Monte Alban and Yagul, where we spend a couple of mornings looking for birds, but also explore and learn about the ruins. We keep it local to Oaxaca City on this itinerary and have an entire week to explore a number of these areas and habitats. From our city-based hotel, we unpack once and enjoy!

As rich as it is in habitat and avi-fauna, Oaxaca is equally rich in cultural diversity. Twelve distinct indigenous groups inhabit the area around Oaxaca City, and utilize the same number of languages! The richness of the culture and history is evident on every corner of the city and throughout the surrounding countryside. Enjoy time to experience the heart of the city around our birding outings, to experience the human side of this wonderfully rich and diverse area. The arts and crafts in the region are amazing and abundant.

The pace of our trip is very relaxed—you can participate as much as you wish on the outings or choose more cultural time on your own in the city. We offer a full array of options to take advantage of all there is to see and do in Oaxaca. Our plan is to bird every morning and afternoon, sometimes at ruins and sometimes in the mountains. If you choose, take time to wander the plaza



and the extensive municipal markets. Oaxaca is considered one to the gastronomical wonders of Mexico and we take advantage of this at every opportunity.

Whether you are an experienced birder looking to add some Mexican endemics to your life list or a beginner who wants add a couple of hundred new birds to your list, our Oaxaca birding tour has everything to make it your Mexican birding trip of a life time. Peg Abbott, owner of Naturalist Journeys and Caligo Ventures teams up with David MacKay, our specialist guide for Mexico, to lead this NEW! colorful journey.

## Itinerary



### Wed., Oct. 20 Arrive in Oaxaca | Oaxaca City

Welcome to Mexico! Please plan to arrive in Oaxaca City no later than 6:00 PM today. Please note that our cultural and shopping fans may wish to arrive early to explore a bit on their own. A real plus for this tour is being based out of one hotel for the entire journey, a very relaxing trip with more time for birding and enjoying Oaxaca. Rufous-backed Robin may be found right in the plazas of town.

We assemble as a group for dinner tonight, and afterwards we have a brief orientation to go over the week's plan, including information about the birding and areas we visit, trip timing, and perhaps most important of all—an overview of Oaxacan cuisine.

*Accommodations in central Oaxaca City (B,L,D)*

### Thurs., Oct. 21 Oaxaca Valley | Monte Alban

The state of Oaxaca is in the southeastern portion of Mexico and lies at the western edge of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec—the narrowest point of the North American continent. Two mountain ranges come together on this narrow neck of land: The Sierra Madre Oriental and the Sierra Madre Sur. In between them lies the valley of Oaxaca, and the city of the same name. The valley lies at an elevation of over 6,000 feet and the surrounding mountains reach 10,000! This elevational gradient holds a great array of habitats which have allowed the development of nearly 12 birds endemic to southern Mexico and indeed the valley of Oaxaca itself. Birds like Oaxaca and Bridled Sparrows, Ocellated Thrasher, Pileated Flycatcher, Dwarf and Slaty Vireos, White-throated Towhee, and Boucard's Wren.

Our first morning of Oaxaca valley birding takes us to the fantastic and famous Zapotec ruins of Monte Alban, perched high on a hill overlooking modern day Oaxaca City. Monte Alban was one of the most important and intricately built Mesoamerican cities of its era. Intricate and fanciful carvings adorn buildings, many depicting animals.



In the sparse vegetation surrounding the ruins we search for Beautiful Hummingbird, Ocellated Thrasher, Blue Mockingbird, Boucard's Wren, Pileated Flycatcher, Slaty and Golden Vireos, and White-throated Towhee. Since this trip is not all about birding, we're sure to take some time to visit the ruins and the museum.

At midday, we head back for lunch and a siesta at the hotel.

In the afternoon, we head out to explore the arid hills above Teotitlan del Valle, a small town famed for its hand-woven rugs, colorful and intricate in design. The heritage of these rugs goes back over 2000 years; their craftsmanship is marvel. While here we search of other Oaxaca valley endemics such as Dusky Hummingbird, Dwarf Vireo, and Oaxaca and Bridled Sparrows.

We return to the city for dinner, venturing out to sample local foods like the varieties of mole, tamales or chile rellenos this evening, perhaps topped off by some flan or the local (scrumptious!) hot chocolate.

*Accommodations in central Oaxaca City (B,L,D)*

### **Fri., Oct. 22 Pine-Oak Highlands at Cerro San Felipe**

An early start gets us up to the pine-oak highlands of Cerro San Felipe (also known as La Cumbre) to the north of Oaxaca City. En route we make a few stops to bird the arid scrub on the lower slopes looking for Lesser Roadrunner, Oaxaca Sparrow, Black-vented Oriole, and Rufous-capped Warbler.

Cerro San Felipe is well known as an accessible site for the Mexican endemic Dwarf Jay, but it hosts other birds typical of central Mexico's pine-oak highlands, as well as mixed species flocks of wintering warblers from western North America. In addition to the Dwarf Jay, we seek such species as Amethyst-throated, Garnet-throated, and Bumblebee Hummingbirds, Wood-Partridge, Pine Flycatcher, Grey-barred Wren, Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo, Red Warbler, Black Thrush, Collared Towhee, and Rufous-capped Brushfinch.

The birds, as well as the mountain scenery and alpine habitat, make for a great way to spend the day. Once we've had our fill, we head back down the mountain for another delicious dinner.

*Accommodations in central Oaxaca City (B,L,D)*

### **Sat., Oct. 23 Yagul & Mitla Zapotec Ruins | Birding for Mexican Endemics**

This morning we visit the arid-scrub vegetated hills outside of Teotitlan and venture a little farther afield to the interesting ruins of Yagul and Mitla at the eastern end of the valley. Yagul is a significant archeological site; the word means "Old Tree." The site has commanding views to admire as we search for Gray-breasted Woodpecker and other species. At Yagul, we spend most of our time searching the hillsides covered in beautiful columnar cactus in search of Beautiful and Lucifer Hummingbirds and the hedge rows for Boucard's Wren. The habitat is





most picturesque with giant yuccas and varied species of cacti mixed in with oak-scrub. Possible to find here are some familiar species which extend in range or seasonal movements to Arizona: Elegant Trogon, Acorn Woodpecker, Bridled Titmouse, Painted Redstart, Cassin's Vireo, and Thick-billed Kingbird.

At Mitla, we visit the ruins, considered to be the most important religious centers for the Zapotecan culture, well-preserved in its arid surroundings. We have a restaurant lunch in town.

While exploring the ruins in this area, we have good chances to find Oaxaca Sparrow, Bridled Sparrow, Lesser Roadrunner, Ocellated Thrasher, Beautiful Hummingbird, and Boucard's Wren. Depending on timing, we may have an opportunity to head farther east to pick-up some birds that venture up from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

We return to the city at day's end—time for another enjoyable night of dining! Local Zapotec culture is flourishing here and many people out for the evening still dress traditionally.

*Accommodations in central Oaxaca City (B,L,D)*

## **Sun., Oct. 24 Birding Cerro de San Felipe & Beyond**

Today we spend the entire day up at high elevation in the Cerro de San Felipe area and beyond, including having dinner at a wonderful little restaurant that leaves us well positioned to try for some high elevation owls. It is a big day of birding in pine and mixed-conifer habitat and we may arrive back at the hotel a bit on the late side—worth it for this bird- and scenery-rich day. We have good chances today to find Dwarf Jay, Chestnut-sided Shrike Vireo, Red Warbler, Olive Warbler, Long-tailed Wood-partridge, and Bumblebee Hummingbird.

If anyone wishes to skip this outing, Sunday is a big market day in Oaxaca and you can explore these at your leisure.

*Accommodations in central Oaxaca City (B,L,D)*

## **Mon., Oct. 25 Guide's Choice | Oaxaca City**

We like to look at this as a "clean-up" day ... in other words we take a look at our list and make plans to go back to any areas where we may be missing looks at species we still hope to find. It's very likely we head up into the pines again—we'll see!

This afternoon, enjoy a chance to wander the heart of Oaxaca City, visit the botanical gardens (which also have a bit of good birding), as well as Santo Domingo's fantastic museum. Local markets are also fun; find chiles, cheeses, regional fruits, sauces, handicrafts, pottery, textiles, and more.

This evening we enjoy a delicious farewell dinner off the plaza and have one last chance to stroll the gardens and shops in the central district.

*Accommodations in central Oaxaca City (B,L,D)*

## Tues., Oct. 26 Departures

The tour ends this morning after breakfast with flights out of Oaxaca City. (B)

### 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.

#### Tour Notes & Pace

This tour is moderate in pace, with ample opportunity for birding by walking local trails, ruins sites, and by visiting parks and preserves. We walk 1 – 3 miles per day, over uneven terrain at times, including steps at ruin sites. The city is at 5000 feet elevation, and we go up to almost 10,000 feet on one mountain day outing. Those that wish can opt out of some of these for more city time, meeting up for dinner in the evenings. The focus of guided time is on nature and birding, with free time to enjoy culture and a nice mix of restaurants chosen for dining. There is no long, strenuous walking, and as terrain is fairly open, good views of species are quite possible.

#### Cost of the Journey

Cost of the tour: **\$3790 DBL / \$4365 SGL**, based on double occupancy from Oaxaca City. The tour includes six nights' accommodations, all meals as noted in the itinerary, purified water, airport transfers, ground transportation in vans, professional guide services, park and other entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses.

Not included is round-trip airfare to and from Oaxaca International Airport (OAX), personal expenses such as laundry, telephone, drinks from the bar, and gratuities for luggage handling or other services. Guide gratuities for David MacKay, your local guide, are at your discretion.

#### Travel Information

The airport is Oaxaca International Airport (OAX). Plan to arrive no later than 6:00 PM on October 20, 2021. You may arrive at times convenient for you, and we will arrange transfers accordingly. Departures from Oaxaca City can be planned at any time on October 26, but remember it is suggested that you be at the airport three hours ahead of an international flight so consider that when planning. For departures, again you can depart at a time convenient for you and we will arrange airport transfers.

#### Photo Credits

Oaxaca, courtesy UnSplash; Green Jay, Tom Dove (TD); Elegant Trogon, TD; Olive Warbler, [Red Warbler, Francesco Veronesi - Sinaloa - Mexico S4E1238](#); Textiles, courtesy UnSplash; Common Black Hawk, Greg Smith (GS); Altamira Oriole, TD; Squirell Cuckoo, Sandy Sorkin; Olive Warbler, Peg Abbott; Painted Redstart, Barry Ramdass; Monte Alban, courtesy UnSplash; Acorn Woodpeckers, GS; [Dwarf Jay \(Cyanolyca nana\), Dominic Sherony](#); Blue Mockingbird, PA; Mexican Chickadee, PA.

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