

The Beaches & Mountains of Pacific Mexico With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



March 11 – 21, 2021

866.900.1146

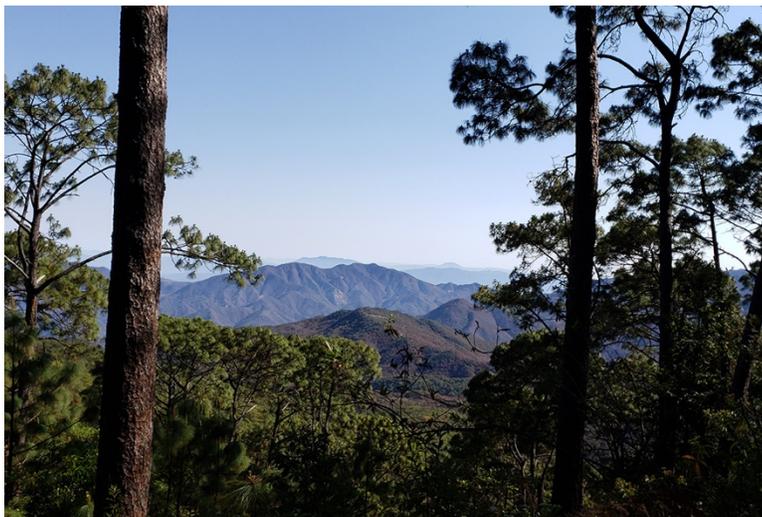
800.426.7781

520.558.1146

travel@naturalistjourneys.com

www.naturalistjourneys.com

or find us on Facebook at
Naturalist Journeys, LLC





The Pacific Slope of Mexico offers a unique tropical birding experience, far from the rainforests on the Caribbean side of the country and biographically isolated by the Sierra Madre Occidental. The jungles here are relatively dry and open compared to the dense, dripping rainforest, and we even visit habitat known as ‘thorn scrub’, where you may feel like you are birding in a desert. Our gateway of Puerto Vallarta makes travel easy. We are never more than a few hours from Vallarta’s services.

Itinerary

Thurs., Mar. 11 Arrivals | El Tuito

Our tour begins and ends in Puerto Vallarta, making travel easy with many direct flights from the United States and Canada. Please plan your arrivals for no later than 2:00 PM today. You are met on arrival and we quickly head south past the cruise ships and resorts and away from Banderas Bay. Our drive takes us up the Rio Horcones canyon and into the pine forests of Cabo Corrientes. We make a quick stop in Culpumpio to buy some fresh hot breads before reaching the pueblo of El Tuito. Just a few minutes farther and we arrive at Rancho Primavera. After settling into our rooms, we take advantage of any remaining light to do some casual birding on the property, followed by a short drive into town for dinner. Welcome to Mexico!

Accommodations at Rancho Primavera (D)

About Ranch Primavera

The 200-acre Rancho Primavera is a birder’s paradise, and we spend plenty of time exploring the property. A typical day at the ranch starts with the dawn chorus. The last calls of the nocturnal Mottled Owl and Common Pauraque are followed by the cacophonous chatter of the West Mexican Chachalaca and the haunting howl of the Collared Forest Falcon. White-tipped Dove begin cooing, followed by the gregarious Social Flycatcher. Grayish Saltator, Russet-crowned Motmot, and others join the chorus. Before breakfast, we can enjoy the first visitors to the feeders, which typically include Yellow-winged Cacique, Blue Mockingbird, Rufous-backed Robin, and Stripe-headed Sparrow. Yellow Grosbeak quickly arrives and is joined by the resident flock of Black-throated Magpie-Jay.

Tour Highlights

- Watch for up to 40 Pacific Slope endemics, several of which are common feeder birds
- Witness many Neotropical migrants, including up to 20 migrant warblers
- See nearly 30 possible flycatchers—the world’s largest bird family—and up to 25 different raptors
- Explore the private 200-acre Rancho Primavera, with its productive feeders and miles of well-maintained trails
- Discover productive aquatic habitats and enjoy a ‘panga’ ride to the isolated coastal town of Yelapa and evening boat ride at La Tovara, where we can get up close and personal with Common Potoo and American Crocodile!
- Visit three lovely Mexican pueblos: San Blas, El Tuito, and San Sebastian del Oeste, each with its own unique history and charm.

Tour Summary

11-Day / 10-Night Pacific Mexico Birding Tour with Steve Shunk

\$TBD, from Puerto Vallarta

Airport is Licenciado Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (PVR)



Birding around the property typically produces both Elegant and Citreoline Trogons, Squirrel Cuckoo, Berylline Hummingbird, and Orange-fronted Parakeet. Resident woodpeckers include the impressive Lineated and Pale-billed, plus the endemic Golden-cheeked and Gray-crowned Woodpeckers. Songbird diversity starts with several different flycatchers and ends with a host of warblers and vireos. In case these aren't enough, ponds on the property support Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Least Grebe, Blue-winged Teal, Wood Stork, and Sora.

In addition to our sunrise ritual, we spend a one full day hiking the ranch, as well as an afternoon or two. After a few days here, you will want to book your own return trip!

Fri., Mar. 12 – Sun., Mar. 14 Birding Around Cabo Corrientes

Our first full day is dedicated to exploring Rancho Primavera; we have two full additional days to experience the diverse habitats around El Tuito and Cabo Corrientes. We also venture into pine forest and thorn-scrub habitats, above and below the ranch, respectively. One afternoon and evening is dedicated to the Provincia Road, which courses through Montezuma Pine forest. Here we could find Colima Pygmy-Owl, Grace's and Fan-tailed Warblers, Slate-throated Redstart, Arizona Woodpecker, and Hepatic Tanager. At sunset we stage ourselves in the perfect spot for the Eared Poorwill. One morning takes us down the Bioto Road—just below the ranch in elevation—where we search for Red-crowned Ant-Tanager, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, and the endemic Lilac-crowned Parrot and Sinaloa Wren. Another afternoon in the desert-like thorn-scrub typically brings us Nutting's and Flammulated Flycatchers, several species of seedeaters and grassquits, Red-breasted Chat, and White-throated Magpie-Jay. Orange-breasted Bunting is common here.

We also spend one full morning at the Vallarta Botanical Gardens, where we enjoy several of the common Mexican specialty birds, along with some fun new species. Green Jay often joins the San Blas Jay and Golden-cheeked Woodpecker at the fruit feeders. We may see Zone-tailed Hawk overhead, and hummers at the gardens typically include Mexican Woodnymph and Sparkling-tailed Hummingbird. The well-kept grounds and featured displays at the gardens are absolutely gorgeous, and we enjoy lunch at the on-site La Hacienda de Oro.

Accommodations at Rancho Primavera (B,L,D)

Mon., Mar. 15 Cabo Corrientes to San Sebastian

We leave Rancho Primavera after breakfast and head back toward Puerto Vallarta. Our first stop is quite an adventure. From Boca de Tomatlan, we embark on a boat trip to the tiny coastal pueblo of Yelapa. Before Yelapa, though, we cruise to the Los Arcos rocks and throughout the surrounding waters. The rocks are covered



with Brown Pelican, along with Magnificent Frigatebird, and several Blue-footed Booby. We should see Heerman's Gull and Royal Tern over the water, and we hope to spend time with Humpback Whales. Common Black-Hawk are fishing from the rocky shoreline. Once at Yelapa, we take a walk to the small estuary formed by the Tuito River. The waters here could host any number of herons, including Reddish Egret and Little Blue Heron. We could see any or all of the three resident kingfisher species—Belted, Green, and Ringed.

Once back at Boca de Tomatlan, we head into Puerto Vallarta for lunch before heading into the Sierra Madre en route to San Sebastian del Oeste. This little village has achieved the national designation of 'Pueblo Magico' for its charm and cultural import. We spend the afternoon and evening birding along the nearby creek and adjacent woodlands. Some of the birds we may find include Brown-backed Solitaire and Flame-colored Tanager. *Accommodations at Hotel Mansion Real, San Sebastián (B,L,D)*

Tues., Mar. 16 San Sebastian & La Bufa

Our one full day at San Sebastian is dedicated to birding the road and surrounding habitats from town to the summit of La Bufa. The scenic mountain of La Bufa peers down on San Sebastian from about 8,100 feet, giving us the highest elevation birding on the trip. The weather is delightfully cool here, and we look for several montane



specialty birds of the Sierra Madre Occidental. Just a few of these may include Red-headed Tanager, Bumblebee and White-eared Hummingbirds, Mountain Trogon, Ultramarine Jay, and a mix of fun warblers and flycatchers. At the summit we might find wintering Hammond's Flycatcher, and mixed flocks could include Crescent-chested Warbler and Slate-throated Whitestart. You have the afternoon to wander the streets and town square of San Sebastian.

Accommodations at Hotel Mansion Real, San Sebastián (B,L,D)

Wed., Mar. 17 San Sebastian to San Blas

Today is our longest travel day as we head down the western slope of the Sierra Madre and north through foothills and agricultural areas to Matanchen Bay. We make a few stops to break up the road trip. Along the side roads we sift through mixed flocks of songbirds that could include wintering orioles and buntings, plus resident seedeaters. We should encounter plenty of raptors on the drive, including the common Gray Hawk and possible Roadside Hawk. On our final stop, we visit the beach town of Atacama. The rocky shores at the mouth of the Atacama River often host Heerman's Gull, Black-necked Stilt, Surfbird, and Whimbrel. We arrive in San Blas in time for dinner and our first of four nights.

Accommodations at Hotel Garza Canela, San Blas (B,L,D)

Thurs., Mar. 18 — Sat., Mar. 20 Exploring Southwestern Nayarit

The charismatic little fishing village of San Blas serves as our base for the next three full days. Birders have been flocking to San Blas for decades to explore this corner of the state of Nayarit. From the seashore to the jungle, the habitats are diverse, and the birds are abundant. The upland jungles hosts many of the same Pacific-slope birds we enjoyed in Jalisco, with the addition of some additional specialties. Pale-billed Woodpecker chisels away at the largest trees, while Squirrel Cuckoo dashes through the canopy. We could encounter a hungry flock of Mexican Parrotlet in a fruiting fig tree or a group of gregarious Purplish-backed Jay, both of which are endemic. Other regional endemics include Sinaloa Crow and Golden Vireo, with possible White-striped Woodcreeper.



The jungles surrounding San Blas are only the beginning. We enjoy the local mangrove swamps on our evening boat trip up the Rio San Cristobal and La Tovar. Traveling through tunnels of mangroves, we watch for Boat-billed Heron and Northern Potoo staring at us from a few feet away. We may see a Limpkin or Rufous-necked Wood-Rail feeding in a muddy cove—giving wide berth to a loafing crocodile—and raptors may include Snail Kite or Laughing Falcon. Bare-throated Tiger-Heron dwarf the tiny Green Kingfisher, and a “Mangrove” Yellow Warbler may whistle at us from overhead.

The outskirts of San Blas are dotted with a few famous shrimp ponds that are worthy of a daily stop or two to scan through the shorebirds and waders and to watch Mangrove Swallow feeding over the water. Collared Plover is one of our key species here, with Northern Jacana skulking along the grassy shoreline. Common Black-Hawk or Harris’s Hawk may be roosting around the fringes of the ponds, with Wood Stork, White Ibis, and Anhinga representing some of the common large waterbirds.

On the outer coast, a visit to Peso Island (actually the tip of a small peninsula) just across the river from downtown San Blas allows views of an offshore seabird rookery, where Blue-footed and Brown Boobies nest. Peso Island is also an excellent place to see Crane Hawk at close range, plus Rufous-bellied Chachalaca skulking in the trees. We could also run into both Elegant and Citreoline Trogons, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, and flocks of resident Tropical Parula feeding in the stunted scrubby canopy.

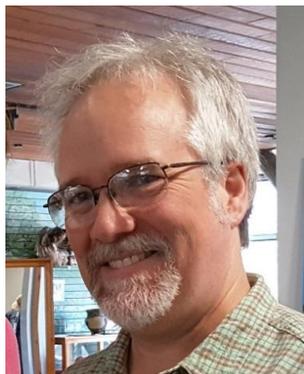
Other species we may encounter in various habitats around San Blas include: Orange-fronted Parakeet; White-throated Thrush; Bronzed Cowbird; Painted and Varied Buntings; Ruddy-breasted Seedeater; and the endemic Elegant Quail. A stay in San Blas could be one of your most memorable birding experiences ever!

Accommodations Hotel Garza Canela, San Blas (B,L,D)

Sun., Mar. 21 San Blas to Puerto Vallarta

After breakfast on our final morning in San Blas, we allow some time to explore the town square, with its authentic artisanal wares and delicious local foods. Heading south from San Blas, we may enjoy an early lunch in Sayulita before arriving at Puerto Vallarta for departures. We return to Puerto Vallarta airport by 1:00 PM for 3 PM or later departures. *(B,L)*

Guide Steve Shunk



Steve Shunk has been teaching adults about birds and nature since 1992. Steve is a seasoned tour guide, having led over 150 trips—across North America, as well as Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America, South America, Sicily, and Malaysian Borneo. Steve is a patient, experienced educator with an infectious passion and enthusiasm for nature and conservation. At home on the eastern slope of Oregon’s Cascade Mountains, he leads private tours. Steve is a nationally recognized woodpecker expert, and he is the author of the *Peterson Reference Guide to Woodpeckers of North America*. Steve has made several trips to Pacific Mexico since 2008, exploring Nayarit, Jalisco, and Colima. He has participated as a speaker and trip leader for the Vallarta Bird Festival, and he loves exploring the rural towns and backroads of “real” Mexico. Steve joined Naturalist Journeys in 2020, and we are excited to have him on our roster.

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 at Licenciado Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (PVR) on March 11 no later than 2:00 PM.

Please plan departures from 3:00 PM onward on March 21.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the tour: \$TBD DBL / \$TBD SGL, based on double occupancy from Puerto Vallarta. Includes 10 nights’ accommodation, meals as noted in the itinerary, airport transfers, ground transportation, professional guide services, park and other entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses. Not included is airfare to and from Puerto Vallarta, personal expenses such as laundry, telephone, drinks from the bar, and gratuities for luggage handling or other services. Guide gratuities are at your discretion.

Photo Credits

Beryline Hummingbird, Steve Shunk (SS); Blue Bunting, SS; La Bufa Summit Pines, SS; Golden-cheeked Woodpecker, SS; Orange-breasted Bunting, SS; Crocodile, SS; Boy on a horse, SS; Yellow-winged Cacique, SS; La Tovarà Sunset, SS; Erato Heliconian, SS; Rancho Primavera at Dawn, SS; Two-barred Flasher, SS; Tropical Kingbird, SS; Streak-backed Oriole, SS; Festival Boaters, SS; Green Jay, SS; Pale-billed Woodpecker, SS; San Blas Jay, SS; Red-headed Tanager, SS;

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.