

Guatemala: Birding & Nature

With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



February 17 – 28, 2022

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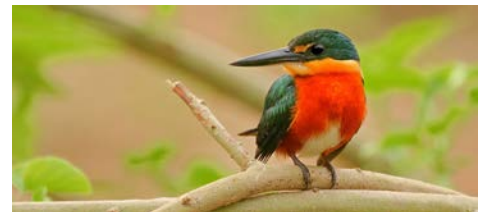
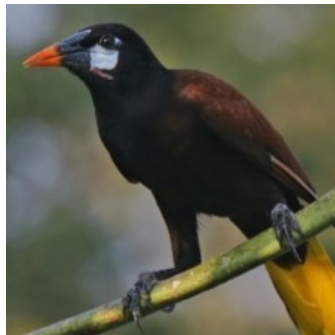
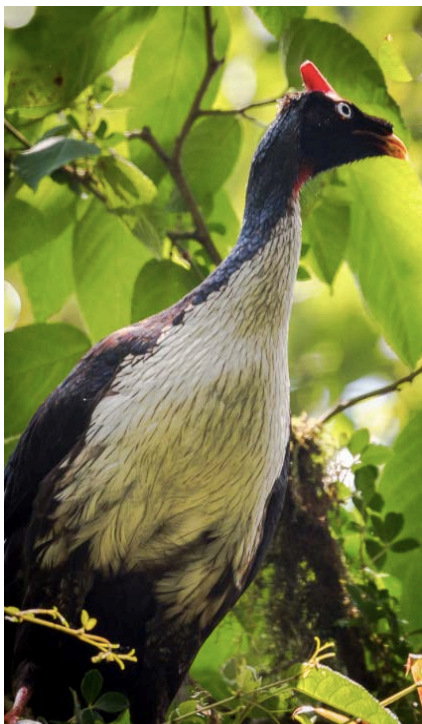
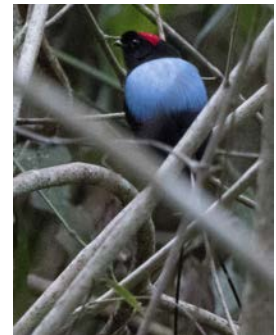
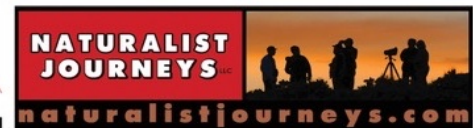
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NEW! We have added a different Guatemala tour in 2022, this one with a focus on birds and natural history. We increased time at two prime birding areas—more field time and a great mix of species. Guatemala is a spectacular birding destination, home to more than 700 bird species, from which at least 40 are regional endemics shared only with southern Mexico and Honduras. Combined with time at the stunning Tikal Maya ruins, 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 added Tikal to the main tour this year because it added so much culturally and bird-wise to our tour.

Tour Highlights

- ✓ Bird the famous Maya ruins at Tikal, oh so rich in birdlife
- ✓ 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

Tour Summary

12-Day / 11-Night Guatemala Birding Tour
\$4290, from Guatemala City
Airport is La Aurora International (GUA)



Itinerary

Thurs., Feb. 17 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 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., Feb. 18 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.

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)

Sat., Feb. 19 & Sun., Feb. 20 Tikal National Park

Protected as a national park in 1955, Tikal preserves the most magnificent example of pyramids, plazas, and temples of the ancient Maya 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 Maya commerce



and trade, Tikal's towering pyramids stretch towards the heavens 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 Maya 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 Maya 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-lored, 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., Feb. 21 El Remate Cerro Cahui | Travel to Guatemala City

This morning we continue our birding at another site today, Cerro Cahui Protected Biotope, located 30km from Tikal. This protected area also has water and land birds. Established for scientific studies by CECON (Centro de Estudios Conservacionistas) of the Universidad de San Carlos, Guatemala, the tropical rainforest reserve covers 650 hectares, and is a large forest over the northern edge of Lake Peten Itza. Because of its location next to Lake Peten Itza it has unique ecological characteristics. This biotope covers the lake shore, ponds, and a mature forest, and provides a rich array of plants and animals. Lunch in a local restaurant. We have scheduled an afternoon flight for the 45-minute jaunt back to Guatemala City.

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

Tues., Feb. 22 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 Maya 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 is 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)*

Wed., Feb. 23 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)

Thurs., Feb. 24 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 Guan's 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 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)

Fri., Feb. 25 Pink-headed Warbler 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)

Sat., Feb. 26 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 Robin, 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)

Sun., Feb. 27 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 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 en 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)

Mon., Feb. 28 Departures

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

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 February 17 for at La Aurora International (GUA) in time for a group dinner at 6:30 PM. Please note that you need to be at the airport three hours before your return flight on February 28, 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 \$4290 DBL / \$4690 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, internal flight, and miscellaneous program expenses.

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.

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