

Birding Guatemala's Maya Realm: Toucans, Tanagers, Tikal & More with Naturalist Journeys



Feb. 21 – Mar. 3, 2023

w/ Tikal extension Mar. 3 – 7

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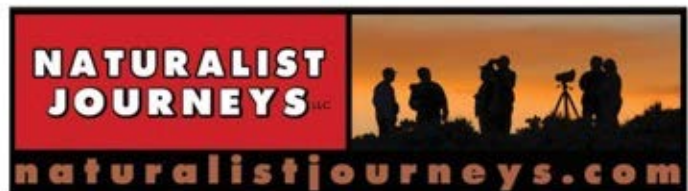
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Naturalist Journeys, LLC





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.

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: 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.

Tour Highlights

- Bird Cayala and Cerro Alux Ecological Parks, located in Guatemala City's green belt
- 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
- 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 to extend your trip with our exciting Tikal extension

Tour Summary

11-Day / 10-Night Guatemala Birding Tour
\$3990, From Guatemala City
Airport is Airport is La Aurora International (GUA)

Day-to-Day Itinerary

Tues., Feb. 21 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.

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

Wed., Feb. 22 Cayala & Cerro Alux Ecological Parks | Zunil

Enjoy breakfast this morning before departing for Cayala, part of Guatemala City's metropolitan green belt, offering 14 acres of natural forests, wildlife, and nature trails. This park is in the heart of Guatemala City on the eastern edge of the city and has an easy walking trail. Here, 106 species have been recorded, including resident, endemic and migratory birds, making it an excellent introduction to bird watching in Guatemala. We look for birds like Buffy-crowned Wood Partridge, Blue-and-White Mockingbird, Pacific Parakeet, Bushy-crested Jay, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Melodious Blackbird, Northern Flicker, Black-capped Swallow, Tufted Flycatcher, and many others.

We then continue towards Zunil, located in the highlands. En route, we visit Cerro Alux, located along the Inter-American Highway, between Guatemala City and Antigua Guatemala, 30 minutes from the capital. This mountain chain has the typical highlands pine oak forest, and the mountains already gain some elevation, hosting highland endemics. This is the wintering habitat for at least 25 species of American wood warblers along with other migratory species. Watch for Steller's Jay, Rufous-browed Wren, Blue-and-white Mockingbird, Blue-throated Motmot, Golden-browed Warbler, Crescent-chested Warbler, Grey Silky-flycatcher, Hooded Grosbeak, Mountain Trogon, Rufous-collared Thrush, Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer, and with a little luck Singing Quail, among others.

Accommodation at Las Cumbres (B,L,D)

Thurs., Feb. 23 Full Day at Fuentes Georginas

We enjoy a full day exploring Fuentes Georginas, a reserve that offers excellent birdwatching. Here, we can find Mountain Trogon, Blue-throated Motmot, Unicolored Jay, Black-capped Swallow, Rufous-browed Wren, Hooded Grosbeak, Golden-browed Warbler, and Pink-headed Warbler (stunning!). This site is also quite rich in montane hummingbirds, many of which are unique to Mexico and Central America, such as Green-throated Mountain-gem, Amethyst-throated Mountain-gem, Garnet-throated Hummingbird, and Wine-throated Hummingbird. Birding is quite easy here; species can be observed on the paved road and near the visitor center.

We return to our hotel for dinner and a relaxing evening.

Accommodation at Las Cumbres (B,L,D)

Fri., Feb. 24 Travel to Los Trrales

After breakfast this morning it's time to pack up and head to our next exciting destination: Los Trrales. Los Trrales Reserve itself protects humid, subtropical forest located on the southeastern slope of Atilán Volcano. The reserve is part of the Atilán 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 and natural history areas. The verdant forests of Los Tarrales are home to a fantastic assortment of birds, and we have chances to see the nearly endemic Azure-rumped Tanager, as well as a rich supporting cast of colorful species such as Emerald-chinned Hummingbird, White-faced Quail-Dove, White-winged Tanager, and White-eared Ground-Sparrow. As the day warms up, there is also a rich diversity of butterflies, from morphos to daggerwings to crescents. Situated at a lower elevation, your comfortable lodge immerses you in nature with splendid scenery and birdy surroundings with shade-grown coffee plantations (yes, you can buy local coffee!). 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 original home of the estate. Walking to the dining room through hedgerows of flowers brings sightings of active and colorful hummingbirds. This is a cozy, simple birding lodge to long remember.

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

Sat., Feb. 25 Full Day at Tarrales

We rise early today for breakfast before meeting our local guide to bird a different area of the reserve. We drive partway 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., Feb. 26 Los Tarrales | Lake Atitlan

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. Then, it's time to pack up and head to our next exciting destination.

We continue to the community of Santiago Atitlan on the shore of Lake Atitlán. Few places in the world can match the spectacular beauty of this lake, one of Guatemala's most prized natural treasures. Geologists state its origin is due to a large volcanic blast that occurred millions of years ago. Pockets of broad-leaf and mixed pine-oak forests grow in the region.

For many centuries, several native groups of Maya origin have lived on the shores of Lake Atitlán and continue

to share a relationship based on community. Divided among numerous small townships, the two main groups that share the lake are the T'zutujiles and Kaqchiqueles.

Accommodations at El Bambu, Santiago Atitlan (B,L,D)

Mon., Feb. 27 Birding Mirador Rey Tepepul

We enjoy breakfast at the lodge before setting off for our birding destination of the day: Mirador del Rey Tepepul. At this site chances we hope to observe not only the stunning and iconic Resplendent Quetzal, but also the highly sought after endemic Azure-rumped Tanager, as well as Blue-crowned Chlorophonia, Barred Parakeet, Chestnut-capped Brush-finch, Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer, Grey Silky-flycatcher, Brown-backed Solitaire, Green-throated Mountain-Gem, Golden-browed Warbler, the Northern Central American sub-species of Hairy Woodpecker, Mountain Elania, and so many more. We spend the whole morning birding the trails here before heading back to the hotel.

After lunch, we bird locally near the lodge.

Accommodations at El Bambu, Santiago Atitlan (B,L,D)

Tues., Feb. 28 Pink-headed Warbler at Tecpan | Antigua Guatemala

After breakfast at the hotel, we check out and travel to Antigua Guatemala, stopping in 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 again, 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 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 or similar, Antigua (B,L,D)

Wed., Mar. 1

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

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

Thurs., Mar. 2 Jardines de Provenza | Guatemala City

This morning, after an early breakfast, we continue to see some local points of interest between Antigua and Guatemala City, we visit Jardines de Provenza. It is a wonderful field of lavender flowers, the largest lavender garden in the country, located just 7 minutes from La Antigua Guatemala in San Mateo Milpas Altas. It is a private reserve with a trail surrounded by nature, presents a mixed forest within a mountainous system that is part of the Central Volcanic Chain of Guatemala, an area with different types of habitats, such as cloud forests, pine-oak forests, and dry forests. Currently there are more than 50 species of birds reported.

Thanks to Guatemala's wonderful climate, the lavender gardens bloom all year round, which allows you to visit at any time of the year and get wonderful views of the majestic volcanoes of Agua, Fuego and Acatenango. We watch for Green-throated Mountain-gem, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Mountain and Collared Trogons, Blue-throated Motmot, Rufous-collared Robin, and Golden-fronted Woodpecker.

Enjoy lunch and some down time before making our way back to Guatemala City, planning to arrive at sunset.

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

Fri., Mar. 3 Departures or Tikal Extension

For those not doing the Tikal extension, the tour ends this morning with a transfer to the international airport for flights out today at leisure. (B)

Tikal Extension

Fri., Mar. 3 Flight to Flores | Tikal

This morning, after our short flight to Flores we meet up with our local guide; en route to Jungle Lodge 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 or similar, Tikal (B,L,D)

Sat., Mar. 4 & Sun., Mar. 5 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! These days are to wander 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 or similar, Tikal National Park (B,L,D)

Mon., Mar. 6 El Remate | Guatemala City

This morning we continue our birding at another site today, El Remate. This is an idyllic spot at the eastern end of Lago de Petén Itzá, and here we have lunch. A nice variety of water birds occur along the shores of the lake, including both Limpkin and Snail Kite. Rank grasses might attract small flocks of Morelet's Seedeater and Groove-billed Ani. We should also see a nice selection of herons and egrets.

We have scheduled an afternoon flight for the 45-minute jaunt back to Guatemala City, where we spend our last night in the same comfortable city hotel. This evening you have time to pack, get organized for your trip home, and relax during a final evening with friends.

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

Tues., Mar. 7 Departures

Depart at your convenience this morning from La Aurora International airport. Keep in mind when booking flights that you need to be at the airport approximately three hours ahead of your flight, so mid- to late-morning is far more comfortable than an early morning flight. Breakfast for those on a schedule that allows is in the hotel. The tour ends this morning with the transfer to the international airport. (B)

Tour Details

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.

Cost of the Journey

The cost of this journey is \$3990 DBL / \$4290 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 \$1395 DBL / \$1650 DBL and includes your internal flight.

The cost does not include transportation to or from your home to Guatemala, or items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone charges, portorage, maid gratuities, or beverages from the bar.

Travel Information

Please plan to arrive to La Aurora International Airport (GUA) on February 21 in time for a 6:30 PM group dinner at our first night's hotel. There is a convenient shuttle to the hotel from the airport. Please plan departures at leisure on March 3 for the main tour or at leisure on March 7 for the Tikal extension.

You need to be at the airport three hours before your flight, so a mid- to late-morning flight time is most comfortable. Please plan to use the hotel's airport shuttle service.

Photo Credits

Resplendent Quetzal, Greg Smith (GS); Turquoise-browed Motmot, Luis Búrban, courtesy Operador Latino (OL); Ocellated Turkey, Peg Abbott (PA); Woman at Market, Irene Rodriguez (IR), courtesy OL; Montezuma Oropendola, Alex Navarro, courtesy OL; Unicolored Jays, Irene Rodriguez, OL.

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