

# Oaxaca Valley: Birds, Culture & Crafts with Naturalist Journeys



August 1 – 9, 2022

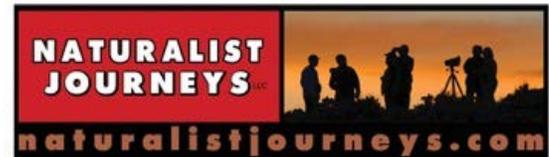
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On this delightful tour, it is so easy to blend the enjoyment of local foods and culture in a World Heritage Site with some truly exceptional birding! Time in Oaxaca City is memorable and yet nature is just a short drive away—the city is surrounded by mountains with varied habitats that we can easily access at different elevations. Many of the specialty birds can be found at such significant archeological sites like Monte Alban and Yagul, both stunning sites to take in history and find the birds. We spend four nights in city accommodations from which we explore the greater Oaxaca Valley and northern mountains, and then we venture to the southern side of the valley and up into the mountains to stay three nights in cozy cabins (with fireplaces!) in pine forests where hummingbirds, including the endemic Bumblebee, and higher elevation species abound. The arts and crafts in the region are amazing and abundant—a good reason to come in early, or stay on post-tour, if you want to see artisans' work in detail.

Surrounding the Oaxaca Valley are two mountain ranges that come together—the southern end of the Sierra Madre Oriental meets the Sierra Madre Sur creating an area rich in biodiversity. Oaxaca Valley has a lovely climate as it lies at an elevation of over 6,000 feet. Some of our birding is in lush forests at 9000 feet, where fresh air and cool temperatures abound. The elevational gradient holds a great array of habitats where we have a grand time looking for 12 bird species endemic to southern Mexico such as Oaxaca and Bridled Sparrows, Ocellated Thrasher, Pileated Flycatcher, Dwarf and Slaty Vireos, White-throated Towhee, and Boucard's Wren. These are residents so they are present year-round.

Our guide and host this year is Eric Martinez, resident of the Oaxaca Valley at Teotitlan, a village famous for rug weaving. Eric is a fabulous all-around naturalist, keen birder and avid conservationist. He interprets the landscapes, knows the butterflies (of which there are many!) and, as a resident, his knowledge of where to find the birds is unsurpassed. Oaxaca is also famous for its food and hospitality ... dining is a big part of our fun!

## Tour Summary

9-Day / 8-Night Mexico Birding & Nature Tour

\$3790, from Oaxaca City

Airport is the Oaxaca International (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 surrounding mountains
- ✓ Explore the city's botanical gardens and shop handmade crafts

## Day-to-Day Itinerary

### Mon., Aug. 1 Welcome to 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. It's easy to walk around historic parts of the city, replete with artisan shops and crafts. And the city parks can have some nice birding—Gray Silky Flycatcher and Rufous-backed Robin may be found in the town's plazas.

Meet your guides and fellow travelers at a welcome dinner tonight, and savor your first sample of Oaxacan cuisine! Afterwards, we have a brief orientation to go over information about the birding and week ahead.

*Accommodations at the Mision de Los Angeles, Oaxaca City (D)*

## **Tues., Aug. 2 La Cumbre | Ixtepeji | Yagul**

What can be better than birding in fresh mountain air with marvelous views back down to the Oaxaca Valley. We start early to head up through the vegetation zones that adorn the mountains, passing from scrub up to oak woodland and into lush humid pine oak forest located about 45 minutes north of Oaxaca City near the town of Ixtepeji, known to birders as La Cumbre. We explore on trails and quiet roads, moving slowly at a birder's pace since we are at 9,000 feet elevation. This lush forest is the upper part of the Benito Juarez National Park and home to the striking Red Warbler, Dwarf Jay, Collared Towhee, Mountain Trogon, Chestnut-sided Shrike Vireo, possible Russet Nightingale-Thrush, and other species. Mixed flocks are common here, often signaled by noisy flocks of Gray-barred Wren; with any luck Dwarf Jay might be with them. Mexican Chickadee, Crescent-chested Warbler, Slate-colored Redstart, and Red Crossbill are likely finds today as well.

Lunch is with the birds at a delightful local restaurant that has hummingbird feeders on its patio. Hot soup and warm tortillas may be most welcome in the cool mountain air. Blue-throated Mountain-gem may be at arm's length. Rufous-capped Brushfinch and the olive morph of Spotted Towhee may be active in the gardens. And Acorn Woodpecker is quite common in tall pines just off the deck.

We head down the mountain, and if time allows we visit the beautiful archaeological site of Yagul. The setting is enchanting with fine views of the mountains. Columnar cacti on the entrance road are a good spot to find Beautiful Hummingbird visiting flowers, along with Grey-breasted Woodpecker, Dusky Hummingbird, and more.

Returning to the city we pick out a wonderful spot for dinner, tally up our species list, and recount the day.

*Accommodations at the Mision de Los Angeles, Oaxaca City (B,L,D)*

## **Wed., Aug. 3 Teotitlan | Piedra Azul Reservoir | Local Weaving**

Eric, our guide is from the village of Teotitlan and is proud of their Zapotec heritage. A quieter village than the city but rich with artisans, we weave our way through a mix of habitats starting with some arid-scrub around town and moving up to Piedra Azul Reservoir just above the town on the road that winds into the mountains. We scan for Least Grebe, Green Kingfisher, and any water birds and shore birds that are present.

Birding in Teotitlan del Valle, located about 45 minutes east from Oaxaca City, at about 5200 feet elevation, is known to birders as a great place to scan scrub vegetation for Mexican endemic and specialty species in the area that include Bridled Sparrow, Boucard's Wren, Dusky Hummingbird, Gray-Breasted Woodpecker, White-throated Towhee, White-striped Woodcreeper, and Collared Towhee.

Going into the foothills we have a chance for two often vocal but hard to find species, Dwarf Vireo and Slaty Vireo. Blue Mockingbird may be present, Rose-throated Becard is always nice to see, as well as Streak-backed Oriole. We keep an eye peeled for Lesser Roadrunner. Enjoy a local lunch at one of Eric's favorite restaurants.

If there is interest we can visit a local weaver and learn more about the rich colors and patterns of Zapotec rugs made with natural dyes. On the way back, we try for the valley's namesake Oaxaca Sparrow, and watch the sky for raptors above the agricultural fields that rim the village.

Back in Oaxaca City, we have another fine meal, tally up our list, and prep for another good field day tomorrow.

*Accommodations at the Mision de Los Angeles, Oaxaca City (B,L,D)*

## **Thurs., Aug. 4 Las Guacamayas | Oaxaca City**

Today we head northwest on Highway 190, sampling our way through a mix of habitats. We focus much of our time in scrub vegetation and the mixed shrub arroyos that cut through them. We work our way up to oak woodland at a mid-elevation site (about 6000 ft.) good for endemic Ocellated Thrasher, Oaxaca Sparrow, and another chance to find Slaty Vireo. The vegetation mix is fascinating, with plants showing adaptations to arid conditions. This is a good area for butterflies. Elegant Euphonia occurs here, Nutting's Flycatcher, White-throated Towhee, Black-vented Oriole, and we could find the often elusive Blue Mockingbird.

We enjoy lunch along the way and return in time for a break, and then go into the historic section of the city with time to explore a bit ahead of dinner.

*Accommodations at the Mision de Los Angeles, Oaxaca City (B,L,D)*

## **Fri., Aug. 5 Morning at Monte Alban | Drive to San Jose del Pacifico**

This morning's highlight is to visit the striking archaeological site of Monte Alban, the largest and most important pre-Columbian site in the state, starting around 500 BC. Intricate and fanciful carvings adorn buildings, many depicting animals. The ruins are situated around an open plaza.

We bird our way there, as the entrance road has nice views and vegetation, then we park and walk through the historic site. Monte Alban has some interesting species of birds such as Rock Wren, Cassin's Kingbird, Vermilion Flycatcher, and perhaps some lower elevation mixed flocks that may include Golden Vireo. After birding and enjoying the history of the site we find a local place for lunch and then have a travel afternoon, with a scenic four-hour drive to the town of San Jose del Pacifico for three nights.

We arrive at our cozy lodge in time to check out the hummingbird feeders; with luck we may find Rivoli's, White-eared, Garnet-throated, or the tiny Bumblebee. At night we listen for songs of Mexican Whip-poor-will.

*Accommodations at the Puesto del Sol, San Jose del Pacifico (B,L,D)*

## **Sat., Aug. 6 San Jose del Pacifico**

Cool and comfortable while birding in San Jose at 8,000 feet elevation, today we can have a nice-relaxed pace morning as our lodge grounds have wonderful plantings, trees, and birds. We may hear or, with luck, see Long-tailed Wood-Partridge. Some species possible include Gray-Silky Flycatcher, Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer, and more chances for Red Warbler, Yellow-eyed Junco, Flame-colored Tanager, and other highland species.

In the afternoon we check out the hummingbird feeders for activity and we may venture down the winding highway to a quiet road that descends to a village. The forest here is draped with bromeliads and mosses, a magical realm to enjoy.

Tonight we go into town to try a fun local Italian restaurant.

*Accommodations at the Puesto del Sol, San Jose del Pacifico (B,L,D)*

## **Sun., Aug. 7 Pluma Hidalgo | Puesto del Sol**

Today we continue south on the highway, eventually dropping down in elevation to deciduous forest at a place with fine views all the way to the ocean. Birding in the upper vicinity of Pluma Hidalgo lets us get into new habitat with a strong tropical influence. Bird species today may include the Oaxacan endemic Blue-capped Hummingbird, Northern Emerald-Toucanet, Red-headed Tanager, Golden Vireo, and more. We have lunch at a family-run coffee finca where we can sample shade grown coffee, and do some more birding in the area, looking

for Ferruginous Pygmy Owl, Happy Wren, Greenish Elaenia, White-tipped Dove, and Red-legged Honeycreeper. This area is superb for butterflies too.

We arrive back in time to see what's patrolling the gardens and feeders. Then, we have time to tally up our findings and enjoy another nice dinner.

*Accommodations at the Puesto del Sol, San Jose del Pacifico (B,L,D)*

## **Mon., Aug. 8 Local Birding | Return to Oaxaca City**

This morning we bird the gardens and enjoy some casual birding near the town of San Jose del Pacifico before starting the drive back to Oaxaca City. We break up the drive with some scenic and birding stops. Watch for Crested Caracara and other birds of prey. We end with a farewell dinner, perhaps at a rooftop restaurant watching sunset over the city. We share highlights of the trip and compare notes for our next adventure!

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

## **Tues., Aug. 9 Departures**

It is time for our flock to disperse. Depart today at leisure. (B)

# **Tour Details**

## **Plan Ahead!**

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

## **Cost of the Journey**

Cost of the tour is **\$3790 DBL / \$4285 SGL** per person, based on double occupancy, from Oaxaca City. Cost includes: all accommodations; all meals as stated in the itinerary; group airport transfers; ground transportation; professional guide services; park, preserve, and other activity fees; and miscellaneous program expenses.

Tour price does not include: roundtrip airfare to and from Oaxaca City or items of a personal nature such as laundry, portage, telephone charges, alcoholic beverages, or guide gratuities.

## **Travel Information**

Please make flight plans only after the minimum group size has been reached. Please arrive in Oaxaca City at Oaxaca International (OAX) no later than 6:00 PM on August 1. Please plan departures at leisure on August 9.

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