

# Durango Highway & San Blas

## The Best Bird Diversity of Western Mexico

with Naturalist Journeys



**December 1 – 11, 2022**

866.900.1146

520.558.1146

[travel@naturalistjourneys.com](mailto:travel@naturalistjourneys.com)

[www.naturalistjourneys.com](http://www.naturalistjourneys.com)

or find us on Facebook & Instagram at  
Naturalist Journeys, LLC



Join Naturalist Journeys for an exciting Mexico birding tour. We begin and end our journey in Mazatlan, and spend time working our way from low to high elevations, exploring large estuaries, extensive mudflats, dry tropical deciduous forests, gallery oak forests, and coniferous forests at the highest elevations.

We work our way up along the famed Durango Highway to the town of Copala. The extreme elevation changes found along the highway, coupled with significant rainfall amounts, rugged topography, and diverse habitats offer the potential to see upwards of 20 Mexican endemics, including the incredibly showy and very regional endemic Tufted Jay.

Then it's back down again to the coast to San Blas, long recognized for its plethora of bird diversity, where we spend lovely days with short driving distances looking for tropical birds at the top of their range and neotropical migrants enjoying the warm weather. We also enjoy siestas most days on the coast

This is a fun, birdy, and exciting Mexican birding tour that has the potential to see nearly 300 species of birds! We hope you'll join us.

## **Tour Summary**

11-Day / 10-Night Mexico Birding & Nature Tour

Small-group, Limit 7!

\$4390, from Mazatlan

Airport is Mazatlan International (MZT)

## **Tour Highlights**

- Stay at three lovely, locally owned hotels, and indulge on fresh seafood and traditional Mexican gourmet meals
- Explore in a region that is home to more than 25 percent of Mexico's species list, including more than a third of the country's endemics
- Look for Eared Quetzal, Green-striped Brush-finch, Red-headed Tanager, and Golden-browed and Red Warblers in the highlands along the Durango Highway
- Bird the tropical deciduous forests in the foothill region of Concordia and Copala, one of the richest plant communities on Earth
- Search for Collared Forest-Falcon, Lilac-crowned Parrot, Colima Pygmy Owl, Fan-tailed Warbler, and Blue Mockingbird as we explore from San Blas

## **Day-to-Day Itinerary**

### **Thurs., Dec. 1 Arrivals**

Welcome to Mexico! Please plan to arrive before 6:00 PM at Mazatlan, Sinaloa International Airport and transfer to the hotel by taxi or Uber. We enjoy a nice dinner as a group and settle in to our small, boutique hotel in the historic city center of Mazatlan.

*Accommodations in Mazatlan (D)*

### **Fri., Dec. 2 West Mexican Endemics | Up the Durango Highway**

We have an early breakfast at the hotel before heading off for birding areas to the north of Mazatlan, about a 45 minute drive from the hotel. This morning we are primarily looking for some of the West Mexican endemics, such as Black-capped Gnatcatcher, Mexican Parrotlet, Citoline Trogon, Flamulated Flycatcher Sinaloa Crow,

Yellow-winged Cacique, Rufous-bellied Chachalaca, Elegant Quail, Black-throated Magpie Jay, Purplish-backed Jay, Red-breasted Chat, Fan-tailed Warbler, Blue Mockingbird, and Orange-billed Nightingale Thrush.

After lunch, we make our way up the Durango Highway to the sleepy historic mining town of Copala. Although this little town is a major stop for the tour buses herding cruise ship folks up from Mazatlan during the day, at night it is nearly abandoned except for local kids kicking soccer balls in the street. Our hotel for the next three nights is Daniel's, a simple and clean establishment that is the best option in the area and a place we've stayed for years. What it lacks in amenities and style, it more than makes up for with its wonderful staff and proximity to good birding! Dinner is at Daniel's restaurant.

*Accommodations at Daniel's or similar (B,L,D)*

### **Sat., Dec. 3 Barranca del Liebre**

This morning we have a 90 minute drive to our birding spot so we kick off the day quite early. We plan to cover the high elevations of an area known as the "Barranca del Liebre" (the Canyon of the Jack Rabbit ... don't ask us why, the closest Jack Rabbit is 50 miles away!). This is one of the only readily accessible locations to find the amazingly beautiful and highly endemic Tufted Jay. Although the jay is certainly our goal, this area is a wonderful place to find a large number of Mexico's endemic high elevation dwellers. We have a good chance to see all of the following species: Bumblebee Hummingbird, Green-striped and Rufous-capped Brush-finches, Golden-browed Warbler, Red Warbler, White-napped Swift, White-striped Woodcreeper, Mountain Trogon, Rusty Sparrow, Rusty-crowned Ground-Sparrow, and Eared Quetzal to name a few.

Today requires a fair bit of walking at high elevation, so be prepared to take it slow and steady! It can also be a bit chilly at this elevation, particularly in the morning. Lunch is a picnic at the top of the canyon, and dinner tonight is back at the hotel.

*Accommodations at Daniel's or similar (B,L,D)*

### **Sun., Dec. 4 Guide's Choice**

We have one more day in the mountains to pick up any missed high elevation species. Our destination today is determined by how we did the day before. Essentially the species list is the same as yesterday with the addition of Flame-colored Tanager, Black-headed Siskin, Blue Bunting, and Red-headed Tanager. We enjoy another field lunch and then dinner back in Copala.

*Accommodations at Daniel's or similar (B,L,D)*

### **Mon., Dec. 5 Panuco Road Birding | San Blas Nayarit**

After breakfast we drive about 10 minutes to the Panuco Road and spend the morning birding at the mid-elevation habitat. This is a great morning to get a look at fantastic birds like Colima Pygmy Owl, Yellow-winged Cacique, Golden-cheeked, Lineated and Pale-billed Woodpeckers, Golden-crowned Emerald, Military Macaw, Yellow Grosbeak, Blue Bunting, Orange-fronted Parakeet, and Russet-crowned Motmot. The walking this morning is on a maintained and utilized dirt road, so we need to be aware of traffic but it is not typically heavy.

We have lunch back at Daniel's before packing up and heading off for the lowlands and San Blas Nayarit, four hours to the south. Our home for the next four nights is a wonderful family-owned and operated hotel and one of the most birder friendly hotels in the world!

*Accommodations at Hotel Garza Canela or similar (B,L,D)*

### **Tues., Dec. 6 Birding San Blas**

This morning, the close proximity to great birding outside the ejido village of Singayta allows a few more



minutes of sleep before breakfast. As is the case on all but one of our days in San Blas, we head back to the hotel for lunch and a siesta, which gives us a break from the tropical sun before going out for afternoon birding.

Some of today's birds include Laughing Falcon, Collared Forest-Falcon, Great and Common Black Hawks, Short-tailed Hawk, Mexican Parrotlet, Lilac-crowned Parrot, Long-tailed (Mexican) Hermit, Berylline Hummingbird, San Blas Jay, Blue Mockingbird, Golden Vireo, White-collared (Cinnamon-rumped) Seedeater, Black-vented Oriole, Fan-tailed Warbler, and Rosy Thrush-Tanager. We enjoy dinner tonight in San Blas.

*Accommodations at Hotel Garza Canela or similar (B,L,D)*

### **Wed., Dec. 7 La Bajada Birding | Mangrove Boat Trip**

Morning birding today is a short drive from San Blas above the town of La Bajada, in a coffee growing area about 35 minutes from San Blas. This morning requires a fair bit of walking on a cobblestone road, but the distances are not great. The area is very well shaded, but it can get warm by the time we call it a morning.

Some possibilities this morning are San Blas Jay, Purplish-backed Jay, Sparkling-tailed Hummingbird, Mexican Woodnymph, Gray-crowned Woodpecker, Brown-backed Solitaire, Red-breasted Chat, Rosy Thrush-Tanager and Scrub Euphonia.

After lunch and a short siesta, we head out to La Tovar for a mangrove boat trip that we take in the evening in an attempt to pick up some owls, among other things. A wonderful trip! Some very good bird possibilities are Rufous-necked Wood-Rail, Boat-billed Heron, Pauraque, Lesser Nighthawk, Buff-collared Nightjar, Mottled Owl, Vermiculated Screech Owl, and Northern Potoo! There are also good chances to see American Crocodile and Greater Fishing Bats! We have dinner a bit later tonight, but we pre-order at lunch so the service is speedy.

*Accommodations at Hotel Garza Canela or similar (B,L,D)*

### **Thurs., Dec. 8 Cerro de San Juan**

Today we head up to the mountains above San Blas to Cerro de San Juan, a one hour drive from San Blas. Here we hope to find a large assortment of pine-oak birds, and experience a much cooler climate! We are out most of the day and bring a picnic lunch with us. Our favorite birds today include San Blas Jay, Calliope and Bumblebee Hummingbirds, Sparkling-tailed Hummingbird, Mexican Woodnymph, White-striped and Olivaceous Woodcreepers, Gray-crowned Woodpecker, Gray-collared Becard, Spotted Wren, Russet Nightingale Thrush, Crescent-chested, Red-faced, Rufous-capped, and Golden-crowned Warblers, Flame-colored and Red-headed Tanagers, Brown-backed Solitaire, Gray-silky Flycatcher, and Lesser Roadrunner.

*Accommodations at Hotel Garza Canela or similar (B,L,D)*

### **Fri., Dec. 9 Boat Trip on the San Cristobal River | Guide's Choice**

Our morning birding finds us back in the boats, this time on the San Cristobal river, rewarding us with incredible numbers of shore and water birds. Least, Pied-billed and Eared Grebes, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, 16 species of waders, 14 species of ducks, huge numbers of raptors, and a huge array of sandpipers and other water birds, Willow and White-throated Flycatchers, Mangrove Cuckoo, and massive mobs of wintering warblers from both sides of the continent! Truly a bird-o-rama!

After lunch at the hotel, we plan to head out to the crocodile farm and the shrimp ponds searching for Collared Plover and other shore birds. However, depending on how we've done this week, we can adjust the location of this afternoon's birding to best suit our expanding list of birds!

*Accommodations at Hotel Garza Canela or similar (B,L,D)*

## **Sat., Dec. 10    Birding Back to Mazatlan**

We take our time, birding our way back to Mazatlan today. Tonight we enjoy a fun, final meal together celebrating our trip, going over the final bird list, and saying goodbye to new friends.

*Accommodations in Mazatlan (B,L,D)*

## **Sun., Dec. 11    Departures**

Please plan departures at leisure today, with an easy taxi or Uber back to the airport. Adios! (B)

*Itinerary subject to change due to weather or other unforeseen circumstances. We will keep you informed of any changes prior to or during the trip.*

## **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**

Cost of the tour: \$4390 DBL / \$4940 SGL, based on double occupancy from Mazatlan. The cost includes 10 nights' accommodation, meals as noted in the itinerary, ground transportation, professional guide services, park and other entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses.

The cost does not include airfare to and from Mazatlan, airport transfer, personal expenses such as laundry, telephone, drinks from the bar, and gratuities for luggage handling or other services. Guide gratuities are at your discretion.

### **Travel Information**

Please plan to arrive at Mazatlan International (MZT) on December 1 before 6:00 PM. Please plan departures at leisure on December 11. Please plan to taxi or Uber to the hotel on arrival and from the hotel to the airport on departure.

### **Photo Credits**

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