



**BIRDING TOUR COLOMBIA:
GENERAL INFORMATION**



With 1986 species of birds, Colombia is the Land of Birds. No other country in the world has more avian species than Colombia. Despite its relatively small size, occupying only one percent of the world's landmass, this country boasts 19 percent of the world's species of birds (more than North America and Europe combined). Colombia is the second-most biologically diverse country on earth and a land of startling contrasts and unlimited possibilities. Colombia's immense natural richness is positioning the country as one of the top birding destinations in the world. With 84 endemic species, astounding geography, vibrant culture, and a growing capacity to provide world-class services in urban as well as rural settings, Colombia is soon becoming the go-to destination for birders from around the planet.

This diversity is due to Colombia's immensely diverse landscapes, which include three Andean ranges, two vast inter-Andean valleys, the imposing Santa Marta Mountains and the Caribbean Coast, the Chocó Bioregion along the Pacific Ocean, a large portion of the Orinoquía or Llanos region, and the Amazon Rainforest.

Birding Ecotours has been running tours in Colombia since 2012, and we found the country very safe to travel around in. The days of violence are in the past, and we very much agree with the government slogan that claims "Colombia: the only risk is wanting to stay".

The birding is outstanding in numbers and diversity of species. Our itinerary is designed to provide you with the best of the country, including the Caribbean coast and the Santa Marta Mountains, the Central Andes including the high Andean mountains of Los Nevados National Park and the Rio Blanco Reserve, the Chocó rainforest, and the western Andes. We believe you are going to love your trip with us!

ARRIVAL INFORMATION

Our tour will start in the northern city of Barranquilla. You can reach Barranquilla's Ernesto Cortissoz International Airport (BAQ) with flights from all over Colombia and from some international airports like Miami (USA) and Panama City (Panama). Please consult your travel agent to book your most convenient flight. Your tour leader will be waiting for you at Barranquilla airport with a small board with the Birding Ecotours logo and then transfer you to your hotel. Please be aware that most international flights arrive in Barranquilla in the afternoon, so we don't have any birding activity planned for that day. In case you arrive on an early flight, you will be transferred to the hotel but will have to wait until check-in is available. For an early check-in you might be charged extra directly from the hotel; this cost would not be included in the Birding Ecotours tour price.

Please remember to keep your luggage tags, as they are required to exit the terminal at the Barranquilla airport.

When filling out the customs declaration form, use this address for the hotel:

Hotel Barranquilla Plaza

Carrera 51B No. 79-246, Barranquilla, Colombia

DEPARTURE INFORMATION

Our tour will end in the southern city of Cali after some wonderful 18 days in Colombia. After a last morning birding your tour leader will transfer you to the Cali Alfonso Bonilla Aragón International Airport (CLO), from where you can take connections to any city in Colombia to connect with your international departures.

DOMESTIC FLIGHT INFORMATION

There is only one domestic flight on this trip, covering the leg Riohacha – Pereira. This flight is not included in the Birding Ecotours tour price, but we will book it for you. We will fly with AVIANCA, which we found to be the most reliable airline in Colombia. This flight will have a connection in Bogotá. We have to be at the Riohacha airport two hours before the flight. Your flight details will be provided within two months before the tour starts and after we have received full payment.

PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS AND PACE

We qualify this trip as moderate. Most of the birding consists of walking along roads, although some of them lead up and down hills. We will spend time sitting and enjoying hummingbird feeders and watching for birds around the lodges' clearings. We will do very few trails (only if necessary), except for an afternoon exploring the El Dorado Lodge trail (which is rather gentle) and a wide, short trail around Sonso Lake. Nevertheless, Colombia does not require long, hard mountain walks as do some other Birding Ecotours destinations like Peru, Guatemala, or Ecuador. Keep in mind that as is usual on birding trips that we need to be awake very early in the morning, and predawn starts are in order each day. We normally spend the whole morning birding in the field, return to the lodge for lunch, and then provide a little rest before continuing birding in the afternoon. Your guide will invite you to look for owls at night, but this is an optional activity that you can skip if you feel tired. Some people would rather like to rest, skipping birding in the afternoon; this can be done at those lodges when we are staying more than one night. When we do birding stops while traveling from location to location, people who feel tired do not have to follow the group and can remain in the vehicle.

Even though we customized our tour so that we'll be spending two or three nights at a few places, which allows you to walk around and not stress to pack and re-pack every day, Colombia is a big country, and the tour includes some lengthy drives. But this lets you enjoy the interesting countryside and maximizes chances for unexpected birds along the roads.

We will stay at the best places available, but still not all lodges provide facilities such as air conditioning or a heating system (this latter is almost non-existent in Colombia). Other accommodations provide fans instead.

We think this trip might be difficult for people with back, walking, and balance problems or for those who are not used to a birding trip with the early starts involved

MEDICAL AND TRIP CANCELLATION INSURANCE

All tour participants are strongly advised to obtain adequate medical cover prior to any tour and to take steps to ensure that all valuables are covered against damage, loss, or theft. So please **obtain travel insurance for loss of luggage, unforeseen delays, or cancellation of the trip** due to events such as delayed flights, adverse weather conditions, or civil unrest.

We strongly recommend to purchase trip cancellation insurance, as Birding Ecotours will not provide a refund on deposit or balance payment if the trip is canceled for any reason whatsoever, including, but not limited to, illness and death. Participants should consider insurance that covers any medical accident expenses, evacuation expenses, and trip cancellation insurance if participants have to leave the tour for any reason unrelated to Birding Ecotours. Note that some hospitals and doctors in South America will ask for payment in advance before they provide any medical attention. **We advise you to get a plan that ensures that it will cover all your medical care and evacuation back to your country of residence**

MEALS

We normally have breakfast at the lodges when breakfast is available very early in the morning. We normally have a small lunch (box-lunch) or even a hot meal in a lodge or restaurant. This depends much on the day's schedule. We always have hot meals in the evening either in the lodges or in hotel restaurants.

In restaurants we have two options of menu, of which one is always a vegetarian option. In the lodges we have a fixed meal. Please let us know in advance about any diet restriction or preferences.

For our last day in Colombia we will have the chance to choose plates a la carte. Since the Colombian food is not the most diverse and not necessarily the best of the region, after a while some local dishes may become boring. However, we do our best to provide you with the most varied options during the trip.

Water is included during the trip. Drinks, including soft drinks, fruit juices, alcoholic beverages, and beer are not included in the tour price

MONEY

We recommend carrying US dollars. Sometimes traveler checks are difficult to change, and it is not possible to do this everywhere, especially in remote areas. We cannot spend birding time or schedule time looking for financial institutions where you can cash traveler checks. Your holiday is almost an all-inclusive tour, so you only might need money to cover personal expenses such as drinks, laundry service, phone calls from the hotels, bar expenses, souvenirs and gifts you want to take home, or any non-mandatory gratuities you would like to give to any person who you think has provided exceptional service. ATM machines are available in Barranquilla, Riohacha, Pereira, Manizales, and Cali. Be aware that credit cards are not accepted everywhere, especially in remote locations.

Please do not bring US dollar bills that are damaged in any way (broken tips and edges, ink marks, pieces of tape, etc.). Most institutions and people do not accept US dollars that show this kind of damage.

HEALTH

Please refer to the **Centers for Disease Control** for health advice (including about malaria and vaccinations). Please also consult with your physician or your local travel clinic for recommendations.

While not a requirement for entry into Colombia, unless you are arriving from an infected area in another country, a yellow fever vaccination is a good idea for most people traveling to third world or tropical countries, and the vaccination is good for ten years. People with compromised immune systems should consult with their personal physician before getting any vaccination.

Your Hepatitis A, B, and C, as well as polio, tetanus, and typhoid protection are recommended. Dengue fever is very infrequent and is transmitted by day-flying *Aedes* mosquitoes infected with a dengue virus, but there is no prophylaxis against dengue fever. Proper clothing and use of insect repellent, especially in lowland areas, is the best protection.

Diarrhea is always a tricky hazard traveling in South America. Even though many travelers escape untouched, we ask you to consult your doctor and bring some medicine to treat diarrhea, such as Imodium or Ciprofloxacin 500mg. We recommend drinking only bottled water and not eating in street shops when you are suspicious about hygienic conditions. Follow your tour leader's suggestions.

We take care of the places where we go for meals and of the food we prepare in the field. We ask you to clean your hands using hand sanitizer. Please note that sometimes the change in the normal diet might result in some mild stomach or digestive abnormalities that may disappear in a short time. Only when this problem is followed by nausea and/or even fever there may be a real diarrhea problem. Again ask your doctor what he recommends is best for you.

We will reach high elevation at Los Nevados National Park, 4000 meters (13.120 feet) above sea level. Please ask your doctor if you have any medical condition that might be affected by going to high elevation. Spending a few hours at high elevation is never a problem, but some minor symptoms might appear, like a slight headache and mild dizziness. A regular Paracetamol 400mg, taken two hours before we reach this elevation, should prevent any headache trouble. We suggest avoiding eating a large dinner on the previous night to result in easier digestion.

Please let us know about any medical condition you have, such as diabetes, asthma, allergies, heart conditions, or knee problems, also including phobias or anything you think we should know in order to take care of you and suggest to you what is best for you in order to have an enjoyable trip.

WEATHER

We ask you to be ready for all kinds of weather during this trip.

Barranquilla, the Santa Marta foothills, and especially the Guajira are hot with temperatures reaching between 30 °C and 37 °C (86°F – 98 °F). Use clothes in which you feel most comfortable in this kind of weather. We highly recommend using sunscreen and a light-colored hat or cap.

Even when it is sunny in the mornings, the temperatures can be cool at night in the Santa Marta Mountains, especially at El Dorado. But we don't expect rain on the Caribbean coast and in the Santa Marta Mountains during this time of year.

The Central Andes can be sunny in the morning, but the temperature can drop to 16 °C (60 °F) with 70 percent humidity, which results in feeling cold at night. We can also expect some rain in this part of the Andes. But several flocks of birds are more active on rainy and overcast days.

Up in Los Nevados National Park in the Cordillera Central of the Andes windy days may produce even colder temperature. **Please check below on what we recommend to bring.**

The Chocó rainforest is probably one of the most humid natural areas in the world, so during our stay there we should encounter some rain, which should, however, not be an impediment to getting some good birds. It is hot in the mornings (if not overcast), with temperatures reaching 30 °C. Similar is the weather around Calí – high humidity and some rainy mornings should be expected.

INSECTS

Insects should not be a big problem over most of our route, but we recommend that you wear loose-fitting long pants and long-sleeved shirts and keep insect repellent handy. Spraying your feet, socks, shoes, and the lower portion of pants with insect repellent will help reduce a problem with chiggers. Chiggers are burrowing mites that are well-spread throughout the Americas in hot areas. They occur on grass, and even though they do not spread any kind of disease, their bites produce long-term itching as an allergic reaction.

WHAT TO BRING

Equipment:

- Binoculars (of course)
- Spotting scope (optional). The tour leader will have a spotting scope for general use of all participants. However, we ask you to have brief views of the birds in order to allow everybody to

have good views, especially of elusive species. If you like to enjoy longer scope views of species, you might consider bringing your own scope. Digiscoping is not allowed with the tour leader's scope.

- Alarm clock
- Flashlight
- Batteries
- A small notebook and pen to take notes in the field

Personal items

- Grooming Kit

- Glasses if you use them
- Personal medication. We recommend bringing your prescription medication because it might be difficult to buy personal medication in local pharmacies.
- Sunscreen
- Sunglasses
- Waterproof plastic bags to keep your passport, wallet, and other valuables safe
- Umbrella (we recommend an umbrella rather than a waterproof jacket)

Clothing

- Long-sleeved shirts for being in the field (especially when walking forest trails)
- Regular t-shirts to feel comfortable while resting in the lodges and in the cars
- A regular shirt to be dressed for some dinners and checklist sessions
- Hiking boots to walk in the field, especially along forest trails. We will cover all kind of terrain, including paved roads, unpaved dirt roads, steep forest trails, grass, and rocky roads – we might even have to walk on slightly muddy trails.
- Another pair of shoes to be comfortable during the drives, flights, and for meals. You may even bring some sandals to be comfortable in your room and for some spare time.
- A warm hat
- Gloves
- A warm jacket
- Waterproof trousers

Please do not bring any military camouflage, as that conveys an inappropriate image to police and military personnel, whom we are likely to encounter at highway checkpoints.

Please avoid nylon or plastic jackets and/or rainwear of similar materials. Noisy clothing is annoying to others and may frighten birds, especially when owling

SECURITY

The Colombian countryside in all areas that we visit is now safe, and you will find that Colombians everywhere are friendly and helpful. Big cities, however, suffer the same problems as large cities anywhere, and you should take precautions to safeguard personal belongings such as money, passport, and optical equipment. We recommend using money belts or security pouches worn inside your clothing. Avoid walking at night in large cities without informing your tour leader, and don't walk around big cities displaying binoculars and big cameras.

ELECTRICITY

Electrical plug-in sockets in Colombia are usually the two flat-pin type ([ITA Type A](#), the same as in the United States), and the current is usually 110 volts. A surge protector is strongly

recommended. We also recommend bringing a universal adaptor to fit your electric devices into all kinds of sockets.

PASSPORT AND VISA

A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure from Colombia is required. We recommend it having a few blank pages; some countries require a full page for the stamp in your passport. Bring a few Xerox copies of your passport and details of your consular representation in Colombia as well.

Citizens of the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the UK, the EU, and Latin America do not require a visa to enter Colombia. Citizens of any other country should check with their local Colombian consulate about any requirements that need to be met to get into Colombia.

LAUNDRY

Laundry service is available at El Dorado Lodge, Hotel Taroa in Riohacha, Hotel in Manizales, and Hotel Dann Cali. The Finca Montezuma cabins offer laundry service as well, but they don't have a drier, so clothes must be hang-dried, and if we have rainy or very damp days your clothes may not dry well. We think the most convenient options during the trip are Riohacha, Manizales, and Cali. Laundry fees are not included in the tour price.

ACCOMMODATION

We try to include the best accommodations available on our tours to provide our clients with a great holiday. We use accommodations we consider comfortable but not luxurious. In a few remote areas we visit during the tour the lodges provide basic accommodation, but no other options are available, and it is necessary to stay there in order to get some of our key target species. If the birding sites are not far, we rather stay in better accommodations, in cities where possible.

Note: Accommodation at Finca Montezuma is fairly basic and rustic with not much comfort except a clean, private room. The small house provides shared and en-suite bathroom cabins (depending on availability), but hot water is not available 24/7. This is a remote location on the border of the Tatamá National Park. We consider the birding here excellent with some of the most-sought-after species in Colombia, such as **Golden-ringed Tanager**.

Note on bedrooms: The price of our tour is per person and sharing a twin bedroom. Most of our clients, even some couples, rather prefer to have their own bed in order to have a better sleep after long days. The standard matrimonial or double bed in South America is just the normal double bed, which might be too small for some people. Bedrooms with queen/king-size beds are normally more expensive, and we do not include those rooms in the tour price. If you rather want to upgrade your rooms, the hotel will charge the difference directly to you (if there is availability). This surcharge is not included in the tour price

Accommodations at Tairona Eco-Lodge do not provide a hot shower; however, the weather is humid and hot, and we stay only one night there.

TRANSPORT

We will have a private van for the whole tour with plenty of room for everybody. However, we will have to divide the group for the transfer from Santa Marta to El Dorado Lodge and back to Santa Marta. The road conditions along this stretch are too rough for the regular large tourist vans, so we will replace the van with 4x4 vehicles. Normally for a group of four people we use two 4x4

vehicles. The same applies for the transfer to Finca Montezuma, where we also will use 4x4 vehicles.

TOUR LEADER FOR BIRDING ECOTOURS



Giancarlo Ventolini, a new addition to the Birding Ecotours team, comes from an Italian family that immigrated to Colombia, where he grew up and lives. Giancarlo has been in love with birds and nature all his life.

His birding skills, such as excellent eyes and hearing and knowledge of bird calls seem to indicate that he was predestined to become the excellent birding tour leader that he is proving to be. In addition to his birding proficiency Giancarlo has great people- and communication skills and is a wonderful travel companion and good friend. There is nothing that he enjoys more than showing new birds to his clients and driving wherever birds are calling as far as the car can go.

He has extensive knowledge about his native Colombia, especially in his local areas such as the western and central Andes, including the classic hotspots like the Rio Blanco Reserve, Anchicaya Road and San Cipriano, Los Nevados National Park, Otún-Quimbaya, and the entire Calí area. During 2018 he co-guided tours with Eduardo Ormaeche in Colombia, Peru, and the Pampas de Moxos in Beni Bolivia. He will guide our two-week Northern Peru tour and customized and day tours in Colombia for now, but his popularity among clients guarantees that he will expand his frontiers to more Neotropic destinations in the near future.