



**BIRDING TOUR BOLIVIA: THE ANDES AND THE CHACO
LOWLANDS**

TOUR-SPECIFIC INFORMATION



Red-fronted Macaw is a major target on our Bolivia birding tour (photo Ken Logan).

ARRIVAL INFORMATION

Our tour will start in the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra in Bolivia. You can reach Santa Cruz de la Sierra by several international flights coming from cities such as Lima, São Paulo, Miami, and Madrid. Please consult your travel agent to book the most convenient flight. Your Birding Ecotours tour leader will be waiting for you at Viru Viru International Airport with a small board with the Birding Ecotours logo and then transfer you to your hotel in a private shuttle.

Please be aware that most international flights arrive in Santa Cruz de la Sierra in the afternoon, so we do not have any official birding activity planned for day 1. In case you arrive on an early flight you will be transferred to the hotel and will have to wait until check-in is available. For an early check-in you might be charged an extra fee directly by the hotel, which is not included in the Birding Ecotours tour price. When arriving at the airport please remember to keep your luggage tags, as they are required to exit the terminal at the Santa Cruz de la Sierra airport. Depending on time and weather we can spend a couple of hours of afternoon birding around the terminal's grasslands.

DEPARTURE INFORMATION

After an incredible 22 days our tour will end in the city of La Paz. We will say fairwell the previous evening, and you will be transferred on the following day to El Alto International Airport to connect with your international flights. El Alto International Airport is located at a distance of 25 kilometers from La Paz, which can take an hour or more due to frequent serious traffic jams. We ask you to take precautions and leave the hotel early enough to avoid any unforeseen problems.

PHYSICAL REQUIREMENT AND PACE

This trip combines easy, moderate, and difficult legs. You will start the trip in the Bolivian lowlands. Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Trinidad, and the Chaco are lowlands at elevations from 170 to 760 meters (557 to 2,400 feet). We will spend a week at these elevations. The weather is hot in the lowlands with temperatures that oscillate between 26°C and 40°C (78°F and 104°F). In this environment most of the birding is on flat grounds along roads, close to the vehicles, and from the vehicles.

There are some hilly, steep trails at Refugio Los Volcanes, which we will hike on foot at 1,470 meters (5,400 feet) above sea level. They are not difficult but require a certain level of fitness. Birding the inter-Andean valleys between Samaipata and Cochabamba will be relatively easy, similar to the first leg of the trip. Once we reach the high-elevation areas of Cochabamba such as Cerro Tunari, La Cumbre, and Lake Titicaca the elevation increases to 4,000 meters (13,124 feet) above sea level. Most of the birding will be near the vehicle and walking on roads, but the high altitude and the lack of oxygen might affect those participants which are not used to such high elevations. We will spend a night in Huarina at the shores of Lake Titicaca, which ranks among

the highest elevations of the trip, but the hotel is very comfortable, and medical oxygen is available in the hotel in case of any potential altitude sickness.

Bolivia is the fifth-largest country of South American and sadly among the lesser-developed ones with the poorest road infrastructure in the area. We will face long drives and early starts on almost every day of the trip. However, we have chosen the most comfortable places available for our guests.

Overall the trip is not any harder than any other birding trip in terms of walking and hiking, but we will face bad roads, long drives (five to nine hours in some cases), and high elevation for the last seven days of the trip.

MEDICAL AND TRIP CANCELLATION INSURANCE

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

We strongly recommend to purchase trip cancellation insurance, as Birding Ecotours will not give a refund on deposits or balance payments 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 expenses, evacuation expenses, and trip cancellation expenses in case a participant has to leave the tour for any reason unrelated to Birding Ecotours. Note that some hospitals and doctors in South America will ask for advance payment before providing any medical attention. **We advise you to get a plan that ensures cover of all medical care and evacuation that applies to your country of residence.**

MEALS

Due to the early starts we will have on the trip and the remote locations we will visit breakfast and lunch will be served in the field, but we will have hot meals for dinner in restaurants and hotels. In restaurants we have two options of menu with always a vegetarian option. In lodges we have a fixed meal. Please let us know in advance about any diet restriction or preferences. 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, and alcoholic beverages, are not included in the tour price.

MONEY

The official Bolivian currency is the boliviano. One US dollar equals 6.90 bolivianos.

We recommend that you bring US dollars. Often traveler's checks are difficult to change, and this is not possible everywhere, especially in remote areas. We cannot spend birding time or scheduled time looking for financial institutions where you could cash these checks.

Your Birding Ecotours birding tour is an almost all-inclusive tour. You might need some money to cover personal expenses such as drinks, alcoholic drinks, laundry service, phone calls from the hotel, bar expenses, souvenirs and gifts you want to take home, or any non-mandatory gratitude you would like to give to any person who you think has provided exceptional service.

ATM machines are available in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Cochabamba, and La Paz. Be aware that credit cards are not accepted everywhere, especially in remote locations. ATMs only provide bolivianos. We recommend that you get an amount you think you might need at the Santa Cruz de la Sierra airport immediately at your arrival. You will find exchanges at the airport.

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

HEALTH

Malaria has been confirmed in Bolivia, including the chloroquine-resistant strain in rural areas. **But malaria is not expected to be a problem on our route.** There are two malaria prophylaxes recommended in areas where chloroquine-resistant malaria is present: Mefloquine (Lariam) and Malarone. For travelers who are unable to take either Malarone or Mefloquine, the CDC recommends the drug Doxycycline as an alternative. **We will not be in any known malaria areas during this trip.** Proper clothing and use of insect repellent, especially in lowland areas, are the best protection. Be aware that some antimalarial prophylaxes also produce stomach problems and other side effects. Please consult your physician or local travel clinic for recommendations. We ask you to follow your doctor's advice.

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

Hepatitis A, B, and C as well as polio, tetanus, and typhoid protection are recommended.

Dengue fever, carried by day-flying *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes, does occur in Bolivia, but no vaccine is yet available. To prevent mosquito bites we recommend to wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants, treat clothes with repellents like permethrin or use permethrin-treated clothing (such as Buzz Off), and use an EPA-registered mosquito repellent containing DEET.

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 like Imodium or Ciprofloxacin 500mg. We recommend drinking only bottled water and not eating at any street vendors if you are suspicious about the hygienic conditions. Follow your tour leader's suggestions.

We take care of the places where we go for meals and 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 show some mild stomach digestive abnormalities that may disappear in a short time. Only when this problem is followed by nausea, sickness, or fever there may be a real infection problem. Again, please ask your doctor what he recommends as best for you.

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

WEATHER

The weather will be hot and humid in the tropical lowlands with temperatures of 26°C to 40°C (78°F to 104°F) in places such as Santa Cruz, Trinidad, Camiri, and Coroico, but it will be less hot in the inter-Andean valleys such as Samaipata and Comarapa, where it can be hot in the morning but cool and windy in the afternoon.

La Paz, El Alto International Airport, and La Cumbre can be cold with temperatures around 5°C to 8°C (41°F to 46°F).

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 repellents handy. Spraying shoes, socks, and the lower portion of pants with insect repellent will help reduce problems with chiggers.

Chiggers are burrowing mites that are found in the Americas from Texas to Argentina 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. We recommend spraying insect repellent on feet and socks and lower legs to avoid chiggers. The forest holds all kind of insects such as mosquitoes, sandflies, blackflies, no-see-ums, and horseflies but never in large enough amounts to present a real problem. Ticks are uncommon in this part of Bolivia.

WHAT TO BRING

Equipment:

-Binoculars (of course)

-Spotting Scope (optional) The leader will have a spotting scope for general use of all participants. However, we ask you to have quick views of the birds in order to allow everybody to have good views, especially of elusive species. If you like to enjoy long scope views of species at all times 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 wear them
- Personal medication. We recommend bringing your prescription if you think you may need to buy any serious 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 shirt to be in the field (especially when walking forest trails)
- A regular t-shirt 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 kinds of terrain including paved roads, unpaved dirt roads, steep forest trails, grassy surfaces, rocky roads, and sandy surfaces. 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 also bring sandals to be comfortable in your room and during spare times.
- A warm hat
- A warm jacket
- Waterproof pants

Please avoid nylon or plastic jackets and/or rainwear of similar materials that produce noise when we are owling.

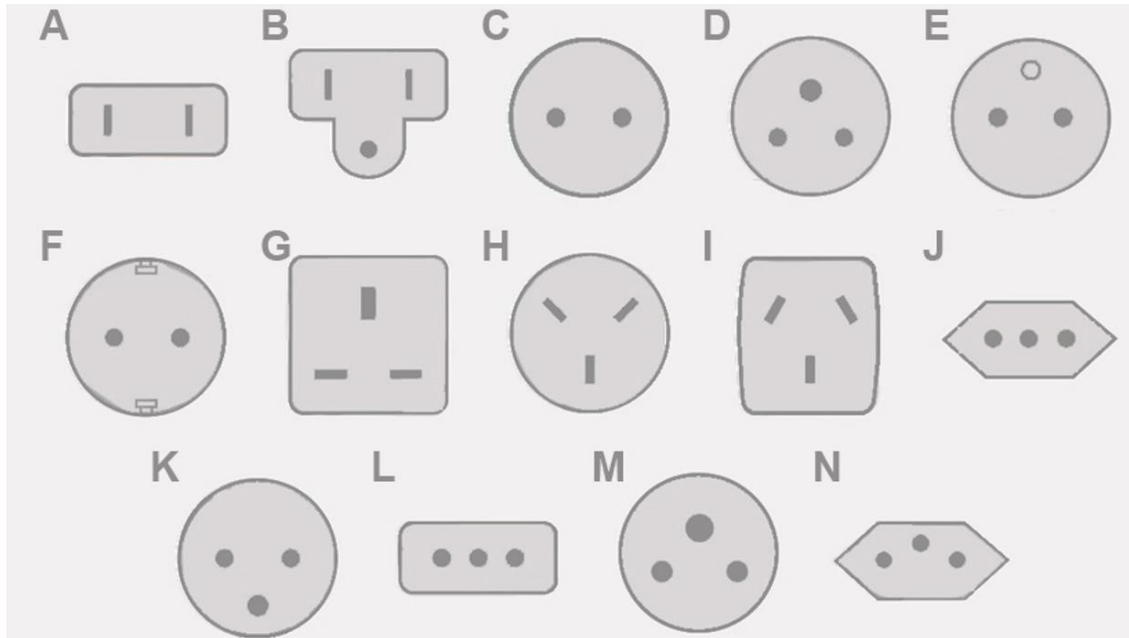
SECURITY

The Bolivian countryside in all the areas that we visit are now quite safe, and you will find that Bolivians are friendly and helpful in general. Big cities, however, suffer the same problems as large cities anywhere, and you should take precautions to safeguard your 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 do not walk in big cities displaying binoculars and big cameras. We will be birding

close to the Paraguayan border in the remote Chaco, so please be not surprised if we are stopped by military police; they are just checking what we are doing in the area.

ELECTRICITY

Bolivia uses 230 volts. We recommend bringing your electric converters and adapters to fit your electric devices. Bolivia uses A and C electricity plugs.



PASSPORT AND VISA

A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure is required. We recommend having a few blank pages in your passport; some countries require a full page for their stamp. Bring a few copies of your main passport page as well as details of your consular representation in Bolivia. Citizens of the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the UK, Europe, and Japan as well as countries that belong to the Latin-American MERCOSUR trade bloc do not require visa to enter Bolivia. Citizens from Africa, Asia, Central America, and the Caribbean as well as Puerto Rico, Surinam, and Guyana should check directly with the Bolivian representation in their country about any requirements and visa they might need to enter Bolivia.

LAUNDRY

Laundry service is available Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Cochabamba, and La Paz. Laundry fees are not included in the tour price.

PHOTOGRAPHY

We recommend that you bring all the photographic gear you may need because photographic equipment is difficult to find in Bolivia, especially in remote areas that we will visit.

Please ask permission of the local people before taking any photos of them. Some of them may feel that it is OK, while others may feel disturbed, and yet others, especially in tourist zones, may charge money or even might react aggressively.

Bird photographers are welcome, and the opportunities to photograph birds are good, but our tour is birding orientated. We will not waste time searching for birds that have been seen by the group if somebody needs a photo or even an upgrade photo. Our birding schedule is not always associated with the best light conditions for photography. Your tour leader doesn't waste any client time on personal photography.

LUGGAGE

For the domestic flight to Trinidad you are allowed one piece of luggage of 20 kilograms (44 pounds) as checked luggage and five kilograms (11 pounds) as carry-on luggage. If your luggage is heavier you will have to pay a fee, which is not included in the tour price. We ask you to put a sign with your name and contact information on your luggage.

BOLIVIA DEMONSTRATIONS

We would be remiss if we did not inform you that Bolivia has been the scene of political unrest in recent years. The wealthier lowlanders of the Santa Cruz and Beni departments are trying to maintain autonomy from the current socialist government, which wants to centralize power and most major industries. Due to this political disagreement Bolivia has been the scene of major protests, strikes, and demonstrations. Normally these issues are dealt with by blocking roads, particularly the highway between Santa Cruz de la Sierra and Cochabamba, which normally happens once or twice per year and sometimes might not happen for a few years at all. Fortunately we have never experienced any such civil unrest during our Birding Ecotours trips since we started operating in Bolivia in 2013. If this should happen during our trip we will do everything in our power to minimize the impact on our tour, but you should be aware that the tour might suffer some itinerary shuffles, unexpected down time, or even a re-routing of international flights. Should the situation become unsafe (which, currently, is unlikely; most demonstrations are not violent, and tourists are not a target), cancellation of the tour, perhaps just prior to the tour departure or even during the tour, is a possibility.

EXPECTATIONS AND RULES FOR GROUP TOURS

Thank you for joining a small group tour, and we trust you will have a truly wonderful experience.

If you are on a group tour with more than two or three participants, please kindly take heed of a few simple rules we follow to keep everyone in the group happy and ultimately to maximize the enjoyment of the tour for the group:

- 1) Once a day we swap seats in the vehicle. Those at the front one day go to the back the next day and then move forwards each day until the process is repeated. Usually tour members sort this out automatically, but the tour leader will help after the first couple of days if there are problems.
- 2) On narrow forest trails and even on broader trails please swap your position every ten minutes. If you are walking at the front please drop to the back every ten minutes, allowing the next person time near the tour leader. Both the local guide and the tour leader are often at the front, especially when communication between them is necessary – one of these leaders may also sometimes be at the back of the group at times to help birders not near the leading guide at the time.
- 3) If you have any concerns or problems please speak to the tour leader so we can solve the problem – that is our job, but we do need to hear from you as soon as possible if you have any concerns. The longer you leave it the more difficult it often becomes to solve.
- 4) When we use playback kindly keep absolutely quiet and focus on trying to see the bird approaching. We discourage talking on the trails, especially on forest trails, but whispering to the person next to you can be acceptable if done discreetly. The tour leader will sometimes tell you when it is even more necessary than usual to be quiet. The tour leader may also occasionally say that it is OK to talk freely. The guide may occasionally shout if he or she wants to get the group rapidly onto a bird that is already flying away – but this does not mean that it is OK to become noisy! ☺ The guide uses his/her discretion and aims to get everyone onto all the birds – but this usually means the group needs to stay quiet whenever we are birding.
- 5) On forest trails only the front two or three people usually hear what the tour leader or local guide is saying. We therefore ask that you whisper what is being seen or what the guide is saying from the front to the back, so that the people at the back can be kept informed of what is being said and what the guide has found. Otherwise it can get very frustrating for the people currently at the back.
- 6) We emphasize communication. If anyone has missed a bird it is critically important that this is communicated to the tour leader, who then needs to make sure you get onto the bird at some stage. Also the guide sometimes ignores birds that the whole group has seen well, so please say if you need to see something again. While we love studying each species, we often don't have the luxury of spending as much time with each species as we'd like. For those who want to spend extra time photographing or studying species, we recommend a photography tour or a special trip – in some cases a custom tour.

- 7) We ask that all participants have a quick look in the scope. Once everyone in the group has had a quick look, further saturating views can then be obtained by those who feel like it. Don't spend a long time at the scope when others in the group have not seen the bird through it. Digiscoping photography is not allowed using the leader's scope.
- 8) Please be aware at all times of where you are standing relative to other people. Taller people should generally allow shorter people to stand in front of them, or at the very least ensure that they aren't in other people's way.
- 9) It is always good to wear neutral colors and to avoid fabrics that make a lot of noise when walking.
- 10) Opinion varies as to whether pointing chases the bird away – the guide will advise on this. Sometimes you might be advised not to point directly at a bird. Importantly, control your excitement and don't shout out when you see a bird – this happens all the time!
- 11) During any trip there will be activities that are optional, and participants are welcome to sit these out for various reasons - ill health, tiredness, difficulty of the activity, etc. Please do not feel obliged to partake in every activity. These activities will often be mentioned in your itinerary. In some trips and on some days there might not be the opportunity to opt out, though – please try and speak to us in advance if you plan to opt out.
- 12) When on a group tour the guide will make decisions in favor of the majority of the group. This might not always suit every individual, but it is important to keep in mind that the group's needs take precedence over individual needs.
- 13) At certain stops there invariably are curios for sale, but we might not always have time to do any shopping, and when we do have time please try to keep it brief unless otherwise indicated by the guide.
- 14) Safety always comes first, so if for example stopping along a freeway is deemed unsafe by the driver/guide, then we might in some cases have to forfeit stopping and seeing a bird
- 15) We use playback with great care. If we are going to use playback (ideally only after we've failed to see the bird without this tool), please gather around to see the bird. To protect the bird's interest we usually only call it once.
- 16) Group dynamics on a birding tour can sometimes be tough because of personality clashes. We recommend keeping spirits up, making the most of a trip, and compromising as much as possible to maximize enjoyment for everyone on the trip.
- 17) Get excited about the birds – it keeps the guides motivated; just don't make it noisy, though, otherwise you'll chase the birds away! ☺
- 18) For specific destinations we like to warn people about what to expect. For example, some countries have substandard accommodation in parts, etc. We strongly advise you to ask as

many questions as you can before the tour to avoid nasty surprises! We'd prefer you to be pleasantly surprised, rather than the other way around.

ACCOMMODATION

We use very comfortable accommodation in cities such as Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Huarina (Lake Titicaca), Trinidad, and Cochabamba. You can expect all the usual comfort in these hotels. The Hotel in Camiri is comfortable enough, with private bathroom, air conditioning, and WiFi, but there is not much service or staff to provide extra services to the guest. In La Paz we use a hotel bed-and-breakfast style, which is strategically located to avoid the infernal traffic jams in the city. The Hotel in Samaipata is rustic but very charming, and the food is delicious; it normally ranks as one of the favorites for our guests. Refugio Los Volcanes is rustic, simple, and relatively old and provides only a room with en-suite bathroom and three meals per day. The accommodation in Comarapa (the most remote location we will visit on the tour) is very basic, with just your room and private bathroom but no service at all.