



## COLOMBIA: GENERAL INFORMATION



*The dazzling Scarlet-bellied Mountain Tanager is always a favorite of our Colombia birding tours.*

## PLEASE SEE TOUR PAGES FOR SPECIFIC INFORMATION ABOUT INDIVIDUAL COLOMBIA TOURS

With 1987 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 % 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 positions 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 becoming the go-to destination for birders from around the planet.

This staggering bird diversity is due partly to Colombia’s immensely diverse landscapes, which include three Andean ranges, two vast inter-Andean valleys, the imposing Santa Marta Mountains, the Caribbean Coast, the Chocó Bioregion along the Pacific Ocean, a large portion of the Orinoquía or Llanos region, and last but not least, the Amazon Rainforest.

Birding Ecotours has been running tours in Colombia since 2012, and we have 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”.

### MEDICAL AND TRIP CANCELLATION INSURANCE

We strongly encourage you to purchase trip cancellation or interruption insurance in case you have to cancel due to illness or for any other reason, as tour payments are non-refundable as per our terms and conditions. **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 meal. In the lodges we have a fixed meal. Please let us know in advance about any diet restriction or preferences you may have.

Often on the last day in Colombia, we have the chance to choose plates a la carte. Since 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.

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

### ACCOMMODATION

We always try to include the best accommodations available on our tours to provide our clients with a memorable holiday. We use accommodations we consider comfortable however not

luxurious. In some remote areas the lodges provide basic accommodation, with no other options available; in these areas it is necessary to stay in these more basic lodges to ensure we have the best chance at finding our key target species. If the birding sites are nearby, we rather stay in better accommodations in cities, where possible.

**Note on bedrooms:** The price of our tour is per person sharing a twin bedroom. Most of our clients, even some couples, rather prefer to have their own bed to have a better sleep after long days out birding. The standard matrimonial or double bed in South America is the normal double bed size, 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.

## MONEY

We recommend carrying US dollars. 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. Sometimes travelers' checks/cheques 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 travelers' 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 the larger cities and towns. Be aware that credit cards are not accepted everywhere, especially in remote locations.

## HEALTH

Please refer to the [Center for Disease Control website](#) 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 dramatic change from your 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, please ask your doctor what they recommend is best for you.

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, to take care of you and suggest to you what is best for you so you can have an enjoyable trip.

## 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

Please kindly read the general list of what to bring on a birding tour, [here](#).

The tour leader will usually 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.

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 considered 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 currently require a visa to enter Colombia but this may change so please check carefully. Citizens of any other country should check with their local Colombian consulate about any requirements that need to be met to get into Colombia.

### **TOUR VEHICLES & SEAT ROTATION**

For all our Colombian tours we mostly use vans (Mercedes Sprinters) however we do occasionally have to switch to 4x4 vehicles when negotiating rougher sections of road.

At Birding Ecotours we employ a seat rotation policy on all our small-group set departure tours. This will ensure everybody has equal opportunities throughout the tour. Unfortunately motion sickness will not excuse you from our seat rotation policy and thus if you are prone to motion sickness you should ensure you bring the necessary medication. We also require that you are fit and flexible enough to maneuver yourself to the back of the vehicle. Tour participants should also be mindful of what extra equipment they bring into the general seating area of the vehicle (rather than the luggage section) and should ensure they do not clog up general thoroughfare or extra seats with camera equipment, tripods, etc. from a comfort and health and safety point of view.



*Mercedes Sprinter van which we use on our Colombian tours.*



*4x4 jeeps as used on some sections of our tours.*



*Specialized safari-style 4x4s as used while exploring Los Llanos.*

