

Birding Ecotours



GUATEMALA: HIGHLANDS SPECIALS AND HORNED GUAN

2-12 MARCH 2024



Horned Guan is the holy grail of Central American birds and the main target of our trip.

Guatemala is an underrated birding destination and one of the most amazing avian countries in Central America. It offers visitors a vast avifauna including classic Central American jewels like the splendid and most wanted **Resplendent Quetzal**, **Tody Motmot**, **Turquoise-browed Motmot** and **Keel-billed Toucan**. It also boasts localized near endemics shared with the Chiapas region of Mexico only, such as the handsome **Pink-headed Warbler**, **Belted Flycatcher**, **Azure-rumped Tanager** and the enigmatic **Horned Guan**.

Other northern Central America specials (shared only with Nicaragua, El Salvador and Honduras) such as **Fulvous Owl**, **Highland Guan**, **White-bellied Chachalaca**, **Brown-backed Solitaire**, **Rufous-browed Wren**, **Blue-throated Motmot** and **Blue-and-white Mockingbird** are easily found here.

Our trip starts in Guatemala City and explores the Sierra de Cuchumatanes, home of the **Goldman's Warbler**. For many years this was considered one of the truly Guatemalan endemics, but an isolated population was found in Mexico recently. Today some authorities recognize it as a full species, while others treat it as a subspecies of **Yellow-rumped Warbler**, which is also a target of our trip. We will spend a few days birding all montane forest looking for highland specialities. The scenery here is incredible.

Have you ever heard the expression “The Horned Guan Death March”? A good description indeed because until a couple of years ago the only way to get this bird in Guatemala was making a 03.00 am start and hiking up the steep slopes of the Atitlan Volcano. This strenuous endeavor is suitable only for the fit and healthy, leaving this bird as an unattainable dream for the majority of our clients and friends. The good news is that **Horned Guan** has been found in the forest around the Tacana Volcano in an area accessible by car. Surely this sounds almost too good to be true. Please do join us on this 11-day tour in search of this amazing bird, while enjoying all the highlights of this fascinating country with active volcanoes, amazing coffee, great gastronomy and experience the living Mayan culture.

This 11-day tour is easily combined with our [Guatemala: Tikal and Mayan Rainforest Highlights](#) tour to create a comprehensive Guatemala experience.

Itinerary (11 days/10 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Guatemala City

Upon arriving in [Guatemala City](#), you will be transferred to the hotel.

Overnight: [Hotel Barcelo](#)

Day 2. Flight to Huehuetenango and transfer to Unicornio Azul

Today we start our adventure flying to the city of Huehuetenango located in the foothills of the Sierra de Cuchumatanes, a large mountain range in the northern part of the state bordering Sierra de Chiapas, Mexico. We will head directly to the Unicornio Azul Lodge where we spend the whole day birding the lodge grounds and the route to the lodge looking for incredible species including the beautiful **Pink-headed Warbler**, one of the most wanted species in Guatemala.



*The stunning **Pink-headed Warbler** is one of the stars of our Guatemala tour (photo Renato Fernandez).*

Other top species around Unicornio Azul Lodge include **Buff-breasted Flycatcher**, **Crescent-faced Warbler**, **Rock Wren**, **Brown-backed Solitaire**, **Great Silky-flycatcher**, **Rufous-browed Wren**, **Black-capped Swallow**, **Blue-throated Motmot**, **Hermit Warbler**, **Steller's Jay**, **Northern Flicker**, **White-eared Hummingbird**, **Mexican Violetear**, **Greater Pewee**, **Velasquez Woodpecker**, **Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer**, **Black Thrush**, **Grace's Warbler**, **Brown Creeper**, **Black-headed Siskin**, **Broad-tailed Hummingbird**, **Black-throated Jay**, **Spot-crowned Woodcreeper**, **Yellow-eyed Junco**, and **Spotted Towhee**. At night we will try for the **Mexican Whip-poor-will** and, if we are lucky, for the enigmatic and seldom seen **Unspotted Saw-whet Owl**.

Overnight: Unicornio Azul Lodge

Day 3. Explore Todos Los Santos and transfer to Unicornio Azul

Today we make a special excursion to explore Todos Los Santos in the Cuchumatanes in search of the localized and range-restricted **Goldman's Warbler**, found only in this part of the country and with an isolated small population in Mexico.



Goldman's Warbler is another localized target (photo Renato Fernandez).

Our visit to Todos Los Santos aims for **Black-capped Siskin, Yellow-eyed Junco, Rufous-collared Robin, Northern Raven, Hutton's Vireo, Red Crossbill, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Singing Quail, Eastern Bluebird, Acorn Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush, Bushtit, Violet-green Swallow, Bushy-crested Jay, Black-vented Oriole, Red-faced Warbler** and others.

Overnight: Unicornio Azul

Day 4. Transfer to Union Reforma

Today we leave the lodge and start our drive to the base of Tacana Volcano and spend the afternoon birding the remote Union Reforma site. Here in the humid montane forest, we look for **Highland Guan, Amethyst-throated Hummingbird, Mountain Trogon, Blue-throated Motmot, White-throated Hummingbird, Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo, Rufous-browed Wren, Blue-headed Vireo** and **Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush**. We focus on the shy **Blue-and-white Mockingbird, Rivoli's Hummingbird, Green-throated Mountaingem, Northern Tufted Flycatcher, Pine Siskin, Mountain Elaenia** and **Flame-colored Tanager**. We stay overnight in the basic Sibinal Lodge.

Overnight: Sibinal Lodge

Day 5. Volcan Tacana and search for the Horned Guan

We make a predawn start in a convoy of small 4x4 vehicles and drive all the way up to the Tacana volcano to look for the sought after **Horned Guan**. This would be the day target but we should have other avian encounters with species such as **Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Steller's Jay, Wilson's Warbler, Townsend Warbler, Chestnut-capped Brushfinch, Hammond's Flycatcher, Mountain Thrush, Golden-browed Warbler, Garnet-throated Hummingbird, and Crescent-chested Warbler.**

Overnight: Sibinal

Day 6. Transfer to San Rafael

Today we leave Sibinal and transfer to San Rafael de la Cuesta, arriving in the afternoon. If time permits we might get some interesting species such as **Collared Trogon, Orange-bellied Nightingale-thrush, Brown-capped Vireo, Spotted Woodcreeper, Black-headed Saltator, Scaly-throated Foliage-gleaner, Guatemalan Tyrannulet and Bushy-crested Jay.**

Overnight: Victoria

Day 7. San Rafael and transfer to Tarrales

Another early start to explore Refugio El Quetzal where, with luck, we'll see the splendid male **Resplendent Quetzal**. Other targets for this area are the localized **Azure-rumped Tanager** and the handsome **Blue-crowned Chlorophonia, Emerald-chinned Hummingbird, Rose-throated Becard, Black-throated Green Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler, Yellow-throated Euphonia, Slate-throated Whitestart, Northern Emerald Toucanet, Olive Warbler, Sparkling-tailed Woodstar, Red-tailed Hawk, Western Tanager, Ruddy Foliage-gleaner,** and others. Then we will transfer to Los Tarrales Reserve. At night we will try for the **Northern Potoo and Mottled Owl.**

Overnight: Los Tarrales

Day 8. Los Tarrales

We have a full day to explore Los Tarrales Reserve to look for **Long-tailed Manakin, Tody Motmot, White-bellied Chachalaca, Lesson's Motmot, Orange-chinned Parakeet, Spot-breasted Oriole, Scrub Euphonia, Crested Guan, Turquoise-browed Motmot, Gartered Trogon, Rufous-and-white Wren, Collared Aracari, Masked Tityra, Sungrebe, Least Grebe, Cinnamon-bellied Saltator** and others. At night we will try for **Black-and-white Owl**

Overnight: Los Tarrales



Resplendent Quetzal, the iconic Central America bird (photo Renato Fernandez).

Day 9. Belted Flycatcher and transfer to Antigua

The next day we leave Tarrales and head to the dry, steep slopes of the Atitlan Lake in search of the range-restricted **Belted Flycatcher**. Despite the loss of habitat, there are a few birds still breeding in the area and we will target one for the benefit of the tour participants. Other interesting species here include **Blue-and-white Mockingbird**. The hike to get the **Belted Flycatcher** might be strenuous but is always rewarded. Then we will be transferred by ferry across the Atitlan Lake (once habitat of the now extinct Atitlan Grebe) to get our vehicle and head to La Antigua. If time permits we will visit the bird feeders at El Pilar to get views of hummingbirds like **Rufous Sabrewing** and **Beryline Hummingbird**, and **Green-throated Mountaingem**.

Overnight: La Antigua



Belted Flycatcher another special localized target of this trip (photo Renato Fernandez).

Day 10. El Pilar and transfer to Guatemala

A predawn start to visit Finca del Pilar Reserve in search of the most wanted **Fulvous Owl**. Other birds include **White-eared Ground Sparrow**, **Rufous-browed Wren**, **Blue-throated Motmot**, **Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo**, **Brown-backed Solitaire**, **Singing Quail**, **Mountain Trogon**, **Northern Emerald Toucanet**, **Inca Dove**, **Bushtit**, **Black-capped Swallow**, **Band-backed Wren**, **Black-headed Siskin**, **Elegant Euphonia**, **Black-vented Oriole**, **White-naped Brushfinch**, **Chestnut-capped Warbler**, **Squirrel Cuckoo**, **Philadelphia Vireo**, and **Cinnamon Hummingbird**. After lunch, we transfer to Guatemala City.

Overnight: Hotel Barcelo

Day 11. Transfer to the airport for flight home or connect with the Tikal Tour

Today we transfer to the airport to catch our international flight home or continue with the Birding Tour Guatemala: Tikal and Mayan Rainforest Highlights tour.

Duration:	11 days
Group Size:	4–8
Dates:	2 – 12 March 2024
Start:	Guatemala City, Guatemala
End:	Guatemala City, Guatemala
Prices:	US\$ 5,982 per person sharing – based on 4-8 participants (2024)
Single Supplements:	US\$ 432 (2024)

Price includes:

All accommodation
All meals (except when indicated)
Land transportation
Private English speaking tour leader
Admission fees
Local guides
Transfer from the airport to the hotel on Day 1
Water

Price excludes:

Hotel in Guatemala City on Day 11
Dinner in Guatemala City on Day 11
Personal expenses such as laundry, phone calls, internet access, room service, etc.
Personal beverages and alcoholic drinks
Domestic flights from Guatemala//Huehuetenango around US\$ 188 (we can help you purchase your flight ticket)
Luggage fees such as excess weight on flights