

Birding Ecotours



BIRDING TOUR CARIBBEAN: PUERTO RICO ESCAPE – ENDEMIC AND ISLAND BIRDING

23 – 29 FEBRUARY 2024



The tiny Puerto Rican Tody is always a top target.

Puerto Rico, the smallest and eastern-most island of the Greater Antilles, is full of beauty and amazing avian species. Surrounded by the gorgeous blues, turquoises, and greens of the warm Caribbean waters, this island features a multitude of habitats from highland forests to coastal wetlands. Puerto Rico is often overlooked when it comes to the larger islands in the Greater Antilles. However, this island has so much to offer! With 17 endemic bird species plus a host of other great Caribbean specials, Puerto Rico is a birder's paradise. These amazing species include **Puerto Rican Tody**, **Puerto Rican Owl**, **Puerto Rican Lizard Cuckoo**, and **Adelaide's Warbler**. Four of the endemics are currently red listed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). These include **Puerto Rican Nightjar** (Endangered), **Yellow-shouldered Blackbird** (Endangered), **Elfin Woods Warbler** (Endangered), and **Puerto Rican Amazon** (Critically Endangered).



*We will look for the endemic **Adelaide's Warbler** along with other warbler species.*

This tour takes us on a great adventure circling the entire island of Puerto Rico. Many species are specialized in certain regions of Puerto Rico, so it is important we visit all corners and spend enough time there to target them. We will begin in San Juan in the northeast section of the island. From here we will transfer across the northern coastline and down the western edge to the more relaxed town of La Parguera, stopping at places such as Rio Abajo State Forest and Maricao Forest Reserve. We will stay here for three nights, birding this area which hosts many key species. Next, we will traverse the southern coastline into El Yunque National Forest where we will stay for the final two nights of the trip. Here we will explore the southeast and eastern reserves of the island including Humacao Nature Preserve and the small town of Fajardo. Finally, we will wrap back to San Juan for the trip's conclusion and departure home.

We offer other great tours to the Caribbean region including Cuba, Dominican Republic, and Jamaica. All of these destinations may be combined with Puerto Rico to give a more complete exploration of the Caribbean! Please don't hesitate to ask any questions.

Itinerary (7 days/6 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in San Juan, Puerto Rico

After arrival at San Juan International Airport (SJU), you will be transferred to the hotel where a room will be reserved in your name. Some folks may want to arrive earlier in the day and explore the town of Old San Juan, full of historic buildings and culture. Some common species are likely to be encountered more casually after arriving such as **Magnificent Frigatebird**, **Grey Kingbird**, **White-winged Dove**, and **Bananaquit**. We will gather in the lobby and head to dinner for more proper introductions and we will discuss the details of our week on the beautiful island of Puerto Rico.

Overnight: San Juan

Day 2. Northeast to southwest – Rio Abajo State Forest and Cambalache State Forest

We will start off early this morning leaving the San Juan area behind and begin heading across the island. Our first morning stop will be at Cambalache State Forest, a beautiful lowland forest loaded with endemic birds. A productive morning can yield up to half of the island endemics and this area is a favorite spot for **Puerto Rican Bullfinch**, **Puerto Rican Lizard Cuckoo**, **Puerto Rican Spindalis**, **Adelaide's Warbler**, and **Puerto Rican Tody**. In addition to the endemics, these trails are normally full of other great species such as **Bananaquit**, **Black-faced Grassquit**, **Black-whiskered Vireo**, and **Smooth-billed Ani**, to name a few.

From here we will move onto Rio Abajo State Forest which is absolutely our best site for spotting the Critically Endangered **Puerto Rican Amazon** (Parrot). Access to known nesting areas is not always possible due to the strict management of these birds and recent weather conditions such as hurricanes. We should hopefully be able to see some of the fine work going on in this park, aiding the conservation of these amazing birds. After exploring these two remarkable locations, we will make it to the small town of La Parguera for the evening where we will set up for the next three nights. This area is one of the last strongholds for **Yellow-shouldered Blackbird** and perhaps we will come across one as we get into town.

Overnight: La Parguera

Day 3. Maricao Forest Reserve and Laguna Cartagena

After breakfast we head off to Maricao Forest Reserve, a wet mountain-forest area. Our top target here is the Endangered and range-restricted **Elfin Woods Warbler**. This elusive species was only discovered in 1968 and is restricted to high humidity, high altitude forests with elfin (dwarfed) trees. The trails here are an excellent place to find this fascinating bird as well as **Puerto Rican Oriole**, **Scaly-naped Pigeon**, and **Puerto Rican Flycatcher**. While the warbler may be the top

target of the day, we will carefully search for the unique **Puerto Rican Tanager**, as this is a great area for it. This species is highly desirable to many listers as this unique bird is the only member of its genus and recently has been placed into its own family, Nesospingidae.

After lunch we will move on to explore Laguna Cartagena National Wildlife Refuge, located in the southwest corner of the island. This area and the nearby rice fields are fantastic for waders (shorebirds) and waterbirds. Here we will target specials such as **Masked Duck** and **West Indian Whistling Duck**. This site can also be great for other wetland species including **Smooth-billed Ani**, **Black-necked Stilt**, **Sora**, **Common Gallinule** and **Glossy Ibis**, plus a host of wintering warblers and some exotic species which have become established in Puerto Rico like **Orange-cheeked Waxbill** and **Northern Red Bishop**. We will return to La Parguera for dinner, always keeping our eyes peeled for **Yellow-shouldered Blackbird**. After dinner we will venture out in the evening in search of **Puerto Rican Nightjar**, located only in this region of the island.

Overnight: La Parguera



*The curious **Pearly-eyed Thrasher** is only found in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.*

Day 4. Cabo Rojo and other southwest Puerto Rico birding

After breakfast we will head out to Cabo Rojo National Wildlife Refuge, a great location for seabirds and shorebirds. The mudflats here should be teeming with wintering species such as **Wilson's** and **Semipalmated Plovers**, **Black-necked Stilt**, **Least Sandpiper**, and **Royal Tern**. We will head out to the lighthouse and scan the sea in hopes of spotting a **White-tailed Tropicbird** or **Brown Booby** flying close to shore. The trees in the area should be full of other great species like **Caribbean Elaenia**, **Puerto Rican Flycatcher**, **Grey Kingbird**, and the established exotic **Venezuelan Troupial**.

The afternoon will be a free one with our birding dependent on how we have fared with endemics and other Caribbean species thus far. Some folks may want to enjoy an afternoon around the town of La Parguera, certainly a fine and relaxing option. Others may want to venture out to other nearby birding locations for species such as **Puerto Rican Woodpecker**, **Puerto Rican Vireo**, **Pearly-eyed Thrasher**, **Green Mango**, **Puerto Rican Emerald**, and **Puerto Rican Spindalis** or any other species we may still be lacking. After dinner gives us another chance for **Puerto Rican Nightjar** and **Puerto Rican Owl** in case of a miss or bad weather the previous night.

Overnight: La Parguera

Day 5. Southern edge of Puerto Rico to El Yunque National Forest

This morning we will enjoy our final breakfast in the southwest portion of Puerto Rico before loading up and heading east across the island with a few birding stops planned. First up will be Aguirre State Forest, a coastal mangrove forest. Here is our first chance at spotting **Antillean Crested Hummingbird** plus other nice species including **Mangrove Cuckoo**, **Prairie** and **Adelaide's Warblers**, and **Pearly-eyed Thrasher**. From here we will cut north through the center of Puerto Rico and into the mountains in search of the Near Threatened and range-restricted **Plain Pigeon**. We will also keep our eyes peeled for any endemics we might be missing at this point, if any, such as **Green Mango** and **Puerto Rican Spindalis**. In the afternoon, we will enjoy a relaxing walk around our lodging in El Yunque National Forest, full of scenic trails and waterfalls.

Overnight: Casa Cubuy



*The energetic **Bananaquit** can be seen energetically foraging in the canopies.*

Day 6. Humacao Nature Preserve to Fajardo

After breakfast we will head off to Humacao Nature Preserve, a great area of wetlands and flowering trees, typically loaded with birds. Here we will search for both **Green-throated Carib** and **Antillean Crested Hummingbird** which are mostly restricted to the eastern areas of the island. Unfortunately, they have become scarcer due to recent hurricanes that have swept through Puerto Rico. In addition to the hummers, we will be on the lookout for other great species including **White-cheeked Pintail**, **Puerto Rican Flycatcher**, and **Mangrove Cuckoo**. From here we will head to the town of Fajardo for lunch next to the ocean. Here we will continue searching for those two hummingbirds and will scan the sea for **Magnificent Frigatebird** and **Brown Booby**.

In the afternoon we will head back to El Yunque to continue birding the trails around our lodge hopefully digging up nice species including **Loggerhead Kingbird** (Puerto Rican subspecies), **Red-legged Thrush**, and **Puerto Rican Tanager**. The evening will provide an optional outing for **Puerto Rican Owl** on our final night of the tour.

Overnight: Casa Cubuy



Black-faced Grassquit is a common species throughout the Caribbean region.

Day 7. Departure from San Juan

After breakfast, and potentially some morning birding, we will load up and head back to the San Juan Airport to catch flights home. We strongly recommend flights departing after noon to allow enough time to transfer to the airport (approx. 1hr 15min drive). This will be the final trek on what was surely an amazing week spent in the paradise of Puerto Rico!

Be sure to check out our other tours in the Caribbean region, easily combinable with this one: [Cuba – Endemics and Cultural Paradise](#), [Dominican Republic – Complete DR Experience](#) and [Jamaica – Island Endemics in the Heart of the Caribbean](#).

Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides, and other factors. In addition, we occasionally need to use a different international guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling.

Duration: 7 days
Limit: 4 – 8
Dates: 23 – 29 February 2024

Start: San Juan, Puerto Rico
End: San Juan, Puerto Rico
Prices: US\$3,640 per person sharing (2024)

Single Supplement: US\$790 (2024)

Price includes:

Meals
Accommodation
Guiding fees
Entrance fees
All transport while on tour
Fuel/tolls

Price excludes:

Flights
Laundry
Gratuities (please see our [tipping guidelines blog](#))
Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts