

Clouds of hummingbirds, antpittas at your feet, an Andean Cock-of-the-Rock lek and mixed flocks are some of the highlights of this popular itinerary that hits the best spots of Ecuador's Chocó, highland paramos and Amazon drainage slopes.

Day 1 - Full morning Yanacocha Reserve, afternoon birding to the Tandayapa area

We will be picked-up from the hotel by our guide for the hour-long drive up to Yanacocha. The Yanacocha Reserve, situated on the west slopes of Volcán Pichincha (at about 11,000 ft), is a spectacular chunk of forest run by the Jocotoco Foundation, and is home to many sought after, high temperate forest species that can be hard to find, such as the Golden-breasted Puffleg, Ocellated Tapaculo, Barred Fruiteater and Black-chested Mountain-Tanager. A stroll along the trails often yields Rainbow-bearded Thornbill, Equatorial Antpitta, White-browed Spinetail, Crowned Chat-Tyrant and Yellow-breasted Brushfinch. The hummingbird feeders here are a big draw and often attract hummers with such dreamy names as Sword-billed Hummingbird, Great Sapphirewing, Sapphire-vented Puffleg and Shining Sunbeam. You might even see the trained Tawny Antpitta that comes to chow on worms near the headquarters. We should also have our first brushes with some active mixed species flocks.

After a full morning along the easily-walked and level trail at Yanacocha, and a lunch in the field, it will be time to move down-slope towards the small hamlet of Tandayapa to a well-appointed lodge nestled in the subtropical hills in the Tandayapa Valley. On the way, however, there will be plenty of birding opportunities along the upper Old Nono-Mindo rd. to search for some of the mid-elevation species that make the west-slope such an attraction for birders, like Toucan Barbet, Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan, Beautiful Jay and maybe even the scarlet form of Andean Cock-of-the-Rock. The possibilities will be many! Night at Tandayapa Bird Lodge.

Day 2 - Tandayapa Bird Lodge grounds and nearby surroundings

This will be our first morning in the Chocó region, one of the most endemic-ridden spots on the planet. During our full day here we'll be situated right in the heart of the subtropical west-slope, and surrounded by mossy forest just dripping with orchids and special birds. The Tandayapa/Mindo areas are legendary to birders and a great place from which to base the birding of the zone since it is so central to many of the different and interesting birding areas, and we will explore many of these hotspots. Tandayapa's hummingbird feeders are some of the most active and diverse to be found anywhere, and we should have no trouble finding

White-booted Racket-tail, Violet-tailed Sylph, Purple-bibbed Whitetip, Velvet-purple Coronet and Purple-throated Woodstar. The trails and forested roadsides around the lodge can be great for lower denizen species like Uniform Antshrike and Golden-winged and Club-winged Manakin, for mixed flocks where we will hope to see the likes of Red-headed Barbet, Spotted Woodcreeper, Red-faced Spinetail, Scaly-throated Foliage-gleaner, Olivaceous Piha, Scaled Fruiteater, Yellow-collared Chlorophonia, Flame-faced and Metallic-green Tanagers, Tricolored Brushfinch, Black-winged Saltator and so many more. Night birding can be rewarding so we will certainly want to give this a try on an evening or two during the our stay on the west slope. Some of the interesting nocturnal species that we could see over the next few days include Common Potoo, Lyre-tailed Nightjar, Rufescent Screech-Owl, and Mottled and Rufous-banded Owls, depending on how keen we are to search for nightbirds. Whichever way we end up organizing the birding, it will be overwhelming and huge fun! Night at Tandayapa Bird Lodge.

Day 3 - Tandayapa Bird Lodge to Mindo area

Today we will say farewell to Tandayapa and continue our travels on down the lower stretches of the fabled Old Nono-Mindo rd. The road takes us on an initial steep climb up to the Tandayapa Ridge – topping out at about 7,800 ft - through the Bellavista area, where the forests are often shrouded in mist. The roadside birding can be fabulous with amazing flocks, with the likes of Streaked Tuftedcheek, Green-and-black Fruiteater, Turquoise Jay, Grass-green Tanager and Hooded and Blue-winged Mountain-Tanagers. This is also one of the few places to see the rare and local Tanager Finch, a secretive understory species that seems only to be found on mid-elevation ridges.

After crossing the low pass, the old road meanders down towards the Mindo Valley through a patch-work of beautiful forest and small farms where we will spend the remainder of the day searching for flocks, toucans and even some interesting skulkers, such as tapaculos and antpittas; the scenery alone is enough to make the trip worth it! In the late afternoon/ early evening we will arrive to our comfortable lodge for the evening in the Mindo area.

Day 4 - Morning Paz de Las Aves, afternoon drive through Quito to Guango Lodge on the east slope

Today we will rise early and get on our way since we will want to be in position at Paz de Las Aves at first light. The reason for this is to be at their Andean Cock-of-the-Rock lek while the action is still in high gear. After having seen a few males in display mode, we hope, we will follow (the now iconic) Angel Paz through his reserve along a network of trails to try and coax out his many antpitta friends - Giant, Yellow-breasted, Moustached and Ochre-breasted are regulars - among others. Some of the trails are steep, but we will take our time... this will be the slowest-paced birding of the trip. Some of the other species that we often see here include Golden-headed Quetzal, Sickle-winged Guan, Dark-backed Wood-Quail, Orange-breasted Fruiteater, Olivaceous Piha, Black-chinned Mountain-Tanager, and Toucan Barbet.

In the afternoon we will leave the west slope and set our sights on the east, traveling back through Quito and then up and over the high continental divide to Guango Lodge, where we will spend a couple of nights. Depending on timing and traffic, we may have some time to make a few stops en route for some central valley and paramo birding. Night at Guango Lodge.

Day 5 - Guango Lodge reserve and surroundings

Today will be devoted to birding the trails and spectacular hummingbird feeders at Guango Lodge, or even possibly heading back up to higher zones to the Papallacta Pass. It all depends on the weather, and how we did on the way over from the west the previous day. On the grounds at Guango we frequently run into some of the best temperate forest flocks on any of our tours in Ecuador; in a matter of minutes it isn't uncommon to see Bar-bellied Woodpecker, White-banded Tyrannulet, Dusky Piha, Black-capped and Black-eared Hemispingus, Slaty and Pale-naped Brushfinches, Gray-hooded Bush-Tanager, Lacrimose and Hooded Mountain-Tanagers and even Plushcap. Andean Guans and loud Mountain Caciques can usually be found right around the lodge. Down by the river we have excellent chances at finding both Torrent Duck and White-capped Dipper. At any rate, we will enjoy a hot, sit-down lunch, only feet away from the hummingbird feeders. Night at Guango Lodge.

Day 6 - Guango Lodge morning, afternoon transfer to San Isidro Lodge

Since Guango Lodge is such a fantastic birding spot we will take advantage of another morning here on the grounds to search for any bird species that have eluded us up to this point. Mountain Avocetbill, Gray-breasted Mountain Toucan, Barred Fruiteater, Blue-backed Conebill, and Red-hooded Tanager would all be great finds. We will enjoy another hot, sit-down lunch, and soon after transfer to San Isidro Lodge – about 1 ½ hours down-slope - making some birding stops along the way should time permit. We will shoot to arrive in time to shower up and even try and spotlight a Rufous-bellied Nighthawk and night monkeys at dusk before what will certainly be a delicious dinner. The “mystery” Black-banded-type Owl will probably put in an appearance right off of the main veranda at the dining room, so have your binoculars handy. This is a gorgeous owl that may one day prove to be a new species to science. Mountain Tapir is also a fairly regular visitor to the gardens next to the dining room as well. Night San Isidro Lodge.

Day 7 - San Isidro Lodge

We will kick the morning off with some birding right from the main dining room veranda, where we often find it hard to pull ourselves away... the birds just sometimes keep coming. San Isidro is nestled right in the middle of the subtropical zone, so there will be a new set of birds waiting for us here. Some of the regulars include Masked Trogon, Montane and Olive-backed Woodcreepers, Golden-bellied Flycatcher, Marble-faced and Variegated Bristle-Tyrants, Black-billed Peppershrike, Inca Jay, Oleaginous Hemispingus Saffron-crowned Tanager and Scarlet-rumped Cacique. The hummingbird feeders and flowers at the dining room attract a variety of species, including Fawn-breasted Brilliant and Violet-fronted Brilliants, Collared and Bronzy Incas, Chestnut-breasted Coronet, Geoffroy's Daggerbill and Gorgeted Woodstar. After about an hour of this, we will want to visit the bird hide just down into the forest where we might see White-bellied Antpitta, Highland Motmot, Black-eared Hemispingus and Chestnut-capped Brushfinch. The rest of the morning will be spent birding the ample trail system and forested roadside at San Isidro where we will be on the lookout for Sickle-winged and Wattled Guans, Powerful Woodpecker, Tyrannine and Strong-billed Woodcreepers, Pearled Treerunner, Bicolored Antvireo, Barred Becard, Beryl-spangled Tanager, Bluish Flowerpiercer, Chestnut-breasted Chlorophonia and those noisy White-capped Tanagers.

After lunch at the lodge (and possibly an afternoon break), we can choose any of the trails that sprawl out from the lodge (or even the roadside) for a second crack at flocks and other activity... Crested Quetzal or a Black-chested Fruiteater would be nice finds. We may even want to try a

spot near the lodge for Andean Potoo and Rufous-banded Owl. Night at San Isidro Lodge.

Day 8 - Cordillera de Guacamayos and San Isidro area

Morning birding the beautiful Guacamayos ridge trail – only about 20 minutes from the lodge by vehicle - where some of the birds we hope to see include Green-and-black Fruiteater, Handsome Flycatcher, Rufous-headed Pygmy-Tyrant, Rufous Wren, Turquoise Jay, Lacrimose Mountain-Tanager, Grass-green Tanager, a few species of skulking tapaculos (and maybe even an Ocellated) and Mountain Cacique. While not as common, but still regularly seen here, some of the other harder possibilities include White-faced Nunbird, Peruvian Antpitta, Greater Scythebill, Dusky Piha and Black-billed Mountain-Toucan. Depending upon the guide's plan for the day, we may choose to bring along a box lunch for the day to explore further downslope into the foothills, while some further birding around San Isidro could be just as fruitful. Night San Isidro Lodge.

Day 9 - Drive to Wildsumaco via the Loreto rd. with birding stops

We will want to rise early for the drive down into the tropical foothills, and a chance at birding the Loreto rd. while it is still early. A stop at some active hummingbird feeders along the way should score Black-throated Brilliant, Many-spotted Hummingbird, Violet-headed Hummingbird, Golden-tailed Sapphire and maybe even Wire-crested Thorntail. Roadside stops can be good for Orange-breasted Falcon, Cliff Flycatcher and mixed flocks full of insectivores and tanagers. We plan to get to Wildsumaco with time to get into the rooms with daylight, and maybe even a stab at the very active hummingbird feeders right around the lodge. If we still have energy left, some night birding could turn up Band-bellied Owl. Night at Wildsumaco.

Day 10 - Wildsumaco grounds

The bird diversity in the eastern foothills explodes, and Wildsumaco is the ideal base from which to exploit it! We will have a day-and-a-half to bird the grounds and trails that fan out from this modern and comfortable birding lodge. Some of the foothill specialties that we will hope to see include Yellow-throated Spadebill, Gray-tailed Piha, Ecuadorian Piedtail, Foothill Antwren, Foothill Elaenia, Blue-rumped Manakin, and Scarlet-breasted Fruiteater, and Blue-browed and Yellow-bellied Tanagers. The area birdlist is huge, with a nice mix of lowland species as well – groups like toucans, antbirds, and tanagers all reach an impressive diversity, so we will want to get out there and get busy for what will certainly be a bonanza for birdlife! Night at Wildsumaco.

Day 11 - Morning Wildsumaco with afternoon drive back to Quito area

After a full morning of birding around Wildsumaco - which will probably include a mix of trail and roadside birding - we'll enjoy a last hot meal at the lodge, and soon after backtrack our back up and over the mighty Andes, once again cresting continental divide, to then descend to your hotel in the Quito area, making birding stops along the way should time permit.