

A complete, two-week birding swing across the south that visits the major hot spots, comfortable lodges, and most important reserves... and how about Jocotoco Antpittas practically at your feet!?

Day 1 - Flight early morning flight Quito-Guayaquil; transfer to Buenaventura with lunch and birding stops en route

Our travels to the Buenaventura Reserve (Umbrellabird Lodge) from Guayaquil will take much of the day depending on how we program our birding stops along the way. Much of this mostly travel day is spent traversing the devastated western lowlands that have been converted into agriculture, with cacao and banana plantations as far as the eye can see in some areas. Nevertheless, there are some very interesting spots to explore. On the way we will pass through some prime coastal marsh habitats (Manglares-Churute), where we should find the fancy Horned Screamer and maybe even the scarce Pinnated Bittern, among others. A peek into a patch or two of the lowland transitional forests here should yield Jet Antbird, as well as our first looks at some of the birds we will see in the drier zones of western Ecuador.

We will likely arrive to the Buenaventura Reserve in the late afternoon/early evening to get settled into our cabins. Night Umbrellabird Lodge, in the Buenaventura Reserve.

Days 2 & 3 - Two full days exploring the lush cloud forests of the Buenaventura Reserve

We will dedicate two full days to birding at Buenaventura, where the forest trails and forested roadside habitats drip with birds; this is certainly one of the "birdiest" spots in the country. This is the home of the endemic El Oro Parakeet, a bird only discovered back in the 80's. If we are lucky to visit during their nesting season, we stand an excellent chance of seeing them at one of their nest boxes. Aside from being a great place for some rare and local bird species – Umbrellabird and Club-winged Manakin leks just up the hill from the lodge! - Buenaventura offers up a fantastic cross section of neotropical bird groups, such as toucans, antbirds, and tanagers. The feeding stations right at the lodge are captivating, with clouds of hummers, Rufous-headed Chachalacas, and even the odd and curious coati! Nights Umbrellabird Lodge.

Day 4 - Birding/drive to Jorupe Reserve, near Macará

This is one of our longer travel days, but there will be some interesting birding along the way, especially further south once we get into some prime Tumbesian habitats, where we might see

our first Tumbes Hummingbird, Black-and-White Tanager or White-winged Brushfinch. Night Urraca Lodge, in the Jorupe Reserve.

Days 5 & 6 - Two full day birding at Jorupe reserve and surrounding areas

Urraca Lodge is situated right in the middle of the Jorupe reserve, where large, gnarled Bombax trees dominate the deciduous forest landscape. Here we will likely see many of our Tumbesian bird targets, like Blackish-headed Spinetail, Rufous-necked Foliage-gleaner, and Slaty Becard. Corn feeders right next to the dining room sometimes even attract the shy Pale-browed Tinamou. The lodge itself is beautifully designed, and is surrounded by very birdy, native habitat, so we will really want to take full advantage of our time here. Night Urraca Lodge.

Day 7 - Drive to Loja, birding on the way in the Sozoranga area, Utuana Reserve, and Catamayo Valley

Today will be concentrated more on the middle and upper elevation specialty-birds of Tumbesia. We plan to leave Jorupe early and head straight up into the highlands in the mountains to the east where we will be in search of Chapman's Antshrike, Gray-headed Antbird, Black-crested Tit-Tyrant, Black-cowled Saltator, Bay-crowned Brush-Finch, Tumbes Sparrow, and many more. Temperatures should be cooler today once we leave the lowland Macará area, barring intense sun. We will aim to get to our lodging - this time on the east slope in the heart of Jocotoco Antpitta territory - in the late afternoon/early evening. Night Casa Simpson, in the Tapichalaca Reserve.

Day 8 - Tapichalaca Reserve and surroundings

A morning visit to the now famous Jocotoco Antpitta feeder will be our first order of business, where we should see the antpittas at our feet! The rest of the day will be spent birding gorgeous temperate and subtropical montane forests of the Tapichalaca Reserve that dominate the landscape, whether along trails or roadsides. We'll be on the lookout for Bearded Guan, Black-and-chestnut Eagle, Golden-plumed Parakeet, Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucan, Orange-banded Flycatcher and Red-hooded and White-capped Tanagers. The flocks here can be overwhelming, and the hummingbird feeders at the lodge will hold an entirely different set of species to dazzle us! Night Casa Simpson.

Day 9 - Birding/drive to Zamora

In the event we miss seeing the Jocotoco Antpitta the previous day due to bad weather or luck, we have this morning built in as a cushion, but this is not likely to be necessary. Depending on the weather and our earlier success with the birds here at Tapichalaca, we can decide whether to do some early morning birding around the lodge, or just head back north, setting our sights on the rich diversity of the east slope based out of Copalinga Lodge, another Jocotoco Foundation lodge and reserve. Once we finally do get through Loja, and drop over to the east slope, a birding drive down the old Loja-Zamora road can be very productive, especially for colorful tanagers (like Vermilion and Blue-browed), and active mixed species flocks. The drive is scenic and follows the rushing Zamora River, which can be a great place for Torrent Duck, White-capped Dipper, and even Fasciated Tiger-Heron at the lower end. Night Copalinga Lodge.

Days 10 & 11 - Two full days birding at Copalinga Reserve and the Bombuscaro sector of the Podocarpus National Park

Copalinga and Bombuscaro are nestled in a breath-takingly beautiful valley, with the roaring Bombuscaro River down below. Only at about 3,000 ft above sea level in the tropical foothills, the slopes are blanketed by lush, upper tropical forest, and of course, loaded with a new (and very large!) set of bird species. We will only have time to scratch the surface, but weather permitting, some great birds should be seen. Coppery-tailed Jacamar, the range-restricted White-necked Parakeet, Black-streaked Puffbird, Amazonian Umbrellabird, Andean Cock-of-the-Rock, and Paradise Tanager are all regulars of the area. Bombuscaro also happens to be the place where the Foothill Elaenia was first sound-recorded and determined to be a new species to science, and we have a strong chance of seeing it providing we hit the right flock; the mixed flocks here can be enormous and full of diversity. Copalinga is a very comfortable and attractive lodge to spend our two nights here. The vervain flowers around the dining room attract one of the best assemblages of east-slope hummers anywhere, including Wire-crested Thorntail, Spangled Coquette, and Golden-headed Sapphire, while the feeders always buzz with Violet-fronted Brilliants. Nights Copalinga Lodge.

Day 12 - Travel to Loja airport for flight back to Quito

Depending on our flight time back to Quito, we should have time for some last birding around Copalinga, and even some programed stops on the way to the airport, such as in the Catamayo Valley for another go at some drier habitat species. Flight back to Quito.

A general note about conditions to expect:

Much of the birding on this trip will be along roadsides or easily walked trails, but do expect some mud and soggy conditions, especially along some stretches of the Jocotoco Foundation lodge trails, but nothing extreme, but rubber boots can come in handy for these situations. There will not be any very high-altitude visits - so no worries with respect to altitude sickness - but the tour does spend some time at mid-elevations at around 2,300 meters, which might require some folks to walk more slowly on hillier slopes, such as along the trails at Tapichlaca. The vast majority of the tour will be spent at relatively lower elevations, between sea level up to about 1,000 meters. If sunny, heat will be a factor in most areas, but most birding is planned during the morning and late afternoon hours, when it is cooler, and the birds are most active. Mosquitoes can be an issue around Jorupe and Buenaventura, but repellent should keep them at bay.

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