

Visit Ecuador's endemic-pumped Chocó region from head-to-toe. This tour hits the key spots – from the highlands to the lowlands - on the NW slope to see to it that you get the best coverage of the region possible and find the birds you are looking for.

Day 1 - Yanacocha and afternoon birding to the Mindo area

We will be picked-up from the hotel by your 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 yield 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 tour. 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 to 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 continues to wind 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/evening we will arrive to our comfortable lodge for the evening in the Mindo area.

Day 4 – Morning Paz de Las Aves, afternoon birding Mindo area

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.

The rest of the day will be dedicated to birding the hotspots of the Mindo area, and we will want to make time to visit one or two of the productive tanager/hummingbird feeding stations that the area has to offer. Night at lodge in Mindo area.

Day 5 – Day-trip to the Silanche and Milpe areas

An early wake-up will be necessary to get into position for this day of birding. Silanche is a place to start and bird early, before the sun has a chance to beat down, and requires about an hour-and-a-half drive to get to, but it should be well worth it. The reserve at Silanche, at about 1,500 ft in elevation, has a small canopy tower and a trail system that offers up a healthy sampling of many species endemic to the lower elevation Chocó biome; the Chocó is one of the

most diverse, yet endangered, endemic centers in South America, with only about 3% left. Some of the interesting regional endemics that we stand a very good chance of seeing here include Rose-faced Parrot, Dusky Pigeon, Chocó Toucan, Blue-tailed Trogon, and Scarlet-browed and Gray-and-gold Tanagers. Some of the rarer denizens that are resident in the area that we hope to cross paths with are Scarlet-breasted Dacnis and Blue-whiskered Tanager, but the bird life is abundant, and a morning list of over 100 species is not out of the question!

After a field lunch, we will want to make our way back up-slope into the upper foothills, around 1,100 meters in elevation, to the bird-rich Milpe reserve, where the temperatures should be a lot cooler. Here the roadside and trail birding can be very rewarding. One of the most interesting birds of the region is the strange Club-winged Manakin, a bird that makes the fastest known mechanical noise (with its wings) of any organism! We'll hope to see the males in action, displaying at a lek, but their activity is hard to predict. The hummingbird feeders here are great for Green-crowned Brilliant and Woodnymph, Green Thorntail and White-whiskered Hermit. The frugivorous and insectivorous flocks that often sweep through the treetops and understory are host to Rufous-throated and Ochre-breasted Tanagers, Russet Antshrike, and Golden-bellied (Chocó) Warbler. With any luck at all, we'll see some of these and many more. Night at lodge in Mindo area.

Day 6 – Mindo area, afternoon return to hotel near Quito

We will have the better part of the day to focus our birding on any of the target birds that have to this point side-stepped us, which is a nice luxury to have! In the afternoon we will need to travel back to our hotel in the Quito area to be in position for flights out, other trip extensions.

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