

NATURE, BIRD AND WHALE WATCHING

A Rapport With Nature

Ecuador is a nature lover's paradise. The wide variety of vegetation, from high Paramo to Tropical Rain-forests and mangrove swamps, make it the home to a greater number of species than any other country in Latin America. Over 1,500 species of birds and 3,000 species of orchids have been recorded - twice as much as in the continental USA. We have selected the following tours to take the enthusiast through a cross-section of the Ecuadorian countryside and to some of the best known places.

NA-01	<p>Cotopaxi National Park</p> <p>Travel South 60km to the base of Cotopaxi, the world's highest active volcano at 5.897m. Observe low growing vegetation of the Paramo, home to the Tury Hummingbird, the Andean Hillstar and the giant Andean Condor, with its 3m wingspan. Depending on weather conditions and group interests, hike up to the snow line at approximately 5.000 m. Picnic lunch served in park area - Return to Quito in the late afternoon.</p>	<i>1 day, box-lunch included</i>
NA-02	<p>Quilotoa Crater Lake</p> <p>We leave Quito and drive South along the Avenue of the Volcanoes, enjoying the wonderful Andean scenery, until we reach the town of Latacunga. There we head to the Southwest up the Western Cordillera to the village of Zumbahua. The route we follow takes us through really desolate Andean terrain, with its patch-work fields, the occasional shepherd and oxen at work. From Zumbahua we take a dusty road to Quilotoa. This is a volcanic crater filled by a dazzling aquarmarine lake. From its rim the view of the surrounding volcanoes is fantastic. Also, for the adventurous, the hike down the steep winding trail to the lake is really worthwhile.</p>	<i>1 day, box-lunch included</i>
NA-03	<p>Pasochoa Nature Reserve</p> <p>Early morning departure, for a 30 minute drive South of Quito, to Pasochoa. Here we find one of the few remaining Andean forests on the slopes of a dormant volcano and home to a substantial variety of bird life; over 11 Hummingbird species, Tyrant Flycatchers and Honeycreepers amongst them, making it an excellent introduction to the ornithology of Ecuador.</p>	<i>1 day, box-lunch included</i>
NA-04	<p>Tinalandia</p> <p>Drive south of Quito, for 37km, cross the Western Andes and drop down into an interestingly vegetated area, the Cloud Forest. Several stops to discover a humid world of trees and mosses, orchids and many migrant and resident bird species such as toucans and parrots. Lunch. Walk through the forest; looking for wildlife. Late afternoon, return to Quito</p>	<i>1 day, box-lunch included</i>
NA-05	<p>Nono - Mindo Road Tour</p> <p>The Nono - Mindo Road is the second of two rarely used cobblestone roads out of Quito towards the Western lowlands. A dream for the serious birdwatcher; we will slowly drive down the road looking out for the Andean guan, the Andean Cock-of-the-rock, and other rare species for which Ecuador is well known.</p> <p>Optional: The Nono-Mindo Road tour can be extended to include a stay at a bird lodge in the Tandayapa/Mindo area (NA-06).</p>	<i>1 day, box-lunch included</i>
NA-06	<p>Tandayapa / Mindo Bird Lodges</p> <p>Several bird lodges are located in the valley of the same name, less than two hours away from Quito. The Tandayapa valley extends for 6 km along the old Nono-Mindo road, from 1650m to 2350m above sea level, in the midst of the mid-altitude cloud forest. It is an excellent area to experience the marvel of the Andean</p>	<i>2 days, all meals & accommodation</i>

	<p><i>(Tandayapa / Mindo Bird Lodges... continued from previous page)</i></p> <p>mixed species feeding flocks, as well as to observe species that are endemic to this area. The lodging is comfortable and neat, and the food is very good. For the serious birdwatcher, the lodges are strategically located as a base camp to explore the incredible diversity of the entire surrounding area.</p> <p><i>Day 1.</i> Early departure from Quito. Slow drive along the old Nono-Mindo Road until we reach the lodge. Lunch at the lodge. Afternoon free to explore the area. Evening hike after dinner. Overnight at the bird lodge.</p> <p><i>Day 2.</i> Morning hike. Return to Quito after lunch. The exact itinerary for the hikes is agreed upon there, depending on the specific interests of the client.</p> <p><i>Optional.</i> The tour may be extended to up to four days for the serious birdwatchers interested in exploring the entire surrounding area.</p>
NA-07	<p>Papallacta Pass Tour <i>1 day, box-lunch included</i></p> <p>Leave Quito. Cross the Eastern Cordillera at the Pass (4,100 m) approaching via a glacier carved canyon. See dramatic changes in vegetation, on to cloud forest to observe birds and exotic flowers surviving in a rather difficult environment. PM drive back to Quito.</p>
NA-08	<p>Baños Cloud Forest Tour <i>2 days, breakfast, lunch and accommodation</i></p> <p><i>Day 1.</i> Head South from Quito via the Avenue of the Volcanoes. Stop at the Indian village of Salasaca, well known for weavings and wall hangings. Before arriving in Baños, visit cloud forest area, with an enormous variety of plant and bird life. Proceed to Pastaza canyon and its thermal baths. Overnight in Baños.</p> <p><i>Day 2.</i> All day hiking or horseback riding around Baños. Return to Quito in the late afternoon.</p>
NA-10	<p>Machalilla National Park & Isla de la Plata with Whalewatching (June to Sept) <i>4 days, all meals & accommodation (airfare Quito-Manta/Portoviejo – Quito not included)</i></p> <p>This is the only coastal park in the country, created in 1979 to protect one of the last remaining habitats of its kind. Covering approximately 60,000 hectares, it combines many different climatological zones: desert, tropical dry forest, matorral and mountain wilderness areas and two off-shore coral islands that have some similarities to the Galapagos. It is populated by a large variety of endemic flora and fauna like mountain tapirs, guantas, iguanas and pumas, parrots, pelicans, frigates and a wide range of cacti, succulent bromeliads and flowering trees. Several natural bays and wide sandy beaches curve between the many rocky cliffs of its shores, the most famous being "Los Frailes", a virgin, white-sanded beach with clear blue water. Machalilla also has important archaeological sites such as Agua Blanca, the ancient seat of successive cultures, Valdivia, Guangala, Bahía, Chorrera and Manteña.</p> <p><i>Day 1.</i> Morning flight to Manta or Portoviejo. Private bus to lodging. Lunch. Visit archaeological museum and animal sanctuary at Salango. Return to lodge for swim and overnight accommodation.</p> <p><i>Day 2.</i> Breakfast. Boat ride to Isla de la Plata, a 2-hour journey. From June to September we offer unique viewing of the Humpback whales off the coast of Machalilla accompanied by a naturalist guide. Hundreds of whales come up from the Antarctic to breed in the tropical waters of the Ecuadorian coast. On the islands one sees a multitude of sea birds: Blue Footed Boobies, Frigatebirds, Pelicans and Petrels. After disembarking, walk from Drake Bay to Playa Escondida, possibly seeing Albatross and Sea Lions on the way. Picnic lunch en route. Snorkeling to see the coral marine life. Return to lodge late afternoon.</p> <p><i>Day 3.</i> Hike through tropical dry forest to see the characteristically bottle shaped trees (<i>Prosopis Juliflora</i>), Kapok trees, Figs, Laurels and Palo Santo trees. In this strange-looking forest, 119 species of birds, deer, Guantas, Anteaters, Iguanas and Lizards, among others, have been recorded. If time allows, visit the beach of Los Frailes for a refreshing bath before returning to the lodge.</p> <p><i>Day 4.</i> Visit Montecristi, a town famous for its Panama hat manufactory. Late afternoon/evening arrival in Quito.</p>

NA-11

Birdwatching in the Highlands, Cloud- and Rainforest

8 days

Ecuador is a nature lover's paradise. The wide variety of habitats - from tropical rainforests, to cloud forests, to high paramo, to mangrove swamps, to the dry Pacific coast- make it home to the highest diversity of birds in the world and to one of the greatest number of species of flora and fauna. The following 8-day sample itinerary gives a glimpse of the different regions that can be visited. Tours can be designed to include all or some of the areas described. Please contact us for further information.

The tour starts in Quito to the famous, bird-rich Nono-Mindo Road. Passing the crest of the western Andes and down into the subtropical forest to about 1500 m, we can observe species such as the sickle-winged guan, prince hawk, red-billed parrot, red-backed hawk, golden-headed quetzal, black-billed peppershrike, booted rackettail, cock of the rock and a great number of hummingbirds, just to mention a few of the long list of birds found here. Overnight at a lodge in the Tandayapa/Mindo area for the next two nights. This area also has a great variety of orchids.

The journey continues along the Nanegalito – Puerto Maldonado – Santo Domingo Road, birdwatching along the way. Here we experience the transition between cloud forest and subtropical rainforest, with its great variety of bird species of the area. At the private reserve of Tinalandia we spot species like the masked trogon, rufous-breasted anthrush, mountain tanagers, black-chinned mountain tanager, plush-capped finch and rufous-naped brush-finch, to name just a few.

Return to the highlands, driving from Santo Domingo on this spectacular route where we can experience dramatic changes from subtropical forest, cloudforest to interandean highlands. Our destination is La Cienega, a colonial hacienda which is now a beautiful hotel. The historical importance of this hacienda, its beautiful gardens and easy birdwatching make this a delightful stop. PM birdwatching in the grounds. Next stop on this tour is the Cotopaxi National Park, the base of the highest active volcano in the world. At higher altitudes (3600-4400 m) we may view the puna hawk, bar-winged cinclodes, Andean teal and brown-backed chat tyrant. This will also be our best opportunity to see the rare Andean condor. PM drive to Papallacta. We climb up the Eastern Cordillera to reach the pass, at an altitude of 4100 m. About three km below the pass, there is an extensive Polylepis woodland, and the pass itself is a good example of Paramo ecosystem. This area is wonderful for observing sword billed hummingbirds, mountain avocetbill, blue mantled thornbill, Andean tit spinetail, among many other species. We continue the journey to the Guango/Baeza area where we will spend the next two days before returning to Quito.

We visit the Guango Trail to observe the incredible variety of birds there. Then we continue our drive Eastward down the Eastern Andean cordillera to Cosanga. The Baeza – Cosanga area, which lies at approx. 2000 meters altitude, and includes the Guacamayos Ridge, is very rich in bird species. We might observe, among others, solitary eagles, black and chestnut eagles, orange breasted falcons, rufous breasted wood-quails, military macaws, band bellied owls, white capped parrots, vermiculated screech owls, Andean potoos, black mandibled toucans and emerald toucanets.

This tour provides the opportunity for a close-up view of the authentic rural Ecuador: as you walk on back roads, between the tilled fields, you can observe the indigenous women washing their clothes in the rivers, the ancient agricultural methods used, as well as experience the sights, smells and sounds of life in rural Ecuador. A knowledgeable resident naturalist guide will accompany you on this extraordinary journey on foot through the highlands of Ecuador.

The journey begins in Quito, the capital city, initially heading to the northern Province of Imbabura. Walking 4 to 6 hours daily on trails and backroads you get a firsthand experience of life in the Andean highlands. The scenery is breathtakingly beautiful, and you will visit areas such as Cuicocha Lake, Zuleta and San Pablo. Overnight accommodations are at traditional Ecuadorian haciendas that have been converted into charming hotels.



After 3 nights in this area, return to Quito for one night. The journey then continues to the South along the "Avenue of the Volcanoes" to Cotopaxi National Park at the foot of Cotopaxi, which at 5897 m is considered the highest active volcano in the world. Depending on weather conditions, either hike up to the refuge at 4800 m or walk at lower elevations within the park. This area is striking with its almost equatorial glaciers and its tundra-like vegetation. With a bit of luck, you may also be able to observe the typical wildlife of the park. Accommodation for two nights in this area is in the Hacienda La Cienega, one of the oldest haciendas in Ecuador.

The next leg of the tour takes you to Baños, situated at the base of the Tungurahua volcano, 1800 m above sea level. The dramatic change from highland vegetation to lush subtropical flora is fascinating and one of the highlights of this excursion. From here the tour

continues to the South to Ingapirca, one of the most important Inca ruins in Ecuador. This area is fascinating for its historical significance as well as its landscape which, while being in the highlands, is very different from the scenery experienced further north.

Note: This tour can also be custom-designed and/or shortened, in accordance with the clients' wishes and time availability. Please contact our office for more information.