

Go Slow in Colombia

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Bogota Pre-extension

- Day -1** Fly Bogota
-
- Day 0/1** Bogota; Botero & Gold museums, touring
-

Main tour

- Day 1** Fly Bogota
-
- Day 2** Arrive Bogota; fly Pereira/Hacienda
-
- Day 3/8** Birding excursions from Hacienda Venecia
-
- Day 9** Transfer Pereira, fly Bogota and on to UK
-
- Day 10** Arrive UK
-

Montezuma Extension

- Day 9** Transfer to Montezuma
-
- Day 10/12** Three full days at Montezuma
-
- Day 13** Transfer Pereira; fly Bogota/UK
-
- Day 14** Arrive UK
-

Departs

November - March

Focus

Birds

Grading

A – see paragraph at end of itinerary

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code COL07)



Grey-breasted Mountain-Toucan



White-capped Tanager



Torrent Ducks



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Introduction

Colombia, with around 1,900 recorded species at the last count, including around 80 endemics, is the undisputed number one country on the planet for bird diversity. Unfortunately, for most of the 90's and 'noughties', civil unrest had made visiting remote areas within the country inadvisable. Whilst ecotourism flourished in neighbouring Panama, Ecuador, Venezuela, Brazil and Peru, Colombia remained in the doldrums, waiting patiently for the chance to reveal its wonderful landscapes, birds and people to the world once more. Happily, Colombia has changed dramatically in the past few years and birders worldwide are now flocking to this beautiful country in search of its many avian jewels.

Colombia's topography is both diverse and breathtaking, with snow-capped mountains, cloud-filled valleys, savannas and rainforests providing habitat for a magnificent birdlife ranging from tiny hummingbirds to Andean Condors. This tour concentrates on endemics as well as the trademark hummingbirds, antpittas and tanagers which are always a feature of birding tours in the subtropical Andes.

Although this new tour doesn't tick all our 'Go Slow' boxes (we have to take an internal flight once in Colombia), in all other respects we are delighted to be able to offer a relaxing, single-centre tour to the most bird-rich country on the planet. This tour is aimed at those who wish to experience some of Colombia's finest birding spots, all from a comfortable base and while keeping to hours that don't leave you exhausted and needed a holiday at the end of the holiday to recover!

Join us too for an optional 2-night pre-tour cultural extension in Bogota and/or a post-tour 4-night extension to Montezuma Cloudforest Lodge and the Tatama National Park!

Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Fly Bogota

We leave London Heathrow in the evening on a direct overnight scheduled flight with Avianca to the Colombian capital Bogota. Regional departures can be organised either by way of BA connections to Heathrow, or by flying with Air France or KLM through Paris or Amsterdam. Please ask us for advice upon booking.

Day 2

Pereira – Hacienda Venecia

Arriving in Bogota in the very early morning local time, we will clear passport control and have a couple of hours to wait for our short (one hour) onward flight west to Pereira, a city of half a million people in a mountainous arena in the central Andes known for its coffee production. Once we have

collected our baggage we will drive north for an hour or so to our base for the next seven nights, Hacienda Venecia.

Hacienda Venecia is a delightful coffee hacienda, nestled in the verdant slopes of Colombia's central Andes, just outside the city of Manizales. Perched at 1,350 metres above sea level, the climate is ideal, with warm (but not too hot) days with cooler temperatures in the evening and at night. The hacienda boasts luxuriant bird-filled gardens (the house list is approaching 300 species!), well-appointed rooms, an inviting swimming pool and a kitchen team offering delicious, freshly cooked meals...not to mention as much delicious Colombian coffee as you can drink.



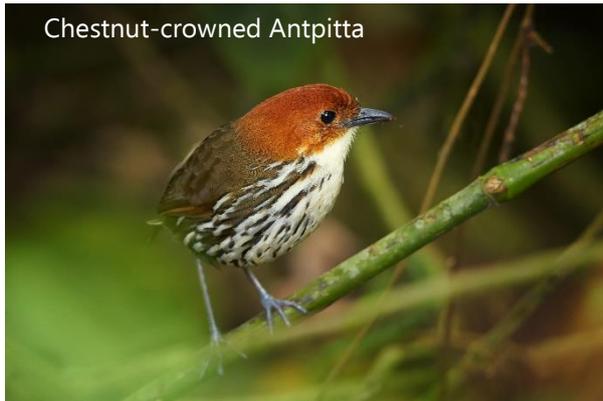
Once we've settled in and unpacked, we are likely to use the day in a relaxed fashion to begin to get to grips with some of the many birds which call the hacienda grounds home, including our first Colombian endemics in the form of Greyish Piculet, Colombian Chachalaca, both Parker's and Stile's Antbirds and Chestnut Wood-quail, as well as several regional specialities such as Scrub Tanager, Bar-crested Antshrike, Spectacled Parrotlet and Moustached Puffbird.

Days 3-8

Hacienda Venecia

From our base we will enjoy daily early morning excursions to various reserves in the area, returning for a relaxed afternoon around the hacienda.

On our agenda is a visit to Rio Blanco, a beautiful cloud forest reserve famed for its antpittas (including the endemic Brown-banded and striking Chestnut-capped varieties) and mixed species flocks comprising a dazzling selection of tanagers, woodpeckers, woodcreepers, and more! This wonderful reserve, located an hour from our base, is owned by Aguas de Manizales, a municipal water company. A guest house and visitor facilities are operated by the Fundación Gabriel Arango Restrepo (FUNDEGAR). The area offers several excellent forest trails with busy mixed species flocks, active hummingbird feeders and, more recently, several remarkable antpitta feeding sites run by resident guide Albeiro Uribe where Chestnut-crowned Antpitta and Brown-banded Antpitta are regular visitors, and Bicolored Antpitta and Slate-colored Antpitta are also possible, although less reliable.



Chestnut-crowned Antpitta

Antpittas, however, are only a small part of the appeal of this reserve as many rare and other infrequently-seen species also occur here, including Rusty-faced Parrot, Golden-plumed Parakeet, Black-collared Jay, Powerful Woodpecker, Black-billed Mountain-Toucan, Ocellated Tapaculo (occasionally visits the antpitta feeding stations), Black-billed Peppershrike, Golden-faced Redstart, Plushcap, and two prize species, the Red-hooded Tanager

and Masked Saltator. These last two are local in distribution and much sought by birders. The saltator is perhaps more easily seen here than anywhere else in its range but even here there are days when it is quiet and unresponsive and cannot be found. Other species, including a few that occur in low density, include Tyrannine Woodcreeper, Montane and Lineated foliage-gleaner, Rusty-winged Barbtail, Pearled Treerunner, Dusky Piha, Oleaginous Hemispingus, Grass-green and White-capped Tanager, Buff-breasted Mountain-Tanager, and (Northern) Mountain-Cacique. Buff-tailed Coronets dominate the hummingbird feeders, but over ten species of hummers are regular attendees here including Green Violetear, Sparkling Violetear, Speckled Hummingbird, Fawn-breasted Brilliant, Mountain Velvetbreast (seasonal), Bronzy Inca, Collared Inca, Tourmaline Sunangel, Long-tailed Sylph, and White-bellied Woodstar. Patches of bamboo above the guest house are frequented by Black-capped Tyrannulet, Sharpe's Wren, Citrine Warbler, Black-capped, Oleaginous, Superciliaried, and Black-eared Hemispingus, Plushcap and Yellow-billed Cacique.

Twenty miles in the other direction is the wetland site of Cameduadua which will entertain us during a different morning's excursion, offering an excellent selection of waders, waterbirds and kingfishers, while fringing forest and open areas should produce a fine selection of warblers (many of them boreal migrants), flycatchers, seedeaters, orioles, siskins, swallows and raptors.

Another morning will be spent at Rio Claro just minutes from our lodge, where a rushing white-water river should offer a great chance to see the incomparable Torrent Duck, as well as White-capped Dipper, the endemic Turquoise Dacnis and a wealth of other mouth-watering species.

Our days will follow a similar pattern, with an early breakfast, birding during the most productive hours of the morning, before returning to our hacienda for a relaxed afternoon (with the option to enjoy several tours and experiences laid on by the lodge, including a coffee tour, a rum tasting experience and chocolate tasting. We will aim to alternate the days with a longer drive out with those outings where sites are closer to our base.

On one of the days (to be carefully planned in accordance with the weather forecast) we shall enjoy a longer, full day excursion (it's a 2-hour drive each way) to the high reaches of Colombia's central Andes at Nevado del Ruiz National Park, which offers access to some of the most easily accessible páramo (a tropical alpine grassland above the tree line) vegetation anywhere in Colombia. Nevado del Ruiz, at 5,429 m. (17,788 ft.), is the northernmost volcano in the Andes and is glacier-covered

but still active. It will be chilly here, as we begin birding at elevations above 13,000 feet, so it will be a day to be fleeced, hatted and gloved-up.

We will go as far as the national park HQ as all the key high elevation specialists of the low, damp elfin woodland mixed with páramo can be found here and a little lower. Initially birding from the rustic national park café (just under 13,500 feet or 4,100m) and a viewing platform which is perfect



Buffy Helmetcrest

for the delightful little Buffy Helmetcrest (formerly known as Bearded Helmetcrest before a four-way split) as it does its regular feeding rounds, we'll also look for Stout-billed Cinclodes, Tawny Antpitta, Andean Tit-spinetail, White-chinned Thistletail, Brown-backed Chat-tyrant, Páramo Tapaculo, Sedge Wren, Plain-colored Seedeater and Plumbeous Sierra-Finch. If the weather is still and clear, it will also be worth keeping an eye skywards for Andean Condor.

At slightly lower elevations, and in grassy areas, we'll be searching for the Many-colored Canastero and continue birding downward in elevation through patches of montane forest, searching for such species as Viridian Metaltail, Tyrian Metaltail, White-throated and White-banded Tyrannulet, Golden-crowned Tanager, Scarlet-bellied Mountain-tanager, Buff-breasted Mountain-tanager, Lacrimose Mountain-tanager, Blue-backed Conebill and Glossy Flowerpiercer. The endemic and very local Rufous-fronted Parakeet occurs in this area but is unpredictable and difficult to find. A small lake, Laguna Negra, sometimes harbors Andean Teal and Ruddy Duck (the Andean form with an all or mostly black head).

There will be time this afternoon to enjoy the magnificent hummingbird garden at our fabulous hot springs lunch stop. Arguably the star species here is the dazzling Rainbow-bearded Thornbill, although other gems include Buff-winged Starfrontlet, Shining Sunbeam and both Black-thighed and Golden-breasted Pufflegs.

On our final full day at Hacienda Venecia we will take you to an exciting new reserve called Hacienda el Bosque. The reserve has been formed around a working dairy farm. The owners have created wonderful antpitta stations, hummingbird gardens and fruit feeders also. Here we'll again be trying for a couple of special antpittas in the form of Equatorial Antpitta and the striking and rare Crescent-faced Antpitta. In



Sword-billed Hummingbird

the cloud forest we'll be on the lookout for Yellow-bellied Chat-tyrant, Crimson-mantled Woodpecker, Golden-fronted Redstart, Pearled Treerunner, Plushcap and Purple-backed Thornbill, to name only a few. The reserve offers a wonderful selection of hummingbirds; indeed, hummingbirds will be a daily fixture on this tour and we should see as many as thirty plus species in total. Here at Hacienda el Bosque the highlights include the jaw-dropping Sword-billed Hummingbird, Mountain Velvetbreast, both Bronzy and Collared Incas and Fawn-breasted Brilliant. We'll also keep our fingers crossed for close-up encounters with arguably the star birds of the reserve - Grey-breasted Mountain Toucan and Barred Fruiteater!

Day 9

Hacienda Venecia – Pereira - Bogota

Having been dazzled by incredible birds, spectacular scenery, delicious food and wonderfully inviting hosts over the past days, the final day will be spent in our hacienda. Here we can again soak up the avian diversity and perhaps cool off on the inviting swimming pool with a cold glass of wine or a beer! In the mid-afternoon we will make tracks to Pereira airport for our domestic flight back to Bogota and a smooth onward connection to London.

Day 10

UK

We are due to arrive back in the UK mid-afternoon on Avianca's service direct from the Colombian capital.

MONTEZUMA/TATAMA NATIONAL PARK EXTENSION

Day 9

Montezuma

The extension contingent will need to leave Hacienda Venecia in the late morning for a 70-mile, 4 hour drive westwards, the last part of which (from Pueblo Rico) requires us to decant to 4x4 all-terrain vehicles to navigate the rough unmade road surface. It's the price we pay for accessing such a remote and exciting region.

The lodging at Montezuma is quite basic but has been recently remodelled and updated to include private bathrooms each with a hot water shower. The rooms are very clean, the food excellent and the owner (a delightful lady called Leopoldina) is extremely hospitable as well as being a sharp birding guide! Our



Montezuma Lodge

birding here will be within the Reserva Natural Cerro Montezuma and the Tatamá National Park, which is a well-known site within the history of Colombian ornithology, with a long list of Chocó-Pacific birds first known from this area.

We settle in for four nights at the lodge.

Days 10-12

Montezuma

Our first morning will be spent in a leisurely fashion around the lodge and in the lower altitudinal zones of the park between 1,350m - 1,650 m. The lodge itself is close to some small-scale agriculture and secondary forest, but also close to beautiful wet, mossy forest. Hummingbird feeders at the lodge usually attract several interesting species including Rufous-gaped Hillstar, Violet-tailed Sylph and Empress Brilliant. Olinguito, a relatively recently described member of the raccoon family, has been known to visit the bird tables for bananas after dark, as has Tayra in the daytime. This region is one of the most biodiverse locations anywhere in the world, and with a lodge-list of over 600 species (including a host of prized endemics and range-restricted specials), the next three full days should prove a real highlight!

The lodge itself lies on the edge of the Chocó-Pacific region, and it 'enjoys' some of the highest rainfall in the continent (one of the main drivers of its biodiversity). Mornings tend to be clear here, but weather can change quickly so we'll leave very early (0500) on our second morning, by 4WD for the 90 minute or so drive up to the end of the road where we will begin birding. The road, which leads up to an army base and communications centre at the summit, is rough and a bumpy ride up is in store. Once at the top, the view across to Cerro Tatama should be fantastic given clear conditions, and we'll enjoy a packed breakfast and steaming coffee before the birding begins in earnest.



Purplish-mantled Tanager

At the very highest elevations (around 2,500m) the endemic Munchique Wood-wren is a target bird (a species first discovered in southwestern Colombia by Steve Hilty in the late 1970s but not formally described until 2003) as well as the endemic Chestnut-bellied Flowerpiercer. The rest of the morning will be spent walking down the same wide track we have driven up earlier, stopping for particular targets or connecting with a busy feeding flock. The tanagers may well steal the show, including jaw-droppers like Purplish-mantled Tanager, Glistening-green

Tanager, Grass-green Tanager, Blue-winged and Black-chinned Mountain-tanagers plus Green and Black Fruiteater. The endemic Gold-ringed Tanager (not generally found in mixed flocks) is a key target and while patience is needed, over the course of the day we should enjoy great views of this emblematic species. After a packed lunch, the highlights may include Black Solitaire, Beautiful Jay and Chestnut-breasted Chlorophonia, while lower down the slope, birds such as Parker's Antbird,

Chocó Tapaculo, Chocó Warbler, Crested Ant-tanager and Black-and-gold Tanager will swell our list. This is Pacific-Andean birding at its best, with no traffic and no other birders in sight! Just a bumpy ride up and one mind-blowing flock after another!

Our second full day's birding from Montezuma will play out much the same as the first, although this time we'll start our birding from where we left off yesterday. By doing so we'll target mid-lower elevational species, and so find more new and exciting birds as we go!

The third full day is on standby to target any missing species or to spend as we please!

Day 13

Montezuma – Pereira - Bogota

After a final morning's birding and an early lunch, we will make tracks to Pereira airport for our domestic flight back to Bogota and a smooth onward connection to London.

Day 14

UK

We are due to arrive back in the UK mid-afternoon on Avianca's service direct from the Colombia capital.

PRE-TOUR BOGOTA HISTORY AND CULTURE EXTENSION

Day -1

Fly Bogota

We leave London Heathrow in the evening on a direct overnight scheduled flight with Avianca to the Colombian capital Bogota.

Day 0

Arrive Bogota

Arriving in Bogota in the very early morning local time (0340), we will clear passport control, collect our baggage and be met by our local guide with whom we'll transfer into the historic centre of Bogota and our base for two nights. You'll be able to check into your rooms immediately. A little later you will have a leisurely breakfast and then after a period of rest you will be picked up by your guide for some gentle touring of historical Bogota, lunch and a visit to the Botero museum, an extremely highly rated art museum located in La Candelaria neighbourhood of Bogotá. It houses mostly works by Colombian artist Fernando Botero; however it also includes artwork by other international artist that were part of Botero's own private art collection. Dinner will be at the hotel.



Day 1

Bogota

Today we have a full day cultural tour including a cable car visit to Monseratte, a 3,000 metre peak that dominates the city centre of Bogotá. The mountain, already considered sacred in pre-Columbian times when the area was inhabited by the indigenous Muisca, is a pilgrim destination, as well as a tourist attraction. In addition to the church near the summit, the area contains restaurants, cafeteria, souvenir shops and many smaller tourist facilities. All downtown Bogotá, south Bogotá and some sections of the north of the city are visible facing west, making it a popular destination to watch over the city.



We'll also enjoy a walking tour of the city where we'll have time around Bogota's historical centre, a visit to the famous Gold Museum and Simon Bolivar square. Throughout the day we'll taste excellent coffee, enjoy a traditional lunch and taste exotic fruits of the region.

Day 2

Hacienda Venecia

An early start today involving a drive back to the airport and a flight to Pereira, on which we will meet the group freshly-arrived from London who haven't done the pre-tour extension. Refer to the entry for Day 2 above.

Tour Grading & Focus

Grade A. Being a Go Slow holiday this will not be a difficult or strenuous tour and there will only be limited amounts of easy walking (no more than a mile or two a day). Some rural roads in Colombia are bumpy. There will be a series of early starts (occasionally as early as 4am) but these will be mostly compensated for by plenty of relaxation time around our hacienda base in the afternoons. The one longer day out is the one to Nevado del Ruiz, where you should be aware of the high altitude detailed in the description above.

This is a birdwatching holiday with only occasional passing references to plants, insects, herps and other taxa.

Opportunities for photography will be plentiful.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All accommodation and meals are included from lunch on day 2 to lunch on day 9, as well as drinking water. We encourage you to bring a refillable water bottle. For those on the main tour only, you will be able to buy breakfast in Bogota airport on day 2. On day 9, Avianca serve an evening meal on the flight to London. You are free to buy an evening meal in the airport before boarding if you wish.

On the pre-tour cultural extension, breakfast, lunch and dinner are all included.

All meals are included on the Montezuma extension with the same caveat regarding a meal in the airport before boarding the flight to London.

Extra expenses

Please note that we do not include the following in the cost of this holiday: all items of a more personal nature such as alcoholic drinks, laundry, tips and souvenirs. Please also note that Hacienda Venecia only accept credit/debit cards for payments, for example, should you wish to purchase coffee to bring home, extra alcoholic drinks, etc.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

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