

# Amazonian Ecuador

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

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### Outline Itinerary

Day 1	Fly Quito
Day 2/5	Shiripuno Lodge
Day 6/9	Sani Lodge
Day 10	Fly Coca to Quito & depart
Day 11	Arrive UK

### Departs

January

### Focus

Birds

### Grading

B - To enjoy the trip to the full you should be reasonably fit as we will be spending the majority of each day on foot. The trails around Sani Lodge and Shiripuno are undulating in places and can be muddy, although rest breaks will be taken at the lodge during the heat of the day

### Dates and Prices

See website (tour code ECU11) or brochure

### Highlights

- Look for Casqued Oropendola & Scarlet Macaw along the Shiripuno River
- Upper Amazonian birds such as Pavonine Quetzal & elusive Rufous Potoo
- Fiery Topaz & Spotted Puffbird possible
- Enjoy a 'staked-out' Great Potoo roosting on a branch near our lodge
- Walk trails looking for Great Tinamou & White-lored Antpitta at Sani
- Spectacled Caiman, Night Monkey, opossums & armadillos all possible
- Mealy, Blue-headed, Yellow-crowned & Orange-cheeked Amazon-parrots at clay-lick



Collared Puffbird, Golden-headed Manakin and Rufescent Tiger Heron



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**NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some reordering 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

### Quito

We leave London in the morning on a scheduled (indirect) service to Quito, usually transiting through Amsterdam or Madrid. We will arrive in Quito in the late evening and transfer to our simple, but comfortable birders' guesthouse not far from the new airport.

## Day 2

### Quito to Shiripuno, via Coca

A 45-minute flight takes us over the Andes and down to the port town of Coca, properly named Puerto Francisco de Orellana, after the discoverer of the Ecuadorian Amazon. The warm, humid jungle air will hit us as we step from the plane and we will drive for about 2½ hours (75 km or so) along the Auca road, a metalled but bumpy road south of the Napo River, passing through the villages of settlers who colonised the area when the road was built for oil exploration back in the early 1980s. Arriving at Shiripuno River, we will board a motorised canoe and head downstream along this narrow and sinuous river to our lodge. This trip usually takes about three hours, but can take longer when the river is lower. The return journey will take about half an hour longer since we will be going against the current. The Shiripuno is a narrow, meandering river with silt-laden water, surrounded by thick tropical forest. Birds such as Casqued Oropendola, Orange-backed Troupial, Scarlet Macaw, White-throated Toucan, Brown Jacamar, Magpie Tanager, Black-capped Donacobius, Swallow-winged Puffbird and many other species can easily be seen during the journey!

We will eat a packed lunch en route and arrive at the lodge by late afternoon where, after some initial exploration (time permitting), we will enjoy a well-deserved supper.

Shiripuno Lodge is a new birding location in the Ecuadorian Amazon, located on the boundary of Pastaza and Orellana provinces, and surrounded by pristine lowland forest within the Huaorani Anthropological Reserve. This is a protected territory where human impact remains minimal. Visitors can observe a similar abundance of spectacular flora and fauna as that which is present in the bordering Yasuni National Park (also a territory of the Huaorani people). The park was designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 1989.

In this remote area, hunting and logging are not a major problem; all the big indicator species such as curassows and eagles flourish here. The habitat is mainly primary 'terra firme' forest, but there are also some swamps, small oxbow lakes, riverside scrub, and some low hills and associated ravines – perfect habitat for sought-after upper-Amazonian birds such as Pavonine Quetzal, Yellow-browed and Hairy-crested Antbirds, the mysterious Nocturnal Curassow, Fiery Topaz, Spotted Puffbird, Yasuni Antwren, Wing-banded Antwren, White-lored Antpitta, Ash-throated Gnateater, Citron-bellied Attila, Short-billed Honeycreeper, and the very rare Rufous Potoo, which is sometimes staked out.

The lodge's cabins are basic but comfortable; all rooms have private facilities and hammocks which are ideal for a siesta. No electricity is available at the lodge, although there is a small generator which can be used upon request to charge batteries. The lack of generator noise makes it a wonderfully peaceful environment when compared to some other Amazonian lodges. The regular nocturnal murmurings around the lodge made by a plethora of wildlife such as Tawny-bellied Screech-Owl, Great Potoo, Night Monkeys, Nocturnal Curassow and millions of nocturnal insects will lull us to sleep after the candles have been blown out for the night.

This remote setting is our base for 4 nights.

## Day 3 – 5

### Shiripuno Lodge

We have three full days to explore the fabulous habitat around our lodge. Early morning excursions, scheduled for pre-dawn and sunrise, will enable us to take full advantage of peak wildlife activity. After a break for lunch and a siesta, further outings will take place in the afternoon and evening and, for those who want to, after dark, when the forest really does come alive and when an overwhelming concert of natural sound floods the atmosphere!

This lowland Amazonian environment fits perfectly with a dedicated birding holiday; diversity is extremely high (over 500 species present) but the forest does not give up its jewels easily – we will have to search hard. The birding is fantastic with many species occurring here but not on the better-known north bank of the Napo river.

The mixed species feeding flocks found here (containing woodcreepers, antwrens, antbirds, foliage gleaners and much more) are a particular highlight and are sure to keep us on our toes. Flocks here are truly mind-blowing, and frequently come one after the other, to the point where it is often difficult to make any significant progress on the trail we are birding!

Apart from the flocks, there are great target birds to aim for – many of the Amazonian species of antpittas, jacamars, manakins, cotingas, and numerous parrots are all present here. It is not unusual to see several Blue-and-yellow Macaws flying across the forest and on one day alone it's possible to see or hear over 30 different species of antbirds which follow the swarms of army ants – White-plumed Antbird, Hairy-crested Antbird, Bicoloured Antbird, Sooty Antbird, and the elusive Reddish-winged Bare-eye to name a few.

## Day 6

### Shiripuno to Sani Lodge

After an early breakfast, we will leave the lodge at dawn, birding and taking advantage of the first light of the new day. We will be expecting to arrive at Coca by lunch time, from where we will be taken down to the Napo river port where we will board a covered motorised canoe for the 2½ hours to Sani Lodge. The Napo River is Ecuador's principal tributary of the Amazon and at this point it is about half a kilometre wide. Its waters are sediment-rich and during the dry season huge sandy beaches are exposed. We will look for various birds such as Greater Yellow-headed Vulture, Black and Yellow-headed Caracaras, Cooi and Capped Herons, Ringed and Amazon Kingfishers and birds of prey such as Plumbeous Kite, and Roadside and Crane Hawks as we continue downstream. We will arrive at the mouth of 'river' Challuayacu, a small and narrow black-water stream which acts as the main drainage channel of Lake Challuacocha; large groups of Hoatzin, Greater and Smooth-billed Anis, Red-capped Cardinal,

Black-capped Donacobius, Magpie Tanager, Straight-billed Woodcreeper, Violaceous Jay, Great and Lesser Kiskadees and many more species reside here. We will transfer to dugout canoes and paddle across the lake to Sani Lodge which lies on the far bank. This is the only way to access this remote and magical place, as there are no roads in the area.

To the north of Challuacocha Lake, the vast Cuyabeno Reserve stretches out along the Aguarico River, whereas the southern border extends towards Yasuni National Park – comprising 40,000 hectares of largely untouched pristine Amazonian rainforest. Sani Lodge lies in the corridor between the two reserves. The forest gallery here is home to more than 1,500 species of trees, hundreds of climbing vines and exotic flowers, as well as 550 species of birds, 13 monkeys and over 1,000 species of beautiful tropical butterflies.

Sani Lodge is dedicated to ecotourism, environmental conservation, and community projects in the Amazon rainforest of Ecuador and it is entirely owned and operated by members of the Sani Isla community. This guarantees that all the profits generated by the jungle lodge go back into the local community. The lodge only accommodates 40 guests and cabins are comfortable though somewhat rustic; each is equipped with private facilities. The cabanas are spaciouly designed for double or triple occupancy. Electricity is generated by powerful solar panels instead of a noisy generator, so any night sounds will be natural ones. Oil lamps are also provided.

The lodge's bar, lounge and dining room overlook the lake and offer a first-class service, as well as unparalleled views of the horizon at sunset! The cuisine is always innovative, combining some of the best fresh and local ingredients with international-style food. A variety of vegetarian and meat options will be served every day. Fresh homemade bread is baked daily and fresh scrumptious fruit juices and exotic fruits will greet you every morning at breakfast, lunch and dinner time.

## Day 7 – 9

### Sani Lodge

We will wake up every day to the calls of many of the lodge's 'garden birds', which include Russet-backed Oropendolas, Yellow-rumped Caciques, Hoatzins, Great and Lesser Kiskadees, Tropical Kingbirds, Buff-throated Woodcreepers, Magpie Tanagers, Black-billed Thrushes and even Laughing Falcon. The canopy tower is one of the highlights of the lodge and we will spend a morning here. It is accessed at the end of a short canoe ride, during which we should see Buff-throated Woodcreeper, Lesser Kiskadee, Blue-grey and Palm Tanagers, Striated Heron, Crested Oropendola, Grey-crowned Flycatcher, Black-capped Donacobius, Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet, Red Capped Cardinal and Blue-and-yellow Macaw. The birding is fantastic at the tower, particularly if we are lucky enough to have a fruiting tree in the vicinity. Among the myriad birds living here we should see species such as Bare-necked Fruitcrow, Cobalt-winged Parakeet, Crowned Slaty Flycatcher, Grayish Mourner, White-browed Purpletuft, White-lored Euphonia (often nesting just above the tower!), Spangled Cotinga, Moriche Oriole, Slender-footed Tyrannulet, Yellow-tufted Woodpecker, White-necked Jacobin, Double-toothed Kite, and a variety of tanagers including Opal-rumped, Opal-crowned, Flame-crested, and Black-faced Dacnis.

Back at the lodge, we may be lucky enough to enjoy a 'staked-out' Great Potoo roosting on a branch and also more colorful tanagers and antbirds moving throughout the foliage.

After lunch we will take once again to the lodge's trails in search of Many-banded Aracari, Little Cuckoo, Least Bittern, Great Tinamou, Wattled Jacana, Limpkin, Ruddy Pigeon, Cinnamon Attila, Buff-throated Saltator, Mealy Parrot, White-flanked Antwren, Black-spotted Bare-Eye, Short-billed Leaf-tosser, Cinereous Antshrike, Gray Antbird, Slate-colored Hawk, Golden-collared Toucanet, Wing-barred Piprites, Plumbeous Pigeon, Lineated Woodcreeper, Long-billed Gnatwren, Southern Nightingale-wren, Black-tailed Trogon, Ruddy Quail-dove, King Vulture, Violaceous Trogon, Spix's Guan, Bartlett's Tinamou, and more.

The Chorongo trail starts just off the west arm of Challuacocha, and requires about 6 hours to complete at 'birders' walking' pace. This terra firme forest is home to a vast array of attractive birds. Our list of finds should include an almost bewildering selection; here are some of them: White-fronted Nunbird, Screaming Piha, Channel-billed and White-throated Toucans, Olive Oropendola, Great Jacamar, Thrush-like Wren, Gilded Barbet, White-tailed Trogon, Ruddy Spinetail, Blue-crowned and Wire-tailed Manakins, Rusty-belted Tapaculo, Sapphire Quail-dove, Purple-throated Fruitcrow, Fork-tailed Palm-swift, Red-bellied Macaw, Pink-throated Becard, Mouse-colored Antshrike, Plain-throated Antwren; Bicoloured, Black-faced, and White-plumed Antbirds, Dusky-throated Antshrike, Buff-throated, Black-banded, Long-billed and Cinnamon-throated Woodcreepers, Ferruginous Pygmy Owl, Fork-tailed Woodnymph, Black-throated Hermit, Crimson-crested Woodpecker, Purple Honeycreeper, Black-bellied Thorntail, Black-headed Parrot, and Black-faced Antthrush!

After our evening meals we will make several walks and canoe rides around the lake in order to see some of the jungle's nocturnal wildlife such as Spectacled Owl and Tawny-bellied Screech-owl, Comoon Potoo, Pauraque, Tropical Screech Owl, Crested Owl, Mottled Owl, Spectacled Caimans and even some nocturnal mammals such as Night Monkeys, and maybe an opossum or armadillo!

A chance to bird the Garza trail, which features a good amount of 'varzea' (flooded forest) and second-growth habitat, will boost our trip list. The trail runs along the banks of the Napo River for several kilometres and then returns via terra firme to Challuacocha and the lodge. Many representative birds can be seen here – perhaps even the stunning Rufous Potoo, roosting in the open only 6 metres off the trail! This could be one of the highlights of the tour in terms of our bird-finds, but we'll need a good slice of luck.

We will also make an early morning excursion to two of Ecuador's most accessible parrot clay-licks. These parrot clay-licks are part of the reserve, which has in total a dozen clay-licks, some of which are only used seasonally. The parrot clay-licks are located near the lodge, accessed by canoe and viewed from sturdy, comfortable hides. Activity kicks off at the main lick between 7-8am, and at the second lick after midday. Species include Mealy, Blue-headed, Yellow-crowned, Orange-winged and Orange-cheeked Amazon-parrots; Cobalt-winged, Dusky-headed, Maroon-tailed and White-eyed Parakeets; plus occasional rarities such as Scarlet-shouldered Parrotlet and Scarlet Macaw. In ideal weather conditions (dry and sunny) at least 800 individual birds of different species can be spotted, while on rainy days a couple of dozen birds might be present. One possibility could be a full day's excursion to visit both blinds, equipped with a freshly made packed lunch. Alternatively, we could do a half-day visit to the main lick and return for a sit-down lunch at the lodge. One thing is certain – we will not want to miss out on this superb natural event, which is so full of unique sounds and brightly coloured plumage of every description!

The lodge complex also has a large lake with two streams that can easily be explored quietly from a dugout canoe, paddled by our expert guides and staff who are always eager to spot and show you wildlife. A quiet paddle down one of the streams is an ideal way to locate primates such as troops of Squirrel Monkey, Black-mantled and Saddle-

backed Tamarin, Dusky Titi, Red Howler, Pygmy Marmoset and White-fronted Capuchin Monkeys. Rarer species, or those that only occur on the south side of the Napo River include Monk Saki, Spider and Woolly Monkeys. Sani Lodge is home to a total of 11 species of monkeys, and you can hope to see the majority of these during your stay.

All four species of native caiman are found in the area and the main lake provides a home for Black Caiman, which is the largest of the four. Largely nocturnal, these animals can best be seen during night-time canoe rides when our torch-light beams are reflected by their eyes.

The creeks also present a good chance of tracking down the resident family of Giant River Otters. It is impossible to say what might be hiding around the next meander – a magnificent Anaconda in an area of flooded forest, a White-lipped Peccary (wild pig) taking a drink, or possibly a serene Three-toed Sloth.

We will also have a chance to visit Sani's River Napo islands. These are hot and cloaked in the fast-growing 'brave cane'. Several species have evolved to live in this inhospitable environment, such as Grey-breasted Crake, White-tipped Dove, Dark-billed and Little Cuckoos, Olive-spotted Hummingbird, Lesser Hornero, Dark-breasted, Plain-crowned, White-bellied and Parker's Spinetails, Barred and Castelnau's Antshrikes, Black-and-white Antbird, Small-billed and Large Elaenias, River Tyrannulet, Lesser Wagtail-tyrant, and Orange-headed Tanager. Other island birds such as Yellow-headed Caracara, Collared Plover, Large-billed Tern, Yellow-billed Tern, Sand-coloured Nighthawk, Little Woodpecker, Amazonian Umbrellabird, the Ladder-tailed Nightjar, Lesson's and Chestnut-bellied Seedeaters, Lesser and Greater YellowLegs, Pied Lapwing, Giant and Shiny Cowbirds and Oriole Blackbird can be also seen here.

## Day 10

### Quito

One final paddle through the flooded palm forest will bring us back out to the River Napo for our journey upstream to Coca. Our flight to Quito will depart at noon and we should be back at our guesthouse in Quito by early afternoon in time for coffee and some light birding before returning to the airport for our flight home..

## Day 11

### Arrive UK

We're due to arrive home in the late afternoon.

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## Grading & Focus

This is a focused birding holiday.

To enjoy the trip to the full you should be reasonably fit as we will be spending the majority of each day on foot. Days 2 and 6 might appear quite packed and long because of the extensive periods driving on bumpy roads to the

remote area of Shiripuno Lodge. The journey is well worth the effort, however, as this pristine area is, so far, the best upper-Amazonian birding spot known, due to its remote location. Access to Sani Lodge is easier.

The trails around Shiripuno and Sani Lodge are undulating in places and can be muddy, although rest days can be spent at the lodge and all excursions are optional! Rubber boots are provided at the lodges.

## Weather

The climate in Ecuador varies enormously, depending on the region and the altitude. The Amazon basin is usually very hot and humid. Temperatures can reach 35-37°C on a hot day, and the humidity can be up to 80% or more, though a cooling breeze is often in evidence, especially around lakes. Night-time temperatures are quite pleasant and may even be slightly chilly sometimes.

Quito is mild and temperate with chilly night, somewhat similar to an English spring day. There is a possibility of heavy rain at any time.

## Clothing

100% cotton or specialised mixed-material outdoor gear is highly recommended. Please inspect the separate clothing list, sent to you on booking, thoroughly.

## Food & accommodation included in the price

All accommodation and meals are included. Shiripuno Lodge is very basic, but comfortable with no hot water or windows, but excellent food – hearty Ecuadorian cuisine and plenty of it. Sani Lodge is very comfortable but has no hot water. Food is more international. Both lodges make for a real Amazonian experience.

## 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 drinks, tips laundry and souvenirs. There is a \$30 fee to get to the Yasuni National Park clay lick and \$20 Huaorani community fee, all payable locally.

## 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](http://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. Please note that as all our Bargain Selection tours are carefully costed on maximum group sizes to maximise value for money, it may be necessary to impose a small group surcharge of 10% on groups falling short of 8.