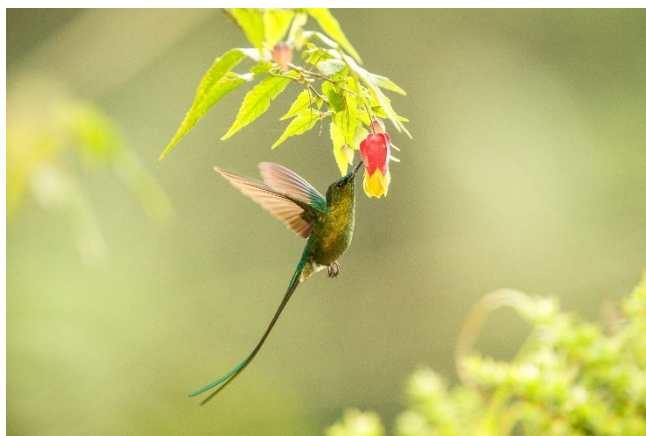
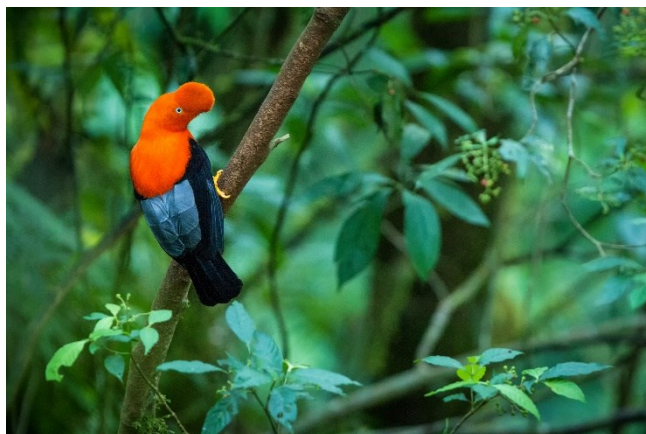


Ecuador: A Wildlife Photography Tour

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Arrive Quito
Day 2 – 4	Mindo & Paz de las Aves Refuge
Day 5	Quito & Zurolooma
Day 6	Guango
Day 7 – 8	Oriente
Day 9 – 10	Depart Quito on inbound flights



Andean Cock-of-the-rock, Violet-tailed Sylph, Empress Brilliant

Departs

December – February

Focus

Wildlife photography

Grading

A/B

Dates & Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code ECU19)

Highlights

- Discover hummingbird photography with use of multi-flash equipment included
- A network of local knowledge to provide up-to-date information on the best feeder activity at the time of your visit
- Superlative Neotropical birding. Tanagers and hummingbirds galore!



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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 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.

Introduction

Ecuador is a wildlife photographer's utopia, a place where vibrant colours, intricate patterns, and morphological marvels converge to create a kaleidoscope of opportunity. Ecuador boasts more bird species per square kilometre than any other country on Earth. An exciting catalogue of mammals, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates and flora can also be found amongst photogenic moss- and epiphyte-endowed habitats. On this 10-day holiday, we'll join an Ecuadorian photography tour leader to guide us around his home country's finest opportunities for wildlife photography including feeders, blinds, hides, and snow-capped volcano-dotted landscapes.



Sword-billed Hummingbird

Day 1

In flight

If using the group flights, we leave London Heathrow in the morning, usually on KLM's or Iberia's service to Quito. Changing planes in Amsterdam or Madrid, we will arrive in Quito in the evening and transfer to our hotel. Should you wish to join the holiday from another home country, please do get in touch and we will be very pleased to assist with such arrangements.

Quito is located in a hollow at the foot of the volcano Pichincha. On a clear day, Andean peaks tower around and the sun is bright and strong. The climate is delightful; the name means "Eternal Spring" in the ancient language of Quechua. Standing at 2,850 metres, Quito is the second highest capital in the world.

In our comfortable hotel with birding garden – and in easy-reaching distance of the airport – we'll share our first meal together before getting a good rest for the thrilling itinerary which lies in wait!

Day 2 – 4

Mindo

After leaving Puembo, we'll have three nights (split between two lodges) based in the cloudforest of Mindo, a magnificent setting to photograph wildlife. Over 450 species of birds have been recorded within the valley and just a few of the tantalising possibilities are Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan, Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager, Golden, Black-capped and Summer Tanagers. The endless list continues with



Velvet-purple Coronet and Green Thorntail

Crimson-mantled and Powerful Woodpeckers, Strong-billed Woodcreeper, Toucan Barbet, Golden-headed Quetzal, Streaked Tuftedcheek, Red-billed Parrot, Scaly-naped Amazon, Slate-throated Whitestart, Western Hemispingus, Beautiful Jay and many more!

Here too, our expert guide will assist us in obtaining stand-out hummingbird photos using the multi-flash system. Likely species we'll get to photograph here include Booted Racket-tail, Velvet-purple Coronet, Green Thorntail, Green-

crowned Woodnymph, Fawn-breasted Brilliant and many others.

There are endless opportunities here and other activities will include visiting a dedicated area where insectivorous species are drawn in and can be photographed with delightful ease. Masked Trogon, Rufous Motmot, Rufous-breasted Antthrush, woodcreepers, Golden-crowned Flycatcher, Russet-crowned Warbler and many others are often seen and photographed at this station.

On one of our days in Mindo, we'll depart very early today to explore one of the most important bird sites in the area, the wonderful Paz de las Aves Refuge. This beautiful reserve is set within subtropical forest where the moist, moss-covered trees are adorned with bright red bromeliads. Our early rise will let us visit an area deep within the forest where, a short time after dawn, several displaying Andean Cock-of-the-rocks will start our day off with a spectacular and photogenic performance. As the morning unfolds, walks along the trails may reveal Golden-headed Quetzal, Olivaceous Piha, Toucan Barbet and Black-chinned Mountain-tanager. After this, we will walk back to the entrance to enjoy a sumptuous breakfast. Further time will then be spent in and around the reserve in search of such species as Scaled and Orange-breasted Fruiteaters, colourful tanagers and various species of hummingbirds around the property.

Ángel Paz, a resident of Nanegalito, a small town near Mindo, once had other plans for this beautiful reserve in the forest-clad hills of north-west Ecuador, including agriculture and valuable hardwoods. Talking to neighbours involved in ecotourism, Ángel came to realise that his land might have an even

greater value and a sustainable future. He first allowed visitors onto his land to see the Andean Cock-of-the-rock lek. He soon discovered that visitors were interested in other birds and at this point he embarked on a quest that nobody else had ever thought possible: to earn the confidence of these secretive, almost mythical birds, luring them out of their shadowy haunts with food and gentle whistling so that birders could enjoy and photograph them in all their splendour. It took time, effort and patience, and after several months of hard work with not a day missed, he had three of Ecuador's most coveted antpittas coming in for their morning breakfast of fat earthworms – Giant, Moustached and Yellow-breasted. To put this feat into context, Giant Antpitta was only rediscovered in the early '90s after decades of being essentially "lost". With no record of its call – even less was known of Moustached – a few old specimens from Colombia were the only clue to its existence. Yellow-breasted meanwhile was only recorded within Ecuador in the 1980s!

Another half-day will be dedicated to photographing one of the region's most iconic species – the spectacular Andean Cock-of-the-rock.

Day 5

Quito & Zurolooma

After an excellent time in Mindo, this morning we journey east to Zurolooma. Perched on the slopes of the Pichincha Volcano, Zurolooma Reserve, this private reserve is a haven for bird photographers, with panoramic views of lush montane forest and snow-capped peaks. The hummingbird feeders here are alive with dazzling activity and we can expect encounters with the incomparable Sword-billed Hummingbird, and the jewel-like Sapphire-vented Puffleg. The reserve's network of trails and feeding stations provides unrivalled photographic opportunities, making it one of the most reliable sites for these spectacular species.

Zurolooma is equally renowned for its antpittas, those elusive denizens of the forest floor. With the help of expert local guides, guests often enjoy intimate views of Chestnut-naped and Rufous Antpittas, coaxed into the open for a rare glimpse. Other highlights include Blue-capped Tanagers, flowerpiercers, and occasional sightings of toucanets and fruiteaters. Beyond the birds, a visit here supports vital conservation work within the UNESCO-designated Chocó Andino Biosphere Reserve, safeguarding one of the planet's last biodiversity hotspots.

In late afternoon, we shall pack up and make the 1.5hr journey, overnighting in Puembo to position ourselves comfortably for the next part of the itinerary.

Day 6

Guango

This morning we journey further east to take our photography into the páramo grasslands of the high Andes. The journey affords splendid views of several snow-capped peaks as it winds its way over the 4,000-metre-high Papallacta Pass and with good luck this provides us with another chance to find an Andean Condor soaring over the crags, hopefully with blue sky behind it!

We will continue to Guango for a delicious lunch, where we will also have most of the afternoon to photograph hummingbirds, walk the forest trails behind the lodge, or scan the river alongside for Torrent

Duck, depending on what we have seen already. Guango Lodge is a must-visit for the wildlife photographer travelling to Ecuador, where plentiful trails wind through beautiful habitats with orchids hanging from moss- and bromeliad-covered branches and overhead Black-and-chestnut Eagles still soar. Over 135 species have been recorded at the lodge and those that are seen regularly include Turquoise Jay, Scarlet-bellied, Lacrimose, Buff-breasted and Hooded Mountain-Tanagers, Grey-hooded Bush-Tanager, Black-headed, Black-capped and Black-eared Hemispingus, Slaty Brush-Finch and Andean Guan.

The hummingbird feeders in the lodge's gardens host the remarkable Sword-billed Hummingbird, Green Violet-ear, Speckled Hummingbird, Fawn-breasted Brilliant, Mountain Velvetbreast, Collared Inca, Buff-winged Starfrontlet, Buff-tailed Coronet, Chestnut-breasted Coronet, Tourmaline Sunangel, Glowing Puffleg, Tyrian Metaltail, Long-tailed Sylph, and White-bellied Woodstar amongst others. We can spend plenty of time here capturing excellent photos with the comfort of the lodge right next to us. Nearby we will visit a feeder and hide established for the very photogenic Grey-breasted Mountain-Toucan.

Guango's growing orchid garden is a fascinating place to spend some time as there is almost always a nice assortment in bloom. Additionally, some groups have even been treated to spotting the occasional Mountain Tapir!

Day 7 – 8

Oriente

The Oriente harbours some of the largest and most accessible tracts of primary subtropical forest in Ecuador and the excellent lodges in the area attract a wealth of birds to their gardens. Right from our doorsteps we can start looking out for tanagers including Black-capped, Blue-grey, Blue-necked, Golden, Golden-eared, Summer and White-lined, Red-Billed Parrot, Red-headed Barbet, Inca Jay and much more.

Here mixed understorey and canopy flocks seemingly drip from the foliage, frugivores (both large and small) raid trees and bushes for the 'fruit-of-the-month' and skulkers steal about in the shade of low vegetation betraying their presence by an occasional whistled song. We will be looking out especially for Golden-Headed and Crested Quetzals, White-throated Toucanet, and Highland Motmot.

Meanwhile one does not need to go any further than the hummingbird feeders to enjoy the dazzling array of hummingbird species: Booted Racket-tail, Bronzy Inca, Gorgeted Woodstar, Green-backed Hillstar, Long-Tailed Sylph, Sparkling Violetear, Speckled Hummingbird, Tawny-Bellied Hermit, and Violet-fronted Brilliant.

The majority of the forests here are what most newcomers to the tropics envision: large hardwood trees draped with lush mosses that support a seemingly endless number of orchid and bromeliad species. Orchids and other flamboyant epiphytes reach their peak diversity at these mid-elevation habitats, and the accessibility of these species for photography and admiration are amongst the many benefits of staying at San Isidro.

Days of rewarding photography are promised, with a comfortable, homely and superbly located lodge to return to in the evening!

Day 9

In Flight

After a wonderful holiday photographing Ecuador's wildlife, we'll have a final breakfast together as a group before we make our way back to Quito for our onward journeys. A number of extensions are available to this holiday. Quito is the gateway to a dream destination for many visiting photographers – the Galápagos Islands – and we would be pleased to provide extensions for those who wish.

Day 10

London

For those taking the group flights from the UK, we are due to arrive back into London's Heathrow Airport early in the morning.

Tour grading

To enjoy the trip to the full you should be reasonably fit and mobile as we will be spending the majority of each day on foot. The trails around some lodges can be muddy, although rest periods can be spent at the lodge, where there are numerous hummingbird feeders. The time spent up on the Papallacta Pass will be at over 4,000m in altitude.

Weather

The climate in Ecuador varies enormously, depending on the region and the altitude. Quito is mild and temperate with chilly nights, like a spring day in England. There is a possibility of heavy rain at any time, but hopefully not to the extent that it will spoil your enjoyment.

Food & accommodation

All accommodation and meals are included, except for evening meals in Quito (£50 should be more than enough for these).

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, laundry and souvenirs. Entrance taxes to private reserves totalling \$115 per person are also payable locally. All locally paid expenses are subject to change without notice.

Booking your place on the tour

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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