

Guatemala – Birding in the Realm of the Maya

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Guatemala City, transfer Antigua
Day 2	Antigua, Finca El Pilar
Day 3/6	Los Tarrales, The Lost Tinamou
Day 7/8	Panajachel, Lake Atitlán & surroundings
Day 9/11	Tikal
Day 12/13	Villa Maya, Yaxha, Topoxte Lake
Day 14	Flores to Guatemala City
Day 15	Cerro Alux; depart Guatemala
Day 16	Arrive UK

Departs

November and January

Focus

Birds, plus culture and mammals.

Grading

Grade A/B with steep terrain in some places (plus the optional hike up San Pedro, which is more challenging B+)

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code GTM01) or brochure

Highlights

- Look for Bushy-crested Jay, Pink-headed Warbler & Rose-throated Becard
- Visit the magnificent Maya ruins of Tikal.
- Highland Guan, Resplendent Quetzal & Tody Motmot



Pink-headed Warbler



Ocellated Turkey



Tikal



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Introduction

Guatemala is a small Central American country blessed with beautiful scenery, nestling between Mexico, Belize, Honduras and El Salvador. It is a country where civilizations battled and merged, and where breathtaking archaeological ruins jut out from pristine rainforest inhabited by myriad birds displaying a seemingly endless variety of colours and plumage. Although the Spanish arrived in the 1500s and displaced the indigenous Maya people, in many ways this still feels like their place, the place of the Maya. Indeed, their influence is still found everywhere: in the world-famous remains of Maya cities and religious sites of which Tikal is the most magnificent; in the faces of the people; the numerous languages and dialects that evolved from their common ancestral tongue; and in the delicious cuisine, much of which is still based on ancient recipes. Guatemala is also home to one of the largest tracts of undisturbed rainforest in Central America and even the most well-travelled naturalist cannot fail to be impressed by its wealth of wildlife and, in particular, its avifauna.

A special feature of this new holiday in Guatemala will be time spent at comfortable country houses – fincas – in shade-coffee plantations. Such houses, with well-maintained trails, welcoming staff, lush native forest and colourful and active bird feeding stations, provide ideal accommodation for groups of birders. Waking up to a mug of fresh-brewed coffee from the farm, busy feeding flocks of birds and atmospheric views of distant volcanoes each morning will be sure to set each day off on the right foot!

We begin our tour in colonial La Antigua, its manicured cobbled streets and bustling plazas lined with colourfully dressed vendors and intricate textiles and ceramics transporting us seemingly back in the time. This is an ideal base from which to explore nearby Finca El Pilar, where quiet trails meander through humid broadleaf and dry forest. Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo and Bar-winged Oriole are amongst the targets here, while regional endemics Rufous Sabrewing and Green-throated Mountain-Gem are possible on the hummingbird feeders.

We next drive two hours east to Los Tarrales Reserve on the slopes of Atitlán Volcano just to the south of the Lago de Atitlán. We spend four nights at this quiet, charming lodge with its distinct old-world charm.



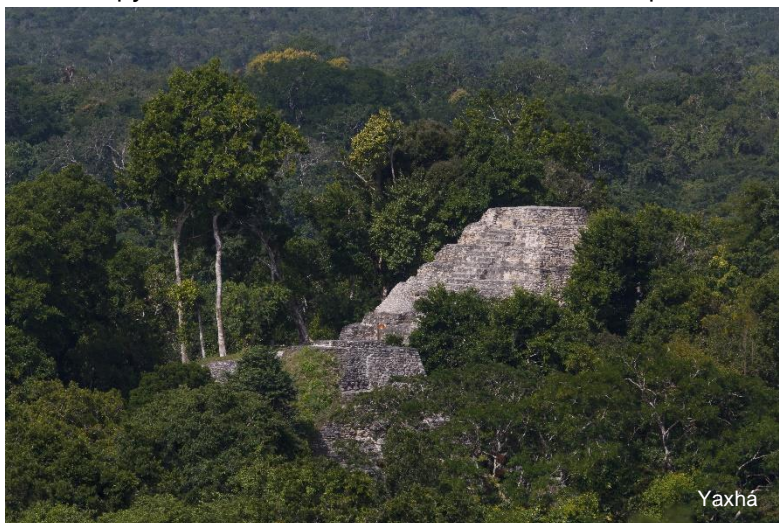
Guatemalan Pygmy-owl

This extended stay will allow us to explore a range of altitudinal zones and habitat types with the Atitlán Important Bird Area. Amongst these are: Atitlán Lake, once home to the now extinct Atitlán Grebe; San Pedro Volcano, a conical 9,000-foot peak rising from the shores of the lake (we have an option to hike up, and see Horned Guans at the top!); and the beautiful Los Andes Reserve where we will search for such globally threatened and regional endemic birds as Highland Guan, Azure-rumped Tanager, Guatemalan Pygmy-Owl and Pink-headed Warbler.

We go to the shores of the Lake Atitlan next, for two nights in the Panajachel area in order to explore the surroundings, including a visit to Volcan San Pedro. Our comfortable lodge located by the lake's shore provides luxuriant gardens – including many types of local fruit trees and orchids – surrounding the main house with comfortable verandas overlooking the lake, ideal to watch lots of egrets, herons, swallows, orioles, woodpeckers, flycatchers, warblers and so on.

After all of this exciting Mesoamerican birding in the south of Guatemala, we still have the country's 'jewel in the crown' to come – the magnificent Maya ruins of Tikal. From around 200 AD to 900 AD Tikal dominated much of the Maya region politically, economically and militarily. Today, it is the best understood of any of the large lowland Maya cities, with a long known list of dynastic rulers together with the discovery and exploration of many of their tombs, monuments, temples and palaces. For the present-day visitor, the scale and majesty of the site lingers long in the memory, especially as a combined birding/culture visit can reveal such sought-after birds as Pheasant Cuckoo! Ocellated Turkeys wander along the deserted trails at dawn, and a plethora of exciting Neotropical birds such as flycatchers, hummingbirds, euphonias, puffbirds and honeycreepers flit about in the treetops, all to the chorus of Guatemalan Howler Monkeys roaring in the distance and attendant Central American Spider Monkeys and White-nosed Coatis.

The Maya retreat complex of Yaxhá is one of the major Maya archeological sites in northern Petén. Rediscovered in 1904, the ruins continue to be excavated and have been found to be part of one of the largest ancient Maya cities. In recent years several pyramids have been restored. The site is part of the National Park Yaxhá-Nakúm-Naranjo, which protects lowland rainforest. At the foot of the ruins there is a lagoon carved in limestone and framed by forest. The birding experience in Yaxhá is as astonishing as in Tikal. From the remarkable solstice observatory pyramid you can observe swarms of Red-lored, White-fronted, Mealy, and White-crowned Parrots flying over the canopy of the Yaxhá rainforest on their way to their nocturnal roost site.



We next explore the clear azure waters of Laguna Peten-Itzá and the Island of Flores. Then, after a night in Guatemala City, we finish the main tour with a short visit to the pine-oak forests of Cerro Alux, where we'll look for new species including Blue-and-white Mockingbird, Rufous-collared Robin, Rufous-browed Wren, Blue-throated Motmot and Black-capped Siskin. Colourful images of birds, mystical ruins and stunning volcanos are sure to linger with us on the long flight home!

Resplendent Quetzal Extension - One of the main species that we hope to see on this trip Guatemala's national bird, the Resplendent Quetzal, and whilst in the area of Lake Atitlan and Los Tarrales we have a good chance. However, there is another area of the country, Las Verapaces, which is a hotspot for this most magnificent species, and whilst seeing one can never be guaranteed, a visit here would improve the chances overall. Located about 3.5 - 4 hours drive to the north-east of the capital are the neighbouring reserves of

Biotopo del Quetzal and Los Ranchitos, both of which are quite small but pack a punch on the wildlife front (the location is awkward to fit into our regular itinerary, as it is the other side of Guatemala City from Antigua, Los Tarrales and Lake Atitlan). As the name suggests, Biotopo del Quetzal is a private reserve that was established to help conserve the Quetzal, but is also home to a wealth of other birds and animals. Spot-breasted Oriole, Garnet-throated Hummingbird and Collared Trogon are amongst some of the attractive avian residents. Los Ranchitos is the larger of the two reserves and therefore home to even more highland specialities, and is also very active in Quetzal conservation efforts. Please see further below for more details.

N.B. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and 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

UK to La Antigua, Guatemala

We leave the UK in the morning on a daytime flight to Guatemala City, via Madrid.

Arriving in the late afternoon, we will transfer an hour or so to the beautiful city of La Antigua and our lovely colonial-style hotel. La Antigua de Guatemala is one of the most beautiful colonial cities of Latin America; it is a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site and lies in the central highlands of Guatemala. It is famous for its well-preserved Spanish Baroque-influenced architecture as well as a number of spectacular ruins of colonial churches. We will have the chance to have a stroll around this beautiful city admiring its architecture,



people-watching, and enjoying the impressive views of three volcanoes which dominate the horizon around Antigua. The most commanding of these, to the south of the city, is the Volcán de Agua or 'Volcano of Water', some 3,766 metres (12,356 ft) high.

We will check in at our traditional colonial-style hotel and enjoy our first dinner together, followed by a relaxing night in order to get ready for the exciting days to come!

Day 2

Finca El Pilar

After enjoying a delicious breakfast and local coffee (one of the best coffees in the region!), we will drive the short distance to Finca El Pilar, a coffee eco-plantation/conservation area, which is on the outskirts of La Antigua. This private area protects habitat ranging from 1,600 to 2,400 metres in altitude, and includes dry forest in the lower ranges and pine-oak and cloudforest at higher elevations. The preserve is part of the Antigua Guatemala Important Bird Area, designated by BirdLife International. A well-made mile-long path has recently been constructed, making it possible to walk along a narrow valley with shade-grown coffee,

humid broadleaf forest and dry forest, where flocks of Bushy-crested Jays can be often seen. Canopy birds such as Rose-throated Becard, Dusky-capped Flycatcher and Emerald Toucanet can be seen and, if we are fortunate, we will also hope to see Chestnut-sided Shrike-vireo and Bar-winged Oriole, which often move quietly in pairs through the canopy here.

There are several species of woodpecker in the reserve, including Golden-fronted, Golden-olive, and Hairy Woodpeckers; some northern wintering species such as Baltimore Oriole, and Tennessee, Black-throated, Green and Townsend's Warblers are common. In the scrubby undergrowth we will be hoping to find such species as White-eared and Prevost's Ground-Sparrows, White-naped (Yellow-throated) Brushfinch, Ruddy Foliage-gleaner, Rufous-capped Warbler, and White-tipped Dove.



Baltimore Oriole

Hummingbird feeders are located at the lower entrance to the trail. This is a good spot to see Rufous Sabrewing, which is endemic to the Pacific Slope mountains, and the regional endemic Green-throated Mountain-gem is seen frequently here too; Magnificent, White-eared, Azure-crowned, Berylline, and Blue-tailed Hummingbirds, as well as Violet Sabrewing and Green Violet-ear also use the plantation's feeders.

The forest harbours a typical highland bird community with species such as Slate-throated Redstart, Black-capped Swallow, Golden-browed Warbler, Gray-breasted Wood-wren, and White-faced Quail-dove, Highland Guans, Greater Pewee, Hammond's Flycatcher and Black-capped Swallow being amongst the species seen.

After a good birding day around Finca El Pilar we will return to our hotel in Antigua for dinner.

Day 3 Antigua to Los Tarrales Reserve, via Tecpan (La Suiza)

Today we will leave Antigua after breakfast in order to drive for approximately three hours, heading south to Los Tarrales Reserve. We will make a small diversion en-route, to Cerro Tecpán, a mountain partially covered by pine-cypress-oak-alder forests at elevations of 2,100 to 3,000 metres above sea level. Also known as La Suiza, the Cerro Tecpán area offers a very interesting birding trail, and in the early morning various important species can be seen, including the sought-after Pink-headed Warbler. Other species such as Montane Trogon, Blue-and-White Mockingbird, Crescent-chested Warbler, Rufous-browed Wren, Blue-throated Motmot, Black-capped Siskin and Rufous-collared Robin are found here too.

After visiting Cerro Tecpán we will rejoin the road towards Los Tarrales Reserve and our next finca. Los Tarrales Reserve was the brainchild of a North American farmer who bought the land in the 1950s to preserve it as a place in which conservation is managed in conjunction with the local indigenous community. His



Tody Motmot

grandson, Andy Burge, now runs the reserve, which is located on the southern slope of the Atitlán volcano; the reserve protects pristine cloudforest and humid broadleaf forest on the volcano's slopes at elevations of between 700 and 3,000 metres. Los Tarrales Reserve is an important conservation area in Guatemala and it is home to several globally threatened and regional endemic bird species including Horned Guan, Azure-rumped Tanager and Pink-headed Warbler. Other specialties found here, from the southern coast of Guatemala, include Long-tailed Manakin, Cinnamon

Hummingbird, Berylline Hummingbird, Pacific Parakeet, Orange-fronted Parakeet, Orange-chinned Parakeet, Rufous-breasted Spinetail, Black-crested Coquette, Tody Motmot, Green Shrike-vireo and Northern Potoo.

The reserve is private and independently sustainable, as funds towards its conservation are covered by the income generated from the sale of coffee and ornamental flowers, and through ecotourism. Los Tarrales Reserve also provides an income for the 60 Maya Kaqchikel families which live within the reserve's protected areas; and some Maya Kaqchikel work as guides within the reserve. Los Tarrales provides many facilities for the people living within the protected area such as primary education. A variety of excursions in the reserve, both cultural and birdwatching/wildlife, will be offered. After this, we will have a typical supper at the finca's main house. Because there has been no hunting for three generations in Los Tarrales, species such as White-tailed Deer, Agouti, White-bellied Chachalaca and Crested Guan are less timid here than in some areas. Pumas live here, and are usually detected by signs such as droppings and scratches; we would be extremely fortunate to catch a glimpse of one on a short visit!

Days 4/6

Los Tarrales Reserve & surrounding areas

The pace of daily life at our finca is a leisurely one. We'll wake to the sights and sounds of the 'garden birds', and the smell and taste of freshly roasted coffee, and these are likely to lure us gently from our cosy rooms into the lovely dining room where a delicious traditional breakfast will be waiting for us every morning. In addition to exploring the different areas of Los Tarrales Reserve, we will venture around and beyond the finca's extensive grounds, making road trips to Lake Atitlán, and to local bird hotspots including San Pedro Volcano, the home of such important Mesoamerican endemics as Blue-and-



Horned Guan

white Mockingbird, Chestnut-sided Shrike-vireo, Lesser Roadrunner, Golden-browed Warbler and Ocellated Quail. If we are lucky, we may be able to add Black-throated Jay, Pink-headed Warbler, Wine-throated Hummingbird, Fulvous Owl and Horned Guan to our list of finds!

In addition, we will explore areas of old-growth cloudforest between 2,100 and 2,350 metres. We will look



Lake Atitlán by Byron Palacios

for such species as Yellow-throated and Chestnut-capped Brush-finch, Golden-browed Warbler, and Slate-throated Redstart. Tennessee Warblers, Baltimore Orioles, Montane Trogon, Rock Wren, Blue-throated Motmot, Speckled-breasted Oriole, Belted Flycatcher and Western Tanagers are common wintering migratory birds here. If we are lucky we might also see Guatemala's national bird, the Resplendent Quetzal. Whilst cloudforests on Guatemala's Atlantic-slope mountains is the prime habitat for this sort-of species, they are known to be in found along Guatemala's volcanic belt on the Pacific slopes.

On another day we may explore Finca la Gracia, which has a reserve called The Lost Tinamou. This is a small patch of subtropical forest at a lower altitude of 380 to 520 metres, and is a refuge for wildlife in amongst the surrounding land for agricultural use. In fact, this is part of a network of private nature reserves conserving forests on the southern and eastern slope of the Atitlán volcano and continuing southwards. There are up to 6km of trails in the reserve, and as we walk, we will be looking out for an assemblage of species such as Great Curassow, Thicket Tinamou, Squirrel Cuckoo, Spot-breasted and Rufous-and-white Wren, , Orange-billed Nightingale-thrush, Swainson's Thrush, Gartered and Collared Trogon, Tody and Lesson's Motmot, Slate-throated Redstart, Golden-fronted and Smoky-brown Woodpecker, Ruddy Quail-dove, Barred, Pacific and Orange-chinned Parakeet, Blue Grosbeak, as well as many species of flycatcher, vireo, oriole, tanager and warbler. Hummingbird species recorded here include White-necked Jacobin, Violet Sabrewing, Long-billed Starthroat, Blue-throated Goldentail and Ruby-throated Hummingbird. Many raptor species have been seen here including Turkey Vulture, Hook-billed and Plumbeous Kite as well as Crane and Harris's Hawk.



Violet Sabrewing

We will retire to our comfortable headquarters in Los Tarrales every day in the late afternoon in order to relax before enjoying a delicious dinner in the early evening!

Days 7/8

Panajachel – Lake Atitlán & surroundings

The contrast from the evergreen subtropical Pacific slopes of Los Tarrales and the impressive Lake Atitlán blend together to deliver a mixed biodiversity and habitats; as well as different indigenous cultures settled by the lake shore. Located at just an hour's drive from Los Tarrales Reserve, the surroundings of the lake offers a variety of species such as Montane Trogon, Rock Wren, Blue-throated Motmot, Speckled-breasted Oriole, Chestnut-sided Shrike-vireo, Lesser Roadrunner and Belted Flycatcher among our finds on this trip. There are many hotspots around the lake, including the reserve itself with loop trails that traverse the reserve from 1,500 to 1,800 metres above sea level. The lower parts of the slopes are more humid and gardened with flowering plants, which Rufous Sabrewing, White-eared and sometimes Garnet-throated Hummingbird and Sparkling-tailed Hummingbird can be seen. Scrub and adjacent open spaces are home to Yellow-throated Brush-Finch and Prevost's Ground-Sparrow.

In the oak forest, foraging mixed warbler flocks can be seen during the northern winter, including migratory Black-throated Green, Townsend's, Golden-cheeked, Nashville, and Wilson's Warblers, and resident Slate-throated Redstart. Flocks are often joined by Rufous-browed Pepper-Shrike and Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo, alongside flocks of Bushy-crested Jays that roam through the open forest canopy. On flowering canopy trees, such as *Grevillea robusta* (introduced from Australia) in a small coffee plantation in the lower part, different orioles can be seen, including the resident Yellow-backed, Black-vented, and Bar-winged Orioles.



Rose-breasted Grosbeak

We will also have time to visit Laguna Lodge which is located on the northern shore of Atitlan Lake. This eco-resort and private nature reserve (accessible by boat) protects an area of forest on the steep slope of the Atitlán caldera and is part of the Atitlán Lake Important Bird Area. The 100-acre nature reserve has extensive trails leading through secondary scrub and forest. We will be hoping to see Plain Wren, Lesser Goldfinch, Prevost's Ground-sparrow, Rufous-capped Warbler, Rusty Sparrow, Rufous-browed Pepper-Shrike, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Greater Pewee, Spotted Towhee, White-tipped Dove, and House Wren among a host of other species. Common winter visitors we may see include Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Least Flycatcher, Wilson's and Townsend's Warblers, Warbling Vireo, Indigo Bunting, and Lincoln's Sparrow. A small population of Belted Flycatchers

has been found here together with other restricted-range species such as Blue-and-white Mockingbird, Blue-throated Motmot, Rufous Sabrewing, Black-capped Swallow, Bar-winged Oriole and Bushy-crested Jay.

We will have a very restful time at a comfortable hotel in the shore of Lake Atitlán.

Day 9

Guatemala City to Tikal via Flores

After some early birding morning and other alternative activities, we will drive towards Guatemala City in order to catch our 45-minute late-afternoon flight to the northern city of Flores, the gateway to the magnificent Maya ruins of Tikal, Guatemala's 'jewel in the crown'.

From around 200 to 900AD, Tikal dominated much of the Maya region politically, economically and militarily. Today, it is the best understood of the lowland Maya cities; its rulers and their dynasties, and many of their tombs, monuments, temples and palaces have been well studied by archaeologists. Tikal was the capital of a state that became one of the most powerful kingdoms of the ancient Maya. Though architecture at Tikal dates back as far as the 4th century BC, the city reached its height in around 200 to 900 AD. There is evidence that Tikal was conquered by the people of Teotihuacan (a city in the Mexican Basin) in the 4th century AD, and that the site had been abandoned by the end of the 10th century.

The scale and majesty of Tikal lingers long in the memory of the modern visitor, especially those able to appreciate the rich birdlife of this site as well as its cultural appeal. Here, Ocellated Turkeys wander on



White-nosed Coati

deserted trails at dawn, and such sought-after birds as Pheasant Cuckoo and a plethora of other exciting Neotropical birds – flycatchers, hummingbirds, euphonias, puffbirds and honeycreepers to name a few – may be seen along the old plane-landing strip, around our lodge's garden and along the complex's trails which are wide enough to give us great views of the many birds found in flocks. Mammals such as Guatemalan Howler

Monkey, Central American Spider Monkey and White-nosed Coati may also be encountered in the forest and even sometimes clambering around the large trees by our cabins.

We will stay for three nights at the Jungle Lodge, Tikal.

Day 10-11

Tikal

Tikal National Park covers an area of 576 square kilometres (222 square miles). It was created on 26th May 1955 under the auspices of the Instituto de Antropología e Historia and was the first protected area in Guatemala. We'll begin each day here with some optional pre-breakfast birding. After breakfast we set off to explore a different part of this exciting area, birding along the trail system that links the dozens of pyramids and temples with each other. This is a fantastic combined birding/archaeological experience; you can even climb to the top of one of the pyramidal temples and look out over vast swathes of unbroken forest canopy.

Tikal is one of the best birdwatching localities in the whole of Central America. At dawn the ancient ruins echo to the strange whistle of the shy Slaty-breasted Tinamou, whilst magnificent Ocellated Turkeys wander the deserted trails. White-crowned Parrot and Olive-throated (Aztec) Parakeet are here, as well as Wood Stork, Limpkin, Brown Pelican and an array of other commoner wetland species nearby. We will search at the forest edge, hoping to see our first Brown Jays, Keel-billed Toucan and large numbers of Collared Aracaris. Orange-breasted



Keel-billed Toucan

Falcon, Roadside Hawk, Laughing Falcon and other raptors such as King, Turkey and Black Vultures can be seen soaring in the sky above the pyramids; and nocturnal residents such as Mottled Owl, Common Pauraque and Northern Potoo are also possible. The temple tops provide excellent vantage-points from which to see canopy birds such as Keel-billed Toucan, an array of different parrots (Mealy, Red-lored, White-fronted, White-crowned, and Brown-hooded). Army ant swarms are often accompanied by mixed foraging flocks, with several species of woodcreepers, such as Northern Barred, Olivaceous, Ruddy, Tawny-winged, and Ivory-billed. Red-crowned and Red-throated Ant-tanager, Grey-headed Tanager, and Tawny-crowned Greenlet. Other interesting bird species to look out for include Red-lored Amazon, Pale-billed Woodpecker, and Yellow-throated, Philadelphia and White-eyed Vireos, the range-restricted Black-throated Shrike-tanager, Yellow-bellied Tyrannulet, skulking Kentucky Warblers and Eye-ringed Flatbill. We will do all our birding around Tikal on foot, taking breaks in the middle and at the hottest times of the day.

Because hunting is forbidden within Tikal National Park, mammals wander freely between the primary forest and ruins. The most commonly observed animals are Coatis, Agoutis, and Grey Fox – and all of these can be seen walking around the park grounds. Central American Spider Monkeys and the loud Guatemalan Black Howler Monkeys live in the forest canopy and are easy to see.

Day 12-13

Tikal to Yaxhá

Today we will leave Tikal and drive 80 kilometres south towards the beautiful Yaxhá area (a drive of approximately one and a quarter hours), Yaxhá is one of the major Maya archeological sites in northern



Yellow-tailed Oriole

Petén. Rediscovered in 1904, the ruins continue to be excavated and have been found to be part of one of the largest ancient Maya cities. In recent years several pyramids have been restored. The site is part of the National Park Yaxhá-Nakúm-Naranjo, which protects lowland rainforest. At the foot of the ruins there is a lagoon carved in limestone and framed by forest. The birding experience in Yaxhá is as astonishing as in Tikal. From the remarkable solstice observatory pyramid one can observe flocks of Red-lored, White-fronted, Mealy and White-crowned Parrot flying over

the canopy of the Yaxhá rainforest on their way to the nocturnal roost site. Scrub and savannah vegetation adjoining the lake is home to Yellow-tailed Oriole, Fork-tailed Flycatcher and Northern Cardinal. Birds are easy to see throughout the complex and among the other species we will be looking for are Yucatan Flycatcher, King Vulture, Yucatan Woodpecker, Black-headed Trogon, Golden Vireo, Mangrove Vireo, Red-capped Manakin, and Brown-capped Tyrannulet.

At the lagoon we may observe various species of Nearctic shorebirds as well as the rare Jabiru. A swim in Yaxhá Lake, which appears very inviting from afar, is not recommended, as crocodiles (*Crocodylus moreletii*) are abundant!

We will enjoy daily excursions in this area while based for 2 nights at the pleasant Villa Maya Lodge.

We may also organize an optional day trip to Aguateca from Punta de Chimino (the access to this wonderful area is quite difficult due to broken boardwalks). This involves a boat ride in the Petexbatún basin, following the slow-flowing waters to the incredible hidden complex of Aguateca, a Maya city occupied from 200 to about 800 AD. Aguateca was attacked and ransacked in about 800 AD, but because many of the buildings were left with their contents intact, archaeologists have been able to piece together some of the site's history.

Amongst the ruins we may see early morning mixed-flocks of birds such as Strong-billed, Ruddy and Olivaceous Woodcreepers, Northern Schiffornis, Hooded Warbler, Plain Antvireo, Rufous Mourner, Bright-rumped Attila, both Scrub and Tawny-crowned Greenlets, Worm-eating Warbler, Sepia-capped Flycatcher, and Red-crowned and Red-throated Ant Tanagers. The massive walls offer good habitat for other species such as Yellow-bellied Tyrannulet, Tawny-winged Woodcreeper, Slaty-tailed Trogon, Chestnut-coloured Woodpecker and Black-throated Shrike-tyrant, amongst others. A full morning may be dedicated to exploring this incredible area, and we will also explore other corners of the river.



Slaty-tailed Trogon

Day 14

Flores & flight to Guatemala City

There will be an option to do a pre-breakfast birding walk along the carefully maintained lodge trails; this will give us a chance to try and locate species that may have so far eluded us, as well as to get another (or better) view of others that we've already seen. There are many rare species of trees and plants here, and we will also be hoping to get a close look at Morelet's Crocodiles which typically sunbathe on the nearby river banks.

After another morning exploring the grounds of our lodge, we will be transferred to the city of Flores in order to catch our afternoon flight to Guatemala City, where we will spend our last night of the tour in a comfortable city hotel.

Day 15 Cerro Alux; airport transfer for a late afternoon flight to the UK

After a very early breakfast, we will check out and then make the hour's drive to the outskirts of the city and towards Cerro Alux. Cerro Alux is a pine-oak forest situated along the Inter-American Highway, between Guatemala City and Antigua. A circular trail provides easy access to the forest. We will be looking for key Mesoamerican highland species such as Steller's Jay, Rufous-browed Wren, Blue-and-white Mockingbird, Blue-throated Motmot, Golden-browed Warbler, Crescent-chested Warbler, Grey Silky-flycatcher, Hooded Grosbeak, Mountain Trogon, Black and Rufous-collared Robins, Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer and, with some luck, Singing Quail. There are also beautiful hummingbirds to look for in this forest, and we could get great views of species such as White-eared and Green-throated Mountain Gems, Azure-crowned Hummingbird, Berylline Hummingbird, Blue-tailed Hummingbird, Magnificent Hummingbird, Rufous Sabrewing and White-eared Hummingbird.

After lunch, we will start heading back to Guatemala City in order to get to the airport in time for our international flight to the UK via Madrid.

Day 16 Arrive UK

We will arrive in the UK in the early afternoon.

RESPLENDENT QUETZAL EXTENSION

Day 15 Cerro Alux; transfer to Las Verapaces

We will spend the morning at Cerro Alux as described above, and then after saying goodbye to the others who are travelling home today, we will then set off for the region of Las Verapaces, to the north-east of Guatemala City. It is about a 3.5 to 4 hours drive to our accommodation, the Posada Montaña del Quetzal, just outside the village of la Union Barrios.

Day 16-17 Biotopo del Quetzal & Los Ranchitos

We will spend one day at Biotopo del Quetzal reserve. There are two short, well-maintained trails, crossing streams and waterfalls in the middle of the cloud forest. There are all kinds of other flora and fauna including many other species of birds, butterflies, insects, ferns, orchids, and trees. We will then spend the other day at the neighbouring Los Ranchitos del Quetzal, a larger reserve which is very active in the conservation efforts for the Resplendent Quetzal. Arguably it offer even better opportunities of sightings than the day before, and it also boasts many more Central American highland specialities.



Day 18

Journey back to Guatemala City

We head back to Guatemala City, making birding stops en-route, as well as lunch, in order to get to the airport in time for our international flight to the UK via Madrid.

Day 19

Arrive UK

We will arrive in the UK in the early afternoon.

Pricing for this extension depends on the number of people doing it. Please enquire with the Naturetrek office for more information.

Tour Grading

Grade A. Mainly fairly easy walks along comfortable trails and tracks. The excursion to San Pedro Volcano is very challenging and is graded B+ but it's an optional activity. The trail at Los Andes Reserve is steady incline and it's also optional.

Pre-tour Extension

An extra night or two in La Antigua would help in terms of adjusting to the time difference after the long flight and the town is of great interest culturally. Please let us know upon booking if this would be of interest.

Weather

The overall climate of Guatemala can be described as sub-tropical to tropical; the central highlands have a temperate climate and are much drier than the evergreen forests in Tikal and Yaxha. While humidity can be quite high, it is seldom oppressive for long and is most noticeable along the coast. The temperature is mostly pleasant around La Antigua, Los Tarrales and Las Nubes, and ranges from 13°C to 25°C. In Tikal temperatures vary from 18°C to 34°C, but it is typically very pleasant, often with a breeze. Heavy rain showers are a possibility at any time.

Food & Accommodation

All accommodation and meals are included.

Extra expenses

Please note that we do not include any items of a personal nature such as drinks, laundry, tips and souvenirs. Tips to guides, drivers, lodge staff and airport taxes are not included either.

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.