

# Venezuela - Llanos & Henri Pittier

## Bargain Birdwatching Tour

### Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

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#### Outline Itinerary

**Day 1** Fly Caracas and transfer to Maracay

**Day 2/4** Hato Piñero

**Day 5/7** Maracay

**Day 8/9** Transfer to Caracas and fly London

#### Departs

February and November

#### Focus

Birds

#### Grading

To enjoy the trip to the full you should be reasonably fit and enjoy walking as a high percentage of the time in Henri Pittier will be spent on foot.

#### Dates and Prices

See website (tour code VEN02) or brochure

#### Highlights:

- Visit the Llanos – a wonderland of wetland birds!... 7 ibis and numerous heron species amongst them
- Excellent raptor potential, averaging 20+ species, and often including one or more hawk-eagles
- Yellow-knobbed Curassows, Sunbitterns and Hoatzins
- Encounter such mammals as Capybara, Sloth, Howler Monkey, and perhaps even Ocelot, Jaguar or Tapir
- Endemic birds galore!... from Handsome Fruiteaters to White-tipped Quetzals
- Enjoy the birds and mammals of world-renowned Hato Piñero Lodge



Groove-billed Toucanet by Andy Swash



Hato Piñero river by Andy Swash



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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.**

## Day 1

## Maracay

We depart this morning on a scheduled flight from Heathrow bound for the Venezuelan capital, Caracas, via Europe, arriving during the early evening. Having collected our luggage we will meet our local guide and transport and travel westwards, through Caracas, and on to Maracay - about a three hour drive, depending on traffic. On arrival at Maracay we will check in to the Posada El Limón.

## Day 2

## Hato Piñero

We will embark early on the long (about 4 hours) drive to our next destination – the wonderful Hato Piñero nestled deep within the Llanos.

We plan to arrive at Hato Piñero for a late lunch before taking an introductory ride around the ranch. This experience alone should be well worth the long journey to get here!

## Day 3 - 4

## Hato Piñero

The Venezuelan Llanos, or “flatlands”, provide a wildlife spectacle on a par with anything else the Americas have to offer and, indeed, have sometimes been referred to as “America’s East Africa”.

The Llanos flood during the wet season and some regions become a vast lake. With the onset of the dry season, the waters drop and isolated creeks and pools begin to dry up, creating a feeding bonanza for caiman, anacondas, mammals and birds alike.



Russet-throated Puffbird

Hato Piñero is a private cattle ranch nestling in the northern Llanos and offering birding packages in comfortable accommodation. The list of birds found at the 800 square kilometre ranch currently stands at 300 and when you take your first ride in one of the open-top trucks (complete with a huge cooler box full of ice-cold water and soft drinks!), it's easy to believe that the total will eventually be much higher!

Besides its extensive wetlands, Hato Piñero also boasts one of the largest areas of intact deciduous forest in the entire Llanos, a habitat which is

home to many sought-after species such as White-fringed Antwren, Pale-tipped Inezia, Pale-eyed Pygmy-Tyrant and Trinidad Euphonia. Gallery forests hold Rusty-backed Spinetail and Orinocan Saltator, while forest patches are good for Dwarf Cuckoo, Scarlet Macaw, Russet-throated Puffbird and White-bearded Flycatcher. Night excursions at Piñero are a major attraction and can provide a chance to search for Common and Great Potoos, Lesser Nighthawk, Pauraque and White-tailed Nightjar, although Nacunda Nighthawk and Striped Owl, Spectacled Owl and large cats can also be encountered - Hato Piñero is one of the best places anywhere within its wide range to encounter a Jaguar.

## Day 5

## Maracay

We plan to leave the ranch after an early breakfast and head to Maracay, leaving behind the world of herons, ibis, egrets and ducks. We should arrive by about lunchtime, with a whole afternoon and evening to head into Henri Pittier.

## Day 6 - 7

## Maracay

Maracay is conveniently situated right on the edge of the Henri Pittier National Park and after an early breakfast each day we will head into the hills and start birding in earnest. Henri Pittier is an isolated and virtually pristine area of sub-tropical forest which sits astride the central segment of the coastal cordillera, a chain of mountains which runs east to west along the Caribbean coast of Venezuela. Despite its relatively small size (just over 100,000 hectares) the altitudinal range in Henri Pittier National Park, from sea-level to almost 8,000 feet, supports a tremendous variety of habitats which accounts for its astonishing bird list of nearly 600 species. This is one of the highest levels of bird species diversity in the world and includes well over 40% of the bird species recorded in Venezuela, a number of which are Venezuelan endemics such as the Blood-eared Parakeet, Helmeted Curassow, Groove-billed Toucanet, Rufous-cheeked Tanager and the beautiful Handsome Fruiteater.

The chief attraction of the National Park is its lush cloud forest which harbours avian delights such as Venezuelan Wood-Quail, Band-tailed Guan, Violet-chested Hummingbird, White-tipped Quetzal, Groove-billed Toucanet, Guttulated Foliage-gleaner, Venezuelan Bristle-Tyrant, Rufous-ored Tyrannulet and Golden-breasted Fruiteater. Raptors are particularly conspicuous and Black Hawk-Eagle, Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Black-and-white Hawk-Eagle and Solitary Eagle are all considerably easier to encounter here than elsewhere within their wide range. Black-throated Spinetail, Venezuelan Antwren, Scallop-breasted Antpitta, Scalloped Antthrush, Caracas Tapaculo, Golden-winged Sparrow and White-fronted Tyrannulet are further specialities but are much more rarely encountered.

There are two roads providing access to the park. The well known but rather dingy Rancho Grande Biological Station nestles at 1,100 m in semi-deciduous forest at the top of the Ocumare road. It is well known for its spectacular viewing terrace and a trail system which gives access to higher elevations up to 2,200 m. The road itself can also provide spectacular birding. The Choroní road provides vehicle access to slightly higher elevations with a pass at 1,600 m. Both roads lead eventually to beach towns with ample possibilities for lowland and coastal birding. The deciduous forests of the lower slopes are home to Pale-bellied Hermit, Black-backed Antshrike, Venezuelan Flycatcher and White-eared Conebill while the coast

holds Buffy Hummingbird, Bicoloured Conebill, Glaucous Tanager and Black-faced Grassquit. In addition to its resident avifauna, the park is famous for the Portachuelo Pass which is one of the most studied migratory routes in the Neotropics.

In short, Henri Pittier is a truly amazing and extremely beautiful place and during our stay we shall be able to spend time exploring many of the different habitats.

## Day 8

## In Flight

We will have time for a quick final look around the grounds of Rancho Grande this morning before packing our bags and driving back to Caracas, arriving in time to check-in for our early evening flight home.

## Day 9

## London

We will arrive back at Heathrow in the afternoon.

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## Tour Grading

To enjoy the trip to the full you should be reasonably fit and enjoy walking as a high percentage of the time in Henri Pittier will be spent on foot.

## Flights

With no direct flights currently available between the UK and Venezuela, we will arrange the flights with Air France, Iberia, Lufthansa or Air Portugal (via their respective European gateways). Contact us for availability of regional departures.

## Weather

The climate in Venezuela varies enormously, depending on the region and the altitude. The cordilleran climate is largely mild and temperate with chilly nights; like a spring day in England. In the Llanos it will be warmer and more humid. There is a possibility of heavy rain at any time, but hopefully not to the extent that it will spoil your enjoyment.

## Clothing

Please inspect the separate clothing list, sent to you on booking, thoroughly.

## Food & accommodation included in the price

All accommodation and meals are included, except the evening meal on the day of arrival and on the day of departure.

## 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, and airport departure tax from Caracas. The latter fluctuates (currently \$30).

## 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 10.



Burnished-buff Tanager by Andy Swash