

Venezuela - Off the Beaten Track

Bargain Birdwatching Tour

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline Itinerary

Day 1 Fly Caracas and transfer to Maracay

Day 2/3 Morrocoy National Park

Day 4 Drive to Sanare

Day 5/7 Yacambu

Day 8/9 Drive Caracas and Fly London

Departs

February and October/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 tour will be spent on foot.

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code VEN03) or brochure

Highlights:

- Cloudforest specialities, eg. Northern Helmeted Curassow, Crested Quetzal, Merida Tapaculo and Scaled Fruiteater
- Rarely-seen desert endemics: Bare-eyed Pigeon, White-whiskered Spinetail, Black-backed Antshrike, Slender-billed Inezia and Tocuyo Sparrow
- A spectacle of wetland and shore birds, amongst them the endemic Rusty-flanked Crake and Plain-flanked Rail
- An exciting destination that is definitely "Off the Beaten Track"



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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 drive three hours or so west to Maracay, a convenient overnight stop en-route to Morrocoy.

Day 2 - 3

Morrocoy National Park

Just four hours from Caracas, and with a bird list of over 350 species, this area has only recently begun to find its way onto standard birding itineraries. The 11,852 ha Cuare Faunal Refuge and Ramsar Site was created in 1972 to protect saline coastal lagoons, while the 32,090 ha Morrocoy National Park was formed in 1974 to protect marine and coastal habitats including mangroves, coastal xeric scrub and coral keys. Together these two areas form the heart of a birding enclave in eastern Falcón State. Long popular amongst Venezuelan beach lovers (of whom there are many!), Morrocoy has been put firmly on the birding map through the rediscovery a few years ago of the threatened Plain-flanked Rail.

Two full days in the area will be used fully to explore the different habitat types. For most visiting birders the chief attraction of this area is waterfowl. Several thousand American Flamingos can often be seen feeding in coastal lagoons near Chichiriviche. The same habitats are home to a variety of ducks and migratory shorebirds, whilst mangroves hold Scarlet Ibis, Plain-flanked Rail and Bicoloured Conebill. Coastal scrub is good for Bare-eyed Pigeon and Buffy Hummingbird while deciduous woodland holds Rufous-vented Chachalaca, Russet-throated Puffbird, Scaled Piculet, Black-backed Antshrike, Pale-tipped Inezia and Glaucous Tanager.

Just a few kilometres inland, slightly more humid limestone forests provide habitat for Black-and-White Hawk-eagle, Horned Screamer, Red-and-Green Macaw, Caribbean Hornero, Hooded Tanager, White-eared Conebill and a host of other birds, while nearby wetlands are the domain of Stripe-backed Bittern (difficult) and Rusty-flanked Crike.

We will be based for two nights in the delightful little inn near Tucacas. Rooms have en-suite facilities and the staff caters amicably for birders with early morning coffee and breakfasts!

Day 4

Morrocoy/Sanare

We will have a short morning bird excursion before driving to our next destination, Yacambú National Park at the northern tip of the Andes. The journey will take some four hours and we will pass through desert cactus and thorn-scrub habitat. We may make a stop on the way for some of the dry country specialties.

Our destination is another delightful posada near the village of Sanare, the gateway to Yacambú National Park. In the afternoon, we will bird the vicinity of the inn.

Day 5 - 7

Yacambu

For many years, the 14,580 ha Yacambú National Park was little known and even less visited by birders, probably because it lay some distance from the traditional birding circuits. Nowadays this has changed and the park has justly become one of Venezuela's most popular birding sites, due in large part to the rediscovery a few years ago of the Great Antpitta, a bird previously unknown in life. Recently, several species from much further south in the Andes have been discovered at this northern outpost. These include White-rumped Hawk, Crested Quetzal, Barred Becard, Scaled Fruiteater and Orange-eared Tanager. In fact, Yacambú gives the impression of being full of ornithological surprises!



Glass-winged Butterfly by M Potter

Yacambú is justly famous as a cloud forest park and, as such, holds many of the specialities of the Coastal Cordillera and Andes. Oddly enough the parakeets here are Blood-eared from the Coastal Cordillera rather than Rose-headed, and Green-tailed Emerald is the common *Chlorostilbon* on the lower slopes. However, typical Andean species include Orange-throated Sunangel, "Mérida" Tapaculo and Golden-winged Manakin. The Tapaculo, probably an undescribed species, is actually more common here than anywhere else within its range. Mixed tanager flocks are always an exciting feature at Yacambú and neotropical migrants are common during the boreal winter.

Apart from the cloud forest, a small artificial pool at El Blanquito has long been known as a reliable site for Rusty-flanked Crake with a couple of pairs usually present. The pool usually has Caribbean Coot and Masked Duck and a variety of other commoner birds like Rusty-breasted Antpitta and Golden-winged Manakin too.

While not strictly within the park, Yacambú adjoins the xeric habitats which characterise NW Venezuela and one only has to descend a few kilometres towards Barquisimeto to be in with a chance of dry country endemics like Slender-billed Inezia and Tocuyo Sparrow.

Four nights will be spent at Sanare. During our time in the field we will hope to see at least some of the following specialities and endemics: Rufous-vented Chachalaca, Band-tailed Guan, Helmeted Curassow, Rusty-flanked Crake, Blood-eared Parakeet, Lilac-tailed Parrotlet, Green-tailed Emerald, Copper-rumped Hummingbird, Violet-chested Hummingbird, Golden Starfrontlet, Orange-throated Sunangel, Rufous-shafted Woodstar, Crested Quetzal, Yellow-billed Toucanet, Scaled Piculet, Crested Spinetail, Great Antpitta, Rusty-breasted Antpitta, "Mérida" Tapaculo, Venezuelan Tyrannulet, Slender-billed Inezia, Golden-breasted Fruiteater, Red-ruffed Fruitcrow, Black-hooded Thrush, Fulvous-headed Tanager and Tocuyo Sparrow.

Day 8

In Flight

We should have some time for a final couple of hours' birding for any species we may have missed before a long drive back to Caracas, arriving in time to check-in for our early evening flight home.

Day 9

London

We will arrive back at Heathrow early in the evening.

Tour Grading

To enjoy the trip to the full you should be reasonably fit and enjoy walking as a high percentage of the tour 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. It is likely to be warm and humid, and even hot, for much of the tour. There is a possibility of heavy rain at any time, but hopefully not to the extent that it will spoil your enjoyment.

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 international departure tax from Caracas (currently about \$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, 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.