

# Go Slow in Ecuador

Naturetrek Tour Report

22nd November – 7th December 2025

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Plate-billed Mountain Toucan



Orange-breasted Fruiteater



Red-headed Barbet



Golden-naped Tanager

Tour report by John Moulding



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Tour participants: Manuel Sanchez (leader) with two Naturetrek clients

## Pre-tour extension Day 1

**Saturday 22nd November**

We started with a guided tour of Quito, a UNESCO World Heritage Site: our visit was full of local colour and colonial history. Highlights included the busy cathedral, churches and monasteries tracing the city's history, and viewpoints showing Quito's startling setting between Andean mountains and the Cotopaxi volcano glacier.

After lunch a pleasant walk through the city's botanic park where we were pleased to see a Purple Gallinule, usually a lowland wetlands bird, but occasionally found in highland marshy places. We also had our introduction to Ecuador's hummingbirds, seeing Sparkling Violetears, Andean Emeralds and an Amethyst-throated Sunangel.

## Pre -tour extension Day 2

**Sunday 23rd November**

We made a dawn start to head up to 4000m on the slopes of the Antisana volcano. En route to the highest point, we saw Andean Coot, Andean Lapwing, Andean Gull, Black-tailed Trainbearer, Giant Hummingbird, Cinereous Harrier, American Kestrel, Carunculated Caracara, Variable Hawk, Cinereous Conebill and others. We had seen Andean Condors perched across the valley waiting for the day to warm up, but on the drive to the Laguna La Mika we screeched to a halt as two adults and a juvenile were circling twenty metres above us. Andean Teal and Ruddy Duck on the lake completed the day.

## Main tour

### Day 1

**Monday 24th November**

At dawn we headed for the cloud forest, spotting our first Black Vulture and Red-billed Parrot, plus Tropical Mockingbird and White-capped Dipper along the way. Lunch at the Mirador Guaycapi restaurant was brightened by a stream of hummingbirds on the feeders, among which were Sparkling, Brown and Lesser Violetears, Brown and Collared Incas, Purple-bibbed Whitetip, White-booted Racket-tail, Fawn-breasted and Empress Brilliants, Green-tailed Trainbearer and Tyrian Metaltail, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird and Andean Emerald.

At Guaycapi Lodge we were greeted by Plate-billed Mountain Toucans, Red-headed Barbet, Blue-necked and Blue-grey Tanagers, as well as a host of hummingbirds on the feeders. The vegetation was so lush that the plants and trees weren't just growing; they seemed to burst!

### Day 2

**Tuesday 25th November**

After breakfast birding from the lodge terrace, we headed for the Bellavista Cloud Forest Reserve, stopping regularly along the road for sightings of Roadside Hawk, Crested Quetzal, Masked Trogon and Rufous Motmot. The toucan count went up as we spotted a Pale-mandibled Aracari; then we found a Crimson-mantled Woodpecker. We visited the Chocó Bird Reserve and the Saucotambo Bird Lodge, picking up Brown-capped and Chivi Vireos, Swainson's Thrush, Andean Siskin, Dusky Chlorospingus, Capped Conebill and Tropical Parula, among many others.

After dinner that night, a surprise visitor was a Common Potoo stranded on the terrace, confused by the lodge lights. We turned off all the lighting and it flew off back to its nocturnal comfort zone.

## Day 3

## Wednesday 26th November

After an early start, we headed for the El Refugio de las Aves, where local farmers have made hard-to-see birds feel at home. First was the signature Ecuadorian bird, the Andean Cock-of-the-rock; then we squeezed into place where Angel Paz used his bird-charming skills to entice Giant, Moustached and Yellow-breasted Antpittas. Keeping still was easy, until one of us found he was standing in a nest of bees! They were non-stinging, though quite indignant; but we were rewarded with good pictures of these shy birds.

Over lunch there was a terrific bang on the lodge window, and an Andean Motmot stood dazed on the decking. It soon gathered its senses and flew away, and we allowed our concern to turn to pleasure that we had had such a close-up view of an interesting, if slightly befuddled bird. Later, on the Guaycapi road, we saw Hook-billed Kite, Black-winged Saltator, Yellow-vented Woodpecker, Crested Guan and the bonus of a snoozing Lyre-tailed Nightjar.

## Day 4

## Thursday 27th November

Daily walks through the cloud forest were like passing through different film sets of mountain greenery. Today, we dropped down to 1400m and the Amagusi Reserve, on our way to Sachatamia Lodge. We found Dark-backed Wood Quail, White-throated Quail Dove, Tawny-bellied Hermit, Ornate Flycatcher, Choco Tyrannulet, Social Flycatcher, and Great and Black-crowned Antshrikes.

Lunch at Recanto Mashpi Wuasi brought us Wedge-billed Woodcreeper, Spotted Barbtail, Pacific Hornero, Black Solitaire and Choco Bushfinch. Arriving at Sachatamia Lodge, 1700m mere above Mindo, we added Shiny Cowbird, Blackburnian Warbler, Golden-collared Honeycreeper, White-lined Tanager, Indigo Flowerpiercer and Bananaquit.

## Day 5

## Friday 28th November

In the Sachatamia hide in time for dawn, we started with Masked Trogon, Plain-brown Wpdcreeper, a passing agouti and an Andean Motmot. Near the lodge we found Turkey Vulture, Crimson-bellied and Smoky-brown Woodpeckers, Maroon-tailed Parakeet, Masked Tityra and Tawny-breasted Myiobius. Down by the Mindo River, we saw Scale-crested Pygmy Tyrant, Torrent Tyrannulet, Snowy-throated Kingbird, Choco Warbler, and Scaly-throated Lineated and Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaners.

## Day 6

## Saturday 29th November

A day at and around the Milpe Bird Sanctuary brought us Smooth-billed Ani, Common Squirrel Cuckoo, Fasciated Tiger Heron, the Purple-crowned Fairy hummingbird we had been waiting for, Swallow-tailed Kite, Yellow-throated Toucan, Lineated Woodpecker, Laughing Falcon, Bronze-winged Parrot, Golden- and Club-winged Manikins, Western Wood Pewee, Pacific Antwren, Zeledon's Antbird, Peruvian Pygmy-owl and many more.

**Day 7****Sunday 30th November**

After a dawn rendezvous at the lodge hide, we found the cloud had thickened. The beauty of the cloud forest here is that if visibility is low, you jump in the car, and half an hour later you find sunshine.

We arrived early at the Long-wattled Umbrellabird lek. They made us wait as the mist came in and out, but then we had one good look at a male with his impressive wattle. We also picked up Black-throated Mango, Long-billed Starthroat, Grey-lined Hawk, the hard-to-find Guayaquil Woodpecker, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Slaty-capped Flycatcher, Marble-faced Bristle Tyrant, Red-billed Scythebill and Red-eyed Vireo.

**Day 8****Monday 1st December**

Before leaving Sachatamia and heading back to Quito, we had a dawn start in the lodge hide and then a walk in the local area, where one tree alone had eighteen species of bird. We made several stops on the Primero de Mayo Road, adding Cattle Egret, Broad-winged Hawk, Saffron Finch and Metallic-green Tanager, and were pleased to have a good look at the White-throated Daggerbill.

**Day 9****Tuesday 2nd December**

After a night at the Puembo Birding Garden, we flew over the Andes to Coca, and from there to the Napo Wildlife Centre extension. The first journey was over the three-quarter mile wide Napo river in a large motorised canoe, zigzagging to avoid fallen trees and sandbanks. Great Egrets looked on from the sandbanks with Snowy Egrets lining the river bank. Approaching the reserve, we switched to paddled canoes and immediately saw a troupe of Red Howler Monkeys. The forest gave us Yellow-rumped Cacique, Violaceous Jay, Palm Tanager, Yellow-tufted Woodpecker, Cobalt-winged Parakeet and Lesser Kiskadee.

The lodge at Napo was a secluded, peaceful paradise for nature-lovers. Caimans and anacondas patrolled the lake, and Russet-backed Oropendolas and Yellow-rumped Caciques sang all day in the trees by the *cabanas*. Squirrel, Woolly, Howler and Spider Monkeys were a regular attraction, swinging en masse through the canopy.

**Day 10****Wednesday 3rd December**

We travelled by canoe to a clay lick, where Blue-and-yellow Macaws thronged the trees before coming down for their fix of minerals. Suddenly, they all disappeared when a raptor, probably a Roadside Hawk, did a fly-by.

Each day brought a morning and afternoon canoe trip down the dark-water creeks, and each day saw Hoatzins (or 'Stinky Turkeys') flapping in the trees. We also found Coraya Wren, Great Kiskadee, Boat-billed Heron, Silver-beaked Tanager, Greater Ani, Green and Amazon Kingfishers, Wattled Jacana, Capped Heron, Slender-billed Kite, Anhinga 'snakebird', Cobalt-winged Parakeet and Orange-cheeked Parrot.

## Day 11

## Thursday 4th December

The next of many clay licks in Napo brought Scarlet Macaws, and Orange-winged and Orange-cheeked Parrots. Later, we saw White-throated Toucan, Red-bellied Macaw, Spangled Cotinga, Paradise Tanager and Blue-and-yellow Macaw.

High above the forest canopy, from a viewing platform at the top of a kapok tree, we could see birds in all directions: Crimson-crested Woodpecker, Crested, Olive and Green Oropendolas, Scarlet-shouldered Parrotlet, Flame-crested Tanager, the big White-throated Toucan, Orange-bellied Euphonia, Blue Dacnis, White-necked Puffbird, Ivory-billed Aracari, Tropical Kingbird, Greater Kiskadee, Boat-billed and Striated Herons, Great Potoo, Squirrel Cuckoo, Red-bellied Macaw and Amazon Kingfisher.

## Day 12

## Friday 5th December

Today we did more slow boating down the black-water creeks. Even when returning to the lodge towards lunchtime, when the heat made the birds go quiet, it was a joy to glide silently through the forest and appreciate the scenery, and the gentle buzz of insects and unseen wildlife through the leaves. We saw Masked Tanager, Black-tailed Tityra, Chestnut-fronted Macaw, White-fronted Nunbird, Pied Puffbird, Red-throated Caracara, Spangled Cotinga, Yellow-tufted, Crimson-crested and Ringed Woodpeckers, Many-banded and Ivory-Billed Aracaris and Wattled Jacana.

We then climbed another canopy tower, complete with its own tarantula scurrying away. Here we added Yellow-browed and Peruvian Warbling Antbirds, Great-billed Hermit, Lawrence's Thrush, Amazonian Trogon, Ochre-bellied Flycatcher, White-crowned Manakin, Citron-bellied Attila, King Vulture and Great Jacamar. One dog-sized and nimble 'bird' in a tree turned out to be a Tayra, a very big and agile member of the weasel family.

On our afternoon slow paddle, we saw Red-capped Cardinal, Little Blue Heron, Cinnamon Atilla, Rufescent Tiger Heron, Green and Rufous Kingfishers, Agami Heron, American Pygmy Kingfisher and Yellow-billed Tern.

## Day 13

## Saturday 6th December

We made a 4.30am start, paddling in the moonlight on the journey back to Coca. We then caught a flight to Quito, and finally headed for home.

## Day 14 Sunday 7th December

We finally arrived back home.

From the home of the condors high in the Andes, through the wonders of the cloud forest, to the abundance of the Amazonian basin, we had collected a huge range of memories, in a world so completely different from that of our everyday lives.

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