

Guatemala

Quetzal Quest in the Andes

Saturday 23 January – Friday 05 February 2016 (14 days)

Guatemala is the only country in the world whose currency is named after a bird. The banknotes of this Central American nation bear an illustration of its national bird, the Resplendent Quetzal, whose tail-feathers were used as a currency by the Mayans.

This bird, which was of special significance to them, is also found on the country's flag and in the badge of the national football team, Fortunately the Resplendent Quetzal is relatively easy to find, and we should have several good views of this stunning trogon.

Guatemala is also famed for its remarkable Mayan sites, such as those at Tikal and Yaxca, whose Mayan pyramids are surrounded by luxuriant tropical rainforest brimming with wildlife that includes monkeys and regional endemic species of birds. Indeed, the pyramids can be the best places to see birds such as Orange-breasted Falcon, Bat Falcon and Ocellated Turkey.

Few countries can match Guatemala's rich natural and cultural history, and this tour combines both elements to create a truly memorable holiday. Our tour begins in the erstwhile capital, Antigua, declared a World Heritage Site due to its fine colonial architecture. There are some good birdwatching sites nearby, and we soon start seeing hummingbirds and migrant warblers from North America. From here we visit some of the best sites in the Central Highlands to look for regional endemic species such as the beautiful Pink-headed Warbler.

We also take a boat trip on Lake Atitlan, which has a reputation of being one of the world's most beautiful lakes, overlooked by a trio of volcanoes – active and extinct – that create a stunning backdrop. The lake holds species such as Lesser Scaup, Pied-billed Grebe and American Coot. This part of Guatemala still retains and celebrates its Mayan culture and each different village has its own traditional colours and pattern to its clothing.

A two-day stay on the Pacific slope offers a different range of species including more regional endemics. Our accommodation is at an eco-lodge on a coffee plantation, with a protected forest that rises all the way to the summit of the mountain. The lodge's birding guides will take us to see some of the specialities such as Azure-rumped Tanager and Long-tailed Manakin. We then move to the cloud forest of the Quetzal Biotope Reserve where photographers will be hoping to fill their memory cards with images of the Resplendent Quetzal. There are plenty of other photogenic birds here, including Azure-hooded Jay and Spotted Nightingale-Thrush. From here we head north to visit a rich wetland area where we should see several species of water birds, raptors, flycatchers and grassland species.

Our final destination is a visit to the Mayan sites of Tikal and Yaxca. Our local guide will inform us about the history, but is also very knowledgeable about the area's wildlife. We should get good views of mammals that include Yucatan Howler and Spider Monkeys, and Coatimundi. Tikal features in the book "100 Best Birding

Sites in the World” – and we soon find out why as we add new species to our list on a regular basis. Parrots, hummingbirds, woodpeckers, flycatchers and raptors are some of the families here that will give rise to memories that prove that Guatemala is a fantastic location for wildlife and Mayan culture. The food is also very good!

Itinerary

Day 1 Depart UK

We depart London to fly to Guatemala City International Airport, from where we transfer to a hotel near Antigua. Depending on our arrival time we have a welcome dinner.

Two nights Antigua

Day 2 Finca El Pilar / Antigua

This morning we go birdwatching at Finca El Pilar, where we should find several species of hummingbirds and warblers. After lunch, the options are resting or birdwatching around the hotel or visit Antigua for sightseeing and an introduction to Guatemalan culture.

Day 3 Tecpan / Santiago Atitlan

We depart early and drive for one hour to Tecpan, where we have a traditional Guatemalan breakfast. Birdwatching in Tecpan is very productive and we aim to find some of the interesting endemic species of the north Central American highlands such as Pink-headed Warbler, Rufous-browed Wren and Amethyst Throated hummingbird. Various warblers may be found such as Townsend's, Tennessee, Wilson's, Black-and-White, Hermit, Crescent-chested and Red-faced Warblers. However the stars are most likely to be Slate-throated Redstart and the beautiful Pink-headed Warbler.

After a productive morning, we move on to Santiago Atitlan, which is situated on Lake Atitlan. Birdwatching around the hotel gardens and lake will bring more new species.

Overnight Santiago Atitlan

Day 4 Volcan San Pedro/Santiago Atitlan/Tarrales Private Reserve

Two morning options depend on individual preference and fitness levels:

Option 1: For the fit and energetic - Boat ride to San Pedro La Laguna where we climb San Pedro Volcano to search for Horned Guan and other interesting species such as Prevost's Ground-sparrow, Amethyst-throated Hummingbird, Slender Sheartail, Rufous and Violet Sabrewings, Bushy-crested Jay, Rufous-browed Peppershrike and Mountain Trogon.

Option 2: Anyone who doesn't wish to hike up the volcano can enjoy good birding around the hotel and along the edge of the lake. There is also an easy walk into the town to experience Mayan culture and buy souvenirs.

After lunch we drive to the hills of the Pacific slope for our two night stay at a private reserve and birdwatching around the gardens of the estate, where we may see Cinnamon Hummingbird.

Two nights Los Tarrales

Day 5 Los Tarrales Reserve

An early start for the drive up the slopes of Volcan Atitlan to look for Azure-rumped Tanager, Rufous Sabrewing, Emerald-chinned Hummingbird, flycatchers, orioles and doves – among other species of the highlands. We have our lunch back at the lodge. In the afternoon we visit another area of the estate in the hope of seeing species such as White-bellied Chachalaca, Yellow-naped Parrot, and Rufous-breasted Spinetail and Lesser Nighthawk.

Day 6 Los Tarrales/Coban

Depending on how we did the previous day, this morning we visit areas to seek out Long-tailed Manakin, Mottled Owl and Yellow-throated Euphonia. Later in the day we transfer to Quetzal Biotope Reserve, near Coban.

Two nights Coban

Day 7 Quetzal Biotope Reserve, Coban Area

Today we have an early start to look for Resplendent Quetzal and other birds of the cloud forest. Later in the morning, we drive a short way down the mountain to visit an estate which offers a different range of species. We round off the day with more birdwatching at the Quetzal Biotope Reserve.

Day 8 Quetzal Biotope Reserve and Flores

Early this morning we get another chance to look for Resplendent Quetzal and other cloud forest birds. After breakfast we drive to Flores in the Petén region with occasional stops to look for wildlife en route.

Overnight Flores

Day 9 Flores and Tikal National Park

After breakfast we leave Flores and drive west to a wetland and grassland area to search for flycatchers, raptors, herons and kingfishers. We then continue to Tikal National Park, where we look for wildlife such as Orange-breasted Falcon and Oscillated Turkey and Howler and Spider Monkeys around the imposing Mayan ruins and pyramids.

Three nights Tikal

Day 10 Tikal National Park full day

Today is an early start as we go on a birdwatching tour in Tikal National Park. Tikal is part of the nucleus areas of the Maya Biosphere Reserve, with a high level of conservation activities and research. After breakfast we take an archaeological tour to learn about the history of this fascinating site. The monuments, remnants of the ancient Maya culture located in the middle of luxuriant jungle, are ideal places for birdwatching and we look for interesting species such as Ocellated Turkey, Orange-breasted Falcon, Yucatan Jay, White-fronted Parrot, Mealy Parrot, Slaty-tailed Trogon, Keel-billed Toucan, Chestnut-coloured Woodpecker, White-bellied Wren, Montezuma's Oropendola and several species of hummingbirds.

After lunch, we can stay as a group to do more birdwatching and possibly visit the site museum, or do our own sightseeing among the Mayan ruins.

Day 11 Yaxha National Park

After an early breakfast we travel to Yaxha National Park. We will start our tour on the trails and causeways of this fantastic reserve located on the shores of a lake of the same name. The forests that surround the Mayan site are very well preserved and the Yaxha Lagoon is one of the most important water systems in the Maya Biosphere. This location, in the middle of a tropical rainforest, has reported 150 bird species, 40 species of mammals, 14 amphibians, 45 reptiles, and 22 species of fish. Here we may find species such as Bat Falcon, Crane Hawk, Pale-billed Woodpecker, Slaty-tailed Trogon, Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher, Brown Jay, Yucatan Flycatcher and many more.

Day 12 Tikal National Park, Flores and Guatemala City

An early breakfast followed by a further exploration of Tikal National Park. In the late morning we drive back to Flores for lunch then take an afternoon flight from Mundo Maya International Airport back to Guatemala City. We transfer to the charismatic UNESCO heritage town of Antigua for our last night and farewell dinner.

Overnight in Antigua

Day 13 Return to the UK

This morning is at leisure to take in the incredible atmosphere of Antigua. We may enjoy a cuppa of delicious home-made coffee or visit the local art and craft shops. After lunch we transfer to La Aurora International Airport and check in our overnight flight home.

Day 14 Arrive UK

Accommodation

The hotels we stay in are all comfortable and clean, although one or two are more rustic than others. In Tikal National Park there is sometimes no electricity between 2200 and 0600.

Leader(s): Barrie Cooper
Numbers: maximum 12 clients
Price : £4,595
Single supp.: £390
Deposit: £900 per person

The price is per person, and is fully inclusive of accommodation as detailed above, all meals, return flight London – Guatemala City, airport taxes, minibuss transport, admissions, and the services of the leader.

The price excludes holiday insurance, tips, drinks, and personal expenses.

**For an ex-international flight cost (Buenos Aires/Buenos Aires), please deduct £800 from the tour cost.*

Booking

Please make sure you are happy with the booking conditions that appear on our website at:

<http://www.naturalist.co.uk/booking>

If you would like us to post or email you a copy then we will be happy to do so.

Financial Security

The Travelling Naturalist is a fully bonded Tour Operator. We hold an ATOL (Air Tour Operator's Licence) issued by the CAA which regulates the entire travel industry, providing you with complete financial protection and a guarantee on all monies we receive from you.

Telephone: 01305 267994
01962 302086

Email: info@naturalist.co.uk

