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BIRDING TOURS COLOMBIA



Short Tour

SANTA MARTA MOUNTAINS & LA GUAJIRA PENINSULA

**High quality birding at the world's highest mountain massif rising from the sea,
with an incredible amount of endemics & specialties, covering lush forest,
scrub dryland & wetlands.**

This short tour (5 nights / 6 days) has been carefully designed in order to cover most of the endemic, near-endemic & specialty birds of the gorgeous Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta & La Guajira scrubland. The Santa Marta Mountains hosts an amazing concentration of endemic species, having evolved in isolation from the main Andes. Furthermore, it harbors a great number of near-endemics and race variations that are especially intriguing to experienced birders and newcomers into the world of birds.

Without doubt, covering "high", intermediate and foothill habitats in the Santa Marta Mountains provides exposure to an incredible variety of birds. In addition, this tour visits protected nature reserves with dry scrubland and Caribbean wetlands at La Guajira Peninsula, in search for a big number of near-endemics shared between Colombia and Venezuela, but otherwise difficult to see in neighboring Venezuela.

Our guides are expert birders in the region, traveling through forests and wetlands in an almost daily routine. Thus, we know very well where the best birds are at any moment and time of the year, increasing your chances to see them well.

Expect good to fair lodges, tough roads in the mountains (unfortunately not good enough to continue all the way up into tree line), basic hotels in Riohacha (no hot water – it is too warm locals say) and amazing birding.

DETAILED ITINERARY:

Day 1: Arrival to Santa Marta.

Tour will begin with an afternoon flight into Santa Marta (landing approx. 6:30 pm). We will pick you up at the airport and drive 60 minutes to the town of Minca, in the very foothills of the Santa Marta Mountains. Dinner and rest.

Day 2: Birding low (foothills), intermediate & “high” altitudes in the Santa Marta Mountains.

This day will have us birding through a big altitudinal gradient, starting from the foothills around the town of Minca, moving into the intermediate levels around ProAves’s El Dorado Lodge, and all the way up into the higher elevations of Cuchilla de San Lorenzo. Our aim will be to reach the Estación Biológica de San Lorenzo by the end of the day (headquarters for the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta National Park, managed by the Ministry of the Environment). This way, we will be ready to approach the habitats of high-altitude endemics, while birding all day on our way up, looking for low & medium height endemics.

We will start with a search for the beautiful Golden-winged Sparrow (*Arremon schlegeli*) and the endemic Santa Marta Tapaculo (*Scytalopus sanctamartae* - E). One of our stops will be specially made for the Blossomcrown (*Anthocephala floriceps* - E & VU) and the recently described Santa Marta Foliage-gleaner (*Automolus rufipectus* - E). As we work our way up the road, we will search in suitable habitats for the spectacular (but very rare) Rosy Thrush-Tanager (*Rhodinocichla rosea*), the Rusty-headed Spinetail (*Synallaxis fusciorufa* - E & VU) and the White-lored Warbler (*Basileuterus conspicillatus* - E).

Hummingbirds will be high in the list for the day, as we search for the Coppery and Red-billed Emeralds (*Chlorostilbon russatus* & *Ch. gibsoni*, both are near-endemics), the White-vented Plumeleteer (*Chalybura buffonii*) and Sooty-capped Hermit (*Phaethornis augusti*). Certainly, we will like to see the powerful flight of the Military Macaw (*Ara militaris* - VU) over our heads, and the good-looking Black-backed Antshrike (*Sakesphorus melanonotus* - NE), hopefully at our nose!

We will have lunch at El Dorado Lodge, not before seeing (hopefully) a fair number of gorgeous tropical species, such as the very nice Swallow Tanager (*Tersina viridis*), White-bellied Antbird (*Myrmeciza longipes*), the handsome Rufous-capped Warbler (*Basileuterus rufifrons*), the colorful Blue-naped Chlorophonia (*Chlorophonia cyanea*), the Groove-billed Toucanet (*Aulacorhynchus sulcatus*) and the special race (subspecies) of the Emerald Toucanet (*Aulacorhynchus prasinus lautus*), also known as the Santa Marta Toucanet.



The Santa Marta Brush-Finch (*Atlapetes melanocephalus*): an endemic species from the Santa Marta Mountains, photographed at El Dorado Nature Reserve.

Having replenished energies and after a short break to enjoy the many hummingbirds that come into the lodge's feeders, we will then head into the higher elevations of our birding transect, searching for more great birds (all endemics): the Santa Marta Parakeet (*Pyrrhura viridicata*), Santa Marta Warbler (*Basileuterus basilicus*), Santa Marta Mountain-Tanager (*Anisognathus melanogenys*), Santa Marta Bush-Tyrant (*Myiotheretes pernix*) and Brown-rumped Tapaculo (*Scytalopus latebricola*).

After dinner we will certainly scout for the endemic and recently described Santa Marta Screech-Owl (*Megascops gilesi*), having the advantage that here at this altitude, the bird has not been played-back as often as in El Dorado reserve.

Day 3: Birding high and intermediate altitudes, lodging at El Dorado.

After a good and well-deserved rest, we will start birding early in search for any missed endemic and specialty, going a bit further up on the road. Many good birds can be seen at this height, including the beautiful and near-endemic White-tipped Quetzal (*Pharomachrus fulgidus*).

After using productively the good early morning hours, we will head down towards the El Dorado Lodge, where we will have lunch and settle down with our gear. After lunch we will take a short brake, either for a good "siesta" or for enjoying and taking photos of the hummingbirds and tanagers that visit the garden flowers and feeding stations.

In the afternoon we will hike slowly around the lodge and along the road, enjoying any birds that come in the way of our binoculars, but looking attentively for the fast moving White-tailed Starfrontlet (*Coeligena phalerata* - E) and perhaps a mixed flock carrying the

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gorgeous Yellow-crowned Redstart (*Myioborus flavivertex* - E). Certainly, by this time we would have seen many Santa-Marta Brush-Finches (*Atlapetes melanocephalus* - E), but most other endemics cannot be absolutely guaranteed. Thus, we will plan for an afternoon strategy aimed at finding any of the most important target species missed so far.

Dinner and lodging at El Dorado Lodge, with perhaps a short night walk in search of the Santa Marta Screech-Owl (if we had not seen it the night before).

Day 4: Birding intermediate altitudes at El Dorado.

This morning we will pay special attention to all target species at this wonderful reserve, looking for better views of the most wanted species and for any species unchecked in our target list.

The Santa Marta Antpitta (*Grallaria bangsi* - E & VU) and the Black-fronted Wood-Quail (*Odontophorus atrifrons* - NE & VU) will probably be on our list for the day. Amazingly, both species come close to the lodge's grounds, visiting earthworm feeders or the kitchen compost.



The **Black-fronted Wood-Quail** (*Odontophorus atrifrons* - NE & VU): seen here visiting the compost at El Dorado.

For sure there will not be a scarcity of desired birds for the second day of birding in forests at one of the most bird-rich localities in the world. Amazing birds such as the Golden-breasted Fruiteater (*Pipreola aureopectus*) and the Streak-capped Spinetail (*Cranioleuca hellmayrii*) can be seen this day.

After lunch we will pack our luggage and cars, heading down the mountain and stopping at key places for most wanted species. We will bird slowly, arriving in Minca just before sunset in order to enjoy the very good hummingbirds at our lodge's feeders.

Day 5: Scrublands at La Guajira Peninsula.

This day we will head north along the Caribbean coast and into La Guajira Peninsula, birding the foothills of the Santa Marta Mountains, lush forests at Tayrona National Park, and dry forests and scrubland just before reaching the city of Riohacha at the end of the day. Many great and different birds along the route! We will stop at key places, birding most of the day rather than sitting in the car.

It is amazing how bird-rich these dry forests are, in spite of limited precipitation. The many nice birds, combined with plenty of sunlight and rather open views even within the dense thickets and shrubs, will provide with excellent photo opportunities and surely great birding.

In Colombia, lowlands are certainly not as diverse as mountains, but in this case we will be dealing with species that live "isolated" in the dry peninsula, many of them shared only with neighboring Venezuela.

Near-endemics that we will look for include the beautiful (and happily common) White-whiskered Spinetail (*Synallaxis candei*), Buffy Hummingbird (*Leucippus fallax*), the scarce Chestnut Piculet (*Picumnus cinnamomeus*), the rather uncommon Black-billed Flycatcher (*Aphanotriccus audax*) and the abundant Slender-billed Inezia (*Inezia tenuirostris*).

Most certainly we will enjoy the beautiful Vermillion Cardinal (*Cardinalis phoeniceus*) and we will be very attentive for a good view of the astonishing Ruby-topaz Hummingbird (*Chrysolampis mosquitus*). Also nice to see are the Bare-eyed Pigeon (*Patagioenas corensis*), Rufous-vented Chachalaca (*Ortalis ruficauda*) and the charismatic Russet-throated Puffbird (*Hypnelus ruficollis*). The Pale-tipped Inezia (*Inezia subflava*) and the Pale-legged Hornero (*Furnarius leucopus*) are also possible.

Night at a hotel in the city of Riohacha.



Left: A female **Vermillion Cardinal** (*Cardinalis phoeniceus*). **Right:** **Black-billed Flycatcher** (*Aphanotriccus audax* – NE & NT). Both images taken along the road to Riohacha.

Day 6: Final day at Los Flamencos National Park and Isla Salamanca.

As it goes in desert areas, we will make an early start this day in order to maximize our birding hours before the sun gets too strong. A short 30-minute drive will see us birding at dawn in Los Flamencos National Park in the outskirts of the Caribbean town of Camarones.

This protected area has a large wetland with great variety of aquatic and riparian birds, but our first priority will be to bird the scrublands, where the most interesting birds live. We will look for the much-desired (but seldom seen) Tocuyo Sparrow (*Arremonops tocuyensis* - NE), the Chestnut Piculet (*Picumnus cinnamomeus* – NE), Orinoco Saltator (*Saltator orenocensis* – scarce), Glaucous Tanager (*Thraupis glaucocolpa* – uncommon), Green-rumped Parrotlet (*Forpus passerinus*), Blue-crowned and Brown-throated Parakeets (*Aratinga acuticaudata* and *A. pertinax*) and Pileated Finch (*Chlorospingus pileatus*), among many others.

Most likely we will see and enjoy the Blue-tailed Emerald (*Chlorostilbon mellisugus*), Black-crested Antshrike (*Sakesphorus canadensis*), White-fringed Antwren (*Formicivora grisea*), Scrub Greenlet (*Hylophilus flavipes*), Yellow Oriole (*Icterus nigrogularis*), Trinidad Euphonia (*Euphonia trinitatis*) and Grayish Saltator (*Saltator coerulescens*).

Aquatic birds here include the gorgeous (but scarce) American (Greater) Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*), the very nice Reddish Egret (*Egretta rufescens* – NT) in both white & dark morphs, Scarlet Ibis (*Eudocimus ruber*), White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*), Roseate Spoonbill (*Platalea ajaja*), Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*) and the Wood Stork (*Mycteria americana*).

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American (Greater) Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*): both resident and migrant populations are to be found in the Colombian Caribbean. This image taken at Punta Gallinas, the most northern geographic feature of the Guajira Peninsula and the South American continent.

Shore birds include many resident and migrant species coming from the North. Nice to see are the Magnificent Frigatebird (*Fregata magnificens*), Tricolored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*), Little Blue Heron (*Egretta cerulea*), Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*), Great Egret (*Ardea alba*), Black-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), Capped Heron (*Phalacrocorax pileatus*), Semipalmated & Wilson's Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*, *Ch. wilsonia*), Collared Plover (*Charadrius collaris*), among many others. Along the interior shore line, the Double-striped Thick-Knee (*Burhinus bistriatus*) can be seen in pairs or family groups.

Migrants will be present beginning late September & early October, all the way through March & April. These include the Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*), Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*), Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*), Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*, *T. flavipes*), Solitary Sandpiper (*Tringa solitaria*), Willet (*Tringa semipalmata*), Sanderling (*Calidris alba*), Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) and many others.



The **Reddish Egret** (*Egretta rufescens* – NT) at Camarones: this amazing egret jumps and dances while hunting for fish. A joy to see!

Before midday we will head back south into the Santa Marta area for our last birding hours at Isla Salamanca National Park, a place where more aquatics and shore birds will be seen, but where our priorities will be with the very rare Sapphire-bellied Hummingbird (*Lepidopyga lilliae* – E & CR) and the Sapphire-throated Hummingbird (*Lepidopyga coeruleogularis*). Highly desired will also be the Chestnut-winged Chachalaca (*Ortalis garrula* – E) and one more chance for the Chestnut Piculet. We will not ignore, of course, the nice Golden-green Woodpecker (*Piculus chrysochloros*), Yellow-chinned Spinetail (*Certhiaxis cinnamomeus*) or a Purple Gallinule (*Porphyrio martinica*).

Final birds of the trip may include the Straight-billed Woodcreeper (*Dendroplex picus*), the Northern Scrub-Flycatcher (*Sublegatus arenarum*), Bicoloured Conebill (*Conirostrum bicolor*) and why not a family group belonging to the only population for South America of the Bronzed Cowbird (*Molothrus aeneus*). Or perhaps one or more species of kingfishers, out of 5 species possible: Ringed Kingfisher (*Megaceryle torquata*); Belted Kingfisher (*Megaceryle alcyon* – a rather rare boreal migrant); Amazon Kingfisher (*Chloroceryle amazona*); Green Kingfisher (*Chloroceryle americana*); or the tiny and beautiful American Pygmy Kingfisher (*Chloroceryle aenea*).

We will drive into the Santa Marta airport in time for your flight back to Bogotá or any other suitable destination.

TOUR SIZE: Limited to 8 participants.

TOUR LEADER: Waly Naranjo.

PRICE:

SANTA MARTA MOUNTAINS & LA GUAJIRA (5 nights/6 days): US\$2,050 per person (COL \$3´587,500.00 pesos pp) in double occupancy for a group of 2-3 participants.

US\$1,835 per person (COL \$3´211,250.00 pesos pp) for a group of 4-8 participants.

Price includes the domestic flight Bogotá-Santa Marta-Bogotá (round trip).

Single supplement for the Santa Marta extension costs US \$100 per person (covering 2 of the 5 nights; other nights are at lodges with double occupancy).

Price includes ground transportation, lodging, all meals from dinner on day 1 to lunch on final day of the tour, daily water, guidance and domestic flights.

Price does not include alcoholic drinks or beverages in addition to those served in meals, laundry and personal expenses.

Price will be sustained for its value in Colombian pesos but not for the US dollars equivalent, due to current instability of the exchange rate.

BOOKING: To book a tour, we require a 50% deposit with 60 days in advance. The other 50% should be paid 30 days prior to the first day of the tour.

PAYMENT: Payment must be done by wiring money to our bank in Colombia (Bancolombia). An instruction sheet will be emailed with the indications for wiring money. This is an easy and fast procedure.

CANCELLATION POLICY: If cancellation is made 45 days or more before the tour departure date, we will refund your money minus a cancellation fee of US\$500 per person. If cancellation is made fewer than 45 days before tour departure, no refund will be available. Please have in mind that refunding might be affected by changes in foreign currency exchange rates. The client will be solely responsible for any refunding costs or surcharges imposed by banks or money exchange procedures.

PLEASE NOTE: All efforts will be done to comply with the specified itinerary, sites and attractions. However, Birding Tours Colombia reserves the right to introduce variations in the itinerary, services (lodges, restaurants, guides) and sites at short notice, if need arises due to unpredictable events. In all cases, we will preserve attractions and activities as much as possible and special efforts will be done to maintain the same quality and characteristics that have been offered.

Abbreviations used:
 E = Endemic
 NE = Near Endemic
 NT = Near Threatened
 VU = Vulnerable
 EN = Endangered
 CR = Critically Endangered

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