

BIRDWATCHING & PHOTOGRAPHY TOURS IN SOUTH AMERICA

Tandayapa & Mindo

The heart of the Chocó cloud forest, ninety minutes northwest of Quito — toucans, cock-of-the-rock and the antpitta spectacle of Refugio Paz de las Aves.

Photo © Jess Findlay

DURATION

Full Day (~13 hours)

DEPARTURE

4:30 AM from Quito

ELEVATION

1,600–2,200 m

GROUP SIZE

1–4

FROM

\$195 per person

1 pax \$390 · 2 pax \$240 · 3+ pax \$195

This is the classic western-slope route, between 1,600 and 2,200 metres, with the dizzying biodiversity of the Chocó. Hummingbird feeders, tanager flocks and — as the star option — Refugio Paz de las Aves for hand-fed antpittas and a dawn lek of the Andean Cock-of-the-rock.

The day can produce Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan, Toucan Barbet, Golden-headed Quetzal and Andean Cock-of-the-rock, with feeders alive with Velvet-purple Coronet, Booted Racket-tail, Empress Brilliant and Violet-tailed Sylph. At Paz de las Aves the Paz family calls in Giant, Yellow-breasted and Moustached Antpittas, a birding experience found almost nowhere else on Earth.

TARGET SPECIES

Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan
Golden-headed Quetzal
Velvet-purple Coronet
Booted Racket-tail

Andean Cock-of-the-rock
Toucan Barbet
Giant Antpitta
Violet-tailed Sylph

DAY BY DAY

4:30 AM — Pickup in Quito

We start very early — in the dark — to be in position on the western slope for first light. We drive northwest out of the city and over the ridge, descending into the Chocó cloud forest as dawn breaks, so the timing lines up with the day's single most spectacular event.

Dawn — Andean Cock-of-the-rock lek

At Refugio Paz de las Aves we take our places at the blind overlooking the lek, where male Andean Cock-of-the-rock gather at first light to display — a riot of scarlet, bowing and calling in the half-dark. It is a short walk in and one of the most memorable sights in Ecuadorian birding.

The antpitta trails

This is what makes Paz de las Aves unique: over years the Paz family have habituated normally near-invisible antpittas to come to a call. Walking the forest trails we hope for Giant, Yellow-breasted, Moustached and Ochre-breasted Antpittas, along with Dark-backed Wood-Quail and, at a special stop, the roosting Common Potoo and a Lyre-tailed Nightjar.

Breakfast & the Paz feeders

We stop for a hearty local breakfast (bolón and coffee) beside the refuge's feeders, which draw Toucan Barbet, Crimson-rumped Toucanet, Sickie-winged Guan and a first wave of tanagers and hummingbirds while we eat.

Tandayapa Valley — mixed flocks

Working the forested Tandayapa road we watch for the canopy and mid-storey mixed flocks that are the heart of Chocó birding: Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan, Golden-headed Quetzal, Toucan Barbet, Beautiful Jay, and tanager flocks with Grass-green, Golden and Flame-faced Tanagers.

The hummingbird feeders

At a valley feeder station we settle in for the Chocó's dazzling hummingbirds — Velvet-purple Coronet, Empress Brilliant, Violet-tailed Sylph, Booted Racket-tail, Purple-bibbed Whitetip and Brown Inca — an unbeatable session for photography with everything coming in close.

Lunch in the cloud forest

We break for a relaxed lunch at a lodge in the Tandayapa/Mindo area, with feeders in view so the birding never really stops, and a chance to rest through the quietest part of the midday.

Afternoon — Mindo & roadside birding

In the afternoon we bird the more open country and feeders around Mindo for tanagers, honeycreepers, Golden-headed Quetzal and, along the rivers, Torrent Tyrannulet and White-capped Dipper, adjusting the sites to what we still need.

Evening — return to Quito

We climb back over the ridge and return to the city in the evening after a long, extraordinarily bird-rich day — realistically one of the highest single-day species totals available anywhere near Quito.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

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- Private transportation from Quito
- Expert local birding guide
- Boxed breakfast
- Reserve & feeder-station entrance fees

NOT INCLUDED

- Lunch
- Refugio Paz de las Aves fee (optional)
- Accommodation
- Tips

Ready to book, or want it tailored?

wildandestours.com/tandayapa-mindo-birding-tour/ · sales@wildandestours.com

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