



ITINERARY & INFO

Ecuador Photo Tour

Calling all bird, wildlife, and nature enthusiasts — as well as photography lovers!

Step into the colourful world of Ecuador's natural treasures and let your camera tell the story.

At the heart of this adventure are the jewels of the Andes — the hummingbirds. With fantastic feeder set-ups designed for close encounters, you'll have outstanding opportunities to capture these dazzling "winged gems" in flight.

But hummingbirds are just the beginning. Ecuador's extraordinary diversity also brings you a dazzling array of tanagers, toucans, trogons, woodpeckers, and the unforgettable scarlet Andean Cock-of-the-rock. Add in superb lodges and reserves, many with excellent feeders, and it's easy to see why Ecuador is one of South America's premier bird photography destinations.

Day 1 – Quito

Your journey begins this evening in Quito, where you'll be met at the airport and transferred to Puembo Birding Garden — a welcoming and cozy retreat just minutes away. Settle in, relax, and prepare for the adventure ahead.

Overnight in Quito.

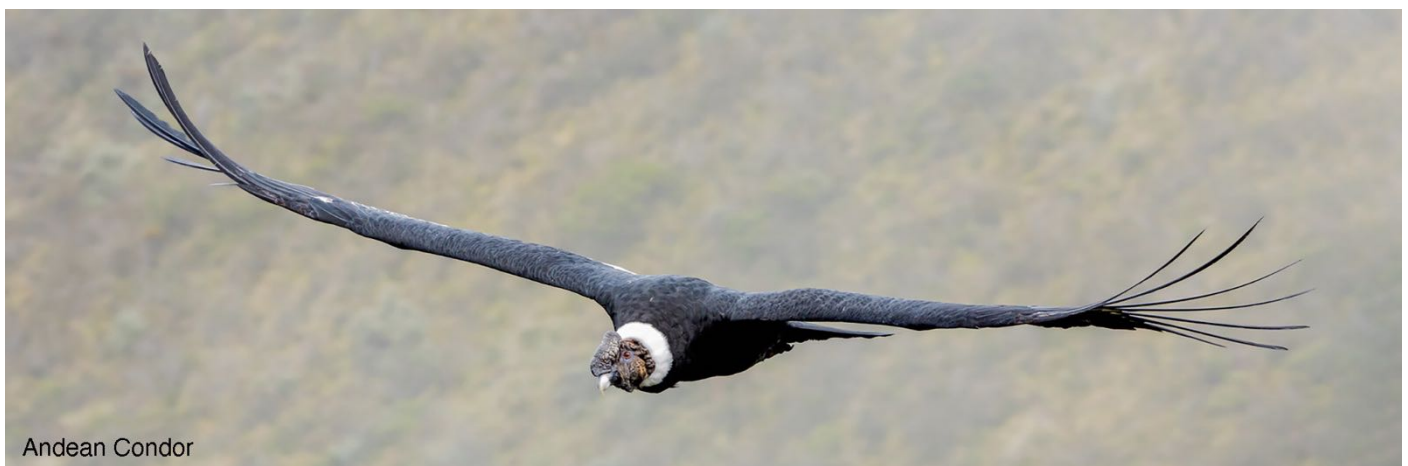
Day 2: Antisana to Guango Lodge

Our first morning sets the tone for the trip with a truly spectacular experience: the open grasslands around the enormous Antisana Volcano. Often a highlight of the tour, this area offers some of the most breathtaking scenery you'll encounter — snow-capped peaks, dramatic rocky slopes, sweeping páramo grasslands, and shimmering Andean lakes dotted with high-altitude waterfowl.

Birdlife abounds here. We'll see Carunculated Caracaras in striking numbers, watch Black-faced Ibis and Andean Lapwings patrol the plains, and enjoy large flocks of Andean Gulls. There's also the thrilling possibility of encountering Spectacled Bear or soaring Andean Condors. Add to this the world's largest hummingbird, the aptly named Giant Hummingbird, and it's easy to see why this stop is unforgettable.

We'll pause for a traditional lunch at Tambo Condor, a local favourite known for simple but delicious food, before continuing our journey. By late afternoon we arrive in Papallacta, where you can unwind at the famous hot springs resort.

Overnight at Termas de Papallacta. (B, L, D)



Andean Condor



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Day 3: Guango Lodge

This morning, we travel to Guango Lodge, set at a higher elevation of about 2,700m and just an hour from San Isidro. The lodge is nestled within a humid temperate forest — cooler, mistier, and distinctly different in character from San Isidro, with shorter trees, a dense canopy, and a unique bird community.

Here, species such as Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle, Viridian Metaltail, and Buff-breasted Mountain-Tanager become possible highlights. Guango's famous hummingbird feeders are a major attraction, offering unrivalled photographic opportunities with dazzling species like the Tourmaline Sunangel, the extraordinary Sword-billed Hummingbird, and the tiny White-bellied Woodstar.

We'll enjoy both morning and afternoon sessions before returning to Termas de Papallacta to relax in the soothing hot springs.

Overnight at Termas de Papallacta. (B, BL, D)



Sword-billed Hummingbird



Buff-breasted Mountain Tanager

Day 4: Papallacta

Weather permitting, we'll head into the sweeping páramo grasslands around Papallacta Pass, where clear days reveal unforgettable views of several snow-capped volcanoes. The birdlife here is equally rewarding — Cinclodes scurrying comically across the open páramo, Tawny Antpittas hopping confidently along the roadside, and, with luck and playback, secretive high-altitude specialists like canasteros and tit-spinetails may show themselves.

After lunch, the afternoon is yours to photograph hummingbirds at the lodge feeders, walk the lush forest trails, or scan the riverbanks for the elusive Torrent Duck. By mid-afternoon, we pack up and make our way back to Puembo Birding Garden, ready for the next stage of our adventure. (B, BL, D)



Papallacta Pass



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Days 5–8: Northwest Ecuador (Mindo Area)

Leaving Quito behind, we spend four nights at Sachatamia Lodge, a comfortable base nestled within lush subtropical forest on the west slope of the Andes. This region is world-famous for its extraordinary bird diversity, and nowhere is this more evident than in the lodge's hummingbird community.

Here, thousands of hummingbirds dart among the feeders daily, with 10–20 species regularly present. The star of the show is the outrageous Booted Racket-tail, the male sporting its bizarre long tail tipped with paddle-like ornaments. Other dazzling visitors include the elegant Violet-tailed Sylph, the striking Purple-bibbed Whitetip, the jewel-like Western Emerald, the dainty Purple-throated Woodstar, and the shimmering Velvet-purple Coronet. For hummingbird photographers, this is paradise — with chances for both natural shots and multiframe photography sessions.

The fruit feeders draw in equally spectacular species such as Red-headed Barbet, Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager, and the charismatic Toucan Barbet, while night lights attract insects that in turn bring in flycatchers and woodcreepers.

While much of our time will be spent photographing right at the lodge, we'll also explore nearby private reserves. The exact mix will depend on weather, feeder activity, and up-to-date local reports — ensuring we're always in the best spots for action. Overnights at Sachatamia Lodge. (B, BL, D)



Violet-tailed sylph



Toucan Barbet



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Day 9: Paz de las Aves to Quito

An early departure takes us to the famous Paz de las Aves Refuge, a magical reserve of mossy, bromeliad-laden subtropical forest. Just after dawn, we'll witness the unforgettable Andean Cock-of-the-rock lek, where scarlet males gather for their dramatic courtship display.

But what makes this site world-renowned is the remarkable habituation of elusive forest-floor birds. Here, with a bit of patience, we stand a good chance of photographing antpittas — from the hefty Giant Antpitta to the rare Moustached, Yellow-breasted, Ochre-breasted, or Chestnut-crowned Antpittas. Usually at least two species perform on any given visit. Other possibilities include Dark-backed Wood-Quail, Rufous-breasted Antthrush, and White-capped Dipper along the rushing streams.

Afterward, depending on conditions, we may make additional reserve stops or return briefly to Tandayapa before heading back to Quito. Overnight at Puembo Birding Garden. (B, BL, D)



Andean Cock-of-the-rock

Day 10: Departure

Transfer to Quito airport for your international flights home — with memory cards full of winged gems, Andean landscapes, and unforgettable moments. (B)



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Important Notes and Information:

Ecuador – Photo Tour – Highlights

This itinerary has been designed to guarantee the best wildlife-viewing opportunities at several of the most gorgeous reserves and landscapes in mainland Ecuador.

- Visit Angel Paz's famous Antpitta reserve in Mindo.
- Superlative Neotropical birding. Tanagers & hummingbirds galore!
- Wonderful cloud forest & mountain scenery.
- High-altitude birds at Papallacta include Seedsnipe & Andean Condor.
- Expertly guided by an outstanding Ecuadorian ornithologist and photographer.
- We operate with personalized service in small groups, catering to birdwatchers and photographers of all levels.
- Extend your holiday with a visit to the Galapagos Islands and/or the Amazon rainforest (please request additional information)

Departs: All year round.

Note: In some departures the tour might be run in reverse order.

The tour leader may modify the plan on any particular day based on weather, feeder activity, recent sighting information, newly opened sites, and other factors. As most of the tour is based in just a few lodges, there is a certain amount of flexibility built into the itinerary.

Grading: Easy to moderate. Much of the main tour will be spent near feeders which are accessed by only a short walk. At Refugio Paz, we will need to walk roughly half a mile (about 1 km) on moderately steep and often slippery trails in order to photograph some of the special birds. There will also be short walks on trails to target a few things at Milpe and Guango.

Parts of at least three days will be spent at high elevations above 11,500 ft. (3500 m.), however little walking is done at these altitudes, and those nights are spent much lower at 8500 ft. (2600 m). On the Amazon extension, much more walking is required, up to 3 miles (4.8 km) a day, and sometimes on trails that are very muddy (the lodge provides rubber boots), and accessing the canopy tower requires climbing up 120 ft. (37 m.) via a sturdy and well-made staircase.

Weather: Usually very pleasant (mostly 55°-75°F, 13°-24°C), but cold at Papallacta and Antisana (possibly down to near freezing) and hot on the one day at Suamox and for the entire extension (up to c. 90°F/32°C). Some rain can be expected, especially in the afternoons and evenings, and intense downpours are not unexpected on the extension (good rain protection for your gear is essential).

Clothing: Proper hiking gear, a rain jacket, comfortable shoes, a backpack with essential things such as warm clothes and waterproof gear.

What's included:

- Expert guidance
- Transport service
- Visits described in the itinerary
- Airport transfers
- Accommodation (in a standard room) and meals, as described in the itinerary
- Entrance fees to all natural reserves described in the itinerary

Not included:

- Soft and alcoholic beverages
- Tips
- Wi-Fi (due to the remote location of some of the places we will visit, internet connection may be intermittent and low-bandwidth)
- Personal expenses (extra nights, late checkout, laundry, gifts, etc.)
- Accommodation and meals not described in the program



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Photo Philosophy:

Our goal is to give you unforgettable moments of joy and discovery through photography. With your camera in hand, you'll connect with wildlife, from birds and mammals to breathtaking landscapes, capturing unique encounters that reveal the richness of biodiversity.

Along the way, you won't just collect photos and memories to take home — you'll also develop your skills and deepen your relationship with your camera and gear. Each outing offers the chance to witness remarkable bird and wildlife behaviours, and to preserve those fleeting moments forever through your lens.

Recommended Gear:

A good 300mm lens (or high-end zoom that covers 300mm) and a full-frame camera are ideal for hummingbirds, but a longer lens is better for most other birds. A 500mm with a 1.4x or 600mm are the best options, but a 300mm with 1.4x and 2x teleconverters also usually does a great job. A smaller lens can be nice for scenery shots in the high Andes.

Cost: \$4200 per person (approx. £3300)

Interested in booking this tour?

Please reach out to us at info@victor-soares.com. While we do not directly lead this tour, we will be your dedicated point of contact for anything you need — from advice on photography equipment to assistance with flights, visas, and travel arrangements.