

Birding, Natural History, and Culture in Oaxaca, Mexico

Mark Pretti Nature Tours, L.L.C. and the Golden Gate Audubn Society

January 4 - 14, 2022

Harboring about ten percent of Earth's biodiversity, Mexico is one of the most biologically rich countries in the world. During this natural adventure, we'll explore and learn about some of that richness as we travel through the valley of Oaxaca, the bordering sierras, and the lovely Pacific coast.

Tropical deciduous forest, shade-grown coffee plantations, the lush evergreen forests of the Sierra Norte and the Sierra Madre del Sur, mangroves, beaches, and the arid scrub of the Oaxaca valley make up the varied sites we'll visit as we enjoy the birds, natural history, and culture of southern Mexico. During our journey, we'll experience good birding as we search for species such as dwarf jay, red warbler, bumblebee hummingbird, mountain and citreoline trogons, white-throated magpie jay, ocellated thrasher, Oaxaca sparrow, gray-breasted woodpecker, gray-barred wren, russet-crowned motmot, spot-breasted oriole, and many others. We'll also tour the Zapotec ruins of Monte Alban, visit a master weaver in Teotitlan del Valle, tour the Oaxacan Cultural Museum, enjoy a boat trip through a gorgeous mangrove estuary, and spend an unforgettable day with Seasons of My Heart Cooking School as we tour the Mercado Abastos, enjoy a superb lecture on regional farming, culture and cuisine, and savor a delicious lunch.

In addition to the natural wonders, a major trip highlight will be our unique and superb lodging situations. All have warm hospitality and terrific views, and some have great birding right outside your front door. Oaxaca also has the best and most interesting food of any Latin American trip I do.

Led by naturalist and bird guide Mark Pretti and local guide Benito Hernandez, the cost will be about \$3500.00 per person, double occupancy, and includes all lodging, meals, admissions, GGAS administration fee, and transportation from Oaxaca City to Puerto Escondido. The single supplement will be about \$400. Group size is limited to 8. For more

information, contact Mark at mpnaturetours@earthlink.net or (520) 803-6889.

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Day 1 – Jan. 4 – Travel to Oaxaca / Hotel Azucenas

Please see the General Information section below for information on travel to Oaxaca. Arrive at the Oaxaca airport from where you'll take a colectivo (shared taxi) to the Hotel Azucenas about 25 minutes away. As you exit the glass doors of the baggage area, continue straight for about 100 feet, and on your right will be an obvious taxi booth where you can buy a colectivo ticket for about 85 pesos (approx. \$4 - 5 US) for the shared van or hire a private one (called especial) for about 350 pesos (about \$18 - 20 US). The especial will take you right to the hotel whereas you'll be with a group in the colectivo and may be the third or fourth stop. The white colectivo vans will be right out front, and the process is very straightforward. Just let them know you are going to the Hotel Azucenas on the corner of Calle Matamoros and La Union and one block north of La Soledad Church. FYI – if you take the regular colectivo, please note that the Hotel Azucenas is often one of the last stops and the trip can take a while. I always spend the few extra dollars for the especial. Our hotel is perfectly situated in a nice neighborhood about 5 blocks (5-10 min. walk) from the zocalo (central plaza) and will serve as a comfortable home base from which we'll explore the area around Oaxaca City - www.hotelazucenas.com. While almost of the day staff at the Azucenas speak English, please be aware that in the evening, sometimes the staff person speaks only Spanish. Just be patient as it always works out.

Though I'll remind you when we're there, please keep in mind that the Azucenas is a small and intimate place and that during our early breakfasts (which they're doing specially for us), and after 9 pm, we need to be VERY quiet so as not to disturb other guests. Also please note that in some of the rooms it can take an unusually long time for hot water to arrive in your shower.

We'll be at the Hotel Azucenas for 5 nights, January 4 - 8.

Though we have never had a problem, when walking around town, please watch out for the uneven sidewalks and curbs.

(As in several other countries, be sure to keep the immigration card you receive at the airport with your passport as you will need this to leave Mexico without a steep fine.)

Day 2 – Jan. 5 – Teotitlan del Valle

After breakfast at 6:15 AM, we'll head east toward the weaving town of Teotitlan del Valle, about 35-40 minutes away. The habitat in the area is oddly reminiscent of the grasslands and desert scrub of southeast Arizona, with similar plant species and habitat structure. The avifauna also shares similarities but with a few interesting twists. Instead of Gila woodpecker, we'll be

looking for its cousin, the endemic gray-breasted woodpecker, and instead of canyon towhee and cactus wren, the local specialties are white-throated towhee and Boucard's wren. Just above town is a small reservoir that, like other open bodies of water in arid areas, can be attractive to grebes, waders, ducks, shorebirds, and a variety of passerines. It can also be a good spot for bridled sparrow. We'll pass by a grove of Erythrina trees which may be starting to flower. The crimson blooms may be hosting several hummingbird species (with possibilities for dusky, berylline, and ruby-throated) as well as orioles including black-vented. Also in the area are blue mockingbird, wintering sparrows and warblers, and various flycatchers. After our half-day in the foothills, we'll return to Teotitlan del Valle for lunch after which we'll visit the home of a Zapotec weaving family, Francisco and Maria de Lourdes Martinez. From Francisco and his family, we'll learn how local artisans spin wool, use natural dyes, and create colorful finely woven products. We'll also get a glimpse into traditional Zapotec life and perhaps sample some delicious atole. **If you're interested in purchasing a carpet or other weaving, this is the place to do it. They accept pesos, US dollars, and credit cards.** Gorgeous pieces begin at about \$100 US. On the way back to Oaxaca City, we'll stop at Santa Maria del Tule to see the "biggest" tree on Earth, a Montezuma cypress (*Taxodium mucronatum*) with a circumference of about 50 meters and a footprint of about 2000 sq. ft. While it's not the tallest, it is said to be the widest, and you just have to see this impressive tree. As a bonus, the nieves (tropical fruit-flavored sorbet-like desserts) they sell there are tasty. I'm buying.

Day 3 – Jan. 6 – Sierra Norte

Breakfast at 6:15 AM, then depart for the La Cumbre area in the Sierra Norte (also known as the Sierra Juarez), about 45 mins. away. First we'll make a short stop on the way up to look for the endemic Oaxaca sparrow as well as several other species. Then we'll spend most of the day around 8000-9500 ft. in the high forests where pines, firs, and oaks are dotted with epiphytic bromeliads, lichens, ferns, and orchids. The area is lush and can be excellent for birds, and fortunately the forests are being protected by local communities whose efforts so far seem effective. Mixed flocks, which are sometimes more common when the weather is cool and foggy, are of two general types. One is led by noisy Steller's jays and gray-barred wrens amidst which may be quiet and inconspicuous dwarf jays (endemic to the mountain range). The other includes smaller songbirds such as warblers (Townsend's, hermit, red, crescent-chested), brown creeper, Hutton's vireo, chestnut-sided shrike-vireo and spot-crowned woodcreeper. The understory is punctuated in places with wildflower blooms, mostly salvia but also some lobelia and penstemon. We've enjoyed hummers including Mexican violetear, amethyst-throated (a cousin of the blue-throated), bumblebee, and white-eared and have also found cinnamon-bellied flowerpiercer here. The understory also provides good cover for hooded yellowthroat, rufous-capped and chestnut capped brush-finches, and collared towhee. We'll have a terrific lunch at a mountaintop restaurant (they serve some of the best chiles rellenos I've had) before an afternoon outing along another mountain road. We'll return to Oaxaca City where we'll have a little time to relax at the hotel before dinner.

Please keep in mind that because of the altitude in the Sierra Norte, about 9500 feet at the highest point, the temperature will be colder than in Oaxaca City. Layers are important. A lightweight insulating undergarment, a good fleece jacket, and a windbreaker-type shell, as well as a light pair of mittens and warm hat, are highly recommended.

Day 4 – Jan. 7 – Mercado de Abastos / Seasons of My Heart Cooking School

Today you can sleep in a bit before breakfast at 7:30 after which we'll begin what should be an unforgettable day. We'll do our bird list after breakfast, then leave the hotel at 9 AM and head to the nearby Mercado de Abastos, where we'll learn about the wonderful mix of local flora, culture, and cuisine on a guided tour with my good friend Yolanda Giron. The market is a spectacle of colors, scents, tastes, sounds, and vibrant activity. After our market tour, we'll head north to the village of San Lorenzo Cacaotepec and the Seasons of My Heart cooking school where we'll be treated to a lecture and lunch with well-known chef and author Susana Trilling (or Yolanda if Susana is not available). This will be our big meal for the day. There are many food items (and just about anything else you can think of) for sale in the market, and also moles, chocolate, mescal, Susana's cookbook, and other items for sale at Seasons of My Heart. We'll return to Oaxaca city in the late afternoon and you'll have free time for relaxing, a walk around town, or perhaps a visit to the nearby Ruffino Tamayo Museum (a 5 min. walk and open until 7 PM). If you still have an appetite, you'll be on your own for dinner.

In the market, you want to be sure that any valuables that you have are kept in a location other than a pocket where it can be stolen. This is especially true of smartphones. I have nothing valuable in my pockets, and my cash for the day is out of reach of pickpockets. We've never had a problem, and I'd like to keep in that way.

Day 5 - Jan. 8 – Monte Alban / Oaxacan Cultural Museum

After breakfast at 6:15, we'll spend the early morning at a site just north of town, where interior valley scrub can be very good for birds, before visiting the Monte Alban ruins. At our birding site, called Biguera, we'll search for some of the same birds as in the Teotitlan del Valle area – ocellated thrasher, berylline and dusky hummingbirds, bridled sparrow – as well as others including blue mockingbird, several orioles, warblers, Oaxaca sparrow, tanagers, and the hard-to-find dwarf vireo. Monte Alban (a name given by the Spanish to the site known to its native Zapotec inhabitants as Danni Baa) is a major site that dominated the region between Teotihuacan (in the Valley of Mexico to the north) and the great Mayan sites (to the south) for about 1200 years. During its peak, from 500 B.C. to 750 A.D., the cultivation of corn, beans, squash, chiles, and fruit on the surrounding hillsides and nearby valleys sustained an urban population of about 40,000 people whose architecture, carvings, pottery, and mythology reflected a rich culture. My co-leader, Benito Hernandez, will do a fascinating 2.5-hour tour of this unique site.

After our tour, we'll have a picnic lunch at Monte Alban and return to the city for the afternoon. After a break at the hotel, we'll visit the stunning Museo de las Culturas de Oaxaca (with excellent views of the adjacent botanical garden and its many birds). We'll return to the hotel where our neighbor, my friend Carmen, will prepare a wonderful dinner for us on the patio with fresh memelas, salad, and homemade flan.

Day 6 – Jan. 9 – Yagul / Sierra Miahuatlan

After our usual 6:15 AM breakfast, we'll pack up and make a visit to Yagul, an ancient Zapotec site about 45 mins. away and with excellent native habitat and birds. We'll spend a few hours here looking for bridled sparrow, Boucard's wren, beautiful hummingbird, and others, while enjoying and learning about more plants as there are some excellent stands of native scrub here. If time permits, we'll then make a stop at a cochineal farm where they produce the insects from which the bright red dye is made, following a tradition thousands of years old. We may need to eat our packed lunch on the road as we begin our journey south into the Sierra Miahuatlan and the ridgetop town of San Jose del Pacifico and the Hotel Puesta del Sol where we'll spend the night. Along the way we'll stop at the home of the young and talented alebrije artists, Zeny y Reyna Fuentes who will provide a demonstration and lecture. **If you're interested in purchasing alebrijes, this is the place. They accept pesos, US dollars and credit cards and can ship items.** From here it's about 2.5 hours to Puesta Del Sol where we should arrive about 5-5:30 PM.

As in the Sierra Norte, please keep in mind that because of the altitude at Puesta del Sol (8000 feet), the temperature will be colder than in Oaxaca City. Layered clothing with mittens and a warm hat are important. Most of the rooms have fire places and a supply of wood to warm them (but please keep in mind that they don't crank out heat like a wood-burning stove).

Day 7 – Jan. 10 – Sierra Miahuatlan to Rancho Cerro Largo

Today we'll start with breakfast at 6:30 followed by a walk around the hotel grounds during which we'll look for cinnamon-bellied flowerpiercer, hooded yellowthroat, black-vented, Bullock's, and Scott's orioles, blue mockingbird, yellow-eyed junco, and several hummingbirds. Madrean birds such as greater pewee, hepatic and flame-colored tanagers, Aztec thrush, and pine flycatcher are also possible. If the *Pyracantha* is in fruit, we may find gray-silky flycatcher, white-throated robin, russet nightingale-thrush, and brown-backed solitaire. "El Arbol de las Manitas" or "The Little Hands Tree" is usually in bloom, and its flowers attract a large number of nectar feeding birds. We'll then begin our gradual descent to the coast and Rancho Cerro Largo. We'll make several stops along the way on quiet side roads to enjoy the forests which transition from mixed conifer to tropical evergreen (with shade grown coffee in the understory) to tropical deciduous forest (TDF) on the coast. There are all kinds of possibilities for birds and butterflies along this route. We'll make special stops at our favorite spots for seeing the diminutive bumblebee hummingbird and the endemic blue-capped hummingbird. If we're lucky we'll find standouts like northern emerald toucanet or perhaps some mixed flocks with red-headed tanager, golden and slaty vireos, common bush tanager, chestnut-capped brushfinch, crescent-chested, red, and golden-browed warblers, gray-breasted wood-wren, long-billed starthroat, Grace's warbler, gray-crowned woodpecker, and others. We'll cover about 75 miles, have a packed lunch along the way, and arrive at Cerro Largo at about 5 PM. We'll eat well there as Cerro Largo has wonderful (vegetarian) food. **Please read the note about Cerro Largo's cabanas in the trip information section below under "Accommodations" - ranchocerrolargo.wix.com/ranchocerrolargo.** We'll be at Rancho Cerro Largo for 3 nights – January 10, 11, and 12.

Day 8 and 9 – Jan. 11 and 12 – Rancho Cerro Largo, Finca El Pacifico

The grounds around Cerro Largo have a few different roads and trails and seem to have some of the best habitat in the area so we'll spend a fair amount of our three days close to the lodge. Russet-crowned motmot, orange-breasted, blue, and painted buntings, banded and happy wrens, white-throated magpie jay, yellow-winged cacique, West-Mexican chachalaca, citreoline trogon, least flycatcher, Nutting's and brown-crested flycatchers, and white-lored gnatcatcher are fairly common in the area. Though they're not regularly seen, I've never failed to at least hear lesser ground cuckoo. Before breakfast (but after early coffee, tea, and cake) we'll spend time on the adjacent road which can be extremely productive. We've had good luck finding Altamira, streak-backed and spot-breasted orioles as well as olive sparrow, red-breasted chat, Colima pygmy owl, and happy and banded wrens at these sites. One of the viewpoints from the bluff at Cerro Largo is an excellent spot to scan an offshore rock for magnificent frigatebird, red-billed tropicbird, brown boobies, and occasionally pink-footed shearwater. The weather will be much warmer on the coast, and after our busy week in the Oaxaca valley and in the mountains, we'll make some time for relaxing, swimming, or reading at Cerro Largo. They have a small library or you may want to bring a good book. All of the cabanas have great Pacific views.

On our second day there we'll make an early morning trip (breakfast about 6:00 AM) back up Highway 175 into the broadleaf evergreen forest a little over an hour away. In the lush shade-grown coffee plantations we'll look for northern emerald toucanet, masked tityra, Audubon's oriole, golden vireo, cinnamon hummingbird, Mexican hermit, boat-billed flycatcher, russet-crowned motmot, fan-tailed warbler, rose-throated becard, ivory-billed woodcreeper, pale-billed and lined woodpeckers, and many others. We'll have lunch and take a tour at Finca el Pacifico, the first certified-organic shade-grown coffee plantation in Oaxaca, before returning to Cerro Largo. The Gomez family has been operating the finca and protecting its forest for four generations, and they are as passionate about the conservation benefits of preserving biodiversity and watershed function as they are about the quality of their coffee. You'll be able to buy some of their excellent coffee with pesos or US dollars for about \$8 per pound.

Day 10 – Jan. 13 – Puerto Escondido

On our final morning at Cerro Largo, we'll return to the nearby side road for birding before a late breakfast after which we'll head west to Puerto Escondido and the Hotel Santa Fe – www.hotelsantafe.com.mx – about an hour and twenty minutes away. We'll have lunch at the hotel before a late afternoon visit to the Rio Colotepec and its rich river mouth where waders, shorebirds, terns, gulls, and as many as six species of plover, including collared, can be found. The nearby scrub can be good for cinnamon-rumped (formerly white-collared) and ruddy-breasted seedeaters, willow flycatcher, savannah sparrow, scissor-tailed flycatcher, blue-black-grassquit, and Bell's vireo. We'll have dinner at the hotel.

Day 11 – Jan. 14 – Laguna Manialtepec / Trip ends in Puerto Escondido

After a 6:00 AM breakfast, we'll head about 25 minutes west to Laguna Manialtepec, a beautiful estuary lined with tall red mangroves, where we'll take a boat tour with local guide Pepe Martinez. Both water and forest birds are found in and around the lagoon. Waders (including bare-throated tiger heron and boat-billed heron), waterfowl, shorebirds, gulls, terns, kingfishers, crane and black hawks, northern jacana, purple and common gallinules, white-fronted parrot,

red-billed pigeon, scissor-tailed flycatcher, thick-billed kingbird, mangrove vireo, and ruddy-breasted seedeater can be found in this area. We've also had good luck here with a few of the more difficult to see birds such as mangrove cuckoo and russet-naped (gray-necked) wood-rail.

If you plan to take one of the flights that leave about noon from Puerto Escondido to Mexico City (with Aeromar or Interjet), we'll return to the hotel with plenty of time to get to the airport for this flight. If United resumes its direct flight from Huatulco to Houston (departing at about 2:30 – 3 PM), you will also have time to make this flight. Please see the information below in the Travel to Oaxaca section for flight details.

We'll try to have a few snacks available, but you'll be on your own for lunch this day. There are small food shops at the Puerto Escondido and Huatulco airports.

Please note from the itinerary that **this is generally an early-to-bed, early-to-rise trip**. Most mornings begin about 6:15 - 6:40 AM.

Trip Style - As with all of my excursions, we will do more than birding and include general natural history and culture as well. This trip offers the most cultural activities of any trip I do, and what's so great about them is that almost all of the cultural elements have connections to the natural world that we'll experience and learn about while in the field. Though we'll do some wonderful birdwatching (which will include ecology and behavior as well as basic identification), we will also learn about plants, butterflies, forest ecology (tropical deciduous forest, Sierra Madre, shade-grown coffee plantations, and mangroves), and Oaxacan culture. On past trips, we've seen between 230 and 280 species of birds, including many regional endemics. Benito is an excellent guide for cultural history and has become a very good birder and naturalist. We will also make a little time, mainly on the coast, to relax and just enjoy the beauty and tropical ambiance. As you can see from the itinerary, we'll weave many memorable cultural activities into the trip.

A brief note about the food on this trip. The food we'll enjoy in Oaxaca is fresh, whole, mostly local and organic, and without a doubt the best food I've had in Latin America. While this is something of a back-to-basics, health-oriented movement in the U.S., this is how Oaxacans have been eating for thousands of years. During our trip, and especially during our time in the valley of Oaxaca, we'll enjoy some interesting specialties, many of them made with prehispanic ingredients. These include atole, atole espuma, nicuatole, memelas, chiles, and tejate, as well as native fruits such as chico sapote, sapote negro, mamey, guanabana, and guayaba. If, like most of us, you're used to what I think of as "industrial corn" you'll be amazed at how different simple tortillas and not-so-simple tamales taste when made from the many types of more natural corn that have been grown in the area for thousands of years. The strong connections between the landscape, its native plants, the people, and their traditions are more evident in Oaxaca than in any other place I've traveled.

General Trip Information

- Please note from the itinerary that **this is generally an early-to-bed, early-to-rise trip**. Two early mornings at Cerro Largo will be optional if you want to sleep in.
- **Travel to Oaxaca** – You’ll need to make your own travel arrangements to get to and from Oaxaca. **Please note that the trip begins in Oaxaca City (OAX) but ends in Puerto Escondido (PXM) on the Pacific coast.** There are several airlines that serve Oaxaca City. You’ll need to make the arrangements that work best for you. **Please note that though airline schedules change, these suggested options have been used in the past. United usually has a very convenient direct flight from Houston to Oaxaca City, departing about 5:00 - 6 PM and arriving about 7:30 - 8:00 PM. American Airlines also has a direct flight from Dallas, departing about 6 PM and arriving about 9 PM.** Otherwise you will most likely come through Mexico City (MEX) from where you’ll take a short 1-hour flight to OAX. There are many good online services for arranging flights, and, as always, you can contact a travel agent. **You’ll want to arrive in Oaxaca no later than the evening of Tuesday, Jan. 4.** If you arrive early, the Hotel Azucenas will be expecting you, but you’ll be on your own for dinner.

For the return, there are several flights from Puerto Escondido (PXM) to Mexico City (MEX) on Aeromar usually departing around noon and 4:30 PM. There are also flights to MEX between noon and 2:40 PM with Interjet and Vivaaerobus. Aeromar (www.aeromar.com.mx) is a partner with United and you can usually book the entire trip through United. **If you take one of these flights, be sure that you have plenty of connection time in Mexico City for a return to the states. I’ve done these flights with all three airlines, and while most flights were on time, I’ve had a few delays of 30-60 minutes with each.** After our morning outing, you’ll have plenty of time to get to the airport in time for these flights on Jan. 14. The later flight may make for a late return to the states, and an overnight in either Mexico City or Houston might make this easier. **If you have an interest in spending a night or two in Mexico City, there are many nice hotels and lots of interesting activities.** The taxi to the PXM airport takes about 10 minutes and costs about 100 pesos.

United used to have a direct afternoon flight (departing about 2:30 – 3 PM) from Huatulco to Houston. You might want to check to see if this is still being offered. **It was not available in the winter of 2020/2021.** If it is offered, you will have plenty of time to make this flight. You can easily hire a taxi at our hotel, or, Benito, depending on his schedule, may be able to take you there for a small cost as it’s a small detour on his return to Oaxaca City. It’s about an hour and 45 minutes from Puerto Escondido to Huatulco.

Another option is to book a round trip to Oaxaca (OAX). If you choose to do this, you can drive back to Oaxaca with Benito on Jan. 14. **Please note that it’s a 7.5-hour drive with a lot of it on a winding mountain road,** and you’ll want as early a start as possible. We’ll be back at the Hotel Santa Fe by 10 - 10:15 AM and will try to have you on the road by about 11 AM. **Please note that you won’t be flying back to the states on Jan. 14 if you return by van to Oaxaca.** If the long drive back to Oaxaca is not your style, you can consider spending Jan. 14 at the Hotel Santa Fe and flying back to OAX on Jan. 15 with Aerotucan

(www.aerotucan.com) which usually has an 8 AM flight from Puerto Escondido to OAX. This costs about \$115 US and goes over spectacular forest. You could then spend a day in the city before returning to the states on Jan. 16.

- If for some reason you are delayed, please try to get a message to me by doing the following. Please send an email to the Hotel Azucenas and copy me at my email (admin@hotelazucenas.com and mpnaturetours@earthlink.net). If you can, please call the Azucenas at 011 52 951 514 7918 from the U.S. The staff members speak English. We'll be in Oaxaca City for five days so it won't be a problem joining up with the trip.
- **Early Arrivals and Extensions** – If you choose to arrive a day or two early or stay a few extra days, there are many hotels in Oaxaca City – I always stay at the Azucenas. You can contact them at 011 52 951 514 7918 or admin@hotelazucenas.com to book your extra night or use one of the online sites like Booking.com. The Hotel Santa Fe in Puerto Escondido is also very comfortable if you want a night to relax and unwind at the end of the trip. If you arrive early in Oaxaca, you may want to visit the Ruffino Tamayo Museum (open Mon – Sat 10 AM to 7 PM, Sunday 10 AM – 3 PM, and closed Tuesdays), the Textile Museum (open until 8 PM and free), or the Botanic Garden (see their website for details of **pre-scheduled tours which is the ONLY way to visit**), or you may just want to walk around town and enjoy the ambiance. There are many interesting shops, galleries, and restaurants, and a few small markets. Benito is usually available for cultural tours of the town, and you can contact him at alban45@hotmail.com. If you're eating out, please note that we'll probably have dinners as a group at La Catedral (about 6 blocks from the Azucenas) and at Los Danzantes (about 7 blocks away) in case you want to try something different – La Olla, Zandunga, Pitona, Origen, Cabuche, or Casa Oaxaca - during your free time.

- **Contact Information** - The following numbers are contacts while we're traveling in Mexico:

011 52 951 514 7918 from the U.S. – Hotel Azucenas. The staff speaks English. Their email address is admin@hotelazucenas.com.

011 52 951 190-8256 from the U.S. - Hotel Puesta del Sol. Email is sanjose@sanjosedelpacifico.com.

011 52 954 582 4700 or toll free from the U.S. 1 888 649 6407 – Hotel Santa Fe in Puerto Escondido. They speak English. Their email is info@hotelsantafe.com.mx.

Rancho Cerro Largo does not have a phone, but their email is rcerrolargo@yahoo.com.

Benito Hernandez, our driver and co-leader, can be reached at alban45@hotmail.com or 011 52 1 951 100 1169

(520) 803-6889 – this is my home number where you can leave a message that I should be able to pick up.

- About four months before the trip, I'll send each participant a packet with information on some of the natural and cultural history of the area, payment information, a Oaxaca bird list, a suggested reading list, an itinerary, maps, and medical information and release forms to be filled out and returned to me with payment.
- **Accommodations** on the trip are good, clean and comfortable. The Hotel Azucenas in Oaxaca de Juarez is very nice and the staff is superb, **but please note that the rooms are a bit on the small side.**

The Puesta del Sol in the Sierra Miahuatlan is beautifully situated on a south facing ridge that looks toward the Pacific Ocean. The rooms have a log-cabin ambiance, and there is a restaurant and good birding on site. They also have fireplaces as it can get fairly cold. **All of the cabins are on a steepish slope at different levels with some of the cabins higher up and some lower down, so we will ALL have some climbs to make.**

Rancho Cerro Largo is an artful creation of our host Mario Corella. No two cabanas are alike, and all have an indoor/outdoor living situation. Perched on an isolated bluff above the Pacific, it has a magical ambiance unlike anything in the area, but **it also has quite a few stairs, especially if you want to get down to the beach.** It's about 30 - 50 steps from the dining area to the cabanas and another 100 yards or so from there to the beach on a switchback trail. The stairs are large flat stones and are rock solid but can be slightly uneven. **Please note the following:**

1 - Their unique outdoor detached bathrooms have composting toilets and, instead of traditional showers, large tubs of clean water to pour over and wash yourself with. The water is not heated but is quite comfortable in the local climate. The views from the bathrooms are exquisite and the habitat is excellent. **Please note that the toilets are lower than what you're used to.**

2 – There is no air conditioning, but every cabana has a fan. Most people find it reasonably cool at night.

3 - There is one cluster of three cabins that have individual showers but SHARE a toilet. This has never been a problem, but please be prepared to be flexible as our group will be using these rooms.

4 - It is a magical place, but you should be prepared for the indoor/outdoor style, the steps, warm temperatures, and mild humidity.

5 – The beds are probably smaller than what you might be used to – doubles. There are only TWO rooms with two beds - one has a ladder up to a small loft where the other bed is located, and the other is almost all the way down to the beach.

6 – At least one of the cabanas is an open air affair without walls (but with a mosquito net over the bed).

7 – MOST IMPORTANTLY, it is the lowest resource-consuming accommodation of our trip (and the “greenest” place I’ve stayed), and almost everyone who has stayed there has loved it.

- **Transportation** - We’ll have a local driver/guide, Benito Hernandez, for the trip and will be traveling in a comfortable, air-conditioned van with plenty of room for luggage. Most drives will be fairly short, about an hour or so, and road conditions, except for a few bumpy sections on dirt roads in the mountains, are good. **The 50 minute drive up to the Sierra Norte is winding.** The drive up to the Sierra Miahuatlan from the Fuentes home is about 2.5 hours, mostly straight with slight rollers for half of the drive, and then winding mountain road for the remaining hour. **The 75-mile stretch from Puesta del Sol down to Cerro Largo is a winding mountain road.** We’ll break up this drive with 3-4 stops and take most of the day to get there. We can rotate seats and try to accommodate any special needs. **If you’re prone to carsickness, please let me know and please be sure to bring whatever remedy you normally use.**
- **General safety and travel** – after over 100 trips to Mexico, I’ve never experienced a safety problem. We follow common sense rules of travel that work well and pay close attention to health and safety issues. Overall the pace is relaxed to moderate, the scenery and natural history fascinating, the food good, and the experiences memorable. Though I’m always looking to improve my Spanish, I’m completely comfortable with the language in the situations we’ll encounter. The Azucenas and Rancho Cerro Largo have safes in which to keep your valuables. **When walking around Oaxaca, which is a very safe city, I never carry my passport, credit card, or bank cards unless I must use them, and I only carry the cash that I know I will need. When I do need to carry these items, they are in a secure place unreachable by pickpockets. Again, no one has ever had a problem, but it is always best not to take any unnecessary chances.**
- **Trip difficulty** – Overall this is a fairly easy trip in terms of physical exertion. Many fit folks in their 70s and a few in their 80s have had no problems. The walks in the mountains outside of Oaxaca city will be fairly short, about one mile in length. Surfaces are mostly even with a few uneven spots and, of course, some mild to moderate inclines. Puesta del Sol is located on a fairly steep hillside at 8500 ft. with short, steep, paved paths between the parking area and the cabins. **As noted above, Cerro Largo has many stairs.** You should be in good physical condition – if you can comfortably walk about two miles (though we’ll never go more than a mile) with some gentle inclines at an easy pace, you’ll be fine. **Do be prepared to spend quite a bit of time on your feet.** If you’re a “flatlander” by location or habit, you may want to do a little “stair work” before the trip to get your leg muscles used to the up-and-down work they’ll be doing. Keep in mind that we will be taking our time and stopping frequently to enjoy flora and fauna, and we’ll have some afternoon breaks as well as some relaxation time at Cerro Largo. No hurries. **When out in the field, you need to be your own best judge of what is safe for you. Please don’t take any unnecessary chances. A collapsible walking stick is VERY helpful for many people – if you don’t need it, you can always leave it in the van or I can carry it on my pack.**

- **Trip Cost** - The price of the trip includes all meals, lodging, boat trips, entrance fees, hotel, restaurant, and guide tips, and transportation from Oaxaca City to Puerto Escondido. At most restaurants, your trip cost will include one drink per person per meal - this includes bottled water, sodas, lemonade, beer, wine, and mixed drinks. **You will be responsible for paying for your drinks at Cerro Largo and at the Hotel Azucenas.** The trip officially begins with your lodging on Jan. 4 at the Azucenas and ends with our return to the Hotel Santa Fe in Puerto Escondido after the boat trip on Jan. 14.

The cost does NOT include laundry, purchases you make, airport taxis, drinks at the Azucenas and Cerro Largo, and airfare to and from Oaxaca.

- **Tips** – Hotel, restaurant, and guide tips are covered in your trip cost, but if you feel that someone has provided exceptional service (especially our driver Benito), please feel free to add a tip of your own, keeping in mind that these service providers are generally much poorer than us and can only dream of such a vacation as we'll be enjoying.
- **Electricity** in Mexico is the SAME as in the U.S. If you have a cord with a three-pronged plug, you may want to bring a two-pronged adaptor.
- **Money and Shopping** – **The only things you'll need to pay for are some drinks, laundry, airport taxis, any tips you wish to leave, and any purchases you make.** There are many excellent crafts for sale in Oaxaca City, Teotitlan del Valle, at Puesta del Sol, and Puerto Escondido. These include carpets and other weavings, coffee, chocolate, mole, alebrijes (whimsically carved and elaborately painted wooden creatures), mescal, and more.

Dollars or pesos are accepted by Francisco and Maria de Lourdes Martinez (the weavers), Zeny and Reyna Fuentes (alebrije artists), Seasons of My Heart, Rancho Cerro Largo, Finca el Pacifico (coffee), and the Hotel Azucenas and Hotel Santa Fe. **If you bring dollars, try to bring bills in good condition.**

Credit cards are accepted at the Hotel Azucenas, the weavers in Teotitlan, the alebrije artists, Seasons of My Heart, and the Hotel Santa Fe.

There are ATM machines in Oaxaca City where you can use your debit card or credit card to withdraw cash – don't forget your PIN. Please note that occasionally an ATM may not accept your card. This is not unusual, and all you need to do is just try another one. ATM exchange rates, even with a service fee, are better than the rates at the cambios. I always bring both a debit card and a credit card just in case. You'll also be able to change dollars to pesos in Oaxaca City at one of the many "Cambios" which are open most of the day until about 6 PM. If you pass through the Mexico City airport, they often have the best rates at the easily accessed cambios.

For an idea of general costs and how much you may want to bring;

Textiles/carpets - \$75 - \$500

Market foods - cacao seeds, mole, chocolate - \$1 - \$10

Coffee - about \$8 per pound

Alebrijes (the fanciful wood carvings) - \$20 - \$1500

Miscellaneous market items - wooden utensils, clothing, molcajetes (like a mortar and pestle)
- \$1 - \$10

- **Health** – All of the hotels where we'll stay (except Puesta del Sol) have large 5-gallon containers to refill your water bottle. Please be sure to drink only bottled water and also use it to brush your teeth. We'll also have extra bottled water in the van. The food throughout the trip is excellent and varied. I recommend that you take it easy the first few days, particularly in terms of amount as sometimes the change in diet can unsettle your stomach. **I will have a first aid kit with Pepto-Bismol tablets and Immodium, but please be sure to bring some of your own.** There are many pharmacies in Oaxaca City if we need one. We will be eating in restaurants where I have eaten with groups many times with almost no GI problems. There are presently no vaccinations required for visiting Mexico. Please consult with your doctor, a travel clinic, or the Center for Disease Control website if you have any concerns.
- **Communication** – There is free wifi available at all locations. Please note that it can be slow and/or intermittent in some places and is often only available near the reception area. You'll need to get the password at the reception. If you need to make phone calls, you can either bring your own phone with international coverage or purchase a prepaid calling card before leaving for Mexico. Be sure to get the access number for Mexico from the provider before departure. You can also use Skype when we have internet access.
- All of the hotels have soap and bath towels. **Some don't have washcloths so you might want to bring one.** Please keep in mind that plumbing in Mexico is different from that in the states and you **MUST put toilet paper in the basin next to the toilet and NOT in the toilet itself.** An alcohol based hand cleaner is useful for those times when we're out in the field. Please be sure to have some toilet paper in your pack as there will be times when we won't have access to restrooms.
- **Snacks** – We'll have ample food throughout the trip, **including snacks (fruit, nuts, chips, granola bars) in the van. If you have a favorite snack bar, you may want to bring some.** We'll have several days when we have breakfast and 6:15 AM and won't have lunch until about 1 PM.
- **Laundry** – There is laundry service available at the Hotel Azucenas and at Rancho Cerro Largo. They'll have it back to you in 24 hours. Please note that there is no service on Sundays. The lightweight nylon travel clothes dry out quickly at Cerro Largo if you choose to do your own laundry there.

Things to bring

You MUST bring the following items;

PASSPORT – you **MUST** have a valid passport. Of course, it's always a good idea to have several copies kept separately, including one with your travel partner if you have one.

Binoculars - I recommend having your rainguards attached and having something to clean your binoculars. A microfiber cloth (available at any eyeglass store) or a LensPen is good.

Day pack/fanny pack (in which you should ALWAYS have water, sunscreen, toilet paper, and insect repellent). Ideally your pack will be big enough to carry an extra clothing layer if needed. We'll have plenty of room in the van and usually won't be so far from it that you can't get something if you need it. **I find that some people like to carry as little as possible in the field, and I can understand that, but, when you think about it, an extra half-pound or pound in your pack is unlikely to ruin your trip whereas dehydration, insect bites, and sunburn can, so please bring the items mentioned above and keep them in your pack.**

Water bottle – 1 liter recommended (we'll have plenty of purified water to refill). To minimize resource consumption, please bring a durable and reusable water bottle.

Small Flashlight – you'll need this at Rancho Cerro Largo and at Puesta del Sol as the paths to your cabana are not brightly lit at night. Bring NEW batteries.

Hat for good sun protection

Sunscreen (minimum 30 SPF recommended)

Sturdy walking or light hiking shoes – most of the walking is easy, but there will be uneven surfaces and inclines in some places so sturdy walking or light hiking shoes with good support are best. If you benefit from the use of a walking stick and have a foldable one, you might want to bring it. **I recommend wearing good walking or light hiking shoes at ALL TIMES in the field.** Heavy hiking boots are not needed unless you feel that you need that kind of support.

Earplugs if you're a light sleeper – though the Hotel Azucenas is in a pretty quiet neighborhood, Mexico in general is noisier than the states. There are many festivities in December and sometimes fireworks in the evening. The other hotels should be very quiet except for the sound of the waves at Cerro Largo and the hum of air-conditioners at the Santa Fe.

Insect repellent – you should bring a small container of whatever insect repellent works for you. I expect few biting insects in and around Oaxaca City, but there are occasionally mosquitoes on the coast and some small biting blackflies in the mid elevations. As biting insects and people's reactions to them vary, please be sure to have some insect repellent with you at all times in the field. Many people have had very good success at preventing insect bites by spraying or soaking their clothes with Permethrin prior to the trip. If you react strongly to insect bites, you might want to consider an anti-itch remedy that works for you. **Long sleeve pants and shirts will protect you from insects and sun.** In general, there are few biting insects on this trip, and I and many others have done the trip for years without ever using insect repellent.

Sunglasses

Light rain jacket or small umbrella – we'll be in Oaxaca in the dry season, and though I have never had rain in Dec. and Jan., it's best to be prepared.

Bathing suit - if you want to do some swimming at the beach at Cerro Largo where the water is warm and beautiful or in one of the two pools at the Santa Fe. If you're a swimmer, you might want to bring your swim goggles.

Medications – if you regularly take medications, be sure to bring them. It is also good to bring some aspirin or other analgesic, Imodium, and Pepto-Bismol tablets. If you have any chronic conditions that may flare up during the trip, please be sure to bring a remedy that works for you. We will not have easy access to pharmacies outside of Oaxaca City.

Patience and flexibility - Despite its proximity to the U.S., Mexico is a different country with a different culture so patience and flexibility are important when traveling there. In general we'll be very comfortable in terms of basic amenities. Like anywhere outside the states, the customs and style of service in Mexico are different. These differences are usually minor things, but it is important to approach the experience with an open mind and enjoy learning about the Mexican culture. I've made every effort to make sure that the details of our itinerary are in place with our Mexican hosts, but occasionally things don't go as smoothly as planned. Almost always these are minor things, but it's good to be prepared for small itinerary changes.

The remaining items to bring are up to you – **casual clothes are fine.** We'll have a first aid kit with Immodium, Pepto-bismol, Dramamine, bandaids, etc. (You should, however, bring some band-aids, immodium and pepto-bismol yourself.) In the lower elevations, expect balmy daytime temperatures - 70-75 degrees in Oaxaca City and 80-90 on the coast. In the mountains, early mornings may find temperatures in the high 40s to low 50s, hopefully warming to the high 60s or mid 70s by mid-day. Nights in Oaxaca City should be in the mid 50s-60s while on the coast temperatures should be in the 70s.

You'll probably want to err on the side of dressing for colder weather so that we'll all be prepared for the mountains. Layers are the key, and I and others have found that a good fleece jacket, a windbreaker/outer shell garment, long pants, light mittens, a shirt, and a lightweight, long-sleeve undergarment sufficient. If you're the type of person who gets cold easily, don't be shy about bringing warm clothes for the mountains.

If you have any questions about what to bring, please contact me.

BIRDING - Though we will see and learn about more than birds, the birds of the area are pretty exciting. We'll focus on a quality experience, seeing the birds as best we can, observing behaviors, listening to calls and songs, and seeing how they use habitats. The following list includes some highlight species among of the 390 species of birds that we've seen collectively on past trips. As in most places, some are rare, some common, and some are really good at hiding;

Least grebe

Red-billed tropicbird

Magnificent frigatebird
Brown booby
Anhinga
Boat-billed heron
Bare-throated tiger-heron
Wood stork
Common black hawk
Gray hawk
Roadside hawk
White-tailed hawk
Short-tailed hawk
Broad-winged hawk
Zone-tailed hawk
Great black hawk
Common black hawk
Aplomado falcon
Bat falcon
West Mexican chachalaca
Long-tailed wood-partridge
Russet-naped wood-rail
Northern jacana
Collared plover
Wilson's plover
Snowy plover
Sandwich tern
Royal tern
Caspian tern
Elegant tern
White-tipped dove
Red-billed pigeon
Ruddy ground dove
Band-tailed pigeon
White-fronted parrot
Orange-fronted parakeet
Mangrove cuckoo
Squirrel cuckoo
Lesser ground-cuckoo
Lesser roadrunner
Groove-billed ani
White-collared swift
Chestnut-collared swift
Mexican Hermit
Mexican (Green) violet-ear
Cinnamon hummingbird
Blue-capped hummingbird
Amethyst-throated hummingbird

Garnet-throated hummingbird
White-eared hummingbird
Berylline hummingbird
Bumblebee hummingbird
Dusky hummingbird
Plain-capped starthroat
Long-billed starthroat
Mountain trogon
Citreoline trogon
Collared trogon
Northern emerald toucanet
Russet-crowned motmot
Ringed kingfisher
Green kingfisher
Amazon kingfisher
Golden-cheeked woodpecker
Gray-breasted woodpecker
Gray-crowned woodpecker
Yellow-bellied sapsucker
Hairy woodpecker
Pale-billed woodpecker
Lineated woodpecker
Ivory-billed woodcreeper
Spot crowned woodcreeper
White-striped woodcreeper
Tufted flycatcher
Least flycatcher
Gray flycatcher
Cordilleran flycatcher
Pacific-slope flycatcher
Dusky flycatcher
Greater pewee
Vermilion flycatcher
Tropical kingbird
Thick-billed kingbird
Social flycatcher
Great kiskadee
Boat-billed flycatcher
Scissor-tailed flycatcher
Rose-throated becard
Masked tityra
Dwarf vireo
Hutton's vireo
Blue-headed vireo
Bell's vireo
Golden vireo

Mangrove vireo
Slaty vireo
Chestnut-sided shrike-vireo
Dwarf jay
White-throated magpie jay
Green jay
Gray-breasted martin
Mangrove swallow
Mexican chickadee
Gray-barred wren
Happy wren
Banded wren
Boucard's wren
Rufous-naped wren
Gray-breasted wood-wren
White-lored gnatcatcher
Brown-backed solitaire
Russet nightingale-thrush
White-throated robin
Rufous-backed robin
Aztec thrush
Ocellated thrasher
Blue mockingbird
Gray silky flycatcher
Northern waterthrush
Black-and-white warbler
American redstart
Townsend's warbler
Hermit warbler
Black-throated gray warbler
Crescent-chested warbler
Slate-throated redstart
Red warbler
Red-faced warbler

Golden-browed warbler
Golden-crowned warbler
Rufous-capped warbler
Red-breasted chat
Common chlorospingus (bush tanager)
Red-headed tanager
Cinnamon-bellied flowerpiercer
Red-legged honeycreeper
White-collared seedeater
Ruddy-breasted seedeater
Blue-black grassquit
Rufous-capped brushfinch
Chestnut-capped brushfinch
Collared towhee
White-throated towhee
Bridled sparrow
Oaxaca sparrow
Grasshopper sparrow
Clay-colored sparrow
Grayish saltator
Black-headed saltator
Painted bunting
Orange-breasted bunting
Blue bunting
Indigo bunting
Yellow-winged cacique
Streak-backed oriole
Black-vented oriole
Spot-breasted oriole
Altamira oriole
Audubon's oriole
Elegant euphonia
Scrub euphonia