

Colombia: Santa Marta Tour Itinerary

January 27–February 3, 2024

The tour begins and ends in the city of Barranquilla, on Colombia's Caribbean coast. The Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta is the highest coastal mountain in the world and one of the most important endemism centers in the world, with 22 species of birds restricted to it. Join us on a search for many of these endemics including Santa Marta Screech-owl, Antpitta, Mountain-tanager, Tapaculo, Foliage-gleaner, Brush-finch, Parakeet, Sabrewing, Bush-tyrant, Seedeater, Warbler, and a plethora more!

This trip will also take us to Isla Salamanca, Tayrona and Los Flamencos National Parks, where birding through mangroves and coastal wetlands, along the ocean and in dry scrub forest should yield species such as the near endemic Buffy Hummingbird, the endemic Chestnut-winged Chachalaca, Russet-throated Puffbird, the near endemic Chestnut Piculet, Bicolored Conebill, Tocuyo Sparrow, and Panama Flycatcher among many others.

DAY 1: CALI TO BARRANQUILLA

After breakfast we take a 2-hour drive to the airport to catch a 90-minute flight to Barranquilla. Check in at the hotel after lunch and if time permits some birding in the afternoon.

Lodging: Hotel Movich

DAY 2: ISLA SLAMANCA AND DRIVE TO EL DORADO

We will rise early and spend the morning birding at Isla Salamanca National Park, 45 minutes from Barranquilla, where we will bird the newly rebuilt walkways through the mangroves in search of Sapphire-throated Hummingbird, Bicolored Conebill, the common Brown-throated Parakeet, Green-and-rufous Kingfisher, and Yellow-chinned Spinetail among many others.. We will also have time to bird some wetlands in the area in search of Northern Screamer and other specialties. After a morning of birding we will have lunch on the road and then begin an ascent up the Santa Marta Mountains.

The afternoon will have us birding through a vast altitudinal gradient, stopping at different elevations along the road to El Dorado Lodge. Birding up the mountain will surely yield a large number of species, including Golden-winged Sparrow, Rosy Thrush-tanager, Rusty-headed Spinetail, Ruddy Foliage-gleaner, the recently described Santa Marta Foliage-gleaner, Rusty-breasted Antpitta, Santa Marta Tapaculo, Black-backed Antshrike, the magnificently colored Blue-naped Chlorophonia, and the attractive Rufous-capped Warbler.

Lodging: El Dorado Lodge

DAY 3: CERRO KENNEDY

We will rise early and head up to higher elevations towards Cerro Kennedy, in search of these endemics: Santa Marta Parakeet, Santa Marta Warbler, Santa Marta Mountain-tanager, Santa Marta Bush-tyrant and Brown-rumped Tapaculo, among many others. We will have a picnic at high elevation with great views of the Sierra Nevada, and bird along the road on our way down, hoping to run into awe inspiring species such as Swallow Tanager, Grove-billed and Santa Marta Toucanet, Black-chested Jay, the endemic White-lored Warbler, Golden-breasted Fruiteater and the near endemic White-tipped quetzal. After dinner we will certainly scout for the endemic and recently described Santa Marta Screech-owl.

Lodging: El Dorado Lodge

DAY 4: EL DORADO LODGE

After breakfast we will have time to enjoy the well-maintained feeders at the lodge. Hummingbirds that visit the feeders include the endemic White-tailed Starfrontlet, White-vented Plumeteer, and Long-tailed Hermit. The bananas attract the endemic Santa Marta Brush-finch and also the endemic Colombian brush-finch, and the many flowers in the garden attract White-sided and Black Fowerpiercer. We will spend some time trying to see Santa Marta Antpitta, a skullker that will definitely take some work. A day of birding near the lodge will have its rewards, a special treat being the near endemic Black-fronted Wood-quail that visit the lodges' compost pile in the afternoon.

Lodging: El Dorado Lodge

DAY 5: EL DORADO LODGE TO BARLOVENTO

After some birding around the lodge in the morning we will have lunch at the lodge and spend the afternoon birding along the road to Minca. We will make stops to catch any birds we missed on the drive up to the lodge. making a stop in the town of Minca, a great location to bird for lower elevation species. We will enjoy the hummingbird feeders at the hotel while we have breakfast where some of the species that visit include Rufous-breasted Hermit, Black-throated Mango, Long-billed Starthroat, the near endemic Red-billed Emerald and Violet-crowned Woodnymph. We will also have time to explore the surroundings in search of birds such as Black-backed Antshrike, Scaled Piculet, Swallow Tanager, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Keel-billed Toucan, Masked Tityra, and Whooping Motmot. After lunch we head down the hill towards out hotel near Tayrona National Park.

Lodging: Casa Tayrona Los Naranjos

DAY 6: LOS FLAMENCOS NATIONAL PARK

Very close to the city of Riohacha is Los Flamencos and the village of Camarones. This is the west edge of the Guajira desert, where dry forest becomes shorter and sparser and bare dry earth separates the trees from each other. But before you have a mistaken idea of a parched world, Los Flamencos is on the coast and it has shallow waterbodies that fill as the rains come, and evaporate during the dry season. These evaporating ponds concentrate salt, and then brine shrimp bloom which brings in the namesake bird of the park – American Flamingos! Their numbers vary depending on water levels, but they can be here in the hundreds on a good day. Gulls, terns, and many migratory shorebirds are to be found at Los Flamencos.

Retreating to the forest though, one is quite surprised that a series of very attractive regional specialties are found here. The sole South American offshoot of what is really a North American group, the Vermilion Cardinal can be seen here. Nothing prepares you, even if you have backyard Northern Cardinals, for the striking red of this species, the overdone crest and the very different look to its close relatives from the north. On the ground, a member of a group that is usually very drab and brown, may elicit “wows!” from the crowd – the White-whiskered Spinetail is one heck of a good looking Spinetail.

Pecking in the branches and trilling away is a tiny and colorful woodpecker, the Chestnut Piculet. Sure there are specialties that are more somber in tone, such as the Slender-billed Inezia (Tyrannulet), and White-tipped Inezia. A crowd favorite is the Russet-throated Puffbird (the Bobo bird as the locals call it) who will just sit there, staring back at you as hard as you stare at it. In a crowd of what tend to be relatively greenish or grayish and nondescript birds, the saltators, the uncommon Orinoco Saltator is quite a good looking bird. Don't ask why there are so many good looking birds in this drab desert habitat, just enjoy these wonderful dry forest birds. After lunch we drive back to Barlovento.

Lodging: Casa Tayrona Los Naranjos

DAY 7: TAYRONA NATIONAL PARK AND TRANSFER TO BARRANQUILLA

We will have a morning visit to the park, and if all things align for us, the Blue-billed Curassow could show up for us. Otherwise, this is a great place to see some species which we are not as likely to see elsewhere on the trip. One abundant bird that is easiest to see here than anywhere is the stunning Lance-tailed Manakin. Sometimes it can be found with its relative, the White-bearded Manakin. The birds here are varied, from Crane Hawk and Boat-billed Heron to Greater Ani, White-necked Puffbird and Rufous-tailed Jacamars. Blue-headed Parrot is common, and Lineated Woodpeckers are impressive to see as they forage on the large trees.

White-bellied Antbirds belt out their song from the understory, if one is lucky they will even show themselves. The complex songs of Buff-breasted and Bicolored wrens are heard in the forest, along with the repetitive songs of Scrub Greenlets, nasal sounds of Barred Antshrikes or loud calls of Boat-billed and Streaked flycatchers. It is an active area, full of birds! Crimson-backed Tanagers and the gorgeous Red-legged Honeycreepers give a lot of color to the local flocks. While birding here it is common to see the Cottontop Tamarin, a gorgeous little monkey dwarfed by the less common White-fronted Capuchin. After lunch we head to the city of Barranquilla to prepare for flights home.

Lodging: Hotel Movich

DAY 8: DEPART FROM BARRANQUILLA

EBIRD HOTSPOTS

ISLA SALAMNCA AND KM 4 <https://ebird.org/colombia/hotspot/L2141044>

MINCA <https://ebird.org/colombia/hotspot/L1161669>

MINCA TO EL DORADO <https://ebird.org/colombia/hotspot/L11802673>

BELOW EL DORADO LODGE <https://ebird.org/colombia/hotspot/L2340002>

EL DORADO LODGE <https://ebird.org/colombia/hotspot/L2141124>

CERRO KENNEDY / SAN LORENZO <https://ebird.org/colombia/hotspot/L2146871>

TAYRONA NATIONAL PARK <https://ebird.org/colombia/hotspot/L10947719>

LOS FLAMENCOS NATIONAL PARK <https://ebird.org/colombia/hotspot/L1637004>

ITINERARY:

Date	Day	Birding Site	Lodging
1/27/2023	Day 1	Cali - Barranquilla Flight	HOTEL MOVICH
1/28/2023	Day 2	Barranquilla - Km 4 - El Dorado Lodge	EL DORADO
1/29/2023	Day 3	El Dorado Lodge	EL DORADO
1/30/2023	Day 4	El Dorado Lodge	EL DORADO
1/31/2023	Day 5	El Dorado - Barlovento	BARLOVENTO
2/1/2023	Day 6	Los Flamencos National Park	BARLOVENTO
2/2/2023	Day 7	Tayrona National Park and transfer to Barranquilla	HOTEL MOVICH
2/3/2023	Day 8	Depart Barranquilla	

COST 8 PAX: \$ 2895 USD PER PERSON

COST 6 PAX: \$ 3150 USD PER PERSON

COST 4 PAX: \$ 3450 USD PER PERSON

Single Supplement: \$ 480

Includes:

All meals, from Lunch on Day 1 to Breakfast on Day 8

All lodging (Double Occupancy)

Internal Flights (Cali - Barranquilla)

Bilingual professional guide

Bottled Water and Snacks

Terrestrial transport from airport pickup to airport drop off (1 17 PAX van in the lowlands and 3 4X4 vehicles for a group of 8, 2 4X4 vehicles for a group of 6, and 2 4X4 vehicles for a group of 4.

Entrance Fees to Parks and Private Nature Reserves

Limited Medical and Accident Insurance

Does Not Include:

Tips

Laundry

Items of Personal Nature

International Airfare