

Birding Trip to Guatemala with Nigel Marven

December 1 to 9 2021

Main tour summary:

December 1, 2021:

Arrival Day - Antigua - Afternoon birding El Pilar - Night at Hotel las Camelias

December 2, 2021:

Antigua - Morning birding Finca Caleras de Chichavac - Afternoon birding Los Tarrales - Night at Los Tarrales Lodge

December 3, 2021:

Full day birding Los Tarrales reserve - Night at Los Tarrales Lodge

December 4, 2021:

Tarrales - Birding around Lake Atitlan - Drive to Sibinal - Night at Estrella Dorada Hotel

December 5, 2021

Full Day Birding Sibinal - Night at Estrella Dorada Hotel

December 6, 2021

Morning birding Sibinal - Drive to Huehuetenango - Afternoon birding Chiabal village - Night at Hotel Casa Familiar Todos Santos

December 7, 2021

Full day birding Sierra de los Cuchumatanes - Night at Hotel Casa Familiar Todos Santos.

December 8, 2021

Morning birding Puerta del Cielo - Drive to Guatemala City - Night at Hotel Las Americas

December 9, 2021

Departure day for main tour



Blue-throated Motmot - Photo credit: Daniel Aldana

Tikal extension summary:

December 9, 2021

Early morning Drive - Morning birding Lo de China and Guaytan Reserves - Afternoon birding the Hotel grounds at La Posada Montaña del Quetzal - Night at La Posada Montaña del Quetzal.

December 10, 2021

Morning birding Ranchitos del Quetzal reserve - Drive to Tikal with birding stops on the way - Night at Hotel Jungle Lodge

December 11, 2021

Full day Birding Tikal National Park - Night at Hotel Jungle Lodge

December 12, 2021

Morning birding Tikal National Park - Afternoon birding Cerro Cahui reserve - Night at Casa de Don David, El Remate.

December 13, 2021

End of the tour departure from Flores International Airport. Morning birding around El Remate/Santa Ana will be optional and will depend on departure flight times.



Azure-hooded Jay - Photo credit: John Cahill

Detailed Itinerary:

December 1, 2021:

Arrival Day (please arrive before 1:00 pm)

As you arrive at Guatemala City's La Aurora International Airport, you will be picked up by one of our representatives and transferred to the colonial city of Antigua. Depending on traffic this drive will take us 1 hour.

Regularly on the arrival day there aren't many birding activities, but if you arrive at or before 1:00pm, there will be an optional birding afternoon at a birding hotspot called Finca El Pilar, located in the outskirts of Antigua. At this private reserve we will have good chances at seeing some of our highland regional endemics like Rufous-collared and Black Thrush, Guatemalan Flicker, Blue-throated Motmot, Green-throated Mountain-Gem, Rufous Sabrewing and Rufous-browed Wren. Other widespread highland species are also possible, including Mountain Thrush, White-eared Ground-Sparrow, Pine Flycatcher, Band-backed Wren, Black-vented Oriole, Acorn Woodpecker, Golden-browed Warbler, Grey Silky-Flycatcher among many more.

At Finca El Pilar we will bird an interesting Pine-oak forest habitat. The reserve starts at 1400 meters above sea level and goes all the way up to El Cerro Cucurucho (2800 m).

At dusk we will visit some good spots inside the reserve to try to catch up with our first owl species for the trip... the impressive Fulvous Owl. After the afternoon visit at el Pilar we will drive back to the hotel for dinner.

Overnight Hotel Posada San Vicente

December 2, 2021:

After an early cup of coffee at the hotel's front desk we will take a packed breakfast and drive west, getting into the higher pine oak forest at 2500 meters elevation. We will visit Finca Caleras Chichavac Private Reserve in search of the first gem of the trip... The Pink-headed Warbler. Along with this beautiful wood-warbler we can also expect to find such specialties as Guatemalan Pygmy-Owl, Amethyst-throated Mountain-Gem, Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo, Hutton's Vireo, Olive and Crescent-chested Warblers, Blue-and-White Mockingbird, Spotted Towhee and Mountain Trogon.



Pink-headed Warbler - Photo credit: Daniel Aldana

Birding Caleras Chichavac will take up most of the morning. At noon we will have lunch at a nice local restaurant near the reserve.

After lunch we will keep driving south towards Los Tarrales Reserve.

Los Tarrales is in the southern foothills of the Atitlan Volcano. The lower part of the reserve (where the lodge is located) is merely 700 meters above sea level. The reserve extends up the south slope of the Atitlan Volcano reaching an impressive 3500 meters. Thanks to this wide altitudinal range, Los Tarrales is probably one of the birdiest places we will visit during our trip. Mainly we will be birding in the lower portion of the reserve where most of our targets can be found. But we will also venture up into the mid-elevation foothill rainforests in search of some difficult specialties.

The drive from Caleras to Los Tarrales will take us around an hour and a half so probably we will get to the lodge in time to do some afternoon birding around the feeders and surrounding gardens. The birding right around the lodge is actually really good, target species include White-bellied Chachalaca, White-throated Magpie-Jay, Spot-breasted and Altamira Oriole, Lesson's Motmot, Yellow-winged Tanager, Cinnamon Hummingbird, Common Tody-Flycatcher, Yellow-naped Parrot, Orange-fronted and Orange-chinned Parakeet, Lineated Woodpecker, Black-headed Saltator, Scrub and Yellow-throated Euphonia and several other species.

There are usually Mottled Owls vocalizing around the lodge at dusk and at night. Here we can also expect to catch up with Lesser Nighthawk and Common Pauraque.

Overnight and dinner at Los Tarrales Lodge.



White-bellied Chachalaca - Photo credit: Daniel Aldana

December 3, 2021:

A place as diverse as Los Tarrales always deserves a full day of birding. After an early breakfast at the lodge (great coffee!) we will do some of the lower elevation trails in search for Rufous-breasted Spinetail, White-bellied Chachalaca, Green Shrike-Vireo, Fan-tailed Warbler, Turquoise-browed Motmot, Beryline Hummingbird, Long-billed Starthroat Laughing and Bat Flacon, White Hawk, King Vulture, Tody Motmot, Red-throated Ant-Tanager, Tennessee, Black-throated Green and Rufous-capped Warbler, Yellow-billed Cacique to mention a few.

After a long morning we will return to the lodge for lunch and a chance to rest up and relax a little.

In the afternoon we will head out again in search of more birds and other wildlife.

Overnight and dinner at Los Tarrales Lodge.



Fan-tailed Warbler - Photo credit: John Cahill

December 4, 2021:

After some early coffee and cookies, we will grab a packed breakfast and drive towards the town of Santiago Atitlan. This drive will takes us around an hour and a half. We will be exploring both Toliman Volcano and Atitlan Volcano slopes. We will be looking for all the specialites of the lake shores such as Belted Flycatcher, Azure-rumped Tanager, Wine-throated Hummingbird, Emerald-chinned Hummingbird, Resplendent Quetzal, Ruddy Foliage gleaner, Blue-and-white Mockingbird, Blue-throated Motmot, White-faced Ground Sparrow, and so on and so forth. After lunch we will leave the Atitlan area and make our way towards Sibinal.

Overnight at Hotel Estrella Dorada.



Wine-throated Hummingbird - Photo credit: Daniel Aldana

December 5, 2021:

This will be our first attempt to find the unicorn of the cloud forests of Guatemala, the enigmatic and very bizarre looking Horned Guan.

The birding in this area is concentrated in two different areas: Union Reforma (10 minutes away from the Hotel) and Vega del Volcan (a village 45 minutes away from the Hotel). Both places are located on the Tacaná Volcano, the second tallest volcano in Central America. The habitat here is very interesting, it's a sub-tropical cloud forest with an abundance of conifers, at 3300 meters above sea level. This is one of the best places to find Pink-headed Warbler.

What we do on this first morning will depend on where the fruiting trees are for the guans to feed on. This can be around Vega del Volcan or in Union Reforma. The afternoon will be spent also looking for the Guan in case we don't find it in the morning.

Overnight at Hotel Estrella Dorada.



Horned Guan - Photo credit: Daniel Aldana

December 6, 2021:

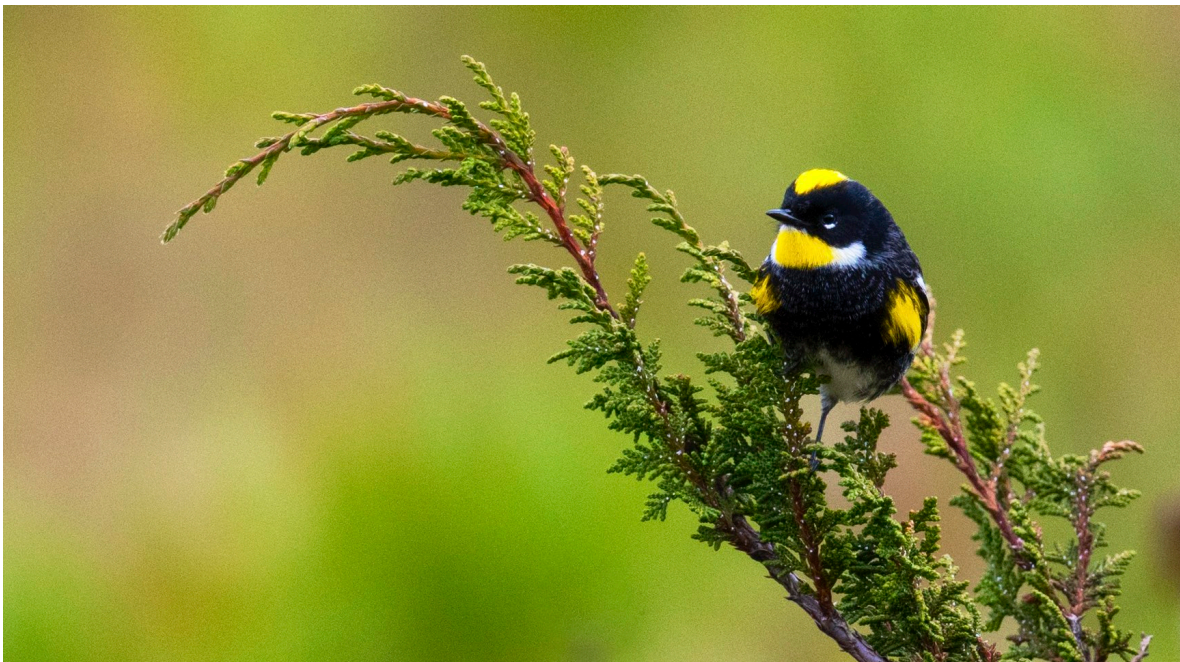
We will have a full morning in the vicinity of Union Reforma and Vega del Volcán if needed to locate birds that we might have missed the day before. With some luck we may encounter the near-mythical Maroon-chested Ground Dove.

After lunch we will drive to the city of Huehuetenango. This drive will take us around 5 hours. Our destination will be the Sierra de los Cuchumatanes. Usually we make it to Chiabal (the town where our local guide Esteban lives). We will bird Chiabal in the late afternoon and later will head to our hotel in Todos Santos. At night we will be searching for one of the rarest owls in Central America, the Unspotted Saw-Whet Owl.



Maroon-chested Ground Dove - Photo credit: John Cahill

Overnight at Casa Familiar Todos Santos Cuchumatan.



Goldman's Warbler - Photo credit: John Cahill

December 7th, 2021:

Full day spent birding the Sierra de los Cuchumatanes. We will visit early in the morning the Todos Santos National Park in search for the endemic Goldman's Warbler, Ocellated Quail, Garnet-throated Hummingbird, Guatemalan Flicker and many other quality species of the area. This region is unique in the neotropics, holding a Highland Pine and Juniper Savannah. Also this national park holds a resident population of Savanna Sparrows.

Overnight Casa Familiar Todos Santos Cuchumatan.

December 8th, 2021:

Morning Birding Puerta del Cielo National Park. This is a conifers forest that holds one of Guatemala's most endangered habitats, the last remaining stands of the endemic 'pinabete' or Guatemalan Fir (*Abies guatemalensis*). Here we have another chance at spotting the ultra-rare Maroon-chested Ground Dove as well as additional regional endemics. After lunch drive to Guatemala City this drive is about 6 hours, with birding stops along the way.

Overnight Hotel las Americas, Guatemala City.

December 9th, 2021:

Departure day for participants not taking the Tikal extension (Depart La Aurora International Airport).

Participants attending the Tikal extension will depart from the Flores International Airport (December 13).



Rufous-browed Wren - Photo credit: Daniel Aldana

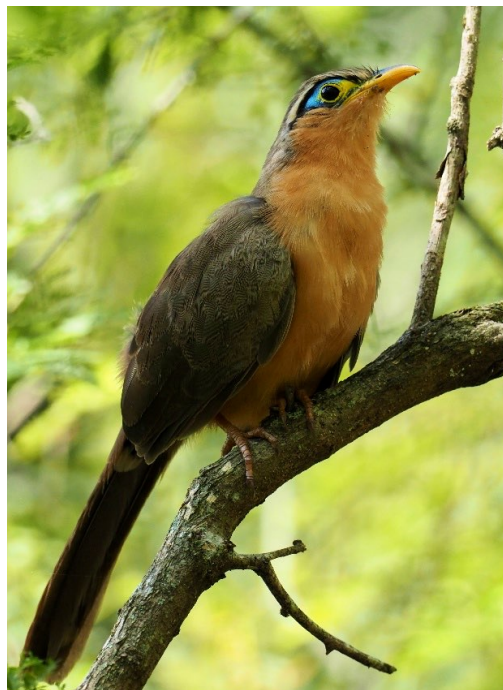
Tikal extension:

December 9th, 2021

Early drive to Ranchitos del Quetzal from Guatemala City. Birding stops will be made along the way in the arid Motagua Valley. The thorn-forest hotspots of Lo de China and Guaytan offer unique specialties such as Banded Wren, Lesser Roadrunner, Varied Bunting, Plain-capped Starthroat, Russet-crowned Motmot, Elegant Trogon and many more.

After birding for the morning in the thorn forest we will drive up to the central highlands reaching the humid cloud forests of Baja Verapaz. The habitat along the drive changes drastically, from the driest place in Central America to one of the most humid broad leaf forests in the country. Lunch will be at Hotel Posada Montaña del Quetzal. In the afternoon we will be looking for quetzals and Highland Guans near on the hotel grounds.

Overnight at Hotel Posada Montaña del Quetzal



Rufous-browed Wren - Photo credit: Daniel Aldana

December 10th, 2021:

We will leave the hotel early in the morning, to visit a nearby reserve that is one of the best places to try to see the Resplendent Quetzal and Azure-hooded Jay. At the reserve breakfast will be waiting for us. After trying for the quetzals and a few other targets like Blue-crowned Chlorophonia, Chestnut-headed Oropendola, Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush, Spotted Nightingale-Thrush, Tawny-throated Leaf-tosser. We will drive north to Tikal National park, this is 6 hours drive. We will stop for lunch on the way and also for birding stops at La Ventana and El Rosario National Park.

The estimated time of arrival to the Jungle Lodge in Tikal is around 8 pm. Dinner will be served at the hotel.



Spotted Nightingale-Thrush and Resplendent Quetzal - Photo credits: Daniel Aldana



Azure-hooded Jay - Photo credit: John Cahill

December 11th,2021:

Full day birding Tikal. The day will be spent exploring the archaeological site that is a fantastic birding hotspot and nature in general. We will start at the abandoned airstrip looking for Pheasant Cuckoo and Yucatan endemics such as Grey-throated Chat, Yucatan Flycatcher, Rose-throated Tanager, Black-throated Shrike-Tanager, etcetera. We will look for Boat-billed Heron in the ponds near the parking lot. Ocellated Turkey should be a relatively easy Yucatan endemic.

Lunch will be enjoyed inside the park. The afternoon will be spent birding and walking the archeological site looking for Orange-breasted Falcon and an extensive list of tropical rainforest species. We will end the day on top of a mayan temple contemplating the afternoon golden hours over the rainforest canopy and waiting for the chorus of Keel-billed Toucans. Owling is also an option on this day.

Overnight at the Jungle Lodge in Tikal



Ocellated Turkey - Photo credit: Daniel Aldana

December 12th,2021:

Morning birding Tikal. We will still be around Tikal in the morning looking for targets that we might have missed. After lunch we will drive to a different area, south of Tikal, the village of El Remate, located on the Lago Petén Itza. We will visit the Cerro Cahui reserve in the afternoon, in search of more interesting birds like Golden-crowned Warbler, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Pheasant Cuckoo, Mayan Antthrush, Yellow-bellied Tyrannulet and Olivaceous Woodcreeper.

The lake shore has also proven productive in the past, a good spot for viewing the elusive Ruddy Crake, Purple Gallinule, Snail Kite, Least Bittern and more. We will bird this area until dusk and then enjoy a nice dinner at Las Orquideas to celebrate the trip.

Overnight at Casa de Don David.

December 13th, 2021:

The birding tour officially ends at breakfast this day. Tikal extension participants will fly out from the Flores International Airport. Birding is optional during this day and will depend on participants departure times.



Orange-breasted Falcon - Photo credit: John Cahill