



Southeast Ecuador: Orange-throated Tanager; Jocotoco Antpitta & Regional Specialties

March 12-24, 2021



The foothills of southeastern Ecuador are some of the least explored areas of the country, primarily due to their remoteness and rugged terrain. Until recently, lack of infrastructure and conflict with neighboring Peru have kept all but the most intrepid birders away. However a peace treaty was signed between the two nations in 1999 and since then an ever expanding network of roads has made visiting the area a much more practical affair. The tour will visit 3 major areas: the deep southeast along the western slope of the Cordillera del Condor right along the Peruvian border; the lower eastern slopes of the famous Podocarpus National Park, and areas nearby, including the old Loja-Zamora road and the Tapichalaca Reserve south of the city of Loja. The tour will give participants a chance to see two of the world's most range-restricted species: the Orange-throated Tanager and the Jocotoco Antpitta. The tanager was long considered a Peruvian endemic until a small population was discovered in Ecuador in 1990 and the antpitta was only discovered and described to science in 1999! The tour will take us to the most accessible areas known where both can be seen and thanks to the aforementioned infrastructure improvements we can arrive into the core areas on wheels rather than undertaking the previously required arduous hikes and lengthy boat rides. Though these two species will be the highlight of the tour for many people, there will be an abundance of other interesting birds along the way that will be new even for experienced and well-traveled birders, and participants can expect a trip list of 350+ species during the tour. We will base primarily at 3 separate lodges during the tour: 3 nights at Casa Simpson at the Tapichalaca Reserve operated by the Jocotoco Foundation; 3 nights at Copalinga Lodge and 3 nights at Yankuam in the heart of the range of the Orange-throated Tanager. All three are comfortable and well-appointed with Yankuam being a bit more rustic than the others. We will also stay one night in the mountain town of Paquisha to break up the journey between Copalinga and Yankuam. If you're looking for an exciting tour to a relatively unexplored part of Ecuador with a chance to see some very rare birds, consider joining us as we delve into the avian riches of southeastern Ecuador.



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DAILY ITINERARY

Friday March 12, Day 1

Our tour begins today with arrival in Quito at Mariscal Sucre International Airport (airport code UIO). Upon arrival participants will be transferred to our hotel about 20 minutes away. Most flights from the U.S. arrive later in the evening and we will be leaving quite early the following morning, so participants are encouraged to arrive a day early to reduce the chances that they will miss the flight to Loja. Quito is an exciting, vibrant city with many options for exploration and we can help you with planning any additional time there prior to the beginning of the tour. Also, due to the late arriving flights, tonight's dinner will not be included in the tour price. Night in Quito.

Saturday March 13, Day 2

After breakfast at the hotel we will transfer back to the airport for our flight to Loja. This will likely be a very early flight, but our hotel is close to the airport and the early flight will afford us a full day of birding after we land. Upon arriving in Loja we'll gather our bags, meet our driver, load the bus and begin the 2-hour drive south to the Tapichalaca reserve. The temptation to begin birding immediately will be difficult to resist, so we will take time to look for some of the species typical of the area. The habitat near Loja will be characteristic of the drier Tumbesian zone (shared with NW Peru), so it should yield numerous species that we will not encounter on the rest of our route, such as Croaking Ground-Dove, Pacific Parrotlet, Fasciated Wren, Peruvian Meadowlark, and maybe even Peruvian Pygmy-Owl. However we won't linger long here as the more interesting birds lie further south and we will try to arrive at Tapichalaca by mid-afternoon to allow for some time to explore the trails and feeders there. This fairly new Ecuadorian reserve was established by the Jocotoco Foundation to protect the type of ridgetop forest preferred by the Jocotoco Antpitta. Our accommodations here are very comfortable in a beautiful two-story lodge with four bedrooms, each with a private bath and hot-water shower. If we arrive in time, we'll enjoy the wonderfully active hummingbird feeders surrounding the lodge where we can hope for Rufous-capped Thornbill among the many more common species. We'll have two nights here. Night at Tapichalaca.





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DAILY ITINERARY (cont)

Sunday-Monday March 14-15, Day 3-4

Tapichalaca's most famous resident is the Jocotoco Antpitta, a large, spectacular Grallarid and the namesake for the Jocotoco Foundation. With the help of Angel Paz, the "antpitta farmer" from northwestern Ecuador, the reserve's rangers have begun a worm feeding program and the Jocotoco Antpitta is now seen regularly along the trails of Tapichalaca. One of our mornings here will be dedicated to visiting one of these feeding sites, but bear in mind that these are wild birds and they don't always behave in predictable fashion. However our track record of seeing them here is good and they are often within a few feet of the observing area! Reaching the antpitta feeding area involves some climbing on trails that are often muddy, but it is not overly strenuous and we will take our time, birding as we go. There is much more to see at Tapichalaca than the Jocotoco Antpitta. The temperate forests of the reserve are home to over 300 species including Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucan, Bearded Guan, Ocellated Tapaculo, Golden-plumed Parakeet, Barred Fruiteater, Orange-banded Flycatcher, Barred Antthrush, Dusky Piha and Red-hooded Tanager. The feeders at the lodge attract a nice variety of hummingbirds including Chestnut-breasted Coronet, Long-tailed Sylph and Flame-throated Sunangel. If the weather is favorable and energy levels of the group are sufficient we will do some night birding on at least one evening with possibilities of seeing White-throated Screech-Owl and Swallow-winged Nightjar. Nights at Casa Simpson in Tapichalaca.

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L483255?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec> Casa Simpson at Tapichalaca





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DAILY ITINERARY (cont)

Tuesday March 16, Day 5

After breakfast and a last bit of birding around the reserve in Tapichalaca, we will begin the 3 hour drive to Copalinga Lodge situated on a lovely hillside in the Bombuscaro River valley near Podocarpus National Park. We will try to arrive for lunch and then have the afternoon to explore some of the trails around the lodge. Copalinga also has an elaborate feeding station that attracts numerous colorful tanagers and hummingbirds. The feeders near the dining area regularly host Violet-fronted and Black-throated Brilliants, Fork-tailed Woodnymph, Many-spotted Hummingbird, and Golden-tailed Sapphire and the flowering shrubs in the parking area attract Spangled Coquette and Booted Racket-tail. On the last afternoon, we can hike to a blind where corn scattered by the staff attracts the rarely seen Gray Tinamou. On our last tour here we had killer views of this rarely encountered species. Night at Copalinga Lodge.

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L481261?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec> Copalinga Lodge

Wednesday March 17, Day 6

Today we will spend the bulk of the day birding along the trails at the Bombuscaro sector of Podocarpus National Park, only a short drive from Copalinga. This will get us into some of the best foothill forest habitats of the tour and the birding will be fabulous. The main road into the park can be very productive for species like Ecuadorian Piedtail, Andean Motmot, Coppery-chested Jacamar, Black-streaked Puffbird, Blackish Antbird, Andean Cock-of-the-Rock, Amazonian Umbrellabird, and Blue-rumped Manakin. We will have picnic lunches prepared by the lodge to allow us more birding time and to avoid having to leave the park for several hours to eat. We will be away from our vehicle for much of the day, so we will hope for good weather. Slightly overcast days are generally best, but the birding can be good even in light rain as the headquarters area has shelter and can be a great place from which to bird while it's raining. Some of the possible birds here will include Foothill Elaenia, Lemon-browed Flycatcher, Golden-eared and Orange-eared Tanagers, Russet Antshrike, Yellow-breasted Antwren, Olive-backed Woodcreeper, Montane Foliage-gleaner, Streaked Xenops, Equatorial Graytail, Slaty-capped Flycatcher, Ecuadorian Tyrannulet, Gray-mantled Wren, Flame-crested Tanager and Deep-blue Flowerpiercer. This is also a good place for the very range-restricted White-necked Parakeet which moves up and down the valley in screeching groups in search of fruiting trees.

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L482424?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec> Podocarpus NP-Río Bombuscaro



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DAILY ITINERARY (cont)

Thursday March 18, Day 7

Much of today will be devoted to birding the old Loja-Zamora road which climbs eastward from Loja, cresting the eastern Andes at a low 9000 feet pass and winding down through still relatively undisturbed temperate and subtropical forest. On a good day (cloudy is best) this forest can teem with activity from Long-tailed Sylphs and Andean Cocks-of-the-rock feeding at the roadside to mixed flocks of up to twenty species of tanagers (including Yellow-throated, Rufous-crested, Saffron-crowned, Flame-faced, Blue-necked, Blue-browed, Golden, Golden-eared, Orange-eared, Vermilion, and Blue-winged Mountain). There is also a chance we'll encounter a noisy flock of White-capped Tanagers, a gregarious species that behaves more like a jay than a tanager! Near 5000 feet, mixed flocks could include rarities like Equatorial Graytail and Fulvous-breasted Flatbill. We will also have more chances here for the range-restricted White-necked Parakeet, an Ecuadorian near-endemic that was rediscovered in 1981 above Zamora. Night at Copalinga Lodge.

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L894839?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec> Old Loja-Zamora Road

Friday March 19, Day 8

We will have a final morning to explore the trails and feeders at Copalinga Lodge before driving for an hour and a half to the mountain town of Paquisha. We will bird along the way planning to arrive by late afternoon. Paquisha is merely a stopover point that will allow us early morning access to the highly productive areas around Chinapintza which is higher in the Andes and very near the Peruvian border. Paquisha is a small unremarkable town, but one with a lot of character that will give you a sense of what this part of Ecuador was like historically. Though the recent roadwork in the area has somewhat dimished its "living history museum" character, it still retains some of that charm and spending a night here will be a worthwhile experience. Night in Paquisha.

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L2209138?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec> Paquisha area





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DAILY ITINERARY (cont)

Saturday March 20, Day 9

We will leave the Paquisha early in order to get to the Chinapintza area situated at an elevation of about 7,000 feet. We plan to spend the majority of the day birding the humid slopes around Chinapintza where there are many extremely rare possibilities available. Though most of the forests around Chinapintza are still intact, an influx of gold mining in the hills above the village has been resulted in numerous roads leading up to the higher slopes and increased clearing of land. Though the birds suffer from such activities, the increased number of roads will allow us access to some of the higher parts of the mountain and this is where the best birds are to be found. Possibilities will include Black-streaked Puffbird, Buff-browed Foliage-gleaner, Scarlet-breasted Fruiteater, Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager and Yellow-throated Tanager. After a picnic lunch in the field we will continue on to Cabañas Yankuam where we will spend the next three nights and where we hope to encounter the very rare Orange-throated Tanager. Night at Cabañas Yankuam.

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L2209135?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec> Chinapintza area

Sunday-Monday March 21-22, Days 10-11

Yankuam Lodge sits on the banks of the Nangaritza River at the base of the west slope of the Cordillera del Condor, and surrounded by scenic ridges and hills. Though a bit on the rustic side, the lodge is comfortable with hot water and excellent food. The cabins are scattered about in the garden and the birding around the lodge is terrific. Yellow-bellied and Blue Dacnis and Turquoise Tanagers are common and Black-and-white Hawk-Eagle is frequent in the area. Uniform Crakes are possible in a nearby wetland but always difficult to see. We will have 2 full days and part of a third to explore the trails around Yankuam. Early starts will be imperative to take advantage of the early morning activity before it either gets too hot or begins to rain. Reaching the best Orange-throated Tanager territories used to require traveling up the river in motorized canoes, but a new bridge next to the lodge has made vehicular access to the best spots possible. Getting good views of the Orange-throated Tanager will be paramount here, but there are countless other interesting species to see as well including White Hawk, Spot-fronted and White-chinned swifts, Purplish Jacamar, Black and White-browed antbirds, Ocellated Woodcreeper, Rufous-tailed Foliage-gleaner, Speckled Spinetail, White-bellied Pygmy-Tyrant, Black-and-white and Golden-winged Tody-Flycatchers, Blackish Pewee, Cinnamon Manakin-Tyrant, Wing-barred Piprites, Sharpbill, Gray-tailed Piha, Flame-crested, Green-and-gold, and Yellow-backed tanagers, and Yellow-shouldered Grosbeak. A trail across the road from the lodge climbs rather steeply up to a nearby "tepui" and we will check the lower sections for Zimmer's Antbird, Green Manakin, Scarlet-breasted Fruiteater and Yellow-throated Tanager. We will return for a relaxing, sit-down lunch at the lodge on these days since the lodge will be close, and is the perfect spot to take a midday break during the hot hours of the day when activity dwindles. Nights at Yankuam.

<https://ebird.org/species/orttan1/L901084> Cabañas Yankuam & Tepui Trail



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DAILY ITINERARY (cont)

Tuesday March 23, Day 12

We will spend a final few hours around Yankuam this morning before driving back to Loja where we will take a mid-afternoon flight back to Quito. The internal flight schedules vary, but generally we should expect to be back in Quito by late afternoon or early evening. We will transfer to a hotel near the airport where we will have a final dinner and prepare for flights home the following day. Many U.S. airlines operate late evening flights out of Quito and if anyone is inclined they can schedule a red-eye flight home this evening. However participants should be aware that due to the uncertain flight schedules from Loja to Quito, there is a possibility that you won't make it back on time. At any rate, the hotel and dinner for this evening in Quito are included in the tour price. Night in Quito

Wednesday March 24, Day 13

Participants can schedule their flights home at any time today.

Golden Tanager





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Tour information

Cost

The price for this tour is \$3795 from Quito and includes 12 nights lodging (March 12-23), ground transportation in Ecuador, round trip airfare between Quito and Loja, guide service throughout the tour, all park entrance fees and all meals beginning with breakfast on Day 2 through dinner on Day 12. The price does not include round trip airfare between Quito and your originating city, alcoholic beverages, phone calls, laundry, gratuities or items of a personal nature. A single supplement of \$400 will be charged if you choose to room alone or if you do not have a roommate and we cannot provide one for you..

Tour Registration

A deposit of \$500 and a completed registration form will be required to secure a place on this tour. Checks should be made payable to Otus asio Tours and mailed to Jan Hansen at 900 Hillsborough Road in Chapel Hill NC 27516

Cancellation Policy

Cancellation penalties and refunds are based on the following schedule: if cancellation is made 90 days or more before the tour departure date, the deposit less \$250 per person is refundable. If cancellation is made fewer than 90 days before departure date and after final payment is received the refunded amount will be limited to the amount that can be recouped from merchants and booking agents. This could be as little as 25% of the tour price. We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.

Leader

The tour will be led by Marcelo Quipo and Jan Hansen. Marcelo has led numerous trips in Ecuador for Otus asio Tours and has some of the best eyes and ears of any local guide we have ever used.

Documents

To enter Ecuador you will need a passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure date. Visas are not required for U.S. citizens entering Ecuador.

Altitude and Trip Difficulty

Like most tropical tours, there will be hiking involved to increase our chances of seeing forest-based species. The difficulty level will vary from wide trails with rolling hills at Bombuscaro (a few sections are steeper, but footing is generally good) to some steeper trails with uneven footing at Copalinga and around Yankuam. Most of our birding will take place between 1500-4000 feet, but we will spend some time at higher elevations near the town of Zamora where we may be as high as 7000 feet. Temperatures will range from hot at midday (80's-90's), to comfortably cool mornings and nights (60's-70's). Along the Loja-Zamora road, it can be quite chilly if it is overcast, but our time in this habitat will be minimal. The coolest temperatures we will experience will probably be near Quito, but we will only be there for two short nights.



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Tour information (cont)

Altitude and Trip Difficulty (cont)

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of the tour will be the length of time we spend on our feet each day. Though the hiking will be done at a leisurely pace, spending many hours at a time standing or moving slowly can take its toll on people over time. This something to consider when trying to decide if this is the right tour for you. It is also important to note that this part of Ecuador is very wet and it can rain at any time. Trails are often muddy and slippery and this also can be problematic for people who are in poor physical condition. However, in general, anyone in reasonable good physical condition should be able to participate in all phases of this tour without any difficulty.

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Clothing

As is the case with all tropical tours, lightweight field clothing is recommended. Quick dry, lightweight field pants and long-sleeved shirts are best. A hat and sunscreen are recommended for protection from the sun. **DARK-COLORED OR EARTH TONE CLOTHING IS STRONGLY RECOMMENDED, AS WHITE AND OTHER BRIGHT COLORS FRIGHTEN THE BIRDS.** Lightweight and comfortable hiking shoes are recommended since we will spend a good bit of time on foot. Waterproof boots are essential as the trails can be muddy. Knee high rubber boots will keep your feet dry in wet, muddy conditions and are also good for keeping chiggers and other biting insects at bay. A rain jacket or a poncho are also necessary items for the trip.

Currency

The currency used in Ecuador is the US dollar, so there is no need to change or obtain foreign currency during this tour.

Field Guides

Recommended field guide for the tour is:

Ridgely, Robert S. and Paul J. Greenfield. The Birds of Ecuador. Cornell University Press. June, 2001.



Central Panama & the Darién

March 12-24, 2021

Tour information (cont)

Health

Please remember to bring any prescription medicine you are taking and to pack it in your carry-on baggage. We recommend that you be up to date with tetanus, typhoid and polio vaccinations, and strongly consider inoculations against Hepatitis types A and B. None of these are required but prudent travelers should be current on these things regardless of their destination. Malaria is present in Ecuador so please consult with a physician about appropriate medication. Yellow fever vaccination is not necessary for entry into Ecuador. There are a few other mosquito and fly borne diseases present in Ecuador including Dengue Fever and Zika. There is no vaccine available to protect against these, but contraction rates are very low and the best protection is wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants and using insect repellent. We recommend checking the CDC website for any current recommendations on visiting this part of Ecuador. The web address is www.cdc.gov/travel. Tap water is generally not potable and drinkable in Ecuador and drinking it is not recommended, but bottled or purified water will be available for purchase throughout the tour.

Other Trip Essentials

Other important items will be sunglasses, sunscreen, lip balm, toilet paper and an alarm clock. You should also bring a refillable water bottle so that you don't have to purchase and dispose of plastic bottles everyday. A day pack in which to carry things you will need during our birding excursions is always a good idea.

Miscellaneous

There is no departure tax due at the airport. This fee is included in the cost of your air ticket.

Electricity: 110 volts and the outlets are the same as those in the U.S.

Language: Spanish is the official language

Time: Central Standard Time.

Information

For further information please contact Jan Hansen at otusasiotours@gmail.com or at 919-259-9423.