

Colombia

Avian Jewels of the Western and Central Andes

July 1 to 15, 2025



Trogon
© Christopher Calonje

SAFARI OVERVIEW

Discover Colombia, the birdwatching capital of the world! With over 1,900 bird species—making up 20% of global avian diversity—this biodiverse paradise is a must-visit for nature enthusiasts. Nestled within just 0.7% of Earth’s landmass, Colombia offers unrivaled birding experiences across its cloud forests, wetlands, and Andean peaks.

Embark on an unforgettable birdwatching safari, where you’ll explore lush ecosystems teeming with rare and endemic species. From the leks of the fiery red Andean Cock-of-the-Rock to the vibrant tanager flocks of the legendary Anchicayá Watershed, every moment promises spectacular sightings.

More than just a birding tour, this adventure connects you with Colombia’s rich culture and conservation efforts. Discover hidden ecological treasures, engage with local communities, and support sustainable travel initiatives. Whether you’re soaking in Andean hot springs while spotting hummingbirds or navigating biodiverse marshlands, this safari promises a once-in-a-lifetime wildlife experience.

Why Choose This Colombia Birding Safari?

- **Discover Colombia's Birding Paradise:** Spot endemic and migratory birds in Colombia, the world's top birdwatching destination with over 1,900 species.
- **Witness Spectacular Displays:** Experience the vibrant Cock-of-the-Rock courtship and colorful tanagers in the Anchicayá Valley.
- **Explore Diverse Birding Habitats:** Visit wetlands, lagoons, and cloud forests across the Andes, home to rare hummingbirds and tropical species.
- **Expert-Led Birdwatching Tours:** Maximize sightings of elusive species with guidance from a top Colombian naturalist.
- **Support Ethical Ecotourism:** Travel sustainably, supporting local conservation and communities through this responsible birding tour.

LEADER: Jose Luna.

DAYS: 15, including estimated travel time.

GROUP SIZE: 8.

COST: \$5,990 per person, double occupancy, not including airfare, singles extra. See the *Costs* section on page 8.

Date	Description	Accommodation	Meals
Jul 1	Travel to Cali. Arrive in Cali, Colombia, the gateway to your birdwatching safari and a city locals call "a branch of heaven."	Hotel Guadalajara, Buga	D
Jul 2	Lagoon birding and Andes adventure. Birdwatch at the Sonso Lagoon, one of the few wetlands left in Cauca Valley, then ascend the bird-rich Central Andes.	Hotel Quo, Manizales	B, L, D
Jul 3	Rio Blanco Reserve. Explore Rio Blanco Reserve, renowned for its diverse ecosystems and rare Andean bird species.	Hotel Quo, Manizales	B, L, D
Jul 4	Local birding efforts. Discover uncommon birds at Owl's Watch Nature Preserve, a prime spot for Colombia birding enthusiasts.	Hotel Quo, Manizales	B, L, D
Jul 5	High altitude birding. Start with breakfast birding on a cattle farm, then ascend to 11,000 ft for high-altitude avian sightings.	Terminales, Hotel Termales del Ruiz	B, L, D
Jul 6	More high altitude birding. Explore above the tree line at Los Nevados National Park, home to endemic highland species.	Hotel Termales del Ruiz, Manizales	B, L, D
Jul 7	Tinamu Nature Reserve. Travel to Pereira stopping for lunch and birding at Tinamu Nature Reserve, a hotspot for tropical species.	Hotel Movich, Pereira	B, L, D
Jul 8	Otun-Quimbaya Reserve. Spot howler monkeys and vibrant birdlife at the lush Otún-Quimbaya Sanctuary in the Western Andes.	Hotel Movich, Pereira	B, L, D

Jul 9	Finding the Ruby. Journey to Araucana Lodge, birding en route at National Grape Park to spot the dazzling Ruby-topaz Hummingbird.	Araucana Lodge, Valle del Cauca	B, L, D
Jul 10	Western Andes birding. Bird along KM 18 in the Western Andes in search of tanagers, plus stop at an Andean Cock-of-the-Rock lek and a garden with hummingbird feeders.	Araucana Lodge, Valle del Cauca	B, L, D
Jul 11	Cock-of-the-Rock Lek. Bird the biodiverse Upper Anchicaya and visit Doña Doras in the morning; witness the spectacle of a Cock-of-the-Rock lek in the afternoon.	Araucana Lodge, Valle del Cauca	B, L, D
Jul 12	More hummingbird spotting. Explore near the lodge, including visits to the hummingbird feeders and fruit plates for up-close bird watching.	Araucana Lodge, Valle del Cauca	B, L, D
Jul 13	Unique rail ride. Ride the rails to San Cipriano to explore the pristine forests at the reserve and view an abundance of birdlife.	Araucana Lodge, Valle del Cauca	B, L, D
Jul 14	Exploring diverse habitats. Contrast the dry forest rain shadow habitat near Atuncella in the morning with the Rio Bravo wetlands in the afternoon.	Araucana Lodge, Valle del Cauca	B, L, D
Jul 15	Depart for home. Leave for your flights home, with a rich bird list and wonderful memories.		B

LEADER



Jose Luna

Jose was born and raised in the western Andes of Colombia, and he has been birding since he was 16 years old. Jose was the first guide to join Colombia Birdwatch and has since traveled throughout most regions of Colombia with hundreds of guests from all corners of the world. Jose shines amongst his colleagues for his calm demeanor, friendliness, and proficiency in English, not to mention his ability to find birds.

DETAILED ITINERARY

Jul 1 ~ Arrive in Cali, Colombia

Meet your host at the airport and drive to the city of Buga in a private vehicle. If you would like to arrive earlier, we can arrange divergent airport transfers and extra nights.

Jul 2 ~ Sonso Lagoon

Start early to take a 15-minute drive to this wetland gem. Sonso Lagoon is one of the only remaining wetlands in the Cauca Valley and is teeming with birds, making it one of Colombia's best wetland birding locations. Scan the marshes and lagoons that line the Cauca River for Fulvous and Black-bellied Whistling Ducks, Roseate Spoonbill, Glossy Ibis, Anhinga, Herons (Little Blue, Cooi, and Striated), Snowy Egret, Black-necked Stilt, and Snail Kite. We are likely to find Wattled Jacana, which have a polyandry mating system, meaning females mate with many males within a breeding season. Polyandry is a fascinating adaptation that occurs in less than 1% of birds and is most common among shorebirds.



Yellow-Headed Caracara
© Christopher Calonje

Other interesting species you might spot include the endemic Apical Flycatcher and Grayish Piculet, Jet Antbird, Blackish Rail, Ruby-topaz Hummingbird, and Horned Screamer. Along riparian areas you may find Greater Ani, Ringed Kingfisher, Crested and Yellow-headed Caracara, Red-crowned and Spot-breasted Woodpeckers, and Cocoa Woodcreeper. Greater Anis are fascinating because two to four unrelated pairs form a nesting group that build a single nest in which all the females lay their eggs and raise the young communally.

After lunch, you will traverse the Cauca Valley and begin the ascent up the central Andes towards the city of Manizales in the famed Coffee Triangle.

Jul 3 ~ Rio Blanco Nature Reserve

The Rio Blanco Reserve is owned by Aguas de Manizales, the local water company, and is situated along an altitudinal gradient, therefore including a wide variety of ecosystems. You could possibly observe five antpitta species, including the endemic and endangered Brown-banded, the elusive Bicolored, the Chestnut-crowned, the Chestnut-naped, and the Slate crowned Antpittas at feeders located within a short hike from the lodge. Other feeder visitors seldom seen include Slaty-backed Nightingale Thrush and Stripe-headed Brush Finch. Additional species observed in Rio Blanco include the uncommon and endangered Rufous-fronted and Golden-plumed Parakeets and the very rare and sought-after Masked Saltator. Other species you may encounter at this vast reserve include Tyrannine Woodcreeper, Golden-fronted Whitestart, Dusky Piha, Lachrymose and Buff-breasted Mountain Tanagers, showy Grass-green and White-capped Tanagers, Powerful Woodpecker, and the hard to see Ocellated, Blackish, and Spillman's Tapaculos. Less common species that are possible are Long-tailed Black-billed Peppershrike, the handsome Plushcap, Red-hooded Tanager, Mountain Cacique, and the endangered Golden-plumed Parakeet.



Chestnut-Crowned Antpitta
© Christopher Calonje

Jul 4 ~ Owl's Watch Nature Reserve

The Owl's Watch Nature Reserve is located adjacent to Rio Blanco providing a great opportunity to search out any species that we may have missed at Rio Blanco. The staff there have also mastered the art of attracting birds to feeders, so it is possible to see Tourmaline Sunangel, Buff-tailed Coronet, Speckled Hummingbird, Bronzy and Collared Incas, Mountain Velvetbreast, the tiny, slow-flying White-bellied Woodstar, and the showy Long-tailed Sylph.

Jul 5 ~ Manizales to Caldas

Hacienda El Bosque is roughly an hour drive from Manizales, so plan to get there early in time for breakfast before the amazing birding begins. The day will be spent on this working cattle farm that produces milk, whose owners have been protecting large swaths of forests and paramo ecosystems for decades. Some of your targets on this wonderful property are Crescent-faced Antpitta, Gray-breasted Mountain Toucan (comes to feeders to eat grapes), Collared Inca, Tourmaline Sunangel, Buff-winged Starfrontlet, Mountain Velvet Breast, Purple-backed Thornbill, Sword-billed Hummingbird, and Hooded Mountain-Tanager. Lunch will be at the hacienda, and you will have time for some afternoon birding



Buffy Helmetcrest
© Christopher Calonje

before driving up the mountain to spend two nights at Hotel Termas del Ruiz, at 11,000 feet, where you can relax in its mineral-rich, medicinal hot springs and enjoy scenic views of the central Andes.

Jul 6 ~ Los Nevados National Park

Explore Los Nevados National Park, located on the highest part of the Colombian central Andes. Wind through patches of forest that open to Paramo, an ecosystem of tropical grasslands above the treeline, toward the picturesque 5,300-meter (17,400-foot) volcano Nevado del Ruiz. The scenery in Paramo is magical and surreal, with velvety frailejon plants adding to this effect. Frailejon plants belong to the Espeletia genus and are endemic to Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador.



Blue-necked Tanager
© Christopher Calonje

The tour reaches elevations up to 13,000 feet, so it will be cold. Here the goal is to find species adapted to high elevations like the endemic Buffy Helmet Crest and the near endemic Rainbow-Bearded Thornbill, both of which sometimes forage on the ground. Also possible are Viridian Metal Tail, Stout-billed Cinclodes, Brown-backed Chat-tyrant, the beautiful Golden-crowned Tanager, near endemic Black-backed Bush Tanager, and Glossy Flower Piercer. We may also find a variety of seedeaters in the Paramo, including Plumbeous Sierra Finch plus Paramo and Plain-colored Seedeaters.

Jul 7 ~ Los Nevados National Park to Pereira via Tinamu Nature Reserve

The morning is spent searching for any targets that may have been missed and enjoying the hummingbird feeders at the hotel. There is also a chance to look for the very rare and endangered endemic Rufus-fronted Parakeet along a two-kilometer stretch of road that passes through elfin forest, an ecosystem of dwarfed plants. You may spot the very tame Tawny Antpitta, a common companion in this area.

You will stop for lunch at Tinamu Lodge where some of the species include Moustached Puffbird, Jet Antbird, Stripe-throated Hermit, and Bay-headed, Blue-necked and Guira Tanagers. Fifteen species of hummingbirds have been observed at the lodge, including Long-billed Star Throat, White-vented Plumeteer, and Western Emerald.



Green Jay
© Christopher Calonje

Jul 8 ~ Otun-Quimbaya Reserve

The Otun-Quimbaya Reserve is a flora and fauna sanctuary located on the west slope of the Central Cordillera and is home to the wax palm, the tallest palm in the world and the national tree of Colombia. These palms, unlike most other species of palm, thrive at high altitudes and cool climates found here. You will also be received by the sounds of Howler Monkeys and the endangered, endemic Cauca guan, once believed to be extinct until rediscovery of a population in 1990. Another rare target is the endemic Hooded Antpitta. Otun-Quimbaya is also one of the best places in the world to observe Red-ruffed Fruit Crow. You will search for endemics – Chestnut Wood Quail,

recently described Stiles's Tapaculo and near endemics, like Moustached Antpitta, the handsome Rufous-breasted Flycatcher, and bright-colored Golden-fronted Whitestart. Other impressive birds include Three-striped, Russet-crowned, and Canada Warblers, Masked Trogon, Green Jay, Andean Motmot, Blue-naped Chlorophonia, and Orange-bellied Euphonia. You will also look for Black-billed Mountain Toucan, Chestnut-breasted Wren, Plumbeous-crowned Tyrannulet, Marble-faced and Variegated Bristle-tyrants, and Glossy and Masked Flowerpiercers.

July 9 ~ Pereira to Aruacana Lodge via National Grape Park

This day is devoted to traveling to the spectacular Aruacana Lodge, with a stop at the Grape Park in the Cauca Valley where the main goal is to photograph Ruby Topaz Hummingbird. The bird is attracted to the yellow flowers of the Aloe Vera plant, which is planted at the park specifically to attract this species.

Jul 10 ~ Cloud Forest of KM 18 and San Antonio

Spend the day around the famous KM 18, located on a 5,900-ft (1,800-m) pass 11mi (18km) northwest of Cali, along the road connecting Cali with Buenaventura's port city. Birding can be very productive with more than 180 species recorded in the San Antonio Forest. You'll search for four endemics: Chestnut Wood Quail, Colombian Chachalaca, Grayish Piculet, and the threatened, spectacular Multicolored Tanager. This area is a tanager paradise where you have a good chance to observe some stunning birds like Choco-endemic Purplish-mantled, Summer, Golden, near-endemic Scrub, Metallic-green, Saffron-crowned, and Golden-naped Tanagers as well as Ashy-throated Bush Tanager and Blue-winged Mountain Tanager.



Golden Tanager
© Christopher Calonje

You may be privileged to see an impressive show of hummingbirds at a private house along the same road including the beautifully ornate Long-tailed Sylph, Booted Rackettail, Blue-headed Sapphire, Green Violetear, Fawn-breasted Brilliant, Speckled Hummingbird, White-necked Jacobin, Brown Violetear, and Tawny-bellied Hermit. Birding the forest can also produce many near endemics such as Scrub Tanager, Purple-throated Woodstar, and Nariño Tapaculo.

Jul 11 ~ Upper Anchicaya

Perhaps Colombia's most famous birding locations is the Anchicaya watershed in the Farallones National Park, one of the most diverse parks on the planet. The birding begins just 30min from the hotel via a paved road that can offer many of the Choco endemics that this mega diverse locality has to offer. You will spend the day birding along the upper portion of the road.



Silver-Throated Tanager
© Christopher Calonje

You will devote some time to the El Descanso area where Doña Dora, displaced by war, started a small cafeteria to support her family, which she, over time, has turned into a destination for birders. You can observe many of the following in the area: Rufous-throated, Glistening-green, and Silver-throated Tanagers. A day of birding on the road should yield many highly prized species including the endemic Crested Ant Tanager, Golden-collared Honeycreeper, White-whiskered Puffbird, Uniform Treehunter, Sooty-headed Wren, Green Thorntail, and Empress Brilliant. Toucan Barbet, sporting five different colors elegantly while still having a tough demeanor, will be one of the main targets. Don't forget to keep scanning the skies for Barred hawk, Ornate Hawk-eagle, and Swallow-tailed Kites, whilst keeping an eye out on low branches for the attractive Ornate Flycatcher feeding. Another target is the recently described Tatama Tapaculo.

After lunch you'll drive two hours to an Andean Cock-of-the-Rock lek to witness the spectacular mating rituals of these fascinating birds.

July 12 ~ Araucana Lodge

Spend the day on the 30 acres of the Araucana Lodge in search of some of the targets that include species such as Parker's Antbird, Grayish Piculet, Apical Flycatcher, Smoky Brown Woodpecker, Bar-crested Antshrike, Spectacled Parrotlet, Scaled Antpitta, Crimson-rumped Toucanet, Colombian Chachalaca, and Scale-crested Pygmy-tyrant.

You will also have opportunities to explore the more than 5km of trails that wind through the pre-montane forest on the property and stroll around the organic coffee, fruit, and vegetable gardens that provide produce for your meals at the lodge.

July 13 ~ San Cipriano Reserve

Drive for about 1.5 hours to Zaragosa, your entry point into the humid forests of the San Cipriano Reserve. Since the reserve does not have roads, access is via a pleasant ride on *brujitas*, which are motorcycle-powered wooden carts on rails that have been ingeniously engineered by the locals. In the heart of the Choco Bioregion, the area is known for being one of the wettest and most biodiverse on the planet. Some of the possible birds include Choco Toucan, Stripe-billed Aracari, Blue-headed Parrots, Spot-crowned, Broad-billed Motmot, Purple-throated Fruitcrow, and Tawny-crested Tanager. Also possible are near endemics: Black-tipped Cotinga, Rose-faced Parrot, and Five-colored Barbet.



Broad-Billed Motmot
© Christopher Calonje

The area is teeming with antbirds, with chances to see Ocellated, Jet, Stub-tailed, and Bicolored Antbirds. With the high humidity and heat, you hope to find species such as Pacific and Checker-throated Antwrens, Pacific Flatbill, Cinnamon Becard, Thicket Antpitta, Black-chested Puffbird, White-ringed Flycatcher, Blue-black Grosbeak, and Blue-crowned and Golden-collared Manakin.

July 14 ~ Atuncella and Rio Bravo

Drive about 40min to visit the village of Atuncella, where a very interesting habitat exists due to a localized rain shadow. A dry forest with several endemic cactus species harbors entertaining birds such as Bar-crested Antshrike and Striped Cuckoo. Other targets of this area include Pale-breasted Spinetail, Golden-rumped Euphonia, and the endemic Apical Flycatcher and Cocoa Woodcreeper.

When it starts to warm up, you will head back to the main road for lunch and a one-hour drive to the Rio Bravo Reserve, known as one of the wettest parts of the world, where you will seek out targets such as Rufus-throated Tanager, Purplish-mantled Tanager, Brown-billed Scythebill, Sooty-headed Wren, White-winged Tanager, Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaner, Uniform Antshrike, Rufous-Rumped Antwren, Cerulean Warbler, and Uniform Treehunter.

Jul 15 ~ Depart for home

After breakfast at the Araucana Lodge, you will be transferred to the airport for your flights home.

COSTS (ALL COSTS ARE IN US DOLLARS)

Cost

Type	Cost per Person
Trip Cost, double occupancy	\$5,990
Single Supplement	\$845

Costs are per person, double occupancy, not including airfare, singles extra. See *Included* and *Not Included* sections for more details.

Payment Schedule

Payment	Due Date	Amount per Person
Deposit	Due now to reserve your space	\$500
Final	January 1, 2025	Remaining Balance

Payments are due based on the schedule above. All reservations require a deposit to confirm reservation of your space.

Cancellations

Until the Final Payment due date, deposits are refundable except for a cancellation fee of \$150 per person, which can be applied toward another trip if reserved within six months of the cancelled trip's departure date. Cancellations are non-transferrable. No refunds are given after the Final Payment due date.

Included

- Carbon offsets for the duration of this trip.
- All leaders, transport, park entry fees, landing fees, and permits for all activities unless described as optional.
- Accommodations (double occupancy) for the nights of July 1 through July 14.
- Meals from dinner on July 1 through breakfast on July 15.
- Purified water at the lodge to refill your water bottle.
- Juice during every meal.
- Soda and beer at restaurants.
- Transfers between the Cali airport and Hotel Guadalajara and between the Araucana Lodge and the Cali airport regardless of the day.
- Trip Planning Materials – information about entry requirements, flights, packing, gratuities, etc.

Not Included

- Carbon offsets for your flights to/from this trip.
- All airfare, airport and departure taxes, and excess baggage fees. Round-trip airfare is approximately \$500 to \$850 between the US and Cali, depending on origin.
- Passport and visa fees.
- COVID tests.
- Extra hotel nights.
- Gratuities – tipping is always discretionary. However, we suggest budgeting about \$25 to \$35 per participant per day for 15 days for our main leader, local leaders, and lodge staff (about \$375 to \$525 total per participant).
- [Emergency evacuation insurance and trip cancellation insurance.](#)
- Items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone calls, medical costs or hospitalization, room service, items not on the regular menu, etc. If you have special dietary needs, please indicate them on your Traveler Form.

SIGN UP

Please contact us first to check availability, reserve your space, and obtain a Traveler Form. To confirm your reservation, we require a deposit and signed form from each participant.

[Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris](#)

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WhatsApp: (408) 741-5330

Phone: (800) 527-5330 or (408) 741-5330

OTHER DETAILS

Climate

The climate has been variable over the last few years. But generally, temperatures will be hot and humid in the lowlands (70°F at night to 85°F during the day) and comfortable in the highlands (60°F at night to 70°F during the day), but it can be quite chilly at high elevations where you should plan to wear layers.

Fitness Level

This trip involves ascending from the lowlands to an elevation above 10,000ft. There will be time to acclimate, but if you have heart or lung disease, or any other reason to suspect that high altitude may pose a problem for you, please speak with your doctor before booking this trip. Walks are not strenuous, but the elevation may make them feel more difficult while in the Central Andes. In the lower elevation, the cock-of-the-rock lek requires a 15-minute hike down and a 25-minute hike up on a trail in good condition. The days in Sanso Lagoon and San Cipriano require 2 to 3-mile hikes and are hot and humid. Please contact us if you have any health concerns that may make this trip challenging.

Flights

Detailed logistical information is included in the Trip Planning Materials we will send you.

Flights you book

- Arrive in Cali, Colombia (CLO) by 3:00pm on July 1.
- Depart from Cali, Colombia (CLO) after 10:00am on July 15.

Terms and Conditions

Read our current [Terms and Conditions](#).

Conservation

Our company ethos has always regarded conservation as inseparable from responsible tourism. We struggle with the dilemma that traveling worldwide expends climate-changing carbon. However, we wholeheartedly believe that traveling with us will cultivate your passion for conserving our beautiful world while stimulating each destination's local economy. We encourage you to explore the various ways in which Cheesemans' operates within this context:

- **Ecotourism and Conservation for [Colombia](#).**
- **Cheesemans' Trips are [Carbon Neutral](#).**
- **Offsetting your Travel to/from our Trip:** We ask you to pledge to offset the carbon emissions for your travel to and from our trips. You can purchase offsets with most airlines (Delta includes them

automatically), use our handy [carbon calculator](#) and donate to Sustainable Travel International, or contribute to your favorite offsetting organization.