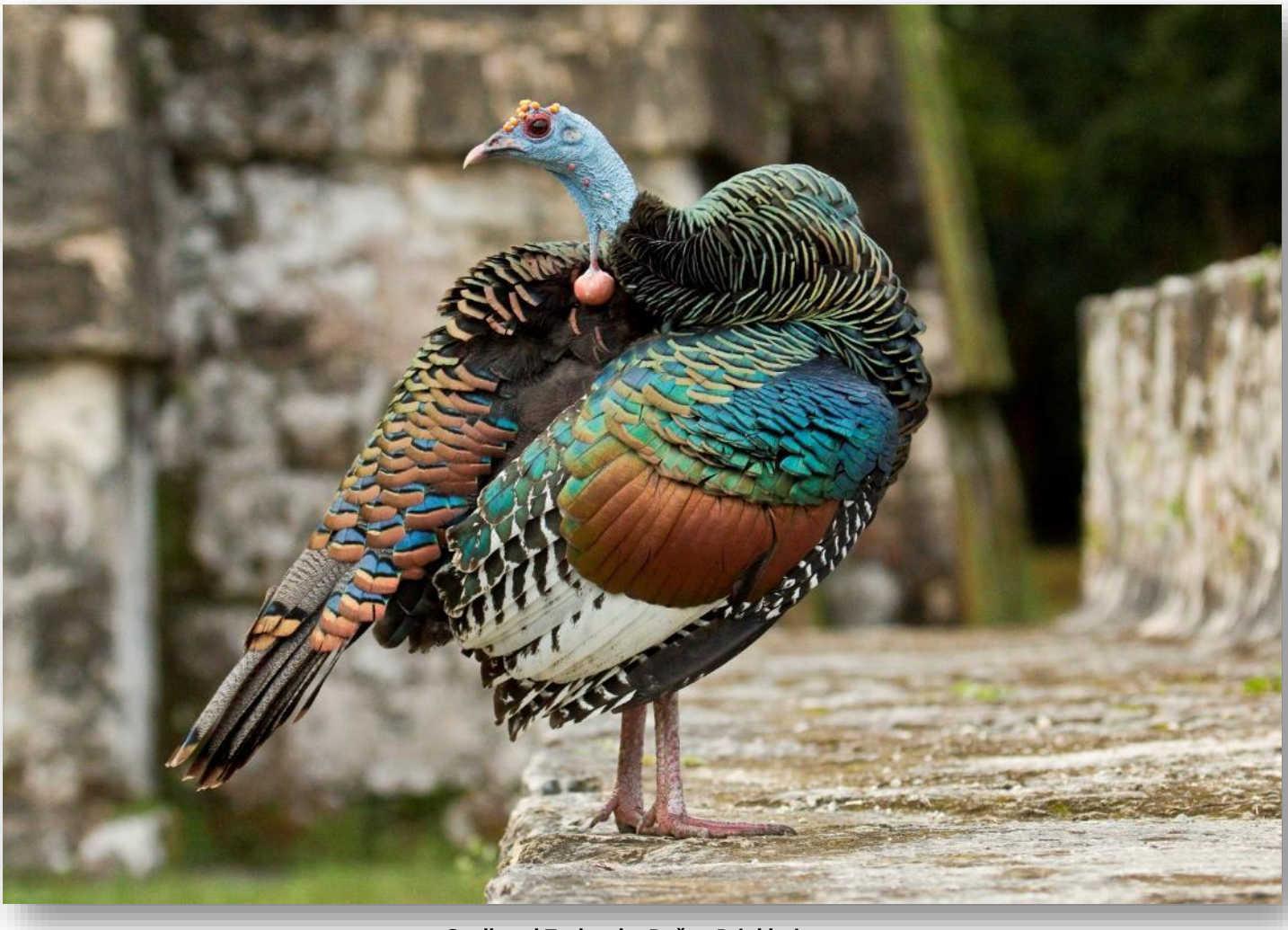
Belize & Guatemala

Bird Photo Tour

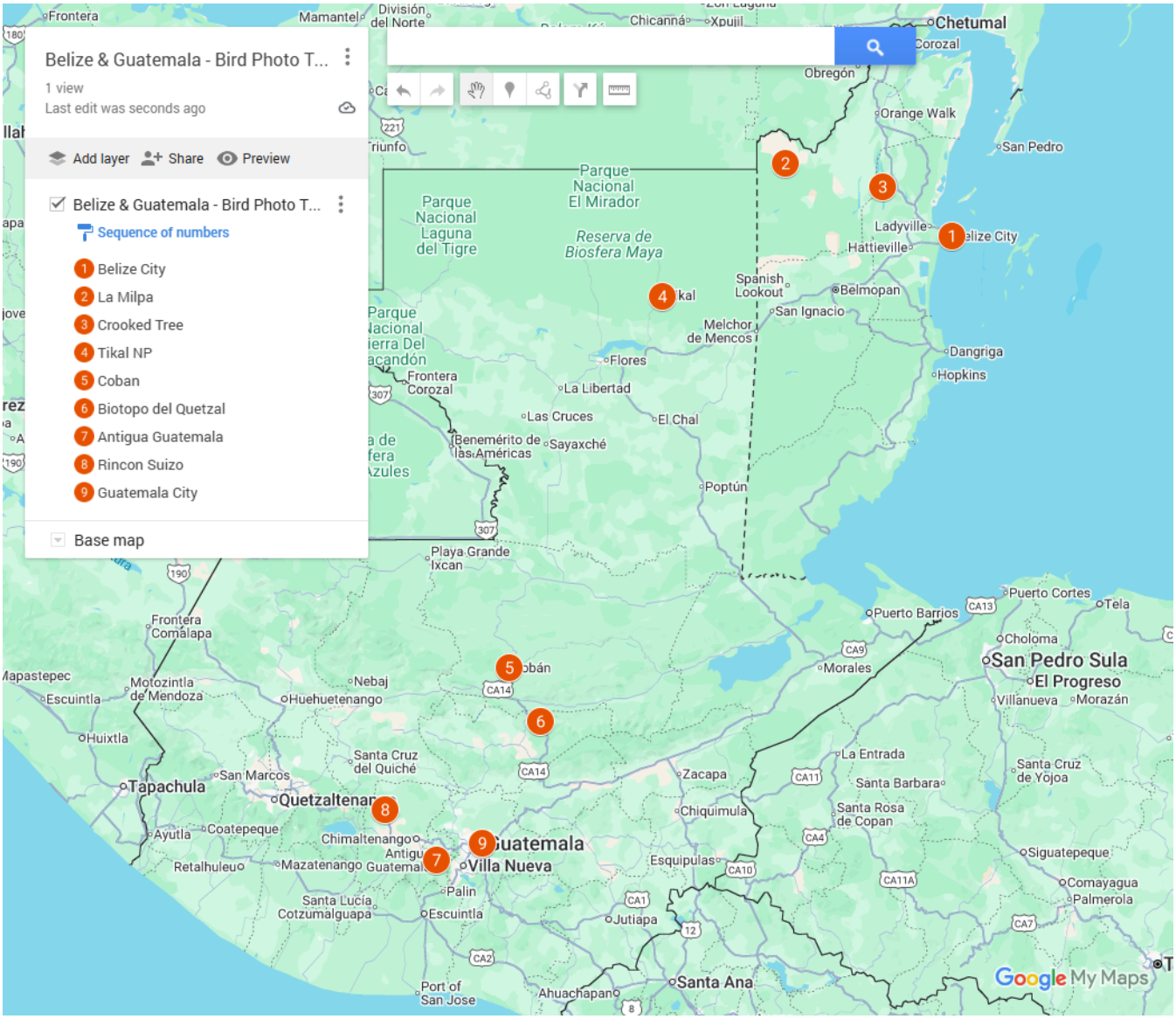


Ocellated Turkey by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Tiny Belize, the only English-speaking Central American nation, supports the highest density of Jaguar known to man and claims the world's second largest barrier reef. Our tour begins in Belize, taking in La Milpa, a large series of Mayan ruins full of birds. We'll next head to the famed Crooked Tree Sanctuary, where opportunities for many Yucatan endemics are plentiful. Waterbirds of all sorts abound, and there is a great chance to get up close and personal with the spectacular Jabiru, the largest flying bird in the New World!

Crossing into Guatemala, we take in the remarkable Mayan temple complexes and cities of Tikal National Park that dominate the region of Petén. Here we target such highly sought-after species as the remarkable Ocellated Turkey, Black-throated Shrike-Tanager, Pale-billed Woodpecker, Mayan Antthrush, Tropical Royal Flycatcher and the impressive Great Curassow! This northern Petén region of Guatemala is covered in extensive lowland rainforest harbouring many special birds of the Yucatan Peninsula and other more widespread forest species, most of which will represent new species for our tour. Not only is the birding superb, but mammal viewing and fascinating historical insights only add to our appreciation of the area. Leaving the Petén area behind, we head into the Guatemalan highlands to seek out Resplendent Quetzal, Russet-crowned Motmot, Rufous Sabrewing, Blue-and-white Mockingbird, Pink-headed Warbler, Guatemalan Pygmy Owl and Collared Trogon.

Itinerary & Map



Belize & Guatemala Bird Photo Tour

Day 1	**Arrival in Belize City, tranfser to La Milpa**
Day 2	**La Milpa Archaeological Site**
Day 3	**La Milpa to Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary**
Day 4	**Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary**
Day 5	**Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary to Tikal National Park, Guatemala**
Days 6 & 7	**Tikal National Park**
Day 8	**Tikal National Park to Coban**
Day 9	**Biotopo del Quetzal**
Day 10	**Coban to Antigua Guatemala via El Rancho & El Pilar**
Day 11	**Rincon Suizo, Tecpan & El Pilar**
Day 12	**Antigua Guatemala to Guatemala City & final departure**

Highlights

- ***Diverse Habitats: The tour covers a wide range of habitats, from rainforests and archaeological sites to wetlands and coastal lagoons, providing opportunities to see and photograph a diverse array of species.***
- ***Central America's most sacred (and attractive?) bird, the Resplendent Quetzal, both the national bird and currency of Guatemalan!***
- ***Cultural Significance: The tour visits several cultural sites such as La Milpa and Tikal that double up as excellent birding, wildlife and photographic sites.***

Sites in detail

Belize City to La Milpa. The two hour drive from Belize City to La Milpa traverses the massive Rio Bravo Conservation Area in the northwest of the country. We'll make several birding stops at key locations photogenic Snail Kites, Black-throated Bobwhites, Aplomado Falcon and Jabiru.



Snail Kite by Bobby Wilcox

La Milpa Archaeological Site. We'll spend our time birding the Rio Bravo Reserve, La Milpa Archaeological Site and Blue Creek rice fields. Northern Belize is a premier birdwatching destination, and La Milpa boasts diverse forest species like Tropical Royal Flycatcher, Barred and Collared Forest Falcons, Strong-billed Woodcreeper, Laughing Falcon, Rose-throated Tanager, Grey-throated Chat, Purple-crowned Fairy, Mealy Amazons and other

Yucatan endemics. We'll have our first chances for Great Curassow and Ocellated Turkey who often roam trails at the edge of the compound's.

The hotel gardens are exceptional for photography, attracting flocks of honeycreepers, parrots, tanagers, and allies to the forest edge. In the open farmlands, we'll seek White-tailed Hawk, Aplomado and Bat Falcons, and hopefully, a Pinnated Bittern concealed among roadside reeds.

A night drive will focus on finding Middle American Screech Owl, Northern Potoo, Spectacled Owl, and perhaps even the elusive Jaguar.



Agami Heron by Rob Williams

Maya Mountains area. We'll head south towards the foothills of the Maya Mountains scanning for Black and Ornate Hawk-Eagles, Golden-crowned Warbler, various jacamars and trogons.

Ant Trail Wetlands. A short stop here should produce Black-bellied Whistling Ducks, Common Gallinule, Yellow-crowned Night Heron, possibly Crested Caracara and Vermilion Flycatchers. We'll also keep an eye out for Hook-billed Kite, Laughing Falcon and, Golden-hooded Tanager.

Gra Gra Lagoon. A short detour to the coast at Gra Gra Lagoon should give us good views of Roseate Spoonbills, Black-necked Stilts, Yucatan Vireo and Mangrove Warbler.

Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary. Situated on the shores of Belize's first RAMSAR site, we will be birding during the 'dry' season when the wetlands receive a huge influx of refuge-seeking, migratory water birds. Around our

lodge, we hope to see Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, Snail Kite, Roseate Spoonbill, Wood Stork, Limpkin, Black-collared Hawk, Tropical Mockingbird, Yucatan and Yellow-headed Amazons, Rufous-breasted Spinetail, Northern Cardinal, Couch's Kingbird, Green-backed Sparrow and and Buff-bellied Hummingbird.



Jabiru by Dušan Brinkhuizen

An early morning boat trip through the maze of lagoons and creeks will turn up several waterfowl in large numbers, none will be quite as 'large' as South and Central America's tallest bird, the Jabiru. We expect to see some of these impressive locals as they begin nesting. With some luck, our boat trip will also produce some of the much sought after, but shy species such as Sungrebe, Boat-billed Heron or Agami Heron. Other possible species include Bare-throated Tiger Heron, Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Rufous-naped Wood Rail, American Pygmy Kingfisher, and Laughing Falcon.

This evening after dinner, we will head out to search for potoos, owls and nighthawks around the lodge.

Black Rock Lodge. This lodge has excellent feeders and and photgraphic optioins, and we'll be on the look out for White necked Jacobin, Wedge-tailed Sabrewing, Green and Red-legged Honeycreepers, Ornate Hawk-Eagle, White Hawk, Gartered Trogon and even the very elusive Black-and-white Hawk-Eagle.

Tikal National Park. Believed to have supported over three million people at its peak, Tikal was once one of the major cultural, military and population centres of the Mayan civilisation. The Tikal temple complex and main

city cover an area of more than 16km^2 (6.2 miles^2) and includes about 3 000 structures; though the residential area of Tikal covers an estimated 60km^2 (23 miles^2), all of which now falls within the 570km^2 (220 miles^2) Tikal National Park. The city itself is believed to have supported up to 90 000 people but the site was abandoned in the latter part of the 10th century, mostly due to the lack of water – remarkably the city relied entirely on rainfall! For centuries it lay untouched as the rainforest regenerated and swallowed it up, covering all the temples and other buildings. Now much of the city has been restored, although thousands of structures are still buried under mounds of dirt and covered in trees. Tikal was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979 and it now attracts thousands of visitors annually.



White-necked Jacobin by Adam Riley

During our time here, we should soon become acquainted with the more common denizens of this remarkable park, including flocks of unbelievably patterned and remarkably tame Ocellated Turkeys. This stunning gamebird is one of only two species of turkey and is restricted to the Yucatan Peninsula. Another gamebird species that is commonly encountered in flocks here is Plain Chachalaca, while we should also observe the impressive Great Curassow and Crested Guan during our time at Tikal. The strident yet melodious bubbling call of Montezuma Oropendola will be bursting around us as these attractive icterids prepare themselves for roosting in large flocks. Brown Jays will also be obvious, another common bird of open spaces. The pond area near our lodge holds some interesting birds including the nocturnal Boat-billed Heron (such a distinctive bird that it used to be considered the sole member of a unique family), Limpkins, and if we are lucky, Ruddy Crake

and Grey-necked Wood Rail. Here we can also observe the uncommon Morelet's Crocodile, another Yucatan endemic.

We will keep an eye out for Brown-hooded Parrot, Stripe-throated Hermit, Black-headed Trogon, Chestnut-colored Woodpecker, Plain Xenops, Tawny-winged, Northern Barred and Ivory-billed Woodcreepers, Plain Antvireo, cute Stub-tailed Spadebill, Red-capped and White-collared Manakins, Northern Rough-winged



Resplendent Quetzal by Lev Frid

Swallow (the distinctive Ridgeway's subspecies), White-bellied Emerald, active Long-billed Gnatwren, Black-cowled Oriole, the localised Black-throated Shrike-Tanager, Green Honeycreeper and Blue Bunting.

As hunting is prohibited in Tikal National Park, mammals wander freely between the primary forest and ruins. The most commonly observed are White-nosed Coaties, Central America Agouties, and Northern Grey Foxes walking around the park grounds, and both Central American Spider Monkeys and Central American Black Howler Monkeys in the forest canopy.

Biotopo del Quetzal & Ranchitos del Quetzal. Biotopo del Quetzal is a protected area founded in 1977 by Mario Dary Rivera, former director of San Carlos University. The reserve covers 1 150 hectares of primary cloud forest at 1 500 – 2 300m (4 920 – 7 545ft). The private Ranchitos del Quetzal is located next to Biotopo. Loop trails are available in both reserves providing access to the cloud forest. The Biotopo and neighboring private reserves

are part of the Sierra de Chuacús, which connects cloud forests of Sierra de las Minas with cloud forests in Alta Verapaz.

These exciting cloud forest hold an impressive number of Resplendent Quetzal, which will be our primary target. Other species of interest include Green-throated Mountaingem, Northern Tufted Flycatcher, Unicolored Jay, Crescent-chested Warbler and Blue-crowned Chlorophonia. We'll also be hoping to connect with the handsome Azure-hooded Jay and Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush. In the evening, we'll try to find the reclusive Fulvous Owl or Bearded Screech Owl.



Turquoise-browed Motmot by Adam Riley

El Rancho. A quick side stop at El Rancho may turn up a few dry forest specailtieis such as the regionally endemic Orange-fronted Parakeet and both Russet-crowned and Turquoise-browed Motmots.

Antigua Guatemala. We'll take some time time to explore the magic of this ancient city, wondering around old churches and cultural sites. This colonial town is in the heart of an Important Bird Area of southern Guatemala. The area has been designated as such because of a high number of endemic bird species restricted to the highlands of northern Central America and southern Mexico.

Antigua is located at an elevation of 1 500 m (4 900 ft) and the surrounding skyline is dominated by mountain ridges over 2 500m, specficailly the towering volcanoes og Agua, Acatenango, and Fuego. Hillsides are covered with plantations of shaded coffee, avocado and macadamia trees, small corn fields, and forest patches. These are mainly pine-oak and arid forests because the valley of Antigua is rather dry. Only some hilltops receive enough humidity for cloud forests to flourish. Some of these forests between 1 500 and 2 600m (4 900 – 8 500ft) are easily accessible from town.



Violet Sabrewing by Bobby Wilcox

Finca El Pilar. This private shade-coffee farm is perched on a nearby hillside above the city Antigua Guatemala offering dramatic views of the three surrounding volcanoes (one of them active and smoking) that loom over the town.

Much of the natural forest habitat here is protected as a conservation area and visitors are welcome to walk the region's numerous trails. We can anticipate many exciting and colourful species! Hummingbird feeders situated on the lower slopes are swarmed by a profusion of highland species, often gathering in large numbers. Several species can be seen, including White-eared, Azure-crowned, Berylline, and Rivoli's Hummingbirds, Green-throated Mountaingem and the near endemic Rufous and Violet Sabrewings.

The lower slopes are also home to Bushy-crested Jay and Emerald Toucanet, while mixed flocks may include Rose-throated Becard, Squirrel Cuckoo, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, scarce Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo, Acorn, Velasquez's, Golden-olive and Hairy Woodpeckers, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and the unique Guatemalan sub-

species of Northern Flicker (a possible future armchair tick!). Even the scarce Collared Forest Falcon or White-breasted Hawk might appear. In the scrubby undergrowth, we'll look for the shy White-naped Brushfinch as well as Inca and White-tipped Doves and Rufous-capped Warbler.

Driving up to a higher elevation of around 2 000m (6 600ft), a convenient car park will allow spectacular views overlooking the volcanoes Agua, Acatenango and the smoking Fuego. A different selection of birds occur in the drier forest habitat, including the distinctive local race of Plumbeous Vireo, Blue-headed and Hutton's Vireos, Flame-colored Tanager, Hooded Grosbeak, families of Eastern Bluebirds, Rufous-collared and Black Thrush, Hermit, MacGillivray's, Red-faced and Golden-browed Warblers, Black-vented Oriole and Black-headed Siskin.



Pink-headed Warbler by Adam Riley

Tecpan. The pine and oak mixed temperate forest of El Rincon Suizo in the Tecpan area gives us further chances for the delightful Pink-headed Warbler, a stunning species and one of Guatemala's most sought-after specialties. Other birds that we will look for include Acorn Woodpecker, Pacific Parakeet, Painted Redstart, Hermit, Red-faced and the monotypic Olive Warbler, Blue-throated Motmot, Blue-and-white Mockingbird, Steller's Jay (rather different looking to the northern forms of this species), American Bushtit, Band-backed Wren, Amethyst-throated Mountaingem, Spotted and Spot-crowned Woodcreepers, Brown Creeper, Pine Flycatcher and, if we are very fortunate, Scaled Antpitta (seen on previous Rockjumper tours to this area).

Tour Grading & Key

Photography		Good overall. Some species are seen within the forest, or in the upper canopy. Some lodges have good feeder setups.
Overall Ease		Moderate. Suitable for most photography / birding / wildlife interest levels.
Accommodation		Comfortable, some lodges are simple/rustic.
Walking / Trails		Mostly short walks on relatively flat ground. Some trails within forest can be narrower. Depending on weather conditions, some trails may be muddy.
Vehicles / Roads		Several drives, some long. Mostly sealed roads between towns, changing to dirt in remoter areas. Mountain passes and eroded dirt roads can be bumpy. Most roads in mountainous areas are winding.
Birding Ease		Moderate, several forest skulkers & some low-density targets. Garden & lodge birding typically easier offering good visuals of many species. Limited time to find all specialties, focus on photography.
Annoyances		Some winding roads can cause motion sickness, small biting insects in places. The lowlands of Guatemala & Belize can be hot & very humid.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 12;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursion to a traditional Maasai village;
- Optional guided forest walks;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- It is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20kg (44lb) for check in luggage and 8kg (+-18lb) for hand luggage.
- We will be birding some mountainous areas of Guatemala on foot along forest trails that can be muddy when wet. A generally good level of fitness is required for this tour.
- Even though distances from location to location are relatively short, there can be some long driving days due to the condition of some roads, as well as the mountainous nature of the areas we visit.
- It can be hot and humid with harsh sun in the lowlands, so please come prepared with hats and sun cream for protection. Humidity levels are high for much of the tour.
- Mosquitoes and tiny bloodsucking flies can be numerous at times, and it is advisable to pack a good supply of DEET or another effective insect repellent.

Bird Photo Tours

- Our Bird Photo Tours are a hybrid between our Classic birding tours and dedicated photographic tours. You don't have to be a professional photographer or have the biggest lens; this is for everyone with an interest in photography and birding. Whether you're using a bridge camera or the latest body and prime lens, our aims are the same.
- These tours are not aimed at seeing the most species possible on the route, rather taking time to photograph key targets and any other interesting species we may find. Naturally, the overall species list will be lower than a comparable birding focused tour.
- Whilst we may use blinds, feeders and hide setups on some of these tours, we will not be spending an entire day nor even several hours fixed in one spot.
- These tours are suitable for photographers who prefer opportunistic photography over entire days in a hide.
- Our leaders will assist in helping everyone secure good photographic opportunities and advise as much as they can on camera setup. However, they are not professional photographic tour leaders.

Arrival and Departure Details

Day 1 of the tour will depart Belize City with a group transfer to La Milpa. The tour will conclude after breakfast on day 12 in Guatemala City.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Philip S. W. Goldson International Airport, Belize City (IATA: BZE) and La Aurora International Airport, Guatemala City (IATA: GUA) are the main ports of entry and departure for this tour.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.