Argentina & Chile

Altiplano, Andes & Humboldt Coast



Andean Condor by Dušan Brinkhuizen

This remarkable journey through northwestern Argentina and northern Chile explores one of South America's most dramatic and ecologically diverse regions. Beginning in the lush subtropical foothills of Tucumán, we quickly ascend into the spectacular Andean landscapes of Tafí del Valle, where high-altitude grasslands and montane forests host regional endemics such as Tucuman Mountain Finch, Red-tailed Comet, and Moreno's Ground Dove.

From here, we traverse the arid Valles Calchaquíes, a land of towering cacti, sculpted red-rock formations, and vast open valleys. Scenic routes such as the Quebrada de las Conchas and Cuesta del Obispo provide breathtaking vistas and excellent birding, with species like Sandy Gallito, Steinbach's Canastero, and the majestic Andean Condor.

Continuing north, we explore the striking Quebrada de Humahuaca, a UNESCO World Heritage Site rich in both cultural history and Andean biodiversity. This dramatic valley supports birds such as Straight-billed Earthcreeper, Black-hooded Sierra Finch, and Grey-hooded Parakeet, all well adapted to these dry intermontane landscapes.

Crossing the high-altitude Salinas Grandes and the dramatic Paso de Jama, we enter Chile and the vast Altiplano, where saline lakes and puna grasslands hold Andean Avocet, Puna Ibis, and elegant James's Flamingos against a backdrop of volcanic peaks.

The Chilean leg of the tour focuses on the high Andean lagoons of the Atacama Desert, including Miscanti, Miñiques, and Tuyajto. These pristine waters support specialised species such as Andean Goose, Puna Teal, and Grey-breasted Seedsnipe, all thriving in this stark, high-elevation environment.

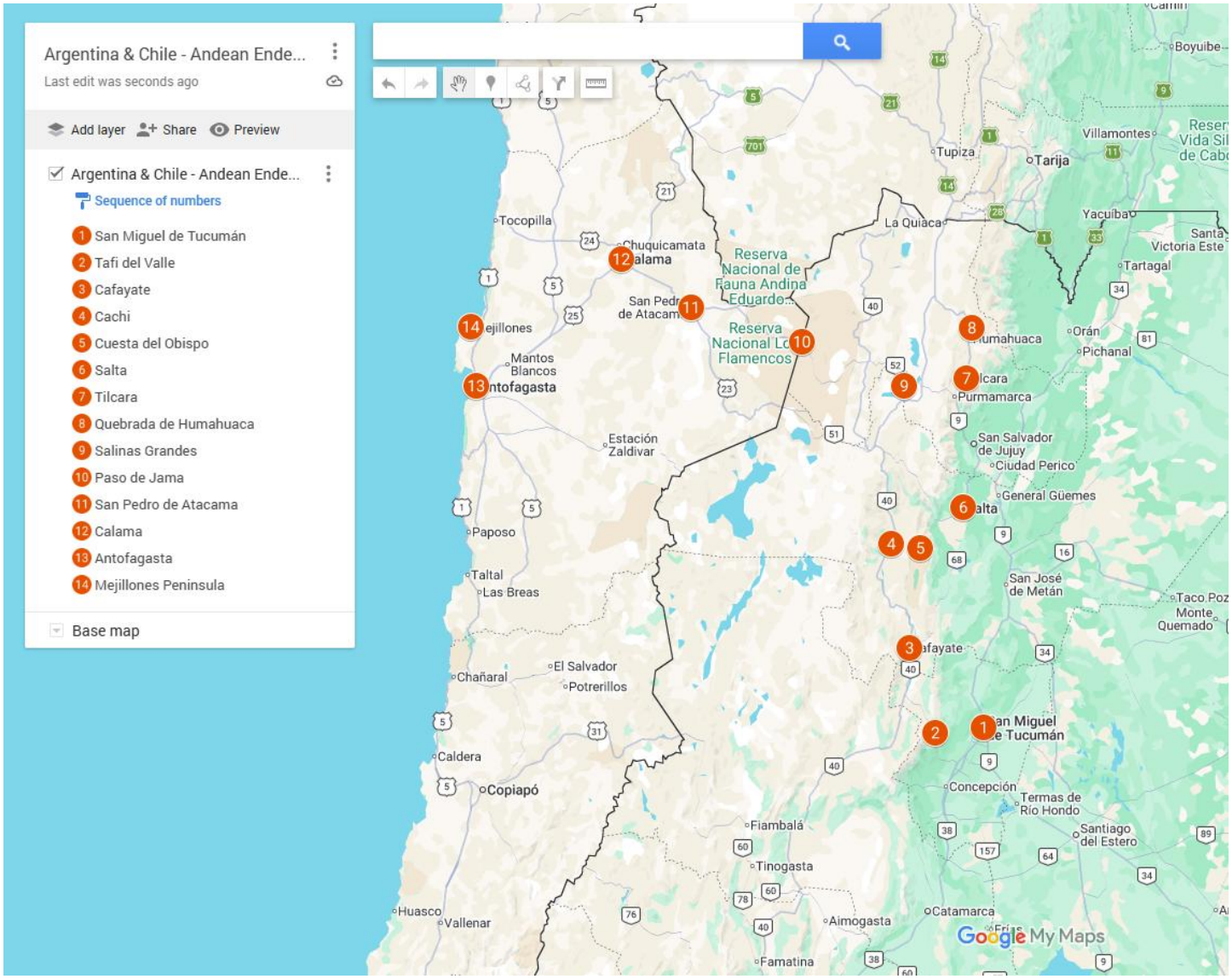
An early start takes us to the famed El Tatio Geysers, where steaming fumaroles and icy morning air create an unforgettable setting. Here we may encounter Andean Hillstar, White-winged Cinclodes, and Puna Miner, while nearby wetlands attract a variety of high-Andean specialists.

As we descend toward the Pacific, the desert landscape gradually softens along the Río Loa and coastal margins, eventually giving way to the rich marine ecosystem of the Humboldt Current. The Mejillones Peninsula offers a superb finale, with seabirds such as Inca Tern, Peruvian Pelican, and Red-legged Cormorant providing a dynamic and rewarding end to the journey.

This tour combines exceptional scenery, diverse habitats, and a carefully designed route to showcase some of the most sought-after birds of the southern Andes, delivering a rich and memorable birding experience.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in San Miguel de Tucumán**
Day 2	**San Miguel de Tucumán to Tafi del Valle via Rio Los Sosa Valley**
Day 3	**Tafi del Valle**
Day 4	**Tafi del Valle to Cafayate via Quebrada de las Conchas**
Day 5	**Cafayate to Cachi via Valles Calchaquíes**
Day 6	**Cachi to Salta via Parque Nacional Los Cardones & Cuesta del Obispo**
Day 7	**Salta to Tilcara**
Day 8	**Purmamarca & Quebrada de Humahuaca**
Day 9	**Tilcara to San Pedro de Atacama (Chile) via Salinas Grandes & Paso de Jama**
Day 10	**San Pedro de Atacama (Miscanti & Miñiques Lagoons, Salar de Talar & Tuyajto)**
Day 11	**San Pedro to Calama via El Tatio Geysers, Putana wetlands & Salar de Atacama**
Day 12	**Calama to Antofagasta via Río Loa Valley**
Day 13	**Mejillones Peninsula**
Day 14	**Final departure**


Argentina & Chile - Andean Ende...
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Sequence of numbers
1 San Miguel de Tucumán
2 Tafi del Valle
3 Cafayate
4 Cachi
5 Cuesta del Obispo
6 Salta
7 Tilcara
8 Quebrada de Humahuaca
9 Salinas Grandes
10 Paso de Jama
11 San Pedro de Atacama
12 Calama
13 Antofagasta
14 Mejillones Peninsula
Base map
Tocopilla
Chuquicamata
Reserva Nacional de Fauna Andina Eduardo...
Reserva Nacional Los Flamencos
Mantos Blancos
Estación Zaldivar
Paposo
Taltal
Las Breas
Chañaral
El Salvador
Potrerillos
Caldera
Copiapó
Huasco
Vallenar
Tupiza
Tarija
La Quiaca
Yacuiba
Tartagal
Orán
Pichanal
Purmamarca
San Salvador de Jujuy
Ciudad Perico
General Güemes
San José de Metán
Concepción
Termas de Río Hondo
Santiago del Estero
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Birding sites in detail



Yellow-striped Brush Finch by Clayton Burne

Rio Los Sosa Valley. The ascent through the Río Los Sosa Valley provides our first immersion into the lush Yungas cloud forest, where dense vegetation cloaks the steep Andean slopes. This productive stretch is particularly rewarding for a suite of localised specialities including the endemic Yellow-striped Brushfinch and Tucuman Amazon, alongside Rusty-browed Warbling Finch, Plumbeous Tyrant, Crested Becard, and Black-backed Grosbeak. Skulkers such as Yungas Guan and White-browed Tapaculo add to the challenge, while the lively Brown-capped Whitestart is often encountered along forest edges.

Fast-flowing rivers cut through the valley, offering opportunities for Torrent Duck and, with luck, the highly localised Rufous-throated Dipper, one of the region's most sought-after species.

Tafi del Valle & surrounds. Today we explore the diverse habitats around Tafí del Valle, ranging from the reed-fringed shores of La Angostura reservoir to the windswept high Andean grasslands of El Infiernillo Pass. This elevational gradient supports an excellent range of regional specialities, including the endemic Tucuman Mountain Finch and Moreno's Ground Dove, alongside White-browed Tapaculo and the striking Red-tailed Comet.

Lower slopes and scrubby areas hold species such as Checkered Woodpecker, Spot-breasted Thornbird, and Greater Wagtail-Tyrant, while more open terrain provides opportunities for Buff-breasted Earthcreeper, Streak-fronted Thornbird, and Ash-breasted Sierra Finch. Higher elevations support Ornate Tinamou and Paramo Pipit, with Rufous-banded Miner and Andean Negrito also possible in suitable habitat.



Rufous-throated Dipper by Clayton Burne

Overhead, Andean Condor may be seen soaring along the ridgelines, while Aplomado Falcon patrols the valley. Additional species such as Black-billed Shrike-Tyrant, Brown-capped Whitestart, and Plumbeous Sierra Finch add further diversity to this scenic Andean landscape.

Quebrada de las Conchas & Cafayate. Departing Tafí del Valle, we descend from the high Andean grasslands into progressively drier landscapes, eventually entering the spectacular Quebrada de las Conchas. This dramatic canyon is defined by towering red and ochre rock formations, sculpted cliffs, and winding riverbeds, creating one of the most visually striking regions in northwestern Argentina.

The surrounding Monte desert supports a specialised avifauna adapted to these arid conditions. Here we search



Moreno's Ground Dove by Bobby Wilcox

for key species such as the endemic Sandy Gallito and Steinbach's Canastero, alongside White-throated Cacholote, Chaco Earthcreeper, and Patagonian Mockingbird. Dry scrub and riverbeds may also produce Ringed Warbling Finch and the striking Ultramarine Grosbeak, while overhead raptors, including the occasional Andean Condor, may be seen soaring above the canyon walls.

Arriving in the verdant wine-growing region of Cafayate, the contrast is immediate. Irrigated vineyards and surrounding scrub attract large flocks of Green-cheeked Parakeet and the local form of Burrowing Parrot, while nearby thorny habitats hold Chaco Puffbird, White-winged Black Tyrant, and both Green-barred and Checkered Woodpeckers. This combination of dramatic scenery and diverse birdlife makes for one of the most memorable transitions of the tour.

Valles Calchaquíes. Today we travel north through the spectacular Valles Calchaquíes, following a scenic route via the Quebrada de las Flechas, Molinos, and Seclantás toward Cachi. This vast intermontane valley is characterised by classic Monte desert habitat, where towering cardón cacti and low, stunted scrub dominate an arid landscape framed by rugged Andean peaks. The Quebrada de las Flechas, with its dramatic, jagged rock formations, provides a particularly memorable stretch of the journey and ranks among the most striking landscapes of the tour.

Birdlife here is highly specialised, reflecting the harsh, dry conditions. Key targets include the endemic Sandy Gallito and Steinbach's Canastero, both well adapted to life among sparse shrubs and open ground. More conspicuous species include White-throated Cacholote, Patagonian Mockingbird, and White-fronted Woodpecker, often seen foraging in the scattered vegetation. The attractive Golden-rumped Euphonia may be encountered in slightly lusher pockets, while the nomadic Cinnamon Warbling Finch and Monte Yellow Finch remain unpredictable but highly desirable possibilities.

This route offers a fascinating contrast to the greener habitats visited earlier in the tour, combining exceptional scenery with a suite of range-restricted desert specialists as we continue deeper into the Andean northwest.



Tucuman Mountain Finch by Bobby Wilcox



Sandy Gallito by Clayton Burne

Parque Nacional Los Cardones & Cuesta del Obispo. Leaving Cachi, we cross the arid expanse of Parque Nacional Los Cardones, a striking landscape of open valleys dotted with towering cardón cacti and framed by high Andean ridges. This high-altitude environment supports a suite of specialists, with opportunities for species such as Puna Canastero, Grey-hooded Parakeet, and the range-restricted Rock Earthcreeper, while Andean Condor may be seen soaring overhead.

From here, we ascend to the high pass before beginning the dramatic descent along the Cuesta del Obispo, one of the most scenic routes in northwestern Argentina. As we wind down through steep, eroded slopes, the habitat gradually shifts from dry puna and scrub into patches of Yungas cloud forest, creating a rich mosaic of birding opportunities.

This elevational transition produces an excellent diversity of species, including Boulder Finch, Zimmer's Tapaculo, and Rufous-webbed Bush Tyrant, alongside Scribble-tailed and Maquis Canasteros. In more sheltered and forested sections, we may encounter Yungas Guan, Brown-capped Tit-Spinetail, and Rufous-bellied Mountain Tanager, while Ornate Tinamou and Plain-colored Seedeater occur in more open areas. This varied and scenic drive provides a fitting conclusion to our time in Argentina's Andean northwest as we descend toward Salta.

Yala & Purmamarca. The lush Yungas foothills and montane forest provide a final opportunity to explore this rich habitat. Here we search for key species such as Red-faced Guan, Fulvous-headed Brushfinch, and Cream-backed Woodpecker, along with a variety of other forest and edge specialists typical of this biodiverse region.



Quebrada de Humahuaca scenery by Clayton Burne



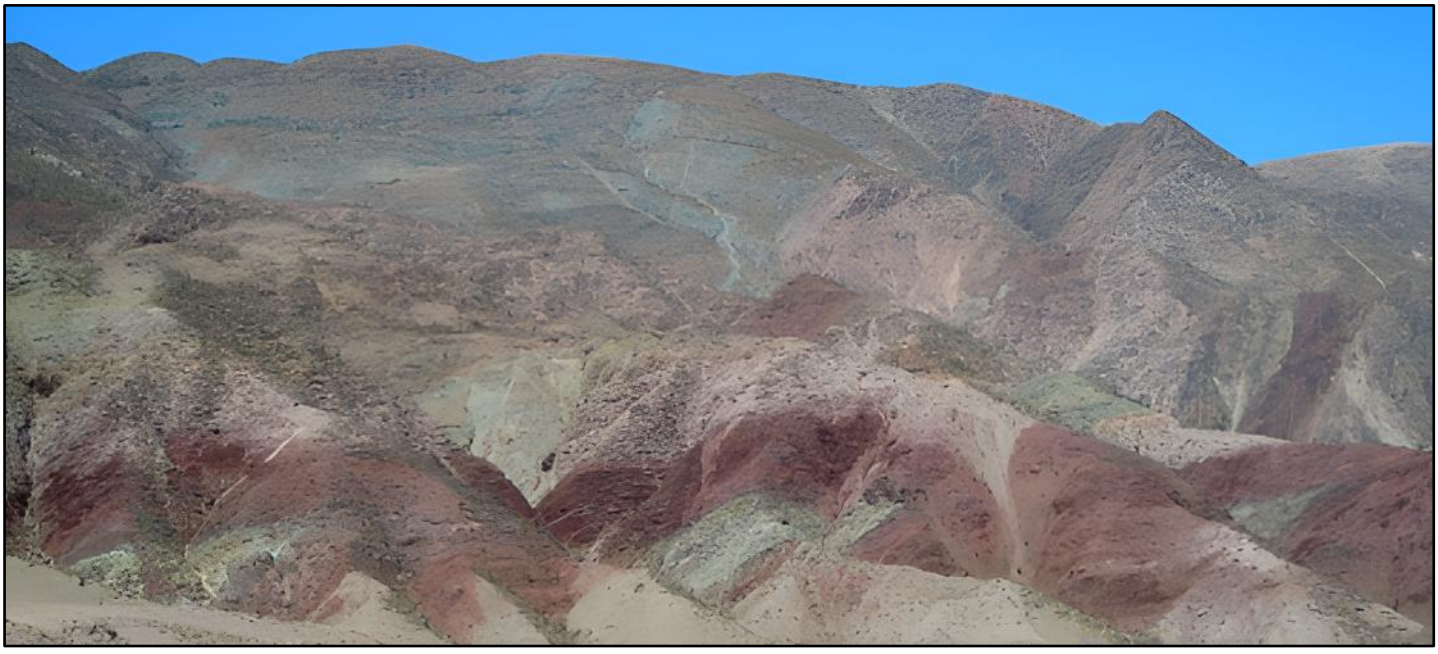
Red-tailed Comet by Dubi Shapiro

Leaving the Yungas behind, we travel north into progressively drier landscapes, with the scenery shifting dramatically to the rugged, multicoloured slopes around Purmamarca and the southern reaches of the Quebrada de Humahuaca. Birding en route and around Tilcara focuses on these arid habitats, where species such as Straight-billed Earthcreeper, Rufous-banded Miner, and Black-hooded Sierra Finch are typical, while Grey-hooded Parakeet and Andean Swift are often seen overhead. This gradual transition provides an excellent introduction to the Andean dry valley.

Quebrada de Humahuaca & Hornocal. Today we explore the spectacular Quebrada de Humahuaca, travelling north from Tilcara through a series of dramatic, multicoloured valleys framed by towering Andean ridges. This ancient corridor has long served as a natural route through the mountains, but today it is the striking scenery and unique high-Andean habitats that take centre stage.

We make a series of birding stops around Purmamarca, Uquía, and Humahuaca, where dry slopes, riverbeds, and open scrub support a distinctive suite of species. Here we search for Straight-billed Earthcreeper, Rufous-banded and Common Miners, Black-hooded Sierra Finch, and White-tipped Plantcutter, while Grey-hooded Parakeet and Andean Swift are often seen overhead. Raptors such as Cinereous Harrier and Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle patrol the valley, and the colourful Blue-and-yellow Tanager may be encountered in more vegetated areas.

A highlight of the day is the ascent to the spectacular Hornocal viewpoint, where vividly layered mountains create one of the most striking landscapes in the Andes. At these higher elevations, additional species such as



Paleta del Pintor by Clayton Burne



Steinbach's Canastero by Amanda Guercio

Puna specialists may be encountered, rounding off a rewarding day of birding and scenery before returning to Tilcara.

Cuesta de Lipán. We start with a dramatic ascent out of the Quebrada de Humahuaca via the winding Cuesta de Lipán, a series of sweeping switchbacks climbing rapidly into the high Andes. As we gain elevation, dry valley slopes give way to puna grassland and increasingly open, windswept landscapes. Birding along this stretch can produce species such as Rufous-banded Miner, Grey-hooded Parakeet, and various ground-tyrants, while Andean Condor may occasionally be seen soaring along the ridgelines.

Salinas Grandes. At the top of the pass, we reach the vast Salinas Grandes, an immense high-altitude salt pan stretching to the horizon and framed by distant mountains. This stark and visually striking environment supports a specialised avifauna, with opportunities for species such as Andean Avocet, Puna Teal, and, in suitable conditions, flamingos. The surrounding flats and sparse vegetation may also hold ground-tyrants and other hardy puna specialists adapted to these extreme conditions.

Paso de Jama. Continuing across the remote Altiplano toward Susques and the Chilean border, we traverse a landscape of volcanic peaks, saline lakes, and expansive plains. This is classic high-Andean desert, where birding is focused on carefully chosen stops in suitable habitat. Here we may encounter species such as Puna Ibis and Grey-breasted Seedsnipe, along with other specialised Altiplano birds. Crossing Paso de Jama, we enter Chile before descending toward San Pedro de Atacama, where the stark beauty of the Atacama Desert provides a dramatic conclusion to this remarkable high-altitude journey.



Grey-hooded Parakeet by Clayton Burne

Miscanti & Miñiques Lagoons. We begin the day ascending onto the high Altiplano to visit the stunning Miscanti and Miñiques Lagoons, set beneath towering volcanic peaks. These pristine, deep-blue waters provide classic high-Andean scenery and support a range of specialised birdlife, including Andean Goose, Puna Teal, and various ground-tyrants. The surrounding grasslands and shoreline offer excellent opportunities for observing species adapted to these cold, windswept conditions.

Salar de Talar. Continuing deeper into the Altiplano, we reach the remote and visually striking Salar de Talar. This expansive red-hued salt pan, fringed by volcanic ridges and mineral-rich lagoons, offers a more isolated and otherworldly setting. Birding here may produce



Diademed Sandpiper-Plover by Bobby Wilcox

species such as Grey-breasted Seedsnipe, Puna Ibis, and additional high-Andean specialists, while the dramatic scenery makes this one of the most memorable stops of the day.

Tuyajto Lagoon. Our exploration concludes at the beautiful Tuyajto Lagoon, a high-altitude wetland surrounded by open plains and distant volcanoes. This quieter, less-visited site provides further opportunities for Altiplano species, with chances for Andean, Chilean, and James's Flamingos, Andean Avocet, and other water-associated birds. The combination of clear light, vast open space, and minimal disturbance makes this an ideal location to appreciate both the birdlife and the stark beauty of the high Andes.

El Tatio Geysers. We start early to visit the renowned El Tatio geyser field, one of the highest geothermal sites in the world. Arriving at dawn, we experience dramatic plumes of steam rising from the earth against the cold morning air, creating an unforgettable atmosphere. The surrounding puna habitat supports a range of high-Andean species, with opportunities for Andean Goose, Puna Ibis, and, in suitable bofedal habitat, the highly sought-after Diademed Sandpiper-Plover, along with various ground-tyrants, while the hardy Andean Hillstar and White-winged Cinclodes may be found in suitable areas.

Vado de Putana. As we descend from the geysers, we make stops at the wetlands of Vado de Putana, where meltwater creates a productive ribbon of life through the otherwise arid landscape. These marshy areas attract a variety of birdlife, including Puna Teal, Andean Avocet, and other water-associated species, alongside ground-tyrants and miners typical of the high Andes.

Puritama River. Continuing our descent, the Puritama River provides a striking contrast, with clear flowing water cutting through the desert terrain. The vegetated margins offer opportunities for additional species, while the setting itself provides a welcome change from the stark openness of the Altiplano.

Salar de Atacama Lagoons (Chaxa & Tebinquiche). Later in the day, we explore sections of the vast Salar de Atacama, including Chaxa and Tebinquiche Lagoons. These saline wetlands are among the most important birding sites in the region, supporting large numbers of Andean, Chilean, and James's Flamingos, alongside species such as Andean Avocet and various shorebirds. The expansive salt flats and reflective waters create a fitting visual finale before we continue to Calama.



Andean Hillstar by Dubi Shapiro



James's Flamingos by Clayton Burne

Río Loa Valley. Departing Calama, we spend time along sections of the Río Loa, Chile's longest river, which cuts a narrow ribbon of life through the otherwise stark Atacama Desert. The river margins and associated vegetation provide a welcome contrast to the surrounding arid landscapes, attracting a range of birdlife. Here we may encounter species such as Andean Negrito, Rufous-webbed Bush Tyrant, and various water-associated birds, while the green corridor itself offers a refreshing change in scenery.

Atacama Desert to Antofagasta. Continuing west, we cross the vast expanse of the Atacama Desert, one of the driest places on Earth. The landscape gradually opens into sweeping plains and barren hills before descending toward the Pacific coast. This transition highlights the extreme environmental contrasts of northern Chile, with opportunities along the route for a suite of desert and riparian specialists. Species such as Greyish Miner, Tamarugo Conebill, and Slender-billed Finch may be encountered in arid scrub and oasis-like vegetation, while the Río Loa corridor can hold Rufous-webbed Bush Tyrant and Andean Negrito. Ground-tyrants and other hardy puna and desert species may also be seen as we descend toward the Pacific coast, culminating in our arrival at Antofagasta, where the rich waters of the Humboldt Current support an entirely different suite of birdlife that we will explore the following day.

Mejillones Peninsula. Today we explore the productive coastal habitats of the Mejillones Peninsula, where the cold, nutrient-rich waters of the Humboldt Current support an impressive diversity of seabirds. Rocky shorelines, sandy beaches, and offshore waters provide excellent birding opportunities, with species such as Peruvian Pelican, Red-legged Cormorant, and the striking Inca Tern often seen at close range. Gulls, terns, and a variety of shorebirds add further interest as we work different sections of the coastline.

We also cover areas along the wider Antofagasta coastline, where additional seabirds and coastal specialists may be encountered. Depending on conditions, this can include flocks of feeding birds offshore, as well as waders along exposed shores and tidal areas. The dramatic contrast of desert meeting ocean, combined with excellent light and accessible birding, makes for a relaxed yet rewarding final day in the field.



Tamarugo Conebill by Dušan Brinkhuizen



Inca Tern by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Moderate, with challenging high-altitude elements. This is an endemic & target-focused trip, not suitable for inexperienced birders or those with mobility or significant health concerns.
Birding Ease		Moderate. Many species occur in open habitats & provide good viewing, but some skulkers / low-density desert species may require persistence.
Accommodation		Comfortable, though some lodges are simple in more remote areas.
Walking / Trails		Walking distances are generally short, mostly on flat or gently sloping ground, but conditions can be variable. At higher elevations, even short walks may feel more strenuous.
Vehicles / Roads		Several long drives. Roads are mostly sealed between towns, becoming rougher, unsealed in remote areas. Mountain passes & dirt roads can be bumpy.
Photography		Good to good+. Open landscapes allow for good opportunities, though strong light & heat shimmer can be challenging. No dedicated hides.
Annoyances		Significant temperature variation from hot lowlands to cold high elevations. High winds are common, flies may be present at some sites. High altitude (up to ±4,500m / 15,000 ft) may affect some guests.

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 14;
- 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 excursions;
- 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.**

- To ensure your comfort and that of your companions, please limit yourself to one medium-sized suitcase or duffel bag (20 kg / 44 lb) and one carry-on bag, as space in the vehicles is limited.
- This tour includes travel at high altitudes, with several days spent between 3,000m and 4,500m (10,000–15,000 ft). Guests should be aware that altitude can affect everyone differently, even short walks can feel strenuous.
- We have designed the itinerary to allow for gradual acclimatisation, but it is important to remain well hydrated, avoid overexertion, and follow your guide's recommendations. If you have any pre-existing medical conditions, particularly relating to heart or lung function, you should consult your doctor before joining the tour.
- Temperatures can vary significantly, ranging from warm to hot conditions at lower elevations to very cold mornings at high altitude, particularly around the Altiplano and El Tatio geysers.
- The tour involves several long driving days, often on a mix of sealed and unsealed roads. While most travel is comfortable, some sections—particularly mountain passes and remote areas—can be rough or bumpy.

- Conditions in the Andes and Atacama Desert can be dry, windy, and dusty, and sun exposure is intense at higher elevations. Sun protection, including sunscreen, sunglasses, and a hat, is strongly recommended.
- Early starts are required on some days to maximise birding activity and to visit key sites under optimal conditions.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour begins with an arrival dinner in the evening of day 1 at our hotel in San Miguel de Tucumán, Argentina and concludes at Antofagasta Airport, Chile after breakfast on day 14.

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.

Teniente General Benjamín Matienzo International Airport, San Miguel de Tucumán, Argentina (IATA: TUC) is the main port of entry for this tour. Best connected via Buenos Aires.

Andrés Sabella Gálvez International Airport, Antofagasta, Chile (IATA: ANF) is the main port of departure for this tour. Best connected via Santiago.

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.