# Colombia

## Central Andes (Relaxed)



**Andean Cock-of-the-rock by Bobby Wilcox**

*Colombia needs no introduction in birding circles, home to over 1900 species, more than any other country. This huge diversity of species results from the equally diverse range of habitats: three Andean Cordilleras (Western, Central and Eastern Andes), two inter-Andean valleys (the Cauca and Magdalena Valleys), the lowland forests of the Amazon and Orinoco regions, the isolated snow-capped Santa Marta Mountains, the Pacific and Caribbean coasts, deserts and lakes, and the rich wet forests of the Chocó all help to make it one of the most exciting countries to bird on earth!*

*This relaxed tour focuses on the Pacific slope habitat of Las Tangaras, montane forests above Jardin, the famous antpittas of Rio Blanco and the high-altitude elfin forest and paramo of Los Nevados del Ruiz.*

# *Itinerary & Map*

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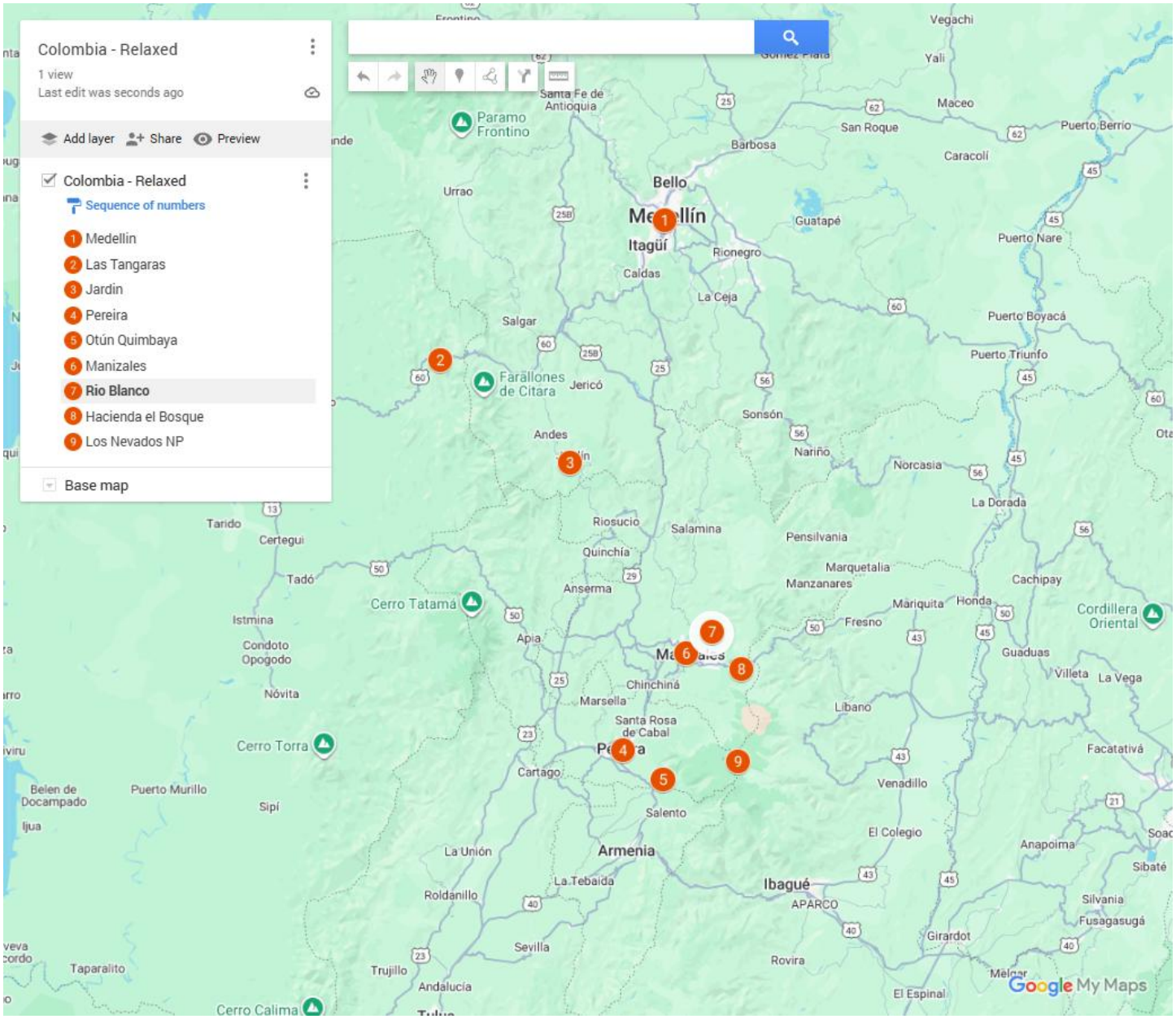
| **Day 1** | **Arrival in Medellin** |
| **Day 2** | **La Romera Park to Las Tangaras** |
| **Days 3 & 4** | **Las Tangaras** |
| **Day 5** | **Las Tangaras to Jardin** |
| **Day 6** | **Loro Orejiamarillo Reserve to Medellin** |
| **Day 7** | **Medellin; flight to Pereira & transfer to Otún Quimbaya area** |
| **Day 8** | **Otún Quimbaya** |
| **Day 9** | **Otún Quimbaya to Manizales via Hotel Tinamu** |
| **Days 10 & 11** | **Rio Blanco & Hacienda el Bosque** |
| **Day 12** | **PNN Los Nevados del Ruiz to Termales** |
| **Day 13** | **Termales to Pereira & final departure** |



## *Birding sites in detail*



**Red-bellied Grackle by Adam Riley**

**La Romera Park.** The narrow watershed of La Romera Municipal Park protects an island of forest surrounded by farms and semi-rural homes. Birding from the road, we will watch for Andean Motmot, which can often be quite confiding compared to the undergrowth skulkers we will be searching for. Specifically, we will be targeting the endemic Stiles's Tapaculo that is found in the same dense undergrowth where Chestnut-capped Brushfinch also lurks. The shy Yellow-headed Manikin is also high up on our list of endemic targets, La Romera is perhaps the best-known site for it in Colombia. Bird flocks can be quite a spectacle in this area with a pleasant assortment of migrant warblers including Golden-winged, Tennessee, Canada, Black-and-white, Blackburnian and the increasingly scarce Cerulean Warbler all possible. The gorgeous but elusive endemic, Red-bellied Grackle moves around in small flocks, uttering extraordinary shrieks as they search for fruits and invertebrates.

**Las Tangaras.** In this biodiverse Chocoan region, some 2,000m elevation on the Pacific Slope of the Andes, it seems that nature has decided to throw an additional splash of wild colour onto the palette, with the birds being as bright and colourful as the orchids, bromeliads, ferns and hanging epiphytes that cover every visible foot of branch, trunk, or root. Even the ground is a riot of blooming plants and moss.

Las Tangaras is home to some of Colombia's best-known and most mythical birds. From the fantastic Gold-ringed and Black-and-gold Tanagers, known in bygone eras of Colombia's difficult past as the "guerrilla tanagers", to the recently described Tatama (Alto Pisones) Tapaculo, which proves there are yet species to be found in accessible areas. Las Tangaras and the road travelling down from the mountain village of El Carmen into the foothills and Choco rainforest will provide some of the most, if not the most, exciting birds and birding of the entire tour. Mixed flocks are nearly constant; bird song emanates from behind



**Velvet-purple Coronet by Bobby Wilcox**



**Tanager Finch by Bobby Wilcox**

every leaf the day long. No amount of enthusiasm would oversell this memorable site, remote in the forests and pastures of the rural West Andes.

The total bird list here seems more akin in quantity to a list from humid lowland rainforest, rather than a mountain slope. However, the mystique of the endemic habitats and species that populate Las Tangaras is given away by the high-quality endemic and range-restricted species present on the list.

Tantalising species we will search for along the car tracks and trails include Cloud Forest Pygmy Owl, Pacific Tuftedcheek, Golden-headed Quetzal, Toucan Barbet, Yellow-vented, Crimson-mantled and Powerful Woodpeckers, Uniform Treehunter, Star-chested Treerunner, Bicolored Antvireo, Yellow-breasted Antpitta, Rufous-breasted Antthrush, Tatama and Narino Tapaculos, Handsome Flycatcher, Orange-breasted Fruiteater, Olivaceous Piha, Choco Vireo, Beautiful Jay, Chestnut-breasted and White-headed Wren, Black Solitaire, Black-chinned Mountain Tanager, Purplish-mantled, Glistening-green, Rufous-throated and Flame-faced Tanagers, Indigo Flowerpiercer, and both Chestnut-breasted and Yellow-collared Chlorophonias – to name just some of the potential highlights!

We'll also spend some time birding at the upper hummingbird feeders. Some of the dazzling and bright species that visit the feeders include Violet-tailed Sylph, the eye-searing Velvet-purple Coronet, scarce Empress Brilliant, Greenish Puffleg and Purple-bibbed Whitetip. The banana feeders at the lodge attract stunners like Flame-rumped and Silver-throated Tanagers whilst the hummingbird feeders attract a different set of gems including Steely-vented Hummingbird and Andean Emerald.

**El Carmen del Atrato.** There are few places to access the high-elevation temperate forests that rim the upper ridges of the West Andes. One of the best places is above the village of El Carmen del Atrato. With luck we will find all the high-elevation specials we are searching for, with the most notable of these being the vociferous and endemic Munchique Wood Wren, skulking Tanager Finch, and the bulky, glowing White-capped Tanager.

**Jardin.** The town of Jardin has one of the most accessible Andean Cock-of-the-rock lekking sites on earth. This can



**Black-and-gold Tanager by Clayton Burne**

be an overwhelming frenzy of more than twenty eye-searing males in full raspy song and ostentatious display, while we marvel from only a few feet away! If lucky, the endemic Red-bellied Grackle might also show up. In the river below, we will scan for White-capped Dipper feeding along the rocks, plus several possible tanagers including the boldly pattered Saffron-crowned, and near-endemic Flame-rumped.



**Golden-plumed Parakeet by Dušan Brinkhuizen**

**Loro Orejiamarillo.** Setting out this morning with 4x4 jeeps along a dirt road, we will enter the highland reserve of Loro Orejiamarillo above Jardin, also known as Las Ventanas. This ProAves owned reserve is frequented by nearly 600 Yellow-eared Parrots, a vulnerable species that use the higher montane forest with tall wax palms for roosting, feeding, and nesting. Obtaining views of this diagnostically green and yellow patterned parrot will be our primary target early this morning before we continue birding along the little-travelled road through the reserve.

Here Black-billed Mountain Toucan, the near-endemic monotypic Tanager Finch and bands of Black-collared Jay are all possible, along with a superb selection of montane specialities that include White-browed Spinetail, Rufous-headed Pygmy Tyrant, Yellow-bellied Chat-Tyrant, Yellow-vented Woodpecker, the radiant Tourmaline Sunangel and Strong-billed Woodcreeper. Although rare throughout its range, this forest also supports a small population of the arboreal Chestnut-crested Cotinga and we will keep an eye peeled for this highly sought-after species. At Mirador El Roble we have possibilities to visit a feeding station for both Chestnut-naped and Chami Antpitta.



**Cauca Guan by Adam Riley**

**Otun-Quimbaya.** Situated at 1 800 meters, this sanctuary in the Western Cordillera is one of the few sites known for Cauca Guan. Once presumed extinct, this species was only rediscovered in 1994; and with protection, this guan is now relatively common in the reserve, as is the more widespread Sickle-winged Guan. The scarce Wattled Guan also occurs and sometimes gives away its presence with an unlikely loud rising trill. Hoffmann's Two-toed Sloth can sometimes be spotted casually lounging in a roadside Cecropia, a tree that also provides fruits for the impressive crimson-fronted race of Red-ruffed

Fruitcrow, here at perhaps its highest density anywhere in South America. With luck, we may stumble across the gaudy Multicolored Tanager.



White-vented Plumeleteer by Clayton Burne

The forests come alive in the morning with the songs of the enthusiastic Chestnut-breasted Wren and the deep, booming calls of Red-ruffed Fruitcrow. We'll sift through mixed flocks containing Crimson-rumped Toucanet, White-throated Daggerbill, Spotted Barbtail and a nice assortment of localised flycatchers. Colonies of Acorn Woodpeckers can be conspicuous as we scan the river below for Torrent Duck, and we will keep an eye out for Pale-eyed Thrush and Andean Solitaire, both excellent songsters that are often found perched motionless on high tree limbs.

**Hotel Tinamu.** Most of the surrounding area is dedicated to shade-grown coffee and agricultural. The reserve is a mosaic of shade grown coffee, forest, and secondary scrub. This is an excellent site to see Little Tinamou rather than just hear it! We'll also be looking for Golden-collared Manakin, Moustached Puffbird, Jet Antbird, Great Antshrike, Scrub Tanager, Scaled Antpitta, Spectacled Parrotlet and Colombian Chachalaca.

We should have some time to enjoy the hummingbird feeders, where we may see White-necked Jacobin, Green Hermit, Steely-vented and Rufous-tailed Hummingbirds, Black-throated Mango and White-vented Plumeleteer.

**Rio Blanco.** This beautiful reserve is situated above the city of Manizales. Here there are over a dozen active hummingbird feeders along a wooden balcony that is lined with flowers, and these glitter with hummingbirds that include gems such as Long-tailed Sylph, Buff-tailed Coronet, Speckled Hummingbird, the boldly patterned Collared Inca and Tourmaline Sunangel. Finding an Andean Guan or even the oversized monotypic White-capped Tanager that can sometimes be seen from the balcony of the lodge would be a typical way to start the morning in Rio Blanco.



Grey-breasted Mountain Toucan by Bobby Wilcox

Our main quest for the day, however – and certainly one of the highlights of the entire trip – will be the rarely-seen antpittas, which have been patiently habituated to come to earthworm feeding stations that are active very early in the morning. The reserve features several of these 'antpitta feeders' where worms are placed out every day to attract these secretive birds, and here we have a chance to marvel at these fascinating but normally



**Buffy Helmetcrest by David Hoddinott**

extremely difficult understory dwellers – sometimes only at an arms-length away! Ornately patterned Chestnut-crowned Antpitta and the endemic Brown-banded Antpitta are usually present, but we might also have a visit from the tiny vine-loving Slaty-crowned Antpitta, Chestnut-naped Antpitta, and occasionally even the vocal but sneaky near-endemic Bicolored Antpitta. As these special birds are accustomed to a human presence at these sites, we often obtain exceptional studies (and photographs!) not just of the antpittas themselves, but also of their interesting behaviour as they stuff their bills with worms to feed hungry chicks or sometimes even hop across our feet! Other species that regularly visit the antpitta feeders include Grey-browed Brushfinch, the beautiful Green-and-black Fruiteater and Great Thrush.

The wide pathways within the reserve offer excellent access to the pristine cloud forest, where we will watch for the secretive Tawny-breasted Tinamou crossing the track, Golden-headed Quetzal perched motionlessly on a fern-covered branch, Crimson-mantled Woodpecker (arguably the world's most beautiful woodpecker!), and peer into the undergrowth for skulking Blackish, Spillmann's and Ash-colored Tapaculos.

We might also locate a fruiting tree where several species of parrots could be in attendance, including the scarce Golden-plumed Parakeet, Scaly-naped Amazon and the endangered Rusty-faced Parrot (this being its type location where it was first discovered). Mixed flocks here are sometimes composed of fifty plus species all swarming together in excited movements with intense sound at all levels of the mossy forest and have the potential to leave us dizzy! Just a few of the possibilities include Buff-breasted and Blue-winged Mountain Tanagers, Yellow-billed Cacique, Pearled Treerunner, Black-eared Hemispingus, Streaked Tuftedcheek, Pale-edged Flycatcher, Dusky Piha, Smoke-colored Pewee, the bright Plushcap that prefers dense bamboo, Grey-hooded Bush Tanager, Smoky Bush Tyrant, White-banded and White-tailed Tyrannulets, the white capped form of Capped Conebill, bright Blue-and-black Tanager, Sepia-browed Wren creeping through the vines, Streaked Xenops, Slaty-backed and Yellow-bellied Chat-Tyrants, and a wide range of other warblers, tyrants, spinetails, and tanagers.



**Brown-banded Antpitta by Clayton Burne**

Continued birding inside this fantastic reserve throughout the day could produce specialities



**Golden-breasted Puffleg by Stephan Lorenz**

such as the tiny but colourful Rufous-crowned Tody-Flycatcher, Mountain Wren, Powerful Woodpecker (giving its distinctive double tap), and colourful Masked Trogon. Although we will need considerable luck on our side, we also have possibilities for rarities such as Masked Saltator.

Several hummingbird feeders are frequented by Long-tailed Sylph, Buff-tailed Coronet, Speckled Hummingbird, the boldly patterned Collared Inca and Tourmaline Sunangel. We might even find Andean Guan or the oversized, monotypic White-capped Tanager along the entrance road.

**Hacienda El Bosque.** This cattle ranch has two tricky *Grallaridae* to find, in the form of Equatorial and Crescent-faced Antpittas. As we head into the forest, we'll also be keeping our eyes open for other desirable species such as Grey-breasted Mountain Toucan, Barred Fruiteater, Grey-browed Brushfinch, Yellow-bellied Chat Tyrant, Black-thighed Puffleg and Sword-billed Hummingbird

**Los Nevados National Park.** The snow-covered Ruiz Volcano and Los Nevados National Park give us access to pristine, stunted elfin forest and flowering Paramo scrub situated well above 13 000 feet. Whilst being spoilt by the spectacular scenery, we will seek our primary target at this high elevation, the unique range-restricted Buffy Helmetcrest (split from Bearded). This spectacular hummingbird 'trap lines', which means that it visits the same flowers at regular intervals on its circuit, and we will carefully watch the known areas of its territory. Tawny Antpittas can sometimes be ridiculously tame here, while other specialities we will be searching for include Paramo Tapaculo, Andean Tit-Spinetail, Stout-billed Cinclodes, Grass Wren, Plain-colored Seedeater and Many-striped Canastero.

**Termales del Ruiz road.** Time permitting, we may spend a few hours birding the lower sections of the Termales del Ruiz road. Here we will search for usually difficult species such as Golden-breasted and Black-thighed Pufflegs, Rainbow-bearded Thornbill and Viridian Metaltail, as well as commoner species such as Great Sapphirewing, Buff-winged Starfrontlet and Shining Sunbeam. If lucky, we might run into a flock of the endemic Rufous-fronted Parakeet.

## *Tour Grading & Key*

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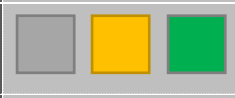
|---|---|---|
| **Overall Ease** |  | Undemanding to moderate. One of our tougher 'relaxed tours'. |
| **Birding Ease** |  | Moderate. Several low-density species. Typical forest birding difficulties of visibility & lighting. |
| **Accommodation** |  | Comfortable, some lodgings are simple. |
| **Walking / Trails** |  | Moderate, mostly on flat ground with variable substrate. High altitude walking is mostly downhill or kept to short distances. |
| **Vehicles / Roads** |  | Several drives, some impacted by city traffic. Mostly sealed roads between towns, changing to dirt in remoter areas. Mountain passes & eroded dirt roads can be bumpy. Risk of landslides & road closures. |
| **Photography** |  | Good. Typical forest lighting difficulties. Several feeders. |
| **Annoyances** |  | Temperatures vary from hot & humid to cold at altitude. Rain is to be expected. |

## *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 13;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve & site 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.

Our Relaxed series of tours are designed to focus on having an enjoyable holiday with a bird and wildlife focus. Where possible; we have reduced or removed long drives, single night stays and poor/rustic accommodation. We have also sought to reduce or remove difficult hikes, narrow/muddy trails and otherwise oppressive environmental conditions. Early starts and night birding are mostly optional, and we will not spend much time searching for difficult and/or skulking species. These tours are not suitable for hardcore birders and listers, or dedicated photographers.

- **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.**

- This tour involves some moderate walking and hiking. We will be at high altitudes on occasion.
- Guests should be in good health and reasonable fitness to undertake these tours.
- If you have any physical limitations or medical conditions of any sort, please let the Rockjumper office know in advance of the tour.
- The hotels are of comfortable, yet sometimes basic/simple standard.
- Transport is by small coach or minibus, and the roads are mostly in good condition. However, due to the nature of the topography, there is the possibility of landslides interfering with our trip, though we have minimised this risk by undertaking the tour during the drier season.
- There will be times where we switch to smaller 4x4 vehicles where necessary.
- Traffic in and around the large city of Medellin can be heavy, which impacts our time in vehicles.
- We expect the weather to be mostly dry and often sunny; it can be hot and occasionally humid in the lowlands.
- At higher elevations, it can be quite cold, especially at night. There is likely to be some rain, which can be heavy.
- Our guides are experienced Neotropical birders who have led numerous tours to Latin America.

## *Arrival and Departure Details*

Day 1 of the tour is set aside as an arrival day, and you may arrive at any time in advance of our introductory group dinner. The tour will conclude mid-morning of day 13.

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.

El Dorado International Airport, Bogotá (IATA: BOG) is the main port of entry and exit for international flights to Colombia. José María Córdova International Airport, Medellin (IATA: MDE) and Matecaña International Airport, Pereira (IATA: PEI) are the main ports of entry and departure for the tour, both easily reached via Bogotá.

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.**