Mexico

Chiapas



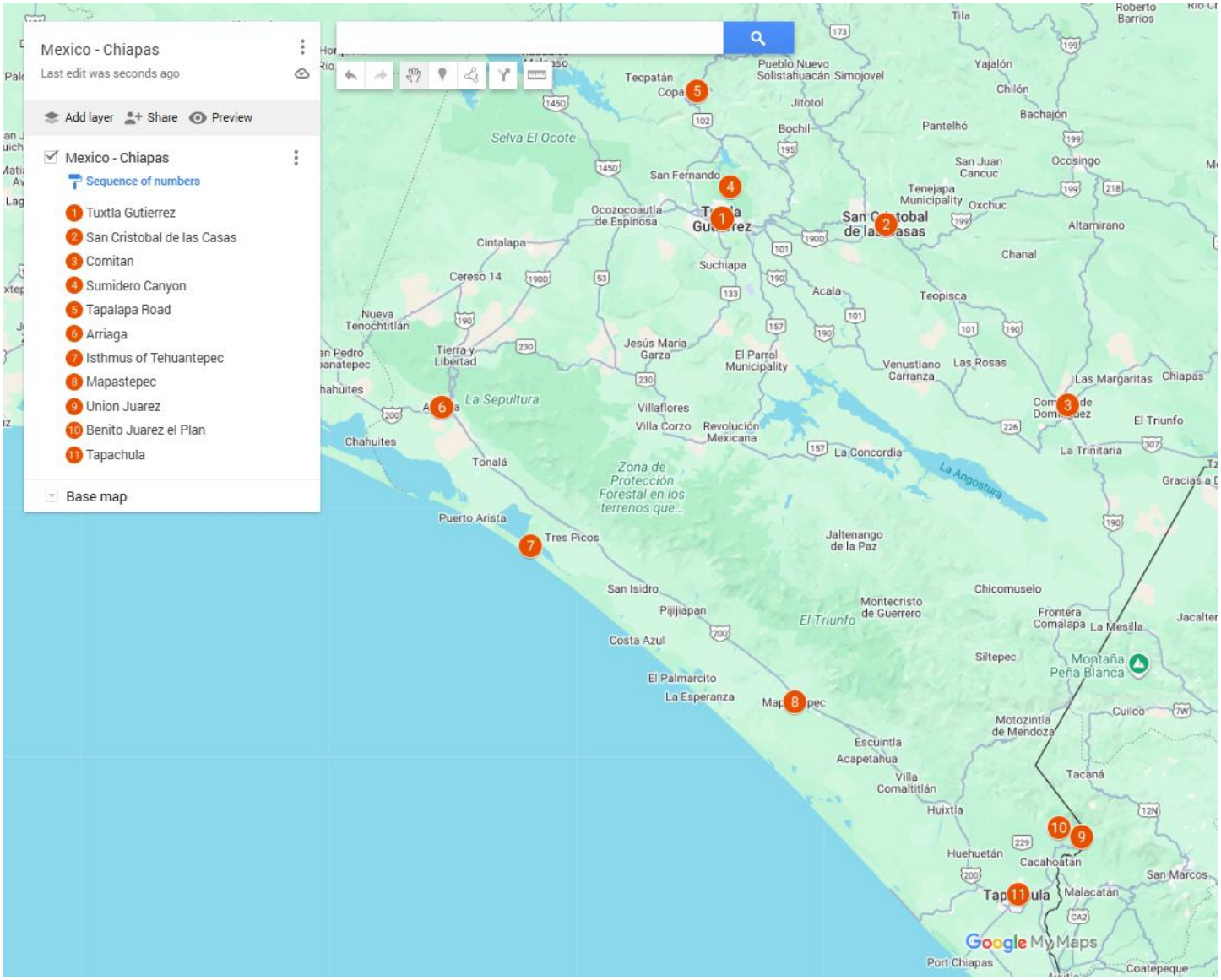
Azure-rumped Tanager by Eric Antonio Martinez

Chiapas is the southernmost state of Mexico, located on the border of Guatemala. Our tour of Chiapas takes in the very best of the areas birding sites such as San Cristobal de las Casas, Comitan, the Sumidero Canyon, Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Tapachula and the slopes Volcan Tacana. A myriad of beautiful and sought after species includes the amazing Giant Wren, localized Nava's Wren, dainty Pink-headed Warbler, Rufous-collared Thrush, Garnet-throated and Amethyst-throated Hummingbird, Rufous-browed Wren, Azure-rumped Tanager, Blue-and-white Mockingbird, Bearded Screech Owl, Slender Sheartail, Belted Flycatcher, Red-breasted Chat, Bar-winged Oriole, Lesser Ground Cuckoo, Lesser Roadrunner, Cabanis's Wren, Mayan Antthrush, Orange-breasted and Rose-bellied Bunting, West Mexican Chachalaca, Citreoline Trogon, Yellow-eyed Junco, Unspotted Saw-whet Owl and Long-tailed Sabrewing.

Itinerary & Map

Chiapas

Day 1	**Arriva in Tuxtla Gutierrez, transfer to San Cristobal de las Casas**
Day 2	**San Cristobal to Comitan**
Day 3	**Comitan to Tuxtla Gutierrez**
Days 4 to 6	**Sumidero Canyon, Tapalapa Road & Eastern Sierra tropical forests**
Day 7	**Arriaga to Mapastepec via the Isthmus of Tehuantepec**
Day 8	**Mapastepec to Union Juarez**
Days 9 & 10	**Benito Juarez el Plan & Union Juarez to Tapachula**
Day 11	**Final departure**



Birding sites in detail

San Cristobal de las Casas. Considered the cultural capital of the region, San Cristobal was founded in 1528 with the christening of one of the most famous cathedrals in the country. The colonial architecture, cobblestone streets, and crisp mountain air make this an attractive birding city perfectly located near the divide of the eastern Sierra Madres.



Pink-headed Warbler by Dušan Brinkhuizen

We'll be birding the forested mountains around the city at around 2,200m (7200 feet) above sea level. Humid cloud forests and lush pine-oak mixed forests can be accessed within proximity of the city itself. Tzontehuitz is one of the more popular birding areas close by, as is the track up to the radio towers atop Cerro Huitepec. We will concentrate our efforts in the most pristine areas, maximizing our chances to see some of the specialties here such as Highland Guan, Singing Quail (rare), Amethyst-throated and Garnet-throated Hummingbirds, Blue-throated Motmot, Band-backed and Rufous-browed Wrens, Rufous-collared Thrush (Robin), the striking Pink-headed Warbler, and the beautiful songster Blue-and-white Mockingbird! If we can muster ourselves to make a pre-dawn foray, we might try our luck for the rare, endemic, Bearded Screech Owl, or perhaps Mexican Whip-poor-will, at the southern end of its range.

Comitan. Situated at the head of a large, relatively dry valley, Comitan is a good base to explore some of the drier highland forests, which share much in common with neighbouring Guatemala and farther south into Central America.

The flats and slopes in the area host thorn forest species, while the hills harbour mountain species. Our main target today is none other than the beautiful Slender Sheartail! This graceful little hummingbird is an inter-montane valley specialist, depending on only a few species of flowering shrubs. The area around Comitan is one of the best places to see this special bird. Other fine birds can be expected today, and we will keep our eyes and ears open for Belted Flycatcher, Black-headed Siskin, Black-capped Swallow, Yellow Grosbeak, and both Black-vented and Bar-winged Orioles. Among other more widespread and common species that will be no less entertaining to view we might see Red-billed Pigeon, Squirrel Cuckoo, Azure-crowned Hummingbird, Russet-crowned Motmot, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Brown Jay, Rusty Sparrow and several species of neotropical migrant flycatchers, warblers, and tanagers.



Rufous-collared Thrush by Eric Martinez

Sumidero Canyon. This is one of the best-known birding sites in all of Mexico and indeed, Central America. The Canyon itself is a stunning geological

formation, and we will take some time at the various miradores (overlooks) to admire nature's creation.

Green-fronted Hummingbird, Belted Flycatcher, Banded Wren, Red-breasted Chat, Blue-and-white Mockingbird and Bar-winged Oriole are the clear targets here today, whilst Thicket Tinamou, Singing Quail, Lesser Ground Cuckoo, and Lesser Roadrunner are often heard. We are likely to encounter Plain Chachalaca, Ferruginous Pygmy Owl, Plain-capped Starthroat, Canivet's Emerald, Berylline and Buff-bellied Hummingbirds, Gartered Trogon, Russet-crowned and Lesson's Motmot, Velasquez's Woodpecker, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, Greenish Elaenia, Yellow-olive Flatbill, Nutting's Flycatcher, Couch's Kingbird, Lesser Greenlet, White-eyed, Yellow-throated, and Blue-headed Vireo, White-throated Magpie-Jay, Green Jay, the recently split Cabanis's Wren, Canyon Wren, White-lored Gnatcatcher, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Fan- tailed and Rufous-capped Warbler, Black-headed Saltator, Olive Sparrow, Blue, Indigo and Varied Bunting, Streak-backed and Altamira Orioles, Yellow-billed Cacique and Yellow-throated Euphonia, amongst others.



Nava's Wren by David Nelson

Tapalapa Road. This area of cloud forest about 2 hours from the city of Tuxtla is an interesting road that offers access to some great areas of cloud forest. Some of the species of interest include Black-throated Jay, Black Thrush, Rufous-collared Thrush, Brown Capped Vireo, Yellow throated nightingale Thrush, White-naped Brushfinch, and if we get lucky, we may be able to find or get flyby views of Resplendent Quetzal.

Eastern Sierra tropical forests. Today will be devoted to low-elevation habitat, and finding the scarce, endemic, Nava's Wren. This species is the southerly counterpart to Sumichrast's Wren, the only other member of the endemic *Hylorchilus* genus. They survive only in the limestone foothill outcrops and caves along the base of the eastern Sierra Madre. Their preferred habitat is less than an hour's drive, and with luck we will find this gem.



Rose-bellied Bunting by David Nelson

Many other endemics, and sought-after birds occur in the same habitat. We will also be watching for range-restricted species like Long-tailed Sabrewing, Mayan Antthrush, Yellow-bellied Tyrannulet, Stub-tailed Spadebill, White-bellied Wren, Yellow-winged Tanager, Montezuma Oropendola, Black-faced Grosbeak, White-winged, Crimson-collared and Golden- hooded Tanagers are among the more colourful birds of the forest edge, there will be less flashy, though no less exciting species to look for. White-bellied Emerald, Collared Trogon, Keel-billed Toucan, Smoky-brown and Golden-olive Woodpecker, White-fronted, Red-lored, and White-crowned Amazon, Green Parakeet, Olivaceous, Ruddy and Tawny-winged Woodcreeper, Rufous-breasted Spinetail, Northern Bentbill, Masked Tityra, Green Shrike-Vireo, Green Jay, Band-backed and Spot-breasted Wren, White-breasted Wood Wren, Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush, White-throated Thrush,

Red-legged honeycreeper, Black-headed Saltator and Orange-billed Sparrow are all numerous here.

La Sepultura Biosphere Reserve. This narrow stretch of land, the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, marks one of the lowest spots of the Sierra Madre mountains. The humid pacific moisture that accumulates into rainfall just a few miles further east along the pacific slope, is allowed to escape over the Isthmus, towards the Gulf of Mexico.



Citreoline Trogon by Eric Martinez

Therefore, an interesting, relatively arid area has evolved here, and hosts many fabulous endemic birds! With a little luck, we are likely to find West Mexican Chachalaca, the striking Lesser Ground Cuckoo, endemic Green-fronted Hummingbird, Citreoline Trogon, gorgeous Russet-crowned Motmot, Orange-fronted Parakeet, Nutting's and Brown-crested Flycatcher, outrageous Long-tailed Manakin, raucous White-throated Magpie-Jay, Banded Wren, scarce endemic Cinnamon-tailed Sparrow, Stripe-headed Sparrow, and the two stars of the show: Orange-breasted and Rose-bellied (Rosita's) Buntings.

Mapastepec. The thorny scrub forests of western Mexico start to give way to more lush growth here. Just South of Mapastepec, a little bit higher into the foothills of the mountains, we will search the forest for the endemic Giant Wren, stunning Turquoise-browed Motmot, White-bellied Chachalaca, Cinnamon Hummingbird, Yellow-winged Cacique, Pacific Parakeet, the impressive, Ruddy-breasted Seedeater, Painted Bunting, Streak-backed and Spot-breasted Orioles, Long-billed Starthroat, Yellow-naped Amazon, Spot-breasted Wren, Yellow-winged Tanager and Scrub Euphonia.

Benito Juarez el Plan & Union Juarez. With a tiny range that extends less than 200miles down the Sierras, from just within the border between Chiapas and Guatemala, to a few volcanoes down the mountain chain, Azure-rumped (Cabanis's) Tanager is one of the rarest birds in Central America. Rare, might not be the right word, because within its proper habitat it is readily encountered in mixed flocks and fruiting trees it prefers. The difficult part is getting to the tiny elevation band of lower subtropic forest that it inhabits. Here, a series of trails meander higher up the flanks of the majestic Tacana Volcano allow access to just the right spot!



Giant Wren by David Nelson

We'll explore this trail system looking for a host of new birds in the bromeliad-laden, mossy foothill and subtropical forests. Aside from the sought after Azure-rumped Tanager, other possibilities include the tiny Emerald-chinned Hummingbird, near-endemic Green- throated Mountaingem, Violet and Rufous Sabrewings, Blue-tailed Hummingbird, Blue-throated Motmot, Emerald (Wagler's) Toucanet, Scaly-throated Foliage- gleaner, Tawny-throated Leaftosser, Yellowish Flycatcher, Grey-collared Becard, Rufous-and-white Wren, White-eared Ground Sparrow, spectacular White-winged Tanager, Red-throated Ant Tanager, Blue- crowned Euphonia, and the widespread, though seldom seen, Hooded Grosbeak.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease	■ ■ ■	Moderate. Endemic and target focussed trip. Not suitable for dedicated photographers; inexperienced birders; or anyone with mobility or health challenges.
Birding Ease	■ ■ ■	Most species provide decent visuals in open conditions. But some skulkers and low-density targets.
Accommodation	■ ■ ■	Comfortable.
Walking / Trails	■ ■ ■	Average walking, mostly on flat ground with variable substrate. Higher altitude walking is mostly downhill or kept to short distances.
Vehicles / Roads	■ ■ ■	A number of drives, some long. Mostly sealed roads between towns, changing to dirt in remoter areas. Mountain passes and eroded dirt roads can be bumpy.
Photography	■ ■ ■	Average to good.
Annoyances	■ ■ ■	Nothing of note.

Tacana Volcano. Our hike begins from Benito Juarez el Plan after a light breakfast. This is a hike that involves descending into a ravine, before climbing up and over a mountain ridge. Benito Juarez el Plan is set at 4,500 feet above sea level, and the camp is at approximately 7,800 feet above sea level making this a serious and difficult hike. A team of porters will take our luggage as well as the necessary camping equipment up for us, they will also provide food along the way.

Birding wise, the hike is staggering - Wine-throated Hummingbird, Black-crested Coquette (uncommon), Green-throated Mountaingem, Amethyst-throated, Garnet-throated, White-eared and Blue-tailed Hummingbirds, Blue-throated Motmot, Emerald Toucanet and Mountain Trogon should provide some splashes of colour, while Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Ruddy Foliage-gleaner, Northern Tufted Flycatcher, Greater Pewee, Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo, Rufous-browed Wren, Brown-backed Solitaire and Guatemalan Tyrannulet might represent some of the less flashy species we could see today. Mixed flocks will hopefully be numerous, and may include a fabulous warbler show of Black-and-white, Crescent-chested, Nashville, Townsend's, Rufous-capped, Golden-browed and Wilson's! Nocturnal birding around our camp may produce Fulvous Owl.



Horned Guan by Adam Riley

Horned Guan Quest. From our camp, we'll contuinue another 1,500 vertical to reach the prime habitat for Horned Guan. As the guan is a highly protected species, we are not

allowed to camp too close to its range. This secretive bird prefers areas of undisturbed cloud forest, and area we'll spend the majority of our day in to maximise our chances of finding a few of these spectacular creatures.

The Horned Guan Extension is only available as a Tailor-made Tour. It is included in this itinerary as an example only.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease	🟥⬜⬜	Extreme. Not suitable for any but the very fittest hikers.
Birding Ease	🟥⬜⬜	Demanding. Primarily focused on 1 target species.
Accommodation	🟥⬜⬜	Basic camping on high slopes. No running/hot water, no bathroom facilities.
Walking / Trails	🟥⬜⬜	Extreme. Involves vertical climb of >1800m (5900ft)
Vehicles / Roads	⬜🟨⬜	Fairly short drives.
Photography	⬜🟨⬜	Worthwhile, but heavy/large cameras will only add to difficult of hike.
Annoyances	🟥⬜⬜	Extreme hike, very basic camping conditions.

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 10 for those on the Chiapas tour;
- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 4 of the Horned Guan Extension;
- 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 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.**

- This Chiapas tour does not require a high level of fitness, but participants should be in good general health. Birding will be done on foot and may require walking for several hours at a time (always at a slow pace).
- There are some lengthy drives on this tour.
- There will be several early morning and optional nocturnal owling sessions.
- The coastal lowlands can be quite hot, while mornings and evenings in and around higher elevations can be chilly to cold. Overall, the climate is very pleasant.
- The vehicles we use are comfortable, although we should expect some bumpy roads in some areas.
- Accommodation on the Chiapas tour is comfortable to good throughout.
- The Horned Guan Extension requires two nights of basic camping on the higher slopes of Tacana Volcano.

Arrival and Departure Details

The Chiapas tour will depart on day 1 from Tuxtla Gutierrez Airport with a group transfer to San Cristobal del las Casas and will conclude at Tapachula International Airport after breakfast on day 10.

The Horned Guan Extension will begin in Union Juarez in the afternoon of day 1 (day 10 of the Chiapas tour) and conclude at Tapachula International Airport after breakfast on day 4.

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.

Ángel Albino Corzo International Airport, Tuxtla Gutierrez (IATA: TGZ) and Tapachula International Airport, Tapachula (IATA: TAP) are the main ports of entry and departure for this tour. Where direct international flights are not possible, it is generally advised to fly via Mexico City International Airport, Mexico City (IATA: MEX).

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.