Ecuador

Western Chocó Specialities

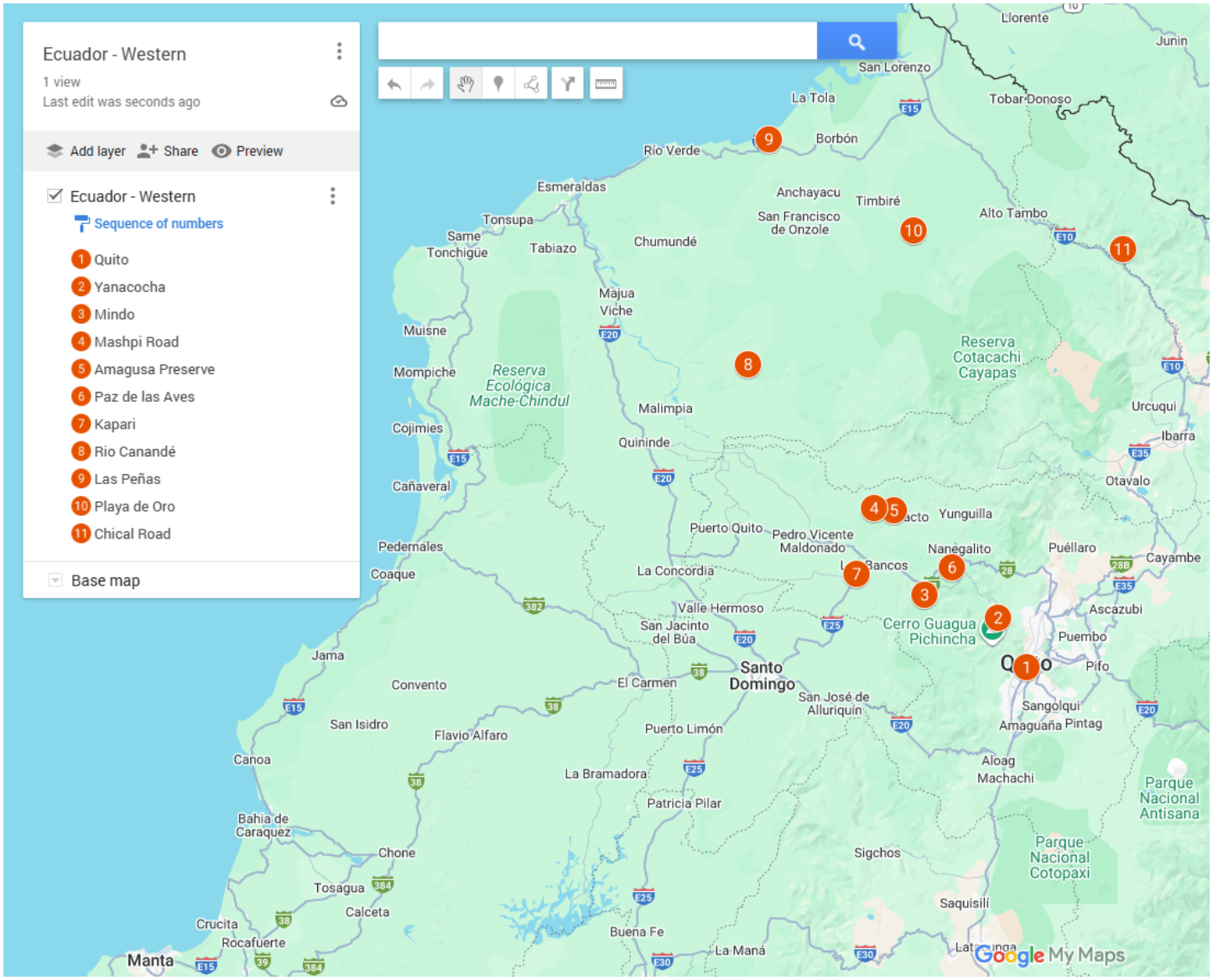


Rufous-crowned Antpitta by Dušan Brinkhuizen

The Chocó is an eco-region and biodiversity hotspot that ranges from the Pacific coast of Colombia south to Ecuador. It supports the largest number of restricted-range birds of any Endemic Bird Area in the Americas, with 62 unique species. This tour has been carefully designed to target as many Chocó endemics as possible, including the tricky lowland species. We will venture into the vast jungle of Playa de Oro and Rio Canandé, where Black-headed Spider Monkeys, and even Jaguars, persist. Sadly, these sites are also the final accessible lowland sites in Ecuador. Deforestation rates are accelerating, and habitat destruction has been severe with African oil-palm plantation taking a heavy toll. We will travel from Andes to coast visiting several reserves and thereby directly supporting the conservation of this critically threatened region. Our tour to this forgotten corner of the country is unique and covers many different habitats and elevations with the focus being the remote Chocó lowlands.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Quito**
Day 2	**Yanacocha via Tandayapa to Mindo**
Day 3	**Mashpi Road & Amagusa Reserve**
Day 4	**Paz de las Aves to Kapari**
Day 5	**Long-wattled Umbrellabird lek to Canandé**
Days 6 to 8	**Canandé**
Day 9	**Canandé to Las Peñas**
Day 10	**Las Peñas to Playa de Oro**
Days 11 to 13	**Playa de Oro**
Day 14	**Playa de Oro to Hacienda Primavera**
Day 15	**Chical Road to Quito**
Day 16	**Final departures**



Birding sites in detail

Yanacocha. We travel to the north-western flanks of the Pichincha Volcano, climbing to an altitude of approximately 3 500m (11 000ft). We wind our way up a gravel road where we will have a morning's birding in the temperate zone of the western Andes. This spectacular area is especially productive for hummingbirds, and we can expect to find numerous representatives, including the incredible Sword-billed Hummingbird, Sapphire-vented and Golden-breasted Puffleg and, if we are extremely lucky, the endemic, inexplicably rare and critically endangered Black-breasted Puffleg. Other possible species we may find as we sift through the twisted vegetation and open shrubby habitat include Andean Pygmy Owl (often located by its diurnal call), stunning Hooded and Black-chested Mountain Tanagers, and the equally striking Golden-crowned Tanager. Andean Guan, Superciliaried Hemispingus, Blue-backed Conebill, Crowned Chat-Tyrant, and the beautiful, but shy Barred Fruiteater are also likely.



Toucan Barbet by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Mashpi Road & Amagusa Reserve. We will ascend the so-called Mashpi Road to search for more specialties. This fairly new site holds some of the best Chocó endemic cloud forest species. We will be targeting them at several sites along the road, the variable elevations (3 000 – 5 000ft / 800 - 1 500m) corresponding with different species. At the Amagusa feeders, we have chances of seeing a host of tanagers including the sought-after Moss-backed, Glistening-green, Black-chinned Mountain, Rufous-throated, Flame-faced, Golden-naped and Golden. The hummingbird feeders attract spectacular hummingbirds, including Velvet-purple Coronet, Violet-tailed Sylph, Brown Inca, Purple-bibbed Whitetip and Empress Brilliant (all Chocó endemics). In the mixed-species flocks, we will be looking for rare Chocó denizens such as Indigo Flowerpiercer, Chocó Vireo, Yellow-collared Chlorophonia, Pacific Tuftedcheek, Uniform Treehunter and Orange-breasted Fruiteater. If we get really lucky, we might run into Black and/or Rufous-brown Solitaires! At lower sites and warmer elevations, we'll be searching for such crackers as Grey-and-gold Tanager, Scarlet-browed Tanager, Orange-fronted Barbet and Barred Puffbird.



Orange-breasted Fruiteater by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Paz de las Aves. Perhaps the most amazing bird show on earth, this morning we will visit the famous Refugio Paz de Las Aves at 5 900ft (1 800 m) in a private cloud forest reserve. This affords us an outstanding way to support a local conservation project for long-term habitat protection. Walking along the forest trails, we will specifically be targeting the difficult forest undergrowth skulkers that a couple of entrepreneurial Ecuadorians have managed to coerce into cooperation through the use of daily feeding rituals! One of the stars of the show is undoubtedly the

goliath Giant Antpitta, which often approaches to within only a few feet! Other targets include Dark-backed Wood Quail, Moustached, Ochre-breasted, Chestnut-crowned and Yellow-breasted Antpitta as well as more widespread species such as Chestnut-capped Brush Finch, Nariño Tapaculo and the vocal Grey-breasted Wood Wren. Another highlight is visiting a lek with a regularly attending population of Andean Cock-of-the-rock, one of the gaudiest of all South American birds. Along the way, we might also find a fruiting tree with possible attendants including Crimson-rumped Toucanet, the elusive Olivaceous Piha and the stunning Toucan Barbet.



Long-wattled Umbrellabird by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Kapari. To reach Kapari, we travel to lower elevations of the Rio Blanco valley. Kapari is a new birding site that hosts astonishing mixed-species flocks of the region, and we hope to come across such spectacular species as Chocó Warbler, Chocó Tyrannulet, Spotted Woodcreepers, Buff-fronted and Scaly-throated Foliage-gleaners, Cinnamon and One-colored Becards, the stunning Ornate Flycatcher, and a wide host of other canopy beauties! Silver-throated, Bay-headed, Rufous-throated and Ochre-breasted Tanagers, Yellow-tufted Dacnis and the gorgeous White-necked Jacobin and Green Thorntail are all found here with regularity. We also have an opportunity to find other Chocó specials that could include Chocó Trogon, Chocó Toucan, Esmeralda's and Zeledon's Antbirds.

Long-wattled Umbrellabird lek. We have an early start to reach a Long-wattled Umbrellabird lek near San Miguel de Los Bancos. A local community protects a small patch of forest where we have a good chance of seeing this spectacular, but rare Chocó endemic. In the early morning, several individuals disperse from the forest patch and if we get lucky birds sometimes perch nearby our viewpoint. After (hopefully) seeing this major target species, we start a long (and rather depressing) drive through mainly African Oil Palm plantations to Rio Canandé. We hope to arrive at the Chocó lodge in time for lunch and some afternoon birding around the lodge gardens, where fairly common species include Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Bright-rumped Atilla, Red-headed Barbet, Long-tailed Tyrant, Snowy-throated Kingbird, Red-rumped Woodpecker, Chestnut-mandibled and Chocó Toucans amongst others.



Giant Antpitta by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Canandé. Rio Canandé is an important Jocotoco reserve and protects one of the final tracts of Chocó lowland forest in Ecuador and is at key Chocó lowland site on the itinerary. The primary forest is a refuge for many rare birds including Great Curassow and Harpy Eagle, species that were thought to be extirpated in Western Ecuador. The Critically Endangered Black-headed Spider Monkey still persist here in good numbers, and it is probably the

best site in the world to see it. Rare species including Banded Ground Cuckoo, Rufous-crowned Antpitta, Baudo Guan, Indigo-crowned Quail-Dove, Tawny-faced Quail and Berlepsch's Tinamou inhabit the forest interior, and we have good chances of running into some of these high calibre species. While walking the extensive forest trails, we hope to chance upon an army ant swarm, which are typically attended by a host of antbirds including Ocellated, Bicolored and Spotted, a true spectacle!



Banded Ground Cuckoo by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Other goodies that are regularly seen inside the forest include Black-headed Antthrush, Spot-crowned Antvireo, Tawny-faced Gnatwren, Green and Red-capped Manakin, Rufous Piha, Rufous Mourner, Black-capped Pygmy Tyrant, Tooth-billed Hummingbird, Chocó Tapaculo, Pacific Flatbill and Dusky Pigeon. Even on our lodge doorstep, the forest edge provides excellent tanager flocks with Scarlet-breasted, Scarlet-thighed Yellow-tufted Dacnises, Scarlet-and-white, Golden-hooded, Bay-headed, Rufous-winged and Blue-necked Tanagers. The flowers at the lodge attract several species of hummingbirds, including Purple-chested Hummingbird, White-whiskered Hermit and Purple-crowned Fairy. Overhead, Rose-faced Parrots are frequent flyovers and the 'pearl of the Chocó', the all-white male Black-tipped Cotinga is often spotted from the viewpoint.

Canandé to Las Peñas. We make our journey to the coast of Esmeraldas making several short stops en route, looking for such rare targets as Slate-colored Seedeater and Large-billed Seed Finch, while also stopping at a colony of Magnificent Frigatebirds.

Las Peñas. We will bird the coastal road between Las Peñas and La Tola. Here the freshwater wetlands are full of birdlife and hold a wide array of interesting residents such as Pinnated Bittern, Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned Night Herons, Wood Stork, Tricolored Heron, Cocoi and Little Blue Herons, Wattled Jacana, Rufous-necked Wood Rail, White-throated Crake, Black-necked Stilt, Black-bellied and Fulvous Whistling Ducks, White-cheeked Pintail and Gull-billed Tern to mention but a few. The surrounding fields and scrub hold a handful of interesting species: Ecuadorian Ground Dove, Pacific Parrotlet, Chestnut-throated Seedeater, Olivaceous Piculet, Striped Cuckoo, Red-breasted Blackbird, Masked Water Tyrant and Vermilion Flycatcher. If time permits, we can also scan the shrimp ponds at La Tola that often have large numbers of migrant shorebirds.



Choco Woodpecker by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Majagual. We visit the nearby mangroves (the tallest mangroves in the world!) and coastal forests near to the village of Majagual. This site holds several interesting

species such as Mangrove Warbler, Slaty-tailed Trogon, Red-lored Amazon, Panama Flycatcher, Jet Antbird, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Ochraceous Atilla and the rare Humboldt's Sapphire.

Playa de Oro. This is an Afro-Ecuadorian community located along the Santiago River in the province of Esmeraldas. It is the last village found upriver and can only be reached by canoe. The community land covers roughly 10 000ha and borders with the Cotacachi-Cayapas National Park. Most of the land is covered with pristine Chocó lowland pluvial forest ranging from 170 – 1 700ft (50 – 500m).

We'll enter pristine forest which begins right behind our lodge. If we happen to run into any understory flocks, we will have our first chance at seeing the highly sought after Sapayoa – a species of indeterminate genetics, currently placed in its own monotypic family.



Sapayoa by Adam Riley

Playa de Oro is the only community along the river that has not yet extensively logged its forest. Luckily, members of the community understand preserving their forest is important for many reasons. Eco-tourism is the way to go, and our visit will directly support the conservation of this critically threatened habitat. The birding is simply superb, though as with any primary forest birding, it can also be tough, and Playa de Oro is no exception. Of the many species to be found here, our key targets that are often quite easily seen here and nowhere else, include Sapayoa, Five-colored Barbet, Lita Woodpecker, Stub-tailed Antbird, Ocellated Antbird, Streak-chested Antpitta, Dagua Thrush, Stripe-throated Wren, White-breasted Wood Wren and Lemon-spectacled Tanager.

Other Chocó endemics such as Dusky Pigeon, Rose-faced Parrot and Chocó Trogon are common here. Baudo Guan, Great Green Macaw and Rufous-crowned Antpitta are rare targets, but Playa de Oro is probably the best site for them. Understory mixed-species flocks are frequently encountered in the forest, and common flock members include the much sought-after Sapayoa, Tawny-crowned Greenlet, Tawny-faced Gnatwren, Checker-throated and White-flanked Antwren, Spot-crowned Antvireo, Tawny-crested Tanager and Lemon-spectacled Tanager. The lodge garden is a good place to look for secondary forest species and migrants that prefer forest edge and riparian habitats. Many of these species are fairly common and widespread, and the second-floor balcony is a perfect dry spot for scoping and scanning the canopy. The forest edge often has canopy flocks with Yellow-margined Flatbill, Brown-capped Tyrannulet, Black-headed Tody-Flycatcher, Scarlet-breasted and Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, Golden-hooded, Bay-headed, Rufous-winged, Blue-necked, Grey-and-gold and Blue-whiskered Tanagers,



Rose-faced Parrot by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Griscom's Antwren and Slate-throated Gnatcatcher. The dense secondary growth and vine tangles are home to Dusky Antbird, Pacific Antwren, Bay Wren and White-bearded Manakin, while Rufous-tailed Jacamar and Long-tailed Tyrant both occur in the garden.



Lita Woodpecker by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Humedal Yalare. We will make an exciting birding stop at Humedal Yalare which lies along the Esmeraldas - San Lorenzo highway. The Ceropia dominated forest here is home to Black-breasted, Pied and White-necked Puffbirds, Five-colored Barbet, Chocó Toucan, Stripe-billed Aracari and Slaty-tailed Trogon. We will then check some sites in the foothills of the Awa reserve with tricky targets like Golden-chested Tanager and Choco Woodpecker. We expect to arrive at Hacienda Primavera in the afternoon, and if time permits, we will bird the lodge grounds. The gardens are surrounded by secondary habitat and are often very birdy with the likes of White-winged, Fawn-breasted, Swallow and Scrub Tanagers, White-winged Becard, Ruddy-breasted Seedeater, Western Emerald and many others.

Chical Road. We'll spend time birding along the Chical Road which goes through the finest Chocó cloud-forest in Ecuador and is the only area in the country where such cracking species as Star-chested Treerunner and Purplish-mantled Tanager can be seen. Other Chocó endemics that are frequently observed along this road include Mountain Toucan, Toucan Barbet, Beautiful Jay, Hoary Puffleg, Black Solitare, Uniform Treehunter, Glistening-green, Black-chinned Mountain and Dusky Bush Tanagers, as well as Western Hemispingus. Barred Hawk and Black-and-chestnut Eagle nest in the area. Rufous Spinetail, Streak-headed Antbird, Plushcap and Striped Treehunter prefer the dense bamboo while the recently split and rather rare Ecuadorian Seedeater is also fairly regular here.

Mixed-species flocks are often productive with Barred Becard, Streak-necked and Golden-crowned Flycatchers, Golden-faced Tyrannulet (another potential species aside from the elevated Chocó), White-tailed Tyrannulet, Handsome Flycatcher, Beryl-spangled, Rufous-crested, Saffron-crowned (normally found on the east-slope!), Flame-faced, Golden-naped and Golden Tanagers, Streak-capped Treehunter, Lineated Foliage-gleaner and Montane Woodcreeper.



Five-colored Barbet by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Lago San Pablo. a large natural highland lake surrounded with marshes and reed beds hosts Ecuadorian Rail and Subtropical Doradito, while Andean Duck, Andean Coot and Yellow-billed Pintail are common on the lake. The secondary habitat surrounding the lake holds Southern Yellow Grosbeak, Band-tailed and Black-and-white Seedeaters, Sedge Wren, Vermillion Flycatcher and Eared Dove.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		This is a moderate to difficult tour. You should have a VERY GOOD level of fitness and stamina & be in VERY GOOD health. Not suitable for dedicated or avid photographers; inexperienced birders; or anyone with mobility or health challenges.
Birding Ease		Moderate to demanding. Bird density is low, many visuals are high in the canopy.
Accommodation		Varies from basic to very comfortable.
Walking / Trails		Trails can be very muddy & steep to very steep. Long days on our feet. Some long hikes of >5 hrs.
Vehicles / Roads		Good quality roads between major towns. Some long drives, several on poor, bumpy roads. Some sites may be unreachable if roads are damaged. Landslides can impact access to others.
Photography		Reasonable, typical rain forest conditions of variable light and frequent rain.
Annoyances		Can be hot to very hot & humid at some sites, muddy trails.

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 16;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- Ground transportation (including boat transfers);
- Extra activities mentioned in the itinerary;
- All national park and other reserve entrance fees; and
- All guiding services (including tips for local guides 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 tour requires a **HIGH** level of fitness, and participants should be in **VERY GOOD** physical and general health as most of the birding will be done on foot and may require walking for several hours at a time, often on muddy and sometimes steep trails.
- This is a fast-paced birding adventure designed for the dedicated lister and serious birder. The focus of the tour is to see as many of the endemics and area specialities as possible in our given time.
- **This tour is not suitable for anyone with physical or mobility limitations, or birders who are more interested in photography.**
- In some areas, it may be very hot and humid. We will thus make good use of the early mornings and will have many early starts to avoid, as far as possible, birding in the middle of the day. Furthermore, in the rainforest areas the humidity will be high and potentially uncomfortable.
- It is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20 kg (44 lb) for check in luggage and 8 kg (+-18 lb) for hand luggage.
- Accommodation varies from basic to very comfortable.

Arrival and Departure Details

The Endemics tour begins with a welcome dinner in Quito on day 1. The tour will conclude here after breakfast on the morning of day 16.

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.

Mariscal Sucre International Airport, Quito (IATA: UIO), Quito is the major port of entry into Ecuador 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.