



## Tico Tours

### Ecuador- "Land of Hummingbirds"

#### Duration- 12 Days

#### INTRODUCTION

Ecuador has the greatest diversity of hummingbirds in the world boasting **132 species** grouped into 57 genera, representing almost half of all hummingbirds found worldwide. Hummingbirds can be found in nearly every type of habitat in Ecuador from sea level to the snow capped mountains and can even be found in city centers of large towns. The most amazing ones occupy the high altitude regions of the Andes right up to the glaciers of 5000 meters. To survive that high up, those species of **colibries** (Spanish for hummingbirds) go into a state of torpor at night, diminishing their heart rate and dropping body temperature by 25° Celsius to conserve energy in the cold and often freezing paramo nights. Thanks to hummingbirds, many organizations have started conservation programs in Ecuador. Their beauty and peculiar way of flying makes them admired by scientists and photographers looking for exclusive and difficult shot of these birds.

We will concentrate our search within the spectacular slopes of the Northern Andes. The diversity of hummingbird species in the Andes is unsurpassed. Concentrating on the northern Andes—east, central and western slopes—we will see and photograph at least 40 and possibly over 60 species of these incredible jewels. *Sparkling Violetear, Violet-tailed Sylph, Gorgeted Sunangel, Sword-billed Hummingbird, Ecuadorian Hillstar, Booted Racquet-tail, Purple-throated Woodstar, and Shining Sunbeam* are just a few of the wonderful names given to these magnificent creatures. Along the way we will not ignore any opportunity to enjoy and photograph other birds and mammals we may see. There will also be exceptional opportunities to photograph rare and endemic species. This has been made easier by the recent installation of hummingbird feeders at several key locations we shall be visiting. For example, at one single location there is the likelihood of seeing eight Choco endemics (species found only in southwest Colombia and northwest Ecuador). At another location, 36 species can be seen from the porch with no less than 18 species seen daily. This includes such rare and

endemic species as the *Empress Brilliant*, *Purple-bibbed Whitetip*, and *Brown Inca*, as well as regular visitors like the *Collared Inca*, and *Andean Emerald*.

We will begin our tour with a visit to the newly established Yanacocha Reserve, with its spectacular views overlooking Pinchincha Volcano and deep gorges covered in dense elfin forest. Here we will discover yet another assemblage of unique and endemic hummingbirds. The reserve is home to the *Black-breasted Puffleg* (*Eriocnemis nigrivestis*). As far as anyone is aware, the reserve contains the entire world range of this very rare hummingbird.

## ITINERARY

### **Day 1: Arrive in Quito and transfer to Hotel Café Cultura**

Upon arrival to Quito, our guides will be waiting for you to meet and transfer you to your hotel.

### **Day 2: Early morning departure to Yanacocha Reserve**

Very early in the morning we will drive to Yanacocha Reserve in the high montane cloud forest on Volcan Pichincha at 11,300ft, traveling to the northwest of Quito. The reserve protects 964 ha of elfin Polylepis forest, which is home to the Black-breasted Puffleg (*Eriocnemis nigrivestis*). As far as we are aware, the reserve contains the entire world range of this very rare hummingbird. The reserve has a nice trail lined with native flowers and feeders to attract many different species, including the beautiful *Shining Sunbeam*. We will also have astonishing views of the remarkable *Sword-billed Hummingbird*, as well as *Sparkling Violet-ear*, *Great Sapphirewing*, *Rainbow-bearded Thornbill*, *Buff-winged Starfrontlet*, and both *Sapphire-vented* and *Golden-breasted Pufflegs*.

Other birds in this area may include *Turquoise Jay*, *Barred Fruiteater*, *Hooded* and *Scarlet-bellied* and the Choco Endemic *Black-chested Mountain-Tanagers*. We will enjoy a nice picnic lunch here before continuing west crossing the west slope of the Andes range to the famous Tony's House, where with a cup of coffee and accompanied by Tony, we will see a great variety of birds, especially hummingbirds with more than 30 species recorded. *Green-tailed Trainbearer*, *Shining Sunbeam*, *Tyrian Metaltail*, *Sword-billed Hummingbird*, *Buff-rumped Starfrontlet*, *Buff-tailed Coronets*, *Collared Inca* and *White-tailed Hillstar*, Choco Endemics here may include *Brown Inca*, *Violet-tailed Slyph* and *Gorgeted Sunangel*. Whilst on Tony's Balcony we will look skywards for the rare *Spot-fronted Swift* in amongst the common *Chestnut-collared Swift* and we will seek raptors such as *Plain-breasted Hawk* and *Barred Forest-Falcon*. Then we will continue our trip to arrive to Fausto and Amparo's home, a cozy house located in Tandayapa region, where the owners will receive us.

### **Night at Fausto and Amparo's House**

### Day 3: Tandayapa Region -Sachatamia Lodge

After breakfast, we will bird along the famous Old Nono-Mindo Road along the way. The birds are present all day long, but the greatest numbers appear on wet afternoons, especially in the last half-hour before dusk as they fill up on energy to last the night. The birds allow very close approach and provide great photo opportunities.

Hummingbirds we should find in this area are *Tawny-bellied Hermit*, *Green-fronted Lancebill*, *Brown Violet-ear*, *Green Violet-ear*, *Sparkling Violet-ear*, *Western Emerald*, *Green-crowned Woodnymph*, *Andean Emerald*, *Rufous-tailed Hummingbird*, *Speckled Hummingbird*, *Fawn-breasted Brilliant*, *Green-crowned Brilliant*, *White-tailed Hillstar*, *Mountain Velvetbreast*, *Brown Inca*, *Collared Inca*, *Buff-tailed Coronet*, *Velvet-purple Coronet*, *Gorgeted Sunangel*, *Hoary Puffleg*, *Purple-bibbed Whitetip*, *Booted Racket-tail*, *Long-tailed Sylph*, *Violet-tailed Sylph*, *Green tailed Train bearer*, *Wedge-billed Hummingbird*, *Purple-throated Woodstar*, *White-bellied Woodstar*.

Box lunch on route and arrival to Sachatamia Lodge, near Mindo. The lodge is encompassed by a private reserve composed of subtropical cloud and rainforest at 1700 meters (5200 feet) adjacent to the protected Mindo-Nambillo Forest reserve.

The feeders here hold a huge variety of hummingbirds including *Brown Inca*, *Purple-throated Woodstar*, *Brown Violetear*, *Velvet-purple Coronet*, the very cute *Booted Racket-tail*, the endemic *Empress Brilliant*, *Violet-tailed Sylph*, and *Andean Emerald* among others.

### Night at Sachatamia Lodge

### Day 4: Sachatamia Lodge and Mindo-Nambillo Forest Preserve

This day we will start with a nice breakfast while enjoying great views of the hummingbirds at the feeders. In addition to the hummingbirds already mentioned, we should see *Fawn-breasted Brilliant*, *Speckled Hummingbird*, and *Purple-bibbed Whitetip*.

After breakfast, we will walk through the trails of this reserve. After an early breakfast we will walk through the different trails of this private reserve around the lodge. This is an excellent area for birding and we will likely encounter a great deal of bird activity. Exciting birds we hope to encounter include *Palm Tanager*, *Golden Tanager*, *Orange-billed Sparrow*, *Andean Solitaire*, *Masked Trogon*, *Golden-headed Quetzal*, and *Crimson-rumped Toucanet*.

After lunch we will explore the beautiful Mindo-Nambillo Forest where highlights are likely to include *Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan*, *Crested Quetzal*, *Masked Trogon*, and *Powerful Woodpecker*, *Moss-backed Tanager*,

*Toucan Barbet, Sunbittern, and Cloud-forest Pygmy-owl.* We will return to Sachatamia to freshen up before dinner.

## Night at Sachatamia Lodge

### Day 5: Sachatamia Lodge-Maquipucuna Lodge

Early in the morning, we will have the opportunity to have one of the most amazing experiences, visiting the *Andean Cock-of-the Rock* lek. In the breeding season, the males produce a special sound and fly and dance about like acrobats waiting for the female to choose one of them to mate with. This is truly one of the most awe-inspiring sights in the neotropics. Afterwards, we will have another even more amazing experience as we visit the nearby Paz Reserve for Birds. Here we will stand in awe as three different species of extremely shy antpittas come out to see Angel Paz as he calls them by the names he has given to each individual! We will have absurdly close views of extremely secretive *Moustached Antpitta* (*Grallaria alleni*), *Yellow-breasted Antpitta* (*Grallaria flavitincta*), and the impressive *Giant Antpitta* (*Grallaria gigantea*) as Angel hand feeds them grubs and worms.

After our walk, we will depart for Maquipucuna Lodge. On the road in to Maquipucuna, several new species will likely be added to our list including *Pacific Hornero, Olive-crowned Yellowthroat, Blue and White Swallow, Southern Rough-winged Swallow, Tropical Kingbird, Buff-rumped Warbler, Blue-black Grassquit, and Yellow-faced Grassquit.*

Once we arrive at Maquipucuna Lodge, members of the staff will help us with our luggage and show us to our rooms. The [Maquipucuna Reserve](#) is a 6,000-hectare privately owned and managed nature reserve, surrounded by 14,000 hectares of "protected forest." Eighty percent of Maquipucuna consists of steeply sloped, undisturbed cloud forest. Covering four different life zones ranging from 1,000 to 2,800 meters above sea level, the reserve houses a tremendous diversity of flora and fauna. In fact, it is located within the Choco-Andean Corridor, one of the planet's top five "biodiversity hotspots." The lodge is staffed with guides and service personnel mainly from the local communities and provides comfortable accommodations for up to 30 people in five separate bedrooms and shared bathrooms, 3 suites with private bathrooms, and a family cabin with private bathrooms. All bathrooms offer hot showers.

The lodge also has a magnificent porch where we can relax to the sounds of the forest and watch the constant activity at the numerous hummingbird feeders. *Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Green-crowned Brilliant, White-necked Jacobin, White-whiskered Hermit, and Green-crowned Woodnymph* are all common here.

In the late afternoon, we may take a short hike across the river and through the nearby pastures. Here, we may connect with many new birds including *Smoke-colored Pewee, Red-faced Spinetail, Spotted Woodcreeper, White-*

*banded Tyrannulet, Scale-crested Pygmy-tyrant, Black Phoebe, Social Flycatcher, Brown-capped Vireo, Fawn-breasted Tanager, Silver-throated Tanager, Orange-bellied Euphonia, and Buff-throated Saltator.* We will return to the lodge to freshen up before dinner. At dusk, we will keep an eye out for the huge *Rufous-bellied Nighthawk* passing high overhead. After dark, we will enjoy spending some time relaxing on the porch and admiring the myriad insects attracted to the lights. **Night at Maquipucuna Lodge (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner included)**

#### **Day 6: Maquipucuna Lodge-Quito**

We will arise very early and, after a cup of coffee or tea and a quick bite, we will hike one of the trails close to the lodge. Later we will have lunch and then take a short walk in the area to spot more incredible birds. Around the lodge we should find *Southern House Wren, Lemon-rumped Tanager, Rufous Motmot, Orange-billed Sparrow, and Golden-crowned Flycatcher.* In the more brushy areas along the trail, we will encounter *Slaty Spinetail, Western Slaty Ant-shrike, Ruddy Pigeon, Black-capped Becard, Whiskered Wren, and Tropical Parula.* In the open forest, we may spot *Squirrel Cuckoo, Band-tailed Pigeon, Slate-colored Grosbeak, Black-billed Peppershrike, Stripe-throated Hermit, Scaly-crested Pygmy-tyrant, Golden-olive Woodpecker, and Plain Brown Woodcreeper.* We will hope for good looks at the endemic *Choco Toucan.* Other species we may see or hear on this morning hike include *Southern Nightingale Wren, Gray-breasted Wood-wren, White-winged Tanager, and Golden Tanager.*

After breakfast, we will pack up and head back to Quito. Along the road out to the main highway, we may see *Dull-colored Grassquit, Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaner, Rusty-margined Flycatcher, Subtropical Casique, and Smooth-billed Ani.*

On the way back to Quito, we will stop at Mitad del Mundo "Middle of the World" to have the unusual opportunity to be in two hemispheres at the same time! Here we will also hope to find the *Giant Hummingbird.*

#### **Night at Café Cultura Hotel**

#### **Day 7: Travel to the Papallacta region**

We will have a very early specially prepared breakfast before heading for Papallacta Pass to the northeast of Quito. Our travel route today will take us between the West and East slopes of the Andes. Here we shall search the more arid scrub habitats of the inter-Andean valley near Pifo where, among the flowers of the agave plants, we hope to find the *Giant Hummingbird.* We should also find *Shinning Sunbeam* and *Sparkling Violet-ear* as well as both the *Black-tailed* and *Green-tailed Trainbearer* giving the opportunity for a nice comparison of these beautiful hummingbirds streaking like comets across the desert-like habitat.

After this brief stop, we climb out of the valley and begin our ascent to Papallacta Pass. This area has well conserved patches of polylepis forest and is an excellent place to observe high mountain bird species. The 4000-meter high páramo holds a fascinating group of high-altitude species. While traveling up and over the Papallacta Pass, we will search the flowers of the paramo for the specialty hummers of this area *Ecuadorian Hillstar*, *Blue-mantled Thornbill*, and the *Purple-backed Thornbill*. We also hope to see *Variable Hawk*, *Many-striped Canastero*, *Tawny Antpitta* and, perhaps, an *Andean Condor* or two. Near the summit at 4500 meters (14,700 feet), with luck, we should find the much sought after *Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe*.

We will then descend and search nearby polylepis groves for specialties such as *Black-backed Bush-Tanager* and *Giant Conebill*. After our box lunch, we will continue traveling lower down near the town of Papallacta, looking for the spectacular *Sword-billed Hummingbird* and *Great Sapphire-wing* as well as a host of other great birds like, and the colorful *Scarlet-bellied Mountain-Tanager*. We will also scan the Río Papallacta for the "torrent trio" of *Torrent Duck*, *Torrent Tyrannulet* and the superb *White-capped Dipper*.

On the eastern side of the Andes await still more resplendent hummers amid distinctive types of habitats. Our travels will take us from above the timberline and paramo down into the humid temperate forest to Guango Lodge, where more feeders bring in such wonderful varieties as *Tourmaline Sunangel*, *White-bellied Woodstar*, *Glowing Puffleg*, *Mountain Velvetbreast*, and the rare and local *Mountain Avocetbill*.

## Night Guango Lodge

### Day 8: Guango Lodge- San Isidro Lodge

Early morning birding around the lodge may produce *Capped Conebill*, *Blue-backed Conebill*, *Gray-headed Bush-tanager*, and *Mountain Wren*. We will have breakfast then we will continue our trip to [Cabañas San Isidro](#). At San Isidro Lodge, we will check the hummingbird feeders near the entrance to the forest trail. Here we should see *Long-tailed Sylph*, *Chestnut-breasted Coronet*, *Bronzy Inca*, and *Collared Inca*. We may also see the uncommon *Gorgeted Woodstar* and *White-tipped Hillstar*.

After lunch, we will hike along some of the different trails of the lodge, searching for bird activity. We will seek out specialties such as *Black-chested Fruiteater*, *Long-tailed Antbird*, *Barred Anthrush* and the little-known *Peruvian Antpitta*, a nest of which was discovered right on the property! Along the road we may find *Highland Motmot*, *Marbled-faced Bristle-tyrant*, *Azara's Spinetail*, *Pearled Treerunner*, *Torrent Tyrannulet*, *Variiegated Bristle-tyrant*, *Rufous-breasted Flycatcher*, *Cinnamon Flycatcher*, *Inca Jay*, *Turquoise Jay*, *Rufous-headed Pygmy-tyrant*, *Sulphur-bellied Tyrannulet*, *Common Bush-tanager*, and *Sub-tropical Casique*.

## Night Cabañas San Isidro

**Day 9:** Early in the morning we will bird around the lodge. We will return to the lodge for lunch and then we will travel to the Cordillera de Los Huacamayos where we will walk one of the trails specialized for birdwatching. Here it is possible to see many different species and we'll look for *Black-billed Mountain-Toucan*, *White-bellied Antpitta*, *Bicolored Antvireo* and the very local *White-rimmed Brush-Finch* among others. We will have a box lunch and bird a number of spots en route on our way back to San Isidro.

#### **Night at Cabañas San Isidro**

#### **Day 10: Cabañas San Isidro-Quito**

Early breakfast and departure to Termas de Papallacta, place from where we will enter to the pristine Cayambe Coca Reserve, where it is possible to see some of the species of Ecuador paramo. We will cross this reserve for a road that is visited only few times per year giving us a biggest opportunity to see more species; arrival to a small town called Oyacachi that takes care of this area. After a full day in the paramo we will go back to Quito.

#### **Night at Café Cultura Hotel**

#### **Day 11: Antisana Ecological Reserve**

After breakfast we will be transferred to the Antisana Ecological Reserve (Volcan Antisana is the 4<sup>th</sup> largest volcano in Ecuador at 5758m, 17274ft), where we will observe many representative bird species of the highlands including *Blue-mantled Thornbill*, *Red-rumped Bush-Tyrant*, *Paramo Pipit*, *Plumbeous Sierra-finch*, and *Black-winged Ground-dove*. We will visit Mica Lake here in order to see *Silvery Grebe*, *Andean Teal*, *Andean Duck*, *Yellow-billed Pintail*, *Andean Coot* and other high Andean waterfowl, as well as many land birds such as *Aplomado Falcon*, *Andean Gull*, *Andean Lapwing* and *Carunculated Caracara*. Here we have a high probability of connecting with the majestic *Andean Condor* and while we are looking upwards for this we will also be on the lookout for *Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle* and *Variable Hawk*. We should also find both *Bar-winged* and *Stout-billed Cinclodes* here and *Black-faced Ibis*, an extremely rare species in Ecuador, all of this set amongst some of the most spectacular scenery in the country. We will enjoy a nice lunch in Hacienda Antisana or a box lunch on route while watching one of the real jewels of this high country, *Ecuadorian Hillstar*. After lunch, we will return to Quito.

In Quito we will have time to rest or visit the city followed by a Farewell dinner party. Tonight we will salute an enlightening trip of birding, full of a variety of ecosystems, beautiful views, cozy places, wonderful food, and the most spectacular, colorful birds.

#### **Night at Café Cultura Hotel**

**Day 12: Quito-Transfer to airport for international departure or flight to Coca for NWC rainforest extension**

Includes- Accommodations, private transportation, bilingual naturalist guidespecialized in birdwatching, all meals (including a farewell dinner party on the last night), air tickets Quito-Coca-Quito, and boat transfer Coca-NWC-Coca

Also includes entrance fee to Yanacocha Reserve, Tony's house, Maquipucuna Reserve, Mindo Nambillo Reserve, Paz Reserve, and the Cock of the Rock lek, Mitad de Mundo (equator line), Antisana Ecological Reserve, Cayambe Coca Reserve (Papallacta), and entrance fee to Yasuní National Park

Not included- Airport tax (US\$38), tips and personal expenses