

**NORTHERN
COLOMBIA:
Birding &
Cultural Tour**



STUNNING SCENERY

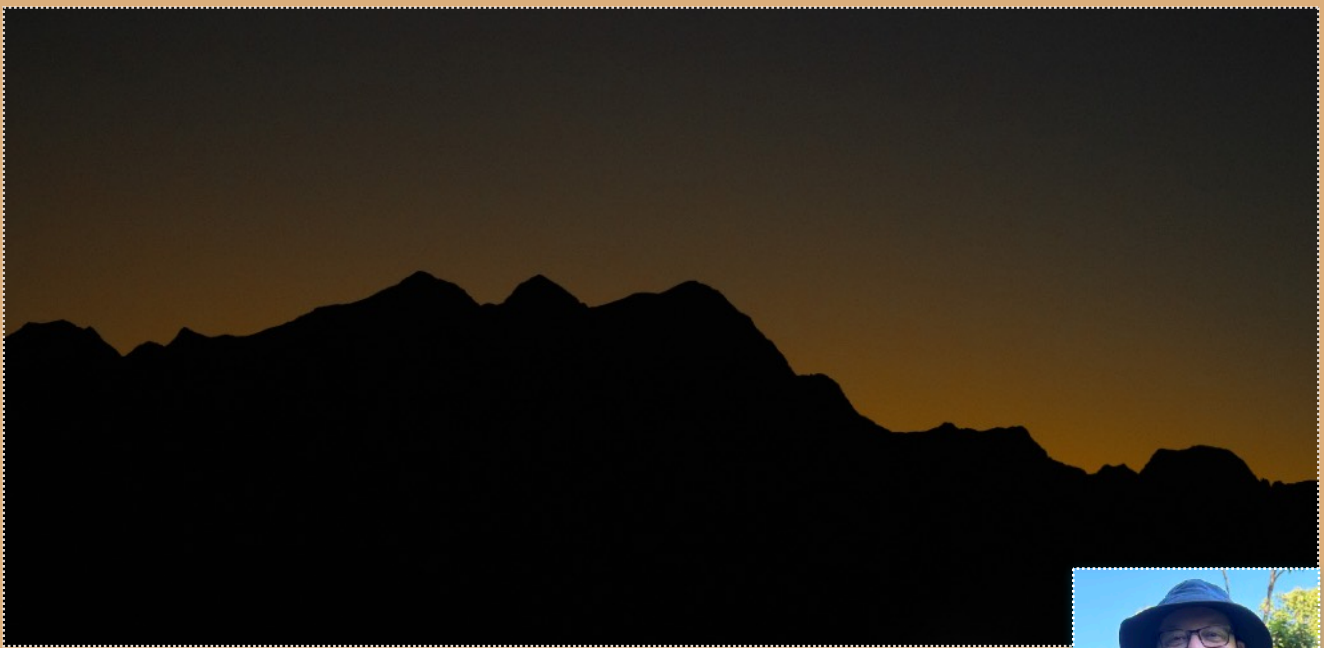


JOYFUL PEOPLE



ANCIENT HERITAGE

TRAVEL JOURNAL



***FROM THE CARIBBEAN COAST, TO THE
PEAKS OF THE SIERRA NEVADA DE
SANTA MARTA AND THE WINDSWEPT
DRY FOREST OF THE GUAJIRA***

Northern Colombia offers up a tremendous diversity of habitats, birds, and cultural experiences within a compact area that is easy to explore. National parks, eco-lodges, and unique biomes in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, along the Caribbean coast from Cartagena through Barranquilla, and in the tropical dry forest of La Guajira provided incredibly rich birding opportunities for beginner and advanced birders alike. This tour was a fantastic and diverse experience of Colombia at its best!



**WRITTEN BY:
JEFFREY
KIEFER
2023 TOUR
PARTICIPANT**

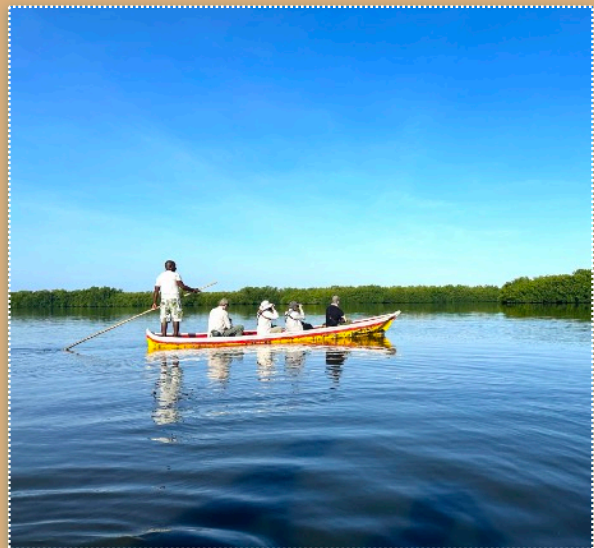
**PHOTOS BY:
BIRDING BY BUS**



Our Birding by Bus trip in Northern Colombia was outstanding, full of diverse birds and rich culture. Guided by Roger Rodriguez, Marc and Eliana Kramer, each day was perfectly planned. This remarkable trip, filled with unique experiences, has earned nothing but my highest praise. As a non-birder, or SOB (Spouse of a Birder), I found every aspect of this Birding by Bus journey in Northern Colombia truly extraordinary.

We started our trip with a visit to the historic Cartagena Old Town and vibrant Getsemaní neighborhood, providing a perfect introduction to the region's rich culture and setting the tone for our incredible journey. Carlos, our local guide, led us through the historic old town of Cartagena. His friendly and engaging approach unveiled the city's history, guiding us through the colorful murals of Calle de la Sierpe, and introducing us to the lively and boisterous neighborhood of Getsemaní. Although not the focus of the city tour, there were of course still some highlight birds during our guided urban stroll including Yellow-crowned Parrot, Gray-Breasted Martin, and Yellow-headed Caracara.

The next day, local guide Sandra joined us, steering our exploration through La Boquilla, a fishing village at the northern edge of Cartagena. Her pride in showcasing the local culture added a memorable depth to our understanding of the area. We started in La Boquilla fishing village for birding by canoe in the mangroves where we spotted the Hudsonian Godwit, a rare Northern American migrant in this area. During our visit to La Boquilla, we engaged with the DAMARTES project, a local women's cooperative, where we tried our hand at making jewelry.





This was not just a creative endeavor but also a way to connect with the local culture. Another memorable experience was the BATAMBORA percussion music project, which supports teaching local children. A standout moment there was watching Kevin, a fellow SOB, deliver an entertaining rendition of Smash Mouth's "Allstar." That night we headed to Barranquilla. The roundup of additional unique birds, among

many, included the Roseate Spoonbill, Hook-billed Kite, and Large-Billed Tern.

The next leg of our adventure in Barranquilla began spectacularly with a sighting of a pair of Northern Screamers by the side of the Magdalena River. While we paused to take pictures, two policemen on a motorcycle stopped to check if we needed assistance. One of the officers, who spoke English, was keen to engage with us. We had a delightful conversation about our trip. As we departed, they kindly escorted us for a distance with their lights flashing. This encounter perfectly illustrated the friendliness and generosity of the Colombian people, adding a memorable and heartwarming touch to our journey. Before connecting with our drivers to head up the Santa Marta Mountains, we stopped to bird with a local guide, Omar.



He was an expert in spotting local birds. We were able to view Snail Kite, Bare-faced Ibis, Russet-throated Puffbird, Chestnut Piculet, Snail Kite, Pied Puffbird, and Sapphire-bellied Hummingbird. We were also lucky in spotting a single American Flamingo out in a lagoon on the Cienaga-Barranquilla road.

The next leg of our adventure began by meeting up with our 4-wheel drive caravan for our rugged journey up and into the Santa Marta Mountains and our initial lodging at the Colores de la Sierra Eco-lodge. Our Colombian Jeep (aka Landrovers) was led by Cacique, who not only navigated the challenging mountain roads with skill, but he also proved to be an awesome bird guide, complementing the expertise of Roger, Marc, and Eliana. The birding in this region of the Santa Martas was as spectacular as promised, but the highlight for me was our visit to Hacienda La Victoria coffee farm. La Victoria is a historical farm employing gravity-based water flow to move beans through the processing steps, and turn of the last century equipment that is repaired with parts fabricated on site. As an added bonus the farm also sported an operating brewery. The beer was refreshing and delicious on a hot humid



day. An amusing incident with a dropped beer bottle added to the trip's memorable moments, all handled with good humor and grace (sorry about that one, Marc). Throughout the numerous birding opportunities, before ascending further in the Santa Marta's we captured sightings of a number of bird species including, but not limited to,

Whooping Motmot, Steely-vented Hummingbird, Yellow-Backed Oriole, Black-chested Jay, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Crimson-crested Woodpecker,



Masked Trogon, Keel-billed Toucan, Santa Marta Antbird, Rusty-breasted Antpitta, and Santa Marta Tapaculo.

On Day 5 we decamped and headed up the mountain to the El Dorado Bird Reserve. On our trek upward we stopped at a local home led by the matriarch

Mery. She lives modestly and harvests and roasts coffee in small batches around her grounds. We were lucky enough to acquire her rare coffee beans to take home. While there, we also were treated to even more spectacular birding, sighting Crowned Woodnymph, Santa Marta Blossomcrown, and the rare Coppery Emerald hummingbird. After our short visit we headed to lunch at Cacique's brother's Mountain House and for birding at the feeders located there. Highlights included the Santa Marta Woodstar, Lazuline Sabrewing, Rusty Flowerpiercer, and Black-headed Tanager. After lunch we made are way to the El Dorado Lodge.

Upon shuttling up the mountain by tuk-tuk to El Dorado's Kogi cabins, we were met with stunning views, with magnificent sunsets, and the haunting serenades of howler monkeys in distant valleys. One highlight was a rare encounter with a recently identified Kankuamo marquezii tarantula species, adding an element of excitement to our excellent birdwatching sessions. The early morning excursion to the remote San Lorenzo Ridge at 9,000 feet was capped off by a breathtaking sunrise, the sighting of the



Santa Marta Parakeet, and the mountaintop outdoor breakfast Eliana put together. In the afternoon, we were also lucky enough to be able to partake in an amazingly simple but extraordinarily tasty squash soup prepared by the young ladies that helmed the kitchen at the lodge. These experiences showcased the lengths Eliana went to, ensuring our trip was filled with memorable and unique experiences. This portion was also nonetheless spectacular for the bird sighting highlights that included Mottled Owl, White-tipped Quetzal, Cinnamon Flycatcher, Band-winged Nightjar, Tyrian Metaltail, Southern Emerald-Toucanet, White-rumped Hawk, and White-lored Warbler.

Continuing back to the Caribbean coast and landing at La Jorara Eco-hotel, the warm hospitality of the lodge staff made the humid warm climate bearable. I had banked on taking advantage of my SOB



status and stay in to rest during the afternoon birding, however, I was coaxed by Eliana in joining her to see the new lookout that was built at La Jorara. Little did I realize that the 'visit' was actually accompanied by a strenuous hike up a long hill in the mid-day heat. Even so, we had fun and the view was magnificent overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. A minor setback with a van breakdown showcased the resilience and adaptability of Eliana where the group continued to bird while she leveraged her resources and network, to get them back on the road in no time. The Day 7 bird highlights were Orange-crowned Oriole, Blue Dacnis, Gray-headed Kite, White-necked Puffbird, and Lance-tailed Manakin.

Our last day was full of birding and more meaningful cultural experiences. In the unique ecosystem of Los Flamencos Flora and Fauna Sanctuary, Jhonys, our local bird guide, demonstrated his keen birdwatching skills, ensuring no sighting went unnoticed. What made our visit extra special was the breakfast hosted at his extended family's house in the village of Camarones. Seated in their back courtyard, we enjoyed a delightful meal overseen by Jhonys's daughter and brother, providing a personal touch to our adventure. We capped the day with a visit to a local indigenous community of Wayuu, where I got to relish my inner Bourdain with a tasting of a fermented corn drink and locally prepared goat. The numerous species viewed this day included Rufous-



vented Chachalaca, Green-rumped Parrotlet, Buff-necked Ibis, Pale-tipped Tyrannulet, Trinidad Euphonia, Tocuyo Sparrow, Vermilion Cardinal, Orinoco Saltator, Buffy Hummingbird, American Oystercatcher, Scarlet Ibis, and Reddish Egret. That night back at La Jorara the culmination of our trip was a joyful celebration of surpassing 300 bird species, marking a significant milestone for Eliana and Marc's 25th Birding by Bus tour.



The trip was made all the more enjoyable and memorable by my fellow travelers. This includes Guy and Susan, Paula, Chris H., Susan H., Kevin (a fellow SOB), and Jess. Each of you added your own unique touch to our journey. A special mention goes to our partner in mischief, Jacquie, who played a notable role in the 'corruption' of our guide Roger. Your camaraderie and the fun we shared truly made this trip one to remember.

I'd like to extend special appreciation to our tour leaders. Starting with Roger, our local Colombian bird expert, who was exceptional. His talent in birding was unmatched, consistently guiding us to spectacular sightings. Beyond his expertise, Roger's warm personality and humor made every interaction enjoyable. He was always ready for a good laugh, making him a fantastic companion on our journey. Roger was more than our guide but someone I will view as my friend for many years to come.



Marc, co-founder of Birding by Bus alongside Eliana, was

a constant, reassuring presence on the tour. His extensive knowledge of Colombian birds was invaluable, always ready to identify the various species we encountered. He patiently helped with my sightings, whether they be well known or something special. Lastly, Marc is a mean Parqués player that relished in his victory, still talking about it the next day.



Eliana's role cannot be overstated. Her boundless enthusiasm and meticulous attention to detail kept the trip running smoothly. She anticipated our every need, ensuring all arrangements were perfect. Her ability to swiftly switch to backup plans in unforeseen circumstances was impressive, ensuring our experience was uninterrupted. Guided by these incredible individuals, our trip was an extraordinary adventure, and their dedication and skill deserve immense acclaim.



This journey was more than just a birding tour; it was a deep dive into the heart of Colombia's natural splendor and cultural richness. It stands out as one of my most favorite vacations, filled with laughter, learning, and unforgettable memories. I cannot recommend traveling with Birding by Bus enough. Do it! You will have the adventure of a lifetime. My wife and I have two more scheduled and we can't wait.

KNOW

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE A COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF THE BIRDS, FLORA, AND FAUNA SEEN DURING THIS TRIP, PLEASE VISIT:

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