



Sunbird, 26B The Market Square,
Potton, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2NP
UK

Tel: (+44) 01767 262522
Fax (+44) 01767 262916
Email: sunbird@sunbirdtours.co.uk
www.sunbirdtours.co.uk



TOUR INFORMATION FOR ECUADOR: AMAZON LOWLANDS in February

These notes are designed to help you prepare for your tour. Please read this carefully.

ENTERING ECUADOR: United Kingdom citizens will need a passport valid for six months after the date you leave Ecuador. A visa is not required. You will be handed an Tourist Card to fill in while on the aircraft - this needs to be presented with your passport. Make sure you put this card somewhere safe after you have entered the country as you will need to present it again on your departure. Citizens of other nations should contact the nearest Ecuadorian Consulate for entry requirements.

It is always a good idea to take a photocopy of your passport with you when travelling abroad. They can prove invaluable in helping you get a replacement if your original is lost or stolen. Obviously you should keep the photocopy in a separate bag to the originals.

Proof of health insurance is now required when entering Ecuador. The exact requirements are unclear, but please have your travel insurance confirmation details with you on arrival. If for some reason your coverage doesn't meet the requirement, we have been told that medical insurance can be purchased at the airport and that there are 2 or 3 companies stationed just outside of the baggage area.

ARRIVAL DATE: While the tour starts with dinner at 18:30 on the evening of Day 1 of the tour, you may be tempted by convenient flights arriving in Quito. If you elect to arrive late in the evening of Day 1 remember that flights can be delayed, and be aware that we will be flying to Coca in the morning on Day 2; you may get only a few hours' sleep that night. Our hotel offers some good birding right within the grounds, with feeders, and we have found that a restful 'day before' is preferable to a late night arrival.

Note: The hotel we use in Quito is located in a small town near the airport, away from the cultural and shopping centres of the capital itself. Those wishing to explore Quito more fully should plan on spending an extra day or two before or after the tour.

INTRODUCTORY MEETING: There will be an introductory meeting during dinner on Day 1 of the tour. This informal meeting affords the leader the opportunity to introduce everyone to each other and to let you know generally what to expect on the trip - pace of the tour, daily routine, etc. We strongly recommend you arrange your flights to arrive in the late afternoon, or perhaps a day early, so that you can be present at the introductory meeting. If you cannot be present at the first dinner, the leader will leave a message for you with the information and plan for the next day.

TIME DIFFERENCE: Ecuador is five hours behind Greenwich Mean Time.

CURRENCY: Ecuador uses the U.S. dollar as its currency. Most credit cards are readily accepted. Although your basic expenses on tour are covered, you will almost certainly want to bring money for incidental expenses, gifts and departure tax. Miscellaneous expenses at Sani (e.g. additional drinks beyond what's covered by the tour) can be paid for with U.S. currency or credit cards.

ECUADOR – Amazon Lowlands: Tour Information...2

LANGUAGE: Spanish is spoken everywhere. Our leader will be competent in Spanish, and you will not be required to converse in the language. However, you may want to consider bringing a Spanish phrase book. It may be helpful to you in negotiating simple hotel and restaurant situations when no leader is around. The staff at Sani and the Garden Hotel vary from somewhat adept to fluent in English.

CLIMATE: Quito has been called the city of eternal spring, and the climate there is crisp and cool with chilly nights and pleasantly warm days. Rain is possible, but sunburn is more likely. At Sani Lodge in the Amazonian lowlands, we can expect occasional rain and warm, muggy days with marginally cooler nights.

ALTITUDE: Puenbo is at about 8,000 feet in elevation. The tour itinerary takes place in the Amazon lowlands at about 700 feet elevation.

PACE OF THE TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE: This tour is of a moderate pace, though pre-dawn starts are the norm, and the hot, humid weather is unrelenting and can be very draining even with minimal activity. Most days will be broken up into modules: we'll go birding early in the morning returning before lunch, then a siesta, and another birding excursion before dinner perhaps staying out until dark for some target species. A few of the days we'll be longer away from the lodge and we'll eat a boxed lunch on a forest trail or elsewhere.

Birding is mostly done from a paddled canoe or on foot on forest trails. The conditions of the trails at Sani vary. Most of the trails around the lodge are relatively flat. Across the river in Yasuni National Park, the trails are typically hilly and some have carved earthen steps. When they're dry, the trails are not difficult, though rain is always a possibility and mud in the trails is to be expected. Some trails may also have small stream crossings depending on weather. After rain, when the trails are wet, they can be slippery and difficult, and some of the boardwalks can become slick and a little hazardous. A collapsible walking stick can be useful. February is a drier period here, and we hope for a visit with minimal rain.

The small canoes that we use almost every day are paddled by one of the lodge staff. It can be a bit awkward getting into or out of the canoes, depending on water levels. The seats are made of wood with separate vinyl cushions.

HEALTH: It is essential that you contact your own doctor to obtain the latest information on the regions you are visiting. Please contact your doctor well in advance of your tour's departure as some medication must be initiated weeks before the period of possible exposure.

It is recommended that you are up-to-date on routine vaccinations. These include measles-mumps-rubella (MMR), diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis, varicella (chickenpox), polio, and your yearly flu shot. It is further recommended that most travelers have protection against Hepatitis A and Typhoid.

Certification of yellow fever vaccination is not required unless you are entering Ecuador from a country where yellow fever is present (check with your local Medical Advisory Service). For example, if you are entering Ecuador from the USA a Yellow Fever Certificate is not required. However, it is recommended that travelers be protected against Yellow Fever vaccination in rural Ecuador.

One can never completely escape the risk of parasites or fungal infections. We avoid tap water but purified water is readily available. Finally, you may wish to bring a broad-spectrum antibiotic in case of stubborn bacterial infections and an anti-diarrhea medication such as Immodium.

ECUADOR – Amazon Lowlands: Tour Information...3

Malaria is present in the Amazon basin of Eastern Ecuador, so a malaria medication is important. Please remember that many anti-malarial drugs must be started one or more weeks before the period of exposure, and continued for several weeks after it concludes. Useful information on all aspects of malaria, including how to reduce your chances of being bitten can be found at the website <http://www.preventingmalaria.info>.

One can never completely escape the risk of parasites or fungal infections. We avoid tap water, but bottled water is readily available. You may wish to bring a broad-spectrum antibiotic in case of stubborn bacterial infections, and an anti-diarrhea medication such as Imodium.

Biting insects are usually only a minor problem on this tour, and most areas are delightfully insect-free. We recommend using insect repellents with a high concentration of DEET. However, care must be taken to avoid getting the DEET repellent on optical equipment as DEET dissolves rubber and plastic and can damage coated lenses. Camping supply stores and outfitters carry some reasonably effective alternatives, which contain natural products and aren't corrosive. One example is a product containing permethrin 0.5%, which must be applied directly to clothing in advance of wearing and allowed to dry. This non-staining, odorless chemical is non-toxic to humans and protective on clothing through several launderings.

Important note: Sani is an isolated jungle lodge. There are no local doctors, and emergency evacuation procedures are certain to be slow and expensive. Please be sure that you are in good physical condition before scheduling this trip.

It may be difficult to obtain any special medication during the tour, so bring all you are likely to need.

For further information on health advice refer to the Medical Advisory Services for Travellers Abroad website www.masta-travel-health.com

ACCOMODATION: Sani is a clean and comfortable, but not luxurious, jungle lodge. The cabins are constructed of wood and have screened windows. Each has one king or two double beds with good mattresses, mosquito netting and a fan. Each has its own bathroom with sink, flush toilet, and shower. Electricity for the lodge and cabins is supplied by a main generator and is typically available in the mornings, evenings, and around lunchtime. Hot water is available when the generator is operating, though it can cut out occasionally. The cabins are separate but are connected by a common walkway to the bar and dining room. We should note that occasionally spiders, crickets, mice or tree frogs find their way into the bathrooms.

LAUNDRY: There is simple (but expensive) laundry service available at Sani. You can also bring cool-water laundry soap such as Woolite™. Clothes dry quickly in the equatorial sun (although it's often cloudy), although during rainy periods you can count on dampness.

ELECTRICITY: The lodge and cabins are supplied by a main generator and is typically available in the mornings (04.00 to 09.00), evenings (17.00 – 22.00), and around lunchtime (midday to 14.00). Hot water is supplied by solar heaters, though it can cut out occasionally. However, to be prepared for power failures we recommend bringing a small torch and headlamp. This will also be helpful when coming or going from the lodge in the dark.

Electricity is 110 volts. You may find the following website helpful: <http://www.power-plugs-sockets.com>.

ECUADOR – Amazon Lowlands: Tour Information...4

FOOD: Meals at Sani are excellent and run the gamut of international fare, and often include lots of vegetables, great soups, various salads and splendid desserts to accompany the fresh meat, chicken and fish. Vegetarians are easily accommodated.

Sunbird tours are all-inclusive and no refunds can be issued for any tour meals participants choose to miss. While we will try to do all we can to accommodate the requirements of all participants, please note that we cannot guarantee all causes of food allergies can be avoided at every destination. Many restaurants offer set menus and are unable to accommodate all special requests within a group. Thus, participants with significant food allergies or special dietary needs should bring appropriate foods with them for those times when their needs can, regrettably, not be accommodated. Our tours are carefully scheduled to ensure the best possible birding experience and although the leaders will do all they can to make sure the group eats at a reasonable time, sometimes early or late lunches and/or evening meals cannot be avoided. Any participants who need to eat at specific times may need to take supplemental food with them.

DRINKS: Bottled water, a soft drink or a beer (or wine if appropriate) are provided at meals, as is coffee or tea. In addition we keep a supply of bottled water on the tour vehicles. Bottled or filtered water may also be provided in some of the rooms where we stay.

INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS: There is WIFI available in the common area of the lodge when the generator is running.

Mobile phones can be useful while on tour but keep in mind that many countries operate on a different cellular technology. Your phone may be incompatible with the local system, so please check with your local carrier. Fortunately, with the advent of smartphones, it is easy to download applications such as Skype or Google Voice, which can make calling home free or very inexpensive. Another option is to replace the data (“SIM”) card in your phone in-country. The SIM cards, including data can be very cheap. If you wish to use this option you will need to check that your smart phone has a SIM card slot.

FIELD CLOTHING: Dress is informal throughout. The following items are basic requirements:

Long trousers of a quick-dry fabric (not cotton)	Sun hat
Quick-dry shirts	Light wind-proof jacket & gloves
Water-proof clothing (no bright colours!)	Sweatshirt (for dinner at Puemblo)
Folding umbrella (IMPORTANT! *See note)	
Boots (“wellies” are great) or hiking boots/trainers which you don't mind getting wet and muddy	

Note: Rubber boots are available (free-of-charge) from Sani, but the largest size is men's 11½ (UK) / 45 (Europe). Rain ponchos are also available. Your jacket and sweatshirt may only be useful during our evenings in Puembo and possibly during the breezy boat ride between Coca and Sani Lodge.

Umbrellas: Although some regard this as silly, we feel a small collapsible umbrella is an essential item for birding in the Neotropics. Those choosing not to bring umbrellas usually regret that choice! A small, dark-coloured travel umbrella is preferable - a big bright yellow and white umbrella, for example, will be unwieldy in group situations and will make you even more conspicuous to the birds.

ECUADOR – Amazon Lowlands: Tour Information...5

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS:

Notebook/pencil	Alarm clock
Sunscreen	Sunglasses
Laundry soap	Pocket knife (packed in your suitcase!)
Plastic bags (to protect optical equipment)	Laundry bag
Insect repellent	Anti-fog spray for spectacles
Water bottle	Ear plugs (if you are a light sleeper)
Small first aid kit	Collapsible walking stick
Small rucksack/daypack	Personal medication
Small torch or LED headlamp (useful for doing the checklist in the evenings)	

Optional: Telescope & tripod (recommended if you have them), camera, film or memory cards, spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), field guide.

Note: The most effective insect repellents are those containing at least 35% of the active ingredient diethyltoluamide (DEET). The higher the percentage, the greater the effectiveness. However, care must be taken to avoid getting the repellent on to optical equipment as it dissolves rubber and plastic and can damage coated lenses. A reasonably effective alternative, which isn't corrosive, is Mosi-guard, produced by MASTA, and we recommend this. It is available in most high street chemist (including those at the airport). Camping supply stores sell a product containing permethrin 0.5%, which must be applied directly to clothing in advance of wearing and allowed to dry. This non-staining, odourless chemical is non-toxic to humans and protective on clothing through several launderings. Please make sure you never to spray insect repellent inside the vehicle or when you are standing close to other participants – it may drift on to their optical equipment.

LEADER'S EQUIPMENT: The leader will bring copies of the more important field guides and references and maps, a laser pointer, iPod and recordings for playback, spotlight, and a telescope.

LUGGAGE: Our Final Information document, which will be sent to you approximately three weeks before departure, will give details about baggage weight and size restrictions imposed by the airline used for this tour.

There is a weight restriction of 20 kg (44 lbs) per person, plus two small carry-ons, on our internal Ecuador flights. Please try to limit your luggage as much as possible.

If possible, please bring your luggage in soft-sided bags or cases (rather than large hard 'Samsonite'-type suitcases) as these pack more easily into our vehicles during the tour. Please note that on many tours there are no porters to carry your luggage so please ensure that **no bag is so heavy that you are unable to lift and carry it yourself**. As a general rule, in addition to using your luggage labels, it is a good idea to fix identification to the *inside* of each piece of luggage.

PHOTOGRAPHY: Scenery and memory shots will be plentiful and simple to obtain. Although there will be occasions when bird photography is possible, a birdwatching tour is not normally the best means of pursuing this aim. Bring all your film or memory cards with you as it may be difficult to find precisely what you need during the tour. Camera equipment should be packed in moisture- and dust-proof bags, as a precaution. "Digiscoping" is perfectly compatible with the tour, though it is recommended you bring your own telescope as the leader's telescope is not available for this activity.

ECUADOR – Amazon Lowlands: Tour Information...6

There will be plenty of opportunities to take photos of birds, mammals and scenery and the leaders will do all they can to accommodate anyone wishing to take photographs. However if you are a serious photographer please bear in mind that this is first and foremost a birdwatching tour. Please do not allow your photographic desires to conflict with other participants' birdwatching activities.

TRANSPORT: Flights from Quito to Coca are on modern aircraft. We'll use canoes of varying sizes to get from Coca to Sani and around Sani. The long (two and one-half hour) motorized canoe ride from Coca to Sani will have a canopy for sun/rain protection and padded seats with backs. The shorter canoe rides at Sani are paddled by staff and have padded seats with a back but no cover (we're often shaded by nature). Otherwise we'll be on foot.

SMOKING: Smoking is not allowed in the vehicles or when the group is gathered for meals, checklists etc. If you are sharing a room with a non-smoker, please do not smoke in the room. If you smoke in the field, we ask that you do so well away and downwind from the group if possible. Note: At our lodges smoking is prohibited inside any of the buildings.

TRAVEL INSURANCE: Travel insurance is essential and we insist that you take out suitable cover as soon as your tour is booked. If you are bringing expensive optical equipment or other valuable items, please make sure they are also adequately insured on your home contents policy, as most travel insurance policies do not cover very expensive individual items. You may wish to consult your insurance broker regarding coverage. Please also ensure that your policy covers you in the event of a medical emergency, cancellation of a trip or severe delays. Medical costs abroad can often be extremely expensive. Please note that Sunbird is not liable for any medical or repatriation costs resulting from injury or illness during a tour or for covering any costs resulting from a flight delay such as extra hotel accommodation.

If you wish, insurance can be arranged by Helen Fisher, Bullerwell Independent Insurance Brokers, 13 Goldington Road, Bedford, MK40 3JY. Tel: 01234-866964. Please contact Helen for a quote and she will send the schedule directly to you.

TIPPING: All tour-based tips are included in the tour price. These include tips to local guides, drivers, hotel porters, and waiters and waitresses. You only need to pay tips for personal services such as room service or drinks from the bar.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Dunning, John S. 1989. *South American Birds: A Photographic Aid to Identification*. Harrowood Books, Newtown Square, PA. This book contains color photographs of over 1,000 South American landbirds including a number of Ecuadorian species not illustrated in Hilty et al.

Forsyth, Adrian and Ken Miyata. 1984. *Tropical Nature*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. A superb and very readable introduction to the ecology of tropical rain forests. **Recommended.**

Hilty, S.L. 1994. *Birds of Tropical America*. Chapters Publishing, Ltd., Shelburne, CT. Excellent treatment of natural history of neotropical birds.

Kricher, J.C. 1989. *A Neotropical Companion*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.

McMullen, Miles and Lelis Navarrete. 2013. *Fieldbook of the Birds of Ecuador*. Quito, Ecuador. This new small field guide has updated rangemaps and identification information. The plates are mediocre, but the text is quite helpful and its small size makes it a useful book for the field.

ECUADOR – Amazon Lowlands: Tour Information...7

Ortiz, Fernando, Paul Greenfield and Juan Carlos Matheus. 1990. *Birds of Ecuador: locational checklist*. Feptours, Quito, Ecuador. A very useful distributional checklist which divides Ecuador into various altitudinal zones and give the status of all the species to be found in each. **Recommended.**

Ridgley, Robert S. and Paul J. Greenfield. 2001. *The Birds of Ecuador*. Comstock Publishing Associates, Cornell Univeristy Press, Ithaca NY. This is the recommended guide for the tour though its large size makes it impractical for field use.

Ridgely, Robert S. and Paul J. Greenfield. 2001. *The Birds of Ecuador: Status, Distribution and Taxonomy*. Cornell University Press. This is the companion book to the field guide listed above.

OBTAINING BOOKS: Most of the field guides and the major ornithological references in print are available by mail order from booksellers specialising in natural history titles.

Natural History Book Service Ltd
Tel: 01803 865913
www.nhbs.co.uk

Subbuteo Books
Tel: 0870 010 9700
www.wildlifebooks.com

WildSounds
Tel: 01263 741100
www.wildsounds.co.uk

NEOTROPICAL BIRD CLUB: Please support this international organisation which published three excellent journals each year about the birds of the Neotropics.. You will find their contact details and further information about the Club at www.neotropicalbirdclub.org

FINAL INFORMATION: Final information with instructions for meeting the group, hotel addresses etc and your international air tickets will be sent out about three weeks before the start of the tour. If you have any questions about the tour in the meantime, please contact us.