

Bolivia - Highlands

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Bargain Birdwatching Tour

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Santa Cruz/Cochabamba
Day 2	Laguna Alalay
Day 3/5	Cochabamba; Cerro Tunari, Miguelito, Tablas Monte
Day 6	Oruro
Day 7	La Paz
Day 8/9	La Cumbre & the Yungas of La Paz
Day 10	Lake Titicaca & Sorata
Day 11/12	Fly London

Dates

February & October

Focus

Birds

Grading

Grade B - A traditional birding tour involving some early starts and late finishes.

Dates & Prices

See website

Highlights

- Explore a wide range of highland habitats along the Andean Cordillera
- Look for waterfowl such as Cinnamon, Puna & Speckled Teals at Cochabamba
- Sickle-winged Guan & Straw-backed Tanager among other cloudforest species
- Led by expert local naturalist guides



Images from top to bottom:
Andean Flamingoes, Great Sapphirewing & Puna Teal



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NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

In Flight

We depart from London Gatwick today on an afternoon flight to Madrid, from where we connect with an overnight flight to Santa Cruz, Bolivia. In the event of having to fly through the US, an ESTA will become necessary. We will give you plenty of notice if this is the case.

Day 2

Laguna Alalay

Upon arrival in Santa Cruz, we collect our bags and rendez-vous with any participants who have just completed the 'Lowlands' leg of our Bolivian tour, before checking in again for the short domestic flight to Cochabamba, where we'll be based for 4 nights.

Our first birding destination is Laguna Alalay, 30 minutes to the south of Cochabamba. Our drive to the lake will provide opportunities to look for waterfowl such as Cinnamon, Puna and Speckled Teal, Yellow-billed and White-cheeked Pintail, Red Shoveler, Andean Duck, Fulvous Whistling-Duck, Rosy-billed Pochard, White-tufted, Least and Pied-billed Grebe, Puna Ibis. Plumbeous Rail, Many-colored Rush-tyrant and Wren-like Rushbird. The surrounding scrubby habitat around the lake holds species like White-tipped Plantcutter, Glittering-bellied Emerald, Blue-and-yellow Tanager and Gray-crested Finch.

After a gentle first day we overnight in Cochabamba at the Hotel Regina.

Located in the temperate valleys of the central Andes, Cochabamba is commonly referred to as the city of eternal spring as it enjoys what is arguably the most pleasant year-round climate of any region in the country. The Department of Cochabamba offers access to all of the important habitats found throughout the Andes; from upper tropical, subtropical, and temperate forests on the wet eastern slopes to arid temperate scrub, puna grassland, and Polylepis woodland. Therefore, it should be no surprise that although being one of Bolivia's smallest departments, more endemic species can be found in the Department of Cochabamba than anywhere else in Bolivia.

Days 3-5

Cochabamba

The next three days will be quite flexible, with the tour leader amending plans to fit in with weather and other local considerations.

On one morning we leave very early in the morning (no later than 0500) to spend the day birdwatching in temperate forests at Tablas Monte along the new highway to Santa Cruz. Although this is only 70km away, it is a journey of 1 ½ - 2 hours due to the heavy traffic on the road. Birds which may be seen during the day include Violet-throated

Starfrontlet, Great Sapphirewing, Hooded Mountain-Toucan, Light-crowned Spinetail, Black-throated Thistletail (Cochabamba form), Rufous-faced Antpitta, Diademed Tapaculo, Rufous-bellied Bush-Tyrant and Gray-bellied Flower-piercer.

On another day will be head up to Cerro Tunari. Species to anticipate here might include Andean Condor, Mountain Caracara, Andean Lapwing, Gray-breasted Seedsnipe, Andean Gull, Picui Ground-Dove, Bare-faced Ground-Dove, Black-winged Ground-Dove, Gray-hooded Parakeet, Wedge-tailed Hillstar, Giant Hummingbird, Green-barred Woodpecker, Andean Flicker, Slender-billed Miner, Plain-breasted Earthcreeper, Rock Earthcreeper, Maquis Canastero, Cordilleran Canastero, Rufous Hornero, Brown-capped Tit-Spinetail, Tawny Tit-Spinetail, Yellow-billed Tit-Tyrant, White-fronted Ground-Tyrant, Brown-backed Mockingbird, Black-hooded Sierra-Finch, White-winged Diuca-Finch, Short-tailed Finch, Bolivian Warbling-Finch, Rufous-sided Warbling-Finch, Black-and-chestnut Warbling-Finch, Cochabamba Mountain-Finch, Ringed Warbling-Finch, Bright-rumped Yellow-Finch and Bolivian Blackbird.

On our third day in the region another 0500 start will see us heading to Miguelito (lower Cloud Forest) 2 ½ hours away along the new highway towards Santa Cruz. Our day's birding might reveal Sickle-winged Guan, Blue-banded Toucanet, Solitary Eagle, Black-and-Chestnut Eagle, White-throated Quail-Dove, Rufous-capped Thornbill, Upland Antshrike, Yellow-rumped Antwren (rare), Ochre-breasted Antpitta (rare), Fulvous-breasted Flatbill, White-eared Solitaire and Straw-backed Tanager.

Day 6

Oruro

Today we leave Cochabamba and transfer to Oruro, a beautiful drive of some 230km (5 ½ hours) through the Bolivian Altiplano, with stops en route. Altiplano means "high plain" but in reality the landscape consists of valleys, rolling hills, salt flats, volcanoes, rivers, and lakes, which together provide habitat for birds such as Crested Duck, Puna Teal, Puna Flamingo, Andean Flamingo, Cinereous Harrier, Andean Avocet, Puna Plover, Andean Gull, Taczanowski's Ground-Tyrant, Rufous-naped Ground-Tyrant, Puna Ground-Tyrant, Andean Swallow, Short-billed Pipit, Correndera Pipit, and Yellow-winged Blackbird.

Day 7

La Paz

La Paz is a 5 or 6 hour drive from Oruro (295km), but we will be birding and stopping en-route, taking all day over the journey. Taking a picnic lunch with us, birds en-route might include the hard to see Darwin's Nothura, Spot-winged Pigeon and other species such as Aplomado Falcon, Band-tailed Sierra Finch, Ash-breasted Sierra finch, Puna Plover (providing Villa Villa lake has not dried up, which it sometimes does), Cinereous Harrier (rare), several ground tyrant species and Black Siskin amongst others.

Nestling in a gaping canyon at an altitude of 3,600 metres, La Paz is commonly thought of as the world's highest capital. In fact Sucre is the capital of Bolivia but nevertheless La Paz boasts a series of records such as the world's highest international airport, highest football stadium and highest golf-course! The city is overlooked by the snow-capped triple peak of 6,400 metre-high Mount Illimani, providing a wonderfully scenic background to our birdwatching activities in the altiplano. During the following days we will journey from the city to explore different

facets of the Andean landscape beginning with an excursion into the foothills and mountain passes at the edge of the plateau. This final phase of the tour will further emphasize the ethnic origins of the country as we meet villagers dressed in traditional costume descending from mountain settlements to exchange goods at one of the rural markets, or enter villages where the style of life seems to have changed little over the centuries. In many of these remote communities, the ancient Aymara language is spoken in preference to Spanish.

As Bolivia's largest city, accommodations in La Paz range from budget to luxury, and everything in between. The hotel we have chosen for this tour is the Residencial Rosario, which is in an excellent location close to the craft markets. This is important as we routinely arrive late in the afternoon to La Paz, to have the markets close is handy. The hotel also has one of the best restaurants in La Paz; we are assured of excellent meals! We will be based in this hotel for the next four nights.

Day 8 – 9

La Cumbre and the Yungas of La Paz

We have two flexible days which we will use to explore in detail many of the excellent puna and cloud forest sites around La Paz, including La Cumbre, Valle de Choquetanga, Pongo, Unduavi, Velo de la Novia, Cotapata and Chuspipata.

Some of the best birding at higher altitudes might include Andean Goose, Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe, Gray-breasted Seedsnipe, Black-hooded Sunbeam, Tawny Tit-Spintail, Streak-throated Canastero, Crowned Chat-Tyrant, Chestnut-crested Cotinga (rare), Andean Swallow, Paramo Pipit, Drab Hemispingus, Rust-and-yellow Tanager, Hooded Mountain-Tanager, Chestnut-bellied Mountain-Tanager, Golden-collared Tanager, White-browed Conebill, Black-throated Flowerpiercer, Moustached Flowerpiercer and Plushcap.

Descending the road down the wet slopes towards the town of Coroico, there are four major habitats to concentrate upon: puna grassland and bogs above the tree line at around 4,600 meters (15,100 feet); shrubby precipitous canyons; stunted temperate forest with bamboo; and the subtropical “yungas” forests lower down. Descending 4,300 meters (14,100 feet) in just meters, the road between La Paz and Coroico is considered to be one of the most spectacular in South America and it is frequented by mountain bikers. We won't be travelling nearly as far down as Coroico itself but, if we're lucky enough to hit some flocks, it promises to be a good day's birding.

For those preferring a temporary break from the birding, a travel agency located in the basement of our hotel in La Paz offers tours to the impressive pre-Incan ruins at Tiwanaku (\$35 extra – payable locally) or for those wanting more time to see Lake Titicaca, the agency also offers full day tours to Titicaca, Copacabana and Isle del Sol (\$66 or so extra, also payable locally).

Day 10

Lake Titicaca and Sorata

Lake Titicaca is considered by many to be one of the greatest and most mystical places in all of South America. Sitting high up on the altiplano on the Bolivia/Peru border, Titicaca derives much of its mystique from the ancient belief that its deep and bottomless waters were the birthplace of the Incan civilization. With a depth of up to 281 meters (1,000 feet), there is no doubting that the beauty of its sapphire-blue waters and the lofty snow-covered peaks of the Cordillera Real account for some of the most splendid panoramas anywhere. As well as providing for breathtaking

vistas of the expansive and rugged landscapes of the altiplano, Titicaca and its surrounding highland habitats feature some of the most interesting birds and mammals in Bolivia. After spending the first couple of hours in the morning looking at the rich avifauna of Titicaca (including with luck the endemic Flightless Grebe), we will continue on to search for one of South America's rarest birds, Berlepsch's Canastero. This species can be found in one single valley close to the small town of Sorata. The drive from Titicaca down towards Sorata and the return to La Paz will provide us with impressive views of Mount Illampu at 6,368 meters (20,892 feet) and Mount Ancohuma at 6,427 meters (21,086 feet).

Day 11

In Flight

This morning we take an early morning domestic flight from La Paz to Santa Cruz, arriving in plenty of time to check in for our departure to Madrid, which leaves at 1pm.

Day 12

London

We arrive in Madrid during the early morning and quickly connect to London Gatwick, where we're due to arrive at just gone 9am.

Grading

A traditional birding tour involving some very early starts (0430 – 0500) and late finishes. As with other South American birding itineraries "off the beaten track", one should be prepared at times for some long drives along rough roads, simple accommodation and plenty of time spent on foot, occasionally on steep trails. This is also a tour which spends much time above 13,000 feet. Our pre-departure information talks in more depth about altitude sickness and how the effects may be countered.

Weather

The weather in the altiplano can be very variable. In the Andean winter (i.e. outside the rainy season), the weather is cold and dry. However the temperature is very much influenced by the sun. When the sun is out it is very pleasant (18 degrees C). When it is cloudy or you are in the shade, it is much lower (8 degrees). The Andean "summer" is a bit of a misnomer as this is the wet season: cold and much precipitation. In short: be prepared for all eventualities!

Clothing

Please inspect the separate clothing list, sent to you on booking, thoroughly.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All accommodation and meals are included.

Extra expenses

Please note that we do not include the following in the cost of this holiday: airport taxes (currently \$27 on the international departure from La Paz and local airport taxes approx. \$ 4 per flight) and all items of a more personal nature such as drinks, laundry and souvenirs.

How to book your place!

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.