

Itinerary

March 19 Arrive in Quito

After our flight from our home city to Quito we will spend the night at a bed and breakfast near the airport in Quito. If you are arriving directly from the US for this tour, we will pick you up at the airport and take you to the hotel. You can also continue onto this tour from our Hummingbirds tour March 7-17.

March 20 Arrival at Sani Lodge

The flights to Coca usually leave in the late morning, and our journey starts with a 30-minute flight from Quito to Coca where we will be met and driven the short distance to the boat docks on the banks of the Napo River. It's then a 2 ½ motorized boat trip on this, the largest Ecuadorian tributary of the Amazon. During the journey we will see some of the Amazon ancestral communities who live along the Napo River, as well as evidence of the 21st century oil exploration. Birdlife is difficult to see due to the speed of the canoe, but we may see Great and Snowy Egrets, Roseate Spoonbill and other obvious waterbirds. The canoe ride is followed by a 15 minute walk across a raised wooden walkway followed by a 20 minute paddle through a narrow channel and across the small lake in front of Sani Lodge. The staff will welcome us with a refreshing cold drink and show us to our rooms before we start our adventure in Amazonia. In the late afternoon we will probably a short walk on the nearby trails or take a canoe ride in the vicinity of the lodge. We could see Tamarins, Giant Otters and Black Caimans, as well as the unique and bizarre-looking Hoatzin which is common around the lake. Sani lodge offers a wide variety of national and international cuisine and also caters to vegetarians and vegans. We will then have a briefing with the guide about the Amazon Rainforest while we relax after our first birding day.

March 20-26 Sani Lodge

For the next 7 days we will have a lot of options in and around the lodge. Of course the day to day itinerary could vary depending on what birds are being seen, the weather and other factors, but we will do all of the following activities:

The 36 meter (118 ft.) **Observation Tower** is wonderful and allows us to see birds and other wildlife from above the canopy. We will probably spend a couple of mornings here as the birding can be incredible and often very close allowing for some excellent photographic opportunities. Flocks of tanagers move through the canopy throughout the morning and include Opal-rumped, Opal-crowned and Turquoise Tanagers visit the tree, along with Yellow-bellied and Green-and-Gold on a more irregular basis. Lemon-throated, Gilded and Scarlet-crowned Barbets also call from the canopy and visit the canopy tree. Many species of parrots and macaws fly by every morning and sometimes perch in the crowns of adjacent trees, and toucans are a regular sight over the treetops. By mid-morning the forest warms up and small bird activity starts to drop. It's now when birds of prey begin to soar up from their roosting spots in the canopy. On our last visit we had King and Greater Yellow-headed Vulture, Slate-colored, White and Broad-winged Hawk, Swallow-tailed, Plumbeous, Slender-billed and Double-toothed Kite and many more. The bird of prey show can be quite impressive. The tower gives us a unique perspective, opening up a whole new world of Amazon biodiversity that is often difficult and almost impossible to see from the understory.

We will also take the boat from the lodge along the Napo River to visit the **parrot clay lick** at Yasuní National Park for a wonderful view of hundreds of parrots searching for a gap to land and eat the earth to aid their digestion process. The species diversity is not huge, but includes: Mealy Amazon, and Yellow-crowned, Orange-winged and Blue-headed parrots and Dusky-headed Parakeets. Opportunities for photography can be excellent as the birds take little notice of the passing boats.

Paddling the narrow waterways and on **Challuacocha Lake** in front of Sani Lodge can be excellent for many waterbirds, as well as species that frequent marshes and river edge vegetation. Ringed, Green, American Pygmy and the uncommon Green-and-Rufous Kingfishers can all be seen from the boat dock, along with the bizarre Hoatzin. Capped and Striated Herons, Green Ibis, Least Bittern and Sunbittern are all around the marshes and waterways and the duets of the unusual Black-capped Donacobius are a common sound. Chestnut-fronted and Red-bellied Macaws are common and fly over every morning from their roosting sites and they can be easily distinguished by their quite different flight calls. Russet-backed and Crested Oropendolas stream over every morning and evening on the way to good fruiting localities in and around the forest. Sitting on the boat dock in the evening, and armed with a beer is a lovely way to enjoy the late afternoon and watch the evening sunset.

Another unique habitat along the Amazon River system are the **River Islands**. This dynamic ecosystem is always changing due to abundant rain upstream and the rise and fall of the water levels. New islands are formed, short vegetation colonizes the sand bars and year by year more plant species begin to grow on the island. Pied Lapwing and Collared Plover nest on the sandbars and Oriole Blackbirds soon move in once the Cecropias start to grow. Castlenau's Antshrike and Many-spotted Hummingbird are restricted to river islands and as the vegetation grows up they move to newer islands. Ruddy Ground-Doves seem to be restricted to these temporary habitats, although they will probably expand as forest is cleared in some areas. Seedeaters are also well-represented in these new habitats with Caqueta, Chestnut-bellied and Yellow-browed Sparrow.

Walking along the **Terra Firma** forest trails is also a wonderful activity. Birding can sometimes be slow as the canopy is high above our heads and birds can be too high for decent views. We can hope for mixed understory flocks or shy Tinamous and other furtive forest birds. Sometimes a Forest-falcon is glimpsed as it hunts within a few feet of the ground, but the prize is always an army-ant swarm with its attendant Antbirds. As the ants move through the forest a community of birds follows it around. They don't feed on the marauding ants, but prey upon the insects and small animals that try to escape. Some antbirds, such as White-plumed and Reddish-winged Bare-eye are usually only found around antswarms, but other species will join the swarm as it passes through their territory. Some of the more common antbirds around Sani Lodge include Plumbeous, Sooty and White-shouldered while the uncommon Cocha Antshrike may rarely be seen along the adjacent waterways.

Another fascinating experience is to visit the **Sani Community Center** where the villagers have built a demonstration to give us a taste of how a typical Kichwa family lives. We can watch the ladies prepare food in the traditional kitchen and enjoy some local fare and also shop for some of the traditional weavings and other hand-made items. The Sani community has embraced eco-tourism and the abundance of wildlife in the surrounding forests demonstrates their commitment to the future. We can enjoy their food, drinks, customs, and culture of the Sani Isla community and learn how the lifestyle of the locals and the nearby tourist lodge is environmentally sustainable.

Yasuni National Park is on the south side of the Napo River and we will make several visits to the local community's large forest preserve. We will hike some of the trails inside Yasuni National Park, which is considered by scientists to be amongst the most biodiverse areas in the world. Here we could see species that are not be found further north, such as Golden-mantled Tamarins, White-fronted Spider Monkeys, and with a bit of luck a close encounter with groups of White-lipped or Collared Peccaries as they move through the forest.

March 27 Return to Quito and either spend the night or fly back to the US late this evening.