



THE BEACHES & MOUNTAINS OF
PACIFIC MEXICO

San Blas (SW Nayarit) & El Tuito (NW Jalisco)

5–13 March 2019

\$4,250 single, \$3,800 double

*Maximum of 6 participants,
with 2 US guides and 1 local guide*

In the spring of 2008, we took our first trip to the Tropics when we visited the Pacific coast of Mexico. We had heard great things about birding around the pueblo of San Blas, in the Mexican state of Nayarit near the northern end of Matanchén Bay. Traditionally a Mexican tourist town, San Blas has attracted birders for several decades for the fascinating combination of a diverse avifauna and an authentic Mexican birding experience. One of our best memories was a boat tour through the mangrove tunnels, putting us eye-to-eye with Boat-billed Heron, Rufous-necked Wood-Rail, Common Potoo, and Snail Kite. Outside of town, the woodlands and jungles introduced us to west-Mexican endemics like Mexican Parrotlet, Citreoline Trogon, Purplish-backed Jay, Mexican Hermit, and Rufous-bellied Chachalaca.

A few years later, I spoke at the Vallarta Bird Festival, and I stayed at a lovely private estate—Rancho Primavera—nestled among the mixed woodlands of the southern Sierra Madre and just outside the historic pueblo of El Tuito. Here I found still more resident endemics, including Russet-crowned Motmot, San Blas Jay, Blue Mockingbird, and Black-vented Oriole. Woodpeckers on the property included the giant Pale-billed, plus the endemic Golden-cheeked Woodpecker.

Habitats surrounding the ranch hosted even more endemics, just a few of which included Mexican Woodnymph, Golden Vireo, and Rusty-crowned Ground-Sparrow. And I enjoyed an abundance of wintering North American songbirds will make you feel right at home! Now it's your turn. Escape with us to Pacific Mexico, and wrap yourself in a warm, laid-back birding paradise.

*Your host and trail boss,
Steve Shunk*



TOUR SUMMARY

Our tour begins and ends in Puerto Vallarta, with its beautiful historic old-town now seemingly lost among the glitz and glamour of resorts for the beach-bound tourist. Since we seek an authentic Mexico experience, we will quickly leave the shiny resorts behind, heading northward around Banderas Bay. Once we leave the busy tourist regions, we may stop along a side road to sift through flocks of wintering orioles and buntings. The trees and shrubs along these local cobblestone streets may produce our first Ivory-billed Woodcreeper or a busy flock of White-collared Seedeaters. We should encounter plenty of raptors on the drive, including the common Gray Hawk. We will arrive in San Blas for dinner, where we will spend our first five nights.

The charismatic little fishing village of San Blas will serve as our base for exploring four primary habitat types: dry tropical jungle, mangrove swamp, shrimp ponds, and open seashore. The jungles occupy the foothills of the Sierra Madre, and the higher elevations may produce a Fan-tailed Warbler or Masked Tityra, among a mixed flock of more familiar North American songbird species. Pale-billed Woodpecker will be chiseling away at the largest trees, while Squirrel Cuckoo dashes through the canopy. We will visit several locations between the jungle and lower transitional habitats, where we could encounter a hungry flock of endemic Mexican Parrotlets in a fruiting fig tree or a flock of gregarious Purplish-backed Jays.

The highlight of the mangrove swamps is our boat trip up the Rio San Cristobal and La Tovar. Traveling through tunnels of mangroves, we will watch for Boat-billed Heron and Northern Potoo staring at us from a few feet away. We may see a Limpkin or Rufous-necked Wood-Rail feeding in a muddy cove—giving wide berth to a loafing crocodile—and raptors may include Snail Kite or Laughing Falcon. Bare-throated Tiger-Heron will dwarf the tiny Green Kingfisher, and a “Mangrove” Yellow Warbler may whistle at us from overhead.

The shrimp ponds surrounding the town of San Blas will be worthy of a daily stop or two to scan through the shorebirds and waders and to watch the Mangrove Swallows feeding over the water. Collared Plover will be one of our target species here, with Northern Jacana skulking along the grassy shoreline. Common Black-Hawk or Harris’s Hawk may be roosting around the fringes of the ponds, with Wood Stork, White Ibis, and Anhinga representing some of the common large waterbirds.

A visit to Peso Island (actually the tip of a small peninsula) just across the river from downtown San Blas will allow views of an offshore seabird rookery, where Blue-footed and Brown Boobies nest. Peso Island is also an excellent place to see Crane Hawk at close range, plus Rufous-bellied Chachalaca skulking in the trees and Blue-black Grassquit on the grassy fringes of the beach. We could run into both Elegant and Citreoline Trogons and flocks of Tropical Parulas feeding in the stunted scrubby canopy.

Other species we may encounter in various habitats around San Blas include: Orange-fronted Parakeet; White-throated Thrush; Bronzed Cowbird; Painted and Varied Buntings; Ruddy-breasted Seedeater; and the endemic Elegant Quail and Sinaloa Crow. A stay in San Blas could be one of your most memorable birding experiences ever; but, we have only just begun our Mexican adventure!

After breakfast on our final morning in San Blas, we will allow some time to explore the town square, with its authentic artisanal wares and delicious local foods. Heading south from San Blas, we may enjoy an early lunch in Sayulita before passing through Puerto Vallarta and into the state of Jalisco. Once through the small cliff-side towns of Mismaloya and Boca de Tomatlan (actually the mouth of the Horcones River), we will head inland to the heart of Cabo Corrientes. Just 10 minutes from the 16th century pueblo of El Tuito is our home for the next five nights, Rancho Primavera.



Based at Rancho Primavera, we will have ample time to explore the trails, ponds, and feeding stations on this amazing 200-acre private ranch, as well as the diverse habitats around El Tuito and Cabo Corrientes. The dawn chorus at Rancho Primavera features the haunting calls of Mottled Owl and Collared Forest-Falcon, followed by Social Flycatcher and Great Kiskadee. Before breakfast, the local flock of Black-throated Magpie-Jays may descend upon the feeders for their breakfast, often chasing away the more abundant Grayish Saltators. Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl often perches just above the main driveway, while the resident Groove-billed Anis squeak from within the flowering shrubs. Stripe-headed Sparrows make a constant chatter around the main house, and on most days, a pair of Military Macaws flies high overhead. Hummingbirds at the ranch typically include Plain-capped Starthroat, Violet-crowned Hummingbird, and Cinnamon Hummingbird, among several other possible species.

While based at the ranch, we will also venture out to explore the mountain and thorn-scrub habitats above and below the mid-elevations. The Provincia Road courses through Montezuma Pine forest, where we could find Colima Pygmy-Owl, Gray-crowned Woodpecker, Grace's Warbler, Slate-throated Redstart, and Hepatic Tanager. The Bioto Road—just below the ranch in elevation—may bring us our first Orange-breasted Bunting or Red-crowned Ant-Tanager. We could see both Elegant and Citreoline Trogons on our walks, along with Rose-throated Becard and Bright-rumped Attila. The desert-like thorn-scrub will typically bring us Nutting's Flycatcher and several species of seedeaters and grassquits, and we may even find a White-throated Magpie-Jay.

We will spend our last full day at Vallarta Botanical Gardens, where we will enjoy several of the common Mexican specialty birds, along with some fun new species. Green Jays often join the San Blas Jays at the fruit feeders, before they both get chased off by the West Mexican Chachalacas. We may see Zone-tailed Hawk overhead, and hummers at the gardens could include Mexican Hermit, Mexican Woodnymph, and the Sparkling-tailed Woodstar. The well-kept grounds and featured displays at the gardens are absolutely gorgeous, and we will enjoy lunch at the on-site La Hacienda de Oro.

We will enjoy our final morning at Rancho Primavera with a casual walk around the property, watching for common residents like Ruddy Ground-Dove, Vermilion Flycatcher, Happy Wren, Elegant Trogon, and Golden Vireo, along with any number of wintering songbirds, such as American Redstart, Black-throated Gray Warbler, and Northern Parula. After an early lunch in Tuito, we will return to Puerto Vallarta airport by 1 p.m.



MEET YOUR GUIDES

Your lead guide, **Steve Shunk**, has operated [Paradise Birding](#) for nearly 20 years, and he has been teaching adults about birds and nature since 1992. Steve is a seasoned tour guide, having led over 150 trips—across North America, as well as Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America, South America, Sicily, and Malaysian Borneo. Steve is a patient, experienced educator with an infectious passion and enthusiasm for nature and conservation. At home on the eastern slope of Oregon’s Cascade Mountains, Steve co-founded the East Cascades Bird Conservancy (now East Cascades Audubon), and he is the author of the recently published *Peterson Reference Guide to Woodpeckers of North America*. Steve has made several trips to Pacific Mexico since 2008, exploring Nayarit, Jalisco, and Colima. He has participated as a speaker and trip leader for the Vallarta Bird Festival, and he loves exploring the rural towns and backroads of “real” Mexico.



We are joined in Mexico by professional naturalist and teaching artist, **Christine Elder**. Christine has co-led several tours with Paradise Birding, including our Mexico trip, and she leads our “Birds & Blossoms Nature Sketching Holidays,” currently offered in Mexico and Honduras. Christine got her Master’s degree in biology from Humboldt State University, and she brings a keen knowledge of ecology and general natural history to our trips. Her teaching experience and her artistic portfolio are far too long to list here, and she is currently developing interpretive panels for the US Forest Service and a coloring book on endemic Caribbean birds for the non-profit BirdsCaribbean. Christine also serves as the Paradise Birding hospitality director, and her presence on any tour draws rave reviews.



Our local guide in Mexico is **Francisco Garcia**, owner and operator of [Safaris San Blas](#). We met Francisco during our trip to Nayarit in 2013. Paradise Birding hires local guides for several reasons, and Francisco excels at all of them. For starters, Francisco’s English skills are excellent, and he is a native speaker of the local Spanish dialect where we will be traveling. Francisco has also explored every corner of our tour region; he knows all the local bird calls; and he knows where to find the birds we want to see. He knows the best local restaurants and the cleanest bathrooms, among other amenities, and he makes sound, spontaneous decisions throughout the birding day to accommodate our groups. But perhaps most importantly, Francisco’s friendly personality will make you feel welcome in his home community.



TOUR STYLE AND PACE

In general, our daily birding experiences on this tour are rather casual, moving at a leisurely pace and spending plenty of time just watching the birds. Most birding sites are either walking distance from our lodging or a short drive away. We will typically start each morning with an early breakfast, followed by a birding outing of a few hours. On some days we may go birding early and enjoy a later breakfast. At Rancho Primavera, you will want to be up before sunrise to greet the day with hot coffee and amazing birding at the productive feeding stations. We may take afternoon breaks to avoid the heat of the day, followed by evening birding before dinner; on longer day-trips, we will bird through the afternoon. Each day will involve plenty of walking on quiet rural roads and well-used trails, but individual walks will be relatively short.

We will distribute and maintain a ‘trip list’ of birds encountered (reviewing each night), but in the field we will not just glimpse birds and move on. We want you to get excellent looks at our desired species and to learn about their natural history and ecology in the local habitats. This particular tour will appeal to birders with a wide range of skill and ability levels, including novice birders. As with any group birding experience, those birders with more advanced skills will likely see and identify more of the anticipated species, while less experienced birders can be guaranteed excellent looks at many potential ‘life-birds.’ Your guides will work diligently to help each participant learn bird identification, as well as general natural and cultural history of the region.

You will have two U.S. guides and a local guide throughout the tour. We will travel in a large minivan, with ample room for luggage and for each participant to have a window seat. We will take a *minimum of 4 and a maximum of six participants*.

LODGING, MEALS & REFRESHMENTS

We will spend our first five nights at [Hotel Garza Canela](#) (named for the local Boat-billed Heron!), just a few blocks from the San Blas ‘harbor’ and the town square, or *el centro*. The second half of the trip includes five nights at the private [Rancho Primavera](#), about 10 minutes outside El Tuito. Both locations have comfortable hotel-style rooms, with Rancho Primavera a bit more like a homestay. Garza Canela has air conditioning in the rooms, and the Rancho Primavera rooms do not need a/c. The tour fees include lodging for both single and double occupancy. If you are traveling with a birding partner and wish to share a room, we should be able to accommodate you at both locations. If we are unable to place you with a roommate, you will be responsible for the single tour rate.

Your tour fee also includes all meals, snacks, and non-alcohol beverages from dinner on Thursday, February 1, through lunch on Sunday, February 11. Most breakfasts will be casual sit-down meals, though we may have one or two in the field. Breakfasts and dinners at Rancho Primavera will be home-cooked meals at the lodge, with lunches in El Tuito or nearby local eateries. In San Blas, we will sometimes eat at the lodge restaurant for breakfast, with dinners sampling the best local restaurants. Lunches during our San Blas days will be spent in the field or at favorite cafes near our birding sites.

All meals should appeal to birders with varied food preferences, including vegetarians, but it may be difficult to accommodate the most restrictive diets. If you maintain such a diet, remember that appropriate foods may not be available at restaurants or even in local grocery stores. To prepare for these possibilities, you may wish to bring some foods that will satisfy your personal preferences. In addition to main meals, we typically provide snack foods and beverages in the field.

The survey included in your registration materials asks for your dietary restrictions and preferences. While we cannot honor every food and drink request, the more detailed your response, the better we can serve you. If you do not provide us with any input on the forms, we will assume you eat almost anything!



Cinnamon
Hummingbird

PREPARING FOR THE TRIP

Daily weather in Pacific Mexico is generally sunny and warm, with average daytime highs in the 80s F., and average lows in the upper 50s F. The relatively arid climate here results from the region's location on the leeward side of the Mexican Neotropics. Misty morning fog in the foothills and mountains often burns off shortly after sunrise, and afternoon heating can lead to a thunderstorm on any given day. You should be prepared to be outside for most of the day in warm, sunny weather. Long-sleeved shirts and long pants are ideal for both insect and sun protection. We will probably encounter mosquitoes in a handful of locations, as well as tiny biting flies, so you should bring your preferred chemical repellent or insect-proof clothing. Shorts, skirts, or dresses may be appropriate for evenings, but be prepared for biting insects, especially any time we eat outside. More on insects below.

For cool mornings you may want a sweater and/or lightweight, water-resistant shell jacket. For footwear, we recommend trail walking shoes or lightweight hiking boots. Athletic shoes or sandals are very comfortable for evenings and other casual times, but always be aware of possible biting insects (did I say that already?!). You would probably appreciate a wide-brimmed hat, and you may wish to bring a swimsuit for the pools at Garza Canela and Rancho Primavera.

Hazards: Regarding insects, we always seem to underestimate the tiny black flies that tend to feast around sunrise and sunset. These little flies bite, and the bites can itch for several (or many) days. If you are prepared, they won't adversely affect your trip. The locals swear by baby oil, but other oils will work. The theory is that the flies get stuck and die in the oil, so they stay away. We will bring chemical repellents, but please be prepared with your own chosen brand. Beyond the black flies, mosquitoes may be a problem in some places, and especially in Nayarit, where we will visit wetland habitats. Our La Tovaranga mangrove boat ride on the final evening is a time when you want to be prepared for mosquitoes. In addition to chemical repellents, we find that bug resistant clothing helps keep our attention focused on the birds.

Additional hazards may include biting spiders, scorpions, or other arthropods, but we have never seen a snake on our Mexico trips. When the likelihood of an encounter with hazardous wildlife is especially high, we will warn you in advance. Other hazards include rough terrain, thorny tropical plants, automobile traffic (when we are birding from a road shoulder), and the most hazardous of them all, the sun. Make sure you bring sunscreen—preferably waterproof and SPF 25 or above.

Other items we recommend: You must have a valid passport for the trip (see below)! We may not have laundry service at our lodging sites, so you may want to consider bringing hand-washing laundry supplies. You should also bring a light daypack or fanny pack; a headlamp or small flashlight; and, of course, binoculars. You may bring a spotting scope, but we will have at least one scope available for the group. Note that many of our birding sites will be in dense tropical jungle, when you will want both hands free for your binoculars and a spotting scope would only be a hindrance.

We encourage you to take photos as souvenirs, but this is not a photography tour. If you wish to focus on photographic opportunities, we ask that you remain sensitive to the group's needs and the tour schedule. Ensuring that everyone gets their binoculars or scope on a bird will take precedence over shooting photos, and it may not be practical to stop just for photographs.



Baggage Recommendations: We suggest that you travel with one medium or large bag and whatever luggage you can carry onto your flight. Your carry-on should have all of your necessities in case your checked bags get delayed. This may include a change of clothing, money, travel documents, toiletries, medicines, and any expensive equipment such as binoculars. Of course, if you are a light packer, you may be able to get all your items in your carry-on baggage

A note on currency: The unit of currency in Mexico is the Mexican Peso. As of this writing the exchange rate is \$1 USD = 17.53 Mexican Pesos (MXN), or 1 MXN = ~\$0.06 USD. Several places where you might want to spend some cash—on souvenirs, snacks, drinks, etc.—may not accept U.S. dollars. We suggest that you either ‘buy’ yourself some Pesos before you leave home or use one of the foreign exchange kiosks at your departing airport. Typical tourist facilities, such as Garza Canela, will take major credit cards, especially for souvenirs. If you plan to drink alcohol during the trip, please be prepared to pay for your drinks after each meal with Mexican Pesos.



HEALTH & SAFETY

Throughout our stay in Mexico, you should avoid drinking the tap water. Bottled water will be provided in all rooms and at all meals, and we will always have bottled water in the vehicle. We will eat in clean, well-respected local restaurants. If we ever have food on the road, we will take the necessary precautions to ensure that its consumption will be safe for your health. However, Mexico does not have the same standards of cleanliness as most places in the USA, and food-borne pathogens do exist. *Always consult your physician before traveling outside the USA, and take the recommended precautions and medicines to prevent possible illness. Also ask your physician about any recommended prescription medicines to treat travel illnesses.* In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

If you are taking prescription medication or regular doses of over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring ample supplies to get through the tour safely, plus extra days in case of a delayed schedule. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. Our registration materials ask for any medical conditions, a complete list of medications, and emergency contact information. As is the nature of emergencies, we never expect them, but we need to be prepared. It is very important that you be detailed in your answers, in case of emergency.

TRAVEL PLANNING

Your trip fee includes ground transportation from Puerto Vallarta Airport (PVR). If possible, please arrive at PVR by 2 p.m. on Thursday, February 1, to allow us ample time for a leisurely 3-hour drive to San Blas. Depending on your flight schedule, you may wish to arrive a day early. In this case, the resort hotels at Nuevo Vallarta are the most convenient for us to pick you up directly (the same for drop-offs, in case you wish to stay longer after the tour), with some excellent birding in the surrounding ‘neighborhood.’ We will return to PVR by 1 p.m., Sunday, February 11, for 3 p.m. or later departures. If you need assistance with travel, we recommend [Caribbean Journey](#), based in Atlanta.

They assist clients who are traveling throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, and they will help you book your very best flight options. They are also well-equipped to help you with any pre-trip or post-trip lodging needs in the Vallarta area. If you have any trouble meeting the travel schedule, please contact us and we will help you plan your itinerary.

Travel Insurance: We strongly recommend that you purchase travel insurance with your airline ticket! This insurance covers costs associated with flight delays, trip cancellation, illness, medical expenses, lost baggage, and emergency transportation. Caribbean Journey can help you purchase coverage, or you may be covered by existing insurance programs or credit cards used for trip purchase.

Customs & Immigration: A passport valid for six months beyond your return date is required for entry to Mexico and return to the USA, with one blank page for the entry stamp. If you are not a USA citizen, check your local consulate or embassy for any additional information on requirements for traveling to Mexico.

Once you disembark your arrival flight in PVR, you will go through Passport Control, where the Mexican immigration officer will ask you some questions and stamp your passport. You will then collect your checked luggage and proceed through the (occasionally very long) line through customs. If you do not bring checked baggage, proceed directly to the customs line. The customs official may ask you some additional questions, and you may be randomly selected to have your luggage searched. We will meet you just outside customs once you are cleared for entry. Look for at least one gringo with a small Paradise Birding sign!

BASIC DAILY ITINERARY

Our travel plans will roughly follow the itinerary below. However, we may adjust each day's plan based on any number of factors, including daily tides, weather conditions, and our success at finding certain species. We always give our local guide, Francisco, the prerogative to alter the daily itinerary based on the best overall birding, nature, and cultural experiences.

Thursday, February 1: Rendezvous in Puerto Vallarta; drive north to San Blas for first dinner and night.

Friday, February 2: Morning at Peso Island; afternoon at Matenchen Bay. Dinner and night in San Blas.

Saturday, February 3: Morning birding at Tecuitata, evening mangrove boat tour. Dinner and night in San Blas.

Sunday, February 4: Morning birding at Chacalilla, afternoon in and around San Blas. Dinner and night in San Blas.

Monday, February 5: All day road trip to Rancho La Noria and areas around Tepic. Dinner and night in San Blas.

Tuesday, February 6: Travel to El Tuito, with several birding stops en route. Dinner and night at Rancho Primavera.

Wednesday, February 7: All day birding Rancho Primavera and El Tuito. Dinner and night at Rancho Primavera.

Thursday, February 8: Morning birding Bioto Road; afternoon, dinner, and night at Rancho Primavera.

Friday, February 9: Morning birding Provincia Road; afternoon, dinner, night at Rancho Primavera.



Saturday, February 10: Morning birding and lunch at Vallarta Botanical Gardens. Afternoon, dinner and night at Rancho Primavera.

Sunday, March 11: Morning birding at Rancho Primavera. Early lunch in El Tuito, then depart for Puerto Vallarta.

TOUR FEE

Your tour fee includes the following: 5 nights lodging in San Blas and 5 nights in El Tuito; all meals and non-alcohol beverages from dinner on Thursday, February 1, through lunch on Sunday, February 11; transportation from Puerto Vallarta (PVR) airport; service-related gratuities; and the services of two U.S. guides and a local guide.

Not included are alcohol beverages; trip insurance (strongly recommended); other personal expenses; and guides' gratuities, which are never expected but always appreciated based on your satisfaction with our skills and service. (As a general guideline, the *maximum* gratuity for a tour such as this would be about 10%, and we divide the total equally among your guides).

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| <i>2018 TOUR FEE:</i> | <i>\$4,250 single/\$3,800 double</i> |
| <i>DEPOSIT:</i> | <i>\$500</i> |
| <i>BALANCE due 10/1:</i> | <i>\$3,750 single/\$3,300 double</i> |

NOTE: Our tour fees are structured to allow the best possible client-to-guide ratio for an optimal birding experience; this tour will operate with 2 U.S. guides, a local guide, and a minimum of 4 and maximum of 6 participants.

REFUND POLICY: Once we confirm the tour has reached the minimum registration, \$100 of your deposit becomes non-refundable. If you cancel your reservation for a confirmed tour more than 120 days prior to the start, you will be refunded any payments over the \$100 retained from your deposit. If you cancel 119–60 days prior to the tour, you will receive a 50% refund of all fees paid. If you cancel less than 60 days prior, you forfeit your entire tour fee, unless you can fill your space with another birder. If you cancel at any time, your deposit is transferrable to any Paradise Birding tour at any time in the future. If we cancel the trip for any reason, all payments will be refunded, including the \$100 retained from your deposit.

TOUR REGISTRATION

To reserve your space for this tour, submit your \$500 deposit (per person) with the registration forms that follow this tour summary. These forms are also available to download as a PDF file from our web site. Please feel free to contact us with any questions.

We look forward to seeing you in Mexico in 2018!

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Rosy
Thrush-
Tanager