







# MAMMAL AND BIRDING TOUR TO ECUADOR: THE LAND OF SPECTACLED BEAR AND HUMMINGBIRDS!

16 days | 17 Jan 2026 - 01 Feb 2026

-  Nature group tours
-  Nature
-  Bird tours
-  Mammal tours
-  Wildlife tours
-  Experience tours

*This tour offers an exceptional opportunity to observe the elusive spectacled bear, the only bear species native to South America, in its most reliable habitat—just outside Quito, Ecuador. Unlike in other parts of the Andes where sightings are rare, the highland parks of Cayambe Coca and Antisana provide an extraordinary setting for regular encounters with these bears. The region’s status as one of the few viable habitats for the species makes it a global hotspot for bear watching. During prior visits, participants witnessed up to eight individual bears in just a few days—an astonishing number for such a typically hard-to-spot animal. Beyond bears, the tour also spotlights a variety of rare and beautiful mammals and birds, appealing to nature enthusiasts, photographers, and birders alike. Visits to cloud forests and tropical reserves add further depth to the journey, combining breathtaking landscapes with world-class wildlife viewing. Exceptional photography opportunities, expert guides, and comfortable accommodations complete the experience. The tour’s seamless logistics, from 4WD travel to localized spotting expertise, ensure guests are in the right place at the right time. Altogether, this trip stands out for its rare wildlife sightings, scenic diversity, and high success rate for key target species.*

## Bear Watching and Highland Wildlife

The adventure begins near Quito, quickly transitioning into the Andean highlands where **spectacled bears** are frequently sighted. Traveling from the city into elevations above 2,500 meters, participants explore areas where the forest thins into *páramo* grasslands dotted with *bromeliads* and *Polylepis* trees—prime habitat for bears and the elusive **mountain tapir**. Here, bears forage during the day, often in open areas, while tapirs appear around dusk and dawn, requiring patience and quiet observation. Alongside these headline mammals, participants may also encounter **Andean foxes**, **tayras**, and **Colombian night monkeys**. While tapirs demand effort and luck, the even rarer **oncilla** cat is a true prize for those hoping for the unexpected. Throughout this phase, short walks and vehicle-based viewing make for a comfortable yet immersive experience. This region’s open vistas and dramatic mountain backdrops provide stunning scenes both for wildlife spotting and photography. Time here is carefully structured to maximize viewing during optimal wildlife activity windows.



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### Western Andes – Cloud Forest and Chocó Region Mammals

The journey then moves to the western slopes of the Andes into the richly biodiverse Chocó region, famous for its cloud forests and high endemism. With elevations ranging between 1,000 and 2,300 meters, guests escape the heaviest tropical rainfall while still enjoying lush, humid forest landscapes. This area is home to rare mammals like the **olinguito** and **kinkajou**, often seen near forest lodges or along quiet trails. This part of the tour highlights subtropical ecosystems teeming with birdlife and exotic flora. Despite being less open than the high Andes, the western forests offer exceptional sightings due to the density of species. Days are spent tracking wildlife, listening for movement in the canopy, and visiting specific spots where mammals are reliably seen. The damp but not overwhelming weather allows for pleasant hiking, and guides use local knowledge to access hidden forest corners. The diversity here complements the highland section, expanding the scope of species encountered.

### Birding Experiences – Antpittas, Hummingbirds, Tanagers, and More

Birdwatching is a major component of the tour, and the trip includes visits to renowned sites known for their avian diversity and accessibility. Iconic families like **antpittas**, **tanagers**, **hummingbirds**, and **cotingas** are all featured, many of which are endemic to the Andes. Guests witness trained antpittas with charming nicknames like **Maria** and **Shakira** emerge from the forest for worms—an intimate and often emotional experience. Hummingbird feeders at various lodges allow for close-up observation of the iridescent jewels of the tropics. Likewise, **tanagers**—bright, tropical songbirds—are commonly seen at banana feeders and in mixed flocks. Special attention is given to **army ant swarms**, which draw an array of rare forest birds that follow the insects in search of prey. If active swarms are reported by local contacts, the itinerary may be adjusted for a chance to spot rare followers like the **banded ground-cuckoo**. Binoculars, cameras, and telescopes are essential companions, making this a birding paradise as much as a mammal expedition.





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### Final Notes on the Tour's Exclusivity

What sets this tour apart is its combination of targeted wildlife tracking, expert local knowledge, and logistical excellence, offering sightings that are nearly impossible elsewhere. The team includes a seasoned naturalist guide, driver, and local wildlife spotters to maximize chances for meaningful encounters. All accommodations are thoughtfully chosen for comfort and proximity to key wildlife areas, some featuring hot volcanic baths or swimming pools. The itinerary is shaped by over a decade of field experience and recent prospecting, ensuring that routes are based on the most up-to-date wildlife data. This isn't a mass-market tour but a curated adventure for small groups with a serious interest in mammals and birds. The flexibility to adapt based on sightings, along with insider access to specialized viewing spots, provides a level of immersion that general tours can't match. Participants don't need to be extreme trekkers—most walks are moderate—but should be ready for field conditions and the thrill of discovery. In every sense, this is an exclusive, high-success-rate journey for wildlife enthusiasts eager to experience the Andes at their wildest and most rewarding.

### What makes this mammal tour to Ecuador so special?

- The itinerary is the result of a prospecting carried out by Jan Kelchtermans himself, the guide who effectively accompanies this trip. He has been to South America a total of eight times.
- On site, Jan is assisted by one of South America's best guides. A driver is also part of the accompanying team.
- You will go in search of spectacled bears and mountain tapirs.
- You will get to know the birds of Ecuador, we focus on the regions around the capital Quito and the Western Andes.

### Get to know your tour guide

Jan Kelchtermans has been familiar with birds and mammals for a long time. He is fascinated by nature like no other. His enthusiasm is evident during his trips. He is also one of the most traveled bird guides of our team. He considers Ecuador a fantastic bird and mammal destination thanks to the many biotopes that you can explore along the flanks of the Andes.



## Is this mammal tour to Ecuador something for you?

You want to see the magical spectacled bear at all costs.

You are looking forward to a diverse journey full of colorful fauna and flora to observe or photograph.

You have a normal basic physical condition.

Experience

*Beginner*

*Expert*

Comfort

*Basic*

*Luxurious*

Condition

*Easy*

*Heavy*



Photography Level



Nature Level

Interested? We keep you posted

## Itinerary & Locations

17/01

### Brussel/Amsterdam - Quito

Arrival in Quito, airport pick-up and rest at the hotel.

*Overnight: Zaysant Ecolodge, Quito*

18/01

### Antisana National Park – Jerusalem Protected Forest



Today we explore Antisana National Park for our first excursion in search of **spectacled bears** on the lower mountain slopes of the Andes. We'll also look for **Andean foxes** and characteristic páramo bird species.

Later we visit Jerusalem Forest, a dry forest habitat near Quito.

*Overnight: Zaysant Ecolodge, Quito*

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19/01

## **Cayambe–Coca National Park and Pimampiro**

We drive via the Papallacta Pass through Cayambe–Coca National Park, scanning once more for **spectacled bears**. Along the way we enjoy the mountain scenery and have chances to see species such as the **Andean condor**. In the afternoon, we continue on to Pimampiro.

*Overnight: Casa Lolita, Pimampiro*

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20/01

## **Mirador del Oso Andino**

Our first dedicated attempt to observe **spectacled bears** at Mirador del Oso Andino, an excellent site for bear sightings. Besides mammals, we'll also watch for local mountain bird species and **hummingbirds** in the area.

*Overnight: Casa Lolita, Pimampiro*

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21/01

## **Mirador del Oso Andino and Pululahua**

Morning excursion for a final chance to observe **spectacled bears** at Mirador del Oso Andino.

We then travel to the Pululahua Geobotanical Reserve near Quito. After dark, we'll search for owls, this is a well-known spot for the **buff-fronted owl**, a truly magical species.

*Overnight: Pululahua Ecolodge*

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22/01

## **Guaycapi Lodge**

Breakfast at Pululahua Ecolodge and a morning birdwatching session.

Afterwards, we drive to Guaycapi Lodge. After sunset, we have a good chance to spot **olinguito, kinkajou, and oncilla**.

*Overnight: Guaycapi Lodge*

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23/01

## **Bellavista Cloud Forest**

Early morning walk around the lodge and visit to the feeders, where we may see species such as the **plate-billed mountain toucan** and a variety of **hummingbirds**.



In the afternoon and evening, we'll explore the trails and feeders of Bellavista Lodge, looking for **tayra, olinguito, kinkajou, and oncilla**.

*Overnight: Guaycapi Lodge*

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24/01

## Refugio Paz de las Aves and Las Cotingas

Visit to Refugio Paz de las Aves, famous for its various **antpittas, cock-of-the-rock**, and **toucans**. After lunch, we'll search for the **mountain coati**, a type of Andean coati, near Las Cotingas.

In the evening, we'll again look for **oncilla and olinguito**.

*Overnight: Guaycapi Lodge*

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25/01

## Maquipucuna Reserve

Morning visit to the feeders of Mashpi–Amagusa, where we can observe many colourful species and enjoy spectacular cloud forest views.

We'll spend the day exploring higher elevation zones. Optionally, we can make another attempt to find **spectacled bears** in Maquipucuna if we haven't been lucky yet. There's also another chance to see **tayra or olinguito**.

*Overnight: Hosteria Airport Garden, Quito*

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26/01

## Chakana Reserve and Antisana National Park

Early departure and transfer to Chakana Reserve, where we'll take up position at a lookout for **spectacled bears** and **Andean condors**.

Afterwards, we head again to Antisana National Park in search of **Andean fox** and páramo bird species.

Later we transfer to San Isidro Lodge, where a night excursion gives us the chance to see **mountain tapir, Colombian night monkey and oncilla**.

*Overnight: San Isidro Lodge*

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27/01

## San Isidro Lodge

Morning walk along the Jumani Trail for **woolly monkeys, capuchins, and birds**. In the evening, another opportunity to spot **mountain tapir and oncilla**.

*Overnight: San Isidro Lodge*

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28/01 - 29/01



## Baeza Area and Cayambe–Coca National Park

After an early session for **white-bellied and chestnut-crowned antbird** at the lodge's feeders and breakfast, we transfer to Baeza, looking for **cock-of-the-rock** and other forest birds.

In the afternoon, we continue to the Oyacachi Valley and Cayambe–Coca National Park for excursions in search of **spectacled bears** and **mountain tapirs**, focusing on typical high-Andean wildlife.

*Overnight: Hosteria Pampallacta*

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30/01

### Papallacta Pass and Pululahua

We return to Papallacta Pass for a final opportunity to spot the **spectacled bear**.

In the afternoon, we drive to Pululahua Geobotanical Reserve for a short birding walk around the lodge area.

*Overnight: Hosteria Airport Garden*

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31/01

### Quito

Last day Ecuador. We stay near Quito. Those who wish can explore the old part of the city. Those who wish can also spend the last day in nature. In the evening we take the flight home.

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01/02

### Arrival at home

Today we arrive back home.

## Practical

### Accommodation, meals and transportation

All overnight stays are of standard to good quality. We stay everywhere in special eco-lodges or hotels.

All meals on site are included.

Travel is done by minibus with driver, the roads are moderate to good.

The international flight to and from Quito is not included in the price of this trip. With guaranteed departure, STARLING will propose suitable flights. For the flights, expect prices of 1500 – 2500 euros per person. You can also choose to arrange your own flights.

### Walking and climate

The walking is generally relatively easy. A good basic condition is recommended for this trip. You will regularly walk on unpaved trails in the forest. In Papallacta, the observation takes place at high altitude (3500m+), which means that we have to take acclimatization into account.

This trip aims for a diversity of species and landscapes. As a result, we will come across all kinds of habitats (tropical rainforest, cloud forest and paramo plains in the high mountains) with very different weather conditions. Both clothing for tropical conditions is applicable for this trip as well as good, warm and waterproof clothing. An



umbrella, rubber boots and a poncho can do wonders.

## Price

5975 euro (Price per person)

Book before 1 September 2025

### Included

- insurance guarantee fund
- specialized local guides
- enthusiast guiding by STARLING tour guide(s)
- all transport at site
- all nights
- all meals
- all excursions and entrance tickets for parks
- all drinking water

### Excluded

- travel insurance and cancellation insurance (available for purchase through us)
- personal expenses
- international flights and airport taxes
- tips for local collaborators (horeca, hotel,...)
- alcoholic beverages and soda

