

Trip Report
Colombia 2025

Intro

We (Jorick van de Water and Onnika van Oosterbosch) organised our own 30-day trip to Colombia, covering parts around the Andes, Amazon, Llanos and Caribbean coast. It was our first trip primarily focused on birds and mammals. We still consider ourselves somewhat amateur wildlife watchers, and we did not have set target lists in terms of mammals and/or birds. Although we did have big hopes for the Andean Bear and Jaguar especially (but unfortunately saw neither of them). Still we very much enjoyed our trip and this proved to be a test trip for a year-long journey through South & South-East Asia.

We booked the rental car, all accommodations and most of the excursions in advance. Accommodations were booked either through Booking or directly by WhatsApp. Especially WhatsApp combined with lodges pinned on eBird proved to be an useful match. With regards to driving, we are used to driving quite long distances, so also for Colombia we've had days of 6-8 hours driving without any problems. Luckily most of the longer drives were very doable and especially the toll roads are of good quality where one can drive up to 100 km/h.

While parts of Colombia were considered 'orange' or even 'red' regarding Dutch travel safety advice (2025), overall we felt very safe and did not experience any problems. The most 'unsafe' part of Colombia would be going towards San Jose del Guaviare, but we did not experience anything out of the ordinary here either. In general, for the areas we visited, just be sure you're not driving at night unless you have a guide with you. In total, we were stopped about 8-10 times by (traffic) police, but never had any problems.

Besides birding and mammal watching, this was also our first trip focused on animal photography. All photos were all taken by me (Jorick van de Water) on a Canon R7 + RF100-500, and much more is posted on my Instagram [@wild.water.photos](https://www.instagram.com/wild.water.photos).

If you have any questions about our itinerary, contacts or sightings, feel free to contact me on Instagram!

Overview

31-01-2025	Flight Amsterdam → Bogota - Car pickup
01-02-2025	Travel to Salento / Walk around Salento
02-02-2025	Hike through Valle de Cocora / Travel to Manizales
03-02-2025	Hacienda El Bosque / Los Nevados NP (Cancelled due to food poisoning)
04-02-2025	Travel to Jardin / Visit Mirador el Roble
05-02-2025	Walk around Jardin
06-02-2025	Travel to Medellin / Medellin Tour
07-02-2025	Travel to la Piedra del Peñol / Travel to Rio Claro RN
08-02-2025	Rio Claro
09-02-2025	Travel to Villa da Leyva
10-02-2025	Rogitama / Villa da Leyva
11-02-2025	Travel to Yopal
12-02-2025	Travel to Hato la Aurora / evening safari
13-02-2025	Hato la Aurora Full day safari / Night walk
14-02-2025	Hato la Aurora Horse ride / River cruise
15-02-2025	Hato la Aurora Morning safari / Travel to Yopal
16-02-2025	Travel to Villavicencio / Walk around Bosque Bavaria
17-02-2025	Walk around Vereda El Carmen / Travel to San Jose del Guaviare
18-02-2025	San Jose del Guaviare
19-02-2025	San Jose del Guaviare
20-02-2025	San Jose del Guaviare HappyLife Home / Travel to Restrepo
21-02-2025	Restrepo / Travel to la Calera
22-02-2025	Chingaza NP
23-02-2025	Travel to Bogota / Flight to Santa Marta / Travel to Calabazo
24-02-2025	Tayrona NP
25-02-2025	Travel to Minca / Minca walk around
26-02-2025	Cuchilla San Lorenzo
27-02-2025	Travel to Cartagena
28-02-2025	Boquilla Mangroves / Cartagena / Flight Cartagena → Amsterdam

Logistics

We booked our rental car long beforehand through Localiza after several recommendations. It was a Renault Duster 4x4, which was in very good condition and only had about 8000 km. Be aware that bigger cities in Colombia have '**pico y placa**', which prohibits the use of number plates ending in specific numbers on specific days of the week (see <https://www.pyphoy.com>). However, when picking up the car you receive a document which exempts you for the first day. We tried to get some information beforehand (and assurances on the number plate), but getting information online or from Localiza proved to be very difficult. However, on the spot the agents made it sound like our request was no problem at all.

Renting a car also enabled us to buy big water jugs to refill our bottles. Moreover, we also brought our [Water-to-Go](#) filter bottle with us to get some extra water to drink while in the field and reduce our plastic bottle usage for the parts we did not have a car. Since many places had creeks and streams we could easily get some extra water on the spot. If you're also interested in this, be sure to use the promo code **JWATER15** to get an additional 15% discount.

For navigation we used Google Maps, which usually had up-to-date information regarding traffic jams, accidents etc. Waze was also recommended, but didn't give us any more or accurate information than Google Maps did. We also installed Maps.me, but only used it from time to time for the smaller off-road parts or trails in national parks.

We bought a local Claro SIM card at a shop in Hayuelos, Bogotá, which was just 10GB and lasted our whole trip. Definitely cheaper to buy it in a local Claro shop than at the airport. We had very good reception pretty much everywhere, except for the really remote areas. Cities were always fine, unless it was 'too hot' (as happened in San Jose del Guaviare).

Most of the payments were made in cash. The ATMs of Davivienda proved to be the best maintained and were present in all the major cities. They also had the lowest transaction fees, as far as we could find.

During the whole month of February we hardly had any rain while we were out and about. We had three big downpours during the day (Valle de Cocora, Rio Claro and Minca), and luckily every time we just stepped into the car or were inside. These usually only lasted for about an hour, after which it was sunny again.

The language barrier was never a big problem. We could manage with some basic Spanish, or otherwise the Colombians could manage with some basic English. Just a couple of times we would have to resort to Google Translate for specific issues (such as making the payment to Chingaza NP).

Detailed Itinerary

Bogota

Smooth direct flight from Amsterdam to Bogotá El Dorado, immigration only took about half an hour. To get to the Localiza office to pick up the rental car we had to go to 'floor 2, door 2'. There were no signs or booths either inside or outside, but after asking and waiting a few minutes, a small green electric bus from Localiza came by and stopped at approximately [here](#). It usually takes 30 minutes max before it arrives. Car pickup at their [office](#) was smooth (see logistics for more details).

We drove to Hotel Natural Sevgi where we could park the car on site. As we didn't want to go downtown Bogotá and continue on to Salento right away the next day, this hotel on the edge of the city was fine. Dinner at a food court, ATM, SIM card and some groceries at Hayuelos shopping mall before walking back to our accommodation.

Salento

The drive from Bogota to Salento can take a full day if there are any problems on the 'La Linea'. Luckily in our case there were none and it took us about 7 hours driving with a lunch stop halfway at [Lechoneria Mr. Chonchito](#). The road conditions were very good and about every 1-2 hours there was a toll booth. These usually were good instances to break down big bills.

In Salento we parked the car at one of the many guarded sites around Salento and checked in at IntiLuna (which was renamed to Hostal el Quinde later on). Walked up to the viewpoint and had a quick walk around in the forest below the platform where we encountered our first **Andean Motmot** and **Moustached Puffbird**. After the hike up to the Mirador we walked down again to one of the many dinner options in Salento.



Andean Motmot



Moustached Puffbird

Next morning we walked through the Valle de Cocora, parking the car in the main car park opposite the 'blue gate' entrance. We first walked the upper parts, and walked back along the creek, thus leaving through the blue gates. We did not visit the Acaime Nature Reserve and the Casa de Colibries as we did not have enough time and the reviews were meh. For walking the upper and lower parts, an entrance fee must be paid for each section (25k and 8k). Got some good views of a **Masked Trogon**, **Sickle-Winged Guan**, **Golden-fronted Redstart** and **Pearled Treerunner** in the upper parts. On the lower parts we saw our first **Green Jay**, **Hooded Mountain Tanager**, **Buff-necked Ibis**, **Bare-faced Ibis**, and a **White-tailed Hawk**.

Coming back to the car park we stopped at a picnic area with a small caravan restaurant where we had a drink and some empanadas which later caused us some food poisoning on the drive to Manizales. Just before leaving Valle de Cocora we had a massive downpour so we were quite happy this didn't occur while walking through the valley. Initially we also contacted Otun Quimbaya to provide us with a tour as well, but they never responded to our e-mails.



Masked Trogon



Sickle-winged Guan

Manizales

As we were struck down with food poisoning, we weren't able to visit our planned sites of Hacienda El Bosque and Los Nevados NP. However, the accommodation we stayed in, [Paraiso Verde](#), offered very good opportunities to do some veranda bird watching from the hammock, so we did that all day long while recovering. It's just outside of Manizales, off the main road towards Medellin. Not that far off the more popular Tinamu Birding Nature Reserve.

The staff were very attentive and brought us some chicken soup to recover. The lodge also has a very lush and varied garden on the slope below, with several trails and a hide to do some birdwatching. The **Andean Emerald**, **Sparkling Violetear**, **Lesser Violetear**, **White-bellied Woodstar**, **Steely-Vented hummingbird** and **Rufous-Tailed hummingbird** all came to visit the feeders. **Acorn Woodpeckers** visited the pole just a few meters away from the veranda. **Flame-Rumped Tanager**, **Palm Tanager**, **Blue-Gray Tanager**, **Golden Tanager** and **Chestnut-capped Brushfinch** were also hanging around.



Acorn Woodpeckers



Golden Tanager

Mirador el Roble

Going from Manizales to Jardin we took the road going through Riosucio. At times this road can be quite tough due to landslides and heavy rainfall. As it was not the rainy season and we had some contacts tell us the road was fine we took this route. Only high clearance can be advised, but otherwise the road was perfectly doable. Along the way we had a stop at [Mirador el Roble](#). Even though we had some contact beforehand about our visit they seemed surprised we visited. Since we just arrived in Colombia and our Spanish was beginner level, there were some difficulties to make ourselves understandable and to pay the visiting fee. Still, we enjoyed some coffee/tea, chocolate and a good view of some spectacular hummingbirds. They also offer you some small feeders to get the hummingbirds in the palm of your hand, if you'd like to do so. The stars here are the Antpittas but unfortunately we did not see any of them. You can also take a walk around the area for the Antpittas but you need to book them as a guide to walk the trails. We did hear them though. **Buff-tailed Coronet**, **Collared Inca**, **Long-tailed Sylph** and **Speckled Hummingbird** all regularly visited the feeders. **Masked Flowerpiercer** and **Lacrimose Mountain Tanager** were present as well.

Going down from Mirador el Roble one also passes ProAves reserve Loro Oreijamarillo. Although we didn't stop, along the way we heard some screeching, saw a flock of 3 and later on in the distance got a shot of a pair of **Yellow-eared Parrots** on top of an old palm tree.



Yellow-eared Parrots



Long-tailed Sylph

Jardin

Our accommodation was just outside of Jardin, at [Monte Rio BnB](#). They have their own veranda and bird feeder looking out over a small creek. Very friendly owners, very knowledgeable about birding in the area and very good meals. They have put up two feeding stations around the house and from the veranda we could comfortably see **Torrent Tyrannulet**, **Black Phoebe**, **Summer Tanager**, **White-lined Tanager**, **Blue-necked Tanager**, **Blackburnian Warbler**, **White-naped Brushfinch**, **Russet-backed Oropendola**, **Yellow-olive Flatbill**, and a **Yellow-backed Oriole**. There is also a **Ringed Kingfisher** often perching on the poles along the river.

Within Jardin we walked the Sendero de la Herrera with a beautiful view over the town. Going down we took la Garrucha cable-car which basically feels like a tiny cabin on a wire, but a fun experience. Taking la Garrucha going up is better if you don't want to do the hike up. Along the way we added a **Red-crowned Woodpecker** and **Broad-winged Hawk** to our list.

Within Jardin there is also the possibility to have an extremely good look at the **Oilbird**. The owner of [Cabaña Manantial del Turpial](#) has constructed a small suspension bridge over the river to get in between the cliffs to see the birds while not disturbing them within a cave or having to shine at them with a torch. The walk is done in a harness and the bridge is very stable, so it's a real easy experience to get to see them. At times **Torrent Duck** and **Andean Cock-of-the-Rock** hang out near the river as well.

The owner is also very passionate about birds and they also have a feeding station surrounded by their cabañas, where we also spent another hour getting good views of a **Crimson-backed Tanager**, **Black-capped Tanager**, **Bay-headed Tanager**, **Scrub Tanager**, **Green Honeycreeper**, **Orange-bellied Euphonia**, **Thick-billed Euphonia**, **Red-headed Barbet**, and the endemic **Red-bellied Grackle**. In the trees behind a **Red-Tailed Squirrel** came passing by.

The major birding attraction in Jardin is Reserva Natural Jardin de Rocas which has several **Andean Cock-of-the-Rock** fighting for the females' attention. Other than the main attraction we also saw a **Colombian Chachalaca** hopping through the trees.



Oilbird



Red-bellied Grackle

Medellin

Leaving Jardin we took the drive to Medellin to experience a little bit of city life and a cultural excursion going to Comuna 13. Medellin and surrounding cities (Itaguí, Bello, among others) enforce Pico y Placa. Some specific roads are also exempted, allowing you to drive through, so be sure to check.

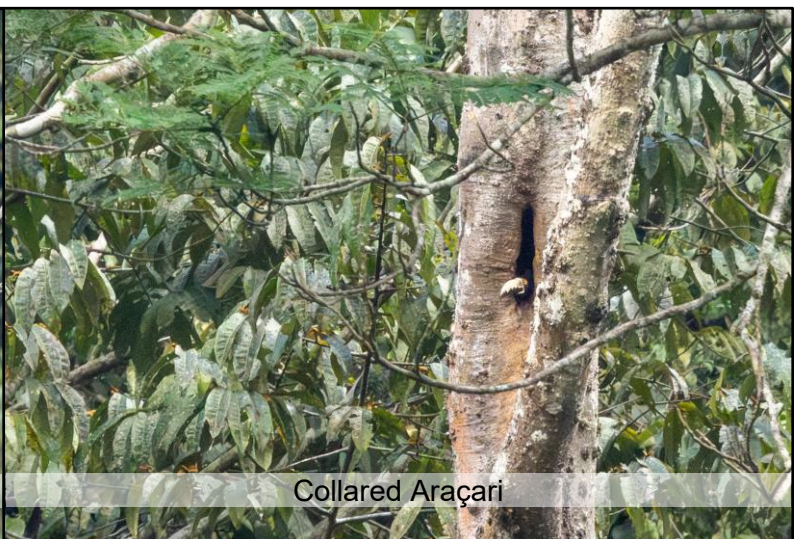
We stayed in Poblado which has ample opportunities for accommodation and food. Taking an Uber in Medellin is also quite easy going to Comuna 13 and back.

Rio Claro

Leaving Medellin we had a quick stop going up the Piedra el Peñol before continuing our drive towards [Reserva Natural Rio Claro](#). We reserved 2 nights beforehand through their website. The entrance is just off the main road, and after confirming we had a reservation, the drive is another 5 minutes towards the reception. It's a well-managed location, mostly focusing on activities in the canyon such as rafting and ziplining. So especially on the weekends it tends to be busier. They have different types of accommodations, located in different parts of the canyon. The larger family rooms (La Mulata) are between the entrance and the reception, the smaller rooms (Refugio) require another 10-15 minute walk with your luggage. We received room #1, which was all the way up on the side of the building; pretty much the best room possible. The room was spacious and had balconies on both sides, perfect for spotting some wildlife. As soon as we entered the room, we spotted a group of **Colombian Red Howlers** on the other side of the river and spent almost an hour observing them from our balcony. Besides these, **Channel-billed Toucan**, **Yellow-billed Toucan**, **Bat Falcon**, and a **Collared Araçari** (poking its head out of its tree from time to time) were around as well. Afterwards, we walked all the way to the end of the canyon to 'Las Dantas', which can take up to an hour or two if you're spotting along the way, although we didn't see much of note. About halfway there is a cave on the other side of the river which can be visited if you do the speleology tour. Inside, you can see some oilbirds, although they also come out in big numbers at night (around 18.30), but then it's quite hard to see them.



Bat Falcon



Collared Araçari

The next day we walked all the way back to the main road, the Mulata trail (up until the point where you'd need wellies to cross the small stream) and back past the houses up to the cave where the Oilbirds are. The other accommodations along the main road seem somewhat deserted and run-down, and there is also a huge cement factory nearby. Close to the main entrance building are some trees with a lot of **Chestnut-headed Oropendola** and their nests. Going towards the Mulata trail a **Choco Black-throated Trogon** perched close to the ground. The Mulata trail offered a lot of new birds for us, and this is also where it showed we were still beginner birders 😊. Among others, we saw **Buff-throated Saltator**, **Northern Plain-Xenops**, **Masked Tityra**, **Long-tailed Tyrant**, **Beautiful Woodpecker** and **Band-backed Wren**. The rest of the afternoon was spent chilling, birdwatching and howler-watching on our balcony.



Choco Black-throated Trogon



Long-tailed Tyrant

Villa da Leyva

Going towards Villa de Leyva we took the road through Puerto Araujo, good road conditions and very easy to drive. We stayed outside of Villa de Leyva, about one hour drive, at [Rogitama Biodiversidad](#). This place used to be a cattle ranch but the owners have turned into a biodiversity hotspot and an education centre. Basic breakfast and dinner can be provided, though very tasty.

The verandas on the first floor have multiple feeders on which the **White-bellied Woodstar**, **Lazuline Sabrewing**, and **Black Inca** can be seen. We also did a short walk around the grounds and a little bit outside. Here, we also added **Swainson's Thrush**, **Azara's Spinetail**, **Common Chlorospingus** and **Montane Woodcreeper** to the list.



Black Inca



White-bellied Woodstar

Villa de Leyva is a picturesque colonial town with some nice small-scale options for lunch and dinner, and a museum or two. It's mostly known for its main square which is one of the largest (cobblestone) squares in South America. We only spent a couple hours in the town before we drove up to Iguaque NP, just to have a look. The drive up to the administration office is easily done with any high-clearance vehicle. Up top you can walk around, although if you have no reservation for any of the hikes you're not allowed any further. So we drove back to Rogitama, had a seat on the veranda to enjoy the hummingbirds and had some dinner.

Yopal

The next stop was the Llanos, specifically Ecolodge Juan Solito in Hato la Aurora. But this drive was unrealistic to do in one day, so we had a stopover in Yopal at Hotel Estelar. We did the same on the way back, as we had a morning programme in Hato La Aurora so we could spend the afternoon driving, eat something in Yopal and spend the night. It was a good typical hotel, nice warm showers, comfortable bed and buffet-style breakfast. The road from Villa de Leyva towards Yopal was beautiful. We passed by Laguna de Tota, the largest lake in Colombia and third highest lake in South America. Especially the part after the lake, driving through páramo and coming out of the eastern cordillera down towards the Llanos was beautiful.

Hato La Aurora

The drive to Hato La Aurora from Yopal took about 5-6 hours. At $\frac{2}{3}$ of the way, the paved road ended and turned to sand/gravel. As it was dry season, it was perfectly doable with our car, high clearance wasn't essential. The road is quite straightforward; going from Yopal, to Paz de Ariporo, through Montaña del Totumo, taking the entrance [here](#). We booked the stay beforehand through WhatsApp, together with all the excursions. There are several other agencies providing packages to [Ecolodge Juan Solito](#), but we found it was far cheaper (and easier) to book through them directly. We agreed to pay on-location with cash, which meant we had to have a large stack with us when going there. Although paying with credit card was also an option. We had not booked an English speaking guide, luckily we were paired with another English-Colombian couple who helped us with translations. The guides and most of the staff at this lodge didn't speak English, only one lady who welcomed us spoke English.

Especially in the last $\frac{1}{3}$ of the way, we already spotted quite some bird species on the roadside, gathered around the pools. **Little Blue Heron, Cocoi Heron, Snowy Egret, Scarlet Ibis, Bare-faced Ibis, Buff-necked Ibis, Sharp-tailed Ibis, Great Egret, Roseate Spoonbill, Wattled Jacana**. Later on we also spotted several **Horned Screamer, Wood Stork and Jabiru**. While stopping also a **Vermillion Flycatcher** and **Fork-tailed Flycatcher** came to visit the tree nearby. Arriving at Juan Solito we already saw the numerous **Capybara** around the site and in the river. There are also several animals being fed by the ecolodge, including **Green Iguana, Scarlet Macaw, Rufous-vented Chachalaca, Shiny Cowbird**, but also a **Common Opossum**. Besides this they also have a resident **White-tailed Deer**, called Pepita, often visiting the kitchen and restaurant area.

The first evening we went on a safari through the hato. The main target was the Jaguar, but during our whole stay we were not successful to spot one. One of the spots visited was a small lake with hundreds of **Orinoco Goose, Black-bellied Whistling Duck and White-faced Whistling Duck**. Several raptors were spotted as well such as **Black-collared Hawk, Savanna Hawk, Black-crested Caracara** and **Yellow-headed Caracara**. A **Black Skimmer** also came flying by, scraping the water surface for some fish. Along the banks are also quite a lot of **Spectacled Caiman** and **Capybara** getting spa treatments by Caracara's.



Scarlet Ibis, Little Blue Heron, Snowy Egret, Great Egret



Capybara, Yellow-headed Caracara

In the morning we did a small walk around the lodge before breakfast, and we spotted a family of **Chestnut-eared Araçari** in the trees nearby. Along the river, a pair of **Giant Otter** came swimming by. Also a **Sunbittern** crossed the river, showing its wings beautifully.

The first full day was spent doing a whole-day safari going deeper into the ható. We made a stop at a pool to feed a **Orinoco Crocodile**, which was one of the few in the area. We had lunch at the [main building](#), and received a presentation about the efforts done for Jaguar conservation in the area, which proved to be quite successful.

The second full day started off by a horse-ride tour. It started off some time after breakfast when it was getting quite hot already, and about half of the ride is in the shade. It was a nice ride, although in terms of wildlife spotting it wasn't very interesting. In the afternoon we opted for the river cruise, which definitely yielded better wildlife viewing. Along the banks there were quite some **Hoatzin**, a **Plumbeous Kite**, **Squirrel Cuckoo**, **Gray-cowled Wood-Rail**, **Crestless Curassow**, **Gray-headed Kite** and **Anhinga**. In terms of mammals we saw an **Agouti**, and some **Colombian Red Howler** up in the trees.

In the evening we did a night safari. Before starting out we got some good views of a **Boat-billed Heron** at a pond close to the restaurant area. Starting the safari, pretty quickly we found a **Tropical Screech-Owl** on two occasions, which were pretty much the only bird we spotted. Along the path there was also a **Common Lancehead**, and we tried our luck to get a good view of a **Southern Tamandua**, but it was already up in the trees once we got a proper look. Just a little later we heard the shuffling through the vegetation which turned out to be a **Nine-banded Armadillo**, our guide helped us find him, and we got a good view of the animal.

The last day we did one more morning safari in the hopes of seeing the Jaguar, but no luck. At the start we did see a couple of **Crab-eating Fox**, and we went past one of the burrows for some lovely shots of a couple of **Burrowing Owls**. Arriving back at the lodge, we lounged a bit, waiting for lunch after which we left for our stopover in Yopal before continuing to Villavicencio.



Villavicencio

We arrived in the late afternoon to [Wairaparu Eco Lodge](#) which we booked beforehand for one night. Before going to the lodge, we made a quick stop at [Bosque Bavaria](#). We parked the car just inside the roped-off entrance (although it is also possible to drive up). As it was the weekend, it was quite crowded with locals going to the waterfalls and taking a swim. Just beyond the waterfalls, a little up the hill, we were suddenly surprised by several primates running about in the trees. A big group of **Large-headed Capuchin** came passing by, later followed by a couple of **Humboldt's Squirrel Monkeys**.



The Wairaparu Eco Lodge's location is quite beautiful, located up the mountain side with a nice view over Villavicencio. It seemed to be quite a popular and up-market location celebrating birthdays and taking a lot of selfies. The Italian restaurant was somewhat pricey, but the food was really good. We stayed in one of the three cabañas which included a netting to lounge on. This combination seems to be very popular throughout Colombia. It turned out to be quite a nice location to do some spotting as well, both for birds and mammals. Because as soon as we arrived and were settled, some **Humboldt's Squirrel Monkeys** came passing by just above our cabaña. A **White-throated Toucan** also had its nest in a nearby tree, which offered some extra entertainment.

Breakfast was included, and the next morning we received one of the most elaborate breakfast we ever received, which was very delicious. Before leaving we walked around in the area, along the 'Vereda El Carmen', to try and see some more birds. Along the road are quite some more accommodations, and also several still being built. However it's quite steep in some places, and especially after our big breakfast we only walked for a kilometer or so before going back. We hopped in the car, filled our tank, got some money from the ATM and bought some snacks at the Viva Centro Commercial in Villavicencio and continued on to San Jose del Guaviare.

San Jose del Guaviare

We booked a 2½ day tour with Happy Life tours. Santiago Vargas guided us during these days; a very friendly and knowledgeable bird guide with a good eye. Happy Life Tours is one of the few touring companies in and around San Jose del Guaviare. It's managed by Wilmer Ramirez and Diana Gavilan. Especially Wilmer is the best bird guide in the area, but unfortunately he doesn't speak English, so they arranged Santiago for us who also guides tours for them.

Arriving in San Jose del Guaviare, we stayed at Hospedaje Familia Lalay, which is managed by the mother of Diana. The room is small but comfortable, and luckily with air conditioning as San Jose can get very warm and humid.

Both full days we spent time in the forests around [La Morada del Yawis](#). Driving from San Jose del Guaviare it takes about 1-2 hours to reach the area. 4x4 is not necessary, but high clearance is. Although our guide said he also does it with his Kia Picanto. At La Morada del Yawis they provided a very delicious breakfast and lunch. On the way, we spotted some **Humboldt's Squirrel monkeys** and a **White-chested Titi**. Birdwise we were treated with a **Black-throated Mango**, and a **Green-backed Trogon**. Going into the forest behind we tried to look for the Golden-backed Uakari, but without any luck. This species also eluded us the following days. The forests were quite lively; amongst others we spotted **Black-fronted Nunbird**, **Rose-breasted Chat**, **Double-toothed Kite**, **Amazonian Antshrike**, **White-flanked Antwren**, a beautiful **Yellow-billed Jacamar** who didn't seem shy at all, several types of **Araçari** (**Many-banded**, **Chestnut-eared** and **Lettered**), **Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl**, **Purple Honeycreeper**, and a **Crimson-crested Woodpecker**. The main attraction was the Juvenile **Harpy Eagle**, for whom they made a viewing site within the forest. While the mom visits from time to time, she wasn't at home during our visit. Still, it was very cool to see such a fabled bird, and quite impressive to see the spine of (probably) a woolly monkey around the nest. Afterwards we drove to our stay for the night which is called [Casa de José Rojas](#) on OpenStreetMap. From here, we did a short night walk and didn't see much except for a **Common Pauraque** and a **Kinkajou**, coming back to the hut.



Harpy Eagle



Kinkajou

The next morning we visited the forests around La Morada del Yawis again. Besides a good look at a **Screaming Piha**, we didn't see many birds. However, we did get some very good views and our favourite shot of a big group of **Humboldt's Woolly Monkeys**; big males shaking the trees trying to scare us off, and moms with little ones on their back (see cover photo).

In the afternoon we set off to [Cerro Azul](#), which is one of the three sites in the area with rock paintings. The walk up took just about an hour. Close to the top, there is a cave with several bat species. Taking a lot of pictures, afterwards we identified the **Lesser Dog-like Bat**, **Seba's Short-tailed bat** and the **Common Vampire Bat**. Supposedly there should be 7 species in the cave alone. Going down, just before we were about to get into the car to drive back to San Jose, we spotted a pair of **Swallow-tailed Kite** getting busy on a palm leaf.



Seba's Short-tailed Bats



Swallow-tailed Kites

We spent the night in Hospedaje Familia Lalay again, and the next morning we paid a visit to HappyLife Home. However, just before going there we went along a side road going towards San Jose del Guaviare (just past Cabañas Kinkaju, going towards Laguna Negra) to view a **Great Potoo**, even with a little one! The HappyLife Home is the house of the owners of the tour agency, just across the river from the city. As birders, they have several feeders around the house and have tried to make the surroundings bird-friendly, and successfully so. While having breakfast we spotted a **Masked Crimson Tanager**, **Yellow-tufted Woodpecker**, **Scarlet-crowned Barbet** and a **White-eared Jacamar**. After breakfast, we returned to the city by taking the boat over the Guaviare river, said our goodbyes, and got into our car for the next drive.

Restrepo

From San Jose del Guaviare we drove all the way back, past Villavicencio, to Restrepo. We stayed at [Rancho Camaná](#), a very popular stay for birders and a very nice location. While we wanted to stay here on our way towards San Jose del Guaviare, it was already fully booked. This time however, we were the only ones. The owner Marta was very friendly and although her English is basic, communication was smooth. She was also able to provide us with a lovely vegetarian lasagne, made from vegetables out of their own garden.

We did a quick walk around through their extensive forest/garden. After coming back, the owner pointed us to their resident **Brumback's Night Monkeys**, living in a big bamboo bush on her property.

The next morning, after breakfast, we had another walk around the premises and met up with a guide a little later. Although we initially booked with Elvis (who lives there), he turned out to be guiding on the other side of Colombia. The owner managed to arrange a local guide, and together we went towards Bosque Bavaria again. First, we did a walk along the road on the east side of the Guatiqua river, just north of the old bridge. New birds were a **Golden-bellied Euphonia** and a **Glittering-throated Emerald**. At Bosque Bavaria, we entered with the car and drove halfway up, walking and birding on our way down. Unfortunately we were already late in the morning so we didn't spot that much.



Brumback's Night Monkeys



Glittering-throated Emerald

Around noon we left Restrepo and headed towards La Calera, just outside Bogotá to go to Chingaza. The road towards Bogota is in good condition, although getting stuck behind big trucks can increase travel time quite a bit. Also getting into Bogotá (or partly driving past it) turned out to be quite a struggle. As we were not allowed to go into Bogotá because we didn't have the right number plate, we partly had to drive around the city. We were stopped by police about 5 times for routine checks, but also once because we overtook a truck on the winding roads over the cordilleras. Fortunately, we never ran into any troubles and did not have to pay any fines. We arrived at our AirBnb just outside of La Calera late in the afternoon, after a drive of about 7 hours.

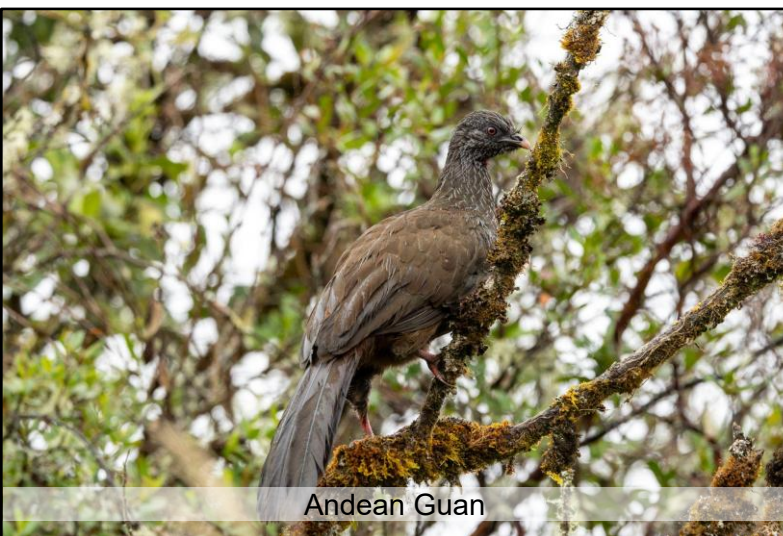
Chingaza

It is not possible to drive around Chingaza NP without a guide, and a guide has to be booked through the [online system](#), and this site seems to be constantly changing. Furthermore, the entrance and activity fees have to be paid in advance, which is not possible with a foreign credit card. Earlier, while we were Jardin we went to a convenience store from where we could transfer the money to the park authority. Arrangements were made mostly through WhatsApp.

We picked up our guide early in the morning in La Calera and drove up to the entrance, which is quite a long and bendy road. At the entrance we first had to register and watch a short film regarding the responsibilities of the park authorities, which took about 30 minutes.

Unfortunately it was very misty with a slight drizzle. As you have to arrange the visit beforehand, there is not much room for flexibility to plan for the weather. The temperature hovered between 7 to 10 degrees, so be prepared to wear some layers. There are several trails to walk, and these have to be chosen beforehand. As we wanted to have as much change as possible to view the Andean Bear, we opted for the one deepest into the park, as we figured we'd have the most chance of spotting the Andean Bear. However due to the mist we hardly had any views of the park, let alone a chance to spot a bear. The drive to Laguna Chingaza took around 2 hours. At the Laguna the weather cleared momentarily, so we parked the car at the [trail entrance](#) and walked part of the trail.

On our way back we passed by the [administration center](#) we passed earlier, about halfway into the park, to have some lunch. This is also the only place where it's possible to stay overnight. However, to do any excursions or hikes, you need to have a guide with you. In the end, we managed to see just 10 bird species (a **Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle**, **Glossy Flowerpiercer**, **Hooded Mountain Tanager**, **Andean Guan** and **Rufous Wren** being the most interesting) and a couple of **White-tailed Deer**.



Andean Guan



Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle

Leaving the park, we dropped our guide back at the [abandoned cement factory](#) along the way, and continued our way to the supermarket in La Calera, got some dinner and went back to our accommodation.

The next morning we made the drive back down to Bogota to return our car. The steep road between San Luis and Bogotá turned out to be an extremely popular road for cyclists; it almost looked like a competition was happening, but it turned out to be a regular weekend day. Not a very pleasant drive down between the hundreds of cyclists. Car drop off at Localiza was quick and easy, and we were transported back to the airport for our flight to Santa Marta.

Tayrona

Once we arrived in Santa Marta, we booked a taxi through InDrive (as Uber is not allowed around Santa Marta, apparently). But in the end the costs were about the same as a regular taxi and looking back we might as well have taken the regular bus, which would have been far cheaper. Although you probably need a transfer in Santa Marta to go towards Calabazo and Tayrona.

Tayrona NP has two entrances; El Zaino (east) and Calabazo (west). El Zaino is by far the more popular entrance with queues lining up every morning. From here you can take a shuttle bus to just off Playa Cañaveral from where you can walk (or take a horse) towards Playa Cabo San Juan. The Calabazo entrance is definitely not as popular, which is also why we chose this one.

We stayed at Hostel La Casablanca just outside of the entrance. Rooms were okay, the food was really good, with some nice vegetarian options available. When going in through the Calabazo entrance, we first had to pay a small fee for 'road maintenance' up to the [official entrance point](#) (just blatant money grabbing). It is also possible to hop on the back of a motorbike to go towards the [split point](#) where the road takes you either to Playa Brava or Playa Cabo San Juan. We were assured we wouldn't see any animals along the way because of the motorbike noises. Still, we decided to walk the first bit.

Already after 15 minutes we saw our first **Cotton-top Tamarins**; a group of about 15 moving about in the trees. Not necessarily shy but they were quick to move and kept a constant eye on us. Continuing we got some great views of a **Lance-tailed Manakin** and constantly heard the **Golden-headed Manakins**, but were unable to spot it. Higher up we also had a great display of a male and female **Rufous-tailed Jacamar**, and both the **Santa Marta White-fronted Capuchin** and **Humboldt's Squirrel Monkey** came passing by in the trees overhead.



Cotton-top Tamarin



Lance-tailed Manakin

The way to the split point takes about 2 hours, then it gets quieter (no more motorbikes) and you move along towards Pueblito; the indigenous village which you were previously able to visit but is now off-limits. From Pueblito, it takes another hour going down towards the coast.



Santa Marta White-fronted Capuchin



Rufous-tailed Jacamar

The coast at Cabo San Juan is quite touristy, but provides some decent options for a drink and food. Many people also stay overnight on the beach in one of the already set-up tents. Unfortunately we didn't have time for this, as only then you're able to do some walk arounds late in the evening or early in the morning; as you are required to leave the park before 18.00 (although we left later, but nobody seemed to mind). Walking along the beach, we saw quite big groups of **Royal Tern** and some groups of **Brown Pelican** flying overhead.

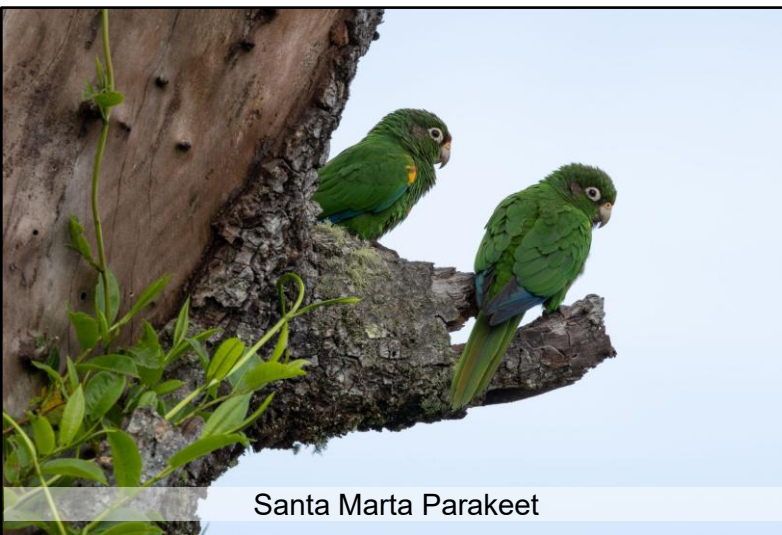
Afterwards, we walked back the same route back towards Calabazo. As it was already later in the afternoon and it was getting somewhat warmer, the forest became noticeably quieter. So we definitely didn't see as much going back. Especially the first part up from the beach, it is quite a climb and we never sweated this much in our entire lives, so be sure to have enough water with you.

Minca

From Calabazo we hopped on a bus towards Santa Marta, from where we took the colectivo up into the mountains towards Minca at the little [bus stop](#). The colectivos depart once it's filled, which took about 20 minutes waiting in the small air-conditioned room. At Minca it was a short walk to our accommodation, after which we walked to one of the waterfalls nearby.

The next morning we were picked up around 3.45 by our guide Saddam to go up to [Cuchilla San Lorenzo](#) & Cerro Kennedy. The road up is extremely bumpy and requires a really high clearance 4x4. Even so, I still would not recommend driving it yourself. We saw some other people going up by motorbike and walking back down, which seems much more recommended. We arrived just before dawn at the top. When the weather is clear, you can see the sea on one side and the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta on the other side. Unfortunately it was quite cloudy, but not so cloudy that we could still do some proper birding.

Saddam first tried calling a **Santa Marta Screech Owl**, but no luck. 10 minutes later we tried again and had one flying right between us. Unfortunately it did not go and sit in a tree nearby, so we weren't able to get a good luck at it. We walked along the Cuchilla San Lorenzo for an hour or two before going back down. Among others, we spotted a **Strong-billed Woodcreeper**, **Santa Marta Warbler**, **Santa Marta Brushfinch**, **Buff-breasted Mountain Tanager**, a couple of **Santa Marta Parakeet** screeching by and posing beautifully on a nearby tree, and a **White-tipped Quetzal**.



Santa Marta Parakeet



Santa Marta Brushfinch

Going back we had a simple, but tasty breakfast at Hostal Donde Moncho, where we also spotted a **Tyrian Metaltail**. One can also camp here, but this wasn't our cup of tea. Although it looked like a nice natural location, with no feeders, still some hummingbirds visiting the flowers nearby. We continued further down, passing by Hostal El Ramo for some more hummingbirds such as a **White-tailed Starfrontlet**, and a **Santa Marta Woodstar**. This location however, and especially the feeders, did not seem very well taken care of. Just before arriving at our next stop we saw a family of a **Masked Trogon** male, female and juvenile posing just above the road. The last stop was at [Mountain House](#), which would definitely be a location where we would've liked to stay for a couple nights; nice veranda, beautiful garden with feeders and feeding station, friendly owners and - while we didn't see the rooms - the

reception area seemed very well taken care of. Here we saw quite a lot of **Crowned Woodnymph**, **Brown Violetear** and also **Santa Marta Blossomcrown**, which did not visit the feeders, but was zipping by the flowers. The feeding station was visited by, among others, a **Sierra Neva Brushfinch** and a **Blue-naped Chlorophonia**. Going further down, it became very misty and eventually started raining quite heavily. Just before that though, we spotted a **Whooping Motmot** through the mist, up in the trees. The drive back to town took about 30 minutes. We had some dinner at [Arabesca](#), a very tasty Syrian restaurant.



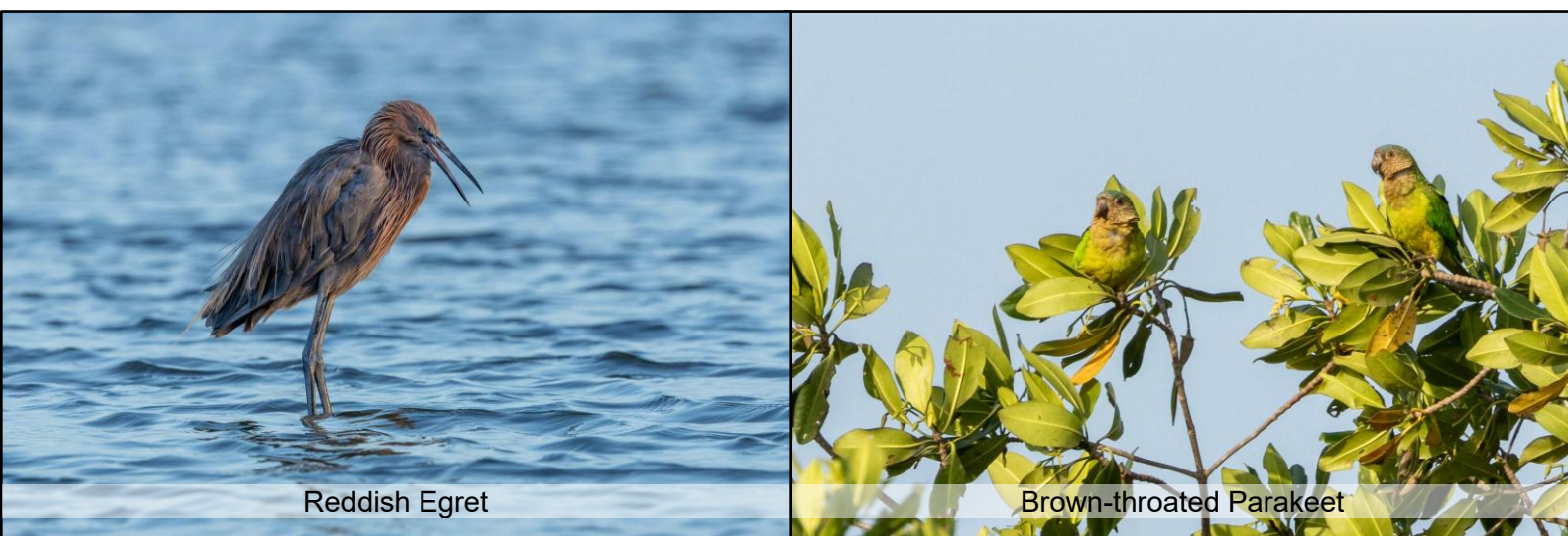
The next day we took the colectivo down the mountain back to Santa Marta. Before arriving at the city centre, the colectivo stops at the [bus terminal](#). Here, we booked a bus ticket towards Cartagena. The drive took about 8-9 hours, mostly due to an accident and heavy traffic in Cienaga. Usually it should take about 5-6 hours. The bus stopped once in Barranquilla. The bus also got stopped and searched by police, clearly fishing for some bribe money.

In Cartagena we arrived at the [bus terminal](#), which is quite far from the city centre, and booked an Uber. Within 50 meters, still in the bus terminal area, we were stopped by local police, saying Ubers are not allowed in Colombia (which isn't true though). Inside the bus terminal there is also a big sign with the fees for taking a taxi to the different locations. So in the end we took a regular taxi to the historic city (which had about the same price as the Uber). We walked around the city at night and had some dinner.

Cartagena

We arranged a mangrove tour with [Boquilla Eco Tours](#), for the morning of our flight back. We were picked up sharply at 05.30 at our accommodation in the historic centre, and the drive was about 20 minutes to the [location](#). The guide on the boat isn't necessarily a bird guide, but knew the local names and a detail or two. The whole experience takes about an hour or three. Most of the tours are done during the day, focusing more on fishing, visiting the communities and going through the mangrove tunnels, which are apparently well-known because of a telenovela.

In total, we saw 36 species of birds and were able to come up close on quite a few occasions. Most notably we saw **Willets**, **Whimbrels**, **Green Heron**, **Tricolored Heron**, some **Yellow-crowned Night Herons**, **Reddish Egrets**, some well-camouflaged **Brown-throated Parakeets** and a few **Magnificent Frigatebirds**. We also spotted a **Crab-eating Raccoon** skulking around within the mangrove trees.



Reddish Egret

Brown-throated Parakeet

The tour takes you along some sand banks, mangrove tunnels, along open water parts, under the causeway and back to the start. After the boat tour we were treated to some coconut water and brought back to our accommodation.

As our whole tour took place before breakfast, we had some on the rooftop area and freshened up. Then we took a walk through Cartagena, passing by Parque Centenario which is home to some **Cotton-top Tamarin**, **Green Iguana**, and a **Brown-throated Sloth**. After picking up our stuff from the hotel later in the afternoon, we took a taxi drive to the airport for our flight back. Once again a direct flight directly to Amsterdam.

Species list

For the full bird species list (344 species) see <https://ebird.org/tripreport/392753>

Mammals spotted were (22 species):

Colombian Howler monkey (*Alouatta seniculus*)
Humboldt's Squirrel monkey (*Saimiri cassiquiarensis*)
Tufted Capuchin / Brown Capuchin spp Large-headed (*Sapajus apella macrocephalus*)
Black Titi (*Cheracebus lugens*)
Brumback's Night monkey (*Aotus brumbacki*)
Humboldt's Woolly Monkey / Common Woolly Monkey (*Lagothrix lagothricha*)
Cotton-top Tamarin (*Saguinus oedipus*)
Santa Marta white-fronted Capuchin (*Cebus malitiosus*)
Kinkajou (*Potos flavus*)
Red-tailed Squirrel (*Sciurus granatensis*)
Crab-eating Fox (*Cerdocyon thous*)
White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)
Nine-banded Armadillo (*Dasypus novemcinctus*)
Crab-eating Raccoon (*Procyon cancrivorus*)
Common Capybara (*Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris*)
Giant Otter (*Pteronura brasiliensis*)
Common Opossum (*Didelphis marsupialis*)
Southern Tamandua (*Tamandua tetradactyla*)
Lesser Dog-like Bat (*Peropteryx macrotis*)
Seba's Short-tailed bat (*Carollia perspicillata*)
Common Vampire Bat (*Desmodus rotundus*)
Brown-throated Sloth (*Bradypus variegatus*)

Herptofauna spotted were (9 species):

Green Iguana (*Iguana iguana*)
Orinoco Crocodile (*Crocodylus intermedius*)
Spectacled Caiman (*Caiman crocodilus*)
Common Lancehead (*Bothrops atrox*)
Striped Kentropyx (*Kentropyx striata*)
Collared Treerunner (*Plica plica*)
Cryptic Golden Tegu (*Tupinambis cryptus*)
Red-footed Tortoise (*Chelonoidis carbonarius*)
Savanna Side-necked Turtle (Genus *Podocnemis*)