

Bolivia

Nature's Masterpiece

A Greentours Itinerary

The natural riches of Bolivia are really only just starting to be realised. This is a country where one doesn't have to travel half the length of a continent to reach thoroughly different habitats for here are the meeting points of Paramo, Amazonas and Chaco. This is full natural history exploration of some of Bolivia's finest natural parks with equal emphasis placed on all the myriad flora, butterflies, mammals, birds, and reptiles there-in.

Pre-tour to San Miguelito & the Gran Chaco

Day 1

To Santa Cruz

Day 2

Santa Cruz Botanic Garden and transfer to San Miguelito

After a rather short night we'll head to the Santa Cruz Botanic Garden for a relaxing morning. The lovely gardens are a good way to start to get to know Bolivia's flora and its fauna. Black Howler Monkeys are easily seen and photographed here and we'll also see Brown-throated Three-toed Sloths and Brown Capuchins too. Amazonian Red-tailed Squirrels scamper through the trees. The birdlife is varied with Yellow-eared Woodpecker, Guira Cuckoo, Ocellated Piculet, Purple-throated Euphonia, Thrush-like Wren and both Green-cheeked Parakeets and Yellow-chevroned Parakeets all likely to be seen. The butterfly fauna will already be hotting up with large Thoas Swallowtails, Cattlehearts and Red-rims.

After lunch we'll head towards the Gran Chaco and San Miguelito Jaguar Conservation Ranch.

Days 3-5

San Miguelito Jaguar Conservation Ranch in the Gran Chaco

The Kaa-Lya National Park protects perhaps the most unspoilt remaining area of the Gran Chaco, the second largest forest in South America. It is a semi-arid region, hot and dry, bisected by large rivers and home to a rich variety of birds and mammals, many of them either found only within this ecosystem or more often most easily seen in the Chaco's more open habitats. We'll visit the San Miguelito Jaguar Conservación Ranch, a working cattle ranch some way to the north of the national park which has been working at protecting Jaguars in particular as well as the habitat in general. During our three days we can expect to see Ocelot (just one of six species of cat on the ranch), Peccaries, Tapirs, Anteaters and birds such as Undulated Tinamou, Cocoli Heron and Plush-crested Jay.

In the afternoon of Day 5 you'll join the Main Tour on their Day 2 see below.

Main Tour

Day 1 To Santa Cruz

Day 2 Santa Cruz Botanic Garden and to Los Volcanes

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After lunch we'll head for Los Volcanes. The lodge there is set in a clearing surrounded by the most remarkable scenery, with soaring red cliffs capped with dwarf forest.

Days 3 & 4 Los Volcanes

We'll start our exploration of the middle altitudes (thus acclimatizing for the higher areas to come) of the Refugio Los Volcanes set amid a spectacular landscape of red rock domes surrounded by forest. There's an amazing variety of trees here framing red cliffs plastered with huge bromeliads. Crested Oropendola and both Plush-crested and Purplish Jays are constant companions around the grounds. Flamboyant giant bromeliad cling to the rocks and prolifically and we'll also look out for the lovely *Epidendrum amplum*, an orchid endemic to this area with big sprays of pink flowers. With luck the impressive aestivating roost of thousands of delicate *Episcada hymenaea* glasswings is still in residence in the cool stream valleys. Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaners chase one another through the canopy tangles and we'll also see Blue-crowned Motmot, Speckled Chachalacas and Chestnut-eared Aracari. A ridge above the lodge where the trees are strung with the delicate beards of *Tillandsia* is a good spot to look down on the forest – we've a good chance of Harpy Eagle here. And looking up we're likely to see the equally impressive Andean Condor soaring effortlessly across the sky.

In the afternoon we'll return to Santa Cruz and catch a flight to Cochabamba and then make the short drive to a local lagoon where we can enjoy rafts of lovely White-cheeked Pintail mixed with Rosy-billed Pochard, richly-coloured

Cinnamon Teal and Yellow-billed Pintail. Puna Ibis and Black-necked Stilts are in the shallows.

Day 5

Yungas

From Cochabamba the road climbs to a heady 3800 metres before descending into an altogether more verdant and lush landscape with dramatic hills and ridges clothed in rich cloud forest. We'll explore a side road that will take us through beautiful tree fern filled forest with scarlet *Begonias* hanging from the banks and huge floriferous Senecio shrubs laden with dinner-plate sized corymbs of yellow flowers. Lovely Hooded Mountain-tanagers are common, often forming mixed flocks with Spectacled Redstart, Blue-backed Conebill, White-browed Conebill, Masked Flowerpiercer, Barred Becard, and the simply sensational Scarlet-bellied Mountain-tanager. Sunny days will bring an abundance of montane butterflies such as Brazilian Painted Lady, Christophori Mapwings and Andean Silverspot and we'll constantly have stunning views out across a wide landscape of moody peaks and forested slopes, framed by lichen-clad trees and tree ferns. Orange *Bomarea crocea* dangles its showy flowers over mossy *Polylepis pepeii* forest mixed with stout *Blechnum auratum* semi-tree ferns. Studding the deep moss are the sky-blue stars of *Gentiana sedifolia*. In the undergrowth are more cryptically marked birds such as Pearled Treerunner, Streaked Tuftedcheek and Montane Woodcreeper.

Day 6

Cerro Tunari

Today we'll head for the heights of the wonderful Cerro Tunari. We'll start in pre-puna scrub where we can find Golden-billed Saltator, White-browed Chat-tyrant, Chiguanco Thrush and Plumbeous Sierra-finch. Next are superb stands of *Leucostele (Echinopsis) tunariensis* cacti laden with huge softly fragrant flowers. Among these taller columnar plants are the low-growing ribbed domes of *Lobivia obrepanda* bearing outsize bright pink flowers on long tubes. Parasitic *Tristerix penduliflorus*, flowering *Berberis commutata* and the peculiar swollen-trunked *Vasconcellea quercifolia* feature too. Three really special birds in this zone are the endemic hummer Red-tailed Comet, lovely Blue-and-yellow Tanager, and the handsome Cochabamba Mountain-finch, also an endemic to this area.

The hanging bells of *Bomarea crocea* drape *Polylepis subtusalbida* forest as we reach around 3500m. Sublime Andean landscapes surround higher lakes above 4000m. The inflated scarlet flowers of *Caiophora horrida* bloom with *Salpichroa glandulosa*, festooned with hanging yellow flowers. Feeding amongst alpine turf and rocks are Bar-winged Cinclodes, White-winged Cinclodes, Puna Ground-tyrant, White-winged Duica-finch, Bright-rumped Yellow-finch and Hooded Siskin. Dainty white *Saxifraga magellanica* flowers in wet crevices.

Day 7

Flight to Trinidad. Through the Pampas to Rurrenabaque

The vastness of Bolivia is laid bare as we traverse a slice of the pampas, a matrix of marshes, grasslands and woods that stretch to the horizon in all directions. Wildlife is plentiful, with Southern Screamer, Roseate Spoonbill, Snail Kite, Black-collared Hawk together with stately Greater Rheas, herds of Capybaras and the hunched forms of huge-billed Jabirus scouring the ponds for unwary fish. In the trees are the amazing mud nests of Horneros, like little clay ovens wedged into branch nooks. There is a fun river crossing on rustic barges too. Much depends on the water levels in the various parts of the pampas as to what we see where. We will reach Rurrenabaque in the late afternoon and spend the night there.

Days 8 & 9(am)

Santa Rosa de Yacuma

Black and Spectacled Caiman, Turtles, Rufescent Tiger-heron and grunting Hoatzins are all likely to be seen as we travel to the pleasant Las Tortugas Lodge on a short boat ride. The comfortable cabanas are spread out amid wildlife-filled grounds - Tamandua, Black Howler, Squirrel Monkey, and Brazilian Porcupine are often seen around them.

Boat trips along the river will prove productive for birds such as Cooi Herons, Ringed, Amazon and Green Kingfishers and Red-capped Cardinals. Blue-winged Parrotlets feed on riverside daisies and Rufous-tailed Jacamars hawk insects from low perches, whilst Great Antshrikes and Solitary Caciques take baths in the shallows. This is one of the very best spots to watch the Pink Dolphin, also known as Boto, for here they have become somewhat habituated and tend to be tolerant of the presence of the boat. Black Howler pose in large riverside trees and we'll see Orinoco Geese, Pale-legged Hornero, Silver-beaked Tanager, Toco Toucan, Black Nunbird, Cinnamon-throated Woodcreeper and Yellow-rumped Cacique. Marshy grasslands are home to the impressive Green Anaconda and an excellent array of very visible marshland birds - Rufescent Tiger-heron, Southern Screamer, Maguire Stork, Plumbeous Ibis, Wattled Jacana, Limpkin, Great Black Hawk, Black-collared Hawk and the imposing Jabiru amongst others.

Post dinner we'll take a night boat ride. Sleek Boat-billed Herons feed along the shores and we'll find Pauraque and Ladder-tailed Nightjar amidst the many Caiman eyes. Capybara haul out on the shore here and there.

Days 9(pm) – 12(am)

Sadire

Moving into Amazonas we'll visit the Sadire Ecolodge nestled in hills overlooking forested ridges studded with big pink-flowered trees. Sadire is a community project known for its rare primates. We'll walk trails listening for the peculiar and remarkable bellicose calls of the Madidi Titi Monkey emanating from the dense tangled vines in which they feed. Their fur is a rich reddish-brown with a white tail tip. Another special primate here is the Saddleback Tamarin. The approach roads

to the lodge cross streams packed with superb butterflies and we'll spend time dazzled by eighty-eights such as *Callicore hesperis*, *Diaethria clymena* and *Paulogramma pyracmon*, dozens of daggerwings, iridescent *Urania leilius* moths, stunningly coloured skippers such as *Jemadia fallax*, which are matched by the many dazzling *Rhetus periander* metalmarks. With these are so many *Adelpha*, *Memphis* and tigerwings that the handsome *Polythore boliviana* damselfly provides some relief from the lepidoptera. Careful searching of the seeps might reveal the poison dart frog *Ameria picta*.

There's some really beautiful birds in the mixed flocks in Sadire such as Black-faced Dacnis, Green-and-gold and Paradise Tanagers. Crested Oropendulas and Green Oropendulas are common in the canopy and we'll see Southern Amazon Red Squirrels scurrying about the branches as well as Razor-billed Curassow, Red-crested Woodpecker, Screaming Piha and Ivory-billed Aracari. Two lovely species of wild *Heliconia* are found here, the pinkish *chartacea* and striking red-and-gold *rostrata*, a plant that is widely cultivated elsewhere in the tropical world.

Days 12(pm) – 16(am) Chalalan

Further into the great rainforest we'll finish the tour at wonderful Chalalan. We'll travel to Chalalan by boat. The journey takes us through a gorge flanked by ragged-toothed ridges and then into more open landscapes, the river banks high above us. Birdlife along the river includes Black Hawk, Crested Oropendola, Scaled Pigeon, Roseate Spoonbill, Cooi Heron, Capped Heron, Egrets, and Pied Lapwing. Above us soars a King Vulture or two. From the boat landing a short walk through forest filled with bird and monkey sounds takes us to the rustic, but perfectly comfortable lodge. The large cabins are spread out along the edge of a beautiful glassy lagoon, fringed by attractive *Mauritia flexuosa* palms. Sometimes a family of Giant Otters come to play in the lagoon. Once settled into your cabin you'll have the chance to meet the local residents such as noisy Turquoise-fronted Parrots and Curl-crested Aracaris. Around the lake we can get marvellous close views of Hoatzin, Ringed Kingfisher, Blue-and-yellow Macaws, and Buckley's Forest Falcon.

Sound clearly plays an important part in Chalalan's forests – this may be the noisiest forest you have ever visited. At dawn there's a cacophony of sound coming from myriad unseen birds and monkeys. Each day we'll spend time exploring the river and lake by boat and walking in the magnificent forests here. Chalalan has several forest trails and along them we'll get to spend time with lively and large mixed gatherings of Brown Capuchin and Common Squirrel Monkey, the latter particularly acrobatic and active, as they glean fruits and insects from the canopy, often descending much lower to give excellent views. Lovely Gould's Jewelfronts buzz noisily about patches of wild gingers while Collared Trogons sit and watch us quietly.

Once again the butterfly life is exceptional with swirls of colourful '88s' and heliconids. *Morpho helenor* is common - seldom have we seen more blue morphos

than here at Chalalan. Beside the river there is a constant parade of species along the trails, sometimes drawn irresistibly to fresh Jaguar scat - *Prepona laertes*, *Agrias claudina*, *Siderone galanthis* and various *Memphis*.

Among forest giants are Spix's Guans and Black Caracara. White Hawk floats overhead and on the forest floor we'll see Black-throated Antbird and Red-crowned Ant-tanager. Mud on the trail will reveal Jaguar tracks and we'll see plenty of signs of Giant Armadillo activity. Sightings of either species are quite possible – we'd expect to get one or the other every second tour. Giant Armadillo was seen in 2023. Hope you are on the right one! Much more easily seen are more primates in the shape of Spider Monkeys and troupes of Red Howler Monkeys.

We'll glide along the calm waters under colonies of Yellow-rumped Cacique their pendant tightly-woven nests hanging from Cecropias. Red-and-green Macaws and Chestnut-fronted Macaws call raucously as they fly across the river and White-bellied Parrots feed in riverside palms. Troupes of Hoatzin honk their disapproval as we land to watch Blue-crowned Motmot and enjoy the rich variety of butterflies and other insects that is characteristic of Chalalan's forests. Odonata skim the lake's surface as we watch Neotropical Cormorants, Rusty-margined Flycatchers, Horned Screamers and Sungrebe.

We'll also explore Chalalan after dark. The attractive Paca is quite common and we'll surely see Kinkajou. We'll hope for something altogether larger.... The roar of Great Potoo reverberates through the forest and we'll also see Tropical Screech-owl. Black Caiman eye us from the water's edge. The forest is alive with frogs – we'll see the large Gladiator Tree Frog – and the insect life is as full of interest after sunset as it is in the daytime.

Day 16(pm)

To Rurrenabaque via macaw lick

We'll have another chance to see Giant Otter, often spotted on the journeys to and from the lodge, as we make the return boat journey. Purplish Jays are a constant feature of riverbank life and we'll also see Piping Guan, Osprey, Orinoco Geese, Yellow-billed Tern and Banded Swallow.

This time though rather than heading straight to town we'll detour to a renowned macaw lick where we'll be treated to a spectacle of large numbers of Red-and-green Macaws providing a kaleidoscopic show for our cameras. The trail there is yet again butterfly rich with *Caeruleptychia coelestis*, glasswings, Prola Beauty and dainty helicopter damselflies.

Day 17

To Santa Cruz

This morning we'll have a relaxed start before flying to La Pax and then on to Santa Cruz. In the afternoon we'll have the chance to spend some time in the wildlife-rich grounds of the botanic garden again.

Day 18
Depart Santa Cruz

Day 19
Arrive Europe

Call 01298 83563 or visit www.greentours.co.uk for the trip report from our previous visits to Bolivia. If you would like to ask about any other aspect of this holiday, please call 01298 83563 or email us at enquiries@greentours.co.uk.

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