Full Detailed Itinerary - Bolivia: Birding Off the Beaten Track

Day 1: Arrival and travel to Sadiri Lodge

After early morning arrival in La Paz, we will take a short flight north to Rurrenabaque along the eastern base of the Andes. We'll then drive a couple of hours up into the foothills to Sadiri Lodge, where we spend three nights. Note that we highly recommend coming in a day early as insurance against possible travel delays; we can help book a hotel in La Paz if needed.

Days 2-3: Madidi National Park and Sadiri Lodge

Sadiri is an excellent lodge located just inside Madidi National Park in the lower reaches of the Andes. There is an interesting mix of cloudforest and lowland forest species here that we'll search for during our time in this rich areas. Some possibilities include Long-tailed Potoo, Great-billed and White-browed Hermits, Rufous-crested Coquette, Many-spotted Hummingbird, White Hawk, Band-bellied Owl, Subtropical Pygmy-Owl, Western Striolated Puffbird, Lemon-throated Barbet, Curl-crested Aracari, White-throated Woodpecker, Rose-fronted Parakeet, Military Macaw, Brownish-headed and Hairy-crested Antbirds, Gray-throated Leaftosser, Inambari Woodcreeper, Bolivian Recurvebill, Cinnamon-faced Tyrannulet, Two-banded and Cuzco Warblers, Yellow-lored Tanager, White-winged Shrike-Tanager, and many more.

Day 4: Sadiri Lodge to Trinidad

Today is largely a travel day as we drive east to Trinidad, but we should have some time for afternoon birding in the varzea forests nearby, looking for Unicolored Thrush and a vocally distinct race of Plain Softtail. We have one night in a resort in Trinidad.

Day 5: Trinidad to Blue-throated Macaw Reserve

After a morning of birding near Trinidad, we'll take a chartered flight to the famous Blue-throated Macaw reserve in the Beni savanna of northern Bolivia. This area is a wildlife paradise with tall grasslands, bird-filled wetlands, and patches of palm-dominated forest. We'll spend three nights at the lodge in the reserve.

Days 6-7: Blue-throated Macaw Reserve

We have two full days to explore this superb area. In addition to the macaws, which should be breeding this time of year, we will look for a huge number of birds including Streamer-tailed Tyrant, Cock-tailed, and Sharp-tailed Tyrants, White-rumped Tanager, Black-masked Finch, Greater Rhea, Southern Screamer, Orinoco Goose, Yellow-collared Macaw, Long-tailed Ground-Dove, Nacunda Nighthawk, Hoatzin, Azure Gallinule, Whistling Heron, Plumbeous Ibis, Long-winged Harrier, Black-collared Hawk, and Toco Touca, to name just a few. Mammals are also well represented here with Giant Anteater, Maned Wolf, Marsh and Pampas Deer, and several cat species all possible.

Day 8: Travel to Santa Cruz

Today we take a chartered flight black to Trinidad, then a commercial flight to Santa Cruz, where we spend the night.

Day 9: Santa Cruz to Samaipata

We'll drive west for a few hours back up into the Andes. We'll have time for some birding in the chaco habitat near Santa Cruz, where we can look for species such as Spot-backed and White-eared Puffbirds, White-wedged Piculet, Red-legged Seriema, Chotoy Spinetail, Hudson's Black-Tyrant, Fawn-breasted Wren, White-banded Mockingbird, Red-crested Finch, and others. We have one night in Samaipata

Day 10: Quirusillas and drive to Comarapa

The moist Yungas forests near Quirisillas host a number of localized species, including the threatened Tucuman Parrot. We'll have the morning to look for it along with a number of other interesting birds like White-throated Antpitta, Green-throated Tanager, and Slaty Elaenia. Later on, we will drive to Comarapa for a two-night stay.

Day 11: Siberia Cloudforest

Comarapa is located in one of those areas that demonstrate the magic of the Andes: drive a short distance one direction, and you have a certain habitat with certain birds, but drive the same distance the other direction and everything is different. In this case we'll be experiencing that wonderful diversity in the form of ascending into cool, much wetter cloudforest only a short distance above the dry, dusty foothills we'd been driving through the last couple of days. Here we'll scan the flocks for birds like Buff-banded Tyrannulet, Light-crowned Spinetail (the southern, buffy-crowned subspecies), Bolivian Brushfinch, Bar-bellied Woodpecker, and Band-tailed Fruiteater. Siberia has its fair share of skulkers, too, from the endemic Rufous-faced Antpitta to mouse-like Trilling Tapaculo to easily heard but almost impossible to see Brown Tinamou. And we'll be sure to keep an eye to the sky for the rare Black-winged Parrot, in addition to the more common Scaly-naped Amazon and Red-billed Parrots.

Day 12: Siberia to Red-fronted Macaw Reserve

After another morning in the cloudforest, well drive a couple of hours into the Rio Mizque Valley. The gorgeous Red-fronted Macaw is the most famous bird of this arid valley, where they breed to impressive cliffs. We'll also search for Bolivian Blackbird, Bolivian Earthcreeper, Red-faced Guan, and the distinctive "Cliff" form of Monk Parakeet, a likely future split and Bolivian endemic. We should also see Chaco Puffbird, a distinctive form of Striped Woodpecker, and various warbling-finches while searching. Other dry-country possibilities include Ultramarine Grosbeak, Greater Wagtail-Tyrant, the golden-breasted form of Green-barred Woodpecker, and more. We'll spend one night in the lodge in the Red-fronted Macaw reserve.
Day 13: Red-fronted Macaw Reserve to Cochabamba. We'll have all day to travel to the highland city of Cochabamba, and where we stop will depend on what we still need. As the road ascends to treeline and beyond, we'll stop at some elfin forest patches to look for the southern race of the endemic Black-throated Thistletail, and if we're lucky we may stumble on another endemic, the stunning Black-hooded Sunbeam in the same area. As the habitat dries out a bit on the high-Andean plateau we could see a different variety of warbling-finches, including Rusty-browed and the rare Black-and-chestnut. Our first shot at the local Citron-headed Yellowfinch will also come on this drive, and we should find White-tipped Plantcutter and Great Pampa-Finch before making it to Cochabamba. In the city itself, should we arrive early enough, we can check out a productive lake that in recent years has held a small population of Red-fronted Coot in addition to the usual assortment of highland duck species. We will spend three nights in Cochabamba.

Days 14-15: Cochabamba area

Exactly where we go during these two days will depend partly on road conditions along with recommendations of our local guide, but below is what we have done on some past trips.

The drive from Cochabamba up and over the eastern slope of the Andes is one of South America's great descents. Starting in the barren, dry inter-andean slopes, the road traverses puna grassland, elfin forest, a wide elevational band of Yungas, and finally foothill and lowland forest. While much of the habitat along the road here has been cut, there are still some good patches and a dizzying variety of birds. We'll first concentrate on the higher elevations just over the crest out of Cochabamba. Here a side road goes through some nice upper-elevation Yungas. Many of the birds are similar to Siberia, but here we have a shot at some rarities like Hooded Mountain-Toucan, and maybe even Yellow-rumped Antwren. Stripe-faced Wood-Quail can be common by voice, and with a good deal of luck we may even get a visual. Easier to see are the many White-browed Brush-Finches and Rufous-faced Antpittas that call around here. We have another shot at Black-winged Parrot zooming overhead, and the usually rare Pale-footed Swallow can be surprisingly common. After finishing in the forest patch we'll head back uphill a short ways and check some brushy hillsides just below treeline. Here we'll have our best shot at the incomparable Black-hooded Sunbeam. We'll also hope for a visual of Huayco Tinamou (usually easy to hear), though as in any tinamou hope may not be enough The lower elevations offer an entirely different suite of species. The lower elevation Yungas are pretty cutover, but still productive. A good side-road off the highway goes through patches of bamboo-choked forest and open pastures, and we'll spend a few hours scouring the flocks for goodies like Green-throated Tanager, a distinctive race of Black-eared Hemispingus, and Unadorned Flycatcher among a host of others. As always, the shy and skulky contingent is well represented, and we'll put some effort into actually seeing the many calling Yungas Tody-Tyrants while also searching hard for the much less common Upland Antshrike. Located just to the west of Cochabamba, the various dry habitats on Cerro Tunari are a plethora of local specialties. Among the most hoped for birds here are the rare Wedge-tailed Hillstar, a species found only at a few locations in Bolivia and northernmost Argentina, the endemic Bolivian Warbling-Finch, and the more common Rufous-sided Warbling-Finch. Higher up we'll pass through small country farms and small patches of habitat (sometimes a good area to find another local rarity, Rufous-bellied Saltator) before reaching the famed San Miguel Polylepis stand. The endemic Cochabamba Mountain-Finch is found in this area, and we'll have another shot at the saltator if we hadn't seen it yet.

Day 16: Cochamamba to Lake Titicaca

After another morning birding the area, we'll take a flight to La Paz and then drive to Lake Titicaca, where we spend one night.

Day 17: Sorata and Lake Titicaca

Our morning excursion will take us back into the high-elevation puna grasslands so abundant in Bolivia. Our eventual goal is the long valley descending into the trekking town of Sorata, but on the way we'll make a few stops for species such as Giant Coot and Black-faced Ibis. Once we reach the slopes above Sorata we'll look for two of the most local of all Bolivian endemics. One, Berlepsch's Canastero, is found nowhere else on earth. Luckily, despite the mostly trashed habitat, the bird is still fairly common. The other species, Bolivian Spinetail, has only recently been found and is much more difficult, but we'll still spend some effort on the search. We'll also have another shot at Black-hooded Sunbeam should we still need it. We'll also spend some time birding at Lake Titicaca, where we'll be sure to get some good views of the flightless Titicaca Grebe, along with a good variety of other waterbirds. In the afternoon, we drive to the start of the Coroico Road, where we spend three nights.

Day 18: Upper Coroico Road

Our first birding stop will be at the height of the famous Coroico Road. Hidden among the open, barren puna grassland here is a beautiful high-elevation cushion plant bog, home to the much sought after Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe. In addition to this ptarmigan-mimic we'll also look for its smaller cousin Gray-breasted Seedsnipe, as well as White-fronted Ground-Tyrant, White-winged Diuca-Finch, and Slender-billed Miner. Further down we'll enter some of the most dramatic scenery in South America as we descend the Coroico Road, justly famous as one of the premier birding sites on the continent.

Day 19: Lower Coroico Road

We return today to the Coroico Road, picking up where we left off yesterday, looking for our last few remaining targets for the trip. These could include birds like Hooded Mountain-Toucan, the stunning Orange-browed Hemispingus, shy Rufous-bellied Bush-Tyrant, or Yungas Dove. The northern, white-crowned form of Light-crowned Spinetail is found in this area, and flocks, in general, have an excellent variety of tanagers and flycatchers to sort through. Bamboo stands here, in addition to being good for the hemispingus, give us our best shot at Diademed Tapaculo.

Day 20: Coroico Road to La Paz

We'll plan our last full day in Bolivia based on whatever targets we have not seen yet. We may return to the Coroico Road, bird some Yungas Forests, or go somewhere different. In the afternoon, we return to La Paz for one final night and a farewell dinner.

Day 21: Departure

The tour ends this morning with transfers to the La Paz airport.

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