Full Detailed Itinerary - Mexico and Guatemala: Yucatán, Cozumel, and Tikal

Day 1: Arrival in Mérida

The tour begins this evening in Mérida. No birding is planned for today, but transportation from the airport to the hotel will be available. Mérida is often called the cultural capital of the Yucatán and a very safe city. Some people may wish to arrive a day or two early to explore its museums, plazas, or take a day trip to Uxmal.

Day 2: Mérida to Rio Lagartos

We'll begin our birding north of the city, targeting the scarce and local Yucatan Gnatcatcher, found only in the northwest corner of the Yucatán Peninsula. We'll have the chance to see plenty of other species too, such as Black-throated Bobwhite, Cinnamon Hummingbird, Turquoise-browed Motmot, Yucatan Woodpecker, White-fronted Parrot, Olive-throated Parakeet, Orange Oriole, and Cinnamon-bellied Saltator. In the afternoon, we head to Río Lagartos, where we spend two nights.

Day 3: Río Lagartos

Situated on the north coast of the Yucatán, Río Lagartos is most famous as a location to see hundreds of American Flamingos. Habitats are varied, from salt flats and mangroves to thorn forest and desert-like scrub. The thorn forest supports two more endemic species, Yucatán Wren and the gorgeous little Mexican Sheartail (which visits feedes in town). We'll also keep an eye out for Lesser Roadrunner and have more chances to see Black-throated Bobwhite. A boat ride through the mangroves may yield Boat-billed Heron, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Mangrove Cuckoo, Mangrove Vireo, or even a sprightly American Pygmy Kingfisher.

Day 4: Río Lagartos, Ek Balam, and Chichén Itzá

We have another morning to target anything we haven't seen yet. Often we are have seen all the thornscrub species, so we have time to visit the Ek Balam archaeological site. While not as famous as Chichén Itzá, it is much less crowded with better birding, and we'll have our first chances to see Lesson's Motmot, Gartered Trogon, Golden-olive Woodpecker, Black-headed Saltator, Spot-breasted Wren, and others. In the afternoon, we visit the breathtaking ruins of Chichén Itzá. This is mainly a cultural site and birding is rather limited due to the crowds, but we may see a few species typical of the Yucatán, such as Turquoise-browed Motmot, Yucatan Jay, and Orange Oriole. We spend one night in nearby Valladolid.

Day 5: Cobá and Cozumel

After an early morning rise, we'll head south towards lush coastal forest. The first stop is Cobá, a ruins site situated in very nice forest. Among the ruins we'll have our first chance to see one of the Yucatán's most iconic species, the spectacular Ocellated Turkey. We'll also search for Thicket Tinamou, Black-headed Trogon, Yucatan Woodpecker, Northern Bentbill, Gray-collared Becard, Red-throated Ant-Tanager, Yellow-winged Tanager, White-bellied Emerald, Eye-ringed Flatbill, and Pale-billed Woodpecker, among many

others. Wintering North American warblers are often here in an abundance and it is not unusual to see five or more species in a morning. In the afternoon, we'll head to the coast at Playa del Carmen and take the fast passenger ferry to the island of Cozumel, where we spend two nights.

Day 6: Cozumel

Cozumel is a small island off the coast of the Yucatán Peninsula that is popular vacation spot and cruise ship destination. However, birders are attracted to it as well for its endemic species. Of the four island endemics, Cozumel Wren, Cozumel Vireo, and Cozumel Emerald should show themselves without too much effort; Cozumel Thrasher is sadly likely extinct. There are many endemic subspecies on Cozumel as well: Western Spindalis, Bananaquit, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Roadside Hawk, and Rufous-browed Peppershike all have distinctive populations that should pique our interest. Cozumel offers a unique mix of these mainland species plus Caribbean birds like Caribbean Elaenia and White-crowned Pigeon. An added bonus is a load of migrants, such as Yellow-throated, Black-and-white, and sometimes even a Cape May or a Prairie.

Day 7: Cozumel to Cancún, fly to Flores

After another few hours of birding on Cozumel, we'll take the passenger ferry back to the mainland and transfer to Cancún Airport. At time of writing, the flight was scheduled to depart Cancún at 2:10pm and arrive in Flores at 6:45pm, with a layover in Guatemala City. We spend one night in Flores.

Days 8-9: Tikal

Tikal is world famous as one of the largest archeological sites and urban centers of the Maya civilization. This UNESCO World Heritage Site is also surrounded by tall semi-evergreen forest, making it a wonderful place to go birding. Spectacular ground-dwelling birds like Ocellated Turkey and Great Curassow are usually easy to see here, and with luck we could find several species of tinamou. Some of the other mouth-watering possibilities here include Tody Motmot, Rose-throated Tanager, Keel-billed Toucan, White-necked Puffbird, Black-throated Shrike-Tanager, Pheasant Cuckoo, Red-capped and White-collared Manakins, Gray-throated Chat, Orange-breasted Falcon, Mayan Antthrush, Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Gray-headed Kite, White Hawk, Tropical Royal Flycatcher, and several species of colorful parrots and trogons. We'll spend two nights at a lodge nestled inside the forest and within walking distance of the archaeological site.

Day 10: Tikal to Flores and departure

After another morning to take in the splendors of Tikal, we will transfer to the airport in Flores, where the tour ends. There are evening flights out of Flores to Guatamala City that connect well with late evening international flights. If you would prefer to spend the night in Flores and take a morning flight instead, we can assist with making the bookings. This is not a bad idea if you have the time, since flying out of Flores the same day can be very tiring, often with a very long layover in Guatemala City and a 1:00am red-eye international flight.

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