Full Detailed Itinerary - Southeast Brazil: Atlantic Rainforest and Savanna

Day 1: Arrival Rio de Janeiro

The tour begins today in Rio. No activities are planned for today except for dinner.

Day 2: Rio to Regua

his morning we drive a couple of hours to Guapiassu Ecolological Reserve (also known as Regua). Birding this huge reserve at the foot of the Serra dos Órgãos mountains (named after the organ pipes they resemble) will give us a chance to find birds like Sooretama Slaty-Antshrike, Crescent-chested Puffbird, Eye-ringed Tody-Tyrant, Spot-billed Toucanet, Black-capped Becard, Yellow-eared Woodpecker, and the star of the reserve, the rare Shrike-like Cotinga. Noisy flocks of Yellow-green Grosbeaks are often around, and this is one of the better spots on the trip for Pin-tailed Manakin; even though it is a rather common species, it can be hard to find a nice adult male. In the afternoon, we can do some easy birding around the wetlands for species like White-faced Whistling-Duck, Brazilian Teal, Capped Heron, Chestnut-capped Blackbird, Wing-banded Hornero, Yellow-chinned Spinetail, Masked Water-Tyrant, and others. We spend two nights in a nice lodge inside the reserve.

Day 3: Regua to Nova Friburgo

After another morning of birding this huge reserve, we will drive up into the Serra dos Órgãos mountains to the charming town of Nova Friburgo, where we spend two nights.

Day 4: Serra dos Órgãos

We'll first attempt to reach a site for the very rare Gray-winged Cotinga, a ghostly bird that haunts the highest reaches of the forest. We'll take our vehicle as high as possible, but road conditions can sometime prevent reaching the best site for the cotinga. The lush forest here is also excellent for Large-tailed Antshrike and Velvety Black-Tyrant, and we'll have our first shot at some really nice high-mountain species more common in Itatiaia (later in the trip), including Green-crowned Plovercrest, Rufous-tailed Antbird, Black-and-gold Cotinga, and Serra do Mar Tyrannulet. Later in the day, we'll bird another road that can be excellent for the superb Swallow-tailed Cotinga, and where the Red-legged Seriemas can sometimes be absurdly tame.

Day 5: Serra dos Órgãos to Itatiaia National Park

After another morning birding around Nova Friburgo, we will drive through much of the day to Brazil's oldest national park. We'll stay two nights in a lovely hotel with fruit feeders that attract some of the most colorful birds on the planet, including Green-headed Tanager, Blue-naped Chlorophonia, Yellow-fronted Woodpecker, and Saffron Toucanet. Hummer feeders bring in Scale-throated Hermit, White-throated Hummingbird, and occasionally even a Frilled Coquette, among others. Dusky-legged Guans are bordering on tame here, and are sometimes joined by a Slaty-breasted Wood-Rail. Blue-winged Macaws can sometimes be seen flying over the forest below the hotel, and Tawny-browed Owl is a regular visitor to the

lodge grounds after dark.

Day 6: Algulhas Negras road

The highest peaks in southern Brazil are easily accessed by a dirt road on the other side of the park, about 1h20m drive from our hotel. Species like Itatiaia Thistletail, Black-and-gold Cotinga, Black-capped Piprites, and Thick-billed Saltator are more easily seen here than anywhere else. We'll also be looking for Rufous-tailed Antbird, Rufous-backed Antvireo, Brassy-breasted Tanager, Plovercrest, Mottle-cheeked and Greenish Tyrannulets, Buff-throated and Bay-chested Warbling-Finches, Gray-bellied Spinetail, Araucaria Tit-Spinetail, Olivaceous Elaenia, Swallow-tailed Cotinga, Speckle-breasted Antpitta, and others. We'll spend much of the day here with a packed lunch, and head back to the lower part of Itatiaia National Park in the afternoon.

Day 7: Itatiaia NP to Paraty

We'll start birding right near the hotel, which is one of the better spots for the impressive Robust Woodpecker and scarce Pileated Parrot. Swallow-tailed Cotinga can also occasionally be seen here with some luck. Later, we'll work our way along some moderately inclined (but not difficult) forest trails looking for shy species like Such's and Rufous-tailed Antthrushes, Speckle-breasted Antpitta, White-bibbed Antbird and Bertoni's Antbirds, White-bearded Antshrike, and Rufous Gnateater. Other targets include Drab-breasted Pygmy-Tyrant, Black-billed Scythebill, White-browed Woodpecker, Scaled Woodcreeper, and Gilt-edged Tanager. Later in the day, we drive several hours down to the coast, and spend one night in the town of Paraty.

Day 8: Perequê to Ubatuba

The valley north of Perequê (now called Parque Mambucaba) has some drier, scrubbier forest that is one of the last havens for the incredibly beautiful and endangered Black-hooded Antwren. While this is the main target, there are many other possibilities including Frilled Coquette, Yellow-eared Woodpecker, Chestnut-backed Antshrike, Half-collared Sparrow, and Squamate Antbird. After lunch, we'll drive about 2 hours to the beach town of Ubatuba, where we spend two nights.

Day 9: Ubatuba area

The lowland forest patches near town can be surprisingly good, and the going is easy along mostly flat trails and roads, though there are a couple of small streams to cross and overgrown trails to negotiate. Many great birds are regularly seen here like Buff-throated Purpletuft, Spotted Bamboowren, Tufted Antshrike, Ferruginous and Scaled Antbirds, Spot-breasted Antvireo, Unicolored Antwren, Eye-ringed Tody-Tyrant, Red-necked Tanager, Crescent-chested Puffbird, Buff-bellied Puffbird, Black-cheeked Gnateater, White-necked Hawk, Slaty Bristlefront, Thrush-like Woodcreeper, Rufous-capped Antthrush, Fork-tailed Pygmy-Tyrant, Crested Becard, Flame-crested Tanager, Salvadori's Antwren, Star-throated Antwren, Rufous-winged Antwren, Black-capped Foliage-gleaner, Gray-hooded Flycatcher, Spot-backed Antshrike, and Lemon-chested Greenlet. We'll visit a private residence with hummer and fruit feeders that is a magnet for handsome birds like Festive Coquette, Saw-billed Hermit, White-chinned Sapphire, Black Jacobin, Sombre Hummingbird, Brazilian Tanager, and Green-headed Tanager.

Day 10: Ubatuba to Campos do Jordão.

After another morning of birding around Ubatuba, we head back into the mountains to Campos do Jordão. Situated in the Serra da Mantiqueira mountain range, Campos do Jordão is the highest Brazilian city with an

altitude of 5350 ft. (1630 m.). It is a popular tourist destination, especially in the winter, due to its low temperatures and European architecture. We spend one night here.

Day 11: Campos do Jordão to Salesópolis

We will spend the morning birding the patches of Araucaria forest around town, especially targeting the endangered Vinaceous-breasted Amazon. Other species we may encounter include Black-capped Piprites, Serra do Mar Bristle Tyrannulet, Sharp-billed Treehunter, Rusty-barred Owl, Araucaria Tit-Spinetail, and Swallow-tailed Cotinga. In the afternoon, we'll head south to Salesópolis for a one-night stay.

Day 12: Sítio Macuquinho to Peruíbe.

This morning should be a real tour highlight as we visit a private reserve called Sítio Macuquinho. The owners have set up feeding stations that provide up-close views of shy species like Red-and-white Crake, Brown Tinamou, White-shouldered Fire-eye, and sometimes even Giant Antshrike. Fruit feeders and hummingbird feeders also can be teeming with birds, making for a truly wonderful morning. Another big target today is the endemic Marsh Antwren, which can be seen in wetlands nearby. In the afternoon, we will drive several hours, skirting around the south side of the city of São Paulo to the coast, and spend the night in Peruibe.

Day 13: Peruíbe to Piracicaba

This morning we will bird in stunted coastal forest on sandy soil known as Restinga. This area is at the northern limit of the range-restricted and endemic Red-tailed Amazon, which will be one of our main targets along with Azure Jay, Black-backed Tanager, Buff-bellied Puffbird, Long-billed Wren, Little Wood Rail, Bicolored Conebill, and others. Much of the afternoon will be spend driving to Piracicaba, where we overnight.

Day 14: Tanquã to Intervales State Park

Tanquã is a small village located in an area known as "São Paulo's Mini Pantanal". It is a flooded area around the Piracicaba River that is home to many aquatic species, including the rare Yellow-breasted Crake. While looking for the crake by boat, we will also have the chance of seeing many other interesting aquatic species such as Fulvous, White-faced, and Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, Brazilian and Silver Teals, White-cheeked Pintail, Rosy-billed Pochard, Large-billed Tern, Jabiru, Rufous-sided and Ash-throated Crakes, Spotted and Plumbeous Rail, and Crested Doradito. After our boat ride, we'll drive three hours to Intervales State Park, where we'll spend three nights in a simple but pleasant guesthouse.

Days 15-16: Intervales State Park

This huge park is a birding wonderland – large numbers of endemics thrive in the wet montane forest, and many are easier to find here than anywhere else. We'll spend our days walking various wide dirt tracks through the forest. Portions of these tracks are moderately steep and can be a bit slippery if it has been raining, but overall it is quite easy going. Some of the best birding is in the main park complex. It's easy to see many of the common Atlantic Rainforest specialties like Azure-shouldered, Golden-chevroned, and Green-headed Tanagers, Green-winged Saltator, Black Jacobin, Violet-crowned Woodnymph, Pallid Spinetail, Red-breasted Toucan, Hangnest Tody-Tyrant, and Yellow-fronted Woodpecker. A reed-filled marsh may have Orange-breasted Thornbird and Red-and-white Crake, and local guides sometimes have a nest of Swallow-tailed Cotinga staked out. With a bit of work, we can usually tease out a Dusky-tailed Antbird. A network of forested-fringed roads crisscrosses the park, and we'll spend our mornings looking for

Giant, Tufted, and White-bearded Antshrikes, Black-fronted Piping-Guan, Cinnamon-vented Piha, Hooded Berryeater, Buff-bellied Puffbird, Black-legged Dacnis, Blue-bellied Parrot, Bare-throated Bellbird, Saffron and Spot-billed Toucanets, White-collared and White-browed Foliage-gleaners, Brown Tanager, Solitary Tinamou, Squamate, Bertoni's, and Ochre-rumped Antbirds and Violet-crowned Plovercrest just to name a few. Night birding can also be good at Intervales. We'll check stakeouts for the mind-blowing Long-trained Nightjar, and have chances to see several owls including Tropical and Black-capped Screech-Owls, Rusty-barred Owl, and Tawny-browed Owl.

Day 17: Intervales State Park to PETAR

We'll target anything else we still need at Intervales before driving a couple of hours to another large park adjacent to Intervales called Alto Ribeira State Tourist Park, or PETAR. By this point in the trip we will be looking for very specific targets that have eluded us previously, which may well include Black-headed Berryeater, Atlantic Royal Flycatcher, Blue-bellied Parrot and other rare species. With the help of a local guide, we will try to track down as many of them as possible this afternoon and the following morning.

Day 18: PETAR - São Paulo

We have most of the morning to birding to bird in PETAR before embarking on a six hour drive to Sao Paulo, where part 1 of the tour comes to a close. Those joining part 2 will spend the night in Sao Paulo. Otherwise, we will arrive in time to catch late evening international flights back home.

Tour Extension 1

??Day 1 (same date as Day 18 of Part 1): Arrival in São Paulo

Anyone who did not join Part 1 arrives today in São Paulo. The night will be spent at a hotel near the airport with a shuttle bus.

Day 2: São Paulo to Vitoria to Linhares Reserve

Today we fly from Sao Paulo to Linhares. For anyone only joining Part 2, please coordinate your flight with our office staff – it would be best if you connected through Sao Paulo and took the same flight as those who are continuing of from Part 1 to Part 2. The drive from Vitoria to Linhares takes about three hours, and we'll spend two nights at the lodge inside the reserve.

Day 3: Linhares Reserve

This reserve protects one of the largest remaining tracts of intact lowland Atlantic Rainforest. It is one of the only sites where the endangered Red-billed Curassow can still be found. Other interesting species we could find here are Ochre-marked and White-eared Parakeets, Red-browed Amazon, Black-headed Berryeater, Least Pygmy-Owl, Minute Hermit, Black-necked Aracari, Ringed and Red-stained Woodpeckers, Red-headed and White-crowned Manakins, Yellow-green Grosbeak, and others. We even have a chance to see the magnificent Harpy Eagle if there are any active nests when we visit.

Day 4: Linhares to Santa Teresa

After another morning of birding in the reserve, we'll drive a couple of hours up into the mountains to the town of Santa Teresa. The lodge where we spend the night has a nice set of hummingbird feeders that attract good numbers of these amazing birds. Black Jacobin, Scale-throated Hermit, White-vented Violetear, Frilled Coquette, Brazilian Ruby, Amethyst Woodstar, and Violet-capped Woodnymph are some of the species that can be seen here.

Day 5: Santa Teresa to Vargem Alta

We'll bird the cloudforest around Santa Terese, looking specifically for the rare and local Wied's Tyrant-Manakin. Other targets include Yellow-eared and Yellow-browed Woodpeckers, Black-billed Scythebill, Salvadori's Antwren, Pin-tailed Manakin, Rufous-brown Solitaire, and more. The very local Russet-winged Spadebill is also possible, but we will need a serious amount of luck in order to find one. Later in the day, we drive about three hours southwest to Vargem Alta, where we spend the next two nights.

Day 6: Mata de Caetés

This private cloudforest reserve is one of the last refuges of the ultra rare and critically endangered Cherry-throated Tanager. This gorgeous bird is on the brink of extinction, so even though we will be birding in the best location to see it in the world, lots of luck is needed to encounter one – fingers crossed! Other than the tanager, we also have good chances to see species like Spot-billed Toucanet, White-bibbed Antbird, Robust Woodpecker, Cinnamon-vented Piha, and many more.

Day 7: Mata de Caetés to Caparaó National Park

We'll have another morning to search for Cherry-throated Tanager before driving several hours to Caparaó National Park. This enormous park straddles the border of the states of Espírito Santo and Minas Gerais and protects a huge chunk of montane Atlantic Rainforest as well as high elevation grasslands and scrub. We'll spend two nights in one of the towns along the edge of the park.

Day 8: Caparaó National Park

We'll spend much of the day focusing on the higher elevations of the park, where we may encounter the very local Itatiaia Spinetail along with other target species like Large-tailed Antshrike, Rufous-tailed Antbird, Hooded Berryeater, Half-collared Sparrow, and Green-crowned Plovercrest. Once activity dies down, we'll go in search of a very localized endemic, Forbes's Blackbird, which occurs in agricultural areas northeast of the park.

Day 9: Caparaó National Park to Caraça Sancturary

We'll have another chance to search for the blackbird if we missed it yesterday, then drive about five hours west to one of the most scenically gorgeous locations in all of Southeast Brazil, the Caraça Sanctuary. This is a private nature reserve and historical site owned by the Catholic Church. The old monastery and church has been converted into a lodge and a museum, surrounded by forest and impressive mountain peaks. Two nights will be spent in this privileged location. We'll also see the unique nightly ritual of priests putting out raw chicken to attract wild Maned Wolves on to the church steps (they usually come in, but you may need some patience, and occasionally they stay away).

Day 10: Caraça Sanctuary

Before breakfast, we check a pond nearby where a pair of Blackish Rails is often surprisingly obliging. Breakfast itself is unlike anywhere else in Brazil – you can cook your own eggs on a massive cast iron grill heated by a wood fire, along with the other lodge guests! We'll spend the rest of the day birding the forest and scrub of the reserve, searching especially for targets like Serra Antwren, Pale-throated Pampa-Finch, White-breasted and Rock Tapaculos, Gray-eyed Greenlet, Black-capped Antwren, Dusky-tailed Antbird, Swallow-tailed Cotinga, and others.

Day 11: Caraça Sanctuary to Serra do Cipó

After some final birding, we'll drive about 3.5 hours, skirting the edge of the city of Belo Horizonte, to a different mountain range called Serra do Cipó. We have a single night in a touristy town at the base of the mountains. We should arrive in time for some afternoon birding.

Day 12: Serra do Cipó

This isolated range is one of the only places to see the extremely range restricted Cipo Canastero, which skulks around rocky outcrops at the highest elevations. Another possibility here is the espinhacensis subspecies of Long-tailed Cinclodes – which likely deserves full species status and has an even smaller range than the Canastero. We'll search for these two birds along with a nice selection of others such as the gorgeous Hyacinth Visorbearer (it's as good as it sounds!), Cinereous Warbling-Finch, the electric Blue Finch, and the unique White-banded and White-rumped Tanagers.

Day 13: Serra do Cipó to Pompéu

After finishing up around Cipó, we head west about three hours to the town of Pompéu, where we spend the night. The main attraction here is a small private reserve owned by the "Pompeu Twins", as they have become known as in the birding community. With great effort and persistence, they have attracted some truly difficult normally hard to see crakes to feeding stations, notably Ocellated Crake, Russet-crowned Crake, Gray-breasted Crake, as well as other species.

Day 14: Pompéu to Serra da Canastra

After visiting the "Pompeu Twins" reserve, we'll focus on different species. Unlike the parks we have been visiting over the previous days, there is virtually no protected habitat here, so we'll travel a fair distance to small patches of cerrado targeting some very cool birds including Coal-crested Finch, Chapada Flycatcher, Henna-capped Foliage-gleaner, Checkered Woodpecker, and Spot-backed Puffbird. The afternoon will be devoted to driving farther west to a town at the edge Serra da Canastra National Park, where we will spend three nights.

Days 15-16: Serra da Canastra

This park is simply magnificent. The Canastra plateau, with its scenic escarpments and waterfalls, dominates the area, and there is a mosaic of habitats including gallery forest, rivers, wooded farmland, scrubby cerrado (savanna), and tall, undisturbed grasslands. The area is one of the last strongholds for the Brazilian Merganser, one of the world's rarest ducks; while we have seen it on most of our tours, in recent years sightings have become less frequent. Even if we aren't fortunate enough to find one, there are plenty of other birds and animals to fill our days here. During one full day, we'll bird areas at the base of the escarpment. There are numerous lookouts to scan for "ducks", but there are plenty of other birds to see while we do so such as Whistling Heron, Buff-necked Ibis, Yellow-chevroned and Golden-capped Parakeets, White-eared Puffbird, Narrow-billed Woodcreeper, Rufous-fronted Thornbird, Pale-breasted

Spinetail, Black-capped Antwren, Plain-crested Elaenia, Yellow-browed Tyrant, Plush-crested Jay, Yellowish Pipit, Blue Finch, Plumbeous and Dubois's Seedeaters, Black-throated Saltator, and Chopi Blackbird. We may walk along a trail to the base of the impressive Casca D'Anta Waterfall, where Great Dusky Swifts can usually be seen clinging to the cliffs. The trail can also be productive for some tough birds like Brasilia Tapaculo, Flavescent Warbler, and Chestnut-headed Tanager, and we can usually track down a singing male Helmeted Manakin.

On the other day, we'll bird the windswept grasslands on top of the escarpment, which is a world apart from anything else on this tour. Cock-tailed Tyrants zip back and forth over the grass, Ochre-breasted Pipits perform cool display flights, and cute grassland specialists like Sharp-tailed Tyrant and Black-masked Finch can usually be found with a bit of searching. It's not unusual to see Giant Anteaters, and Maned Wolf is a possibility as well. We'll reach the top of the waterfall we visited the previous day, which is also a spot to look for Brazilian Merganser. If the water level is low enough, we may be able to cross the river and try to flush up some Sickle-winged Nightjars. Other birds we have a chance for today include Collared Crescentchest, Gray-backed Tachuri, Rufous-winged Antshrike, and Tawny-headed Swallow.

Day 17: Serra da Canastra to Belo Horizonte, departure

It normally takes about five to six hours to reach the airport, and we intend to arrive by early to midafternoon. That should give us time for some last minute birding to target anything we still need. The tour will end in the airport as we catch flights out of Belo Horizonte – it is usually easy to connect to evening international flights out of São Paulo. If anyone prefers to fly out the following day, there is a convenient airport hotel a few miles from the terminal with a shuttle bus.

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