Spectacular volcanoes and fabulous highland lakes form a brilliant backdrop to our Guatemala – Volcano Birding & Lake Atitlán tour. While this region is probably best-known for its shade coffee production, residents have embraced ecotourism in a way that has fostered an environmental bond and resulted in much of the highland forests being protected.

National Audubon Society, along with several partners, has been instrumental in cultivating these efforts. Through the implementation of a remarkable guide-training curriculum specializing in birding and local culture along with education on basic business, hospitality, and English-language training, 24 people have undergone advanced guide training, with another 100+ having completed a basic-level program. This trip, featuring a series of sites managed by Audubon partners, many with which Rockjumper also shares a good history, is a great example of how ecotourism can help support the area’s conservation and sustainable development.
On this Volcano Birding tour, we visit fantastic reserves, and signature coffee fincas which also offer superb birding. We will see a magnificent array of special birds, searching for one of the world’s most prized species: the odd and beautiful Horned Guan. Throw in some other dazzlers like the gorgeous Pink-headed Warbler, the legendary Resplendent Quetzal, Blue-throated Motmot, Blue-and-white Mockingbird, Rufous-collared Thrush and Cabanis’s (Aztec-rumped) Tanager, and you have the makings of an unforgettable Impact Adventure. This Volcano Birding and Lake Atitlán tour offers the very best of Guatemalan birding, along with comfortable lodgings, delicious fare and fabulous scenery throughout!

Rockjumper & Audubon
Rockjumper is proud to partner with the National Audubon Society in support of their unrivaled, on the ground work protecting birds and the places they need while training area residents in guiding, business, and hospitality. Through Rockjumper’s Impact Adventures with Audubon, we showcase amazing nature spectacles while celebrating the efforts and expertise of local businesses and conservationists, fostering sustainable economic growth in Neotropical hotspots with high biodiversity. Support the National Audubon Society’s work by joining a Rockjumper Impact Adventure today.

THE TOUR AT A GLANCE...

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THE TOUR IN DETAIL...

Day 1: Arrival to Guatemala City, transfer to Antigua. Upon arriving in Guatemala City, you will be met at the airport and transferred to our well-appointed accommodations in the lovely, nearby, historic city of Antigua. Antigua Guatemala, once the capital city, is today the best-preserved of all the Spanish colonial cities in the Americas. Situated in the central highlands, and combining the fascinating Baroque architecture with the three surrounding volcanoes (one of them active and smoking), and Antigua is the perfect dramatic spot to begin our exploration of this amazing country. Common city birds we might see include Great-tailed Grackle, Azure-crowned Hummingbird and flocks of both Vaux’s Swift and the near-endemic Black-capped Swallows. The group will convene for a welcome dinner with your Rockjumper leader, to get oriented for the exciting adventures to come! Night in Antigua.

Day 2: Finca El Pilar and Antigua Environs. We set out this morning for Finca el Pilar, a private shade coffee farm perched on a nearby hillside above the city. Much of the natural forest habitat here is protected as a conservation area, and visitors are welcome to walk the region’s numerous trails. Hummingbird feeders situated on the lower slopes are swarmed by a profusion of highland species, often gathering in large numbers. Several species can be seen, including White-eared, Azure-crowned, Berylline, Blue-tailed and Rivoli’s Hummingbirds, as well as the near-endemic Rufous Sabrewing. The lower slopes are also home to Bushy-crested Jay and Emerald Toucanet; while mixed flocks may include Rose-throated Becard, Squirrel Cuckoo, scarce Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo, Acorn, Velasquez’s, Golden-olive and Hairy Woodpeckers, and the unique Guatemalan sub-species of Northern Flicker (a possible future armchair tick!). Even the scarce Collared Forest Falcon or White-breasted Hawk might put in an appearance.
In the scrubby undergrowth, we’ll look for the shy White-naped Brush Finch, as well as Ruddy Foliage-gleaner and Rufous-capped Warbler. Driving up to a higher elevation of around 6,600ft, a convenient car park will allow spectacular views overlooking the volcanoes Agua, Acatenango and the smoking Fuego. A different selection of birds occur here in the drier forest, including Spot-crowned and Spotted Woodcreepers, Northern Tufted Flycatcher, the distinctive local race of Plumbeous Vireo, plus Flame-colored Tanager, Hooded Grosbeak, families of Eastern Bluebirds, Rufous-collared and Black Thrushes, Red-faced and Golden-browed Warblers, Black-vented Oriole, Black-headed Siskin and, if we are really lucky, Singing Quail. Fingers crossed! If time permits, we may spend the twilight hours looking for some nocturnal species, including Mexican Whip-poor-will and the very difficult Fulvous Owl. After which we will head back down the mountain to our hotel for a wonderful dinner. Night in Antigua.

Day 3: Antigua to Sierra de Las Minas, via Rio Motagua Valley. After an early breakfast, we have some ground to cover, and so will drive east for a couple of hours towards Parque Nacional Sierra de las Minas. Just before we get there, at the base of the Sierra, the Rio Motagua Valley holds some of the best dry forest habitat in the whole country. While the cloud forests and pine-oak montane forests are perhaps what this region is best known for, the dry inter-montane valleys are home to several range-restricted, habitat-specific species. Here we hope to find a covey of the shy and crepuscular Spot-bellied Bobwhite, the velociraptor-like Lesser Roadrunner, and another pre-historic bird in the Russet-crowned Motmot. These rank among just a few of our targets, and after we’ve given ourselves a good chance at them, we will wind our way up into the mountains. For the next two nights we are situated high in the Sierra, and though our lodgings here are a little more rustic compared to elsewhere on the tour, from this lovely site we will see a tremendous host of brilliant cloud forest birds. Foremost among these, is Guatemala’s most special bird species. Night in Sierra de Las Minas.

Day 4: Sierra de Las Minas Biosphere Reserve. With a full day of birding at this glorious cloud forest, we offer ourselves a chance at two of the country’s most famous specialty birds, the one-and-only Resplendent Quetzal and, the star of any visit to Guatemala: the Horned Guan. Alongside this special Biosphere Preserve rests the huge Sierra de las Minas National Park, and the combination of these two protected areas allows for one of the largest contiguous protected cloud forests in Central America. The quality of the habitat is exceptional.

This is arguably the best place in the country to see both the quetzal and the guan. The density of Horned Guans here is rivaled only at the end of the species’ very restricted range, at El Triunfo, in Chiapas, Mexico. Despite its
large size, it is impeccably camouflaged and very quiet, especially for a guan. It is likely to be no more than a soft purr that signals us to freeze, or perhaps a massive dark form moving in the foliage above us. Whatever the case, we stand an excellent chance of encountering this enormous, prehistoric-looking bird, complete with slick black feathers and a unique, bright red horn. On most mornings at the preserve, guests awake to the haunting songs and odd guttural noises of the guans, interspersed with the last hooting of Fulvous Owls before they retire to roost, and fevered singing of Pink-headed Warblers in the bushes lining the cabanas! It will be quite a privilege to spend the day in this pristine habitat.

We will range up and down in elevation to explore the cloud and pine-oak forests that cloak the slopes of the isolated mountain range. Other species of interest include Highland Guan, Spotted Wood Quail, Buffy-crowned Wood Partridge, Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Unspotted Saw-Whet Owl (rare), Guatemalan Pygmy Owl, Green-throated Mountaingem, White-faced Quail-Dove, Amethyst-throated, Garnet-throated and Wine-throated Hummingbirds, Blue-throated Motmot, Barred Forest Falcon, Barred Parakeet, Tawny-throated Leafcreeper, Scaly-throated and Ruddy Foliage-gleaners, Unicolored Jay, Brown-backed and Slate-colored Solitaires, Ruddy-capped and Spotted Nightingale-Thrushes, Black Thrush, Golden-browed and Crescent-chested Warblers, Linnaean-bellied Flowerpiercer, Slaty Finch, and Blue-crowned Chlorophonia. Night in Sierra de Las Minas.

**Day 5: Sierra de Las Minas to Biotopo Quetzal.** With a final bit of morning birding amid the middle-elevations, we will work our way back down the mountain into the dry forests of the Motagua Valley. Most of the habitat at these middle elevations has been partially cleared for coffee plantations, but there are some good patches of forest, harboring some species we may not see elsewhere in our travels. We’ll take time to look for Plain Chachalaca, Red-billed Pigeon, Violet Sabrewing, Azure-crowned Hummingbird, Collared Trogon, Turquoise-browed Motmot, Golden-fronted, Golden-olive and Lineated Woodpeckers, Ivory-billed Woodcreepers, a host of sharp-looking warblers, and five species of orioles as we move along. And the semi-open conditions are good for searching for raptors, so we will keep our eyes peeled for soaring Black and the stunning Ornate Hawk-Eagles which frequent the coffee plantations.

In the afternoon, we reach our next site, the beautiful wet cloud forest of Biotopo Quetzal. This reserve, created specifically to protect the national bird, represents a rather drastic habitat change. Compared to the nearby dry Motagua Valley, here the misty cloud forest is a prime spot for Resplendent Quetzal. Other possibilities include Azure-hooded and Unicolored Jay, Green-throated Mountaingem, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Tawny-throated...
Leaftosser, Chestnut-headed Oropendolas and even White-faced Quail-Dove. *Night near Biotopo Quetzal.*

**Day 6: Biotopo Quetzal to Lake Atitlán.** Today involves a rather long drive, as we make our way towards one of Guatemala’s most well-known attractions, Lake Atitlán. It will require the better part of the day to reach it, but we’ll get a wonderful feel for the countryside as we travel. And, of course, we will see birds along the way. Birding along the road can offer chances for raptors, and we’ll make opportunistic stops, enjoying whatever we find. We may opt for a little getaway birding early this morning around Biotopo Quetzal to seek any unseen specialties of the atmospheric woodlands, but then by mid-morning we are off to picturesque Atitlán! *Night at Lake Atitlán.*

**Day 7: Lake Atitlán.** Spectacular Lake Atitlán, surrounded by volcanoes, is intensely scenic. Add together the interplay of the slopes, and the reflections in the water of the fisherman in their dugout canoes with the cloudscape rolling overhead, and you have a thrilling atmosphere. And the birding is equally pleasing, with a wonderful array of regional specialties, and so many waterbirds at home here. *Night at Lake Atitlán.*

Not so long ago, the Lake hosted the endemic Atitlán Grebe. This species worked the shores, perhaps never numbering more than several hundred in all, and appearing very much like an inflated version of a Pied-billed Grebe. Its numbers dwindled beginning in the 1960s until it vanished altogether. Introduced fish (bass) gobbled up the crabs that were its main prey, and despite concerted conservation efforts, factors conspired against this bird, until the final two birds disappeared in 1989 and it was declared extinct.

We will just have to imagine the grebe as we work our way around Vulcan Atitlán. Luckily for us there are fine birding stops all over, and some great scenic photo opps too! The area around Panajachel shall abound with new birds, as the dry scrubby habitat here is host to a special avifauna we have yet to sample. Visiting some secondary habitat sites outside of town, we may catch up with Slender Sheartail, which is one of the trickiest hummers in all the world. If the right flowers are blooming, there is also the chance of the equally-difficult Sparkling-tailed Woodstar. Some of the more regular denizens of the scrub include Lesser Goldfinch, Prevost’s Ground Sparrow, and a bevy of boreal migrants, including flycatchers, warblers, orioles and tanagers. There is also another chance here for the always-tricky Blue-and-white Mockingbird, and also one of the most sought-after species in the area: the Belted Flycatcher. With a range restricted to montane dry
Itinerary – RBL Guatemala - Volcano Birding & Lake Atitlan

valley scrub in Guatemala and neighboring (far-south) Mexico, this bird features on nearly everyone’s wish-list. We’ll give ourselves a good chance, and hope the birding gods smile on us. Given its unique crest, showy plumage, and limited range, the species definitely warrants a thorough search. Night at Lake Atitlán.

Day 8: Lake Atitlán to Los Tarrales. We’ll say farewell to Lake Atitlán today, departing for the incomparable Los Tarrales property. Here, three generations of concerted conservation efforts have allowed the bird and wildlife populations to successfully regenerate. Employing local Kaqchikel families living within the protected area, the reserve sustains itself by cultivating ornamental plants, as well as the processing of its shade-grown coffee. Bird-life abounds in the gardens around our accommodations, and an active feeding station attracts the likes of Cinnamon Hummingbird, Blue-diademed Motmot, Velasquez’s Woodpecker, Yellow-winged, Blue-gray and Summer Tanagers, numbers of Red-legged Honeycreeper, Melodious Blackbird, Yellow-throated Euphonia, Black-headed Saltator, Rufous-naped Wren and the striking White-throated Magpie-Jay. Great photographic opportunities exist here, indeed! Night at Los Tarrales.

Days 9: Los Tarrales Reserve. With a full day to explore this rich area, we will bird the magnificent surrounds of this special finca. We’ll walk a ridgeline trail on the lower slopes of Los Tarrales and our main targets include the stunning Long-tailed Manakin, the elaborately-patterned White-eared Ground Sparrow, the furtive Tody Motmot, leks of Blue-throated Sapphires, White-bellied Emerald and the handsome Gartered Trogon. Here, there are also good chances for three species of cracid: the localized Highland Guan, the White-bellied Chachalaca, as well as the more widespread Crested Guan.

Later we will work the open country trails closer to the lodge. Birds are abundant here, and we may encounter raucous flocks of Orange-fronted, Orange-chinned and Pacific Parakeets, small groups of Yellow-naped Amazon, the gawky Squirrel Cuckoo, Ferruginous Pygmy Owl, Blue-tailed Hummingbird, the stunning Long-billed Starthroat, entertaining Collared Aracari, the sought-after Turquoise-browed Motmot, Lineated, Smoky-brown and Golden-olive Woodpeckers, Rufous-breasted Spinetail, Barred Antshrike, Greenish Elaenia, Spot-breasted and Rufous-and-white Wrens, Long-billed Gnatwren, and the near-endemic Prevost’s Ground Sparrow. Raptors are also a feature, and previous tours have recorded Cooper’s, Broad-winged, Short-tailed, Red-tailed, White, Gray, Roadside and Great Black Hawks, Black Hawk-Eagle, Northern Crested Caracara, Laughing Falcon, Bat Falcon and the magnificent King Vulture. On the mammal front, Central
American Agouti, White-nosed Coati, Variegated Squirrel, Gray Fox and White-tailed Deer are distinct possibilities. A nocturnal foray here could produce Mottled and Black-and-white Owls, Northern Potoo or Common Pauraque.

We may devote time to high elevation specialties too, as the birding in this Pacific slope cloud forest can be thrilling. If we haven’t seen it yet, Horned Guan is still a possibility here, though access through the finca is via a fairly steep trail. Regardless, there is plenty of eye-candy to keep us busy. The higher slopes of the volcano hosts Chestnut-capped Brush Finch, Rufous-browed Wren, Mountain Trogon, Green Violetear, Rufous-collared Thrush, Mountain Elaenia and Wine-throated Hummingbird. Most of our birding efforts, however, are focused on the middle-elevation cloud forest specialties that we are unlikely to encounter elsewhere. These include the likes of Emerald-chinned Hummingbird, the much sought-after Azure-rumped Tanager, Buffy-crowned Wood Partridge, Highland Guan, White-faced Quail-Dove, Green-throated Mountain-gem, the spectacular Resplendent Quetzal, Emerald Toucanet, Greater Pewee, the striking Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo, Bushy-crested Jay, Band-backed, Spot-breasted and Cabanis’s Wrens, Spotted Nightingale-Thrush, Blue-and-white Mockingbird, Gray Silky-flycatcher, Rusty Sparrow, White-naped Brush Finch, Elegant Euphonia, and Blue-browed Chlorophonia. An amazing array of color and sound will be enjoyed today, along with exceptional exposure to the lush cloud forest and pine-oak forests of the upper Pacific slope. If all goes according to plan, we hope to have time for some photo opps in the afternoon around the lodge proper.

Day 10: Los Tarrales to Guatemala City, via Tecpán. Making an early start this morning, we depart for the temperate mixed pine and oak forest of El Rincon Suizo. The days can be a little nippy up here, so the exquisite mugs of hot chocolate will not be missed! First up today will be two of the major target species for the entire tour: the delightful Pink-headed Warbler and the scarce Blue-throated Motmot. Both rather stunning species, these are two of Guatemala’s most sought-after specialties. Bumping into a mixed flock can be an overwhelming experience, with possibilities including Acorn Woodpecker, Black-throated Jay, Hooded Grosbeak, Red-faced and the monotypic Olive Warbler, American Bushtit, Band-backed Wren, Amethyst-throated Mountain-gem, Spotted and Spot-crowned Woodcreepers, Brown Creeper, Pine Flycatcher and Elegant Euphonia, as well as a host of other migrant warblers. A mix of travel and
birding today, we will wrap up our final night with a farewell dinner in Guatemala City. **Night in Guatemala City.**

**Day 11: Flights home, or on to next Impact Adventure.** Today we head for home; or some may wish to extend their trip and roll on to the next Impact Adventure at Tikal & the Petén, or in Belize!

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:**
Tour prices can be adjusted to accommodate different group sizes in some cases. For more info on pricing, please contact Rockjumper’s Conservation Tours Department at: conservationtours@rockjumperbirding.com.

- **Tour Price:**
  - $4,500 with 8 participants
  - $4,100 with 10 participants
  - $3,900 with 12 participants
- **Single Supplement:** $250

**This includes:**
- All meals from dinner on day 1 to dinner on day 10;
- All lodgings as per itinerary;
- Ground transportation mentioned in the itinerary;
- Reserve entrance fees;
- Gratuities for local guides and services; and
- Guiding services of local guides and Rockjumper tour leader.

**This excludes:**
- Any airfares (see above);
- Any beverages;
- Special gratuities; and
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

**IMPORTANT NOTES:**

a) **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration a small party supplement will have to be charged.**
b) **Furthermore, these costs are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
c) **Lastly, we may be forced to change or alter the itinerary and/or the designated Rockjumper leader at short or no notice due to unforeseen circumstances; please be aware that we will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

**Please note:**
- Some of our time is spent in vehicles, and we do have a couple of lengthy drives to get to the best birding sites. The more luggage you pack the less room there is in the vehicle, so it is important for your comfort and that of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack.
- We will be birding the mountainous areas of Guatemala on foot, along forest trails that are steep and, depending on weather conditions, sometimes slippery. A generally good level of fitness is required for this tour. The Horned Guan hike in particular is rigorous. We will take our time with it, but participants should be prepared for a lengthy and rather strenuous hike. Otherwise, the walking isn’t so strenuous. We do not hike up Volcan San Pedro, but rather attempt to see the Horned Guan at a more accessible location.

**ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE DETAILS:**
This tour does not include ANY airfares. The main tour will begin in Guatemala City on day 1 with a transfer to our hotel in Antigua Guatemala. Day 1 is scheduled as an arrival day, but you should have arrived at Guatemala City Airport by **14:00** in order to reach Antigua Guatemala in time for our welcome dinner. The tour will conclude at approximately **16:00** on Day 12 at La Aurora International Airport, Guatemala City (GUA).

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

**FLIGHTS:**
La Aurora International Airport, Guatemala City (GUA) is the main port of entry for international flights into and out of Guatemala and is well serviced by most of North America’s and Europe’s major airlines.

Rockjumper has an in-house travel agent who can assist with booking flights. Ask us for help at conservationtours@rockjumperbirding.com.

**IMPORTANT:** If you opt to book your own flights, please DO NOT book any international flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour.

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**Rockjumper Birding Ltd**  
Labourdonnais Village  
Mapou  
Mauritius  
Tel: (USA & Canada) toll-free: 1-888-990-5552  
Email: info@rockjumperbirding.com  
Alternative email: rockjumperbirding@yahoo.com  
Website: www.rockjumperbirding.com