

## Chiapas Birding Adventures

A Trip Review

By Jane Olson

This trip was neotropical birding at its best: wonderful guides on a well-organized itinerary that covered a variety of eco-systems that yielded a list of 180 species. The lodgings were simple but pleasant and always were set in very birdy areas right off the porch. One afternoon Howler Monkeys serenaded during siesta time. Each accommodation had its own open-air dining room which often provided birding possibilities. The food was good. Nothing beats handmade corn tortillas hot off the stove. The fruit-waters were delicious.

The trip included an interesting mix of birding locales. Our birding sites included three separate Mayan ruins. Birding in these ruins has been on my bucket list for some time. Check that one off! Just before I left, I was re-reading portions of Bird Coloration by Geoffrey E. Hill reviewing how patterns are created in feathers. I was really appreciating the artistry of feathers on this trip. A male Banded Antshrike at Palenque exhibited a complex use of melanin all over his black and white body. The Yellow-throated Euphonia, my favorite lowland bird, was a scrap of yellow and blue-black popping about in the bushes and trees. In the highland regions, we stayed next to lakes and rivers. There is nothing like a tree full of neotropical birds in front of your cabin next to the lake with a stunning view of mountains to let you know that you are not in your desert! Unless, it is birding from a small boat in rivers cutting through the jungle.

When I told friends where I was going, some had concerns for our safety. The Mexican state of Chiapas borders Guatemala. The US State Department posts warnings state by state in Mexico. There are no warnings issued for Chiapas. However, there is a lingering collective memory about the uprisings of the Zapatistas 20-25 years ago. I don't know about the larger cities in Chiapas, but we felt safe in all the places that we traveled. Often, we birded the small towns where our lodges were, and I had an opportunity to see some of village life. On every single town walk, we were greeted with friendly, "Buenas dias," from children on their bikes to seniors sitting on the porch. No exceptions.

We traveled with Chiapas Birding Adventures from February 20 to March 5, 2018. We used Interjet Airlines to fly from LAX to our destination. They are a Mexican low-cost airline with lots of leg room and reserved seating. It was cheaper than flying to the east coast for all those eastern warblers. We were escorted from the time we landed to the time we departed. You can book a group tour or arrange a private tour. My husband and I booked pretty much the tour on the website, but we added days in some places to achieve a more leisurely pace. Beside the birding and touring ruins, we experienced some of the cultural aspects of the area as well. This made a better tour for my husband, who describes himself as a "bird-glancer." Chiapas Birding Adventures website is: [chiapasbirdingadventures.com](http://chiapasbirdingadventures.com). (Did I say how good the bird guides were?)

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