

ITINERARY
MEXICO: YUCATAN & COZUMEL
November 18–27, 2017



The Cozumel Vireo is restricted to the island of Cozumel. Despite its endemic status, little is known about this tiny songbird. It is fairly common, yet like many vireos, it can be difficult to see. Photograph by guide Chris Benesh.

We include here information for those interested in the 2017 Field Guides Mexico: Yucatan & Cozumel tour:

- a general introduction to the tour
- a description of the birding areas to be visited on the tour
- an abbreviated daily itinerary with some indication of the nature of each day's birding outings

Those who register for the tour will be sent this additional material:

- an annotated list of the birds recorded on a previous year's Field Guides trip to the area, with comments by the guide(s) on notable species or sightings (may be downloaded from our web site)
- a detailed information bulletin with important logistical information and answers to questions regarding accommodations, air arrangements, clothing, currency, customs and immigration, documents, health precautions, and personal items
- a reference list
- a Field Guides checklist for preparing for and keeping track of the birds we see on the tour
- after the conclusion of the tour, a list of birds seen on the tour

Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula combines rich tropical birding with a spectacular cultural setting. The magnificent stone ceremonial cities of the ancient Maya rise up out of the tropical forests of this wondrous limestone peninsula like surreal visions of a lost world. Here, the culture and history of the Maya are woven together with an exciting amalgam of resident birds characteristic of northern Central America and endemic Mexican specialties found nowhere else in the world. Added to this already irresistible blend is a strong Caribbean influence in the birdlife of wonderful Cozumel Island—where there

are also at least two endemics (Cozumel Emerald and Cozumel Vireo) which have never been recorded on the adjacent Mexican mainland.

Although the emphasis throughout will be on birding, we'll have good chances to savor the magnificent Mayan ruins of Chichen Itza and Uxmal, and to ponder the mysterious collapse of this ancient but highly advanced civilization. The rural Maya still live throughout the area in villages, some of which have changed little since the arrival of the Spanish in the early 16th century, and the faces one sees in the elaborate carvings could just as easily belong to the people one encounters going about their everyday lives here. As if this were not already tempting enough, we'll also dine at several elegant, restored Mexican haciendas.

About the Physical Requirements & Pace: The Yucatan is a relatively flat region that experiences quite pleasant temperatures in the early morning and heats up considerably during the day. With this in mind, it is important to be in the field soon after first light, when bird song and activity are at their highest. On most days, we'll meet for breakfast at 5:30 a.m., and then head into the field for a full morning of birding. On most non-travel days, we will have an opportunity to take an afternoon siesta during the hottest part of the day before venturing out again in the late afternoon. Some participants may want to go for a swim or return to the ruin sites on their own during this time. Our hotels are usually quite close to the birding areas, and the grounds of our various hotels can provide some very good birding. Generally, we will be walking on wide trails or dirt roads during our birding time, and a substantial part of some mornings may be spent on foot. This is especially true when we bird and explore the ruin sites, which may require climbing some steps or the slope of a buried temple. Occasionally, we may venture off the trails into the brush to track down a flock of birds.

While we will certainly attempt to see all of the bird species we encounter, we will make a special effort to find the endemic and local specialties of the Yucatan. Some of these are quite common and conspicuous, while others take more time or may be the focus of a visit to a certain locale. Finally, all of our accommodations are quite comfortable, though the hotel at Coba is quite basic. If you are uncertain as to whether this tour is a good match for your abilities, please don't hesitate to contact our office; if they cannot directly answer your queries, they will put you in touch with the guide.

About the Birding Areas

The island of **Cozumel** lies some 12 miles off the eastern coast of the Yucatan peninsula. Measuring roughly thirty miles long by twelve miles wide, it is covered by low, dense tropical evergreen forest, with mangroves fringing the shore in places. Species such as Green-breasted Mango, Bananaquit, Western Spindalis, Caribbean Elaenia, Smooth-billed Ani, and White-crowned Pigeon lend a definite West Indian flavor to the island's avifauna, and Cozumel is also the place where we are most likely to find Mangrove Cuckoo, Yellow-lored Parrot, Black Catbird, and Yellow-faced Grassquit. Other species we could see include Ruddy Crake, Yucatan Woodpecker, and Yucatan Vireo. A pair of endemics is possible here; Cozumel Emerald and Cozumel Vireo can be found right on the grounds of our hotel! Sadly, a third endemic, the Cozumel Thrasher, was all but wiped out by a series of hurricanes starting in September 1988, and the species hasn't been recorded anywhere for more than a decade; we'll look for it in some traditional spots, but we'll be lucky indeed to spot one!



Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve, located east of Felipe Carrillo Puerto, is a premier natural area in the Quintana Roo state of the Yucatan Peninsula. It is an area rich in diversity with more than 345 species recorded in the reserve. The seasonal rainforest that engulfs the ruins is the most luxuriant anywhere on our route, and holds a host of birds, some of which aren't likely elsewhere on the tour. We will explore two of the premier birding roads in this area, where we should see a nice mix of species characteristic of the wetter lowland forests of the Yucatan. This area is home to Thicket Tinamou, Ocellated Turkey, Great Currawong, Plain Chachalaca, Singing Quail, King Vulture, Hook-billed Kite, Black

Hawk-Eagle, Scaled Pigeon, Blue Ground-Dove, Green-breasted Mango, Canivet's Emerald, Wedge-tailed Sabrewing, White-bellied Emerald, Gartered, Black-headed, and Collared trogons, Keel-billed Toucan, Yellow-lored Parrot, Rose-throated Tanager, and a plethora of flycatchers, becards, and tityras. Nightbirds tend to be quite quiet at this time of year, but on at least one evening, we'll go in search of Mottled Owl, Northern Potoo, Yucatan Poorwill, and Yucatan Nightjar.



Turquoise-browed Motmot has a small range that includes the northern Yucatan. We've seen these beauties at Chichen Itza and Uxmal. Photograph by guide Chris Benesh.

The spectacular ruins of **Chichen Itza** lie nestled in semi-deciduous forest. One of the largest of the ancient Mayan cities, its core area covers nearly two square miles, with scores of buildings, more than 80 *sacbe* (which extend off in all directions), and at least 13 ballcourts, including the largest and best preserved in all of Mesoamerica. Among the unique features of this ancient site are a pair of deep *cenotes*—huge sinkholes filled with fresh water. The woodland surrounding the site's restored buildings and our nearby hotel hold such species as Laughing Falcon, White-fronted Parrot, Golden-olive Woodpecker, Wedge-tailed Sabrewing, Cinnamon Woodpecker, Turquoise-browed and Lesson's (Blue-crowned) s, Boat-billed Flycatcher, White-bellied Wren, Masked and Black-crowned tityras, Rose-throated Becard, Clay-colored Thrush, Blue Bunting, and Yellow-winged Tanager.

The ruins of **Uxmal** feature massive blocks of masonry faced with a veneer of thin and beautifully cut stone. We'll take time to explore this extraordinary site, as well as the dense surrounding woodland that shares with Chichen Itza many of the Yucatan's characteristic birds. Species to watch for include Collared Forest-Falcon, Lesser Roadrunner, Barred Antshrike, Bright-rumped Attila, Green Jay, Gray-throated Chat, Painted Bunting, and Orange Oriole.

Celestun is situated in the coastal zone of the northern Yucatan—a narrow band of unique (and somewhat magical-looking) arid scrub, with many epiphytic and terrestrial orchids, bromeliads, and tall, stately, flowering agaves. Our hotel is right on the coast, with luxurious cabins sprinkled among the low vegetation; coveys of Black-throated Bobwhite sometimes scurry along the pathways here, and we should find the tiny, endemic Mexican Sheartail and the large Yucatan Wren, both of which nest in the littoral scrub. This is also a good area for

Olive-throated Parakeet, and explorations nearby may yield the localized White-lored Gnatcatcher and shorebirds such as Black-necked Stilt, Greater and Lesser yellowlegs, Willet, and Solitary, Spotted, Stilt, and Western sandpipers. While here, we'll take a boat trip onto the Estero de Celestun, famous for its concentration of American Flamingoes.

Itinerary for Mexico: Yucatan & Cozumel

Day 1, Sat, 18 Nov. Arrival on Cozumel. As participants from North America will be arriving on different flights today, your guide will not be able to meet everyone at the airport. When you have cleared customs in Cozumel, please take a shared minibus or van to our hotel. You can buy a ticket at a counter just outside the baggage claim area, and catch the shared taxi outside. The trip to our hotel is short, though the exact trip length will vary depending on how many other stops the taxi makes. (They try to group hotel guests, so that the number of stops is minimized.) We'll gather this evening by the hotel pool at 6:30 p.m. to discuss the week's plans and head for dinner. Night on Cozumel Island.

Day 2, Sun, 19 Nov. Cozumel. Surrounded by the crystalline blue waters of the Caribbean (famed for its snorkeling, fabulous coral reefs, and endless shoals of tropical fish), Cozumel is a wonderful place to start our exploration of the riches of the Yucatan area. We may find Cozumel Emerald and Cozumel Vireo right on our hotel grounds! We'll venture further afield by vehicle, exploring areas of forest, swamp, mangrove, and beach primarily on the northern and western sides of the island. See the Cozumel entry in the "About the Birding Areas" section above for details on what we'll be looking for. Night on Cozumel.

Days 3-4, Mon-Tue, 20-21 Nov. To Felipe Carrillo Puerto. After some early morning birding on Cozumel on Day 3, we'll catch the ferry to the mainland (roughly a 45-minute trip) and drive 2 hours or so to Felipe Carrillo Puerto. FCP is located adjacent to the **Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve**, one of the most wild areas in northern Central America. It is host to a variety of species that are not found elsewhere on the Yucatan Peninsula and is well away from the tourist crowds. We'll have a full day to explore this area, with birding along Camino Virgilio Chico and a visit to Laguna Ocom. Nights at Felipe Carrillo Puerto.

Day 5, Wed, 22 Nov. Lago Coba and a drive to Chichen Itza. The porous limestone of the Yucatan holds very little surface water, so lakes are rare here. We will search the marshy margins of Lago Coba for the reclusive Ruddy Crake and Spotted Rail, other species we may see include Neotropic Cormorant, Purple Gallinule, Least Grebe, Northern Jacana, Limpkin, Couch's Kingbird, Gray-crowned Yellowthroat, and Grayish and Black-headed saltators. Morelet's Crocodiles live here, too. As we move westward across the northern end of the Yucatan, annual rainfall becomes progressively lower and the tropical woodlands lighter and scrubbier. It is here, however, that some of the peninsula's endemics and specialties reach their greatest densities. Our destination today is Chichen Itza, where we shall have this afternoon to explore the ancient ruins and tomorrow morning to seek many of the dry-forest birds. Dominated by the massive step pyramid of El Castillo, Chichen Itza is renowned as one of the New World's most impressive archaeological sites. It includes the famous Ballcourt, scene of a remarkable ball game that, according to some theories, ended with the execution of some of the players! Night at Chichen Itza.

Day 6, Thu, 23 Nov. Chichen Itza; to Uxmal. After a morning of birding, we'll pack up and drive to Uxmal where we'll spend the next two nights. En route, we'll stop for lunch at a beautifully restored hacienda that will offer traditional Yucatecan dishes—and the possibility of Orange Oriole. We should arrive at Uxmal in time for some afternoon birding near our hotel before dinner. Afterwards, you may choose to visit the ruins for the evening sound and light show if you wish. Night at Uxmal.



We will be able to get up close to American Flamingoes at Estero de Celestun. Photograph by guide Chris Benesh.

Day 7, Fri, 24 Nov. Uxmal. The well-preserved ruins of Uxmal feature buildings made of massive blocks of masonry faced with a veneer of thin and beautifully cut stone. We'll take time to explore this extraordinary site, as well as the dense surrounding woodland that shares with Chichen Itza many of the Yucatan's characteristic birds. Species to watch for include Laughing Falcon, Lesser Roadrunner, Golden-olive Woodpecker, Barred Antshrike, Bright-rumped Attila, Green Jay, the beautiful Gray-throated Chat, Painted Bunting, and Orange Oriole. After dinner, we'll offer another night-birding opportunity for the region's specialties. Night at Uxmal.

Day 8, Sat, 25 Nov. Uxmal; to Celestun. After some further birding around Uxmal this morning, we'll head northwest towards the coast. We'll make some birding stops as we approach Celestun, and plan to have lunch at an open-air restaurant on the beach of this small town. After lunch, we'll make the short drive to our attractive lodgings, stopping at a few places en route to check for Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, White-lored Gnatcatcher, Yucatan Wren, Mexican Sheartail, and various shorebirds. Night in Celestun.

Day 9, Sun, 26 Nov. Estero de Celestun; to Merida. This morning's highlight will be a boat trip through the Estero de Celestun, a broad, mangrove-lined inlet that is the winter feeding ground for several thousand American Flamingos, at least some of which should have arrived by the time of our tour. Formerly part of the Greater Flamingo complex, this species is far more colorful than its Old World cousins. With luck, we may also see Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Boat-billed Heron, Rufous-necked Wood Rail, Common Black Hawk, and the diminutive American Pygmy Kingfisher. In the afternoon, we'll drive to Merida, Yucatan's capital city. Night in Merida.

Day 10, Mon, 27 Nov. Merida; departure for home. Called the “White City,” Merida is rich in history, and the central plaza and market are within easy walking of our hotel. Participant schedules will vary today depending on international flight arrangements. *Safe travels!*

About Your Guides

Chris Benesh grew up studying natural history in California, where he was inspired by his father to take up birding as a teenager. After earning a degree in zoology from UC Santa Barbara in 1987, Chris moved to Austin to join the Field Guides staff. Since then, his life has undergone a wonderful transformation. The intervening years at Field Guides have taken him to many corners of the world and across both the Arctic and Antarctic circles!

Chris takes an interest in nearly anything that flies, and you might catch him sneaking a peek at a passing aircraft or stopping to examine a butterfly or odonate. You might also notice him getting especially excited at the sighting of a rare or wonderful mammal (heck, he can get excited about a squirrel).

Chris's passion for education has led to his serving on the Arizona Bird Committee, leading the occasional workshop, presenting at birding conventions, and—we must add—thoroughly explaining in admirable detail the nuances of flycatchers to tour participants and colleagues alike. These days, most of his “down time” is spent at home in Tucson watching his two wonderful kids, Sean and Linnea, grow.

*“I would travel with **Chris Benesh** anywhere, any time. He is calm, pleasant, and good-humored. He is not only brilliant at spotting and finding birds, but equally brilliant at ensuring that every member of the group gets a great look at the bird.” B.M., Arizona's Second Spring*

Visit <http://fieldguides.com/guides> for Chris's complete tour schedule; just click on his photo.

A **second guide** will be added as tour size warrants.

Financial Information

FEE: \$3450 from Cozumel

DEPOSIT: \$350 per person

FINAL PAYMENT DUE: July 21, 2017

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): \$450

LIMIT: 12

Other Things You Need to Know

TOUR MANAGER: The manager for this tour is Mandy Mantzel. Mandy will be happy to assist you in preparing for the tour. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call her!

DOCUMENTS: For US citizens traveling to Mexico, a current passport is necessary to reenter the United States.

If you are not a US citizen, please check with the Mexican consulate nearest you for entry requirements. Information about consulates and entry requirements is generally available online or you can contact us and we will be happy to look this up for you. Passports should have an adequate number of blank pages for the entire journey. Some countries require a blank page for their stamp and as a precaution it is best to have one blank page per country you will visit or transit.

AIR ARRANGEMENTS: Please note that the tour begins in Cozumel and ends in Merida. Please call our office for the best fare from your home. Field Guides is a full service travel agency and your tour manager will be happy to assist you with flights to join this tour. Field Guides does not charge a service fee for these services to clients booking a tour. However, we understand that tech-savvy clients often prefer to shop online or that you may wish to use mileage to purchase tickets. Regardless of which method you choose, your tour manager will be happy to provide assistance regarding ticket prices and schedules, along with rental cars and extra hotel nights as needed.

Please be sure to check with your tour manager prior to purchasing your ticket to make sure the flights you have chosen will work well with the tour itinerary and that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. Once purchased, most

airline tickets are non-refundable and carry a penalty to change. Field Guides cannot be responsible for these fees. **Also, it is imperative that we receive a copy of your comprehensive flight itinerary—including any and all flights not covered in the tour fee—so that we may track you in the event of missed connections, delays, or other mishaps.**

LUGGAGE: Please be aware that many airlines have recently modified their luggage policies and are charging additional fees for checked bags. Updates could easily occur before your departure, so you may wish to contact your airline to verify the policy. Additional charges for bags on any flights, whether these are covered by the tour fee or not, will be the client's responsibility.

TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS: The tour fee is \$3450 for one person in double occupancy from Cozumel. It includes all lodging from Day 1 through Day 9, all meals from dinner on Day 1 through dinner on Day 9, all ground transportation, entrance fees, and the guide services of the tour leader(s). Tipping at group meals and for drivers, porters, and local guides is included in your tour fee and will be handled for the group by your Field Guides leader(s). However, if you would like to recognize your Field Guides leader(s) or any local guide(s) for exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are optional and not expected.

The above fee does not include your airfare to and from Mexico, airport taxes, visa fees, any checked or carry-on baggage charges imposed by the airlines, any alcoholic beverages, phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature.

The **single supplement** for the tour is \$450. If you do not have a roommate but wish to share, we will try to pair you with a roommate from the tour; but if none is available, you will be billed for the single supplement. Our tour fees are based on double occupancy; one-half the cost of a double room is priced into the tour fee. The single supplement is calculated by taking the actual cost of a single room and subtracting one-half the cost of a double room (plus any applicable taxes).

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, complete the Registration/Release and Indemnity form and return it with a **deposit of \$350** per person. If registering by phone, a deposit must be received within fourteen days, or the space will be released. **Full payment** of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to departure, or **by July 21, 2017. We will bill you for the final payment at either 120 days or when the tour has reached sufficient subscription to operate, whichever date comes later.** Since the cost of your trip insurance and airline tickets is generally non-refundable, please do not finalize these purchases until you have received final billing for the tour or have been advised that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate by your tour manager.

TOUR LIMITS: Our limits are firm and we don't exceed the limit by one to accommodate a couple when only one space remains open. However, on occasion, we will send along a guide in training on a tour. In these cases, one seat in the van or bus will be taken by the guide in training. Our guides will have a rotation system within the vehicle so that clients share the inconvenience equally. We hope this minor inconvenience will be more than offset by the advantages of having another guide along.

SMOKING: Almost all of our clients prefer a smoke-free environment. If you smoke, please be sensitive to the group and refrain from smoking at meals, in vehicles, and in proximity to the group on trails and elsewhere.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refund of deposit and payment, less \$100 handling fee, will be made if cancellation is received up to 120 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 119 and 70 days before the departure date, 50% of the tour fee is refundable. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable.

This policy only applies to payments made to Field Guides for tour (and any services included in those fees). Airline tickets not included in the tour fee and purchased separately often carry penalties for cancellation or change, or are sometimes totally non-refundable. Additionally, if you take out trip insurance the cost of the insurance is not refundable so it is best to purchase the policy just prior to making full payment for the tour or at the time you purchase airline tickets, depending upon the airlines restrictions.

The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved in case of emergency to substitute another guide for the original one.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EMERGENCY INSURANCE: We strongly recommend you consider purchasing trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to cover your investment in case of injury or illness to you or your

family prior to or during a trip. Because we must remit early (and substantial) tour deposits to our suppliers, we cannot offer any refund when cancellation occurs within 70 days of departure, and only a partial refund from 70 to 119 days prior to departure (see CANCELLATION POLICY). In addition, the Department of State strongly urges Americans to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and if it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. US medical insurance plans seldom cover health costs incurred outside the United States unless supplemental coverage is purchased. Furthermore, US Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States.

When making a decision regarding health insurance, Americans should consider that many foreign doctors and hospitals require payment in cash prior to providing service and that a medical evacuation to the United States may cost well in excess of \$50,000. Uninsured travelers who require medical care overseas often face extreme difficulties. When consulting with your insurer prior to your trip, please ascertain whether payment will be made to the overseas healthcare provider or whether you will be reimbursed later for expenses that you incur.

US citizens will receive from us a brochure regarding optional tour cancellation/emergency medical insurance. Our agent, CSA, will insure for trip cancellation and interruption, medical coverage, travel delay, baggage loss and delay, 24-hour accident protection, and emergency medical transportation. If you purchase the insurance when making final payment for the tour, and cover all non-refundable parts of the trip (including any non-refundable flights), pre-existing conditions are covered. The CSA brochure includes a contact number; you may also purchase your CSA policy on-line by visiting our website at www.fieldguides.com/travelinsurance.htm and clicking the link to CSA. Please note, once the insurance is purchased it is non-refundable, so please check with your tour manager prior to making the purchase to assure the tour will operate as scheduled. Citizens of other countries are urged to consult their insurance broker.

RESPONSIBILITY: For and in consideration of the opportunity to participate in the tour, each tour participant and each parent or legal guardian of a tour participant who is under 18 agrees to release, indemnify, and hold harmless Field Guides Incorporated, its agents, servants, employees, shareholders, officers, directors, attorneys, and contractors as more fully set forth in the Release and Indemnity Agreement on the reverse side of the registration form. Field Guides Incorporated acts only as an agent for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, or other means, and assumes no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity caused by defect in such vehicles or for any reason whatsoever, including the acts, defaults, or bankruptcies of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. Field Guides Incorporated accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. The tour participant shall bear all such losses and expenses. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely.

Participants should be in good health and should consult a physician before undertaking a tour. If you have questions about the physical requirements of a tour, please contact our office for further information. Participants should prepare for the tour by reading the detailed itinerary, the information bulletin, and other pertinent matter provided by Field Guides. Each participant is responsible for bringing appropriate clothing and equipment as recommended in our bulletins.

THE RECEIPT OF YOUR TOUR DEPOSIT SHALL BE DEEMED TO BE CONSENT TO THE ABOVE CONDITIONS. EACH TOUR PARTICIPANT AND EACH PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN OF A TOUR PARTICIPANT WHO IS UNDER 18 SHALL SIGN AND DELIVER THE RELEASE AND INDEMNITY AGREEMENT AT THE TIME OF REGISTRATION.

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