ITINERARY

MEXICO: OAXACA VALLEY

I. March 1 - 8, 2026

II. December 19 - 26, 2026

The Russet-crowned Motmot is a near endemic, found in arid woodlands on the Pacific slope of Mexico. This motmot occupies drier habitats than others, so it is the only motmot we'll see on this tour, but it's a real beauty!.
Photograph by guide Chris Benesh.

We include here information for those interested in the 2026 Field Guides Mexico: Oaxaca Valley I or II *tours:*

- 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

These additional materials will be made available to those who register for the tour:

- an annotated list of the birds recorded on a previous year's Field Guides trip to the area, with comments by guide(s) on notable species or sightings (may be downloaded from our website)
- 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 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

This tour offers rewarding winter birding in an area of Mexico with a high concentration of endemic species. The combination of a city with a rich archaeological and cultural heritage, short drives to numerous birding areas, and the possibility of seeing nearly twenty Mexican endemics (as well as many other interesting species), makes this tour a winner.

The beautiful colonial city of Oaxaca might itself be considered old were it not for the fact that the scenic semi-arid valley in which it stands is studded with the truly ancient cities of the pre-Columbian Zapotec culture. The imposing ruins of Monte Alban, overlooking the present-day city of Oaxaca, and Yagul, in the giant cactus forest to the south of the city,

are reminders that a complex and advanced civilization flourished here millennia before the arrival of European conquistadores. The present-day Zapotecs, many still clothed in colorful traditional dress, are living testimony to the concurrent existence of several different and distinctive cultures in modern Oaxaca.

Oaxaca is located at the crossroads of several major biogeographic regions of Mexico, and its bird life is influenced by all of these. The resultant mixture includes nearly two dozen species endemic to Mexico. Some of these include West Mexican Chachalaca, Boucard's and Gray-barred wrens, White-throated and Collared towhees, Dusky and Beautiful hummingbirds, Bridled and Oaxaca sparrows, Gray-breasted Woodpecker, Dwarf Jay, Rufous-capped Brushfinch, Russet Nightingale-Thrush, Ocellated Thrasher, Blue Mockingbird, Red Warbler, and Slaty and Dwarf vireos.

Boucard's Wren is another arid habitat endemic we'll seek. These wrens have a limited range, but can be easily seen in Oaxaca. Photograph by guide Sam Wilson.

Tour I may be combined with ***MEXICO: ENCHANTED CHIAPAS, February 20 – March 1, 2026, or MEXICO: OAXACA'S ATLANTIC & PACIFIC SLOPES, March 8 – 19, 2026.***

We want to be sure you are on the right tour! Below is a description of the physical requirements of the tour. If you are concerned about the difficulty, please contact us about this and be sure to fully explain your concerns. We want to make sure you have a wonderful time with us, so if you are uncomfortable with the requirements, just let us know and we can help you find a better-fitting tour! Field Guides will not charge you a change or cancellation fee if you opt out within 10 days of depositing.

Physical requirements of this tour

- **TRAILS & WALKING**: Moderate amounts of slow walking (1-3 miles in the morning, 1-2 miles in the afternoon), mostly on roads or packed dirt trails. Several walks require going up or down a mild grade for a short distance.
- **POTENTIAL CHALLENGES**: We will likely stand for long periods to observe flocks of birds. At several ruins sites, there are steep steps.
- **PACE**: Early starts (5:30 a.m. breakfast) followed by birding until lunch, which is sometimes a picnic. In the afternoons, we will bird or take in cultural attractions such as ruins and local markets. On most days, we will be away from the hotel for the entire day. There will be at least one nighttime excursion to look for birds, but we will return to the lodge by 10:30 p.m.
- **WEATHER**: Temperatures range from the low 40s F in the early morning in the higher elevations of mountains to the mid-90s F in lower elevations. Rain is a possibility, most likely in the mountains. Participants should also be prepared to get a great deal of sun, especially at the ruins.

- **ELEVATION**: In the mountains, we reach almost 10,000 feet on several days; we lodge at 5000 feet, in the City of Oaxaca.
- **VEHICLE SEATING**: So that each participant has equal opportunity during our travel, we employ a seat rotation system on all tours. Participants will need to be flexible enough to maneuver to the back of the vehicle on occasion. Those who experience motion sickness will need to bring adequate medication for the duration of the tour, as we are not able to reserve forward seats for medical conditions.
- **BATHROOM BREAKS**: Whenever possible, we use modern, indoor restrooms, but on most days, participants must be prepared to make a comfort stop in nature.
- **OPTING OUT**: As we stay in the same lodging throughout the tour, participants can easily opt to sit out a day. Our lovely hotel has a big pool and a bird garden and is an easy walk (or quick cab ride) from the shops and museums at the city's center.

If you are uncertain about 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 for the tour.

About the Birding Areas

The Valley of Oaxaca—The large interior valley in which Oaxaca City is located is on relatively level ground, sloping up to the ringing wall of high mountains that surround it. Arid subtropical scrub, including areas of giant yucca and giant cactus forest, clothe parts of the valley floor and lower slopes. On the higher slopes, dense areas of scrub and scrub oak support Oaxaca Sparrow, Ocellated Thrasher, Slaty Vireo, White-throated Towhee, and a number of species widespread in the Mexican highlands. More open, semi-desert habitats, including areas of giant columnar cactus, host the beautiful Bridled Sparrow, Gray-breasted Woodpecker, Boucard's Wren, and Beautiful and Dusky hummingbirds. The valley floor is at approximately 5000 feet, and the weather is typically warm and dry at this season.

Cerro San Felipe—The higher mountains surrounding the Valley of Oaxaca are most accessible on the slopes of Cerro San Felipe in the Sierra Aloapaneca, north of the city. Although lumbering has occurred here, there are still magnificent forests of humid pine-oak and fir, as well as broadleaf "cloudforest." The distinctive highland avifauna of Mexico is restricted from further expansion by the low-lying Isthmus of Tehuantepec, just east of the mountains surrounding Oaxaca City. Many montane species, including several endemic to Mexico, reach their southern limits here. The most famous, partly because Cerro San Felipe is the only accessible place in the world where they can be found, are the endemic Dwarf Jays. These small, often quiet, jays frequently travel in mixed flocks through the canopy of humid montane forests with other highland specialties, including Gray-barred Wren, "Central American" Steller's Jay, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, and Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo. Black Thrush, the enigmatic Aztec Thrush (rare and erratic here as elsewhere in its range), Mountain Trogon, Rufous-capped Brushfinch, the elusive Long-tailed Wood-Partridge, Red Warbler, Collared Towhee, and Russet Nightingale-Thrush are among some of the other interesting species that inhabit these beautiful forests. Our birding will take place along dirt logging roads, where we will try to do our walking downhill as much as possible. Most grades are gentle to moderate, but a few may be steep. The elevation of our birding activity ranges from approximately

7000 to 9600 feet. Temperatures at these elevations will be chilly in the early mornings, but should warm to comfortable levels if skies are clear.

We'll seek the brilliant Red Warbler on Cerro San Felipe in the upper elevation forests. Photograph by participant Timothy Skillin.

Itinerary for Mexico: Oaxaca Valley I or II

Day 1, Sun, 1 Mar. or Sat, 19 Dec. Arrival in Oaxaca. Upon arrival into Oaxaca City, you'll be met at the airport by our local driver (who should be carrying a sign with your name and "Field Guides" on it) and transferred directly to our hotel. The ride from the airport to our hotel takes about 45 minutes. We'll get together in the hotel lobby at 7:00 p.m. for a short get-acquainted session; then, we'll head to dinner, where we'll discuss our plans for the tour. Night in Oaxaca City.

Days 2-7, Mon-Sat, 2-7 Mar. or Sun-Fri, 20-25 Dec. The Oaxaca area. We will have six full days to thoroughly bird the Oaxaca area. This will allow us considerable flexibility in our daily schedule, so that repeat visits to key areas will be possible if deemed necessary to our goal of finding the endemic and specialty birds of the region. Our daily destinations will be announced by the guides, usually at dinnertime the night before, and will include all major habitats and proven birding sites in the vicinity. We will certainly visit the lush forests of Cerro San Felipe on at least two days, and we'll pay a visit to the ruins of Monte Alban, Yagul, and Mitla. While the focus of the tour will be on birding, there will be ample opportunity to sample the rich Zapotec culture, both in the markets and shops of the city (where you may wish to spend an afternoon) and in the outlying villages. Nights in Oaxaca City.

Day 8, Sun, 8 Mar. or Sat, 26 Dec. Departure for home. You may schedule your departure for any time today; we will provide transportation to the airport based on departure times. *¡Que les vaya bien!*

Visiting Oaxaca at Christmastime results in a few additional cultural perks: one can enjoy several traditions, both pre-colonial and Catholic, here. Besides the colorful adornments and traditional piñatas, there is the famous *Noche de Rábanos* (Night of the Radishes), which is an impressive feast for the eyes of art and humor involving these roots, either carved into elaborate shapes or used as the base for amazing scenes. On Christmas Eve, various groups collect to perform "*posadas*", a procession of families and friends that provides a nativity scene and then ends at the city's *zocalo* (town square) to form a parade before each group returns to its church for the *Misa de Gallo* (mass of the rooster). These, as well as other traditions pre-dating the Conquest, are among the sights we may see around the valley.

About Your Guides

Tour I:
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 peak 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).

*"I would travel with **Chris Benesh** anywhere, any time. He is calm, pleasant, and good-humored. He is not only brilliant at finding and spotting 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*

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, a lot of his "down time" is spent at home in Tucson.

A second leader will be added as tour size warrants.

Tour II:
Dan Lane was barely out of diapers when his love for birds manifested itself. He was an active birder in his home state of New Jersey until he moved to Louisiana to pursue a master's studying Neotropical birds at Louisiana State University. By 1999, he'd received his degree and participated in three LSU expeditions to Peru and Ecuador, discovering a new species of bird (Scarlet-banded Barbet) along the way. His increasing experience with the Peruvian avifauna, coupled with having the luck of being "in the right place at the right time," landed Dan coauthorship on the recently published *Birds of Peru*—alongside his childhood heroes Ted Parker and John O'Neill. Meanwhile, his continuing fieldwork has resulted in uncovering additional new species to science (although writing these up, sadly, takes far more time than finding the birds, and Dan's way behind schedule).

*"**Dan Lane** is superior in all aspects as a guide—excellent recognition of bird sounds, patient in drawing birds in for views, able to relate to group members with relaxed courtesy and helpfulness. We rate Field Guides the highest." J.N. & E.H., Amazonian Ecuador: Sacha Lodge*

Dan's interests in birds also include illustration, bird vocalizations, and bird biogeography and evolution. He's pleased to share his knowledge with participants on tours and loves birding with folks who are really enthusiastic about seeing BIRDS! Working with Field Guides is a blast and Dan thoroughly enjoys the friendship and fun the Field Guides family provides. His favorite areas are largely in tropical Latin America, but on occasion he has led tours to other corners of the globe and of course (somewhat) regularly birds near his home in Louisiana.

A second leader will be added as the tour size warrants.

Visit https://fieldguides.com/our-staff/ for everyone's complete tour schedule; just click on their photos.

Financial Information

FEE: $3595 from Oaxaca
SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): $625
DEPOSIT: $350 per person
FINAL PAYMENT DUE: Tour I: September 2, 2025; **Tour II:** June 22, 2026
LIMIT: 14

Other Things You Need to Know

TOUR MANAGER: The tour manager for Tours I & II is Nicole Cannon. Nicole will be happy to assist you in preparing for the tour. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact them!

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 your 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: Flights are available from most cities to Oaxaca via Mexico City, Dallas, or Houston. 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 miles 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 for changes. 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.

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.

TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS: The **tour fee** is **$3595** for one person in double occupancy from Oaxaca City. It includes all lodging from Day 1 through Day 7, all meals from dinner on Day 1 through dinner on Day 7, all ground transportation, including airport transfers, 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 Oaxaca City, airport taxes, any checked or carry-on baggage charges imposed by the airlines, any alcoholic beverages, breakfast on Day 8, optional tips to local drivers, phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature.

The **single supplement** for the tour is **$625**. 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 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.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact us at fieldguides.com/contact-us/. Our office will be in touch with you by email by the next business day (Mon-Fri) with instructions on how to complete our new electronic registration form and medical questionnaire. (We are no longer accepting the paper version.)

Please mail your **deposit of $350** per person, or see https://fieldguides.com/payment-options/ for our Payment Options. **Full payment** of the tour fee is due **180 days** prior to departure, or **by September 2, 2025 (Tour I)** or by **June 22, 2026 (Tour II). We will bill you for the final payment at either 180 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.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refund of deposit and full payment, less $100 handling fee, will be made if cancellation is received up to 180 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 179 and 90 days before the departure date, 50% of the full tour fee is non-refundable, which would include the full deposit if the final payment has not yet been paid. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable and non- transferable.

Our cancellation 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 that 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 airline's restrictions.

The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure. In most such cases, full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. Note this exception, however: If you have been advised pre-tour that there is a non-refundable portion of your tour fee no matter the reason for Field Guides cancellation of the tour, that portion will not be refunded. The right is reserved to substitute in case of emergency 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, you acknowledge and agree that we will not issue a refund when cancellation occurs within 70 days of departure, and only a partial refund from 90 to 179 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 information from us 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, and emergency medical transportation. If you purchase the insurance prior to, or within 24 hours of making final payment for the tour, and cover all non-refundable parts of the trip (including any non-refundable flights and in some cases, other arrangements), pre-existing conditions are covered. You may purchase your CSA policy on-line by visiting our website at https://fieldguides.com/trip-cancellation-insurance/ and clicking the link to CSA. The CSA webpage also includes a contact number.

Currently we are unable to offer CSA insurance policies to residents of New York and Hawaii. We have had clients provide positive feedback after acquiring insurance thru InsureMyTrip (https://www.insuremytrip.com/) in the past, and would suggest that company as an alternative. When purchasing insurance with a company other than CSA, you will want to understand whether the timing of your purchase will affect coverage before paying your first deposit. Insurance purchase requirements can vary from company to company, and such requirements could limit your options if you do not look into this until making your final payment for your tour. Please let us know if you have any questions about this.

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 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. You acknowledge and agree that Field Guides Incorporated is not responsible 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 when 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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