

ITINERARY
MEXICO: OAXACA VALLEY
I. February 28 - March 7, 2027
II. December 19 - 26, 2027



Ocellated Thrasher is a Mexican endemic, found in a small range in Oaxaca and Guanajuato. They can be very skulky and difficult to see, but we have had good views on our tours. Photograph by guide Sam Wilson.

We include here information for those interested in the 2027 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.



*The uniquely colored Slaty Vireo is one of several range-restricted vireos we'll watch for.
Photograph by participant Jason Leifester.*

Tour I may be combined with **MEXICO: OAXACA'S ATLANTIC & PACIFIC SLOPES, March 7 - 18, 2027.**

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 endemic Dwarf Jay on Cerro San Felipe in the upper elevation forests.
Photograph by guide Micah Riegner.*

Itinerary for Mexico: Oaxaca Valley I or II

Day 1, Sun, 28 Feb. or Sun, 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, 1-6 Mar. or Mon-Sat, 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, 7 Mar. or Sun, 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:

Alex Sundvall is a proud Minnesota native and has truly loved birds all his life. At the young age of five, he took a field trip with his kindergarten class to their local Nature Center and learned all about birds. At the end of the trip, the class got to watch staff release a Dark-eyed Junco they had been rehabilitating, and from that moment he was hooked! With the help of his very supportive and encouraging parents, he learned everything he could about birds and birding. Even as a child, whenever anyone asked him what he wanted to be when he grew up, he would always reply: "I'm going to be an ornithologist!"

This love of birds and nature has followed him throughout his life. He graduated from the University of Minnesota's College of Food, Agriculture, and Natural Resource Sciences with a degree in Fisheries, Wildlife, and Conservation Biology with a double minor in Forest Ecosystem Management and Conservation; and Environmental Sciences, Policy, and Management. In 2016, Alex received the Young Birder Award from the Minnesota Ornithologists Union, and he has served as an alternate on his State's Bird Records Committee.

Growing up in Minnesota, Alex developed a passion for studying bird migration. In the past he has worked as both a Counter and Count Interpreter at Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory in Duluth, MN. Even now, in his free time he'll often drive somewhere, post up for the day, and just count migrating birds as they pass by.

In recent years, Alex has led numerous tours across the US and beyond -- from the deserts and sky islands of the Southwest to the hallowed shores of Attu, Alaska, and everything in between. He loves teaching people about birds and showing them all that nature has to offer!

"I really enjoyed Alex. His ability to get onto various birds and ensure that all group members were able to get on them as well was greatly appreciated." R.S., Texas's Big Bend & Hill Country

Sam Wilson grew up in New Jersey and had his spark moment as a young adult visiting Hawk Mountain Sanctuary. On his first visit, he witnessed an epic migration of 10,000 Broad-winged Hawks as they took to the skies over the Appalachian ridges. He was hooked, and his fascination with bird migration has only grown.

Sam spent four years working in Cape May, New Jersey, for New Jersey Audubon, developing bird migration programs for school groups and families and leading group trips for Cape May Bird Observatory and New Jersey Young Birders Club. He enjoyed a stint in the Hawaiian Islands doing breeding bird surveys in the remote Alakai Swamp for the Kauai Forest Birds Recovery project (though his gear didn't recover!).

Eventually, wanderlust led him to Alaska, where he led backcountry trips focused on birds and wildlife in Denali National Park, as well as guided trips for birding festivals along the Kenai Peninsula and Copper River. He has since led group trips as a naturalist guide in most regions of the country with a special focus on National Parks and Wilderness areas. Sam is an eBird reviewer in Alaska and contributor to both *Cape May Magazine* and ABA's *Birding* magazine.

When not experimenting with flight photography, investigating nocturnal migration, or researching biodiversity hot spots, Sam enjoys backpacking, growing super-hot peppers, discovering new music, and creating experimental dishes (usually Asian cuisine). Sam and his wife, Margeaux, have spent months traveling around the world seeking out rare birds and wildlife. They currently reside in Anchorage, Alaska.

"Sam is an expert guide and one of the best spotters we've ever experienced. He was great to get us on hard-to-see birds. He worked well with all the participants and was knowledgeable about the birds and plants." A.D., Texas Coast Migration Spectacle

Tour II:

Micah Riegner grew up exploring the Central Arizona Highlands and was fortunate to have parents who took him along on college field courses ranging from the coast of Mexico to the mountains of Costa Rica, where encounters with tinamous, barbets, and jacamars launched him into the birding world at a young age. During his time at Prescott College, he made annual pilgrimages to Amazonia, where he worked as a guide and participated in expeditions, mostly in Brazil. For his master's he studied the foraging ecology of Amazonian woodcreepers. When he's not in the field, he tries to make time to paint birds and other creatures that spark his interest.

"Micah is a real bird finder and a delightful guy. He obviously knows the country and the culture well. He provided us with some really great owling, too." P.B., Central Mexico & Baja: Birds, Butterflies & Whales 2022

Micah guided tours with Bret Whitney, John Coons, Dan Lane, and Tom Johnson before joining Field Guides full time in 2019. Micah is a generous guide with an easy laugh and is eager to share his love of birds and nature in the years to come. We know you will have a great time traveling with him, too!

Micah scouted for this tour with Jorge and his partner Amy back in 2021. He is thrilled to be going back to this bird rich part of Mexico.

Bret Whitney must be *at least* half Brazilian by now. It all began when he was born, birding in the Wild Midwest, mostly in Indiana, where he was narrowly overlooked by his high school baseball team and did, in fact, graduate from Earlham College. He is known for his ability to identify birds by their calls and songs, which has led to his stumbling onto multiple species new to science. Bret is one of the founders of Field Guides, a Research Associate of the Museum of Natural Science at Louisiana State University, an Associate of the Laboratory of Ornithology at Cornell, a 2004 recipient of the ABA's Ludlow Griscom award, and an eternal optimist about everything except Ivory-billed Woodpeckers. Bret guides most of our Brazil tours and, with Brazilian colleagues, he is supposed to be producing a series of regional field guides to the birds of Brazil. When not on tour, "the Kite" attempts to stay in shape with irregular bike rides, by leaning over pool tables, and by hefting kegs of Live Oak Pilz and dumping 35-lb sacks of spicy crawfish, corn, and potatoes onto old doors covered with newspapers so his family and friends can pig out at his crawfish boils. Oh yes, and by stirring cauldrons of Brazilian *moqueca* at the Field Guides annual business meeting.

"Bret Whitney is a superb guide who knows the birds at a level I have not experienced in any other tour. His scientific expertise was a huge plus for serious birders." P.P., Brazil's Rio Roosevelt.

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

Financial Information

FEE: \$3775 from Oaxaca

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): \$900

DEPOSIT: \$375 per person

FINAL PAYMENT DUE: Tour I: September 1, 2026; Tour II: June 22, 2027

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: Be sure to verify the latest entry requirements for each country you will visit or transit.

Passport: For US citizens traveling to Mexico, a current passport is necessary to re-enter the United States.

It should be in good condition, valid for at least 6 months beyond your return date, and have at least one blank page for each country on your itinerary. If you are not a US citizen, please check with the Mexican consulate nearest you for entry requirements.

AIR ARRANGEMENTS: This tour begins and ends in Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, Mexico. (Oaxaca International Airport, OAX). Flights are available from most cities to Oaxaca via Mexico City, Dallas, or Houston.

Arrival: Oaxaca, Day 1, in time for dinner at 7:00 PM.

Departure: Oaxaca, Day 8, any time

Please wait to purchase airline tickets until we notify you that the tour is confirmed to operate. At that time, we'll be glad to assist with your flight arrangements at no service fee.

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 \$3775 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 \$900 for those requesting a single room. 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 electronic registration form and medical questionnaire. (We are no longer accepting the paper version.)

Please send your deposit of \$375 per person; 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 1, 2026 (Tour I) or by June 22, 2027 (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 purchasing trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to protect your investment in case of injury or illness to you or an immediate family member before or during a trip. Because we must remit early and substantial deposits to our suppliers, we cannot offer refunds for cancellations outside of our Cancellation Policy. If a participant is unable to join or continue a tour due to illness, all related expenses will be their responsibility, and no refunds can be issued for missed days. Please wait to purchase insurance until we notify you that the tour is confirmed to operate, as most policies are non-refundable.

For full details, visit our Trip Cancellation Insurance page at <https://fieldguides.com/trip-cancellation-insurance/>.

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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