

Altiplano

A Trip Between the High-Plateau and the Sea



Oasis Hummingbird

The Atacama Desert, located in the extreme north of Chile, is the driest desert in the world, since there are places where no precipitation has ever fallen. In spite of this, its coastline and transversal valleys have considerable biodiversity as the species that live there have made the necessary adaptations in order to survive in this environment. Moreover, migratory birds from the Northern Hemisphere spend the northern winter here. The city of Arica is an excellent starting point for the exploration of the birds of the extreme North of Chile.

We will travel inland, climbing higher, and cross the desert in order to reach the Andean foothills. This environment receives its humidity from the Amazon region and is covered by bushes and offers shelter to diverse species of animals. The village of Putre will serve as our base for a few days, while we visit environmental sites located on higher altitudes.

We will reach the *Altiplano* (high plateau), which lies above 4,000m (13,100 ft). The ethnic group of the Aymara lives here in little villages. We will find diverse environments, like grasslands, brush and wetlands, each with their very specific birds which have adapted to the rigors of the climate. The harsh environmental conditions with very low temperatures (below zero even in summer) at night and high temperatures and high solar radiation during the day have contributed to the creation of a particularly attractive fauna.

PROGRAM

Day 1. Welcome to Chile

Arrival and reception of passengers at Santiago International Airport and transfer to the hotel. After check-in, the passengers will have a few hours of spare time to settle in and take a rest from the flight. We will meet in the evening in order to get acquainted, have dinner and talk about our forthcoming trip. Overnight stay in Santiago.

Day 2. Arica

Very early in the morning we will fly to Arica, arriving at midday. We will visit the river Lluta wetlands delta, the Azapa valley, and go to the coast at sunset. Our aim is to see the following birds, for example: Band-tailed Gull, Grey Gull, Elegant Tern, Inca Tern, Oasis Hummingbird, Peruvian Sheartail, Cinereous Conebill, Slender-billed Finch and Peruvian Meadowlark. Overnight stay in Arica.

Day 3. Arica and Putre

Today we will start our excursion at the coast and then travel on to the river Lluta valley. If necessary we will make a short detour to the Azapa valley. Later we will continue to the village of Putre in our search for birds like the Peruvian Booby, Peruvian Thick-knee, Blackish Oystercatcher, Grey Gull, Elegant Tern, Inca Tern, Croaking Ground-Dove, Andean Swift, Greyish Miner, Seaside Cinclodes (endemic), Blue-Black Grassquit, Chestnut throated Seedeater and Peruvian Meadowlark. Overnight stay in Putre.

Day 4. Putre and Parinacota

We will spend the morning in the environs of Putre, looking for the birds typical of the foothills. Later we will go up to Portezuelo de Putre where the environment changes and the *Altiplano* (high plateau) species appear, and then drive on to the wet grasslands of Parinacota (4,000m; 13,100 ft), located in the Lauca National Park.



Among the birds to see in this area are: the Ornate Tinamou, Andean Goose, Aplomado Falcon, Giant Coot, Andean Flicker, Bare-faced Ground Dove, White-throated Earthcreeper, Plain-breasted Earthcreeper, Streaked Tit-Spintail, Yellow-billed Tit-Tyrant, Puna Ground-Tyrant, Blue-and-Yellow Tanager, Golden-billed Saltator, White-throated Sierra-Finch, White-winged Diuca-Finch, and some mammals like the Vicuña and the Vizcacha (a rodent-like rabbit). Overnight stay in Putre.

Day 5. Surire Salt flat

This will be a long and interesting day. We will visit the Surire salt flat (4,200m; 13,800 ft), where the three species of Flamingos to be found in Chile live. We will also see other species that are highly adapted to this hostile environment, such as the Lesser Rhea, Andean Flamingo, James's Flamingo, Chilean Flamingo, Andean Avocet, Puna Plover, Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe, Andean Swallow, Black-billed Shrike-Tyrant and White-tailed Shrike-Tyrant. Overnight stay in Putre.



Day 6. Lake Chungará

On our last day, we will travel to Lake Chungará, the highest lake on earth, located at an altitude of 4,600m (15,000 ft), and in spite of this, is teeming with life. As usual, we will stop on the road as often as necessary in order to observe particular species like the Silvery Grebe, White-tufted Grebe, Ruddy Duck, Puna Teal, Andean Coot, Giant Coot,

Andean Lapwing, Andean Gull, Plain-breasted Earthcreeper, Black-headed Sierra-Finch, Plumbeous Sierra-Finch and Black Siskin. After midday we will return to Arica and from there fly back to Santiago. Overnight stay in Santiago.

Day 7. End of the programme

After a good night's rest and a nice breakfast, the trip will end with check out and transfer to the airport, if requested.