

Honduras – Pico Bonito

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly USA
Day 2	Fly San Pedro Sula; transfer Pico Bonito
Day 3/8	Pico Bonito & surroundings
Day 9	In flight
Day 10	Arrive UK



Departs

November and February – see website

Focus

Birds (mainly) & other wildlife

Grading

Mostly Grade A. In the main easy birding walks only

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code HND01)



Highlights

- Explore the stunning Pico Bonito National Park.
- Over 420 bird species recorded in Pico Bonito Park
- Lovely Cotinga and Honduran Emerald amongst several specialities.
- Agami Heron and various wetland birds at Salado Wildlife Refuge.
- A whole host of hummingbirds, woodpeckers and raptors on offer.
- Various monkeys, Lesser Anteater, Coati.



From top to bottom:
Lovely Cotinga, Red-capped Manakin, Keel-billed Toucan



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Introduction

Honduras is an enchanting place where the past mingles with the present. It is a land where mountains run into the sea, where ancient civilisations once thrived and where one can still be immersed in large expanses of wilderness. The country is about the size of England and is part of northern Mesoamerica, sandwiched between Nicaragua to the south and El Salvador and Guatemala to the west. The sparkling Caribbean Sea lies off the north coast. It is 83% mountainous with the highest peak rising to 9,000 feet. More than 100 protected areas of different sizes dot the countryside and these represent every major habitat found here. In eastern Honduras the Rio Platano Biosphere Reserve alone is larger than all of Costa Rica's reserves combined. Such is the low volume of visiting natural history tour groups that it is not uncommon to have a whole national park to yourself!

Honduras sits on an ecological divide and contains elements of North America, Central America and South America, making this a naturalist's paradise. There are many major ecosystems that range from coastal mangrove estuaries, vast wetlands, and lowland rainforest to cloudforests, vast pine/oak forests and rain shadow valleys harbouring arid thorn scrub forest. The country is a birders' paradise, even though it 'only' possesses 740 species of birds (but waits in expectation of at least another 70 to be added to the list). It has one known endemic (Honduran Emerald) and offers some spectacular bird watching in its diverse and accessible habitats. Some species that are easier to see here than elsewhere in their range include Keel-billed Motmot, Lovely Cotinga, Fulvous Owl, White-breasted Hawk, Guatemalan Screech-owl, Great Swallow-tailed Swift, Speckled Mourner and White-vented Euphonia to name a few.

On this tour, we will be based at the comfortable Lodge at Pico Bonito. The Lodge nestles at the base of 250,000 acre Pico Bonito National Park which has contiguous forest cover from sea level to over 2,400 metres (8,000 feet).

We will hike the Lodge trails through lowland rainforest in search of key species such as the prized Keel-billed Motmot. The observation tower by the river can produce the glimmering Lovely Cotinga which often sits atop the emergent trees. During our stay we will also visit the 30,000 acre Cuero y Salado wildlife refuge, a coastal mangrove estuary. We will take a short train ride to reach the reserve, followed by a 2-hour boat ride in search of mammals, reptiles and birds.

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

In flight

We depart from the UK in the morning, picking from the best schedules on offer from American Airlines, United and Delta via Miami, Houston and Atlanta. Upon arrival in the US you will transfer to a convenient airport hotel. An ESTA will be required for the transit in the US.

Day 2

The Lodge at Pico Bonito

Your flight down to Honduras will be an arrival around midday. We will then drive for 2½ hours from San Pedro Sula north-east towards the port city of La Ceiba, turning off into the Pico Bonito National Park. The Lodge at Pico Bonito is located on the northern (Caribbean) coast of Honduras. This fantastic place is uniquely nestled between the Corinto and Coloradito Rivers and its 400-acre-reserve borders the park involving various habitats including riparian areas, lowland tropical wet forest, and some small plantations (coffee, banana, orange and cacao). Each area harbours its own set of bird species with some being confined to very specific areas, while others can be seen at several sites. The lodge's three strategically located observation towers offer maximum viewing and photography opportunities. This extremely comfortable lodge will be our base for the next seven nights.



The restaurant deck at Pico Bonito

Day 3

Pico Bonito

Our first day at the Lodge at Pico Bonito will begin with an early breakfast/orientation on the spacious, front deck of the Lodge's Itzama Restaurant. For the next several hours our guide will lead us through the Lodge grounds, looking for and familiarising ourselves with numerous bird species that are common around the lodge grounds. A climb to the top of the 'Toucan Tower' observation platform, offers a bird's eye view of the forest canopy that can include heart-stopping views of the coveted Lovely Cotinga.

Throughout the morning we will bird areas of tropical, secondary and gallery forest and plantation areas along the Rio Coloradito. Along this route, diversity is high with possible species including: Lovely Cotinga; Masked Tityras; Blue crowned and Turquoise-browed Motmots; Tody Motmot; Keel-billed Toucan; Collared Aracari; Ferruginous Pygmy Owl; Black-cowled Oriole; Black-headed, Collared and Slaty-tailed Trogons; Royal Flycatcher; Green, and Red-Legged Honeycreepers and up to 16 species of hummingbirds including Crowned Woodnymph, Blue-throated Sapphire, Violet Sabrewing, Purple-crowned Fairy, Stripe-tailed Hummingbird, Brown Violet-ear, Green Violet-ear and White-necked Jacobin.

In the afternoon, after lunch and a siesta/rest period, we'll ascend with our guide along the Lodge's loop trail system in search of some of the forest interior birds that this rainforest paradise has to offer.

In addition to the Toucan tower at the beginning of the trail, this route offers views from an elevated ridge, which overlooks the Rio Coloradito and surrounding forested slopes. Forest-dwelling species may include, Violet-headed Hummingbird, Tawny-crowned Greenlet, Green Shrike-vireo, Black-throated Shrike-tanager, Chestnut-coloured

Woodpecker and our first attempt at the Keel-billed Motmot. Overlooks often produce White Hawk, Black Hawk-eagle and at times Ornate and Black-and-white Hawk-eagles. Other species we will be on the look-out for include Great Potoo, Guatemalan Screech-owl and White-vented Euphonia. Many species of parrots, toucan, flycatchers, orioles and hummingbirds can be found around the pool area.

We'll may also visit observation Tower #3 along the way, set amidst an area of bird-rich secondary forest and overgrown plantation.

White-collared and Red-capped Manakins occur at various locations here and the Grey-headed Piprites may be seen as well. Species here may also include the Slaty-breasted Tinamou, Little Tinamou, Scaly-throated Leaf-tosser; Keel-billed, and Yellow-eared Toucanets; plus Collared Aracari, and a host of flycatcher species, including the Royal Flycatcher, and many of the trogon, woodpecker, woodcreeper, tanager and oriole species in the national parks 420+ bird list.



Collared Aracari

In addition to superb viewing from the lodge's towers, this route passes several overlooks along the Rio Coloradito and sightings of many raptor species can be made here. Great Potoo are also common here with the chance of Northern Potoo as well.

We will enjoy dinner at The Lodge at Pico Bonito.

Day 4

Cuero y Salado Wildlife Refuge

After early pre-breakfast birding around the lodge's gardens, we will get ready to jump on our bus and drive towards the mangroves of Cuero y Salado, located 30 minutes away from the lodge. Cuero y Salado Wildlife Refuge is named after the Cuero and Salado Rivers which meet the ocean here and we'll likely take a packed lunch today so that we can enjoy fully our time in the field. The Refuge comprises over 35,000 acres of rivers, lagoons, mangroves, and forests that are home to diverse wildlife and a variety of birds exceeding 350 species. After we arrive at the reserve's main entrance, a quirky little truck-like train will give us a short train ride along the wet plains beneath Pico Bonito National Park right behind us.

Birding from the train is always fun and exciting, as the conductor is eager to stop and point out species of interest along the way. We will scan the rail-side marshes for Wood Stork, White-tailed Kite, Bare-throated Tiger-heron, Laughing Falcon, Mangrove Cuckoo and Red-lored Parrot.

Once at the Refuge, we will board a small, motorized skiff and cruise slowly through the mangrove estuary which is comprised of three different species of mangroves, as well as other hardwood tree species. Our guides and boat handlers have great eyes and, when needed, prefer to silence the boat's motor to quietly paddle in for a better look. Agami Heron, Boat-billed Heron, Bare-throated Tiger Heron, Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Tri-coloured Heron, Jabiru Stork, Pygmy Kingfisher, Gray-necked Wood Rail, Sungrebe, Laughing Falcon, Bat Falcon and

Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture are but a few potential highlights of a visit to Cuero y Salado. During the right season (February and March), we may also have the opportunity to visit an established Boat-billed Heron rookery, consisting of several hundred pairs of these broad billed, wide-eyed, bill clapping mangrove inhabitants.

Mantled Howler and White-faced Capuchin monkeys are fairly common here, and Manatee could be the highlight of our mammal list if we are lucky! Crocodile populations are also plentiful and Lesser Anteater, Central American Coati, Raccoon and Green Iguana are all possible.

The metallic blue Common Morpho and Shining Morpho butterflies are also a welcome sight amidst the green foliage while Gray-headed Kites may be seen wheeling overhead.

Having driven back to Pico Bonito we will spend the late afternoon birding the trails again (depending on the time) or birding the lower grounds, looking for species such as Red-lored Amazon Great Potoo, Lovely Cotinga, White-throated Robin, White-necked Manakin, Black-headed Trogon, Cocoa, Spot-crowned and Olivaceous Woodcreepers, Red-capped Manakin, Green Shrike Vireo, Black-throated Shrike-tanager, Russet Antshrike, Rufous Mourner, Dusky Antbird, Ovenbird, Royal Flycatcher, Tufted Flycatcher, Honduran Screech-owl, Black-faced Ant-thrush, Olive-backed Euphonia, White-winged Tanager, Black-faced Grosbeak, and many more!

After dinner, we'll be guided around the Lodge's gardens and plantation areas where Mottled Owl, Vermiculated Screech Owl and both Great and Northern Potoo may be found.

Day 5

Rio Aguan Valley and the endemic Honduran Emerald

We will dedicate today to visit the River Aguan Valley and Olanchito areas, home of the only Honduran endemic: the Honduran Emerald. This beautiful but critically endangered hummingbird survives only in remaining pockets of tropical dry forest to the south of Pico Bonito National Park. Descending the 'rain shadow', or southern side of the Park, cloudforested peaks and pine-studded slopes give way to an arid, almost desert-like plain, once dominated by tropical thorn or dry forest. Although endangered, the Honduran Emerald is considered common within its habitat. As such, regardless of season, our chances of seeing the Honduran Emerald are very good.

We need to leave very early today – 0415 – in order to be on site at first light. Our ride into 'Emerald country' will be an interesting one, as a surprising number of bird species inhabit this dry forest and it'll provide a look at a very different side of Honduras. Along the way, we'll also visit pockets of wet areas within this arid region. These sites can be magnets for wading birds and other species such as Double-striped Thick-knee, Lesser Roadrunner, Beardless Tyrannulet, White-lored Gnatcatcher, White-throated Magpie-jay, Banded Wren, White-bellied Wren, Stripe-headed Sparrow, and Salvin's Emerald among others. We will aim to reach the Emerald site for breakfast and will walk a short distance to search for them.

We will enjoy lunch in the nearby ranching town of Olanchito, and return to the Lodge mid-afternoon in time to relax before dinner.

Day 6

Hummingbirds of Rio Santiago

We will today pay a visit to River Santiago Nature Resort, a 15-acre private reserve located 30 kilometres west of the Lodge at Pico Bonito. Its secluded, rainforest location and impressive numbers of hummingbird feeders has earned it the name of 'hummingbird capital of Honduras'. Throughout most of the year, Santiago's trails and main garden areas abound with bewildering numbers of some of Honduras' best-known hummingbird species such as Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Cinnamon Hummingbird, Brown Violet-ear, Band-tailed Barbthroat, Violet Sabrewing, Crowned Woodnymph, Stripe-throated Hermit, Long-billed Hermit, Stripe-tailed Hummingbird, White-bellied Emerald, and Scaly-breasted Hummingbird. All are among those species that frequent Santiago's feeders. After enjoying the feeders, we'll walk along the nearby trails searching for the spectacular Keel-billed Motmot and Rufous-tailed Jacamar along with Red-capped and White-collared Manakins along Santiago's trail system.

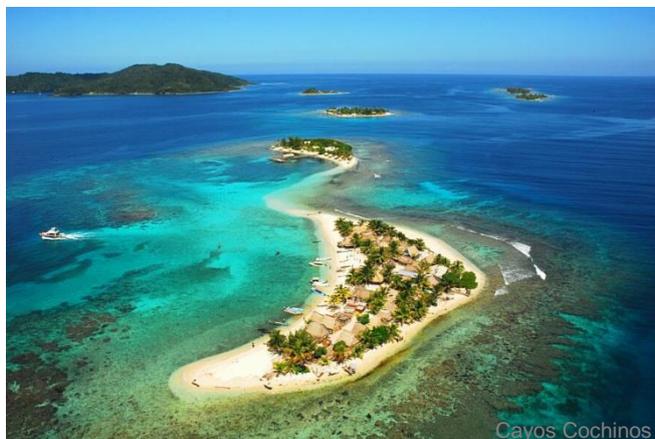


Keel-billed Motmot

Day 7

The Lodge at Pico Bonito

This is an ideal day to walk one of the long trails at Pico Bonito. Alternatively some may prefer to relax, enjoy additional hiking or focus on photography. Our guide will be free and available at all times. If there is interest today, we will endeavor to run a snorkelling excursion to the Cayos Cochinos, a collection of 15 little barrier-reef islets, surrounded by pristine coral reefs. The snorkelling would cost an additional (approx.) \$130+tax per person, payable at the lodge. This



Cayos Cochinos

tour leaves at 6:30am and involves a 35-minute drive, followed a 1-hour boat ride to the Cayos Cochinos archipelago. This price includes the guide, gear, several snorkelling stops, a short island hike in pursuit of an endemic subspecies of boa constrictor (strangely, pink in colour) and lunch on a small island called Cayo Chachaguat. We return to the Lodge at Pico Bonito usually by about 3:30pm or so.

Day 8

Lancetilla Botanical Gardens

The Lancetilla Botanical Gardens is another of the must-see birding hotspots in Honduras. Set amidst a coastal valley flanked by low, rain-forested hills, William Popenoe of The United Fruit Company founded Lancetilla in 1925 as a station where tropical fruit (especially bananas) and trees were studied for commercial value. Since Popenoe was a plant biologist he also experimented with fruits and plants from all over the world. Some of this work continues, although this diverse tropical treasure, composed of a mosaic of forest and edge habitats, is today arguably best known for its superb birding. Honduras 'annual Christmas Bird Count' is held at Lancetilla; every December birders flock to confirm, and add to, the Garden's growing list of colorful, tropical species.

The current bird list includes motmots and manakins, woodcreepers and warblers, woodpeckers, toucans, tanagers, and scores of others. Thanks to this diversity, a typical day of birding here could yield, Common Black Hawk, Ornate Hawk-eagle, Ruddy Crake, White-fronted Parrot, Red-lored Parrot, Squirrel Cuckoo, Black-headed Trogon, Violaceous Trogon, Collared Trogon, Turquoise-browed Motmot, Blue-crowned Motmot, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Great Antshrike, Barred Antshrike, Long-billed Gnatwren, and a host of other resident and migrant species. We will complete our morning at Lancetilla with lunch in the beach-side town of Tela, and return to the Lodge by late afternoon.

Day 9

Pico Bonito – San Pedro Sula

Today, we will be transferred to San Pedro Sula in order to catch our flight to the UK via the US. Please remember there is a departure tax of \$40

Day 10

Arrive in London

Arrive in Heathrow mid-morning.

Honduran Highlands pre-tour extension

A 4-night/5-day, 2-centre birding extension to La Tigra and Cerro Azul Meambar National Parks, Lake Yojoa and Los Naranjos Archeological Park. £850pp; £95 single room supplement.

Day 1

Miami

We depart from London Heathrow in the morning on a direct flight to Miami, Atlanta or Houston (alternatively from Manchester to Atlanta for a modest additional cost). Upon arrival you will transfer to a convenient airport hotel for the night.

Day 2

Panacam

A late morning departure takes us down to the Honduran capital of Tegucigalpa. Upon arrival you'll be met and transferred a short distance to the simple but clean and comfortable Hotel Suites Picacho in the hills just to the north of downtown. Half an hour from the airport, the hotel is located on the entrance road to La Tigra National Park, with excellent birding just 15 minutes away providing a nice introduction to birding in Honduras.

Day 3

La Tigra National Park

We make an early departure to La Tigra National Park. At 59,500 acres, this is one of the first national parks established in Honduras. The park consists of a beautiful expanse of cloudforest with easy, open trails that makes the birding here a delight. Taking a picnic lunch with us, we'll spend a full day in the park looking for a wide variety of birds. The entrance road consists of mixed pine oak forest and secondary growth, harbouring species such as Blue and white mockingbird, Rufous-browed Wren, Band-backed Wren, Rufous-collared Robin, Azure-crowned Hummingbird and Green-breasted Mountain Gem.

Progressing deeper into the park we'll be on the lookout for Resplendent Quetzal, Singing Quail, Wine-throated Hummingbird, Crescent-chested Warbler, Slate-coloured Solitaire, Ruddy-capped Nightingale Thrush and Bushy-crested Jay.

After dinner back at the hotel some may choose to go back out with our guide to look for owls and nocturnal birds.

Day 4

Panacam

We'll use the early morning to drive up in to La Tigra once more in an effort to track down any species missed thus far. We then depart for Panacam Lodge and Cerro Azul National Park.

Panacam and Cerro Azul are 3 hours' drive from La Tigra and offer easy access to mid-elevation rainforest and pine-oak forest. Upon arrival that afternoon, we will bird around the park's visitor centre looking for Keel-billed Motmot, Black-crested Coquette, Tody Motmot, Spectacled Foliage Gleaner, Collared Trogon, White-bellied Emerald, Bushy-crested Jay and many more.

In the afternoon we'll check in to the simple but comfortable and clean Panacam Lodge.

Day 5 (day 1 of main tour)

Panacam

This morning we will bird the 'Panacam Lowlands', a mixture of pine oak and tropical forest. One key target will be Prevost's Ground-sparrow, as well as other species such as Green-backed Sparrow, Passerini's Tanager. Plain Chachalaca, Black-crowned Tityra, Slate-headed Tody Flycatcher, Dusky Antbird and many more.

We will have lunch at Finca Las Glorias at Lake Yojoa (45 minutes west of Panacam) and afterwards spend the afternoon birding 'Los Naranjos' archaeological park. A shoreline boardwalk here offers an easy walk and possibilities of Ruddy Crake, Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Muscovy Duck, Spotted Rail, Gray-breasted Crake, Northern Jacana and more wetland/lakeshore species.

Day 2 (of main tour)

Panacam/The Lodge at Pico Bonito

After early morning birding at Panacam Lodge entrance road and grounds, and breakfast, we depart for Honduras' north coast, and The Lodge at Pico Bonito, the highly acclaimed birding/rainforest resort within 270,000 acre Pico Bonito National Park. We'll stop for lunch along the way, and a late afternoon arrival at the Lodge will afford us time to unpack, refresh and enjoy some light birding in Lodge's grounds before dinner. The incoming group will join us at the lodge.

Accommodation and group size

We generally hold 8-10 rooms at The Lodge at Pico Bonito for each group. The group size will depend on the number of singles in the party. All rooms at The Lodge are air-conditioned.

Guide

Our group will be led by one of the lodge's resident expert guides. We'll have two guides should the group size number more than 12.

Flights

Standard flights are via Miami, Atlanta or Houston. Extensions and US stop-overs are easily arranged but you must state your intentions at booking. It is difficult/impossible to change flight plans once booked. You will need to arrange an ESTA before travel. <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov/esta/>

Manchester flights are also possible for a modest additional cost. Please state your preference upon booking, otherwise default, non-changeable flights from Heathrow will be booked.

Grading

To enjoy the trip to the full you should be reasonably fit and mobile as we will be spending the majority of each day on foot. It is by no means a strenuous or difficult tour though, and all outings and walks are optional. This is not a hard-core birding holiday from dawn to dusk with an eye on rushing around and sweeping up as many Honduran species as possible. It is a relaxed, but focused, birdwatching holiday in lovely surroundings.

Weather

The climate in Honduras varies enormously, depending on the region and the altitude. Pico Bonito is generally very warm and humid but the temperature can drop, especially on a wet day. Olanchito is a very warm area but humidity here is very low. There is a possibility of heavy rain at any time, but hopefully not to the extent that it will spoil your enjoyment.

Clothing

Please inspect the separate clothing list thoroughly.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All accommodation and meals are included (except meals in the US during the outbound overnight stay), together with a soft drink at meal times. The Lodge at Pico Bonito supplies complimentary bottled water in the cabins. These can be re-filled for free at water coolers that we have in our lobby and restaurant. Our groups will eat from the restaurant's menu each evening.

Extra expenses

Please note that we do not include the following in the cost of this holiday: all items of a more personal nature such as drinks not mentioned above, laundry, tips and souvenirs.

Please note that there is also a \$40 departure tax to leave Honduras so please keep back this amount for the final day.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.