

# BIRDS by BIJS International Tours Welcome Packet



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## Visa Requirements - Costa Rica & Ecuador:

**US/Canadian Citizens** - No Visa Requirements. Your country of origin determines the length of the visa. However, US and Canadian Citizens are automatically granted a 90-day tourism visa upon entry.

### \*\*IMPORTANT PLEASE READ

- At the US airports, they may be sticklers about your return timeline. This is because Costa Rica/Ecuador doesn't allow you to remain in the country longer than 90 days.
- All you have to do is show them your return flight, and home at the ticket counter and you will be good to go.
- Upon Entry, Immigration officials generally require you to show your return flight or ticket confirmation of a bus, flight, or boat trip departing the country to grant you your visa stamp.
- Once this is done, your passport will be stamped with a 90-day tourism visa, so you will be good to go during the duration of our tour, and if you decide to remain in-country afterward.

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**Medications:** No specific medications are required or recommended for the trip.

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**Vaccines:** BIRDS by BIJS International Tour Participants are required to be fully vaccinated against Covid-19, which includes two standard doses and a booster shot.

*Costa Rica* - As of April 1, 2022, the vaccine mandate and all other Covid related entry and travel restrictions for Costa Rica have been suspended.

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*Ecuador* - Ecuador eliminated its COVID-19 entry requirements effective October 20, 2022. International travelers are no longer required to present COVID-19 vaccination cards or proof of a negative COVID-19 test prior to entering Ecuador.

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**Travel Insurance:** One of the best ways to protect your trip purchase, in case of trip cancellation, unexpected delays, lost baggage, medical emergencies, or otherwise, is to purchase international travel insurance.

\*\*It is HIGHLY RECOMMEND EVERYONE purchase travel insurance.  
BIRDS by BIJS is a certified affiliate with Travel Insurance Center and our rep Brandon will happily advise, and provide specific information to support your purchase.

A sample quote was generated for Costa Rica - Northern Region and it was between \$127 - \$174. Your cost might be slightly different, but this provides an idea of the cost.

Please purchase your own travel insurance to protect your trip!

<https://get.travelinsurancecenter.com//eng/cobrandindex.cfm?affiliate=BIRDSbyBIJS>

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\*In the case of any Force Majeure event BBB will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. Please review the [Refund, Returns, and Cancellations](#) section for complete clarity on this topic.

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**Baggage:** Soft-sided luggage is recommended. As a precaution, please pack your travel documents, binoculars, medications, basic toiletries, and a change of clothes in your carry-on bag. Check with your airline for restrictions.

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**Clothing:** Dress is casual or informal throughout. Lightweight field clothing is the norm for most areas visited, with a sweater or jacket for extra warmth. We suggest dark field pants and shirts for forest birding, and lightweight long-sleeved shirts that dry quickly (long sleeves are not essential, but offer additional protection from sun and biting insects). Please wear darker colors, not whites, and avoid striking patterns that frighten the birds. Also important are a hat and sunscreen for sun protection, rain jacket, poncho or umbrella. Good footwear is essential, and for this, we strongly suggest sturdy waterproof hiking boots. In any case, your footgear for the field should at the very least be rated "water resistant," as this is a damp climate and even the dew on the roadside grass will get your feet wet!

In Ecuador, at higher elevations, the temperatures can be as low as the 40s on occasion and you should be prepared to layer for warmth. You can shed layers as the day warms up (or add them as it cools down). Consider bringing gloves and a warm hat if you know that you chilly easily. There is a strong likelihood that we will be out in at least some mist or light rain on both slopes, so a good umbrella or rain jacket is essential.

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## Packing List:

### Head

- Wide Brimmed Hat
- Beanie (in case it's cold at higher elevations)
- Sunhat
- Sunglasses (optional)
- Headlamp/flashlight (for night walks or owling)
- Spare batteries

### Upper Body

- T-shirts (x6-7) - a few can be cotton but several should be non-cotton quick-dry
- Long-sleeve (x3-4) - ideally, all are non-cotton quick-dry
- Lightweight Sweater (x1-x2) -non-cotton

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- Mid-weight Jacket (x1) - non-cotton
- Light-weight Rain Jacket (make sure that it actually is waterproof! Better to have it and not need it than to need it and not have it)

## Lower Body

- Underwear (personal preference)
- Shorts (x4-5 pairs)
- Pants (x3-4 pairs) light-weight non-cotton field pants are the way to go. They make great zip-off pants that can transition from morning cool to mid-day heat.
- Rain Pants (x1) are optional but sometimes a nice option in case we get heavy rain

## Footwear

- Mid-weight tennis shoes (x1) for meals and relaxing
  - Sturdy Waterproof Hiking Boots (good to wear these on the plane to save space in the bag)
  - Flip-flops/Crocs (optional) but nice to wear when getting out of the shower or walking to reception etc
  - Socks
    - 5-6 pairs of non-cotton hiking socks
    - 1-2 pairs of casual chilling socks for dinner or in your room
- Sleeping** - I like to keep a t-shirt and lightweight pants reserved for just bedtime. Always clean and cozy for night-time

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## Weather:

*Costa Rica* - We will be traveling during the dry season, however, rain is always possible, which is why we pack a wide variety of clothing. The early mornings are generally cooler, and then the days can get quite warm by 10 AM.

*Ecuador* - We will be traveling through a variety of climates and habitats from the high-elevation paramo (which can get into the 40s) to the Caribbean slope which can get into the 80s and be quite humid. We'll help let folks know what to expect weather-wise each day, but the best advice is to always dress in layers, so you can shed or add to keep your body happy!

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**Arrival and Departure:** Rest assured we got you! At the beginning and end of our tours, we will provide transportation for all clients to and from the local airport. More details will come prior to tour departures

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**Cellular Coverage:** Sign up with your service provider before you leave home for an international plan. Depending on your provider, a flat daily or monthly charge will pair you with a Costa Rican provider. Usually, the plan provides for a set number of minutes and data per day. For example, Verizon has 2 international plans, a daily charge of \$10/day for unlimited access or \$70/month for more limited voice and data access.

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**Wifi:** Connection will generally be found at all of our lodges/hotels throughout the tour. Our in-country providers understand the needs of the modern traveler. Although the speed and reliability can be variable, especially at more remote locations, WiFi is available for guests throughout the duration of our tour.

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## Currency Exchange:

*Costa Rica* - The official currency in Costa Rica is Colón. We will be able to exchange currency on this tour. Many lodges or destinations will accept dollars, however, you may not get the best exchange rate, but they won't rip you off. I would recommend bringing smaller bills like 10s and 20s in case you would like to make snack purchases or things from lodges. Many places accept ATM cards, but having spare cash is great for tipping, and for making any purchases you feel called for.

*Ecuador* - The official currency in Ecuador is USD so you won't need to worry about converting your money. I would recommend bringing smaller bills like, 10's and 20's in case you would like to make snack purchases or things from lodges. Many places accept ATM cards, but having spare cash is great for tipping, and for making any purchases you feel called for.

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**Tipping Guidelines:** Tips are a great way to support the team that makes these amazing trips happen! Here are some guidelines -

Costa Rica	Ecuador
Guides - \$20/person/day	Guides - \$20/person/day
Drivers - \$10/person/day	Drivers - \$10/person/day
Lodges - \$10/room/night	Lodges - \$20/room/night

**Binoculars:** Birding in the tropics presents a unique set of challenges, including what can oftentimes be a highly variable environment. Especially on our tours, we visit a variety of ecosystems from the low-light cloud forests to the sun-soaked lowlands. Wherever we bird, the glass in our optics will heavily influence our ability to view and appreciate the local birds and wildlife clearly.

There are tons of different binoculars on the market however I would recommend that whatever you use or select have the following specifications

- Either 10x42 or 8x42 (there are a few variations to this combo)
- Waterproof & fog proof
- Sturdy build
- \*Feel good in your hands
- \*Not too heavy, during long days of birding the weight can become cumbersome if you aren't used to carrying your binoculars.

\*BIJS's recommendations all fit this bill. However, two things that I can't comment on as they are particular to your preference are the weight and how the binos feel in your hands.

I recommend using binoculars around \$200 and up in price. There is a big jump in quality from binoculars in the \$150 range to the \$300 and \$300 and up. For the best bang for your buck, I highly recommend binoculars for \$300 and up. The quality of the glass and other specifications including light-gathering ability, field-of-view, and minimum focus length is dramatically better than less expensive binoculars. To note, most manufacturers have a lifetime guarantee on their products so you can send them back for repairs or tune-ups.

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**Top of the Line** - These three brands are widely known as the top optics brands in the game. As you will see the price tag certainly reflects this and so does the optical quality.

## **Swarovski**

EL 10x42 - ~\$2,400  
EL 8.5x42 - ~\$2,400  
NL 8x42 - ~\$3,300  
NL10x42 - ~\$3,400

## **Zeiss**

Terra HD 8x42 - ~\$500  
Terra HD 10x42 - ~\$500  
Conquest HD 8x42 - ~\$1000  
Conquest HD 10x42 - ~\$1000  
Victory SF T\* 8x42 - ~\$2,900  
Victory SF T\* 10x42 - ~\$2,900

## **Leica**

Trinovid 8x42 - ~\$1,000  
Trinovid 10x42 - ~\$1,000  
Ultravid 8x42 - ~\$2,300  
Ultravid 10x42 - \$2,300  
Noctivid 8x42- ~\$2,850  
Noctivid 10x42- ~\$2,850

**Middle to Upper-Level** - These are all fantastic options as well!

**Vortex** - This is a great brand of binoculars and they have a variety of different models, below are some of my recommendations. I would not go below the Diamondbacks in terms of quality.

Diamondback HD - \$289 - \$299  
Viper HD - \$750  
Razor HD - \$1300

**Nikon** - This is a classic brand of binoculars with lots of different models to choose from. Below are some of my recommendations.

Monarch M5 - \$300  
Monarch M7 - ~\$500  
Monarch HG - ~\$950

**Kowa** - Many people aren't familiar with this brand, but they are an excellent company with great optics!

Kowa BD II 8x42 XD - ~\$489  
Kowa BD II 10x42 XD - ~\$489

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Genesis Prominar 8.5 x 44 - ~\$1,300

Genesis Prominar 10.5 x 44 - ~ \$1,400

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**Photography:** Although the focus of our trips is not photography, there will certainly be great opportunities to photograph local birds and wildlife. The best chances for this will be at lodges or restaurants that have bird feeders set up. Other chances to photograph birds will happen naturally on the trail as the birds or wildlife present themselves. Below are some camera/lens recommendations.

**Telephoto Lenses:** Telephoto lenses are the best way to capture birds and wildlife in their natural environment. Throughout the tour, we will have photography opportunities for birds at feeders, which will undoubtedly be our best chance for bird photos. We will also have chances while on the trail, but this is not the main focus of our tour. That being said, telephoto lenses can tend to be expensive, below are a few length options and actual lenses that you might want to consider if you don't already have a bird photography setup.

**100-400mm** is the standard intro length for bird and wildlife photography

**>400mm** is where you start getting into a more ideal length for birds

**≥600mm** is the minimum length most professional bird photographers are shooting with

## Camera Body Types: Mirrorless vs DSLR

**Mirrorless Digital Cameras** - A digital camera that accepts different lenses but does not use a mirror to reflect the image into the viewfinder. These "new" camera bodies hit the market in 2008 and have steadily been getting better and better!

**DSLR Cameras** - DSLR is the abbreviation for Digital Single Lens Reflex.

Digital means that the camera operates with a fixed, digital sensor.

*Single-lens* means the camera uses the same lens for framing, focusing, and taking the photograph. *Reflex* refers to a system where a mirror splits or directs the incoming light toward the optical viewfinder. It allows you to see an exact, optical view of the scene. This mirror can be fixed and semi-transparent (in SLT-type cameras). Or, it can flip up during exposure (in SLRs and DSLR).

**Camera Body:** When selecting a camera body there is A LOT to consider, I won't go too much into it here but a couple of things to consider are the following:

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**Sensor Size** - As far as picture quality and exposure flexibility are concerned the larger sensors perform better in lower light and can handle bright, highly contrasting light.

**Megapixel Resolution** - Although most advertising material and much of the media hype focuses on the number of megapixels the camera supports, megapixel count is relatively unimportant when buying a digital SLR. In theory, the number of megapixels in an image file should dictate the size to which it can be printed at 'photo' quality. However, you can make great prints and digital images from cameras with low megapixel counts as long as they are properly exposed. Most modern cameras have megapixel counts from 15-50, 20 megapixels is generally more than enough for most uses!

**ISO Capability** - ISO is the third camera setting that changes how bright and dark your photo is. However, unlike shutter speed and aperture, changing the ISO doesn't actually capture more or less light. Instead, it's a lot more similar to changing a photo's brightness in post-processing software like Photoshop.

Cameras with a higher ISO range allow you to increase the brightness of the image, which is helpful when photographing in low-light situations. However, when you increase the ISO you tend to see more grain or pixelation in the image, so it's a balancing act.

**Shutter Speed** - Shutter speed is the amount of time your camera allows light to hit the sensor and expose the image. Most cameras can be set to have fast shutter speeds like 1/4000 of a second, as well as long shutter speeds like 30 seconds. The faster your shutter speed, the less light hits your camera sensor, which puts you at risk of underexposure. But it also allows you to freeze movement which is ideal for capturing birds and wildlife.

**Image Stabilization** - All modern (last several years) camera bodies and lenses have built-in image stabilization which is extremely helpful!

## **Full-frame Sensor vs Crop Sensor**

The primary difference between a full frame and a crop sensor is simply the physical size of the sensor. Full frame sensors are 35mm x 24mm while crop sensors are smaller than this and can vary in dimensions. Sensors come in several sizes, have varying characteristics, and wildly differing prices

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## How these two sensor types affect the focal length of lenses:

**Full-Frame** does not increase the perceived length of the lens. It operates at a 1x.

*Example:* A full-frame camera with a 400mm lens will capture images at 400mm

**Crop-sensors** essentially crop out part of the sensor, and to make the image full size it results in the image being automatically zoomed in.

*Example:* A crop-sensor body can either add a zoom of 1.4x - 1.6x to the zoom length of your lens. So if you're using 400mm on a 1.6x crop sensor your effective reach would actually be  $400 \times 1.6 = 640\text{mm}$ . This can be helpful since you get some extra reach without having to spend extra money to get a longer lens. The downside is that crop sensors often have lower megapixel counts, which can impact the ISO capability range or how large you can print an image. But in reality, this only substantially impacts photographers looking to print large, professional images.

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## Canon

### DSLR Bodies

**Canon 5d Mark IV** - (full-frame) ~ \$2,300

**Canon 7d Mark II** - (crop-sensor) ~ discontinued but can be purchased used ~\$650

**Canon EOS 6D Mark II** - (full-frame) - \$1,400

### Mirrorless Bodies

**Canon EOS R5** - (full-frame) ~\$3,500

**Canon EOS R6** - (crop sensor) ~ \$2,300

**\*Canon EOS R7** - (crop sensor) ~\$1,500

\* This camera body is a favorite for bird and wildlife photographers.

Standout features include high Frames/Second, Eye-Tracking, 4k Video, and high-quality image stabilization.

### DSLR Lenses

**\*Canon EF 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L IS II USM** - \$2,000

**Sigma 100-400mm f/5-6.3 DG OS HSM Contemporary Lens for**

**Canon EF** - \$800

**\*Sigma 150-600mm f/5-6.3 DG OS HSM Contemporary Lens for**

**Canon EF** - \$989

\*Top choices for Birds and Wildlife

**Adaptor for Mirrorless Body** - If you already have a Canon DSLR lens you can purchase this adaptor to use on the Canon R series mirrorless Bodies.

**Mount Adapter EF-EOS R** - \$100

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## Mirrorless Lenses

Canon RF 100-500mm f/4.5-7.1 L IS USM Lens - ~\$2,700

Canon RF 100-400mm f/5.6-8 IS USM Lens - ~\$650

Canon RF 800mm f/11 IS STM Lens - ~\$800

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## Nikon

### DSLR Bodies

**Nikon D850** - (full-frame) ~\$3,000

(this camera is a professional-level camera)

**Nikon D750** - (crop sensor) discontinued but can be purchased used ~\$850

**Nikon D500** - (crop sensor) discontinued but can be purchased used  
~\$1,100

### DSLR Lenses

**Nikon AF-S NIKKOR 200-500mm f/5.6E ED VR** ~ \$1,400

**Sigma 150-600mm f/5-6.3 DG OS HSM Contemporary** for Nikon F  
~\$1000

**Nikon AF-S NIKKOR 500mm f/5.6E PF ED VR** ~\$3,600

**Adaptor** - If you already have an F-mount lens (for a Nikon DSLR) you can purchase this adaptor to use on the Nikon Mirrorless Bodies

**Nikon FTZ II Mount Adapter** - ~\$250

### Mirrorless Bodies

\***Nikon Z6 II** - (full-frame) ~\$2,200

\* A great option for bird and wildlife photographers. High Frames/Second, great autofocus, 4k video, and image stabilization.

### Mirrorless Lenses

**Nikon NIKKOR Z 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6 VR S Lens** ~ \$2,700

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## Sony

### Mirrorless Bodies

**Sony a7 IV** - (full-frame) ~\$2,500

**Sony a7 III** - (full-frame) ~ \$2,000

### Mirrorless Lenses

**FE 100-400mm F4.5-5.6 GM OSS Full-frame Telephoto Zoom G** - \$2,500

**FE 200-600 mm F5.6-6.3 G OSS Full-frame Telephoto Zoom G Lens** - ~\$2,000

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**Point-and-Shoot Cameras:** Quickly gaining popularity amongst birders is the fantastic all-in-one **Nikon P1000** series. This camera is only ~\$1000 and has a digital zoom of 3000mm, which is remarkable. For folks who don't want to fuss with expensive DSLR lenses and have to swap them out etc, this is an excellent all-around camera.

It shoots 4k video, has solid-image stabilization, and WiFi capabilities so you can wirelessly transfer images to a phone or laptop.

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**Where to purchase your optical gear:** There are tons of great places online to purchase your optical gear below are a few of the most popular ones:

1. <https://www.bhphotovideo.com/>
2. <https://www.abesofmaine.com/>
3. <https://www.adorama.com/>