



Chile and Argentina

Birds and Wine

Tour Leaders: Rob Ripma and Claudio Vidal

February 1 - 14, 2025

This is a unique and special journey across the Andes, specially designed to discover the wealth of birds and landscapes of the central regions of Chile and Argentina. This trip also focuses on the wines that have given these countries their well-deserved fame on the international scene. From skulking tapaculos to imposing albatrosses, from extraordinary hummingbirds to majestic Andean Condors, from Chilean Carmenere to Argentine Malbec, we will find out that on this land wine literally flows freely. Come and indulge yourself with a taste of Chile and Argentina; its birds and wines are the perfect excuse.

On this fascinating trip we will discover the birdlife (and wine) occurring on both slopes of the majestic Andes, by exploring the central regions of Chile and Argentina. We will commence our adventure birding along the Pacific coast of Chile and discovering the wealth of shorebirds and seabirds of the rich waters of the Humboldt Current; we will have the unique opportunity to find its more emblematic pelagic seabirds, including many species of albatrosses, petrels and shearwaters occurring here. The central region of Chile is characterized by dense 'matorral' (equivalent to California's 'chaparral') vegetation where we expect to see the majority of Chile's terrestrial endemic birds. A short exploration south to the northern limit of Patagonia's temperate forests, will allow us to find some striking tapaculos and hopefully Magellanic Woodpecker.

An impressive crossing over the Andes will be the grand finale – this will allow us to reach Argentina and its rich and diverse avifauna. We will have the time to explore from the Andean Piedmont down to the Xeric Monte Desert and its many specialties.

But we can't forget the wine! We have prepared an in-depth wine-tasting program, visiting the most remarkable and traditional wineries of Maipo, Casablanca, and Colchagua Valleys in Chile as well as around Mendoza, Argentina. This trip has been designed for the birder and the nature enthusiast alike, wishing to combine some time in the field with wine-tasting activities.

The landscapes and the culture of both countries are equally fascinating, and you will have the opportunity to learn a lot about Argentina and Chile along the way. Salud! Cheers!

Itinerary Overview:

February 1: Arrival and Stay at Airport Hotel

February 2: Birding Around Santiago – Wine Tasting at Cousiño Macul

February 3: El Yeso Reservoir and Termas del Plomo

February 4: Drive to Talca – Altos de Lircay Nature Reserve

February 5: Lago Colbún – Transfer to Santa Cruz and Visit Santa Cruz Vineyards

February 6: Colchagua Valley Visiting Montes, Viu Manent, and Montgrass Vineyards

February 7: Maipo River and El Peral Nature Reserve – Transfer to Quintero with a Stop at Matetic Vineyard

February 8: Pelagic off Quintero – Cachagua (Humboldt Penguins)

February 9: La Campana National Park – Visits to Emiliana and Casas del Bosque Vineyards

February 10: Crossing the Andes into Argentina – Birding Uspallata and Potrerillos

February 11: Drive to Mendoza – Visits to Zuccardi and Escorihuela Gascon Vineyards

February 12: Birding Around Mendoza – Visit Krontiras Vineyards

February 13: Drive Back to Santiago over the Andes – Birding on Route

February 14: Free Morning - Afternoon Transfer to the Airport

Detailed Itinerary:

February 1: Arrival and Stay at Airport Hotel

Arrive in Santiago and transfer to our nearby airport hotel. In the evening, we will have a wonderful welcome dinner.

-Overnight: Holiday Inn Santiago Airport

February 2: Birding Around Santiago – Wine Tasting at Cousiño Macul

Our Birds & Wine tour begins! This morning we'll drive a short distance north of Santiago airport to visit some lowland marshes. Targets here include the rare South American Painted-Snipe, Rosy-billed Pochard, White-cheeked Pintail, and Cocoi Heron.

In the afternoon, we'll visit Cousiño Macul, located in the well-known Maipo Valley. This is a beautiful vineyard with a rich history. Once finished here, we will transfer to our hotel in San José de Maipo.

-Overnight: Hotel Sel

February 3: El Yeso Reservoir and Termas del Plomo

We will spend a full day exploring the surroundings of El Yeso reservoir in the Andean foothills, where we will hopefully be rewarded with sightings of the endemic Crag Chilia plus our first Andean Condor and Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle, as well as several other Andean specialties such as Black-winged Ground Dove, Gray-flanked Cinclodes, Black-billed Shrike-Tyrant, and Yellow-rumped Siskin. Careful scanning of grasslands and streams may produce the stunning Diademed Sandpiper-Plover, our main target species for the day. This is a lovely mountain spot where we will also have chances for Mountain Parakeet flocks.

-Overnight: Hotel Sel

February 4: Drive to Talca – Altos de Lircay Nature Reserve

Today we will continue our explorations south of Santiago, driving for at least 2.5 hours along the Pan-American Highway. Once we reach Talca, we'll head eastwards to the majestic Andes once again. Altos de Lircay Nature Reserve, located in an area better known as Vilches, holds the northernmost southern beech (*Nothofagus*) forests. Nowadays, these woodlands, deriving from ancient tree lineage, are just found as relict communities in temperate regions of the Southern Hemisphere including in distant places like New Zealand, Australia, and New Caledonia. These temperate woodlands are home to a number of unique forest-dwelling birds. Among others, today we shall look for Rufous-legged Owl, Magellanic Woodpecker, White-throated Hawk (and Rufous-tailed Hawk, if we are lucky), White-throated Treerunner, and the quasi-endemic Chestnut-throated Huet-huet. Other tapaculos we will be trying to find are the striking Chucao Tapaculo and the skulking Magellanic Tapaculo.

-Overnight: Hosteria de Vilches

February 5: Lago Colbún – Transfer to Santa Cruz and Visit Santa Cruz Vineyards

In the morning, we'll explore the nearby man-made Lago Colbún. Here we'll scan the rocky slopes looking for noisy flocks of the threatened endemic race of Burrowing Parrot. Later, we will descend to the central valley, to immerse ourselves in one of the most famous wine-making regions of Chile, the Colchagua Valley. Santa Cruz is literally the center of the wine industry of this famed region and is a picturesque little town, where we'll learn a lot about the culture of this part of the country. The lovely Hotel Santa Cruz will be our base for the following two nights, providing us with the chance to explore the museum and its fascinating collections of the pre-history and history of Chile. In the afternoon, we'll explore the Santa Cruz vineyards to enjoy a sampling of reds and whites.

Along the dirt roads we will try to find the largest of the New World tyrant-flycatchers, the voracious Great Shrike-Tyrant.

-Overnight: Hotel Santa Cruz

February 6: Colchagua Valley Visiting Montes, Viu Manent, and Montgrass Vineyards

The Colchagua Valley is synonymous with full-bodied and richly flavored red wines, including Carménère and Cabernet Sauvignon, and praised Merlot and Syrah have been produced in recent years. Today, we plan to visit at least three top-quality wine properties of the valley including Montes, Viu Manent, and Casa Silva for tastings.

-Overnight: Hotel Santa Cruz



Burrowing Parakeets

February 7: Maipo River and El Peral Nature Reserve – Transfer to Quintero with a Stop at Matetic Vineyard

We'll head north and to the coast to explore the Maipo River estuary and the productive coastal ponds and marshes nearby. At the tiny El Peral Nature Reserve, we'll concentrate on finding the cryptic-colored Stripe-backed Bittern, the brood-parasitic Black-headed Duck, and the striking Many-colored Rush Tyrant. We'll also

have a chance to find the scarce and restricted Ticking Doradito. After a rewarding morning, we will visit the splendid facility of Matetic vineyards, where a top-quality tasting of whites and interesting blends awaits us. Just before reaching our seaside hotel, we'll inspect the rocky coast for the endemic Seaside Cinclodes and a variety of Humboldt Current seabird specialties.

-Overnight: Hotel Yachting

February 8: Pelagic off Quintero – Cachagua (Humboldt Penguins)

Today we'll make an unforgettable visit to the cold and rich waters of the Humboldt Current, considered to be one of the world's finest pelagic birding locations. We can expect to see a great variety of tubenoses such as Black-browed and Salvin's Albatrosses. We often see Buller's, Chatham, Wandering, and Royal Albatrosses. We should also find Southern and Northern Giant Petrels, Cape, Masatierra, Juan Fernandez, White-chinned, and Westland Petrels, Pink-footed, Buller's, and Sooty Shearwaters, Wilson's Storm-Petrel, and Peruvian Diving-Petrel. Other seabirds we could encounter include Red Phalarope, Sabine's Gull, and Chilean Skua. Regarding marine mammals, although difficult to predict, Orca, Sperm Whale, and large pods of Dusky and Southern Right Whale Dolphins are often spotted. We'll have repeated sightings of the abundant South American Sea Lion.

In the afternoon, we'll continue exploring the coastal areas, visiting a protected breeding colony of Humboldt Penguin. We hope to see the scarce and range-restricted Southern Sea Otter here, too. Before ending the day, we'll stop at a coastal marsh to see a variety of waterfowl including Red Shoveler, Yellow-billed Pintail, Speckled Teal and Chiloe Wigeon, all three lowland coot species, Spot-flanked Gallinule, and Plumbeous Rail, which surprisingly for a rail is quite easy to spot as it often walks in the open.

-Overnight: Hotel Yachting

February 9: La Campana National Park – Visits to Emiliana and Casas del Bosque Vineyards

La Campana National Park and its scrub community, Chilean Palm-tree groves and dry forests will be the sceneries for today's birding adventures. Mount La Campana (The Bell), after which the park is named, is one of the most prominent peaks of the whole Coastal Range and was also one of the many interesting places that young Charles Darwin explored during his long stay in Chile in the 1830s. Here we will look for an interesting array of passerines, all endemic to Chile, including Chilean Mockingbird, Dusky-tailed Canastero, Moustached Turca, Dusky Tapaculo and White-throated Tapaculo. Chilean Pigeon, Striped Woodpecker, Austral Pygmy Owl, Giant Hummingbird and Green-backed Firecrown are also regulars here. We will also look for the endemic Chilean Tinamou.

After birding we will visit two wonderful vineyards, Emiliana and Casas del Bosque.

-Overnight: Hotel Yachting



Northern Royal Albatross

February 10: Crossing the Andes into Argentina – Birding Uspallata and Potrerillos

The Great Day, time to make our Andes crossing! Today we will drive along the international road towards Argentina. At this latitude the majestic Andes Range reaches its maximum altitude and forms an impressive geological boundary between the two countries. The mountains divide not just their cultures but also their biodiversity, and we will witness this as the day progresses. The ‘Snail’ or Caracol, is a portion of the road consisting of multiple ascending bends that will give us access to Cristo Redentor tunnel and eventually into Argentina. After the border formalities, we will have the chance to bird the eastern foothills of the Andes. The bird assemblage is similar to Chile’s, although it drastically changes as we descend in altitude. We hope to enjoy impressive views of the highest peak in the Americas and both Southern and Western Hemispheres, Mount Aconcagua (22,837 ft – 6,961 m). The birding will be quite productive here; Mountain Caracara, Grey-breasted Seedsnipe, White-sided Hillstar, Rufous-banded and Creamy-rumped Miners, Black-billed Shrike-Tyrant, Cinereous, Black-fronted, White-browed and Rufous-naped Ground Tyrants plus Greater Yellow Finch, Band-tailed Sierra Finch, and Yellow-rumped Siskin can all be found in this setting. Andean Condor, a true icon of the Andes, is also quite abundant here. The Valley of Uspallata will offer a proper birding welcome to this ‘Gaucho’ nation. The orchards and poplar groves hold a number of species that are absent in the Chilean side. Among the species that we hope to see this afternoon will be White-collared Swift, the striking Red-tailed Comet, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Great Kiskadee, White-winged Black-Tyrant, Chaco Earthcreeper, Patagonian Mockingbird, White-tipped Plantcutter, and the delightful Rufous-sided Warbling-Finch.

-Overnight: *Pueblo del Rio*



Gray-breasted Seedsnipe

February 11: Drive to Mendoza – Visits to Zuccardi and Escorihuela Gascon Vineyards

Welcome to the land of Malbec! Two thirds of all of Argentina’s wine is produced in the Mendoza province, and Malbec is certainly its best ambassador in the international scene. We will spend the morning exploring a couple of vineyards in the area surrounding Mendoza city, San Lujan de Cuyo. This wine region of Argentina has no influence from the ocean and has more continental weather patterns, the summers being hotter and having much cooler winters than in Chile. There is plenty of water coming from the mountains and these offer ideal conditions for the production of interesting wines with unique features. Together with the Malbecs, other fine wines are produced here including Cabs and Tempranillo.

-Overnight: *Hotel Huentalá*

February 12: Birding Around Mendoza – Visit Krontiras Vineyards

The Monte Desert is a vast scrub community extending broadly throughout the length and breadth of Argentina and of course, holds a lot of goodies for the bird enthusiast. We will explore the plains located east of Mendoza, into the adjacent province of San Luis, to discover the well-supplied array of specialties of this scrub desert; this includes unique tapaculos such as Crested and Sandy Gallitos plus other interesting passerines including the endemic Steinbach's Canastero, White-throated Cacholote, Tufted Tit-Spinetail, the recently described Straneck's Tyrannulet and the lovely Cinnamon Warbling-Finch, among several others.

-Overnight: Hotel Huentala

February 13: Drive Back to Santiago over the Andes – Birding on Route

Today we will be driving back to Santiago, and we will cross the Andes once again. This will be a great opportunity to re-visit the area of Uspallata, having plenty of time to stop, to bird and to fill our list gaps.

-Overnight Hotel La Reve

February 14: Morning at leisure - Afternoon Transfer to the Airport

You'll have a free morning to explore Santiago. We'll make an afternoon transfer to the airport for connecting flights home.



View from Montes



Viu Manent Vineyards



Tasting at MontGras

Trip Details:

Cost:

Main Tour:

Price per person (double occupancy), from Santiago, Chile: \$8,499

Single Supplement: \$850

Minimum Participants: 6

Maximum Participants: 10

Price Includes:

2 Expert Guides

Ground Transportation in Chile

All Lodging

All Meals including

Park Entrance Fees

All flights within Chile

Price Does Not Include:

Airfare to and from Chile

Airport Taxes

Passport and Visa Fees (if applicable)

Alcoholic Beverages

Personal Items

Travel Insurance

Tips

Deposit:

A deposit of \$500 per person is required to hold your spot on this tour. The remaining balance is due no later than 3 months prior to the scheduled start date of the tour (November 3, 2024).

If you have any questions about this tour or would like to sign up for it, please contact us at info@sabrewingnaturetours.com, by phone at 317-324-8505, or register through our website at sabrewingnaturetours.com.

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