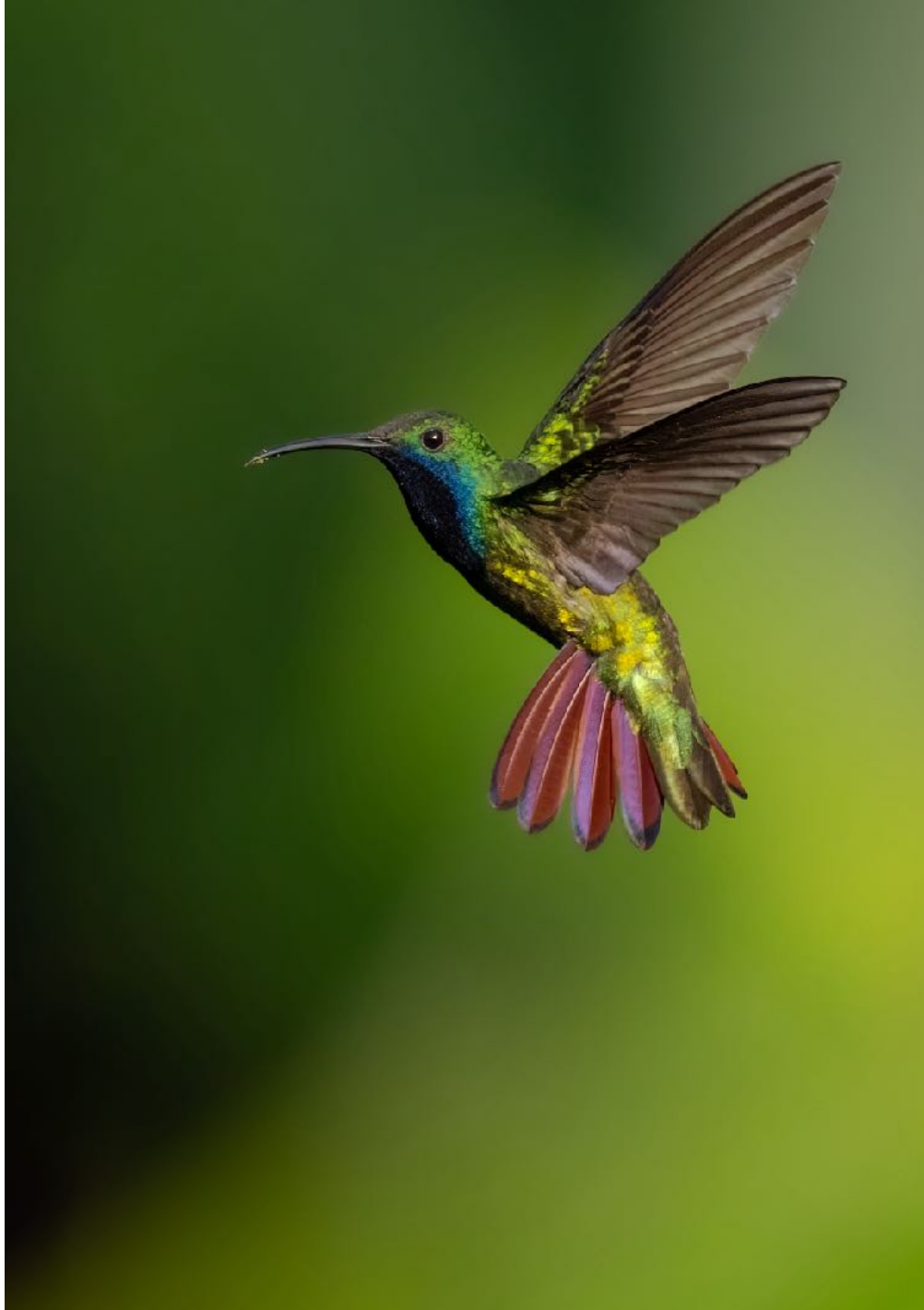


Tropical Birding Tours

Trinidad and Tobago: Custom Photo Tour



Tour Guide: Ben Knoot

Tour Introduction

Well ... what a trip. Honestly, all of us on this tour needed this tropical vacation for some reason or another and we couldn't have asked for better during this 10-day sojourn through Trinidad and Tobago. While our primary goal was of course to photograph as many birds and animals as possible, the guests of course came with some specific requests. Happily, we were able to do very well on all of them including the tiny Tufted Coquette, the critically endangered Trinidad Piping Guan, the spectacular Ruby Topaz Hummingbird and the incredibly odd Bearded Bellbird. But there were other important elements of this tour as well...

A big thing for all of us on this tour was to unwind a bit. Happily we were able to have some great beach time, especially in Tobago. We also explored some of the lovely natural pools at the Asa Wright Nature Center and of course we were all excited to try out Trinidad and Tobagos famous local Caribbean cuisine...which did not disappoint! Perhaps the best surprise of the entire trip and what would turn out to be a highlight for everyone was being privileged to witness an early nesting Leatherback Sea Turtle. I think we all agreed it was worth the early wake up call (3:45am) and at least for me, it will definitely remain a strong memory!

All in all I think the guests will agree we did very well on this trip. We nailed all of our targets, had some incredible and unexpected sightings, the ground agency we used was great throughout as were the hotels, and food. Once you get used to some of the Caribbean peculiarities, Trinidad and Tobago should definitely make everyones list of places to travel at some point. A big thanks Trinidad and Tobago! 🇹🇩



Itinerary

- February 12th.....Hacienda Jacana
- February 13th.....Hacienda Jacana to Outskirts of Nariva Swamp
- February 14th.....Woodland/Waterloo to Deep South to West Coast/Caroni Swamp
- February 15th.....Yerette Hummingbird Garden to Asa Wright Nature Center
- February 16th.....Asa Wright Nature Center
- February 17th.....Blanchisseuse Road/Northern Range
- February 18th.....Asa Wright Nature Center to Grand Riviere Village & Beach
- February 19th.....Piping Guan to Tobago/Adventure Park (Hummingbird Feeders)
- February 20th.....Main Ridge Forest Reserve/Beach Afternoon
- February 21st.....Main Ridge Forest Reserve to Little Tobago Island
- February 22nd.....Tobago to Trinidad/Departures

Tour Summary

February 12th (Day 1): Hacienda Jacana Grounds

As a quick introduction to our tour, we had a bit of time to explore the grounds of [Hacienda Jacana](#). Here, the row of verbena bushes, scattered ponds and large fruiting trees gave us our first taste of some great birds, including a few of our targets. On the grounds we managed a few fun photographs of birds like; [Tufted Coquette](#), [Ruby Topaz Hummingbird](#), [Purple Gallinule](#), [Smooth-billed Ani](#), [Spectacled Thrush](#), [Copper-rumped Hummingbird](#), [White-chested Emerald](#), [Blue-chinned Sapphire](#), [Black-throated Mango](#), [Red-bellied Macaw](#), [Lineated Woodpecker](#), [Southern Lapwing](#), [Rufous-tailed Jacamar](#), [Streak-headed](#) and [Plain-brown Woodcreeper](#).



Purple Gallinule - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Rufous-tailed Jacamar - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Smooth-billed Ani - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



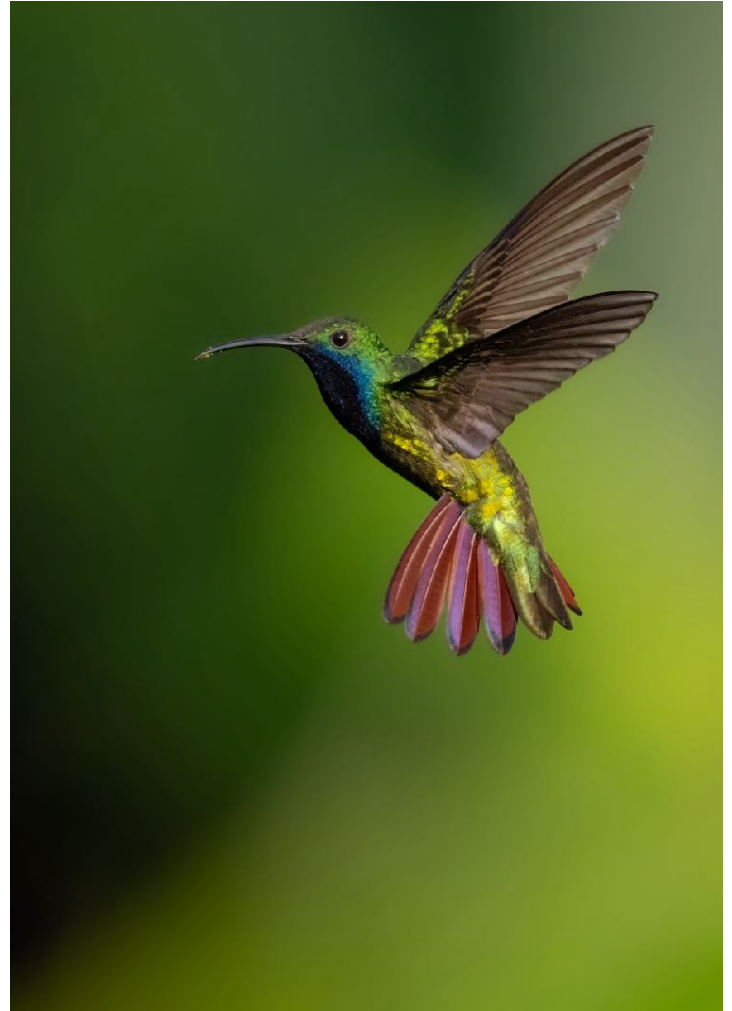
Lineated Woodpecker - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Smooth-billed Ani - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Copper-rumped Hummingbird - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Black-throated Mango - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot

February 13th (Day 2): Hacienda Jacana Grounds to Outskirts of Nariva Swamp

Today we had a quick walk around the gardens before breakfast in order to see if we could photograph more of the same birds previously mentioned. It is worth mentioning that [Hacienda Jacana](#) has some absolutely 5-star service and operators. The food was delicious and they were super attentive to our needs and extremely catering ... not the “typical” vibe you get from the service industry in the Caribbean so 5-stars to them for that!

After a lovely meal, we met up with our local ground agent, driver and guide for our first outing of the trip. He took us around some of his local hotspots that skirted [Nariva Swamp](#). A hot day definitely warranted the amazing beach side lunch and cold beverage and even though it was a bit warm throughout the day, we still managed some cool stuff to photograph. Highlights

included; **Striped Cuckoo, Zone-tailed Hawk, Black-crested Antshrike, Pied Water Tyrant, Wattled Jacana, Silvered Antbird, Green Kingfisher, Bicolored Conebill, Gray-lined Hawk, Yellow Oriole and Yellow-chinned Spinetail.** A fun ending to the day was a shoot with some **Blue-and-yellow Macaws!** The light was fading fast but we did our best with them.



Pied Water Tyrant - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Blue-and-Yellow Macaw - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Yellow Oriole - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Striped Cuckoo - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Silvered Antbird - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot

February 14th (Day 3): Woodland/Waterloo to Deep South to West Coast/Caroni Swamp

Another early start to the day saw us driving around the farm and open country of the south and west coasts. We managed some fun stuff but ultimately the wildly hot and sunny conditions didn't lead to many photographic opportunities. Over the course of the morning we did manage **White-headed Marsh Tyrant**, **Yellow-hooded Blackbird**, **Red-breasted Meadowlark**, **Scarlet Ibis** (shot only by me out the window while our local guide was driving), **Tricolored Munia** and **White-winged Swallow**.



Tricolored Munia - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Scarlet Ibis - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



White-winged Swallow - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



White-headed Marsh Tyrant - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot

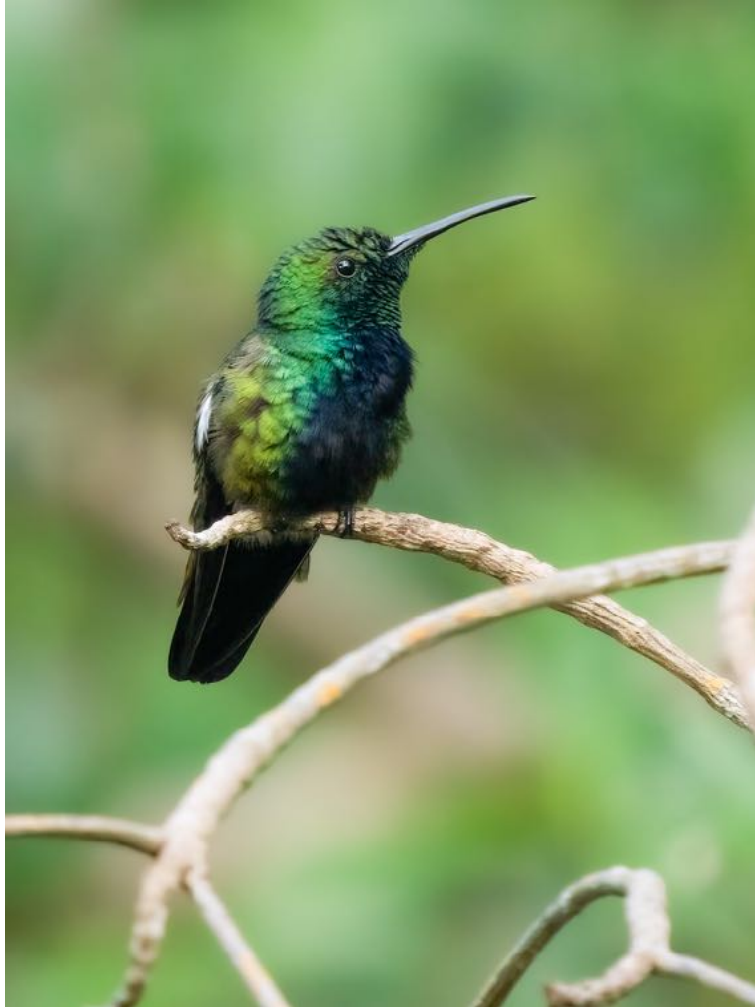
The afternoon was lovely. We spent the first half of our time in [Caroni Swamp](#) navigating the small fingers of this stunning habitat seeing things like; [Green-breasted Mango](#), [American Flamingo](#), [Tropical Screech Owl](#), [Masked Cardinal](#), [Little Blue Heron](#), [American Pygmy Kingfisher](#) and unfortunately no photos but some quick views of [Straight-billed Woodcreeper](#). The animal highlight was a sweet little [Silky Anteater](#). This incredibly small creature only graced us with the puffy-ball version of itself but a very sweet animal to see. The main event of the afternoon was watching hundreds of [Scarlet Ibis](#) come in to their island roost while we had a lovely boat dinner and rum punch cocktail. On the way out of the swamp we had a quick spotlight view of a [Common Potoo](#).



American Flamingo - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Masked Cardinal - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Green-breasted Mango - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Scarlet Ibis - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot

February 15th (Day 4): Yerette Hummingbird Garden to Asa Wright Nature Center

Today we had our scheduled time slot at the famous [Yerette Hummingbird Garden](#) but first, we had some free time around the grounds of our fabulous B&B. Some of us chose to go and focus on the verbena bushes and some walked the grounds. I personally didn't see too much new but did add a fun shot of a [Smooth-billed Ani](#) and a semi-decent shot of a [Spectacled Thrush](#).



Smooth-billed Ani - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Spectacled Thrush - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot

Now at the garden we were met by Theo who was to say the least, quite the talkative fellow! In between his lecture, the scattered cloud cover (given us some much needed even lighting), and the delicious lunch, we all managed some great shots of our main target, the **Tufted Coquette**!



Tufted Coquette - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Tufted Coquette - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot

Most of the other birds we'd photograph much better in other locations so I will skip those for now. Theo's yard is quite busy and in relatively poor light for photography unless graced by cloud cover however, it is without a doubt the best place to photograph the coquette so if you need to photograph this bird reliably, this is the spot.

The rest of the day was spent driving over to the world famous [Asa Wright Nature Center](#). This center had recently closed down due to change in ownership and needed renovations. Happy to say that it is more beautiful than ever with the best service we received during our trip and as an overall experience was top notch. Everything from the natural swimming pools, food, accommodations, feeders and staff was just perfect. WELL DONE AWNC!

We had a few minutes to photograph at the feeders before enjoying our first dinner. I will do a generally summary of this area in the next entry.



Brown Violetear - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot

February 16th, 17th, 18th (am) (Day 5, 6, 7): Asa Wright Nature Center & Northern Range

For two days and the morning of the 18th we explored the [grounds of Asa Wright](#) and the area of “[the Northern Ranges](#)”. For the most part, the northern ranges didn’t offer any great photos so we the vast majority of our great photos came from the grounds of Asa Wright. We had success with birds like; [Violaceous Euphonia](#), [Purple Honeycreeper](#), [Long-billed Starthroat](#), [Blue-chinned Sapphire](#), [White-chested Emerald](#), [Bay-headed Tanager](#), [Oilbird](#), [White-bearded](#) and [Golden-headed Manakins](#), [Barred Antshrike](#), [Guinean](#), [Green-backed](#) and [Collared Trogon](#), and the big target, the [Bearded Bellbird](#).



Bearded Bellbird - Photo by Guide: Ben Kroot



White-bearded Manakin - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Golden-headed Manakin - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Oilbird - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Long-billed Starthroat - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Long-billed Starthroat - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Blue-chinned Sapphire - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Purple Honeycreeper- Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Bay-headed Tanager - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot

February 18th (pm) (Day 7): Travel Grand Riviere Village & Beach

The afternoon was mainly travel. We took to the road after a morning of great shooting and then upon our arrival in [Grand Riviere Village](#), chose to have a lovely beach afternoon and the relax in the pool before heading to dinner. Very civilized! 🍹

February 19th (Day 8): Grand Riviere Village - Piping Guan to Tobago and Adventure Park

WELL...this is a core memory day for me personally and I think likely for the rest of the guests as well. Around 3:45am, we were all woken up by the night time security guard (at our request) because he had found what we had hoped for but realistically weren't expecting...a giant **Leatherback Sea Turtle** had come ashore to lay eggs! How lucky is that?!?!?! For the turtles comfort, we used a red light so there were no real photo opportunities (just cell phone) but for nearly 3hrs we watched as she finished digging her hole, laid her eggs, covered the hole and then with the sun starting to rise, return to the sea ... absolutely breathtaking and something none of us will ever forget!



Leatherback Sea Turtle - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot

The good luck continued for us when our main target, the critically endangered **Trinidad Piping Guan** made some spectacular appearances, both in flight and perched! We enjoyed some cracking views and pretty darn good photo opportunities of this rather large but somehow graceful turkey-like bird.



Trinidad Piping Guan - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot

It was now time to head out of the area and on towards the airport in order to catch our flight to Tobago, the second part of our journey. We had a long, long drive so we didn't stop for anything except a pretty spectacular display of fishing **Magnificent Frigatebirds**. We watched for about 10-minutes as these giant thieves scraped scrapes of fish off of the water. But again, as we were in a hurry, we continued on until we finally reached the airport.

Once we arrived at the airport, we were treated to a choice; wait three hours or, take the earlier flight to Tobago. After a quick call to our local guide in Tobago, we decided to hop on the early flight so after a quick meal in the airport, we boarded our flight and took off towards Tobago.



Magnificent Frigatebird (both; female top, male bottom) - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Once we landed in Tobago, we were picked up by our local guide who decided to switch it up and take us to [Adventure Park](#), which was a brilliant idea so kudos for this change of itinerary decision. This little garden held several of our targets that we were still looking for photography wise. Here we added some new photos of; [Trinidad Motmot](#), [Ruby Topaz Hummingbird](#) and [Tawny-breasted Hermit](#). A fantastic first afternoon on Tobago!



Tawny-breasted Hermit - Photo by Guide: Ben Knot



Ruby Topaz Hummingbird - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot

February 20th and 21st (Day 9): Main Ridge Forest Reserve/Beach/Little Tobago

Over our last two days, we spent the mornings in and around the [Main Ridge Forest Reserve](#). Here we picked up our target forest birds like; [Rufous-tailed Jacamar](#), [Violaceous Euphonia](#), [Northern White-fringed Antbird](#), [Blue-backed Manakin](#), [Trinidad Motmot](#), [Common Potoo](#), and [Collared Trogon](#). We also made a great stop off at some hummingbird feeders where we had some great success with the [White-tailed Sabrewing](#), one of the last big targets we were missing. The mornings were indeed productive! The afternoons however...

One of the afternoons we designated as a “beach afternoon”. Honestly...this was amazing. We enjoyed some cocktails on a beautiful beach, the nice oceanside pool and each others company. This was originally built into the itinerary as the plan so we didn’t feel like we missed anything by doing this and indeed based on our amazing results, we didn’t miss anything we were wanting to target so we really did enjoy this. The last afternoon and what would be our last photo shoot of this tour was spent on [Little Tobago Island](#). About 20 minutes away by boat, we enjoyed the spectacle of hundreds of [Red-tailed Tropicbirds](#) circling around us. We also enjoyed a stunning [Ocellated Gecko](#) on the hike up to the viewing area. This wonderful shooting session was a great way to end this wonderful trip with great friends.



Rufous-tailed Jacamar - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Rufous-tailed Jacamar - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Blue-backed Manakin - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Northern White-fringed Antbird - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



White-lined Tanager - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Violaceous Euphonia - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



White-tailed Sabrewing- Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Ocellated Gecko - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Red-billed Tropicbird (both) - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Guests Top 5 Birds

