

COLOMBIA
MITU & INIRIDA
With some birding around BOGOTA
(PN Chicaque, Monterredondo, Refugio del Tororoy, Parque La Florida,
Observatorio des Colibries, PN Sumapaz)
From 7 January to 3 February 2023
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After reading the very good trip report by Josh Vandermeulen in 2022, and Ross Gallardy's report on Mitu, we planned a visit to Mitu and Inirida in early 2023.

In August we booked our return flights Bogotá-Mitu and Bogotá-Inirida on Satena website. The flights leave from Puente Aereo, a smaller terminal near the main airport.

That said, given the difficulties in getting out of Bogota in the mornings and evenings, the alternation of licence numbers allowed to drive (pica y placa), and the car-free day on 2 February which caused us to lose 1 day of birding, we regretted not having booked the flights from Villavicencio, which is 125 km away, has a more flexible system of pica y placa, and is smaller than the capital.

Beware: Satena easily changes flight schedules without warning, so be sure to check their website the day before your flight.

As for our flight to Mitu, they informed us by email the 13th of December that it was cancelled, they proposed us other dates, so instead of going from January 9th to 19th, we went from 7th to 18th.

It is better to plan one or two free days before and after the flights, like we did.

Both Mitu and Inirida have chiggers, Inirida was warmer. For the 2 sites, our guides did not speak English (but know the English names of the birds), so you need to speak Spanish or at least have some basic knowledge. Everything was relatively easy, as long as you have a guide you just have to follow him and we did not encounter any particular problem.

All our observations and videos are posted on Ebird website. 20000 COP = 4€. We don't give detailed informations about the birds as the guides know where they are, and that the latest observations can be seen on ebird.

MITU (7-18/01)

It is a small town, but there is an ATM where foreigners can draw up to 2 million pesos.

In August we contacted the guide Miguel Portura by WhatsApp +57 320 4965973 to see if he was available. He immediately agreed, at a cost of 180 000 COP per day, about 35€, regardless of the number of hours worked.

He is a fantastic guide and very calm, very pleasant, he targets the species we are looking for and he is ready for anything we want. We left every morning between 4:30 and 5:30, depending on the sites we went to, for a return at around 5:30 pm; He has no playback equipment and it is up to us to play the sounds at his request.

Miguel was always on time with Nelson, the tuktuk driver he works with.

Each day Nelson charged us a different price, depending on time and mileage, we found that this was not always justified. But we never bargained, firstly because we don't like it, secondly because Miguel told us it was the normal price, and thirdly because he still got up very early every morning. It is still cheap for us.

We stayed 11 nights at the simple but good Hotel Brasilia at 90000 COP per night. The tuktuk between the airport and the hotel is 6000COP. Monica, the owner, is a generous woman, friend of Miguel. Booked by WhatsApp +57 318 7673142.

They couldn't prepare breakfast for us so early, but filled our thermos with hot water the night before, so we could drink nescafe in our room and eat buns from the supermarket. This is what we always do when we travel as we don't like to start on an empty stomach, no matter what time it is.

And the cook prepared hard-boiled eggs and sandwiches for our lunch the day before. The dinner was served from 6:45pm, on request.

Our video is on youtube : <https://youtu.be/B454RKJryQ8>

The sites visited :

Puente Lata : the most distant site, 1h30 away. Nelson stayed all day and asked for 400000COP. The entrance fee was 20000 per person.

Mitu Cachiveira : tuktuk 20000 round trip; entrance fee 20000 pp. This is the village of Miguel, and the path passes through a beautiful sand forest.

Cerrito Verde : tuktuk 10000 the round trip; entrance fee 20000 pp.

Cruce Bocatoma : tuktuk 140000 round trip; no entrance fee. We went there 3 times in all, for the Barred Tinamou that we heard but did not come to the tape.

Pueblo Nuevo : tuktuk 150000 one way; entrance fee 20000 pp.

Linea Bocatoma : tuktuk 150000 one way; no entrance fee.

Mitu Señor Urania : tuktuk 60000 one way; entrance fee 20000 pp.

The town : we did it in early morning the last day. Very good.

Thanks to Miguel we saw many birds, in spite of our researches we missed the Curve-billed Scythebill, the Rio Negro Gnatcatcher, the Chestnut-belted Gnatcatcher, more rare but all seen at the end of January on Pueblo Nuevo trail by Julio Calderón.

Total expenses for our stay (11 nights and 11 birding days), including guide, travel, hotel and meals : 1000€ for the two of us plus flight 156€pp.



Nelson and Miguel

INIRIDA (20-29/01)

We contacted the renowned guide Daniel Orjuela in the hope that he would be available to guide us. We wanted to proceed as in Mitu, choose our hotel and meals, and pay the guide to go to the sites where the birds on our life list were found, for the 9 nights and 8 days of our stay.

Daniel answered that he was not available but could propose another guide, and imposed a 6 nights and 5 days tour with a programmed route for a price ranging from 4760\$ per person for a group of 2 to 2820\$ per person for a group of 10, including hotel, meals and transportation.

This concept was not at all what we wanted and we declined his offer.

We chose to book the Hotel Toninas in town, in the main street, WhatsApp +57 310 5634887 (possible on booking.com); 120000 COP the room with fan, 140000 with AC (we suggest AC, it is hot). As the hotel is also a travel agency, we asked if they knew a good bird guide, and they gave us 2 names: Javier Garrido Aves Guamal, and Josué Peña nicknamed Jota.

A quick search on facebook made us choose Josué Peña. He lives right across the street from the Toninas Hotel, which was very convenient.

We contacted him via WhatsApp +57 317 8938814, and agreed on our visit and sent him our list.

He asked for 100000 COP (21€) per day, and that we pay his meals.

Josue comes from an indigenous community, and his parents are managers of the Kenke reserve, also called Flor de Inirida.

He does not have (yet) the level of the best tour leaders, but he is very good, he knows the target species and where to find them, he has a good ear, we got along very well. He doesn't know all the English names of the birds, but finds them quickly in the Merlin application. He uses playback and has a speaker.

What we really liked about him was the way he negotiated with the indigenous communities to get them to participate in the protection of their forest and the maintenance of the paths in exchange for an entrance fee, which is not easy, as some of them think that they just can receive money without doing anything.

Five sites were reachable by boat, to our great pleasure, and we made wonderful trips on the Inirida, Guaviare and Orinoco rivers. The driver of the boat is called João, he is great, and has a very good eye. He knows the river very well which allowed us to leave well before dawn to look for the nocturnals.

Inirida is a lively city and bigger than Mitu. You can find all you want in the street, there is a supermarket near the hotel. The Hotel Toninas is quiet during the night, has a good restaurant open for lunch only; they have a small bar with sandwiches and cakes open in the evening, and there are restaurants around.

As we were leaving in the morning between 3:30 and 5:00 it was impossible to have breakfast or sandwiches to go. But we asked for our hot water in the thermos every night, and bought milk, buns, oats for our breakfasts. But for the lunches, we asked Josué to take care of it and add them to the bill, and it was perfect, even too copious;

Total expenses for our stay (9 nights and 8,5 birding days), including guide, transports, hotel and meals : 1000€ for the two of us, plus flight 166€ per person.

The sites visited :

Caño Negro : visited the 1st afternoon, along the Rio Inirida, tuktuk 15000 one way.

Sabanitas : tuktuk 50000 round trip. We joined Fredy, who guided us on the trails, with his son John. We observed the Capuchinbird building a nest, it seems that later the visitors saw some eggs in the nest. A nice lunch was cooked by Fredy's wife for Josué and us, we paid a total of 210000 COP for the entrance fee, guiding and lunch.

Kenke or Sendero Ecoturístico Flor de Inirida : tuktuk 15 to 20000 round trip. A beautiful reserve supervised by Joshua's parents with an exceptional flora and particular birds. Shortly before our departure the Capuchinbird was seen there and seems to be settling in.

Josué's mother had prepared a healthy lunch, we paid a total of 150000 COP.

Matraca : left at 4am; walked 5mn to the harbour where we boarded a boat and met João. Entrance fee 20000pp. At noon João came back with lunch in lunchboxes, then boat ride to bird in small channels. Paid 250000 to João.

Sendero El Paujil : on Rio Inirida, left by boat, a stop on the way to get a guide, in this case Nelson, to accompany us on the way. 30000pp the entrance fee, 50000 for Nelson, 100000 for João.

La Rompida : left at 4am on Rio Guaviare, in the Vichada region. Accompanied by a youth from the community, paid 50000. Stayed for the morning, then João brought us lunch, and we crossed the river to go to a new trail :

Sendero Laguna Cajaro : very good flocks, with more time we would have liked to do it again one morning. Boat 250000 for the day for these 2 sites.

Caño Vitina : visited after Kenke on foot; 20000pp, guided by Jaime who also took us by canoe on the red river in search of white bats that we didn't find. Jaime asked for 20000 pp more for the canoe ride.

Caño Culebra : a sandy area close to Inirida, briefly visited on the day of departure.

Island on the Orinoco (4.174, -67.783) : a great trip on the Orinoco river to an ileet where you can find some different species. And also a clearing for the Butterfly Coquette. It was superb; it is a long trip, we paid 300000 for the fuel, 180000 for the boat, and 120000 to João.

Some sites were visited twice to search for birds of our lifelist, so we didn't have time to go everywhere, especially to visit Cerros de Macuvere. We needed 2-3 more days...

Video on youtube : <https://youtu.be/k1bwxyy1Muw>



Josué and João

AROUND BOGOTA

PARQUE NATURA CHICAQUE (6/01)

We had 1 day and 2 nights before our flight to Mitu, we had rented a car at Localiza and left around 3pm. The traffic was very difficult and the reserve closes at 4pm, so we just drove the road to it.

We had contacted the reserve a few days before to ask if an accommodation was available but everything was taken. The campsites being reachable on foot, and coming directly from the airport we could not prepare our equipment, so we thought we would find a hotel in the area... mistake, we had to go to the very crowded town of Soacha, where we wondered what we were doing there. We reached with difficulty the hotel La Terraza located in a pedestrian street, where finally we could spend a good night.

So the next morning early we went to the reserve where we could find some lifers.

There is a big car park, you pay 15000COP and go to the trails.

The return to Bogota after 4pm earned us a 100€ fine 2km from our hotel for a prohibited license plate number (yes of course, it's odd or even, so you can't drive 2 days in a row, unless you rent an electric or hybrid car).

PARQUE LA FLORIDA (19/01)

We had a free day between Mitu and Inirida, so we spent a morning there; officially open at 8am, it is possible to go there at 6am.

Despite Ross Gallardy's negative opinion we wanted to go and did not regret it because we easily saw the Bogota Rail, the Rufous-browed Conebill and the Silvery-throated Spinetail.

We got there by taxi, with Muricio WhatsApp +57 318 3607304; he has a Duster, essential for the potholed road. We asked him to wait for us for 3 hours, the price is 84000 the way in, 28000 per hour of waiting, and 42000 the way back (half price of the way in). The total was 210000 (40€).

At the entrance a very friendly guard opened the gate to the path that leads to the observation platform; he really likes birds and spent the morning with us, we gave him a tip as we left.

You definitely have to arrive at 6am to have a chance to see the Noble Snipe on the path that runs along the lagoon and leads to the platform. So we missed it.

OBSERVATORIO DE COLIBRIES (3/02)

We went there the day of our departure, we had reserved for 9am, with the right to stay 3 hours. The price is 30000 per person.

We called on Muricio again, at a cost of 140000 to go, 28000 per hour of waiting and 70000 for the return trip, for a total of 300000 (58€). We also paid Muricio's entrance fee so that he could watch the hummingbirds instead of staying in the car and he really liked it.

Three main sites with feeders in the garden, and a small trail. We observed 12 species of colibris, but the Coppery-bellied Puffleg only showed up at noon at the 2nd site. We pushed the gate and followed the path, down the stairs to the left to the bamboos, the Pale-bellied Tapaculo responded immediately to the registration and came to our feet;

-At one point of our trip we thought about doing the Parque La Florida and the Observatorio de Colibries on the same day, but since we didn't want to rent a car just for 1 day we contacted 2 local companies to ask for their rates for 2 people. One of them proposed 400\$ for 2, breakfast and lunch included, the other 320\$ for 2, lunch included.

By taxi the 2 sites cost us 126\$, and it would have been a little less by visiting them the same day.

REFUGIO TOROROY-SENDERO LA HERREDIA (30/01)

Back from Inirida, we had 3 days and 2 nights to visit Refugio Tororoy, Monterredondo and Sumapaz.

We had booked a Duster 4x4 at Localiza, and did well, you need a 4x4 for Tororoy.

Our license plate number did not allow us to drive that day after 6am so we left Bogota at 5am to Guayabetal. Just before the town there are restaurants and stalls for truckers and buses for 350m selling cakes baked in banana leaves, and arepas with cheese, perfect for picnics. The Hotel Restaurant Guayabetal is along this noisy road, we took a room at the back on the river side, simple but very correct at 40000 (8€) per night. The women are very friendly, and prepared our thermos in the evening for our morning coffee. On the advice of the locals, we parked the car at night in the central square of the town, where there are cameras.

Once our bags were in the room, we headed to **Refugio del Tororoy**, which had several birds from our lifelist. We had no info, and followed the road to the GPS point. After Guayabetal take the roundabout on the left 4.212543 -73.811649 and 1st exit, then left at 4.211894 -73.81066, follow the track, on the right at point 4.214404 -73.807425, the refugio is at 8km still straight on.

We had not informed them of our arrival, and the family was very surprised to see us; it was 9am, immediately the son, Yersson, told us that there was still a chance to see the Cundinamarca Antpitta at the feeding station and we quickly went there and there she was. As Yersson was already guiding a group, we followed his father, Ariel, along the paths in search of our targets. And we booked lunch.

After lunch, we followed Yersson and his group on the road back down and made some productive stops. Before leaving we paid 180000 for the whole thing, entrance, guiding and meal. We recommend contacting them before you go to make sure it is not too crowded, WhatsApp +57 300 4259029. They are an extremely friendly family and Yersson is a very good guide. It is possible to camp, which is a good idea.

MONTERREDONDO (31/01)

As Yersson had seen and heard some Schwartz Anthrush in an unvisited forest situated on a ridge east of Monterredondo road, he suggested that he contact a friend who is not a birder but who knows this forest and the bird. We spent the whole morning there and heard the bird which refused to show itself. The access is not easy without a local, so there is no need to describe it.

In the afternoon we went on the road to Monterredondo (in fact the road from Monterredondo to San Juanito) and made stops, in particular to find the Brown-breasted Parakeet, in vain.

Our last morning, before taking the road to Sumapaz (drive 2h30), we returned there from 6am to 7:30am, without seeing the parakeet.

SUMAPAZ NP (1/02)

Arrived at 9am, our disappointment was big when we realized that there was no way, all being barricaded, and that the birding is done from the dusty road with a consequent passage of trucks.

Different stops as soon as there was the possibility to move away from the roadside, or when there was a view on lagoons; we easily found the Apolinar Wrens, who answered in group as soon as we passed the sound of the Pale-bellied Tapaculo. We thought we were going to miss the Green-bearded Helmetcrest when we saw it on our way out; we were back in Bogotá in the afternoon.