

The Yucatan and Cozumel

Island and Mainland Endemics, Mayan History and Culture, Cenotes, and Flamingoes

Mark Pretti Nature Tours, L.L.C. and the Golden Gate Audubon Society

January 26 - February 4, 2024

Harboring about ten percent of Earth's biodiversity, Mexico is one of the most biologically rich countries in the world. During this journey, we'll explore and learn about some of that richness as we visit Isla Cozumel and the Yucatan Peninsula. Though the region is well known as a popular resort destination, what's often overlooked are its extensive tracts of native forest and its impressive diversity of flora and fauna.

In addition to rainforest, lagoons, mangroves, beaches, cenotes, and coral reefs, the area is of course rich in Mayan culture.

We begin on Isla Cozumel, a tropical island which retains almost 90% of its native forest cover. From our home base at the very nice Villas El Encanto, we'll make special efforts to find two island endemics, Cozumel vireo and Cozumel emerald. We'll also search for some elusive Caribbean specialties including western spindalis, Caribbean elaenia, and white-crowned pigeon, several endemic subspecies such as the "golden" race of yellow warbler, and regional endemics such as black catbird, Yucatan vireo and rose-throated tanager.

After a short ferry ride to the mainland, we'll head to the Tulum area where we'll stay at Casa Mango, a lovely lodge surrounded by excellent forest and well away from the tourist crowds. Here we'll look for many species, including black-headed and gartered trogons, long-billed gnatwren, yellow-lored parrot, northern bentbill, Yucatan woodpecker, wedge-tailed sabrewing, Yucatan flycatcher, orange oriole, and Yucatan jays which are near daily visitors to the yard. We'll visit nearby Punta Laguna (a forest reserve with Geoffrey's spider monkey and black howler monkey as well as great birds), Cenote Mool Ich (one of the

least known cenotes in the area), and also the scenic Mayan ruins of Tulum where we'll take a guided tour.

From Casa Mango, we head a short way northwest to Valladolid and the historic Hacienda San Miguel. We'll make a day trip north to Ria Lagartos for a boat tour in a reserve famous for its breeding American flamingoes. Open water, mangroves, and mudflats provide habitat for waders, shorebirds, skimmers, common black hawk, and many others. In the adjacent cactus scrub, a unique habitat in the region, we'll look for two Mexican endemics, Yucatan wren and Mexican sheartail.

From Hacienda San Miguel, we'll visit two important Mayan sites, Ek Balam and Chitzen Itza. Ek Balam is a site off the beaten path while Chitzen Itza is perhaps the most impressive site in the Mayan world.

In addition to guided tours at each site, we'll be looking for turquoise-browed and Lesson's motmots, black-throated bobwhite, ocellated turkey, white-bellied and white-browed wrens, rufous-browed peppershrike, bright-rumped Attila, blue bunting, ferruginous pygmy-owl, white-fronted parrot, and many more.

While seeing and learning about many of the region's birds, we'll also spend time learning about general ecology and natural history with stories about plants, insects, reptiles, amphibians, and mammals. The Yucatan is an easily reached destination with good infrastructure, easy access to many habitats, and many warm, talented people who help put together a memorable trip.

Led by naturalist and bird guide Mark Pretti, the cost will be about \$3650 per person, double occupancy, starting in Cozumel and ending in Cancun, and includes all lodging, meals, guides, GGAS administration fee, and ground transportation. The single supplement will be about \$550. Limited to 8. For more information, contact Mark at mpnaturetours1@gmail.com

Itinerary for Birding and Natural History in The Yucatan and Cozumel

January 26 - February 4, 2024

Mark Pretti Nature Tours, L.L.C.

A brief note about the itinerary. The Yucatan is a big place, and there are many travel options in terms of routes and lodging. As with all of my trips, this route has been designed to optimize our field time and exposure to the main habitat types with the minimum amount of driving time. We'll see impressive ruins, stay in unique lodges away from large crowds of tourists, enjoy very good food, and have a chance to see all of the area's endemic birds as well as hundreds of other species. **Please keep in mind that the trip begins in Cozumel and ends in Cancun.**

Day 1 – Jan. 26 - Arrive in Cozumel

Arrive at the Cozumel International Airport (CZM), which is small and easily managed. Just before you exit the main arrivals door, there will be a booth for airport shuttle/taxi tickets. This is the ONLY transport service from the Cozumel airport. The shared shuttle to Villas El Encanto costs about 100 pesos or \$5 - 6 US. You can also hire a private van for about 250 pesos or \$12 - 15 US. The address for Villas El Encanto is Calle 21 Sur No. 44, between Rafael Melgar and Avenida 5a, Colonia Andres Quintana Roo, and the phone number is 52 987 113 3318. The Villas are two blocks to the south of the large Chedraui Supermarket near the coast.

Please see the “Travel to and from Mexico” section on page 7 for arrival information. For some people, it's more convenient to fly into Cancun from where you can take a bus or taxi to Playa del Carmen and then the ferry to Cozumel.

We'll spend two nights, Jan. 26 and 27, at Villas El Encanto. We'll have excellent catered dinners on the hotel patio both nights. Prior to departure, I'll be in touch with arrival times within the group for possible taxi sharing. **We'll meet at 6:30 PM on the patio and have dinner at 7 PM.**

Villas El Encanto is a very nice place with a nice garden, hot water showers, free wifi and purified water (from a faucet or large bottle with a filter in the shared kitchen on the ground floor of each building), a small pool with lounge chairs, and air conditioning.

You'll be pleased to know that most people involved in tourism on Cozumel and the Yucatan speak very good English.

Day 2 – Jan. 27 - Cozumel

After breakfast at 7:00 AM, we'll head east about 25 minutes to San Gervasio, the only significant Mayan ruin site on the island. Here, where there is very good forest and some good trails, we'll look for most of the island's specialties, all of which have been seen here. Hopefully we'll find Cozumel vireo and Cozumel emerald, the two island endemics. We'll also look for Caribbean elaenia, green-breasted mango, western spindalis, rose-throated tanager, black catbird, Yucatan vireo, several wintering migrants such as American redstart and Magnolia warbler, and

rufous-browed peppershrike. Though the ground is flat at the ruin site, there can be exposed limestone surfaces which can be slippery and uneven.

Please note that at San Gervasio as well as at other Mayan Ruin sites, there are camera restrictions and they do not allow large lenses. The exact size allowed can vary depending on which employee is in charge that day. So we need to be as flexible as possible. At San Gervasio, we usually check at the desk then leave whatever cameras we cannot take in with our driver in the locked van.

We'll take a picnic lunch with us today and eat near the ruins. Afterward, we'll drive about ten minutes to Mayan Bees, an interesting place where they demonstrate how Mayan people still cultivate native, honey-making Mellipona bees. We'll then return to San Gervasio to take a guided tour of about an hour. Finally we'll drive north to the island's sewage treatment plant which can be a productive spot. There are usually many warblers here including palm, yellow-throated, yellow-rumped, Magnolia, northern waterthrush, and American redstart. This is also just about the only place on the island (and in ALL of Mexico) where smooth-billed ani can sometimes be found. Northern jacana and ruddy crane are also possible. We'll return to Villas El Encanto for a break and then another catered dinner on the patio at 7 PM

Day 3 – Jan. 28 - Cozumel to Casa Mango

After breakfast at 7:00 AM, we'll return to San Gervasio or another nearby spot, hoping to see any specialties that we missed previously. We'll return to Villas El Encanto to have lunch and pack our bags before heading to the ferry pier where we'll take the 1-hour ferry to Playa del Carmen. We'll have porters to help carry our luggage several blocks to meet our driver, Jose Cabrera, and drive south for about two hours to Casa Mango where we'll spend three nights, Feb. 7, 8, and 9. We should arrive with time for a walk in the well-forested neighborhood before dinner.

Casa Mango is a special spot in the forest with nicely done clean cabanas (all different), hot water, fans, purified water and free wifi. They do not have air conditioning which is not needed as it cools off nicely at night. Please note that the cabins are nice but **on the rustic side**. There are very good birds on the grounds and in the neighborhood.

Though it varies from year to year, please note that the Casa Mango/Punta Laguna area can have chiggers and that some people react strongly to them. Please see the notes on page 11 regarding prevention measures.

Day 4 and 5 – Jan. 29 and 30 – Tulum Area / Casa Mango

We'll have two full days to enjoy the Tulum area, which, in addition to the town and rather crowded and well-developed beach area, has loads of excellent forest with almost no people. (Please note that most of the birds mentioned for each site we'll visit in the area can be found at almost all of the other sites.)

On our first full day in the area, after our 7:00 AM breakfast, we'll start with a morning walk right from the lodge where there is good, moist evergreen forest. Here we may find black-crowned and masked tityras, long-billed gnatwren, gartered and black-headed trogons, white-fronted and yellow-lored parrots, green-backed sparrow, rose-throated tanager, stub-tailed spadebill, greenish elaenia, yellow-backed and yellow-tailed orioles, and many other species. It can be a rich site. We'll have a break before lunch before heading to the Tulum ruins, about 35 minutes away, where we'll take a guided tour of about 1.5 hours. While the ruin site is one of the most unique in the Mayan world with several unusual structures, what often stands out most are the views of the blue Caribbean. There are also birds, including hooded oriole, Couch's kingbird, Yucatan jay, and flocks of indigo buntings. **Please note that most of the site is in the open without shade, and if the sun is out, it can be pretty warm. Sun protection, a full water bottle, maybe an umbrella, and pacing yourself are very important. This will also be true at the other Mayan sites we'll visit.**

On our second day, after breakfast at 6:00 AM, we'll drive about 40 minutes north to Punta Laguna, a 130,000-acre nature reserve protected by a local Mayan community. While the natural lake (with least and pied-billed grebes, limpkin, and snail kite) is beautiful, so too, is the forest which has both black howler and Geoffrey's spider monkeys (both uncommon). Birds here include Carolina (white-browed) and spot-breasted wrens, bright-rumped attila, northern bentbill, sepia-capped flycatcher, yellow-olive flycatcher, blue bunting, yellow-tailed oriole, lesser greenlet, and, if we're lucky enough to encounter an army ant swarm, several woodcreepers (ruddy, tawny-winged, and northern barred), and both red-throated and red-crowned ant-tanagers. After our visit, we'll return to the Casa for lunch and a break. **Please note that part of the trail at Punta Laguna has rocky steps. There is nothing steep, but it is uneven and a walking stick may be helpful for some people.**

In the afternoon we'll drive about 40 minutes to Cenote Mool Ich, an out-of-the-way spot that usually receives very few visitors. We'll walk down the spiral staircase into this interesting cenote, visit a nearby grotto, and then spend some time walking in the forest. On our return to Casa Mango, we'll stop at Laguna Coba. In the marshy vegetation that surrounds the lake, we'll look for two elusive birds, ruddy crake (which we've seen several times) and spotted rail (which we've only heard). Dinner at Casa Mango.

Day 6 – Jan. 31 – Casa Mango to Valladolid / Hacienda San Miguel

After breakfast at 7:00 AM, we'll spend a few hours walking through the forest next to the lodge. Hopefully we might add several new species, include several hummingbirds (wedge-tailed sabrewing, buff-bellied hummingbird, Canivet's and white-bellied emeralds), thicket tinamou, orange and Altamira orioles, Yucatan flycatcher, mangrove vireo, northern bentbill, Yucatan and brown jays, and roadside hawk.

We'll have lunch about noon, before making the 1.5-hour drive to Valladolid. We may make a short stop again at Laguna Coba or Punta Laguna on the way. We'll be at the **Hacienda San Miguel for three nights – Jan. 31, and Feb. 1, and 2.**

Hacienda San Miguel is a historic property in the forest with nicely done clean rooms with hot water, fans, purified water, a small pool, and free wifi. Please note that there is a one-hour time change between the states of Quintana Roo (where Cancun and Tulum are) and Yucatan (where Valladolid is). It's one hour earlier in Yucatan at the Hacienda San Miguel.

Day 7 – Feb. 11 – Valladolid area to Ria Lagartos

Today we have an early start, leaving at 5 AM with a packed breakfast as we make the 2.5-hour drive to Ria Lagartos, an estuarine nature reserve famous for its American flamingoes. Before arriving at the lagoon itself, we'll make a short stop in the dry coastal scrub where two Mexican endemics, Yucatan wren and Mexican sheartail, can be found. Hopefully we'll have good luck with these two species and other specialties of the area including lesser roadrunner and black-throated bobwhite (neither of which are easy). We'll then continue to the lagoon for a 2.5-hour boat trip. We can sometimes get fairly close to the flamingoes (whose numbers can vary greatly between many hundreds or just a handful) and will also enjoy gulls (laughing gull is common but we sometimes see lesser black-backed), terns, frigatebirds, waders, shorebirds, common black hawk, and others. After lunch at the Restaurante Ria Maya (where Mexican Sheartail comes to the feeders !), we'll return to the Hacienda where we'll take a break before dinner at 6 PM.

Day 8 – Feb. 12 – Chitzen Itza

This morning we'll have breakfast at 6:00 AM followed by a walk on the Hacienda property where the semideciduous forest is home to green jay, rufous-browed peppershrike, white-eyed and mangrove vireos, golden-fronted and Yucatan woodpeckers, and gray-throated chat. We'll then head west about 40 minutes to Chitzen Itza, perhaps the most dramatic archeological site in the Mayan world. At Chitzen Itza, we'll do a short walk in the dry forest, have lunch, see a planetarium presentation on Mayan mythology, and then take a guided tour of the ruins. We'll also have a little time for shopping (they have a great chocolate shop). We'll return to Hacienda San Miguel for a break and dinner at 6 PM

Please note that there is quite a bit of open space and therefore quite a bit of sun exposure at the ruins. We'll do our best to stay in shaded areas but good sun protection and a full water bottle will be important. This is perhaps the most visited site in the Yucatan, and it can seem pretty crowded after our stays at Casa Mango and Hacienda San Miguel.

Day 9 – Feb. 3 – Valladolid and Ek Balam to Cancun

After breakfast at 6:00 AM, we'll drive about 40 minutes to the Mayan site of Ek Balam (which means black jaguar). We'll arrive at the site and start with a bird walk on the outer edges of the property, where almost no tourists go, looking for black-headed and grayish saltators, turquoise-browed and Lesson's motmots, bright-rumped attila, up to six species of oriole (orange, yellow-backed, yellow-tailed, Altamira, hooded, and orchard), ivory-billed and olivaceous woodcreepers, green-backed sparrow, ovenbird, hooded warbler, white-eyed vireo, golden-olive woodpecker, and many others. We'll then continue for about 1 hour for a guided tour of the site which has one of the most impressive and pristine original carvings in the Mayan

world. We'll return to the Hacienda for lunch at noon before making the 2-hour drive to Cancun where we'll be at the Courtyard Marriot for our final group dinner and the night. **(It will be one hour later in Cancun).**

The Courtyard Marriot is a modern hotel with good service, nice rooms, a pool, air conditioning, free wifi, and a good restaurant.

Day 10 – Feb. 4 – trip ends in Cancun

The buffet breakfast at the Marriot, which begins at 6 AM, is included in the trip cost. The hotel has a free airport shuttle that departs every 30 minutes, and it's about 10 - 15 minutes to the airport. Please note that there are three terminals at the Cancun airport. Though it may be indicated on your ticket, Terminal 3 is usually the one for international flights to the U.S. (United, Delta, and American).

If you have a late afternoon flight, you can consider a visit to the nearby Museo Maya de Cancun about 15 minutes away. The courtyard Marriot has a shuttle that takes guests to the nearby Omni Cancun Resort where they use the beach. The Museo is right next door and the shuttle will take you even if you did not purchase a day pass for the resort.

The style of this trip is designed to provide a high quality experience of seeing, enjoying and learning about the birds, wildlife and general natural and cultural history of the Yucatan. Although we'll be doing a good amount of birding and may see about 165 - 190 species, we'll also spend time enjoying and learning about tropical ecology, plants, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and the Maya people. We'll also make time to relax and just enjoy the beauty and tropical ambiance.

In November, participants will receive an information packet with a reference list, species lists, general information (about Mexico, flora and fauna, and some of the sites we'll visit), a map, payment information, and release and medical information forms.

Additional Trip Information

Travel to and from Mexico – You'll need to make your own travel arrangements to get to and from Mexico. **Please keep in mind that the trip begins in Cozumel and ends in Cancun.** Cozumel is served by several airlines from the U.S., and Cancun is a major destination with many carriers offering direct flights back to the U.S. **The trip officially begins in Cozumel with dinner and lodging at Villas El Encanto on Friday, Jan. 26.**

Certainly the easiest travel option is to fly in to Cozumel and back from Cancun. United has a direct flight from Houston to Cozumel, and American has a direct flight from Dallas.

Another option you can consider, if it works better for you, is a round trip to and from Cancun. Depending on your arrival time in Cancun, you can either overnight there or continue on to

Cozumel. From Cancun to Cozumel, it appears that you now have only one option which is to take the ADO shuttle bus (or hire a private taxi) from the CUN airport for one hour south to Playa del Carmen, then catch the 45-minute ferry to Cozumel (it runs every hour until about 9 PM) for a total cost of about \$50 per person US.

On our last day, Sunday, Feb. 4, the Courtyard Marriot has a free shuttle to the Cancun airport leaving every 30 minutes.

If for some reason you are delayed, please try to get a message to me by doing the following. Send me an email and please copy Villas El Encanto (mpnaturetours1@gmail.com and info@villaselencantocozumel.com) or send me a whatsapp message at +15202265446. Also, if you can please try to call my home in Arizona and leave a message with my wife Karen, who can get in touch with me – 520-803-6889.

Early Arrivals – If you choose to arrive early, there are numerous lodging options in Cozumel, but it will be most convenient to stay at the Villas El Encanto which is small and has a nice garden, a gift shop, and a small pool. **Please note however, that they do not serve food.** A large Chedraui supermarket is within walking distance (about 3 blocks), and the hotel has small shared kitchens (with a refrigerator, stove, microwave, and kitchenware) on the ground floor of each unit. Immediately across the street is a good breakfast and lunch place, La Cocina de Silvia (they open at 7:30 AM and are closed on Saturdays). There are several restaurants nearby, including Rolandi's, an Italian place with a nice deck overlooking the Caribbean, about a 15-minute walk away.

On Cozumel, there are many boat trips for snorkeling or diving. There is some decent snorkeling right off the shore within walking distance of the hotel and numerous small tour operators that will take you out in a boat to these nearby spots. A little further afield are Palancar, Colombia, and Cielo Reefs, all of which are adjacent to each other and usually included in half or full-day trips that depart by boat from various locations, including the passenger ferry terminal. The staff at Villas El Encanto can help you with day trip arrangements.

Contact Information - The following numbers and email addresses are contacts while we're traveling in Mexico;

Villas El Encanto, Cozumel, Ana Martin – 011 52 987 113 3318,
info@villaselencantocozumel.com

Casa Mango, Tulum, Adone – 011 52 984 106 5053

Hacienda San Miguel, Valladolid – Gema Saucedo, 011 52 998 148 3731, gema@gc-bh.com

Courtyard Marriot, Cancun – 011 52 998 287 2200

Trip cost – the cost of the trip is all inclusive (lodging, meals, entrance fees, transportation, GGAS administration fee) except for some alcoholic drinks (these are included the 1st, 2nd, and last nights), laundry, gifts, and any tips you want to leave (see below). **Please note that Villas El**

Encanto, Casa Mango, Hacienda San Miguel, and the Courtyard Marriot accept credit cards. You will need to pay in cash at all or most rural craft shops. Mexican pesos or US dollars are fine **The trip officially begins in Cozumel with dinner and lodging at Villas El Encanto on Friday, Jan. 26 and ends after breakfast at the Courtyard Marriot on Sunday, Feb. 4.**

Tips – all tips for Mexican staff are included in your trip cost. If, however, you feel that an individual has provided exceptional service, and many of them do, you are welcome to give a tip. Please keep in mind that our service providers are poorer than us and can only dream of making such a trip as we'll be enjoying.

Valuables – While Villas El Encanto has lock boxes in the rooms, **our other locations do not.** Please be sure to do what you are most comfortable with in regard to your valuables. I have mine locked in my suitcase in my locked room. Some people prefer to keep them on their person.

Food & Water - The food is excellent throughout the trip. **Please note that because we will be in slightly remote spots for most of the trip and because we will be a large group, we will be pre-ordering most of our meals. I'll be in touch before the trip with details, and we shouldn't have any problems accommodating special diets.....but please keep in mind that options might be a little limited and we need to be flexible.** Every lodge has free purified water available in the main lodge to refill your bottle, and we'll always have water in the van. All water and ice served in the dining areas is purified and fine to drink.

Health – There are no immunizations required for visiting Mexico. You should check with your doctor regarding any prophylactic medications.

Trip Difficulty – You should be in good physical condition for this 10-day trip. **Overall, most of the walking (and almost all of the Yucatan) is fairly easy and flat,** and I'd rate this as one of my easier trips physically. The longest distances are about 1.5 miles, and there will be times when you will be on your feet for 2-4 hours (though usually with places to stop and sit). Climbs to the tops of Mayan temples (at Ek Balam only) are optional. **There are small stairs at some of the lodges, and there are some uneven surfaces on the trails.** **You need to be your own best judge of what is safe for you. Please don't take any unnecessary chances.**

Packing and Luggage - You're welcome to pack as you see fit for the trip, but for whatever it's worth, we should have no cold weather, and we probably won't have any really hot weather. It can be "light jacket" cool on Cozumel and it can rain almost anywhere though showers are usually brief. So you can pack fairly light if that works for you. Many people have done this trip with just carry-on luggage. As noted below, laundry service is available at Villas El Encanto, Casa Mango, and Hacienda San Miguel.

Transportation – My good friend Jose Cabrera will be our driver for the trip and will be traveling in comfortable, air-conditioned vans with plenty of room for luggage. Almost all of our drives will be on flat, straight roads in good condition. There will be a few short dirt roads with some small bumps on Cozumel and near Rio Lagartos. Driving distances are noted in the itinerary, with the longest drives being our 2-hour trip from Valladolid to Ria Lagartos and the

2.5-hour drive from Valladolid to Cancun. We can rotate seats and try to accommodate any special needs. **Though the roads are straight and flat, if you're prone to carsickness, please let me know and please be sure to bring whatever remedy you normally use.**

Shopping – There are many gift shops available during the trip, and most are of Mayan crafts.

Laundry - If you need it, laundry service is available at Villas El Encanto, Casa Mango, and Hacienda San Miguel. If you choose to wash your own clothes, the light, thin, quick-dry nylon type clothes almost always dry out over night at this time of year in the Yucatan.

Books – Like most people, I now use the Merlin App as a handy field guide. You'll want to download the Bird Pack – Mexico/Yucatan Peninsula, and I recommend that you download this **before** the trip. I may bring the plates of the Howell and Webb Mexico Bird guide and the plates for Birds of Belize. These will cover every bird possible on the route.

Luggage Labels – please have luggage labels on your bags so that lodge staff can efficiently get your bags to and from your room.

Electricity is the SAME in Mexico as it is in the states. If you have a device with a three-prong plug, you may want to bring an adaptor.

Pre and Post-Trip Opportunities – If you would like to extend your trip or arrive early, I can provide some basic recommendations and contacts for visiting other areas in the Yucatan. However, most of these are rather far afield as we'll be visiting all the main nearby sites.

Communications - Phone Calls and Internet – All lodges have phone service if you need to make calls to the U.S. All of the lodges have free wifi available, but please note that it can be slow and/or intermittent. Many participants have been able to use their smart phones, with appropriate international capability, on parts of this route, and with wifi you can use Skype.

Cameras – If you're a photographer carrying a large lens, please note that the archeological sites have varying restrictions and usually allow ONLY small (point-and-shoot or similar) cameras. This is especially true at San Gervasio on Isla Cozumel. Larger cameras are usually, but not always, fine at Tulum, Chitzen Itza, and Ek Balam.

In case of an emergency that requires getting to a medical facility, please keep in mind that we will sometimes be in slightly remote areas about an hour or two from medical facilities.

Things to Bring

You MUST bring the following items;

PASSPORT – of course it's important to have at least one or two copies kept separately.

Vaccination Card – you may or may not need this at some point. I now have one in my day pack and another with my passport (as well as several copies kept separately) all the time. I also carry multiple masks and several home testing kits for covid.

Binoculars – I recommend having your rainguards attached and having something to clean your binoculars with. A microfiber cloth (available at any eyeglass store) or a LensPen is good.

Day pack/fanny pack in which you should ALWAYS have water, sunscreen, toilet paper, and insect repellent. I find that some people like to carry as little as possible in the field, and I can understand that, but, when you think about it, an extra pound in your pack is unlikely to ruin your trip whereas dehydration, insect bites, and sunburn can, so please bring the items mentioned above and keep them in your pack. Ideally your pack will be big enough to carry raingear (poncho or umbrella) if needed.

Water bottle – **Please be sure to bring a reusable bottle.** Purified water will be available for free to refill your bottle throughout the trip. Though plastic bottles of water are available at most lodges, there is usually little or no need to use them. Please do your best to use the bottle you bring and use as little plastic as possible.

Hat for good sun protection

Sunscreen - minimum 30 SPF recommended

Sturdy walking shoes – Most of our walking will be on flat, easily managed trails. However, between walking on forest trails, amidst Mayan ruins, and getting in and out of the boat, we'll encounter some uneven and possibly slippery surfaces. Though this is the dry season, rain is possible anywhere at any time so shoes with some water resistance or waterproofing are recommended. **Wearing good walking shoes at all times will keep your feet safe and comfortable. Tevas or similar footwear are fine around the lodges.** Large, heavy hiking boots are not necessary unless you prefer that kind of support.

Insect repellent – This is the tropics and there can be biting insects, but overall there are very few biting insects, mainly some mosquitos and chiggers, along this route at this time of year. Please keep in mind that attractiveness to biting insects and subsequent reactions vary greatly from person to person. I've had groups for which biting insects were a minor issue at best and other groups in which a few individuals reacted quite strongly to certain insect bites. **Of course, biting insects are best dealt with through proper clothing – long pants and long sleeve shirts - and the careful use of insect repellent.** Please bring the repellent that works best for you. Many people I know have had very good success (especially against chiggers, which can occur but are rare on this route) by spraying or soaking their clothes before the trip with Permethrin which you can order online or get at some sporting goods stores. Though there are no guarantees, I recommend that you consider this as it is perhaps the best defense against chiggers which some people react strongly to. Though I'm probably unusual in that I don't tend to get many insect bites and don't react strongly, I've never used insect repellent in the Yucatan and I do most of the trip in shorts and a short sleeve shirt.....which is NOT a recommendation that

you should do the same but rather an attempt to give you an idea of what to expect. **If you are particularly sensitive to insect bites you should also bring an anti-itch medication that you have used before.**

Sunglasses

Raingear – poncho, light jacket, or collapsible umbrella – use what works best for you. I’ve found that a collapsible umbrella is very comfortable and effective in the warm, humid tropics. **Though January/February is the dry season, you should be prepared for rain as it can rain anywhere at any time. I always bring a collapsible umbrella and a light rainjacket (which is the only jacket I bring) for the trip. With that said, we have never been rained out of a single activity on this trip.**

Money – The only things you’ll need to pay for are some drinks, laundry, airport taxis, any tips you wish to leave, and any purchases you make. There are many crafts for sale at the various archeological sites. **All of our lodges accept credit cards and US dollars. Some rural craft shops may only accept pesos but most accept dollars.**

Perhaps the easiest way to get Mexican pesos (and usually at the best exchange rate) is to use an ATM machine – don’t forget your debit or credit card PIN. There are ATMs at the Cozumel and Cancun airports, around the town of San Miguel de Cozumel, and in the large Chedraui supermarket about 3 blocks from Villas El Encanto. Please note that occasionally an ATM may not accept your card. This is not unusual, and all you need to do is just try another machine. I always bring both a debit card and a credit card just in case. You’ll also be able to change dollars to pesos at the Cozumel airport or at one of the “Cambios” in town which are open most of the day until about 6 PM. If you pass through the Mexico City airport, they often have good rates at the easily accessed cambios.

Alarm clock – most of our days will begin between 6 and 7 AM.

Small flashlight – you will need a flashlight as some lodge grounds can be very dark at night.....and we will do a few short night walks. The small LEDs work well. Bring NEW batteries.

Patience and flexibility - Mexico is a foreign country in which we will be fortunate guests. Patience and flexibility are perhaps the most important things you can bring when traveling in any foreign land. In general we will be very comfortable with lodging, food, and transportation, but like anywhere outside the states, the customs and style of service may be different. In Mexico these differences are usually minor things, but it is important to keep them in mind and approach the experience with an open mind and enjoy learning about the Mexican culture.

You SHOULD bring;

Earplugs – I don’t expect much other than wild noises, but sometimes earplugs can be helpful.

Bathing suit – there are small pools at all locations, and there may be snorkeling opportunities on Cozumel.

Personal medications – if you are prone to allergies, have serious itching with insect bites, get migraines, etc. you should bring appropriate remedies. If you have any chronic conditions that may flare up during the trip, please be sure to bring a remedy that works for you. **We will not always have easy access to pharmacies. You should also bring some analgesic, Imodium, Pepto-Bismol, or similar remedies just in case.**

Plastic bags – I always carry a large, folded, plastic garbage bag (which takes up almost no room) in my daypack for quickly storing cameras, binoculars, etc. in case of heavy rain.

Snacks – our lodges serve three ample meals daily, and we will have snacks available in the van. If you are the type of person who enjoys or needs snacks between meals, you might want to bring some. Time between meals will be about 5-6 hours.

Toilet Paper – always good to have some in your pack when we're out in the field where there will usually be no restrooms available. **Please keep in mind that in ALL of Mexico and pretty much ALL of Latin America, your toilet paper must go in the wastebasket and NOT the toilet.**

The remaining items to bring are up to you – casual clothes are fine. Expect warm daytime temperatures, 75-80 degrees, and mild nights, about 65-70 degrees. Humidity is very mild in January/February. Cool, breathable, light-colored clothes are best for the days. Occasionally a cold front can come through, and the daily high may reach only 70 with night temperatures of about 60. A light jacket is important. **I highly recommend the quick-dry nylon travel clothes made by Ex-Officio, Columbia, etc. They are ideal for tropical warmth and humidity, they are light and cool, protect you from the sun and insects, and dry quickly. Lightweight long pants and long sleeve shirts are the best all-round clothing for the humid tropics. Some people have been fine with shorts, but this depends largely on your susceptibility to insect bites and general level of comfort.** If you have questions about what to bring, please contact me.

BIRDING – Though we'll see and learn about more than birds, the birds of Cozumel and the Yucatan are pretty exciting. We'll focus on a quality experience, observing behaviors, listening to calls and songs, and seeing how they use habitats. The following list includes some of the 360+ species of birds collectively seen on past trips along this route. As in most places, some are common, some less common, and some quite rare;

Thicket tinamou
Bare-throated tiger heron
Boat-billed heron
Wood stork
Lesser yellow-headed vulture

Common black hawk
Great black hawk
Roadside hawk
Short-tailed hawk
White-tailed hawk

Black hawk eagle
Laughing falcon
Bat falcon
Plain chachalaca
Ocellated turkey
Russet-naped (Gray-necked) wood-rail
Northern jacana
White-crowned pigeon
Red-billed pigeon
Scaled pigeon
White-tipped dove
Caribbean dove
Olive-throated parakeet
White-fronted parrot
Yellow-lored parrot
Squirrel cuckoo
Striped cuckoo
Groove-billed ani
Smooth-billed ani
Mottled owl
Ferruginous pygmy-owl
Common pauraque
Wedge-tailed sabrewing
Green-breasted mango
Canivet's emerald
Cozumel emerald
White-bellied emerald
Buff-bellied hummingbird
Cinnamon hummingbird
Black-headed trogon
Gartered (Violaceous) trogon
Lesson's (Blue-crowned) motmot
Turquoise-browed motmot
Ringed kingfisher
Belted kingfisher
White-necked puffbird
Collared aracari
Keel-billed toucan
Golden-fronted woodpecker
Yucatan woodpecker
Golden-olive woodpecker
Pale-billed woodpecker
Lineated woodpecker
Plain xenops
Tawny-winged woodcreeper
Ruddy woodcreeper

Olivaceous woodcreeper
Northern barred woodcreeper
Ivory-billed woodcreeper
Barred antshrike
Black-faced antthrush
Gray-collared becard
Rose-throated becard
Yellow-bellied elaenia
Caribbean elaenia
Greenish elaenia
Northern bentbill
Common tody flycatcher
Yellow-olive flycatcher
Eye-ringed flatbill
Stub-tailed spadebill
Tropical pewee
Yellow-bellied flycatcher
Least flycatcher
Bright-rumped attila
Great kiskadee
Boat-billed flycatcher
Social flycatcher
Tropical kingbird
Couch's kingbird
Thrushlike schiffornis
Masked tityra
Black-crowned tityra
White-collared manakin
White-eyed vireo
Mangrove vireo
Yellow-throated vireo
Yucatan vireo
Cozumel vireo
Lesser greenlet
Rufous-browed peppershrike
Green jay
Brown jay
Yucatan jay
Mangrove swallow
Cave swallow
Yucatan wren
Spot-breasted wren
Carolina (white-browed) wren
White-bellied wren
Long-billed gnatwren
Wood thrush

Clay-colored robin	Blue-black grassquit
Gray catbird	Morelet's seedeater
Black catbird	Yellow-faced grassquit
Tropical mockingbird	Green-backed sparrow
Blue-winged warbler	Cinnamon-bellied (Grayish) saltator
Magnolia warbler	Black-headed saltator
Black-throated green warbler	Western spindalis
Yellow-throated warbler	Rose-breasted grosbeak
Black-and-white warbler	Blue bunting
Worm-eating warbler	Indigo bunting
Ovenbird	Blue grosbeak
Kentucky warbler	Melodious blackbird
Hooded warbler	Altamira oriole
American redstart	Orange oriole
Palm warbler	Hooded oriole
Red-crowned ant tanager	Black-cowled oriole
Red-throated ant tanager	Yellow-backed oriole
Rose-throated tanager	Yellow-tailed oriole
Blue-gray tanager	Yellow-billed cacique
Yellow-winged tanager	Yellow-throated euphonia
Red-legged honeycreeper	Scrub euphonia

WILDLIFE – In addition to the many birds we'll see, there are several other animals we may encounter. Some of the more common species include;

MAMMALS

Great fruit-eating bat
 Greater white-lined bat
 Tent-making bat
 Collared peccary
 Common opossum
 Central American agouti
 Coatimundi
 Kinkajou
 Gray fox
 Cozumel pygmy raccoon
 Northern raccoon
 Black howler monkey
 Geoffrey's (Central American) Spider Monkey
 Deppe's squirrel
 Yucatan squirrel
 Nine-banded armadillo

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

Speckled racer
Green vine snake
Tropical ratsnake
Black-lined snake
Orange-bellied swamp snake
Mexican parrot snake
Morelet's crocodile
American crocodile
Striped basilisk
Green iguana
Black (spiny-tailed) iguana
Rosebelly lizard
Brown forest skink
House gecko
Central American ameiva
Brown anole
Rainforest toad
Marine toad