



[birdingwithme@gmail.com](mailto:birdingwithme@gmail.com)

## The Escape Route

### Looking for the fugitive free rider Martín Aquino

#### 6-day tour



Martín Aquino was the quintessential gauchito. A man born in the impoverished Uruguayan countryside by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Aquino was a natural rebel and a symbol of the resistance against the injustices of a system that had no mercy with those poor and illiterate men who from their early childhood were forced to work hard to get by.

The legend created by Aquino grew beyond his deeds. Theatre plays, radio series and popular songs made him a myth among generations who were born far after his tragic death.

*The legend makes way  
In the campfire rounds  
And in the middle of the emotion  
Aquino's shadow passes*

*La leyenda abre camino  
En las ruedas de fogón  
Y en medio de la emoción  
Pasa la sombra de Aquino*

Extract the song *El Matrero* by Los Olimareños.  
Original text by Rubén Lena.



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On this tour you will travel accompanied by a bird guide and a history guide to the east of the country, through the Cuchilla Grande Range of Hills. We will visit diverse destinations of historical and nature relevance.

We will stay at hotels with en-suite bathrooms, maid and laundry service, Wi-Fi and vegetarian/vegan optional meals, with the exception of one in which some rooms have no en-suite bathroom and Wi-Fi is possible to get only during the day.

By the end of the tour can be seen **over 180 bird species**.

### **Itinerary**

**Day 0:** Pick up at the Montevideo International Airport and transfer to Costa de Oro City (20 km / 25 min), in the Department of Canelones, at 40 kilometers to the east of the Montevideo Capital City. Your guide will be waiting for you at the beach hotel you will stay overnight to introduce you the place and the surroundings.



View of the beach in front of the hotel.



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Brief historical tour:

- Atlántida City
- House of the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda
- El Águila
- Cristo Obrero Church and the legacy of the architect Eladio Dieste



**Day 1:** After breakfast we will leave the Costa de Oro City in direction to the Cuchilla Grande Range. We will pass through several historical spots along the Route 7, also called Aparicio Saravia, which has an historical background as well.

- The Santa Lucía River: The area where Martín Aquino was born. The river source of fresh water to a million and a half inhabitants
- Fray Marcos, the twister capital of Uruguay.
- The railway to Nico Pérez and its history.

We will arrive for lunch at a ranch located at the heart of the eastern range of hills, in the Department of Lavalleja. This will be our accommodation for two nights. The ranch and its surroundings are integrated in an Important Bird Area (IBA – BirdLife International) of 640,000 hectares where endangered species find refuge. After having lunch we will go for a walk to contemplate the natural beauty of the area and do some birding until sunset.

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Landscape at the ranch.

**Day 2:** Full day birding in the IBA.

*Some birds to be seen:* Red-legged Seriema, White-tailed Hawk, Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle, White-eyed Parakeet, Squirrel Cuckoo, Crested Black-Tyrant, Diademed Tanager, Chestnut-backed Tanager, Red-crested Cardinal, Rufous-capped Antshrike, Variable Antshrike, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Gray-throated Warbling-Finch, Long-tailed Reed-Finch, Yellow-rumped Marshbird, Golden-winged Cacique.

**Day 3:** After breakfast we will take again the Route 7 heading to Melo Capital City of the Department of Cerro Largo.

Some historical topics on the way:

- Nico Pérez: former end of the rail and of government authority
- The old towns of Cerro Largo: Santa Clara de Olimar, Tupambaé
- Fraile Muerto and the death of Martín Aquino

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Left: Glaucous-blue Grosbeak. Right: Gray-throated Warbling-Finch.

Photo credits: Bill Pohley

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Close to Melo there is a region of wetlands where we will see some water birds like Roseate Spoonbill, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Striated Heron (summer migrant), Cocoi Heron, Wattled Jacana, Yellow-billed Teal, Yellow-billed Pintail, Silver Teal, Ringed Teal, Rufous-sided Crake, Plumbeous Rail, Plumbeous Ibis, Wren-like Rushbird, Sulphur-bearded Spinetail, Yellow-chinned Spinetail, Many-colored Rush-Tyrant, Sooty Tyrannulet and many others.



After birding we will check-in at an Apart Hotel where we will have lunch. In the afternoon we will go to the Biopark of Melo where we can see Capybaras, the largest rodent in the world; go for a walk along trails through native forests and look for birds like the Diademed Tanager, Glaucous-blue Grosbeak, Masked Gnatcatcher, Masked Yellowthroat, Golden-crowned Warbler, White-browed Warbler, White-spotted Woodpecker, Green-barred Woodpecker, White Woodpecker, Campo Flicker. Dinner and overnight stay at the hotel.

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**Day 4:** Early in the morning we will drive for 2 and a half hours to a special region called Paso del Centurión, by the shores of the Yaguarón River, right on the border with Brazil. This is a small village of 35 inhabitants and one of the most biodiverse spots in the country that is in process to be integrated in the National System of Protected Areas. It is an Important Bird Area where local vegetation show a clear influence of the Brazilian Atlantic Forest. This characteristic is reflected in the species of birds that can be seen which are exclusive to this environment. The entire protected area corresponds to private fields. Francisco Giudice and Laura Magallanes are a wonderful couple that owns a property in a privileged place. They left behind their city life to move into this natural reserve in 2017 starting an ecotourism project to preserve the local flora and fauna and since then, they have made important contributions to science exploring the forests and recording wildlife with trap cameras. Many new bird species to this area have been recorded by them. Once we get there they will introduce us to the area and then we will have a vegetarian homemade meal at their house.



Large-tailed Antshrike (female)  
By Francisco and Laura

Afterwards, Laura will take us for a walk to know not only the exclusive birds that are found here, but also the richness of the forest. This is one of a few areas in Uruguay where the tree species *Ilex paraguariensis* grows naturally. It is locally known as Yerba Mate due to the fact that it is massively consumed as an infusion drunk from a little calabash gourd locally known as *mate*.



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Left: Rufous Gnateater. Right: Surucua Trogon.  
Photo credits: Francisco and Laura.

Near the banks of the Yaguarón River are the ruins of the old customs offices of Paso del Centurión that were erected by the Spaniards in their attempt to control the Portuguese military intrusions and monitor the continuous contraband of cattle from their territories to the neighbor of the north. . But also, our history guide will tell us about the many important events that took place here and the many important people in the history of Uruguay that passed through this place; the Portuguese invasion in 1816, the liberating troops in 1828, the first presidency, the escape of Garibaldi from Brazil.

Paso del Centurión and its surroundings such as Cañas – one of the last vestiges of the famous Quilombolas communities – have an extremely long and rich history worth studying.

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Old customs by the shores of the Yaguarón River, Paso del Centurión.

**Day 5:** In this day we will leave Melo to go to the Crows Ravines (Quebrada de los Cuervos) Protected Area, located in the contiguous department to the south called Treinta y Tres. This is an Important Bird Area where endangered species are found, like the Straight-billed Reedhaunter, Black-and-white Monjita and Saffron-cowled Blackbird and Chestnut Seedeater. The name of the protected area refers to the vultures that nest here; the Lesser Yellow-headed, Turkey Vulture and Black Vulture. When the Spaniards saw this New World Vultures they related them to the crows they knew from Europe, so now they are referred to as crows or “cuervos”, in Spanish.

Once we arrive at the protected area we will go birding along the walking trail that ends in a viewpoint where the whole area can be appreciated from the top of the hills. We will have lunch in the posada where we will stay overnight. There is no electricity in the area, but the posada uses a generator to provide power during the day, when is also possible to get Wi-Fi. Some of the rooms have no en-suite bathrooms, but hot showers are available anytime.

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Special birds: Brown Tinamou, Least Grebe, Maroon-bellied Parakeet, Pale-vented Pigeon, Planalto Woodcreeper, Long-tailed Antshrike, Rufous Gnateater, Surucua Trogon, Ferruginous Pymy-Owl.

After lunch we will go trekking through the valleys to see the dense forest that covers the area, the waterfalls and the birds.

**Day 6:** We will leave the Crows Ravines after breakfast to take a Panoramic Route to the ocean coasts of the Department of Maldonado. Here is one of the most important wetland reserves of the country. The shores of the ocean coast



Southern Screamer  
By Bill Pohley



Spectacled Tyrant  
By Bill Pohley

and the Maldonado River are a feeding and breeding destination for many migrant birds that come from the north and south of the continent, in winter and in summer. Among the winter migrants that come from the south are the Two-banded Plover, Rufous-chested Dotterel, Austral Negrito, Orlog's Gull. The summer migrants that come from North America are the Semipalmated Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs, Common Tern, American Golden-Plover, Hudsonian Godwit. Other birds we will see are the Snowy-crowned Tern, South American Tern, Royal Tern, Black Skimmer, Black-necked Stilt, Southern Screamer, Giant Wood-Rail, Brown-and-Yellow Marshbird.

We will have lunch at a local restaurant and afterwards, our history guide will introduce us the Punta del Este and Piriapolis coastal cities and tell us about their stories.

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*The hand* in Punta del Este represents the emergence of humanity from nature.  
Chilean artist Mario Irarrázabal.

We will finish the tour by the end of the day when we will leave you at the Montevideo International Airport or in the place previously agreed.

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