

ECUADOR'S GUANGO LODGE

# HUMMINGBIRD HEAVEN

Sited in the Andean foothills and close to Quito, this beautiful temperate forest private property is a destination not to be missed by hummingbird lovers



Guango's mountainous, cool, temperate forests in the Andean foothills - a veritable paradise for orchids and hummingbirds. On the opening spread, an in-flight portrait of the stunning Sword-billed hummingbird *Ensifera ensifera*, a rare species which is seen regularly on the lodge's grounds.



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*G*uango Lodge, located at 2,700 meters above sea level, is a charming tourist facility on the Ecuadorian eastern slope of the Andes, surrounded by a 300-hectare private reserve in an area classified as humid temperate forest, a habitat characterized by its stunted trees, cool climate, and stunning orchid diversity. Guango is only a short drive from the tree-line forests and treeless *paramo* zones above - only 11 kilometers down the paved Interoceanica Highway from the town of Papallacta and its hot springs, the lodge is easily reached from Quito in about 1 ½ hours. It truly is a paradise for hummingbird lovers and photographers, as seeing 14 species of hummingbirds within an hour is not uncommon, with the Sword-billed hummingbird with its uniquely long bill being particularly notable. Scenic vistas and a variety of easy trails offer visitors great opportunities to hike in a beautiful setting surrounded by forest-covered mountains. Hummingbird photography can be very fruitful here as hanging feeders adorn the gardens of the great stone lodge house, attracting spectacular species such as the Sword-billed Hummingbird, Tourmaline Sunangel and Mountain Avocetbill among many others. "Guango" in the Quichua language means "a place of great mountains that crisscross, whose waters concur to form mighty rivers in deep valleys covered by the cloud forest of the Andean slopes, under an ever-changing climate and



a typical drizzle". This combination of geographic and climatic factors makes Guango a true gateway to the rainforests to the east or west. Guango has always been a necessary stop along the traditional route from Quito to the Napo River and remains one to this day. As part of the Papallacta region, Guango is the central point between the cold forest and Andean highlands and also between the Amazonian ethnic groups and Quito. This regular stop for travelers and transport carriers for years was transformed in the mid-twentieth century into a cattle farm. Today, it is a hostel specializing in nature tourism located between the Antisana

Reserve and Cayambe-Coca National Park. Over the years, the majority of the property has remained untouched. Be it a day trip from Quito, or a few nights in a gorgeous Andean valley with towering crests and forest-blanketed slopes, Guango Lodge

provides a great getaway opportunity. Birds are an important part of Guango's fauna. Some birds of particular interest that can be seen with relative ease at Guango include the Andean Guan, Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucan, Turquoise Jay, Scarlet-bellied, Lacrimose, Buff-breasted and Hooded Mountain-Tanagers, Gray-hooded Bush-Tanager, Black-headed, Black-capped and Black-eared Hemispingus, Slaty Brush-Finch, and of course the unique stream-dwelling Torrent duck.

● <https://www.guangelodge.com/>

Long-tailed Sylph *Agelaiocercus kingii*, rio Papallacta valley, Guango, Ecuador



Chestnut-breasted coronet *Boissonneaua matthewsii*, one of the hummingbird species most commonly observed in the rio Papallacta valley at Guango, Ecuador.



Tourmaline Sunangel *Heliangelus exortis*, rio Papallacta valley, Guango, Ecuador. None of the images featured here were taken - as it usually is done in hummingbird photography - in front of cut flowers hanging in front of an artificial background lit by a multi-flash set-up. We much prefer free-hand photography on the foot.



White-bellied Woodstar *Chaetocercus mulsant*, rio Papallacta valley, Guango, Ecuador, feeding on the wing. Such actions usually last one or two seconds at the most, offering an interesting challenge to the true nature photographer who refrains from using artificial set-ups in hummingbird photography.



Frontal portrait of a Buff-tailed Coronet *Boissonneaua flavescens*.



Portrait of a Chestnut-breasted coronet *Boissonneaua matthewsii*.



Torrent duck *Merganetta armata*, rio Papallacta, Guango, Ecuador. This is a rarely observed and beautiful species which is exclusively found in fast-running, cold, rocky streams running down the slopes of the Andes.





Buff-tailed Coronet *Boissonneaua flavescens*.



Tourmaline Sunangel *Heliangelus exortis*.



Buff-winged Starfrontlet *Coeligena lutetiae*. Photographing hummingbirds in mid-flight requires a steady hand and a manageable VR-equipped zoom with a fast autofocus which performs well in low-light situations. We utilize the Tamron SP 150-600mm f/5-6.3 Di VC USD and the Nikon AF-S Nikkor 80-400mm f/4.5-5.6G VR.



Andean Guan *Penelope montagnii*, rio Papallacta valley, Guango, Ecuador.



Top, Long-tailed Sylph *Aglaiocercus kingii*; bottom left, Chestnut-crowned Antpitta *Grallaria ruficapilla*; bottom right, Tourmaline Sunangel *Heliangelus exortis*. Hummingbird species identification is often complex due to local light conditions affecting colors/iridescence and sex and age of the specimen portrayed.



A pair of male Buff-tailed Coronet *Boissonneaua flavescens*. Hummingbirds are fiercely territorial, being very prone to fast, in-flight violent fights.



Top, Collared Inca  
*Coeligena torquata*;  
left, Tourmaline  
Sunangel  
*Heliangelus exortis*;  
right, Buff-tailed  
Coronet  
*Boissonneaua  
flavescens*.





Masked Flowerpiercer *Diglossa cyanea*, found in humid montane forest and scrub in Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia. Flowerpiercers got their name from the fact that they have a sharp hook on the tip of their upper mandible which they use to slice open the base of flowers to get at the nectar.



Chestnut-breasted coronet *Boissonneaua matthewsii*.



Buff-tailed Coronet *Boissonneaua flavescens*.





White-bellied Woodstar *Chaetocercus mulsant* in mid-flight. Free-hand, on the foot photography of hummingbirds with a hand-held camera and without a tripod is much more difficult than the usual practice of sitting in front of an artificial set-up waiting for the subjects to come to the feeders, but it is also immensely more satisfying.



Torrent duck *Merganetta armata*, rio Papallacta, Guango, Ecuador - this beautiful, shy species is highly adapted to a strictly aquatic lifestyle.



Torrent duck *Merganetta armata*.



Torrent duck *Merganetta armata*.



Chestnut-breasted coronet *Boissonneaua matthewsii*, rio Papallacta valley, Guango, Ecuador.



Sword-billed hummingbird *Ensifera ensifera* - this is a largish, fast-moving, erratical species which can prove very difficult to shoot properly in a forested environment. The great majority of this bird's images are of baited individuals which are attracted to feeders positioned in front of artificial backgrounds lit by multi-flash set-ups.



Buff-tailed Coronet *Boissonneaua flavescens*. This is possibly the most commonly observed hummingbird species in the Guango Lodge grounds.



Sword-billed hummingbird *Ensifera ensifera* - hummingbirds will occasionally perch for no more than one or two seconds' time.



The Rio Papallacta valley is shrouded in a thick, humid temperate forest cut by countless brooks and waterfalls cascading from the Andes' slopes.



Guango's most iconic and beautiful hummingbird species, and certainly the most searched for - the Sword-billed hummingbird *Ensifera ensifera*. It uses its bill to drink nectar from flowers with long corollas. This is also one of the largest hummingbird species, and it is the only bird to have a beak longer than the rest of its body.