From Cloud Forest to Rainforest:

Day 1: Tuxtla Gutierrez to Jaltenango:

A night before the group will meet our guides and will review the schedule for the entire tour. Our tour leaders, Jorge Montejo and Amy McAndrews will meet you at the Hotel in Tuxtla Gutierrez. From there we will visit the Sumidero Canyon vistas, one of the deepest canyons in the world; in addition to the incredible scenery, we may see Emerald Toucanet, Lesser Roadrunner, Banded Wren, Violaceous Trogon and several other species. We will then continue to Jaltenango a small rural village on the foot of the Sierra Madre de Chiapas and famous for its excellent shade grown coffee production. Arriving time: late afternoon.

Day 2: Jaltenango to El Triunfo:

After breakfast, we will depart Jaltenango to Finca Prussia, a remote coffee village in the heart of the coffee zone and in the buffer zone of El Triunfo. This takes about 2 hours on rough four-wheel drive road. Finca Prussia is at 1030 meters (3,280 feet) elevation and we will be able to observe coffee processing. We will have a light snack/lunch at the trailhead in Punta Cafetales while listening the beautiful songs of tropical birds. After lunch we begin our 760-meter (2,500 foot) ascent to our base camp in El Triunfo. We will pass through four different vegetation zones on our 14-kilometer (9.3 mile) hike and enjoying cooler temperatures as we journey up to El Triunfo. Normally the trip takes between 3 to 4 hours depending on how many distractions we encounter, which can be considerable depending on your area of interest. The trail is well designed with many switchbacks, and with the mules carrying all the gear, the hike-in is very enjoyable. Our goal is to reach base camp by 6:00 p.m. or just before sunset. However, due to the incredible biodiversity of the area, we are often sidetracked on the way in and hike the last half-hour or so in the dark (headlamps recommended!). If it’s a clear sky, the entrance to the valley of the base camp is spectacular with the stars so close you can almost reach out and touch them. Night: Campamento El Triunfo
Day 3-4: In the Heart of El Triunfo:

From our base camp we will explore the diverse trails into the forest to seek the special birds of this region. With luck, we should see the incredible flight of resplendent quetzal (Pharomaccros mocinno). This area is also home to the horned guan, endemic to the cloud forests of Chiapas and Guatemala. With some luck and help from our guides we should be able to find tapir and jaguar tracks, and if we are really lucky see one of these elusive animals. The red brocket deer are quite abundant, and if you are very still and patient, not too difficult to encounter. In the heart of El Triunfo, it seems as if we are on another planet, far removed from our normally hectic lives. It’s a magical place with colorful butterflies, birds, and an incredible diversity of plants with blooming bromeliads everywhere. Night: Campamento El Triunfo.

Day 5: El Triunfo to Limonar:

Today, we leave the base camp and begin our hike toward the Pacific lowlands. The great news is it’s almost all downhill from here. We begin our leisurely five-hour hike at 10:00 a.m. to Limonar. As we hike over the crest of the Sierra Madres the views are spectacular as we leave the cloud forest and descend through a cypress dominated vegetation zone. We may be able to see the Pacific Ocean, and, if we are extremely lucky, we will see the azure-rumped tanager, one of the rarest tanagers in the world. We will pass by Cañada Honda, one of the only places in the world where the azure-rumped tanager is consistently spotted. Besides the great diversity of birds, Cañada Honda is also preferred habitat for the elusive jaguar and howler monkeys. We will spend time at Cañada Honda and will continue our beautiful hike through lower montane tropical forest. This vegetation zone will be the last of the five different zones that we will experience. The lower montane tropical forest has an incredible array of biodiversity. On one trip we saw four different species of mot mot in one day! We will have the afternoon to relax and explore this rich ecosystem. Night: Limonar Campground
Day 6: Limonar–Paval:

Today we continue our hike through the lower montane tropical forest, which has an incredible array of biodiversity. Once we settle down we will have the afternoon to relax and explore this rich ecosystem. Some of the many birds we should see include Blue-crowned Tody, Turquoise-browed Motmots, Violaceous and Collared Trogons, Ivory-billed Woodpecker, Red-legged Honeycreeper, and many more.  

Night: Paval Campground

Day 7: Finca Paval – Tres de Mayo-Tuxtla Gutiérrez:

We begin our final day in El Triunfo hiking out to the ejido of 3 de Mayo. This 6-mile hike is almost all downhill. As we descend it becomes hotter, so the last couple of miles can be quite challenging. From ejido 3 de Mayo we continue to the town of Mapastepec where you will have the opportunity to have lunch before our drive up to Tuxtla Gutiérrez.  

Night: Hotel of your election at Tuxtla Gutiérrez

Accomodations Information:

Hotel El Triunfo, Jaltenango: Half Star, as good as it gets in the middle of nowhere.
Campamento El Triunfo: Hot showers, flushing toilets, dining area, bunk beds, good open areas to set up tents.
Campamento Limonar: Backcountry camping, no amenities except pit toilet.
Campamento Paval: Backcountry camping, no amenities except pit toilet

PRACTICAL INFORMATION:

This is a wilderness trip to one of the world’s “last great places”. It provides the opportunity to enjoy the beauty and solitude of one of the most pristine forests and coastal areas remaining in our hemisphere. Viewing wildlife in these habitats can be frustrating. With the thick vegetative cover, one must proceed patiently and cover an area thoroughly.

This is a camping trip so you will need to bring appropriate gear. It is a rigorous trip involving a great deal of walking and climbing. There will be no backpacking since the horses will carry all our equipment. This tour should only be taken by persons who are in good health and are physically able to walk three to six miles a day on moderate to steep grades at elevations as high as 6000 feet. For those living at low elevations a minimum target health level should be the ability to cover ten flat miles in less than four hours comfortably. If you cannot do this you will jeopardize your own safety and the safety of the entire group. The trails are generally in very good condition and have been used by local people for generations. However, there is a limestone element to the Sierra Madres and loose rocks are common. Hiking boots with strong ankle support are recommended. Living conditions during the tour will be primitive with all the discomforts of camping.
WEATHER: The weather on this trip can vary from warm and sunny to cloudy, misty, foggy or rainy. Daytime temperature highs can reach into 90s in the lowlands. Precipitation is one of the key factors in creating this ecosystem and we can expect heavy rain any day even during the dry season.

DANGERS OF DEHYDRATION: Visitors are drawn to El Triunfo Biosphere Reserve by grand vistas, interesting plants and animals (our main landmark is perhaps the Quetzal), backcountry recreation and solitude. However, the allure and excitement of El Triunfo can disguise its harsh character. Walking up towards the base camp from the trailhead in Finca Prusia demands considerable effort. Humidity in the environment is extremely high reaching some cases more than 90%. High humidity combined with the high temperatures can lead to dehydration, heat exhaustion and heat stroke. Dehydration decreases mental efficiency, upon which all of our actions depend. As fluids become depleted, a person loses sensitivities to the environment and may not recognize physical hazards. Reasoning and problem-solving skills are diminished, making it difficult to make correct decisions.

Because all this, we suggest the following recommendations:

- Carry, and more important, drink plenty of water during our expedition to El Triunfo. At least 1 gallon per day per person is highly recommended.
- Shade in the forest means the difference between excessive heat gain from the radiant sun and sheer comfort.
- Our sensitive skin burns easily; it needs shade, sunscreen, sunglasses, and proper footwear. Dehydration is accelerated by exposed skin, so keep your clothing on. Wear long-sleeved, light-colored clothes. Be sure to cover your brain by wearing a hat.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is US $ XXXX per person in double occupancy from Jaltenango. This includes all food from lunch on Day 1 to dinner on Day 9; all lodging (camping) for 9 nights during the tour, ground transportation, and guide services provided by the tour leader and local guides. Fees do not include alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, passport fees, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the group does not have sufficient registration a small party supplement may have to be charged. The single supplement for this tour is US $ 100.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to a maximum of 12 participants and a minimum of 8 participants.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for the tour, please contact Claudia Virgen from ECOBIOFSERA in Tuxtla Gutierrez, Chiapas. Phone number: +52 (961) 125-1177, E-mail: cvirgen@ecobiosfera.org.mx y www.ecobiosfera.org.mx

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS: For international visitors a valid passport is required. For US citizens: a valid passport beyond your anticipated date of return to the US and tourist card (available on flight) is required. Currently no visas or immunization certificates are required. Those with foreign passports should contact the Embassy of Mexico for details.

TRANSFER AND CANCELLATION POLICY: Refunds are made according to the following schedule: If cancellation is made 60 days or more before departure date, the deposit less $100 is refundable. If cancellation is made between 59-nine and 16 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made 15 days or less before departure date, no refund is available.

RESPONSIBILITY: ECOBIOFSERA-El Triunfo and/or their Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever,
or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. They can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of the tour. Baggage is at owners risk.

**HEALTH PRECAUTIONS:** There are no recommended vaccinations for the areas we will visit. However, this is subject to change and Emerald Planet will alert you of such changes. For comprehensive information please contact the Center for Disease Control and Prevention on the Internet at www.cdc.gov or by phone at 404-332-4559. The CDC information is a comprehensive listing of any disease reported in a particular region or state. Mexico is included with Central America. We have not had any problems with diseases, and again, there are no recommended vaccinations. However, you will see some of the Mexican states where we will be traveling listed. If you have any questions please consult your physician.

**STATE DEPARTMENT TRAVEL ADVISORIES:** There has been increasing crime against tourists in Mexico City over the last few years. The most publicized has been taxi cab robberies. Authorized taxis are generally easy to find and well worth the higher fares. You do need to be careful and always have the hotel or restaurant verify that it is an authorized taxi. It is important to remember that Mexico City has a population of over 22 million people and incidents do happen. In regards to Chiapas, the political and security situation is calm and stable. Our itinerary is well outside the conflict area and we do not anticipate problems. You should familiarize yourself with State department announcements and warnings particularly for Mexico City and Chiapas. You will be updated on any significant developments that pertain to our trip.

**BAGGAGE:** All luggages must be the soft, duffel-bag type. These are more readily attached to the pack animals than the hard-case type. Remember that everything has to be transported by us or the mules, so do not plan to carry anything that will not be used. Weight is a deciding factor for this primitive camping.

**CLIMATE:** The weather at El Triunfo can vary from warm and sunny to cloudy, misty, foggy, or rainy. At night, temperatures sometimes get low as 5 degrees Celsius (around 36 F). Daytime highs range from 70 degrees (F) at El Triunfo to 90 degrees (F) in the lowlands. We can experience heavy rain, even during the dry season (January-May). During the rainy season, the months of September and October are the heaviest (for obvious reasons, we try to avoid expeditions during these two months).
About El Triunfo’s Tour Leaders:

**Jorge Montejo:** Born in Yucatan, Mexico, Jorge developed a passion for nature at a young age exploring around his hometown of Merida. He began to bird seriously while attending the University of Veracruz where he received his B.Sc. in Biology. It was also during his time in university that Jorge and several friends "discovered" the world-renowned River of Raptors in central Veracruz. Since the ‘90s he has led birding tours in southern Mexico and directed birding workshops throughout Mexico and Central America.

In Jorge’s words: To have the opportunity to help Ecobiosfera is a great honor, and also a great responsibility, due to the beauty and importance of the millenary woods of El Triunfo. This is one of the most amazing and magical places on earth, and help to its conservation is a work that has to be done by a team of people with the same common goal: conservation.

**Amy McAndrews:** Born and raised in Kingston, Ontario, Amy has been birding for as long as she can remember. Some of her earliest memories include solo explorations at a local conservation area using dad’s binoculars and an old eastern Peterson guide. After graduating from Queen’s University with an Honours degree in Biology, she left Kingston to travel, work, and with a craving to see new birds. After a brief trip to Mexico in the fall of 2000 it was love at first sight and she vowed to return, ultimately moving to Xalapa, Veracruz in 2004.

According to Amy Chiapas is an amazing and beautiful place to explore, with many wild places remaining within its borders. The preservation of these last wild places is a great challenge and gratefully there are groups like Ecobiosfera to rise to the occasion. Their work in El Triunfo is to be commended and they will hopefully continue for years to come so El Triunfo will remain as it is now for all to someday visit.