



VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

ITINERARY

BELIZE: A RELAXED & EASY TOUR

A Special Departure for Houston Audubon

MARCH 20–27, 2025

©2024



Agami Heron © Michael O'Brien

On this trip, arranged exclusively for members of Houston Audubon, participants will experience the richness of birds and habitats of Belize, a tiny nation in northern Central America revered as a powerhouse of biodiversity. Based in two choice locations, we will seek the special birds of the region and a wonderful assortment of more widely occurring species, plus a range of wintering Neotropical songbirds.

The two sites from which we will base our activities are very different, and together sample much of this charming country's diverse habitats. In both areas, our accommodations are very comfortable—ranging from standard to very good—and our schedule will be flexible enough to accommodate those who wish for longer periods of “down time.”

At Bird's Eye View Lodge in rural Crooked Tree Village, we will explore the lagoons, pine forest, and savanna that dominate much of the landscape of northeastern Belize. At Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary, a boat ride through the main lagoon may produce such exciting birds as Boat-billed and Agami herons, Jabiru, Black-collared Hawk, Russet-naped Wood-Rail, and American Pygmy Kingfisher. Nearby pine forest and cashew orchards host a long list of birds, including the stunning Yucatan Jay, along with Yellow-lored Parrot, Canivet's Emerald, Yucatan Woodpecker, and Yucatan Flycatcher. We will also tour the impressive Maya ruins of Altun Ha, dating from the Middle- and Late-classic period (500–900 A.D.)



American Pygmy Kingfisher © Michael O'Brien

From Crooked Tree we will relocate a short distance to Lamanai Outpost Lodge, situated on a bluff above the tranquil New River Lagoon, and adjacent to another spectacular Maya ruin. Here we will experience some of the finest forest birding in Belize. The diversity of birds here is fabulous, with almost 400 species recorded within a three-mile radius of the lodge. We should have regular encounters with such interesting and dazzling species as Gartered and Slaty-tailed trogons, White-whiskered Puffbird, Keel-billed Toucan, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, and Barred Antshrike, and we'll also seek such specialties as Tody Motmot and Black-throated Shrike-Tanager. During siesta time, an eye on the gardens and flowering trees right outside our cabañas could produce Long-billed Hermit, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Spot-breasted Wren, Black-cowled Oriole, Blue Bunting, Yellow-throated Euphonia, and migrant warblers. One of the real pleasures of staying at Lamanai is having access to the river. A cocktail cruise to watch the sun set over the ruins and an evening spotlight safari to look for nightjars, potoos, and other birds along the river will be simply delightful.

Guiding this trip will be the dynamic husband and wife team, Michael O'Brien and Louise Zemaitis from Victor Emanuel Nature Tours. Together, we'll gain exposure to the marvelous birdlife and other natural history features of this special part of the world.

We are pleased to announce that a portion of the proceeds go toward the support of Houston Audubon.



March 20, Day 1: Arrivals in Belize City. Participants should arrive in Belize City today at Philip S. W. Goldson International Airport (airport code BZE). Upon collecting bags, participants will be met by one of the group leaders or a representative of Bird's Eye View Lodge and transferred to the lodge in Crooked Tree village, about 40 minutes north, where a room has been reserved in your name.

Our trip begins with a welcome meeting and orientation at 5:30 p.m. in the lounge near the front desk. Our gathering provides guests the opportunity to meet fellow travelers and trip leaders, who will outline the events of the coming days. Dinner will follow. If time permits, we suggest arriving a day early to allow for potential flight delays. VENT will be happy to assist with any additional lodging arrangements should you choose to arrive early.

NIGHT: Bird's Eye View Lodge, Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary

March 21, Day 2: Crooked Tree: Morning Boat Trip; Afternoon in Pine-Savannas. Established in 1984 with the cooperation of the Belize Audubon Society, the government of Belize, and local villagers, Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary is a 12,600-acre network of lagoons, swamps, pine-savanna, and mango and cashew orchards surrounding the village of Crooked Tree in Belize's northern coastal plain. The wetlands here form a keystone ecosystem of such significance that in 1988 it received RAMSAR status as a wetland of international importance.

The key to Crooked Tree is water. The lagoons that comprise the bulk of the sanctuary are shallow and elongated. Water levels in the lagoons rise and fall according to the wet-dry cycle, but at critical times are the only places in the region with water after the surrounding areas have gone seasonally dry. It is the location of these lagoons near the Belize River by which they are sustained. In most years the river floods during the rainy season. It is the overflow created by flooding that is the source of water for the mosaic of streams and lagoons of Crooked Tree. As the dry season arrives in December, rainfall plummets and the water levels in the lagoon start to recede. The receding waters concentrate fish and other prey items, which draw hundreds, if not thousands, of birds to the

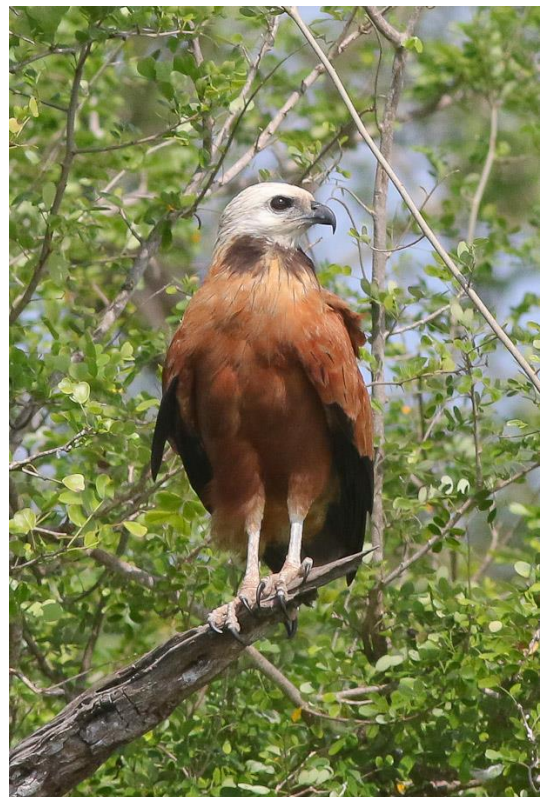
harvest. Our visit is timed for peak productivity. Depending on water levels, we should be treated to a series of amazing spectacles.



Jabirus at Crooked Tree Lagoon © Michael O'Brien

From our lodge overlooking the Northern Lagoon, we should see a wide spectrum of birds including Limpkin, Northern Jacana, Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, Snail Kite, and Great Black-Hawk. Our activities will begin with a relaxing morning boat ride on the lagoon, possibly all the way to Black Creek, through Logwood-edged waterways in search of birds and other wildlife. Likely here are stunning Russet-naped Wood-Rails, elusive Sungrebes, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, the rare and highly-sought Agami Heron, Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned night-herons, Boat-billed Heron, Black-collared Hawk, the tiny American Pygmy Kingfisher, Rufous-breasted Spinetail, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Yellow-billed Cacique, and Yellow-tailed Oriole.

In addition to these prizes, we will give special attention to locating and observing Jabirus. This huge stork, at five feet in height, is among the tallest birds in the Americas (only the Greater Rhea of southern South America is taller), and with a nine-foot wingspan is second only to the Andean Condor as the largest flying bird in the Western Hemisphere. In Belize, Jabirus breed in November and raise their young through the winter and spring months. They are always found around water, where favored prey items include frogs, fish, snakes, snails, and a variety of invertebrates. Depending on the year, Crooked Tree can be a premier place to see Jabirus as they converge on the drying



Black-collared Hawk © Michael O'Brien

lagoons to gorge on vulnerable prey. Under ideal conditions, it is not uncommon in March to see a dozen or more individuals in a morning. Also here are Wood Storks, a much smaller species, but a remarkable bird in its own right.

After lunch and a break, we will explore nearby cashew orchards and pine-savanna in search of several Yucatan specialties such as Yellow-lored Parrot, Yucatan Woodpecker, Yucatan Flycatcher, and dapper Yucatan Jays. In this birdy area, we should expect constant entertainment by various parrots, flycatchers, warblers, tanagers, and other species. Common birds here include Pale-vented Pigeon, White-fronted Parrot, Great Kiskadee, Vermilion Flycatcher, Brown Jay, Gray-breasted Martin, Mangrove Swallow, Clay-colored Thrush, Tropical Mockingbird, Cinnamon-bellied Saltator, Melodious Blackbird, and Hooded Oriole.



Yucatan Jay © Michael O'Brien

March 22, Day 3: Altun Ha and Crooked Tree. This morning we'll journey further afield to Altun Ha, an archaeological site from the Maya Classic period.

Compared to the larger, better-known Maya sites in Mexico and northern Central America, Altun Ha is not an especially large site, yet its appeal lies in the fact that it has been significantly excavated and restored. With a local guide we will tour the site and admire the plazas and temples that date from the Classic period (400–900 A.D.), when Altun Ha reached its zenith as an intermediary city on the trade route between the coast and larger cities in the interior.

Altun Ha is also a very good place to see birds, and in the couple of hours we'll spend here, we'll scan the sky for soaring King Vulture and Black Hawk-Eagle, and watch the treetops for a variety of interesting birds such as Olive-throated Parakeet, Boat-billed and Piratic flycatchers, Masked Tityra, Red-legged Honeycreeper, and Black-cowled Oriole.

NOTE: Altun Ha serves as a popular destination for day excursions offered by the large cruise ships that come to Belize City several times a week. Depending on the ship arrival schedule, our visit to the site may require an early breakfast and early departure time from the lodge in order to enjoy the site before the large crowds arrive.

Our relaxing lunch at a nearby restaurant will feature authentic Belizean cuisine in a birdy environment. In the afternoon we'll return to Crooked Tree and take an afternoon walk near the lodge.



Temple of the Sun God, Altun Ha © Dennis Barthel/Creative Commons

NIGHT: Bird's Eye View Lodge, Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary

March 23, Day 4: Crooked Tree to Lamanai. After another birdy morning at Crooked Tree, we'll depart after lunch and make our way to Lamanai (meaning "submerged crocodile"), another fabulous Mayan ruin situated above the New River Lagoon. Our transfer to Lamanai will include a lovely 75-minute boat ride down the New River, where sightings will likely include several species of kingfishers, numerous herons, and perhaps a few raptors. We'll arrive at Lamanai with plenty of time to settle in to our new surroundings before dinner.

NIGHT: Lamanai Outpost Lodge, Lamanai

March 24–26, Days 5–7: Lamanai. We'll spend the next three days exploring the trails, clearings, and ruins at Lamanai. Here we'll experience some of the finest tropical forest birding in Belize. A stroll through forest trails may produce Blue Ground-Dove; Long-billed and Stripe-throated hermits; Black-headed, Slaty-tailed and Gartered trogons; White-whiskered Puffbird; Keel-billed Toucan; Chestnut-colored Woodpecker; Tawny-winged and Ivory-billed woodcreepers; Barred Antshrike; Northern Bentbill; a long list of wintering and migrant warblers; Black-throated Shrike-Tanager; Red-throated Ant-Tanager; and Yellow-throated and Olive-backed euphonias. Beyond birds, there are always other interesting creatures here such as howler monkeys, agoutis, coatis, lizards, and a host of dazzling butterflies. A cocktail cruise on the river will be a relaxing way to watch the sun set and perhaps see a few new birds. For those who wish, one evening after dinner we'll do a river cruise, to search for interesting nocturnal species. This gives us the opportunity to see some night birds such as Northern Potoo, Yucatan Nightjar, Common Pauraque, and Mottled Owl, and is also the best chance we'll have to see other secretive creatures, like Morelet's Crocodile, or even a Jaguar.

Our days will usually be broken up into a series of short outings with a midday or afternoon siesta. For those who wish to have more time away from the group, there will be ample opportunity to take a longer siesta, walk a trail on your own, or go canoeing or fishing with a local guide.



Gartered Trogon © Michael O'Brien



Cruising the New River © Michael O'Brien

NIGHTS: Lamanai Outpost Lodge, Lamanai

March 20, Day 8: Lamanai to Belize City; Departures Home. After a final early morning at Lamanai, we'll transfer back to Belize City, where the tour concludes with departures home. Please do not schedule a departure flight for earlier than 1:00 p.m. Upon arrival at the Belize airport, you will have sufficient time to check in for your return flights to the U.S.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 12 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: Michael O'Brien and Louise Zemaitis



Michael O'Brien is a freelance artist, author, and environmental consultant living in Cape May, New Jersey. He has a passionate interest in bird vocalizations and field identification, and a serious addiction to migration and nocturnal birding. His travels have taken him throughout North and Central America and beyond. At home in Cape May, Michael serves as an Associate Naturalist with Cape May Bird Observatory for whom he conducts numerous workshops, and, for many years, conducted a fall songbird migration count. He is co-author of *The Shorebird Guide*, *Flight Calls of Migratory Birds*, and *America's 100 Most Wanted Birds*, and is primary author of *Larkwire*, an online and handheld application for learning bird sounds. His illustrations have been widely published in books and field guides, including the *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America* and the new Peterson field guides. Michael also has an intense interest in butterflies, leads several "Birds & Butterflies" tours with his wife, Louise Zemaitis, and is coordinator of the Cape May Butterfly Count.



Louise Zemaitis is an artist and naturalist living in Cape May, New Jersey where she is a popular field trip leader teaching birding workshops as an Associate Naturalist with New Jersey Audubon's Cape May Bird Observatory. She also enjoys leading birding groups and lecturing at birding festivals and is known for her enthusiasm for all natural history subjects. Louise and her husband, Michael O'Brien, have been guiding young birders at birding events and conferences for many years. In addition to leading, Louise worked as field coordinator of the Monarch Monitoring Project in Cape May and served as compiler of the Cape May Christmas Bird Count for many years. An honors graduate of Temple University's Tyler School of Art (owner of Swallowtail Studio), she enjoys working as a freelance artist, and her illustrations have been widely published. Her proudest accomplishment has been the raising of her two sons: Bradley, a conservation educator and artist, and Alec, a library scientist and musician.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for this tour is **\$4,895** per person in double occupancy from Belize City. This includes all meals beginning with dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 8, lodging, ground transportation during the tour and guide services provided by the tour leaders. Quoted fees do not include airfare from your home to Belize City and return, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$795**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. If you would like to pay your deposit using a credit card, the deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at <https://ventbird.com>) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

PAYMENTS: All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 150 days prior to the tour departure date (October 21, 2024).

FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

CANCELLATION & REFUNDS:

Cancellation by Participant:

Refunds, if any, for any cancellation by a participant are made according to the following schedule: If participant cancels 180 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of \$500 per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months from the date of participant tour cancellation, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person. If cancellation is made between 179 and 151 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the tour fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 150 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre- and post-tour extensions. **For participants’ protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

<u>If participant cancels:</u>	<u>Participant’s refund will be:</u>
180 days or more before departure date	Participant’s deposit minus \$500*
179 to 151 days before departure date	No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance of the tour fee will be refunded
150 days or less before departure date	No refund available

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months from the date of participant tour cancellation, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person. To qualify, cancellation must occur 180 days or more before departure date; deposit transfers must be made at the time of cancellation; and one transfer per deposit.

Cancellation by VENT:

If VENT cancels a tour prior to departure without cause or good reason, VENT will provide the participant a full refund, which will constitute full settlement to the participant.

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. A “**Force Majeure**” event means any act beyond

VENT's control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

This VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside of the services described in the tour itinerary.

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

TRAVEL INSURANCE: To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit. VENT has partnered with Redpoint Travel Protection as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend their **Ripcord** plan. Designed for all types of travelers, Ripcord is among the most comprehensive travel protection programs available.

Critical benefits of Ripcord include a completely integrated program with a single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims; medical evacuation from your point of injury or illness to your hospital of choice; comprehensive travel insurance for trip cancellation/interruption, medical expense coverage death of pet, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or political or security reasons, waiver for pre-existing medical conditions exclusion, and a "Cancel for Any Reason" benefit. Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.*

For a price quote, or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: ripcordtravelprotection.com/ventbird; or click the **Ripcord** logo on our website (click Help and Trip Insurance); or call +1-415-481-0600. Pricing is based on age, trip cost, trip length, and level of coverage.

*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 15 days of making your first trip payment. The CFAR benefit provides reimbursement for 75% of covered costs, and increases the policy premium by approximately 50%. Policies may be purchased either for the full value of the tour fee at the time of deposit or in segments as individual tour payments are made (deposit, mid-payment, final balance, additional arrangements, etc.). The "pay as you go" approach reduces up-front expense and ensures that the amount paid toward your full policy premium is in proportion to the amount paid toward the full tour fee. If you choose to "pay as you go," you must cover each deposit or payment within 15 days, and insure all non-refundable trip cost in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

Coronavirus (COVID-19):

In line with the decision made by the federal government (including the CDC), Redpoint considers COVID-19 illness as any other seasonal respiratory illness. Providing only a positive Covid-19 test result will likely not be considered a covered event per the terms and conditions of the company's policy. Redpoint maintains a Coronavirus FAQ page on its website that addresses questions and concerns travelers may have regarding COVID-19 and Redpoint's policy. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of relevant topics.

Please visit the **Coronavirus FAQ** page at the following link:
https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid_19_faq/

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Per person fees apply for each set of travel arrangements: \$50 domestic; \$75 international.* Many of our travelers choose to make their own air travel arrangements, but we emphasize the benefits to using our services. If you book your air arrangements yourself, Victor Emanuel Travel is unable to provide support in managing any flight delays and/or cancellations that could occur before and during a tour. When you purchase air tickets through Victor Emanuel Travel, our staff has ready access to your air ticket record and can provide assistance as problems arise. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements. Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be held responsible for any air ticket penalties.

*An air ticket will be purchased by Victor Emanuel Travel on behalf of the traveler with the traveler's consent. A purchase is considered final upon receipt of payment. If a ticket is subsequently reissued at the behest of the traveler (i.e. voluntary change of plans), the same fee rates apply for the reissue process, in addition to any fees that may be charged by the airline.

RELAXED & EASY TOUR INFORMATION: Relaxed & Easy (R&E) tours are similar to "regular" VENT tours, but set to a slower pace, with somewhat fewer hours in the field and lighter physical activity. They are ideal for participants who prefer a somewhat later start in the morning, a little lengthier afternoon break, and a shorter afternoon outing. Walking is limited to short walks of usually not more than one mile, round-trip, avoiding rough terrain. **However, these tours are NOT appropriate for anyone who needs assistance walking at a normal birding pace, or anyone not able to negotiate minor trail obstacles such as roots, rocks, or puddles.**

Designed as a Relaxed & Easy tour, this trip will require a low level of physical activity from participants, with most birding being in open area situations and on level ground. However, it should be emphasized that **THIS TOUR IS NOT APPROPRIATE FOR PARTICIPANTS WHO HAVE DIFFICULTY DOING STEPS**; all participants must be able to negotiate **multiple tall (about 12-inch) steps at Lamanai**, and also get in and out of boats on several occasions. A typical day will begin with breakfast at approximately 7:00 or 7:30 a.m., followed by birding until about noon. We will attempt to have lunch every day between 12:00 and 1:00, followed by an afternoon break. Be advised that an afternoon break may not be possible every day. We will resume birding for a couple of hours in the late afternoon. On most days we will provide forty-five minutes to an hour of down time before dinner. For those interested in extra birding time, there will also be a pre-breakfast outing of about an hour offered on most days.

Relaxed & Easy (R&E) refers only to the slower pace of a tour, not to a participant's birding skills or ability. Accordingly, birders of all levels of ability are welcome, as they are on typical VENT tours; R&E tours should not be mistaken as tours for beginning birders.

BAGGAGE: Please limit baggage to one medium-size, lockable piece of luggage and one carry-on. The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. Please consult your pre-departure materials and/or airline to find out specific weight restrictions.

As a precaution against lost luggage, we suggest that you pack a change of clothes, toiletries, medications, important travel documents, optics, and any other essential items in your carry-on bag. Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government's attempts to improve airport security, we recommend that you check the website of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for information pertaining to permissible carry-on items: <http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/prohibited/permitted-prohibited-items.shtm>.

CLOTHING: The physical environment of this trip is humid coastal lowlands and interior moist forest. The days will be warm to hot with little rain expected. Light field clothing and casual attire are suitable for this trip. The following items are recommended:

- **Pants:** A couple pairs of long pants are essential. Many people prefer lightweight pants made of cotton or other material, but denim, though not as comfortable, is certainly acceptable. Pre-treating field pants and socks with repellent can provide extra protection from chiggers.
- **Field Clothing:** Outdoor stores such as Cabela's and REI carry field clothing that many birders find appealing. Pants and long-sleeved shirts made of lightweight, yet durable materials with multiple pockets and ventilated seams are popular. These provide useful protection from the sun and occasional biting insects.
- **Shirts:** A couple long-sleeved t-shirts in addition to other comfortable styles suitable for warm weather. We do not recommend short-sleeved shirts as they offer no protection from biting insects or the sun.
- **Hat:** A hat, particularly of a wide-brimmed style, for protection from the sun is essential. Please bring a baseball-style cap at the very least.
- **Outerwear:** Warm weather is anticipated on this trip, but a light sweater and/or light coat or jacket will come in handy for the mornings and evenings, especially if we encounter a cold front from the north (possible but unlikely). In the event of rain, you'll want to have a water repellent jacket as well.
- **Swimsuit:** At least one of the lodges has a nice swimming pool.

FOOTWEAR: We recommend a good trail-walking shoe or light hiking boot when in the field. Heavier hiking boots are not necessary. Athletic shoes are acceptable but will not keep your feet dry and can become soiled from muddy conditions, which do occur. A lighter shoe, like an athletic shoe, sandals, or other open-toed shoe, will come in handy for down time or during periods around towns or hotels and lodges. Some people may prefer calf-high rubber boots (if it rains the trails can be muddy, especially from June through January).

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Paid laundry service is available at Bird's Eye View Lodge and Lamanai Outpost Lodge. Please be aware if you plan to wash your clothes in your room, drip-drying (even of quick drying nylon items) may take a couple of days with the frequently high humidity.

CLIMATE & WEATHER: The climate in Belize varies throughout the year, but generally can be categorized into wet and dry seasons. The dry season runs from December through May, but showers can happen anytime in this region of subtropical, humid forest. The average temperatures in January vary from daytime highs around 83 (°F) and nighttime lows in the low 70s. The midday weather can feel hot and humid. Overall, participants should expect pleasant sunny days with cool mornings and warm-to-hot afternoon temperatures. The chance of precipitation is low to moderate, but showers can occur at any time. Any rain that falls would likely occur as an afternoon shower.

CONDITIONS: There will be several leisurely bird walks, either in open areas or on wide, usually flat paths. Although none of the walking will be particularly strenuous, **in some areas there will be steps, roots, rocks, or other uneven terrain, and participants must be able to negotiate these without assistance, and at a normal birding pace. Participants must be able to negotiate multiple tall steps (about 12-inches each) at Lamanai Outpost Lodge. This trip is not appropriate for those who can't meet these conditions.**

At both Crooked Tree and Lamanai we will also do some birding by boats, accessed by docks in most cases. Elevation changes will vary from sea level to less than 1,000 feet elevation. To take advantage of the best time for avian activity, we will offer optional pre-breakfast birding during the dawn hours each morning, and siesta during the heat of the day. Traveling on bumpy roads is expected whenever we are off the Western Highway.

Accommodations: Birds Eye View Lodge has a large ceiling fan and air conditioner in all rooms. Please note at Lamanai Outpost Lodge the tour fee includes cabanas with high-output ceiling fans. A/C units are available for an additional charge of \$30.00 USD per room, per night, subject to availability. Due to the shade and design of the rooms, we have never felt a need for air conditioning.

Birding Etiquette: To make the tour most enjoyable for yourself, other participants, and your leader, it is important to use common sense and show proper etiquette while in the field. Birds tend to be shy. Loud noises and bright colors can scare them. We encourage clothing with earth tones. Try to avoid colors like oranges, yellows, and reds. Always keep your voice down. Shouting is not conducive to extended looks at a given species. When looking through the spotting scope, always wait your turn and look briefly the first time so that others may have the opportunity to get a look. If you are a smoker, please do so at a distance.

EQUIPMENT: One of the most important aspects of having an enjoyable travel experience is being prepared with proper equipment. The following items will come in handy during your trip to Belize:

- **Backpack** – Good for carrying extra clothing, field guides, supplies, optical equipment, etc.
- **Notebooks and pens**
- **Travel alarm clock** – Battery operated is best (if not using this feature on your mobile phone).
- **Polarized sunglasses with good UV protection**
- **Sunscreen, lip balm, skin lotions**
- **Personal toiletries**
- **Cameras, lenses, memory cards, and extra batteries** – These items can be expensive to purchase abroad.
- **Collapsible walking stick** – A highly recommended item for those who have trouble walking
- **Umbrella** – A small, collapsible umbrella can be indispensable should we be caught on the trail in the rain. Highly recommended.
- **Water bottle**
- **Tissue packs**
- **Small flashlight or headlamp**
- **Small folding stool** – Many people find this item extremely useful when patiently waiting for shy forest birds, or when touring the ruins complex at Altun Ha.
- **Favorite snacks** – To supplement the available offerings

BINOCULARS & SPOTTING SCOPES:

Binoculars – We strongly recommend good binoculars of at least 8x32, 8x42, or 10x42 magnification. We recommend that you do NOT bring mini-binoculars of any kind. Some people like “minis” because they are small and lightweight; but they have an extremely small field of view and very poor light gathering power. Trying to find a bird in your binoculars using minis is like trying to read a book through a keyhole. You will be very frustrated, and even if you do manage to get the bird in your binoculars before it flies, you will have a poor view. You will find that 8x32 or 8x42 binoculars are compact and light enough.

Spotting Scopes – Your tour leaders will have scopes available for group use throughout the trip, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so (mainly useful for viewing Crooked Tree Lagoon from our lodge).

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS:

PASSPORTS - A valid passport is required. Please check the expiration date on your passport. **If it is not valid beyond the length of your trip return date, you will need to get it renewed.** You will also want to make sure that you have at least two blank pages in your passport for stamps.

If you need a passport, you should get it well in advance of your trip departure date. For additional fees, a passport can be issued on an expedited basis. In the United States this can be done at the nearest passport office, most post offices, or the county clerk's office. You may also visit <https://state.gov/travelers/> for information on how to get or renew a passport.

As a safety measure, photocopy the first two pages of your passport and keep the photocopies in a safe place, so if your passport is lost you will have proof of identification. Your passport should be signed and easily available at all times. You will need it for check-in at the airport on your first day of departure, so **do not pack it in your checked luggage.**

VISAS - Citizens of the United States and Canada are not required to obtain a visa for entry into Belize; however, a tourist card will be issued on your flight. Rules and regulations pertaining to non-U.S. and Canadian citizens may vary; please check with the consulates or embassies.

CURRENCY & MONEY MATTERS: Your trip fee includes all necessary expenses; however, you may want to bring some cash to cover personal expenses not included in the program, such as gifts, laundry, gratuities, meals on your own, and personal items. It is best to carry small denominations as the lodges may be unable to provide change for large bills. It is not necessary to exchange currency for the tour since USD are accepted everywhere. If you plan to extend your vacation in Belize beyond what is offered in the program, you'll want to consider obtaining local currency. It is best to acquire local currency before leaving home or at the airport upon arrival in Belize.

Major credit cards are accepted at all lodges for gift shop items, laundry, etc. Please check with your bank and credit card issuer for more information regarding banking and the use of ATM and credit cards overseas.

The official currency of Belize is the Belizean Dollar (BZD). \$1 USD = \$2 BZD. The exchange rate is subject to change but has been constant for many years. Both currencies have identical denominations. So, if you plan to spend any money in Belize, make sure you understand whether the price is being quoted in USD or BZD. You can check the latest currency conversion rate by visiting "XE-The World's Favorite Currency Site" at: <http://www.xe.com/>.

ELECTRICITY: Standard voltage in Belize is 110/220. Electrical outlets at all lodges are of the American-style two-prong flat blade variety. Electricity is available at both Lamanai Outpost Lodge and Bird's Eye View Lodge 24 hours a day. Wall outlets are provided in each room/cabaña and electrical appliances may therefore be used at any time day or night. No adapter is needed.

INTERNET ACCES: Wi-Fi service is available at each property on this tour.

LANGUAGE: English, Spanish and Creole are the primary languages spoken in Belize. The staffs at all lodges speak English.

TIME: Belize is on Central Standard Time (CST), in late March two hours behind Eastern Daylight Time (EDT).

HEALTH: VENT follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up to date with Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccinations.

If you are taking personal medication, prescription or over the counter, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

COVID-19: We continually emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. Although VENT no longer maintains any of its COVID-era prevention protocols, we strongly recommend best practices for protecting yourself and your fellow travelers against COVID-19 illness. These measures include receiving the primary series vaccinations for those eligible, staying “Up to Date” with COVID-19 booster shots, wearing high filtration N-95 or KN-95 masks when in airports and on airplanes, and avoiding risky social settings in the lead-up to your tour. These recommendations are firmly rooted in CDC guidance regarding recommendations for avoiding COVID-19. Please visit the **Coronavirus Travel Update** page of our website <https://ventbird.com/covid-19> for our official statement regarding COVID-19 and the operation of our tours. Please visit the CDC website for the most up to date information about COVID-19 and associated guidance for proper health and hygiene: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>.

Sun Exposure – The sun’s ultraviolet rays are dangerous under prolonged exposure (sometimes only a matter of minutes), even in winter and early spring. Anytime you are outdoors you will want to protect your skin, including your lips, eyes, nose, and ears. A severe sunburn is potentially very painful and will affect your level of enjoyment. Always protect yourself when outdoors and be sure to bring an ample supply of high SPF sunscreen and lip balm. We strongly recommend the use of ultra-violet blocking, polarized sunglasses.

Food and Water: Purified or bottled water is available at both Crooked Tree and Lamanai, and throughout the trip in general. All food is safe to consume, including raw fruits and vegetables, and is cooked on site. All salads, dairy products and home-cooked meals at both lodges are perfectly safe to eat, plus they are tasty and satisfying.

Biting Insects: Mosquitoes, black flies and other small, biting insects can sometimes be a nuisance in Belize, especially in the forested areas. Fire ants occur in disturbed areas, such as roadsides, and should be carefully avoided. The leaders will point out fire ant mounds when they are first encountered on the tour. Chiggers are found in most grassy areas. We suggest a stick-type repellent for your face and hands, plus a pump-style container of repellent for your clothing.

A Note About Chiggers: This tour visits areas where chiggers are known to occur. Chiggers are tiny parasitic mites found in most warm weather areas of the southern United States and the world’s tropics. They are especially numerous in grassy areas, where, in the immature stage, they attach themselves to other animals or humans who make contact with the grass as they pass by. Chiggers do not suck blood and the majority of species do not carry disease. They do feed on bodily fluids through a process in which a digestive enzyme is produced by the chigger which essentially liquefies the skin around the area where the chigger is attached. The chigger is not usually attached to the skin for more than a few hours before it either falls off or is knocked off. Our bodies respond by producing a hardened area as a defense against the chigger’s digestive enzyme. Though the chigger may be long gone, it is the presence of the hardened area, and the body’s natural process of reabsorbing it that typically causes intense itching, often lasting for a week or more. Chiggers like to attach themselves to areas of thin skin, like around the ankles, beltline, undergarment lines, knees, and elbows.

Chiggers can be avoided by following these procedures:

- Avoid walking or standing in areas dominated by grass. These areas are where one is most likely to encounter chiggers.
- Tuck your pants into your socks to avoid direct skin-to-grass contact. Chiggers can find their way through clothing, but this is a standard and effective prevention technique.
- Apply insect repellent to your skin and clothing. Please refer to the Insect Repellent section that follows for important information about selecting and applying repellent.
- Powdered sulfur applied to waist, bottoms of pants, sock and boots is also effective at repelling chiggers. However, be warned that clothes will retain the sulfur odor for several washings. If using sulfur, never touch your eyes, nose, or mouth before washing your hands first.
- Shower at the end of each day in the field. Use a washcloth to vigorously rub your legs, feet, and ankles.

By following these methods, you should be able to avoid all chigger bites, as well as tick bites. If, however, you are bitten by chiggers anyway, you can reduce or eliminate the symptoms by applying benzocaine or hydrocortisone creams, calamine lotion, After Bite, or any number of anti-itch products.

Insect Repellents – There are insect repellents for the skin and an insect repellent used to treat clothing that should not be applied to the skin.

Insect repellents for the skin are commonly available in three forms:

- DEET (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide): A chemical compound that is marketed under various brand names (OFF!®, Cutter™, Ultrathon™, etc.) and offered in a variety of formulations including sprays, lotions, time-release preparations, and disposable wipes. The formulations will state a percentage of the active ingredient DEET on the packaging. DEET may be applied to exposed skin directly and/or sprayed on clothing. Please be careful when applying DEET as it can damage plastics and lens coatings.
- Picaridin: A synthetic formulation that is derived from piperine, a substance found in plants that produce black pepper.
- Herbal insect repellents: Various mixtures of organic ingredients such as oils from eucalyptus, citronella, cedar, and other herbs. The herbal repellents are more difficult to categorize because of the difference in ingredients from one brand to another. There is considerable variation in their effectiveness.

An insect repellent for clothing is marketed in one approved formulation:

- Permanone® (Permethrin) is an odorless spray-on repellent that may be used for pre-treatment of clothing, gear, and tents. It should not be used directly on the skin or sprayed on clothing while it is being worn. The pre-treatment process requires a number of hours to complete and must be done outdoors, so is best completed in advance of travel. Do-it-yourself pre-treatment has to be repeated more often than commercial treatment using Insect Shield® technology. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online.
- Insect Shield® apparel: Clothing pre-treated with Permanone is made by a variety of manufacturers. It is available for purchase from some sporting goods suppliers. The clothing is advertised as retaining its repellency for up to 70 washings.

The US EPA offers a search tool to help choose a repellent that is best for a particular situation. For example, some repellents work for mosquitoes, but not for ticks.

<https://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/which-insect-repellent-right-you>

***We strongly recommend the use of Insect Shield® clothing.** Insect Shield is a process by which clothing is treated with an EPA-approved formula of the insect repellent permethrin. Such clothing is highly repellent to insects and provides durable and long-lasting protection, even after dozens of washings. Outdoor wear with Insect Shield protection includes name brands such as ExOfficio and Tilley, and can be purchased at outdoor recreation stores such as REI and from a variety of online retailers. In lieu of Insect Shield clothing, you should consider treating your clothes with permethrin, which has the same effect, and that can be purchased at outdoor recreation stores and from a variety of online retailers.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line (800) CDC-INFO (800-232-4636). You can check the CDC website at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel>. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html> (click on Travel Health).

SUGGESTED READING: A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend www.amazon.com which has a wide selection; www.buteobooks.com and www.nhbs.com which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and www.abebooks.com for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

Birds: Either of the following two resources is an excellent and suitable option for bird identification on this trip.

Howell, Steve N.G. and Dale Dyer, ***Birds of Belize***. Princeton Field Guides. Princeton University Press, 2023. This new pocket-sized book is the most up to date and authoritative guide to the birds of Belize and is the single best option for visiting birders. Highly recommended.

Jones, H. Lee. ***Birds of Belize***. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2003. Large format and not as convenient to carry in the field, but the most complete and authoritative guide to the birds of Belize.

Sibley, David Allen. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*, Second Edition. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014. Arguably the best North American field guide; useful for wintering migrants in Belize.

Mammals

Emmons, Louise H. ***Neotropical Rainforest Mammals***. University of Chicago Press. Chicago. 1997

Butterflies

Glassberg, Jeffrey. ***A Swift Guide to the Butterflies of Mexico and Central America***. Sunstreak Books, 2007.

Birding Resources: The following titles are classics of modern popular science. Easy to read, easy to understand, and always entertaining, these books are written for the experienced naturalist and layman alike. Highly recommended.

Hilty, Steven. ***Birds of Tropical America: A Watcher's Introduction to Behavior, Breeding and Diversity***. University of Texas Press, 2005.

Forsythe, Adrian and Ken Miyata. ***Tropical Nature: Life and Death in the Rainforests of Central and South America***. Reprint edition. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1987.

Cornell Lab or Ornithology Apps & Online Resources:

eBird. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Among the largest and most successful citizen science projects in existence, eBird is an essential tool in promoting bird study and conservation. Among a range of benefits, eBird allows users to keep a variety of lists in a single application. When taxonomic splits are incorporated, lists are automatically updated. Additionally, trip leaders can share daily lists, so one only need accept a shared list and it will upload to your files! **Highly recommended.**

Merlin Bird ID. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Merlin is an app designed as a birding coach for beginning and intermediate bird watchers. Excellent for use in the field, Merlin asks the observer a series of questions regarding his or her bird sighting, including date and location, and color, size, and behavior of a bird. Merlin then processes the viewer's responses to present a shortlist of possible identifications, from which the user can choose the likely bird. Species profiles include a brief physical description, photographs, and sound samples. The Photo ID feature allows anyone with a camera to snap a photo and obtain a list of suggestions. Merlin's Sound ID feature allows identification of birds through audible recognition. To use Merlin, download the app, followed by the appropriate regional "pack." For this trip, please download the pack for **Belize**.

Birds of the World. "Discover the world of birds" through the Lab's Birds of the World online resource, offering comprehensive life histories for all bird species and families. Visit the [Birds of the World website](#), where for any bird you can learn about its appearance, distribution, diet, behavior, and more. Free samples are available through the home page while subscriptions are available at the monthly, annual, and three-year levels. **Highly recommended.**

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that tips are not expected and are entirely optional. Tips should be given directly to your tour leader; they should not be sent to the VENT office.

RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc., a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, "VENT") act only as agents for the participant 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 participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

VENT reserves the right (i) to substitute hotels of similar category, or the best reasonable substitution available under the circumstances, for those indicated and (ii) to make any changes in the itinerary that are deemed necessary by VENT or which are caused by third party transportation schedules (i.e. railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, etc.).

VENT reserves the right to substitute leaders or guides on any tour. Where VENT, in its sole discretion, determines such substitution is necessary, it will notify tour participants.

VENT reserves the right to cancel any tour prior to departure with or without cause or good reason. See the VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy set forth above.

Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on June 6, 2024, and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

VENT reserves the right to decline any participant's Registration Form and/or refuse to allow any participant to participate in a tour as VENT deems reasonably necessary, in its sole discretion. VENT also reserves the right to remove any tour participant from any portion of a tour as VENT deems necessary, in its sole discretion, reasons for such removal include but are not limited to, medical needs, injury, illness, inability to meet physical demands of a tour, personality conflict or situations in which such removal is otherwise in the best interest of the tour, the tour group and/or such participant. A participant may also voluntarily depart from a tour. If a participant is removed from a tour or voluntarily departs from a tour, such participant will be responsible for any expenses associated with such removal or departure, including but not limited to, transportation, lodging, airfare and meals, and VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any such removed or departed participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by such participant.

Baggage is carried at the participant's risk entirely. No airline company, its employees, agents and/or affiliates (the "**Airline**") is to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time participants are not on board the Airline's aircraft. The participant ticket in use by any Airline, when issued, will constitute the sole contract between the Airline and the purchaser of the tickets and/or the participant. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for VENT tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airlines Reporting Corporation.

BZRE:20230314
04/02/19-MO
06/12/24-PN/RS