

BEST OF BELIZE: CROOKED TREE & CHAN CHICH LODGE

MARCH 12-19, 2023

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This tour combines two premier locales in Belize into one action-packed week of birding. The incredible waterbird spectacle of Crooked Tree and the fabulous, protected rainforests of Chan Chich Lodge combine for Central American birding at its best!

Crooked Tree, just north of Belize City, is a region renowned for its wonderful concentrations of water birds. For most of two days we will explore the expansive wet and dry savannas, patches of coastal thorn scrub, pine/oak woodland and the famous Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary where Jabiru, Boat-billed Heron, Agami Heron, Snail Kite, Black-collared Hawk, Sungrebe, Russet-naped Wood-Rail and American Pygmy Kingfisher are among the many possibilities. Pine forests just west of the lagoon can harbor such regional specialties as Yellow-headed Parrot, Yucatan Woodpecker, and Yucatan Jay among a host of other land birds.

Anyone who has had the privilege of visiting the Chan Chich Lodge in northwestern Belize has been dazzled by its high quality facilities, special ambience, and superb birding and wildlife viewing opportunities. For many years, this area was private property, but with construction of the lodge, birders and naturalists have the unprecedented ability to experience wildlife on over 30,000 acres of pristine, subtropical moist forest.



Chan Chich is a place where rare and/or secretive species may still be encountered, many of which have been eradicated elsewhere. The lodge is built into the main plaza of an ancient Maya ruin. The forest starts right outside your door with monkeys, parrots, turkeys, guans, and more all visible from the veranda of your cabaña. Many highly sought Central American species can be found here including the likes of Great Curassow, Crested Guan, Ocellated Turkey, Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Tody Motmot, Gray-throated Chat, Rose-throated Tanager, and more. Additionally, this is one of the better spots in the New World to have a chance of seeing a wild cat of some species. Simply put, this is the largest tract of undisturbed, easily accessible lowland forest remaining in all of Central America, and it abounds with wildlife.

While birds will be the focus of our time in the field, this tour also provides exposure to a variety of other wildlife including mammals, reptiles, and butterflies.

March 12, Day 1: Arrival in Belize City. Participants should make plans to arrive in Belize City anytime this afternoon. After clearing immigration and customs, you will be met outside the airport and transported to the Radisson Fort George Hotel and Marina in Belize City (about a 20-minute ride). Those arriving with enough time to bird may find a good variety of species right around the hotel. Cinnamon Hummingbird, Social and Scissor-tailed flycatchers, Common Tody-Flycatcher, Great Kiskadee, and Hooded and Orchard orioles are all regulars on the hotel grounds. We will gather in the hotel lobby at 6:00 p.m. for a welcome session followed by dinner.

NIGHT: Radisson Fort George Hotel and Marina, Belize City



Jabiru © Barry Zimmer

March 13, Day 2: Crooked Tree. We will depart early this morning (around 5:00 a.m.) heading northward to the village of Crooked Tree. Pine forests and semi-open savannas in this area support a nice diversity of species, many of which are not likely to be seen elsewhere on the tour. Common species here include Pale-vented Pigeon, White-fronted Parrot, Great Kiskadee, Vermilion Flycatcher, Brown Jay, Gray-breasted Martin, Mangrove Swallow, Clay-colored Thrush, Tropical Mockingbird, Grayish Saltator, Melodious Blackbird, and Hooded Oriole. Several less numerous species will be our main targets of the morning however. We will give special effort to locating the uncommon Yucatan Woodpecker and the stunning Yucatan Jay (both regional endemics). In addition, the road into Crooked Tree crosses the main lagoon, and here and at other wet areas, we should see a variety of waterbirds including such possibilities as Neotropic Cormorant, Little Blue and Green herons, White Ibis, Wood Stork, Russet-naped Wood-Rail, Limpkin, and Northern Jacana. Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, Snail Kite (in some years downright common), Osprey, and Ringed and Belted kingfishers are likely. We will also try to keep an eye out

overhead for the magnificent Jabiru. When water conditions are right (usually the lower the better), this incredible species visits Crooked Tree Lagoon.

After lunch we will head back to Belize City for birding on foot near the hotel. Cinnamon Hummingbirds forage in flowering trees in the hotel gardens, Scissor-tailed Flycatchers often roost in palms nearby, neotropical migrants forage in the gardens and a variety of shorebirds and terns are possible along the wharf.



Yucatan Woodpecker © Barry Zimmer

NIGHT: Radisson Fort George Hotel and Marina, Belize City

March 14, Day 3: Crooked Tree Lagoon; Continue to Chan Chich Lodge. We will again depart Belize City early this morning (probably around 5:00 a.m.) so as to be at Crooked Tree shortly after first light for a boat trip to the south end of the lagoon and hopefully on to Spanish Creek. Here a wide variety of new birds might be encountered, including the comical Boat-billed Heron, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned night-herons, the rare and highly sought Agami Heron, Wood Stork, the stunning Russet-naped Wood-Rail, the elusive Sungrebe, and the tiny American Pygmy Kingfisher. All these species favor the brush-lined edges of the lagoon, and finding them can be highly dependent on water levels at Crooked Tree (low water levels are required to see many of these species). Short forests on the edge of the water could also produce Black-collared Hawk, Rufous-breasted Spinetail, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Yellow-billed Cacique, and Yellow-tailed Oriole.

After lunch, we will head back to Belize City for our afternoon charter flight to Gallon Jug. Upon arrival at Gallon Jug airstrip, we will be met and transferred to Chan Chich Lodge.

Our lodging facilities are nestled on an ancient elevated plaza ringed by grass-covered temples and palaces clothed in dense forest. The owner has a reputation for doing everything first-class and this lodge is no exception. The

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thatched-roof cabañas are skillfully handcrafted of exquisite hardwoods to blend well with the natural surroundings. Inside each cabaña are two queen-size beds, a large array of well-screened windows, a ceiling fan, a spacious bathroom with shower facilities and hot and cold running water, plus electrical power available twenty-four hours a day. To begin birding, all you have to do is step out your door! This is beyond doubt a dream come



Chan Chich Lodge © Barry Zimmer

true—creature comforts and home-cooked food in an avian-rich setting, free of hunting and logging pressures. We will spend the last hour or so of the afternoon birding the area right around the cabañas. Hummingbird feeders around the dining area and flowering bushes play host to White-necked Jacobin, Long-billed and Stripe-throated hermits, White-bellied Emerald, and Rufous-tailed Hummingbird. Ocellated Turkeys stroll about the grounds, and often Central American Spider Monkeys are visible around the edge of the clearing. A pair of stunning Bat Falcons is often visible in the vicinity of the pool, and other raptors may be spotted overhead. A check of nearby fruiting trees could yield a wide variety of flashy birds including Crested Guan, Collared Aracari, Keel-billed Toucan, Mealy and Red-lored parrots, Olive-throated Parakeet, Masked Tityra, Yellow-winged Tanager, and Yellow-throated and Olive-backed euphonias.

As dusk settles in, we may be treated to some of the most incredible sounds of nature, including the ethereal calls of Great Tinamou, the eerie cries of Common Pauraque, and the impressive roars of Mexican Black Howler Monkeys.

NIGHT: Chan Chich Lodge, Gallon Jug Estate

March 15-18, Days 4-7: Chan Chich and Vicinity. For the next four days, we will enjoy the avian riches awaiting us in the private reserve surrounding Chan Chich and Gallon Jug. Situated amidst over 30,000 acres of protected seasonal rain forest, Chan Chich is truly a birder's paradise. Nine miles of well-maintained trails radiate out from the lodge, each covering somewhat different habitats. In addition, a series of roads through the property will allow for drives to outlying areas such as Laguna Seca, the escarpment, and Zibal. All in all, we should tally over 200 species of birds just on the lodge property.

On our first full day here, we will spend the first hour or so of the morning birding the area right around the cabañas. The lodge clearing is usually quite birdy with possibilities including Black-cheeked, Lineated and Pale-billed woodpeckers, Red-billed Pigeon, Gartered Trogon, White-crowned Parrot, Red-legged Honeycreeper, and a host of other species. It can be hard to tear one's self away from the area right around the rooms!



Slaty-tailed Trogon © Barry Zimmer

A walk down toward the suspension bridge takes us through taller forest where a new list of possibilities arises. Black-headed, Gartered, and Slaty-tailed trogons; Pale-billed and Chestnut-colored woodpecker; Cinnamon Becard; Spot-breasted Wren; White-breasted Wood-Wren; Long-billed Gnatwren; Lesser Greenlet; and Red-crowned Ant-Tanager are among the many possibilities. A side trip to the Upper Plaza and King's Tomb could produce such stunners as Rufous-tailed Jacamar, White-whiskered Puffbird, and Lesson's Motmot. Even the highly sought Tody Motmot is a real possibility here.

Each day we will venture onto a different trail or drive to a different habitat. On most days we will do both, alternating walking for part of the day with driving for the remainder.

In the shorter, drier forest, called bajo forest or tintal, we could see such specialties as Blue Ground-Dove, Yellow-lored Parrot (scarce), Northern Schiffornis, White-bellied Wren, Long-billed Gnatwren, White-browed

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Gnatcatcher, Blue Bunting, and Green-backed Sparrow. In addition, two very special regional endemics are also possible, the striking Gray-throated Chat and Rose-throated Tanager.

Taller forests produce a different set of birds. Large mixed-species flocks roam about the jungle, often led by a Black-throated Shrike-Tanager. Each flock contains a somewhat different make-up, but Slaty-tailed, Black-headed, and Collared (very uncommon) trogons; seven species of woodcreepers; the incredible Chestnut-colored Woodpecker; Dot-winged Antwren; Plain Xenops; Eye-ringed Flatbill; Ochre-bellied, Yellow-olive, and Ruddy-tailed flycatchers; Rufous Mourner; Tawny-crowned and Lesser greenlets; Green Shrike-Vireo; Red-crowned and Red-throated ant-tanagers; and Black-faced Grosbeak are among the possibilities in this habitat.



Chestnut-colored Woodpecker © Barry Zimmer

At a special location along Chan Chich Creek, birds come in to bathe in the afternoon, and the show can be spectacular. Purple-crowned Fairys dance over the water, while a variety of manakins, flycatchers, warblers, and tanagers come in for a quick bath or drink before sunset.

In the more open country around Gallon Jug and Zibal, expected species include White-tailed Kite, Roadside Hawk, Green-breasted Mango, the comical Barred Antshrike, stunning Fork-tailed and Scissor-tailed flycatchers, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Brown Jay, White-collared Seedeater, Blue-black Grassquit, Montezuma Oropendola, and Yellow-tailed Oriole. Raptors abound throughout this area with a wide variety of species possible (one year we had 21 species in one day!): King Vulture; Gray-headed, Hook-billed, Plumbeous, and Double-toothed kites; White, Gray, and Short-tailed hawks; Ornate and Black hawk-eagles; and Laughing Falcon are among some of the species we could see. Any drive could produce one of the most sought after birds of the area, the impressive Great Curassow. Like the turkey and the guan, this species has been eliminated from most of its range due to hunting pressures. Here one has a very good chance of seeing all three of these species.

In addition, we will take one night walk and a night drive away from the lodge. Several night birds are possible including Mottled, Barn, and Black-and-white (very uncommon) owls; Common Pauraque; the bizarre Northern Potoo; and Yucatan Nightjar. There is usually a good chance for an interesting mammal as well. We have had Ocelot on about a third of our trips, and there is always the possibility of something truly amazing such as a Jaguar or Puma. Again, due to the protection from hunting, this is perhaps one of the best places in the world to encounter a wild cat of some sort.

Our days here at Chan Chich are certain to yield some of the most memorable birding you will encounter anywhere!

NIGHTS: Chan Chich Lodge, Gallon Jug Estate

March 19, Day 8: Chan Chich and Departures Home. We will have a final couple of hours around the lodge this morning to look for any species we may have missed or we may just opt to walk down toward the suspension bridge before returning to pack. We will leave Gallon Jug on a charter flight at 10:00 a.m., arriving at the Belize International airport around 10:30 a.m. Departing flights home should be scheduled for no earlier than 1:00 p.m., as time is needed for check-in on international departures. Departures back to the States are scheduled at various times during the afternoon depending on the airline, so some participants may have a longer wait than others at the Belize airport.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 14 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: Barry Zimmer & Brian Gibbons



Barry Zimmer has been birding since the age of eight. His main areas of expertise lie in North and Central America, but his travels have taken him throughout much of the world, including such exotic locales as Japan, Russia, Madagascar, Africa, and New Zealand. Barry is a longtime member of the New Mexico Bird Records Committee, and served on the Texas Bird Records Committee for 12 years. He has coauthored three books: *Birds of the Trans-Pecos*, *A Birder's Guide to the Rio Grande Valley*, and *Birds and Birdfinding in the El Paso Area*. Barry has a keen interest in nature photography, having captured over 1,600 species of birds on film. His other interests include sports (a diehard Red Sox fan), cooking, and movies. He received his degree in psychology at the University of Texas in El Paso. Barry resides in El Paso with his wife, Yvonne, and their daughter, Alexandra.



Brian Gibbons grew up in suburban Dallas where he began exploring the wild world in local creeks and parks. Chasing butterflies and any animal that was unfortunate enough to cross paths with the Gibbons boys occupied his childhood. A wooden bird feeder kit sparked a flame that was stoked by a gift of the *Golden Guide* and family camping trips to Texas state parks. Thirty years ago Brian attended two VENT camps for young birders. Birds are now his primary interest, but all things wild continue to captivate him. After college, Brian undertook a variety of field biology research jobs that have taken him to the Caribbean, the Bering Sea, and the land of the midnight sun, arctic Alaska. He enjoys working with kids, hoping to spark environmental awareness through birds. For many years Brian's field research has involved bird banding. His most amazing recoveries were a female Wilson's Warbler that had been banded in Alaska and was captured by Brian in Colorado, and a Sooty Tern that perished after a hurricane on the Texas coast; it had plied the Gulf of Mexico and the oceans of the world for 24 years. Brian's recreational bird-seeking has taken him to Machu Picchu in Peru, the Great Wall in China, the plains of East Africa, and the Himalayas in Nepal. Brian leads birding trips in the United States,

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Central America, the Caribbean, South Africa, and Europe. As well as being a fanatical birder, he loves capturing birds with photography. He lives in Tucson, Arizona with his wife, Lacrechia Johnson, and their son, Grayson.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for this tour is **\$6,595** per person in double occupancy from Belize City. This includes all meals beginning with dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 8, lodging, internal air transportation, ground transportation during the tour and guide services provided by the tour leader. 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 **\$1,195**.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. If you prefer 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 13, 2022).

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, 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.**

If participant cancels:

180 days or more before departure date

179 to 151 days before departure date

150 days or less before departure date

Participant's refund will be:

Participant's deposit minus \$500*

No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance of the tour fee will be refunded

No refund available

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, 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 and rescue services** from your point of injury or illness to your **hospital of choice**; comprehensive travel insurance for **trip cancellation/interruption**, primary medical expense coverage, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as security evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or other security events, **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 14 days of making your tour deposit. 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 14 days in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. The primary medical expense benefit is available to U.S. residents only. For this reason, non-U.S. residents will pay an adjusted premium when purchasing a comprehensive policy, which includes all of the other benefits available to U.S. residents. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.**

Coronavirus (COVID-19):

The coronavirus pandemic has brought uncertainty for many people currently holding travel insurance policies or who are considering future travel and purchasing such insurance. Redpoint has added a **Coronavirus FAQ page** to its website that addresses questions and concerns regarding its travel insurance and the impact of COVID-19. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of topics such as policy coverage and limitations, policy modifications, cancellation, refunds, and more. Among the most important points: 1) Trip cancellation solely for concern or fear of travel associated with COVID-19 is not covered; 2) Should you request cancellation of your policy, a full refund of your premium is available only under a limited set of conditions; and 3) Should

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you request cancellation, you may be eligible to receive a pro-rated refund of the unused portion of your premium or a travel insurance credit. Travel insurance credit ("Premium Credit") is for the value of the policy purchased and may be applied to future policies. Premium Credits have no expiration dates. Rules and regulations apply.

Please visit the **Coronavirus FAQ** page at the following link:

https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid_19_faq/

Additionally, as countries begin opening up for travel, many are instituting an array of COVID-19 entry requirements, including mandates to purchase travel insurance covering medical expenses due to COVID-19 illness and accommodation in case of quarantine. Ripcord's comprehensive travel insurance plans are designed to satisfy the various country-specific travel insurance entry requirements. Those who purchase a Ripcord policy will receive a "letter of confirmation" that affirms that the policy satisfies such requirements.

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.

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. ***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 responsible for any air ticket penalties.***

CLIMATE: The dry season runs from December through May, but showers can happen anytime in this region of lush, tropical moist forest. The average temperatures in March are lows in the low 60's to low 70's (but can on occasion dip into the 50's) and highs in the mid to upper 80's. The midday weather is often hot and humid (80-90 degrees), with slightly cooler evenings (each cabaña has a ceiling fan). Good raingear or an umbrella (or both) should be brought on any trip despite it being the dry season.

Temperatures in the Crooked Tree area will be somewhat hotter than at Chan Chich. Daytime highs here might reach into the 90s.

OTHER CONDITIONS: There will be several leisurely bird walks at Chan Chich, where the paths are wide and for the most part flat (there are a few ups and downs, especially around the temple areas). None of the walking will be particularly strenuous (longest walk will be around three miles). Altitude changes will vary from sea level to less than 800 feet elevation. To take advantage of the best time for avian activity, we will begin birding during the dawn hours each morning (breakfast will be at 6:00 a.m. each morning in Chan Chich). Chan Chich Lodge has a beautifully designed swimming pool and hot tub; the pool is enclosed by mosquito screens and is bug-free. There is also a pool at the Fort George Radisson in Belize City. There will be two early morning departures from Belize City (5 AM) in order to be at Crooked Tree for an early breakfast followed by birding in the peak of the morning.

CLOTHING: Light field clothing and casual attire are suitable for this tour. Bring several pairs of long pants and comfortable shirts. Long-sleeved shirts are useful for protection from the sun and occasional biting insects. Pre-treating field pants and socks with repellent can provide extra protection from chiggers. A good hat or cap, plus rain gear and/or an umbrella are essential. Be sure to have a pair of comfortable walking shoes or hiking boots, plus a second pair of footwear such as tennis shoes. Waterproof boots or NEOS overshoes may be useful if the rainy season has been prolonged (if it rains the trails can be muddy). A sweater and/or light jacket are also useful for the occasional cool, damp mornings, evenings and overcast days. Remember to take a bathing suit if you would like to take advantage of the pool. Laundry service is available on a charge-per-item basis at Chan Chich. Items dropped off in the morning at the front desk are usually returned late the same afternoon. If you plan to wash your

clothes in your room, please be aware of the fact that drip-drying (even of quick drying nylon items) may take a couple of days with the frequently high humidity.

CURRENCY: \$1 USD equals \$2 Belizean Dollars. The exchange rate is subject to change, but has been constant for some 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 Belizean or USD. It is not necessary to exchange currency for this tour, since USD are accepted everywhere.

DOCUMENTS: A passport valid beyond your planned return date is required for entry to Belize, with at least one blank page for entry stamp. We recommend that your passport be valid for at least six months beyond your planned return date. If your passport is stamped by the immigration officials upon entry, you must be sure to get an exit stamp before returning to the United States. Visas are not required for entry by United States citizens. Non-United States citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions.

ELECTRICITY: The electricity at Chan Chich Lodge is provided via two distant generators, which are in operation 24 hours a day.

EQUIPMENT: You should pack a pair of binoculars that are in good condition, along with a belt pack or day pack (good for carrying books, sunscreen, camera, etc.). As a precaution, it's a good idea to pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medications, and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag. Your leader will have a spotting scope; but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so. You should also bring sunglasses and sunscreen, a small flashlight or headlamp, a small folding stool (many find this extremely useful when we are patiently waiting for shy forest birds, as well as at the bird bathing spot along the Sac Be Trail where we will be waiting for some time), battery-operated alarm clock, water bottle, camera, digital storage media and spare batteries, small daypack, and your favorite snacks. We highly recommend that you bring a collapsible umbrella, and also carry it with you on longer walks. Personal items like digital storage media, sun lotion, batteries, etc., can be very expensive anywhere in Belize. Bring sufficient supplies with you.

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: The world has been in the grip of a pandemic since early 2020, a result of the uncontrolled spread of SARS-CoV-2, the novel coronavirus that causes the illness COVID-19. COVID-19 is transmitted through person-to-person contact, almost always through inhaling respiratory aerosols or droplets exuded from an infected person. Common signs of COVID-19 illness include fever or chills, fatigue, shortness of breath, cough, loss of taste or smell, and more. Based on what is known about the disease, COVID-19 is far more serious than seasonal flu. Few places in the world have been unaffected. The impact on travel has been substantial, as demonstrated by the fact that VENT did not operate a tour between late March 2020 and late April 2021. The development and deployment of COVID-19 vaccines, particularly in the United States, has allowed VENT to return to tour operations. We emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. **With this in mind, VENT instituted a COVID-19 vaccination requirement.** All tour participants and tour leaders must be fully vaccinated in order to travel with us while we are still in a declared public health emergency. In accordance with the latest guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), full vaccination is defined as an individual being 14 days beyond having received the required amount of vaccine for reaching full immunity to the degree specific vaccines confer. In the United States, so far, this means either the two-shot sequence for the

Moderna or Pfizer vaccines or the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine. Proof of vaccination must be provided to our office at least one week before the start of the tour and kept with you while on the tour. Because the world is a very different place than it was before the pandemic, we've made a number of important adjustments to our processes to ensure that our tours can operate as safely as possible. Please visit the **Coronavirus Travel Update** page of our website <https://ventbird.com/covid-19>, where you may view our **COVID-19 Protocols for VENT Tours** document, which details the guidance VENT will follow in the operation of its tours in the time of pandemic. Our decision and policy are firmly rooted in the latest CDC guidance regarding recommendations for avoiding COVID-19. As we move forward, VENT will continue to follow the latest information from the CDC and will update our policy accordingly. 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>.

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>

Mosquitoes, black flies, no-see-ums and other small, biting insects can sometimes be a nuisance in Belize, especially in the forested areas. Chiggers are found in most of the grassy areas. We suggest a stick-type repellent for your face and hands, plus at least one pump-style container of repellent for your clothing. Purified water is available throughout this tour (each cabaña at Chan Chich Lodge has a water cooler). As for foods, all salads and dairy products are perfectly safe to eat at the places we visit, and the home-cooked meals at Chan Chich Lodge are tasty and satisfying.

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.

***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 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).

LUGGAGE: We request you try to limit your luggage to one medium-sized lockable piece and one carry-on bag. It's a good idea to pack a change of clothes, your binoculars, medications, toiletries, walking shoes, and travel documents in the carry-on.

INTERNET ACCESS: Chan Chich Lodge has Wi-Fi in the rooms as well as the common areas. The Radisson Fort George has Wi-Fi available in the rooms.

MISC:

Electricity - 110/220 volts
Language - English
Time - Central Standard Time

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

Best of Belize: Crooked Tree & Chan Chich Lodge, Page 14

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.

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

Fagan, Jesse & Komar, Oliver. *Peterson Field Guide to Birds of Northern Central America*. Houghton Mifflin Publishing, 2016.

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

Hilty, Steven. *Birds of Tropical America*. Shelburne, VT: Chapters Publishing Ltd., 1994. Subtitle: “A watcher’s introduction to behavior, breeding and diversity.”

Howell, Steve N.G. and Sophie Webb. *A Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Jones, H. Lee. *Birds of Belize*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2003.

Rabinowitz, Alan. *Jaguar*. New York, NY: Arbor House, 1986.

SUGGESTED RECORDINGS: These will be helpful in learning the vocalizations of some of the region’s birds.

Bird Songs of Belize, Guatemala and Mexico by Dale Delaney. Library of Natural Sounds, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 1992.

A Bird Walk at Chan Chich by John V. Moore. San Jose, California: Astral Sounds Recording, 1992. Proceeds aid the local library in Gallon Jug, Belize.

Birds of Mexico MP3 Sound Collection, by Peter Boesman. Distributed by Birdsounds.nl

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 May 16, 2022, 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.

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