

PANAMA: BOCAS DEL TORO ARCHIPELAGO

MARCH 26-APRIL 4, 2021

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Panama is without doubt one of the premier birding destinations in the Neotropics. It is famous for its rare combination of easy access to extensive, high-quality habitat, good food and water, comfortable to luxurious accommodations, and high diversity of birds—all within a compact geographic area. While ideal for those new to the Neotropics, the Bocas Del Toro Archipelago and nearby mainland offer plenty of challenges and local specialties for those who have birded elsewhere in the country. We will search for these potential species: Nicaraguan Seed-Finch, six kingfishers, four trogons, Yellow-eared Toucanet and Northern Emerald-Toucanet, Collared Araçari & two toucans, Prong-billed Barbet, three cotingas, three parakeets & six parrots, Bare-necked Umbrellabird, three puffbirds, Purple-throated Fruitcrow, four manakins, Black-chested Jay, seventeen hummingbirds, eight woodpeckers, over twenty tanagers and many more species.

Among the pleasures of a visit here is the opportunity to stay at the wonderful Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge co-owned by Jim & Renée Kimball and Jay Viola. Located amidst 110 acres of mangroves and spectacular rainforest on Bastimentos Island and next to Bastimentos National Marine Park, Tranquilo Bay offers a chance to hear the dawn chorus, to gaze upon seldom-seen denizens of the forest, and to remain in beautiful surroundings without sacrificing amenities. There are six deluxe cabanas, each with air-conditioning, large walk-in shower, full-size water heater, local hardwood floors, and fine linen and handcrafted beds. Each cabana has a covered porch with a hammock, Adirondack chairs and a ceiling fan. There are now two smaller single rooms available, with all the same amenities. This innovative venture will soon be known for providing one of Central America's very finest ecotourist experiences.



Except for picnic lunches, all meals will be served in the main lodge, which includes a nice sitting area, a bar, and Wi-Fi. Hors d'oeuvres are offered during the open bar cocktail hour preceding dinner and these may be taken to the porch while watching the sunset. The second story porch covers two sides of the building and is high enough to overlook the canopy to views of the Caribbean Sea. Tranquilo Bay

has over a kilometer of Caribbean coastline covered with coral gardens teeming with tropical fish, which offer great opportunities to swim, snorkel, kayak and fish.

Our specific day-to-day itinerary will be kept flexible, allowing us to take advantage of local weather and birding conditions. Therefore, the itinerary destinations below are subject to be taken on different days but all ecosystems listed will be visited.

Participants registering by October 3, 2020 will receive a discount of \$500.

March 26, Day 1: Arrival in Panama City and Transfer to the Radisson Hotel Panama Canal. Participants arriving in Panama City (Tocumen International Airport) anytime this afternoon or evening will be met and transferred to the Radisson Hotel Panama Canal where a room will be reserved in your name. Those arriving with some daylight may wish to bird around the hotel grounds, which often harbor a good variety of birds including such possibilities as Yellow-headed Caracara, Pale-vented Pigeon, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Social Flycatcher, Tropical Kingbird, Tropical Mockingbird, Blue-gray Tanager, and Saffron Finch.

NIGHT: Radisson Hotel Panama Canal, Panama City

March 27, Day 2: Flight to Bocas del Toro on Isla Colón; Transfer to Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge. We will take an early flight to Bocas del Toro on Isla Colón and transfer to Isla Bastimentos by motorboat. Upon arrival at Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge, we'll enjoy a delicious breakfast in the main lodge, be shown to our cabanas, and be given time to unpack.



One of four cabanas near the open field and six-story tall observation tower
© Jeri Langham

We will then meet and bird the grounds around the cabanas and main lodge before lunch. After lunch and a short siesta, we will bird the open area near the cabanas and explore the trails on this wonderful 110-acre property that is adjacent to Bastimentos National Marine Park. Huge, spectacular Montezuma Oropendolas fly past the second story balcony of the main lodge and throughout the grounds, and on boat trips to the mainland and other nearby islands we often see Bottlenose Dolphins.

The fruiting trees planted near the balcony attract many frugivorous species, as well as other birds searching for insects, and feeding flocks that happen to move through. From the balcony one can enjoy the view of the Caribbean Sea just beyond the mangrove forest between the lodge and the dock. Near our cabanas there is a wonderful



Montezuma Oropendolas © Natalia Decastro



Bottlenose Dolphins © Linette Mansberger

Golden-collared Manakin lek and one forest trail leads to a pool where one can sit on benches and watch birds come to bathe. We will plan to be up on the deck of the new, six-story high observation tower near our cabanas by 5:00 p.m. this afternoon. This new addition provides us with a view of the treetops in the surrounding forest as well as the mangroves and Caribbean Sea. Small birds feeding in the canopy of adjacent tall trees are much easier to see from up here. Some of the Red-lored Parrots going to roost often fly so close we could almost touch them.



Golden-collared Manakin © Chris Manzey



Red-lored Parrots from tower © Linette Mansberger

Every evening, a half-hour before our three to four course dinner, we will meet in the main lodge to enjoy hors d'oeuvres and fresh fruit juices, sodas, ice water or open bar beer, wine or mixed drinks. The hors d'oeuvres are different every night we are there. After dinner, we complete the day's checklist and head to our cabanas, hoping to encounter an owl or night mammal along the way.

NIGHT: Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge, Isla Bastimentos

March 28, Day 3: Punta Róbalo and Oleoducto Road to Reserva Forestal La Fortuna. After breakfast we will travel by motorboat to Punta Róbalo, a small town on the mainland. The best birding is to be found on the mainland due to much greater diversity of species caused by the many different ecosystems we will encounter as we bird from the coast up Oleoducto Road to the circa 4,200 feet elevation when we cross the Continental Divide. A van will await us at Punta Robalo and we will begin birding the low flat area between here and Punta Peña, which consists of marshes, cattle pastures, clumps of woodlands and an occasional pond. We will make a special visit to Two (now three of them) Tanks Road that is about 5 km from the town of Chiriquí Grande. Some potential birds in this area are Bronzy Hermit, Rufous-breasted Hermit, Brown Jay, Cinnamon & Pale-billed woodpeckers, Band-backed & Black-throated wrens, Crimson-collared Tanager, Lovely Cotinga (Blue Cotinga was recently reported from here too), Olive-crowned Yellowthroat, White-collared Seedeater and Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant, the smallest passerine in its range. As we continue to drive uphill toward the Continental Divide, we will keep an eye out for Snowy Cotinga.

We will bird along the bridge and road at Rancho Ecológico Willy Mazú, watching for Lanceolated Monklet (rare). With the recent passing of Wilberto Martinez, owner of Rancho Ecológico Willy Mazú, many of the wonderful trails at this location are overgrown and not accessible. We hope someone will buy this property and reopen the trails. Next will be a stop at the bridge over a stream called Quebrada Arena to look for Torrent Tyrannulet.



Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant
© Linette Mansberger



Black Guan © Linette Mansberger

The Fortuna Forest Reserve was created to protect the nearly pristine montane and cloud forests that surround the Fortuna Hydroelectric Project. The number of species in wet forests at this elevation goes on and on, but some of the highland specialties and endemics are Black Guan, Violet Sabrewing, Black-bellied Hummingbird, Red-headed and Prong-billed barbets, Black-banded Woodcreeper, Rufous-rumped Antwren, Silvery-fronted Tapaculo, Rufous-browed Tyrannulet, Black-and-white Becard, Three-wattled Bellbird, Azure-hooded Jay, Black-and-yellow Silky-flycatcher, Wrenthrush and Sooty-faced Finch. Possible but tough to find specialties are Bare-necked Umbrellabird and Yellow-green Finch. Since there is no way to do justice to this vast and very bird rich area in one day, we will devote two more full days to it.

NIGHT: Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge, Isla Bastimentos

March 29, Day 4: Soropta Canal and Swan's Cay. This morning we will travel by motorboat to the Soropta Canal. If the tide isn't high enough, we may take a second boat to help us get over the sandbar at the mouth of the Canal. Originally created to bring bananas down from Costa Rica and parts of Panama, it's now a lazy body of

water providing many miles of excellent habitat on both sides. The hoped-for specialty here is Nicaraguan Seed-Finch. One beautiful male has been seen during all previous visits just after entering the canal.



Nicaraguan Seed-Finch © Bill Fraser



Collared Araçari eating Cecropia fruit © Linette Mansberger

Lowland species abound on both sides of the canal and we will proceed very slowly, with many stops, birding our way up to the mouth of the Rio Changuinola. Here we will get off the boat and bird our way to the opening. Sometimes there are many shorebirds on the sandy beaches here, as well as ducks, terns and gulls. If we have not already enjoyed our picnic lunch, this would be a good place to eat. We will then slowly bird our way back looking for araçaris, trogons, wrens, tanagers, woodpeckers, finches, hummingbirds, oropendolas, flycatchers, orioles, parrots, and many other species.

As we exit Soropta Canal in mid-afternoon, we will go directly to Swan's Cay, a tiny, picturesque island 1.6 km off the north coast of Isla Colón. Small alcoves and crevices provide nesting habitat between September and March for Brown Boobies and 50-75 pairs of Red-billed Tropicbirds. We cannot land on Swan's Cay, but will circle the area to see the spectacular Red-billed Tropicbirds with their long tails swaying in the breeze as they fly past us.

NIGHT: Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge, Isla Bastimentos



Red-billed Tropicbird © Chris Conard

March 30, Day 5: Green Acres Chocolate Farm. After an early breakfast, we will travel by motorboat eight miles to the Buena Esperanza area and Green Acres Chocolate Farm, a wonderful cacao plantation with trails offering great birding potential. The overstory trees that shade the cacao trees are very tall and old, creating great habitat for birds like large woodpeckers, trogons, jays, oropendolas, orioles, etc. We should have time to visit the chocolate factory and an opportunity to purchase some of their wonderful chocolate. This is the best location to photograph the Green-and-black Poison Dart Frog.



Green-and-black Poison Dart Frog
© Linette Mansberger



Pale-billed Woodpecker © Linette Mansberger

We will return to the main lodge for lunch and a siesta. Since the previous days have been long ones, this afternoon offers the opportunity to bird trails on the property, do some snorkeling on the wonderful coral reefs, kayak around the mangroves and reefs, visit the bat cave, relax on the cabana porches and basically re-energize. During our March 2015 tour, we divided into four groups with owner Jim Kimball taking the snorkelers, owner Jay Viola leading the kayakers, local guide Natalia and me birding with some at pineapple hill and at the bird bathing pools, and Ramón, the other local guide, taking those wanting to visit the bat cave.

NIGHT: Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge, Isla Bastimentos

March 31, Day 6: Return to Punta Robalo and Oleoducto Road. Today we will visit any areas that we did not get to on Day 3 and revisit some of the best areas we did visit to look for endemic and specialty birds that we



Hoffman's Two-toed Sloth with baby © Bill Fraser



Raptor -filled sky in migration © Linette Mansberger

missed. One of the great highlights on our visits to this road has been the Swallow-tailed Kites and thousands of migrating Swainson's Hawks and fewer Broad-winged Hawks and Turkey Vultures. On at least one of the visits to this mainland road, we expect to encounter over 2,000 migrating birds in a long line or lifting up from an overnight roost or getting ready to land on an overnight roost.

On every one of our three days birding this magnificent road, we usually encounter about 120+ species and many are new for our list. We do not ignore mammals. The record for sloths was by a participant who saw 26 individuals but did not distinguish how many were Hoffmann's Two-toed vs. Brown-throated Three-toed sloths.

NIGHT: Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge, Isla Bastimentos

April 1, Day 7: Almirante to Valle Risco, La Gloria, and Junquito. After an early breakfast, we will travel by motorboat to Almirante. This is one of the main banana-exporting towns and is surrounded by huge banana plantations, some of which we will drive past on our way to the first major stop on an unpaved side road to Valle Risco. This road gets almost no traffic and provides wonderful windows to scan the hillside and valley below us. An out-of-range Green Thorntail was found here in 2014. We will bird this downhill road until almost noon and then drive to an overlook with a roof and chairs to enjoy our picnic lunch. After lunch we will bird a little used side road to La Gloria and then another to Junquito. We will be on the lookout for both Great and Little tinamous, Black Hawk-Eagle, Great Antshrike, and Red-breasted Blackbird.



Red-breasted Blackbird © Rick Melnicoe



Snowy Cotinga © Natalia Decastro

NIGHT: Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge, Isla Bastimentos

April 2, Day 8: Isla Popa and Tranquilo Bay. Most of us will be up on the deck of the six-story observation tower at dawn and then join others at 7:30 a.m. for a buffet breakfast. We will make a special motorboat trip this morning to nearby Isla Popa where in past years we have been successful at locating Snowy Cotinga, Mangrove Warbler, and Mangrove Cuckoo.

We may also take time to visit a property that always produces poison dart frogs as well as other birds we may have missed earlier. We will return to the lodge for lunch and then have many choices for afternoon activities, ranging from an opportunity to snorkel, fish, kayak or bird around the Lodge. We also will offer an optional four-hour adventure to a bat cave that includes kayaking after getting to the general area by motorboat. More details

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for this adventure will be provided at lunch. We will meet in late afternoon on the top of the tower and then enjoy our farewell dinner followed by the Top 10 countdown.

NIGHT: Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge, Isla Bastimentos

April 3, Day 9: Morning at Tranquilo Bay; Flight to Panama City. After a morning at leisure, we will catch an afternoon flight to Panama City and transfer to our hotel.

NIGHT: Riande Aeropuerto Hotel, Tocumen

April 4, Day 10: Departure for Home. Participants can use the hotel's complimentary shuttle service to Tocumen International Airport for morning or afternoon flights home.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 7 participants.

TOUR LEADER: Jeri Langham with the assistance of local guides



Jeri M. Langham has a Ph.D. in plant ecology from Washington State University, and after 38 years as a professor of biological sciences at California State University in Sacramento, retired in May 2008. He received the first Outstanding Teacher Award from the newly formed College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in 1997; the Outstanding Faculty Award from the Science Educational Equity and Minority Organization of Science Students organizations in 2005; and his University's third annual Lifetime Achievement Award for Community Service in 2006. Jeri has ardently birded all over North America, as well as Mexico, Costa Rica, Panama, Venezuela, Ecuador, the Galapagos Islands, Peru, Brazil, Argentina, Kenya, Borneo, South Africa, Cuba and Australia. Born and raised in Venezuela, he speaks fluent Spanish. Known for his enthusiasm and boundless energy, Jeri thoroughly enjoys searching for birds and sharing them

with others. His passion for teaching and his natural teaching abilities soon become apparent as his tour participants enjoy learning more about the biological world around them. Jeri is a former member of the California Bird Records Committee. He is a Founding and the Fundraising Director for the Neotropical Grassland Conservancy.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: *Participants registering by October 3, 2020 will receive a discount of \$500.*

The fee for this tour is **\$5,620 (\$5,120 with discount)** per person in double occupancy from Panama City. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 until lunch on Day 9, shared accommodations for nine nights during the tour, ground & boat transportation during the tour, the flights between Panama City and Bocas del Toro, tipping, park entrance fees, and guide services provided by the tour leader. It does not include airfare from your home to Panama City and return, airport departure taxes, 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 is **\$815** for occupying a standard guestroom as a single in Panama City on Days 1 & 9 and a deluxe cabana as a single on Days 2-8 at Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge (see TRANQUILO BAY ECO ADVENTURE LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS section below). 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.

The single supplement is **\$145** for occupying a standard guestroom as a single in Panama City on Days 1 & 9 and a small single room on Days 2-8 at Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge (see TRANQUILO BAY ECO ADVENTURE LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS section below).

TRANQUILO BAY ECO ADVENTURE LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS: There are six deluxe cabanas, each with private bathrooms, air-conditioning, large walk-in shower, full-size water heater, local hardwood floors, fine linen and handcrafted beds. Coffee makers, hair dryers and snack baskets are also located within the bathroom. Each bedroom features a bed or beds, handcrafted for Tranquilo Bay, made from local hardwoods and topped with an orthopedic mattress. Each cabana has a covered porch with a hammock, Adirondack chairs and a ceiling fan. Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge now has two smaller, single, deluxe rooms in a new two-story building that have the amenities mentioned above for the six large deluxe cabanas and their own private porches with hammocks.

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, Visa, or American Express 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 www.ventbird.com) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

PAYMENTS: All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard, Visa, American Express), 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 27, 2020).

CANCELLATION & REFUNDS: Refunds are made according to the following schedule: If cancellation is made 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 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 your protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

If you cancel:

180 days or more before departure date
179 to 151 days before departure date
150 days or less before departure date

Your refund will be:

Your deposit minus \$500*
No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance 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.

Upon cancellation of the transportation or travel services, where you, the customer, are not at fault and have not cancelled in violation of the terms and conditions of any of the contract for transportation or travel services, all sums paid to VENT for services not received by you will be promptly refunded by VENT to you unless you otherwise advise VENT in writing. This policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside 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.

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES: In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize

the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

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.

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 Resolutions as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance™**. Designed for all types of travelers, Ripcord is among the most highly regarded travel insurance programs available.

Critical benefits of **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance** 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. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available but must be purchased within 14 days of tour deposit.** Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as security evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or other security events, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause (must be purchased within 14 days of tour deposit). Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.

For a price quote, or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: ripcordrescuetravelinsurance.com/ventbird; or click the **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance™** 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.

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 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 responsible for any air ticket penalties.***

BAGGAGE: In case your checked luggage is delayed, it's recommended that you pack all documents, medications, a change of clothes, your binocular, and toiletry items in a carry-on bag. Air Panama has a 30 lb. limit for checked luggage and small compartments for carry-on storage above the seats on the plane. Fortunately, you can pay for any excess weight.

CLIMATE: The climate in northwestern Panama is usually warm, with mornings in the 70s and afternoons in the 80s. Conditions at midday can be humid and very warm, with temperatures reaching into the lower 90s. Rainstorms may occur at any time of year, but are more likely during the rainy season. The two seasons with the least amount of rain are in February/March and September/October. On the two days we travel up to 4,200 feet near La Fortuna, the temperatures will be lower and may even be cool. Clouds and overcast skies frequently prevail in higher areas, leading to damp conditions.

CLOTHING: As is the case for all our tropical tours, lightweight field clothing is the norm for Panama. This includes several pair of lightweight field pants, along with cool and comfortable long-sleeved shirts. A hat and sunscreen are recommended for protection from the sun. **DARK-COLORED OR NEUTRAL CLOTHING IS REQUESTED, AS WHITE AND BRIGHT COLORS MAY FRIGHTEN SECRETIVE BIRDS WE ARE TRYING TO TAPE IN.** Lightweight and comfortable walking shoes are recommended, since some days we will spend a good bit of time on foot. Waterproof boots are essential, as the trails can be muddy. A small umbrella and/or rain gear are essential as well.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Free laundry service is available at the Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge, but we recommend you leave something in the tip box for this service on our last morning.

CURRENCY: The U.S. Dollar is the official currency of Panama. VISA and American Express are most commonly used, but MasterCard and Diners Club are also accepted.

DOCUMENTS: For U.S. citizens, a passport valid for at least three months beyond your planned stay is required to enter Panama. Non-U.S. citizens should check with their local Panamanian Consulate or Embassy.

EQUIPMENT: You should pack a binocular that is 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 binocular, 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.

INTERNET ACCESS: Wi-Fi will be available at the Radisson Hotel Panama Canal, Riande Aeropuerto Hotel and in the main building of the Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge.

HEALTH: In general, we recommend that you consult your doctor before taking any immunizations. Health requirements change frequently and often vary from district to district within a country. No vaccinations are required to enter Panama. However, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta advise that there is some risk of malaria in parts of the country. The areas visited on this tour are not at risk. The CDC is recommending precautions for travelers going out of these main areas. Your tetanus, polio, and yellow fever vaccinations should be current. The water is drinkable in Panama, and the food is safe. Please do check with your doctor for your own personal needs and prescription drugs (which may or may not be available on tour).

If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, 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. As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against hepatitis types A and B.

It is possible the normally calm waters in the archipelago could get rough if there is a storm. Hence it might be wise to bring whatever remedy you normally use to prevent seasickness. Most boat rides will be under an hour in length.

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 (232-4636). You can check the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html (click on travel and tourism).

INSECT PROTECTION: As chiggers can be a problem in some areas, we recommend you come prepared with a good repellent. Some of the name brand manufacturers (Cutter and OFF!) produce a variety of products you will find useful. Pump-action dispensers are generally preferable to sprays, while lotions and sticks are especially good for quick and easy application to sensitive areas on the face, or when out in the field. Topsyn gel is useful in reducing irritation from chigger bites or nettle stings (cortisone creams are now available without a prescription). Some people recommend sprinkling sulphur on your socks as a chigger deterrent.

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 the world's species do not carry disease. They do feed on bodily fluids, however, 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 particular, 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 commonly employed by many.
- Apply a cream-style insect repellent, such as "Cutter" to your body from the waist down BEFORE putting on your clothing.
- Spray your pants and socks with a spray repellent such as "Cutter" or "Off!" Repellants with high concentrations of DEET (70-100%) are most effective. You do not need to apply these to your skin, only to clothing. (Be careful as DEET will damage plastics and lens coatings). Repel Permanone is an odorless aerosol insecticide that offers perhaps the best defense against chiggers. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online. It should only be applied to clothes and allowed to dry before you dress. Never apply Permanone directly to the skin. Permethrin is known to be a highly toxic chemical to insects. It is the active ingredient in Permanone, but is present in a small amount (0.5%).
- 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.
- 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.

MISC:

Departure Tax - US \$40 (included in the price of your air ticket)
Electricity - 120 volts; plugs are the flat 2-pin American type.
Language - The official language is Spanish, but English is spoken.
Time - Eastern Standard Time

SUGGESTED READING: Our website at www.ventbird.com offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from the store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You might also want to visit such other online stores as www.amazon.com, and for those out-of-print and hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com, or www.buteobooks.com, which specializes in ornithology books.

Field Guides

Birds:

Ridgely, Robert S. and John Gwynne. *A Guide to the Birds of Panama*. (Second Edition). Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

George R. Angehr and Robert Dean. *The Birds of Panama: A Field Guide*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010.

Mammals:

Emmons, Louise H. *Neotropical Rainforest Mammals: A Field Guide*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Butterflies:

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

Background Reading

Natural History:

Chapman, Frank. *My Tropical Air Castle*. New York: Appleton and Company, 1929. Fun reading by an early ornithologist in Panama. Out of print; try www.abebooks.com.

Chapman, Frank. *Life in an Air Castle*. New York: Appleton-Century Co, 1938. Out of print; try www.abebooks.com.

Forsyth, Adrian and Ken Miyata. *Tropical Nature*. New York: Charles Scribner, 1987. Excellent introduction to many fascinating aspects of the tropical rainforest.

Hilty, Steven. 1994. *Birds of Tropical America*. Shelbourne, VT: Chapters Publishing, 1994. Subtitle: "A watcher's introduction to behavior, breeding and diversity."

Kricher, John C. *A Neotropical Companion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999. An excellent introduction to the rainforest.

Human History:

McCullough, David. *A Path Between the Seas: The Creation of the Panama Canal*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999. An excellent history of the construction of the Panama Canal.

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel your VENT leader 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 and/or local guides; they should not be sent to the VENT office.

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