

# PANAMA: EL VALLE'S CANOPY LODGE

**JANUARY 3-10, 2021**

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*Straddling the Continental Divide, the foothills of Panama harbor a unique avifauna that includes both lowland and highland species, as well as birds of both the Pacific and Caribbean slopes. Our tour, designed to pick up where traditional Canal Zone tours leave off, offers some of Central America's most exciting birding, set amidst beautiful middle-elevation forest and in a refreshingly moderate climate.*

*This tour will be based in the very comfortable Canopy Lodge at El Valle, sister property to the famed Canopy Tower. Nestled in the crater of an extinct volcano, and surrounded by jagged ridges and hills, our lodge enjoys a magnificent scenic backdrop and ready access to lush forests that are alive with colorful hummingbirds and tanagers. Among the many species that we will be searching for are such gems as Spectacled Owl; Rufous-crested Coquette (rare); Snowcap; White-tipped Sicklebill (rare); Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer; Violet-headed Hummingbird; Veraguan*



*Mango; Orange-bellied Trogon; Emerald (Blue-throated) Toucanet; Tody Motmot; Spotted Woodcreeper; Dull-mantled Antbird; Tufted Flycatcher; Lance-tailed Manakin; Ochraceous Wren; Silver-throated, Dusky-faced, Tawny-crested, Black-and-yellow and Bay-headed tanagers; Common Chlorospingus; Scarlet-thighed Dacnis; the very rare Blue Seedeater; and the nearly mythical Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoo.*

*This tour can be taken by itself or in combination with Panama's Darien Lowlands: Canopy Camp (January 9-17, 2021).*

**January 3, Day 1: Arrival in Panama City and Transfer to the Radisson Hotel Panama Canal.** Participants arriving into Panama City's Tocumen International Airport (airport code PTY) 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

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of birds, including such possibilities as Yellow-headed Caracara, Pale-vented Pigeon, Blue-headed Parrot, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Social Flycatcher, Tropical Kingbird, Great Kiskadee, Blue-gray Tanager, and Saffron Finch.

NIGHT: Radisson Hotel Panama Canal, Panama City

**January 4, Day 2: Panama City to El Valle.** For those wishing to get a running start, we will meet in the hotel lobby at 6:00 a.m. for a one hour walk around the hotel grounds. Many common species can be found here, including a few which are difficult to see on the rest of our trip.

For those wishing to sleep in a bit, we will gather in the hotel lobby at 7:00 a.m. for breakfast. At 8:00 a.m., we will load up and leave Panama City behind, head across the Bridge of the Americas to the western side of the Canal and on to the foothills of El Valle. Although the drive takes about two and a half hours, we may make a roadside stop or two if something unusual is seen.

After turning off the Pan-American Highway, a narrow road winds up through dry hills for 28 km (17 miles), slowly increasing in elevation until we round a bend and El Valle de Antón comes into view. At nearly 2,300 feet in elevation, the views of the charming valley before us are memorable indeed. The climate here is refreshingly cooler than in the lowlands. Everywhere around the town are lovely landscaped gardens, colorful with flowers and shaded by open groves of trees, while nearby hillsides are covered in secondary forest. Birds are abundant in this patchwork of habitats. We will make our way through the bustling little town en route to the Canopy Lodge, our home for the next five nights.

The Canopy Lodge's spacious guestrooms offer comfortable beds and private baths with tasteful interior decoration. The grounds meanwhile, are a birder's paradise. The gardens and walkways are often loaded with birds. In fact, it is not uncommon to record 60 species from the property alone in a single visit. Further enhancing the delightful setting are feeding trays, which draw birds all day long. This is indeed a most relaxing way to bird.



**Birding Paradise at the Canopy Lodge © Erik Bruhnke**

After a tasty lunch, we will pay close attention to the feeders and explore the expansive grounds. Among the many species that visit the garden and feeders are Gray-cowled Wood-Rail; Rufous Motmot; Collared Aracari; Red-crowned Woodpecker; Clay-colored Thrush; Crimson-backed, Flame-rumped, Blue-gray, Palm, White-lined, and Dusky-faced tanagers; Red-crowned Ant-Tanager; Bananaquit; Red-legged Honeycreeper; Orange-billed Sparrow; Buff-throated Saltator; Thick-billed Euphonia; and Chestnut-headed Oropendola (a colony of which sometimes nests on the hillside above).

Later in the afternoon, we will begin exploring the many side roads and trails nearby. There are a number of species possible along the road above the lodge in the vicinity of the Canopy Adventure. Here we will search for Lineated Woodpecker, Black-chested Jay, Bay Wren, Rufous-capped Warbler, and Tawny-crested Tanager among others. Nearby forest trails could yield Cocoa Woodcreeper, Scaly-breasted Wren, and Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush. This will be our first chance for the Tody Motmot, found locally in these forests but often elusive. We will also keep a close eye out for Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth and the locally uncommon Geoffroy's Tamarin.

NIGHT: Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Antón

**January 5, Day 3: La Mesa & the Cara Iguana Trail.** From El Valle, a country road leads a short distance up through scattered farms and forest to the back side of three tall peaks, a flat area known locally as “La Mesa.” This area is on the crest of the ridge along the Continental Divide. For much of the year, it is brushed by clouds passing over from the Caribbean slope. The frequent misting creates a super moist environment, where the remaining forests are fantastically sculpted and laden with epiphytes and shade the dense understory.

This area is home to some fantastic foothill birds not found in the forests below or the Canal area. Among these, tanagers are the dominant group with potential for gems like Emerald (scarce), Bay-headed, Silver-throated, Golden-hooded, and Tawny-crested tanagers; Tawny-capped Euphonia; and Scarlet-thighed Dacnis.



**Orange-bellied Trogon © Erik Bruhnke**

Hummingbirds are also diverse here and possibilities include some real foothill specialties like White-tipped Sicklebill (rare), Green Hermit, Green-crowned Brilliant, Rufous-crested Coquette (scarce), Violet-headed Hummingbird, Crowned Woodnymph and Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer. A hike along the Las Minas Road offers opportunities to see a variety of species including Orange-bellied Trogon, Broad-billed Motmot, Emerald (Blue-throated) Toucanet, Spotted Woodcreeper, Plain & Spot-crowned antvireos, Chestnut-backed Antbird, Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant, Common Chlorospingus and Wedge-tailed Grass-Finch among others. We will return to the Lodge at mid-day for lunch.

Following an early afternoon break we will venture out the Cara Iguana Trail on the outskirts of El Valle itself. Drier forests here often harbor a different set of birds altogether. Roadside Hawk, Tropical Screech-Owl, Lesson's Motmot, Tody Motmot, Long-billed Starthroat, Barred Antshrike, White-bellied Antbird (a real skulker), Lance-tailed Manakin, Isthmian Wren, Rufous-and-white Wren, and the challenging Rosy Thrush-Tanager are among the possibilities here. Additionally, for several years in a row now, a pair of Spectacled Owls has been roosting in one area with some regularity. Although far from guaranteed, we have had good success on recent tours.

NIGHT: Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Antón

**January 6-7, Days 4 & 5: Altos del Maria.** Two full days will be spent at the avian rich Altos del Maria, a remnant cloud-forest type habitat that is over 3,000 feet above sea level. Here we may find several species not readily available elsewhere on the tour. Orange-bellied Trogon, Spotted Woodcreeper, Dull-mantled Antbird, Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant, Tufted Flycatcher, White-ruffed Manakin, Ochraceous Wren, Gray-breasted Wood-Wren, Silver-throated Tanager, Black-and-yellow Tanager, and Common Chlorospingus are among the expected fare. Less numerous but still possible targets include Red-faced Spinetail, Spotted Barbtail, Brown-billed Scythebill, and Rufous-browed Tyrannulet. The greatest potential prizes of this location are the stunning Black-crowned Antpitta and the incomparable Snowcap. The antpitta is secretive and generally difficult to see, but we have a chance of finding one of these spectacular ground dwellers. Numbers of the tiny, wine-colored Snowcap may vary seasonally, but we have had some success at finding this jewel on recent trips. Additionally, Altos del Maria can be a good area to find a variety of raptors. Double-toothed Kite, the amazing White Hawk, Barred Hawk (very uncommon to rare), Black Hawk-Eagle and Bat Falcon are among the possibilities. At any rate, our visits to Altos del Maria will certainly prove memorable.



**White Hawk © Erik Bruhnke**



NIGHTS: Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Antón

**January 8, Day 6: Pacific Lowlands of Juan Hombrón and El Chirú.** The final area that we will visit will be the rice fields and forest edges of Juan Hombrón and the village of El Chirú near the Pacific Coast. Here open farm country, scattered hedgerows, and grasslands play host to an entirely different group of birds. Among the many possibilities are the likes of Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, Savannah Hawk, Common Black-Hawk, Aplomado Falcon, Crested Bobwhite, Wattled Jacana, Southern Lapwing, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, the recently split Veraguan Mango (endemic), Sapphire-throated Hummingbird, Groove-billed Ani, Brown-throated Parakeet, Yellow-crowned Parrot, Straight-billed Woodcreeper, Barred Antshrike, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Mouse-colored Tyrannulet, Lance-tailed Manakin, and Blue-black Grassquit. We will also visit the beaches near Santa Clara where a variety of coastal species should be seen including Magnificent Frigatebird, Brown Pelican, and possibly Blue-footed Booby. It is not uncommon to add 40 or more species to the trip list on this day alone.



Sunbittern © Erik Bruhnke

We will likely return with enough time for another afternoon feeder vigil back at the Lodge. A variety of possible new birds could be added to our ever-growing list such as Gray-headed Chachalaca, Rufous-tailed and Snowy-bellied hummingbirds, Purple-crowned Fairy (uncommon), Social Flycatcher, Squirrel Cuckoo, Plain-colored Tanager, Red-legged Honeycreeper, and Orange-billed Sparrow (best at dawn and dusk). Even the rarely seen Sunbittern is occasionally spotted in the tumbling stream that passes by the front of the lodge.

NIGHT: Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Antón

**January 9, Day 7: Morning at El Valle; Return to Panama City.** Our last day will be somewhat flexible. We will likely choose between a return to the La Mesa area or to the Cara Iguana trail. This will be dependent upon which species we still need. We will also likely make a stop at the Canopy Adventure just above the lodge. This is a private reserve that protects tall tropical moist forest along a clear foothill stream dominated by a 200-foot-high waterfall. The goal of the refuge is to provide much-needed employment for the local population, who would otherwise be cutting the forests for fuel and agriculture. The refuge currently employs ten young men to safeguard its treasures. Highly sought-after birds that we might search for here include White Hawk, Sunbittern (rare), Mottled Owl, Tody Motmot, Black-chested Jay, and Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush amongst the more widespread forest birds. We will return to the lodge around 11:00 a.m. to give us some time to pack before an early lunch. After lunch, we will head back towards Panama City and should arrive at the hotel in the mid to late afternoon, where we will enjoy our farewell dinner.

NIGHT: Riande Aeropuerto Hotel, Tocumen

**January 10, Day 8: Departure for Home.** Participants not continuing on Panama's Darien Lowlands: Canopy Camp (January 9-17, 2021) 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 12 participants.

**TOUR LEADER:** Erik Bruhnke with the assistance of local guides



**Erik Bruhnke** has loved birds since he was a child looking at chickadees. In 2008 he graduated from Northland College in Wisconsin with a Natural Resources degree. Erik taught field ornithology at Northland College for three semesters. Between 2009 and 2014, he spent his summers conducting field research focused on breeding bird transects in Upper Michigan, point counts for a breeding bird atlas in Minnesota and Wisconsin's Northwoods, vegetation and breeding bird surveys throughout wind farms in North Dakota's prairie potholes, and cavity-nesting surveys in the Cascade Mountains of Oregon. A devoted raptor nerd, he is drawn to hawkwatches. He worked as an interpreter for six seasons at Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory in Duluth, Minnesota; counted migrating raptors at the Corpus Christi HawkWatch in Texas in 2015; and was the 2016 and 2017 hawk counter at the Cape May Hawkwatch in New Jersey. Erik's wildlife photography has won national awards, and he's written for the American Birding

Association's *Birder's Guide*, *BirdWatching* magazine, and *Bird Watcher's Digest*. When not leading birding tours, Erik often leads field trips and speaks at birding festivals. He also enjoys hiking, kayaking, cross-country skiing, and just being out in the snow. In his free time he loves to cook and bake.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for this tour is **\$3,695** per person in double occupancy from Panama City, Panama for occupying a standard guestroom at the Canopy Lodge, Radisson Hotel Panama Canal and Riande Aeropuerto Hotel. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 to dinner on Day 7, five nights in one of the Canopy Lodge's standard double rooms (see CANOPY LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS section below), one night at the Radisson Hotel Panama Canal, one night at the Riande Aeropuerto Hotel, ground transportation during the tour, tipping, park entrance fees, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. 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 for this tour is **\$785** for occupying a standard double room with a private bath for five nights at the Canopy Lodge (see CANOPY LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS section below), a single room for one night at the Radisson Hotel Panama Canal and a single room for one night at the Riande Aeropuerto Hotel. 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 fee for this tour is **\$3,995** per person in double occupancy from Panama City, Panama for occupying a premium guestroom at the Canopy Lodge and standard room at the Radisson Hotel Panama Canal and Riande Aeropuerto Hotel. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 to dinner on Day 7, five nights in one of the Canopy Lodge's two premium rooms (see CANOPY LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS section below), one night at the Radisson Hotel Panama Canal, one night at the Riande Aeropuerto Hotel, ground transportation during the tour, tipping, park entrance fees, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. 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 fee for this tour is **\$3,445** per person in single occupancy from Panama City, Panama for occupying a single room at the Canopy Lodge. This includes all meals, single accommodations for five nights in one of the Canopy Lodge's single rooms (see CANOPY LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS section below), a single room for one night at the Radisson Hotel Panama Canal, a single room for one night at the Riande Aeropuerto Hotel, ground transportation during the tour, tipping, park entrance fees, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. 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.

Participants combining this tour with **Panama's Darien Lowlands: Canopy Camp** will receive a discount of **\$100** in double occupancy and **\$150** in single occupancy.

**CANOPY LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS:** In their main building, the Canopy Lodge has a total of six standard double guestrooms and two premium rooms. Each premium room has more space than a standard room, windows on two walls and a king bed. A building adjacent to the main building houses four single rooms. These rooms are about two-thirds the size of the doubles but of equal quality. Based on room availability, singles have a choice of paying a supplement to occupy one of the standard double guest rooms or a paying a discounted tour fee to occupy one of the single rooms in a separate building. All rooms will be pre-reserved on a first-come, first-served basis. You will be advised of room availability and your specific room assignment at the time of your registration.

**PANAMA CITY ACCOMMODATIONS:** The Radisson Hotel Panama Canal in Panama City is located right along the Pacific entrance to the Panama Canal. Rooms have balconies that face out onto the Canal, so that one can sit out and watch ships coming and going. The grounds of the hotel also offer very good birding with 30 or more species possible in a short walk. It is, however, an older property, and despite recent renovations, has some issues with older plumbing that can be bothersome. There are certainly newer hotels in the middle of Panama City that offer more luxuries, but lack the location and birds. We feel that the advantages of staying along the Canal with birding right on the grounds, outweigh any of the inconveniences.

**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](http://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 (August 6, 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.

**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](http://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.*

**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.

**BAGGAGE:** In case your checked luggage is delayed, it's recommended that you pack all documents, medications, a change of clothes, your binoculars, and toiletry items in a carry-on bag.

**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 suggested, as white or bright colors may frighten secretive birds. Lightweight and comfortable walking shoes are recommended, since some days we will spend a good bit of time on foot. Waterproof boots (or overshoes such as NEOS) are essential during the rainy season (May through December), as the trails can be muddy, but may not be necessary during the dry season (January through April). A small umbrella and/or rain gear are essential as well.

**CLIMATE:** The climate in the El Valle region is generally cooler than that of the Canal Zone. Mornings and evenings are cooler (may get down into the low 60s) while midday temperatures usually do not exceed the low 80s. Clouds, drizzle, and overcast skies frequently prevail in higher areas, leading to damp conditions. Rain is possible at any season, but is more likely from May through December when some rain is expected on a daily basis. At areas such as La Mesa and Los Altos del Maria, some rain, fog or mist is likely at any season. Along the Pacific Coast near El Chirú, one can expect hotter temperatures and drier conditions. Midday highs in this area may reach the 90s.

**SCHEDULE:** Breakfast times will vary from 5:00 a.m. to 7:00 a.m. (most days it will be around 6:00 a.m.). Some days we will be out in the field the entire day taking lunch with us, while on others we will return to the Lodge for lunch and an afternoon break. Walks on this tour will vary in length from very short distances to up to two miles and at a generally leisurely pace. Terrain will vary from level ground to trails with varying amounts of ups and downs. Some steep trails and roads are possible in the higher elevations.

**INTERNET:** The Canopy Lodge has a computer available for guest use free of charge and Wi-Fi available in the dining area. Sometimes weather may affect internet access. The Radisson Hotel Panama Canal and Riande Aeropuerto Hotel offer Wi-Fi.

**PHOTOGRAPHY:** With the increase in digital photography of late, the following are requested. If you are interested in obtaining a digiscoped shot through the VENT scope, please ask the leader to assist you to avoid scratching the lens of the scope. If you use flash for photography, please refrain from doing so until all participants have seen the bird, as sudden flash may scare the bird away. Thank you for your cooperation.

**LAUNDRY SERVICE:** Laundry service is available at the Canopy Lodge.

**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 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 leaders will have a spotting scope; but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so.

**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 Polio and yellow fever vaccinations should be current. The water is drinkable in Panama and the food is safe.

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.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers'



Information Line 800-CDC-INFO (232-4636) or you can check their website at [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel). Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: [www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html) (click on travel and tourism).

**INSECT PROTECTION:** Chiggers can be a problem in some areas. We recommend the use of Cutter lotion (or a similar lotion) and a pump-style container of OFF! or a similar repellent. Topsy gel is useful in reducing irritation from chigger bites or nettle stings (cortisone creams are now available without a prescription).

**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!" Repellents 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. Sulphur is available for use at the Canopy Lodge.

**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:** 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](http://www.amazon.com) which has a wide selection; [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com) and [www.nhbs.com](http://www.nhbs.com) which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

***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](http://www.abebooks.com).

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

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