

PANAMA'S CANOPY TOWER & EL VALLE'S CANOPY LODGE

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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, VENT's Panama tours also offer plenty of challenges and local specialties for those who have birded elsewhere in the region. Our focus will be on finding, identifying, and observing a wealth of wonderful Neotropical birds, including trogons, toucans, hummingbirds, parrots, motmots, puffbirds, manakins, antbirds, and tanagers. We'll take time to sort out the look-alikes, learn a bit about the plant associations and habitats, and call up many of the more skulking species.

Among the pleasures of a visit here is the opportunity to stay at the Canopy Tower, a lodge located amidst spectacular birding in Soberania National Park. Offering the chance to hear the dawn chorus from above the treetops, to gaze upon seldom-seen denizens of the upper reaches of the forest, and to remain in such beautiful surroundings without sacrificing amenities, this innovative venture has taken its place as one of Central America's very finest ecotourist experiences.



Canopy Tower © Bill Fraser



Arriving at Canopy Lodge in El Valle de Antón © Barbara Skelly

The fabulous Canopy Lodge is situated approximately 60 miles west of Panama City in the picturesque El Valle de Antón, known as El Valle for short, a pleasant and quiet community of country homes. Nestled in the crater of an extinct volcano and surrounded by jagged ridges and hills, El Valle is considered a “secret getaway” for many Panamanians. The three forested peaks of Cerro Gaital National Monument loom over the valley and impart a deep sense of tranquility.



This part of Panama is visually and sensually different than the area around the Canal Zone. The verdant forests and gardens support a broad diversity of birds that one simply cannot find around the Canopy Tower. Realizing the natural beauty and great birding potential of the surroundings, the creator of the Canopy Tower, Raúl Arias de Para, put to work his intimate knowledge of the land and the people who live there. The result was a very posh facility called the Canopy Lodge.

The fruit feeders in front of the open lobby are visited by Rufous Motmots, Tawny-capped and Thick-billed euphonias, Red-legged and Green honeycreepers, Red-crowned Woodpeckers, Clay-colored Thrushes, and such tanagers as Flame-rumped, Crimson-backed, Dusky-faced, Palm and Blue-gray. It is difficult to walk away from this spectacle to participate in other birding activities. The Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology has installed a bird cam on one of these feeders. Here is the link http://cams.allaboutbirds.org/channel/57/Panama_Fruit_Feeders/. In addition, there is a natural pool where one can cool off during siesta time. The pool is fed from the crystal-clear small river that runs past our rooms and lulls us to sleep at night. Foothill species such as Northern Emerald-Toucanet, Collared Trogon, Spotted Woodcreeper, Dull-mantled Antbird, Black-crowned Antpitta, Tody Motmot, and Silver-throated and Tawny-crested tanagers are among many other possibilities in the forests nearby.

Our specific day-to-day itinerary will be kept flexible, allowing us to take advantage of local weather and birding conditions. Having two comfortable bases in the midst of so much fine birding gives us leeway in planning our activities.

January 4, Day 1: Arrival in Panama City and Transfer to the Canopy Tower. All participants reserved on direct flights from various cities, which are scheduled to arrive into Panama City's Tocumen International Airport prior to 8:00 p.m., will be met at the airport and transferred to the Canopy Tower, which is about 45 minutes away. The Canopy Tower is not set up to accommodate late evening arrivals.

NIGHT: Canopy Tower, Gamboa

January 5, Day 2: Canopy Tower, Semaphore Hill Entrance Road and Gamboa Area. One is often awakened by Mantled Howler Monkeys whose loud roars are made to let other troops know they have survived the night and their territory is still occupied. An early start this morning (6:00 a.m.) will find us on the observation deck of the Tower enjoying a cup of coffee or tea while watching the sunrise over the forested hillsides. The predawn chorus often includes the strange barks and moans of forest-falcons, the haunting calls of a tinamou, or the last hoots of an owl. As the light hits the treetops, the forest really begins to come alive. Birds begin singing and actively foraging, many of them close and often below us. Species regularly seen from here include incredible Keel-billed and Yellow-throated toucans, Slaty-tailed Trogon, Masked Tityra, wintering Bay-breasted Warblers and Yellow-throated Vireos, and the stunning Slate-colored Grosbeak. Fruiting *Cecropias* often harbor a nice variety of tanagers, including Plain-colored, White-shouldered, and Palm; Fulvous-vented Euphonia; and gorgeous Green Honeycreepers. We'll also keep a sharp eye out for two of the true prizes of the treetops, the spectacular Blue Cotinga (increasingly scarce) and the brilliant, but difficult to see, Green Shrike-Vireo. We've had good luck seeing Blue Cotinga here (about half of our trips), often at close range. Green Shrike-Vireo, whose monotonous titmouse-like song sounds like "can't-see-me" and can be heard in many areas of the tropics, can perhaps be viewed best here at the Canopy Tower or the tower at the nearby Discovery Center. It can be hard to leave the show outside to go inside for breakfast. Fortunately, the dining room has panoramic windows that will allow us to keep an eye out even while eating, and during breakfast we often see Geoffroy's Tamarins visiting the bananas set up in the tree next to our table!



Green Shrike-Vireo © Doug Johnson



Geoffroy's Tamarin © Doug Johnson



Blue Cotinga © Sam Naifeh

By mid-morning we'll tear ourselves away from the Tower and begin working our way down the one-mile entrance road. As we descend Semaphore Hill, a host of new birds will greet us. Broad-billed and Rufous motmots, various trogons, Chestnut-backed Antbird, and Blue-crowned and Red-capped manakins are among the many possibilities. Army ant swarms are sometimes encountered along this road as well, with a variety of attendant antbirds and woodcreepers possible.

After lunch and an afternoon siesta, we will likely spend some time watching the hummingbird feeders around the base of the tower. While there is much seasonal variation, up to eight species are possible here. Among the more regular visitors are the stunning White-necked Jacobin, Long-billed Hermit, the incomparable Violet-bellied Hummingbird, Blue-chested Hummingbird, Snowy-bellied Hummingbird, and White-vented Plumeleteer.

In mid-afternoon we will head for the small town of Gamboa. Feeders at Raúl's Canopy Bed and Breakfast may produce a dazzling variety of tanagers (Crimson-backed, Flame-rumped, Blue-gray, and Palm) and beautiful honeycreepers (Red-legged and Green), as well as other species. Beyond Gamboa there are some nice wetlands where we'll seek out a whole new group of birds. Tiny White-throated Crakes dart about the marsh. Wattled Jacanas and Purple Gallinules walk on the floating vegetation. Greater Anis are sometimes seen atop the brushy tangles, while Lesser Kiskadees prefer perches closer to the water. Sometimes a Capybara strolls by, and Rufescent Tiger-Herons are regular. A careful check of the shoreline might reveal a skulking Gray-cowled Wood-Rail or a gorgeous

American Pygmy Kingfisher hiding in the shadows. The open field and edge habitats surrounding the marsh can be good for Squirrel Cuckoo, Barred Antshrike, Black-striped Sparrow, and Yellow-billed Cacique (rare), in addition to a variety of raptors, parrots, hummingbirds, and flycatchers.

NIGHT: Canopy Tower, Gamboa

January 6, Day 3: All Day on Pipeline Road. Beginning just beyond the old Canal Zone town of Gamboa, Pipeline Road winds for miles through the forests and foothills of Soberania National Park. The combination of rich primary and secondary forests; clear, beautiful streams; lack of traffic; and abundant birdlife makes this arguably the most famous birding road in the world. The road is only open to the public for the first 2.2 kilometers that lead to the new Discovery Center. Beyond that, only those with a key to the gate can drive on. We are fortunate to have a key. One never knows quite what to expect here, but there will certainly be much to see. Perhaps we'll find a fruiting Matchwood tree with two species of toucans and several trogons feeding in it. Maybe it will be a Black-breasted Puffbird or Broad-billed Motmot perched motionless at eye level or a noisy troop of Purple-throated Fruitcrows working the forest edge. We may locate a lek of spectacular Golden-collared Manakins displaying on sunlit patches of the forest floor. The wild frenzy of wing snapping and jumping is truly an amazing sight. Fruiting *Cecropias* lure honeycreepers, tanagers, and dacnises to their fruiting spikes. We'll always be on the alert for a foraging army ant swarm with its attendant antbirds (Spotted, Bicolored, and perhaps the stunning Ocellated) and woodcreepers (Northern Barred-Woodcreeper and Plain-brown Woodcreeper are among the possibilities). Other than the Darién, the very remote frontier zone between Panama and Colombia, Pipeline Road is the best area we've found in the Neotropics for locating army ant swarms. Surely the whirl of activity around a swarm is one of the most exciting phenomena of the bird world. As the voracious ants march along the forest floor seeking smaller terrestrial prey, the birds pursue larger, more mobile insects and other arthropods. Because the birds are so intent on feeding, it is often possible to get very close views of them.



Broad-billed Motmot
© Fred Engelman



Ocellated Antbird © Cliff Hawley



Streak-chested Antpitta © Jeri Langham

Some of the other birds we may encounter in the Pipeline Road area are Black Hawk-Eagle, Blue-headed and Mealy parrots, Slaty-tailed and Black-throated trogons, Rufous Motmot, Great Jacamar, Cinnamon Woodpecker, Scaly-throated Leaf-tosser, Fasciated and Black-crowned antshrikes, Spot-crowned Antvireo, Streak-chested Antpitta (secretive), Brownish Twistwing, and Chestnut-headed Oropendola.

Pipeline Road is so diverse that one could easily spend an entire week birding its length without exhausting the possibilities for new birds. We will devote two days to this area, starting at opposite ends of the road on different days to maximize diversity. The more distant stretches of Pipeline Road gain slightly in elevation and feature taller forest that harbors some species seldom found along the early stretches of the road. Having two full days along this

road will also maximize our chances of encountering an army ant swarm and, along with it, the spectacular Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoo.

NIGHT: Canopy Tower, Gamboa

January 7, Day 4: Cerro Azul and Panama City Shoreline. An early start (about 5:00 a.m.) will take us to the foothills of Cerro Jefe and Cerro Azul, a huge gated community. We'll head directly to an area where some of the native vegetation has not been removed and planted in pines and then up to Cerro Jefe, where tanagers are our main target. Before noon, we will head for the gardens surrounding the private residence of Jerry and Linda Harrison. The hummingbirds coming to the nectar feeders and fruit platforms will astound you. Violet-capped, Snowy-bellied, and Violet-headed hummingbirds; Green and Long-billed hermits; Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer; and Crowned Woodnymphs fight for space at the feeders. Even the rare White-tipped Sicklebill, Rufous-crested Coquette and Long-billed Starthroat are possible. In any of the areas we visit here on Cerro Azul, Red-lored and Mealy parrots can often be seen cruising by at eye level in the morning light. Fruiting trees in the yards typically attract some of the most colorful foothills birds including Speckled, Bay-headed, and Emerald tanagers; and Scarlet-thighed and Blue dacnises. The very local and striking Rufous-winged Tanager, difficult to see anywhere else in its range, is sometimes spotted here as well. Other birds we may encounter include Yellow-eared Toucanet, Stripe-cheeked Woodpecker (endemic), Mistletoe Tyrannulet, Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant, Spotted and Black-striped woodcreepers, Rufous-capped Warbler, and Yellow-faced Grassquit. It should be noted that many of these foothills birds can be hard to locate in a short visit, especially with unpredictable foothills weather, but the possibilities here are certainly enticing.



Rufous-crested Coquette
© Carlos Bethancourt



Rufous-winged Tanager © Fred Engelman



Stripe-cheeked Woodpecker
© Laurie Dann

In the early afternoon, we will head downhill to a shoreline area in Panama City where a creek empties into the Pacific Ocean. This is the only time we will have to look for shorebirds and will have to deal with whatever tide level we encounter. It is a great place to see Southern Lapwings close to shore. Thousands of gulls, terns, Neotropic Cormorants, Brown Pelicans, and dozens of shorebird species are possible; it can be quite a spectacle. This is also a chance to see part of Panama City as we drive along the shoreline to the road that takes us back to the Canopy Tower.

NIGHT: Canopy Tower, Gamboa

January 8, Day 5: Rainforest Discovery Center & Gamboa Area. This morning we will return to Pipeline Road, where we will spend the morning at the Rainforest Discovery Center (RDC). A highlight of our visit will be the time spent atop the RDC observation tower, which will give us an impressive view of the rainforest canopy. Blue Cotingas are regularly seen from here, as are Scaled Pigeon, various swifts, Squirrel Cuckoo, White-necked Puffbird, several species of trogons, Brown-capped Tyrannulet, Yellow-margined Flycatcher, and mixed-species flocks with a variety of warblers, honeycreepers and tanagers. The tower can be particularly good for seeing forest raptors as they perch above the canopy in the early morning or as they catch the first thermals later in the morning. Possibilities include Gray-headed Kite, Hook-billed Kite, Semiplumbeous Hawk, Ornate and Black hawk-eagles, and others. Watching the birds awaken here was a highlight of our last tour. When activity in the canopy dies down, we will descend from

the tower to bird the trail system below, where many of the typical Pipeline Road birds are possible. Eventually, we will make our way back to the Visitor Center, where feeders along the deck attract large numbers of hummingbirds of several species, among them White-necked Jacobin, Violet-bellied Hummingbird, Blue-chested Hummingbird, Crowned Woodnymph, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Black-throated Mango, White-vented Plumeleteer, and Long-billed and Stripe-throated hermits.



Crowned Woodnymph
© Fred Engelman



Yellow-tailed Oriole © Sam Naifeh



Crimson-backed Tanager
© Dave Taliaferro

We will return to the Canopy Tower for lunch and siesta, after which we will spend the afternoon somewhere in the Gamboa area. Our exact plans will remain flexible to take advantage of current conditions. We might choose to bird along the Chagres River near the Gamboa Rainforest Resort. The forest edge here can make for interesting birding, with such possibilities as Yellow-tailed Oriole, Jet Antbird, Great Antshrike, White-bellied Antbird, Golden-fronted and Scrub greenlets, Crimson-backed Tanager, and others. Conversely, we might head to Old Gamboa Road where the trail leads through more open country and thus yields a different variety of birds. Jet Antbird; Rufous-breasted, Buff-breasted, and Isthmian wrens; Lance-tailed Manakin; and Rosy Thrush-Tanager (rare) are among the many possibilities. The nearby police academy ponds often produce Boat-billed Heron, kingfishers, Southern Rough-winged Swallow, Lesser Kiskadee, and Rusty-margined Flycatcher. More common open country species such as Orange-chinned Parakeet, Red-crowned Woodpecker, and Buff-throated and Streaked saltators should also be in evidence.

NIGHT: Canopy Tower, Gamboa

January 9, Day 6: All Day on Pipeline Road. Today we will return to Pipeline Road, this time driving into the off-limits area first thing in the morning. All of the species mentioned above as possible on our first visit are again possible. Our main reason for devoting two full days to this incredible area is to increase our chances of encountering an army ant swarm and also of finding many of the rarer species that can only be found on multiple trips to this forested region. Because the water supply for the famous Panama Canal depends on the watershed created by the rain forest in the Canal Zone, these forests will never be removed.

NIGHT: Canopy Tower, Gamboa

January 10, Day 7: Metropolitan Natural Park, Panama Canal Museum and Miraflores Locks. The entire morning will be devoted to the drier forests of the Metropolitan Natural Park area. The avifauna here is quite different from that around the Canopy Tower. Among the many possibilities are Gray-headed Chachalaca, White-bellied and Dusky antbirds, Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet, Lance-tailed Manakin, Golden-fronted Greenlet, Rufous-breasted and Rufous-and-white wrens, Long-billed Gnatwren, Pheasant Cuckoo (scarce and seasonal), Whooping Motmot, White-necked Puffbird, Fasciated Antshrike, Crimson-backed Tanager and Cinnamon Woodpecker.



Pheasant Cuckoo © Jeri Langham



Fasciated Antshrike © John Barkla



Cinnamon Woodpecker © Laurie Dann

In addition, we will spend some time searching for two of the real specialty birds of this area: the endemic Yellow-green Tyrannulet and the magnificent Rosy Thrush-Tanager, both of which can be found in this park.

Afternoon plans will be flexible but may include a walk through the lush forest of Plantation Road or we will offer an optional trip to the Panama Canal Museum and Miraflores Locks, where you can watch a large ship transit through one of the famous Panama Canal locks and learn how the canal was constructed.

NIGHT: Canopy Tower, Gamboa

January 11, Day 8: Transfer from Canopy Tower to Canopy Lodge in El Valle de Antón and La Mesa. You will have the option of one last early morning of birding on the observation deck of the Canopy Tower, where sunrises can be spectacular, especially on overcast days.

We will depart the Canopy Tower around 9:00 a.m. and arrive in El Valle de Antón in time for lunch. Soon after diverging from the Pan-American Highway, we'll come to charming El Valle de Antón. At nearly 2,000 feet, the climate is cooler here and less humid than in the lowlands but still dominated by dry Pacific weather. The three forested peaks of Cerro Gaital National Monument loom over the valley and impart a sense of tranquility. 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 four nights.

The Canopy Lodge's guestrooms offer large comfortable beds, private baths, and 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. Greatly enhancing the delightful setting are feeding stations that attract hordes of birds every morning and afternoon. This is indeed an incredible way to bird. For added effect, a beautiful clear stream tumbles past the open-air dining room and our luxurious guestrooms. Highlights of this location include expansive grounds, with flowering bushes that attract hummingbirds, and banana feeders right off the porch where we may see Gray-headed Chachalaca; White-tipped Dove; Red-crowned Woodpecker; Black-chested Jay; Bananaquit; Blue-gray, Crimson-backed, Flame-rumped and White-lined tanagers; Black-striped Sparrow; Buff-throated Saltator; and Chestnut-headed Oropendola (a colony of which nests on the hillside above). Gorgeous Rufous Motmots are known to visit the feeders too.



Rufous Motmot © Cathy Rogier



Blue-gray Tanager © Laurie Dann

It is quickly apparent that the El Valle region contains an impressive diversity of habitats, from semi-deciduous forest typical of the Pacific lowlands and foothills, to wet, higher elevation cloud forest, to lush Caribbean slope foothill forest. Each of these habitats has its own special birds, and during our stay we will attempt to cover as many of these habitats as possible. Our exact itinerary, particularly the sequence in which we cover the various spots, will remain flexible, and, in part, be determined by conditions on the ground, including weather and current birding conditions.

After a delicious lunch we will take time for a siesta or watching the feeders from chairs on the porch. From El Valle, a country road leads a short distance up through scattered farms and forest to the back side of three tall peaks to a flat area known locally as “La Mesa,” where we will spend the afternoon. At 2,800 feet, this area sits below the crest of 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 that shade the dense understory.

This area is home to some fantastic foothills birds not found in the forests below or in the Canal Zone. Among these, tanagers are the dominant group, with potential for gems like Emerald, Bay-headed, Golden-hooded, Tawny-crested, and Silver-throated. A good representation of the birds of this elevation includes Southern Lapwing, Bat Falcon, Lineated Woodpecker, Keel-billed Toucan, Northern Emerald-Toucanet, Collared Trogon, Spotted Woodcreeper, Mistletoe Tyrannulet, Tawny-capped Euphonia and Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, while Canada and Mourning warblers are found here in the winter months.

Your introduction to El Valle will conclude this evening with tasty appetizers and a delicious meal.

NIGHT: Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Antón

January 12, Day 9: Altos del Maria. This morning we will load up in four-wheel drive vehicles for an all-day trip to one of two areas in Altos del Maria. One option is to cross the mountains to the far end of the huge Altos del Maria gated community to a remnant cloud-forest habitat at 3,000 feet. Altos del Maria, literally translated to “Highlands of Maria,” represents the altitudinal highpoint of the trip. Because it sits on the Caribbean slope, this area gives us chances for a number of species not possible elsewhere on our route. Unfortunately, this huge gated community is slowly being developed and eventually may have as many as 1,000 homes. The developer has built a castle-like home high in one of the undeveloped areas and we may get to see it if there is no fog cover when we drive past it. On our first of two visits, we stop about two kilometers shy of the entrance gate, where we have had great success with rare species like White-tipped Sicklebill, Snowcap, and Stripe-throated Hermit. While watching the Lobster-claw or *Heliconia rostrata* inflorescences for those three hummingbirds, we will encounter other species such as flycatchers, tanagers, antbirds and woodcreepers.



White-tipped Sicklebill © Jeri Langham



Heliconia rostrata © Bill Fraser



Tody Motmot © Carlos Bethancourt

After passing the gate, strategic stops at a number of locations will expose us to several impressive stretches of forest. Birds are typically plentiful, but we will focus our efforts on finding more challenging species like Tody Motmot, Collared Trogon, Brown-billed Scythebill, Rufous-browed Tyrannulet, Dull-mantled Antbird, Ochraceous and Rufous-and-white wrens, and the special local subspecies of Common Chlorospingus. The greatest potential prize of this location is the stunning Black-crowned Antpitta. Though secretive and sometimes difficult to see, we have a chance of finding one of these spectacular ground dwellers. A favorite stop on this day is the Santiago Aposto Forest, an incredible patch of climax forest area with gorgeous, tall trees covered with epiphytes. Walking on the paved trail in this lush rainforest is almost magical. On a recent tour, upon our return to the building with bathrooms and a porch, four species interrupted our leader's mini lecture: Ochraceous Wren, Collared Trogon, Chestnut-backed Antbird, and Chestnut-capped Brushfinch.

Our picnic lunch is always at a little park with a trail to a waterfall that drops about 75 meters into a valley. Another area we visit on this distant side has a wonderful boardwalk just below a ridge where we sometimes at least hear the elusive Black-crowned Antpitta. The rest of the afternoon is spent walking the paved road in areas where the native vegetation has not been removed and replaced by horrendous pines. We hope to encounter feeding flocks as well as species on territory. One stretch with lots of mistletoe has produced up to four species of euphonias. Depending on the time we return to the valley floor, you will have a choice of shopping for locally made presents to take home or being returned to the Lodge to enjoy the species coming to the fruit and nectar feeders.

NIGHT: Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Antón

January 13, Day 10: Juan Hombrón; Santa Clara Beachfront Home. We will depart around 5:00 a.m. to head for the dry Pacific lowlands. Once we reach the Pan-American Highway, we will drive west toward Costa Rica until we reach the unpaved side road to the extensive rice fields at Juan Hombrón. Before reaching the rice fields, we will bird along the tree-lined and shrub-lined, unpaved road for Savanna Hawk, Aplomado Falcon, Pearl Kite, Crested Caracara, Crested Bobwhite, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Brown-throated Parakeet, Sapphire-throated Hummingbird, Veraguan Mango, Orange-chinned Parakeet, Social Flycatcher, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Barred Antshrike, Mouse-colored Tyrannulet, Lance-tailed Manakin, Pale-eyed Pygmy-Tyrant and Rufous-browed Peppershrike. The extensive rice fields are great for herons, tiger-herons, bitterns, egrets, ibises, Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, Yellow-headed Caracara, and many raptors following heavy equipment harvesting the fields. A few Swainson's Hawks stop here instead of going all the way down to Argentina for the winter months. The beachfront can be good for shorebirds and a few years ago produced the only American Oystercatcher for this tour. Small ponds might have ducks and Southern Lapwings.



Pearl Kite
© Danilo Rodriguez



Raúl Arias de Para's beachfront home © Bill Fraser



Lance-tailed Manakin
© Fred Engelman

We will drive to Santa Clara to enjoy our picnic lunch at the beachfront home of Raúl and Denise Arias de Para. Some participants take advantage of this visit to swim in the Pacific Ocean. Along the shoreline, we often see various species of terns, gulls, shorebirds and an occasional booby. After time to siesta in the comfortable porch chairs or swim, we may make a short visit to an area that often produces Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl. If we get back early, we might head across the narrow valley to the other side of El Valle for a trip to Cariguana. Literally translated to "Iguana's Face," this area is said to be named for the silhouette outline of a nearby mountain. To us, the main interest here is the birdlife, and the afternoon is a prime time to look for a number of special species. A gradually ascending gravel road skirts a large patch of dense forest where the fabulous Tody Motmot resides. We'll try to locate it, in addition to such other dandies as Lesson's Motmot, Yellow Tyrannulet, White-bellied Antbird, Rufous-and-white Wren, and Yellow-crowned Euphonia. A private home here sometimes hosts a pair of Spectacled Owls.

NIGHT: Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Antón

January 14, Day 11: Altos del Maria. This morning we will again load up in four-wheel drive vehicles for another all-day trip to Altos del Maria, but this time we will bird stretches of this gated community that are closer



One of the volcanic ridgelines of Altos del Maria © Fred Engelman

and thus we will have more time to explore areas in which the original vegetation still supports native highland species. Strategic stops will expose us to several impressive stretches of forest.

We will focus again on the previously listed challenging species of this area, such as the Collared Trogon, and also visit the fruiting tree that has produced both Northern Emerald-Toucanet and the rarer Yellow-eared Toucanet. These elevations have the same potential as those we visited on our first trip to the far, undeveloped side of the gated community.



Yellow-eared Toucanet © Laurie Dann



Collared Trogon © Tom Horner



Black-crowned Antpitta
© Moyo Rodriguez

Many hours today are spent at Valle Bonito. The man-made small lake here has several covered kiosks and we always use one for our picnic lunch. Depending on fog we might come here before lunch since it is lower than the other areas we visit. There is a small stream feeding this lake and it has huge, epiphyte-covered trees on both slopes. A paved walkway follows the creek and, for the first ½ kilometer or so, is wide enough for wheelchair access. The trail meanders back and forth over the creek for about 1.5 kilometers. It is a paradise to walk, experience and bird. The greatest potential prize of this location is the stunning Black-crowned Antpitta. Though secretive and usually very difficult to see, we have a chance of finding one of these spectacular ground dwellers.

Any time that we are at the lodge before and after outings or during siesta time, the birding will be extraordinary. Freshly stocked feeding trays brim with birds. Red-legged Honeycreepers and Thick-billed Euphonias dance through the bushes and onto the feeding trays, looking like living jewels. Clay-colored Thrushes appear by the dozens, seemingly everywhere, and Black-chested Jays survey the scene imperiously from exposed snags. Even Rufous Motmot visits the feeders. Surely one of Panama's most glorious birds, it appears with a flourish, brandishing an impossibly burnt orange breast and belly and long metallic blue tail. A procession of tanagers appears like clockwork. First come the soft Blue-grays, followed by the velvety Flame-rumped and Crimson-backed. Then come the rest: White-lined, Palm, and the odd olive and black Dusky-faced. Even the Red-crowned Ant-Tanager has overcome its distrust of open space and ventures forth from the nearby forest.

NIGHT: Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Antón

January 15, Day 12: Canopy Adventure Option and Canopy Lodge Grounds. After breakfast, those who wish will have the opportunity to experience *The Canopy Adventure*. It consists of a series of ziplines high in the canopy by which one can explore the rainforest using safe and modern techniques. After an invigorating short climb to the top of the ridge through bird-rich forest, you strap in and soar through the treetops, where you can see a wealth of unexpected natural beauty and activity. Swooping from platform to platform high among the sturdy cloud forest trees, you pass over the stream and waterfall not once, but twice. *Since not all participants will want to enjoy this adventure, the cost is extra and can be paid in cash or with credit card.* *The Canopy Adventure* is located in a private refuge in the foothills above the Canopy Lodge. The main attraction of this refuge is a beautiful 150-foot high waterfall called Chorro Macho; the birdlife and the flora are especially rich and diverse because the area has been a wildlife refuge for several years. The principal purpose of this refuge, apart from the obvious task of keeping the area free from poachers and loggers, has been to provide sustainable, nature-based employment to ten young adults to support themselves and their families. The refuge is a way to keep the forest ecosystem whole while providing much needed employment. Those who prefer not to do *The Canopy Adventure* can explore the trail around the waterfall, where it is possible to see Green and Stripe-throated hermits, various motmots, Slaty-tailed Trogon, Dull-mantled Antbird, and Tawny-crested and Dusky-faced tanagers. Because this is our last morning here, some might prefer to bird the feeders and flower gardens with hopes of a final look at Flame-rumped Tanagers, Orange-billed Sparrows, and some colorful butterflies, or even go for a swim in either of the two natural pools.



Flame-rumped Tanager © Cliff Hawley



Sara Longwing
© Linette Mansberger



Orange-billed Sparrow © Bill Fraser

After lunch at 11:30 a.m. we will depart this wonderful setting at 12:30 p.m. and drive back to Panama City via the Pan-American Highway. Our early departure can save more than an hour stuck in traffic returning to Panama City in the late afternoon.

NIGHT: Radisson Hotel Panama Canal, Panama City

January 16, Day 13: Departure for Home. Transfers will be provided to the airport in time for morning or early afternoon flights home.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 12 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, South Africa, Borneo, 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 Bausch and Lomb Birding Council and the California Bird Records Committee. He is a Director for the Neotropical Grassland Conservancy.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for this tour is **\$6,495** per person in double occupancy from Panama City, Panama for occupying a **standard guestroom** (Canopy Room) at the Canopy Tower, Canopy Lodge and Radisson Hotel Panama Canal. This includes all meals, seven nights shared accommodations in one of the Canopy Tower's Canopy Rooms (see ACCOMMODATIONS section below), four 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, 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 **\$1,470** for occupying a standard guestroom (Canopy Room) with a private bath for seven nights at the Canopy Tower (see CANOPY TOWER ACCOMMODATIONS section below), four nights in a standard guestroom at the Canopy Lodge (see CANOPY LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS section below) and one night at the Radisson Hotel Panama Canal. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations.

The fee for this tour is **\$6,895** per person in double occupancy from Panama City, Panama for occupying a **premium room** at the Canopy Tower and Canopy Lodge. This includes all meals, shared accommodations for seven nights in either the Canopy Tower's Blue Cotinga Suite or Harpy Eagle Suite (see CANOPY TOWER ACCOMMODATIONS section below), four nights in one of the Canopy Lodge's premium rooms (see CANOPY LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS section below), one night at the Radisson Hotel Panama Canal, 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 **\$5,895** in single occupancy from Panama City, Panama for occupying a **small single room** at the Canopy Tower and Canopy Lodge. This includes all meals, single accommodations for seven nights in one of the Canopy Tower's 4 small single rooms with a private bath (see CANOPY TOWER ACCOMMODATIONS section below), single accommodations for four nights in one of the Canopy Lodge's small rooms with their own bathroom (see CANOPY LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS section below), single accommodations for one night in a room at the Radisson Hotel Panama Canal, 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.

CANOPY TOWER ACCOMMODATIONS: The Canopy Tower has a total of two suites (Blue Cotinga with a small balcony and Harpy Eagle), five standard double guestrooms (Canopy Rooms) and four small single rooms, each with a private bathroom. Based on room availability, singles have a choice of paying a supplement to occupy one of the Canopy Rooms or paying a discounted tour fee to occupy one of the small single rooms. All rooms will be pre-reserved on a first-come, first-served basis. You will be advised of your specific room assignment at the time of your registration.

Please also note that since there is no elevator, all guests will climb several flights of stairs to reach the guestrooms, dining area and observation deck.

CANOPY LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS: In the 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. In a separate building on the grounds, there are four rooms, each with a private bath, which are smaller than the rooms in the main building. Based on room availability, singles have a choice of paying a supplement to occupy one of the standard double guest rooms or paying a discounted tour fee to occupy one of the small 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 initial deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. If you would like to pay your initial 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. If you prefer to pay the initial deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at <https://ventbird.com>) should then 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 (August 7, 2021).

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.

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 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. 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 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.

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.

CLIMATE: The climate in the Canal Zone of Central 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, which runs from May into early December, when a shower of some sort is expected almost daily. Generally, the weather in Central Panama is mild and pleasant, with our activities corresponding to the cooler parts of the day and heightened bird activity.

The climate in the El Valle region is considerably cooler than that of the Canal Zone. Mornings and evenings are cooler while midday temperatures usually do not exceed the low 80s. 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 pairs 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 OTHER 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 are essential, as the trails can be muddy. The leader brings knee-high rubber boots because they help prevent chiggers. A small umbrella and/or rain gear are essential as well. Those wishing to swim should bring swimwear.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry service is available at the Canopy Tower. Because the clothes are sent out to Panama City to be cleaned, expect items to be returned within 48 hours. Laundry service at the Canopy Lodge is handled in-house. Expect items to be returned within 24 to 36 hours.

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.

As of this writing (February 26, 2021), travelers are required to present proof of a negative COVID-19 PCR or antigen test taken no later 48 hours prior to their arrival time into Panama. If such a test has not been taken within this time frame, a COVID-19 rapid test will be mandated at the airport prior to customs. The traveler will have to cover the cost of this test (\$50).

INTERNET ACCESS: Both the Canopy Tower and Canopy Lodge have a computer available for guest use with internet access. Sometimes the internet is sporadic at the Lodge, due to its remote location. Wi-Fi is available at the Tower, the dining area of the Lodge, and rooms at the Radisson Hotel Panama Canal.

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 leaders will have a spotting scope; but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so. It will be useful from the observation towers and along the Panama City shoreline.

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).

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 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. Topsy gel is useful in reducing irritation from chigger bites or nettle stings (cortisone creams are now available without a prescription). Some people recommend sprinkling sulfur, which is available at both lodges, 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 species do not carry disease. They do feed on bodily fluids through a process in which a digestive enzyme is produced by the chigger which essentially liquefies the skin around the area where the chigger is attached. The chigger is not usually attached to the skin for more than a few hours before it either falls off or is knocked off. Our bodies respond by producing a hardened area as a defense against the chigger's digestive enzyme. Though the chigger may be long gone, it is the presence of the hardened area, and the body's natural process of reabsorbing it that typically causes intense itching, often lasting for a week or more. Chiggers like to attach themselves to areas of thin skin, like around the ankles, beltline, undergarment lines, knees, and elbows.

Chiggers can be avoided by following these procedures:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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).

MISC:
Departure Tax – U.S. \$40 (included in the price of your airline 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 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.

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.
This is our preferred field guide for this tour.

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.

Panama's Canopy Tower & El Valle's Canopy Lodge, Page 20

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 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 February 4, 2021 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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