

PANAMA'S DARIÉN LOWLANDS: CANOPY CAMP

JANUARY 13-21, 2024

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This tour to the lowlands of eastern Panama fuses the rich diversity of tropical birds for which Panama is justly famous with the classic atmosphere of a luxurious African tented camp. We will be quartered in the Canopy Camp, courtesy of Raúl Arias de Para, whose vision for sustainable ecotourism and devotion to preserving Panama's birds and wild places introduced the birding world to the famed Canopy Tower in the Canal Zone and the Canopy Lodge in El Valle. Located in the lowlands of Darién, just a four-hour-drive (via the Pan-American highway) from Panama City, and tucked at the base of some low-lying hills whose forested slopes are part of a protected zone, this camp will provide a comfortable base for a great week of Neotropical birding. Our accommodation will be in spacious, walk-in, African-style tents, mounted on platforms, and replete with comfortable beds, fans, and private bathrooms with showers and flush toilets. Keeping with the tradition established by the other Canopy lodges, the camp will offer imaginatively prepared, tasty meals, and an abundance of cold drinks.

The camp clearing affords a fabulous view of the surrounding forest and is bordered by Heliconia thickets that buzz with the activity of Pale-bellied and Rufous-breasted hermits, and reverberate with the cascading songs of White-bellied Antbirds. Planted stands of Vervain swarm with a variety of hummingbirds, from Blue-chested and Sapphire-throated to the dazzling Blue-throated Goldentail. Dawn brings a flurry of activity and a cacophony of avian sound, dominated by the screeching calls of commuting parrots, the yelping of Chestnut-mandibled Toucans, and the incessant croaking of



Keel-billed Toucans, but sometimes also including the raucous calls of Red-throated Caracaras, the noisy chattering of White-headed Wrens, and the plaintive whistles of Barred Puffbirds. Our mornings and late afternoons will be spent exploring the camp trail system and a number of nearby sites, where, in addition to seeing a broad cross section of toucans, trogons, motmots, woodcreepers, antbirds, tanagers, and other tropical birds that typify the Canal Zone, we will also search for a

number of special birds whose Panamanian ranges are (in most cases) largely restricted to the far eastern lowlands and foothills, among them: Capped and Cocol herons; Bare-throated Tiger-Heron; three species of macaws (Great Green, Blue-and-yellow and Chestnut-fronted); Spectacled Parrotlet; Gray-cheeked Nunlet; Rufous-tailed and Dusky-backed (rare) jacamars; Black-tailed Trogon; Red-rumped, Spot-breasted, and Golden-green woodpeckers; Red-billed Scythebill; Double-banded Graytail; Black Antshrike; Rufous-winged Antwren; Bare-crowned Antbird; Black-billed Flycatcher (rare); Sooty-headed Tyrannulet; Yellow-breasted Flycatcher; Choco Sirystes; One-colored Becard; Golden-headed Manakin; Black-capped Donacobius; White-eared Conebill; Orange-crowned Oriole; and Black Oropendola.

In 2016, Canopy Camp personnel began interfacing with local guides, biologists, and landowners from the surrounding region (including several indigenous communities) and Darién National Park, regarding the location of active Harpy Eagle nests in the region. This outreach revealed multiple active nests, and resulted in our last three groups being treated to exceptional views of these iconic raptors at their nests (One VENT group was even treated to a chance encounter with a perched Harpy Eagle at the Canopy Camp!). Although sightings of Harpy Eagles can never be guaranteed, Harpy Eagle chicks have prolonged nestling and fledging periods (and continue to be fed by the adults in the vicinity of the nest for months after fledging), and adults tend to return to the same nests every other year, meaning that there is a decent chance that at least one known nest in the area may be active for several months out of each year. The Canopy family and their local contacts can be counted on to maintain a “finger on the pulse” of local Harpy and Crested eagle nesting activity. Accordingly, our itinerary will maintain the built-in flexibility to take advantage of conditions on the ground in prioritizing any opportunities to visit active Harpy (and/or Crested) Eagle nests.

This tour can be taken by itself or in combination with Panama: El Valle's Canopy Lodge (January 20-27, 2024), also led by Erik Bruhnke.

January 13, Day 1: Arrival in Panama City and Transfer to Crowne Plaza Panama Airport Hotel.

Participants arriving into Panama City's Tocumen International Airport anytime this afternoon or evening, after clearing customs and gathering luggage, should take the courtesy shuttle to the nearby Crowne Plaza Panama Airport Hotel where a room will be reserved in your name.

NIGHT: Crowne Plaza Panama Airport Hotel, Tocumen

January 14, Day 2: Tocumen to the Bayano Valley, and on to the Canopy Camp, Darién.

An early start will take us to the lowlands of eastern Panama Province and the region surrounding Bayano Reservoir. Much of the area between here and Panama City has been deforested and converted to cattle pasture, but there is still extensive, selectively logged forest beyond the reservoir. The margins of the reservoir are good places to find Cocol Heron, Bare-throated and Rufescent tiger-herons, Pied Water-Tyrant and several species of kingfishers. However, it is in the forest where we will concentrate our time. The forest here has an interesting composition, with pockets of drier, semi-deciduous forest dominated by towering Cuipo trees interdigitated with more typical humid evergreen forest. Several bird species more



Barred Puffbird © Erik Bruhnke

typical of Colombia and the Darién lowlands reach the western (northern) limit of their ranges in the Bayano region, and finding these will be our primary focus. However, the forest here is often extremely birdy, and affords abundant opportunities for seeing many species typical of the Canal Zone, none of which will be ignored. Among the many Bayano birds that we might hope for are Barred Puffbird, Red-rumped and Golden-green woodpeckers, Red-billed Scythebill, the range-restricted Black Antshrike, Rufous-winged Antwren, Streaked Xenops, One-colored Becard, White-eared Conebill and Orange-crowned Oriole. This has also proven to be a particularly good spot for some species of wider distribution, among them, Crane Hawk, Black-tailed Trogon, Bare-crowned Antbird, Cinnamon Becard, Blue Cotinga, Golden-collared Manakin, Black-headed Tody-Flycatcher and Plain-colored Tanager. We'll probably devote a few hours to birding this interesting region before continuing on to the town of Tortí. We'll plan to have lunch in Tortí at a restaurant where past groups have enjoyed close studies of Long-billed Starthroat, Black-throated Mango, and Scaly-breasted, Rufous-tailed, Snowy-bellied and Sapphire-throated hummingbirds attending the hummingbird feeders. Depending on when we arrive in Tortí, we may have time for an hour or two of local birding prior to lunch, either at the nearby San Francisco Reserve or along the Río Tortí.

After lunch, we will continue our drive eastward into the Darién. Much of the countryside east of the Bayano region has been deforested, but this open country can be good for Savanna Hawk, Yellow-headed and Crested caracaras, Pearl Kite, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Red-breasted Blackbird and a number of other species. We'll arrive at the Canopy Camp in the late afternoon, with time to settle in to our accommodations before dark and perhaps with time to enjoy the late flurry of bird activity around the camp clearing.

The Canopy Camp is designed in the tradition of African-style luxury tented camps. The spacious, walk-in tents are mounted on platforms, replete with comfortable beds, fans, and adjoining (right outside the tent, on the same deck) private bathrooms with hot-water showers and flush toilets. The tents are well spaced through the camp clearing, maximizing privacy. Keeping with the tradition established by the other Canopy lodges (Canopy Tower, Canal Zone and Canopy Lodge, El Valle), the camp will offer imaginatively prepared, tasty meals, and an abundance of cold drinks. This will be a never before afforded opportunity to bird the lowlands of Darién in comfort!

NIGHT: Canopy Camp, Sanson, Darién

January 15-19, Days 3-7: Darién Lowlands Based out of the Canopy Camp. The Canopy Camp is tucked at the base of a jagged line of low-lying hills whose forested slopes are part of a protected zone. The camp clearing affords a fabulous view of the surrounding forest, and is bordered by *Heliconia* thickets that often buzz with the activity of Pale-bellied and Rufous-breasted hermits, and reverberate with the cascading songs of White-bellied Antbirds. Dawn brings a flurry of activity and a cacophony of avian sound, dominated by the screeching calls of



Crested Eagle © Erik Bruhnke

commuting parrots, the yelping of Yellow-throated (Chestnut-mandibled/Black-mandibled) Toucans, and the incessant croaking of Keel-billed Toucans, but also often including the raucous calls of Red-throated Caracaras, the liquid gurgling of an active colony of Chestnut-headed Oropendolas, the noisy chattering of White-headed Wrens, the incessant calls of Piratic Flycatchers and the plaintive whistles of Barred Puffbirds. The entrance road to the camp and parts of the main camp clearing are lined with Vervain, whose flowers attract multitudes of hummingbirds, including Blue-chested, Sapphire-throated, Rufous-tailed, and Blue-throated Goldentail. Even the spectacular Ruby-topaz Hummingbird, a rarity anywhere in Central America, has been recorded here the past few years, after first being found by our inaugural tour to the camp. We'll have five full days available for exploring the camp trail system and a number of nearby sites, where, in addition to seeing a good cross section of toucans, trogons, motmots, woodcreepers, antbirds, tanagers, and other tropical birds that

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typify the Canal Zone, we will also search for a number of special birds whose Panamanian ranges are (in most cases) largely restricted to the far eastern lowlands and foothills, among them: Capped Heron; Spectacled Parrotlet; three species of macaws (Great Green, Blue-and-yellow and Chestnut-fronted); Gray-cheeked Nunlet; Rufous-tailed and Dusky-backed (rare) jacamars; Black-tailed Trogon; Red-rumped, Spot-breasted, and Golden-green woodpeckers; Red-billed Scythebill; Double-banded Graytail; Black Antshrike; Rufous-winged Antwren; Bare-crowned Antbird; Black-billed Flycatcher (rare); Choco Sirystes; One-colored Becard; Golden-headed Manakin; Bicolored Wren; Black-capped Donacobius; White-eared Conebill; Orange-crowned Oriole; and Black Oropendola.

Our exact day-to-day itinerary will be kept flexible, allowing us to take advantage of local weather and birding conditions, including the known presence of any active Harpy and/or Crested eagle nests. However, our time here will certainly include one or more mornings birding a wonderful stretch of forested road at El Salto, an excellent area for raptors, as well as for multiple species of trogons and woodpeckers, Whooping Motmot, Gray-cheeked Nunlet, Barred Puffbird, Double-banded Graytail, Black Antshrike, Bare-crowned Antbird, Yellow-breasted Flycatcher, Black-bellied and White-headed wrens, and Yellow-backed Orioles, among many others. Trails at El Salto and nearby Tierra Nueva, as well as those at the Canopy Camp, will allow us access into the heart of the forest, maximizing our chances of ferreting out the more secretive forest interior species. We'll also hope to spend one full day birding by boat along the Río Chucunaque and Río Tuquesa to an Emberá community called Nuevo Vigia, which could be particularly good for finding raptors, parrots and the rare Dusky-backed Jacamar. On most other days, we'll return to the camp for lunch and siesta, with late afternoons typically devoted to birding forest-edge, open country and marshes. This is often the best time to see the spectacular Black Oropendola (We currently know the precise location of only one colony, and it is in an area which requires 4x4 vehicles to access.), as birds commute from their feeding areas back to the nesting colonies for the night. On at least one night, we'll plan some night-birding activities, which could afford us views of some nocturnal mammals as well.



Dusky-backed Jacamar © Erik Bruhnke

NIGHTS: Canopy Camp, Sanson, Darién

January 20, Day 8: Canopy Camp to Panama City. After a final morning of birding in the Darién lowlands, we will spend the afternoon retracing our route back to Panama City, perhaps with one more stop at Lake Bayano. Conversely, depending on what we've already seen (or missed), we may leave camp immediately after breakfast and drive directly to Tortí, where we would spend the remainder of the morning birding the nearby San Francisco Reserve. This private reserve has some lovely tall forest (offering such possibilities as Great Jacamar and White-fronted Nunbird), as well as brushy fields and second growth that could produce a number of new birds. After lunch at a restaurant in Tortí, we will begin making our way back to Panama City where we will enjoy a farewell dinner.

Participants continuing on Panama: El Valle's Canopy Lodge (January 20-27, 2024) will be transferred after the farewell dinner to the Radisson Hotel Panama Canal where you will spend the night.

NIGHT: Crowne Plaza Panama Airport Hotel, Tocumen

January 21, Day 9: Departure for Home. Participants can use the hotel's complimentary shuttle service to Tocumen International Airport for morning or afternoon flights home.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 12 participants. However, VENT reserves the right to increase the tour limit by one in order to accommodate a couple when only one space is available.

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 **\$4,675** per person in double occupancy from Panama City, Panama for occupying a standard tent at the Canopy Camp (see CANOPY CAMP ACCOMMODATIONS section below) and standard double room at the Crowne Plaza Panama Airport Hotel. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 to dinner on Day 8, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, 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 **\$4,875** per person in double occupancy from Panama City, Panama for occupying a Tent Suite at the Canopy Camp (see CANOPY CAMP ACCOMMODATIONS section below) and standard double room at the Crowne Plaza Panama Airport Hotel. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 to dinner on Day 8, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, 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 **\$935**. Due to the limited number of tents at the Canopy Camp (see CANOPY CAMP ACCOMMODATIONS section below), singles may be asked to share on Days 2-7. If so, you'll be credited accordingly.

CANOPY CAMP ACCOMMODATIONS: The Canopy Camp has a total of eight tents including two Tent Suites and six standard tents. Both Tent Suites, one of which has a queen bed while the other has two twin beds, have more space than a standard tent. All tents will be pre-reserved on a first-come, first-served basis. You will be advised of tent availability and your specific assignment at the time of your registration. All tents have private bathrooms with flush toilets and warm water showers.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. If you would like to pay your deposit using a credit card, the deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit.

and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at <https://ventbird.com>) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

PAYMENTS: All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 150 days prior to the tour departure date (August 16, 2023).

MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE REQUIREMENT: This tour visits remote locations where immediate access to primary medical care may **NOT** be available. **For this reason, travel insurance which covers you for emergency evacuation is required for participation on this tour.** This coverage is included in the **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance™** program. Through Ripcord, “emergency evacuation” can be purchased as a stand-alone benefit or as part of a comprehensive travel insurance policy. If you choose not to purchase insurance through Ripcord, you are required to obtain it through another provider.

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: <https://ripcordtravelprotection.com/ventbird>; or click the **Ripcord** logo on our website (click Help and Trip Insurance); or call +1-415-481-0600. Pricing is based on age, trip cost, trip length, and level of coverage.

*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 14 days of making your tour deposit. The CFAR benefit provides reimbursement for 75% of covered costs, and increases the policy premium by approximately 50%. Policies may be purchased either for the full value of the tour fee at the time of deposit or in segments as individual tour payments are made (deposit, mid-payment, final balance, additional arrangements, etc.). The “pay as you go” approach reduces up-front expense and ensures that the amount paid toward your full policy premium is in proportion to the amount paid toward the full tour fee. If you choose to “pay as you go,” you must cover each deposit or payment within 14 days in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. The primary medical expense benefit is available to U.S. residents only. For this reason, non-U.S. residents will pay an adjusted premium when purchasing a comprehensive policy, which includes all of the other benefits available to U.S. residents. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

Coronavirus (COVID-19):

Concerns about COVID-19 may present uncertainty for those holding travel insurance policies or who are considering future travel and purchasing such insurance. Redpoint features a **Coronavirus FAQ page** on 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.

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

https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid_19_faq/

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Additionally, some countries maintain COVID-19 entry requirements, including mandates to purchase travel insurance covering medical expenses due to COVID-19 illness and 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. Per person fees apply for each set of travel arrangements: \$50 domestic; \$75 international.* Many of our travelers choose to make their own air travel arrangements, but we emphasize the benefits to using our services. If you book your air arrangements yourself, Victor Emanuel Travel is unable to provide support in managing any flight delays and/or cancellations that could occur before and during a tour. When you purchase air tickets through Victor Emanuel Travel, our staff has ready access to your air ticket record and can provide assistance as problems arise. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements. **Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be held responsible for any air ticket penalties.**

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

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.

PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS: Participants should be prepared for early starts with full mornings of activity. Regardless of our morning activities, we will be returning to camp for lunch and a mid-afternoon break on most days based out of the Canopy Camp (exceptions would involve all-day excursions to Nuevo Vigia and/or targeted visits to Darién National Park or other areas to visit active Harpy Eagle or Crested Eagle nests). Late afternoon excursions of a few hours will be less physically rigorous, and will mostly involve roadside birding. Most walking on this tour will be along lightly traveled roads or trails of easy to moderate grade. We may spend some time on one or two trails that are somewhat hillier and require greater exertion, such as along Nando's Trail at the Canopy Camp (which has some moderate-to-considerably steep sections for those who require walking assistance). None of the regularly planned hiking will involve distances of much more than a mile, but we will likely be on our feet for much of the morning most days. Again, targeted excursions to active eagle (Harpy or Crested) nests may involve much longer and/or more challenging hikes, as well as the possibility of longer time spent on rivers in motorized dugout canoes. Your tour leader and local guide will provide you, in advance, with detailed information regarding the physical requirements of any such "special excursions," allowing you to make an informed decision regarding your options.

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. Some participants may find sturdier hiking shoes preferable for trail walks. A small umbrella and/or rain gear are essential as well.

CLIMATE: The climate in the Darién lowlands and eastern Panama Province is usually warm, with mornings in the 70s to 80s. Conditions at midday can be humid and very warm, with temperatures reaching into the 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 eastern Panama is warm and pleasant, with our activities corresponding to the cooler parts of the day and heightened bird activity.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Due to energy conservation efforts in the Darién, Canopy Camp is not currently offering laundry services to their guests.

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

IMPORTANT: Please provide the VENT office with a copy of the photo page of your passport. This is required in order to pre-arrange group entry into the Darién.

INTERNET ACCESS: Wi-Fi is available in the common areas of the Canopy Camp but not in the individual tents. However, expect service to be sporadic due to its remote location. Wi-Fi is available at the Crowne Plaza Panama Airport Hotel.

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., and particularly useful should we end up hiking a long distance to a Harpy or Crested eagle nest). 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.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta advise that there is some risk of malaria. The CDC currently recommends that travelers to Darién Province in Panama should take one of the following antimalarial drugs (listed alphabetically): atovaquone/proguanil, doxycycline, mefloquine, or primaquine (in special circumstances).

As standard travel precautions, your tetanus, polio, hepatitis types A & B, and yellow fever vaccinations should be current.

Water served at meals is drinkable at the Canopy Camp and the Crowne Plaza Panama Airport Hotel, and all of the food (including uncooked salads) is safe. The Canopy Camp also has filtered water containers in each of the bathrooms, and water coolers in the dining/lounge areas, from which your personal water bottles can be refilled. They do not recommend drinking from the tap. 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: We continually emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. Although VENT no longer maintains any of its COVID-era prevention protocols, we strongly recommend best practices for protecting yourself and your fellow travelers against COVID-19 illness. These measures include receiving the primary series vaccinations for those eligible, staying “Up to Date” with COVID-19 booster shots, wearing high filtration N-95 or KN-95 masks when in airports and on airplanes, and avoiding risky social settings in the lead-up to your tour. These recommendations are firmly rooted in CDC guidance regarding recommendations for avoiding COVID-19. Please visit the **Coronavirus Travel Update** page of our website <https://ventbird.com/covid-19> for our official statement regarding COVID-19 and the operation of our tours. Please visit the CDC website for the most up to date information about COVID-19 and associated guidance for proper health and hygiene: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>.

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).

INSECT PROTECTION: Because chiggers and ticks can be a problem, we recommend carrying insect repellent and liberally applying it to your ankles and pant cuffs. You may also want to spray your field clothing with permethrin several times to help repel the ticks and chiggers. In some parts of the forest mosquitoes are sometimes a problem, so wearing long-sleeved shirts and carrying a small repellent with you is advised.

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>

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.

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 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.

Mammals:

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

Panama's Darién Lowlands: Canopy Camp, Page 12

Butterflies:

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

Background Reading

Natural History:

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

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

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

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

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

Human History:

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

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel 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 April 3, 2023 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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