



VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

ITINERARY

FALL AT PANAMA'S CANOPY TOWER

OCTOBER 19–26, 2024

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Rufous Motmot, Panama © Barry Zimmer

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 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 tropical birds, including trogons, toucans, motmots, puffbirds, manakins, antbirds, and tanagers. We'll take time to sort out the look-a-likes, 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, 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 hotels.

This special departure occurs during an excellent time for observing hawk migration through Panama. Virtually the entire U.S. population of Broad-winged and Swainson's hawks, plus hundreds of thousands of Turkey Vultures, migrate to South America through Panama. With the right weather conditions, spectacular flights can be observed. The Canopy Tower provides an ideal site from which to observe this phenomenon. Imagine sitting in a comfortable chair on the roof of the lodge while you view exciting tropical species and observe one of the world's greatest hawk spectacles.



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

*This tour can be taken by itself or in combination with **Panama: El Valle's Canopy Lodge (October 6-13, 2024)** and/or **Panama's Darien Lowlands: Canopy Camp (October 12-20, 2024)**.*

October 19, Day 1: Arrival in Panama City and Transfer to the Canopy Tower. 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.

Participants continuing from Panama's Darien Lowlands: Canopy Camp (October 12-20, 2024) will be transferred to the Canopy Tower after dinner this evening or early on October 20.

NIGHT: Canopy Tower, Gamboa

October 20, Day 2: Canopy Tower and Entrance Road. An early start this morning (we will meet at 6:00 a.m. atop the observation deck) will find us on top 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 Scaled Pigeon, the incredible Keel-billed Toucan, Collared Araçari, Red-lored and Mealy parrots, Black-breasted Puffbird, Slaty-tailed Trogon, Brown-capped Tyrannulet, 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 tree tops, the spectacular Blue Cotinga (increasingly scarce) and the brilliant Green Shrike-Vireo. We've had good luck seeing cotingas here (about half of our trips), often at close range, and the shrike-vireo, whose monotonous titmouse-like song can be heard in many areas of the tropics, can perhaps be viewed best here at the Tower. Mammals may also be in evidence with Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth, Mantled Howler Monkey, and the adorable Geoffroy's Tamarin all possible. It can be hard to tear oneself away from the show to go inside for breakfast. Fortunately, the dining room has panoramic windows that will allow us to keep an eye out even while eating!



Keel-billed Toucan, Panama © Barry Zimmer

After breakfast we'll likely head back out to the top of the Tower for a raptor watch. A variety of forest species are possible from here, including such gems as White, Semiplumbeous, and Short-tailed hawks and Black Hawk-Eagle. In fall, the Tower serves as an excellent spot to observe migrating raptors as well. We will spend some time here hoping to observe flights of migrating Broad-winged and Swainson's hawks and Turkey Vultures.

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. 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 and White-vented Plumeleteer.

In the mid-afternoon we will head for the small town of Gamboa. Feeders here may produce Orange-chinned Parakeet, a dazzling variety of tanagers (Crimson-backed, Flame-rumped, Blue-gray, and Palm), honeycreepers (Red-legged, Green, and occasionally Shining), as well as other species. Near 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 often 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-necked 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, Isthmian Wren, Black-striped Sparrow, and Yellow-billed Cacique, in addition to a variety of raptors, hummingbirds, parrots, and flycatchers.



Green Honeycreeper © David Ascanio

NIGHT: Canopy Tower, Gamboa

October 21-22, Days 3-4: 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 (the road dead ends); and abundant birdlife make this



White-tailed Trogon © Barry Zimmer

arguably the most famous birding road in the world. One never knows quite what to expect here, but there will certainly be much to see. Perhaps we'll find a fruiting tree with three 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 dacnis to their fruiting spikes. We'll always be on the alert for a foraging ant swarm with its attendant antbirds (the Spotted, Bicolored, and perhaps the stunning Ocellated) and woodcreepers (Northern Barred and Plain-brown 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 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.

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

We'll have two full days to enjoy the riches of the famous Pipeline Road area.

NIGHTS: Canopy Tower, Gamboa

October 23, Day 5: Cerro Azul. An early start (about 4:30 a.m.) will take us to the foothills of Cerro Azul. We'll head directly for the gardens surrounding a private residence in this area. The view of Chagres National Park alone is worth the visit, but the birds can be equally compelling. Violet-capped, Snowy-bellied, and Violet-headed hummingbirds; Green Hermit; and Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer are among the twelve species that patrol the flower gardens and feeders. Even the rare White-tipped Sicklebill is possible. Red-lore and Mealy parrots can often be seen cruising by at eye level in the morning light. Fruiting trees in the yard typically attract some of the most colorful foothill birds including Speckled, Bay-headed, and Emerald tanagers; and Scarlet-thighed and Blue dacnis. The very local and striking Rufous-winged Tanager, difficult to see anywhere else in its range, is regularly 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, 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.

NIGHT: Canopy Tower, Gamboa

October 24, Day 6: Rainforest Discovery Center and Gamboa Area. This morning we will return to Pipeline Road, where we will spend most of the morning at the Panama Rainforest Discovery Center (PRDC). A highlight of our visit will be the time spent atop the PRDC canopy 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, and Black Hawk-Eagle, among others. 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 a number of 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, White-vented Plumeleteer, Long-billed Hermit and Stripe-throated Hermit.



Violet-bellied Hummingbird © Barry Zimmer

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 Jet Antbird, Great Antshrike, White-bellied Antbird, Golden-fronted and Scrub greenlets, Yellow-tailed Oriole 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 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.



Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth with young © Barry Zimmer

On this, or another of our evenings, we will offer a post-dinner night drive by open vehicle along the entrance road down Semaphore Hill from the Canopy Tower and back. This night drive may treat us to

such nocturnal birds as Common Potoo, Choco Screech-Owl, Mottled Owl, or Black-and-white Owl, not to mention a number of exciting mammals, with Northern Tamandua, Kinkajou, Bushy-tailed Olingo, Hoffmann's Two-toed Sloth, Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth, Paca and Western Night Monkey among the many possibilities.

NIGHT: Canopy Tower, Gamboa

October 25, 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, Whooping Motmot, White-necked Puffbird, Lineated Woodpecker, Fasciated Antshrike, White-bellied and Dusky antbirds, Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet, Lance-tailed Manakin, Golden-fronted Greenlet, Rufous-breasted and Rufous-and-white wrens, Long-billed Gnatwren, and Crimson-backed Tanager. In addition, we'll spend some time searching for two of the real specialty birds of this area: the endemic Yellow-green Tyrannulet (rare) and the magnificent Rosy Thrush-Tanager, both of which can be found in this park. A late morning stop at Panama Viejo could yield twelve or more species of shorebirds plus a variety of herons, gulls, and terns.

In the afternoon we will have an optional trip to visit the Miraflores Locks to watch a ship transit the locks and spend time in their visitor center. Alternatively, some may wish to spend a final afternoon atop the observation deck of the Canopy Tower.

NIGHT: Canopy Tower, Gamboa

October 26, Day 8: Departure for Home. Transfers from the Canopy Tower to the airport will be provided in time for various 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: Barry Zimmer with the assistance of local guides



Barry Zimmer has been birding since the age of eight. His main areas of expertise lie in North and Central America, but his travels have taken him throughout much of the world, including such exotic locales as Japan, Russia, Madagascar, Africa, and New Zealand. Barry is a longtime member of the New Mexico Bird Records Committee, and served on the Texas Bird Records Committee for 12 years. He has co-authored three books: *Birds of the Trans-Pecos*, *A Birder's Guide to the Rio Grande Valley*, and *Birds and Birdfinding in the El Paso Area*. Barry has a keen interest in nature photography, having captured over 1,000 species of birds on film. His other interests include sports (a diehard Red Sox fan), cooking, and movies. He received his degree in psychology at the University of Texas in El Paso. Barry resides in El Paso with his wife, Yvonne, and their daughter, Alexandra.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for Fall at Panama's Canopy Tower is **\$3,795** per person in double occupancy from Panama City, Panama for occupying a standard guestroom (Canopy Room) at the Canopy Tower. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 to dinner on Day 7, seven nights shared accommodations in one of their five Canopy Rooms (see ACCOMMODATIONS section below), 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 Fall at Panama's Canopy Tower is **\$315** per person for occupying a standard guestroom (Canopy Room) with a private bath. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

The fee for Fall at Panama's Canopy Tower is **\$4,095** per person in double occupancy from Panama City, Panama for occupying a premium room at the Canopy Tower. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 to dinner on Day 7, shared accommodations for seven nights in either the Blue Cotinga Suite or Harpy Eagle Suite (see CANOPY TOWER ACCOMMODATIONS section below), 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 Fall at Panama's Canopy Tower is **\$3,795** per person in single occupancy from Panama City, Panama for occupying a small single room at the Canopy Tower. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 to dinner on Day 7, single accommodations for seven nights in a single room with a private bath (see CANOPY TOWER ACCOMMODATIONS section below), 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, all with private bathrooms. Based on room availability, singles have a choice of paying a supplement to occupy one of the Canopy Rooms or be waived for the single supplement for occupying 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 room category at the time of your registration.

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

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 www.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 (May 22, 2024).

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 from the date of participant tour cancellation, 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 its **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 from your point of injury or illness to your hospital of choice**; comprehensive travel insurance for trip cancellation/interruption, medical expense coverage, death of pet, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or political or security reasons, 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 15 days of making your first trip payment. 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 15 days, and insure all non-refundable trip cost in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

Coronavirus (COVID-19):

In line with the decision made by the federal government (including the CDC), Redpoint considers COVID-19 illness as any other seasonal respiratory illness. Providing only a positive Covid-19 test result will likely not be considered a covered event per the terms and conditions of the company's policy. Redpoint maintains a **Coronavirus FAQ** page on its website that addresses questions and concerns travelers may have regarding COVID-19 and Redpoint's policy. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of relevant topics.

Please visit the **Coronavirus FAQ** page at the following link: https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid_19_faq/.

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.

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.

The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. Please consult your airline to find out specific weight restrictions. Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government's attempts to improve airport security we recommend that you check the website of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for the most updated information: <http://www.tsa.gov/>.

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 (some could be intense) 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.

CLOTHING: As is the case for all our tropical tours, lightweight field clothing is the norm for Panama. This includes several pair of lightweight field pants, along with cool and comfortable long-sleeved shirts. A hat and sunscreen are recommended for protection from the sun.

Dark-colored or neutral clothing is suggested, as white or bright colors may frighten secretive birds. Lightweight and comfortable walking shoes are recommended, since some days we will spend a good bit of time on foot. Waterproof boots or overshoes such as NEOS may prove useful (May to December), as the trails can be muddy. A small umbrella and/or rain gear are essential.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry service is available at the Canopy Tower. Because the clothes are sent out to nearby Gamboa to be cleaned, expect items to be returned within 48 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 departure is required for entry into Panama. Non-U.S. citizens should check with their local Panamanian consulate/embassy for instructions.

INTERNET ACCESS: The Canopy Tower has a computer with internet access available for guest use and Wi-Fi available in all the rooms and common areas.

EQUIPMENT: You should pack a pair of binoculars that are in good condition, along with a belt pack or day pack (good for carrying books, sunscreen, camera, etc.). As a precaution, it's a good idea to pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medications, and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag. Your leader will have a spotting scope; but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so.

HEALTH: VENT follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccinations.

If you are taking personal medication, prescription or over-the-counter, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

COVID-19: 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>.

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).

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. Sulphur is available for use at the Canopy Tower.

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.

Vallely, Andrew and Dale Dyer. *Birds of Central America*. Princeton University Press, 2018.

Mammals:

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

Butterflies:

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

Background Reading

Natural History:

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

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

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

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

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

Human History:

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

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel 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 January 19, 2024 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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