



## PANAMA: BOCAS DEL TORO ARCHIPELAGO

MARCH 22–31, 2024

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

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



*Except for picnic lunches, all meals will be served in the main lodge, which includes a nice sitting area, a bar, and Wi-Fi. Hors d'oeuvres are offered during the open bar cocktail hour preceding dinner and*

*these may be taken to the porch while watching the sunset. The second story porch covers two sides of the building and is high enough to overlook the canopy to views of the Caribbean Sea. Tranquilo Bay has over a kilometer of Caribbean coastline covered with coral gardens teeming with tropical fish, which offer great opportunities to swim, snorkel, kayak and fish.*

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

**March 22, Day 1: Arrival in Panama City and Transfer to the Radisson Hotel Panama Canal.** Participants arriving in Panama City (Tocumen International Airport) anytime this afternoon or evening will be met and transferred to the Radisson Hotel Panama Canal where a room will be reserved in your name. Those arriving with some daylight may wish to bird around the hotel grounds, which often harbor a good variety of birds including such possibilities as Yellow-headed Caracara, Pale-vented Pigeon, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Social Flycatcher, Tropical Kingbird, Tropical Mockingbird, Blue-gray Tanager, and Saffron Finch.

NIGHT: Radisson Hotel Panama Canal, Panama City

**March 23, Day 2: Flight to Bocas del Toro on Isla Colón; Transfer to Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge.** We will take an early flight to Bocas del Toro on Isla Colón and transfer to Isla Bastimentos by motorboat. Upon arrival at Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge, we'll enjoy a delicious breakfast in the main lodge, be shown to our cabanas, and be given time to unpack.



**One of four cabanas near the open field and six-story tall Observation Tower  
© Jeri Langham**

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

The fruiting trees planted near the balcony attract many frugivorous species, as well as other birds searching for insects, and feeding flocks that happen to move through. Wooden perches with bananas and papaya get bird action during the day and mammals at night. From the balcony one can enjoy the view of the Caribbean Sea just beyond the mangrove forest between the lodge and the dock. Near our cabanas there is a wonderful Golden-collared

Manakin lek and one forest trail leads to a pool where one can sit on benches and watch birds come to bathe. We will plan to be up on the deck of the six-story high observation tower near our cabanas by 5:00 p.m. this afternoon.



**Montezuma Oropendolas © Natalia Decastro**



**Bottlenose Dolphins © Linette Mansberger**

This structure provides us with a view of the treetops in the surrounding forest as well as the mangroves and Caribbean Sea. Small birds feeding in the canopy of adjacent tall trees are much easier to see from up here. Some of the Red-lored Parrots going to roost often fly so close we could almost touch them.



**Golden-collared Manakin © Chris Manzey**



**Red-lored Parrots from tower © Linette Mansberger**

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

**NIGHT: Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge, Isla Bastimentos**

**March 24, Day 3: Punta Robalo and Oleoducto Road to Reserva Forestal La Fortuna.** After breakfast we will travel by motorboat to Punta Robalo, a small town on the mainland. The best birding is to be found on the mainland due to much greater diversity of species caused by the many different ecosystems we will encounter as we bird from the coast up Oleoducto Road to the circa 4,200 feet elevation when we cross the Continental Divide. A coaster bus will await us at Punta Robalo and we will begin birding the low flat area between here and Punta Peña, which consists of marshes, cattle pastures, clumps of woodlands and an occasional pond. We will make a special visit to Two (now three of them) Tanks Road that is about five kilometers from the town of Chiriquí Grande. Some potential birds in this area are Bronzy Hermit, Rufous-breasted Hermit, Brown Jay, Cinnamon & Pale-billed woodpeckers, Band-backed & Black-throated wrens, Crimson-collared Tanager, Lovely Cotinga (Blue Cotinga was recently reported from here too), Olive-crowned Yellowthroat, Morelet's Seedeater and Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant, the smallest passerine in its range. As we continue to drive uphill toward the Continental Divide, we will keep an eye out for Snowy Cotinga.

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



**Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant**  
© Linette Mansberger



**Black Guan** © Linette Mansberger

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

NIGHT: Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge, Isla Bastimentos

**March 25, Day 4: Soropta Canal and Swan's Cay.** This morning we will travel by motorboat to the Soropta or Snyder Canal. If the tide isn't high enough, we may take a second boat to help us get over the sandbar at the mouth of the Canal. Originally created to bring bananas down from Costa Rica and parts of Panama, it's now a lazy body

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



Nicaraguan Seed-Finch © Bill Fraser



Collared Araçari eating Cecropia fruit © Linette Mansberger

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

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



Red-billed Tropicbird © Chris Conard

NIGHT: Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge, Isla Bastimentos

**March 26, Day 5: Green Acres Chocolate Farm.** After an early breakfast, we will travel by motorboat eight miles to the Buena Esperanza area and Green Acres Chocolate Farm, a wonderful cacao plantation with trails offering great birding potential. The overstory trees that shade the cacao trees are very tall and old, creating great habitat for birds like large woodpeckers, trogons, jays, oropendolas, orioles, etc. We should have time to visit the chocolate factory and an opportunity to purchase some of their wonderful chocolate. This is the best location to photograph the Green-and-black Poison Dart Frog.



Green-and-black Poison Dart Frog  
© Linette Mansberger



Pale-billed Woodpecker © Linette Mansberger

We will return to the main lodge for lunch and a siesta. Since the previous days have been long ones, this afternoon offers the opportunity to bird trails on the property, do some snorkeling on the wonderful coral reefs, kayak around the mangroves and reefs, visit the bat cave, relax on the cabana porches and basically re-energize.

NIGHT: Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge, Isla Bastimentos

**March 27, Day 6: Return to Punta Robalo and Oleoducto Road.** Today we will visit any areas that we did not get to on Day 3 and revisit some of the best areas we did visit to look for endemic and specialty birds that we



Hoffmann's Two-toed Sloth & baby © Bill Fraser



Raptor-filled sky in migration © Linette Mansberger

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

On every one of our three days birding this magnificent road, we usually encounter about 120+ species and many are new for our list. We do not ignore mammals.

NIGHT: Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge, Isla Bastimentos

**March 28, Day 7: Cañazas Road.** After an early breakfast, we will travel by motorboat to Punta Robalo and board the coaster, stopping only for new species or migrating flocks. During the two COVID-19 years when this tour was cancelled, Jim discovered a new paved road going east from Cañazas that is very productive. In 2022 it provided us with the first Blue Cotinga for this tour and, better yet, a nesting pair of Central American Pygmy-Owls...a new record for this section of Panama.



Central American Pygmy-Owl © Roger Morales



Snowy Cotinga © Natalia Decastro

**March 29, Day 8: Isla Popa and Tranquilo Bay.** Most of us will be up on the deck of the six-story observation tower at dawn and then join others at 7:30 a.m. for a buffet breakfast. We will make a special motorboat trip this morning to nearby Isla Popa where in past years we have been successful at locating Snowy Cotinga, Mangrove Warbler, and Mangrove Cuckoo.

We may also take time to visit a property that always produces poison dart frogs as well as other birds we may have missed earlier. We will return to the lodge for lunch and then have many choices for afternoon activities, ranging from an opportunity to snorkel, fish, kayak or bird around the Lodge. We also will offer an optional four-hour adventure to a bat cave that includes kayaking after getting to the general area by motorboat. More details for this adventure will be provided at lunch. We will meet in late afternoon on the top of the tower and then enjoy our farewell dinner followed by the Top 10 countdown.

NIGHT: Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge, Isla Bastimentos

**March 30, Day 9: Morning at Tranquilo Bay; Flight to Panama City.** After a morning at leisure, we will catch an afternoon flight to Panama City and transfer to our hotel.

NIGHT: Crowne Plaza Panama Airport, Tocumen

**March 31, Day 10: Departure for Home.** Participants can use the hotel's complimentary shuttle service to Tocumen International Airport for morning or afternoon flights home.

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

**TOUR LEADER:** Jeri Langham with the assistance of local guides



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

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

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for this tour is **\$6,945** per person in double occupancy from Panama City. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 until lunch on Day 9, shared accommodations for nine nights during the tour, ground & boat transportation during the tour, the flights between Panama City and Bocas del Toro, tipping, park entrance fees, and guide services provided by the tour leader. It does not include airfare from your home to Panama City and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement is **\$990** for occupying a standard guestroom as a single in Panama City on Days 1 & 9 and a deluxe cabana as a single on Days 2-8 at Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge (see **TRANQUILO BAY ECO ADVENTURE LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS** section below).

The fee for this tour is **\$7,105** per person in single occupancy from Panama City, Panama occupying a standard guestroom as a single in Panama City on Days 1 & 9 and a small single room on Days 2-8 at Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge (see **TRANQUILO BAY ECO ADVENTURE LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS** section below). This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 until lunch on Day 9, accommodations for nine nights during the tour, ground & boat transportation during the tour, the flights between Panama City and Bocas del Toro, tipping, park entrance fees, and guide services provided by the tour leader. It does not include airfare from your home to Panama City and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

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



**REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT:** To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. If you would like to pay your deposit using a credit card, the deposit must be made with MasterCard 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 (October 24, 2023).

**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.**

<u>If participant cancels:</u>	<u>Participant's refund will be:</u>
180 days or more before departure date	Participant's deposit minus \$500*
179 to 151 days before departure date	No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance of the tour fee will be refunded
150 days or less before departure date	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/](https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid_19_faq/)

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. For more information, visit [www.ventbird.com](http://www.ventbird.com)

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.

**BAGGAGE:** 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/>.

In case your checked luggage is delayed, it’s recommended that you pack all documents, medications, a change of clothes, your binocular, and toiletry items in a carry-on bag. Air Panama has a 50 lb. limit for checked luggage and small compartments for carry-on storage above the seats on the plane. Fortunately, you can pay for any excess weight.

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

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

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

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

**DOCUMENTS:** For U.S. citizens, a passport valid for at least six 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.

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

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

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

VENT follows 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.

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

**SUGGESTED READING:** A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) which has a wide selection; [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com) and [www.nhbs.com](http://www.nhbs.com) which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

### **Field Guides**

#### **Birds:**

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

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

#### **Mammals:**

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

#### **Butterflies:**

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

### **Background Reading**

#### **Natural History:**

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

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

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

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

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

#### **Human History:**

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

**TIPPING:** Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel your VENT leader or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that tips are not expected and are entirely optional. Tips should be given directly to your tour leader and/or local guides; they should not be sent to the VENT office.

**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 May 31, 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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