



PANAMA: EL VALLE'S CANOPY LODGE

JANUARY 18–25, 2025

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

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



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

This tour can be taken by itself or in combination with Panama's Darien Lowlands: Canopy Camp (January 11-19, 2025), also led by Erik Bruhnke.

January 18, Day 1: Arrival in Panama City and Transfer to the Radisson Hotel Panama Canal. Participants arriving into Panama City's Tocumen International Airport (airport code PTY) anytime this afternoon or evening, will be met and transferred to the Radisson Hotel Panama Canal where a room will be reserved in your name.

Those arriving with some daylight may wish to bird around the hotel grounds, which often harbor a good variety of birds, including such possibilities as Yellow-headed Caracara, Pale-vented Pigeon, Blue-headed Parrot, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Social Flycatcher, Tropical Kingbird, Great Kiskadee, Blue-gray Tanager, and Saffron Finch.

NIGHT: Radisson Hotel Panama Canal, Panama City

January 19, Day 2: Panama City to El Valle. For those wishing to get a running start, we will meet in the hotel lobby at 6:00 a.m. for a one hour walk around the hotel grounds. Many common species can be found here, including a few which are difficult to see on the rest of our trip.

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

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

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



Birding Paradise at the Canopy Lodge © Erik Bruhnke

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

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

NIGHT: Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Antón

January 20, Day 3: La Mesa & the Cara Iguana Trail. From El Valle, a country road leads a short distance up through scattered farms and forest to the back side of three tall peaks, a flat area known locally as “La Mesa.” This area is on the crest of the ridge along the Continental Divide. For much of the year, it is brushed by clouds passing over from the Caribbean slope. The frequent misting creates a super moist environment, where the remaining forests are fantastically sculpted and laden with epiphytes and shade the dense understory.

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



Orange-bellied Trogon © Erik Bruhnke

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

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

NIGHT: Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Antón

January 21-22, Days 4 & 5: Altos del Maria. Two full days will be spent at the avian rich Altos del Maria, a remnant cloud-forest type habitat that is over 3,000 feet above sea level. Here we may find several species not readily available elsewhere on the tour. Orange-bellied Trogon, Spotted Woodcreeper, Dull-mantled Antbird, Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant, Tufted Flycatcher, White-ruffed Manakin, Ochraceous Wren, Gray-breasted Wood-Wren, Silver-throated Tanager, Black-and-yellow Tanager, and Common Chlorospingus are among the expected fare. Less numerous but still possible targets include Red-faced Spinetail, Spotted Barbtail, Brown-billed Scythebill, and Rufous-browed Tyrannulet. The greatest potential prizes of this location are the stunning Black-crowned Antpitta and the incomparable Snowcap. The antpitta is secretive and generally difficult to see, but we have a chance of finding one of these spectacular ground dwellers. Numbers of the tiny, wine-colored Snowcap may vary seasonally, but we have had some success at finding this jewel on recent trips. Additionally, Altos del Maria can be a good area to find a variety of raptors. Double-toothed Kite, the amazing White Hawk, Barred Hawk (very uncommon to rare), Black Hawk-Eagle and Bat Falcon are among the possibilities. At any rate, our visits to Altos del Maria will certainly prove memorable.



White Hawk © Erik Bruhnke

NIGHTS: Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Antón

January 23, Day 6: Pacific Lowlands of Juan Hombrón and El Chirú. The final area that we will visit will be the rice fields and forest edges of Juan Hombrón and the village of El Chirú near the Pacific Coast. Here open farm country, scattered hedgerows, and grasslands play host to an entirely different group of birds. Among the many possibilities are the likes of Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, Savannah Hawk, Common Black-Hawk, Aplomado Falcon, Crested Bobwhite, Wattled Jacana, Southern Lapwing, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, the recently split Veraguan Mango (endemic), Sapphire-throated Hummingbird, Groove-billed Ani, Brown-throated Parakeet, Yellow-crowned Parrot, Straight-billed Woodcreeper, Barred Antshrike, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Mouse-colored Tyrannulet, Lance-tailed Manakin, and Blue-black Grassquit. We will also visit the beaches near Santa Clara where a variety of coastal species should be seen including Magnificent Frigatebird, Brown Pelican, and possibly Blue-footed Booby. It is not uncommon to add 40 or more species to the trip list on this day alone.

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



Sunbittern © Erik Bruhnke

NIGHT: Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Antón

January 24, Day 7: Morning at El Valle; Return to Panama City. Our last day will be somewhat flexible. We will likely choose between a return to the La Mesa area or to the Cara Iguana trail. This will be dependent upon which species we still need. We will also likely make a stop at the Canopy Adventure just above the lodge. This is a private reserve that protects tall tropical moist forest along a clear foothill stream dominated by a 200-foot-high waterfall. The goal of the refuge is to provide much-needed employment for the local population. The refuge currently employs ten young adults to safeguard its treasures. Highly sought-after birds that we might search for here include White Hawk, Sunbittern (rare), Mottled Owl, Tody Motmot, Black-chested Jay, and Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush amongst the more widespread forest birds. We will return to the lodge around 11:00 a.m. to give us some time to pack before an early lunch. After lunch, we will head back towards Panama City and should arrive at the hotel in the mid to late afternoon, where we will enjoy our farewell dinner.

NIGHT: Crowne Plaza Panama Airport Hotel, Tocumen

January 25, Day 8: Departure for Home. The hotel's complimentary shuttle service to Tocumen International Airport can be used for morning or afternoon flights home.

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

TOUR LEADER: Erik Bruhnke with the assistance of local guides



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

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

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for this tour is **\$4,295** per person in double occupancy from Panama City, Panama for occupying a standard guestroom at the Canopy Lodge, Radisson Hotel Panama Canal and Crowne Plaza Panama Airport Hotel. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 to dinner on Day 7, five nights in one of the Canopy Lodge's standard double rooms (see CANOPY LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS section below), one night at the Radisson Hotel Panama Canal, one night at the Crowne Plaza Panama Airport Hotel, ground transportation during the tour, tipping, park entrance fees, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Panama City and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$885** for occupying a standard double room with a private bath for five nights at the Canopy Lodge (see CANOPY LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS section below), a single room for one night at the Radisson Hotel Panama Canal and a single room for one night at the Crowne Plaza Panama Airport Hotel.

The fee for this tour is **\$4,495** per person in double occupancy from Panama City, Panama for occupying a premium guestroom at the Canopy Lodge and standard room at the Radisson Hotel Panama Canal and Crowne Plaza Panama Airport Hotel. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 to dinner on Day 7, five nights in one of the Canopy Lodge's two premium rooms (see CANOPY LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS section below), one night at the Radisson Hotel Panama Canal, one night at the Crowne Plaza Panama Airport Hotel, ground transportation during the tour, tipping, park entrance fees, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Panama City and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The fee for this tour is **\$4,295** per person in single occupancy from Panama City, Panama for occupying a single room at the Canopy Lodge. This includes all meals, single accommodations for five nights in one of the Canopy Lodge's single rooms (see CANOPY LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS section below), a single room for one night at the Radisson Hotel Panama Canal, a single room for one night at the Crowne Plaza Panama Airport Hotel, ground transportation during the tour, tipping, park entrance fees, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Panama City and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

CANOPY LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS: In their main building, the Canopy Lodge has a total of six standard double guestrooms and two premium rooms. Each premium room has more space than a standard room, windows

on two walls and a king bed. A building adjacent to the main building houses four single rooms. These rooms are about two-thirds the size of the doubles but of equal quality. Based on room availability, singles have a choice of paying a supplement to occupy one of the standard double guest rooms or one of the single rooms in a separate building without paying a supplement. All rooms will be pre-reserved on a first-come, first-served basis. You will be advised of room availability and your specific room assignment at the time of your registration.

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

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. If you would like to pay your deposit using a credit card, the deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at <https://ventbird.com>) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

PAYMENTS: All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 150 days prior to the tour departure date (August 21, 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 from the date of participant tour cancellation, 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.

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

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.

CLOTHING: As is the case for all our tropical tours, lightweight field clothing is the norm for Panama. This includes several pair of lightweight field pants, along with cool and comfortable long-sleeved shirts. A hat and sunscreen are recommended for protection from the sun. Dark-colored or neutral clothing is suggested, as white or bright colors may frighten secretive birds. Lightweight and comfortable walking shoes are recommended, since some days we will spend a good bit of time on foot.

Waterproof boots (or overshoes such as NEOS) are essential during the rainy season (May through December), as the trails can be muddy, but may not be necessary during the dry season (January through April). A small umbrella and/or rain gear are essential as well.

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

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

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

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

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

HEALTH: 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).

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

A Note About Chiggers: This tour visits areas where chiggers are known to occur. Chiggers are tiny parasitic mites found in most warm weather areas of the southern United States and the world's tropics. They are especially numerous in grassy areas, where, in the immature stage, they attach themselves to other animals or humans who make contact with the grass as they pass by. Chiggers do not suck blood and the majority of 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 Lodge.

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

SUGGESTED READING: A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend www.amazon.com 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.

Angehr, George R. 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.

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

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

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

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

Human History:

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

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

RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc., a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, “**VENT**”) act only as agents for the participant in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

VENT reserves the right (i) to substitute hotels of similar category, or the best reasonable substitution available under the circumstances, for those indicated and (ii) to make any changes in the itinerary that are deemed necessary by VENT or which are caused by third party transportation schedules (i.e. railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, etc.).

VENT reserves the right to substitute leaders or guides on any tour. Where VENT, in its sole discretion, determines such substitution is necessary, it will notify tour participants.

VENT reserves the right to cancel any tour prior to departure with or without cause or good reason. See the VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy set forth above

Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on April 13, 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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