

2022 Panamá Birding

Feb 12 - 21



We are excited to offer this opportunity to travel and bird Panamá and stay at two of the country's finest eco-lodges. A quick flight from the US and an hour later you are in the big middle of the rainforest, with its abundant birds and wildlife, birding at the Canopy Tower. Then another quick flight to the archipelago of Bocas del Toro and Tranquilo Bay.



*At the **Canopy Tower**, overlooking **Soberanía National Park** as well as the **Panamá Canal**, one has eye-level-with-the-canopy views of stunning rainforest birds, as well as monkeys and sloth. Perhaps the most well-known birding spot in Panamá is Pipeline Road, just a short distance away. Pipeline has a strange history with an excellent conclusion: today, birds and wildlife abound here. A never-used petroleum pipeline and service road, it stretches for about 25 miles and many consider it to be the hottest birding spot in Central America.*

*Then on to **Bocas del Toro** on the Caribbean Coast of Panamá. **Tranquilo Bay** is located on 200 pristine acres, adjacent to Bastimentos National Marine Park, among the convergence of three distinct ecosystems, creating an extremely diverse and unique wildlife observation opportunity. It is possible to identify over 100 species of birds without leaving the property, but you will – including an old banana boat canal and “Bird Island” the only known nesting site in the southwest Caribbean for Red-billed Tropicbird.*



Additionally, you have the chance to see white-faced capuchin monkeys, night monkeys, two and three toed sloths, iguanas, caiman, butterflies, a variety of frogs and lizards, and within the canopy a collage of rain forest hardwood and fruit trees, lianas, mangroves, ferns, orchids and cycads.

Sat, Feb 12 – arrive Panamá's Tocumen International airport where one of our drivers will meet your flight and drive you to the Canopy Tower. The drive can be anywhere from 45 minutes or more, depending on traffic. Once here we recommend you head up to the Observation Deck, the first of many incredible Panamá birding opportunities! Up here, you get a unique eye-level perspective of the rainforest canopy, including toucans, parrots, tanagers of various types, hawks, and dozens of others, as well as 2 species of sloths, monkeys and other mammals. From this vantage point you can also see ships transiting the Panamá Canal, the majestic Centennial Bridge and miles of rainforest! Others will be arriving this afternoon and once all here, we'll head to the dining room for dinner.

The Canopy Tower was built by the United States Air Force to house powerful radar used in the defense of the Panamá Canal. In 1996 the tower and its 35 acres of rainforest were transferred to Panamá in compliance with the Torrijos-Carter Treaty. Local businessman and conservationist, Raúl Arias de Para, transformed the structure into an exclusive ecolodge and started a brand, now the standard bearer for nature tourism. The Canopy Tower is located in the heart of Soberanía National Park and is literally surrounded by great birding locations.

The Canopy Tower has five levels that offer different views of the forest around it. The flat roof is a great place to watch the canopy, as well as the Panamá Canal and, in the distance, the skyline of the city. The top floor, covered by a 30 foot high geo-tangent dome (a variation of Buckminster Fuller's famous geodesic dome), is used as the main dining area, and is completely surrounded by panoramic windows. The floors below house the bedrooms. Below the rooms, a mezzanine with more windows adds viewing opportunities of the lower levels of the forest canopy. Finally, the ground floor houses exhibits and a mural about the environment and the surrounding forest and the animals that live in it.



Guest rooms at the Tower are simple but very comfortable. Each of the double rooms has 2 twin beds, a small desk and chair, private bath with hot water, hairdryers, and environment safe soaps and shampoos. A limited number of guaranteed single rooms share two bathrooms.

The Canopy Tower is famous for birds. You won't believe how comfortable it is and how delicious and creative the meals are. They utilize local produce and can accommodate special diets.

Sun, Mon, Tue, Feb 13, 14, 15 – Each morning you'll be up with the birds for the morning chorus! Head up to the roof where coffee is served with incredible views of not only birds, monkeys and other wildlife, but also the surrounding forest canopy, the Panamá City skyline, and ships passing through the Guilliard Cut of the Panamá Canal. Your morning coffee time will never be the same! The next three days will include the following visits with all meals at the Tower.

- **Semaphore Hill Road** - After breakfast, at mid-morning, you'll start exploring Soberanía National Park by taking a pleasant walk down Semaphore Hill Road. This winding, shady paved road, festooned on the shoulders by wildflowers of many types, is a little more than a mile long and crosses a large creek about half-way down. There are some incredible Panamá birding opportunities here, including birds from the forest interior as well as edge-dwellers. Olivaceous Flatbill, Plain Xenops, Lesser Greenlet, Black-breasted and White-whiskered puffbirds, Fasciated and Black-crowned (formerly Western Slaty) antshrikes, Slate-colored Grosbeak, Bay-headed and White-shouldered tanagers, Black-throated Trogon, Broad-billed and Rufous motmots and Great Jacamar may be found. Great Tinamou is often heard, but harder to find. This road is also great for raptors—White, Tiny and Great Black hawks have been seen.
- **Ammo Dump Ponds** - The Ammo Dump Ponds are located just past the town of Gamboa on the way to Pipeline Road. It is the best place to see the elusive White-throated Crake, as well as a host of other waterbirds. Least Grebes and Purple Gallinules are common, and Rufescent Tiger-Heron and American Pygmy-Kingfisher are also resident. Here, we often find Greater Ani, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Whooping Motmot (recent split from Blue-crowned), Yellow-tailed Oriole, Southern Lapwing, Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet, Tropical Kingbird, Scrub Greenlet, Lesser Kiskadee, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck and Panamá, Social and Rusty-margined flycatchers and even an Olivaceous Piculet!



- Pipeline Road** - After breakfast you board the open-air 4X4s to Pipeline Road, the best place in Central Panamá to find forest birds, and one of the premier birding spots in the world! This morning we concentrate our efforts at the beginning of Pipeline, where we will look for Greater Ani, Gray-necked Wood-Rail, Yellow-tailed Oriole, Masked Tityra, Rosy Thrush-Tanager, Plain Wren, Streaked Flycatcher, Red-throated Ant-Tanager, Squirrel Cuckoo, Gray-headed Chachalaca, Southern Bentbill, Forest Elaenia, Panamá Flycatcher, Blue Ground-Dove and Little Tinamou. Other birds recorded here are Black-bellied and Buff-breasted wrens, Golden-collared Manakin, White-necked Puffbird, Gartered, Slaty-tailed, Black-throated, White-tailed and Black-tailed trogons, Purple-crowned Fairy, Yellow Tyrannulet, White-bellied and Dusky antbirds, Fasciated and Black-crowned antshrikes.



- Summit Gardens** - Summit Gardens is a center for recreation, education and conservation, dedicated to reflect and enhance Panamá's tropical and cultural diversity. The botanical gardens are great for migratory warblers and other forest-edge species, including a colony of Chestnut-headed Oropendolas, Yellow-margined Flycatcher, Laughing Falcon, Gray-lined, Crane and Great Black hawks, Collared Forest-Falcon, Tropical Pewee, Masked Tityra, Golden-fronted and Scrub greenlets, Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet, Yellow-rumped Cacique, Giant, Shiny and Bronzed cowbirds, and Blue Cotinga. This park is the best place to find Streak-headed Woodcreeper, a difficult species to get elsewhere. The Harpy Eagle is Panamá's national bird, and this park has an exhibit, including a life-size nest and interpretive panels, tracing the importance of the Harpy in Panamánian history and culture dating back to Pre-Columbian times.

- Plantation Trail** - We take a short ride to the bottom of Semaphore Hill to Plantation Trail, just 5 minutes away. This easy trail passes through mature rainforest and follows a small creek (Rio Chico Masambi) and is a reliable place to find Golden-crowned Spadebills. Oftentimes at the parking area near the entrance, we find Black-chested Jays. Other birds to look for along the trail include Ocellated, Bicolored, Chestnut-backed, White-bellied and Spotted antbirds; Broad-billed and Whooping motmots, trogons, White-whiskered Puffbird, hummers (Blue-chested, White-necked Jacobin and others); Plain Brown, Northern Barred and Cocoa woodcreepers; Cinnamon, Crimson-crested and Black-cheeked woodpeckers; White-breasted Wood-Wren, Song Wren, Dot-winged, Checker-throated and White-flanked antwrens; Purple-throated Fruitcrow, Bright-rumped Attila, Gray-headed Tanager, Long-billed Gnatwren, Black-crowned and Fasciated antshrikes, Red-capped and Blue-crowned manakins, Great Tinamou, Ruddy-tailed, Royal and Yellow-margined flycatchers, Yellow-rumped Cacique, Scaly-throated Leaf-tosser and occasionally, a Great Jacamar or the endemic Yellow-green Tyrannulet!



- Chagres River, Gamboa** - First, we stop at the Canopy Bed and Breakfast in the picturesque village of Gamboa, to look at the bird feeders! With a beautiful backdrop of Cerro Pelado, the backyard at the Canopy B&B is teeming with bird life. At the fruit feeders, we are likely to see Red-legged, Shining, and Green honeycreepers, Lemon-rumped, Crimson-backed, and Blue-gray tanagers, Thick-billed Euphonia, Yellow-bellied and Variable Seedeaters, Whooping Motmot and Gray-headed Chachalaca, with Central

American Agoutis lurking about under the feeders. Next, we're off to Chagres River, the main tributary for the Panamá Canal. The birding along the riverbanks and the forest edges of Gamboa Resort can be spectacular! Here, we search for Amazon, Green and American pygmy kingfishers, as well as, Whooping Motmot and Cinnamon Woodpecker.



We could also see Gray-Necked Wood-Rail, Cocoi, Green, and Striated herons, Wattled Jacana, Pied-billed Grebe, Anhinga, Royal and Sandwich terns, Brown Pelican, Neotropic Cormorant, Tricolored and Little Blue herons, Rufescent Tiger-Heron, Mangrove Swallow, Black-chested Jay, Lesser Kiskadee, Rusty-margined Flycatcher, Yellow-billed Cacique, Black-bellied and Buff-breasted wrens, Fasciated and Barred antshrikes, Cinnamon Becard, Slaty-tailed Trogon, White-bellied Antbird, and even

Slaty-backed Forest-Falcon and Blue Cotinga at times!

Wed, Feb 16 – You can sleep in or take one last morning of birding on the Observation Deck for a few last birds. After an early lunch, we'll drive to Albrook Field for the 1-hour flight to Bocas del Toro.

- 2:00 pm – depart Albrook 3:00 pm – arrive Bocas del Toro.

Reminder about local flight baggage allowance: On Air Panamá, the allowed weight is 30 lbs (14 kg) in one or two suitcases maximum. An excess baggage surcharge of \$3 per extra kilogram (2.2 lbs) can be paid. The limit for carry-on luggage is 9 lbs (4 kg).

Once we land on Bocas, we'll gather our things and head over to Tranquilo Bay by boat. After settling into our cabins, we can all meet for an orientation walk then end up at the dining room for dinner.

Tranquilo Bay

The Kimball and Viola families left Texas in the late 1990's to build and operate this beautiful eco-lodge in the archipelago of Bocas del Toro. They came to Panamá for the fishing but stayed for the birding!

The main building houses the dining room, bar and offices. Meals are served family style and are mostly locally sourced, delicious, and plentiful. Bar drinks are included, with the exception of top shelf brands. They are dedicated to sustainably manage the lodge, with their own water catchment and purification systems, growing much of their own fruits and herbs, employing locals, managing their waste systems, and preserving land.

A walk along a mangrove boardwalk brings you to the nine cabins. Each has air-conditioning, a private hot water bath with a large walk-in shower, and is furnished with local hardwoods, tile floors, and fine linens, a king or queen bed or two double beds with an orthopedic mattress. Covered porches with a hammock and Adirondack chairs are a great place to begin or end each day.



The addition of a 100-foot observation tower has added tremendously to birding experience. The wildlife and views from the tower are incredible, but the natural history lesson alone is worth the climb. All life zones known to the tropics, from mountains to coral reefs are visible from this tower. This vantage point above the forest's canopy gives you a bird's-eye view of the entire archipelago.

Fri, Sat, Sun, Feb 17, 18, 19

We have three full days exploring the area and expect to do the following.

- **Zapatilla Cayes, Bastimentos National Marine Park** - A full day exploring the Zapatilla Cays inside the national park. These pristine white sand islands just 15-minutes away are covered in coconut palms, tropical hardwoods, sea grapes, and almond trees draped in a collage of bromeliads, ferns, orchids, and other epiphytes. Every year hawksbill sea turtles use these islands as an important nesting ground. It is possible to walk here while stopping to explore the white sand beaches, forest and reefs covering the entire circumference. Snapper, barracuda, and vivid tropical fish abound on the beautiful coral reefs surrounding the area.



The birds are plenty—Common Black-Hawks, Mangrove Warbler, Magnificent Frigate, Brown Boobies, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, kingfishers, Great Kiskadee, Brown Pelicans, osprey, hummingbirds, plovers, and Gray-necked Wood-Rail. Guided activities include your choice of birding, hiking, snorkeling, sea kayaking and hammock surfing.

- **Bird Tranquilo Bay Trails** - Today have breakfast at your leisure and then regroup for birding the lodge's trails. The Lodge grounds include over 200 acres with several kilometers of forested trails covering different habitats. This forest and its edge are home to many of Isla Bastimentos common favorites including multiple raptors, Montezuma Oropendolas, Red-lored Parrots, hummingbirds, 5-species of kingfishers, Green Ibis, tityras, woodpeckers, honeycreepers, tanagers, pigeons, antbirds, manakins, seedeaters, and herons, and, in season Three-wattled Bellbirds. White-faced Capuchins, three and two toed sloths, green iguanas, basilisk lizards, butterflies and poison dart frogs are also common on these trails. Additionally, we'll take advantage of the amazing Observation Tower,



over 100 feet above sea level. At forest canopy level, you'll be eye-to-eye with birds and sloth, plus have fantastic vistas of Bastimentos National Marine Park.

- **Changuinola River, Bird Island by boat** - This will be an early start, departing around 6:30AM for a one-hour journey to the Soroopta Canal. Construction began on the 7-mile long canal in 1898 and was financed by a banana plantation owner named Michael T. Snyder. Later purchased by the United Fruit Company (now Chiquita) at the turn of the century, the canal was used to shelter banana barges from the open sea on their way to the shipping port in Almirante. The Soroopta canal is today part of an important wetland reserve called the Humedal de San San Pond Sak. A unique collage of fruiting trees and habitats lines the canal making it possible to see up to 100 species of birds in one day. From the boat we will have chances at Olive-throated Parakeets, Laughing Falcon, toucans, manakins, herons, Northern Jacana, flycatchers, cuckoos, tanagers, honeycreepers, orioles, woodpeckers, White-throated Crake, hummingbirds, and Nicaraguan Seed finch. After a refreshing picnic lunch, we will bird the mouth of the Changuinola River by foot. This is an excellent area for shorebirds, Roseate Spoonbill, Brown Pelicans, terns, and nighthawks. Manatees can be seen here on occasion. Given favorable conditions, we will stray just offshore to a basalt outcropping called Swans Cay, known locally, as "Bird Island" or "Isla Pájaros". This surreal island serves as a rookery for Magnificent Frigates, Brown Boobies and is the only known nesting site for the Red-billed Tropicbird in the Caribbean's southwest region.



One evening after dinner, we will try to spot some of the local nocturnal residents such as the Common Potoo, Owls, Western Night Monkey, Four-eyed opossum, Woolly opossum, Crab-eating raccoon, Speckled Caiman and bats.

At some time in the last 2 days, your guides will arrange Covid testing if the requirement is still in effect. The cost of the test is at your expense.

Sun, Feb 20 – After a final morning of birding on the grounds, we'll have an early lunch then take the boat over to the mainland to catch our flight from Bocas airport.

- 3:10 pm - depart Bocas 4:10 pm arrive Albrook

On arrival our driver will take us to the Holiday Inn City of Knowledge for a final night. Tonight's dinner is special – we go to the Miraflores Locks restaurant overlooking the first lock of the Panamá Canal. Dinner with a view!!

Mon, Feb 21 – after breakfast, we head to the airport, departing about 3.5 hours before flight departure.

Note: The order and sites visited may vary due to weather, road conditions and other factors beyond our control. Hotels listed are valid as of printing but may change.

ERIC STAGER will escort the group for JB Journeys, working with local guides.



Eric grew up on the Upper Texas Coast where he was bitten by the birding bug in 1981 at the age of 13. Although detrimental to his teenage social life, his obsession with birds was spurred on by kind mentors and nourished by the excitement of growing up in one of North America's top birding locations. While still in high school, Eric was leading field trips for the local bird club, compiling his local Christmas Bird Count, and operating the Texas Coast Rare Bird Alert (in the days of cassette tape answering machines). Eric left the coast to attend the University of Texas and has lived in Austin ever since. He has expanded his sights with birding trips in South America, Africa, Asia and Australia.

In Austin, Eric leads field trips and teaches birding classes for Travis Audubon Society, and also serves as president of the board of directors. He works as a Senior Environmental Scientist for the City of Austin.

#####

COST:

- \$4195 per person in double occupancy with 12 participants. (With 8: \$4395. With 6: \$4695).
- Single Supplement: \$695* - \$1500**
- **Smaller single room at Canopy Tower with share bath. **Single occupancy in double room at Canopy Tower with private bath. At Tranquilo Bay and Holiday Inn, single occupancy in double room with private bath.*
- Minimum 6 to operate, maximum 12 participants.
- To confirm your spot, please [complete the reservation form on-line.](#)
- Deposit \$500 to hold space; final payment will due November 12, 2021.
- Cancellation policy – fully refundable within 30 days of confirmation. Up to 120 days prior to departure, \$500/person. 119-90 days, 50%. Inside 90 days – non-refundable. We recommend the purchase of travel insurance.

INCLUDED:

- Ground transportation as listed by van
- Local flights Panama City-Bocas roundtrip
- 9 nights lodging with taxes included
- Escorted by Eric Stager
- Local bilingual bird guides
- Entry fees to parks, etc
- All meals
- Basic gratuities for hotels, group meals, & drivers

NOT INCLUDED:

- Airfare (into/out of Panama City, sample flights on registration)
- Drinks
- Gratuities to local guides*(See suggestions)
- Travel Insurance
- Personal expenses
- **Suggested tipping for guides:*
→ For local guides: \$10-15 per person/per day