

Panamanian Paradise Reader Rendezvous Itinerary

Tranquilo Bay & Canopy Tower

November 5-14, 2019



Day 1, November 5: Arrival Day ☺

Please schedule your flights to arrive today at the Tocumen International Airport (PYT) in Panama City, Panama. We will have an airport transfer ready to pick you up and deliver you to the Country Inn & Suites for the night. We want you to rest and relax from your travels before the start of our adventure tomorrow. By the way, Panama is on eastern standard time throughout the year.

Day 2: Birding at Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge

Early in the morning, we will transfer you to the nearby domestic airport, Albrook Airport (PAC). We will fly from Panama City to Bocas del Toro, where we will be transferred to Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge—on the North American side of the canal. After settling in, we will enjoy some early morning birds and a casual breakfast. Following breakfast we will enter the forest trail in search of chestnut-backed antbird, white-flanked and dot-winged antwrens, black-crowned antshrike, red-throated ant-tanager, tawny-crested tanager, rufescent tiger-heron, and the geographically misplaced stub-tailed spadebill. After a short hike we will arrive at Pineapple Hill, a small, elevated clearing at the forest's edge, which is an important foraging area for a multitude of Neotropical and migratory species. This is an excellent place to get good looks at feeding birds such as golden-collared and red-capped manakins; three species of honeycreepers; Passerini's, scarlet, white-lined, and summer tanagers; Baltimore oriole; band-tailed barbthroat; green-breasted mango; white-necked jacobin and purple-crowned fairy hummingbirds; scaled pigeon; double-toothed kite; roadside hawk; and the hard-to-see white-throated crane.

Once we are ready to move on, another forest trail will take us to a golden-collared manakin lek. Farther along this trail will take us to an area of high forest canopy, where three-wattled bellbirds like to spend midday. On the way back to the lodge (to enjoy a homemade lunch in comfort), we will search the forest floor for the famous Isla Bastimentos red Poison dart frog. This morph of *Oophaga pumilio* is studied on site by the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, which is researching the species' evolutionary traits. After a short siesta, we can focus our efforts in the mangrove forest

looking for several species of herons, green ibis, mangrove black hawk, all six kingfishers known to reside in the Americas, mangrove cuckoo, whimbrel, willet, prothonotary warbler, and the resident yellow warbler or “mangrove warbler,” in which males exhibit a stunning red hood. In the evening we will climb the canopy tower to watch from a bird’s-eye view the pandemonium of red-ored and mealy parrots paired up and returning home, as groups of chattering blue-headed parrots join in the chorus. Once we watch the beautiful tropical sunset over the Talamanca Range, we can walk back to the lodge for hard-earned drinks, appetizers, and a delicious meal.

Day 3: The Chocolate Farm & Tranquilo Bay Canopy Observation Tower

After birding from the lodge’s terrace with Panamanian coffee and a casual breakfast a little later than usual, we will take a calm, 20-minute boat ride through Dolphin Bay to Buena Esperanza. The collection of tropical flora found at this location represents the best plants and therefore, butterflies in the archipelago. A superb water garden and natural creek running through the property also attract many species of mammals, reptiles, and multicolored amphibians. The landowners, who live on site, protect this beautiful piece of mainland forest by using the property to operate an artisanal chocolate farm. Cacao trees, grown to produce organic chocolate, thrive under the shade of the forest canopy. Under this stunning canopy we will be searching for slaty-tailed, white-tailed, and gartered trogons; purple-throated fruitcrow; black-chested jay; pale-billed woodpecker; pied puffbird; black-capped pygmy-tyrant; Montezuma and chestnut-headed oropendolas; keel-billed and black-mandibled toucans; cocoa woodcreeper; and many more species. Mammal sightings might include bottle-nosed dolphin, mantled howler monkey, kinkajou, three- and two-toed sloths, squirrels, and greater white-lined bats. After returning to Tranquilo Bay for lunch and a hammock siesta, birding excursions to the canopy observation tower, forest trail system, and hummingbird bathing station will be available options. For anyone wanting water activities, guided sea kayaking or snorkeling amid the alluring coral reefs will also be options. Dinner entrees vary nightly—one night we may serve seafood and the next night it may be South American beef. Tonight we end with something chocolate to close the day.

Day 4: San San Pond Sak Wetlands

Today will be a tranquil day of birding by boat within several lush, coastal, wetland habitats. San San Pond Sak Wetlands is a designated Ramsar site, as well as part of the La Amistad UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. Access to this verdant wildlife area will be via boat through the historic Snyder Canal, as birds conveniently fly through the gallery forest back and forth across the waterway. This is an excellent place to find many lowland bird species, northern and altitudinal migrants, raptors and shorebirds. All six species of kingfishers known to occur in the Americas can be found here, and we will be watching closely for regional endemics, such as the range-restricted Nicaraguan seed-finch, white-collard manakin (Almirante race), olive-backed euphonia, black-cowled oriole, canebrake wren, and three-wattled bellbird. Also possible are, masked duck, common gallinule, least bittern, pied-billed grebe, great potoo, northern jacana, and bare-throated tiger-heron. Raptor sightings might include yellow-headed caracara; bat, laughing and peregrine falcons; osprey; and pearl kite. From the high branches of fruiting trees down to the grassy and shrubby edge, we might find Passerini’s and golden-hooded tanagers, olive-crowned yellowthroat, red-breasted blackbird, buff-throated saltator, groove-billed ani, squirrel cuckoo, chatters of olive-throated parakeets, streaked and

scissor-tailed flycatchers, and the minute common, black-headed and slate-headed tody-flycatchers. With any luck, mammal sightings might produce mantled howler monkey, crab-eating racoon, white-nosed coati, Neotropical river otter, West Indian manatee and bottlenose dolphin. Soropta Beach, important for migrating and resident shorebirds, is also a nesting ground for leatherback and hawksbill sea turtles, in addition to green iguanas, basilisk lizards, common boa constrictor, spectacled caiman and American crocodile. Here on the beach, we will enjoy a picnic lunch with fresh sea breeze and the shorebirds. This vibrant river mouth and beachfront might produce parasitic and pomarine jaegers; Wilson's, collared, and semipalmated plovers; ruddy turnstones; sanderlings; least, pectoral and semipalmated sandpipers; common and lesser nighthawks; lesser and greater yellowlegs; four species of tern; and roseate spoonbill. In the afternoon, sea conditions permitting, we will pass just two miles offshore to a breathtaking rookery and reserve known as Swan's Caye, for close-up looks at Panama's only known breeding colony of red-billed tropicbirds, as well as brown boobies and magnificent frigatebirds. We will return to the lodge in the late afternoon. Dinners vary based upon the local ingredients available; however, you should expect three or four delicious courses each night.

Day 5: Changuinola River Valley and Low Caribbean Foothills

After coffee, fresh tropical juices, and a complete Panamanian breakfast, we will leave the dock at 6 a.m. for a comfortable sunrise boat ride to Almirante, a banana town on the mainland. From Almirante our van will take us along the foothills stretching the coastline in one of Central America's narrowest migratory bottlenecks. The number of kettles and flights can be sensational, with thousands of Swainson's and broad-winged hawks, swallow-tailed and plumbeous kites, and turkey vultures being seen at a time. This area is also important for a diverse group of resident Neotropical raptors, such as black hawk-eagle; white-tailed, grey-headed, and hook-billed kites; white and red-tailed hawks; and the mighty king vulture. We will delight in a picnic lunch at an amazing overlook in the Caribbean foothills. This beautiful vista will give us an excellent opportunity to scan the canopy for lovely and snowy cotingas, as well as soaring raptors. We will take several sideroads today that branch out into indigenous villages where the Ngäbe practice sustenance farming along the Changuinola River. Here along forested edge, cocoa farms and patches of gallery forest we will search for scarlet-rumped cacique; black-faced grosbeak; chestnut-colored, rufous-winged, and crimson-bellied woodpeckers; rufous-tailed jacamar; blue-ground dove; northern bentbill; great antshrike; rufous and broad-billed motmots; and the rare yellow-eared toucanet. A short boat ride through "Dark Land" and "Dolphin Bay" will bring us back to the lodge in the early evening.

Day 6: Isla Popa and Hummingbird Bathing Pools

Each of the islands in the Bocas del Toro archipelago has interesting wildlife and high levels of endemism. Isla Popa is the second-largest island in the chain, and has more species of birds and mammals due to its close proximity to the mainland. A leisurely boat ride will bring us to a dense gallery forest surrounded by the rich mangrove lagoons of nearby Isla Popa. We will bird watch in this area by boat; peacefully enjoying flights of keel-billed and black-mandibled toucans, crimson-fronted parakeets, brown-hooded parrots, slaty-tailed trogon, golden-hooded tanager, plumbeous and swallow-tailed kites, pale-billed, and lineated woodpeckers, mangrove cuckoo, American-pygmy kingfisher, and, with luck, we will see male snowy cotingas conspicuously blazing in the sun. Later

that evening on one of the many forest trails at the lodge, we will visit a winding spring creek that creates a favorite locale for resident hummingbirds to bathe. We have set up some benches as viewing stations to comfortably observe and photograph this daily high-octane spectacle. Band-tailed barbthroat, purple-crowned fairy, crowned woodnymph, and other hummingbirds fight ruthlessly for the best bathing positions. Once they get their turn at the fresh water, each species has its own dancelike preparations before taking its first splash. Red-capped manakins, prothonotary warblers, and chestnut-backed antbirds might be found along the creek's shallow edges hoping for a bath, as well.

Day 7: Palo Seco Protection Forest

After Panamanian breakfast, we will leave the dock at 6 a.m. and travel via boat to the town of Punta Robalo. Today we will be birding in the Palo Seco Protection Forest, which is one of the most vital areas of La Amistad Biosphere Reserve. This incredible area consists of Atlantic forest, foothills, and watersheds, and is part of BirdLife International's Central American Caribbean Slope Endemic Bird Area. It is a hotbed for restricted-range species and altitudinal migrants, such as the three-wattled bellbird, and is one of the most important protected areas in the Neotropics. snowy cotinga; chestnut-colored and cinnamon woodpeckers; rufous-tailed jacamar; crimson-colored, speckled, emerald, and silver-throated tanagers; lattice-tailed trogon; bronze-tailed plumeleeter; green hermit; slaty spinetail; dull-mantled antbird; and band-backed and black-throated wrens are all possibilities on this outing. Other lowland specialties might include: brown jay, white-crowned parrot, white-collared seedeater, olive-crowned yellowthroat, cinnamon and white-winged becards, long-billed gnatwren, wedge-billed woodcreeper, black-and-yellow tanager, buff-rumped warbler, torrent tyranulet, crimson-fronted parakeets, and red-fronted parrotlet. In the late afternoon, we will work our way back through the lowland foothills scanning for kettles of raptors, snowy and blue cotingas, and, finally, some marsh birds, such as various sandpipers, three species of ibis, southern lapwings, blue-winged teal, black-bellied whistling-ducks, and the always-stunning common gallinule. A fresh picnic lunch will be served in the field, and we will return to the lodge in the evening for our last night at Tranquilo Bay.

Day 8, November 12: Arrival to Canopy Tower, Orientation, & Canopy Tower Observation Desk

We will have an early flight from Bocas del Toro airport to Albrook Panama City airport. A driver who will transport you to the Canopy Tower, located at the top of Semaphore Hill in the rainforest of Soberanía National Park—on the South American side of the canal. Canopy Tower staff will greet us and provide an orientation to the facilities. As your luggage is being ferried to your room, you may visit the dining/bar area and enjoy a refreshing drink. We recommend that you spend some time on the observation deck, where the view provides incredible Panama birding opportunities! Here, you get a unique eye-level perspective of the rainforest canopy. Many birds, including toucans, parrots, tanagers of various types, hawks, and dozens of others, as well as two species of sloths, monkeys, and other mammals are commonly seen. From this vantage point you can also see ships transiting the Panama Canal, the majestic Centennial Bridge and miles of rainforest! You may also want to watch the hummingbird feeders at the base of the Tower for long-billed hermit, white-necked jacobin, violet-bellied and blue-chested hummingbirds, and white-vented plumeleeter. Occasionally, a snowy-bellied

hummingbird is spotted! After all this Panama birding, dinner will be served at the Canopy Tower.

Day 9: Pipeline Road Entrance & Ammo Dump Ponds & Environments

After breakfast we will board the Birdmobile or the Rainfomobile, both open-air vehicles, that will take us to Pipeline Road, the best place in Central Panama to find forest birds, and one of the premier birding spots in the world! We will 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, Panama 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, and fasciated and black-crowned antshrikes. During migration, this entrance road is excellent for migrant warblers, flycatchers, grosbeaks, and tanagers. We will have lunch at Canopy Tower, then off to the Ammo Dump Ponds. The Ammo Dump Ponds are located just past Gamboa on the way to Pipeline Road. It is the best place to see the elusive white-throated crane, as well as a host of other water birds. 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 (recently split from blue-crowned), yellow-tailed oriole, southern lapwing, yellow-crowned tyrannulet, tropical kingbird, scrub greenlet, lesser kiskadee, black-bellied whistling-duck and Panama, social and rusty-margined flycatchers, and even an olivaceous piculet! Panama birding is excellent here, and you'll definitely add to your impressive list of birds! Dinner at Canopy Tower.

Day 10, November 14: Departure Day ☹

If time permits after breakfast, you may snag one last look from the observation deck. Then we'll be off to the Tocumen International airport for your return flight home, with awesome memories of birds, mammals, wildflowers, butterflies, and everything else you experienced while birding at the Canopy Tower!