

GRAND BELIZE: CROOKED TREE, HIDDEN VALLEY, AND CHAN CHICH

MARCH 11-21, 2010

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We are pleased to offer a comprehensive tour in 2010 to the premier birding locales in the popular country of Belize. Our journey begins with a visit to the Crooked Tree region, renowned for its excellent water birds. We will spend time exploring the expansive wet and dry savannas, plus patches of coastal thorn scrub and the famous Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary where Jabiru, Agami Heron, and American Pygmy-Kingfisher are among the many possibilities. From there we will venture to Hidden Valley Inn in the extraordinary Mountain Pine Ridge of south-central Belize. Quite unlike the low-lying jungles at Chan Chich, Hidden Valley sits amid the pine and broadleaf forests of the Belizean highlands. We will have two full days to immerse ourselves in spectacular scenery—featuring two enormous waterfalls—and in the pursuit of two of the most rarely seen birds in Central America, the Orange-breasted Falcon and the Stygian Owl

Our final destination is famed Chan Chich Lodge, thought by many to be one of the best eco-tourist lodges in the world. Anyone who has had the privilege to visit Chan Chich has been very impressed with the comfortable facilities, the special ambience, and the overall superb birding. It's an ideal situation for both novice and veteran birders alike. For many years, this area was private property, inaccessible to the public. In 1988, the owner completed tourist facilities, which permitted birders and naturalists to have the unprecedented opportunity to experience wildlife on hundreds of thousands of acres of pristine, subtropical moist forest.

If you've visited the ruins of Tikal in northern Guatemala or Palenque in southern Mexico, you will find that the habitats and the avifauna are similar at Chan Chich. The significant difference at Chan Chich is the lack of large villages, commercial establishments, vendors, discos, and continual flow of bus loads of tourists. There is nothing to distract us from the wonderful sights and sounds of nature...we have the entire range of habitats exclusively for our own enjoyment. This is a region where rare and/or secretive species may still be encountered, many of which have been eradicated from Palenque and are increasingly endangered at Tikal. Simply put, this may be the largest tract of undisturbed, easily accessible lowland forest remaining in Central America.

March 11, Day 1: Arrival in Belize City. Participants should make plans to arrive in Belize City anytime this afternoon. After clearing immigration and customs, you will be met outside the airport and transported to the Radisson Hotel in Belize City (about a 25 minute ride). Clients arriving with enough time to bird may find a good variety of species right around the hotel. Cinnamon Hummingbird, Social Flycatcher, Common Tody-Flycatcher, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Great Kiskadee, and Orchard Oriole are all regulars on the hotel grounds. We will gather in the hotel lobby at 6:30 p.m. for a get acquainted session followed by dinner.

NIGHT: Radisson Fort George, Belize City

March 12, Day 2: Crooked Tree & Caye Caulker. We will depart early this morning (around 5:00 a.m.) heading northward to the village of Crooked Tree. Pine forests and semi-open savannahs in this area support a nice diversity of species, many of which are not likely to be seen elsewhere on the tour. Common species here include Pale-vented Pigeon, White-fronted Parrot, Great Kiskadee, Vermilion Flycatcher, Brown Jay, Gray-breasted Martin, Clay-colored Robin, Tropical Mockingbird, Blue-gray Tanager, Grayish Saltator, Melodious Blackbird, and Hooded Oriole. Several less numerous species will be our main targets of the morning however. We will give special effort to locating the uncommon Yucatan Woodpecker, Streak-headed Woodcreeper, and the stunning Yucatan Jay. In addition, the road into Crooked Tree crosses the main lagoon, and here and at other wet areas, we should see a variety of waterbirds including such possibilities as Neotropic Cormorant, Little Blue and Green herons, White Ibis, Wood Stork, Gray-necked Wood-Rail, Limpkin, and Northern Jacana. Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, Snail Kite (in some years downright common), Osprey, and Ringed and Belted kingfishers are also likely. We will also try to keep an eye out overhead for the magnificent Jabiru. When water conditions are right (usually the lower the better), this incredible species visits Crooked Tree Lagoon.

After lunch we will head back to Belize City to catch a short (fifteen minute) flight out to Caye Caulker. Our main target will be the rarely seen Rufous-necked Wood-Rail, which frequents the mangroves here. Other species we hope to see include Yucatan Vireo, Black Catbird, “Mangrove” Warbler, and a variety of shorebirds, herons, and terns.

NIGHT: Radisson Fort George, Belize City

March 13, Day 3: Crooked Tree Lagoon; Drive to Hidden Valley. We will again depart Belize City early this morning (probably around 5:00 a.m.) so as to be at Crooked Tree shortly after first light for a boat trip to the south end of the lagoon. Here a wide variety of new birds might be encountered, including the comical Boat-billed Heron, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned night-herons, the rare and highly sought Agami Heron, Wood Stork, the stunning Gray-necked Wood-Rail, the elusive Sungrebe, and the tiny American Pygmy-Kingfisher. All these species favor the brush-lined edges of the lagoon, and finding them can be highly dependent on water levels at Crooked Tree. Short forests on the edge of the water could also produce Black-collared Hawk, Rufous-breasted Spinetail, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Yellow-billed Cacique, and Yellow-tailed Oriole.

After lunch we will be transported to Hidden Valley Inn in the Pine Ridge region of southern Belize. The drive will take about four hours, but will give a nice view of the countryside as we go. We should arrive well before dark and may even have time to bird the grounds after checking in.

NIGHT: Hidden Valley Inn

March 14, Day 4: Hidden Valley Inn. The lodge at Hidden Valley is a newly renovated facility featuring clean, comfortable accommodations, excellent food, beautiful gardens, swimming pool and well-maintained paths and trails. The management loves birding groups and is excellent at accommodating all our wants and needs. Set in the Mountain Pine Ridge, the lodge and grounds lie amidst a forest of Caribbean pine, dense shrubs and scattered groves of broadleaf trees. Totally unlike the massive lowland jungles around Chan Chich, the different habitats found here assure a variety of bird species not likely to be found elsewhere on our adventure. Furthermore, the lodge is the gateway to some of the most beautiful and dramatic scenery anywhere.

One and a half days have been allotted for exploring this less-visited part of Belize. Our visit here should be delightful and easygoing as we stay entirely around the lodge and nearby areas. The whole property is private, so we will virtually have it and the birds to ourselves! By simply venturing outside our doors, we are sure to encounter a number of dazzling species. Yellow-tailed and Yellow-backed orioles sing nearly side-by-side on exposed limbs right around our rooms. Brilliant Azure-crowned Hummingbirds dart from flower to flower; Black-headed Saltators chatter constantly from the gardens. Because most of Belize is covered in thick jungle, the Pine Ridge is an ecosystem with habitats not found in many other places. Therefore it is home to a number of bird species whose

ranges in Belize are restricted to this area. We will target a number of these species, most of which are wonderfully common.

Short walks on roads and paths will undoubtedly yield Rufous-capped Warblers skulking in the undergrowth, scolding us as we pass by. Hepatic Tanagers sing from the exposed perches of dead pines and burly Rusty Sparrows peer at us from elevated perches above the grass. Other species found here that we may encounter include isolated populations of Greater Pewee (increasingly rare here), Plumbeous Vireo, Plain Wren, Grace's Warbler, and Black-headed Siskin. Scaled Pigeon, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, White-crowned and Red-lored parrots, Golden-olive Woodpecker, Green Jay, Gray-crowned Yellowthroat, and Yellow-faced Grassquit are possibilities near the lodge as well.

By mid-morning we will be ready to venture a bit further. A short drive will take us to the edge of the plateau and to a sight that is simply awesome, Thousand Foot Falls. By walking down a short flight of stairs, we come to a viewing platform at the top of a sheer chasm, eye level with a roaring waterfall that churns and tumbles over a stupendous drop down to the bottom of the canyon. Aside from the falls themselves, the canyon is one of extraordinary beauty. Both deep and narrow, it is covered from top to bottom by dense, uncut broadleaf forest. This is not the only reason we come to Thousand Foot Falls, however. The falls and environs are also home to the nearly mythical and seldom seen Orange-breasted Falcon.

Similar in appearance to the far more common Bat Falcon, the Orange-breasted seems to have an affinity for steep canyons. Nobody is certain of the reasons, but the Orange-breasted Falcon is a species with a very spotty distribution and is only rarely encountered on any of our tours. Thousand Foot Falls support a pair of these raptors, and by scanning the nearby hillsides, we can usually pick them out as they sit high atop some lone dead tree watching over the canyon, looking for the next meal. Should we find the birds, we will be sure to spend a considerable amount of time with them, as most of us may never encounter this species again.

This afternoon we will spend more time birding the lodge grounds, but by mid-afternoon we will go on another foray, this time to King Vulture Falls. In contrast to Thousand Foot Falls, this waterfall is not a long, plunging cascade; rather, it is a more gently sloping falls in which water runs like a long, wide ribbon over an apron of boulders. The canyon is about as narrow as at Thousand Foot Falls, with steep-sided canyon walls and dense, impenetrable jungle. If we have missed the Orange-breasted Falcon earlier in the day, we have more chances here, as there is a resident pair that haunts this chasm as well. This site is where the Peregrine Fund has done work with the falcons in Belize and is a reliable place for finding them.

King Vulture Falls takes its name for a reason. Every afternoon as many as twenty King Vultures will fly up the river valley toward the falls as they prepare to roost for the evening. Often the birds come by at eye level, and usually many can be seen strutting around on exposed parts of the waterfall, angling for a bath or a final drink. All too often King Vultures are seen soaring high overhead; here we can experience them under far more ideal conditions. Their stunning black and white wings stand out the most initially, but we are also sure to study their colorful and strangely marked heads and necks. This should be a most fitting ending to a perfect day.

By night the lodge grounds are the home of another of the tropics' rarely seen birds, the Stygian Owl. Our chances for finding one are perhaps fifty-fifty. The good news is that the birds sometime occur literally right around the main lodge building. We have also had some luck locating this species on day roosts, so a nighttime prowl may not be required.

NIGHT: Hidden Valley Inn

March 15, Day 5: Final Morning Hidden Valley Inn; Flight to Chan Chich. This morning will signal our departure from Hidden Valley. We will have a few hours for final birding of the lodge grounds or a return to Thousand Foot Falls before loading up at around 11:00a.m. for our charter flight into Gallon Jug (the airstrip for Chan Chich Lodge). This will be another very short flight (about 20 minutes) and will provide us with excellent views of the forest as we approach the open area around the airstrip.

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We should arrive at magical Chan Chich in time for lunch. Our lodging facilities are nestled on an ancient elevated plaza ringed by grass-covered temples and palaces clothed in dense forest. The owner has a reputation for doing everything first-class and this lodge is no exception. The thatched-roof cabañas are skillfully handcrafted of exquisite hardwoods to blend well with the natural surroundings. Inside each cabaña are two queen-size beds, a large array of well-screened windows, a ceiling fan, a spacious bathroom with shower facilities and hot and cold running water, plus electrical power available twenty-four hours a day. To begin birding, all you have to do is step out your door! This is truly a dream come true...creature comforts and home-cooked food in an avian-rich setting, free of hunting and logging pressures.

We will spend the last couple of hours of the afternoon birding the area right around the cabañas. Fruiting bushes near the restaurant often harbor stunning Red-capped and White-collared manakins. Heliconias and other flowering bushes play host to Long-billed and Stripe-throated hermits, White-bellied Emerald, and Rufous-tailed Hummingbird. Ocellated Turkeys stroll about the grounds, and often Central American spider monkeys are visible around the edge of the clearing. A pair of stunning Bat Falcons is usually visible in the vicinity of the pool, and other raptors may be spotted overhead. A check of nearby fruiting trees could yield a wide variety of flashy birds including Crested Guan, Collared Aracari, Keel-billed Toucan, Mealy and Red-lored parrots, Olive-throated Parakeet, Masked Tityra, Yellow-winged Tanager, and Yellow-throated and Olive-backed euphonias.

As dusk settles in, we may be treated to some of the most incredible sounds of nature, including the ethereal calls of Great Tinamou, the eerie cries of Pauraque, and the impressive roars of Mexican black howler monkeys.

NIGHT: Chan Chich Lodge

March 16-20, Days 6-10: Chan Chich and Vicinity. For the next five days, we will enjoy the avian riches awaiting us in the private reserve surrounding Chan Chich and Gallon Jug. Situated amidst over 300,000 acres of protected seasonal rain forest, Chan Chich is truly a birder's paradise. Nine miles of well-maintained trails radiate out from the lodge, each covering somewhat different habitats. In addition, a series of roads through the property will allow for drives to outlying areas such as Laguna Seca, Cedar Crossing, and Xibal. All in all, we should tally over 200 species of birds just on the lodge property.

In the shorter, drier forest, called bajo forest or tinal, we could see such specialties as Blue Ground-Dove, Yellow-lored Parrot, White-bellied Wren, Long-billed Gnatwren, Tropical Gnatcatcher, Blue Bunting, and Green-backed Sparrow. In addition, two very special regional endemics are also possible, the striking Gray-throated Chat and Rose-throated Tanager.

Taller forests produce a different set of birds. Large mixed-species flocks roam about the jungle, often led by a Black-throated Shrike-Tanager. Each flock contains a somewhat different make-up, but Slaty-tailed, Black-headed, and Collared (very uncommon) trogons; seven species of woodcreepers; the incredible Chestnut-colored Woodpecker; Dot-winged Antwren; Plain Xenops; Eye-ringed Flatbill; Ochre-bellied, Yellow-olive, and Ruddy-tailed flycatchers; Rufous Mourner; Tawny-crowned and Lesser greenlets; Green Shrike-Vireo; Red-crowned and Red-throated ant-tanagers; and Black-faced Grosbeak are among the possibilities in this habitat.

A visit to the King's Tomb and Upper Plaza may yield Blue-crowned Motmot, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, White-whiskered Puffbird, and White-throated Robin, among others. At a special location along Chan Chich Creek, birds come in to bathe in the afternoon, and the show can be spectacular. Purple-crowned Fairys dance over the water, while a variety of manakins, flycatchers, warblers, and tanagers come in for a quick bath or drink before sunset.

In the more open country around Gallon Jug and Xibal, expected species include White-tailed Kite, Roadside Hawk, Green-breasted Mango, the comical Barred Antshrike, stunning Fork-tailed and Scissor-tailed flycatchers, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Brown Jay, White-collared Seedeater, Blue-black Grassquit, Thick-billed Seed-Finch, and Yellow-tailed Oriole. A trip to Cedar Crossing will likely include an impressive list of raptors (One year we had 21 species in a morning!). King Vulture; Gray-headed, Hook-billed Plumbeous, and Double-

toothed kites; White, Gray, and Short-tailed hawks; Ornate and Black hawk-eagles; and Laughing Falcon are among some of the species we could see. Any drive could produce one of the most sought after birds of the area, the impressive Great Curassow. Like the turkey and the guan, this species has been eliminated from most of its range due to hunting pressures. Here one has a very good chance of seeing all three of these species.

In addition, we will take one night walk and a night drive away from the lodge. Several night birds are possible including Mottled, Barn, and Black-and-white (very uncommon) owls; Pauraque; the bizarre Northern Potoo; and Yucatan Nightjar. There is always a good chance for an interesting mammal as well. We have had ocelot on about a third of our trips, and there is always the possibility of something truly amazing such as a jaguar or puma. Again, due to the protection from hunting, this is perhaps one of the best places in the world to encounter a wild cat of some sort.

Our days here at Chan Chich are certain to yield some of the most memorable birding you will encounter anywhere!

NIGHTS: Chan Chich Lodge

The following skeleton itinerary represents a typical daily schedule. Naturally, it may be subject to change, due to inclement weather conditions and/or lengthy visits to outlying areas (all times are approximate):

6:00-6:45 a.m. buffet-style breakfast at the lodge
6:45-11:30 a.m. morning birding - walk and/or drive to outlying areas
Noon-1:30 p.m. lunch at the lodge
1:30-3:00 p.m. afternoon break for rest & relaxation
3:00-6:00 p.m. afternoon birding - walk
6:00-6:30 p.m. pre-dinner break
6:30-7:00 p.m. checklist session
7:00-8:30 p.m. dinner at the lodge

March 21, Day 11: Chan Chich and Departures Home. We will have a final few hours around the lodge this morning to look for any species we may have missed or we may just opt to walk down toward the suspension bridge before returning to pack. We will leave Gallon Jug on a charter flight at 10:00 a.m., arriving at the Belize International airport around 10:30 a.m. Departing flights home should be scheduled for anytime after 12:00 p.m., to allow a couple of hours for checking-in to your international flight.

EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS: Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive early or extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least **four months** prior to your departure date. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 16 participants. Should the tour register eight or fewer participants, only the first leader will accompany the group.

TOUR LEADER: Barry Zimmer

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

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for Grand Belize is **\$5,595** per person in double occupancy from Belize City. This includes all meals beginning with dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 11, lodging, ground/charter air transportation during the tour and guide services provided by the tour leaders. Quoted fees do not include airfare from your home to Belize 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 registrations, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for the Grand Belize tour is **\$1,310**. Please note that single accommodations are available on a limited basis at Chan Chich Lodge. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES: In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Cancellation penalties and refunds are based on the following schedule: if cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, the deposit less \$300 per person is refundable. If cancellation is made fewer than 120 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions, as well as any transfers from one tour to another. ***We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.***

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$300.
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	No refund available.

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.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE: A brochure and application form for optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office. **We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance as soon as possible to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. VENT recommends Travel Insured International as our preferred insurance provider.** Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available; however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering.** Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as work-related cancellation, medical upgrade, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause among others. **Contact Travel Insured International prior to registration for details.** Not all insurance providers provide the same levels of coverage. If you purchase insurance through a company other than Travel Insured International, please be advised that rules and stipulations may be different.

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

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours. We will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements for you.

CLIMATE: We are often asked about the weather at Chan Chich Lodge and how it differs throughout the year. The dry season runs from December through May, but showers can happen anytime in this region of lush, tropical moist forest. The average temperatures from December through February run from 70 degrees to the low 80s. The midday weather is often hot and humid (80-90 degrees), with slightly cooler evenings (each cabaña has a ceiling fan). November, December and January tours may encounter cold fronts that cross the Gulf of Mexico and bring cooler temperatures into Belize. Good raingear and warm clothing should be brought on these trips. Highest rainfall is usually in June.

The Hidden Valley Inn sits at a higher elevation than Chan Chich – 1500 to 2000 ft. above sea level. Although the average temperature is usually very pleasant (highs in the low 80s), a cooler weather pattern can bring temperatures into the upper 50s. Make sure you bring along warmer layers just in case (see also “**CLOTHING**” below).

Temperatures in the Crooked Tree area will be somewhat hotter than at Chan Chich or Hidden Valley. Daytime highs here might reach into the 90s.

OTHER CONDITIONS: There will be several leisurely bird walks at Chan Chich, where the paths are wide and usually flat. None of the walking will be particularly strenuous (longest walk will be around two and a half miles). Altitude changes will vary from sea level to less than 2000 feet elevation. To take advantage of the best time for avian activity, we will begin birding during the dawn hours each morning. Chan Chich has a beautifully designed swimming pool and hot tub; the pool is enclosed by mosquito screens and is bug-free. Hidden Valley also has a lovely pool.

CLOTHING: Light field clothing and casual attire are suitable for this tour. Bring several pairs of long pants and comfortable shirts. Long-sleeved shirts are useful for protection from the sun and occasional biting insects. Pre-treating field pants and socks with repellent can provide extra protection from chiggers. A good hat or cap, plus rain gear and/or an umbrella are essential. Be sure to have a pair of comfortable walking shoes or hiking boots, plus a second pair of footwear such as tennis shoes or calf-high rubber boots (if it rains the trails can be muddy, especially from June through January). A sweater and/or jacket are also essential for the occasional cool, damp mornings, evenings and overcast days. Remember to take a bathing suit if you would like to take advantage of the pool. Laundry service is available on a charge-per-item basis at Chan Chich. Items dropped off in the morning at the front desk are usually returned late the same afternoon. If you plan to wash your clothes in your room, please be aware of the fact that drip-drying (even of quick drying nylon items) may take a couple of days with the frequently high humidity.

Since Hidden Valley sits at higher elevation, a cooler weather pattern can bring temperatures in the upper 50s, and if it is both cool and damp, you will want to be prepared. Make sure you have sufficient layers or a light jacket or windbreaker, long sleeve shirts and wind/rain pants.

CURRENCY: \$1 USD equals \$2 Belizean Dollars. The exchange rate is subject to change, but has been constant for some years. Both currencies have identical denominations. So if you plan to spend any money in Belize, make sure you understand whether the price is being quoted in Belizean or USD. It is not necessary to exchange currency for the Chan Chich tour, since USD are accepted everywhere.

DOCUMENTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure from Belize is required. Visas are not required for entry by United States citizens; however, a tourist card will be issued on your flight. Non-United States citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions. If your passport is stamped by the immigration officials upon entry, you must be sure to get an exit stamp before returning to the United States.

ELECTRICITY: The electricity at Chan Chich is provided via two distant generators, which are in operation 24 hours a day. Wall outlets are provided in each cabaña and electrical appliances may therefore be used at any time of day or night. No adapter is needed. The same is true for Hidden Valley Inn.

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, extra digital storage media, etc.). As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medications, and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag. Your leader will have a spotting scope; but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so. You should also bring sunglasses and sunscreen, a small flashlight or headlamp, a small folding stool (many find this extremely useful when we are patiently waiting for shy forest birds), battery-operated alarm clock, water bottle, camera, digital storage media and spare batteries, small daypack, and your favorite snacks. We highly recommend that you bring a collapsible umbrella, and also carry it with you on longer walks. Personal items like digital storage media, sun lotion, batteries, etc., can be very expensive anywhere in Belize. Bring sufficient supplies with you.

HEALTH: A routine anti-malarial regimen is recommended; please consult your physician. In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line 877-FYI-TRIP (394-8747) or you can check their website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

Mosquitoes, black flies and other small, biting insects can sometimes be a nuisance in Belize, especially in the forested areas. Chiggers are found in most of the grassy areas. We suggest a stick-type repellent for your face and hands, plus at least one pump-style container of repellent for your clothing. Purified water is available at Chan Chich (each room has a water cooler). As for foods, all salads, dairy products and home-cooked meals at Chan Chich and Hidden Valley are perfectly safe to eat, plus they are tasty and satisfying.

If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, 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.

As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against Hepatitis types A and B.

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 the world's species do not carry disease. They do feed on bodily fluids, however, 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 particular, 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 commonly employed by many.
- Apply a cream-style insect repellent, such as “Cutters” to your body from the waist down BEFORE putting on your clothing.
- Spray your pants and socks with a spray repellent such as “Cutters” or “Off.” Repellants with high concentrations of DEET (70-100%) are most effective. You do not need to apply these to your skin, only to clothing. (Be careful as DEET will damage plastics and lens coatings). Repel Permanone is an odorless aerosol insecticide that offers perhaps the best defense against chiggers. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online. It should only be applied to clothes and allowed to dry before you dress. Never apply Permanone directly to the skin. Permethrin is known to be a highly toxic chemical to insects. It is the active ingredient in Permanone, but is present in a small amount (0.5%).
- 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.
- 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.

LUGGAGE: We request you try to limit your luggage to one medium-sized lockable suitcase and one carry-on bag. It's a good idea to pack a change of clothes, your binoculars, medications, toiletries, walking shoes, and travel documents in the carry-on.

MISC:

Departure Tax - \$32.50 USD
Electricity - 110/220 volts
Language - English
Time - Central Standard Time

SUGGESTED READING: Our website at www.ventbird.com offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from the store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You might also want to visit such other online stores as www.amazon.com, and for those out-of-print and hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com, or www.buteobooks.com, which specializes in ornithology books.

Emmons, Louise H. *Neotropical Rainforest Mammals*. University of Chicago Press. Chicago. 1997.
Glassberg, Jeffrey. *A Swift Guide to the Butterflies of Mexico and Central America*. Sunstreak Books. 2007.
Glassman, Paul. *Belize Guide*. Moscow, Vermont: Passport Press, 1989.
Hilty, Steven. *Birds of Tropical America*. Shelburne, VT: Chapters Publishing Ltd., 1994. Subtitle: “A watcher’s introduction to behavior, breeding and diversity.”
Howell, Steve N.G. and Sophie Webb. *A Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
Jones, H. Lee. *Birds of Belize*. University of Texas Press. Austin. 2003
Peterson, Roger T. and Edward L. Chalif. *A Field Guide to Mexican Birds*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973.
Rabinowitz, Alan. *Jaguar*. Arbor House, New York. 1986.
Wood, D. Scott, Robert C. Leberman & Dora Weyer. “*Checklist of the Birds of Belize*” (booklet). Pittsburgh: Special Publication #12, Carnegie Museum of Natural History, 1986.

SUGGESTED RECORDINGS: These will be helpful in learning the vocalizations of some of the region's birds. *Bird Songs of Belize, Guatemala and Mexico* by Dale Delaney. Library of Natural Sounds, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, 1992.

A Bird Walk at Chan Chich by John V. Moore. San Jose, California: Astral Sounds Recording, 1992. Proceeds aid the local library in Gallon Jug, Belize.

TIPPING: As noted in our itineraries, tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, and 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 such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

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