

PANAMA'S DARIÉN LOWLANDS: CANOPY CAMP

APRIL 8-16, 2017

PANAMA: EL VALLE'S CANOPY LODGE EXTENSION

APRIL 15-20, 2017

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This tour to the lowlands of eastern Panama fuses the rich diversity of tropical birds for which Panama is justly famous with the classic atmosphere of a luxurious African tented camp. We will be quartered in the Canopy Camp, courtesy of Raúl Arias de Para, whose vision for sustainable ecotourism and devotion to preserving Panama's birds and wild places introduced the birding world to the famed Canopy Tower in the Canal Zone and the Canopy Lodge in El Valle. Located in the lowlands of Darién, just a five-hour-drive (via the Pan-American highway) from Panama City, and tucked at the base of some low-lying hills whose forested slopes are part of a protected zone, this camp will provide a comfortable base for a great week of Neotropical birding. Foremost among our activities is the opportunity to visit a nest of Harpy Eagles, the Western Hemisphere's greatest avian predator and a species of near-mythical proportion. The most recent VENT tour to the area (January 2017) was treated to marvelous views of an adult bird at close range!

Our accommodation will be in spacious, walk-in, African-style tents, mounted on platforms, and replete with comfortable beds, fans, and private bathrooms with showers and flush toilets. Keeping with the tradition established by the other Canopy lodges, the camp will offer imaginatively prepared, tasty meals, and an abundance of cold drinks.

The camp clearing affords a fabulous view of the surrounding forest, and is bordered by Heliconia thickets that buzz with the activity of Pale-bellied and Rufous-breasted hermits and reverberate with the cascading songs of White-bellied Antbirds. Dawn brings a flurry of activity and a cacophony of avian sound, dominated by the screeching calls of commuting parrots, the yelping of Yellow-throated (Chestnut-mandibled/Black-mandibled) Toucans, and the incessant croaking of Keel-billed Toucans, but also including the raucous calls of Red-throated Caracaras, the liquid gurgling of an active colony of Chestnut-headed Oropendolas, the noisy chattering of White-headed Wrens, the incessant calls of Piratic Flycatchers, and the plaintive whistles of Barred Puffbirds. The entrance road to the camp is lined with Vervain, whose flowers attract multitudes of hummingbirds, including Blue-chested, Sapphire-throated, Rufous-tailed, and Blue-throated Goldentail. Even the spectacular Ruby-topaz Hummingbird, a rarity anywhere in Central America, has been recorded here the past few years, after first being found by our inaugural tour to the camp. Our mornings and late afternoons will be spent exploring the camp trail system and a number of nearby sites, where, in addition to seeing a broad cross section of toucans, trogons, motmots, woodcreepers, antbirds, tanagers, and other tropical birds that typify the Canal Zone, we will also search for a number of special birds whose Panamanian ranges are (in most cases) largely restricted to the far eastern lowlands and foothills, among them:

Capped and Cocol herons; Bare-throated Tiger-Heron; Spectacled Parrotlet; Gray-cheeked Nunlet; Rufous-tailed and Dusky-backed (rare) jacamars; Black-tailed Trogon; Red-rumped, Spot-breasted, and Golden-green woodpeckers; Red-billed Scythebill; Double-banded Graytail; Black Antshrike; Rufous-winged Antwren; Bare-crowned Antbird; Black-billed Flycatcher (rare); Sooty-headed Tyrannulet; Yellow-breasted Flycatcher; Cattle Tyrant; One-colored Becard; Golden-headed Manakin; Black-capped Donacobius; White-eared Conebill; Viridian Dacnis (rare); Orange-crowned Oriole; and Black Oropendola.

Those who desire an expanded Panama experience are encouraged to join our extension to El Valle's Canopy Lodge, two hours west of Panama City.

Nestled in the crater of an extinct volcano and surrounded by stark ridges and forested hills, El Valle is considered a 'secret' and scenic getaway for many Panamanians. A cool and refreshing climate makes for a welcome change from the warmer lowlands, and at nearly 2,000 feet, this part of Panama presents visual and sensual differences from the area around the Canal Zone.

Featuring excellent cuisine, beautiful accommodations, and an abundance of birds, the pleasures of a stay at the Canopy Lodge are revealed immediately upon arrival. Feeding stations set amid flower-filled gardens host a dazzling array of beautiful tropical tanagers, euphonias, motmots, and honeycreepers for what has to be one of the most enchanting experiences in the American tropics.

Nearby, verdant forests and gardens support an alluring diversity of birds that do not occur at the Canopy Camp. Field trips into the foothills may produce such species as Emerald (Blue-throated) Toucanet, Orange-bellied Trogon, Black-crowned Antpitta, Tody Motmot, and Silver-throated, Bay-headed, and Dusky-faced tanagers.

April 8, Day 1: Arrival in Panama City and Transfer to Riande Aeropuerto Hotel. Participants arriving in Panama City's Tocumen International Airport anytime this afternoon or evening, after clearing customs and gathering luggage, should take the courtesy shuttle to the nearby Riande Aeropuerto Hotel where a room will be reserved in your name.

NIGHT: Riande Aeropuerto Hotel, Tocumen

April 9, Day 2: Tocumen to the Bayano Valley, and on to Canopy Camp, Darién. An early start will take us to the lowlands of eastern Panama Province and the region surrounding Bayano Reservoir. Much of the area between here and Panama City has been deforested and converted to cattle pasture, but there is still extensive, selectively logged forest beyond the reservoir. The margins of the reservoir are good places to find Cocol Heron, Bare-throated and Rufous tiger-herons, Pied Water-Tyrant and several species of kingfishers. However, it is in the forest where we will concentrate our time. The forest here has an interesting composition, with pockets of drier, semi-deciduous forest dominated by towering Cuipo trees interdigitated with more typical humid evergreen forest. Several bird species more typical of Colombia and the Darién lowlands reach the western (northern) limit of their ranges in the Bayano region, and finding these will be our primary focus. However, the forest here is often extremely birdy, and affords abundant opportunities for seeing many species typical of the Canal Zone, none of which will be ignored. Among the many Bayano specialties that we might hope for are Gray-cheeked Nunlet, Barred Puffbird, Red-rumped and Golden-green woodpeckers, Red-billed Scythebill, the range-restricted Black Antshrike, Rufous-winged Antwren, Black-billed Flycatcher (rare), One-colored Becard, White-eared Conebill and Orange-crowned Oriole. This has also proven to be a particularly good spot for some species of wider distribution, among them, Crane Hawk, Black-tailed Trogon, Bare-crowned Antbird, Blue Cotinga, Golden-collared Manakin, Black-headed Tody-Flycatcher and Plain-colored Tanager. We'll devote the entire morning to birding this interesting region, probably followed by lunch at a restaurant in the town of Tortí.

After lunch, we will continue our drive eastward into the Darién. Much of the countryside east of the Bayano region has been deforested, but this open country is good for Savanna Hawk, Yellow-headed and Crested caracaras, Pearl Kite, Sapphire-throated Hummingbird, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Red-breasted Blackbird and a number of other species. We'll arrive at the Canopy Camp in the late afternoon, with time to settle in to our accommodations before dark, and, perhaps, with time to enjoy the late flurry of bird activity around the camp clearing.

The Canopy Camp is designed in the tradition of African-style luxury tented camps. The spacious, walk-in tents are mounted on platforms, replete with comfortable beds, fans, and private bathrooms with warm water showers and flush toilets. The tents are well spaced through the camp clearing, maximizing privacy. Keeping with the tradition established by the other Canopy lodges (Canopy Tower, Canal Zone and Canopy Lodge, El Valle), the camp will offer imaginatively prepared, tasty meals, and an abundance of cold drinks. This will be a never before afforded opportunity to bird the lowlands of Darién in comfort!

NIGHT: Canopy Camp, Sanson, Darién

April 10-14, Days 3-7: Darién Lowlands Based out of the Canopy Camp; Harpy Eagle Excursion. The Canopy Camp is tucked at the base of a jagged line of low-lying hills whose forested slopes are part of a protected zone. The camp clearing affords a fabulous view of the surrounding forest, and is bordered by *Heliconia* thickets that often buzz with the activity of Pale-bellied and Rufous-breasted hermits, and reverberate with the cascading songs of White-bellied Antbirds. Dawn brings a flurry of activity and a cacophony of avian sound, dominated by the screeching calls of commuting parrots, the yelping of Yellow-throated (Chestnut-mandibled/Black-mandibled) Toucans, and the incessant croaking of Keel-billed Toucans, but also including the raucous calls of Red-throated Caracaras, the liquid gurgling of an active colony of Chestnut-headed Oropendolas, the noisy chattering of White-headed Wrens, the incessant calls of Piratic Flycatchers and the plaintive whistles of Barred Puffbirds. The entrance road to the camp is lined with Vervain, whose flowers attract multitudes of hummingbirds, including Blue-chested, Sapphire-throated, Rufous-tailed, and Blue-throated Goldentail. Even the spectacular Ruby-topaz Hummingbird, a rarity anywhere in Central America, has been recorded here the past few years, after first being found by our inaugural tour to the camp. We'll have five full days available for exploring the camp trail system and a number of nearby sites, where, in addition to seeing a good cross section of toucans, trogons, motmots, woodcreepers, antbirds, tanager, and other tropical birds that typify the Canal Zone, we will also search for a number of special birds whose Panamanian ranges are (in most cases) largely restricted to the far eastern lowlands and foothills, among them: Capped Heron; Spectacled Parrotlet; Gray-cheeked Nunlet; Rufous-tailed and Dusky-backed (rare) jacamars; Black-tailed Trogon; Red-rumped, Spot-breasted, and Golden-green woodpeckers; Red-billed Scythebill; Double-banded Graytail; Black Antshrike; Rufous-winged Antwren; Bare-crowned Antbird; Black-billed Flycatcher (rare); Cattle Tyrant; One-colored Becard; Golden-headed Manakin; Black-capped Donacobius; White-eared Conebill; Viridian Dacnis (rare); Orange-crowned Oriole; and Black Oropendola.

Our exact day-to-day itinerary will be kept flexible, allowing us to take advantage of local weather and birding conditions. However, our time here will certainly include one or more mornings birding a wonderful stretch of forested road at El Salto, an excellent area for raptors, as well as for multiple species of trogons and woodpeckers, Whooping Motmot, Gray-cheeked Nunlet, Barred Puffbird, Double-banded Graytail, Black Antshrike, Bare-crowned Antbird, Yellow-breasted Flycatcher, Black-bellied and White-headed wrens, and Yellow-backed Orioles, among many others. Trails at El Salto and nearby Tierra Nueva, as well as those at the Canopy Camp, will allow us access into the heart of the forest, maximizing our chances of ferreting out the more secretive forest interior species. We'll also hope to spend one day birding by boat along the Río Chucunaque and Río Tuquesa to an Emberá community called Nuevo Vigía, which could be particularly good for finding raptors, parrots and the rare Dusky-backed Jacamar. We'll return most days to the camp for lunch and siesta, with late afternoons typically devoted to birding forest-edge, open country and marshes. This is often the best time to see the spectacular Black Oropendola (we only found one colony far into one area, which required 4x4 vehicles), as birds commute from their feeding areas back to the nesting colonies for the night. On at least one night, we'll plan some night-birding activities, which could afford us views of some nocturnal mammals as well.

Harpy Eagle Excursion

In 2016, two nests of Harpy Eagles were discovered in relatively close proximity to the Canopy Camp. The news of nesting birds so close to the camp has caused a sensation. The Harpy Eagle is the Western Hemisphere's greatest avian predator as well as one of its most seldom-seen birds. The ability to observe the "King of the Neotropics" with relative ease represents an extraordinary opportunity, of which we will take advantage.

We will visit the Harpy Eagle nest within the first couple of days of arrival at the Canopy Camp. A long, full day is required to make the journey to the nest site along the Rio Membrillo. After a very early breakfast, we will depart the camp at 4:30 a.m. for the hour-and-a-half drive to Puerto Limón. There, we will board cayucas (long, narrow dugout boats with motors) and travel upstream along the Rio Chucunaque and Rio Membrillo. The boats will have chairs with backs. Many birds will be in evidence along the way (including such possibilities as Green Ibis, Gray-headed Kite, various kingfishers, Chestnut-fronted Macaw, White-necked Puffbird, etc.), but we will travel with "blinders on" as the Harpy Eagle is our singular target of the day, and time is critical. We should arrive at our target destination within two hours and 45 minutes. The walk to the Harpy nest site is slightly more than a mile on a good, wide trail. There are some uphill stretches, but the trail is not a difficult one. Once we reach the nest site, there will be two viewing areas that are fairly close to the nest itself. By remaining quiet, we should be able to have excellent observations of this nearly mythical species.

After spending some time at the nest site (maybe up to an hour), we will walk back to the boats and travel another 15-20 minutes upstream to the Embera-Wounaan village of Sinai. Here, we will have our picnic lunch, likely followed by a performance from the native tribe. Crafts (such as baskets and carvings) will be available for purchase. By mid-afternoon (about 3 p.m.), we will retrace our route back to Puerto Limón. The return journey is slightly shorter, as we will have the current at our backs. With luck we should arrive back at the Canopy Camp around 7 p.m.—an exhausting but thoroughly enjoyable day!

NIGHTS: Canopy Camp, Sanson, Darién

April 15, Day 8: Canopy Camp to Panama City. We will depart after breakfast and drive directly to Tortí. After lunch at a local restaurant in Tortí, we will make our way back to the Riande Aeropuerto Hotel where participants not continuing on Panama: El Valle's Canopy Lodge Extension will spend the night. Participants continuing on the Extension will proceed to the Canopy Lodge.

NIGHT: Riande Aeropuerto Hotel, Tocumen

April 16, Day 9: Departure for Home. Participants not continuing on Panama: El Valle's Canopy Camp Extension can use the hotel's complimentary shuttle service to Tocumen International Airport for morning or afternoon flights home.

EL VALLE'S CANOPY LODGE EXTENSION

APRIL 15-20, 2017

April 15, Day 1: Panama City to El Valle. After a brief afternoon stop at Riande Aeropuerto Hotel to say goodbye to participants not continuing on this Extension, we'll continue to El Valle's Canopy Lodge in time for dinner.

Soon after diverging from the Pan-American Highway, we'll come to charming El Valle de Antón. At nearly 2,000 feet, the climate is cooler here and less humid than in the lowlands, but still dominated by dry Pacific weather. The three forested peaks of Cerro Gaital Natural Monument loom over the valley and impart a sense of tranquility. 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 four nights.

The Canopy Lodge's guestrooms offer large comfortable beds, private baths, and 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. Greatly enhancing the delightful setting are feeding stations that attract hordes of birds every morning and afternoon. This is indeed an incredible way to bird. For added effect, a beautiful clear stream tumbles past the open-air dining room.

NIGHT: Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Antón

April 16, Day 2: Canopy Lodge and La Mesa. It will be readily apparent that the El Valle region contains an impressive diversity of habitats, from semi-deciduous forest typical of the Pacific lowlands and foothills, to wet, higher elevation cloud forest, to lush Caribbean slope foothill forest. Each of these habitats has its own special birds, and during our stay we will attempt to cover as many of these habitats as possible. Our exact itinerary, particularly the sequence in which we cover the various spots, will remain flexible, and, in part, be determined by conditions on the ground, including weather and current birding conditions.

This morning we will bird and explore the expansive grounds of the Canopy Lodge, paying close attention to the feeders and flowering bushes. Though birding is good here throughout the day, it is the early morning hours when activity is at its peak. Freshly stocked feeding trays brim with birds. Consequently, the birding is extraordinary. Starting early, a procession of tanagers appears like clockwork. First come the soft Blue-grays, followed by the velvety Flame-rumped and Crimson-backed. Then come the rest: White-lined, Palm, and the odd olive and black Dusky-faced. Even the Red-crowned Ant-Tanager has overcome its distrust of open space and ventures forth from the nearby forest. Red-legged Honeycreepers and Thick-billed Euphonias dance through the bushes and onto the feeding trays, looking like living jewels. Clay-colored Robins appear by the dozens, seemingly everywhere, and Black-chested Jays survey the scene imperiously from exposed snags. Even the Rufous Motmot visits the feeders. Surely one of Panama's most glorious birds, it appears with a flourish, brandishing an impossibly burnt orange breast and belly. We may also see Gray-headed Chachalaca, White-tipped Dove, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Black-chested Jay, Bananaquit, Blue-gray and White-lined tanagers, Black-striped Sparrow, Buff-throated Saltator, and Chestnut-headed Oropendola (a colony of which nests on the hillside above).

Wandering through the flower-lined walkways can produce a good variety of hummingbirds. Rufous-tailed is the most common, but many others are seen almost as often. Radiating metallic colors in the morning light, these feathered sprites appear from out of nowhere, often bearing angelic names as beautiful as the birds themselves. Possibilities include Green Hermit, Green Thorntail, White-vented Plumeleteer, Snowy-bellied and Violet-headed hummingbirds, Purple-crowned Fairy, Crowned Woodnymph, Garden Emerald, and Stripe-throated Hermit.

Remarkably, the rarely seen Rufous-crested Coquette occurs in the garden on a somewhat regular basis. This diminutive bird is not regularly found on any other VENT tour aside from the Canopy Lodge.

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," where we will spend the afternoon. At 2,800 feet, this area sits below the crest of 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 that shade the dense understory.

This area is home to some fantastic foothill birds not found in the forests below or even in the Canal Zone around Panama City. Among these, tanagers are the dominant group, with potential for gems like Emerald, Bay-headed, Golden-hooded, Flame-rumped, Tawny-crested, and Silver-throated. A representation of the birds of this elevation includes Bat Falcon, Lineated Woodpecker, Keel-billed Toucan, Emerald (Blue-throated) Toucanet, Orange-bellied Trogon, Spotted Woodcreeper, Paltry Tyrannulet, Tawny-capped Euphonia and Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, while Canada and Mourning warblers are found here in the winter months.

NIGHT: Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Antón

April 17, Day 3: Altos del Maria or the Rio Indio Road. This morning we'll load up in four-wheel drive vehicles for an all-day trip to one of two areas. We might cross the mountains to Altos del Maria, a remnant cloud-forest habitat at 3,000 feet. Altos del Maria, literally translated to "Highlands of Maria," represents the altitudinal highpoint of the trip, and because it sits on the Caribbean slope, gives us chances for a number of species not possible elsewhere on our route.

Strategic stops at a number of locations will expose us to several impressive stretches of forest. Birds are typically plentiful, but we will focus our efforts on finding more challenging species like Snowcap, Brown Violet-ear, Orange-bellied Trogon, Brown-billed Scythebill, Rufous-browed Tryannulet, Dull-mantled Antbird, Ochraceous and Rufous-and-white wrens, and the special local subspecies of Common Bush-Tanager. The greatest potential prize of this location is the stunning Black-crowned Antpitta. Though secretive and sometimes difficult to see, we have a decent chance of finding one of these spectacular ground dwellers.

Conversely, we might ascend once more to La Mesa, and then descend on a newly opened road to the Jordinal-Rio Indio area of the Caribbean slope. Many of the same species found at Los Altos del Maria can also be found here, as can such prizes as Barred Hawk, Black Hawk-Eagle, Rufous-crested Coquette, Spot-crowned Barbet, Barred Puffbird, Emerald Tanager, Scarlet-thighed Dacnis and many more. Which location we visit will be based on weather, road conditions, and the current birding conditions at each spot.

NIGHT: Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Antón

April 18, Day 4: El Chirú; Afternoon at Cariguana or La Zamia. We will depart around 6:00 a.m. to head for the dry Pacific lowlands around the small communities of Antón, El Chirú and the Juan Hombrón rice fields. Many of the species here will be new for us, with some highly sought birds among the many possibilities. Savannah Hawk, Aplomado Falcon, Pearl Kite, Crested Caracara, Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, Crested Bobwhite, Brown-throated Parakeet, Sapphire-throated Hummingbird, Veraguan Mango, Mangrove Cuckoo, Straight-billed Woodcreeper, Mouse-colored Tyrannulet, Pale-eyed Pygmy-Tyrant, Mangrove Warbler and Rufous-browed Peppershrike will all be targeted.

Following lunch at the lodge and an afternoon break, we might head across the narrow valley to the other side of El Valle and a trip to Cariguana. Literally translated to "Iguana's Face," this area is said to be named for the appearance of a nearby mountain. To us, the main interest here is the birds, and the afternoon is a prime time to look for a number of special species. A gradually ascending gravel road skirts a large patch of dense forest where the fabulous Tody Motmot resides. We'll try to locate it, in addition to such other dandies as Blue-crowned Motmot, Lance-tailed Manakin, Yellow Tryannulet, White-bellied Antbird, Rufous-and-white Wren, and Yellow-crowned Euphonia.

Alternatively, we might spend the afternoon walking a forest trail at La Zamia, a forest patch on the west side of El Valle. Sometimes moving a short distance can make a big difference in habitat and birdlife. Though only 15 minutes from the lodge, time here may give us our best opportunity to find Blue-crowned Motmot and Black-faced Anthrush, among the more common species.

NIGHT: Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Antón

April 19, Day 5: El Valle and Return to Panama City. Just above El Valle lies "The Canopy Adventure," 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 preserve is to provide much-needed employment for the local population, which would otherwise be cutting the forests for fuel and agriculture. The refuge currently employs ten young men to safeguard its treasures.

On this final morning at El Valle, we'll work sections of the entire property, from the lodge grounds all the way to the Canopy Adventure. There are always so many birds around El Valle that each outing is sure to produce something new for the trip. Some distinct possibilities are White Hawk, Mottled Owl, Blue-headed Parrot,

Collared Araçari, Bay Wren, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Streaked Saltator, and Orange-billed Sparrow. The forest above the lodge will give us another chance for the Tody Motmot, found locally here, but typically elusive.

NIGHT: Country Inn & Suites Panama Canal, Panama City

April 20, Day 6: Departure for Home. Transfers will be provided to the airport in time for morning or early afternoon flights home.

TOUR SIZE: Each section will be limited to 12 participants.

TOUR LEADER: Tony Nunnery with the assistance of local guides

Tony Nunnery grew up in Mississippi, then moved to Texas, and graduated from Stephen F. Austin University. After teaching elementary school for several years, he moved to Monteverde in Costa Rica. His fascination with birds began when a friend there showed him a Resplendent Quetzal and a Bare-necked Umbrellabird in the same tree. This experience “hooked” him on birds, and he soon learned the Costa Rican birds, ran the Tarcoles Lodge, and conducted guided tours. In 1997 he relocated to Ecuador where he bought land and built a home in the Tandayapa Valley. Since settling in that beautiful valley, Tony has played an important role in ecotourism and conservation. He has guided groups throughout Ecuador, and also guided one of the trips at VENT’s “Ecuador Celebration,” organized to celebrate the publication of *The Birds of Ecuador*. He received high marks from all of the participants. Tony and his wife Barbara are becoming renowned for the hummingbird show they have created in their yard where 28 hummingbird feeders regularly attract 15 to 20 species of hummingbirds – a total exceeding any other location in the world. Their yard list includes an amazing 40 species of hummingbirds, a world record. Tony is incredibly knowledgeable about birds and plants. His eagerness to share that knowledge and his relaxed, easygoing manner combine to make him a delightful traveling companion.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for Panama’s Darien Lowlands: Canopy Camp is **\$3,695** per person in double occupancy from Panama City, Panama for occupying a standard tent at the Canopy Camp (see CANOPY CAMP ACCOMMODATIONS section below) and standard double room at the Riande Airport Hotel. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 to lunch on Day 8, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, 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 Panama’s Darien Lowlands: Canopy Camp is **\$3,995** per person in double occupancy from Panama City, Panama for occupying a Tent Suite at the Canopy Camp (see CANOPY CAMP ACCOMMODATIONS section below) and standard double room at the Riande Airport Hotel. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 to lunch on Day 8, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, 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 Panama’s Darien Lowlands: Canopy Camp is **\$1,015**. 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. Due to the limited number of tents at the Canopy Camp (see CANOPY CAMP ACCOMMODATIONS section below), singles may be asked to share on Days 2-7. If so, you’ll be credited accordingly.

Participants combining Panama’s Darien Lowlands: Canopy Camp with Panama: El Valle’s Canopy Lodge Extension will receive a discount of **\$75** in double occupancy and **\$150** in single occupancy.

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The fee for Panama: El Valle's Canopy Lodge Extension is **\$2,095** per person in double occupancy from Panama City, Panama for occupying a standard double room at the Canopy Lodge. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to dinner on Day 5, four nights in one of the Canopy Lodge's six standard double rooms (see CANOPY LODGE ACCOMODATIONS sections below), 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 Panama: El Valle's Canopy Lodge Extension is **\$2,245** per person in double occupancy from Panama City, Panama for occupying a premium room at the Canopy Lodge. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to dinner on Day 5, four nights in one of the Canopy Lodge's two premium rooms (see CANOPY LODGE ACCOMODATIONS sections below), 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 the Panama: El Valle's Canopy Lodge Extension is **\$530** for occupying a standard double room with a private bath for four nights at the Canopy Lodge (see CANOPY LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS section below) and a single room for one night at the Country Inn and Suites Canal. 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. 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 Panama: El Valle's Canopy Lodge Extension is **\$1,745** per person in single occupancy from Panama City, Panama for occupying a small room for four nights at the Canopy Lodge. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to dinner on Day 5, single accommodations for four nights in a small room with a private bath at the Canopy Lodge (see CANOPY LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS section below), a single room with a private bath for one night at the Country Inn and Suites Canal, 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 CAMP ACCOMMODATIONS: The Canopy Camp has a total of eight tents. The seven available for our group include one Tent Suite with a queen bed, another Tent Suite with 2 twin beds, three standard tents with 2 twin beds and two standard tents with a queen bed. Their Tent Suites have more space than a standard tent. All tents will be pre-reserved on a first-come, first-served basis. You will be advised of tent availability and your specific assignment at the time of your registration. All tents have private bathrooms with flush toilets and warm water showers. Due to the limitations of their solar power system, hair driers and any other high voltage appliances cannot be used.

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. In a recently constructed separate building on the grounds, there are four rooms (each with a private bath) that are smaller than the rooms in the main building. Based on room availability, singles have a choice of paying a supplement to occupy one of the standard double guest rooms or a paying a discounted tour fee to occupy one of the smaller rooms in a separate building. 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 Country Inn & Suites 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 initial deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person per tour section. If you would like to pay your initial 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. If you prefer to pay the initial deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with American Express, MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at www.ventbird.com) should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

PAYMENTS: Initial tour deposits may be made by American Express, MasterCard, Visa, check, money order, or bank transfer. All other tour payments, including second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc., must be made by check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

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, a cancellation fee of **\$250** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made 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. ***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 \$250*
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	No refund available

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person.

Upon cancellation of the transportation or travel services, where you, the customer, are not at fault and have not cancelled in violation of the terms and conditions of any of the contract for transportation or travel services, all sums paid to VENT for services not received by you will be promptly refunded by VENT to you unless you otherwise advise VENT in writing.

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.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE: **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 (800-243-3174 or www.travelinsured.com) 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.

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. 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 responsible for any air ticket penalties*

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.

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.

PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS: Participants should be prepared for early starts with full mornings of activity. Regardless of our morning activities, we will be returning to camp for lunch and a mid-afternoon break on virtually all days based out of the Canopy Camp. Late afternoon excursions of a few hours will be less physically rigorous, and will mostly involve roadside birding. Most walking on this tour will be along lightly traveled roads or trails of easy to moderate grade. We may spend some time on one or two trails that are somewhat hillier. None of the hiking will involve distances of much more than a mile, but we will likely be on our feet for much of the morning. The Harpy Eagle excursion is an exception to the routine. This activity requires that we be away from the camp for the duration of the day, involving a pre-dawn departure and a return at nightfall. This activity is described on Page 4 in the description of the daily activities.

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. Some participants may find sturdier hiking shoes preferable for trail walks. A small umbrella and/or rain gear are essential as well.

CLIMATE: The climate in the Darién lowlands and eastern Panama Province is usually warm, with mornings in the 70s to 80s. Conditions at midday can be humid and very warm, with temperatures reaching into the 90s. Rainstorms may occur at any time of year, but are more likely during the rainy season, which runs from May into early December, when a shower of some sort is expected almost daily. Generally, the weather in eastern Panama is warm and pleasant, with our activities corresponding to the cooler parts of the day and heightened bird activity.

The climate in the Canal Zone of Central Panama is usually warm, with mornings in the 70s and afternoons in the 80s. Conditions at midday can be humid and very warm, with temperatures reaching into the lower 90s. Rainstorms may occur at any time of year, but are more likely during the rainy season, which runs from May into early December, when a shower of some sort is expected almost daily. Generally, the weather in Central Panama is mild and pleasant, with our activities corresponding to the cooler parts of the day and heightened bird activity.

The climate in the El Valle region is considerably cooler than that of the Canal Zone. Mornings and evenings are cooler while midday temperatures usually do not exceed the low 80s. Clouds and overcast skies frequently prevail in higher areas, leading to damp conditions.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Due to energy conservation efforts in the Darién, the Canopy Camp is not currently offering laundry services to their guests. Laundry service at the Canopy Lodge is handled in-house. Expect items to be returned within 24 to 36 hours.

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 stay is suggested to enter Panama. Non-U.S. citizens should check with their local Panamanian Consulate or Embassy.

Please provide the VENT office with a copy of the photo page of your passport. This is required in order to pre-arrange group entry into the Darién.

INTERNET ACCESS: Wi-Fi is available in the common areas of the Canopy Camp but not in the individual tents. However, expect service to be sporadic due to its remote location. Wi-Fi is available at the Riande Aeropuerto Hotel, the Canopy Lodge and the Country Inn & Suites Panama Canal.

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: In general, we recommend that you consult your doctor before taking any immunizations. Health requirements change frequently and often vary from district to district within a country. No vaccinations are required to enter Panama.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta advise that there is some risk of malaria. The CDC currently recommends that travelers to Darién Province in Panama should take one of the following antimalarial drugs (listed alphabetically): atovaquone/proguanil, doxycycline, mefloquine, or primaquine (in special circumstances).

As standard travel precautions, your tetanus, polio, hepatitis types A & B, and yellow fever vaccinations should be current.

The water is drinkable in Panama and the food is safe. Please do check with your doctor for your own personal needs and prescription drugs (which may or may not be available on tour).

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.

The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line (800) CDC-INFO (232-4636). You can check the CDC 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).

Zika Virus – This tour visits an area or areas where Zika virus is known to occur or could occur; however, we believe the risk to VENT travelers is extremely low. The Zika virus is a mosquito-borne infection transmitted by mosquitos of the genus *Aedes*, and is related to other tropical diseases: Dengue, Yellow Fever, and West Nile virus. This type of mosquito bites during the day and typically is found in areas of dense human habitation where sanitation and drainage of standing water is poor. Zika virus presents the greatest threat to women of childbearing age. For others who become infected, the effects are usually nonexistent to mild, although some people exhibit symptoms such as mild fever, rashes, joint and muscle pain, and red eyes. If infected, the best treatment is plenty

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of rest, nourishment, and other supportive care. There is no vaccine to prevent or cure the disease; however, Zika virus is not contagious and, therefore, cannot be transmitted through air, food, or water.

Your safety is our highest priority, and we want to emphasize that the best way to avoid Zika virus (and other mosquito-borne diseases), is to take appropriate precautions in avoiding mosquito bites:

- Stay informed about the Zika virus
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants, socks and shoes, and a hat*
- Use effective insect repellents (those containing DEET) and reapply regularly

***We strongly recommend the use of Insect Shield® clothing.** Insect Shield is a process by which clothing is treated with an EPA-approved formula of the insect repellent permethrin. Such clothing is highly repellent to insects and provides durable and long-lasting protection, even after dozens of washings. Outdoor wear with Insect Shield protection includes name brands such as Ex Officio and Tilley, and can be purchased at outdoor recreation stores such as REI and from a variety of online retailers. In lieu of Insect Shield clothing, you should consider treating your clothes with permethrin, which has the same effect, and that can be purchased at outdoor recreation stores and from a variety of online retailers.

For the latest information and news about Zika virus, please visit the website of the CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/zika/>

INSECT PROTECTION: Because chiggers and ticks can be a problem, we recommend carrying insect repellent and liberally applying it to your ankles and pant cuffs. You may also want to spray your field clothing with Permethrin several times to help repel the ticks and chiggers. In some parts of the forest mosquitoes are sometimes a problem, so wearing long-sleeved shirts and carrying a small repellent with you is advised.

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 "Cutter" to your body from the waist down BEFORE putting on your clothing.
- Spray your pants and socks with a spray repellent such as "Cutter" or "OFF!" Repellents 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.

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.

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

Mammals:

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

Butterflies:

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

Background Reading

Natural History:

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

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: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger 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 passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. When this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on January 12, 2017 a date to be announced and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.

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