

PANAMA'S CANOPY TOWER & EL VALLE

JANUARY 5-17, 2009

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Panama is without doubt one of the premier birding destinations in the Neotropics. It is famed for its rare combination of easy access to extensive, high-quality habitat, good food and water, comfortable to luxurious accommodations, and high diversity of birds—all within a compact geographic area. While ideal for those new to the Neotropics, VENT's Panama tours also offer plenty of challenges and local specialties for those who have birded elsewhere in the region. Our focus will be on finding, identifying, and observing a wealth of wonderful tropical birds, including trogons, toucans, motmots, puffbirds, manakins, antbirds, and tanagers. We'll take time to sort out the look-a-likes, learn a bit about the plant associations and habitats, and call up many of the more skulking species.

Among the pleasures of a visit here is the opportunity to stay at the Canopy Tower Ecolodge & Nature Observatory, a lodge located amidst spectacular birding in Soberania National Park. Offering the chance to hear the dawn chorus from above the treetops, to gaze upon seldom-seen denizens of the upper reaches of the forest, and to remain in such beautiful surroundings without sacrificing amenities, this innovative venture has taken its place as one of Central America's very finest ecotourist experiences.

Situated approximately 60 miles west of Panama City lies picturesque El Valle de Antón, known as El Valle for short, a pleasant and quiet community of country homes. Nestled in the crater of an extinct volcano and surrounded by jagged ridges and hills, El Valle is considered a "secret getaway" for many Panamanians. The three forested peaks of Cerro Gaital Natural Monument loom over the valley and impart a deep sense of tranquility.

This part of Panama is visually and sensually different than the area around the Canal Zone. The verdant forests and gardens support a broad diversity of birds that one simply cannot find around the Canopy Tower. Realizing the natural beauty and great birding potential of the surroundings, the creator of the Canopy Tower, Raul Arias de Para, put to work his intimate knowledge of the land and the people who live there. The result was a brand new and very plush facility called the Canopy Lodge.

The fruit feeders in front of our rooms are visited by Rufous Motmots, Tawny-capped and Thick-billed euphonias, Red-legged and Green honeycreepers, Red-crowned Woodpeckers, Clay-colored Robins, and such tanagers as Lemon-rumped, Crimson-backed, Dusky-faced, Palm and Blue-gray. It is difficult to walk away from this spectacle to participate in other birding activities. In addition, there is a natural pool where one can cool off during siesta time. The pool is fed from the clear river that runs past our rooms and lulls us to sleep at night. Foothill species such as Blue-throated Toucanet, Orange-bellied Trogon, Spotted Woodcreeper, Dull-mantled Antbird, Black-crowned Antpitta, Tody Motmot, and Silver-throated and Tawny-crested tanagers are among many other possibilities in the forests nearby.

Our specific day-to-day itinerary will be kept flexible, allowing us to take advantage of local weather and birding conditions. Having two comfortable bases in the midst of so much fine birding gives us leeway in planning our activities.

Note that this tour can be combined with Venezuela: Hato Pinero New Year (December 27, 2008-January 4, 2009), which will also be lead by Jeri Langham.

January 5, Day 1: Arrival in Panama City and Transfer to the Canopy Tower. Participants are encouraged to fly to Panama City on either American Airlines Flight 959 from Miami or Continental Airlines Flight 888 from Houston, which are both scheduled to arrive in the evening. Passengers on either flight will be met at the Tocumen International Airport and transferred to the Canopy Tower Ecolodge, which is about 45 minutes away. For those not on either of these flights, private transfers can be arranged for an additional fee.

NIGHT: Canopy Tower Ecolodge & Nature Observatory, Gamboa

January 6, Day 2: Canopy Tower and Semaphore Hill Entrance Road. An early start this morning will find us on top of the Tower enjoying a cup of coffee or tea while watching the sun rise over the forested hillsides. The predawn chorus often includes the strange barks and moans of forest-falcons, the haunting calls of a tinamou, or the last hoots of an owl. As the light hits the treetops, the forest really begins to come alive. Birds begin singing and actively foraging, many of them close and often below us. Species regularly seen from here include incredible Keel-billed and Chestnut-mandibled toucans, Slaty-tailed Trogon, Masked Tityra, wintering Bay-breasted Warblers and Yellow-throated Vireos, and the stunning Slate-colored Grosbeak. Fruiting *Cecropias* often harbor a nice variety of tanagers, including Plain-colored, White-shouldered, and Palm; Fulvous-vented Euphonia; and gorgeous Green Honeycreepers. We'll also keep a sharp eye out for two of the true prizes of the tree tops: the spectacular Blue Cotinga and the brilliant Green Shrike-Vireo. We've had excellent luck seeing Blue Cotinga (increasingly scarce), often at close range. Green Shrike-Vireo, whose monotonous titmouse-like song can be heard in many areas of the tropics, can perhaps be viewed best here at the Tower. It can be difficult to tear oneself away from the show to go inside for breakfast. Fortunately, the dining room has panoramic windows that will allow us to keep an eye out even while eating!

By mid-morning we'll descend from the Tower and begin birding our way down the one-mile entrance road. As we descend Semaphore Hill, a host of new birds will greet us. Broad-billed and Rufous motmots, various trogons, Chestnut-backed Antbird, and Blue-crowned and Red-capped manakins are among the many possibilities. Ant swarms are sometimes encountered along this road as well, with a variety of attendant antbirds and woodcreepers possible.

After lunch and an afternoon siesta, we will likely spend some time watching the hummingbird feeders around the base of the tower. While there is much seasonal variation, up to eight species are possible here. Among the more regular visitors are the stunning White-necked Jacobin, Western Long-tailed Hermit, the incomparable Violet-bellied Hummingbird, Blue-chested Hummingbird, Snowy-bellied Hummingbird, and White-vented Plumeleteer.

NIGHT: Canopy Tower Ecolodge & Nature Observatory, Gamboa

January 7, Day 3: Achiote Road and Fort San Lorenzo. An early morning departure in our A/C bus will find us heading towards Colon on Panama's Atlantic coast and crossing the locks to the west side of the Canal. Our destination will be Achiote Road, one of Central Panama's most famous birding spots. The early morning activity along this road is marvelous. Semiplumbeous Hawk; Double-toothed Kite; Violaceous, Slaty-tailed, and White-tailed trogons; Blue-headed Parrot; Black-breasted and Pied puffbirds; Cinnamon Woodpecker; Purple-throated Fruitcrow; Golden-collared Manakin; Black-chested Jay; Yellow-backed and Yellow-tailed orioles; and Scarlet-rumped and Yellow-rumped caciques can all be seen here. Though harder to find, Achiote specialties such as Spot-crowned Barbet, Bare-crowned Antbird, and White-headed Wren will be targeted as well.

Edge habitats near the town itself could yield Greater Ani, Long-tailed Tyrant, and Thick-billed Seed-Finch. A quick stop on our return at Gatun Locks might reveal Savanna Hawk and Red-breasted Blackbird.

We'll end the day by boarding a train in Colon for the 50-mile journey from sea to sea. This was the first trans-continental railroad in the world and has recently been privatized and completely rebuilt. Crossing the isthmus at sunset should provide a perfect ending to the day. En route we'll keep a watch out for Snail Kites and other birds in Gatun Lake. Upon arrival at the station near Panama City, we'll be met and transferred back to the Canopy Tower.

NIGHT: Canopy Tower Ecolodge & Nature Observatory, Gamboa

January 8, Day 4: Gamboa, Summit Gardens, Panama Canal Museum and Miraflores Locks. Near Gamboa there are some nice wetlands where we'll seek out a whole new group of birds. Tiny White-throated Crakes dart about the marsh. Wattled Jacanas and Purple Gallinules walk on the floating vegetation. Greater Anis are often seen atop the brushy tangles, while Lesser Kiskadees prefer perches closer to the water. Sometimes a capybara strolls by, and Rufescent Tiger-Herons are regular. A careful check of the shoreline might reveal a skulking Gray-necked Wood-Rail or a gorgeous American Pygmy-Kingfisher hiding in the shadows. The open field and edge habitats surrounding the marsh can be good for Squirrel Cuckoo, Barred Antshrike, Black-striped Sparrow, and Yellow-billed Cacique, in addition to a variety of raptors, hummingbirds, parrots, and flycatchers.

The Summit Gardens area hosts a good variety of edge species as well. Ponding areas near the police academy often yield a variety of herons (occasionally including the rare Capped), as well as kingfishers. Orange-chinned Parakeet, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Thick-billed Seed-Finch, and Streaked Saltators are among the open country birds to be seen here. In the afternoon, we will offer an optional trip to the new Panama Canal Museum and Miraflores Locks where you can watch a large ship transit through one of the famous Panama Canal locks and learn how the canal was constructed.

NIGHT: Canopy Tower Ecolodge & Nature Observatory, Gamboa

January 9, Day 5: Cerro Azul and Tocumen Marsh. Another early start will take us to open country birding in the vicinity of the Tocumen Marsh and rice fields. Some of the species possible here include Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, Pearl and White-tailed kites, Great Black-Hawk, Crested Caracara, Southern Lapwing, Wattled Jacana, Yellow-crowned Parrot, Little (rare) and Striped cuckoos, Greater Ani, Pale-bellied Hermit, Sapphire-throated Hummingbird, American Pygmy-Kingfisher, Pale-breasted Spinetail, Barred Antshrike, Streak-headed and Straight-billed woodcreepers, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Common Tody-Flycatcher, Lesser Kiskadee, Panama Flycatcher, Gray Kingbird, White-winged Becard, Olivaceous Piculet (scarce), Buff-breasted Wren, Prothonotary Warbler, Variable and Ruddy-breasted seedeaters, and Streaked Saltator.

About mid-morning, we will depart for the foothills of Cerro Azul and head directly for the gardens surrounding a private residence that was once owned by a Panamanian President. The view of Chagres National Park alone is worth the visit, but the birds can be equally compelling. Violet-capped and Violet-headed hummingbirds, Green Hermit, and Bronze-tailed Plumeteer patrol the flower gardens. Even the rare White-tipped Sicklebill is possible. Red-lore and Mealy parrots can often be seen cruising by at eye level in the morning light. Fruiting trees in the yard typically attract some of the most colorful foothill birds including Speckled, Black-and-yellow, Bay-headed, and Emerald tanagers. The very local and striking Rufous-winged Tanager, difficult to see anywhere else in its range, is regularly spotted here as well. Other birds we may encounter include Yellow-eared Toucanet, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Paltry Tyrannulet, Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant, Spotted and Black-striped woodcreepers, Rufous-capped Warbler, and Yellow-faced Grassquit. It should be noted that many of these foothill birds can be difficult to locate in our short visit, especially with the unpredictable foothill weather, but the possibilities here are certainly enticing.

NIGHT: Canopy Tower Ecolodge & Nature Observatory, Gamboa

January 10, Day 6: Pipeline Road. Beginning just beyond the old Canal Zone town of Gamboa, Pipeline Road winds for miles through the forests and foothills of Soberania National Park. The combination of rich primary and secondary forests; clear, beautiful streams; lack of traffic (the road is now gated and dead-ends); and abundant birdlife make this arguably the most famous birding road in the world. One never knows quite what to expect here, but there will certainly be much to see. Perhaps we'll find a fruiting matchwood tree with three species of toucans and several trogons feeding in it. Maybe it will be a Black-breasted Puffbird or Broad-billed Motmot perched motionless at eye level, or a noisy troop of Purple-throated Fruitcrows working the forest edge. We may locate a lek of spectacular Golden-collared Manakins displaying on sunlit patches of the forest floor. The wild frenzy of wing-snapping and jumping is truly an amazing sight. Fruiting *Cecropias* lure honeycreepers, tanagers, and dacnises to their fruiting spikes. We'll always be on the alert for a foraging ant swarm with its attendant antbirds (Spotted, Bicolored, and perhaps the stunning Ocellated) and woodcreepers (Northern Barred and Plain-brown among the possibilities). Other than the Darien, the very remote frontier zone between Panama and Colombia, Pipeline Road is the best area we've found in the Neotropics for locating ant swarms. Surely the whirl of activity around a swarm is one of the most exciting phenomena of the bird world. As the voracious ants march along the forest floor seeking smaller terrestrial prey, the birds pursue larger, more mobile insects and other arthropods. Because the birds are so intent on feeding, it is often possible to get very close views of them.

Some of the other birds we may encounter in the Pipeline Road area are Black Hawk-Eagle, Blue-headed and Mealy parrots, Slaty-tailed and Black-throated trogons, Rufous Motmot, Great Jacamar, Cinnamon Woodpecker, Scaly-throated Leaf-tosser, Fasciated and Western Slaty antshrikes, Spot-crowned Antvireo, Streak-chested Antpitta (secretive), Brownish Flycatcher (Twistwing), and Chestnut-headed Oropendola. We'll have a full day to enjoy the riches of this area.

NIGHT: Canopy Tower Ecolodge & Nature Observatory, Gamboa

January 11, Day 7: Metropolitan Natural Park. The entire morning will be devoted to the drier forests of the Metropolitan Natural Park area. The avifauna here is quite different from that around the Canopy Tower. Among the many possibilities are Gray-headed Chachalaca, Pheasant Cuckoo (scarce and seasonal), Blue-crowned Motmot, White-necked Puffbird, Lineated Woodpecker, Fasciated Antshrike, White-bellied and Dusky antbirds, Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet, Lance-tailed Manakin, Golden-fronted Greenlet, Rufous-breasted and Rufous-and-white wrens, Long-billed Gnatwren, and Crimson-backed Tanager. In addition, we'll spend some time searching for two of the real specialty birds of this area: the endemic Yellow-green Tyrannulet and the magnificent Rosy Thrush-Tanager, both of which can be found in this park. Afternoon plans will be flexible, but may include a walk through the lush forest of Plantation Road or a visit to Panama Viejo. If the tides are favorable, we will look for shorebirds, terns, gulls, egrets, herons, and other coastal species along the Panama Viejo shoreline. These vast mudflats rival those of Cairns in Australia.

NIGHT: Canopy Tower Ecolodge & Nature Observatory, Gamboa

January 12, Day 8: Transfer from Canopy Tower to Canopy Lodge in El Valle de Antón. We will have one last early morning of birding on the top of the Canopy Tower, depart around 9:00 a.m. and arrive in El Valle de Antón in time for lunch. En route, stops may be made in the dry Pacific lowlands. Though this region is heavily settled, birds are abundant around the farms, woodlots and hedgerows.

After turning off the Pan-American Highway, a narrow road winds up through dry hills for 20 km., slowly increasing in elevation until we round a bend and El Valle de Antón comes into view. At nearly 2,000 feet in elevation, the views of the charming valley before us are memorable indeed. The climate here is refreshing, cooler than in the lowlands but still dominated by the dry Pacific weather. 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 spacious guestrooms offer comfortable beds complete with mosquito netting and private baths, as well as hammocks 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. Further enhancing the delightful setting are feeding trays, which draw birds all day long. This is indeed a most relaxing way to bird. Raul's wife Denise has introduced another luxury treat here, the opportunity to schedule a masseuse (at a reasonable cost) who will bring her table to your room.

After a tasty lunch and siesta, we will pay close attention to the feeders and explore the expansive grounds. Among the many species that visit the garden and feeders are Lemon-rumped and White-lined tanagers, both of which are hard to find elsewhere; Rufous Motmot; Red-crowned Woodpecker; Bananaquit; Black-striped Sparrow; Buff-throated Saltator; and Chestnut-headed Oropendola (a colony of which nests on the hillside above). Yellow-bellied Elaenias perch conspicuously in the open near the outdoor dining area and Blue-headed Parrots occasionally streak overhead.

Today we will also begin exploring the many side roads and trails nearby. There are a number of species especially sought in this area including Blue-crowned Motmot, Lance-tailed Manakin, numerous flycatchers of all sizes and stripes, Rufous-and-white and Rufous-breasted wrens, Rufous-capped Warbler, Rosy Thrush-Tanager and Red-crowned Ant-Tanager. This will be our first chance for Tody Motmot, found locally in these forests but often elusive.

NIGHT: Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Antón

January 13, Day 9: El Valle de Antón, El Chiru Forest and La Zamia Trail. Today we will have an early breakfast and travel outside El Valle to visit a patch of dry forest just one hour away near the small village of El Chiru. The contrast with the lush and wet foothills of El Valle is dramatic. This habitat consists of relatively permanent growth of low and often straggly bushes and small trees with grass interspersed. It is a distinctive habitat of the Pacific lowlands and there is little of it left because most of the population in Panama has settled in the Pacific Coast. We will search for Pearl and White-tailed kites, Crested Bobwhite, Brown-throated Parakeet, Blue and Plain-breasted Ground-Doves, Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher, Pale-eyed Pygmy-Tyrant, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Lance-tailed Manakin, and Rufous-browed Peppershrike among other feathered residents of this scarce scrubby area. Bird activity is high during the first few hours; then it gets hot and it will be time to return to the much cooler foothills. We will have lunch back in the Canopy Lodge and afterwards bird the La Zamia Trail at the base of the Cerro Gaital Natural Monument. This is an easy, level trail in which the rare Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoo has been seen occasionally. We will also look for Little Tinamou, Gray-headed Chachalaca, Blue-crowned Motmot, Common Potoo, and Sepia-capped Flycatcher. For those interested in botany, it is worth noting that La Zamia Trail is named after the rare and primitive genus of palm-like plants called *Zamia* of the Order Cycadales. Some of these unusual and ancient fern-like dioecious plants with aerial stems are found along this trail.

At some point during our stay, we hope to find time to visit the local market where artisans come down from the surrounding mountains to sell their goods. The El Valle Market is considered one of the best supplied in the region. This will be an excellent opportunity to buy local handicraft directly from the "manufacturer." Prices are usually negotiable. There are ceramics, bateas (wooden trays), woven baskets, hats, carved and painted totumas (cups made from squash) and trinkets made from acorn, as well as vegetables, fruits, ornamental plants, flowers and orchids.

NIGHT: Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Antón.

January 14-15, Days 10-11: Altos del Maria (Western Ridge). After an early breakfast, we will board 4-wheel drive SUVs, and head to the western ridge of Altos del Maria. We will concentrate our effort along the ridge above Mata Ahogado. This ridge is blanketed in an impressive shroud of mature cloud forest. Birding mostly from the roadside, we will search for some of the characteristic species of this cloud forest including White Hawk, Orange-bellied Trogon, Spotted Woodcreeper, Red-faced Spinetail, Spotted Barbtail, Russet Antshrike,

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Tufted Flycatcher, Rufous-browed Tyrannulet, White-ruffed Manakin, Ochraceous Wren, Gray-breasted Wood-Wren, Pale-vented Thrush, Black-and-yellow Tanager, Dusky-faced Tanager, Tawny-crested Tanager, and Slate-colored Grosbeak, plus Double-toothed and Gray-headed kites, Purplish-backed Quail-Dove, Violet Sabrewing, Green Thorntail, Blue-throated Toucanet, Eye-ringed Flatbill, and White-throated Robin. Rarer species including Snowcap, Plumbeous Hawk, Brown-billed Scythebill, and the spectacular Black-crowned Antpitta occur in this area and are to be watched for. Later in the morning, we will explore some trails into the woods, perhaps including a fairly steep, but well-maintained path to a wonderful 360 degree lookout of the crater. Along this trail, we will have additional chances for secretive species of the forest interior. At some point we will enjoy a picnic lunch. We will spend part of today in an area with many *Heliconia* flowers that are sometimes frequented by the elusive White-tipped Sickbill. Because of the high altitude of this site (up to 1,200 meters, or 4,000 feet), the temperatures frequently remain cool late in the day and mid-day birding can be surprisingly good. Since this area is so good and also extensive, we may visit it twice.

NIGHTS: Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Antón.

January 16, Day 12: Canopy Adventure Option and Canopy Lodge Grounds. After breakfast, those who wish will have the opportunity to experience *The Canopy Adventure*. It consists of a series of zip lines high in the canopy by which one can explore the rain forest using safe and modern techniques. After an invigorating short climb to the top of the ridge through bird-rich forest, you strap in and soar through the treetops, where you can see a wealth of unexpected natural beauty and activity. Swooping from platform to platform high among the sturdy cloud forest trees, you pass over the stream and waterfall not once, but twice. Since not all participants will want to enjoy this adventure, the cost is extra and can be paid in cash or with credit card. *The Canopy Adventure* is located in a private refuge in the foothills above the Canopy Lodge. The main attraction of this refuge is a beautiful 150-foot high waterfall called Chorro Macho; the birdlife and the flora are especially rich and diverse because the area has been a wildlife refuge for several years. The principle purpose of this refuge, apart from the obvious task of keeping the area free from poachers and loggers, has been to provide sustainable, nature-based employment to ten young men who would otherwise be practicing traditional slash and burn agriculture to support themselves and their families. The refuge is a way to keep the forest ecosystem whole while providing much needed employment. Those who prefer not to do the Canopy Adventure can explore the trail around the waterfall where it is possible to see Green and Little hermit, various motmots, Slaty-tailed Trogon, Dull-mantled Antbird, and Tawny-crested and Dusky-faced tanagers. Because this is our last morning here, some might prefer to bird the feeders and flowers gardens or even go for a swim in either of the two natural pools.

After lunch and some final birding on the Canopy Lodge grounds, we will depart this wonderful setting and drive back to Panama City via the Trans American Highway.

NIGHT: Country Inn & Suites Canal, Panama City.

January 17, Day 13: Departure for Home. Participants will be provided with transfers to the airport in time for morning or early afternoon flights home.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 14 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: Jeri Langham with the assistance of local guides

Jeri M. Langham has a Ph.D. in plant ecology from Washington State University and has been a professor of biological sciences at California State University in Sacramento since 1970. He received the first Outstanding Teacher Award from the newly formed College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in 1997; the Outstanding Faculty Award from the Science Educational Equity and Minority Organization of Science Students organizations in 2005; and his University's third annual Lifetime Achievement Award for Community Service in 2006. Jeri has ardently birded all over North America, as well as Mexico, Costa Rica, Panama, Venezuela, Ecuador, the Galapagos Islands, Peru, Argentina, Kenya, and Australia. Born and raised in Venezuela, he speaks fluent

Spanish. Known for his enthusiasm and boundless energy, Jeri thoroughly enjoys searching for birds and sharing them with others. His passion for teaching and his natural teaching abilities soon become apparent as his tour participants enjoy learning more about the biological world around them. Jeri is a former member of the Bausch and Lomb Birding Council and the California Bird Records Committee. He is a Director for the Neotropical Grassland Conservancy, www.conservegrassland.org.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for this tour is **\$4695** per person in double occupancy from Panama City, Panama for occupying a standard guestroom at the Canopy Tower, Canopy Lodge and Country Inn & Suites Canal. This includes all meals, seven nights shared accommodations in one of the Canopy Tower's five Canopy Rooms (see ACCOMMODATIONS section below), 4 nights in one of the Canopy Lodge's standard double rooms (see CANOPY LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS section below), 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.

The fee for this tour is **\$4945** per person in double occupancy from Panama City, Panama for occupying a premium room at the Canopy Tower. This includes all meals, shared accommodations for seven nights in either the Canopy Tower's Blue Cotinga Suite or Harpy Eagle Suite (see CANOPY TOWER ACCOMMODATIONS section below), 4 nights in one of the Canopy Lodge's standard double rooms (see CANOPY LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS section below), 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.

The fee for this tour is **\$4095** per person in single occupancy from Panama City, Panama for occupying a single room at the Canopy Tower and Canopy Lodge. This includes all meals, single accommodations for seven nights in one of the Canopy Tower's single rooms with a shared bath (see CANOPY TOWER ACCOMMODATIONS section below), four nights in one of the Canopy Lodge's single rooms with a shared bath (see CANOPY LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS section below), one night in a single room with a private bath 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.

The fee for this tour is **\$4745** per person in single occupancy from Panama City, Panama for occupying a single room at the Canopy Tower and a standard room at the Canopy Lodge. This includes all meals, single accommodations for seven nights in one of the Canopy Tower's single rooms with a shared bath (see CANOPY TOWER ACCOMMODATIONS section below), four nights in one of the Canopy Lodge's standard rooms with a private bath (see CANOPY LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS section below), one night in a single room with a private bath 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 TOWER ACCOMMODATIONS: The Canopy Tower has a total of 2 suites (Blue Cotinga and Harpy Eagle), five standard double guestrooms (Canopy Rooms) and 5 single rooms with a shared bath. Both suites and all Canopy Rooms have private bathrooms. All rooms will be pre-reserved on a first-come, first-served basis. You will be advised of your specific room assignment at the time of your registration.

Please also note that since there is no elevator, all guests will climb 3 to 4 flights of stairs to reach their rooms, the dining area and observation deck.

CANOPY LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS: The Canopy Lodge has a total of 8 standard double guestrooms and 2 pairs of single rooms each sharing a bath. Based on room availability, singles have a choice of paying a supplement to occupy a standard double guest room with a private bath or a paying a discounted tour fee to occupy a single room with a shared bath. The single rooms, which are in a separate building from the main lodge, are considerably smaller and less fancy than the doubles. 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.

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 INSURANCE: Application forms 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 to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. 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. Contact the VENT office prior to registration for details.**

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 (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.

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.

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 AND BRIGHT COLORS MAY FRIGHTEN SECRETIVE BIRDS.** Lightweight and comfortable walking shoes are recommended, since some days we will spend a good bit of time on foot. Waterproof boots are essential, as the trails can be muddy. A small umbrella and/or rain gear are essential as well.

CLIMATE: 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 the summer months into early December. 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: Laundry service is available at the Canopy Tower. Because the clothes are sent out to Panama City to be cleaned, expect items to be returned within 48 hours. 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: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure from Panama is required. Visas are not required for entry by U.S. citizens. A tourist entry card is required and can be purchased at the check-in counter of the airline on which you travel into Panama or at customs & immigration in Tocumen International Airport (\$5.00 U.S.). Non-U.S. citizens should check with their local Panamanian consulate/embassy for instructions.

EQUIPMENT: You should pack a pair of binoculars that are in good repair, along with a belt pack or day pack (good for carrying books, sunscreen, extra film, 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. However, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta advise that there is some risk of malaria in parts of the country. The areas visited on this tour are not at risk. The CDC is recommending precautions for travelers going out of these main areas. Your tetanus, Polio, 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.

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

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line (877) FYI-TRIP. 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).

INSECT PROTECTION: As chiggers can be a problem in some areas, we recommend you come prepared with a good repellent. Some of the name brand manufacturers (Cutter's and Off) produce a variety of products you will find useful. Pump-action dispensers are generally preferable to sprays, while lotions and sticks are especially good for quick and easy application to sensitive areas on the face, or when out in the field. Topsyng gel is useful in reducing irritation from chigger bites or nettle stings (cortisone creams are now available without a prescription) Some people recommend sprinkling sulphur, which is available at both lodges, on your socks as a chigger deterrent.

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. Sulphur is available for use at the Canopy Tower and Canopy Lodge.

MISC: Departure Tax – U.S. \$20 (included in the price of your airline 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: Our Web site 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.

Field Guides:

Ridgely, Robert S. and John Gwynne. *A Guide to the Birds of Panama*. (Second edition). Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. This excellent field guide is highly recommended as your primary reference book on the birds. No other field guides are really necessary.

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

Background Reading:

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.

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.

Richards, Paul W. *The Tropical Rain Forest: An Ecological Study*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. (Second edition.) A more scientific review of the botanical structure of rainforests.

Gradwohl, Judy and Russell Greenberg. "The Formation of Antwren Flocks on Barro Colorado Island, Panama." *Auk* 97 (April 1980).

Munn, Charles A. and John W. Terborgh. "Multi-species Territoriality in Neotropical Foraging Flocks." *Condor* 81 (1979): 338-347.

Reference:

Croat, Thomas B. *Flora of Barro Colorado Island*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978. A massive technical manual, but the best plant book available for the region.

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Hilty, Steven L. and William L. Brown. *A Guide to the Birds of Colombia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986. An excellent field guide that has most of the birds of Panama in it; perhaps useful as an additional reference book. There is one available in the library at both Canopy Tower and Lodge.

Ridgely, Robert S., and Guy Tudor. *Birds of South America Volume I, The Oscine Passerines: Jays, Swallows, Wrens, Thrushes and Allies, Vireos, Wood-warblers, Tanagers, Icterids and Finches*. Austin: The University of Texas, 1989. Very useful reference, with range maps and illustrations of many species not previously illustrated. There is one available in the library at both Canopy Tower and Lodge.

Ridgely, Robert S., and Guy Tudor. *Birds of South America Volume II, The Suboscine Passerines: Ovenbirds and Woodcreepers, Antbirds, Gnateaters, and Tapaculos, Tyrant Flycatchers, Manakins and Cotingas*. Austin: The University of Texas, 1994. Very useful reference, with range maps and illustrations of many species not previously illustrated. There is one available in the library at both Canopy Tower and Lodge.

TIPPING: As noted in our itineraries, tipping (restaurants, 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 such tips are entirely optional.

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 March 19, 2008 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.