

# Panama: Birding, Nature & History With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



January 14 – 23, 2018

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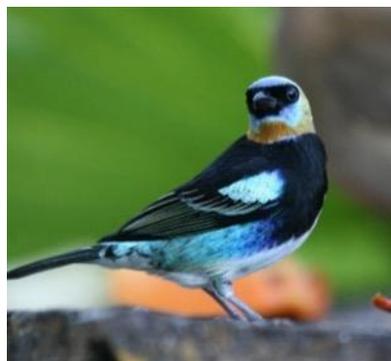
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Naturalist Journeys, LLC



*"We felt immersed into this land, quickly and easily. It was an adventure of the senses, all the senses, and we felt filled with Panama every day. Leadership ... was impeccable."*

— Sharon and Park Furlong

*"Great trip and great birds, guides, good companions, good food, definitely go on another of Peg's trips. Thanks for your excellent leadership!"*

— Lyn Diana & Martha Breed

Discover Panama's unrivaled birding, rich variety of mammals, amphibians, insects, and plants, and unique habitats — from volcanic craters to lush rainforest and Canal-side jungle — on this [Naturalist Journeys](#) Panama nature tour.



Live among the birds at Canopy Tower, in Soberanía National Park, a repurposed radar tower ideally situated right in the rainforest. The canopy-level dining area offers views of monkeys, toucans, sloths,

# Panama: Birding, Nature & History With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures

mixed flocks, and more, right at eye level! There is also an upper deck, where you can take your morning coffee (or afternoon cocktail), that has 360° degree views of the forest, and a view of the Panama Canal. Early mornings on the top deck boast great views of raptors and parrots taking flight for the day.

Enjoy spectacular Canopy Lodge, where you awake to bird calls in the cool mountain air, with wisps of cloud forest fog and frantically feeding wildlife all around. From here, set off for adventures in El Valle de Antón. This journey just can't be beat!

## Tour Highlights

- Enjoy daily excursions to renowned birding areas like Panama's famous Pipeline Road
- Let expert guides help you tally a great list of tropical butterflies, frogs, birds, and mammals
- Bird from Canopy Tower's open-air "Birdmobile" — yes!
- Opt-in to night bird excursions and search for Spectacled Owl, Kinkajou, fantastic large insects, and more
- Immerse yourself in wildlife — on a walk, or from your balcony or hammock ... photo ops abound
- Ziplining anyone? A rush awaits just next door to Canopy Lodge (optional, of course)
- Stay on (or come in early) and experience the Panama Canal by boat, even going through two locks



## Tour Summary

10-Day / 9-Night Panama Sampler Tour with [Pat Lueders](#)

\$3690 from Panama City

Airport is Tocumen International (PTY)

## Itinerary

### Sun., Jan. 14 Arrivals in Panama City

Welcome to Panama! Upon arrival in Panama, you are transferred by hotel van to Riande Aeropuerto Hotel, just five minutes from Tocumen International Airport. While you acclimatize to the tropical heat and have a cold drink, you can bird around the lovely pool or enjoy a swim. Those arriving in time can join tour host Pat Lueders for dinner. We travel to the Canopy Tower tomorrow after a delicious breakfast.

*Accommodations at Riande Aeropuerto Hotel (D)*



# Panama: Birding, Nature & History With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



## **Mon., Jan. 15 Travel to the Canopy Tower**

After breakfast today we set out for Canopy Tour. Our route to passes through modern Panama City and then parallels the Canal; watch ships pass by as we drive. Nature starts to prevail in lush forests that line the road as we turn up Semaphore Hill and the road to our lodgings at the Canopy Tower.

Over the next few days, the Canal is ever present, providing a great opportunity to understand its operations (past and present), recent expansion, and role in Panama's economy.



On arrival, we walk down the hill for our first bird sightings. Lush forests line the road to the Tower — we never know what we may find! Black-breasted Puffbird, Double-toothed Kite, Black-tailed or other trogons, secretive antbirds or wrens, Geoffrey's Tamarin, and more are possible. This is a leisurely walk, downhill, and the lodge's open-air vehicle is waiting to take us back to the Tower. If you wish, opt out of this first walk and simply enjoy watching hummingbirds vie for nectar at the feeders near the lodge.

We then settle into one of the most unique eco-lodges, and before a delicious dinner we watch the sunset and ships passing through the Panama Canal from the observation deck — spectacular!

*Accommodations at Canopy Tower (D)*



## **Tues., Jan. 16**

### **Panama Canal Rainforest Boat Adventure / Gamboa History / Summit Ponds**

This morning you can sleep in a bit after your travels ... if you are able to over the sounds of the forest just outside your door! Others may want to watch the sunrise with a good cup of Panamanian coffee from the observation deck.



After breakfast, we explore the waters of the Panama Canal on small boats, quietly moving through coves and inlets in search of wildlife, including Greater Ani, Snail Kite, other raptors, and possibly whistling-ducks, reptiles such as Spectacled Caiman and Green Iguana, and both Mantled Howler and White-faced Capuchin Monkeys. We find this to be the most comfortable and accessible way to discover the natural attributes of the Panama Canal watershed. We have the freedom to explore Gatun Lake in detail, passing by gigantic cargo ships transiting the waterway. Along the way,

# Panama: Birding, Nature & History With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures

we should spot Three-toed Sloth resting on tree branches, while Osprey are vocal and on the prowl for Peacock Bass. Limpkin, Anhinga, and Keel-billed Toucan are some of the birds we may encounter.

This is also a great place to focus on some history. At the time of its creation, Gatun Lake was the largest man-made lake in the world. The flow of all the rivers within the Panama Canal Watershed is contained in Gatun Lake to provide water for the operation of the lock system. More than 52-million gallons of fresh water are used for every ship that transits through the Panama Canal from one ocean to another.

In 1902, after years of negotiation and a disastrous attempt to build the canal (the Suez Canal was opened in 1869), the U.S. Congress authorized construction of the canal. The project was put on hold, however, when Colombia, which controlled Panama at the time, rejected the authorizing treaty. It was only in 1904, after Panama's independence that construction began. Ten years later, ahead of time and under budget, the Canal was opened to bridge the world. Imagine that first historic passage!

The year 2000 marked the end of the U.S. treaty (which had actually been revised several times) and Panama now assumes responsibility for operations of the Canal. In 2016, a third lock opened to accommodate increased traffic and larger ships. From our boats on Gatun Lake you can see the Titan Crane and learn more about history of Gamboa, which is still the Canal's dredging operations center.



Mid-afternoon we visit Summit Ponds, a wonderful, leisurely birding area where even in the quiet time of afternoon we find roosting Boat-billed Heron and a host of interesting species. Here we are at the edge of open and forested areas, and good numbers of migrant warblers join resident tropical species, making it a very rewarding stop. The ponds themselves often host nesting Boat-billed Heron, a nocturnal species that can be otherwise difficult to find. Those less keen on birding might enjoy seeing the zoo across the street that specializes in the mammals and raptors of Panama (small additional charge).

Return to enjoy a happy hour, dinner, and evening at the Tower.

*Accommodations at Canopy Tower (B,L,D)*

**Wed., Jan. 17**

**Soberanía National Park / Pipeline Road / Ammo Pond**

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# Panama: Birding, Nature & History

## With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



Soberanía National Park is considered one of Central America's most spectacular and accessible areas for bird watching and wildlife observation. Only 45 minutes from Panama City, Soberanía's 55,000 acres boast some 525 species of birds, 105 species of mammals (including large cats), Tamandua (a type of anteater), Two and Three-toed Sloths, four species of monkey, Agouti, and 59 endemic plant species that inhabit four life zones. We depart early to get out on Pipeline Road when bird activity is most lively.

A walk along world-renowned Pipeline Road is unforgettable, a prized destination among birdwatchers and nature enthusiasts. During World War II, a pipeline was built along the Panama Canal to transport fuel from one ocean to the other in the event the waterway was attacked. Fortunately, it was never used. The road, not open to traffic, provides a lush, easy pathway for us to explore. This is the site where the Audubon Society held its world Christmas bird count record for 19 years straight, with 357 species of birds identified in a period of 24 hours. This morning we look for secretive antbirds such as White-flanked and Pygmy Antwrens, and other rainforest birds such as Great Jacamar, Broad-billed Motmot, Blue-crowned and Golden-collared Manakins, Brown Twistwing, and some of the rarer forest raptors. We likely encounter the tropical phenomena of the mixed flock — a veritable explosion of birds that work and feed together, exhibiting complex social structure that scientists are only beginning to understand.



We return to the lodge for lunch and a mid-day break, then venture out to a very productive pond called Ammo Pond, where we hope to find Northern Jacana, Rufescent Tiger Heron, Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Yellow-tailed Oriole, Lesser Kiskadee, possibly Pygmy Kingfisher, and other interesting species.

*Accommodations at Canopy Tower (B,L,D)*



### **Thurs., Jan. 18 East Side of the Isthmus at Achiole Road / Fort San Lorenzo / Panama Canal Railroad**

This morning, learn more about Panama's early days when pirates ruled the seas, attracted here for the important trade route of wealth coming back from Peru. To learn more about nature and history, we drive east across the Isthmus of Panama to the Caribbean province of Colon.

# Panama: Birding, Nature & History With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures

Near Colon, we drive over the Panama Canal at Gatun Locks (another opportunity to see the workings of the Canal), and for those who choose this early morning birding option, we find a whole new array of species — those associated with the Atlantic side forests of the country. Achiote Road is perhaps best known as the place the Panama Audubon Society has regularly recorded over 340 species on a Christmas Bird Count! The habitat is varied and an easy trail lets us explore adjacent forests. Some of the birds we hope to find include migrants from the north on wintering range, along with White Hawk, Chestnut-mandible Toucan, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Broad-billed and Black-throated Trogons, Black-breasted and Pied Puffbirds, Bi-Colored Antbird, possibly beautiful Blue Cotinga, Black-chested Jay, White-headed Wren, Red Breasted Blackbird, and other species. This is a great place for mammals as well, and we should have great looks at troops of Howler Monkey.



After an exciting (and intense!) morning of birding, we take a break at a delightful nearby marina where we have a late lunch (don't worry, we have plenty of snacks on hand for the morning).



After lunch, we have a chance to walk around the ruins of the historic Castle of San Lorenzo, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Built at the mouth of the Chagres River, this Spanish bastion served to fortify and protect the river entrance to Las Cruces Trail that led to Panama City on the Pacific Ocean, and was later used as the port of entry for gold diggers on their way to California during the second half of the 19th century. Sir Henry Morgan captured San Lorenzo and used it as a jumping off point to sack Panama City in 1671. Christopher Columbus also stopped here on his third voyage in 1503. Birding is excellent in and near the park as well, with Yellow-headed Caracara, Chestnut-headed Oropendola, Streaked Flycatcher, and other species.



Celebrating Panama's Railway, we return by train along the Panama Canal. The Panama Railroad was the first transcontinental railroad in the Western Hemisphere when it opened in 1855. Sit back and relax with a cold drink, a snack, and views of Snail Kite feeding at dusk.



This is our last evening at the Tower and we gather on the observation deck for sunset and the sight of birds returning to roosts ahead of dinner.

*Accommodations at the Canopy Tower (B,L,D)*

# Panama: Birding, Nature & History With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures

**Fri., Jan. 19**

## **Plantation Road / Canopy Lodge**

This morning we enjoy an early walk on Plantation Road in a bit more open forest than we experienced on Pipeline Road. This is another good area for finding mammals, and we often find tame trogons and motmots here, too, as well as some mixed flocks.



Plantation Road is close to our lodge, so those that prefer a leisurely morning can stay back and relax. By mid-morning we pack up and drive north to the other fabulous property operated by the Canopy Family — the Canopy Lodge near El Valle in the central mountains.

On arrival at Canopy Lodge, nature is active all around us. We quickly find a host of hummingbirds, tanagers, and oropendolas at feeders adjacent to the open-air dining area. We have close up views of tanagers: Lemon-rumped, Crimson-backed, White-lined, and Blue-Gray, as well as electric Red-legged Honeycreeper. Clay-colored Thrush, Streaked Saltator, and Yellow-faced Grassquit provide us with intrigue throughout our stay. Sometimes more secretive Rufous Motmot or Orange-billed Sparrow come into vegetation or one of the feeders near the lodge!

We meet new guides who are eager to share bird specialties on the forest trails that lead from the Lodge. Two often-difficult to see Neotropical species can be found here occasionally: Tody Motmot and Rufous-vented Cuckoo. Basilisk Lizard sun themselves on rocks along the stream, while Broad-billed and Rufous Motmots, Chestnut-backed Antbird, and even Dull-mantled Antbird are often present along the trail.

We relax and settle in. The food here is wonderful, as is the atmosphere for tonight's meal. Enjoy!

*Accommodations at the Canopy Lodge (B,L,D)*

**Sat., Jan. 20**

## **Canopy Lodge Trails / Canopy Zipline Adventure (Optional) / La Mesa**

This morning we venture to higher elevation to watch birds near what might be the world's most beautiful chicken farm. Walking into the forest, we have a chance to see some of the more secretive species like mixed flocks of antwrens, Bluethroated Toucanet, White-tipped Sicklebill, and more.

# Panama: Birding, Nature & History With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



In the afternoon, we stay close to the lodge, exploring trails and flying through the trees at Canopy Zipline (for the adventurous among us — optional, of course). This is a great way to experience a thrill while seeing the forest canopy at a bird's eye view. Whether on the zipline or taking photos of friends from below, all can enjoy views of a lovely waterfall.

Trees surrounding the lodge serve as perches for a good diversity of flycatchers, including Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Lesser and Yellow-bellied Elaenias, and Boat-billed, Social, and Piratic Flycatchers. During the dry season, raucous Chestnut-headed Oropendola nest in a colony in the tall Eucalyptus trees in the yard, while Giant Cowbird sometime show up looking for an unguarded nest in which to deposit an egg.

Birding along the road near the lodge, we have a good chance of hearing and seeing many species typical of the dry Pacific slope: Blue-crowned Motmot, Lance-tailed Manakin (difficult to see), Rosy Thrush-Tanager, and Red-throated Ant-Tanager. Humid foothill species are also present, including Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, and Dusky-faced and Tawny-crested Tanagers. Watch for larger species like the noisy Gray-headed Chachalaca, Keel-billed Toucan, Collared Aracari, and Black-chested Jay. It is also worthwhile to keep an eye on the sky, in case a White Hawk or a Black Hawk-Eagle passes overhead.

*Accommodations at Canopy Lodge (B,L,D)*

## **Sun., Jan. 21** Cara Iguana / Rare Frog Conservation Facility / Canopy Lodge

There are so many wonderful places to bird right near the Canopy Lodge. Today we choose according to what species the guides are finding, and where. The Tody Motmot is a secretive one, often found on a road above a lovely residential district we like to walk along near town.

We do want to visit a facility for endangered frog research and propagation, housed at El Nispero, a small zoo in El Valle with a wide selection of native animals and birds, mostly in good-sized cages. In addition to learning about the many forms of frogs and the challenges they face, we spend some time birding here, too. The grounds are landscaped with artificial streams and the backdrop is the most dramatic of El Valle's hills. It's a pleasant place to spend an hour wandering around. Rosy Thrush-Tanager is one we look for here, a lovely songster!

In the afternoon we travel to the charming local farmer's market in El Valle where colorful vegetables and artisan crafts are found. The local ice cream store serves delicious treats to sample, too! This is a great chance to purchase any local souvenirs or gifts to take home.

*Accommodations at Canopy Lodge (B,L,D)*

# Panama: Birding, Nature & History With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures

## Mon., Jan. 22 Las Minas Road / El Valle

This morning we walk atop La Mesa on Las Minas Road where we search for foothill species and hope to see one of our favorites: the comical Blue-throated Toucanet. In lush clusters of bromeliads that festoon the trees, we encounter Ochraceous and Gray-breasted Wood Wrens, on tree trunks we search for both Plain-brown and Spotted Woodcreepers, and we listen for Red-faced Spinetail which may sing out from roadside shrubbery. Both White-throated and Pale-vented Thrushes can be found along our route, along with mixed groups of beautiful tanagers like Silver-throated. Masked Tityra like to call from treetops at the road's edge and Black-headed Saltator, Tawny-capped and White-vented Euphonias, and Spot-crowned Barbet have been seen at local feeders! Those who prefer hiking to birding can simply walk farther along this scenic mountain road, returning to join us at a specified time.

We return to the lodge by late morning for lunch and a break. Relax on your porch, browse books in the open-air library, or wander the grounds where Stripe-throated Hermit and Violet-headed and Rufous-tailed Hummingbirds visit purple verbena flowers. You may even glimpse the rare Rufous-crested Coquette! We may hear the beautiful cascading notes of an Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush or watch a mixed flock come through, perhaps with a beautiful Bay-headed Tanager. Along a stream that runs through the property we watch for Green Kingfisher, possible Sunbittern, Buff-rumped Warbler, and a host of colorful butterflies, including the brilliant Blue Morpho. A Three-toed Sloth may be seen draped lazily across an open branch or peeking out from behind the large leaves of a Cecropia tree.

Those who wish can venture into town in the mid-afternoon, where we can bird at leisure in a residential area with lovely gardens. This is a great spot to observe Barred Antshrike, Collared Aracari, and along a dirt road leading into the forest, Tody Motmot.

This evening we have a wrap-up over happy hour to list our trip highlights, tally the species we've seen, and enjoy a celebratory dinner at the lodge.

*Accommodations at Canopy Lodge (B,L,D)*



# Panama: Birding, Nature & History With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures

## Tues., Jan. 23 Departures from Panama City

We enjoy one last morning with nature as our alarm clock before heading off to the airport. **Important!** We have a three-hour return trip to the airport, so we ask that you book flights out after NOON. Those electing to leave earlier need to pay for a special transfer, with your start time set so that you have at least two hours at the airport. If you just can't bear to leave yet, you can book additional days here, and enjoy a field trip up to Altos Las Marias by 4WD, or simply relax!



## Cost of the Journey

### Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with [Allianz Travel Insurance](#). Their website will show a grid of tour cost and your age category for you to make selections. As of January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

The cost of this journey is \$3690, per person, from Panama City. This cost is based on double occupancy and includes all accommodations; meals as specified in the itinerary, group airport transfers, professional guide services, local park and other area entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses. The cost is based on a minimum number of 6 participants, with fewer a small group surcharge (typically \$100 – \$300) may apply. Single travelers travel at a discount, due to having shared bath facilities for four nights at the Canopy Tower (private bath at Canopy Lodge). Subject to availability — please ask us for price and details. Single in same type of accommodations is limited, but available, please inquire. A limited number of upgrades to suite accommodations are also available.

The cost does not include transportation to or from your home to Panama, or items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone charges, portage, maid gratuities, or beverages from the bar.

For those that wish to include a transit of the Panama Canal, this opportunity is available on Saturdays, so we've ended the tour to encourage you to take advantage of this if you choose. If you wish to add days on to your trip to make this work, we are happy to make suggestions for activities and lodgings for you. As of last year, there were cruises on some other days as well, please inquire.

### Travel Information

Please plan to arrive on January 14 to check into the Riande, get settled, take a short walk, and enjoy dinner. If you must arrive later, plan on meeting the group the morning of January 15 at the Riande for breakfast. We then travel to the Canopy Tower for a morning walk before lunch. Plan to depart after NOON on January 23. It is a three-hour plus drive down from the Lodge, so if you MUST leave earlier it is possible, but not enjoyable, and we'd need to charge you for an independent transfer.

If you are arriving early or staying longer to see other parts of Panama or to transit the Canal (a tour available each Saturday), we will help with your hotel and transit arrangements and other activities like a guided city tour if you wish.

# Panama: Birding, Nature & History With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures

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## **Photo Credits:**

Golden-collared Manakin, Bud Ferguson (BUFE); Capped Heron, Peg Abbott (PA); Golden-headed Tanager, PA; Tropical Flower, PA; Chestnut-headed Oropendola, PA; Road to Canopy Tower, PA; Panama City View, PA; Violet-bellied Hummingbird, PA; Snail Kite, PA; Group Birding, PA; Titan Crane, PA; Black-throated Trogon, PA; Broad-billed Motmot, PA; Rufescent Tiger-Heron, PA; Rufous-capped Warbler, PA; Howler Monkey, PA; Geoffrey's Tamarin, Howard Topoff; Three-toed Sloth, PA; Red-breasted Blackbird, David Ramlal; Train, PA; White-necked Jacobin, PA; Yellow-headed Caracara, PA; Canopy Lodge, PA; Las Minas view, PA; Red-capped Manakin, Bob Behrstock; Crimson-backed Tanager, PA; Group birding Cara Iguana area, PA; Hikers, Las Minas, PA; Female Barred Antshrike, PA; Tody Motmot, PA; Collared Aracari, PA; Howler Monkey with baby, PA; Morning Coffee atop Canopy Tower, Bob Behrstock.

