

Texas' Big Bend National Park

With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



April 22 – 29, 2019

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“It’s a totally different world and fascinating. A new set of everything — climate, birds, mammals, geology, history”

— *Franni Tourtellot*



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Immerse yourself in the big, bold landscape of Big Bend National Park, home to the stunningly eroded Chisos Mountain range and the elusive Colima Warbler. A playground of light, the rugged mountains, rolling hills, and deep canyons glow with rich, red and orange hues. Life forms of the Chihuahuan Desert are fascinating and abound.

Experience the rhythm of spring bird migration, as Eastern, Western, Mexican, and Rocky Mountain birds converge — nearly 450 species, many rare or vagrant. Big Bend also hosts its share of mammals, from Kangaroo Rat, skunks, Badger, and Javelina, to Mountain Lion and Black Bear. Cacti and unique desert plants abound.

In addition to wildlife watching and geological and ecological interpretation, we base our trip out of accommodations with western character and enjoy delicious meals along the way ... and of course, good company.

Tour Highlights

- Visit two of Texas' three sky island mountain ranges
- Search for the rare Colima Warbler on its only US breeding territory
- Catch the peak of migration — every day brings new arrivals!
- Travel along some of the most ruggedly beautiful roads in west Texas
- Gaze up at the stunning stars in a premier dark sky region
- Slow down and live life more slowly, the “Texas Way”

Tour Summary

8-Day / 7-Night Big Bend Birding, Nature & Natural History Tour w/ Michael Marsden

\$2290 from El Paso, TX

Airport is El Paso International (ELP)



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Itinerary

Mon., Apr. 22

**Arrive in El Paso, Texas |
Alpine, Texas — Gateway to
Big Bend**

Please plan to arrive in El Paso no later than 1:00 PM today. Your guide meets you at the airport; we plan to do some birding en route to Alpine, so be sure your binoculars are handy and your shoes are good for walking. We drive east about two hours to Van Horn, where we take a break and then continue through Chihuahuan Desert grasslands to Alpine, passing the artisan town of Marfa on the way. Settle into your accommodations at the historic Holland Hotel and enjoy a first group dinner at a trendy restaurant that features “cowboy cuisine.”

Accommodations at the Holland Hotel (D)



Tues., Apr. 23

**The Post at Marathon | Prairie
Dogs | Big Bend National Park**

Big Bend is calling us, and after breakfast we're on our way! Passing through grassland habitat, we are likely to see Pronghorns and possibly Scaled Quail. At Marathon, we turn slightly north to visit an active Prairie Dog town to observe these animals' lively and sometimes comical behavior. With luck, a Coyote or Golden Eagle may be here on patrol. We then visit a lush birding oasis at a creek-side park that once housed the U.S. Cavalry. Today it is known as The Post, and its large cottonwood trees and small reservoir attract a good number and variety of birds like Vermilion Flycatcher, Summer Tanager, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, and possibly Yellow-billed Cuckoo.



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After lunch, either a picnic or locally in Marathon, we turn south to Big Bend National Park, interpreting the geologic features on the way. We pass through low desert that was once so rich in Tobosa grass that the early settlers could cut it as hay. Our destination today is Chisos Basin, which sits at a comfortable 5,400 feet surrounded by mountain peaks. Here, we keep an eye out for Zone-tailed Hawk and other birds of prey. Relax, settle in, and enjoy dinner in the lodge's dining room. A Say's Phoebe may have a nest by the door; at night, Gray Fox and Javelina are sometimes seen from our porches.

Accommodations at Chisos Mountain Lodge (B,L,D)

Wed., Apr. 24 Big Bend National Park | Rio Grande Village

We get an early start this morning so we can get to Rio Grande Village early enough for prime bird activity. Ro Wauer, author of *The Birds of Big Bend*, regards this as the most consistent location in the park to see good numbers of species, and today should be no exception. Painted Bunting often steal the show, but there is stiff competition from Greater Roadrunner, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Inca Dove, Indigo Bunting, and Blue Grosbeak.

We encourage you to take the time to learn some of the calls before the trip so that you can be aware of Yellow-breasted Chat and Bell's Vireo; with luck, we hear the scream of a Gray Hawk. Common Black Hawk have nested here for several years, and Black Vulture can be seen along the river. Along the nature trail — a boardwalk through a beaver pond — the blend of lush cattails and rushes, desert scrub, and distant views of the Chisos is striking! Enjoy a picnic lunch with a view of the Sierra del Carmen Mountains. A siesta under the shade of the cottonwoods is a must before we return to the Basin. We stop at the Boquillas Canyon Overlook and Hot Springs Historic Site, as well as the park's visitor center.

Accommodations at Chisos Mountain Lodge (B,L,D)



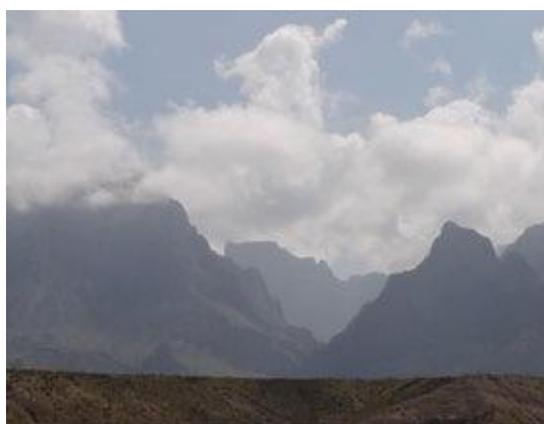
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Thurs., Apr. 25 Big Bend National Park | Boot Springs

Enjoy a full day of walks and hikes in Chisos Basin. Those with energy can scale the nine-mile loop trail high into the Chisos where we search for nesting Colima Warbler. The entire hike is fascinating, and we have all day to do it, so many can participate. If we are lucky we may find the Colima en route at lower elevation, typically they get right up to their territories in the high Chisos. We climb steadily on a good park service trail through oak and juniper woodland, finding an abundance of Mexican species such as Evergreen Sumacs and Drooping Junipers. Fresh-flowering Texas Madrones are magnets for warblers. We often find Townsend's, Hermit, Yellow-rumped, and sometimes Orange-crowned and MacGillivray's. Wildflowers and brilliant cactus blooms brighten the trail.



In sheltered Boot Canyon we find huge pines and Arizona Cypress, a Mexican relict species. The route down through Laguna Meadows opens up to great vistas and more birding. Listen for calls of Hutton's Vireo and Bewick's Wren, as well as the trill of Broad-tailed Hummingbird during courtship displays.



Those who do not wish to scale the mountain can go part of the way with us, then return to enjoy a free day in Chisos Basin where a number of trails near the lodge can be explored.

On this, or another evening, your guide offers an optional drive out to a location where we have a great chance of observing Elf Owl, Poorwill, and possibly Lesser Nightjar.

Accommodations at Chisos Mountain Lodge (B,L,D)



Fri., Apr. 26 Big Bend National Park | Burro Mesa Pouroff | Santa Elena Canyon

Today we head west toward magnificent Santa Elena Canyon. Our first stop is at the Old Sam Nail Ranch, where water coming from a windmill attracts Varied Bunting and a variety of other migrant songbirds. We

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then walk to Burro Mesa Pouroff, a unique geologic feature where unusual plants like the Texas Persimmon and Texas Buckeye bear fruit that attracts some of the larger songbirds. The arid hills provide good habitat for Black-chinned Sparrow, while the canyon seems to echo with the songs of Rock and Canyon Wrens.

We have lunch at Cottonwood Campground, another oasis with large trees and a Hackberry and Lotebush hedgerow that provides shelter and food for migrants. In some years, we see waves of birds coming through — grosbeaks and buntings seem especially fond of this area. We may also find Lucy's Warbler in the dry mesquite, and Hooded, Orchard, and Bullock's Orioles.

In the afternoon, after our siesta, we discuss the vivid geologic story of the Big Bend region. Visit historic Castolon, where ice cream is a welcomed treat. In the late afternoon, the sun is off the trail into Santa Elena Canyon, so we can enjoy a walk along 1,000-foot limestone walls laid down during the Cretaceous Period. Watch swallows hunt over the river and listen for the calls of White-throated Swift. From here we take a back road north to the west entrance of Big Bend and enjoy dinner at a local restaurant as unique as its desert surroundings at Terlingua.

Accommodations at Chisos Mountain Lodge (B,L,D)

Sat., Apr. 27

Big Bend National Park | Lajitas | Christmas Mountains

Today we say good-bye to the scenic Chisos Basin. We depart towards the west side of the park, and do a bit of birding around the green golf course area of Lajitas. We may also visit the Christmas Mountains and the home and feeders of Carolyn Ohi-Johnson, a grand display of bird activity where difficult to find species like Lucifer Hummingbird and Varied Bunting can be found with ease. Carolyn has worked tirelessly to create a stunning oasis just north of Big Bend.



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We then continue on to another sky island, the scenic Davis Mountains, where our lodgings for the next two nights are in Fort Davis.

Accommodations at the Hotel Limpia (B,L,D)

Sun., Apr. 28 The Davis Mountains

Today we have the full day to explore the Davis Mountains, a sky island mountain range. Learn more about the ecological significance of the Davis Mountains as a link between Mexico and the Rocky Mountains. In the morning, if we hear that the Montezuma Quail have been regularly feeding, we start at the feeders of Davis Mountains State Park. We then visit The Nature Conservancy's outstanding preserve, high in the Davis Mountains. For many years the higher elevations of this range have been inaccessible as private land. Since the preserve was established, limited public access is allowed, and a number of very exciting birds have been recorded. Those familiar with the Chiricahua Mountains of Arizona recognize Olive Warbler, Buff-breasted Flycatcher, Painted Redstart, and Dusky-capped Flycatcher, found there in similar habitat.

Enjoy a walk amid large Ponderosa Pines, with a view of the highest peak in the Davis Mountains, Mt. Livermore. Permission to visit this area varies by the year, and if for reasons of fire restriction or other don't allow us to visit, we have several other great Davis Mountain areas as alternatives.

Returning by mid-afternoon, we offer an optional visit to historic Fort Davis, one of the best preserved post-Civil War forts in our National Park system. The volcanic geology at this setting is quite spectacular. As afternoon brings a higher level of bird activity, we want to go into Davis Mountains State Park, where in some years Montezuma Quail come into feeders along with Scrub Jay, Acorn Woodpecker, and Green-tailed Towhee. Here we can treat ourselves to some idyllic sit-down birding!

Tonight we enjoy a farewell dinner at our hotel's restaurant. By now the arid landscape and its riches of cactus, vistas, birds, and wildlife is a part of you.

Accommodations at Hotel Limpia (B,L,D)

Mon., Apr. 29 Departures from El Paso



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Our journey comes to an end today in El Paso. We have a four-hour drive, so plan to arrive at the airport by 11:00 AM (time change works in our favor today!) for flights out NOON or later. (B)

Please Note

Big Bend is best experienced by those fit enough to do some hiking; the route to see the famed Colima Warbler is a nine-mile loop hike with a gain of almost 2000 feet in elevation. Our other walks average two to four miles at a leisurely pace over uneven terrain, so you may forego the Colima hike, but should be able to do the others for full participation. Days at lower elevation can be HOT (90° plus) on occasion. Expect full field days with evenings to 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.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the main journey is \$2290 DBL / \$2880 SGL, per person, based on double occupancy, from El Paso, TX (ELP). This cost includes: accommodations for seven nights, meals as specified in the itinerary (B=breakfast, L=lunch, D=dinner), airport welcome and transfer or hotel shuttle, land transportation during the journey, professional guide services, park and other entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses.

Cost does not include round-trip airfare to and from El Paso, items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone, drinks from the bar, gratuities for luggage handling or personal services. With fewer than 6 participants, a small-group surcharge (typically \$100 – \$300 per participant) may apply, or



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we may request that you pick up the cost of a few additional dinners in lieu of this surcharge.

Special Offer!

If you opt to pair this Texas Big Bend tour with our [Texas Hill Country tour](#) (April 14 - 19), we'll reimburse your connecting flight up to \$300. Talk to us for details.

Travel Information

The airport for this journey is El Paso International Airport (ELP). Plan to arrive in El Paso no later than 1:00 PM on April 22 and plan to depart after NOON on April 29. If you arrive early or stay on after the trip in El Paso, there are a number of motels close to the airport; we recommend the historic Camino Real Hotel downtown (which has an airport shuttle), the Wyndham Hotel at the airport, or the economical Microtel Inn and Suites next door to the Wyndham.

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Photo Credits

Big Bend Sunset, Woody Wheeler (WW); Golden-fronted Woodpecker, WW; Mexican Jay, Naturalist Journeys Stock (NJS); Big Bend Hikers, Lynn Tennefoss (LT); Colima Warbler, Tom Dove; Vermillion Flycatcher, Peter Steve Gantlett, courtesy Operado Latino; Big Bend Panorama, NJS; Black-throated Sparrow, Stephen Hubbard; Painted Buntings, Mark Wetzell; Bullock's Oriole, Peg Abbott (PA); Javelina, Steve Wolfe; Mule Deer, PA; Green Sunfish, WW; Group at Dinner, LT; Acorn Woodpecker, Barry Ramdass; Summer Tanager, NJS; Hiking Madera Canyon in Search of Colima Warbler, LT; Coyote, PA; Big Bend Scenic, NJS; Greater Roadrunner, PA; Common Black Hawk, NJS; Chisos Mountain Lodge, NJS; Olive Warbler, PA; Painted Redstart, PA; Agave in Bloom, LT; Black-headed Grosbeak, WW; Lucifer Hummingbird, Bob Behrstock; Hiking Big Bend, WW; Reviewing Checklist at Chisos Mountain Lodge, WW; Group at Santa Elena Canyon, WW; Boot Springs, WW; Group at Christmas Mountain Oasis, WW; Claret Cup, NJS; Black-tailed Jackrabbit, WW; Pipevine Swallowtail, WW; Javelina Skull, LT; Ocotillo, WW.

