

Belize Birding & Nature

With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



October 2 – 9, 2021

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Tour Highlights

- Treat yourself to a real vacation at two of the best eco-lodges in the Neotropics
- Enjoy three nights at the beautiful Lamanai Outpost Lodge, just a stroll away from impressive Maya ruins
- Bird the forest canopy from above, atop two stunning Maya temples
- Explore bird-rich lagoons by boat to find Snail Kite and colorful wading birds
- Traverse the trails of famous Chan Chich Lodge in search of trogons, parrots, toucans, and more
- Wake to the noisy chorus of tinamous, forest-falcons, and motmots, right outside your door
- Take night excursions in search of bats, night birds, and maybe even a Margay, Ocelot, or Jaguar!

Tour Summary

8-Day / 7-Night Belize Birding & Nature Tour
\$4250 from Belize City
Airport is Philip SW Goldson International (BZE)

Just a two-hour flight from Miami, Belize offers a rich blend of Maya ruins and lush forests, still wild enough to host Jaguars and a diversity of tropical birds, butterflies, and mammals. This nation's warm, hospitable people speak English and have a strong tradition of caring for their biological legacy.

We are pleased to offer time at two of Belize's finest and best-known naturalists' lodges: Lamanai Outpost Lodge and Chan Chich Rainforest Lodge, situated in reserves and protected forests. With a two-lodge trip our goal is to keep logistics simple, providing you with time to savor the lodges' rich natural history, abundant birds, pleasant creature comforts, and tasty food.

Join us to explore Belize's biological treasures and cultural roots. We emphasize birding, but also examine natural history and Maya heritage while having some simple, relaxing fun. We enjoy extended time at each lodge to ease travel and soak in the special attributes that give them such fine reputations. Colorful resident birds are joined by migrants, making birding each day extraordinary and fun!

Itinerary

Sat., Oct. 2 Arrivals | Lamanai Outpost Lodge

Start your adventure with ease. The Belize City airport is small and welcoming, and you are greeted by tropical air and the smile of your guide. The transfer in to Lamanai Outpost Lodge is FUN and starts your trip with some great birding action. We first travel a short way by van and then switch to a boat. From the boat, we should see Mangrove Swallow, Limpkin, Northern Jacana, Swallow-tailed and Snail Kites, and, with luck, a Black-collared Hawk or a huge Jabiru Stork. Be ready with a windbreaker, camera, and binoculars. We arrive in time for late-afternoon birding by the lodge, followed by dinner.

Lamanai (Mayan for "submerged crocodile"), is located at the edge of a 28-mile spring-fed lagoon and offers rainforest, Maya ruins, pine savannahs, freshwater marshes, and open water habitats, all within walking distance. Over 400 species have been counted here, including Thicket Tinamou, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Jabiru Stork, King Vulture, Zone-tailed Hawk, Ruddy Crane, White-fronted Parrot, Squirrel Cuckoo, and Northern Bentbill. Otters, manatees, crocodiles, and the occasional Jaguar are also nearby.

Forest trails and Maya ruins are easily accessed at Lamanai; birds and butterflies always seem to be at arm's length. Just a short stroll from the lodge stands the Temple of the Jaguar and the High Temple, two of about 700 Maya structures at Lamanai that were hidden under a blanket of earth and vegetation until their excavation began in 1974. These ruins date back two millennia. Climbing the temples requires a bit of effort, but the reward is great: a bird's-eye view over the forest canopy.

Accommodations at Lamanai Outpost Lodge (D)

Sun., Oct. 3 Lamanai Outpost Lodge

Whether you're well-traveled in Central America or visiting for the first time, there is much to hold your attention at Lamanai. Birds and monkeys busy themselves around the cabins; nearly 200 species of butterflies flit through the area, colorful dragonflies and damselflies buzz by, lizards ranging in size from tiny geckoes to five-foot-long iguanas lounge around, and of course, numerous herbs, shrubs, and trees attract wild tropical wonder.

We're mindful of some of the regional endemics, including Black Catbird, Rose-throated Tanager, Yucatan Jay, and Gray-throated Chat. One of the most interesting phenomena, and one we are likely to encounter at Lamanai and Chan Chich, is an army ant march. Birds of many families attend these marches, eating the insects, frogs, lizards, and other organisms flushed by the foraging ants. Standing quietly at the margin of an ant swarm, we get close looks at faithful ant followers, including Gray-headed Tanager, Red-throated Ant-Tanager, and a number of woodcreepers, including Tawny-winged and Northern Barred. Other possibilities are White-whiskered Puffbird, several flycatchers, migrant warblers, and perhaps a Great Tinamou. Even birds of prey like the dainty Barred Forest-Falcon follow ant swarms—all so absorbed in the sea of insect life that they ignore our fascinated observation.

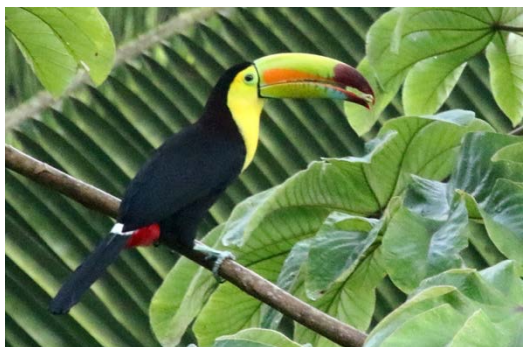
Accommodations at Lamanai Outpost Lodge (B,L,D)

Mon., Oct. 4 Lamanai Outpost Lodge

Overlooking the edge of the large New River Lagoon, Lamanai offers a different mix of birds from Chan Chich, our second lodge. Some birds at the water's edge are familiar: Neotropic Cormorant, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, and Purple Gallinule. Others, like White-collared Seedeater, Mangrove Vireo, Ruddy Crake, or the delightful American Pygmy Kingfisher remind you that you have left the United States. Open-air dining lets you be immersed in nature; local foods and tropical fruits abound!

During our stay we take several boat trips. Canoe excursions offer relaxing and intimate wildlife views, and can be arranged for both day and night paddles. Such trips frequently produce an endangered Morelet's Crocodile, iguanas, and basilisk lizards, up to five species of kingfishers, Boat-billed Heron, Gray-necked Wood-Rail, and





occasionally a rarity like an Agami Heron. At night, with the aid of spotlights, we look for several species of bats, Yucatan Nightjar, Yucatan Poorwill, and Northern Potoo.

We also make sure to have time to see the impressive Lamanai Maya Ruins, and to explore the open savanna habitat, which affords us a good mix of species including Yucatan Woodpecker, Yellow-lored Parrot, the Petén race of Botteri's Sparrow, and occasionally Aplomado Falcon.

Accommodations at Lamanai Lodge (B,L,D)

Tues., Oct. 5 Lamanai Outpost Lodge to Chan Chich Lodge

We enjoy a last morning of birding and breakfast at Lamanai Outpost Lodge before departing by van shuttle to Chan Chich Lodge. This is largely a travel day, on back roads through Mennonite farming country; we do stop for some birding along the way as the opportunity presents itself, and take a break at a small country store. We bring snacks, and plan on a late lunch upon arrival at the lodge.

Chan Chich (Maya for "little bird") is one of the premier birding lodges in the world, located near the very remote coffee and livestock producing community of Gallon Jug. En route, we watch for Crested Caracara and other birds of prey, Scissor-tailed and Fork-tailed Flycatchers, and flooded fields that attract waterfowl, large wading birds, and migrating shorebirds.

Chan Chich Rainforest Lodge, set in a Maya Plaza dating from the Classic Maya Period of 250 – 800 AD, is located within the 250,000 acre Rio Bravo Wilderness Conservation Area in northwestern Belize. The comfortable lodge and its twelve cabañas are made of local materials and are attractively furnished. From your porch you are likely to see Ocellated Turkey parading through the plaza, hear howler monkeys calling above, and see a Crested Guan crashing through the trees.

The extensive trail network could reveal Great Tinamou, Red-capped Manakin, Royal Flycatcher, and Lovely Cotinga, along with a host of trogons, parrots, and toucans. Finding their tracks, the possibility of sighting secretive wild cats adds to the excitement. You can visit Maya burial chambers with painted friezes still intact, canoe on Laguna Verde, or swim in a nearby stream where you might be joined by a playful River Otter. Chan Chich also has a swimming pool and spa in this exquisite forest setting.

The rich forest here is home to over 350 species of birds, including Ocellated Turkey, Great Curassow, Crested Guan, Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Maya Antthrush, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Royal Flycatcher, and the impossibly cute and often elusive Tody Motmot. It is always a pleasure to be here!

Mammals like Yucatan Black Howler Monkey, Central American Spider Monkey, Central American Agouti, and Gray Fox are commonly seen, and five felines, including Ocelot and Jaguar, have been found here, too. Beautiful hummingbirds like the Purple-crowned Fairy and Long-billed and Stripe-throated Hermits feed in clearings around the cabins, and both Red-capped and White-collared Manakins take berries at fruiting shrubs near the dining room.

As the morning air warms, birds of prey like Bat Falcon, White Hawk, Black Hawk-Eagle, and Plumbeous Kite soar over the cabañas. By October, the bird population is rich as local nesting birds are joined by numerous migrants: warblers, vireos, orioles, and flycatchers.

Once settled, we begin our exploration with a short afternoon hike to the Upper Plaza and the King's Tomb Trail. Mounds that have formed over unexcavated ruins provide nest sites for Lesson's Motmot, which are frequently seen around the lodge clearing. Montezuma Oropendola, which nest in colonies around the lodge, are fun to watch as they tumble and gurgle in courtship display.

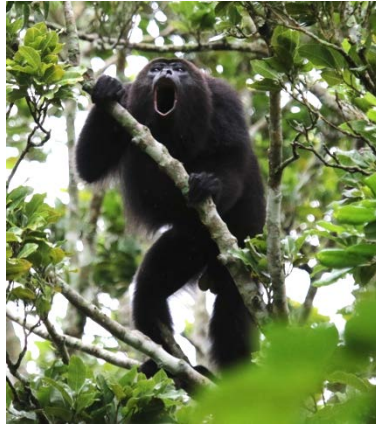
Accommodations at Chan Chich Lodge (B,L,D)

Wed., Oct. 6 Chan Chich Lodge & Nature Reserve

The nighttime serenade of Common Pauraque quickly blends into a dawn chorus of tinamous, motmots, and perhaps a Strong-billed Woodcreeper, ushering in our early morning walk. With luck we find an assortment of dazzling tropical tanagers, woodpeckers, euphonias, and honeycreepers.

After a delicious breakfast, we venture into the forest, past manakin leks and the territories of dueting Spot-breasted Wren. One trail takes us to a lower open and moist tinal forest where specialties include Rose-throated Tanager, Gray-throated Chat, and Yucatan Flycatcher. On a recent visit to the tinal, a Pheasant Cuckoo sang endlessly. Here we have a greater chance of encountering shy birds like Ruddy Quail-Dove, Great Curassow, and Scaly-throated Leaf-tosser that are unlikely to venture into the lodge clearing.





We break for lunch and perhaps a brief siesta or a swim, then head out in the late afternoon as the forest cools and life stirs. Today we likely explore the River Trail, which skirts wetter habitats. On past tours we've surprised a Tapir enjoying its bath, found both Green and Pygmy Kingfishers and watched delicate hummingbirds come in to drink and bathe.

By 5:30 PM, the afternoon is turning to dusk and we enjoy camaraderie and armchair birding at the lodge's traditional happy hour and dinner. Mealy Parrot and Olive-throated Parakeet are noisy and are seen as they come to their evening roosts.

Accommodations at Chan Chich Lodge (B,L,D)

Thurs., Oct. 7 Chan Chich Lodge & Nature Reserve

Today we have several options to choose from; our agenda is to venture farther afield. We may opt for a motorized excursion, with a visit to an escarpment, good for birds of prey (including Ornate Hawk-Eagle) or visit a lagoon that may produce a Bare-throated Tiger-Heron or Pinnated Bittern. Our local guides that are out regularly can help us make the best decision. On either outing, passing through open country around the town of Gallon Jug, we seek birds like Tropical Pewee, Giant Cowbird, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, and Bat and Laughing Falcons.

We return in the afternoon to enjoy dusk time in the beautiful surroundings, when guans and parrots come in to roost. After dinner, we venture out on a night drive. This is one of the few sites where you may actually see a Jaguar, Jaguarundi, Margay, or Ocelot in the wild. More frequently seen are White-tailed Deer, Northern Tamandua, Four-eyed Opossum, Gray Fox, and birds like Common Pauraque and Northern Potoo.

Accommodations at Chan Chich Lodge (B,L,D)

Fri., Oct. 8 Chan Chich Lodge & Nature Reserve

This morning we walk along the lush Sylvester Village road, which passes through a variety of forest types, good for birds and butterflies (when sunny). This is always a productive walk for elusive species.

In the afternoon we stroll out on the main road leading from the lodge to the suspension bridge over Chan Chich Creek. Here, huge Blue Morpho butterflies flit by, Cinnamon Becard whistle at the roadside, and fruiting trees attract Black-crowned Tityra, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Golden-hooded Tanager, and maybe a Yellow-throated Vireo. Some spotting scope work at the bridge could produce several species of dragonflies and damselflies, including one of the red-eyed dancers or the colorful Caribbean Yellowface.

We return to the lodge for a relaxing final evening and a delicious dinner, with time to recount our trip highlights.

Accommodations at Chan Chich Lodge (B,L,D)

Sat., Oct. 9 Chan Chich Rain Forest Lodge | Departures

Today, we leave Chan Chich and return to Belize City via charter flights out of Gallon Jug. Please schedule return flights for noon onwards, figuring you need to be at the airport 2.5 hours ahead of your flight. Ground transportation (that takes considerably longer than the flight) is possible out from the lodge if you prefer not to fly. (B)

Guide James P. Smith



James brings some twenty five years of guiding experience to Naturalist Journeys. Originally from Sheffield in the United Kingdom, he discovered a love for guiding in Israel in 1995 where he helped establish the Kibbutz Lotan Center for Birdwatching in the Southern Arava Valley. Since then, he's led hundreds of tours throughout the Northern Hemisphere for a number of UK-based tour companies. His trips to Israel and North America are especially close to his heart but he's also led or co-led tours to Mexico (Veracruz), The Gambia, Kenya, Iceland, Scottish Highlands, Spanish Pyrenees, Central/Southern France, Greece

(Lesvos), and India (Goa). An accomplished illustrator, James placed runner-up in the British Birds "Bird Illustrator of the Year" competition in 1992 and went on to have his work published in numerous birding magazines and journals. He also co-authored the two volume set A Guide to the Birding Hotspots of Israel (Published in 2000 by the Israel Ornithological Center and the S.P.N.I.). He returns to Israel every year to lead trips and remains an active member of the Israel Rarities and Distribution Committee. When not leading tours he can be found at home in Western Massachusetts with his wife Susannah and their young son Matan.

Naturalist Journeys, LLC is an equal opportunity service provider and committed to the goal of ensuring equal opportunity for all in employment and program delivery.

Cost of the Journey

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Please note, starting in January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Travel Information

Please plan to make air travel plans only after the minimum group size has been reached—Naturalist Journeys will contact you when the tour is confirmed. Please arrive in Belize City at the Philip SW Goldson International Airport no later than 2:00 PM on October 2.

Please note that for the departure date, we are a short charter flight away from the International Airport, but it is best to plan outbound flights no earlier than NOON on October 9. If you find a flight close to noon, please inquire. If staying on in Belize, we can help you make plans.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is \$4250 DBL / \$4850 SGL per person, based on double occupancy, from Belize City. Cost includes: all accommodations; all meals as stated in the itinerary (*B,L,D*); group airport transfers; in-country charter flights, ground transportation within Belize between two lodges; professional guide services; park, preserve, and other activity fees; lodge tips; and miscellaneous program expenses.

Tour price does not include: roundtrip airfare to and from Belize City or items of a personal nature such as laundry, portage, telephone charges, or alcoholic beverages, gratuities for maids or porters.

Photo Credits

Amazon Kingfisher, Barry Ulman (BU); Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Bill Fraser (BF); Ocelot, Don Cooper; Collared Aracari, Peg Abbott (PA); Morelet's Crocodile, PA; Ocellated Turkey, PA; Central American Spider Monkey, PA; Lesser Nighthawk, PA; Jabiru, BU; King Vulture, BF; White-whiskered Puffbird, PA; Purple Gallinule, Tom Dove (TD); Naturalist Journeys Group at Lamanai Ruins, Naturalist Journeys Stock; Keel-billed Toucan, PA; Boat-billed Herons, TD; Barred Forest Falcon, Narca Moore-Craig; Chan Chich, courtesy Chan Chich; Lovely Cotinga, James Adams; Rufous-tailed Jacamar, TD; Tody Motmot, PA; Crested Guan, Sandy Sorkin; White Hawk, Robert Gallardo; Yucatan Black Howler Monkey, PA; Montezuma Oropendola, TD.