

Ultimate Southern Belize

With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures

Feb. 23 – Mar. 6, 2022

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Naturalist Journeys, LLC





We call it **ULTIMATE** for the way this journey is crafted, bringing years of expertise to its planning. The result is an in-depth birding and natural history experience at a pace that lets you absorb and learn. We've carefully selected top birding lodges with excellent local guides and we visit important conservation areas.

We start off at Blackrock, a fabulous lodge with a view of the wild Macal River with massive cliffs of the pine-ridge plateau behind it, home to rare Orange-breasted Falcon and elusive Black-and-white Hawk Eagle. We move a short ways into the pine ridge uplands and most comfortable lodgings at Hidden Valley where poolside dining on magical tropical nights is memorable. This lovely lodge sits on a huge private reserve where we venture to see King Vulture, possible Stygian Owl, and a host of other pine-habitat species. From here we can visit Caracol, one of the top Maya sites in the region, also a place replete with birds. We follow the scenic route known as the Hummingbird Highway to the coast, where beachside lodgings at Hopkins put us just in the right place to explore Cockscomb Basin, one of Belize Audubon Society's prime conservation reserves. There is also a fabulous wetland right here so it's nice to be there for the sunset fly-in of marsh species. Steven Choco, premier guide of the region, joins us here and then takes us to his "patch" of southern Belize, where we have our final four nights at The Lodge at Big Falls. For us this is now "family time," we so admire the staff of this place.

Believe us when we say our guides are excited about this combination and can't wait to share the rich Maya Biosphere ecoregion with you.

Tour Highlights

- Enjoy three nights at Black Rock lodge along the Macal River, a perfect base to explore the local forests and the first of our Maya ruins
- Opt to canoe or tube to the Belize Botanic Gardens, 45 acres of tropical wonder
- Bird the Mountain Pine Ridge Reserve and Caracol Maya site from Hidden Valley Inn
- Relax ocean-side at Hopkins Bay, perfect for sea breezes and exploring Cockscomb Basin for waders galore
- See Scarlet Macaw take their morning flight at Red Bank
- Explore and bird with top local guide, Steven Choco, from The Lodge at Big Falls; Steve was the 2017 recipient of the prestigious National Tour Guide of the Year award from the Belize Tourism Board

Tour Summary

12-Day / 11-Night Belize Birding & Nature Tour
w/ James P. Smith & Steven Choco

\$5490, from Belize City

Airport is Philip S. W. Goldson International (BZE)

Day-to-Day Itinerary



Wed., Feb. 23 Arrivals in Belize

Welcome to Belize! It's hard to believe that just a short two hour flight from a USA gateway puts you right into the tropical zone. Breathe deep—you are HERE and your vacation starts now. Please plan to arrive by 2:30 PM.

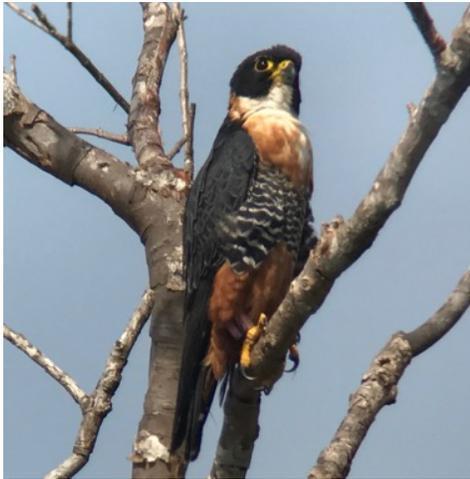
We head out from the airport to reach Black Rock lodge late in the day. On the way, we keep our binoculars handy, scanning fencerows and utility lines for the first birds of the trip. Expect to see Tropical Kingbird, Vermilion and Social Flycatchers, Great Kiskadee, White-collared Seedeater, and Tropical Mockingbird, with Lesser Yellow-headed and Black Vultures soaring overhead. We also keep our eyes open for wading birds in the roadside wetlands and farm ponds as we move into the countryside, watching for Tricolored and Little Blue Herons, Wood Stork, and possibly a Roseate Spoonbill.

We want to arrive at the lodge in time for you to take in the marvelous late-day feeding frenzy on feeders below the veranda. Our route is about a 2.5 hour drive in total, the last seven miles on a country back road (yes bumps—that is what keeps the area pristine and wild!). Black Rock considers its style as casual, in keeping with the local culture. Its setting is dramatic, above the winding Macal River. Views from the dining area down to the river and out to extensive forested ridges of Don Eljio Panti National Park, a 13,000-acre swath of luxurious rainforest, are sublime. Settle in, scan the sky for raptors, and enjoy the relaxed vibe! Staff help to make you immediately feel at home.

Accommodations at Black Rock Lodge (D)

Thurs., Feb. 24 Local Birding | A Chance to Canoe | Belize Botanical Gardens

Join the lodge's keen birding guide for an early morning bird walk starting at 6:30 AM. Guides and guests avidly note their sightings on eBird, contributing knowledge of this region through citizen science efforts. We plan to participate too! Often greeting us in the morning are Crimson-collared and Yellow-winged Tanager, Black-headed and Grayish Saltators, Red-legged Honeycreeper, and other species of mixed flocks. Barred Antshrike and Spot-breasted Wren call as Rufous-tailed Hummingbird monitor nectar at the garden flowers.



After taking advantage of the early super-charged bird activity on the grounds, we enjoy a full breakfast, never leaving the beautiful view as you dine. On the towering cliffs behind the lodge, a resident pair of Orange-breasted Falcon have occurred for many years. Vaux's Swift patrol the sky.

After breakfast we have the chance to continue birding the area; watch for some of the showy rainforest species such as Keel-billed Toucan, Collared Aracari, and parrots of several species including Red-lored, White-fronted, and Mealy. More secretive on trails through the forest, we scan for Scaly-throated Leaf-tosser, Pheasant Cuckoo, Tody Motmot, Gartered and Black-headed Trogon, White-necked Puffbird, and more. The lodge has an extensive trail system.

This afternoon have some (optional) fun, taking time to tube or canoe on the Macal River down to another lodge, from which we visit the Belize Botanical Garden. Located on the banks of the Macal River in the Maya Mountains, the gardens host 45 acres of tropical wonder. Orchids, palms, cycads, and edibles abound. Watch for Common Tody Flycatcher, Rose-throated Becard, and both Sulphur-bellied and Royal Flycatchers. It's a great place for birds and butterflies too!

We return to watch sunset with a view and enjoy dinner.
Accommodations at Black Rock Lodge (B,L,D)

Fri., Feb. 25 El Pilar Maya Site | Spanish Lookout | Aguacate Lagoon

We leave early at day-break for a full-day adventure, returning around 4:00 PM. Our first destination is El Pilar, a fascinating Maya site close to the Guatemala border. The site covers about 120 acres with the remnants of 25 plazas, 12 pyramids, and other buildings. This Middle Pre-Classic and Late Classic Maya site was first mapped in 1983 and now forms the heart of El Pilar Archeological Reserve for Maya Flora and Fauna, a 5000-acre reserve.



The surrounding area is lush with many streams and waterfalls, including well-known Bullet Tree Falls. The site is only lightly excavated, but it's still quite interesting and its trails are ideal for birding.

After the ruins, we drive on to the Mennonite village of Spanish Lookout. In this agricultural area we find Tropical Kingbird, Vermilion and Social Flycatchers, Great Kiskadee, Morelet's Seedeater, Tropical Mockingbird, and Black Vultures soaring overhead. Blue-gray and Yellow-winged Tanagers, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Blue Ground-Dove, Roadside Hawk, Olive-throated Parakeet, Red-lored Parrot, Blue Bunting, Barred Forest-Falcon, Rose-throated Becard, Squirrel Cuckoo, and Black-cowled Oriole are other possible species.

Just twenty minutes down the road is one of the best birding hotspots in all of Belize, Aguacate Lagoon. This is a private wetland preserve of nearly 300 acres. We look for a variety of herons and egrets, resident Laughing Falcon, and other species. The lagoon is named for the many avocado trees that grow here now, planted in the early 1960s by Mennonite farmers.

Throughout our day we hope for mammal sightings, too—possible are White-nosed Coatimundi, Kinkajou, Deppe's Squirrel, and Yucatan Black Howler Monkey.

Accommodations at Black Rock Lodge (B,L,D)

Sat., Feb. 26 Mountain Pine Ridge Reserve

Today we pack up, making a short move but one to totally different habitat. After early morning birding on the grounds of Black Rock and a delicious breakfast, we load luggage and drive up into pine habitat, in search of Brown and Green Jays, orioles, and raucous groups of Plain Chachalaca which, alongside Acorn, Pale-billed, and Golden-olive Woodpeckers, forage in the nearby pines. With luck we also find Melodious Blackbird, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Masked Tityra, and Slaty-tailed Trogon as well as several hummingbirds, including Azure-crowned and White-necked Jacobin. While some of the United States' Sky Island species breed to the north and return here to winter, we keep an eye out for lingering Greater Pewee, Grace's Warbler, and Hepatic Tanager. Also possible are Rufous-capped Warbler, Yellow-faced Grassquit, Gray-crowned Yellowthroat, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, and Dusky-capped Flycatcher. We also keep an eye to the sky for sightings of King Vulture overhead.



We enjoy a garden lunch at Hidden Valley, keeping our eyes open for Yellow-backed and Yellow-tailed Orioles, then check into our rooms at Hidden Valley. We then head out with the lodge's marvelous naturalist to see some private reserve sites and species before nightfall. A likely trip is to nearby King Vulture Falls. As the name suggests, this is a roosting area for the imposing King Vulture, second only to the condors among New World vultures in overall mass and wingspan. We hope to get good looks as they return from soaring on the thermals along the escarpment.

This evening enjoy dinner by the pool and tropical breezes. We tally up our sightings and look forward to the next day!

Hidden Valley Inn is nestled in a private, impressive 7,200-acre nature reserve featuring open Caribbean pine habitat with scattered pockets of tropical broadleaf forest. Each of the inn's luxurious cottages feature a fireplace and handmade mahogany and leather furniture, with full bath (including shower), comfortable bed, writing desk, screened windows, and Wi-Fi.

Accommodations at Hidden Valley Inn (D)

Sun., Feb. 27 Caracol Maya Ceremonial Center

After coffee and a quick bite this morning, we leave Hidden Valley early for the Vaca Plateau to reach Caracol during the cool of the day—the best time for birding and exploration of the site. En route we move from the well-drained granitic soils that favor pines to limestone substrates that give rise to broad-leafed forest, resulting in a significant change in avifauna. The birding on the drive is excellent, and we could have our first looks at Keel-billed Toucan, Ocelated Turkey, and possibly Laughing Falcon as we descend into the lower woodlands. At the river that divides the Mountain Pine Ridge from the rest of the Maya Mountains, we may even have a chance to glimpse the rare Scarlet Macaw (though we have a better chance for this later, during our stay at Big Falls).

Staying at Hidden Valley provides ready access to Caracol, a Maya site within the remote Chiquibul National Park that rivals Guatemala's Tikal in size and scope. Although loggers discovered the site in 1938, only in the last three decades has it been renovated and opened to visitors. Walking the area today, we find a marvelous blend of nature and history, with lush broad-leafed forests intertwining and surrounding five plazas, numerous stelae, pyramids, hieroglyphics, and an astronomy observatory. Particularly stunning is the temple of Caana, or "Sky Palace;" at nearly 140 feet it is one of the tallest Maya structures known. The Mayas of Caracol were at the peak of their influence during the latter part of the Classic Period, approximately 400 – 850 A.D. We explore both forest trails and ruins, learning about the latest discoveries at Caracol, quite likely the city from which Tikal in Guatemala was conquered in 562 A.D.

The birding at Caracol is extraordinary and we hope to see Montezuma Oropendula, several parrots (including White-crowned, Brown-headed, and Red-lored), all three species of Belizean motmots (Lesson's, Tody, and the rare Keel-billed), Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Collared Aracari, and the colorful Crimson-collared Tanager. In



late winter Keel-billed Motmot are courting and can be quite vocal, so we have a fair chance to find this rare gem! The area also supports Great Curassow and Crested Guan. The exceedingly rare Lovely Cotinga, perhaps Belize's most colorful songbird, is occasionally observed here, and scarce raptors such as Ornate and Black Hawk-Eagles have also been reported from Caracol.

Finding mammals like White-nosed Coatimundi, Kinkajou, Deppe's Squirrel, and Mexican Black Howler Monkey (considered by some to be the most endangered of the 15 known species of howler monkeys), is an important part of our tour.

After our picnic lunch we head back to the inn, stopping along the way at the Rio Frio Cave (well regarded by birders) with its quiet pools and impressive formations. The shaded forest trails leading to the cave offer the chance to observe seldom seen understory species such as Orange-billed Sparrow and White-throated Robin, as well as both Red-throated and Red-crowned Ant Tanagers (not often seen together) and possibly Plain Xenops, a tiny acrobatic species that gleans insects from the underside of leaves.

Upon our return to Hidden Valley we relax or stroll the lodge grounds for the rest of the afternoon, and then meet to review our bird list for the day before enjoying another excellent dinner.

Accommodations at Hidden Valley Inn (B,L,D)

Mon., Feb. 28 Hidden Valley Inn | The Ocean at Hopkins Bay

We depart Hidden Valley after breakfast, making our way to the coast. We break up the drive south with two nights at the beach, giving us time to bird a primo lagoon and the dynamic Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Preserve.

We drive directly to be there by lunch, giving you some free time to swim and unwind in this lovely location. About 4:00 PM we meet expert guide Steven Choco coming up from The Lodge at Big Falls to meet us. He takes us to a marvelous lagoon not far from the hotel where we should get good looks at large wading birds such as Jabiru, Woodstork, Roseate Spoonbill, and various herons and egrets. There may be smaller waders and shorebirds and a chance for secretive rails. Dinner tonight is at the resort.

Accommodations at the Muy 'Ono Hopkins Bay Belize Resort (B,L,D)

Tues., Mar. 1 Cockscomb Basin | Hopkins Wetlands

We get up early to head to Cockscomb Basin. We bird some of the more open areas outside the reserve, have breakfast at a favorite local spot, then continue into the preserve, starting at the visitor center for the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary. Even a short visit to Cockscomb can be very productive for birds, with the chance to see forest and scrub species such as Short-billed Pigeon, Red-capped and White-collared Manakins, Lesser Greenlet, and possibly even Green Honeycreeper (among many others). Open areas around the visitor



center may yield views of Boat-billed Flycatcher, Ovenbird, Groove-billed Ani, Variable Seedeater, and Golden-fronted Woodpecker.

Further in to the reserve, we hope to find the incomparable Lovely Cotinga, Keel-billed Motmot, Great Curassow, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Royal Flycatcher, Scale-breasted Leaf-tosser, and other ground-dwelling birds (perhaps accompanying an ant swarm!), Red-capped and White-crowned Manakins, and possible Barred or Collared Forest Falcons. Overhead we watch for Black Hawk-Eagle and other soaring raptors.

After a great morning of birding, we have lunch in the local village and head back to our oceanside digs for a swim and chance to relax. Late afternoon, keen birders can go to the nearby wetlands for a great show of wading birds, with even the magnificent Jabiru possible!

Accommodations at the Muy 'Ono Hopkins Bay Belize Resort (B,L,D)

Wed., Mar. 2 Red Bank | The Lodge at Big Falls

This morning we have another early start in order to arrive at Red Bank Village at dawn. The hills behind Red Bank are the most accessible area in Belize to reliably locate Scarlet Macaw. Conservation organizations, as well as the village of Red Bank, have been involved in a macaw monitoring program for well over a decade, gathering data on the movement and behavior of these charismatic birds that arrive in fall, sometimes as early as



September, and depart by early spring. Early morning sightings of a flight of macaws gliding around the hillside with the sun catching their plumage is an unforgettable experience for any birder.

Breakfast is once again taken at a local restaurant run by a Maya family in Red Bank village. After breakfast we continue birding in the area among mature forest. We again watch for Scarlet Macaw, as well as Collared and Slaty-tailed Trogons, Lesson's Motmot, Green Honeycreeper, King Vulture, Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Black-and-white Hawk-Eagle, and White Hawk.

We arrive at the lodge by mid-afternoon. The Lodge at Big Falls is located on the forested banks of the Rio Grande River (kayaks provided for leisure time). This is one of the very best birding lodges in Belize, with attractive grounds, a beautiful swimming pool, and excellent accommodations that include hardwood interiors, sparkling bathrooms, comfortable furnishings, and fully screened windows. Enjoy the afternoon strolling the grounds, relaxing by the pool, or taking the kayaks out.

Before dinner, we may spot Russet-naped Wood-Rail and scampering agouti on the open lawns fronting the main lodge building, which has a breezy, covered porch, Wi-Fi access, and comfortable seating—perfect for relaxing with an afternoon drink or morning coffee, while watching Rufous-tailed Hummingbird at the feeders or pondering your bird list.

The Lodge at Big Falls offers the advantage of outstanding birding right on site, and it's possible to spot species such as Gartered Trogon, Yellow-billed Caciue, Gray-headed and Golden-hooded Tanagers, Grayish Saltator, and Red-throated Ant-Tanager literally steps from your cabin door. Specialties like the shy Bare-crowned Antbird and Rufous-breasted Spinetail (the latter the most northerly species of this largely South American group) are regularly recorded within earshot of the main lodge, while the immediately adjacent Rio Grande River provides habitat for four of Belize's five kingfisher species (i.e., Green, Amazon, Belted, and Ringed), which can be seen without leaving the property.

This evening we discuss activities for the coming days, go over our species list, and listen to the eerie calls of the Common Pauraque as the sun sets before dinner. Over the next three days we have the chance to bird and explore in a range of habitats, from savanna grasslands and coastal forests and mangroves, to interior forests and swamps.

Accommodations at The Lodge at Big Falls (B,L,D)

Thurs., Mar. 3 Morning Lodge Birding | Afternoon Birding Excursion

With such excellent birding right on our doorstep, it's hard to resist getting up at the crack of dawn to head right out. Coffee is ready ahead of breakfast, and a walk around the compound is sure to be productive. Our guide, Steven Choco, takes us on two early morning bird walks. This morning we plan to bird around the lodge property. The lodge sits on thirty acres within a long meander of the Rio Grande and includes riparian,



secondary growth forest, disused agricultural land, orchard, and meadow habitats. Species we search for include Black-faced Antthrush, Barred Antshrike, Great Antshrike, Bare-crowned Antbird, Black-and-white Owl, Crimson-collared Tanager, Golden-hooded Tanager, Black-crowned Tityra, Pale-billed Woodpecker, Lineated Woodpecker, and Stub-tailed Spadebill.

After an excellent breakfast, we stay with Steven Choco for some birding on the lodge grounds. In late morning we head out with a packed lunch. All of the field trips from the lodge are within a thirty-minute drive, meaning less time in vehicles and more time outdoors. Depending on what's being seen at the time of our visit, we may head to Blue Creek Village or a similar site (Forest Home), both featuring mature broadleaf and gallery tropical forests with riparian understory habitats.

Birding at both sites can be excellent, with important species in field and forest edge habitats include Striped Cuckoo, Bronzed and Giant Cowbirds, Plain-breasted Ground Dove, Blue-black Grassquit, Scaly-breasted Hummingbird, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, and Scrub Euphonia. The gorgeous Crimson-collared Tanager and closely related Passerini's Tanager (the latter a specialty for southern Belize) are also both found along the road into Blue Creek (as well as on the lodge grounds at Big Falls). Less common raptors such as Gray-headed and Double-toothed Kites are also sometimes seen here, together with the common Roadside Hawk.

Birding mature forests in these areas can yield a number of intriguing mid-canopy and understory species, including Lesson's Motmot, Little and Great Tinamou, Collared Trogon, White-breasted Wood Wren, Strong-billed Woodcreeper, Red-capped Manakin, Black-crowned Antshrike, and the seldom seen Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher. Along the forest margins we look for Collared Aracari, as well as White-whiskered Puffbird and Rufous-tailed Jacamar, the latter species typically sitting motionless for extended periods as they wait for large insect prey.

Accommodations at The Lodge at Big Falls (B,L,D)

Fri., Mar. 4 Guide's Choice | Dump Rice Fields

As Steve is such a master birder, we like to allow him some choices to make the most of the moment. We may choose Blue Creek, a great hike with some primary forest and attendant elusive species; or, we may rise early to leave for our birding among mature forest about two miles from the coast at Punta Gorda. The area is also home to a troop of Yucatan Black Howler Monkeys that we have a good chance of seeing and hearing in the forest canopy. There are local pocket wetlands where we look for Little Blue Heron, Green Heron, and other egrets as well as roosting Yellow-crowned Night-Heron.



We return to Big Falls for lunch at Pearleen’s restaurant. This is Caribbean food like you’ve never seen, almost reason to book the trip! We may visit a local spice farm during the mid-day quiet hours, a fascinating operation with tropical spices grown from around the world.

Before sunset we have the option to visit what is known as the “Dump Rice Field,” an expanse of rice paddies and swamps located a short drive from the lodge. The road passing through sits on an elevated causeway, with side tracks leading into the marshy areas. Key species here include Sora, Ruddy and Uniform Crake, Purple Gallinule, White-throated Flycatcher, Least Bittern, Short-tailed Hawk, Limpkin, and Common Tody-Flycatcher. Dinner this evening is at the lodge.

Accommodations at The Lodge at Big Falls (B,L,D)

Sat., Mar. 5 Nim Li Punit | San Felipe Hills

After grabbing coffee, juice, and a roll, our early morning birding outing today with Steven Choco focuses on the Nim Li Punit Maya site, located just six miles from the lodge. Nim Li Punit, which is Kekchi Maya for “Big Hat,” dates from the Maya Classic Period that flourished from the 5th through the 8th Century AD, and consists of three distinct plazas and several step-pyramids. In 2015, the second largest carved jade artifact in Belize was discovered here. The site itself is set high in mature forest with fantastic views east across the coastal plain to the cays in the Gulf of Honduras.

The area offers some very good birding, including several woodpeckers (Lineated, Pale-billed, Smoky-brown, and potentially Chestnut-colored) and woodcreepers (Streak-headed, Wedge-billed, and Ivory-billed), as well as various migrant warblers and vireos. Other possible highlights include White-crowned Parrot, Keel-billed Toucan, White-throated Thrush, Hook-billed Kite, Red-legged and Green Honeycreeper, Bat Falcon, Yellow-bellied Tyrannulet, Blue Grosbeak, Montezuma Oropendola, and Rose-throated Becard.

We return for a proper breakfast, and then head out for the San Felipe Hills, a karst landscape about 12 miles from the lodge. Our goal is to bird across an orange grove (Belizean orchards are not the manicured settings we’re used to at home, and can be great for birding), and eventually arrive at the karst limestone foothills of San Felipe that rise to a height of around four hundred feet. As the ground slopes upwards, we enter a broadleaf forest. We look for some of the most difficult to locate species in Belize, including Tody Motmot, Rufous Piha, Rufous Mourner, Northern Schiffornis, Nightingale Wren, Scaly-throated Leaf-tosser, White-winged Becard, Tawny-crowned Greenlet, and Northern Barred Woodcreeper.



As the day heats up, we head to Ixcacao Maya Belizean Chocolate a small twenty-year old business run by Juan and Abelina Cho. We have lunch there with a chocolate themed main course and a selection of beautiful vegetable dishes from their own gardens. We also have a chance to try a variety of chocolate flavors such as chocolate with salt, chili, cardamom, ginger, and coconut and learn about the chocolate making process. We return to the lodge for a break—swimming or kayaking, or perhaps a good book and a hammock on your veranda.

We gather on the lodge’s porch this evening to update bird lists and review the day, and after dusk we may get lucky and hear (or even see) one or more of the resident Black-and-white Owls, which previously nested on the lodge grounds (and were recorded here in 2017 and 2018). We should also see Common Pauraque and Lesser Nighthawk flitting across the dusky sky before we head inside. Dinners at Big Falls are excellent, often featuring fresh seafood and Belizean beef, with local fruits and vegetables—a perfect end to the day and the tour.

Accommodations at The Lodge at Big Falls (B,L,D)

Sun., Mar. 6 Departures

Our adventure comes to an end today. This morning we drive the 30 minutes to Punta Gorda and board a Tropic Air flight back to Belize City. To ensure a smooth connection, please plan your international flight to depart after 1:00 PM today. (B)

Guides James P. Smith & Steve Choco



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.

Raised in the local Kek'chi Maya community, Steve Choco is one of the top local guides in Belize, and a great resource for visitors exploring on this Southern Belize nature tour. Steve developed his love of nature and his early fascination with wildlife during camping trips with his grandfather in the Belizean bush. Recognized today for his unparalleled birding skills, Steve was the 2017 recipient of the prestigious National Tour Guide of the Year award, given annually by the Belize Tourism Board. Naturalist Journeys relies on Steve and other experts to

ensure high quality birding (and cultural) experiences for travelers.

Cost of the Journey

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. 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. Please arrive in Belize City at the Philip SW Goldson International Airport no later than 2:30 PM on February 23. Please plan departures after 1:00 PM on March 6.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the main tour is **\$5490 DBL / \$6350 SGL** per person, based on double occupancy, from Belize City. Cost includes: all accommodations; all meals as stated in the itinerary; group airport transfers; ground transportation within Belize; domestic flight at the end of the journey; professional guide services; park, preserve, and other activity fees; 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 your local lodge guides in Belize are not included, these are at your discretion, but highly appreciated and recommended.

Photo Credits

Golden-hooded Tanager, Peg Abbott (PA); Slaty-tailed Trogon (F), PA; Jabiru, Barry Ulman (BU); Birding Belize, PA; Black Howler Monkey, PA; Roseate Spoonbills, Betty Andres (BA); Striated Heron, Narca Moore-Craig (NMC); Fork-tailed Flycatcher, PA; Acorn Woodpecker, Greg Smith; Great Kiskadee, Bud Ferguson; Slaty-tailed Trogon with fruit, PA; Violet Saberwing, Sandy Sorkin (SS); Masked Tityra, PA; Green Jays, Bob Behrstock; Orange-breasted Falcon, Pat Lueders; King Vulture, Doug Greenberg (DG); Squirrel Cuckoo, SS; Black-cowled Oriole, Naturalist Journeys Stock (NJS); Blue-gray Tanager, PA; Tody Motmot, PA; Olive-backed Euphonia, SS; Black-faced Grosbeak, SS; Crested Guan, SS; Birding Caracol, NMC; Great Curassow, SS; Keel-billed Toucan, DG; Muy 'Ono Hopkins Bay x3 courtesy of hopkinsbaybelize.com; Lesson's Motmot, PA; Red-capped Manakin, Bob Behrstock (BB); Barred Forest Falcon, NMC; The Lodge at Big Fall, courtesy thelodgeatbigfalls.com; Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, SS; Ringed Kingfisher, BU; Great Tinamou, Terry Peterson; Yellow-billed Cacique, PA; Birding Big Falls, Bob Meinke (BM); Blue-black Grassquit, SS; Roadside Hawk, Naturalist Journeys Stock (NJS); Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Tom Dove.

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