

Panama & the Wild Darién

with Naturalist Journeys

July 29 – August 5, 2022

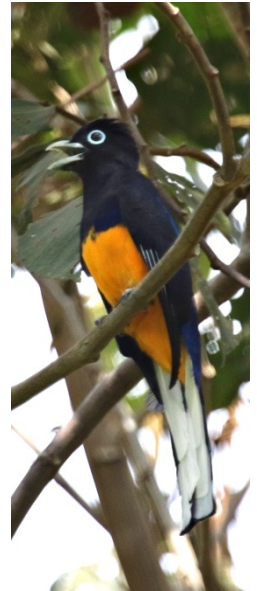
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Discover Panama, where the wildlife of North and South America blend and the biodiversity is unmatched. On this Panama birding and nature tour, we explore the dense western jungles interspersed with open agricultural areas of Panama's Darién region, long coveted, but only recently opened to birders.

Like so much of the world, most of the Darién's primary forest has been logged, yet it still boasts many rich habitats; indeed, the Darién continues to produce new Central American records and is a stepping stone for northward spreading species like Whistling Heron, Southern Lapwing, Slender-billed Kite, Pearly-breasted Cuckoo, Cattle Tyrant, and Yellow-hooded Blackbird.

Spend a delightful five nights at the Canopy Camp Darién, which boasts modern amenities like large, safari-style tents, full-size beds, private baths and showers, flush toilets, solar electricity, and fans. One night at the start of the tour is in Panama City.

Tour Highlights

- Visit Nusagandi, one of Panama's first ecotourism projects, conceived and built by the Kuna Tribe
- Bird Canopy Camp's trails for local specialties like Black Antshrike, Double-banded Graytail, Gray-cheeked Nunlet, Yellow-breasted Flycatcher, and Russet-winged Schiffornis
- Explore near Yaviza, at the end of the Pan-American Highway and less than 50km from Colombia
- Search for night birds near camp, including Striped, Crested, Barn, Black-and-white, and Mottled Owls, as well as Common and Great Potoos
- Hike to Las Lagunas in search of beautiful Capped Heron and the extraordinary Black-capped Donacobius
- Visit Fundación Tierra Nueva, a non-profit that focuses on sustainable development of the Darién's people
- Visit the mountain village of Nuevo Vigía, accessible by piragua (locally made dugout canoes)

Tour Summary

8-Day / 7-Night Birding & Nature Tour in Panama's Darién with Local Expert Guides

\$2990 from Panama City

Airport is Tocumen International (PTY)

Itinerary

Fri., July 29 Arrival in Panama

Today you arrive in Central America's southernmost country! Upon your arrival 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 birdwatch right on the grounds of the hotel. Great-tailed Grackle, Clay-colored Thrush, Variable Seedeater, Tropical Kingbird, Blue-gray Tanager, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, and more await your visit in the gardens.

Those arriving in time can join your tour host for dinner. We meet our expert local guides tomorrow.

Accommodations at Riande Aeropuerto Hotel (D)

Sat., July 30 Nusagandi Forest Reserve | Canopy Camp Darién

This morning we enjoy a delicious breakfast in the hotel restaurant, featuring fresh tropical fruits and juices. Our local guide arrives at 6:15 AM to answer any questions you may have. Soon after breakfast we head for eastern Panama, where a host of great birds and plenty of exploring await!

The journey to our final destination is approximately five hours, but we make stops along the way in exciting birding areas. As we drive east along the Pan-American Highway, we scan for roadside birds and open-field raptors, including Savanna Hawk and Crested Caracara.

Our first scheduled stop is in the Nusagandi area, not too far off the highway in the foothills of the Caribbean Slope. Nusagandi was one of the first ecotourism projects in Panama, conceived and built by indigenous people. It provides naturalists access to an area administered and protected by the Guna (Kuna) Tribe.

As we follow the El Llano-Cartí Road north, we cross the Continental Divide and reach the Comarca (reserve) of Guna Yala (formerly a portion of San Blas Province). Here we explore the trails through the pristine forest of the Nusagandi Forest Reserve in search of rarities and localized species including Sapayoa, Speckled Antshrike, Stripe-throated Wren, Slate-throated Gnatcatcher, Rufous-winged, Sulphur-rumped, and Black-and-yellow Tanagers, Yellow-eared Toucanet, the endemic Stripe-cheeked Woodpecker, Blue-fronted Parrotlet, Streak-chested Antpitta, and Tawny-capped Euphonia.

While enjoying a lovely Panamanian lunch, the hummingbirds at the feeders capture our attention, as Long-billed Starthroat, Sapphire-throated Hummingbird, Scaly-breasted Hummingbird, and Black-throated Mango take their lunch, too, offering great photo opportunities.

After lunch, we head back to the Pan-American Highway and continue east. Although we are on the Pan-American Highway, the passport check at the provincial boundary reminds us that we are entering a more remote part of Panama. We carry on from here to the Canopy Camp Darién, arriving before daylight fades so we can settle into our tents and get acquainted with the setting. After a delicious dinner of fresh American and Panamanian fare, we gather for an overview of the days to come and settle into our tents for the night.

Accommodations at Canopy Camp (B,L,D)

Sun., July 31 – Wed., Aug. 3 Four Full Days at Canopy Camp

Most mornings start with a before sunrise coffee or tea and enjoying the dawn chorus of unfamiliar bird songs, including the mellow "wolf-whistle" of the handsome Barred Puffbird. Yellow-throated and Keel-billed Toucans call from the towering Cuipo trees; Red-lored and Mealy Parrots fly overhead; and White-bellied Antbird, Bright-rumped Attila, White-headed Wren, Golden-headed Manakin, and Rufous-tailed Jacamar sing from the surrounding forests, while Pale-bellied Hermit and Sapphire-throated Hummingbird visit the flowers around

camp. By the 7:30 AM breakfast call, we are ready to refuel! We explore many locations during our four full days here.

The following are some of the areas we plan to visit and explore during our time at camp. Please note that the itinerary is flexible, and may change without prior notice due to weather, alterations in habitat, or other conditions.

Bayano Lake Area & Torti Area

We drive along the Pan-American Highway, and scan for roadside birds and open-field raptors including Savanna Hawk and Crested Caracara. At the bridge at Bayano Lake, a great opportunity awaits to see what we can see along the lakeside. This reservoir supports great numbers of water birds, including a large colony of Neotropic Cormorant, as well as Anhinga, Cocoi Heron, and the rare Bare-throated Tiger-Heron. We scan the water's edge for Purple Gallinule, Pied Water-Tyrant, Smooth-billed Ani, and Ruddy-breasted Seedeater. A short trail leading from the water's edge is a great place to search for Black Antshrike, Bare-crowned Antbird, Rufous-winged Antwren, and Golden-collared Manakin. Just 10 minutes down the road at Río Mono Bridge, the surrounding forest is home to One-coloured Becard, Black-headed Tody-Flycatcher, Blue Cotinga, Pied Puffbird, Orange-crowned Oriole, Blue Ground Dove, and more. We also scan the river below for Green-and-rufous Kingfisher and the elusive Fasciated Tiger-Heron. The forest edge and scrubby roadsides around Rio Torti offer good opportunities to see Pacific Antwren, Double-banded Graytail, and Little Cuckoo. At a lovely Panamanian restaurant in Torti, the hummingbirds at the feeders capture our attention, as Long-billed Starthroat, Sapphire-throated Hummingbird, Scaly-breasted Hummingbird, Black-throated Mango, and more take their lunch as well; great hummingbird photo opportunities abound throughout this Panama wildlife tour!

Canopy Camp Grounds & Nando's Trail

Yellow-throated and Keel-billed Toucans call from the towering Cuipo trees; Red-lored and Mealy Parrots fly overhead; White-bellied Antbird, Bright-rumped Attila, White-headed Wren and Golden-headed Manakin sing from the surrounding forests; while Pale-bellied Hermit and Sapphire-throated Hummingbird visit the flowers around camp. Rufous-tailed Jacamar and Barred Puffbird are also seen frequently around the grounds. We work our way into the forest on "Nando's Trail" in hopes of finding Tiny Hawk, Black Antshrike, Great Antshrike, Olive-backed Quail-Dove, Cinnamon Becard, Black-tailed Trogon, Double-banded Graytail, Gray-cheeked Nunlet, Yellow-breasted Flycatcher, Royal Flycatcher, and Russet-winged Schiffornis. We also be looking for groups of Red-throated Caracara, King Vulture, and Short-tailed Hawk overhead in the clearings. Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Plumbeous and Zone-tailed Hawks are also possible.

In the open areas, the verbenas are full of hummingbird and butterfly activity, where we hope to see Violet-bellied Hummingbird, Pale-bellied Hermit, Long-billed Starthroat, Blue-throated Goldentail, and if lucky, the stunning Ruby-Topaz Hummingbird feeding here. Spot-crowned Barbet, Olivaceous Piculet, White-headed Wren, Red-rumped Woodpecker, and Streak-headed Woodcreeper are other birds we may encounter. If desired, we can hike up the slope to stand in the shadows of two giant Cuipo trees.

There is an opportunity during the week to explore the grounds of the Canopy Camp at night in search of nocturnal birds and mammals, including Black-and-white and Mottled Owls, Great and Common Potoos, Kinkajous, Central American Woolly Opossum, and more!

Birding the Pan-American Highway

We head southeast and bird the forests and swampy meadows along the road toward Yaviza, at the end of the Pan-American Highway. Black-billed Flycatcher, Sooty-headed Tyrannulet, Jet Antbird, Black Oropendola, Pied Water-Tyrant, Bicolored and Black-collared Hawks, Pearl and White-tailed Kites, Limpkin, Spot-breasted Woodpecker, Ruddy-breasted Seedeater, Yellow-hooded Blackbird, Black-capped Donacobius, and Red-breasted Meadowlark can all be found as we head further into Darién.

El Salto Road

El Salto Road extends 6 km north from the Pan-American Highway and ends at the mighty Río Chucunaque. This open road and surrounding dry forest is a great place to search for regional specialties including Golden-green Woodpecker, Double-banded Graytail, Blue-and-yellow and Chestnut-fronted Macaws, Black and Crested Oropendolas, Blue Cotinga, White-eared Conebill, Black-breasted Puffbird, Orange-crowned Oriole, and the majestic King Vulture. A trail at the end of the road takes us into low-canopy forest, where we hope to find Bare-crowned Antbird, Pale-bellied Hermit, Olivaceous Piculet, Streak-headed Woodcreeper, and Forest Elaenia.

Tierra Nueva Foundation

Adjacent to El Salto Road is the property of the Tierra Nueva Foundation. Fundación Tierra Nueva is a non-profit organization whose main mission is “working towards the sustainable development of people of the Darién Rainforest.” The property is the home of a technical school focusing on applications in agriculture. We explore the trails of this large, forested property, in hopes of finding Streak-headed Woodcreeper, Yellow-breasted and Black-billed Flycatchers, Red-rumped Woodpecker, Slaty-backed Forest-Falcon, Cinnamon, Cinereous and One-colored Becards, White-eared Conebill, White-headed Wren, and the magnificent Great Curassow. We also search for the eastern race of the Chestnut-backed Antbird, which shows white spots on the wings.

Las Lagunas Road (Aguas Calientes) & Aruza Lagoons

This road extends 12 km south off the Pan-American Highway through open farmland, dry scrub, and roadside habitat. The road eventually crosses a stream and ends at some small ponds. Along the roadsides, we hope to find Red-breasted Meadowlark, Spot-breasted Woodpecker, Yellow-breasted Flycatcher, White-headed Wren, Smooth-billed and Greater Anis, Muscovy Duck, Rufescent Tiger-Heron, Southern Lapwing, Blue-headed Parrot, Striped Cuckoo, Scaly-breasted Hummingbird, Ringed and Amazon Kingfishers, Buff-breasted Wren, Bananaquit, Giant and Shiny Cowbirds, Crested Oropendola, and Laughing and Aplomado Falcons. If we're lucky, we may get a glimpse of a Chestnut-fronted Macaw or a shy Little Cuckoo, both having been seen along this road. At the lagoons, we hope to find Pied Water-Tyrant, Capped Heron, the beautiful Yellow-hooded Blackbird and the extraordinary Black-capped Donacobius—this is great habitat for all these wonderful species.

Quebrada Felix

Quebrada Felix—this newly discovered site awaits exploration! Quebrada Felix is nestled in the base of the Filo del Tallo Hydrological Reserve, and is just a short drive from the Canopy Camp. Surrounded by tall trees and mature lowland forest, we walk the rocky stream in search of some of Panama's most wanted species, including Black-crowned Antpitta, Scaly-throated Leaf Tosser, Speckled Mourner, Ocellated Antbird, Rufous-winged and Moustached Antwrens, White-fronted Nunbird, Wedge-billed Woodcreeper, Royal Flycatcher, and the endemic Stripe-cheeked Woodpecker. It is also a great spot to find Fasciated Tiger-Heron, Green-and-rufous Kingfisher, Bicolored Antbird, Golden-crowned Spadebill, Double-banded Graytail, and much more. Crested and Solitary Eagles have even been spotted here, a great testament to the mature forest of the area. Quebrada Felix is becoming a favorite spot among our guides and recent visitors!

Lajas Blancas

We eagerly explore the open areas and mixed forests of the area of Lajas Blancas. Lajas Blancas is the closest Embera community to the Canopy Camp, a large town with a population of over 1000 residents. Just 15 minutes away, the area around the community boasts great birding and the opportunity to find many Darien specialties! After turning off the Pan-American Highway, we drive through pasture and open farmland—a great place to see One-colored Becard, Great Potoo, Spot-breasted Woodpecker, Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet, Yellow-breasted Flycatcher, Black Antshrike, and Black Oropendola. During the dry season, a bridge across the Chucunaque River provides us easy access to some mature secondary forest where Double-banded Graytail, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, White-winged and Cinnamon Becards, Cinnamon and Golden-green Woodpeckers, manakins, and others can be found. Beyond the community, the road continues and there is much more forest, including primary forest at its far reaches, waiting to be explored.

Nuevo Vigia

Nuevo Vigia, an Embera community nestled north of the Pan-American Highway, is surrounded by great secondary growth dry forest and two small lakes, all of which attract an enticing variety of birds. The community is accessible by “piragua,” a locally-made dugout canoe. As we coast along the Chucunaque and Tuquesa Rivers, we keep our eyes and ears open for Chestnut-backed, Crested and Black Oropendolas, Spot-breasted Woodpecker, Common Black Hawk, Yellow-tailed Oriole, Red-billed Scythebill, Capped and Cocoli Herons, White Ibis, Greater Ani, Solitary Sandpiper and other water birds. We spend the majority of the morning birding a trail toward a small lagoon, a great place to see Black-collared Hawk, Bare-crowned and White-bellied Antbirds, Green Ibis, Gray-cheeked Nunlet, Spectacled Parrotlet, Black-tailed Trogon, Striped Cuckoo, Black-bellied Wren, Little Tinamou, Golden-green Woodpecker and Green-and-rufous Kingfisher! In the town of Nuevo Vigia, local artisans weave colorful decorative masks and plates out of palm fronds and carve cocobolo wood and tagua nuts into animals and plants, and we have the opportunity to meet some of the community members and admire and purchase some of the beautiful products they make by hand. We enjoy a satisfying picnic lunch in the village, followed by more great birding around the riversides and scrubby habitat surrounding Nuevo Vigia before heading back.

Aligandi

Aligandi is a huge area with unique scrub forest and much to be explored. We head out toward the end of the Pan-American Highway, taking a turn prior to reaching Yaviza. Along the roadsides here, we scan for Red-breasted Meadowlark, Striped Cuckoo, Ruddy-breasted Seedeater, Thick-billed Seed-Finch, American Kestrel, and other open area birds. A Great Green Macaw nest is tucked up in the canopy of a huge Cuipo tree, visible from the road, and if lucky, an adult or a chick may be seen poking its head out of the cavity. At Finca Doncella, we continue on foot along the road through the scrub forest, seeking out Spot-breasted Woodpecker, Bat Falcon, Giant Cowbird, Orange-crowned Oriole, Red-billed Scythebill, White-eared Conebill, and mixed feeding flocks. It is possible to see macaws flying over as we further explore the area.

San Francisco Reserve

San Francisco Nature Reserve is a private forest reserve owned and managed by the St. Francis Foundation, covering 1,300 acres in eastern Panama Province. The San Francisco Reserve was established in 2001 by Father Pablo Kasuboski, an American priest from Wisconsin who came to Panama in 1988. The reserve serves as a wildlife refuge and protects the headwaters of the main rivers of the area. The foundation created by Padre Pablo, as Father Kasuboski is called, also works on infrastructure development in the area by building and maintaining aqueducts, roads, schools, and churches. In fact, the St. Francis Foundation built and maintains the largest private rural aqueduct in all of Panama and Central America. The reserve has a variety of habitats including primary, secondary, and riparian forests, forest edge, fields, farmland, ponds, and wetlands. During our morning here, we explore some of the different habitats along the short road that enters the reserve. We hope to find Great Jacamar, Broad-billed Motmot, Collared Aracari, Sulphur-rumped Tanager, Russet-winged Schiffornis, Royal Flycatcher, White-fronted Nunbird, Brownish Twistwing, the endemic Yellow-green Tyrannulet, Central American Pygmy-Owl, Blue and Plain-breasted Ground Doves, and if we're very lucky, a Black-and-white Hawk-Eagle soaring overhead or a Wing-banded Antbird along the trails!

Thurs., Aug. 4 Morning Birding | Return to Panama City

We enjoy breakfast and the birds at Canopy Camp as the sun rises, and if time allows, choose one more birding site to explore before birding our way back to Panama City. We enjoy dinner tonight in the city, reminiscing about a grand trip with new friends.

Accommodations at the Crowne Plaza (B,L,D)

Fri., Aug. 5 Departures

Departures today are at your leisure.

Cost of the Journey

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. A handy link for travel insurance is in the footer of each of our emails. 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

The cost of this 7-night journey is **\$2990 DBL / \$3490 SGL**, from Panama City. This cost is based on double occupancy and includes 7 nights' 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. Singles are limited at Canopy Camp, so please inquire promptly if interested.

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.

Travel Information

All major airlines service Panama City. Since you are spending your first night at an airport hotel, arrive any time on July 29 into Tocumen International (PTY). Departures are at leisure on August 5.

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Photo Credits

Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Tom Dove (TD); Green-backed Trogon, Peg Abbott (PA); Juvenile Harpy Eagle, Pat Lueders; Keel-billed Toucan, PA; Capped Heron, PA; Southern Lapwing, PA; Yellow-hooded Blackbirds, Alan Gertler; Silver-throated Tanager, PA; Collared Aracari, James Adams.