

Belize Birding & Nature

with Naturalist Journeys



March 4 – 12, 2023

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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 winter migrants, making birding each day extraordinary and fun!

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

9-Day / 8-Night Belize Birding & Nature Tour

\$4290, from Belize City

Airport is Philip SW Goldson International (BZE)

Day-to-Day Itinerary

Sat., Mar. 4 Arrivals | Black Orchid Resort

Welcome to Belize! Your local guide meets you upon arrival today and transfers you to the beautiful Black Orchid Resort. Please plan to arrive by 2:00 PM today.

Our resort is on the Belize River and boasts a host of amenities including a pool, restaurant, and canoes. We can bird the lodge's grounds today before kicking off the trip with dinner at the resort's restaurant.

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Accommodations at Black Orchid Resort (D)

Sun., Mar. 5 Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary | Lamanai Outpost Lodge

After an early breakfast and coffee we depart for Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary where we enjoy a morning boat trip. Barely an hour north of the airport, this refuge is one of the premier birding destinations for aquatic birds in Central America, and is designated as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention.

A labyrinth of waterways and small islands, the refuge covers 16,400+ acres of creeks, swamps, and hummocks, including adjoining lowland pine savannas and tropical broadleaf forests. Watch for Morelet's Crocodile and other reptiles, as well Yucatan Squirrel and possible Neotropical River Otter.

Inland lagoons support an astonishing array of bird life. Peregrine Falcon, Black-collared Hawk, Great Black Hawk, and Snail Kite are raptor highlights, while across the lagoon, we look for long-toed Northern Jacana and Common Gallinule among the lily pads, with Black-bellied Whistling and Muscovy Ducks nearby. Overhead we may see Caspian and Gull-billed Terns, while the vegetation along the banks supports populations of Anhinga, Tricolored Heron, and Limpkin. Additional heron species may include Little Blue, Green, both night herons (Black- and Yellow-crowned), and possibly Agami. Crooked Tree is also known for its Boat-billed Heron rookeries, which can be noisy, with birds vocalizing and bill-clacking. We also watch for Amazon, Green, Belted, Ringed, and even American Pygmy Kingfishers (the latter as small as a sparrow) perched above the water.

One of the key species we look for on the water is the Sungrebe. We also carefully watch for Jabiru storks, the tallest flying bird in Central and South America. Yucatan endemics include Red-vented (or Yucatan) Woodpecker, Yucatan Flycatcher, Yellow-lored Parrot, the raucous Yucatan Jay, and possibly even Black Catbird.

Nearby Crooked Tree Village, established around 1750, is possibly the earliest inland European settlement in Belize. Surrounded by Crooked Tree Lagoon, it is known for its locally grown and processed cashews. We enjoy lunch in the village before we depart for Lamanai.

After lunch we depart on another boat trip, this time to transport us to Lamanai Outpost Lodge, our home for the next three nights. The transfer in to Lamanai is FUN. 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. Be ready with a windbreaker, camera, and binoculars. We arrive in time for late-afternoon birding by the lodge and dinner.

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

Mon., Mar. 6 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)

Tues., Mar. 7 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)

Wed., Mar. 8 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 January, the bird population is even richer as local nesting birds are joined by numerous migrants: warblers, vireos, orioles, and flycatchers that spend the winter in these rich forests.

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)

Thurs., Mar. 9 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)

Fri., Mar. 10 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)

Sat., Mar. 11 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 wintering 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)*

Sun., Mar. 12 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)

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.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is \$4290 DBL / \$4940 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.

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

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 March 4.

Please plan flights home after NOON on March 12. If you find a flight close to noon, please inquire. If staying on in Belize, we can help you make plans.

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