

Belize Summer Birding: Green Season!

with Naturalist Journeys



July 7 – 14, 2023
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Why Summer Belize? Because the rainforest biodiversity is strongest in the wet or “green” season! While you may miss some winter migrants, you find the forest replete with life, as many fascinating large insects like katydids, beetles, mantids, and butterflies emerge. Birds respond to this abundance and are active, busy feeding on the flourish of insects. Yes, it will rain—you are in a rainforest. But between this season’s dramatic and often short showers the sun pops out and with it, life revs up. In-the-know birders watching their budget also know this is a great time for good savings.

We offer Belize journeys throughout the year—it’s a close and exotic destination clients rave about. In just a few hours you are watching toucans and parrots fly, and hearing trogons alluring calls. From Lamanai Outpost Lodge we take several boat trips, finding 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. At Black Rock Lodge we gaze out at pristine forest and down to the Macal River, keeping our eyes peeled for a pair of Orange-breasted Falcon that frequent here ... you’ve arrived at a birding paradise.

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 make 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 Black Rock Lodge in search of trogons, parrots, toucans, and more
- Wake to the noisy chorus of tinamous, forest-falcons, and motmots, right outside your door

Tour Summary

8-Day / 7-Night Belize Birding & Nature Tour

\$3290 DBL / \$3890 SGL, from Belize City

Airport is Philip SW Goldson International (BZE)

Day-to-Day Itinerary

Fri., July 7 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, Amazon and Green Kingfishers, Limpkin, Northern Jacana, Plumbeous Kite, 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, 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. Also seen are otters, manatees, monkeys, and crocodiles. There is even the chance of seeing signs of Jaguar activity nearby.

Forest trails and Maya ruins are easily accessed at Lamanai; birds and butterflies always seem to be at arm’s length. Lesson’s Motmot, Bat Falcon, and the tiny Tody Motmot all like this area. 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)

Sat., July 8 & Sun., July 9

Two Full Days at Fabulous 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.

One of the most interesting phenomena, and one we are likely to encounter at Lamanai and Black Rock Lodge, 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, and more. 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.

Relax at meals, so delightful at Lamanai, where open-air dining lets you be immersed in nature; local foods and tropical fruits abound!

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

Mon., July 10

Lamanai Outpost Lodge | New River Boat Transfer | Black Rock Lodge

Enjoy a final morning with a birding option at the nearby village at Lamanai, where Squirrel Cuckoo and Boat-billed Flycatcher are often found. After a last, lovely breakfast we travel by boat back to the Lamanai office by the airport. Along our route 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 Crane, or the delightful American Pygmy Kingfisher remind you that you have left the United States.

We meet our drivers from Black Rock Lodge late morning, and get to know them as we enjoy lunch at a fun local café. Next stop is the delightful Belize Zoo, where interpretive signs match the cultural style of Belize and you

have a chance to see Tapir, Coatimundi, and other mammals at close range. Native birds are much at home around the enclosures and the stop lets us stretch our legs.

It 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 Elijo 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 (B,L,D)

Tues., July 11 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 by citizen science effort knowledge of the region. 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 of the garden flowers.

After taking advantage of the early super-charged bird activity on the grounds, we enjoy a full breakfast, choosing what you'd like to have from the breakfast menu, and 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 Swifts patrol the sky.

After breakfast you can have a 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-ored, 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 fun, for those that wish, we take 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)

Wed., July 12 El Pilar Maya Site | Spanish Lookout | Aguacate Lagoon

We leave early at day-break for a full-day adventure, to return 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 Mayan 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 where we turn to enter the site. 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, and 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 Coatiundi, Kinkajou, Deppe's Squirrel, and Yucatan Black Howler Monkey.

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

Thurs., July 13 Mountain Pine Ridge Reserve

Today we 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, Green Jay, 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. Always we keep an eye to the sky for sightings of King Vulture overhead.

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

Fri., July 14 Departures

After some final early birding (say good-bye to the Rufous-tailed Jacamar) and breakfast we head to the Belize City airport. Please plan flights out after 12:30 PM; we should arrive at the International airport by 10:30 AM. We may be able to send one vehicle out earlier if needed, but please check in if your flight is before noon. (B)

Tour Details

Plan Ahead!

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

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the tour is **\$3290 DBL / \$3890 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; 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 your local lodge guides in Belize are not included, these are at your discretion, but highly appreciated and recommended.

Travel Information

Please plan to make air travel plans only after the minimum group size has been reached. Arrive in Belize City at the Philip SW Goldson International Airport (BZE) no later than 2:00 PM on July 7. Please plan departures after 12:30 PM on July 14.

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; Snail Kite, Steve Shunk; Central American Spider Monkey, PA.

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