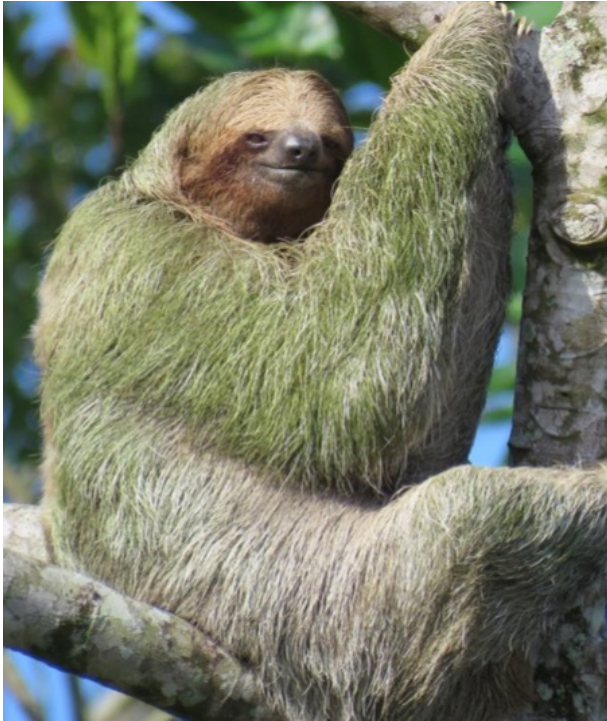


Panama: Intro to Tropical Biodiversity

with Naturalist Journeys



Sept. 27 – Oct. 5, 2023

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Tropical environments and ecosystems are extremely diverse in comparison to their temperate counterparts. Panama encompasses many distinct biomes and ecosystems, teeming with plant and animal life. Location, elevation, and climate influence these environments and the plants and animals within, all part of an intricate and delicate web of interactions. When you first step into a tropical forest, you may be overwhelmed by the sights, sounds and smells around you. From the towering canopy above to the soil beneath your feet, there is life lurking in every nook and cranny.

The Canopy Family and Naturalist Journeys are excited to offer a special Tropical Rainforest Biodiversity workshop, featuring guest scientists Dr. Howard Topoff and Dr. Carol Simon, both formerly of the City University of New York and the American Museum of Natural History. For more than ten years they have brought their expertise on tropical environments and biodiversity to us for this event! We spend our time exploring the forests in search of birds, mammals, frogs, insects, and fascinating trees and plants, and almost every day there is an informative and entertaining presentation on a wide variety of tropical biodiversity topics. Lodging is at the world-famous Canopy Tower, surrounded by the lowland tropical forests of Soberania National Park, and the Canopy Lodge, in the picturesque foothills of El Valle de Antón, both perfect locations for exploring tropical ecosystems.

Tour Highlights

- Enjoy time at the Canopy Lodge, with cool mountain breezes and incredible birds on feeders and trails
- Learn about the herps that live in Panama's forests during a presentation by guide Carol Simon called "Poisonous Reptiles and Amphibians of the Rain Forest"
- Visit Cerro Gaital to learn more about the butterflies of the region, from the large Blue Morpho to the pretty little Passion Vine butterflies
- See Red-lored Parrot, Keel-billed Toucan, and Palm and Golden-hooded Tanagers right from Canopy Tower
- Watch Geoffroy's Tamarin, Mantled Howler, and Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth in the surrounding forests
- Search for Broad-billed Motmot, White-whiskered Puffbird, Gartered Trogon, South American Common Toad, Northern Tamandua, and more along Plantation Road
- Spend time at the Summit Botanical Gardens, which houses more than 100 non-releasable animals—a great way to study many species difficult to see in the wild
- Walk the famous Pipeline Road, which boasts over 500 species of birds, as well as hundreds of mammals, reptiles, and amphibians, and even more insects and trees and plants
- Visit the BioMuseo along the Amador Causeway in Panama City, and explore its several halls that focus on the biodiversity of the isthmus of Panama
- Explore by boat on Gatun Lake, looking for Lesser Capybara, West Indian Manatee, and more
- Enjoy an afternoon at the Panama Canal, learning its history and watching cargo ships go through the locks

Tour Summary

9-Day / 8-Night Panama Biodiversity Tour
\$3350 DBL / \$3790 SGL, from Panama City
Airport is Tocumen International (PTY)

Day-to-Day Itinerary

Wed., Sept. 27 Arrivals | Canopy Lodge

Welcome to your Introduction to Tropical Biodiversity tour! You are met at the airport and transferred to the Canopy Lodge, a three hour drive from Panama City. The shuttle to the Lodge leaves no later than 2:30 PM, so please plan your arrivals accordingly. It is recommended that you arrive the day before and stay at an airport hotel. You don't want to miss anything!

Upon arrival at the lovely Canopy Lodge you can check into your room and enjoy the comfortable el Valle location. Here we are greeted by our Canopy guide. Just outside your bedroom window, the cloud forest beckons. Birds abound and Basilisk (Jesus Christ) Lizards, sitting on rocks in the stream, can be seen with a little patience, running across the water. Dinner is served on the veranda, as are all meals. If time permits, your guest scientists present their first multi-media presentation. If not, there will be lots of time to hear it later.

Presentations are geared towards the interests of the participants and have included an introduction to the rain forest, butterflies, social insects, tropical plants, reptiles and amphibians, bird brains, tropical primates, animal coloration, the Panama Canal, and more. These talks are always a highlight of the workshop.

Accommodations at Canopy Lodge (D)

Thurs., Sept. 28 La Mesa & Las Minas Road | Canopy Adventure | Cara Iguana Road | Mario Urriola's Reptile & Conservation Facility

This morning early risers can enjoy checking out the feeders that are positioned near the outdoor dining area. There is an abundance of hummingbirds including Long-billed Starthroat, Violet-headed and Snowy-bellied Hummingbirds, Bronze-tailed Plumeleaters, and Garden Emerald. Black-throated Mango feed at the verbenas in the gardens as well. Thick-billed Euphonia, Dusky-face and Flame-rumped Tanagers, Rufous Motmot, Gray-headed Chachalaca, and many others are commonly found at the banana feeders. Central American Agouti also forage in the garden.

After breakfast, we continue our biodiversity tour along several roads, searching mainly for birds, insects, and plants. Las Minas Road follows a ridge line, with sweeping vistas of forested mountains, speckled with grasslands and small fincas (farms). The views from the higher elevations are fantastic, and on a clear day near the summit, both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans can be seen! The road is lined with sensitive Mimosa, a plant that closes up quickly when touched. It is a great place to see some of the most beautiful tanagers, including Black-and-yellow, Bay-headed, and Emerald, as well as many other birds. It is also a great place for butterflies, as many skippers, satyrs, tigers, hairstreaks, and clearwings flutter along the roadsides.

Moving to the Canopy Adventure, we spend time in a long-time private refuge adjacent to the Canopy Lodge. A large waterfall is one primary focus here. We can see birds, rain-forest flora, Turnip-tailed Geckos, Water Anoles and Brilliant Forest Frogs. It is simply a lovely walk in a dense tropical forest. We get back in time for lunch at the lodge.

After lunch, we meet again to drive to a nearby area where we are almost always successful in getting great views of Spectacled Owl. Next, we head out to meet Mario Urriola, a native of El Valle who has extensive experience and knowledge about the reptiles of the area. Mario is the owner of "El Serpentario Maravillas Tropicales," a reptile facility in El Valle, which houses various species of snakes and lizards that can be found in the area. Up-close looks at some of these difficult-to-find creatures is paired with an informative narrative about local species. Mario is an important figure in the area for both education and conservation. Carol also has a

strong interest in reptiles and amphibians and tonight's presentation focuses on poisonous amphibians and venomous reptiles.

Accommodations at Canopy Lodge (B,L,D)

Fri., Sept. 29 Full Day at Altos del Maria

Departing after an early breakfast, we're off into the highlands of Altos del Maria! With the sunrise ahead of us, we climb into the mountains along the Continental Divide east of El Valle. Often engulfed by the mist of the expansive cloud forest that surrounds the area, Altos del Maria sits at an altitude of 1,100 meters (3,600 feet). Today we can find highland forest birds, including Black-crowned and Streak-chested Antpittas, White Hawk, Barred Forest-Falcon, Northern Emerald and Yellow-eared Toucanets, Spotted Barbtail, Tufted and Sulphur-rumped Flycatchers, Rufous-browed Tyrannulet, Orange-bellied Trogon, and the tiny yet stunning Snowcap. We hope to see a tiny Western Pygmy Squirrel working away in the treetops. Plants can't be ignored and this is a good place to see the large white Sobralia orchids.

Carol's favorite walk is here, on a paved path along a narrow, riparian canyon. The stream here was the last place that Panamanian Golden Frogs were seen in the wild. After a picnic lunch, we return back to the Canopy Lodge by mid-afternoon. It should be a good evening for one of our presentations during cocktail hour.

Accommodations at Canopy Lodge (B,L,D)

Sat., Sept. 30 Butterflies & Natural History Of Cerro Gaital | Artisan & Fruit Market | El Valle Amphibian Conservation Center

This morning, while birding (there is always a Canopy bird guide with us) and searching for other animals in the forest, such as the deep forest Dunn's Spiny Lizard, we take a close look at the fascinating world of butterflies and insects in Central America. The biodiversity of butterflies (and moths, their nocturnal counterparts) is incredible in tropical regions around the world, and Panama alone has over 1500 species! From the beautiful metallic blue of the large Blue Morpho, to the pretty little Passion Vine butterflies (*Heliconius* spp.), tropical butterflies always capture the attention. We look for such eye-catching species as Mimosa Yellows, Deep-blue Eyed-Metalmarks, Sara Longwings, Orange Mapwings, Togarna Hairstreaks, Puerta Satyrs, Common Ur-Satyrs, Red-headed Firetips, and the crepuscular Yellow-bordered and Giant Owl-Butterflies roosting along the trails. Insight into the lives of butterflies—their life cycles, how they eat and various methods to evade predation—are just a few of the interesting topics we explore! This is Howard's favorite local area. We head back to the Lodge for lunch.

This afternoon, first we visit the local amphibian conservation center. Here we see captive Panamanian Golden Frogs; they no longer exist in the wild. An informal, informative presentation is given by one of the owners and we have the opportunity to see some other species of frogs that would be difficult to find in the field.

We also visit the artisan and fruit market in the heart of El Valle de Anton. The market is run by Panamanian artisans from Guna Yala and sells beautiful "molas"—traditional handmade panels sewn by combining layers of fabric and showing geometric and animal designs—as well as hand-painted wooden decorations, paintings, and jewelry. The market in El Valle is very colorful, and a great place to take photos and purchase souvenirs.

We return in time for our evening presentation at the cocktail hour. Perhaps the butterfly talk is a good one for tonight.

Accommodations at Canopy Lodge (B,L,D)

Sun., Oct. 1 Transfer To Canopy Tower | Visit To Biomuseo

Today we transfer to the Canopy Tower, about two and half hours from the Lodge. Situated in the lush lowland rain forests along the Panama Canal, the Tower is a very different and unique setting. One of the first things you should do is to make your way up to the observation deck overlooking the vast forest canopy of Soberania National Park. You can see glimpses of the Panama Canal plus Panama City. You can also view many stunning tropical birds, mammals, and reptiles. It is common to see Geoffroy's Tamarins, Mantled Howlers, Brown-throated Three-toed Sloths, and Green Iguanas in the rainforest canopy here. Green-and-Black Dart Poison Frogs are just outside the front doors of the Tower, along with Turnip-tailed Geckos. Tungara Frogs call loudly here and you can often find their foam nests nearby. It is an exciting place to stay.

Today we also visit the BioMuseo, either before we reach the Tower or as an afternoon excursion from the Tower. The stunning BioMuseo is along the Amador Causeway in Panama City. This spectacular and unique building, designed by renowned architect Frank Gehry, features several halls focusing on the biodiversity of the isthmus of Panama—from its geological beginnings through to modern day culture, the great faunal interchange over the land bridge, and other fascinating exhibits. Our visit no doubt opens our eyes further to the incredible biodiversity of Panama! And don't forget your binoculars, as we may see Brown Pelican and Magnificent Frigatebird flying over the Pacific entrance to the Panama Canal.

Accommodations at Canopy Tower (B,L,D)

Mon., Oct. 2

Plantation Road | Summit Gardens & Harpy Eagle Exhibit | Night Walk

As we awaken to the roars of Mantled Howlers in the distance, breathe in the fresh air, and make our way up to the observation deck at dawn. This is the best time of day to observe the canopy, both for the beautiful sunrise and for the bird activity. With warm coffee or tea in hand, we watch for Red-lored and Mealy Parrots, Keel-billed Toucan, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Masked Tityra, Green Honeycreeper, Green Shrike-Vireo, and dozens of other species as they actively communicate and feed in the treetops. After breakfast, we board one of the Canopy Tower's specialized nature-watching vehicles and head slowly down Semaphore Hill Road, scanning the understory of the forest for animals like Central American Agouti and White-nosed Coati. This morning we take a walk along Plantation Road, one of the trails of Soberania National Park. The Canopy Tower is surrounded by 22,000 hectares of lowland tropical rainforest of Soberania National Park, adjacent to the Panama Canal and mighty Chagres River. It is the perfect setting for our first morning in the lowland rain forest. Walking through the forest with its towering giants (Ceiba and Cuipo trees), we spend the morning searching for animals from tiny leafcutter ants on the ground to large raptors in the treetops. Broad-billed Motmot, White-whiskered Puffbird, Gartered Trogon, South American Common Toads, Northern Tamanduas, and so much more can be found along this trail. The rainforest is so full of life! After our morning walk we return to the Canopy Tower in time for lunch.

This afternoon we visit the Summit Municipal Park and Botanical Gardens. We can find free-roaming Central American Agoutis, Central American Ameivas, Laughing Falcon, Tropical Mockingbird, Crimson-backed Tanager, and hundreds of other species of birds. We also visit some of the enclosures housing Panama's native fauna. In the 1960s, Summit Botanical Gardens started receiving injured and non-releasable animals from all over Panama. Now, this facility houses over 100 animals including macaws, spider monkeys, tapirs, jaguars, pumas and Panama's national bird, the Harpy Eagle. We make a stop to visit a non-releasable Harpy Eagle living at this wildlife refuge. It is a great opportunity to see some species that are rather difficult to encounter in the wild in Panama.

Back at the Canopy Tower, we meet at the cocktail hour for Howard and Carol's early evening presentation. For dinner we can expect an enjoyable blend of Panamanian and international fare!

After dinner we take a short night excursion, riding in one of the open vehicles. We may also walk bit. We listen for owls and potoos and scan the trees with a spotlight for Western Night Monkeys, Kinkajous, Olingos, and other nocturnal wildlife. If the weather doesn't cooperate, we reschedule for another evening.

Accommodations at Canopy Tower (B,L,D)

Tues., Oct. 3 Pipeline Road | Miraflores Locks, Panama Canal

After some time on the observation deck, head down to a hot breakfast at the Canopy Tower's third floor dining room, surrounded by the forest canopy just outside the open windows. We board our vehicle once again and head out to the world-famous Pipeline Road—once an access road built during WWII to serve a pipeline installed as a precautionary measure for the Panama Canal. Surrounded by mature secondary lowland forest and protected within the boundaries of Soberania National Park, Pipeline Road boasts incredible biodiversity—over 500 species of birds have been recorded in these Caribbean slope forests, as well as hundreds of mammals, reptiles and amphibians, and even more insects and trees and other plants. As we walk the first part of the gravel road, we watch for five species of trogon, Whooping and Rufous Motmots, Cinnamon and Crimson-crested Woodpeckers, three species of manakin, hummingbirds, raptors, peccaries, lizards, frogs, butterflies, insects, and more. It is hard to decide whether to look up or down! We hope to come across a swarm of army ants, where many species of birds attend the feeding frenzy. Howard is an army ant specialist, and we can look forward to his very entertaining talk on social insects. Central American Whiptails and Striped Rocket Frogs may be seen along the road. Our list from the morning alone will no doubt be extensive! After a full morning in this superb forest, we make our way back to lunch at the Tower.

The Panama Canal is nearby, and not be missed. After lunch, we head for the Miraflores Locks. The entire canal is an engineering marvel, truly one of the wonders of the modern world. The Miraflores Locks are the first set of locks on the Pacific side of the canal. They operate 24 hours a day and have changed very little since 1914 when the Panama Canal opened. Today over 14,000 ships and boats pass through the Canal annually. At the Miraflores Visitor Center we visit the four-floor museum and watch a large container ship or two pass through the locks from an observation deck.

We return to the Tower in time for a presentation at the cocktail hour, as is our custom.

Accommodations at Canopy Tower (B,L,D)

Wed., Oct. 4 Jungle Boat Tour | Chagres River & Gamboa Resort Grounds

As always, you can enjoy early morning hours on the observation deck where there is always be a bird guide with a scope. After breakfast, we board a small, covered boat for a spectacular tour on the Panama Canal. Most of the Canal is actually an artificial lake, Gatun Lake, and our tour takes us from Gamboa—just 15 minutes from the Canopy Tower—to the edges and inlets of this large lake. We start our tour by exploring the edges of the mighty Chagres River, where Common and Purple Gallinules, Rufescent Tiger-Heron, Amazon Kingfisher, and Spectacled Caiman may be found. Along the way to Gatun Lake along the Panama Canal we pass huge cargo ships and ocean liners; American Crocodile may be seen basking along the beaches and we should spot Common Basilisk, also known as Jesus Christ Lizards for their ability to run across the water. We visit hidden coves and beautiful inlets with fascinating fauna and flora, and search for White-faced Capuchins, Mantled Howlers, and Proboscis Bats along the water's edge.

The Chagres River is the main tributary for the Panama Canal. Here Embera Indian Trails lead from the river, and we often see individuals fishing from their canoes. The birding along the banks and forest edges of Gamboa Resort can be spectacular, and so is the tropical vegetation. Here you may be “kissed” by Psychotria, commonly known as Hot Lips. And if you are fond of Panama hats, you will be interested to see the Toquilla Palm, whose leaves are woven to make your hat. There is a butterfly house and the Verbena shrubs around it attract dozens of species of butterflies, including Erato Longwing, Apricot Sulphur, Banded Peacock, and Banded Orange. We may even find some bats, hiding out in the daytime. After a pleasant afternoon we make our way back to Canopy Tower. Here we have a final talk by Carol and Howard at the cocktail hour, followed by our farewell dinner. It all goes by so very quickly!

Accommodations at Canopy Tower (B,L,D)

Thurs., Oct. 5 Departures

This morning we can enjoy one more visit to the observation deck before enjoying your morning breakfast. If you begin to assess all we have seen and learned in eight days you should be very pleased indeed!

We are only 45 minutes from the Panama City Airport. We are transported in time for our flights. (B)

Tour Details

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

The cost of this journey is \$3350 DBL / \$3790 SGL, from Panama City. This all-inclusive rainforest tour includes lodging and meals at the Canopy Tower and Canopy Lodge, bilingual professional guides, wine with dinner, group airport transfers to and from Panama City and all tours and presentations as per the itinerary.

This cost does not include flights to and from Panama City, tips and alcoholic beverages (apart from dinner).

Travel Information

Arrival: September 27, 2023

Arrival Airport: Tocumen International (PTY)

You may arrive any time before 2:30 PM; the shuttle to the lodge leaves no later than 2:30 PM

Departure: October 5, 2023

Departure Airport: Tocumen International (PTY); please be aware that we are 45 minutes from the airport on the last day

Travel Tips: If your flight comes in late, we suggest you arrive a day early to rest up from your travels. There are three hotels quite close to the international airport, the closest two are the Riande (a bit dated but with gardens and a pool), the Crowne Plaza (newer) with the Courtyard by Marriot a bit farther and by a mall. All of these have a convenient shuttle service. It is about 35 - 40 minutes into the city, pending traffic. If you have time to explore we recommend the Radisson Panama Canal which has rooms with balconies overlooking the entrance to the Canal and is located within walking distance of the Biomuseo museum of biodiversity. Casco Viejo is now a

trendy area having been totally refurbished in the last 25 years. There are shops, restaurants, quite a few boutique hotels, the Cathedral, an excellent museum on the Panama Canal, and a terrific view back on the modern city. Another boutique hotel known for its welcoming hospitality is the Bristol. The Canal location and Casco Viejo require taking a taxi.

The Canopy Tower and Lodge have set times for transfers to their facilities included with your stay, private transfers can be arranged outside of these times at additional cost. Once we have all of the group member's information on arrivals we can let you know the times and where to meet. They can pick up at airport hotels for these timed shuttles, and for city locations, this would be a private transfer.

Photo Credits

Three-toed Sloth, Howard Topoff; Juvenile Harpy Eagle, Pat Lueders; Red-eyed Tree Frog, Greg Smith; White-necked Jacobin, Peg Abbot; Boa, Robert Gallardo; Blue Morpho Butterfly, Robert Gallardo; Capybara Family, Peg Abbott.

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