

# Belize: Three Great Lodges Trip Report | April 7-17, 2026 with Naturalist Journeys



**Our local guides included Isaias and Jeffrey at Black Rock Lodge, Chris and Vidal at Lamanai Outpost Lodge and Steve and Vince at Tanager Rainforest Lodge.**

**Our group included Meg, Ron, Lysa, Mort, Pat, Eileen, Ed, Kevin, Tony, Doni, Ken and Naturalist Journeys guide Kip Miller.**

*As noted in the title of this tour, we spent quality time at three “great” lodges during our time together in Belize – Black Rock Lodge, Lamanai Outpost Lodge and Tanager Rainforest Lodge. All were host to diversity of resident tropical bird species and wintering migrants and each provided a slightly different mix of species. In addition, the hospitality at each lodge was phenomenal and we had the opportunity to visit two significant Mayan archeological sites – Caracol and Lamanai – so it really was a “great” adventure together in Belize. Below please find a summary of our daily activities and highlights – and thanks again to all for joining us!*

## **Tuesday, April 7 – The Adventure Begins | Transfer to Black Rock Lodge**

Our adventure began at the appropriately named “Amigo’s Restaurant”. Here the group that overnighted at the Black Orchid Lodge linked up with the group arriving from the Belize City airport and we met the father/son duo of Isaias and Jeffrey, our guides for the first segment of the tour. It did not take long to get our bird list started, as several species including Vermilion Flycatcher, Great Kiskadee and Morelet’s Seedeater were easily seen from the open-air restaurant. After lunch we loaded up and made the drive to the Black Rock Lodge on the banks of the Macal River in Belize’s Maya Mountains.





Upon arrival, we made our way to the restaurant verandah for welcome drinks and an orientation by the lodge staff. Although we tried hard to be polite listeners, it was incredibly difficult as a variety of colorful species including Northern Emerald Toucanet, Black-cheeked Woodpecker and Yellow-throated Euphonia kept distracting us at the feeders and in the nearby trees. After receiving the information we needed (and sneaking peeks at the birds just noted), we settled in our rooms for our four-night stay and then gathered later for our first checklist session and dinner together.

### **Wednesday, April 8 – Black Rock Lodge | Belize Botanic Gardens**

We began our first full day with a pre-breakfast outing on the grounds of the lodge that yielded over 50 species. Picking a few highlights from so many birds is tough, but a few crowd-pleasers that quickly come to mind include White-collared and Red-capped Manakins, Crimson-collared and Yellow-winged Tanagers and Red-legged Honeycreeper. In addition to these colorful tropical residents, we also enjoyed views of a variety of northern wintering species such as Wood Thrush, Hooded Warbler, Summer Tanager and Indigo Bunting.

Following breakfast, we made the short drive to the Belize Botanic Gardens where we spent the remainder of the morning. Our local guide Johnny was excellent, both a knowledgeable botanist and extremely good-humored and patient with his group of *very* easily distracted birders! One of the botanical highlights here was the chance to see Belize's national flower, the Black Orchid. Bird highlights included close views of Lesson's Motmot and Gartered Violaceous Trogon, along with scope views of the often-challenging American Pygmy Kingfisher and the small and infrequently seen Tody Motmot.



Later, we returned to the lodge for an afternoon of independent birding, relaxation and in some cases, pool time! After dinner, most in the group joined Isaias and Jeffrey for a night drive on nearby road, where we enjoyed spotlight views of Common Pauraque and Northern Potoo.

#### **Thursday, April 9 – Spanish Lookout Wetlands, Rice Fields and Agricultural Areas**

This morning, we departed the lodge for a full day of birding near the community of Spanish Lookout. Shortly after departing the lodge, we made a roadside stop where we had heard a Pheasant Cuckoo calling in the dark during our drive the night before. This species is typically quite reclusive and our expectations were not high, but surprisingly, it came right to the edge of the road where all could see – a great start to our day!

The remainder of the morning was spent birding open agricultural and wetland areas. Some of our highlights included hundreds of Blue Grosbeaks and White-winged Doves feeding in sorghum field, a Snail Kite hunting over a wetland area, a variety of waders and shorebirds in an area of active rice fields and attractive landbirds such as Barred Antshrike and Fork-tailed Flycatcher.

Following lunch at an open-air restaurant that was hosting a Rufous-tailed Hummingbird at the feeders, we continued our exploration of the Spanish Lookout area with a walk on the shady trail around the Aguacate Lagoon, where highlights included several Least Grebes, a perched White Hawk and a couple of Rufous-tailed Jacamars. We then concluded the birding for the day with a visit to another rice field location where we found Osprey, Belted Kingfisher, Roseate Spoonbill and several species of migrant shorebirds, including an American Golden-Plover.

#### **Friday, April 10 – Mountain Pine Ridge | Caracol | Thousand Foot Falls**

Following an early breakfast, we set off for the Caracol National Monument, host to the largest Mayan archaeological site in Belize. On the way we made a stop at the Douglas D'Silva Forest Station in the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve. Here we admired the large, hanging nests of a colony of noisy Motezuma Oropendolas in the tall Caribbean Pines and located a Swallow-tailed Kite on a nest as well. Continuing on, we enjoyed the smooth ride on the newly paved highway to Caracol – a welcome improvement from the previously rough dirt road!

After checking in at the entrance station, we spent the next several hours wandering some of the plazas and between the many towering temples. (Some even climbed one of the taller ones!) As we explored, Isaias provided background on the Mayan culture and history and it was more than a little awe inspiring to be at a location with such an amazing and ancient history. The forest surrounding the ruins was also host to many birds and kept us busy with the binoculars and scopes. Some of the species we enjoyed included Slaty-tailed and Collared Trogon, Keel-billed Toucan, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Band-backed Wren and Golden-crowned Warbler. We also enjoyed close (but not too close!) views of a small and well-camouflaged Hog-nosed Viper curled up amongst a cluster of roots on the trail.

Following our walk, we enjoyed a picnic lunch provided by the lodge and then departed to explore a few other locations. Our first stop was at a nearby ranger station where we found a pair of Cinnamon Becards in the trees and a Short-tailed Hawk soaring overhead. Next, we stopped on the new bridge over the Macal River where we found several Gray-breasted Martins flying about and a Neotropic Cormorant perched on a rock in the river. We then continued on to Thousand Foot Falls before returning to the lodge for the final night of our stay. Birds were rather quiet in the late afternoon, but it was refreshingly cool, we did find Acorn Woodpecker, Black-headed Siskin and Hepatic Tanager and we all enjoyed the views of the forested river gorge and the impressive waterfall.

### **Saturday, April 11 – Green Hills Butterfly Ranch | Transfer to Lamanai Outpost Lodge**

Before leaving Black Rock, we spent time at the feeders enjoying sightings of previously seen species, but one does not get tired of views of colorful manakins, tanagers and others! After breakfast and packing the vans, we left for a final morning of birding with Isaias and Jeffrey. Our first stop was along a nearby side road where we found Keel-billed Toucan, Black-cowled Oriole and an exceptionally well-camouflaged Northern Potoo on its day roost. We then traveled to the Green Hills Butterfly Ranch for the remainder of the morning. After a tour of the butterfly enclosure, we spent time at the hummingbird feeders, where four species including White-necked Jacobin and Wedge-tailed Sabrewing were feeding. We then walked a few trails and found Black-headed Trogon, White-whiskered Puffbird, Pale-billed Woodpecker and several species of wintering warblers, including Black-and-white, Magnolia and American Redstart.

Following another picnic lunch provided by the Black Rock Lodge, we put some miles behind us and spent a few hours driving to the boat launch on the New River, where the boat that would take us to our next





lodge was waiting. En route we made one fun stop to view a Jabiru, a huge and massive-billed stork of tropical lowlands. Arriving later at the boat launch, we transferred our luggage from the vans into the boats and sadly said our good-byes to Isaias and Jeffrey.

We then loaded the boat and met Chris, who would be one of our two guides for the Lamanai Outpost Lodge portion of our tour. Our trip on the river to the lodge took an hour or so and included views of a variety of birds, including Russet-naped Wood-Rail, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture and several Ringed Kingfishers. After arriving at the lodge, we unloaded the boat and got settled in our cabins and then met for dinner in another nice open-air restaurant setting.

### **Sunday, April 12 – Lamanai Outpost Lodge | Lamanai Archaeological Reserve**

This morning Chris was joined by Vidal, the other half of the guide team that would assist us during our time at Lamanai and we set out on a pre-breakfast search for birds near the lodge grounds. Noisy Plain Chachalacas quickly made their presence known, along with the much smaller, but still quite vocal Spot-breasted Wrens. Walking through the parking area and out to an adjacent two-track road provided views of many birds including Smoky-brown Woodpecker, Red-lore Amazon, Green-backed Sparrow, Painted Bunting and a crowd-pleasing gathering of at least eight male Black-headed Trogons.

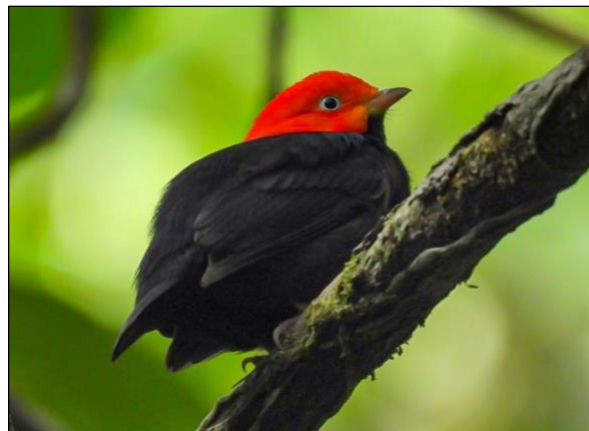
After breakfast, we returned to the dock for a “morning commute” on the New River to the nearby Lamanai Archaeological Reserve. Here we spent the remainder of the morning exploring the impressive ruins while Chris and Vidal provided additional background and history on the ancient Mayan culture. And like Caracol earlier in the tour, the site was host to many birds. In the trees amongst the temples we found Gartered Violaceous Trogon, Bat Flacon, Black-cowled Oriole and a wintering Black-throated Green Warbler. Later, while waiting for the boat back to the lodge, we had close views of a family group of Brown Jays and enjoyed a vey “spotted” Spotted Sandpiper in handsome breeding plumage.

Following an afternoon off for rest and independent birding, we met for dinner and then a night boat trip on the New River Lagoon. By spotlighting along the shore as we slowly cruised along, we were able to find a variety of species on their night roosts, including Russet-naped Wood-Rail, Ringed Kingfisher and Prothonotary Warbler. Then before heading back to the dock for the night, we motored to the center of the lagoon and cut the engine and lights in order to enjoy the night sky. The view of the stars and Milky Way overhead was quite spectacular and it made for a wonderful conclusion to another great day.

## Monday, April 13 – Lamanai Outpost Lodge | Indian Church Village Visit

We started with another pre-breakfast walk on the grounds, basically retracing our steps from the previous morning. But, as is often the case in the tropics, each day brings a different mix of birds and experiences. A few new species seen this morning included Scaled Pigeon, Green-breasted Mango and Rose-breasted Grosbeak. We also enjoyed views of several species seen previously, including Collared Aracari, Barred Antshrike and Couch's Kingbird and we witnessed an interesting interaction between a pair of Red-lored Amazons and a Golden-fronted Woodpecker over the ownership of a cavity in a dead tree branch.

After breakfast, most in the group joined Chris and Vidal for a medicinal plants walk on the lodge grounds and then made the walk into the nearby village of Indian Church for a "hands on" tortilla and tamale making demonstration. Following lunch and a break, we met again in late afternoon at the boat dock for a "birds and cocktails cruise" via pontoon on the New River Lagoon. This was great fun and we started with close views of a Green Kingfisher right next to the dock. Later, by slowly cruising with binoculars (and drinks) in hand we saw wading birds such as Limpkin, Snowy Egret and Green Heron, along with soaring birds overhead such as Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, Short-tailed Hawk and Osprey. Just before returning to the dock at dusk, we could make out the silhouette of the High Temple of the Archaeological Reserve sticking up above the forest canopy, complete with two Black Vultures settled in for the night on the very top.





## Tuesday, April 14 – Lamanai Savannah | Transfer to Tanager Rainforest Lodge

For our final Lamanai outing, we met at dawn to shuttle across the lagoon to the Lamanai savannah. Once here, we got off the boat and enjoyed birding the open habitat before the heat of the day set in. Highlights included several range-restricted species such as Yucatan Woodpecker, Yucatan Flycatcher and Black Catbird and other new additions to our list included White-bellied Wren and Botteri's Sparrow. We then returned to the lodge to pack up for our transfer to the Tanager Rainforest Lodge.

After breakfast, we loaded the boat with our gear and said our good-byes to Vidal, who would not be joining us for the river transfer. The trip back to the boat launch was much quicker than our trip to the lodge a few days earlier, but we did stop for fantastic views of a Great Black hawk that seemed to be hunting for bird nests in the vegetation along the river's edge.

Once back to the launch area, we said our good-byes to Chris and transferred into the two vans that would take us back to the Belize City airport for the short flight south to Punta Gorda. The flight was interesting and fun, as we followed the coast south at a low enough altitude to easily see the estuaries and many square miles of nearby tropical forest. Shortly after our arrival in Punta Gorda, we met Steve, our primary guide for this segment of the tour and made the short drive to the Tanager Rainforest Lodge, where we settled into our rooms, eager to begin our exploration of this new area.

### **Wednesday, April 15 – Tanager Rainforest Lodge | Blue Creek Village**

We kicked off the exploration of our new location with Steve and his assistant guide (and nephew!) Vince on the reception area porch. Here, with hot drinks in hand, we kept an eye on the feeders and nearby tress where a variety of species including Masked Tityra, Orange-billed Sparrow and multiple tanager species provided nice views. We then spent an hour or so walking the lodge grounds, where we found a variety of other resident tropical species and at least seven species of wintering warblers, including Northern Waterthrush and Hooded and Magnolia Warblers.

After breakfast, we loaded the vehicles for a morning of birding offsite. Our first stops were along a lightly traveled road, where highlights included a flock of Black-bellied Whistling Ducks in a marsh, a weedy field full of Indigo Buntings and a pair of handsome Yellow-tailed Orioles that perched conspicuously adjacent to the road. We then continued on to the village of Blue Creek, where we walked a trail adjacent to the river. Here we found a White-bellied Emerald on her tiny nest, Amazon Kingfisher, Collared Aracari and Tropical Royal Flycatcher.

Following our walk, we enjoyed lunch in a small café in the village and then returned to the lodge to take a break for the heat of the day. After our evening checklist session and dinner, we concluded the day with our second night drive of the tour, an adventure that provided excellent views of both Mottled and Striped Owls.

### **Thursday, April 16 – Tunich Ha Reserve | Ixcacao Maya Belizean Chocolate | Tanager Lodge**

We began our final full day at the nearby Tunich Ha Reserve, where we enjoyed both birds and breakfast. Birds were abundant and a highlight was standing on a second story deck with eye-level views of birds feeding in a nearby fruiting tree. A partial list of birds we enjoyed here includes White-winged Becard, Red-eyed and Yellow-green Vireos, Baltimore Oriole, Bay-breasted Warbler and the always crowd-pleasing Golden-hooded Tanager.

Following breakfast at Tunich Ha, we drove into Punta Gorda for some coastal birding and added Sandwich Tern, Magnificent Frigatebird and Brown Pelican to our tour list. Then it was off to Ixcacao Chocolate, a small Maya Belizean-owned company in a nearby village where we participated in a chocolate making demonstration and then enjoyed chocolate tasting (the best part!) and lunch.



After a break back at the lodge, we gathered in late afternoon for a walk down a forest trail to an open area on the lodge grounds. On our way through the forest, we found a pair of noisy Dusky Antbirds and in the open area we found three species of orioles and several colorful tanager species, including Crimson-collared and Scarlet-rumped. Then to conclude the day, we (sadly) met in the lodge restaurant for our final checklist session and dinner together.

### Friday, April 17 – Tanager Rainforest Lodge | Departures for Home

Before officially concluding the tour, we enjoyed one more walk on the grounds with Steve, retracing our route from the night before. Morning highlights included views of forest interior species like Mayan Antthrush and Great Antshrike and we spent time on the lodge's recently constructed observation tower, where we enjoyed eye-level views of Barred Antshrike and Common Tody-Flycatcher. It was an easy and enjoyable conclusion to our time together, before ending with breakfast and shuttle trips back to the Punta Gorda airfield.

**Tour Sightings:** As a group we saw 242 species of birds. A full list of our sightings can be viewed [here](#).

**Tour Photos:** More photos of birds, places and people from the tour can be viewed [here](#).



**Trip Report Photos – Page 1:** Caracol birding (Kip), Northern Emerald Toucanets (Ron) **Page 2:** Jabiru pair (Ken), Group at Black Rock (Kip), Swallow-tailed Kite (Mort), Bare-throated Tiger-Heron (Ed), Montezuma Oropendola (Ron) **Page 3:** Black-headed Trogon (Mort), Breakfast at Lamanai (Kip), Red-legged Honeycreeper (Ron) **Page 4:** Green Kingfisher (Ken), Cocktail Cruise on the New River Lagoon (Kip) **Page 5:** Coffee time! (Kip), Boat-billed Flycatcher (Ken) **Page 6:** Black-bellied Whistling Ducks (Ron), First Class seating! (Lysa), Black-necked Stilt (Mort), Red-capped Mankin (Ron), Striped Owl (Kip) **Page 7:** Birding at Tanager Lodge (Ken), Magnificent Frigatebird (Mort), Black-throated Green Warbler (Kip), Flight to Punta Gorda (Lysa) **Page 8:** Chocolate samples! (Kip), Morelet's Seedeater (Ed), Yellow-throated Euphonia (Ron) **Page 9:** Group ready to motor down the New River to Lamanai Outpost Lodge, View from the flight to Punta Gorda (Kip)