



THE BEST OF PANAMA: CANOPY TOWER AND THE DARIÉN

12 - 23 FEBRUARY 2025



Rufous-vented Ground Cuckoo will hopefully be encountered on this trip.

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Welcome to our Best of Panama birding tour! Panama is perhaps one of the best birding countries in the Neotropics. With easy access, an excellent logistics infrastructure, and a huge bird list of 1,012 species it is an obligatory birding destination. Panama is excellent for beginners in the Neotropics, who would certainly fall in love with the natural history and the overwhelming amount of birds such as colorful tanagers, sparkling hummingbirds, noisy parrots, and lovely motmots and trogons, and for those who are quite experienced Panama offers an exquisite set of seldom-seen and sought-after species, such as **Bare-crowned** and **Ocellated Antbirds**, **Black-crowned Antpitta**, **Rufous-vented Ground Cuckoo**, and the strange **Sapayoa**.

During this 12-day tour you will have the chance to visit the Gamboa area near the Panama Canal, where we will be based at the world-famous Canopy Tower Lodge. This tower, a former US military center that was built to house powerful radar used in the defense of the canal, today is one of the most magnificent birding lodges in Latin America, allowing the guest a magnificent 360° view of the forest of the Soberanía National Park. We will stay a total of four nights, exploring the great surroundings, including places like the Pipeline Road, Summits Ponds, Semaphore Hill Road, and the Gamboa Marina Resort while looking for species such as **Brown-hooded Parrot**, **Northern Mealy** and **Red-lored Amazons**, **Keel-billed** and **Yellow-throated Toucan**, **Rufous** and **Broad-billed Motmots**, **American Pygmy Kingfisher**, **Boat-billed Heron**, **Crimson-backed** and **Golden-hooded Tanagers**, **Purple-throated Fruitcrow**, **Spotted Antbird**, **Dot-winged Antwren**, **Long-billed Gnatwren**, **Song Wren**, **Slaty-tailed**, **Gartered**, and **White-tailed Trogons**, and if we are lucky **Rufous-vented Ground Cuckoo** and **Ocellated Antbird**. The lodge's surroundings are also good for wildlife, including **Brown-throated Sloth**, **Nine-banded Armadillo**, **Central American Agouti**, and **Lesser Capybara**.



*The brightly colored **Yellow-throated Toucan** will hopefully be seen on this tour.*

Then we will visit the Canopy Lodge in the Valle del Antón (Anton Valley), surrounded by lush forested hills and ridges and home to several special species, such as **Yellow-eared Toucanet**, **Snowcap**, **Ochraceous Wren**, **White-tipped Sicklebill**, **Black-and-yellow Tanager**, **Tiny Hawk**, **Tody Motmot**, **Rosy Thrush-Tanager**, **Grey-headed Chachalaca**, and **Collared Trogon**, and we'll have another chance for **Rufous-vented Ground Cuckoo**. The Canopy Lodge is a very comfortable, beautiful lodge, situated in a peaceful location and surrounded by gardens, where we will try for **Tropical Screech Owl** and, with luck, **Uniform Crake** as well as for several tanagers like **Bay-headed** and **Dusky-faced Tanagers**.



*The strange **Boat-billed Heron** is possible at Summit Ponds.*

Finally we will spend four nights and days at the recently built Canopy Camp in the Darién Province, looking for a whole set of range-restricted species shared only with Colombia, some of them quite hard-to-get in other Neotropical countries. The amenities at the Canopy Camp are very comfortable; each camping unit provides an African safari tent with wooden floor, beds, electricity, fans (however, no AC), a second room to place the luggage inside the tent, and a private bathroom outside the tent. The birds in the Darién include **White-eared Conebill**, **Double-banded Greytail**, **Dusky-backed Jacamar**, **Black Oropendola**, **Spectacled Parrotlet**, **Black-crowned Antpitta**, **Bare-crowned Antbird**, **Black Antshrike**, **Grey-cheeked Nunlet**, **Spot-crowned Barbet**, and **Orange-crowned Oriole**. We will also try for **Blue Cotinga**, **Green Shrike-Vireo**, **Stripe-cheeked Woodpecker**, and the most wanted **Sapayoa**.

Itinerary (12 days/11 nights)

Day 1. Arrival

Arrival in Panama City and transfer to Canopy Tower Lodge.

Overnight: Canopy Tower

Day 2. Birding the Canopy Tower, Semaphore Hill, and Summit Ponds

We will meet at the observation deck before dawn to enjoy the forest canopy with the early calls of **Barred** and **Slaty-backed Forest Falcons**. While enjoying some coffee we will try to detect the secretive **Green Shrike-Vireo** and the beautiful **Blue Cotinga**. Other birds include **Northern Mealy** and **Red-lored Amazons**, **Brown-capped Tyrannulet**, **Collared Aracari**, and the striking **Keel-billed Toucan**.

After breakfast we will bird the famous Semaphore Hill, looking for **Rufous** and **Broad-billed Motmots**, **Slaty-tailed Trogon**, **Semiplumbeous Hawk**, **Plain-colored** and **White-shouldered Tanagers**, **Fulvous-vented Euphonia**, and **Green Honeycreeper**. Before lunch we will check the hummingbird feeders around the lodge entrance, enjoying views of **Blue-chested Hummingbird**, **Violet-bellied Hummingbird**, **White-necked Jacobin**, and **Snowy-bellied Hummingbird**.



*Semaphore Hill usually produces some great birds such as **Green Honeycreeper**.*

In the afternoon we will explore the Summit Ponds area, where we will try for the elusive **White-throated Crake**, **Boat-billed Heron**, **Wattled Jacana**, **Rufescent Tiger Heron**, and

Purple Gallinule. Other birds include **Lemon-rumped Tanager, Palm Tanager, Crimson-backed Tanager, Black-striped Sparrow, Isthmian Wren,** and many others.

We might also have our first mammal encounters here with **Lesser Capybara** and **Brown-throated Sloth.**

Overnight: Canopy Tower

Day 3. Birding the Pipeline Road

We will have a full day at the famous Pipeline Road, trying to see as many birds as possible and enjoying all of them. The list includes species like **Black-breasted Puffbird, White-tailed, Gartered, and Black-throated Trogons, Song Wren, Golden-collared Manakin, Purple-throated Fruitcrow, Great Jacamar, and Fasciated and Black-crowned Antshrikes.** If we are lucky to find any army ant swarms we might see the striking **Ocellated Antbird** and also **Spotted and Bicolored Antbirds** and **Northern Barred** and **Plain-brown Woodcreepers.** We will visit some hummingbird feeders with species such as **Long-billed** and **Stripe-throated Hermits, Crowned Woodnymph,** and if we are lucky **Rufous-crested Coquette.**

Overnight: Canopy Tower



*The impressive **Fasciated Antshrike** is possible along the Pipeline Road.*

Day 4. Transfer to and birding at Canopy Lodge

Today we will transfer to El Valle de Antón, with time to explore the surroundings. En route we'll pay a visit to the Canopy Adventure Center, where we have seen the mythical **Rufous-vented Ground Cuckoo** in the past.

After lunch we will explore the lodge surroundings, enjoying **Gray-headed Chachalaca, White-tipped Dove, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Black-chested Jay, Black-striped Sparrow, Buff-throated Saltator, and Chestnut-headed Oropendola.**

Overnight: Canopy Lodge

Day 5. Birding the La Mesa and Cerro Valle Chiquito areas

Today we will explore the La Mesa and Cerro Valle Chiquito areas, looking for species such as **White-tipped Sicklebill, Dusky-faced Tanager, Red-crowned Ant Tanager, Thick-billed Euphonia, Silver-throated Tanager, Bay-headed Tanager, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Black-faced Antthrush,** and if we are lucky **White Hawk.** We will also try for **Tody Motmot** and **Rosy Thrush-Tanager.** Other birds include **Grey-necked Wood Rail** and if we are lucky **Uniform Crake.** At night we will search for **Tropical Screech Owl.**

Overnight: Canopy Lodge

Day 6. Birding the Altos del Maria road

We will have a full day at the Altos del Maria road, focusing on special targets such as **Yellow-eared Toucanet, Collared Trogon, Snowcap, Rufous-browed Tyrannulet, Ochraceous and Rufous-and-white Wrens, Barred Hawk,** and with luck the secretive **Black-crowned Antpitta.**

Overnight: Canopy Lodge

Day 7. Transfer to the Canopy Tower

Today we will transfer back to the Canopy Tower, focusing on any species we might have missed on previous days.

Overnight: Canopy Tower

Day 8. Transfer to Canopy Camp, birding on the way

A predawn start will take us to Nusagandi, where we will look for the most wanted **Sapayoa** and also for **Checker-throated Stipplethroat, Dull-mantled Antbird, Black-striped, Cinnamon,** and **Stripe-cheeked Woodpeckers, White-ruffed and Red-capped Manakins, Speckled Mourner, Spot-crowned Antvireo,** and if we are lucky **Scarlet-thighed Dacnis.**



Black-throated Mango is one of the many hummingbird species we should see visiting feeders.

We will have lunch in the village of Torti, enjoying some nice hummingbird feeders with species such as **Scaly-breasted** and **Snowy-bellied Hummingbirds**, **Rufous-breasted Hermit**, **Black-throated Mango**, and **Long-billed Starthroat**. We will continue to the Canopy Camp in the Darién Province, where we will spend the afternoon birding around the camp grounds, looking for **Olivaceous Piculet** and **Spot-crowned Barbet**.

Overnight: Canopy Camp

Day 9. Birding the Quebrada Felix trail and El Salto

We will explore the forest along the Quebrada Felix trail, looking for the sought-after **Black-crowned Antpitta**. Other birds here may include **Rufous Piha**, **Speckled Mourner**, **Black Antshrike**, **Bare-crowned Antbird**, **Northern Barred Woodcreeper**, **Wedge-billed Woodcreeper**, **Sooty-headed Tyrannulet**, **Yellow-throated Toucan**, **Double-banded Greytail**, **Rufous-winged Antwren**, and, as always, many others.

In the afternoon we will explore the secondary growth and open fields near El Salto to look for **Grey-cheeked Nunlet**, **Pied Puffbird**, **White Hawk**, and with luck **Great Potoo** in a day-roosting tree.

Overnight: Canopy Camp



Great Potoo is often seen at its cryptic day roosts.

Day 10. Birding the Nuevo Vigia area

Today we will have a boat trip in the morning to the Nuevo Vigia site to look specifically for the range-restricted **Dusky-backed Jacamar** among many other birds.

In the afternoon we will bird not far from Canopy Camp, looking for other Darién specialists such as **White-eared Conebill** and **Choco Sirystes**, and if we are lucky **Great Green Macaw**.

Overnight: Canopy Camp

Day 11. Darién clean-up day

We will have this extra day to maximize our chances of finding all our targets and most wanted species in the area, including the range-restricted **Black Oropendola** near Yaviza (the southeastern end of the northern half of the Pan-American Highway).

Overnight: Canopy Camp

Day 12. Birding the San Francisco Reserve and departure

This is our last morning in the Darién with a visit to the San Francisco Reserve, near Torti, where we will have one more chance for **Stripe-cheeked Woodpecker** as well as **Blue Cotinga**, **Great**

Jacamar, Orange-crowned Oriole, Black-headed Tody-Flycatcher, and the endemic Panamanian Tyrannulet.

After lunch we will transfer back to the Panama City airport to connect with our international flights.

Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors.

Duration: 12 days

Limit (Group Size): 6 - 8

Dates: 12 – 23 February 2025

Start: Panama City

End: Panama City

Prices: US \$ 7,521 per person sharing, assuming 6 - 8 participants (2025)

Single Supplements: US\$2,056 (2025)

Price includes:

Transfer from the Panama City airport to the Canopy Tower and back to the airport on the last day

Accommodation

All meals (except as indicated)

Bottled water and complementary soft drinks

All transportation

English-speaking tour leader

Admission fees

Price excludes:

International airfares

Hotel in Panama (before or after the tour if needed)

Alcoholic drinks

Personal expenses such as laundry, internet access, phone calls, etc.

Gratuities (please see our tipping guidelines blog)

Dinner in Panama on the last day

Any activity and meals in Panama City on the first day if arrival is early in the morning

Tour information

We consider this an easy trip. Most of the birding is along roads and near the vehicle. However, we will walk up to 3 km (2 miles) per day at birding pace. Around Canopy Tower we will spend most of the time along paved roads and also at the lodge observation deck. During our visit to the Canopy Lodge almost all birding is along roads, except for the visit to the Canopy Adventure Center, where there is some steep terrain.

The Canopy Tower lodge does not have elevators, and the rooms are located on the second and third floors, the dining room on the fourth floor, and the observation deck at the top. The participants should be able to walk up and down every day.

Canopy Camp is a comfortable African safari style setting with private bathrooms with sink, showers, flush toilets, and electricity. We will bird around forest clearings and explore some forest trails, including birding along roads.

Accommodation Notes:

The Canopy Tower is a unique but rather small lodge which includes dining, observation levels, and lodging. Due to its small size, the Canopy Tower does not have an elevator, and sounds may occasionally be heard from other guests climbing the stairs in the evening. Additionally, we unfortunately cannot always guarantee participants a single room. For those who do require a single room, we encourage an early booking which will certainly help your chances. We will do our best to accommodate your requests, however we are subject to the capacity limits of the Canopy Tower.