

Reef and Rainforest Tours



Panama at its Very Best

11 Days Group Tour
Led by Local Naturalist Guides
Plus Optional Post-Tour Extension

25 December 2009 – 04 January 2010

29 January – 08 February 2010

19 February – 01 March 2010

09 – 19 April 2010

16 – 26 July 2010

17 - 27 September 2010

15 – 25 October 2010

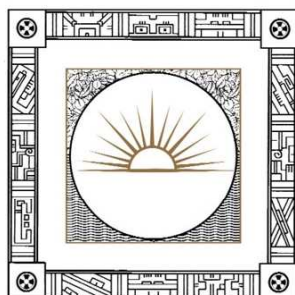
31 December – 10 January 2011



Panama at its Very Best Group Tour ITINERARY IN BRIEF

Panama, with its indigenous tribes, white sand islands, coral reefs, rainforests, cloud forests and national parks teeming with wildlife, is an extremely diverse natural history destination. In addition, there is the natural and historic legacy of the world famous canal. This escorted group itinerary reflects this diversity and encompasses all of the elements which make Panama so special – the very best of Panama.

- Day 01 Depart **LONDON HEATHROW**. Arrive **PANAMA CITY**. Met and transfer to the hotel. O/n HOLIDAY INN PANAMA CANAL, BB.
- Day 02 Morning drive to **GAMBOA**, for a boat expedition in search of wildlife on the **PANAMA CANAL** and waterways of **GATUN LAKE**. Picnic lunch. Afternoon return to Gamboa and transfer to the airport. Catch flight to **DAVID**. Met and transfer to the hotel. O/n HOTEL DOS RIOS, FB.
- Day 03 Morning visit to **LA AMISTAD** International Park and Biosphere Reserve. Afternoon visit to **FINCA DRACULA**. O/n HOTEL DOS RIOS, FB.
- Day 04 Drive to Boquete, visiting **SITIO BARRILES** en route. Afternoon visit to the Lerida Coffee Estate. O/n FINCA LERIDA LODGE, FB.
- Day 05 Morning to explore **FINCA LERIDA**, a privately owned reserve in the buffer zone of **BARU VOLCANO NATIONAL PARK**. Afternoon at leisure. O O/n FINCA LERIDA LODGE, FB.
- Day 06 Drive to David and board flight to **PANAMA CITY**. City tour to include Old Panama City, Casco Viejo and the Panama Canal Museum. O/n HOLIDAY INN PANAMA CANAL, FB.
- Day 07 Depart by small plane to the **SAN BLAS ISLANDS** at the crack of dawn. Met and transfer to the lodge. Visit the Kuna village of Achutupo and learn about the Kuna culture and traditional ceremonies. Afternoon snorkelling tour. O/n UAGUINEGA LODGE, FB.
- Day 08 Fly to Panama City and transfer to **EL COROTU**. Board a motorized *piragua* (dugout canoe) and travel up the Chagres River to visit the Embera indigenous village of **EMBERA DRUA**. After a picnic lunch, return via the waterfall and transfer to Panama City. O/n HOTEL EL PANAMA, FB.
- Day 09 Early morning drive to the port of **GAMBOA** to board the boat for a trip on the world famous journey through the **PANAMA CANAL**. Return to Panama City for a farewell dinner at a local restaurant. O/n HOTEL EL PANAMA, FB.
- Day 10 Morning at leisure. Later, transfer to Tocumen International Airport. Depart **PANAMA**.
- Day 11 Arrive **LONDON HEATHROW**.



PANAMA AT ITS VERY BEST – ESCORTED GROUP TOUR

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 01 Depart LONDON HEATHROW and fly to PANAMA CITY via MIAMI. Met on arrival at Tocumen International Airport and transfer to the hotel. O/n HOLIDAY INN PANAMA CANAL, BB.

Day 02 Early morning pick up from the hotel and transfer to GAMBOA, where the Chagres River meets the Panama Canal. Board a boat and depart on an expedition in search of wildlife on the banks of the PANAMA CANAL and waterways of GATUN LAKE. Pass gigantic cargo ships transiting through the canal from one ocean to another. Along the way, there are opportunities to spot Green iguana and Three-toed sloth resting on tree branches, Crocodile, Osprey in the hunt for Peacock bass, Snail kite and Keel-billed toucan among other wildlife. The expedition boat will allow for close approximations to rainforest covered islands (former hill tops) in Gatun Lake to search for White-faced capuchin, Mantled howler monkey, Central American spider monkey, and Geoffrey's tamarin. Enjoy a picnic lunch on a small island with extraordinary views.



Return to GAMBOA and drive to ALBROOK domestic airport to catch the scheduled flight to DAVID, capital of the Chiriqui province. Chiriqui is known as "Panama's breadbasket" and contains some of the most breathtaking highland scenery in Central America. Transfer to VOLCAN on the western side of the Baru Volcano. O/n HOTEL DOS RIOS, FB.

(2).../ PANAMA AT ITS VERY BEST, GROUP TOUR

Day 03 Morning expedition in LA AMISTAD International Park. Shared with neighbouring Costa Rica and recognized in 1982 as a World Biosphere Reserve and UNESCO World Heritage Site, LA AMISTAD is located on the Central American natural land bridge. This area benefits from species overlap and, with great ranges in altitude, precipitation, soil and temperature, bio-diversity here is at its best. Morning spent hiking and exploring La Amistad in the area of El Retoño in search of the Resplendent Quetzal, Silvery-fronted Tapaculo, Andean Pygmy-Owl, Barred Becard, Black and Yellow Silky Flycatcher among many other western highland birds. After lunch at a local restaurant visit FINCA DRACULA, home to over 1500 orchid species. O/n HOTEL DOS RIOS, FB.



Day 04 Morning visit to SITIO BARRILES, an archaeological site with remains of the extinct Barril culture. Here the site guide will interpret the petroglyphs provide a wealth of information on the many artefacts which have been discovered over the years. After lunch, transfer to BOQUETE, a quaint town on the eastern side of Baru Volcano. The countryside here is dotted with flowers, fruit and produce farms, coffee plantations and also lush tropical cloud forests. At the entrance to Boquete, stop atop a bluff where there is an extraordinary view of the town set in the mountain valley at 1,060 meters above sea level with the Caldera River running through it. Afternoon visit to the Lerida Coffee Estate to learn how coffee is harvested and processed. This is no ordinary coffee. Organically grown and scrutinized; Lerida's coffee is world renowned. Enjoy a fresh brewed cup of coffee while watching the spectacular sunset over the Baru Volcano, the highest peak of the country at 3,475 meters above sea level.



O/n FINCA LERIDA LODGE, FB. This small, comfortable eco-lodge is situated South of Baru Volcano, within an 800-acre private cloud forest nature reserve, approximately 1600 metres above sea-level. The lodge has comfortable rooms, a lounge area with an open fire to ward off the chilly evenings and small restaurant serving fresh and extremely good coffee from the lodge's private coffee plantation.

Breathtaking views of the surrounding highlands and excellent birding can be found on the lodge's trails or simply from one's verandah.

(3).../ PANAMA AT ITS VERY BEST, GROUP TOUR

Day 05 Morning to explore FINCA LERIDA, a privately owned reserve in Boquete, in the buffer zone of BARU VOLCANO NATIONAL PARK. At an elevation of 2,286 meters there is the opportunity to look for the elusive Resplendent Quetzal, Three-wattled Bellbird, Black-faced Solitaire, Volcano Hummingbird, Long-tailed Silky Flycatcher and Prong-billed Barbet in their cool habitat of orchids, bromeliads and wild avocados. Afternoon at leisure to relax or walk through the coffee plantation within the property. O/n FINCA LERIDA LODGE, FB.



Day 06 After a leisurely breakfast, travel to the city of David to board the mid-morning flight to PANAMA CITY. Met on arrival and commence a tour of Panama city, a contrasting metropolis with World Heritage Sites, rainforests and a flourishing business district filled with skyscrapers. Explore the ruins of Old Panama City, the first European settlement to be established along the shores of the Pacific Ocean (1519) , Casco Viejo with its colonial landmarks and cobblestone streets, the panama Canal Museum and the modern city. O/n HOLIDAY INN PANAMA CANAL, FB.

Day 07 Early morning transfer to the airport and catch domestic flight to ACHUTUPO on the San Blas archipelago. To enhance the interaction with the Kuna, travellers will go without the Naturalist Guide. The archipelago is made up of nearly 400 tiny islands scattered along the Caribbean coast of Eastern Panama. As part of the Comarca de Kuna Yala, the area is ruled by the fiercely independent Kuna Indians who inhabit only 40 of the islands. Met on arrival and transfer by boat to Uaguitupo Island. Morning to settle in before departing on an excursion to a nearby Kuna village to learn about the culture of this colourful, vibrant tribe. Visit the communal house of



“Sahilas” (Kuna chiefs) where the chiefs are responsible for enforcing the law of the community as well as offering advice on other aspects of life - including marital problems! Learn about the building of the typical Kuna house, their economy, the traditional “mola”, and the processing of sugar cane into the alcoholic drink known as “chicha”. Return to the lodge to relax at one of the hammocks and to have lunch. Later this

afternoon snorkel in the crystal clear waters of the Caribbean Sea to look for stunning marine life. (Contd.../)

(4).../ PANAMA AT ITS VERY BEST, GROUP TOUR

(Contd.../) O/n UAGUINEGA LODGE, FB. This small, simple island lodge is run by the Kuna and consists of a small number of rustic wooden huts with private bathrooms and balconies overlooking the water, and a small restaurant serving traditional seafood dishes. A number of perfectly positioned hammocks provide the perfect setting for a lazy afternoon.



Day 08

After breakfast, transfer to the airport and catch flight to Panama City. Met on arrival by the Naturalist Guide and transfer to EL COROTU on the shores of Madden Lake. The main reservoir of drinking water for the cities of Panama and Colon, Madden Lake also supplies 40% of the water required for the operation of the Panama Canal. Here, board a motorized *piragua* (dugout canoe) and travel up the Chagres River to the Embera indigenous village of EMBERA DRUA. The boat journey takes us through the rainforest of the 320,000-acre CHAGRES NATIONAL PARK, which is the largest of the National Parks protecting the Panama Canal Watershed. Along the Chagres River, we may be able to spot Little



Blue and Green Heron, Great Egret, Anhingas, Neotropical Cormorant, Amazon, Ringed, and Green Kingfishers, along with Keel-billed Toucans and Ospreys flying above.

At the Embera village there will be dancing and music. Time to learn about Embera customs still practised by the Embera and their relationship with nature. There will be handcrafts available for sale and a chance to be painted with the traditional *jagua*, a natural dye the Embera use to adorn their bodies. After a picnic lunch, head back to Panama City. O/n



HOTEL EL PANAMA, FB. Centrally located, the hotel offers accommodation in comfortable rooms with private bathroom, cable tv and safety deposit box. There is a conference centre, as well as a selection of bars and restaurants.

(5).../ PANAMA AT ITS VERY BEST, GROUP TOUR

Day 09 Morning pick up from the hotel and drive to GAMBOA. Board a boat and begin the journey heading south ion Gatun Lake. At this point, the ship will be sailing at 26 metres above sea level. Shortly after departure, the ship will enter Gaillard Cut, the narrowest section of the Panama Canal. The 13.7 kilometer long portion of the Continental Divide was carved through rock and shale at the beginning of the last century when the canal began operating (1914).

The ship will reach Pedro Miguel Locks, where the vessel will be lowered 9.4 meters into Miraflores Lake. After travelling nearly 2 Kilometers, arrive at Mirflores Locks, where the transition from fresh water to salt water takes place in the locks chambers. Due to the Pacific Ocean's extreme tidal variations, Miraflores locks meter gates are the tallest of the locks system. In two steps, the vessel will be lowered 16.6 meters onto the Pacific Ocean. Sail under the bridge of the Americas, which reunites the land divided by the Panama Canal as part of the pan American highway. The Amador Marina will be your final destination, where you will disembark and return to the hotel. Tonight, enjoy a farewell dinner at a local restaurant. O/n HOTEL EL PANAMA, FB.

Day 10 Morning at leisure. Later, pick up at the lobby of the hotel and transfer to Tocumen International Airport. Depart PANAMA and connect in MIAMI.

Day 11 Arrive LONDON.

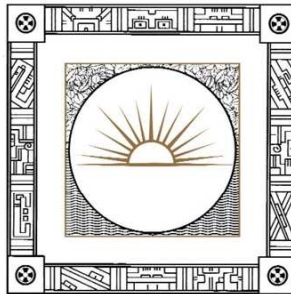
Minimum group size is 2, maximum 14 plus the tour leader.

PANAMA AT ITS VERY BEST 2009 / 2010

Departure Dates from London	Adult Price	Single Supplement
18 September 2009	£2,494	£344
25 December 2009	£2,647	£344
29 January 2010	£2,538	£344
19 February 2010	£2,538	£344
09 April 2010	£2,538	£344
16 July 2010	£2,684	£344
17 September 2010	£2,538	£344
15 October 2010	£2,538	£344
31 December 2010	£2,684	£344

Prices are based on "O" Class flights with IBERIA AIRLINES.

Please call 01803 866965 if you have any queries, would like to secure your place on the tour, and/or if you would like to extend the tour to include the optional Bocas del Toro post-tour extension or other locations.



BOCAS DEL TORO

SIX DAYS

UNESCORTED POST-TOUR EXTENSION

Day 11 Morning pick up from the hotel and transfer to the domestic airport. Catch flight to BOCAS. Met on arrival at the airport and transfer to BOCAS TOWN, capital of the Boca del Toro archipelago on the Caribbean Sea, where you will spend the next days enjoying the calm waters and snorkelling in the mangroves and coral reefs. Board a water taxi for the 25 minute boat ride to Colon Island. Meet with the hotel agent and tfr by boat to Punta Vieja on Bastimentos island in the BASTIMENTOS MARINE RESERVE. O/n PUNTA CARACOL, HB. The small luxury resort consists of nine exclusive cabins, each with private bathroom and terrace overlooking the Caribbean Sea. There is a restaurant offering traditional Caribbean and Mediterranean cuisine and snorkelling is possible offshore.



Day 12 Full day at leisure. OPTIONAL: Full day tour of the idyllic Zapatillas Cays with their snow-white sandy beaches and translucent waters. These little islands were hideouts for famous pirates during the 17th and 18th centuries. You will have the opportunity here to swim in this true Caribbean paradise. Continuing after a picnic lunch, there will be two snorkelling stops: first at a nearby coral reef, teeming with colourful tropical fish, such as Four-eyed Butterflyfish, Blueheads, Queen Angelfish, Rock Beauty, as well as Banded coral Shrimp and Mithrax Crabs living among Gorgonians and Sea Fans. Another stop will be made in a nearby mangrove, allowing the unique opportunity to witness the extremely delicate balance of the ocean's infant life as you carefully snorkel under roots and among the tiny forms of life, which will later make the reef their home. O/n PUNTA CARACOL, HB.

(2).../

Day 13 Full day at leisure. OPTIONAL: Hike along Caiman trail to look for birds and other wildlife including Red-throated Ant Tanager and Golden-collared Manakin, White-faced Capuchins, Three-toed Sloths and the tiny endemic poison dart frog *Dendrobates Pumilio*. O/n PUNTA CARACOL, HB.



Day 14 Full day at leisure. OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES available. O/n PUNTA CARACOL, HB.

Day 15 Morning at leisure. Afternoon pick up from the lodge and transfer to the airport. Catch flight to PANAMA CITY. Met on arrival at the airport and transfer to the hotel. O/n COUNTRY INN, BB

Day 16 Morning at leisure. Afternoon transfer to the airport to catch flight to LONDON HEATHROW.

Day 17 Arrive LONDON HEATHROW.

SIX DAYS UNESCORTED POST-TOUR EXTENSION

Please contact the office on 01803 866965 for further details and prices.



IMPORTANT NOTES TO ACCOMPANY THE ABOVE ITINERARIES

INCLUSIONS: All international flights from London, all accommodation, all transfers, full board everywhere except Days 1 & 2 and Days 10 & 11, all domestic flights, all excursions and activities as stated, assistance and guide services, museum and reserve entrance fees, protection through ATOL.

EXCLUSIONS: Not included: other meals, tourist card (US\$5 per person) personal items, alcoholic drinks, tips, travel insurance, entry visa.

TRIP CLASSIFICATION: Easy/moderate hiking 2-4 hours per day with rolling and slippery hills. Hotel or lodge accommodations are comfortable.

NB: The San Blas portion of this trip is led by a local bilingual guide. The Naturalist Guide will not be travelling to San Blas. Women travellers to the San Blas Islands should wear one-piece swimsuits when swimming in accordance to Kuna traditions.

NB: Weight restrictions apply to luggage in both commercial and chartered flights within Panama. A maximum of 25 lbs. of checked luggage and 10 lbs. of carry-on per person is allowed. Arrangements can be made to store luggage that will not be needed while away from the city. Excess baggage charges assessed by commercial carriers are the responsibility of the passenger.

NB: All itineraries are subject to change without notice to take into account possible international and domestic flight schedule changes which can take place before departure date or during the tour, and other operational factors.

NB: The quoted price for the above itinerary is based on current airline fares (both international and domestic), fuel surcharges and flight taxes. These (and other tour costs) may be subject to unanticipated increases beyond our control at short notice, either before or after you have booked the tour, in which case the price would need to be revised accordingly.

NB: This tour involves some travel in remote areas. This adds to the adventure and increases the opportunity to enjoy a true wildlife experience. However, due to terrain, weather, road conditions, and other factors beyond our control, some elements of the tour may have to be altered. Times of some activities may need to be changes or even cancelled due to the conditions. If an activity is cancelled it will usually be replaced with an alternative activity that is more appropriate for the conditions. Advance notice will be given for any changes where possible, although at times changes may need to be made whilst the tour is in progress.

NB: With any trip involving wildlife it is impossible to guarantee a sighting, but each trip is designed around known habitats. Every effort will be made to ensure a sighting, but cannot be held responsible if no sighting is made due to the wildlife itself, weather, or any other elements beyond our control.

NB: Prices are based on specific airlines and specific economy seating classes. Flights are booked on an ad hoc basis and so early booking is recommended to take advantage of this fare availability. Prices may rise if a more expensive seat class needs to be booked. Please call for information on price variations for using alternative airlines or for seat upgrades.

NB: Adequate insurance cover is mandatory. Please supply us with details of your cover.

NB: All domestic flights should be re-confirmed at least 36 hours before departure. During the group tour our representatives will provide this service. During extensions you should make the re-confirmations – your hotel should be happy to provide this service if requested. All international flights should be re-confirmed at least 72 hours before departure.

NB: Once the tour has been booked and a deposit paid, any further changes initiated by the client may be subject to additional charges.

NB: Inclusive tours and excursions as stated in the itinerary will have been pre-paid. Once full payment has been made and/or clients are actually at their destination, should clients be disinclined to partake of any inclusive tour or excursion, no refunds will be possible.

NB: Visas are easily obtainable on arrival for EU residents. Please ensure your passport has six months validity from the date of return.

Reef and Rainforest Tours Ltd.

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