



# TREASURES OF WESTERN BELIZE

Black Rock Lodge & Jade Jungle Resort

*December 6 - 13, 2026*



*Northern Emerald-Toucanet © Michael O'Brien*

In western Belize's Cayo District, two outstanding lodges, Jade Jungle Resort (formerly Pook's Hill) and Black Rock Lodge, serve as a perfect base for exploring the Maya Mountain foothills and Mountain Pine Ridge. This interesting area has a different mix of species than lowland Belize, including many regional specialties and possibilities for several very rare species.

Jade Jungle Resort lies in a private reserve along the Roaring River, adjoining the vast Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve, and offers some of the best forest birding in all of Belize. A day and a half exploring the trails here will seem barely adequate to soak in the bounty of this fabulous place. From before dawn when calls of Great Tinamou and Spectacled Owl echo through the forest, to mid-morning when White Hawk and King Vulture circle overhead, we'll amass an amazing list of species. Some highlights may include Great Curassow, Purple-crowned Fairy, Wedge-tailed Sabrewing, Great

Antshrike, Wedge-billed Woodcreeper, Tropical Royal and Ruddy-tailed flycatchers, and Rufous Mourner. At St. Herman's Blue Hole National Park, we'll search for Nightingale Wren and Lesson's Motmot, as well as such dazzling beauties as White-collared Manakin, Scarlet-rumped Tanager, and Orange-billed Sparrow.

A short distance to the west, Black Rock Lodge is one of a kind. Operating off-grid, Black Rock uses micro-hydroelectric and solar power to run their



facilities and is also extremely comfortable. From the main veranda, a grand vista over the Macal River Gorge offers some of the best raptor watching in Belize, including resident, Orange-breasted Falcon, Black-and-white and Ornate hawk-eagles, and often eye-level Swallow-tailed Kites! When we tear ourselves away from the veranda, excellent birding along the trails and entrance road may yield Spotted Wood-Quail, Collared Trogon, Northern Emerald- Toucanet, and Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher. A day trip to Mountain Pine Ridge will bring us to a whole new set of birds, such as Azure-crowned Hummingbird, Green Jay, Cabanis's Wren, Grace's and Rufous-capped warblers, Rusty Sparrow, Yellow-backed and Yellow-tailed orioles, and Black-headed Siskin.

To make things even more exciting, this itinerary allows possibilities for some very uncommon species including Solitary Eagle, Uniform Crake, Pheasant Cuckoo, Stygian Owl, Black-crested Coquette, White-chinned Swift, Keel-billed Motmot, Scarlet Macaw, Lovely Cotinga, and Blue Seedeater. We would be thrilled to find just one or two of these, but even a chance for them adds excitement to each outing!

## December 6, Day 1: Arrival and Transfer to Jade Jungle Resort

Participants should plan to arrive in Belize City (airport code BZE) by 2:00 p.m. Upon arrival, you'll be met by a representative of Jade Jungle Resort and transferred to the lodge, a drive of less than two hours. Some of us may travel to Jade Jungle Resort together, but our first official meeting will be at the veranda and bar at 5:30 p.m.

**NIGHT:** Jade Jungle Resort (near Teakettle)

## December 7, Day 2: All Day at Jade Jungle Resort

Jade Jungle Resort was built around an ancient Mayan residential complex, referred to as a Plazuela Group (a "diminutive plaza"), and much of the forest surrounding the main clearing contains unexcavated Mayan settlements. In our wanderings, we will likely see mounded piles of stones, indicating the presence of an ancient Maya family dwelling. The lodge is simple but very comfortable and is set in some of the finest forest we have birded in Belize. We'll take a full day to explore this fabulous site and may find over 100 species without ever getting into a vehicle!



*Jade Jungle Resort © Louise Zemaitis*

Our day will be entirely on foot, but broken into several segments, with ample time to get off our feet, use the restroom, and take in some wonderful meals. Some of the many species we'll look for include Great Curassow, Purple-crowned Fairy, Lesson's Motmot, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Mealy Parrot, Great

Antshrike, seven species of woodcreepers, Stub-tailed Spadebill, Band-backed Wren, and Golden-crowned Warbler. With a great deal of luck, some of the rarer possibilities at Jade Jungle Lodge include Uniform Crake, Pheasant Cuckoo, Scaly-throated Leaf-tosser, and Blue Seedeater.

When conditions are right, we'll position ourselves to watch the sky for soaring raptors, such as King Vulture, White Hawk, and Hook-billed and Double-toothed kites. At the same time, we'll watch for the four possible swift species here: Vaux's, White-collared, Chestnut-collared, and Lesser Swallow-tailed. In the evening, we may hear Spectacled, Mottled, and Black-and-white owls, and if so, we will try to see them.

**NIGHT:** Jade Jungle Resort (near Teakettle)

## December 8, Day 3: St. Herman's Blue Hole National Park

After an early breakfast, a 45-minute drive will take us to St. Herman's Blue Hole National Park, a 500+ acre preserve managed by Belize Audubon Society, and one of Belize's true national treasures. We'll spend much of our time in the vicinity of St. Herman's Cave, a limestone cave best known among birders as a reliable site for Nightingale Wren. This cave was an important Maya ritual site during the Classic Period and many artifacts such as pottery vessels, torches, and spears have been found here. The trails here can be incredibly birdy, and we'll keep an eye out for Lesson's and Tody motmots, Tropical Royal Flycatcher, Eye-ringed Flatbill, White-collared Manakin, Northern Schiffornis, Cinnamon Becard, Crimson-collared and Scarlet-rumped tanagers, and Orange-billed Sparrow. Around the entrance to the cave, there are likely to be several "Ridgeway's" Rough-winged Swallows, a subspecies which nests in caves and limestone sinks, primarily in the Yucatan Peninsula. We'll also visit the Inland Blue Hole, a sapphire-blue limestone sinkhole in the jungle (not to be confused with Belize's offshore Great Blue Hole), often an excellent spot to see Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Tropical Royal Flycatcher, and other forest species. En route to the national park, some agricultural fields can be alive with birds including numerous raptors, parrots, grassquits, and more, making for a very species-rich day afield.

**NIGHT:** Jade Jungle Resort (near Teakettle)

## December 9, Day 4: Morning at Jade Jungle Resort; Transfer to Black Rock Lodge

We'll spend our final morning hours at Pook's Hill before we transfer to Black Rock Lodge, arriving in time for lunch and afternoon birding the grounds.

**NIGHT:** Black Rock Lodge (near San Ignacio)

## December 10, Day 5: Black Rock Lodge

Our first full day at Black Rock Lodge will be spent entirely on the grounds, nearby trails, and entrance road. This top-notch resort is a true eco-lodge, with a passionate commitment to sustainability and environmental stewardship. Operating off grid, they use micro-hydroelectric and solar power to run their facilities, have a micro wetland for wastewater processing, and grow their own produce. The rooms are extremely comfortable, and the main veranda has a stunning vista over the Macal River Gorge in Black Rock Canyon. What's more, the birding here is outstanding! Looking out over the gorge, one may see a swirling group of Swallow-tailed Kites at eye level, or see an Ornate Hawk-Eagle sail by, or even see a courting pair of Orange-breasted Falcons in a noisy tail chase overhead or perched on a nearby cliff. Meanwhile, the feeders will likely be covered with the likes of Yellow-throated and Olive-backed euphonias, Red-legged Honeycreepers, Yellow-winged Tanager, and Black-cheeked Woodpecker.



*Ornate Hawk-Eagle © Michael O'Brien*

This 250-acre private reserve abuts the vast Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve and is one of Western Belize's true gems. Three species of toucans nest right on the grounds, and four species of trogons can be found in the immediate vicinity. Our explorations of the lodge, trails and entrance road should yield a large list of species, possibly including Spotted Wood-Quail, Long-billed and Stripe-throated hermits,

Wedge-tailed Sabrewing, Amazon Kingfisher, White-necked and White-whiskered puffbirds, Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher, Green-backed Sparrow, and a host of North American migrants. On one of our evenings here, we'll take a night drive in search of Northern Potoo, and possibly an owl or interesting mammal.

**NIGHT:** Black Rock Lodge (near San Ignacio)



*White-whiskered Puffbird © Michael O'Brien*

## December 11, Day 6: Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve

Today we'll drive up to Mountain Pine Ridge, a 100,000-acre reserve situated largely on a granite massif and established in 1944 to protect Belize's forest of native Honduras Pine (*Pinus caribaea hondurensis*). The birds here are quite different from those in the broadleaf forest of the foothills, so we'll expect to find a good number of new species. Some of those on our target list today include Azure-crowned Hummingbird, Greater Pewee, Plumbeous Vireo, Green Jay, Cabanis's Wren, Grace's and Rufous-capped warblers, Rusty Sparrow, Hepatic Tanager, Yellow-backed and Yellow-tailed orioles, and Black-headed Siskin. And, though chances are slim, we'll hope for a sighting of Solitary Eagle, Stygian Owl, or Lovely Cotinga. On



*Rusty Sparrow © Michael O'Brien*

our return trip, we'll visit some private hummingbird feeders where possibilities include Wedge-tailed and Violet sabrewings.

**NIGHT:** Black Rock Lodge (near San Ignacio)



*Caracol Archeological Reserve © Michael O'Brien*

## December 12, Day 7: Caracol Archeological Reserve and Chiquibul Forest Reserve

This morning, we will visit the Mayan ruins at Caracol, located deep in the vast Chiquibul Forest Reserve near the Guatemala border. This site was one of the largest and most important regional political centers of the Maya lowlands during the Classic Period, and nearly 100,000 people lived here during its peak. The main temple, Caana (meaning "sky palace") stands 143 feet high and is the tallest manmade structure in Belize, offering spectacular vistas for those who wish to climb to the top. Birding can be excellent at the ruins, and there are often mixed songbird flocks including various flycatchers, vireos, warblers, orioles, tanagers, and euphonias. A thriving colony of Montezuma Oropendolas is always a highlight, and in the sky overhead, raptors may include King Vulture, Plumbeous Kite, White Hawk, and Black Hawk-Eagle. As we stroll through the forest edge, a few special birds we'll be looking and listening for at Caracol include Collared Trogon, Keel-billed Motmot,

Northern Emerald Toucanet, Plain Antvireo, Rufous Mourner, and Band-backed Wren. For those who do not wish to go to Caracol, there is always the option to stay back and have more time to enjoy the amenities and birdlife of Black Rock Lodge.

**NIGHT:** Black Rock Lodge (near San Ignacio)

## December 13, Day 8: Transfer to Airport and Departure

This morning we'll transfer to the airport in good time for departing flights home. Please plan departing flights for no earlier than 12:00 noon.

### **ESSENTIAL TOUR INFORMATION**

**TOUR SIZE:** This tour will be limited to 14 participants.

**TOUR LEADERS:** Michael O'Brien and Louise Zemaitis.



**Michael O'Brien** is a freelance artist, author, and environmental consultant living in Cape May, New Jersey. He has a passionate interest in bird vocalizations and field identification, and a serious addiction to migration and nocturnal birding. His travels have taken him throughout North and Central America and beyond. At home in Cape May, Michael serves as an Associate Naturalist with Cape May Bird Observatory for whom he conducts numerous workshops, and, for many years, conducted a fall songbird migration count. He is co-author of *The Shorebird Guide*, *Flight Calls of Migratory Birds*, and *America's 100 Most Wanted Birds*, and is primary author of *Larkwire*, an online and handheld application for learning bird sounds. His illustrations have been widely published in books and field guides, including the *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America* and the new Peterson field guides. Michael also has an intense interest in butterflies, leads several "Birds & Butterflies" tours with his wife, Louise Zemaitis, and is coordinator of the Cape May Butterfly Count.



**Louise Zemaitis** is an artist and naturalist living in Cape May, New Jersey where she is a popular field trip leader teaching birding workshops as an Associate Naturalist with New Jersey Audubon’s Cape May Bird Observatory. She also enjoys leading birding groups and lecturing at birding festivals and is known for her enthusiasm for all natural history subjects. Louise and her husband, Michael O’Brien, have been guiding young birders at birding events and conferences for many years. In addition to leading, Louise is field coordinator of the Monarch Monitoring Project in Cape May, served as compiler of the Cape May Christmas Bird Count for over 20 years, and owns Swallowtail Studio at West End Garage in Cape May. An honors graduate of Temple University’s Tyler School of Art, she enjoys working as a freelance artist and her illustrations have been widely published. Her proudest accomplishment has been the raising of her two sons, Bradley, a biologist and artist, and Alec, a philosopher and musician.

**TOUR FEE:** \$5,895 per person based on double occupancy or \$7,147 for a person requiring single accommodation. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 through dinner on Day 8, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, all ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does **not** include airfare to nor from the starting/ending city; however, flights within the tour (if any) are included. The fee also excludes laundry, personal expenses, and other items of a personal nature. For information about gratuities, please see the “TIPPING” sub-section below. If the minimum group size is not met, each participant will be charged a small-group supplement—shared equally and communicated in advance—to allow the tour to proceed.

**REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT:** You may register for this tour through the VENT website or by calling our office (512-328-5221). The initial deposit for this tour is \$1,000 per person. At 180 days (June 9, 2026) VENT will collect a second deposit that brings the total deposit amount to 40% of the tour price. We accept MasterCard and Visa for both deposits.

**PAYMENTS:** All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date (August 8, 2026).

## CANCELLATION & REFUNDS:

### **CANCELLATION BY PARTICIPANT:**

- **More than 120 days prior to the tour start date:** A refund of all monies paid will be issued, less 50% of the deposit (including initial and second deposit)
- **120 days or fewer prior to the tour start date:** No refund will be provided.
- **Optional add-ons:** Some tours offer optional add-ons that are designated as non-refundable. Any such add-ons are clearly identified as non-refundable at the time of booking. By selecting and purchasing an optional add-on, the participant acknowledges and accepts its non-refundable status. Fees paid for non-refundable add-ons are not refundable under any circumstances, regardless of when the tour is cancelled.

This cancellation policy applies to all participants and all tours (Pre-Tours and Extensions are considered self-contained tours separate from the main tour). Because unexpected events can occur, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance.

### **CANCELLATION BY VENT:**

If VENT cancels a tour prior to departure without cause or good reason, VENT will provide the participant a full refund, which will constitute full settlement to the participant.

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement.

A "**Force Majeure**" event means any act beyond VENT's control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

This VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside of the services described in the tour itinerary.

**Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.**

**TRAVEL INSURANCE: To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit.** VENT has partnered with Redpoint Travel Protection as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend their **Ripcord** plan. Designed for all types of travelers, Ripcord is among the most comprehensive travel protection programs available.

Critical benefits of Ripcord include a completely integrated program with a single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims; **medical evacuation and rescue services** from your point of injury or illness to your **hospital of choice**; comprehensive travel insurance for **trip cancellation/interruption**, primary medical expense coverage, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as security evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or other security events, **waiver for pre-existing medical conditions exclusion**, and a **“Cancel for Any Reason”** benefit. Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.\*

For a price quote, or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: [ripcordtravelprotection.com/ventbird](http://ripcordtravelprotection.com/ventbird); or click the **Ripcord** logo on our website (click Help and Trip Insurance); or call +1-415-481-0600.

Pricing is based on age, trip cost, trip length, and level of coverage.

\*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 14 days of making your tour deposit. The CFAR benefit provides reimbursement for 75% of covered costs, and increases the policy premium by approximately 50%. Policies may be purchased either for the full value of the tour fee at the time of deposit or in segments as individual tour payments are made (deposit, mid-payment, final balance, additional arrangements, etc.). The “pay as you go” approach reduces up-front expense and ensures that the amount paid toward your full policy premium is in proportion to the amount paid toward the

full tour fee. If you choose to “pay as you go,” you must cover each deposit or payment within 14 days in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

### **Coronavirus (COVID-19):**

The coronavirus pandemic has brought uncertainty for many people currently holding travel insurance policies or who are considering future travel and purchasing such insurance. Redpoint has added a **Coronavirus FAQ page** to its website that addresses questions and concerns regarding its travel insurance and the impact of COVID-19. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of topics such as policy coverage and limitations, policy modifications, cancellation, refunds, and more. Among the most important points: 1) Trip cancellation solely for concern or fear of travel associated with COVID-19 is not covered; 2) Should you request cancellation of your policy, a full refund of your premium is available only under a limited set of conditions; and 3) Should you request cancellation, you may be eligible to receive a pro-rated refund of the unused portion of your premium or a travel insurance credit. Travel insurance credit (“Premium Credit”) is for the value of the policy purchased and may be applied to future policies. Premium Credits have no expiration dates. Rules and regulations apply.

Please visit the **Coronavirus FAQ** page at the following link:

[https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid\\_19\\_faq/](https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid_19_faq/)

Additionally, as countries begin opening up for travel, many are instituting an array of COVID-19 entry requirements, including mandates to purchase travel insurance covering medical expenses due to COVID-19 illness and accommodation in case of quarantine. Ripcord’s comprehensive travel insurance plans are designed to satisfy the various country-specific travel insurance entry requirements. Those who purchase a Ripcord policy will receive a “letter of confirmation” that affirms that the policy satisfies such requirements.

**FUEL & FUEL SURCHARGES:** In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

**TOUR CONDITIONS:** There will be much walking on this tour, mainly in open areas, roadsides, or well-maintained trails. Although none of the walking will be particularly strenuous, **in some areas there will be steps, roots, or other uneven terrain, and participants must be able to negotiate these without assistance, and at a normal birding pace.** Elevation changes will vary from sea level in Belize City to around 1,500 feet in Mountain Pine Ridge. To take advantage of the best time for avian activity, we will usually take an early breakfast and try to be out birding at first light. To balance the early mornings, there will be ample siesta times during either early or late afternoon, depending on the day's schedule. Traveling on bumpy roads is expected whenever we are off the Western Highway.

**CLIMATE:** We are often asked about the weather in Belize and how it differs throughout the year. The dry season runs from December through May, but showers can happen any time. The temperatures in January generally vary between an average high during the day of 83 degrees and an average low of 68 at night.

**CLOTHING:** Light field clothing and casual attire are suitable for this tour. Bring several pairs of long pants and comfortable shirts. Long-sleeved shirts are useful for protection from the sun and occasional biting insects. Pre-treating field pants and socks with repellent can provide extra protection from chiggers. A good hat or cap, plus rain gear and/or an umbrella are essential. Be sure to have a pair of comfortable walking shoes or hiking boots, plus a second pair of footwear such as tennis shoes or calf-high rubber boots (if it rains the trails can be muddy, especially from June through January). A light sweater and/or jacket are also nice for the occasional cool, damp mornings, evenings and overcast days. There is no laundry service available at either lodge. If you plan to wash your clothes in your room, please be aware of the fact that even quick drying nylon items may sometimes take 24 hours to dry when humidity is high.

**EQUIPMENT:** You should pack a binocular that is in good condition, along with a belt pack or daypack (good for carrying books, sunscreen, camera, etc.). As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binocular, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medications, and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag. Your leader will have a spotting scope; but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so. You should also bring sunglasses and sunscreen, a small flashlight or headlamp, a small folding stool, battery-operated alarm clock, water bottle, camera, digital storage media and spare batteries, small daypack, and your favorite snacks. We highly recommend that you bring a collapsible umbrella, and also carry it with you on longer walks. Personal items like digital storage media,

sunscreen, batteries, etc., can be very expensive anywhere in Belize. Bring sufficient supplies with you.

**AIR TRAVEL:** Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Per person fees apply for each set of travel arrangements: \$50 domestic; \$75 international.\* Many of our travelers choose to make their own air travel arrangements, but we emphasize the benefits to using our services. If you book your air arrangements yourself, Victor Emanuel Travel is unable to provide support in managing any flight delays and/or cancellations that could occur before and during a tour. When you purchase air tickets through Victor Emanuel Travel, our staff has ready access to your air ticket record and can provide assistance as problems arise. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements. **Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be held responsible for any air ticket penalties.**

\*An air ticket will be purchased by Victor Emanuel Travel on behalf of the traveler with the traveler's consent. A purchase is considered final upon receipt of payment. If a ticket is subsequently reissued at the behest of the traveler (i.e. voluntary change of plans), the same fee rates apply for the reissue process, in addition to any fees that may be charged by the airline.

**CURRENCY:** \$1USD equals \$2 Belizean Dollars. The exchange rate is subject to change, but has been constant for some years. Both currencies have identical denominations. So if you plan to spend any money in Belize, make sure you understand whether the price is being quoted in Belizean or USD. It is not necessary to exchange currency for this tour, since US dollars are accepted everywhere.

**DOCUMENTS:** A passport valid beyond your planned return date is required for entry to Belize, with at least one blank page for entry stamp. We recommend that your passport be valid for at least six months beyond your planned return date. If your passport is stamped by the immigration officials upon entry, you must be sure to get an exit stamp before returning to the United States. Visas are not required for entry by United States citizens. Non-United States citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions.

**ELECTRICITY:** Electricity is available at both Pook’s Hill and Black Rock Lodge 24 hours a day. Wall outlets are provided in each room/cabaña and electrical appliances may therefore be used at any time day or night. No adapter is needed.

**HEALTH:** VENT follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccinations.

**COVID-19:** We continually emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. Although VENT no longer maintains any of its COVID-era prevention protocols, we strongly recommend best practices for protecting yourself and your fellow travelers against COVID-19 illness. These measures include receiving the primary series vaccinations for those eligible, staying “Up to Date” with COVID-19 booster shots, wearing high filtration N-95 or KN-95 masks when in airports and on airplanes, and avoiding risky social settings in the lead-up to your tour. These recommendations are firmly rooted in CDC guidance regarding recommendations for avoiding COVID-19. Please visit the **Coronavirus Travel Update** page of our website <https://ventbird.com/covid-19> for our official statement regarding COVID-19 and the operation of our tours. Please visit the CDC website for the most up to date information about COVID-19 and associated guidance for proper health and hygiene: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>.

If you are taking personal medication, prescription or over-the-counter, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

**Insect Repellents** – There are insect repellents for the skin and an insect repellent used to treat clothing that should not be applied to the skin.

Insect repellents for the skin are commonly available in three forms:

- DEET (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide): A chemical compound that is marketed under various brand names (OFF!®, Cutter™, Ultrathon™, etc.) and offered in a variety of formulations including sprays, lotions, time-release preparations, and disposable wipes. The formulations will state a percentage of the active ingredient DEET on the packaging. DEET may be applied to exposed skin directly and/or sprayed on clothing. Please be careful when applying DEET as it can damage plastics and lens coatings.
- Picaridin: A synthetic formulation that is derived from piperine, a substance found in plants that produce black pepper.
- Herbal insect repellents: Various mixtures of organic ingredients such as oils from eucalyptus, citronella, cedar, and other herbs. The herbal repellents are more difficult to categorize because of the difference in ingredients from one brand to another. There is considerable variation in their effectiveness.

An insect repellent for clothing is marketed in one approved formulation:

- Permanone® (Permethrin) is an odorless spray-on repellent that may be used for pre-treatment of clothing, gear, and tents. It should not be used directly on the skin or sprayed on clothing while it is being worn. The pre-treatment process requires a number of hours to complete and must be done outdoors, so is best completed in advance of travel. Do-it-yourself pre-treatment has to be repeated more often than commercial treatment using Insect Shield® technology. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online.
- Insect Shield® apparel: Clothing pre-treated with Permanone is made by a variety of manufacturers. It is available for purchase from some sporting goods suppliers. The clothing is advertised as retaining its repellency for up to 70 washings.

The US EPA offers a search tool to help choose a repellent that is best for a particular situation. For example, some repellents work for mosquitoes, but not for ticks.

<https://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/which-insect-repellent-right-you>

Mosquitoes, black flies and other small, biting insects can sometimes be a nuisance in Belize, especially in the forested areas after rains. Fire ants occur in disturbed areas, such as roadsides, and should be carefully avoided. The leaders will point out fire ant mounds when they are first

encountered on the tour. Chiggers are found in most of the grassy areas. We suggest a stick-type repellent for your face and hands, plus at least one pump-style container of repellent for your clothing. Purified or bottled water is available at both Crooked Tree and Lamanai. As for foods, all salads, dairy products and home-cooked meals at both lodges are perfectly safe to eat, plus they are tasty and satisfying.

**A Note About Chiggers:** This tour visits areas where chiggers are known to occur. Chiggers are tiny parasitic mites found in most warm weather areas of the southern United States and the world's tropics. They are especially numerous in grassy areas, where, in the immature stage, they attach themselves to other animals or humans who make contact with the grass as they pass by. Chiggers do not suck blood, and the majority of species do not carry disease. They do feed on bodily fluids through a process in which a digestive enzyme is produced by the chigger which essentially liquefies the skin around the area where the chigger is attached. The chigger is not usually attached to the skin for more than a few hours before it either falls off or is knocked off. Our bodies respond by producing a hardened area as a defense against the chigger's digestive enzyme. Though the chigger may be long gone, it is the presence of the hardened area, and the body's natural process of reabsorbing it that typically causes intense itching, often lasting for a week or more. Chiggers like to attach themselves to areas of thin skin, like around the ankles, beltline, undergarment lines, knees, and elbows.

Chiggers can be avoided by following these procedures:

- Avoid walking or standing in areas dominated by taller grass. These areas are where one is most likely to encounter chiggers.
- Tuck your pants into your socks to avoid direct skin-to-grass contact. Chiggers can find their way through clothing, but this is a standard and effective prevention technique.
- Apply insect repellent to your skin and clothing. Please refer to the Insect Repellent section that follows for important information about selecting and applying repellent.
- Powdered sulfur applied to waist, bottoms of pants, socks and boots is also effective at repelling chiggers. However, be warned that clothes will retain the sulfur odor for several washings. If using sulfur, never touch your eyes, nose, or mouth before washing your hands first.
- Shower at the end of each day in the field. Use a washcloth to vigorously rub your legs, feet, and ankles.

By following these methods, you should be able to avoid all chigger bites, as well as tick bites. If, however, you are bitten by chiggers anyway, you can reduce or eliminate the symptoms by applying benzocaine or hydrocortisone creams, calamine lotion, After Bite, or any number of anti-itch products.

**\*We strongly recommend the use of Insect Shield® clothing.** Insect Shield is a process by which clothing is treated with an EPA-approved formula of the insect repellent permethrin. Such clothing is highly repellent to insects and provides durable and long-lasting protection, even after dozens of washings. Outdoor wear with Insect Shield protection includes name brands such as Tilley and can be purchased at outdoor recreation stores such as REI and from a variety of online retailers. In lieu of Insect Shield clothing, you should consider treating your clothes with permethrin, which has the same effect, and that can be purchased at outdoor recreation stores and from a variety of online retailers.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line (800) CDC-INFO (800-232-4636). You can check the CDC website at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel>. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html> (click on Travel Health).

**LUGGAGE:** We request you try to limit your baggage to one medium-sized lockable piece of luggage and one carry-on bag. It's a good idea to pack a change of clothes, your binoculars, medications, toiletries, walking shoes, and travel documents in the carry-on.

**INTERNET ACCESS:** Wifi is available around the lounge and office areas at each property on this tour.

**MISC:**

Electricity - 110/220 volts

Language – English

Time - Central Standard Time

**SUGGESTED READING:** A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) which has a wide selection; [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com) and

[www.nhbs.com](http://www.nhbs.com) which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

Fagan, Jessie and Oliver Komar. 2016. *Peterson Field Guide to Birds of Northern Central America*. Houghton Mifflin. The most convenient pocket-sized book covering all birds found in Belize.

Hilty, Steven. *Birds of Tropical America*. Shelburne, VT: Chapters Publishing Ltd., 1994. Subtitle: "A watcher's introduction to behavior, breeding and diversity."

Howell, Steve N.G. and Dale Dyer. *Birds of Belize*. Princeton University Press, 2023. This new pocket-sized book is the most up to date and authoritative guide to the birds of Belize and is the single best option for visiting birders. Highly recommended.

Howell, Steve N.G. and Sophie Webb. 1995. *A Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America*. New York: Oxford University Press. Large format and not convenient to carry in the field, but generally the most helpful reference for difficult identifications such as soaring raptors or perched nightjars.

H. Lee Jones. 2003. *Birds of Belize*. University of Texas Press, Austin. Large format and not convenient to carry in the field, but a complete and authoritative book on birds of Belize.

H. Lee Jones and A. C. Valley. 2000. *Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Belize*. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona, Spain. The most authoritative status and distribution information on Belize. Unfortunately, this publication is not widely available.

Sibley, David Allen. 2014. *The Sibley Guide to Birds, Second Edition*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York. Arguably the best North American field guide; useful for wintering migrants in Belize.

Valley, Andrew C. and Dale Dyer. 2018. *Birds of Central America: Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama*. Princeton University Press. The most comprehensive and well-illustrated book for Central America, but rather large.

**SUGGESTED RECORDINGS:** These will be helpful in learning the vocalizations of some of the region's birds (also see "Suggested Apps" for bird sounds).

*A Bird Walk at Chan Chich* by John V. Moore. San Jose, California: Astral Sounds Recording, 1992.

Proceeds aid the local library in Gallon Jug, Belize.

*Birds of Mexico MP3 Sound Collection*, by Peter Boesman. Distributed by Birdsounds.nl

*Bird Songs of Belize, Guatemala and Mexico* by Dale Delaney. Library of Natural Sounds, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, 1992.

### **SUGGESTED APPS:**

***Merlin Bird ID by Cornell Lab.*** Cornell University. Highly recommended! This free download from the App store is a remarkable machine-learning ID tool to help birders of any skill level identify birds through sound ID, photo ID, or based on a few simple questions. ID text and audio recordings included for more than 10,000 species worldwide. Free “Bird Packs” need to be downloaded for each region; the Belize bird pack is 610.8 MB.

**TIPPING:** An important part of the value of a VENT tour is knowing that tips for local service providers at our destinations—restaurant staff, hotel staff, drivers, local guides, and various other support staff—are included in your tour fee. If you would like to offer any of your local guides an additional tip, \$5 to \$10 a day is a common amount.

Tips for your VENT tour leader(s) are **not** included, but it is customary to tip one or both if you feel that you have received exceptional service. To assist in your planning, we recommend tipping your VENT tour leader(s) \$15 to \$20 per day, or the equivalent of approximately 2–4% of the tour fee.

If you plan to give tips by cash, they should be given directly to your tour leader at the end of the tour and **not** sent to the VENT office. Some of our tour leaders use mobile payment applications such as Venmo, PayPal, and Wise. If you would like to use this method, please ask your tour leaders directly whether they can accept tips through such an application.

We emphasize that tipping is optional and that these amounts are only recommendations. The amount you decide to tip is based entirely on your experience and at your discretion.

**RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT:** Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc., a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, “**VENT**”) act only as agents for the participant in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss,

accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

VENT reserves the right (i) to substitute hotels of similar category, or the best reasonable substitution available under the circumstances, for those indicated and (ii) to make any changes in the itinerary that are deemed necessary by VENT or which are caused by third party transportation schedules (i.e. railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, etc.).

VENT reserves the right to substitute leaders or guides on any tour. Where VENT, in its sole discretion, determines such substitution is necessary, it will notify tour participants.

VENT reserves the right to cancel any tour prior to departure with or without cause or good reason. See the VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy set forth above.

Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on April 5, 2026 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

VENT reserves the right to decline any participant's Registration Form and/or refuse to allow any participant to participate in a tour as VENT deems reasonably necessary, in its sole discretion. VENT also reserves the right to remove any tour participant from any portion of a tour as VENT deems necessary, in its sole discretion, reasons for such removal include but are not limited to, medical needs, injury, illness, inability to meet physical demands of a tour, personality conflict or situations in which such removal is otherwise in the best interest of the tour, the tour group and/or such participant. A participant may also voluntarily depart from a tour. If a participant is removed from a tour or voluntarily departs from a tour, such participant will be responsible for any expenses associated with such removal or departure, including but not limited to, transportation, lodging, airfare and meals, and VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any such removed or departed participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by such participant.

Baggage is carried at the participant's risk entirely. No airline company, its employees, agents and/or affiliates (the "**Airline**") is to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time participants are not on board the Airline's aircraft. The participant ticket in use by any Airline, when issued, will constitute the sole contract between the Airline and the purchaser of the tickets and/or the participant. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for VENT tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airlines Reporting Corporation.

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