

ITINERARY

***BELIZE: Tropical Birding, Short and Sweet***

*February 10-17, 2024*



*We'll look for Tody Motmot and other wonderful tropical birds when we stay at Lamanai.  
Photograph by participant Harold Browning.*

*We include here information for those interested in the 2024 Belize: Tropical Birding Short & Sweet tour:*

- a general introduction to the tour
- a description of the birding areas to be visited on the tour
- an abbreviated daily itinerary with some indication of the nature of each day's birding outings

*These additional materials will be made available to those who register for the tour:*

- an annotated list of the birds recorded on a previous year's Field Guides trip to the area, with comments by guide(s) on notable species or sightings (may be downloaded from our web site)
- a detailed information bulletin with important logistical information and answers to questions regarding accommodations, air arrangements, clothing, currency, customs and immigration, documents, health precautions, and personal items
- a Field Guides checklist for preparing and keeping track of the birds we see on the tour
- after the conclusion of the tour, a list of birds seen on the tour

**For** those birders who've never before ventured south of the US border, or for those who prefer their tropical experiences to be short and super sweet, the small Central American country of Belize offers an ideal birding destination. With a diversity of species that includes many in families associated with the New World tropics, a rich assortment of habitats in which to search for them, plus minimal time spent traveling – four nights at one lodge, three at the other, with a short charter flight between the two – our revamped Belize tour offers a truly engaging tropical experience.

We'll begin the tour at the Lamanai Outpost Lodge, which has a simple, yet elegant, main building and comfortable thatched cabañas perched on the shores of Crab-catcher Lagoon, part of the largest body of fresh water in Belize. The lodge sits less than a mile from the Mayan ruins of Lamanai, an extensive, largely unexcavated site that sprawls along the western shore of the lagoon; on a couple of days, we'll take a quick boat trip along the lagoon to get to the site. The ruins house a rich assortment of birds typically found in the tropical hardwood forests of western Belize and the Petén region of

Guatemala – Keel-billed Toucan, Collared Aracari, Pale-billed, Chestnut-colored, and Golden-olive woodpeckers, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Slaty-tailed, Black-headed and Gartered trogons, Yellow-bellied Tyrannulet, Black-cowled Oriole, Blue Bunting and the diminutive Tody Motmot are just a few of the many species we'll seek here. The village of Indian Church lies just down the road from the lodge. Here, open *milpas* (agricultural fields) and second-growth scrub are home to an assortment of birds not found in the forest, including (with some luck) the attractive Black-throated (Yucatan) Bobwhite. Interspersed among these other habitats are tracts of savanna with a different set of interesting birds, including seldom-encountered Yellow-headed Parrots, White-tailed Hawk, Buff-bellied and Azure-crowned hummingbirds, Yucatan Woodpecker, Yucatan Flycatcher, Yucatan Jay, Gray-throated Chat, Gray-crowned Yellowthroat, Botteri's and Grasshopper sparrows, and the impressive Jabiru. And, of course, the lagoon and its tributaries are home to another suite of birds, including Limpkin, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Boat-billed and Agami herons, Sungrebe, and Black Catbird.



*The unusual Sungrebe is fairly widespread in the American tropics, but they are cryptic and not easy to see. This one was very cooperative on our 2023 tour, and we'll hope for a similar experience! Photograph by participant Harold Browning.*

Our trip takes on a somewhat new flavor when we transfer to our next base, Black Rock Lodge in the Cayo District of south-central Belize. Here limestone hills are carpeted with dense rainforest. Located along the banks of the Rio Macal, adjacent to the Don Elijio Panti Nature Reserve / National Park. Well over 300 species have been recorded here and the views are magnificent! We will venture one day to the Mountain Pine Ridge where dry Caribbean Pine forest dominates. The pine forest is home to a group of birds perhaps unexpected in Belize—Rusty Sparrow, Grace's Warbler, Cabanis's Wren, and Acorn Woodpecker, to name a few. From viewpoints high above the adjacent countryside, we'll scan cliffs for King Vulture and the rare Orange-breasted Falcon. The humid valley forests host a high diversity of species, many already mentioned above, but including tinamous, forest-falcons, trogons, White-whiskered Puffbird, many flycatchers, Mayan Anthrush, Dusky Antbird, Gray-collared Becard, and more.

*We want to be sure you are on the right tour! Below is a description of the physical requirements of the tour. If you are concerned about the difficulty, please contact us about this and be sure to fully explain your concerns. We want to make sure you have a wonderful time with us, so if you are uncomfortable with the requirements, just let us know and we can help you find a better fitting tour! Field Guides will not charge you a change or cancellation fee if you opt out within 10 days of depositing.*

## Physical requirements of this tour

- **TRAILS:** Most of the walking will be on excellent packed dirt trails. Generally, there isn't much elevation change, but there are a few walks at Black Rock Lodge that require going up and down a steep grade for a short distance.
- **BOAT RIDES:** Our boat rides at Lamanai will last approximately 2-3 hours. Please note there is no canopy on the boat so be sure to apply lots of sunscreen and wear a hat.
- **POTENTIAL CHALLENGES:** Staying hydrated! It will be very important to stay hydrated and to carry electrolytes - even on days when we are out of direct sunlight. Also, there will be time spent in vans on bumpy roads around the Mountain Pine Ridge and back to Belize City. Those with back, neck, and shoulder issues may wish to consider this when deciding if the tour is appropriate.
- **PACE:** Most days we'll start early to avoid the heat, around 5:30 a.m. with a quick snack and return for breakfast around 8:00-8:30 a.m. We will then bird until lunch and enjoy a mid-day siesta until another outing in the late afternoons. We will typically walk several miles in the morning and enjoy shorter trails in the afternoon.
- **WEATHER:** The climate is warm to hot with midday temperatures in the 90s. The mornings and evenings can be cool and breezy, especially on the boat rides.
- **VEHICLE SEATING:** So that each participant has equal opportunity during our travel, we employ a seat rotation system on all tours. Participants will need to be flexible enough to maneuver to the back of the vehicle on occasion. Those who experience motion sickness will need to bring adequate medication for the duration of the tour, as we are not able to reserve forward seats for medical conditions.
- **BATHROOM BREAKS:** Whenever possible, we use modern, indoor restrooms, but on occasion, participants must be prepared to make a comfort stop in nature.
- **OPTING OUT:** Where we are staying multiple days in the same lodging, participants can easily opt to sit out a day or sometimes a half-day. This will not be possible on days when we are changing locations.

If you are uncertain whether this tour is a good match for your abilities, please don't hesitate to contact our office; if they cannot directly answer your queries, they will put you in touch with the guide.

## About the Birding Areas



**Lamanai Outpost Lodge**—We'll divide our time at Lamanai among several distinct but productive habitats that exist side by side near the lodge. We'll spend most mornings birding the lowland forest around the nearby ruins or the lodge. While we may cover the same trails for part of the morning each day, the selection of birds seen from one day to the next can vary considerably. If we locate an ant swarm, we'll be in for one of the greatest of Neotropical nature spectacles, as a multi-species bird flock typically forms at the swarm's leading edge, and birds scoop up insects ahead of the ants. On several occasions, we'll travel by boat along the New Lagoon and its smaller tributaries. Species to watch for on these nautical jaunts include Agami and Boat-billed herons, Black-collared Hawk, Great Black Hawk, Sungrebe, Muscovy Duck, Jabiru (possibly at a nest), Russet-naped Wood-Rail, and as many as five species of kingfishers. On one morning, we'll cross the New Lagoon and bird in the open pine savanna on foot. This is a harsh habitat—flooded for part of the year, then baked dry for the rest, with frequent fires also part of the ecology. Here, we'll search for Gray-throated Chat and Black Catbird, as well as members of the Yucatan "group"—Jay, Woodpecker, and Flycatcher. Nights at Lamanai Outpost Lodge.

**Black Rock Lodge** is an ecolodge located next to the Rio Macal in the Cayo District of Belize. Lots of wonderful rainforest habitat is present right outside of our cabins. Nearly 380 species of birds have been recorded on the lodge property. Four species of tinamou occur here. Walking along the entrance road should be very productive with Great Curassow, Spotted

Wood-Quail, Gray-chested Dove, Wedge-tailed Sabrewing, three species of hawk-eagles, White Hawk, Collared Trogon, Tody Motmot, Amazon Kingfisher, Pale-billed Woodpecker, White-winged Becard, Royal Flycatcher, a variety of wintering warblers, Golden-crowned Warbler, Gray-throated Chat, Crimson-collared Tanager, among others.

**Mountain Pine Ridge** is an extensive region of central Belize covered in pine savanna, with surrounding scrub and tropical forest. We will focus on roadside and lookout birding where we could spot Swallow-tailed Kite, Black Hawk-Eagle, Acorn Woodpecker, Lesson's Motmot, Hepatic Tanager, Green Jay, Azure-crowned Hummingbird, Grace's Warbler, Rusty Sparrow, and White-collared Swift, along with an interesting local subspecies of Rufous-capped Warbler and resident Plumbeous Vireo. This region has nesting Black-and-white Hawk-Eagle, Solitary Eagle, and Orange-breasted Falcon, which—with a whole lot of luck—we hope to come across! All of the area along the rather rough roads lies within the national forest, and nature trails fan off from the main road at regular intervals.



*The lovely Gray-throated Chat is a regional specialty that we'll look for in the pine savanna near Lamanai.  
Photograph by participants David and Susan Disher.*

## Itinerary For Belize: Tropical Birding, Short and Sweet

**Day 1, Sat, 10 Feb. Flight to Belize City; transfer to Lamanai.** You should plan to arrive at the international airport in Belize City (BZE) before 3:30 p.m. We'll arrange for two group transfers to Lamanai Outpost Lodge – typically one in the early afternoon and the other in the late afternoon. If you arrive early, feel free to go in to the restaurant which is upstairs by the waving gallery—take your binoculars as several interesting birds are sometimes seen around the airstrip, including Cinnamon Hummingbird, Short-tailed Hawk and Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture. If you are hungry, the chicken and rice dish is great!

Once assembled, you'll be taken by bus and boat (weather and water levels permitting) to Lamanai Outpost Lodge, heading northwest out of Belize City along the Northern Highway. The drive from the airport to the boat launch typically takes about an hour, and it's another hour or so by boat down the New River—watching for the likes of Boat-billed Heron, Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, Northern Jacana, Lesser Nighthawk, and Sungrebe along the way. Your guide will join each transfer for the river portion of the trip. Be sure to have a hat and sunscreen for the boat trip, as well as a windproof outer layer (it may be cooling off by the time you approach the lodge) and your binoculars. Night at Lamanai Outpost Lodge.

**Days 2-4, Sun-Tue, 11-13 Feb. Lamanai Outpost Lodge.** We'll have three full days to explore the varied habitats around our lodge. Each morning, we'll depart the lodge about 5:30 a.m. (having first fortified ourselves with coffee and

muffins) and spend a couple of hours birding – either in second growth areas around Indian Church, some forested areas near the lodge, or the palm savanna on the other side of the lagoon. We'll return for a proper breakfast between 8:00 and 8:30 a.m., then will head out for the remainder of the morning, either to the nearby ruins site, the flat open farmland of nearby "Mennonite country" or along one of the lagoon's tributaries. We'll return to the lodge as the day heats up, for lunch and a bit of a siesta. As the temperatures cool in the late afternoon, we'll venture out again, either checking forest and second growth areas around Indian Church, or heading out onto the waters of the New Lagoon. We'll take one "sunset cruise", enjoying cocktails and nibbles as we bird along the shores watching the sun sink towards the horizon, and we'll head out for one "spotlight safari" to see what we can find on the water after dark. We'll also offer at least one (and maybe more) land-based owling options. Nights at Lamanai Outpost Lodge.

**Day 5, Wed, 14 Feb. Lamanai to Black Rock Lodge.** After a final morning's birding around the Lamanai Outpost Lodge, we'll have lunch at the lodge, then transfer by air to our next base at Black Rock Lodge; the flight, on a small chartered plane, should take about 20 minutes. We'll arrive in time for an afternoon walk on the lodge grounds! Night at Black Rock Lodge.

**Day 6, Thu, 15 Feb. Black Rock Lodge.** After an early breakfast, we'll spend the entire morning walking along the entrance road in wonderful rainforest. Our afternoon plans are flexible but may include a hike up a short but steep trail leading up the hill behind the lodge. Tonight or tomorrow night we will offer an optional night walk. Night at Black Rock Lodge.



*Mottled Owls are one of the larger species of nightbirds we might see on the tour. We'll go owling a couple of times to see what we might find! Photograph by guide Chris Benesh.*

**Day 7, Fri, 16 Feb. Mountain Pine Ridge.** After a very early breakfast, drive out and up to several areas within the Mountain Pine Ridge. Feeders at a nearby butterfly ranch may bring as many as 13 species of hummingbirds (as well as a variety of other species) into view. We will take a picnic lunch with us on this day and plan to seek out Stygian Owl and Orange-breasted Falcon. Night at Black Rock Lodge.

**Day 8, Sat, 17 Feb. Departure.** After a final early morning's birding around our lodge and a final breakfast together, we'll return to Belize City in time to connect with our flights home. **Please arrange for flights no earlier than 12:00 noon.**

## About Your Guide

**Chris Benesh** grew up studying natural history in California, where he was inspired by his father to take up birding as a teenager. After earning a degree in zoology from UC Santa Barbara in 1987, Chris moved to Austin to join the Field Guides staff. Since then, his life has undergone a wonderful transformation. The intervening years at Field Guides have taken him to many corners of the world and across both the Arctic and Antarctic circles! Chris takes an interest in nearly anything that flies, and you might catch him sneaking a peak at a passing aircraft, or stopping to examine a butterfly or odonate. You might also notice him getting especially excited at the sighting of a rare or wonderful mammal (heck, he can get excited about a squirrel).

Chris's passion for education has led to his serving on the Arizona Bird Committee, leading the occasional workshop, presenting at birding conventions, and—we must add—thoroughly explaining in admirable detail the nuances of flycatchers to tour participants and colleagues alike.

Visit <https://fieldguides.com/our-staff/> for Chris's complete tour schedule; just click on his photo.

*"I would travel with **Chris Benesh** anywhere, any time. He is calm, pleasant, and good-humored. He is not only brilliant at finding and spotting birds, but equally brilliant at ensuring that every member of the group gets a great look at the bird..." B.M., Arizona's Second Spring*

## Financial Information

**FEE:** \$4375 from Belize City

**DEPOSIT:** \$450 per person

**FINAL PAYMENT DUE:** August 14, 2023

**SINGLE SUPPLEMENT** (Optional): \$1050

**LIMIT:** 8

**All participants will be required to confirm they will have completed a full COVID vaccination course at least two weeks prior to the tour (which includes a booster for those eligible to have one).** Note too, that many travel destinations may still require proof of vaccination for entry to bypass testing delays or quarantine, and that entry requirements for a destination can change at any time. Proof of a booster shot, too, may be a requirement for some travel destinations.

## Other Things You Need to Know

**TOUR MANAGER:** The manager for this tour is Nicole Cannon. Nicole will be happy to assist you in preparing for the tour. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call her!

**DOCUMENTS:** A **current passport valid for the length of your stay** is necessary for US citizens to enter Belize. We recommend that your passport be valid for at least 6 months beyond the dates of your visit, as regulations vary from country to country, and are subject to change. If you are not a US citizen, please check with the Belize consulate nearest you for entry requirements. Information about consulates and entry requirements is generally available online or you can contact us and we will be happy to look this up for you. Passports should have an adequate number of blank pages for the entire journey. Some countries require a blank page for their stamp and as a precaution it is best to have one blank page per country you will visit or transit.

**AIR ARRANGEMENTS:** Please plan to arrive at the international airport in Belize City (BZE) on Day 1 before 3:30 p.m. Please arrange for homeward flights on Day 8 no earlier than 12:00 noon.

Field Guides is a full-service travel agency and your tour manager will be happy to assist you with flights to join this tour. Field Guides does not charge a service fee for these services to clients booking a tour. However, we understand that tech-savvy clients often prefer to shop online or that you may wish to use mileage to purchase tickets. Regardless of which method you choose, your tour manager will be happy to provide assistance regarding ticket prices and schedules, along with rental cars and extra hotel nights as needed.

Please be sure to check with your tour manager prior to purchasing your ticket to make sure the flights you have chosen will work well with the tour itinerary and that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. Once purchased, most

airline tickets are non-refundable and carry a penalty to change. Field Guides cannot be responsible for these fees. **Also, it is imperative that we receive a copy of your comprehensive flight itinerary—including any and all flights not covered in the tour fee—so that we may track you in the event of missed connections, delays, or other mishaps.**

**LUGGAGE: Please limit your luggage for this relatively short tour to one carry-on and one medium-sized suitcase or duffel.** Please be aware that many airlines have recently modified their luggage policies and are charging additional fees for checked bags. Updates could easily occur before your departure, so you may wish to contact your airline to verify the policy. Additional charges for bags on any flights, whether these are covered by the tour fee or not, will be the client's responsibility.

**TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS:** The **tour fee** is **\$4375** for one person in double occupancy from Belize City. It includes all lodging from Day 1 through Day 7, all meals from dinner on Day 1 through breakfast on Day 8, the group flight within Belize, all ground transportation, entrance fees, and the guide services of the tour leader. Tipping at group meals and for drivers, porters, and local guides is included in your tour fee and will be handled for the group by your Field Guides leader(s). However, if you would like to recognize your Field Guides leader(s) or any local guide(s) for exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are optional and not expected.

The above fee does not include your airfare to and from Belize, airport taxes, visa fees, any checked or carry-on baggage charges imposed by the airlines, any alcoholic beverages, optional tips to local drivers, phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature.

The **single supplement** for the tour is **\$1050**. If you do not have a roommate but wish to share, we will try to pair you with a roommate from the tour; but if none is available, you will be billed for the single supplement. Our tour fees are based on double occupancy; one-half the cost of a double room is priced into the tour fee. The single supplement is calculated by taking the actual cost of a single room and subtracting one-half the cost of a double room (plus any applicable taxes).

**TOUR REGISTRATION:** To register for this tour, please contact us at [fieldguides.com/contact-us/](https://fieldguides.com/contact-us/). Our office will be in touch with you by email by the next business day (Mon-Fri) with instructions on how to complete our new electronic registration form and medical questionnaire. (We are no longer accepting the paper version.)

Please mail your **deposit of \$450** per person, or see <https://fieldguides.com/payment-options/> for our Payment Options. **Full payment** of the tour fee is due **180 days** prior to departure, or **by August 14, 2023. We will bill you for the final payment at either 180 days or when the tour has reached sufficient subscription to operate, whichever date comes later.**

Since the cost of your trip insurance and airline tickets is generally non-refundable, please do not finalize these purchases until you have received final billing for the tour or have been advised that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate by your tour manager.

**SMOKING:** Almost all of our clients prefer a smoke-free environment. If you smoke, please be sensitive to the group and refrain from smoking at meals, in vehicles, and in proximity to the group on trails and elsewhere.

**CANCELLATION POLICY:** Refund of deposit and payment, less \$100 handling fee, will be made if cancellation is received up to 180 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 179 and 90 days before the departure date, 50% of the tour fee is refundable. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable and non-transferable.

Our cancellation policy only applies to payments made to Field Guides for tour (and any services included in those fees). Airline tickets not included in the tour fee and purchased separately often carry penalties for cancellation or change, or are sometimes totally non-refundable. Additionally, if you take out trip insurance the cost of that insurance is not refundable, so it is best to purchase the policy just prior to making full payment for the tour or at the time you purchase airline tickets, depending upon the airline's restrictions.

The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure. In most such cases, full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. Note this exception, however: If you have been advised pre-tour that there is a non-refundable portion of your tour fee no matter the reason for Field Guides cancellation of the tour, that portion will not be refunded. The right is reserved to substitute in case of emergency another guide for the original one.

**TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EMERGENCY INSURANCE:** We strongly recommend you consider purchasing trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to cover your investment in case of injury or illness to you or your family prior to or during a trip. Because we must remit early (and substantial) tour deposits to our suppliers, you

acknowledge and agree that we will not issue a refund when cancellation occurs outside of our cancellation policy as published in the itinerary (see CANCELLATION POLICY). In addition, the Department of State strongly urges Americans to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and if it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. US medical insurance plans seldom cover health costs incurred outside the United States unless supplemental coverage is purchased. Furthermore, US Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States.

When making a decision regarding health insurance, Americans should consider that many foreign doctors and hospitals require payment in cash prior to providing service and that a medical evacuation to the United States may cost well in excess of \$50,000. Uninsured travelers who require medical care overseas often face extreme difficulties. When consulting with your insurer prior to your trip, please ascertain whether payment will be made to the overseas healthcare provider or whether you will be reimbursed later for expenses that you incur.

US citizens will receive information from us regarding optional tour cancellation/emergency medical insurance. Our agent, CSA, will insure for trip cancellation and interruption, medical coverage, travel delay, baggage loss and delay, and emergency medical transportation. If you purchase the insurance prior to, or within 24 hours of making final payment for the tour, and cover all non-refundable parts of the trip (including any non-refundable flights and in some cases, other arrangements), pre-existing conditions are covered. You may purchase your CSA policy on-line by visiting our website at <https://fieldguides.com/trip-cancellation-insurance/> and clicking the link to CSA. The CSA webpage also includes a contact number.

**Currently we are unable to offer CSA insurance policies to residents of New York and Hawaii.** We have had clients provide positive feedback after acquiring insurance thru InsureMyTrip (<https://www.insuremytrip.com/>) in the past, and would suggest that company as an alternative. When purchasing insurance with a company other than CSA, you will want to understand whether the timing of your purchase will affect coverage before paying your first deposit. Insurance purchase requirements can vary from company to company, and such requirements could limit your options if you do not look into this until making your final payment for your tour. Please let us know if you have any questions about this.

Please note, once the insurance is purchased it is non-refundable, so please check with your tour manager prior to making the purchase to assure the tour will operate as scheduled. Citizens of other countries are urged to consult their insurance broker.

**RESPONSIBILITY:** For and in consideration of the opportunity to participate in the tour, each tour participant and each parent or legal guardian of a tour participant who is under 18 agrees to release, indemnify, and hold harmless Field Guides Incorporated, its agents, servants, employees, shareholders, officers, directors, attorneys, and contractors as more fully set forth in the Release and Indemnity Agreement on the registration form. Field Guides Incorporated acts only as an agent for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, or other means, and assumes no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity caused by defect in such vehicles or for any reason whatsoever, including the acts, defaults, or bankruptcies of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. You acknowledge and agree that Field Guides Incorporated is not responsible for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. The tour participant shall bear all such losses and expenses. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely.

Participants should be in good health and should consult a physician before undertaking a tour. If you have questions about the physical requirements of a tour, please contact our office for further information. Participants should prepare for the tour by reading the detailed itinerary, the information bulletin, and other pertinent matter provided by Field Guides. Each participant is responsible for bringing appropriate clothing and equipment as recommended in our bulletins.

**THE RECEIPT OF YOUR TOUR DEPOSIT SHALL BE DEEMED TO BE CONSENT TO THE ABOVE CONDITIONS. EACH TOUR PARTICIPANT AND EACH PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN OF A TOUR PARTICIPANT WHO IS UNDER 18 SHALL SIGN AND DELIVER THE RELEASE AND INDEMNITY AGREEMENT AT THE TIME OF REGISTRATION.**

NCP 7/2020

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