

ITINERARY

**THANKSGIVING IN BELIZE: CHAN CHICH & HIDDEN VALLEY**

*November 23-December 1, 2019*



*We'll be looking for a different sort of turkey for our Turkey Day celebrations in Belize! The handsome Ocellated Turkey is a likely sighting on the grounds of the Chan Chich Resort. Photograph by guide Richard Webster.*

*We include here information for those interested in the 2019 Field Guides Thanksgiving in Belize: Chan Chich & Hidden Valley 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

*Those who register for the tour will be sent this additional material:*

- 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 reading list
- 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 looking for a bit of adventure on their Turkey Day, how about a short hop to the small, delightful Central American country of Belize? Independent from Britain since 1981, Belize has become a haven for lovers of natural history mainly because of its commitment to habitat conservation, its small and primarily English-speaking population, its excellent tourist facilities, and its abundance of wildlife. The publication of a number of field guides to the region – including the *Peterson Field Guide to the Birds of Northern Central America* by our own Jesse Fagan – makes study and learning about the birds even easier.

Although Belize has no true highlands within its borders, Mountain Pine Ridge, site of Hidden Valley Inn, comes pretty close. The numerous panoramic vistas and recovering stands of Caribbean Pine (decimated by a beetle infestation years ago and a number of wildfires since then) give you the feeling of being much higher than you actually are. The birds here reinforce this impression; Acorn Woodpecker, Grace's Warbler, Hepatic Tanager, Rusty Sparrow, and Black-headed Siskin are common inhabitants of the area. The special birds that we'll be looking for on the Mountain Pine Ridge are decidedly more tropical in nature and include a couple of real Neotropical rarities: Orange-breasted Falcon and Stygian Owl.

One of the most highly-favored stops in this wonderful country is Chan Chich Lodge, located due west of Belize City near the country's border with Guatemala. Here, situated in a 250,000-acre private reserve chiefly of primary forest (itself abutting another huge conservation tract managed by the Programme for Belize) and effectively isolated from the distractions of the modern world, birders can wander quietly among largely unexcavated Mayan ruins and towering trees on well-maintained trails to explore a variety of microhabitats in search of the birds and other wildlife. But visitors need not be concerned with relinquishing essential comforts at the lodge, as the food is excellent, the service friendly, and the accommodations superb.

Birding, too, is superb here. The more than 300 species recorded at this site include such prizes as Great and Slaty-breasted tinamous, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, three species of hawk-eagles, Collared Forest-Falcon, Great Curassow, Ocellated Turkey, Middle American Screech-Owl, Mottled Owl, Northern Potoo, Tody Motmot, American Pygmy Kingfisher, Stub-tailed Spadebill, Royal Flycatcher, Green Shrike-Vireo, Gray-throated Chat, Black-throated Shrike-Tanager, and Rose-throated Tanager. During our stay we should see a large percentage of these birds plus myriad others, along with a host of forest mammals that, with some luck, could include one or more species of cats in the area (including Jaguar), White-tailed and Red Brocket deer, Yucatan Black Howler and Central American Spider monkeys, Kinkajou, Tayra, and Collared Peccary.



*The Orange-breasted Falcon is rare in Belize, but we've seen this magnificent raptor on recent tours in the Thousand Foot Falls area. Photograph by guide Dave Stejskal.*

**About the Physical Requirements & Pace:** The habitats we visit on this trip are so rich that it really pays off to be out early and beat the midday heat. With that in mind, we'll be starting fairly early each day (around 6:00 a.m) and bird right through until lunch. On most days we'll take a break after lunch, then head back out for the late afternoon. With few exceptions, we'll be walking on excellent packed dirt trails. Generally there isn't much elevation change, but there are a few walks that require going up and down a steep grade for a short distance. While distance varies from day to day, we often walk several miles in the morning and usually shorter trails in the afternoon. If you would like extra rest, it is often possible to stay back, particularly at Chan Chich, and enjoy the many birds that frequent the grounds.

Although the birds will command our attention much of the time, this trip is designed to take notice of some of the rainforest's many other attributes. Chan Chich offers a plethora of potential mammalian encounters, along with an assortment of reptiles and amphibians.

**Visiting Belize's Offshore Islands and Barrier Reef:** Belize is famous for the quality of diving and snorkeling off its many cays. If you would like to enjoy a few relaxing days on the cays, the Field Guides staff would be happy to help you arrange some time for walking on beaches and watching the fish around coral reefs, either before or after the tour. Accommodations are available in a wide range of prices and styles, and service is generally very good in these tourist-friendly locales. Some cays support a few special birds (e.g. Black Catbird, Yucatan Vireo) and receive a number of migrants during fall.

## About the Birding Areas



**Hidden Valley & Mountain Pine Ridge**—The low Maya Mountains are the only mountainous terrain of which tiny Belize can boast. The highest peak in this chain, remote Mount Victoria, is a mere 3675 feet above sea level. The most accessible sector of these mountains is Mountain Pine Ridge, the northernmost extension of this low massif. Despite their low stature, these mountains, the higher parts of which are cloaked in Caribbean Pine, harbor a very different avifauna than Belize's lowland rainforests. While based here for three nights in the comfortable Hidden Valley Inn, we'll sample the bird life of the low ridges, canyons, and patches of wet tropical forest for a variety of species, including the rare Orange-breasted Falcon and Stygian Owl.

**Chan Chich Lodge**—Since opening to the public in 1988, Chan Chich has earned a reputation among active Neotropical birders as the premier birding destination in Belize. Situated in the heart of a massive private forest reserve that has not known hunting for a number of years, Chan Chich with its surrounding forests represents (along with certain areas of Guatemala's Peten) one of

the only remaining extensive wilderness areas in northern Middle America. A careful observer still has a chance here to encounter a number of mammal and bird species that have all but disappeared from much of their ranges in Middle America with the encroachment of humans.

During the course of our stay, we will sample a variety of habitats such as tall primary rainforest, short seasonally flooded tinal forest, riparian habitats, permanent marsh, second growth and edge, and even small lakes. With this variety of habitats (nearly all within a short walking distance of the doors of our cabanas) comes an astounding variety of birds. This wealth of birds, combined with superb accommodations and excellent food, should make our stay here a memorable one.

## Itinerary for Chan Chich & Hidden Valley, Belize

**Day 1, Sat, 23 Nov. Arrival into Belize City and transfer to Hidden Valley Inn.** You should plan to arrive at the international airport in Belize City by 3:00 p.m. Your leader(s) will meet you outside the baggage claim/customs exit at the front door of the terminal at 4:00 p.m. If you take a flight that arrives earlier, feel free to go to the restaurant upstairs by the waving gallery and wait there; take your binoculars as several interesting birds are sometimes seen around the airstrip, including Short-tailed Hawk and Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture. Once we've all assembled, we'll depart immediately, heading southwest on the Western Highway and eventually climbing onto Mountain Pine Ridge to reach the comfortable Hidden Valley Inn; the journey should take about three hours. Night at Hidden Valley Inn.

**Please note: No flights should be scheduled to arrive in Belize City later than 3:00 p.m.** If your schedule does not allow you to arrive on time, you will need to arrive a day earlier and overnight in Belize City. Our office can assist with these arrangements.

**Day 2, Sun, 24 Nov. Rio Frio Caves/Thousand Foot Falls/King Vulture Falls.** After an early breakfast, we'll drive roughly 40 minutes to the Rio Frio Cave road, a dirt track that meanders gently downhill, cutting through some very birdy moist tropical forest on its way to its terminus at a pretty little river. We'll spend the morning walking here, finishing with a short tour of the vast cave the river has carved through one of the area's hills. After lunch and a bit of a siesta at our

lodge, we'll head out again later in the afternoon to visit some of the fantastic vistas of the Pine Ridge, such as Thousand Foot Falls and King Vulture Falls, where a pair of Orange-breasted Falcons has long bred and King Vultures gather to roost for the night. There are likely to be small, biting black flies around, so be sure to have some repellent – and perhaps a long-sleeved shirt – with you! On at least one of the nights that we're here, we'll do some nightbirding in an attempt to connect with the rare Stygian Owl. Night at Hidden Valley Inn.



*The Keel-billed Toucan is an iconic tropical species that we'll see on the tour. Photograph by guide Chris Benesh.*

**Day 3, Mon, 25 Nov. Mountain Pine Ridge.** After another early breakfast, we'll venture out to several areas within a half hour or so from our lodgings. 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, and we'll make a stop at the Slate Creek overlook – a raptor watchpoint where we have another chance for some of the region's special raptors. Following lunch at the ranch and a bit of a break, we'll head out again to see what else we can find in the nearby habitats. Plain Chachalaca, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Grace's Warbler, Hepatic Tanager, Yellow-backed Oriole, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Yellow-faced Grassquit, and Rusty Sparrow are a few of the species we'll be on the lookout for around our cabins. Night at Hidden Valley Inn.

**Day 4, Tue, 26 Nov. To Chan Chich.** After a final breakfast and some morning birding near Hidden Valley Inn, we'll transfer by bus to Chan Chich, a drive of about 3 hours – with the occasional birding stop, of course! We'll have lunch at Chan Chich, then (after a bit of a siesta) begin our explorations here. There's plenty of great birding right around the lodge, with more than 300 species recorded on the property. Night at Chan Chich Lodge.

**Days 5-8, Wed-Sat, 27-30 Nov. Birding around Chan Chich Lodge.** We'll have four full days to explore the numerous trails and habitats that surround our beautiful lodge. Typically we'll gather for morning coffee on the porch while flocks of parrots, toucans, and oropendolas fly back and forth through the plaza, and Ocellated Turkeys strut around the cabins. After breakfast, we'll walk one of many trails that radiate out from the lodge, and we'll probably spend the entire morning birding. After lunch, we'll take a short break during the midday heat, then head back out for the late afternoon. On some evenings we'll go nightbirding, all the time watching for mammals of interest, too. On a few occasions, we'll travel by vehicle to some nearby sites, but the majority of our travel will be done simply by walking out the door and into some of the most productive forest in Central America! Nights at Chan Chich Lodge.

**Day 9, Sun, 1 Dec. Departure.** After a final early morning's birding around our lodge and a final breakfast together, we'll take a short charter flight back to Belize City (flying time about 30 minutes) in time to connect with our flights home. **Please arrange for flights no earlier than 12:00 noon.**

## About Your Guide

**Megan Edwards Crewe** has been birding since childhood, when she discovered she could have her father all to herself (rather than sharing him with her brother and sisters) if she was willing to get up very early on Saturdays and tromp around the woods in search of birds. After graduating from Purdue University, she sampled an impressive variety of jobs (including veterinary technician, park ranger, junior high school science teacher, freelance writer and computer programmer) before discovering Field Guides. Since joining the company more than two decades ago, Megan—who brims with information and enthusiasm—has delighted in sharing the wonders and adventures of birding and the natural world with tour participants. One unexpected bonus of the job was meeting her husband, Mike, with whom she co-led a trip to France in 2000. They now live in a tiny seaside village in England’s Norfolk county, spending their free time converting their half-acre into a wildlife garden and exploring the surrounding countryside.

*“Megan Crewe is a star, with superb birding (and people) skills, unbounded patience, and a fascinating trove of bird lore... We were abundantly favored and look forward to future trips with her.”*  
J.H., Spring in Cape May

## Financial Information

**FEE:** \$4550 from Belize City

**DEPOSIT:** \$500 per person

**FINAL PAYMENT DUE:** July 26, 2019

**SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional):** \$900

**LIMIT:** 8

## Other Things You Need to Know

**TOUR MANAGER:** The manager for this tour is Karen Turner. Karen 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:** 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.**

**TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS:** The **tour fee** is \$4550 for one person in double occupancy from Belize City. It includes all lodging from Day 1 through Day 8, all meals from dinner on Day 1 through breakfast on Day 9, the flights within Belize, all ground transportation, entrance fees, tips for baggage handling and meal service, and the guide services of the tour leader(s). 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 alcoholic beverages, optional tips to local drivers, phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature.

The **single supplement** for the tour is \$900. 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, complete the enclosed Registration/Release and Indemnity form and return it with a **deposit of \$500** per person. If registering by phone, a deposit must be received within fourteen days, or the space will be released. **Full payment** of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to departure, or **by July 26, 2019. We will bill you for the final payment at either 120 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 120 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 119 and 70 days before the departure date, 50% of the tour fee is refundable. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable.

This policy only applies to payments made to Field Guides for tour fees (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 the 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 airlines restrictions.

The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute another guide for the original one. Where this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members, and they will have the right to cancel their participation and receive a full refund.

**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, we cannot offer any refund when cancellation occurs within 70 days of departure, and only a partial refund from 70 to 119 days prior to departure (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 from us a brochure 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. **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 with InsureMyTrip ([www.insuremytrip.com](http://www.insuremytrip.com)) in the past, and would suggest that company as an alternative. Please let us know if you have any questions about this. If you purchase the insurance within 24 hours of making final payment for the tour, and cover all non-refundable parts of the trip (including any non-refundable flights), pre-existing conditions are covered. The CSA brochure includes a contact number; you may also purchase your CSA policy on-line by visiting our website at <https://fieldguides.com/travelinsurance.html> and clicking the link to CSA. 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 reverse side of 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. Field Guides Incorporated accepts no responsibility 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.**

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