



Panama

Tropical Islands with San Diego Bird Alliance

Tour Leader: Rob Ripma and SDBA Ambassador

September 24 - October 2, 2027

Itinerary Overview:

September 24: Arrival and Transfer to Hotel in Panama City

September 25: Morning Flight to Tranquilo Bay and Birding on the Property

September 26: Palo Seco Protected Forest

September 27: Isla Popa and Tranquilo Bay

September 28: San San Pond and Sak Wetland

September 29: Fortuna Forest Reserve

September 30: Full Day at Tranquilo Bay

October 1: Departure to Panama City and Panama Canal Visit

October 2: Flights Home

Detailed Itinerary:

September 24: Arrival & Orientation

Welcome to Panama! You will be met at the airport and then driven to our hotel for the evening. We will have time to relax at the hotel before a welcome dinner. We have an early flight on day two, so we will want to get plenty of rest.

Overnight: Marriott Panama Hotel or similar

September 25: Morning Flight to Bocas del Toro and Birding at Tranquilo Bay

We'll depart the hotel very early this morning to catch our flight to Bocas del Toro. Upon arrival in the islands, a representative from Tranquilo Bay will be waiting to transfer us to the lodge by boat.

Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge is strategically located in the epicenter of national parks and protected reserves. This advantageous geographic position enables efficient use of the archipelago's protected waters to reach otherwise inaccessible wildlife areas on the mainland and islands by boat. The lodge sits on 200-forested acres covering three distinct ecosystems, adjacent to Bastimentos Island National Marine Park, within the La Amistad UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. The main lodge's veranda, private cabanas, and canopy observation tower provide elevated decks for a birds-eye view of the extraordinary wildlife found here. Several kilometers of hiking trails, in addition to the lodge's grounds, often provide encounters with Two-toed and Three-toed Sloths, White-faced Capuchin, Panamanian Night Monkeys, Nine-banded Armadillo, Spectacled Caiman, Central American Woolly Opossum, Gray Four-eyed Opossum, Northern Tamandua, Greater White-lined Bats, kettles of migrating raptors, Three-wattled Bellbird, Golden-collard Manakin (several leks), and hummingbird bathing pools.

The islands of Bocas del Toro are often called the "Galapagos of the Caribbean" due to endemism and species' differentiation. Each of the archipelago's islands, in addition to various points on the mainland, contain different morphs of the Strawberry poison dart frog species *Oophaga pumilo* which are heavily studied for their geographic variation. Panama's only known population of Stub-tailed Spade-

bill is also found on the islands of Bocas and does not occur on the mainland. There is so much to see and do here that you're going to have trouble leaving.

We'll spend the rest of the day exploring this wonderful property. Our day will end watching the sunset over the islands before enjoying drinks, appetizers, and a fantastic dinner.

Overnight at Tranquilo Bay

September 26: Palo Seco Protected Forest

After an early delicious Panamanian breakfast, we'll travel by boat to the town of Punta Robalo on the mainland. Today we will be birding in the Palo Seco Protection Forest that is one of the most vital areas of La Amistad Biosphere Reserve. This incredible area consisting of wet Atlantic forest, foothills, and watersheds, is part of BirdLife International Endemic Bird Area Central American Caribbean Slope. It is a hotbed for restricted range species and altitudinal migrants, like the Three-wattled Bellbird.

Chestnut-colored and Cinnamon Woodpeckers, Slaty-backed Nightingale-thrush, Crimson-collared, Dusky-faced, Speckled, Emerald, and Silver-throated Tanagers, Lattice-tailed Trogon, Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer, Green Hermit, Green-fronted Lancebill, Snowcap, White-bellied and Purple-throated Mountain-gem, Slaty Spinetail, Dull-mantled Antbird, and Band-backed and Black-throated Wrens are all possibilities on the outing.



Emerald Tanager

Other lowland specialties might include Brown Jay, White-crowned Parrot, Morelet's Seedeater, Olive-crowned Yellowthroat, Cinnamon and White-winged Becard, Long-billed Gnatwren, Wedge-billed Woodcreeper, Black-and-yellow Tanager, Buff-rumped Warbler, Torrent Tyrannulet, Red-fronted Parrotlet, and Crimson-fronted and Sulphur-winged Parakeet. Mammal sightings in the area might include sloths, Mantled Howler Monkeys, Red-brocket Deer, squirrels, and several species

of bats.

In the late afternoon we will work our way back through the lowland foothills scanning for kettles of raptors, and finally some marsh birds such as Green Ibis, Southern Lapwings, Blue-winged Teal, Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, and the always stunning Purple Gallinule.

A relaxing boat ride back to the lodge might produce Brown Boobies, Black and Royal Terns, Willet, Mangrove Swallow, and Bottlenose Dolphins among others. We will arrive at the lodge in the early evening where we can discuss our lists and share the day's best photos over appetizers and drinks on the veranda followed by a tasty dinner.

Overnight at Tranquilo Bay

September 27: Isla Popa and Tranquilo Bay

Each of the islands in the Bocas del Toro archipelago has interesting wildlife and high levels of endemism, however, Isla Popa, the second largest island in the chain, has more species of birds and mammals due to its proximity to the mainland. A leisurely boat ride of about two kilometers will bring us to a dense gallery forest surrounded by the rich mangrove lagoons of nearby Isla Popa. We will bird watch in this phenomenal area by boat, peacefully enjoying flights of Keel-billed and Yellow-throated Toucans, Crimson-fronted Parakeets, Brown-hooded Parrots, Slaty-tailed Trogon, Golden-hooded Tanager, Plumbeous and Swallow-tailed Kites, Pale-billed and Lineated Woodpeckers, Mangrove Cuckoo, American Pygmy Kingfisher, and hopefully Snowy Cotinga. This mangrove lagoon has some beautiful Turtle Sea Grass where we can have good looks at sponges, starfish, urchins, and upside-down jellyfish.

We'll return to Tranquilo Bay for lunch. After a siesta, we will spend the afternoon around Tranquilo Bay.

Overnight at Tranquilo Bay

September 28: San San Pond and Sak Wetland

Today will be a tranquil day of "birding by boat" within several lush, coastal, wetland habitats. San San Pond Sak Wetlands is a designated Ramsar site, as well as part of the La Amistad UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. The area is rich with abundant habitats including Atlantic wet lowland forest, Raphia palm swamp, freshwater river course, ocean impact beachfront, and mangroves. Access to this verdant wildlife area will be via boat through the historic Snyder Canal, as birds conveniently fly through the gallery forest back and forth across the waterway. After the Snyder brothers finished construction in the late 1890s, the canal was used to transport bananas from the Changuinola River Valley to the protected waters of Almirante Bay at Boca del Drago, where they were loaded onto transport ships. Panama's first canal was vital in establishing The United Fruit Company, and the very beginnings of what would become, "The Banana Republic".

This is an excellent place to find many lowland bird species, northern and altitudinal migrants, raptors, and shorebirds. All six species of kingfishers known to the Americas can be found here and we will be watching closely for regional endemics like the diminutively distributed Nicaraguan Seed-Finch, White-collared Manakin (Almirante race), Olive-backed Euphonia, Black-cowled Oriole, Canebrake Wren, and Three-wattled Bellbird. Also possible are Masked Duck, Common Gallinule, Least Bittern, Pied-billed Grebe, Great Potoo, Northern Jacana, and Bare-throated Tiger-Heron. Raptor sightings might include Yellow-headed Caracara, Bat, Laughing, and Peregrine Falcons, Osprey, and Pearl Kite. From the high branches of fruiting trees down to the grassy and shrubby edge, we might find Passerini's and Golden-hooded Tanagers, Olive-crowned Yellowthroat, Red-breasted Blackbird, Buff-throated Saltator, Groove-billed Ani, Common Squirrel Cuckoo, chatters of Olive-throated Parakeets, Streaked and Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, and the tiny Common, Black-headed, and Slate-headed Tody-Flycatchers.

With any luck, mammal sightings might produce Mantled Howler Monkey, Crab-eating Raccoon, White-nosed Coati, Neotropical River Otter, West Indian Manatee and Bottlenose Dolphin. Soropota Beach, important for migrating and resident shorebirds, is also a nesting ground for Leatherback and Hawksbill sea turtles, in addition to Green Iguanas, Basilisk Lizards, Common Boa Constrictor, Spectacled Caiman, and American Crocodile. Here on the beach, we will enjoy a picnic lunch with fresh sea breeze and shorebirds. This vibrant river mouth and beachfront might produce Parasitic and Pomarine Jaegers, Wilson's, Collared, and Semipalmated Plovers, Ruddy Turnstones, Sanderlings, Least, Pectoral and Semipalmated Sandpipers, Common and Lesser Nighthawks, Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs, four species of tern, and Roseate Spoonbill.



Red-billed Tropicbird

In the afternoon, sea conditions permitting, we will pass just two miles offshore to a breathtaking reserve known as Swan's Caye, for beautiful close-up looks at Panama's only known breeding colony of Red-billed Tropicbirds, as well as Brown Boobies and Magnificent Frigatebirds. We will return to the lodge in the late afternoon.

September 29: Fortuna Forest Reserve

The Continental Divide of the Talamanca Range, between the provinces of Bocas del Toro and Chiriqui, is one of Panama's premier birding and wilderness areas. Today we will focus on the area known as Umbrellabird Road, between the Continental Divide and north of Fortuna Reservoir.

Fortuna Forest Reserve, established in 1976, is a species-rich area and part of BirdLife International Endemic Bird Area Costa Rica and Panama Highlands. The distinct avifauna in this globally important area include many regional endemics and restricted range species. Our visit here is sure to produce some outstanding birds with opportunities to see: Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush, Red-faced Spinetail, Ashy-throated Chlorospingus, Golden-browed Chlorophonia, Black and Crested Guans, Blue-and-gold Tanager, Black-thighed and Black-faced Grosbeaks, and Golden-winged Warbler to mention a few.



Golden-browed Chlorophonia

We will enjoy a picnic lunch while overlooking the beautiful vistas of Lake Fortuna. Typical species highlights might include: Azure-hooded Jay, Sulphur-winged and Barred Parakeets, Bay-headed, Rufous-winged, Flame-colored, White-winged, Carmiol's, Cherrie's, Hepatic, and Spangled-cheeked Tanagers, Slate-throated Redstart, Tropical Parula, Blue-and-white Swallow, Rufous-winged, Golden-olive, and Smoky-brown Woodpeckers, Elegant and Tawny-capped Euphonias, Slaty Flowerpiercer, Golden-bellied Flycatcher, and the gorgeous Collared Trogon.

Several raptors are possible including Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Barred Hawk, Great Black-Hawk, and Swallow-tailed Kite. More possibilities worth mentioning include Northern Emerald-Toucanet, Red-headed and Prong-billed Barbets, White-crowned and White-ruffed Manakins, Broad-billed

Motmot, Green Thorntail, Snowy-bellied, Stripe-tailed, and Black-bellied Hummingbirds, and Rufous-crested Coquette. The strange Tayra, a weasel like Neotropical mammal with wrinkled facial skin, has been spotted in this area.

Overnight at Tranquilo Bay

September 30: Full Day at Tranquilo Bay

Today after enjoying some early morning birds from the canopy observation tower or the lodge's veranda, we will have a casual breakfast including highland coffee and fresh tropical fruit juices. Following our full breakfast, we will enter the forest trail in search of Chestnut-backed Antbird, White-flanked and Dot-winged Antwrens, Black-crowned Antshrike, Red-throated Ant-Tanager, Tawny-crested Tanager, Rufescent Tiger-Heron, and the geographically misplaced Stub-tailed Spadebill. After a short hike we will arrive at Pineapple Hill, a small, elevated clearing at the forest's edge, which is an important forage area for a multitude of Neotropical and migratory species. This is an excellent place to get good looks at feeding birds like Golden-collared and Red-capped Manakins, three species of honeycreepers, Passerini's, Scarlet, White-lined, and Summer Tanagers, Baltimore Oriole, Band-tailed Barbthroat, Green-breasted Mango, White-necked Jacobin, Purple-crowned Fairy, Scaled Pigeon, Double-toothed Kite, Roadside Hawk, and the hard to see White-throated Crake. Once we are ready to move on, another forest trail will take us to a Golden-collared Manakin lek. During the mating season, from about December-August, active courts in each lek should have displaying males. Further along this trail will bring us to an area of high forest canopy, where Three-wattled Bellbirds like to spend midday. When the sun is a little strong, this canopy specialist likes to perch underneath the leaves in the cooler shade, presenting a nice opportunity with less backlighting for the photo enthusiast. On the way back to the lodge, to enjoy a homemade lunch in comfort, we will search the forest floor for the famous Isla Bastimentos red Poison dart frog. This morph of *Oophaga pumilio* is studied onsite by the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute who are researching its evolutionary traits.



Blue-headed Parrot

After a short siesta, we can focus our efforts on the mangrove forest looking for several species of herons, Green Ibis, Common Black Hawk, all six kingfishers known to the Americas, Mangrove Cuckoo, Whimbrel, Willet, Prothonotary Warbler, and the resident Mangrove Yellow Warbler whose males exhibit a stunning rufous hood. In the evening, we will climb the canopy tower to watch from a bird's-eye view, the pandemonium of Red-lore and Mealy Parrots paired up and returning home, as groups of chattering Blue-headed Parrots join in the chorus. Some previous guests have dubbed these daily flights "The Invasion of Tranquilo Bay." We will also have a good chance of up-close looks at White-crowned and Scaled Pigeons, Black-crowned and Masked Tityras, Lineated and Black-cheeked Woodpeckers, Blue-gray, Palm, and Plain-colored Tanagers, White-vented Euphonia, and scores of flycatchers. Once we watch the beautiful tropical sun set over the Talamanca Range, we can walk back to the lodge for hard earned drinks, appetizers, and a delicious meal.

Overnight at Tranquilo Bay

October 1: Departure to Panama City and Panama Canal Visit

We will return to Panama City around midday and spend the afternoon sightseeing. Our first stop will be the Panama Canal where we can enjoy their wonderful museum and then watch as ships pass through the locks. We'll make a few other stops around Panama City as time allows before checking in at the Riande Aeropuerto Hotel. Once everyone is settled in, we'll have a farewell dinner at the hotel.

Overnight at Riande Aeropuerto Hotel

October 2: Flights Home



Red-capped Manakin

Trip Details:

Cost:

Price per person (double occupancy), from Panama City, Panama: \$5,899

Single Supplement: \$1200

Min Participants: 8

Max Participants: 14

Price Includes:

2 Expert Guides

Ground Transportation in Panama

Domestic Flights To/From Bocas

All Lodging

All Meals

Park Entrance Fees

Portion of Proceeds Donated to SDBA

Price Does Not Include:

Airfare to and from Panama City, Panama

Airport Taxes

Passport and Visa Fees

Alcoholic Beverages

Personal Items

Travel Insurance

Tips

Deposit:

A deposit of \$500 per person is required to hold your spot on this tour. The remaining balance is due no later than 3 months prior to the scheduled start date of the tour (June 26, 2027).

If you have any questions about this tour or would like to sign up for it, please contact us at info@sabrewingnaturetours.com, by phone at 317-324-8505, or register through our website at sabrewingnaturetours.com.

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