



Bay-headed Tanager

## Panama: Birds of the Isthmus

Discover the extraordinary birdlife of Panama, where Central and South American species converge across lush rainforests, canal-side jungle, and misty cloud forests. Explore legendary sites like Pipeline Road and stay at welcoming, locally owned lodges that place you in the heart of the action. With over 1,000 bird species (7 endemic), exceptional wildlife diversity, and constant opportunities for remarkable sightings, this mindfully crafted tour delivers the very best of Panama's world-class birding. For a chance to see the mighty **Harpy Eagle**, extend your adventure into the wilds of the Darién.

**Dates:** 11-20 March 2027 (10-days) + Extension option

**Group Size:** 10 travelers

**Locations:** [MAP](#) (interactive)

**Price:** from \$3,095

**Potential Bird Species:** 300 + other wildlife

### TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

- ✿ Visit world renowned birding locations like Pipeline Road, the Panama Canal, and Soberanía National Park
- ✿ Seek out some of Central America's top targets including, antbirds, tanagers, and trogons
- ✿ Learn how indigenous women make a living from traditional basket weaving
- ✿ Extend your trip with a 5-day tour to the Darién in search of Harpy Eagles and learn how local families are working to protect them



This tour will involve early mornings, hot/humid weather, moderate-to-high intensity birding, with some rough terrain.

## TOUR OVERVIEW

Discover the extraordinary birdlife of Panama on an immersive journey through one of the most diverse and rewarding birding destinations in the Americas. Straddling the biological crossroads of Central and South America, Panama offers an exceptional blend of neotropical species and habitats – from lush lowland rainforest and the wildlife-rich forests of the Panama Canal, to misty cloud forests, and rushing mountain streams. With over 1,000 bird species – more than North America and Europe combined – alongside extraordinary plant diversity and abundant wildlife, every day promises remarkable encounters, from colorful tanagers and hummingbirds, to the thrilling possibility of rarities like Harpy Eagle, Ocelot, and Tapir.

Our journey explores the best of Panama’s famed Canal Zone and Western Panama, including the legendary Pipeline Road in Soberanía National Park, where mixed flocks move through towering rainforest. We stay at locally owned and managed accommodation with natural grounds and feeders buzzing with activity, and trails revealing rich biodiversity. Additional highlights include the hummingbird-rich forests of El Valle and the surprisingly productive Metropolitan Natural Park in the heart of Panama City.

With its compact geography, excellent infrastructure, and extensive network of protected areas, Panama delivers an unparalleled blend of comfort, accessibility, and world-class wildlife viewing. Join us for an unforgettable birding adventure in the tropical forests of Central America.

## ITINERARY

**Day 1:** Thursday, 11 March 2027

**Arrival in Panama City**

Welcome to Panama, the natural bridge between Central and South America. Upon arrival at Tocumen International Airport in Panama City, you’ll be met and transferred (approximately 45 minutes) to the Summit Rainforest & Golf Resort, where you’ll spend your first night. Set on a hillside overlooking the Camino de Cruces National Park - which connects to Soberanía National Park – the hotel grounds provide an ideal introduction to the region’s rich birdlife.

If time allows, those arriving earlier in the day can join a guided walk around the lush hotel gardens to begin birding right away, with possible sightings that include **Bat Falcon**, **Collared Aracari**, **Short-billed Pigeon**, **Saffron Finch**, **Moustached Antwren**, and **Ruddy-breasted Seedeater**, as well as some perhaps more familiar birds like **Chuck-will’s Widow**(NT), and **Hooded** and **Palm Warblers**. In the evening, we’ll gather for a brief trip orientation before enjoying a welcome dinner at the hotel restaurant.

During our stay at the resort, our guide will take us on a night walk in search of nocturnal wildlife including Night Monkeys, various tropical frogs, and exotic insects.

*Accommodation:* Summit Rainforest & Golf Resort, Paraiso  
(3 nights)



Saffron Finch

**Day 2:** Friday, 12 March 2027

## Pipeline Road

We start early to take advantage of peak morning activity along the famed Pipeline Road and surrounding areas within Soberanía National Park. The Park is widely regarded as one of Central America's most accessible and rewarding destinations for spotting birds and wildlife. Just 45 minutes from Panama City, this 55,000 acre reserve supports an extraordinary diversity of life, including more than 525 bird species and over 100 species of mammals - among them Mantled Howler Monkey, Geoffroy's Tamarin monkeys, both Hoffman's Two-toed and Brown-throated Three-toed Sloths, White-nosed Coatis, Northern Tamandua, and potentially even elusive wild cats.



Geoffroy's Tamarin © Ryan Candee

Originally constructed during World War II to transport fuel from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean in the event the canal was attacked, Pipeline Road is now a quiet, vehicle-free trail that offers ideal access to pristine lowland rainforest. Long celebrated by birders, this was the site of the 19-year straight record-breaking Christmas Bird Counts conducted by the Audubon Society (357 sp. in 24hrs!). As we explore this morning, we'll search for species such as **Great Jacamar, Black-tailed Trogon, Velvety and Golden-collared Manakins, Tawny-faced Gnatwren, White-flanked Antwren, Choco Elaenia, Brownish Twistwing, Streak-chested Antpitta, and Pheasant Cuckoo**, along with a rich diversity of other lowland forest birds. There are also excellent opportunities for photography, with species like **Slaty-tailed Trogon, Black-breasted Puffbird, and Broad-billed Motmot** all showing well. We will likely encounter

the tropical phenomenon of the "mixed flock" - an explosion of birds that work and feed together, exhibiting complex social structure that scientists are only beginning to understand. Insect enthusiasts may find iridescent beetles, beautiful clearwing butterflies, or even the world's largest damselfly.

After lunch and a midday break, we head out again to the Ammo Dump Pond near Gamboa, that despite its name, is a productive wetland habitat that supports a suite of species. Here, we'll look for **Northern Jacana, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Gray-cowled Wood-Rail, White-throated Crake, Rufescent Tiger-Heron, Yellow-tailed Oriole, Panama Flycatcher, Masked Tityra, and Scrub Greenlet**.

*Accommodation:* Summit Rainforest & Golf Resort, Paraiso (3 nights)



**Day 3:** Saturday, 13 March 2027

## Metropolitan Park and Summit Ponds

This morning we bird in Metropolitan Natural Park, one of the most expansive and biodiverse city parks in all of Latin America, and an excellent site for species typical of the Panama Canal Pacific slope. With more than 340 species recorded, we'll walk the forest trails looking for highlights including the endemic and highly restricted **Yellow-green Tyrannulet\***, **Whooping Motmot, Red-throated Ant-Tanager, Black-tailed Flycatcher, Rufous-breasted Wren, Lance-tailed Manakin**, and the elusive **Rosy Thrush-Tanager** which has an interestingly disjunct distribution.



Yellow-green Tyrannulet\* © Evi Meyer

## Day 3: Saturday, 13 March 2027 cont.

After lunch at a local restaurant, we'll make a short journey to Gamboa for a visit with an Indigenous community, where we'll gain insight into traditional customs and the deep connections between people, birds, and wildlife in everyday life. This engaging cultural experience offers a rare opportunity to see how nature is woven into local knowledge, stories, and practices.

Time permitting, we will continue birding in nearby Pacific lowland forest sites, including the scenic Summit Ponds near our resort. Here we may encounter a rich variety of species such as **American Pygmy Kingfisher**, **Anhinga**, **Jet Antbird**, and **Yellow-billed Caciue**, along with migratory highlights like **Painted Bunting** and **Prothonotary Warbler**.

*Accommodation:* Summit Rainforest & Golf Resort, Paraiso (3 nights)



Indigenous Panamanian woman in traditional dress © Francesco Veronesi

## Day 4: Sunday, 14 March 2027 Old Gamboa Rd , Plantation Rd, and El Valle de Anton

After breakfast this morning we'll explore another hot spot of the Canal corridor – Old Gamboa Road, looking for **Spectacled Owls**, **Lesson's Motmot**, **Greater Ani**, **Black-bellied Wren**, **Slate-colored Seedeater**, and if we're lucky **Rufous Nightjar**. We'll also walk along Plantation Road, where more open forest provides a different birding experience from other locations we've visited. This area can be productive for both birds and mammals, with regular sightings of trogons, motmots, and mixed-species flocks. On the forest floor, we'll look for **Orange-billed Sparrow**, **Scaly-throated Leaf-tosser**, **Song Wren**, **Chestnut-backed Antbird**, and above, a variety of flycatchers. We may find army ant swarm and the many birds that follow behind, such as **Dot-winged Antwren**, **Black-faced Antthrush**, and **Spotted, Bicolored, and Ocellated Antbirds**. The rainforests of the Panama Canal are highly diverse, and the number of bird sp. can be overwhelming - reviewing the checklist each evening will help you become familiar with the varied bird names.



Ocellated Antbird © Ryan Candee

After lunch in a local restaurant, we'll drive 1.5 hours west to our next destination, El Valle de Anton in the central mountains, stopping for any good birds along the way. After checking-in to our hotel we'll take a short bird walk looking for **Red-lored Amazons**, **Yellow-headed Caracara**, and **Crimson-backed Tanagers**.

*Accommodation:* Casa Grimaldo, El Valle de Anton (2 nights)








## Day 5: Monday, 15 March 2027 El Valle de Anton Foothills

This morning we'll explore nearby higher elevation sites (800m) in the Cerro Gaital and La Mesa area. We'll be on the lookout for wet forest species typical of the western foothills of Panama such as **Tody Motmot**, **Spot-crowned Barbet**, **Flame-rumped Tanager**, **Yellow-eared Toucanet**, **Dull-mantled Antbird**, **Green Hermit**, **Snowcap**, **Brown-billed Scythebill**, **Tawny-faced Gnatwren**, **White-throated Spadebill**, **Black-faced Grosbeak**, **Northern Schiffornis**, **Plain Antwren**, and **Barred Forest-Falcon**.

## Day 5: Monday, 15 March 2027 cont.

After lunch, we'll visit a few new locations that will likely include Cara Iguana and the Minas Trail on La Mesa where we may encounter foothill species like **White-bellied Antbird**, **Common Pauraque**, **Long-billed Starthroat**, **Bronze-tailed Plumeleeter**, **White-tipped Sicklebill**, **Rosy Thrush-Tanager**, **White-winged Becard**, **Gartered Violaceous Trogon**, **Lance-tailed Manakin**, **Isthmian Wren**^, **Striped Cuckoo**, **Tawny-capped Euphonia**^, and **Panama Flycatcher**. Both **White-throated** and **Pale-vented Thrushes** can be found along our route also, as well as mixed groups of beautiful tanagers like **Black-and-Yellow**, **Bay-headed**, and **Emerald**. Along the Minas Trail we'll search tree trunks for the endemic **Stripe-cheeked Woodpecker**\* as well as **Spotted Woodcreeper**, **Red-capped** and **White-ruffed Manakins**, **Black-capped Antthrush**^, and **Black Guan**^ which have all been recorded here.

Later in the day our guide will take us to the El Valle Amphibian Conservation Center where we will learn about threatened and endangered frogs and how a local conservation organization is working to protect them. We'll also pay a visit to the local farmer's market while we are in town, to see what artisans are making and farmers growing nearby.

*Accommodation:* Casa Grimaldo, El Valle de Anton (2 nights)     



Bronze-tailed Plumeleeter © Francesco Veronesi, White-tipped Sicklebill © Mike's Birds, Long-billed Starthroat © Joao Quental, Panamanian Golden Toad(CR) © Brian Gratwicke

## Day 6: Tuesday, 16 March 2027

### El Valle de Anton Foothills – Drive to the Highlands

For our last morning in El Valle de Anton we'll spend time in the town itself, a picturesque place located in the crater of an extinct volcano. The town has year-round Spring weather thanks to its 700m altitude. Some of the birds we'll be on the lookout for are **Black-chested Jay**, **Blue-headed Parrot**, **Blue Dacnis**, **Rufous-crested Coquette**, **White-vented Plumeleeter**, **Yellow-crowned Euphonia**^, **Bright-rumped Attila**, **Silver-throated Tanager**, **Collared Trogon** (Orange-bellied), and **Thick-billed Seed-Finch**.

After lunch, we'll take the scenic (5 hour) drive to Volcán in the Western Highlands.

*Accommodation:* Hotel Bambito, Volcán (3 nights)










Blue-headed Parrot © Francesco Veronesi

Day 7: Wednesday, 17 March 2027

Los Quetzales Trail and Volcán Baru National Park

Our focus this morning is the iconic and highly sought-after **Resplendent Quetzal**(NT). Our specialist local guide will have scouted suitable habitat increasing our chances of finding this spectacular bird, and with luck, getting some great photos. Other species we'll be on the lookout for include **Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher**^, **Barred Becard**, **Black-faced Solitaire**^, **Chestnut-capped Brushfinch**, **Black-capped Flycatcher**^, **Buffy Tuftedcheek**^, **Ruddy Treerunner**^ and another chance at **Northern Emerald-Toucanet** should we have missed it previously.

After lunch, visit various birding locations around Cerro Punta in search of highland specialists and near-endemic species only shared with Costa Rica - **Maroon-chested Ground Dove**, **Red-faced Spinetail**, **Volcano**^ and **Talamanca**^ **Hummingbirds**, **Slaty Flowerpiercer**^, **Dark Pewee**^, **Rufous-browed Peppershrike**, **Black-cheeked Warbler**^, **Yellow-bellied Siskin**, and **Elegant Euphonia**.

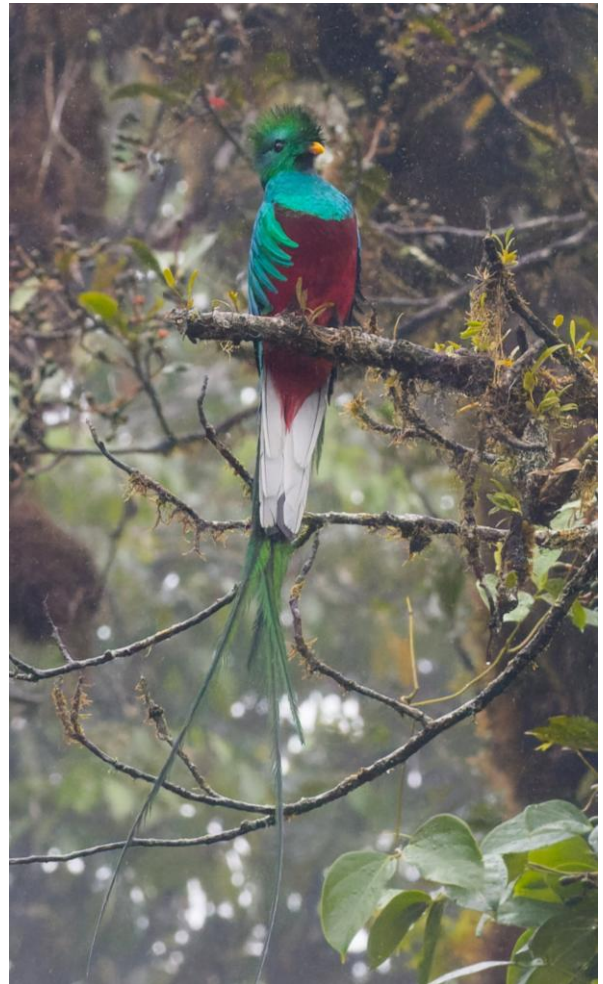
Accommodation: Hotel Bambito, Volcán (3 nights)       

## SPECIES FOCUS:

The **Resplendent Quetzal** (*Pharomachrus mocinno*) held deep cultural and spiritual significance in both Aztec and Maya civilizations, symbolizing light, fertility, goodness, and freedom. Its extraordinary iridescent green uppertail coverts - often longer than the bird's body - were prized above gold and reserved exclusively for rulers and high-ranking priests, signifying wealth and divine authority. The Quetzal was closely associated with the Feathered Serpent deities Quetzalcoatl (Aztec) and Kukulcán (Maya).

In Maya tradition, the Quetzal is said to have gained its vivid red breast feathers from the blood of the hero Tecún Umán during his resistance against the Spanish conquest. The bird remains a powerful symbol today as the national bird of Guatemala, where its name - derived from the Nahuatl word *quetzalli*, meaning "precious" or "beautiful tail feather" - is also used for the national currency.

Revered as a symbol of freedom, the Quetzal was believed to die in captivity. Rather than being killed, birds were carefully captured, their prized feathers plucked and then released. Killing a Quetzal was considered a serious crime, often punishable by death. A member of the trogon family, the Resplendent Quetzal is now among the most threatened of its kind, as the cloud forest habitat it depends on continues to decline due to agriculture and logging.



Resplendent Quetzal

**Day 8:** Thursday, 18 March 2027

**La Amistad International Park**

After breakfast today, we'll take a short drive to La Amistad International Park (PILA). This transboundary protected area covers over 400,000 acres and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The park is shared with Costa Rica and protects a large part of the Cordillera de Talamanca mountain range.



Wrenthrush © Josanel Sugasti

The park and surrounding biosphere reserve is one of the most outstanding conservation areas in Central America, preserving approximately 20% of the region's species diversity and a major tract of tropical forest wilderness. Here we can find the highest concentration of endemic and threatened species in Panama including **Silvery-fronted Tapaculo**^, **Yellow-thighed Brushfinch**^, **Collared Redstart**^, **Flame-throated Warbler**^, and **Prong-billed Barbet**^. We will be on particular lookout for **Wrenthrush**^, the only member of its Family and surely one of the most charismatic in all of Central America. Other species we may not have seen yet include **Ochraceous Peewee**^, **Large-footed Finch**^, **Spot-crowned Woodcreeper**, **Ochraceous Wren**^, **White-naped Brushfinch**, and **Flame-colored Tanager**.

In the afternoon we'll visit a birding hotspot called Volcán Lakes where we'll pick up some wetland species like **Masked Duck**, **Blue-winged Teal**, **White-throated Crake**, **Wilson's Snipe**, **Least Grebe**, **Northern Jacana**. Interesting forest birds found here include **Fiery-billed Aracari**^, **Collared Forest-Falcon**, **Bicolored Hawk**, **Golden-winged Warbler**(NT), **Olivaceous Piculet**, **Spotted Wood-Quail**, **Pale-breasted** and **Slaty Spinetails**, **Slaty-capped Flycatcher**, **Chiriquí Foliage-gleaner**^, **Gray-headed Tanager**, and **Olive-crowned Yellowthroat**.

*Accommodation:* Hotel Bambito, Volcán (3 nights)



**Day 9:** Friday, 19 March 2027

**Chiriquí Highlands and Birding Paradise**

Nestled on the lower slopes of Volcán Barú of western Panama is the well-named Birding Paradise reserve. This beautiful property is perfectly situated along a fast-flowing mountain river with excellent forest and managed gardens nearby. Hummingbird diversity is especially high here and we may see **Charming Hummingbird**^, **Crowned Woodnymph**, **White-necked Jacobin**, **Purple-crowned Fairy**, **Blue-throated Goldentail**, **Slaty-breasted Hummingbird**, **Long-billed Starthroat**, and **Brown Violetear**. Other likely birds for this area are **Cinnamon-bellied Saltator**, **Smoky-brown Woodpecker**, **Red-throated Becard**, **Bran-colored Flycatcher**, **Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher**, **Riverside Wren**^, **Spot-crowned Euphonia**^, **Orange-collared Manakin**^, **Green Honeycreeper**, and **Golden-hooded Tanager**.

After lunch we will check-out of our hotel and drive to David to catch our flight back to Panama City. On arrival we will be transported to our final hotel for our last night in Panama.

*Accommodation:* Summit Rainforest & Golf Resort, Paraiso (1 night)



Fiery-billed Aracari © ryanacandee



**Day 10:** Saturday, 20 March 2027

**Farewell**

After a final breakfast, transfer to Tocumen International Airport for onward journeys.



Crowned Woodnymph



Brown Violetear

#### LAND PRICE

\$ 3,095 per person - 9-10 people traveling

\$ 3,350 per person - 7-8 people traveling

\$ 3,750 per person - 5-6 people traveling

#### REGISTER

To reserve your place on this trip, please contact:

**Toby Ross** [alighttours@gmail.com](mailto:alighttours@gmail.com) or (206) 552-3834

A \$500 deposit is needed to secure your spot.

## THE FINE PRINT

**WHAT'S INCLUDED:** Price includes full-time wildlife guide and tour leader, all activities outlined in this itinerary, accommodation in standard rooms, one-way flight from David to Panama City (Day 9), all meals and non-alcoholic drinks, private transportation (with A/C), park entrance fees, arrival and departure airport transfers, donations to local conservation organizations, carbon offset, and a Panama Bird Checklist.

**WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED:** Price does not include international flights, travel visas, travel insurance, alcoholic drinks, tips and gratuities, and camera permits (if required).

**GRATUITIES:** If you prefer, the tour leader can manage all tips and gratuities during this tour. Please contact your tour leader for further details.

**PAYMENTS:** A deposit of \$500 is required to reserve your place on this tour. **The deadline for final payment is December 1, 2026.** If the trip has not met the minimum number of travelers (5) by the deadline, you will be refunded 100% of your deposit and the trip will be canceled. If you cancel your participation in the trip before the final payment deadline, there is a \$150 cancellation fee that will be deducted from your deposit, and the remainder will be refunded. If you cancel after the December 1, 2026 deadline, you will forfeit 100% of your deposit and any trip-related costs that have already been expended by Alight Tours and any travel partners. Alight Tours will not be held responsible for any lost expenses or fees paid by the traveler should the trip not depart; these include, but are not limited to flights, additional hotel bookings, travel visas, and travel insurance. It is therefore strongly advised that you purchase insurance that will cover the cost of trip cancellation.

## THE FINE PRINT cont.

**SINGLE TRAVELERS:** Price is based on double occupancy. Single rooms may be available for an additional cost of \$245pp. We will make every effort to match people who request to share with others seeking a roommate.

**NOTE:** Specific locations and activities detailed in this itinerary are subject to change based on field conditions, wildlife movements, and local logistics. If changes are required, a like-for-like alternative will be arranged.

**MAP:** The map below shows the locations of accommodation, activities, and birding sites visited during this tour. Some locations are approximate and are subject to change. An interactive map can be found [HERE](#).



## CARBON OFFSET






Climate change threatens all life on our planet, as well as the very destinations that ecotourism relies upon. Tourism is responsible for roughly [8% of the world's carbon emissions](#), making it a significant contributor to climate change. Every time we fly, stay in a hotel, or ride in a car, carbon emissions are being generated. A single return flight from Seattle to Panama City for example produces approximately 1.5 metric tons of carbon emissions per passenger. That's nearly a third of the [amount of carbon](#) that the average person worldwide produces per year (4.7 tons) – just from one round trip flight.

While there are many ways that you can and should minimize your carbon footprint while traveling (e.g. turning off the air conditioner and lights when not in your room), no matter how sustainable our travel habits are, certain CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are unavoidable. That's where **carbon offsetting** comes in. By calculating your carbon footprint, you can pay a small amount to an organization that supports a portfolio of forest, biodiversity, clean energy, and blue carbon projects that focus on capturing CO<sub>2</sub> and locking it away in the environment where it belongs.

Alight Tours is committed to minimizing the environmental impacts of its tourism activities and is partnering with [Sustainable Travel International](#) to offset all in-country ground transportation CO<sub>2</sub> emissions for every passenger on every Alight Tours trip.

## CONSERVATION CONNECTIONS












Your trip to Panama will support conservation and sustainable development in a number of ways:

-  Employ expertly trained and knowledgeable Panamanian bird and wildlife guides.
-  Support Indigenous communities in Panama who are actively protecting globally important Neotropical ecosystems – strengthening conservation efforts while fostering sustainable, community-led ecotourism and long-term livelihoods.
-  Learn how conservation biologists at the El Valle Amphibian Conservation Center are safeguarding threatened amphibians through innovative captive breeding and head-starting programs designed to support population recovery in the wild.
-  Alight Tours will offset the CO<sub>2</sub> from your in-country ground transportation across a portfolio of forest, biodiversity, clean energy, and blue carbon projects.
-  Alight Tours will donate 3% of all profits from this trip to a Panamanian non-profit organization that works to conserve birds, wildlife, and the habitats they depend on.



Scarlet Macaw © Roland Kilcher

## KEY

-  Locally owned accommodation – so the money you spend on accommodation remains in-country
-  Habitat surrounding hotel/lodge suitable for birding and other wildlife viewing
-  Our stay directly contributes to conservation and/or supports sustainable community initiatives
-  Bird feeders located on the property
-  Internet available
-  Laundry service available (at additional cost)
-  Swimming pool on site
-  Ceiling or floor fan in room
-  Air conditioning in room
-  Restaurant on site
-  Spa and/or gym facilities available (at additional cost)

\* Endemic – a species only found in Panama and nowhere else

^ Regional Endemic – endemic to Costa Rica plus neighboring Nicaragua and/or Panama

NT – Near Threatened – IUCN classification: nearly threatened with extinction

VU – Vulnerable – IUCN classification: a species that faces a high risk of extinction in the wild

EN – Endangered – IUCN classification: faces a very high risk of extinction

CR – Critically Endangered – IUCN classification: faces an extremely high risk of extinction



## Panama: Darién Extension

The remote Darién region of Panama is one of the most exciting and biodiverse birding destinations in the neotropics. As a natural bridge between Central and South America, it hosts an exceptional mix of species, including range-restricted endemics and sought-after specialties. Vast tracts of intact rainforest provide critical habitat for elusive birds, while relatively low visitation enhances the experience. Birders come here for the chance to see iconic species such as the Harpy Eagle, along with many others rarely encountered elsewhere in Panama.

**Dates:** 20-24 March 2027 (5-days)

**Group Size:** 10 travelers

**Locations:** [MAP](#) (interactive)

**Price:** from \$1,095 pp

**Potential Bird Species:** 80 (200 if extension only)

### TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

- ✿ Explore the remote and bird-rich forests of the Darién wilderness
- ✿ Search for Harpy Eagle and other Darién and Chocó specialties
- ✿ Visit an indigenous community protecting active Harpy Eagle nests
- ✿ Discover eastern Panama's unique mix of Central and South American birds.
- ✿ Experience one of the neotropic's least-visited birding frontiers.
- ✿ Bird species-rich lowland rainforest, rivers, wetlands & foothills



This tour will involve early mornings, hot/humid weather, moderate-to-high intensity birding, with some rough terrain.

# Panama: Darién Extension

## TOUR OVERVIEW

Our Darién Extension takes you into one of the most remote and biologically rich regions of Panama. Located east of the Panama Canal and bordering Colombia, Darién is a vast wilderness where nature remains largely undisturbed. We focus on the little-explored northern lowland forests, an area rarely visited by birders yet exceptionally rich in species.

These forests offer the chance to encounter some of Panama's most sought-after birds, including the country's national bird, the Harpy Eagle, as well as Crested Eagle, Red-throated Caracara, Bare-crowned and Dull-mantled Antbirds, Black Antshrike, Black Oropendola, Double-banded Graytail, Dusky-backed Jacamar, Spectacled Parrotlet, Grey-cheeked Nunlet, and Spot-breasted Woodpecker. With such a diverse and underexplored region, each day holds the potential for new discoveries and memorable encounters with Darién and Chocó specialty birds.



Cinnamon Woodpecker



Pied Puffbird



Great Antshrike

**Day 1:** Saturday, 20 March 2027






**Darién Lowlands**

For those continuing onto the Darién Extension, we depart Panama City and travel east along the Pan-American Highway toward Darién Province (approximately 2 hours), making strategic birding stops along the way. Depending on timing, we may visit the foothills of Cerro Azul, a unique tropical coniferous forest bordering Chagres National Park, known for its rich birdlife - especially hummingbirds, with up to 20 species recorded in the region. Here we'll look for species such as the Panama endemic **Stripe-cheeked Woodpecker**<sup>\*</sup>, and the regional endemics **Violet-capped Hummingbird**<sup>^(NT)</sup> and **Black-and-yellow Tanager**<sup>^</sup>.

Continuing into the Bayano lowlands, we explore productive habitats around Lake Bayano, the country's second-largest lake. This region offers excellent opportunities for eastern Panama specialties, including **Black Antshrike**<sup>^</sup>, **White-eared Conebill**, **Rusty-winged Antwren**, **Orange-crowned Oriole**, **Forest Elaenia**, and **Green-and-rufous Kingfisher**. Additional species may include **Cocoi Heron**, **Neotropic Cormorant**, **Red-rumped** and **Cinnamon Woodpeckers**, **Black-billed Flycatcher**<sup>^(NT)</sup>, **Tropical Parula**, **Isthmian Wren**<sup>^</sup>, and **Crimson-backed Tanager**.

## Day 1: Saturday, 20 March 2027 cont.

After lunch, we continue to Tortí (approximately 45 minutes), located at the gateway to Darién. Once settled, we head to the nearby Tortí River for afternoon birding, where we'll search for **Green Ibis, Pearl Kite, Little Cuckoo, Pied Puffbird, Pacific Antwren^, Great Antshrike, Black-crowned Tityra, Tropical Royal Flycatcher, and Red-breasted Meadowlark.**

Accommodation: Hotel Portal Avicar, Torti (1 night)     

## Day 2: Sunday, 21 March 2027 Torti River and Reserve

After breakfast we'll take a short 10 minutes drive from our hotel to the Torti River and Reserve. This area covers over 500 hectares of lowland tropical rainforest and holds many Eastern Panama and Darién specialties. We'll be looking for **Black-and-White Hawk-Eagle, Bare-crowned Antbird, Barred Puffbird, Spot-breasted Woodpecker, Great Jacamar, Double-banded Graytail^, Gray-cheeked Nunlet^, Spectacled Parrotlet, Ochre-lore Flatbill,** as well as the extraordinary **Red-billed Scythebill.** This is a great place for hummingbirds which might include **Pale-bellied** and **Rufous-breasted Hermits, Black-throated Mango, Sapphire-throated^ and Snowy-bellied^ Hummingbirds.**

After checking-out of our hotel and getting lunch, we'll drive deeper into the Darién to keep birding and spend the night.

Accommodation: Hotel Aruba, Meteti (basic hotel, 2 nights)  



Red-billed Scythebill © Dominic Sherony

## Day 3: Monday, 22 March 2027 Darién Lowlands and Harpy Eagle Tour

This morning will be special! We will begin with a short boat ride to a nearby indigenous community, where we'll search for one of the neotropics' most iconic raptors – the **Harpy Eagle(VU).** March coincides with the peak of the nesting season, when active nest sites are carefully located and monitored by local indigenous families. In recent years, nests on both protected lands and indigenous territories have provided responsible viewing opportunities, offering a rare chance to observe this powerful and elusive raptor.



Rio Chuquanaue, Darién © Francesco Veronesi

After time with the Harpy, we continue birding in the surrounding agricultural fields, scrub, and forests, looking for species such as **Crested Eagle(NT), Olive-backed Quail-Dove, Plain-breasted Ground-Dove, Rusty-winged Antwren, Smooth-billed Ani, Great Antshrike, Golden-headed Manakin,** and both **Giant and Shiny Cowbirds.** We'll look especially hard for **Dusky-backed Jacamar^,** a poorly known species with a small worldwide range that occurs along the creeks here.

## Day 3: Monday, 22 March 2027 cont.

In the afternoon, we explore areas near the eastern end of the Pan-American Highway, where open and wetland habitats may yield **Yellow-hooded Blackbird**, **Pied Water-Tyrant**, and **Rufous-tailed Jacamar**. We will also have an opportunity to make a stop in a small indigenous Emberá village, where local artisans sell intricately woven baskets and masks.

*Accommodation:* Hotel Aruba, Meteti (basic hotel, 2 nights)  

### SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: Harpy Eagle (*Harpia harpyja*)



Harpy Eagle © rulenumberone2

In Greek mythology the harpies were spirits with a woman's face and an eagle's body, who transported the dead to Hades. Today the Harpy Eagle is the largest and most powerful raptor in the Americas, an apex predator of the neotropical rainforest canopy that fills a role comparable to the jaguar on the forest floor below. Weighing up to 15 pounds, it is equipped with immense talons - among the largest of any eagle - allowing it to take substantial prey like monkeys and other arboreal mammals. Expertly adapted to life in dense forest, they employ a sit-and-wait hunting strategy - perching silently in emergent trees before launching short, controlled flights; their relatively short, broad wings and long tail provide exceptional maneuverability, while specialized facial feathers can be raised into a disc to enhance hearing.

Today, the species is classified by the IUCN as Near Threatened, with habitat loss from logging, agriculture, and development driving declines across much of its range. In Panama, however, significant populations persist, particularly in the forests of the Darién along the border with Colombia. Here, conservation success is closely tied to the stewardship of Indigenous Emberá and Wounaan communities, for whom the Harpy Eagle holds deep cultural and spiritual importance. Traditional knowledge and respect for the species have contributed to the protection of nesting sites and surrounding habitat.

As both Panama's national bird and a powerful indicator of intact rainforest ecosystems, the Harpy Eagle symbolizes the health of the forest itself. Protecting this remarkable species means safeguarding vast tracts of tropical wilderness - ensuring that both wildlife and local communities continue to thrive.

## Day 4: Tuesday, 23 March 2027

### Darién Lowlands

This morning we'll explore several hotspots around Meteti and Yaviza in search of some more Darién specialties, such as **Black Oropendola**^, **Gray-cheeked Nunlet**^, **Red-rumped Woodpecker**, **Dusky-backed Jacamar**^, **Yellow-backed Tanager**, and **Bicolored Wren** which has only recently been recorded in Panama, adding the species to Central America's avifauna list.



Red-tailed Squirrel © Francesco Veronesi

# Panama: Darién Extension

## Day 4: Tuesday, 23 March 2027 cont.

This Darién area is also perfect for those looking to find species with South American origins not found in the rest of Central America. Species like **Short-tailed Swift**, **Red-throated Caracara**, **Slender-billed Kite**, **Lesser Kiskadee**, **Rusty-margined Flycatcher**, **Black-capped Donacobius**, and **Fulvous-vented Euphonia**^\*. Other typical birds of the area might include **Pale-vented Pigeon**, **Laughing Falcon**, **Fork-tailed Flycatcher**, and **Yellow-rumped Cacique**.

After lunch we'll return by road to Panama City (5 hours) and check-in to our hotel for the final night.

*Accommodation:* Summit Rainforest & Golf Resort, Paraiso (1 night)



Rufous-tailed Jacamar

## Day 5: Wednesday, 24 March 2027

## Farewell

After a final breakfast, transfer to Tocumen International Airport for onward journeys.

### LAND PRICE

\$1,095 per person, group size 9-10  
 \$1,150 per person, group size 7-8  
 \$1,250 per person, group size 5-6

### REGISTER

To reserve your place on this trip extension, please contact:  
**Toby Ross** [alighttours@gmail.com](mailto:alighttours@gmail.com) or (206) 552-3834  
 A \$200 deposit is needed to secure your spot.

## THE FINE PRINT

**WHAT'S INCLUDED:** Price includes full-time wildlife guide and tour leader, all activities outlined in this itinerary, accommodation in standard rooms (Note: accommodation is more basic but comfortable than the main tour), all meals and non-alcoholic drinks, private transportation (with A/C), park entrance fees, arrival and departure airport transfers, donations to local conservation organizations, carbon offsets, and a Panama Bird Checklist.

**WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED:** Price does not include international flights, travel visas, travel insurance, alcoholic drinks, gratuities, and camera permits (if required).

**GRATUITIES:** If you prefer, the tour leader can take care of all tips and gratuities during this tour at an additional cost. Please speak to your tour leader for further details.

**PAYMENTS:** A deposit of \$200 is required to reserve your place on this tour. **The deadline for final payment is December 1, 2026.** If the trip has not met the minimum number of travelers (5) by the deadline, you will be refunded 100% of your deposit and the trip will be canceled. If you cancel your participation in the trip before the final payment deadline, there is a \$50 cancellation fee that will be deducted from your deposit, and the remainder will be refunded. If you cancel after the December 1, 2026 deadline, you will forfeit 100% of your deposit and any trip-related costs that have already been expended by Alight Tours and any travel partners. Continued...

# Panama: Darién Extension

**PAYMENTS** continued... Alight Tours will not be held responsible for any lost expenses or fees paid by the traveler should the trip not depart; these include, but are not limited to flights, additional hotel bookings, travel visas, and travel insurance. It is therefore strongly advised that you purchase insurance that will cover the cost of trip cancellation.

**SINGLE TRAVELERS:** Price is based on double occupancy. Single rooms may be available for an additional cost of \$150pp. We will make every effort to match people who request to share with others seeking a roommate.

**NOTE:** Specific locations and activities detailed in this itinerary are subject to change based on field conditions, wildlife movements, and local logistics. If changes are required, a like-for-like alternative will be arranged.

**MAP:** The map below shows the locations of accommodation, activities, and birding sites visited during this tour. Some locations are approximate and are subject to change. An interactive map can be found [HERE](#).



Yellow-eared Toucanet © Martin Bravenboer



Black-faced Anthrush © Francesco Veronesi