

Belize & Tikal

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Depart London
Day 2	Arrive Belize, Black Orchid Resort
Day 3/4	Birds Eye View/Manatee watching
Day 5/7	Lamanai Outpost Lodge
Day 8/10	Pook's Hill Lodge, Cayo District
Day 11/12	Tikal, Guatemala
Day 13/14	Pelican Beach, Dangriga
Day 15/16	Depart Belize, Arrive London

Departs

January/February and November

Focus

Birds, natural history and culture

Grading

A. Day walks only

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code BLZ02) or brochure

Highlights

- Sungrebe, Jabiru & Mangrove Vireo in wetland areas of Crooked Tree
- Enjoy hummingbirds, trogons, becardes & manakins from lodge viewing platform
- Mixed-species flocks including a wealth of woodcreepers, warblers & tanagers
- Ocellated Turkey, puffbirds, euphonias & honeycreepers at Tikal
- Howler monkey chorus, turtles & Fish-eating Bats
- Chance to swim on coral reefs with myriad tropical fish



Tikal



Yellow-tailed Oriole



Boat-billed Heron



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

In Flight

We leave London around lunchtime on a scheduled service to the USA, arriving in the late afternoon/evening. We transfer to a nearby airport hotel.

Day 2

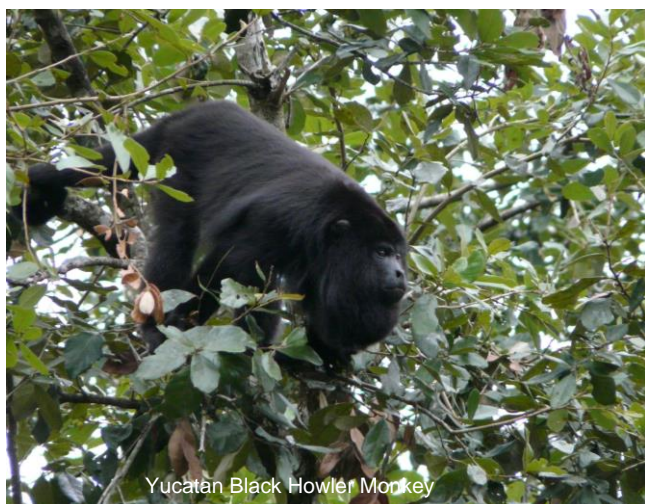
Black Orchid

We depart this morning from our overnight base, down past the western tip of Cuba, over the Gulf of Mexico and finally dropping down over the 1,000 kilometre long coral reef adjacent to the Yucatan peninsula to land in Belize City, usually arriving just before lunchtime.

Belize City is the largest city in Belize, with a population of around 60,000. The city, with its rustic, old-fashioned Caribbean charm, is a pleasant contrast to the usual hustle and bustle, pollution and noise of other large cities in Latin America. The Belize River meanders through the middle of the city and twice a day the city's swing bridge closes to allow sail boats to pass. There are many traditional street vendors selling fruits, vegetables, arts and crafts in the city's public squares, especially in the colonial marketplace.

Once loaded up, we will drive a short distance north-west from the airport to the Black Orchid resort at Burrell Boom, looking out for Wood Storks, Black-collared Hawk possibly Bare-throated Tiger Heron en route.

Over lunch on the verandah overlooking the river we'll look out for Grey-necked Wood Rail and Mangrove Swallows while the habitat around the cabins at Black Orchid provides gentle but productive birding in the form of Vermillion Flycatchers, Pale-vented Pigeon, Orchard Oriole, Common Tody Flycatcher, Common Yellowthroat and many others. During the afternoon we will travel another half an hour or so further west



Yucatan Black Howler Monkey

to Bermudian Landing to visit the 'Community Baboon Sanctuary' (baboon is the local name for the Yucatan Black Howler Monkey). The sanctuary is a community-inspired conservation project in which the locals volunteered to put aside land to help protect the habitat for the "baboons". The project started back in the 80's, gaining some support from WWF and has been very successful with the local howler monkey population now estimated to be 200-400. There will be time for some gentle birding both here (species to look out for include Rufous-tail Jacamar, Hooded Warbler and Yellow-bellied Elaenia) and back around the lodge before dinner.

Day 3

Manatee watching/Birds Eye View

We will spend some time today exploring the small cayes off the coast in search of the elusive West Indian Manatee.

Following optional pre-breakfast birding around the cabins, and breakfast itself, we drive back to Belize City and a private quay from where we board our boat to the manatee sanctuary at the mouth of the Belize River. Upon arrival we will cut our engine and punt our boat in closer to the sanctuary. With stealth and patience we'll hopefully be rewarded with sightings of West Indian Manatee. Following our date with these gentle marine giants we head out to the coral reef (usually South Gallows Point) where they'll be an opportunity to go snorkeling. Many tropical reef fish can be seen with some of the more colourful, conspicuous species including Blue Tang, Trumpet Fish, Queen Trigger Fish and Butterfly Fish, along with different types of coral, lobsters and sea cucumbers.

Following a swim we'll take a tasty picnic lunch on board with local fare consisting of turkey sandwiches, watermelon and papaya. Depending on the time, we'll weigh up our options for further exploration of the reef before motoring back to the quay. Changing out of wet swimming gear, we'll soon be on our way to our next destination of Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary and Birds Eye View Lodge, 90 minutes or so away if driven directly but a little longer if we make some short birding stops en route.

We will arrive at Birds Eye View by late afternoon with time to relax and freshen up before dinner.

Day 4

Birds Eye View/Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary

Established in 1984 for the protection of resident and migrant birds, the sanctuary consists of a network of inland lagoons, swamps and waterways. During the dry season, thousands of birds congregate here, taking advantage of the food resources, and migrants find a safe resting spot on their spring migration back to the north.

The wide variety of habitats in the Crooked Tree area provides food and home for a diversity of fauna. Our accommodation at Birds Eye View lodge looks out over this lovely wetland habitat. Within the logwood swamps roost the nocturnal Boat-billed Herons as well as Chestnut-bellied Herons and Bare-throated Tiger-Herons. Two species of ducks, the Black-bellied Whistling-Duck and the Muscovy Duck (very rare elsewhere in Latin America due to hunting pressure), nest in trees along the swamps. Snail Kites, feeding exclusively on apple snails, the elegant Snowy and Great Egrets fishing along the shoreline, all five species of neotropical kingfishers, birds of prey such as Ospreys and the impressive Black-collared Hawk all add to the avian interest. Spending our time here both on foot and on small boats, our possible list today contains many neotropical specialties: Jabiru, (the largest flying bird in the New World), Pied-billed Grebe, Anhinga, Great Blue, Tricoloured, Little Blue and Green Herons, Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned Night Herons, Boat-billed Heron, White Ibis, Roseate Spoonbill, Wood Stork,



Jabiru

the peculiar Sungrebe, Limpkin, plus various waders and terns. Meanwhile Black Creek, with its mature trees, provides a home for Black Howler Monkeys, Morelet's Crocodiles, Coatiundi and several species of turtle and iguana.

The afternoon will give us a chance to bird Crooked Tree's pine forests, where we'll look for Yucatan Jay, a regional endemic. We might also see Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Grace's Warbler, Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher, Northern Bentbill, Mangrove Vireo, and Yellow-billed Cacique amongst others. Back at the lodge, we should see Cinnamon Hummingbird before we wind down for the night.

We stay at Birds Eye View for a second night.

Days 5 - 7

Crooked Tree/Lamanai Outpost Lodge

Our final morning at Crooked Tree will consist of another optional pre-breakfast birding walk. After breakfast, we'll take the opportunity to drive some of the village trails to look for species such as Northern Cardinal, Chipping Sparrow, Orchard Oriole and Acorn Woodpecker and to build up a picture of the challenges of living in this isolated community. We'll see the hurricane shelters which provide safe emergency shelter for everyone, and the raised causeway which links the lagoon island to the main road – built after the island was cut off by flooding a few years ago.

We return to the hotel at around 10am with time to pack before a leisurely lunch at noon. After loading up, we head north for about 45 miles along the Northern Highway towards Orange Walk, from where we are transported up the lush, verdant channels of the New River on a pontoon boat. The boat ride will allow us further views of a wide variety of wetland species following on from our experiences at Crooked Tree.

Lamanai Outpost Lodge is surely one of the best-kept secrets in Belize; a wonderfully appointed lodge overlooking the attractive New River Lagoon and surrounding tropical forest with the mystique of Maya ruins and a varied flora and fauna right on the doorstep. We settle in for three nights at the lodge.



The lodge itself sits less than a mile from the Maya ruins of Lamanai. Trails lead off from the lodge into the ruins, where there is a rich assortment of birds typically found in the tropical hardwood forests of western Belize and the Petén region of Guatemala. In the early morning, troops of chachalacas, toucans, aracarís, and parrots forage through the adjacent forest. Next to Lamanai lies

the village of Indian Church. Here, open milpas (a crop-growing system used in the Yucatan) and second-growth scrub are home to an assortment of birds not found in the primary forest, including the attractive Black-throated Bobwhite. Interspersed among these other habitats are tracts of pine savanna with its own set of interesting birds, including the rare Yellow-headed Parrot, White-tailed Hawk, Buff-bellied and Azure-

crowned Hummingbirds, Yucatan Flycatcher, Yucatan Jay, Gray-throated Chat, Gray-crowned Yellowthroat, Botteri's Sparrow, and the impressive Jabiru.

After the sun sets on our second and third evenings we will have the option of an exciting night time spotlighting exploration of the lagoon, where Morelet's Crocodile and Hickatee, a large river turtle, are usually spotted, along with potoos, Pauraques, and Fish-eating Bats, or a night-time walk.

Days 8-10

Lamanai/Pook's Hill

After breakfast we leave the tranquil setting of Lamanai Outpost Lodge and retrace our steps to Tower Hill, rendezvousing with our van. We next drive south again, past Crooked Tree and Burrell Boom and then south-west to Belize Zoo. En route we'll keep our eyes open again for Eastern Meadowlark, Wood Stork and the impressive Jabiru.

Belize's charming little zoo has gained world renown as a home for animals native to Belize where they can be viewed in their natural setting – forest enclosures. All of the animals living at the zoo were rescued as orphans, from poaching situations, the illegal pet trade, injury, or exposure due to habitat loss. Thousands of international tourists visit the zoo yearly, but its mission of promoting conservation is clearly aimed towards benefiting Belize and its people. The zoo serves as the main venue for Belizeans to experience the country's wildlife and is a favorite field trip for school groups. The forest at the zoo also provides excellent habitat for birds so some of the wildlife highlights of the tour will likely be flying about outside the enclosures!



Spectacled Owl

Next we continue on to Pook's Hill, a small eco-lodge in western Belize arranged around a restored Maya residential site in heart of a 300 acre primary rainforest reserve, which serves as a buffer to the 6,700 acre Tapir Mountain Reserve.-We have two full days here to explore the area. The birding is exceptional, with over 300 species recorded within a 5-mile radius. An open deck is an ideal viewing platform in the early mornings - should we concentrate on the white hawks soaring overhead, hunt down the Spectacled Owls calling to each other in the forest, watch the hummingbirds come and go constantly

to the Erythrina Tree, or watch the trogons, tityras, thrushes, becards, manikins, Tawny-winged, Ruddy and Olivaceous Woodcreepers, Band-backed Wrens, warblers, orioles and tanagers (to name a few!) feeding on the native plants? All this, and many more, will be just yards from our cabins! Tapir, Jaguars, Coatimundi, deer, peccary, armadillo, monkeys, iguanas and just about all the other animals found in Belize make their homes in the forest around the lodge and while sightings of the larger mammals are uncommon they are a possibility.

On our second full day at Pook's Hill we have the opportunity to visit Barton Creek Cave. The Barton Creek Cave tour is a leisurely tour in which you travel to the neighboring river valley and the Upper Barton Creek Mennonite Colony and explore the spectacular Barton Creek Cave via a canoe! You will view the impressive

cave formations from aboard your canoe as you slowly paddle through the cave passage. After exploring the cave, visit the nearby Green Hills Butterfly Ranch where you will experience Belize's biggest and best butterfly exhibit. Enjoy a picnic lunch at the ranch and then discover the beautiful butterflies of Belize. The knowledgeable staff will present an excellent synopsis of the butterfly life cycle, but the main attraction is the enclosed flight area where scores of gorgeous tropical butterflies flutter around you.

During our time at Pooks your tour leader will plan excursions carefully to maximize our time in this charming and wildlife-rich setting.

Day 11

Tikal

After three nights at Pook's Hill, we depart this morning for Guatemala and Tikal, crossing the border at Benque Viejo(Belize)/Melchor de Mencos(Guatemala). Guatemala is an entirely different world with Spanish replacing English and Guatemalan Quetzales replacing the Belize Dollar. The country has a long and rich history of revolution and conquest.

Once over the border, we meet our Guatemalan driver, Julio. The contrast between Belize, with its British influence and relative prosperity, and the Spanish influence and poverty of Guatemala is striking. Heading west, we can stop at Lake Peten Itza which at 32km x 5km is Guatemala's second largest lake.

We then drive north, arriving at Jungle Lodge in the amazing Tikal National Park by late afternoon. The famous Maya ruins of Tikal, the 'Machu Picchu of Central America', are located in the Guatemalan department of El Petén, just across from Belize's western border. Few spots on Earth so beautifully combine a diversity and abundance of rainforest birds and mammals with outstanding archaeological ruins. We will settle into our accommodation (Jungle Lodge) for the next two nights, full of anticipation for our day of exploring tomorrow.

Day 12

Tikal

A stay at Tikal is an unforgettable experience, and the memories of a mix of wonderful birdwatching, splendid Maya ruins and lush, verdant rainforest, with onlooking Guatemalan Howler Monkeys and Black-handed Spider Monkeys, are sure to linger long in our minds after our return home.

The spectacular temple complex of Tikal covers 2 square kilometres, while the whole of this ancient city covers an incredible 120 square kilometres! One can climb to the top of one of the pyramidal temples and look out over vast swathes of unbroken forest canopy. At dawn the ancient ruins echo to the strange whistle of the shy Slaty-breasted Tinamou, whilst magnificent Ocellated Turkeys wander the





Mottled Owl

deserted trails and spectacular flights of parrots dash, squawking, overhead. Birds of prey, falcons, hawks and kites, wheel over the ruins as the day warms up, whilst mixed species feeding flocks containing flycatchers, warblers, honeycreepers and tanagers forage in the tree tops. We will spend the whole day on foot here, walking slowly between the ruined temples on the excellent trails. In addition a possible excursion after dinner might reveal Mottled Owl, Common Pauraque or Northern Potoo.

Few who have visited Tikal would dispute that this is one of the best birdwatching localities in the whole of Central America.

Day 13

Tikal to Pelican Beach, Dangriga

After our second night at Jungle Lodge in Tikal and breakfast, we drive back east into Belize and begin our drive to the town of Dangriga on the central coast of Belize. En route, we'll call in at the picturesque Blue Hole National Park for a leg stretch. The main attractions in this park, the St. Herman's Cave and the Blue Hole, are connected by an underground stream. The Blue Hole is a cool and refreshing place for an afternoon swim. It was formed by the collapse of an underground limestone cave. In this case, the river running through the original cavern still flows through the cave system, and forms a sapphire-colored pool at the bottom of the cenote (Yucutan name for sinkhole). Birds here could include Slaty Antwren, Piratic Flycatcher, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Tody Motmot and Northern Nightingale Wren.

We continue on to Pelican Beach Resort on the coast where a completely new suite of birds await us including Willet, Whimbrel, Ruddy Turnstone, Spotted Sandpiper and other waders. We settle in for our final two nights in Belize.

Day 14

Pelican Beach, Dangriga

We'll offer a choice today between another boat, swimming and snorkeling trip to South Water Caye and Bird Island with a Pelican Beach guide, or a land-based bird and nature excursion to Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary and Jaguar Preserve with the tour leader.

The marine excursion will provide a great look at Belize's barrier reef, with some excellent snorkeling if conditions are calm. Bird Island is a nesting area for Magnificent Frigatebirds and Brown Boobies.



Magnificent Frigatebird

The Jaguar Reserve has a healthy population of cats including of course the Jaguar itself (although we're extremely unlikely to see one) as well as a wealth of other wildlife, being considered one of the premier birding sites in Belize. The birding here is superb and we will look carefully for any species not seen thus far.

We'll meet up again in the evening to swap tales and to spend our second night at Pelican Beach.

Day 15

In Flight

Another chance to enjoy sunrise over the Caribbean before our drive back along the coast north to Belize City and onwards on to the US and Europe.

Day 16

London

We arrive back at London Heathrow during morning.

Tour Grading

Grade A. Easy day walks only. The cave tour from Pooks is very much optional, as are the snorkeling activities. Snorkeling equipment is provided but wetsuits are not and so please bring your own if preferred (although not necessary as swimsuits will suffice).

Weather

The overall climate of Belize can be described as sub-tropical. While humidity can be high, it is seldom oppressive for long and is most noticeable along the coast. Belize has an annual mean temperature of an extremely pleasant 79°F although it will likely be in the high 80's during the tour. Heavy rain showers are a possibility at any time.

Clothing

Please inspect the separate clothing list, sent to you on booking, thoroughly.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All accommodation and meals are included, except meals in the US on the outward journey.

Extra expenses

Please note that we do not include all items of a personal nature such as drinks, laundry, tips and souvenirs.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.