

Belize – Chan Chich Lodge

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline Itinerary

Day 1	Depart UK and overnight in the USA
Day 2	Arrive Belize; transfer to Chan Chich
Day 3/8	Exploring Chan Chich and its surroundings
Day 9	Depart Belize
Day 10	Arrive UK

Departs

March

Focus

Birds, Mammals and Herpetofauna

Grading

A/B. A moderate level of fitness is required,
Please see detailed notes at the end of the itinerary.

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code BLZ03)

Highlights

- Stunning rainforest of Chan Chich and the Rio Bravo Conservation Area.
- Over 370 species of bird recorded.
- Ocellated Turkey, Great Curassow, Crested Guan and Ornate Hawk Eagle among the specialities.
- Regional endemics including Tody Motmot, Lovely Cotinga, Grey-breasted Chat and Rose-throated Tanager.
- Black Howler and Central American Spider Monkeys are regularly seen chance of Jaguar, Ocelot, Puma and Tapir.
- Maya ruins at Lamanai.



From Top: Ocellated Turkey, Collared Aracaris and Giant River Otter.



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Introduction

Belize is a country of unexpected surprises and offers the traveller wildlife excitement way beyond its tiny size. One of the best places to sample this wonderful potential is at the luxurious Chan Chich Lodge, the base for this single-centre holiday.

In the heart of the Rio Bravo Conservation Area in the north-west of Belize, Chan Chich lies at the centre of 30,000 acres of protected rainforest that comprise the Gallon Jug Estate. Over 370 species of birds and an impressive array of reptiles, amphibians and mammals have been recorded on the estate and Jaguars, Pumas, Ocelots and Tapirs are all regularly seen.

The beautifully appointed lodge, atmospherically situated within a complex of Maya ruins, is served by an extensive and varied network of trails that allow the visitor to fully explore the wonders of the surrounding forest. Central American Spider and Black Howler Monkeys are common (the latter a conspicuous part of the dawn chorus!) and birds to be seen close to the lodge include Ornate Hawk Eagle, Great Curassow, Crested Guan, Great Tinamou, Keel-billed Toucan and an exciting range of parrots, trogons, woodpeckers, woodcreepers and hummingbirds. Further spice is added by the prospect of seeing localised regional endemics such as Lovely Cotinga, Rose-throated Tanager, Grey-throated Chat and the extraordinary Ocellated Turkey, a bizarre apparition with its bare blue head, orange warts and strange bubbling calls.

A short drive from the lodge takes us to the Laguna Seca, a reed-fringed lake where we can find Morelet's Crocodiles and wetland birds such as Sungrebe, Bare-throated Tiger Heron, Pinnated Bittern, Anhinga and Northern Jacana; whilst a nearby escarpment provides an ideal mid-morning viewpoint from which to scan for White Hawks and majestic Black-and-white Hawk-Eagles. Night drives offer another exciting dimension to a stay at Chan Chich and bring the chance of encountering tree-frogs and tarantulas, potoos and auraques, Spectacled Owl and a host of mammals such as Tamandua, Mexican Porcupine, Kinkajou, Margay and even, of course, Ocelot and Jaguar.

With so much to see and explore from one very comfortable base, a stay at Chan Chich provides a Belizean experience that is hard to beat. With a day trip to visit the wonderful Maya ruins at Lamanai included and easily arranged optional extensions to one of the many offshore islands for an unbeatable reef experience, this trip to Belize presents an almost irresistible package.

Itinerary

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

Fly London to United States

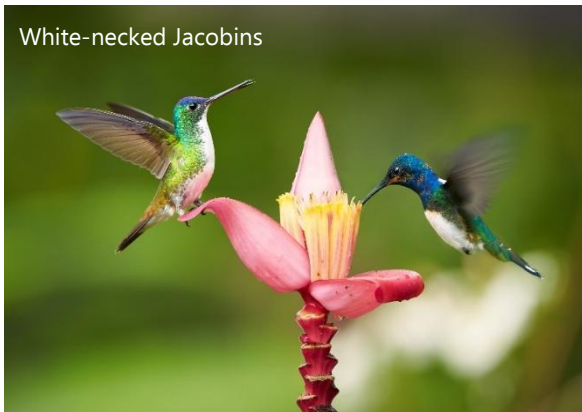
We depart from the UK in the morning bound for a transit airport in the USA. Upon arrival in the US in the late afternoon/early evening we'll transfer to a convenient airport hotel.

Day 2

USA to Belize & travel to Chan Chich

Our morning flight down to Belize will arrive around midday. Meeting up with our local guides, driver and bus, we will then drive for three hours or so, first north to the town of Orange Walk and then south-westwards through San Felipe and Blue Creek to Gallon Jug and Chan Chich itself. The latter stage of the journey takes us into the increasingly remote and pristine forest of the Rio Bravo Conservation Area, one of the largest intact areas of lowland forest in Central America. The quality of the forest will be evident as we drive and we're likely to see some exciting wildlife along the way.

White-necked Jacobins



Long-billed Hermit



The lodge itself, built from local wood and set in the middle of an ancient Maya plaza surrounded by dense rainforest, has a reputation for luxury and will be the perfect base for us for the next seven nights. Depending on our arrival time, we may be able to spend the last hour or so of the afternoon exploring the area immediately around the lodge. Flowering bushes and nectar feeders around the dining area play host to a range of hummingbirds including White-necked Jacobin, Long-billed Hermit and White-bellied Emerald, whilst bizarre Ocellated Turkeys are often to be seen out on the lawn. A group of Central American Spider Monkeys might be visible around the edge of the clearing or a Bat Falcon overhead and if there is a fruiting tree nearby then we can check for any of a host of exciting species including Collared Aracaris, Keel-billed Toucans, Mealy and Red-lored Parrots or even some Crested Guans.

Overnight: Chan Chich Lodge

Day 3/8

Days out around Chan Chich

From our base at Chan Chich we'll enjoy a varied and flexible programme of walks, drives and excursions. The exact order of events will depend on local factors.

The lodge itself has a network of over nine miles of walking trails, plus some driveable tracks that collectively give us excellent walking access into the surrounding forest and all its various habitats. We'll also take excursions by vehicle a little further afield to explore the Laguna Seca, the Escarpment, the Gallon Jug farmland and coffee plantations and, of course, the Maya site at Lamanai. Aside from all this, with its swimming pool, spa, beautiful gardens and local Maya ruins, staying back at the lodge and relaxing is always a possibility for those who want some time on their own.

Our first full day will be spent locally, starting with some pre-breakfast birding around the immediate grounds. The lodge clearing can be very productive and possibilities include Black-cheeked and Lineated Woodpeckers, Red-billed Pigeon, Gartered Trogon, White-crowned Parrot, Collared Aracari, Golden-hooded Tanager and a host of other species. Walking down the entrance track and following some of the nearby loop trails takes us through some taller forest and brings the possibility of Emerald Toucanet, Black-headed and Slaty-tailed Trogons, Chestnut-coloured and Pale-billed Woodpeckers, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, White-whiskered Puffbird, Lesson's Motmot and, with luck, the localised and unobtrusive Tody Motmot.

As we become more familiar with our surroundings we'll venture further afield and over subsequent days we'll explore local trails that take us to subtly different habitats within the surrounding forest, each of which brings a different suite of species. In the areas of shorter, drier forest, for example, we can search for Tropical Gnatcatcher, White-bellied Wren, Blue Bunting, Green-backed Sparrow, the delicately beautiful Blue Ground Dove and regional endemics like the Rose-throated Tanager and the handsome Grey-breasted Chat. Meanwhile, in taller, more humid forest, we might meet a Great Curassow or a Giant Tinamou on the trail or a dazzling Purple-crowned Fairy flitting around the foliage and with luck we'll encounter one of the mixed-species flocks that make tropical rainforest birding so exciting. Flocks at Chan Chich are often led by the striking Black-throated Shrike-Tanager and will include a range of species that typically includes various trogons, woodpeckers and woodcreepers, Plain Xenops, Eye-ringed Flatbill, Yellow-olive Flycatcher, Dot-winged Ant-Wren, Rufous Mourner, Tawny-crowned Greenlet, Red-crowned and Red-throated Ant-Tanagers, the stunning Green Shrike-Vireo and lots more.



Central American Spider Monkey

Chan Chich Creek, which winds its way through the forest close to the lodge, adds further variety. This is a good area to see the local Black Howler and Central American Spider Monkeys and brings the possibility of encountering Morelet's Crocodile, Brown Basilisk, Green or Pygmy Kingfisher and any of a wide range of manakins, flycatchers, warblers and other small birds coming down to bathe and drink.

During our stay at Chan Chich our excursions further afield will include:

The Laguna Seca

A short drive takes us to the Laguna Seca a large reed-fringed lake set in the forest. During an easy exploration along the lakeshore we'll encounter a range of exciting wetland species that could include Least and Pied-billed Grebes, Northern Jacana, Anhinga, Bare-throated Tiger Heron, Green Heron and Wood Stork. With luck and persistence we might find a secretive Pinnated Bittern poking its head up out of the reeds, a River Otter out fishing in the lake or even a mighty Jabiru



which regularly feed here. It's worth keeping an eye on the skyline here too, for this is a good place to find a dazzling Lovely Cotinga perched in a treetop or a soaring Ornate Hawk-Eagle.

The Gallon Jug Estate

A tour around the Gallon Jug Estate takes us through pasture and coffee plantations. These open and semi-open habitats with associated areas of scrub and isolated big trees bring another dimension to our explorations. Birds to be seen here include White-tailed Kite, Roadside and Grey Hawks, Laughing Falcon, Barred Antshrike, Fork-tailed, Scissor-tailed and Vermilion Flycatchers, Brown Jay, Montezuma Oropendola and Eastern Meadowlark.

The Escarpment

Another relatively short drive will take us to the nearby escarpment which, at 900 feet altitude, is truly lofty by northern Belizean standards. We'll aim to get there at the point in the morning when the forest warms up sufficiently for the raptors to start to fly. From our viewpoint we'll be able to scan over a vast and apparently unbroken area of forest and with luck we'll see a good variety of raptors which may include Black-and-white Hawk-Eagle, White Hawk, Short-tailed Hawk, Grey-headed Kite, Double-toothed Kite and even King Vulture.

Night Drives & Walks

During our stay we intend to make a night drive and a night walk. These will give us the chance to look for tarantulas and tree-frogs, Common Pauraque and Northern Potoo, Yucatan Nightjar, owls such as Mottled and Spectacled and a range of mammals that could include Kinkajou, Tamandua, Mexican Porcupine or Northern Raccoon and if we're really lucky, an Ocelot or Jaguar! Due to the extent of the protected forest here, this is one of the best places in Central America to see one of the cats.

Lamanai

On one of the days we'll make an early start and drive for a couple of hours to Tower Hill Landing on the New River, where we'll transfer to a boat and continue for an hour or so upriver and into the New River Lagoon. The boat trip will give us a great opportunity to see some wetland wildlife and along the way our boatman will stop for anything interesting. As the boat twists and turns its way along the river we are likely to see Boat-billed, Great Blue and Bare-throated Tiger Herons, Anhinga, Great Black and possibly Black-collared Hawks, Snail Kite, Belted and Ringed Kingfishers, various swallows and martins, a loafing Green Iguana or two and hopefully some roosting Long-nosed Bats.



The boat trip concludes at Lamanai itself, the third largest Maya site in Belize. Set on a bluff overlooking the New River Lagoon and surrounded by pristine forest, it is both a beautiful place and a true archaeological wonder. Once ashore we'll be joined by an expert local guide who will take us on a guided tour around the various temples and plazas. Set in the forest as it is, there will also always be the likelihood of good wildlife sightings along the way and we'll keep our eyes open for Spider Monkeys, Keel-billed Toucans, Collared Aracaris, Gartered Trogons and perhaps even a roosting Mottled Owl. When we've finished our time at Lamanai, we'll retrace our steps back downriver to Tower Hill Landing and so back to Chan Chich. It promises to be a full and very rich day!

Overnight: Chan Chich Lodge

Day 9/10

Travel back to UK via USA

After some final pre-breakfast birding at Chan Chich, we'll make our way back to Belize International Airport for our afternoon flight back to the USA and our overnight connection back to the UK.

Extensions

For those who wish to stay on in the region, we can easily arrange a few days of snorkelling and beachside relaxation on one of the many offshore islands dotted along Belize's coral reef, the second largest in the world, or a trip to Tikal in adjacent Guatemala for a further chance to experience the splendours of the region's Maya heritage. For details contact the Naturetrek office.

Tour Grading

This is an escorted natural history holiday suitable for most people with moderate fitness levels and mobility. However, you should be prepared for humid, hot, and occasionally muddy conditions, as well as some unpaved roads, uneven trails and biting insects. The majority of our time will be spent observing wildlife from boats or on foot.

To fully enjoy the tour, anticipate full days with early starts and late finishes. These extended hours are essential for maximising wildlife-viewing opportunities. Please be aware of this before committing to the tour. While there will be opportunities for relaxation, it's important to note that daily itineraries are full. However, keep in mind that all activities are optional, and you can choose to unwind at the lodge if desired.

Tour Focus

This tour offers a broad focus. While there will always be an emphasis on birding, you will also dedicate time to finding mammals and herpetofauna. With this in mind, you will be accompanied by an expert local naturalist/birding guide for daytime excursions. In addition, for your evening walks and drives, you will encounter nocturnal mammals, frogs and tarantulas. Please note that this tour may involve encounters with reptiles including snakes. You can also expect to see a diverse range of butterflies and insects.

If your main interest is birds, you are likely to enjoy this tour. However, if you are interested in only one of these aspects, such as mammals, and do not wish to engage in searching for birds and herpetofauna (or vice versa), this tour may not be for you. Please consider this before committing.

Please note that mammals, in particular, tend to be shy, retiring, and present in low densities across the Neotropics, often exhibiting crepuscular or nocturnal behaviour. As with birding, increasing our chances of spotting the more elusive forest dwellers requires moving slowly and quietly. Your guide may utilise specialist equipment to further aid our efforts, but it's important to maintain patience and accept whatever encounters come our way. While specific wildlife sightings can never be guaranteed, the opportunity to explore untouched rainforests is a rare privilege. Anticipation for what we might encounter each day is part of what makes this trip truly exciting!

Please do not hesitate to talk to the Operations Manager, Dan Lay (dan@naturetrek.co.uk or 01962 733051), if you have any additional questions regarding this holiday.

Weather, Clothing & Equipment

Generally sunny with minimal rainfall, which often comes in short bursts. Temperatures are warm, with cooler, breezy days in the winter months (December to February) and hotter, cloudless days from March to May. June to November is the rainy season, also known as the 'green season'. Rain can be frequent and heavy, but full days of rain are rare. This season also includes the official hurricane season, which runs from June 1 to November 30, with peak activity from August to October.

Please inspect the separate clothing list contained within the pre-departure information, of which a copy will be sent to you upon booking. Binoculars are, of course, essential for this holiday.

Luggage Allowance

Standard airline international baggage regulations apply to international flights.

What's Included

All food, soft drinks, local beers, local rum, and house wine, starting at dinner on Day 2 and ending with breakfast on Day 9. Items of a personal nature are not included in the price of the tour.

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 and your interest in an extension at the time of booking.

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Lodge and Accommodation