

Panama - Canopy Tower - A Mammal Tour

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Panama City
Day 2	Semaphore Hill & Ammo Ponds
Day 3	Pipeline Road (Part I) & Summit Gardens
Day 4	Plantation Trail & Old Gamboa Road
Day 5	Lake Gatun & Gamboa Wildlife Sanctuary
Day 6	Metropolitan Natural Park & the Canal
Day 7	Discovery Centre & Pipeline Road (Part II)
Day 8 / 9	Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Anton
Day 10	El Valle / In flight
Day 11	UK

Departs

May and July

Focus

Mainly mammals; also birds, reptiles and butterflies.

Grading

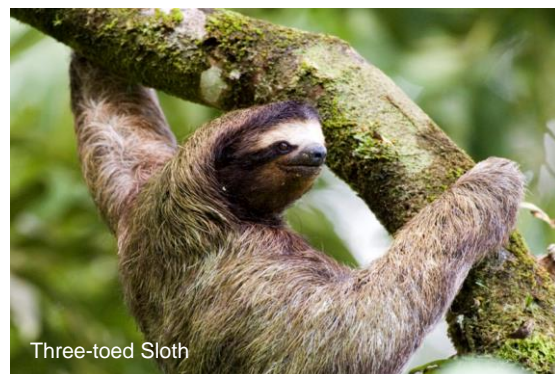
Grade A (easy). This is a traditional lodge-based mammal-watching tour.

Dates and Prices

See Website (tour code PAN02) or brochure

Possible Highlights:

- Howlers, capuchins, spider monkeys & Geoffroy's Tamarin
- Armadillos, 3 species of sloth, coatis, Silky Anteater & Agouti
- Nocturnal mammals such as Western Night Monkey & Kinkajou
- A wealth of canopy birds: jacamars, puffbirds, manakin leks & antbirds



Three-toed Sloth



Mantled Howler Monkey



Northern Tamandua

Images courtesy of David Tipling and Paul Gale.



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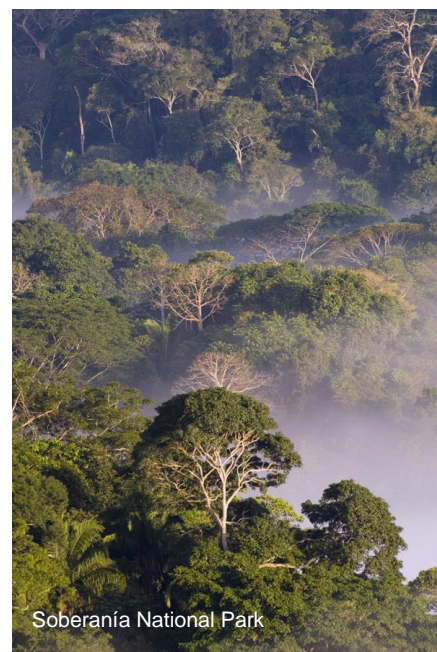
W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Introduction

Panama forms the narrowest part of the Mesoamerican Isthmus, which is not only of huge historical importance linking the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans by rail and canal, but also of considerable biogeographical importance as the land bridge between North and South America.

Panama is well known for offering some of the best birdwatching in Central America, but it is also home to over 200 species of mammal – from sloths and tamanduas, to tapirs and tiny bats! Many are elusive in nature, and indeed the majority of the rainforest mammals are crepuscular or nocturnal, remaining well hidden to the observer during a walk through the rainforest. However, on this tour we go straight to the best places for seeing an excellent range of them, and our main base – at the top of the rainforest canopy – gives us an excellent vantage point for seeing a wide range of Panama's most interesting mammals: howler monkey, Nine-banded Armadillo, White-nosed Coati, Silky Anteater, Agouti, Kinkajou and capuchins to name a few.

We will be staying within the Soberanía National Park, which extends right down to the suburbs of Panama City and the famous Panama Canal. Here we will spend an entire week residing in the canopy itself at the world famous Canopy Tower in the hands of expert guides. The Canopy Tower, originally a US Air Force radar station, was converted into a wildlife enthusiast's paradise in 1999 by a Panamanian birdwatcher and entrepreneur. Here, with bedrooms at treetop level, there could be no better place to wake to the sounds of Panama's great rainforest. The main viewing deck offers superb 360° views over the canopy and the chance to observe exciting and otherwise difficult-to-see canopy mammals and birds.



Although mammal-watching from the tower will be our focus, the surrounding rainforest offers a variety of habitats and some superb Neotropical birdwatching, including various trogons, motmots, jacamars, puffbirds, woodcreepers, manakins, antbirds and tanagers. Panama itself harbours nearly 1,000 bird species in only 80,000 square kilometres (an area slightly larger than Ireland!).

Some of Panama's 230-odd species of mammal, comprising 13 major groups, will no doubt be fairly familiar to the Western naturalist, even those visiting for the first time: animals such as anteaters, armadillos, sloths, monkeys and bats. The Neotropics really is a naturalist's paradise, however, and all around us there are surprises in store: Tayras and grisons, soledons and opossums ... and bats that make tents!

On this tour we are highly unlikely to see Jaguar or other felines, and the mammal-watching requires patience, but we are likely to see a range of unusual species – from the canopy to the forest floor – and a considerable amount of it from our comfortable accommodation perched high in the rainforest. At this time many trees are flowering and the chances of seeing nocturnal mammals are improved.

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some reordering 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

Canopy Tower

We depart this morning from the UK to Panama City. On arrival at Tocumen International Airport this evening, we will be met by our guide and drive for just one hour to the Canopy Tower, which will be our home for the next seven nights. After the first of many delicious dinners (if we arrive after 8pm a light meal/snack will be served) we'll have an introductory talk then settle in to our Fsegment-shaped rooms for a good night's sleep, before the excitement of our first dawn in the canopy.

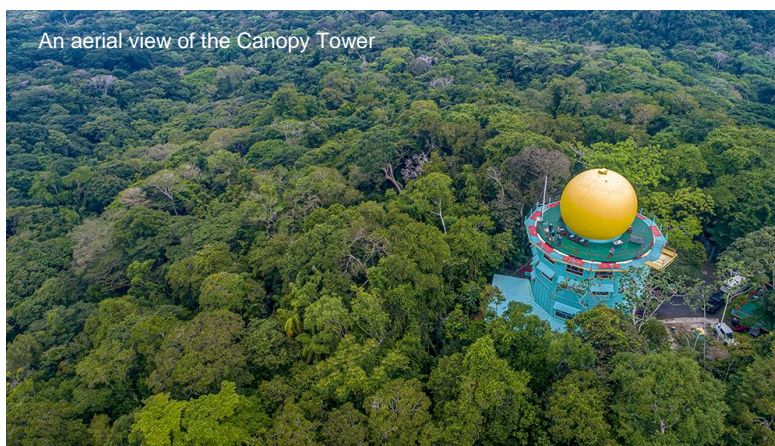
Depending on flight schedules, regional departures from the UK can sometimes be facilitated with KLM via Amsterdam. Please state when making your booking whether you would prefer a regional departure and we will confirm availability and any additional cost.

Day 2

Semaphore Hill & Ammo Ponds

At dawn, as the morning lightens, we will climb the stairs to the observation deck, which affords superb views over miles of rainforest with the famous canal 3km away and Panama City and the Pacific Ocean in the distance.

We will start our second day at 6am on the observation deck, on the top floor. The Canopy Tower's observation deck will offer a great opportunity to look over the treetops, and the fresh coffee served on deck will ensure a full state of alertness! From this vantage point we can often see Geoffroy's Tamarin, Mantled Howler Monkey, Three and Two-toed Sloths, Red-tailed Squirrel and a variety of the colourful birds, such as Red-legged Honeycreeper,



Violaceous Trogon, Green Shrike-Vireo and Blue Cotinga that come to feed on the *Cecropia* trees. After our first exciting early morning on the tower, we will have to tear ourselves away from the viewing deck – at about 7.30am – and down a level for breakfast in the tower's restaurant, which has panoramic windows ensuring nothing is missed!

After breakfast, we will start walking down the Semaphore Hill Road, past the hummingbird feeders located just outside the tower's entrance, where over half a dozen spectacular species can be seen at any visit including White-necked Jacobin, Long-tailed Hermit and Black-throated Mango, to continue our search for tamarins, monkeys, sloths and squirrels. As we walk along this road there's a high chance of finding Brown-

throated Three-toed Sloth and Hoffmann's Two-toed Sloth. A type of anteater lives here too – the Northern Tamandua; we'll be on the look-out for its attractive, patchy-brown coat. This paved road is a little more than a mile long and passes through some of the forest protected by Soberanía National Park. Here, as well as mammals, you will get a chance to see birds and interesting plants, flowers and butterflies. We may be lucky enough to catch a glimpse of the secretive Tayra here too, which are spotted occasionally along this road. Tayras are large, weasel-like mustelids which feed on birds, small mammals and fruits, and are real gems of the New World rainforest.

At the end of this walk we'll be picked up by one of our modified open top vehicles, and driven up to the Tower.

After lunch and a siesta, we will drive about 20 minutes north to the Ammo Ponds, located in the small town of Gamboa. This is a great place to look for the world's second largest rodent, the Lesser Capybara which can be found by the Chagres river. Also, in Gamboa's forested neighbourhoods, we look for Red Squirrels and Central American Agouti, a large diurnal rainforest rodent. We will make a stop at the marina on the Chagres river, the main source of water for the Panama Canal. With a bit of luck, we will find a Neotropical River Otter and Variegated Squirrels before returning to Canopy Tower for dinner.



After dinner, (weather-permitting) we board the Canopy Tower's open back vehicle for a night drive along the Semaphore Hill Road. Many neotropical mammals are nocturnal, and the night drives are the best way to find them. We hope to find Panamanian Night Monkey, Paca, Central American Woolly Opossum and possibly Rothschild's Porcupine.

Day 3

Pipeline Road (Part I) & Summit Gardens

This morning after an early breakfast, we will board an open-backed vehicle and spend the morning at the world-famous Pipeline Road. This 17-km gravel road with 11 creeks is most famous for its 400+ bird species (including trogons, puffbirds, motmots and manakin leks), but it is also a great place for mammals. We'll be looking – and listening – for White-faced Capuchin, howler monkeys, the lovely, golden-brown Central American Agouti (a type of rodent), White-nosed Coati, Tayra and Collared Peccary. Members of the raccoon family, coatis are sometimes seen in huge troops here and we'll be hoping to see such a group of these endearing mammals; this species has distinctive long dark muzzles and dark markings around a

white nose. There have also been sightings of three species of wildcats, Jaguarundi, Ocelot and rarely, the Jaguar.

The group will head back to the Canopy Tower for lunch.

After lunch, we head up to the famous Summit Botanical garden, just 10 minutes from the tower, which houses a variety of native and non-native-plant species. Our main target here will be the roosting colony of Common Tent-making Bats under the large palm leaves at the entrance to the park. These attractively marked bats (they have four distinctive white stripes on their faces) have a highly unusual roosting technique – they chew through the structural parts of the leaves of palms and other plants, leaving them to collapse into tent-like shelters! Other mammals are always a possibility.

Day 4

Plantation Trail & Old Gamboa Road

After breakfast, we will take a short drive down to the bottom of Semaphore Hill to Plantation Road, one of Soberania National Park's trails. It is a good, easy graded dirt road, passing through a mature forest for about four miles. The road follows a small creek, the Chico Masambi River. This trail, once a black topped road, has some incredible forest, including gigantic Wild Cashew, Ficus, and Cuipo Trees that reach heights of more than 30 meters. During this walk there is the chance to find more Mantled Howlers, White-nosed Coatis and more. There is also the probability of encountering a Northern Tamandua (Anteater) and occasionally, a spider monkey is seen!

This afternoon will be spent exploring the area of Old Gamboa Road and the adjacent Summit Ponds. This site boasts the nearest access to Pacific Dry Forest from the Canopy Tower. The ponds are a great place to look for some secretive herons, namely Boat-billed and Capped Herons and the diminutive American Pygmy Kingfisher, along with Spectacled Caiman and Common Basilisk or "Jesus Lizard". Carrying on down the Gamboa Road south, we hope to encounter Tayra, Red-tailed Squirrel, more Two and Three-toed sloths, White-nosed Coati, Jaguarundi and other mammals we have yet to encounter.

Back at the Canopy Tower, we will review our checklist and enjoy happy hour prior to dinner. During dinner, Little Mastiff Bats may be seen flying around the dining room as they head out for their evening hunt. Out of the window we may see the False Vampire Bat, the largest bat in the Americas, hunting around the Cecropia trees.

After dinner, we head out on another night drive, targeting nocturnal mammals. Common Opossum, Northern Tamandua, Hoffmann's Two-toed Sloth and Collard Peccary are some hopefuls on our night drives.

Day 5

Boat trip on Lake Gatun & Gamboa Wildlife Sanctuary

This morning after breakfast we board a motorboat for a spectacular tour on the Panama Canal.

Most of the Panama Canal is actually an artificial lake, Lake Gatun. Our boat tour on the lake will take us past the canal's huge cargo ships and ocean liners, and to visit hidden coves and beautiful inlets which are home to some of the region's fascinating fauna and flora.

We start in the Chagres river, enjoying the abundance of water birds and keep an eye out for the Lesser Capybara and Neotropical River Otter. Then we pass under the historic one-way Gamboa bridge into the Panama Canal. From the boat we will explore several small islands for primates including Mantled Howlers, White-faced Capuchins and Geoffroy's Tamarins. There are nine species of Howler Monkey in total, but the ones seen in Panama are mainly black in colour and given the name 'Mantled' because of the long fringe of reddish-brown hair down their flanks. They live in troops of 15-20 individuals and make incredibly loud and distinctive calls, as their name suggests – though, in truth, it is more of an extremely hoarse roar than a howl! White-faced Capuchins are a noisy, gregarious species led by an alpha male, and give the impression of being somewhat hyperactive, even for monkeys! They make astonishing 15-metre leaps through the canopy, and the trees appear to 'come alive' with them as they move en masse; they certainly make captivating viewing!

There is also a chance to see some interesting reptiles here including: American Crocodile (found primarily in Central America, some individuals of this species reach 5 metres or more in length!) and its smaller relative, the Spectacled Caiman; also Basilisk and Black River Turtle. A little scarcer, but not an impossibility, is a chance of seeing a Neotropical River Otter and, if we are really lucky, a Manatee. This species was introduced to the Panama Canal in the 1960s to control the growth of a type of algae, and it has adjusted very well to this habitat. Another highlight of the day will be a visit to a 'secret' Proboscis Bat roost.



We return to the Canopy Tower for lunch.

In the afternoon, we will pay a visit to the Gamboa Wildlife Center, a newly-opened public facility owned and operated by the APPC, Panamerican Association for Conservation. Passionately run by a team of wildlife rehabilitators and educators, this center takes in injured and orphaned wildlife from across the country. Their ambassador animal is the sloth, and they receive dozens of orphaned and injured sloths every year, along with many other species. Their goal is to rehabilitate every animal that comes through their facility in the hopes that it can be released back into the wild, and educate locals and visitors to Panama about conservation. We will meet their staff, hear about the work they do and their conservation message, and meet the animals currently in their care. A visit to the Gamboa Wildlife Center is an enjoyable and meaningful experience! Donations are welcome to support their work. This evening, we will meet during cocktail hour to review our growing checklist and enjoy dinner at Canopy Tower.

Day 6

Metropolitan Natural Park and Panama Canal

Located right next to Panama City, and only 25 minutes from the Canopy Tower, the forests of the Metropolitan Natural Park are much drier than those around the Pipeline or Plantation Roads. The park is also a great place for bird migration from September through till October.

There is a wonderful look-out at the summit of a hill which will give you an incredible perspective of the whole of Panama City and some of its closer islands. Some of the commoner residents are: the distinctively marked black-and white Geoffroy's Tamarin (Central America's smallest primate), and both Variegated and Red-tailed Squirrel. Northern Tamandua is also a possibility.

Later in the morning we will head into Panama City to the Amador Causeway to visit Punta Culebra, a public nature facility run by the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute. Hoffmann's Two-toed Sloth are abundant here and our main target is the Crab-eating Raccoon, a shy mammal that lives in the Pacific Dry Forest and mangroves.

After lunch we visit the "must see" attraction on any trip to Panama, the world-famous Panama Canal. The newly expanded Panama Canal is one of the wonders of the modern world and an engineering marvel. There are four exhibition halls at the ultra-modern museum, which includes historic artifacts used in the construction of the canal, interactive modules, video presentations and models of the canal. Most importantly, we will watch the huge cargo ships negotiate the tight-fitting locks.

At around 5pm we'll head back to the Tower for happy hour and after dinner, we head out on another night drive, targeting nocturnal mammals.

Day 7

Rainforest Discovery Centre and Pipeline Road (Part II)

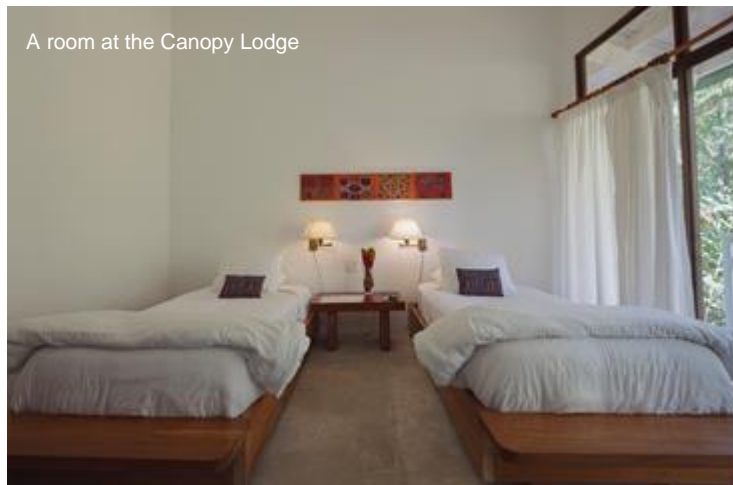
After breakfast, we will drive 25 minutes down the Pipeline Road to the Rainforest Discovery Centre. The Discovery Centre is an ecotourism and environmental education facility created and administrated by Fundacion Avifauna Eugene Eisenmann. It is located in the tropical forests surrounding the Panama Canal, adjacent to Soberanía National Park. About 70% of all the materials used in the construction of the centre were recycled. About 180 metres from the main building there is a 30-metre high observation tower with resting platforms every 7½ metres.

After a picnic lunch, we will make the return journey down the Pipeline Road in 4x4s - the road is so biodiverse that one morning simply isn't enough! This time we will walk a little further into the park, reaching the wetter Caribbean slope forest, hoping to see some different mammals and birds. Tatyra, Collard Peccary and Jaguarundi are all possibilities. We will keep an eye out for Rufous Tree Rat and the rare Silky Anteater. Among the avian possibilities are Great Tinamou, Tiny Hawk and Slaty-backed Forest Falcon.

Day 8

Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Anton

After our final breakfast at the Canopy Tower, we will load up our luggage and transfer to the Canopy Lodge in El Valle de Anton, in the foothills of Central Panama, about 2 hours west of the Canopy Tower. El Valle is located in the caldera of a gigantic volcano that erupted 3.5 million years ago. It is the largest inhabited caldera in the western hemisphere. The volcano has been dormant for many, many years, but there are mud baths and thermal pools in certain areas of the caldera. Both the Canopy Lodge and the town where it is located are just delightful. When we arrive at the Lodge, it is usually hard to get to your room since visitors are hypnotized by the several colorful tanagers visiting the feeders- not to mention the



very pleasant temperature. The altitude here is about 700 meters above sea level resulting in very pleasant temperatures.

After having lunch and enjoying the bird feeders, we will take a walk on some of the trails near the Lodge, and this will include a visit to Chorro El Macho at the Canopy Adventure, a 36-metre high waterfall. We come back to the Canopy lodge in time for "happy hour" and dinner.

The Canopy Lodge is a great place to catch up on some of the mammals we may have missed at the Tower and to get some other foothill specialties. After dinner we will take a leisurely night walk around the lodge grounds. Some of the nocturnal mammals often seen in this area are Gray Four-eyed, Common and Water opossums, Rothschild's Porcupine, Western Night Monkeys, Ocelot and Orange Nectar Bats—they come to the hummingbird feeders at night!

Day 9

Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Anton

After being awakened by the morning chorus of birds and having breakfast, we will go out again in search of any other animal that is still missing on our list. This time we will visit two places, the first one is La Mesa, a flatland up along the rim of the crater, within the protected area of Cerro Gaital Natural Monument. We will also visit Finca Candelario, a private and well-maintained finca with tranquil trails and a pleasing open area to explore. Both these areas are great places to look for Western Pygmy Squirrel, Greater Grison, Rothschild's Porcupine, Tayra and Jaguarundi.

Following lunch, our journey takes us to the privately-owned Las Mosas trail, a haven for diverse wildlife nestled within a serene stretch of dry forest habitat. Notably, this area is home to the lively Geoffroy's Tamarin and the vibrant Variegated Squirrel. We might even catch sight of the elusive Spectacled Owl.

Bird watchers are in for a treat as well. The trail is renowned for its avian riches, hosting an array of bird species, including the Lesser Eleania, Yellow-olive Flycatcher, Rosy Thrush-



Tanager, Rufous and White Wren, and Lance-tailed Manakin. Our last afternoon of the tour is sure to be an enjoyable one! Back at the Canopy Lodge we will review our final checklist and reminisce about our favorite moments of the tour. Dinner is at the Canopy Lodge.

Day 10

El Valle/In flight

After breakfast we depart for Panama City to catch our return flight home with memories of the many species of mammals, birds, insects and other wonders of the neotropics seen and photographed.

Day 11

UK

Today we will arrive back in the UK.

Tour Grading and Focus

You will need to appreciate that neotropical mammals are largely shy and retiring, present in low densities and often crepuscular or nocturnal in nature. Although this tour spends time and effort in looking for exciting mammal species such as Mantled Howler Monkey, White-faced Capuchin, Geoffroy's Tamarin, two species of sloth, White-nosed Coati, Kinkajou, Northern Tamandua and others, potential participants should be aware that mammals will be on view for only a small percentage of our time in the field. Anybody wishing for and expecting a safari-type experience full of animals should consider carefully whether this is the holiday for them. Time between mammal encounters will be spent largely birdwatching (alert to mammals at all times of course), as birds are the most conspicuous members of the local fauna.

This is a conventional wildlife holiday with a focus on mammals, birds and general natural history. No trekking or hardship is involved, and the holiday is generally suitable for those of all ages and degrees of fitness. Some of the optional walks will be on undulating trails, sometimes muddy.

NB If you would like a mammal (or photography) focused holiday in Panama with little or no focus on birds, then a tailor-made holiday could be right for you. Contact us for details – we'd be delighted to help.

Group size & guide(s)

This wildlife holiday will be limited to 12 participants and will be led by one of Canopy Tower's full-time guides. If the group is of 9 or more then two guides will be assigned. Canopy Tower is set up to work with the demands of the most serious naturalist and therefore prides itself on its knowledgeable guides. The guides are enthusiastic, very knowledgeable and speak excellent English.

Transportation

The Canopy Tower is less than one hour's drive from Panama's international airport and is accessed by paved road and bus. For our excursions we will use Canopy Tower's own 4-wheel drive vehicles; the drives to our trails are short, but our vehicles will help us gain access to more remote locations.

Food & accommodation included in the price

This tour price is inclusive of all food and accommodation. The Canopy Tower's kitchen offers delicious and wholesome set meals and can cater for all individual dietary requirements with prior notice. Breakfast and lunch are accompanied by fresh tropical fruit juices and wine at dinner. For our all-day excursions we will take packed lunches to eat in the field.

The Canopy Tower is a unique structure and unlike any other lodge in the world. The tastefully converted Canopy Tower contains 4 floors. The ground floor contains the Manager's Office and a small souvenir shop. The first floor at 6m, (20ft), contains 4 single en-suite rooms, and the Harpy Eagle Suite is also on this floor. On the second floor at 9m, (30ft), there are 5 twin en-suite rooms and the Blue Cotinga Suite. The third floor at 12m, (40ft), is the communal area including; dining room, lounge and library. Finally the viewing deck at 15 m, (50ft) harbours the old radar dome and a 360° view across miles of rainforest. Naturetrek has the use of the twin and singles rooms mentioned, although an upgrade to the Suites could be arranged subject to availability, at an additional cost of £300 per person. On the fourth floor one finds the restaurant and lounge areas, equipped with a good library, hammocks and comfortable seating. There is also wifi connectivity as well as a free-to-use computer with internet access. The fifth floor is the observation deck, with the old radar dome still taking pride of place. The observation desk has plenty of seats and an all important telescope. The walls between the rooms are not the thickest, and it is possible to hear some goings-on around the tower. Generally people find this aspect of the tower insignificant in terms of their overall stay, but it is something to be aware of.

During our stay at El Valle, single participants will be accommodated in one of four large single rooms in a block adjacent to the main lodge, each with a large wall of windows overlooking the gardens and the stream (Rio Guayabo), private bathroom, ceiling fan, desk and chair, reading lamp, towel warmer and storage space. If you prefer to be in the main building, taking single use of a double room, you can do so subject to availability, paying the single supplement of £450 (this also gives single use of a double for the 7 nights at Canopy Tower).

The main building has eight double rooms, each with a balcony overlooking the gardens and stream. Six of these rooms have two full-size beds and the two corner rooms have one king-size bed. The rooms are quite ample and have lots of storage space, an overhead fan, a desk, reading lamps behind the bed and a towel warmer in the bathroom.

Extra expenses

Drinks, tips, laundry, and all items of a personal nature are not included in the cost of the holiday. You might want to budget for up to US\$80 – \$100 for tips, but remember that tips should reward good work and aren't mandatory.

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. Please note that as all our Bargain Selection tours are carefully costed on maximum group sizes to maximise value for money, it may be necessary to impose a small group surcharge of up to 10% on groups falling short of 8 members.

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