

Panama's Butterflies

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	In flight, transfer to Canopy Tower
Day 2	Pipeline Road
Day 3	Metropolitan NP and Old Gamboa Road
Day 4	Transfer to Canopy Lodge
Day 5	Las Minas and La Mesa
Day 6	Cerro Gaital and Cara Iguana
Day 7	Santa Clara
Day 8	Canopy Lodge, in flight
Day 9	Arrive London

Departs

October (see website for details)

Focus

Butterflies but birds, mammals and reptiles are also enjoyed.

Grading

A. A traditional lodge based tour with no strenuous walking involved, although some trails (optional) at El Valle are steep and can be slippery.

Dates & Prices

See website (tour code PAN05)

Highlights

- Metalmarks, crescents and longwings in the Canopy Lodge gardens
- Sought-after cloud forest species
- Canopy butterflies at eye-level
- Expert local butterfly guides



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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.

Introduction

Panama forms the narrowest part of the Meso-American 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 offers some superb habitat for the butterfly enthusiast, harbouring around 1800 species in only 80,000 square kilometres (slightly larger than Ireland). It also contains large tracts of tropical rainforest, from the foothills of the Cerro Gaital in the west to the Soberanía National Park in the central lowlands which extends right down to the suburbs of Panama City and the famous Panama Canal. On this two-centred holiday we will be based for four nights at the Canopy Lodge in the foothills of the western highlands and three nights at the world famous Canopy Tower in the hands of expert lepidopterist guides.



The Canopy Lodge

Our introduction to Panama's butterflies will begin in the central lowlands at The Canopy Tower. The tower was originally a US Air Force radar station, which was converted into a birdwatcher'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. It is also a fantastic place for the butterfly-watcher as the main viewing deck offers superb 360° views over the canopy and the chance to observe

exciting and otherwise difficult-to-see canopy species.

Then we will head to The Canopy Lodge - a small, charming lodge built next to a mountain stream and contiguous to the Cerro Gaital Natural Monument. It is located in the small town of El Valle within the crater of an extinct volcano that last erupted five million years ago. The resultant scenery is quite unique - a steep valley surrounded by jagged peaks, filled with streams and verdant forests. The gardens of the lodge provide a host of butterfly species close to hand whilst we shall make short excursions on forest roads to search for more elusive species at different altitudes.



Canopy Tower lounge area

Butterflies are active year-round; however, they rely heavily on their host plants and their activity can be quite seasonal, with more flight and visibility in the wetter months of the year (April to December).

Day 1

Arrival and transfer to Canopy Tower

We depart this morning on a scheduled flight from London (usually Heathrow via Amsterdam, Madrid or Paris) to Panama City. On arrival in the late afternoon, we will be met by our local agents and driven the short distance to the Canopy Tower, which will be our home for the next 3 nights. After a delicious dinner - the first of many (although if we arrive after 8pm a light meal/snack will be served), we will have an introductory talk, before we settle into our rooms for a good nights' sleep before the excitement of our first day.

After dark, we will turn on the UV light in to attract some nocturnal insects! There are far more species of moths than butterflies in the Neotropics, and although they present challenges to species identification, we will hope to see species in several families of moths, including some large sphinx moths and silk moths! *Please note that our butterfly tours focus on the identification of diurnal lepidopterans (butterflies and skippers). We will enjoy the moths on the light sheet but there will be no attention to their identification.*

Day 2

Pipeline Road

After a hearty breakfast at the Tower, we will board our open-air "Rainfomobile" and head to the world-famous Pipeline Road. Before we arrive at Pipeline, we will make a stop at the Ammo Ponds along the way to scan the grassy roadsides for Tropical Buckeye, Queen, Glassy-winged Skipper, Cassius Blue, Golden White, White Yellow, Bordered Patch, Pompeius Skipper, Banded Longwing, Mimosa and Yellow-rimmed Skippers. Not far from Ammo Ponds, the Pipeline Road extends 17 kilometres through Soberania National Park on the Caribbean slope. Pipeline Road is renowned as a bird-watcher's paradise, but the mature secondary forest also houses an incredible array of other wildlife. We will search for forest and understorey butterflies in this lowland rainforest. Common and Menelaus Morphos patrol the wide gravel road, while Ruby-spotted Swallowtail, Apricot Sulphur, Pale-clubbed and Sky-blue Hairstreaks, Periander, Barne's, Shaus', and Irene Metalmarks, Guyanan Sarota, Straight-lined Theope, Idae Tigerwing, Pale-banded and Eunice Crescents, Iphiclus Sister, East-Mexican Banner, Two-eyed Eighty-eight, Whitened Bluewing, Red and Variable Crackers, Many-banded Daggerwing, Terrestrial Satyr, Long-tailed Flasher, Broad Banded-skipper and the stunning Glorious Blue-skipper will be targets. Longwing (*Heliconius* spp.) butterflies are well represented here, and we will hope to find Doris, Sara, Erato and Cydno Longwings. If we're lucky, we'll spot a Pale Owl-butterfly roosting low on a vertical tree trunk in the understory. To maximize our time at this fantastic location, we will have a picnic lunch in this beautiful forest and continue searching for butterflies in the afternoon before heading back to the Tower for dinner.



Glorious Blue-skipper

Day 3

Metropolitan Natural Park and Old Gamboa Road

Before heading out to the Metropolitan Natural Park in Panama City this morning, it is a good idea to see what butterflies can be found in the windows of the Canopy Tower, as some of the crepuscular butterflies enter the tower during dawn and dusk and sit on the windows around the dining room. Common Phanus,

Split-banded and Narrow-banded Owl-butterflies, Tricolored Metalmark, White-patched Emesis, White-posted Metalmark and Cramer's Satyr often find themselves inside the Tower, a great opportunity to see these butterflies up close!

The drier forests and open areas of Metro Park offer species like Tiger Mimic-queen, Hermes Satyr, Tropical Buckeye, Erato Longwing, Emerald-patched Cattleheart, Great White Longtail, Stigma Skipper, Uzza and Thamyra Satyrs, Polydamas Swallowtail, Blue-gray Satyr, Lasus Metalmark, Statira Sulphur, Panna Skipper, Tropical Checkered-skipper, Whitened Crescent and Brown, Plain and Great White Longtails. These are just some of the butterflies we will look for today. The park offers a variety of habitats to explore, so our list here could be extensive. We will head back to the Tower for lunch.

This afternoon we are off to Old Gamboa Road. This is the original road that extended to Gamboa; once a passageway for traffic, now it is a wide footpath, overgrown by tall grasses bordering open areas and surrounded by patches of forest and wetlands. It is a great place to search for Dimorphic Skipper, Golden White, Togarna Hairstreak, Molina and Lucianus Metalmarks, Green, Hecale and Melpomene Longwings, Whitened and Orange-patched Crescents, Banded and White Peacocks, Stub-tailed Morpho, Golden-snouted Sootywing, Two-eyed Eighty-eight, Dusky Owl-butterfly, Polymnia Tigerwing, Hermes and Plain Satyrs, Great White Longtail, Trailside Skipper and much more. After a great afternoon of butterflying, we will return to the tower in time to freshen up for dinner.



Day 4

Transfer to Canopy Lodge

After a satisfying breakfast at the Canopy Tower, we can scan the canopy one final time for any butterflies we have missed and those we enjoy seeing daily. We will then transfer to the foothills of western Panama and the Canopy Lodge in the town of El Valle de Anton, which will be our home for the next 4 nights. After settling into our rooms, we will have lunch followed by a brief orientation, then butterfly around the lodge grounds and along the road if time permits. Then we will enjoy our first dinner in the Canopy Lodge's open-air dining room!

Day 5

Las Minas, La Mesa and Finca Macarena

The morning chorus of birds starts at dawn, and the garden feeders attract colourful tanagers, euphonias and hummingbirds. As we enjoy a hearty breakfast in the open-air dining area, the day continues to warm up and the first butterflies become active. We will make a quick check along the creek for the first butterflies

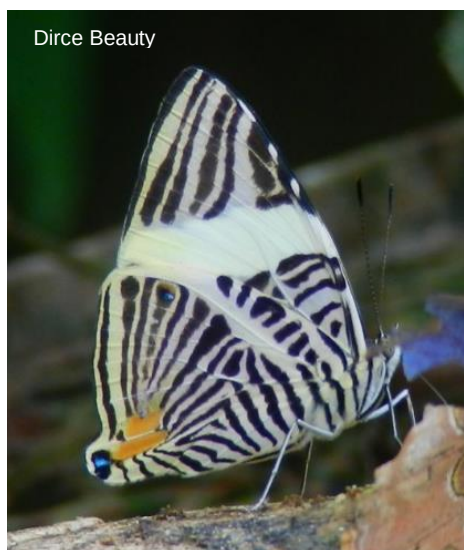


Black-bordered Crescent

of the morning before we head to our morning destination—Las Minas Road. This dirt road, used mainly for foot travel, extends through tropical scrubland and low canopy forest. It is a haven for butterflies! We will slowly walk the road and scan the roadsides for swallowtails, hairstreaks, brushfoots and skippers, which are particularly abundant here. Simple Sarota, several metalmarks, Tutia and Diasia Clearwings, Lycaste Tigerwing, East-Mexican Banner, Black-bordered Crescent, Isidora Leafwing, Sara, Sapho and Fine-lined Longwings, Hermes and Rufous-margined Satyrs, Pasture, Trailside and Pompeius Skippers and many more can be found along this

road. This area can be so active with butterflies that we barely make it a few hundred meters down the road! If time permits, we will also visit the area of La Mesa and Finca Macarena. Forest, field, scrubby pastures and gravel roads provide excellent habitat for a great diversity of butterflies. Here we will look for the tiny yet stunning metalmarks, including Panamanian and Godman's Sarotas and Deep-blue Eyed-metalmark. Lunch at the Canopy Lodge.

After lunch and a short rest (which most of us will use to look for butterflies around the Canopy Lodge



Dirce Beauty

gardens!), we are off to Valle Chiquito. We head out of El Valle and start our way down the slope of the ancient volcano; we descend a steep road into a valley, adorned with ferns and broadleaf trees. At a slightly lower elevation, we hope to see some different species. The roadside vegetation is perfect butterfly habitat. Aquamarine and Phaleros Hairstreaks, Zebra Longwing, Thamyra Satyr and Panna Skipper are common here. We will check under broad leaves for the stunning Pixie! As the heat of the day passes and the butterflies settle in to their forest roosts for the night, we will head back to the lodge where there will be plenty of time to freshen up before our checklist and dinner. As dusk approaches, we will watch for the crepuscular species—Pale and Scalloped Owl-butterflies--which may be active around the gardens.

Day 6

Cerro Gaital and Cara Iguana

After an energising breakfast, we will make our way uphill to Cerro Gaital—the steep, forested, mist-shrouded mountain that you can see from the lodge. Cerro Gaital (3,500') is the namesake of Cerro Gaital Natural Monument, which protects more than 335 hectares of mature cloud forest in the foothills of central Panama. After disembarking from the van, we will slowly explore the first short forest trail, where even in the morning mist, we may see Dark and Banded Owl-butterflies as they seek out their daytime roosts. Mimosa Yellow, Clearwinged Mimic-white, Blue-patched Eyed-metalmark, Tiger Mimic-queen and Blue-gray Satyr can be seen flying low in the cloud forest understorey. We will reach a clearing and a small wetland, where a great variety of butterflies can sometimes be found, particularly hairstreaks, metalmarks and skippers—Cattleheart White, Togarna and Fine-lined Hairstreaks, Golden and Bright-centered Euselasias, Azure-winged Eurybia, Lasus Metalmark, Westwood's and Thamyra Satyrs, Red-headed Firetip and Trailside Skipper can be found here. As mid-day approaches, we will return to the lodge for lunch.



Banded Owl-butterfly

In the early afternoon, we will head to Cara Iguana. Here, a seldom-travelled paved road provides a perfect means to butterfly the weedy, forest edges. We will scan the edges searching for skippers, metalmarks, and hairstreaks among others, always keeping a watchful eye out for crackers and daggerwings! As the sun lowers and the butterfly activity quietens for the day we will head back to the Lodge.

Day 7

Santa Clara

Today is an exciting day—after an early breakfast, we head to the Pacific Lowlands to Juan Hombron and Santa Clara. We will drive to the west of El Valle and down towards the coast, stopping at any spots along the way that look promising for butterflies. Our first “planned” stop will be the road to Juan Hombron where we will check the forest and pasture edges for skippers, metalmarks, hairstreaks and tigerwings. After checking the roadsides, we head to Santa Clara and a beach house where we will enjoy our picnic lunch while watching the waves come ashore. The road in front of the beach house is bordered by forest and fields and offers excellent habitat for butterflies. After our day of butterflying in the lowlands we head back to El Valle. This is a good opportunity for us to visit the ever-popular El Valle artisan market in the centre of town. It is a great place to find hand-made Panamanian products and souvenirs. As the last of the sun's rays fade for the day, we will enjoy a lovely evening, reviewing today's butterflies with appetisers before dinner.

Day 8

Canopy Lodge and In Flight

This morning, before saying “adios” and heading to the airport to catch our return flights home.

Day 9

London

We will arrive back at London Heathrow in the afternoon.

Tour Grading

Grade A. This is a traditional lodge-based tour with no really strenuous walking involved, although it does involve a few early starts and plenty of time spent on foot! Suitable for active people of all ages; just a love of butterflies is required! Some of the trails are steep and can be slippery, but these are optional.

Focus

- Butterflies are the main focus on this tour, as we will find and identify as many species as possible.
- An average of 250 butterfly species are seen.
- Photographic opportunities are plentiful, but this is not a strictly "photographic tour".
- While searching for butterflies we will also see birds, mammals, reptiles and other insects. Though we won't be concentrating on these, we will certainly identify as many as possible.
- Butterflies will be identified near, far and in-between, so bring camera and **binoculars**!
- The guides will have a telescope that can also be used for digiscoping (with your phone) for images of the more obliging species!
- A light and sheet will be used to attract moths, katydids, mantids and other insects to enjoy and photograph but be aware that we will not be able to identify most of these.

Please note that a butterfly holiday to the tropics is a completely different experience to that in temperate Europe. The species to be seen are both numerous and spectacular but there are none of the flower-filled alpine meadows one would expect in Europe where butterflies often allow very close approach at ground-level. In the tropics they may, on occasion, be high in the canopy, rarely settled or easily spooked. We will not be using sweep-nets for close examination. Binocular and telescope views will often be necessary and our guides are expert with the use of the latter and will ensure, that where possible, everyone has the opportunity to observe the more distant species. A suitable variable-range zoom lens may be preferable to a macro lens for photography.

Group size & guide

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/Lodge 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 Lodge is two hours and the Canopy Tower less than one hour's drive from Panama's international airport accessed by paved road and bus. For our excursions we will use four-wheel drive vehicles, again 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 Lodge and Tower's kitchens offer 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 full-day excursions we will take packed lunches to eat in the field.

At the Canopy Lodge 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. For single participants who prefer to be in the main building you could share a twin en-suite room with one of the other single members of the party or have a twin room for yourself, paying the single supplement of £300.

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.

The Canopy Tower is a unique structure and unlike any other lodge in the world. The Tower has a suite (Blue Cotinga) and five comfortable twin rooms with en-suite facilities on the third floor. Each room is a strange segment shape and has its own forest view offering your own views of the canopy birds. There is a further suite (Harpy Eagle) on the second floor along with 4 en-suite single rooms. The use of either of the two suites will incur the advertised supplement. 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. On the fourth floor one finds the restaurant and lounge areas, equipped with a good library, hammocks and comfortable seating. There is also a computer with internet available free of charge and WIFI signal in case you bring your laptop. 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.

Extra expenses

Drinks, tips, laundry, and all items of a personal nature are not included in the cost of the holiday. During your time at Canopy Lodge and Tower you will be very well cared for by local guides. It would be wise to allow around US \$75 per person for tips to your local guides and \$45 per person to the staff of the Canopy Lodge and Tower. A \$10 tip for the driver who will be with you for the week would also be gratefully received. Tipping is optional (dependant on good service!), however, due to its close relation to the United States the American habit of tipping is well entrenched and Panamanian guides as well as the staff in hotels and restaurants do generally expect a tip.

EXTENSION TO CANOPY CAMP DARIÉN

Darién is a land of new discoveries; this area is truly revered for its vast untouched rainforest and its close connection to South America ensures us that there is still much to be discovered here, butterflies included! Long renowned as a birding mecca, Darién is fast becoming known for all its flora and fauna. Butterflies adorn all habitats and there is so much to explore! During this 5-night extension, we seek out some of Darién's most intriguing butterflies, found nowhere else in Central America! Based at the Canopy Camp, we enjoy daily excursions to some of the best butterfly sites in the area. There is plenty here to keep our eyes, binoculars and cameras busy!



Come join the expert Canopy Family butterfly guides as we explore the lowlands of Panama's fabled Darién Province. This butterfly tour offers a great sense of adventure and exploration, as well as many beautiful Panama butterflies.

We will be staying in the Canopy Camp Darién, which has spacious and comfortable walk-in safari tents, each with full-sized beds, private bathroom facilities with hot water and flush toilets, electricity and a fan.

Some of the sites we will be visiting include:

El Salto Road: We will start near the beginning of El Salto just off the Panamerican Highway and walk down this wide dirt road bordered by grassy edges and forest, keeping an eye out for a large variety of butterflies. As we butterfly our way along the road we will scan ahead for wet areas as they often attract some interesting species! On another morning, we will drive in farther before we begin our search.

El Salto Trail: El Salto Road ends at the river where there is an excellent grassy trail that cuts through the forest. The weedy edges and sunny patches are great butterfly habitat. We never know what we may find under a leaf! We will also check the river bank for puddling butterflies.

Nuevo Vigia Embera Village: If weather conditions permit, we will spend most of a day at this small Embera community. The day consists of a boat trip up-river where we will make a river bank landing and head into the village. We will spend time in a large grassy/weedy field as it usually holds numerous species of skippers, crescents and longwings, among others. It is here where we will keep a sharp eye out for Red Peacock! At the back of the field there is a forested trail we will also explore. We will enjoy a picnic lunch under the community's thatched roof common area. During lunch the Embera women will display baskets, plates and masks they weave, some of which can take several months to complete. This is an excellent opportunity to purchase a keepsake of your time in the Darién and to support the local Embera community.

San Francisco Reserve: We will stop here on our way to Canopy Camp in route or on our return trip to Panama City. Our butterflying here begins at the end of a dirt road at a slight elevation. We will drive to the top, park and scan the area before walking down the road, scanning the grassy edges and tree line. The sunny roadside patches usually have small blooming weedy plants that attract a variety of butterflies, especially skippers.

Canopy Camp grounds: The camp grounds include the open areas between the dining/meeting area and the tents where flowering shrubs are planted, the road leading to the camp and a forested trail. We will butterfly here on our first afternoon after we settle into our tents. This area can be "butterflied" every day after lunch before we head out for our afternoon location.

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.

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