

## **Panama, a Wildlife and Cultural Walking Tour**

<http://www.kudutravel.com/tours/panama-wildlife-tour>

**10 – 22 January 2021**

Panama – the name is synonymous with the Canal, but there is far more to this Central American country than the century-old link between the Pacific and the Caribbean. A bridge between continents, the isthmus has an exceptionally rich ecological diversity, with one third of its territory classified as protected areas of tropical rainforests, mountains, cloud forests, offshore islands and coral reefs. This itinerary is perfect for exploring gently on foot to observe monkeys, sloths, anteaters, parrots, toucans, hummingbirds, turtles and exuberant tropical flowers.

We begin our journey concentrating on the wildlife of the Soberania National Park, including boat trips to islands in the Canal lakes. We walk in the highlands; take tours of coffee and chocolate estates; fly out to the Bocas del Toro archipelago for dolphin-watching boat trips and snorkelling; explore the Pacific coast; and of course, discover the engineering wonder of the world that is the Panama Canal.

A beautifully restored 5-star colonial hotel in the heart of the UNESCO listed ‘Casco Viejo’ of Panama City makes the ideal base for the conclusion of our visit, investigating the 17<sup>th</sup> century Spanish colonial heritage - a renovated maze of lanes, shady *plazas*, enticing restaurants, Baroque churches and grand mansions, on a headland above the Bay of Panama.

### **HIGHLIGHTS of the tour include:**

- A private boat trip on the Gatun Lake within the Panama Canal and a visit to the excellent Museum of the Canal at Miraflores Locks
- 2 days exploring the islands, white sand beaches and coral reefs of the Bocas del Toro archipelago
- Guided tours to learn about chocolate and coffee production, piracy and the colonial obsession with gold
- Wildlife walks in the cloud forest in search of Resplendent Quetzals, hummingbirds, howler monkeys, coatis, sloths and toucans
- Discovering the UNESCO listed architecture and museums of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Spanish Casco Viejo quarter of Panama City

### **Guests’ comments on this trip:**

*‘A super trip, very well researched and thought-out.’*

*‘An enjoyable tour with a varied itinerary which gave an insight into the diverse aspects of Panama.’*

### **Itinerary**

#### **DAY 1**

#### **D included**

After meeting in the late afternoon at Panama international airport, we have an hour’s road transfer to our 4-star hotel, ideally situated at the edge of the rainforest and the Soberania National Park. Perhaps there is time for a swim before dinner.

## **DAY 2**

### **B, L, D included**

Accompanied by an expert naturalist guide, we begin our wildlife observations with a visit to the Panama Rainforest Discovery Centre in the heart of the National Park. Their 100 ft observation tower gives excellent views over the forest canopy, with chances to see mantled howler monkeys, soaring turkey and king vultures, and a walk (2 km) may produce sloths, coatimundis, toucans and red-lored Amazon parrots. After lunch, we visit the excellent Museum of the Canal at Miraflores Locks and watch ships undertaking the complex transit of the Canal.

## **DAY 3**

### **B, L, D included**

An early start is needed to explore another 'hotspot' of the central Canal Zone, walking gently in search of Spectacled owls and Blue-crowned motmots and scanning the Summit Ponds for Amazon, Green and Ringed Kingfishers and nesting Boat-billed herons. After lunch, we board a private boat to cross Gatun lake, part of the Canal, where huge cargo ships are a startling contrast with sightings of green iguanas, snail kites, ospreys, spider monkeys and Geoffroy's tamarins on the small islands.

## **DAY 4**

### **B, L, D included**

Today is devoted to a specially arranged visit to the Barro Colorado Island, run by the Smithsonian Institute as a research centre into Neo-Tropical Biodiversity. We travel by boat and explore the island with our guide, seeing the Field Station and following trails in search of Northern Tamandua (anteaters), Tayra, Central American agoutis and Brown-headed Spider monkeys.

## **DAY 5**

### **B, L, D included**

The morning is spent walking on the world-famous Pipeline track, with one the highest bird counts recorded anywhere. Mammals and butterflies feature too! After a local lunch, we drive to the dry Pacific coast, looking for shorebirds on mud and salt flats en route, and settle into our 4-star boutique hotel in Chitre, with a pool and a well-regarded restaurant.

## **DAY 6**

### **B, L, D included**

A short drive brings us to Las Macanas marsh, a superb wetland birding area with Black-bellied and Fulvous-bellied Whistling ducks, Glossy ibis, Jacanas, Aplomado falcon and Savanna hawk, plus dragonflies. After enjoying a local Panamanian lunch (chicken and coriander soup is a national dish), we explore the Chitre estuary in search of shorebirds, returning to our hotel in time for a refreshing swim before dinner.

## **DAY 7**

### **B, L, D included**

Heading north, we pause in Nata, once a strategic military base for Spanish conquistadors in search of gold, to visit the church of Santiago Apostol, begun in 1522 using indigenous slave labour and with a bell tower encrusted with mother of pearl. We catch an afternoon flight out to the Bocas del Toro archipelago. These idyllic islands in a remote bay near Panama's northwest border with Costa Rica, were first discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1502. Transferring to a private water taxi, we continue to Popa island where our 4-star hotel, built in elegant colonial style, is set above a white sand beach. Amenities include a large pool, kayaks, all-inclusive drinks, a spa and an offshore reef with excellent snorkelling.

## **DAY 8**

### **B, L, D included**

Following an early start, we travel by boat to a quiet bay frequented by dolphins and royal terns. After watching and photographing them we go ashore for an informative walking tour of an organic cocoa estate and indulge in an informal chocolate tasting. We return by boat to our hotel for lunch and a free afternoon to enjoy the pool, gardens and beach.

## **DAY 9**

### **B, L, D included**

We spend the morning exploring the Bastimentos Marine National Park, mainly by boat, with opportunities to snorkel over coral reefs rich in marine species. We land on the Zapatillo islets for beach combing and swimming and can watch magnificent frigate birds and brown pelicans patrolling the shore. The afternoon is again left free for relaxing on our own island.

## **DAY 10**

### **B, L, D included**

Departing by boat, we disembark at Almirante and continue by road through banana and pineapple plantations and up into the highlands of western Panama, crossing the Talamanca Continental Divide en route. The journey is punctuated by photo stops and lunch in a rustic restaurant, and our destination is an historic Finca set on a private coffee estate. Once settled into our very comfortable rooms, we have a guided walk of the estate seeing an amazing variety of hummingbirds and mountain views.

## **DAY 11**

### **B, L, D included**

We explore the cloud forest on foot this morning, following graded trails in search of the Resplendent Quetzal, a stunningly beautiful bird whose diet consists mainly of wild avocados. Ferns, epiphytic orchids and mosses festoon the huge ancient trees of the Vulcan Baru National Park and we also hope to encounter the brightly coloured, tiny, poison dart frogs. In the afternoon, we have a comprehensive coffee tour, walking amongst the coffee trees, learning about the harvesting, watching the processing and then tasting the award-winning results in one of the oldest traditional mills in Panama.

## **DAY 12**

### **B, L, D included**

Leaving the highlands, we drive south to David to catch a morning flight to Panama City. Private transport takes us to the startlingly designed new Museum of Biodiversity by architect Frank Gehry for a tour of the 'Panama - Bridge of Life' exhibition. After a seafood lunch on the causeway, we transfer into the city and settle into our beautifully restored 5-star historic hotel in the centre of the old quarter, 'Casco Viejo'.

## **DAY 13**

### **B, L included**

Setting off on foot from our hotel, a guided walking tour of Casco Viejo introduces the highlights of the district, built in 1673 after the pirate Henry Morgan destroyed the first settlement. We wander past or into the *palacio* containing the Museum of the History of Panama; the Cathedral and several fine churches; the Teatro Nacional which opened in 1908 with a performance of Verdi's *Aida* and where Dame Margot Fonteyn danced after the restoration in 1974; and the old sea wall with views across the bay. We have a leisurely lunch before transferring to the airport for flights home.

## Activity Level

### Relaxed

Mainly short walks (1 – 3 hours) most days, with uneven stony ground, muddy jungle trails, steps on and off boats and boardwalks. Tough trainers or good walking shoes (with a gripping sole) are appropriate. Swimming available every day.

## Temperatures

With numerous different climate zones, weather generalisations are fairly unhelpful. In January, temperatures are likely to range from 21°C (up in the cloud forest) to 30°C (down on the coast) during the day. This is the peak dry season, but short warm rain showers are always possible in the tropics.

## Accommodation

- 4 nights in a 4-star hotel, ideally situated at the edge of rainforest and the Soberania National Park
- 2 nights in a 4-star boutique hotel in Chitre, with a pool and a well-regarded restaurant
- 3 nights on Isla Popa, in a 4-star hotel built in elegant colonial style, set on a white sand beach – amenities include a large pool, kayaks, all-inclusive drinks, a spa and an offshore reef with excellent snorkelling
- 2 nights in Boquete, in an historic Finca set on a private coffee estate
- 1 night in Panama City, in a beautifully restored 5-star historic hotel in the centre of the old quarter, Casco Viejo

**Trip Price**, per person sharing:

**£5,540.75** until 9<sup>th</sup> April 2020

**£5,690.50** until 9<sup>th</sup> July 2020

**£5,840.25** until 9<sup>th</sup> October 2020

**£5,990** after 9<sup>th</sup> October 2020

<https://www.kudutravel.com/faq#discounts>

**£1,080** double for single room supplement

**£1,000** deposit per person

*Please note that the double room for single use supplement is imposed by the hotels and not by Kudu Travel. If you are willing to share but no other suitable guest books on the trip, we regret that the supplement will be payable.*

## Price Includes

- accommodation for Days 1 through 13, on a twin shared basis
- all meals with local beer/soft drinks at lunch and wine at dinner
- all land transportation in private airconditioned vehicles, except during free periods
- 2 internal flights as described
- trips on various watercraft as described
- snorkelling trips as described
- chocolate and coffee tours as described
- all entrance, National Park and sightseeing fees except during free periods
- tips for porters, restaurant staff & drivers (appreciation for tour leaders is discretionary)
- services of English-speaking local naturalist guides and drivers throughout (plus our Kudu Travel tour leader)

## Price does not include

- flights transportation to and from Panama City
- trip cancellation, medical or other insurance
- immunisations, prescriptions or other medical requirements

- passport, visa and health documentation
- personal expenses (laundry, alcohol besides beer & wine with group meals, free time activities, etc.)
- meals noted as excepted in the daily notation
- transport and transfer of excess baggage
- Panama departure tax, if any

### **VALUE FOR MONEY - SO MUCH IS INCLUDED**

On Kudu trips, you will only need money for postcards, presents to take home, the odd G & T or an irresistible ice cream. Festival and opera tickets, museum and gallery entrances, National Park fees, all meals (with a very few exceptions specified in individual itineraries), wine with lunch and dinner, access to specialist books carried by the guides, gratuities for porters and hotel and restaurant staff, boat rides, train trips, internal flights, wine tastings, 4WDs with drivers, the services of skilled local guides and trackers etc. are ALL INCLUDED in the cost of your holiday.

We are confident that, like previous very satisfied guests, you will discover that our tours give you excellent value for money.

### **Off the beaten track**

Please be aware that electricity and water supplies may occasionally be erratic and travel arrangements (e.g. water taxis, domestic flights) can be disrupted. Kudu Travel will endeavour to do everything possible to ensure a smooth-running tour, but please be ready with your sense of humour and tolerance when travelling in the tropics.

### **Visa and Health Requirements**

Visitors from the EU, USA, Canada and New Zealand currently require a valid passport, but no visa, for entry to Panama. If you are a national of any other country, please check visa regulations with your nearest Embassy of Panama.

A Yellow Fever vaccination certificate is not required when arriving from Europe or the USA. Immunisation/boosters against Hepatitis A, Tetanus, Typhoid and Polio are usually recommended. Please **consult your doctor** in good time (**at least 6 weeks before departure**) about this and anything else they recommend. A dental check-up is a good idea. You may also wish to check the advice given to travellers by the Department of Health (<https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/healthcare-abroad/healthcare-when-travelling-abroad/>) and the FCO (<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>).

### **Insurance**

It is essential, and a condition of booking, that you protect yourself with a suitable travel insurance policy as soon as you book a trip. We can arrange comprehensive cover for UK residents. For further details please see the Kudu website or ask our office.

### **Size of Party**

This trip will run with a minimum of 6 and a maximum of 14 guests.