

## Reef and Rainforest Tours



### **Panama at its Very Best**

10 Days Group Tour  
Led by Local Naturalist Guides

20 – 29 January 2018  
17 – 26 February 2018  
21 – 30 April 2018  
18 – 27 August 2018  
27 December 2018 – 05 January 2019



## Panama at its Very Best Group Tour ITINERARY IN BRIEF

Panama, with its indigenous tribes, white sand islands, coral reefs, rainforests, cloud forests and national parks teeming with wildlife, is an extremely diverse natural history destination. In addition, there is the natural and historic legacy of the world famous canal. This escorted group itinerary reflects this diversity and encompasses all of the elements which make Panama so special – the very best of Panama.

- Day 01 Depart **LONDON HEATHROW**. Arrive **PANAMA CITY**. Met and transfer to the hotel. O/n **GAMBOA RAINFOREST RESORT, BB**.
- Day 02 Early morning boat expedition in search of wildlife on the **PANAMA CANAL** and waterways of **GATUN LAKE**. In the late morning Enjoy a **PARTIAL TRANSIT** of the **PANAMA CANAL**. O/n **GAMBOA RAINFOREST RESORT, FB**.
- Day 03 Transfer to the **GATUN RIVER** and visit an Embera indigenous village. After lunch head to **AGUA CLARA LOCKS** then return to **PANAMA CITY** and fly to **DAVID**. Met and transfer to the **CHIRIQUI HIGHLANDS**. O/n **CASA BAMBITO, FB**.
- Day 04 Nature walk at **FINCA CERIANA** and visit a Sugar Cane Mill. O/n **CASA BAMBITO, FB**.
- Day 05 Morning **JANSON'S GEISHA COFFEE TOUR**, lunch in **BOQUETE**, afternoon canopy zipline tour then transfer to the **GULF OF CHIRIQUI**. O/n **CALA MIA BOUTIQUE HOTEL, FB**.
- Day 06 Island and beach exploration of the **GULF OF CHIRIQUI NATIONAL MARINE PARK**. O/n **CALA MIA, FB**.
- Day 07 Morning to relax, then transfer to **DAVID** and fly to **PANAMA CITY**. Met for a sunset walking tour through **CASCO VIEJO** and transfer to the hotel. O/n **BRISTOL PANAMA, FB**.
- Day 08 Morning bike ride along the **AMADOR CAUSEWAY** and visit the **BIODIVERSITY MUSEUM**. Afternoon explore the **CANAL ZONE** and evening folkloric dinner show. O/n **BRISTOL PANAMA, FB**.
- Day 09 Morning at leisure. Later, transfer to **TOCUMEN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT**. Depart **PANAMA**.
- Day 10 Arrive **LONDON HEATHROW**.



## **PANAMA AT ITS VERY BEST DETAILED ITINERARY**

Day 01

Morning departure from LONDON HEATHROW. Met on arrival in TOCUMEN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, PANAMA CITY, and transfer to your hotel at Soberania National Park. No meals are included today.

O/n GAMBOA RAINFOREST RESORT, BB. Gamboa Rainforest Resort has extensive grounds, many on-site activities, and an enviable location by the rainforested Chagres River close to the Panama Canal. It is a short drive from Panama City yet feels completely in the wild – the Americans, previous owners of the Canal Zone, ensured the rainforest around the canal



remained intact to prevent too much silting, and maintain natural precipitation, since the canal uses up huge amounts of fresh water every time a ship passes through.

Accommodation in the 167 rooms and suites varies between converted, historic ex-US canal staff quarters to deluxe river rooms and junior suites. The rooms are large and spacious with views over the Chagres River and Soberania National Park. Each has a private bathroom and large private balcony, complete with hammock.

The resort offers a choice of three restaurants, two bars and a café and boasts a spa and large outdoor swimming pool. There are many tours and activities available nearby which can be arranged by the onsite activities desk (for an additional charge). These include a boat trip to Monkey Island, an aerial tram ride, birdwatching, and kayaking on the Chagres River.



## (2).../ PANAMA AT ITS VERY BEST GROUP TOUR

### Day 02

After an early breakfast you will be picked up at the lobby of the hotel by your naturalist guide for a 30-minute drive to the town of Gamboa, where the Chagres River meets the Panama Canal. Here you will board an expedition boat and depart on an adventure that will include a voyage across Gatun Lake in the Panama Canal passing by gigantic cargo ships transiting the waterway, making contrast with the natural surroundings. Along the way, you will have the opportunity to spot green iguana and three-toed sloth resting on tree branches, caiman, osprey in the hunt for peacock bass, snail kite and keel-billed toucan among other wildlife. Gatun Lake was formed to give way to the Panama Canal in 1914. With a surface of 262 sq km (164 sq mi), at the time of its creation was the largest man-made lake in the world. The flow of all the rivers within the Panama Canal Watershed is contained in Gatun Lake to provide water for the operation of the locks system. Nearly 200 million litres (52 million gallons) of fresh water are used for every ship that transits through the Panama Canal from one ocean to another. Your expedition boat will allow for close approximations to rainforest-covered islands (former hill tops) in Gatun Lake to search for white-faced capuchin, mantled howler monkey, central American spider monkey, and Geoffrey's tamarin.



Later this morning you will board a 300 passenger ferry for a Partial Transit of the Panama Canal. Now you will be sailing at 26m (85 feet) above sea level. Shortly after departure, the ship will enter Gaillard Cut, the narrowest section of the Panama Canal. The 13.7 km (8.5 miles) long portion of the Continental Divide was carved through rock and shale at beginning of last century when the canal began operating (1914). You will have the opportunity to look at the work's progress on this extraordinary engineering venture. The ship will reach Pedro Miguel locks, where the vessel will be lowered 9.4 meters (30.8 feet) into Miraflores Lake. After traveling nearly two kilometres you arrive to Miraflores locks, where the transition from fresh water to salt water takes place in the locks chambers. Due to the Pacific Ocean's extreme tidal variations, Miraflores locks miter gates are the tallest of the locks system. In two steps, the vessel will be lowered 16.6 meters (54.5 feet) onto the Pacific Ocean. You will then sail under the bridge of the Americas, which reunites the land divided by the Panama Canal as part of the Pan-American Highway. After disembarking at Flamenco Island you will be driven back to Gamboa. All meals are included today. O/n GAMBOA RAINFOREST RESORT, HB.



### (3).../ PANAMA AT ITS VERY BEST GROUP TOUR

#### Day 03

This morning you will visit an Embera indigenous village on the shores of the Gatun River. You will board a motorized piragua (dugout canoe) and travel up through lush forest to the community. Along the river you may be able to spot little blue and green heron, great egret, anhinga, neotropical cormorant, Amazon, ringed, and green kingfishers, along with keel-billed toucans and ospreys flying above. At the Embera village you will be greeted with dancing and music. You will learn about Embera customs and their relationship with nature. There will be handcrafts available for sale and you will have a chance to be painted with the traditional jagua, a natural dye the Embera use to adorn their bodies. After a traditional Embera lunch you will head to the Agua Clara Locks of the Panama Canal Expansion just outside Colon.



Unlike the viewpoints at Gatun and Miraflores, this new visitor center has a more ecological design, being built in the middle of the jungle area next to the new Agua Clara Locks on the Atlantic side, inaugurated on June 26, 2016. The US\$5.25 billion project included, among other tasks, dredging works on both ends of the canal and the route itself in order to increase water depth and the straightening of bends along the route that will allow larger ships to transit through the canal.

The most important aspect of the project, however, was the building of two new sets of locks, one at each terminus of the canal, which will increase the waterway's capacity to move cargo from one ocean to the other by 50% within the next 15 years and will allow the passage of bigger ships (almost three times the



capacity of the largest size vessels that can cross the old locks. The new locks accommodate neopanamax ships that can carry up to 14,000 containers. A ship with this capacity pays approximately US\$850,000.00 in toll fees to cross the Panama Canal. The new locks were designed to reuse up to 60% of the fresh water that would flow into the ocean by using recycling water basins.

Return back to Panama City's domestic airport in order to catch a 50-minute late afternoon flight to David, capital of the Chiriqui province, in western Panama. Chiriqui is the country's "breadbasket" contains some of the most breathtaking highland scenery in Central America. After arrival to David Airport, you continue to the Western side of the Volcano, where you will spend the next two nights at a mountain lodge. All meals are included today.

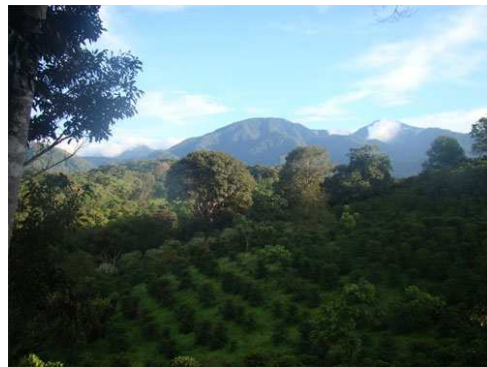
#### (4).../ PANAMA AT ITS VERY BEST GROUP TOUR

O/n CASA GRANDE BAMBITO, HB. This small mountain boutique hotel is located approximately 90 minutes driving from David Airport, and about 15 minutes after the small town of Volcán enroute to Cerro Punta, at an elevation of 1,900 metres. The fresh mountain air and temperatures are a nice change from the hot and humid Panama City and lowlands. Nestled in the Chiriqui highland's cloud forest along a small river and nearby mountain road, Casa Grande Bambito is a great place to relax, explore the outdoors and enjoy the bird watching around the area. The nicely appointed hotel rooms offer a comfortable overnight stay. The property also features a small outdoor swimming pool, a spa with hot springs and different relaxation and beauty treatments, the "Blue Garden" restaurant, and a lush green outdoor garden area.



#### Day 04

Strategically located between the highlands and lowlands of Chiriqui, Finca Ceriana forms part of a privately protected area for the conservation of flora and fauna in the region. One of its unique characteristics is the number of bird species and other animals from the upper and lower mountain areas. The property is part of the biological corridor that hosts the famous volcano lagoons and a large variety of animal and plant species. The total area counts 10 hectares of protected land and nearly two kilometres of nature trails, in addition to one of the most beautiful views to Costa Rica's Golfo Dulce, or sweet golf, and Osa peninsula as well as to Punta Burica in Panama. Once at Finca Ceriana this morning, you will walk through three kilometres of beautiful trails while your expert guide explains what you see, particularly, beautiful and rare birds of the 180+ species that live in this forest. Mid-way through your tour climb a canopy tower and enjoy Janson Family coffee whilst savouring local butter cookies and admiring the cloud forest. The tour then continues through the trails up a hill where you will get to see a magnificent view of the low lands of Chiriquí (weather permitting!), as well as the Pacific Ocean and Punta burica in Panama, and the Osa peninsula and Golfo Dulce in Costa Rica. By noon you will start your descent to the lower part of the farm to enjoy a picnic under the welcoming shade of cedar trees. The tour ends with a visit to the sugar cane mill where your guide will explain the sugar cane process and you will get to taste fresh sugar cane juice and other sugar cane products. Return back to your hotel late afternoon. All meals are included today. O/n CASA GRANDE BAMBITO, HB.



## (5).../ PANAMA AT ITS VERY BEST GROUP TOUR

### Day 05

This morning, the Janson' Coffee estate owners invite you for a comprehensive tour at their farm in the mountain range of Baru Volcano and surrounding valley. You will learn about planting, harvesting, processing, roasting and packaging of the world class coffee Del Fino and Geisha, grown on the Janson's coffee farm. This coffee is grown at the perfect altitude in rich volcanic soil and processed by utilizing the best that tradition and technology have to offer. Janson Coffee has a unique aroma and brilliant flavours and has won many prizes.



Then proceed to the eastern side of Baru Volcano for lunch in the charming mountain town Boquete, situated on the Caldera River. In the afternoon get ready for an exciting canopy zipline tour that allows you to contemplate the cloud forest from fourteen different canopy platforms while smoothly soaring in the heights of the cloud forest from one treetop to another. You will marvel at the sight of a great variety of orchids, trees and wildflowers that are found throughout the area.



In the late afternoon descend for approximately one hour to Boca Chica where you head out by boat through the Parque Nacional Marino Golfo de Chiriquí, a 36,000-acre marine park encompassing two dozen islands, their surrounding open waters, and estuaries. The refuge is home to marine and land wildlife, including howler monkeys, leatherback and hawksbill turtles, and tiger herons. Your home for the next two nights is on one of the larger islands at the edge of the park, Boca Brava. Approximately 10 miles long and four miles wide, its topography is as rich as its flora and fauna, with a grassy interior sloping to a coast composed of idyllic and empty beaches, estuaries, and mangrove wetlands. Upon checking in at your seaside boutique hotel you have some time to take a first dip in the warm waters of the Pacific or enjoy the calm bay by kayak during sunset hours. The dining room serves the bounty of the property's own organic gardens and nearby waters in a fusion of Mediterranean and Latin American tastes. All meals are included today.



(6).../ PANAMA AT ITS VERY BEST GROUP TOUR

O/n CALA MIA BOUTIQUE HOTEL, FB. Boutique Hotel Cala Mia, a luxury eco island resort in the archipelago of Chiriqui, is only a 15 minute boat ride away from Boca Chica. This beautiful get away gives you an unforgettable total immersion in nature: palm-lined virginal white sand beaches, private



boat trips to uninhabited islands, kayaking into mangroves, bird watching, swimming, snorkelling or surfing. The 11 private bungalows have each a private bathroom, thatched roof, patio and furniture, materials and woodwork designed and handcrafted by local artisans. Enjoy Cala Mia's excellent Mediterranean-inspired gourmet cuisine and relax in the spa or in the infinity-edge freshwater pool perched on the edge of the ocean.

Day 06

Awakening just yards from a white sand beach and the tranquil waters of the bay in your private bungalow, you will enjoy your breakfast with panoramic views over the bay. Get ready for your day tour venturing to a neighbouring island, beach relaxation and underwater exploration with snorkel and fins.



In the months from late June through early October, you will also have the opportunity to be part of the magical whale season when thousands of humpbacks migrate northwards from their summer feeding grounds around Antarctica, arriving in this Pacific region of Panama where they breed and give birth to their calves in the warm, shallow and safe waters near Cala Mia.

After some beach time, snorkelling and a picnic lunch on one of the white sand beaches around Boca Brava Island, return back to the lodge. In the afternoon enjoy a guided nature hike on Boca Brava Island which consists of 7,500 acres of rolling hills. All meals are included today. O/n CALA MIA BOUTIQUE HOTEL, FB.

Day 07

In the morning you can relax on the island's private beach, make use of the complimentary kayaks or enjoy the fresh-water swimming pool at the lodge. You may also opt for optional activities (at additional cost) such as horseback riding, bird watching, fishing or relaxing spa treatments with stunning views over the Pacific Ocean.



## (7).../ PANAMA AT ITS VERY BEST GROUP TOUR

In the afternoon catch the domestic flight from David back to Panama City. Before returning to your hotel downtown enjoy a historical sunset walking tour through Casco Viejo, a UNESCO World Heritage site with its colonial landmarks and charming cobblestone streets. Here you also enjoy dinner at a local restaurant before being dropped off at your fine hotel in the modern city centre. All meals are included today.

O/n BRISTOL PANAMA, BB.

Long considered the city's finest, the Bristol Panama offers distinctive charm and warmth in the heart of the financial district, minutes from shopping, cultural attractions and nightlife. Unrivalled in its service and setting, this is a highly acclaimed hotel with timeless architecture including 125



luxurious guest rooms and 48 suites. Enjoy the hotel's fitness room, spa facilities, pool, business centre, 858 Lounge and one of Panama's finest culinary offerings at the Salsipuedes Restaurant.

### Day 08

This morning you will start out with a scenic bicycle ride along the Causeway Amador, a six-kilometre long coastal way that connects four islands to the Amador neighbourhood: Naos Island, Culebra Island, Perico Island and Flamenco Island at the end. Its history dates back to the Spanish colonial time when the Spanish used the islands to land the stolen Inca treasures they brought from Peru. Later the Causeway became part of Grant Fort to guard the entrance of the canal from any possible attack. On this route you'll enjoy views of the modern city skyline, the entrance of the Panama Canal, the America's Bridge and Panama Bay.

En route stop for a tour at the Biodiversity Museum, designed by the world renowned architect Frank Gehry. As a Smithsonian Affiliate museum, the Biodiversity Museum serves as a gateway to new information about the biodiversity and natural history of the Isthmus of Panama. Scientific experts from both the Smithsonian Institute and the University of



Panama oversee the contents of the museum and aim at teaching visitors about eco-awareness, conservation, and Panama's extraordinary natural treasures, in various unique exhibition galleries. Lunch will be served at a local restaurant nearby.

(8).../ PANAMA AT ITS VERY BEST GROUP TOUR

Continue in the tour van through the former Canal Zone, passing by the Panama Canal Administration Building and Ancon Hill for more spectacular views over the Panama port, nearby Metropolitan Nature Park and Panama City bay area. On return to the downtown area you may experience a short ride on the Panama A subway line, the first one of its kind in the region which was completed in May 2014 to provide fast, comfortable and frequent public transportation on a nearly 14 kilometre stretch in the city centre.

Before returning to the Bristol Panama you will have the opportunity for an encounter with a local artist learning about handmade products and artefacts. Tonight enjoy a folkloric dinner show including traditional Panamanian cuisine accompanied by a dance and music presentation where you will learn about the local Pollera dress and its cultural value, the musicians and their instruments, songs, and clothing. After dinner you will be transferred back to your hotel. All meals are included today. O/n BRISTOL PANAMA, BB.

Day 09 Today you will be picked up at the lobby of the hotel 2 hr 30 mins prior to your scheduled departure flight and transferred to TOCUMEN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT. Fly back to the UK. Breakfast only is included today.

Day 10 Arrival back in the UK.

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(9).../ PANAMA AT ITS VERY BEST GROUP TOUR

Minimum group size is 4, maximum 14 plus the tour leader.

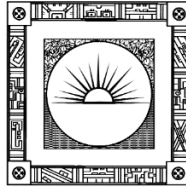
**PANAMA AT ITS VERY BEST 2017**

<b>Departure Dates from London</b>	<b>Adult Price</b>	<b>Single Supplement</b>
20 January 2018	£3,390	£815
17 February 2018	£3,390	£815
21 April 2018	£3,390	£815
18 August 2018	£3,590	£815
27 December 2018	£3,590	£815

**NB:** Prices include full board accommodation, Economy flights, transfers, guided activities and ATOL protection. Not included are drinks from the bar, gratuities, insurance or departure taxes

**NB:** Flight prices are based on a specific economy fare class and may be higher subject to availability.

Please call 01803 866965 if you have any queries, would like to secure your place on the tour, and/or if you would like to extend the tour to include the optional Bocas del Toro post-tour extension or other locations.



## **IMPORTANT NOTES TO ACCOMPANY THE ABOVE ITINERARY**

**NB:** Weight restrictions apply to luggage in both commercial and chartered flights within Panama. A maximum of 14 kg. of checked luggage and 4 kg. of carry-on per person is allowed. Arrangements can be made to store luggage that will not be needed while away from the city. Excess baggage charges assessed by commercial carriers are the responsibility of the passenger.

**NB:** All itineraries are subject to change without notice to take into account possible international and domestic flight schedule changes which can take place before departure date or during the tour, and other operational factors.

**NB:** The quoted price for the above itinerary is based on current airline fares (both international and domestic), fuel surcharges and flight taxes. These (and other tour costs) may be subject to unanticipated increases beyond our control at short notice, either before or after you have booked the tour, in which case the price would need to be revised accordingly.

**NB:** This tour involves some travel in remote areas. This adds to the adventure and increases the opportunity to enjoy a true wildlife experience. However, due to terrain, weather, road conditions, and other factors beyond our control, some elements of the tour may have to be altered. Times of some activities may need to be changes or even cancelled due to the conditions. If an activity is cancelled it will usually be replaced with an alternative activity that is more appropriate for the conditions. Advance notice will be given for any changes where possible, although at times changes may need to be made whilst the tour is in progress.

**NB:** With any trip involving wildlife it is impossible to guarantee a sighting, but each trip is designed around known habitats. Every effort will be made to ensure a sighting, but cannot be held responsible if no sighting is made due to the wildlife itself, weather, or any other elements beyond our control.

**NB:** Prices are based on specific airlines and specific economy seating classes. Flights are booked on an ad hoc basis and so early booking is recommended to take advantage of this fare availability. Prices may rise if a more expensive seat class needs to be booked. Please call for information on price variations for using alternative airlines or for seat upgrades.

**NB:** Adequate insurance cover is mandatory. Please supply us with details of your cover.

**NB:** Once the tour has been booked and a deposit paid, any further changes initiated by the client may be subject to additional charges.

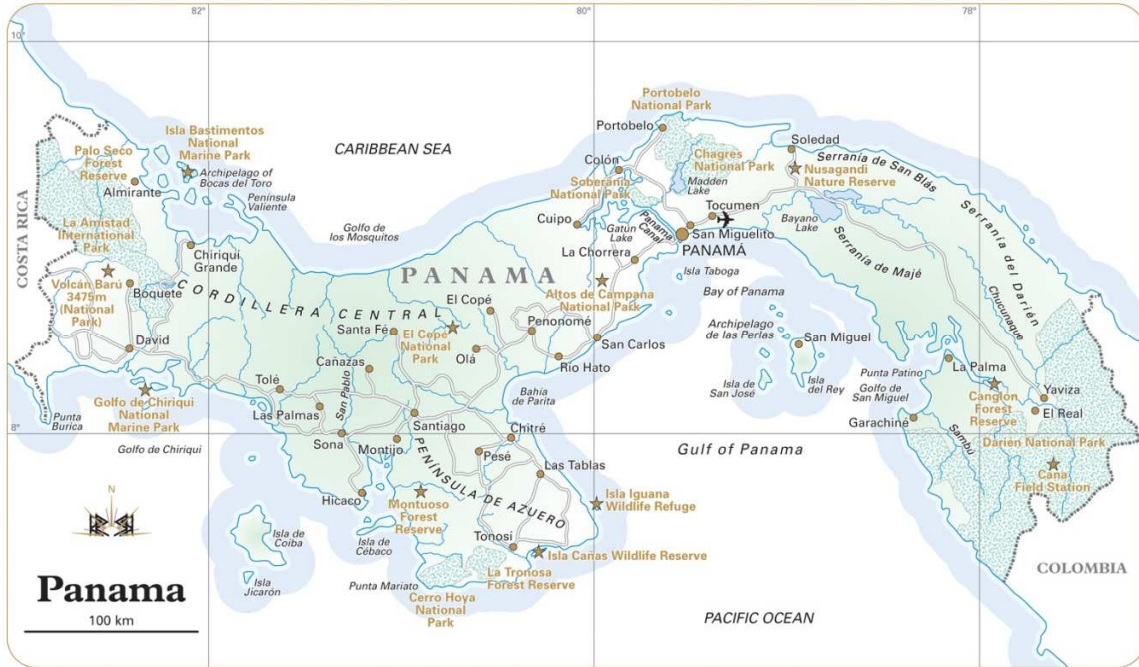
**NB:** Inclusive tours and excursions as stated in the itinerary will have been pre-paid. Once full payment has been made and/or clients are actually at their destination, should clients be disinclined to partake of any inclusive tour or excursion, no refunds will be possible.

**NB:** Visas are not required for EU residents. Please ensure your passport has six months validity from the date of return.

**NB:** Some service providers may require that guests sign an indemnity waiver form and may refuse services if these forms are not signed. Reef and Rainforest Tours cannot give refunds for services not provided due to a refusal to sign such forms.

**NB:** Before and after booking, clients must familiarise themselves with current UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) travel advisories so as to satisfy themselves as to the suitability of the destination(s) to be visited in this itinerary. All decisions relating to the tour will be based on UK FCO advisories, and not those of any other countries' governments. In the event of any emergency or other problem encountered in the destination, it is advisable if appropriate to contact the local UK Embassy, High Commission or Consulate for assistance. The FCO in London also has dedicated telephone call centres: Crisis Management Dept - 0207 008 5335 (during UK office hours), and Global Response Centre - 0207 008 1500 (out of UK office hours).

## COUNTRY MAP



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