



Natural Selections

BIRDING, WILDLIFE, AND PHOTO TOURS



Green Honeycreeper

Birding and Sketching Beautiful, Tropical Belize with Catherine Hamilton and Debby Kaspari Main Tour

9 Nights/10 Days

With a dazzling array of over 574 species of birds, the tiny, tropical nation of Belize is a favorite Central American destination among birders and nature lovers. Belize is located on the eastern coast of Central America, with Caribbean Sea shorelines to the east and dense jungle to the west. Offshore, her massive Barrier Reef, dotted with hundreds of low-lying islands called cayes, hosts some of the richest marine life of the Meso-American Barrier Reef System.

This tour is designed by Catherine Hamilton and Debby Kaspari to offer their friends the very best of Belize's birding, wildlife, natural history and sketching opportunities while visiting world-renowned reserves like Rio Bravo Conservation Area, Mountain Pine Ridge, Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary, and key Mayan sites such as Xunantunich, Caracol and Lamanai.

This tour is designed for those who want a safe, easy to get to destination, relaxed pace, excellent accommodations, rich diversity of birds and wildlife, and of course the personal, day to day hands-on sketching and artistic guidance of Catherine and Debby.

And for those wanting to take advantage of being so close, the tour continues with an optional extension to Belize's Meso-American Barrier Reef System, for quiet beach time, snorkeling, and more instruction and sketching opportunities!

9 Night/10 Day Itinerary

Tour Overview

Day 1: Arrive Philip Goldson International Airport (BZE) and transfer to La Milpa, Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area

Days 2 and 3: Sketching and birding La Milpa, Rio Bravo

Day 4: Transfer from La Milpa to Mountain Pine Ridge

Days 5 and 6: Sketching and birding Mountain Pine Ridge and Caracol Archaeological Site

Day 7: Transfer from Mountain Pine Ridge to Crooked Tree

Days 8 and 9: Crooked Tree, Lamanai, New River Lagoon

Day 10: Final birding sketching Crooked Tree and transfer to airport (BZE) or on to extension.

Day 1, Arrival at La Milpa Ecolodge:

Upon arrival, our group will transfer to La Milpa. La Milpa is managed by The Program for Belize (PFB) who operates in the Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area (RBCMA), the largest private reserve in Belize, covering approximately 260,000 acres in the northwest of the country. The area is a mosaic of tropical ecosystems that support a high level of biodiversity, including tropical broad leaf forest, savannas, wetlands, riparian forest and transitional areas.

The Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area serves as a critical refuge for threatened and



Orange-breasted Falcon

endangered species and supports ecological research and sustainable practices, making it one of the most valuable conservation areas in Belize.

After transfer to La Milpa, our guide will provide a detailed orientation after which we can relax and enjoy our surroundings. After dinner we'll have a short introduction on our goals for the tour and the materials and tools we'll be using.

Meals: Dinner

Lodging at La Milpa Ecolodge

Day 2, La Milpa Ecolodge:

Morning sunrise birding & sketching:

After a morning bird walk, we will begin our first day of field sketching! We will introduce warm up exercises to help us loosen up and will take advantage of the beautiful morning light to explore both monochromatic and color approaches.

Afternoon leisurely sketching:

Our afternoons will often feature a targeted lesson, and this afternoon we will work on learning how to

capture a bird's essence and how to understand their structure. A guided sketching session at the bird feeders will be the perfect opportunity to put this into practice.

Birds and mammals we are likely to see during our stay at La Milpa include; Keel-billed Toucan, Rose-throated Tanager, Gray-throated Chat, Northern Barred Woodcreeper, Black-throated Shrike-Tanager, Ocellated Turkey, Great Curassow, Black-cowled Oriole and more.

Baird's Tapir, White Tail Deer, Armadillos, Northern Tamandua, Agouti, Yucatan Black Howler Monkey, Central American Spider Monkey, Coati, Kinkajou, Mexican Hairy Porcupine, Tayra, and while not easy to spot, we may also be lucky to see Jaguar or a Puma or perhaps the elusive Margay.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Lodging at La Milpa Ecolodge

Day 3, Rio Bravo Birding and Sketching:

Morning and afternoon, full-day birding & sketching:

As we bird our way around Rio Bravo, we'll stop to sketch herons and other waders whenever they appear. A variety of watery landscapes will give us a chance to be inspired by views of the forest and surrounding environment and its reflections.

Other wildlife we may see are Morelet's Crocodile, other herps such as Boa constrictors and various tropical frog and toad species. There is also a rich diversity of insects including ants, butterflies, and beetles. Leafcutter ants are especially known for their ecological importance, and pollinators such as bees and moths are vital for the area's flora. We will look at everything!

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at La Milpa Ecolodge*

Day 4, Transfer from La Milpa to Mountain Pine Ridge:

Morning birding & sketching:

We will spend the morning capturing the last impressions of the lodge and area, focusing on any birds or plant life we might have missed, or simply sketching at the feeders.

Afternoon visit to Xunantunich for sketching:

After lunch in San Ignacio, we will visit Xunantunich. This will be an opportunity to sketch the ancient Maya ruins, focusing on the architecture, shapes, and textures of the stones. The scale and

history of the site in its rainforest setting is highly inspirational on its own, and if we are lucky enough to see a troupe of howler monkeys or nest-building oropendolas, we can easily draw them as well.

Xunantunich, a prominent Maya archaeological site in western Belize near the Mopan River, is surrounded by a diverse natural environment. Though primarily known for its historical significance, the site is nestled in habitats rich in biodiversity with tropical broadleaf forest, riparian forest along the Mopan River and secondary growth.

Wildlife we are likely to see at Xunantunich includes but is not limited to; Yucatan Black Howler Monkeys, White-tailed Deer, Coatimundi, Keel-billed Toucan, Black-headed Trogon, Montezuma Oropendola, Green Iguana, various frogs and toads (active during the wet season), butterflies such as the Blue Morpho are abundant, and

myriad ant species, including leafcutter ants, are an integral part of the ecosystem.

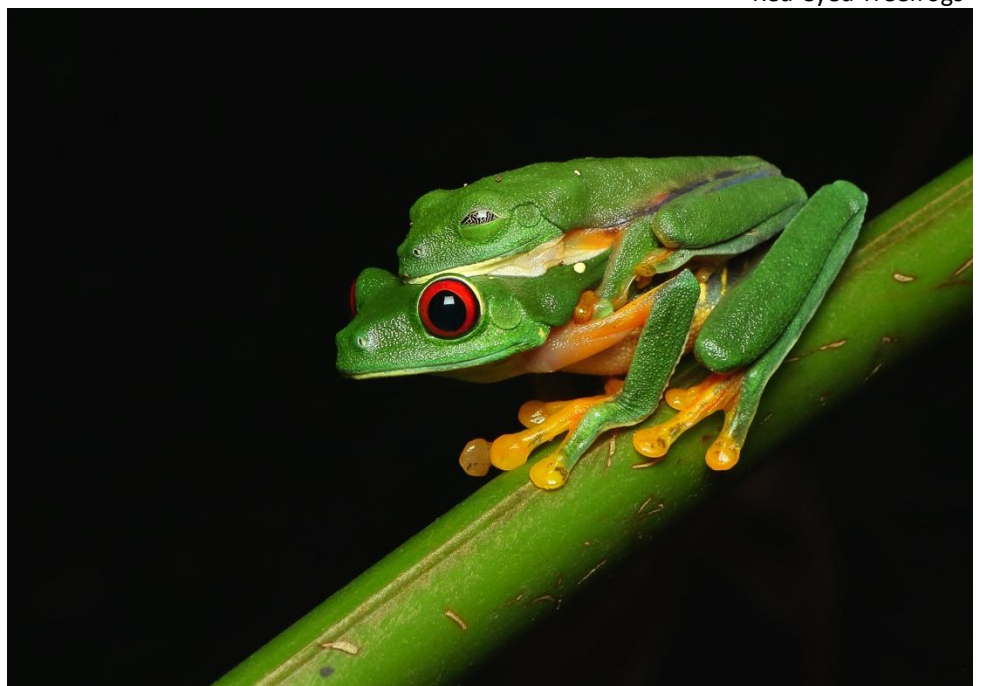
*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Hidden Valley
Wilderness Lodge*

Day 5, Hidden Valley-Mountain Pine Ridge Sketching:

Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve, located in the Cayo District of Belize, is a unique and ecologically significant area. It spans over 300 square miles and offers a stark contrast to the tropical broadleaf forests that dominate much of the country. This area is characterized by its rugged terrain, granite outcrops, waterfalls, and pine-dominated ecosystems.

Habitats include Caribbean pine forest with understory of grasses, ferns, and shrubs adapted from the frequent fires and sandy soils. Prominent are the open grassy savannas, riparian zones and

Red-eyed Treefrogs



granite outcrops. All fantastic for sketching!

Morning sketching of birds, waterfalls, and tropical landscapes:

We'll spend the morning looking for incredible landscapes to sketch; notable in that area are impressive valleys, cliffs, and waterfalls. We'll delve into sketching water and study how it moves around and over rocks, while observing the way light and shadows play on the scenery.

Afternoon of cultural immersion & Manakin Birding Trail:

In the afternoon, we'll engage in cultural immersion activities and visit the Manakin Birding Trail. We will sketch both the trail environment and any local cultural elements. We'll look for White-collared and Red-capped manakin leks, where we can sit and sketch them as they display for females and other males. If we're very lucky, we may get to see (and sketch) the Red-capped manakins' famous "moon-walk" dance.

Collared Aracari



Other notable bird and wildlife species in the area include Rusty Sparrow, Rufous-capped Warbler, Golden-olive Woodpecker, Azure-crowned Hummingbird, Yellow-backed Oriole, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Golden-hooded Tanager, Orange-breasted Falcon, King Vulture, Acorn Woodpecker, Ocellated Turkey, Black-headed Siskin, Jaguar, Puma, Kinkajou, White-tailed Deer, Fer-de-lance, Red-eyed Tree Frog, Blue Morpho Butterfly, Leaf Cutter Ants, and pollinators like bees and wasps which are abundant

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Hidden Valley
Wilderness Lodge*

Day 6, Caracol Archaeological Site:

Caracol, one of the most significant Maya archaeological sites in Belize, is situated within the Chiquibul Forest Reserve in the Cayo District. Its location in the Maya Mountains places it in a dense tropical broadleaf forest that supports rich biodiversity and is part of the largest contiguous forested area in Belize.

Morning and afternoon all-day birding & sketching:

At Caracol, we will focus on sketching the expansive archaeological ruins in the context of the surrounding jungle. We will take our time to sketch the interplay of the ancient architectural stonework and



Bare-throated Tiger Heron

intricate carvings with the natural environment, and also incorporate sketches of birds and wildlife that we encounter around the ruins. Distant and beautiful mountain vistas provide very scenic opportunities to sketch and paint more expansive views.

Notable Species at Caracol include; Jaguar, Yucatan Black Howler Monkeys, Baird's Tapir, Kinkajou, Ocelot, Keel-billed Toucan, Scarlet Macaw, Crested Guan, Great Curassow, Fer-de-Lance, Red-eyed Tree Frog, Rainforest Anoles, Leafcutter Ants, Blue Morpho Butterfly and other species, pollinators like bees, wasps, and moths which support the forest's diverse plant life.

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Hidden Valley
Wilderness Lodge*

Day 7, Transfer from Mountain Pine Ridge to Crooked Tree:

Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary, located in northern Belize, is one of the country's premier protected areas for wetland and waterfowl conservation. Designated as a Ramsar site (a wetland of international importance), the sanctuary encompasses over 16,400 acres of lagoons, creeks, savannas, and broadleaf forests, providing a diverse range of habitats for wildlife. The sanctuary is world-famous for its birdlife (over 300 species identified), particularly during the dry season when water levels drop, concentrating fish and other food sources.

Morning birding and sketching:

Before departure, we'll spend the early morning sketching the birds around the lodge or the mountain views from the pool terrace.

Afternoon free sketching and leisure time:

After arrival at Crooked Tree, we

will choose our own subjects from the surroundings and spend the afternoon leisurely sketching. The landscapes, water scenes, and local bird and plant life are all inspirational here.

Key Species at Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary include; Jabiru Stork, Great Egret, Northern Jacana, Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Snail Kite, Roseate Spoonbill, Wood Stork, Baird's Tapir, Neotropical Otter, Raccoons, Coatimundi, Morelet's Crocodile, Green Iguana, Frogs and Toads such as Red-eyed Tree Frog and Marine Toads.

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Bird's Eye View Lodge*

Day 8, Crooked Tree Birding by Boat:

Morning sunrise birding & sketching by boat:

We will focus on lake and wetland

bird species and work on conveying both movement and reflections. Sketching from a boat often allows close approach to waders and other birds, and we'll make quick sketches as we near them, and longer studies of the birds that stay put. This will also be an amazing opportunity for cloud studies!

Afternoon birding & sketching in pine savannas:

The sparse and ruggedly beautiful landscape of the pine savannas has a flavor all its own. Full of unique flora as well as bird species adapted to this environment, we will absorb the beautiful afternoon savanna light and explore its textures.

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Bird's Eye View Lodge*

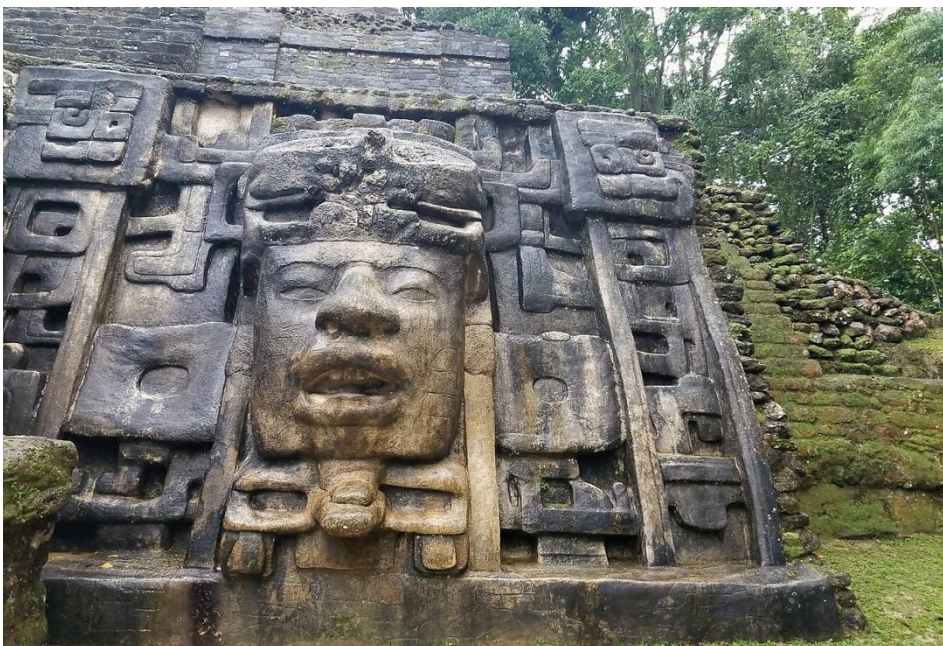
Day 9, Lamanai Day Trip:

Lamanai, an ancient Maya city located in northern Belize near the New River Lagoon, is surrounded by diverse habitats that support a rich variety of plant and animal life. The combination of its archaeological significance and biodiverse surroundings makes Lamanai a unique site for both cultural and ecological exploration. Habitats includes tropical broadleaf forest, riparian zones, wetlands and open water.

Morning and afternoon birding & sketching:

During our Lamanai day trip, we will sketch the combination of ancient ruins, lush tropical jungle, and local wildlife. We will balance our sketches between ancient

Mask Temple, Lamanai





Belize Wetland

architecture, flora, and wildlife, and hope for some particularly interesting sitting birds.

Notable Species at Lamanai include; Yucatan Black Howler Monkeys, Many Bat species, Coatiundi, Agouti, Morelet's Crocodile, Green Iguana, Various Frogs and Toads, Non-venomous Boa Constrictors and some venomous species like the Fer-de-Lance, Keel-billed Toucan, Jacana, Osprey, Northern Potoo, Black-collared Hawk, and others.

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Crooked Tree*

Day 10, Departure Day:

Morning birding & sketching at lodge grounds:

Today before transferring to the airport or on to our extension, we will use the morning to polish up any sketches we feel would benefit from having extra eyes and feedback, and take the time to reflect on our favorite pieces from the trip. We will have a final review

of our sketches, talk about the learning process, and celebrate our sketchbook success!

Included in this itinerary:

Price includes accommodations and meals, guide and entrance fees to parks, ground transportation and all tours described within.

Not Included:

Personal items such as tips, international airfare, alcoholic beverages, gift shop, laundry, etc. are not included.

Travel insurance:

We highly recommend purchasing travel insurance. In the event that you need to cancel your trip due to medical or other reasons, this insurance will protect you. Please see:

<https://www.naturalselectionstours.com/travel-insurance/> for details.



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