



INDEPENDENT BIRDING VENTURE IN BELIZE

Two Lodge Option: Lamanai Outpost & Chan Chich Lodge

Just a two-hour flight from Miami, the country of Belize offers a rich blend of Mayan ruins and lush forests that are still wild enough to host jaguars and a rich diversity of tropical birds, butterflies, mammals, and other creatures. The country's warm, hospitable people speak English (with Spanish as a second language), and have a strong tradition of caretaking their country's great biological wealth. This IBV features two of Belize's finest and best-known naturalists' lodges, Lamanai Outpost Lodge and, Chan Chich Lodge, both situated in large, protected forests, but offering as well, savanna, marsh, and riverine habitats. Mayan ruins, and tasty food accent your stay.

ITINERARY

ARRIVAL / LAMANAI OUTPOST LODGE

You will be met at the Belize City airport after going through Customs.

The transfer to Lamanai Outpost Lodge is fun, conducted by van and boat. Be sure to have your camera and binoculars handy for this transfer, as well as a hat and sunscreen. From the boat, you may see birds such as Mangrove Swallow, Limpkin, Northern Jacana, Swallow-tailed and Snail kites and, with luck, a Black-collared Hawk or a huge Jabiru Stork. Be ready with a windbreaker as the boat moves right along. You travel up the New River to a lagoon on which Lamanai Outpost Lodge is perched. Perhaps you'll catch a glimpse of the Lamanai ruins on the way.



On arrival at the dock, look up for possible Yucatan Black Howler Monkeys to greet you as you're led up to the reception area and then to your cabin. You'll be given an orientation and a chance to choose your included adventures for the next few days. You'll spend either 3 or nights here based on the option you choose, and there is plenty to see and do.



Coffee and muffins are available every morning at 5:30, so even if you have a dawn adventure you'll be able to enjoy a before-breakfast snack. The meals are varied and delicious here, and the day's offerings will be posted.

Your cabins are simple but comfortable, and a wake-up call is available for those morning adventures. During your stay, you will have the opportunity to take several boat trips. Canoe excursions

provide a relaxing way to get intimate views of wildlife, and may be arranged both by day and at night. Such trips frequently produce an endangered Morelet's Crocodile, iguanas and basilisk lizards, up to five species of kingfishers, Boat-billed Heron, Gray-necked Wood-Rail, and occasionally a rarity such as an Agami Heron.



At night, with the aid of spotlights, you may see several species of bats, Yucatan Nightjar, Yucatan Poorwill, or a Common Potoo. At some point during the evening Spotlight Safari, your guide may stop for you to listen for sounds of cats, possibly Jaguar. And you can always be on the lookout for an elusive Tapir at the water's edge.

Forest trails and Mayan ruins are easily accessed at Lamanai; birds and butterflies always seem to be at arm's reach. Just a short stroll from the lodge stand the Temple of the Jaguar and the High Temple, just two of about 700 Mayan structures at Lamanai that were hidden under a blanket of earth and vegetation until their excavation began in 1974. These buildings date back two millennia to a period when there was a large Mayan settlement in the area. Climbing the temples requires a bit of effort but rewards you with a bird's-eye view as you look down on the forest canopy.

Guides from Lamanai are happy to interpret the ruins while also pointing out birds and other nature. They are proud of the Lamanai ruins, one of the longest-occupied Mayan sites in Belize. A small museum at the site will also help with understanding the history of this very special place, and you'll see that the location at the lagoon's edge contributed greatly to the longevity of the settlement, which was initially constructed in 100BC. The beautiful Jaguar temple was constructed in the 1500's.



Mammals in the area of Lamanai include Paca, Agouti, Baird's Tapir, Collared and White-lipped Peccaries, Kinkajou, and five wild cats – Puma, Jaguar, Jaguarundi, Maargay, and Ocelot.

Whether you're an old hand in Central America, or immersing yourself in tropical diversity for the first time, there will be much to get your attention at Lamanai (Mayan for submerged crocodile).

Although birds and monkeys may be the most obvious life forms around the cabins, there are perhaps 200 species of butterflies in the area, many colorful dragonflies and damselflies, lizards ranging from tiny geckoes to five-foot-long iguanas, and, of course, the numerous herbs, shrubs and trees that make up the tropical forest.

Among Lamanai's 400 or so species of birds, we'll be mindful of some of the regional endemics we might encounter, including Black Catbird, Rose-throated Tanager, Yucatan Jay, and Gray-throated Chat. One of the most interesting phenomena for birders in the tropics, and one we are likely to encounter at Lamanai and Chan Chich, is an army ant march. Birds of many families attend these marches, eating the insects, frogs, lizards, and other organisms flushed by the foraging ants. By standing quietly at the margin of an ant swarm, one can get close looks at the most faithful ant followers in this area including Gray-headed Tanager, Red-throated Ant-Tanager, and a number of woodcreepers including Tawny-winged and Northern Barred. Other possibilities are White-whiskered Puffbird, several flycatchers, migrant warblers, and perhaps a Great Tinamou. Even birds of prey such as the dainty Barred Forest-Falcon follow ant swarms – all so absorbed in the sea of insect life that they ignore the fascinated observers.



Overlooking the edge of the large New River Lagoon, and with access to savanna habitat, Lamanai offers a rather different mix of birds than Chan Chich. Some birds at the water's edge will be familiar: Neotropic Cormorant, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, and

Purple Gallinule. Others, such as White-collared Seedeater, Mangrove Vireo, Ruddy Crake, or the delightful American Pygmy Kingfisher will remind you that you have left the U.S.



Options include Sunrise Canoeing, a Jungle Dawn walk, a tour of the Lamanai Maya Ruins, a walk featuring Maya Jungle Medicine & Village Life, a Sunset Cocktail Cruise, a Nature Walk, an evening Spotlight Safari, and a Night Walk. You will be able to choose 2 of these for every night you stay.

Accommodations at Lamanai Outpost Lodge (B,L,D)

CHAN CHICH LODGE

On your final morning you have one more chance to bird or enjoy a boat ride. Then you will pack up and, typically just after lunch, leave Lamanai for the drive to Chan Chich (Mayan for little bird). You will travel by van via the coffee and livestock producing community of Gallon Jug. En route, watch for Crested Caracara and other birds of prey, Scissor-tailed and Fork-tailed flycatchers. You pass through rural

landscapes and flooded agricultural fields that attract waterfowl, large wading birds, and migrating shorebirds.

Chan Chich Lodge was constructed amidst the ruins of a classical Mayan center, where trade fairs and religious ceremonies once were celebrated. The lodge now protects the ruin's treasures from further looting and sponsors archeologists who study the site. Situated in a private nature reserve, part of a large protected area in the northwestern part of the country, the lodge's 12 thatched-roof cabins, bar, restaurant, gift shop, and swimming pool are surrounded by one of the largest and most pristine tracts of lowland subtropical moist forest left in Central America. Few will want to ever leave this delightful retreat.



In the reception area, you'll be checked in and given an overview. Other information, including a trail map, is waiting in your cabana. You can also purchase a trail guide with detailed maps and interpretation.



A trail system over 15 kilometers (about 9 miles) long and mostly flat winds around ruins and over the ancient causeways. Typically, the trails are wide and are cleared of leaves and other fallen debris. Here (as at Lamanai) you have an opportunity to observe birds of many unique Neotropical families, including toucans, puffbirds, motmots, jacamars, ovenbirds, woodcreepers, antbirds, and manakins. Guided walks are offered daily, you will learn about these each previous night at dinner to make selections.

The rich forest is home to over 350 species of birds including the superb (and locally common) Ocellated Turkey, Great Curassow, Crested Guan, Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Mexican Antthrush, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Royal Flycatcher, and impossibly cute and often elusive Tody Motmot.

Mammals such as Yucatan Black Howler Monkey, Central American Spider Monkey, Central American Agouti, and Gray Fox are commonly seen; and five feline species including Ocelot and Jaguar have been found here. Beautiful hummingbirds such as the Purple-crowned Fairy, and Long-billed and Stripe-tailed hermits feed in clearings around the cabins, and both Red-capped and White-collared manakins may be seen at fruiting shrubs adjacent to the dining room.



As the morning air warms, birds of prey such as Bat Falcon, White Hawk, Black Hawk-Eagle, and Plumbeous Kite soar over the cabañas. During March, the area's bird population swells as local nesting

birds are joined by numerous migrants--warblers, vireos, orioles, and flycatchers--winging their way northward to breed.

Once situated in your comfortable cabins, you could begin your exploration with a short afternoon hike to the Upper Plaza and the King's Tomb Trail. Mounds that have formed over unexcavated ruins provide nest sites for Blue-crowned Motmot and they are frequently seen around the lodge clearing. Ocellated Turkey are present, perhaps the most outrageous bird of your trip! Montezuma Oropendula, which nest in colonies around the lodge, are easily viewed as they tumble and gurgle in courtship display. Parrots fly over as dusk approaches, going to nightly roosts.



The nighttime serenade of Common Pauraque quickly blends into a dawn chorus of tinamous, motmots, and perhaps a Strong-billed Woodcreeper, ushering you out on an optional early morning walk with the lodge's resident bird guide. With luck you find an assortment of dazzling tropical tanagers, woodpeckers, euphonias, and honeycreepers.



Each day, after a delicious breakfast, venture into the forest on guided walks, or on the featured guided outing of the day.

On trails you may walk past manakin leks and the territories of dueting Spot-breasted Wrens. One trail takes you to a lower, open, and moist tinal forest where specialties include Rose-throated Tanager, Gray-throated Chat, and Yucatan Flycatcher. While inside the forest, you have a greater chance to encounter shy birds like Ruddy Quail-Dove, Great Curassow, or Scaly-throated Leaf-tosser that are unlikely to venture out into the lodge clearing. If you would like to go out again the afternoon, this is all possible, as guiding is included with your stay.

Typically you will take a break for lunch and perhaps a brief siesta or a swim; then head out in the late afternoon, as the forest cools and life stirs. Some outings may take lunch as a picnic. Chan Chich, like Lamanai Outpost Lodge, has a long tradition of catering to birders, so they understand how best to find you the species.

Each evening the choices are outlined by the guides, so you can make your selection.



It is also quite nice to simply stay at the lodge, where bird life is plentiful. Perhaps a Pale-billed Woodpecker will nest close to the lodge. There are many species very close at hand!

In the late afternoon, Mealy Parrot and Olive-throated Parakeet are noisy and more easily seen as they come to their evening roosts. By 5:30 PM, the afternoon is turning to dusk and you can enjoy camaraderie and some armchair birding at the lodge's traditional happy hour and dinner.

While at Chan Chich, your IBV includes a night drive with a local guide. This is one of the few sites where you actually have hopes of seeing a Jaguar, Jaguarundi, or Ocelot in the wild. More frequently seen are White-tailed Deer, Northern Tamandua,

Four-eyed Opossum, Gray Fox, and nightbirds such as Common Pauraque and Common Potoo.

You are signed up for the Discovery Package at Chan Chich Lodge. This give you daytime guided birding, medicinal plant, archaeology, or general nature walks, daytime vehicle tours to Laguna Seca, Laguna Verde, the Escarpment, Gallon Jug Farm and Coffee Plantation, and Sylvester Village. In addition, you get a night drive, an excellent chance to see a wild cat!

Accommodations at Chan Chich Lodge (B,L,D)

DEPARTURE DAY

On your final day, you'll leave Chan Chich for your return to Belize City. You will take a charter flight from the Gallon Jug airstrip for this return. Please schedule return flights for the afternoon (Noon onwards recommended).

Or, if you wish to stay on for some snorkeling and beach time on the Cays, we can make recommendations. Ambergris Caye is most commonly selected, it is easy to get to and the reefs are right out your door. Farther afield, South Water Caye beckons those that want isolation and some quality beach and reef time (see our other IBV options).

Want to keep birding? Try our THREE LODGE IBV option!



TRAVEL INFORMATION

Please arrive in Belize City at the Philip SW Goldson International Airport no later than 2-3PM (ask us, changes with the seasons) for a scheduled transfer to Lamanai Outpost Lodge. If you must arrive later, you will have to come a day early and spend the night at a Belize City hotel; contact us for recommendations.

Please note that for the departure date, you are a short charter flight away from the International Airport, but it is best to plan outbound flights no earlier than NOON. If you find a flight close to Noon, enquire. If going on to on-your-own time to stay on in Belize, we can help you make plans.

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PLAN AHEAD!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance.

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Guest Cabaña © LAMANAI OUTPOST



Chan Chich Lodge Casitas and Walkway



Dining Area © LAMANAI OUTPOST