

FRIENDS OF THE CONSERVATORY present:

The Best and ORIGINAL Botanical and Cultural tour to

PANAMA

SPRING 2010

On the Loose With Lars and Hoppin' With Henry

Experience one of the world's best-kept secrets, the country of PANAMA. It is a naturalist's dream with some 940 species of birds, boasting the two top birding destinations in the world; staggering biodiversity with over 218 mammals and 226 reptiles; and flora that is comprised of over 10,000 plant species including 1200 orchid species, 675 ferns, and 1300 tree species. WOW!

We begin our adventure in Panama City, founded in 1519, and which is arguably the most cosmopolitan capital in Latin America. In 2003 Casco Viejo was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site and from here you'll visit two other UNESCO World Heritage Sites, namely San Lorenzo and Portobello National Park that includes one of the most beautiful natural harbors in all the Caribbean. In this vicinity are the great birding destinations, Achote Road and Pipeline Road in Soberania National Park. Optional side trips out of Panama City on free days include a trip to Isla Barro Colorado in Lake Gatun by Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute; to Archipelago San Blas, one of Panama's natural wonders, where the Kuna Indians make their home; a partial water transit through the canal itself; plus others. We head out towards the Azuero Peninsula which is the heart and soul of the country and that has preserved and still produces some of the finest handicrafts. We'll overnight at an extraordinary eco spa situated in an incredibly gorgeous setting before moving on with visits to artisan villages and preserved colonial towns which, during Semana Santa, stage amazing Easter celebrations. On our return to Panama City, we'll spend time at the mountain retreat of El Valle and shop at a fabulous handicraft market there.

TOUR LEADERS AND GUIDES:

LARS HUSBY has been leading tours to Mexico, Central and South America since the mid '80's. He is a practicing artist, member of NW Designer Craftsmen, art instructor at Bellevue College, and board member of the Friends of the Conservatory. He holds a double MFA from the University of Washington.

HENRY KUCHARIC is a longtime board member of the Friends of the Conservatory, and a retired physician. He has traveled extensively throughout Central America and also worked with the Peace Corp programs for Latin America at the UW, trained volunteers for Bolivia, was involved in the post-Hurricane Mitch rescue in Nicaragua, and visits his sponsored foster children in Guatemala and Nicaragua.

GISELLE BLYTHE is a tropical horticulturist at Volunteer Park Conservatory and a Certified Interpretive Guide. She will help us identify plants, birds and wildlife throughout the trip.

Space is limited - SIGN UP NOW!!

The Best and Original Botanical and Cultural tour of...

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ITINERARY:

14 days, March 23-April 5, 2010

Day 1-2 Tues.-Wed., March 23-24 Evening departure on Continental Airlines, Seattle to Panama City via Houston. Our layover time in Houston will allow us the opportunity for breakfast. Early afternoon arrival and transfer to La Estancia B&B, situated at the top of Cerro Ancon that is a nature preserve surrounded by lush tropical vegetation, or similar. On the way there'll be a city orientation and later a guided walking tour of Casco Antigo. This evening Henry has arranged for a lecture possibly by world renowned Mireya Correa.

Day 3 Thurs., March 25 After an early breakfast, transfer to the Panama Canal Railway Station in Corozal where we board the glass domed luxury train for travel across the Isthmus of Panama in what is one of the world's great train rides that follows a similar route as the original train took that transported 49ers coming from the east coast of the USA across Panama to continue their journey by boat to California. The route was diverted when Gatun Lake was formed to give way to the Panama Canal. It will travel along the magnificent waterway that is flanked by exuberant rainforests of Soberania National Park. At the terminus in Colon we will be met by our driver and transported to Portobello National Park, a World Heritage Site since 1980 that includes over 86,000 acres, historic colonial ruins, a fishing village, and one of the most beautiful natural harbors on the Caribbean. We'll lunch in Colon before traveling onward, crossing over the Panama Canal at Gatun Locks, to the Castle of San Lorenzo, another UNESCO World Heritage Site, built at the mouth of the Chagres River. Transfer to the nearby Davis Suites Panama Canal, or similar. Or you may choose as an option to homestay tonight with a local family. (B, L)

Day 4 Fri., March 26 Early morning guided walk provided by Centro El Tucan, located in the village of Achiote. Achiote Road is renowned for its bird watching, rated #1 or 2 on the planet. Also to be viewed here are waterfalls, ponds, organic shade grown coffee fincas, and an incredible variety of wildlife. Transfer back to La Estancia B&B. This afternoon an OPTIONAL outing to visit museums and for some shopping in Panama City. (B)

Day 5 Sat., March 27 Following breakfast, you'll have several choices on this first of two FREE DAYS. See the separate OPTIONAL TOURS sheet for descriptions or just R&R. (B)

Day 6 Sun., March 28 After an early breakfast, we depart with our specialist guide, passing by the Panama Canal's celebrated Culebra Cut and the Chagres River before reaching our destination, the Pipeline Road Trail. Known for its birding, Soberania National Park is full of other wildlife and one of the Audubon Society's chosen destinations. A picnic lunch will be provided before we head to Summit Botanical Garden and Zoo. Check out the new Jaguar Habitat along with the Harpy eagle and other exotic wildlife native to Panama. Transfer to the serene Albrook Inn with its lush gardens located in Ancon Las Magnolias, or similar. (B)

Day 7 Mon., March 29 After breakfast, you'll head out on the OPTIONAL adventure you've chosen on the 2nd FREE DAY. See the separate OPTIONAL TOURS sheet for descriptions or just R&R. (B)

Day 8 Tues., March 30 This morning after everyone has returned from their OPTIONAL adventure, we'll pack up and head out of Panama City into Cocolé Province to the Posada Ecologica Cerro La Vieja Penonome, or similar. Now that's a name but well deserved in terms of its ties to nature and its gardens that are populated by both native and exotic plants including a large orchid collection and its magnificent views from its perch in the Chiguirí Arriba. It is surrounded by imposing peaks like the karst formations outside Guilin, China. It is also a holistic eco spa and its cuisine is renowned. (B)

Day 9 Wed., March 31 Following an early breakfast you'll have an opportunity to explore some of the many nature trails in the area or just relax and do spa things. We'll pack up and head out towards the provincial capital of Penonome with a stop for lunch at the Parrillada El Gigante (not included) an open sided restaurant that serves excellent traditional country style food plus pizza and Middle Eastern cuisine. Next door is the Mercado de Artesanias where vendors sell the famed Panama hats for which Panama and particularly Penonome are known. Continuing on we'll stop briefly in Nata to see the Santiago Apostol Minor Basilica, a national monument and the 2nd oldest in the Western Hemisphere dating back to 1522. From here to the nearby Parque Arqueologico del Cano which is the best of only two archeological sites open to the public, and then onwards to Chitre, the capital of Herrera Province and to the Hotel Versailles, or similar. We may have time to visit the Cathedral and the Museo Herrera but if not then in the morning. (B)

Day 10 Thurs., April 1 After breakfast, we'll stop for visits in nearby La Arena which is the ceramics center of the country and still uses pre-Columbian designs; to the town of Parita founded in 1558 with its preserved Spanish colonial center that in 1926 became a national historical monument and a visit there to the studio of one of Panama's famous mask makers, Darido Lopez. We'll continue on to Villa de Los Santos in Los Santos Province for a lunch stop (not included) and a visit to the studio of Carlos Ivan de Leon, Panama's other famous mask maker. Completing the day, we'll visit the town of Guarare's Museo Manuel F. Zarate which houses an incredible collection of folk art and then finally a visit to the town of Domingo de Las Tablas where the ladies still make traditional "polleras" (costumes) that can be purchased. (B)

Day 11 GOOD FRIDAY, April 2 TODAY is one of the premier celebration days on the Azuero peninsula in several of the small towns. The town of Pese hosts a reenactment of the Golgotha drama and there is a candlelit parade in Los Santos, which are only two of the more prominent celebrations during Semana Santa in this vicinity. We may have time to visit also the towns of La Enea and Ocu. (B)

Day 12 Sat., April 3 Following an early breakfast, we leave the Azuero peninsula on a route that takes us into the mountains in Cocle Province to the town of El Valle, nestled in the crater of a giant extinct crater. We'll visit the Arovaca Orquideas, the best selection of orchids in the region with over 96 species; the Museo El Valle; the "Arboles Cuadrados" (trees with square trunks); El Macho waterfall where there is a famous hair-raising canopy tour; and La Piedra Pintada which is a huge boulder decorated with pre-Columbian carvings/petroglyphs. Then check into our hotel, Anton Valley Hotel, or similar. Late afternoon is an OPTIONAL trip to the relaxing Pozos de Aguas Termales (hot springs). (B)

Day 13 EASTER SUNDAY, April 4 After breakfast we'll head over to the Sunday handicrafts market, one of the largest in Panama that opens at 7 AM and is filled with artisans who come down to town from the surrounding mountains to sell their goods. This is one of your best shopping opportunities for such original items as bateas (wooden trays), baskets, tutumas (cups made from squash), objects produced from acorns, and many other arts and crafts. We'll return to our hotel for check out and head for Panama City with transfer to the relaxing Hostal Casa de Campo, or similar. Tonight we'll have a farewell party and birthday celebration. (B)

Day 14 Mon., April 5 After a leisurely breakfast, we'll prepare for our transfer to Tocumen International Airport for our return flight on Continental to Seattle via Houston. Remember there is a departure tax of \$20 USD paid by the individual at the airport. Buen Viaje!!! (B)

OPTIONAL DAY TOURS & PRICES

On the two full "free" days, choose an optional special tour, or spend the whole day on your own.

Saturday 27 March Day 5 - OPTIONAL TOURS DAY:

Choose from two Daytime Tours, and/or Evening Dinner/Show

Barro Colorado Island:

Prices starting from 4 people: \$120 per-person

A day trip to the **Smithsonian Institute Research Center** on **Barro Colorado Island** in Lake Gatun, via Gamboa, formerly in the Canal Zone. This sanctuary is an island isolated by the making of the Lake Gatun for the Panama Canal and is prized for the natural flora and fauna still intact. Most trails are about 2 km long and include steep sections and stairs. The trails are not appropriate for people who suffer from heart and respiratory conditions, knee injuries, or are in generally poor health. The day visit includes boat transportation, the guided tour and lunch. The boat departs STRI dock at Gamboa and arrives at BCI 45 min. to an hour later. The guide will give some information about natural history and prepare the group for the walk along the trail. This is a 2-3 hr. hike. The walk ends at the Visitor Center, where you will find an exhibition regarding BCNM. After the Visitors Center you will head to the cafeteria to have lunch. This is a cafeteria-style lunch with a variety of dishes, including a vegetarian section, since some of the scientists that live and work at Barro Colorado are also vegetarian. After lunch, there will be time to ask questions and relax.

Departure time: 6:30 AM Duration: 8-9 hours

Partial Canal Transit:

Prices starting from 2 people: \$145 per-person

The tour departs from the **Port of Balboa** on the Pacific side of the canal, where you will board a comfortable passenger ferry. We will first sail under the **Bridge of the Americas**, which rises over 100 meters above sea level and reunites the land divided during construction of the canal forming another link in the Pan-American Highway. Breakfast is available buffet style. Northbound on the Panama Canal, the first stop is at **Miraflores locks**, which are the tallest in the locks system due to the extreme tidal variation of the Pacific Ocean. The boat will be raised 17 meters above sea level in two steps to enter Miraflores Lake which is almost 2 kilometers long. A transition from salt water in the Pacific Ocean to fresh water in the locks chambers and lake take place here. Next the ship is raised in one step, this time an additional 9 meters, at the **Pedro Miguel locks**. At this point the ship will be sailing in Gatun lake at 26 meters above sea level and entering **Gaillard Cut**, the narrowest section of the Panama Canal. The 13.7-kilometer long portion of the waterway was carved through rock and shale and it is flanked by the backbones of the Continental Divide. The original width of Gaillard Cut was 92 meters and was increased to 152 meters in the early 1970s. In order to accommodate to the demands of today's transit needs, the Panama Canal Authority recently completed the monumental task of widening the Cut to 192 meters in straight sections and up to 222 meters in curves. This allows for unrestricted two-way traffic of Panamax vessels, the largest ships that fit in the Panama Canal locks. The Gaillard Cut opens up into Gatun Lake where the Chagres River flows into the waterway near the town of **Gamboa**, site of the Panama Canal's Dredging Division, where you disembark.

In some instances the tour may be offered in reverse, starting in Gamboa. In such cases the tour will start later in the morning, it will not include breakfast, but it will include lunch aboard

Departure time: 6:30 AM Duration: 4-5 hours

Panama Folkloric Dinner & Show

Prices starting at 4 passengers: \$50 per-person

You will be met in the lobby of your hotel and transferred to **Tinajas Typical Restaurant**. Here you will have the opportunity to eat Panamanian food, made of corn, plantains, yucca, fish, tamale, sancocho (typical Panamanian chicken soup), pork, seafood, beef and more. After dinner you will watch a colorful folkloric show of the diverse national dances with their elegant costumes. The name of these dances are the Punta, Travesado, Diablos Sucios and are preformed with live music performed using the typical instruments of Panama. Afterwards you will be transferred back to your hotel.

Includes: Transfer to and from hotel, traditional Panamanian dinner, cover charge, service charge and folkloric dance show.

Departure time: 7:30 PM Duration: 4 hours

Monday 29 March Day 7 - OPTIONAL TOURS DAY:

Choose from Two optional Overnight Excursions, or stay in town for other local tours.

San Blas 1 night at Cabanas Kuanidup, or similar

Prices Starting at 4 people: \$200 per-person

Pick up at your Panama City hotel and transfer to the Albrook Domestic Airport for a flight to the **San Blas Archipelago**, a natural wonder governed by the Kuna Indians. Upon your arrival you will be met by your local host and proceed to one of the island lodges, your home for the next two days. Most of your stay will be spent at leisure observing the Kuna culture, swimming, snorkeling or relaxing on beautiful white sand beaches. Rustic accommodations may share baths and have kerosene lights but very peaceful. Optional tours are offered to neighboring villages, etc...

Includes: Ground and air and boat transportation, meals and Island excursion.

Embera Indians 1 night in Chagres National Park

Prices Starting at 4 people: \$210 per-person

This adventure takes us to the fascinating indigenous community in **Chagres National Park**. We will get to know the culture of the Embera Indians, witness their artisans at work and learn their knowledge about botanical plants. Embera dance and music evokes scenes of a time before the colonization of the Americas. If you wish, you can try the traditional body painting using the "Jagua" fruit. We will also observe a variety of birds found in this area. Walk in the jungle, explore a waterfall and learn from this magical and ancient culture. Spend the night in your own open-air hut, built on stilts above the ground. Listen to the sounds of the jungle as you fall asleep in total darkness.

Includes: Ground and river transportation, meals and a specialized guide.

Optional Excursions Staying in Panama City:

Camino de Cruces Trail

Prices starting at 4 passengers: \$130 per-person

The 8-mile **Camino de Cruces Trail** takes visitors through 4,000 hectares of primarily tropical forest that connect the Metropolitan and the Soberania National Parks. Freshwater birds can be seen by the ponds located at the start of Chiva Chiva Road. Follow the road and discover a variety of birds, flora and fauna. The Camino de Cruces Trail was originally used in the 16th and 17th centuries by Spanish plunderers to haul gold from Peru by mule across the Isthmus of Panama on its way to Spain. This trail was also used as a path for fortune seekers transiting the isthmus during the 1849-1950 California Gold Rush.

This tour has a minimum of 4 people.

Includes: Transportation, Specialized Guide, Snacks, Box Lunch.

Duration: All day

Anthropological Museum and Shopping Tour

Prices starting at 4 passengers: \$60 per-person

Your guide and driver will collect you from your Hotel this morning and take you into the city. Your first stop is at the **Museo Antropológico Reina Torres de Araúz** which conveys the rich cultural heritage of Panama with a collection of pre-Colombian artifacts and exhibits including artifacts from the Barriles tribe, the earliest residents of Panama until 700 B.C. There is also an interesting collection of gold huacas, the tiny ceremonial figures that were buried with indigenous VIPs, as well as more modern pollera dresses and antique household items and farm tools. After visiting the museum, your driver and guide will take you shopping for Artesanía, or indigenous handicrafts. Molas, the reversed appliqué panels made by Kuna Indian women, rank high on the list of popularity for souvenirs and gifts, either sewn onto a beach bag, as a shirt, or sold individually for you to frame or stitch onto anything you'd like (pillowcases are an ideally sized canvas). Other popular handicrafts, such as tagua nuts or vegetable ivory carved into tiny figurines, Ngobe-Buglé dresses, and Emberá Indian baskets and masks. Your visits will include the **Mercado Nacional de Artesanías**, an expansive market selling all varieties of National crafts, and in Balboa the **YMCA Handicrafts Market**, with mostly Kuna and Emberá indigenous arts and crafts, and clothing and the Kuna Cooperative, featuring Kuna handicrafts.

Includes: Transportation, Specialized Guide, Entrance to the museum.

Departure time: 9:30 AM Duration: 4-5 hours

MUSEUMS AND MERCADOS IF YOU WANT TO EXPLORE ON YOUR OWN

The **Museo Antropologico** with exhibits of the rich cultural heritage and pre-Columbian artifacts and the nearby **Mercado Buhonecias** and **Artesanias** with indigenous crafts can be enjoyed by those who want to limit walking. There are several other **museums including West Indian culture, Natural History, Contemporary art, Religious Colonial art** as well as artisan markets and replicas of rural villages and native restaurants at **Mi Pueblito** and a **Mercado Nacional de Artesanias**.

For the more adventurous traveler seeking an "authentic" shopping experience, you can't beat **Avenida Central**, a pedestrian street and market that stretches from where Justo Arosemena meets Vía España to the Santa Ana Plaza, and that is near **Casco Viejo**. It's a scrappy, run-down neighborhood, with cheap stores, outdoor fruit and vegetable markets, and a bustling fusion of ethnic groups shopping for a bargain. Visually, it's the most colorful neighborhood in town. Apart from \$1-and-under kind of shops, vendors lining the streets hawk clothing, accessories, plastic gizmos, and knickknacks. Shopkeepers like to blare music or announce their deals through megaphones to pull buyers in. It's a slice of everyday Panama, but it's also street theater and people-watching as fascinating as catching sight of Kuna Indian women lining up at McDonald's. Don't wander too far off Avenida Central, and keep an eye on your personal belongings. This area is patrolled by police and is generally safe during the day.

The **Mercado de Mariscos**, located on Avenida Balboa and Calle 15 Este, is distribution headquarters for fresh seafood pulled from the Pacific and Caribbean. It's a vibrant market with lots of action as fishmongers shout while they deftly fillet corvina, tuna, octopus, and more. You can dine here at their upstairs restaurant. Several food stands sell seafood snacks like ceviche. Next door is the brand-new **Mercado Público**, the covered farmer's market of Panama City with exotic fruits and vegetables, meats, dried spices and nuts, and a food court of fondas, or cheap food stands serving Panamanian fare. Don't forget to bring your camera.

Wildlife Contraband: Don't Destroy What You've Come Seeking

International laws prohibit the trade of endangered plants or animals, or products made from endangered wildlife. Yet many travelers to Panama who purchase such goods rarely realize that what they are doing is illegal, nor do they understand the consequences of their purchase. Illegal trade destroys the very wildlife and habitat that travelers come here to enjoy. You could also set yourself up for being issued a heavy fine by law-enforcement officials upon your return. To help with wildlife conservation, ask yourself, "Do I know what this product is made of? Do I know where this product came from? Do I need a special permit to bring this product home?"

The World Wildlife Fund's trade monitoring network, TRAFFIC, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have a series of "Buyer Beware" brochures, including one aimed at travelers in the Caribbean, that you can download from their site at www.worldwildlife.org/buyer beware.

When in Panama, you should avoid purchasing:

- Products made from turtle shell (including jewelry)
- Leather products made from reptile skins
- Live birds including parrots, macaws, and toucans
- Live monkeys
- Certain coral products
- Orchids (except those grown commercially)

Read more:

<http://www.frommers.com/destinations/panamacity/3751010031.html#ixzz0PlosgpNe>

THE DETAILS

TOUR COST: \$2,500 Estimated for 2010 per person based on double occupancy. Single supplement and Triple reductions will be announced.

TOUR INCLUDES:

International roundtrip airfare on Continental Airlines from/to Seattle. Other cities are available on request through EEI Travel. Air tax & fuel surcharges are included in package pricing, but are subject to increase until payment in full has been received. Estimated itinerary includes 12 nights lodging as described; private coach w/AC land transportation as outlined; guided tours and sightseeing as outlined; entrance fees as mentioned; meals including 12 breakfasts and 2 lunches.

NOT INCLUDED:

Panama exit tax of \$20 USD; tips for guides and driver; and optional items. Travel Insurance is highly recommended and available through EEI Travel. Insurance must be purchased within 7 days of initial deposit to cover pre-existing medical conditions. Last day to purchase Travel Insurance is with your final payment (excludes pre-existing medical conditions if you have previously deposited).

RESERVATIONS AND PAYMENTS:

A deposit of \$200 per-person is due by Nov. 27, 2009 and is required to hold your space. This tour is limited in size so book early; payment in full must be received by Jan. 15, 2010; payments by CC add 3%; reservations are by the name that appears exactly on your passport.

CANCELLATIONS AND REFUNDS:

\$100 per-person is non-refundable once deposit is received. Airline tickets are non-refundable once purchased. Cancellations within to 90 days of departure involve penalties for the land portion of your trip. Cancellations within 30 days are non-refundable.

DOCUMENTATION:

A valid USA passport with a minimum of 6 months remaining from the departure date is required. It is your responsibility to have the correct documents needed to enter Panama.

AND don't forget a suggested tax-deductible donation of \$200 to the Friends of the Conservatory.

----- CLIP AND MAIL TO -----

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I understand and agree to the terms regarding cancellations, refunds, and payments.

Enclosed please find a deposit/payment of \$_____

Name (circle one): Mr. Mrs. Ms. _____

Date of Birth: _____ Passport Issuing Country: _____

Phone: (H): _____ (W) _____

E-Mail: _____

Mailing address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

My roommate will be: _____

Signature _____ Date: _____