

Natural and Man-made Wonders of The Isthmus of Panama

February 16 – 24, 2012



AMC Adventure Travel

Summary

There is no better way to learn about Panama than by visiting this country! On this nine day adventure we will investigate one of the largest and most difficult engineering projects ever undertaken, the world-famous Panama Canal. We will travel to an Emberá indigenous village, and explore among a variety of rainforest habitats, looking for wild life including monkeys, colorful birds, and two species of sloth. We will experience the best of Panama's bio diversity by hiking a cloud forest



trail at Barro Colorado and snorkeling at San Blas Island. This adventure will introduce you to amazing natural and man-made wonders at the Isthmus of Panama.

We will take an expedition boat to Gatun Lake, which was formed to give way to the Panama Canal in 1924. We will visit the Miraflores Visitor Center where we will observe transiting vessels from a distance of only a few meters and learn firsthand about the various operations of the Panama Canal including the history of its construction and its participation in the world markets.

Visiting Barro Colorado, one of the oldest tropical research stations in the world, is part of our Panamanian journey. People have been studying the forest here for more than 80 years. The Chagres River was dammed during the construction of the Canal (1910 to 1914) and as its waters rose to form Gatun Lake. A small mountain of 476 ft. was isolated from the mainland and formed Barro Colorado Island. Located in the Panama Canal, Barro Colorado Island is the largest island, of 3,707 acres, in Lake Gatun. More than 200 scientists visit this open-air biology laboratory every year to study ecology, evolution and behavior of the animals and plants of the monument. Some of the projects focus on monitoring climatic conditions in relation to the populations of particular plants and animals.

We will also visit an Emberá Indian village, where we will be greeted with dancing and music. We will learn about Emberá customs and their relationship with nature while we explore a variety of rainforest habitats where monkeys, colorful birds, and two species of sloth live.



All our tours will be conducted with licensed local guides to provide the maximum educational content and safety.

Climate - The dry season in Panama is from mid-December to mid-April and the temperature during January and February is 72° – 81° Fahrenheit.

Electricity – Electricity is 120V / 60 Hz. U.S. electrical items can be used without adapters.

Water – The water is of good quality and is potable throughout the country with the exceptions of San Blas and Bocas del Toro. We will have bottled water in San Blas.

Time Zone – Panama is in the Eastern Standard Time with no daylight savings.

Language – Spanish is the official language. English is widely used.

Culture – Pace of life is slow and relaxed, nobody seems to be in much of a hurry.

Currency - Panama uses the US dollar as its currency. The official name for it is the *balboa*, but it's exactly the same bill, and in practice people use the terms '*dólar*' and '*balboa*' interchangeably. Panamanian coins are of the same value, size and metal as US coins, though both are frequently used.

Vaccinations - None

Passport – Necessary and Required. Visitors are required to carry a passport at all times. If you are hesitant to carry your passport and would rather carry a copy, the copy must include the page with your entrance stamp given by immigration when you enter the country.

Application Process

If you decide that you would like to sign up for this excursion, let us know by email or give us a call. We will email you an Application, mandatory Confidential Health Questionnaire, optional Confidential Supplemental Medical Questionnaire, and Acknowledgement and Assumption of Risk and Release and Indemnity Agreement. A reservation deposit of \$850 per person is due with your application. Please make your check payable to the Appalachian Mountain Club and mail (forms can be returned by e-mail, but the release signature page must also be mailed) with the completed forms, to Lynn at the address shown on the Application.

After we receive your application, we may talk to you about your experience to ascertain your ability to participate successfully in this trip. Providing information to us about a medical issue or injury will not necessarily disqualify you from participation, but we may need to ask you some follow up questions. We want to be sure that we can adequately provide for your needs in our backcountry locations. We prefer to use e-mail as our primary method of communication. If you prefer phone calls, please let us know or note that on your Application.

Deposit and Payment

Upon acceptance on the trip, we will notify you by email or surface mail. At that point we will deposit your check into the trip account and use the money to cover trip expenses incurred on your behalf. The application is due November 14th, with a down payment of \$850. The balance of \$1,665 per person is due November 14th, 2011 (three months before the start of the trip).

The cost for the trip is \$2,475. This will cover the following items:

- Roundtrip airfare from the East coast to Panama City, Panama (other home airports considered and depending on price fluctuations)
- English/Spanish speaking multi-lingual guide
- One-way ticket from Panama City Airport to Playon Chico
- All accommodations, taxes and tips
- All meals as noted on itinerary
- All local transportation
- All activity fees and licensed local guides
- AMC Adventure Travel Fee
- Emergency evacuation insurance

NOT included in trip price:

- Trip cancellation insurance
- Your personal transportation to your US departure airport
- Alcoholic beverages
- Panama exit tax of \$20
- Gratuities for Panamanian Guides (~\$30)

The cost for the excursion is based on quotes at the time the trip was submitted to the Adventure Travel Committee (April 2011). The final cost of the trip may be adjusted in accordance with the best arrangements we can make with the airlines. **Any savings we achieve will be passed on to you.**

A registration deposit of \$850 is due with the application. You must also submit the Confidential Medical form, the signed Acknowledgement and Assumption of Risk and Release, and the Trip Application form. A payment of \$850 is due by November 14th, and the balance of \$1,625 is due November 14th. Make checks payable to the Appalachian Mountain Club – Lynn Matt. The check and forms should be mailed to Lynn Matt at the address shown on the application.

Cancellation/ Cancellation Insurance

Once you are accepted on the trip and we have deposited your check(s), a \$100 cancellation fee will apply. A refund of amounts paid in excess of \$100 will be given to the extent that it does not raise the cost of the trip to the other participants. If your spot is filled from the waiting list, then you may be entitled to a full refund, less the \$100 cancellation fee. If your spot cannot be filled, then you will receive a refund for any part of the trip that can be cancelled by the leaders, less the \$100 cancellation fee.

Optional trip cancellation insurance is available through a variety of programs, including one available from the AMC. You decide on your own, and handle this directly with the sponsor. Based upon your response in the application, and subject to you being accepted on the trip, we will send information on the program offered by the AMC.

Questions

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact either of us to discuss them.

Lynn Matt, Leader, lmatt2002@hotmail.com, 269-673-3672

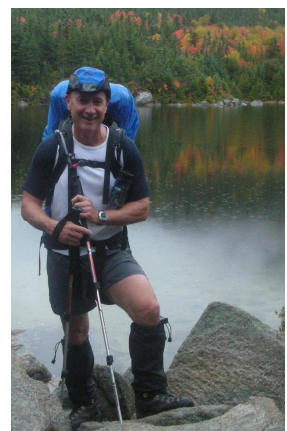
Ken Jones, Co-Leader, lotsoluck@comcast.net, 508-697-0142

Trip Leadership

Lynn is currently a leader for the AMC Major Adventure Travel Chapter. She has been leading day and weekend trips for AMC's Boston Chapter for over ten years. She is Wilderness First Aid and CPR certified and has taken map and compass training and winter hiking training with the AMC. Lynn led an AMC Major Excursion Belize Wonders trip in January 2010 and led an AMC Major Excursion hiking and site seeing trip to Greece and three of the Greek Islands in May 2007. She also led a trip to Utah, hiking trails throughout Zion, Bryce, Canyonlands, Escalante and Arches in September 2010. Lynn has explored many countries, including the Bahamas, Peru, Myanmar, England, Australia, Austria and Hungary.



Ken is currently a co-leader for the AMC Adventure Travel Chapter. He is new to the Adventure Travel team however has been leading four season day and multiday hiking/backpacking trips for the AMC's South Eastern Mass. Chapter for over ten years. He is Wilderness First Aid and CPR certified and has taken map and compass training and winter hiking training with the AMC. Ken annually leads the White Mountain AMC Hut to Hut Traverses and the Mount Katahdin backpack trip. He has also led private trips to Grand Canyon, Yosemite and North Cascades National Parks as well as the Canadian Rockies. He completed the Haute Route in France and Switzerland in 2008.



Airlines and Travel

We are anticipating taking morning flights and arriving in the afternoon. We will return late in the day on the 24th. We will seek the least expensive tickets possible, and these usually have stiff cancellation penalties attached to them. After tickets have been purchased, each participant owns their ticket; thus if you wish to change or cancel the ticket, you must deal directly with the airlines.

Upon arrival, we will be met by our guide for an hour drive to the lodge.

Emergency Evacuation Insurance

In the case of an emergency during our trip, emergency medical transportation and evacuation costs can be exorbitant. Most U.S. medical Policies, HMOs & PPOs provide little or no coverage for these expenses.

The basic policy that is included with your trip fee is through TripMate™ and includes \$100,000 for emergency medical evacuation. It also includes an additional \$5000 for accident and sickness medical expense, which would supplement anyone's personal medical insurance. The \$5000 is not high, but participants should have their own medical insurance.

Experience and Risks

Requirements

a) **Physical Capability**. This trip is suitable for persons of basic to average hiking ability in good physical condition, able to walk over rocky or slippery terrain in changeable conditions. We will be walking every day, however this is a mild activity trip. It is, however, an adventure and we will visit areas that you may never have visited anything like before. Because we have options for a number of activities on the water (canoeing, rafting) you must be able to swim.

b) **Adaptability**. An important criterion for this trip is the ability to be flexible. Weather conditions, delayed planes, automotive breakdowns can change our daily plans. Everyone is expected to be able to "roll with the punches" as much as possible, be cooperative, abide by leader decision, assist leaders as requested and add to the total group experience while enjoying themselves. Foremost, while leaders will try to offer options and solicit participant preferences, the decision of the leaders will always be final as they are ultimately responsible for the safety of the group.

c) **Understanding Purpose of Trip**. This trip is designed for everyone to experience the natural wonders and culture of Panama and to enjoy hiking, and the other activities selected by leaders and group while socializing with other participants. We appreciate that each person comes with their own expectations; however, this is primarily a group trip. Overall, safety will always take priority in the leaders decisions, which is final.

Accommodations and Meals

We will stay at B&B La Estancia for six nights of this trip. La Estancia is a contemporary good quality bed & breakfast accommodating two participants to a room which will include two twin beds, private shower, air conditioning, wireless internet and breakfast. There are superb views of the Bridge of the Americas and we can expect to see monkeys, umpteen birds, sloth and agouti in the surrounding vegetation. There's a laundry room, grand piano and reading room for guests. We are within walking distance to Mi Pueblito, which is a replica of several typical towns through out Panama including typical Panamanian, Antillian and Indian. It includes numerous gift shops, restaurants, courtyards, a pollera museum and a church.



The accommodations in the Emberá Village are rustic, as is the lifestyle of the population. We will be staying overnight in bamboo and wood huts with thatched roofs. We will be provided with foam pads to sleep on. The huts are built so that you must climb a ladder 6 feet high so that unwanted guests are less likely to appear. The food we are served is minimal by American standards, but quite good. Fried talapia and plantains for lunch, and fried chicken and rice for dinner.



The San Blas Archipelago comprises over 365 islands with palm-dotted, white-sand beaches. We will be staying overnight on Isla Kuanidup at Cabañas Kuanidup. The cozy cabañas have a little foyer, sand floors, and foam mattresses. The shared bathrooms contain both showers and toilets. There is no electricity here and at night guests must use kerosene lamps.



All meals are included, except for dinner on the day we are touring the Panama Canal and lunch on our departure day, which can be purchased at the airport.



Tentative Daily Itinerary (subject to change, particularly weather-related)

Lodging: Six nights at B&B LaEstancia, one night at the Emberá Indian Village and one night at Cabañas Kuanidup.

Thursday, February 16 - Arrival to Panama - Upon arrival to Panama the group will be met in the Tulumán International airport by our Panamanian guide and escorted to our accommodations at B&B Estancia. Located on Ancon Hill, close to busy Panama City, but in a secluded and peaceful setting. (D)

Friday, February 17 – Panama Canal and Miraflores Locks - Where the Chagres River meets the Panama Canal we will board an expedition boat and depart on an adventure within Gatun Lake and the Panama Canal passing by gigantic cargo ships transiting the waterway, contrasting with the natural surroundings.



We will visit Panama Canal's Miraflores Locks, then Casco Viejo (UNESCO Heritage Site) where we will see Panama's colonial section, home of the Herrera Plaza, the French Plaza, la Boveda, the Bolivar Plaza, the Cathedral Plaza, the flat arch, the golden altar and other historic sites. This tour also includes the Amador Causeway with its stunning views of the city from across the bay. (B,L)

Saturday, February 18 – Emberá Encounter –

After breakfast, we take a minibus for a ride of 90 minutes to the bank of the Chagres River and then we ride for 1 hour in a dug out canoe to the Chagres National Park, where there are four Emberá villages.

We will be greeted with dancing and music and we'll learn about Emberá customs and their relationship with nature and share meals with a family. Chagres National Park is full of waterfalls, birds, monkeys and other creatures. We spend the night in the village. It is highly recommended to stay overnight in the village, so we are! (B,L,D)



Sunday, February 19 - Emberá Encounter Day 2 –We spend another exciting day in the Chagres National Park with the Emberá Indians experiencing their culture and doing a short hike in the jungle to learn about the medicinal plants and the opportunity to get tattoos! We spend the night back at the B&B. (B,L,D)

Monday, February 20 – San Blas Experience – Today, we need to get up really early to catch a 6am flight to San Blas. In San Blas we can discover the Kuna Indians and their art. The staff, comprised of Kuna Indians, will try to fill our dinner request for fish or lobster by diving for them before meal time. If they come up empty, perhaps crab or something from the frig. We get to stay in a sand floor bamboo hut overnight. (B,L,D)

Tuesday, February 21 – San Blas Experience Day 2 – Another day to play Robinson Crusoe on this tiny island in the Caribbean Sea. Like the Emberá Indians, the Kuna Indians live in their own autonomous Indian territory. The tribes’ traditional culture has not changed much, so we will have the opportunity to visit unspoiled villages and witness their way-of-life. Swimming and snorkeling in crystal clear water, viewing bird life and walking in the tropical jungles is also an option. We head back to the B&B for the night. (B,L,D)



Wednesday, February 22 – Barro Colorado Island and the Smithsonian- Again, we start early in the morning departing Panama City. This time, we travel to Gamboa, where we take a 60 minute bus ride and then board and navigate Gatun Lake to Barro Colorado Island for a 30 minute boat ride. Once there, we visit the Smithsonian office before following the trail through his virgin ecological environment with its unique flora and fauna. This is a highly recommended experience! Back to the B&B for the night. (B,L,D)

Thursday, February 23 – Barro Colorado Island and the Smithsonian Day 2 – Whatever we didn’t see yesterday, we have the opportunity to see today. The visitors program at the Smithsonian offers a visit to the island with hiking on the many trails through the monument of the most accessible tropical forest from Panama City under the guidance of an expert. On the island of Barro Colorado, there are trails designed to promote a respect for ecological interactions and to offer the opportunity to experiment and participate in the forest’s natural history. (B,L,D)

Friday, February 24 - Panama Departure - Today we’ll say “hasta luego” to this enchanting country and return home, where you’ll be eager to share your incredible Panama and the Panama Canal experiences. (B)

Equipment List

You will be required to provide your own daypack, walking shoes and rain gear.

Clothing:

- Lightweight comfortable casual wear
Shirts – both long and short sleeve
Pants – both long and short
- Comfortable closed-toe walking/hiking shoes or boots
- Extra Socks
- Water sport Sandals
- Windbreaker or light jacket or sweater
- Hat (wide-brimmed)
- Swimwear
- One set of “nice” clothes for evenings (optional). Ladies can add a large shawl, for over the shoulders in the evening, and also a sarong over a swimsuit; a dress and/or skirt, depending on how much room is left in the suitcase.

Gear:

- Camera with lots of film and extra batteries or Digital Camera
- Backpack
- Water bottle
- Dry sack to hold personal items
- Sunscreen (SPF 35 & waterproof)
- Insect Repellent
- Sun glasses
- Binoculars for birding

Personal:

- Personal medications (Any prescription medications for you and your kids – enough supplies to last for the duration of your stay)
- Contact lens supplies (you might be better off with glasses but if you prefer contact lenses be sure to bring sufficient cleaning supplies)
- Toiletries: toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo, and enough razors.

Good to Have:

- Garbage bags – for wet and dirty clothes
- Good Book
- Maps, Guidebooks
- Alarm clock

NOTE: Avoid bringing perfumes, heavily scented toiletries (they attract mosquitoes). All expensive jewelry and watches should be left at home.