Panama - Adventures at Coastal and Mountain Eco Lodges

February 2 - 14, 2024
Trip #2404

Casa Cayuco Eco Adventure Lodge, Isla Bastimentos Bocas Del Toro
Trip Overview

Come join us in exploring the wonders of Panama! Panama, the isthmus between the Americas, melds together an awe-inspiring collection of both natural and cultural treasures. Our trip to this fascinating country encompasses the sites of Panama City, exploration of Caribbean coastal water areas, and hiking in an extraordinarily biodiverse rainforest.

Panama’s biodiversity is staggering: the country is home to 220 mammal species, 226 species of reptile, 164 amphibian species and 125 animal species found nowhere else in the world. Panama also boasts 978 avian species, which is the largest number in Central America.

Our adventure begins with a visit to Panama City and the famed Panama Canal. The Panama Canal, a famous feat of human engineering, stretches 48 miles long, linking the Atlantic and Pacific oceans and serving as an essential shipping route. During our stay in Panama City, we’ll also tour the historic Casco Viejo district (literally meaning old quarter) which is an UNESCO World Heritage Site. This charismatic neighborhood is known for its unique architectural styles including Spanish colonial, neoclassical, art deco, and Caribbean. We’ll have the opportunity to try out the flavor of local restaurants, shop for Panama hats, and take in the sites of this vibrant city.

Our next stop on our adventure will be to remote Isla Bastimentos located in the Caribbean coastal area of Bocas del Toro. Here we’ll be immersed in the essence of the Panamanian Caribbean. This tropical destination provides us opportunities for snorkeling coral reefs, meeting indigenous villagers, and observing the astonishing biodiversity. A visit to a local chocolate farm and some short, local hikes have also been scheduled. We will have the establishment to ourselves as we have reserved the entire resort. Many of the cabins are nestled in the jungle or perched close to the edge of the water. They are all designed in an open-air style to give you the sense of being outdoors.

Following our Caribbean stay, our voyage continues to the Mount Totumas Cloud Forest eco-resort located in the province of Chiriquí, 12 miles outside of Volcán. This majestic preserve has a network of well-marked trails teeming with flora and fauna like monkeys, jungle cats, wild orchids, and birds ranging from quetzals and red-headed barbets to black guans and blue-crowned motmots. The knowledgeable owners have dedicated their lives to preserving this fragile habitat and La Amistad National Park, which it borders. Here again, we have the entire place to ourselves for our stay. After visiting Mount Totumas eco-resort, we return to Panama City for a special dinner and stay until our flights the next day.
Trip Difficulty

This trip is rated Easy to Moderate (#3 -#4).

Easy: Reasonable fitness for the expected activity is needed, but the trip is designed for those new to the activity. Expect to be active up to 4 hours/day. A bit more active time than the relaxed rating, but with generous breaks.

Moderate: Fitness level and/or past experience to sustain the activity at a moderate pace is required. Expect to be active up to 4-6 hours per day with reasonable breaks for photos, lunch/snacks, etc.

AMC Trip Rating System: [Ratings](#)

Daily Itinerary

**Feb. 2, 2024 - Friday** - Fly from US to Panama City. After arrival at Panama-Tocumen International Airport (PTY), we recommend taking a taxi to our Panama City hotel and get settled in. Tonight, we’ll get together as a group for dinner at a local restaurant known for their Panamanian dishes. During dinner we’ll discuss our trip itinerary and return to our hotel to rest up for tomorrow’s introduction to Panama City.
Feb. 3 - Saturday – Today we’ll tour the famed Panama Canal as well as explore the historic Casco Viejo area of Panama City. Tonight, we’ll experience Latin American cuisine at another local restaurant while taking in the fabulous rooftop views of this very vivacious city.

Feb. 4 - Sunday – This morning we fly to Bocas del Toro where staff from eco-resort Casa Cayuco whisk us away to Isla Bastimentos to embark on the Caribbean segment of our Panamanian adventure. Our Casa Cayuco staff have specially arranged daily excursion choices for us. During our stay here, our Casa Cayuco hosts will provide us a nice variety of locally sourced Panamanian fish and vegetarian dishes for mealtimes. Dinner will be at Casa Cayuco.

Feb. 5 - Monday – Feb. 8 - Thursday
We will spend four full days at this resort and participate in the following activities:

● We’ll experience getting to know the people and customs of Salt Creek, which is our neighboring indigenous village. We’ll have the opportunity to mix and meet with local villagers and learn much more about their fascinating culture and traditions. This is a very special place and a wonderful opportunity to partake in our AMC’s mission to foster the protection, enjoyment, and understanding of the outdoors. During our visit to Salt Creek, we’ll also participate in a short-guided tour and boat transfer through Salt Creek’s mangrove channel.

● We’ll venture out to snorkel the reefs of beautiful Isla Zapatillas. This location is known for its pristine sandy beaches, clear turquoise water, and the abundant presence of tropical fish within the National Marine Park.

● We’ll visit a chocolate farm where we will hike through botanical gardens while finding out how organic chocolate is made in a sustainable manner.

● Individually or in small groups we will enjoy kayaking, stand up paddle boarding, and snorkeling, all from the beach at the resort, or just spend time relaxing on the beach.
We will have two guided walks during our visit. One starts at the resort and hikes through the jungle where we may encounter poison dart frogs, sloths, monkeys and various species of birds. The other walk starts at Salt Creek and takes us on a hike filled with information about flora and fauna. Many jungle animals and birds as well as caimans may be seen along the hike.

In addition to these planned activities, the resort offers other excursions such as a bat cave tour, mangrove snorkeling, surfing, fishing, and massages all of which may be scheduled and paid for outside of the trip.

**Feb. 9 - Friday** – We depart Casa Cayuco via water taxi and travel by chartered vans on a scenic route to our next destination, Mount Totumas Cloud Forest (the highest eco-lodge in Panama at 6,300 ft). We’ll be in for a treat as the cuisine here is predominantly created from their gardens and local produce vendors.

**Feb. 10 - Saturday - Feb 12 - Monday** – We will have three days of hiking and exploring at this eco lodge with the use of guides where appropriate. We will consult with the guides to determine the best hike for each day based on current conditions. For instance, the guide may suggest a trail if they are aware of a nest site of a Resplendent Quetzal or a Lek of Wattled Bellbirds. Observing spider monkeys feeding on a fruiting fig tree is also a possibility. Examples of the hikes include:

- **La Amistad Trail (2.6 miles)** known for great opportunities to spot howler and spider monkeys.
- **Roble Trail** which is a short 1.4-mile loop trail of moderate difficulty known as an excellent spot for birding. Here we hope to catch a glimpse of the Resplendent Quetzals, Black Guans, and other exotic species.
- **The Puma Trail**, which is the easier option (1.8 miles), is a prime habitat and viewing spot for forest birds and monkeys.
- Those wishing to have a more difficult hike, can elect to do the **Mount Totumas Peak Trail in La Armistad National Park**. This is a challenging trail, with 2,000 feet elevation change, with an accompanying guide. This trail rewards participants with a hike through a magical pristine oak bamboo forest and views from the 8,628 ft. peak of Mount Totumas.
- A less arduous hike in **La Armistad National Park** includes a visit to an old Homestead that has old growth trees and a cornucopia of epiphytes.

**Feb. 13 - Tuesday** – This morning we’ll travel to David (the capital of Chiriquí Province in western Panama) to catch our flight back to Panama City. Back in Panama City, we’ll celebrate our final dinner together at a special restaurant and enjoy an evening stay again at the Global Hotel Panama.

**Feb. 14 - Wednesday** – Today we say goodbye to this remarkable country and catch our flights home. While we will be leaving Panama, we will leave with the treasure of exceptional memories of our adventure.
Accommodations, Meals and Transportation

Accommodations will be 2-4 persons/room; subject to confirmation. Leaders will assign roommates for single applicants.

Planned Lodging includes:
- Global Panama Hotel or similar (Panama City) [http://www.globalpanamahotel.com/](http://www.globalpanamahotel.com/)
- Casa Cayuco Eco-Resort [https://casacayuco.com/](https://casacayuco.com/)
- Mount Totumas Cloud Forest Eco-Resort [https://www.mounttotumas.com/](https://www.mounttotumas.com/)

Note that the meals at Casa Cayuco are primarily plant based with a different fish dish each night based on the local catch. Both Eco-Resorts are able to accommodate vegetarian or vegan diets.

Weather

There are two basic climatic zones in Panama. The first of them is flatland with a humid, typical climate and the second is highland “eternal spring.” The plain
regions have average daytime temperatures in the range between 77-86 °F, while in the highlands it is lower, about 50-81 °F. In terms of weather conditions, the year is divided into two seasons which are rainy and dry. Panama’s dry season lasts from mid-December through mid-April.

Trip Price

The AMC Member trip price is $3,700. The non-member price is $3,800. To join the AMC (2022 pricing $50 individual, $75 family) click here. A deposit of $1,500 is due with the application. Your balance payment is due July 15, 2023.

Price includes:
- Panama City Hotel (double occupancy) 2/2, 2/3, and 2/13
- All group meals (Breakfast and Dinner) starting dinner 2/2 through breakfast 2/14
- 7 Lunches at Eco Lodges
- Panama Canal/ Panama City tour
- Group internal flight from Albrook Panama City Airport (PAC) to Bocas del Toro (BOC)
- Group water transport to/from our accommodations at Isla Bastimentos
- Accommodations (2-4 per room) at Casa Cayuco Eco-Lodge 2/4-2/9
- AMC group scheduled events at Casa Cayuco
- Use of kayaks, paddle boards, and snorkel gear at Casa Cayuco
- Land transport from Isla Bastimentos to Mount Totumas Cloud Forest Eco-Lodge
- Accommodations (2-4 per room) at Mount Totumas Cloud Forest Eco-Lodge 2/9-2/13
- Group hikes at Mount Totumas Eco-Lodge
- Group transport from Mount Totumas Eco-Lodge to Enrique Malek Airport (DAV) in David
- Group internal flight from Enrique Malek Airport (DAV) to Panama City (PAC)
Price does not include:

- Arrival and Departure flights to/from the country of Panama
- Airport transfer (taxi) to/from Panama City hotel
- Any snacks or meals on-own
- 4 lunches (1 in Panama City, 3 on travel days)
- Optional activity offerings such as Bat Cave Tour, Mangrove snorkeling or other optional activities at Casa Cayuco mentioned above.
- Alcoholic drinks

The trip leaders will advise you as much as you need and will facilitate group travel. At this time, we estimate that the cost for a round trip ticket between the East Coast and Panama City will be in the vicinity of $800 - 1,000.

The final trip cost will be adjusted in accordance with the best final arrangements we can make and currency fluctuations. Any savings we achieve, as well as any cost increases, will be passed back to you. Our cost estimates are conservative, and so a refund is considerably more likely than a price increase. AMC Adventure Travel trips are run on a non-profit basis. Leaders are volunteers who are not compensated except for their travel costs associated with the trip. The advertised trip cost includes a surcharge, which goes toward the administrative expenses of the AMC Adventure Travel program. The trip fee includes emergency medical and evacuation insurance coverage, which is required by the AMC. It does not include insurance for travel delay, interruption, or cancellation, or for baggage loss. If the possibility of such problems concerns you, individual travel insurance is suggested. More information about included emergency medical and evacuation insurance, as well as about optional and
recommended travel insurance, will be provided to participants in their formal acceptance letters (or by request prior to application), which will be sent out when the trip has the required number of accepted applicants.

Participant Expectations

When you participate in this activity, you should be in proper condition for the challenges outlined in this prospectus and equipped with the appropriate gear as stated. You should always be aware of the risks involved and conduct yourself accordingly. You are ultimately responsible for your own safety. Prior to your acceptance as a participant in this trip, you will be asked to discuss your capabilities and experience with us. We may also request references to confirm your fitness level and suitability for participating in trip activities. This trip is designed so that everyone may experience our adventure in Panama through shared participation in activities and tasks in an organized group environment. AMC travelers are known for their cooperative efforts, and expectations are that all participants will be considerate of others sharing this AMC Adventure Travel experience. It may happen on any trip that a trip member is or becomes unable to participate in one or more of the planned activities. The Leader(s) in their sole judgment have the right and obligation to refuse participation in any activity to any group member for reasons of safety, whether it be of the group or of the individual. Illness, injury or lack of proper gear or fitness for a particular activity are examples of some conditions that might result in a participant being unable to perform one or more activities. The leader may try to find a substitute activity for the trip member, but this may not always be possible.

Application Process

We expect a group size of 18 to 20 travelers, including your AMC Adventure Travel leaders. This trip is likely to fill quickly. If you are interested, you should apply as soon as possible.

1. Complete the online trip application materials (Application Link)

2. Mail your $1,500 deposit check, made out to the Appalachian Mountain Club to: Larry Yetter, 277 E Dunstable Road, Nashua, NH 03062.

You will not be accepted until you have completed the steps above, and the leaders have determined by telephone conversation with you that you and the trip are a good match. Your check will not be deposited until the trip leaders confirm the trip has a sufficient number of participants. Deposit checks from wait-listed applicants will not be cashed until we offer them a spot on the trip and they accept.
Cancellation Policy

Our cancellation policy is based on several considerations.

● First, a cancellation shall not raise the cost to the other participants or to the leaders
● Second, we will charge a canceling participant for the expenses already incurred on his/her behalf and any unavoidable future expenses that will be incurred as a result of his/her registration, unless they can be applied toward another acceptable participant
● Cancellation Penalty
  1. $0 penalty if canceled (in writing) before the earliest of May 1, 2023 or the trip is declared to run, less any funds that fall into the category of the second bullet above
  2. $250 penalty if canceled (in writing) after May 1, 2023 plus any funds that fall into the category of the second bullet above.

Terms, Conditions and General Information

Please carefully read the Adventure Travel Standard Terms and Conditions. The standard terms and conditions include:
● Cancellation Policy
● Leaders’ Right to Change Itinerary
● Leaders’ Expectations of Participants
● Trip Price
● Travel Documents
● Safety
● AMC Activity Rating System
Trip Leadership

Larry Yetter

Larry is an active AMC leader with Adventure Travel and NH Excursions (Hiking) Committee. He leads hikes in New England throughout all four seasons and is the Director of the AMC NH Winter Hiking Series. He has lived in four countries outside the US and visited over 40 others located on all seven continents. He has co-led an Adventure travel trip to Switzerland and Southwest US and led trips to Canadian Rockies, Azores and the Smoky Mountains. Contact Larry at (713) 724-2856 or yetter95@gmail.com.

John English

John English is a four-season day hike and trip leader for the AMC NH Chapter. He has co-led Adventure Travel trips to Austria, Italy, and domestically. John has led at AMC August Camp and has taught at the AMC NH Cardigan Lodge series. He has been hiking in over 50 of the US National Parks and Monuments. John has traveled to over 20 foreign countries, hiked the Machu Picchu trek in Peru, and has hiked in the Alpine areas of Austria, France, Germany, Italy, and Switzerland. Contact: englishire@gmail.com, (508) 944-6650.

What to Bring

A reading list and packing list will be provided to all participants at a later date.

Photo credits

All photos except leader photos are from Casa Cayuco or Mount Totumas websites used with permission of owners.