

# Panama's Incredible Flora

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

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### Outline itinerary

<b>Day 1</b>	In flight, transfer to Canopy Tower
<b>Day 2</b>	Pipeline Road and Semaphore Hill
<b>Day 3</b>	Cerro Jefe and Cerro Azul
<b>Day 4</b>	Transfer to Canopy Lodge/Valle Chiquito
<b>Day 5</b>	Altos del Maria
<b>Day 6</b>	Cerro Gaitial and Canopy Adventure Trails
<b>Day 7</b>	Las Minas/La Mesa
<b>Day 8</b>	Canopy Lodge, transfer to airport
<b>Day 9</b>	Arrive London

### Departs

September/October

### Focus

Plants and Flowers, with birds, butterflies, mammals and reptiles studied.

### Grading

A. A traditional lodge-based tour with no strenuous walking involved.

### Dates & Prices

See website (tour code PAN08)

### Highlights

- Botanise world famous Pipeline Road
- Visit orchid garden in Cerro Azul
- Bird and botanise foothill tropical forests
- Led by Canopy Family expert botanical guides



Images (from top to bottom)  
Heliconia irrasa (Jerry & Linda Harrison), Panama rainforest,  
Canopy Tower



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: [info@naturetrek.co.uk](mailto:info@naturetrek.co.uk)

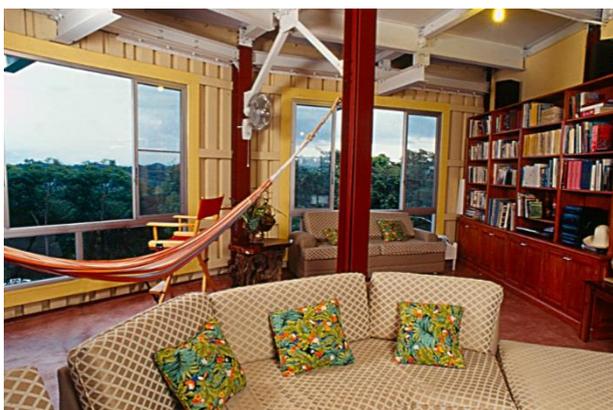
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**NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.**

## Introduction

Panama forms the narrowest part of the Meso-American Isthmus, which is not only of huge historical importance linking the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans by rail and canal, but also of considerable biogeographical importance as the land bridge between North and South America. Panama offers some superb habitat for the wildflower enthusiast, harbouring around 10,000 species in only 80,000 square kilometers (slightly larger than Ireland). It also contains large tracts of tropical rainforest, from the foothills of the Cerro Gaital in the west to the Soberanía National Park in the central lowlands which extends right down to the suburbs of Panama City and the famous Panama Canal. On this two-centred holiday we will be based for three nights at the world famous Canopy Tower followed by four nights at the Canopy Lodge in the foothills of the central Panama, in the hands of expert botanical guides.



Canopy Tower lounge area

The Canopy Tower, originally a US Air Force radar station, was converted into a birdwatcher's paradise in 1999 by a Panamanian birdwatcher and entrepreneur. Here, with bedrooms at treetop level, there could be no better place to wake to the sounds of Panama's great rainforest.

We will then head west to the central foothills to the Canopy Lodge in El Valle, nestled within the crater of an extinct volcano that erupted five million years ago! The charming lodge is situated next to a mountain stream and contiguous to the Cerro Gaital Natural Monument. The resultant

scenery is quite unique - a steep valley surrounded by jagged peaks and filled with flowers, streams and verdant forests.

On this 7-night botanical tour, we take field trips to the biodiverse Pipeline Road and to the foothills of Cerro Jefe (home to many endemics and where your co-leaders have discovered/published 8 new plant species), Cerro Gaital Natural Monument, the heights of Altos del Maria and other locations of botanical interest, where you will enjoy (and learn!) a good sampling of this country's spectacular and unique flora, some 10,000 species strong! You will not only be able to enjoy excellent opportunities to photograph stunningly beautiful—and some, extremely rare or endemic—orchids, gesners, ericads, melastomes, heliconias, gingers, begonias, bromeliads



The Canopy Lodge

and many more fascinating groups of plants, but also see a host of Panama's colourful birds, including parrots, trogons, motmots, tanagers & hummingbirds along with the mammals and insects (especially butterflies!) associated with these unique plants—all within a framework of learning some of their complex ecological relationships. This extraordinary "field botany adventure," will be replete with on-the-spot mini-lectures on the unique morphological features of many of the plants encountered -- all explained in simple terms for the beginner or for the more advanced. Visiting in late September early October, during the rainy season, we hope to take advantage of the profusion of flowers.

## Day 1

### Arrival and transfer to Canopy Tower

We depart this morning on a scheduled flight from London (usually Heathrow via Amsterdam or Madrid) to Panama City. On arrival this evening, we will be met by our driver and drive just one hour to the Canopy Tower, which will be our home for the next 3 nights. After a delicious dinner - the first of many! (although if we arrive after 8pm a light meal/snack will be served), we will have an introductory talk, before we settle into our segment-shaped rooms for a good night's sleep before the excitement of our first dawn in the canopy.



The observation deck of Canopy Tower

## Day 2

### Pipeline Road and Semaphore Hill

On the first morning of our botanical tour, we are off to the world famous Pipeline Road, an area of acute interest to botanists and other researchers for its diversity and ease of access. After quick stops by the Ammo Ponds and its brushy borders, we explore the forest edges along the level Pipeline Road. Here, you will get your first taste of a mature tropical rainforest, and our pace will be slow, with all eyes out for unusual wildflowers, shrubs and trees, as well as butterflies and birds. We will return to the Tower for lunch.



*Columnea dissimilis* by Jerry and Linda Harrison

After a respite, we take a leisurely walk down Semaphore Hill, passing through good forest, where a myriad of plants, especially palms, create a tapestry of colour and layers of green -- but always with a watchful eye out for avian and insect visitors which feed on and call these plants "home." Dinner at the Tower.

## Day 3

### Cerro Jefe and Cerro Azul

The cloud forests associated with Cerro Jefe have been a mecca for botanists since the 1960s because it is renowned as being an area of high endemism. Of the approximately 10,000 plant species recorded for Panama, 1,300 are endemic. Roughly 230 of these are found on Cerro Jefe --and more than 70 found ONLY on Cerro Jefe! Although the flora here is generally well-known, there may be surprises yet to be discovered. Here, the orchid, gesner, bromeliad & aroid diversity is astounding! One of the highlights of today's botanical tour will be lunch at the Harrison house, where 12 hummingbird feeders and 3 tray feeders will be swarming with hummingbirds, tanagers, euphonias, woodpeckers, motmots and, possibly, a small troop of Geoffroy's Tamarins, Panama's smallest monkey. During our lunch stop, we will also explore the bromeliad and orchid garden at the Harrison house. Dinner at the Tower.



*Sobralia citrea* by Jerry and Linda Harrison

## Day 4

### Transfer to Canopy Lodge/Valle Chiquito

After a good breakfast at the Canopy Tower our botanical tour continues with a drive of two hours farther west to El Valle de Anton in Coclé Province, home to the Canopy Lodge where we will spend the next 4 nights. We arrive in time to get settled in before lunch. You will immediately notice a cooler breeze, as the Lodge sits at 2,100 ft. This afternoon we visit APROVACA, the local "Orchid House" on the edge of El Valle, where hundreds of species of orchids are on display, many in bloom. The research at APROVACA promotes education & propagation of rare species toward an eventual re-introduction. Immediately afterwards, we continue a short distance to an interesting area 20 minutes south of El Valle, called Valle Chiquito. Here, we hope to see species flowering that are difficult to find in other parts of central Panama. Dinner at the Lodge..

## Day 5

### Full day Altos del Maria



*Chrysothemis pulchella* by Jerry and Linda Harrison

At Altos del Maria (altitude above 1,000M), we pass sweeping vistas where on clear days one can see both coasts. Today's botanical tour highlight is exploring along a completely paved nature trail through primary forest next to a meandering creek. The forest is ablaze with color, with bromeliads and orchids festooning the trees and bizarre herbs and shrubs along the creek. This area has only recently been accessed, so anything is possible here, from ground-cuckoos to new plant species! This nature trail is quite level and our pace, as always, will be slow. We will enjoy a picnic lunch along

the banks of a picturesque lake; after more stops for interesting plants, especially orchids, we head back to the Lodge. If time allows and anyone is interested we can make a stop at the El Valle artisan market. Dinner at Lodge.

## Day 6

### Cerro Gaital and Canopy Adventure Trails

This morning our goal is to visit the highly biodiverse Cerro Gaital area, whose flora is rich in orchids, aroids, gesners, begonias and melastomes as well as other fascinating and stunning plants. Along the way we will make stops to scout for terrestrial and epiphytic orchids. Lunch at the Lodge. After lunch we will check the Lodge gardens then walk our way to the Canopy Adventure trails, where still more floral surprises await. A highlight is viewing "El Macho," the famous waterfalls associated with the Canopy Adventure zip-line tours. Dinner at the Lodge.



*Epidendrum adsettii* by Gerry and Linda Harrison

## Day 7

### Las Minas/La Mesa

We will make our way to Las Minas after breakfast, where we will walk up the dirt road a short distance and find a different suite of plants that we don't see at other areas. After lunch at the Canopy Lodge, we will botanise the roadsides in the La Mesa area. These roadsides are home to several species that will be new for the trip and is also excellent for butterflies and mixed bird flocks! Farewell Dinner at the Lodge.

## Day 8

### Canopy Lodge and transfer to airport

After a final morning's botanising and lunch at the Lodge we depart for our transfer to Panama City's International Airport for our evening homeward-bound flight back to Europe.

## Day 9

### London

We will arrive back at London Heathrow in the afternoon.

## Grading

Grade A. This is a traditional lodge-based tour with no really strenuous walking involved, although it does involve a few early starts and plenty of time spent on foot! Suitable for active people of all ages; Some of the trails are steep and can be slippery, but these are optional.

## Group size & guide

This tour will be limited to 10 participants and will be led by the two Canopy Lodge/Tower's botanical guides, Linda and Jerry Harrison.

## Transportation

The Canopy Lodge is two hours and the Canopy Tower less than one hour's drive from Panama's international airport accessed by paved road. For our excursions we will use four-wheel drive vehicles, again the drives to our trails are short, but our vehicles will help us gain access to more remote locations.

## Food & accommodation included in the price

This tour price is inclusive of all food and accommodation. The Canopy Tower and Lodge's kitchens offer delicious and wholesome set meals and can cater for all individual dietary requirements with prior notice. Breakfast and lunch are accompanied by fresh tropical fruit juices and wine at dinner. For our full-day excursions we will take packed lunches to eat in the field.

The Canopy Tower is a unique structure and unlike any other lodge in the world. The Tower has five double and one comfortable larger suite with en-suite facilities on the third floor. Each room is a strange segment shape and has its own forest view. There is a further double en-suite larger room on the second floor along with 5 small single rooms, which share bathroom facilities. These single rooms will not incur a single-room supplement, but the use of a double room as a single will indeed incur the advertised single-room supplement. There will only be limited scope for using the larger rooms as singles and will ultimately depend on availability. The walls between the rooms are not the thickest, and it is possible to hear some goings-on around the tower. Generally people find this aspect of the tower insignificant in terms of their overall stay, but it is something to be aware of. On the fourth floor one finds the restaurant and lounge areas, equipped with a good library, hammocks and comfortable seating. There is also a computer with internet available free of charge and WIFI signal in case you bring your laptop. The fifth floor is the observation deck, with the old radar dome still taking pride of place. The observation deck has plenty of seats and an all-important telescope.

At the Canopy Lodge single participants will be accommodated in one of four large single rooms in a block adjacent to the main lodge, each with a large wall of windows overlooking the gardens and the stream (Rio Guayabo), private bathroom, ceiling fan, desk and chair, reading lamp, towel warmer and storage space. For single participants who prefer to be in the main building you could share a twin en-suite room with one of the other single members of the party or have a twin room for yourself, paying the single supplement of £300.

The main building has eight double rooms, each with a balcony overlooking the gardens and stream. Six of these rooms have two full-size beds and the two corner rooms have one king-size bed. The rooms are quite ample and have lots of storage space, an overhead fan, a desk, reading lamps behind the bed and a towel warmer in the bathroom.

## Extra expenses

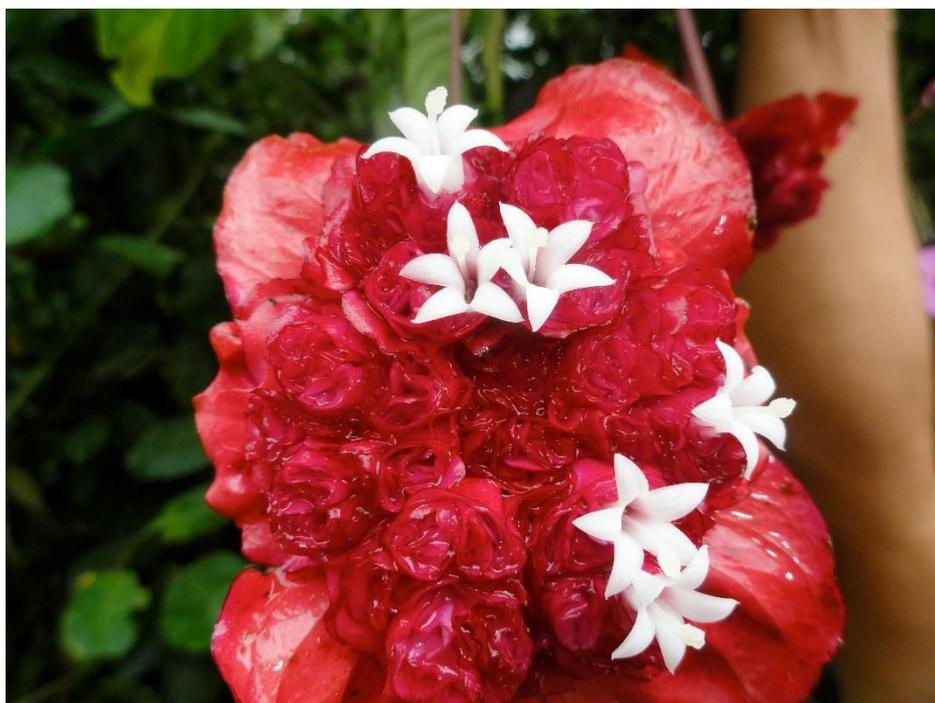
Drinks, tips, laundry, and all items of a personal nature are not included in the cost of the holiday. During your time at Canopy Tower and Lodge you will be very well cared for by guides. It would be wise to allow around US \$75 per person for tips to your local guides and \$45 per person to the staff of the Canopy Lodge and Tower. A \$10 tip for the driver who will be with you for the week would also be gratefully received. Tipping is optional (dependant on good service!), however, due to its close relation to the United States the American habit of tipping is well entrenched and Panamanian guides as well as the staff in hotels and restaurants do generally expect a tip.

## How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk), or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

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*Psychotria correae* by Jerry and Linda Harrison