



## Belize & Tikal Trip Report (Feb 21 - Mar 3, 2026)

[Link: Belize & Tikal Trip Report \(Feb 21 - Mar 3, 2026\)](#)

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In February 2026, our group escaped the winter storms battering North America with snow and ice, embarking on a very different course - to explore the wilds of Belize and Tikal. 10 days, 252 species - and three local guides, all named Mike! - later, we have a fine story to tell...



*Our group*

First stop was at Jade Jungle, a delightful end-of-the-road lodge nestled in the forest. Discerning birders look for accommodations with sustainable practices, and this place ticked so many boxes! Fresh produce? Grown in their hydroponics garden. Hot water? Generated by burning the seeds of the Cohune tree, gathered from the forest floor. Accommodations? Luxurious. Food: sumptuous, three course meals...



*Hydroponics garden, Jade Jungle hotel © Gareth Thomson*

Local guide Mike was amazing. Trogons are a spectacular tropical bird, and he showed us three species - Slaty-tailed, Black-headed, and Gartered - that seemingly fluttered around our heads all day long. In other fabulously-coloured news, we were able to see both White-collared and Red-capped Manakins within a hundred meters of the lodge, the males gathering in groups called leks, showing off their finery to the seemingly unimpressed females...



*Gartered Trogon* © Oscar Zuñiga



*White-collared Manakin* © Tony Nastase



*Red-capped Manakin © Tony Nastase*

Then it was time to head to Guatemala from Belize. Every step of our complex transfer as we crossed the border was masterminded by our driver, Neil, an affable Belize national who held us rapt in the van, telling us a 150 kilometer-long story about the troubled history of Belize (population 400,000) and its giant neighbor Guatemala (population 19,000,000). Neil combined superb storytelling with a passion for efficiency, and got us across the border and into and out of restaurants in record time, a master in the art of pre-ordering our meals to avoid lengthy restaurant waits, and shaving the edges off our travel time with a dozen other masterful strategies...



*lunch over looking Lago Petén Itzá © Gareth Thomson.png*

Tikal was a celebration of both natural and human history. First, the birds. We viewed blizzards of passerines (perching birds) in the Guatemalan jungle. These were mixed flocks, with a twist: these flocks were a mix of different species AND nationalities, with the well-travelled migrants (from both North AND South America) rubbing shoulders with the native species. We appreciated seeing old friends such as Hooded Warbler and American Redstart, and reveled in getting acquainted with new ones as we learned their unfamiliar calls, appearance, and names. And what names they had! Listen (and if you're currently alone - what the heck! say these names out loud): Fawn-throated Foliage Gleaner. White-whiskered Puffbird. Stub-Tailed Spadebill. Tawny-winged Woodcreeper...



*Tawny-winged Woodcreeper, a Central American resident © Tony Nastase*



*Hooded Warbler, a migrant from eastern North America © Tony Nastase*

We were privileged to have as our guide the legendary Miguel Antonio (henceforth Mike #2; the Spanish name for Mike is Miguel), a sprightly and dynamic 67-year-old, and a direct descendent of the ancient Maya who began building Tikal thousands of years ago. He led us to an imposing set of wooden stairs leading to the top of one pyramid, the 140 steps definitely steeper than any building code. Our plucky guests looked at the thing doubtfully (one guest nicknaming it the 'Rickety Staircase of Death') and then of course we all went up, to catch the splendid views of the ancient Acropolis, and scan for warblers in the treetops below us. It was a very warm afternoon, this archaeological site is vast, and as the hours went by - our brains began to bake. Mike #2 was undeterred, and told us everything he knew about these buildings and their builders; and in the feverish heat we began to feel as if we were walking through an agreeable miasma of very, very deep time. In the heat haze it seemed to us that Mayan elite with flattened foreheads walked among us, accompanying us through layers upon layers of sunbaked, limestoned history. In the distance, we could sense Mayan warriors waging solemn centuries of warfare with the neighboring city states of Caracol and Chichen Itza. Ingenious human history mixed with raw savagery, as we contemplated massive water cisterns fed by ingenious rainwater collection systems being constructed beneath the feet of the priests, as they made their grisly human sacrifices. And in sacred rooms at the top of the pyramids, Mayan kings pierced their skin with stingray spines, adding their blood to fuel to make incense, making offerings to their implacable gods as the smoke curled upwards to forever darken the temple rock...



*Tikal Temples © Gareth Thomson*

We finally found our way to a refreshment stall at the base of Temple #4, and the guides purchased an abundant supply of ice cold and intensely sugary soft drinks for the group. Refreshed and invigorated, we generated the energy to manifest a real life figure: the rare Orange-breasted Falcon, who dashed above us at falcon speed, calling loudly and welcoming us back to the real world, a world in which falcons nest on ancient temples. After another entertaining and highly efficient drive with Neil, we were back in English-speaking Belize, at the fabulous Birds Eye View Lodge at the Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary. The friendly staff welcomed us, although they were understandably bemused when one of our guides, failing to effectively toggle between the official languages of these two countries, addressed them at length in Spanish... Experienced birders throughout the world all agree: nothing beats an early morning boat trip to see birds. Early on our first morning, in the company of the hugely talented Mike #3, we set out on the lagoon...



*Nothing beats an early morning boat trip to see birds. © Gareth Thomson*

It was magic! At all times we had many dozens of large-bodied birds all around us, living testimony to the biological productivity of this place that could sustain so many animals. So, huge abundance - and huge diversity as well, as we exclaimed over 62 species seen in just three hours! Birders fantasize about viewing rare and seldom seen birds, and this morning these were everywhere: The rare and truly massive Jabiru stork! The fabulously colored and fabulously secretive Agami Heron! The cryptic Sun Grebe! Boat-billed Heron! Four species of kingfisher - including the tiny Pygmy Kingfisher, a scintillating gem of a bird no bigger than a house sparrow!



*Jabiru © Tony Nastase*



*Boat-billed Heron © Paul Schorn*



*Snail Kite, carrying its favorite food to a luncheon spot © Tony Nastase*

This is the stuff that birders dream of - and for us, our trip to Belize and Guatemala is one that we will dream of repeating again someday... [Belize & Tikal eBird list \(Feb 21 - Mar 3, 2026\)](#)