



Belize & Tikal Trip Report (Jan 19 - 29, 2026)

[Link: Belize & Tikal Trip Report \(Jan 19 - 29, 2026\)](#)

DAY 1 - Belize City

Our group gathered in the evening for introductions, and welcome dinner.

DAY 2 - Belize City to Jade Jungle Lodge

We began the day early, birding near the hotel before breakfast. Even short morning sessions in a urban area in Belize can be highly productive. Our early list included birds like Limpkin, White-fronted Amazon, Morelet's Seedeater, Common Yellowthroat, Yellow-throated Warbler, and Golden-fronted Woodpecker. We enjoyed excellent views of Cinnamon Hummingbird, a species mostly restricted to coastal and lowland habitats in Belize. Another highlight was observing four species of orioles—Hooded, Baltimore, Orchard, and Black-cowled Oriole—an impressive diversity in a single morning. Waterbirds were also active, including Great Blue Heron, Northern Jacana, Roseate Spoonbill, and Osprey. After breakfast, we packed our bags and met our drivers and local guides, Mike and Israel, whose deep knowledge of Belizean culture and history greatly enriched the experience. Our first stop was Baron Bliss Lighthouse, a coastal site overlooking the Caribbean Sea. Here we recorded Royal Tern, Sandwich (Cabot's) Tern, Laughing Gull, Ruddy Turnstone, Sanderling, Willet, Magnificent Frigatebird, Double-crested Cormorant, and Brown Pelican, among others. We then continued to Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, a nonprofit organization dedicated to conservation, environmental education, and the protection of Belize's biodiversity. Almost immediately upon arrival, we encountered an army ant swarm crossing the gravel road, allowing close views of ant-following species such as Red-throated Ant-Tanager and Tawny-winged Woodcreeper. Additional highlights included Brown-crested Flycatcher, Red-capped Manakin, Hooded Warbler, and Magnolia Warbler. We paused for lunch at a local restaurant, enjoying delicious food, cold drinks, and reggae music, while watching the brilliantly colored Vermilion Flycatchers. In mid-afternoon, we returned to Monkey Bay, where we observed a Rufous-tailed

Jacamar hunting dragonflies along the roadside. A flowering Combretum vine attracted a flurry of activity, drawing in Red-legged Honeycreeper, Tennessee Warbler, Northern Parula, and Rufous-tailed Hummingbird. Other notable species included Yellow-bellied Tyrannulet, Greenish Elaenia, and heard only Rufous-breasted Spinetail. On our drive back to the lodge, we enjoyed two memorable raptor encounters: a Crane Hawk actively foraging in a roadside coconut palm and a Laughing Falcon perched elegantly atop a dead tree. We ended the day at the beautiful Jade Jungle Lodge, illuminated by soft lamplight and capped off with a delicious dinner.

DAY 3 - Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve

We gathered before breakfast in the parking area of Jade Jungle Lodge to experience a stunning dawn chorus, highlighted by Bright-rumped Attila and Barred Forest-Falcon. As daylight emerged, several hummingbirds fed on the native flowering Firebush plants near the reception area, including Long-billed Hermit, White-necked Jacobin, and White-bellied Emerald. After an early breakfast, we traveled to the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve, one of the most geologically significant regions in Central America. The reserve is characterized by a unique mix of pine and broadleaf forest, supporting a distinctive bird community.

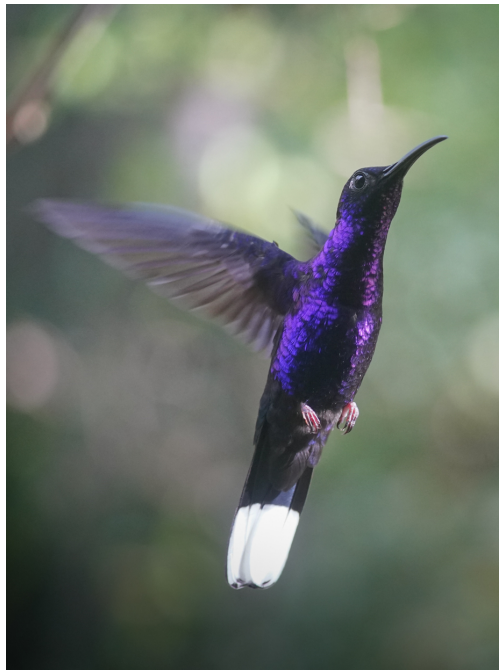


Mountain Pine Ridge © Jose Pablo Castillo

Despite the rainy conditions, our mid-morning birding produced Black-throated Green Warbler, American Redstart, Red-capped Manakin, and prolonged views of the beautiful Grace's Warbler, a species strongly associated with pine forests. At midday, we enjoyed a picnic lunch overlooking the beautiful On River, where the charismatic and noisy Brown Jays entertained us at close range. In the afternoon, we continued exploring the reserve, adding Acorn Woodpecker, Ocellated Turkey, Rusty Sparrow, White-eyed Vireo, Collared Trogon, Hepatic Tanager, Purple-crowned Fairy, and Pale-billed Woodpecker. On the return drive, we made several roadside stops, finding Collared Aracari, White-fronted Amazon, and a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl being vigorously mobbed by Magnolia and Black-and-white Warblers, along with three hummingbird species: Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, White-bellied Emerald, and Canivet's Emerald—all accompanied by country music drifting from a small roadside shop.

DAY 4 - Jade Jungle Lodge & Green Hills Butterfly Ranch

We began the day birding before breakfast in the hotel's Maya plaza, surrounded by beautifully landscaped rooms. A fruiting Ficus tree loaded with ripe figs attracted a remarkable concentration of birds. Species observed included Gartered Violaceous Trogon, Black-headed Trogon, Yellow-winged Tanager, Yellow-throated Euphonia, Scrub Euphonia, Black-faced Grosbeak, Crimson-collared Tanager, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, and Band-backed Wren. One of the most extraordinary moments of the trip occurred when we found both Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl and Central American Pygmy-Owl simultaneously, perched roughly 30 meters apart. With a scope trained on each bird, we were able to carefully compare their plumage, size, and behavior—an exceptional learning opportunity! As if that weren't enough, we finished the morning session with prolonged, eye-level views of a White Hawk perched in full view. After breakfast, we enjoyed a mid-morning walk, recording Couch's Kingbird, Boat-billed Flycatcher, Slaty-tailed Trogon, Streak-headed Woodcreeper, Eye-ringed Flatbill, Yellow-throated Vireo, and Buff-throated Saltator. Our expert local guide Miguel also provided a fantastic explanation of the area's archaeology and ancient Maya history. In the afternoon, we visited Green Hills Butterfly Ranch, home to a beautiful butterfly garden featuring species such as Common Morpho, Owl Butterfly, Malachite, and Isabella's Longwing. The main attraction, however, was the hummingbird feeders, where species like Violet Sabrewing and Wedge-tailed Sabrewing stole the show.



Violet Sabrewing © Jose Pablo Castillo

DAY 5 - Belize to Guatemala

We birded early around the lodge, focusing on open areas with spiny bamboo and grasslands, where birds sang energetically from exposed bamboo stems. Morning highlights included Blue-black Grosbeak, Yellow-tailed Oriole, Yellow-billed Cacique, Least Flycatcher, Crimson-collared Tanager and Bright-rumped Attila. Just before breakfast, we found a Spectacled Owl perched low over the trail—an unforgettable finale to another excellent morning. After breakfast, we said goodbye to the warm staff at Jade Jungle Lodge and departed for Tikal, crossing the border into Guatemala. Along the way, we made a couple productive stops, observing American Kestrel, Black-necked Stilt, Wood

Stork, Roseate Spoonbill, Greater Yellowlegs, Blue-winged Teal, Common Gallinule, American Coot, and Tricolored Heron. Lunch overlooking Lake Petén Itzá produced Neotropic Cormorant, Laughing Gull, Royal Tern, and Mangrove Swallow. Upon arrival at our hotel by the Tikal National Park, we were welcomed by five Ocellated Turkeys!

DAY 6 - Tikal National Park

Our morning birding session in Tikal National Park, part of the vast Maya Forest, yielded Ovenbird, Kentucky Warbler, Northern Parula, Blue-winged Warbler, Yucatan Flycatcher, Ocellated Turkey, Ochre-bellied Flycatcher, Vaux's Swift, Lineated Woodpecker, Red-crowned Ant-Tanager, White-bellied Wren, Blue Bunting, Olivaceous Woodcreeper and heard Gray-throated Chat. In the afternoon, we explored Tikal's iconic plazas and temples with our friend and local guide Miguel Marín, learning about the site's extraordinary history and cultural significance. Despite the archaeological focus, wildlife sightings were abundant, including White-nosed Coati, Central American Spider Monkey, Black Howler Monkey, Red-lore Amazon, White-crowned Parrot, and Montezuma Oropendola. We ended the day with spectacular views of a pair of Bat Falcons perched atop Temple I.



Ocellated Turkey © Jose Pablo Castillo



Details of Ocellated Turkey © Jose Pablo Castillo



Mexican Black Howler Monkey © Jose Pablo Castillo



Birding in Tikal Grand Plaza © Jose Pablo Castillo

DAY 7 - Tikal National Park

After an early breakfast, we returned to Tikal with a specific goal: the rare and threatened Orange-breasted Falcon, a species that naturally nests on tall cliffs and ancient structures like the massive, 70-meter tall Temple IV. On the walk toward Temple IV, we observed Ochre-bellied Flycatcher, Slaty-tailed Trogon, Keel-billed Toucan, Montezuma Oropendola, Black-headed Trogon, and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, along with numerous Ridgway's Rough-winged Swallows circling the temples. We also observed other temples and structures that were not visited on the previous day. Upon reaching the base of Temple IV, we waited less than five minutes when a Black Vulture drifted overhead, followed immediately by two fast-moving falcons aggressively chasing it away—the Orange-breasted Falcons! The birds repeatedly crossed the sky, calling loudly and offering excellent views of their behavior. Some of us climbed the temple for better vantage points and photographs, also recording a Gray-headed Kite being harassed by these falcons. Without question, this was the most thrilling moment of the morning.



Orange-breasted Falcon © Jose Pablo Castillo



View from Tikal Temple IV © Jose Pablo Castillo

In the afternoon, we explored the park entrance area and nearby sites, enjoying close encounters with Central American Spider Monkey, White-nosed Coati, and Central American Agouti, while adding Russet-naped Wood-Rail, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Olive-throated Parakeet, Yellow-rumped Warbler, King Vulture, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, and White-crowned Parrot. We ended the day watching Red-lore Amazons flying toward their roosts and listening to the calls of a Pheasant

Cuckoo.

DAY 8 - Return to Belize

This was primarily a travel day from Tikal back to Belize, though roadside stops and lunch still produced birds such as Hooded Oriole, Roseate Spoonbill, Northern Waterthrush, Wood Stork, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Blue-winged Teal, and Common Tody-Flycatcher. Upon arrival at Crooked Tree, we checked into Bird's Eye View Lodge. In the late afternoon, we gathered along the beautiful wetlands by the lodge and enjoyed excellent views of Limpkin, Wilson's Snipe, Least Sandpiper, White Ibis, Ringed Kingfisher, Lesser Scaup, Ring-necked Duck, and Snail Kite.

DAY 9 - Crooked Tree Wetlands

At dawn, we embarked on our first boat tour through the Crooked Tree Lagoon and Spanish River, one of Belize's most important freshwater wetland systems. The morning was packed with excitement, including dozens of Northern Jacanas, a copulating pair of Lesser Yellow-headed Vultures, multiple Snail Kites feeding on apple snails, Black-collared Hawk, Boat-billed Heron, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Ruddy Crake, Common Squirrel Cuckoo, Mangrove Vireo, and Yellow-headed Amazon. We also enjoyed spectacular views of four species of kingfishers, highlighted by the tiny and dazzling American Pygmy Kingfisher.



Boat trip © Jose Pablo Castillo

After a midday break, we headed out again for an afternoon walk near the lodge, adding several new species including Northern Cardinal (here at the southern edge of its resident range), Yucatán Flycatcher, Yucatán Woodpecker, Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift, Vaux's Swift, Laughing Falcon, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, and Indigo Bunting. In total, we recorded over 100 bird species in a single day.



Yellow-headed Amazon © Jose Pablo Castillo



Black-collared Hawk © Jose Pablo Castillo

DAY 10 - Pine Savanna & Final Boat Tour

We welcomed the day birding the pine savanna ecosystem, a unique open habitat largely restricted to northern Belize. Morning highlights included Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Yucatán Jay, Yucatán Amazon (Yellow-lored), Chipping Sparrow and Rose-throated Becard.



Yucatan Jay © Jose Pablo Castillo

In the afternoon, we enjoyed our final boat tour in the Crooked Tree wetlands. Pleasant temperatures and clear skies made for ideal conditions. While we revisited many familiar species, we also added new highlights such as Great Black Hawk, Ruddy Crake, Amazon Kingfisher, Green Kingfisher, and better views of Boat-billed Heron. The tour ended on a perfect note when a Jabiru flew directly in front of the boat, offering brief but unforgettable views of this magnificent stork. That evening, over dinner, we shared memories, laughter, poetry, and—most importantly—the positive energy that defined the journey. A heartfelt thank you to all participants for joining this adventure, to everyone who made the logistics run smoothly, and to my co-leader James Lees for his work throughout the tour. Until next time!



Our group



Tikal birders

[Belize & Tikal Birding Tour species list \(Jan 19 - 29, 2026\)](#)