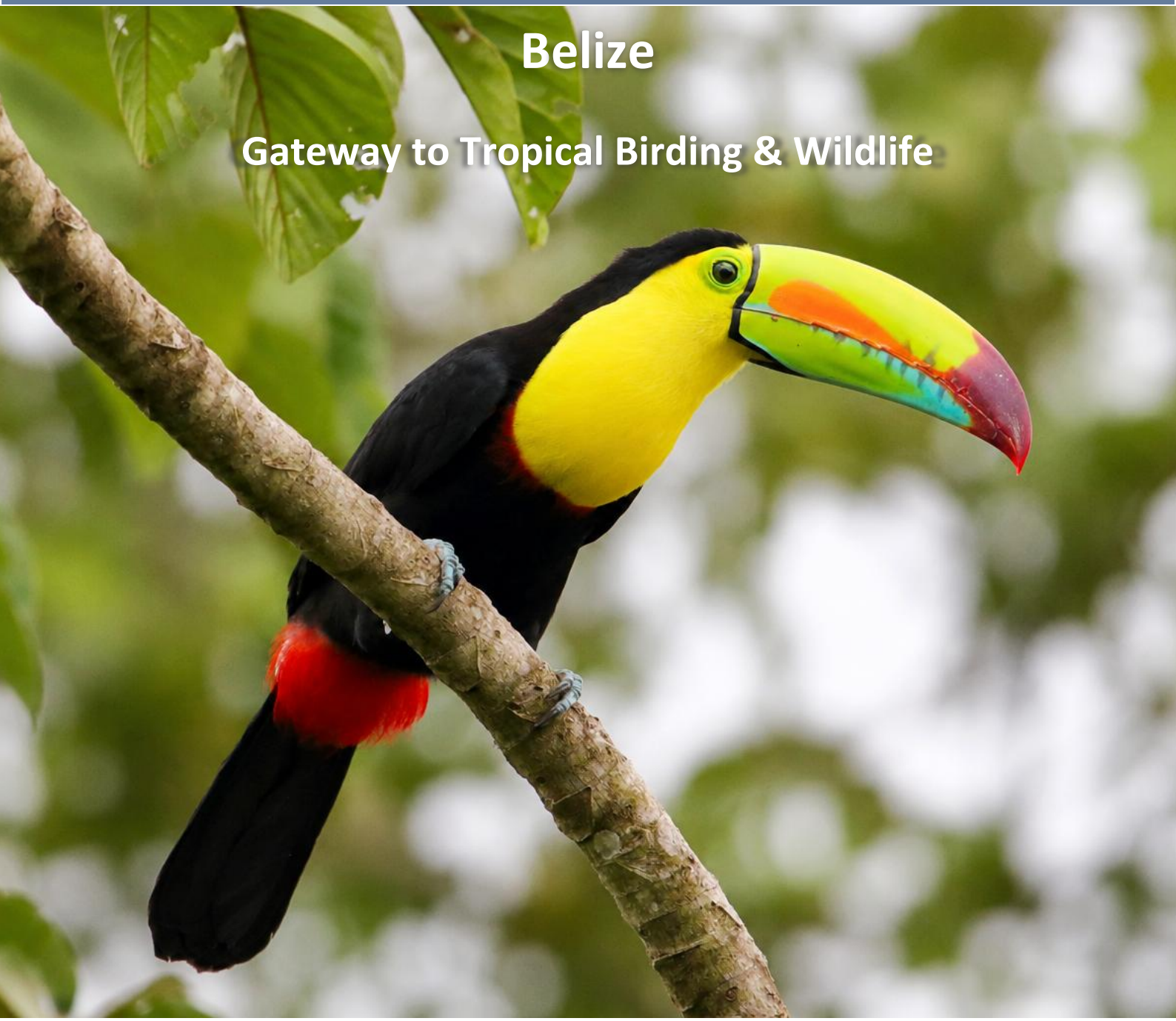
Belize

Gateway to Tropical Birding & Wildlife



Keel-billed Toucan by Adam Riley

Belize offers the perfect introduction to the exciting world of tropical birding and wildlife travel. Small, welcoming and remarkably diverse, this relaxed Central American nation combines lush rainforests, scenic wetlands, rich Mayan history and an outstanding variety of colourful birdlife within surprisingly short travel distances. From peaceful wetland lagoons and tropical rainforest to Caribbean coastal forests and ancient Mayan landscapes, Belize offers a wonderfully varied and accessible tropical wildlife experience. As the only English-speaking country in Central America, Belize provides an approachable and comfortable setting for travellers embarking on their first international birding adventure.

Our Rockjumper Gateway Tour has been specially designed to introduce travellers to the birds, wildlife and natural beauty of the Neotropics in a comfortable and enjoyable way. Exploring a variety of habitats including freshwater wetlands, tropical rainforest, foothill forest and Caribbean lowlands, we can expect an exciting array of visually spectacular species throughout the journey.

Among the many highlights are the towering Jabiru, dazzling Keel-billed Toucan, colourful motmots and trogons, impressive Scarlet Macaw, handsome Great Curassow and the bizarre Boat-billed Heron. Hummingbirds, parrots, tanagers and raptors are wonderfully represented, while opportunities for wildlife viewing may include monkeys, crocodiles, iguanas and perhaps even signs of Belize's elusive wild cats.

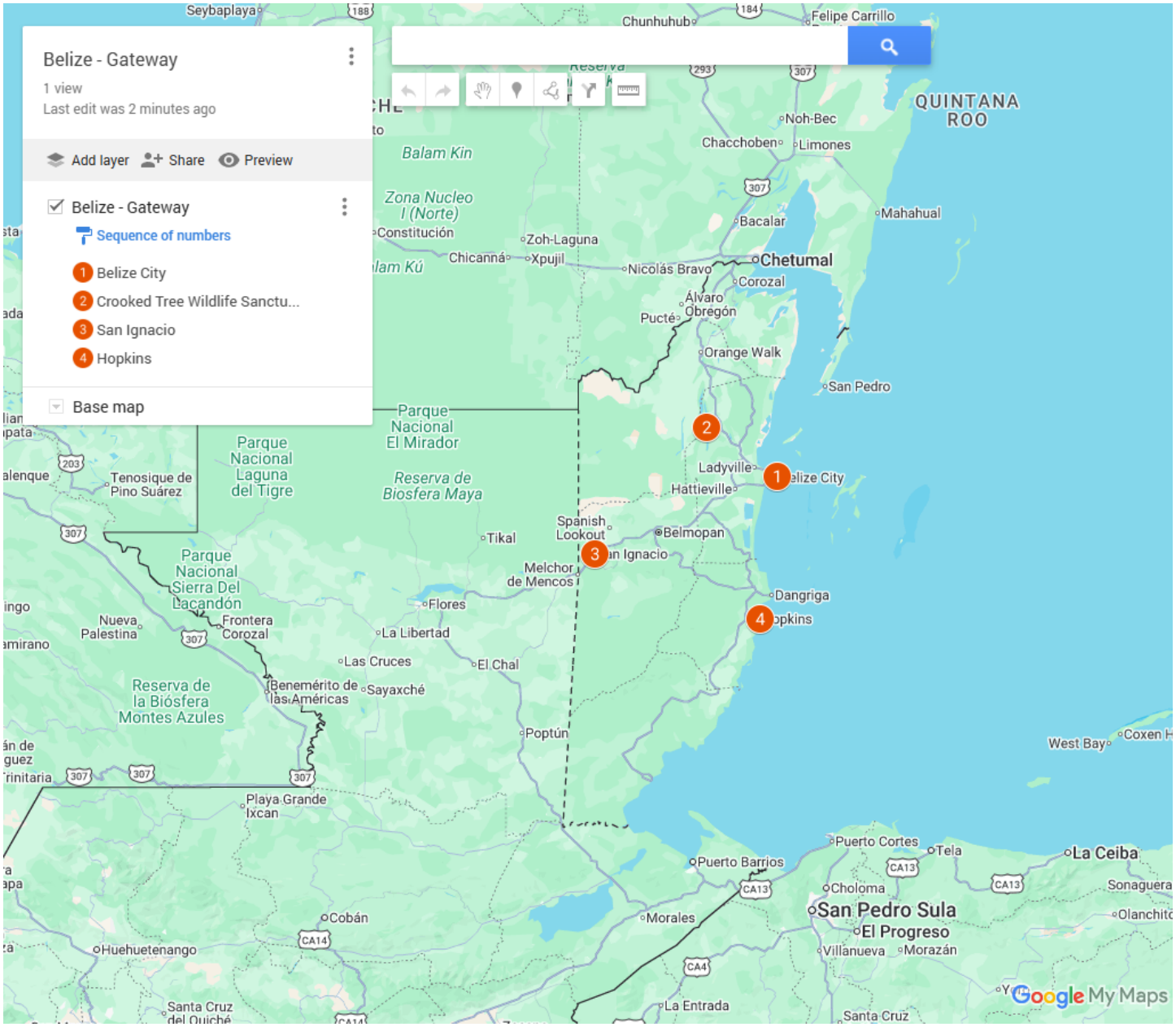
In addition to the excellent birding, Belize's friendly atmosphere, manageable pace, comfortable lodges and excellent wildlife experiences make it an ideal destination for travellers seeking a gentle introduction to tropical birding travel. Combined with unhurried travel days, enjoyable accommodations and the support of experienced Rockjumper leaders throughout the journey, this tour provides the perfect gateway into the fascinating birds and wildlife of tropical Central America.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Belize City, Belize & welcome group dinner**
Day 2	**Belize City to Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary**
Days 3 & 4	**Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary**
Day 5	**Crooked Tree to San Ignacio, western Belize via Altun Ha**
Days 6 & 7	**San Ignacio, rainforest birding & Maya archaeology**
Day 8	**San Ignacio to Hopkins, southern Belize**
Days 9 & 10	**Cockscomb Basin & southern Belize**
Day 11	**Hopkins to Belize City & final departure**

*Optional Gateway Start Package**

Day 0	**Arrival in Miami & overnight stay**
Day 1	**Flight from Miami to Belize City, Belize & welcome group dinner**



Feeders & close bird encounters

Excellent **photography** opportunities

Optional **night** birding

Tropical **rainforest** scenery

Wetlands & lagoons

Birding sites in detail

Travel to Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary. Leaving Belize City behind, we'll travel north into the scenic wetlands and lagoons of the Belizean lowlands. The drive provides an excellent introduction to the gentle-paced atmosphere, tropical scenery and colourful birdlife of Belize, with opportunities to stop for some introductory birding along the way. Wetland areas, roadside lagoons and open savanna habitats may already produce a variety of exciting species such as Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Northern Jacana, Snail Kite, Roseate Spoonbill, Wood Stork and numerous herons and egrets. Arriving at Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary, we'll settle into our comfortable lodge overlooking the surrounding wetlands and begin our first proper taste of tropical birding in this beautiful and wildlife-rich region.



Jabiru by David Hoddinott

Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary. Situated within Belize's first RAMSAR wetland reserve, Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary offers some of the most enjoyable and accessible birding in Central America. The combination of lagoons, waterways, pine savanna, broadleaf forest and village gardens supports an astonishing diversity of birdlife, while the easy pace and birding conditions make this the perfect introduction to tropical birding.

One of the major highlights during our stay will be a morning boat excursion through the maze of lagoons, creeks and wetland channels. These productive waterways support a tremendous variety of birds and wildlife, and we may encounter Bare-throated Tiger Heron, Boat-billed Heron, American Pygmy Kingfisher, Limpkin, Sungrebe, Black-collared Hawk and large numbers of waterbirds. Crooked Tree is also one of the best places in Central America to see the towering Jabiru, the tallest flying bird in the New World and certainly one of the region's most impressive wildlife spectacles.



Turquoise-browed Motmot by Adam Riley

Away from the wetlands, we'll explore nearby savanna and woodland habitats where some of the Yucatán region's specialties may include Yucatan Jay, Yucatan Woodpecker, Yellow-headed Amazon, Canivet's Emerald, Rufous-browed Peppershrike and the attractive Green-backed Sparrow. The surrounding forests and village gardens are also alive with colourful tropical species such as White-fronted Amazon, Collared Aracari, Vermilion Flycatcher, Tropical Mockingbird, Couch's Kingbird and several species of orioles and tanagers.

The sanctuary also offers excellent opportunities for wildlife viewing and photography, with crocodiles, iguanas and numerous waterbirds often seen at close range. Optional evening excursions may produce nocturnal species such as Northern Potoo, Yucatan Nightjar or various owls.



Yucatan Jay by Clayton Burne

Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary to San Ignacio. Today we journey west towards the scenic Cayo District and the lively town of San Ignacio, travelling through a changing landscape of rivers, farmland and tropical forest. Along the way we will visit the important Maya site of Altun Ha, where ancient temples rise above the surrounding forest. In addition to its fascinating archaeological history, the site also offers excellent birding opportunities, with species such as Collared Aracari, Lesson's Motmot, Pale-billed Woodpecker and White-fronted Amazon all possible. As we continue into western Belize, the forests gradually become lusher and more mountainous, signalling our arrival into one of the country's richest birding regions.

San Ignacio & surrounds. The forests and river valleys around San Ignacio offer a wonderful introduction to tropical rainforest birding in a highly enjoyable setting. Comfortable lodges, excellent feeder activity and relatively accessible forest trails make this an ideal area to experience many of Central America's most iconic bird groups.

Colourful hummingbirds are often a constant presence around flowering gardens and feeders, with species such as White-necked Jacobin, Violet Sabrewing and Rufous-tailed Hummingbird possible. The surrounding forests support an exciting array of larger tropical birds including Keel-billed Toucan, Collared Aracari, Montezuma Oropendola, Crimson-collared Tanager, White Hawk and King Vulture, while motmots, trogons and parrots are frequently encountered along forest roads and trails.



Black Howler Monkey by Bobby Wilcox

We will spend time exploring nearby rainforest, riverside woodland and forest edge habitats in search of species such as Lesson's Motmot, Black-headed Trogon, White-whiskered Puffbird, Northern Bentbill, Red-legged Honeycreeper and White-crowned Parrot. Mixed feeding flocks often provide a constant source of excitement, while troops of monkeys and other wildlife may occasionally be encountered moving through the canopy overhead.

In addition to the excellent birding, the San Ignacio area offers a relaxed atmosphere and beautiful tropical scenery, with opportunities to enjoy rivers, forests and the fascinating cultural character of western Belize.

In addition to the region's excellent birding, we will explore one or more of western Belize's remarkable Maya sites such as Cahal Pech or Xunantunich. These impressive archaeological complexes provide fascinating insight into Belize's ancient history while also offering enjoyable birding opportunities in attractive forested surroundings.



White-necked Jacobin by David Hoddinott

San Ignacio to Hopkins. Leaving western Belize behind, we'll travel south along the scenic Hummingbird Highway, one of the country's most beautiful roads. Winding through the foothills of the Maya Mountains, the journey passes through lush tropical forest, citrus groves, rolling hills and river valleys, with opportunities for birding stops along the way. As we descend towards the Caribbean coast, the atmosphere becomes distinctly more tropical and relaxed, eventually arriving in the laid-back coastal region around Hopkins. This beautiful part of southern Belize provides a wonderful combination of rainforest, foothill forest and coastal habitats, together with an easy-going Caribbean atmosphere that makes it an ideal setting for the final stage of our adventure.

Cockscomb Basin & southern Belize. Southern Belize offers some of the country's most scenic rainforest birding, combining lush foothill forest, clear rivers and rich tropical wildlife within a remarkably peaceful setting. The forests surrounding Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary are especially well known for their exceptional biodiversity and support an exciting variety of birds, mammals and other wildlife.



Scarlet Macaws by Julian Parsons

Among the many highlights we may encounter are Scarlet Macaw, Great Curassow, White-whiskered Puffbird, Lesson's Motmot, Black-headed Trogon and several colourful parrots and hummingbirds. The forests also support a variety of manakins, flycatchers and tanagers, while mixed flocks moving through the canopy can provide constant interest throughout the day.

Birding here is generally unhurried and conducted along relatively easy roads, lodge grounds and forest trails, allowing plenty of time to enjoy both the birds and the spectacular tropical scenery. The area is also excellent for wildlife viewing, and we may encounter troops of monkeys, iguanas and other rainforest creatures during our explorations.

Birding in southern Belize is conducted at a relaxed pace, allowing plenty of time to enjoy both the spectacular scenery and the rich diversity of birds and wildlife found throughout the region. Opportunities for evening birding and nocturnal wildlife viewing may also be enjoyed during our stay. Combined with the peaceful atmosphere and beautiful surroundings of southern Belize, this provides a fitting and memorable conclusion to our introduction to the remarkable birdlife and wildlife of tropical Central America.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease	☐ ☐ ■	Designed specifically for first-time international birders and travellers. Relaxed pacing, comfortable accommodations and generally easy birding conditions throughout the tour. Some early starts are necessary to take advantage of peak bird activity.
Birding Ease / Pace	☐ ☐ ■	Easy. Birding is conducted at a comfortable pace with a strong emphasis on enjoying visually rewarding and easily observed tropical species rather than pursuing highly elusive birds.
Accommodation	☐ ☐ ■	Comfortable tourist lodges and hotels with private bathrooms, air conditioning or fans, and reliable amenities throughout the tour.
Walking / Trails	☐ ☐ ■	Easy. Most birding is conducted on lodge grounds, quiet roads, boardwalks and relatively easy forest trails. Some uneven surfaces, short inclines and occasional muddy patches may be encountered.
Vehicles / Roads	☐ ☐ ■	Travel is conducted in comfortable vehicles on generally good roads. A few longer transfer days are unavoidable, though distances are moderate by Central American standards.
Climate	☐ ☐ ■	Warm, tropical and often humid throughout the tour, particularly in lowland and coastal areas. Conditions are generally comfortable, though brief rain showers and high humidity may occasionally be experienced.
Photography	☐ ☐ ■	Excellent. Many birds are seen well, several lodges offer close bird encounters and excellent feeder activity, and numerous opportunities exist for wildlife and scenic photography.
Annoyances	☐ ☐ ■	Warm tropical conditions, humidity, occasional rain showers and biting insects may be encountered. Some early mornings are necessary for the best birding opportunities.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 11;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve & site entrance fees;
- All guiding services,
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- International and domestic flights unless specifically stated;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Optional gratuities for your Rockjumper leader/s;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Typical additional personal costs may include travel insurance, airport hotels, alcoholic beverages, personal shopping and optional tour leader gratuities.

***Optional Miami Gateway Start Package**

For travellers who may feel uncertain about international travel, we offer an optional pre-tour (Day 0) overnight stay in Miami, Florida, where guests can meet a Rockjumper tour leader prior to the international portion of the journey. On Day 1, the group will travel together from Miami to Belize City, Belize.

The package includes a group dinner on Day 0 and breakfast on Day 1, one night of airport hotel accommodation, and assistance from a Rockjumper tour leader during airport check-in and international travel procedures.

Single Supplement: Many accommodations use twin-bed rooms. Guests who prefer private accommodation may request a single room for an additional fee. If you elect to share accommodation but a suitable roommate cannot be found, the applicable single supplement will become payable. We will always make reasonable efforts to match guests wishing to share.

Tipping: Gratuities for drivers, hotel staff, restaurants and local services are included on this tour. Tipping your Rockjumper leader/s is entirely optional and based on your satisfaction with the tour.

- **Tour prices are fixed in the primary currency shown in bold on our website. Prices listed in other currencies are approximate and may vary slightly due to exchange rate fluctuations at the time of final invoicing.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement may be offered to confirm departure.**

- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour-related costs and may need to be adjusted accordingly.**
- **Designated tour leader/s may change due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only and minor adjustments to the order of travel, accommodations or sites visited may occasionally be necessary.**

Rockjumper Gateway Tours are specially designed for travellers taking their first steps into international birding travel, as well as those seeking a more comfortable and approachable tropical birding experience. These tours combine enjoyable birding, comfortable accommodations and manageable travel days with a relaxed pace and a high level of support throughout the journey.

While birding remains the primary focus of these tours, the overall pace and structure are designed to be enjoyable and accessible rather than intensive. We avoid demanding hikes, difficult travel schedules and overly strenuous birding conditions wherever possible, allowing guests to focus on enjoying the birds, wildlife, scenery and overall travel experience.

Gateway Tours are intentionally designed around comfort, atmosphere and enjoyable birding experiences rather than long species lists or physically demanding schedules. These tours provide an ideal introduction to tropical birding travel while still offering exciting wildlife encounters and memorable birding throughout.

These tours are not suitable for guests seeking demanding, fast-paced, highly target-driven birding experiences or intensive photography-focused itineraries.

Most days begin with optional early morning birding sessions when bird activity is at its best, followed by breakfast and a relaxed mid-morning pace. Afternoons generally include additional birding, wildlife viewing or travel between locations, with time available to enjoy the lodges and scenery. Optional evening outings may occasionally be offered in search of nocturnal wildlife.

Guests are welcome to participate at a pace comfortable to them throughout the tour.

- It is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that luggage is kept to a reasonable minimum. Kindly limit baggage to 20kg (44lb) for checked luggage and 8kg (18lb) for hand luggage.
- Belize experiences warm tropical conditions throughout the year, particularly in lowland and coastal regions. Lightweight clothing, sun protection and adequate hydration are recommended.
- Conditions are generally warm and humid throughout the tour, though occasional rain showers may occur. A lightweight waterproof jacket or rain layer is advisable.
- Mosquitoes and small biting insects may occasionally be encountered, particularly in wetter areas and around wetlands. We recommend bringing a good quality insect repellent containing DEET or a suitable alternative.
- Accommodation throughout the tour is comfortable and well situated for birding and wildlife viewing. A good variety of western and local cuisine is generally available throughout the trip.
- Belize is widely regarded as one of the more relaxed and traveller-friendly destinations in Central America, with English as the official language and a well-established tourism infrastructure.
- Electricity, Wi-Fi and mobile coverage are available throughout most of the tour, although internet speeds may occasionally be slower in more remote areas.

Arrival and Departure Details

Day 1 of the tour is set aside as an arrival day, allowing guests time to settle in after their international journey. Guests may arrive in Belize City at any time during the day, with a welcome dinner held in the evening to meet your fellow travellers and tour leader before the tour begins. The tour will conclude in Belize City around midday after a road transfer from Hopkins to Belize City on Day 11.

Guests joining the **Optional Miami Gateway Start Package** may arrive in Miami at any time on Day 0 and check in to the group hotel at their convenience. That evening, guests will meet their Rockjumper tour leader and fellow travellers during a relaxed group dinner, providing an opportunity to get acquainted and discuss the exciting adventure ahead.

On Day 1, the group will travel together from Miami to Belize City, Belize, with assistance provided throughout airport check-in and international travel procedures where required.

The above information regarding arrivals and departures is intended as a general guide only. Precise arrival and departure details will be provided in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive earlier and/or depart later and require assistance with additional accommodation or travel arrangements, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Please do not book any flights until the Rockjumper Team has officially confirmed the tour.

Rockjumper Gateway Tours are specifically designed around destinations with straightforward entry requirements for most travellers, with little or no visa or travel authorization requirements typically necessary. At the time of booking, we will advise guests of any known visa, entry or travel authorization requirements relevant to the tour.

Visa and entry requirements can vary depending on nationality and may occasionally change at short notice. Guests are ultimately responsible for ensuring they meet all entry requirements for the countries visited and should verify the latest information with the appropriate consulate, embassy or official government authority prior to travel.