

Exploring the Biosphere Reserves of the Ancient Maya

# calakmul & sian ka'an



A Special Departure for The Nature Conservancy  
\$3250.00 (from Cancun, departing Merida)  
November 9-18, 2007

## Overview

The Maya Forest forms the heart of the Yucatán Peninsula, covering more than six million acres from the Caribbean coast of Mexico through Belize and into the Petén region of Guatemala. The ecological importance of the region is truly astonishing; mature tropical jungle, seasonally inundated lowland forests, and wetlands provide refuge for rare and endangered species. Also of great significance is the fact that these forests accommodate a large concentration of ruins of the Maya civilization. Using a variety of strategies specific to each region of the Maya Forest, The Nature Conservancy works in Belize, Guatemala and Mexico to conserve the magnificent forest. On this trip, we plan to explore the approach that the Conservancy and its governmental and NGO partners are taking to protect the Mexican portion of the Maya Forest: **the Calakmul Biosphere Reserve**. Encompassing 1.7 million acres, the Calakmul Reserve is located in the northern portion of the Peten Region, and contiguous with 6 million more acres of the Maya Forest in Guatemala and Belize. Five feline species - puma, ocelot, jaguar, jaguarundi, and margay- reside in the region. Other species seen frequently are spider and howler monkeys, peccary, and the endangered tapir. Three hundred species of birds have been recorded at Calakmul, which also shelters one of largest bat caves in North America with a spectacular mass exodus at sundown.

We will also visit the **Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve**, Mexico's greatest wetland area. This amazing site protects one of the last remaining expanses of tropical forest, savanna, mangrove, and coastal habit along the Maya Riviera – all protected in the same contiguous World Heritage site. In between Biosphere Reserve visits we will also be visiting numerous Mayan archaeological sites. Some are so far off the beaten track, that we may be the only visitors of the day. We will also visit with local community members that have agreed to stop slash and burn agricultural practices, visit a Maya history museum in a colonial fortress, and search for howler monkeys, mot mots, and toucans in the many tropical natural areas that we will be visiting.

## Itinerary

### Day 1: Arrival and transfer to Los Lirios

Our hotel is located on the beach approximately 90 miles south of Cancun and just north of the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve. Your trip leader from Emerald Planet will meet the group at the Cancun airport along with our local guide and drivers. After an hour and a half drive to our Caribbean beachfront hotel, we check in and have some free time to walk along the beach before trip orientation followed by dinner.

Overnight: Los Lirios

### Day 2: Pez Maya and Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve

Sian Ka'an, is Maya for "Where the Sky is Born". Here the land melts with marine habitats forming a complicated hydraulic system that encompasses a variety of wetlands and coastal habitats such as seasonally flooded forest, savannas, mangroves, fresh water canals, lagoons, bays, cenotes (limestone sinkholes), and coral reefs. Approximately one-third of the reserve is covered by tropical forest, while another third is composed of savanna and mangrove. The last third contains coastal and marine habitats, including 70 miles of the second longest barrier reef in the world. The great variety of habitats houses all the mammal species normally found in the region including jaguar, puma, ocelot, margay, jaguarundi, spider and howler monkeys, tapir, white-lipped and collared peccary, manatee, and red brocket and white-tailed deer. In addition, the reserve provides habitat for crocodiles and beaches for nesting endangered green, loggerhead, hawksbill and leatherback sea turtles. Over 300 species of birds are found in Sian Ka'an, including the rare jabiru stork. We will take a boat trip through its canal system, do some freshwater snorkeling, and relax along the beaches of Pez Maya, a 3 kilometer long beachfront property recently protected by TNC and their local counterparts, Amigos de Sian Ka'an (ASK). We will visit an island rockery with Roseate Spoonbills, Boatbill Herons, and Reddish Egrets. At night, we will explore the lagoons of Sian Ka'an by boat to search for crocodiles. TNC's local partner Amigos de Sian Ka'an has been conducting research on the crocodile population of these lagoons for over a decade and has the most extensive crocodile database in the region. We'll have the opportunity to held our expert guide (and crocodile handler) capture the animals and bring them into the boat, take their measurements, and tag them. This is a wonderful awe-inspiring opportunity to feel like you are part of a live Discovery Channel program.

Overnight: Los Lirios



### **Day 3: Snorkeling on the Mesoamerican Reef**

Our day starts off a little bumpy, literally, as we travel the dirt road toward Punta Allen. Upon arrival, we will head out to the second longest barrier reef in the world for a half-day of snorkeling. We will have several stops to enjoy the incredible marine environment. We will have lunch on the beach with the bounty of the sea prepared in traditional manner. The afternoon is free.

Overnight: Hotel Los Lirios

### **Day 4: Laguna Azul de Senor, Caste War Museum, Hanging Boa Bat Cave**

This is an active day. We start with a visit to a small inland community of Senor. We will spend the morning exploring the Laguna Azul de Senor by kayak (optional) with our Mayan guides. We will have a traditional Maya lunch prepared by the families of our guides. In the afternoon we will be immersed in the local Maya culture visiting some of their artisan product workshops, learning about traditional medicines from the local forests and seeing how traditional musical instruments are made. Late afternoon we will visit the Caste War Museum in Tihosuco. (You need a good map to find these places!) At sunset we have a special treat, visiting a bat cave that has boa constrictors hanging from the roof of the cave that feed on the passing bats. This is an incredible opportunity to see nature in its wild and pure form. In addition to the snake/bat spectacle, a water source in the cave is home to albino blind catfish and shrimp. We mountain bike (or walk) to the cave entrance just before dusk and participants can opt for the thrilling night-bike-back or walk the 1 kilometer. We will have a late dinner, but snacks will be provided to carry us over. The hotel is very basic and the only hotel option in Felipe Carrillo Puerto. (The night trip to the bat cave is optional for those with fear of bats or snakes or both).

Overnight: Hotel Esquivel, Felipe Carrillo Puerto

### **Day 5: Arriving in Calakmul**

After breakfast we depart for our 4 hour trip south to the Calakmul Biosphere Reserve. Calakmul is located in the northern portion of the Peten Region, and is a 1.7 million acre Biosphere Reserve, contiguous with 5.5 million additional acres of forest reserves in Guatemala and Belize. Pronatura Peninsula de Yucatan, a TNC partner organization, is very active in this area. We should arrive in the early evening with time to freshen up before happy hour and dinner.

Overnight: Hotel Ecovillage Chicanna

### **Day 6: Project visit and Mayan archaeological sites**

This morning we will visit an agrarian community in the buffer zone of the Calakmul Biosphere Reserve. The Nature Conservancy and partner Pronatura Peninsula Yucatan are working with farmer Valentine Gomez Farias and others in communities that border the forest to develop an integrated agricultural system that allows the community to abandon the traditional, destructive slash and burn techniques, while at the same greatly increasing their profit margins. We return to Ecovillage Chicanna for lunch, and then travelers will have time to visit nearby Mayan archeological sites like Becan and Chicanna.

Overnight: Hotel Ecovillage Chicanna

### **Day 7: Calakmul Biosphere Reserve visit**

Today we will be visiting the Calakmul Archeology Site located deep within the Biosphere. At its height in the classic Maya period, Calakmul rivaled Tikal and, in fact, defeated Tikal not once but twice! Ocellated turkeys and chachalacas are commonly seen as are many other tropical bird species. Five wild felines have healthy populations in this region, although seeing one requires lots of luck. The jaguar, for example, has its strongest Mexican population in this reserve. We are often fortunate to catch the Howler Monkeys in between naps and on occasion find a couple Spider Monkeys passing through the Reserve.

Time permitting, we also visit Balamku, an archeological site with three 15-foot masks inside the main pyramid structure. We hope to see toucans, trogons, parrots, and agouti. Over 300 species of birds have been recorded in the area, including over twenty species of birds of prey. Right before sunset we will visit one of the largest bat caves in North America. Very little is known about this cave, however, the population has been estimated at between 5-10 million. We will arrive just in time to witness their nightly mass exodus.

Overnight: Hotel Ecovillage Chicanna

### **Day 8: Calakmul to Campeche City**

From Calakmul, we will turn west and head towards the Bay of Campeche. After lunch we will continue on for a visit to Edzná, a spectacular archeological site. This is one of our favorite archeology sites due to its beautiful structures and non-existent crowds. It's a wonderful way to finish of our exploration of the Yucatecan Mayan Sites.

Overnight: Hotel del Mar, Campeche

### **Day 9: Campeche City**

Campeche City. We have a full day to enjoy this beautiful colonial city that is off the beaten track for tourists. We will visit the Mayan archaeological museum, set in a Fort that was built to protect the original walled city of Campeche, a city first constructed by Spanish conquistadors in 1531. In 1999 UNESCO added the city of Campeche to its list of World Cultural Heritage Sites.

Overnight: Hotel del Mar, Campeche

### **Day 10: Departure**

In the morning, we will depart Campeche City for the drive to the Merida airport to catch our international flight connections.



## ***Logistical Details***

### ***Biosphere Reserves of the Ancient Maya: Calakmul & Sian Ka'an***

***November 9-18, 2007***

#### **Trip Details:**

This trip covers a wide variety of activities. We will be both on foot and in boats, and the possibility of rain always exists. We are, however, visiting during the dry season and we hope for good weather throughout the trip. The accommodation will have showers and ceiling fans.

#### **Financial Arrangements:**

The fee for the tour is \$3250 per person based on double occupancy. Single rates are an additional \$655. This price includes: a detailed pre-trip packet including a reading list, country bird list, packing suggestions, and background reading and conservation project information; all food, three meals per day, from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 10; all lodging for 9 nights during the tour; ground transportation; in country airfares, and guide services provided by the tour leader and local expert guides. The tour fee does not include international airfare, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, passport fees, airport departure taxes or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the group does not have sufficient registration a small party supplement may have to be charged. Flight arrangements (not included) for this tour can be made through your local travel agent.

#### **Tour Size:**

This tour will be strictly limited to a maximum of 16 participants and a minimum of 10 participants. Sign up early in order to secure your space.

#### **Tour Registration:**

To register for the tour, complete the enclosed registration form and return it with a deposit of \$500 per person. Full payment of the tour fee is due ninety days prior to the tour departure (August 9, 2007). If you have any questions please contact Katherine King of Emerald Planet (970-231-4890 or toll-free, 888-883-0736).

#### **Travel Documents:**

A US passport valid beyond your anticipated date of return to the US and tourist card (available on flight) is required. Currently no visas or immunization certificates are required. Those with foreign passports should contact the Embassy of Mexico for details.

#### **Cancellation Policy:**

Refunds are made according to the following schedule: If cancellation is made ninety days or more before departure date, the deposit less \$150 is refundable. If cancellation is made between eighty-nine and seventy days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made sixty-nine days or less before departure date, no refund is available except for amounts recoverable through our agents. We recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself. Trip cancellation insurance can be arranged through Travel Insured International by calling 1-800-243-3174 or by visiting [www.travelinsured.com](http://www.travelinsured.com). Insurance can also be arranged through CSA Vacation Guarantee by calling 1-800-645-5926 or by visiting [www.csatravelprotections.com](http://www.csatravelprotections.com).

### **Responsibility:**

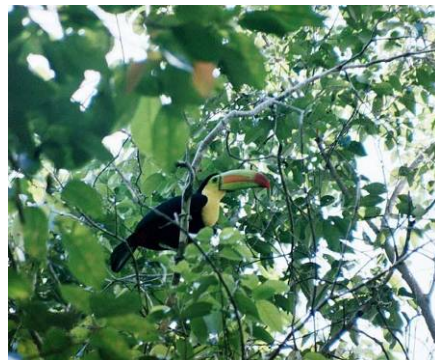
Emerald Planet, The Nature Conservancy, and/or their Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. They can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of the tour. Baggage is at owners risk entirely.

### **Health Precautions:**

For comprehensive health information, please contact the Center for Disease Control and Prevention on the Internet at <http://www.cdc.gov/travel> or by phone at 1-877-394-8747 (traveler's health hotline). The CDC information is a comprehensive listing of any disease reported in a particular region or state. We have not had any problems with diseases; however, you may need to discuss with your physician what is best for you individually. If you have any questions please consult your physician. For general information about Mexico please refer to the Consular Information sheet: <http://travel.state.gov/mexico.html> Please check with your medical insurance provided to make sure that your insurance covers you while you are abroad. Several companies can provide additional international insurance as well as emergency evacuation insurance. See MEDEX for an example of one such provider: <http://www.medexassist.com/> or 1-410-453-6300

### **For more information contact:**

Katherine King  
Emerald Planet Tours  
1706 Constitution Court  
Fort Collins, CO 80526  
Phone: 970-231-4890  
Toll-free: 888-883-0736  
E-mail: [ryan@emeraldplanet.com](mailto:ryan@emeraldplanet.com)  
Website: <http://www.emeraldplanet.com>



To sign up for an experience of a lifetime, please fill out and return the registration form.