The Natural and Cultural Wonders of Panama & Costa Rica

March 11-21, 2015
You are cordially invited to join the Marine Biological Laboratory on an expedition to two of the world’s most ecologically diverse countries: Panama and Costa Rica. This program features a partial transit of the legendary Panama Canal. Our adventure begins in Panama, one of the best-kept travel secrets in Latin America. Today’s Panama offers visitors a wealth of cultural and natural history in a stable and peaceful setting. As a land bridge between the two continents of the Western Hemisphere, the Panamanian biosphere is a fascinating intersection of the fauna and flora of both North and South America. Verdant forests teem with wildlife, including 940 species of birds, 1,500 species of trees, 10,000 species of plants and a colorful variety of insects. Journey on the Panama Canal through the Miraflores and Pedro Miguel locks on the Pacific side of the canal and go through the “spinal cord” of the Continental Divide continuing to Gamboa, part of the route that took ten years to complete and had a profound effect on international commerce and American foreign policy. Continue on to Costa Rica, a democracy for over 100 years and a world model for national park development. With over 25 percent of its land protected, the country is renowned as an ecological wonderland. Delight in its varied landscapes: rushing waterfalls, beautiful beaches and lush jungles with a wide array of animals, from the white faced capuchin monkey to sloths and iguanas. This itinerary brings us to two distinctive habitats: the famed Monteverde Cloud Forest in the Tilarán Mountains and Costa Rica’s sun-drenched Pacific Coast. Spot colorful wildlife on hikes through the forest and along suspended bridges in the rainforest canopy. Visit Santa Elena Reserve and one of the most beautiful and scenic parks in Costa Rica, Manual Antonio National Park.

Come join MBL on this unforgettable trip and savor the unique flavors of these Central American nations!
**Itinerary**

**USA / PANAMA CITY**

**Day 1 - Wednesday, March 11**
Depart the U.S. on a flight for Panama City. This evening, we will celebrate the beginning of our trip with cocktails, dinner, and an orientation.

*Marriott Panama (D)*

**PANAMA CANAL PARTIAL TRANSIT**

**SMITHSONIAN TROPICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE**

**Day 2 – Thursday, March 12**
Board the *M/V Pacific Queen* and embark on a partial transit of the Panama Canal. The canal spans 48 miles to connect the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans and remains one of the largest and most difficult engineering projects ever undertaken. A full transit typically takes 10 hours. This partial transit allows a traverse of two of the three sets of locks and avoids the relatively uneventful navigation of Gatun Lake. Cross Miraflores and Pedro Miguel locks on the Pacific side of the canal and go through the “spinal cord” of the Continental Divide and to the narrowest section of the waterway, the Gaillard Cut, before continuing to Gamboa where we will disembark. We continue by bus to the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute of *Galeta Point Marine Laboratory* located on the Caribbean entrance of the Panama Canal and on the outskirts of the port city of Colón. Research at the station includes studies of tropical, coastal and marine ecosystems - coral reefs, sea grass beds, mangrove forests and wetlands, as well as on the hundreds of creatures that inhabit them. Our visit will be hosted by Smithsonian biologists. Transfer back to Panama City on the historic Panama Canal Railway.

*Marriott Panama (B, L, D)*

**SMITHSONIAN PUNTA CULEBRA/ BIOMUSEUM – PANAMA CITY / SAN JOSÉ, COSTA RICA**

**Day 3 – Friday, March 13**
This morning visit the Smithsonian Research Center of Punta Culebra Marine Laboratories, located 15 minutes from the heart of Panama City. The Center is an open-air museum focusing mainly on marine science and education, Conservation, and interpretation of marine coastal environments of Panama and nearby regions of Central and South America. Our visit will be hosted by a Smithsonian biologist. Continue to the newly opened Biomuseum designed by Frank Gehry, the only building in Latin America designed by this famed architect. The museum offers a unique experience that weaves scientific knowledge and artistic creation to enlighten visitors on the emergence of the Isthmus of Panama. Enjoy lunch and an afternoon tour of Panama’s colonial *Casco Viejo* (the “Old Compound”), a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Casco Viejo has an unusual blend of Spanish and French architectural styles, iron clad balconies, cobblestone streets and monuments. Transfer to the airport for an afternoon flight to San José, Costa Rica (short flight). Sitting on a plateau in the Central Valley ringed by lush green mountains and is home to over a third of the country’s population. Upon arrival at Juan Santamaría Airport, transfer to your hotel. Snacks and soft drinks will be available upon arrival.

*Real Intercontinental Hotel (B,L)*

**SAN JOSÉ POÁS VOLCANO / MONTEVERDE CLOUD FOREST**

**Day 4 – Saturday, March 14**
Set out for Poás Volcano, one of the few active volcanoes on the continent. On a clear day, we will be able to observe the active fumaroles and simmering lake at the bottom of the immense crater, one of the largest in the world.
Monteverde Cloud Forest

Days 5 – Sunday, March 15
We start our day with a visit to the Monteverde Reserve. Here, wind-battered elfin woods on its exposed ridges give way to more protected areas, where sheets of mist envelope the forest in a blanket of moisture. Many of the trees are shrouded with moss, orchids and other epiphytes, lending a magical feeling to the forest. This private reserve is home to over 400 species of birds, including the Resplendent quetzal, considered the most spectacular bird of the Americas, and is one of the few remaining habitats of five species of the cat family: jaguar, ocelot, puma, margay and jaguarundi. Stop at the Hummingbird Gallery, where we find several species attracted by feeders. During our stay, we will enjoy a bird’s eye view of the lush canopy from a combination of suspended bridges and platforms, as well as guided hikes along the rain forest floor.
El Establo Hotel (B, L, D)

Santa Elena Reserve

Day 6 - Monday, March 16
This morning we depart for a nature walk in the community-managed Santa Elena Cloud Forest Reserve, home to its own unique ecosystem to spider monkeys, which are not found in Monteverde. The community of Santa Elena borders the Monteverde Conservation area in the Cordillera de Tilarán of Central Costa Rica. This afternoon is unscheduled to further explore the town of Santa Elena or return to the Cloud Forest.
El Establo Hotel (B, L, D)

Manuel Antonio National Park

Day 7 – Tuesday, March 17
We depart Monteverde on a fascinating route to the area of Arenal and Arenal Volcano. The countryside here is beautiful with Arenal rising abruptly from flatland vegetation. As we travel, we will keep an eye out for toucans and monkeys. We cross Arenal Lake to the airstrip and fly by small charter plane to Quepos next to Manuel Antonio National Park (short flight, approximately 35 minutes). We will proceed to the beautiful, seaside Hotel Parador near the Manuel Antonio National Park, our home for the next three nights.
Parador Boutique Resort and Spa (B, L, D)

Manuel Antonio National Park

Day 8 – Wednesday, March 18
This morning we will explore Manuel Antonio National Park and take walks in the forest as well as along the beaches. Located near Quepos on the Pacific Coast, it is considered one of the most beautiful and scenic parks in the extensive Costa Rica park system. Pristine white-sand beaches are backed by a lush tropical forest teeming with endangered squirrel monkeys, white-faced and howler monkeys, two-toed sloths, agoutis and iguanas. We may also spot coatis, armadillos, and parrots. Above all, it is the spectacular jagged coastline, exquisite sheltered tide pools, abundant marine life and beaches that have given this park its popular reputation. The afternoon is unscheduled to enjoy the beach, or just relax by the pool at the hotel with its fabulous vistas of the Pacific Ocean.
Parador Boutique Resort and Spa (B, L)

Manuel Antonio National Park

Day 9 – Thursday, March 19
Enjoy the morning relaxing by the pool or take a swim in the ocean. In the afternoon, depart on a boat tour through mangroves to Damas Islands. Visiting the islands and navigating the canals of the reserve will afford great birding opportunities and great vistas. Look for caimans, sloths, anteaters, and much more! There will be ample opportunities to see the antics of the white-face monkeys as we travel through the canals. The timing of this excursion could change to the morning depending on the tides.
Parador Boutique Resort and Spa (B, L)

Pacific Coast/San José

Day 10 – Friday, March 20
This morning, after a relaxing breakfast, depart to San José, stopping at Moravia where you can find wood and leather goods. Lunch will be en route. Gather in the evening for a farewell dinner.
Real Intercontinental Hotel (B, L, D)

San José / USA

Day 11 – Saturday, March 21
After breakfast, transfer to the international airport for your return flight home.
(B)
Enclosed is my check for $_______ ($1,000 deposit per person) payable to Royal Adventures to hold ______ places on the Marine Biological Laboratory Panama & Costa Rica March 11-21, 2015. Final payment is due December 1, 2014.

Name as on passport__________________________________________________________

Name as on passport__________________________________________________________

Address____________________________________________________________________

City_________________________ State__________ Zip____________________

Home (____) ______________ Office (____) ___________ Cell (____) _____________

Fax ______________________ E-mail _____________________________

If possible, please assign a roommate:  ❑ Smoker    ❑ Nonsmoker

❑ I wish to pay the additional for a single supplement.

❑ I/We want to upgrade our rooms in Manual Antonio at Hotel Parador to Vista Suites at an additional charge of $399 per person.

❑ I/We will take care of our own international flight arrangements. (Royal Adventures makes all in-tour charter flight arrangements for the program.)

Please make round-trip flight arrangements from:

❑ Boston    ❑ New York    ❑ Miami    ❑ Other ______________

Please charge my deposit of $1,000 per person to:

❑ MasterCard    ❑ Visa    ❑ American Express

Card #________________________ Expiration date ________  CCV#_______

I/We have read the Costs and Conditions/Responsibility sections of this brochure and agree to their terms.

Date: __________ Signature: ________________________________________________

Date: __________ Signature: ________________________________________________

Please complete and return this form with deposit check (payable to Royal Adventures) or credit card authorization to:

Royal Adventures: 9 Crow Canyon Court Suite 205, San Ramon, CA 94583 1(800) 453-4754
COSTS AND CONDITIONS

Program Cost...............................$5,995  
(per person double occupancy)

Single Supplement.......................$1,290

Sample Airfare from Boston...........$752*  
*as of August 2014 and is subject to change

PROGRAM COST INCLUDES: All accommodations as specified in the itinerary in deluxe hotels or charming country lodge; partial transit of Panama Canal; In-tour chartered flight(s) to Quepos; lake crossing in Arenal; the services of a tour director throughout the trip; professional English speaking local guides at all locations; meals as indicated in the itinerary; transportation by private motor coach; hotel/airport transfers for group flights; baggage handling; all group activities and excursions; gratuities to local guides and drivers; entrance fees on schedule excursions and visits; service charges and taxes; pre-departure information; coordination and administration. The program is quoted with Garden View rooms in Manuel Antonio at the Parador Hotel; upgrades to Vista Suites (with views of the Pacific Ocean) can be made at an additional cost. The price of the trip is based on a minimum of 15 passengers.

PROGRAM COST DOES NOT INCLUDE: International airfare (US to Panama City; Panama City to San José Costa Rica; San José, Costa Rica/US) quoted separately; departure taxes, meals not specified in the itinerary; personal items such as laundry, fax or telephone calls; alcoholic beverages, dishes or beverages not part of included meals; room service; passport fees; excess baggage charges, individual transfers; medical expenses; travel insurance or deviation from the scheduled tour. Tip to tour director is not included and at passenger's discretion.

RESERVATIONS, DEPOSITS, AND FINAL PAYMENT: To reserve a space on this tour, please mail a deposit of $1,000 per person payable to “Royal Adventures,” along with the completed reservation form to: Royal Adventures, 9 Crow Canyon Ct. Suite 205, San Ramon, CA 94583. Reservations are acknowledged in order of receipt. Final payment is due December 1, 2014 and must be paid by check. Royal Adventures handles all bookings, ticketing, and invoicing. CST #2009579-40.

CANCELLATIONS AND REFUNDS: Refunds, less a cancellation fee of $500 per person, are made if we are notified in writing on or before December 1, 2014. No refunds are made after that date. All cancellations must be made in writing. There are no refunds for unused meals, accommodations, or other trip features.

INSURANCE: We highly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance. An application for trip cancellation insurance will be available upon confirmation. Neither the Marine Biological Laboratory nor Royal Adventures accepts liability for any airline cancellation penalty incurred by the purchase of a non-refundable airline ticket or other expenses incurred by tour participants in preparing for the tour.

QUESTIONS: Please call Martha Tarafa, Marine Biological Laboratory at (508) 289-7171, email mtarafa@mbl.edu or Royal Adventures at (800) 453-4754.

RESPONSIBILITY
Royal Adventures, its owners and employees act only as agents for the various independent suppliers and contractors providing transportation, hotel accommodations, restaurant and other services connected with this tour. Such travel and services are subject to the terms and conditions under which such accommodations, services and transportation are offered or provided, and the Marine Biological Laboratory and Royal Adventures and their respective, employees, agents, representatives, and assigns, accept no liability therefor. The Marine Biological Laboratory and Royal Adventures, assume no liability for any injury, damage, loss, accident, delay or other irregularity which may be caused by the defect of any aircraft or vehicle or the negligence or default of any company or person engaged in carrying out or performing any of the services involved. Additionally, responsibility is not accepted for losses, injury, damages or expenses of any kind due to sickness, weather, strikes, local laws, hostilities, wars, terrorist acts, acts of nature or other such causes. All services and accommodations are subject to the laws of the country in which they are provided. The Marine Biological Laboratory and Royal Adventures reserve the right to make changes in the published itinerary whenever, in their sole judgment, conditions warrant, or if they deem it necessary for the comfort, convenience or safety of the tour participants. They reserve the right to withdraw this tour without penalty. The right is also reserved to decline to accept or retain any person as a member of the tour, or to substitute another qualified leader or special guest. Baggage and personal effects are the sole responsibility of the owners at all times. The price of the program is given in good faith based on current tariffs and rates, and is subject to change. Any tariff, exchange rate, or fuel increases will be passed onto participants. Neither the Marine Biological Laboratory nor Royal Adventures accept the liability for any airline cancellation penalty incurred by the purchase of a non-refundable airline ticket. The air ticket when issued shall constitute the sole contract between the passenger and the airline concerned. As part of the consideration and right to participate in this tour, each participant will be asked to sign a liability release.
What to Expect

On this expedition, it helps to be enthusiastic about outdoor adventure, intellectually curious and comfortable traveling as part of a group. Travel is during the dry season and at peak time for wildlife viewing. Typically, the weather is hot and humid in the lowlands (high 80’s) and spring-like in the highlands. While at the national parks and reserves, there is a daily program of nature exploration and guided rainforest walks in addition to a Canal transit and cultural explorations. The partial transit of the Canal will be aboard the 250-passenger M/V Pacific Queen. This will be a shared passage that highlights two of the three sets of locks on the Canal and avoids the less eventful and much longer navigation of the canal through Gatun Lake. Marvel at the progress of the 5.2 billion dollar expansion project that is scheduled for completion in June of 2015. There will be ample interpretation in the field and animated discussions. Travel is by motor coach, ship, small planes, motor launches and boats, with daily walks of approximately two miles in length (sometimes over uneven terrain) at a leisurely pace suitable for nature study and field observation. Binoculars are recommended. The prerequisites for this trip are a spirit of adventure, anticipation, and the desire to explore spectacular natural areas. Flexibility is essential, since local conditions may require alterations in schedule.

History Of The Canal

The idea of cutting a course from the Atlantic to Pacific Ocean was first suggested in 1524 to Charles V, the King of Spain. A survey of the land was completed in 1529, but war in Europe forced the project into permanent delay. Interest returned in the 19th century. In 1878, a French company led by Ferdinand Marie de Lesseps proposed a sea level canal without locks based on his successful construction of the Suez Canal. The attempt was disastrous, both technically and financially unsound. Tropical disease killed an estimated 22,000 workers between 1881 and 1889. In the wake of the “Canal Scandal,” the U.S. took over the company’s assets and signed the controversial Hay-Bunau-Varilla treaty with the new state of Panama. At the time, it was the most expensive construction project in U.S. history, costing 375 million dollars. The first official transit took place in 1914 and the U.S. administered the canal and surrounding Canal Zone until December 31, 1999, when it was handed over to Panamanian control. It continues to be of crucial importance to the international shipping economy and, in 2006, Panamanian citizens approved a referendum to expand it to double its current capacity.