

# **A BIRDING ADVENTURE IN THE LLANOS OF COLOMBIA: HATO LA AURORA**

**JANUARY 2-9, 2022**

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Please note that this tour can be taken in combination with  
*Undiscovered Eastern Colombia: Birding Secrets of the White Sands of Inírida,*  
January 9-16, 2022.



Giant Anteater © David Ascanio

*Colombia is one of the most bio-diverse countries in the world, with an amazing number of distinctive biomes from high-peak mountains in the Andes to extensive flatlands and Amazonian rainforest. This has made Colombia a dream destination for birders and nature lovers alike. VENT is proud to offer this short trip that concentrates on the Llanos (Plains) of the Orinoco, a vast area rich in waterbirds and forest species alike.*

*Our tour's focus is Hato La Aurora, a working cattle ranch where dazzling species such as the Scarlet Ibis share the wetlands with gorgeous Sunbittern and bizarre Hoatzin. You can expect a wealth of tropical birds and some of the easiest and most pleasant birding anywhere. During the tour, we should get close to 200 species, which include such spectacular birds as Jabiru (stork), Orinoco Goose, Great*

*Potoo, Scarlet Macaw, Horned Screamer, Gray-cowled Wood-Rail, Pale-headed Jacamar and many others. Evening spotlighting of mammals, night birds, reptiles, and amphibians from the custom-designed observation truck is superb and is often considered one of the highlights of the tour.*

*In addition to our visit to the reserve, we'll have a full day in Bogotá, where we plan to visit the Chingaza National Park, a high-Andes location where we will be introduced to the páramo, a distinctive habitat that hosts Scarlet-bellied Mountain Tanager and Golden-fronted*

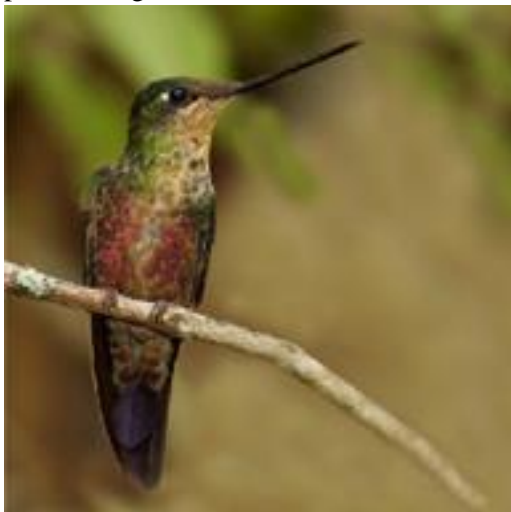
*Redstart. We will also enjoy a hummingbird site hosting an incredible mix of bright colored species such as Blue-throated Starfrontlet, Glowing and Coppery-bellied pufflegs, White-bellied Woodstar and Great Sapphirewing.*



**January 2, Day 1: Arrival in Bogotá.** Participants should plan to arrive in Bogotá (El Dorado International Airport code BOG) at any time today, but please bear in mind that we will be departing for our first day afield quite early the following morning (by about 4:30 to 5:00 AM), so you may consider arriving a day early. On arrival, you will be met and transferred to our hotel in Bogotá for the night. Upon request, the VENT office will be happy to assist with early arrival lodging and airport transfers.

NIGHT: Hilton Garden Inn Bogotá Airport, Bogotá

**January 3, Day 2: Full Day in the Bogotá Area: Chingaza National Park and Hummingbird Observatory at La Calera.** Located in the northeast of Bogotá, Chingaza National Park offers the opportunity to observe birds in elfin (high montane) forest as well as páramo (high Andean scrub). The scenery of this park is absolutely astonishing and offers views of the Bogotá plateau. We should leave around 4:30-5:00 a.m. to reach the pre-páramo vegetation where Grass Wren, Pale-bellied Tapaculo, Silvery-throated Spinetail, Coppery-bellied and Glowing pufflegs, Blue-throated Starfrontlet, and Crimson-mantled Woodpecker occur. We will also keep our eyes peeled for feeding



Great Sapphirewing © David Ascanio

flocks, which bring the opportunity to observe Rufous-browed Conebill, Golden-fronted Whitestart and Superciliaried Hemispingus, along with astonishing Scarlet-bellied and Buff-breasted mountain-tanagers and Black-crested Warbler, as well as Masked and Black flowerpiercers. Many specialized tyrant-flycatchers occur in the high Andean scrub, and a good sample includes White-throated Tyrannulet, Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant (commoner in páramo) and Black-capped Tyrannulet. Once in the higher elevations (depending upon mist and visibility, we plan to reach 12,000 feet), we will be exposed to another habitat and indeed to more new birds. This area is what we call páramo and is home for Green-bearded Helmetcrest (can be difficult to locate in the dry season), Bronze-tailed Thornbill, Black-headed Hemispingus, Rufous Antpitta (difficult to see), Many-striped Canastero, White-browed Spinetail, White-chinned Thistletail and the robust Black-

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ched Buzzard-Eagle. In the afternoon, we will head to the Hummingbird Observatory at La Calera where we should get close views of Blue-throated Starfrontlet as well as Great Sapphirewing, Green and Sparkling violetears, Glowing and Coppery-bellied pufflegs, Sword-billed Hummingbird, Black-tailed and Green-tailed trainbearers, White-bellied Woodstar, and Amethyst-throated Sunangel. Generally speaking, many hummingbird species perform altitudinal migrations and our visit during the dry season will be reflected in the number of rare or occasional species that we will see there.

NIGHT: Hilton Garden Inn Bogotá Airport, Bogotá

**January 4, Day 3: Flight to Yopal; Drive to Hato La Aurora.** An early departure to the Bogotá airport will allow us to take the flight to Yopal, in the heart of the vast Colombian Llanos, a grassland broken by forest-bordered rivers and occasional low-lying, swampy regions. As soon as we're out of the airport, we will begin our six-hour drive to the heart of this biome. We will make stops along the road and will pay special attention to grass fires, which attract raptors such as Aplomado Falcon; Savanna Hawk; and Zone-tailed, Roadside, and White-tailed hawks. Some of the most popular birding spots are the borrow pits and wetlands along the road since these bring opportunities to look for the impressive Jabiru and Maguari storks (the latter is rare) as well as many other waterbird species including White-faced and Black-bellied whistling ducks. Particularly beautiful are the unique Whistling Heron and the striking Scarlet Ibis, both of which are possible today. Our base for the next four nights will be the Ecolodge Juan Solito, in the Hato La Aurora.

NIGHT: Ecolodge Juan Solito, Hato La Aurora, Colombian Llanos

**January 5-7, Days 4-6: Hato La Aurora.** During our three full days in this unique and bird-rich biome, we will explore the key habitats including riverine (gallery) forest, wetlands, patches of tropical dry forest, scrubby vegetation and shrubs. Each of these habitats offers distinctive wildlife. For example, the gallery forest hosts the unique and bizarre Hoatzin, a folivorous bird with an elongated esophagus, an adaptation to ferment the cellulose in the leaves they eat. This habitat also hosts more restricted distribution species including the Pale-headed Jacamar and the White-bearded Flycatcher. Additionally, some more widespread but spectacular birds include Sunbittern and Green-and-rufous Kingfisher. In more open areas, one can find wetlands and with them, the enormous Horned Screamer. A favorite among tour participants is the astonishing Scarlet Ibis, a species restricted to northern South America. Another interesting area to look for birds is the ecotone forest-grassland, which is the transition between these two habitats. Here, we will look for Blue-tailed Emerald and Blue-chinned Sapphire. In the Llanos, there are endless opportunities to keep adding birds to your list. There will be time to look for the Orinoco Goose, Pied Lapwing and Sharp-tailed Ibis. Once we have seen the commoner species, we will pursue less easy-to-see birds including Crestless Curassow, Wire-tailed Manakin and Sepia-capped Flycatcher. Along with the bird diversity, a visit to the Llanos offers a great cultural experience. The local cowboys, locally named *Llaneros*, stand as a heavy mix between the Spaniards and the Amerindian tribes that once populated this area. They are used to living in rough conditions and are also great musicians; their songs usually reference the flora and fauna of this splendid area. Many flagship species are also present on the Llanos, and although our chances of actually seeing a Jaguar are very slight (there are photo records from camera traps!), it could happen. We should, however, see Capybara, the largest rodent in the world, and the impressive Anaconda. Hato La Aurora is also a famous site to look for the Giant Anteater.



**Wire-tailed Manakin © David Ascanio**



NIGHTS: Ecolodge Juan Solito Lodge, Hato La Aurora, Colombian Llanos



Orinoco Goose © David Ascanio

**January 8, Day 7: Drive to Yopal; Flight to Bogotá.** We may take advantage of the early morning to catch-up on any birds we've missed, and after breakfast we will prepare for our drive back to Yopal to connect with our afternoon flight to Bogotá.

NIGHT: Hilton Garden Inn Bogotá Airport, Bogotá

**January 9, Day 8: Departures for Home.** For participants not continuing to *Undiscovered Eastern Colombia: Birding Secrets of the White Sands of Inírida*, transfers to the airport will be provided for departures at any time today.

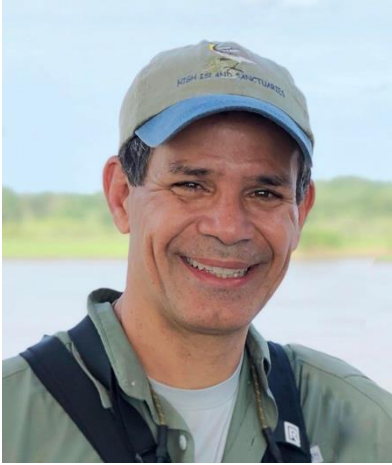
**NOTES ABOUT THIS TOUR:** Until a few years ago, Colombia was rarely visited by birders. Tourism infrastructure has been limited but is developing rapidly and accommodations are generally comfortable and the food is good. The transfer from Yopal to Juan Solito is about six hours each way and half of it is on a dirt road. Be prepared for walking short distances, mostly on even terrain. The ecolodge has eight rooms, all with private bath (no heated water). The traditional structure of the building with palm roof is designed to keep it cool, and there is no air conditioning. Wi-Fi is available around the dining room at Juan Solito; however, it is unreliable.

**CONDITIONS:**

- Expect a full day of birding at high elevations above Bogotá.
- There will be a domestic flight with luggage weight restrictions. We plan to arrange a luggage storage area in Bogotá for you to leave behind your cold weather clothing.
- The road from El Yopal to the ranch will be in 4-wheel drive vehicles through mud and uneven terrain.
- There is no mobile phone access at Juan Solito Lodge.
- Bring a small bottle of shampoo to be used at Juan Solito lodge.
- You might want to consider bringing rubber boots. First, to keep your feet warm in high elevations and second, to avoid chiggers and ticks in the Llanos.

**TOUR SIZE:** This tour will be limited to 8 participants.

**TOUR LEADER:** David Ascanio



**David Ascanio**, a Venezuelan birder and naturalist, has spent 35 years guiding birding tours throughout his native country, Colombia, Brazil, Peru, Costa Rica, the Orinoco and Amazon river basins, Trinidad & Tobago, Suriname, the Guianas, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, the Lesser Antilles, Cuba, Chile, and Panama. He is especially interested in bird vocalizations and has a private library containing voices of more than 70% of all the birds of Venezuela. David combines superb birding skills with an astonishing command of bird vocalizations. He has published a book for children about bird songs and has coauthored the descriptions of two new species, the Rio Orinoco Spinetail and the Delta Amacuro Softtail. David has also published various manuscripts about the birds of the *llanos* (plains), the Orinoco River island species, and the pan-tepui endemic species for which he has become an authority. He is the first author of the *Field Guide to the Birds of Venezuela* (2017). David is an excellent communicator, has a great sense of humor, and is tireless in helping others find birds and wildlife. These traits have made him

one of the most popular naturalists/guides in the Neotropics.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for the tour is **\$3,595** per person in double occupancy from Bogotá, Colombia. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 to dinner on Day 7, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, internal flights, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leader. It does not include airfare from your home to Bogotá and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$350**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations.

**REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT:** To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. If you would like to pay your deposit using a credit card, the deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at <https://www.ventbird.com>) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

**PAYMENTS:** All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 150 days prior to the tour departure date (August 5, 2021).

**MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE REQUIREMENT:** This tour visits remote locations where immediate access to primary medical care may **NOT** be available. **For this reason, travel insurance which covers you for emergency evacuation is required for participation on this tour.** This coverage is included in the **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance™** program. Through Ripcord, “emergency evacuation” can be purchased as a stand-alone benefit or as part of a comprehensive travel insurance policy. If you choose not to purchase insurance through Ripcord, you are required to obtain it through another provider.

## **CANCELLATION & REFUNDS:**

### **Cancellation by Participant:**

Refunds, if any, for any cancellation by a participant are made according to the following schedule: If participant cancels 180 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$500** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made between 179 and 151

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days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the tour fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 150 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre- and post-tour extensions. **For participants' protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

### If participant cancels:

180 days or more before departure date

179 to 151 days before departure date

150 days or less before departure date

### Participant's refund will be:

Participant's deposit minus \$500\*

No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance of the tour fee will be refunded

No refund available

\*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person. To qualify, cancellation must occur 180 days or more before departure date; deposit transfers must be made at the time of cancellation; and one transfer per deposit.

### **Cancellation by VENT:**

If VENT cancels a tour prior to departure without cause or good reason, VENT will provide the participant a full refund, which will constitute full settlement to the participant.

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. A "**Force Majeure**" event means any act beyond VENT's control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

This VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside of the services described in the tour itinerary.

**Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.**

**TRAVEL INSURANCE:** To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit. VENT has partnered with Redpoint Travel Protection as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend their **Ripcord** plan. Designed for all types of travelers, Ripcord is among the most comprehensive travel protection programs available.

Critical benefits of Ripcord include a completely integrated program with a single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims; **medical evacuation and rescue services** from your point of injury or illness to your **hospital of choice**; comprehensive travel insurance for **trip cancellation/interruption**, primary medical expense coverage, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as security evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or other security events, **waiver for pre-existing medical conditions exclusion**, and a "**Cancel for Any Reason**" benefit. Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.\*

For a price quote, or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: [ripcordtravelprotection.com/ventbird](https://ripcordtravelprotection.com/ventbird); or click the **Ripcord** logo on our website (click Help and Trip Insurance); or call +1-415-481-0600. Pricing is based on age, trip cost, trip length, and level of coverage.

\*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 14 days of making your tour deposit. The CFAR benefit provides reimbursement for 75% of covered costs, and increases the policy premium by approximately 50%. Policies may be purchased either for the full value of the tour fee at the time of deposit or in segments as individual tour payments are made (deposit, mid-payment, final balance, additional arrangements, etc.). The “pay as you go” approach reduces up-front expense and ensures that the amount paid toward your full policy premium is in proportion to the amount paid toward the full tour fee. If you choose to “pay as you go,” you must cover each deposit or payment within 14 days in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

### **Coronavirus (COVID-19):**

The coronavirus pandemic has brought uncertainty for many people currently holding travel insurance policies or who are considering future travel and purchasing such insurance. Redpoint has added a **Coronavirus FAQ page** to its website that addresses questions and concerns regarding its travel insurance and the impact of COVID-19. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of topics such as policy coverage and limitations, policy modifications, cancellation, refunds, and more. Among the most important points: 1) Trip cancellation solely for concern or fear of travel associated with COVID-19 is not covered; 2) Should you request cancellation of your policy, a full refund of your premium is available only under a limited set of conditions; and 3) Should you request cancellation, you may be eligible to receive a pro-rated refund of the unused portion of your premium or a travel insurance credit. Travel insurance credit (“Premium Credit”) is for the value of the policy purchased and may be applied to future policies. Premium Credits have no expiration dates. Rules and regulations apply.

Please visit the **Coronavirus FAQ** page at the following link:

[https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid\\_19\\_faq/](https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid_19_faq/)

Additionally, as countries begin opening up for travel, many are instituting an array of COVID-19 entry requirements, including mandates to purchase travel insurance covering medical expenses due to COVID-19 illness and accommodation in case of quarantine. Ripcord’s comprehensive travel insurance plans are designed to satisfy the various country-specific travel insurance entry requirements. Those who purchase a Ripcord policy will receive a “letter of confirmation” that affirms that the policy satisfies such requirements.

**EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES:** In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

**FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES:** In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

**AIR INFORMATION:** Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. ***Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be responsible for any air ticket penalties.***

**BAGGAGE:** We request that participants limit their luggage to one medium-sized, soft-sided bag and one carry-on as space in the vehicles will be limited. Bear in mind that domestic airlines in Colombia have a limit of one piece of checked luggage not exceeding 50 pounds (23 kilos). The cost for excess weight or a second piece of checked luggage is at your own expense and varies from \$50 to \$80 (prices and policies may change frequently). We will do our best to keep you posted with the latest policy if there is a substantial change. Please avoid bringing large suitcases. As a precaution, we suggest you pack your travel documents, medications, toiletries, a change of clothes, and your binoculars in your carry-on bag.

**LAUNDRY:** Laundry service may be limited or unreliable on this tour. Therefore, we recommend that you bring sufficient clothes for the entire trip and/or bring items that can be washed and will dry quickly.

**CLIMATE & CLOTHING:** Throughout this tour we will visit areas where the climate may vary from cool, damp and foggy in Chingaza National Park, to hot and dry in the Llanos. Although this is not a peak rainy period (rains are heaviest in April, May, and September to early November), participants should expect some rain as the Colombian Andes generally receive fairly high rainfall. Please do not wear white or brightly colored clothes, including hats or raingear, and avoid nylon or plastic jackets and/or rainwear of similar materials; bright, noisy clothing is annoying to others and may frighten birds and animals. Military camouflage clothing should not be worn as it conveys an inappropriate image to police and military personnel, whom we are likely to encounter at various highway checkpoints. Chingaza National Park is at a fairly high elevation and likely to be cool, even cold (and often damp and foggy) and will require a long, waterproof poncho or rain jacket; warm sweater or down jacket (or light jacket and down vest combination in layers); and warm hat and gloves. For the Llanos we suggest loose-fitting khaki clothing or other cotton clothing in a dark green, dark blue, tan or brown shade. Long pants and long-sleeved shirts are recommended as protection against insects. Walking shorts may be worn at lodges, but long pants are recommended in the field (we suggest you bring both). Footwear should include water-resistant/waterproof hiking boots, and perhaps a second pair of walking shoes and/or sneakers. Rubber boots are not mandatory on this trip but you might want to consider bringing them for some muddy or wet areas on trails and some tall, wet grass in some areas. The sun can be more intense at higher elevations so we suggest you bring a broad-brimmed hat for protection from over exposure and a good sunscreen. Shower thongs are highly recommended.

**DOCUMENTS:** A valid passport is required for U.S. citizens, with at least one blank page for entry stamps. We recommend your passport be valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure from Colombia. Visas are not required for entry by United States citizens for stays of 90 days or less. Non-United States citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions.

**EQUIPMENT:** All participants should bring sunscreen and lip balm, a good hat or cap for shade, a durable and reliable flashlight or head lamp (head lamps are easier to maneuver during short blackouts), extra batteries, a battery-operated alarm clock (today's mobile phones do have alarm settings), snacks (if you have a special diet), plastic bags to protect your equipment from dust or rain, a daypack and/or small backpack. A compact umbrella and a dry bag for your camera and optic equipment are highly recommended. Your leader will have a spotting scope, but if you have one, we encourage you to bring it. All participants must have some type of refillable water bottle.

**MISCELLANEOUS:** Participants should bring enough spare batteries to last for a few days between charges in case of unplanned electrical outages. Electrical plug-ins in Colombia usually are two flat-pin type (same as in USA) and electrical current is 110 volts in virtually all areas (but always check first as 220 to 240 volts may be found in a few areas). If you plan to recharge batteries, bring appropriate converters; a surge protector also is recommended. Because much of this route traverses relatively remote regions where the variety (although not quantity) of food may be limited, we recommend that everyone, including especially those persons with dietary restrictions or other dietary requirements, bring at least some trail snacks and other emergency food items that are portable. Colombia is in the Central Time Zone. Spanish is the official language.



**HEALTH:** Malaria has been confirmed in Colombia, including the chloroquine-resistant strain in rural areas. However, it is not expected to be a problem on this route. Please consult with your physician or local travel clinic for recommendations.

While not a requirement for entry into Colombia unless you are arriving from an infected area in another country, a yellow fever vaccination is a good idea for most people traveling to third world, tropical countries, and the vaccination is good for 10 years. People with compromised immune systems should consult with their personal physician before getting any vaccination.

You should not drink local water or use it for brushing your teeth. All hotels will supply drinking water in your room. Bottled water of various kinds is available at all restaurants. Extra water for rooms may be purchased by tour participants and will always be available when we are in the field.

VENT follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccinations.

If you are taking personal medication, prescription or over-the-counter, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

**COVID-19:** The world has been in the grip of a pandemic since early 2020, a result of the uncontrolled spread of SARS-CoV-2, the novel coronavirus that causes the illness COVID-19. COVID-19 is transmitted through person-to-person contact, almost always through inhaling respiratory aerosols or droplets exuded from an infected person. Common signs of COVID-19 illness include fever or chills, fatigue, shortness of breath, cough, loss of taste or smell, and more. Based on what is known about the disease, COVID-19 is far more serious than seasonal flu. Few places in the world have been unaffected. The impact on travel has been substantial, as demonstrated by the fact that VENT did not operate a tour between late March 2020 and late April 2021. The development and deployment of COVID-19 vaccines, particularly in the United States, has allowed VENT to return to tour operations. We emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. **With this in mind, VENT instituted a COVID-19 vaccination requirement.** All tour participants and tour leaders must be fully vaccinated in order to travel with us while we are still in a declared public health emergency. In accordance with the latest guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), full vaccination is defined as an individual being 14 days beyond having received the required amount of vaccine for reaching full immunity to the degree specific vaccines confer. In the United States, so far, this means either the two-shot sequence for the Moderna or Pfizer vaccines or the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine. Proof of vaccination must be provided to our office at least one week before the start of the tour and kept with you while on the tour. Because the world is a very different place than it was before the pandemic, we've made a number of important adjustments to our processes to ensure that our tours can operate as safely as possible. Please visit the **Coronavirus Travel Update** page of our website <https://ventbird.com/covid-19>, where you may view our **COVID-19 Protocols for VENT Tours** document, which details the guidance VENT will follow in the operation of its tours in the time of pandemic. Our decision and policy are firmly rooted in the latest CDC guidance regarding recommendations for avoiding COVID-19. As we move forward, VENT will continue to follow the latest information from the CDC and will update our policy accordingly. Please visit the CDC website for the most up to date information about COVID-19 and associated guidance for proper health and hygiene: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line (800) CDC-INFO (800-232-4636). You can check the CDC website at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel>. Canadian

citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: [www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html) (click on Travel Health).

**INSECT PROTECTION:** Insects are present but not usually troublesome. There are chiggers in the Llanos and some type of repellent is strongly recommended for these areas. We recommend bringing an adequate supply of insect repellent, including a stick-type form for your hands and face, plus a pump-style container of “OFF!” or “Cutter” for your clothing. Please, avoid bringing any spray-form of bug repellent as it may damage cameras or binoculars. Instead, roll-on or lotion forms are appropriate.

**A Note About Chiggers:** This tour visits areas where chiggers are known to occur. Chiggers are tiny parasitic mites found in most warm weather areas of the southern United States and the world’s tropics. They are especially numerous in grassy areas, where, in the immature stage, they attach themselves to other animals or humans who make contact with the grass as they pass by. Chiggers do not suck blood and the majority of the world’s species do not carry disease. They do feed on bodily fluids, however, through a process in which a digestive enzyme is produced by the chigger which essentially liquefies the skin around the area where the chigger is attached.

The chigger is not usually attached to the skin for more than a few hours before it either falls off or is knocked off. Our bodies respond by producing a hardened area as a defense against the chigger’s digestive enzyme. Though the chigger may be long gone, it is the presence of the hardened area, and the body’s natural process of reabsorbing

it that typically causes intense itching, often lasting for a week or more. Chiggers like to attach themselves to areas of thin skin, like around the ankles, beltline, undergarment lines, knees, and elbows.

Chiggers can be avoided by following these procedures:

- Avoid walking, or standing in particular, in areas dominated by grass. These areas are where one is most likely to encounter chiggers.
- Tuck your pants into your socks to avoid direct skin-to-grass contact. Chiggers can find their way through clothing, but this is a standard and effective prevention technique commonly employed by many.
- Apply a cream-style insect repellent, such as “Cutter” to your body from the waist down BEFORE putting on your clothing.
- Spray your pants and socks with a spray repellent such as “Cutter” or “Off!” Repellents with high concentrations of DEET (70-100%) are most effective. You do not need to apply these to you skin, only to clothing. (Be careful as DEET will damage plastics and lens coatings). Repel Permanone is an odorless aerosol insecticide that offers perhaps the best defense against chiggers. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online. It should only be applied to clothes and allowed to dry before you dress. Never apply Permanone directly to the skin. Permethrin is known to be a highly toxic chemical to insects. It is the active ingredient in Permanone, but is present in a small amount (0.5%).
- Powdered sulfur applied to waist, bottoms of pants, sock and boots is also effective at repelling chiggers. However, be warned that clothes will retain the sulfur odor for several washings.
- Shower at the end of each day in the field. Use a washcloth to vigorously rub your legs, feet, and ankles.

By following these methods, you should be able to avoid all chigger bites, as well as tick bites. If, however, you are bitten by chiggers anyway, you can reduce or eliminate the symptoms by applying benzocaine or hydrocortisone creams, calamine lotion, After Bite, or any number of anti-itch products.

**\*We strongly recommend the use of Insect Shield® clothing.** Insect Shield is a process by which clothing is treated with an EPA-approved formula of the insect repellent permethrin. Such clothing is highly repellent to insects and provides durable and long-lasting protection, even after dozens of washings. Outdoor wear with Insect Shield protection includes name brands such as Ex Officio and Tilley, and can be purchased at outdoor recreation stores such as REI and from a variety of online retailers. In lieu of Insect Shield clothing, you should consider treating your clothes with permethrin, which has the same effect, and that can be purchased at outdoor recreation stores and from a variety of online retailers.

**CURRENCY:** Colombian Peso (COP). We recommend that you exchange all or most of your dollars at the international airport in Bogotá upon arrival. ATMs are available in the airports and many other public sites where you can obtain local currency (and generally give the most favorable exchange rates).

**INTERNET ACCESS:** Colombia is one of the most “wired” countries in South America and most hotels have internet access and Wi-Fi (at least in the lobbies if not actually in hotel rooms), but it is unlikely to be available in the Llanos. Also, for those with the appropriate chip in your mobile phone (iPhone, Samsung, etc.) or iPad, you should be able to connect via one of Colombia’s main telecommunications services such as CLARO or MOVISTAR (CLARO has more coverage in remote rural areas, such as this one). Sometimes this entails a trip to a local telecommunications service center, something best done in Bogotá before the trip begins. Those with Apple phones or iPads can obtain a chip from the Apple store in Bogotá. Cell phone access is now virtually country-wide in Colombia near populated areas, although in rural areas there might not be a signal (this is usually a local issue). Before leaving home, we suggest that you check with your personal service provider for roaming rates and coverage use areas pertaining to your personal calling plan.

**SUGGESTED READING:** A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) which has a wide selection; [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com) and [www.nhbs.com](http://www.nhbs.com) which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

**Birds:**

- Hilty, S. L. 2021. *Birds of Colombia*. New guide, we hope becomes the recommended book for Colombia. Forward-looking taxonomy includes all species and subspecies groups (as in Clements checklist). Illustrations are from 16-vol. *Handbook of Birds of the World* (Lynx) with many updates and additions. All species, as well as subspecies, and subspecies groups are illustrated and mapped. Unique for South America, this book contains a QR code for every species, which allows users to quickly link, via mobile phone, to Cornell’s *Birds of the World* website and listen to vocalizations, view photos, and read an expanded text. Almost like having an App embedded in this book (and Colombia has remarkably good cellular coverage so this feature should be usable almost everywhere). Available from Lynx Editions [www.lynxeds.com](http://www.lynxeds.com). Should soon be available from Buteo Books/ABA sales, and elsewhere.
- Mc Mullan, Miles; T. Donegan, G. Pantoja-Peña; T. Tuncer-Navarro; A. Bartels & T. Ellery. *Field Guide to the Birds of Colombia*. Bogotá, Colombia: Rey Naranjo Editores, 2018. Illustrates every species known to have occurred in Colombia and includes range map for each species. The text is concise and includes a description of the bird vocalization. A color-band separating each family may be a useful way to find the species when using in the field. Represents a significant achievement in simply dealing with nearly 2,000 species in a book that is remarkably compact and portable.
- McMullan, Miles, T. M. Donegan & A. Quevedo. *Field Guide to the Birds of Colombia*, 2nd edition. Bogotá, Colombia: ProAves, 2014. Ca. 360 pages. Paperback. Illustrates every species known to have occurred in Colombia, and includes a very small range map for each species. Although you will want this for the updated taxonomic treatment of species, and for the maps, you will find that even in this improved second edition many species still cannot be identified accurately because of the poor printing (colors dull and muddy or inaccurate), especially hummingbirds, flycatchers, furnariids and some species in other families. A few brief, text remarks accompany each species. The index is brief but adequate and the print is very small. Despite some drawbacks we recommend that all visitors obtain a copy of this little book (available from Buteo Books, USA and Amazon store). It is jam-packed with helpful information but due to the quality of the illustrations, it should be regarded as a supplement for field identification (not a solution to all identifications). Nevertheless, it represents a significant achievement in simply dealing with nearly 2,000 species in a book that is remarkably compact and portable.
- Hilty, S. L. and W. L. Brown. *Guide to the Birds of Colombia*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986. Now a classic but still a good source for basic Colombia bird identification. Excellent source of

information on voice, behavior, breeding and status and habitat, range maps for almost all species. Plates excellent but taxonomy now dated because of many new changes. For those that object to the size of this volume we suggest you simply remove the plates AND maps and have them bound separately so that you can carry this portion into the field. Please note that in an avifauna as complex and confusing as that in Colombia, accurate RANGE MAPS are essential too. At present this book is out of print and may be difficult to find.

- Ridgely, R & G. Tudor. *Field Guide to the Birds of South America: Passerines*. Helm Field Guides, 2009. An essential field guide for those wanting to go birding in South America. Very well illustrated and concise but relevant accounts.
- Restall, R., C. Rodner, and M. Lentino. *Birds of Northern South America*. Vol. 2. Plates and maps. London: Christopher Helm, 2006. Relatively up-to-date taxonomy but very different color plate style compared to previous two books (plates useful for some groups; less so for difficult groups like flycatchers); similar in size and almost as heavy as the Hilty book. It covers seven countries (over 7,000 images) which complicates field use because of the large number of illustrations. Maps are tiny and lack detail. All text is in a separate volume. Despite its large size and weight, a good reference.

***Bird Apps:***

- *Merlin Bird ID*. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The best app to use in the field. Nowadays considered the “future of birding.” Once the app is downloaded, you must download the packs for Colombia. As this itinerary was made, there are four packs for Colombia available. Includes a brief bird description, photos and voices. Also, there is a section for Bird Photo ID which can be useful. **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.**
- *Ebird*. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. A friendly and essential tool for the modern birdwatcher, this is nowadays your best way to keep your life list, all in a single application. Users can compile personal bird lists by location and by trip. When taxonomic splits are incorporated, your list will be automatically updated. Furthermore, your guide will be able to share the daily list. You can just accept the shared list from your VENT leader and have it uploaded in your account! An essential tool to promote bird conservation. **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.**
- *Bird Data*. A free App that provides summarized information for each species, including the subspecies and presence in neighboring countries. It has a section of endemic species. Look for the Colombia package. Providing that you have data access in your phone, it will show the eBird hotspots near your location, thus being one of its main advantages.
- *The Birds of Colombia*. IMB publicación. A basic app showing a list of the birds of Colombia based in taxonomic order and arranged by family. Contains an ornithological dictionary.
- *All Birds Colombia*. Sunbird Images. Blue Level Series. Available in Apple Store. This app was made from the information in *Birds of Northern South America* by R. Restall et al (Helm Field Guide). It contains images, maps and bird voices. The user must be aware that the maps used from the publication were out-of-date at the time of printing. The most powerful aspects are the bird voices and the sonograms accompanying each species as well as the search tools. Good source to study the voice of the birds and get acquainted with the plumage and other aspects of the species natural history.
- *Colombia – guía de viaje y mapa offline*. Tripwolf. The free download provides limited information. A good source for those wanting to learn about culture, important dates and other aspects of the country. To access all the information, an upgrade must be purchased.
- *MAPS.ME*. This app allows you to navigate offline. Detailed maps, all free of cost. Once the application is downloaded, you will have to download the map (s) for Colombia.



**Mammals:**

- Emmons, L.H. & François Feer. *Neotropical Rainforest Mammals. A field guide*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997. Paperback. The best resource for mammals occurring in Colombia.

**Natural History:**

- Hilty, Steven. *Birds of Tropical America: A Watcher's Introduction to Behavior, Breeding and Diversity*. University of Texas Press, 2005. Highly recommended for background information on how things work in bird communities in tropical latitudes; topics include diversity of birds, hummingbird communities; mixed species flocks; antbirds and army ants; colorfulness, song structure in relation to environments, and much more.
- Kricher, John C. *The New Neotropical Companion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017. Excellent broad-based resource on just about everything from plants and birds to insects, herps and mammals in the Neotropics.
- Forsyth, Adrian, and Ken Miyata. *Tropical Nature: Life & Death in the Rain Forests of Central and South America*. New York: Scribners Sons, 1984. Does not deal much with birds but is a fantastic introduction to all kinds of topics relating to tropical wildlife including bugs, frogs, plant strategies, bot flies, and much more. Extraordinarily well written. Excellent introductory reading on tropical natural history.

**General Travel:**

- Porup, J, K. Raub, C. Soriano & R. Reid. *Lonely Planet Guide to Colombia*. Latest edition. A good introduction to Colombia life, culture and just getting around the country. A little time with this or a similar travel book should provide a richer travel experience for almost anyone, such as the latest editions of: Colombia Handbook; Rough Guide; Bradt Guide; Michelin Green Guide Colombia (highly rated).

**Recordings:**

- Alvarez, M., V. Caro, O. Laverde and A. M. Cuervo. *Guía sonora de las aves de los Andes Colombianos* (A Guide to the Bird Sounds of the Colombian Andes). CD discs 1-7. Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, 2007. Good source for bird sound recordings for the Andes of Colombia (over 600 species). Songs are not introduced at beginning of each track (follow with booklet).

**History:**

- Rockefeller, J.D. *Pablo Escobar: Colombia's Greatest Hero or Villain? History of the Greatest Drug Lord*. 2015. A comprehensive lecture about the life of Pablo Escobar and the economic repercussions of his career. A must to understand Colombia's recent past.
- Albinson, Henry. *Colombia History, and Pre-Columbian Era: The Spanish Conquest, The Founding of the Nation*. Sonit Education Academy.

**TIPPING:** Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that tips are not expected and are entirely optional. Tips should be given directly to your tour leader; they should not be sent to the VENT office.

**RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT:** Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc., a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, “**VENT**”) act only as agents for the participant 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 participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or

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other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

VENT reserves the right (i) to substitute hotels of similar category, or the best reasonable substitution available under the circumstances, for those indicated and (ii) to make any changes in the itinerary that are deemed necessary by VENT or which are caused by third party transportation schedules (i.e. railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, etc.).

VENT reserves the right to substitute leaders or guides on any tour. Where VENT, in its sole discretion, determines such substitution is necessary, it will notify tour participants.

VENT reserves the right to cancel any tour prior to departure with or without cause or good reason. See the VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy set forth above.

Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on April 26, 2021, and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

VENT reserves the right to decline any participant's Registration Form and/or refuse to allow any participant to participate in a tour as VENT deems reasonably necessary, in its sole discretion. VENT also reserves the right to remove any tour participant from any portion of a tour as VENT deems necessary, in its sole discretion, reasons for such removal include but are not limited to, medical needs, injury, illness, inability to meet physical demands of a tour, personality conflict or situations in which such removal is otherwise in the best interest of the tour, the tour group and/or such participant. A participant may also voluntarily depart from a tour. If a participant is removed from a tour or voluntarily departs from a tour, such participant will be responsible for any expenses associated with such removal or departure, including but not limited to, transportation, lodging, airfare and meals, and VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any such removed or departed participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by such participant.

Baggage is carried at the participant's risk entirely. No airline company, its employees, agents and/or affiliates (the "***Airline***") is to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time participants are not on board the Airline's aircraft. The participant ticket in use by any Airline, when issued, will constitute the sole contract between the Airline and the purchaser of the tickets and/or the participant. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for VENT tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airlines Reporting Corporation.

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