



VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

ITINERARY

**Victor Emanuel Nature Tours presents:
A Special Departure for Tucson Audubon Society
BELIZE:
LAGOONS, SAVANNAS & FORESTS**

JANUARY 24–FEBRUARY 3, 2025



American Pygmy Kingfisher © Brian Gibbons

Designed exclusively for the members of Tucson Audubon Society, this exciting natural history experience explores one of the most inviting countries in Central America, Belize. This tiny English-speaking country on the Caribbean Sea features a tremendous range of habitats, and each of the three very comfortable lodges we have selected offers a rich sampling of unmistakably tropical diversity.

In Belize, fantastic birding starts right away. Our TAS group will begin just north of Belize City, at Crooked Tree, renowned for wonderful concentrations of water birds. A collaborative project of the Belize Audubon Society, the Belizean government, and local residents, Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary was created in 1984, a 16,000-acre network of lagoons, swamps, pine savanna, and mango and cashew orchards surrounding the village of Crooked Tree. We will have most of two days to explore expansive wet and dry savanna, coastal thorn scrub, pine-oak woodland, and the famous sanctuary itself, where Jabiru, Boat-billed and Agami herons, Snail Kite, Black-collared Hawk, Sungrebe, Russet-naped Wood-Rail, and American Pygmy Kingfisher are among the many possibilities. A boat trip will give us a chance to see many of these birds and even Mexican Black Howler Monkeys. The low waterside forest can also produce Rufous-breasted Spinetail, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, and Yellow-billed Cacique. The pine forests just west of the lagoon harbor a host of land birds, among them such regional specialties as the Yellow-headed Parrot, Yucatan Woodpecker, and Yucatan Jay.



Russet-naped Wood-Rail © Brian Gibbons

From Crooked Tree, a short drive and pleasant boat ride take us to Lamanai Outpost Lodge, next to a spectacular Maya ruin on a bluff above the tranquil New River Lagoon. Here we will experience some of the finest forest birding in Belize: almost 400 species have been recorded within three miles of the lodge. We should have regular encounters with such dazzling species as Gartered and Slaty-tailed trogons, White-whiskered Puffbird, Keel-billed Toucan, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, and Barred Antshrike. We'll also be looking for specialties such as Tody Motmot and Black-throated Shrike-Tanager. During siesta time, an eye on the gardens and flowering trees right outside our cabanas could produce Long-billed Hermit, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird,

Spot-breasted Wren, Black-cowled Oriole, Blue Bunting, Yellow-throated Euphonia, and migrant warblers. One of the real pleasures of staying at Lamanai is access to the river, and our sunset cocktail cruise beneath the ruins and our evening spotlight safari in search of nightjars, potoos, and other birds will be simply delightful.

Our extremely comfortable accommodation in western Belize's Cayo District, Black Rock Lodge, is the perfect base for exploring the Maya Mountain foothills and Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve. Operating off the grid, Black Rock runs on micro-hydroelectric and solar power. From the main veranda, the grand vista over the Macal River Gorge offers some of the best raptor watching in Belize, with resident Orange-breasted Falcons and Ornate Hawk-Eagles, and even eye-level Swallow-tailed Kites! When we tear ourselves away from the veranda, the excellent birding along the lodge trails and entrance road may yield Spotted Wood-Quail, Collared Trogon, Northern Emerald-Toucanet, and Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher.



Slaty-tailed Trogon © Brian Gibbons

A day trip to Mountain Pine Ridge will introduce us to a whole new set of birds, such as Azure-crowned Hummingbird, Green Jay, Cabanis's Wren, Grace's and Rufous-capped warblers, Rusty Sparrow, Yellow-backed and Yellow-tailed orioles, and Black-headed Siskin. On one day we will drive to Xunantunich, a Maya ruin with great birding around the ancient plaza. This area, too, offers a different mix of species, including many regional specialties and a chance at several very rare birds not found in lowland Belize.

After nine days of birding in this small but birdy country, we expect our list to approach 300 species.

Guiding this trip will be Donito Burgess, Community Engagement Manager at TAS, and Brian Gibbons, from Victor Emanuel Nature Tours. Together, we'll explore the marvelous birdlife and natural history of a very special part of the world.

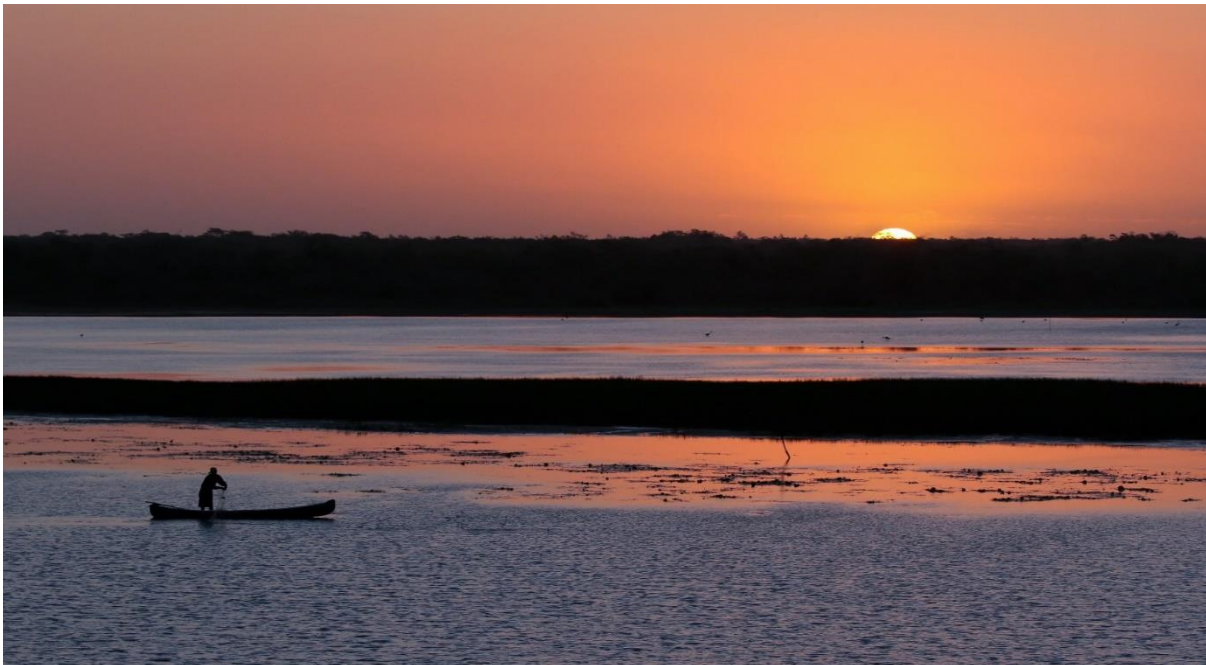
We are pleased to announce that a portion of the proceeds from this tour will support Tucson Audubon Society.

January 24, Day 1: Arrival in Belize City; Transfer to Crooked Tree. Participants should arrive in Belize City today at Philip S. W. Goldson International Airport (airport code BZE). Upon collecting bags, participants will be met outside of the airport by a representative of Bird's Eye View Lodge and transferred to the lodge in Crooked Tree village, about 40 minutes north.

Our trip begins this afternoon with a welcome meeting and orientation at 5:30 p.m. in the lounge, near the front desk. Our gathering provides guests the opportunity to meet fellow travelers and trip leaders, who will outline the events of the coming days.

NIGHT: Bird's Eye View Lodge, Crooked Tree

January 25, Day 2: Crooked Tree. Established in 1984 with the cooperation of Belize Audubon Society, the national government, and local villagers, Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary is a 16,000-acre network of lagoons, swamps, pine-savanna, and mango and cashew orchards surrounding the village of Crooked Tree. From our lodge overlooking Crooked Tree Lagoon, we should see a wide spectrum of birds including Limpkin, Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, Snail Kite, Great Black Hawk, and Northern Jacana. Part of our full day at Crooked Tree will include a relaxing morning boat ride through forest-edged lagoons in search of Jabiru, Agami and Boat-billed herons, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Black-collared Hawk, Sungrebe, and American Pygmy Kingfisher. In the afternoon, we'll explore nearby cashew orchards and pine savanna in search of several Yucatan specialties such as Yellow-lored Parrot, Yucatan Woodpecker, Yucatan Flycatcher, and Yucatan Jay. In this birdy area, we should expect to be constantly entertained by various parrots, flycatchers, warblers, tanagers, and other species.



Sunrise over the Northern Lagoon at Crooked Tree © Michael O'Brien

NIGHT: Bird's Eye View Lodge, Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary

January 26, Day 3: Crooked Tree to Lamanai. After another birdy morning at Crooked Tree, we'll depart after lunch and make our way to Lamanai (meaning "submerged crocodile"), a lodge built in proximity to a small but fabulous Mayan ruin situated above the New River Lagoon. Our transfer to Lamanai will include

a lovely 75-minute boat ride down the New River, where sightings will likely include several species of kingfishers, numerous herons, and perhaps a few raptors. We'll arrive at Lamanai with plenty of time to settle into our new surroundings before dinner.

NIGHT: Lamanai Outpost Lodge, Lamanai

January 27–28, Days 4–5: Lamanai. We'll spend the next two days exploring the trails, clearings, and ruins at Lamanai including a couple more boat trips. Here we'll experience some of the finest tropical forest birding in Belize. A stroll through the local forest trails may produce Blue Ground Dove; Long-billed and Stripe-throated hermits; Black-headed, Slaty-tailed and Gartered trogons; White-whiskered Puffbird; Keel-billed Toucan; Chestnut-colored Woodpecker; Tawny-winged and Ivory-billed woodcreepers; Barred Antshrike; Northern Bentbill; White-collared Manakin; a long list of wintering and migrant warblers; Black-throated Shrike-Tanager; Red-throated Ant-Tanager; and Yellow-throated and Olive-backed euphonias. Beyond birds, there are always other interesting creatures here including mammals such as Mexican Black Howler Monkey, White-nosed Coati, Central American Agouti; an array of lizards; and a host of dazzling butterflies. A cocktail cruise on the river will be a relaxing way to watch the sun set and perhaps see a few new birds. For those who desire, on one evening after dinner we'll conduct a river cruise to search for interesting nocturnal species.



Long-billed Hermit © Brian Gibbons

This gives us the opportunity to see some night birds such as Northern Potoo, Yucatan Nightjar, Common Pauraque, and Mottled Owl, and is also the best chance we'll have to see other secretive creatures, like Morelet's Crocodile, or possibly even a Jaguar! Our days will often be broken into a series of short outings with a midday or afternoon siesta. For those who want more down time, there will be ample opportunity for a longer siesta, to walk a trail on your own, or go canoeing or fishing with a local guide.

NIGHTS: Lamanai Outpost Lodge, Lamanai

January 29, Day 6: Lamanai to Black Rock Lodge. After a final early morning at Lamanai, we'll transfer back to the airport where we'll connect with our transportation to Black Rock Lodge. Total driving time will be about three hours, but we will break up this drive with bathroom breaks and perhaps a little birding.

NIGHT: Black Rock Lodge, near San Ignacio

January 30, Day 7: Black Rock Lodge. Our first full day at Black Rock Lodge will be spent entirely on the grounds, nearby trails, and entrance road. This top-notch resort is a true eco-lodge, with a passionate commitment to sustainability and environmental stewardship. Operating off-grid, they use micro-hydroelectric and solar power to run their facilities, have a micro wetland for wastewater processing, and grow their own produce. The rooms are extremely comfortable, and the main veranda has a stunning vista over the Macal River Gorge in Black Rock Canyon. What's more, the birding here is outstanding! Looking out over the gorge, one may see a swirling group of Swallow-tailed Kites at eye level, or an Ornate Hawk-Eagle sail by, or even a courting pair of Orange-breasted Falcons in a noisy tail-chase overhead or perched on a nearby cliff. Meanwhile, the feeders will likely be covered with Yellow-throated and Olive-backed euphonias, Red-legged Honeycreepers, and maybe a Yellow-winged Tanager or Black-cheeked Woodpecker.



Ornate Hawk-Eagle © Brian Gibbons

This 250-acre private reserve abuts the vast Don Elijio Panti National Park and the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve and is one of Western Belize's true gems. Three species of toucans nest right on the grounds, and four species of trogons can be found in the immediate vicinity. Our explorations of the lodge, trails and entrance road should yield a large list of species, possibly including Spotted Wood-Quail, Long-billed and Stripe-throated hermits, Wedge-tailed Sabrewing, Amazon Kingfisher, White-necked and White-whiskered puffbirds, Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher, Green-backed Sparrow, and a host of North American migrants.

NIGHT: Black Rock Lodge, near San Ignacio

January 31–February 2, Days 8-10: Exploring Western Belize. We will have three more full days with which to explore the area around Black Rock Lodge. While staying at the lodge we hope to explore Mayan ruins at Xunantunich, Mountain Pine Ridge, and Pook’s Hill Lodge while expanding our birding possibilities.

Xunantunich – One morning we will visit the Mayan ruins at Xunantunich, located on a ridge above the Mopan River near the Guatemala border. The site was a Mayan ceremonial center during the Late and Terminal Classic periods. Its name, which means “stone woman,” was given in modern times for the ghost of a woman reported to inhabit the site in the 19th century. Birding can be excellent at the ruins, and there are often mixed songbird flocks including various flycatchers, vireos, warblers, orioles, tanagers, and euphonias. The forest edge here is frequented by Gartered and Black-headed trogons and is also very good for finding Lesson’s Motmot. Overhead, various raptors are possible, including Black Hawk-Eagle.

Mountain Pine Ridge – On this longer trip, we will spend most of the day in the mountains. As the name suggests, the habitat is very different, with pines dominating the landscape. A very early departure from Black Rock will ensure we have a good chance to see many of the unique birds from the Mountain Pine Ridge: Rusty Sparrow, Rufous-capped Warbler, Yellow-backed and Yellow-tailed orioles, Grace’s Warbler, Hepatic Tanager, Black-headed Siskin, and Cabanis’s Wren. If we are extremely fortunate, even the very rare Solitary Eagle and Stygian Owl are possible.

Pook’s Hill Lodge and Surrounding Forest – Pook’s Hill was built around an ancient Mayan residential complex, referred to as a Plazuela Group (a “diminutive plaza”), and much of the forest surrounding the main clearing contains unexcavated Mayan settlements. In our wanderings, we will likely see mounded piles of stones, indicating the presence of an ancient Maya family dwelling. The lodge is simple but very comfortable and is set in some of the finest forest we have birded in Belize. We’ll take a full day to explore this fabulous site and should expect well over 100 species without ever getting into a vehicle! Our day will be entirely on foot, but broken up into several segments, with ample time to get off our feet, use the restroom, and have a wonderful lunch. Some of the many species we’ll look for include Great Curassow, Purple-crowned Fairy, Lesson’s Motmot, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Mealy Parrot, Great Antshrike, seven species of woodcreepers, Stub-tailed Spadebill, Band-backed Wren, and Golden-crowned Warbler. With a great deal of luck, some of the rarer possibilities at Pook’s Hill include Uniform Crane, Pheasant Cuckoo, Scaly-throated Leaf-tosser, and Blue Seedeater. When conditions are right, we’ll position ourselves to watch the sky for soaring raptors, such as King Vulture, White Hawk, and Hook-billed and Double-toothed kites. At the same time, we’ll watch for the four possible swift species here: Vaux’s, White-collared, Chestnut-collared, and Lesser Swallow-tailed.

NIGHTS: Black Rock Lodge, near San Ignacio

February 3, Day 11: Transfer to Airport and Departure. This morning we’ll transfer to the airport in good time for departing flights home. Please plan departing flights for no earlier than 12:00 p.m.

TOUR SIZE: This trip will be limited to 12 participants.

TRIP LEADERS: This trip will be led by **Donito Burgess** of Tucson Audubon Society and **Brian Gibbons** of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours.



Donito Burgess was born and raised in deep Southeast Texas, where his passion for nature was nurtured amidst the rich biodiversity of the region. From the sprawling Texas Gulf Coast to the tranquil Piney Woods, Donito's upbringing instilled in him a profound appreciation for the wonders of the natural world. After a move to Austin, Donito spent the better part of two decades exploring the vibrant landscapes of the Hill Country's rugged beauty. Yet, it was his numerous excursions to the Rio Grande Valley and the majestic Big Bend region that captured his heart, igniting a love affair with the untamed wilderness of Texas. Drawn by the allure of the desert's stark beauty,

Donito found himself irresistibly drawn to the Sonoran Desert. Seduced by its rugged landscapes and diverse wildlife, he and his family made the bold decision to relocate to Tucson, where they now call the desert home. Whether he's leisurely strolling through an urban park or navigating the rugged terrain of a remote canyon, Donito's passion for birds and the unique environment of southeast Arizona knows no bounds. As the Community Engagement Manager at Tucson Audubon, he finds joy in sharing his deep-seated love for the desert and its avian inhabitants with birders of all skill levels. Currently residing on the east side of Tucson with his wife, Whitney, and their two sons, Brooks and Easton, Donito strives to inspire others to embrace the beauty of the natural world and to cultivate a deep sense of stewardship for the environments that sustain us all.



Brian Gibbons grew up in suburban Dallas where he began exploring the wild world in local creeks and parks. Chasing butterflies and any animal that was unfortunate enough to cross paths with the Gibbons boys occupied his childhood. A wooden bird feeder kit sparked a flame that was stoked by a gift of the *Golden Guide* and family camping trips to Texas state parks. Thirty years ago Brian attended two VENT camps for young birders. Birds are now his primary interest, but all things wild continue to captivate him. After college, Brian undertook a variety of field biology research jobs that have taken him to the Caribbean, the Bering Sea, and the land of the midnight sun, arctic Alaska. He enjoys working with kids, hoping to spark environmental awareness through birds. For many years Brian's field

research has involved bird banding. His most amazing recoveries were a female Wilson's Warbler that had been banded in Alaska and was captured by Brian in Colorado, and a Sooty Tern that perished after a hurricane on the Texas coast; it had plied the Gulf of Mexico and the oceans of the world for 24 years. Brian's recreational bird-seeking has taken him to Machu Picchu in Peru, the Great Wall in China, the plains of East Africa, and the Himalayas in Nepal. Brian leads birding trips in the United States, Central America, the Caribbean, South Africa, and Europe. As well as being a fanatical birder, he loves capturing birds with photography. He lives in Tucson, Arizona with his wife, Lacreia Johnson, and their son, Grayson.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for this tour is \$5,795 per person in double occupancy from Belize City. This includes all meals beginning with dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 11, lodging, ground transportation during the tour and guide services provided by the tour leaders. Quoted fees do not include airfare from your home to Belize City and return, 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 \$1,155. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

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://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 27, 2024).

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, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

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 from the date of participant tour cancellation, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made between 179 and 151 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.**

<u>If participant cancels:</u>	<u>Participant's refund will be:</u>
180 days or more before departure date	Participant's deposit minus \$500*
179 to 151 days before departure date	No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance of the tour fee will be refunded
150 days or less before departure date	No refund available

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months from the date of participant tour cancellation, 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 its **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 from your point of injury or illness to your hospital of choice**; comprehensive travel insurance for trip cancellation/interruption, medical expense coverage, death of pet, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or political or security reasons, 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:

<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 15 days of making your first trip payment. 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 15 days, and ensure all non-refundable trip cost in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

Coronavirus (COVID-19):

In line with the decision made by the federal government (including the CDC), Redpoint considers COVID-19 illness as any other seasonal respiratory illness. Providing only a positive Covid-19 test result will likely not be considered a covered event per the terms and conditions of the company's policy. Redpoint maintains a **Coronavirus FAQ** page on its website that addresses questions and concerns travelers may have regarding COVID-19 and Redpoint's policy. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of relevant topics.

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

https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid_19_faq/.

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. Per-person fees apply for each set of travel arrangements: \$50 domestic; \$75 international.* Many of our travelers choose to make their own air travel arrangements, but we emphasize the benefits to using our services. If you book your air arrangements yourself, Victor Emanuel Travel is unable to provide support in managing any flight delays and/or cancellations that could occur before and during a tour. When you purchase air tickets through Victor Emanuel Travel, our staff has ready access to your air ticket record and can provide assistance as problems arise. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

*An air ticket will be purchased by Victor Emanuel Travel on behalf of the traveler with the traveler's consent. A purchase is considered final upon receipt of payment. If a ticket is subsequently reissued at the behest of the traveler (i.e. voluntary change of plans), the same fee rates apply for the reissue process, in addition to any fees that may be charged by the airline.

BAGGAGE: Please limit baggage to one piece of luggage and one carry-on. The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. Please consult your pre-departure materials and/or airline to find out specific weight restrictions.

As a precaution against lost luggage, we suggest that you pack a change of clothes, toiletries, medications, important travel documents, optics, and any other essential items in your carry-on bag. Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government's attempts to improve airport security, we recommend that you check the website of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for information pertaining to permissible carry-on items: <http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/prohibited/permitted-prohibited-items.shtm>.

CLOTHING: The physical environment of this trip is humid lowland and drier mid-elevation forest. The days will be warm to hot with little rain expected. Light field clothing and casual attire are suitable for this trip. The following items are recommended:

- **Pants:** A couple pairs of pants are essential. Many people prefer lightweight pants made of cotton or other material, but denim, though not as comfortable, is certainly acceptable.
- **Field Clothing:** Outdoor stores such as Cabela's and REI carry field clothing that many birders find appealing. Pants and long-sleeved shirts made of lightweight, yet durable materials with multiple pockets and ventilated seams are popular. These provide useful protection from the sun and occasional biting insects.
- **Shirts:** A couple long-sleeved t-shirts in addition to other comfortable styles suitable for warm weather. We do not recommend short-sleeved shirts as much as they offer no protection from biting insects or the sun.
- **Hat:** A hat, particularly of a wide-brimmed style, for protection from the sun is essential. Please bring a baseball-style cap at the very least.
- **Outerwear:** Warm weather is anticipated on this trip, but a sweater or light coat or jacket will come in handy for the mornings and evenings, especially if we encounter a cold front from the north (possible but unlikely). In the event of rain, you'll want to have a water repellent jacket as well.
- **Swimsuit:** At least one of the lodges has a nice swimming pool.

FOOTWEAR: We recommend a good trail-walking shoe or light hiking boot when in the field. Heavier hiking boots are not necessary. Athletic shoes are acceptable but will not keep your feet dry and can become soiled from muddy conditions, which do occur. A lighter shoe, like an athletic shoe, sandals, or other open-toed shoe, will come in handy for down time or during periods around towns or hotels and lodges.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Paid laundry service is available at Bird's Eye View Lodge and Lamanai Outpost Lodge but not Black Rock Lodge. If you plan to wash your clothes in your room, please be aware of the fact that drip-drying (even of quick drying nylon items) may take a couple of days with the frequently high humidity.

CLIMATE & WEATHER: The climate in Belize varies throughout the year, but generally can be categorized into wet and dry seasons. The dry season runs from December through May, but showers can happen anytime in this region of subtropical, humid forest. The average temperatures in January vary from daytime highs around 83 (°F) and nighttime lows around 68. The midday weather can feel hot and humid. The early part of the dry season (December–January) can be interrupted by cold fronts out of the north that bring extended periods of overcast, cooler temperatures, and the possibility of rain. Overall, participants should expect pleasant sunny days with cool mornings and warm-to-hot afternoon temperatures. The chance of precipitation is low to moderate; any rain that falls would likely occur as an afternoon shower, unless we experience a late-season cold front.

CONDITIONS: There will be much walking on this tour, mainly in open areas, roadsides, or on well-maintained trails. Although none of the walking will be particularly strenuous, in some areas there will be steps, roots, or other uneven terrain, and participants must be able to negotiate these without assistance, and at a normal birding pace. **This tour is not appropriate for those who have difficulty with steps and staircases. Participants must be able to negotiate multiple tall steps (about 12-inches each) at Lamanai Outpost Lodge.**

Elevations range from sea level near Crooked Tree to around 3,500 feet in the Mountain Pine Ridge. To take advantage of the best time for avian activity, we will usually take an early breakfast and try to be out birding at first light. To balance the early mornings, there may be ample siesta times in the early or late afternoon, depending on the day's schedule, but on some days this is not possible.

Traveling on bumpy roads is expected whenever we are off the Western Highway.

Accommodations: Birds Eye View Lodge has a large ceiling fan and air conditioner in all rooms. Please note at Lamanai Outpost Lodge the tour fee includes cabanas with high-output ceiling fans. A/C units are available for an additional charge of \$30.00 USD per room, per night, subject to availability. Due to the shade and design of the rooms, we have never felt a need for air conditioning.

Birding Etiquette: To make the tour most enjoyable for yourself, other participants, and your leader, it is important to use common sense and show proper etiquette while in the field. Birds tend to be shy. Loud noises and bright colors can scare them. We encourage clothing with earth tones. Try to avoid colors like oranges, yellows, and reds. Always keep your voice down. Shouting is not conducive to extended looks at a given species. When looking through the spotting scope, always wait your turn and look briefly the first time so that others may have the opportunity to get a look. If you are a smoker, please do so at a distance.

EQUIPMENT: One of the most important aspects of having an enjoyable travel experience is being prepared with proper equipment. The following items will come in handy during your trip to Belize:

- **Backpack** – Good for carrying extra clothing, field guides, supplies, optical equipment, etc.
- **Notebooks and pens**
- **Travel alarm clock** – Battery operated is best (if not using this feature on your mobile phone).
- **Polarized sunglasses with good UV protection**
- **Sunscreen, lip balm, skin lotions**
- **Personal toiletries**
- **Cameras, lenses, memory cards, and extra batteries**
- **Collapsible walking stick** – A highly recommended item for those who have trouble walking
- **Umbrella** – A small, collapsible umbrella can be indispensable should we be caught on the trail in the rain. Highly recommended.
- **Water bottle**
- **Tissue packs**
- **Small flashlight or headlamp**
- **Small folding stool** – Many people find this item extremely useful when patiently waiting for shy forest birds.
- **Favorite snacks** – To supplement the available offerings

BINOCULARS & SPOTTING SCOPES:

Binoculars – We strongly recommend good binoculars of at least 8x32, 8x42, or 10x42 magnification. We recommend that you do NOT bring mini-binoculars of any kind. Some people like “minis” because they are small and lightweight; but they have an extremely small field of view and very poor light gathering power. Trying to find a bird in your binoculars using minis is like trying to read a book through a keyhole. You will be very frustrated, and even if you do manage to get the bird in your binoculars before it flies, you will have a poor view. You will find that 8x32 or 8x42 binoculars are compact and light enough.

Spotting Scopes – Your tour leaders will have scopes available for group use throughout the trip, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS:

PASSPORTS - A valid passport is required. Please check the expiration date on your passport. **If it is not valid beyond the length of your trip return date, you will need to get it renewed.** You will also want to make sure that you have at least two blank pages in your passport for stamps.

If you need a passport, you should get it well in advance of your trip departure date. For additional fees, a passport can be issued on an expedited basis. In the United States this can be done at the nearest passport office, most post offices, or the county clerk's office. You may also visit <https://state.gov/travelers/> for information on how to get or renew a passport.

As a safety measure, photocopy the first two pages of your passport and keep the photocopies in a safe place, so if your passport is lost you will have proof of identification. Your passport should be signed and easily available at all times. You will need it for check-in at the airport on your first day of departure, so **do not pack it in your checked luggage.**

VISAS - Citizens of the United States and Canada are not required to obtain a visa for entry into Belize; however, a tourist card will be issued on your flight. Rules and regulations pertaining to non-U.S. and Canadian citizens may vary; please check with the consulates or embassies.

CURRENCY & MONEY MATTERS: Your trip fee includes all necessary expenses; however, you may want to bring some cash to cover personal expenses not included in the program, such as gifts, laundry, gratuities, meals on your own, and personal items. It is best to carry small denominations as the lodges may be unable to provide change for large bills. It is not necessary to exchange currency for the tour since USD are accepted everywhere. If you plan to extend your vacation in Belize beyond what is offered in the program, you'll want to consider obtaining local currency. It is best to acquire local currency before leaving home or at the airport upon arrival in Belize.

Major credit cards are accepted at all lodges for gift shop items, laundry, etc. Please check with your bank and credit card issuer for more information regarding banking and the use of ATM and credit cards overseas.

The official currency of Belize is the Belizean Dollar (BZD). \$1 USD = \$2 BZD. The exchange rate is subject to change but has been constant for many years. Both currencies have identical denominations. So, if you plan to spend any money in Belize, make sure you understand whether the price is being quoted in USD or BZD. You can check the latest currency conversion rate by visiting "XE-The World's Favorite Currency Site" at: <http://www.xe.com/>.

ELECTRICITY: Standard voltage in Belize is 110/220. Electrical outlets at all lodges are of the American-style two-prong flat blade variety. Adapters are not needed in most cases, but we recommend bringing one anyway in the unlikely event a particular plug (three-prong) or appliance does not fit the socket.

INTERNET ACCES: Wi-Fi service is available at all lodges.

LANGUAGE: English, Spanish and Creole are the primary languages spoken in Belize. The staffs at all lodges speak English.

TIME: At the time of this tour, Belize is on Central Standard Time (CST), one hour behind Eastern Standard Time (EST).

HEALTH: 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: We continually emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. Although VENT no longer maintains any of its COVID-era prevention protocols, we strongly recommend best practices for protecting yourself and your fellow travelers against COVID-19 illness. These measures include receiving the primary series vaccinations for those eligible, staying “Up to Date” with COVID-19 booster shots, wearing high filtration N-95 or KN-95 masks when in airports and on airplanes, and avoiding risky social settings in the lead-up to your tour. These recommendations are firmly rooted in CDC guidance regarding recommendations for avoiding COVID-19. Please visit the **Coronavirus Travel Update** page of our website <https://ventbird.com/covid-19> for our official statement regarding COVID-19 and the operation of our tours. 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>.

Sun Exposure – The sun’s ultraviolet rays are dangerous under prolonged exposure (sometimes only a matter of minutes), even in winter and early spring. Anytime you are outdoors you will want to protect your skin, including your lips, eyes, nose, and ears. A severe sunburn is potentially very painful and will affect your level of enjoyment. Always protect yourself when outdoors and be sure to bring an ample supply of high SPF sunscreen and lip balm. We strongly recommend the use of ultra-violet blocking, polarized sunglasses.

Food and Water: Drinking water is purified at all lodges. All food is safe to consume, including raw fruits and vegetables, and is cooked on site. Purified water is available throughout the trip. All salads and dairy products are perfectly safe to eat at the places we visit.

Biting Insects: Mosquitoes, black flies and other small, biting insects can sometimes be a nuisance in Belize, especially in the forested areas. Chiggers are found in most grassy areas. We suggest a stick-type repellent for your face and hands, plus a pump-style container of repellent for your clothing.

Insect Repellents – There are insect repellents for the skin and an insect repellent used to treat clothing that should not be applied to the skin.

Insect repellents for the skin are commonly available in three forms:

- DEET (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide): A chemical compound that is marketed under various brand names (OFF!®, Cutter™, Ultrathon™, etc.) and offered in a variety of formulations including sprays, lotions, time-release preparations, and disposable wipes. The formulations will state a percentage of the active ingredient DEET on the packaging. DEET may be applied to exposed skin directly and/or sprayed on clothing. Please be careful when applying DEET as it can damage plastics and lens coatings.

- Picaridin: A synthetic formulation that is derived from piperine, a substance found in plants that produce black pepper.
- Herbal insect repellents: Various mixtures of organic ingredients such as oils from eucalyptus, citronella, cedar, and other herbs. The herbal repellents are more difficult to categorize because of the difference in ingredients from one brand to another. There is considerable variation in their effectiveness.

An insect repellent for clothing is marketed in one approved formulation:

- Permanone[®] (Permethrin) is an odorless spray-on repellent that may be used for **pre-treatment** of clothing, gear, and tents. It should not be used directly on the skin or sprayed on clothing while it is being worn. The pre-treatment process requires a number of hours to complete and must be done outdoors, so it is best completed in advance of travel. Do-it-yourself pre-treatment must be repeated more often than commercial treatment using Insect Shield[®] technology. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online.
- Insect Shield[®] apparel: Clothing pre-treated with Permanone is made by a variety of manufacturers. It is available for purchase from some sporting goods suppliers. The clothing is advertised as retaining its repellency for up to 70 washings.

The US EPA offers a search tool to help choose a repellent that is best for a particular situation. For example, some repellents work for mosquitoes, but not for ticks.

<https://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/which-insect-repellent-right-you>

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 species do not carry disease. They do feed on bodily fluids 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 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.
- Apply insect repellent to your skin and clothing. Please refer to the Insect Repellent section that follows for important information about selecting and applying repellent.
- 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. If using sulfur, never touch your eyes, nose, or mouth before washing your hands first.
- 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.

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: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html> (click on Travel Health).

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 <https://amazon.com> which has a wide selection; <https://www.buteobooks.com/index.php> and <https://nhbs.com> which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and <https://abebooks.com> for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

Birds: Either of the following two resources is an excellent and suitable option for bird identification on this trip.

Howell, Steve N.G. and Dale Dyer, *Birds of Belize*. Princeton Field Guides. Princeton University Press, 2023.

Jones, H. Lee. *Birds of Belize*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2003. The most complete and authoritative guide to the birds of Belize.

Sibley, David Allen. *The Sibley Guide to Birds, Second Edition*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014. Arguably the best North American field guide; useful for wintering migrants in Belize.

Mammals

Emmons, Louise H. *Neotropical Rainforest Mammals*. University of Chicago Press. Chicago. 1997

Butterflies

Glassberg, Jeffrey. *A Swift Guide to the Butterflies of Mexico and Central America*. Sunstreak Books, 2007.

Birding Resources: The following titles are classics of modern popular science. Easy to read, easy to understand, and always entertaining, these books are written for the experienced naturalist and layman alike. Highly recommended.

Hilty, Steven. *Birds of Tropical America: A Watcher's Introduction to Behavior, Breeding and Diversity*. University of Texas Press, 2005.

Forsythe, Adrian and Ken Miyata. *Tropical Nature: Life and Death in the Rainforests of Central and South America*. Reprint edition. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1987.

CLO Apps & Online Resources:

eBird. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Among the largest and most successful citizen science projects in existence, eBird is an essential tool in promoting bird study and conservation. Among a range of benefits, eBird allows users to keep a variety of lists in a single application. When taxonomic splits are incorporated, lists are automatically updated. Additionally, trip leaders can share daily lists, so one only need accept a shared list and it will upload to your files! **Highly recommended.**

Merlin Bird ID. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Merlin is an app designed as a birding coach for beginning and intermediate bird watchers. Excellent for use in the field, Merlin asks the observer a series of questions regarding his or her bird sighting, including date and location, and color, size, and behavior of a bird. Merlin then processes the viewer's responses to present a shortlist of possible identifications, from which the user can choose the likely bird. Species profiles include a brief physical description, photographs, and sound samples. The Photo ID feature allows anyone with a camera to snap a photo and obtain a list of suggestions. Merlin's Sound ID feature allows identification of birds through audible recognition. To use Merlin, download the app, followed by the appropriate regional "pack." For this trip, please download the pack for **Belize**.

Birds of the World. "Discover the world of birds" through the Lab's Birds of the World online resource, offering comprehensive life histories for all bird species and families. Visit the [Birds of the World website](#), where for any bird you can learn about its appearance, distribution, diet, behavior, and more. Free samples are available through the home page while subscriptions are available at the monthly, annual, and three-year levels. **Highly recommended.**

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 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 May 8, 2024, 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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