



COVID-19 PROTOCOLS FOR VENT TOURS

MARCH 26, 2021

With VENT's 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.

VENT put significant consideration into this decision and determined this approach is the best one for keeping our tour leaders and tour participants safe during this time. 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>

The protocols listed here serve as general guidance for the operation of all VENT tours for the foreseeable future. The information for "[Before-Tour Protocols](#)" is strongly recommended, while the "[During-Tour Protocols](#)" will be employed and enforced by the tour leader(s) for the sake of collective group health. In addition to these guidelines, travelers must be prepared to adapt to unique regulations or requirements at country, state, and local levels. No matter what steps VENT takes to create a tour atmosphere conducive to good health and hygiene, we cannot fully protect against the possibility of illness; however, the measures and protocols we describe here will go a long way toward keeping everyone as safe as possible. Additional protocols and information are [provided below for International Tours](#).

VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

2525 Wallingwood Drive, Suite 1003 ■ Austin, Texas 78746 ■ 512/328-5221 ■ 800/328-VENT ■ info@ventbird.com ■ www.ventbird.com

VENT strongly recommends the purchase of travel insurance. Good travel insurance policies (such as those offered by Ripcord Rescue Travel Protection) include strong medical expense and trip interruption benefits and 24/7 access to medical professionals.

BEFORE-TOUR PROTOCOLS

Prior to the start of the tour, based on the [latest CDC guidance](#), VENT strongly recommends participants adopt the following protocols to reduce the threat of contracting COVID-19 prior to joining the tour:

- **Avoid mid- and large-size gatherings:** Avoid mid- and large-size gatherings of people for the 14 days prior to the start of your tour. Environments where such gatherings occur include but are not limited to sporting events, restaurants, bars, and parties.
- **Practice proper social distancing:** For the 14 days before departure, maintain a distance of 6 feet when in the presence of persons who are not members of your household. This is especially important when in proximity to anyone whom you do not know to be vaccinated. Avoid close contact with any person who has tested positive for COVID-19, is exhibiting symptoms, or has been exposed to the disease within the last 14 days.
- **Masks:** Masks should be worn at all times when you are in close contact (less than 6 feet) with anyone who is not a member of your household. Please refer to the section on masks and mask wearing in the “During-Tour Protocols” that follow.
- **Pre-tour meeting:** Attend a VENT-hosted Zoom meeting 10–14 days prior to departure, where you’ll meet your tour leader(s) and fellow tour participants to discuss the upcoming tour and get answers to questions you might have.
- **Supplies:** Use the time before a tour to make sure that you have an ample supply of necessary COVID-19-avoidance supplies, such as masks, disinfectant wipes, and hand sanitizer liquids or gels (for the latter, products with at least 60% alcohol content are recommended by the CDC).
- **Transportation to the airport:** On the day of departure, if assistance is needed getting to the airport, please try to ride with someone from your household. Whenever possible, avoid ridesharing options or public transportation. If you are unable to travel with someone from your household, always wear your mask regardless of the setting.
- **At the airport:** Being in an airport elevates the risk of contracting the virus that causes COVID-19. Airports are often crowded, and the process of moving through an airport typically includes standing in lines of people in close quarters, such as check-in lines, security lines, and when boarding the aircraft. These are inescapable aspects of air travel. To mitigate the heightened risk, maintain proper social distancing to the extent

possible; avoid touching surfaces; wash your hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds as needed; avoid touching sensitive parts of your face such as your eyes, nose, and mouth; and wear your mask. For the airport environment, we recommend following [CDC guidance](#) to wear a mask with double layers, or wear two masks.

- **On the plane:** Federal rules require that masks be worn at all times when on aircraft or other public transportation. We suggest having disinfectant wipes on hand to wipe down the surfaces around your seating area including arm rests, head rest, seat-back in front of you, folding tray table, seatbelt, A/C and light controls, handle on overhead luggage bin, and bathroom.
- **Health check:** If you are exhibiting signs of COVID-19, do not attempt to join the tour. Common symptoms of the illness are listed on the [CDC website](#) and include fever or chills, fatigue, shortness of breath, cough, loss of taste or smell, and more.

DURING-TOUR PROTOCOLS

A VENT tour is a complex operation with significant logistical components. This may include but is not limited to transportation via different vehicle types such as vans, buses, cars, and safari vehicles; multiple accommodation changes; visits to a host of private and public facilities and places of business; and interactions with individuals and service providers not associated with the tour group. During a tour, participants must abide by tour leader(s) directives concerning matters of health and safety so that the tour can operate as planned during this public health emergency.

- **Mask wearing:** Masks must be worn at all times in any enclosed space environments, including public areas in hotels and lodges, restaurants (except when eating), when riding in vehicles, and when in any other indoor settings the tour may visit. While in the vehicles, you may briefly remove your mask in order to take a drink, but the mask must be returned to proper position around your nose and mouth immediately thereafter. Outside the vehicle, masks are not required unless the tour group is within 6 feet of persons unassociated with our group. Masks will be required in such instances. The tour leader(s) will direct group members when to adorn masks and when it is permissible not to. Participants should never go anywhere without masks on their person, and should always have a mask readily available for immediate use.
 - Wearing a mask is perhaps the most important action a person can take to minimize the risk of COVID-19. A well-fitting mask, properly worn over the nose and mouth, forms a barrier that greatly reduces the spreading of respiratory droplets. Therefore, masks are **required** for tour participation.

Masks are made from a variety of materials and vary considerably in quality. It is essential that the masks you bring to the tour meet CDC guidelines. Other types of

face-coverings that do not meet CDC guidelines, such as scarves, bandanas, balaclavas and gaiters, are not acceptable as mask substitutes.

Please select masks large enough to completely cover your nose and mouth and that fit snugly against the sides of your face with no gaps. Many masks are made with a nose wire that prevents air from leaking out the top of the mask and improves fit and comfort. Your mask should have good “breathability” so that your breathing is not impaired while your mask is worn. The medical grade N95 respirator mask is not necessary or even desired, but the alternative KN95 is a good option.

DO NOT select loose-fitting masks that allow air to escape from the edges; masks that contain exhalation valves or vents; or masks made of porous cloth or other loose fabric.

While not required during the tour, the CDC currently recommends two or more layers of masks. Please note, it has been shown that wearing masks with multiple layers of fabric, or wearing two masks, further protects against the spread of respiratory droplets. Additionally, wearing masks with multiple layers, or wearing two masks, is especially beneficial when in airports or other elevated risk situations. One accepted practice is wearing a disposable surgical mask with another mask layer over it.

Please be sure to bring enough masks to last for the duration of the tour. Masks that are hand washable will satisfy this recommendation.

- **Social distancing:** One point of departure from CDC guidance is on the matter of social distancing, where on a nature tour, maintaining the recommended 6-foot distance standard within a tour group is often impossible. Time together in a tour van or bus precludes the possibility of group members maintaining the recommended 6 feet of separation. And when in the field, there will be times when the group is clustered together observing birds or around a spotting scope. For all situations where the tour group is in proximity of persons not associated with the group, the proper social distancing protocol will be observed.
- **Ventilation in vehicles:** When riding in tour vans and buses, the central air conditioning or vent will always be on to enhance air flow through the vehicle. Air typically will not be recirculated through the vehicle, but rather will be fresh air drawn in from the outside. Air may be recirculated on occasions when outside air conditions warrant, such as when traveling on dirt or gravel roads could otherwise mean drawing dust inside the vehicle when using the air conditioning or vent. Where weather and travel conditions allow, windows on the vehicles can be opened as another means of improving ventilation.
- **Sanitization of surfaces in a tour van:** Your tour leaders will equip the vehicle(s) with boxes of disinfectant wipes. Participants may use the wipes as desired to wipe surfaces in the

vicinity of his or her seating area, including arm rests, dashboard, interior walls, seat belts, air vents, and seat backs.

- **Restaurants and dining:** There is no one-size-fits-all alternative approach to group dining. A host of variables will determine how best to plan group meals. Considerations include weather, dining options, time of day, location, etc. Tour leaders will rely on a range of options throughout the trip, including: visiting restaurants with outdoor seating; visiting restaurants during times of lower occupancy, which means having early breakfasts, early or late lunches, and early dinners; dividing the group into smaller groups to minimize crowding at a table; and ordering take-out or delivery meals.
- **Spotting scopes:** Tour leaders will have their spotting scopes available for group use. The tour leader will periodically wipe the surface area around the viewing lens with a sanitizing cloth or wipe. As always, participants are welcome to bring their own scopes. Participants should refrain from using or asking to use other participants' scopes unless invited to do so.
- **Hand washing and hand sanitizing:** Tour participants should carry an ample supply of liquid or gel hand sanitizer. Products of 60% alcohol content are recommended by the CDC. Frequent hand washing, to the extent possible, should occur.
- **Field checklist sessions:** The field checklist session is another important component of a VENT tour. Such sessions are traditionally conducted in hotel lobbies or in restaurants prior to meal service. The tour leader(s) will make determinations about appropriate settings for when such sessions will take place, taking into account variables such as privacy, ability to practice social distancing, outside seating, weather, and timing. Participants need to be flexible as daily checklist sessions may not always be possible.
- **Symptoms of illness and self-isolation:** Common signs of COVID-19 illness include fever or chills, fatigue, shortness of breath, cough, loss of taste or smell, and more. [Please refer to the CDC website for a full list of symptoms.](#) If you develop any of these symptoms during the tour, you must self-isolate and notify your tour leader(s) immediately. If this should occur, VENT will work with you to determine the best course of action, which may include communication with your family/emergency contacts and locating resources for access to COVID-19 testing including hospitals, clinics, online resources, and state and county public health departments. Your tour leader(s) and the VENT office staff will provide as much assistance as possible; however, a participant who experiences symptoms of COVID-19, and who requires self-isolation, will be required to discontinue participation in the tour. Also, participants acknowledge that nature tours often involve moving great distances, and that anyone self-isolating in a hotel or lodge will remain behind.
- **VENT strongly recommends the purchase of travel insurance.** Should your tour be interrupted by illness, your insurer will be an important source of information and support. Travelers should be familiar with the benefits of his or her policy.

INTERNATIONAL TOURS: Additional Protocols and Information

We anticipate operating many of our scheduled international tours during the remainder of 2021. However, some tours may not operate due to a host of challenges associated with traveling abroad including mandatory COVID-19 testing requirements, potential quarantine requirements, airline travel restrictions, and closed borders. As of this writing, travel to many international destinations is restricted. However, based on the latest reporting, VENT is optimistic that the situation will improve in the coming months as regulations and restrictions are relaxed or removed with increased availability of vaccines worldwide. VENT will revise or update this information as needed.

Protocols and important information for tours to international destinations:

- VENT will not operate a tour to any destination with a mandatory quarantine requirement upon arrival into the country, even for travelers who have been vaccinated.
- As of January 26, 2021, U.S. law mandates that all air passengers entering the United States (including U.S. citizens and Legal Permanent Residents) must present a negative COVID-19 test, taken within three calendar days of departure for the United States. Airlines must confirm the negative test result for all passengers two years of age and over prior to boarding.
- Tour itineraries may need to be modified to allow the tour group to meet the requirement. Among the adjustments is ensuring the group has access to a testing facility and/or public health professionals who can administer the test. The testing requirement may also affect tours with itineraries to more than one country.
- In-country testing will be arranged by our ground operator/destination management company, working in concert with VENT. Testing will occur with enough time to ensure that results are received prior to scheduled flight times.
- Some countries provide free testing for COVID-19 while others do not. Because costs of testing, if applicable, will vary among countries, the cost for testing is not included in the tour fee and will be the sole responsibility of the traveler. In some situations, the traveler will pay for the cost of testing at the time, while for other occasions it may be more feasible for VENT to pay for a group testing event, in which case participants will be invoiced after the tour.
- If you develop any symptoms of COVID-19 during the tour, you must self-isolate and notify your tour leader(s) immediately. If this should occur, VENT will work with you to determine the best course of action, which may include communication with your family/emergency contacts and locating resources for access to COVID-19 testing and/or professional medical services. Our primary point of contact will be our ground

operator/destination management company, who is best positioned to communicate with local authorities and assist in identifying quality medical care, if needed, and managing logistics such as arranging for self-isolation. Your return travel to the United States will be managed by VENT, if you purchased your air ticket through VENT, our ground operator/destination management company, and/or your airline.

- In general, VENT strongly recommends the purchase of travel insurance, but please note, **some countries are requiring proof of travel insurance with strong medical expense and trip interruption benefits in order to enter the country.** Please check with the VENT office, your preferred travel insurer, or other online resources to learn whether travel insurance is a requirement for entry into your destination country.

AFTER-TOUR PROTOCOLS

- If you develop symptoms of, or test positive for, COVID-19 within 14 days of returning from the tour, please notify VENT immediately, as VENT may need to notify other participants on the tour that a fellow group member has developed symptoms or tested positive.

I have read, understand, and agree to comply with the foregoing Protocols.

Signature: _____

Print name: _____ Date: _____

Tour name: _____

Tour dates: _____