

# COLOMBIA: HUMMINGBIRDS & TANAGERS OF THE WESTERN ANDES

## *A RELAXED & EASY TOUR*

DECEMBER 3-10, 2023

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White-necked Jacobin (*Florisuga mellivora*) © D. Ascanio

*Given its impressive avifauna, Colombia is the dream destination for birders all over the world. Part of this richness is due to the branching of the imposing Andes into three ranges, called the Eastern, Central and Western Andes. Two rivers dissect the valleys between these mountains and given the altitudinal factor, it has triggered a rich process of endemism. Considering the presence of steep slopes and species associated with each altitudinal level, most tours must start their daily routine before dawn and usually stay in the field until dusk. But that is not the case on this tour! We have found the perfect match of lodges and hotels to offer a relaxed & easy tour that will expose you to the best birding of the Western Andes and provide the opportunity to see several species of hummingbirds and tanagers at bird feeders without*

*having to spend full days of birding in the field.*

*Our eight-day tour will focus on two locations found in premontane and montane forest on both slopes of the Western Andes and in addition, it will offer some birding in a wetland contiguous to the Cauca River. The tour starts with a visit to Laguna Sonso, a wetland that is a remnant of the original vegetation around the Cauca River. Here we will be seeking Jet Antbird, Greenish Elaenia, Black-bellied and Fulvous whistling-ducks, Little Cuckoo, Snail Kite, Spectacled Parrotlet, Bar-crested Antshrike, the ultra-small Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher and the brightly colored Western Emerald.*





Bar-crested Antshrike (*Thamnophilus multistriatus*)  
© D. Ascanio

We will then start ascending the Andes to Finca La Huerta, a small inn that allows us to visit a cloud forest birding location—the protected area of the Río Bravo. Birding the road that crosses this impressive patch of forest will give us the opportunity to look for Crowned Woodnymph and White-throated Wedgebill as well as colorful birds such as Andean Motmot; Red-headed Barbet; and Bay-headed, Metallic-green, Scrub and Golden tanagers. Also, the distribution-restricted and Colombia endemic Crested Ant-Tanager can be seen here as well as Uniform Antshrike and Black-winged Saltator. As we search for birds, we will be serenaded almost continuously by the musical voice of the Andean Solitaire and the repetitive notes of the Black-billed Peppershrike. We might come across feeding flocks that may include Grayish Piculet, Golden-olive Woodpecker, Montane Woodcreeper and Red-faced Spinetail. There is a small bridge where we have seen Andean Cock-of-the-rocks in flight. After two nights

in La Huerta we will descend to the Cauca River valley to continue up the Andes again, to our next location.

The second lodge will allow us to visit four birding areas. From the comfortable Araucana Lodge we plan to make daily drives to La Minga, La Florida, Doña Dora bird feeders and Bosque de Niebla in the famed El Kilometro 18 or “KM 18” area. Each location will offer new hummingbirds and tanagers as well as other birdlife. Collectively, we should get about 20 species of hummingbirds and more than 20 species of tanagers, including Saffron-crowned, Golden, Bay-headed, Blue-capped, Golden-chested and Golden-naped tanagers. The drive to the Anchicaya road will expose us to other fascinating birds such as the Toucan Barbet, Torrent Duck, Violet-tailed Sylph and White-capped Dipper. During our tour, we plan to have breakfast at 6:00 am, followed by birding sessions at feeding stations, forest edges, roadsides, and wetlands. When not moving between locations, we will enjoy resting time after lunch and will resume our birding in the afternoon. There will be no strenuous walks or steep trails. There will be an optional night outing. VENT has offered tours to various locations in Colombia since 2009 and our program offerings continue to grow. A booming economy and well-established peaceful culture that has called victory over violence will reshape your view of Colombia and its efforts towards long-lasting peace.



Golden-naped Tanager (*Tangara ruficervix*) © D. Ascanio





Red-faced Spinetail (*Cranioleuca erythrops*) © D. Ascanio

*This tour is one in our series of Relaxed & Easy tours. These tours are appropriate for participants who want a slower paced tour, with somewhat fewer hours in the field and lighter physical activity. They are ideal for persons who prefer a somewhat later start in the morning (typically between 6:00-6:30 a.m.), a break after lunch and a shorter afternoon outing. They typically involve shorter walks, usually less than a mile, and avoid difficult terrain.*

*Participants must be aware that Colombia's infrastructure is still basic, with little development. Although this is changing rapidly, expect some lengthy drives between locations. We will make every possible effort to stop along the drives to stretch, find birds and enjoy the scenery, making these drives more enjoyable.*

**December 3, Day 1: Arrival in Cali.** Upon arrival at *Alfonso Bonilla Aragón International Cali Airport* (airport code CLO), you will be met by a representative of our ground agent and transferred to our hotel in Cali. Participants should plan to arrive no later than the late afternoon since we plan to start tomorrow at around 6:00 a.m. The trip begins this evening with a get-acquainted meeting followed by an early dinner. Some participants may wish to arrive early in Cali or Bogotá. Bogotá, Colombia's bustling capital city of more than seven million, is signatred by red-tile roofed buildings and mountains all around. Past participants have opted to arrive early and spend a day or two here before beginning our tour. The short flight from Bogotá to Cali is about an hour. There are many activities in Bogotá including the Botero Museum; the stunning Gold Museum, which boasts an exquisite array of pre-Columbian gold artifacts in beautiful displays; numerous striking cathedrals; and nearby birding at sites such as the Monserrate Mountain and the El Dorado marshes, both within the city limits. The views of the imposing Eastern range of the Andes will be spectacular from almost anywhere in the city. Upon request, VENT will be happy to assist with hotel reservations for early arrivals.

NIGHT: Casa del Alférez, Cali, Valle del Cauca (1,018 meters – 3,340 feet elevation)

**December 4, Day 2: Birding Laguna Sonso; Drive to la Huerta.** Our morning starts with a drive to a protected area, Laguna de Sonso. The importance of this wetland lies in the fact that the Cauca River was once surrounded by an exuberant moist forest, but today's sugar cane industry is threatening this important habitat. Established in 1987, it has become a regular site to look for widespread species such as Black-bellied and Fulvous whistling-ducks, Snail Kite, Limpkin, and egrets as well as Bare-faced and Glossy ibises. But there will be target species including Apical Flycatcher and the beautiful Spot-breasted Woodpecker, which frequently shows up to inspect rotten branches of a tree. We may enjoy a vocal Little Cuckoo that could surprise us if it ever landed in the open! There will be ample bird photo opportunities including a small flock of Spectacled Parrotlets flying around or a Bar-crested Antshrike pumping its tail as it sings from the forest edge. Once it starts warming up, it will be time to start driving to the highlands but before that, we will enjoy a rich Colombian lunch in a town near the wetland.

In the early afternoon we will start ascending the Western Andes to our headquarters for the next two nights. The hotel itself is located in farmland that is close to the forest edge of protected areas. Some typical forest edge species that wander around include Yellow-backed Oriole, Lineated Woodpecker and Black-winged Saltator. In some years we have found the prehistoric-looking Striped Cuckoo singing from the top of a scrub.

NIGHT: Hotel la Huerta, dept. Valle del Cauca (1,500 meters – 4,920 feet elevation)



Golden Tanager (*Tangara arthus*) © D. Ascanio

and that includes Grayish Piculet, and Parker's Antbird (previously considered part of Dusky Antbird). Other more widespread but interesting species include Uniform Antshrike, Choco Daggerbill (previously part of Wedge-billed Hummingbird), Black-billed Peppershrike and Black-headed Brushfinch. In the afternoon, we will explore mountain rivers and hope to see an Andean Cock-of-the-rock commuting from a foraging ground to a fruiting tree or even to the lek, where young males continue to display almost year-round. Our field list may round-up several tanagers for today, and that includes White-lined, Rufous-throated, Scrub, Bay-headed, Golden and Metallic-green tanagers.

NIGHT: Hotel la Huerta, dept. Valle del Cauca (1,500 meters – 4,920 feet elevation)

**December 6, Day 4: Drive to Araucana.** An optional early morning will find us at the surroundings of La Huerta. We might see Lineated Woodpecker, Brown-capped Vireo, Squirrel Cuckoo and Bronze-winged Parrot. As we enjoy the birdlife getting active with the morning, we will surely be serenaded with the penetrating song of the Tropical Mockingbird and maybe welcomed with the unique sound of a slow-moving primate, the Venezuelan Red Howler.

After breakfast we will start driving back to the Cauca Valley to ascend the Western Andes again, but this time along the old Cali-Buenaventura Road. Here the forest patches are larger although threatened by agricultural projects. We will stop for lunch in a local restaurant called "*Aquí me quedo*" (restaurant name translates to "I am going to stay here"). Because the terrace faces the canopy of some forest edge vegetation, there will be chances for seeing canopy species at eye level, including the Red-faced Spinetail and Golden-faced Tyrannulet. Besides having the opportunity to see canopy dwellers, we will enjoy close hummingbird views of White-necked Jacobin, Brown Violetear, Bronzy Inca, Booted Racket-Tail, Fawn-breasted Brilliant, Crowned Woodnymph, Andean Emerald, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird and the bumble-bee sized Purple-throated Woodstar!



Purple-throated Woodstar (*Calliphlox mitchellii*) © D. Ascanio

Continuing our drive up along the Western Andes, we will eventually reach Araucana Lodge, our home for the next four nights. In the lodge gardens there are hummingbird feeders and bird tables with fruits. Time allowing,



**Booted Racquet-tail © David Ascanio**

we will explore the gardens and trails surrounding the lodge where White-necked Jacobin fans its tail frequently to set its foraging territory and a Green Hermit visits the feeders with irregular intervals. Also, the wonderful Black-throated Mango will be seen in both male and female plumages. In addition, Andean Emerald will come cautiously because he will have to deal with a territorial Steely-vented Hummingbird that will be defending the feeder from intruders (namely, any other hummingbird species).

NIGHT: Araucana Lodge, dept. of Valle del Cauca (1,600 meters – 5,600 feet elevation)

**December 7, Day 5: La Minga.** Following breakfast, we will load our van and drive for about a bit more than an hour to a wonderful little paradise, La Minga. Surrounded by primary forest of the Río Bitaco reserve, this is the prime site to look for the astonishing Multicolored Tanager. But, aside from this amazing species, the list of wonderful species found here will drop your jaw! Starting with toucanets and motmots and continuing with a parade of hummingbirds that include Green and Tawny-bellied hermits, Long-tailed Sylph, Brown Violetear, White-necked Jacobin, Bronzy Inca, and Speckled and Steely-vented hummingbirds. The birdlist also includes equally colorful birds such as Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager; Saffron-crowned, Golden, Scrub and Black-capped tanagers; and Green Honeycreeper as well as Rusty and Masked flowerpiercers. We will enjoy lunch here and relax in the gardens of the lodge before heading back to Araucana, although it will be hard to leave this wonderful site.



**Rufous-tailed Hummingbird (*Amazilia tzacatl*)  
© D. Ascanio**



**Multicolored Tanager (*Chlorochrysa nitidissima*) © D. Ascanio**





**Black-capped Tanager (*Tangara heinei*) © D. Ascanio**

NIGHT: Araucana Lodge, dept. of Valle del Cauca (1,600 meters – 5,600 feet elevation)

**December 8, Day 6: La Florida and Bosque de Niebla.** After breakfast we will take a short drive to La Florida, a small property hosting forest bird species that are normally labeled as “impossible-to-see.” This site has become famous for having a feeder where Chestnut Wood-Quail comes for few minutes right after dawn. Although there are mornings when this secretive species won’t show up, we believe that it’s worth the effort to try to see it. In the same area we have also seen another astonishing bird, the White-throated Quail-Dove.



**Saffron-crowned Tanager (*Tangara xanthocephala*)  
© D. Ascanio**

We will continue our birding in forest edge along the road and weather permitting, we will be looking for colorful Metallic-green, Saffron-crowned, Purplish-mantled, Scrub and Golden-naped tanagers. We might come across flying (and noisy) flocks of Scarlet-crowned Parakeet. Inside the thick forest canopy, either Scaled or Green-and-black fruiteaters may give their unique vocalization and Chestnut-breasted Wren will be heard giving its distinct penetrating call.

To match the morning field trip, we have reserved another special treat for the afternoon outing, to Bosque de Niebla. This location also hosts hummingbird feeders and you will find yourself deciding whether to look at one or another species. Some birds are relatively common and visit most of the feeders but others, like the Blue-headed Sapphire, will take time to locate. Bosque de Niebla is a photographer’s and bird lover’s paradise. You will never get tired of seeing so many hummingbirds buzzing around the garden, all in great plumage and showing a distinctive territorial behavior.

NIGHT: Araucana Lodge, dept. of Valle del Cauca (1,600 meters – 5,600 feet elevation)

**December 9, Day 7: Comederos Doña Dora; Anchicaya Road.** Our last full day in Colombia will take us to the west side of the West Andes, to the slope facing the Choco region.

After a relatively moderate drive we will get to a small property, run by a family that has set out bird tables and hummingbird feeders, and surely will make us salivate upon viewing such wonderful birds. Among the hummingbirds, we may see White-necked Jacobin, Rufous-gaped Hillstar and the impressive Empress Brilliant. There might also be a pair of Toucan Barbet as well as less impressive birds such as Lemon-browed Flycatcher and Golden-faced Tyrannulet. The bird table will probably be hosting Golden, White-lined and Silver-throated tanagers and the conspicuous Bananaquit will be observed wandering around.

During our return to the lodge, we will make a couple of stops to look for Tricolored Brushfinch, one that is usually observed in a semi-open area. Today will surely be a highlight of the tour, not only for its birds but also for its wonderful landscape and flora associated with each forest type.

NIGHT: Araucana Lodge, dept. of Valle del Cauca (1,600 meters – 5,600 feet elevation)

**December 10, Day 8: Return to Cali; Departure for Home.** An optional early morning walk around the lodge gardens will allow us to search for Slaty Spinetail, which usually keeps out of sight. Also, a nice assortment of colorful birds may show up on the bird table including Crimson-backed, Blue-gray, Palm and Flame-rumped tanagers. The forest edge surrounding the lodge hosts other more insectivorous avifauna such as Streaked Xenops, Yellow-olive Flycatcher, Chivi Vireo and Black-billed Peppershrike, the latter being a great consumer of chili peppers!

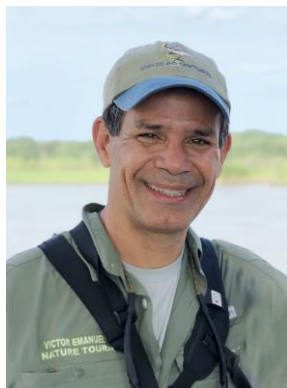


Toucan Barbet © David Ascanio

We will depart from the lodge after breakfast, arriving in time for flights departing Cali airport no earlier than 1:00 p.m.

**TOUR SIZE:** This tour will be limited to 10 participants.

**TOUR LEADERS:** David Ascanio and a local leader



**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 this tour is **\$4,895** per person in double occupancy and includes all meals beginning with dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 8, accommodations as stated, ground transportation during the tour and guide services provided by the tour leaders. The tour fee does not include roundtrip airfare from your home to Cali and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, telephone 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 be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$550**.

**REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT:** To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. If you prefer 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 (July 6, 2023).

### **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 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](http://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. The primary medical expense benefit is available to U.S. residents only. For this reason, non-U.S. residents will pay an adjusted premium when purchasing a comprehensive policy, which includes all of the other benefits available to U.S. residents. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

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

Concerns about COVID-19 may present uncertainty for those holding travel insurance policies or who are considering future travel and purchasing such insurance. Redpoint features a Coronavirus FAQ page on 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.

Please visit the Coronavirus FAQ page at the following link:

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

Additionally, some countries maintain COVID-19 entry requirements, including mandates to purchase travel insurance covering medical expenses due to COVID-19 illness and 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.

**FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES:** In the uncertain, often volatile oil market, 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.

**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.

**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. 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 held responsible for any air ticket penalties.

**TRIP CLASSIFICATION:** This is a Relaxed and Easy tour (R&E). There is no physically demanding activity and all walks will be on flat and open roads. We might explore the interior of the forest or attempt to enter a trail for a very short distance if an interesting bird is found. Breakfast typically is offered at 6:00 a.m. or 6:30 a.m. and we leave for the field around 7:00 a.m. On days when we are not driving, we will offer a mid-day break and resume birding for a few hours in the afternoon. Only in circumstances when appropriate, and probably once during the tour, an optional early morning departure will be offered if your leader believes that this will increase the chances for seeing a target species.

**BAGGAGE LIMITS:** All tour participants are asked to limit their luggage to a single bag of no more than forty-four pounds (20 kilos) and a single carry-on item such as a small backpack. Luggage space on our buses and 4x4 vans is limited, and excessive baggage may have to be stored in passenger seats, thus limiting seating options in our vehicles. Therefore, we ask that you adhere to the luggage limits outlined above both for your comfort and for the comfort of others on the trip. Please pack in duffels with wheels if possible as these will fit better in our buses and will be more useful in the lodges where we stay. Amenities at the lodges and hotels vary. At hotels, there should be porter service, but we cannot guarantee them at the lodges. When packing, we urge you to give thought to traveling lighter rather than heavier. We also recommend that you bring a few plastic bags or dry bags large enough to protect your clothing and/or luggage in case of rain.

**LAUNDRY:** We recommend that you bring sufficient clothes to see you through the trip and/or bring items that can be washed and will dry quickly (i.e. COOLMAX® shirts, etc.) in your rooms. Laundry is, unfortunately, not available at most locations.

**CLIMATE:** Weather conditions can be variable due to the wide range of habitats and elevations visited. Lowland areas on the Anchicaya road and Laguna Sonso can be hot and humid (temperatures in the high 80s to low 90s). Most other sites where we stay are in the mountains. Light weight gloves and a warm hat will be useful in the morning hours. Participants should dress with layers for changing conditions. Morning temperatures can be quite chilly to moderate in the mountains but are likely to be warm mid-day. Participants should expect some rain as the Colombian Andes generally receive fairly high rainfall.

**CLOTHING:** Lightweight field clothing is generally the rule. Please do not wear white or brightly colored clothes, including hats or raingear, as it may frighten shy birds and animals and is likely to emphasize any movements that you make. At lower elevations, we suggest loose-fitting khaki clothing or other cotton clothing in a dark green, dark blue, tan or brown shade. 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. Also, please avoid nylon or plastic jackets and/or rainwear of similar materials; noisy clothing is annoying to others and may frighten birds and animals. Long pants and long-sleeved shirts are recommended as protection against insects. A long, waterproof poncho or rain jacket; warm sweater or down jacket (or light jacket and down vest combination in layers); warm hat; and gloves may be needed for the higher elevation sites which can be chilly (but not freezing) early in the morning. Bring a broad-brimmed hat for sun protection and a good sunscreen. Footwear should include Gore-Tex water-resistant/waterproof hiking boots, and perhaps a second pair of walking shoes and/or sneakers. Rubber boots are not necessary on this trip although there may be some muddy or wet areas on roads. Shower things will be useful.

**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>.

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. 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. Leishmaniasis is a disease transmitted by a small fly that is mainly active at dusk or during the night. It is not a common insect and only a



few of the flies are disease carriers; proper clothing and the use of insect repellent are your best protection, and this disease is not considered a threat on this route. Dengue fever also is very infrequent and is transmitted by day flying *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes. Finally, after the Zika virus outbreak, cases have been documented in Colombia. It also is transmitted by the same day flying *Aedes aegypti* mosquito that transmits Dengue. Again, proper clothing and use of some insect repellent, especially in lowland areas, is the best protection.

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

**INSECTS:** Insects should not be a problem over most of our route (the highlands should be particularly free of biting insects), but depending on rain, we could encounter a few biting insects. We are not expecting to expose you to any chigger country. However, it is impossible to determine whether a given area will have chiggers or not. As a precaution, we recommend you wear loose-fitting long pants and long-sleeved shirts, and bring bottles or roll-on sticks of "Cutter" or similar insect repellents. Spraying shoes, socks and the lower portion of pants with insect repellent will help reduce problems with unexpected chiggers. Pants pretreated with permethrin are also helpful. We urge that you not bring very strong-scented "natural" repellents, if possible, because these often have strong unpleasant odors that are inappropriate in group situations.

**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 is best completed in advance of travel. Do-it-yourself pre-treatment has to 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.

**CURRENCY:** Colombian Peso (COP). We recommend that you exchange all or most of your dollars at the international airport 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).

**DOCUMENTS:** A valid passport is required for U.S. citizens, with one blank page for entry stamp. We recommend your passport be valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure. A visa is not required; a tourist card will be issued by the airline. Non-United States citizens should check with their local Colombian consulate or embassy.

**EQUIPMENT:** We strongly recommend that participants bring a WIDE-mouth water bottle that can be easily refilled (from a large 10-gallon tank in the bus). A day pack is essential; a small, compact umbrella is highly recommended; and raingear (rain jacket or poncho) and plastic bags for water-proofing gear in the field can be useful. Earplugs may come in handy at a couple of the hotels.

**BINOCULARS & SPOTTING SCOPES:**

**Binoculars** – We strongly recommend good binoculars of at least 7x35, 8x42, 10x40, or 10x42 magnification. We recommend that you do NOT bring mini binoculars of any kind. Some people like them 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 7x35 or 8x42 binoculars are compact and light enough.

**Spotting Scopes** – Your tour leader will have a scope available for group use throughout the trip; however, if you prefer to bring your own scope, you should feel free to do so.

**MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS:** There will be opportunities to recharge batteries for electronic equipment at virtually all locations where we stay, but 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 snacks and other emergency food items that are portable.

**INTERNET ACCESS:** Colombia is one of the most “wired” countries in South America and most hotels and lodges have internet access and Wi-Fi (at least in the lobbies if not actually in hotel rooms). Also, for those with the appropriate SIM card 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, AVANTEL or MOVISTAR (CLARO and AVANTEL have more coverage in remote rural areas). Sometimes this entails a trip to a local telecommunications service center, something best done before the trip begins. Cell phone access is now virtually country-wide in Colombia, although a few sites located in deep valleys may not be able to receive signals (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.

**Field Guides (Birds):**

Hilty, S. L. 2021. *Birds of Colombia*. This is the recommended field guide 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 <https://www.lynxeds.com>. Also 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. This is the tour recommended field guide despite some drawbacks with the quality of the bird illustrations. 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. Paperback. A useful field guide with an updated taxonomy since it is compact and portable. Unfortunately, distribution maps are tiny and printing is poor (colors dull and muddy or inaccurate), especially hummingbirds, flycatchers, furnariids and some species in other families. Despite some drawbacks we recommend that all visitors obtain a copy of this little book (available from Buteo Books, USA). 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.



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.

Hilty, S. L. & 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 outdated 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.

Restall, R., C. Rodner, & M. Lentino. *Birds of Northern South America*. Vol. 2, Plates and maps. London: Christopher Helm, 2006. Relatively up-to-date taxonomy by the year of publishing (notice that taxonomy keeps changing!) 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. 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.

Ayerbe-Quiñones, Fernando. 2019. *Birds of Colombia*. Wildlife Conservation Society. Small and compact book with fine, well-organized, computer-generated illustrations; a detailed map (with color-coded subsp. distributions) accompanies each species. No text but has comments pertaining to each genus. Lacks useful index (only Order, Family and genus but not English names). Small size and accurate illustrations make this book very useful in field but paper cover (as well as all inside pages) printed on low-quality paper easily damaged by contact with moisture (always carry it inside a plastic bag for protection and do not let water reach this book). Now shown as available on Amazon. There is also a Spanish-language edition (2018).

#### ***General Introduction to the Tropics:***

Forsyth, Adrian, & 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, a classic, and a book that ought to be read by anyone contemplating a visit to the American tropics.

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 University Press, 2017. An introduction to the animals, plants and ecosystems of the New World Tropics. Recommended as a general, broad-based introduction to plants and animals of Amazonia.

#### ***Further Reading:***

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 in the latest edition should provide a richer travel experience for almost anyone. Also see Colombia Handbook, Rough Guide, Bradt Travel Guide, and the highly rated Michelin Green Guide Colombia.

Perry, Donald. *Life Above the Jungle Floor*. Simon & Schuster, 1986. Out of print, but still available. A popular book that tells much about life in the tropical rainforest, especially in the little-known canopy.

## ***Colombia: Hummingbirds & Tanagers of the Western Andes, Page 16***

Abad Gomez, Hector, *Manual de Tolerancia*. 2018. An interesting compilation of documents and notes written by Hector Abad Gomez about the civil conflict that took place in Colombia for many decades. Currently available only in Spanish,

### ***Recordings:***

Alvarez, M., V. Caro, O. Laverde & 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).

### ***Apps:***

*Merlin Bird ID*. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The best app to use in the field. Nowadays considered the “future of birding.” Once you download the app, you must download the packs for Colombia. As this itinerary was written, there are two 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. This is nowadays your best way to keep your life list, all in a single application. When taxonomic splits are incorporated, your list will be automatically updated. Furthermore, your VENT leader will be able to share the daily list, so you simply have to accept the list and have it uploaded in your files! The project eBird is nowadays the largest Citizen’s Science Project in the World and is 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. \$24.99 (as of July 2018). 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 for Colombia.

### ***Movies and Documentaries:***

*Colombia Wild Magic*. Netflix. This documentary presents a kaleidoscope of images of one of the most biodiverse countries in the world.

*Narcos*. Three seasons. Netflix. An overview of Colombia’s violent past. Mixes fiction and history.

**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 March 1, 2023, 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.