Costa Rica is one of the premier birding destinations in the world and no part of this small and friendly country has more to offer than the Caribbean lowlands and nearby mountains. The sheer abundance of tropical birds in this region is stunning, not to mention their beauty and diversity, or the backdrop of spectacular scenery and lush vegetation. This Relaxed and Easy tour, weekend through weekend inclusive, offers a great introduction to Neotropical birding at a slow pace. Such perennial favorites as parrots, hummingbirds, trogons, toucans, and tanagers are numerous and easy to view here, while top quality birds like Great Tinamou, Great Curassow, Crested Guan, Great Green Macaw and raptors still survive well in the region and are, in fact, usually findable.

Our tour starts in the lush forest and farmlands along the road to Cerro de la Muerte. Here, we will get our introduction to hummingbirds and to our delight; the endemic Fiery-throated Hummingbird has been seen in previous tours. Also, we will explore the forest edge in search of feeding flocks including tanagers, tyrant-flycatchers, woodpeckers and some Central America specialties as well. But Cerro de la Muerte is also one of the premier sites for seeing the Resplendent Quetzal, and we will certainly keep our eyes open looking for it.

In contrast to Cerro de la Muerte, the Sarapiqui lowlands offer a classic tropical experience. Here parrots, aracaries, guans and many passerines assemble in a perfect combination of sounds and colored feathers. On one day, we will take the aerial tram at the buffer zone of Braulio Carrillo National Park where the secretive and difficult-to-find Bare-necked Umbrellabird has been reported. Later, a full morning will be offered to visit the world-famous La Selva Field Station of the Organization for Tropical Studies (OTS). Also, we will take a boat trip to the Sarapiqui River to explore the magnificent riverine forest at both sides of it. These areas are home to numerous little-known birds not found at higher elevations and include several tyrant-flycatchers, parrots, parakeets and a possibility to enjoy the unique Snowy Cotinga.
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 6.30 to 7:00 AM), a break after lunch and a shorter afternoon outing. They typically involve shorter walks, usually less than a mile, and avoid difficult terrain.

**November 2, Day 1: Arrival in San José.** Participants should plan your flights to arrive San José, Costa Rica (Juan Santamaria International Airport, airport code SJO) today. After clearing customs and immigration you will be met by our local ground agent and transferred to the Hotel Bougainvillea where a room will be reserved in your name. Because most flights arrive San José this evening, there are no functions scheduled this evening and you are on your own for dinner.

**NIGHT:** Hotel Bougainvillea, near San José

**November 3, Day 2: From San José to Cerro de la Muerte.** Our first morning birding will start right outside our rooms, where pairs of Rufous-naped Wren give a cacophony of calls while Costa Rica’s national bird, the Clay-colored Robin, hops around. The Hotel Bougainvillea is also a great location to enjoy the owner’s passion for gardens. Each corner offers different plants arrangements and it’s indeed a must for a nature’s photographer. Among the target bird species, we will focus our search to locate the distinctive Lesson’s Motmot and the unique White-eared Ground Sparrow. There will be also Rufous-tailed Hummingbirds and almost certain a Great Kiskadee will be singing around. As we enjoy the gardens, we might see large flocks of Crimson-fronted Parakeet flying from to their foraging grounds. After breakfast, we will take the ascending road to the Buena Vista massiff (better known as Cerro de la Muerte) which is part of the Talamanca mountains. This location is known as one of the best sites to look for high elevation Costa Rican specialties, from the Resplendent Quetzal to the diminutive Volcano Hummingbird or the territorial Fiery-throated Hummingbird. We will stop for lunch in Paraiso Quetzal, where we will enjoy our first encounters with the Talamanca (Magnificent) Hummingbird and Lesser Violetear. The density of the endemic Fiery-throated Hummingbird has been variable as it is common in some years and extremely difficult in other years. Weather allowing, we will explore an even higher ground, to the antenna road, where we will search for Volcano Junco, Slaty Flowerpiercer, the scarce Timberline Wren and the secretive Peg-billed Finch. We expect to arrive to our lodge by the late afternoon and will have time to relax and enjoy the hotel grounds before meeting for the daily field checklist session.

**NIGHT:** Savegre Hotel, San Gerardo de Dota

**November 4, Day 3: Cerro de la Muerte.** A full day in the San Gerardo de Dota area in the Cerro de la Muerte Massif will increase our chances for finding the much sought-after Resplendent Quetzal. We will be in contact with local farmers to learn about the recent sightings and will surely organize our outings to increase the changes of seeing this amazing species. Also, we will come across opportunities to look for Volcano Hummingbird, Collared Trogon, Silvery-fronted Tapaculo (always difficult to see), Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Ochraceous Pewee, Black-capped Flycatcher, Barred Becard, Black-and-yellow and Long-tailed silky-flycatchers. In previous years we have enjoyed feeding flocks containing Flame-throated and Black-cheeked warblers, Collared Redstart,

Volcano Hummingbird, *Selasphorus flammula*. Photo: D. Ascanio ©
Silver-throated Tanager and other passerine birds. Depending on weather conditions, after lunch we will explore the higher elevations along the road to look for the secretive Black Guan or the more widespread Sooty Thrush. In some years, we have reported large groups of Barred Parakeet in flight and although they are usually distant, it is exciting to know about the presence of such little-known species. Given that the lodge landscaping attracts hummingbirds in abundance, we will plan to explore this area sometime in the day.

**NIGHT: Savegre Hotel, San Gerardo de Dota**

**November 5, Day 4: From Cerro de la Muerte to Sarapiqui.** Our day will start with an optional pre-breakfast visit to the Batsu gardens, a location with hummingbird feeders and bird tables. The parade of tanagers and warblers coming to the fruits is unstoppable! There will be Flame-colored and Silver-throated tanagers. Also, Tennessee Warbler and Acorn Woodpecker surely will show up. Sometimes, the regional endemic Sulphur-winged Parakeet wanders around and the active Collared Redstart will be singing in the vicinity of the garden. Hummingbirds will be also abundant with territorial Talamanca Hummingbird and Lesser Violetear defending the feeders. The day will continue with a drive through the highway between San Jose and the lowlands of Sarapiquí. This road crosses an incredibly lush and wet forest and, depending on weather we might stop in a patch of vervain flowers where more hummingbirds will be added to our day checklist. One species we will search is the diminutive and astonishing Snowcap, a hummingbird that performs seasonal altitudinal migration. Once we reach the lowlands we will continue to La Quinta, our headquarters for the next following three days.

**NIGHT: La Quinta de Sarapiqui, near Puerto Viejo**

**November 6, Day 5: La Selva Field Station and the Pinguino’s farm.** The Sarapiquí region, although now largely cleared and settled, harbors the richest avifauna in the country, and birds are generally conspicuous. We will explore the humid tropical lowlands and the contiguous farmlands. Today we will visit the world-famous La Selva Field Station of the Organization for Tropical Studies (near Puerto Viejo). The great diversity of habitats here includes tall lowland rainforest, second-growth of varying ages, overgrown plantations, successional thickets, riverine forest, and swampy pastures. Within these habitats are numerous specialized niches. All are home to a wonderful variety of tropical birds. Initially we will linger along the La Selva entry road, getting acquainted with the common birds of the open country and second-growth. Flycatchers, tanagers, and seed-eating birds are abundant and conspicuous in the early morning hours. Later in the morning we will explore a flat and easy trail, trying to see manakins, antbirds and probably a poison dart frog! After lunch in La Quinta we will enjoy a deserved siesta time, and in the afternoon, we will we will enjoy a mix of cultural and birding experience. We will visit a local black-pepper farm along a road where we have seen parrots and macaws in flight as well as Bat and Laughing falcons. Also, the unique Long-tailed Tyrant might be seen there.

**NIGHT: La Quinta de Sarapiqui, near Puerto Viejo**
November 7, Day 6: Braulio Carrillo National Park and Rainforest Aerial Tram. Today we will have a full morning to explore the Braulio Carrillo National Park and an adjacent 1,100-acre private reserve about an hour from La Quinta. Created in 1978, Braulio Carrillo National Park encompasses a huge band of wet Caribbean foothill forest. In 1987, the road was finally completed, and the park opened to the public. Now birders have access to some of the country’s rarest, least known and most restricted species in this fabulous area of steep forested slopes, cloud-filled valleys, and plunging waterfalls. We will devote all morning to the area, which will include an unforgettable 90-minute Aerial Tram ride, and hike along the trails on portions of the preserve. The tram ride enables us to traverse all levels of a Caribbean foothill rainforest canopy and later explore the rainforest trails on this privately-owned property.

The forest edge is not far away, and we’re sure to spot some spectacular large birds sitting up in the crowns of the trees. These may include Crested Guan, Mealy and White-crowned parrots, Gartered Trogon, Keel-billed and Yellow-throated toucans, Collared Aracari, Snowy Cotinga, Montezuma Oropendola, Yellow-tailed Oriole and even Great Green Macaw. Close to the station itself are dense secondary thickets with young trees and vine-tangled forest edge, the preferred habitat for birds like Rufous-tailed Jacamar; Great and Fasciated antshrikes; Long-tailed Tyrant; White-collared Manakin; Black-throated and Cabani’s wrens; honeycreepers; Plain-colored, Crimson-collared and Scarlet-rumped (Passerini’s) tanagers; or Black-headed and Buff-throated saltators. Hummingbirds visit the flowering shrubs, including Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird and White-necked Jacobin.

We will also search for an absolutely stellar line-up of tanagers, such as Emerald, Silver-throated, Speckled, Spangle-cheeked, Blue-and-gold, Black-and-yellow and Tawny-crested, as well as White-throated Shrike-Tanager. Many other birds also occur, but for various reasons, the chances of seeing them are vanishingly small. Nevertheless, just being where they occur and knowing that one of them could turn up is exciting. This remarkable group includes Tiny Hawk, Violaceous Quail-Dove, Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoo, Black-crowned Antpitta, and Bare-necked Umbrellabird.

NIGHT: La Quinta de Sarapiqui, near Puerto Viejo

November 8, Day 7: Boat trip to the Sarapiqui and Puerto Viejo rivers; road to Guapiles. Today we will have the opportunity to visit the boundaries of La Selva while exploring the banks of the Sarapiqui River. We will be using a covered boat to explore the river where riverine forest birds are usually found, including Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Green Heron and Green Ibis. The boat trip also offers a good opportunity for seeing Squirrel Cuckoo, Gartered Trogon, any of the 3 species of kingfishers (ringed, amazon and green kingfishers) and Collared Aracari. Mangrove Swallow will be common and might even get perched on the roof of the boat and Spotted Sandpiper will surely be seen foraging along the river bank. In some years we have been rewarded with views of the Secretive and absolutely astonishing Sunbittern and we will keep searching for it. Also, Black River Turtles will be taking a sun bath while an Anhinga will probably be seen drying its wings from a open branch. In the afternoon we will go birding along the main road and contiguous dirt roads and will keep our eyes open in search for a toucan or a macaw perched in an open branch. We might also see waterbirds including various species of egrets, more tiger-herons and jacanas.

NIGHT: La Quinta de Sarapiqui, near Puerto Viejo

November 9, Day 8: Morning at Sarapiqui; Afternoon Drive to San Jose. Because of the incredible diversity of species possible in this region, we will offer an optional early morning birding in the Sarapiqui region. After breakfast, we will start our way back to San Jose but for that we will be using a different road known as La Virgen. This road quickly ascends the Caribbean slope of Costa Rica, one of the wettest regions in Central America. This is an incredibly lush and scenic wonderland of rushing water and deep valleys, much of it still covered in a profusion of exotic plants. We plan to stop at the side of the road (Cinchona) where a local family feeds hummingbirds and tanagers and chances for seeing Green-crowned Brilliant, Violet Sabrewing, Coppery-headed Emerald and Green Thorntail abound. There are also plenty of other birds around the feeders and forest edge including Prong-billed Barbet, Red-faced Spinetail, flycatchers, Silver-throated and several other dazzling tanagers.
We will continue our drive to the road entering the Poás Volcano where we will look for the elusive Wren-thrush, and we might come across more tanagers and possibly a feeding flock containing tyrant-flycatchers and foliage-gleaners. Lunch will be on the way down to San Jose in a restaurant that has hummingbird feeders, and this will be our unique opportunity to add two more hummingbird species to our list, the White-bellied and Purple-throated mountain-gems. In the early afternoon, we will continue our drive to our hotel in San José where we will enjoy a farewell dinner.

NIGHT: El Rodeo Country Inn, near San José

November 10, Day 9: Departure for Home. Our tour ends this morning with an early transfer to the San José airport for flights departing before noon today. Transfers for flights departing at other times can be arranged in advance at an additional charge.

EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS: Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive early or extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least three months prior to your departure date. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

RELAXED AND EASY TOUR INFORMATION AND CONDITIONS: Relaxed & Easy (R&E) tours are similar to “traditional” VENT tours, but set to a slower pace, with somewhat fewer hours in the field and lighter physical activity. They are ideal for participants who prefer a somewhat later start in the morning, a little lengthier afternoon break, and a shorter afternoon outing. Walking is limited to short walks of usually not more than a half mile one-way, avoiding difficult terrain. A typical day will begin with breakfast around 6:30-7:00 a.m., followed by birding until about noon. We will attempt to have lunch every day between 12:00 and 1:00 p.m., followed by an afternoon break (when possible). We will resume birding for a couple of hours in the midafternoon. On most days we will attempt to provide about an hour for personal time before dinner which will usually be between 6:00 and 6:30 PM (or right after the daily checklist session). Strenuous physical activity will be avoided, and all walking will be limited to well-marked roads and trails, excluding uneven or rough terrain.

Relaxed & Easy (R&E) refers only to the slower pace of a tour, not to a participant’s birding skills or ability. Accordingly, birders of all levels of ability are welcome, as they are on typical VENT tours; R&E tours should not to be mistaken as tours for beginning birders. All birders are welcome, regardless of skill level, as they are on traditional VENT tours.
TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 8 participants.

TOUR LEADER: David Ascanio, with the assistance of a local guides in some locations.

David Ascanio, a Venezuelan birder and naturalist, has spent 33 years guiding birding tours throughout his native country, Colombia, Trinidad & Tobago, Suriname, the Orinoco and Amazon river basins, Guyana, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, the Lesser Antilles, Cuba, Costa Rica, 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 the songs of the birds of Venezuela, and has coauthored the descriptions of two new species, the Rio Orinoco Spinetail and the Delta Amacuro Softtail. David has also published various manuscripts about the birds of the llanos (plains), the Orinoco River island species, and the pan-tepui endemic species for which he has become an authority. He is the first author of the Field Guide to the Birds of Venezuela (2017). David is an excellent communicator, has a great sense of humor, and is tireless in helping others find birds and wildlife. These traits have made him one of the most popular naturalists/guides in the Neotropics.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is $3945 per person in double occupancy from San José, Costa Rica. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 to dinner on Day 8; accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leader. It does not include airfare from your home to San José and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is $475. 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.

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.

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.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The initial deposit for this tour is $500 per person. If you prefer to pay the initial deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard, Visa, or American Express at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your initial 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 www.ventbird.com) should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

PAYMENTS: All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard, Visa, American Express), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial
Costa Rica: A Relaxed & Easy Tour, Page 7

deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Cancellation penalties and refunds are based on the following schedule: if cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of $250 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 fewer than 120 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions. We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.

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*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.

Upon cancellation of the transportation or travel services, where you, the customer, are not at fault and have not cancelled in violation of the terms and conditions of any of the contract for transportation or travel services, all sums paid to VENT for services not received by you will be promptly refunded by VENT to you unless you otherwise advise VENT in writing.

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.

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.

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 Resolutions as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance™. Designed for all types of travelers, Ripcord is among the most highly regarded travel insurance programs available.

Critical benefits of Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance 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. Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available but must be purchased within 14 days of tour deposit. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as security evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or other security events, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause (must be purchased within 14 days of tour deposit). Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.

For a price quote, or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: ripcordrescuetravelinsurance.com/ventbird; or click the Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance™ 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.

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please 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 responsible for any air ticket penalties.

**BAGGAGE:** We request that participants limit their baggage to one medium-sized soft-sided bag and one carry-on, if possible, as space in the vehicle will be limited. Extra luggage can be stored at our hotel in San José, if you so desire. Laundry can be done at both of the hotels at which we stay more than one night. As a precaution, we suggest you pack your travel documents, medications, toiletries, a change of clothes, and your binoculars in your carry-on bag.

The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. Please consult your airline to find out specific weight restrictions. 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 the most updated information: http://www.tsa.gov/.

**CLOTHING/CLIMATE:** As is the case for all of our tropical tours, lightweight field clothing is the norm for Costa Rica tours. We will be visiting Costa Rica during the rainy season thus long-sleeved shirts, hat, sunglasses, umbrella and a strong sunscreen are recommended for protection from the sun and rain. We need to emphasize that although we might encounter rain, we will be visiting Costa Rica during the breeding season of many target species, thus making it a perfect time for birding at a slow pace. Please, be sure to have a pair of good **water-resistant** hiking boots or walking shoes for the field and a second pair of lightweight shoes. Mud boots are **not** necessary, as we will avoid damp trails. Generally, the weather will be warm to hot and humid with daytime highs of 75 to 90 degrees. **However,** it is cool at night at Savegre Hotel (temperatures can be as low as the upper 40s and rarely even the upper 30s) so a thermal top, and warm sweater or jacket is essential for layering. Most days it warms up quickly once the sun is up. **Do not forget a small umbrella and/or poncho,** as we may get caught out in mist or rain.

**DOCUMENTS:** At the time of printing, a valid passport is required for entry into Costa Rica for United States and Canadian citizens, visas are not required. Non-U.S. and Canadian citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions. You will be issued a tourist card by the airline on which you travel. Although no vaccinations are required for entry into Costa Rica, you may be asked to present proof of a current yellow fever vaccination if you have traveled recently in other countries within Latin America or Africa.

**EQUIPMENT:** You should pack a pair of binoculars that are in good condition, along with a belt pack or day pack (for carrying books, sunscreen, camera, etc.). As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medication and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag. Your leader will have a spotting scope, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so. Pack a small flashlight or headlamp, and an alarm clock. A small folding umbrella is a good idea for mist and light rain.

**HEALTH:** If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, 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, check with your airline for procedures for packing medication. Although no vaccinations are required for entry into Costa Rica, you may be asked to present proof of a current yellow fever vaccination if you have traveled recently in other countries within Latin America or Africa. Anti-malarial medications are generally not necessary for the regions visited on this tour, but this can change, so please consult the CDC and your physician. As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against hepatitis types A and B.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta Georgia. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers’ Information Line at 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636), or you can check their website at
The drinking water is good everywhere that this tour goes in Costa Rica. We recommend that you bring a supply of aspirin or any other medication you think you might need during the trip. Imodium tablets are recommended for traveler’s diarrhea.

**INSECT PROTECTION:** Chiggers are occasionally a problem in some areas. For prevention of bites, we recommend regular use of a repellant lotion (small plastic squeeze bottle) and a pump-style container of insect repellent that has close to 100% DEET. Topsyn gel is useful in reducing irritation from stings or bites, and some cortisone creams are available without prescription. Also, “Flowers of Sulphur” powder has proven effective for deterring chiggers (ask your pharmacist).

**A Note About Chiggers:** This tour visits areas where chiggers are known to occur. Chiggers are tiny parasitic mites found in most warm weather areas of the southern United States and the world’s tropics. They are especially numerous in grassy areas, where, in the immature stage, they attach themselves to other animals or humans who make contact with the grass as they pass by. Chiggers do not suck blood and the majority of the world’s species do not carry disease. They do feed on bodily fluids, however, through a process in which a digestive enzyme is produced by the chigger which essentially liquefies the skin around the area where the chigger is attached. The chigger is not usually attached to the skin for more than a few hours before it either falls off or is knocked off. Our bodies respond by producing a hardened area as a defense against the chigger’s digestive enzyme. Though the chigger may be long gone, it is the presence of the hardened area, and the body’s natural process of reabsorbing it that typically causes intense itching, often lasting for a week or more. Chiggers like to attach themselves to areas of thin skin, like around the ankles, beltline, undergarment lines, knees, and elbows.

Chiggers can be avoided by following these procedures:

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

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

**MISCELLANEOUS:**
- Departure Tax – now included in ticket with most major airlines.
- Electricity – 110/220 volts (same as USA); two-pin plugs are standard.
- Language – Spanish, although English is widely spoken.
- Time – Central Standard Time
- Internet Access – available at all locations (and generally, but not always, reliable).
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 which has a wide selection; www.buteobooks.com and www.nhbs.com which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and www.abebooks.com for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

Field Guides (Birds):

Field Guides (Other):

General Introduction to the Tropics:

Further Reading:
Janzen, Daniel H. (ed.). Costa Rican Natural History. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983. An encyclopedia that contains a wealth of information on the plants and animals of Costa Rica, especially those that have been studied in the field; also has chapters on geology and soils, agriculture, etc. Recommended as a technical reference book.
**App’s:**


Mammals of North, Central and South America - A mammal app.

Sky Guide. If you’re interested in stargazing, you might want to consider using this app. Just hold your device overhead and it will show you the stars, constellations and planets. Downloadable in the App Store and Google Play.

Maps.me. If you like checking routes, roads and locations, this app allows you to track the tour route even with your phone offline! Just download the app and the Costa Rica map and you will be all set. Downloadable in the App Store and Google Play.

**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:** Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motor coach, 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 passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. Where this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect January 31, 2019 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned, and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.

CRR:20191102
Rev: 11/28/18 – DA
PNP: 12/06/18 – GL
P: 02/12/19 – GL