

VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

ITINERARY

## THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: A CARIBBEAN BIRDING ADVENTURE

APRIL 4-12, 2025

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Ridgway's Hawk, *Buteo ridgwayi*. Photo: D. Ascanio ©

*Welcome to the Dominican Republic—an exciting Latin American country in the Caribbean featuring outstanding nature, a rich human history and, best of all, wonderful birding. Like other locations in the Caribbean, the Dominican Republic embodies the classic vacation in paradise: sandy beaches, palm trees, beautiful coastline, rugged mountains, and lush tropical forests. Add to this a splendid array of endemic or nearly endemic bird species and the picture is complete.*

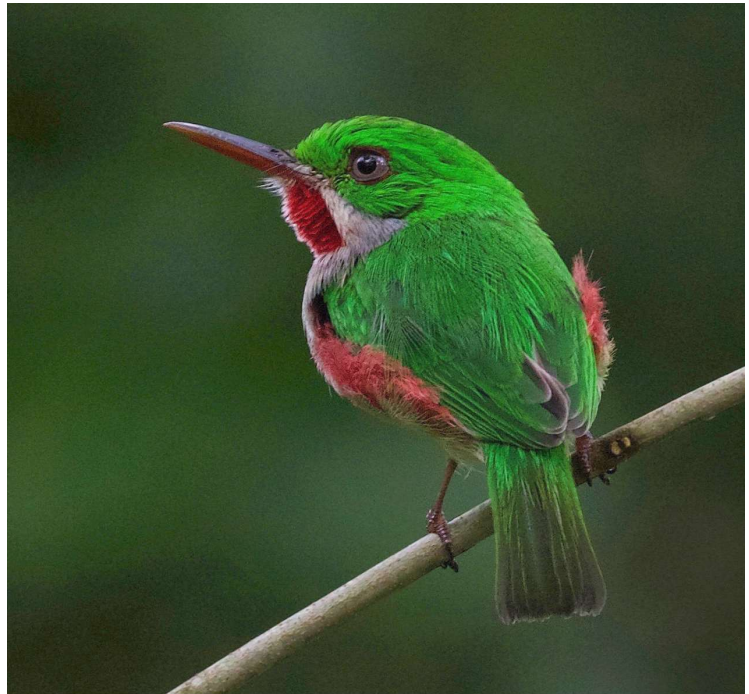
*The Dominican Republic is surely the most geographically diverse country in the Caribbean, containing four mountain ranges, with peaks rising over 10,000 feet, as well as an inland lake, Enriquillo, that lies an astonishing 130 feet below sea level. Nearly half the plant species are endemic and we will visit at least four of the country's five major vegetation zones. The birding, of course, is superb. Out of a remarkable 30 endemic bird species, we have a chance to see almost all of them! Among the numerous possibilities, we should encounter the Hispaniolan Lizard-*

*Cuckoo, Hispaniolan Parrot, Hispaniolan Parakeet, Hispaniolan Emerald, Hispaniolan Pewee, Hispaniolan Woodpecker, Hispaniolan Trogon, Antillean Piculet, and Green-tailed Warbler (previously known as Green-tailed Ground-Tanager).*

*A special family of bird endemic to the Greater Antilles is the todies, one of nature's more fascinating creations. These sprites of the forest would seem more at home in a cartoon rather than the woods of the Dominican Republic. We should have the great fortune of encountering two species, the broad-billed and narrow-billed.*

*The richness of this island is further revealed through the presence of at least 15 other bird species endemics to the Caribbean region as a whole, including West Indian Whistling-Duck, Antillean Palm-Swift, Rufous-throated Solitaire, Red-legged Thrush, Antillean Euphonia, and Hispaniolan Oriole.*

*This tour also includes an opportunity to search for the Ridgway's Hawk, considered to be the most threatened buteo in the world. For this endeavor we will journey to the northeast part of the island, to the buffer zone of Los Haitises National Park. Here, few known pairs of this critically endangered species hang on. Should there be a nesting site, we will surely be taken by a local guide, making our chances of finding the hawk good.*



Broad-billed Tody. *Todus subulatus*. Photo: D. Ascanio ©

*The wonders of the Dominican Republic are certainly not limited to its impressive birdlife. We are certain to encounter marvelous scenery everywhere we go. Additionally, the island exudes a charm that is manifested through its friendly people and delightfully painted houses. In Santo Domingo we plan to spend an afternoon through the city's beloved colonial zone, site of the earliest Spanish colony in the New World.*

*Our tour is timed for the height of the breeding season and for maximizing our chances for seeing as many birds as possible. Aside from the island and regional endemics, we may encounter lingering Neotropical migrants. This dynamic island will not only give the birder a unique impression of the alluring beauty of the Caribbean and its birds but is also guaranteed to impart a true sense of adventure.*

**April 4, Day 1: Arrival in Punta Cana; travel by land to Sabana de la Mar.** Participants should plan to arrive Punta Cana, Dominican Republic (airport code PUJ) no later than 1:30 P.M. today. Participants not being able to arrive Punta Cana prior to the meeting time are suggested to arrive a day early and meet at the airport at 1:00 P.M.

Once we have all assembled, we will take a 3-hour drive to the southern side of the Samana Bay, the buffer zone of Los Haitises National Park where we will spend the next two nights. A couple of stops along the road might give us our first views of the conspicuous Palmchat and probably another endemic, the Hispaniolan Lizard-Cuckoo. We might also come across groups of Antillean Palm-Swift, a pair of the active Black-crowned Palm-Tanager and the fairly common Yellow-faced Grassquit.

NIGHT: Hotel El Embajador, Santo Domingo



**April 5, Day 2: Search for Ridgway's Hawk.** Caño Hondo is located in the buffer zone of Los Haitises National Park, the home for one of the most threatened birds of prey, Ridgway's Hawk. The park landscape probably involves the most rugged and impenetrable terrain in the entire Dominican Republic. While most of the unreachable areas are scarcely populated, most of the valleys contiguous to populated areas have been deforested, reducing the habitat of the hawk. Nevertheless, this area is lightly visited and most development is primitive. All this is probably the reason that the Ridgway's Hawk has not yet gone extinct. Once found over large swaths of Hispaniola, it is now restricted to the northeast part of the island. Decades of habitat destruction and persecution have seen this bird's numbers dwindle to just several known pairs. In fact, until expedition surveys were done in Los Haitises and reintroduced to the Punta Cana area, the bird's very existence remained in question. Happily, they are still with us. We have allotted a day for the pursuit of this enigmatic bird of prey in the buffer zone of the park.



Ashy-faced Owl. *Tyto glaucops*.  
Photo: D. Ascanio ©

The specific area where we will focus our search efforts will be determined by our local guide. Several nest sites have been reported in the buffer zone of the park, with some sites much easier to get to than others. Participants should be prepared for changing plans as we will do what is necessary to enjoy success in locating the hawk. Of course, nothing is guaranteed, but we feel our chances for finding the bird are good. In addition, we might explore the grounds at night in search for another endemic bird, the Ashy-faced Owl.

NIGHT: Duvergé, Independencia

**April 6, Day 3: Morning in Paraiso Caño Hondo; Afternoon drive to Santo Domingo.** An additional morning is kept in case we need to consider a second search for the Ridgway's Hawk. Otherwise, we might continue looking for Hispaniola endemic or near-endemic birds of the Caribbean including White-necked Crow, Hispaniola Woodpecker, Antillean Mango, and Hispaniolan Oriole. After an early lunch we will start our drive to Santo Domingo, the capital city of the Dominican Republic. Traffic permitting, we might explore areas along the road to look for Neotropical Migrants such as the Black-and-white and Yellow-throated Warblers, Ovenbird and Common Yellowthroat.

The grounds of the hotel in Santo Domingo are often birdy and will produce sights of Hispaniolan Woodpeckers, Palmchats, Bananaquits and Yellow-faced Grassquits. Of special interest is the Vervain Hummingbird (only larger by 0.16 inches to the Been Hummingbird in Cuba). One of the more exciting events of the trip is the daily spectacle of hundreds of wild Hispaniolan Parakeets descending on the large trees of the hotel grounds as they congregate for the evening roost. These green beauties are loud and easy to locate as they swirl amongst the trees and buildings in tight, screeching flocks. We should have unlimited opportunities for good views of these birds.

NIGHT: Duvergé, Independencia

**April 7, Day 4: National Botanic Gardens; Drive to Puerto Escondido de Duverge.** Today will begin with an early morning visit to the Dr. Rafael M. Moscoso National Botanic Gardens. Created in 1976 and named for the botanist who first catalogued the flora of Hispaniola, the gardens are truly one of the special landmarks of the

Dominican Republic. The wide, paved paths wind through gardens, open lawns, forests, and past a wooded meandering stream. Native and exotic plants include ferns, palms, cacti, and flowers.

Remarkably, several endemic and near-endemic species are found in and around the gardens, nestled in this city of three and a half million people! From the moment we come through the gate, we are assured of a rewarding morning of birding and some exciting encounters with the birds of the Dominican Republic. Antillean Palm-Swifts soar just above the tops of the stately royal palms; a pair of striking Hispaniolan Woodpeckers chatters as they work a dead limb; a handsome Black-crowned Palm-Tanager investigates a clump of tangled vines; a dazzling Antillean Mango darts about in the morning sun; a Black-whiskered Vireo sings overhead, just out of sight. We may see the diminutive Vervain Hummingbird, the world's second smallest bird (only the Bee Hummingbird of Cuba is tinier). We should also see the Palmchat—not only a Hispaniolan endemic, but the sole representative of its family! These gregarious birds are conspicuous, and we should see them at their communal nest sites or “apartments.” Bananaquits are downright abundant and even the prehistoric-looking Hispaniolan Lizard-Cuckoo is likely. A shaded paved path parallels the garden's waterway, and close attention may turn up Least Grebes, often with chicks, or a Limpkin stalking the water's edge.

Following the visit to the botanical gardens we will begin the drive to Barahona, located on the rocky Caribbean south coast, to climb the slopes of the Sierra de Bahoruco on our route to Duvergé. During our four-and-a-half-hour drive west from Santo Domingo, the subtropical forests of the Santo Domingo lowlands give way to an increasingly arid region of acacias and thorn scrub. We expect to arrive in the late afternoon.

NIGHT: Hotel El Quemaito, Barahona

**April 8, Day 5: Zapotén Cloud Forest.** Lying in the southwest corner of the Dominican Republic is a remote and largely inaccessible mountain range known as the Sierra de Bahoruco. Quite unlike the other ranges of the country, the story of the Bahoruco is a fascinating one of evolution, endemism, and island biogeography. Twenty million years of mountain building and changing sea levels routinely connected and separated the Bahoruco from the rest of the island in a continuing cycle. The effect on the flora and fauna of the island cannot be overstated. Nearly all the endemic bird species are found on this part of the island, and we will spend three days exploring the different habitats of the Bahoruco range. The changes in birdlife can be monitored as we reach elevation and thus, a different habitat.



White-fronted Quail-Dove. *Geotrygon leucometopia*.  
Photo: D. Ascanio ©

This first full day in the area will involve a 3:30 a.m. departure for the higher reaches of the Bahoruco. The early departure is necessary for taking advantage of birding in the early morning hours. At the middle elevations we might make a predawn search for the Least Poorwill and the Hispaniolan Nightjar, two rarely seen island endemics. As we reach the higher elevations (about 7,000 feet) the forest becomes much wetter, with magnificent, twenty-foot-tall tree ferns dominating the understory. The birdlife here is totally different. We will target the seldom-seen La Selle Thrush and Western Chat-Tanager, and may also spot Hispaniolan Emerald and Hispaniolan Spindalis, White-winged Warbler, Rufous-throated Solitaire (its haunting early morning song is ethereal in the dripping cloud forest), Greater Antillean Elaenia, Golden Swallow, and Antillean Siskin. The always shy White-fronted Quail-Dove is possible along the roadside in the early morning hours.

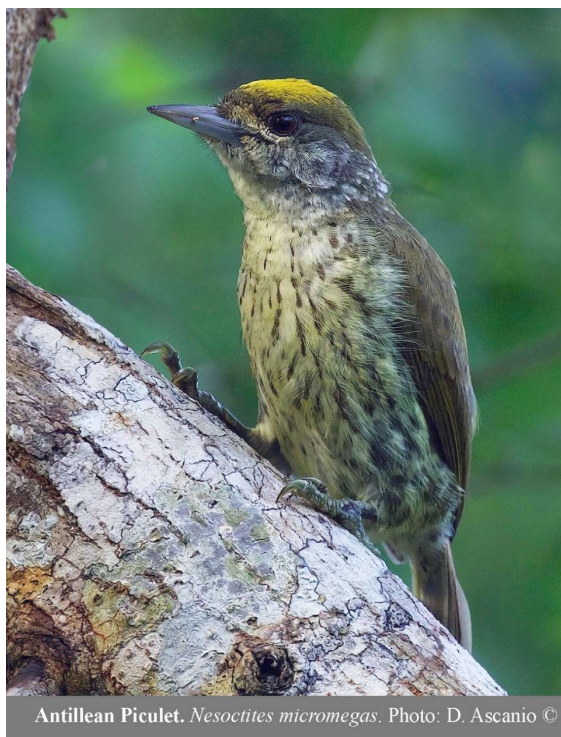
After a whole morning in the Zapotén area, we will start heading down to bird drier forest where in previous years we have found the incredibly elusive Bay-breasted Cuckoo. Other species that we have observed at mid elevations include Flat-billed Vireo, Olive-throated Parakeet (presumably introduced) and Hispaniolan Lizard-Cuckoo.

NIGHT: Hotel El Quemaito, Barahona



**April 9, Day 6. Sierra de Bahoruco & Lago Enriquillo.**

Our second day in the area will see us on the farmlands neighboring the Bahoruco mountains. Here, we will look for Plain Pigeon, Antillean Euphonia, Greater Antillean Grackle, and White-fronted Quail-Dove (rare and unpredictable). For most of the day, we'll be birding the zone where thorn-scrub meets semi-evergreen, sub-humid forest. Birds are often plentiful, and we may see as many as 20 island and regional endemics this morning. Among our targets are the beautiful Hispaniolan Parrot, the solitary Hispaniolan Pewee, the comical Hispaniolan Lizard-Cuckoo, the extravagant Bay-breasted Cuckoo (infrequently heard, rarely seen), Black-crowned Palm-Tanager, Stolid Flycatcher, Zenaida Dove, Key West Quail-Dove and Antillean Piculet. Following a picnic lunch, we will head to the alkaline shore of nearby Lago Enriquillo. Lying to the north of the Sierra de Bahoruco is the Neiba Valley, a highly alkaline coral desert. Now 130 feet below sea level, this valley was once a strait of the Caribbean. What is left now is a massive body of water fed by about ten streams and rivers, but with no outlet! Evaporation is high and, as a result, the lake is three times as salty as the sea. Descending from the higher elevations, the view of the sprawling lake below us is one of great panoramic beauty. The deep valley is further highlighted by the view of the Neiba Mountains to the north. Photographic opportunities are plentiful here.



Antillean Piculet. *Nesocittes micromegas*. Photo: D. Ascanio ©

The purpose for our visit is to seek out another island endemic, the Palm Crow (considered by some an endemic species, the Hispaniolan Palm-Crow). Normally a bird of the pine forests, they occur in small numbers around the shore of the lake. By driving near the lakeshore, we stand a good chance of locating them. Other birds we may come across are Plain Pigeon, Antillean Nighthawk, and Hispaniolan Oriole. We will then proceed to the hotel, arriving in late afternoon, simply to relax or watch the late afternoon sun set on the ocean.

NIGHT: Hotel Hodelpa Caribe Colonial

**April 10, Day 7: Aceitillar, along the Alcoa Road; Cabo Rojo.** From a birding standpoint, the Aceitillar Region of Alcoa Road is one of the wonders of the Dominican Republic. The upper reaches of these mountains once yielded significant deposits of bauxite, and for years the multi-national company Alcoa mined it for export. In order to accommodate the heavy truck traffic, a wide, paved road was built from the sea all the way up to the open pit mines. Abandoned for more than a decade, the road is now part of a national park, is virtually free of all other traffic. Our strategy will be to start at the top and work our way down the mountain. During our initial ascent the changes in vegetation are obvious; cactus and thorn scrub give way to broadleaf forest, which in turn becomes open woodland of Caribbean pine. At the top we'll scan the skies carefully for Golden Swallow, an uncommon endemic species (formerly occurring in Jamaica, the bird is now extinct there). Caribbean Martins occasionally make passes over the treetops.

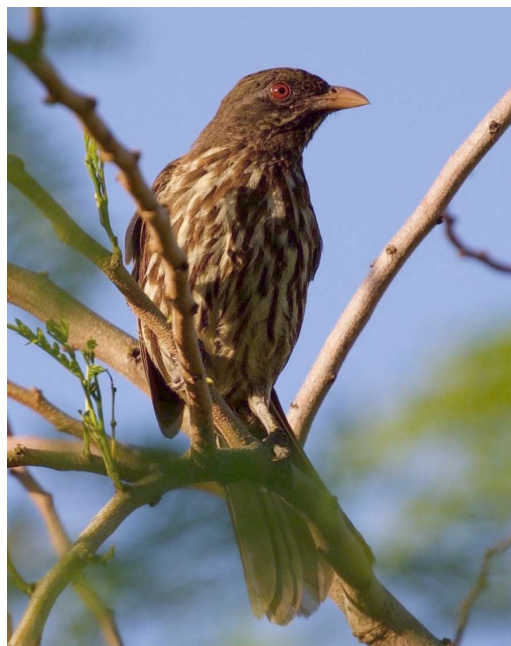
In the pine woodlands we will look for the Hispaniolan Crossbill, Antillean Siskin, and Hispaniolan Emerald. Pine Warblers are common here too. Back down in the broadleaf forest we may find Antillean Piculet, Scaly-naped Pigeon and Narrow-billed Tody.

The ride to and from the Aceitillar Region of Alcoa Road is equally interesting. The beautiful, rocky Caribbean coast is a pleasant sight under the early morning sun. Brown Pelicans, Royal Terns, and Magnificent Frigatebirds patrol the calm waters. As the road turns inland, we will cross the northern section of Jaragua National Park. This park is the largest in the Caribbean and sits in a near pristine condition. The lack of surface water probably accounts for the paucity of human habitation and accompanying habitat alteration. Rugged beds of limestone host a semiarid ecosystem of cactus and thorn-forest. This area is truly remarkable and is further augmented by several delightful

views of the distant sea. Hispaniolan Parrots form large flocks and are at times seen from the road. Greater Antillean Bullfinches are found here as well, and occasionally are seen feeding on the fruits of cactus.

Before returning to Barahona, we will deviate for a side trip to Cabo Rojo, near the southern-most tip of the island. Cabo Rojo is an interesting seaside location that offers the chance to see the island form of the “Golden Warbler,” a special Caribbean race of the Yellow Warbler. This area also is sometimes productive for White-cheeked Pintail. The lagoon at nearby Oviedo supports small population of Roseate Spoonbills and Greater Flamingos, but our success will depend greatly on the water level.

NIGHT: Paraiso Cano Hondo



Palmchat, *Dulus dominicus*.  
Photo: D. Ascanio ©

**April 11, Day 8: Cachote; Eastern Chat-Tanager Search. Return to Santo Domingo; An afternoon walk in the Colonial Zone Tour.**

Today we will take another dirt road, but much shorter than the one taken to Zapotén. This time we will head to the village of Cachote to search for the Eastern Chat-Tanager. Until about ten years ago, the species was thought to occur only in areas that we had no real chance of accessing. Further DNA work on chat-tanagers in the eastern end of the Bahoruco Mountains has verified what some had suspected; the birds that occur here are indeed Eastern Chat-Tanagers! Getting to see this bird involves another early departure from the hotel as we need to make sure we have spare time to return to the lodge, pick our luggage and drive to Santo Domingo. Upon arrival, we will enjoy a relaxing outdoor dinner in the city’s famed Colonial District. Set amid 500-year-old buildings, a shaded plaza and bustling shops, our lunch will be an enjoyable break before we check in to the hotel. Toward late-afternoon you will have spare time to walk around the old Colonial District.

Columbus reached Hispaniola in 1492, and the island became the focal point of his searches for gold. The Spaniards also attempted to convert the indigenous Taino people to Christianity. After a failed attempt at a permanent settlement on the wild north coast, Santo

Domingo was established on the more hospitable south coast in 1494 and is considered the oldest city in the Western Hemisphere. Walking through the Colonial District, you can absorb the colorful history of the city. Many of the structures are well-preserved originals, including the oldest church in the New World, the Cathedral Basilica Menor de Santa Maria, completed in 1544. Several houses constructed in the 1520s were home to some of the important colonial figures of the time. The National Pantheon, built in 1747, served many functions, but is now a burial ground for national heroes. There is also a National Amber Museum with its impressive collection of amber as well as the national stone of the country, the aqua-blue larimar. This evening, we will gather for a farewell dinner and final checklist session.

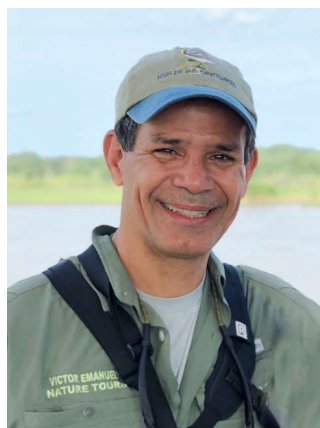
NIGHT: Paraiso Cano Hondo

**April 12, Day 9: Departure for Home.** Participants are free to depart to the Punta Cana International Airport (PUJ) for afternoon flights. We will organize transfers to the airport for afternoon flights.

**EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS:** Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive early or extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least two 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.

**TOUR SIZE:** This tour will be limited to 9 participants. However, VENT reserves the right to increase the tour limit by one in order to accommodate a couple when only one space is available.

**TOUR LEADER:** David Ascanio and local leader, Iván Mota



**David Ascanio**, a Venezuelan birder and naturalist, has spent 36 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 coauthored the descriptions of two new species, the Rio Orinoco Spinetail and the Delta Amacuro Softtail. David has also published numerous papers about the birds of the *llanos* (plains), Orinoco River Island species, and the pan-tepui endemic species on which he has become an authority. He is the senior 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 and guides in the Neotropics.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for the tour is **\$4625** per person in double occupancy from Punta Cana (tour ends in Santo Domingo). This includes all meals from Dinner on Day 1 to Dinner on Day 8, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to the Dominican Republic 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 **\$600**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

**REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT:** To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. If you 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 (November 5, 2024) prior to the tour departure date.

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

**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.

**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.**

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

\*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, 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.**

**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 Travel Protection as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend its **Ripcord** plan. Designed for all types of travelers, Ripcord is among the most comprehensive travel protection programs available.

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

\*

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

\*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 15 days of making your first trip payment. The CFAR benefit provides reimbursement for 75% of covered costs, and increases the policy premium by approximately 50%. Policies may be purchased either for the full value of the tour fee at the time of deposit or in segments as individual tour payments are made (deposit, mid-payment, final balance, additional arrangements, etc.). The “pay as you go” approach reduces up-front expense and ensures that the amount paid toward your full policy premium is in proportion to the amount paid toward the full tour fee. If you choose to “pay as you go,” you must cover each deposit or payment within 15 days, and insure all non-refundable trip cost in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

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

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

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

**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.**

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

**BAGGAGE:** 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/>.

**CLIMATE:** The rainy season in the Caribbean runs from mid-spring through early fall, with the dry season running from mid-November to April. However, peculiarities of the island's topography create microclimates where rain can occur at any time. Though significant rainfall is not expected, heavy afternoon thunderstorms are a possibility. In both islands, temperatures will be in the 80s to possibly 90 degrees. In the mountainous areas, temperatures could dip to the mid-50s. In the more arid southwest, temperatures may rise into the upper 80s and low 90s. Humidity levels will be low to moderate. Participants need to be prepared for conditions ranging from hot and dry to wet and muddy. Overall, conditions should be pleasant with cool mornings and warm afternoons. Elevations will range from sea level to 7,000 feet.

**OTHER CONDITIONS:** The Dominican Republic is a beautiful and fascinating destination, yet participation on a tour here is demanding. Road conditions are often moderate at best; the hotel in Barahona is satisfactory, but not great; and there are various very early starts. Still, the quality of birding is very high, and the spirit of adventure is strong.

There will be numerous leisurely bird walks. All walking will be easy on maintained paths, roads, and trails. There will be several early departures, with at least two before dawn. Every activity is optional unless it is scheduled on a travel day.

The roads in the Dominican Republic are not very wide. While mostly paved, the roads are often bumpy and marked with shallow holes. This can lead to riding conditions that are at times uncomfortable. We try to mitigate this issue by using a comfortable touring bus with driver for the duration of the trip. The roads on the north side of the Baboruco Mountains can be downright awful if they have not been graded recently. Tour participants need to be aware that the possibility exists for our not being able to reach the cloud forest in Cachote, if the roads have not been recently graded. This road can be in horrible condition. Although the distance isn't great, the going is always slow and sometimes impossible. However, note that all our previous Dominican Republic groups have made it up this mountain. Travel to the cloud forest and to Cachote will be in 4x4 vehicles. Snacks and drinks will be readily available between meals each day.

Los Haitises is a legendary location for several reasons, one of which is that travel is difficult here. Seeing the Ridgway's Hawk may be as simple as walking 1.5 miles through pasture lands to the forest edge, or the experience may require considerably more effort. For this reason, participants should be prepared for a lengthy walk on a rocky trail, possibly with mud and mosquitoes as travel companions.

**CLOTHING:** Lightweight field clothing in muted, natural colors and casual attire are suitable for this tour. Bring several pairs of long pants, comfortable lightweight shirts, and a swimsuit. We strongly recommend bringing several long-sleeved shirts, as they provide protection from the sun and occasional biting insects while also providing warmth during cool morning hours. If the rainy season starts early, mosquitoes might be a problem around the coast and the middle elevations. You will be glad you have full body protection. A good hat for sun and rain is essential. A small umbrella is recommended as well. Your luggage should include some light rain gear. For the higher country in the Dominican Republic, you will want a warm sweater or light jacket. For footwear, a comfortable pair of walking shoes or light hiking boots is fine. For our visit to Los Haitises, rubber boots for muddy trails will be useful. Since some hotels will not have decent lighting for night reading and may have blackouts, we suggest you bring a small flashlight or headlamp.

**EQUIPMENT:** You should pack a pair of binoculars that are in good condition, along with a belt pack or daypack (for carrying books, sunscreen, extra digital storage media, 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 leaders will have spotting scopes, but feel free to bring your own if you like. You should also bring sunglasses and sunscreen, a small flashlight or headlamp, water bottle, camera, digital storage media, and spare batteries. A day pack is essential, a small, compact umbrella is highly recommended, and raingear (rain jacket or poncho) and plastic bags or a dry bag for water-proofing gear in the field can be useful. Insect repellent is essential.

**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>

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).

**CURRENCY:** The Dominican Republic uses the Dominican Peso (RD\$). Money can be exchanged upon arrival in the Dominican Republic airport (exchange booth).

**DOCUMENTS:** A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure from The Dominican Republic is required. Visas are not required for entry by United States citizens for visits under 30 days. Non-United States citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions.

All visitors to the Dominican Republic are charged a \$10 tourist card fee that is incorporated into airline charges. Once issued, the card allows for stays up to 30 days but can be extended at the General Directorate of Migration in Santo Domingo.



## **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.

## **MISC:**

Departure Tax – Included with the international air ticket.

Electricity - 110 volts, 60 cycle AC, the same as in the U.S.

Time - 1 hour ahead of Eastern Standard Time

**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. We also recommend Andrew Isles books for the Asia-Pacific region at <http://www.andrewisles.com> for difficult to find and out of print books for Australia.

This list includes some basic field guides and reference volumes of use to the visitor. A great deal has been written about all aspects of Australia's natural history. You will find a variety of selections in any library. Browse around a little and you will discover many resources not listed here.

## **Birds**

Latta, Steven, Christopher Rimmer, Kent McFarland, Dana Gardner, and Barry Kent MacKay. *Field Guide to the Birds of the Dominican Republic and Haiti*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022. **The most important field guide for this tour.** This field guide should be the bible of any birder going to the D.R. The book is a collaboration of the people who know the island's avifauna best and features the most recent taxonomic changes.

Raffaele, Herbert, James Wiley, Orlando Garrido, Allan Keith and Janis Raffaele. *Birds of the West Indies*. Second edition. 2020. Princeton University Press. This book gives an excellent overview of the species that occur in the West Indies. The field guide format is smaller and more practical than the previous book for field use.

## **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 Caribbean pack. Includes a brief bird description, photos and voices. Also, there is a section for Bird Photo ID which can be useful. HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.

*Ebird*. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. A friendly and essential tool for the modern birdwatcher This is nowadays the best way to keep your life list, all in a single application which also promotes bird conservation. Personal bird lists can be compiled by location and by trip. When taxonomic splits are incorporated, your list will be automatically updated. Furthermore, your leader will be able to share the daily list. You can just accept the list and have it uploaded in your account. HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.

## **Fiction:**

Alvarez, Julia. *In the Time of the Butterflies*. USA: Penguin Group, 1995. Set during the waning days of the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic in 1960, this extraordinary novel tells the story of the Mirabal sisters, three young wives and mothers who are assassinated after visiting their jailed husbands.

Vargas Llosa, Mario. *The Feast of the Goat*. A must read for those interested in the last days of Trujillo's era. The author reproduces in a brilliant way the ambiance of Santo Domingo and the fear that surrounded Trujillo's brutal practices at the time when he was murdered.

Danticat, Edwige. *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. New York, NY: Knopf Publishing Company, 1998. **Barnes & Noble Review:** Told from the viewpoint of a young Haitian American, this novel concentrates on relationships between generations of women, both in Haiti and in the United States. This is a highly regarded book by an amazingly talented young author.

Danticat, Edwige. *The Farming of Bones*. New York, NY: Knopf Publishing Company, 1999. **Barnes & Noble Review:** Edwige Danticat's first collection of short stories, *Krik? Krak!* was shortlisted for the National Book Award in 1995, making her the youngest writer ever nominated for that honor. Her first novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, which was a recent Oprah pick, established her as not only a remarkable young talent but also a new and important voice for Haitian Americans. Now, with her latest, Danticat turns to the past, to locate and give a new voice to a moment in history that is an all-but-forgotten holocaust. Her powerful new novel focuses on the 1937 massacre by Dominicans of the Haitians living within their borders.

Danticat, Edwige. *Krik? Krak!* New York, NY: Knopf Publishing Company, 1996. **Barnes & Noble Review:** Nine powerful stories about life under Haiti's dictatorships: the terrorism of the Tonton Macoutes; the slaughtering of hope and the resiliency of love; about those who fled to America to give their children a better life and those who stayed behind in the villages; about the linkages of generations of women through the magical tradition of storytelling.

### **History and Historical Fiction:**

Moya Pons, Frank. *The Dominican Republic: A National History*. Marcus Weiner Publisher, 1998. The definitive history of the Dominican Republic.

Wucker, Michele. *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola*. New York, NY: Hill and Wang Publishing, 2000.

**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 August 7, 2024, and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

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

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

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