

# ESCAPE TO AMAZONIAN COLOMBIA: MITÚ

## A RAINFOREST BIRDING DESTINATION

OCTOBER 10-19, 2023

*Colombia is one of the most biodiverse countries in the world, due to its distinctive tropical location, which includes two oceans, a remarkable number of distinctive biomes ranging from coastal deserts to snow-capped peaks, and an array of complex grasslands and rainforests both west, and east of the Andes. Colombia's bird list, now well over 1,900, is the largest of any country, and it ranks nearly as high in plant and mammal diversity, and also high in reptiles and amphibians. In a testament to the determination of a new generation of young and energetic Colombian students and ornithologists, these lists are now a source of national pride and observers continue to travel and work throughout the country. Since the publication of Hilty and Brown's landmark Guide to the Birds of Colombia in 1986, at least 250 additional species of birds have been added to the country list, including several species new to science. And the list continues to grow. The zeal to learn more about their country has resulted in several recent, smaller, pocket-sized birding guides (see references). More recently a new guide by Hilty, Birds of Colombia, published in 2021, continues in this tradition by incorporating forward-looking taxonomy, and QR codes for every species that enable an e-link to Cornell's Laboratory of Ornithology audio, photo and natural history data bases.*



Río Vaupés, Eastern Colombia Photo: S. Hilty

*Where in the World is Mitú? Since our return to Colombia in 2009, when we operated two tour routes in the Andes, and four departures that year, our Colombia program has greatly expanded in an attempt to provide more complete coverage of Colombia's remarkable avifauna. The Mitú region (pronounced "Me'tó"), is a new VENT offering and one that we have been planning for some time. This trip offers world-class birding opportunities in a rich Amazonian region that combines, broadly, three important soil and forest types—white sandy soil forests, upland terra firme (rich in iron-oxide and reddish in color) forest, and alluvial floodplain (várzea) forest. The Mitú area thus offers an interesting juxtaposition of three differing Amazonian forest-types on these respective soils and a somewhat different avian species composition in each of these areas. Hilty spent two weeks in this small Amazonian town in 1978 and it was then, and remains today, one of the most fascinating Amazonian birding destinations anywhere in Colombia. It was here that Hilty saw, for the first time such marvelous species as Red-fan Parrot, Pearly Antshrike, Chestnut-crowned Antbird, Black Bushbird, and Pavonine Quetzal, among many others.*



Chestnut-crowned Antbird. Photo: S. Hilty

*Mitú is a small eastern Colombian town (01°11'70"10') located on the banks of the Río Vaupés, which flows eastward into Brazil and the Río Negro. No roads connect the town to the rest of Colombia and it can only be reached by air, making it the most isolated capital city of any department in the country. The Río Vaupés, as well as almost all of the department of Vaupés, is geologically a westernmost portion of the vast Guianan Shield. The influence of the Guianan Shield is evidenced by the vast amount of white sand, which is derived from the erosion of an ancient elevated seabed. Large areas around Mitú are dominated by white sandy soil forests, blackwater rivers and large rock outcrops, some rising hundreds of feet above the surrounding rainforest. Within this mix there also are large areas of reddish iron-rich soils typical of what is found southward across much of Amazonia. With an elevation of only c. 600 feet (183 m) this is a warm, humid, lowland region. Rainfall is heaviest between April and September but significant rain falls in every month of the year. The Vaupés department is one of the least populated regions in Colombia with an estimated 0.3 inhabitants per square kilometer. A large proportion of the inhabitants in the region, including at Mitú, are members of indigenous communities, several of which are extremely accomplished birding guides and have now worked as guides for almost a decade. To date an astonishing total of over 570 species of birds have been recorded in the vicinity of Mitú, a number that equals some of the richest sites anywhere in Amazonia.*



**About this Tour:** Mitú is in the humid Amazonian lowlands so participants should expect to encounter warm temperatures; **avg. daytime highs** 29-34° C; 84-93° F); and **avg. nighttime temperatures** c. 20-22° C; 68-71° F. In general, these temperatures are much like those across most of lowland Amazonia. Daily birding activities will be on foot exploring various habitats including *terra firme* (non-flooded) rainforest; *várzea* (seasonally flooded) rainforest; savanna (varying-sized pockets of grassland); forest borders; Amerindian gardens (chagras); various age-stages of second growth; and riverine and riverbank environments (Río Vaupés and small tributaries). We will have an indigenous guide (from the Tucano



community) with us every day and these indigenous guides are extraordinarily skilled bird spotters. Transportation to sites may include boats, dugouts, and on roads (there are only a few) we will use moto-taxis; vans or pick-up trucks. There are a few short roads near Mitú, and a single longer road that extends a little over thirty kilometers southeast from Mitú and links a few remote indigenous communities. Large bottled water containers will be available to refill your canteens. Trails will be mostly flat, or with relatively gentle rises (except at the end of one trail), and may be dry, or with muddy areas. In low-lying areas trails will be wet enough that rubber boots will be necessary. Rubber boots also provide protection against chiggers, but are hot in humid lowland climates. Trip dates correspond to drier months (rainiest months, April-September) but keep in mind that c. 8-10 inches of rainfall can be expected in each of the “drier” month of the year and about twice that in the wetter months. An umbrella will be useful for both rain showers and as a sunshade in open sunny areas.



White Sandy Soil Road, Vaupés, Colombia. Photo: S. Hilty

*Note: Endemic and near-endemic species are noted in boldface in the daily itinerary below.*

**October 10, Day 1: Arrival in Bogotá (elevation c. 2,600m; 8,660 ft.).** Participants may arrive any time today, or earlier if you wish to spend a day or two exploring the city. Regardless of arrival date, your air flight will be met and you will be transferred to our hotel on arrival. Keep in mind, however, that we will likely leave fairly early for our first day afield, which will be spent at a site an hour or so beyond Bogotá. The city of Bogotá is located on a wide flat, highland plateau, which was formerly a vast network of wetlands. Today only a few small wetlands remain including several within the city itself. Bogotá is a vibrant modern city of nearly eight million inhabitants. Dominated by red tile roofs and a spectacular panorama of high Eastern Andean slopes rising at the eastern edge of the city, it boasts an outstanding array of museums, e.g. Botero Museum, restaurants, theaters, and historic districts (e.g. La Candelaria; and a former home of Simon Bolívar). It also is known for its high educational standards and excellent medical facilities. A world-class exhibit of gold artifacts at the famous Gold museum (closed Mondays) ranks as a must-see for visitors.

Night: Hilton Garden Inn Bogotá Airport, Bogotá

**Oct 11, Day 2: Bogotá to Laguna de Pedro Palo.** This area lies southwest of Bogota and at slight lower elevations of between c. 2,000 to 2,300 m (6,000 to 6,900 ft.). The climate is generally pleasant and cool and the area is a mix of second growth, pastures, forest borders, and patches of older forest. There also is a small lagoon. The Laguna de Pedro Palo area provides a good introduction to birds found in the Eastern Andes. We will return to our hotel relatively early this afternoon to allow time to prepare for our flight to Mitú tomorrow.

**Key species here include** some that are relatively widespread, and several that are endemic (E) or near-endemics (NE): Indigo-capped Hummingbird (E), Black Inca (E; scarce), Spectacled Parrotlet (NE), Silvery-throated Spinetail (E), Turquoise Dacnis (E; formerly Turquoise Dacnis-Tanager), Bar-crested Antshrike (NE), Speckle-breasted (Colombian) Wren (E if split), and Sharp-tailed Streamcreeper. Along the gravel road toward the lake, small mixed species flocks are likely to contain Smoky-brown Woodpecker; Ash-browed Spinetail; Red-headed Barbet; Whiskered Wren; Scrub, Saffron-crowned, Beryl-spangled, and Black-capped tanagers; and occasionally Flame-faced Tanager. Yellow-backed Orioles can sometimes be heard or seen in trees in pastures.

Night: Hilton Garden Inn Bogotá Airport, Bogotá

**Oct. 12, Day 3: Flight from Bogotá to Mitú; Afternoon on Bocatoma Trail in White Sandy Soil Forest.**

Today we will spend the afternoon on this *terra firme* trail (also known as Pipeline Trail), which is close to the town of Mitú (10 minutes south of the town center via Moto-taxi). Initially the trail is flat and passes through relatively low second growth on white-sandy soil forest, but the trail gains a little in elevation and eventually it is possible to obtain views over the top of some of the surrounding rainforest. Further out on this trail the forest is taller and more pristine. An astonishing 433 species of birds have been recorded along this trail (as of July 2022), including many high-quality species.

**Important species found here include:** Blue-throated Piping Guan, Amethyst Woodstar, Crested Eagle (scarce), Yellow-billed Jacamar, Spotted Puffbird, Chestnut-capped Puffbird, Rusty-breasted Nunlet, Sapphire-rumped Parrotlet, Ringed Woodpecker, Spot-backed Antwren, Gray-bellied Antbird, Thrush-like Antpitta, Saffron-crested Tyrant-Manakin, Black Manakin, Pompadour Cotinga, Cinnamon Manakin-Tyrant (*Neopipo*), Rufous-tailed Flatbill, Citron-bellied Attila, Pectoral Sparrow, and Yellow-green Grosbeak.

E-Bird: <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L1451781?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec>  
<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L1451781>

[Note: Later in the trip (Day 6) we will return for a full day on this Bocatoma trail. However, because it is quite close to the town center of Mitú, on that day we will be able to return to town for a mid-day lunch and brief afternoon “siesta” during the heat of the day.]

Night: Hotel Brasilia, Mitú

**Oct 13, Day 4: Mitú; Full Day at Santa Cruz (Kilometer 32) and Near Micro-Hydroelectric Plant (MCH).**

This is the most distant locality that we can reach by road in the Mitú area and also is the location of the Micro-Hydroelectric Central facility, which provides electrical power for the town of Mitú. This is a fantastic birding area and also is of considerable cultural interest. Our birding trail is near the Santa Cruz community, where there is a permanent lek of Guianan Cocks-of-the-rock. The trail is a mix of *terra firme* forest with some low wet areas where rubber boots may be advisable. Near the end of the trail there is a gain in elevation and the trail climbs out onto a rock outcrop, which provides a spectacular panoramic view of the rainforest. However, the trail to reach the Guianan Cock-of-the-rock lek is more difficult and is often quite muddy (rubber boots advised). This entire region belongs to two indigenous communities, the Tucano and Cubeo. These communities are quite



Guianan Cock-of-the-rock. Photo: S. Hilty



interested in bird tourism and also have a restaurant where we can take our mid-day meal. It is also likely that our guide for the week will be from one of these communities. Early this morning we hope to visit a blackwater creek where a Fiery Topaz has often been seen.



**Black-throated Trogon.** Photo: S. Hilty

**Important species recorded here include:** Blackish Nightjar, Fiery Topaz, Fiery-tailed Aowlbill, Gould's Jewelfront, Pavonine Quetzal, Amazonian Motmot, Collared Puffbird, Black-throated Trogon, Tawny-tufted Toucanet, Orinoco Piculet, Scarlet-shoulder Parrotlet, Red-fan Parrot, White-shouldered Antshrike, Yellow-throated Antwren, Banded Antbird, White-plumed Antbird, Common Scale-backed Antbird, Chestnut-winged Hookbill, Guianan Cock-of-the-rock, Brown-winged Schiffornis, and Royal Flycatcher.

E-Bird: <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L1450948?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec>  
<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L1450948>

Night: Hotel Brasilia, Mitú

**Oct 14, Day 5: Mitú; Trails in Vicinity of Pueblo Nuevo Community.** The indigenous community of Pueblo Nuevo is located about 20 km southeast of Mitú and on the same road as yesterday but not quite as distant. In part because of its isolation, this community has conserved more of its ancestral culture than other indigenous communities closer to Mitú. In addition to being a great birding destination, with opportunities to search for a number of very high-quality species, we also will be able to have our mid-day meal here. Birding today will focus on two shady, *terra firme* trails that pass through beautiful tall rainforest. The trails are generally dry throughout the year, although there will be one stream crossing where participants may want to use rubber boots.

**Important species recorded on these trails include:**

Spix's Guan, Black-throated Brilliant, Brown-banded Puffbird (scarce and local), Rusty-breasted Nunlet, Great Jacamar, Red-necked Woodpecker, Dusky-billed Parrotlet, Red-fan Parrot, Black Bushbird (scarce), Imeri Warbling Antbird, Banded Antbird, Chestnut-crested Antbird, Dot-backed Antbird, Black-faced Antbird, Rufous-capped Antthrush, White-chinned Woodcreeper (an army-ant follower), Bar-bellied Woodcreeper (rare), Curve-billed Scythebill, Amazonian Umbrellabird, White-browed Purpletuft, Golden-crowned Spadebill, Masked Tanager, Opal-crowned Tanager, Opal-rumped Tanager, Green-and-gold Tanager, White-bellied Dacnis, Yellow-bellied tanager, Turquoise Tanager, Paradise Tanager, Olive Oropendola, and Green Oropendola.

E-Bird: <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L3571110?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec>  
<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L3571110>



**Imeri Warbling-Antbird.** Photo: S. Hilty

Turquoise Tanager, Paradise Tanager, Olive Oropendola, and Green Oropendola.



**White-browed Purpletuft. Photo: S. Hilty**

Night: Hotel Brasilia, Mitú

**Oct 15, Day 6: Mitú; Bocatoma *terra firme* Forest.** This trail is one of the closest to Mitú (see Day 3) and we will have the opportunity to return here, this time for a full day, although we will return to the town center mid-day for lunch and a brief siesta before resuming our afternoon activities. There is a long list of birds for this trail: see examples under Day 3 (above).

Night: Hotel Brasilia, Mitú

**Oct 16, Day 7: Mitú; Cavichera Forest and Guacamayas.** There are several trails in this area, all of them relatively close to Mitú, and generally flat. They provide access to a mixture of habitats that include pastures, second growth forest, and extensive primary forest. The Cachivera trail leads to a well-known area known locally as Guacamayas Hill (Macaw Hill), the highest point near the town of Mitú. It is an excellent birding area and the top of the rocky hill offers a spectacular view of the surrounding rainforest. This last section, however, which ascends to the top of the outcrop, is steep and rocky and requires considerable physical effort and good balance. This climb may not be suitable for those with limited physical mobility.



**Cherrie's Antwren. Photo: S. Hilty**

**Important species recorded here include:** Gray-winged Trumpeter, Slate-colored Hawk, Black Caracara, Green-backed Trogon, Pied Puffbird, Ivory-billed Araçari, Red-necked Woodpecker, Maroon-tailed Parakeet, Black-headed Parrot, Amazonian Antshrike, Cherrie's Antwren, Saffron-crested Tyrant-Manakin, Yellow-crested (crowned) Manakin, Amazonian Umbrellabird, Purple-breasted Cotinga, Amazonian (Rothschild's) Grosbeak (split from Blue-black Grosbeak), Plumbeous Euphonia, Flame-crested Tanager, and Grayish Mourner.

E-Bird: <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L1450896?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec>  
<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L1450896>

NIGHT: Hotel Brasilia, Mitú

**Oct 17, Day 8: Mitú.** Day reserved in case of rain, or for a repeat visit to an area, or, we may visit a new trail. Repeat options may include Bocatoma trail, Pueblo Nuevo, Santa Cruz and Cachivero areas. All of these trails have such a great variety of birds that repeating a walk is always worthwhile, and it may give us the opportunity to try again for something we may have missed.

NIGHT: Hotel Brasilia, Mitú

**Oct 18, Day 9, Mitú: Early Morning Birding Excursion to Mituseño and Urania Forest Area; Mid-day or Early Afternoon Flight from Mitú to Bogotá.** Our activities this morning will be centered along an unpaved road to the Urania indigenous community, around the community itself, and on nearby trails and banks of the Río Vaupés where the community is located. This area is quite close to the town of Mitú. Some of our birding activities will almost certainly take place on or near a wooden bridge built by the community. Also, as a means of earning extra income, the community sells refreshments and snacks, which we will be able to purchase.



Female Blackish-gray Antshrike. Photo: S. Hilty

**Species that have been found in this area include:** Red-throated Caracara, Spotted Puffbird, Red and Green Macaw, Scarlet Macaw, Orange-cheeked Parrot, Blackish-gray Antshrike, Black-chinned Antbird, Slender-billed Xenops, Point-tailed Palmcreeper, Yellow-crested Manakin, Striated Manakin, White-crowned Manakin, Golden-headed Manakin, Blue-crowned Manakin (now split from C. Amer. population), Rusty-fronted Tody-Flycatcher, Amazonian Tyrannulet (*Inezia*), Amazonian Scrub-Flycatcher (*Sublegatus*), Azure-naped Jay, White-banded Swallow, Rufous-bellied Euphonia, Epaulet (Moriche) Oriole (*Icterus cayanensis chrysocephalus*), and Yellow-bellied Dacnis.

E-Bird: <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L1193327?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec>  
Mituseño Bridge: <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L4015410>  
Urania: <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L1193327>

Following our flight to Bogotá, we will have day rooms available for those departing tonight on international flights; or alternatively, overnight rooms will be available for those departing the following morning.

NIGHT: Hilton Garden Inn Bogotá Airport, Bogotá

**Oct 19, Day 10: International Flights Home.** Transfers to the airport will be provided for departures at any time today.

**TOUR LIMIT:** This tour is limited to 8 participants.

**TOUR LEADERS:** Steve Hilty with the assistance of a local leader





**Steve Hilty** is the senior author of *A Guide to the Birds of Colombia* (1986), and author of *Birds of Venezuela* (2003), both by Princeton University Press, as well as the popular *Birds of Tropical America, A watcher's introduction to behavior, breeding and diversity*. His most recent work, *Bird of Colombia*, by Edicions in Barcelona, is a completely new guide incorporating forward-looking taxonomy and, for every species, a QR code electronic link to Cornell's Library of Ornithology. He has also written a number of scientific papers on birds and plants, has described two species of birds new to science in Venezuela, and another, with a team of scientists, in Colombia. He also wrote the text and species accounts for the tanager family for the acclaimed *Handbook of Birds of the World*, published by Lynx Edicions in Barcelona. A recent work, *Dirt, Sweat, and Diesel: A Family Farm in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, marks a departure from his previous works, in focusing on a Midwestern farm family. Steve holds a Ph.D. in zoology from the University of Arizona and has

worked at the Arid Lands Department at the University of Arizona, and as a broker with Merrill Lynch. He is currently a research associate in ornithology at the University of Kansas Biodiversity Institute. Since 1983 he has worked for Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, guiding trips throughout North and South America, and co-leading trips to India, the Orient, and Australasian regions. With more than four decades of experience in South America and a wide range of natural history interests, he brings a unique breadth of expertise to his Neotropical tours. At night he often turns his binoculars towards the skies for stargazing. Steve lives in Kansas City with his wife, Beverly. They have two daughters.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for this tour is **\$6,095** per person in double occupancy and includes all meals beginning with dinner on Day 1 to lunch on Day 9, accommodations as stated, ground transportation during the tour, internal flight, and guide services provided by the tour leader. The tour fee does not include roundtrip airfare from your home to Bogota, 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 **\$350**.

**REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT:** To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The initial deposit is **\$1000** per person per tour. 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. If you prefer to pay the initial deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at [www.ventbird.com](http://www.ventbird.com)) should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

**PAYMENTS:** Initial tour deposits may be made by MasterCard, Visa, check, money order, or bank transfer. 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 (May 14, 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 apply to pre- and post-tour extensions. **For participants' protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**



If a 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:

Your 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: <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 14 days of making your tour deposit. The CFAR benefit

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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):**

The coronavirus pandemic has brought uncertainty for many people currently holding travel insurance policies or who are considering future travel and purchasing such insurance. Redpoint has added a **Coronavirus FAQ page** to 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. Among the most important points: 1) Trip cancellation solely for concern or fear of travel associated with COVID-19 is not covered; 2) Should you request cancellation of your policy, a full refund of your premium is available only under a limited set of conditions; and 3) Should you request cancellation, you may be eligible to receive a pro-rated refund of the unused portion of your premium or a travel insurance credit. Travel insurance credit (“Premium Credit”) is for the value of the policy purchased and may be applied to future policies. Premium Credits have no expiration dates. Rules and regulations apply.

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

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

Additionally, as countries begin opening up for travel, many are instituting an array of COVID-19 entry requirements, including mandates to purchase travel insurance covering medical expenses due to COVID-19 illness and accommodation 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 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.

**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 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.***

**TRIP CLASSIFICATION:** This may be regarded as a physically moderate trip with much of our birding along roads or fairly flat trails, although bear in mind that most of this trip is based in the humid Amazonian lowlands where humidity and daily temperatures will likely be high. In general, expect warm to hot conditions each day at

Mitú. On two or three days there will be sections of trails with moderate gradients. At one site there is a short section at the end of the trail that is steep and rocky and may be physically challenging. The first day afield, near Bogotá, should be pleasant and cool.

**CONDITIONS:** Single-site tour (at small town of Mitú) except for arrival and departure in and out of capital city of Bogotá. There is one internal flight from Bogotá to Mitú, and another to return to Bogotá (probably SATENA airlines). Some birding sites are very close to the town of Mitú and we may walk to these sites; others will require relatively short drives in 4x4 vehicles (max of about 30 minutes), but there are few roads and only one that extends out a little more than 30 km. Accommodations will be in town of Mitú in a mid-level hotel (the best available) with air-conditioning and simple, but good food and cold drinks; limited laundry service but note this is a relatively short trip. Most birding will be on forest trails; a limited amount also along roads or other open areas; relatively flat terrain with a few easy grades. Some trails will have wet or muddy sections requiring (at minimum) waterproof ankle-high hiking boots, or rubber boots or (preferably) canvas type pull-overs (e.g. Neos)—these latter very light weight, more portable and comfortable than rubber boots, which are hot and heavy. The region is lowland (elevation less than 300 m); expect conditions to be pleasant in the early morning hours but hot and humid during midday and, when possible, we plan to have mid-day breaks. Rain is always possible, although we are not visiting during the rainiest months. Because of the heat, humidity and considerable amount of trail walking, participants should be a good physical condition and able to walk several miles in these conditions in order to maximize their participation on this trip. **Note:** On all birding excursions we will be accompanied/guided by a local Amerindian guide (mandatory, and we will have the same guide throughout the trip), as we will be accessing traditional lands of several different Amerindian tribes. These guides, it goes without saying, are extremely skilled at finding birds and wildlife and are a tremendous asset.

**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 weight limits on our internal flights (with SATENA airlines) may differ somewhat from those in the USA and on international flights. Therefore we ask that you adhere to the luggage limits outlined above. Please pack in duffels with wheels if possible.** At the hotel in Mitú there may or may not be porter service. **When packing, we urge you to give thought to traveling lighter rather than heavier. We also recommend that you bring a few plastic bags large enough to protect your clothing and/or luggage in case of rain.**

**LAUNDRY:** Laundry services will be available at the Hilton Garden Inn Bogotá Airport, although note that we are there only for the first two nights and the last night. Laundry service should also be available at Mitú but we cannot guarantee the quality or promptness of service. Mitú is quite warm during the day so quick-dry travel clothes which dry readily are recommended. **In any case, 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.**

**CLIMATE:** Weather conditions at Mitú will generally be warm to hot and humid—temperatures in the high 80s to low 90s during the day but cooler and pleasant at night. Our first day at Laguna Pedro Palo should be cool and pleasant. A light to **medium weight jacket should be sufficient.** Light weight gloves also might be useful in the early morning hours at Laguna Pedro Palo. Although this is not a peak rainy period at Mitú (rains are heaviest April-September), participants should always be prepared for some rain.

**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. We suggest loose-fitting khaki clothing or other cotton clothing in a darker shade, e.g. 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 could encounter. 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 highly recommended as protection against insects. Although a waterproof poncho or rain jacket can be used at Mitú, keep in mind that both of these items are hot and uncomfortable, and bulky to carry in humid lowland climates. Instead, we highly recommend that you bring (and



carry) an umbrella, which is also much more portable. Bring a broad-brimmed hat for sun protection and a good sunscreen. Light weight sun gloves also will be useful both for sun, and as protection from occasional biting black flies in open sunny areas. A neck scarf also is useful for sun protection as well as for biting insects. **Footwear should include Gore-Tex water-resistant/waterproof hiking boots**, and perhaps a second pair of walking shoes and/or sneakers. **Rubber boots (unfortunately) are necessary on this trip because we may encounter muddy or wet areas on trails, and it will be necessary to cross at least one shallow stream.** Shower thongs will be useful in the hotel.

**HEALTH PRECAUTIONS:** 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. There are two malaria prophylaxis recommended in areas where chloroquine-resistant malaria is present: Mefloquine (Lariam) and Malarone. For travelers who are unable to take either Malarone or Mefloquine, the CDC recommends the drug Doxycycline as an alternative. Please consult with your physician or local travel clinic for recommendations.

Hepatitis A vaccination is strongly recommended as a precaution. 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. Your polio, tetanus, and typhoid protection should be current. 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, Zika virus has been reported 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.

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. Please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against hepatitis types A, and also 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 [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel). Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new\\_e.html](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html) (click on travel health).

**COVID-19:** We continually emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. **With this in mind, VENT maintains a COVID-19 vaccination requirement.** All tour participants and tour leaders must receive the primary series vaccinations in order to travel with us while we are still in a declared public health emergency. Proof of vaccination must be provided to our office at least one week before the start of the tour. More recently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has updated its guidance to recommend people be Up to Date with COVID-19 vaccinations. Although the CDC website defines "Up to Date" as the primary series vaccinations and all recommended boosters, for those eligible, VENT requires the primary series and strongly recommends boosters. While VENT no longer requires a booster shot for participation on its tours, the high transmissibility of certain variants and subvariants should encourage everyone who is eligible to receive boosters to please do so. VENT has determined this approach to be the best one for keeping our tour leaders and tour participants safe during this time. Our decision and policy anchor a regime of protocols firmly rooted in the latest CDC guidance regarding recommendations for avoiding COVID-19. Please visit the **Coronavirus Travel Update** page of our website <https://ventbird.com/covid-19>, where you may view our **COVID-19 Protocols for VENT Tours** document, which details the guidance VENT will follow in the operation

of its tours in the time of pandemic. 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>.

**INSECTS:** Insects should not be a problem on the single day we are in the Andes. In the lowlands around Mitú, we could encounter some biting insects, especially in hot sunny areas near the river. They also may be a few chiggers. Wear loose-fitting long pants and long-sleeved shirts, and bring bottles or roll-on sticks of “Cutter” or similar insect repellents, or “Flowers of Sulphur” (ask at your pharmacy), which can be dusted on lower pant legs and inside boots. Spraying shoes, socks and the lower portion of pants with insect repellent will help reduce problems with chiggers and rubber boots are particularly useful in this regard. Pants pretreated with permethrin are also helpful. However, please do not bring very strong-scented “natural” repellents, because these often have very strong unpleasant odors, may trigger allergic reactions in some people, and 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

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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.

**We strongly recommend the use of Insect Shield® clothing.** Insect Shield is a process by which clothing is treated with an EPA-approved formula of the insect repellent permethrin. Such clothing is highly repellent to insects and provides durable and long-lasting protection, even after dozens of washings. Outdoor wear with Insect Shield protection includes name brands such as Ex Officio and Tilley, and can be purchased at outdoor recreation stores such as REI and from a variety of online retailers. In lieu of Insect Shield clothing, you should consider treating your clothes with permethrin, which has the same effect. Permethrin can be purchased at outdoor recreation stores and from a variety of online retailers.

**CURRENCY:** Colombian Peso (COP). **We recommend that you exchange all or most of your dollars at the international airport in Bogotá upon arrival; a limited amount of money may be exchanged at the Hilton Garden Inn Bogotá Airport.** ATM machines 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. Your passport must be valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure. A visa is not required. Non-United States citizens should check with their local Colombian consulate or embassy.

**EQUIPMENT:** **It is essential that all participants bring a WIDE-mouth water bottle that can be easily refilled** (from a large tank in the hotel in Mitú). Also, **a daypack is essential.** Other useful items include plastic bags for water-proofing gear in the field, plenty of snacks such as trail mix or dried fruit, and any personal medications. An umbrella is highly recommended. We feel that rain jackets or ponchos are far less useful in hot humid climates but feel free to bring these if you wish. Earplugs may come in handy in the hotel at Mitú.

**MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS:** There **will be** opportunities to recharge batteries for electronic equipment at 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 trail 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 have internet access and Wi-Fi (at least in the lobbies if not actually in hotel rooms). Also, for those with the appropriate 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 & AVANTEL have more coverage in remote rural areas). Sometimes this entails a trip to a local telecommunications service center, something best done in Bogotá before the trip begins. Those with Apple phones or iPads can obtain a chip from the Apple store in Bogotá and, of course, many international plans now are also available from service providers in the US. Cell phone access is now virtually country-wide in Colombia, although service in a remote area such as Mitú may be limited to areas in the vicinity of the town. *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: \*\*recommended**

**\*\*Hilty, Steven L. 2021. *Birds of Colombia*. [NEW].** Lynx Edicions, Barcelona, Spain. A little larger and heavier than the references that follow but with far more information and much better illustrations, as well as QR codes that link, via your phone, to Cornell’s web site where you can listen to songs, view photos and videos, and peruse additional information.

**Hilty, S. L. and W. L. Brown. *Guide to the Birds of Colombia*.** Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ. 1986. Now a classic. Excellent illustrations (mostly) and information on voice, behavior, breeding and status and habitat, range maps for almost all species. Taxonomy now very dated because of many new changes. Presently out of print; possibly difficult to find.

**\*\*McMullan, Miles, T. M. Donegan & G. Plautoja-Penna, T. Tuncer-Navarro, A. Bartels, and T. Ellery. 2018. *Field Guide to the Birds of Colombia*. THIRD EDITION.** Published by Rey Naranjo Editores. Paperback. Illustrates all species known to have occurred in Colombia up to 2018; very small range map for each species; illustrations variable, most fairly good but often inadequate for difficult groups. A few brief, text remarks accompany each species. Relatively recent publication date but taxonomy has already changed and some groups not up to date. Despite drawbacks this book is quite useful, especially so because of its small size. Can be obtained through Buteo Books, USA. Regard as a supplement for field identification (not a solution to all identifications). Nevertheless, a significant achievement in dealing with nearly 2000 species in a book remarkably compact and portable.

**Natural History:**

**\*\*Hilty, Steven L.. *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. *A Neotropical Companion*.** Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989. Excellent broad-based resource on just about everything from plants and birds to insects, herps and mammals in the Neotropics.

**\*\*Forsyth, Adrian, and Ken Miyata. 1984. *Tropical Nature. Life & Death in the Rain Forests of Central and South America*.** Scribners Sons, New York. 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.

**General Travel:**

**Egerton, Alex, et al. most recent edition. *Lonely Planet Guide to Colombia*.** A good introduction to Colombia life, culture and just getting around the country. A little time with this or a similar travel book (see four others below) should provide a richer travel experience for almost anyone.

**Also see: Jacobs, Daniel and Stephen Keeling. most recent edition. *The Rough Guide to Colombia (Travel Guide)*.** Also quite good.

**Recordings:**

**Alvarez, M., V. Caro, O. Laverde and 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).

**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, 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 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 on at the time of publication, 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.