

FRANCE: BIRDS & ART IN PROVENCE

MAY 12-20, 2022

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Mediterranean France is famous for the diversity of its bird life and for the richness of its 2,000-year-old culture. This relaxed tour, based at a single hotel in Arles, gives us the opportunity to enjoy both, with a Mediterranean avifauna complementing artistic and architectural treasures from the Roman, medieval, and modern periods.

We will be based for our entire trip in one comfortable hotel in the lovely Provençal town of Arles, founded by Julius Caesar as a gift to his legions after their conquest of Gaul—and as a way to keep those battle-hardened veterans from causing him trouble back home in Rome. In the early Christian period, Arles was a bustling center of commerce and spirituality, a status only heightened in the Middle Ages, when some of the finest sculpture in European history was produced to ornament the city's churches and cemeteries. Today, Arles is an elegant, vaguely sleepy town, proud of its well-preserved past and its preeminent status among the cities of Provence.



Arles is also the gateway to some of the best wildlife areas in France. On some days of our trip, birding will predominate, while others will be devoted primarily to historical sites, but most of our time will feature a balance between birds and culture. Late morning starts, leisurely meals, and plenty of time built in for shopping, strolling, or enjoying the sights ensures a relaxed pace, and the food, the wine, and the inviting landscapes of Provence combine to make this an especially appealing European sojourn for birders and non-birders alike.

May 12-13, Days 1-2: Departure from home and arrival in Arles. Most flights from the United States will depart on Day 1, arriving in France the following morning. If your ticket includes a layover in Paris, please be certain that your flights land and take off from the same airport.

Participants should arrange to arrive at our Arles hotel on Day 2, meeting as a group for the first time that evening. Arles is quickly and easily reached by train from both Paris airports, and from the Marseille airport (airport code MRS) (<https://tinyurl.com/VENTArles>); fast bus or taxi transportation is available from the airport of Avignon (airport code XZN, with service from several airports in England). On May 13, we will meet in the hotel lobby as a group for the first time at 7:00 p.m. for a brief orientation followed by dinner.



Arles © Rick Wright

Behind its modern façade on rue Emile Fassin, our comfortable hotel occupies two remodeled Arlesian townhouses from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Across the street are the city's tourist information booth and the Boulevard des Lices, the site of the twice-weekly market that brings farmers and artisans from all over southern France. The shady Alyscamps, the Roman and early Christian necropolis so famously painted by van Gogh, is four blocks down the road, and the Roman theater is just up the hill. Rooms in the front of the hotel look out onto the towers of the sixteenth-century town hall and Romanesque St-Trophime; the view from the back of the hotel takes in the Alyscamps and the dramatic ruins of St-Honorat.

We are also within easy walking distance of all of Arles's best restaurants, a circumstance we take full and happy advantage of.

NIGHT (Day 1): In transit (overnight flight)

NIGHT (Day 2): Hotel Atrium, Arles

May 14, Day 3: Pont du Gard and Arles. After breakfast in our hotel, we will begin this morning with a drive to the Pont du Gard, an imposing Roman bridge and aqueduct built early in the first century AD. Not just a marvel of engineering, the pont is also the nesting site for large numbers of Common and Alpine Swifts and Crag Martins; the rocky shores of the river Gard beneath are often haunted by White Wagtail, Little Egret, and Yellow-legged Gull. If the morning is warm, raptors rise out of the woods across the river; Short-toed Snake Eagles are regularly seen here, and one recent tour was fortunate enough to see a Eurasian Griffon fly low overhead.



Pont du Gard © Rick Wright

Fields and lawns in the area can be good for migrants and resident birds; Eurasian Hoopoe can be common, and this is a nearly reliable spot to not just hear but actually see the stunning Golden Oriole. While Black Redstart will quickly become a familiar sight, seen everywhere there is a wall or a rock, the woods around the pont and visitor center are often our best chance at good looks at the poorly named Common Redstart, a bird of decidedly uncommon beauty. Serin, Greenfinch, and Cirl Bunting are sometimes conspicuous in the brush-lined parking lots.

After lunch, we will return to Arles for a short break and then, time permitting, a visit to the Alyscamps, right around the corner from our Arles hotel and the subject of an especially fine painting by van Gogh. The long, quiet allée is lined by sarcophagi and the remains of medieval chapels. At the end is St-Honorat, the ruin of a large Romanesque church with an imposing squat tower. Inside, the main altar is made from a Roman sarcophagus, and the chapels added over the centuries are a veritable textbook of architectural styles from the early Middle Ages to the Baroque. Dinner will be in one of our favorite Arlesian restaurants.

NIGHT: Hotel Atrium, Arles

May 15, Day 4: The Eastern Camargue. We will spend a long morning exploring some of the most consistently and most impressively productive birding sites in the Rhone delta. All of the European herons are possible, along with Mediterranean Gull, Whiskered and Gull-billed Terns, Zitting Cisticola, and Great Reed Warbler. White Storks, ever more common in the area, will already have occupied their enormous nests, and Nightingales and Cetti's Warblers shout their songs all day long from the damp woodlands.

Out on the Fangassier flats, Tawny Pipits and Kentish Plovers dart from salicornia clump to salicornia clump. Here, on the remotest mudflats of the Camargue, is where the Greater Flamingos breed; in most years, the nests are not visible from the road, but large numbers of adults will be seen overhead and feeding and loafing at close range in the shallows. The finest specialty of this area is perhaps the breathtakingly beautiful Slender-billed Gull, which in some years gathers in large flocks right next to the road.



Kentish Plover © Rick Wright

We will have lunch in the quiet coastal town of Salin de Giraud, then return to Arles for a little relaxation before re-assembling in the evening for dinner.

NIGHT: Hotel Atrium, Arles



Alyscamps © Rick Wright

May 16, Day 5: Les Baux and van Gogh. The dramatic limestone hills of Les Alpilles stretch across the horizon just north of Arles, their flanks clad in olive groves and woodlands. Our first destination is Les Baux, a hulking medieval fortress perched high on the cliff above the deep, dark, evocatively named Valley of Hell. The self-styled "lords" of Les Baux terrorized the countryside through much of the Middle Ages. Later, Les Baux was a refuge for French Protestants; in 1632, Richelieu turned the cannons of France on their stronghold, leaving much of the once impregnable fortress in ruins.

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We'll search the narrow streets and castle walls for Alpine Swift, Eurasian Crag Martin, Black Redstart, and Blue Rock Thrush; Nightingales and Sardinian Warblers are likely to be singing on the vegetated slopes below us. If the morning is warm, soaring raptors might include a Honey Buzzard or Red Kite. A recent tour even lucked into a stunning male Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush.

After lunch, we will stop to admire the astonishingly well-preserved Roman cenotaph and triumphal arch at Glanum, both products of the time right around the change of eras 2,000 years ago. Besides its archaeological interest, this site can turn up a surprising variety of birds, and over the years we have seen anything from Short-toed Treecreeper to European Roller here.

Just across the road is the hospital of St-Paul de Mausole. The small Romanesque church at the institution's center has an attractive cloister with handsome capitals and a riotously colorful flower garden. St-Paul is most famous, however, as the asylum where Vincent van Gogh resided after that trouble with his ear in Arles. The barred window of his tiny room looks out over endless olive groves and beds of blooming iris. Inspired by their great predecessor, the current patients display their own artwork in the gallery just off the peaceful cloister. The calm, quiet hospital grounds are a good place to look for European Robin, Common Blackbird, and Green Woodpecker. We should arrive in Arles with time for a short break before dinner.



St-Paul de Mausole © Rick Wright

NIGHT: Hotel Atrium, Arles

May 17, Day 6: The Petite Camargue. The Rhône River and its broad delta dominate the landscape of southern Provence. After breakfast we will make the drive down the western branch of the Rhône to the Petite Camargue, a patchwork of rice paddies, fields, woodlots, and marshes. Among the wide variety of wading and water birds that breed or forage here are Red-crested Pochard, Greater Flamingo, and Whiskered Tern. We will keep an eye on roadside wires and fences for such colorful Mediterranean specialties as Hoopoe, European Bee-eater, and European Roller.

We will have lunch, then visit another birding site or two on our way back to Arles, where we will have some time to rest up a bit before our evening meeting for dinner.

NIGHT: Hotel Atrium, Arles

May 18, Day 7: Peau de Meau and St-Trophime. Early risers in the group can spend the start of the morning on La Crau, an otherworldly landscape reminiscent of the steppe of Eastern Europe or Spain in its vegetation and its bird life. Among the many specialties here are Stone Curlew and Little Bustard; Pin-tailed Sandgrouse may be present, too, but have become rare. European Rollers and Hoopoes nest on the wooded edge of the Crau, and Corn Buntings jangle away from every other fencepost.



Squacco Heron © Rick Wright



La Crau © Rick Wright

A slow walk of about a mile across the stony plain takes us to a traditional sheep barn with the signatures of 150 years of Provençal shepherds carved into the rough stone walls. Northern Wheatears and sometimes even Little Owls breed in the rock pyramids constructed in the 1940s to prevent the landing of Allied airplanes. Easily visible from the barn at the end of the trail is a wall that has recently become home to a colony of Lesser Kestrels.

Those who would prefer not to make an early start can have breakfast in the hotel, then dawdle away the morning in Arles. The early birders will return from La Crau in the late morning, and we will all gather for lunch together before making an optional late afternoon visit to the world-famous Romanesque sculptures of St-Trophime, right on the main square of Arles.

After a break—especially welcome for those of us who will have been out since dawn—we will have yet another fine dinner in Arles.

NIGHT: Hotel Atrium, Arles



Arles Market © Rick Wright

May 19, Day 8: The Western Camargue. Forty-five minutes from Arles, we will explore the wide unpaved Cacharel Road, playing “leapfrog” with our vehicles as we stroll between the reedy marshes of the Etang de Consécanière and the stunted salicornia flats of the Etang Munro in search of Eurasian Oystercatcher, Little Tern, Spectacled Warbler, Eurasian and Great Reed Warblers, Bee-eaters, and a host of other specialties; this area offers our best chances at Eurasian Spoonbills, which can be common at this season, and Great Spotted Cuckoo, which is pulse-racingly rare but possible. The morning grows warm quickly out here, so we will most likely return to Arles for lunch, then have a couple of hours free to pack or to visit some of our favorite destinations in the city one last time.



Lunch in Provence © Photo Rick Wright

Our final dinner together will be in yet another of the excellent restaurants that make Arles such an appealing destination.

NIGHT: Hotel Atrium, Arles

May 20, Day 9: Departures for home. Participants may make their arrangements to leave Arles at any time today.

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 12 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: Rick Wright and Alison Beringer



Rick Wright is a widely published author and sought-after lecturer and field trip leader. A native of southeast Nebraska, Rick studied French, German, Philosophy, and Life Sciences at the University of Nebraska before making a detour to Harvard Law School. He took the Ph.D. in German Languages and Literatures at Princeton University in 1990, then spent a dozen years as an academic, holding successive appointments as Assistant Professor of German at the University of Illinois, Reader in Art and Archaeology at Princeton University, and Associate Professor of Medieval Studies at Fordham University. His numerous scholarly publications include two books on the Latin animal literature of the later Middle Ages.

Among Rick's recent books are the *ABA Field Guide to Birds of New Jersey* and the *ABA Field Guide to Birds of Arizona*; his *Peterson Reference Guide to American Sparrows* was published in 2019. He is also the co-author with Sanford Sorkin of *Watching Birds in Montclair* and *Watching Birds in the New Jersey Meadowlands*. Especially interested in the history and culture of birding, he is hard at work on a study of hummingbird collecting in France from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. In his spare time, he teaches Latin courses online for the Paideia Institute. Rick lives with his family, Alison Beringer and Avril Huang, and their black lab, Quetzal, in northern New Jersey, where he offers private birding tours to the marshes, woodlands, and ocean beaches.



Alison Beringer is Associate Professor of Classics and Humanities at Montclair State University, where she teaches courses in literary history, women's studies, and medieval literature and culture. She holds the M.A. in Classics from the University of Victoria and the Ph.D. in German Studies from Princeton University. Her scholarly research focuses on the transmission and illustration of Latin and German literature in the medieval and early modern periods. Her book *The Sight of Semiramis* appeared in 2016; her current project is a study of the place of monumental sculpture in the life and literature of the late Middle Ages. A native of Canada, she lives in northern New Jersey and birds widely in the Americas and Europe, most often with her husband, Rick Wright.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is **\$4495** per person in double occupancy from Arles France. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 2 to breakfast on Day 9, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include costs getting from your home to Arles 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 **\$375**.

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 (December 12, 2021) 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™** 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.**

If participant cancels:

180 days or more before departure date

179 to 151 days before departure date

150 days or less before departure date

Participant’s refund will be:

Participant’s deposit minus \$500*

No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance of the tour fee will be refunded

No refund available

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person. To qualify, cancellation must occur 180 days or more before departure date; deposit transfers must be made at the time of cancellation; and one transfer per deposit.

Cancellation by VENT:

If VENT cancels a tour prior to departure without cause or good reason, VENT will provide the participant a full refund, which will constitute full settlement to the participant.

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. A “**Force Majeure**” event means any act beyond VENT’s control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

This VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside of the services described in the tour itinerary.

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

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 their **Ripcord** plan. Designed for all types of travelers, Ripcord is among the most comprehensive travel protection programs available.

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

For a price quote, or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: [**ripcordtravelprotection.com/ventbird**](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 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. 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/

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.

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements. ***Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be responsible for any air ticket penalties.***

BAGGAGE: 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 determine 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/>.

As a precaution against lost luggage, we suggest that you pack a change of clothes, toiletries, medications, important travel documents, optics, and any other essential items in your carry-on bag.

BINOCULARS & SPOTTING SCOPES:

Binoculars – We strongly recommend good 7x35, 8x42, 10x40, or 10x42 binoculars. Do NOT bring mini-binoculars of any kind. Some people like "minis" because they are small and lightweight, but they have an extremely small field of view and very poor light gathering. 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 leaders will have scopes available for group use throughout the trip, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so.

CLOTHING: French birders wear the same clothing as American birders in the field. For our visits to museums, churches, and restaurants, you will be most comfortable in neat, but still informal, attire.

The following items are recommended:

- **Pants:** A couple of pairs of pants are essential. Many people prefer lightweight pants made of cotton or other materials. Denim, though not as comfortable, is certainly acceptable for the field.
- **Field Clothing:** Outdoor stores such as Cabela's and REI carry field clothing that many birders find appealing. Pants and shirts made of lightweight, yet durable materials with multiple pockets and ventilated seams are popular.
- **Shirts:** Several comfortable long-sleeved shirts are recommended, suitable for warm weather or for layering with a sweater or jacket.
- **Hat:** A hat for protection from the sun is essential.
- **Sweaters and Coats:** Mostly warm weather is anticipated on this trip, but a sweater, fleece, or light coat will definitely be useful for cool mornings and evenings or if we have rain.

FOOTWEAR: We recommend a good trail-walking shoe; light hiking boots are fine, too, but not necessary on any of the paths and walks we take. Athletic shoes are acceptable, but will not keep your feet dry and can become soiled in muddy conditions. Any comfortable walking shoe is good for our excursions in cities and towns and for evenings.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry service is available at an extra charge in our hotel and elsewhere in Arles, but it is always best to bring enough clothes to get you through the entire tour.

EQUIPMENT: One of the most important aspects of an enjoyable travel experience is being prepared with the right equipment. You will find the following items useful on your trip in Provence:

- Small daypack for extra clothing, books, supplies, and optics.
- Notebook and pencils.
- Alarm clock.
- Polarizing sunglasses with UV protection and high-SPF sunscreen.
- Lip balm and lotions.
- Cameras, lenses, and extra batteries and memory cards (oddly hard to find in Arles, one of the most photogenic cities in France).
- Telescoping walking stick – highly recommended for those who have trouble walking.
- Pocket packages of tissues.
- Insect protection: (Not that the insects need it.) The marshes of the Camargue are usually breezy enough to make mosquitoes no problem at all, but biting insects can be a minor annoyance on the infrequent mornings and evenings of dead calm. The best mode of prevention is swatting; some participants carry a head net and gloves. If you prefer chemical deterrents, it is best to bring them from home, as they can be hard to find in Arles.

OTHER ITEMS: The classic guide, one of the best ever written for any avifauna, is the second edition of *Birds of Europe* by Lars Svensson, Killian Mullarney, and Dan Zetterström. Very attractive and easily carried, Eduardo De Juana and Juan Varela's *Birds of Spain* also covers every species we are likely to encounter on this tour.

CLIMATE & WEATHER: Late April through mid-May is usually very pleasant in southern France, with average highs reaching into the high 60s F and lows unlikely to go below 50. Rain is infrequent but possible at any time; our schedule is flexible enough to accommodate being rained out of one or the other of our destinations on a given day. Recent tours have had one or no rainy days.

The most famous—or notorious—feature of Provençal weather is the howling wind known as the mistral. In most years, we never experience it; in others, we have one or two windy days, and simply adjust the sequence of our itinerary to keep us in towns and sheltered areas on those days.

CONDITIONS: Our days will be full, but our pace will always be easy and relaxed. Some of our activities are optional, and it is always possible to simply take the day off to enjoy Arles on your own if you'd like.

While we are birding, our walking will be restricted to paths and roadsides, and we are not likely to walk more than a mile at a time. The longest walk of the tour, across the plain of La Crau in hopes of close looks at the Lesser Kestrel colony, is a bit less than one mile each way on a broad, entirely level path; we stop often to look at birds and flowers or simply to enjoy the sky. This walk is optional, and some participants choose to keep birding on their own at the trailhead or along the small canal.

Towns and villages often have uneven pavement. Several of the churches we visit have short, steep staircases. The walk to the castle at Les Baux is steep, on somewhat irregularly paved walkways. We take our time and never hurry in such situations.

The physical demands of this tour are light to barely moderate, but remember that our explorations of cities and monuments involve a moderate amount of walking and standing. We emphasize that you will never be subjected to physical demands beyond your capabilities. All of our walking is at a slow “birder’s pace.” If you cannot comfortably walk a mile on level trails or sidewalks, this tour may not be for you.

Special note: This tour, like all of our Birds and Art offerings, takes us into the natural history *and* the architectural, historical, and cultural riches of one of Europe's most ancient landscapes. It is *not* exclusively a birding program or exclusively a cultural excursion. On some days, birding will dominate, on others art and history—but most of our itinerary mixes the two in ways that do justice to the inextricable links between culture and nature in Provence.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

PASSPORTS: A passport valid for at least six months after your return from the tour is required. If your passport expires within six months of your return, you must renew it. You should also be certain that your passport still has at least one page blank for stamps.

If you need to obtain or renew a passport, do so well in advance of your departure. Passports can be issued on an expedited basis on the payment of an additional fee. Applications for US passports are accepted at passport offices, most post offices, and most county clerk's offices. Visit www.state.gov/travel for information on obtaining or renewing your passport.

As a safety measure, photocopy the first two pages of your passport and keep those copies in a safe place so that you have proof of identification should your passport be lost. Your passport must be signed and easily accessible at all times: you will need it to check in at airports and to clear immigration in France, so **do not pack your passport in checked luggage.**

VISAS: Visas are not required for entry by United States citizens. Non-United States citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions.

CURRENCY & MONEY MATTERS: Your tour payment includes most necessary expenses while you are in France. You will need cash to cover such personal expenses as gifts, laundry, gratuities, and snacks and meals on your own; to avoid putting our friendly restaurateurs in an awkward situation, please give your leader at least 24 hours' notice if you will not be joining the group for dinner.

The official currency in France is the euro; US dollars are not accepted anywhere in the country. You can check the exchange rate at www.xe.com. Euros can be ordered through your bank before leaving home, or you can simply withdraw them from ATMs at the airport or in Arles; your leaders will be happy to show you the nearest ATM, a short block from our hotel. Please ask your bank or credit card issuer about the use of your ATM and credit cards abroad.

ELECTRICITY: Electrical current in France is 220V; outlets accept two round prongs. Most new electronic devices can run on 220V, but if you have items that do not or if you are unsure, you will need a step-down transformer in addition to a plug adapter of the Europlug type C or Schuko F.

LANGUAGE: French is spoken throughout the area, with Provençal dominating in parts of the countryside; most road signs are bilingual. Younger people and people in the cities also generally speak good English. Most of our hotel staff is fluent in English.

TIME: France is on Central European Time at the time of our tour, 6 hours ahead of Eastern Time and 9 hours ahead of Pacific Time.

HEALTH: VENT follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccinations.

If you are taking personal medication, prescription or over-the-counter, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

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).

COVID-19: The world has been in the grip of a pandemic since early 2020, a result of the uncontrolled spread of SARS-CoV-2, the novel coronavirus that causes the illness COVID-19. COVID-19 is transmitted through person-to-person contact, almost always through inhaling respiratory aerosols or droplets exuded from an infected person. Common signs of COVID-19 illness include fever or chills, fatigue, shortness of breath, cough, loss of taste or smell, and more. Based on what is known about the disease, COVID-19 is far more serious than seasonal flu. Few places in the world have been unaffected. The impact on travel has been substantial, as demonstrated by the fact that VENT did not operate a tour between late March 2020 and late April 2021. The development and deployment of COVID-19 vaccines, particularly in the United States, has allowed VENT to return to tour operations. We emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. **With this in mind, VENT instituted a COVID-19 vaccination requirement.** All tour participants and tour leaders must be fully vaccinated in order to travel with us while we are still in a declared public health emergency. In accordance with the latest guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), full vaccination is defined as an individual being 14 days beyond having received the required amount of vaccine for reaching full immunity to the degree specific vaccines confer. In the United States, so far, this means either the two-shot sequence for the Moderna or Pfizer vaccines or the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine. Proof of vaccination must be provided to our office at least one week before the start of the tour and kept with you while on the tour. Because the world is a very different place than it was before the pandemic, we've made a number of important adjustments to our processes to ensure that our tours can operate as safely as possible. 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. Our decision and policy are firmly rooted in the latest CDC guidance regarding recommendations for avoiding COVID-19. As we move forward, VENT will continue to follow the latest information from the CDC and will update our policy accordingly. Please visit the CDC website for the most up to date information about COVID-19 and associated guidance for proper health and hygiene: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>.

SUGGESTED READING: A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend www.amazon.com which has a wide selection; www.buteobooks.com and www.nhbs.com which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and www.abebooks.com for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

Birds

Mullarney, K., L. Svensson, and D. Zetterstrom. *Birds of Europe*. 2nd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

De Juana, E., and J. Varela. *Birds of Spain*. Barcelona: Lynx Edicions, 2017.

Mammals

MacDonald, D., and P. Barrett. *Mammals of Europe*. Princeton Field Guides. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

Insects

Dijkstra, K., and R. Lewington. *Field Guide to the Dragonflies of Britain and Europe*. London: British Wildlife Publishing, 2006.

Tolman, T., and R. Lewington. *Collins Butterfly Guide*. HarperCollins: London, 2009.

Habitats and General Natural History

Hilbers, D., C. Swinkels, and A. Vliegenthart. *Provence and Camargue, France*. Crossbill Guides, 2019. Highly recommended, as are all the other titles published by Crossbill.

Art, Architecture, History

Borg, A. *Architectural Sculpture in Romanesque Provence*. Oxford UP, 1971.

Child, J. *My Life in France*. Anchor, 2007.

Stirton, P. *Provence and the Cote d'Azur*. Blue Guides: London, 2003.

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 27, 2021 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.

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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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