



VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

ITINERARY

GHANA: AN AVIAN BONANZA ON AFRICA'S GOLD COAST

MARCH 8–27, 2025

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The near-mythical White-necked Rockfowl (Yellow-headed Picathartes) © B. Cottele

An acclaimed new field guide, published in 2022, makes the identification of Ghana's more than 760 bird species easier than ever. That impressive list, in a country smaller than the state of Oregon, includes five turaco species, five rollers, ten kingfishers, eight bee-eaters, and an amazing 20 sunbird species, including the regionally endemic Buff-throated. Our comprehensive itinerary takes us to lush rainforests, coastal savannas, lagoons, and glorious white sand beaches. March is also the perfect time to see many wintering European songbirds in their finest spring plumage. All told, we expect our species list to approach 400.

The crème de la crème in Ghana are two intriguing and highly sought-after birds, each of them occupying its own distinct family: the nearly mythical White-necked Rockfowl (or Yellow-headed Picathartes) and the sublimely beautiful Egyptian Plover.

Alongside these avian riches, we will also enjoy an exciting selection of cool mammals, including the Savanna Elephant, Roan Antelope, Kob, Bushbuck, and Diana and Colobus monkeys; with luck we may even encounter the remarkable Bongo, a nocturnal, forest-dwelling antelope. Nighttime excursions will give us a chance at the Pel's Anomalure (an incredible flying squirrel-like rodent) or even a rare Long-tailed Pangolin.

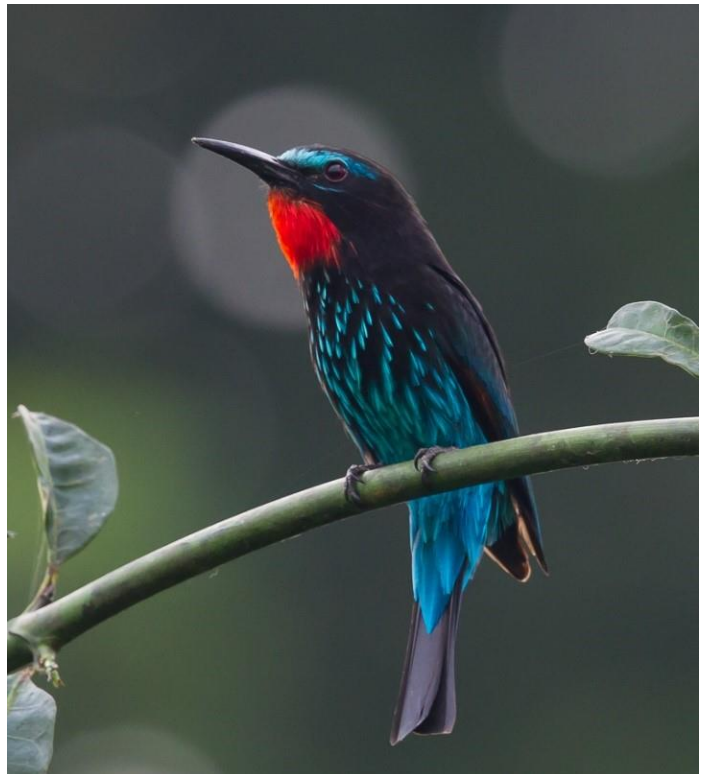
Ghana's national parks are justly world-famous. In Kakum National Park, Africa's only canopy walkway brings us to a plethora of avian treasures at eye level. The many Upper Guinea endemics we will be looking for include Brown-cheeked Hornbill, Fire-bellied Woodpecker, Blue Cuckooshrike, Copper-tailed Starling, and Sharpe's Apalis. Among the other notable species are the Congo Serpent-Eagle, Gray Parrot, Great Blue and Yellow-billed turacos, African Emerald Cuckoo, Black Bee-eater, and Blue-throated Roller.

Ankasa Reserve is another natural paradise, where our beautiful lodge nestles in the forest along the Ankasa River. Avian gems abound, including Chocolate-backed Kingfisher, Rufous-sided Broadbill, and Red-billed Helmetshrike. Even the African Finfoot and the legendary Nkulengu Rail, first found here in 2011, are possible. The excellent marshes may hold a rare Dwarf Crocodile, Hartlaub's Duck, and Shining-blue, White-bellied, and African Dwarf kingfishers, while the hill forest of the nearby Atewa Reserve is home to the mind-blowing Blue-breasted Kingfisher, Blue-moustached Bee-eater, and Red-cheeked Wattle-eye.

In the Abrafo Forest, we will walk to a protected area with a breeding colony of the unique and bizarre White-necked Rockfowl. Like South America's cocks-of-the-rock, this secretive forest-dwelling bird cements its mud nest onto the bare faces of the dry overhangs, granitic boulders, and inselbergs that characterize this landscape.

Northern Ghana's Sahel region features drier Guinea woodland and savanna. Spectacular Mole National Park is home to almost 100 mammal species and more than 330 species of birds. Our delightful lodge here stands atop an 800-foot escarpment, with breathtaking views out over the park's 1,900 square miles. It is an amazing feeling to sit on the pool terrace watching African Savanna Elephants bathing in the nearby watering holes.

Among the sought-after birds here are the Standard-winged Nightjar, Forbes's Plover, Pel's Fishing-Owl, and African Spotted Creeper, along with such colorful gems as the Red-throated Bee-eater and Rufous-crowned, Blue-bellied, and Broad-billed rollers. This area is also home to a mouthwatering assortment of



Black Bee-eater © Willie DeVries

sunbirds and many raptors. Mammals abound, and we hope to see Kob, Bushbuck, Waterbuck, Hartebeest, and the beautiful Roan Antelope, in addition to both Green Vervet and Patas monkeys.

We will also sample Ghana's history with a visit to the infamous Cape Coast Castle, built in 1653, now a World Heritage Site and a chilling reminder of the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade.



Egyptian Plover © Ashanti Tours

March 8–9, Days 1–2: Travel to Accra, Ghana. Participants should plan their flights to arrive in Accra (Kotoka International Airport, code ACC) in time for dinner on March 9 (Day 2). Upon arrival and after clearing customs and immigration, you will be met by a representative of our local operator and transferred to our hotel, **Labadi Beach Hotel**, where a room has been reserved in your name.

We will meet as a group for the first time on March 9 in the hotel lobby at 6:30 p.m. for a brief orientation followed by dinner. The Labadi Beach Hotel is a true oasis just outside the bustling city. Situated right on the beautiful Atlantic coast, it's an ideal place to relax before beginning our West Africa adventure! Even better, it is rather birdy too, with expansive grounds and the adjacent beach providing a pleasing introduction to the local birdlife. Red-eyed and Laughing doves, Little Swift, Western Reef-Heron, Squacco Heron, Yellow-billed Egret, Green Woodhoopoe, Pied Kingfisher, Pied Crow, and Splendid Starling are all here, and we even have the chance of locating Western Plantain-eater or African Gray Hornbill.

Those desiring more time to rest following the lengthy international flight are encouraged to arrive in Accra a day or more early. Upon request, VENT will be happy to assist with extra arrangements.

NIGHTS: Aboard international flight (March 8)
Labadi Beach Hotel, Accra (March 9)

March 10, Day 3: Drive to Cape Coast Winneba Lagoon, Cape Coast Castle, and on to Jukwa. We will depart very early this morning in order to avoid the horrendous traffic congestion that engulfs Accra every day. Heading west along the coastal highway, we will pass tiny food stands (with hilarious grandiose names like Consuming Fire Fast Food), repair shops, traditional medicine stalls, and taxis which all compete for space in this entrepreneurial wonderland. The first birding site along our route will be a wetland complex in the region of Winneba, consisting of lagoons, mud flats, and salt pans now recognized as a RAMSAR site due to a globally important wintering shorebird population. Here, we should find a variety of Palearctic waders, including Bar-tailed Godwit, Common and Spotted redshanks, Curlew Sandpiper, and Collared Pratincole to name a few. Large numbers of gulls and terns are usually in attendance here, as well as Senegal Thick-knee. Among the aggregation of birds, we should find the resident race of Little Tern, Royal Tern, the fascinating Black Heron, Western Reef-Heron, and more. We should also encounter several species of cisticolas and weavers in the surrounding vegetation.



The stunning Red-cheeked Cordonbleu is a trip highlight! © B. Cottele

Other species we may encounter include African Pygmy-Goose, Black-billed Wood-Dove, Black-bellied Bustard, Black Coucal, Levillant's and African cuckoos, Lizard Buzzard, African Hobby, Northern Fiscal, Flappet Lark, Croaking Cisticola, Mosque Swallow, Copper Sunbird, Red-headed Quelea, Northern Red and Black-winged bishops, Yellow-mantled Widowbird, Orange-cheeked and Black-rumped waxbills, Quailfinch, Red-cheeked Cordonbleu, and Yellow-throated Longclaw.

From Winneba we will continue westwards to Cape Coast, home to one of Ghana's most notorious edifices, the Cape Coast Castle. Originally built by the Swedish in 1653, this "slave castle" housed enslaved Africans before they were loaded onto vessels bound for the Americas. The Cape Coast Castle is now a World Heritage Site that offers a chilling reminder of the horrors of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. In particular, a visit to the dank dungeons and the notorious "Door of No Return" is a deep and sobering experience. During the height of this abhorrent trade, between 12 and 20 million West Africans were removed to the New World.

From there we will continue to our hotel, in Jukwa, located near to Kakum National Park. Timer permitting, we will explore an area of scrub and farm-bush during the late afternoon.

NIGHT: Rainforest Lodge, Jukwa

March 11–12, Days 4–5: Birding Kakum National Park and Antwkwaa. We will have two full days to explore the superb Kakum National Park. On our first day and after an early breakfast, we will head for the famous canopy walkway, only a fifteen-minute drive away. We aim to arrive there just prior to first light so that we can experience the awakening forest and its lovely early morning voices. This will also enable us to pinpoint the location of several key species and be in position to enjoy the best of the morning's birding. We will make special arrangements for the early opening and late closure of the walkway, thereby allowing us patronage during these critical birding hours. We will spend much of the morning here on the canopy walkway, in part because it offers fairly open viewing, and we anticipate encountering a good number of species that we typically only ever see from far below. We can certainly look forward to some very exciting bird viewing up here, fully forty meters above the forest floor. The canopy walkway includes seven platforms that are large enough to support telescopes.



The famous Kakum Canopy Walkway © Ashanti Tours

Among the many species we hope to see from the walkway are some of West Africa's most highly sought forest jewels including White-headed Woodhoopoe; Forest Scimitarbill; Cassin's, Willock's and Yellow-footed honeyguides (the latter is very rare); Blue Cuckooshrike; Violet-backed Hylota; Lemon-bellied Crombec; Gray Longbill; Rufous-crowned Eremomel; Sharpe's Apalis; Green Hylia; Tit-hylia; Crested and Red-headed malimbos; Yellow-mantled and Preuss's weavers; and White-breasted and Chestnut-breasted nigrilas.

Other species we hope to see are Blue Malkoha, African Emerald Cuckoo, Piping Hornbill, the exquisitely beautiful Black Bee-eater, Naked-faced and Hairy-breasted barbets, Black-collared Lovebird, Gray and Red-fronted parrots, family groups of Red-billed Helmetshrike. African Shrike-flycatcher, Sabine's Puffback, Velvet-mantled Drongo, Ussher's Flycatcher, and a wide variety of sunbirds including Fraser's, Little Green, Collared, Olive, Buff-throated, and Splendid sunbirds.

Be warned, butterflies here can provide quite a distraction from all these wonderful birds!

The tree platforms provide a fabulous vista over the forest and forest edge, offering a unique opportunity for raptor watching. Some of the views of raptors from this walkway are notably impressive, with sightings of a variety of species possible, including African Harrier-Hawk, African Cuckoo-Hawk, the peculiar Palm-nut Vulture, Congo Serpent-Eagle, the rarely seen Cassin's Hawk-Eagle, the superb Long-tailed Hawk, Red-necked Buzzard, and African Hobby. Additionally, this is a good place to watch for mixed flocks of swifts which often include Sabine's and Cassin's spinetails.

As the day heats up, we will take advantage of the hotel's proximity to the park and return there for lunch and a mid-afternoon siesta. During the latter part of the day, we'll visit a different section of the national park in order to sample a range of microhabitats and their attendant bird species. The viewing of mammals, birds, and butterflies can all be very good here. As always, we will be alert to mixed species flocks, which often include several understory skulkers. We will make a night excursion to look for Brown Nightjar, which is sometimes quite common here, Fraser's Eagle-Owl, African Wood-Owl, and, if we are very lucky, the highly sought-after Nkulengu Rail. These large forest rallids roost high in trees and emit their loud "Congo-drum" duets after dusk and in the pre-dawn period.



The spectacular and common African Emerald Cuckoo will certainly be seen. © P. Gnodde

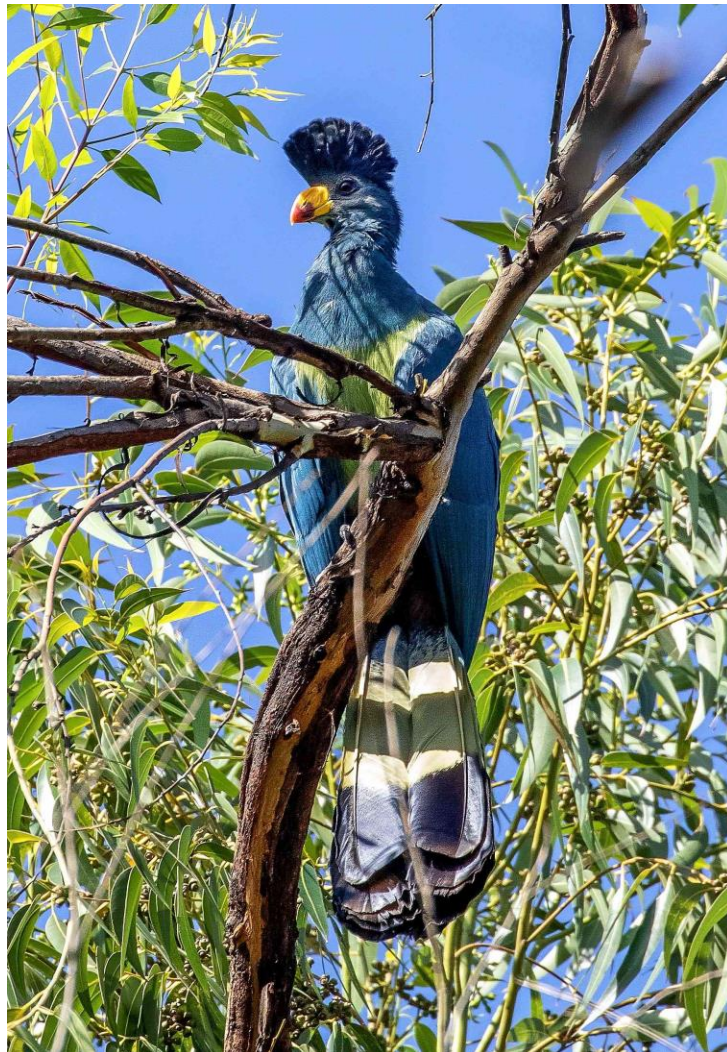
The forest edge can also be extremely productive, especially early in the morning and late in the afternoon. This relatively more open habitat supports a remarkably different suite of bird species including the shy Ahanta Spurfowl, the wonderful but scarce Yellow-throated Cuckoo, Yellow-billed and Bristle-nosed barbets, Yellow-throated and Yellow-rumped tinkerbirds, Fire-bellied and Melancholy woodpeckers, Black-winged Oriole, Green Crombec, Kemp's Longbill, Yellow-browed and Olive-green camaropteras, Copper-tailed and Splendid starlings, Dusky-blue and Tessmann's flycatchers, Blue-billed Malimbe, and Magpie Mannikin. Back in the forest, we will search the forest floor for Latham's Francolin which is common, but always a challenge to see. Other possibilities include Red-thighed and Black goshawks, and the magnificent Great Blue and Yellow-billed turacos!

Others birds here include Black-throated Coucal, the colorful Blue-breasted Bee-eater, Blue-throated Roller, several spectacular hornbills, African and Rufous-sided broadbills, Spotted and White-throated greenbuls, Finsch's Flycatcher-Thrush, Gray-throated Tit-Flycatcher, Blue-headed Crested-Flycatcher, Black-headed Paradise-Flycatcher, Shining Drongo and the localized Copper-tailed Starling.

West African forests harbor a confusingly rich assemblage of greenbuls. These largely sociable birds inhabit the forest mid-story, typically in noisy mixed flocks, and can prove a big challenge to identify. Among the many varieties of greenbuls we might see are Slender-billed, Golden, Swamp, Honeyguide, Western Bearded-Greenbul, Red-tailed, Yellow-bearded (endangered), Little, Yellow-whiskered, Plain, Gray, Icterine, and the endangered Yellow-bearded greenbuls, and Western Nicator (now no often longer included with the Greenbuls).

Rainforest mammals are never conspicuous, but we should see several species of primates that include Lesser Spot-nosed Monkey and Lowe's Mona Monkey, Olive and Geoffrey's Black-and-white Colobus Monkey. Many other mammals occur in Kakum but most are very seldom seen. These include the African Forest Elephant, Giant Forest Hog, Leopard, Water Chevrotain (a primitive antelope that is largely aquatic and often feeds on meat), five species of duiker, Bongo (a secluded forest antelope), three species of pangolin, and the arboreal African Brush-tailed Porcupine. We should be able to find several diurnal squirrels including African Giant Squirrel and Fire-footed Rope-squirrel.

Do be aware, interior forest birding is challenging, but the rewards can be marvelous, and the joy of being inside the forest is a reward in itself.



The magnificent Great Blue Turaco © Andrew Whittaker

Another early start allows us to visit the Antwikwaa section of Kakum National Park, hoping to add some amazing birds to our growing list: Dideric Cuckoo, White-spotted Flufftail; Little, White-throated, and Rosy bee-eaters; Blue-throated Roller; Red-rumped Tinkerbird; Buff-spotted Woodpecker, Violet-backed Starling, Johanna's and Superb sunbirds, Northern Yellow White-eye, Bronze Mannikin, and Western Bluebill. Some of the more difficult species we'll seek include Ayre's Hawk Eagle and Forest Penduline-Tit. We then visit a nearby river site for White-crowned Lapwing, Rock Pratincole, the beautiful White-throated Blue Swallow, Preuss's Swallow, and, if we are lucky, the highly sought African Finfoot.

In the afternoon we will concentrate our attention on the many trails within and surrounding the park, which should prove very productive. We hope to find Yellow-billed Turaco, Red-billed and Western dwarf hornbills, Olive Long-tailed Cuckoo, White-tailed Alethe, and Orange-breasted Forest Robin. We may remain outside until dark trying for owls and nightjars that we may still need before returning to our accommodation for our meal and checklist.

NIGHTS: Rainforst Lodge, Jukwa

March 13, Day 6: Morning birding at Abafro; afternoon transfer to Ankasa Reserve. This morning, we will concentrate our time on the farmland, scrub, forest edge, and trails at Abrafo, a section of forest habitat near Kakum National Park. Among the many species possible this morning are birds that, by now, will be familiar sights while others will be new to the trip. We'll watch for Long-tailed Hawk, Red-cheeked Wattle-eye, Brown-crowned Tchagra, Lowland Sooty Boubou, Red-faced and Whistling Cisticolas, Fanti Saw-wing, Lesser Striped Swallow, Spotted Greenbul, Finsch's Flycatcher-Thrush, Pale Flycatcher, Puvel's Illadopsis, and Black-and-white Mannikin.

We will return to the lodge for lunch before setting off westwards for what should prove to be a major highlight of your time in Ghana. Our destination is Ankasa Reserve, Ghana's only wet evergreen rainforest that remains in near pristine condition. An exceptional forest in a remote location, Ankasa protects many rare and sought-after bird and mammal species. Our newly constructed lodge is nestled along the river on the boundary of a stunning rainforest. The Ankasa reserve is located on the border with Ivory Coast in the far west corner of Ghana. The park covers an area of 139 square miles and encompasses a mixture of semi-deciduous and wet evergreen rainforest. Ankasa is biologically the most diverse rainforest in Ghana and one of the most diverse in West Africa, protecting over 800 vascular plant species and almost 650 species of butterfly, in addition to Forest Elephant, Bongo, Diana Monkey, Chimpanzee, and several species of Pangolin. With its remarkable biodiversity, Ankasa is a nature-lover's paradise!

If we are very lucky, we may find the almost mythical Nkulengu Rail in the early evening. We could also see one of Africa's most sought after but rarely seen owls, Akun Eagle-Owl. In addition to this wonderful owl, we will also try for Fraser's and Shelley's eagle-owls and African Wood-Owl, and nocturnal primates, such as Pottos and Demidoff's Galagos, African palm civet and Hammer-headed Bat, before returning to our hotel.

NIGHT: Ankasa Reserve Lodge, Ankasa Reserve

March 14–16, Day 7–9: Birding Ankasa Reserve. We will have three full days to enjoy this important forest reserve. We will spend time birding around the lodge as well as exploring away from the lodge in different directions.

On our first day here, we'll arise early and listen to the magical forest waking up with us, an amazing experience anywhere. As we don't have to lose time traveling long distances today, we can plunge right into the birding around our lodge. After breakfast we'll set off deeper into the forest seeking birds, our targets being Blue-headed Wood Dove, Great Blue and Yellow-billed turacos, White-throated Bee-eater, Yellow-spotted Barbet, Shining Drongo, Black-capped Apalis, Green-tailed and Gray-headed bristlebills, Ansorge's Greenbul, White-tailed Ant-Thrush, Cassin's Flycatcher, White-tailed Alethe, Pale-breasted and Blackcap Illadopsis, Tiny Sunbird, and Red-fronted Antpecker.

To be able to penetrate deep into the remoter areas, we will be using four-wheel-drive vehicles enabling us to navigate the difficult forest road ensuring we get to the desired sites at the best time of day. Western Crested Guinea fowl are occasionally seen on the road. Secluded, remote watering holes located deeper inside the Ankasa's forest can produce such prizes as Hartlaub's Duck, African Finfoot, White-bellied Kingfisher and the rare Dwarf Crocodile among many other species. Our target birds will include Dwarf Bittern, and Shining-blue, African Dwarf, White-bellied, and Blue-breasted kingfishers.

Forest raptors are always a welcome sight, and we hope to see Congo Serpent-Eagle and Long-tailed Hawk. We will scan the sky for Crowned Eagle and Square-tailed and Fanti Saw-wings. Among other possibilities are White-breasted Guinea fowl, White-crested Tiger Heron, Black and Yellow casqued-hornbills, Dusky Long-tailed Cuckoo, Blue-moustached Bee-eater, and Forest Scrub-Robin.

Our evenings will be spent enjoying good food and discussing the days' birding over cold, refreshing drinks.



The range-restricted White-throated Bee-eater is a strong possibility. © B. Cottele

NIGHT: Ankasa Reserve Lodge, Ankasa Forest

March 17, Day 10: Birding Ankasa Reserve; Brenu Akyinim coastal Savanna. We will have a final morning of birding at this wonderful location before departing for Kakum National Park. We may walk different trails in other areas of the forest with hope of finding species we may have previously missed. Following lunch, we will set off towards Kakum National Park. During our journey we will target several species not seen in other parts of Ghana. These include African Pygmy-Goose, Little Grebe, White-browed Forest-Flycatcher, Reichenbach's and Mouse-brown sunbirds, and Orange Weaver to mention a few.

A visit to Brenu Akyinim and the coastal savannah plains and mangrove scrub will yield new species to enjoy. There are some special birds found in this area, and new birds we hope to see include Double-spurred Spurfowl, Marsh Tchagra, and Compact Weaver. Other birds may include Blue-spotted Wood-Dove, Wattled Lapwing, Malachite Kingfisher, Red-headed Quelea, Black-rumped Waxbill, and Wilson's Indigobird.

In the afternoon, we will backtrack towards Jukwa and return to our hotel of a few nights earlier to relax and reflect on another great day of birding.

NIGHT: Rainforest Lodge, Jukwa

March 18, Day 11: Abrafo (Kakum National Park); Yellow-headed Picathartes walk; transfer to Bonkro.

Today, following an early (pre-dawn) breakfast with check-out, we'll head towards Abrafo on the northwest border of Kakum National Park. Along the way we should be alert for Brown, Plain, and Long-tailed nightjars on the road. We will aim to arrive in the Abrafo area early so as to make the most of our time here. Abrafo is, in the view of many birders, the most productive section of Kakum National Park.

Some of the species we hope to see include Black-throated Coucal, Yellow-throated and Rufous-chested cuckoos, Bristle-nosed Barbet, African Piculet, Gray and Brown-necked parrots, Western Nicator, Black-capped Apalis, Chestnut-capped Flycatcher, and Red-vented and Crested malimbés. If we are lucky, perhaps we'll also locate the elusive Tessman's Flycatcher.

After an excellent morning in the field, we'll set off northwards toward the Ashanti region, stopping for lunch en route. Afterward, we'll continue toward the remote village of Bonkro set among low rolling hills in proximity to a small rainforest. On arrival we'll check into the Picathartes Guesthouse, which was built by our excellent, conservation-minded tour operator, Ashanti African Tours, and donated to the communities surrounding the *picathartes* forest. The guesthouse includes a restaurant and a school that now offers access to education for 300 children.

The entire purpose of our visit to this area is for the opportunity to see one of the truly remarkable birds of the world, the White-necked Rockfowl. Also known, as Yellow-headed Picathartes, this bird is endemic to primary and secondary forest in West Africa, from Guinea to Ghana. The birds nest in colonies, and there are 12 to 16 active nests in the forest around Bonkro, all reached by walking through the forest for 45 to 60 minutes. As we set off on the walk through this beautiful forest, we'll see why this bird is one of the must-see species of the world. The experience adds to this mythical bird's reputation. As stated, the walk should take between 45 to 60 minutes depending on one's fitness level. As we approach the nesting site, we need to be very quiet as we take our seat on bamboo benches built purposefully for our comfort. The overhanging rock face before us and small cave with mud nests create the setting as we begin our wait for the birds to return from foraging excursions for snails, frogs, and insects. The wait could take a couple of hours. It will be hard to contain our excitement as these remarkable birds hop and jump on the rocks whilst preening themselves only meters from our eyes (no telescope needed). Seeing this truly remarkable bird will be a trip highlight!

Once we have enjoyed good views of the rockfowl, we'll leave the birds in peace as we set off back through the forest to our accommodation and a well-deserved cold drink. Our hosts will have prepared a wonderful celebratory meal, and we'll enjoy our evening reflecting on our day. Staying in this remote local community, meeting the locals and relaxing in this quiet setting will be a definite highlight of our time together. For anyone interested, there may be an option to go for night birding and nature walk before we settle down for the evening.

VENT is proud to use this site, as our visit helps this important eco-tourism project provides financial incentive for the locals to protect their forest and its population of rockfowl.

NIGHT: Picathartes Guesthouse, Bonkro

March 19, Day 12: Birding Bonkro Forest; afternoon the Bobiri Butterfly Sanctuary. We'll enjoy a slightly more relaxed breakfast this morning as we are so close to the forest. There are several trails we can enjoy. The bird community here is similar to that of Kakum, which means more opportunity to search for any species we may have missed. One of the factors that makes lowland forest birding potentially frustrating is that although the species diversity is high, many of the individual species occur at low density, and therefore are seldom encountered. However, even the hardest to find species can appear at any moment so the golden rule is to maximize our time in the field. Species we may see here include Thick-billed and Yellow-throated cuckoos, Congo Serpent Eagle, Long-tailed Hawk, Forest Scimitarbill, Western Dwarf Hornbill, Fire-bellied Woodpecker, Rufous-sided Broadbill, Blue Cuckooshrike, Black-and-white Shrike-Flycatcher, Sharpe's Apalis, Red-tailed and Gray-headed bristlebills, and Gray-throated Tit Flycatcher. Also here, but rare and difficult to see, is the Western-wattled Cuckoo-shrike.

We will enjoy our lunch in Bonkro before setting off towards Kumasi. Our route to Kumasi leads back through the forest for afternoon birding at Bobiri Butterfly Sanctuary. Bobiri is the final forest location we'll visit before we head north on the following day to the drier guinea woodland and savannah habitat. Target species at the butterfly sanctuary include Bronze-naped Pigeon, Black-throated Coucal, Western Nicator, Hairy-breasted Barbet, Green Crombec, Kemp's Longbill, Black-cap Apalis, West African and Red-cheeked wattle-eyes, Tit-hylia, Puvel's Illadopsis, African Forest-Flycatcher, Green-headed Sunbird.

After another wonderful afternoon, we'll continue to Kumasi and check in to our hotel on arrival.

NIGHT: Royal Basin Resort, Kumasi

March 20, Day 13: Transfer to Mole National Park. After breakfast this morning, we will commence the long journey northwards to Mole National Park, Ghana's premiere national park. The nearly ten-hour drive, with lunch on route, takes us on a gradual transect from semi-evergreen forests and woodland, which becomes increasingly drier as we transition into Guinea savanna. The birdlife changes noticeably too as we proceed north. For example, African Gray Hornbill becomes the default hornbill, and new raptors include Beaudouin's Snake-Eagle, Long-crested Eagle, Grasshopper Buzzard and perhaps Dark Chanting-Goshawk. Other possibilities include beautiful Abyssinian and Blue-bellied rollers and, if we are exceptionally lucky, the scarce and localized White-throated Francolin.



Blue-bellied Roller is one of five roller species possible © B. Cottele

Depending on our time, we may break our journey with a visit to the Boabeng-Fiema Monkey Sanctuary, located within an 86-acre patch of semi-deciduous forest. The Boabeng-Fiema Monkey Sanctuary is unique as it is the only place where two different species of monkeys regarded as sacred and protected, Campbell's Mona and Geoffroy's Colobus, live together within the same habitat in harmony with human beings. This is one of the few areas where we have a real chance to see these animals in the world and, for the photographers among us, an opportunity to photograph these attractive animals.

From this welcome break in our journey, we will continue north to Mole National Park arriving in the late afternoon at our exclusive

safari lodge within the park which is one of West Africa's finest. Beautifully situated into a high escarpment, the lodge offers breathtaking views. After checking in we can enjoy an amazing feeling sitting around the pool, enjoying our cold drinks on the hotel terrace, while watching African Savannah Elephants bathing in the two nearby watering holes which are also inhabited by crocodiles!

After our scrumptious evening meal, we shall set off for a night excursion birding around the Mole airstrip where we hope to see displaying Standard-winged Nightjars. The airstrip is also productive for owls, and we will be looking for Grayish Eagle-Owl and Northern White-faced Owl before we retire for the night.

NIGHT: Zaina Lodge, Mole

March 21–22, Day 14–15: Birding Mole National Park. Mole is a real nature lover's paradise, and we are in for a real treat over the next two days as we immerse ourselves into the exceptional West African birds and mammals found here! Mole National Park covers 1,870 square miles and is Ghana's second most-visited, protected area after Kakum. Our hotel here is scenically situated on an 820 feet high escarpment within the National Park and overlooks a seemingly endless vista of broad-leaved woodlands and wetlands. The broad-leaved woodland zone here superficially resembles the Miombo woodlands of south-central Africa and is likewise inhabited by a wonderful assemblage of good-looking species which, in many cases, represent northern sister-species of their south-central counterparts. Each day we will begin early but include a mid-day break at our delightful lodge before we set off for afternoon birding.

Frolicking pachyderms sometimes populate an elephant-wallow at the base of the escarpment. The elephants of Mole are renowned for their tolerance, and it is possible to get very close to them on foot (should you wish to do so). From the viewing platform at the lodge, we are also able to scan over the marsh and see Defassa Waterbuck, Common Bushbuck and handsome Kob. In addition to these mammals, we

may see White-faced Whistling Duck, “West-African” Helmeted Guineafowl, Black Crake, Hadada Ibis, Gray-headed Kingfisher, and Broad-billed Roller.



The handsome Kob is an antelope occurring throughout West Africa. © P. Gnodde

The woodland surrounding our lodge is a superb place to begin birding. Seed eaters abound and we should find mixed flocks of Chestnut-crowned Sparrow-Weaver, Lavender Waxbill, Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu, Red-billed and Bar-breasted Firefinches, Pin-tailed Whydah, Exclamatory Paradise-Whydah, Northern Grey-headed Sparrow, and Yellow-fronted Canary. We will also explore the rocky escarpment below the lodge, and here we hope to find family groups of Stone Partridge and Double-spurred Francolin, Rock-loving and Dorst's cisticolas, White-fronted Black-Chat, and Cinnamon-breasted Bunting.

The moist woodland surrounding the swamp is home to some special birds, and, in particular, we will search for the highly desirable Oriole Warbler, one of West Africa's most beautiful birds. In fact, colorful birds are the rule here rather than the exception! White-throated Francolin, Bruce's Green Pigeon, Violet Turaco, Abyssinian Ground-Hornbill, Gray-headed and Blue-breasted kingfishers, Red-throated and Northern Carmine bee-eaters, Abyssinian and Rufous-crowned rollers, Bearded Barbet, Rose-ringed Parakeet, Sulphur-breasted and Gray-headed bushshrikes, Long-tailed Glossy and Lesser Blue-eared starlings, and Western Violet-backed, Green-headed, Beautiful, and Splendid sunbirds are just some of the possible species on offer!

Other birds in these woodlands include Vinaceous Dove, Green Woodhoopoe, Black Scimitarbill, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Brown-backed and Fine-spotted woodpeckers, Red-shouldered Cuckooshrike, African Golden Oriole, Brown-throated Wattle-eye, White Helmetshrike (this race topped with an enormous, floppy crest), Senegal Batis, Brubru, Northern Puffback, Yellow-billed Shrike, Yellow-bellied Hylia, African Blue Flycatcher, Northern Crombec, Senegal Eremomela, African Spotted Creeper, African Thrush, Swamp Flycatcher, Northern Black-Flycatcher, White-crowned Robin-Chat, Northern Red-headed Weaver, Black-bellied Firefinch, and Brown-rumped and Cabanis's Buntings.



The stunning Red-throated Bee-eater is one of nine bee-eater species possible. © B. Cottele

Raptors are particularly prolific in Mole, and regularly encountered species include White-headed, Hooded, and White-backed vultures, Bateleur, Beaudouin's and Brown snake eagles, Martial and Wahlberg's eagles, Lizard Buzzard, Ayres's and African hawk-eagles, and African Hobby and Lanner Falcon. We will also venture out on a couple of nocturnal excursions to look for Plain, Freckled, and Long-tailed nightjars, as well as the spectacular Standard-winged Nightjar, Northern White-faced Owl, Grayish Eagle-Owl, and some of the lesser-known mammals.

NIGHT: Zaina Lodge, Mole



Standard-wing Nightjar, a West African specialty, must be seen to be believed! B.

March 23, Day 16: White Volta River and transfer to Kumasi. After an early breakfast, we'll set off from Mole heading back southwards to Kumasi. Before heading south, we'll spend the morning along the banks of the White Volta River where we'll seek Egyptian Plover, one of the most highly sought birds on the continent. We will make a concerted effort to track down this beautiful species, which is the sole resident of its own family. We therefore will dedicate quality time to observing and enjoying the bird along the sandy banks of the river. During our time here, we will watch for any number of other birds that occur, examples being Dark Chanting-Goshawk, Northern Carmine Bee-eater, and Chestnut-backed Sparrowlark.

Following a good meal, we will set off to Kumasi. On arrival in Kumasi, we check into our hotel to relax in preparation for an early start in the morning.

NIGHT: Royal Basin Resort, Kumasi

March 24, Day 17: Birding Bobiri Butterfly Sanctuary and Atewa Range. Following breakfast this morning, we will head back into rainforest habitat where so many of Ghana's sought-after special species are found. This morning, we hope to see Black-throated Coucal, Red-chested Owlet, the much sought-after Yellow-footed Honeyguide, African Piculet, Red-billed Dwarf Hornbill, Purple-throated Cuckoo-shrike, Blue-headed Crested Flycatcher, Dusky Tit, Green Hylia, Tit-hylia, and Magpie Mannakin among many others.

We'll continue south following a productive morning in the field, heading toward the Atewa region, stopping for lunch en route. After some rest and relaxation, we'll set off for the lower farmland bush near the Atewa Range where we hope to see Levillant's, Klaas's, African Emerald, and Yellow-throated Cuckoos; Marsh and Black-crowned tchagras; Black-headed (Red-bellied) Paradise Flycatcher, Whistling Cisticola, Tessmann's Flycatcher, Maxwells Black, Compact and Grosbeak Weavers, Western Bluebill, and others.

Later in the afternoon, we'll check in to our nearby guesthouse for the evening to relax, reflect and enjoy our evening meal.

NIGHT: Nelsban Palace Hotel, New Tafo

March 25, Day 18: A day in the Atewa Range. Today we'll spend time higher up in the Atewa Range birding a tract of critically endangered rainforest. As this area is home to so many rare species, we will dedicate a full day birding here. Our birding areas will require a fair amount of walking uphill to reach our destination, and we will take a packed lunch with us to minimize exertion. Please note that we will not set a strenuous pace. We will move at a comfortable rate that ensures that no one will be asked to do more than what he or she is comfortable doing. Among our objectives on the walk is seeing the spectacular Blue-moustached Bee-eater.

Here in these highland forests, we will immerse ourselves in birds of the Upper Guinea forest biome. A representation of birds we might see includes Bronze-naped Pigeon, African Goshawk, Long-tailed Hawk, Speckled and Yellow-rumped tinkerbirds, Chocolate-backed Kingfisher, African Hobby, West African Batis, Many-colored Bushshrike, Red-tailed and Green-tailed bristlebills, a big variety of greenbuls, Brown Illadopsis, Forest Scrub-Robin, Collard and Blue-throated Brown sunbirds, and Crested and Red-headed malimbos.

After another wonderful day of birding, we'll return to our guesthouse for our evening meal and to reflect on another enjoyable and productive day in the field.

NIGHT: Nelsban Palace Hotel, New Tafo

March 26, Day 19: Kalakpa Resource Reserve. Our birding destination today is Kalakpa Reserve, located in the Volta region well to the east of New Tafo. This reserve protects open savanna and Guinea forest. Our avian targets include African Scops Owl, Thick-billed and Yellow throated cuckoos, Spotted Honeyguide, Red-cheeked Wattle-eye, Pied-winged Swallow, Leaf-love, Brown and Puvel's Illadopsis, Capuchin Babbler, and more.

NIGHT: Chances Hotel, Ho

March 27, Days 20: Kalakpa Reserve and departure for home. This morning we'll have time for a couple of hours of post-breakfast birding before returning to the lodge. We'll have time to freshen up and pack our bags before beginning the return to Accra. The journey back to the capital city will require a drive of about four hours, and we will break the journey with a couple of stops for lunch and bathrooms.

We should arrive back in Accra by 4:00 p.m., at which time we will check into the Labadi Beach Hotel again, where a room has been reserved in your name.

A wonderful trip has come to an end and we say our goodbyes after a final checklist session and dinner. Flights from Accra should be scheduled to depart either late this evening or the morning of March 28. Those departing this evening will return to the airport after dinner with time to check in for international flights. Most flights from Ghana to the United States depart late in the evening (after 10:00 p.m.). Due to flying west, those departing tonight will arrive in the United States on March 27. Those not desiring or able to depart Ghana tonight may depart on the morning of March 28.



We will encounter lots of smiles in our time in West Africa! © P. Gnodde

DAYROOM/NIGHT: Labadi Beach Hotel

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 8 tour participants.

TOUR LEADER: This tour will be led by **Andrew Whittaker** and a local leader.



Andrew Whittaker, a senior member of the VENT staff, has led VENT tours since 1993 throughout South and Central America, Antarctica, Europe, Israel, and, more recently, Africa and Asia. His birding passion began at the early age of seven (thanks to his parents). Andy is also a true all-around naturalist and loves sharing his intimate bird knowledge and fascination for all aspects of the natural world in a fun and enthusiastic way. Andy was born in England; however, he considers himself Brazilian, having lived more than 30 years in this mega biodiverse country, first working for the Smithsonian Institution, studying Amazonian rainforest birds in Manaus. Andy is a qualified ringer/bander trained by the

late Dr. Clive Minton (fondly known as the father of shorebird/wader studies). A lifelong fascination with bird migration has seen Andy working around the globe at several top bird observatories: Eilat, Israel; Long Point, Canada; and in the UK at Sandwich Bay and on Fair Isle, Scotland, as well as researching shorebirds in Borneo in Sabah. Andy is well recognized for his passionate and intimate knowledge of bird vocalizations and taxonomy, which has enabled him to discover several new species (such as the Cryptic Forest-Falcon in 2002) and rediscover others thought to be extinct. He is an excellent communicator and tour organizer and loves nothing better than finding and sharing a rare skulker, or telling one of his many fascinating and fun bird and travel stories. Andy had the honor of working with Sir David Attenborough in Brazil as a consultant for the prestigious BBC *Life of Birds* series. He is widely considered an authority on Amazonian birds, having authored numerous technical publications on the region's avifauna. At present, Andy is working with Kevin Zimmer on a comprehensive field guide to the birds of Brazil to be published by Princeton University Press. Andy is an associate researcher at the Museum Goeldi, Belem and an active conservationist. He loves photography (with many of his images being used in books) and is an avid football fan of Birmingham City FC and an orchid lover. Andy lives with his partner in life, Jaqueline in Porto Alegre, southern Brazil.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is **\$8,645** per person in double occupancy from Accra. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 2 through dinner on Day 20, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, entrance fees, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Accra 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 **\$1,150**.

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 or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 150 days prior to the tour departure date (October 9, 2024).

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.

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 from the date of participant tour cancellation, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made between 179 and 151 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the tour fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 150 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre- and post-tour extensions. **For participants’ protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

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

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months from the date of participant tour cancellation, 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 its **Ripcord** plan. Designed for all types of travelers, Ripcord is among the most comprehensive travel protection programs available.

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

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

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

Coronavirus (COVID-19):

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

Please visit the **Coronavirus FAQ** page at the following link: https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid_19_faq/.

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.

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.

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Per person fees apply for each set of travel arrangements: \$50 domestic; \$75 international.* Many of our travelers choose to make their own air travel arrangements, but we emphasize the benefits to using our services. If you book your air arrangements yourself, Victor Emanuel Travel is unable to provide support in managing any flight delays and/or cancellations that could occur before and during a tour. When you purchase air tickets through Victor Emanuel Travel, our staff has ready access to your air ticket record and can provide assistance as problems arise. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements. **Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be held responsible for any air ticket penalties.**

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

BAGGAGE: Please limit baggage to one piece of luggage and one carry-on. The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. Please consult your pre-departure materials and/or airline to find out specific weight restrictions.

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. Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government's attempts to improve airport security we recommend that you check the website of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for the most updated information: <http://www.tsa.gov/>.

CLOTHING: This program is a very casual birding and natural history trip. Field-type clothing and casual attire are appropriate for all occasions. The following items are recommended:

- **Field Clothing:** Lightweight, dull-colored field clothing is recommended throughout the tour. Outdoor stores such as Cabela's and REI carry field clothing that many birders find appealing. Pants and shirts made of lightweight durable and dull-colored materials with multiple pockets and ventilated seams are popular. Please do not wear white or brightly colored clothes, including hats or raingear
- **Pants:** A couple of pairs of pants are essential. Many people prefer lightweight pants made of cotton or other material, but denim, though not as comfortable, is certainly acceptable.
- **Shirts:** A couple long-sleeved t-shirts in addition to other comfortable styles suitable for warm weather. We do not recommend short-sleeved shirts as they offer no protection from biting insects or the sun.

- **Outerwear:** A water repellent poncho, jacket, or parka is essential in the event we encounter rain when in the field. Generally, ponchos are better than rain jackets or parkas for protecting optical equipment. Please avoid nylon or plastic jackets and/or rainwear of similar materials; noisy clothing is annoying to others and may frighten birds and animals.
- **Socks:** Long socks are very useful so that you can tuck in your pants and further avoid biting insects.
- **Hat:** A hat, particularly of a wide-brimmed style, for protection from the sun is essential. Please bring a baseball-style cap at the very least.
- **Swimsuit:** Several of our accommodations have swimming pools.

FOOTWEAR: Although there will be no rigorous walks or serious uphill jaunts, we may infrequently encounter mud, slippery surfaces, and stony ground. Add the fact that you are on your feet for much of the day, and you'll realize that it is most important that you provide suitable protection and support for your feet and ankles. We recommend a light hiking boot (waterproof or Gore-Tex) when in the field. Boots that rise to the ankle and have a good lug-sole are ideal. Many people are apprehensive that these will be too heavy; this is not true. The protection, grip, and day-long comfort that such boots afford are far superior to the seemingly comfortable sneakers/training shoes. Athletic shoes do not provide as much traction or ankle support and will not keep your feet dry. Athletic shoes or other casual footwear may be preferred for down times or when traveling between destinations. Rubber boots are not necessary.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry service is available at some of our accommodations. Additional charges apply.

CLIMATE & WEATHER: The combination of low altitude and proximity to the Equator gives Ghana a typical tropical climate. Daytime temperatures are high throughout the country, approaching or topping 90 (°F) on most days. Temperatures do drop at night; however, most of our accommodations are serviced with air-conditioning. In some areas it may be very hot, especially in the north, around Mole. We will make good use of the early mornings and will have many early starts to avoid, as much as possible, birding in the middle of the day. In the rainforest areas in the south the humidity will be high and uncomfortable. If you are not used to humid tropical climates you may find, especially during the first few days of the tour, that the heat and humidity are a little uncomfortable. Although we have timed our tour to avoid the period of heaviest rainfall we can expect to encounter some rain during the tour.

CONDITIONS:

Physical demands and pace:

In general, this is an easy to moderately paced tour and one that is not especially physically demanding. Most walking and hiking will be on level or slightly hilly ground, paved and unpaved roads, tracks, and forest trails, but nothing overly strenuous. At one or two sites there may be some moderate uphill walking including the walk to the Picathartes site, which is about two miles through forest and culminates with a short but steepish clamber up to a cave at the end. Walking sticks will be useful here and there, and there will always be a helping hand. Walks will always be at a gentle pace with regular stops. At certain times, there may be a bit of standing around where a collapsible stool can be very useful.

We will spend a day at the canopy walkway at Kakum National Park. This walkway involves a short uphill walk (700 yards) on an uneven stepped track to the structure itself; the walkway is about 40 yards above the forest floor and has several very stable observation platforms linked by stretches of rope and board walkway.

At all of the places we visit, it will be important to be in the field before dawn so that we can hear birds sing as the day begins. This may be our only way to discover if certain key species are present. Additionally, the very early morning can be a very good time to detect the occasional nightjar, owl, forest-dwelling rail or francolin, or nocturnal mammal. Typically, when possible, we will return to our hotel or lodge for lunch and a break before going out again in the late afternoon. These breaks do not amount to wasting good birding time because bird activity is virtually nil during the heat of the day, and by recharging our batteries and concentrating our efforts on the most optimal times of day, we will be in good shape to properly enjoy whatever comes our way later in the afternoon.

Transportation:

Chunks of our time will be spent in vehicles, as we do have to cover long distances in order to reach the best areas for birds. Some of the roads (especially the road to Mole) can be poor for stretches, and the going will be slow and potentially frustrating. Traffic in certain urban areas can be very bad too. Travel will be aboard comfortable, air-conditioned bus (probably a 30 seat Coaster or similar), with large windows for viewing and photography. There will be some lengthy drives between sites, but we will make regular and appropriately timed rest-stops. There will be plenty of drinking water and snacks on board.

Photography:

Characteristically, photographing wildlife, birds in particular, is difficult in the tropical forest; however, there will be several times when we are in more open country when the lighting and photographic opportunities are better. For non-wildlife subject matter, Ghana has some wonderfully striking people and attractive scenery. When photographing people, it is courteous to ask first (a smile helps), but please do not force the issue if the subject declines.

EQUIPMENT: One of the most important aspects of having an enjoyable travel experience is being prepared with proper equipment. The following items will come in handy during your trip to Belize:

- **Daypack or beltpack** – Good for carrying extra clothing, field guides, supplies, and optical equipment, etc.
- **Notebooks and pens**
- **Travel alarm clock** – Battery operated is best (if not using this feature on your mobile phone).
- **Polarized sunglasses with good UV protection**
- **Sunscreen, lip balm, skin lotions**
- **Personal toiletries**
- **Cameras, lenses, memory cards, and extra batteries**
- **Collapsible walking stick** – A highly recommended item for those who have trouble walking
- **Umbrella** – A small, collapsible umbrella can be indispensable should we be caught on the trail in the rain
- **Water bottle** – Bottled water will be available throughout the trip, but we suggest bringing your favorite water bottle to cut down on waste.
- **Plastic bags or “dry bags”** – These items are very useful if we get caught in the rain while birding. They provide an excellent mean for keeping dry sensitive items like optical equipment.
- **Hand sanitizer/toiletries** – Hand sanitizer and/or packets of moist towelettes can be a pleasant way of keeping refreshed and clean (especially the antiseptic type) and is very useful for hand-washing prior to meals.
- **Tissue packs**
- **Small flashlight or headlamp** – Very useful at times for our early morning starts and evening nightbird excursions.
- **Small folding stool** – Many people find this item extremely useful when patiently waiting for shy forest birds.

BINOCULARS & SPOTTING SCOPES:

Binoculars – We strongly recommend good binoculars of 8x32, 8x42, or 10x42 magnification. We recommend that you 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 power. Trying to find a bird in your binoculars using minis is like trying to read a book through a keyhole. You will be very frustrated, and even if you do manage to get the bird in your binoculars before it flies, you will have a poor view. You will find that 8x32 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.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS:

PASSPORTS – A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure date is required for United States citizens to enter Ghana. **If it is not valid through this period, you will need to get it renewed.** You will also want to make sure that you have at least one blank pages in your passport for stamps.

If you need a passport, you should get it well in advance of your trip departure date. For additional fees, a passport can be issued on an expedited basis. In the United States this can be done at the nearest passport office, most post offices, or the county clerk’s office. You may also visit <https://state.gov/travelers/> for information on how to get or renew a passport.

As a safety measure, photocopy the first two pages of your passport and keep the photocopies in a safe place, so if your passport is lost you will have proof of identification. Your passport should be signed and easily available at all times. You will need it for check-in at the airport on your first day of departure, so please **do not pack it in your checked luggage.**

VISAS – A valid entry visa is required of anyone visiting Ghana. Visas are obtained through the Embassy of Ghana website (<https://ghanaembassydc.org/visa/>) and must be procured prior to arrival. On the homepage, please click the Visa Application button in the middle of the page and follow the directions.

There are two types of entry visa: Single Entry and Multiple Entry. You will need the Single Entry type, valid for three months and that must be utilized within three months from the date of issue. Among the conditions required of applicants, as stated on the website, “tourism applicants (us) must provide a letter of invitation from their host in Ghana, proof of a roundtrip ticket, and show proof of sufficient funds for the duration of their stay in the country.” The wording and meaning of these items can cause confusion. For this reason, the VENT office provides assistance with navigating the application process. Upon completion of the application, you will mail your passport with the printed copy of the application, one current passport-size photograph, and all the required supporting documents, including payment receipts to the embassy.

Visas may be obtained either through Standard Service or Rush Service. A Standard Service application will take 15–20 business day to process. The cost is \$60.00. The processing period for Rush Service applications is seven 7 business days. The cost is \$100.00.

Visa requirements can change without notice, and you should check the latest requirements as far in advance as possible in order to allow time to obtain a visa should that be necessary.

CURRENCY & MONEY MATTERS: Your tour fee includes all necessary expenses; however, you may want to bring local cash currency to cover personal expenses not included in the program, such as gifts, laundry, gratuities, meals on your own, and personal items. It is best to carry small denominations as lodges, shops, and other service providers may be unable to provide change for large bills. While local currency can be obtained at the airport upon arrival in Accra, it is best acquired before arriving in the country, in order to secure a better exchange rate. ATM machines are available in larger cities and some towns. Should you extend your vacation in Ghana beyond what is offered in the program, you'll definitely want to obtain local currency.

Most major credit cards are accepted at the larger hotels, but often nowhere else. Please check with your bank and credit card issuer for more information regarding banking and the use of ATM and credit cards overseas.

The official currency of Ghana is the Ghanaian Cedi (GHS). The name is pronounced "seedy," after the Tiwi name for cowry shell. Cent-like divisions are called pesewas. You can check the latest currency conversion rate by visiting "XE-The World's Favorite Currency Site" at: <http://www.xe.com/>.

ELECTRICITY: The electric current in Ghana is 230V at 50 hertz (cycles). Electrical outlets are of types D and G. The type D plug features three round pins arranged in triangular pattern, while the type G plug contains three rectangular blades also arranged in triangular pattern. At the very least, you will want to bring adapter plugs to accommodate these outlet styles. Additionally, a voltage converter may also be necessary. To avoid the risk of damage to your electrical devices while using them in Ghana, please make sure you understand their voltage limitations and requirements before departing your home.

INTERNET ACCES: WIFI service is available at most of the hotels and lodges on our tour route. The strength and consistency of the internet signal will vary throughout the trip. In some of our accommodations, the internet signal may be confined to the hotel lobby. Please be prepared for no internet service in some of the smaller or remoter places we'll visit.

LANGUAGE: English is the official language of Ghana. At least 46 African languages are spoken; among the more frequently heard are: Twi, Fante, Ewe, Ga, Dagomba, and Halisa.

TIME: At the time of this tour, Ghana is four hours ahead of Eastern Daylight Time (EDT).

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 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 as standard travel precautions.

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

Covid-19: We continually emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. Although VENT no longer maintains any of its COVID-era prevention protocols, we strongly recommend best practices for protecting yourself and your fellow travelers against COVID-19 illness. These measures include receiving the primary series vaccinations for those eligible, staying "Up to Date"

with COVID-19 booster shots, wearing high filtration N-95 or KN-95 masks when in airports and on airplanes, and avoiding risky social settings in the lead-up to your tour. These recommendations are firmly rooted in CDC guidance regarding recommendations for avoiding COVID-19.

Biting Insects: Biting insects such as mosquitoes, sandflies, and leeches can occasionally be a problem. This is best dealt with by wearing long-sleeved shirts of sufficient thickness and density of weave that insects cannot bite through, long trousers tucked into long socks, and liberal coatings of insect repellent.

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 it is best completed in advance of travel. Do-it-yourself pre-treatment must 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>

The CDC strongly recommends taking proper precautions against the mosquito transmitted diseases **Yellow Fever, Malaria, and Dengue**.

Yellow Fever: Yellow Fever is present in all areas of Ghana and presents a legitimate threat to unvaccinated travelers to this country. Yellow Fever vaccination is **required** for all travelers to Ghana over the age of nine, regardless of nationality.

Malaria: Malaria is present in all areas of Ghana and presents a legitimate threat to travelers to this country. The strains of malaria present in Ghana include the chloroquine-resistant types. To reduce the risk of contracting this disease, travelers are strongly urged to take an antimalarial regimen. Recommended anti-malarial drugs include atovaquone/proguanil (Malarone), doxycycline, mefloquine (Lariam), or tafenoquine. Some travelers may experience side effects from antimalarial drugs. **Please consult with your physician to determine the best preventative medication.**

Dengue: Dengue is present in all areas of Ghana. There is no vaccination against Dengue, but while it can cause painful illness, it is usually not fatal.

In general, there are a number of simple precautions you can take to prevent mosquito bites. We strongly recommend wearing long-sleeved shirts, pants, and a hat, particularly between dusk and dawn. Keep windows closed while you sleep, and make sure that your insect repellent contains DEET.

The CDC also recommends vaccination against **Meningitis** and **Typhoid**.

Meningitis: Meningitis is an infection of the fluids surrounding the brain and spinal cord and is caused by the *Meningococcal* bacteria. Meningitis is spread by respiratory secretions through close contact with an infected person.

Typhoid: Typhoid is a disease of contaminated food or water and is caused by the bacteria *Salmonella typhi*. It is common in the developing world, where hand washing is less frequent and sanitation and water systems are less advanced. Depending on which vaccine a person receives, immunity is conferred for 2–5 years. Thereafter, a booster will be needed.

Additional health items:

Rabies: Rabies is a viral infection that is mainly spread by a bite from an infected animal. Street dogs represent the most frequent risk for bite exposure to travelers. Tour participants are instructed not to approach these animals and to be aware of their surroundings so that they do not surprise a dog in a confined space. Although rabies is relatively rare, pre-exposure prophylaxis should be considered. Please consult with your physician to determine whether the rabies prophylaxis is right for you.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Physical Fitness: If there is any doubt as to your physical fitness to travel, consultation should be sought with your doctor bearing in mind that there may be a fair amount of walking and standing in warm-to-hot and humid conditions. The temperatures in West Africa are warm throughout the year. Please be prepared to spend several hours outdoors in temperatures that may reach into the 90s. The low humidity in the region means that dust may pose problems for people with respiratory conditions.

Food & Water: Sanitation throughout Ghana is relatively good compared to most tropical areas of the world; however, it is advisable to treat water outside of the large, modern hotels with caution. Ideally, stick to bottled drinks, tea, and coffee. All raw food is subject to contamination, particularly in areas where hygiene and sanitation are inadequate; travelers should avoid salads, uncooked vegetables, and unpasteurized milk and milk products such as cheese, and eat only food that has been cooked and is still hot or fruit that has been peeled by the traveler personally. Cooked food that has been allowed to stand for several hours at ambient temperature can provide a fertile medium for bacterial growth, so if you sample local delicacies from a street vendor, be sure that the food is cooked in front of you.

Drink only bottled or boiled water and canned or bottled beverages. Avoid drinks with ice.

Everyone is encouraged to bring along their own bottle of liquid hand sanitizer and/or packs of moist towelettes or Handi Wipes, to ensure the highest standards of personal hygiene.

Please note that your tour leaders will let you know at every location of the safety of the food and water.

Sun Exposure: The sun's ultraviolet rays are dangerous; under prolonged exposure sunburn can take only a matter of minutes. Anytime you are outdoors you will want to protect your skin, including your lips, eyes, nose, and ears. A severe sunburn is potentially very painful and will affect your level of enjoyment. Always protect yourself when outdoors and be sure to bring an ample supply of high SPF sunscreen and lip balm. We strongly recommend the use of ultra-violet blocking, polarized sunglasses.

We strongly recommend carrying a copy of your vaccination record in your carry-on bags or luggage. 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. 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).

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

Field Guides

Birds:

Borrow, Nik and Ron Demey. ***Birds of Ghana***. UK: Helm Field Guides, 2022. Second edition. This recently **Second edition**. The most important resource for this tour.

Mammals:

Kingdon, Jonathan. ***The Kingdon Field Guide to African Mammals***. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015. Second edition. A fabulous field guide; beautifully illustrated.

History

Ahlman, Jeffrey. ***Ghana. A Political and Social History***. London: Zed Books. 2023. A well-received treatment of the social history and culture of Ghana from the 18th–20th centuries.

CLO Apps & Online Resources:

eBird. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Among the largest and most successful citizen science projects in existence, eBird is an essential tool in promoting bird study and conservation. Among a range of benefits, eBird allows users to keep a variety of lists in a single application. When taxonomic splits are incorporated, lists are automatically updated. Additionally, trip leaders can share daily lists, so one only need accept a shared list and it will upload to your files! **Highly recommended.**

Merlin Bird ID. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Merlin is an app designed as a birding coach for beginning and intermediate bird watchers. Excellent for use in the field, Merlin asks the observer a series of questions regarding his or her bird sighting, including date and location, and color, size, and behavior of a bird. Merlin then processes the viewer's responses to present a shortlist of possible identifications, from which the user can choose the likely bird. Species profiles include a brief physical description, photographs, and sound samples. The Photo ID feature allows anyone with a camera to snap a photo and obtain a list of suggestions. Merlin's Sound ID feature allows identification of birds through audible recognition. To use Merlin, download the app, followed by the appropriate regional "pack." For this trip, please download the pack for **Ghana**.

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that tips are not expected and are entirely optional. Tips should be given directly to your tour leader; they should not be sent to the VENT office.

RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc., a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, "**VENT**") act only as agents for the participant in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

VENT reserves the right (i) to substitute hotels of similar category, or the best reasonable substitution available under the circumstances, for those indicated and (ii) to make any changes in the itinerary that are deemed necessary by VENT or which are caused by third party transportation schedules (i.e. railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, etc.).

VENT reserves the right to substitute leaders or guides on any tour. Where VENT, in its sole discretion, determines such substitution is necessary, it will notify tour participants.

VENT reserves the right to cancel any tour prior to departure with or without cause or good reason. See the VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy set forth above.

Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on March 4, 2024, and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

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

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

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