



VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

ITINERARY

INDIA: TIGERS, TAJ & BIRDS GALORE KANHA, CORBETT & BHARATPUR

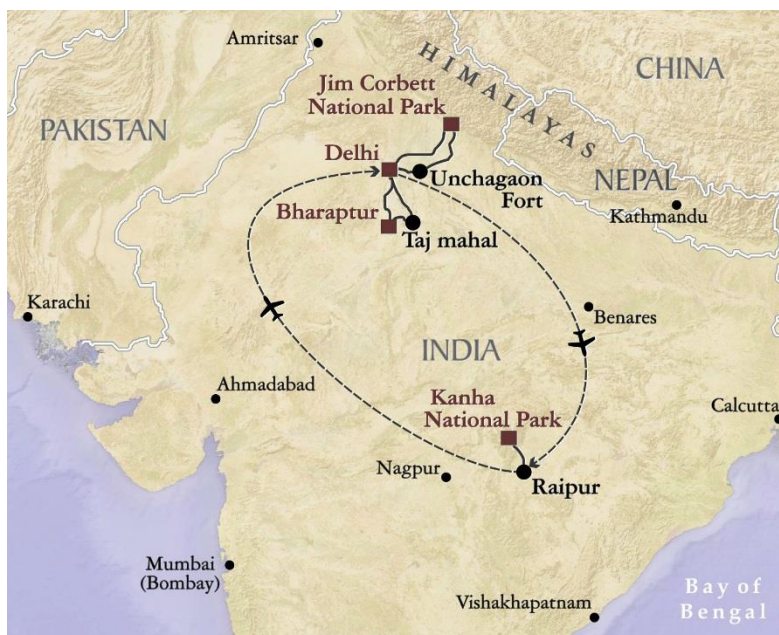
JANUARY 27–FEBRUARY 14, 2025

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*“I do not know how the close proximity of a tiger reacts on others,
but for me it is always with a breathless feeling”*

Jim Corbett in “The Maneaters of Kumaon”

There is something indefinable about India which makes Westerners who have been there yearn to return. Perhaps it is the vastness of the country and its timeless quality; perhaps it is the strange mixture of a multiplicity of peoples and cultures—so alien and yet so fascinating—which strikes a hidden chord in us; or perhaps it is the way that man and nature are so closely linked, co-existing in a way that seems intrinsically impossible. There are just some places one has to visit in a lifetime and India is one of them. On this tour we will be treated to an indelible view of India—its people, its history and its impressive wildlife. We have an excellent chance to see tigers in the wild with additional chances for Leopard, Dhole, Gaur and Asian Elephant. We will sight an impressive variety of birds.



India, however, is so much more than a series of highlights—it is a total experience. Perhaps no other country on earth provides such rich panoplies of culture and living history intertwined with nature, literally at one’s feet. For the photographer, the traveler, the historian, the anthropologist, and most emphatically for the naturalist, India is a veritable dream. Join us on a very special journey to the Indian subcontinent, one of the most romantic and magical places on our planet.

Our journey begins in the capital, New Delhi. From here we will fly to Raipur and then continue on to our superb resort which is located on the edge of Kanha

National Park. The primary focus of this trip is to search for the increasingly endangered but nevertheless magnificent Royal Bengal Tiger.

The tiger is the quintessence of a predatory mammal and an enduring icon for everything that is wild and wonderful about India and Asia. Kanha provides a good chance of seeing tigers; among the best anywhere in the world. We will spend three full days here enjoying morning and afternoon safari drives in perhaps the richest region in India for wild game. This is where Rudyard Kipling wrote The Jungle Book. Meadows are alive with herds of deer while the deep grass offers shelter to the world's charismatic great cat. Some of the bird specialties we may encounter include Painted Francolin, Red Spurfowl, five species of vulture, Lesser Adjutant Stork, Brown Fish-Owl, White-naped Woodpecker and Indian Scimitar-Babbler.

We will then proceed to another of India's great national parks, Corbett National Park, which is cradled in the western Himalayan foothills. With over 550 species on the park bird list, including an incredible 50 species of raptor, this location offers outstanding birding. Some of the special birds possible here include Collared Falconet, Great Hornbill, Great Slaty Woodpecker, Slaty-headed Parakeet, Tawny and Brown fish-owl, Pallas's and Lesser fish-eagle, Wallcreeper, and Crested Kingfisher, to mention just a few. Herds of Asian Elephants are a major feature and there is always a good chance for a tiger encounter here. Like Kanha, the biomass of hoofed mammals here is impressive, with herds of Spotted Deer, Sambar, Hog Deer and Wild Boar.

Before going on to Bharatpur, we will visit the incredible Taj Mahal. There can be no finer way to visit this monument than by the light of a beautiful sunrise. It is a wonderful, romantic location and often with an array of great birds to enjoy.

The final leg of the tour will take us to the famed bird sanctuary at Bharatpur. Again, the location of our hotel will allow us to explore this wetland reserve and other nearby sites in great comfort. The birding is exceptional, with a host of nearby locations like Bund Baretha and the Chambhal River providing the chance for sightings of such rarities as Sarus Crane, Black-necked Stork, Indian Skimmer, Indian Spotted Eagle or perhaps the critically endangered Sociable Plover. Local guides often have a variety of owls like Dusky Eagle-Owl and Indian Scops-Owl staked out. Our visit is timed for the maximum number of winter visitors like Bar-headed Geese, Common Crane and Bluethroats. This is a great birding location, and it is quite possible to see over 100 species in a single day.

January 27, Day 1: International Flight to New Delhi. Most flights from the United States connect with flights bound for New Delhi that typically arrive late in the evening. If time permits, we suggest arriving a day early to allow for potential flight delays and to be well rested. VENT will be happy to assist with additional lodging arrangements and transfers should you choose to arrive prior to January 27.

NIGHT: Aboard aircraft in transit to New Delhi

January 28, Day 2: Arrive in New Delhi. Upon arriving at New Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport (airport code DEL), you will be met by a representative of our ground agent and transferred to our comfortable hotel.

NIGHT: Radisson Blu Plaza, New Delhi

January 29, Day 3: Outab Minar; Fly to Raipur. This morning we'll gather as a group with our leader for breakfast, introductions, and tour details.

Few large cities can equal New Delhi in the number, variety and tameness of its birds. During the Palearctic winter, many species migrate south to the Indian subcontinent and supplement New Delhi's resident bird fauna. New Delhi's numerous parks, ruins, and gardens function as a huge man-made oasis for birds and other wildlife in an otherwise dry, semi-arid region. Hindu reverence for life also contributes to the approachability of so many birds. It is astonishing

to see the stately Indian Peacock stalking arrogantly along the ramparts of an ancient fortress, or a flock of Black Kites attending the carcass of some unfortunate animal. Be assured, aside from seeing some of India's magnificent history, we will encounter a good number of birds, many of which are very easy to photograph. This morning we will visit Qutab Minar, a soaring, 73-meter-high tower of victory, built in 1193 by Qutab-ud-din Aibak immediately after the defeat of Delhi's last Hindu kingdom.

Early this afternoon we will fly south to Raipur, capital of the state of Chattisgarh, located at the heart of the great forests of Central India. After arrival we will head straight for Kanha National Park. Our relatively long drive from Raipur will take us on a wonderful journey across India with its bird-rich farmlands and villages that barely appear to acknowledge the passage of time.

NIGHT: The Baagh Resort, Kanha

January 30-February 1, Days 4-6: Kanha National Park. Kanha National Park is one of the largest national parks, covering 1,945 sq. km., including a "core zone" of 940 sq. km. It is also part of Project Tiger, one of India's most important conservation efforts. Here amidst the setting for Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, we will travel by jeep through different habitats, including sal forest, bamboo thicket, dadar (plateau grasslands), meadows, and mixed forests. This beautiful area of forest and lightly wooded grassland with many rivers and streams supports an excellent variety of wildlife. Some of the species we may encounter include the endangered Hard-ground Barasingha (this being the only place where this subspecies of Swamp Deer persists), Barking Deer, Spotted Deer, Gaur – the largest of all wild cattle, Golden Jackal, Jungle Cat, Northern Plains Gray Langur, Sloth Bear, Wild Boar and Dhole (Asian wild dog).



A massive tiger crossing the road during our tour with the VENT group in the background © M. Valkenburg

The park hosts many central Indian bird species including Red-naped Ibis, Jungle Owlet, Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Crested Bunting, Red Junglefowl, Indian Peafowl, Oriental Darter, Indian Pond-Heron, Woolly-necked Stork, Bronze-winged Jacana, Green Bee-eater, Indian Roller, Indian Gray Hornbill, Brown-throated Barbet, Black-rumped Flameback, Black-headed Oriole, Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, Rufous Treepie, Scarlet Minivet, White-rumped Shama, White-eyed Buzzard, Changeable hawk-eagle, Crested Serpent-Eagle, Red-headed Vulture, Alexandrine and Plum-headed parakeets, Yellow-footed Pigeon, Sirkeer Malkoha, Greater Coucal, Indian Scops-

Owl, Indian Jungle and Savannah nightjars, Crested Treeswift, Indian Scimitar-Babbler, Tawny-bellied and Yellow-eyed babbler, Tickell's Blue and Verditer flycatchers, Asian Paradise-Flycatcher, Olive-backed Pipit, and Red Avadavat.

NIGHTS: The Baagh Resort, Kanha

February 2, Day 7: Kanha National Park and Return to Raipur; Fly to New Delhi. Three full days exploring this park will give us excellent opportunities to observe all that is offered. This includes great birds like the White-rumped vulture, Lesser Adjutant, Orange-headed Thrush, Stork-billed Kingfisher and the Malabar Pied-Hornbill. Or perhaps it will be a rarely seen mammal like a Honey Badger (Ratel) or the diminutive Four-horned Antelope. Always though, the tiger will be in our thoughts. This evening, we will catch the flight to New Delhi.

NIGHT: Radisson Blu Plaza, New Delhi

February 3, Day 8: Drive New Delhi to Corbett. This morning, we will depart from New Delhi for Corbett National Park. India's first national park lies cradled in the foothills of the Himalayas, approximately 300 km. northeast of New Delhi. On the way, we will make a visit to Humayun's tomb. Located in the eastern part of Delhi, Humayun's tomb is one of the best-preserved Mughal monuments. This spellbinding mausoleum is the first example of Mughal architecture in India.

Today's travel takes us across the vast Gangetic Plain, the very core of Hindu India and the most populous part of this nation of over one billion people. In addition to providing plenty of opportunity for seeing a good cross section of open country birds, the journey provides a fascinating window on the life of everyday India. The sheer mass of humanity and the ensuing congestion has to be seen to be believed! Every imaginable form of transport including buses, trucks, motorized and cycle rickshaws, bullock carts, camels, even the occasional elephant, together with teeming numbers of pedestrians, cram on to roads designed for traffic of one hundred years ago. The squalor of the cities and larger towns gives way to mud-walled villages and reservoirs teeming with birds, while women gracefully adorned in silk saris collect buffalo dung to be dried and used as cooking fuel. This is another world that never fails to totally overwhelm the first-time visitor. Perhaps one of the most salutary impressions is that birds are everywhere; truly a tribute to the Hindu reverence for animal life. We will make a stop on the Ganges River where funeral pyres may be seen in the distance, while Ruddy Shelduck and Great Black-headed Gulls winter on the river itself.

Eventually we will reach Corbett National Park. We will spend the first two nights on the outskirts of the park in rather comfortable and attractive accommodations, followed by three nights at Dhikala Forest Rest House, located deep within the heart of the reserve.

NIGHT: The Den, Corbett

February 4, Day 9: Corbett. Our accommodation is situated close to the Kosi River and during this full day we will explore its vicinity thoroughly. The hotel gardens are magnificent and here the first birding starts with foraging parties containing Long-tailed Minivet, Black-hooded Oriole, White-throated Fantail, Red-billed Blue-Magpie, Gray-headed Canary-Flycatcher, Yellow-bellied Fairy-Fantail, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch, Bar-tailed Treecreeper and the exquisite looking Orange-bellied Leafbird, all possible before breakfast. Along the fast-flowing river new birds include River Lapwing, Crested and Pied kingfisher, Brown Dipper, Plumbeous and White-capped redstarts, and probably the most-wanted shorebird for this trip—the rare Ibisbill—are added to our list! On previous tours, we encountered the wonderful Mountain (Hodgson's) Hawk-Eagle and Pallas's Fish-Eagle patrolling near the river while in the darker parts of the woods along the river, mysterious Long-billed Thrushes are found foraging.

NIGHT: The Den, Corbett

February 5-7, Days 10-12: Corbett National Park. The stillness is broken by the raucous bugle of an advertising peacock as the mists part to reveal another day. Eerie skeleton-like drowned trees host Lesser Fishing-Eagles and snake-birds more commonly known as Asian Darters, while nearby rivers are home to impressive Crested Kingfishers, Plumbeous and White-capped redstarts, and the quintessential Himalayan inhabitant, Brown Dipper.

Corbett encompasses more than 200 square miles of magnificent deciduous forest and grassland at an elevation of 1,300 to 4,000 feet, and occupies a series of ridges centered round the Ramganga River. The dam, which now forms Ramganga Lake at the western boundary of the park, is a haven for wildlife and attracts good numbers of large mammals including Asian Elephant, Spotted Deer, Sambar and Wild Boar, in addition to their attendant predators, leopard and the magnificent tiger. This classic tract of wild India has a special beauty that is vividly described in *The Maneaters of Kumaon* and other books by Jim Corbett, for whom the park is named. During the winter, the snows of the Himalayas force large numbers of birds down to lower elevations where together with the resident avifauna, they form one of the richest communities of birds in northern India. Corbett also harbors a plethora of mammals. In addition to those mentioned above, other mammals include Jungle and Fishing cats, Sloth and Himalayan Black Bears, the strikingly marked Yellow-throated Marten, Indian Crested Porcupine, and both Terai Langur and Rhesus Macaque.



We have good chances to get close views of the wonderful Kalij Pheasant. © M. Valkenburg

A list of 550 species of birds for the park present enough options for even the most hardened lister, and our days here will be filled with many new and exciting sights and sounds. Some of the birds we may encounter here include Black Stork; the magnificent but increasingly rare Pallas's Fish-Eagle; Bonelli's Eagle; Changeable, Rufous-bellied and Mountain Hawk-eagles; Black Francolin – a real snappy looking bird that is best seen at dawn when the male calls from exposed tree stumps at the edge of the grassland; Red Junglefowl; Kalij Pheasant; River Lapwing; Eurasian Thick-knee; perhaps even the elusive Great Thick-knee; Red Collared-Dove; Emerald Dove; Lesser Coucal; Slaty-headed, Red-breasted, Plum-headed, and possibly Alexandrine parakeets; Crested Treeswift; Himalayan Swiftlet; Brown-backed Needletail; both Brown and Tawny fish-owls; Jungle Owlet; and with a bit of luck, we may find the rather sparsely distributed Blue-bearded Bee-eater – quite unlike any bee-eater you have ever encountered! We may

also see Oriental Pied and the simply astounding Great hornbill; Lineated, Brown-headed, Blue-throated and Coppersmith barbets; Streak-throated, Gray-headed, Fulvous-breasted and Gray-capped woodpeckers; Oriental Skylark; Gray-throated Martin; Large Wood-Shrike; Large Cuckoo-shrike; Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike; Small Minivet; Common Iora; Black-crested and Ashy bulbuls; Chestnut-capped and Yellow-eyed babblers; Rufous-gorgeted and Slaty-blue flycatchers; White-throated Fantail; Gray-breasted Prinia; Tickell's Leaf and Smoky warblers; Indian Robin; Black-throated Thrush; Little and Spotted forktails; and Chestnut-bellied and Velvet-fronted nuthatches. If we are lucky, we may come across the highly sought after Wallcreeper, Gray-backed and Long-tailed shrikes, Black-hooded Oriole, Hair-crested Drongo, Chestnut-tailed and Spot-winged starlings, Jungle Myna, Green Magpie, Rufous and Gray treepies, Oriental White-eye, Red Avadavat, Common Rosefinch, and Chestnut-eared and Crested buntings.

Our lodge at Dhikala overlooks the attractive, seasonal Ramganga Lake, where at dawn, ripples in a secluded bay may reveal a Smooth Otter fishing. For many, this will be the India you have always dreamed of—gentle, sunlit days in true wilderness made magical by some of earth's most charismatic creatures.

NIGHTS: Dhikala Forest Rest House, Corbett National Park

February 8, Day 13: Corbett National Park to Unchagaon Fort. This morning, we will depart Corbett for Unchagaon Fort near the Ganges. We may stop along the way to do some birding as we drive out of the park. This early 19th century fort was inherited in 1927 by the present Raja, Surendra Pal Singh. He took an active interest in the maintenance and preservation of his ancestral home so the décor is authentically aristocratic but with all the modern amenities. There are beautifully manicured lawns and flowerbeds and a mango orchard that is good for birding. Upon arrival, we will get settled and time permitting, look for birds in the beautiful gardens.

NIGHT: The Fort, Unchagaon

February 9, Day 14: Agra and the Taj Mahal. This morning, we depart for Agra, making stops to explore some wetlands near Aligarh. We will aim to arrive in good time to settle in to our lovely hotel. In the afternoon we may explore the spectacular Agra Fort, from which it is possible see the very beautiful Taj Mahal, undoubtedly one of the great architectural wonders of the world. The Tajview hotel is centrally located in Agra, which will afford a good location from which to do some more sightseeing or shopping, if time permits. The birds in Agra are also excellent, including River Lapwing, Pallas's and Steppe gull, occasionally Little Pratincole, and maybe the Indian River Tern.

NIGHT: Tajview, Agra

February 10, Day 15: Taj Mahal, Sikandra (Aqbar's Tomb), Chambhal River and Bharatpur. We will make a superb morning visit to the Taj Mahal when the light is at its best. After taking in the best of the Taj, we will continue our Mughal explorations with a visit to Aqbar's Tomb, known also as Sikandra, where herds of Blackbuck wander the lawns. We will then make a detour to travel the Chambhal River by boat, which offers a unique opportunity to explore a relatively pristine freshwater habitat that is home to populations of Indian Skimmer, Black-bellied Tern, and Great Thick-knee, with the chance for Gharial and the scarce Ganges River Dolphin.

Next, we journey south and westwards into the state of Rajasthan. As we venture out into the countryside, we cannot help but be fascinated as we pass camel carts, mud brick villages and elegantly attired women—all seemingly little changed in a thousand years. We will make regular stops along the way for anything of interest before arriving at our lovely hotel for a three-night stay. All of these sites combined will be among the tour highlights.



The prehistoric Gharial provides a good photo opportunity. © M. Valkenburg

NIGHT: The Baagh, Bharatpur

February 11-12, Days 16-17: Bharatpur. Bharatpur is one of the last major undisturbed wetlands remaining in north-central India and is considered one of the greatest birding spots on our planet. It is of critical importance to huge numbers and a wide variety of Palaearctic waterbirds wintering in the subcontinent. In addition, it supports important nesting colonies of Painted and Asian Openbill storks. Although they will not be in peak nesting at the time of our visit, these storks are resident throughout most of the year, feeding on the rich pickings provided by the reserve's protected water supply.

In addition to its wonderful wetlands, Bharatpur encompasses areas of tall woodland and low semi-arid scrub. These habitats support a fascinating assemblage of birds. This includes the elusive Spotted Creeper, Yellow-crowned Woodpecker, Eurasian Wryneck, Dusky Eagle-Owl, Small Minivet, scarce Marshall's Iora, Orange-headed Thrush, and the scarce Brook's Leaf-Warbler, to mention a few. It is quite possible we will record well over 100 species of birds daily in the Bharatpur area.

During two full days, we hope to see Indian and Little cormorant, Sarus and Common crane, four species of egret, Purple Heron, Black Bittern, Painted and Black-necked stork, Black-headed and Red-naped ibis, Eurasian Spoonbill, Graylag and Bar-headed goose, Garganey, Red-crested and Common pochard, Ferruginous and Comb duck, Cotton Pygmy-goose, Shikra and Eurasian Sparrowhawk. Wintering raptors are a major feature of Bharatpur. It is possible to see Steppe, Eastern Imperial, Greater Spotted and the rare Indian Spotted eagle in a single day. Other likely raptors include Short-toed Eagle, Red-headed Vulture and Pallid Harrier. More secretive or elusive waterbirds we hope to locate include Painted Snipe, Brown Crake and White-tailed Lapwing. In the dry country we will look for Indian Courser, Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, Isabelline Shrike, and Variable and Desert wheatears. We can hope for sightings of such global rarities as Sociable Lapwing.

NIGHTS: The Baagh, Bharatpur

February 13-14, Days 18-19: Return to New Delhi; Evening Flights Home. Today we will enjoy a final morning birding in Bharatpur before driving back to New Delhi. Dinner will be provided along with the use of day rooms until 9:00 p.m. Late-night international departures will connect with your flight home the next day, February 14.

DAY ROOM (February 13): Radisson Blu Plaza, New Delhi

TOUR LIMIT: This tour is limited to 8 participants.

TOUR LEADER: Scott Baker with the assistance of a local guide



Scott Baker's interest in wildlife began early on while growing up in the leafy, outer eastern suburbs of Melbourne which, although a highly urbanized environment, retained significant tracts of remnant natural woodland. It was here at the age of 11 that he got his first pair of binoculars and began what was to become a lifetime quest to identify all the birds in an ever-expanding neighborhood. By the age of 15 he was running weekly bird walks and talks and became a founding member of the very successful Yarran Dheran Junior Field Naturalists Club. In 1988 he was named the Nunawading Young Citizen of the Year in recognition of his contribution to natural history and conservation. Pursuing mutual interests in life science and fine art, Scott went on to hold various roles in business, education, and environmental consultancy. This has

facilitated opportunities to explore the wild places and wildlife of Australia and beyond. In 30 plus years he has traveled extensively throughout the continent with a major focus on birds. He loves the rare and sometimes challenging, cryptic varieties but also shorebirds and seabirds, having spent many days at sea. To date he has recorded (and photographed) almost all of the regular and resident land birds and pelagic species likely in the country. Scott has a passion for wildlife, not just birds, and conducts studies and regular surveys for mammals, reptiles, and frogs. His fieldwork will often involve additional nocturnal spotlighting sessions, requiring late nights and early mornings to maximize the "tetrapod" options, when possible. Scott is a well-regarded member of the Australian birding community, a moderator on several birdwatching forums and rare bird committees, and, since 2017, has run birdwatching and nature tours within Australia and parts of southeast Asia. He currently resides in Victoria but frequently interstate or abroad.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for this tour is **\$10,475** per person in double occupancy and includes all meals beginning with breakfast on Day 3 to dinner on Day 18, accommodations as stated, ground transportation during the tour, internal India flights, and guide services provided by the tour leader. The tour fee does not include roundtrip airfare from your home to New Delhi, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, telephone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small party supplement may be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$1,525**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. A second deposit of \$3,000 is due 210 days prior to departure (July 1, 2024). If you would like 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 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 prior to the tour departure date (August 30, 2024).

CANCELLATION & REFUNDS:

Cancellation by Participant:

Refunds, if any, for any cancellation by a participant are made according to the following schedule: If participant cancels 210 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 209 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>
210 days or more before departure date	Participant’s deposit minus \$500*
209 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.

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**, 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; or click the **Ripcord** logo on our website (click Help and Trip Insurance); or call +1-415-481-0600. Pricing is based on age, trip cost, trip length, and level of coverage.

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

Coronavirus (COVID-19):

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/

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: When traveling on domestic flights within India, officially one piece of checked luggage weighing **no more than 33 pounds is allowed free of charge. In addition, you are allowed one piece of carry-on luggage up to 13 pounds** and whatever you carry over your arm or in your hands (i.e. coat, book, purse, umbrella etc.). In reality we generally find that airlines in India are fairly flexible; however, you should be prepared for some excess baggage charges if you exceed the baggage limits by more than five to six pounds. We feel it is better for you to incur this charge than to cut back your luggage so that you do not have enough clothing, etc. for the trip. On our previous tours, we had no problem with the number of pieces we checked or the weight of our total baggage. Nevertheless, imposition of such rules and regulations is idiosyncratic, and participants will be expected to pay any excess baggage fees charged.

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.

MEALS & ACCOMMODATIONS: We will stay in the best accommodations available. In many cases, we will be staying at some superb locations and very comfortable hotels such as in New Delhi, Kanha, Corbett National Park, Bharatpur and Agra. Accommodations at Dhikala Forest Rest House are spartan, but everyone has their own private basic bathroom facilities. Dhikala is located in the heart of the Corbett reserve and the opportunity to be serenaded by jackals or trumpeting elephants is surely well worth any slight inconvenience.

Much to the surprise of many, the food in India is outstanding and not just a plate of hot spices. In fact, on many of our tours, participants have felt that India's cuisine was one of the highlights of the tour. Excellent breads, tandoor cooked chicken, and a dazzling variety of vegetarian dishes can cater for any palate. Beef is generally not available at all due to religious reasons.

Providing one takes common sense measures such as not eating uncooked vegetables or unpeeled fruit or drinking unbottled water, participants on VENT trips rarely encounter any serious stomach disorders. Good bottled water is always available.

PHOTOGRAPHY: India is one of the most photogenic countries in the world. You could spend a day literally standing in one spot, and shooting in all directions. Furthermore, the wildlife is exceptionally tame. Add good lighting and a preponderance of open habitats, and you have a photographer's paradise. However, beware of dust, and bring spares of all those batteries you may need, in addition to lots of digital memory.

CLIMATE: At the time of our visit (January) and because of the wide geographical range that our tour covers, we will encounter a broad spectrum of temperatures from VERY cold and damp to warm, occasionally hot conditions with very bright sunshine. **This is typically the COLDEST time of year in north India and we have experienced some genuine cold snaps, so please bring lots of warm clothes. Bring along a minimum of four to five layers of clothing, which should include a jacket; wind-breaking soft-shell; warm fleece vest; long underwear; hat, gloves and a warm BUFF® or other neck gaiter!** In the mornings at all locations, it can be surprisingly cold riding in the back of open jeeps, especially with wind chill. Fog is also a feature of the mornings and that is why we have opted for a late afternoon flight from New Delhi to Raipur, to avoid fog delays. We are unlikely to experience significant rain on this tour.

CLOTHING: Casual is the order of the day. Hard wearing, easy-to-wash-and-dry field clothes are ideal. BUFF® brand head and neck wear offer fantastic cover from dust and will keep you warm in the cold mornings. Protection from the sun is essential; therefore, bring a good hat which protects head and neck. Sneakers or sports-type shoes

are appropriate as most of the time we will be birding from jeeps (in Kanha and Corbett), but decent boots may be beneficial in certain areas like The Den and Bharatpur, where we may have to walk along rocky roadsides.

In January we can experience cold weather, with temperatures often just below zero degrees Celsius (32°F) in the morning producing frost. Participants are recommended to bring several layers of warm clothes. Strong rain-proof jackets and pants are highly recommended. In addition, we also recommend bringing at least one or two warm sweaters and a jacket or down vest. **It can be very cold in the early mornings on jeep safaris, particularly due to the wind chill.** Other items that are recommended include a warm head covering such as a knit or fleece hat or balaclava, in addition to a regular birding hat, along with gloves and scarf or neck gaiter. Sunglasses are very useful (occasionally essential). Thick socks that absorb perspiration and cushion one's feet from hard surfaces are important. Blankets are typically provided by the lodges for early morning drives. The days typically warm up to be very pleasant.

Bring lightweight, long-sleeved shirts and pants in natural fabric, such as cotton, or cotton and man-made fiber mixes. These offer protection against the sun and insects (very few) while remaining comfortable, cool and easy to launder. Laundry service will be available at most of the places we will be staying.

SPECIAL NOTE: Please absolutely NO bright colors. Although the birds and other wildlife are relatively approachable, we will be trying to see a number of very elusive species. Muted colors are essential to enhance our chances. Please do not wear brightly colored clothes, hats, gloves, bags or other paraphernalia. Furthermore, if you can avoid crackling nylon/plastic jackets and pants, this will greatly enhance everyone's enjoyment of the trip and enable the leader to hear those critical but so easily overlooked subtle call-notes of the birds you want to see!

CURRENCY: Rupee (Rs); Currency can only be changed at banks or authorized money changers. Credit cards are accepted by the major hotels on this tour in New Delhi and Agra. Participants are advised to carry sufficient cash in US dollars. This can be changed into rupees at airports or major hotels. Automatic teller machines that are compatible with American banking systems are not readily available in India. Participants need to bring enough cash to cover alcoholic beverages, laundry and perhaps shopping expenses. Everything else is covered in the tour cost.

EQUIPMENT: Everyone should have a pair of binoculars that are in good condition. Your tour leader will be carrying a spotting scope; however, you are welcome to bring your own spotting scope if you so wish. You should bring sufficient camera equipment, spares, batteries and digital memory for the duration of the tour. (Most participants find that they require a great deal more digital memory space than they think they will before leaving home.) India is exceptionally photogenic with lots of good lighting and many opportunities for both cultural, scenic and wildlife photography, and it will likely be **almost impossible** to obtain additional digital memory once you arrive in New Delhi. UV and polarizing filters are recommended. A supply of strong plastic bags is very useful to protect equipment from rain and especially dust. A small day pack (either waterproofed or with a strong plastic bag inside) is essential for carrying excess clothing, camera equipment, toiletries, food and water. However, in many of the birding areas we will have regular access to our transport, which will be attended by a driver and his assistant. **Water bottles are important** if you like to carry a regular supply of water.

Other useful items include:

1. Flashlight or headlamp - we will be out at night on a few occasions when a small light is **essential**.
2. Handy wipes and paper tissues - these are especially useful and all participants should carry sufficient for their personal needs for the entire tour.
3. Spare glasses or contact lenses.
4. Sunscreen - Sunscreen lotion is strongly recommended, especially for higher elevations where the UV is much greater. A lip balm is also essential.

5. Umbrella - The collapsible type is easy to carry and useful both against rain and sun.

CONDITIONS: Within the national parks of India, all visitors must ride in park service jeeps. Since only three passengers are allowed in the jeep, on some outings you will not be with the VENT leader. The VENT leader will rotate to the extent possible, allowing him to spend an equal amount of time with each participant. The park service guide will know the mammals and a great majority of the birds, but may not be as knowledgeable as your VENT guide on some birding aspects. The VENT leader will let the park guides know what birds we may be searching for in particular so they can focus on certain desirable sightings. The birds you will see in the parks are widespread species that you should see during your time in the parks as well as elsewhere during the trip. Therefore, you will almost surely not miss any birds by virtue of being with local park staff during part of the time.

DOCUMENTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure date, with at least two blank pages for India visa stamp, is required for United States citizens to enter India.

A tourist visa is required for entry into India and must be obtained prior to departure. The visa can be obtained online through the Indian government's website (indianvisaonline.gov.in) or Travel Document Systems (<https://www.traveldocs.com/>) on the web; or a company which handles visa procurement. Non-United States citizens should check with your local Indian consulate embassy for instructions.

HEALTH: Participants are advised **NOT** to drink the tap water. Bottled water will be available at **all times** throughout the tour. Participants should not eat uncooked foods such as meat or vegetables or food that has cooled and/or been sitting in the open. Unpeeled fruit is fine; provided you wash the exterior thoroughly first in clean water.

Cholera and yellow fever inoculations are required only if you arrive within five days of departing from an infected area. Malaria is highly unlikely, but a slight possibility. Participants may wish to protect themselves with prophylactics. These should be taken as prescribed by your doctor. A number of forms of hepatitis may be present and participants are recommended to contact their doctor for advice prior to departure.

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.

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. Please visit the Coronavirus Travel Update page of our website <https://ventbird.com/covid-19> for our official statement regarding COVID-19 and the operation of our tours. 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>

Insect Repellents – There are insect repellents for the skin and an insect repellent used to treat clothing that should not be applied to the skin.

Insect repellents for the skin are commonly available in three forms:

- DEET (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide): A chemical compound that is marketed under various brand names (OFF!®, Cutter™, Ultrathon™, etc.) and offered in a variety of formulations including sprays, lotions, time-release preparations, and disposable wipes. The formulations will state a percentage of the active ingredient DEET on the packaging. DEET may be applied to exposed skin directly and/or sprayed on clothing. Please be careful when applying DEET as it can damage plastics and lens coatings.
- Picaridin: A synthetic formulation that is derived from piperine, a substance found in plants that produce black pepper.
- Herbal insect repellents: Various mixtures of organic ingredients such as oils from eucalyptus, citronella, cedar, and other herbs. The herbal repellents are more difficult to categorize because of the difference in ingredients from one brand to another. There is considerable variation in their effectiveness.

An insect repellent for clothing is marketed in one approved formulation:

- Permanone® (Permethrin) is an odorless spray-on repellent that may be used for **pre-treatment** of clothing, gear, and tents. It should not be used directly on the skin or sprayed on clothing while it is being worn. The pre-treatment process requires a number of hours to complete and must be done outdoors, so is best completed in advance of travel. Do-it-yourself pre-treatment has to be repeated more often than commercial treatment using Insect Shield® technology. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online.
- Insect Shield® apparel: Clothing pre-treated with Permanone is made by a variety of manufacturers. It is available for purchase from some sporting goods suppliers. The clothing is advertised as retaining its repellency for up to 70 washings.

The US EPA offers a search tool to help choose a repellent that is best for a particular situation. For example, some repellents work for mosquitoes, but not for ticks.

<https://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/which-insect-repellent-right-you>

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line (800) CDC-INFO (800-232-4636). You can check the CDC website at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel>. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html> (click on Travel Health).

SHOPPING: India has some very fine handicrafts, including spectacular rugs and carpets from Kashmir, metal cast statues and inlaid marble from Agra, that have to be seen to be believed.

MISCELLANEOUS:

Electricity – India uses 220 volts, 50 cycles, AC. Electricity supplies can be erratic in remote areas or not capable of supporting high wattage items like hair dryers. A flashlight or headlamp with a good supply of batteries will be essential. Do not rely on an electric razor, or always having electricity available for charging your batteries. Please bring all of the power adaptors as sometimes you may find two or even three styles in one room!

Internet – Wi-Fi is available at Radisson Blu Plaza New Delhi and Tajview Agra, and in the reception area of all other lodgings, with the exception of Dhikala Forest Rest House (Days 10-12).

Language – The national language of India is Hindi.

Time – 10½ hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time

SUGGESTED READING: A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend

www.amazon.com 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.

Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C. and T. Inskipp. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. Christopher Helm Identification Guide Series, 2012. This will cover all of the birds we are likely to encounter. ISBN: 9781408127636 *All participants are recommended to obtain a copy of this guide or Rasmussen and Anderton (2005; see below) as they greatly supersede all previous guides we have advocated for tours to the Indian subcontinent.*

Arlott, N. *Collins Field Guide Birds of India*. HarperCollins Publisher, 2015

Daniel, J.C. *The Book of Indian Reptiles*. Bombay Natural History Society, 1983.

Gurung, K.K. and Singh, Raj. *Mammals of the Indian Subcontinent and Where to Watch Them*. Oxford: Bishop's Printers Ltd., 1996.

Insight Guides. *Indian Wildlife*. Apa Productions, 2007.

Kazmierczak, Krysz and Singh, Raj. *A Birdwatchers' Guide to India*. Bedfordshire, United Kingdom: Prion Ltd., 1998. This book describes a cross-section of birding sites covering all of India's regions and main habitats—a wonderful and very informative book co-authored by Raj Singh, owner of the company that handles our ground operations in India, Assam and Bhutan. He also co-authored *Mammals of the Indian Subcontinent and Where to Watch Them*.

McNeely, J.A. & Wachtel, P.S. *Soul of the Tiger*. New York: Doubleday, 1988. One of the most intriguing and beautifully written books on the complex relationships between man, his myriad beliefs and nature, and the implications for conservation.

Menon, V. *A Field Guide to Indian Mammals* Helm Field Series 2009

Prater, S.H. *The Book of Indian Animals*. Bombay Natural History Society, 1971. An excellent mammal book with color plates and black and white photographs.

Rasmussen, P.C. & Anderton, J.C. *Birds of South Asia: The Ripley Guide*. Vols. 1 & 2 Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions, Washington, D.C. and Barcelona, 2005. The new standard field guide to birds of India and neighboring countries with a complete taxonomic reappraisal of the birds in this region. Highly recommended although Vol. 2 is not necessary to be carried in the field.

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 May 2, 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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