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

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.

“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”

India: TIGERS, TAJ & BIRDS GALORE

FEBRUARY 4-22, 2020
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India: Tigers, Taj, & Birds Galore, Page 2

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.

**February 4, 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 February 5.

**NIGHT: Aboard aircraft in transit to New Delhi**

**February 5, Day 2: Arrive in New Delhi.** Upon arriving at New Delhi’s Indira Ghandi International Airport (airport code DEL), you will be met by a representative of our ground agent and transferred to our comfortable hotel.
February 6, Day 3: Qutab Minar; Fly to Raipur. Few large cities can equal New Delhi in the number, variety and tameness of its birds. During the Palaearctic 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 newly created 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.

February 7-9, 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 2018 tour with the VENT group in the background © M. Valkenburg
India: Tigers, Taj, & Birds Galore, Page 4


NIGHTS: The Baagh Resort, Kanha

February 10, 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 11, 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.

Our travel today takes us across the vast Gangetic Plain, the very core of Hindu India and the most populous part of this nation’s 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 Dikhala Forest Rest House located deep within the heart of the reserve.

NIGHT: The Den, Corbett

February 12, 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 being 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—is 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 13-15, 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.

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...
India: Tigers, Taj, & Birds Galore, Page 6

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 16, 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, we will look for birds in the beautiful gardens.

NIGHT: The Fort, Unchagaon

February 17, 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 18, 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.
NIGHT: The Baagh, Bharatpur

**February 19-20, 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 Palearctic 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.
India: Tigers, Taj, & Birds Galore, Page 8

NIGHTS: The Baagh, Bharatpur

February 21-22, 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 22).

DAY ROOM (February 21): Radisson Blu Plaza, New Delhi

TOUR LIMIT: This tour is limited to 8 participants.

TOUR LEADER: Machiel Valkenburg with the assistance of a local guide

Machiel Valkenburg was born in 1982 in a southern province in the Netherlands where, encouraged by his parents, he began birding at an early age. During his teens he studied landscape ecology and began performing bird surveys with the Dutch Centre for Field Ornithology. During this period he started traveling outside of Holland, first to Greece, Hungary, Romania, Scotland, and Morocco. Later, his birding travels took him extensively outside of Europe into Western Africa and further east to Russia and Kazakhstan. The nature and birds of Central Asia fascinated him so much that he stayed, resulting in the founding of his own bird tour company, Rubythroat Birding Tours. He lived in Kazakhstan for over 10 years, but moved back to Europe several years ago with his wife, Bonny. They now reside in Valencia on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. From Central Asia he ventured further, with Southeast Asia and India becoming favorite destinations. Machiel has developed an expertise in the natural history of Asia. Along with birds, a good part of his attention is also given to butterflies, dragonflies, and mammals. Machiel speaks four languages, has good people and logistical skills, and is a natural-born bird guide. He loves to explore new destinations and show birds to his fellow birders. He has a keen eye and an excellent ear for bird sounds. Machiel is noted for his calm and respectful social approach, providing a good atmosphere during time in the field.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for this tour is $8,995 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 $1,500. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and one cannot be provided for you.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is $1,000 per person. If you would like to pay your deposit using a credit card, the deposit must be made with MasterCard, Visa, or American Express 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 www.ventbird.com) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

PAYMENTS: All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard, Visa, American Express), 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 (September 7, 2019) prior to the tour departure date.
CANCELLATION & REFUNDS: Refunds are made according to the following schedule: If cancellation is made 180 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of $500 per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be $100 per person. If cancellation is made between 179 and 151 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the 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 your protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.

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

Upon cancellation of the transportation or travel services, where you, the customer, are not at fault and have not cancelled in violation of the terms and conditions of any of the contract for transportation or travel services, all sums paid to VENT for services not received by you will be promptly refunded by VENT to you unless you otherwise advise VENT in writing.

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 Resolutions as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance™. Designed for all types of travelers, Ripcord is among the most highly regarded travel insurance programs available.

Critical benefits of Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance include a completely integrated program with a single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims; medical evacuation and rescue services from your point of injury or illness to your hospital of choice; comprehensive travel insurance for trip cancellation/interruption, primary medical expense coverage, and much more. Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available but must be purchased within 14 days of tour deposit. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as security evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or other security events, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause (must be purchased within 14 days of tour deposit). Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.

For a price quote, or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: ripcordrescuetravelinsurance.com/ventbird; or click the Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance™ 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.

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. Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be responsible for any air ticket penalties.

**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, Raipur, 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 (February) 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 February 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!

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 valid passport with at least one blank page for entry stamp is required for United States citizens to enter India. We recommend that your passport be valid for at least 6 months beyond your planned departure from
India. Visitors are required for entry into India and must be obtained prior to departure. E-visa is available through the Indian Visa Online: [https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/](https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/)

For further information, you may wish to contact the India consulate nearest you or Pinnacle Travel Document Systems ([www.traveldocs.com](http://www.traveldocs.com) on the web or 888-838-4867 by phone), a company which handles visa procurement. Non-U.S. citizens should check with their 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.

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

As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against hepatitis types A and B.

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 (232-4636). You can check the CDC website at [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel). Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html) (click on travel health).

**LUGGAGE:** 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 5-6 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.

**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.

**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.

**MISC:** 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!

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](http://www.amazon.com) which has a wide selection; [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com) and [www.nhbs.com](http://www.nhbs.com) which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

**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.*


**Kazmierczak, Krys 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.*


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

**RESPONSIBILITY:** Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make
any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. When this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on May 9, 2019, and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.