



VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

ITINERARY

THE LESSER ANTILLES ABOARD THE *SEA CLOUD* FEBRUARY 15–23, 2025

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Sea Cloud © Sea Cloud Cruises

"Small is beautiful" is a common saying in the West Indies, and nowhere is this more apt than in the string of pearls known as the Lesser Antilles. On this special voyage we will discover just how beautiful small is by visiting the six major islands that form the Caribbean Sea's eastern boundary: Barbados,



Dominica, Guadeloupe, Martinique, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent. Seeking the region's specialty birds is a dominant theme, but plenty of beautiful island scenery, wonderful botany and geology, and fascinating history are equally compelling attractions. Best of all, we have chartered the peerless Sea Cloud, a four-masted barque widely regarded as the world's most beautiful sailing vessel. We will spend our days exploring the forests and coastlines of each of these lovely islands while experiencing the Caribbean Sea—one of the world's most famous bodies of water—under the towering masts and spreading sails of the Sea Cloud.

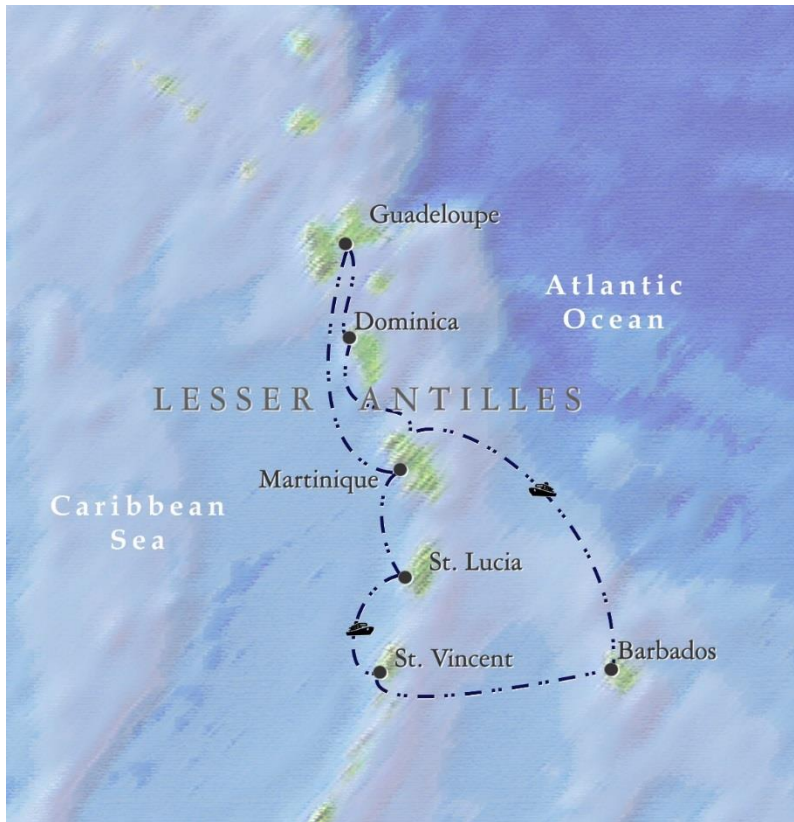
The Lesser Antilles offer a fascinating study in evolution and biogeography, the stepping-stone process by which various organisms have colonized each island and developed into unique forms. These isolated islands are tiny, mere specks of land rising out of some of the deepest waters on Earth. Mostly volcanic in origin, they are dominated by towering peaks and serrated ridges, heavily forested interiors, and rugged coastlines. Scenically, they are among the most beautiful places in the world.



Purple-throated Carib © Steve Gast

Each island is subtly different from the others, and all of them contain birds found nowhere else, in addition to an array of special plants, reptiles and amphibians, and insects. Leading the list of the region's avian riches is an especially remarkable group of scarce and endangered parrots that includes the St. Vincent, St. Lucia, Red-necked, and Imperial parrots; and a dazzling assortment of hummingbirds, headlined by two species of caribs, the glittery Blue-headed Hummingbird, and the

diminutive Antillean-crested Hummingbird. Many other exciting birds occur here as well, some of which represent widespread families while others signal bird groups not found outside the Caribbean. Each island is limited in its overall diversity of birds, but collectively they offer a wonderfully diverse list of hawks, woodpeckers, thrushes, thrashers, tremblers, warblers, tanagers, orioles, and finches.



Our cruise route begins and ends in Barbados. Island-hopping our way first to the north, then back south, our travels will take us to one veritable paradise after another. Our excursions will visit the forest sanctuaries where the specialty birds persist, and at each site we'll travel with a local guide whose intimate knowledge of the islands' natural history will result in greater success in our bird finding endeavors and greater understanding of our natural surroundings.

A sample of the many alluring birds we'll seek includes Blue-headed Hummingbird, Brown Trembler, Lesser Antillean Flycatcher, Rufous-throated Solitaire, and Plumbeous Warbler on Dominica; Bridled Quail-Dove, Guadeloupe Woodpecker, and Forest Thrush on Guadeloupe;

Martinique Oriole and White-breasted Thrasher on Martinique; Gray Trembler, St. Lucia Warbler, St. Lucia Oriole, and St. Lucia Black-Finch on St. Lucia; and Whistling Warbler, Lesser Antillean Tanager, and Lesser Antillean Swift on St. Vincent.

Complementing the outstanding birding is the supreme natural beauty of the islands. Among the highlights are the luxuriant cloud forests of Dominica, the gorgeous coastline of Martinique, and the iconic Pitons of St. Lucia. Additionally, the program includes options for joining shore excursions that emphasize the islands' historical, cultural, and sightseeing attributes—ideal for those who travel with a non-birding spouse or companion.

Adding to the allure is the opportunity to travel aboard Sea Cloud. Ornate in her construction, resplendent under sail, and owner of a vivid history, this majestic ship sets a standard by which all other ships are measured. All cabins are immaculately appointed and contain private facilities. Public areas include a lounge, viewing deck, lido deck, and bar. High quality cuisine is served in an elegant dining room.



Sea Cloud Dining Room © Sea Cloud Cruises

Joining VENT leaders Barry Lyon, David Ascanio, and Barry Zimmer for this special departure are Larry Wolff, the Silver Professor of European History at New York University and Director of the NYU Center for European and Mediterranean Studies; and Peter Zika, a superb field biologist and botanist at the herbarium of the University of Washington.

Finally, this departure offers what we think is the finest means to experience a comprehensive trip to the Eastern Caribbean. Unlike land-based itineraries that require numerous hotel changes and unreliable inter-island flights, our ship-based program eliminates accommodation changes while providing comfort and ease throughout our travels. Welcome aboard!

February 15, Day 1: Departure to Bridgetown, Barbados; arrival and evening welcome. Participants should arrive in Bridgetown, Barbados (airport code BGI) at any time today. After clearing customs and immigration, you will be met outside the baggage claim by a representative of our ground agent and transferred to the **Courtyard by Marriott** hotel where a room is reserved in your name. After check-in you will have the remainder of the day on your own. We will gather as a group in a meeting area of the hotel at 6:00 p.m. for a trip welcome and the chance to meet our fellow travelers and trip leaders, followed by dinner.

NIGHT: Courtyard by Marriott, Bridgetown

February 16, Day 2: Birding and sightseeing on Barbados; embark *Sea Cloud*. As we will not embark the *Sea Cloud* until later this afternoon, we will have much of the day today for birding and sightseeing. Lunch will be at a scenic location along the rugged Atlantic Coast, followed by a visit to one of the island's historic plantation houses.

Highlights:

- **Birding: Morning excursion to a series of wetlands for shorebirds, Barbados Bullfinch, and other birds.**
- **History, culture, and sightseeing option: Morning excursion to the Andromeda Botanic Gardens.**

Island overview:

Ninety miles east of St. Vincent, the island of Barbados rises from the Atlantic Ocean as an ancient coralline uplift. Easternmost of the Lesser Antilles, Barbados is an independent country (since 1966) that seems worlds apart from its more recently independent brethren. A flourishing tourism industry works in concert with healthy banking, commerce, and agricultural sectors to provide Barbadians with a high standard of living. Barbados contains some of the Caribbean's finest beaches in addition to important wetland ecosystems. Of the 275,000 people inhabiting Barbados, 80,000 live in the capital, Bridgetown.

Morning activities:

As our trip gets underway, participants may choose from two activity options: a morning of birding at a series of wetland locations, or a visit to the Andromeda Botanic Gardens. Those opting to go birding will depart the hotel at 8:00 a.m. while those visiting the botanic garden will depart at 8:30 a.m. Both groups will rendezvous for lunch.

Option #1: Birding (8:00 a.m.–noon)

We will make a point of observing the island's only endemic bird, the Barbados Bullfinch, while visiting a mixed habitat site for waterfowl, waders and landbirds. The most likely destination is Walkers Reserve, a flourishing eco-tourism destination located on the island's upper east coast. Formerly Walkers Quarry, the reserve originated as a sand extraction mine that, once exhausted, would likely end up as a landfill. Thanks to the efforts of Walkers Institute for Regenerative Research, Education, and Design (WIRRED), a large portion of the 277-acre property has been rehabilitated into a nature reserve through the process of "Regenerative Agriculture." In brief, regenerative agriculture restores native habitats, but with a special focus on increasing climate resilience and food security. With two lakes, coastal dune forests, orchards, mangroves and more, Walkers Reserve is a conservation success story and a place of productive birding.

The bullfinch, a common and widespread bird, should be easy to find, along with the endemic island race of Carib Grackle, a candidate for full species status. Other resident species that we might see are Antillean Crested Hummingbird (island subspecies), Green-throated Carib, Scaly-naped Pigeon, Zenaida Dove, Common Ground-Dove, Gray Kingbird, Yellow Warbler (resident island subspecies), Bananaquit, Shiny Cowbird, and Black-faced Grassquit. Among the waterbird and wading bird possibilities are Blue-winged Teal, Great Blue Heron, and Snowy and Little egrets. Barbados is the only site in the Western Hemisphere that hosts a breeding population of Little Egrets.



Barbados Bullfinch © David Ascanio

Option #2: History, culture and sightseeing (8:30–noon) We will travel to the east coast of the island this morning for a visit to the beautiful Andromeda Botanic Garden, one of the pre-eminent botanical gardens in the Caribbean and a Partner Garden of the Royal Horticultural Society.

Created by native Barbadian Iris Bannochie in 1954 as both a pleasure garden and a botanic garden, Andromeda Botanic Garden is the essence of horticulture as an artform. Within the property's six acres is a network of paths that takes the visitor past plantings of tropical trees, plants, shrubs, and flowers. Beyond the pure beauty of the place, Andromeda is renowned for its sustainable practices. Industrial pesticides and fertilizers are avoided in favor of organic cultivation methods, and the 600 species of plants that form the collection are used for conservation and education purposes, in addition to display.

Both groups will convene for lunch at a lovely hotel with ocean views. Afterward we will spend some time sightseeing before heading to the seaport. Barbados was the initial site of the Caribbean's first sugar plantations, whose establishment in the 1600s proved transformational for the economies of western Europe and that heralded a period of extravagant wealth generation and equally extravagant brutality and decadence. Our itinerary includes a visit to one of the historic plantation houses for a guided tour.

In the late afternoon we will end up at the port in Bridgetown in time to embark the *Sea Cloud*. Once aboard, we will spend time settling into our cabins, attend mandatory orientation and safety drills, and explore the ship. We will depart the harbor around 6:00 p.m. and enter the sea on a northwest routing.

NIGHT: Aboard *Sea Cloud*

February 17, Day 3: At sea. Today will be spent at sea, sailing northwestward through the warm, deep-blue Caribbean, and getting acquainted with our special home for the week. There is a long history of sailing in these waters, from the earliest Arawak settlers paddling canoes northward from South America to the repeated struggles among the Spanish, French, British, and Dutch for control of the islands, and to the days of the buccaneers and rum-runners. Few, however, have sailed these waters in such style as the *Sea Cloud* offers!

Over the course of the day, we'll offer a variety of activities suitable for a day at sea. You may wish to take in a lecture from Peter or Larry, or perhaps join your leaders on deck for periods of sea watching. And always of great interest, the captain will offer a sailing presentation in which he demonstrates the complex operations of *Sea Cloud*'s many sails. Or you may simply wish to relax with a good book on the Spanker Deck.

For the birders and wildlife enthusiasts among us, we may be fortunate to spot some of the marine mammals that frequent the Caribbean. Sperm Whales are resident; Atlantic Spinner Dolphins are sometimes seen in large herds; and Humpback Whales have migrated into the region at this season. Flying fish are a frequent sight as well and can deceive the unwary traveler into thinking they are birds! Seabirds, on the other hand, are more irregular in appearance and reflect the fact that food resources are more scattered and limited in these warm tropical waters. Among the birds that we will likely encounter during our time at sea are Brown and Red-footed boobies, Red-billed and White-tailed tropicbirds, Magnificent Frigatebird, Laughing Gull, and Royal Tern. Less likely, but certainly possible, are Masked Booby, Audubon's Shearwater, Pomarine and Parasitic jaegers, and Brown Noddy.



Masked Booby © David Ascanio

We'll cruise through the night as we make our way toward our first destination: the island of Dominica.

NIGHT: Aboard *Sea Cloud*

February 18, Day 4: Dominica: Syndicate Estate; optional sightseeing at Fort Shirley and north end.

Highlights:

- **Birding: Morning and afternoon excursions to Syndicate Estate.**
- **History, culture, and sightseeing option: Morning excursion to Syndicate Estate; afternoon trip to Fort Shirley and sightseeing on island's north end.**

Island overview:

Dominica proudly bills itself as the "Nature Island," a nickname richly deserved. This is the least-populous of the Lesser Antilles, and the pace of life here is decidedly more relaxed. The people are friendly and there is extensive forest remaining, and, almost alone among the West Indies, the island has been spared from the ravages of the introduced mongoose. Dominica is the most mountainous island of the Lesser Antilles and also the wettest island in the Caribbean, with an annual rainfall of around 300 inches. The landscape is so rugged—with misty peaks over 4,500 feet—the island has its own microclimate. Its caves, sparkling rivers, and black beaches are surrounded by a rainforest of 100-foot trees, wild orchids, and ferns. The dramatic elevation differences provide three different and unique forest environments. Our moorage here is at scenic and historic Cabrits, on the dry northwestern point of the island, within sight of Morne Diablotin, a huge volcanic peak that dominates the entire northern half of Dominica.

Morning activities:

Our destination for the morning is Syndicate Estate, an important middle elevation forest preserve boasting virgin tropical forest and panoramic vistas. From Cabrits it is less than an hour up to Syndicate Estate; to make the most of our available time, birders will depart at 6:30 a.m. while a later departure for those whose interests are more general, will leave at 8:00 a.m.

Option #1: Birding (Depart 6:30 a.m.; Return 12:30 p.m.):

At just under 2,000 feet elevation, the climate at Syndicate Estate is pleasant and the volcanic soils are fertile. Much of this mid-elevation forest has been converted to banana, citrus and dasheen (a root crop also known as taro) plantations. They are not unattractive, and many of the native birds and butterflies survive quite well amidst the hodgepodge of planted crops and strips of native vegetation. Loss of habitat, however, has been one of the major problems for Dominica's two spectacular endemic birds, the Red-necked and Imperial parrots. Both are in the genus *Amazona*, and both were seriously reduced in numbers before widespread publicity and strong conservation efforts halted their decline.

Nowadays the Red-necked Parrot population is healthy and expanding, and they seem able to survive quite well in partially-cleared terrain. We should get good looks at this special bird. On the other hand, seeing the spectacular Imperial Parrot usually requires much more effort. The wild population of this bird reached a nadir of perhaps as few as 50 birds before the situation was stabilized through the cessation of hunting and forest clearance for agriculture. Now, after prolonged efforts to save the species, it may number as many as 300 individuals. They prefer forest at a slightly higher elevation than the Red-necked (though both overlap in this area) and are restricted to the northern and western ridges of Morne Diablotin, using the taller forest just below the elfin forest on the ridges of the volcano. Unlike most parrots of the genus *Amazona*, the Imperial Parrot is an inconspicuous bird that does not often leave the cover of the forest canopy, nor does it engage in long commuter flights between feeding and roosting areas. Instead, pairs or small family groups move about unobtrusively inside the canopy, seeking out the *gommier* trees as an especially important food item.



Blue-headed Hummingbird © David Ascanio



Brown Trembler © David Ascanio

Solitaire, Brown Trembler, Scaly-breasted and Pearly-eyed thrashers, Plumbeous Warbler (shared only with Guadeloupe), Antillean Euphonia, and Black-faced Grassquit. Resident Broad-winged Hawks and Lesser Antillean Swifts are common and may be spotted overhead.

We will walk a well-marked forest trail that has various lookouts where we have at least a chance of seeing or hearing Imperial Parrots. One area is the Syndicate Nature Trail, which enters a flat area of tall and open rainforest along the rim of the wild Picard River Gorge. Other vantage points are at the plantation/forest ecotone (edge). This habitat is one of the “birdiest” places we will visit on our trip. Among the other special birds that we may see here are a splendid variety of hummingbirds, including Purple-throated Carib, Antillean-crested Hummingbird, and the rare Blue-headed Hummingbird. We may also spot Lesser Antillean Flycatcher, House Wren (an odd-looking endemic race), Red-legged Thrush (at its only outpost in the Lesser Antilles), Forest Thrush (very difficult), Rufous-throated

Option #2: History, culture, and sightseeing option (Depart 8:00 a.m.; Return 12:30 p.m.):

We will travel to the Syndicate Estate to experience the beauty of the Caribbean's most accessible cloud forest. We will walk the well-marked Syndicate Nature Trail (about a mile in length), which enters a flat area of tall and open rainforest along the rim of the wild Picard River Gorge. We will be accompanied by a local guide who will provide interpretation of the natural history of the surrounding forest. The opportunity to meander among giant *gommier* and *clusia* trees, observe the delicate flora of the forest understory, and photograph the exquisitely sculptured root structures of the ancient trees around us are highlights. Although birding will not be an overriding objective, we do have chances to see wild Red-necked Parrots while the unseen voices of understory birds provide an ethereal quality to the cathedral-like atmosphere in which we walk.

Afternoon activities:

Option #1: Birding (Depart 2:00 p.m.; Return 5:30 p.m.):

After lunch, birders will return to Syndicate Estate for the duration of the afternoon. Finding the Imperial Parrot and other key island birds often takes most of the day, and a return visit increases our chances for success.

Option #2: History, culture, and sightseeing option (Depart 2:30 p.m.; Return 5:30 p.m.):

For this group, we'll offer a walking tour of historic Fort Shirley which sits adjacent to the harbor, followed by a sightseeing tour of the north end of the island.

Our excursion will begin at Fort Shirley, an impressive brick and stone fortification offering spectacular views of Cabrits, Prince Rupert Bay, and the royal-blue Caribbean Sea beyond. Fort Shirley was constructed as a headquarters for the British military garrison in the 1770s at a time when Britain vied with France for control of the West Indies. Owing to significant restoration efforts, the fort is today recognized as Dominica's most important historical site. We'll spend time inside the fort exploring the parade grounds and a variety of significant buildings and structures including troop barracks, officer's quarters, kitchens and mess, guardroom, powder magazines, and cannon emplacements.



Antillean-crested Hummingbird © David Ascanio

Later, we'll continue to the north end of the island where we'll have more opportunities to take in Dominica's tremendous natural beauty, including its gorgeous coastline and several geothermal features. In particular, we hope to visit "Cold Soufrière," a bubbling geothermal pool located in a shallow crater amid the foothills of Morne Aux Diabes.

All groups will be back onboard *Sea Cloud* in the late afternoon in preparation for a night at sea cruising north toward the island of Guadeloupe.

NIGHT: Aboard *Sea Cloud*

February 19, Day 5: Guadeloupe: Guadeloupe National Park or sightseeing excursion.

Highlights:

- **Birding:** Visit the lush rainforest of Guadeloupe National Park, and, time permitting, the Gardens of Valombreuse.

- **History, culture, and sightseeing option: Guided tour of Pointe-à-Pitre and Fort Fleur d'épée; visit the Musée des Beaux Arts in Saint-François.**

Island overview:

Guadeloupe is really two islands arrayed in the shape of a butterfly, connected by a bridge over a narrow strait. The eastern island, or Grand-Terre, is the flattest island in the Lesser Antilles and is heavily-settled and developed for agriculture, especially sugarcane. The western wing of the butterfly, Basse-Terre, is rugged, forested, and mountainous, and dominated by the Soufrière Volcano. Soufrière erupted early in the twentieth century with sudden force, causing widespread death and destruction and a major relocation of many inhabitants to Grand-Terre. Most of the southern half of Basse-Terre has been designated a national park. It is the largest remaining wilderness area in the Lesser Antilles, with far more lowland rainforest than any of the other islands. Guadeloupe is not an independent country but rather an “overseas region” of France (France is made up of 18 regions, of which 5 are considered overseas regions).

Morning activities:

We will arrive in the port of Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe very early this morning. *Sea Cloud* will be docked here for half the day, during which time we'll operate birding and non-birding excursions.

Option #1: Birding (Depart 5:30 a.m.; Return 12:30 p.m.):

A pre-dawn arrival at Pointe-à-Pitre allows for an early disembarkation of the ship, and as we have only half a day on the island, we'll want to be out early to maximize our time in the field. From the port we'll drive west by southwest along the coast toward Guadeloupe National Park. As day breaks, our first views of the island will likely be a vast band of verdant green forest covering the slopes of Soufrière as far as the eye can see. Soon the road abruptly enters the lowland rainforest, taking us right into the habitat for Guadeloupe's only endemic bird, the Guadeloupe Woodpecker. This attractive species somewhat resembles the dark Lewis's Woodpecker of western North America, except that it prefers the midstory and canopy of dense forest. Hurricane damage to the trees from past storms is evident in this part of the forest, and the tops of many trees have been twisted off or snapped, leaving plenty of dead branches and snags for the woodpecker.

We will check several places along the highway where we've seen the woodpecker in the past, including a delightful park-like opening in the forest that lies adjacent to a sparkling stream. Across the road, meanwhile, a short trail dead-ends at a highly photogenic cascade. Many of the birds we'll see this morning are widespread in the Caribbean, such as Gray Kingbird, Black-whiskered Vireo, Bananaquit, and Lesser Antillean Bullfinch, while others are more local in distribution including Purple-throated Carib, Scaled and Pearly-eyed thrashers, Brown Trembler, Plumbeous Warbler, and Lesser Antillean Saltator. Of extra special interest, the elusive Bridled Quail-Dove and shy Forest Thrush occur here as well, and we will place ourselves in an excellent location to look for both species!



Guadeloupe Woodpecker © David Ascanio

We will spend the remainder of the morning at the beautiful Gardens of Valombreuse. Located about 30 minutes from the national park, this super-attractive botanical garden is home to hundreds of native and imported trees, plants, bushes, and shrubs. Tranquility is the theme here as paths take the visitor past the gardens' multitudes of plantings

and water features. Both Purple-throated and Green-throated carib hummingbird species occur here and are often seen darting from one flower to another.

Option #2: History, culture, and sightseeing option (Depart 8:30 a.m.; Return 12:30 p.m.):

A historical and sightseeing excursion includes two outstanding activities, a visit to the highly regarded Memorial ACTe (slavery museum) followed by a visit to the Gardens of Valombreuse.

- Located on the site of a former sugar factory, the Memorial ACTe is a cultural center dedicated to the memory and history of the slave trade, particularly in Guadeloupe. A component of UNESCO's Slave Route Project, a primary function of the complex is memorial and museum to the legacy of slavery. This museum is often touted as a premier cultural attraction in the Caribbean. The museum is closed on Monday, and our cruise route in most years involves a visit to Guadeloupe on a Monday. Our visit this year will occur on a Wednesday!
- We will spend the remainder of the morning at the beautiful Gardens of Valombreuse. Located about 30 minutes from the museum, this super-attractive botanical garden is home to hundreds of native and imported trees, plants, bushes, and shrubs. Tranquillity is the theme here as paths take the visitor past the gardens' multitudes of plantings and water features.

Both groups will be back on-board *Sea Cloud* in time for lunch, with the remainder of the day spent at sea cruising south toward the island of Martinique. This will be a leisurely time on the ship when we'll have the choice of relaxing in our cabins, sitting in the sun on the Spanker Deck, or perhaps reading a book in the shade of the Lido Deck. Later in the day, participants may attend a presentation by Peter or Larry on the human history or natural history of the region.



The Coast of Martinique © David Ascanio

NIGHT: Aboard *Sea Cloud*

February 20, Day 6: Martinique: Caravelle Peninsula; Fort-de-France.

Highlights:

- **Birding: Half-day trip to the Caravelle Peninsula and the Chateau Dubuc.**
- **History, culture, and sightseeing option: Guided tour of Fort-de-France; Balata Gardens.**

Island overview:

Like Guadeloupe, Martinique is an overseas region of France and shares the same economic and political structures as the mother country. As with the other islands of the region, Martinique possesses high volcanic peaks that dominate the island's landscape, but in contrast to the other islands, Martinique's geography is also composed of

many square miles of flat lowlands, which are ideal for a healthy agricultural sector. Indeed, Martinique is home to vast sugar cane plantations and other crops. A high percentage of Caribbean rum is produced here, much of which is consumed in Europe.

Along with its ties to mainland France comes a much more urbanized and industrial approach to island development. Modern buildings and highways create a sense of culture shock in direct comparison to the laid-back atmospheres of Dominica, St. Lucia and St. Vincent.

Morning activities:

This morning, we will disembark the ship at Fort-de-France, capital of Martinique, in advance of birding and non-birding shore excursions. Those with an interest in birding will travel across the island for a half day of birding on the Caravelle Peninsula, while those who prefer sightseeing and historical activities will visit the nearby Balata Gardens and then tour Fort-de-France.

Option #1: Birding (Depart 6:30 a.m.; Return 1:00 p.m.):

The Caravelle Peninsula is among Martinique's greatest natural attractions, featuring a spectacular coastline and a national park that preserves the last of the island's unique dry forest. A ragged tongue of land that juts six miles out into the Atlantic Ocean on the windward (eastern) side of the island, the peninsula is covered in dry forest growing on low ridges and surrounded by gleaming turquoise-colored bays. Our time here provides our best and only chance to experience the natural history of this drier environment, in the vicinity of the ruins of historic Chateau Dubuc.

The small national park here is home to two of the most endangered songbirds of the West Indies, the White-breasted Thrasher and the Martinique Oriole. The oriole is found nowhere else in the world and is a widely dispersed and reclusive species. The thrasher is shared only with St. Lucia, where it occurs in the nearly-inaccessible arid northeast and is so restricted in habitat on both islands that it may number no more than 80 pairs total, none of them securely protected in inviolate sanctuaries. Mongoose, rats, and feral cats, which have infested the dry scrub on both islands, may well be the cause of the precipitous decline of the thrasher. Though we cannot count on seeing either of these highly sought birds, we will have a full morning to maximize our chances. Other birds of the dry



White-breasted Thrasher © David Ascanio

forest here include Zenaida Dove, Mangrove Cuckoo, Green-throated Carib, Gray Kingbird, Black-whiskered Vireo, Spectacled Thrush, Lesser Antillean Saltator, Carib Grackle, and Lesser Antillean Bullfinch.

Option #2: History, culture, and sightseeing option (Depart 8:30; Return 1:00 p.m.):

For those who do not wish to visit the Caravelle Peninsula, our day will start with a visit to the Jardin de Balata (Balata Garden), a short distance north of the city. This attractive seven-acre botanical garden is famous for its displays and beds of begonias, anthuriums, orchids, bamboos, palms, and a marvelous canopy walkway.

Afterward, we'll offer a sightseeing and historic tour of Fort de France, visiting the following sites:

- Schoelcher (cast-iron) Library – Originally built for the 1889 World's Fair in Paris, the library was then disassembled, shipped to Martinique, and reassembled. Constructed of cast-iron, the structure features exquisite painting and ornamentation, cupola facade, and a library of over 130,000 books.
- St. Louis Cathedral – Dating from 1895, St. Louis Cathedral is a dramatic edifice featuring flying buttresses, a 187-foot tall steeple, and a unique iron frame.

- Théâtre Aimé Césaire – Essentially the national theatre of Martinique, boasting fine architecture inside and out.
- Statue of Josephine Bonaparte – Statue erected in honor of the wife of Napoleon Bonaparte. She was born on Martinique.

Both groups will return to the ship for lunch, followed by departure from Martinique. We'll spend another afternoon at sea cruising toward the island of St. Lucia. If conditions permit, the captain may choose to unfurl some of *Sea Cloud's* majestic sails. This is a rich tradition for any trip aboard this unique vessel and always a real crowd pleaser.

NIGHT: Aboard *Sea Cloud*

February 21, Day 7: St. Lucia: Quillesse Forest Reserve; Soufrière; sightseeing.

Highlights:

- **Birding: Morning and afternoon field trips.**
- **History, culture, and sightseeing option: Sightseeing tour of southwest corner of St. Lucia.**

Island overview:

With an especially rugged terrain, St. Lucia may well be the most beautiful of the Lesser Antilles. Steep canyons and mountain slopes rise dramatically right from the sea while lush plantations and forests thrive on the moist slopes. Towering perpendicular peaks dominate the island's heavily forested, mountainous interior.



Soufrière and the Pitons, St. Lucia © David Ascanio

Our anchorage for the day will be at Soufrière, a bustling coastal town that fronts a large bay on the southwestern coast of the island. Soufrière is an important center of human activity in southern St. Lucia as well as the home of the famous “Pitons.” Among the most recognizable landforms in the Caribbean, the Pitons are giant volcanic plugs, conical mountains of solid igneous rock that rise like sentinels along the bay's southern end. There are two pitons, Gros Piton and Petit Piton, both of which tower over 2,500 feet above the sea.

Our travels on the island will be limited to the southern half, where the largest remaining tracts of the island's rainforests are found in addition to some of its most interesting natural attractions. Unlike the north end of the island, where annual rainfall is about 50 inches, the south receives up to 150 inches. While this amount is less than what other islands receive, it is still enough to nourish a mature rainforest ecosystem complete with a multi-tiered canopy and lush understory. The best remaining examples of rainforest are protected within the boundaries of the Quillesse and Edmund Forest reserves.

Morning activities:

This morning, we will offer options for a birding excursion and a sightseeing tour for those who want a more general survey of southern St. Lucia. For birders, the objective is to locate the five endemic birds of the island, more than

are found on any other island in the Lesser Antilles. The gorgeous St. Lucia Parrot garners the greatest interest, while the other endemic species—St. Lucia Pewee, St. Lucia Warbler, St. Lucia Oriole, and St. Lucia Black Finch—are more widespread and generally easier to find.



St. Lucia Parrot © David Ascanio

About the St. Lucia Parrot:

Of St. Lucia's many wonderful birds, the St. Lucia Parrot could be described as "first among equals." Sporting an indigo face, piercing orange eyes, and green breast and belly feathers overlaid with a dusting of scarlet, there is no other parrot that resembles this one. Those who monitor the species estimate the current population at around 3,000 individuals, a remarkable number considering it was down to as few as 100 free-flying birds by 1975. The story of the birds near demise and miraculous rebound is one of the great success stories in modern bird conservation. As with other members of the parrot family, the St. Lucia Parrot's decline was attributable to the combined pressures from deforestation, hunting, and illegal capture. Spurred to action by the dwindling numbers, the St. Lucia Forestry Department, in collaboration with the RARE Center for Tropical Conservation, began a nation-wide program to educate the population on the plight of its unique bird. Hunting was outlawed and forest reserves established. The parrot became the national bird in 1979, the year of St. Lucia's independence from Britain.

Option #1: Birding at Bouton (Depart 7:00 a.m.; Return 12:00 p.m.):

Situated a mere 15 minutes above Soufrière, the small community of Bouton offers a close-by destination for high quality birding. All of the special birds of the island are found here, including the St. Lucia Parrot, and all of the birding is done along a paved road that runs from the edge of the rainforest down through a mosaic of second-growth woodland and fruit orchards. Although the chance of seeing St. Lucia Parrots well is somewhat lower here than at more remote locations, we are almost certain to see parrots in flight in addition to the other sought-after species.

We'll start the morning with a vigil from a ridgetop location that provides sweeping views of forest-clad slopes on one side and the distant sea on the other. From this position, we'll have excellent vantage points for surveying the region around us for perched and flying parrots. Besides parrots, this area has also proven productive for the lovely Purple-throated Carib, Antillean-crested Hummingbird, St. Lucia Warbler, Scaly-breasted and Pearly-eyed thrashers, and Gray Trembler.



St. Lucia Oriole © David Ascanio

A short while later we will work our way down the road toward Bouton, enjoying the island's birdlife in the cooler morning hours. Taking our time on the descent, we should encounter a fine variety of birds including Green-throated Carib, Lesser Antillean Flycatcher, and St. Lucia Pewee.

Option #2: History, culture, and sightseeing option (Depart 8:00 a.m.; Return 12:00 p.m.):

Those interested in other activities will enjoy a morning-long sightseeing tour. Our itinerary includes a visit to the Sulfur Springs in the crater of the now-dormant Soufrière volcano, where geothermal-fueled springs produce steam, sulfur, and boiling mud and water. We'll also travel the short distance to the Soufrière Estate for a trip to Diamond Falls Botanical Garden, home to beautiful award-winning floral displays, a nature trail, and the lovely namesake falls. An additional highlight is the chance to photograph Soufrière harbor and the pitons from an elevated roadside vantage point.

Afternoon activities:

In the afternoon we will offer a birding option and an option for swimming or walking around town.

Option #1: Birding at Bouton (Depart 2:15 p.m.; Return 5:30 p.m.)

A return trip to Bouton will appeal to those who either missed some of the birds in the morning, those who simply desire more time with the unique birds of St. Lucia, or those who participated in the alternative activities option in the morning and who would like to sample the native birdlife before returning to the ship.

Option #2: Swimming; walking around Soufrière (Times variable):

There will be opportunity for a swim off a nearby beach or a chance to walk around in Soufrière. In the late afternoon we will depart St. Lucia for St. Vincent, sailing by the famous Pitons on our way out of the harbor at Soufrière. There will be plenty of opportunities for photography.

NIGHT: Aboard *Sea Cloud*

February 22, Day 8: St. Vincent: Vermont Forest; St. Vincent Botanical Gardens; sightseeing.

Highlights:

- **Birding: Vermont Forest and St. Vincent Botanical Gardens.**
- **History, culture, and sightseeing option: Walking tour of Kingstown and visit to the botanical gardens.**

Island overview:

Situated at approximately 13° north latitude, and a mere 24 miles south of St. Lucia, St. Vincent is the largest of the more than 30 islands that make up the nation of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. At roughly 150 square miles, St. Vincent is smaller than the other islands on our route, yet it bears many of the trademark landscapes associated with a volcanic origin, including a rugged mountainous interior and a highly scenic, rocky shoreline. A population of 120,000 is spread widely over the island, and the capital, Kingstown, is home to about 20,000. St. Vincent and the Grenadines achieved independence from England in October 1979. The country's economic base resides in an agricultural sector that produces large amounts of bananas, arrowroot, and other fruits and vegetables.

As one would expect, St. Vincent is a lovely tropical island that evokes the ideal of "Caribbean Paradise." Small but not tiny, developed but not overly so, St. Vincent is essentially an emerald outpost in a deep blue sea. Although the distances from its nearest neighbors (St. Lucia and Grenada) are not enormous, they are great enough to have allowed speciation to occur on a moderate level. Many of the birds found on St. Vincent occur elsewhere in the Lesser Antilles while two, St. Vincent Parrot and Whistling Warbler, are island endemics.

Morning activities:



**Lesser Antillean Bullfinch © David
Ascanio**

As with our visits to the other islands on our cruise route, this morning we will experience St. Vincent via birding and non-birding-based shore excursions. Birders will have half of the day to visit two top birding areas: the Vermont Forest, a government-protected natural area that preserves an exquisite expanse of native rainforest, and the national botanical garden offering wonderful lowland birding on the edge of Kingstown. Those who favor a more general approach, with walking and sightseeing, will spend time in Kingstown before finishing with a visit to the botanical garden.

About the St. Vincent Parrot:

Once numbering in the thousands, but reduced to perilously low numbers through the effects of extensive deforestation and illegal capture, the St. Vincent Parrot became the subject of a concerted conservation effort to halt its slide toward extinction. Employing a mascot, "Vincie the Parrot," an island-wide campaign was launched to educate Vincentians on the importance of protecting their national bird. The project, spearheaded by the government and the RARE Center for Tropical Conservation, has been a conservation success story, with parrot numbers having increased to as many as 850 wild birds. This parrot is one of the most beautiful members of this exotic family, and

our birding field trips have a good chance of encountering them.

About the St. Vincent Botanical Garden:

Founded in 1765, the St. Vincent Botanical Gardens is among the oldest botanical gardens in the Americas and contains what is probably the earliest tropical plant collection anywhere. Established in 1763 under the governorship of Robert Melville, the gardens' original purpose was propagating plant species that would be of medicinal value to the military. Through the rest of the 18th century, tropical plants were imported from many parts of the world including many specimens from Southeast Asia and the South-Pacific. Among the many beautiful trees and flowering plants here is a third generation breadfruit tree, a sucker from the original plant brought by Captain William Bligh in 1793.

Option #1: Birding at Vermont Forest and botanical garden (Departs 5:00 a.m.; Returns 12:30 p.m.)

Option #2: Birding at Vermont Forest and botanical garden (Departs 5:45 a.m.; Returns 12:30 p.m.)

Both field trips will disembark the ship early this morning for a visit to the Vermont Forest, famous as the home of the highly endangered St. Vincent Parrot. There are two ways to see the St. Vincent Parrot: one is to ascend a steep 1¾ mile loop trail through the heart of the forest until reaching a viewing platform where views of the birds are likely; the other is to position ourselves on a trail at the edge of the forest and hope to see parrots flying and perching in the open. The option you choose will depend largely on your physical abilities. Those favoring the walk through the forest to the viewing platform will choose departure option #1; those who prefer starting a little later and who don't want to walk as far will choose option #2. **NOTE:** Option #1 is not to be taken lightly. The ascent through the forest is steep, and, if it's rained lately, potentially very muddy.

For those that do not make the forest hike, we'll spend a couple of hours exploring the edge habitats that fringe the larger forest above. We will position ourselves at different places to watch for any parrots flying over, particularly later in the morning when the birds are more inclined to sit in the open before dispersing for the day into the forest. For those that choose to make the hike, our best chance of seeing St. Vincent Parrots at closer range will be to climb a well-constructed trail up a ridge to a viewing platform looking out over the rugged valleys radiating from the central volcano, all still clad in forest. The parrots utilize only the 5% of the island still covered in mid-elevation rainforest, ignoring the elfin forest above and the tropical moist forest and dry scrub below. They are highly vocal birds that are easily heard, even at a great distance. We will likely see a number of them in flight, but finding one perched is the morning's goal. Decked in rust-orange attire, the birds also feature an unusually marked collection of colors on the neck and head that includes varying amounts of white, blue, and green.

St. Vincent's other endemic bird, also found along the forest trail, is the unique Whistling Warbler, a bird patterned like no other member of its family. Typically, this active bird forages in the subcanopy, gleaning insects from clusters of both living and dead leaves, at long intervals giving its surprisingly loud and pleasant song. With luck and keen eyes, we will find it this morning. The unique island-form of House Wren (a candidate for a future species split) issues its decidedly different song throughout the forest while the skies overhead are often filled with Short-tailed and Lesser Antillean swifts.

Beyond the birding, the hike offers a rare opportunity to explore deep into the forest that blankets the mountains above. This beautiful area offers a wonderland of island rainforest. Shady gullies inside the forest create a super-humid niche where ferns, heliconias, palms, and epiphytes thrive, while immense buttressed trees tower overhead and cast a deep shade.

Later in the morning, both groups will have time for birding along the forest edge. In the Tropics, the forest edge is always a great place to see birds. The intermingling of large and small trees along with a variety of sun-loving plants provides ideal foraging and nesting opportunities for a number of species that shun the unbroken mature forest ecosystem. Present in this habitat are Grenada Flycatcher and Lesser Antillean Tanager (two species shared only with Grenada), Scaly-naped Pigeon, Mangrove Cuckoo, and other Antillean specialties like Purple-throated Carib, Brown Trembler (a very comical character) and Lesser Antillean Bullfinch. Within the region, Common Black-Hawk is found only on St. Vincent where it hunts crabs in the mountain streams, while the Cocoa Thrush of South America reaches its northern limit here.

With our remaining time, we'll return to Kingstown for a visit to the St. Vincent Botanical Gardens. Here, several paths provide access to all parts of the garden and we will take time to explore the grounds, viewing the plant collection and watching for birds. St. Vincent marks the northernmost point for a number of species that barely enter the Caribbean, and the bounty of flowering and fruiting trees that grow here make the botanical garden an essential stop for finding these birds. Common Black-Hawk, Eared Dove, Grenada Flycatcher, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, and Spectacled Thrush are all fairly easily found. Other key birds occurring here are Green-throated Carib, Caribbean Elaenia, Gray Kingbird, Tropical Mockingbird, and Bananaquit (both "regular" and an all-dark St. Vincent variety). Furthermore, the garden hosts an aviary designed especially for St. Vincent Parrots. All the parrots that live here are former caged birds recovered by the government and turned over to the botanical garden for study and propagation. While viewing parrots under these circumstances is vastly different than seeing free-

flying birds, our visit does represent an excellent opportunity to see an endangered species up close and note the remarkable plumage coloration.



Bananaquit © David Ascanio

Option #3: History, culture, and sightseeing option (Departs 8:00 a.m.; Returns 12:30 p.m.): A city tour will be offered to those who do not wish to visit the Vermont Forest this morning. Among the sites we'll see are:

- St. George's Anglican Cathedral – Built in 1820, St. George's Cathedral offers an excellent example of Georgian architecture and is famous for its remarkable stained-glass windows.
- St. Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral and School – Perhaps the most recognizable landmark in Kingstown, St. Mary's Cathedral was completed in 1920 and features a unique Romanesque construction style.
- Fort Charlotte – Constructed just west of the city atop Berkshire Hill, Fort Charlotte offers spectacular views of Kingstown and its gleaming harbour beyond. Built in 1806, the fort's purpose was to defend the island against Carib invaders.
- Markets – If the markets are open during our visit, we will walk some of the narrow streets past stalls where local vendors sell their wares.
- Botanical garden – Our morning will conclude in the national botanical gardens where we'll have opportunities to view an array of native and introduced ornamental plants and trees, and see St. Vincent Parrots up close, recovered for breeding and propagation purposes.



Sunset on the Caribbean © David Ascanio

All groups will be back on board the ship for lunch. The remainder of the day will be dedicated to relaxation as *Sea Cloud* makes its way back to Barbados. We may enjoy some sailing time this afternoon and perhaps attend a final lecture presentation. For a final act, this evening we'll attend the Captain's Farewell Dinner.

NIGHT: Aboard *Sea Cloud*

February 23, Day 9: Arrival in Barbados; disembark the *Sea Cloud*. Our grand voyage is now at an end. We will dock in Bridgetown, Barbados this morning around 8:00 a.m. followed with disembarkation of the ship at 9:00 a.m. Because international flights to the United States don't depart until mid-afternoon, we will have about four-and-a-half hours on the island this morning for sightseeing and lunch before transferring to the airport. Flights should not be scheduled to depart Bridgetown (airport code BGI) prior to 1:00 p.m.

With most of the morning ahead of us, we will take a sightseeing tour of Barbados that takes us out of Bridgetown to several points of interest a little further afield. Possible destinations include:

- Gun Hill Signal Station – A series of signal stations was established in Barbados in 1818 for the purpose of alerting island residents to approaching ships or a slave rebellion (such were the concerns of the time). Each station was constructed prominently atop a hill and consisted of a watch tower that afforded views in all directions. Gun Hill Signal Station was built in the parish of St. George and offers commanding views, via a wrap-around deck, of the lowlands below and the distant sea beyond.
- Atlantic Coast at Bathsheba – Unlike the sheltered western coast of Barbados, the eastern side faces the open Atlantic Ocean, where the continual waves and surf have etched a remarkably scenic coastline. Mushroom-like rock formations, rocky headlands, and broad beaches present scenes of rugged beauty.
- Codrington College – Upon his death in 1710, sugar baron Christopher Codrington bequeathed his personal estate to the Anglican Church, which converted the old plantation to a theological college in 1743, which today remains the oldest of its kind in the Western Hemisphere. Beautiful grounds and marvellous views of the Atlantic Ocean are highlights.

- Sunbury Plantation – Dating from 1660, Sunbury Plantation is a restored plantation house that reminds visitors of a bygone era, a time when sugar was known as “white gold” and Barbados was of pre-eminent importance to the economy of the Western Hemisphere. Featuring period furniture, clothing, tools, and equipment, and of course the house itself, Sunbury offers an authentic look at aristocratic life in seventeenth century Barbados.

After lunch, we will transfer to the airport in time for check-in for flights departing after 1:00 p.m.

EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS: Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive early or extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least two months prior to your departure date. We can very easily make hotel arrangements if we receive your request with enough advance time.

MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE REQUIREMENT: This tour visits remote locations where immediate access to primary medical care may **NOT** be available. **For this reason, travel insurance which covers you for emergency evacuation is required for participation on this tour.** This coverage is included in the **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance™** program. Through Ripcord, “emergency evacuation” can be purchased as a stand-alone benefit or as part of a comprehensive travel insurance policy. If you choose not to purchase insurance through Ripcord, you are required to obtain it through another provider.

TOUR SIZE: We have chartered the 64-passenger *Sea Cloud* exclusively for VENT travelers; this cruise is limited to 54 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: This cruise will be led by **Barry Lyon, David Ascanio, Barry Zimmer, Peter Zika, Larry Wolff, and Perri Klass**



Barry Lyon's passion for the outdoors and birding has its roots in his childhood in southern California. During his teenage years, he attended several VENT/ABA youth birding camps, which ultimately led to his future involvement with Victor Emanuel Nature Tours. He holds a B.A. from the University of Arizona at Tucson where he studied history and political science, with an emphasis on environment and development politics. Barry joined the VENT team as a tour leader in 1995 and embarked on a travel-based career that has taken him to an array of worldwide destinations. He has lived in Austin, Texas since 2004 when he joined our office staff as an administrative assistant. In 2014 he was named Chief Operating Officer (COO), reflecting his increased experience and responsibilities. In 2023 Barry ascended to the role of Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Although Barry still leads two or three trips a year, these days his work is geared almost entirely toward business, customer

relations, and the management of the company. Barry's background and his knowledge of natural history have provided him with a strong interest in conservation. He is a former board member and past president of Travis Audubon Society, which emphasizes conservation through birding and outdoor education for children. Barry resides in South Austin with his wife, Brooke Smith.



David Ascanio, a Venezuelan birder and naturalist, has spent over 39 years guiding birding tours throughout his native country, Colombia, Brazil, Peru, Costa Rica, the Orinoco and Amazon river basins, Trinidad & Tobago, Suriname, the Guianas, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, the Lesser Antilles, Cuba, Chile, and Panama. He is especially interested in bird vocalizations and has a private library containing voices of more than 70% of all the birds of Venezuela. David combines superb birding skills with an astonishing command of bird vocalizations. He has published a book for children about bird songs and coauthored the descriptions of two new species, the Rio Orinoco Spinetail and the Delta Amacuro Softtail. David has also published numerous papers about the birds of the *llanos* (plains), Orinoco River Island species, and the pan-tepui endemic species on which he has become an authority. He is the senior author of the *Field Guide to the Birds of Venezuela* (2017). David is an excellent

communicator, has a great sense of humor, and is tireless in helping others find birds and wildlife. These traits have made him one of the most popular naturalists and guides in the Neotropics.



his wife, Yvonne, and their daughter, Alexandra.

Barry Zimmer has been birding since the age of eight. His main areas of expertise lie in North and Central America, but his travels have taken him throughout much of the world, including such exotic locales as Japan, Russia, Madagascar, Africa, and New Zealand. Barry is a longtime member of the New Mexico Bird Records Committee, and served on the Texas Bird Records Committee for 12 years. He has coauthored three books: *Birds of the Trans-Pecos*, *A Birder's Guide to the Rio Grande Valley*, and *Birds and Birdfinding in the El Paso Area*. Barry has a keen interest in nature photography, having captured over 1,600 species of birds on film. His other interests include sports (a diehard Red Sox fan), cooking, and movies. He received his degree in psychology at the University of Texas in El Paso. Barry resides in El Paso with



Peter Zika is a field biologist from Seattle, investigating and describing new species of plants from western North America. Working at the herbarium of the University of Washington, he is writing several chapters for new books on the plants of California, the Pacific Northwest, and the flora of North America, as well as conducting biological inventories of National Parks and Nature Conservancy preserves, studying interactions between noxious weeds and native wildlife, and researching the diet of fruit-eating birds. His interests in ecology have led him across the Tropics and into Polar Regions for the last 25 years. In addition to teaching wetland plant identification, he serves as a ship's naturalist on all oceans and continents. Peter has published more than 100 scientific notes, articles, and books, as well as occasional photographs, cards, and reviews in the popular press.



Larry Wolff is the Silver Professor of European History at New York University, and at NYU he has held the positions of Director of the Center for European and Mediterranean Studies, Director of the Remarque Institute, and Co-director (with Perri Klass) of NYU Florence at Villa La Pietra. He received his B.A. from Harvard and his Ph.D. from Stanford. With particular interests in Eastern Europe and Mediterranean Europe, his books, which have been widely translated into foreign languages, include *Inventing Eastern Europe* (1994), *Venice and the Slavs: The Discovery of Dalmatia in the Age of Enlightenment* (2001), *Paolina's Innocence: Child Abuse in Casanova's Venice* (2012), *The Singing Turk: Ottoman Power and Operatic Emotions on the European Stage* (2016), and *Woodrow Wilson and the Reimagining of Eastern Europe* (2020). His newest book is *The Shadow of the Empress: Fairy-*

Tale Opera and the End of the Habsburg Monarchy (2023). Larry is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and has traveled as a lecturer with cruises in the Adriatic and around the Mediterranean. He also writes frequently about opera for the *New York Review of Books* and the *Times Literary Supplement* of London. He lived for many years in Boston and now lives in New York City with his wife, Perri Klass, the well-known doctor and writer.

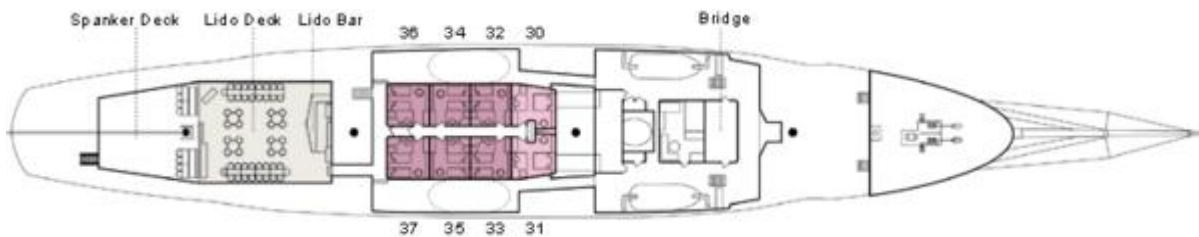


Perri Klass, MD, is Professor of Journalism and Pediatrics at New York University, where she directs the Minor in Medical Humanities. She attended Harvard Medical School and completed her residency in pediatrics at Children's Hospital, Boston. Dr. Klass has written extensively about medicine, children, literacy, and knitting. Her most recent book is *The Best Medicine: How Science and Public Health Gave Children a Future*, about how the decline in infant and child mortality has changed parenting, pediatrics, and the world; her other nonfiction includes *Treatment Kind and Fair: Letters to a Young Doctor*, *Every Mother is a Daughter: the Neverending Quest for Success*, *Inner Peace*, and *a Really Clean Kitchen*, which she coauthored with her mother, and *Quirky Kids: Understanding and Helping Your Child Who Doesn't Fit In*, which she coauthored with Eileen Costello, M.D. She has written regularly

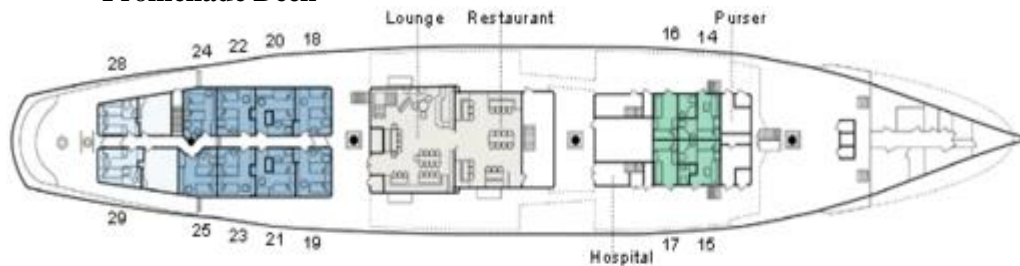
about children's issues for *The New York Times* for many years, and her medical journalism has appeared in a wide variety of publications, including *Harper's*, *The Atlantic*, *Smithsonian*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New Yorker*, *The New England Journal of Medicine*, and *Harvard Medicine*. Dr. Klass is the National Medical Director of Reach Out and Read, a program through which pediatricians promote parents reading aloud with young children, providing guidance and books to more than 4.4 million children and their families every year. She is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Sea Cloud Deck Plan

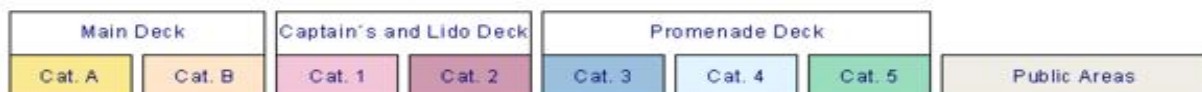
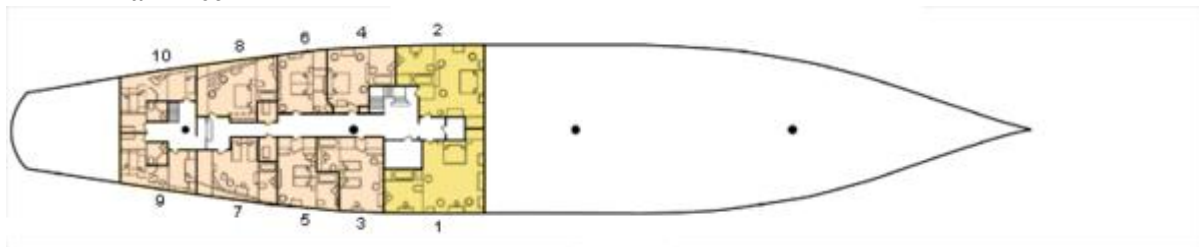
Captain's and Lido Deck



Promenade Deck



Main Deck



FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Cabin prices quoted are per person based on double occupancy and include port taxes. Cabins will be reserved on a first-come, first-served basis. A limited number of single cabins are available as quoted below. Once these are taken, single accommodation will be 1.6 times the double rate.

Category A: (Owner's Suites)	Cabins #1-2	\$19,745
Category B: (Deluxe Original Cabins)	Cabins #3-10	\$16,645
Category 1:	Cabins #30-31	\$14,525
Category 2:	Cabins #32-37	\$13,545
Category 3:	Cabins #18-25	\$12,345
Category 4:	Cabins #28-29	\$12,045
Category 5: (Singles)	Cabins #14-17	\$14,745

Included in the cruise program:

- Arrival transfer to Courtyard Marriott*
- Land –based accommodations as stated in the itinerary; 1 night in Bridgetown, Barbados, Day 1
- 7-nights (Days 2-8) aboard the *Sea Cloud*
- All shore excursions and tours as described in the itinerary
- Non-ship meals in Bridgetown from dinner on Day 1 through lunch on Day 2; and lunch in Bridgetown on Day 9
- All ship-board meals, including non-alcoholic beverages, from dinner on Day 2 through breakfast on Day 9; select beer and wine at lunch and dinner
- Land transfer to the airport in Barbados on day 9*
- Passenger email system
- Services of VENT leaders and local guides (including gratuities for local guides and drivers)
- Port fees and all entrance fees (national parks, reserves, museums, etc.)
- Gratuities to the ship staff and crew
- Baggage handling

***Transfers are included only for passengers arriving Barbados on February 15, and for those departing Barbados on February 23.**

Not included in the cruise program:

- Roundtrip air transportation from your home to Barbados
- Hotel accommodations prior to day 1 and after day 8
- Meals prior to dinner on day 1, and after lunch on day 9
- Alcoholic beverages except for select wines available during lunch and dinner
- Land transfers in Bridgetown from the airport to the hotel before Day 1, and to the airport after Day 9*
- Laundry, postage, telephone calls, internet usage, or other items of a personal nature
- Travel insurance
- Fuel or exchange rate surcharges
- Excess baggage charges
- Passport fees
- Airport departure taxes (if applicable)
- Gratuities to VENT leaders (optional)

***VENT can arrange transportation for anyone arriving in Bridgetown, Barbados outside the dates of this program. Added charges will apply to this service.**

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 voyage. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of brochure printing. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES: In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

TOUR REGISTRATION: A deposit of **\$2,000** is required to reserve a space on this cruise. A second deposit of **\$3,000** is due 210 days prior to departure (July 17, 2024). The balance of the fee is due 150 days prior to departure (September 18, 2024).

If you prefer to pay the initial deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your initial deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at <https://ventbird.com>, should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

This cruise is designed for persons in reasonably good health. By forwarding the expedition deposit, you certify that you do not have a physical condition or disability which would create a hazard to you or other passengers. VENT reserves the right to decline to accept or retain you or other passengers should your health, actions, or general deportment impede the operations of the expedition or the rights, welfare, or enjoyment of other passengers.

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.

CANCELLATION POLICY: **\$1,000** of your initial deposit is non-refundable if cancellation occurs up to 210 days prior to the departure date. For cancellations that occur between 209 and 151 days, both deposits are non-refundable; cancellations within 150 days of the departure date are 100% non-refundable whether previously paid or not. Any refunds will be reduced by applicable airline cancellation penalties. No refunds will be made in the event of “no shows” or cancellations made on the day of sailing.

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
210 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$1,000
Between 209 and 151 days before departure	No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance will be refunded
Fewer than 150 days before departure date	No refund available

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

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

TRAVEL INSURANCE: To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit. VENT has partnered with Redpoint Travel Protection as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend its **Ripcord** plan. Designed for all types of travelers, Ripcord is among the most comprehensive travel protection programs available.

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

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

*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 15 days of making your first trip payment. The CFAR benefit provides reimbursement for 75% of covered costs, and increases the policy premium by approximately 50%. Policies may be purchased either for the full value of the tour fee at the time of deposit or in segments as individual tour payments are made (deposit, mid-payment, final balance, additional arrangements, etc.). The “pay as you go” approach reduces up-front expense and ensures that the amount paid toward your full policy premium is in proportion to the amount paid toward the full tour fee. If you choose to “pay as you go,” you must cover each deposit or payment within 15 days, and 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: The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. Please consult your airline to find out specific weight restrictions. Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government's attempts to improve airport security we recommend that you check the website of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for the most updated information: <http://www.tsa.gov/>.

CONDITIONS:

The program – Your trip to the Caribbean is primarily a natural history excursion that provides visitation to six

islands while cruising in the eastern Caribbean Sea. The program emphasizes observation of the many special birds of the region, but also incorporates interpretation and presentations on other aspects of natural history, such as botany and geology, and human history. For non-birders in the group, we'll offer alternative activities that include visits to various historical and cultural attractions. Note that all activities are optional.

Shore excursions center mainly on reaching important birding areas and various scenic and cultural attractions. Since bird activity is best in the morning, we will be up early or fairly early every day. Once ashore, we will travel in a variety of local vehicles for up to an hour before we reach the protected forests and nature trails. The trails that we will visit are well-constructed and offer a chance to be inside these beautiful forests. However, some people may find the trails too steep or too physically challenging. In particular, the trail into the Vermont Forest on St. Vincent is not to be taken lightly. It is steep, obstructed by tree roots and often muddy. In most cases, many of the birds can be spotted from the roads and forest edge, and we will offer that option. Some of the forests have a fascinating array of plant species labeled and some have additional interpretive signs. It is worth noting that while we will seek all of the endemic birds possible on this cruise route, several of them, such as Imperial Parrot, Whistling Warbler and Martinique Oriole, are extremely difficult and cannot be guaranteed.

Exploring the Lesser Antilles by ship is, in our opinion, a superior option to a land-based trip because this style of travel avoids the numerous hotel changes and inter-island flights that are otherwise necessary. The one consequence to ship travel is that we have less time to find all the special birds. This fact should be considered before registering for this cruise.

For the birders, our routine for most days will involve an early breakfast on board followed by disembarkation for land transfers to the birding sites (ranging from 5:00-7:00 a.m.). For non-birders, breakfast will be later followed by departures to historic, cultural, and sightseeing areas (ranging from 8:00-8:30). We'll spend a full morning in the field before returning to the ship for lunch, between 12:00-1:00 p.m.. Depending on our location during the cruise, the afternoons will either include more birding, sightseeing, or cruising at sea. Dinner will be at 7:00 p.m. most nights.

The ship – Considered a masterpiece of shipbuilding, the four-masted *Sea Cloud* is widely regarded as the world's most beautiful sailing vessel. Her towering masts, full rigging, and polished wooden decks are testament to her unparalleled beauty. *Sea Cloud* offers 32 cabins that host a maximum of 64 passengers. All cabins are immaculately appointed, elegantly designed, and contain private facilities, telephones, and a small safe. Below decks, cabins 1-10 date from the ship's original construction; each feature individual design and decoration, ornate furniture, walk-in closets, expanded bathroom areas, and large windows. Public areas include a formal restaurant, expansive spanker (viewing) deck, lido deck (with canopy), and lido bar. Other amenities include a gift boutique and a passenger communications system comprised of direct-dial satellite telephone, GSM cellular phone service, fax, email, and internet access.

Technical Information:

- | | |
|--|--|
| • Built: 1931 | • Total Sail Area: 32,000 sq. ft. |
| • Length: 360 feet; Beam: 50 feet; | • Number of Sails: 30 |
| • Draft: 17 feet | • Speed: 10 knots |
| • Gross Tonnage: 2,532 | • Crew: 60 |
| • Engines: 2 SKL Diesel engines | • Flag: Malta |

Dining – The *Sea Cloud*'s restaurant offers a relaxed atmosphere amid handsome surroundings. Carefully crafted and finely styled, the dining room's decoration includes natural wood adornment, a fire place, wall paper, and chandelier lighting. The sizeable double dining room comfortably seats all passengers in single seating for all meals, with tables unassigned. The chefs can prepare food according to special dietary needs, provided we receive sufficient notice. **Please inform our office of any special needs at the time of registration.**

Breakfast consists of a full buffet and an option to order from the menu; several meal options are available every day for lunch and dinner, including a vegetarian plate. All meals are served with complimentary coffee, tea, bottled

water, juice, soft drinks, and select beers and wines.

While at sea – While cruising at sea, you'll have options to join your leaders on the viewing decks for sea watching or remain inside and relax in the passenger lounge or your cabin. As we will not be far from shore most of the time, we expect smooth, easy seas throughout. Wind is an unpredictable variable. The mornings are typically calmer and the afternoons breezy to windy. If we are cruising into the wind, participants should be prepared for rougher seas than what is expected, especially on the two longer crossings (Barbados-Dominica; St. Vincent-Barbados).

While on land – On shore excursions we'll travel in an array of vehicles from 6-seater mini-vans to large occupancy buses. Walking conditions range from easy birding on established roads and trails to moderately strenuous forest walks. We emphasize that no one will be subjected to physical demands that exceed their capabilities, and that all walking will be done at a slow pace. As always, it is important to pay close attention to footing and terrain. The following descriptions provide an overview of the conditions we'll experience on each of the islands:

- **Barbados** – Easy walking on paved road and trails.
- **Guadeloupe** – Walking within the national park will be limited to short stretches along the paved park road and in picnic grounds. The botanical garden at Valombreuse offers wide paved paths with some ups and downs.
- **Dominica** – Easy walking on roads outside the Syndicate Forest Estate. Inside the forest are paths and trails that offer easy to moderate conditions. Tree roots and some ups and downs may be challenging for some. Overall, physical demands are light.
- **Martinique** – Easy walking on paved roads and closely cropped lawns within the national park on the Caravelle Peninsula. Efforts to see the White-breasted Thrasher include descending several short flights of steps on a narrow forest trail.
- **St. Lucia** – Easy to light-moderate. At Bouton we'll walk on easy paved roads downhill.
- **St. Vincent** – The walk to see St. Vincent Parrots within the Vermont Forest Reserve includes a 1¾–2 mile hike over a loop trail through the forest. The first half of the hike is uphill and should be regarded as strenuous. We will walk at an easy, but steady pace. Those not able to make the hike will likely have an opportunity to see parrots in flight from the edge of the forest above the parking area. The national botanic garden provides easy walking over flat, paved paths.

Our non-birding activities, including city tours and visits to historical sites, involve simple walks on streets, sidewalks, and wide trails.

Swimming – In some years we are able to offer swimming as an activity option on one or more occasions. The possibility for swimming generally depends on sea and weather conditions and we never know until the captain gives permission. St. Lucia offers the best opportunity for swimming.

COMMUNICATIONS / INTERNET SERVICE:

Phone/Fax: The vessel is equipped with both a Satcom B satellite system and a GSM cellular system, either of which can access outgoing calls from your stateroom. Incoming calls and faxes are received via the satellite system due to the inherent range limitations of the GSM system. GSM cellular costs approximately 3 Euros per minute, and is available in European waters and near French islands in the Caribbean. Satellite communication costs approximately 5 Euros per minute, and is available in all cruising areas (rates subject to change).

Internet/Email: The ship provides a laptop computer station available for passenger use. You can use this laptop or your own laptop to connect to the internet (Wi-Fi) using the access code; however, please note that there is a charge. The access code can be obtained from reception or the purser.

The vessel can be reached via on-board email address at **Seacloud@seacloud.com**. Please advise your friends and family to send "text only" messages (no photos or HTML) when sending email to the ship's address. Also, cabin number and name should be used as reference. Please note that messages sent to the vessel are generally

limited to 50 KB for each message and could possibly be rejected automatically by the system if the message exceeds this file size. For outgoing email, messages up to a file size of 50 KB are free of charge. The cost of sending messages that exceed 50 KB will be charged to your shipboard account. For incoming email, messages up to a file size of 50 KB are free of charge. The cost of receiving messages that exceed 50KB, are applicable and will be charged to your shipboard account. Internet access is available at an extra charge.

CLIMATE & WEATHER: The Caribbean region is famous among travelers for its good year-round weather. A tropical climate prevails in most places, which translates, in general terms, to warm, lightly humid conditions and ample sunshine. The afternoons are often punctuated with occasional showers or heavy, localized storms. All of the islands are influenced by regional weather patterns, but seasonality, location, and island topography affect each island on a local basis. Over a typical 24-hour period, temperatures range from 70°–90°F. The early morning hours are the coolest while the afternoons are warmest. Temperature variation also occurs according to elevation. Low-lying coastal areas tend to be hot and humid by mid-day while the mountains may be as much as 15° cooler. Cloud cover, mist, and afternoon rain are most likely in the mountains as well.

Early March is a time when the northeast trade winds may be increasing in activity. Higher temperatures and dry, windy conditions are typical of this phenomenon, but the weather on a given island is affected by location. At this time, some islands receive considerable moisture (Windward Islands), while those out of the wind (Leeward Islands), can be very hot and dry. Participants should expect a variety of conditions. The Windward Islands we will visit are the southeastern islands of the Caribbean and include Martinique, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and Barbados. They're called the Windward Islands because they're exposed to the wind ("windward") of the northeast trade winds. The Leeward Islands we will visit include Guadeloupe, and Dominica. They're called the Leeward Islands because they're away from the wind ("lee").

CLOTHING: As this trip offers birding, interpretive walking tours, and leisure cruising, you should pack a mix of clothing that prepares you for all activities. Generally the weather will be warm and sunny, but it can be cool enough at higher elevations in the early morning that you should bring a light jacket for layering. Do not forget to bring a small umbrella and/or poncho, as we could get caught in sudden showers at several locations. The following items are recommended:

- **Pants and Shorts:** A couple of pairs of pants and shorts each are recommended. Many people prefer lightweight pants made of cotton or other material, but denim, though not as comfortable, is certainly acceptable. Shorts will be desirable for warmer times of day and when cruising.
- **Field Clothing:** Outdoor stores such as Cabela's and REI carry field clothing that many birders find appealing. Pants and shirts made of lightweight, yet durable materials with multiple pockets and ventilated seams are popular and more reasonably priced than in the past. Please select clothing in muted colors.
- **Sweaters and Coats:** Warm weather will be the rule on this trip, but a sweater or light coat or jacket will come in handy some mornings and evenings. A rain poncho will be very useful if we are caught in a sudden shower.
- **Shirts:** Several t-shirts, (long and short-sleeved), in addition to other comfortable styles suitable for warm weather.
- **Bathing Suit**
- **Hat:** A hat, particularly a broad-brimmed one, is essential for protection from the sun.
- **Evening Wear:** The atmosphere aboard *Sea Cloud* is casual, but women and men should consider packing some Smart Casual attire for evenings and dressier occasions, such as the Captain's Welcome and Farewell cocktail receptions and dinners. For women this includes casual dresses or skirt/slacks ensembles. For men this includes khakis/slacks and open-collared shirts. Men may choose to wear a sports jacket and tie. The degree of dress is also in accordance with your personal preference.

FOOTWEAR: We strongly recommend a light hiking boot or trail shoe for birding outings. You may also prefer athletic shoes for walking tours and time on board the ship; sandals or other open-toe style shoes are appropriate for time on board as well. Dress shoes will be appropriate for some evenings.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry service is provided by the ship staff for an extra charge. Please check with the staff upon embarkation for procedures and turnaround time.

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

- **Backpack** – Good for carrying extra clothing, field guides, supplies, and optical equipment during all land excursions
- **Notebooks and pens**
- **Travel alarm clock**
- **Polarized sunglasses with good UV protection**
- **Sunscreen, lip balm, skin lotions**
- **Personal toiletries**
- **Water bottle**
- **Small collapsible umbrella** – Good to have if we are caught in a sudden shower
- **Cameras, lenses, film, memory cards, and extra batteries**
- **Collapsible walking stick or walking pole** – Highly recommended for those who have trouble walking, in addition to the fact that there is a fair amount of walking on at least two of the islands.
- **Tissue packs**

BINOCULARS & SPOTTING SCOPES:

- **Binoculars** – We strongly recommend you bring a pair of good binoculars of 8x32, 8x42, or 10x42 magnification. We recommend that you do NOT bring mini-binoculars of any kind. Some people like them because they are small and lightweight; but they have an extremely small field of view and very poor light gathering power. Trying to find a bird using mini binoculars is like trying to read a book through a keyhole. You will be very frustrated, and even if you do manage to get the bird in your binoculars before it flies, you will have a poor view. You will find that 8x32 binoculars are compact and light enough.
- **Spotting Scopes** – Given the ship-based nature of the program, and that most of our land-birding will take place in the forest, it is not necessary for you to bring a spotting scope. Your tour leaders will have scopes available for group use throughout the trip (however, you may bring your own if you prefer).

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS:

PASSPORTS - A valid passport is required for entry into the islands included in this itinerary. Please check the expiration date on your passport. **If it is not valid for at least six months after your trip return date, you will need to get it renewed.** You will also want to make sure that you have ample blank pages in your passport for each country we visit on this trip. If you need a passport, you should get it well in advance of your trip departure date. For additional fees, a passport can be issued on an expedited basis. In the United States this can be done at the nearest passport office, most post offices, or the county clerk's office. Another source for information on how to get or renew a passport is www.state.gov/travel/.

As a safety measure, photocopy the first two pages of your passport. Keep the photocopies in a safe place, so if your passport is lost you will have proof of identification. Your passport should be signed and easily available at all times. You will need it for check-in at the airport on your first day of departure, so **do not pack it in your checked luggage**. On board ship, it is customary for the purser to hold all passports for clearance with port authorities. Your passport will be collected upon embarkation, and returned upon disembarkation.

VISAS - Citizens of the United States and Canada do not need tourist visas to enter the Caribbean. Rules and regulations pertaining to non-U.S. citizens may vary; please check with the immigration offices, consulates, or embassies of the countries we will visit for information on entry requirements. Visa requirements can change without notice, and you should check the latest entry requirements as far in advance as possible in order to allow time to obtain a visa in your home country should that be necessary.

CURRENCY & MONEY MATTERS: Your trip to the Caribbean includes all necessary expenses, including all meals and accommodations aboard *Sea Cloud*. While U.S. dollars might be accepted in large cities and shops, it

is always convenient to have a supply of local currency for such items as taxi rides, gifts, non-meal-time and off-ship refreshments, laundry tips, meals on your own, extra gratuities, and personal items.

Upon embarkation, a shipboard account will be opened for your convenience. The Euro is the official currency aboard *Sea Cloud*. Credit cards, including Visa, MasterCard, and American Express, are accepted for expenses on board that may be paid/settled at the end of the cruise; the purser would appreciate the use of Euros, if paying by cash in smaller denominations for settlement of your shipboard account.

The official currency of Dominica, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent is the East Caribbean Dollar (XCD); the official currency of Barbados is the Barbados Dollar (BBD). The Euro is the official currency of Martinique and Guadeloupe.

You can check the latest currency conversion rates by visiting “XE-The World’s Favorite Currency Site” at: <http://www.xe.com/>.

There is no facility on board for exchanging U.S. dollars into local currency. It is best to acquire local currency before leaving the U.S. Small denominations of cash are always best as it is easier for individuals and businesses to provide change. Should you extend your vacation in the Caribbean beyond what is offered in the cruise program, you should strongly consider obtaining local currency. ATM machines can be found in large cities and in some towns; you shouldn’t have any problems using major cards in hotels, restaurants, and some shops. Please check with your bank and credit card issuer for more information regarding banking and the use of ATM and credit cards overseas.

ELECTRICITY: Power on board the *Sea Cloud* is 220V, with the recessed outlets of the round, two-pronged European type. If you plan to use American standard 110V equipment with the flat-pronged plugs, you will need to bring an all-purpose transformer to convert the current for 110V use, in addition to a round European-type adapter plug. Electricity in Barbados is 115V, with recessed outlets accommodating the Type A (2 blade) and Type B (2 blade and 1 round pin) plugs.

LANGUAGE: English is the primary language spoken on board *Sea Cloud* and throughout our tour. English is the language of Barbados, St. Vincent, St. Lucia and Dominica; French is spoken on Martinique and Guadeloupe.

TIME: At the time of this tour, the eastern Caribbean region is 1 hour ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST).

MEDICAL SERVICES: A qualified physician is in attendance on *Sea Cloud*, but must be made aware of any potential medical problems that might arise because of any medical condition, disability, or illness of any passenger on board. The doctor is available 24 hours a day in case of emergency.

The ship’s pharmacy has a limited supply of general medicines and seasickness medications. In case of emergency, the ship is equipped with excellent radio and marine and satellite telephone facilities, and is never more than a few miles from shore so that aid in an emergency can be called.

Those passengers who are not fit for a cruise, including those with physical disabilities that affect mobility and balance, heart or immune deficiencies, or other conditions associated with poor health, are advised not to join the cruise

Comprehensive optional insurance, including coverage for medical evacuation (REQUIRED), can be purchased with your trip cancellation policy. Please consult your insurance agent or existing policy, if in effect, for the terms and limitations of your existing coverage. Please refer to the section on Trip Cancellation Insurance.

HEALTH: VENT follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine,

poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccinations.

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

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>.

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).

Motion Sickness – The Caribbean Sea is known for occasional wind-generated turbulence. Although we expect mild seas, passengers should be prepared for the possibility of challenging sea conditions, particularly around Dominica as the island lies in the most direct path of the trade winds. *Sea Cloud* may carry a limited supply of anti-motion sickness medication for general availability to passengers, but we recommend that you consult your physician on an appropriate medication.

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

Biting Insects – Mosquitoes occur on all the islands we’ll visit. To protect you from being bitten, we recommend wearing long-sleeved shirts and pants when in the field, particularly during the cooler hours of the morning and late afternoon. In certain areas we also recommend the use of insect repellent containing DEET. Repellent can be applied to exposed skin and/or clothing. Please note that Dengue Fever is present throughout the Caribbean. The disease is transmitted by the mosquito *Aedes aegypti*, which occurs most commonly around populated urban and residential centers. In most cases, signs of Dengue may include severe flu-like symptoms accompanied by rash, headache, muscle pain, and joint pain. We consider the risk of exposure very low on this trip, but do recommend that participants follow the suggestions for prevention of mosquito bites.

A Note About Chiggers: This tour visits areas where chiggers are known to occur. Chiggers are tiny parasitic mites found in most warm weather areas of the southern United States and the world’s tropics. They are especially numerous in grassy areas, where, in the immature stage, they attach themselves to other animals or humans who make contact with the grass as they pass by. Chiggers do not suck blood and the majority of the world’s species do not carry disease. They do feed on bodily fluids, however, through a process in which a digestive enzyme is produced by the chigger which essentially liquefies the skin around the area where the chigger is attached. The chigger is not usually attached to the skin for more than a few hours before it either falls off or is knocked off. Our bodies respond by producing a hardened area as a defense against the chigger’s digestive enzyme. Though

the chigger may be long gone, it is the presence of the hardened area, and the body's natural process of reabsorbing it that typically causes intense itching, often lasting for a week or more. Chiggers like to attach themselves to areas of thin skin, like around the ankles, beltline, undergarment lines, knees, and elbows.

Chiggers can be avoided by following these procedures:

- Avoid walking, or standing in particular, in areas dominated by grass. These areas are where one is most likely to encounter chiggers.
- Tuck your pants into your socks to avoid direct skin-to-grass contact. Chiggers can find their way through clothing, but this is a standard and effective prevention technique commonly employed by many.
- Apply a cream-style insect repellent, such as "Cutters" to your body from the waist down BEFORE putting on your clothing.
- Powdered sulfur applied to waist, bottoms of pants, sock and boots is also effective at repelling chiggers. However, be warned that clothes will retain the sulfur odor for several washings.
- Shower at the end of each day in the field. Use a washcloth to vigorously rub your legs, feet, and ankles.

By following these methods, you should be able to avoid all chigger bites, as well as tick bites. If, however, you are bitten by chiggers anyway, you can reduce or eliminate the symptoms by applying benzocaine or hydrocortisone creams, calamine lotion, After Bite, or any number of anti-itch products.

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).

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

Birds:

The most important field guide to the birds of the region:

Raffaele, Herbert, James Wiley, Orlando H. Garrido and Allan Keith et al. *A Guide to the Birds of the West Indies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, New Jersey. Second edition. 2020.

Other Birding Resources:

Wauer, Roland. *A Birder's Guide to the West Indies*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996. Easy reading and informative. This book has chapters on all of the islands that we visit, and imparts an excellent overview of the birding areas. Highly recommended.

History:

Page, Matthew Parker. *The Sugar Barons*. London: Windmill Books, 2012. In this highly regarded (and highly recommended) book, author Page tells the fascinating history of the sugar industry in the West Indies. More than simple historical narrative, *The Sugar Barons* delves deeply into the role a few small islands played as the most fought-over colonies in the world—all because of sugar, a commodity so valuable it was known as “White Gold.” The book explores the immense fortunes made and lost in the sugar trade, and the lives of those responsible for it all, in a way that connects to England becoming the most powerful empire in the world. Beyond economics and financial gain and loss, this is also the compelling story, vividly told, of the brutality and decadence of the societies that grew up around the sugar industry, an ocean away from the moral and political authority of mother England.

Historical Fiction:

Michener, James A. *Caribbean*. Fawcett Crest Publishing, 1990. Few authors can tell a tale like James Michener. In this complex novel, we are taken on a 700 year rampage of Caribbean history, complete with cannibals, buccaneers, rum-runners, pirates, heroes, and villains. In classic Michener style, the fictitious lives of the book's central characters play out against a backdrop of true historical events.

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 June 10, 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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