

MEXICO: EL TRIUNFO

MARCH 7 – 17, 2019

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In this one-of-a-kind trip, participants will experience the majestic mountain citadel known as El Triunfo—“The Triumph.” So wonderful is this place that many who go there behold its cathedral-like forest and spectacular birdlife with reverence. Victor Emanuel calls it his single most-favorite travel destination in the world.

The journey to El Triunfo is a journey back in time, to a previous age when the great forests of Mexico’s Sierras were pristine. The El Triunfo cloud forest is now regarded as the finest natural area remaining in Mexico. To hike these mountain trails and walk among El Triunfo’s one-hundred-foot trees and thirty-foot tree ferns is a rare privilege. In this extraordinary place, participants will have a unique opportunity to immerse themselves in one of nature’s true Edens, exploring an ancient cloud forest in search of some of the most captivating and enchanting birds in the American tropics.

At three hundred thousand acres, the El Triunfo Biosphere Reserve is a sanctuary for a spectrum of bird species whose worldwide ranges are restricted to the mysterious fog-shrouded cloud forests of southern Chiapas and Guatemala. We will spend three days at El Triunfo, walking the trails and peering into the surrounding forest for a suite of higher elevation species. The prospect of seeing such inhabitants as Emerald Toucanet and



Collared Trogon is certainly alluring, but this cloud forest is also the domain of the Resplendent Quetzal and the incomparable Horned Guan, quite possibly the two most sought-after birds in Mexico.

For more than thirty years, Victor Emanuel Nature Tours has been taking people to El Triunfo to share her beauty and her wildlife. But this trip is much more than a visit to a single site. It is an adventure and a wilderness trip unlike any other we offer. In addition to our time at El Triunfo, this trip features an unforgettable traipse through southern Mexico’s Sierra Madre de Chiapas. We’ll spend a full week on foot in the heart of the biosphere, climbing up the Atlantic slope, crossing the

Continental Divide and descending the Pacific slope to our pick-up point northwest of Tapachula. Along the way, we'll befriend a family of horsemen, whose sturdy pack animals are the key to a successful trip.

An added bonus is a full morning of birding at beautiful Sumidero Canyon, whose towering limestone walls support a diversity of plants and birds we will not see elsewhere. From start to finish, this trip promises excitement and adventure, first rate birding, and exhilarating physical exercise.

March 7, Day 1: Arrival in Tuxtla Gutierrez, Chiapas. Participants should plan to arrive in Tuxtla Gutierrez's Ángel Albino Corzo International Airport (code TGZ) today and take a taxi to the Best Western Palmareca where a room will be reserved in your name. The group will meet in the hotel lobby at 6:30 p.m. for a get-acquainted dinner and orientation.

A note about taxis in Tuxtla. After claiming your baggage, exit the claim area and there will be several taxi service desks. Pay for your taxi here and then proceed outside with your receipt. Cost in 2018 was less than \$20.

Non-stop service from Mexico City to Tuxtla Gutierrez includes Aero Mexico Flight 555, which is scheduled to depart at 1:15 p.m. and arrive in Tuxtla Gutierrez at 2:51 p.m. (subject to change.)

Participants wanting to avoid the risk of misconnecting with the group should consider arriving in Mexico City or Tuxtla Gutierrez on March 6 and spending the night. Upon request, VENT will be happy to assist with any additional lodging arrangements.

A note about the Mexico City airport which is difficult to navigate. The smaller national flights often don't have a gate assigned until less than 30 minutes before flight time. The flight directory board will simply say Sala M (Hall M) until a gate is finally assigned

NIGHT: Best Western Palmareca Hotel & Suites, Tuxtla Gutierrez

March 8, Day 2: Sumidero Canyon; Transfer to Jaltenango. We'll kick our trip off in grand fashion with a full morning of birding at Sumidero Canyon just outside Tuxtla Gutierrez. Now a national park, Sumidero Canyon offers visitors an outstanding collage of impressive scenery, fascinating botany, and excellent birding. We'll depart the hotel shortly after breakfast, arriving at the park entrance while the morning is still cool. Beyond the gate, a road leading into the heart of the park crosses through several vegetation zones. We'll take time to work a few of the roadside pullouts, as everything we see will be exciting and new.

Our first stop, in the thorn-scrub forest, is likely to be among the most productive. Simply wandering around the parking area and working the forest edge may produce encounters with Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Russet-crowned Motmot, White-throated Magpie-Jay, Red-breasted Chat, and Banded Wren. With good fortune we should encounter White-lored Gnatcatcher, a thorn-scrub specialist. Moving farther up the road, we'll make a point of stopping in the bamboo belt, where the endemic Belted Flycatcher resides.

The road continues into the park's interior and eventually tops out at a dramatic promontory. From our lofty perch, it is instantly clear why this place received park status. Looking out on a landscape of wondrous panoramic scenery, we can view sheer rising walls of ancient limestone towering 2,000 feet over the mighty Rio Grijalva far below. With its headwaters on the eastern slope of the Sierra de Chiapas, the Grijalva cuts its way across central and northern Chiapas on its way to the Gulf of Mexico. Geologists believe the erosive power of the river is enhanced by an uplift of land occurring simultaneously. The scenic splendor of this canyon is surely not to be underestimated.

Once we tear ourselves away from the vista before us, we'll pay special attention to the birdlife. Sumidero Canyon offers opportunities for a variety of birds that we won't see again. Such localized inhabitants as Slender Sheartail

and Bar-winged Oriole headline a list of alluring possibilities. Flowering trees can be productive for waves of birds that include such resident species as Clay-colored Thrush and Yellow-throated Euphonia, as well as such northward-surging migrants as Western Wood-Pewee and Western Tanager. Following a tasty lunch in the field, we'll load up and begin the drive to Jaltenango. The transit will take about four hours, but time passes quickly once we leave the park and move beyond the outskirts of Tuxtla. We'll have plenty of time to view the drier countryside of central and western Chiapas as we move southeast. A short break along the way will keep us alert, and toward late afternoon we'll make a final stop in an agricultural area called La Tigrilla outside of Jaltenango. Though we won't have a lot of time here, we'll likely encounter Yellow-winged Tanagers and Vermilion, Scissor-tailed and Fork-tailed flycatchers.

We'll arrive in Jaltenango early this evening. Jaltenango is literally at the end of the road but serves as the jumping off point for El Triunfo. Our hotel is simple and basic, but also very clean. Spending a night here actually provides an interesting experience and is another aspect to our adventure.

NIGHT: Hotel Finca Jaltenango, Jaltenango

March 9, Day 3: Jaltenango to Finca Prusia; Ascent to El Triunfo. After an early breakfast, we'll depart Jaltenango for the Sierra, Finca Prusia, and the trail to El Triunfo! The road is rough in places and very dusty in others. Because of the hike we'll undertake this afternoon, we'll need to hurry to the trailhead, hopefully arriving by 11:00 a.m. We will make one or two brief stops along the road to sample the area birdlife, but time truly is of the essence.

Our destination is the upper end of Finca Prusia, a large coffee farm that seems to swing from apparently abandoned to partially inhabited. Begun under the ownership of a former German prisoner of war, the property is now owned by his absentee landlord son. The trail to El Triunfo takes off from the upper end of Finca Prusia.

Arriving at the trailhead, we'll watch with interest as some local horsemen strap our luggage and supplies to the sides of their trusted pack horses for the trip up the mountain. We'll start walking at about 4,300 feet; the valley floor at El Triunfo sits at an altitude of about 6,500 feet. Our walk this first day is about seven miles along a good, wide trail with numerous switchbacks. We will be inside the forest most of the time and should enjoy some good birding. The journey up the mountain is a special one, as it represents the only day we'll be on the Atlantic slope of the mountains.

We would like to be in camp by 5:00 p.m., but we also want to enjoy the forest. The sounds of birds singing from the treetops and understory will seem full of mystery; foreign sounds most of us have not heard before.

NIGHT: Camping at El Triunfo

March 10-12, Days 4-6: Hiking, Birding, and Exploring El Triunfo. Awakening this morning, our first impression of El Triunfo is likely to be the stirring dawn chorus. As light breaks over the forested eastern ridgetops, the cascade of birdsong descends on us. The sweet song of the colorful Yellow Grosbeak surrounds our camp, while throughout the forest one hears the incredibly complex, cascading song of the Brown-backed Solitaire and the sweet carol of the Black Robin. Other memorable songsters we should encounter include Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush, Gray-breasted Wood- and Rufous-browed wrens, and Flame-colored Tanager. Another special sound of the cloud forest is the wing-rattling courtship dive of the Highland Guan—it has been described by some as the sound of ripping sail cloth.

Each morning after breakfast, we will gather in the clearing to survey the surrounding forest. Many of the voices that serenaded us while we were still in our tents should be revealed through our scopes and binoculars as gorgeous tropical birds. Yellow Grosbeaks and Flame-colored Tanagers should be common. In the morning, when birds are more likely to perch in the open, we'll scan the bare snags for such dandies as Gray Silky-flycatcher, Emerald

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Toucanet, and Black and Mountain thrushes. Migrating flocks of Vaux's Swifts often descend to feed over the valley.

From our base camp at El Triunfo, we'll take trails into the forest to seek the special birds of the region. The possibilities are nearly endless and we'll take time to look at everything, but the prized sightings are the birds that spend their lives entirely within the moist world of the cloud forest. We'll be on the watch for Highland Guan, Yellowish Flycatcher, Spotted Woodcreeper, Black-throated and Unicolored jays, and Blue-crowned Chlorophonia. With luck we will see the incredible display flight of the Resplendent Quetzal, a bird many consider the most beautiful bird in the tropics.

Other cloud forest specialties we hope to find include the shy White-faced Quail-Dove; the Blue-throated Motmot, with its haunting call and soft colors; the striking Spotted Nightingale-Thrush; and the hulking Fulvous Owl. Always we will be thinking about the "pavon," the Horned Guan, one of the world's rarest cracids (curassow and guan family) and surely the most spectacular. Every day we'll be listening for its low-pitched humming call. We have been fortunate enough to locate the Horned Guan on almost all of our previous trips to El Triunfo, but even the possibility of seeing this magnificent bird is exciting.

We will make a point of exploring all the trails in the area, but will spend our time where we think we may see the most. Aside from the birding, El Triunfo offers a complete natural history experience. An impressive variety of butterflies is readily found flitting along the forest floor and perching atop trailside flowers. Such gems as Abderus Swallowtail, Common Morpho, Mountain Longwing, Apricot Sulphur, and Two-barred Flasher are representatives of some of the families of butterflies found here. Mammals, though harder to find, are present in impressive diversity. The wild yowls of the cacomistle (southern ringtail) are heard each night from the forest surrounding the campsite. We have seen this animal in some years.

NIGHTS: Camping at El Triunfo

March 13, Day 7: Descending El Triunfo, Over the Continental Divide, to Cañada Honda. After a final round of birding around the clearing, we'll leave El Triunfo this morning and begin our hike down the Pacific slope of the mountains. Our destination is Cañada Honda (Deep Canyon.) Our hike today is about five miles, and the elevation of our camp is about 4,800 feet. Departing the clearing, the first mile involves an ascent through the cloud forest, where Mountain Trogons may be heard, up to the Continental Divide. From here it's finally down, down, down. We'll leave the cloud forest behind, descend through a zone of cypress and pines, and finally arrive in camp in the late afternoon.

We will take our time birding the entire way down the trail, hoping for mixed species flocks that might contain something new! Brown-capped Vireo and Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo are two birds we have chances for. Above Cañada Honda, we'll hear our first Rufous-and-white Wrens belting out their beautiful but somewhat haunting songs.

Central American Spider Monkeys roam these forests and we will watch for them. These animals are among the first to disappear with human intrusion in the forest, so the appearance of these animals is always a good sign.

NIGHT: Camping at Cañada Honda

March 14, Day 8: Descent from Cañada Honda to Limonar. Cañada Honda is one of the few places in the world where one can hope to see the endemic Azure-rumped Tanager. We will spend much of the morning birding around the camp, and sighting this special bird is our priority. White-eared Ground-Sparrows are also here but require patience and a bit of luck to see.

Departing our campsite in mid-morning, we will bird our way down to the next campsite at El Limonar. This hike is only about four miles and will take us through a magnificent oak and sweetgum forest. Our camp, at about 4,200 feet, is near a small spring where Emerald-chinned Hummingbirds often come to bathe.

We stand a good chance of finding Rufous and Violet sabrewings along the way and have a good possibility of finding Tody Motmot. We'll also make more attempts to locate the Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo. We should see Long-tailed Manakins along the way, possibly dancing!

NIGHT: Camping at Limonar

March 15, Day 9: Descent from Limonar to Paval. We will hike the final leg of our journey today, descending 2,500 feet from Limonar to Paval. The distance is about 7 miles and will take us into the rich tropical zone. Some of the many species we should see include Lesson's, Tody, and Turquoise-browed motmots; Gartered and Collared trogons; Ivory-billed woodcreepers; Red-legged Honeycreepers; and many others.

At the end of the hike sits Paval at about 1,600 feet.

NIGHT: Camping at Paval

March 16, Day 10: Exploring Paval; Transfer to Tapachula. We'll have part of the morning to bird Paval, one of the "birdiest" places we'll visit on the tour. Birds are everywhere and include a diversity of motmots, trogons, hummingbirds, flycatchers, and saltators. We'll take some organized walks, where we'll seek such special targets as White Hawk and White-faced Ground-Sparrow.

About 10:30 a.m., we will leave Paval on foot for the $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile walk to the end of the road. We'll be met by vehicles and drivers and taken to Las Mandarinas, where we'll have lunch in the home of one of our horsemen.

After lunch we'll continue on to Tapachula. We'll arrive at the hotel in the late afternoon. As this represents the only time we have in the Pacific lowlands, we'll offer an optional walk around the hotel grounds for a shot at a handful of very special Pacific coast birds. We'll likely turn up White-bellied Chachalaca, Pacific Screech-Owl, and Giant Wren. The wren is the largest member of its family in the world and a species whose entire range is the Pacific coast of Chiapas. Cinnamon Hummingbirds and Altamira and Spot-breasted orioles are also possible here.

We'll reconvene in the hotel restaurant this evening for our final dinner and checklist session.

NIGHT: Hotel Loma Real, Tapachula

March 17, Day 11: Departure for Home. We will transfer to the Tapachula International Airport (code TAP) in time for the 6:05 a.m. departure of Aero Mexico Flight 563 which is scheduled to arrive in Mexico City at 7:55 a.m., enabling connections to homeward flights (times subject to change).

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 12 participants.

TOUR LEADER: Brian Gibbons and Victor Emanuel with the assistance of a local guide



Brian Gibbons grew up in suburban Dallas where he began exploring the wild world in local creeks and parks. Chasing butterflies and any animal that was unfortunate enough to cross paths with the Gibbons boys occupied his childhood. A wooden bird feeder kit sparked a flame that was stoked by a gift of the *Golden Guide* and family camping trips to Texas state parks. Twenty-five years ago Brian attended two VENT camps for young birders. Birds are now his primary interest, but all things wild continue to captivate him. After college, Brian undertook a variety of field biology research jobs that have taken him to the Caribbean, the Bering Sea, and the land of the midnight sun, arctic Alaska. He enjoys working with kids, hoping to spark environmental awareness through birds. For many years Brian's field research has involved bird banding. His most amazing recoveries were a female Wilson's Warbler that had been banded in Alaska and was captured by Brian in Colorado, and

a Sooty Tern that perished after a hurricane on the Texas coast; it had plied the Gulf of Mexico and the oceans of the world for 24 years. Brian's recreational bird-seeking has taken him to Machu Picchu in Peru, the Great Wall in China, the plains of East Africa, and the Himalayas in Nepal. Brian leads birding trips in the United States, Central America, the Caribbean, and Europe. As well as being a fanatical birder, he loves capturing birds with photography. He lives in Tucson, Arizona with his wife, Lacreia Johnson, and their son, Grayson.



Victor Emanuel started birding in Texas 69 years ago at the age of eight. His travels have taken him to all the continents, with his areas of concentration being Texas, Arizona, Mexico, Panama, and Peru. He is the founder and compiler for 50 years of the record-breaking Freeport Christmas Bird Count and served a term as president of the Texas Ornithological Society. Birds and natural history have been a major focus throughout his life. He derives great pleasure from seeing and hearing birds, and sharing with others these avian sights and sounds, both the common ones and the more unusual ones. He initiated the first birding camps for young people and considers that one of his greatest achievements. Victor holds a B.A. in zoology and botany from the University of Texas and an M.A. in government from Harvard. In 1993, he was the recipient of the Roger Tory Peterson Excellence in Birding Award, given by the Houston Audubon Society in recognition of a lifetime of dedication to careful observation, education, and addition to

the body of avian knowledge. In 2004, he received the Roger Tory Peterson Award from the American Birding Association, and the Arthur A. Allen Award from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. He is a past board member of the Nature Conservancy of Texas, the National Audubon Society, the American Bird Conservancy, and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. In May 2017, the University of Texas Press published his memoir, *One More Warbler, A Life with Birds*.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is **\$3,895** per person in double occupancy from Tuxtla Gutierrez (tour ends in Tapachula.) This includes all food from dinner on Day 1 to dinner on Day 10, all lodging during the tour as described in this itinerary, ground transportation, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Tuxtla Gutierrez and return from Tapachula; camping gear (tents, sleeping bags, and pads); airport departure taxes; alcoholic beverages; special gratuities; phone calls; or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the group does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$80**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but do not have a roommate and we cannot provide one for you. This fee covers the single accommodations only at hotels in Tuxtla Gutierrez and Tapachula (Days 1 and 10). This does not cover nor guarantee single accommodations at Jaltenango on Day 2, where you may be asked to share. However, your preference will be noted and accommodated if possible at no additional cost.

Due to the special nature of this trip and the remote area we will be visiting, we require every participant to purchase medical evacuation insurance.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The initial deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person. 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. If you prefer to pay the initial deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with American Express, MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at www.ventbird.com) should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

PAYMENTS: Initial tour deposits may be made by MasterCard, Visa, American Express, check, money order, or bank transfer. All other tour payments, including second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc., must be made by check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

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

CANCELLATION POLICY: Cancellation penalties and refunds are based on the following schedule: if cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$250** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made fewer than 120 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions. ***We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.***

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$250*
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	No refund available

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person.

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

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

FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE: To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit. VENT has partnered with Redpoint Resolutions as our

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

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

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

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.

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

CONDITIONS: A journey to El Triunfo is a wilderness trip to one of the world’s most beautiful cloud forests and provides the opportunity to enjoy the beauty and solitude of such a place. It is remote enough that getting there is not easy. There is no nearby airport or sophisticated road system anywhere near the preserve. As such, the tour begins in Tuxtla Gutierrez in central Chiapas, but ends on the southern pacific coast in Tapachula. Over the course of this expedition, participants will experience a huge diversity of conditions, from warm lowlands to cool cloud forests; from an elevation near sea level to 6,500 feet; Atlantic slope birds and Pacific slope birds; and warm days and cold nights. This tour involves a lot of moving; only at El Triunfo are we in any single location for more than one night.

ACCOMMODATIONS: The Best Western Palmareca Hotel & Suites in Tuxtla Gutierrez (Day 1), and the Hotel Loma Real Hotel in Tapachula (Day 10) are very good full-service hotels with large rooms and bathrooms. The Hotel Finca Jaltenango (Day 2) is very basic, but also very clean, with round-the-clock electricity and hot (sometimes) and cold running water. Jaltenango is a sleepy little town that serves as the jump-off point to El Triunfo, and our hotel is the best place to stay in town.

VEHICLE TRAVEL: Upon leaving the hotel on the morning of Day 2, we will spend a half day at Sumidero Canyon before transferring to Jaltenango for the evening. All travel will be aboard a bus in comfortable riding conditions. The ride from Tuxtla Gutierrez to Jaltenango will take around four hours. The transfer from the Hotel Finca Jaltenango on the morning of Day 3 to the trailhead for El Triunfo at Finca Prusia will take approximately four hours, with a few stops for birding. This ride is generally in an open truck; there are wooden benches for sitting in the back of the truck where we will ride. After hiking out of Paval on Day 10, we will ride in open trucks to our lunch spot, then a nice bus for the trip into Tapachula (approximately 2 hours).

HIKING & WALKING: A lot of the magic of El Triunfo lies in the hiking and walking aspect to the tour. Unlike any other tour we operate, this one is based nearly entirely around exploration on foot. We have operated this trip in most years since the late 1970s. Participants have ranged in age from 20 to 77 years; however, this is a challenging trip involving a great deal of walking. There will be no true backpacking. This tour should only be taken by persons who are in good health and are physically able to walk an average of approximately four miles per day on moderate to steep grades at elevations as high as 6,500 feet. On our hikes at El Triunfo, we will be accompanied by a local guide, or park ranger who is intimately familiar with the region. All walking will be on well-traveled roads and trails. Off-trail terrain will be avoided. Determining exact distances on mountain trails is difficult, but participants should refer to the following “table” for approximate distances on daily hikes.

Day 3 – Finca Prusia to El Triunfo: Approximately 7 miles uphill with 2,200 feet elevation gain

Day 4 – Hiking at El Triunfo: Approximately 1.5 to 4 miles on hilly terrain

Day 5 – Hiking at El Triunfo: Approximately 1.5 and 4 miles on hilly terrain

Day 6 – Hiking at El Triunfo: Approximately 1.5 and 4 miles on hilly terrain

Day 7 – El Triunfo to Cañada Honda: Approximately 1 mile uphill then 5 miles mostly downhill

Day 8 – Cañada Honda to Limonar: Approximately 4 miles slightly downhill

Day 9 – Limonal to Paval: Approximately 7 miles downhill with 2,500 feet elevation loss

CAMPING: Camping conditions have improved dramatically at El Triunfo. We’ll pitch our tents in the clearing but will be able to take hot (warm to cool in 2018) showers and use the flush toilets and wash basin in the building where the researchers stay. There is a possibility of sleeping inside in a dorm room with minimal privacy. All meals will be taken in the mess building, where an on-site cook prepares breakfast, lunch and dinner. Camping at Cañada Honda, Limonar, and Paval is more primitive, yet the horsemen who oversee our trip down the mountain run a clean, well-organized camp. **NOTE:** Camping for seven consecutive nights involves a special set of pleasures as well as discomforts, but it is our opinion that a visit to one of the earth’s wild places is worth the inconveniences. Every step takes us through a succession of rich life zones that are as interesting and rewarding as our destination. In addition, note that **participants must provide their own tent and sleeping bag.** (You might want to consider renting or borrowing from a friend if you do not already own a tent and sleeping bag and do not wish to purchase these items.)

“TRAIL” FOOD: Your tour leaders will provide an assortment of granola bars and nuts throughout your time in the mountains. Lunches on Days 3 and 7-9 will be on the trail.

THE HORSEMEN: On a trip full of unique qualities, perhaps none exceeds the experience of traveling for three days with a family of horsemen from El Triunfo down to Paval. The Argueta family, longtime friends of VENT and absolutely essential to the logistics of this tour, will greet us while we are camped at El Triunfo. From the time we leave El Triunfo, this family of brothers, cousins, and nephews will oversee the transport of our bags down the mountain from one campsite to the next. Toward mid-morning each day, they will overtake us on the trail as they push ahead to the next campsite. By the time we arrive in camp each afternoon, the Arguetas will have a fully functional makeshift campground organized and in full swing!

INSECT PROTECTION: Small biting “no-see-ems” are frequently encountered on some of the stretches of trail at El Triunfo, and particularly on the way down to the warm Pacific lowlands. Please bring an adequate supply of insect repellent. We suggest one or two pump-style containers of Deep-Woods OFF! and either a small squeeze-bottle of CUTTER repellent lotion or a small capsule of CUTTER repellent “stick.” Apply the lotion or stick each morning to more exposed parts of your body, in addition to spraying your clothes. Tucking your pant legs into your socks and wearing long-sleeved shirts are highly effective defenses against biting insects.

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 "Cutter" to your body from the waist down BEFORE putting on your clothing.
- Spray your pants and socks with a spray repellent such as "Cutter" or "Off!" Repellants with high concentrations of DEET (70-100%) are most effective. You do not need to apply these to your skin, only to clothing. (Be careful as DEET will damage plastics and lens coatings). Repel Permanone is an odorless aerosol insecticide that offers perhaps the best defense against chiggers. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online. It should only be applied to clothes and allowed to dry before you dress. Never apply Permanone directly to the skin. Permethrin is known to be a highly toxic chemical to insects. It is the active ingredient in Permanone, but is present in a small amount (0.5%).
- 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.

Zika Virus – This tour visits an area or areas where Zika virus is known to occur or could occur; however, we believe the risk to VENT travelers is extremely low. The Zika virus is a mosquito-borne infection transmitted by mosquitos of the genus *Aedes*, and is related to other tropical diseases: Dengue, Yellow Fever, and West Nile virus. This type of mosquito bites during the day and typically is found in areas of dense human habitation where sanitation and drainage of standing water is poor. Zika virus presents the greatest threat to women of childbearing age. For others who become infected, the effects are usually nonexistent to mild, although some people exhibit symptoms such as mild fever, rashes, joint and muscle pain, and red eyes. If infected, the best treatment is plenty of rest, nourishment, and other supportive care. There is no vaccine to prevent or cure the disease; however, Zika virus is not contagious and, therefore, cannot be transmitted through air, food, or water.

Your safety is our highest priority, and we want to emphasize that the best way to avoid Zika virus (and other mosquito-borne diseases), is to take appropriate precautions in avoiding mosquito bites:

- Stay informed about the Zika virus
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants, socks and shoes, and a hat*
- Use effective insect repellents (those containing DEET) and reapply regularly

***We strongly recommend the use of Insect Shield® clothing.** Insect Shield is a process by which clothing is treated with an EPA-approved formula of the insect repellent permethrin. Such clothing is highly repellent to insects and provides durable and long-lasting protection, even after dozens of washings. Outdoor wear with Insect Shield protection includes name brands such as Ex Officio and Tilley, and can be purchased at outdoor recreation stores such as REI and from a variety of online retailers. In lieu of Insect Shield clothing, you should consider treating your clothes with permethrin, which has the same effect, and that can be purchased at outdoor recreation stores and from a variety of online retailers.

For the latest information and news about Zika virus, please visit the website of the CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/zika/>.

CLIMATE & WEATHER: As this journey will take us from the interior of Chiapas to the heights of the Sierra Madre del Sur, we are assured of experiencing a variety of conditions. March is a good time to be in southern Mexico. The heat of summer has not yet arrived and conditions are generally dry, with smaller chances for significant rainfall. Around Tuxtla Gutierrez and Sumidero Canyon, participants should expect a beautiful morning (Day 2) with temperatures in the 70s, but warming toward 90 degrees by midday.

March is an ideal time to be at El Triunfo, as bird activity is high with drier conditions than later in the spring and summer. The weather can vary from warm and sunny to cloudy, misty, foggy, or rainy. At 6,500 feet we will experience chilly to cold mornings, with frost possible, and warm days. Temperatures can range from the low to mid 30s in the early morning into the low 80s by mid-afternoon. More typically a day at El Triunfo may begin with some early overcast skies and morning temperatures in the 40s, warming into the mid to upper 70s during the day.

BAGGAGE: Please keep in mind that from the time we arrive at Finca Prusia on Day 3, (jump-off point for El Triunfo), to the time we depart Paval for Tapachula on Day 10, every item of baggage and equipment we bring is transported on pack horses. **All luggage must be of the soft-sided, duffel-bag type and not of excessive size. This type of luggage is more readily attached to the packhorses than hard-sided bags.** Weight is a deciding factor for this primitive-type camping, so pack smart and please do not plan to bring anything that will not be used.

The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. Some airlines, including Delta and American, have significantly lowered their weight allowances for checked and carry-on baggage, some to as little as 50 lbs. per bag. **Please consult your airline to find out specific weight restrictions.**

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

CLOTHING: It is very important to pack “smart” for your trip to El Triunfo. You can very effectively conserve space in your luggage and keep its weight down by bringing only what you need. Getting maximum “wearings” out of your clothing should also be taken into consideration.

As a general rule for going into the field to view the natural world, it is best to avoid brightly colored or white clothing. Earth tones, dark colors, and khaki are preferred. The concept of dressing in layers should also help guide your packing.

- **Underwear** – Try to get at least two days’ use per pair.
- **Socks** – Many people prefer wool socks when wearing hiking boots, as they are thicker and tend to protect better against blisters. Cotton socks are lighter, but sufficient if your boots are well broken in. Try to get at least two days of use per pair.
- **Pants** – Khakis or other lightweight cotton pants are ideal, especially when you’re hiking in warmer conditions. Denim, while certainly acceptable, is not as comfortable as lighter weight material. The best choice may be the ultra-light, but durable field clothing widely available at any outdoor store. Brands such as ExOfficio specialize in making this type of clothing.
- **T-Shirts** – Several short-sleeved t-shirts are essential for layering. They work well as undershirts, or when out in warm or hot weather. A long-sleeved t-shirt or two will come in handy for the cool mornings at El Triunfo.
- **Outer Shirts** – 2 or 3 long-sleeved shirts are essential for protection from the sun and biting insects. Cotton works, but the lightweight field clothing sold in various outdoor stores is preferred. Such shirts

tend to be designed with good ventilation, which allows you to cool off quickly and for your clothes to dry out fast when wet. These shirts frequently come equipped with multiple pockets for holding pens, notebooks, and other gear.

- **Sweaters and Fleece** – Please bring one very good sweater or fleece for the mornings at El Triunfo. Temperatures in the low 30s are entirely possible and you could be miserable if you are not properly prepared.
- **Jacket** – In addition to a sweater or fleece, a jacket is strongly recommended. Make sure that it is water repellent and provides warmth yet doesn't consume too much space in your baggage.
- **Hats** – A hat for protection from the sun is essential. Many people like the "Tilly-style" and its wide flat-brimmed design. Others prefer a simple baseball cap. In terms of sun protection, baseball caps do not offer any defense against sunburn on the ears, side of the face or neck.
- **Footwear** – See next section.
- **Long Underwear** - If you tend to get cold at night.
- **Swimsuit** – Hotel pools and bathing in streams on the trail
- **Stocking cap and gloves for chilly mornings in El Triunfo**

FOOTWEAR: Good footgear is essential. On a hiking trip, few things can reduce your level of enjoyment like bringing insufficient footgear. Please bring a quality pair of hiking boots or sturdy trail shoes with ridged soles, preferably waterproof, and which offer good ankle support. Be sure to break in new boots or shoes before coming on the tour (wear for several weeks). If you tend to get blisters, be sure to apply moleskin or blister padding before you begin hiking. The added weight of a daypack, believe it or not, can also cause blisters. Boots should be laced loosely for uphill hiking and tightly for downhill.

Bringing a pair of sneakers or other light shoe for time around the campsite or when not out on trails is also a good idea. If your primary hiking footwear gets too wet you will be glad to have the second pair, while waiting for your boots to dry. A pair of thongs or other light open-toed shoe may come in handy for coming and going from the shower/bathrooms at El Triunfo.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: None

INTERNET ACCESS: The only locations with internet access (Wi-Fi) available are the Best Western Palmareca Hotel & Suites in Tuxtla Gutierrez and the Hotel Loma Real in Tapachula.

EQUIPMENT: One of the most important aspects of having an enjoyable travel experience is being prepared with proper equipment. As this tour requires that participants bring more supplies and equipment with them as compared to other tours, we refer you to the separate packing list for all recommended items.

DOCUMENTS: Travel into Mexico for citizens of the United States requires a passport valid for the full duration of your time in the country. Non-United States citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions. Additionally, a tourist card, which may be filled out aboard your flight to Mexico, is required. Both your passport and tourist card must be carried with you while in Mexico.

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.**

CURRENCY AND MONEY MATTERS: Your tour fee includes most necessary expenses, including all meals and beverages (non-alcoholic only). You will want to bring enough cash to cover such extra expenses as taxi rides, gratuities (optional), meals on your own before and after the tour, and personal items. Opportunities for shopping and gift buying are few during the tour, so the need for extra cash is limited. U.S. dollars are widely accepted by

taxi drivers and SOME shops, stores, and restaurants, but this is unpredictable. Small denominations of cash are best, as any places we visit where money could be spent will likely be unable to provide change for large bills.

Should you extend your time in Mexico beyond what is offered in the tour program, you'll want to obtain local currency. U.S. Dollars are easily exchanged into Mexican pesos at exchange stores in the United States, at many major U.S. airports, and at banks in larger Mexican cities. While the exchange rate is more favorable in Mexico than in the U.S., you may feel more comfortable exchanging money before departing from home.

In larger cities, such major credit cards as Visa and MasterCard are universally accepted at bigger hotels and restaurants. ATM machines are available in Tuxtla Gutierrez. Please check with your bank and credit card issuer for more information regarding banking and the use of ATM and credit cards overseas.

TIME: Southern Mexico in March operates on Central Standard Time (CST).

MEDICAL SERVICES: As this is a wilderness trip, we will not be close to emergency personnel or facilities. No sophisticated medical facilities are available at El Triunfo. People who are not fit for a wilderness-type trip, 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 tour. A serious health emergency at El Triunfo may result in an air evacuation, which will come at considerable expense to you, and which may not be possible in certain areas. **All participants are required to purchase a medical evacuation policy for this tour.** Please refer to the TRIP EVACUATION INSURANCE section above.

HEALTH: A trip to El Triunfo offers an extraordinary travel opportunity, yet it is also a moderately strenuous trip requiring hiking/walking distances of approximately 2 to 5 miles a day, with two hikes of approximately 7 miles. For this reason, we strongly suggest you consider your overall physical condition before registering for this tour. This tour is not a good choice for those with existing medical conditions pertaining to cardiac, pulmonary, or circulatory disorders, or chronic knee and foot issues.

Currently, no major shots or inoculations are required for travel to Mexico; however, we recommend that you contact your physician for general advice on travel immunizations. As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against hepatitis types A and B. Hepatitis A is a disease of contaminated food and water. Precaution against the disease comes in the form of a two-shot sequence. Hepatitis B is a disease transmitted through unsanitary needles and contaminated blood. Precaution against the disease comes in the form of a three-shot sequence.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) lists Mexico as a known country where travelers are at risk of contracting malaria. Specifically, the state of Chiapas is listed as an "at risk" location. In thirty years of operating tours to El Triunfo, there has not been a single instance of a VENT tour participant or leader contracting malaria. Our tour leaders do not take anti-malarial medications. Malaria-carrying mosquitoes tend to predominate around human settlement in lowland areas with warmer temperatures and abundant moisture and humidity. Malaria transmission occurs with far less frequency at higher elevations where temperatures are cooler. As the majority of this trip is spent in the mountains, we consider the risk of contraction extremely low.

However, in keeping with official CDC notification, we cannot guarantee that you are NOT entirely risk free of contraction. If you harbor any fears or concerns about contracting malaria, we recommend you consider a routine anti-malarial regimen of chloroquine, which is the preferred preventative drug of choice in Mexico and northern Central America. As always, please consult your physician.

Be sure to notify VENT and your tour leaders of any allergies or known medical conditions, so that they may better care for your comfort and safety. If you have a known allergy to bee or wasp stings, you should carry an anaphylaxis kit (Anakit or Epipen) as a routine precaution.

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If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. 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.

Sun Exposure – The sun’s ultraviolet rays are always a threat to sensitive skin. Anytime you are outdoors you will want to protect your skin, including your lips, eyes, nose, and ears. 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.

Water & Food – The two most likely sources of illness are dehydration and bacterial infection. To prevent dehydration, it is very important that you consume plenty of water. We require all participants to bring **two** one-liter bottles with tight-fitting or screw-on caps. Regarding infection, you will be provided with bottled water at the beginning and end of the trip and treated and/or boiled water while at El Triunfo. We take all precautions to ensure that the food you are provided is safe to eat.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers’ Information Line at 800-CDC-INFO (232-4636) or you can check their website at www.cdc.gov/travel and select “Mexico” in the “Traveler’s Health” section. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

ELECTRICITY: Power throughout Mexico is supplied through 127V/60Hz outlets. Standard American-style 110V equipment with the flat-pronged plugs works easily and without the use of special adapters or power converters. Electricity is available throughout the tour except from the time of descent from El Triunfo on Day 7 until arrival in Tapachula on the afternoon of Day 10. Electricity at El Triunfo, though technically available, is a very recent newcomer to this previously more primitive site. Researchers have brought in chargers that do allow participants to recharge small items such as razors and cell phones; however, the continued availability of this source of electricity cannot be assured. Electricity is available with certainty only on Days 1, 2 and 10.

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:

Howell, Steve N.G. and Sophie Webb. *A Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995. **This is the best field guide ever produced on the birds of Mexico.**

Fagan, Jesse and Oliver Komar. *Peterson Field Guide to Birds of Northern Central America*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016. A fine new compact guide that covers all species we may encounter except Flammulated Flycatcher.

National Geographic Society. *Field Guide to North American Birds*. Fifth Edition. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2006. It’s a good idea to bring a field guide to North American birds as we will see many Neotropical songbirds either on their wintering grounds or on the move as early north-bound migrants.

Another new great resource is the Merlin Bird ID app available from The Cornell Lab. Download the App and load the Mexico – All Bird Pack or the Mexico – Chiapas and Oaxaca Bird Pack. This App has simple ID and natural history text, photos and songs for nearly every bird we could encounter on this trip and it’s free!

Butterflies:

Glassberg, J. *A Swift Guide to the Butterflies of Mexico and Central America*. Sunstreak Publishing, Second edition, 2018.

Garwood, Kim and Richard Lehman. *Butterflies of Northeastern Mexico*. Second Edition. Eye Scry Publishing, 2005.

History:

Parks, Henry Branford. *A History of Mexico*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1969. A truly outstanding treatment of Mexican history is especially appealing as it is highly “readable.” There are many books available on the history of Mexico; but though older, this one is one of the best. Originally published in 1938.

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, and 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 such tips are not expected and are entirely optional. Tips should be given directly to your tour leader; they should not be sent to the VENT office.

RESPONSIBILITY: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. When this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on June 4, 2018 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.

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