

MOROCCO

BIRDING THE ATLAS MOUNTAINS, COASTAL WETLANDS & DESERTS TO THE DUNES OF THE SAHARA

MARCH 3-18, 2024

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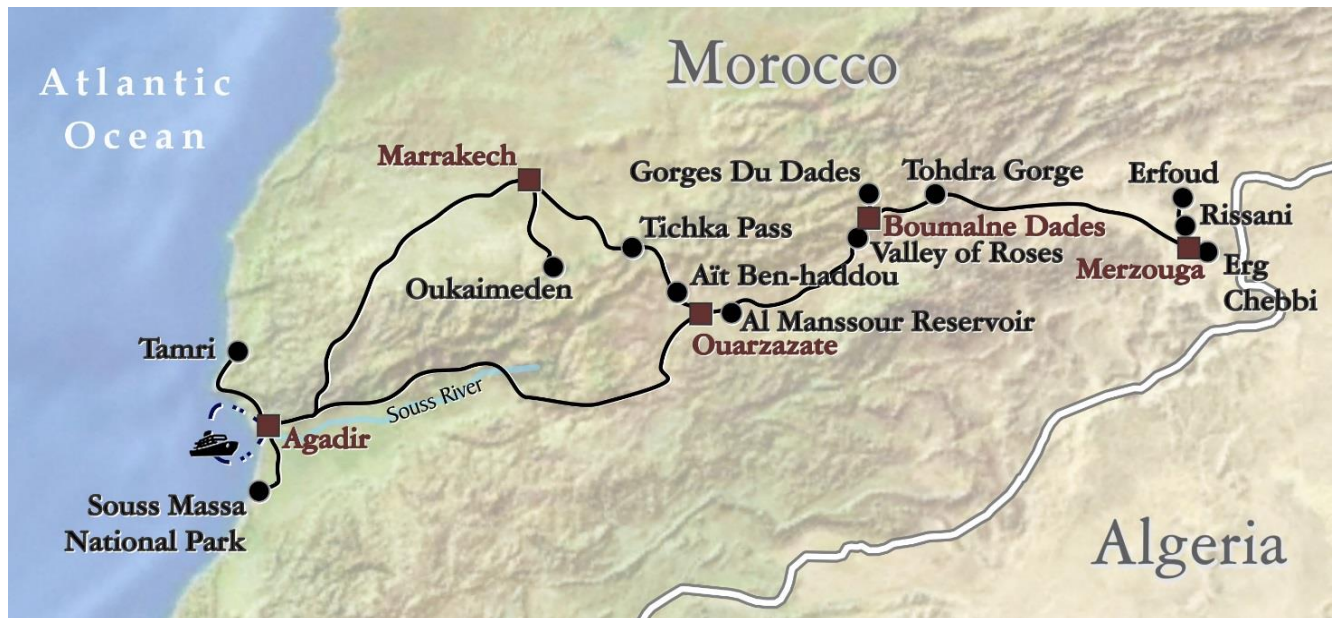


Desert Sparrow by Santi Villa © Spainbirds Nature Tours

This expedition to the Kingdom of Morocco promises the finest birding and natural history experience available in North Africa. March is the best time for birding in Morocco as Palearctic species that wintered in sub-Saharan Africa have started migrating north to their breeding grounds in Europe. Morocco is ideally located on this route and is very important as a stopover point for many species. Also, the many endemic resident species are in prime plumage and ready for breeding. This tour is designed to cover all the important habitat zones of the country. Combine the wildlife with the friendly laid-back atmosphere of the locals and you have the ingredients for an excellent travel destination. Traveling in Morocco is very safe and a real pleasure!

Our first night of the tour is spent in the fortified ancient imperial city of Marrakech, famous for its colorful and bustling medina (bazaar), which is typically walled with many narrow maze-like streets.

From Marrakech, we will travel to the small city of Agadir on the Atlantic coast to begin our explorations. Nearby, the Souss Massa National Park still hosts the critically endangered Northern Bald Ibis or Waldrapp. The protection of nesting colonies and foraging sites has proven effective as the national park encompasses three of the four remaining nesting sites. The wetlands of Oued Souss will be scoured for Marbled Teal; Audouin's, Slender-billed, and Mediterranean gulls; and Squacco and Purple herons, as well as dozens of other marsh dwellers.



After exploring the coastal region, we will head for the Tagdilt Track for some desert birding. Here we will search for Greater Hoopoe-Lark and Thick-billed Lark, while Cream-colored Courser, Pin-tailed and Black-bellied sandgrouse, and Red-rumped Wheatear are other major highlights. Gorges Du Dades is the realm of the powerful Bonelli's Eagle and taxonomically interesting "Atlas" Long-legged Buzzards. We will look for them on our way to the edge of the Sahara. A full day exploring the Erg Chebbi Dunes by 4x4 will be the highlight of the trip for those wanting to see the famous dunes of the Sahara. In this desolate landscape are myriad birds including Barbary and Lanner falcons, two more species of sandgrouse (Crowned and Spotted), the cute African Desert Warbler, the gorgeous Desert Sparrow, the outlandish Pharaoh Eagle-Owl, the common Brown-necked Raven, and perhaps Egyptian Nightjar.

Outside of Marrakech we will venture into the High Atlas Mountains at Oukaimeden, a ski resort that hosts a wonderful array of birds. Here we will search for Crimson-winged Finch, Atlas Wheatear – recently split from Northern Wheatear, Levaillant's Woodpecker, and the appealing Moussier's Redstart.

European birders have been enjoying this safe and stable country and its fantastic birds and history since the early nineteen-eighties. The best birding sites are well-established and there is an excellent network of local guides. We are sure that you will be delighted with this extraordinary North African experience as well.

March 3-4, Days 1-2: Travel to Marrakech. All participants should arrange to arrive at Marrakech Menara International Airport (Airport Code RAK) on the afternoon of March 4 (Day 2). You will be met by our local tour operator and transferred from the airport to the Hotel Della Rosa where a room will be reserved in your name. The group will meet in the hotel lobby this evening at 6:00 p.m. for a get-acquainted dinner.

Flights to Marrakech from the United States will depart on March 3 for an overnight flight to a European airport, then connect to a flight to Marrakech. Participants wanting to avoid the risk of misconnecting with the group should consider arriving in Marrakech or your European gateway city on or before March 3 and spending the night. Upon request, VENT will be happy to assist with any additional lodging arrangements.



Greater Hoopoe-Lark by Santi Villa © Spainbirds Nature

NIGHTS: Aboard aircraft in transit to Marrakech (March 3)
Hotel Della Rosa, Marrakech (March 4)



Woodchat Shrike © Brad Schram

should have time to visit one of these production centers this afternoon. Afterwards, we'll explore the wetlands of the Oued Souss where we should see Greater Flamingo, Slender-billed and Audouin's gulls, Osprey, and a good selection of waders.

NIGHT: Riad Villa Blanche, Agadir

March 6, Day 4: Souss Massa National Park. We will devote a full day to birding Souss Massa National Park, where the Massa River flows into the Atlantic Ocean creating a large estuary whose nutrient-rich soils are favored by many birds during their migration north. The rare and endangered Northern Bald Ibis or Waldrapp still survives here and will be our main target. On the little lakes and along the reed beds we'll search for Eurasian Spoonbill, Glossy Ibis, Marbled Teal, Squacco Heron, Purple Heron, Audouin's Gull, Mediterranean Gull, and Savi's Warbler. Among the species we'll seek here, the most alluring are the tropical Black-crowned Tchagra and Plain Martin. In the evening we'll return to our lovely hotel in Agadir for a wonderful dinner.

NIGHT: Riad Villa Blanche, Agadir

March 7, Day 5: Northern Bald Ibis. In case we missed the Northern Bald Ibis the previous day, we plan an extra visit today to a little village called Tamri, where more individuals are known to forage. The brilliant Sardinian Warbler is common in the hills, and with some patience, this major skulker should show its gorgeous dark head with prominent red orbital ring, while the Moroccan subspecies of White Wagtail prominently marches by. In the evening we'll return to our hotel where another delicious meal awaits us.

NIGHT: Riad Villa Blanche, Agadir

March 8, Day 6: Agadir to Ouarzazate. Today we will be birding en-route to the city of Ouarzazate in central Morocco, stopping for anything of interest as we travel. One of the special pleasures of birding in Morocco is the many *wadis* the country contains. These little valleys are dry for most of the year and only contain water with heavy rainfall. The vegetation in the wadis is short and spread out but accommodates a lot of life. Specialized mammals, butterflies, and birds live in this habitat, a good example of which are the colourful *Sylvia* warblers. We are likely to see Sardinian, Subalpine and Spectacled warblers foraging here. With migration on its way, we expect to come across the first European-bound migrants of the season like Garden Warbler, Western Bonelli's Warbler, Common Chiffchaff, Spotted Flycatcher and Common Redstart. The stunning Woodchat Shrike will be a good addition to the list; we will look for it hunting from the tops of larger shrubs.



Cream-colored Courser by Santi Villa

This evening we will arrive Quarzazate in time for dinner at a local traditional restaurant.

NIGHT: Kasbah Daar Chamaa, Ouarzazate

March 9, Day 7: Ouarzazate to Boumalne Dades. We will spend this morning birding at Al Manssour Reservoir. One desert bird that loves this remarkable habitat is the endemic Maghreb Lark, we are likely to encounter northbound migrants here as well like warblers, Western Yellow Wagtail and the rare Red-throated Pipit. Bibron's Agama and Moroccan Spiny-tailed Lizard are commonly found on the ground when walking around the reservoir. Little Swifts inhabit the skies while Ruddy Shelduck and Black-winged Stilts are seen foraging along the lake. The gorgeous White-crowned Wheatear is unmistakable, and from this day on we can expect regular encounters in these arid zones.

After a nice grilled chicken lunch in a roadside restaurant, we will visit the stony deserts of Tagdilt Track for the first time. Here, we have the opportunity to see a large range of species confined to the desert. We will be searching for Red-rumped and Desert wheatears; Temminck's, Thick-billed, Bar-tailed, and Desert larks; Greater Hoopoe-Lark; and the amazing Cream-colored Courser. The birding should be superb. We will overnight in the Hotel Xaluca Dades near the Valley of Roses where rose bushes are cultivated to produce perfume and other cosmetics. We plan a little stop there to have a look.

NIGHT: Hotel Xaluca Dades, Boumalne Dades

March 10, Day 8: Boumalne, Tagdilt Track and Gorges Du Dades. After an early breakfast we'll return to Tagdilt Track and Boumalne to try to find the elusive Black-bellied and Pin-tailed sandgrouse as they head for the drinking pools. The jolting rhythm of their flight call will be heard first, which will raise our excitement. We will do our best to get excellent scope views. All outstanding species mentioned on the previous day are possible here as well.

In the afternoon we plan to explore the alluring Gorges Du Dades which is full of orchards that attract many migrating birds. The first Common Nightingales of the season will be arriving, while other possibilities include European Bee-eater, the lovely Common Hoopoe, and European Serin. Our target bird for the afternoon is the impressive Bonelli's Eagle, which soars the sky together with the *Atlas* form of Long-legged Buzzard and Eurasian Crag-Martins. We will enjoy some relaxed birding in some truly peaceful surroundings. In the evening we'll return to our hotel in Boumalne.

NIGHT: Hotel Xaluca Dades, Boumalne Dades

March 11, Day 9: From Tohdra Gorge to Merzouga.

Today we leave Boumalne behind and drive further east, with the Sahara Desert foremost on our minds. A stop at Tohdra Gorge will hopefully yield close views of huge Alpine Swifts, more Eurasian Crag-Martins, the gorgeous Blue Rock-Thrush, and the range-restricted House Bunting. In the palm plantations of the Tafilalt Valley, we will search for Blue-cheeked Bee-eater and the *algeriensis* subspecies of Great Gray Shrike, a truly impressive bird. After a stop for the enigmatic Scrub Warbler at one of the wadis while en route, we'll arrive in Erfoud—the gateway town to the sandy deserts of the Sahara! The Kasbah Hotel Tombouctou will be our home for the next three nights, located near the impressive Erg Chebbi Dunes, the largest sand dune complex in Morocco.



Blue-cheeked Bee-eater by Santi Villa
© Spainbirds Nature Tours

NIGHT: Hotel Xaluca Tombouctou, Merzouga

March 12-13, Days 10-11: Erg Chebbi Sand Dunes and Rissani. Over the next two days, we'll explore the areas around Merzouga in search of memorable birds and landscapes. A small caravan of 4x4 vehicles will bring us to Erg Chebbi. The word Erg comes from the Arabic word *Arg* which, freely translated, means “dune field,” and that is precisely what lays in front of us—a massive area of desert with wind swept sands. This desert area, with aeolian



African Desert Warbler by Santi Villa
© Spainbirds Nature Tours

depositions, is an extraordinary habitat, home to equally extraordinary birds and mammals. We will have the whole day to explore this sea of sand. An expert local birding guide will help us find the rarest birds in this part of our world. We'll start with the adorable African Desert Warbler, which only very rarely makes long flights. Instead, the bird walks and hunts for little insects on or near the ground. Our stake-out for Egyptian Nightjar (a little on the early side) and Pharaoh Eagle-Owl will hopefully prove productive, while arguably the most beautiful sparrow of the Old World, the Desert Sparrow, is almost guaranteed. The Desert Sparrow has very gentle coloring with a gorgeously contrasting dark throat. A real treat! Over the duration of the day, we should be on the lookout for Spotted and Crowned sandgrouse, Brown-necked Raven, Barbary Falcon, and Lanner Falcon.

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Another truly enjoyable moment will be lunch in the nearby kasbah with the fantastic landscapes of the Sahara sand dunes out the window! In the late evening we'll return to our hotel in Merzouga.

While driving back, we might be lucky enough to find a Greater Egyptian Jerboa. These rodents are nocturnal, and a spotlighting effort might reveal one jumping around. Please note, however, that these little animals are very difficult to see.

On the second day we will focus on birds we might have missed in the Rissani area, and we will seek them out while paying attention to the local Berber culture as well. Here, there may even be an opportunity for a little shopping!



Crowned (L) & Spotted Sandgrouse (R) by Santi Villa
© Spainbirds Nature Tours

NIGHTS: Hotel Xaluca Tombouctou, Merzouga

March 14, Day 12: Erfoud to Ouarzazate (via the Agdz Oasis). This morning we will travel towards Ouarzazate, crossing the stony deserts and impressive acacia landscapes of Alnif, Nkob and Agdz (pronounced Ag-Dez). Along the road we should find Desert Lark, Black Wheatear, and Trumpeter Finch. If time allows, we will stop again at Al Manssour Reservoir. After the passage of five days following our first visit, a stop here will undoubtedly produce new migrant bird arrivals, such as flocks of Western Yellow Wagtails or Red-throated Pipits. After a long drive, with a birding stop or two en route, we expect to arrive at our hotel in Ouarzazate in the early evening.

NIGHT: Kasbah Daar Chamaa, Ouarzazate

March 15, Day 13: Aït Benhaddou & transfer to Atlas Mountains. This morning we will visit the medieval fortified village (ighrem or ksar in Arabic) of Aït Benhaddou, which, centuries ago, was a small settlement on the caravan route from the Sahara Desert to the imperial city of Marrakech. Inside the walls of the ksar are half a dozen kasbahs or merchants' houses. This kasbah is a great example of earthen clay architecture, which has been



Kasbah Ait Ben-haddou by Santi Villa
© Spainbirds Nature Tours

used commonly in Moroccan architecture. Aït Benhaddou has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1987. We will do some birding en route to the High Atlas Mountain pass called Tichka. Here, chances exist for Tristram's Warbler, Levaillant's Woodpecker, Moussier's Redstart, Hawfinch, Red Crossbill (North African race), and migrant raptors, mainly Booted and Short-toed Snake-eagles. In the evening we will arrive in Oukaimeden where a fine dinner will restore our minds from this long day of travel. The magnificent drive into the mountains will include a stop or two at some roadside shops, which should reveal our first mountain birds.

The Atlas Wheatear is here as well but might require more effort to find. In the Ourika valley Barbary Partridge, Corn Bunting and the regional endemic African Blue Tit will be in our scopes. We will make a few more stops on the return trip tomorrow and hope to add Levaillant's Woodpecker and more sightings of the common but absolutely splendid Moussier's Redstart to our already long list of birds.

NIGHT: Hotel Aurocher Ourika, Atlas Mountains near Oukaimeden



(African) Crimson-winged Finch by Santi Villa
© Spainbirds Nature Tours

March 16, Day 14: High Atlas at Oukaimeden. After an early morning breakfast, we'll head out to snow-capped mountains and, especially, the ski resort of Oukaimeden, where we will be able to walk in the snow. What a difference in landscape this place is compared to the past days in the Saharan Desert! We will see the difference as well in the avifauna. The birds we'll seek today are, again, highly specialized for survival in a very tough ecosystem.

NOTE: Our visit to Oukaimeden will depend on weather conditions and how clear of snow the road is. The road to the ski resort is usually

plowed, but not always immediately after a serious snowstorm. Although the chances for snow are diminished in March, a storm is still possible. In the event of a storm, we may not be able to reach the higher elevation, in which case alternate plans will be made.

NIGHT: Hotel Della Rosa, Marrakech

March 17, Day 15: Marrakech city excursion. We will be welcomed this morning by an expert cultural guide who will show us the most amazing sites of this mesmerizing city. We begin at the Jemaa el-Fnaa square, which is home to almost a millennium of culture that includes trading, bargaining, eating, and mingling. You'll feel the history, tradition, and culture instantly as you wander off into the cozy narrow streets radiating from the square, stopping along the way to explore hidden local shops to taste a few of the many versions of olives, nuts and other typical Moroccan snacks. From there, we head to one of the most popular sections of the city – the spice market! We'll take in the fragrant aromas of cumin, saffron, ginger, pepper, and turmeric as we wander through the colorful market, and then continue our Moroccan food odyssey through the souks, where we'll discover the many traditional breads!

After seeing all the fresh ingredients of the souks and markets, we will enjoy a traditional Moroccan dinner amid the bustling World Heritage-listed Jemaa el-Fnaa at its peak, surrounded by locals, snakes, and monkeys – an atmosphere that is hard to beat.

NIGHT: Hotel Della Rosa, Marrakech

March 18, Day 16: Departure for Home. Participants may schedule their flights home from Marrakech at any time today.

TOUR SIZE: This tour is limited to 10 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: Brian Gibbons and Santiago Villa



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. Thirty 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, South Africa, 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.



Santiago Villa has operated his own birding tour company, Spainbirds Nature Tours, since 1999. He has also led tours for some of the well-known UK tour companies, as well the American Birding Association and several RSPB local groups. Santi has participated as an ecotourism expert at meetings and conferences in different localities of Spain such as Madrid, Cádiz, Trujillo, Monfragüe, and Doñana, as well as Lisbon (Portugal). Santi has guided tours in Chile, Argentina, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Colombia, Portugal, Scotland, Romania, Finland, Norway, Poland, Turkey, Estonia, The Gambia, Morocco, and Kazakhstan.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is **in \$6095** per person in double occupancy from Marrakech. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 2 to dinner on Day 15, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Marrakech and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$970**. Please note that single accommodations are limited and you may be asked to share at some of the lodges. If so, you will be credited accordingly.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, the deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at <https://ventbird.com>) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

PAYMENTS: All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, 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 (October 5, 2023) prior to the tour departure date.

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.

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 & REFUNDS:

Cancellation by Participant:

Refunds, if any, for any cancellation by a participant are made according to the following schedule: If participant cancels 180 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$500** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made between 179 and 151 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the tour fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 150 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre- and post-tour extensions. **For participants’ protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

If participant cancels:

180 days or more before departure date
179 to 151 days before departure date

150 days or less before departure date

Participant’s refund will be:

Participant’s deposit minus \$500*

No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance of the tour fee will be refunded

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. To qualify, cancellation must occur 180 days or more before departure date; deposit transfers must be made at the time of cancellation; and one transfer per deposit.

Cancellation by VENT:

If VENT cancels a tour prior to departure without cause or good reason, VENT will provide the participant a full refund, which will constitute full settlement to the participant.

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. A “**Force Majeure**” event means any act beyond VENT’s control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats

or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

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

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

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

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

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

For a price quote, or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: <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 14 days of making your tour deposit. 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 14 days in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. The primary medical expense benefit is available to U.S. residents only. For this reason, non-U.S. residents will pay an adjusted premium when purchasing a comprehensive policy, which includes all of the other benefits available to U.S. residents. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

Coronavirus (COVID-19):

Concerns about COVID-19 may present uncertainty for those holding travel insurance policies or who are considering future travel and purchasing such insurance. Redpoint features a **Coronavirus FAQ page** on its website that addresses questions and concerns regarding its travel insurance and the impact of COVID-19. We

strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of topics such as policy coverage and limitations, policy modifications, cancellation, refunds, and more.

Please visit the **Coronavirus FAQ** page at the following link:

https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid_19_faq/

Additionally, some countries maintain COVID-19 entry requirements, including mandates to purchase travel insurance covering medical expenses due to COVID-19 illness and in case of quarantine. Ripcord's comprehensive travel insurance plans are designed to satisfy the various country-specific travel insurance entry requirements. Those who purchase a Ripcord policy will receive a "letter of confirmation" that affirms that the policy satisfies such requirements.

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.

ACCOMMODATIONS & INTERNET ACCESS: Accommodations throughout are very good—clean, comfortable rooms with private bathrooms, and all in lovely locations. There are swimming pools at several lodges, laundry service, well-stocked bars, and excellent service. Internet is available at most lodges (at least in common areas) but is not always reliable. NOTE: two hotels have rooms on second floors and don't have elevators, we can help with bags in these situations.

BAGGAGE: We request that participants limit their baggage to **one medium, soft-sided roller bag or duffel bag** and one carry-on, as storage space in the vehicles is limited.

TRANSPORTATION: We will be traveling in an air-conditioned small bus during most of the tour. During our time in the Sahara, we will access more remote areas of the desert in 4x4 vehicles.

CLIMATE: Weather should be dry, but a rain shower at some point in our two-week trip is possible. In the lowlands and desert areas expect sunny and dry conditions with temperatures ranging from 50–85 degrees. In the High Atlas Mountains, we will encounter cold temperatures on a couple of days (possibly 40 degrees or cooler with snow on the ground; folks who are susceptible to getting chilled should bring a warm hat and gloves). Rain can happen during the trip while along the coast, or in the mountains where snow may also be a slight possibility.

CLOTHING: Depending on weather, heat, and your susceptibility to the sun, you could bring a mix of T-shirts and long-sleeved and lightweight blouses or shirts. Lightweight, washable pants are also recommended. A light sweater/fleece for cooler evenings and a light, easily packable rain shell are advised. A warm hat and gloves are advisable for our birding in the Atlas Mountains. Neutral colors (grays, tans, and khakis) are most appropriate. Easily washable, quick-drying clothes are useful. To lighten your load, you may consider bringing some clothes you plan to discard. These can be worn on the tour and left behind—and are very well-received by local staff that we meet.

Some lodges have swimming pools, so bring swimwear if you wish. We will be walking along roads and into the mountains and deserts; a sturdy hiking shoe should suffice for most folks, and a walking stick is advised for anyone who needs assistance on uneven ground. A sunhat and sunglasses are advised. Casual clothes are adequate throughout; leave the fancy jewellery at home. Cultural note: as we will be traveling in a Muslim country, attire should be conservative (no sleeveless shirts, tanks, or dresses).

CURRENCY: You shouldn't need much local currency but if you do, you should acquire it in Marrakech at an ATM. Don't forget your PIN.

DOCUMENTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure from Morocco is required. Visas are not required for entry by United States citizens. Non United States citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions.

EQUIPMENT: You should pack a pair of binoculars that are in good repair, along with a belt pack or day pack (for carrying books, sunscreen, extra film, etc.). As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medications, and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag. Your leader will have a spotting scope, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so.

You should bring all the camera equipment and spare batteries and digital storage media that you need as these items may not be available in Morocco. There are abundant, excellent photographic opportunities, so be sure to bring plenty of digital storage media. Also bring a small flashlight or headlamp. Please bring an alarm clock for early morning wakeups. A few dust masks or Buff Neckwear are advised in case we encounter dry and dusty roads.

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.

Bottled and purified water is supplied during the tour and at meals, so you shouldn't need a water bottle or purification tablets. You will need sunscreen and a small amount of insect repellent (though mosquitoes are scarce and not a problem). A few dust masks are a good item to bring, in case we encounter dry and dusty roads. Though food hygiene and quality is generally good, and we rarely experience any serious stomach problems, you may want to bring whatever remedy you prefer or are prescribed for upset stomach. Moist towelettes can be a pleasant way of keeping refreshed and clean en route. Lodges do have emergency medical kits and some lodge shops stock basic, well-known drugstore remedies for headaches, etc. However, participants should bring their own supply of any medical/pharmaceutical items they need or have been prescribed, as these will not be available. Elevations range from sea level to 8,000 feet in the Atlas Mountains.

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).

MISC: Departure Tax - None

Electricity - 220 volts; two pin round (this is the Europlug)

Language – Moroccan Arabic, Arabic, Berber, French and a little English

Time – 5 hours later than EST

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:

Svensson, Lars, Peter J. Grant, Killian Mullarney, and Dan Zetterstrom. *Birds of Europe Second Edition*. Princeton University Press, 2010. This field guide to the birds of Britain and Europe has received rave reviews. It is packed with 3,500 color illustrations, masses of detail on identification, beautifully produced. Highly recommended. Available as an App too.

BIRDS – APP's:

Merlin. *Western Palearctic Bird Pack*. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. An incredible source of photo, information, and voice of all Moroccan species we will encounter.

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 April 18, 2023 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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