



VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

ITINERARY

PANAMA: BOCAS DEL TORO ARCHIPELAGO

JANUARY 31-FEBRUARY 9, 2025

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Snowy Cotinga © Michael O'Brien

Panama is without doubt one of the premier birding destinations in the Neotropics. It is famous for its rare combination of easy access to extensive, high-quality habitat, good food and water, comfortable to luxurious accommodations, and high diversity of birds—all within a compact geographic area. While ideal for those new to the Neotropics, western Panama's Bocas Del Toro Province offers numerous local specialties for those who have birded elsewhere in the country. Some of the special birds that we'll search for on this itinerary include Short-tailed Nighthawk, Spot-fronted Swift, 15+ hummingbirds, Uniform Crake, Collared Plover, Red-billed Tropicbird, six kingfishers, Prong-billed Barbet, Northern Emerald-Toucanet, Collared Araçari, Yellow-throated & Keel-billed toucans, Black-chested Jay, four parakeets & six parrots, four manakins, Purple-throated Fruitcrow, Snowy Cotinga, 20+ tanagers, Nicaraguan Seed-Finch, and many more species.

Among the pleasures of a visit here is the opportunity to stay at the wonderful Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge, co-owned by Jim & Renée Kimball and Jay Viola. Located amidst 110 acres of

mangroves and spectacular rainforest on Bastimentos Island and next to Bastimentos National Marine Park, Tranquilo Bay offers a chance to hear the dawn chorus, gaze upon seldom-seen denizens of the forest, and remain in beautiful surroundings without sacrificing amenities. There are nine deluxe cabanas, each with air-conditioning, large walk-in shower, full-size water heater, local hardwood floors, fine linens, and handcrafted beds. Each cabana has a covered porch with a hammock and Adirondack chairs. This innovative venture is known for providing one of Central America's very finest ecotourist experiences.



Golden-collared Manakin © Michael O'Brien

Except for picnic lunches, all meals will be served in the main lodge, which includes a nice sitting area, bar, and Wi-Fi. Hors d'oeuvres are offered during cocktail hour preceding dinner, and these may be taken to the porch while watching the sunset. The second story porch covers two sides of the building and is high enough to overlook the canopy to views of the Caribbean Sea. Tranquilo Bay has nearly a mile of Caribbean coastline covered with coral gardens teeming with tropical fish, which offer great opportunities to swim, snorkel, kayak, and fish. In addition to walks on site, many outings will be via boat rides through peaceful waters to access other wonderful birding areas.

Our specific day-to-day itinerary will be kept flexible, allowing us to take advantage of local weather and birding conditions. The locations and ecosystems described below will all be visited during our tour, but the sequence may differ from that listed.



View from the tower at Tranquilo Bay © Michael O'Brien

January 31, Day 1: Arrival in Panama City and Transfer to the Radisson Hotel Panama Canal. Participants arriving in Panama City (Tocumen International Airport) anytime this afternoon or evening will be met and transferred to the Radisson Hotel Panama Canal where a room will be reserved in your name. Those arriving with some daylight may wish to bird around the hotel grounds, which often harbor a good variety of birds including such possibilities as Pale-vented Pigeon, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Yellow-headed Caracara, Orange-chinned Parakeet, Yellow-crowned Parrot, Social Flycatcher, Tropical Kingbird, Blue-gray Tanager, and Saffron Finch.

NIGHT: Radisson Hotel Panama Canal, Panama City

February 1, Day 2: Flight to Bocas del Toro on Isla Colón; Transfer to Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge. We will take an early flight to Bocas del Toro on Isla Colón and transfer to Isla Bastimentos by motorboat. Upon arrival at Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge, we'll enjoy a delicious breakfast in the main lodge, be shown to our cabanas, and be given time to unpack.

We will then meet and bird the grounds around the cabanas and main lodge before lunch. After lunch and a short siesta, we will continue to explore this wonderful 110-acre property that is adjacent to Isla Bastimentos National Marine Park and within the La Amistad Biosphere Reserve. The lodge's veranda, private cabanas and canopy observation tower provide elevated decks for a birds-eye view of the extraordinary wildlife found here. Several kilometers of hiking trails, in addition to the lodge's grounds, are home to more than 200 species of birds. Huge, spectacular Montezuma Oropendolas fly past the second story balcony of the main lodge and throughout the grounds. Fruiting trees planted near the balcony attract many frugivorous species, as well as other birds searching for insects, and feeding flocks that happen to move through. Feeders with bananas and papaya can be swarming with Prothonotary and Tennessee warblers, Bananaquits, and other species. From the balcony one can enjoy the view of the Caribbean Sea just beyond the mangrove forest between the lodge and the dock. Near our cabanas there is a wonderful Golden-collared Manakin lek and one forest trail leads to a pool where one can sit on benches and watch birds come to bathe. In addition to birds, the lodges grounds and trails often provide encounters with

Two and Three-toed sloths, White-faced Capuchin, Panamanian Night Monkey, Nine-banded Armadillo, Crab-eating Raccoon, Central American Woolly Opossum, Grey Four-eyed Opossum, and Northern Tamandua. We will plan to be up on the deck of the six-story high observation tower near our cabanas by 5:00 p.m. this afternoon. This structure provides us with a view of the treetops in the surrounding forest as well as the mangroves and Caribbean Sea. Small birds feeding in the canopy of adjacent tall trees are much easier to see from up here. Some of the Red-lored Parrots going to roost often fly so close we could almost touch them.



Red-lored Parrots © Michael O'Brien

NIGHT: Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge, Isla Bastimentos

February 2, Day 3: Palo Seco Protection Forest. After breakfast we will travel by motorboat to Punta Robalo, a small town on the mainland. A coaster bus will await us, and we will begin exploring the 167,00 hectare Palo Seco Protection Forest in the lowlands and foothills of the Talamanca Range (sea level to 600 meters). This incredible area, one of the most vital portions of La Amistad Biosphere Reserve, consists of wet Atlantic forest, foothills, and watersheds. We'll begin by birding the lowlands between Punta Robalo and Punta Peña, exploring marshes, cattle pastures, small woodlots, and an occasional pond. Here, we'll keep an eye out for Collared Aracari, Keel-billed Toucan, Crimson-fronted Parakeet, Red-fronted Parrotlet, Cinnamon and White-winged becards, Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant, Black-chested Jay, Olive-crowned Yellowthroat, and Crimson-collared and Sulphur-rumped tanagers. Depending on conditions, we may also see some early season raptor migration through this area. Thousands of Turkey Vultures are already moving at this season, and we may see numerous Swallow-tailed Kites as well as the season's first few Swainson's and Broad-winged hawks on the move. As we get higher into the foothills, possible species include Green Thorntail, White-bellied Mountain-gem, Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer, Barred Hawk, Lattice-tailed Trogon, Sulphur-winged Parakeet, Torrent Tyrannulet, Scaly-breasted Wren, Tawny-capped Euphonia, Buff-rumped Warbler, and numerous tanagers including Speckled, Bay-headed, Emerald, and Silver-throated. Mammal sightings on this action-packed day might include sloths, Mantled Howler Monkeys, and Red-brocket Deer.



Crimson-collared Tanager © Michael O'Brien

NIGHT: Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge, Isla Bastimentos

February 3, Day 4: Isla Popa and Tranquilo Bay. This morning we'll take a short boat ride to Isla Popa, the second largest island in the archipelago. Dense mangroves surround a rich gallery forest on this beautiful island, which has a higher diversity of species than other islands due to its proximity to the mainland. As we cruise the edge, we'll keep an eye out for the very local Snowy Cotinga, which often perches up on dead snags. A short walk through the forest may yield Long-billed Hermit, Uniform Crake (very hard to see), Crested Guan, Slaty-tailed Trogon, Yellow-throated Toucan, Crimson-fronted Parakeet, Pale-billed and Lineated woodpeckers, Mangrove Cuckoo, Plain Xenops, and Golden-hooded Tanager. We'll return to the lodge in time for lunch and a siesta. In the afternoon, options will include snorkeling, kayaking, or more birding around the lodge area.

NIGHT: Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge, Isla Bastimentos

February 4, Day 5: Snyder Canal, San San-Pond Sak Wetlands, and Swan Cay. This morning we will travel by boat to the San San-Pond Sak Wetlands, designated as a wetlands of international importance, and part of the La Amistad Biosphere Reserve. The rich habitats in this area include Atlantic wet lowland forest, *Raphia* palm swamp, mangrove swamp, and ocean beach. We'll begin by traversing the historic Snyder Canal (Panama's first canal). Originally created to bring bananas down from Costa Rica and parts of Panama, it's now a quiet waterway providing miles of excellent habitat on both sides. All six species of American kingfishers can be seen along this waterway, and we'll search carefully for regional specialties such as Great Potoo, White-collared Manakin, Black-headed Tody-Flycatcher, Canebrake and Black-throated wrens, Olive-backed Euphonia, Black-cowled Oriole, and the very local Nicaraguan Seed-Finch. We'll also watch the sky for the enigmatic White-chinned and Spot-fronted swifts. Lowland species abound on both sides of the canal, and we will proceed very slowly, with many stops, as we bird our way up to the mouth of the Changuinola River.

At the river mouth, we will find marsh, pasture, tidal flats, and a whole new set of birds. Various herons and egrets will be numerous here, and with luck, we may see a Least or Pinnated bittern or White-throated Crake lurking in the grass. In the adjacent open country, we are likely to find the stunning Red-breasted Meadowlark, and various raptors including both Yellow-headed and Northern caracaras. There are often numerous shorebirds on the sandy beaches, including the very local Collared Plover. Various ducks, terns and gulls are also present here, giving us opportunities to search for uncommon or rare species. And in the waters, we'll keep an eye out for West Indian Manatee, Atlantic Bottlenose Dolphin, and Neotropical River Otter.



Red-billed Tropicbird © Michael O'Brien

We'll depart the Changuinola River by mid-afternoon and head out to Swan Cay, a tiny, picturesque island a mile off the north coast of Isla Colón. Small alcoves and crevices provide nesting habitat between September and March for Brown Boobies and 50-75 pairs of Red-billed Tropicbirds. In recent years, a pair of Red-footed Boobies has also nested here. Although not far offshore, other seabirds such as Brown Noddy and Pomarine or Parasitic jaeger occasionally pass by to investigate this thriving colony. We cannot land on Swan Cay but will circle the area to see the spectacular tropicbirds with their long tails rippling in the breeze as they fly past us.

NIGHT: Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge, Isla Bastimentos

February 5, Day 6: Tierra Obscura and Tranquilo Bay. After an early breakfast, we'll travel by boat eight miles to the town of Hope Well and explore a new road through the Tierra Obscura Corregimiento, providing access to a long list of birds. In this area, the overstory trees are very tall and old, and the new road edge provides access to a rich array of forest and edge species. Some of the many birds we may find along this road include Pied Puffbird, Yellow-throated and Keel-billed toucans, Pale-billed and Lineated woodpeckers, Wedge-billed and Cocoa woodcreepers, Purple-throated Fruitcrow, Masked and Black-crowned tityras, Cinnamon and White-winged becards, Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant, Long-tailed Tyrant, Black-chested Jay, Olive-backed Euphonia,

Montezuma and Chestnut-headed oropendolas, Giant Cowbird, Scarlet-rumped Tanager, and Thick-billed Seed-Finch. This is also a good area to find the beautiful Green-and-black Poison Dart Frog as well as a wonderful variety of butterflies, and often sloths. We will return to the lodge for lunch and siesta. In the afternoon, we'll have options to bird trails on the property, do some snorkeling on the wonderful coral reefs, kayak around the mangroves and reefs, visit the bat cave, or simply relax on the cabana porches.



Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth © Michael O'Brien

NIGHT: Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge, Isla Bastimentos

February 6, Day 7: Fortuna Forest Reserve and the Continental Divide. We'll return to the town of Punta Robalo this morning, and travel about two hours up to the Continental Divide of the Talamanca Range (~4200 feet). Fortuna Forest Reserve, established in 1976, is a nearly pristine montane cloud forest and is one of Panama's premier birding and wilderness areas. It is home to many regional endemics and restricted range species, and our visit here is sure to produce some outstanding sightings. While we are unlikely to find all of these species, some of the many possibilities include Black Guan, Purple-throated and White-bellied mountain-gems, White-tailed Emerald, Collared (Orange-bellied) Trogon, Prong-billed Barbet, Northern Emerald-Toucanet, Sulphur-winged Parakeet, Zeledon's Antbird, Silvery-fronted Tapaculo, Red-faced Spinetail, Azure-hooded Jay, Orange-billed and Slaty-backed nightingale-thrushes, Tawny-capped and Elegant euphonias, Common and Yellow-throated chlorospingus, Tropical Parula, Slate-throated Redstart, and numerous tanagers including Blue-and-gold, Spangle-cheeked, Bay-headed, and Silver-throated. We will enjoy a picnic lunch overlooking the beautiful Lake Fortuna, giving us the chance to watch the sky for raptors. We will return to the lodge by late afternoon, in time to enjoy drinks and appetizers on the veranda as we discuss our favorite sightings of the day.



Common Chlorospingus © Michael O'Brien

NIGHT: Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge, Isla Bastimentos

February 7, Day 8: Tranquilo Bay. Today, our schedule will be a flexible one, with opportunities to enjoy the amenities of our wonderful lodge, walk some of the extensive trails, go snorkeling or kayaking, or possibly revisit a favorite site.

NIGHT: Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge, Isla Bastimentos

February 8, Day 9: Morning at Tranquilo Bay; Flight to Panama City. After a morning at leisure, we will catch a midday flight to Panama City and transfer to our hotel, where we will enjoy a farewell dinner together.

NIGHT: Crowne Plaza Panama Airport, Tocumen

February 9, Day 10: Departure for Home. Participants can use the hotel's complimentary shuttle service to Tocumen International Airport for morning or afternoon flights home.

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

TOUR LEADERS: Michael O'Brien and Louise Zemaitis



Michael O'Brien is a freelance artist, author, and environmental consultant living in Cape May, New Jersey. He has a passionate interest in bird vocalizations and field identification, and a serious addiction to migration and nocturnal birding. His travels have taken him throughout North and Central America and beyond. At home in Cape May, Michael serves as an Associate Naturalist with Cape May Bird Observatory for whom he conducts numerous workshops, and, for many years, conducted a fall songbird migration count. He is co-author of *The Shorebird Guide*, *Flight Calls of Migratory Birds*, and *America's 100 Most Wanted Birds*, and is primary author of *Larkwire*, an online and handheld application for learning bird sounds. His illustrations have been widely published in books and field guides, including the *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America* and the new Peterson field guides. Michael also has an intense interest in butterflies,

leads several “Birds & Butterflies” tours with his wife, Louise Zemaitis, and is coordinator of the Cape May Butterfly Count.



Louise Zemaitis is an artist and naturalist living in Cape May, New Jersey where she is a popular field trip leader teaching birding workshops as an Associate Naturalist with New Jersey Audubon's Cape May Bird Observatory. She also enjoys leading birding groups and lecturing at birding festivals and is known for her enthusiasm for all natural history subjects. Louise and her husband, Michael O'Brien, have been guiding young birders at birding events and conferences for many years. In addition to leading, Louise is field coordinator of the Monarch Monitoring Project in Cape May, served as compiler of the Cape May Christmas Bird Count for over 20 years, and owns Swallowtail Studio at West End Garage in Cape May. An honors graduate of Temple University's Tyler School of Art, she enjoys working as a freelance artist and her illustrations have been widely published. Her proudest accomplishment has been the raising of her two sons,

Bradley, a biologist and artist, and Alec, a philosopher and musician.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for this tour is **\$7,195** per person in double occupancy from Panama City. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 until lunch on Day 9, shared accommodations for nine nights during the tour, ground & boat transportation during the tour, the flights between Panama City and Bocas del Toro, tipping, park entrance fees, and guide services provided by the tour leader. It does not include airfare from your home to Panama City 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 is **\$870** for occupying a standard guestroom as a single in Panama City on Days 1 & 9 and a deluxe cabana as a single on Days 2-8 at Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge (see TRANQUILO BAY ECO ADVENTURE LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS section below).

The fee for this tour is **\$7,365** person in single occupancy from Panama City, Panama occupying a standard guestroom as a single in Panama City on Days 1 & 9 and a small single room on Days 2-8 at Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge (see TRANQUILO BAY ECO ADVENTURE LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS section below). This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 until lunch on Day 9, accommodations for nine nights during the tour, ground & boat transportation during the tour, the flights between Panama City and Bocas del Toro, tipping, park entrance fees, and guide services provided by the tour leader. It does not include airfare from your home to Panama City 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.

TRANQUILO BAY ECO ADVENTURE LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS: There are six deluxe cabanas, each with private bathrooms, air-conditioning, large walk-in shower, full-size water heater, local hardwood floors, fine linen and handcrafted beds. Coffee makers, hair dryers and snack baskets are also located within the bathroom.

Each bedroom features a bed or beds, handcrafted for Tranquilo Bay, made from local hardwoods and topped with an orthopedic mattress. Each cabana has a covered porch with a hammock, Adirondack chairs and a ceiling fan. Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge has two smaller, single, deluxe rooms in a new two-story building that have the amenities mentioned above for the six large deluxe cabanas and their own private porches with hammocks.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. If you would like to pay your deposit using a credit card, the deposit must be made with MasterCard 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 prior to the tour departure date (September 3, 2024).

CANCELLATION & REFUNDS:

Cancellation by Participant:

Refunds, if any, for any cancellation by a participant are made according to the following schedule: If participant cancels 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.**

<u>If participant cancels:</u>	<u>Participant's refund will be:</u>
180 days or more before departure date	Participant's deposit minus \$500*
179 to 151 days before departure date	No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance of the tour fee will be refunded
150 days or less before departure date	No refund available

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, 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.

BAGGAGE: The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. Please consult your airline to find out specific weight restrictions. Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government's attempts to improve airport security we recommend that you check the website of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for the most updated information: <http://www.tsa.gov/>.

In case your checked luggage is delayed, it's recommended that you pack all documents, medications, a change of clothes, your binocular, and toiletry items in a carry-on bag. Air Panama has a 50 lb. limit for checked luggage and small compartments for carry-on storage above the seats on the plane. Fortunately, you can pay for any excess weight.

CLIMATE: The climate in northwestern Panama is usually warm, with mornings in the 70s and afternoons in the 80s. Conditions at midday can be humid and very warm, with temperatures reaching into the lower 90s. Rainstorms may occur at any time of year, but are more likely during the rainy season. The two seasons with the least amount of rain are in February/March and September/October. When we travel up to 4,200 feet near La Fortuna, the temperatures will be lower and may even be cool. Clouds and overcast skies frequently prevail in higher areas, leading to damp conditions.

CLOTHING: As is the case for all our tropical tours, lightweight field clothing is the norm for Panama. This includes several pair of lightweight field pants, along with cool and comfortable long-sleeved shirts. A hat and sunscreen are recommended for protection from the sun. **DARK-COLORED OR NEUTRAL CLOTHING IS REQUESTED, AS WHITE AND BRIGHT COLORS MAY FRIGHTEN SECRETIVE BIRDS WE ARE TRYING TO CALL IN.** Lightweight and comfortable walking shoes are recommended, since some days we will spend a good bit of time on foot. Waterproof boots are essential, as the trails can be muddy. A small umbrella and/or rain gear are essential as well.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Free laundry service is available at the Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge, but we recommend you leave something in the tip box for this service on our last morning.

CURRENCY: The U.S. Dollar is the official currency of Panama. VISA and American Express are most commonly used, but MasterCard is also accepted.

DOCUMENTS: For U.S. citizens, a passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure is required for entry into Panama. Non-U.S. citizens should check with their local Panamanian consulate/embassy for instructions.

ELECTRICITY: Electricity is available at all of our lodging 24 hours a day. Wall outlets are provided in each room/cabaña and electrical appliances may therefore be used at any time day or night. No adapter is needed.

EQUIPMENT: You should pack a binocular that is in good condition, along with a belt pack or day-pack (good for carrying books, sunscreen, camera, etc.). As a precaution, it's a good idea to pack your binocular, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medications, and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag. Your leaders will have spotting scopes, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so.

INTERNET ACCESS: Wi-Fi will be available at the Radisson Hotel Panama Canal, Crowne Plaza Hotel and in the main building of the Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge.

HEALTH: In general, we recommend that you consult your doctor before taking any immunizations. Health requirements change frequently and often vary from district to district within a country. Currently, no vaccinations are required to enter Panama. However, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta advise that there is some risk of malaria in parts of the country. The areas visited on this tour are not at risk. The CDC is recommending precautions for travelers going out of these main areas. Your Polio and yellow fever vaccinations should be current. The water is drinkable in Panama and the food is safe.

VENT follows CDC recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccinations.

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

COVID-19: We continually emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. Although VENT no longer maintains any of its COVID-era prevention protocols, we strongly recommend best practices for protecting yourself and your fellow travelers against COVID-19 illness. These measures include receiving the primary series vaccinations for those eligible, staying “Up to Date” with COVID-19 booster shots, wearing high filtration N-95 or KN-95 masks when in airports and on airplanes, and avoiding risky social settings in the lead-up to your tour. These recommendations are firmly rooted in CDC guidance regarding recommendations for avoiding COVID-19. Please visit the **Coronavirus Travel Update** page of our website <https://ventbird.com/covid-19> for our official statement regarding COVID-19 and the operation of our tours. Please visit the CDC website for the most up to date information about COVID-19 and associated guidance for proper health and hygiene: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>.

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

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

- DEET (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide): A chemical compound that is marketed under various brand names (OFF!®, Cutter™, Ultrathon™, etc.) and offered in a variety of formulations including sprays, lotions, time-release preparations, and disposable wipes. The formulations will state a percentage of the active ingredient DEET on the packaging. DEET may be applied to exposed skin directly and/or sprayed on clothing. Please be careful when applying DEET as it can damage plastics and lens coatings.
- Picaridin: A synthetic formulation that is derived from piperine, a substance found in plants that produce black pepper.

- Herbal insect repellents: Various mixtures of organic ingredients such as oils from eucalyptus, citronella, cedar, and other herbs. The herbal repellents are more difficult to categorize because of the difference in ingredients from one brand to another. There is considerable variation in their effectiveness.

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

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

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

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

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

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 species do not carry disease. They do feed on bodily fluids 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 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.
- Apply insect repellent to your skin and clothing. Please refer to the Insect Repellent section that follows for important information about selecting and applying repellent.
- 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. If using sulfur, never touch your eyes, nose, or mouth before washing your hands first.
- 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.

MISC: Departure Tax - US \$40 (included in the price of your air ticket)
Electricity - 120 volts; plugs are the flat 2-pin American type.
Language - The official language is Spanish, but English is spoken.
Time - Eastern Standard Time

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

Field Guides

Birds:

Ridgely, Robert S. and John Gwynne. *A Guide to the Birds of Panama*. (Second Edition). Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

George R. Angehr and Robert Dean. *The Birds of Panama: A Field Guide*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010.
The most useful guide for this tour.

Mammals:

Emmons, Louise H. *Neotropical Rainforest Mammals: A Field Guide*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Butterflies:

Glassberg, Jeffrey. *A Swift Guide to the Butterflies of Mexico and Central America*. Sunstreak Books Inc., 2007.

Background Reading

Natural History:

Chapman, Frank. *My Tropical Air Castle*. New York: Appleton and Company, 1929. Fun reading by an early ornithologist in Panama. Out of print; try www.abebooks.com.

Chapman, Frank. *Life in an Air Castle*. New York: Appleton-Century Co., 1938. Out of print; try www.abebooks.com.

Forsyth, Adrian and Ken Miyata. *Tropical Nature*. New York: Charles Scribner, 1987. Excellent introduction to many fascinating aspects of the tropical rainforest.

Hilty, Steven. 1994. *Birds of Tropical America*. Shelbourne, VT: Chapters Publishing, 1994. Subtitle: "A watcher's introduction to behavior, breeding and diversity."

Kricher, John C. *A Neotropical Companion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999. An excellent introduction to the rainforest.

Human History:

McCullough, David. *A Path Between the Seas: The Creation of the Panama Canal*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999. An excellent history of the construction of the Panama Canal.

SUGGESTED APPS:

Merlin Bird ID by Cornell Lab. Cornell University. Highly recommended! This free download from the App store is a remarkable machine-learning ID tool to help birders of any skill level identify birds through sound ID, photo ID, or based on a few simple questions. ID text and audio recordings included for more than 10,000

species worldwide. Free “Bird Packs” need to be downloaded for each region; the Panama bird pack is 971.8 MB.

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel your VENT leader 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 and/or local guides; they should not be sent to the VENT office.

RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc., a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, “**VENT**”) act only as agents for the participant in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

VENT reserves the right (i) to substitute hotels of similar category, or the best reasonable substitution available under the circumstances, for those indicated and (ii) to make any changes in the itinerary that are deemed necessary by VENT or which are caused by third party transportation schedules (i.e. railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, etc.).

VENT reserves the right to substitute leaders or guides on any tour. Where VENT, in its sole discretion, determines such substitution is necessary, it will notify tour participants.

VENT reserves the right to cancel any tour prior to departure with or without cause or good reason. See the VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy set forth above.

Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on June 24, 2024 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

VENT reserves the right to decline any participant’s Registration Form and/or refuse to allow any participant to participate in a tour as VENT deems reasonably necessary, in its sole discretion. VENT also reserves the right to remove any tour participant from any portion of a tour as VENT deems necessary, in its sole discretion, reasons for such removal include but are not limited to, medical needs, injury, illness, inability to meet physical demands of a tour, personality conflict or situations in which such removal is otherwise in the best interest of the tour, the tour group and/or such participant. A participant may also voluntarily depart from a tour. If a participant is removed from a tour or voluntarily departs from a tour, such participant will be responsible for any expenses associated with such removal or departure, including but not limited to, transportation, lodging, airfare and meals, and VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any such removed or departed participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by such participant.

Baggage is carried at the participant’s risk entirely. No airline company, its employees, agents and/or affiliates (the “**Airline**”) is to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time participants are not on board the Airline’s aircraft. The participant ticket in use by any Airline, when issued, will constitute the sole contract between the Airline and the purchaser of the tickets and/or the participant. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for VENT tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airlines Reporting Corporation.

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