



VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

ITINERARY

SOUTHERN INDIA

JANUARY 6–26, 2025

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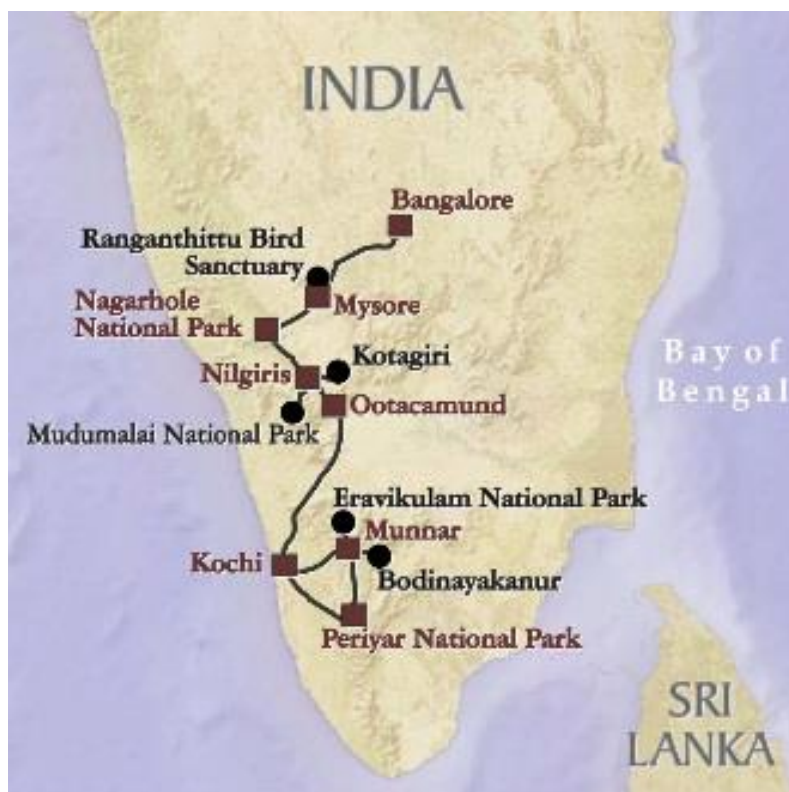
India overwhelms the senses with the richness and diversity of its culture, history and wonderful aromas of mouth-watering spices. Its traditional agricultural techniques and religious history of reverence for wild deities have produced an amazing complexity of wildlife tolerance in this incredible country. Every nook and cranny in even the seemingly unlikeliest place teems with birds and mammals. A huge country, most visitors have focused on the north of India and largely left the south of the subcontinent undiscovered to the naturalist's eye. Southern India has surprised participants with the richness of its birds and wildlife, the splendid comfort of its accommodations, and exquisite cuisine. We will enjoy a relaxed pace and the opportunity to watch at length some of India's most magnificent wildlife.

We will certainly see Asian Elephant, Gaur, Spotted Deer, Sambar, Barking Deer, Nilgiri Langur and Bonnet Macaque. We will also be looking hard for the more elusive big carnivores: Tiger, Leopard and Asian Wild Dog. Adding to the diversity is an array of lesser-known mammals ranging from the extraordinary and endangered Lion-tailed Macaque, to the Sloth Bear and Stripe-necked Mongoose. We will stay in some particularly beautiful hotels ranging from beautifully renovated British regimental barracks in Ooty, a classic hill station, to the Kabini River Lodge, located within roaring distance of Nagarhole National Park and some of southern India's richest woodland and forest areas.

The Western Ghats are a dramatic series of granite mountains. They extend along the western edge of the peninsula, rising from emerald green lowlands of ripening rice paddies to a mosaic of forests. Here a large number of bird species reside that are found nowhere else in the world (some are shared with neighboring Sri Lanka). A major taxonomic reassessment of the birds of South Asia in recent years has seen a tremendous number of populations isolated in South India being elevated to full species status.

We will make a special effort to locate as many of these species as possible, including Gray Junglefowl; Painted Bush-Quail; Gray-fronted Green-Pigeon; Nilgiri Wood-Pigeon; Malabar Imperial-Pigeon; Malabar Parakeet; Sri Lanka Frogmouth; Jerdon's Nightjar; Indian Swiftlet; Malabar Trogon; Malabar Gray and Malabar Pied-hornbill; Malabar Flameback; Malabar and White-cheeked barbet; Jerdon's Bushlark; Malabar Lark; Hill Swallow; Nilgiri Pipit; Malabar Woodshrike; Orange Minivet; Square-tailed, Flame-throated, Yellow-browed, Gray-headed and the very local Yellow-throated bulbul; Malabar Whistling-Thrush; Indian Blackbird; Nilgiri Thrush; White-bellied and Nilgiri sholakili; the handsome Black-and-orange Flycatcher; Nilgiri Flycatcher; White-bellied Blue Flycatcher; Nilgiri, Palani and Wayanad laughingthrushes; Dark-fronted, Yellow-billed and Rufous babbler; Nilgiri Flowerpecker; Loten's, Crimson-backed and Purple-rumped sunbird; Malabar Starling; Southern Hill Myna; and White-bellied Treepie.

Southern India is distinctly different from the north; life is more relaxed, winters are not severe, and the monsoon is dramatic. Exotic Dravidian temples punctuate the lush countryside and add a special element to our journey. This tour will take us to the finest reserves in Southern India including magnificent Nagarhole and Periyar National Parks, which contain the best concentrations of wildlife in the peninsula. We will also explore remnant patches of bird-rich montane forest among little known sholas hidden in the folds of these granite mountains, vast areas of semi-arid woodland, and wander through medieval villages where birds and humans have coexisted for hundreds of years.



This is truly a photographer's and birder's paradise. In addition to the large number of endemic birds, we will also encounter a number of species rarely, if ever, recorded on our Northern India tours: Red Spurfowl, the impressive White-bellied Woodpecker, Heart-spotted Woodpecker, Indian Pitta, the rare White-bellied Minivet, Indian Scimitar-Babbler, Indian Blue Robin, Kashmir Flycatcher, Forest Wagtail, and Black-throated Munia, to mention a few.

January 6-8, Days 1-3: Travel to Bengaluru. Please plan to arrive in the city of Bengaluru (airport code BLR) **no later than the afternoon of January 8.** Upon arrival, you will be met by a representative of our ground operator and transferred to our hotel. If your arrival in Bengaluru is not on this date, the VENT office will be happy to assist with pre-tour hotel arrangements. The tour will gather in the hotel lobby at **6:30 p.m. on January 8**, for introductions and a welcome dinner.

NIGHTS (January 6 & 7): In transit to Bengaluru
 NIGHT (January 8): Vivanta by Taj – MG Road, Bengaluru

January 9, Day 4: Bengaluru to Mysore. This morning, we will drive through the wonderful Indian countryside to the city of Mysore. As always in India, the place will be teeming with birds and fascinating things to see, imbibe, and photograph. We will stop frequently as time permits. Mysore is a lovely city that was, until independence, the seat of the Maharajas of Mysore, a princely state covering much of present-day Karnataka. It is the epitome of “living history”; historians, architects, or for that matter anyone interested in seeing a civilization radically different from the West will enjoy Mysore.

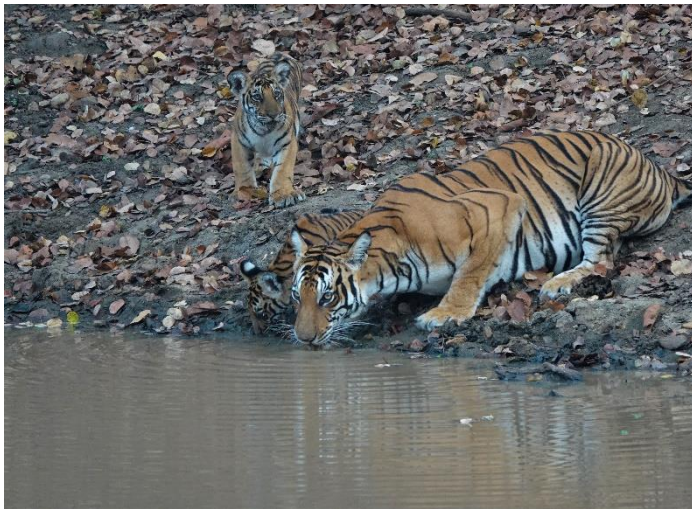
Along the way we may visit Kokkare Bellur, where Painted Storks and Spot-billed Pelicans often nest in the midst of a typical southern Indian village little changed literally for hundreds of years. We will also stop and explore wetlands where large numbers of waterbirds congregate. We can look for such exciting species as Black-necked Stork, together with large numbers of waterfowl and shorebirds, and hopefully some wintering raptors.

NIGHT: Radisson Blu Plaza Hotel, Mysore

January 10, Day 5: Mysore to Nagarahole. This morning, we will make a short drive from the city of Mysore to the Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary. This small, scenically beautiful reserve is set on several small islands in the Cauvery River. Impressive colonies of cormorants, darters, egrets, herons, ibis, storks and spoonbills nest here in addition to a number of other interesting species. This includes the peculiar Great Thick-knee, River Tern, Streak-throated Swallows, Streaked Weaver, Red Avadavat, and Scaly-breasted and Tricolored munias. We will also be on the lookout for Mugger Crocodile that inhabit the area. The surrounding trees host a huge roost of Indian Flying Foxes, giant fruit-eating bats that disperse at night to feed.

Later in the day we will continue on to Nagarahole National Park with regular stops along the way for such species as Cotton Pygmy-Goose plus Red-naped and Black-headed ibis. Nagarahole, a huge, well-protected forest, offers really exciting wildlife viewing possibilities. Beautiful Spotted Deer and herds of Asian Elephant are frequently encountered. We will arrive at our attractive lodge during the late afternoon or at least in time for dinner if the wildlife keeps slowing our progress!

NIGHT: Kabini River Lodge, Nagarahole



Tigress and cubs: Nagarhole NP © Max Breckenridge

January 11-13, Days 6-8: Nagarahole National Park.

Nagarahole National Park, together with the adjoining Mudumalai, Bandipur and Wayanad reserves, encompasses an area of approximately 2,000 sq. km. We will concentrate our efforts on Nagarahole with its luxuriant, lower elevation forests. This vast area contains one of the highest Tiger-prey densities anywhere in Asia and as a consequence, Nagarahole supports one of the few truly thriving populations of Tigers anywhere within the great cat's range. Similarly good populations of Leopard are also present. Neither species is easy to observe as they have learned well to hide themselves from humans. Nevertheless, exploring by open-backed jeep and boat, we will venture out at dawn and dusk to quietly seek out the diversity of wildlife that make Nagarahole home. We can siesta or bird between jeep rides.

The park is home to some 250 species of bird. Some of the species we may see here include Oriental Darter; Asian Woolly-necked Stork; Gray-headed Fish-Eagle; Black-winged Kite; Crested Serpent-Eagle; Red-headed, White-rumped and Indian vultures; Gray Junglefowl; Indian Peafowl; Barred Buttonquail; River Tern; Alexandrine, Rose-ringed, Plum-headed and the endemic Malabar parakeets; Common Hawk-Cuckoo; the elusive but attractive Blue-faced Malkoha; Mottled Wood-Owl; Indian Scops-Owl; Brown Fish-Owl; Brown Hawk-Owl; Jungle Owlet; Indian Swiftlet; White-rumped Needletail; Alpine Swift; Stork-billed Kingfisher; Coppersmith and White-cheeked barbets; Streak-throated Woodpecker; Black-rumped and Malabar flamebacks; the striking White-bellied and Heart-spotted woodpeckers; wintering Indian Pitta (often in the dense scrub around our accommodations); Large Cuckooshrike; Small and Orange minivets; Golden-fronted Leafbird; White-bellied Drongo; Puff-throated, Rufous and Jungle babblers; Indian Scimitar-Babbler; Gray-breasted Prinia; several species of wintering *Phylloscopus* warblers; Tickell's Blue Flycatcher; White-browed Fantail; Indian and Velvet-fronted nuthatches; Purple-rumped and Purple sunbirds; Southern Hill Myna; and Indian Golden and Black-hooded orioles, plus Rufous Treepie. We may also find a Malabar Trogon or Blue-bearded Bee-eater.

This area is superb for mammals and any of the waterholes will be worth watching. Species we may see include Asian Elephant, the gigantic Gaur (a species of forest cattle), Wild Boar, Spotted Deer – a beautiful species, Sambar and Barking Deer. With luck we may see Tiger, Leopard, Sloth Bear, or a pack of Dhole (Asian Wild Dog), all of which are resident in the area but are difficult to see. Some of the less well-known mammals include Golden Jackal, Smooth-coated Otter, Small Indian Civet, Stripe-necked Mongoose, Black-naped Hare and Three-striped Palm Squirrel.

NIGHTS: Kabini River Lodge, Nagarahole

January 14, Day 9: Drive to Masinagudi at the Base of the Nilgiris. After a final morning's jeep safari, we will head for the base of the Nilgiri Hills and the edge of Mudumalai National Park. An area of drier forest lying in the rain shadow of the Nilgiri Hills, it supports a number of species either difficult or not found at all in Nagarahole. Species we may see here include Jungle Bush-Quail, Short-toed Snake-Eagle, Changeable Hawk-Eagle, Red Spurfowl (elusive), Yellow-footed Green-Pigeon, Malabar Parakeet, Spotted Owlet, Crested Treeswift, White-cheeked Barbet, Indian Pitta, Black-headed Cuckooshrike, Blue-capped Rock-Thrush, the skulking Rufous Babbler, Thick-billed and Booted warblers, and Nilgiri Flowerpecker.

NIGHT: Secret Ivory Resort, Masinagudi

January 15, Day 10: Masinagudi Area. Located at the foot of the imposing Nilgiri Hills, we will spend the best parts of the day exploring the surrounding area of dry thorn-scrub and savanna forest for some rather elusive and localized dry-country species. Some of the birds not mentioned already include Steppe Eagle, Yellow-wattled Lapwing, White-naped Woodpecker, White-bellied Minivet (rare), Malabar Lark, and the endemic Yellow-billed Babbler. This is also a good area for many more wide-ranging species and we shall be on the lookout for these and several exciting mammals including the rarely seen Striped Hyena. Elephants are present in good numbers here and our local guides will be ensuring we don't have any close encounters.

NIGHT: Secret Ivory Resort, Masinagudi

January 16, Day 11: Drive to Ooty. After some final birding we will gradually climb the seemingly vertical face of the Nilgiri Hills through a series of "interesting" hairpin bends to the town of Ootacamund, better known as Ooty. We will arrive in time to spend the afternoon birding in the cooler forest at this higher altitude.

NIGHT: Savoy Hotel, Ooty

January 17, Day 12: Ooty. This sprawling hill station, located at 7,250 ft, in the midst of the Nilgiri Hills, has been described as "an unlikely combination of southern England and Australia." The town has a distinctly faded, colonial charm with stone churches, public boy's school, and landscaped gardens. Although tea estates have replaced much of the forest, patches of evergreen forest, known as sholas, still remain in some of the intervening ravines. Here we will look for such specialties as Nilgiri Laughingthrush, the gorgeous Black-and-orange Flycatcher, wintering Kashmir Flycatcher, Nilgiri Flycatcher, the difficult to find Nilgiri Sholakili, the elusive Nilgiri Thrush and with a bit of luck, the increasingly threatened Nilgiri Wood-Pigeon. Other species we will search for include Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike, Tytler's and Large-billed leaf warblers, Gray-headed Canary-Flycatcher, Indian Blue Robin, Indian Blackbird, Olive-backed Pipit, Common Rosefinch and Black-throated Munia.

NIGHT: Savoy Hotel, Ooty

January 18, Day 13: Drive to Valparai. From Ooty we will descend the Nilgiri Hills onto the plains before climbing back up into the Anaimalai Hills further to the south. The journey will take us through a nice cross section of habitats from upland shola forest to extensive tea estates. As we descend, we will pass through some attractive evergreen forest before making the descent down the Kotagiri escarpment with its fine views over the dry woodland and thorn-scrub of the surrounding plains. This is a site for the scarce Yellow-throated Bulbul. With luck in the grasslands here we may spot the Nilgiri Tahr, a spectacular species of endemic mountain goat. After crossing this broad valley, we will climb once again into some fine and very bird and mammal rich evergreen forests. Here we will spend the night in this little-known area where there is a very good chance of encountering the rare, spectacular and typically shy Lion-tailed Macaque.

NIGHT: Stanmore Garden Bungalow, Valparai

January 19, Day 14: Valparai. We will have a full day based out of our comfortable hotel to explore the beautiful evergreen forests of this delightful district. There are plenty of birds to search for including Gray-fronted Green-Pigeon, Malabar Trogon, Malabar Gray Hornbill, Malabar Barbet, Common Flameback, Dark-fronted and Puff-throated babblers, Indian Yellow Tit, Malabar Whistling-Thrush, and White-bellied Blue Flycatcher, to mention a few.

NIGHT: Stanmore Garden Bungalow, Valparai

January 20, Day 15: Drive to Munnar. We will have a more relaxed start this morning before making the drive to Munnar. On the way we will pass several wetlands and enjoy the wonderful scenery of Chinnar Wildlife Reserve. After lunch we will drive up into the Western Ghats and the tea growing area of Munnar. Our accommodations for the next two nights are in an attractive, modern guest-house located in an idyllic setting surrounded by hills covered with tea gardens and patches of remnant forest. On the way we should spot the scarce endemic Hill Swallow.

NIGHT: Tall Trees Resort, Munnar

January 21, Day 16: Birding the Munnar-Eravikulam Plateau. Munnar and especially the Eravikulam Plateau present a spectacular landscape. Although much of the forest has been cleared to make way for tea plantations, small patches of sub-tropical, biologically rich 'shola' forest still remain in a few of the intervening gullies. We will focus our efforts at the stunning Eravikulam National Park. Here in the sholas (immediately recognized at these high altitudes by their beautiful flowering rhododendrons) we will search for several South Indian endemics including the recently split Palani Laughingthrush, White-bellied Sholakili and Nilgiri Pipit. In the afternoon we can bird forest areas close to our hotel for a chance at Painted Bush-Quail, Crimson-backed Sunbird, Black Eagle and maybe even Pied Thrush. It is also a good site for Dusky Striped Squirrel.

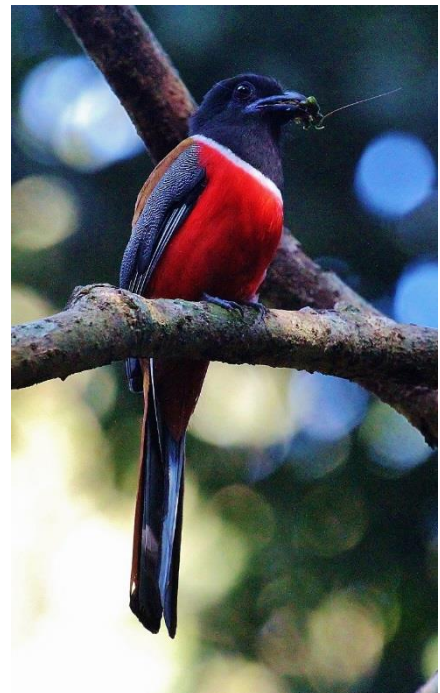
NIGHT: Tall Trees Resort, Munnar

January 22, Day 17: Drive Munnar to Periyar. This morning, we will gradually descend from the cool of Munnar to the delights of the wonderfully diverse Periyar National Park. On the way we will visit a local spice plantation which is always an informative and enjoyable experience. Here you can purchase fresh spices at a very reasonable price, should you choose to.

NIGHT: Spice Village, Periyar

January 23: Day 18: Periyar National Park. Periyar is one of the finest reserves in southern India and encompasses an area of 900 sq. km, ranging in altitude from 500 to 6,600 ft. It is the southern-most of India's famous Tiger reserves. Located in the Cardamom Hills at the southern end of the Western Ghats, the park comprises an area of undulating hills and a multi-fingered lake formed by the damming of the Periyar River. Extensive, fire-climax grasslands provide ideal forage for numerous herbivores such as Asian Elephant, Gaur, Sambar and Barking Deer in addition to Nilgiri Langur and Indian Giant Flying Squirrel. There is also a rich variety of woodland habitats including moist deciduous forest, which is characterized by *Terminalia* and teak; semi-evergreen forest along streams; and tropical evergreen forest in the sholas, characterized by the attractive Silk Cotton Tree.

These woodland habitats support an impressive list of birds including half the peninsular endemics and near endemics. Of these we may see Gray Junglefowl, Malabar Imperial-Pigeon, Malabar Parakeet, Malabar Trogon, Malabar Gray Hornbill, White-cheeked and Malabar barbets, the very attractive endemic White-bellied Treepie, Flame-throated Bulbul, Rufous Babbler, the difficult Wayanad Laughingthrush (we will make a special effort



Malabar Trogon: Periyar National Park
© Dion Hobcroft

to search for this specialty), White-bellied Blue Flycatcher, Southern Hill Myna, Malabar Starling, plus Crimson-backed and Loten's sunbirds.

Other more widespread birds we may see include Oriental Darter; Asian Woolly-necked Stork; Oriental Honey-buzzard; Besra; Red Spurfowl; Pin-tailed Snipe; Gray-fronted Green-Pigeon; Asian Emerald Dove; Plum-headed Parakeet; Brown-backed and White-rumped needletails; Chestnut-headed Bee-eater; Great Hornbill; Rufous, White-bellied and Heart-spotted woodpeckers; Malabar Flameback; Bronzed and Greater Racket-tailed drongos; Rufous Treepie; Malabar Woodshrike; Black-headed Cuckooshrike; Golden-fronted Leafbird; Asian Fairy-bluebird; Indian Scimitar-Babbler; Brown-cheeked Fulvetta; Tickell's Blue-, Gray-headed Canary, and Indian Paradise-flycatchers; Black-naped Monarch; Plain Prinia; Velvet-fronted Nuthatch; and Little Spiderhunter. At this time of the year a number of wintering passerines may also be present, including Asian Brown, Brown-breasted and Rufous-tailed flycatchers; Green, Greenish, Large-billed and Western Crowned leaf-warblers; and Forest Wagtail. Periyar also harbors a number of very elusive specialties that we will make a special effort to locate, including the attractive Indian Pitta, Indian Blue Robin, and Orange-headed Thrush.

NIGHT: Spice Village, Periyar

January 24, Day 19: Thattekad. We will make an important stop in this area of protected dense lowland forest. It is a key location to see the elusive Sri Lanka Frogmouth, a bizarre looking nocturnal bird that is often staked out in the day at its roosting site. If we are lucky, we may find the rare Sri Lanka Bay-Owl and while we are out looking for this, we may find the incredible Slender Loris, a small nocturnal primate with huge eyes. Birding from the hotel is fantastic as you can bird from your balcony and see a steady procession of South Indian special birds.



Sri Lanka Frogmouth: Thattekad © Dion Hobcroft

NIGHT: Amritara Riverside Luxury Tents, Thattekad

January 25, Day 20: Drive to Kochi; Departure for Home. Today we will depart from this wonderful area and drive to the city of Kochi. Late night or early morning flights tonight (or any time on January 26) will connect with your flight home tomorrow.

NIGHT: Courtyard by Marriot Kochi Airport, Kochi

January 26, Day 21: Arrival in Connecting Cities. Departure or continuation of flights home.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 8 participants.

TOUR LEADER: Max Breckenridge with the assistance of a local leader



Max Breckenridge was born in the UK, but has lived virtually his entire life in Sydney, Australia. At age 12, his passion for birds was fostered when his parents took him and his brother out of school for 10 weeks to travel across Australia. After completing high school in Sydney, Max drove solo from Darwin to Broome, birding all the way, and spent the next month volunteering at the world-renowned Broome Bird Observatory. Max completed a Bachelor of Biodiversity & Conservation at Macquarie University in 2018. Max has birded across every state and almost every corner of the Australian landmass. He has an excellent eye, and especially ear, for Australian birds. Some of his birding exploits in Australia include two separate trips to the remote rainforests of Iron Range National Park on Queensland's Cape York (including a fly-in-fly-out trip during the middle of the wet season where he spent two weeks

under a tarp in order to see some of the key migrants from Papua New Guinea). Max is at home birding in the Old World and has spent the last decade covering as much of it as possible. He is incredibly passionate about wildlife conservation. In addition to guiding, he has spent much of his spare time working for BirdLife Australia, monitoring and researching the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater - including working on several captive-releases of zoo-bred individuals. Max receives immense pleasure from birding and showing birds to others, and takes pride in writing detailed trip reports. He is currently living on Lake Macquarie, north of Sydney, with his partner Fernanda.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for this tour is **\$10,795** per person, based on double occupancy, and includes all meals beginning with dinner on Day 3 to dinner on Day 20, accommodations as stated, ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leader. The tour fee does not include roundtrip airfare from your home to Bengaluru with return from Kochi, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, telephone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small party supplement may be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$2,375**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The initial deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. A second deposit of **\$3,000** is due 210 days prior to departure (June 10, 2024). If you would like to pay your deposits using a credit card, the deposits must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your initial deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at www.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 (August 9, 2024) prior to the tour departure date.

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, from the date of participant tour cancellation, 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. **For participants' protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

If you cancel:

210 days or more before departure date

209 to 151 days before departure date

150 days or less before departure date

Your refund will be:

Your deposit(s) minus \$500*

No refund of the deposits, but any payments on the balance 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 from the date of participant tour cancellation, 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.

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

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

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

For a price quote, or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: 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.

*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/

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: Participants are encouraged to take whatever they think they will reasonably need for this tour, including spotting scope and tripod (VERY USEFUL), camera and video equipment. As a precaution against lost luggage, we suggest that you pack a change of clothes, toiletries, medications, important travel documents, optics, and any other essential items in your carry-on bag. Soft-sided luggage is recommended. Please check with your airline for restrictions and fees.

CLIMATE: Southern India is generally warmer and more humid than the north and can, at times, be quite hot and humid, especially in the lowlands and near the coast. However, this tour is arranged at a time when the weather is not too oppressive and is, generally, very pleasant and may be referred to as "shirt-sleeve comfortable." It is a little drier and slightly warmer in and around Mudumalai National Park and quite cool around dawn and dusk at higher altitudes in the Nilgiris and Western Ghats. It may even be cold for the first few hours around dawn on some of our early morning jeep and elephant rides, especially in the hills, so please bring some warm clothes like a sweater. We may also encounter some rain. Our last two days will be the warmest and most humid of the trip.

CLOTHING: For all VENT India tours bring **DULL-COLOURED**, light-weight, long-sleeved shirts and pants in natural fabric such as cotton, or cotton and man-made fiber mixes or even better, the new loose-fitting nylon field shirts and pants that are produced in ideal colors such as those made by Columbia. These offer protection against the sun and insects (very few) while remaining comfortable, cool and easy to launder. A warm sweater or jacket is essential for the cool dawns and evenings. People who feel the cold easily may require additional protection. Strong walking boots with a good lug sole are essential; lightweight sports sneakers are generally insufficient. Thick socks help absorb perspiration and cushion one's feet, especially when walking constantly on a hard surface. A sound rain-proof jacket is recommended. All clothing should be in muted colors as this is less disturbing to birds and other wildlife. A wide brimmed hat is also very important; however, please ensure that it is not white or a similar bright color. Sunglasses can also be useful for reducing glare and keeping dust out of one's eyes during rides in open vehicles. For those who enjoy swimming, a swimsuit would be very useful.

SPECIAL NOTE: Please, absolutely no bright colors. Although the birds and other wildlife are relatively approachable, we will be trying to see a number of very elusive species. Muted colors are essential to enhance our chances. Please do not wear brightly colored clothes, hats, gloves, bags, or other paraphernalia. Furthermore, if you can avoid crackling nylon/plastic jackets and pants, this will greatly enhance everyone's enjoyment of the trip and enable the leader to hear those critical, but so easily overlooked, subtle call notes of the birds you want to see.

ALTITUDE: We will be ascending to elevations above 8,000 feet. However, we will acclimate ourselves by ascending in small increments daily. Most ascents will be by vehicle, and we will then work a given area by walking downhill; however, there will be times when there is no option but to walk uphill. We will almost always be walking along a road on easy grades and at a very slow pace, so this should not be a matter of concern for anyone in moderate to reasonable condition. Those with heart or respiratory concerns should contact their doctor prior to departure.

DOCUMENTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure date, with at least two blank pages for India visa stamp, is required for United States citizens to enter India. Please check the expiration date on your passport. A Tourist Visa is required for entry into India and must be obtained prior to departure. The visa can be obtained online through the Indian government's website (<https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/>) or Travel Document Systems (<https://www.traveldocs.com/> on the web or 888-838-4867 by phone), a company which handles visa procurement. Non-United States citizens should check with your local Indian consulate embassy for instructions.

HEALTH: Sanitation is not ideal; however, it has improved radically during the many years that VENT has been operating tours to the subcontinent, largely as a result of greatly improved hygiene and the widespread availability of bottled, non-carbonated water. Clients are advised **NOT** to drink the water anywhere, even in the very smart hotels of the larger cities. Indian beer is generally excellent and tea and coffee and other bottled soft drinks are safe and widely available. Bottled water is also widely available, and this is perhaps one of the most important contributions to the substantial reduction in sickness on tours to the Indian subcontinent. Participants are advised **NOT** to eat uncooked or partially cooked meat or vegetables or food that has been cooling in the open. Only eat fruit that you have peeled, preferably first washing the outside with clean water. **“BOIL IT, PEEL IT OR FORGET IT.”**

Traveler’s diarrhea used to be a common complaint on trips to the Indian subcontinent. Fortunately, this is now uncommon. A prescription of Lomotil, to take care of the symptoms, is useful to have along. Malaria is present in some parts of the Indian subcontinent. There are currently three popular prophylaxis treatments for malaria: mefloquine (Iariam), malarone, and doxycycline. All of these medications are available by prescription only. Please consult your physician. Recommended vaccinations include cholera, hepatitis, typhoid, and tetanus.

Please be sure to bring along all necessary prescription drugs and other pharmaceutical items. Although they can be purchased in India, you may not be able to obtain your preferred brand.

As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against hepatitis types A and B. In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers’ Information Line (800) CDC-INFO (232-4636). You can check the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html>

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

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

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

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>

CURRENCY & MONEY MATTERS: Your trip to India includes all necessary expenses; however, you will want to bring enough cash to cover any expenses not included in the program such as gifts, laundry, meals on your own, personal items, gratuities (optional), etc. Major credit cards are accepted at large establishments including hotels, restaurants, and shops, particularly in larger cities. Visa and MasterCard are accepted widely; less so for American Express. Smaller vendors and vendors in smaller communities may accept only cash, so it's recommended that you keep a supply of local currency handy. It is best to carry small denominations of cash as it can be difficult to break larger bills.

The Indian Rupee (INR) is the official currency of India. It is easy to exchange U.S. Dollars for Rupees at airport currency exchanges and at some of the larger hotels where we'll stay. You can also use ATMs if your card is compatible with the machine (many ATMs in India are of an older design). Cirrus is widely used, for example.

You can check the latest currency conversion rate by visiting "XE-The World's Favorite Currency Site" at: <http://www.xe.com/>.

Please check with your bank and credit card issuer for more information regarding banking and the use of ATM and credit cards overseas.

SHOPPING: India has some very fine handicrafts and there will be several opportunities for shopping.

EQUIPMENT: You should have a pair of binoculars in good condition (please check before departure!). Your tour leader will be carrying an excellent spotting scope; however, you are recommended to bring your own spotting scope if you so wish, as this will greatly enhance your enjoyment of this tour if you are used to carrying and regularly using your own scope.

You should bring all the camera equipment, spare flash-cards, and batteries that you will need. Flash-cards will be almost impossible to obtain once we depart Bengaluru. **Nearly everyone brings too few batteries and too little**

flash-card space, and this causes some distress. PLEASE bring loads (we cannot emphasize this enough!). UV and polarizing filters are recommended, especially at higher elevations where glare can be a problem. Plastic bags are very useful to protect equipment from rain and dust. A really good flashlight or headlamp is essential, so please ensure that yours is in good working order and that you have spare bulbs and batteries. A spare flashlight or headlamp is ideal. Couples should bring one flashlight or headlamp each.

A small daypack (either waterproofed or with a strong plastic bag inside) is essential for carrying excess clothing, camera equipment, toiletries, food, and water. However, in many of the areas where we will be birding, we will have regular access to our vehicle, which will be attended by a driver and his assistant. **Water bottles are important** if you like to carry a regular supply of water.

Other useful items include:

1. **Flashlight or headlamp** (as previously indicated): We will be out at night on a few occasions; a small flashlight or headlamp is sometimes useful at checklist sessions.
2. **Handy Wipes:** These are very important, and paper tissues are also especially useful. All participants should carry sufficient amounts for their personal needs for the entire tour.
3. **Spare glasses or contact lenses.**
4. **Sunscreen:** Strongly recommended, especially for higher elevations where the UV is much greater; **lip balm** is also essential.
5. **Umbrella:** The collapsible type is easy to carry and useful both against rain and sun.

MISCELLANEOUS:

Electricity – India uses 220 volts, 50 cycles, AC. However, electricity can be unreliable. A flashlight or headlamp with a good supply of batteries will be essential. Do not rely on an electric razor, or always having electricity available for charging your video batteries (although all participants have managed well enough on previous trips). Please bring all of the power adaptors as sometimes you may find two or even three styles in one room!

Language - In India, Hindi, English and 14 other languages are spoken.

Time - 10 to 10½ hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time.

Snacks - It is advisable to bring granola-type bars, dried fruit or other snacks, as Western-style snacks will not be available and Indian food may not include the roughage and variety we have grown accustomed to in our Western diets.

Bug juice – Everyone will need insect repellent.

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.

Ali, S. *The Fall of the Sparrow*. Bombay. OUP. 1984.

Cubbit, G. & G. Mountfort. *Wild India*. London: New Holland, 1991.

Daniel, J.C. *The Book of Indian Reptile and Amphibians*. Bombay: Bombay Natural History Society, 2002.

Grimmet, R. and T. Inskipp. *Field Guide to the Birds of Southern India*. Christopher Helm. 2005

Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C. and T. Inskipp. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent. Christopher Helm Identification Guide Series*, 2005.

Gay, T., Kehimkar, I.D. & J.C. Punetha. *Common Butterflies of India*. Bombay: WWF India, 1992. OUP.

Grewal, B. *A Photographic Guide to Birds of India and Nepal*. London: New Holland, 1995.

Gurung, K.K. and Raj Singh. *Field Guide to the Mammals of the Indian Subcontinent: Where to watch Mammals in India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan*. San Diego: Academic Press, 1996.

Keay, J. *India: A History*. Grove Press. 2001.

Menon, V. *A Field Guide to Indian Mammals*. DK Delhi. 2003 (check for more recent editions).

Undoubtedly the very finest field guide to the mammals of India.

Rasmussen, P. C. & J. C. Anderton. 2005. *Birds of South Asia. The Ripley Guide. Vols. 1 and 2*. Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions. Washington D.C. and Barcelona. This is a superb field guide and is preferred to use over all others. Yes, it covers the whole of India and might appear less easy to use than, for example, the South India guide; however, the excellent range maps, the quality of the illustrations, and its cutting-edge information and taxonomy make it far superior to any other Indian field guide. You can just bring Volume 1, The Field Guide, on tour.

Whittaker, R. and A. Captain. *Snakes of India. The Field Guide*. Chennai, India: Draco Books, 2004.

SUGGESTED APPS:

Merlin Bird ID by Cornell Lab. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. 2022.

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.labs.merlinbirdid.app>

NATURE WEB. Indian Birds. 2019.

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.kokanes.birdsinfo>

MAP: South India - 1:1,500,000, Nelles series.

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 12, 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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