

TEXAS: RIO GRANDE VALLEY

MARCH 11 – 17, 2019

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For birders and other naturalists, few places in the country can match the thrill and excitement of the Lower Rio Grande Valley. It is here, in far south Texas, where species primarily “Mexican” in occurrence reach their northern limits in the parks and preserves along the winding Rio Grande. From Falcon Dam in the north to South Padre Island on the coast, this region is hallowed ground among birders and naturalists as a premier place to see birds, mammals, plants, and butterflies found nowhere else in the United States.



On this short tour, participants will experience the joys of birding in the famous Rio Grande Valley. The focus will be on finding regional specialty birds in addition to a host of over-wintering and actively-migrating shorebirds, raptors, flycatchers, warblers, buntings, and sparrows. Seeking iconic species such as White-tailed Hawk, Plain Chachalaca, Green Kingfisher, Great Kiskadee, Green Jay, Altamira and Audubon’s orioles, Long-billed Thrasher, and Olive Sparrow will be of highest interest, but our travels will provide considerable exposure to the vast richness of the “Valley,” both in terms of birds and habitats.

Underpinning the tremendous birding is the region’s vaunted system of parks and preserves. Among these are sites with place-names instantly recognizable to birders far and wide, places like Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park, and National Audubon’s Sabal Palm Sanctuary. Estero Llano Grande State Park provides an exceptionally rich spectetrum of

wildlife, and smaller birding hotspots like Quinta Mazatlan, Frontera Audubon Thicket, and Edinburg Scenic Wetlands are sure to impress. Some of these are designated as World Birding Center sites. Each site has its own attractions for both the first-time visitor and expert birder. The timing of this tour is prime for birding, as March combines the many year-round species with wintering individuals and migrants as well.

Adding to the allure is the consistency with which rare birds from Mexico turn up in this borderland region—vagrant species that appear north of the border only rarely and whose appearance generates great excitement. Masked Duck, Northern Jacana, Gray-crowned Yellowthroat, Golden-crowned Warbler, Crimson-collared Grosbeak, Blue Bunting, and Black-vented Oriole are a small representation of the many rarities seen on VENT tours to this region through the years.

To top it off, the weather here is generally pleasant at this time of year, making for a great escape from cooler weather elsewhere.

March 11, Day 1: Arrival in McAllen. Participants should plan to arrive in McAllen today (*McAllen International Airport* code is MFE). We'll convene in the hotel lobby at 6:00 p.m. for an official trip welcome and introduction followed by dinner at a local restaurant.

NIGHT: Hampton Inn & Suites, McAllen

March 12-14, Days 2-4: The “Lower” and “Middle” Valleys. The Lower Rio Grande Valley of south Texas is undeniably one of the country's preeminent destinations for birding and natural history observation. The subtropical environment that characterizes the region allows for conditions that provide excellent birding all year long, while an extensive system of parks and preserves protects large tracts of native brush, riparian woodland, and wetlands. The “Valley” is most famous for the assortment of range-restricted specialty birds found here and nowhere else in the United States, and whose diversity increases in the winter months with the presence of more northerly breeding hawks, waterbirds, and songbirds.

Geographically, the Rio Grande Valley extends from Falcon Dam in the north and west to the mouth of the Rio Grande and the Gulf of Mexico to the south and east. Within this broad area the Valley can be further divided into the “Lower,” “Middle,” and “Upper” Valleys. We will have three full days to explore a number of parks and preserves that dot the Lower and Middle valleys. All locations offer superior birding in terms of quantity and diversity, but of equal importance is the opportunity to observe birds at close range. Our field trip schedule on these days will be flexible and largely dependent on the possible presence of rarities. Among the likely destinations are:

- **Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge/South Padre Island:** The brush country and coastal prairie lying to the east of the city of Harlingen offers a scenic and bird-rich departure from the more heavily developed and agricultural Middle Valley. With its great expanses of cactus and mesquite woodlands, subtropical plants, and coastal grasses, this area offers an impressive diversity of birds. The centerpiece of this area is Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge.

Laguna Atascosa is a treasure in the National Wildlife Refuge system. The refuge lines the western side of the Laguna Madre and preserves a vast expanse of coastal prairies, woodlands, and wetlands. The mesquite/yucca grasslands of Laguna Atascosa have a distinct desert flavor, enhanced by the presence of Harris's Hawk, Greater Roadrunner, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, and others. White-tailed and Red-tailed hawks patrol the skies and White-tailed Kites perch adroitly throughout the yucca-studded grasslands.

We will spend time around the refuge visitor center where feeding stations and a large tract of native woodland support a host of species, most of which we will be able to study at close range. The spectacular and boisterous Green Jay is ever-present in flocks while Plain Chachalaca, White-tipped Dove, Long-billed Thrasher, Olive Sparrow, and Altamira Oriole are readily found as well. We'll make the short trip out to the Osprey Overlook on Laguna Atascosa where, depending on tidal conditions, we may see a diversity of waterbirds including American White Pelican, Tricolored and Little Blue herons, Reddish Egret, Roseate Spoonbill, Wood Stork, and a variety of waterfowl. Along the way, we may have the good fortune of spotting the introduced Aplomado Falcon or an over-wintering group of Groove-billed Anis.

South Padre Island, in spite of its reputation as a spring break mecca, is a fantastic place for birding. Coastal mudflats host plenty of shorebirds at this time of year, and sightings of American Oystercatcher, several species of "ringed" plovers, and an assortment of gulls and terns are virtually guaranteed. Mangrove-lined wetlands hold a menagerie of Gulf Coast herons such as Little Blue and Tricolored herons and Reddish Egret. Other birds such as Roseate Spoonbill, Clapper Rail, Piping Plover, Royal and Gull-billed terns, Black Skimmer, and many others are all possible here and may not be seen elsewhere on the tour.

- **Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge:** We'll likely spend a full morning exploring Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge and several nearby areas. Often called the "jewel of our national wildlife refuge system," Santa Ana is the very essence of South Texas birding. Within the boundaries of the refuge we'll explore a complex mosaic of habitats indicative of what early Texas looked like. Dense, impenetrable brush country intermingles with cattail marshes, freshwater impoundments, and towering tropical hardwood forests. Perhaps more than any other single location in South Texas, Santa Ana exists as a bastion for native birds, plants, and animals. The modern visitor center offers excellent interpretive displays and information about the refuge and features a well-stocked bookstore. In sum, a trip to Santa Ana is essential for any visiting birder.

Santa Ana is a dynamic place with many birds that can easily be seen. We will walk a number of the roads and trails that penetrate the native habitat in search of such classic South Texas specialties as White-tipped Dove, Plain Chachalaca, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Great Kiskadee, Green Jay, and Olive Sparrow. The marshy ponds and lakes in the center of the refuge commonly host Least Grebe and Black-bellied Whistling-Duck. Green Kingfishers are often sighted sitting quietly amongst the reeds or on some bare branch, only inches above the surface of the water. Even Fulvous Whistling-Ducks and Ringed Kingfishers are present on occasion. A walk to Pintail Lake might produce a host of herons and egrets. Great Kiskadee and Couch's Kingbird can be common. Toward mid-morning we will want to pay attention to the skies when soaring birds take center stage. Red-tailed, Harris's, and Red-shouldered hawks often join Turkey and Black vultures on the rising thermals while Ospreys and accipiters are seen with regularity. Hook-billed Kite, one of the least numerous of the Valley specialty birds, is occasionally seen here as well.

- **Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park/World Birding Center:** Another destination is the famous Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park. The center of the World Birding Center system, it hosts the full assortment of resident Valley specialties and a variety of other birds. We may spend the greater part of a morning at Bentsen watching the antics of Plain Chachalacas and marveling at the colors of the Altamira Orioles, with these and other birds easy to observe at the park's feeders. This is one of the best places to spot a Gray Hawk or even Clay-colored Thrush, a species that persists in south Texas as an uncommon breeding species. We might also visit nearby Anzalduas County Park, which in some years is the best place to find Hook-billed Kite, Gray Hawk, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Sprague's Pipit, Tropical Parula, and other wintering warblers.
- **Estero Llano Grande State Park and Frontera Audubon Thicket:** Estero Llano Grande is both a state park and one of the World Birding Center sites, which offers a very diverse mix of classic Valley birds, waterbirds and wintering songbirds. In recent years this site has emerged as the most exciting birding

destination in the Valley. A system of flooded impoundments creates ideal feeding and roosting conditions for myriad birds associated with water. In fact, the viewing platform right at the visitor center is not to be missed! As evidence, we should enjoy stunning views of Anhinga, Neotropic Cormorant, Least Grebe, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, herons and egrets, ibises and spoonbills, Green and Belted kingfishers and many others. The surrounding woodlands offer superb opportunities to view South Texas specialty birds such as Plain Chachalaca, White-tipped Dove, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Great Kiskadee, Couch's Kingbird, Green Jay, Long-billed Thrasher, Clay-colored Thrush, and Olive Sparrow.

Frontera Audubon manages a small preserve in the town of Weslaco that encompasses native dry forest and thorn-scrub. Through the years, the site has proven a reliable place to see rare strays from Mexico, the likes of which include White-throated Thrush, Tropical Parula, Crimson-collared Grosbeak, and Blue Bunting.

- **Sabal Palm Sanctuary:** Located in the deepest part of the Valley, outside the city of Brownsville, Sabal Palm Sanctuary is a critical preserve for migrant and resident birds alike. Originally designed to protect a remnant of the native Tamaulipan forest (dry forest and thorn-scrub interspersed with Sabal Palms), the sanctuary is a cornerstone of conservation in the Lower Valley. Whereas most of the surrounding country has been developed or converted for agricultural purposes, a thriving 172-acre tropical woodland still exists here and hosts a range of Valley specialty birds and migrant songbirds. By meandering through the sanctuary's lengthy trail system, we should encounter White-tipped Dove, Plain Chachalaca, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Green Jay, Long-billed Thrasher, Olive Sparrow, and Altamira Oriole.

There are also a number of other smaller sanctuaries in the Lower Valley and time-permitting we will visit some of them. Late afternoon drives in McAllen may turn up staging and roost sites for noisy flocks of Red-crowned Parrots and Green Parakeets.

NIGHTS: Holiday Inn Express, Weslaco

March 15, Day 5: The "Upper" Valley. As one moves northwestward up the Rio Grande, the country becomes progressively drier and less populated. Today and tomorrow we'll be sampling the outstanding birdlife between Rio Grande City and Falcon Dam and beyond. En route to Zapata, we usually stop at the riverside community of Salineño, where bird feeders should provide excellent looks at our first Audubon's Orioles, as well as White-tipped and other doves, Green Jay, Bewick's Wren, Long-billed Thrasher, Olive Sparrow, and many Altamira Orioles.

Time permitting, another target today will be the White-collared Seedeater, a bird who's very limited U.S. range includes the community of Zapata and the nearby village of San Ygnacio. The birds are notoriously unpredictable, sometimes being quite cooperative and visible, and other times requiring hours of diligent searching. Persistence is generally rewarded, however, and we have typically met with success during our time in this area.

NIGHT: Holiday Inn Express, Zapata

March 16, Day 6: Falcon Dam and vicinity. Along the Rio Grande, below Falcon Dam, there will be much to search for today. We should find Ringed and Green kingfishers here as well as cormorants, ducks, and other waterbirds moving up and down the waterway. If we are very fortunate, we might spot the rare Muscovy Duck, a large and very shy duck which is seen nowhere else in the United States. The bluffs at Santa Margarita Ranch and the river access at Salineño are also good spots to scan for Gray Hawk and, possibly, Red-billed Pigeon, a species which generally withdraws during the winter months.

The drier uplands around Falcon State Park, Santa Margarita Ranch, and elsewhere are good places to look for typically western desert birds like Scaled Quail, Greater Roadrunner, Say's and Black phoebes, Verdin, Cactus and Rock wrens, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Curve-billed Thrasher, Cassin's and Black-throated sparrows, and

Pyrrhuloxia. Many birders consider the drier and wilder Upper Valley to be the highlight of a visit to southern-most Texas.

NIGHT: Holiday Inn Express, Zapata

March 17, Day 7: Departure for home. After breakfast and perhaps another hour or two of birding, we will drive back down the river to McAllen, arriving no later than noon. Flights out of McAllen should be scheduled for 1:00 p.m. or later.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 14 participants.

TOUR LEADER: Erik Bruhnke (a second leader will be added if tour size warrants)



Erik Bruhnke has had a love for birds since he was a child. He graduated from Northland College in Wisconsin with a Natural Resources degree in 2008 and taught field ornithology for various semesters while there. As a devoted raptor nerd, Erik is drawn to hawkwatches. He worked as an interpreter for six seasons at Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory in Duluth, Minnesota; has counted migrating raptors at the Corpus Christi HawkWatch in Texas; and is the 2016 hawk counter at the Cape May Hawkwatch in New Jersey. Erik's avian field experiences have taken him throughout Oregon, Washington, Montana, Idaho, North and South Dakota, Maine, California, New Mexico, Arizona, Texas, and western Canada. Erik's wildlife photography has won national awards, and his writings have been featured in *Birder's Guide* via the American Birding Association, *BirdWatching*, and *Birdwatcher's Digest*. When not traveling the

country leading field trips and speaking at various birding festivals, Erik splits his time between the tropics of South Texas and the Northwoods of Minnesota. He loves to cook and bake in his free time.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is **\$2,295** per person in double occupancy from McAllen. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 7, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to McAllen and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$395**. 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 **\$300** per person. If you would like to pay your initial deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay the initial deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard, Visa, or American Express at the time of registration. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at www.ventbird.com) should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

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

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refunds are made according to the following schedule: If cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$150** 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 **\$50** per person. If cancellation is made between 120 and 90 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 90 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions. ***We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.***

If you cancel:

120 days or more before departure date
Between 120 and 90 days before departure

Fewer than 90 days before departure date

Your refund will be:

Your deposit minus \$150*
No refund of the deposit, 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, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$50 per person.

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

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

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

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

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

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.

TOUR INFORMATION: A typical day will begin with breakfast around 6:30-7:00 a.m., followed by birding until about noon. Following lunch we will bird in the afternoon and will usually head for dinner around 6:30 or 7:00 p.m. Please note that on this tour longer walks of more than a half mile may be offered as options at Estero Llano Grande State Park, Bentsen Rio-Grande State Park, and at the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge. Also,

there may be late afternoon or early evening options to look for roosting parrots and parakeets and for Eastern Screech-owl and Common Pauraque, which may delay dinner until after 7:00 p.m.

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

BAGGAGE: Please try to refrain from bringing excessive amounts of baggage as storage space in the vans may be at a premium. Soft luggage is preferable to rigid suitcases for making the most of limited storage space. Please limit your luggage to one medium-sized bag and one carry-on per person. 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.

CLOTHING: Temperatures throughout south Texas in March are typically pleasant, with beautiful and mild days frequenting the region. Lightweight clothing is recommended for much of this tour, but note that cool fronts can move through with the onset of Spring. A light insulating layer is recommended for the morning hours, especially should a cool front present itself. Dressing appropriately for both the weather and regular sun exposure is key. Long-sleeved field clothing is recommended, as are long pants. Jeans will suffice but may become less comfortable with warm mid-day temperatures. Lightweight field shirts and pants provide protection from the sun and also offer breathability, with some shirts offering ventilated seams for additional comfort. Having pockets throughout the field clothing can be a plus when considering new garments. A wide-brimmed hat is best, but participants should bring a baseball cap at the very least. Cabela's, REI, and in the southern states, Academy, are just a few of many retailers that offer a wide selection of field clothes. A proper rain jacket is recommended for this tour, as rain showers are possible.

FOOTWEAR: A light hiking boot or trail shoe will be appropriate for all outings. Athletic shoes are acceptable but could become muddy or wet depending on conditions.

LAUNDRY: On-site guest self-laundry facilities are available throughout the tour.

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

- **Backpack** – Good for carrying extra clothing, field guides, supplies, and optical equipment during all land excursions
- **Notebooks and pens**
- **Travel alarm clock**
- **Polarized sunglasses with good UV protection**
- **Sunscreen, lip balm, skin lotions**
- **Personal toiletries**
- **Cameras, lenses, memory cards, and extra batteries**
- **Collapsible walking stick** – highly recommended item for those who have trouble walking
- **Tissue packs**

BINOCULARS & SPOTTING SCOPES:

Binoculars – We strongly recommend good binoculars of at least 7x35, 8x42, 10x40, or 10x42 magnification. We recommend that you do NOT bring mini-binoculars of any kind. Some people like “minis” because they are small and lightweight; but they have an extremely small field of view and very poor light gathering power. Trying to find a bird in your binoculars using minis is like trying to read a book through a keyhole. You will be very frustrated, and even if you do manage to get the bird in your binoculars before it flies, you will have a poor view. You will find that 7x35 or 8x42 binoculars are compact and light enough.

Spotting Scopes – Your tour leaders will have scopes available for group use throughout the trip, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so.

CLIMATE & WEATHER: March weather in south Texas is generally comfortable, but variable. Typical days will begin with cool mornings in the 50's and low 60's, often warming into the 70's and 80's. Occasionally temperatures in the 90's can take place this early in the year. Rare cool fronts from the north can result in day high temperatures in the 40's and 50's.

CONDITIONS: This tour is not physically demanding, but offers moderate walks on a daily basis. All walks will be over even terrain on established roads, paths, and trails. Most walks will be of short distance, although we may offer an outing or two of up to 1.5 miles in round-trip length.

TIME ZONE: In March, south Texas is on Central Standard Time (CST).

HEALTH: As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases, including the Routine Vaccinations, which are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR), diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT), varicella (chickenpox), Hepatitis A, and Hepatitis B.

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.

Chiggers, ticks, and mosquitoes are present in this part of Texas, even in winter; thus, insect repellent is recommended.

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

Birds: All of the following field guides are widely in use. Any of these references are an excellent choice to bring on this trip.

Dunn, Jon L. & Jonathan Alderfer (Editors). *National Geographic Society Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. Sixth edition, 2011.

Kaufman, Kenn. *Kaufman Field Guide to Birds of North America*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005.
The best available *photographic* field guide to the birds of North America.

Sibley, David Allen. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. Alfred E. Knopf. National Audubon Society. Second edition. 2014.

Other Birding Resources:

Lockwood, Mark and Brush Freeman. *The TOS Handbook of Texas Birds*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004. Annotated accounts with range maps of all Texas species.

Mammals:

Kays, Roland W. and Done E. Wilson. *Mammals of North America*. Princeton University Press: Princeton and Oxford, 2009 (second edition).

Butterflies:

Brock, Jim P. and Kenn Kaufman. *Butterflies of North America (Kaufman Focus Guides)*. Houghton Mifflin Co, 2003.

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: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motor-coach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. When this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on May 7, 2018 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided.

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