



VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

ITINERARY

**Victor Emanuel Nature Tours presents:
A Special Departure for Tucson Audubon Society**

**WEST MEXICO:
THORN FOREST TO THE SIERRA MADRE**

JANUARY 7–17, 2024

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Bumblebee Hummingbird © Brian Gibbons

Western Mexico possesses one of the highest rates of avian endemism in North America, and the foothills and mountains of the Sierra Madre Occidental are an outstanding area to observe a superb cross-section of Mexican species.

On this trip, arranged exclusively for members of Tucson Audubon Society, participants will experience the exceptional richness of birds and habitats of the mountains, foothills, and coastal lowlands of western Mexico's Nayarit and Jalisco states. Based in two choice locations, we will seek the specialty birds of this region—including many endemics—and a wonderful panoply of more widely occurring species.

After a first night in Nuevo Vallarta (near the airport) we will seek out a few endemics before we head into the mountains where we will explore the highland pine-oak zone of the Sierra Madre Occidental, rising above Puerto Vallarta. The moist canyons and the pine-oak forests teem with North American migrants wintering alongside a variety of great Mexican birds. A Long-tailed Wood-Partridge might creep out onto the road, while Mountain Trogons call from fir trees. The higher elevations and moist canyons will enable us to seek at least 10 Mexican endemics, as well as a host of other fantastic birds like Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo. Our base for these explorations will be the charming colonial town of San Sebastián del Oeste, recognized by the Mexican Secretariat



Red-headed Tanager © Brian Gibbons

of Tourism as a Pueblo Mágico, a place with natural beauty, cultural riches, and historical relevance. With its cobbled streets and colonial facades, San Sebastián is from another era. Specialty birds of this area include Bumblebee Hummingbird, Mexican Woodnymph, Gray-crowned Woodpecker, White-striped Woodcreeper, Green-striped and Rufous-capped brushfinches, Red-headed Tanager, among many others.

On the second half of the trip, we will head to El Tuito, just south of Puerto Vallarta, where we will stay at the comfortable Rancho Primavera. Based at lower elevation, this private ranch serves as a hospitable center for exploration of a diversity of nearby habitats, ranging from montane forest down to idyllic sandy beaches on the Pacific Coast.

The accommodations at Rancho Primavera are comfortable, the food is delicious, and the grounds are awash in birds. During our five-night stay, we will visit an array of sites. We will explore coastal areas for herons, shorebirds, and waterfowl. The most unique habitat is the West Mexican thorn forest, and many of the endemic species that we we'll most ardently seek make their homes here. This dry-forest type is home to a number of secretive and inconspicuous species, but can be surprisingly difficult to bird. However, with endemic birds like Citreoline Trogon and Red-breasted

Chat to tempt us, persistence is sure to pay off. While there are many beautiful birds in the thorn forest, we will especially target the exquisite Orange-breasted Bunting, soaking up all the oranges yellows, blues, and greens of this fine endemic. The ranch itself is set in the foothills, where thorn forest gives way to pine-oak woodland, and where we'll encounter various hummingbirds, the spectacular Military Macaw, and more familiar friends such as Acorn Woodpecker and Grace's Warbler.

Over the course of our trip, we expect our bird list to top 250 species, of which more than 30 will be Mexican endemics, and 60 or more of which will be lifers for those who have not previously ventured south of the border.

Guiding this trip will be Luke Safford, Director of Engagement and Education at TAS, and Brian Gibbons, from Victor Emanuel Nature Tours. Together, we'll gain exposure to the marvelous birdlife and other natural history features of this special part of the world.

We are pleased to announce that a portion of the proceeds go toward the support of Tucson Audubon Society.



January 7, Day 1: Arrival into Puerto Vallarta. Participants arriving into Puerto Vallarta International Airport (airport code PVR) in the late morning or afternoon should, upon clearing customs and gathering luggage, make their way to the meeting location detailed in the departure memo. We will then proceed to **Villa Varadero Hotel & Suites**, where a room has been reserved in your name. We'll gather in the hotel lobby at 4:30 p.m. for an orientation session and birding, followed by dinner.

Those wanting to avoid the risk of misconnecting or desiring some down time before the tour are encouraged to arrive before January 7th. Upon request, VENT will be happy to assist with any additional lodging arrangements.

NIGHT: Villa Varadero Hotel & Suites, Nuevo Vallarta

January 8, Day 2: Nuevo Vallarta to San Sebastian del Oeste. On this, our first morning in the field, we will explore the avifauna of Nuevo Vallarta. While there will be many birds around, we will concentrate our efforts on a few of the more-challenging endemics, including Rufous-bellied Chachalaca, Mexican Parrotlet and the stunning Elegant Quail, before heading into the mountains. Nestled in a valley just 40 miles from Puerto Vallarta, San Sebastián del Oeste harkens to the colonial era. Narrow cobbled streets and a charming square are remnants of a previous time, when it was a silver-mining boom-town. Much quieter now, San Sebastián, surrounded by corn and agave fields, is a perfect base for our explorations of the Sierra Madre Occidental which looms to the east. The gardens, orchards, and woods that surround town, and the creek that runs through it, are great places to see some of our first birds of the Sierra, such as Gray Silky-Flycatcher, Tufted Flycatcher and White-throated Thrush.



Rufous-bellied Chachalacas © Brian Gibbons

NIGHT: Hacienda Caudillos, San Sebastián del Oeste

January 9–11, Days 3–5: San Sebastian del Oeste mountain birding. Over the next few days, we will enjoy some spectacular mountain birding. Birds that we will endeavor to see are Long-tailed Wood-Partridge (always a challenge), Lesser Roadrunner, Bumblebee Hummingbird, Mexican Woodnymph, Mountain Trogon, Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo, Aztec Thrush, Green-striped Brushfinch, Red Warbler, Flame-colored Tanager, Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer, and many more. Roving the pine, fir, and oak forests are large, mixed-species flocks of wintering birds, containing resident species and breeders from the north alike, including Gray-collared Becard;

Bullock's and Scott's orioles; Crescent-chested, Townsend's, Hermit and Red-faced warblers; Slate-throated Redstart; Black-headed Grosbeak; Red-headed Tanager, and more. At the flower banks higher up, we hope to find Rivoli's and White-eared hummingbirds and Amethyst-throated and Blue-throated mountain-gems. This is also the foraging area of the flowerpiercer. The moist canyons leading into the mountains host a variety of birds that will be new to us. Golden-crowned and Golden-browed warblers are two beautiful birds we will seek. In addition to great birding, we will also have time to wander the cobble streets of San Sebastián and purchase some of the locally grown organic coffee. It's wonderful! Most of our birding will be along remote, dirt mountain roads surrounded by majestic oaks and enormous pine and Douglas Fir trees. Three days here will provide ample time to explore these tracks all over the mountain and to see many wonderful birds.



Slate-throated Redstart © Brian Gibbons

NIGHTS: Hacienda Caudillos, San Sebastián del Oeste

January 12, Day 6: San Sebastián del Oeste to Rancho Primavera. This morning we will seek the final avifaunal delights of the area before winding down the mountains (perhaps with birding stops en route) to bustling Puerto Vallarta. We will have lunch in the city before making our way south to El Tuito in the afternoon, where we will find Rancho Primavera tucked into the hills above town. We will settle into our rooms and wander the grounds (this birding oasis hosts more than 300 species!) before we enjoy our first home-cooked meal at Rancho Primavera. The accommodations are comfortable and the food has received rave reviews, so we are confident you will enjoy your stay here.

NIGHT: Rancho Primavera, El Tuito

January 13–16, Days 7–10: Birding Rancho Primavera and surrounding areas. One of the great pleasures of Rancho Primavera is that the birding begins right outside your door! A sampling of the West Mexican species that are likely around the lodge includes Red-billed Pigeon, Squirrel Cuckoo, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Mottled Owl, Russet-crowned Motmot, Golden-cheeked Woodpecker, Collared Forest-Falcon, Orange-fronted Parakeet, Masked Tityra, Golden Vireo, San Blas Jay, Blue Mockingbird, Rufous-backed Robin, Happy and Sinaloa wrens,

Orange-breasted Bunting, Stripe-headed Sparrow, Yellow-winged Cacique, and Black-vented and Streak-backed orioles. More familiar species from the southern United States such as Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Great Kiskadee, Thick-billed Kingbird and Vermilion Flycatcher will be present as well. Rare species such as Sparkling-tailed Hummingbird, Military Macaw, and Rosy Thrush-Tanager have even been seen here.

Rancho Primavera will serve as our base, but our birding will not be limited to the grounds. We will divide our time among a number of nearby birding locales which we will explore over the course of our stay. Nearby Bioto Road is good for additional species such as West Mexican Chachalaca, Lineated and Pale-billed woodpeckers, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Rose-throated Becard, Rufous-capped Warbler, and Red-crowned Ant-Tanager.



The stunning Orange-breasted Bunting
© Brian Gibbons

La Bascula is a foothill location, and its higher elevation may have Gray-crowned Woodpecker, White-striped Woodcreepers, and Black-headed Siskins among other species. Some of our time will be spent in the lowlands, where agricultural fields and thorn forest give way to mangrove swamps and coastal estuaries. In these lowlands, we may find raptors such as Common Black Hawk and Gray Hawk, and possibly even the rare Lesser Ground-Cuckoo. The mangrove swamps play host to furtive Rufous-necked Wood-Rail and the “Mangrove” Yellow Warbler. Wintering shorebirds and herons will be abundant, and we will spend time working through some of the identification challenges.

Some of the other species we may see during our week of exploration are Mexican Woodnymph, Crane Hawk, Elegant Trogon, Russet-crowned Motmot, Laughing Falcon, Lilac-crowned Parrot, Mexican Parrotlet, Nutting’s Flycatcher, Black-throated Magpie-Jay, White-throated Thrush, Yellow Grosbeak, and Cinnamon-bellied Saltator (split from Grayish). The West Mexican thorn forest hosts some very special birds that will require extra effort to see. Among the secretive thorn forest birds that we will be trying for are Plain-capped Starthroat, Citreoline Trogon, Flammulated Flycatcher, Black-capped Gnatcatcher, and Red-breasted Chat.



Red-breasted Chat © Brian Gibbons

NIGHTS: Rancho Primavera, El Tuito

January 17, Day 11: Morning birding; departure for home. We will probably stay close to Rancho Primavera this morning enjoying the myriad birds close at hand in the gardens, orchards, and surrounding woods of the ranch before transferring back to Puerto Vallarta International Airport. Participants should select flights which depart after 2:00 p.m.

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

TOUR LEADERS: This tour will be led by **Luke Safford** of Tucson Audubon Society and **Brian Gibbons** of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours.



Luke Safford currently serves as the Director of Engagement & Education for Tucson Audubon, which includes overseeing the Southeast Arizona Birding Festival, field trip and event programs, the Tucson Audubon Nature Shop, and student education opportunities. He started birding and keeping a life list when he was six years old in Washington State thanks to his grandparents. His favorite place to bird is at Sweetwater Wetlands where he's been leading a weekly walk with Tucson Audubon since he moved to Arizona in January 2015. Luke lives in Tucson with his wife, Jolene, and teenagers Ashtyn and Brock.



Brian Gibbons grew up in suburban Dallas where he began exploring the wild world in local creeks and parks. Chasing butterflies and any animal that was unfortunate enough to cross paths with the Gibbons boys occupied his childhood. A wooden bird feeder kit sparked a flame that was stoked by a gift of the *Golden Guide* and family camping trips to Texas state parks. Thirty years ago Brian attended two VENT camps for young birders. Birds are now his primary interest, but all things wild continue to captivate him. After college, Brian undertook a variety of field biology research jobs that have taken him to the Caribbean, the Bering Sea, and the land of the midnight sun, arctic Alaska. He enjoys working with kids, hoping to spark environmental awareness through birds. For many years Brian's field research has involved bird banding. His most amazing recoveries were a female Wilson's Warbler that had been banded in Alaska and was captured by Brian in Colorado, and a Sooty Tern that perished after a hurricane on the Texas coast; it had plied the Gulf of Mexico and the oceans of the world for 24 years. Brian's recreational bird-seeking has taken him to Machu Picchu in Peru, the Great Wall in China, the plains of East Africa, and the Himalayas in Nepal. Brian leads birding trips in the United States, Central America, the Caribbean, South Africa, and Europe. As well as being a fanatical birder, he loves capturing birds with photography. He lives in Tucson, Arizona with his wife, Lacreia Johnson, and their son, Grayson.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for this tour is **\$4515** per person in double occupancy from Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 11, ten nights shared accommodations, ground transportation during the tour, tipping, park entrance fees, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Puerto Vallarta and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$845**. 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.

Rooms are limited at Rancho Primavera (Days 7–10) and singles may be asked to share. If so, you will be credited appropriately.

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, Visa, or American Express 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 www.ventbird.com) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

PAYMENTS: All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard, Visa, American Express), 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 (August 10, 2023.)

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 **\$250** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made between 179 and 151 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the tour fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 150 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre- and post-tour extensions. **For participants' protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

If participant cancels:

180 days or more before departure date

179 to 151 days before departure date

150 days or less before departure date

Participant's refund will be:

Participant's deposit minus \$250*

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

No refund available

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person. To qualify, cancellation must occur 180 days or more before departure date; deposit transfers must be made at the time of cancellation; and one transfer per deposit.

Cancellation by VENT:

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

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. A **"Force Majeure"** event means any act beyond VENT's control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances;

(h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

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

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

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

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

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

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

*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 14 days of making your tour deposit. The CFAR benefit provides reimbursement for 75% of covered costs, and increases the policy premium by approximately 50%. Policies may be purchased either for the full value of the tour fee at the time of deposit or in segments as individual tour payments are made (deposit, mid-payment, final balance, additional arrangements, etc.). The “pay as you go” approach reduces up-front expense and ensures that the amount paid toward your full policy premium is in proportion to the amount paid toward the full tour fee. If you choose to “pay as you go,” you must cover each deposit or payment within 14 days in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. The primary medical expense benefit is available to U.S. residents only. For this reason, non-U.S. residents will pay an adjusted premium when purchasing a comprehensive policy, which includes all of the other benefits available to U.S. residents. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

Coronavirus (COVID-19):

The coronavirus pandemic has brought uncertainty for many people currently holding travel insurance policies or who are considering future travel and purchasing such insurance. Redpoint has added a **Coronavirus FAQ page** to 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. Among the most important points: 1) Trip cancellation solely for concern or fear of travel associated with COVID-19 is not covered; 2) Should you request cancellation of your policy, a full refund of your premium is available only under a limited set of conditions; and 3) Should you request cancellation, you may be eligible to receive a pro-rated refund of the unused portion of your premium or a travel insurance credit. Travel insurance credit (“Premium Credit”) is for the value of the policy purchased and may be applied to future policies. Premium Credits have no expiration dates. Rules and regulations apply.

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

https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid_19_faq/

Additionally, as countries begin opening up for travel, many are instituting an array of COVID-19 entry requirements, including mandates to purchase travel insurance covering medical expenses due to COVID-19 illness and accommodation 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.

*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: Please limit your luggage to one suitcase or duffel and one carry-on bag. As a general precaution, we suggest you pack a change of clothes, optics, medication, toiletries, walking shoes, and documents in the carry-on bag.

The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant.

Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government’s attempts to improve airport security we recommend that you check the websites of your airline and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for the most updated information regarding checked baggage and carry-on items: <http://www.tsa.gov/>.

CLIMATE & WEATHER: At this time of the year we can expect mild temperatures ranging from the low 40s at night to the high 80s during the day. Sunny days are the norm. Rain is rare but possible during the dry season, December–May.

CLOTHING: Dress will be casual throughout. Participants should bring lightweight, cool, well-ventilated clothing. Many people now prefer designer field shirts that most outdoor stores and mail order companies are carrying. A typical shirt is usually long-sleeved and buttoned down the center. The material is lightweight and usually of

earth tones or pastel coloration. Mesh for ventilation is a standard feature as are several pockets for personal effects. Nights and mornings may be cold though, so be sure to bring a sweater, sweatshirt, or lightweight jacket. For those that get cold easily, light weight gloves and a warm hat can help; the morning sun can be slow to find the deep canyons in the mountains where we will be birding. Mosquitoes will certainly be a nuisance at some sites so lightweight long pants and long-sleeved shirts will be preferable and some may want to pack mosquito netting just in case. Rancho Primavera is known for its biting midges as well, so bug spray may help with them too—sandals and shorts are not recommended. Bring a hat to provide shade from the sun, and sunglasses will also be indispensable. You should also bring a bathing suit. There is a pool available at Rancho Primavera and a lunch on the beach will allow time for a quick seaside dip.

FOOTWEAR: Heavy hiking boots are not necessary, but you will want to bring a light hiking boot or trail shoe. For down time or during periods around towns or hotels, sandals or other open toed shoes are a good idea if you prefer them.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry service is available at Rancho Primavera for additional cost.

CONDITIONS: Much of our birding will be along dirt and two-lane roads. Some birding areas are reached via long drives on bumpy, curvy mountain roads without guardrails. Cobblestones in San Sebastian can be challenging to walk on; bring a walking stick if you need extra support over rough terrain. Expect to walk along roads and trails every day. Midday breaks are possible on a few days but don't expect them daily. Picnic breakfasts and lunches will be taken on a couple of days.

Transportation will be aboard 15-passenger Nissan/Toyota vans. Seating space is not a problem for most of the tour as everyone will have a window seat on most days. However, the transfer days from the airport to our hotel in Nuevo Vallarta (Day 1), from Nuevo Vallarta to San Sebastian del Oeste (Day 2), from San Sebastián del Oeste to Rancho Primavera (Day 6) and to the airport (Day 11), means that we will be traveling with both people and luggage in the vehicle. On these transfer days, one of the bench seats will be filled with luggage, thus the other bench seat will require that three people sit together. Please note that your comfort is important and that regular stops will occur for bathrooms and to stretch our legs.

Accommodations note: The rooms at the small private Rancho Primavera are not all equal. Some rooms are located closer to the main ranch house and have more square footage than the rooms a little farther away from the main ranch house. Rooms will be assigned on a first come, first served. In San Sebastián some of the uneven nature of the rooms may be alleviated by the assigning of larger rooms to those who had smaller, basic rooms at Rancho Primavera.

Birding Etiquette: To make the tour most enjoyable for yourself, other participants, and your leader, it is important to use common sense and show proper etiquette while in the field. Birds tend to be shy. Loud noises and bright colors can scare them. We encourage clothing with earth tones. Try to avoid colors like oranges, yellows, and reds. Always keep your voice down. Shouting is not conducive to extended looks at a given species. When looking through the spotting scope, always wait your turn and look briefly the first time so that others may have the opportunity to get a look. If you are a smoker, please do so at a distance.

EQUIPMENT: You will want to have sunglasses and sunscreen first and foremost. You should pack a belt pack or day pack (for carrying books, sunscreen, extra digital storage media, etc.). For those with balance or mobility issues a collapsible walking stick will be useful. A folding stool is a good idea when we are waiting on a target bird to appear. Other important travel items include a flashlight or headlamp, travel alarm clock, and water bottle. A camera is highly recommended as there is much to see. Earplugs may be necessary for dogs, roosters, and donkeys. As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medications, and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag. Insect repellent is helpful at Rancho Primavera.

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. As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binoculars in your airline carry-on bag.

Spotting Scopes – Your trip 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.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS:

PASSPORTS - A passport is required for entry into Mexico and should be valid for the full duration of your time in the country. Additionally, a tourist card, which may be filled out aboard your flight to Mexico, is required. Both your passport and tourist card must be carried with you while in Mexico, and BOTH are needed to exit the country. If you need a passport, you should get it well in advance of your trip departure date.

For additional fees, a passport can be issued on an expedited basis. In the United States this can be done at the nearest passport office, most post offices, or the county clerk’s office. You may also visit <https://www.state.gov/travel/> for information on how to get or renew a passport.

As a safety measure, photocopy the first two pages of your passport. Keep the photocopies in a safe place, so if your passport is lost you will have proof of identification. Your passport should be signed and easily available at all times. You will need it for check-in at the airport on your first day of departure, so please do not pack it in your checked luggage.

VISAS - Citizens of the United States do not need to obtain a tourist visa to enter Mexico. Rules and regulations pertaining to non-U.S. and Canadian citizens may vary; please check with the Ecuador consulate or embassy.

CURRENCY & MONEY MATTERS: Your trip to Mexico includes all necessary expenses. You may want to bring enough cash to cover personal expenses not included in the program, such as gifts, gratuities, meals on your own, and personal items. It is best to carry small denominations of cash as many places we visit may be unable to provide change for large bills. All places visited on this tour accept U.S. Dollars. It is not necessary to obtain local currency (Pesos) as shopping opportunities are very limited. However, should you desire local currency, it is best acquired before arriving in Mexico as it may be difficult to obtain after we depart the Puerto Vallarta area. Some, businesses accept major credit cards.

The official currency of Mexico is the Mexican Peso (MXN). You can check the latest currency conversion rate by visiting “XE-The World’s Favorite Currency Site” at: <http://www.xe.com/>.

Should you extend your vacation in Mexico beyond what is offered in the program, you’ll definitely want to obtain local currency. Please check with your bank and credit card issuer for more information regarding banking and the use of ATM and credit cards overseas.

ELECTRICITY: The electrical current in Mexico is 110-120V, same as in the U.S. Electrical outlets are mostly “Type B” the typical U.S. outlet. However sometimes we will encounter “Type A” which is similar but doesn’t provide a round third hole for a ground.

INTERNET ACCESS: Expect Wi-Fi to be available in common areas and in some individual rooms at all lodges and hotels.

LANGUAGE: Spanish is the primary language spoken in Mexico, but English is spoken by some staff at hotels and lodges.

TIME ZONE: West Mexico is located in the Central Standard Time Zone, and in January is one hour behind Eastern Standard Time (EST).

HEALTH: VENT follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccinations. Traveling in western Mexico does not necessarily mean your chance for exposure is greater or less than anywhere else. You should also know your blood type!

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. Standard items to bring include traditional medicines/products such as Aspirin/Advil/Tylenol as well as Pepto Bismol and Imodium. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

Sun Exposure – The sun’s ultraviolet rays are dangerous under prolonged exposure (sometimes only a matter of minutes). Anytime you are outdoors you will want to protect your skin, including your lips, eyes, nose, and ears. A severe sunburn is potentially very painful and will affect your level of enjoyment. Always protect yourself when outdoors and be sure to bring an ample supply of high SPF sunscreen and lip balm. We strongly recommend the use of ultra-violet blocking, polarized sunglasses.

Food & Water – Your tour leader will always let you know when it is appropriate or not to drink the local water. In places where it is not appropriate, bottle or purified water will be provided. Ice in restaurants is safe, as are raw fruits and vegetables in most places. Again, your tour leader will let you know when it is appropriate or not to consume certain food items.

Insect Protection – Mosquitoes, chiggers, biting midges, and ticks can be a problem and insect repellent is strongly recommended. 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>

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

A Note About Chiggers: This tour visits areas where chiggers are known to occur. Chiggers are tiny parasitic mites found in most warm weather areas of the southern United States and the world's tropics. They are especially numerous in grassy areas, where, in the immature stage, they attach themselves to other animals or humans who make contact with the grass as they pass by. Chiggers do not suck blood and the majority of the world's species do not carry disease. They do feed on bodily fluids, however, through a process in which a digestive enzyme is produced by the chigger which essentially liquefies the skin around the area where the chigger is attached. The chigger is not usually attached to the skin for more than a few hours before it either falls off or is knocked off. Our bodies respond by producing a hardened area as a defense against the chigger's digestive enzyme. Though the chigger may be long gone, it is the presence of the hardened area, and the body's natural process of reabsorbing it that typically causes intense itching, often lasting for a week or more. Chiggers like to attach themselves to areas of thin skin, like around the ankles, beltline, undergarment lines, knees, and elbows.

Chiggers can be avoided by following these procedures:

- Avoid walking, or standing in particular, in areas dominated by grass. These areas are where one is most likely to encounter chiggers.
- Tuck your pants into your socks to avoid direct skin-to-grass contact. Chiggers can find their way through clothing, but this is a standard and effective prevention technique commonly employed by many.
- Apply a cream-style insect repellent, such as "Cutter" to your body from the waist down BEFORE putting on your clothing.
- Spray your pants and socks with a spray repellent such as "Cutter" or "OFF!" Repellants with high concentrations of DEET (70-100%) are most effective. You do not need to apply these to your skin, only to clothing. (Be careful as DEET will damage plastics and lens coatings). Repel Permanone is an odorless aerosol insecticide that offers perhaps the best defense against chiggers. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online. It should only be applied to clothes and allowed to dry before you dress. Never apply Permanone directly to the skin. Permethrin is known to be a highly toxic chemical to insects. It is the active ingredient in Permanone, but is present in a small amount (0.5%).

- Powdered sulfur applied to waist, bottoms of pants, sock and boots is also effective at repelling chiggers. However, be warned that clothes will retain the sulfur odor for several washings.
- Shower at the end of each day in the field. Use a washcloth to vigorously rub your legs, feet, and ankles.

By following these methods, you should be able to avoid all chigger bites, as well as tick bites. If, however, you are bitten by chiggers anyway, you can reduce or eliminate the symptoms by applying benzocaine or hydrocortisone creams, calamine lotion, After Bite, or any number of anti-itch products.

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).

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:

Howell, Steve N.G. and Sophie Webb. 1995. *A Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, **This is the main field guide for the area**, and is far more than a simple field guide in size (2 inches thick). In addition to exceptionally good plates, it is a trove of information on distribution (the only Mexico field guide with range maps), vocalizations, subspecies, and natural history information.

Also, United States field guides will be useful as well since the Mexico guides do not show the common species from the U.S.A. that may occur in Mexico as wintering birds or migrants. Two of the best options are:

Dunn, Jon L. and Jonathan Alderfer. *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America, 7th Edition*. Washington D.C.

Sibley, David S. 2014. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014.

Birding Resources and General Nature:

Howell, Steve N.G. *A Bird-finding Guide to Mexico*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999. Site guide to some of the areas we'll visit.

Leopold, A.S. *Wildlife in Mexico*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959. Detailed volume on the mammals and other wildlife of Mexico.

Pesman, Walter M. *Meet Flora Mexicana*. Flagstaff, AZ: Northland Press, 1962. An introductory guide for the amateur botanist. Out of print, but available on www.abebooks.com.

Sutton, George M. *Mexican Birds: First Impressions*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951. Out of print, but try www.abebooks.com.

History and Culture:

Lumholtz, Carl. *Unknown Mexico: Explorations in the Sierra Madres and Other Regions, 1890-1898*. Dover, 1987. Reprint of the 1902 edition.

Parkes, Henry Banford. *A History of Mexico*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1969. A truly outstanding book. Original edition published in 1938; available on www.abebooks.com.

Ruiz, Ramón Eduardo. *Triumphs and Tragedies, A History of the Mexican People*. Norton Press, 1992. Hard to find.

Apps and Online Resources:

eBird. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Among the largest and most successful citizen science projects in existence, eBird is an essential tool in promoting bird study and conservation. Among a range of benefits, eBird allows users to keep a variety of lists in a single application. When taxonomic splits are incorporated, lists are automatically updated. Additionally, trip leaders can share daily lists, so one only need accept a shared list and it will upload to your files! **Highly recommended.**

Merlin Bird ID. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Merlin is an app designed as a birding coach for beginning and intermediate bird watchers. Excellent for use in the field, Merlin asks the observer a series of questions regarding his or her bird sighting, including date and location, and color, size, and behavior of a bird. Merlin then processes the viewer's responses to present a shortlist of possible identifications, from which the user can choose the likely bird. Species profiles include a brief physical description, photographs, and sound samples. The Photo ID feature allows anyone with a camera to snap a photo and obtain a list of suggestions. Merlin's Sound ID feature allows identification of birds through audible recognition. To use Merlin, download the app, followed by the appropriate regional "pack." For this trip, please download the pack for **Mexico: West.**

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 May 19, 2023 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

VENT reserves the right to decline any participant's Registration Form and/or refuse to allow any participant to participate in a tour as VENT deems reasonably necessary, in its sole discretion. VENT also reserves the right to remove any tour participant from any portion of a tour as VENT deems necessary, in its sole discretion, reasons for such removal include but are not limited to, medical needs, injury, illness, inability to meet physical demands of a tour, personality conflict or situations in which such removal is otherwise in the best interest of the tour,

the tour group and/or such participant. A participant may also voluntarily depart from a tour. If a participant is removed from a tour or voluntarily departs from a tour, such participant will be responsible for any expenses associated with such removal or departure, including but not limited to, transportation, lodging, airfare and meals, and VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any such removed or departed participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by such participant.

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

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REV: 03-19-2023 – BG

05-16-2023 – BL

05-22-2023 – TG

P: 05-23-2023 – GL