



VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

ITINERARY

# COLOMBIA: MAGDALENA RIVER VALLEY & WESTERN ANDES *A RELAXED & EASY TOUR*

JULY 19–27, 2025

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Colombian Chachalaca (*Ortalis columbiana*) © D. Ascanio

**Colombia is one of the most bio-diverse countries in the world. It hosts an amazing number of biomes, from high-peak mountains in the Andes to extensive flatlands and Amazonian rainforest. Along with such richness, Colombia now claims to be the country with the largest avifauna of all. At this writing, the South American Classification Committee (SACC) website shows an astonishing list of 1,863 bird species! Add its recent history of political stability and peace-culture, and you'll understand why Colombia is now a dream destination for birders and nature lovers alike.**

**Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is pleased to offer this tour which complements our extensive list of Colombia tours, this time at a relaxed and easy pace. This Colombia Relaxed & Easy tour will focus on the Magdalena River Valley and the Western Andes, two areas with relatively important endemism and contrasting habitats.**

**We'll start in the vicinity of the city of Medellín, with a drive to the Magdalena River Valley to bird the Río Claro Nature Reserve and other roads cutting forest edge and farmland. The wealth of birds in this humid lowland forest is comparable with its natural beauty; the Río Claro cuts exquisite limestone formations in the reserve. Here, we will have the opportunity to look for Barred Puffbird and Beautiful Woodpecker, two birds that frequently sing in the morning. On both days during our visit, we will keep our eyes open in case a swarm of army ants comes across the road; it will be a great opportunity to look for some of the birds that specialize in following these ants. After a couple of days in this bird-rich area, we will drive back to Medellín to spend a night, and then continue the tour along a narrowly paved road that leads to the beautiful town of Jardín.**

**Jardín (garden) retains much of its colonial architecture with an Andean ambiance. Just walking around the square at night brings you back to a time when the economy of these communities revolved exclusively around coffee production. From Jardín, we will focus on two locations. The first is an accessible Andean Cock-of-the-**



**rock lek near the town. Seeing these bizarre creatures showing their gaudy plumage as they open their wings while uttering an unpleasant vocalization is a life-time experience. This will be, for sure, one of the highlights of the tour. The second location will be the road that leads to the Yellow-eared Parrot Bird Reserve. Along with the possibility of seeing this parrot fly from the roosting area to the foraging grounds, birding possibilities are immense, and we might come across feeding flocks packed with Grass-green Tanager, Barred Fruiteater and Citrine Warbler. Other species found in the forest along the road are Ocellated Tapaculo, White-browed Spinetail, several hummingbirds, tyrant-flycatchers and tanagers.**

**This tour is one in our series of Relaxed & Easy tours. These tours are appropriate for participants who want a slower paced tour, with somewhat fewer hours in the field and lighter physical activity. They are ideal for persons who prefer a somewhat later start in the morning**

**(typically between 6:30-7:00 a.m.), a break after lunch and a shorter afternoon outing. They typically involve shorter walks, usually less than a mile, and avoid difficult terrain.**

**Participants must be aware that Colombia's infrastructure is still basic, with little development. Although this is changing rapidly, expect some lengthy drives between locations. On one morning we will be exposed to a high Andes pass (9,200 feet elevation). We will make every possible effort to stop along the drives to stretch, find birds and enjoy the scenery, making these drives more enjoyable.**

**July 19, Day 1: Arrival in Medellín (Rionegro).** Upon arrival at Medellín's José María Córdova International Airport (airport code MDE), you will be met by a representative of our ground agent and transferred to our hotel. Participants should plan to arrive no later than the late afternoon since we plan to start tomorrow at around 7:00 a.m. The trip begins this evening with a get-acquainted meeting followed by dinner. Upon request, VENT will be happy to assist with hotel reservations for early arrivals.

NIGHT: Movich Hotel las Lomas, Rionegro, dept. of Antioquia (7,000 feet elevation)



**Red-bellied Grackle (*Hypopyrrhus pyrohypogaster*) © D. Ascanio**

**July 20, Day 2: From Rionegro to Río Claro in the Magdalena River Valley.** Our day starts with a drive to Cantos de Agua, a family-owned property with hummingbird feeders and an extravagant collection of orchids including some species in the genus *Dracula*. Among Andean Emeralds and territorial Lesser Violetears, we may be lucky to see a male Booted Racket-tail drinking the sugar-water from the feeders. We have also reported Bronzy Inca, White-bellied Woodstar and Steely-vented Hummingbird in the area. In addition, on the back side of the house, there is a fruit table that is frequently visited by Red-bellied Grackle (endemic), Metallic-green Tanager and Andean Motmot. Close to noon we will return to Rionegro for lunch and will continue driving for approximately two and a half hours to the vicinity of Doradal, in the Magdalena River Valley, located at ca. 1,500 feet elevation. We are expecting at least one or two stops along the road and the primary target will be the endemic White-mantled Barbet although we might surely add tanagers and tyrant-flycatchers new for the tour.

NIGHT: Hotel Los Colores, Doradal, dept. of Antioquia (2,300 feet elevation)



**July 21-22, Days 3-4: Reserva Natural Cañón del Río Claro and Farmlands near Doradal.**

The Cañón del Río Claro private reserve will be our birding site in the Magdalena River Valley. This area preserves some of the very last portions of forest along the Río Claro watershed and what a gem! First, it is home for the very last remnant of tropical dry and moist forests growing on karstic formations in this part of the country. Second and most important, it hosts endemic birds such as White-mantled Barbet, Magdalena Antbird (also found in Venezuela), Sooty Ant-Tanager and Beautiful Woodpecker. One species that has been briefly seen on previous VENT tours is the Antioquia Bristle-Tyrant, another Colombian endemic that was described back in 1988. Although none of these endemic species are easy to see, we will keep our eyes (and ears) alert in case any of them are foraging or calling nearby.



**Andean Motmot (*Motmotus aequatorialis*) © D. Ascanio**

We plan to spend a full morning in the reserve, and it will be devoted to finding rare and uncommon birds as we explore the fairly flat road from the entrance to the headquarters. We hope to see Dusky-faced, Golden-hooded and Crimson-backed tanagers; a Cocoa Woodcreeper giving its distinctive call notes; White-bearded Manakin shaking its tertial feathers to sound like a rattle; Streaked and Buff-throated saltators; and possibly a Red-billed Scythebill probing the rotten bark of a tree.

The reserve always brings surprises to visitors. In some years, we have seen Black-breasted or Barred puffbirds as well as the astonishing Saffron-headed Parrot. Also, we have been rewarded with great views of the astonishingly beautiful Blue Cotinga. Most of the time we get to see Laughing Falcon, Black-mandibled Toucan, Straight-billed and Streak-headed woodcreepers, Ochre-bellied Flycatcher, Forest and Yellow-bellied elaenias, Southern Beardless Tyrannulet, Masked and Black-crowned tityras, and Black-bellied Wren. At the end of the road is a narrow trail; we may visit part of it to look for birds occurring in forest edging rivers such as Fasciated Tiger-Heron, kingfishers and Buff-rumped Warbler.

After a mid-day break, one afternoon we will go birding on roads cutting forest edge, secondary growth and farmland. This will give us an opportunity to look for Chestnut-fronted Macaw, Blue-headed Parrot and Cinnamon Becard. We will also keep looking for Black Antshrike and might come across Large-billed and Chestnut-bellied seed-finches. In contrast, on another morning we will visit a farmland contiguous to the Magdalena River, where we will explore wetlands and extensive grasslands. Here we will have the opportunity to look for Yellow-chinned Spinetail, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, various species of egrets and herons, several tyrant-flycatchers, and Bare-faced Ibis. In previous years we have enjoyed amazing views of Dwarf Cuckoo, with its beautiful peach-colored throat. This morning usually stands out as one of the tour favorites.

NIGHT: Hotel Los Colores, Doradal, dept. of Antioquia (2,300 feet elevation)



Andean Cock-of-the-rock (*Rupicola peruviana*)  
© D. Ascanio

**July 23, Day 5: Río Claro to Medellín.** Depending on the target bird species that we have missed, we will spend some time this morning birding either in the vicinity of Doradal or near the entrance of Río Claro. After an early lunch we will drive to Medellín but will surely make some birding stops along the road, and eventually arrive in Medellín. Here we will spend the night in order to get ready for our next location in the Western Andes.

NIGHT: Estelar Blue Hotel, Medellín, dept. of Antioquia  
(7,000 feet elevation)

**July 24, Day 6: Medellín to Jardín with a Brief Visit to Bolombolo.** After breakfast we will depart for the Western Andes. In order to deal with this longish drive, we plan to make a few stops that will give us the chance to add new birds to our tour. The Bolombolo road will provide a unique opportunity to look for the endemic Antioquia Wren and two other target species, the Apical Flycatcher and Grayish Piculet. We will also be exposed to commoner species such as Scrub Tanager, Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher, Straight-billed Woodcreeper and Thick-billed Euphonia. We will continue driving towards Jardín and plan to stop in a local restaurant where we will enjoy an *Antioqueño lunch* (Antioquia is a province of Colombia) before proceeding on to our hotel in Jardín. Some participants may opt to visit the town of

Jardín (garden), one of Colombia's nicest towns, with colonial architecture and flowers decorating several windows. Those choosing to go birding around the hotel gardens may have the opportunity to see Flame-rumped Tanager, Black-chested Jay and Colombian Chachalacas. Time permitting, upon entering Jardín we will visit an active lek of Andean Cock-of-the-rock, and hopefully we will be on-time to enjoy seeing some males "practicing" even without noticing a female around! Although we're not visiting the lek during the breeding season, we're sure to see some of these males practicing their display. Seeing this bizarre species is surely going to be an outstanding experience; something we cannot say for its ugly voice!

NIGHT: Hotel Hacienda Balandú, Jardín, dept. of Antioquia (6,550 feet elevation)

**July 25, Day 7: Jardín and Yellow-eared Parrot Bird Reserve.** Although this is a *Relaxed & Easy Tour*, we will offer an early morning departure because that will increase the chances of seeing the highly endangered Yellow-eared Parrot. For that, we will take an almost two-hour drive on a dirt road aboard a wooden-seat bus with cushions, locally called a *chiva* or *escalera*. Our plan is to arrive in Alto de Ventanas, where the Yellow-eared Parrot reserve is located. PROAVES, a local conservation organization, has protected this important plot of forest that is now called the Yellow-eared Parrot Bird Reserve. This privately-owned reserve is about 740 acres; it protects not only the bird but the wax palm (*Ceroxylon quindiuense*), which plays an important role for the parrot during roosting and breeding. Here, in addition to increasing the chances of seeing the parrot (usually in flight), we are sure you will also be excited by the prospect of encountering a mixed species feeding flock! Among flock attendants, we have been delighted with views of Grass-green Tanager, Golden-fronted Redstart (Whitestart), Lacrimose Mountain-Tanager, White-browed Spinetail and sometimes Plushcap. A couple of endemics occur here, the Red-bellied Grackle and the Munchique Wood-Wren, although it might be difficult to see them. Other target species

that will require some time to find include the vulnerable and rare Tanager Finch, the secretive Black-billed Mountain-Toucan, a reclusive Rufous-headed Pygmy-Tyrant or the vocal Citrine Warbler.

Upon our return to the hotel, we will take a short break before visiting *Finca La Bambusa*, a family-owned property with bird feeders that usually attract Red-headed Barbet and Colombia Chachalaca, another bird endemic to Colombia, as well as Crowned Woodnymph and Green Hermit, which have been regular visitors to the hummingbird feeders in previous years.



Red-headed Barbet (*Eubucco bourcierii*) © D. Ascanio

NIGHT: Hotel Hacienda Balandú, Jardín, dept. of Antioquia (6,550 feet elevation)

**July 26, Day 8: From Jardín to Medellín.** After breakfast, time allowing, we may pay a second visit to the mountains surrounding Jardín, and for that we will again use the reliable *chiva*. But this time we will focus our birding at a lower elevation where the edge of lush cloud forest mixes with some clearings. This location has been famous in the past to look for Golden-headed Quetzal and Black-billed Mountain-Toucan. With fingers crossed, we may come across feeding flocks, and that would include the astonishing Grass-green Tanager as well as several of the wonderful members of the *Tangara* genus including Blue-and-black, Beryl-spangled, Blue-necked and Saffron-



Blue-necked Tanager (*Tangara cyanicollis*) © D. Ascanio



crowned tanagers. Around the flowering bushes, we may see Collared Inca and Long-tailed Sylph. Larger birds also can be found such as Andean and Sickle-winged guans or Southern Emerald Toucanet. In some years we have seen a family group of Mountain Cacique and in other years a pair of the vocal Strong-billed Woodcreeper. Upon returning to the hotel at noon, we will depart for Rionegro and will enjoy another delicious local lunch as we increase our chances to add more birds to our trip. After lunch, we will continue on to Rionegro. Time allowing, we will make stops along the way to enjoy the scenery or continue birding along the road.

NIGHT: Hotel Movich Las Lomas, Rionegro, dept. of Antioquia (7,000 feet elevation)

**July 27, Day 9: Departure for Home.** Tour participants may plan to depart for home at any time today. Transfers will be arranged from the hotel to the airport according to departing flight times.

**TOUR SIZE:** This tour will be limited to 10 participants.

**TOUR LEADERS:** David Ascanio and a local leader.



**David Ascanio**, a Venezuelan birder and naturalist, has spent 38 years guiding birding tours throughout his native country, Colombia, Brazil, Peru, Costa Rica, the Orinoco and Amazon River basins, Trinidad & Tobago, Suriname, the Guianas, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, the Lesser Antilles, Cuba, Chile, and Panama. He is especially interested in bird vocalizations and has a private library containing voices of more than 70% of all the birds of Venezuela. David combines superb birding skills with an astonishing command of bird vocalizations. He has published a book for children about bird songs and has coauthored the descriptions of two new species, the Rio Orinoco Spinetail and the Delta Amacuro Softtail. David has also published various manuscripts about the birds of the *llanos* (plains), the Orinoco River Island species, and the pan-tepui endemic species for which he has become an authority. He is the first author of the *Field Guide to the Birds of Venezuela* (2017). David is an excellent communicator, has a great sense of humor, and is tireless in helping others find birds and wildlife. These traits have made him one of the most popular naturalists/guides in the Neotropics.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for this tour is **\$5,495** per person in double occupancy and includes all meals beginning with dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 9, accommodations as stated, ground transportation during the tour and guide services provided by the tour leaders. The tour fee does not include roundtrip airfare from your home to Medellín and return, 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 **\$800**.

**REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT:** To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, the deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive

your deposit and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at <https://ventbird.com>) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

**PAYMENTS:** All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 150 days prior to the tour departure date (February 19, 2025).

### **CANCELLATION & REFUNDS:**

#### **Cancellation by Participant:**

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

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

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

**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 its **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: [ripcordtravelprotection.com/ventbird](http://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 \*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 15 days of making your first trip payment. 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 15 days, and insure all non-refundable trip cost in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

#### **Coronavirus (COVID-19):**

In line with the decision made by the federal government (including the CDC), Redpoint considers COVID-19 illness as any other seasonal respiratory illness. Providing only a positive Covid-19 test result will likely not be considered a covered event per the terms and conditions of the company's policy. Redpoint maintains a **Coronavirus FAQ** page on its website that addresses questions and concerns travelers may have regarding COVID-19 and Redpoint's policy. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of relevant topics.

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

[https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid\\_19\\_faq/](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.

**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.

**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.

**TRIP CLASSIFICATION:** This is a Relaxed and Easy tour (R&E). There is no physically demanding activity and all walks will be on flat and open roads. We might explore the interior of the forest or attempt to enter a trail for a very short distance if an interesting bird is found. Breakfast typically is offered at 6:30 a.m. and we leave for the field around 7:00 a.m. On days when we are not driving, we will offer a mid-day break and resume birding for a few hours in the afternoon.

Warm clothing is advised for the birding in Jardín and the Yellow-eared Parrot Bird Reserve. As for the Magdalena River Valley, we recommend clothing for warm and humid weather. In general, expect warm to hot conditions in the lowlands, and pleasant to cool temperatures at mid-elevations between about 4,000 and 7,000 feet.

**BAGGAGE LIMITS:** All tour participants are asked to limit their luggage to a single bag of no more than forty-four pounds (20 kilos) and a single carry-on item such as a small backpack. Luggage space in our vans is limited, and excessive baggage may have to be stored in passenger seats, thus limiting seating options in the vehicles. Therefore, we ask that you adhere to the luggage limits outlined above both for your comfort and for the comfort of others on the trip. Please pack in duffels with wheels, if possible, as these will fit better in our vans, and they are easier to move in and out of the hotels. Amenities at the hotels vary, and porter service may not be available. When packing, we urge you to give thought to traveling lighter rather than heavier. We also recommend that you bring a few plastic bags or dry bags large enough to protect your clothing and/or luggage in case of rain.

**LAUNDRY:** We recommend that you bring sufficient clothes to see you through the trip and/or bring items that can be washed and will dry quickly (i.e., Coolmax® shirts, etc.) in your rooms. Laundry is, unfortunately, not available at most locations.

**CLIMATE:** Weather conditions can be variable due to the wide range of habitats and elevations visited. Lowland areas in the Magdalena River Valley (Río Claro) can be hot and humid (temperatures in the high 80s to low 90s). Most other sites where we stay are in the mountains. Light weight gloves and a warm hat will be useful in the morning hours. Participants should dress with layers for changing conditions. Morning temperatures can be quite chilly in the mountains but are likely to be warm mid-day. Participants should expect some rain as the Colombian Andes generally receive fairly high rainfall.

**CLOTHING:** Lightweight field clothing is generally the rule. Please do not wear white or brightly colored clothes, including hats or raingear, as it may frighten shy birds and animals, and is likely to emphasize any movements that you make. At lower elevations, we suggest loose-fitting khaki clothing or other cotton clothing in a dark green, dark blue, tan or brown shade. Military camouflage clothing should not be worn as it conveys an inappropriate image to police and military personnel, whom we are likely to encounter at various highway checkpoints. Also, please avoid nylon or plastic jackets and/or rainwear of similar materials; noisy clothing is annoying to others and may frighten birds and animals. Long pants and long-sleeved shirts are recommended as protection against insects. A long, waterproof poncho or rain jacket; warm sweater or down jacket (or light jacket and down vest combination in layers); warm hat; and gloves may be needed for the higher elevation sites which can be chilly (but not freezing) early in the morning. Bring a broad-brimmed hat for sun protection and a good sunscreen. Footwear should include Gore-Tex® water-resistant/waterproof hiking boots, and perhaps a second pair of walking shoes and/or sneakers. Rubber boots are not necessary on this trip although there may be some muddy or wet areas on roads. Shower thongs will be useful.

**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.

Malaria has been confirmed in Colombia, including the chloroquine-resistant strain in rural areas. However, it is not expected to be a problem on this route. While not a requirement for entry into Colombia unless you are arriving from an infected area in another country, a yellow fever vaccination is a good idea for most people traveling to third world, tropical countries, and the vaccination is good for ten years. People with compromised immune systems should consult with their personal physician before getting any vaccination.

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.

**INSECTS:** Insects should not be a problem over most of our route (the highlands should be particularly free of biting insects), but depending on rain, we could encounter a few insects. We are not expecting to expose you to any chigger country. However, it is impossible to determine whether a given area will have chiggers or not. As a precaution, we recommend you wear loose-fitting long pants and long-sleeved shirts and bring bottles or roll-on sticks of “Cutter” or similar insect repellents. Spraying shoes, socks and the lower portion of pants with insect repellent will help reduce problems with unexpected chiggers. Pants pretreated with permethrin are also helpful.

Leishmaniasis is a disease transmitted by a small fly that is mainly active at dusk or during the night. It is not a common insect and only a few of the flies are disease carriers; proper clothing and the use of insect repellent are your best protection, and this disease is not considered a threat on this route. Dengue fever also is very infrequent and is transmitted by day-flying *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes.

Finally, the Zika virus is present in Colombia. It also is transmitted by the same day-flying *Aedes aegypti* mosquito that transmits Dengue. Again, proper clothing and use of some insect repellent, especially in lowland areas, is the best protection.

**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>

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

Chiggers can be avoided by following these procedures:

- Avoid walking or standing in areas dominated by grass. These areas are where one is most likely to encounter chiggers.
- Tuck your pants into your socks to avoid direct skin-to-grass contact. Chiggers can find their way through clothing, but this is a standard and effective prevention technique.
- Apply insect repellent to your skin and clothing. Please refer to the Insect Repellent section that follows for important information about selecting and applying repellent.
- Powdered sulfur applied to waist, bottoms of pants, sock and boots is also effective at repelling chiggers. However, be warned that clothes will retain the sulfur odor for several washings. If using sulfur, never touch your eyes, nose, or mouth before washing your hands first.
- Shower at the end of each day in the field. Use a washcloth to vigorously rub your legs, feet, and ankles.

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

**\*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 ExOfficio 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 can also be purchased at outdoor recreation stores and from a variety of online retailers.

**CURRENCY:** Colombian Peso (COP). We recommend that you exchange all or most of your dollars at the international airport upon arrival. ATMs are available in the airports and many other public sites where you can obtain local currency (and generally give the most favorable exchange rates).

**DOCUMENTS:** A valid passport is required for U.S. citizens, with one blank page for entry stamp. We recommend your passport be valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure. A visa is not required; **but you must fill out on-line and submit a CHECK-Migration form. This form must be completed during the 72-hour window of time prior to your flight departure (but not earlier). Also,**

**keep a copy of this form on your mobile phone (or print a hard copy) to present to the airlines when you check-in. Additionally, you will be required to fill this form out again [on-line] within the same 72-hour window immediately prior to your departure from Colombia. The airlines will likely not ask to verify this when you depart Colombia, but this does serve as your official exit visa from Colombia (currently no one will stamp your passport on departure)** Non-United States citizens should check with the airline they plan to fly, or online with the local Colombian consulate or embassy for further travel details.

**EQUIPMENT:** We strongly recommend that participants bring a WIDE-mouth water bottle that can be easily refilled (from a large 10-gallon tank in the bus). A day pack is essential; a small, compact umbrella is highly recommended; and raingear (rain jacket or poncho) and plastic bags for water-proofing gear in the field can be useful. Earplugs may come in handy at a couple of the hotels.

### **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 them 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 leader will have a scope available for group use throughout the trip; however, if you prefer to bring your own scope, you should feel free to do so.

**MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS:** There will be opportunities to recharge batteries for electronic equipment at virtually all locations where we stay, but participants should bring enough spare batteries to last for a few days between charges in case of unplanned electrical outages. Electrical plug-ins in Colombia usually are two flat-pin type (same as in USA) and electrical current is 110 volts in virtually all areas (but always check first as 220 to 240 volts may be found in a few areas). If you plan to recharge batteries, bring appropriate converters; a surge protector also is recommended. Because much of this route traverses relatively remote regions where the variety (although not quantity) of food may be limited, we recommend that everyone, including especially those persons with dietary restrictions or other dietary requirements, bring at least some snacks and other emergency food items that are portable.

**INTERNET ACCESS:** Colombia is one of the most “wired” countries in South America and most hotels have internet access and Wi-Fi (at least in the lobbies if not actually in hotel rooms). Also, for those with the appropriate SIM card in your mobile phone (iPhone, Samsung, etc.) or iPad, you should be able to connect via one of Colombia’s main telecommunications services such as CLARO, AVANTEL or MOVISTAR (CLARO and AVANTEL have more coverage in remote rural areas). Sometimes this entails a trip to a local telecommunications service center, something best done before the trip begins. Cell phone access is now virtually country-wide in Colombia, although a few sites located in deep valleys may not be able to receive signals (this is usually a local issue). Before leaving home, we suggest that you check with your personal service provider for roaming rates and coverage use areas pertaining to your personal calling plan.

**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](http://www.amazon.com) which has a wide selection; [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com) and [www.nhbs.com](http://www.nhbs.com) which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.



**Field Guides (Birds):**

Hilty, S. L. 2021. *Birds of Colombia*. The recommended bird book for Colombia. Forward looking taxonomy includes all species and subspecies groups (as in Clements checklist). Illustrations are from 16-vol. *Handbook of Birds of the World* (Lynx) with many updates and additions. All species, as well as subspecies, and subspecies groups are illustrated and mapped. Unique for South America, this book contains a QR code for every species, which allows users to quickly link, via mobile phone, to Cornell's *Birds of the World* website and listen to vocalizations, view photos, and read an expanded text. Almost like having an App embedded in this book (and Colombia has remarkably good cellular coverage so this feature should be usable almost everywhere). Available from Lynx Editions <https://www.lynxeds.com>. Also available from Buteo Books/ABA sales, and elsewhere.

McMullan, Miles; T. Donegan, G. Pantoja-Peña; T. Tuncer-Navarro; A. Bartels & T. Ellery. *Field Guide to the Birds of Colombia*. Bogotá, Colombia: Rey Naranjo Editores, 2018. Illustrates every species known to have occurred in Colombia and includes range map for each species. The text is concise and includes a description of the bird vocalization. A color-band separating each family may be a useful way to find the species when using in the field. Represents a significant achievement in simply dealing with nearly 2,000 species in a book that is remarkably compact and portable.

McMullan, Miles, T. M. Donegan & A. Quevedo. *Field Guide to the Birds of Colombia*, 2nd edition. Bogotá, Colombia: ProAves, 2014. Paperback. A useful field guide with an updated taxonomy since it is compact and portable. Unfortunately, distribution maps are tiny and printing is poor (colors dull and muddy or inaccurate), especially hummingbirds, flycatchers, furnariids and some species in other families. Despite some drawbacks we recommend that all visitors obtain a copy of this little book (available from Buteo Books, USA). It is jam-packed with helpful information but due to the quality of the illustrations, it should be regarded as a supplement for field identification (not a solution to all identifications). Nevertheless, it represents a significant achievement in simply dealing with nearly 2,000 species in a book.

**Out-of-print field guides (Birds):**

(good source of information at your local library)

Ridgely, R & G. Tudor. *Field Guide to the Birds of South America: Passerines*. Helm Field Guides. 2009. An essential field guide for those wanting to go birding in South America. Very well illustrated and concise but relevant accounts.

Hilty, S. L. & W. L. Brown. *Guide to the Birds of Colombia*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986. Now a classic but still a good source for basic Colombia bird identification. Excellent source of information on voice, behavior, breeding and status and habitat/range maps for almost all species. Plates excellent but taxonomy now outdated because of many changes. For those that object to the size of this volume, we suggest you simply remove the plates and maps and have them bound separately so that you can carry this portion into the field. Please note that in an avifauna as complex and confusing as that in Colombia, accurate RANGE MAPS are essential too. At present this book is out of print and may be difficult to find.

Restall, R., C. Rodner, & M. Lentino. *Birds of Northern South America*. Vol. 2, Plates and maps. London: Christopher Helm, 2006. Relatively up-to-date taxonomy by the year of publishing (notice that taxonomy keeps changing!) but very different color plate style compared to previous two books (plates useful for some groups; less so for difficult groups like flycatchers); similar in size and almost as heavy as the Hilty book. Covers seven countries (over 7,000 images) which complicates field use because of the large number of illustrations. Maps are tiny and lack detail. All text is in a separate volume. Despite its large size and weight, a good reference.

Ayerbe-Quiñones, Fernando. 2019. *Birds of Colombia*. Wildlife Conservation Society. Small and compact book with fine, well-organized, computer-generated illustrations; a detailed map (with color-coded subsp. distributions) accompanies each species. No text but has comments pertaining to each genus. Lacks useful index (only Order, Family and genus but not English names). Small size and accurate illustrations make this book very useful in field but paper cover (as well as all inside pages) printed on low-quality paper easily damaged by contact with moisture (always carry it inside a plastic bag for protection and do not let water reach this book). Now shown as available on Amazon. There is also a Spanish-language edition (2018).

### **General Introduction to the Tropics:**

Forsyth, Adrian, & Ken Miyata. *Tropical Nature*. Life & Death in the Rain Forests of Central and South America. New York: Scribners Sons, 1984. Does not deal much with birds but is a fantastic introduction to all kinds of topics relating to tropical wildlife including bugs, frogs, plant strategies, bot flies, and much more. Extraordinarily well written, a classic, and a book that ought to be read by anyone contemplating a visit to the American tropics.

Hilty, Steven. *Birds of Tropical America: A Watcher's Introduction to Behavior, Breeding and Diversity*. University of Texas Press, 2005. Highly recommended for background information on how things work in bird communities in tropical latitudes; topics include diversity of birds, hummingbird communities; mixed species flocks; antbirds and army ants; colorfulness, song structure in relation to environments, and much more.

Kricher, John C. *The New Neotropical Companion*. Princeton University Press, 2017. An introduction to the animals, plants and ecosystems of the New World Tropics. Recommended as a general, broad-based introduction to plants and animals of Amazonia.

### **Further Reading:**

Porup, J, K. Raub, C. Soriano & R. Reid, *Lonely Planet Guide to Colombia*. Most recent edition. A good introduction to Colombia life, culture and just getting around the country. A little time with this or a similar travel book (see four others below) should provide a richer travel experience for almost anyone. Also, the most recent editions of: Colombia Handbook; Rough Guide; Bradt Travel Guide; and the highly rated Michelin Green Guide Colombia.

Perry, Donald. *Life Above the Jungle Floor*. Simon & Schuster, 1986. Out of print, but still available. A popular book that talks much about life in the tropical rainforest, especially in the little-known canopy.

Abad Gomez, Hector, 2018. *Manual de Tolerancia*. An interesting compilation of documents and notes written by Hector Abad Gomez about the civil conflict that took place in Colombia for many decades. Currently available only in Spanish,

### **Recordings:**

Alvarez, M., V. Caro, O. Laverde & A. M. Cuervo. *Guía sonora de las aves de los Andes Colombianos (A Guide to the Bird Sounds of the Colombian Andes)*. CD discs 1-7. Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. 2007. Good source for bird sound recordings for the Andes of Colombia (over 600 species). Songs are not introduced at beginning of each track (follow with booklet).

### **Apps:**

*Merlin Bird ID*. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The best app to use in the field. Nowadays considered the “future of birding.” Once you download the app, you must download the packs for Colombia. As this itinerary was

made, there are packs covering all of Colombia. We recommend that you either download the pack “Colombia: Andes” or for a wider understanding of the country’s avifauna, the pack “Colombia: All”. Includes a brief bird description, photos and voices. Also, there is a section for Bird Photo ID which can be useful. HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.

*Ebird*. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. A friendly and essential tool for the modern birdwatcher This is nowadays the best way to keep your life list, all in a single application which also promotes bird conservation. Personal bird lists can be compiled by location and by trip. When taxonomic splits are incorporated, your list will be automatically updated. Furthermore, your guide will be able to share the daily list. You can just accept the list and have it uploaded in your files! HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.

*Bird Data*. A free App that provides summarized information for each species, including the subspecies and presence in neighboring countries. It has a section of endemic species. Look for the *Colombia package*. Providing that you have data access in your phone, it will show the eBird hotspots near your location, thus being one of its main advantages.

*The Birds of Colombia*. IMB publicación. A basic app showing a list of the birds of Colombia based in taxonomic order and arranged by family. Contains an ornithological dictionary.

*All Birds Colombia*. Sunbird Images. Blue Level Series. Available in Apple Store. \$24.99 (as of September 2021). This app was made from the information in *Birds of Northern South America* by R. Restall et al (Helm Field Guide). It contains images, maps and bird voices. The user must be aware that the maps used from the publication were out-of-date at the time of printing. The most powerful aspects are the bird voices and the sonograms accompanying each species as well as the search tools. Good source to study the voice of the birds and get acquainted with the plumage and other aspects of the species natural history.

*Colombia – guía de viaje y mapa offline*. Tripwolf. The free download provides limited information. A good source for those wanting to learn about culture, important dates and other aspects of the country. To access all the information, an upgrade must be purchased.

### ***Movies and Documentaries:***

*Colombia Wild Magic*. Netflix. This documentary presents a kaleidoscope of images of one of the most biodiverse countries in the world.

*Narcos*. Three seasons. Netflix. An overview of Colombia’s violent past. Mixes fiction with history.

**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 October 29, 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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