



VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

ITINERARY

## FRANCE: BIRDS & ART IN PROVENCE

MAY 1-10, 2025

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The Roman theater of Arles rings with the songs and calls of European Goldfinches, Blackcaps, and Black Redstarts—just as it did when it was built, two millennia ago. Photo Rick Wright

***Mediterranean France is famous for the diversity of its bird life and for the richness of its 2,000-year-old culture. This relaxed tour, based at a single fine hotel in the quintessential Provençal town of Arles, gives us the opportunity to enjoy both, with a Mediterranean avifauna complementing artistic and architectural treasures from the Roman, medieval, and modern periods.***

*Once in Arles, we will be based in a single high-quality hotel just steps from this charming city's most famous attractions for our entire trip. The shady Alyscamps, the Roman and early Christian necropolis so famously painted by van Gogh, is four blocks down the road, and the Roman theater is just up the hill. Rooms in the front of the hotel look out onto the towers of the sixteenth-century town hall and Romanesque St-Trophime; the view from the back of the hotel takes in the Alyscamps and the dramatic ruins of St-Honorat.*

*Arles, as we know it today, was established by Julius Caesar as a gift to his legions after their conquest of Gaul—and as a way to keep those battle-hardened veterans from causing him trouble back home in Rome. In the early Christian period, Arles was a bustling center of commerce and spirituality, a status only heightened in the Middle Ages, when some of the finest art in European history was produced to ornament the city's churches and cemeteries. Today, Arles is an elegant, vaguely sleepy town, proud of its well-preserved past and its preeminent status among the cities of Provence.*



**Arles is also the gateway to some of the best wildlife areas in France. On some days of our trip, birding will predominate, while other times will be devoted primarily to historical sites, but most of our outings will feature a balance between birds and culture. Late morning starts, leisurely meals, and plenty of time built in for shopping, strolling, or enjoying the sights ensure a relaxed pace, and the food, the wine, and the inviting landscapes of Provence combine to make this an especially appealing European sojourn for birders and non-birders alike.**



The Greater Flamingo is a classic inhabitant of the salt marshes of Mediterranean France. Photo Rick Wright

**May 1-2, Days 1-2: Departure from home and arrival in Marseille (airport code MRS).** Most flights from the United States will depart on May 1, 2025 arriving in France the following day. If your itinerary includes a layover in Paris, please be certain that your flights land and take off from the same airport.

On arriving in Marseille on May 2, participants will be met for the group transfer to the Crowne Plaza Marseille – Le Dôme Hotel. Further transfer information, including pickup times, will be provided in your pre-departure memo. In the evening, we will enjoy a first dinner together, a chance to get to know each other and talk about our plans for the exciting days to come.

NIGHT (Day One): in transit

NIGHT (Day Two): Crowne Plaza Marseille – Le Dôme Hotel, Marseille



The male Blackcap, his somber plumage notwithstanding, sings the most beautiful song of any European bird. Photo Rick Wright

**May 3, Day 3: Salin de Giraud and On to Arles.**

Our comfortable minibus will pick us up at our hotel after breakfast, and we will set off for the beaches and salt pannes of the Mediterranean coast. The sandy beach of Piémanson is an excellent place to look for such specialties as the Kentish Plover, Sandwich Tern, and Yelkouan Shearwater, while isolated stands of tamarisk behind the dunes function as effective migrant traps, drawing passerines exhausted by the long crossing from Africa. The huge salt works and salicornia flats along the causeway attract a different set of equally special birds, including Pied Avocets, Slender-billed Gulls, and Zitting Cisticolas.

We will have lunch in a traditional inn in Salin de Giraud, where House Martins and Eurasian Tree Sparrows nest beneath the eaves. If the weather is warm, we may even see our first European Bee-eaters or Hoopoes here before continuing our journey to Arles, 40 minutes away. Once we have checked in to our hotel, located in a former convent and designed by the Arles native Christian Lacroix, we should have time to unpack, settle in, and catch our breath before gathering again for dinner. Not only does the hotel have its

own fine restaurant, but we are within easy walking distance of all of Arles' other finest dining establishments; a circumstance we take full and happy advantage of.

NIGHT: Hotel Jules César, Arles

**May 4, Day 4: Pont du Gard and the Alyscamps.**

After breakfast in our hotel, we will begin this morning with a drive to the Pont du Gard, an imposing Roman bridge and aqueduct built early in the first century AD. Not just a marvel of engineering, the pont is also the nesting site for large numbers of Common and Alpine Swifts and Crag Martins; the rocky shores of the river Gard beneath are often haunted by White Wagtail, Little Egret, and Yellow-legged Gull. If the morning is warm, raptors rise out of the woods across the river; Short-toed Eagles and European Honey Buzzards are regularly seen here, and some recent tours have been fortunate enough to see Eurasian Griffons low overhead.



The Alyscamps. Photo Rick Wright



Kentish Plover. Photo Rick Wright

Fields and lawns in the area can be good for migrants and resident birds. Unless the spring is late, Eurasian Hoopoe can be common, and this is a nearly reliable spot to not just hear but actually see the stunning Golden Oriole. While Black Redstarts will quickly become a familiar sight; seen everywhere there is a wall or a rock, the woods around the pont and visitor center are often our best chance for good looks at the poorly named Common Redstart, a bird of decidedly uncommon beauty. Serins, Greenfinches, and Cirl Buntings are sometimes conspicuous in the brush-lined parking lots.



**The Pont du Gard, one of the famed marvels of Roman engineering. Photo Rick Wight**

We will eat lunch overlooking the River Gardon, then return to Arles for a short break and, time permitting, a visit to the Alyscamps, right around the corner from our Arles hotel and the subject of an especially fine painting by van Gogh. The long, quiet allée is lined by sarcophagi and the remains of medieval chapels. At the end is St-Honorat, the ruin of a large Romanesque church with an imposing squat tower. Inside, the main altar is made from a Roman sarcophagus, and the chapels added over the centuries are a veritable textbook of architectural styles from the early Middle Ages to the Baroque. Dinner will once again be in a favorite Arlesian restaurant.

NIGHT: Hotel Jules César, Arles

**May 5, Day 5: The Petite Camargue and Ancient Arles.**

The Rhône River and its broad delta dominate the landscape of southern Provence. After breakfast we will make the drive down the western branch of the Rhône to the Petite Camargue, a patchwork of rice paddies, fields, woodlots, and marshes. Among the wide variety of wading and water birds that breed or forage here are Red-crested Pochard, Greater Flamingo, and Whiskered Tern. We will keep an eye on roadside wires and fences for such colorful Mediterranean specialties as Hoopoe, European Bee-eater, and European Roller. This is also the best site in France for the huge and secretive Western Swamphen.

We will have lunch in nearby Albaron or St. Gilles, then return to Arles. Those who wish can visit the wonderful Musée de l'Arles Antique, an unequalled collection of artifacts of life and death in Greek, Roman, and Early Christian Gaul. Sculptures, trade goods, mosaics, and even a wooden ship sunk in the Rhone in the middle of the first century AD are on display; almost all of the objects are from Arles itself, including statues from the Roman theater, sarcophagi from the Alyscamps, and elegantly tiled floors from patrician houses. As a bonus, the trees along the river here are often very attractive to birds, and we will be sure to check those and the Roman-inspired gardens surrounding the museum for resident breeders and newly arrived migrants.



**The stunning relief of a female dancer from the Roman theater of Arles, now in the Musée de l'Arles antique. Photo Rick Wright**

NIGHT: Hotel Jules César, Arles

**May 6, Day 6: Les Baux and van Gogh.** The dramatic limestone hills of Les Alpilles stretch across the horizon just north of Arles, their flanks clad in olive groves and woodlands. Our first destination is Les Baux, a hulking medieval fortress perched high on the cliff above the deep, dark, evocatively named Valley of Hell. The self-styled “lords” of Les Baux terrorized the countryside through much of the Middle Ages. Later, Les Baux was a refuge for French Protestants. In 1632, Richelieu turned the cannons of France on their stronghold, leaving much of the once impregnable fortress in ruins.



**St-Paul de Mausole. Photo Rick Wright**

We'll search the narrow streets and castle walls for Alpine Swifts, Eurasian Crag Martins, Black Redstarts, and Blue Rock Thrushes. Nightingales and Sardinian Warblers are likely to be singing on the vegetated slopes below us. If the morning is warm, soaring raptors might include a Honey Buzzard or Red Kite. A recent tour even lucked into a stunning male Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush.

After lunch inside the ramparts of Les Baux, we will stop to admire the astonishingly well-preserved Roman cenotaph and triumphal arch at Glanum, both products of the time right around the

change of eras 2,000 years ago. Besides its archaeological interest, this site can turn up a surprising variety of birds, and over the years we have seen everything from Short-toed Treecreeper to European Roller here.

Just across the road is the hospital of St-Paul de Mausole. The small Romanesque church at the institution's center has an attractive cloister with handsome capitals and a riotously colorful flower garden. St-Paul is most famous, however, as the asylum where Vincent van Gogh resided after that trouble with his ear in Arles. The barred window of his tiny room looks out over endless olive groves and beds of blooming iris. Inspired by their great predecessor, the current patients display their own artwork in the gallery just off the peaceful cloister. The calm, quiet hospital grounds are a good place to look for European Robin, Common Blackbird, and Crested Tit. We should arrive in Arles with time for a short break before dinner.



A Black Redstart pauses on a sarcophagus lid while feeding its young in the Alyscamps. Photo Rick Wright

NIGHT: Hotel Jules César, Arles



Olives at the Saturday Market. Photo Rick Wright

**May 7, Day 7: The Saturday Market and La Crau.** Arles's weekly market stretches for almost a mile and a half up and down the Boulevard des Lices. Olives, mattresses, exotic spices, cheeses, poultry, silk scarves, wines, shellfish, honey, shoes, fruit, soap, sausages, cookies, cakes, and just about every local and regional delicacy imaginable can be found here. Accordingly, lunch today is on your own; the leaders

will be happy to point you to some of their favorite restaurants, cafes, and ice cream shops, or you can simply let your appetite be spoiled by the irresistible samples offered at the market booths.

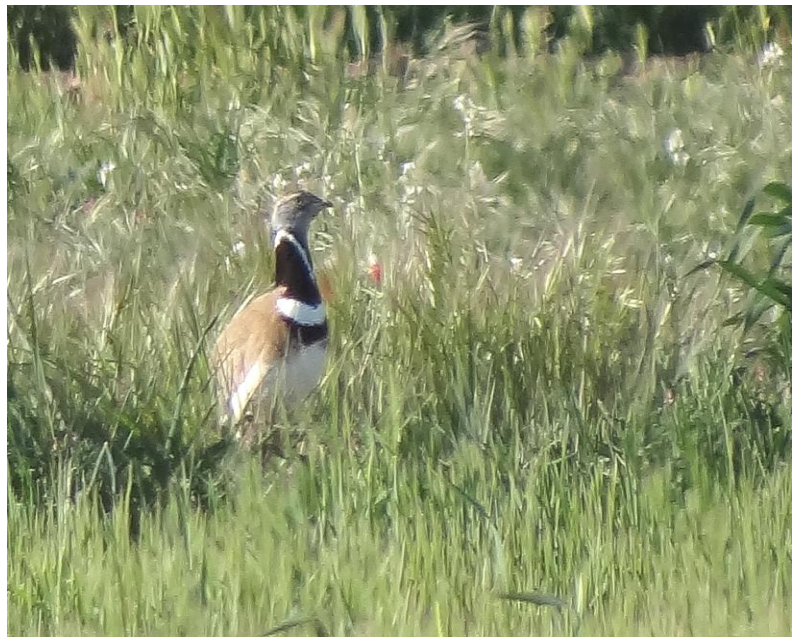
Late in the afternoon, we will re-assemble for an early, light supper together, then be picked up by our minibus for an evening visit to one of the most otherworldly landscapes in France, the rocky plain of La Crau. Among the many specialties of this steppe-like region are Stone Curlew and Little Bustard. Pin-tailed Sandgrouse are present, too, but have become rare. Chaffinches, Greenfinches, and Nightingales all nest in the scattered hedges, and Corn Buntings jangle away from every other fencepost.



A slow walk across the stony plain takes us past rough stone walls where we will look for Northern Wheatears and Little Owls, both of which breed in the rock pyramids constructed in the 1940s to prevent the landing of Allied airplanes. Eurasian Skylarks, Crested Larks, and sometimes Greater Short-toed Larks can be found singing from the sparse vegetation or against the sky's high overhead.

Rollers, Bee-eaters, and Hoopoes are all possible here if the spring is advanced, but even should those species not have arrived, this evening's stroll will be one of the most memorable of the tour.

NIGHT: Hotel Jules César, Arles



Male Little Bustard. Photo Rick Wright





**A Corn Bunting on La Crau. Photo Rick Wright**

**May 8, Day 8: The Western Camargue.** After what is likely to have been an exhilarating evening on La Crau, we will make a slightly later start this morning. Some of us may choose to linger over breakfast in the hotel, while others might want to seize the chance for a little exploration on their own of the inexhaustible riches of the Arlesian cityscape. From the astonishing Romanesque beauty of the church of St. Trophime to Frank Gehry's equally striking LUMA tower, there is something new (or something very old) around every corner. Our minibus will meet us in the late morning for an excursion into the Western Camargue, north of Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer on the shores of the vast Fangassier flats. Here, at one of the most consistently and most impressively

productive birding sites in Europe, we will be looking for all of the French heron species, along with the Mediterranean Gull, Whiskered and Gull-billed Terns, Zitting Cisticola, and Great Reed Warbler. White Storks, ever more common in the area, may already have re-occupied their enormous nests, and Nightingales and Cetti's Warblers shout their songs all day long from the tamarisks. On a rambling walk along the quiet Cacharel Road, we will be keeping an eye and an ear out for such uncommon species as the Bearded Reedling, Great Spotted Cuckoo, and Woodchat Shrike. This is prime habitat, too, for black Camargue bulls and for white Camargue horses, which we are likely to see both in paddocks and roaming free across the marshes.



**In the cloister of St. Trophime © Rick Wright**

We will return to Arles for a late lunch, after which we plan to visit the cloister of St.-Trophime. The anonymous sculptors responsible for creating the two older galleries here, in the early twelfth century, are still accounted some of the greatest geniuses in European art, not just of the Romanesque but of all time. No visit of an hour can take in every one of the masterpieces here, but we will make a point of pausing at

some of the most famous of the capitals and statues—and we will keep an eye out for the birds and other animals that appear in them.

Night: Hotel Jules César, Arles

**May 9, Day 9: Pont de Gau.** Half an hour south of Arles, the Parc ornithologique Pont de Gau was founded seventy-five years ago as a zoo and rehabilitation center for the birds of the French Mediterranean. Beginning in the 1970s, the organization's focus shifted to habitat preservation, and the Parc now owns and manages eighty acres of wild marsh, accessible along four miles of broad, level trails. More than 250 species of wild birds have been seen here, a respectable tally even by the exalted standards of the Camargue. What is most exciting, however, is the opportunity to see many otherwise furtive species at sometimes remarkably close range, from well-placed blinds, observation towers, and even right from the path, where Black-winged Stilts and Pied Avocets nest on islands just a few feet from the human visitors, and several species of normally secretive herons and Glossy Ibis occupy noisy breeding colonies almost all year round. Even skulky passerines can be easy to get a glimpse of here; this is the best place in the region to actually see such noisy but shy songbirds as the Cetti's and Moustached Warblers and the Common Nightingale.



**Eurasian Spoonbill at Pont de Gau © Rick Wright**

We will return to Arles for lunch, then have a little time free for packing or last-minute shopping and sightseeing.

Our final dinner together will be in yet another of the excellent restaurants that make Arles such an appealing destination.

NIGHT: Hotel Jules César, Arles

**May 10, Day 10: Departures for home.** Our minibus will return us to the Marseilles airport this morning. Please do not schedule your departing flight for before 11:30 am in case we are delayed by traffic or other circumstances. For those not flying today, the hotel desk can arrange for a taxi to the Arles train station, or you can ride to Marseille with the group and get a bus from there to the Vitrolles station.

**EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS:** Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive early or extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least two months prior to your departure date. We can very easily make hotel arrangements, and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

**TOUR SIZE:** This tour will be limited to 8 participants. However, VENT reserves the right to increase the tour limit by one in order to accommodate a couple when only one space is available.

**TOUR LEADERS:** Rick Wright and Alison Beringer.



**Rick Wright** is a widely published author and sought-after lecturer and field trip leader. A native of southeast Nebraska, Rick studied French, German, Philosophy, and Life Sciences at the University of Nebraska before making a detour to Harvard Law School. He took the Ph.D. in German Languages and Literatures at Princeton University in 1990, then spent a dozen years as an academic, holding successive appointments as Assistant Professor of German at the University of Illinois, Reader in Art and Archaeology at Princeton University, and Associate Professor of Medieval Studies at Fordham University. His numerous scholarly publications include two books on the Latin animal literature of the later Middle Ages. Among Rick's recent books are second editions of his *ABA Field Guide to Birds of New Jersey* and *ABA Field Guide to Birds of*

*Arizona*; his *Peterson Reference Guide to American Sparrows* was published in 2019. He is also the co-author with Sanford Sorkin of *Watching Birds in Montclair* and *Watching Birds in the New Jersey Meadowlands*. Especially interested in the history and culture of birding, he is hard at work on a study of hummingbird collecting in France from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. In his spare time, he teaches Latin courses online for the Paideia Institute. Rick lives with his family, Alison Beringer and Avril Huang, and their black lab, Quetzal, in northern New Jersey, where he offers private birding tours to the marshes, woodlands, and ocean beaches.



**Alison Beringer** is Associate Professor of Classics and Humanities at Montclair State University, where she teaches courses in literary history, women's studies, and medieval literature and culture. She holds the M.A. in Classics from the University of Victoria and the Ph.D. in German Studies from Princeton University. Her scholarly research focuses on the transmission and illustration of Latin and German literature in the medieval and early modern periods. Her first book, *The Sight of Semiramis*, appeared in 2016, and was followed in 2020 by the publication of *Gender Bonds, Gender Binds*. Her current project is a study of the place of monumental sculpture in the life and literature of the late Middle Ages. A native of Canada, she lives in northern New Jersey and birds widely in the Americas

and Europe, most often with her husband, Rick Wright

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for the tour is **\$6,245** per person in double occupancy from Arles France. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 2 to breakfast on Day 10, except for lunch on Day 7; accommodations as stated in the itinerary; ground transportation during the tour; gratuities and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include costs getting from your home to Marseille and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based on 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 **\$375**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

**REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT:** To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The 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 (December 2, 2024) prior to the tour departure date.

**MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE REQUIREMENT:** This tour visits remote locations where immediate access to primary medical care may **NOT** be available. **For this reason, travel insurance which covers you for emergency evacuation is required for participation on this tour.** This coverage is included in the **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance™** program. Through Ripcord, “emergency evacuation” can be purchased as a stand-alone benefit or as part of a comprehensive travel insurance policy. If you choose not to purchase insurance through Ripcord, you are required to obtain it through another provider.

**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.

### **CANCELLATION & REFUNDS**

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

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

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

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

#### **Cancellation by VENT:**

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

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. A “**Force Majeure**” event means any act beyond VENT’s control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts

of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

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

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

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

**TRAVEL INSURANCE/TRAVEL PROTECTION:** 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 comprehensive Ripcord plan, which includes a medical evacuation benefit. With this in mind, it is important to note that medical evacuation is not offered by Redpoint as a stand-alone policy or benefit. For travelers not interested in comprehensive travel insurance, VENT recommends **Medjet** and its **MedjetAssist®** plan. Medjet is not an insurance company, and Medjet Assist is not an insurance product; rather, Medjet is a membership-based air-medical transport company specializing in moving hospitalized travelers from an admitting hospital to a medical facility of choice. Medjet does not provide medical evacuation service from the point of injury or illness; yet, the MedjetAssist plan offers robust enough travel protection to satisfy the medical evacuation insurance requirement in place for many VENT tours.

### **About Ripcord**

Ripcord is a completely integrated travel insurance program with single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims. Critical benefits include comprehensive travel insurance for trip cancellation/interruption, **medical evacuation from your point of injury or illness to your hospital of choice**; 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:

<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 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, second deposit, 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 costs in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

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

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.

### **About MedjetAssist**

MedjetAssist is a membership program that functions like AAA for motorists. The company’s primary service is air medical transport. Critical benefits of MedjetAssist include a staff on call and ready to provide assistance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; all-expenses-paid air medical transport in the United States and internationally to medical facility of choice, regardless of medical necessity; repatriation of remains; and no exclusions for pre-existing conditions.

For travelers under 75, MedjetAssist may be purchased as Short-Term Memberships of 8, 15, 21, and 30 days, or Regular Annual Memberships from 1 to 5 years. For travelers 75–84, Medjet offers a Diamond Membership that is the same program but with a few additional conditions.

For a price quote or to purchase MedjetAssist, please visit: [Medjet.com/VentBird](http://Medjet.com/VentBird) or call 1-800-527-7478. Pricing is based on type and term of membership.

**AIR INFORMATION:** Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Per person fees apply for each set of travel arrangements: \$50 domestic; \$75 international. \* Many of our travelers choose to make their own air travel arrangements, but we emphasize the benefits to using our services. If you book your air arrangements yourself, Victor Emanuel Travel is unable to provide support in managing any flight delays and/or cancellations that could occur before and during a tour. When you purchase air tickets through Victor Emanuel Travel, our staff has ready access to your air ticket record and can provide assistance as problems arise. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements. **Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be held responsible for any air ticket penalties.**

\*An air ticket will be purchased by Victor Emanuel Travel on behalf of the traveler with the traveler’s consent. A purchase is considered final upon receipt of payment. If a ticket is subsequently reissued at the behest of the traveler (i.e. voluntary change of plans), the same fee rates apply for the reissue process, in addition to any fees that may be charged by the airline.

### **BAGGAGE:**

The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. Please consult your airline to find out specific weight restrictions. Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government’s attempts to improve airport security

we recommend that you check the website of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for the most updated information: <http://www.tsa.gov/>.

**CLIMATE & WEATHER:** Late April through mid-May is usually very pleasant in southern France, with average highs reaching into the high 60s or 70s F and lows unlikely to go below 50. Rain is infrequent but possible at any time; our schedule is flexible enough to accommodate being rained out of one or the other of our destinations on a given day. Recent tours have had one or no rainy days.

The most famous—or notorious—feature of Provençal weather is the howling wind known as the mistral. In most years, we never experience it; in others, we have one or two windy days, and simply adjust the sequence of our itinerary to keep us in towns and sheltered areas on those days.

### **BINOCULARS & SPOTTING SCOPES**

**Binoculars** – We strongly recommend good 7x35, 8x42, 10x40, or 10x42 binoculars. 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. Trying to find a bird in your binoculars using minis is like trying to read a book through a keyhole. You will be very frustrated, and even if you do manage to get the bird in your binoculars before it flies, you will have a poor view. You will find that 7x35 or 8x42 binoculars are compact and light enough.

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

**CLOTHING:** French birders wear the same clothing as American birders in the field. For our visits to museums, churches, and restaurants, you will be most comfortable in neat, but still informal, attire.

The following items are recommended:

- **Pants:** A couple of pairs of pants are essential. Many people prefer lightweight pants made of cotton or other materials. Denim, though not as comfortable, is certainly acceptable for the field.
- **Field Clothing:** Outdoor stores such as Cabela’s and REI carry field clothing that many birders find appealing. Pants and shirts made of lightweight, yet durable materials with multiple pockets and ventilated seams are popular.
- **Shirts:** Several comfortable long-sleeved shirts are recommended, suitable for warm weather or for layering with a sweater or jacket.
- **Hats:** A hat for protection from the sun is essential.
- **Sweaters and Coats:** Mostly warm weather is anticipated on this trip, but a sweater, fleece, or light coat will definitely be useful for cool mornings and evenings or if we have rain. Light gloves can be helpful if the weather turns cool or if an early mosquito finds us.

**FOOTWEAR:** We recommend a good trail-walking shoe; light hiking boots are fine, too, but not necessary on any of the paths and walks we take. Athletic shoes are acceptable, but will not keep your feet dry and can become soiled in muddy conditions. Any comfortable walking shoe is good for our excursions in cities and towns and for evenings.

**LAUNDRY SERVICE:** Laundry service is available at an extra charge in our hotel and elsewhere in Arles, but it is always best to bring enough clothes to get you through the entire tour.

**EQUIPMENT:** One of the most important aspects of an enjoyable travel experience is being prepared with the right equipment. You will find the following items useful on your trip in Provence:

- Small daypack for extra clothing, books, supplies, and optics.

- Notebook and pencils.
- Alarm clock.
- Polarizing sunglasses with UV protection and high-SPF sunscreen.
- Lip balm and lotions.
- Cameras, lenses, and extra batteries and memory cards (oddly hard to find in Arles, one of the most photogenic cities in France).
- Telescoping walking stick—highly recommended for those who have trouble walking.
- Pocket packages of tissues.
- Insect protection: (Not that the insects need it.) The marshes of the Camargue are usually breezy enough to make mosquitoes no problem at all, but biting insects can be a minor annoyance on the infrequent mornings and evenings of dead calm. The best mode of prevention is swatting; some participants carry a head net and gloves. If you prefer chemical deterrents, it is best to bring them from home, as they can be hard to find in Arles. In most years, mosquitos are a problem only for those who leave their windows open at dusk and dawn.

**OTHER ITEMS:** The classic guide, perhaps the best written for any avifauna, is the third edition of *Birds of Europe* by Lars Svensson, Killian Mullarney, and Dan Zetterström. Attractive and easily carried, Eduardo De Juana and Juan Varela’s *Birds of Spain* also covers every species we are likely to encounter on this tour.

**CLIMATE & WEATHER:** Late April through mid-May is usually very pleasant in southern France, with average highs reaching into the high 60s or 70s F and lows unlikely to go below 50. Rain is infrequent but possible at any time; our schedule is flexible enough to accommodate being rained out of one or the other of our destinations on a given day. Recent tours have had one or no rainy days.

The most famous—or notorious—feature of Provençal weather is the howling wind known as the mistral. In most years, we never experience it; in others, we have one or two windy days, and simply adjust the sequence of our itinerary to keep us in towns and sheltered areas on those days.

**CONDITIONS:** Our days will be full, but our pace will always be easy and relaxed. Some of our activities are optional, and it is always possible to simply take the day off to enjoy Arles on your own if you like.

While we are birding, our walking will be restricted to paths and roadsides, and we are not likely to walk more than a mile at a time. The longest walk of the tour, across the plain of La Crau, will be a bit less than one mile each way on a broad, entirely level but occasionally pebbly path; we stop often to look at birds and flowers or simply to enjoy the evening sky. This walk is optional, and some participants may prefer to bird on their own around the trailhead.

Towns and villages often have uneven pavement. Several of the churches we visit have short, steep staircases. The walk to the castle at Les Baux is steep, on somewhat irregularly paved walkways. We take our time and never hurry in such situations.

The physical demands of this tour are light to barely moderate, but remember that our explorations of cities and monuments involve a moderate amount of walking and standing. We emphasize that you will never be subjected to physical demands beyond your capabilities. All of our walking is at a slow “birder’s pace.” If you cannot comfortably walk a mile on level trails or sidewalks, this tour may not be for you.

**Special note:** This tour, like all of our Birds and Art offerings, takes us into the natural history *and* the architectural, historical, and cultural riches of one of Europe’s most ancient landscapes. It is *not* exclusively a birding program or exclusively a cultural excursion. On some days, birding will dominate, on others art and history, but most of our itinerary mixes the two in ways that try to do justice to the inextricable links between culture and nature in Provence.



## **TRAVEL DOCUMENTS**

**PASSPORTS** A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure from France is required. Visas (are/are not) required for entry by United States citizens. Non-United States citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions.

As a safety measure, photocopy the first two pages of your passport and keep those copies in a safe place so that you have proof of identification should your passport be lost. Your passport must be signed and easily accessible. **Do not pack your passport in checked luggage.**

**CURRENCY & MONEY MATTERS:** Your tour payment includes most necessary expenses while you are in France. You will need cash to cover such personal expenses as gifts, laundry, gratuities, and snacks and meals on your own; to avoid putting our friendly restaurateurs in an awkward situation, please give your leader at least 24 hours' notice if you will not be joining the group for dinner.

The official currency in France is the euro; US dollars are not accepted anywhere in the country. You can check the exchange rate at [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com). Euros can be ordered through your bank before leaving home, or you can simply withdraw them from ATMs at the Marseille airport or in Arles; your leaders will be happy to show you the nearest ATM, a short block from our hotel. Please ask your bank or credit card issuer about the use of your ATM and credit cards abroad.

**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.

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

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

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

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

- DEET (N, N-diethyl-meta-toluamide): A chemical compound that is marketed under various brand names (OFF!®, Cutter™, Ultrathon™, etc.) and offered in a variety of formulations including sprays, lotions, time-release preparations, and disposable wipes. The formulations will state a percentage of the active ingredient DEET on the packaging. DEET may be applied to exposed skin directly and/or sprayed on clothing. Please be careful when applying DEET as it can damage plastics and lens coatings.
- Picaridin: A synthetic formulation that is derived from piperine, a substance found in plants that produce black pepper.
- Herbal insect repellents: Various mixtures of organic ingredients such as oils from eucalyptus, citronella, cedar, and other herbs. The herbal repellents are more difficult to categorize because of the difference in ingredients from one brand to another. There is considerable variation in their effectiveness.

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

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

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

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

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

### **MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION:**

**ELECTRICITY:** Electrical current in France is 220V; outlets accept two round prongs. Most new electronic devices can run on 220V, but if you have items that do not or if you are unsure, you will need a step-down transformer in addition to a plug adapter of the Europlug type C or Schuko F.

**LANGUAGE:** French is spoken throughout the area, with Provençal dominating in parts of the countryside; most road signs are bilingual. Younger people and people in the cities also generally speak good English. Most of our hotel staff is fluent in English.

**TIME:** France is on Central European Daylight Time at the time of our tour, 6 hours ahead of Eastern Daylight Time and 9 hours ahead of Pacific Daylight Time.

**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.

**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. We also recommend Andrew Isles books for the Asia-Pacific region at <http://www.andrewisles.com> for difficult to find and out of print books for Australia.

This list includes some basic field guides and reference volumes of use to the visitor. A great deal has been written about all aspects of Australia's natural history. You will find a variety of selections in any library. Browse around a little and you will discover many resources not listed here.

### **Birds**

Mullarney, K., L. Svensson, and D. Zetterstrom. *Birds of Europe*. 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023.

De Juana, E., and J. Varela. *Birds of Spain*. Barcelona: Lynx Edicions, 2017.

### **Mammals**

MacDonald, D., and P. Barrett. *Mammals of Europe*. Princeton Field Guides. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

### **Insects**

Dijkstra, K., and R. Lewington. *Field Guide to the Dragonflies of Britain and Europe*. London: British Wildlife Publishing, 2006.

Tolman, T., and R. Lewington. *Collins Butterfly Guide*. HarperCollins: London, 2009.

### **Habitats and General Natural History**

Hilbers, D., C. Swinkels, and A. Vliegthart. *Provence and Camargue, France*. Crossbill Guides, 2020. Highly recommended, as are all the titles published by Crossbill.

### **Art, Architecture, History**

Borg, A. *Architectural Sculpture in Romanesque Provence*. Oxford UP, 1971.

Child, J. *My Life in France*. Anchor, 2007.

Stirton, P. *Provence and the Cote d'Azur*. Blue Guides: London, 2003.

**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 July 12, 2024, and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

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

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

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