



GERMANY: BIRDS & ART IN BERLIN & BRANDENBURG

SEPTEMBER 19–28, 2025

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The German capital is a bustling world city, full of architectural and artistic treasures—and blessed with an abundance of readily accessible green space and wild habitats—a combination that makes Berlin and its surroundings a first-rate destination for the birding traveler.

Fully a third of Berlin's land area is occupied by forests, parks, lakes, and fields, with more than thirty-five formal nature reserves within the city limits. Autumn finds the resident birds joined by a wide variety of migrants, from noisy troops of Common Cranes to nervous flocks of colorful tits and other passerines. All this wildness goes on just a stone's throw from the great museums and architectural landmarks of the old imperial capital, which is now the leading city in Europe's largest and most influential democracy.



Our tour takes full advantage of Berlin's natural and cultural heritage, with visits to sites commemorating both the bright and the dark sides of German history and excursions in search of the area's wealth of bird species. The city itself will absorb much of our attention, but we will also venture into the nearby countryside of Brandenburg, where we will look for Red Kites, geese, and even the rare (and often elusive) Great Bustard.

Based at a single hotel, we'll have plenty of opportunity to explore Berlin and its surroundings at our leisure, taking full advantage of all that this once-again world-class city has to offer. Morning departures at 8:00 a.m. or later, leisurely meals, and Berlin's friendly and easy-going atmosphere make this an easy and enjoyable tour for anyone.

A note on transportation: Berlin and its surroundings are fortunate to have some of the finest public transit anywhere in the world: safe, immaculately clean, and above all fast. For our city excursions, we will regularly take the subway, bus, or elevated train, all of which stop in easy reach of our hotel. The unlimited-ride tickets provided to all participants are valid for all three modes of transport. Farther afield, we will be using chartered 15- or 18-passenger buses with professional drivers.

September 19, Day 1: Departure from Home. Most flights from the United States will depart in the evening, arriving at Berlin Brandenburg Airport (code BER) the following morning. Participants should plan to arrive in Berlin on or before September 20. Our hotel is easily reached by taxi or by bus and train. Participants wanting to arrange a private transfer can do so through the VENT office for an additional charge. On request, the VENT office will be happy to assist with hotel reservations for early arrivals.

NIGHT: In transit (overnight flight)

September 20, Day 2: Arrival in Berlin, and the Reichstag. We will meet at 5:00 p.m. in the lobby of our centrally located hotel for introductions, then catch a train to the Brandenburg Gate. We will have dinner together and, if circumstances permit, ascend to the top of the Reichstag Building, seat of the German government. This neo-Baroque structure was burned in 1933, with fateful political consequences, and finally reconstructed in the 1990s, with the addition of a spectacular glass dome. If the dome is open—which depends on Parliament sessions, weather, and staffing—we will enjoy a beautiful evening panorama of Berlin and the surrounding countryside before retracing our steps to our hotel.



Reichstag Dome -- Photo Rick Wright

NIGHT: Victor's Residenz Hotel Berlin Mitte, Berlin

September 21, Day 3: Birds and Berlin. Across the street from our hotel, the 120-acre Friedrichshain Park was designed in the 1840s to commemorate the centennial of Frederick the Great's accession to the throne of Prussia. Almost two hundred years later, the formal beds, brushy edges, and tall trees boast a surprising variety of breeding and wintering birds. We will go out this morning in search of such residents as Mandarin and Tufted Ducks, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Blue and Great Tits, Short-toed Treecreeper, European Nuthatch, and Hooded Crow. Like Berlin's other parks, the Friedrichshain is a common "migrant trap," and we can hope for a surprise or two at this time of year.



Great Spotted Woodpecker -- Photo Rick Wright

If the birding is good, we are likely to spend the entire morning wandering the trails here, then have lunch together before taking a short break in the early afternoon. Afterwards, we'll hop back on a convenient bus and ride west to the Brandenburg Gate, long a symbol of divided Berlin and now at the heart of the united city. Time and weather permitting, we may duck into the Tiergarten, the city's largest park, for a little more birding, or simply explore the elegant cityscape of Paris Square, one of Berlin's finest addresses. We will have dinner in one of the area's many good restaurants.

NIGHT: Victor's Residenz Hotel Berlin Mitte, Berlin



September 22, Day 4: Stengsee and Lehnin Monastery. Forty miles west of Berlin, a complex of lakes and fishponds provides refuge and food for large numbers of cranes, ducks, and geese; the fields and marshes are watched over by raptors, often including the impressive White-tailed Eagle. On our short stroll to and from the observation blind, we will look (and listen) hard for such secretive wetland specialties as the Great Bittern, Penduline Tit, and Bearded Tit. The most accessible of the lakes, the Stengsee, is famous as an autumn rarity trap, but even if we don't encounter any exotic strays, this site may well produce the longest bird list of the trip.

A Tundra Bean Goose at the Stengsee – Photo Rick Wright We will have lunch nearby, then pay an afternoon visit to the monastery of Lehnin. Still active today, as a hospital administered by Lutheran deaconesses, the original Cistercian foundation here dates from 1180. The surviving late medieval buildings here are among the most important and most atmospheric examples of red-brick Gothic in Germany. On our return to Berlin, we should have time for a short break before dinner.

NIGHT: Victor's Residenz Hotel Berlin Mitte, Berlin



The former Cistercian monasterv of Lehnin -- Photo Rick Wright

September 23, Day 5: Charlottenburg. Set in a western suburb of Berlin, about half an hour by bus from our hotel, Charlottenburg is the largest and most important of Berlin's royal residences. Originally the summer home of Queen Sophie-Charlotte, the massive house was built between 1695 and 1742; today, this is perhaps the most eloquent surviving witness to the courtly culture of its period. The large park and gardens are a prime spot for woodland birds such as the very secretive Northern Goshawk, and the lakes and secluded ponds shelter Gray Herons, Mandarin and Tufted ducks, Great Cormorants, and other water birds. We expect to walk no more than a couple of miles in total, but if it is as birdy as it often is, our excursion may fill the entire morning.

We will have lunch in the neighborhood, then have the option to visit one or the other of Charlottenburg's fine smaller museums. The Bröhan Museum features decorative works of art nouveau and art deco from France, Germany, and Austria, while the Berggruen is justly famous for its modern art, including particularly notable works by Matisse, Klee, and Giacometti. The holdings of the Scharf-Gerstenberg collection of fantastic and surrealist art reach from Piranesi to Picasso. *Please note that the opening hours of these small museums vary unpredictably, and we may have to adjust our plans.* We will return to our hotel before dinner.



Mandarin Duck -- Photo Rick Wright

NIGHT: Victor's Residenz Hotel Berlin Mitte, Berlin

September 24, Day 6: Gülper See. Today our minibus will take us west to the rural lowlands of the Havelland, where most of Germany's remaining Great Bustards reside. From a pre-war population of some 4,000 individuals, the country's bustard population had declined to fewer than fifty birds by 1997. Intensive conservation efforts, including the human fostering and subsequent re-release of the vulnerable fledglings, has resulted in more than quintupling that number, and the birds are once again reproducing on their own. Finding the bustards on the vast open fields where they winter can be ridiculously easy—or frustratingly impossible. We will check a few sites that have been reliable in the past, and with luck will encounter anywhere from a few to a few dozen of these giant birds. Red Kites are often conspicuous on roadsides in these areas, and sunflower fields sometimes attract migrating finches.

We will wind up at the Gülper See, a large lake that has long been one of the best-known birding sites in Brandenburg. The sparse conifer woods here are a good spot for woodpeckers, and water birds may include numbers of Graylag, Tundra Bean, and Greater White-fronted geese, along with a nice smattering



Schloss Charlottenburg -- Photo Rick Wright

of ducks and shorebirds. One of the specialties here is the White-tailed Eagle, half a dozen or more of which can sometimes be seen harassing the waterfowl or simply loafing in the shallows.

We will return to Berlin for a short rest before dinner.

NIGHT: Victor's Residenz Hotel Berlin Mitte, Berlin

September 25, Day 7: Birding the Friedrichshain, and the National Painting Gallery. We will start the day with another leisurely birding walk through the Friedrichshain. This is one of the best sites in the city to find Eurasian Jays, and Eurasian Red Squirrels, Hooded Crows, Greenfinches, and European Nuthatches are usually common and easily seen.

After a quick stop back at our hotel, we will make our way to the Kulturforum and Berlin's world-famous Gemäldegalerie, one of the richest collections of paintings anywhere in Europe; at any one time, more than 1,000 masterpieces are hanging in the permanent galleries. The Italian holdings include important works by Giotto, Botticelli, Raphael, Titian, and Caravaggio, while the Netherlanders are represented by Vermeer, Bruegel, Rembrandt, and van Eyck. Another special strength of the collection is the German Gothic and Renaissance, with paintings and engravings by Dürer, Grien, Cranach, and Holbein.

Connected to the Gemäldegalerie by a short tunnel, the Museum of Decorative Arts—the Kunstgewerbemuseum—displays works ranging right up to the present day. Among the many precious objects exhibited here is a large collection of reliquaries, altars, and other liturgical objects, many of them from the so-called Guelph Treasure.

Everyone has a different rhythm and tolerance for museum visits. To accommodate that, lunch today will be on your own; there are many restaurants in the area, and the Gemäldegalerie has an informal cafeteria with good food, which is where we typically wind up.



A besotted Aristotle gives his pupil Phyllis a ride on this ivory box in the wonderful Kunstgewerbemuseum – Photo Rick Wright

After gawking and gazing our fill in the museums, we will reassemble for the short walk to busy Potsdamer Platz. We plan to have dinner in the startlingly modern Sony Center before returning to the hotel.

NIGHT: Victor's Residenz Hotel Berlin Mitte, Berlin

September 26, Day 8: The Märkische Schweiz. Thirty miles east of Berlin, the Märkische Schweiz is a richly varied landscape, protected under an EU directive, combining forested hills, narrow gallery woodlands, lakes, fishponds, and open fields. Waterfowl numbers are often high, and we could see a fair portion of the thousands of Tundra Bean Geese that regularly winter here, much to the delight of the resident White-tailed Eagles. This is probably the best place in the region to look for Bar-headed and other uncommon or rare geese.

We will break for lunch, then pay a quick visit to the handsome ruins of another red-brick Cistercian church, the thirteenth-century nunnery of Altfriedland, before our return to the city for dinner.

NIGHT: Victor's Residenz Hotel Berlin Mitte, Berlin

September 27, Day 9: The Museum Island and Nefertiti, Followed by the Linum Cranes. After breakfast we will take the quick ride to Berlin's renowned Museum Island. With their origins in the private holdings of the Prussian kings and, later, German emperors, the almost overwhelmingly rich collections exhibited here are housed in imposing buildings constructed between 1824 and 1930. These grand structures suffered badly during the Second World War, but a thorough restoration beginning in 1999 has turned them once again into a state-of-the-art cultural landmark. *Please note that the entire Pergamon Museum is closed until at least 2027 for structural repairs. Extensive interior remodeling early this decade discovered significant problems with the building's foundations, which stand on wooden pilings driven into the sand of the island.*

There is far too much here to see in a single morning, or in a lifetime of mornings. To get a quick overview, we will start in the New Museum, built 1843–1855, which houses the famous Celtic Golden Hat and the

even more famous bust of Nefertiti, the most recognizable piece of Egyptian art on the planet. We can move from there to the Altes Museum, with its impressive holdings in Greek and Roman sculpture and decorative arts, or to the Late Nationalgalerie for paintings from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. The Bode Museum is especially rich in sculpture of all periods; it also has the best cake and coffee on the island.

We will have a light lunch together across the river from the museums, then depart for the hour-long drive into the soggy landscapes just northwest of Berlin. The fields, ponds, and marshes around the village of Linum are the most significant inland staging area in Europe for southwest-bound Common Cranes, and in the late afternoon, we can hope to see thousands on the surrounding pastures and overhead. If the evening flight is good, we will linger at the viewing areas until sunset, then return to Berlin for a final dinner together in our hotel.



A young Common Crane follows a parent on its first southward migration - Photo Rick Wright

NIGHT: Victor's Residenz Hotel Berlin Mitte, Berlin

September 28, Day 10: Departures for Home. Participants may schedule their departures from Berlin any time today. It is a 30-minute trip to the main train station by public transit, and a 45-minute taxi ride from our hotel to Berlin Brandenburg Airport.

TOUR SIZE: This tour is limited to 8 participants.

TOUR LEADER: Rick Wright



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 the *ABA Field Guide to Birds of New Jersey*, the *ABA Field Guide to Birds of Arizona*, and the *Peterson Reference Guide to American Sparrows*. He is also the co-author with Sanford Sorkin of

Watching Birds in Montclair and *Watching Birds in the New Jersey Meadowlands*. Rick lives with his wife, Alison Beringer, and their jet-black lab, Quetzal, in northern New Jersey.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is **\$6,595** per person in double occupancy from Berlin. This includes all meals beginning with dinner on Day 2 to breakfast on Day 10 except for lunch on Day 7, all lodging and ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leader. It does not include airfare from your home to Berlin and return, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$500**. 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, Visa, or American Express at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at www.ventbird.com) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

PAYMENTS: All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard, Visa, American Express), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 150 days prior to the tour departure date (April 22, 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 their **Ripcord** plan. Designed for all types of travelers, Ripcord is among the most comprehensive travel protection programs available.

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

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

Additionally, as countries begin opening up for travel, many are instituting an array of COVID-19 entry requirements, including mandates to purchase travel insurance covering medical expenses due to COVID-19 illness and accommodation in case of quarantine. Ripcord's comprehensive travel insurance plans are designed to satisfy the various country-specific travel insurance entry requirements. Those who purchase a Ripcord policy will receive a “letter of confirmation” that affirms that the policy satisfies such requirements.

FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is impossible to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based on 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 on 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.

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.

CLOTHING: As this trip combines birding with walking in cities and at historical sites, you should consider bringing a mix of clothing that prepares you for all activities. Our dress will always be casual, but you will be more comfortable most evenings wearing neater attire. The following items are recommended:

- **Pants:** A couple of pairs of pants are essential. Many people prefer mid-weight pants made of cotton or other material, but denim, though not as comfortable, is certainly acceptable for wearing in the field. In restaurants, churches, and palaces, you will be more comfortable wearing neat, but still informal, attire.
- **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:** Comfortable long-sleeved shirts of any style are good for field wear.
- **Hat:** A hat for protection from the sun is essential.
- **Sweaters and Coats:** A sweater and coat or jacket will come in handy most mornings. In the event we encounter rain or mist, you'll want to have a water-repellent jacket as well. The weather can vary considerably in the course of a single day, so dressing in layers is a good strategy.
- **Gloves:** Even on the warmest day, morning and evening can be chilly; light gloves will help keep you warm.

FOOTWEAR: Water-resistant hiking shoes are best for our birding expeditions; boots are fine, too, of course, but not necessary at any of the sites we visit. In the city, lighter-weight shoes will be more comfortable.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry service is available at an extra charge in our hotel, 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 proper equipment. The following will come in handy during your trip to Germany:

- Small daypack for extra clothing, books, supplies, and optics.
- Notebook and pencils.
- Alarm clock.
- Polarized sunglasses with good UV protection; high-SPF sunscreen.
- Lip balm and lotions.
- Cameras, lenses, and extra batteries and memory cards.
- Telescoping walking stick – highly recommended for those with difficulty walking.

- Personal toiletries.
- Pocket packages of Kleenex.
- Umbrellas can be borrowed from the front desk at our hotel.

BINOCULARS & SPOTTING SCOPES:

Binoculars – Bring your binoculars! We strongly recommend good binoculars of 7x35, 8x42, 10x40, or 10x42 magnification. 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, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please do so. The leader will let you know each evening whether scopes will be useful the following day. You will find it especially useful to have your own scope when we are watching ducks, geese, and cranes.

CLIMATE & WEATHER: Early autumn is usually a very nice time to travel in eastern Germany. The heat of summer is past, and winter is still far away; this so-called Nachsommer, the “aftersummer,” can be full of perfect days of bright sun, warm air, and migrating birds. Nighttime low temperatures are generally in the 40s and afternoon highs in the low 60s. Rain, usually in the form of intermittent showers or mist, is always possible, but brilliant autumn days are just as likely. Though wet weather can persist, most recent tours have seen only one or two damp days.

CONDITIONS: Our days will be full of natural and cultural experiences, but our pace will always be easy and relaxed. Though birding will predominate on some days and cultural tourism on others, most of this tour is characterized – thanks to Berlin’s abundance of green space – by a balance between the two. We plan on leaving our hotel each morning at or after 8:00, and are often able to schedule a break between our return to the hotel and dinner.

The physical demands posed by this trip are easy to moderate, but bear in mind that some of our historical sightseeing involves a moderate amount of walking and standing. Towns and villages often have uneven pavement, and in general, European cities have more curbs, stairs, and other minor obstacles than you may be used to. You will never be subjected to physical demands exceeding your capabilities.

While we are birding, our walking will be restricted to paths and roadsides, and we will not walk much more than a mile at a time. If you are not able to comfortably walk a mile at a time on broad level paths, ascend and descend stairs in train stations, or stand for several minutes at a time as we search for birds, you will not find this tour enjoyable.

Most of our activities are optional, and thanks to our central location with excellent public transportation, it is always possible to simply take a day off to enjoy the city on your own if you’d like.

Additional time in Berlin and Germany: Berlin has excellent rail and flight connections to the rest of Germany and to the rest of Europe. Our tour program is intended to include what we think of as many of the area’s top historical and natural sites and many of its wonderful birds. But there is much more to see in Germany and nearby portions of Europe; participants with an interest in enjoying activities beyond the stated program should come early or stay on after the tour ends. Given sufficient advance notice, the VENT office will be happy to help you make additional arrangements.

DOCUMENTS: A passport valid for at least three months after your return from the tour is required, with at least two blank pages for entry stamps. As the rules differ from country to country, we recommend that your passport be valid for at least six months after your planned return home. Beginning in early 2025, visitors from the US need to be in possession of an ETIAS document before entering Germany. The document costs approximately \$8.00, and can be obtained on line at etias.com/etias-application. US citizens will not be admitted to Germany without this document in hand. Rules and regulations pertaining to citizens of other countries may differ; please check with a German consulate or embassy.

CURRENCY & MONEY MATTERS: Your tour payment includes most necessary expenses while you are in Germany. You will need cash to cover such personal expenses as taxis, gifts, laundry, gratuities, snacks and any meals not taken with the group. At the end of the tour, please be ready to reimburse the leader for any alcoholic beverages you have had at meals.

The official currency in Germany is the euro; US dollars are not accepted anywhere in the country. The current exchange rate can be found at www.xe.com. You can order euros through your bank before leaving home, or withdraw them from ATMs at the airport or in Berlin; the closest ATM to our hotel is across the street at the train station, a walk of some 30 seconds. Please ask your bank or credit card issuer about the use of ATM and credit cards abroad.

ELECTRICITY: Electrical current in Germany is 220-240V (110-120V in the US). Electrical outlets are one of the two European standard socket types: the “Type C” Europlug and the “Type E” and “Type F” Schuko. All of these outlets are ungrounded, with openings for two round pins. Most new electronic devices can run on 220V, but if you have items that do not, you will need a step-down transformer in addition to the plug adapter.

LANGUAGE: German is spoken throughout the area, but Berlin is a large, cosmopolitan city, and nearly everyone speaks good English.

TIME: Germany is on Central European Time, which is 6 hours ahead of Eastern Time and 9 hours ahead of Pacific Time. Daylight saving time is expected to be in effect during our tour.

HEALTH: At this time, no major shots or inoculations are required for entry into Germany.

Those who are not fit for light to moderate physical activity, including those with physical disabilities that affect mobility and balance, or other conditions associated with poor health, are advised not to join the trip.

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.

Sun Exposure – The sun’s ultraviolet rays are damaging to the eyes and skin with prolonged exposure. Anytime you are outdoors you will want to protect your skin, including your lips, eyes, nose, and ears. Severe sunburn is potentially very painful and will affect your level of enjoyment. Always protect yourself when outdoors, and be sure to bring an ample supply of high-SPF sunscreen and lip balm. We strongly recommend the use of ultraviolet-blocking, polarized sunglasses.

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

Birds

Mullarney, K., L. Svensson, and D. Zetterstrom. *Birds of Europe*. 2nd edition. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010. This is the standard field guide. If you have the first edition of this splendid guide, please update to the second. If you bring any other bird guide, it should be in addition to, and not instead of, this book.

Mammals

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

History, Art, Architecture

Henckel von Dommersmarck, F. *The Lives of Others: A Screenplay*. Pushkin Press, 2014.

Larsen, E. *In the Garden of Beasts: Love, Terror, and an American Family in Hitler’s Berlin*. New York: Crown, 2012.

MacLean, R. *Berlin: Portrait of a City through the Centuries*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2014.

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel your VENT leaders or drivers 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 January 29, 2025, 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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