



VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

ITINERARY

JAPAN IN WINTER: A CRANE, SEA-EAGLE & SNOW MONKEY SPECTACULAR!

JANUARY 13–30, 2025

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Steller's Sea-Eagle, Hokkaido © Mark Brazil

Where else but Japan can you combine watching stunning Red-crowned Cranes courting amid a lovely snow-covered landscape and viewing dozens of majestic Steller's Sea-Eagles surrounded by ice in Hokkaidō, with witnessing the amazing sights and sounds of more than 15,000 White-naped and Hooded cranes at their winter gathering, in Kyushu? With opportunities to watch an array of East Asian and Japanese species, including the enormous Blakiston's Fish-Owl, and to visit the fabled "Snow Monkeys" (Japanese Macaques) at their thermal pool in the mountains of central Honshū, Japan in Winter offers an amazing experience!

Majestic cranes and stupendous eagles are the avian icons in a truly memorable tour and an exciting birding adventure in a culturally unique country. We will travel in style throughout the tour, in small, comfortable buses.

We begin with a brief exploration of birding sites near the national's capital — Tōkyō — on Japan's mainland of Honshū, then fly to Japan's southern main island of Kyūshū. There, we will visit forest areas in search of endemic and near-endemic species such as Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker, Japanese Woodpecker, Ryukyu Minivet, Varied Tit, and the scarce and shy Yellow-throated (Elegant) and Gray buntings before marveling at the amazing spectacle of over 15,000 wintering and White-naped and Hooded cranes. We will scour their flocks for rare visitors including Common and Sandhill cranes, and hope for an even rarer Demoiselle or Siberian crane, which occasionally put in appearances at the same site.



Hooded and White-naped Cranes, Arasaki © Mark Brazil

Once replete with our crane sightings, we will make our way northwards to internationally renowned wetlands in search of such global rarities as Saunders's Gull and Black-faced Spoonbill. and wintering shorebirds.

Leaving behind the quaint, rural atmosphere of Kyūshū, with its vegetable fields, tea plantations and cedar plantations, we head northwards for the Sea of Japan coast of Honshū on our way to the Japan Alps. During our stop over at Jigokudani in the mountains of Nagano Prefecture, we will visit the

endemic Japanese Macaques, now widely-known as Snow Monkeys, at their thermal pool where the photographic opportunities are awesome.

After several days in the forests of rugged central Honshū where, in addition to the monkeys and the endemic Japanese Serow, we seek out resident pheasants, woodpeckers, and wintering finches, we continue northwards to wild areas of eastern Hokkaido, Japan's northern island.

Winters here are cold, white and beautiful, and, compared with Kyūshū and central Honshū, the landscape is more open and rolling, except where volcanoes stand proud. The beauty of the almost Siberian vista is complemented by two exciting avian icons: Red-crowned Crane and Steller's Sea-Eagle.

We will visit these northern cranes where they winter, and witness them foraging and engaging in their delightful, and highly photogenic, courtship displays. At the peninsulas, capes, headlands and coastal wetlands of eastern Hokkaidō, we will be on the watch for waterfowl, seabirds, and raptors. There is much to keep us busy on the short winter days, not least the dozens of Steller's Sea-Eagles, which outnumber the more widespread White-tailed Eagle. Weather permitting, we will cruise offshore in search of Spectacled Guillemot (a regional specialty) and other alcids including perhaps Least Auklet (the world's smallest auk), Ancient Murrelet, and numerous delightful Harlequin and Long-tailed ducks along with Black and Stejneger's Scoter.



Red-crowned Cranes © Tatsunori Tada

We will also spend two nights at a superb and restful hot spring inn, which is conveniently located beside a river within the territory of a pair of one of the world's largest and rarest owls: Blakiston's Fish-Owl. With no more than 100 pairs surviving in Hokkaidō, this is a great rarity and can never be guaranteed; however, with two nights here our chances are good. Japanese Pygmy and Great Spotted

woodpeckers frequently visit the feeders in front of the inn and the local riverine habitat is the home of Brown Dipper and Crested Kingfisher, and occasionally Solitary Snipe puts in an appearance.

Japan's lakes and coastal waters offer almost 30 species of waterfowl, from ornate Mandarin Duck, Falcated Duck, Stejneger's Scoter, and Smew to immense Whooper Swans. Japan in winter is also home to many handsome and greatly prized bunting species such as Yellow-throated (Elegant), Chestnut-eared, and Meadow buntings; and wonderful northern finches including Hawfinch, Japanese Grosbeak, Long-tailed Rosefinch, and Eurasian "Gray-bellied" Bullfinch. We will seek out these and many more at a comfortable pace.



January 13-14, Days 1-2: Travel to Tokyo. Participants can take any of several non-stop flights from various United States airports, which will depart on Day 1 and arrive at Tokyo's Haneda International Airport (airport code HND) on Day 2*. Upon arrival and after clearing immigration and customs, you may take the courtesy shuttle to our airport-area hotel, where a room will be reserved in your name. We will meet in the hotel lobby at 7:00 p.m. on Day 2 for an orientation briefing followed by dinner.

*Participants wanting to avoid the risk of misconnecting with the group or missing dinner should consider arriving in Tokyo before Day 2 (January 14) and partake of an optional pre-tour to cultural and birding sites close to central Tōkyō (Meiji Shrine and Gardens, Sensoji at Asakusa, and Kasai Rinkai Koen) with your leaders. Upon request, VENT will be happy to assist with any additional lodging arrangements.

NIGHT (January 13): In transit

NIGHT (January 14): Haneda Excel Hotel Tokyo, Tokyo

January 15, Day 3: The Greater Tokyo Area. After an early breakfast, we will drive east to visit various wetland sites, including Japan's second largest lake, to look for wintering Whooper Swan, Taiga Bean Goose and various other waterfowl, including the rare Baikal Teal, Falcated Duck, and the beautiful Smew. At reed beds and agricultural areas, we will watch for raptors such as Black Kite, Eastern Marsh-Harrier, Hen Harrier, and Merlin as they hunt over lakeside reed beds, and if lucky, we may bump into our first endemic Green Pheasant.

NIGHT: Haneda Excel Hotel Tokyu Haneda, Tokyo

January 16, Day 4: Kirishima, on Kyūshū. An early flight this morning will take us to Miyazaki in southeastern Kyūshū (the southernmost of Japan's four main islands) allowing us to visit the woodlands around Miike, a crater lake that forms part of the Kirishima Kinkowan National Park, a fascinating region of volcanic activity. This circular lake, about a kilometer in diameter, is surrounded by lush evergreen forest where many of Japan's more common winter woodland birds occur. These include Oriental Turtle Dove, Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker, Varied and Japanese tits, Long-tailed Tit, Red-flanked Bluetail, Warbling White-eye, and Olive-backed Pipit, with possibilities for Japanese Woodpecker, Ryukyu Minivet, Japanese Grosbeak and Yellow-throated (Elegant) and Gray buntings. Wintering waterfowl on the lake include Eurasian Wigeon, Eastern Spot-billed Duck, Little Grebe, and Eurasian Coot, and we will keep an eye out for gorgeous Mandarin Ducks. With luck, we might even find the huge punk-crested Crested Kingfisher on a branch, ready to dive on a fish.

NIGHT: Ryokojin Sansō, Kirishima

January 17, Day 5: Kirishima to Izumi. After breakfast this morning we will continue across to Kyūshū's west coast stopping on the way to look for birds such as Long-billed Plover as well as gorgeous Mandarin Ducks. We will search rice fields for Common Kingfisher and passerines such as Buff-bellied Pipit, Chestnut-eared and Meadow bunting. In woodland near the coast, we will search for White-bellied Pigeon (Japanese Green Pigeon), Ryukyu Minivet, Japanese Bush Warbler, Goldcrest, and Olive-backed Pipit. On the way to Izumi, we will spend some time scanning offshore for Brown Booby and Japanese Murrelet and along the cliffs for Blue Rock-Thrush before heading to watch the spectacle of thousands of White-naped and Hooded cranes returning to their nighttime roost at Arasaki.

NIGHT: Hotel Sengokutei, Izumi

January 18, Day 6: Izumi & Arasaki. A pre-breakfast visit to the crane fields this morning will allow us to witness, see and hear the spectacle of the mixed crane flock beginning its day as birds leave their roost. We will visit the Arasaki Crane Reserve, where over 15,000 cranes gather each winter. White-naped and Hooded cranes are by far the most common species here, but among them, we are likely to find small numbers of Common and Sandhill cranes, and may even encounter such rarities as Siberian or Demoiselle cranes. We will explore inland to local rivers, reservoirs, reed beds, forest and farmland with species such as Green Pheasant, Daurian Jackdaw, Eastern Rook, Daurian Redstart and Russet Sparrow to look for along with Chestnut-eared, Meadow, Reed Rustic and Masked buntings; while also hoping to encounter wintering Chinese Peduline-Tits.



White-naped Crane, Arasaki © Mark Brazil

NIGHT: Hotel Sengokutei, Izumi

January 19, Day 7: Izumi to Saga. We aim to make a second pre-breakfast visit to the crane fields to say our farewells to these gorgeous species; then, after breakfast, we will journey northwards bound for Saga. Along the way we will visit river mouths and coastal wetlands that are host to Common Shelduck and Saunders's Gull and where there may be Eurasian Spoonbill and even the rare Black-faced Spoonbill. We will be watching for gulls (including Saunders's, Black-headed, Herring "Vega," and Black-tailed) and any wintering shorebirds that may include Northern Lapwing, Dunlin, Common Greenshank, Common Sandpiper, Green Sandpiper, Kentish Plover and more. The reedbeds and paddy fields along the rivers here sometimes attract flocks of Russet Sparrows and Bramblings, and we will be keeping our eyes open for any passing raptors.

NIGHT: Shikisai Hotel Chiyodakan, Saga

January 20, Day 8: Saga to Komatsu. We will take the opportunity for a last look at coastal wetlands early this morning looking for additional shorebirds that we have not sighted so far and which may include Far Eastern Curlew, Eurasian Curlew, Common Redshank, Common Greenshank, and Red-necked Stint. We will also be keeping our eyes open for more flocks of Eastern Rook, perhaps the only Oriental Magpie of our journey, White-cheeked Starling and Daurian Redstart. After our late morning flight to Komatsu we will visit a range of habitats in the local area to seek out Greater White-fronted, Taiga and Tundra Bean goose; and Bewick's Swan. Falcated Duck, Common Pochard and Tufted Duck are also very likely, along with Little and Great Crested grebe.

NIGHT: Hotel Grandbinario, Komatsu

January 21, Day 9: Komatsu to Kambayashi Onsen. We will have time this morning to look for any Asian waterfowl that we may have missed so far, and will also visit coastal sites to look for Pacific Diver, Pelagic Cormorant, Japanese Cormorant, Pacific Reef Heron and Blue Rock Thrush, and watch rice field areas for Gray-headed Lapwing. This afternoon will be a road trip as we drive to Komatsu to Kambayashi Onsen. Along the way we will watch for Eastern Buzzard, more lapwings and roadside birds such as White-cheeked Starling, as we anticipate a wonderful hot spring opportunity ahead.

NIGHT: Senjukaku, Kambayashi Onsen

January 22, Day 10: Kambayashi Onsen to Karuizawa. A pre-breakfast stroll near our hotel may provide Hawfinch or Japanese Grosbeak, then after breakfast we will make our pilgrimage on foot (just over a mile) to the famous hot spring used by the highly photogenic Snow Monkeys. We will have ample time to enjoy their antics while also searching for the scarce endemic Japanese Serow that lives in the same forested montane habitat as the monkeys. Birds are scarce along the narrow shady valley but may include Coal Tit, Goldcrest, Eurasian Nuthatch, Long-tailed Tit and Eurasian Treecreeper, and perhaps even a Japanese Accentor or an Alpine Accentor.

After our morning with the monkeys, we will drive towards Karuizawa stopping along the way beside the Chikuma River where we will look for the rather scarce and well-camouflaged Long-billed Plover as well as the near-endemic Japanese Wagtail, both of which favor wide, rocky streams; and, if we are very lucky, we may also find the beautiful Azure-winged Magpie. Nearby, a small reservoir attracts an exciting range of wintering waterfowl including Eastern Spot-billed Duck, Common Pochard, Tufted Duck and Smew. Sometimes scarcer sightings include Baikal Teal and Falcated Duck.

NIGHT: Hotel Otowa No Mori, Karuizawa



Snow Monkey (Japanese Macaque) © Mark Brazil



Snow Monkeys © Mark Brazil

January 23, Day 11: Karuizawa. We have a full day to devote to birding the various forested habitats around Karuizawa, which are home to numerous Japanese and East Asian specialty birds. Our quest this morning will include a wide range of Japan's common resident or wintering species such as Oriental Turtle-Dove; Bull-headed Shrike; Japanese Pygmy, Great Spotted, and Japanese woodpeckers; Brown Dipper; Japanese Bush-Warbler; Warbling White-eye; Red-flanked Bluetail; Coal, Varied, Willow, and Japanese tits; Brambling; Hawfinch; Japanese Grosbeak; Long-tailed Rosefinch; and Eurasian Siskin. Tantalizing possibilities include the occasionally-seen, gorgeous Copper Pheasant, and the scarce Japanese Waxwing and Pallas's Rosefinch.

NIGHT: Hotel Otowa No Mori, Karuizawa

January 24, Day 12: Karuizawa to Haneda, Tokyo. Leaving Karuizawa, we will drive to Haneda in preparation for our flight to Hokkaidō. On the way, we will admire the outstandingly beautiful mountain and forest scenery of the Myogi mountains and drop in at a local forest reserve to look for Japanese Woodpecker, Goldcrest, Japanese Grosbeak, Eurasian Siskin and perhaps, with luck an endemic Japanese Accentor or a mighty Mountain Hawk-Eagle.

NIGHT: Haneda Excel Hotel Tokyu, Haneda, Tokyo

January 25, Day 13: Haneda to Kushiro. This morning we will take a flight from Haneda to Kushiro, then spend the day enjoying the spectacle of Red-crowned Cranes at their feeding sites in Tsurui where we will be able to see and photograph them at close range. We will hear the hauntingly beautiful calls of these graceful birds as they perform their delightful courtship dances.

We will take time to visit viewpoints overlooking Kushiro Wetland National Park as we watch for our first sea-eagles—White-tailed and the dramatic and enormous Steller's Sea Eagle. And we will also visit roost sites used by overwintering Ural Owl of the distinctive, pale northern race.

If the weather is clear we will have our first sight of the Akan volcanoes to the north and may encounter herds of Japanese Deer, and see Red Fox patrolling the snow-covered landscape.



Red-crowned Crane © Mark Brazil

NIGHT: Hotel Taito, Tsurui

January 26, Day 14: Tsurui to Lake Kussharo. Before breakfast this morning we will take our chances at a local river where Red-crowned Crane roost at night. Seeing these elegant birds standing amid mist rising from the water into the frigid air is a splendid sight. As we watch the cranes we may also sight sea-eagles overhead or Crested Kingfisher along the river.

As we move northwards today, we will take in the dramatic scenery of the Akan–Mashu National Park, visiting Lake Mashu, Iwo-zan and Lake Kussharo. At the latter, we aim to see and photograph Whooper Swans at the lake shore and look for White-backed, Great Spotted, Japanese Pygmy, and Gray-headed woodpeckers along with the northern race of Eurasian Jay (Brandt's Jay), Marsh Tit, the northern race of Eurasian Nuthatch, and perhaps the northern, white-headed race of Long-tailed Tit in the nearby woods.

NIGHT: Kawayu Daiichi Hotel Suikazura, Hokkaido

January 27, Day 15: Hokkaido's East Coast. Today our focus turns to the coast and we will head for the Shiretoko Peninsula National Park with its dramatic volcanic mountain range, first to take an early morning boat trip offshore in the Nemuro Channel, then to visit Notsuke Peninsula — the series of spits here are a fine example of longshore drift. At Rausu we will sample the local wintering gulls — Glaucous, Glaucous-winged, and Slaty-backed — and see large numbers of both White-tailed Eagles and Steller's Sea-Eagles along the coast. There will be Harlequin Duck, Greater Scaup and Common Goldeneye just offshore or in the harbors, and we may be lucky and find Rhinoceros Auklet or Ancient Murrelet. At Notsuke, we have our best chances of large numbers of Japanese Deer and Red Fox. We will watch offshore for Long-tailed Duck, Black and Stejneger's scoters, and hope for scarce wintering passerines such as Asian Rosy-Finch and Snow Bunting.



Steller's Sea-Eagle © Koji Niya

Finally, at our family-run inn in Yoroushi, we will enjoy a lavish Japanese dinner and mount an important vigil. With a population of no more than 100 pairs in Hokkaidō, Blakiston's Fish-Owl is a globally rarity and our inn is situated in a pair's territory! One of the pair often visits a feeding site in front of the inn after dark or in the pre-dawn hours where with good fortune, we will see it.

NIGHT: Yuyado Daiichi,
Yoroushi

January 28, Day 16: Southeast Hokkaidō. After watching birds that include Great Spotted Woodpecker, Brandt's Jay, Marsh

and Japanese tit at our inn's bird feeders, we will drive southeast after breakfast for more coastal birding. We will take in Lake Furen, the Nemuro Peninsula, Cape Nosappu and other capes and harbors as we search for seabirds.

Our main target will be Spectacled Guillemot (a regional specialty), but several other alcids, including Least Auklet (the world's smallest auk) and Ancient Murrelet, and various grebes and loons, including Pacific Loon, are possible — depending on the wind strength and direction. There will be delightful Harlequin Duck, Long-tailed Duck, Common and Red-breasted mergansers, Black and Stejneger's scoter to seek out, and among any gatherings of Pelagic Cormorant we may be lucky enough to find a Red-faced Cormorant. Returning for our second overnight stay in Yoroushi, we have another chance of a sighting of the spectacular Blakiston's Fish-Owl.



Blakiston's Fish-Owl © Shigeki Sogame

NIGHT: Yuyado Daiichi, Yoroushi

January 29, Day 17: Yoroushi to Tsurui, and Kushiro to Haneda. This morning, we will spend time at the riverside in the valley at Yoroushi on the lookout for Crested Kingfisher, Brown Dipper, and the scarce Solitary Snipe; watching the feeders for woodpeckers and the local white-headed race of Long-tailed Tit; and the riverside trees for Coal Tit, Goldcrest, and Eurasian Treecreeper. On our way to Kushiro Airport for our flight back to Tōkyō this afternoon, we will bid farewell to the Red-crowned Crane at a spot that offers excellent photographic opportunities. This evening, we will gather for a farewell dinner and to reminisce about our birding adventure in wintery Japan.

NIGHT: The Royal Park Hotel, Haneda, Tokyo

January 30, Day 18: Departures for Home. Both Tōkyō Haneda (HND) and Tōkyō Narita (NRT) are international airports, but they are quite far apart. If you opt to fly out of Narita, make sure not to schedule your international departure no earlier than 12:00 p.m., so as to allow yourself plenty of time to take the shuttle from Haneda (90 minutes) and arrive with plenty of time (two-and-a-half to three hours) before your departure. The shuttle bus fare is JPY 3,100 a person.

Given that this is a winter tour and that blizzards can strike at any time, it is possible that our final flight from Kushiro to Haneda may be delayed. Therefore, if you wish to limit the risk of misconnecting with your homeward flight, please consider adding an extra post-tour night, giving you time for sightseeing or shopping. Upon request, VENT will be happy to assist with any additional arrangements.

TOUR SIZE: This tour is limited to 9 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: Mark Brazil assisted by Mayumi Brazil



Mark Brazil is a frequent expedition leader of small, land-based, wildlife-focused expeditions in Africa, South America, South Asia, and East Asia. He is a regular lecturer on expedition cruise vessels traveling widely from the Arctic to Antarctica and many destinations between, including Japan. He is best known for his extensive experience of birding in Japan and for his many publications. Born and educated in the UK, Mark has degrees in Biology, English Literature, and Psychology. He has had careers in conservation biology, in natural history television (20+ years), as a university lecturer (9 years), and now works mainly as a freelance author, editor, and wildlife-expedition leader. He has lived in England, Scotland, and New Zealand, and is now a long-term resident of Hokkaidō, northern Japan, where he and his wife, Mayumi, live in the Akan–Mashū National Park. Mark began birdwatching as a child in the UK, studied avian behavioral-ecology for his PhD, and has since enjoyed birding on every continent, though he is not a lister. He is fascinated by the amazing diversity of avian behavior. He began leading nature tours in 1980, became involved in the expedition cruise industry in 1998, and since 2007 he has worked exclusively in the wildlife and adventure travel industry as a consultant,

expedition leader, guide, and lecturer. In the last few years, he has been increasingly involved in outdoor guide training in Japan. His extensive travels across the length and breadth of Japan since 1980 have given him intimate knowledge of the country's birdlife, natural history, and culture. He is well-known for his numerous articles and many books relating to the region. Mark's most recent books are: *Japan: The Natural History of an Asian Archipelago* (2022) and *Wild Hokkaidō: A Guidebook to the National Parks and other Wild Places of Eastern Hokkaidō* (2021). His past books include: *Helm Field Guide to the Birds of Japan* (2018); *The Nature of Japan* (2018); *Helm Field Guide to the Birds of East Asia* (2009), *The Birds of Japan* (1991) and *A Birdwatcher's Guide to Japan* (1987).



Mayumi Brazil is a National Government Licensed Interpreter Guide. She was born and educated in Hokkaido, Japan. Her interests include Japanese Literature, film, and contemporary Japanese culture. She enjoys cross-cultural experiences and particularly enjoys explaining her own culture to others. She is self-confident in a multi-cultural environment, organized, and attentive to detail and customer needs. She is motivated to provide a positive experience for those with whom she travels. Mayumi has worked in various capacities in the travel and service sector. Since 2009, she has worked as a fixer and an interpreter, traveling extensively throughout Japan from Hokkaido to Okinawa with clients ranging from BBC Radio to groups and families. Her overseas travels have taken her to North and South America, Europe,

East Africa, South and East Asia, New Zealand, and Australia. Since 2009, Mayumi has worked on various expedition cruise ships as a lecturer and cultural demonstrator around Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. On land, she has co-led many wildlife-focused expeditions with her husband, ornithologist and expedition leader Dr. Mark Brazil, in Bhutan, Brazil, India, Japan, Nepal, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, and Zambia, and has worked as an interpreter/guide in Japan for various companies catering to photographers, naturalists, and birdwatchers. Mayumi and Mark live in Teshikaga, east Hokkaido.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for this tour is **\$13,825** per person based on double occupancy from Tokyo. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 2 to dinner on Day 17, lodging as stated in the itinerary, internal commercial Japanese flights as described in this itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. The fee does not include airfare from your home to Tokyo and return, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, telephone calls, laundry or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs, if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$400**. 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.

PLEASE NOTE: This tour is priced based on estimated 2024 rates. If our ground operators increase their prices, we reserve the right to surcharge for whatever those additional costs may be.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The initial deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. A second deposit of **\$3,000** is due 210 days prior to departure (June 17, 2024). If you prefer to pay your deposits using a credit card, the deposits must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your initial deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. 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 or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 150 days prior to the tour departure date (August 16, 2024).

CANCELLATION & REFUNDS:

Cancellation by Participant on Japan in Winter:

Refunds, if any, for any cancellation by a participant are made according to the following schedule: If participant cancels 210 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 from the date of participant tour cancellation, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person.

If cancellation is made between 209 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. **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>
210 days or more before departure date	Participant's deposit minus \$500*
209 to 151 days before departure date	No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance of the tour fee will be refunded
150 days or less before departure date	No refund available

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

Cancellation by VENT:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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.

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

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.

PACE: Walking will be at a relaxed pace mostly on flat ground. In most cases, our bus or a nature center will be nearby. The longest walk will be of one mile to and one mile back from the Jigokudani hot spring where the Snow Monkeys are found. There may also be longish walks at Karuizawa, and winter tracks there and at Jigokudani, as well as in Hokkaidō are likely to be snowy or icy—ice-grippers are very strongly recommended.

CLIMATE: At the time of our visit, we are likely to encounter a wide range of temperatures (from highs in the 50s to lows near 0 degrees Fahrenheit). In the south we may encounter rain, but as we head north, temperatures and humidity will decline. Please be prepared for *very* cold conditions at times, especially along the coast and at higher elevations, including snow and ice in Hokkaido and Karuizawa (see CLOTHING section below).

ACCOMMODATIONS: Hotels are a mixture of Western and Japanese styles, and standards are very good. Most rooms are en suite, with private bathrooms. Several of our hotels and inns feature natural hot springs, offering a wonderful Japanese cultural and therapeutic opportunity. Our accommodations provide excellent food, allowing you to enjoy the UNESCO-registered Japanese cuisine to the fullest. On a few nights you may find yourself sleeping on a traditional futon, in comfortable tatami-floored rooms.

INTERNET ACCESS: Wi-Fi is available at all hotels and lodges, though in some cases only in the lobby area.

CLOTHING: Neat, casual clothing is recommended in this part of the world. Japan is a modern first world country where it is customary to remove one's shoes when entering houses, traditional hotels (not Western hotels), and many other places. Please be ready to remove your footwear whenever asked. Accommodations typically offer slippers (one-size for all) for indoor wear, but you may wish to bring your own if you have large feet or simply prefer your own slippers.

In the south, winters are cool but sunny with occasional rain, making waterproof layers essential. Venturing further north, temperatures drop and snow falls. The island of Hokkaido in the far north and Karuizawa at relatively high elevation in central Honshū can be cold (below freezing) in winter. Hand and foot warmer packs are strongly recommended and available locally. Please bring adequate warm clothing layers, including a waterproof/windproof jacket, gloves, hat, neck warmer, and waterproof/windproof over pants. You will find long underwear to be a very important layer in the colder areas, and perhaps two layers for very cold morning outings. You will want all of your insulating and windproof layers (and probably more!) for the boat trip off Hokkaidō's Shiretoko Peninsula, because of the windchill factor when the boat is moving.

Laundry (using coin-operated, do-it-yourself machines) is possible at some (but not all) of our accommodations. There is no laundry service.

FOOTWEAR: Lightweight hiking shoes or boots are ideal for the milder, southern part of the trip, but insulated footwear is essential for the colder portions such as the Japan Alps and Hokkaido.

We may encounter icy walking conditions on trails from the hotel in the Japan Alps and during our time in Hokkaido. For these areas, we recommend bringing ice traction devices that attach to your boots, of which there are various models available. Please note that you do not need mountaineering crampons, in fact these are dangerous, but more modest accessories such Kahtoola Microspikes or ICEtrekkers diamond grip, are ideal. These pull on and off easily and give excellent grip on sheer ice and also work well in packed snow.

For important information on footwear, ice-grippers, and cultural aspects of a winter birding trip in Japan, do please read Mark Brazil's informative web page [Tips, Hints & Important Etiquette](#).

SPECIAL NOTE: Please avoid bright colors and sudden movements to avoid startling the birds and other wildlife that we are searching for, some of which may be shy or elusive species.

CURRENCY: Japanese Yen. Credit cards are increasingly widely accepted, but not always so; therefore, it is important to carry a small amount of yen with you if you want to shop. ATMs at certain convenience stores and post offices accept international cards for cash withdrawals and banks at airports can exchange currency.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS:

PASSPORTS: A passport valid for six months beyond your planned return date is required to enter Japan. Please check the expiration date on your passport. **If it is not valid through** for at least six months beyond **your intended period of stay, you will need to renew it.** You will also want to make sure that you have at least two blank pages in your passport for entry and exit stamps.

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

VISAS: Citizens of the United States are not required to have a visa for Japan for stays of less than 90 days. Non-United States citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions.

All visitors should visit the [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan](#) website to apply for eVISA and eCUSTOMS so as to save time on entry.

EQUIPMENT: You should have a pair of binoculars in good condition (please check before departure!). Your tour leader will be carrying a spotting scope and tripod; however, you are **welcome and encouraged to bring your own spotting scope if you so wish.** You should bring all the camera equipment and spare batteries that you will need as there will be many excellent photographic opportunities. UV and polarizing filters are recommended. Plastic bags are very useful for protecting equipment from rain, dust and humidity.

A small day pack (either waterproofed or with a strong plastic bag inside) is essential for carrying excess clothing, camera equipment, toiletries, food, and water. However, in many of the areas we will be birding, we will have regular access to our transport, which will be attended by a driver. Water bottles are important if you like to carry a regular supply of water. Hot and cold drinks are widely available for purchase from automatic vending machines — and offer an incidental cultural experience.

Other useful items include:

1. A small flashlight or headlamp for finding your way around your room at night (your smartphone also includes one).
2. Handy-wipes and paper tissues are especially useful. All participants should carry sufficient for their personal needs for the entire tour.
3. Spare glasses or contact lenses.
4. A washcloth (face cloth) if you need one, since these are not part of amenities at most traditional Japanese inns.
5. A cloth napkin or supply of paper napkins. Napkins may not be present in some traditional inns and restaurants.
6. Sunscreen and lip balm are essential.
7. A collapsible, easy to pack and carry umbrella.
8. If you have difficulty using chopsticks, we would recommend that you bring your own knife and fork set in your checked luggage, as these may not be available in some restaurants.

9. An insulated wrap for your camera when outdoors, as cold temperatures can impair the electronics of digital cameras.

10. Hand and foot warmer chemical packs are very helpful during the coldest days of the trip; these can be purchased locally.

LUGGAGE: When traveling within Japan, one piece of checked luggage weighing no more than 44 pounds is allowed free of charge. In addition, you are allowed one piece of carry-on luggage and whatever you carry over your arm or in your hands (i.e. coat, book, purse, umbrella etc.). Overhead storage compartments on some flights are small and may not take roller bags.

MISCELLANEOUS:

Electricity: Japan uses 100 volts, 50 cycles, AC. American devices work just fine on this current. The Japanese-style plug has two parallel flat blades, similar to most American plugs. If you have devices with plugs with one larger (third) blade, you will need an adapter to use them in Japanese outlets.

Language: Japanese is the national language. Some younger people speak a little English but it can be difficult at times to find someone who speaks English fluently. Your local leaders are there to help you. Mayumi Brazil is Japanese and speaks fluent English. Airport shuttle buses to hotels typically have the hotel name in both Japanese script and in English. Airport personnel are very skilled in using placards to help you find shuttles and directions.

Time: Japan is 15 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time.

Country Dialing Code: 81

Meals: Most breakfasts and dinners will be served at our accommodations, and the food is of good to excellent quality. Lunches may be taken at a restaurant or café along the day's birding route, or as picnics with materials purchased from local stores. Japanese convenience stores are a world apart from those in the USA. They offer a wide range of fresh, hot and cold foods and drinks; have convenient, clean restrooms; and sell many useful small items such as batteries, and hand and foot warmers. Stops at such stores provide an opportunity to try out and stock up on local snacks and drinks for the day.

Snacks/Drinks: You may want to bring some of your favorite snacks such as granola bars or dried fruit, but you will find that Japanese stores provide a great variety of high-quality produce, including many products with which you will be familiar. Vending machines for drinks are ubiquitous, even in rural areas, and typically stock both cold and hot beverages in winter.

Unless advised otherwise, all tap water is potable. Food hygiene is to very high standards so that you can safely enjoy salads, fresh fruit and vegetables.

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 and Covid-19 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, as many will *not be available* in Japan without a visit to a doctor for a local prescription. **All participants should bring a good quantity of all their medical/pharmaceutical supplies, as these will be very difficult to obtain anywhere on the tour.**

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>.

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.

Brazil, M. A. *Japan: The Natural History of an Asian Archipelago*. Princeton University Press, 2022. *Highly recommended:* A very readable overview of the natural history of Japan including its birdlife.

Brazil, M. A. *Birds of Japan** Christopher Helm, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018. *Highly recommended:* An up-to-date publication on the birds of Japan in English. This is the best available guide and illustrates all the species that we are likely to encounter on this tour. Also available as a digital download.

Otani, C. *Birds of Japan*. Lynx Edicions, 2019. *Highly recommended:* An up-to-date publication on the birds of Japan in English. This illustrates all the species that we are likely to encounter on this tour.

Brazil, M. A. *The Nature of Japan*. Japan Nature Guides, 2013. A collection of personal essays about encounters with nature in Japan. Available from the author.

Brazil, M. A. *Birds of East Asia*. Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009. An up-to-date publication on the birds of east Asia in English. This illustrates all the species that we are likely to encounter on this tour. Also available as a digital download.

Brazil, M.A. *A Birdwatchers Guide to Japan*, Japan: Kodansha International, 1987. A detailed site guide with much information relating, in particular: habitat, likely birds, accommodation, and useful information for getting there. Out of print, but available from the author.

Wild Bird Society of Japan. *A Field Guide to the Birds of Japan*. 1982. At one time the best available guide for Japan, the common names and taxonomy are now out of date, and the illustrations not nearly as good as Brazil’s 2018 guide to the region’s birds. Out of print.

Shimba, T. *A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Japan and East Asia*. London: Christopher Helm, 2007. An up-to-date publication on the birds of Japan in English, a photographic guide.

For a more exhaustive bibliography, see selections in the APA and Lonely Planet guides.

If participants have difficulty obtaining any titles, they may wish to contact the Natural History Book Service which has one of the most comprehensive collections of books on natural history: NHBS Ltd., 1-6 The Stables,

Ford Road, Totnes, Devon, TQ9 5LE U.K. <https://www.nhbs.com/> email: customer.services@nhbs.co.uk. Phone: 011-44-1803865913, Fax: 011-44-1803865280

MAPS: Japan 1:1,500,000 Nelles series

* Recommended to bring on tour.

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 them. We emphasize that tips are not expected and are entirely optional. Tips should be given directly to your tour leader; they should not be sent to the VENT office.

RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc., a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, “*VENT*”) act only as agents for the participant in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

VENT reserves the right (i) to substitute hotels of similar category, or the best reasonable substitution available under the circumstances, for those indicated and (ii) to make any changes in the itinerary that are deemed necessary by VENT or which are caused by third party transportation schedules (i.e. railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, etc.).

VENT reserves the right to substitute leaders or guides on any tour. Where VENT, in its sole discretion, determines such substitution is necessary, it will notify tour participants.

VENT reserves the right to cancel any tour prior to departure with or without cause or good reason. See the VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy set forth above.

Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on May 28, 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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