



NEW ZEALAND HIGHLIGHTS

NOVEMBER 30–DECEMBER 18, 2024

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When New Zealand separated from Gondwanaland 70 million years ago, it had no mammals or large reptiles. Progressively isolated from the other land masses, it has followed its own evolutionary course since then, and in the virtual absence of predators, a remarkable array of flightless birds evolved, including kiwis, rails, the giant moas, even a flightless parrot. With the arrival of humans—first the Polynesians and later the Europeans—a long series of extinctions began. Hunting for food and minor forest clearance by the Maoris gave way to the clearing of large tracts of native habitat for the settlers' livestock. Exotics were released in misguided attempts to make the land “more like home,” predators were released to control them, man's camp followers became established, and alien plants arrived from all directions. All of these factors had a severe negative impact on the native birds and forests. Sadly, this process of extinction continued through the 20th century. Now an estimated ten percent of the world's endangered birds are found in New Zealand. All is not lost, however, because New Zealand is one of the world leaders in bird conservation, and tremendously innovative efforts are being made to preserve the native birds and habitats. This tour offers an opportunity to see a superb assortment of the native birds. In the process, we'll learn a great deal about this fascinating and beautiful land.



The New Zealand Kaka, one of New Zealand's many special birds
© Dion Hobercroft

New Zealand has six entire families of birds found nowhere else: the kiwis, New Zealand parrots, New Zealand wrens, Mohuids (Yellowhead, Whitehead and Pipipi), Stitchbird and New Zealand wattlebirds. We should see a representative or more of each one. In addition, there are over 40 more species of birds endemic to the country. The seabirds are outstanding; many of them nest in the region, and there are few places in the world where such a variety can be seen with such ease. This tour includes a number of boat trips with pelagic birds as the focus, but it's not necessary to travel far offshore to see them.



New Zealand has much more to offer than birds. Scenery is paramount, from the lush lowland forests to majestic Southern Alps. Nowhere else but in this one country will you find such a diverse and spectacular combination of natural features—the mighty snow-capped peaks, deep fiords carved by the glaciers, tranquil lakes and bubbling mud pots, towering forests, dense coastal scrub, and lovely near-deserted beaches. This is also a wonderful country, with outstanding food, excellent accommodations and roads, friendly people, and remarkably tidy towns and countryside. All of these features make for an outstanding natural history tour—offering both comfort and unique biological treasures not to be seen elsewhere.

November 30-December 2, Days 1-3: Travel to Auckland. Participants arriving on either Air New Zealand Flight 5 (scheduled to depart Los Angeles on November 30 at 7:55 p.m. and cross the International Dateline before arriving in Auckland on December 2 at 6:00 a.m.) or Air New Zealand Flight 7 (scheduled to depart San Francisco on November 30 at 7:45 p.m. and cross the International Dateline before arriving in Auckland on December 2 at 5:50 a.m.) will be met and join the group transfer to One Tree Point, north of Auckland.

Participants are strongly encouraged to avoid the risk of misconnection and/or rest prior to the tour by arriving in Auckland on or prior to December 1. Upon request, VENT will be happy to assist with any additional lodging arrangements in the airport area (likely the Novotel Auckland Airport). Those choosing this option will be met in the lobby on the morning of December 2 at a time to be announced.

On this day we will take time to explore some birding sites to the north of Auckland. This includes wetlands at Mangere where we have a chance for a good cross-section of waterbirds and shorebirds, wetlands near Tawharanui that are reliable for the Brown Teal and Buff-banded Rail, and a coastal estuary at Pakiri with an excellent chance for the critically endangered Fairy Tern, New Zealand Dotterel and hopefully a Fernbird or the elusive Spotless Crane.

NIGHT (December 2): One Tree Point Motel, One Tree Point

December 3, Day 4: Pelagic Trip to Hauraki Gulf. New Zealand is justifiably famous as the seabird capital of the world and there's no better start to this tour than a pelagic trip to Hauraki Gulf. The combination of rugged coastline and the cold Southern Ocean mixing with the temperate Tasman Sea makes for nutrient-rich upwellings. The seabirds have to be seen to be believed. By taking a pelagic trip in the Hauraki Gulf, we may encounter a number of subtropical species. These include the endangered Black (Parkinson's) Petrel; Cook's Petrel; the gray-faced population of Great-winged Petrel; Black-winged Petrel; the endangered endemic Pycroft's Petrel (difficult); the superb little White-faced Storm-Petrel; Buller's, Fluttering, Little and Flesh-footed shearwaters; Common Diving-Petrel; and Fairy Prion. The recently rediscovered New Zealand Storm-Petrel will very much be on our birding radar today, and we will hope one or more will be attracted to our chumming station. One species that is guaranteed in these waters is the beautiful Australasian Gannet, with its spectacular plunge-diving behavior into schools of baitfish.

NIGHT: One Tree Motel, One Tree Point

December 4, Day 5: Tiri Tiri Matangi Island. Our adventure continues with a day of birding on Tiri Tiri Matangi Island. On the boat trip to the island, we may see the strikingly handsome Buller's Shearwater, Fluttering Shearwater, Parasitic Jaeger, White-fronted Tern, the ubiquitous and rather dainty Red-billed Gull, and its larger relative, the Kelp Gull.

The first thing that often strikes a first-time visitor to this island is the rich bird song, so absent from the main islands. Spectacularly feathered Tui and New Zealand Bellbirds are responsible for much of this incredible song and provide excellent photographic opportunities. Both of these birds belong to the honeyeater family. The endangered North Island Saddleback, a representative of the endemic New Zealand wattlebird family, will also give excellent views. The Red-crowned Parakeet is also fairly common on the island, and we should encounter this rather quiet but brilliant, emerald-green parrot with its bright red crown. Nasal chattering often reveals its presence. The ultra-tame New Zealand Robin of the now split North Island species is another highlight. A small introduced population of Brown Quail is also possible to see.

More specialties await us in the forest, and Tiri Tiri Matangi Island will provide our best chance to encounter the incredible North Island Kokako—one of New Zealand's most special and sought-after birds. The incredible organ-like, liquid, bell-like notes will give us the sign to look for the Kokako as it creeps squirrel-like through dense foliage—a flash of gray with intense blue facial wattles. The Stitchbird also lives in the forest and is attracted to specially designed feeders aimed at protecting it from the pugnacious honeyeaters. The attractive Whitehead, a diminutive forest warbler, is inquisitive and can often be squeaked in. Both Fernbird and Rifleman have small populations recently established now on Tiri Tiri Matangi Island.

The giant flightless rail called the South Island Takahe (pronounced "Tuck-a-hey") has a small population of a few pairs translocated onto the island. This is a critically endangered New Zealand endemic. At the time of our visit they are often nesting and quite secretive so we will need to be a bit lucky if we are to connect with one. We will have another, better chance to see this bird on Kapiti Island later in the tour.

Walking along the intertidal zone, we will need to keep on the lookout for Little Penguins—the world's smallest penguin. Occasional Pacific Reef Egrets may be seen fishing along the rocky coastline.

NIGHT: Whangaparoa Lodge, Whangaparoa

December 5, Day 6: Whangaparoa to Rotorua. This morning after breakfast we will drive south towards Rotorua, detouring via Waipu (to look for Australian Fairy Tern) and then continue towards Miranda on the Firth of Thames, which presents the greatest shorebird spectacle in New Zealand. The timing of our departure is dependent on the time of high tide. Home to hundreds—even thousands—of Bar-tailed Godwits and Red Knots, the area often also boasts a sprinkling of rarer Asian species including Sharp-tailed and Curlew sandpiper plus

Red-necked Stint. In addition, this location is a good site for the New Zealand Dotterel, a chunky shorebird that is another rare and threatened species found only in New Zealand. Also frequently present are some non-breeding Wrybills. We will make another stop at a wetland that has proved reasonably reliable for sighting the elusive Australasian Bittern. We will then head south to the famous geothermal city of Rotorua. The variety of geysers, hot pools and bubbling mud is exceptional. On the way we will search for the scarce and localized New Zealand Grebe and possibly the Australasian Shoveler and Little Black Cormorant.

NIGHT: Rydges Rotorua, Rotorua

December 6, Day 7: Rotorua to Whakapapa Village. We will explore the impressive Pureora Forest today, on the lookout for the scarce and inconspicuous Yellow-crowned Parakeet. This forest also often holds the elusive Long-tailed Cuckoo and emerald green Shining Bronze-Cuckoo with chances for Tomtit, North Island Robin, Whitehead, Rifleman and Kaka amongst others. Pureora Forest is an excellent example of old growth temperate rainforest. We will then continue south to Tongariro National Park. Here we will explore suitable fast-flowing torrents for the endangered, endemic Blue Duck. We may also have a chance to see Rifleman, Tomtit, New Zealand Pipit and with some luck, the scarce New Zealand Falcon. Wetlands at Lake Taupo will give us a good chance to see the timid Fernbird and a chance for Australasian Bittern. Afterwards we will continue on to Whakapapa Village below the summit of Mount Ruapehu, an active volcano with a snow clad summit.

NIGHT: Skotel Alpine Resort, Whakapapa Village

December 7, Day 8: Whakapapa Village to Kapiti Island. Depending upon our strike rate connecting with certain birds like Blue Duck, Shining Bronze-Cuckoo, Fernbird and New Zealand Grebe, we will spend the day wending south to the coastal town of Paraparaumu. On the way we will make certain stops at various wetlands and coastal sites like the Manawatu Estuary. This estuary often turns up the odd rarity and on different visits we have seen Gull-billed, Little and Common terns. The beautiful Black-fronted Dotterel can also be found locally. We'll take a midafternoon ferry to Kapiti Island. The famous island of Kapiti has long been the jewel in the crown of New Zealand's island sanctuaries. By staying at a traditional, very comfortable nature lodge on private property, we will have the opportunity to take a night-walk to look for one of New Zealand's rarest and most special birds—the Little Spotted Kiwi. A sighting of this beautiful, small, gray-banded kiwi will be a huge event. While searching for the Little Spotted Kiwi, we may also find the Morepork, a small native hawk-owl and some Little Penguins.

NIGHT: Kapiti Island Lodge, Kapiti Island

December 8, Day 9: Kapiti Island. During the day the abundance of birdlife is truly overwhelming, and it is a photographer's paradise. Regularly seen birds include the tame giant parrot—the New Zealand Kaka, New Zealand Pigeon, Sacred Kingfisher, Whitehead, Tui, New Zealand Bellbird, North Island Robin, Fantail, Silvereye, Weka, Red-crowned Parakeet, Paradise Shelduck, Variable Oystercatcher, Great Cormorant, and Little Pied Cormorant. Rarer birds we have a chance of encountering include Takahe, Long-tailed Cuckoo, New Zealand Falcon, North Island Saddleback, Tomtit, Royal Spoonbill and Brown Teal.

Taking our leave from this special island sanctuary, we will return to the main North Island, driving to the capital city of Wellington.

NIGHT: Rydges Wellington, Wellington

December 9, Day 10: Wellington to Picton. If time permits we will make a visit to the superb Te Papa Museum or Zealandia Sanctuary. From Wellington we will board the inter-island ferry to make the journey across Cook Strait. The crossing provides a good opportunity to see Southern Ocean seabirds including White-capped Albatross, Cape Petrel, Sooty Shearwater, and the attractive endemic Spotted Shag. Sperm Whales are occasionally encountered, as are Dusky and Common dolphins. We will disembark at the beautiful town of Picton, where we will spend the night.

NIGHT: Picton Beachcomber Inn, Picton

December 10, Day 11: Marlborough Sound Boat Trip; Transfer to Kaikoura.

We will enjoy a sheltered morning boat trip in Queen Charlotte Sound, one of the Marlborough Sounds, and home to the threatened endemic New Zealand King Shag, among an abundance of marine life. Birds we have encountered on this boat trip include excellent views of Fluttering Shearwater, White-fronted Tern, Parasitic Jaeger and with luck, New Zealand Falcon. If possible, we will land on Blumine Island, where we have a decent chance of encountering the ultra-rare Malherbe's Parakeet. We also have an excellent chance for marine mammals including the elusive Hector's Dolphin. After lunch, we will then head south, making stops at a few wetland and shorebird locations before arriving in picturesque Kaikoura.

NIGHT: The White Morph, Kaikoura

December 11, Day 12: Kaikoura.

Kaikoura is famous for its marine life, and the seabirds here are truly phenomenal. You have to venture only one mile offshore before you are in the deep ocean. This is New Zealand's equivalent of Monterey—only there are a lot more birds. By placing “baitballs” off the back of the boat, we can lure in incredible numbers of very tame albatrosses and petrels, including rare endemic Westland Petrel; White-chinned Petrel; Cape Petrel; the giant Northern and Southern Royal and Antipodean albatross; White-capped and Salvin's albatross; Black-browed and with luck, the scarcer Buller's albatross; Northern Giant-Petrel; and Hutton's Shearwater. We will schedule an extended pelagic trip here (about four hours in duration) to visit some specific sea mountains that have on previous trips turned up rarer birds like the Soft-plumaged Petrel. Combine this abundance of birdlife with the truly spectacular setting of the snow-capped Seaward Kaikoura Range against the ocean and thriving New Zealand Fur Seal colonies, and it becomes clear why Kaikoura is a special destination. Beyond the marine birding, we have a chance to see the localized, introduced Cirl Bunting—a species quite difficult to see in its native Europe—and have occasionally encountered the elusive New Zealand Falcon in this area.

NIGHT: The White Morph, Kaikoura

December 12, Day 13: The Mackenzie Country. Today we will drive to the inland plains of the Mackenzie Country with its beautiful lakes and mountain backdrop (the Southern Alps, New Zealand's highest mountains). We will make a stop to see if the introduced Cape Barren Geese are home at St. Anne's Lagoon. While exploring the high country, we will be searching for the scarce New Zealand Falcon.



The rare Malherbe's (Orange-fronted) Parakeet can sometimes be found in Picton. © Dion Hobcroft

NIGHT: Distinction Twizel, Twizel

December 13, Day 14: Lake Tekapo to Te Anau. At the head of Lake Tekapo, we are on the lookout for two special shorebirds. The critically endangered Black Stilt has its stronghold here and we will make a serious attempt to try to see this specialized alpine bird. Equally as interesting is the curious Wrybill that breeds in the shingle (gravel) of the glacial braided streams. This most unusual small plover has a bill that bends to the right. It is the only bird in the world with this specialized laterally curved bill, which makes the ideal tool for probing under shingle searching for caddisfly larvae. Other endemics we should encounter include the Black-billed Gull, the beautiful Black-fronted Tern, and the handsome Double-banded Plover. Several pairs of Great Crested Grebe nest on the various alpine wetlands we will visit. We also have a chance to see a population of introduced Chukar in this area at an alpine observatory.

NIGHT: Distinction Luxmore Hotel, Te Anau

December 14, Day 15: Northern Fiordland National Park and Milford Sound. Today will be dedicated to exploring spectacular Fiordland National Park, which includes Milford Sound. While taking in this incredible fiord and the stunning photographic opportunities it allows, we will need to be on the lookout for the scarce Fiordland Penguin. This spectacular crested penguin is restricted to these cold, deep waters and a sighting will be a great bonus, as they are difficult to see. As we retrace our steps back to Te Anau, we will be scouting for some very special birds in incredibly spectacular surroundings. At the Homer Tunnel, we will search for the mischievous Kea—a parrot with a penchant for chewing up windshield wiper blades. Higher up on the scree slopes lives the diminutive South Island (Rock) Wren, a representative of the New Zealand wren family, but unfortunately recent road closures due to avalanche concerns make it unlikely for us to encounter it. In the dense beech forests live more special birds like the South Island Tomtit, the Rifleman (a close relative of the Rock Wren), the rare Yellowhead, and the dapper little Pipipi (Brown Creeper). We have had success searching for the rare Blue Duck in this area. We will bird our way to Milford Sound for our boat trip on this world-famous, spectacular sheltered waterway.



A beautiful Tomtit in Fiordland © Dion Hobcroft

NIGHT: Distinction Luxmore Hotel, Te Anau

December 15, Day 16: Te Anau to Stewart Island. We will make our way from Te Anau to the southernmost major town in New Zealand, Invercargill. In the high alpine country, birds are sparse, but we should encounter Swamp Harrier, Paradise Shelduck, Eurasian Blackbird, Song Thrush, Dunnock, Chaffinch, and Australian Magpie. Two interesting endemics we will re-encounter are the Black-billed Gull and the scarcer Black-fronted Tern. Both species nest on the glacial braided streams of the high country. If we are lucky, we may pick up a Little Owl perching out. If we make good time, we may have the chance to explore Tip Lagoon, a large tidal estuary that is home to great numbers of waterfowl and has hosted occasional rarities like Chestnut-breasted Shelduck. In the afternoon we will take the ferry from Bluff to Stewart Island, also called Rakiura (Maori). Stewart Island is New Zealand's third largest island and largely national park. During one of our evenings here, weather permitting, we will go with the resident kiwi trackers, to look for Southern Brown Kiwi feeding along the edge of the forest.



We will have to be very lucky to find a Southern Brown Kiwi in the day but it is not impossible!
© Dion Hobcroft

NIGHT: Kaka Retreat, Stewart Island

December 16, Day 17: Stewart Island. In the morning we will be dropped off by water taxi at Ulva Island in Paterson Inlet, a forested jewel, which will put us into some of the best avian bush walking in New Zealand. Ulva Island is a predator-free haven for a variety of birds including: Weka (an endemic subspecies), New Zealand Kaka, Tui, New Zealand Bellbird, Red-crowned and Yellow-crowned parakeet, the rare South Island Saddleback,

Yellowhead, Pipipi, South Island Robin and New Zealand Pigeon. We'll take a slow walk on excellent paths around the island, with duration on the island of three to four hours. At lunchtime we are scheduled to catch a pelagic vessel to explore offshore.

This boat trip will take us out to the Muttonbird (or Titi) Islands; how far we go will depend on the weather conditions. There will be a number of different species of albatross, petrels, shearwaters and diving-petrels. The possibilities include penguins (Yellow-eyed, Fiordland and Little); Southern Royal albatross; Salvin's, White-capped and Buller's albatross; Northern and Southern giant-petrel; Brown Skua; Sooty Shearwaters; Cape and Cook's petrels; and Common Diving-Petrel. With luck we may encounter some rarer pelagic birds here including Mottled Petrel, Broad-billed Prion or Gray-backed Storm-Petrel.

NIGHT: Kaka Retreat, Stewart Island

December 17, Day 18: Stewart Island to Dunedin via Catlins. After taking the morning ferry from Stewart Island, we will return to Bluff and Invercargill, then drive north to the town of Dunedin. In the late afternoon we will explore Taiaroa Head by boat for a great opportunity to see three special birds. Taiaroa Head is famous for harboring the only mainland albatross-nesting colony in the world; the giant Northern Royal Albatross have been nesting here specially protected for several decades. These are truly giant birds—the world's largest flying birds—and are absolutely immense, with a three-meter wingspan. Nesting nearby is the superb Yellow-eyed Penguin, a threatened species unlike any other penguin in the world. Sadly now though, the population has dramatically declined here in recent years so we will need some luck for a sighting. The third special bird is the Otago Shag, a proposed split out of the Stewart Island Shag. There is also a good chance to encounter the endemic Hooker's Sea Lion. If sea conditions permit, we will venture offshore to enjoy our final albatross feeding session.

NIGHT: Scenic Hotel Southern Cross, Dunedin

December 18, Day 19: Departure for Home. This morning a transfer will be provided to Dunedin International Airport in time for the 9:35 a.m. departure of Air New Zealand Flight 676, which is scheduled to arrive in Auckland at 11:25 a.m., allowing time to connect with various flights to the USA. These flights will cross the International Dateline and arrive on December 18. Please be aware that air travel out of Dunedin is not covered by the tour fee. Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to help you with any flight arrangements (see AIR INFORMATION below).

Participants wanting to avoid the risk of misconnecting and/or desiring more time in New Zealand may consider spending the night of December 18 in Dunedin or Auckland and departing for home on or after December 19. Upon request, VENT will be happy to assist with these arrangements.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 12 participants. However, VENT reserves the right to increase the tour limit by one in order to accommodate a couple when only one space is available.

TOUR LEADERS: Dion Hobcroft with the assistance of a local leader



Dion Hobcroft has been working for VENT since 2001. He has led many tours (more than 200) to Australia, New Guinea, New Zealand, Bhutan, Indonesia, India, China, Southwest Pacific, Philippines, Cambodia, Thailand, Malawi, Myanmar, Japan, Russia, Alaska, Tanzania, Uganda, Madagascar, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and the Antarctic. In 2007 and 2013–2019, 2021–2022 alone, Dion showed more than 2,000 species of birds to VENT clients. His informative, relaxed, and educational nature, combined with sharp eyes and ears, has established Dion as a favorite of many tour participants. His fieldwork for over 40 years on birds and other terrestrial vertebrates has allowed him to amass an extraordinary knowledge of the biodiversity in the Asia-Pacific region. Born in Tasmania and based in Sydney, Dion has traveled widely throughout Australasia, listing over 1,200 species, placing him in the top echelons of the region's

birders. He is very tuned-in to the songs of bird species in the Asia-Pacific region and specializes in rare and elusive species. He is delighted to show these skulking rarities to his travel companions. Dion has published several papers on field ornithology, served on national and state rare bird committees, managed *Birdline NSW*, run introduction to ornithology courses for Sydney University, and, before he traveled so continuously, was a popular speaker with various natural history societies. Dion has worked for many research and government agencies ranging from the Antarctic Division, Department of Environment NSW, Agriculture Protection WA, Taronga Zoo, Australian Museum, and the Queensland Department of Primary Industry. Dion lives in Sydney with his wife, Lise, and two children, Grace (age 22) and Daniel (age 18).

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is **\$9,895** per person in double occupancy from Auckland (tour ends in Dunedin). This includes all meals from lunch on Day 3 to breakfast on Day 19 and lodging as stated in the itinerary, along with ground and boat transportation and guide services provided by the tour leader(s). The tour fee does not include airfare from your home to Auckland and return from Dunedin, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$1,145**. 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.

Note that this fee does not cover nor guarantee single accommodations at the Kapiti Island Lodge (Day 8), where bunkhouse-style bedding will be provided and Kaka Retreat (Days 16 and 17), where you may be asked to share a two or three-bedroom unit with a shared bath and living room. However, if available at either location, single accommodations will be provided at no additional cost (see **ACCOMMODATIONS** section below).

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

PAYMENTS: All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 150 days (July 3, 2024) prior to the tour departure date.

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES: In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

CANCELLATION & REFUNDS:

Cancellation by Participant:

Refunds, if any, for any cancellation by a participant are made according to the following schedule: If participant cancels 180 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$500** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months from the date of participant tour cancellation, 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.

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

TRAVEL INSURANCE: To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit. VENT has partnered with Redpoint Travel Protection as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend 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/.

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

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

BAGGAGE: The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. Please consult your airline to find out specific weight restrictions. Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government’s attempts to improve airport security we recommend that you check the website of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for the most updated information: <http://www.tsa.gov/>.

ACCOMMODATIONS: All accommodations are the best available in each area; many are good quality hotels and inns with laundry facilities, irons, and in-room tea/coffee.

The Kapiti Island Lodge has several cabins, spacious walk-in tents and bunk rooms for accommodation. Bathrooms are a short walk from the rooms. Due to recently added rooms, we expect that all couples and pairs will each have their own room. Although single travelers should expect to be asked to share, single accommodations will be provided, if available, at no additional cost.

We believe the birding here—especially the chance to see Little Spotted Kiwi—makes an overnight visit a must. The Kapiti Island ferry departs from an ocean beach, the boat being reversed off a trailer. If the swell and wind direction are unfavorable, they cannot launch the boats. If we are cancelled by weather off Kapiti Island, we will spend the night in nearby Wellington and visit some conservation sanctuaries nearby.

At Kaka Retreat on Stewart Island, depending on group size and make-up, some participants may share a two or three-bedroom unit with a common living room and bathroom. Please note the rooms at Kaka Retreat are very good.

WALKING CONDITIONS-KIWIS: Most of the walks undertaken on this trip will be of short distance (less than a mile) with varying amounts of ups and downs. One exception to this will be the search for Rock Wren in Fiordland National Park. The Rock Wren lives in the alpine zone in boulder fields and usually on steep slopes. It is likely that an uphill walk through boulders on a well-formed trail will be involved in the search for this species, though it is rarely more than half a mile from the bus.

The night time walk for the kiwis is possibly difficult. We will be walking on trails to find the kiwi, but the trails can be muddy, especially after rain. The local guide will provide you with a flashlight. Sometimes kiwis are found rather quickly, but on occasion it has taken three or more hours to locate one. While this can be a lengthy outing, the likelihood of seeing New Zealand's most sought-after and unique endemics makes it worth the effort. All activities are optional and it is very easy to take any of the scheduled activities off if you so desire.

Searching for kiwis is quite a special skill. We can optimize our chances for success by wearing non-rustling clothing (no Gore-Tex), keeping very quiet and staying close together as a group. We normally find the kiwis by listening for them foraging on the forest floor, so being quiet is critical to success. Kiwis are also very sensitive to any strange noises, so this is another reason why being quiet is essential. Having said this, we have an excellent strike rate for seeing kiwis on this tour, as long as the weather co-operates.

Also be aware that in New Zealand in December, it often does not get dark until 10:00 p.m. or so and we cannot begin to start searching until it is completely dark.

ISLAND SANCTUARIES: Both Tiri Tiri and Kapiti Island are free of pests. The Department of Conservation requests all visitors to diligently check that their packs are free of any introduced pests and seeds and that your boots are clean so that no weeds are transported to these special islands.

ISLAND STAYS: On Kapiti Island and Stewart Island we will store our excess luggage in a secure site in a waterproof luggage trailer and only take over what we will need for the night or nights. Please bring a daypack for this purpose.

CLOTHING: We will be visiting New Zealand in the austral summer and thus can expect cool morning temperatures but warmer days. Warm clothing is advised for the pelagic trips, as chilly winds are always possible. Raingear is essential as well, **including waterproof pants**, which can on occasion be very useful. **Footwear brought into New Zealand should be clean of mud and vegetation, as customs officers will pay careful attention to this.** Casual dress is the norm.

CURRENCY: New Zealand Dollar (NZD). Exchange facilities are available throughout New Zealand. MasterCard, American Express and Visa are widely accepted. Automatic teller machines are widely available and offer the best exchange rates. Check your card logo against the machine and don't forget your pin number and to keep your pin secure!

DOCUMENTS: In addition to a passport valid for at least three months beyond your planned length of stay, a **New Zealand Electronic Travel Authority (NZeTA)** is required for U.S. and Canadian citizens to enter New Zealand. These can be obtained for a fee via the link below. Non-U.S. and Canadian citizens should check with their local consulate/embassy for instructions. <https://nzeta.immigration.govt.nz/>

EQUIPMENT: You should have a pair of binoculars that are in good condition, along with a day pack (good for carrying books, sunscreen, camera, etc.). Your tour leader will have a spotting scope; however, you are welcome and encouraged to bring your own if you so wish. Other items that will be useful are a hat and sunscreen for sun protection, small flashlight or headlamp, alarm clock, and a small amount of non-spray insect repellent (any commercial product containing DEET in high concentrations is helpful). Insects are generally not a problem, though sand flies may be a nuisance in Fiordland National Park. Water is potable everywhere in New Zealand. Please bring your own water bottle on our daily excursions. All food and vegetables are safe.

PLEASE NOTE: Food products **CANNOT** be brought into New Zealand.

HEALTH: Tour participants are advised to contact their physicians for advice regarding medications to prevent seasickness on the pelagic trips. We take a number of pelagic trips on this tour and it is important to be medicated if you suffer from seasickness. Water is drinkable from the tap virtually everywhere in New Zealand and it is a very healthy country.

VENT follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccinations.

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

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

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

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

- DEET (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide): A chemical compound that is marketed under various brand names (OFF!®, Cutter™, Ultrathon™, etc.) and offered in a variety of formulations including sprays, lotions, time-release preparations, and disposable wipes. The formulations will state a percentage of the active ingredient DEET on the packaging. DEET may be applied to exposed skin directly and/or sprayed on clothing. Please be careful when applying DEET as it can damage plastics and lens coatings.
- Picaridin: A synthetic formulation that is derived from piperine, a substance found in plants that produce black pepper.

- Herbal insect repellents: Various mixtures of organic ingredients such as oils from eucalyptus, citronella, cedar, and other herbs. The herbal repellents are more difficult to categorize because of the difference in ingredients from one brand to another. There is considerable variation in their effectiveness.

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

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

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

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

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

INTERNET: Expect Wi-Fi to be available in all locations except Kapiti Island.

MISCELLANEOUS:

- Departure Tax - included in ticket price
- Electricity - 240 volts
- Language - English
- Time - 17 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time

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.

Primary Field Guides:

Heather, Barrie D. and Hugh Robertson. *The Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, (most recent edition).

Scofield, P and Stephenson, B. *Birds of New Zealand: A Photographic Guide*. Auckland University Press, 2013.

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that tips are not expected and are entirely optional. Tips should be given directly to your tour leader; they should not be sent to the VENT office.

RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc., a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, “VENT”) act only as agents for the participant in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity

which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

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

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

VENT reserves the right to cancel any tour prior to departure. 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. Notwithstanding the foregoing, VENT will not provide any participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to any 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, when and to the extent such failure or delay is caused by or results from acts beyond VENT's control, including, without limitation, the following force majeure events: (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 in effect on or after the date of the scheduled tour; (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.

If a participant cancels any tour or any portion of a tour, VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by any participant (see VENT Registration & Deposit policy and Cancellation & Refunds policy contained in the itinerary). Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on February 21, 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. If a participant is removed from a tour, such participant will be responsible for any expenses associated with such removal, including but not limited to, transportation, lodging, airfare and meals, and VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any such removed 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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