



SOUTH FLORIDA & THE KEYS

APRIL 19–27, 2025

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The great pointed paw of the state of Florida, familiar as the map of North America itself, of which it is the most noticeable appendage, thrusts south, farther south than any other part of the mainland of the United States. Between the shining aquamarine waters of the Gulf of Mexico and the roaring deep-blue waters of the north-surging Gulf Stream, the shaped land points toward Cuba and the Caribbean. It points toward and touches within one degree of the tropics.

— Marjory Stoneman Douglas



The incomparably graceful Swallow-tailed Kite graces South Florida skies in the spring. © Rafael Gálvez

*Marjory Stoneman Douglas thus described Florida in her 1947 classic, **The Everglades: River of Grass**. In many ways, the passage is a perfect description of the geographic uniqueness of the state. It is the “youngest” region of the lower 48 states, geologically speaking, having achieved its current appearance a mere 4,000 years ago. During the Pleistocene epoch, the northern and central tiers of the continent were periodically covered with great sheets of ice. As the ice packs repeatedly grew and then shrunk, sea levels rose and fell. Ancient shorelines characterize the south-central part of Florida; in contrast, the southeastern mainland, where the land meets the Atlantic, is mainly formed by limestone, which creates the Atlantic coastal ridge, only 24 feet above sea level. The Keys (a corruption of the Spanish “cayo,” meaning island) are also a result of rising and falling sea levels. Back when sea levels were higher, shallow, warm water spread over the area where the Keys currently lie. With the main barrier reef situated along the edge of the continental shelf to the west, protected waters in the back-reef zone were a perfect medium for the development of a patch reef system. The present Florida Keys later solidified as sea levels dropped and the reefs became exposed.*

This fascinating region is not only rich in geologic history but is also one of the most biologically unique parts of North America. Not surprisingly, several bird species are found nowhere else in the

United States. On this tour, we'll confine our efforts to the southernmost portions of Florida, ranging from the Palm Beaches east of Okeechobee, through Miami to Everglades National Park, and the Florida Keys all the way to Key West. We'll focus on finding a variety of specialty birds including Magnificent Frigatebird, "Great White" Heron, Roseate Spoonbill, Snail and Swallow-tailed kites, Purple Gallinule, Limpkin, Mangrove Cuckoo, White-crowned Pigeon, Gray Kingbird, Black-whiskered Vireo, "Golden" Yellow Warbler, and "Cape Sable" Seaside Sparrow. We will also spend a morning searching for some of the many exotic species that have become established in the Miami area, particularly Gray-headed Swamphen, Red-masked and Yellow-chevroned parakeets, Red-whiskered Bulbul, Common Myna, and Spot-breasted Oriole. Late April is also peak season for northbound songbird migrants, and proper weather conditions could produce a spectacular fallout at any number of locations on our tour route. And there is always the chance for a vagrant from the Bahamas or West Indies. Recent trips during this season have produced La Sagra's Flycatcher, Bahama Mockingbird, Thick-billed Vireo, Bananaquit, and Western Spindalis.

This tour may be combined with Dry Tortugas (April 27-30, 2025).

April 19, Day 1: Arrival in Key West. Participants should plan to arrive in Key West this afternoon and take the complementary shuttle to our hotel where a room will be reserved in your name. We recommend that you consider arriving as early as possible, or even on April 18, to offset travel fatigue and/or potential travel delays. Upon request, the VENT office will assist with any additional lodging arrangements. The group will meet in the hotel lobby at 5:00 p.m. for a get-acquainted dinner and orientation.

NIGHT: Doubletree Grand Key Resort, Key West

April 20, Day 2: The Florida Keys. As a group, the Keys are composed of many plant community types that represent chance colonizations by hundreds of different species, many of West Indian origin. The Upper and Middle Keys are mostly tropical hardwood hammocks bordered by mangroves. The hammocks contain a wide diversity of trees, including mahogany, tamarind, figs, palms, and Gumbo Limbo, that striking tree with the thin bark, burnt red in color. In comparison to the Upper and Middle Keys, the Lower Keys reveal a pronounced change in the soil and vegetation, with the ground less compact and far sandier.



Two regional specialties - left: Gray Kingbird; right: White-crowned Pigeon © Rafael Gálvez

Some of the birds we encounter here are species more typical of the Caribbean basin, whose ranges barely extend to the Keys. Others exist here in forms slightly different from their mainland relatives. We'll especially be on the lookout for White-crowned Pigeon, Mangrove Cuckoo, Gray Kingbird, Black-whiskered Vireo, the "Keys" White-eyed Vireo, the "Mangrove" Prairie Warbler, the distinctive "Golden" Yellow Warbler – a race associated with the West Indies that ranges into the Keys, and the Caribbean "Ridgway's" Osprey, which has a very pale plumage and nearly all-white head.

We may start our day at dawn looking for Antillean Nighthawk, if we did not look for it the night before. These birds are typically a challenge to find in late April, but they are a localized summer resident here and elsewhere in the Lower Keys. Several parks in Key West, such as Fort Zachary Taylor State Park, Indigenous Park, and the Botanical Gardens offer great stopover habitat for migratory birds. We'll be sure to check one of these sites, for if the weather is advantageous, these are where a fallout could take place. Black-throated Blue, Cape May, Blackpoll and several other warbler species are typical at this time of year. We'll then begin to explore some of the forested areas as we travel towards the mainland, with possible stops at Sugarloaf Key and other locations where a primary target will be Mangrove Cuckoo, a shy and furtive species that often proves difficult to find. At Big Pine Key, we'll be entering both the Great White Heron National Wildlife Refuge and the National Key Deer Refuge. By driving on the side roads, we may be able to spot one of the endangered Key Deer, a diminutive version of the White-tailed Deer. In our travels, we should come across a few Great White Herons, Reddish Egrets, and several sandpiper and plover species along the mangrove-lined lagoons and shallow bays.

As we island-hop northward, our journey will take us along the route of the former Overseas Railroad, which Henry Flagler began building in 1904 to connect the mainland to Key West. Construction was completed in 1912 and required 43 bridges. The line was later destroyed by a hurricane in 1935, and by 1938 the railroad had been converted to the Overseas Highway.

NIGHT: TownePlace Suites by Marriott, Homestead

April 21, Day 3: Miami Exotics to Big Cypress Snail Kites. During the first half of the day we will traverse through the bustle of Miami, its neighborhoods and parks in search of a variety of established introduced species. During the second half of the day, we will head west along the Tamiami Trail to look for Snail Kites, Limpkins and other marsh birds along the periphery of Big Cypress National Preserve.



Red-whiskered Bulbul © Rafael Gálvez

As we travel north into Miami from Homestead, we will explore the mangrove forests of Biscayne National Park and adjacent wetlands. Here we will have another opportunity to find Mangrove Cuckoo, “Mangrove” Prairie Warbler, Black-whiskered Vireo, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron and other water birds. We may also see Caribbean Cave Swallows flying overhead as well as migratory raptors. Where cities have increasingly replaced natural habitats in South Florida, there are numerous free-flying, introduced and established bird species. All these exotics have been introduced, either intentionally or as escaped cagebirds, and their populations range along a spectrum from widely established, to only locally marginal. Our morning will be spent searching the Greater Miami area for some of the many exotics that occur in these suburban parks and yards. We will naturally pursue those species considered “countable,” but almost anything is possible. We’ll especially focus on Red-whiskered Bulbul (established since the 1960s), Spot-breasted Oriole (present since the 1940s), Common Myna (since the 1980s) and Egyptian Goose (since the 1980s). Our searches should also turn up Monk, Mitred, Red-masked and Yellow-chevroned parakeets, Lilac-crowned and Orange-winged parrots, and Chestnut-fronted Macaws. Other interesting finds might include Hill Myna, Muscovy Duck, Nanday Parakeet and an assortment of other exotics. As we explore suburban Miami, we will find a number of native species including Red-bellied Woodpecker, Boat-tailed Grackle, and Fish Crow as well as migratory songbirds including warblers, tanagers and vireos. We will also keep an eye on the hotlines—if any rarities are present in the Miami area, we will make an earnest effort to search for them.

NIGHT: TownePlace Suites by Marriott, Homestead

April 22, Day 4: Everglades National Park.

There are no other Everglades in the world. They are, they have always been, one of the unique regions of the Earth, remote, never wholly known. Nothing anywhere else is like them: their vast glittering openness, wider than the enormous visible round of the horizon, the racing free saltiness and sweetness of their massive winds, under the dazzling blue heights of space... The miracle of the light pours over the green and brown expanse of saw grass and of water, shining and slow-moving below, the grass and water that is the meaning and the central fact of the Everglades of Florida. It is a river of grass.

Marjory Stoneman Douglas, *The Everglades: River of Grass*

When Marjory Douglas’s book appeared in 1947, it brought to center stage the one-of-a-kind nature that is the Everglades. The name “Everglades” evokes images of wildness and untamable land. For many, the Everglades *is* Florida.

The east coast of Florida is slightly elevated. The Everglades, lying to the west on almost flat land, act like a trough for tremendous amounts of water flowing south. Because the limestone substrate declines in elevation so gradually, the flow of water is almost imperceptible. Water must travel 12 miles to lose a foot of elevation. In its natural state, water supplies to the Everglades were sustained by torrential thunderstorms over central Florida and Lake Okeechobee. As the water slowly made its way south, it spread out in a great swath, forming a broad, shallow, grass-clogged river to the sea. Marjory Douglas coined the term, “river of grass,” miles and miles of sawgrass prairie broken only by cypress swamps and hardwood hammocks.

The pristine Everglades is largely gone now. Massive projects to drain South Florida, which began in the late 1800s, have proven so effective that the natural flow of water has been severely disrupted: the construction of the Hoover dike around Lake Okeechobee, the channeling of the Kissimmee River, and the crisscrossing of canals north of the park. Some say the park is on life support. There is room for optimism, however, with the \$7.8 billion Everglades Restoration Plan, which is intended to restore some of the natural water flow.



The enigmatic Mangrove Cuckoo is one of the most-sought after and challenging breeders to find. © Rafael Gálvez

Despite the flat, uniform appearance of the Everglades, it holds a variety of natural communities, each showing distinctive plant and animal life. Some of these habitats occur nowhere else in the United States and are closely associated with the Caribbean. We will work along the length of the park, exploring West Indian hardwood hammocks, pine rocklands, sawgrass prairie, mangrove forests, and the shallows of Florida Bay, which composes a third of the national park. For plant enthusiasts, we will not miss opportunities to stop and admire the abundance of plants that thrive here yet are unfamiliar to most North Americans, such as Gumbo Limbo, Blolly, Pond Apple, Poisonwood, Strangler Fig, Tetrazygia, Buttonwood and many others. The diversity of bromeliads alone will thrill anyone with the slightest botanical interest. As many as seven *Tillandsia* species can be found in a single West Indian Mahogany tree. In terms of fauna, the Everglades hold many possibilities, including a broad assortment of wading birds and several specialties.

Very early this morning we will head out to the sawgrass prairie in search of one of the most iconic birds of the glades—and one of the continent’s most imperiled songbirds—the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow. It is imperative to arrive at their territories while they are singing during the first hours of daylight. After that, we may head to the pine rocklands, which host a variety of woodpecker species and other woodland birds. Here we will look for the “White-eyed” Eastern Towhee, for Brown-headed Nuthatches and Pine Warblers. Mangrove rookeries will host Wood Storks, Roseate Spoonbills, White-crowned Pigeons and many others. Along the shores of Florida Bay, we will look for the imposing Great White Heron, Reddish Egrets, as many as six tern species, shorebirds, pelicans and raptors. We will be keen to look for Shiny Cowbirds, Mangrove Cuckoos, Black-whiskered Vireos and other specialties.

The agricultural areas outside of the Everglades will give us a chance at finding a number of flycatcher species including Gray, Western and Eastern kingbirds. Scissor-tailed Flycatcher and Tropical Kingbird can sometimes be found there too. We will be keen on searching for Bronzed Cowbirds to complete the “cowbird trifecta.” As we traverse the open expanses towards the regional airport in hopes of Burrowing Owls, we may see localized White-tailed Kites and Sandhill Cranes, Eastern Meadowlarks and Loggerhead Shrikes.



A Wood Stork parent bringing drinking water to its chick © Rafael Gálvez

Considering our early morning starts, we will be returning to the hotel after lunch for a mid-afternoon rest. For those interested, we will have an optional return to the Everglades at dusk to look for owls, nightjars and other crepuscular critters. As we search the pinelands for specialties, Common Nighthawk may be engaged in their signature sonic boom displays overhead. We will then enter Chuck-will's-widow territory in hopes of displaying males singing and wing-clapping at last light. As night falls, we have chances of encountering a number of owl species including Eastern Screech, Barn, Barred and Great Horned. The area we will be exploring is also one of the best for the extremely rare and endangered Florida Panther.

NIGHT: TownePlace Suites by Marriott, Homestead

April 23, Day 5: To Palm Beach – Limpkins and Wading Bird Nestlings. With our bags packed and loaded, we will drive north from Homestead to Palm Beach County, where we will visit a set of freshwater wetlands that host the rookeries of many species. The boardwalks at Wakodahatchee Wetlands and Green Cay allow us to get extremely close to Pond Apple islands where Wood Storks, Great Blue, Tricolored and Green herons, Great and Cattle egrets, Glossy Ibises, Anhingas, Double-crested and even Neotropic cormorants build their nests and care for their young. At this time of the year there will be plenty of chicks for us to admire at close proximity and watch them interact with their parents. The views and proximity to birds we will get are unrivalled, and visits to these wetlands are often a favorite experience by tour participants. These marshes are also great for Least Bitterns, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Black-necked Stilt and others. We will also search for Purple Gallinules, which can be quite bold here, and for their larger cousins, the charismatic Gray-headed Swampshens.



Roseate Spoonbill © Rafael Gálvez

In the afternoon, we may drive out to nearby Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge. The wetlands there may hold Limpkins, Snail Kites, Mottled Ducks and shorebirds. This can also be a great area for a diversity of wading birds such as Roseate Spoonbill, night-herons and others. The beautiful boardwalk trail through Baldcypress habitat offers intimate views into a unique habitat teeming with bromeliads and other epiphytes, and host to Pileated Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, wintering warblers and vireos, and maybe even the southernmost population of Tufted Titmice. If time allows, we will drive out to the coast and check Spanish River Park for migrants, and possibly Spot-breasted Oriole.

NIGHT: TownePlace Suites by Marriott, Boynton Beach

April 24, Day 6: Sand Scrub and Pine Flatwoods - Florida Scrub-Jays and Bachman's Sparrow. Early this morning we will drive north to Martin County to visit the habitats of two of Florida's most imperiled species. The drive is about an hour long, and it is important that we leave early. Along Pine Flatwoods we will search for Bachman's Sparrows, a species that has experienced steady declines throughout its southeastern range yet persists in pinelands with palmetto understory. Then we will visit Sand Scrub habitat in hopes of finding the state's sole endemic bird species, the Florida Scrub-Jay. This beautiful and curious bird is listed as "threatened" because of its very restricted range, limited to a habitat that has been greatly reduced and under constant threat of development, composed of inland sand ridges and a stunted xeric plant community.

In the afternoon, we will visit open prairies and vast wetlands in the interior. We will search for Sandhill Cranes and Crested Caracara at Kitching Creek Preserve. It is a great area to see wading birds, Bald Eagle, Osprey, "South Florida" Red-shouldered Hawk – which is much paler than its northern counterpart, and America Kestrel. We will keep an eye on the sky for migrating Short-tailed Hawks, returning to their Central Florida breeding grounds from the Keys or the Everglades. As we continue towards the southwest, we will cross through some of Florida's largest ranches where raptors, waders, American Alligator, Yellow-bellied Slider and several other reptile species are possible. We may also opt to stop at the Jones Hungryland Wildlife Environmental Area, a protected, wildlife-rich reserve of wet prairies and marshes. Back at Palm Beach County, we may opt for visiting the afternoon roost of wading birds at Loxahatchee, or try our luck back at Spanish River Park.



Florida Scrub-Jay, the state's sole endemic bird species © Rafael Gálvez

NIGHT: TownePlace Suites by Marriott, Boynton Beach

April 25, Day 7: South to the Keys along the Miami Coast. We will have a leisurely morning exploring either Green Cay or Wakodahatchee Wetlands. If there are any birds we may have missed in the area, such as Snail Kite, we may return to Loxahatchee, or try our luck one more time for Spot-breasted Oriole. We will then start a slow return to the Florida Keys, stopping at a few locations along the way for new birding opportunities if time allows.

Some of the stops could include coastal parks in the Palm Beaches, Broward or Miami Dade. However, the focus will remain to make it back to the Keys at a reasonable time. Possibilities include the northernmost barrier island off Biscayne Bay, along the coast of Miami – Key Biscayne. We will aim to arrive at Marathon by mid-afternoon, for dinner. We may have an optional opportunity to go birding after dinner .

NIGHT: Fairfield Inn & Suites Florida Keys, Marathon

April 26, Day 8: Return to Key West. Our final day will be a flexible one, dictated by the species we have yet to see. We will likely revisit a favorite site or two, particularly in the Florida Keys as we make our way south. If migration is strong, we may stop at Dagny Johnson Botanical State Park in Key Largo or revisit Fort Zachary Taylor State Park. Our final dinner will be in Key West.

NIGHT: Doubletree Grand Key Resort, Key West

April 27, Day 9: Departure for Home or Begin Dry Tortugas. Participants not continuing on to the Dry Tortugas (April 27-30, 2024) may depart Key West at any time today. Those continuing on to the Dry Tortugas have the morning and afternoon at leisure to enjoy Key West before convening for dinner and transfer to the marina.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 12 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: Rafael Galvez (a second leader will be added if group size warrants)



Rafael Gálvez has been birding and illustrating birds since childhood, a dual passion that developed when his family moved from Peru to South Florida. Always with a sketchpad in hand, he has traveled throughout the U.S., Latin America, and Eurasia in pursuit of birds. He served several years as a board member of the BirdLife International affiliate in the Republic of Georgia, developing educational and conservation programs. He gained knowledge of the Caucasus region while directing a series of records and documentary shorts on the ancient chants of the Georgian nation. During that period he also produced retrospective books and catalogs on the works of Russian realist painters. He has combined his love of art, education, and birds while collaborating in several publications, including a field guide to *Raptors and Owls of Georgia (Caucasus)*, which he illustrated and coauthored. After working with raptor research along the

Black Sea, he returned to South Florida to spearhead a new phase for the Florida Keys Hawkwatch migration monitoring project, where he has participated as director. As chair of citizen science and IBA monitoring at Tropical Audubon Society in Miami, he has reached out to underserved communities by providing opportunities for the greater appreciation of birds and Florida habitats. You can find some of his latest sketches and articles about painting in the field at his blog, GalvezBirds.com.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for this tour is **\$4,895** per person in double occupancy from Key West. This includes all food from dinner on Day 1 to dinner on Day 8, all lodging for eight nights during the tour, ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare to and from Key West, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$1,040**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, the deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at <https://ventbird.com>) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

PAYMENTS: All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 150 days prior to the tour departure date (November 20, 2024).

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 \$250*
179 to 151 days before departure date	No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance of the tour fee will be refunded
150 days or less before departure date	No refund available

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

Cancellation by VENT:

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

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

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

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

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

*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.

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BAGGAGE: As space in the vehicles is limited, please restrict your luggage to one medium-sized bag and one carry-on bag. If you are also on the Dry Tortugas tour, you will find soft-sided baggage to be vastly more convenient.

INTERNET AVAILABILITY: Wi-Fi is offered at all hotels on this tour.

GENERAL INFORMATION: If you are combining South Florida & The Keys with the Dry Tortugas, we suggest that you use a small or medium-sized duffel, etc., in which you can carry items needed only on the boat. Extra luggage may be stored in Key West.

Springtime in Florida offers generally warm, sunny, and pleasant weather, although afternoons can be muggy. Rain—particularly in the form of an afternoon shower—is a distinct possibility. Your main considerations when choosing clothes should be avoiding overexposure to the sun and staying cool. The Florida sun can be intense and participants who are especially sensitive to sun exposure should take all necessary precautions. Every so often, an unusually dry season can make for unusually hot weather in the 90s, so prepare accordingly. A light-weight, long-sleeved shirt and some cool field trousers are recommended. A light windbreaker and a sweatshirt or sweater may come in handy for early morning or nighttime excursions. You should also bring sunglasses and a sun hat, preferably one that will not easily blow off.

Sneakers or other comfortable walking shoes are good footwear. Bring a rain jacket or poncho. A small travel alarm clock will be useful.

TOUR LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY:

A mix of early and mid-mornings, mostly mid-afternoon returns but also a couple of longer days, an optional nocturnal venture, short hikes, and easy access to sites. This is a relatively short tour, with seven full days packed with birding. We will be covering a lot of ground by vehicle across a wide range of habitats. Most of the birding will take place within close proximity to the vehicles, on well-maintained trails, roadsides and boardwalks. Some mornings will start at 5:00 a.m. in order to get to important sites at first light, while others may be later starts, allowing us to rest. There will be some long drives. During some instances, we will be returning to the hotel late in the afternoon, prior to dinner. On the fourth day, we will have a mid-afternoon break for those that need some rest, with the option of going back out “owling” in the evening.

PACKING LIST:

- **Protection against insects:** If you are susceptible to insect bites (mosquitos and/or sand fleas), please apply repellent ahead of our meeting time. Spraying your clothes prior to wearing them is a good strategy.
- **Footwear:** We will not be walking far from the vans in general, but the ground surfaces may be gravelly, rocky or uneven. At some locations we will visit throughout this tour, the ground may have puddles or standing rain or tidal water. It is a good idea to wear comfortable shoes with good soles, that you don't mind getting wet. We strongly recommend wearing a pair of water shoes or closed toe "amphibian" sandals that protect your feet, strap on tight, dry quickly, and expose the least amount of skin. We strongly discourage you from wearing flip-flops or any other form of open-toe sandals, shorts or short sleeves.
- **Protect your skin:** Your first protection against the sun and nuisance insects is exposing less skin. Light, ventilated, long-sleeved shirts and long pants are strongly recommended, particularly those with UV protection.
- At times, it may be dark by the time we climb back into the vans, so you may want to bring a **day pack with a small flashlight**.
- **Sun protection:** In addition to long-sleeved shirts and long pants with UV protection, please bring a hat, sunblock lotion and sunglasses. The sun will be strong in South Florida at this time of year, and considering we will often be close to water, it will be bouncing and reflecting on us from various angles. Without protection, getting a bad sunburn is a likely possibility.
- **Weather preparation:** We can expect temperatures up to the mid or high 80s, with dips into the low 70s or upper 60s. Humidity in the Keys may be up to 75%, and 60% at interior mainland locations. Clouds and rains come and go quickly through this region. Rain is possible at any moment. A rain-proof windbreaker and a light sweater are a good idea to bring. Weather is always difficult to predict in South Florida with accuracy, and temperatures and humidity may be higher than anticipated.
- **A small backpack or daypack:** It is a good idea to bring some kind of small bag to pack your things during our daily outings, including the following:

- Consider carrying a small refillable water bottle with you to reduce waste. We will have water jugs with us at all times to refill your bottles.
- As mentioned above, a small flashlight or headlamp will come handy. We are planning a couple of outings early in the morning or after dark.
- Don't forget your optical equipment - binoculars, camera, chargers, and batteries, etc. The guide(s) will bring scope(s) to share with the group, so you will not need to bring a scope.

Biting insects and similar pests can be a problem for some, especially mosquitoes in mangroves and coastal marshes. Chiggers are rarely found in the area, as are deer ticks, but neither usually presents problems. Your best defense against all of these is a good repellent.

Venomous snakes do occur in the area; however, none of our activities involve lengthy hikes or foot travel outside of maintained trails so we will probably not encounter any.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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.

Brock, Jim P. and Kenn Kaufman. *Butterflies of North America (Kaufman Focus Guides)*. Houghton Mifflin Co, 2003.

Douglas, Marjory Stoneman. *The Everglades—River of Grass*. Pineapple Press, 1997 (Reprint of the 1947 edition).

Dunkle, Sidney W. *Dragonflies Through Binoculars: A Field Guide to Dragonflies of North America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Dunn, Jon and Jonathan Alderfer. *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. Seventh edition. Washington, D. C.: National Geographic Society, 2017. Effectively shows all West Indian strays as well.

Glassberg, Jeffrey. *Butterflies Through Binoculars: Florida*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Kaufman, Kenn. *Kaufman Field Guide to Birds of North America*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.

Sibley, David Allen. *The Sibley Guide to Birds. Second Edition*. New York: Knopf, 2014.

Toops, Connie and Willard E. Dilley. *Birds of South Florida. An Interpretive Guide*. Conway, Arkansas: River Road Press, 1986. Very good update on south Florida birdlife. Out of print, but still widely available online.

Zim, H.S. *A Guide to Everglades National Park and the Nearby Florida Keys*. A Golden Guide. New York: Golden Press, 1960. Very useful introduction to this region. Out of print, but still widely available online.

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely

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

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

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

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

VENT reserves the right to cancel any tour prior to departure with or without cause or good reason. See the VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy set forth above. Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect July 1, 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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