



VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

ITINERARY

**VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS
PRESENTS**

TOTALLY SPAIN SOLAR ECLIPSE

BIRDS, CULTURE & AN AMAZING CELESTIAL EVENT

AUGUST 8–17, 2026

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Total solar eclipse © Brian Gibbons

Spain has long been known as a birder's paradise, and VENT has offered tours across the Iberian Peninsula for many years. In 2026, VENT returns to the northwestern part of this immensely varied country to witness a very special event, a total eclipse of the sun. Our time together in Spain will be marked by excellent birding and cultural and culinary experiences, all shared with a congenial band of 42 participants and a superb team of leaders including Barry Lyon, Brian Gibbons, Rick Wright, Virgilio Beltrán Jorda, and expert local guides.

For the eclipse itself, VENT has reserved the entirety of a winery in southern León, where we will enjoy dinner and the vineyard's wines before turning our attention to the skies. VENT is pleased to feature Rob Broeren, an expert astronomer and skilled communicator, who will deliver informative presentations on advances in the general field of astronomy and on the mechanics of the solar eclipse. Rob will likewise be our expert guide for sessions with a solar telescope, and of course, he will provide interpretation throughout the eclipse on August 12.



European Bee-eaters © Javier E. Pozo

Those who wish will be birding for part of every day at sites ranging from Madrid's Casa de Campo to the dry steppe surrounding León and the sheer mountainsides and lush coastal wetlands of Asturias. Even those who have made many trips to Spain may be surprised by how varied Iberia's northwest is. We will be hoping for encounters with many of the peninsula's special birds, among them European Bee-eater, Eurasian Hoopoe, Common Kingfisher, Egyptian and Bearded (Lammergeier) vultures, Spotless Starling, and "the Iberians": Iberian Green Woodpecker, Iberian Gray Shrike, and Iberian Chiffchaff. Mammals are, as usual, more difficult to see, but the mountains of Asturias offer reasonable chances at Chamois or Western Spanish Ibex. We will also have the chance to visit some of Spain's most treasured historic sites, including the Gothic cathedrals of León and Oviedo. There will

be an option for further cultural outings, including a visit to the marvelously preserved throne room of a pre-Romanesque palace.

We have carefully structured this tour program to take full advantage of the astronomical, cultural, and natural historical riches of the region, and to offer opportunities to make new friendships on our field trips and during our evening social hours and meals. We are sure that you will take away fond memories of every aspect of this unrepeatable event.

Please note that the timing of celestial events and of Spanish meals alike is out of our hands. Many of our activities are optional, and we have scheduled a fair amount of free time during this tour, but guests who want to take part in all of our planned activities should be prepared for at least one late evening followed by a departure as early as 6:45 the next morning.

August 8–9, Days 1–2: Departure for Madrid; arrival and welcome. Participants will depart the USA on August 8 and arrive in Madrid on the morning of August 9 at Adolfo Suárez Madrid-Barajas Airport (airport code MAD). Most flights from the United States arrive in Madrid in the morning hours. Upon arrival, please proceed outside of the baggage claim area, where you will be met by a representative of our ground operator who will provide transportation to the **Villa Real Hotel**, where a room has been reserved in your name.

After checking in, you will have the afternoon on your own for rest or exploration. Our five-star hotel is located in the geographic and cultural heart of Madrid, on the Plaza de las Cortes across from the Spanish Parliament. Exceptional service combines with a magnificent setting in an immaculately maintained Hapsburg-era building, decorated with Roman mosaics and Greek vases. Here in the center of the historic city's Museum Triangle, all of Madrid is at our doorstep. The Museo del Prado, one of the world's truly great art collections, is a seven-minute walk from our spacious rooms, and both the Botanical Garden and the Jardines del Retiro (where the Iberian Green Woodpecker can be found) are no more than 12 minutes away on foot.

Many participants may decide to arrive a day or more before the start of our event to take advantage of those and the many other attractions of the Spanish capital, or simply to have a little more time to relax after the international flight. If you would like help in planning an early arrival, the VENT office will be happy, given sufficient notice, to offer assistance in making the necessary reservations and arrangements.

We will gather for the first time as a group in the hotel this evening at 6:00 p.m. for a social hour hosted by the VENT staff. The meeting location will be announced in the pre-tour departure memo you'll receive about two weeks before the start of the tour. Over complimentary drinks and dinner, we will greet old friends and make new acquaintances as we discuss the exciting events we have planned for our time in Spain.

NIGHTS: Aboard international flight (August 8)
Villa Real Hotel, Madrid (August 9)

August 10, Day 3: Birding the Casa de Campo and on to León. After a buffet breakfast in our hotel, we will check out and drive twenty minutes to the Casa de Campo, Madrid's prime urban birding locality. This first brief taste of Spanish birding should introduce us to several common and colorful tits and finches, and we will be on the lookout for such local specialties as Iberian Green Woodpecker or Sardinian Warbler;

overhead, a Cinereous Vulture, Eurasian Griffon, Eurasian Goshawk—recently re-split from the American bird—or a Red Kite could also make an appearance.



Iberian Green Woodpecker © Luis Garcia

We expect to spend about two hours birding this morning, then set off for León, the venerable capital of the province of the same name. We will break the 3-1/2-hour drive for lunch en route, probably arriving in León around 4:00 p.m. After checking in to our hotel, you will have time for a rest. Over the next two days, there will be opportunities for guided visits to some of the many historical, architectural, and cultural treasures of this vibrant 2,200-year-old city.

The elegant façade of the four-star Hotel Plaza Mayor, originally built as a noble villa in the eighteenth century, welcomes guests to comfortable rooms and public spaces featuring elegant and stylish design. The fine restaurant offers a lavish breakfast and dinners that add an international flair to traditional Mediterranean and Spanish dishes, including vegetarian creations. Amenities include a workout room, bar, air conditioning, laundry service, and free wi-fi throughout the hotel.

The hotel stands just 50 yards from the city's famous Gothic cathedral. The fourteenth-century Palacio de Conde Luna and the Castle Gate, the oldest entrance to the city through its Roman and medieval walls, are an easy walk across the pedestrian zone of the main square. Less than a mile away, León's Museum of Contemporary Art is housed in a structure that is itself a work of art, honored in 2007 with the Mies van der Rohe Prize of the European Union and recently featured in a Museum of Modern Art (New York) exhibition on the boldest architectural designs in Spain.

After a break in the hotel this afternoon, we will gather for a social hour with a cash bar, followed by dinner together in the hotel.



Cathedral of Leon © Luis Miguel Bugallo Sánchez

NIGHT: Hotel Plaza Mayor, León

August 11, Day 4: Excursions to the Villafáfila Wetlands, the Cantabrian Cordillera, or Historic León.

After breakfast, we will start out in three groups for the day's excursions. Parallel to visits to two excellent and very different birding destinations, you can choose to join a local cultural guide for a leisurely morning exploring the historic city. All three excursions will be offered both today and tomorrow. The birding groups will switch localities tomorrow morning so that all who wish to can visit both the wetlands and the mountain foothills. **Note that you are not bound to either birding or culture; if you wish, you can take part one day in a birding excursion and on the other join the cultural city tour.**

Our birding excursions today and tomorrow focus on two quite different habitats, the famous wetlands of Villafáfila and the high foothills of the Riaño area. Each of the two groups will visit one of these sites this morning, then switch destinations tomorrow morning so that everyone has the opportunity to experience both sites.

- **Excursion 1: Lagunas de Villafáfila. Depart 7:00 a.m., return ca. 3:00 p.m.** The famous wetlands of Villafáfila are an hour's drive south of León. By late summer, most of these lakes and ponds are often dry, but water levels are usually maintained by pumps at one or the other, most frequently

the Laguna de la Fuente. If water levels are right, we may come across a Garganey or Western Swamphen here, alongside a wide variety of other birds drawn to this scarce resource.



Great Bustards © Virgilio Beltrán Jorda

The lagunas themselves are surrounded by dry, barren steppe habitats. This area hosts the largest population of Great Bustards in the world, along with good numbers of Red-legged Partridges, White Storks, and a small population of Little Bustards. Eurasian Kestrels can be abundant, and in some villages, colonies of Lesser Kestrels can hold as many as sixty pairs. Calandra and Greater Short-toed Larks breed in variable numbers, and among the raptors we can hope to see Montagu's Harrier and Booted, Short-toed, Golden, or perhaps even Spanish Eagles. Other peninsular specialties we will be looking for here include Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Iberian Green Woodpecker, Spotless Starling, and Iberian Gray Shrike. Eurasian Hoopoes and European Bee-eaters can be fairly common.

We will return to León in time for lunch in a local restaurant, returning to the hotel around 3:00.

- **Excursion 2: The Cantabrian Foothills. Depart 6:45 am, return ca. 3:00 p.m.** Our other birding destination lies north of León, near the point where Castilla y León, Asturias, and Cantabria meet. The Riaño Mountains are part of the Cordillera Cantábrica, which runs like a spine through northernmost Spain. This wild range is known among natural historians worldwide for its mammals, including the delicate Chamois and the imposing Western Spanish Ibex. Rarer beasts are also present here, but seeing even one bear or wolf or wildcat in daylight would be almost a miracle.



Eurasian Griffons © Brian Gibbons

The area's birds are more reliable. Here, at elevations approaching 4,000 feet, we

have a chance at a nice variety of woodpeckers, among them Black and Middle Spotted. Eurasian Griffons and sometimes Egyptian Vultures may join Black Kites on the pastures, and eagles, hawks, and falcons hunt the skies. Higher up in the mountains, we could encounter Rock Buntings, Water Pipits, European Serins, or Eurasian Bullfinches.

We will return to León in time for lunch in a local restaurant, returning to the hotel around 3:00.

- **Cultural Excursion: Guided tour of historic León. Depart 9:00 a.m., return ca. 3:00 p.m.** Those who can tear themselves away from the region's birding delights will join a local tour guide to discover the cultural jewels of León, one of Spain's most historic and most attractive cities. León's city center preserves a number of architectural sites unequalled anywhere else in Spain. The Gothic cathedral, in the French style, dedicated to the Virgin, was completed in the fifteenth century after two centuries of construction; especially notable here is the vast amount of medieval stained glass still in situ, estimated at some 2,000 square feet. Four hundred years older, the nearby church of St. Isidore holds the relics of Archbishop Isidore of Seville (560–636), the most influential scholar of Visigothic Spain and the author of a short book on bird names. The church's royal mortuary chapel, resting place of the kings of León, is richly ornamented with beautiful Romanesque paintings and is popularly known as the Pulchra Leonina or the Spanish Sistine Chapel. Nearby Casa Botines is one of the very few buildings outside of Catalonia designed by Antonio Gaudí; the whimsy of its neo-Gothic forms and ornament neatly anticipates later developments in the art of this remarkable architect. Close by, the palace of the Guzman family was begun in the sixteenth century, but the entire extravagant plan was never completed. The palace now houses the government of the Region of León.

Lunch will be in a local restaurant, returning to the hotel around 3:00.



Casa Botines, Leon by Antonio Gaudí © Luis Miguel Bugallo Sánchez

After lunch, all three groups will return to the hotel for a brief break before we dive into the first of our astronomical activities, led by Rob Broeren. Weather permitting, we will visit the observatory of the local

astronomy club, where Rob will administer a solar telescope for us to safely view sunspots and other phenomena, a fitting introduction to the star player in tomorrow's eclipse. So that everyone has an opportunity to fully experience this activity, we will visit the observatory in 90-minute shifts, the first beginning at 4:00 and the second at 5:30 p.m.

We have not scheduled a formal social hour for this evening, though the hotel's bar is always open. Dinner together in the hotel at 7:30 will provide a chance for us to review the experiences of what is likely to have been a very rewarding day for all of us.

Although the day will be long, we will offer two post-dinner activities for those who want to take advantage of all that our program offers. Immediately after dinner, Rob will present a lecture, *Astronomy 101*, that offers a general overview of the night sky. Following his presentation, we will return to the observatory for a "star party," in which Rob will use the telescope to point out a number of outstanding features of the night sky. Rob's lecture will last from approximately 8:30–9:30 p.m. The star party will last from approximately 9:30 p.m.–12:30 a.m. (includes travel time).

NIGHT: Hotel Plaza Mayor, León

August 12, Day 5: Excursions to the Villafáfila Wetlands, the Cantabrian Cordillera, or Historic León. And a Total Solar Eclipse. This morning's plan is identical to yesterday's, with two birding destinations and a cultural option. Each of the two birding groups will visit the site they did not bird yesterday; the cultural group will make another excursion into León's historic city center.

After lunch in León, we will shift gears to concentrate on today's **total solar eclipse**, only the third to be seen from Europe this century. We will leave our hotel at 4:15 p.m. to drive to the winery of Bodegas Vitalis, about 45 minutes straight south of León. VENT has booked the entire winery for the evening, and the views to the west, given favorable skies, should be extremely good during the eclipse. While totality will be observable in this area, weather permitting, for about two minutes beginning at 8:29 p.m., the entire phenomenon, from first contact to totality to fourth contact, is nearly two hours in duration, ending at 9:22 p.m., about six minutes before sunset.

In preparation for the great event, Rob Broeren will make an hour-long presentation beginning at 5:00 p.m. at the winery outlining the celestial mechanics of the eclipse; he will also introduce us to the range of extraordinary astronomical phenomena we may witness in connection with the eclipse, discuss the possible responses of the natural world, and review the procedures required to safely view the sun. The phenomena we may experience include solar prominences, the solar corona, Bailey's Beads, the "diamond ring effect," and shadow bands.



Bodegas Vitalis Winery

Following Rob's presentation, we will have a catered dinner accompanied by some of the wines produced at Vitalis. Our site should yield superlative views of the entire progress of the eclipse, from first contact at about 7:30 to its conclusion shortly before 9:30. We expect to be back in our León hotel by 10:30 p.m.

Experiencing this very infrequent event is the centerpiece of our program. Please note that solar glasses are required for viewing the eclipse at all of its stages. To ensure safe viewing for all participants, VENT has purchased glasses satisfying the ISO 12312-2 standard; the glasses will be distributed before the start of the eclipse. Of course, participants are welcome to bring their own glasses, but you must ensure that they meet the same specifications.

We have selected the steppes and mountains of León for our eclipse viewing because this area has historically been likely to feature favorable skies on this date. Unfortunately, that statistic does not have failsafe predictive force. Your leaders will track the weather patterns continually during the days leading up to the eclipse. In the event of overcast skies or bad weather, you should be prepared for a change in plans for this evening.

NIGHT: Hotel Plaza Mayor, León

August 13, Day 6: León to Oviedo. We will check out of our León hotel this morning after breakfast, then set out at 8:00 to bird our way to Oviedo, seventy miles to the north. We will make a birding stop at the halfway point, just as we cross the Montes de León into the Autonomous Principality of Asturias. Here, at an elevation of nearly 4,500 feet, we will have a first chance at such fine regional specialties as Cinereous and Egyptian vultures, Booted Eagle, Red-billed and Yellow-billed choughs, Eurasian Crag Martin, Rock Bunting, and Water and Tree pipits. All of these species can be elusive on any given day, but we have another opportunity in the days to come on our visit to the Picos de Europa.



Yellow-billed Chough © Brian Gibbons

We will bird for about two hours, then, forty-five minutes after leaving the pass, we will arrive in Oviedo, the Asturian capital. Oviedo was founded in the mid-eighth century and served as the seat of royal government for more than a hundred years before the capital was moved to León. Oviedo and the surrounding countryside are home to more than a dozen pre-Romanesque monuments dating from the ninth and tenth centuries; these palaces and churches are responsible for the name of the Asturian Style of art and architecture, which flourished in northern Spain in the centuries surrounding the reign of Charlemagne.

We will have lunch in our hotel, the Reconquista, which was built in 1752 as the city's orphanage and invalid hospice. In 1974, it was transformed to become Oviedo's finest hotel, with two grand courtyards (one of them now covered to serve as a vast and welcoming lobby), an elegant gallery, and an excellent restaurant specializing in Asturian cuisine. In addition to welcoming visiting birders, the Reconquista is also the site of many of the celebrations accompanying the award of the Princess of Asturias Prize; the Spanish royal family occupies one of the suites here during the annual festivities.



Hotel Reconquista, Oviedo

After a short break, we will leave the hotel at 4:30 this afternoon for a private tour of the city's most famous architectural monument, the cathedral of San Salvador. This stunning Gothic church was built over the last two centuries of the Middle Ages, replacing most of a much older basilica constructed by the Asturian kings. The sixteenth-century altarpiece is a marvel of the Flamboyant Gothic, depicting in polychrome wood scenes from the lives of Christ and the Virgin. Among the important Romanesque works here is a thirteenth-century statue of the crucified Christ, an object of veneration for the thousands of pilgrims who still visit the church on their way to Compostela.

Not all of the original church was destroyed in the construction of the new cathedral. The Camara Santa, a small chapel built in the ninth century for the Asturian king Alfonso II, now serves as the cathedral treasury. Twelve hundred years on, the Camara still houses a number of the most venerated relics in Spain, including two splendid jeweled crosses (the Victory Cross and the Cross of the Angels), a spectacular agate reliquary, the Sudarium of Oviedo, and the Arca Santa, widely recognized as one of the finest pieces of silverwork produced in the European Middle Ages. The Camara is approached through an eleventh-century anteroom ornamented with astonishing Romanesque column figures of the Apostles.

Our tour will last about ninety minutes, after which there should be some free time to explore more of this beautiful and historic city on your own or to relax in our rooms before dinner.

NIGHT: Hotel de la Reconquista, Oviedo

August 14–16, Days 7–9: Birds and Culture in Asturias: The Picos de Europa, Villaviciosa, Cabo Peñas and Avilés, or Culture and Archaeology. On each of these three days, each of three birding groups will visit a different birding site; all three groups will visit all three localities in turn. There will also be the alternative on each of these days of a cultural experience including guided visits to two of the city's world-famous pre-Romanesque churches and the rich holdings of the Museum of Archaeology. **Note that you are not bound to either birding or culture; you can also select two days in the field and one in the city, or vice versa.**

- **Excursion 1: Picos de Europa. Depart 6:45 a.m., return by 4:30 p.m.** At high elevation in the stunning Picos de Europa, the beautiful mountain lakes of Covadonga are surrounded by alpine grassland. Eurasian Coots and Little Grebes nest here in good numbers, while both Red-billed and Yellow-billed choughs haunt the mountain huts in hopes of a French fry or two. Dunnocks, Water Pipits, and Black Redstarts are common and often confiding. Among the raptors of these stark landscapes, we can hope for Eurasian Griffons, Booted or Short-toed Snake-Eagles, or a European Honey-buzzard to pass over. Lunch will be in the historic mountain town of Cangas de Onís, where we will be looking for Common Kingfishers, White-throated Dippers, and Gray Wagtails on the rushing river.



White-throated Dipper © Andrew Whittaker

- **Excursion 2: Villaviciosa Wetlands. Depart 7:45 a.m., return by 3:30 p.m.** The estuary of the Villaviciosa River lies half an hour northwest of Oviedo. Famous for its cider production, this area is among the most important sites for waterbirds in Spain. At this season, we will be looking for breeding and migrant shorebirds, perhaps including Black-winged Stilts, Bar-tailed or Black-tailed

Godwits, Common Redshanks, or European Golden Plover. Among the longer-legged waders we should find Great, Little, and Western Cattle Egrets; Eurasian Spoonbills are regular here, and there is always the possibility of a White or even a Black Stork. In the marshes at the top of the estuary, Spotless Starlings, European Serins, and Zitting Cisticolas are often common. Lunch will be enjoyed in Villaviciosa.

- **Excursion 3: Cabo Peñas and Avilés. Depart 8:00 a.m., return by 3:30 p.m.** The northern coasts of Asturias are rugged and rocky, featuring massive promontories jutting into the wild Sea of Cantabria. On Cabo Peñas, the principality's northernmost point, we can hope to encounter Northern Wheatears, Black Redstarts, Yellow Wagtails, and European Stonechats. This is a prime seawatching locality, with European Shags, Northern Gannets, and Manx, Balearic, and Cory's Shearwaters among the possibilities. In nearby Avilés, the southbound migration of adult shorebirds will already be underway; we will be on the lookout for Kentish and Little Ringed Plovers, Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwits, and Green and Wood Sandpipers. This is often a good area for the ethereally beautiful Mediterranean Gull as well. Lunch will be in the Renaissance city of Avilés.



European Stonechat © Andrew Whittaker

- **Cultural Excursion: History, culture, and architecture in Northern Asturias. Depart 9:00 am, return by 3:00 p.m.** This excursion, led by expert local guides, takes us to the ninth-century church of San Julián de los Prados, right on the edge of Oviedo's city center, which preserves the finest set of pre-Romanesque wall paintings anywhere in western Europe. On the slopes of Monte Naranco, overlooking nearby Oviedo, stand two of the most impressive surviving monuments of pre-Romanesque architecture anywhere in Europe: the ceremonial throne room of the Asturian kings, and the church of San Miguel de Lillo. We will have lunch in Oviedo, then pay a visit to the city's Museum of Archaeology, housed in the former Franciscan monastery a few steps from the cathedral.

On each of these days, we plan to be back at our hotel with time for a break before reassembling for a social hour and dinner.

On the evening of August 15, Rob Broeren will deliver his final presentation, *How the Sun Works*, in which he discusses the composition of the sun, the fusion process, and what we know about the inside of our nearest star.

NIGHTS: Hotel de la Reconquista, Oviedo

August 17, Day 10: Departures. Private transfers will be provided to Oviedo's Asturias Airport (in the town of Castrillón, approximately 30 minutes from our hotel; airport code OVD). Breakfast is available as usual in the breakfast room of the Reconquista; if your flight is before 9:30 a.m., please notify us so that a packed breakfast can be prepared for you.

Most itineraries from Asturias airport to the USA will require connection in Madrid, but direct flights also depart for London, Barcelona, Frankfurt, Venice, Amsterdam, and several other European cities, making it easy for you to continue your exploration of the continent following our tour. If you would like assistance in planning your further travel, please make contact with the VENT office at least two months before the beginning of the tour.

EVENT SIZE: This event will be limited to 42 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: Barry Lyon, Brian Gibbons, Rick Wright, Virgilio Beltrán Jordá, and expert local guides



Barry Lyon's passion for the outdoors and birding has its roots in his childhood in southern California. During his teenage years, he attended several VENT/ABA youth birding camps, which ultimately led to his future involvement with Victor Emanuel Nature Tours. He holds a B.A. from the University of Arizona at Tucson where he studied history and political science, with an emphasis on environment and development politics. Barry joined the VENT team as a tour leader in 1995 and embarked on a travel-based career that has taken him to an array of worldwide destinations. He has lived in Austin, Texas since 2004 when he joined our office staff as an administrative assistant. In 2014 he was named Chief Operating Officer (COO), reflecting his increased experience and responsibilities. In 2023 Barry ascended to the role of Chief Executive

Officer (CEO). Although Barry still leads two or three trips a year, these days his work is geared almost entirely toward business, customer relations, and the management of the company. Barry's background and his knowledge of natural history have provided him with a strong interest in conservation. He is a former board member and past president of Travis Audubon Society, which emphasizes conservation through birding and outdoor education for children. Barry resides in South Austin with his wife, Brooke Smith.



Brian Gibbons grew up in suburban Dallas where he began exploring the wild world in local creeks and parks. Chasing butterflies and any animal that was unfortunate enough to cross paths with the Gibbons boys occupied his childhood. A wooden bird feeder kit sparked a flame that was stoked by a gift of the *Golden Guide* and family camping trips to Texas state parks. Thirty years ago Brian attended two VENT camps for young birders. Birds are now his primary interest, but all things wild continue to captivate him. After college, Brian undertook a variety of field biology research jobs that have taken him to the Caribbean, the Bering Sea, and the land of the midnight sun, arctic Alaska. He enjoys working with kids, hoping to spark environmental awareness through birds. For many years

Brian's field research has involved bird banding. His most amazing recoveries were a female Wilson's Warbler that had been banded in Alaska and was captured by Brian in Colorado, and a Sooty Tern that perished after a hurricane on the Texas coast; it had plied the Gulf of Mexico and the oceans of the world for 24 years. Brian's recreational bird-seeking has taken him to Machu Picchu in Peru, the Great Wall in China, the plains of East Africa, and the Himalayas in Nepal. Brian leads birding trips in the United States, Central America, the Caribbean, South Africa, and Europe. As well as being a fanatical birder, he loves capturing birds with photography. He lives in Tucson, Arizona with his wife, Lacrechia Johnson, and their son, Grayson.



Rick Wright is a widely published author and sought-after lecturer and field trip leader. A native of southeast Nebraska, Rick studied French, German, Philosophy, and Life Sciences at the University of Nebraska before making a detour to Harvard Law School. He took the Ph.D. in German Languages and Literatures at Princeton University in 1990, then spent a dozen years as an academic, holding successive appointments as Assistant Professor of German at the University of Illinois, Reader in Art and Archaeology at Princeton University, and Associate Professor of Medieval Studies at Fordham University. His numerous scholarly publications include two books on the Latin animal literature of the later Middle Ages. Among Rick's recent books are second editions of his *ABA Field Guide to Birds of New Jersey* and *ABA Field Guide to Birds of Arizona*; his *Peterson Reference Guide to American Sparrows* was published in 2019. He is also the co-author with Sanford Sorkin of *Watching Birds in Montclair* and *Watching Birds in the New Jersey Meadowlands*. Especially interested in the history and culture of birding, he is hard at work on a study of hummingbird collecting in France from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. In his spare time, he teaches Latin courses online for the Paideia Institute. Rick lives with his family, Alison Beringer and Avril Huang, and their black lab, Quetzal, in northern New Jersey, where he offers private birding tours to the marshes, woodlands, and ocean beaches.



Virgilio Beltrán Jordá holds a degree in Zoology from the University of Valencia and a Master’s in Environmental Education, recognized by the IUCN, from the University of Cádiz. Throughout his professional career, he has accumulated teaching experience in biology and geology in secondary education, has designed and implemented educational programs in the fields of food and health, and has taught postgraduate socio-environmental educator courses for a private school in Valencia. During the last 20 years, Virgilio has focused on the fields of environmental education, rural tourism, and family tourism experiences in nature, through ACTIO Actividades Educativas SL. He has developed environmental programs for schoolchildren and family tourism products in nature related to the ACTIO Rural Hostel, and has worked in consulting and in the design of touristic and environmental routes and tourism

promotion materials for different municipalities in the Valencia Region and other provinces in Spain. In 2013, he founded a birdwatching company, ACTIO Birding, where his professional skills merge with his hobby and knowledge of birds. ACTIO Birding explores new possibilities of experiential tourism combining birdwatching with wine-tasting, cultural activities, and family tourism. Virgilio works as a tour leader and birding guide in travel programs organized by ACTIO Birding, and conducts fam trips, press trips, and other promotional visits in the Valencia Region. He also acts as a consultant, lecturer, and assistant at international birdwatching fairs on issues related to birding in the Valencia Region. Virgilio is a member of the Board of Directors of the Bird Watching Guides Association of the Valencia Region and serves as First Vice President of Tour & Kids (Family Tourist Product Club of the Valencian Community). In September 2013, he joined SER Viajeros Comunitat Valenciana (the tourism magazine of the Spanish radio station CADENA SER) as an expert collaborator in everything related to birds and nature, including where to observe birds in the Valencia Region, birdwatching news, and environmental education.

FEATURED GUEST: Rob Broeren



Rob Broeren has been an amateur astronomer for over 30 years, traveling with telescopes throughout the United States, Peru, and New Zealand, and has published articles in *Astronomy Technology Today*. Professionally, he works in the aerospace industry. Early in his career he worked on the International Space Station, specializing in thermal propulsion, and then the Delta Rocket program that launches satellites. His rocket scientist journey has continued in his current work on the NASA Space Launch System program whose goal is to make a permanent moon colony and eventually land the first astronauts on Mars. Rob has a degree in Physics (Astronomy/Cosmology) from UC Irvine, and Mechanical Engineering degrees from Oregon State University as well as UCLA. He is an avid bird photographer and currently lives in Huntsville, Alabama.

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

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for **Totally Spain Solar Eclipse** is **\$9,895** per person in double occupancy from Madrid, with departures from Oviedo. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 2 to breakfast on Day 10, alcoholic beverages on Day 2, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not

include airfare from your home to Madrid or from Oviedo, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages except for dinner on Day 2, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$1,995**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, the deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at 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 (March 11, 2026) 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.

FUEL & 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.

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.**

If participant cancels:

180 days or more before departure date
179 to 151 days before departure date

150 days or less before departure date

Participant's refund will be:

Participant's deposit minus \$500*

No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance of the tour fee will be refunded

No refund available

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

Cancellation by VENT:

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

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

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

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

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

Critical benefits of Ripcord include a completely integrated program with a single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims; **medical evacuation 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: 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 tour deposit. 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 in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. The primary medical expense benefit is available to U.S. residents only. For this reason, non-U.S. residents will pay an adjusted premium when purchasing a comprehensive policy, which includes all of the other benefits available to U.S. residents. 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: Please limit your luggage to one soft-sided wheeled bag and one carry-on bag. The airlines strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. As a precaution against lost luggage, we suggest that you pack a change of clothes, toiletries, medications, important travel documents, optics, and any other essential items in your carry-on bag.

We recommend that you check the websites of your airline and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for the most up-to-date information about checked baggage and carry-on items: <http://www.tsa.gov/>.

CLOTHING: We want you to be comfortable throughout the tour, so please be prepared for variable conditions. Lightweight warm-weather apparel is recommended for the first several days of the trip, with somewhat warmer but still lightweight clothing likely to be more comfortable during our time in Asturias.

Dress is casual throughout, but for our evening meals, you may feel more comfortable in slightly dressier clothes. The following items are recommended:

- **Pants:** A couple of pairs of pants are essential. Many people prefer lightweight pants of cotton or other material, but denim, though not as comfortable, is certainly acceptable in the field. On our visits to restaurants, churches, and museums, neater but still informal clothing will be best.
- **Field Clothing:** Outdoor stores such as Cabela's and REI carry field clothing that many birders find appealing. Pants and shirts made of lightweight, durable materials with multiple pockets and ventilated seams are popular, and may prove especially useful in the warm temperatures of the steppe surrounding León.
- **Shirts:** Several comfortable shirts suitable for warm to hot weather or for layering under a sweater or jacket. Most birders prefer long sleeves to protect against sun and insects.
- **Hat:** A broad-brimmed hat for protection from the sun is essential. Please bring a baseball-style cap at the very least.
- **Outerwear:** On our late evening activities and our excursions into the mountains or to the coast, you may find a fleece, sweater, or light jacket and gloves useful. Please be sure also to bring a water-repellent jacket or parka in case of rain.

To help you in your packing, please read the CLIMATE & WEATHER section below carefully.

FOOTWEAR: A light hiking boot or trail shoe will be appropriate for most of our outings. In the cities and at evening meals, a comfortable walking shoe may be preferred. good traction if you intend to take part in that visit. A lighter shoe, like an athletic shoe, will come in handy when in the hotels or on cultural excursions.

LAUNDRY: Laundry service is available at additional charge to you at all hotels, but we recommend that you pack enough clothing to get you through the trip.

CLIMATE & WEATHER: In Madrid and in the dry countryside around León, temperatures are likely to be hot, ranging into the upper 90s (°F) or even 100 and falling into the high 50s overnight. Humidity is generally quite low, and three days out of four features clear to at most partly cloudy skies. Rain falls in these areas on an average of only two days in the month of August. These weather conditions played a significant role in the decision to base our eclipse viewing in León.

Asturias, "Green Spain," is quite different from the rest of the country. August temperatures may struggle to reach even 80° F in Oviedo, and it can be a good ten degrees cooler on the coast and in the mountains of the Picos de Europa. Low temperatures are typically in the mid-50s, sometimes dipping into the 40s in the mountains. Skies are clear over Oviedo about 55% of the time in August, and five days of rain are expected on average. Again, it is often noticeably cooler on the coast and in the mountains, and rain is more frequent there as well.

Overall, participants should anticipate warm to hot conditions in the area from Madrid to León, with only small chances for precipitation. In the Asturias region, conditions will likely be considerably cooler with overcast and rain possible.

CONDITIONS

Accommodations: We will be staying in three different superior-quality hotels during this event: one night in Madrid's Villa Real, followed by three nights in the Hotel Plaza Mayor in León and four in Oviedo's Reconquista. All are full-service, four- and five-star hotels in historic buildings.

Occupying a distinguished early twentieth-century building in the center of Madrid, the Villa Real features marble floors, chandeliers, and wood paneling. There is a rooftop swimming pool and a fully equipped exercise center; the hotel also has arrangements with nearby spa facilities. The fine restaurant, East 47, offers both indoor and outdoor seating. León's Hotel Plaza Mayor is right in the medieval city center; modern in style and approach, this elegant hotel offers a full range of amenities, including a restaurant and a bar. La Reconquista, in Oviedo, is one of Spain's most famous hotels, housed in a mid-eighteenth-century structure originally dedicated to the care of the city's orphans and invalids; today, the Spanish royal family maintains a suite here for use during the weeklong celebration of the Princess of Asturias Prize, and the excellent restaurant and beautiful lobby are among Oviedo's finest gathering places.

Meals: Spanish cuisine is among the best in the world, and especially in northern Spain, it is often served in lavish portions. The breakfast buffets in our hotels offer eggs, meat, bread, cereal, cake, rolls, cheese, yogurt, pastries, and a variety of hot and cold drinks. The mid-day meal usually includes a regional soup followed by meat, fish, or salad, accompanied by wine or beer. Dinner menus range across a wide span of local and regional specialties, including fish, meat, vegetables, and soups—in Asturias, often accompanied by cider.

On the evening of the eclipse, our dinner will be catered at the Vitalis winery. On some of our birding mornings, it may prove convenient to take packed breakfasts to eat in the field at our first destination.

Please note that dinner will be served each night no earlier than 7:00 p.m. Spain is famous for its late-hour meals, relative to what Americans are used to, and it is impossible to arrange dinner for our group earlier than 7:00.

Event program: This special tour includes birding, an eclipse viewing, late afternoon social hours on most days, expertly guided cultural tours, and special presentations by our astronomer, Rob Broeren. Many of our activities are optional, making it possible for participants to schedule free time for shopping, sightseeing, or simply relaxing.

Field Trip Information: Occupying almost all of the Iberian Peninsula, Spain is roughly the size of Texas, and its tremendous diversity of habitats makes it just as interesting to the visiting birder. American visitors with an interest in natural history typically concentrate on southern Spain, but the arid interior and lush northern regions have long been known to European birders as localities of prime interest.

We will take to the field on eight days, in Madrid, the León area, and Asturias. Over the course of the event, every participant will have the opportunity to experience each birding destination and to spend time in the field with your VENT tour leaders. All participants will be assigned to a group in each of the major areas where we will operate field trips (Madrid, León, and Oviedo), with each group given a bird name. Before the event, you will receive a form for you to identify other participants—friends, spouses, companions—with whom you would like to travel on the field trips; we will do our best to honor your requests. In each field trip area, participants will remain with the group to which they are assigned.

In León and in Oviedo, an alternative excursion focusing on the area's rich cultural history will be offered.

Travel will be aboard coach-style buses with seating capacity ranging from 35–55 passengers.

Bottled water and snacks will be provided at all times.

EQUIPMENT: One of the most important aspects of an enjoyable travel experience is proper equipment. The following items will come in handy during your trip to Spain:

- **Backpack** – good for carrying extra clothing, field guides, supplies, and optical equipment.
- **Notebooks and pens**
- **Travel alarm clock**
- **Polarized sunglasses with good UV protection**
- **Sunscreen, lip balm, skin lotions**
- **Insect repellent**
- **Refillable water bottle**
- **Personal toiletries**
- **Cameras, lenses, memory cards, and extra batteries**
- **Collapsible walking stick** – highly recommended for those who have trouble walking.
- **Tissue packs**
- **Water bottle** – Bottled water will always be provided, but some may prefer to bring their own bottle.
- **Tissue packs and moist towelettes**
- **Small flashlight or headlamp**
- **Personal snacks** – Bringing a supply of your favorite snack items is always a good idea, especially if you have dietary restrictions.

SOLAR GLASSES: VENT will provide each participant with a pair of high-quality, fit-over-glasses, solar glasses for viewing the eclipse. These glasses meet the international standard for safe viewing, ISO 12312-2. Participants are also welcome to bring their own solar glasses; we strongly recommend that you confirm that they meet the same standard. There are right ways and wrong ways to look at the sun, and Rob Broeren will provide instruction for safe viewing.

BINOCULARS & SPOTTING SCOPES

Binoculars – We strongly recommend good binoculars of 8x32, 8x42, or 10x42 magnification. We recommend that you NOT bring mini-binoculars of any kind. Some people like “minis” because they are small and lightweight, but they have an extremely small field of view and very poor light-gathering power. You will find that 8x32 or 8x42 binoculars are compact and light enough.

Spotting Scopes – Your tour leaders will have scopes available for group use throughout the event, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so. Having your own scope may increase your enjoyment of the birds on wetlands and the steppes of León.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS:

PASSPORTS - A valid passport is required for United States citizens to enter Spain. Please check the expiration date on your passport. **If it is not valid for at least three months after your trip return date (six months is recommended), you will need to get it renewed.** You will also want to make sure that you have at least two blank pages in your passport for stamps.

If you need a passport, you should get it well in advance of your trip departure date. For additional fees, a passport can be issued on an expedited basis. In the United States this can be done at the nearest passport office, most post offices, or the county clerk’s office. You may also visit www.state.gov/travel/ for information on how to get or renew a passport.

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

On board ship, it is customary for the purser to hold all passports for clearance with port authorities. Your passport will be collected upon embarkation, and returned prior disembarkation.

VISAS - Citizens of the United States and Canada do not need to obtain a tourist visa to enter Spain. Rules and regulations pertaining to non-U.S. and Canadian citizens may vary; please check with the consulates or embassy of Spain.

ETIAS (European Travel and Information Authorization System): Starting in late 2025, Spain will be one of 30 European countries that require visa-exempt nationals of 60 countries (including the United States and Canada) to obtain special entry authorization known as ETIAS (European Travel and Information Authorization System). ETIAS is essentially a pre-approval check for travelers to most European countries. It is linked to a traveler's passport and is valid for three years from the date of issuance or until the expiration date of the passport, whichever comes first. ETIAS costs approximately \$8 USD. The authorization can be purchased online at etias.com/etias-application. At the time of writing, travelers under the age of 18 or over the age of 70 are exempt from this requirement.

CURRENCY & MONEY MATTERS: Your trip to Spain includes all necessary expenses; however, you may want to bring some cash to cover personal expenses not included in the program, such as gifts, laundry, gratuities, meals on your own, cash bars, and personal items. While U.S. dollars might be accepted in large cities and shops, it is always convenient to have a supply of local currency.

The official currency of Spain is the Euro (EUR).

It is best to acquire Euros either before leaving the U.S. or at the airport or a bank in Madrid. Small denominations of cash are always best as it is easier for individuals and businesses to provide change. Should you extend your vacation in Spain beyond what is offered in this program, you should strongly consider obtaining local currency. ATM machines can be found in large cities and in some towns; you shouldn't have any problems using major credit cards in hotels, restaurants, and shops. Please check with your bank and credit card issuer for more information regarding banking and the use of ATM and credit cards overseas.

You can check the latest currency conversion rate by visiting "XE-The World's Favorite Currency Site" at: <http://www.xe.com/>.

ELECTRICITY: The electrical current in Spain is 230V (110-120V in the U.S.). Electrical outlets are primarily of the C and F socket types. The C plug, also known as the Euro-plug, features two round pins on a horizontal plane set in a rectangular plug; the "F" plug, also known as the Schuko-plug, is similar to the C plug but features two round pins set in a round plug, the sides of which are grooved (earth clips) to fit more tightly into the socket. You will need to bring types C or F plug adapters in order to use your American style device or appliance (designed with A and B type plugs).

Since 1995, most small appliances (cell phones, laptop computers, camera battery chargers) are dual-designed to operate on North American (110V) and European (220V) electrical voltages. However, because Spain operates on 230V, you may need to bring a transformer to convert the higher voltage to lower voltage. Even if you prefer to bring a transformer, an important point to consider is that the level of Hertz (cycles per

second that the current runs; abbreviated as Hz) is 50Hz in Spain, as opposed to 60 Hz in the U.S., which means that the transformer only converts voltage and not Hertz. Most small appliances have a built-in power pack that converts AC current to DC, which removes the problem of different Hertz levels. If there is any question about the ability of your electrical device or appliance to handle the higher voltage and lower Hertz cycle of Spain's electrical current, we recommend a special transformer or power pack that can accommodate these unique conditions.

LANGUAGE: Spain (Castilian) is the official language of Spain; however, certain autonomous communities have their own language. Asturian is one example, and is spoken in the northwest of the country. English is spoken widely but not necessarily commonly. English is most likely to be spoken at hotels and in larger cities.

INTERNET SERVICE: Wi-fi is available in all three of our hotels.

TIME: Spain observes Central European Summer Time (CEST) in August. CEST is six hours ahead of Eastern Daylight Time (EDT).

HEALTH: At the time of writing, Spain has no express vaccination requirements for tourists arriving from the United States. 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 **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 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 does not maintain 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.

Sun Exposure – Madrid and the León area are expected to be very sunny at this date. Prolonged exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays is dangerous, and anytime you are outdoors, you should protect your skin, including your lips, eyes, nose, and ears. Severe sunburn can be very painful and will affect your level of enjoyment. Always protect yourself when outdoors, and be sure to bring an ample supply of high SPF sunscreen and lip balm. We strongly recommend the use of ultra-violet blocking, polarized sunglasses.

Biting Invertebrates – Mosquitos may be present at some of our sites, especially wetland localities. Wet grassy areas may also harbor chiggers. Insect repellent will be available in the hotels and vehicles, but for extra care, we suggest bringing your own stick-type repellent for your face and hands. We also recommend wearing long pants and long-sleeved shirts at all times when in the field, and avoiding walking or standing in grass.

Chiggers can be avoided by following these procedures:

- Avoid walking or standing in areas dominated by grass. These areas are where one is most likely to encounter chiggers.
- Tuck your pants into your socks to avoid direct skin-to-grass contact. Chiggers can find their way through clothing, but this is a standard and effective prevention technique.
- Apply insect repellent such as “Cutters” to your body from the waist down BEFORE putting on your clothing.
- Spray your pants and socks with a spray repellent such as “Cutters” or “Off.” Repellents with high concentrations of DEET (70-100%) are most effective. You do not need to apply these to your skin, only to clothing. (Be careful, as DEET will damage plastics and lens coatings). Repel Permanone is an odorless aerosol insecticide that offers perhaps the best defense against chiggers. It is available at outdoor stores and on line. It should only be applied to clothes and allowed to dry before you dress; never apply Permanone directly to the skin. Permethrin is known to be highly toxic to insects. It is the active ingredient in Permanone, present in a small amount (0.5%).
- Powdered sulfur applied to waist, bottoms of pants, socks, and boots is also effective at repelling chiggers. However, be warned that clothes will retain the sulfur odor for several washings.
- Shower at the end of each day in the field. Use a washcloth to vigorously rub your legs, feet, and ankles.

By following these methods, you should avoid chigger bites and tick bites. If you are bitten by chiggers anyway, you can reduce or eliminate the symptoms by applying benzocaine or hydrocortisone creams, calamine lotion, After Bite, or any number of anti-itch products.

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 carry excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources to prepare you for this tour. We recommend www.amazon.com, which has a wide selection; www.buteobooks.com and www.nhbs.com specialize in ornithology and natural history books. For hard-to-find or out-of-print titles.

Birds: Either of the following titles are excellent field guide options for this trip. The excellent Aranzana guide focuses on Spain exclusively, an approach that will be favored by some, while the Mullarney guide remains the best all-around field guide to the birds of Europe.

Aranzana, Eduardo de Juana, and Juan Varela. *Birds of Spain*. Barcelona: Lynx Nature Books, 2024. Second edition.

Mullarney, Killian and Lars Svensson and Dan Zetterstrom. *Birds of Europe*. Princeton Field Guides. Princeton: Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023. Third edition.

Mammals

Aulagnier, Stephanie, Patrick Haffner, A.J. Mitchell-Jones, Francois Moutou, and J. Zima. *Field Guide to Mammals of Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East*. Bloomsbury Wildlife Guides. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2025. Third edition.

Reptiles and Amphibians:

Speybroek, Jeroen, Wouter Beukema, Bobby Bok, Jan Van Der Voor, and Ilian Velikov. *Field Guide to the Amphibians & Reptiles of Britain & Europe*. Bloomsbury Wildlife Guides. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016.

Butterflies

Tolman, Tom and Richard Lewington. *Collins Butterfly Guide: The Most Complete Guide to the Butterflies of Britain and Europe*. Collins Field Guides. London: HarperCollins Publishing, 2009. Third edition.

Dragonflies & Damselflies

Smallshire, Dave and Andy Swash, *Europe's Dragonflies: A Field Guide to the Damselflies and Dragonflies*. WILDguides. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020.

Wildflowers

Booker, Cliff and David Charlton. *Mountain Flowers: Pyrenes & Picos*. Self-published, 2017.

Colwell, Austen. *Common Wildflowers of Spain*. Ediciones, Santana, S.L. 2008.

History, Culture, Novels

Hemingway, Ernest. *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Scribner Classics. New York: Scribner Publishing, 1995. Originally published 1940.

Hochschild, Adam. *Spain in our Hearts: America in the Spanish Civil War 1936–1939*. New York: Mariner Books, 2007.

Menocal, Maria Rosa. *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain*. New York: Back Bay Books, 2003. Reprint edition.

Phillips Jr., William D. *A Concise History of Spain*. Cambridge Concise Histories. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Second edition.

Tremlett, Giles. *Ghosts of Spain: Travels through Spain and its Silent Past*. New York: Walker and Company, 2008. **Highly recommended.**

Apps & Online Resources

eBird, Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Among the largest and most successful citizen science projects in existence, eBird is an essential tool in promoting bird study and conservation. Among a range of benefits, eBird allows users to keep a variety of lists in a single application. When taxonomic splits are incorporated, lists are automatically updated. Your trip leaders will share daily lists from each locality, and you need only to accept the shared list for it to be uploaded to your files. **Highly recommended.**

Merlin Bird ID, Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Merlin is an app designed as a birding coach for beginning and intermediate bird watchers. Excellent for use in the field, Merlin asks the observer a series of questions regarding his or her bird sighting, including date and location, and color, size, and behavior of a bird. Merlin then processes the viewer's responses to present a shortlist of possible identifications, from which the user can choose the likely bird. Species profiles include a brief physical description, photographs, and sound samples. The Photo ID feature allows anyone with a camera to snap a photo and obtain a list of suggestions. Merlin's Sound ID feature allows identification of birds through audible recognition. To use Merlin, download the app, followed by the appropriate regional "pack." For this trip, please download the pack for the Iberian Peninsula. **Highly recommended.**

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel that one or more 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 on January 29, 2025, and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

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

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