



# UNDISCOVERED EASTERN COLOMBIA: BIRDING SECRETS OF THE WHITE SANDS OF INÍRIDA

JANUARY 5–13, 2025

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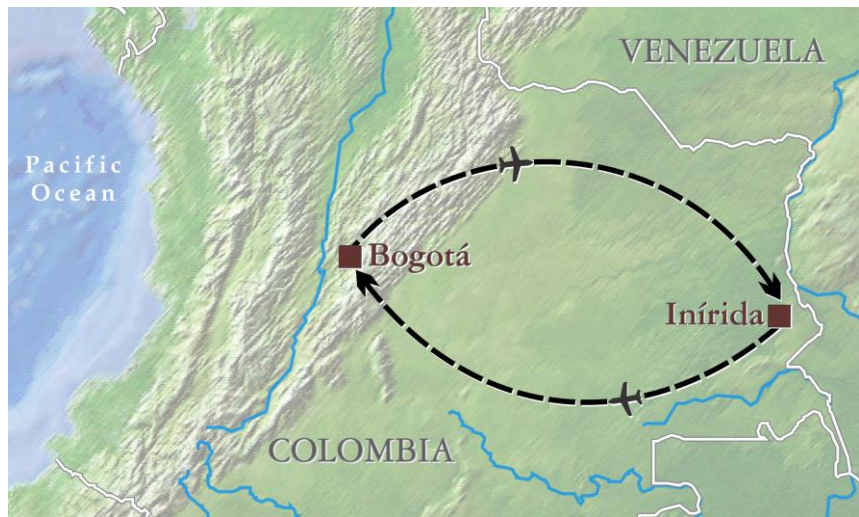
Please note that this tour is part of our Colombia Trilogy, and it can be taken in combination with two other tours:

*A Birding Adventure in the Llanos of Colombia: Hato La Aurora, January 13-19, 2025.*

*Colombia: Diverse western Bogota, January 18-24, 2025*

*The region around Puerto Inírida was, until recently, considered as one of the best kept birding secrets in Colombia. And that says a great deal when one considers the tremendous number of fabulous birding locations in Colombia.*

*That the Puerto Inírida area is only recently visited by birders is largely due to its isolation, because it is far from Colombia's populated centers and areas most often visited by birders. However, with several flights each week from Bogotá, reaching this small city of some ten thousand inhabitants is today relatively easy. Puerto Inírida is located in far northeastern Colombia and more than half of the population in the region consists of indigenous groups. The town is situated on the banks of the Río Inírida and also quite close to the larger Río Guaviare to the north and Orinoco to the east. Several relatively nice hotels are now available, and birders are beginning to discover this unique biome, which has a number of distinct, easily accessible habitats.*



*Much of this region, as is true also of adjacent Venezuela, is dominated by white sand soils, erosional remnants of a once vast and more elevated area that geologists call the Guianan Shield, which extends eastward across southern Venezuela to southern Suriname and northern Brazil. Because sandy soils are poor in nutrients, the mix of forest, savanna and savanna scrub is quite unlike anything birders encounter southward in the Amazonian region. So also, is the spectacular landscape dotted with large, mostly rounded and domed mountains scattered across the region. Some are nearly a thousand feet*

*high, others much lower, or are little more than large rock outcrops. Amidst this fascinating mix of topography, birders will find seasonally flooded forest, swamps, wetlands and a range of shrub-dotted, sandy savanna as well as forest islands growing on white sand soil, and large areas of humid lowland forest.*

*Most intriguing, perhaps, is the unique mix of birds that occur here, some with Amazonian origins, and others of Guianan origins that also are often confined to the white sandy soil habitats characteristically drained by blackwater rivers. It is birds of this Guianan origin, and particularly those associated with white sandy soil habitats, that will be of most interest to visitors because many of these birds have restricted ranges that are remote from sites most often visited in the past by intrepid birders. A few examples of these species are Bronzy Jacamar, Brown-banded Puffbird, Orinoco Piculet, Orinoco Softtail, Blackish-gray Antshrike, Cherrie's Antwren, Yapacana Antbird, Pompadour Cotinga, Capuchinbird, Black Manakin, Saffron-crested Tyrant-Manakin, Azure-naped Jay and White-naped Seedeater.*

*There will, of course, be many other species, some widespread, others less so. There also will surely be a few surprises in this region because there has been relatively little attention here from birders or the ornithological community. And, added to some exciting birding will be an exotic landscape of alluring, domed mountains, rocky outcrops and blackwater rivers, that seem as if they could have been drawn straight from Sir Conan Doyle's fictional The Lost World.*



**Rio Inírida and Cerros de Mavecure near Puerto Inírida, Colombia © L.E. Urueña**

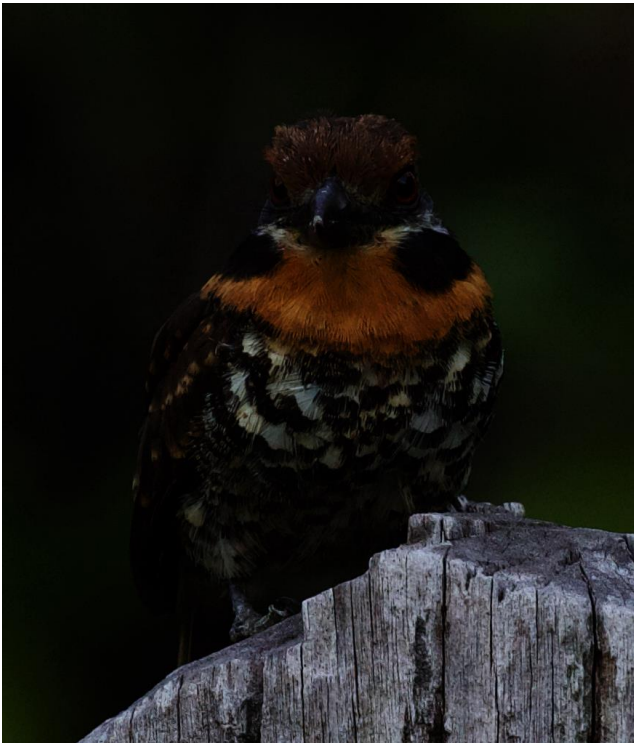
**January 5, Day 1: Arrival in Bogotá.** Participants may arrive at any time today. Upon arrival, you will be met at Bogotá's *El Dorado International Airport* (airport code BOG) and transferred to our hotel for the night.

A bustling city of more than seven million, Bogotá boasts an outstanding array of pre-Colombian gold artifacts at its famous Gold Museum (closed Mondays). There's also a spectacular overview of the city from atop the tram that ascends to Cerro de Montserrat and visitors can usually add several interesting hummingbirds there as well. In the past few decades, the city has transformed its internal transportation system with sleek, rapid articulating buses that enter and exit elevated stations and are capable of loading and unloading rapidly. And, in an effort to

encourage people to get outside and exercise, on weekends the city closes many boulevards and streets to all motorized traffic, so it is not unusual to see thousands of people of all ages out walking, jogging, bicycling, skating and enjoying Bogotá's pleasant climate. The views of the imposing eastern range of the Andes will be spectacular from almost anywhere in the city but Bogotá, at an elevation of 8,600 feet, is high enough that visitors may want to rest and relax upon arrival. Nights are cool but not cold.

Upon request, the VENT office will be happy to assist with hotel and transfer arrangements for early arrivals.

NIGHT: Hilton Garden Inn, Bogotá



Spotted Puffbird, *Bucco tamatia*. © D. Ascanio

may be visited more than once. With a known birdlist of 590+ bird species, there will be plenty to do. The main habitat types are: *Sandy soil forest*. This type of forest grows in poor soil conditions and therefore with low nutrients. The richness is indeed in the foliage of the vegetation rather than in the soil. In such low productivity conditions, fruits are scarce, so the bird community is mostly based on insectivores. This is a habitat with highly specialized birds such as tyrant-flycatchers, jacamars and puffbirds. This habitat is indeed threatened by the presence and continuous growth of subsistence farming. *Red soil forest*. This forest is found in areas adjacent to sandy soil forest and usually hosts much higher trees and a richer avifauna. Most trees are evergreen and bird species tend to be associated with different forest strata, meaning that some will occur on the forest floor, others in the understory, or midstory or be a canopy specialist. Some of the groups found here include tanagers, antbirds, antshrikes, tyrannulets and manakins. *Riverine forest*. This type is found at sides of rivers, with evergreen forest and usually richer in insects, thus dominated by antbirds and tyrant-flycatchers. There are few fruiting trees and are visited by dacnises, tanagers and even manakins. *Savanna*. One of the main habitat types, dominated by *Curatella* trees which grow sparsely among bushes of native grasslands and sometimes reeds. Birds of the savanna are active at dawn and dusk and thus usually silent during most of the day. We are likely to visit this habitat type right at dawn and may enjoy views of Dusky Purpletuft, Black-tailed Tityra and maybe some tanagers and even puffbirds.

### **January 6, Day 2: Morning Flight to Puerto Inírida.**

We will assemble in the hotel this morning for breakfast prior to transferring to the Bogotá airport for our flight to Puerto Inírida. Participants may find that the flight to Puerto Inírida is quite scenic, especially the latter portion as we approach the Guianan ecosystem with its unpolluted rivers and wonderful forest patches. Our birding activities today in Puerto Inírida will depend upon our arrival time but we should certainly have time for our first birding departure this afternoon to Caño Culebra, a narrow track of stunted forest growing in sandy soil forest. Tinamous will certainly be heard, and a Squirrel Cuckoo might be observed moving across the branches with its long tail. Despite being an ecosystem with low productivity due to poor soil conditions, we will look for specialties such as Spotted Puffbird, Rufous-crowned Elaenia, Plumbeous Euphonia and Black Manakin.

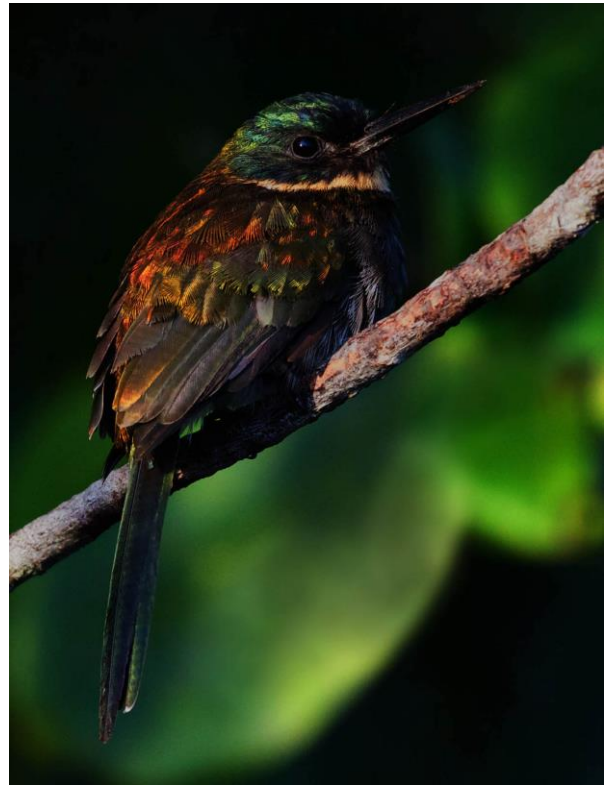
NIGHT: Fuente del Guainía, Puerto Inírida, dept. of Guainía

### **January 7-11, Days 3-7: Birding in Puerto Inírida**

**Area.** During five full days here, we will have the opportunity to visit different habitat types. Some of these

Our visit to the Inirida area coincides with the dry season so we should have relatively easy access to virtually all habitats. However, it is important to note that for half or more of each year some sites are flooded and inaccessible, hence their designation as internationally important wetland sites under the Ramsar Convention.

The entire Puerto Inírida region is located in a transition zone between the more humid Amazonian region to the south—characterized by diverse vegetation and muddy, silt-laden rivers—and the slightly drier and more rocky and upland Guianan region to the east. The Guianan habitats differ markedly in bird and plant species composition from Amazonia. They are typically characterized by clear (or blackwater) rivers, frequent cataracts on rivers, and low-productivity, white sand soils that support bushy grasslands, scrubby woodland, forest islands, and tall but less luxuriant forest than in Amazonia. Numerous areas are seasonally flooded. There also is some spill-over of birds and plants into the Inírida region from the vast northern grasslands (the “llanos”) to the north and northwest. The Amazonian-Guianan distinction is particularly important for birders because of markedly different birds found in this region. Many species of birds are restricted to one or more of the white sandy soil habitats within the Guianan region, and hence are less widespread in distribution than comparable Amazonian species. Some examples of white sandy soil habitat species (a few also occur locally in Amazonia) include: Little Nighthawk, Blackish Nightjar, Green-tailed Goldenthrout, Orinoco Piculet, Green-tailed Jacamar, Brown Jacamar, Bronzy Jacamar, Orinoco Softtail, Blackish-gray Antshrike, Pearly Antshrike, Cherrie’s Antwren, Imeri Warbling-Antbird, Yapacana Antbird, Rufous-crowned Elaenia, Capuchinbird, Purple-breasted Cotinga (scarce), Pompadour Cotinga, Yellow-crowned Manakin, Saffron-crested Tyrant-Manakin, Black Manakin, Azure-naped Jay (scarce), Brown-headed Greenlet, Red-shouldered Tanager, Rose-breasted Chat, Yellow-green Grosbeak, White-naped Seedeater, and Plumbeous Euphonia.



**Bronzy Jacamar, *Galbula leucogastra*. © D. Ascanio**

A few other species are likely in the Inírida region but, as yet, there are few or no reports from the immediate area. Among them are: Río Orinoco Spinetail (recently described from nearby Río Orinoco River islands), Brown-banded Puffbird, Gray-bellied Antbird, Guianan Cock-of-the-rock, Guianan Gnatcatcher, Dotted Tanager and White-bellied Dacnis.

Finally, a sampling of more widespread Amazonian species—for example, birds more typical of Amazonian regions to the south—that occur in the Inírida region include all of the following and many more: Capped Heron, Greater Yellow-headed Vulture, Hook-billed Kite, Little Cuckoo, Sand-colored Nighthawk, Reddish Hermit, Black-eared Fairy, Amazonian Motmot, Spotted Puffbird, Swallow-winged Puffbird, Gilded Barbet, White-throated Toucan, Scarlet-shouldered Parrotlet, Cobalt-winged Parakeet, Black-headed Parrot, Blue-crowned Trogon, Lafresnaye’s Piculet, Cream-colored Woodpecker, Red-necked Woodpecker, Red-and-green Macaw, Fasciated Antshrike, Amazonian Antshrike, Dot-backed Antbird, White-cheeked Antbird, Long-billed Woodcreeper, Yellow Tyrannulet, Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher, Citron-bellied Attila, Spangled Cotinga, Bare-necked Fruitcrow, Amazonian Umbrellabird, Screaming Piha, White-browed Purpletuft, Várzea Schiffornis, Wire-tailed Manakin, Golden-headed Manakin, Tropical Gnatcatcher, Violaceous Jay, Black-faced Tanager, Paradise Tanager, Burnished-buff Tanager, Flame-crested Tanager, Fulvous-crested Tanager, Pectoral Sparrow, Epaulet Oriole, Velvet-fronted Grackle, and both Green and Olive oropendola.



**Wire-tailed Manakin, Puerto Inírida, Colombia © Steve Hilty**

During the course of our six days in this region we should see a good number of these widespread species listed in the paragraph immediately above, although we will be making an effort to visit sites where the more range-restricted white sand soil species have been found. Our accompanying checklist of around 470 species includes all 436 species known (as of 2016) to have been reported in the Inírida area and an additional 30 or so that almost certainly also occur.

NIGHTS: Fuente del Guainía, Puerto Inírida, dept. of Guainía

**January 12, Day 8: Morning Flight to Bogotá.** Following breakfast, we will pack to prepare for our flight back to Bogotá. While we plan to enjoy a farewell dinner at our hotel tonight, some participants may choose to depart on international flights late tonight (arriving home on January 13).

NIGHT: Hilton Garden Inn, Bogotá

**January 13, Day 9: Departures for Home.** Transfers to the airport will be provided for departures at any time today. For those participants who are continuing on to A Birding Adventure in the Llanos of Colombia, today will be a day of rest for you.

**TOUR SIZE:** Limited to 10 participants.

**TOUR LEADERS:** David Ascanio and a local leader



**David Ascanio**, a Venezuelan birder and naturalist, has spent 35 years guiding birding tours throughout his native country, Colombia, Brazil, Peru, Costa Rica, the Orinoco and Amazon River basins, Trinidad & Tobago, Suriname, the Guianas, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, the Lesser Antilles, Cuba, Chile, and Panama. He is especially interested in bird vocalizations and has a private library containing voices of more than 70% of all the birds of Venezuela. David combines superb birding skills with an astonishing command of bird vocalizations. He has published a book for children about bird songs and has coauthored the descriptions of two new species, the Rio Orinoco Spinetail and the Delta Amacuro Softtail. David has also published various manuscripts about the birds of the *llanos* (plains), the Orinoco River Island species, and the pan-tepui endemic species for which he has become an authority. He is the first author of

the *Field Guide to the Birds of Venezuela* (2017). David is an excellent communicator, has a great sense of humor, and is tireless in helping others find birds and wildlife. These traits have made him one of the most popular naturalists/guides in the Neotropics.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for this tour is **\$5,195** per person in double occupancy. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 to dinner on Day 9, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, internal flights, ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Bogotá and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$350**. 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, 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 (May 17, 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.**

If participant cancels:  
180 days or more before departure date

Participant's refund will be:  
Participant's deposit minus \$500\*

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

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

**Cancellation by VENT:**

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

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

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

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

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

**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.

**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: <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/](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.

**Trip Classification:** This may be regarded as a moderately active tour. It is not intended to be strenuous but drinking plenty of water is important at all times to prevent dehydration. We’ll be walking mostly on roads or forest tracks on nearly level ground although any (optional on your part) attempt to climb one of the large granite cerros, especially mid-day, will be strenuous. Expect moderate to fairly high humidity (this is a lowland tropical region). Of necessity there will be early morning departures because that is when birds are most active. Early mornings are cool and pleasant but temperatures rise mid-day and some or most days we will have a mid-day break.



There are a few short and two longer boat trips on this tour. Two short trips are in open boats for transport to birding trails—one less than 10 minutes and one about 20 minutes each way. A covered speed boat will take us upriver to the Cerros de Mavecure (the huge quartzite domed mountains) and downstream to the Orinoco.

**BAGGAGE LIMITS:** All tour participants must limit their baggage to **a single bag of no more than 15 kilos (ca. 32 lbs.) and a single carry-on item such as a back pack limited to 5 kilos (ca. 12 lbs.). Satena Airlines flies smaller airplanes and is strict regarding baggage limits. Individual luggage in excess of this weight will be charged an overweight fee at your personal expense. Packing in a wheeled duffel will save weight.** In general, this is a relatively easy trip and amenities at the hotels where we stay should include the transport and movement of luggage by porters. **When packing, give thought to traveling lighter rather than heavier. Note that temperatures will be warm to hot mid-day and rain is unlikely so cold or even cool weather clothing will not be required. We also recommend that you bring a “dry bag” or a few plastic bags large enough to protect your camera or optical gear in case of dust.**

**LAUNDRY:** **Laundry services are unlikely to be needed on this short trip but limited laundry service may be available at our hotel in Inírida.** We recommend, however, that you bring sufficient clothes to see you through this short trip. In addition, items that can be washed and will dry quickly (i.e. COOLMAX® shirts, etc.) will be helpful.

**CLIMATE:** Weather conditions will generally be pleasant in the mornings but definitely hot by mid-day and afternoon (temperatures in the high 80s to mid- 90s). In general, humidity should not be exceptionally high (more likely highest in early morning) but not uncomfortable during mid-day. But, do expect some hot mid-day temperatures. Some limited walking or boating in mid-day full sun will be necessary; however, most birding outings will be in shady forest. There will be air-conditioned breaks of 1 ½ to 2 hours most days. Rain is unlikely although packing a small umbrella might be prudent and can certainly be useful for shade protection from the sun.

**CLOTHING:** Lightweight field clothing is the rule. **Please do not wear white or brightly colored clothes, including hats,** as these tend to emphasize movements that you make and hence, potentially may frighten birds. We suggest loose-fitting khaki clothing or other cotton/nylon quick-drying clothing in medium or darker shades of green, blue, tan or brown. Military camouflage clothing should not be worn as it conveys an inappropriate image to police and military personnel, whom we might encounter. **Bring only long pants and long-sleeved shirts** as these provide protection against both sun and insects, especially tiny no-see’um black flies which may be numerous in sunny areas near water. You should have a broad-brimmed hat for sun protection and a Buff® or other neck scarf/gaiter for additional sun and insect protection. Sun gloves (e.g. Dr. Shade, etc.) are particularly useful against biting black flies on the backs of hands. Also bring a good sunscreen. Footwear should include water-resistant hiking boots (relatively light weight ones with ankle support should be sufficient), and perhaps a second pair of walking shoes and/or sneakers/Texas/sandals for wear at the hotel. **Rubber boots are not necessary.** Shower thongs will be useful.

**LODGING:** Rooms are air conditioned, and meals are served in open shady areas. The inn in Inírida only has regular water in the shower (no hot water). Best is to take showers in the middle of the day, prior to taking a midday break.

**HEALTH:** Malaria has been confirmed in Colombia, including the chloroquine-resistant strain in rural areas. However, it is not expected to be a problem on this route. Please consult with your physician or local travel clinic for recommendations.

While not a requirement for entry into Colombia unless you are arriving from an infected area in another country, a yellow fever vaccination is a good idea for most people traveling to third world, tropical countries, and the vaccination is good for 10 years. People with compromised immune systems should consult with their personal physician before getting any vaccination. Leishmaniasis is a disease transmitted by a small fly that is mainly active at dusk or during the night. It is not a common insect and only a few of the flies are disease carriers; proper clothing and the use of insect repellent are the best protection. Dengue fever also is very infrequent and is transmitted by day-

flying *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes. Again, proper clothing and use of some insect repellent, especially in lowland areas, is the best protection.

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>.

**INSECTS:** Insects are generally not a problem on this trip at this time of the year but tiny no-see’um black flies are almost always present locally in sunny areas near water. Your best protection against no-see’ums is simply to cover up as much as possible, to include loose-fitting long pants and long-sleeved shirts, sun gloves and a neck scarf. There will likely be few mosquitoes at this time of year; we do not expect mosquitoes to be a problem. You may wish to bring a small bottle of Cutter insect lotion for use on forest trails. Spraying shoes, socks and the lower portion of pants with insect repellent will help reduce problems with insects generally, as well as possibly chiggers. Pants pretreated with permethrin may also be helpful although this is not essential.

**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 Permethrin 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>

**A Note About Chiggers:** This tour visits areas where chiggers are known to occur. Chiggers are tiny parasitic mites found in most warm weather areas of the southern United States and the world's tropics. They are especially numerous in grassy areas, where, in the immature stage, they attach themselves to other animals or humans who make contact with the grass as they pass by. Chiggers do not suck blood and the majority of species do not carry disease. They do feed on bodily fluids through a process in which a digestive enzyme is produced by the chigger which essentially liquefies the skin around the area where the chigger is attached. The chigger is not usually attached to the skin for more than a few hours before it either falls off or is knocked off. Our bodies respond by producing a hardened area as a defense against the chigger's digestive enzyme. Though the chigger may be long gone, it is the presence of the hardened area, and the body's natural process of reabsorbing it that typically causes intense itching, often lasting for a week or more. Chiggers like to attach themselves to areas of thin skin, like around the ankles, beltline, undergarment lines, knees, and elbows.

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 to your skin and clothing. Please refer to the Insect Repellent section that follows for important information about selecting and applying repellent.
- Powdered sulfur applied to waist, bottoms of pants, sock and boots is also effective at repelling chiggers. However, be warned that clothes will retain the sulfur odor for several washings. If using sulfur, never touch your eyes, nose, or mouth before washing your hands first.
- 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 be able to avoid all chigger bites, as well as tick bites. If, however, 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.

**\*We strongly recommend the use of Insect Shield® clothing.** Insect Shield is a process by which clothing is treated with an EPA-approved formula of the insect repellent permethrin. Such clothing is highly repellent to insects and provides durable and long-lasting protection, even after dozens of washings. Outdoor wear with Insect Shield protection includes name brands such as Ex Officio and Tilley, and can be purchased at outdoor recreation stores such as REI and from a variety of online retailers. In lieu of Insect Shield clothing, you should consider treating your clothes with permethrin, which has the same effect, and that can be purchased at outdoor recreation stores and from a variety of online retailers.

**CURRENCY:** Colombian Peso. A small amount of pesos may be useful for alcoholic drinks and other personal items. **You should exchange dollars at the international airport on arrival.**

**DOCUMENTS:** For U.S citizens, a passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure is required. A visa is not required. Non-United States citizens should check with their local Colombian consulate or embassy.

**EQUIPMENT:** **We strongly recommend that participants bring a wide-mouth water bottle that can be easily refilled from large water tanks at the hotel. A day pack to manage personal items is essential.** Also consider a “dry bag” for water-proofing cameras and other gear in the field. Feel free to bring snacks, trail mix or dried fruit as your luggage weight limit permits although some items of this nature may be available locally. Also pack all personal medications in your carry-on bag. Earplugs sometimes come in handy.

**MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS:** There **will be** opportunities to recharge batteries for electronic equipment at virtually all locations where we stay but participants should bring enough spare batteries to last for a couple of days between charges in case of unplanned electrical outages. Or bring one or two small portable power packs (now widely available). Electrical plug-ins in Colombia usually are two flat-pin type (same as in USA) and **electrical current typically is 110 volts.** You might find a surge protector useful although most electrical equipment today comes equipped to handle 110/220 volt current. We recommend that everyone, including especially those persons with dietary restrictions or other dietary requirements, bring some trail snacks and other emergency food items that are portable.

**INTERNET:** Wi-Fi should be available, although we caution that in remote regions like this it may be slow, confined to hotel lobbies, and often intermittent. **Your best bet is to confine your communication to phone calls and text messages** (the latter, especially, require very little band width). Attempting to send large files and photos can be very slow, tedious and often futile.

**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](http://www.amazon.com) which has a wide selection; [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com) and [www.nhbs.com](http://www.nhbs.com) which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

#### ***Field Guides:***

Hilty, S. L. *Birds of Colombia*. 2021. The recommended field guide for Colombia. Forward-looking taxonomy includes all species and subspecies groups (as in Clements checklist). Illustrations are from 16-vol. *Handbook of Birds of the World* (Lynx) with many updates and additions. All species, as well as subspecies, and subspecies groups are illustrated and mapped. Unique for South America, this book contains a QR code for every species, which allows users to quickly link, via mobile phone, to Cornell's *Birds of the World* website and listen to vocalizations, view photos, and read an expanded text. Almost like having an App embedded in this book (and Colombia has remarkably good cellular coverage so this feature should be usable almost everywhere). Available from Lynx Editions [www.lynxeds.com](http://www.lynxeds.com), Buteo Books/ABA sales, and elsewhere.

Mc Mullan, Miles; T. Donegan, G. Pantoja-Peña; T. Tuncer-Navarro; A. Bartels & T. Ellery. *Field Guide to the Birds of Colombia*. Bogotá, Colombia: Rey Naranjo Editores, 2018. Illustrates every species known to have occurred in Colombia and includes range map for each species. The text is concise and includes a description of the bird vocalization. A color-band separating each family may be a useful way to find the species when using in the field. Represents a significant achievement in simply dealing with nearly 2,000 species in a book that is remarkably compact and portable.

#### ***Other Bird References to Explore Prior to the Tour:***

McMullan, Miles, T. M. Donegan & A. Quevedo. *Field Guide to the Birds of Colombia*, 2nd edition. Bogotá, Colombia: ProAves, 2014. Ca. 360 pages. Paperback. Illustrates every species known to have occurred in Colombia, and includes a very small range map for each species. Although you will want this for the updated taxonomic treatment of species, and for the maps, you will find that even in this improved second edition many species still cannot be identified accurately because of the poor printing (colors dull and muddy or inaccurate), especially hummingbirds, flycatchers, furnariids and some species in other families. A few brief, text remarks accompany each species. The index is brief but adequate and the print is very small. Despite some drawbacks we recommend that all visitors obtain a copy of this little book (available from Buteo Books, USA and Amazon store). It is jam-packed with helpful information but due to the quality of the illustrations, it should be regarded as a supplement for field identification (not a solution to

all identifications). Nevertheless, it represents a significant achievement in simply dealing with nearly 2,000 species in a book that is remarkably compact and portable.

Hilty, S. L. and W. L. Brown. *Guide to the Birds of Colombia*. Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1986. **A classic but now out of print and difficult (expensive) to find.** Good source of information on voice, behavior, breeding and status and habitat, range maps for almost all species. Plates excellent but taxonomy now dated.

Hilty, S. L. *Birds of Venezuela*. Second Edition. Princeton University Press, 2003. Very useful for this trip (we are within 30 kilometers of border) as a reference but heavy for field use. Excellent color illustrations and detailed maps showing specimen records and sight records.

Ascanio, David, *Helm Field guides: Birds of Venezuela*. 2017. More compact than the above books but some may still consider it heavy for field use. Has good maps (smaller and less detailed than the Hilty book on Venezuela), a brief, high condensed text; color illustrations well organized, variable in quality but overall quite useful. Has updated taxonomy (to ca. 2016).

### ***Bird Apps:***

- *Merlin Bird ID*. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The best app to use in the field. Nowadays considered the “future of birding.” Once the app is downloaded, you must download the packs for Colombia. As this itinerary was made, there are four packs for Colombia available. Includes a brief bird description, photos and voices. Also, there is a section for Bird Photo ID which can be useful. **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.**
- *Ebird*. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. A friendly and essential tool for the modern birdwatcher, this is nowadays your best way to keep your life list, all in a single application. Users can compile personal bird lists by location and by trip. When taxonomic splits are incorporated, your list will be automatically updated. Furthermore, your guide will be able to share the daily list. You can just accept the shared list from your VENT leader and have it uploaded in your account! An essential tool to promote bird conservation. **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.**
- *Bird Data*. A free App that provides summarized information for each species, including the subspecies and presence in neighboring countries. It has a section of endemic species. Look for the Colombia package. Providing that you have data access in your phone, it will show the eBird hotspots near your location, thus being one of its main advantages.
- *The Birds of Colombia*. IMB publicación. A basic app showing a list of the birds of Colombia based in taxonomic order and arranged by family. Contains an ornithological dictionary.
- *All Birds Colombia*. Sunbird Images. Blue Level Series. Available in Apple Store. This app was made from the information in *Birds of Northern South America* by R. Restall et al (Helm Field Guide). It contains images, maps and bird voices. The user must be aware that the maps used from the publication were out-of-date at the time of printing. The most powerful aspects are the bird voices and the sonograms accompanying each species as well as the search tools. Good source to study the voice of the birds and get acquainted with the plumage and other aspects of the species natural history.
- *Colombia – guía de viaje y mapa offline*. Tripwolf. The free download provides limited information. A good source for those wanting to learn about culture, important dates and other aspects of the country. To access all the information, an upgrade must be purchased.
- *MAPS.ME*. This app allows you to navigate offline. Detailed maps, all free of cost. Once the application is downloaded, you will have to download the map (s) for Colombia.

### ***Natural History:***

Hilty, Steven. *Birds of Tropical America: A Watcher's Introduction to Behavior, Breeding and Diversity*. University of Texas Press, 2005. Highly recommended for background information on how things work in bird communities in tropical latitudes. Includes chapters on diversity, speciation, hummingbird and antbird communities, mixed species flocks, fruit eating adaptations, flycatcher radiation, manakin displays, plumage color in the tropics, Amazonian River islands, cacique and oropendola breeding behavior, environmental constraints on bird song and more.

Kricher, John C. *The New Neotropical Companion*. 2017. Princeton University Press. An introduction to the animals, plants and ecosystems of the New World Tropics. Recommended as a general, broad-based introduction to plants and animals of Amazonia.

### **General Travel**

Porup, J, K. Raub, C. Soriano & R. Reid. *Lonely Planet Guide to Colombia*. Most recent edition. A good introduction to Colombia life, culture and just getting around the country. A little time with this or a similar book should provide a richer travel experience for almost anyone. **Note that there are several other travel books available** (Rough Guide, etc.) and any of these may be equally good. See on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

**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 on May 17, 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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