



VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

ITINERARY

## **WEST MEXICO: THORN FOREST TO THE SIERRA MADRE JANUARY 5–15, 2026**

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Bumblebee Hummingbird © Brian Gibbons

**Western Mexico has one of the highest rates of endemism in North America, and the foothill region of the Sierra Madre Occidental is one of the better areas to observe a good cross section of Mexican species.**

Our West Mexico tour is designed as a comfortable introduction to West Mexican avifauna. After our first night in Nuevo Vallarta, we will seek a few endemics before we head through Puerto Vallarta to Rancho Primavera, a couple hours south of town. El Tuito, where we will stay at the comfortable Rancho Primavera, is a birder's paradise. This private ranch provides a hospitable base for explorations of diverse habitats rich in endemic birds. This lower elevation base will allow us to explore habitats all the way down to idyllic sandy beaches on the Pacific. The accommodations at Rancho Primavera are comfortable and the grounds are awash in birds.



Red-headed Tanager © Brian Gibbons

Our trip will focus on at least three distinct habitat types. We will explore coastal areas for herons, shorebirds, and waterfowl. The most unique habitat type is the West Mexican thorn forest, and many of the endemic species that we will be seeking most ardently make their homes here. This dry forest type can be surprisingly difficult to bird and is home to a number of secretive and inconspicuous species. However, with endemic species like Citreoline Trogon and Red-breasted Chat to tempt us, persistence is sure to pay off. While there are many beautiful birds in the thorn forest, we will make a special effort for the exquisite Orange-breasted Bunting. The ranch itself is set in the foothills, where thorn forest gives way to pine-oak forest, and one begins to see species such as Acorn Woodpecker and Grace's Warbler, as well as specialties like Military Macaw and various hummingbirds.

For the second half of the tour we will head to the Sierra Madre Occidental. The moist canyons and the pine-oak forests teem with North American migrants wintering alongside a variety of great Mexican birds. A Long-tailed Wood-Partridge might creep out onto the road, while Mountain Trogons call from fir trees. The higher elevations and moist canyons will enable us to seek at least ten more Mexican endemics as well as a host of other fantastic birds like Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo and Audubon's Oriole. Our base for these explorations will be the charming colonial town of San Sebastián del Oeste, recognized by the Mexican Secretariat of Tourism as a Pueblo Mágico, a place with natural beauty, cultural riches and historical relevance. With its cobbled streets and colonial facades, San Sebastian is from another era. Endemics of this area include Bumblebee Hummingbird, Mexican Woodnymph, Gray-crowned Woodpecker, White-striped Woodcreeper, Green-striped and Rufous-capped brushfinches, Red-headed Tanager, and many more. Over the course of the tour, we expect our bird list to top 250 species, of which better than 30 should be Mexican endemics, and 60 or more will be lifers for those who have not previously ventured "south of the border."

**January 5, Day 1: Arrival into Puerto Vallarta.** After arriving into Puerto Vallarta International Airport (airport code PVR), passing immigration and clearing customs, travelers should make their way to the meeting location detailed in the departure memo. We will then proceed to Hampton Inn by Hilton, where a room will be reserved in your name. We'll gather in the hotel lobby at 5:00 p.m. for an orientation session and birding, followed by dinner.

NIGHT: Hampton Inn by Hilton, Nuevo Vallarta

**January 6–10, Days 2–6: Rancho Primavera.** On our first morning, we will explore the avifauna of Nuevo Vallarta. While there will be many birds around, we will concentrate our efforts on a few more-challenging

endemics: Rufous-bellied Chachalaca, Mexican Parrotlet and the stunning Elegant Quail. We will then weave our way south through sprawling Puerto Vallarta toward Cabo Corrientes. We will be staying at Rancho Primavera which is a private ranch near the foothill town of El Tuito. The accommodations are comfortable and the food local! We are confident you will enjoy your stay here. Note -Rancho Primavera is a private ranch and the rooms are all different, priority will be given to the first registrants. Best of all, the good birding begins right outside your door. A sampling of the West Mexican species that are likely right around the lodge includes Collared Forest-Falcon, Red-billed Pigeon, Orange-fronted Parakeet, Squirrel Cuckoo, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Mottled Owl, Russet-crowned Motmot, Berylline and Cinnamon hummingbirds, Golden-cheeked Woodpecker, Masked Tityra, San Blas Jay, Happy and Sinaloa wrens, Rufous-backed Robin, Blue Mockingbird, Golden Vireo, Stripe-headed Sparrow, Black-vented and Streak-backed orioles, and Yellow-winged Cacique. More



**The Orange-breasted Bunting is stunning. © Brian Gibbons**

familiar species from the southern United States such as Great Kiskadee, Dusky-capped and Vermilion flycatchers, and Thick-billed Kingbird will be present. Rare species such as Sparkling-tailed Hummingbird, Military Macaw, and Rosy Thrush-Tanager have even been seen here.

Rancho Primavera will serve as our base camp, but our birding will not be limited to the grounds. We will divide our time among a number of nearby birding locales which we will explore over the course of our stay. Nearby Bioto Road is good for additional species such as West Mexican Chachalaca, Pale-billed and Lineated woodpeckers, Rose-throated Becard, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Rufous-capped Warbler, and Red-crowned Ant-Tanager. La Bascula is a foothill location, and its higher elevation may have Black-headed Siskins, White-striped Woodcreepers, and Gray-crowned Woodpeckers among other species. Some of our time will be spent in the lowlands, where agricultural fields and thorn forest give way to mangrove swamps and coastal estuaries. In the lowlands, we may find raptors such as Common Black Hawk and Gray Hawk, and possibly even the rare Lesser Ground-Cuckoo. Wintering shorebirds and herons will be common, and we will spend time working through some of the identification challenges.





**Rufous-bellied Chachalacas © Brian Gibbons**

Some of the other species we may see during our week of exploration include Crane Hawk, Laughing Falcon, Mexican Parrotlet, Lilac-crowned Parrot, Mexican Woodnymph, Elegant Trogon, Russet-crowned Motmot, Nutting's Flycatcher, Black-throated Magpie-Jay, White-throated Thrush, Yellow Grosbeak, and Cinnamon-bellied Saltator. The West Mexican thorn forest hosts some very special birds that will require extra effort to see. Among the secretive thorn forest birds that we will be trying for are Citreoline Trogon, Plain-capped Starthroat, Flammulated Flycatcher, Orange-breasted Bunting, and Red-breasted Chat.

NIGHTS: Rancho Primavera, El Tuito

**January 11, Day 7: Rancho Primavera to San Sebastián del Oeste.** Birding en route, we will seek out the final thorn forest specialties along the way to our next destination. Nestled in a valley just 40 miles from Puerto Vallarta, San Sebastian del Oeste is stuck in a colonial era. Narrow cobble streets and a charming square are remnants of a previous time, one that made it a silver mining boom town. Much quieter now, San Sebastian, surrounded by corn and agave fields, is a perfect base for our explorations of the Sierra Madre Occidental which looms to the east. The gardens, orchards, and woods that surround town, and the creek that runs through it, are great places to see some of our first birds of the Sierra like Gray Silky-Flycatcher, Tufted Flycatcher and White-throated Thrush.

NIGHT: Hacienda Caudillos, San Sebastián del Oeste



Red-breasted Chat © Brian Gibbons

**January 12–14, Days 8–10: Birding the mountains and countryside around San Sebastián del Oeste.**

Over the next few days, we will enjoy some spectacular mountain birding. Birds that we will endeavor to locate are Long-tailed Wood-Partridge (always a challenge to see), Lesser Roadrunner, Mountain Trogon, Mexican Woodnymph, Bumblebee Hummingbird, Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo, Aztec Thrush (rare), Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer, Flame-colored Tanager, Red Warbler, Green-striped Brushfinch and many more. Roving the pine, fir and oak forests are large flocks of wintering North American birds including Bullock's and Scott's orioles; Townsend's, Hermit and Red-faced warblers; Black-headed Grosbeaks. Mexican birds like Crescent-chested Warbler; Red-headed Tanager; Slate-throated Redstart; and Gray-collared Becards often join these mixed flocks. At the flower banks higher up, we hope to find Rivoli's and White-eared hummingbirds and Amethyst-throated and Blue-throated, mountain-gems. This is also the foraging area of the flowerpiercer. The moist canyons leading into the mountains host a variety of birds that will be new to us; Golden-crowned and Golden-browed warblers are two beautiful birds we will seek. In addition to great birding, we will also have ample time to wander the cobbled streets and to purchase some of the locally-grown organic coffee; it's wonderful. Most of our birding will be along remote dirt mountain roads surrounded by majestic oaks and enormous pine and Douglas Fir trees. Three days here will give us ample time to explore these treks all over the mountain and to see many wonderful birds.

NIGHTS: Hacienda Caudillos, San Sebastián del Oeste

**January 15, Day 11: Morning birding; departure for home.** We will probably stay close to San Sebastián del Oeste this morning enjoying the myriad of birds that are close at hand in the gardens, orchards and surrounding woods before our group transfer to Puerto Vallarta International Airport. Participants should select flights which depart after 2:00 p.m.



Mountain Trogon male © Brian

## **Essential Tour Information**

**TOUR SIZE:** This tour will be limited to 10 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:** This tour will be led by **Brian Gibbons** and a second leader to be announced.



**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. More than 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 and South America, and Morocco. As well as being a fanatical birder, he loves capturing birds with photography. He lives in Tucson, Arizona with his wife, Lacreia Johnson, and their son, Grayson.



## **TOUR COSTS & PAYMENT INFORMATION**

**TOUR FEE:** The fee for this tour is **\$7,295** per person in double occupancy from Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 11, ten nights shared accommodations, ground transportation during the tour, tipping, park entrance fees, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Puerto Vallarta 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.

**SINGLE SUPPLEMENT:** The single supplement for this tour is **\$790**. 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.

Rooms are limited at Rancho Primavera (Days 6–10) and singles may be asked to share. If so, you will be credited appropriately.

**REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT:** You may register for this tour through the VENT [website](#) or by calling our office (512-328-5221). The deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. We accept MasterCard and Visa. If you choose not to register online, you may pay your deposit by credit card, check, money order, or bank transfer. If not paying online, or by card, your tour space will be held for 10 days pending receipt of your deposit.

**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 (August 8, 2025) prior to the tour departure date.

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

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

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

**TIPPING:** An important part of the value of a VENT tour is knowing that tips for local service providers at our destinations—restaurant staff, hotel staff, drivers, local guides, and various other support staff—are included in your tour fee. If you would like to offer any of your local guides an additional tip, \$5 to \$10 a day is a common amount.

Tips for your VENT tour leader(s) are **not** included, but it is customary to tip one or both if you feel that you have received exceptional service. To assist in your planning, we recommend tipping your VENT tour leader(s) \$15 to \$20 per day, or the equivalent of approximately 2–4% of the tour fee.

If you plan to give tips by cash, they should be given directly to your tour leader at the end of the tour and **not** sent to the VENT office. Some of our tour leaders use mobile payment applications such as Venmo, PayPal, and Wise. If you would like to use this method, please ask your tour leaders directly whether they can accept tips through such an application.

We emphasize that tipping is optional and that these amounts are only recommendations. The amount you decide to tip is based entirely on your experience and at your discretion.

## **CANCELLATION & REFUNDS**

**CANCELLATION BY PARTICIPANT:** Refunds, if any, for any cancellation by a participant are made according to the following schedule: If participant cancels 180 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$500** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months from the date of participant tour cancellation, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made between 179 and 151 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the tour fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 150 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre- and post-tour extensions. **For participants' protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

<u>If participant cancels:</u>	<u>Participant's refund will be:</u>
180 days or more before departure date	Your deposit(s) minus \$500*
179 to 151 days before departure date	No refund of the deposits, but any payments on the balance will be refunded
150 days or less before departure date	No refund available

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

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

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



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

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

## **TRAVEL INSURANCE**

**MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE/PROTECTION REQUIREMENT:** This tour visits remote locations where immediate access to primary medical care may not be available. **For this reason, travel insurance/travel protection which covers you for emergency evacuation is required for participation on this tour.** This coverage is included in the **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance™** program. Alternatively, comparable service can be obtained through **Medjet** and its **MedjetAssist** plan. If you choose not to purchase insurance/travel protection through Ripcord or Medjet, you are required to obtain it through another provider. Please refer to the TRAVEL INSURANCE/TRAVEL PROTECTION section for additional information.

**SUGGESTED OPTIONS:** To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit. VENT has partnered with **Redpoint Travel Protection** as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend its comprehensive **Ripcord** plan, which includes a medical evacuation benefit. With this in mind, it is important to note that medical evacuation is not offered by Redpoint as a stand-alone policy or benefit. For travelers not interested in comprehensive travel insurance, VENT recommends **Medjet** and its **MedjetAssist®** plan. Medjet is not an insurance company, and Medjet Assist is not an insurance product; rather, Medjet is a membership-based air-medical transport company specializing in moving hospitalized travelers from an admitting hospital to a medical facility of choice. Medjet does not provide medical evacuation service from the point of injury or illness; yet, the MedjetAssist plan offers robust enough travel protection to satisfy the medical evacuation insurance requirement in place for many VENT tours.

### **About Redpoint Travel's Ripcord Plan**

Ripcord is a completely integrated travel insurance program with single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims. Critical benefits include comprehensive travel insurance for trip cancellation/interruption, medical evacuation from your point of injury or illness to your hospital of choice; 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: [Ripcord Travel Insurance](#); or click the **Ripcord** logo on our website (click Help > Preparation and Insurance > 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, second deposit, 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 costs in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

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.

### **About Medjet’s MedjetAssist Plan**

MedjetAssist is a membership program that functions like AAA for motorists. The company’s primary service is air medical transport. Critical benefits of MedjetAssist include a staff on call and ready to provide assistance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; all-expenses-paid air medical transport in the United States and internationally to medical facility of choice, regardless of medical necessity; repatriation of remains; and no exclusions for pre-existing conditions.

For travelers under 75, MedjetAssist may be purchased as Short-Term Memberships of 8, 15, 21, and 30 days, or Regular Annual Memberships from 1 to 5 years. For travelers 75–84, Medjet offers a Diamond Membership that is the same program but with a few additional conditions.

For a price quote or to purchase MedjetAssist, please visit: [Medjet.com/VentBird](https://www.medjet.com/VentBird) or call 1-800-527-7478. Pricing is based on type and term of membership.

## **GETTING THERE & REQUIRED TRAVEL DOCUMENTS**

**AIR TRAVEL:** 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 baggage to one piece of luggage and one carry-on. The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. Please consult your pre-departure materials and/or airline to find out specific weight restrictions.

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.

Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government's attempts to improve airport security, we recommend that you check the website of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for information pertaining to permissible carry-on items: <http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/prohibited/permitted-prohibited-items.shtm>.

## TRAVEL DOCUMENTS:

**PASSPORTS** - A passport is required for entry into Mexico and should be valid for the full duration of your time in the country. 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 <https://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 please do not pack it in your checked luggage.

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

## WHAT TO BRING

**CLOTHING:** Dress will be casual throughout. Participants should bring lightweight, cool, well-ventilated clothing. Many people now prefer designer field shirts that most outdoor stores and mail order companies are carrying. A typical shirt is usually long-sleeved and buttoned down the center. The material is lightweight and usually of earth tones or pastel coloration. Mesh for ventilation is a standard feature as are several pockets for personal effects. Nights and mornings may be cold though, so be sure to bring a sweater, sweatshirt, or lightweight jacket. For those that get cold easily, light weight gloves and a warm hat can help; the morning sun can be slow to find the deep canyons in the mountains where we will be birding. Note also that the hotels in San Sebastian del Oeste generally do not have heat, a set of long thermals can make sleeping more comfortable. Mosquitoes will certainly be a nuisance at some sites so lightweight long pants and long-sleeved shirts will be preferable and some may want to pack mosquito netting just in case. Rancho Primavera is known for its biting midges as well, so bug spray may help with them too—sandals and shorts are not recommended. Bring a hat to provide shade from the sun, and sunglasses will also be indispensable. You should also bring a bathing suit. There is a pool available at Rancho Primavera and a lunch on the beach will allow time for a quick seaside dip.

**FOOTWEAR:** Heavy hiking boots are not necessary, but you will want to bring a light hiking boot or trail shoe. For down time or during periods around towns or hotels, sandals or other open toed shoes are a good idea if you prefer them.

**EQUIPMENT:** You will want to have sunglasses and sunscreen first and foremost. You should pack a belt pack or day pack (for carrying books, sunscreen, extra digital storage media, etc.). For those with balance or mobility issues a collapsible walking stick will be useful. A folding stool is a good idea when we are waiting on a target bird to appear. Other important travel items include a flashlight or headlamp, travel alarm clock, and water bottle. A camera is highly recommended as there is much to see. Earplugs may be necessary for dogs, roosters, and donkeys. As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your

binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medications, and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag. Insect repellent is helpful at Rancho Primavera.

**Binoculars:** We strongly recommend good binoculars of at least 8x32, 8x42, or 10x42 magnification. We recommend that you do 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. Trying to find a bird in your binoculars using minis is like trying to read a book through a keyhole. You will be very frustrated, and even if you do manage to get the bird in your binoculars before it flies, you will have a poor view. 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 trip, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so.

## **DESTINATION INFORMATION & LOCAL CONDITIONS**

**CLIMATE & WEATHER:** At this time of the year we can expect mild temperatures ranging from the low 40s at night to the high 80s during the day. Sunny days are the norm. Rain is rare but possible during the dry season, December–May.

**CONDITIONS:** Much of our birding will be along dirt and two-lane roads. Some birding areas are reached via long drives on bumpy, curvy mountain roads without guardrails. Cobblestones in San Sebastian can be challenging to walk on; bring a walking stick if you need extra support over rough terrain. Expect to walk along roads and trails every day, sometimes they can be very steep in the mountains. Midday breaks are possible on a few days but don't expect them daily. Picnic breakfasts and lunches will be taken on a couple of days.

Transportation will be aboard 15-passenger Nissan/Toyota vans. Seating space is not a problem for most of the tour as everyone will have a window seat on each. Please note that your comfort is important and that regular stops will occur for bathrooms and to stretch our legs.

**ACCOMMODATIONS NOTE:** The rooms at the small private Rancho Primavera are not all equal. Some rooms are located closer to the main ranch house and have more square footage than the rooms a little farther away from the main ranch house. Rooms will be assigned on a first come, first served. In San Sebastián some of the uneven nature of the rooms may be alleviated by the assigning of larger rooms to those who had smaller, basic rooms at Rancho Primavera.

**BIRDING ETIQUETTE:** To make the tour most enjoyable for yourself, other participants, and your leader, it is important to use common sense and show proper etiquette while in the field. Birds tend to be shy. Loud noises and bright colors can scare them. We encourage clothing with earth tones. Try to avoid colors like oranges, yellows, and reds. Always keep your voice down. Shouting is not conducive to extended looks at a given species. When looking through the spotting scope, always wait your turn and look briefly the first time so that others may have the opportunity to get a look. If you are a smoker, please do so at a distance.

**CURRENCY & SPENDING:** Your trip to Mexico includes all necessary expenses. You may want to bring enough cash to cover personal expenses not included in the program, such as gifts, gratuities, meals on your own, and personal items. It is best to carry small denominations of cash as many places we visit may be unable to provide change for large bills. All places visited on this tour accept U.S. Dollars. It is not necessary to obtain local currency (Pesos) as shopping opportunities are very limited. However, should you desire local currency, it is best acquired before arriving in Mexico as it may be difficult to obtain after we depart the Puerto Vallarta area. Some, businesses accept major credit cards.



The official currency of Mexico is the Mexican Peso (MXN). You can check the latest currency conversion rate by visiting “[XE-The World’s Favorite Currency Site.](#)”

Should you extend your vacation in Mexico beyond what is offered in the program, you’ll definitely want to obtain local currency. Please check with your bank and credit card issuer for more information regarding banking and the use of ATM and credit cards overseas.

**ELECTRICITY:** The electrical current in Mexico is 110-120V, same as in the U.S. Electrical outlets are mostly “Type B” the typical U.S. outlet. However sometimes we will encounter “Type A” which is similar but doesn’t provide a round third hole for a ground.

**INTERNET ACCESS:** Expect Wi-Fi to be available in common areas and in some individual rooms at all lodges and hotels. In 2024 internet was very slow and at times, non-functional for much of our time in San Sebastian del Oeste and cell reception was spotty at best in this small mountain town.

**LANGUAGE:** Spanish is the primary language spoken in Mexico, but English is spoken by some staff at hotels and lodges.

**TIME ZONE:** West Mexico is located in the Central Standard Time Zone, and in January is one hour earlier than Eastern Standard Time (EST).

**LAUNDRY SERVICE:** Laundry service is available at Rancho Primavera for additional cost.

## **HEALTH & SAFETY**

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

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

**COVID-19:** We continually emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. Although VENT no longer maintains any of its COVID-era prevention protocols, we strongly recommend best practices for protecting yourself and your fellow travelers against COVID-19 illness. These measures include receiving the primary series vaccinations for those eligible, staying “Up to Date” with COVID-19 booster shots, wearing high filtration N-95 or KN-95 masks when in airports and on airplanes, and avoiding risky social settings in the lead-up to your tour. These recommendations are firmly rooted in CDC guidance for avoiding COVID-19.

**SUN EXPOSURE:** The sun’s ultraviolet rays are dangerous under prolonged exposure (sometimes only a matter of minutes), even in winter and early spring. Anytime you are outdoors you will want to protect your skin, including your lips, eyes, nose, and ears. A severe sunburn is potentially 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 INSECTS:** Mosquitoes will certainly be a nuisance at some. Rancho Primavera is known for its biting midges as well, so bug spray may help with them.

**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.

**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 it is best completed in advance of travel. Do-it-yourself pre-treatment must be repeated more often than commercial treatment using Insect Shield® technology. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online.
- **Insect Shield® apparel:** Clothing pre-treated with Permanone is made by a variety of manufacturers. It is available for purchase from some sporting goods suppliers. The clothing is advertised as retaining its repellency for up to 70 washings.

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

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

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta Georgia. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line at 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636), or you can check their website at [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel). Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new\\_e.html](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html) (click on travel health).

## **SUGGESTED READING & TRIP PREPARATION**

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. We also recommend Andrew Isles books for the Asia-Pacific region at <http://www.andrewisles.com> for difficult to find and out of print books for Australia.

This list includes some basic field guides and reference volumes of use to the visitor. A great deal has been written about all aspects of Australia's natural history. You will find a variety of selections in any library. Browse around a little and you will discover many resources not listed here.

#### FIELD GUIDES:

Howell, Steve N.G. and Sophie Webb. 1995. ***A Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America***. Oxford: Oxford University Press, **This is the main field guide for the area**, and is far more than a simple field guide in size (2 inches thick). In addition to exceptionally good plates, it is a trove of information on distribution (the only Mexico field guide with range maps), vocalizations, subspecies, and natural history information.

Also, United States field guides will be useful as well since the Mexico guides do not show the common species from the U.S.A. that may occur in Mexico as wintering birds or migrants. Two of the best options are:

Dunn, Jon L. and Jonathan Alderfer. ***National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition***. Washington D.C.

Sibley, David S. 2014. ***The Sibley Guide to Birds***. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014.

#### BIRDING RESOURCES AND GENERAL NATURE:

Howell, Steve N.G. ***A Bird-finding Guide to Mexico***. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999. Site guide to some of the areas we'll visit.

Leopold, A.S. ***Wildlife in Mexico***. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959. Detailed volume on the mammals and other wildlife of Mexico.

Pesman, Walter M. ***Meet Flora Mexicana***. Flagstaff, AZ: Northland Press, 1962. An introductory guide for the amateur botanist. Out of print, but available on [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com).

Sutton, George M. ***Mexican Birds: First Impressions***. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951. Out of print, but try [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com).

#### HISTORY AND CULTURE:

Lumholtz, Carl. ***Unknown Mexico: Explorations in the Sierra Madres and Other Regions, 1890-1898***. Dover, 1987. Reprint of the 1902 edition.

Parkes, Henry Banford. ***A History of Mexico***. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1969. A truly outstanding book. Original edition published in 1938; available on [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com).

Ruiz, Ramón Eduardo. ***Triumphs and Tragedies, A History of the Mexican People***. Norton Press, 1992. Hard to find.

#### APPS AND 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. Additionally, trip leaders can share daily lists, so one only need accept a shared list and it will upload 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 **Mexico: West**.

## **TERMS, CONDITIONS & RESPONSIBILITIES**

**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 July 30, 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.

View the complete [Terms and Conditions](#) on our website.

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