



VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

ITINERARY

## WINTER SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

JANUARY 13 - 19, 2026

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La Jolla Cove ©Brennan Mulrooney

***Southern California offers what is arguably the best winter birding in the United States. This tour covers the two southernmost counties of the state and encompasses a tremendous variety of habitats as well as bird species. Scheduled during the winter months, the tour is generally conducted under comfortable, mild conditions, which is especially enticing to many birders who at home normally experience snow, ice, and freezing temperatures during this time. A large percentage of the California and southwestern specialties are resident and readily found at this season. In addition,***

*winter is the time for finding large numbers of raptors, waterfowl, shorebirds, gulls, and sparrows. The overall trip list should approach 200 species.*

*On the picturesque shores of the Pacific Ocean near San Diego, we will search out rocky coast shorebirds such as Wandering Tattler, Black Turnstone, and Surfbird. Nearby coastal estuaries should harbor numerous gulls, including the beautiful Heermann's, the dainty Short-billed (scarce), and perhaps, the rare Glaucous-winged. Further inland, coastal sage scrub and chaparral habitats should produce Wrentit, California Thrasher, California Towhee, the newly split Bell's Sparrow, and the federally threatened California Gnatcatcher. In the pine/oak forests of the Laguna Mountains, Nuttall's and Acorn woodpeckers, Steller's Jay, Pygmy Nuthatch, Mountain Chickadee, Oak Titmouse, and Western Bluebird should be encountered. Other possibilities include Red-naped or Red-breasted sapsuckers and the sporadic Lawrence's Goldfinch.*

*The spectacle of the Imperial Valley in winter must be seen to be believed. The wetlands surrounding the southern end of the Salton Sea, as well as the nearby vast expanses of agricultural fields, are the winter home to tens of thousands of waterbirds. Egrets, ibis, geese (including the diminutive Ross's), ducks, curlews, and gulls*



*occur in very large numbers. Apart from the impressive number of waterbirds we expect to see near the shore of the sea, we will also be seeking out a few specialties of the desert southwest like Gambel's Quail, Verdin, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Gila Woodpecker and Abert's Towhee. Additionally, the Imperial Valley is a major wintering area for the scarce and declining Mountain Plover, and we will dedicate time to searching suitable agricultural fields for this scarce and elusive species.*

*Winter Southern California combines fabulous and diverse birding with beautiful landscapes and pleasant weather. It's an experience you won't want to miss.*

*This tour may also be combined with our "Winter Southern Arizona" tour January 19-25, 2026, which immediately follows this trip with five full days of fabulous birding in southeastern Arizona.*

**January 13, Day 1: Arrival in San Diego.** Participants may plan to arrive in San Diego at any time today. Please make your way by taxi/Uber/Lyft to our hotel where a room will be reserved in your name. We will meet in the hotel lobby at 5:30 p.m. for a brief introduction followed by dinner.

NIGHT: Hampton Inn San Diego - Mission Valley, San Diego

**January 14, Day 2: San Elijo Lagoon, Coastal San Diego County.** We will likely start the day in the coastal sage scrub and chaparral covered foothills north of San Diego. A nice series of trails through a preserved patch of native habitat should yield a good variety of birds. Typical species of this area include Anna's and Allen's hummingbirds, Say's and Black phoebes, Wrentit, Bushtit, Bewick's Wren, California Thrasher, and California Towhee. A special effort will be made to locate California Gnatcatcher, which frequents the



brushy slopes and ravines. By mid-morning we will head toward the scenic coast of La Jolla. If tides are favorable, a wide variety of rocky coast shorebirds may be present in the tide-pools. Black Turnstones, Surfbird (very uncommon), Wandering Tattler (uncommon), Spotted Sandpiper, Sanderling, and Whimbrel are all possible. In addition, Brown Pelican; Brandt's and Pelagic (scarce) cormorants; Heermann's, California, and Western gulls; and Royal Terns should be in evidence. With patience, off-shore scoping often yields distant views of Black-vented Shearwater as well. The cliffs and beaches here also provide refuge for California Sea Lion and Harbor Seal. Meanwhile offshore it might be possible to spot feeding Common or Pacific White-sided dolphin or migrating California Gray Whale.

The remainder of the day will likely be spent around Mission Bay, the San Diego River Channel, and Point Loma. Targets in these areas include Western, Horned, and Eared grebes; Little Blue Heron; Brant (the western subspecies *nigricans*); Cinnamon and Blue-winged teal; Eurasian Wigeon (rare); Snowy Plover; Long-billed Curlew; Black-necked Stilt; American Avocet; and Short-billed Gull (scarce this far south) among others. Land birding around Point Loma could produce the recently split California Scrub-Jay, Hermit Thrush, more chances for California Thrasher, Spotted Towhee, Fox Sparrow, and Golden-crowned Sparrow. All in all, it should be a great day with upwards of 100 species possible!

NIGHT: Hampton Inn San Diego - Mission Valley, San Diego

**January 15, Day 3: San Diego Bay, Imperial Beach, Inland Valleys.**

Our schedule on this day will depend in part on what we did or didn't see on our first day. However, it will likely include a variety of stops along the edge of San Diego Bay and around the town of Imperial Beach. Red-throated Loon, Western and Clark's grebes, Surf Scoter, Ridgway's Rail (a recent split from Clapper Rail), and the distinctive Belding's race of Savannah Sparrow are all possible. In addition, the San Diego area plays host to wintering rarities every year and, time permitting, we will seek them out where possible. In the afternoon, we will work our way back inland to the city of Santee. A series of manmade lakes in this area provide great birding with Wood Duck, Ring-necked Duck, Green Heron, Red-shouldered Hawk, Nuttall's Woodpecker, Cassin's Kingbird, Western Bluebird, Townsend's Warbler, and the declining Tricolored Blackbird among the possibilities. We will also be on the lookout for the introduced, but now countable, Scaly-breasted Munia which occurs in some numbers in San Diego County. If there is an active parrot roost in the area, we may try to intercept the flock on their way to the roost before we return to the hotel for the evening. Red-crowned and Lilac-crowned Parrots are both established in San Diego.



**Ridgway's Rail ©Brennan Mulrooney**

NIGHT: Hampton Inn San Diego - Mission Valley, San Diego

**January 16, Day 4: Coastal Mountains, Anza-Borrego Desert.** We will be up early this morning and will likely work our way through the Cuyamaca or Laguna Mountains (depending on current conditions) and on

to the famed Salton Sea. Various stops in the upper elevations (above 4,000 feet) of the mountains could produce Band-tailed Pigeon; Acorn, Nuttall's and Hairy woodpeckers; Steller's Jay; Mountain Chickadee; Oak Titmouse; Pygmy Nuthatch; Hutton's Vireo (uncommon); Western Bluebird; Spotted Towhee; Purple Finch; and Lesser Goldfinch. Although less likely, Red-breasted, Red-naped or Williamson's sapsuckers are also possibilities. Lawrence's Goldfinch is very unpredictable in southern California (in some winters numerous, in many entirely absent), but we will listen closely here for the tinkling, bell-like notes of this erratic species. Our descent from the mountains to the Salton Sea will take us through a portion of the Anza-Borrego Desert. In this starkly beautiful area, we will search out such species as Costa's Hummingbird, Verdin, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Phainopepla, and Black-throated Sparrow. Alternatively, we may take a more northerly route through Ramona & Borrego Springs, where Ferruginous Hawk, Golden Eagle, Prairie Falcon and Mountain Bluebird may be seen.

If there is still time left in our day, we will stop at the area of the Salton Sea known as Unit 1. Here large numbers of geese (both Ross's and Snow) gather along the roadsides and are often joined by a few Sandhill Cranes. Other birds to look for as we head into El Centro include White-faced Ibis, Mountain Plover, Long-billed Curlew, and Burrowing Owl.

NIGHT: Holiday Inn Express, El Centro



**Sandhill Cranes ©Brennan Mulrooney**

**January 17, Day 5: Imperial Valley and the South End of the Salton Sea.** The entire day will be devoted to birding the Imperial Valley and the southern end of the Salton Sea. This unique body of water lies in a desert "sink" with its only outlet being evaporation. Consequently, the water is saltier than the ocean and supports only a few species of introduced fish. However, due to its unlikely location in the middle of the desert, the sea functions as a natural magnet for waterfowl, shorebirds, gulls, and other species. Many vagrants and accidental species have been recorded at the sea in winter, with each year bringing new surprises.

During the course of the day, we will wander through a vast expanse of agricultural fields where we should see enormous numbers of birds, including spectacular displays of thousands of ducks and geese and flooded fields filled with ibis, egrets, and curlews. Careful searches (often time consuming) of bare dirt or recently burned fields may reveal the scarce and declining Mountain Plover which winters in this area. We will keep a constant lookout for the unofficial avian mascot of the Imperial Valley, the Burrowing Owl. These charismatic little critters make

their homes along the edges of canals and agricultural drains, and we usually encounter several active burrows throughout the day. Other possibilities include American White Pelican, Ferruginous Hawk (declining here), Peregrine and Prairie falcons, Gambel's Quail, Greater Roadrunner, Common Ground-Dove, Inca Dove (declining), Cactus Wren, and Abert's Towhee. We will visit the headquarters of the Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge and learn about the fascinating history of the Salton Sea, and from here it is just a short drive to the shoreline of the sea. The receding lake level and increasing salinity of the Salton Sea have combined to make the sea itself somewhat less productive than in the past, but we should still be able to find large numbers of waterbirds along the southeastern shoreline. It should be a productive day filled with surprises as well as unique and memorable sights.

NIGHT: Holiday Inn Express, El Centro

**January 18, Day 6: Morning Birding Followed by Return to San Diego.** Our schedule today will depend on what we are missing at this point. We may return to the Salton Sea for more attempts at any wintering rarity that may be present or try again to locate a field with Mountain Plovers. Alternatively, we could concentrate on mountain areas that we missed on our way out. If we haven't already seen it, we will make an effort to locate the Bell's Sparrow (recently split off from the old Sage Sparrow complex) which inhabits the chaparral foothills.

We expect to arrive back in San Diego by mid-afternoon in time for a final checklist session and farewell dinner.

NIGHT: Hampton Inn San Diego - Mission Valley, San Diego

**January 19, Day 7: Departure for Home.** Participants may make their own way to the airport any time today.

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

**TOUR LEADER:** Brennan Mulrooney (a second leader will be added if tour size warrants)



**Brennan Mulrooney** was born and raised in San Diego, California. Growing up, his heart and mind were captured by the ocean. He split his summer days between helping out behind the scenes at southern California's leading aquarium and working on sport fishing vessels off the coast. As a wildlife and fisheries biology major at UC Davis, he developed his fascination with birds and love of birding while taking a required ornithology course. After graduating from UC Davis, Brennan traveled throughout the United States working on widespread ornithological field studies. His work took him from the mountains of northern California to the Salton Sea in southern California, and from Cape May, New Jersey to Key Largo, Florida. After a six-year stay in the Florida Keys, Brennan returned home to San Diego where he currently lives with his wife Brynne, their son Declan, and daughter Saoirse. Participants often comment that Brennan's sharp eyes, sharper wit, and easygoing attitude make it a pleasure to bird with him.



**Kevin Burke** is originally from the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia. He grew up running around in the woods and trails of Shenandoah National Park. His family spent many summers camping and hiking in the park. One of Kevin's favorite activities was jumping in the river and turning over every rock to see what was underneath. This eventually earned him the nickname "Hellgrammite Kid." This early exposure to the natural world has vaulted into a lifelong obsession with the outdoors. Kevin was introduced to birding while spending summers in Rhode Island at his grandmother's house. She would point out all the feeder birds and help him identify them. These early encounters helped foster a love for birds. An early Ornithology class at Hocking College in Ohio rekindled his love for birds. He has been birding every day since. He went on to get a Bachelor of Science in Ecotourism and Conservation Ecology from the University of Idaho. Kevin has been involved with leading bird trips in some capacity for almost 20 years. He has led birding trips all throughout the United States, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and the Dominican Republic. His birding journeys have also taken



him to some spectacular locations such as Portugal, Colombia, The Bahamas, and Canada. This is truly a lifelong obsession. He currently resides with his family in Hendersonville, North Carolina. Kevin’s wife and two kids also enjoy birding. They have fun kayaking, hiking, and camping in the mountains that surround their home. One of their favorite activities is jumping on the paddle board and kayaks and leisurely floating the French Broad River near their house.

**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.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for the tour is **\$3,625** per person in double occupancy from San Diego, California. This includes all meals from Dinner on Day 1 to Breakfast on Day 7, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to San Diego and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$650**. 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:** You may register for this tour through the VENT [website](#) or by calling our office (512-328-5221). The deposit for this tour is **\$500** 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 16, 2025) prior to the tour departure date.

**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 **\$250** 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, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made between 179 and 151 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the tour fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 150 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre- and post-tour extensions. **For participants’ protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

<u>If participant cancels:</u>	<u>Participant’s refund will be:</u>
180 days or more before departure date	Participant’s deposit minus \$250*
179 to 151 days before departure date	No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance of the tour fee will be refunded
150 days or less before departure date	No refund available

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

### **Cancellation by VENT:**

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

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

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

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

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

**TRAVEL INSURANCE/TRAVEL PROTECTION:** 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 Ripcord

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: <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, 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.

## Coronavirus (COVID-19):

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 MedjetAssist

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://Medjet.com/VentBird) or call 1-800-527-7478. Pricing is based on type and term of membership.

**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.

\*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.

## **CONDITIONS**

- **CLIMATE AND ALTITUDE:** The weather in southern California is generally quite pleasant during this season. Daytime highs average in the low to mid 60s and nighttime lows in the mid-40s. In the Laguna Mountains, the temperatures will be cooler and often fall below freezing overnight, so expect a cold morning that day (our 2008 tour experienced a snowstorm on this day!). Temperatures at the Salton Sea are usually a little warmer than San Diego (it reached 80 degrees on the 2014 tour), but cool mornings are still the norm. Rain is possible as is snow in the mountains if it gets cold enough. Altitudinal changes will vary from below sea level (in the Imperial Valley) to just over 5,000 feet elevation. Most walks on this tour will be over short distances (a mile or less) and will be conducted at a moderate to leisurely pace.
- **CLOTHING:** Basic field clothing is appropriate for this tour. A combination of long-sleeved and short-sleeved shirts may be useful given the widely varying temperatures. Cool mornings will call for sweaters, light jackets, and possibly a heavy jacket, gloves, and a warm hat up in the mountains (check long-range forecasts!). Be sure to have a comfortable pair of walking shoes or hiking boots and a second pair of lightweight shoes. Casual attire is acceptable for all restaurants in which we dine. Lightweight raingear is also recommended.
- **INSECTS:** Insects should not be a problem (and in fact may be nearly nonexistent) in late January; however, if you wish to take precautions, we suggest bringing one bottle of Cutter or Off!
- **SCHEDULE:** Most mornings we will have breakfast between 6:00-6:30 a.m. Birding will generally conclude in the afternoon by 5:00-5:15 p.m.

**EQUIPMENT:** You should pack a pair of binoculars that are in good repair, along with a belt pack or day pack (for carrying books, sunscreen, extra film, etc.). 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. Your leader will have a spotting scope, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so.

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

If you are taking personal medication, prescription or over-the-counter, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember

to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**SUGGESTED READING:** A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend [www.amazon.com](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 and General Reading:***

Beadle, David and James Rising. *Sparrows of the United States and Canada; The Photographic Guide*. Academic Press. London, 2002.

Crossley, Richard and Jerry Liguori. *The Crossley ID Guide: Raptors*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013

Dunn, John L. *A Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2017.

Kaufman, Kenn. *Mammals of North America*. Houghton Mifflin, 2005.

O'Brien, Michael, Richard Crossley, and Kevin Karlson. *The Shorebird Guide*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006.

Sibley, David. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Knopf, 2014.

Sibley, David. *The Sibley Guide to Birds of Western North America*. New York: Knopf, 2016.

Twiet, Susan J. *The Great Southwest Nature Factbook*. Alaska Northwest books. Washington, 2002.

Zimmer, Kevin J. *Birding in the American West*. Cornell University Press, 2000.

**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.

**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 June 24, 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. If a participant is removed from a tour, such participant will be responsible for any expenses associated with such removal, including but not limited to, transportation, lodging, airfare and meals, and VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any such removed participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by such participant.

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

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2/23/2024-BM  
6/13/2025 – CD  
6/24/2025-DE