

PANAMA: EL VALLE'S CANOPY LODGE

NOVEMBER 7-14, 2009

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Straddling the Continental Divide, the foothills of Panama harbor a unique avifauna that includes both lowland and highland species, as well as birds of both the Pacific and Caribbean slopes. Our tour, designed to pick up where traditional Canal Zone tours leave off, offers some of Central America's most exciting birding, set amidst beautiful middle-elevation forest and in a refreshingly moderate climate.

This tour will be based in the very comfortable Canopy Lodge at El Valle, sister property to the famed Canopy Tower. Nestled in the crater of an extinct volcano, and surrounded by jagged ridges and hills, our lodge enjoys a magnificent scenic backdrop and ready access to lush forests that are alive with colorful hummingbirds and tanagers. Among the many species that we will be searching for are such gems as Rufous-crested Coquette; Snowcap; White-tipped Sicklebill (rare); Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer; Violet-headed Hummingbird; Orange-bellied Trogon; Blue-throated Toucanet; Tody Motmot; Spotted Woodcreeper; Lance-tailed Manakin; Silver-throated, Dusky-faced and Bay-headed tanagers; Scarlet-thighed Dacnis; and the rare Blue Seedeater.

November 7, Day 1: Arrival in Panama City and Transfer to the Country Inn & Suites Canal. Participants arriving in Panama City (Tocumen International Airport) anytime this afternoon or evening will be met and transferred to the Country Inn & Suites Canal where a room will be reserved in your name.

NIGHT: Country Inn & Suites Canal, Panama City

November 8, Day 2: Panama City to El Valle. After an early breakfast, we will leave Panama City, cross the Bridge of the Americas to the western side of the Canal and head towards the foothills of El Valle. The drive takes about two hours, although we may make a roadside stop or two if something unusual is seen. At any rate we will arrive in El Valle in time for lunch and perhaps even some late morning birding prior to lunch.

After turning off the Pan-American Highway, a narrow road winds up through dry hills for 28 km, slowly increasing in elevation until we round a bend and El Valle de Antón comes into view. At nearly 2000 feet in elevation, the views of the charming valley before us are memorable indeed. The climate here is refreshing, cooler than in the lowlands, but still dominated by the dry Pacific weather. Everywhere around the town are lovely landscaped gardens, colorful with flowers and shaded by open groves of trees, while nearby hillsides are covered in secondary forest. Birds are abundant in this patchwork of habitats. We will make our way through the bustling little town en route to the Canopy Lodge, our home for the next five nights.

The Canopy Lodge's spacious guestrooms offer comfortable beds and private baths with tasteful interior decoration. The grounds meanwhile, are a birder's paradise. The gardens and walkways are often loaded with birds. In fact, it is not uncommon to record 60 species from the property alone in a single visit. Further enhancing the delightful setting are feeding trays, which draw birds all day long. This is indeed a most relaxing way to bird.

Panama: El Valle's Canopy Lodge, Page 2

After a tasty lunch, we will pay close attention to the feeders and explore the expansive grounds. Among the many species that visit the garden and feeders are Flame-rumped and White-lined tanagers (both of which are hard to find elsewhere), Rufous Motmot, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Bananaquit, Black-striped Sparrow, Buff-throated Saltator and Chestnut-headed Oropendola (a colony of which sometimes nests on the hillside above).

We will begin exploring the many side roads and trails nearby. There are a number of species especially sought in this area, including Blue-crowned Motmot, Lance-tailed Manakin, numerous flycatchers of all sizes and stripes, Rufous-and-white and Rufous-breasted wrens, Rufous-capped Warbler, Rosy Thrush-Tanager and Red-crowned Ant-Tanager. This will be our first chance for the Tody Motmot, found locally in these forests but often elusive.

NIGHT: Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Antón

November 9-12, Days 3-6: El Valle Area, The Canopy Adventure, Altos del Maria and Cerro Gaital Natural Monument. From El Valle, a country road leads a short distance up through scattered farms and forest to the back side of three tall peaks, a flat area known locally as "La Mesa." This area is on the crest of the ridge along the Continental Divide. For much of the year, it is brushed by clouds passing over from the Caribbean slope. The frequent misting creates a super moist environment, where the remaining forests are fantastically sculpted and laden with epiphytes and shade the dense understory.

This area is home to some fantastic foothill birds not found in the forests below or the Canal area. Among these, tanagers are the dominant group with potential for gems like Emerald, Bay-headed, Silver-throated, Golden-hooded, Flame-rumped and Tawny-crested tanagers; Tawny-capped Euphonia; and Scarlet-thighed Dacnis.

Hummingbirds are also diverse here and possibilities include some real foothill specialties like White-tipped Sicklebill, Green Hermit, Green-crowned Brilliant, Rufous-crested Coquette (scarce), Violet-headed Hummingbird, Violet-crowned Woodnymph and Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer. A short hike up to a lookout over El Valle below takes us into an isolated area of stunted elfin forest, home to birds like Barred Hawk, Orange-bellied Trogon, Blue-throated Toucanet, Spotted Woodcreeper, Plain Antvireo, Black-headed Antthrush (secretive) and a distinctive local race of Common Bush-Tanager (subspecies *punctulatus*).

Just above El Valle lies "The Canopy Adventure," a private reserve that protects tall tropical moist forest along a clear foothill stream dominated by a 200 foot high waterfall. The goal of the refuge is to provide much-needed employment for the local population, who would otherwise be cutting the forests for fuel and agriculture. The refuge currently employs ten young men to safeguard its treasures. Highly sought-after birds that we will search for here include White Hawk, Sunbittern, Tody and Rufous motmot, Dull-mantled Antbird, Black-chested Jay, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Bay Wren and Dusky-faced Tanager, amongst the more widespread forest birds.

Back on the grounds of the Canopy Lodge, another afternoon vigil may produce new birds for our ever-growing list, like Rufous-tailed and Snowy-bellied hummingbirds, Collared Aracari, Social Flycatcher, Barred Antshrike, Blue-gray and Plain-colored tanagers, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Yellow-faced Grassquit and Orange-billed Sparrow. Even the rarely seen Sunbittern is occasionally spotted in the tumbling stream that passes by the front of the lodge.

One morning will be spent at Altos del Maria, a remnant cloud-forest type habitat that is about 3000 feet above sea level. Here we may find several species not readily available elsewhere on the tour. Orange-bellied Trogon, Spotted Woodcreeper, Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant, Tufted Flycatcher, Ochraceous Wren, Silver-throated Tanager, and Common Bush-Tanager are among the expected fare. The greatest potential prizes of this location are the stunning Black-crowned Antpitta and the incomparable Snowcap. The antpitta is secretive and generally difficult to see, but we have a decent chance of finding one of these spectacular ground dwellers. Numbers of the tiny, wine-colored Snowcap may vary seasonally, but we have had some success at finding this jewel on recent trips. At any rate our visit to Altos del Maria will certainly prove memorable.

The final area that we will visit will be the vicinity of the village of El Chiru near the Pacific Coast. Here open farm country, scattered hedgerows, and grasslands play host to an entirely different group of birds. Among the many possibilities are the likes of Pearl Kite, Savannah Hawk, Aplomado Falcon, Crested Bobwhite, the recently split Veraguan Mango, Sapphire-throated Hummingbird, Groove-billed Ani, Brown-throated Parakeet, Yellow-crowned Parrot, Barred Antshrike, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Mouse-colored Tyrannulet, and Blue-black Grassquit.

NIGHTS: Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Antón

November 13, Day 7: Morning at El Valle; Afternoon at Miraflores Locks (Panama Canal). Our last day will be somewhat flexible. We may spend the entire morning around the Lodge if we are still missing important species, or we may head down to the Canal Zone for some lowland birding en route to Panama City. In the case of the latter, we will have lunch at the Miraflores Locks on the Panama Canal. The locks represent an exciting and historic finale to our time in Panama. There are three locks in total on the Panama Canal and the one at Miraflores is certainly impressive. The multi-story visitor center and museum is new and completely redesigned, affording visitors an abundance of information on the history of the Panama Canal and the technology behind it. Beautiful interpretive displays will highlight our visit here and nicely complements a delicious lunch at an outdoor venue overlooking the locks. During our stay we can expect to actually witness the spectacle of an enormous sea-going vessel being lowered through the locks on its journey from the Pacific to the Caribbean.

We will arrive at the hotel in the late afternoon.

NIGHT: Country Inn & Suites Canal, Panama City

November 14, Day 8: Departure for Home. Participants will be provided with transfers to the airport in time for morning or early afternoon flights home.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 14 participants.

TOUR LEADER: Barry Zimmer with the assistance of local guides

Barry Zimmer has been birding since the age of eight. His main areas of expertise lie in North and Central America, but his travels have taken him throughout much of the world, including such exotic locales as Japan, Russia, Madagascar, Africa, and New Zealand. Barry is a longtime member of the New Mexico Bird Records Committee, and served on the Texas Bird Records Committee for 12 years. He has co-authored three books: *Birds of the Trans-Pecos*, *A Birder's Guide to the Rio Grande Valley*, and *Birds and Birdfinding in the El Paso Area*. Barry has a keen interest in nature photography, having captured over 1,000 species of birds on film. His other interests include sports (a diehard Red Sox fan), cooking, and movies. He received his degree in psychology at the University of Texas in El Paso. Barry resides in El Paso with his wife, Yvonne, and their daughter, Alexandra.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for this tour is **\$2395** per person in double occupancy from Panama City, Panama for occupying a standard guestroom at the Canopy Lodge and Country Inn & Suites Canal. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 to Dinner on Day 7, five nights in one of the Canopy Lodge's standard double rooms (see CANOPY LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS section below), two nights at the Country Inn and Suites Canal, 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 Panama City 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 **\$530** for occupying a standard double room with a private bath for five nights at the Canopy Lodge (see CANOPY LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS section below) and a single room for

two nights at the Country Inn and Suites Canal. 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.

The fee for this tour is **\$2245** per person in single occupancy from Panama City, Panama for occupying a single room at the Canopy Lodge. This includes all meals, single accommodations for five nights in one of the Canopy Lodge's single rooms with a shared bath (see CANOPY LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS section below), two nights in a single room with a private bath at the Country Inn and Suites Canal, 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 Panama City 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.

Participants registering for this tour prior to June 1, 2009 will receive an early booking discount of \$300.

CANOPY LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS: The Canopy Lodge has a total of 8 standard double guestrooms each with a private bath in their main building and 4 single rooms each with a private bath in a separate building on the grounds. Based on room availability, singles have a choice of paying a supplement to occupy a standard double guest room or a paying a discounted tour fee to occupy one of the single rooms in a separate building. The single rooms are considerably smaller and less fancy than the doubles. All rooms will be pre-reserved on a first-come, first-served basis. You will be advised of room availability and your specific room assignment at the time of your registration.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refunds are made according to the following schedule: if cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, the deposit less \$300 per person is refundable. If cancellation is made fewer than 120 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions, as well as any transfers from one tour to another. ***We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself.***

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$300.
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	No refund available.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE: A brochure and application form for optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office. **We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance as soon as possible to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. VENT recommends Travel Insured International as our preferred insurance provider.** Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available; however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering.** Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as work-related cancellation, medical upgrade, and a "Cancel for Any Reason" clause among others. **Contact Travel Insured International prior to registration for details.** Not all insurance providers provide the same levels of coverage. If you purchase insurance through a company other than Travel Insured International, please be advised that rules and stipulations may be different.

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.

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. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

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.

BAGGAGE: In case your checked luggage is delayed, it's recommended that you pack all documents, medications, a change of clothes, your binoculars, and toiletry items in a carry-on bag.

CLOTHING: As is the case for all our tropical tours, lightweight field clothing is the norm for Panama. This includes several pair of lightweight field pants, along with cool and comfortable long-sleeved shirts. A hat and sunscreen are recommended for protection from the sun.

Dark-colored or neutral clothing is suggested, as white or bright colors may frighten secretive birds. Lightweight and comfortable walking shoes are recommended, since some days we will spend a good bit of time on foot. Waterproof boots are essential during the rainy season (May through December), as the trails can be muddy, but may not be necessary during the dry season (January through April). A small umbrella and/or rain gear are essential as well.

CLIMATE: The climate in the El Valle region is generally cooler than that of the Canal Zone. Mornings and evenings are cooler while midday temperatures usually do not exceed the low 80s. Clouds and overcast skies frequently prevail in higher areas, leading to damp conditions. Rain is possible at any season, but is more likely from May through December. At areas such as La Mesa and Los Altos del Maria, some rain is likely at any season. Along the Pacific Coast near El Chiru, one can expect hotter temperatures and drier conditions. Midday highs in this area may reach the 90's.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry service is available at the Canopy Lodge.

CURRENCY: The U.S. Dollar is the official currency of Panama. VISA and American Express are most commonly used, but MasterCard and Diners Club are also accepted.

DOCUMENTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure from Panama is required. Visas are not required for entry by United States citizens. On your day of travel to Panama, a tourist entry card must be acquired. These can be obtained at either the departure gate of your Panama City-bound flight or just outside customs & immigration at Panama City's Tocumen International Airport at a cost of \$5.00US (subject to change without notice). Non-United States citizens should check with their local Panamanian consulate/embassy for instructions.

EQUIPMENT: You should pack a pair of binoculars that are in good condition, along with a belt pack or day pack (good for carrying books, sunscreen, extra film, etc.). As a precaution, it's a good idea to pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medications, and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag. Your leaders will have a spotting scope; but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so.

HEALTH: In general, we recommend that you consult your doctor before taking any immunizations. Health requirements change frequently and often vary from district to district within a country. No vaccinations are required to enter Panama. However, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta advise that there is some risk of malaria in parts of the country. The areas visited on this tour are not at risk. The CDC is recommending precautions for travelers going out of these main areas. Your Polio and yellow fever vaccinations should be current. The water is drinkable in Panama and the food is safe.

If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, 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.

As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against Hepatitis types A and B.

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. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line 877-FYI-TRIP (394-8747) or you can check their website at 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 (click on travel health).

INSECT PROTECTION: Chiggers can be a problem in some areas. We recommend the use of Cutter's lotion (or a similar lotion) and a pump-style container of OFF or a similar repellent. Topsy gel is useful in reducing irritation from chigger bites or nettle stings (cortisone creams are now available without a prescription).

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 the world's species do not carry disease. They do feed on bodily fluids, however, 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 particular, 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 commonly employed by many.
- Apply a cream-style insect repellent, such as "Cutters" to your body from the waist down BEFORE putting on your clothing.
- Spray your pants and socks with a spray repellent such as "Cutters" or "Off." Repellents with high concentrations of DEET (70-100%) are most effective. You do not need to apply these to your skin, only to clothing. (Be careful as DEET will damage plastics and lens coatings). Repel Permanone is an odorless aerosol insecticide that offers perhaps the best defense against chiggers. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online. It should only be applied to clothes and allowed to dry before you dress. Never apply Permanone directly to the skin. Permethrin is known to be a highly toxic chemical to insects. It is the active ingredient in Permanone, but is present in a small amount (0.5%).

- 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.
- 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. Sulphur is available for use at the Canopy Tower and Canopy Lodge.

MISC: Departure Tax - US \$20 (included in the price of your air ticket)
Electricity - 120 volts; plugs are the flat 2-pin American type.
Language - The official language is Spanish, but English is spoken.
Time - Eastern Standard Time

SUGGESTED READING: Our website at www.ventbird.com offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from the store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You might also want to visit such other online stores as www.amazon.com, and for those out-of-print and hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com, or www.buteobooks.com, which specializes in ornithology books.

Field Guides:

Ridgely, Robert S. and John Gwynne. *A Guide to the Birds of Panama*. (Second Edition). Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. This excellent field guide is highly recommended as your primary reference book on the birds. No other field guides are really necessary.

Emmons, Louise H. *Neotropical Rainforest Mammals: A Field Guide*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Background Reading:

Chapman, Frank. *My Tropical Air Castle*. New York: Appleton and Company, 1929. Fun reading by an early ornithologist in Panama. Out of print; try www.abebooks.com.

Chapman, Frank. *Life in an Air Castle*. New York: Appleton-Century Co, 1938. Out of print; try www.abebooks.com.

Forsyth, Adrian and Ken Miyata. *Tropical Nature*. New York: Charles Scribner, 1987. Excellent introduction to many fascinating aspects of the tropical rainforest.

Hilty, Steven. 1994. *Birds of Tropical America*. Shelbourne, VT: Chapters Publishing, 1994. Subtitle: "A watcher's introduction to behavior, breeding and diversity."

Kricher, John C. *A Neotropical Companion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999. An excellent introduction to the rainforest.

McCullough, David. *A Path Between the Seas: The Creation of the Panama Canal*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999. An excellent history of the construction of the Panama Canal.

Richards, Paul W. *The Tropical Rain Forest: An Ecological Study*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. (Second Edition.) A more scientific review of the botanical structure of rainforests.

Gradwohl, Judy and Russell Greenberg. "The Formation of Antwren Flocks on Barro Colorado Island, Panama." *Auk* 97 (April 1980).

Panama: El Valle's Canopy Lodge, Page 8

Munn, Charles A. and John W. Terborgh. "Multi-species Territoriality in Neotropical Foraging Flocks." *Condor* 81 (1979): 338-347.

Reference:

Croat, Thomas B. *Flora of Barro Colorado Island*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978. A massive technical manual, but the best plant book available for the region.

Hilty, Steven L. and William L. Brown. *A Guide to the Birds of Colombia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986. An excellent field guide that has most of the birds of Panama in it; perhaps useful as an additional reference book.

Ridgely, Robert S., and Guy Tudor. *Birds of South America Volume I, The Oscine Passerines: Jays, Swallows, Wrens, Thrushes and Allies, Vireos, Wood-warblers, Tanagers, Icterids and Finches*. Austin: The University of Texas, 1989. Very useful reference, with range maps and illustrations of many species not previously illustrated.

Ridgely, Robert S., and Guy Tudor. *Birds of South America Volume II, The Suboscine Passerines: Ovenbirds and Woodcreepers, Antbirds, Gnateaters, and Tapaculos, Tyrant Flycatchers, Manakins and Cotingas*. Austin: The University of Texas, 1994. Very useful reference, with range maps and illustrations of many species not previously illustrated.

TIPPING: As noted in our itineraries, tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, and 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 such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

RESPONSIBILITY: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger 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 passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. When this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on February 27, 2009 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.