

# NEWFOUNDLAND & NOVA SCOTIA

JULY 1 - 11, 2009

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*With the greatest array of seabirds in the North Atlantic, deciduous Acadian woodlands, and dark coniferous forests, the Canadian provinces of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia have much to interest the visiting naturalist. Highlights include a visit to the great gannet colony at Cape St. Mary's; numerous breeding warblers and boreal forest specialties; a boat trip around spectacular seabird colonies; the dramatic scenery of the Cape Breton Highlands; mammals such as caribou, moose, and three or four species of whales; and a pelagic ferry crossing. Wonderful scenery, plentiful photographic opportunities, and excellent seafood cuisine make this a popular tour for non-birding spouses as well.*

*Nova Scotia has long been known to birders as a great area to find the specialties of the boreal forest and a wide assortment of Canadian-zone birds. We'll visit each forest type in search of such species as Spruce Grouse and Black-backed Woodpecker (both elusive), Yellow-bellied and Alder flycatchers, Boreal Chickadee, Bicknell's Thrush (very local), as many as twenty species of breeding warblers, crossbills, and Evening Grosbeak. In addition, Common Eider, Great Cormorant, Arctic Tern, and Black Guillemot nest along the scenic coastline.*

*The ferry crossing to Newfoundland can be exceptional for pelagic birding, especially if the fog does not interfere, with Sooty, Greater, and Manx shearwaters; Northern Fulmars; and Leach's and Wilson's storm-petrels all regularly seen, plus even a skua or Red Phalaropes spotted on a fair number of crossings.*

*Newfoundland, the world's tenth largest island, still has vast numbers of seabirds nesting on its cliffs and islets. Here we will observe literally thousands of Northern Gannets, Black-legged Kittiwakes, Atlantic Puffins, and Common Murres, along with Thick-billed Murres and Razorbills—all at close range. The interior of Newfoundland has many miles of stunted Hudsonian forest broken by barrens, bogs, and lakes, where the variety of land birds may be limited, but most of them will be unfamiliar to U.S. birders as breeding species. Blackpoll and Wilson's are among the commonest warblers, northern finches such as Pine Grosbeak roam the woodlands, while Common Redpolls (erratic) and Willow Ptarmigans (rare) might possibly be found in the barrens.*

*Put all of this birdlife into highly scenic locales populated by the friendliest people anywhere, and it certainly makes for an unforgettable tour.*

**July 1, Day 1: Arrival in Halifax.** Tour participants should make arrangements to arrive in Halifax, Nova Scotia at any time today. Upon arrival at the airport, you can call the hotel to send their courtesy shuttle for the short transfer to the hotel. The group will meet in the hotel lobby at 6:30 p.m. for a get-acquainted dinner at the hotel. (For those unable to arrive in time for dinner, a message will be left for you at the front desk with instructions for the next day).

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NIGHT: Hilton Garden Inn Halifax Airport, Halifax

**July 2, Day 2: Halifax and the Eastern Shore.** Warblers and other woods birds abound in the mixed forests of spruce, tamarack, maple, and birch scrub of Nova Scotia's central highlands and scenic eastern shore. Magnolia, Yellow-rumped, and Black-and-white are among the most widespread warblers; less common are Tennessee, Nashville, Black-throated Green, Palm, and Canada. Also found here are Blue-headed Vireo, Boreal Chickadee, both kinglets, Hermit and Swainson's thrushes, Lincoln's Sparrow, Pine Grosbeak, and Purple Finch. After driving east and south on back roads from Halifax towards the coast, often seeing Bobolinks and a mix of other species en route, we arrive at Taylor Head Provincial Park, a key stop where we have had such difficult-to-find specialties as Spruce and Ruffed grouse, Black-backed Woodpecker, and Red Crossbill on some trips, and where we typically see our first Common Eiders and Great Cormorants.

In the afternoon we'll arrive at the chalets of Liscombe Lodge. Several species of warblers breed in the vicinity, as well as Yellow-bellied Flycatcher and Winter Wren. Before dinner, depending on how we did at Taylor Head, a special search might be made along the Liscomb River for the always-elusive Spruce Grouse and Black-backed Woodpecker. This river, by the way, is highly favored by the Atlantic salmon, and the only fish ladder in the province is located here.

NIGHT: Liscombe Lodge, Liscomb Mills

**July 3, Day 3: Liscombe Lodge, St. Mary's River, and Drive to Cape Breton Highlands.** After an early morning walk on the lodge grounds, we will drive a wooded back road along the St. Mary's River, where we often find the widest array of woods birds on the tour. These include Bald Eagle, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Alder Flycatcher, Red-eyed Vireo, Winter Wren, another wide assortment of warblers, Evening Grosbeak, and many others. The deciduous woodlands along the river also offer our best or only chance to see Eastern Wood-Pewee, Least Flycatcher, Veery, and Black-throated Blue Warbler.

After lunch, there is normally time to check a coastal locale or two near Antigonish for Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow and the endangered Piping Plover. Then we head east and cross over to Cape Breton Island en route to Cheticamp, a colorful Acadian community located at the western entrance to Cape Breton Highlands National Park.

NIGHT: Laurie's Motor Inn, Cheticamp

**July 4, Day 4: Cape Breton Highlands National Park.** We will have a full day and a half to explore the incomparable Cape Breton Highlands National Park. Bounded by the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of St. Lawrence, the rugged hills of the highlands drop dramatically to the sea and beaches, and Acadian forests of beech and maple line the rushing rivers and ravines. Characteristic birds of the park include Ruffed Grouse, Common Loon, Great Cormorant, Black Guillemot, Gray Jay, Boreal Chickadee, and such warblers as Northern Parula, Blackburnian, Ovenbird, Northern Waterthrush, and Mourning. A special effort will certainly be made to find the shy Bicknell's Thrush, which breeds locally here in small numbers. Since this species was split from the Gray-cheeked Thrush in the mid-1990s, it is worth noting that we have managed to observe this specialty of the Highlands on every one of our tours.

NIGHT: Laurie's Motor Inn, Cheticamp

**July 5, Day 5: Cape Breton Highlands.** We will have another morning to look for any of the more difficult specialty birds at Cape Breton that may have eluded us on previous days. These might include Spruce and Ruffed grouse, Great Cormorant, Black-backed Woodpecker, Bicknell's Thrush, Cape May and Bay-breasted warblers, the crossbills, and Evening Grosbeak. In the afternoon we'll head for North Sydney in preparation for the ferry crossing to Newfoundland. If time permits, we might check the tidal mudflats at Glace Bay and Port Morien, not far from North Sydney, favorable spots for an occasional Black-headed Gull, migrant shorebirds

(sometimes including a Hudsonian Godwit or Whimbrel), nesting Arctic and Common terns, and singing Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows.

NIGHT: Best Western North Star Inn, North Sydney

**July 6, Day 6: Marine Atlantic Ferry to Argentia, Newfoundland.** In the early morning we will board the ferry for a fourteen-hour passage to Newfoundland (departure time and date subject to change), certainly one of the highlights of this tour. This is a relaxed trip with comfortable accommodations on board and, barring fog, lots of time to watch for pelagic birds and whales. In the summer the abundance of marine life in these rich waters attracts many seabirds, including Greater and Sooty shearwaters, Northern Fulmar, Leach's and Wilson's (uncommon) storm-petrels, and Pomarine or Parasitic jaegers. In addition, the ferry passes near the only major nesting colony of Manx Shearwaters in North America and, weather-permitting, our chances of seeing this specialty are excellent. On several previous crossings, difficult-to-identify skuas (most likely South Polar) and migrating Red Phalaropes have also been spotted.

Marine mammals are frequently sighted as well, including Fin, Humpback, Pilot, and Minke whales, along with White-beaked and Atlantic White-sided dolphins. Barring dense fog or an absence of capelin—a small fish and primary food source for whales and seabirds—this crossing should provide some of the best birding of the entire tour. Upon arrival in Argentia, it is only a short drive to our hotel.

NIGHT: Harold Hotel, Placentia

**July 7, Day 7: Cape St. Mary's.** The drive out to the famed Cape St. Mary's Ecological Reserve passes by wind-swept scrub, isolated fishing villages, and gravel beaches where capelin come to spawn. After miles of tundra-like country, the road ends by a lighthouse and the new interpretive center at the tip of the Cape. The din from the cliffs nearby is overwhelming, inviting one to peer over the edge to discover the thousands of kittiwakes and murres on the ledges. Unless obscured by fog, an apparent great white rock is visible from the visitors' center—binoculars reveal it to actually be covered with thousands of Northern Gannets!

This is their second largest colony in North America, with some 15,000 pairs crowding onto this rock and now spilling over to the adjacent cliffs and slopes. We'll walk along the top of the cliffs to a promontory opposite the gannets, the closest birds now only about 50 feet away (!), coming and going in endless activity. On the cliffs below, Common Murres and Black-legged Kittiwakes line every possible ledge, with a few Thick-billed Murres and Razorbills in their midst. Many eggs have hatched by this time, and there is constant activity as the adults come and go.

Those who spend time scanning the sea from this headland may be rewarded by sighting whales or distant offshore shearwaters. The barrens at and around the Cape harbor nesting Horned Larks and American Pipits, along with the possibility of the elusive Willow Ptarmigan, a flock of migrating Whimbrels, or perhaps a hunting Short-eared Owl or Rough-legged Hawk.

NIGHT: Harold Hotel, Placentia

**July 8, Day 8: Placentia, Dunville, and Vicinity; Drive to Trepassey.** Assuming we weren't fogged out of Cape St. Mary's the previous day, necessitating a return trip, we will begin the morning in the boreal forests near Placentia and neighboring Dunville. Here we should be able to find Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Boreal Chickadee, Northern Waterthrush, Blackpoll and Wilson's warblers, Fox Sparrow, Pine Grosbeak, and other breeding woods birds. Also possible in these Newfoundland woodlands, but typically difficult to find, are Gray-cheeked Thrush, Rusty Blackbird, and Red or White-winged crossbills.

In the afternoon we will drive the western half of the so-called Irish Loop, which follows the coast south of St. John's. En route to the village of Trepassey, we will visit such places as Point La Haye, Holyrood Pond and Bay, and Cape Pine. These rugged headlands and beaches provide several opportunities for finding nesting Arctic

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Terns, large flocks of gulls (with sometimes a Black-headed among them), often with a Parasitic or Pomarine jaeger in pursuit. Rafts of scoters (mostly White-wingeds) and sometimes all three shearwaters can be spotted from shore if the capelin are running. Some of our best sightings of whales, especially Humpbacks, are often on this day. Cape Pine has nesting cliffs for kittiwakes, Razorbills, and puffins below its lighthouse, and the road to this headland through the barrens might be our best chance to spot Willow Ptarmigan, Rough-legged Hawk, Common Redpoll, or a herd of Caribou.

NIGHT: Trepassey Motel, Trepassey

**July 9, Day 9: Continuation of the Irish Loop and Drive to St. John's.** As we travel east from Trepassey on the Irish Loop, there are still many more miles to go through the barrens before the road curves north towards St. John's. The most notable locale on this drive is Cape Race, where the first distress signals from the Titanic were received. Here we will especially continue to scan offshore for shearwaters, scoters, alcids, and whales, and to check the barrens for possible ptarmigan, redpolls, and Caribou. We will also stop at the town of Renew's (where the Mayflower stopped en route to Massachusetts centuries ago), which has an active tern colony with Arctics and Commons nesting side-by-side. The highway also passes through Ferryland, site of an active archeological dig investigating Lord Baltimore's 17th-century settlement.

If the weather forecast for Day 10 looks unfavorable, we might want to reschedule the Witless Bay boat trip for today. Otherwise, we should arrive in St. John's, Newfoundland's richly historic capital, by mid-afternoon, perhaps giving us time to take in some of the sights around downtown and the harbor before dinner.

NIGHT: Comfort Inn Airport, St. John's

**July 10, Day 10: Signal Hill, Cape Spear and Witless Bay Ecological Reserve.** This final day on the Avalon Peninsula will provide a nice conclusion to our tour of Newfoundland's birds and scenery. In the morning we'll visit historic Signal Hill above downtown St. John's, which simultaneously offers fine views of both the city and Atlantic Ocean. (It was here, by the way, that Marconi received that first trans-Atlantic radio signal.) Visible as well from Signal Hill is our next stop at Cape Spear, literally the easternmost point on the North American continent. Standing at this spot, we often see puffins, murrelets, and shearwaters flying past the tip, as well as whales spouting offshore.

But the day's highlight (weather permitting, of course) will certainly be our afternoon visit by boat to the breeding islands of Witless Bay Ecological Reserve, just south of St. John's. This is a major nesting area for literally tens of thousands of Atlantic Puffins, many of which we will see standing by their burrows as close as 50 feet from the boat! Just as impressive here are the countless thousands of kittiwakes and murrelets on the cliffs, with many Razorbills and Black Guillemots among them. Humpback Whales are almost always seen on this excursion as well, sometimes blowing and breaching right alongside the boat. This trip is one of the most exciting anywhere, definitely rivaling the spectacle of Cape St. Mary's, and it is certainly an appropriate and dramatic climax to our tour.

NIGHT: Comfort Inn Airport, St. John's

**July 11, Day 11: Departure for Home.** Participants may plan to depart at any time today.

**TOUR LEADER:** Kim Eckert and a second leader to be announced

**Kim Eckert**, with over 40 years of birding experience throughout the U.S. and Canada, has now been guiding birders or teaching bird identification classes for more than 25 of those years. Since the 1980s, he has annually led VENT tours to Newfoundland, Churchill, various locations in the Great Lakes and Great Plains, and to Texas—a favorite and frequent winter destination. He has authored four editions of *A Birder's Guide to Minnesota*, and has written numerous articles, notes, and seasonal reports for the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union journal, *The Loon*, and other publications such as *Birding* and *North American Birds*. Kim also operates the Minnesota

Birding Weekends program of birding tours, has been a member for three decades of Minnesota's Records Committee, and for 20 years served as Naturalist at Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve in Duluth. A Minnesota resident since the 1960s, he has resided in Duluth since 1977—winters included.

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

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for the tour is **\$3470** per person in double occupancy from Halifax, Nova Scotia (tour ends in St. John's, Newfoundland). The fee includes all food from dinner on Day 1 to dinner on Day 10, all lodging for ten nights during the tour, ground and ferry transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Halifax, Nova Scotia and return from St. John's, Newfoundland, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$710**. 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.

Please note that this fee does not cover nor guarantee single accommodations on the Marine Atlantic Ferry (should a ferry schedule change cause the group to have an overnight crossing). However, your preference will be noted and accommodated if possible for an additional fee.

The **Newfoundland and Nova Scotia tour** is an exception to VENT's guaranteed domestic departure policy. VENT reserves the right to charge a small-party supplement or cancel the tour due to low enrollment.

**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 a tour or cruise departure. Prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While VENT will do everything possible to maintain the original price of the cruise or tour, if fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to implement a fuel surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In most cases, these additional fuel costs are being passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers who reserve the right, in their agreements to provide services for VENT, to raise their prices due to significant changes in fuel costs.

**EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES:** Again, in the uncertain, often volatile 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 being passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

**TOUR REGISTRATION:** To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$300** 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:** Cancellation Penalties and Refunds are based on the following schedule: If cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, the deposit less **\$150** per person is refundable. If cancellation is made between 120 and 90 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 90 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 for your protection.***

If you cancel:

120 days or more before departure date  
Between 120 and 90 days before departure  
  
Fewer than 90 days before departure date

Your refund will be:

Your deposit minus \$150.  
No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance will be refunded.  
No refund available.

**TRIP CANCELLATION INSURANCE:** Application forms 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 to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. 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. Contact the VENT office prior to registration for details.**

**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:** Please take note that Victor Emanuel Travel (VET) is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours. VET will be happy to make any domestic air travel arrangements for you from your home to Bangor and return from St. John's, Newfoundland.

**DOCUMENTS:** Effective January 1, 2007, a passport is required for all air and sea travel to or from Canada. Canadian and U.S. citizens returning from Canada are required to present a passport to enter or re-enter the United States.

**CLOTHING:** You may experience a wide range of temperatures, from about eighty degrees on a warm day to cold, wet weather, especially on the boat trips. So, while lightweight field clothing is recommended for much of the tour, please be sure to pack a warm coat or jacket, sweater, gloves, hat, and raingear. Bring a pair or two of lightweight hiking shoes, one of which should be suitable for wear on rainy days or in wet grass. Dress will be casual throughout the tour.

**INSECT PROTECTION:** Mosquitoes and especially black flies will be present and are a potential problem at many locations. We recommend that you bring insect repellent, one container of spray (not in an aerosol can) and another of lotion.

**OTHER ITEMS:** An alarm clock will be helpful for some early morning starts. Your tour leaders will have a spotting scope, but if you have one and would like to bring it, please feel free to do so. If you are prone to seasickness or if you are not sure, we recommend you bring some form of motion sickness medication, especially for the Witless Bay boat trip. (Seasickness is usually not a problem on the ferry passage to Argentia.)

**BAGGAGE:** We ask that you limit your baggage to one medium-to-large suitcase and a carry-on bag.

**LAUNDRY:** Coin-operated laundries are available at the hotels in Cheticamp and St. John's.

**HEALTH:** 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](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:** Our website at [www.ventbird.com](http://www.ventbird.com) offers an affiliated online store which 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](http://www.amazon.com), and for those out-of-print and hard-to-find titles, [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com).

**Field Guides:**

Dunn, Jon *et al.* *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. Fifth edition. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2006.

Sibley, David A. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. New York: Knopf, October 2000. For those who prefer the smaller regional Sibley field guides (2003), the Eastern guide covers Nova Scotia and Newfoundland.

Proctor, Noble and Patrick Lynch. *A Field Guide to North Atlantic Wildlife*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005. Especially helpful with marine mammal identification.

Titford, Bill and June. *A Travellers' Guide to Wildflowers of Newfoundland*. St. John's, NF: Flora Frames, 1995.

**Reference:**

Godfrey, W.Earl. *The Birds of Canada*. Revised edition. Toronto: The Bryant Press Ltd., 1986.

Maybank, Blake. *Birding Sites of Nova Scotia*. Halifax: Nimbus Publishing Ltd., 2005.

Peters, Harold S. and Thomas Burleigh. *The Birds of Newfoundland*. St. John's: Newfoundland Department of Natural Resources, 1951.

Tufts, Robie. *The Birds of Nova Scotia*. 3rd edition. Halifax: Nova Scotia Museum, 1986.

**Fiction:**

*Rare Birds* by Edward Riche (2001)

*The Shipping News* by E. Annie Proulx (1999)

Both of these books, set in Newfoundland, were also made into movies which are available on video/DVD.

**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

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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 October 30, 2008 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.