

POLAR BEARS OF CHURCHILL

NOVEMBER 2 - 8, 2009

© 2009

Many know Churchill as the southernmost accessible tundra: alive with breeding shorebirds, ptarmigan, grouse, gulls, and raptors in June and July; but, there is another side to Churchill—a chilly, awe-inspiring side that is one of the world's great wildlife spectacles. For approximately five weeks beginning in mid-October there is no other place on earth with more polar bears than Churchill, Manitoba.

Polar bears are primarily seal hunters. They live on the pack ice encircling the North Pole. But in the southern parts of their range, along the shores of Hudson Bay, they must leave the ice as it breaks up in mid-July. As the ice melts, it drifts south and with it come the bears. Here they spend the next three to four months ashore awaiting the autumn return of the sea ice.

Churchill has no equal as a focus for polar bear activity at this season. First, many bears left here by the melting pack ice will wait out the warmer months rather than venturing farther north to find ice and seals. Secondly, a large maternity den site exists southeast of Churchill. These dens, dug into the permafrost, provide an ideal place to spend the “hot” summer months ashore. As freeze-up nears, the bears that have used the summer dens move to the coast to await the ice and the abundant seals.

With the assistance of Tundra Buggies, we will be able to safely and comfortably approach these massive carnivores to watch mock battles between massive young males, get close views of mothers and cubs together, and watch in awe the approach of truly immense adult males.

Although polar bears are certainly the focus of the trip, we will spend time with arctic bird specialties we may encounter. And some nights in the fall may be clear enough to see the Aurora Borealis, or “Northern Lights.” One can't count on this, but it is a magical experience when it happens!

Churchill is “The Kingdom of the Ice Bear” as the television series “Nature” dubbed the area. Come join us for one of the most extraordinary experiences possible with the ice bear.

November 2, Day 1: Arrival in Winnipeg. Upon arrival at the Winnipeg airport, please take the complimentary shuttle to our hotel, where a room will be reserved in your name. We will meet in the lobby of our hotel at 6:30 p.m. for a get-acquainted session and dinner.

NIGHT: Hilton Winnipeg Airport, Winnipeg

November 3, Day 2: Flight to Churchill and Exploring Churchill. An early flight this morning will give us as much time as possible to explore this fascinating town and environs. Upon arrival, we will get acquainted with the town of Churchill and explore as much outside of town as is practical. After lunch, we plan to visit the Cape Merry area, where we can walk a trail and look for Arctic hares, Arctic and red foxes, and a variety of birds. Back in

Polar Bears of Churchill, Page 2

Churchill, the Eskimo Museum is a short walk from our lodgings. Its extraordinary collection of stone and ivory carvings and other Inuit art and material culture makes it well worth a visit.

NIGHT: Tundra Inn, Churchill

November 4-6, Days 3-5: Tundra Buggies and Polar Bears. For the next three full days, we will spend most of the daylight hours traveling across the frozen tundra in the unique Tundra Buggies. These vehicles, which have five and a half foot tall tires, allow us to travel across tundra (on special trails) and rocky shoreline, and across frozen ponds in search of bears and other wildlife. Specially designed for travel over frozen tundra, the Buggies are heated, have a bathroom, and are well-provisioned for our daily outings. Box lunches with hot soup and sandwiches will be served on the buggy. From within the buggies we will be able to approach (or be approached by) bears in safety and comfort. An open back deck, as well as sliding windows, will allow unobstructed views for photography and videotaping. Other animals and birds we could see include Arctic fox (in white winter pelage) and red fox, Arctic hare, Common Eider, Willow Ptarmigan, Rock Ptarmigan, Gyrfalcon (including white morph birds), Snowy Owl, Glaucous Gull, Snow Bunting, and Hoary and Common redpolls. Some years Purple Sandpipers are still moving through. Optional visits to nearby bird-feeding stations may produce a few more species. Distribution and species of arctic wildlife varies considerably from year to year and depends a good deal on how much snow and ice are present, but we expect to see many of the species mentioned above.

NIGHTS: Tundra Inn, Churchill

November 7, Day 6: Town of Churchill and Flight Back to Winnipeg. A late morning flight to Winnipeg should allow us about an hour to do some last visiting around the town in Churchill, or perhaps a bit of birding in the spruce forest enroute to the airport, where sometimes we have found Pine Grosbeaks, Hoary and Common redpolls, Boreal Chickadees, and Gray Jays. The Calm Air flight to Winnipeg should get us back in time for an afternoon break, before a final group dinner.

NIGHT: Hilton Winnipeg Airport, Winnipeg

November 8, Day 7: Departure for Home. Participants may depart for home anytime today.

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. These arrangements may range from an extra night at the initial hotel of the tour to a week or more extension including accommodations and transportation. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 18 participants.

TOUR LEADER: Steve Hilty

Steve Hilty is the senior author of *A Guide to the Birds of Colombia*, and the recently published *Birds of Venezuela*, both by Princeton University Press. Other credits include *Birds of Tropical America*, *A watcher's introduction to behavior, breeding and diversity*, which has just been republished by the University of Texas Press. He has also written a number of scientific papers on birds and plants, and is presently preparing the text and species accounts for the tanagers for a forthcoming volume of the acclaimed *Handbook of Birds of the World*, published by Lynx Press in Barcelona. Steve holds a Ph.D. in zoology from the University of Arizona and has worked at the Arid Lands Department at the University of Arizona, as a consultant to The Nature Conservancy, and as a stockbroker. He is currently a research associate at the University of Kansas Museum of Natural History. Since 1975, he has led tours throughout North and South America, and co-led trips to India, the Orient, and Australasian regions. With three decades of experience in South America and a wide range of natural history interests, he brings a unique breadth of expertise to his Neotropical tours. At night he often turns his binoculars

towards the skies for stargazing. Steve lives in Kansas City with his wife, Beverly. They have two college age daughters.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is **\$3295** per person in double occupancy from Winnipeg. This will include all meals from dinner on Day 1 to dinner on Day 6, all lodging for 6 nights during the tour, ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leader. It does not include airfare, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$420**. 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.

Important information about “internal flights”: This tour requires flights from point to point within the tour (internal flights). The current cost of these flights is **not included** in the total cost of the tour and is subject to change. As of February 6, 2009, the cost of the internal flights is **\$1,075.20CAD** and includes all taxes. We suggest that you ask Victor Emanuel Travel to confirm your internal air reservations as soon as you register for this tour in order to get the lowest available fares. VENT reserves the right to alter the itinerary based on air schedule changes and flight availability.

The **Polar Bears of Churchill** tour is an exception to Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT)’s guaranteed domestic departure policy. VENT reserves the right to charge a small-party supplement or cancel the tour due to low enrollment.

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.

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

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.***

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$150.
Between 120 and 90 days before departure	No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance will be refunded.
Fewer than 90 days before departure date	No refund available.

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 de-

Polar Bears of Churchill, Page 4

parture. 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.

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: Please take note that **Victor Emanuel Travel** is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours. They happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements for you.

WEATHER, CLOTHING, AND TRIP DIFFICULTY: Watching polar bears is not difficult! Staying warm while watching them can be, if you are not prepared; temperatures range from 45° to 0° F. The Tundra Buggies are heated to 40° to 50° F, but with the windows down for viewing, video, and still photography, the temperature can drop lower. There is usually snow on the ground and it is often very windy on the open tundra. The floors of the buggy are bare metal and act as a heat sink. We also walk a few blocks to dinner over sidewalks that may have snow and ice on them. **THIS MAKES ADEQUATE FOOTWEAR A MUST!** We recommend you bring with you a pair of well insulated, preferably waterproof boots; you should purchase a pair before the trip. Cabela's, REI, and other outdoor gear suppliers have good selections. Polypropylene socks and a pair of wool socks or other insulating hiking socks with your insulated boots should complete your footwear. You will want several pairs of such socks. Bringing a small, thin sheet of closed cell foam or a small Thermarest pad will also help insulate your feet from the metal of the tundra buggies. Since the ride can be bouncy in places, you may wish to have a pad to sit on as well.

Layers of clothing are the way to go for the variation in temperatures we will experience. Long underwear, turtlenecks, a shirt, sweater, and windproof and insulated jacket should comprise your upper body wear; long underwear and wool or synthetic equivalent pants for the lower body. You may want a pair of wind pants when walking around on the tundra or just keeping warm in the buggies. Ski clothing, in addition to thermal underwear, works well for these conditions. Gloves and a hat that will keep you warm at the temperatures mentioned above are a must. Sunglasses are also desirable for glare.

DOCUMENTS: Effective in January 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.

OTHER TRAVEL ADVICE: On the Calm Air flight from Winnipeg to Churchill (and return) you are advised to limit your checked baggage to one ample sized bag (50 lbs. maximum), as only one checked bag per person is guaranteed to be marked "priority" and arrive on the same flight with the group. A second checked bag per person may not arrive until a later flight, causing you some inconvenience. Although carry-on luggage space in the

cabin of the plane is limited to one smaller carry-on like a briefcase or day pack, a second carry-on (like a typical wheeled carry-on) can usually be valet-checked at the door of the airplane as you board. Your carry-on luggage should not exceed 25 pounds per person. Your total baggage weight allowance (checked bags plus carry-ons,) on the Calm Air flight is 70 pounds per person.

PHONE AND INTERNET SERVICE: Please note that as of this writing there is no cell phone service available in Churchill. The hotel in Churchill, the Tundra Inn, does have telephones in all rooms and free high-speed internet hook-up. The Hilton hotel in Winnipeg has internet service and most cell phones will operate here.

Please keep in mind that on departure from Winnipeg you must go through U.S. Customs in the Winnipeg airport to re-enter the U.S. Allow yourself enough time (perhaps an extra 20 minutes) during your departure from Winnipeg to account for this clearance process.

TUNDRA BUGGIES: Tundra buggies are huge, very high clearance vehicles that allow us to traverse tundra, rocky shore, and ponds with ease. Seats are fairly comfortable and the buggies move slowly. We will spend seven-eight hours per day in the buggies. A lunch of soup and pre-made sandwiches will be served aboard the buggies. Hot and cold drinks will be available. There is a toilet on board. It is very unlikely that you will be permitted by the driver to get out of the tundra buggy onto the open tundra during the daily tours.

OTHER ITEMS: An alarm clock is suggested, as are lip balm and a daypack for carrying your daily gear. Extra batteries are a necessity as cold temperatures “eat” batteries faster. Your leader will have a spotting scope, but if you have a scope and wish to bring it, please do. You will find a refillable water bottle or two handy for days on the Tundra Buggy and on flights.

POLAR BEARS IN TOWN: Although the chances of running into a polar bear while walking around Churchill are very slim, here are some tips if you do. There are signs on the edge of town that tell you where **NOT** to go; **OBEY THEM** (you may be arrested if you don't). Should you encounter a bear on the streets of town, walk at a normal pace to the nearest building that will give you shelter. Don't make eye contact with the bear; this is a sign of aggression to polar bears. If a home is the nearest building, knock on the door and walk directly in. Most people in Churchill do not lock their doors until late at night. The occupants of the house will understand when you tell them there is a bear, or just point out the window at the bear. They have lived with the bears for many years and understand the problem. Again, this is not something to worry about. You are extremely unlikely to encounter a bear in town during your five days in Churchill. Wildlife officials constantly patrol the area and any bears near the town are quickly removed.

PHOTOGRAPHING POLAR BEARS: It is generally quite easy to photograph polar bears from the Tundra Buggies, which have windows that slide down. At this date, most people use digital cameras, although some use film. You should buy your film or digital storage media before you get to Churchill.

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. 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).

Polar Bears of Churchill, Page 6

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.

Polar Bears International website. Probably the single best source of up to date information on all polar bear topics. [www.polarbearsinternational.org]

Ashworth, W. and A. Wolf. *Bears: Their Life and Behavior*. Crann Publishers Inc.: New York, 1992.

Bruemmer, Fred. *World of the Polar Bear*. North Woods Press: Minoqua, Wisconsin, 1989. (Wonderful photos and very good text overview of polar bears, including lots of shots near Churchill.)

Burt, W.H. and R.P.Grossenheider. *A Field Guide to the Mammals: Field Marks of All North American Species Found North of Mexico*. 3rd edition. Houghton Mifflin and Company: Boston, 1976.

Chartier, Bonnie. *A Birder's Guide to Churchill*. L and P Press: Denver, 1993.

Davids, Richard C. and Dan Guravich. *Lords of the Arctic: A Journey Among the Polar Bears*. Macmillan: New York, 1982. (Excellent natural history and first hand research commentary.)

Feazel, Charles T. *White Bear: Encounters with the Master of the Arctic Ice*. Henry Holt & Co.: New York, 1990. (A very good overview of polar bear natural history and place in native and modern cultures.)

Forsyth, Adrian. *Mammals of the Canadian Wild*. Camden House Publishing LTD.: Ontario, 1985.

Hopfner, Glenn. *Tales from the Tundra*. Published by Glenn Hopfner [glennhopfner.com], 2005. (Veteran Tundra Buggy driver's personal account of Churchill and Polar Bears; available in Churchill or via website; Glenn has been our requested driver for the past three years.)

Johnsgard, P.A. *North American Owls: Biology and Natural History*. Smithsonian Institution Press: Washington & London, 1988.

Lynch, Wayne. *Bears: Monarchs of the Northern Wilderness*. The Mountaineers: Seattle, 1993.

National Geographic Society. *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. Fifth Edition. Washington, D.C.: NGS, 2006. (This is one of our top choices for birding ***anywhere*** in North America. It can be ordered by calling 1-800-638-4077.)

Sibley, David Allen. *The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Eastern North America*. Knopf : New York, 2003.

Stirling, Ian. *Polar Bears*. University of Michigan Press, 1988. (based on research near Churchill)

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 give them a tip. We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

RESPONSIBILITY: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. and/or their 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. They 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 6, 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.