

## HONDURAS: ATLANTIC SLOPE

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**March 21 – 30, 2009**

*Welcome to Honduras! Here in northern Central America, you have come to a land of stunning visual scenery, mystical Mayan ruins, and marvelous birding. It is a land of innumerable mountain ranges, glorious cloud forests, vast intermountain valleys, rushing rivers, and a beautiful, sprawling, deepwater lake. Honduras receives a fraction of the tourism enjoyed by other Central American countries such as Panama, Costa Rica, and Belize, and is virtually unknown to the birding world.*

*On this trip we bring you an opportunity to remove the mystery surrounding this less-visited corner of the world. Your guide is Robert Gallardo, a former Peace Corps volunteer and naturalist extraordinaire who happens to be the de facto world authority on Honduran birds and orchids. He has designed this trip to combine wonderful birding and scenery in a fascinating adventure across northern and central Honduras.*

*Located along the north coast of Honduras near the town of La Ceiba is the impressive Pico Bonito National Park, characterized by rugged mountains and peaks which tower above sea level to over 8,000 feet. The park encompasses over 130,000 acres, contains pristine rainforest, and is home to a wide range of flora and fauna. Nestled at the base of Pico Bonito peak is the Lodge at Pico Bonito, whose four-star accommodations combine luxury with world-class birding. In this area the Lovely Cotinga and the Keel-billed Motmot reside. The cotinga's metallic, turquoise blue and purple colors shine bright against the forest backdrop; they are seen almost daily, sometimes feeding right around the reception area, while the Keel-billed Motmot is usually heard and found in the deep rainforest. With patience we stand an excellent chance of spotting this enigmatic bird. Nearby is Cuero y Salado Wildlife Refuge, an extraordinary wetland reserve with mangrove-lined lagoons, tropical hardwood forests, and winding waterways. Its inhabitants include manatee, mantled howler monkey, white-faced capuchin, tamandua (lesser anteater), and crocodiles. Boat-billed Heron, Gray-necked Wood-Rail, Sungrebe, Pygmy Kingfisher, and a variety of orioles are also found here.*

*Lying on the southern side of the Pico Bonito mountain range is the Aguan Valley. The desert-like environment here is a direct result of its location in the heart of the sprawling rainshadow created by the mountains to the north. Replete with different cacti, succulents, and acacias, the Aguan Valley is quite unlike any other area we visit on the tour. It is also one of only two places where the beautiful Honduran Emerald is found. This glittery green sprite is Honduras's only endemic bird and survives on the nectar of cacti, bromeliads, and other flowering plants. It shares its home with a number of highly sought-after species restricted to the drier habitats of Honduras, including Double-striped Thick-knee, Lesser Roadrunner, Lesser Ground-Cuckoo, White-lored Gnatcatcher, and White-bellied Wren.*

*It is this greater north coast area (centered around La Ceiba), including Pico Bonito, Cuero y Salado, the coastal strip, and the Aguan Valley, that is believed to be the most avian-rich place in Honduras, where over 500 species have been found. Only the Rio Platano area of eastern Honduras, where over 450 species have been recorded, comes close.*

*We will spend a morning at the Lancetilla Botanical Gardens located in Tela, also along the north coast. This site was originally established as a research center in 1926 by the Tela Railroad Company and has an outstanding collection of tropical plants from around the world. Birding here is excellent and we will have the chance to see Great Antshrike, Black-headed Trogon, Turquoise-browed Motmot, and many more.*

*The Lake Yojoa area sits in a natural depression and is Honduras's largest natural lake. It is bordered on the east and west by two national parks containing mid-elevation forest and cloud forest habitats. This area is considered one of the birding hotspots in Honduras, with more than 350 species recorded. We will visit Cerro Azul Meambar National Park and bird at around 3,300 feet. Here we should encounter Stripe-throated Hermit, Collared Aracari, Green Jay, and Violaceous Trogon. Around the lake we will see an abundance of waterfowl, including Muscovy Duck, Black-bellied and Fulvous whistling-ducks, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, and Limpkin. Also present are Snail Kite, and perhaps we will get a glimpse of rarer crakes or rails. The visit to Los Naranjos Archaeological Site will include a walk along gravel paths and a raised boardwalk through beautiful lacustrine forest. This is a Lenca (pre-Mayan affiliated group) site still under investigation and offers a recently opened museum. We will look for Rufous-breasted Spinetail, Rufous-and-White wren, woodcreepers, honeycreepers, and the Slender Sheartail hummingbird.*

**March 21, Day 1: Arrival in Honduras (San Pedro Sula); transfer to Cerro Azul Meambar National Park.**

Today your adventure begins! Participants should plan to arrive in San Pedro Sula no later than 3 p.m. today. Once our group is assembled, we will make the hour-and-a-half drive into the heart of central Honduras to the lodge at Cerro Azul Meambar National Park, our home for the next three nights. Along the way we will take in the variety of sights which characterizes the Honduran countryside. As we approach the national park, we will gain elevation and enter a region of rolling hills and mixed pine/oak woodland.

NIGHT: Lodge at Cerro Azul, Cerro Azul Meambar National Park

**March 22, Day 2: Cerro Azul Meambar National Park; Lake Yojoa.** This morning we will step out of the lodge and begin our exploration of Cerro Azul Meambar National Park, where we will bird in mid-elevation rainforest at about 3,300 feet. Right around the lodge we commonly see Short-billed Pigeon, Brown-hooded Parrot, Violaceous Trogon, Bushy-crested and Green jays, Collared Aracari, Keel-billed Toucan, and Masked Tityra. A short hike to a nearby waterfall will give a glimpse of the national park's beauty. The preserved forest stands as a living monument to the diversity of a tropical rainforest. Along the way we often encounter White-collared Manakin, Northern Bentbill, Plain Antvireo, Northern Nightingale Wren, Spot-breasted Wren, White-breasted Wood-Wren, Chestnut-capped and Golden-crowned warblers, and Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch. In the event we encounter a feeding flock, the opportunities for seeing a wide range of birds grow exponentially. Flycatchers, woodcreepers, woodpeckers, trogons, hummingbirds, and tanagers are all represented here and could keep us busy for quite a while.

Around midday we will descend to the shores of majestic Lake Yojoa to enjoy a relaxing lunch at the lakeside restaurant, Los Remos (The Oars). From the decks of the restaurant we will savor the commanding views of the lake and its expansive marshes. Birds frequently seen from the restaurant include a variety of waterfowl; numbers of herons and egrets, including Bare-throated Tiger-Heron; Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture; White-tailed and Snail kites; and Fork-tailed Flycatcher.

After lunch we will bird the grounds of a nearby property offering access to the immediate waterfront of the lake. Lake Yojoa is the largest natural body of water in the country and a geographic feature of considerable scenic beauty. It sits at about 2,500 feet and is said to be an old volcanic crater. Mountains ring the lake, and its beautiful setting can charm any birder. We will make a couple of visits to the lake and surrounding forests we expect to see a number of exciting birds. Blue-crowned and Turquoise-browed motmots are common along the

entrance road. Both Berylline and Rufous-tailed hummingbirds can be seen, and Mountain Pygmy-Owls and Ferruginous Pygmy-Owls live side by side. Blooming *inga* trees attract a number of hummingbirds, including Green-breasted Mango, Ruby-throated and Azure-crowned hummingbirds, and Sparkling-tailed Woodstar. The seldom-seen Olivaceous Piculet occurs here as well. At the lake's edge we should see a number of waterfowl, including Muscovy Duck, Blue-winged Teal, and Black-bellied and Fulvous whistling-ducks. An assortment of water birds is likely, with Northern Jacana and Bare-throated Tiger-Heron high on our wish list. We will also attempt to find the timid Ruddy Crake in the dense marsh grass. Even the very rarely seen Gray-breasted Crake and Spotted Rail occur here, too.

NIGHT: Lodge at Cerro Azul, Cerro Azul Meambar National Park

**March 23, Day 3: Los Naranjos Archaeological Site; Lake Yojoa.** This morning we will visit the Los Naranjos Archaeological Site, a pre-Mayan site belonging to the Lenca culture. Although mostly mounds alone are visible, there is a new museum on site. The area is conducive to good birding, as it features raised gravel paths and an elevated boardwalk winding through a beautiful lacustrine forest. It then continues down to the edge of the lake through seasonal wetlands. The calls of Rufous-naped and Rufous-and-White wrens echo through the forest. Striped Cuckoo, Violaceous Trogon, Streak-headed and Cocoa woodcreepers, Red-legged Honeycreeper, and Barred Antshrike are all seen here as well. Out over the tall grass we may see a White-throated Flycatcher, while patience and diligent watching may reveal a Rufous-breasted Spinetail, which usually stays hidden in thick cover.

Montezuma and Chestnut-headed oropendolas can occasionally be seen flying overhead while the forest edge and brush host Long-billed Starthroat, Streak-headed Woodcreeper, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Long-billed Gnatwren, Black-crowned Tityra, and Buff-throated Saltator.

In the afternoon we will bird the grounds around the lake again in search of hummingbirds among flowering *inga* trees along the entrance road. We will especially be on the lookout for the Sparkling-tailed Woodstar and the rarer Slender Sheartail. By the lakeshore we will try to spot some of the secretive crakes and rails that reside in the tall, wet grasses. We will also take a one-hour pontoon boat ride from the hotel. Simply cruising the calm waters of the beautiful lake will give us access to more shoreline, as well as the marsh edges. Birds are easily seen every step of the way, with Limpkins and Snail Kites patrolling the shallow waters and an assortment of swifts and swallows coursing overhead. The sight of the beautiful lake, the tranquility of an afternoon cruise, the sound of birds in the marsh, and the setting sun all complement each other nicely, making a perfect ending to a rewarding day.

NIGHT: Lodge at Cerro Azul, Cerro Azul Meambar National Park

**March 24, Day 4: Morning at Cerro Azul Meambar National Park; transfer to Tela.** We will spend a final morning birding the cloud forest in the vicinity of the lodge. Because there is such a broad diversity of species occupying these forests, there is always something new to see. Perhaps we will spend time birding the entrance road, or maybe searching a new section of forest will produce another exciting trogon or tanager. Following lunch we will load up and head for the seaside town of Tela, our home for the coming evening and a perfect starting point for the next day's activities.

The ride to Tela will take approximately two and a half hours and provides unlimited opportunity for viewing the scenic countryside. Riding in a spacious coaster, we will be able to relax and let the time slide by.

We will arrive at Tela between mid and late afternoon. Upon check-in we will have the remainder of the afternoon to explore the hotel grounds. Unlike our surroundings at Lake Yojoa, here we are at sea level, where the vegetation consists of sea grape and coconut palms. Views of the sea are quite appealing, and time spent on the shore may produce a Royal Tern or Magnificent Frigatebird soaring overhead. Yellow-throated Warblers are quite a sight in the palms along the coast, away from their breeding grounds in the southern United States.

NIGHT: Hotel Villas Telamar, Tela

**March 25, Day 5: Lancetilla Botanical Gardens; transfer to Olanchito.** Tela lies just outside the famed Lancetilla Botanical Gardens and is a perfect entry point for exploration. Many diverse habitats are found here, all within close proximity to one another. The result is sure to be a big list of birds!

The entrance road into the gardens presents open space and edge birding, where we will have birds in view on both sides of the road. The numerous species often seen here include Ruddy Crake; Black Hawk-Eagle; Gray and Short-tailed hawks; Short-billed Pigeon; Mangrove and Squirrel cuckoos; Red-lored Parrot; Black-headed, Collared, and Slaty-tailed trogons; Turquoise-browed Motmot; Stripe-throated and Long-tailed hermits; Band-tailed Barbthroat; Social Flycatcher; Yellow-bellied Tyrannulet; Great and Barred antshrikes; Dusky Antbird; Slaty Antwren; Slaty Spinetail; Clay-colored Robin; and Passerini's Tanager.

Following lunch we will spend the remainder of the afternoon in transit to Olanchito, in the Aguan Valley on the far side of the Pico Bonito Mountains. Though the ride is lengthy, the reward at the other end is worth it, for we will go in search of the Honduran Emerald, Honduras's only endemic bird and one of the rarest and most localized birds in Central America.

The drive will present an excellent chance to settle into our comfortable coaster and watch the verdant Honduran countryside glide by. Moving east from Tela, we'll skirt the Pico Bonito Mountains and hit the edge of La Ceiba and a variety of smaller towns. Looking out in any direction will reveal range after range of mountains and rolling hills. The views are scenic and frankly, beautiful. The trip to Olanchito will also expose us to the contrasts of Central America: the rich, dense forests that so obviously demarcate the boundaries of the national parks, and the largely denuded coastal lowlands and intermountain valleys that lie mostly outside the parks.

After a late-afternoon arrival in Olanchito, we will enjoy a lovely, home-style dinner.

NIGHT: Hotel Beverly, Olanchito

**March 26, Day 6: Birding the Aguan Valley; transfer to Pico Bonito.** The thorn scrub forest characterizing the Aguan Valley is one of the most naturally scarce and restricted habitats in Honduras. Lying in the great shadow of the Pico Bonito Mountains, the Aguan is a land of greatly reduced rainfall and sparse conditions. Rather than supporting broadleaf forest or cool jungles, the native vegetation is a spiny, prickly mix of cactus, acacias, thorn scrub, and succulents. This remarkable habitat is a wonderland of isolation, holding populations of species which are found only sparingly in Honduras but predominate further north. It is also one of only two sites where Honduras's sole endemic bird, the Honduran Emerald, survives. The Emerald's close ties with this unique habitat make it an endangered bird, though it is actually fairly common within its habitat. The land is a hodgepodge of farms, ranches, and private estates, rapidly undergoing conversion.

Efforts are currently under way to form as large a reserve as possible to help protect the endemic hummingbird, as well as the unique plant community here. The Pico Bonito Foundation, NGO, and other private donors are working together with local people to see the reserve come to fruition. In 2005 a newly formed Honduran Emerald Preserve opened, protecting more than 5,000 acres of land. The core of the reserve consists of an old Honduran military base; future funds will go to purchase adjacent properties to expand the preserve. Our time here is limited but sure to be one of the highlights of the trip.

This morning we will depart the hotel early to arrive at the proposed reserve site. Here the habitat is close to pristine in many places, and the Honduran Emerald is numerous. By imitating the call of the Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, we can "toot" in numbers of Emeralds, as well as the owl itself! Our searches for the Emerald are bound to turn up a variety of other desirable species. Likely are Cinnamon Hummingbird, Salvin's Emerald, White-lored Gnatcatcher, and White-bellied Wren (north coast range disjunctions). With careful watching we stand good chances for seeing Lesser Ground-Cuckoo, Lesser Roadrunner, White-fronted Parrot, and Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet. The road out from Olanchito, additionally, passes through grazed-over scrublands where

the enigmatic Double-striped Thick-knee prowls. Even the Crested Bobwhite is seen along the roadsides in the early morning hours. Endemic plants have also been discovered here, as well as a species of longhorn beetle.

Following our morning of birding, we will have lunch at a local conservationist's historic, century-old house. Before departing for the final leg of our adventure, we will take a stroll through the property. We will then reboard the coaster and backtrack along the north coast of the country, by the seaside town of La Ceiba and on to the wonderful Pico Bonito Lodge, where we can expect a late afternoon arrival.

Located at the base of Pico Bonito National Park, the Pico Bonito Lodge is the only place in Honduras with Small Luxury Hotel status and is the ideal location for the final destination of the tour. It not only has all the amenities of a four-star lodge, but also is equipped with two birding towers and one viewing platform along its trail system. Around the cabins and reception area one can frequently observe Olive-throated Parakeet, White-crowned Parrot, Black-headed Trogon, Keel-billed Toucan, Collared Aracari, Blue-crowned Motmot, Crowned Woodnymph, Green-breasted Mango, Long-billed and Stripe-throated hermits, Lineated and Black-cheeked woodpeckers, Olive-backed Euphonia, Yellow-winged and Blue-gray tanagers, saltators, and orioles—for a nice introduction. At night it is not uncommon to hear the Great Potoo, while several species of owls are possible, including Guatemalan Screech, Mottled, Spectacled, and Black-and-White. We will arrive at the lodge late this afternoon with plenty of time for check-in and dinner.

NIGHT: Pico Bonito Lodge, La Ceiba

**March 27, Day 7: Birding Pico Bonito.** We will devote today entirely to birding on the lodge premises, particularly the upper trail that gives access to the foothills. Near the trailhead we find the first birding tower that overlooks the Coloradito River. Here we will look for the Lovely Cotinga, which is frequently seen feeding on fruiting trees. In the breeding season a male usually sits right next to the tower, keeping an eye out across the river valley for other males. This area is quite possibly the best place anywhere for seeing this spectacular bird, and it is certainly at the top of our list of priorities.

We will spend ample time atop the observation towers and looking out from breaks along the forested trails watching for them. If fortune is with us, we may spot several, sometimes even in the same tree! The trail continues straight up into the national park and affords us the opportunity to visit a number of habitats.

Mixed flocks often produce such forest species as Tawny-winged and Ruddy woodcreepers; Smoky-brown Woodpecker; Sepia-capped, Ochre-bellied, and Sulphur-rumped flycatchers; Russet Antshrike; Green Shrike-Vireo; Tawny-crowned Greenlet; Black-faced Grosbeak; Black-throated Shrike-Tanager; White-shouldered Tanager; and a host of migratory warblers. Fruiting trees attract the occasional Yellow-eared Toucanet, the dazzling Rufous-winged Tanager, and Shining Honeycreeper. Deep in the rainforest we usually find the Keel-billed Motmot, which, along with the cotinga, is the other treasure of the forests of Pico Bonito. The Keel-billed Motmot is difficult to find almost anywhere else, but this area is home to numbers of pairs, and our chances for sighting this rarely seen bird are excellent. We will spend considerable time, if necessary, searching for it.

From the second observation tower, we will keep a sharp eye out for a host of hummingbirds, particularly White-necked Jacobin and Purple-crowned Fairy, as well as Chestnut-colored Woodpecker and White-collared Manakin. Little tinamou occurs fairly commonly in the dense understory, and with careful watching we hope to spot one. From the viewing platform overlooking the river valley, we will scan the skies and exposed perches for a variety of raptors. White Hawk, Bat Falcon, Ornate and Black hawk-eagles, and sometimes King Vulture are all seen regularly in the morning hours as they stretch their wings to start the day.

In the afternoon we will have time to bird the lodge grounds and perhaps visit the first tower again. For those wanting to take it easy, the lodge offers an array of diversions: a beautiful swimming pool, an outdoor veranda, and a comfortable reading area, as well as a reptile house and a coffee plantation.

NIGHT: Pico Bonito Lodge, La Ceiba

**March 28, Day 8: Cuero y Salado Wildlife Refuge; Pico Bonito.** This morning we have an outing which is sure to be an exciting and unforgettable experience. We will journey out from the forested environs of the lodge and head down to the mangrove-lined waterways of the coast. The birding will be superb, with opportunities to find a number of really great birds. Our destination is the Cuero y Salado Wildlife Refuge, a coastal wetland encompassing grassy marshlands and tropical hardwood and mangrove forests.

Initially our trip is of limited interest as we make our way through big plantations of pineapple and palm oil to a dusty village on the edge of the coastal plain. What happens next is a singular experience. We will board a small train for a delightful ride to Cuero y Salado. The unique appeal of this trip comes from the fact that the train and rail line are original, dating from the 1890s.

The coastal lowlands were originally developed in the late 1800s for large-scale industrial agriculture. Rather than building a network of roads to provide access to the area and to get the crops out, the owners of the property installed a narrow gauge rail train three miles out through the agricultural lands all the way down to the coast. The clackety-clack of the train, the livestock in the pastures, and the sight of men hard at work in their fields will surely remind us of a bygone era. Birds abound, with sightings of such species as Ruddy Ground-Dove and Groove-billed Ani assured. The marshes and pastures often contain a nice assortment of herons and egrets; even the stately Jabiru is possible. Upon arrival at the refuge, we will board sturdy motorboats made for navigating the mangrove-lined lagoons and waterways of the refuge. We are likely to see mantled howler and white-faced capuchin monkeys feeding close to the water, as well as crocodiles and turtles. Butterflies are present in profusion, and the neon male Morpho cypris is another common sight. Notable bird species to be on guard for are Least Grebe, Magnificent Frigatebird, Neotropic Cormorant, Tricolored Heron, Sungrebe, Gray-necked Wood-Rail, Chestnut-colored Woodpecker, Mangrove Vireo, and Spot-breasted Oriole.

Five species of kingfisher are found here, running the size gamut from the giant Ringed to the intermediate Belted and Amazon, to the smaller Green, and finally to the diminutive Pygmy. Gray-headed and Plumbeous kites are occasionally seen soaring overhead, while Gray and Roadside hawks and Laughing Falcons watch over the pastures and cultivated lands.

In the afternoon we can bird the lodge grounds in search of species we may not have seen previously. Every day the White-collared Swifts form huge kettles as they prepare to return to the mountain, where they roost and nest behind the myriad of hidden waterfalls. Fruiting and flowering trees on the lodge grounds are always worth checking and rechecking, as a wide assortment of woodpeckers, honeycreepers, tanagers, and orioles visit throughout the day.

At some point we will explore the roads and trails of the lower lodge grounds. Unlike the heavy forest above the lodge, this area is more open and really more of a patchwork of habitats. Native forest is interlaced with orchards, clearings, and brushy edges. The resulting birdlife can be strikingly different. A sampling of birds often seen here include the colorful Yellow-throated Euphonia, confiding Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, glamorous Turquoise-browed Motmot, irascible Black-cheeked Woodpecker, raucous Plain Chachalaca, regal Black-headed Trogon, Variable and White-collared seedeaters, and an interesting diversity of North American migrants on their wintering grounds. Indeed, a wide variety of "eastern" vireos, warblers, tanagers, buntings, and orioles are likely.

In the early evening we will make at least one attempt to see owls and perhaps even Great Potoo.

NIGHT: Pico Bonito Lodge, La Ceiba

**March 29, Day 9: Morning at Pico Bonito; afternoon return to San Pedro Sula.** We will have a final morning to enjoy the birds and scenery of Pico Bonito. At some point we'll take stock of what we've seen and what exciting possibilities remain. Perhaps we'll wander again through the coffee plantation, watching for hawks, motmots, and a range of neotropical migrants, or may we'll ascend one of the observation towers a final

time. Regardless, there's never a lack of things to do or look at around Pico Bonito. We'll have a full morning before checking out of the lodge and staying for a final lunch.

In the afternoon we will board our coaster and settle in for the ride back to San Pedro Sula. Though the transit will occupy most of the afternoon, the ride presents a wonderful opportunity to simply relax and watch the scenery glide by. We will make a stop or two along the way before arriving at the hotel in San Pedro Sula late this afternoon.

After check-in we will gather for a final dinner and checklist session.

NIGHT: Hotel, San Pedro Sula

**March 30, Day 10: Transfer to the international airport for departing flights home.** Following an early breakfast, all tour participants will transfer to the international airport where they are free to check in and prepare for international departures.

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

**TOUR LEADER:** Robert Gallardo and

**Robert Gallardo** grew up in California, and from an early age he loved nature. He started collecting butterflies at age 11 and has continued that passion ever since. He began birdwatching while attending Humboldt State University and, after graduating, went to Honduras as a Peace Corps Volunteer. During his service, he was taken in by the splendor of Neotropical birds. During the last 11 years he has seen 85% of Honduras' species, and has recorded 11 new ones. He is a contributor to *North American Birds* magazine, and will soon be published in *Cotinga, Journal of the Neotropical Bird Club*. Robert resides in the charming little town of Copan Ruins in western Honduras with his wife Irma, where they own and operate a nature center.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for the main tour is **\$2,630** per person in double occupancy. This includes all meals beginning with dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 9, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to San Pedro Sula 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 **\$590**. 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.

**TOUR REGISTRATION:** To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$500**. 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 \$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 for your protection.***

<b><u>If you cancel:</u></b>	<b><u>Your refund will be:</u></b>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$300.
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	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.**

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

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

**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. **All requests for travel assistance (air tickets, additional hotels, etc.) must be received no later than 60 days prior to departure date. Within 60 days, arrangements must be made on your own.**

**BAGGAGE:** This tour has four hotel changes, an unavoidable consequence of geography and the natural areas we plan to visit. With this in mind, we suggest that for your own enjoyment and ease of travel you pack efficiently and do not bring excessively large luggage. We suggest one medium-size bag and a smaller bag/carry-on. There will not be any severely cold weather on this trip, so you will probably be happiest with less rather than more.

**CLOTHING:** When preparing for a trip to the tropics, it is generally a good idea to pack lightweight field clothing. Clothing made from cotton is always a good idea, but most makers of outdoor apparel (Columbia, North Face, Patagonia, Ex Officio, etc.) make excellent lightweight, well ventilated products from other materials, as well. Several t-shirts, both short and long-sleeved, are recommended. Many people prefer the designer style clothing with shirts made with lots of pockets and ventilated at the seams. Two or three pair of cotton pants is suggested, but again, the designer style clothing is very good, as well. Normally these types of pants are segmented so that easy removal of the lower leg will readily turn any pair of pants into shorts. Denim, i.e., blue jeans, is acceptable, but is not as comfortable or well-ventilated. A pair of shorts or two is recommended, as well. A lightweight jacket for rain is essential, and a warm sweater for the highlands is nice to have on hand. For footwear we recommend a good trail-walking shoe or light hiking boot. Athletic shoes are acceptable but will not keep your feet dry and can become soiled from muddy conditions. We do not anticipate cold temperatures on this tour, so please take this into account when packing.

**CONDITIONS:** Tour participants should expect a relaxing and fun trip to Honduras. Transportation the entire time will be aboard a coaster (small bus) with smooth, comfortable riding conditions. At Cuero y Salado Refuge, travel will be aboard sturdily built motorboats.

Honduras is a mountainous country, and tour participants need to be prepared for uneven ground and several moderately steep trails. At the Pico Bonito Lodge, the main trail system that accesses the higher forests are well made and obvious; however, they are fairly steep in places and contain several hundred steps that take participants up to the top ridge trail. The bird observation towers are wonderful, but they have several decks of stairs that must be considered. At Cerro Azul Meambar National Park, the trails are well made, but again steep and rocky in places.

Participants considering this tour should strongly take into consideration that the degree of difficulty of some of the trails along the tour route is above average. While conditions are not overly difficult, prospective participants should assess their physical capabilities to the best of their ability before registering. This tour is not suitable for those with problems walking. Participants will never be expected to perform beyond their individual capabilities. This is important certainly from a health standpoint, but also for the sake of thoroughly enjoying one's time in Honduras. On all trails your tour leader will move at a rate most suitable for the group. Prospective participants suffering from known cardiac or pulmonary disorders should consult their physician before registering for this tour.

Those participants preferring single accommodations for the duration of the trip should be advised that single accommodations are unavailable at the Honduras Shores Plantation hotel on the evening of March 10. Our group will stay in cabins, each one with two private bedrooms, but a shared bathroom. As of this writing, few quality accommodations are available in Tela and this hotel is the best option, and only for one night.

Tour participants will be assigned to cabins Some cabins have two rooms, but only one bathroom.

**MISCELLANEOUS:**

Electricity in Honduras is the same as in the United States.

International departure tax is approximately \$30.00 U.S./person.

**CURRENCY:** The unit of currency in Honduras is the Lempira and, at the time of this publication (July 2008), is valued at a rate of 19.05 to 1 U.S. Dollar. Most stores and shops in Honduras accept U.S. Dollars, but do not expect change to be easily made. Those participants wanting to travel with Lempiras should note that money is exchanged far more easily in the United States than in Honduras.

**DOCUMENTS:** A valid U.S. passport is required of all American citizens traveling to Honduras. We recommend that the passport be valid for at least six months beyond your intended length of stay.

**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. Honduras is a country with considerable scenic beauty, so a camera is a good idea as well. In the tropics the sun can be intense at any time of year, so a hat (preferably wide-brimmed) is essential. Participants should strongly consider bringing such basic travel items as sunscreen, flashlight, travel alarm clock, and a small umbrella (in case we should be caught in the rain).

**HEALTH:** Participants on this tour need to be prepared for a moderate amount of walking, some of it over uneven ground and up moderately steep trails. Your tour leader will never push you beyond your limits or subject you to excessively strenuous conditions, but tour participants with known cardiac or pulmonary disorders should seriously consider their ability to participate. Throughout our stay in Honduras, we encourage

everybody to drink bottled water. It will always be available either through the lodges where we stay or through your tour leader, who will have it on hand for the group. In Honduras fruits and vegetables are probably best avoided, with the exception of the Pico Bonito Lodge.

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.

Honduras is a country with known occurrences of malaria. Although we will not be in areas of known outbreaks, we recommend participants consult their physician for proper prophylactic prevention. The drug used to prevent and treat the form of malaria found in Central America is Cholorquine.

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 (877) FYI-TRIP. You can check the CDC 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 that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers with a well stocked library of 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) or [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com), which specializes in ornithology books.

**FIELD GUIDE:**

The most important field guide for your upcoming trip to Honduras is *A Field Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America* by Steve N.G. Howell, published in 1995 by Oxford University Press: London, New York, Tokyo.

**TIPPING:** Tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, 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, motor-coach, 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. Where 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 May 1, 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.