

GRAND SOUTHERN INDIA INCLUDING THE ANDAMAN ISLANDS

DECEMBER 31, 2009 – JANUARY 23, 2010

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India has a special place in my heart. Perhaps it is my British heritage or the fact that India plays cricket or maybe something even more indefinable, for I can think of no country in the world that so overwhelms the senses with the richness and diversity of its culture, history and wonderful aromas of unleavened bread and mouth-watering spices. But it's the wildlife that really grabs one's attention. Every nook and cranny in even the seemingly unlikeliest place teems with birds and mammals.

VENT's tours to the southern part of the Indian subcontinent have surprised participants with the richness of its birds and other wildlife, the splendid comfort of most of its accommodations and exquisite cuisine. Our Southern India 2010 tour follows a very similar itinerary to that of previous tours but with some minor fine tuning to increase our chances of a few of the more difficult endemics. This will permit a more relaxed pace and the opportunity to watch at length some of India's most magnificent mammals including tiger, Asian elephant, Indian wild dog, gaur, sloth bear, Nilgiri langur and if we are very fortunate, the endangered lion-tailed macaque.

Our accommodations range from beautifully renovated British regimental barracks in Ooty, a classic hill station, to a Maharaja's palace in the graceful city of Mysore, and Kabini Lodge located within roaring distance of Nagarhole National Park and some of Southern India's richest woodland and forest areas.

The Western Ghats, a dramatic series of granitic mountains extending along the entire western edge of the peninsula, rise from emerald green lowlands garnished with paddies of ripening rice and a mosaic of deep, little known forests. Here a large number of species reside that are found nowhere else in the world (some are shared with neighboring Sri Lanka). We will make a special effort to locate as many of these species as possible, including Gray Junglefowl, Malabar Parakeet, Nilgiri Wood-Pigeon, Malabar Trogon, Malabar Gray Hornbill, White-bellied Treepie, Yellow-browed, Gray-headed and the very local Yellow-throated bulbuls, Black-fronted Babbler, Wynaad, Nilgiri and Gray-breasted laughingthrushes, the handsome Black-and-orange Flycatcher, Nilgiri Pipit, White-bellied Shortwing and Loten's Sunbird.

Southern India is distinctly different from the north. Life is more genteel, caressed by a balmy tropical winter and nurtured by frequent rains. Exotic Dravidian temples punctuate the lush countryside and add a special element to our journey. Our explorations will take us to the finest reserves in southern India including magnificent Nagarhole and Periyar National Parks, which contain the best concentrations of wildlife in the peninsula. We will also explore remnant patches of bird-rich montane forest among little known "sholas" hidden in the folds of these granite mountains, vast areas of semi-arid woodland, and wander through a medieval village graced by Painted Storks and Spot-billed

Pelicans nesting in the thatch roofs. This is truly a photographer's and birder's fantasy. In addition to the large number of endemic birds, we will also encounter a number of species rarely, if ever, recorded on our Northern India tours: Red Spurfowl, Pompadour Green-Pigeon, impressive White-bellied Woodpeckers, Heart-spotted Woodpecker, Indian Pitta, the rare White-bellied Minivet, Indian Scimitar-Babbler, Indian Blue Chat, Kashmir Flycatcher, Forest Wagtail and Black-throated Munia. We will also encounter a large number of mammals ranging from the spectacular Indian giant squirrel to the impressively common leopard. Perhaps, as we have on previous tours, we will be treated to the unforgettable spectacle of a pack of dholes (Indian hunting dogs) stalking a spotted deer at dawn among southern India's dappled woodlands or surrounding a sounder of wild boar. Or maybe our next tour will be treated to that true king-of-beasts, the Bengal tiger!

This tour may be taken by itself or in combination with Royal Rajasthan on Wheels from January 22-31, 2010.

December 31-January 2, Days 1-3: Arrive in Bangalore. Please plan to arrive in the city of Bangalore (BLR) on January 2nd. You will be met by a representative of our ground operator, and transferred to our lovely hotel set in the heart of this thriving city. If your travel to Bangalore is not on this date, we would be happy to arrange a private airport to hotel transfer for you for an additional fee. The tour will gather this evening at **6:30 p.m.** for introductions and a welcome dinner. Your leaders will advise you of the details upon your arrival.

NIGHT: Taj Residency, Bangalore

January 3, Day 4: Bangalore to Mysore. This morning we will drive through the wonderful southern Indian countryside to the city of Mysore. As always in India, the place will be teeming with birds and fascinating things to see, imbibe, and photograph. We will stop frequently as time permits. Mysore is a lovely city which was, until independence, the seat of the Maharajas of Mysore, a princely state covering much of present day Karnataka. It is the epitome of 'living history' and historians, architects or for that matter anyone interested in seeing a civilization radically different than that in the west, will enjoy Mysore. Time will be set aside so that individuals can explore the markets and myriads of shops where some of the best wood crafts in the world are to be found.

Along the way we will visit Kukri Belur where Painted Storks and Spot-billed Pelicans nest in the midst of a typical south Indian village little changed literally for hundreds of years. We will also stop at a dam where large numbers of waterbirds occasionally congregate. In the past we have never been able to give this area much more than a brief scan. This time we have built in more time. What we do know is that such exciting species as Black-necked Stork together with large numbers of waterfowl and shorebirds do occur there. What else occurs will have to wait for us to investigate.

NIGHT: Lalitha Mahal Hotel, Mysore

January 4, Day 5: Mysore to Nagarhole. This morning we will make a short drive from the city of Mysore to the tiny Ranganthitoo Bird Sanctuary. This small reserve is scenically very beautiful, set on several small islands in the Cauvery River. Immense colonies of cormorants, darters, egrets, herons, ibis, storks and spoonbills nest here in addition to a number of other interesting species such as Great Thick-knee, Indian River Tern, lovely Streak-throated Swallows, Streaked Weaver, Red Avadavat, and Scaly-breasted and Black-headed munias. We should also be on the lookout for mugger crocodiles which still inhabit the area. The surrounding trees host a huge roost of large flying foxes which frequently erupt and fly overhead.

Later in the day we will continue on to Nagarhole National Park with regular stops along the way for such species as Cotton Pygmy-goose, and Red-naped and Black-headed ibis. The excitement as we enter the periphery of this huge forest is almost palpable. Spotted deer gambole across the road. Great piles of steaming dung can only belong to one owner and perhaps as on a previous tour, we will be 'held up' by our first Asian elephant as he lets us and the world

know who is boss. We should arrive at our attractive and recently renovated lodge during the late afternoon or at least in time for dinner!

NIGHT: Kabini Lodge, Nagarhole

January 5-7, Days 6-8: Nagarhole National Park. Nagarhole National Park together with the adjoining Mudumalai, Bandipur, and Wynaad reserves encompasses an area of approximately 2000 sq km. We will concentrate our efforts on Nagarhole with its relatively more luxuriant, lower elevation forests. This vast area supports one of the highest tiger-prey densities anywhere in Asia and as a consequence, Nagarhole supports one of the few truly thriving populations of tigers anywhere within the great cat's range (see Wildlife Conservation magazine June 1995). Similarly, large numbers of leopard are also present. Notwithstanding, neither species is easy to observe as they have learned well to hide themselves from man. Nevertheless, with the aid of open-backed jeeps and boats, we will venture out at dawn and dusk to quietly seek out these and the myriad of other wildlife forms for whom Nagarhole is home.

“Nagarhole is everything one might imagine wild India to be; vast, vast woodlands alive with bird song and the territorial calls of Barking Deer, only silenced by the nerve-tingling roar of courting tigers. Herds of elephant, sometimes a hundred strong, wading unmolested across the delightful Kabini river; giant Gaur somnolently munching on rich pasture or an Indian Nightjar trilling from our path as we make our way home in the dark.”

Here you will have the opportunity to acquaint yourselves with the entire spectrum of India's forest community, including many widespread Indian species in addition to a fine selection of southern India endemics. But Nagarhole is so much more; it is an opportunity to imbibe a reminder of what wild India was really like (see E.P. Gee 1964), seemingly endless forests and grasslands teeming with wildlife. Some of the species we may see here include Oriental Darter; Woolly-necked Stork; Gray-headed Fish-Eagle; Black-shouldered Kite; Crested Serpent-Eagle; Red-headed, White-backed and Long-billed vultures (sadly all now very rare); Gray Junglefowl; Indian Peafowl; Barred Buttonquail; Indian River and Black-bellied terns; Alexandrine, Rose-ringed, Plum-headed and Malabar parakeets; Large Hawk-Cuckoo; with diligence the elusive but very attractive Blue-faced Malkoha; Indian Scops-Owl; Brown Fish-Owl; Brown Hawk-Owl; Spotted Little Owl; Indian Edible-nest Swiftlet; White-rumped Needletail; Alpine Swift; Stork-billed Kingfisher; Brown-headed and White-cheeked barbets; Streak-throated Woodpecker; Black-rumped Flameback; the very handsome White-bellied and Heart-spotted woodpeckers; Indian Pitta - often in the dense scrub around our accommodations; Jerdon's Bush-lark; Large Cuckoo-shrike; Small Minivet; Golden-fronted Leafbird; White-bellied Drongo, Puff-throated, Rufous-bellied and Jungle babbler, Indian Scimitar-Babbler, Grey-breasted Prinia; several *Phylloscopus* warblers which should test our powers of identification; Tickell's Blue-flycatcher; White-browed Fantail; Chestnut-bellied and Velvet-fronted nuthatches; Purple-rumped and Purple sunbirds; Southern Hill Myna; Black-naped and Black-headed orioles; and Rufous Treepie. If we are very lucky we may find something exceptional such as a Malabar Trogon, just as we did on our tour there in 2008.

The area is also superb for mammals and any of the waterholes will be worth watching. Species we may see include Asian elephant, the gigantic gaur, wild boar, chital or spotted deer –a notably beautiful species, sambar and barking deer, black-naped hare and sloth bear. If we are lucky we may even see tiger, leopard or a pack of dhole (Asian hunting dog), all of which are resident in the area but are extremely difficult to see. Some of the less heralded but nevertheless very attractive species include golden jackal, smooth-coated Indian otter, small Indian civet, stripe-necked mongoose and three-striped palm squirrel.

NIGHT: Kabini River Lodge

January 8, Day 9: Drive to Jungle Retreat at the base of the Nilgiris. After a final morning's jeep safari, we will head for the base of the Nilgiris and the periphery of Mudumalai National Park. In part because access to the national park is so problematical, but largely because the really good habitat lies just outside the park, we will concentrate our birding on a superb area of dry deciduous woodland and thorn scrub. The area supports a number of

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species either difficult or not found at all in Nagarhole. Species we may see here include Rock Bush-Quail, Short-toed Eagle, Changeable Hawk-Eagle, Oriental Hobby (very rare), Red Spurfowl (elusive), Yellow-footed Green-Pigeon, Malabar Parakeet, Jungle Owlet, Crested Treeswift, White-cheeked Barbet, Gray-headed Bulbul - this is one of the best places for this rarely seen endemic, Black-headed Cuckoo-shrike, Blue-capped Rock-Thrush, the extremely skulking Rufous Babbler, Thick-billed and Booted warblers, and Tickell's Flowerpecker. At night we will make a special effort to locate the distinctive sounding Jerdon's Nightjar.

NIGHT: Jungle Retreat

January 9, Day 10: Jungle Retreat. Located at the foot of the imposing Nilgiris, we will explore the surrounding area of dry thorn scrub and savanna forest for some rather elusive and localised dry-country species including Jungle, Painted and Rock bush-quail; Pallid Harrier; Oriental Hobby (seen superbly on our two previous Southern India tours); Blue-faced Malkoha; Sirkeer Malkoha; perhaps White-naped Woodpecker; White-bellied Minivet - very rare, however, a group of four were seen superbly on our 2004 tour; the extremely localized Gray-headed Bulbul; Puff-throated and Yellow-billed babblers; and the very rare and poorly known White-naped Tit. This is also a good area for many more wide-ranging species and we shall be on the lookout for these and several exciting mammals including the rarely seen striped hyaena, which we observed on our 2000 tour.

NIGHT: Jungle Retreat

January 10, Day 11: Drive to Ooty. After some final birding, we will gradually climb the seemingly vertical face of the Nilgiri Hills through a series of 'interesting' hairpin bends to the town of Ootacamund, better known as Ooty. Our accommodations, now operated by the world famous Taj Group, were once the regimental quarters of the British Raj.

NIGHT: Savoy Hotel, Ootacamund

January 11, Day 12: Ooty. This sprawling hill station, located at 7250 ft, in the midst of the Nilgiri Hills, has been described as “an unlikely combination of southern England and Australia...” The town has a distinctly faded, colonial charm with stone churches, public boys' school, and landscaped gardens. Although much of the forest has been replaced by tea estates, patches of evergreen forest known as “sholas,” still remain in some of the intervening ravines. Here we will look for such specialities as Nilgiri Laughingthrush, the gorgeous Black-and-orange Flycatcher, the very difficult to find White-bellied Shortwing, and with a great deal of luck, the increasingly threatened Nilgiri Wood-Pigeon. Other species we may find include Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike, Malabar Crested Lark, Forest Wagtail, White-throated Fantail, Ashy Prinia, Scaly Thrush, Indian Blue Robin, Kashmir Red-throated Flycatcher, Tickell's Flycatcher, the distinctive local subspecies of the Blackbird, Olive-backed Pipit, Common Rosefinch and Black-throated Munia.

NIGHT: Savoy Hotel, Ootacamund

January 12, Day 13: Drive to Cochin. Our journey through Southern India continues this morning with a descent down the steep and spectacular north face of the Nilgiris via Kotagiri. As we discovered on previous tours, there is superb forest and woodland habitat from Munnar right down to the plains and we will have the entire morning to explore this area. We will then continue on to our hotel at Cochin airport, which will be our base for exploring the lovely Salim Ali or Thattekad Sanctuary.

NIGHT: Airport Hotel, Cochin

January 13, Day 14: Thattakad Sanctuary. We have the entire day to explore this little known sanctuary and we will need to depart early this morning in order to make the most of our time in these biologically rich wet lowland forests. In addition to some of southern India's more widespread species, there is also the possibility of encountering several very rare and local species such as the handsome Black Baza – we watched one hunting for 20 minutes

during a previous tour; Red Spurfowl; Nilgiri Wood-Pigeon; Orange-breasted Green-Pigeon; Malabar Trogon; Rufous Babbler; Pied Thrush; Broad-tailed Grassbird – very tough; Rusty-tailed Flycatcher; and Wynaad Laughingthrush, in addition to several very fancy night-birds: Great Eared Nightjar, Oriental Bay-Owl, Mottled Wood-Owl, Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl and Sri Lanka Frogmouth.

NIGHT: Airport Hotel, Cochin

January 14, Day 15: Drive to Munnar. After some final birding we will drive up into the Western Ghats and the tea growing area of Munnar. Our accommodations for the next two nights are in an attractive modern guest house located in an idyllic setting surrounded by hills covered with tea gardens and patches of remnant forest.

NIGHT: Windemere Estate, Munnar

January 15, Day 16: Birding the Munnar-Eravikulam Plateau. Munnar and especially the Erivakulam Plateau present a spectacular landscape and, although much of the forest has been cleared to make way for tea plantations, small patches of sub-tropical, biologically rich ‘shola’ forest still remain in a few of the intervening gullies. We will focus our efforts on the area around Rajamalai within the Eravikulam National Park. Here in the Sholas (immediately recognized at these high altitudes by their beautiful flowering rhododendrons), we will search for a number of South India endemics including Gray-breasted Laughingthrush, Nilgiri Blue-flycatcher, Nilgiri Pipit, and the very uncommon and nomadic Nilgiri Wood-Pigeon. Other species we may find include Bonelli's and Black eagles, Dusky Crag Martin, Hill Swallow, Black Bulbul, Tickell's Leaf-Warbler, Oriental White-eye and Common Rosefinch.

This area supports roughly half the total world population of the endangered Nilgiri tahr (localized goat-like antelope with a very circumscribed range) in addition to a number of other interesting mammals such as Nilgiri langur, sambar and the endemic Malabar squirrel. As a result of the long-term protection afforded to this area, our chances of seeing the tahr and some of these other mammals is good.

NIGHT: Windemere Estate, Munnar

January 16, Day 17: Drive Munnar to Periyar via Bodinayakanur. This morning we will gradually descend from the cool of Munnar to Periyar National Park. However, *en route* we will make a special diversion via the town of Bodinayakanur where, with a bit of luck, among the sparse thorn scrub jungle interspersed with large trees on broken stony hillsides, we should find the very little known but striking endemic Yellow-throated Bulbul. Other species we may find here include Blue-faced and Sirkeer malkohas, Red Spurfowl, Jungle Bush-Quail, and Tawny-bellied Babbler.

NIGHT: Taj Garden, Periyar National Park

January 17-18, Days 18-19: Periyar National Park. Periyar is one of the finest reserves in southern India and encompasses an area of 777 sq. km., ranging in altitude from 500 to 6622 ft. and is the southern-most of India's famous tiger reserves. Located in the Cardamom Hills at the southern end of the Western Ghats, the park comprises an area of undulating hills and a multi-fingered lake formed by the damming of the Periyar River. Extensive, fire-climax grasslands provide ideal forage for numerous herbivores such as Asian elephant, gaur, sambar and barking deer, in addition to Nilgiri langur and giant red flying-squirrel. There is also a rich variety of woodland habitats including moist deciduous forest which is characterised by terminalia and teak; semi-evergreen forest along streams; and tropical evergreen forest in the sholas characterised by the attractive and important silk cotton tree. These woodland habitats support an impressive list of birds including approximately half the peninsular endemics and near endemics. Of these we may see Gray Junglefowl, Blue-winged Parakeet, Malabar Trogon (the Asian Trogons are much less conspicuous than their counterparts in the Neotropics and require considerable diligence to find), Malabar Gray Hornbill, White-cheeked and Crimson-throated barbets, the very attractive White-bellied Treepie, Yellow-browed Bulbul, Rufous Babbler, White-bellied Blue-Flycatcher, and Crimson-backed and Loten's

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sunbirds. Other birds we may see include Oriental Darter; Woolly-necked Stork; Oriental Honey-Buzzard; Besra; Red Spurfowl; Pompadour Green-Pigeon; Mountain Imperial-Pigeon; Emerald Dove; Plum-headed Parakeet; White-rumped Needletail; Chestnut-headed Bee-eater; Great Hornbill; Rufous, White-bellied and Heart-spotted woodpeckers; Greater Goldenback, Bronzed and Greater Racket-tailed drongos; Gray-headed and Southern Hill mynas; Rufous Treepie; Large Wood-shrike; Black-headed Cuckoo-shrike; Golden-fronted Leafbird; Fairy Bluebird; Black-crested Bulbul; Indian Scimitar-Babbler; Brown-cheeked Fulvetta; Tickell's Blue, Gray-headed and Paradise flycatchers; Black-naped Monarch; Plain Prinia; Black-browed Tit; Velvet-fronted Nuthatch; and Plain Flowerpecker. At this time of the year a number of wintering passerines may also be present, including Asian Brown, Brown-breasted and Rufous-tailed flycatchers; Greenish, Large-billed and Western Crowned leaf-warblers; and Forest Wagtail. Periyar also harbours a number of very elusive specialities which we will make a special effort to locate, including the attractive Indian Pitta, Indian Blue Chat, Orange-headed Thrush and Puff-throated Babbler.

NIGHTS: Taj Garden, Periyar National Park.

January 19, Day 20: Drive to Cochin. Today we will finally take our leave of this wonderful area and drive west to the city of Cochin and fly to Chennai.

NIGHT: Trident Hotel, Chennai (Madras)

January 20, Day 21: Fly Madras to Port Blair, Andaman Islands. This morning we will wing our way across the Bay of Bengal, south and eastwards to the tiny Andaman Islands. These little tropical pieces of paradise harbour a very distinctive avifauna including a number of species found nowhere else in the world.

NIGHT: Bay Island Hotel

January 21-22, Days 22-23: Andaman Islands - Mount Harriet and Chiriya Tappu. Located closer to the west coast of Burma than India, the Andaman Islands are typically balmy, emerald, tropical islands which still retain large areas of pristine rainforest. Isolated for millennia, the islands have witnessed the evolution of a rich array of endemic species and distinctive forms of more widespread species. In addition, because of the islands' geographical location, the avifauna reflects a fascinating mix of typically Indian and South East Asia species. We have more than two full days to explore the mangroves, beaches, mud-flats and moist lowland forests. Some of the birds we may encounter include Pacific Reef Egret; Chinese Pond-Heron; Yellow and Cinnamon bitterns; Andaman and Crested serpent-eagles; Eastern Marsh-Harrier; White-bellied Sea-Eagle; Slaty-breasted Rail; Ruddy-breasted Crake; Watercock; Pintail Snipe; a good sprinkling of shorebirds including Terek Sandpiper and Little Stint; Black-naped Tern; Red Turtle-Dove; Pompadour Green-Pigeon; Green Imperial-Pigeon; the uncommon Andaman Wood-Pigeon; Andaman Cuckoo-Dove; Vernal Hanging-Parrot; Alexandrine, Red-breasted and Long-tailed parakeets; Indian Cuckoo; Andaman Coucal; Edible-nest and Glossy swiftlets; the striking Black-capped Kingfisher; Collared Kingfisher; Chestnut-headed Bee-eater; Fulvous-breasted and Andaman woodpeckers; Black-naped Monarch; Andaman Drongo; Andaman Treepie; Bar-bellied Cuckoo-shrike; Asian Fairy-Bluebird; White-headed Starling; Asian Glossy-Starling; Asian Brown Flycatcher; White-rumped Shama; Black-headed Bulbul; Black-browed Reed-Warbler; Pallas's Grasshopper-Warbler; Dusky Warbler; White-rumped Munia; Forest Wagtail; and Olive-backed Sunbird. With a bit of luck we may encounter the little known Andaman Gray Teal, Andaman Scops-Owl, Andaman Hawk-Owl and Mangrove Whistler. With extraordinary luck, we may encounter the very little known Andaman Crake, which we were lucky enough to see on a previous tour!

NIGHTS: Bay Island Hotel

January 23, Day 24: Fly Port Blair to Chennai, Connecting with Onward Flight to the USA. This morning we will reluctantly depart these enchanting islands and fly back to Chennai. A dayroom will be available for your use here until 10:00 p.m.

NIGHT/DAY-ROOM: Trident Airport Hotel, Chennai (Madras)

PARTICIPANTS: This tour is limited to a maximum of 10 participants.

LEADER: David Bishop

David Bishop loves his vocation and cannot imagine anything better than exploring wild and beautiful places in Asia and the Pacific in the company of friends and clients. He has spent much of the past 33 years studying the birds and natural history of the Oriental region, in addition to New Guinea and the Southwest Pacific. David was once a police officer amid the streets of London's West End, but has emerged as an acknowledged authority on the birds of these exotic regions. His enthusiasm for these places and their birds is contagious. This, along with his skills in locating wildlife, sharing what he sees with others, and conversing with local people in their native language, ensures you the very finest quality tour. David has undertaken a number of expeditions to survey the birds and other wildlife of previously unexplored regions throughout New Guinea (largely together with Jared Diamond) and the Oriental Region. This has resulted in a number of exciting discoveries and rediscoveries including the incomparable Wallace's Standardwing, a bizarre bird-of-paradise. Some of the results of this work, together with observations gained during the VENT tours he leads, have been published in the scientific and semi-popular literature to which David is a regular contributor. In July 1997, David, together with Brian Coates, published *A Guide to the Birds of Wallacea (Sulawesi, the Moluccas, and Lesser Sundas)*, and David is currently working on other book projects. David lives with his wife and daughter (his son currently resides in England) in the attractive university town of Armidale, NSW, Australia.

EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS: Should you wish to make arrangements to extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least **four months** prior to your departure date. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for Grand Southern India Including the Andaman Islands is **\$9,175** per person, based on double occupancy and includes all meals beginning with dinner on Day 3 to dinner on Day 24, accommodations as stated, ground transportation during the tour, internal India flights, and guide services provided by the tour leader. The tour fee does not include roundtrip airfare from your home to Bangalore (BLR) with a return from Chennai (Madras or MAA) back to the USA, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages other than those supplied as part of regular meals, special gratuities, telephone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small party supplement may be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$1,710**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations or if you prefer to share a room, but have no roommate and one cannot be provided for you.

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

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.

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.*

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

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.

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

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

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

BAGGAGE: Participants are encouraged to take whatever they think they will reasonably need for this tour, including telescope and tripod (VERY USEFUL), camera and video equipment. While participants are permitted two large pieces of baggage into and out of the USA, most Indian air carriers restrict the amount of free check-in baggage per person to 20 kg (44 lbs).

CLIMATE: Southern India and the Andaman Islands are generally warmer and more moist than the north and can, at times, be quite hot and humid, especially in the lowlands and near the coast. However, the VENT tour is carefully arranged at a time when the weather is not too oppressive and is, generally, very pleasant and may be referred to as “shirt-sleeve comfortable.” The Andaman Islands tend to be more humid than the mainland as is typical of tropical islands. It is a little drier and hotter in and around Mudumalai National Park and quite cool around dawn and dusk at higher altitudes in the Nilgiris and Western Ghats. It may even be cold for the first few hours around dawn on some of our early morning jeep and elephant rides. We may encounter some rain, but it is unlikely.

CLOTHING: For all VENT India tours bring light-weight long-sleeved shirts and pants in natural fabric such as cotton or cotton and man-made fiber mixes, or even better, the new loose-fitting nylon field shirts and pants that are produced in ideal colors such as made by Columbia and Exofficio. These offer protection against the sun and insects (very few) whilst remaining comfortable, cool and easy to launder. A warm sweater or jacket are essential for the cool dawns and evenings. People who feel the cold easily may require additional protection. Robust walking boots with a good lug sole are essential; lightweight sports sneakers are generally insufficient. Thick socks help absorb perspiration and cushion one's feet, especially when walking constantly on a hard surface. A sound rain-proof jacket is recommended. All clothing should be in muted colors as this is less disturbing to birds and other wildlife. A wide brimmed hat is also very important; however, please ensure that it is not white or a similar bright color. Sunglasses can also be useful for reducing glare and keeping dust out of one's eyes during rides in open vehicles.

Participants may wish to include one dressier outfit (such as a sports coat, dress or pant suit) for wearing to dinner at some of the smarter hotels and/or lodges.

SPECIAL NOTE: Please, absolutely no bright colors. Although the birds and other wildlife are relatively approachable, we will be trying to see a number of very elusive species. Muted colors are essential to enhance our chances. Please do not wear brightly colored clothes, hats, gloves, bags, or other paraphernalia. Furthermore, if you can avoid crackling nylon/plastic jackets and pants, this will greatly enhance everyone's enjoyment of the trip and enable the leader to hear those critical, but so easily overlooked, subtle call notes of the birds you want to see.

ALTITUDE: We will be ascending to elevations above 8,000 feet. However, we will acclimate ourselves by ascending in small increments daily. Most ascents will be by vehicle, and we will then work a given area by walking down hill; however, there will be times when there is no option but to walk up hill. We will almost always be walking along a road on easy grades and at a very slow pace, so this should not be a matter of concern for anyone in moderate to reasonable condition. Those with heart or respiratory concerns should contact their doctor prior to departure.

HEALTH: Sanitation is not ideal; however, it has improved radically during the many years that VENT has been operating tours to the sub-continent, largely as a result of greatly improved hygiene and the widespread availability of bottled, non-carbonated, water. Participants are advised **NOT** to drink the water anywhere, even in the very smart hotels of the larger cities. Indian beer is generally excellent and tea and coffee and other bottled soft drinks are safe and widely available. Bottled water is also widely available, and this is perhaps one of the most important contributions to the substantial reduction in sickness on tours to the Indian sub-continent. Participants are advised **NOT** to eat uncooked or partially cooked meat or vegetables or food that has been cooling in the open, permitting flies to settle. Only eat fruit that you have peeled, preferably first washing the outside with clean water. **“BOIL IT, PEEL IT OR FORGET IT.”**

Traveler's diarrhea used to be a common complaint on trips to the Indian sub-continent. Fortunately, this increasingly is now uncommon and usually only as a result of the incautious eating of some of India's wonderfully spicy food! We recommend bringing an anti-diarrheal medication along, just to be on the safe side. Malaria is present in some parts of the Indian sub-continent (including The Andaman Islands). There are currently three popular prophylaxis treatments for malaria: Mefloquine (Lariam), Malarone, and Doxycycline. All of these medications are available by prescription only. Please consult your physician. Recommended vaccinations include Cholera (now considered only mildly effective), typhoid, and tetanus.

Please be sure to bring along all necessary prescription drugs and other pharmaceutical items. Although they can be purchased in India, you may not be able to obtain your preferred brand.

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.

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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 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. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

INSECT PROTECTION: Insects are generally not a problem at the time of VENT tours to the Indian sub-continent; however, mosquitoes and locally leeches can be an occasional nuisance in some parts of the south. We recommend carrying Cutter's or similar insect repellent.

CURRENCY: US dollars and most other foreign currency can be easily changed at the airport or hotel into Indian Rupees. Credit cards are fairly widely accepted at most of our hotels. However, participants are advised to carry sufficient funds in low denomination American Express U.S. dollar travelers checks and/or U.S. dollars in cash. The latter can be very useful in an emergency.

NOTE: India has some very fine handicrafts and there will be several opportunities for shopping.

DOCUMENTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure date is required for United States citizens to enter India. A single entry visa is required for entry into India, and you must obtain this prior to departure. For further information, you may wish to contact the India consulate nearest you or Pinnacle Travel Document Systems (www.traveldocs.com on the web or 888-838-4867 by phone), a company which handles visa procurement.

EQUIPMENT: You should have a pair of binoculars in good repair (please check before departure!). Your tour leader will be carrying an excellent Leica spotting scope; however, you are recommended to bring your own spotting scope if you so wish, as this will greatly enhance your enjoyment of this tour, if you are used to carrying and regularly using your own scope.

You should bring all the camera equipment, spare flash-cards, batteries, and film that you will need. Flash-cards and film will be almost impossible to obtain once we depart Bangalore. **Nearly everyone brings too few batteries and too little film or flash-card space. PLEASE bring loads (we cannot emphasize this enough!!!!).** UV and polarizing filters are recommended, especially at higher elevations where glare can be a problem. Plastic bags are very useful to protect equipment from rain and dust. A really good flashlight or headlamp is essential, so please ensure that yours is in good working order and that you have spare bulbs and batteries. A spare flashlight or headlamp is ideal. Couples should bring one flashlight or headlamp each.

A small daypack (either waterproofed or with a strong plastic bag inside) is essential for carrying excess clothing, camera equipment, toiletries, food, and water. However, in many of the areas where we will be birding, we will have regular access to our transport, which will be attended by a driver and his mate. **Water bottles are important** if you like to carry a regular supply of water.

Other useful items include:

1. **Flashlights or headlamps** (as previously indicated): We will be out at night on a few occasions; a small flashlight or headlamp is sometimes useful at checklist sessions.
2. **Handywipes:** These are very important, and paper tissues are also especially useful. All participants should carry sufficient amounts for their personal needs for the entire tour.
3. **Spare glasses or contact lenses.**

4. **Sunscreen:** Strongly recommended, especially for higher elevations where the UV is much greater; **lip balm** is also essential.
5. **Umbrella:** The collapsible type is easy to carry and useful against rain and sun.

MISCELLANEOUS:

Electricity – India uses 220 volts, 50 cycles, AC. However, electricity can be unreliable. A flashlight or headlamp with a good supply of batteries will be essential. Do not rely on an electric razor, or always having electricity available for charging your video batteries (although all participants have managed well enough on previous trips).

Language - In India, Hindi, English and 14 other languages are spoken.

Time - 10 to 10½ hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time.

Snacks - It is advisable to bring granola-type bars, dried fruit or other snacks, as western-style snacks will not be available and Indian food may not include the roughage and variety we have grown accustomed to in our Western diets.

Bug juice – Everyone will need insect repellent to deal with the odd occasion we encounter leeches at low elevations (very rarely because we bird mostly from the road).

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. We also recommend Andrew Isles bookstore for the Asia-Pacific region at <http://www.andrewisles.com/AndrewIsles/>. Andrew can also often obtain difficult to find and out of print books.

Ali, S. *The Fall of the Sparrow*. Bombay. OUP. 1984.

Bole, P.V. & Y. Vaghani. *Field Guide to the Common Trees of India*. Bombay. WWF India/OUP. 1986.

Collins, L. & D. LaPierre. *Freedom at Midnight*. 1975. A fascinating account of India's independence movement and much background material on India in general.

Cubbit, G. & G. Mountfort. *Wild India*. London. New Holland. 1991.

Daniel, J.C. *The Book of Indian Reptile and Amphibians*. Bombay: Bombay Natural History Society, 2002.

Grimmet, R. and T. Inskipp. *Field Guide to the birds of Southern India*. Christopher Helm. 2005.
Probably the best book to use on tour.

Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C. and T. Inskipp. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent. Christopher Helm Identification Guide Series*, 1998.

Gay, T., Kehimkar, I.D. & J.C. Punetha. *Common Butterflies of India*. Bombay. WWF India/OUP. 1992.

Gee, E.P. *The Wildlife of India*. London. Collins. 1964.

Grewal, B. *A Photographic Guide to Birds of India and Nepal*. London. New Holland. 1995.

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Gurung, K.K. and Raj Singh. *Field Guide to the Mammals of the Indian Subcontinent: Where to watch Mammals in India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan*. San Diego: Academic Press, 1996.

Hawkins, R. E. *Encyclopedia of Indian Natural History*. Oxford University Press. 1987.

Insight Guides. *Indian Wildlife*. Apa Productions, 1987. A superb evocation of the subcontinent's wildlife, in addition to very useful details of its huge variety of parks and reserves.

Insight Guides. *South India*. Apa Productions. 1992

Kazmierczak, K. & B. van Perlo. *A Field Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. Robertsbridge. Pica Press. 1999.

This is a very nice alternative to the Rasmussen & Anderton 2005 or the Grimmet *et al* guide.

Kazmierczak, Krys and Raj Singh. *A Birdwatchers' Guide to India*. Bedfordshire, United Kingdom: Prion Ltd., 1998.

McNeely, Jeffrey A. and Paul Spencer Wachtel. *Soul of the Tiger: Searching for Natural Answers in Southeast Asia*. New York: Doubleday, 1988. One of the most intriguing and beautifully written books on the complex relationships between man, his myriad beliefs and nature, and the implications for conservation.

Mehta, V. *The New India*. A recent history of India under Indira Gandhi. 1978.

Menon, V. *A Field Guide to Indian Mammals*. DK Delhi. 2003.

Undoubtedly the very finest field guide to the mammals of India.

McNeely, J. A. and P. S. Wachtel. *Soul of the Tiger*. New York. Doubleday. 1988.

Prater, S.H. *The Book of Indian Animals (Mammals)*. Bombay: Bombay Natural History, 1971. Detailed descriptions and illustrations of most, if not all, the animals inhabiting the Indian Subcontinent. A fairly easy book to obtain in India, if it's not available near your home.

Rasmussen, P. C. & J. C. Anderton. 2005. *Birds of South Asia. The Ripley Guide. Vols. 1 and 2*. Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions. Washington D.C. and Barcelona.

If you want something more detailed and comprehensive than the Inskipp Bhutan book, then you should also obtain the Rasmussen book. This book also has a much more up to date taxonomy.

Schaller, G. B. *The Deer and the Tiger*. 1998. Natraj Publishers, Dehra Dun, India.

Singh, R.L. *India – A Regional Geography*. Varanasi. National Geographic Society of India. 1989.

Whittaker, R. and A. Captain. *Snakes of India. The Fields Guide*. Draco Books, Chennai, India. 2004.

TIPPING: As noted in our itineraries, 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.

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