

## **THE LESSER ANTILLES ABOARD THE SEA CLOUD**

### **FEBRUARY 15 – 22, 2010**

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*When legendary businessman E.F. Hutton and his wife, Marjorie Merriweather Post, launched the Sea Cloud in 1931, many proclaimed her the finest luxury yacht ever built. Considered a masterpiece of shipbuilding, the remarkable four-masted barque was a floating palace, with each detail of construction and design reflecting the skill of her European craftsmen.*

*Throughout its long and colorful history—as personal touring vessel; as stage for international diplomacy; as a Navy-commissioned United States warship; as a pirated vessel; and as a playground for society’s elite—Sea Cloud, in all her maritime elegance, was the envy of the high seas.*

*Today, more than ever, Sea Cloud is widely regarded as the world’s most beautiful sailing vessel. Restored to its original design, her towering masts, full rigging, and polished wooden decks are testament to its unparalleled beauty. With sails unfurled, she presents a breathtaking sight.*

*VENT is proud to have chartered this majestic vessel on four occasions. Sadly, we have learned that Sea Cloud will likely be permanently retired at the end of 2010. We have had such wonderful experiences on her that we are chartering her a final time for a Caribbean cruise, to the islands of the Lesser Antilles.*

*Stretching northward from the oceanic trench between Trinidad and Grenada, the Lesser Antilles offer a fascinating study in evolution and biogeography, the stepping-stone process by which various organisms have colonized each island and developed into unique forms. These isolated islands are tiny, mere specks of land rising out of some of the deepest waters on earth. Scenically they are spectacular, as are the surrounding waters and reefs. All of the islands are volcanic in origin and dominated by steep and heavily-dissected peaks; their terrain is quite rugged. Each island is subtly different from the others, and all of the major ones have one to four endemic birds (species found nowhere else in the world), plus an array of special plants, reptiles and amphibians, and insects. Other birds are shared between two or more islands, not always in a predictable pattern. Sadly, many of these endemics are scarce and threatened. Our excursions will visit the forest sanctuaries where they persist, and we will have at least one chance at finding all of them.*

*All of the Lesser Antilles have lost significant areas of their forests and many species of wildlife, a process that began with the first people to find the islands. The birds have been hunted for food (there are almost no native mammals of any size), while the forests have been heavily exploited for building materials and charcoal and cleared for farming. Because of the steepness of the terrain, human settlement has been concentrated in hamlets along the coast and on the gentler flanks of the mountains, but a growing population with a limited resource base has put additional pressure on the steep slopes. Agriculture was once the backbone of the economy of the region, but for a variety of reasons this resource base has declined over many years. Plantations have been abandoned, but the introduced*

*predators, especially the mongoose and rats, and the non-native plants have persisted. Natural disasters, such as hurricanes and volcanic eruptions, have had their impact too and periodically disrupt the island ecosystems.*

*Fortunately, not all is lost. The people of the islands are coming to recognize the natural beauty and value of their forests, both as watersheds and as sanctuaries for the native fauna and flora. Educational efforts by conservation groups like RARE and The Nature Conservancy have had a very positive and far-reaching impact, and island-based ecotourism now brings revenue directly to the local people and provides funding for the conservation of the remaining forests. On each island we will visit a forest area where great efforts have been made to save these priceless treasures and protect a unique environment for future generations to enjoy.*

**A few words of caution:** *To explore the key areas on each island that we visit, we will split into groups and alternate the sites visited. Since bird activity is best in the morning, we will be up early most days. Once ashore, we will travel in a variety of local vehicles for up to an hour before we reach the protected forests and nature trails. The trails that we will visit are well-constructed and offer a chance to be inside these beautiful forests. However, some people may find the trails too steep or too physically challenging. Many of the birds can be spotted from the roads and forest edge, and we will offer that option. Most of the forests have a fascinating array of plant species labeled and some have additional interpretive signs. It is worth noting that, while we will have at least a chance to see all of the endemic birds of the region, several of them are quite difficult and cannot be counted upon. If your sole interest is in seeing these endemics, this may not be the trip for you.*

*The following daily accounts should give you a bit of background information on each island and an idea of which birds we will be seeking each day. Please note that the logistics of a cruise must be somewhat flexible, however.*

**February 15, Day 1: arrival in Antigua; embarkation.** All participants should arrive Antigua no later than 3 P.M. today. After clearing customs and immigration, we will be transferred to the *Sea Cloud* for embarkation. All our nights will be spent on this beautiful sailing ship. We strongly urge you to allow ample connecting times, or to consider arriving Antigua a day early, to ensure you arrive on time.

**February 16, Day 2: at sea.** Today will be spent at sea, sailing southward through the warm deep-blue Caribbean on the lee of the islands and getting acquainted with our special "home" for the week. There is a long history of sailing in these waters, from the earliest Arawak settlers paddling canoes northward from South America to the repeated struggles between the French and British for control of the island and the days of the buccaneers and rum-runners. Few have sailed these waters in such style, however, as the *Sea Cloud* offers!

If we are lucky we may spot some of the marine mammals that frequent the Caribbean. There are resident sperm whales, Atlantic spinner dolphins are sometimes seen in large herds, humpback whales migrate into the region at this season, and other cetaceans are possible. Flying fish are a frequent sight, and will undoubtedly fool us into thinking they are birds at least a few times. Seabirds, on the other hand, are surprisingly scarce in these tropical waters, where the food resources are scattered and limited. Among the birds that we may encounter during our time at sea are Brown Booby, tropicbirds, Magnificent Frigatebird, Pomarine and Parasitic jaegers, Laughing Gull, terns of several species, and Brown Noddy. Far less likely, but not impossible, are Audubon's Shearwater and storm-petrels.

**February 17, Day 3: Vermont Forest, St. Vincent.** Our first port of call is tiny St. Vincent, where we will spend the morning at the Vermont Forest Nature Trail, access to some of the best remaining forest on the island. Famous as the home of the St. Vincent Parrot, this beautiful area offers a 1 3/4-mile loop through a wonderland of island rainforest. Shady gullies inside the forest create a super-humid niche where ferns, heliconias, palms and epiphytes

thrive, while immense buttressed trees tower overhead and cast a deep shade. The parrots themselves are considered one of the most beautiful members of this exotic family. They are highly vocal, and can occasionally even be found in the trees near the small parking area here. Our best chance of seeing them will be to climb a well-constructed trail up a ridge to a viewing platform looking out over the rugged valleys radiating from the central volcano, all still clad in forest. The parrots utilize only the 5% of the island still covered in mid-elevation rainforest, ignoring the elfin forest above and the tropical moist forest and dry scrub below. Happily, "Vincie the parrot" is a conservation success story, thanks to extensive island-wide education campaigns, and its numbers have increased to where there may be 500 or more birds living in the wild. We have a good chance of viewing them, at least in flight.

St. Vincent's other endemic bird is the unique Whistling Warbler. Patterned like no other member of its family, this is a very distinct and isolated island form. Typically this active bird forages in the subcanopy, gleaning insects from clusters of both living and dead leaves, at long intervals giving its surprisingly loud and pleasant song. With luck and keen eyes we will find it this morning. Also present in the forest here are Lesser Antillean Tanager and Grenada Flycatcher (two species shared only with Grenada) and other Antillean specialties like the Purple-throated Carib, Brown Trembler (a very comical character) and Lesser Antillean Bullfinch. Within the region, Common Black-Hawk is found only on St. Vincent, where it hunts crabs in the mountain streams, while the Cocoa Thrush of South America reaches its northern limit here.

We will also visit the St. Vincent Botanical Gardens, the oldest in the Americas, founded in 1765. Captain Bligh was heading to St. Vincent on his fateful voyage aboard the *Bounty* in 1787; six years later he succeeded in bringing 400 breadfruit trees to the island, offshoots of which still grow in the Botanical Garden.

**February 18, Day 4: Edmond Forest area, St Lucia.** St. Lucia, our stop for today, may well be the most beautiful of the Lesser Antilles and has an especially rugged aspect. Steep canyons and mountain slopes rise dramatically right from the sea, while lush plantations and forests thrive on the moist slopes. Our moorage in the small harbor at Soufriere, once the French capital, is dominated by the spectacular Pitons, ancient volcanic plugs that tower like sentinels over the bay.

After taking "water taxis" ashore, we will board open-air trucks for the seven-kilometer trip up a steep sideroad to a ridgetop in the interior of the island. The view here is dominated by Mt. Gimie, the highest peak on the island, while a blanket of lush rainforest sprawls over the valleys below. Once the ridge is reached, the road is relatively level and passes through patches of forest, second-growth, and a few small fruit plantations until it descends downhill into lovely Edmond Forest. Groves of tree ferns are especially large and luxuriant on these upper ridges, and the frequent cloud cover supports a profusion of epiphytes and mosses on the trees. We will station groups along various sections of the road, and everyone will have a chance to enjoy the scenery and search for the special birds.

St. Lucia has four endemic birds, more than any other island in the Lesser Antilles. One, the Semper's Warbler, has not definitely been found in over fifty years, though it may still exist somewhere in the higher forests of the island. The St. Lucia Parrot is very rare, but is now slowly beginning to recover its numbers, after an extensive public relations campaign that instilled a great deal of pride among the islanders in their special bird. Sometimes the parrots are present in this upper zone, but they are not always around or visible, and it is not a certainty that we will see them. Still fairly widespread are the St. Lucia Oriole and the St. Lucia Black Finch, though neither can be said to be common or conspicuous.

The pattern of bird distribution in the West Indies is often crazy-quilt, and certainly this is reflected in some of the other birds found on St. Lucia. The lovely Adelaide's Warbler, for instance, is shared only with distant Puerto Rico, where it occurs in dry scrub rather than rainforest, while the comical Gray Trembler is otherwise known only from Martinique. Other possibilities in this area include Scaly-naped Pigeon (shy), Lesser Antillean Pewee (the distinctive St. Lucia race), Rufous-throated Solitaire (known as the "mountain whistler," it is heard more often than seen), Scaly-breasted Thrasher, Bare-eyed Robin, Bananaquit, and Lesser Antillean Saltator. Two hummingbirds, the stunning Purple-throated Carib and the smaller Antillean Crested Hummingbird, can be quite common.

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We will also offer the opportunity to visit Diamond Falls and Botanical Gardens on the Soufrière Estate, as well as the collapsed crater of a nearby volcano where you can see bubbling sulfur springs filled with volcanic soil.

**February 19, Day 5: Caravelle Peninsula, Martinique.** Culture shock! There is no other way to describe Martinique after a visit to the less-developed and poorer islands. This island is an overseas department of France, and is very modern and "busy." Southern Martinique is also much flatter and more extensively agricultural than our previous two stops. The roads here are excellent, and after landing we will drive eastward to the Caravelle Peninsula, a tongue of land that juts six miles out into the rough Atlantic waters on the windward (eastern) side of the island. Covered in dry forest growing on low ridges and surrounded by sparkling turquoise-colored bays, Caravelle Peninsula will provide our best chance to experience the natural history of this drier environment, in the vicinity of the ruins of historic Chateau Dubuc.

The small park here is home to two of the most endangered songbirds of the West Indies, the White-breasted Thrasher and the Martinique Oriole. The oriole is found nowhere else in the world and is now succumbing to parasitism by the Shiny Cowbird and habitat loss. The cowbird, a recent invader on the island, finds abundant habitat in the extensively agricultural areas. The thrasher is shared only with St. Lucia, where it occurs in the nearly-inaccessible arid northeast and is so restricted in habitat on both islands that it may number no more than 80 pairs total, none of them securely protected in inviolate sanctuaries. Mongooses and rats, which are abundant in the dry scrub on both islands, may well be the cause of the precipitous decline in the thrasher. Though we cannot count on seeing either the thrasher or the oriole, we will certainly make an effort to seek out these two rarities this morning. Other birds of the dry forest here include Zenaida Dove, Mangrove Cuckoo, Green-throated Carib, Gray Kingbird, Lesser Antillean Saltator, and Carib Grackle.

For those who do not wish to visit the Caravelle Peninsula we offer a walking tour of Fort de France, including museums, shopping, and a visit to the spectacular Balata Gardens, located on a mountain ridge above the city.

**February 20, Day 6: Syndicate Estate area, Dominica.** Dominica proudly bills itself as "the Nature Island," a nickname richly deserved. This is the least-populated of the Lesser Antilles, and the pace of life here is decidedly more relaxed. The people are friendly, the traffic is light, there is extensive forest remaining, and almost alone among the West Indies the island has been spared the mongoose. Dominica is the most mountainous island of the Lesser Antilles—it has no major airport because there isn't enough flat ground anywhere on the island! Dominica is the wettest island in the Caribbean, with an annual rainfall of around 300 inches. The landscape is so rugged—with misty peaks over 4,500 feet—the island has its own microclimate. Its caves, sparkling rivers, and black beaches are surrounded by a rainforest of 100-foot trees, wild orchids and ferns. The dramatic elevations provide three different and unique forest environments. Our moorage here is at scenic and historic Cabrits, on the dry northwestern point of the island, within sight of Morne Diablotin, a huge volcanic peak that dominates the entire northern half of Dominica.

From Cabrits it is less than an hour up to Syndicate Estate, our natural history area for the day. At just under 2000 ft. elevation, the climate here is pleasant and the volcanic soils are fertile. Much of this mid-elevation forest has been converted to banana, citrus and dasheen (a root crop) plantations. They are not unattractive, and many of the native birds and butterflies survive quite well amidst the hodgepodge of planted crops and strips of native vegetation. Loss of habitat, however, has been one of the major problems for Dominica's two spectacular endemic birds, the Red-necked and Imperial parrots. Both are in the genus *Amazona*, and both were seriously reduced in numbers before widespread publicity and strong conservation efforts halted their decline. Nowadays the Red-necked Parrot population is healthy and expanding, and they seem able to survive in partially-cleared terrain quite well. We should get good looks at this special bird, at least in flight. This is not necessarily so for the spectacular Imperial Parrot. The wild population of this bird reached a nadir of perhaps as few as 50 birds before the situation was stabilized through the cessation of hunting and forest clearance for agriculture. Now, after prolonged efforts to save the species, it may number as many as 300 individuals. They prefer forest at a slightly higher elevation than the Red-necked (though both overlap in this area) and are restricted to the northern and western ridges of Morne Diablotin, using the taller forest just below the elfin forest on the ridges of the volcano. Unlike most amazons, the Imperial is an inconspicuous

bird that does not often leave the cover of the forest canopy, nor does it engage in long commuter flights between feeding and roosting areas. Instead, pairs or small family groups move about unobtrusively inside the canopy, seeking out the "gommier" trees as an especially important food item.

We will station groups at various "lookouts" where we have at least a chance of seeing or hearing the Imperial Parrots. One area is the Syndicate Nature Trail, which enters a flat area of tall and open rainforest along the rim of the wild Picard River Gorge. Other vantage points are at the plantation/forest ecotone (edge). This habitat is one of the "birdiest" places we will visit on our trip. Among the other special birds that we may see here are a splendid variety of hummingbirds, including the Purple-throated Carib, the Antillean Crested and the rare Blue-headed Hummingbird. We may also spot Lesser Antillean Flycatcher, House Wren (an odd-looking endemic race), Red-legged Thrush (at its only outpost in the Lesser Antilles), Rufous-throated Solitaire, Brown Trembler, Scaly-breasted and Pearly-eyed thrashers (both rather common), Plumbeous Warbler (shared only with Guadeloupe), Antillean Euphonia (inconspicuous), and Black-faced Grassquit. Resident Broad-winged Hawks and Lesser Antillean Swifts may be spotted overhead.

**February 21, Day 7: Guadeloupe National Park, Guadeloupe.** Guadeloupe, our final stop, is really two islands arrayed in the shape of a butterfly, connected by a bridge over a narrow strait. The eastern island, or Grand Terre, is the flattest island in the Lesser Antilles, and is heavily-settled and developed for agriculture, especially sugarcane. The western wing of the butterfly, Basse Terre, is rugged, wild and mountainous, dominated by the Soufrière volcano. Soufrière erupted early in this century with sudden force, causing widespread death and destruction and a major re-location of many inhabitants to Grand Terre. Most of the southern half of Basse Terre has been designated a national park. It is the largest remaining wilderness area in the Lesser Antilles, with far more lowland rainforest than any of the other islands.

As we drive westward onto Basse Terre, our first views will likely be of clouds hiding the upper reaches of Soufrière, a vast band of verdant green forest covering the lower slopes as far as the eye can see. Soon the road abruptly enters the lowland rainforest, taking us right into the habitat for Guadeloupe's only surviving endemic bird, the Guadeloupe Woodpecker. This attractive species somewhat resembles the dark Lewis's Woodpecker of western North America, except that it prefers the midstory and canopy of dense forest. Hurricane damage to the trees from past storms is evident in this part of the forest, and the tops of many trees have been twisted off or snapped, leaving plenty of dead branches and snags for the woodpecker.

Today will be our final opportunity to take a walk in the tropical forests of the Lesser Antilles and to experience the profusion of plant and animal life. Today will be our final chance to see iguanas, monkeys, butterflies, vocal tree frogs, or the giant thorax-horned Hercules Beetle, reportedly the world's second largest beetle. Spectacular views stretch all the way down to the Caribbean Sea. We will then return to our ship and depart for Antigua.

**February 22, Day 8: departure.** Our grand voyage is now at an end. This morning, we will dock in Antigua around 6:00 a.m. and depart for the return trip home, holding on to magical memories of sailing aboard the *Sea Cloud* and visiting some priceless natural areas.

**TOUR SIZE:** This tour will be limited to 56 participants.

**TOUR LEADER(S): Victor Emanuel, Barry Lyon, and David Ascanio.**

**Victor Emanuel** started birding in Texas 60 years ago at the age of eight. His travels have taken him to all the continents, with his areas of concentration being Texas, Arizona, Mexico, Panama, and Peru. He is the founder and compiler for 50 years of the record-breaking Freeport Christmas Bird Count, and served a term as president of the Texas Ornithological Society. Birds and natural history have been a major focus throughout his life. He derives great pleasure from seeing and hearing birds, and sharing with others these avian sights and sounds, both the common ones and the more unusual ones. He initiated the first birding camps for young people, and considers that one of his greatest achievements. Victor holds a B.A. in zoology and botany from the University of Texas

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and an M.A. in government from Harvard. In 1993, he was the recipient of the Roger Tory Peterson Excellence in Birding Award, given by the Houston Audubon Society in recognition of a lifetime of dedication to careful observation, education, and addition to the body of avian knowledge. In 2004, he received the Roger Tory Peterson Award from the American Birding Association, and the Arthur A. Allen Award from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. Victor is a member of the board of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, and the American Bird Conservancy.

**Barry Lyon's** passion for the outdoors and birding has its roots in his childhood where he grew up in southern California. Through his early and teenage years his developing interests were nurtured by summertime camping trips to southern Arizona and road trips throughout the American West. He attended three VENT/ABA youth birding camps, which would ultimately pave the way for his future involvement with VENT. While in college, Barry studied history and political science, with an emphasis on environment and development politics. He holds a B.A. from the University of Arizona at Tucson from which he graduated in 1994. He joined the VENT team in 1995 and hasn't looked back. Barry has guided tours throughout the United States and Canada, as well as to Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, and the Caribbean. In the summer of 2004 he relocated to Austin and joined the staff in an administrative position. Barry will continue to lead a limited number of tours, but his increased responsibilities include new tour development and assisting in marketing and advertising efforts.

**David Ascanio**, a Venezuelan birder and naturalist, has spent the last 25 years guiding birding tours throughout his native country, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, Guyana, the Dominican Republic, western Ecuador, and Panama. He is especially interested in bird vocalizations, and has a private library containing sounds of more than 70% of all the birds of Venezuela, including some which are the only ones known to science. David speaks excellent English and combines superb birding skills with an astonishing command of bird vocalizations. He has published several manuscripts about the birds of the *llanos* (plains) and the tepui endemics for which he has become an authority. He is an excellent communicator, has a great sense of humor, and is tireless in helping others find birds and wildlife. These traits have made him the most popular naturalist/guide in his country.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** Cabin prices quoted are per person based on double occupancy and include port taxes. Single occupancy is available in Category 4 Cabins at the price indicated. Single occupancy in all other Categories is at twice the quoted rate.

Quoted price includes accommodations on board the *Sea Cloud* in the category of cabin chosen; all meals while onboard; shore excursions; services of on-board leaders and lecturers; group transfers and baggage handling between airport and ship; all gratuities.

Not included in the cruise prices are air transportation from the passenger's home to Antigua, St. Johns and return; excess baggage charges; international and domestic departure taxes; passport fees; beverages, wines, liquors or refreshments additional to meals provided; personal and baggage insurance; accommodations, meals, and transfers prior to joining/after leaving the group; all items of a personal nature.

Category A:	\$10,995	Cabins #1, #2
Category B:	\$9,995	Cabins #3, #4, #5, #6, #7, #8, #9, #10
Category 1:	\$8,695	Cabins #30, #31
Category 2:	\$8,495	Cabins #32, #33, #34, #35, #36, #37
Category 3:	\$8,150	Cabins #18, #20, #21, #22, #23, #24, #25
Category 4:	\$8,450 (single)	Cabins #15, #16, #17

**TOUR REGISTRATION:** A non-refundable deposit of **\$2,000** is required to reserve a space on this trip. A second installment of **\$3,500** (**\$4700** for cabins in categories A & B) is due July 1, 2009. The balance of the fee is due October 1, 2009.

**CANCELLATIONS AND REFUNDS:** All cancellations, for any reason, must be received in writing and require forfeiture of your \$2,000 deposit. Cancellations received between July 1, 2009 and October 1, 2009 will be subject to a 60 percent (60%) cancellation fee of total trip cost per tour participant. Cancellations occurring after October 1, 2009 will result in forfeiture of the entire cost of the trip whether previously paid or not. Any refunds will be reduced by applicable airline cancellation penalties. No refunds will be made in the event of “no shows” or cancellations made on the day of sailing. No refunds will be made for any part of the program in which you choose not to participate. Service fees may apply to deviations and are non-refundable. *For your protection we strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance and/or travel insurance*

### **GENERAL INFORMATION**

#### **MISCELLANEOUS:**

Departure Tax - US \$20 from Antigua

Electricity - 220 Volts; a 110 razor socket is provided in each bathroom

Language - English: St. Vincent, St. Lucia & Dominica; French: Martinique & Guadeloupe

Time - 1 hour ahead of Eastern Standard Time on all the islands

**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 voyage. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of brochure printing. 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.

**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. Our 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.

**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.**

**IMPORTANT NOTE: Medical Insurance which covers you for emergency evacuation/repatriation during the voyage is MANDATORY for participation in this cruise.** A good website for information and acquisition of Emergency Evacuation/repatriation insurance is: [www.insuremytrip.com](http://www.insuremytrip.com). **ALL CRUISE PASSENGERS MUST COMPLETE, SIGN AND RETURN AN ASSUMPTION OF RISK & AGREEMENT TO ACQUIRE**

**MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE.** This form may be found in your Participant Packet which will be sent to you approximately eight months prior to departure date.

Due to the nature of the expedition, weather conditions or government regulations may require changes to be made to the itinerary and/or the cancellation of certain shore excursions. Every attempt will be made to adhere to the itinerary described, within the limits of safety and time. In the event of changes, passengers have no right to any refund or other compensation. Expedition fees are based on group participation. Should you choose not to take part in any activity or make use of services provided, no refund will be made.

**AIR INFORMATION:** Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of VENT. Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to assist you in making air arrangements. Airline tickets carry restrictions due to the airfare used. You may find that your ticket cannot be reissued or exchanged for another air carrier or routing. Cancellation penalties and change fees may be assessed for any changes to the ticket. These charges are solely your responsibility. First and business class travel may be available on some flights. **All requests for travel assistance (air tickets, additional hotels, etc.) must be received no later than 90 days prior to departure date. Within 90 days, arrangements must be made on your own.**

**CLIMATE & WEATHER:** The climate throughout this region is generally warm and pleasant, with a range of 70 - 90 degrees F. in the lowlands and at sea, and a bit cooler in the mountains (down into the sixties).

**BAGGAGE:** The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. Please consult your specific airline to find out their weight restrictions.

As a precaution against lost luggage, we suggest that you pack a change of clothes, essential toiletries, medications, a change of clothing, important travel documents, optics, and any other essential items in your carry-on bag.

**Due to airline weight restrictions, and space limitations aboard ship, we ask that you pack as efficiently as possible.**

**CLOTHING:** As is the case for all of our tropical tours, lightweight field clothing in muted, natural colors is the norm here. Long-sleeved shirts, a hat, sunglasses, and a good sunscreen are recommended for protection from the sun. Shorts can be worn most days if you prefer. A pair of good comfortable, water-resistant hiking boots or walking shoes will suffice for field wear (some of the trails and roads may be somewhat damp or a little muddy). Generally the weather will be warm and sunny, but it can be cool enough at higher elevations in the early morning that you should bring a light jacket for layering. Do not forget to bring a small umbrella and/or poncho, as we are likely to get caught in sudden showers at several locations. You may want to bring a swimming suit.

There will be one or two dress-up occasions on this cruise, the Captains "Welcome Aboard" and "Farewell" dinners are considered formal. A tie and jacket is recommended for the gentleman, and for the ladies, a nice skirt or dress.

**CURRENCY:** The USD is the official currency on-board the *Sea Cloud*. A cabin account will be opened for each guest to facilitate payments to be cleared at the end of the voyage. Traveller's checks, American Express, Visa, MasterCard, and Eurocard can be used. The Eastern Caribbean Dollar (EC\$) is the official currency at St. Vincent, St. Lucia & Dominica. The French Franc (FFr) is the official currency at Martinique & Guadeloupe. Local currencies are available in small amounts on board the *Sea Cloud*. Traveller's checks and credit cards can also be used while on shore.

**DOCUMENTS:** A valid passport is required for entry into each country where we will land. Visas are not required for entry by United States citizens. Non United States citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions.

**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. A small water bottle or canteen, alarm clock, and folding umbrella and/or poncho are suggested. Your leaders will have spotting scopes, but feel free to bring your own if you like.

Chiggers can be a problem in some areas that we visit. We recommend the use of repellent lotion and a pump-style container of repellent that has close to 100% DEET, applied liberally to the ankles. We may also encounter mosquitos inside the forest in a few spots. Topsy gel is useful in reducing irritation from bites or stings, and some cortisone creams are available without prescription. Sulphur powder (Flowers of Sulphur) applied to the outside of your clothing also discourages chiggers.

**MEDICAL SERVICES:** A qualified physician is in attendance at all times. Passengers requiring special medications should bring sufficient quantities to last the duration of the expedition.

**SUGGESTED READING:** Our website at [www.ventbird.com](http://www.ventbird.com), offers an 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 our 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.

Bond, James. *The Birds of the West Indies* (4th ed). Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, MA, 1985. The old field guide to the birds of the region, marginally adequate.

Raffaele, Herbert, et al. *A Guide to the Birds of the West Indies*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1998. **The recommended field guide to the birds of the region.**

Wauer, Roland. *A Birder's Guide to the West Indies*. University of Texas Press, Austin, 1996. Easy reading and very informative, this book has chapters on all of the islands that we visit and will give you an excellent idea of the birding areas. Highly-recommended.

**TIPPING:** Tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, and local guides) is included on all land portions of this tour. The Cruise Director and tour leaders are **NOT** considered part of the main crew. **If you decide to tip the Cruise Director or tour leaders you should hand it to them directly.** Please remember that gratuities are a personal decision and the amount extended should be based on the quality and manner of the service you receive.

If you feel any local guide has provided exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

**RESPONSIBILITY:** Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. 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 January 12, 2009, and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The

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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.