

# SOUTHERN MEXICO THE HIGHLANDS AND LOWLANDS OF CHIAPAS

MAY 8-16, 2010

© 2009

*The southern Mexican state of Chiapas is a land of enchantment. Perched on Mexico's back door where it straddles the Guatemalan border, this outlying portion of Mexico is among the most appealing of all the states of this super-diverse country. A rich culture, a tremendously varied landscape, and a bounty of natural wonders define the identity of Chiapas.*

*More than 470 species of birds regularly occur in this southernmost of Mexican states, including such avian gems and rarities as Blue-throated Motmot, Slender Sheartail, Red-breasted Chat, Pink-headed Warbler, Bar-winged Oriole, Black-capped Siskin, and Nava's Wren. This tour will be attractive both to casual birders with little experience south of the U.S. border as well as to widely-traveled birders searching for hard-to-find restricted-range species. We will enjoy a relaxed and easygoing pace while sampling a large proportion of the species and habitats that occur in the state of Chiapas. Our route will be a circular one, originating in the coastal city of Tapachula in the Pacific Lowlands. From Tapachula we will strike out on a week-long adventure that sees us traveling in a circular route first along the coast, then into the magnificent interior. Among the more attractive features of this tour is our immersion into the forested highlands and drier lowlands where such contrasting conditions should provide a limitless avenue for birding and natural history exploration, particularly of most of the vegetation zones that occur in Mexico.*

*One of our birding sites near the Chiapas capital of Tuxtla Gutiérrez is majestic Sumidero Canyon, a gorge almost as deep as the Grand Canyon, but clothed in tropical vegetation. We will spend two mornings here to adequately bird both the upper and lower parts of the canyon. Special birds of the area include Russet-crowned Motmot, Belted Flycatcher, Banded Wren, White-lored Gnatcatcher, Fan-tailed Warbler, Banded Wren, Bar-winged Oriole, and Yellow Grosbeak. Even Thicket Tinamou, Pheasant Cuckoo, and Highland Guan are occasionally seen. West of Tuxtla Gutiérrez we will spend one or two mornings searching for the very rare (and rarely seen) Nava's Wren and many other birds of the tropical rainforest. One afternoon we will visit a roost of dozens to hundreds of Green Parakeets in a huge limestone sinkhole. Another afternoon we will visit a zoo that doubles as a forest reserve, where Crested Guans, Plain Chachalacas, and Great Curassows were successfully reintroduced in 1980.*

*We will visit San Cristóbal de las Casas, a picturesque colonial city located in a pleasant highland valley, and surrounded by pine and oak forests. Here we will search for some of Mexico's most sought-after highland specialties, including Pink-headed Warbler, Rufous-collared Robin, Rufous-browed Wren, and many others.*

*We will also visit the Lagos de Montebello, or Lakes of Montebello, a scenic area with gorgeous mountain lakes of different colors surrounded by picturesque cloud forest. Here we will focus on locating an array of other highland birds of this unique ecosystem. We will have more of a chance to find the dazzling Slender Sheartail in addition to such beauties as Mountain Trogon, Unicolored Jay, and Flame-colored Tanager.*

*Southern Mexico: Chiapas, Page 2*

*Around Tapachula we will look for the seldom-encountered and highly localized Blue-tailed Hummingbird and such lowland favorites as Giant Wren, White-bellied Chachalaca, Spot-breasted Oriole, and other restricted-range species. Farther north around the town of Arriaga, our main goal will be seeing the gorgeous and ultra-local Rose-bellied (Rosita's) Bunting.*

**May 8, Day 1: Arrival in Tapachula, Chiapas, Mexico.** Participants may make arrangements to arrive in Tapachula International Airport (city code TAP) any time today and transfer to the hotel where a room will be reserved in your name. Upon collection of your baggage, proceed through customs and out the exit to the front of the airport. "Colectivos" (or taxis) are easily found. Participants arriving early can meet the tour leader in the hotel lobby at 4:30 pm for afternoon birding. Late arrivals will gather with the tour leader in the hotel lobby at 7:00 p.m. for a get-acquainted dinner. Toward sundown we will listen for the gentle rolling call that announces the presence of Pacific Screech-Owl.

NIGHT: Hotel Loma Real, Tapachula

**May 9, Day 2: Tapachula area and drive to Arriaga.** In the morning we will bird the grounds of our hotel for an enticing introduction to the birds of the Chiapas lowlands. Birds are usually conspicuously abundant and among the morning's spoils may be White-bellied Chachalaca, Giant Wren, and both Altamira and Spot-breasted orioles. After about an hour of birding we will check out and visit Finca Argovia, about an hour's drive away. We'll look especially for the Blue-tailed Hummingbird, a species found only along the Mexico-Guatemala border and one which we will not encounter anywhere else. After returning to the hotel for lunch and check out, we will drive north to Arriaga, stopping to bird on the way in tropical dry forest near Mapastepec and elsewhere, perhaps with a stop or two along the coast.

NIGHT: Hotel Ik-lumaal, Arriaga

**May 10, Day 3: Arriaga to Tuxtla Gutiérrez.** We'll start the morning with a flourish and a short pre-breakfast search for the gorgeous Rose-bellied Bunting, a blue and pink gem found only locally in northwest Chiapas. After breakfast we will leave town in a way that gives us a second chance for the Rose-bellied Bunting if we missed it earlier, taking the long route toward Tuxtla Gutiérrez. Many other birds will be possible at stops en route including White-tailed Hawk, Acorn Woodpecker, Azure-crowned Hummingbird, and Plain Wren. In the early afternoon we will drive to a magnificent limestone sinkhole which is used as a roosting and nesting site by dozens or hundreds of Green Parakeets. On the road we may bump into species such as Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Northern Bobwhite and the striking Yellow-winged Cacique. We will arrive in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, the capital city of Chiapas, late this afternoon.

NIGHT: Hotel Maya Sol, Tuxtla Gutiérrez

**May 11-12, Days 4-5: Tuxtla Gutiérrez: Sumidero Canyon, Laguna Belgica State Park, Tuxtla Gutiérrez Zoo.** We will spend one or two mornings in Sumidero Canyon National Park, exploring the distinct lower and upper portions of the park. The birds here range from dry forest species such as Russet-crowned Motmot; Plain-capped Starthroat; Belted and Flammulated Flycatchers; Red-breasted Chat; Varied Bunting; and Yellow Grosbeak to birds of the more humid tropical forest such as Pheasant Cuckoo; Blue-and-white Mockingbird; Gray-collared Becard; and Emerald Toucanet. The list of potential species encountered is enormous, which is why we need two mornings to do it justice.

Sumidero Canyon offers visitors an outstanding collage of impressive scenery, fascinating botany, and excellent birding. We'll have breakfast in the field so we can begin birding while the mornings are still cool. We'll take time to work a few of the roadside pullouts, as everything we see will be exciting and new. Stops in the thorn-scrub forest are likely to be among the most productive. Simply wandering around the parking areas and working the forest edge may produce encounters with Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, White-throated Magpie-Jay, and Banded Wren. With good fortune we should encounter White-lored Gnatcatcher, a thorn-scrub specialist.

Moving farther up the road, we'll make a point of stopping in the bamboo belt, where the endemic Belted Flycatcher resides. The road continues into the park's interior and eventually tops out atop a dramatic promontory. From our lofty perch it is instantly clear why this place received park status. Looking out on a landscape of wondrous panoramic scenery we can view sheer rising walls of ancient limestone towering 4000 feet over the mighty Rio Grijalva far below. With its headwaters on the northern slope of the Sierra Madre de Chiapas, the Grijalva cuts its way across central and northern Chiapas on its way to the Gulf of Mexico. Geologists believe the erosive power of the river is enhanced by an uplift of land occurring simultaneously. The scenic splendor of this canyon is surely not to be underestimated. Sumidero Canyon offers opportunities for a variety of birds that we won't see again. Such localized inhabitants as Bar-winged Oriole headline a list of alluring possibilities.

One afternoon we will visit the small Laguna Bélgica State Park for true rainforest birds such as White-bellied Emerald; Brown and Green jays; Streaked and Sulphur-bellied flycatchers; Buff-throated Foliage-Gleaner and Gray-headed Dove. The other afternoon we will walk around the famous Tuxtla Gutiérrez Zoo, which is part of a native tropical forest reserve where we can find wild Orange-fronted Parakeets, Crested Guans, and Great Curassows (the last two reintroduced since 1980).

NIGHTS: Hotel Maya Sol, Tuxtla Gutiérrez

**May 13, Day 6: Tuxtla Gutiérrez to San Cristóbal.** In the morning we will drive approximately 45 minutes to a very special forest where the trees grow in peculiar style right over limestone boulders. This is the habitat of the very local Mexican endemic, Nava's Wren. Your leader, Hector Gomez de Silva is one of the people who rediscovered this bird and his subsequent work led to its being classified as a separate species. While searching for this bird, which has been seen by relatively few people, we will encounter many other goodies; the possibilities are many but include Long-tailed Saberwing, another highly restricted-range Mexican endemic; Stripe-tailed Hummingbird; Slate-colored Solitaire; Golden-hooded and Crimson-collared tanagers; and Band-backed Wren.

After a nice lunch in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, we will drive to our next destination, San Cristóbal de las Casas stopping at one or two places on the way to look for birds of highland pine-oak forest. Among the possibilities is our first chance at Rufous-collared Robin.

NIGHT: Parador San Juan de Dios, San Cristóbal de las Casas

**May 14, Day 7: San Cristóbal to Comitán.** Our main targets this morning are the some of the Chiapas-Guatemalan highland birds, particularly the endemic and beautiful Pink-headed Warbler. Other highland birds we will keep an eye out for include Blue-throated Motmot; White-eared, Amethyst-throated, and Magnificent hummingbirds; Pine, Yellowish, and Buff-breasted flycatchers; Unicolored Jay; Black-capped Swallow, Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush, Gray-Silky Flycatcher. We also have many good chances of finding the spectacular Mountain Trogon.

After returning to our hotel we will drive to Comitán, where we will have lunch and check into our hotel. Afternoon birding will be at the Chinkultic Archaeological Site, but the birds may actually hold our attention over the ruins because this is the land of such prized birds as the striking Slender Sheartail and Prevost's Ground-Sparrow.

NIGHT: Hacienda de Los Angeles, Comitán

**May 15, Day 8: Comitán to Tapachula.** We will spend an entire morning birding amid gorgeous cloud forest and mountain lakes at Lagos de Montebello, where we may find an array of other highland species including Highland Guan, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Azure-hooded Jay, Unicolored Jay, Brown-backed Solitaire, Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush, Slate-throated Redstart, Ruddy Foliage-gleaner and Strong-billed Woodcreeper.

## *Southern Mexico: Chiapas, Page 4*

After lunch we will make the drive to Tapachula, which will take up most of the afternoon. We will gather this evening for a final bird checklist followed by dinner.

NIGHT: Hotel Loma Real, Tapachula

**May 16, Day 9: Departure for home.** Participants may take a "collectivo" (or taxi) from the hotel to the airport for return flights from Tapachula any time today.

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

**TOUR SIZE:** This tour will be limited to 8 participants.

### **TOUR LEADERS: Héctor Gómez de Silva**

**Héctor Gómez de Silva** began birding at age eight in New York City. He published his first article about birds at age 15 while in Kenya, where he lived for six years. Since his return to his native Mexico in 1985, Héctor has acquired one of the highest Mexico bird lists at over 950 species, and since 1993 he has led numerous tours in Mexico, Costa Rica, Belize, Panama, Ecuador, Peru, Kenya, Uganda, Papua New Guinea, and New Caledonia. Héctor has a Ph.D. in ecology from the National University of Mexico, and has published more than 30 scientific articles about bird conservation, ecology, distribution, and natural history. His work on bird songs provided evidence for raising Nava's Wren to full species status. He delights in sharing birds and nature with people who appreciate them.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee is **\$2140** per person in double occupancy from Tapachula, Mexico. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 9, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. Fees do not include airfare from your home to Tapachula and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone 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 have to be charged.

The single supplement for the tour is **\$315**. 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.

**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.

**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.

**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, a cancellation fee of **\$250** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. 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. *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 \$250*
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	No refund available

\*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person.

**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.

**Medical Insurance which covers you for emergency evacuation/repatriation is recommended for this trip.** This coverage is included in the Worldwide Trip Protector plan offered by *Travel Insured International*. A good website for information regarding emergency evacuation/repatriation insurance is: [www.insuremytrip.com](http://www.insuremytrip.com).

**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:** As space in the vehicle is tight, we strongly suggest that you limit your baggage to two duffel bags. Please pack as lightly as possible! As a precaution, we recommend you pack a change of clothes, your binoculars, medication, toiletries, walking shoes, and documents in the carry-on.

**CLIMATE, ALTITUDE, AND TRIP DIFFICULTY:** We will move at a leisurely pace, with most walks covering short distances on roads or trails. Altitude will vary from 100 to 7,000 feet elevation. To take advantage of the best time for birding activity, we will start birding during the dawn hours and have breakfast in the field almost every day. The weather should be clear and sunny for most of the tour, though unseasonable rains are a possibility.

## ***Southern Mexico: Chiapas, Page 6***

Tuxtla Gutiérrez will be hot and humid (80° to 90° F) with daytime temperatures very high; and the mountains at Comitán, and especially San Cristóbal de las Casas, may be chilly (40° to 60°) in the mornings with warm afternoons (60° to 80°).

**CLOTHING:** Light-weight field clothing and casual attire are appropriate for this tour. Muted brown and green clothing are less likely to scare skulking birds. Bring several pair of pants and/or shorts and comfortable shirts. At least one or two long-sleeved shirts, sunscreen and a hat are recommended for protection from biting insects and, especially, the sun. Be sure to have a comfortable pair of tennis shoes or hiking boots and a second pair of lightweight shoes. Bring a sweater and/or a light jacket for cool, damp mornings in the mountains. You may want to bring a pair of gloves as well is.

**DOCUMENTS:** Travel into Mexico for citizens of the United States requires a passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure. Non United States citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions. Additionally, a tourist card, which may be filled out aboard your flight to Mexico, is required. Both the passport and the tourist card must be carried with you while in Mexico.

**HEALTH:** If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication. As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against Hepatitis types A and B. No vaccinations are required for travel to Mexico. Malaria is present in lowland rural areas around but very rare at the higher elevations.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line 877-FYI-TRIP (394-8747) or you can check their website at [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel). Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new\\_e.html](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html) (click on travel health).

Avoid uncooked vegetables and fruits that you do not peel yourself. Your leader will always let you know when it is or is not appropriate to drink the local water. In places where it is not appropriate, bottle or purified water will be provided.

**INSECT PROTECTION:** Mosquitoes, chiggers, and other biting insects will be rarely encountered, if at all. However, we recommend bringing some insect repellent such as *Cutter's* or *Off*.

**ITEMS TO BRING:** You will want to bring your camera (with extra batteries) and extra film, sunglasses and sunscreen, a flashlight and batteries, washcloth (no washcloths are available at hotels in Mexico) and towel, water bottle, toilet paper, coffee cup and (if you will want cereal during field breakfasts), a small bowl and spoon, ear plugs (for noisy nights), and an alarm clock. Glasses-wearers may want to have a pump can of Visaclean (available in most drugstores) to help prevent glasses from fogging in the humid lowlands. If you are prone to motion sickness, there are a few bumpy and winding roads. A day pack or large fanny pack for the possible long hikes would be a good idea.

### **MISC:**

- Departure Tax - included in the cost of your air ticket, approximately \$28
- Electricity – 110 volts; US two pin (flat) plugs are usual
- Language – Spanish is the official language
- Time – Central Time

**SUGGESTED READING:** Our website, [www.ventbird.com](http://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 this store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You may also visit such other online stores such as [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), and for those out-of-print or hard-to-find titles, [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) or [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com) which specializes in ornithology books.

**The most important book to bring for your trip to Mexico is:**

- Howell, S. N. G. and Sophie Webb. *A Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. Large and heavy, but the best book on Mexican birds.

It may also be useful to bring your favorite North American field guide.

**Other books you may want to review are:**

- Edwards, Ernest Preston. *A Field Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Adjacent Areas*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998.
- Peterson, Roger T. and Edward L. Chalif. *A Field Guide to Mexican Birds*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973.

***Birds and General Nature:***

- Leopold, A.S. *Wildlife in Mexico*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959. Detailed volume on the mammals and other wildlife of Mexico.
- Pesman, Walter M. *Meet Flora Mexicana*. Flagstaff: Northland Press, 1962. An introductory guide for the amateur botanist.
- Sutton, George M. *At a Bend in a Mexican River*. New York: Paul S. Eriksson, Inc., 1972.
- Sutton, George M. *Mexican Birds: First Impressions*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951.
- Wauer, Roland H. *Birder's Mexico* (Number Twelve: The Louise Lindsey Merrick Natural Environment Series). College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1999. Originally published under the title *A Naturalist's Mexico* as a hard-back in 1992 with color photographs, this paperback edition features black-and-white photos.

***History:***

- Ruiz, Ramón Eduardo. *Triumphs and Tragedies, A History of the Mexican People*. New York: Norton Press, 1992.

***Recordings:*** These will be helpful in learning the vocalizations of some of the region's birds.

- *Bird Songs of Belize, Guatemala and Mexico* by Dale Delaney, Carnell Laboratory of Ornithology, 1992.
- *Mexican Bird Songs* by L. Irby Davis. Houghton Mifflin, 1958.
- *Songs of Mexican Birds* by Ben & Lula Coffey. Gainesville: ARA Records, ARA 13 (2 cassettes).
- *Voices of Neotropical Birds* by John W. Hardy. Gainesville: J.W. Hardy, 1975.

**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, 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

***Southern Mexico: Chiapas, Page 8***

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 October 16, 2009 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.