

VENEZUELA: CASA MARIA & HATO PIÑERO

THE COASTAL CORDILLERA AND THE LLANOS (PLAINS)

FEBRUARY 9-17, 2010

© 2009

“A RELAXED & EASY DEPARTURE WITH DAVID ASCANIO”

Venezuela is one of the most economically advanced countries in South America. It also has a very rich avifauna and many productive areas that are easily accessible, often from paved roads. All these treats along with Steve Hilty’s exceptional field guide “Birds of Venezuela” combine to assure a superb tour that affords a cross-section of many diverse habitats in the coastal cordillera and the upper Llanos of Venezuela. VENT is proud to offer this short trip to the coastal mountains and the plains (Llanos) of Venezuela, a couple of bioregions when combined offers the best wildlife locations of South America, with contrasting birdlife, but more important, easy to see!

Our tour starts at Casa Maria Lodge, located near the village of Bejuma where a huge cloud forest reserve is home to a myriad of tanagers, toucanets, woodcreepers and tyrant-flycatchers. Casa Maria is a lodge contiguous to Palmichal, located in a large track of cloud forest facing the Caribbean Sea. Each morning, dozens of birds come to visit the feeders from woodcreepers, tyrant-flycatchers, tanagers and oropendolas. Without stepping out of the lodge we usually get to see more than 40 species of birds on any given morning!

We will then drive to Hato Piñero and explore savannas, gallery forest, scrubby vegetation, wetlands and large tracks of undisturbed tropical dry forest. In a totally different bioregion, Hato Piñero is a 200,000 acre private cattle ranch located in the upper llanos. For decades many representative habitats have been preserved, making it one of the best examples of land conservation inside a productive ranch in the tropics of America.

At both locations you can expect a wealth of tropical birds and some of the easiest and most pleasant birding anywhere. During the tour we should get almost 300 species which include such spectacular birds as Yellow-knobbed Curassow, Sunbittern, Black-and-white Owl, Agami Heron, both Great and Common potoos, Scarlet Macaw, Jabiru, Gray-necked Wood-Rail, Grey-headed Tanager and many others. Evening spotlighting of mammals, night birds, reptiles, and amphibians from the custom-designed observation truck is superb and is often considered one of the highlights of the tour.

Due to the richness of birds in both areas, we will make very short drives to birding sites. In general, we will have a morning session around the lodges and depart for the field after breakfast. In the afternoon we will make another short birding excursion. You may choose to skip any excursion and remain at the lodge, or bird and/or photograph at your leisure within the bird-rich walking distance of the buildings.

This tour is one in our series of Relaxed & Easy (R&E) tours. These tours are appropriate for participants who want a slower paced tour, with somewhat fewer hours in the field and light physical activity. They are ideal for persons who prefer a somewhat later start in the morning (typically 7:00 a.m.), a break after lunch and a shorter afternoon outing. They involve only short walks, usually not more than a half mile one way, and avoid difficult terrain.

February 9, Day 1: Mid-day Arrival in Caracas, Venezuela. Participants should plan your flights to arrive Caracas, Venezuela (Maiquetía International Airport, airport code CCS) by noon today. After clearing customs and immigration, you will be met by our ground operator and transferred to our hotel, located less than 30 minutes from the airport. Participants arriving on other flights may arrange a private transfer through our office at an additional charge.

NIGHT: Hotel Ole Caribe, Caracas

February 10-11, Days 2-3: to Casa Maria. This morning we will start at the terrace of our hotel where Black-faced Grassquit, Rufous-vented Chachalaca and Chestnut-fronted Macaw will be among the earliest species to show up. After breakfast we will take a three hour drive to Casa Maria, arriving in time for lunch. Social Flycatcher, White-lined Tanager and Sooty-headed Tyrannulet will probably be foraging as we get ready for the afternoon birding session around the lodge.

Day three will find us visiting the contiguous areas of the lodge, including Palmichal Lodge where we will have opportunities to look for Sooty-capped Hermit, White-vented Plumleteer, Green-tailed Emerald, Stripe-breasted Spinetail, Buff-fronted and Montane foliage-gleaners, Long-tailed Antbird, Cinnamon, Flavescent, and Pale-edged flycatchers, Rufous-and-white Wren, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, and a variety of tanagers including Blue-capped, Beryl-spangled, Rufous-cheeked, Golden, and Black-capped. Ochre-breasted Brush-Finches often lurk in roadside shrubbery and shier species such as Plain-backed Antpitta and Short-tailed Antthrush call from roadside forest. We will likely spend a morning along the road and the afternoon at another site nearby.

NIGHTS: Casa Maria, Palmichal.

February 12, Day 4: to Hato Piñero. Today we will take a drive to Hato Piñero, crossing vast extensions of flatlands, and certainly stopping in water ponds to enjoy Scarlet Ibis, Sunbittern, several species of egrets, Jabiru Stork and other waterbirds. Also, as this time of the year is the dry season we will keep an eye out for grass fires which attracts raptors such as Aplomado Falcon as well as Zone-tailed, Roadside, and White-tailed hawks. Hato Piñero will be our headquarters for exploring the northern Venezuelan llanos, a vast grassland broken by forest-bordered rivers and occasional low-lying, swampy regions. During the rainy season, much of this very flat region floods from a depth of a few inches to a few feet. During the dry season, when pools are drying up, large waders and caimans concentrate at the remaining sources of water, often presenting an unforgettable spectacle. For over 50 years, the 80,000 hectre (200,000-acre) Hato Piñero has been owned by the Branger family. Because the owners haven't allowed hunting, it is still possible to see large birds, such as Yellow-knobbed Curassows and Scarlet Macaws that have rapidly disappeared from other settled areas.

Many large mammals are also present on the ranch, and although our chances of actually seeing a jaguar are very slight, it could happen. We should, however, see a remarkable number of other mammals during our stay. At night, previous trips have seen Brazilian tapir, giant anteater, hog-nosed skunk, crab-eating raccoon, ocelot, puma, crab-eating fox, collared and white-lipped peccaries, southern tamandua and tropical cottontail rabbit. We have also seen Great and Common potoos, Great Horned, Mottled, Spectacled, and Striped owls, Tropical Screech-Owl, several nightjar species, and an eerie assemblage of more than 200 spectacled caimans in one pond, their eyes glowing like orange embers in our spotlights.

NIGHT: Hato Piñero

February 13-16, Days 5-8: Hato Piñero. The Venezuelan llanos offer one of the truly great spectacles of bird life in South America. Jabirus, Wood Storks, Limpkins, and hundreds of herons, egrets, and ibises (seven species are possible) concentrate at lagoons or drying pools. Hato Piñero will produce many Bare-faced, Buff-necked, and Scarlet ibises and a few Sharp-tailed, White and Glossy ibises. Green Ibis occurs, but is rare. Other noteworthy species include Yellow-chinned Spinetail, Pied Water-Tyrant, Oriole Blackbird, and Venezuelan Troupial, Venezuela's national bird. In the tree-lined lagoons we may see a dozen Rufescent Tiger-Herons and an occasional Capped Heron or Horned Screamer. In dry forest, Ruby-topaz Hummingbird, Glittering-throated Emerald, Russet-throated Puffbird, Ochre-ored Flycatcher, and flocks of seedeaters and Saffron Finches occur. Perhaps we may also see an Orinocan Saltator or Pale-headed Jacamar. Red howler monkeys and wedge-capped capuchins are relatively common, and the ranch has a population of spectacled caiman estimated at 75,000.

One of the best and most exciting ways to observe wildlife in the llanos is from a boat on the narrow, sluggish, tree-lined Caño San Jeronimo, on which we will spend one morning. In an hour or two we may see several hundred Hoatzins, several dozen Gray-necked Wood-Rails, several species of raptors, Rusty-backed Spinetail, four or five species of kingfishers, many Sunbitterns, and, with a little luck, an Agami Heron. Many birds come down to the edge of the stream in the early morning, and we have an excellent chance of seeing pairs or small groups of Yellow-knobbed Curassows on these river trips. The abundance of wildlife concentrated along streams during the dry season must be seen to be believed. We should have time to do both day and night activities at a relaxed pace during our time at Hato Piñero.

NIGHTS: Days 5-7 - Hato Piñero
NIGHT: Day 8 - Hotel Ole Caribe, Caracas

February 17, Day 9: Conclusion of Tour. The tour ends this morning with an early transfer to the Caracas airport in time for flights departing between 8-10:00 AM. Transfers for flights departing at other times can be arranged in advance at an additional charge.

RELAXED AND EASY TOUR INFORMATION AND CONDITIONS: Relaxed & Easy (R&E) tours are similar to "regular" VENT tours, but set to a slower pace, with somewhat fewer hours in the field and lighter physical activity. They are ideal for participants who prefer a somewhat later start in the morning, a little lengthier afternoon break, and a shorter afternoon outing. Walking is limited to short walks of usually not more than a half mile one-way, avoiding difficult terrain. A typical day will begin with breakfast around 6:30-7:00 a.m., followed by birding until about noon. We will attempt to have lunch every day between 12:00 and 1:00 p.m., followed by an afternoon break (when possible). We will resume birding for a couple of hours in the mid afternoon. On most days we will attempt to provide about an hour for personal time before dinner which will usually be between 6:00 and 6:30 p.m. Strenuous physical activity will be avoided, and all walking will be limited to well-marked roads and trails, excluding uneven or rough terrain.

Relaxed & Easy (R&E) refers only to the slower pace of a tour, not to a participant's birding skills or ability. Accordingly, birders of all levels of ability are welcome, as they are on typical VENT tours; R&E tours should not to be mistaken as tours for beginning birders. All birders are welcome, regardless of skill level, as they are on regular VENT tours.

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 LEADER: David Ascanio

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: The fee for the tour is **\$2955** per person in double occupancy from Caracas, Venezuela. This includes all meals from Lunch on Day 1 to Dinner on Day 8, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Caracas 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 this tour is **\$355**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$500** 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: We request participants limit their baggage to one medium-sized, soft-sided suitcase and one carry-on as space in the vehicle will be limited. Laundry service is available at Hato Piñero Ranch. As a precaution, we suggest you pack your travel documents, medications, toiletries, a change of clothes, and your binoculars in your carry-on bag.

CLIMATE/CLOTHING: The llanos will be hot and dry. No special footwear for wet weather or water is needed. We suggest tennis shoes or a lightweight hiking shoe. Rubber boots are not necessary and will not be needed anywhere on this trip. A fair amount of walking is done on the tour, mostly on roads, but we may occasionally scramble down a creek bank or road ditch. There will be a limited amount of walking on forest trails and at least one boat trip (depending on the water level of the creek). Walking shorts may be worn on many days, but long pants are generally more useful (we suggest you bring both).

DEPARTURE TAX: Bs 90,200; about USD \$45 and usually included in the cost of your air ticket.

DOCUMENTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure from Venezuela is required. Visas are not required for entry by United States citizens. Non United States citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions. When you arrive, the airline will issue a tourist card. Please hold on to the copy they return to you after immigration in Venezuela as you will need it to exit the country.

EQUIPMENT: All participants should bring sunscreen and lip balm, a good hat or cap for shade, a durable and reliable flashlight, extra batteries, a battery operated **alarm clock**, ear plugs, rubber bands, snacks (if you like something special), plastic bags to protect your equipment from dust, a daypack and/or small backpack and shower thongs. Your leader will have a spotting scope, but if you have one, we encourage you to bring it. All participants must have a canteen or some type of refillable water bottle.

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 to enter Venezuela and malaria is not a risk in the areas we visit. However malaria is present in some rural areas of Venezuela including the chloroquine-resistant strain. In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line 877-FYI-TRIP (394-8747) or you can check their website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

You should not drink local water or use it for brushing your teeth. All hotels will supply drinking water in thermos bottles in your room (or in large bottles in hotel hallways and lobbies). Bottled water of various kinds is available at all restaurants. Extra water for rooms may be purchased by tour participants and will always be available when we are in the field.

INSECT PROTECTION: Insects are present but not usually troublesome. There are chiggers in the llanos and some type of repellent is strongly recommended for these areas. We recommend bringing an adequate supply of insect repellent, including a stick-type form for your hands and face, plus a pump-style container of OFF or Cutter's for your clothing.

A Note About Chiggers: This tour visits areas where chiggers are known to occur. Chiggers are tiny parasitic mites found in most warm weather areas of the southern United States and the world's tropics. They are especially numerous in grassy areas, where, in the immature stage, they attach themselves to other animals or humans who make contact with the grass as they pass by. Chiggers do not suck blood and the majority of the world's species do not carry disease. They do feed on bodily fluids, however, through a process in which a digestive enzyme is produced by the chigger which essentially liquefies the skin around the area where the chigger is attached. The chigger is not usually attached to the skin for more than a few hours before it either falls off or is knocked off. Our bodies respond by producing a hardened area as a defense against the chigger's digestive enzyme. Though the chigger may be long gone, it is the presence of the hardened area, and the body's natural process of reabsorbing it that typically causes intense itching, often lasting for a week or more. Chiggers like to attach themselves to areas of thin skin, like around the ankles, beltline, undergarment lines, knees, and elbows.

Chiggers can be avoided by following these procedures:

- Avoid walking, or standing in particular, in areas dominated by grass. These areas are where one is most likely to encounter chiggers.
- Tuck your pants into your socks to avoid direct skin-to-grass contact. Chiggers can find their way through clothing, but this is a standard and effective prevention technique commonly employed by many.
- Apply a cream-style insect repellent, such as "Cutters" to your body from the waist down BEFORE putting on your clothing.
- Spray your pants and socks with a spray repellent such as "Cutters" or "Off." Repellents with high concentrations of DEET (70-100%) are most effective. You do not need to apply these to you skin, only to clothing. (Be careful as DEET will damage plastics and lens coatings). Repel Permanone is an odorless aerosol insecticide that offers perhaps the best defense against chiggers. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online. It should only be applied to clothes and allowed to dry before you dress. Never apply Permanone directly to the skin. Permethrin is known to be a highly toxic chemical to insects. It is the active ingredient in Permanone, but is present in a small amount (0.5%).
- Powdered sulfur applied to waist, bottoms of pants, sock and boots is also effective at repelling chiggers. However, be warned that clothes will retain the sulfur odor for several washings.
- Shower at the end of each day in the field. Use a washcloth to vigorously rub your legs, feet, and ankles.

By following these methods, you should be able to avoid all chigger bites, as well as tick bites. If, however, you are bitten by chiggers anyway, you can reduce or eliminate the symptoms by applying benzocaine or hydrocortisone creams, calamine lotion, After Bite, or any number of anti-itch products.

MISCELLANEOUS:

- Currency - Bolivar
- Electric Current - 110 Volts (some adaptors may be needed)
- Language - Spanish
- Time – ½ hour ahead of Eastern Standard Time

SUGGESTED READING: Our website, 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, and for those out-of-print or hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com or www.buteobooks.com which specializes in ornithology books.

Birds:

- Ascanio, David. *Bird Inventory and Checklist of Hato Piñero*. Fundación Branger, 2005. This publication can be purchased at the nature store at Hato Piñero Ranch.
- Hilty, Steven L. *Birds of Venezuela*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002. **This is the most appropriate book for this trip. It treats and illustrates all of the species you will see.**
- Hilty, S.L. and W.L. Brown. *A Guide to the Birds of Colombia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986. This covers most of the birds found in Venezuela and has some of the same plates.
- **Hilty, Steven L. *Birds of Tropical America: A watcher's introduction to behavior, breeding and diversity*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005. Provides good natural history background for many aspects of tropical bird behavior.**
- Restall, Robin; Rodner, Clemencia and Miguel Lentino. *Birds of Northern South America: An Identification Guide*. Volume 2: Plates and Maps. Helms Field Guides. 2006. Good new book with interesting format but no text in volume 2 and, with over 6000 illustrations, it treats far more species than most travelers to Venezuela would want or need.

Ecology:

- Beebe, William. *High Jungle*. New York: Duell, Sloan, Pearce, 1949. In part, relates to Beebe's experiences at-the Rancho Grande Biological Station. Out of print. Check your local library.
- Forsyth, Adrian and Michael Fogden. *Portraits of the Rainforest*. Canada: Camden House, 1990.
- **Forsyth, Adrian and Ken Miyata. *Tropical Nature*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1984. Excellent introductory reading on tropical natural history.**
- **Kricher, J.C. *A Neotropical Companion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989. Good coverage of tropical natural history.**

History:

- Moron, Guillermo. *A History of Venezuela*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1964. A not-quite-unopinionated history of Venezuela by a Venezuelan, but nevertheless worth reading for an overview on Venezuela's interesting past.
- Vigneras, Louis-Andre. *The Discovery of South America and the Andalusian Voyages*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976. An account of the various Spanish voyages of exploration, beginning with the third voyage of Columbus, and most of those which centered on the Venezuelan coast.

Mammals:

- Emmons, L.H. *Neotropical Rainforest Mammals. A field guide*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990. Paperback. Very good.

General:

- Dunsterville Branchy, Hillary. 2003. *Venezuela. The Bradt Travel Guide*. 4th edition. Globe Pequot Press. Good overview of the country. Also see Lonely Planet Guide; Insight Guide; Rough Guide to Venezuela and others of general interest.

Recording:

- At present there are no CD's or cassettes of bird vocalizations specifically for Venezuela. The most useful for travelers in Venezuela is probably Krabbe, N, J.V. Moore, P. Coopmans, M. Lysinger and R. S. Ridgely, 2001. *Birds of the Ecuadorian Highlands: The upper Montane and Paramo Zones of Ecuador*. John V. Moore recordings: a four-CD publication which has voices of many of the Andean species we will see in Venezuela. A DVD by P. Boesman (Birds of Venezuela, 2003; Bird Songs International) provides photos and songs of many Venezuelan birds but we have found information in DVD format to be less useful than a combination of a field guide and CD's and/or cassettes.

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 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 June 7, 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.