

MYANMAR (BURMA)

FEBRUARY 19 – MARCH 6, 2011

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We invite you to join us on our third tour of Myanmar, arguably one of the most fascinating, beautiful, and bird-rich countries in Asia. Formerly known as Burma, Myanmar is the largest and most ornithologically diverse country in Southeast Asia. It stretches some 2,000 kilometres from the cold, lofty heights of the Himalayas in the north to the steamy, tropical lowland rain forests of southern Tanintharyi (Tenasserim). More than 85% of all Burmese are Buddhists, and Burmese civilization is largely an outgrowth of Indian influences, although the people have retained an indigenous language and literature. For decades, most areas of the country were closed to birdwatchers and other travellers. Now Myanmar has begun opening its doors to overseas visitors. Myanmar's size is equal to that of the United Kingdom and France combined, and it is home to less than 45 million people. With its friendly and intelligent population, impressive natural resources, including large tracts of unspoilt forest, and cultural delights that include thousands of glittering pagodas, Myanmar really is, as the old local name Shwe Pyidaw suggests, "The Golden Land."

*After a brief pause in the present-day capital of Yangon (Rangoon), we will travel north to the ancient capital of Bagan (Pagan), in central Myanmar. Here, along the banks of the Ayeyarwady River (Irrawaddy), once referred to as "the road to Mandalay," we will be able to sample the avifauna of Myanmar's unique dry zone amidst the 4,000 or so pagodas and temples that dot the plains, some dating back to the 9th century. Specialities here include the endemic Burmese Bushlark and the White-throated Babbler, an amazingly long-tailed member of the genus *Turdoides*. Setting off westwards from Bagan and crossing the Ayeyarwady River, we will eventually leave the dry-zone and enter a large area of dry deciduous forest and scrub, which is home to another endemic, the sleek Hooded Treepie. Continuing west, we will work our way up into the Chin Hills, our principal goal. These steep mountains, which form a southern extension of the Himalayas from neighbouring Manipur in northeast India, are one of Southeast Asia's great ornithological landmarks. Here are found numerous unique subspecies, the striking endemic White-browed Nuthatch, and a host of rare and restricted range birds to fire the imagination. These include Blyth's Tragopan, Hume's Pheasant, Slender-billed Scimitar-Babbler, Spotted and Long-tailed wren-babblers, Striped and Brown-capped laughingthrushes, Black-headed Shrike-Babbler, Streak-throated Barwing, Gray Sibia, Black-breasted Thrush, and Broad-billed Warbler.*

This is a tour for those who enjoy a mixture of adventure, fine birding, and wonderful Asian culture. There is an opportunity to see many exciting birds, including all of Myanmar's endemics, in addition to some wonderful mammals and reptiles.

Myanmar's interior is still completely off the "tourist track." Once away from Bagan, we will probably not see another Westerner. Accommodations are superb, except on Mt. Victoria where they are a little rustic, but located at moderate elevations and thus in a very comfortable climate.

Note that this tour can be taken by itself or in combination with Cambodia (February 5-18, 2011).

February 19-20, Days 1-2: Travel to Bangkok, Thailand. Participants can take one of a number of connections which depart the United States on February 19 and arrive in Bangkok on February 20. Upon arrival and after clearing customs and immigration, participants may proceed to our airport-area hotel, where a room will be reserved in your name.

Participants wanting to avoid the risk of misconnecting with the group or missing dinner should consider arriving in Bangkok on February 19 and spending the night. Upon request, VENT will be happy to assist with any additional lodging arrangements.

NIGHT (February 20): Novotel Airport Hotel, Bangkok

February 21, Day 3: Fly from Bangkok to Yangon, Myanmar. This morning we will take an early morning flight to Yangon (Rangoon), the capital of Myanmar (Burma) and the start of a truly great birding adventure. After settling into our very lovely hotel, we will explore the lush grounds and surroundings of Lake Inya. Later in the afternoon, we will drive downtown and visit the waterfront where we may find Brown-headed Gulls and other avian commensals of man. Our main objective, however, is the golden-clad Shwegadon Paya (Pagoda). This, the most sacred Buddhist site in the country, is a not-to-be-missed enchantment.

NIGHT: Kandawgyi Palace Hotel, Yangon

February 22, Day 4: Morning at Hlawgaw; Afternoon Drive to Moeyungyi Wetland Reserve. This morning we will visit a nearby area of dry, secondary woodland surrounding several attractive small lakes. Here we should see a good variety of Southeast Asian birds typical of such habitats, including the spectacular Red Junglefowl, Plaintive Cuckoo, Green-billed Malkoha, Asian Palm-Swift, White-throated Kingfisher, Green Bee-eater, Coppersmith Barbet, Streak-eared and Stripe-throated bulbuls, Black and Greater Racket-tailed drongos, Black-naped Oriole, the rather local Racket-tailed Treepie, White-crested Laughingthrush (always a winner), Olive-backed Sunbird, and Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker. Hlawgaw is also a good site for the increasingly rare and elusive Pale-capped Pigeon, and we will make a special effort to find this attractive species.

As the day heats up and bird activity diminishes, we will return to Yangon in sufficient time to clean up, pack, and enjoy a superb luncheon before taking our leave of the capital. For several hours, we will make our way north to the extensive Moeyungyi wetlands. Of course we will make regular stops along the way for anything of interest. Later during the afternoon, we will commence our exploration of the area.

NIGHT: Moeyungyi Resort Hotel

February 23, Day 5: Morning Moeyungyi Wetland Reserve; Afternoon Return to Yangon. The Moeyungyi wetlands encompass approximately 125 sq. km. in area. A former reservoir built during the British colonial period, its water was used for navigation along the Pegu canal during the dry season. Now, since the roads are much improved, the water in the canal is used for irrigating paddy-fields. This wetland includes a large freshwater lake with extensive shallow margins and is surrounded by even larger areas of rice-paddies. The area is characterised by great rafts of ducks and large numbers of associated birds of prey. Some of the birds we may encounter here include Lesser Whistling-Duck; Cotton Pygmy-goose; Spotbilled Duck and the globally threatened Baer's Pochard (often here in good numbers); large numbers of wintering Palearctic ducks; several egrets and herons; both Indian and Chinese pond-herons (sorting them out in their non-breeding plumage is nigh-impossible!); Cinnamon Bittern; possibly the lovely Painted Stork; Asian Openbilled Stork; White-breasted Waterhen; Watercock; Pheasant and Bronze-winged jacanas; a good selection of shorebirds; the smart-looking Gray-headed Lapwing (if we are lucky); both Eastern and Western marsh-harriers; Pied Harrier; Greater Spotted Eagle; White-breasted Kingfisher; Blue-tailed Bee-eater; Bluethroat; Blunt-winged and Oriental Reed warblers; several wagtails; Red-throated Pipit; and the uncommon Asian Golden Weaver.

NIGHT: Kandawgyi Palace Hotel, Yangon

February 24, Day 6: Fly to Bagan; Birding on the Irrawaddy. This morning we will fly to Bagan where very quickly, any semblance of “civilization” is left behind. We will soon find ourselves in an attractive mosaic of partially wooded farmland and hilly semi-desert, deeply intersected by streams and dry “wadis,” along with occasional swampy patches. Traffic is almost non-existent and the pace of life is slow and relaxed. Birds seem to be everywhere and in such little birded areas we can always expect the unexpected. This will be our very best opportunity to find the dapper Hooded Treepie—Myanmar’s most elusive endemic. Travelling around in pairs and small unobtrusive groups, Hooded Treepie inhabits the more open, scrubby areas with scattered trees. We should encounter many new birds in this habitat, including a good cross-section of Southeast Asia’s typical deciduous forest birds. Dry deciduous forests throughout Southeast Asia typically host a high diversity of woodpecker species, including such spectacular species as the large White-bellied and Great Slaty woodpeckers, as well as Rufous, Yellow-crowned, Streak-throated, Gray-headed, Fulvous-breasted, Gray-capped, Greater Yellow-nape, and Greater and Himalayan goldenbacks. Noisy, mixed feeding flocks of insectivorous passerines methodically work through the forest. They often include Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike; Common Wood-Shrike; gaudy Rosy, Small and Scarlet minivets; Blue-winged and Golden-fronted leafbirds; and Chestnut-bellied and Velvet-fronted nuthatches.

Where there is a little more undergrowth in the forest, we may find Puff-throated Babbler, Lesser Necklaced and Greater Necklaced laughingthrushes, Striped Tit-Babbler, Brown-cheeked Fulvetta, Yellow-bellied Warbler, White-browed Fantail, Asian Paradise-Flycatcher, and White-rumped Shama. This part of Myanmar is one of the few places in Southeast Asia to still have good numbers of parakeets. It is a great pleasure to be driving or walking through the countryside and witness noisy flocks suddenly erupt in front of you. We have a good chance of seeing all five possible species, including Alexandrine, Rose-ringed, Red-breasted, Blossom-headed, and Gray-headed. As the day begins to warm and thermals form, we will regularly scan the horizon for raptors. Again, almost anything is possible, including Black Baza, Oriental Honey-Buzzard, Crested Serpent-Eagle, Shikra, White-eyed Buzzard, and, if we are lucky, the diminutive White-rumped Falcon. Small wetland areas provide habitat for Oriental Darter, Cattle Egret, Black-crowned Night Heron, Indian and Chinese pond-herons, the spectacular Stork-billed Kingfisher, Wire-tailed Swallow, and with luck, Greater Painted-Snipe. Other typical birds which we should encounter include Yellow-footed Pigeon; Red Turtle Dove and Emerald Dove; Banded Bay Cuckoo; Common Koel; Brown Needletail; Crested Treeswift; Eurasian Hoopoe; Chestnut-headed Bee-eater; Lineated Barbet; Red-rumped Swallow; Large Cuckoo-Shrike; Black-hooded Oriole; Black-crested Bulbul; Ashy, Bronzed, and Hair-crested Drongo; Rufous Treepie; Blue Magpie; Large-billed Crow; Black-naped Monarch; Ashy Wood-Swallow; Chestnut-tailed Starling; Hill and White-vented mynas; and Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker.

NIGHT: Bagan Thande Hotel, Bagan

February 25, Day 7: Birding Around Bagan. Along the east bank of the huge Ayeyarwady River, thousands of pagodas and other monuments (more than 4,000!) dating back to the 9th century, extend over a vast area of approximately 40 sq. km. Bagan is undoubtedly one of the most remarkable archaeological sites in the world. Of special interest to us, it is also a great birding site and a wonderful base for our exploration of Mt. Victoria and the Chin Hills to the west. Sheltered from the southwest monsoon by high mountains, central Myanmar receives little rainfall and is a true semi-desert, characterised by cactus-like *euphorbias*, acacias, and thorny scrub-woodland, reminiscent of parts of northwest India. This morning we take a wooden motorised launch and chug our way up the Ayeyarwady River, stopping anywhere that looks remotely interesting. Here we could encounter almost anything, including River Lapwing, perhaps Great Thick-knee, Small Pratincole, Indian Sandlark, and possibly the lovely River and Black-bellied terns. If we are very fortunate, we may also find the increasingly rare Indian Skimmer. Large numbers of Ruddy Shelduck winter along the river’s margin, together with an interesting collection of other waterbirds.

Birding here is an unforgettable experience. Everywhere one looks are relics of all shapes and sizes, from golden stupas glittering in the hazy sunshine to tumbled-down temples, each reflecting the architectural style of a different period. In recent times, with increasing affluence, Burmese families have adopted individual monuments and taken responsibility for the funding of their renovation. As the day begins to cool, we will begin to explore these ruins while at the same time searching for some of the resident or migrant birds that inhabit this

area. In groves of attractive acacia woodland and dry scrub, we should find a good variety of characteristic species including Black and Black-shouldered kites; Spotted Owlet; Indian Nightjar; Indian Roller; the endemic Burmese Bushlark; Common Iora; Red-vented Bulbul; Black Drongo; House Crow; Oriental Magpie-Robin; Pied Bushchat; Siberian Rubythroat; Bluethroat; Daurian Redstart; Blue Rock-Thrush; Common Tailorbird; Gray-breasted Prinia; Oriental Reed, Thick-billed, Tickell's Leaf, Dusky, and Yellow-streaked warblers; Red-breasted Flycatcher; Paddyfield and Olive-backed pipits; Brown and Burmese shrikes; Vinous-breasted Starling; Common and Jungle mynas; Purple Sunbird; Baya Weaver; and Scaly-breasted Munia. We will also make a special effort to find two local but rather elusive specialties, Rain Quail and the lovely White-bellied Minivet, in addition to the Burmese Bushlark—one of Myanmar's five endemics.

As the day heats up, we will return to the comfort and shade of our lovely hotel where large shady trees nurture remarkably confiding White-throated Babblers—a notably attractive Myanmar endemic. Later in the afternoon, we will again wander among Bagan's pagodas in search of its dry country birds.

NIGHTS: Bagan Thande Hotel, Bagan

February 26, Day 8: Drive to Mt. Victoria. This morning we will depart early for the long drive to the small town of Kanpetlet on the lower slopes of Mt. Victoria (5,700 ft.) where we will stay for three nights.

NIGHT: Bungalow, Kanpetlet

February 27-28, Days 9-10: Birding Mt. Victoria. At 10,213 ft. (3,095 meters), Mt. Victoria is the highest peak in the Chin Hills, a range of mountains that constitute a dramatic southward extension of the eastern Himalayas from Manipur in India. Now included in the Natmataung National Park, this remote area was not visited by ornithologists until the early part of this century and remains largely unexplored even today. The forested slopes of the mountain change in character, according to elevation, and range from dry deciduous at the foot of the mountain to stunted oak/rhododendron and short grass around the four summit peaks. Much of our time will be spent at the higher levels. The avifauna is predominantly Himalayan, sprinkled with some enigmatic regional endemics and a whole host of local and distinctive subspecies. The mornings can be cold, but once dawn comes and the sun begins to warm things up, there is a great frenzy of bird activity. Early morning is perhaps the best time to search for pheasants. We will make a special effort to find such mouth-watering gems as Blyth's Tragopan and Mrs. Hume's Pheasant. Finding either species would be a wonderful prize indeed. Other gallinaceous birds we may encounter include Common and Rufous-throated partridges, Mountain Bamboo-Partridge, Kalij Pheasant, and in the dryer, scrubbiest woodland, Chinese Francolin. Mt. Victoria can be very birdy, and its lovely forests hold an impressive diversity of species. The list here is being constantly expanded. Perhaps pre-eminent is the White-browed Nuthatch, a very local endemic only found here and the nearby Mindat area. In addition to more widespread species, Mt. Victoria hosts a good number of species not or rarely found anywhere else on tours of Asia such as Ashy Wood-Pigeon; Crested Finchbill; Spot-throated Babbler; Spot-breasted Scimitar-Babbler; Black-headed Shrike-Babbler; Spotted and Long-tailed wren-babblers; Chinese Babax; Gray Sibia; Brown-capped Fulvetta; Streak-throated Barwing; Red-tailed, Striped, and Brown-capped laughingthrushes; Black-breasted Thrush; and Broad-billed Warbler.

Large, active, mixed foraging flocks are always exciting, if somewhat overwhelming. They typically include Black-browed Tits, Green Shrike-Babbler (a furtive bird, methodically examining the bark crevices for food), Chestnut-bellied Rock-Thrush, and the superb Fire-tailed Sunbird. Hidden in areas of short bamboo and weeds are skulkers, including Aberrant and Brown bush-warblers, as well as the rather more obliging Hill Prinia. Moving down to lower elevations with taller trees, we will encounter a different set of birds. Emanating from the tree tops are the incessant calls of Great and Golden-throated barbets and hiding in the dense foliage will be Wedge-tailed and Barred cuckoo-dove, Large Hawk-Cuckoo, Orange-bellied Leafbird, Striated and Black bulbuls, and Maroon Oriole. A loud "chik" may signal the presence of a Stripe-breasted or Crimson-breasted woodpecker, while flocks of Fork-tailed Swifts can often be found hawking overhead. As is usual in this part of the world, many of the smaller birds will be travelling in fast-moving, mixed feeding flocks. Here they often include Gray-chinned and Long-tailed minivets; Black-throated, Green-backed, Yellow-cheeked, and Yellow-

browed tits; Chestnut-vented Nuthatch; Bar-tailed and Brown-throated treecreepers; inquisitive Golden and Gray-throated babblers; the stunning Cutia; White-browed and Black-eared shrike-babblers; parties of Rusty-fronted Barwings with their floppy crests; colourful Blue-winged, Chestnut-tailed, and Red-tailed minlas; Rufous-winged, White-browed, and Nepal fulvettas; Gray Sibia; Whiskered and Stripe-throated yuhinas; Golden-spectacled, Buff-barred, and tiny Ashy-throated warblers; Blyth's Leaf-Warbler; Mountain Tailorbird; lively Gray-hooded, Chestnut-crowned, and Black-faced warblers; Yellow-bellied and White-throated fantails; Fire-breasted Flowerpecker; and sparkling Gould's and Green-tailed sunbirds. Calling Collared Owlets, which attract the mobbing attentions of these flocks, are often heard but seldom seen. Roving through the middle storey will be larger species such as Lesser Yellowname, Bay Woodpecker, Mountain Bulbul, the beautiful Gold-billed and Green magpies, and Gray Treepie. The forest here abounds with flycatchers. Dark-sided, Verditer, Rufous-gorgeted, Slaty-backed, Little Pied, Slaty-blue, Snowy-browed, Pygmy Blue, and Gray-headed are present, as well as Large, Vivid, and Rufous-bellied niltavas. A rustling sound in the undergrowth, sudden movement in the shadows, or a quick burst of song may signal the presence of one of the more skulking species. These include Rufous-throated Partridge; Streak-breasted Scimitar-Babbler; no less than four species of wren-babbler, including Scaly-breasted and Pygmy as well as the more localized Long-tailed and Spotted; Chestnut-crowned and Blue-winged laughingthrushes; Rusty-capped Fulvetta; White-tailed Robin; and Chestnut-headed and Gray-bellied tesias. We will have a reasonable chance of seeing most of these species.

Swathes of bamboo in the forest are home to some of the more specialized birds. We will be particularly on the look-out for the bizarre Slender-billed Scimitar-Babbler, with its rapid piping call and the little known Broad-billed Warbler. There will also be a sprinkling of migrants, such as Red-flanked Bluetail, Blue-fronted Redstart, Long-tailed Thrush, Common Rosefinch, and Little and Chestnut buntings. Moving lower still, forest patches, clearings, and more open areas with scrub and grass harbour the little-known Striped Laughingthrush, a striking species, as well as Oriental Turtle-Dove, Oriental Skylark, Crested Finchbill, Flavescent Bulbul, duetting pairs of Spot-breasted Scimitar-Babbler, Red-faced Liocichla, Silver-eared Mesia, perky Spot-breasted Parrotbills, Striated Prinia, Hume's Leaf-Warbler, Indian Blue Robin, Gray Bushchat, and Russet Sparrow.

With luck, we may succeed in seeing some of the skulkers in this habitat, such as Mountain Bamboo-Partridge, Spot-throated Babbler, and Brownish-flanked and Russet bush-warblers. During our stay on the mountain, we will also have an outside chance of seeing Gray Nightjar, Indian and Oriental cuckoos, Blue-throated Barbet, Black-winged Cuckoo-shrike, White-tailed Nuthatch, Blue Whistling-Thrush, Black-breasted Thrush, Spot-winged Grosbeak, and Yellow-breasted Greenfinch.

NIGHT: Bungalow, Kanpetlet

March 1, Day 11: Drive from Mt. Victoria to Bagan. Today we will drive back to Bagan with more birding along the way. There is always the possibility of some excellent birds as we travel in Burma and this drive is particularly good for White-rumped Falcon amongst others.

Night: Bagan Thande Hotel, Bagan

March 2, Day 12: Fly to Heho and Drive to Inle Lake. This morning we will take our leave of this magical place and make the short flight to Heho, located further to the east. We will drive to Inle Lake, famous for its peculiar leg-rowers. Our lovely hotel is located on the waterfront with a beautiful view of the lake. Later in the afternoon, we will commence our exploration of this attractive area. Most of our exploration will be done by boat, which will give us a superb opportunity to witness something of the local culture of this region as well as encounter some very good birds. We should see large numbers of mostly migrant ducks, including Baer's Pochard; several eagles, including Steppe, Imperial, and Greater Spotted; Sarus Crane (the world's largest species); Brown-headed and Black-headed gulls; the very local Jerdon's Bushchat; White-tailed Stonechat; and a host of challenging warblers. We will also search for the rather local Collared Myna in a nearby area of scrubby woodland.

NIGHT: Royal Orchid Hotel Inle Lake, Inle Lake

March 3-4, Days 13-14: Drive to Kalaw; Birding in Kalaw Area. From Inle, we will make a short drive into an attractive area of hills around the small town of Kalaw. If time permits, we will commence our exploration of the area later in the afternoon. Kalaw is a southern Shan state town known as Pine Land, located at an elevation of 4,380 ft. An administrative town during the colonial years, one can still find late 19th century British cottages, pine trees, and beautiful lanes. It is popular for its pleasant weather and fresh vegetables, and for the birders, some good birding!

We will visit Yay-aye Kan, a reservoir built by the British to supply water to Kalaw town. The water there is so pure and good that during the British rule, it was regularly shipped to Yangon by train, for the Governor General and high ranking British officials. Evergreen forest surrounds the lake, and here we will search for such gems as Giant Nuthatch, Spectacled Barwing, Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-Babbler, Dark-backed Sibia, Common Green Magpie, Black-breasted Thrush, White-browed Laughingthrush, White-capped Redstart, Brown-breasted Bulbul, Silver-breasted Broadbill, Burmese Yuhina, Pin-tailed Pigeon, Gray-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, and Eurasian Jay. This is a place where we will also have another chance to look for the elusive Pale-capped Pigeon.

NIGHT: Pine Hill Resort Hotel, Kalaw

March 5, Day 15: Fly to Yangon. We will depart our hotel early this morning for our flight to Yangon and then on to Bangkok.

NIGHT: Novotel Airport Hotel, Bangkok

March 6, Day 16: Departure for Home. Participants can depart at any time today.

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

TOUR LEADER: Susan Myers

Susan Myers absolutely loves birding and traveling in Asia. As she says, “The combination of incredible and diverse wildlife, ancient and fascinating cultures, and the best food in the world is unique to this amazing continent.” For more than 15 years Susan has led tours throughout Asia, including at least a dozen tours to Vietnam, countless trips to the Malay Peninsula and Borneo, plus many other tours in India, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Japan, Thailand, Indonesia, Taiwan, Cambodia, and the Philippines, as well as Madagascar, Irian Jaya, the Pacific islands and, of course, Australia. Susan was born in Melbourne of convict ancestry dating back to the establishment of the city, when her shoe-stealing forebear was released from Port Arthur in Tasmania and came to Melbourne to start a new life. She has been a birder and passionate naturalist since early childhood, running around barefoot in the bush chasing birds, lizards, and aquatic insects. Her experiences in Asia started at an early age when a short trip to Singapore cast a spell on her, never to be broken. That first sighting of a sunbird in the tropical rainforest led to the purchase of the first edition of *The Birds of South East Asia*, which she memorized before the age of thirteen! After her university studies in biological sciences, she moved to Japan where she lived for four years, learning the language and studying the natural history and culture; she has traveled there regularly ever since. A few years in Japan and extended travel and birding all over the region further strengthened her deep love of the wildlife and culture of Asia. Susan has also worked as a scuba dive instructor on Australia’s Great Barrier Reef in Queensland, showing international visitors this marine marvel. She loves to explore new areas, and has recently undertaken scouting trips to Myanmar (Burma), Cambodia, Taiwan, Sumatra, and Halmahera. She has published many papers and articles on ornithology and general ecology in a variety of respected magazines and scientific journals. Susan’s deep affection for and appreciation of Asia and its wildlife, her special language skills, and her understanding of the different cultures of this region ensure an extra dimension to your tour. Susan is the author of a new field guide to the birds of Borneo, published in mid 2009.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the **Myanmar (Burma)** tour is **\$4,695** per person in double occupancy from Bangkok and includes all meals from breakfast on Day 3 to breakfast on Day 16, internal

flights, and accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leader. Fees do not include airfare from your home to Bangkok 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 **\$250**. 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.

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

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, 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.

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.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Please read your itinerary carefully to see whether or not your tour/cruise requires MANDATORY Medical Insurance which covers you for emergency evacuation/repatriation during the trip. This coverage is included in the Worldwide Trip Protector plan offered by Travel Insured International. If you do not choose to purchase the insurance through Travel Insured International, you will need to do so through another insurance provider. A good website for information and acquisition of emergency evacuation/repatriation insurance is: www.insuremytrip.com.

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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 air arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

DOCUMENTS: In order for United States citizens to enter Thailand or Myanmar, a United States passport that is valid at least 6 months after departure must be presented upon entry into the country. For stays of 30 days or less in Thailand, a visa is no longer required. **U.S. citizens are required to have a tourist visa to enter Myanmar.** As of May 2010, tourist visas may be obtained upon arrival at the Yangon airport. Please obtain a regular tourist visa, rather than a package tourist visa. Should a package tourist visa endorsement be required, our tour operator will provide it. For further information, you may wish to contact Pinnacle Travel Document Systems (www.traveldocs.com on the web or 888-838-4867 by phone), a company which handles visa procurement. Tourists are currently required to exchange USD \$200 into Foreign Exchange Certificates upon arrival in Myanmar. It is possible that this requirement may be rescinded by the time of our tour; however, please be prepared to make this exchange. Non-United States citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions.

CLIMATE: During the tour, you will experience a wide range of temperatures and climate, from the 70s, high 80s and 90s in the lowlands, to as low as 30 degrees at higher elevations. We will almost certainly encounter some rain, possibly heavy rain (unlikely except at night). Generally it will be cool in the morning and warm to hot and humid at midday. As soon as we ascend to the hill forests of Mt. Victoria, it will become noticeably more comfortable, both from the point of view of humidity and temperature. A light sweater for the evening, especially if we go on a night drive, will be essential. The early morning on top of Mt. Victoria will invariably be very cold for the first couple of hours, and warm clothing will be the order of the day.

CLOTHING: Lightweight, dull-colored field clothing is recommended throughout. This includes several pairs of pants and cool, comfortable shirts. Long-sleeved shirts, a dull-colored hat, and sunglasses are recommended for protection from the sun and mosquitoes. Long socks are very useful so that you can tuck in your pants and further avoid biting insects. RAINGEAR is also essential, including waterproof pants, which are very useful in case we encounter rain while in a boat. A collapsible umbrella is ideal. Dress will be casual, although you may prefer something slightly dressier for the hotels in Bangkok and Yangon. ***Absolutely no light or bright colors.*** Dark, muted colors help to prevent spooking the birds, particularly when we are in the forest, and thus enable you to see the special birds and mammals.

Please remember that both Myanmar (Burma) and Thailand are predominantly Buddhist countries and rather conservative about standards of dress. Women should dress modestly; no halter tops, shorts or miniskirts, please.

BOOTS: In Myanmar we will be walking for several hours most days, often on rough ground. On Mt. Victoria we will drive to the top and then spend the day walking downhill. We may encounter mud, slippery surfaces, and stony ground. Add that to the fact that you are on your feet for much of the day and it is MOST IMPORTANT that you provide suitable protection and support for your feet and ankles. Light-weight boots (of gortex or some similar material) that come up to the ankle and have a good lug-sole are ideal. Many people are apprehensive that these will be too heavy; this is not true. The protection, grip and day-long comfort such boots afford is far superior to the seemingly comfortable sneakers/training shoes.

LAUNDRY: Twenty-four hour laundry facilities are available at most of our accommodations except when we are on Mt. Victoria. Thus you will need to bring with you sufficient clothing to get you through the three nights we are at the latter locality.

HEALTH INFORMATION: Sanitation throughout Myanmar and Thailand is relatively good in the better hotels, compared to most tropical areas of the world; however, in the more remote areas caution is advised. It is always advisable to treat water other than bottled water with caution. Ideally, stick to bottled drinks, tea, and coffee. You should not eat salads and uncooked vegetables outside the good hotels. And even then, check with your tour leader.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, you should be up-to-date on both your tetanus-diphtheria and measles boosters and have a one-time adult dose of polio vaccination. Hepatitis-A and B vaccines are recommended. Typhoid vaccination is particularly important because of the presence of *S. typhi* strains resistant to multiple antibiotics in this region. There is no risk for yellow fever in Southeast Asia. Malaria is present and participants are strongly advised to take and seek the advice of their doctor with regard to the form of prophylactic to use. There are currently three prophylaxis commonly prescribed: Mefloquine (Lariam), Malarone, and Doxycycline. Please check with your physician or local travel clinic for more detailed information. 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. In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travellers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travellers' Information Line 800-CDC-INFO 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).

LUGGAGE: International flights limit baggage to two checked pieces and one carry-on per person. Each passenger may carry, without additional charges(subject to change), one piece of hand baggage suitable for placing under the seat in front or in the closed overhead rack, provided that the carry-on baggage has a maximum length of 56 cms (22 inches), width 45cms (18 inches) and 25 cms (10 inches). However, the sum of the three dimensions shall not exceed 115 cms (45 inches) and the weight must not exceed 7 kgs. A weight limit of **44 pounds per suitcase** (20 kgs) is sometimes enforced. Be prepared to pay excess baggage charges if you bring more than the allotted amount. When travelling, it is suggested that you wear clothing and a pair of shoes suitable for birding in case your baggage is delayed. It is wise to carry several copies of a list of your expensive equipment—cameras, binoculars, tape recorders, spotting scopes, etc.—for customs inspectors. This list should include a description of the object (include the serial number if possible), place of purchase, and price. Visitors to Myanmar and Thailand are rarely challenged about such equipment, but U.S. customs may be more difficult. However, if you are taking an inordinately large amount of equipment abroad with you, it is advisable to declare

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this to a customs officer before you leave the United States. More baggage information for Thai Airways (internal flights) is on their website at http://www.thaiairways.co.uk/pages/flying_with_thai/luggage.htm.

EQUIPMENT: Of course, a good pair of binoculars is essential, and many people may want to take a spare pair in case of accident or theft. The same advice applies for people who wear glasses or contact lenses.

OTHER EQUIPMENT:

- Spotting scope. Your tour leaders will have a Questar spotting scope and another of similar quality. However, you are welcome to bring your own. This will be very useful at a number of locations in Myanmar.
- Duffle bags. One or two small duffle bags can be extremely useful for short trips; these can be packed in your luggage when not in use. As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medications, and documents in your carry-on bag.
- A belt pack or daypack will be handy for books, sunscreen, repellents, extra digital storage media, etc. Other items of use include a flashlight or headlamp and batteries with spare bulbs, a small canteen/flask for water, a collapsible umbrella, wash cloth, camera, notebook, and pen/pencil.

MISCELLANEOUS: Be sure to bring all necessary prescription drugs, as well as aspirin, antacids, and a supply of antihistamines should you develop a cold. Items such as toothpaste, deodorant, soap, cosmetics, sunscreen, and sunglasses also should be brought with you.

For those using electric shavers or other powered devices, please remember that electrical power in Myanmar and Thailand is 220 volts. You may need an adapter for your equipment.

The currency of Myanmar is the *kyat* (pronounced chat), though you may find a supply of U.S. currency very useful. The currency of Thailand is the *bat* (pronounced bot).

Insects such as mosquitoes, sand-flies, and leeches can occasionally, but just locally, be a problem. This is best dealt with by wearing long-sleeved shirts of sufficient thickness and density of weave that the “bugs” cannot bite through, long trousers tucked into long socks, and liberal coatings of Cutters or OFF. We recommend the pump-style containers.

SUGGESTED READING: Our website at www.ventbird.com offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from the store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You might also want to visit such other online stores as www.amazon.com, and for those out-of-print and hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com, or www.buteobooks.com, which specializes in ornithology books. We also recommend Andrew Isles bookstore for the Asia-Pacific region at <http://www.andrewisles.com/AndrewIsles/>. Andrew can also often obtain difficult to find and out of print books for Australia.

There is very little contemporary literature about Myanmar, especially its natural history and its wildlife. The following is a small selection of titles that may be of interest. Note that *A Guide to the Birds of Southeast Asia* by Craig Robson (Princeton University Press, 2000) is undoubtedly THE book to use on this tour.

Clark, Michael & Joe Cummings. *Myanmar (Burma)*. Lonely Planet Publications, Hawthorn, Victoria, 2000.

Kipling, Rudyard. *Letters from the East*. New York: F. F. Lovell, 1889. The author’s travels through Asia. Out of print: consult your local library or use its Inter-Library Loan services.

Lekhakun, Bunsong and J.A. McNeely. *Mammals of Thailand*. Bangkok: The Association for the Conservation of Wildlife, 1988. Out of print; try www.abebooks.com.

Lekhakun, Bunsong et al. *Field Guide to the Butterflies of Thailand*. Bangkok: The Association for the Conservation of Wildlife, 1977. Out of print: consult your local library or use its Inter-Library Loan services.

Luce, G.H. *Old Burma – Early Pagan*. 3 volumes. Artibus Asiae. Ascona Switzerland, 1970. The definitive study of 10th to 12th century Bagan. Out of print: try www.abebooks.com.

McNeely, Jeffrey A. and Paul Spence Sochaczewski. *Soul of the Tiger: Searching for Nature's Answers in Exotic Southeast Asia*. University of Hawaii Press, 1995.

Min, U. Myo. *Old Burma: As Described by Early Foreign Travellers*. Rangoon, Burma: Hanthawaddy Press, 1948. The writings of the first Europeans to explore Burma.

Robson, Craig. *A Guide to the Birds of Southeast Asia*. Princeton University Press, 2000. **This superb field guide is essential for anyone with even a remote interest in the birds of this exotic region and THE book to use on tour.**

Saw Myat Yin. *Culture Shock! Burma*. Graphic Arts Center Publishing, 1993.

Smythies, Bertram E. *The Birds of Burma*. Nimrod Press, England and Silvio Mattacchione & Co., Canada, 1986. Although this covers all the species recorded in Myanmar in considerable detail, it is far too large to be used on tour.

TIPPING: As noted in our itineraries, tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, and 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. When 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 on April 30, 2010, 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.