

**EGYPT:  
THE WORLD'S GREATEST ANTIQUITIES &  
DESERT BIRD SPECIALTIES  
SEPTEMBER 26-OCTOBER 14, 2010**

**PETRA EXTENSION  
OCTOBER 14-17, 2010**

*The very crucible of western civilization, Egypt hosts some of mankind's most stupendous and gargantuan antiquities. To stand at dawn in the Valley of the Kings and gaze upon the Temple of Hatshepsut is to witness something that transcends mere words.*

*Egypt has beckoned travelers since the times of classical Greece, and while the extraordinary monuments from the age of the Pharaohs never fail to impress, this fascinating country hosts an equally attractive natural history. The biodiversity of Egypt includes some wonderful birds and landscapes and thus adds a very special fillip to exploration of the ancient world. We will indeed witness the smile of the Sphinx and gaze upon such eons-old wonders as the Pyramids of Giza while at the same time dwelling on a resident Pharaoh Eagle-Owl or staring in wonder at a huge migratory flock of storks and raptors moving south along the Nile Valley. The Nile River is undoubtedly the life-blood, the very essence of Egypt, and its majestic, lush, and sinuous geography will be the focus for much of this tour.*

*We will commence our exploration of this ancient land amid the hustle and bustle of Cairo with a visit to the Giza Pyramid Complex, home to the world's most instantly recognizable landmarks dating from the distant past. Later, inevitably, we will visit the treasure-trove that is the Egyptian Museum. This museum holds, arguably, one of world's most important collections of ancient antiquities. A guided tour of the rooms, chambers, and galleries will reveal not only the breathtaking treasures of Tutankhamen's tomb, but thousands of other world-famous artifacts. From Cairo we will travel far to the south, through Nubia, to one of the world's largest man-made dams at Aswan, and the seemingly unbelievable monuments at Abu Simbel. From here we will meander downstream for three days along the Nile, exploring a host of fascinating antiquities as we head to fabulous Luxor.*

*While the fascination of this huge country, with its awesome monuments, timeless villages, and scenic contrasts, will appeal to anyone with a love of travel, the country is still largely off the beaten track for birders. Nevertheless, Egypt hosts a considerable range of habitats and vegetation which, in turn, support a diverse fauna.*

*Located at the junction of four bio-geographical regions, (Sahara-Sindian, represented in the vast deserts; Iran-Turanian, occupying a small area in the Sinai highlands; Mediterranean, covering a*

*small area along the Mediterranean coast; and Afro-tropical) Egypt is a fascinating place to bird, especially during the autumn (fall) migration. While the Nile supports most of the country's wetlands, which are some of Egypt's most important habitats and support the greatest diversity and density of bird species, Egypt offers much, much more than the Nile Valley. This exciting journey will see us watching Sooty Falcons; White-eyed and the very localized Sooty gulls, and dapper White-cheeked Terns on the Red Sea coast; and Sinai Rosefinches and Striolated Buntings in the mountains of Sinai.*

*Our post-tour extension will take us to the ancient city of Petra in Jordan, a place many would argue is the single most impressive archaeological site in all of the Middle East. Here, in addition to this fabulous site from antiquity, we may have the chance for such highly sought-after species as Sand Partridge; Hume's Owl; Bar-tailed and Temminck's larks; Red-rumped Wheatear; Palestine Sunbird; and Tristram's Serin—all in the shadow of Petra, in addition to many other very charismatic desert specialties such as Lichtenstein's, Spotted and Crowned sandgrouse; the incomparable Hoopoe Lark; Hooded Wheatear; Fan-tailed Raven; and Tristram's Starling.*

*This departure represents VENT's inaugural tour of Egypt and Petra, and you will be pleased to know that we have reserved some truly lovely and very special places to stay from which to explore the antiquities and natural history of this fabulous region. We will also have three nights on a very comfortable boat from which to explore the Nile River downstream from the great Aswan Dam. This tour will be led by veteran tour leader, David Bishop, and Erik Forsyth. They will be assisted at all times by an Egyptian tour escort and, at historical sites, by an English-speaking guide. We are sure you will be delighted with this extraordinary experience.*

**NOTE:** This itinerary is designed to provide a strong balance of natural history (birding) with Egypt's extraordinary history, archaeology, and culture. If, after reading this itinerary, you desire more time in Egypt to experience the antiquities than what is stated in the itinerary, we recommend you either arrive early or stay later after the tour.

**September 26-27, Days 1-2: Travel to Cairo, Egypt.** Participants traveling from the United States to Cairo will depart on September 26 and arrive in Cairo on September 27. Upon arrival you will be met by our representative and transferred by air-conditioned bus to our hotel. Common birds that might be seen here and around the bustling streets of Cairo include Common Kestrel, swooping Black Kites, Laughing Dove, the distinctive Eurasian Hoopoe, Pallid Swift (which nest on large buildings), raucous Hooded Crows, and dainty, migratory White Wagtails.

NIGHTS: On board commercial aircraft (September 26)  
JWR Marriott Hotel, Cairo (September 27)

**September 28, Day 3: Exploring Cairo (Giza Pyramids & the Sphinx; Coptic Cairo).** Sixteen million people live in the Cairo metropolis, which is squeezed into the narrow Nile Valley, creating one of the world's highest population densities. Nevertheless, it is a remarkably friendly city that retains a distinctly medieval aspect with donkey carts and herds of goats regularly adding to the congestion on the streets. Nevertheless, surprisingly large areas of greenery still persist along the banks of the Nile and we will take some time to stretch our legs and explore these oases that are generally teeming with migrant birds.

It would, of course, be inconceivable to visit Cairo without visiting the Giza Pyramid Complex, home to Egypt's most famous attraction, the Great Pyramid of Giza (Pyramid of Khufu), along with the Pyramids of Khafre and Menkaure. The Great Pyramid is the only survivor of the ancient Greek-listed Seven Wonders of the Ancient World and is certainly the world's oldest tourist site! Only once we are there, gazing in wonder at these vast relics, will we realize why they have held mankind's fascination for thousands of years. The immense size of

these three constructions, completed between 2690 and 2500 B.C. never fails to impress, especially when one considers the sheer lack of technological aids available to their builders. The Egyptians' belief in eternal life and their desire to be one with the cosmos led them to build such incredible mausoleums. A pharaoh was the Son of God, a receiver of ka (life force) that he conducted to his people. The pyramid was a sanctum for the preservation of the ka and a place of worship for his loyal subjects.

Of course, we will pay a visit to the enigmatic Sphinx for those obligatory photographs with the pyramids in the background. The Sphinx—known in Arabic as Abu al Hol (Father of Terror), was named by the ancient Greeks for its resemblance to the mythical winged monster with a woman's head and lion's body—proposed a riddle to the Thebans and killed all unable to answer. The Sphinx was carved from one large piece of limestone and is 125 ft (50m) long and nearly 50ft (22m) high.

We will also have the chance to see the Solar Boat or barque, a completely preserved mortuary boat that was buried with the dead Pharaoh Khufu (Cheops in Greek), in a tomb chamber and believed to provide transport for the king in the next world. Those who are feeling adventurous can take an optional camel ride around the vast Giza complex or venture through narrow passageways for hundreds of feet, to the very epicentre of the pyramids where the pharaohs were buried.

In the afternoon, we will visit the fascinating Hanging Church, Babylon Fortress, and other sites belonging to the early Coptic (Egyptian Christian) era.

NIGHT: JWR Marriott Hotel, Cairo.

**September 29, Day 4: Fly from Cairo to Abu Simbel.** This morning we will take an early flight south to the furthest reaches of Egypt, to the great temples of Abu Simbel, located on the shores of Lake Nasser. Here, close to the Sudanese border, this huge lake was formed by construction of the Aswan High Dam and is the largest man-made lake in the world.

The world famous temples of Abu Simbel lie just north of the Sudanese border and are actually situated to the south of the Tropic of Cancer. Saved from the rising waters of Lake Nasser through international action, they are both an impressive reminder of the glory of ancient Egypt and an interesting birding locality. As is so often the case in Egypt, even the most dedicated birdwatchers can only stand and stare upon first sighting these gargantuan yet graceful monuments that date from a time when civilization was still young. Built by order of Pharaoh Ramses II, one of the greatest rulers in Egypt's history, between 1290 and 1224 B.C., the Great Temple was dedicated to the gods Ra, Amun, and Ptah, while the smaller Temple of Hathor was built in honour of Ramses' wife Nefertari and dedicated to the cow-headed goddess of love. The reconstruction, which involved cutting the temples into over 2000 stone blocks of up to 40 tons each, and the construction of an artificial mountain resembling their original location by the river, into which they were set, was a technological marvel in the 1960s.

Birds occurring here show a closer affinity to the Afro-tropics (sub-saharan Africa) than to the Palearctic (North Africa, Europe, and temperate Asia) and we will search for Reed Cormorant, Pink-backed Pelican, Yellow-billed Stork, Egyptian Goose, Kittlitz's Plover, African Collared Dove, and African Pied Wagtail. Winter visitors that we may find in the surrounding area may include Pied Wheatear and Masked and Woodchat shrikes. Trees and bushes can at times be alive with migrant warblers and other birds including Eastern Olivaceous, Eastern Bonelli's, Willow, Eurasian Reed, and Marsh warblers; Common Chiffchaff; Lesser and Common whitethroats; Clamorous and Great Reed warblers; Eurasian Golden Oriole; Eurasian Wryneck; and Spotted, Semi-collared, and European Pied flycatchers.

We shall remain at the temples until dusk falls to search for such notable species as Pharaoh Eagle-Owl and Egyptian Nightjar and then attend an atmospheric and spectacular *Son et Lumière* performance at the temples.

NIGHT: Seti First Hotel, Abu Simbel

**September 30, Day 5: Cruising Lake Nasser.** Abu Simbel's closeness to the Sudan and the presence of the relatively hospitable Nile corridor means the area has the potential to attract species generally only found south of the Sahara. After some early morning birding around our hotel gardens, we will enjoy a birding cruise on Lake Nasser.

Lake Nasser provides suitable feeding areas for Great White Pelican, Greater Flamingo, Egyptian Goose, Northern Shoveler, Tufted and Ferruginous ducks, Eurasian Coots, and Kittlitz's Plovers. Terns and gulls are a feature here as well and we will be on the lookout for Caspian, Gull-billed, and Whiskered terns, and Black-headed and Slender-billed gulls. Scanning carefully, we also hope to find Pink-backed Pelican, Eurasian Spoonbill, Yellow-billed Stork, Senegal Thick-knee and, if we are lucky, Goliath Heron.

Dense bushes around the lake's shoreline hold a wealth of migrant birds stopping to fuel up for their journey north. Here we will see flocks of Meadow and Red-throated Pipits and Western Yellow Wagtail, of several different races. African Pied Wagtail is resident here too (at its only Western Palearctic location) and we should see some during our visit. We may also be lucky enough to record such stragglers as Long-tailed Cormorant, Yellow-billed Stork, and African Collared-Dove in addition to more typically resident species.

In the afternoon we will bird around the hotel and nearby village, and possibly return to the archaeological site. Blue Rock Thrushes and White-crowned Wheatears perch on the rocky outcrops at Abu Simbel; Greater Hoopoe Larks and Desert Wheatears inhabit the desert waste and groves of trees and bushes function as effective migrant traps, attracting tired passerines and sometimes migrating Egyptian Nightjars at this time of year.

NIGHT: Seti First Hotel, Abu Simbel

**October 1, Day 6: Fly from Abu Simbel to Aswan; embark the M/V Sonesta Nile Goddess.**

This morning we will take a flight to Aswan at the head of Lake Nasser. Upon arrival we will visit the Nubia Museum. The Nubian people of southern Egypt and Sudan are the link between Africa and Egypt and the museum showcases the history, art and culture of Nubia from Prehistoric times to present.

At midday, we will board our cruise ship, the M/V Sonesta Nile Goddess, our home for the next three nights, and enjoy a great buffet lunch. We will then head downstream passing feluccas, traditional Egyptian white-sailed vessels that have barely changed since the days of the Pharaohs and enjoy this delightfully gracious way in which to explore the Nile.

We will visit the Temple complex of Isis on the island of Philae, locate between the Old (1902) and New (1971) dam walls. Amazingly, this temple was also disassembled and rebuilt on higher ground to save it from being submerged. Often said to be one of the most beautiful temples in Egypt, it is certainly a highlight of any visit to the country. We will also visit the remarkable Aswan High Dam (3.6 km wide and 111m high), which was completed in 1971 after 11 years of work. Special birds of the area include Egyptian Vulture and Gull-billed, Whiskered, and Black terns. In the surrounding trees we will look for the beautiful Nile Valley Sunbird and Graceful Prinia.

Late in the afternoon, we will take a motorboat around the First Cataract and Elephantine Island watching for Great Cormorant; Glossy Ibis; Great Egret; Grey, Purple, Squacco, and Striated herons; African Swamphen; and Little Bittern, among many others. This is indeed a relaxing way to spend the afternoon.

NIGHT: Aboard M/V Sonesta Nile Goddess, Lake Nasser/Nile River

**October 2, Day 7: Cruising the Nile from Aswan to Esna via Kom Ombo.** Today we will cruise down the Nile to Kom Ombo where we will visit the Kom Ombo Temple, dedicated to the two gods Sobek, the Crocodile-headed god, and Horus, the Falcon-headed sky god. Thereafter we will cruise to Edfu where we will have time

to visit the Temple of Horus, the largest completely preserved Ptolemaic, Greek-styled temple in Egypt. Edfu is a large and busy pottery and sugar trading center.

Back on board our ship, we will have lunch as we cruise down the Nile. We will keep an eye out for species such as Ferruginous Duck, Glossy Ibis, Greater Flamingo and various herons and waders. Raptors are a feature of this area, often using the Nile as a migratory route, and we may see Barbary Falcon, Osprey, Western Marsh-Harrier and Long-legged Buzzard.

NIGHT: Aboard M/V Sonesta Nile Goddess, Nile River

**October 3, Day 8: Cruising the Nile from Esna to Luxor; Valley of the Kings.** We will cross the Esna Lock today as we cruise onwards to Luxor. Birds that we may encounter along the way may include Red-crested Pochard; Eurasian Teal; Tufted Duck; Garganey; Purple Heron; Glossy Ibis; Black and Black-winged Kites; and Western Marsh-Harrier. At Esna our cruise ship will stop for several hours, until it is our turn to navigate the lock, and we will have time to explore the thriving markets filled with Egyptian curios and trinkets. Esna also has its own ancient temple and it can also be visited. For those in a cruise mood, lounging around our ship's swimming pool is another option.

Upon arrival in Luxor this afternoon, we will cross to the West Bank of the Nile, for one of the most fascinating days of ancient history: a visit to the Valley of the Kings. Here, we will descend into several tombs, intricately adorned with beautiful and colorful artworks representing the lives of the kings who were entombed there, as well as the more mystic aspects of life and death. Strange faces of crocodile-headed gods, beautiful concubines, tortured slaves, and regal kings and queens almost speak to us from the very walls where they were etched thousands of years ago.

We will also visit the Temple of Queen Hatshepsut (partly cut into the base of the desert mountain that guards the Valley of the Kings), the Ramesseum, and the Colossi of Memnon—all world-famous archaeological sites also situated here. The Valley of the Kings is suitably devoid of life other than its human visitors and perhaps some opportunistic Trumpeter Finches looking for scraps. After examining the wonderfully vivid, life-like wall paintings of the tombs, one can climb to a viewpoint high above and look across to Luxor on the far bank. From here one begins to appreciate why the Nile is Egypt and Egypt is the Nile, for beyond the curving strip of life-giving greenery there is only the harshest desert.

NIGHT: Aboard M/V Sonesta Nile Goddess, Nile River

**October 4-5, Days 9-10: Luxor (Temples of Karnak, Luxor, & Dendera); Crocodile Island).** The landscape of the Nile Valley has a timeless magic. In this lush green strip of fertile land, hemmed in by the bare desert hills on either side, we shall see a way of life which has changed little in thousands of years, never mind centuries. The mud-walled villages, the faces of the people working in the tiny fields and the heavily laden donkey carts seem to come straight out of the Pharaonic age. The Nile is always fascinating to watch with its steady traffic of white-sailed feluccas and larger motorized craft.

Our disembarkation from the ship this morning heralds two plus days of exploring the fantastic Luxor area. We will begin with a trip to the awe-inspiring Temple of Karnak, consisting of sanctuaries, obelisks, and pylons and dedicated to the Theban Gods. Started around 2000 B.C., the temple complex, equivalent to around ten Christian cathedrals in area, became the most important in all Egypt during the height of Theban power. The massive scale of the buildings is hard to comprehend—a true marvel of ancient Egyptian engineering—and even more so when one considers how long ago they were built.

We will also visit the Temple of Luxor, another of the famous and grandiose sites from Ancient Egypt. A tour of the grounds will reveal an astonishing array of obelisks, sphinxes, colonnades, and pylons. The great colossus depicting Ramesses II is a must-see attraction. Another feature of this building is a 900-year old mosque built on a portion of the ancient temple. The Temple of Luxor is absolutely spectacular when it is illuminated at night.

We hope to offer a visit one evening following dinner. Little and Barn owls can be found hunting insects around here.

The Luxor museum is yet another attraction which time permitting we may visit. There is currently a plan to link the Luxor Temple and the Karnak Temple complexes within the city to form the largest outdoor museum complex on earth. As a consequence, we should expect to encounter a great deal of excavation work going on all around this ancient town.

In the afternoon we will explore Crocodile Island where we will be based for the next two nights.

The lush vegetated gardens and fields of Crocodile Island support a good variety of birds, and when we take a break from exploring the marvelous antiquities, we will search for such species as the elusive Greater Painted-snipe; Spotted Crake if we are fortunate; several species of shorebirds; stunning Green Bee-eaters; Tree, Tawny and Red-throated pipits; Western Yellow Wagtails of different races; Rufous-tailed Scrub-Robin; Bluethroat; Black-eared Wheatear; Whinchat; Red Avadavat; and Ortolan Bunting.

On the second day we will cruise the Nile to our morning destination: the Dendera Temple complex. The main building, the Dendera Temple, dates to the Ptolemaic Dynasty (Circa 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.), although its construction was later completed by the Romans under the rule of Tiberius. The temple complex is one of the best-preserved of its kind in Egypt and covers almost 40,000 square meters. Originally a site for ancient Egyptian chapels or shrines, it is thought that pharaoh Pep I built here as long ago as 2250 B.C. The temple walls depict numerous reliefs, including of Cleopatra VI and her son by Julius Caesar, Caesarion. Thereafter, we will have lunch on our boat before returning to Luxor.

In the afternoon we will again cover Crocodile Island in search of migrant birds, waterbirds, and anything that may have eluded us in our searches the day before. Or we may simply choose to relax around the hotel.

NIGHTS: Movenpick Resort Crocodile Island, Luxor

**October 6, Day 11: Luxor (Ramesseum; Medinet Habu) to El Gouna (Red Sea coast).** This morning we will visit the Ramesseum, the memorial temple of Pharaoh Ramesses II. This site is located in the Theban necropolis in Upper Egypt across the Nile River from the city of Luxor. Twenty years in construction, the complex includes the remains of a royal palace, a large number of mud-brick granaries and storerooms, as well as a small temple dedicated to Ramesses' mother, Tuya, and his wife, Nefertari. Interestingly, two of Napoleon Bonaparte's French engineers were assigned to study the Ramesseum site after his invasion of 1798, and it was with much fanfare that they identified the Tomb of Ozymandias, or Palace of Memnon, of which Diodorus of Sicily had written in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. One of the most interesting features of the site is the base of Ramesses' statue, which once stood 17m (almost 70 feet) high. It weighed more than 1,000 tons and is said to have been hauled in from Aswan in a single piece!

The remainder of the morning will be spent visiting is Medinet Habu, a temple complex dating back to the New Kingdom (16<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.). This site was originally believed to be the place where the first four pairs of primeval gods were buried. The main attraction here, however, is the great memorial temple of Ramesses II—the best preserved mortuary temple in Thebes. With over 75,000 square feet of decorated walls, we are assured of staying suitably entertained! Thereafter, we will have lunch at an area restaurant, then embark on the drive to El Gouna on the Red Sea coast.

Leaving the Nile Valley behind, we will head eastward across the the bleak Eastern Desert, an often fascinating albeit rather austere landscape inhabited by Brown-necked Ravens and seemingly little else. Approaching the Red Sea, we will pass through the dramatic Red Sea Coastal Range before turning north along the coast to our very attractive resort. Until recently all vehicles were required to join a convoy to drive through the desert and onto the Red Sea coast. Happily, this regulation has been dispensed with and we may now travel at our own pace, thus permitting us to stop if we see anything interesting along the way. Birds that we may find here with a

bit of luck include the stunning Crowned Sandgrouse and several species of lark, in addition to the elegant Lanner Falcon.

The beach resort town of El Gouna is situated on the western shore of the Red Sea, a little to the south of the southern tip of Sinai. This development is growing by the year and is a popular venue for international holidaymakers, offering great beaches, diving, and snorkelling. The greenery of the hotel grounds, effectively small oases in the desert, provides refuges for tired migrants and, if we have time in the afternoon, we will bird the gardens, golf course and beaches around our luxurious hotel. Species we may potentially see include Levant Sparrowhawk; Collared Pratincole; Common Kingfisher; Water Pipit; Common Redstart; Whinchat; Northern Wheatear; Spotted Flycatcher; Red-backed, Lesser Grey, Woodchat, and Masked shrikes; Olivaceous, Sardinian, and Willow warblers; Common and Lesser whitethroats; Blackcap; Common Chiffchaff; Spanish Sparrow, and Greater Short-toed Lark.

NIGHT: Gouna Movenpick Hotel, El Gouna

**October 7, Day 12: El Gouna and Red Sea Islands.** The many islands that guard the entrance to the Gulf of Suez provide nesting grounds for a good variety of seabirds, in addition to many pairs of Sooty Falcons. Today we will venture out on a long boat cruise into the Red Sea where we will search in particular for the three major specialties of the region: Sooty and White-eyed gulls, and White-cheeked Tern. We should also encounter Brown Booby (their numbers have declined markedly in the northern Red Sea in recent years); Western Reef Egret; Osprey; Caspian Gull; and Caspian, Greater Crested and Lesser Crested terns. Baltic, Armenian and Heuglin's gulls, and Sandwich Tern, are also possibilities. In addition, there is always the possibility of seeing Red-billed Tropicbird, which also breeds on islands in the Red Sea. This area is also on an important migration route and almost anything could fly by; so be alert! Lunch will be served on board, or on nearby Gifton Island, and we will also have the chance to snorkel on some incredibly rich coral reefs. The coral reefs of the Red Sea are rightly world-famous for the sheer variety of sea-life and colorful reef fish. The variety of fishes is literally breathtaking! In the late afternoon, we may again have time for some productive birding around our hotel.

NIGHT: Gouna Movenpick Hotel, El Gouna

**October 8, Day 13: El Gouna to St. Catherine's Monastery (foot of Mt. Sinai).** Today we will take our leave of the African continent and cross into Asia. We will take a flight across the Red Sea to Sharm El Sheikh at the southern end of the Sinai Peninsula. We will have lunch in a local hotel before making a lengthy drive via the Gulf of Aqaba road, through the scenic desert mountains of the Sinai Peninsula. We will arrive at our hotel near St. Catherine's Village at the foot of Mt. Sinai later in the afternoon. With time for an initial exploration, we will bird the grounds of our hotel in addition to nearby golf courses and desert areas. This area can be something of a migrant trap for birds that have flown off course. Here, they find themselves trapped at the tip of the Sinai Peninsula instead of having the entire African continent before them into which to disappear. As a consequence, these birds often hang around before trying to find their way across to Africa. Birding highlights could include several species of ducks; Booted, Bonelli's, Steppe, Lesser Spotted, and Greater Spotted eagles; Northern Lapwing, Rufous-tailed Shrike, Blackcap, Barred and Olive-tree Warblers; and Ortolan Bunting.

NIGHT: Wadi Raha Tourist Village, St. Catherine Village, Sinai Peninsula

**October 9, Day 14: Southern Sinai (St. Catherine's; Mt. Sinai) and return to Sharm El Sheikh.** This morning we will bird around the base of Mount Sinai, the site where Moses is reputed to have received the Ten Commandments. The world-famous Greek Orthodox monastery of St. Catherine is located here, where the original sixth century walls dedicated to the Virgin Mary still stand. The monastery orchard can also be a migrant trap, and here we may see various warblers among numerous other species.

We will visit the lush oasis of Wadi Feiran, where we will search the gardens and groves for birds that might include Blackstart, Common Nightingale, Streaked Scrub-Warbler, White and Gray wagtails, Masked Shrike,

Lesser Whitethroat, Eastern Orphean Warbler, White-spectacled Bulbul, White-crowned Wheatear, and the lovely Palestine Sunbird.

Later we will drive back to Sharm El Sheik. The scenery of the southern Sinai is spectacular. Mountains rise just to the west and north of the town of Sharm El Sheik and present an awesome vista of jagged, contorted granitic peaks, riddled with volcanic intrusions—the pink, grey, purple and ochre colours of the rocks blended into an unlikely medley. This will be the backdrop to our birding over the next couple of days. Only a short distance outside town is some pools where Sooty Falcons wing their way in from their breeding sites on offshore islands to hunt. Here we should obtain good views of these enigmatic falcons and, even at dusk, the bright orange feet of the males seem to glow in the waning light as they circle and swoop overhead, teasing fluttering bats, and chasing migrant birds.

In addition to visiting these areas we will also visit the nearby sewage works where wading birds abound and we may see a good variety of ducks. Some of the species we may encounter include Black-crowned Night-Heron; Glossy Ibis; Eurasian Spoonbill; Common, Marsh, Wood, and Curlew sandpipers; Common Greenshank; Black-tailed Godwit; Little Stint; Common Ringed, Little Ringed, and Kittlitz's plovers; and Spotted and Common redshanks. Migrant raptors may be found roosting in a nearby plantation and could include Eurasian Buzzard; Steppe and Imperial eagles; and Black Kite. We will also be on the lookout for the Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse which often come in to drink as night falls, while Crowned and Spotted Sandgrouse often visit during the morning. A good number of migrants are usually present in the area and amongst the species that we are likely to find are White and Black storks; Northern Pintail; Garganey; European Turtle-Dove; European Roller; Greater Short-toed Lark; Sand Martin; Tawny, Tree, and Red-throated pipits, and Bluethroat, while the elegant Hooded Wheatear inhabits the starkly beautiful desert landscape of the plains and mountains. Sometimes the pretty little Namaqua Dove can also be found in this area, while House Crows, recent, ship-assisted colonists, are also present.

NIGHT: Baron Resort, Sharm El Sheik

**October 10, Day 15: Sharm El Sheik and Ras Mohammed National Park.** With another day of birding in store in the Sharm El Sheik/southern Sinai region, we will go in search of new birds and new scenery. Depending on our time at the sewage works the previous afternoon, we may wish to make an early morning return to that site for a more thorough visit. Thereafter, we will head to Ras Mohammed National Park.

Ras Mohammed National Park is a long peninsula projecting into the Red Sea, and occupies the very southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula. This important reserve protects some superb desert and coastal habitats and a host of typical desert birds including Crowned and Lichtenstein's sandgrouse; Sand Partridge; Cream-coloured Courser; Brown-necked Raven; Greater Hoopoe-Lark; Crested, Thekla, Bar-tailed, and Desert larks; Mourning, Red-rumped, Desert, Red-tailed, Hooded, and Black-eared wheatears; Trumpeter Finch; and House Bunting. The region encompassing Sinai, Eilat, and Suez is ornithologically famous for its bird of prey migration and we may well encounter a strong movement of raptors during our stay in the area (anything from hundreds to thousands). Ras Mohammed is a good place for observing this passage as this is a natural 'jumping off point' for the short sea crossing to Africa. The most commonly recorded species at this time of year include Eurasian Griffon; Egyptian Vulture; Golden, Steppe, Lesser Spotted, Booted and Short-toed eagles; European Honey Buzzard; Common Buzzard; Black Kite; Montagu's and Pallid harriers; and Eurasian and Levant sparrowhawks. If we are lucky, we may also see Greater Spotted and Imperial eagles or a party of Red-footed Falcons.

The sea-coast at Ras Mohammed National Park is equally interesting and in addition to seeing Greater Sand Plover, Eurasian Whimbrel, Eurasian Curlew, and Slender-billed Gull, we may also find Sooty Falcons nesting on the nearby cliffs. The southern coast of the Gulf of Aqaba, between Tiran Island in the Straits and Ras Mohammed National Park at the tip of Sinai, features some of the world's most remarkable and well-preserved underwater scenery. Crystal clear waters with large reefs hold an incredible variety of exotic fish darting in and out of the colourful corals. Needless to say, this is another superb area for snorkeling, and yet another opportunity to observe and enjoy the colourful and varied reef fish that abound in these waters.

NIGHT: Baron Resort, Sharm El Sheikh

**October 11, Day 16: Sharm El Sheik to Cairo.** This morning we will take an early flight back to Cairo. We will enjoy lunch on a restaurant ship moored on the Nile at Zamalek before proceeding to the fabulous Egyptian Museum.

The Egyptian Museum is one of the greatest tourist attractions of Egypt and holds more than 100,000 relics and antiquities from every period of Egyptian history. If we spent just one minute at each exhibit it would take us to nine months to see everything! We shall, therefore, use the services of a local expert who will guide us and explain the very best highlights of the Museum including the Tutankhamen Galleries, Akhenaten Rooms, Royal Tombs of Tanis, Animal Mummies, Ancient Egyptian Jewelry Room and the Old Kingdom Rooms. It must be mentioned that the Tutankhamen treasures are probably the most splendid historical artifacts ever produced! For those who are not especially squeamish, an optional visit to the Royal Mummy Room is possible, where you can gaze at the faces of some of Egypt's most famous pharaohs and queens.

NIGHT: Cairo Marriott Hotel, Cairo

**October 12, Day 17: Cairo (Saqqara and Wadi Natrun).** We will leave the bustling city this morning and make our way to Saqqara (or Sakkara), known as the cemetery of Memphis (the capital of Pharaonic Egypt). En route, we might see flocks of White Storks migrating overhead; the beautiful Geen Bee-eater, Pied Kingfishers along the waterways, the colorful local form of Barn Swallow (which is sometimes split off as Egyptian Swallow); House Martin; Common Bulbul; Desert and Northern wheatears; and Southern Gray Shrike.

Saqqara is situated on the desert edge, well away from the more familiar, world-class tourist attractions around Cairo. While less famous than other sites, the main attraction is Zoser's Step Pyramid, the first massive pyramid construction in Ancient Egypt (dating from around 5000 years ago!). We shall take the time to look especially intently at this pyramid as it regularly holds roosting Pharaoh (or Desert) Eagle Owls (split from Eurasian), while nearby is the fascinating Tomb of Mereuka, which has a series of magnificent wall inscriptions that depict, in wonderfully accurate detail, many of the birds, mammals and reptiles familiar to the Ancient Egyptians.

In the afternoon we will make our way to the Wadi Natrun area, famous for harboring the earliest Christian monasteries in Egypt, if not the entire Holy Land region. This is also an area of productive lakes and marshes and, aside from various species of waders and herons, some of the birds that we will search for here include Kittlitz's and Little Ringed plovers, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, and Graceful Prinia.

NIGHT: Cairo Marriott Hotel, Cairo

**October 13, Day 18: Cairo (Abassa and Khan El Khalili).** This morning, our last in Egypt, we will bird the Abassa area, which is situated in the eastern Delta to the north of Cairo. This is a highly productive birding site consisting primarily of agricultural lands and fish farms. Some of the species that we will search for include Senegal Coucal, Senegal Thick-knee, Greater Painted-Snipe, Red Avadavat, and Green Bee-eater, as well as a good selection of waterbirds and migrants.

We will have lunch at the famous Alazhar Park, with its great views of the surrounding historic monuments. This park must be one of the world's best examples of an urban eco-rehabilitation project. Previously a 500-year-old rubbish dump, Alazhar Park—a gift from Aga Khan to the city of Cairo at a cost of over \$30 million (U.S.)—necessitated over 80,000 truckloads of waste being removed over a period of several years! Instead, the park now functions as a vital "green lung" to a city which had previously offered its inhabitants the equivalent of only a footprint's worth of green space per person.

In the afternoon we will visit the grand Khan El Khalili Market, an immense area of markets and shops where it is possible to find everything and anything from books to precious stones and curios typical of Egypt. The merchants are some of the greatest salespeople and smooth-talkers you will ever meet!

Our tour will end at the hotel in Cairo tonight with a sumptuous meal and final birdlist.

NIGHT: Cairo Marriott Hotel, Cairo

**October 14, Day 19: International departures home or continue on to Petra Extension.** Participants not continuing on to the post-tour extension to Petra are free to depart Cairo at any time today. International flights bound for the United States depart in the morning and arrive in the United States the same day. Those continuing on to Petra will depart Cairo today on an international flight to Amman, Jordan.

## PETRA EXTENSION OCTOBER 14-17, 2010

*Petra, in Jordan, is one of the world's most remarkable antiquities and is regarded as the most astounding ancient city left to the modern world. This early capital of the Nabataeans, which housed an estimated 30,000 people in its heyday, was hewn from the blood-red cliffs of the sandstone Sharrah Mountains.*

*Petra previously flourished as a vast trading city and controlled a large part of the "Incense Route," thus profiting from the trade between Greeks, Persians, Medes and Egyptians. The Nabataeans were at their peak from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. until the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., when Petra was annexed by the Romans. Several earthquakes and the rerouting of the main trade routes sidelined Petra until it was finally abandoned, remaining hidden and forgotten for many centuries until its dramatic rediscovery in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century by the German explorer Johann Burkhardt.*

*Petra's intricately carved, multi-storey temples and buildings became familiar to many people when it was used as the set for the Harrison Ford movie, "Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade," and from the cover of National Geographic Magazine. This is, without a doubt, the most "must-see" site in the entire Middle East!*

*Set within a 20,000 hectare National Park, Petra also offers some terrific birding. Notable species include Sooty Falcon, Sand Partridge, Mourning Wheatear, Scrub Warbler, Palestine Sunbird, Rock Sparrow, Sinai Rosefinch, Syrian Serin, and House Bunting. This region is also situated within a strong raptor migration route, so we can expect to see good numbers of these passage migrants as they soar overhead.*

**October 14, Day 1: Cairo to Amman, Jordan; Wadi As Sir; transfer to Petra.** We will depart Cairo today on an early morning flight to Amman, Jordan, where we will be met at the airport by our local ground operator.

Once organized, our first stop is at Wadi As Sir on the western outskirts of Amman. The ridge tops here consist of remnants of the original oak forest, pine plantations, and Olive Orchards. In these areas we will search for Syrian Woodpecker, Great Tit, Woodchat Shrike, Eurasian Jay, and Cretzschmar's and Black-headed Buntings. At the wadi bottoms there are perennial streams surrounded by vegetable gardens and *Oleander* scrub. These areas attract White-throated Kingfisher; Spotted Flycatcher; Upcher's and Cetti's warblers; European Goldfinch;

and Palestine Sunbird. The surrounding rocky slopes with low shrubs hold Chukar, Long-billed Pipit, Blue Rock-Thrush, Sardinian Warbler, and Rock Petronia.

Time permitting, we may visit the nearby Amman National Park, which has similar habitats, but some additional species which may include Eurasian Hobby, Little Owl, European Roller, Common Cuckoo, Spectacled Warbler, Corn Bunting, and Calandra Lark.

In the afternoon we will drive south to Petra, situated in the Sharra highlands (part of the biblical mountains of Moab) and Wadi Musa, the access point for the hidden city, for a two nights stay. We will check into our very attractive and comfortable hotel which has amazing views from every room.

NIGHT: Taybet Zaman Hotel, Wadi Musa

**October 15, Day 2: Petra.** We will have the entire day to enjoy a superb guided tour of the Red Rose City—the very best of Petra. We will set off early with our guide and thus avoid the worst of the crowds and trinket sellers. Our expert guide, who will escort us to the highlights of Petra, will answer any questions we might have as we explore this fascinating site. We will walk down the narrow, water-eroded defile known as the Siq before turning the final corner and facing the famous Khazneh (or ‘Treasury’) of the Nabataean city of Petra.

The Khazneh is not really a building at all, but a fabulous facade cut into the “rose-red” sandstone rock to serve as a tomb. As we emerge from the Siq the ruins of Petra are all around and we shall enjoy this fascinating site as it should be: still-quiet, uncrowded and complete with Fan-tailed Ravens. Many tombs, as well as some other buildings were hewn into the red sandstone cliffs of the Sharrah Mountains by the Nabateans. In its heyday, this important trading city housed around 30,000 people. It was an exceptionally well organized place before a few earthquakes and redirected trade-routes made it less and less important, until it was eventually totally abandoned.

This day will undoubtedly be one of the highlights of the tour. Although birds will be few and far between, we should encounter Chukar, Fan-tailed Raven, Blue Rock-Thrush, Pale Rosefinch, and Chukar. With a bit of luck, we may also find the lovely Sinai Rosefinch and Trstram’s Starling. Other characteristic birds in the area include Pale Crag Martin (split from Rock Martin), White-spectacled Bulbul, Blackstart, Mourning Wheatear, Blue Rock Thrush, the perky little Scrub Warbler, the range-restricted Palestine Sunbird, and Desert Lark.

NIGHT: Taybet Zaman Hotel, Wadi Musa

**October 16, Day 3: Return to Amman via Dana Nature Reserve.** To the north lies Wadi Dana and the Dana Nature Reserve, where more dramatic scenery awaits us. The reserve comprises a series of mountains and valleys that extend from the top of the Jordan Rift Valley down to the desert lowlands. Here, the rugged, juniper-spattered escarpments hold the southernmost population of the very localized Tristram’s (Syrian) Serin, while other species of interest include Long-legged Buzzard, Sand Partridge, Chukar and Eurasian Griffon Vulture.

Aside from its natural heritage, archaeological evidence indicates this site was inhabited as long ago as 4000 B.C.

We will arrive in Amman this afternoon. Our tour will end this evening with a fine meal at our hotel or an area restaurant.

NIGHT: Le Meridien Hotel, Amman

**October 17, Day 4: End tour; fly home to USA.** Tour participants are free to depart Amman (Queen Alia International Airport) at any time today. International flights bound for the United States depart at different times during the day (Delta offers a midnight departure).

**TOUR SIZE:** Both the Egypt and Petra Extension tours will be limited to 14 participants each.

**TOUR LEADERS:** David Bishop and Erik Forsyth

**David Bishop** loves his vocation and cannot imagine anything better than exploring wild and beautiful places in Asia and the Pacific in the company of friends and clients. He has spent much of the past 34 years studying the birds and natural history of the Oriental region, in addition to New Guinea, the Southwest Pacific and most recently Central Asia and parts of Africa. David was once a police officer amid the streets of London's West End, but has emerged as an acknowledged authority on the birds of these exotic regions. His enthusiasm for these places and their birds is contagious. This, along with his skills in locating wildlife, sharing what he sees with others, and conversing with local people in their native language, ensures you the very finest quality tour. David has undertaken a number of expeditions to survey the birds and other wildlife of previously unexplored regions throughout New Guinea (largely together with Jared Diamond) and the Oriental Region. This has resulted in a number of exciting discoveries and rediscoveries including the incomparable Wallace's Standardwing, a bizarre bird-of-paradise. Some of the results of this work, together with observations gained during the VENT tours he leads, have been published in the scientific and semi-popular literature to which David is a regular contributor. In July 1997, David, together with Brian Coates, published *A Guide to the Birds of Wallacea (Sulawesi, the Moluccas, and Lesser Sundas)*, and David is currently working on other book projects. David lives with his wife Linda in the attractive university town of Armidale, NSW, Australia.

**Erik Forsyth** originally hails from Scotland, but lived in South Africa for the past 30 years. During this period he became one of the region's most experienced birders. He has recently relocated to New Zealand. His knowledge of the birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians of Africa and Madagascar is tremendous, and he has a wonderful gift for sharing his enthusiasm and knowledge. His expertise is backed up by a three-year Nature Conservation Qualification, as well as several years of hands-on conservation experience at various National and Regional game reserves in South Africa. Erik has birded extensively throughout Africa, Western Europe, and Tropical Asia. He has also worked as a birding guide at several prestigious lodges in South Africa and is a part-time guide for Rockjumper Birding Tours.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for **Egypt** is **\$7,295** per person in double occupancy. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 2 (September 27) to dinner on Day 18 (October 13); all lodging as stated in the itinerary; ground transportation; internal commercial airfare; guide services provided by the tour leaders and local guides (includes gratuities for local guides); and entrance fees. The tour fee does not include international airfare from your home to Cairo and return; medical evacuation insurance (required); transfers or accommodation other than those mentioned in the itinerary; alcoholic beverages; special gratuities; departure taxes; phone calls; laundry; or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the group does not have sufficient registration a small party supplement may be applied.

The single supplement for **Egypt** is **\$900**. 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. Single accommodations cannot be guaranteed at every location on the tour.

The fee for **Petra Extension** is **\$2,295** per person in double occupancy. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 1 (October 14) to dinner on Day 3 (October 16); all lodging as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation, guide services provided by the tour leader and local guides (includes gratuities for local guides); and entrance fees. The tour fee includes one way international airfare to Amman\*. The tour fee does not include medical evacuation insurance (required); transfers or accommodation other than those mentioned in the itinerary; alcoholic beverages; special gratuities; departure taxes; phone calls; laundry; or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the group does not have sufficient registration a small party supplement may be applied.

\*Please Note: The international one way flight between Cairo and Aman is included in the price of the tour. As of January 25, 2010 the cost of the flight is approximately \$350 per person. However, please note that airfares are subject to change without notice until the time of ticketing. Victor Emanuel Nature Tours reserves the right to assess a surcharge in the event of air cost increases.

The single supplement for **Petra Extension** is **\$200**. 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. Single accommodations are limited at many facilities.

**TOUR REGISTRATION:** To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person for the main tour, and **\$500** per person for the extension. 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 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.

**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 INSURANCE:** Application forms 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 to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. 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. Contact the VENT office prior to registration for details.

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

**IMPORTANT NOTE: Medical Insurance which covers you for emergency evacuation/repatriation during the voyage is MANDATORY for participation in this cruise. A good website for information and acquisition of both Trip cancellation insurance as well as Emergency Evacuation/repatriation insurance is: [www.insuremytrip.com](http://www.insuremytrip.com).**

**AIR INFORMATION:** Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of VENT. Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to assist you in making air arrangements. Airline tickets carry restrictions due to the airfare used. You may find that your ticket cannot be reissued or exchanged for another air carrier or routing. Cancellation penalties and change fees may be assessed for any changes to the ticket. These charges are solely your responsibility. First and business class travel may be available on some flights. **All requests for travel assistance (air tickets, additional hotels, etc.) must be received no later than 60 days prior to departure date. Within 60 days, arrangements must be made on your own.**

**CONDITIONS:**

**Accommodations** - All accommodations will be very comfortable and attractive, with many places we stay considered luxurious.

**Degree of difficulty (How tough is it?)** – This tour is not a strenuous one, but a fair amount of general walking is required; in a number of places we will walk on flat, stony desert and up rocky valleys. Some of our guided tours of the antiquities will be lengthy, which some people may find more tiring than other activities.

**Itinerary** - This tour (including extension) has been carefully crafted so as to avoid, wherever possible, long and uncomfortable drives. The itinerary includes three full days in Cairo to allow plenty of time for exploring the fabulous antiquities in and around the city, including the Egyptian Museum; in addition to permitting plenty of time for shopping as well as birding. Travel will be by air, riverboat (Nile), and land (bus and four-wheel-drive vehicles).

**OTHER INFORMATION:**

- It is important to be aware that it can get quite hot in the far south of the country, where temperatures could reach around 110° Fahrenheit. Since we do not have any strenuous walks on this tour, it is however quite manageable.
- Most of the historic sites we will visit on this tour are extremely popular tourist attractions. We will undoubtedly be sharing each of these areas with multitudes of other people, so patience will be required at times.
- There will be many times at all historical sites when many tourist police will clearly be visible; we will also be escorted by armed guards during some parts of the tour.
- Bottled water will be available at all times during the tour.

**CLIMATE:** It is generally warm to hot and dry in Egypt. Temperatures range from lows of 50-60°F at night, to daytime highs of 70-100°F. Temperatures are likely to be highest in the far south of the country and could reach up to 110° F. Rain is unlikely. Most days are hot and sunny, but periods of cloudiness can occur with the passage of frontal systems.

**CLOTHING:** Light, loose, comfortable cotton clothing that will protect you from the sun is the order of the day. Light, but sturdy walking boots should cover all eventualities. Egypt and Jordan are Islamic countries. While generally more moderate than other Middle Eastern countries, it is expected that both men and women dress conservatively. A light head-scarf for women may be appreciated. A hat and sunglasses will be useful at all times.

**LAUNDRY:** Laundry is available at all of the hotels we stay on a 24-hour basis. If necessary, laundry can be done in just a few hours or less!

**CURRENCY & MONEY MATTERS:** Your trip to Egypt (and Jordan) includes all necessary expenses—accommodations, meals, transportation, and guide services. You may want to bring enough cash to cover such extra expenses as gifts, laundry, gratuities, and items of a personal nature. While some people may choose to obtain local currency, the reality is that American dollars are often preferred (although change may be returned in

local currency). Most credit cards are widely accepted. ATM machines are readily available in Cairo and some of the hotels will exchange currency. It is best to convert larger sums of cash at an exchange before entering Egypt.

Should you extend your vacation in either Cairo or Amman beyond what is offered in the tour program, you'll want to consider obtaining at least some local currency. Please check with your bank and credit card provider for more information regarding banking and the use of ATM and credit cards overseas.

The official currency of Egypt is the Pound (EGP); the official currency of Jordan is the Dinar (JOD).

As of January 20, 2010, the conversion rate is:

1 US Dollar = 5.438 Egypt Pounds

1 US Dollar = 0.707 Jordan Dinars

## **PASSPORTS AND DOCUMENTS:**

### ***PASSPORTS***

A valid passport is required. Please check the expiration date on your passport. **If it is not valid for at least six months after your trip return date, you will need to get it renewed.** You will also want to make sure that you have at least two blank pages in your passport for stamps.

If you need a passport, you should get it well in advance of your trip departure date. For additional fees, a passport can be issued on an expedited basis. In the United States this can be done at the nearest passport office, most post offices, or the county clerk's office. You may also visit [www.state.gov/travel/](http://www.state.gov/travel/) for information on how to get or renew a passport.

As a safety measure, photocopy the first two pages of your passport. Keep the photocopies in a safe place, so if your passport is lost you will have proof of identification. Your passport should be signed and easily available at all times. You will need it for check-in at the airport on your first day of departure, so **do not pack it in your checked luggage.**

### ***VISAS***

Citizens of the United States and Canada will need to obtain a tourist visa to enter Egypt. Officially it is recommended that you obtain a visa before you travel, but most regular visitors to Egypt who arrive by air find it quicker and easier to pick up a visa on arrival at the airport. A 30-day tourist visa costs \$15.

To acquire your visa ahead of time (recommended), please contact the Egyptian embassy or a visa procurement service. We recommend Pinnacle Travel Document Systems ([www.traveldocs.com](http://www.traveldocs.com) on the web or 888-838-4867 by phone), a company which handles visa procurement.

Citizens of the United States and Canada need to have a tourist visa to enter Jordan. Visas are granted upon arrival into Jordan and are valid for 30 days.

Visa requirements can change without notice, and you should check the latest requirements as far in advance as possible in order to allow time to obtain a visa in your home country should that be necessary.

Americans can check [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1108.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1108.html).

Canadians can check [www.voyage.gc.ca/dest/report-en.asp?country=79000#4](http://www.voyage.gc.ca/dest/report-en.asp?country=79000#4).

Rules and regulations pertaining to non-U.S. citizens may vary; please check with the consulates or embassies of Egypt and Jordan.

**EQUIPMENT:** You should pack a pair of binoculars that are in good repair, along with a belt pack or day pack (good for carrying books, sunscreen, hats, film, etc.). **Your leaders will have spotting scopes available for group**

**use, but if you have one and wish to bring it, we strongly recommend you do so.** Personal items (toothpaste, soap, deodorant, and cosmetics) can be purchased in country, but it is simpler to bring your own supply. Bring a small amount of insect repellent (preferably pump-style or stick) – we do not anticipate many mosquitoes, but some damper and marshy areas may host a few. Bring a lightweight, super-absorbent, microfiber, quick-drying camping towel for times when we are snorkeling. A couple of packets of moist towelettes and/or hand-cleanser can be a pleasant way of keeping refreshed and clean en route—especially useful are the antiseptic type—useful for hand-washing prior to meals, etc. Sunscreen is a must; and a small flashlight is always useful. There are some sensational photo opportunities for those who enjoy scenic photography. Bring plenty of film or digital flash-drives, and please ensure you have batteries and a reliable means to recharge and store images. Also ensure you have the appropriate adaptor plug.

**HEALTH:** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases, including:

- The so-called **Routine Vaccinations** (if you are not up-to-date), which are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine; diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine; and poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers who have received a primary series with either inactivated poliovirus vaccine (IPV) or oral polio vaccine (OPV); they should receive another dose of IPV before departure).
- **Hepatitis A** or Immune Globulin (IG)
- **Hepatitis B**
- **Typhoid**

**Please consult your physician well in advance of the tour for advice about these and other health precautions, and visit the website of the World Health Organization (WHO) or CDC for updates.**

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.

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).

**MISCELLANEOUS:**

- Departure Tax – none.
- Electricity - 220V AC, 50 Hz, except around Cairo which have currents of 110V, 50 Hz. Wall sockets are the round two-pin European type.
- Language – Arabic
- Time – Two hours ahead of GMT/ UTC and 7 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST).

**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.AndrewIsles.com](http://www.AndrewIsles.com)), [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.

***Most Recommended:***

Svenson, Lars, Peter J. Grant, Killian Mullarney, and Dan Zetterstrom. *Birds of Europe*. Princeton University Press, March 2000.

**This is the best of the Europe/Middle East/North African field guides and covers most, if not all, of the species we will encounter. It has the most up-to-date taxonomy, identification detail, and illustrations than other guides and has received excellent/rave reviews.**

***Others:***

Porter, Richard, Lars, S. Christensen, and P. Sciermacker-Hansen. *Field Guide to the Birds of the Middle East*. Helm. 2004.

**This is another very well-illustrated, up to date guide that includes many of the species we may encounter in the region (Middle East).**

Hoath, Richard. *A Field Guide to the Mammals of Egypt*. American University in Cairo Press 2003.

***Travel:***

Firestone, M. D., et al. *Egypt*. Lonely Planet Guide. Victoria, Australia. 2008

**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 January 25, 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.