

**GREECE: BIRDS & HISTORY:
A CIRCUMNAVIGATION OF
THE PELOPONNESE
Aboard the 49-passenger M/S *Galileo*
SEPTEMBER 1-10, 2010**

**ATHENS PRE-TRIP
AUGUST 30-SEPTEMBER 2, 2010**

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Splayed like the great hand of Poseidon, Greece's multi-fingered Peloponnesian Peninsula thrusts south into the navy-blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea. Here, where southeastern Europe reaches its terminus at the doorsteps of Asia and Africa is a landscape seemingly bathed in endless light where hills of jumbled limestone, vast fertile plains, and ancient olive groves forever engender the irresistible allure of Greece.

This September, VENT is returning to Greece for a fabulous birds and history cruise. The event, a Circumnavigation of the Peloponnese, will delve into the country's illustrious history and culture while seeking many of the region's special resident and migrant birds. We have chartered the M/S Galileo, a superb three-masted sail cruiser, for a trip offering an abundance of beautiful scenery; visits to timeless archaeological sites and extraordinary museums; historical interpretation; remarkably good birding; and cruising along the dramatic Greek coastline. An optional pre-trip to the Athens area promises a wonderful addition to the cruise program for a more complete Greece experience.

While the white walled, red-tiled roofs of the tourist friendly Aegean islands figure preeminently in the minds of many visitors, it is the Peloponnesian Peninsula and nearby Athens where the heart of Ancient Greece lies. From this largely rugged terrain inhabited by ancient peoples, came words and thoughts never before conceived, ideas that together formed the basis for the development of western civilization. History, drama, politics, philosophy, and athletics all made their debut here. Characterizing the varied country are the names of the city states which competed for dominance in this region between 2,200 and 3,500 years ago: Mycenae, Argos, Corinth, Sparta, and, certainly, Athens. Here also are Delphi, Olympia, and Epidaurus—places eternally linked with the ancient Greeks and the gods they worshipped.

In undertaking a complete circuit of the Peloponnese, our ambitious itinerary includes excursions to some of the most famous and important sites in the ancient Greek world, many of which are situated in pastoral settings and hold tantalizing birding possibilities. Among the places we'll visit are:

- *Epidaurus – containing a near-perfectly preserved 2,400 year-old theater and the remains of the ancient Asclepieion, the greatest center of healing in the Greek classical world.*
- *Mycenae – seat of power of a mighty state in the second millennium B.C. and governed by kings whose genealogy exists in an inextricably linked swirl of mythology and fact; the renown of the archaeological site was forever sealed by Homer, who vividly described the citadel and its most famous inhabitant, King Agamemnon, during the time of the Trojan War.*
- *Nestor’s Palace – a small site belonging to Nestor, king of Pylos, during the time of the Trojan War.*
- *Olympia – the most revered panhellenic sanctuary of ancient Greece, dedicated to worship of Zeus, is best known as the birthplace of the Olympic Games.*
- *Delphi – set amid marvelous natural scenery, it was first among all classical sites in reputation and wealth; home of the legendary Delphic Oracle and greatest place of worship of the god Apollo.*

Our time at each of the archaeological sites and at Dinari Lagoon should produce an impressive assortment of migrant and resident birds. Among the possibilities are a range of Eurasian shorebirds, herons, flycatchers, swifts, tits, wheatears, wagtails, shrikes, warblers, buntings, and more. Little Ringed Plover, Common Redshank, Short-toed Eagle, Alpine Swift, Spotted Flycatcher, Pied Flycatcher, Long-tailed Tit, Black-eared Wheatear, Blue Rock-Thrush, Western Rock-Nuthatch, Red-backed Shrike, and Cirl Bunting are all species we have a good chance of finding. While at sea, careful watching from the ship’s viewing decks may present opportunities to see a variety of southeastern Europe’s special birds, including Cory’s and Levantine shearwaters; Eleonora’s Falcon; and Yellow-legged and Audouin’s gulls.

For added measure, the trip will begin with visits to the highly regarded new Acropolis Museum, and the famed National Archaeological Museum of Greece. We will have parts of two days to explore the rooms and galleries at each site and behold some of the world’s greatest treasures dating from antiquity.

Joining the VENT staff for this special departure is Dr. Paul Woodruff, professor of philosophy and classics at the University of Texas, and an expert on ancient Greece. Paul’s specialty is Plato, whose works he has translated, in addition to those by Sophocles and Euripides. He is well-versed in all aspects of the history and culture of ancient Greece and will present a series of lectures that incorporate the dominant themes of ancient Greek civilization, namely history, philosophy, and theater.

As Greece is an extraordinary destination, we are confident that the multi-thematic approach embodied in this program will provide a rewarding and memorable trip. It is an ideal choice for those who desire a travel experience that includes more than natural history. Conditions aboard Galileo are very comfortable, featuring outside cabins with lower beds, private bathroom facilities, and individual temperature controls. The public areas include a spacious Lounge, located on the

main deck, with large windows for optimal viewing; an ample Sun Deck equipped with deckchairs; a shaded outdoor deck; and outdoor bar. Internet and email service are available.

The optional Athens Pre-trip incorporates visitation to the Acropolis and the Agora, the two monumental sites that reached their zenith during the Classical era. Birding trips to nearby Mt. Parnitha and to the coast near Marathon, round out a marvelous two full days in the Greek capital.

ATHENS PRE-TRIP

AUGUST 30-SEPTEMBER 2, 2010

This optional two-day pre-trip to Greece's capital city provides an excellent complement to our ship-based exploration of the Peloponnese. While Athens today is clearly Greece's largest and most important city, it was also the wealthiest and most influential city state in Classical times (4th-5th centuries B.C.).

Our program combines visits to two of the country's most important and revered archaeological sites with two half-day birding field trips to destinations north and east of the city respectively.

For first time visitors, a trip to Athens is highlighted by the pilgrimage to the Acropolis, the most instantly recognizable landmark in Greece. We will spend our first afternoon at the ancient hilltop citadel meandering among the remains of the magnificent structures for which the site is so justly famous. A guided interpreted walk will focus on the timeless monuments constructed to honor the Olympian gods worshipped by the ancient Greeks. Our tour will also incorporate a visit to the Theater of Dionysus Eleutheris, which is considered the first theater in Greece. On our second afternoon we'll make our way to the Agora, the primary site of public assembly in ancient Athens and the center of administrative, judicial, and social activity during the Classical era, including during the times of Socrates and Plato.

Complementing our focus on the remarkable historical sites, we'll travel away from the city on two consecutive mornings in pursuit of Greece's varied birdlife. Our first morning out will see us moving northeast of the city to the vicinity of Marathon to visit a low-lying coastal area in search of waterbirds and dry-country landbirds. Little Egret; Gray Heron; Common Buzzard; Eurasian Kestrel; Black-winged Stilt; Little Ringed and Common Ringed plovers; Common Redshank; Curlew Sandpiper; Little Stint; Common Sandpiper; Ruff; Yellow-legged Gull; and European Bee-eater are all species that occur in the region. An added bonus is a visit to the famous site where the Athenian army defeated the Persians at the Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C.

On our final morning we will head due north from Athens to the slopes of Mt. Parnitha, a 5,000 ft. mountain with national park designation, in search of resident and migrant landbirds. Among the possibilities are Alpine and Common swifts; House Martin; Blue and Great tits; Blue Rock-Thrush; Whinchat; Blackcap; Willow and Sardinian warblers; and European Greenfinch.

August 30, Day 1: International flight to Athens, Greece. Flights from the United States bound for Athens depart on August 30 and arrive on the morning of August 31.

NIGHT: Aboard aircraft in transit to Athens

August 31, Day 2: Arrival in Athens; transfer to hotel; afternoon tours of Acropolis and Theatre of Dionysus Eleutheris. Participants traveling aboard international flights will arrive in Athens this morning. Upon arrival you will be met outside the baggage claim by a representative of our ground agent and transferred to the Divani Hotel where a room has been reserved in your name. You will have time to check-in and freshen up before we convene for lunch in the hotel restaurant.

We will gather in the hotel lobby in the early- to mid-afternoon for a brief introduction and welcome followed by our first activity! The Divani lies only minutes from the Acropolis, the landmark that for many is the face of Greece. We will make the short ride to the entrance gate where we will meet the local guide who, along with Dr. Woodruff, will give an in-depth interpretive tour of the most famous archaeological site dating from ancient Greece's Classical period.

Although the term Acropolis literally means fortified height, or fortified raised citadel of an ancient Greek city, the Acropolis of Athens is so monumental, and so well known the world over, that its name carries a singularity that generally requires no further explanation. Rising nearly 500 feet above sea level and flat topped, with commanding views in all directions, it is small wonder that the Greeks located their iconic monuments to the gods here.

Archaeological evidence indicates that the site was inhabited remarkably early, by the 6th millennium B.C., but it wasn't until Mycenaean times (1600-1100 B.C.) that the first structures of considerable size were erected, though only scant evidence of the early buildings remains. Little is known of what the Acropolis looked like until the arrival of the Archaic period (7th-6th centuries B.C.). This was a time of unrest for the Athens city state as political instability, marked by uprisings and coups, allowed for control of the region to change hands on a number of occasions. A series of temples was built at the site, one after another through the period, and it is likely that most of these temples were dismantled as newer and grander designs took their place, including some apparently unique forms that appeared in the middle and late 6th century.

The late 6th-century marks the start of the Classical period, a time when the last Athenian tyrant was deposed and Greek culture began to flourish. Following the Greek victory over the Persians at Marathon in 490 B.C., the first Parthenon was partially constructed on the site before the Persians returned in 480 B.C., overran much of Greece, and sacked and burned the Acropolis.

Under the leadership of Pericles (statesman, orator and general), during the so-called Golden Age of Athens (460-430 B.C.), the hilltop was cleared of debris, the temples rebuilt, and the Acropolis, as we know it today, took its final shape. Ictinus and Callicrates, two of the best known architects from the time, along with the great sculptor Phidias, designed and shaped the temples and their friezes using the beautiful Pentelic and Parian marbles that we identify so readily with the gleaming temples and peerless statuary from the Classical period.

While the main buildings are in various stages of decay and restoration, all are protected by law. We will take a guided interpretive tour of the site and hear of the history of the construction of the buildings as they relate to the history of the period and the Olympian gods to whom they were dedicated. Meandering among the columns and pediments that remain as vestiges from antiquity allows one to fully appreciate the creative power of the ancient Greeks.

The four structures that comprised the bulk of the Acropolis were the Parthenon, Athena Nike, Propylae, and Erechtheum, constructed in that order.

In their time, the collective sight of the buildings of the Acropolis must have presented a breathtaking site, yet today, without question, it is the Parthenon, with its massive foundation and towering Doric columns, that remains the enduring emblem of Athenian democracy.

Remarkably, the Acropolis is a wonderful place to view Alpine and Common swifts in the late afternoon before they come in to roost for the night in the ruins complex.

Descending the south face of the Acropolis, we will dedicate the final hour of the day to visit the ancient theater of Dionysus Eleutheris. Considered the oldest theater in Greece, it is believed constructed around 500 B.C. and dedicated to Dionysus, the god of wine, festival, and fertility. The theater is known to have hosted dramas and tragedies from the leading Greek playwrights of 5th-century Athens, including Sophocles, Euripides, and Aeschylus.

This evening we will have dinner in the open-air restaurant atop the hotel, where we should have unobstructed views of the Acropolis.

NIGHT: Divani Hotel Acropolis, Athens

September 1, Day 3: Morning birding and history excursion to Marathon; afternoon tour of Agora. This morning we will depart the hotel for Marathon, located approximately 26-miles to the northeast of Athens. Our destination is a small area of wetlands, canals, ditches, and rocky hillsides where a variety of waterbirds and landbirds can often be found. The numbers of birds and diversity of species is always difficult to predict at this site as everything depends on the amount of water present. This is a small, but potentially important site for southbound migrant shorebirds and waders.

If we find areas of standing water or shallow ditches, we could find up to 10 species of shorebirds including Black-winged Stilt, Little Ringed Plover, Common Ringed Plover; Ruff, Little Stint, Common Redshank, Marsh Sandpiper, and Common Greenshank. Such waders as Gray Heron, Little Egret, and even Eurasian Spoonbill are possible as well. A check of the surrounding rocky hillsides may reveal Eurasian Kestrel; Western Rock Nuthatch, Red-backed and Masked shrikes; Crested Lark, Willow Warbler, and migrating groups of buntings.

On the return to Athens we will stop at the site of the great Battle of Marathon, where an army of 10,000 hoplite warriors, under the command of Miltiades, decisively defeated an army of 20,000 Persians under the rule of king Darius the Great. In the aftermath of victory was born the marathon. According to the often recited legend, the Athenian messenger, Pheidippides, ran the entire 26 miles back to Athens without stopping to inform the assembly of the sensational victory, before promptly dropping dead. Though the legend is very much in doubt among historians, it is a great story that ultimately led to the marathon's inclusion as an event in the first modern Olympics in 1896.

We will return to Athens for lunch, but rather than eating at the hotel, we will be dropped off at the Placa (an area of shops and restaurants around the Acropolis), where you may choose a restaurant of your choice. Please note that lunch is on your own today and is not covered in the tour fee.

In the afternoon we will journey a short distance to an area northwest of the Acropolis for a visit to the famed Agora of Athens. A central component to the Greek city state, the agora, or "public assembly place" appeared possibly as early as 900 B.C. The agora was the place where people gathered to hear public announcements by a king or council, or for men to conduct military business. In Athens, the agora actually served as a marketplace and a place of residence before these practices were ended in the 6th-century B.C.

It was during the Golden Age, under Pericles, when the agora reached its zenith, reflecting the maturation of Athenian democracy and the cultural emphasis on government, politics, debate, current events, and philosophy. It was during this period when the site was beautified with trees, fountains, an advanced drainage system, and

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temples of Pentelic marble erected in honor of the Olympian gods. We will have the remainder of the afternoon to explore the grounds with our local guide, who will provide interpretation of the rich historical and cultural significance of the site. For many, the highlight is seeing the Temple of Hephaestus (Hephaestion). One of the largest and best preserved of ancient Greek temples, this structure was built to honor Hephaestus (god of metal working) and Athena Ergane (goddess of pottery and crafts). It was designed of Pentellic marble and supported by a network of 34 fluted colonnades in the conservative Doric style. This site is decorated with the ruins of other buildings, some remarkably intact, that were constructed for administrative or legal purposes or to honor other gods of the ancient Greek tradition.

The trees and gardens adorning the property are the continuance of a tradition established more than 2,500 years ago. Here, in this lush sanctuary it is easy to imagine oneself walking in the footsteps of Socrates and Plato. It is also easy to see birds here and our tour of the archaeological site is paced slow enough to allow ourselves the distraction of birding the verdant grounds. As the city around us holds little sanctuary for migrating birds, the grounds of the agora are an oasis of sorts where almost anything is possible. A good representation of the many possibilities includes House Martin, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Eurasian Jay, Spotted Flycatcher, Eurasian Hoopoe, Eurasian Blackbird, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Sardinian Warbler, Willow Warbler, Blackcap, European Greenfinch, and European Goldfinch.

We will have dinner at a nearby restaurant offering rooftop dining and fine views of the Acropolis by night.

NIGHT: Divani Hotel Acropolis, Athens

September 2, Day 4: Morning birding trip to Mt. Parnitha. Our pre-trip continues this morning with a birding trip to Mt. Parnitha, a national park situated about an hour north of Athens. Until a few years ago, the park held dense forests of Aleppo pine and Greek fir, but a devastating wildfire in the summer of 2007 charred most of the mature trees, permanently altering the montane ecosystem. Despite the loss of the park's coniferous trees, there are still a number of areas of undamaged grassland and dense shrubbery and we will spend the morning looking for birds in such places.

September marks the onset of hawk migration, and the excellent views enjoyed from the mountain slopes may reveal Short-toed and Lesser Spotted eagles; Common Buzzard, Western Honey Buzzard; and Eurasian Sparrowhawk. In more bare areas we will watch for Eurasian Magpie; Western Rock Nuthatch; Blue Rock Thrush; Northern Wheatear; Whinchat; and Masked and Red-backed shrikes; Common Chaffinch; and Cirl Bunting.

Back in Athens, the pre-trip concludes with lunch at the hotel.

NIGHT: Divani Hotel Acropolis, Athens

GREECE: BIRDS & HISTORY: SEPTEMBER 1-10, 2010

September 1, Day 1: International flight to Athens, Greece. Flights from the United States bound for Athens depart on September 1 and arrive on the morning of September 2.

NIGHT: Aboard aircraft in transit to Athens

September 2, Day 2: Morning arrival in Athens; afternoon at National Archaeological Museum.

Participants traveling aboard international flights should arrive in Athens this morning. Upon arrival you will be met outside the baggage claim by a representative of our ground agent and transferred to the Divani Hotel where a room has been reserved in your name. You will have time to check-in and freshen up before we convene for lunch in the hotel restaurant.

We will gather in the hotel lobby soon after lunch for a brief introduction and welcome followed by a visit to the National Archaeological Museum. The National Archaeological Museum of Athens is certainly one of the great museums of the world, housing an extraordinary collection of art and artifacts from the ancient Greek world.

Among the many treasures is the “mask of Agamemnon” which was discovered at Mycenae by Heinrich Schliemann, the discoverer of the site of Troy. As it turned out the golden death mask turned out to be from an earlier period and thus was not the death mask of Agamemnon, although it remains a beautiful object of inestimable value.

The museum contains examples of ancient Greek sculptures in marble and bronze from the Archaic (700-800 B.C.), Classical (480-338 B.C.), Hellenistic (338-146 B.C.), and Roman periods (146 BC-330 A.D.), along with breathtaking examples of pottery, figurines, weapons, and other artifacts dating from antiquity.

Our time in this marvelous museum will provide a perfect introduction to the ancient Greek world. We will have the remainder of the day to wander the many galleries, rooms, halls, and chambers that provide powerful insight into one of history’s greatest, and most important, civilizations.

We will return to the hotel in the late afternoon to freshen up. We’ll reconvene at 7:00 p.m. for dinner.

NIGHT: Divani Hotel Acropolis, Athens

September 3, Day 3: Morning at Acropolis Museum; afternoon embarkation of Galileo; cruise to

Epidavros. After breakfast we will be transferred to the New Acropolis Museum. This stunning museum, thirty years in the planning, opened in early 2009. It is located at the foot of the famed Acropolis and houses thousands of ancient works and artifacts recovered from the ancient hilltop site.

Briefly, by the 1970s the existing museum, situated just southeast of the Parthenon could no longer adequately accommodate the large numbers of visitors passing through its doors. The museum’s comparatively small space caused problems associated with overcrowding, and reduced the dramatic effect of seeing the ancient masterpieces and artifacts. Further, the museum was unable to handle the sheer number of sculptures and other famous findings from the Acropolis. By necessity many of the pieces were not even on display.

Interestingly, while plans for a new museum were first announced in the 1970s, the discovery of a large urban settlement (Makryianni site) dating from Archaic to Early Christian Athens was discovered at the selected construction site and the entire project was put on hold. It was agreed upon that the discovery needed to be integrated into the New Museum, and the design of the New Museum of the Acropolis was subsequently awarded to American architect, Bernard Tschumi, working in collaboration with Greece’s, Michaelis Fotiadis. Its construction cost approximately \$400 million dollars.

Since its opening, the building has been hailed as an outstanding contribution to the historical and cultural attributes of Athens. Because of its spaciousness and large glass windows, the exquisite sculptures and other carvings can be viewed in natural light without the claustrophobic atmosphere of its antiquated predecessor.

As a significant side note, part of the appeal of a new museum stemmed from Greece’s undeniable desire to recover the Elgin Marbles. From 1801-1812, Lord Elgin, with permission from the Ottoman rulers of Greece,

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removed intact architectural sculptures and inscriptions from the Parthenon and had them shipped to England. The marbles are currently on display in the British Museum.

After a morning-long tour of the museum, we will travel a short distance to the port town of Piraeus. We will have a lunch at a seaside restaurant before boarding *Gallileo* in the afternoon.

Once aboard, we will spend time settling into our staterooms and attending mandatory orientation and safety drills. Toward mid-afternoon we will depart Piraeus for the three-hour crossing of the Saronic Gulf en route to the Peloponnese. We expect a lovely crossing with delightful views of the Greek coastline and nearby islands. Yellow-legged Gulls should be in evidence around the ship and we may even see our first Cory's Shearwaters.

Our arrival at Epidavros Bay on the northeast coast of the Peloponnesian Peninsula is timed for the early evening. Densely vegetated limestone hills protect the bay on three sides, creating a tranquil and scenic setting.

NIGHT: Aboard *Galileo*, Epidavros Bay

September 4, Day 4: Morning excursion to Epidaurus (archaeological site and museum); afternoon cruising to Nafplio. We will disembark the ship after breakfast and travel by bus to the ancient site of Epidaurus.

The ancient site of Epidaurus was independent of Argos (adjacent city state) and not included in Argolis (today, one of 51 Greek prefectures that in ancient times was defined as a collection of city states that had grown up around the vast, fertile Argolid plain) until the time of the Romans. With its supporting territory, it formed the small region called Epidauria. Reputed to be the birthplace of Apollo's son Asclepius, the healer, Epidaurus was known throughout the Greek world as a healing sanctuary and for its theater, which is once again in use today.

The Asclepieion at Epidaurus was the most celebrated healing center of the Classical world, the place where ill people went in the hope of being cured. To find the right cure for their ailments, "patients" spent a night in the enkoimitoria, a big sleeping hall. In their dreams, the god himself would advise them what they had to do to regain their health. Found in the sanctuary was a guest house for 160 guestrooms, which spoke to size of the structure.

Asclepius, the most important healer god of antiquity, brought prosperity to the sanctuary. In the 4th and 3rd centuries B.C., an ambitious building program commenced for enlarging and reconstructing the original monumental buildings. Fame and prosperity continued throughout the Hellenistic period until the arrival of the Romans. In 87 B.C. the sanctuary was looted by the Roman general Sulla, and in 67 B.C., it was plundered by pirates. In the 2nd century A.D., the sanctuary enjoyed a new upsurge under the Romans, but in 395 A.D. a Gothic invasion largely destroyed the place. Today, the expansive site lies mostly in ruins, yet it is easy to appreciate the ingenuity and intelligence of the people that built these once grand edifices.

The prosperity brought by the Asklepieion enabled the residents of Epidaurus to construct civic monuments, including a huge theater (approximately 300 B.C.) renowned for its symmetry and beauty. The theater was designed by Polykleitos the Younger in the 4th century B.C. The original 34 rows were extended in Roman times by another 21 rows. As is typical of Greek theaters, the view of a verdant landscape beyond the stage is an essential aspect of the theater design. When full, the theatre seats up to 15,000 people.

As it did during the time of the ancient Greeks, the theater is still marveled for its exceptional acoustics, which permit almost perfect perception of spoken words from the stage floor to all spectators, regardless of their seating. Tour guides demonstrate the acoustical perfection of the theater using different means, such as singing a song or even striking a match, whereby anyone seated anywhere in the theater can easily hear the sounds.

As the archaeological site sits in a natural setting, we expect to find a number of interesting migrant and resident bird species in adjacent groves of pine and oak. Among the possibilities are Eurasian Collared-Dove; Wood Pigeon; Eurasian Kestrel; Blue and Great tits; Spotted and Pied flycatchers; Eurasian Magpie; Willow Warbler, Common Chaffinch, and European Goldfinch.

After a full morning at Epidaurus we will return to *Galileo* for lunch. We will spend the afternoon cruising to Nafplio. Our route takes us all the way around the “Argolid” Peninsula in what should be an incredibly scenic journey. The birding will probably be light, with little more than Yellow-legged Gulls for travel companions, but this afternoon, and almost any time we are at sea, we have chances of encountering the Eleonora’s Falcon. Eleonora’s Falcon is a dazzling predator that occupies seaside cliffs and islands of the Mediterranean Sea. As the species preys primarily on birds, its nesting season coincides with the autumn migration period, when landbirds and shorebirds are pouring south from their European breeding ranges to their African wintering grounds. The falcons, spectacular fliers and adept aerial hunters, are constantly on the watch for their unsuspecting prey as they fly over open water and along the coastline. It is difficult to predict our chances of encountering this special bird, but we will make every effort to do so.

Nafplio is a well preserved old town stemming from an ancient Greek settlement. Situated at the head of the Argolic Gulf it contains neoclassical architecture, pedestrian-friendly marble streets, and a spectacular island-fortress dating from the second Venetian occupation of 1686-1715. It was a key site in the struggle between the Ottomans and the Venetians from the 15th century onward. After Greece became independent in 1829, Nafplio served as its first capitol.

We expect to dock in Nafplio in the evening after dinner. Anyone who wishes may disembark and explore the town.

NIGHT: Aboard *Galileo*, Navplio

September 5, Day 5: Morning excursion to Mycenae (archaeological site and museum); afternoon cruising to Monemvasia; evening in Monemvasia. We will disembark after breakfast and travel to the ancient site of Mycenae. For anyone interested in ancient Greece, especially those who have read *The Iliad*, the chance to see the site where King Agamemnon lived and died and where the Trojan War began is very thrilling indeed. Surely today will be one of the high points of our time in the Peloponnese. Mycenae is one of the most renowned sites in the ancient world and was a tourist destination even in Roman times!

Mycenae is a particularly ancient site with roots dating to the Neolithic age (early 3rd millennium at least). In the second millennium B.C. (Bronze Age or Helladic periods) Mycenae was one of the major centers of Greek civilization, a military city state which dominated much of southern Greece. The period of history from about 1600 B.C. to about 1100 B.C. is called Mycenaean in reference to Mycenae, the period when Mycenaean power and influence reached its zenith.

It is believed that the earliest Mycenaens were Indo-European settlers who practiced farming and herding. At that time the dominant power in the ancient Greek world rested with the Minoans, who, on their island city state of Crete, developed a very complex civilization that interacted with Mycenae.

The decline of the Minoan civilization more or less corresponded to the rise of that of Mycenae. At its peak, the Mycenaean civilization controlled much of southern Greece. It dominated trade routes, possessed some of the finest military might, served as the seat of government for much of Argolis (eastern Peloponnese), forged critical alliances with other city states, and contained much of the wealth. By 1200 B.C., however, the power of Mycenae was declining. Challenges to its dominance over Argolis arose from such nearby civilizations at Argos, Tiryns, Nauplion (Nafplio), and other powerful Greek city states such as Sparta. With its lines of great kings ended, trade lines cut, catastrophic fires destroying parts of the city, and invading forces to contend with, Mycenae collapsed as Greece’s most powerful civilization. Although nothing like its former self, the site

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remained inhabited beyond the end of the Bronze Age all the way into the early Classic Period (480s B.C.). Mycenaeans even participated in the Persian Wars of the early 5th century B.C.

With all things concerning ancient Greece, history and mythology are inevitably intertwined. In the case of Mycenae, much of the history surrounding the place is defined by internecine power struggles, vengeance, assassination, and even interference by the gods.

A perfect example is the story of the Atreid dynasty. According to the legend, the most famous rulers of Mycenae were kings of the Atreid dynasty. The people of Mycenae had received advice from an oracle that they should choose a new king from among the Pelopids. The two contenders were Atreus and his brother, Thyestes. The latter was chosen at first. At this moment nature intervened. The sun appeared to reverse direction and set in the east. Because the sun had reversed direction, the argument was made that the election of Thyestes should be reversed. Atreus subsequently became king. His first move was to pursue Thyestes and all his family, but Thyestes managed to escape Mycenae.

Atreus went on to sire two sons, Agamemnon and Menelaus, who would later cement their fame in the Trojan War. Aegisthus, the son of Thyestes, killed Atreus and restored his father to the throne. With the help of King Tyndareus of Sparta, the sons of Atreus forced Thyestes from the throne. For his part, Tyndareus had two daughters, Helen and Clytemnestra, whom Menelaus and Agamemnon married, respectively. Agamemnon inherited Mycenae and Menelaus became king in Sparta.

Continuing with the famous Homeric tale of the Trojan War, Helen eloped with Paris of Troy. Agamemnon then called on all the kings of Greece to go to war against Troy to get her back for his brother Menelaus. The war was a grueling affair that lasted 10 years, and although the Greeks were victorious, the war took a heavy toll, with Mycenae in a resulting state of anarchy and ruin. Agamemnon's return from war precipitated his own assassination, which in turn triggered another round of vengeance slayings.

Arriving when the archaeological site opens, we will take our time exploring the ruins, excavations, and on-site archaeological museum. Among the attractions are the famed Lion's Gate, the tholos (shaft) tombs, and the remains of the ancient citadel.

Mycenae is a hilltop site set in a semi-arid environment. Hills of limestone rise to the east while to the north and south are the vast fertile plains of Argolis. Vegetation around the ruins complex consists of scattered bushes and grasses. The general area provides surprisingly good birding opportunities and we will likely interrupt the interpretation on occasion to point out birds. The area around the entrance is typically very productive early in the day and is where a number of special European birds are easily found. Western Rock Nuthatches are common and their loud chattering calls are heard frequently. Blue Rock Thrushes are also common here and frequently sing from atop the ancient stone walls. A real prize is the Black-eared Wheatear, a gorgeous specialty bird of the area that is often seen alongside the entrance path.

Below the perimeter wall we may see such birds as Cirl and Ortolan buntings, Northern Wheatear, and Eurasian Hoopoe. In the pine trees and olive trees around the administrative buildings and museum we may find Blue Tit, European Robin, and Sardinian Warbler while the sparse vegetation away from the ruins may hold a variety of migrant landbirds including Spotted Flycatcher, Whinchat, Greater Whitethroat, and Willow Warbler.

We will return to the ship in the early afternoon and depart for Monemvasia, located near the southern tip of the Peloponnese. Our cruise down the eastern coast of the peninsula will take about six hours and should be a relaxing and scenic transit. Dr. Woodruff may present a lecture this afternoon. We will position ourselves on the viewing deck in an effort to spot seabirds and to enjoy the afternoon at sea. Though relatively early in the migration period, a variety of gull species are possible. Yellow-legged Gull is expected, but Black-headed and even Mediterranean Gulls are possible.

Along with Eleonora's Falcon, the other prize bird of the region is Audouin's Gull, a lovely endemic bird of the Mediterranean. Once considered highly endangered, this species has made an impressive recovery and can be found nesting in scattered locations from southern Spain, to the north coast of Africa, to Greece, and to Turkey. As early September is clearly in the post-breeding period, we will have chances throughout the trip for finding this species, particularly while we are on the eastern side of the peninsula. With a snow-white head, deep red bill, and olive-green legs, Audouin's Gull presents an exciting find anywhere one is fortunate to see it.

We expect to arrive at the dock at Monemvasia around sunset. Adjacent to the small town is the offshore rock bearing the same name, known as the Gibraltar of Greece. Lying 400 meters from land, the rock was separated from the mainland by an earthquake in 375 A.D. A fortress and town was founded here by the Byzantines in the 6th century and remained in Byzantine possession for almost seven hundred years until it was captured by the Franks in 1249 after a three year siege. Between 1460 and 1715 it went back and forth from the Turks to the Venetians. In the Greek war of independence, Monemvasia was the first major Turkish fortress to fall to the Greeks, August 1, 1821, after a four month siege.

For those who wish, we will disembark in the evening (around 8:00) and take a short bus ride up to the city gate. While optional, this activity presents a wonderful opportunity to experience an ancient Byzantine settlement, an infusion of Greek culture, and a serene seascape surrounding the island. Contributing to the uniqueness of the experience is that this is the only site visit on our itinerary that deviates from our focus on ancient Greece.

Once inside the quaint town we can stroll through the narrow streets, visiting various shops and churches or simply experiencing the close confines of centuries-old red-tiled roofs, plaster walls, and winding staircases. Participants can return to the ship at their leisure, but we will want everyone back on board by 10:00 pm.

In the middle of the night, *Galileo* will depart for our next stop, either Elafonisos Island or Kithira Island, located beyond the southern terminus of the peninsula.

NIGHT: Aboard *Galileo*, Monemvasia and at sea

September 6, Day 6: Morning cruising to Elafonisos or Kithira Island; afternoon cruising to Pylos.

Waking up this morning, we will find ourselves at sea rounding the southernmost tip of the Peloponnese. Emerging on deck, we may sight Cory's and Levantine shearwaters around the boat along with the ever-present Yellow-legged Gulls.

Our destination for the day will be one of two islands, Kithira or Elafonisos, situated in the Mediterranean a short distance to the south of the mainland. At the time of this writing, no determination has been made as to which of the islands we'll visit, although each provides a similar experience.

Unlike the better known islands of Crete, Rhodes, Santorini, Naxos, and others, Kithira and Elafonisos exist in comparative seclusion, tucked away in the shadow of the Peloponnesian Peninsula. These islands are frequented mainly by "locals" and have escaped the transformations that result as a consequence of mass tourism.

We will arrive in the vicinity of the islands around 9:00 a.m. and will spend half the day cruising, swimming, and exploring. This day presents the best opportunity of the trip for swimming and we will disembark *Galileo* on as private a beach as we can find so that all who are interested may get into the water for a while and experience the pleasures of a dip in the Med.

Kithira is by far the larger of the two islands. Given its location in the Mediterranean, it was occupied at one time or another by many of history's powerful empires, including Spartans and Athenians in the 5th and 6th centuries B.C. followed by the Romans, and much later by invading armies of the crusades, and ultimately the Venetians. The island fell under Greek control in 1864. The lack of a quality deep water port limited the

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viability of the island in terms of its ability to function as a major center of trade or government. In ancient times, the island capital, Kythira, held a particularly devout cult of Aphrodite.

Kithira offers a dynamic landscape marked by a scalloped coastline, beautiful beaches, seaside cliffs, and gently rolling hills. The villages and towns dotting the island are home to centuries old forts and cathedrals. Our activities will include a swim off one of the many picturesque beaches, and a trip into Kythira. This very small capital of the island (600 people) epitomizes quaintness with its traditionally narrow streets and old churches. The Venetian fort has existed for many centuries and provides an interesting and picturesque attraction. There is an archaeological museum here as well. Time permitting we may complete a circumnavigation to gain a better feel for the island's geographic diversity. The birding opportunities will be light, but we'll still be in the range of Eleonora's Falcon and Audouin's Gull.

Tiny Elafonisos Island lies a short distance to the north of Kithira and only minutes from the mainland. It is remarkable that it remains one of the least visited of all the Greek islands because it is home to some of the country's longest and most beautiful beaches. The sea is very shallow around Elafonisos, which allows the water to take on the various shades of blue that simply make you want to jump into the sea. Simos Beach may be the best beach in Greece and will serve as our likely swim spot if we end up visiting this island.

In the mid- to late afternoon *Galileo* will set a course to the northwest and we will find ourselves on the open sea heading toward sandy Pylos, our next destination. In the late afternoon we will want to be on deck watching for Cory's and Levantine shearwaters.

NIGHT: Aboard *Galileo*, at sea

September 7, Day 7: Pylos: (Dinari Lagoon, Nestor's Palace, archaeological museum); afternoon cruising to Katakolo. We will arrive early this morning in Pylos, a picture-perfect seaside town on the southwest corner of the Peloponnese. It is small wonder why the ancient Greeks, and anyone else who has ever been there, were so attracted to Pylos. The town sits on the backside of stately Navarino Bay and is nestled between the waterfront and hills of limestone rising fairly abruptly to the rear. The bay, meanwhile, is undeniably one of Greece's most beautiful locations, and is formed as a result of an already protected circular scallop in the coastline further guarded by lengthy Sphacteria Island extending down from the north. An opening at the bay's southwest corner provides its only access to the open sea.

Navarino Bay is also the site of two famous battles between the Spartans and Athenians during the Peloponnesian conflict. At the battle of Pylos, and subsequent battle of Sphacteria in 425 B.C., Athenian soldiers scored successive defeats of Spartan armies for control of the bay. The capture of hundreds of Spartan soldiers on Sphacteria led to the Peace of Nicias in 421 B.C. In 1827 a fleet of Venetians and other city states defeated an Ottoman fleet in one of the most important naval battles in history. This defeat led to the independence of Greece, which occurred in 1829.

An early disembarkation (7:00) will be offered for those interested in birding this morning. North of Pylos, Dinari Lagoon is a wildlife preserve consisting of brackish ponds, salt pans, and a large lake that attracts an array of migrating shorebirds and wading birds. The distance from the ship to the preserve is short and we will want to arrive early to take advantage of the cool morning temperatures. There is potential for finding a high diversity of birds, but our success will depend on water levels. The path to the first set of salt pans leads through a small pasture dotted with a mixture of introduced and native grasses and plants. This is perfect habitat for ground-loving landbirds. Crested Larks may prove reasonably common, but we'll also watch for three species of wagtails (Western Yellow, Pied, and Gray), migrating flocks of Cirl and Corn buntings, and up to three species of shrikes (Red-backed, Woodchat, and Lesser Gray).

Tree tops and bushes often hold other migrant birds during the morning hours and we have chances for European Bee-eater, Eurasian Hoopoe, Spotted Flycatcher, Stonechat, Whinchat, and Willow and Wood warblers.

A wide variety of shorebirds are possible if water conditions are right. Historically, Dinari Lagoon was located on a rich river delta. Large irrigation projects of questionable wisdom were introduced in the 20th century which inevitably led to the wetlands being deprived of its former water supply. The establishment of the preserve allowed for conservation voices to be heard so that the wetlands are at least flooded at different times during the year to provide food and shelter for migrating birds. A collection of herons and egrets are expected, including Gray Heron, Black-crowned Night-Heron, and Little Egret, while a number of shorebird species are regular at this time of year as well. Among the possibilities are Black-winged Stilt; Little Ringed and Common Ringed plovers; Little Stint; Curlew Sandpiper; Common Greenshank; and Common and Spotted redshanks. Other possibilities include House Martin, Red-rumped Swallow, and Common Kingfisher. Dinari Lagoon hosts Greater Flamingos in the wintertime, and though still early, we do have a chance of finding an early arriving bird.

Following our birding activities, we'll continue up the road to Nestor's Palace. Those opting to forego the morning birding will depart *Galileo* later and will join us at the archaeological site.

The remains of Nestor's Palace occupy a scenic hilltop setting north of Pylos. Though most of the palace is long gone, the foundation remains surprisingly in tact and the entire site is covered by a large shed-like structure to prevent further damage from the elements. Fine views of the sea are had from the western side of the palace complex and extensive olive groves throughout the area lend a pastoral ambience to the setting.

We know about old king Nestor thanks to Homer who wrote of him in the *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Nestor was an Argonaut king who, along with his sons Antilochus and Thrasymedes fought on the side of the Greeks during the Trojan War. He was perhaps best known for giving advice to younger warriors and for his attempts to mediate differences between Agamemnon and Achilles at a time when the tide of war had turned against the Greeks.

The palace at Pylos belonged to Nestor and was discovered in 1939 by the American archaeologist Carl Blegen. Highlights include the well-preserved royal apartments and a bathtub that archaeologists have speculated belonged to the old king himself. The palace, with its central courtyard, was originally two stories high and richly decorated with frescoes.

Following our visit to the remains of the palace, we will make the short trip to the town of Hora where a superb archaeological museum holds thousands of artifacts recovered from the site. Among the 3,000 year-old treasures are beautifully carved statues, pottery, and weapons.

We will depart Pylos in the afternoon for Katakolo, gateway to Olympia.

NIGHT: Aboard *Galileo*, at sea

September 8, Day 8: Day at Olympia (archaeological site and museums; overland transfer to Patras; cruising to Itea. We will disembark the ship around 7:00 a.m. in the port town of Katakolo and travel by bus to Olympia, one of the most famous and important sites in the ancient world. The drive could take up to an hour and a half. We will dedicate most of the day to exploring this remarkable site and its museums. In the late afternoon we will travel north to Patras and reboard *Galileo*.

Olympia is revered as the birthplace of the Olympic Games. In the ancient Greek world, it was also the greatest panhellenic sanctuary for the worship of Zeus. Although the first recorded Olympics took place in 776 B.C., evidence indicates that some type of games or athletic contests were held as early as Mycenaean times (11th-12th

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centuries B.C.). Remarkably, from 776 on, the games were held uninterrupted for the next 1,000 years. From their inception as a one-day event attended only by Greek athletes, the games evolved to a multi-day endeavor that eventually included Roman athletes. So important were the games that their arrival, every four years, heralded the cessation of hostilities between warring parties throughout ancient Greece.

Of the many temples constructed here from the 3rd-7th centuries B.C., the magnificent temple of Zeus stood without peer. As the most powerful of all Olympian gods, Zeus was revered throughout the Greek world. In the aftermath of battles, men from all over Greece made the journey to Olympia to honor the great Zeus, depositing innumerable weapons, armor, tools, and figurines as tribute.

Olympia persisted well into Roman times until its demise in the 3rd century A.D. when fires, earthquakes and invading tribes from the north left the ancient site in ruins. Massive flooding of the Alpheios River eventually covered the site with mud. From 1875 onward excavation work, spearheaded primarily by the German government, revealed the fantastic treasures from antiquity that sit today in the marvelous archaeological museum.

We will arrive at the site when it opens and embark on a morning-long interpretive tour. Professional local guides, along with Dr. Woodruff, will identify and discuss the most important sites within the ruins complex including:

- Temple of Hera
- Temple of Zeus
- Philippeion – circular memorial of Ionic columns honoring the family of Alexander the Great.
- Leonidaion – lodging place for the athletes who participated in the games.

The most thrilling site at Olympia is the stadium, which looks much like it did more than 2,000 years ago. Gazing at the elongated construction, it is easy to imagine the slopes above the field filled with 45,000 spectators who had traveled from all over the ancient world to see the games. At times those spectators included Aristotle and Plato. They waited in anticipation for the athletes, all Greeks, to walk onto the field and for the competitions to begin.

Like the other sites we've visited to this point, Olympia sits in a natural setting. Pine trees and an abundance of other vegetation offer a sanctuary of their own for migrating birds. We may interrupt the historical interpretation from time to time to point out birds as they appear. Common Buzzards and Eurasian Kestrels hunt over the surrounding hills and are often sighted from the ancient stadium. Long-tailed, Sombre, and Blue tits and European Goldfinch and European Greenfinch are occasionally found in the trees right around the ruins, and migrants such as Pied Flycatcher and Willow Warbler may be found in areas of denser vegetation.

The museum located on the site is one of the most beautiful museums in the world. It is filled with treasures unearthed from the mud that covered Olympia after a flood in about 400 AD. These treasures include the largest collection in the world of ancient armaments, vases, pottery, friezes, and statues. These objects are beautifully displayed and we will spend the last part of the morning wandering among the rooms and chambers admiring the extraordinary artifacts. Among the many astonishing exhibits are the bronze helmet of Miltiades, worn by the Greek general at Marathon in his victory over the Persians at Marathon in 490 B.C.; and the statuary from the east and west pediments of the temple of Zeus.

In exquisite design, the pediments (all carved in Parian marble) tell two mythical stories. The scene from the temple's east pediment tells of the mythical chariot race between Oinomaos, king of Pisa, and the young hero Pelops, that would determine whether the young hero would marry the king's daughter and fulfill the prophecy of killing the king if he won. The west pediment features a wilder scene in which drunken centaurs ruined the wedding feast of Peirithoos, king of the Lapiths, and Deidameia.

Following lunch in the town of Olympia, we'll visit the museum of the History of the Olympic Games of Antiquity. Unlike the main archaeological museum, this building houses statuary and a host of artifacts specifically related to the ancient Olympic games. Moving from room to room we'll be able to trace the evolution of the Olympics from its earliest years up to the time of the Romans, when the emperor Theodosius ended the games because he saw them as an act of paganism.

In the late afternoon we will travel overland to Patras on the north coast of the peninsula, where we will reboard *Galileo* and depart for Itea in the Gulf of Corinth.

NIGHT: Aboard *Galileo*, at sea/Itea

September 9, Day 9: Morning excursion to Delphi (archaeological site and museum); cruising to Corinth; afternoon crossing of canal; crusing to Aegina. Scenic Itea is situated on the Greek mainland at the midway point of the Gulf of Corinth. It is located at the mouth of a fertile plain at an especially deep indentation of the Gulf. Soaring cliffs of limestone rise behind the town. Despite its picturesque coastal location, Itea is best known as the gateway to Delphi, one of the most revered sites from the ancient world. We will disembark the ship early this morning and proceed to the ruins complex.

Unlike other archaeological sites in Greece, Delphi is built on the side of a mountain. First time visitors are awed as much for the stunning natural beauty that surround the ruins as for the ancient buildings themselves. Behind the site, the bare limestone cliffs of the Phaidriades thrust several thousand feet up, towering over the archaeological site and museum, while to the south runs a deep and fertile river valley. The panoramic views from the road are truly inspiring.

In its prime, Delphi was revered for its wealth and reputation, attributes which grew from the site's location as hosting the most important oracle in the classical world. Indeed, because everything in Greece is connected to mythology, Delphi became the premier site for the worship of the god Apollo. Briefly, after he slew the Pytho, a female serpent who guarded the spring of Kassotis, Apollo, in an effort to redeem himself built the first temple on the site and gave voice to the legendary oracle. The oracle had the ability to prophecy the future and give advice. Visitors from across the Greek world traveled here to consult with the oracle, and responded by offering thanks to Apollo in the form of treasure.

As a primary means for paying homage to the great god, every four years, starting in 586 B.C., athletes from all over the Greek world competed in the Pythian games. These games were one of the four Pan-Hellenic games that were the precursors of the modern Olympics, although they never achieved the same level of exaltation as the games at Olympia.

The history of Delphi is both rich and complicated. At the center of attention of so many regional powers, the site was the subject of conquest and plunder on many occasions. What remains today is a well preserved ruins complex that is the highlight for many visitors to the sites of ancient Greece.

We will have a half day to walk around the ruins complex and visit the adjoining museum. Some of the highlights include the Sanctuary of Athena Pronaia, the Gymnasium, the Temple of Apollo, the Treasuries (built by various Greek city-states to commemorate victories), and the stadium.

The birding possibilities at Delphi are actually very exciting. Western Rock Nuthatches and Blue Rock Thrushes inhabit the remains of the ancient buildings, their calls heard all over the archaeological site. The heavily wooded periphery allows birds to enter the ruins complex. Cirl, Rock, and Ortolan buntings are all possible along with European Robin, Northern and Black-eared Wheatears, Common Redstart, Sardinian Warbler, and Red-backed and Masked shrikes.

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Crag Martins and Pallid Swifts, two species of localized occurrence in southern Europe are found here as well. Short-toed Eagles are often seen in the morning hours soaring over the high cliffs of the Phaidriades. After leaving the museum, we will return to Itea, reboard *Galileo* and proceed east to the head of the Gulf of Corinth. At the town of Korinthos we'll transit the Corinth Canal, a nearly 4-mile cut through the Isthmus of Corinth that connects the Gulf of Corinth with the Saronic Gulf. The remarkable engineering accomplishment was achieved between 1881 and 1893.

Our final act for the day will be a late afternoon cruise to the island of Aegina where we'll spend the night. After a final dinner on board the ship, participants may choose to disembark and stroll around the charming port town.

NIGHT: Aboard *Galileo*, Aegina

September 10, Day 10: Early morning cruise to Piraeus; disembark *Galileo*; transfer to airport for departing flights. This morning marks the conclusion of our birds and history cruise. *Galileo* will depart Aegina early this morning for the 17-mile transit to Piraeus. We have scheduled an arrival in port at 7:00 a.m. followed immediately by disembarkation. All participants departing Greece today will be transferred to the international airport with plenty of time to check-in for departing flights.

TOUR SIZE: We have chartered the 50-passenger M/S *Galileo* exclusively for customers of VENT; the **Circumnavigation of the Peloponnese** is limited to 46 people; the **Athens Pre-trip** is also limited to 46 people.

TOUR LEADERS: Victor Emanuel, Barry Lyon, and Dr. Paul Woodruff will lead the cruise and the Athens Pre-trip. Dr. Woodruff will serve as a staff expert on the history, culture, and philosophy of ancient Greece.

Victor Emanuel started birding in Texas 61 years ago at the age of eight. His travels have taken him to all the continents, with his areas of concentration being Texas, Arizona, Mexico, Panama, and Peru. He is the founder and compiler for 50 years of the record-breaking Freeport Christmas Bird Count, and served a term as president of the Texas Ornithological Society. Birds and natural history have been a major focus throughout his life. He derives great pleasure from seeing and hearing birds, and sharing with others these avian sights and sounds, both the common ones and the more unusual ones. He initiated the first birding camps for young people, and considers that one of his greatest achievements. Victor holds a B.A. in zoology and botany from the University of Texas and an M.A. in government from Harvard. In 1993, he was the recipient of the Roger Tory Peterson Excellence in Birding Award, given by the Houston Audubon Society in recognition of a lifetime of dedication to careful observation, education, and addition to the body of avian knowledge. In 2004, he received the Roger Tory Peterson Award from the American Birding Association, and the Arthur A. Allen Award from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. Victor is a member of the board of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, and the American Bird Conservancy.

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

Paul Woodruff is an experienced guide to the intellectual landscape of ancient Greece. He has published translations of works by the philosopher Plato, the historian Thucydides, and the playwrights Sophocles and Euripides. He has written two books that present ancient Greek ideas for modern use—*Reverence: Renewing a Forgotten Virtue* (2001); and *First Democracy: The Challenge of an Ancient Idea* (2005). He teaches philosophy and classics at the University of Texas at Austin.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:

FOR THE CRUISE

Cabin prices quoted are per person based on double occupancy. All staterooms are outside cabins with either windows (upper deck) or portholes (lower deck), and fitted with air conditioning, en suite bathrooms with showers, central music, safe deposit boxes, and internal telephones. Cabins will be reserved on a first-come, first-served basis. Those single travelers who wish to share their cabin will be charged the single supplement if no cabin mate can be found.

Category C	(Lower Deck: 1 double or 2 lower beds)	\$6395
Category B	(Lower Deck: 2 lower beds)	\$6995
Category A	(Upper Deck: 1 double or 2 lower beds)	\$7995

A limited number of singles are available in category C at 1.5 times the per person double cruise rate.

Included in your cruise package:

- One night accommodation at the Divani Hotel Acropolis in Athens on day 2 (September 2)
- Welcome cocktail reception and dinner at the hotel in Athens
- 7-night cruise aboard the 49-passenger M/V *Galileo*
- Welcome and farewell cocktail receptions aboard *Galileo*
- All tours and shore excursions as described in the itinerary
- All non-ship meals in Athens beginning with lunch on day 2 (September 2) and ending with lunch on day 3 (September 3)
- All meals aboard *Galileo* (breakfast, lunch & dinner) beginning with dinner on day 3 (September 3) and ending with breakfast on day 10 (September 10)
- All land transfers, including from the airport to the hotel on day 2 (September 2); transfers around Athens on September 2 and 3, including to the ship; from the ship to the archaeological and historical sites and back; and to the airport from the ship upon disembarkation on day 10 (September 10).
- VENT leaders and local guides (including gratuities for local guides)
- Entrance fees to archaeological sites and museums
- Gratuities to the ship staff and crew

Not included in your cruise package:

- Air transportation from your home to Athens and back.
- Passport fees and airport departure taxes.
- Hotel accommodations prior to Day 2 (September 2); hotel accommodations after Day 9 (September 9)
- Meals prior to lunch on day 2 (September 2); meals after breakfast on Day 10 (September 10)
- Laundry, postage, telephone calls, emails, or other items of a personal nature
- Alcoholic beverages
- Travel Insurance
- Gratuities to VENT leaders
- Fuel surcharges

- Departure taxes (if applicable)

FOR THE ATHENS PRE-TRIP

The fee for the optional **Athens Pre-trip** is **\$1,495** in double occupancy from Athens. This includes all meals from lunch on day 2 (August 31) to lunch on day 4 (September 2), excluding lunch on day 3 (September 3); all lodging as stated in the itinerary; ground transportation beginning with arrival in Athens on day 2 (August 31) and ending with return to the hotel for lunch on day 4 (September 2); guide services provided by the VENT leaders and local guides (includes gratuities for local guides); and entrance fees to museums and archaeological sites. The tour fee does not include international airfare from your home to Athens and return; lunch on day 3 (September 1); transfers or accommodation other than those mentioned in the itinerary; alcoholic beverages; special gratuities; departure taxes (if applicable); 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 the **Athens Pre-trip** 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.

REGISTRATION: To register for **Greece: Birds & History** and optional **Athens Pre-trip**, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for the cruise is **\$2,000** per person and **\$500** per person for the pre-trip. 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.

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

CANCELLATION & REFUNDS: If cancellations for the Athens Pre-trip occur less than 120 days before the departure date, \$250 of your deposit is refundable. For cancellations occurring within 120 days of the departure, all money paid is non-refundable.

If cancellations for the Greece: Peloponnese Cruise occur more than 120 days before the departure date, **\$1,000** of your deposit is refundable. For cancellations occurring less than 120 days before the departure, all money paid is non-refundable. Any refunds will be reduced by applicable airline cancellation penalties. No refunds will be made in the event of “no shows” or cancellations made on the day of sailing. **We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance and/or travel insurance to protect yourself.**

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

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.

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.

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.

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: Your trip to Greece will be a relaxing but full travel experience in which birding activities are combined with visits to famous archaeological sites, guided tours, and cruising the Mediterranean Sea. This trip offers an abundance of cultural, historical, and anthropological experiences in addition to being a birding trip, and participants should strongly consider this point before registering.

Note that the birding portions of the trip are optional. Participants whose main interest is the history and culture of Greece do not need to be birders to enjoy this trip or to participate in the birding portions of the itinerary.

Our time off the ship includes walking tours and visits to major historical sites and at least one nature reserve. Physical demands will be easy to moderate, but please bear in mind that our land excursions will involve a moderate amount of walking and standing. We emphasize that no one will be subjected to physical demands that exceed their capabilities. All walking will be done at a slow pace.

The ship – *Galileo* features 26 comfortable, outside cabins with lower beds, private bathroom facilities, and individual temperature controls. The public areas include a spacious Lounge, located on the main deck, with large windows for optimal viewing; an ample Sun Deck equipped with deckchairs; a shaded outdoor deck; and outdoor bar. Internet and email service are available.

Dining – The sizeable dining room comfortably seats all passengers in single seatings for all meals, with tables unassigned. The chefs can prepare food according to special dietary needs, provided we receive sufficient notice. **Please advise of any special needs at the time of registration.**

While on land – Walking conditions on land are generally not difficult, yet it is important to pay close attention to footing and terrain. For almost all shore excursions we will visit several of Greece's most illustrious archaeological sites including Epidauros, Mycenae, Olympia, and Delphi. All of these sites are well-developed

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with established paths and walkways providing access to the most important ruins and museums. Delphi sits at the base of a mountain and the paths leading to the higher parts of the ruin complex are moderately steep and may not be suitable for everyone. Participants should take into consideration that a lot of walking and standing will be required at all of the archaeological sites and museums. The same conditions apply to the Athens Pre-trip.

While at sea – While cruising at sea, you'll have options to join your leaders on the viewing decks for sea watching, or remain below decks and relax in the passenger lounge or your stateroom. As we will not be far from shore most of the time, we expect smooth, easy seas throughout. Wind is an unpredictable variable. The mornings are typically calmer and the afternoons breezy to windy. If we are cruising into the wind, participants should be prepared for rougher seas than what is expected.

The Program – Our routine for most days will involve breakfast on board between 6:00-7:00 a.m., followed by disembarking the ship for land transfer to the archaeological sites. We want to arrive at the sites at the time of opening, typically 8:00, to beat the crowds and the warmest daytime temperatures. We will tour the sites and associated museums for a full morning (except at Olympia, where we will have almost a full day) and return to the ship for lunch. Most afternoons will be reserved for cruising, seabirding, and lectures by Dr. Woodruff. Dinner will be at 7:00 p.m. most nights. Birding opportunities, remarkably, are best around the ruins sites. We will visit a major nature reserve at Dinari Lagoon, located north of Pilos.

Extra time in Athens – Athens is a large metropolis that serves as the jumping off point for other parts of Greece and even other countries in Southern Europe, North Africa, and the Near East. Our cruise program (including the pre-trip) will provide exposure to many of Greece's top archaeological and historical sites and many of its wonderful birds. However, because there is so much to see and experience on mainland Greece, and, particularly, the many islands in the Aegean and Mediterranean seas, participants with an interest in enjoying other activities outside the stated program should come early or stay after the cruise ends.

CLIMATE & WEATHER: September is one of the better months to travel in Greece. The hot days that characterize the Mediterranean summer have relented while the likelihood of an early cold front is small. Nearly all of our time will be spent along the immediate coast, where daytime temperatures range into the upper 80s (°F). Seabreezes have a cooling effect and keep the coast about 10 degrees cooler than in the interior regions. Night and morning temperatures may dip to the mid-60s. Around Athens and at Mycenae, daytime temperatures could reach into the 90s. If we are cruising into the wind, air temperature can seem colder than it really is.

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

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

*Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government's attempts to fight terrorism, we strongly recommend that you check the website of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for information pertaining to permissible carry-on items:

<http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/prohibited/permitted-prohibited-items.shtm>.

CLOTHING: As this trip combines birding with interpretive walking tours and leisure cruising, you will want to pack a mix of clothing that prepares you for all activities. The following items are recommended:

- **Shoes:** A lightweight hiking boot or trail shoe for birding outings and when walking among the ruins; you may also prefer sandals and/or tennis shoes for walking tours and time on board the ship; dress shoes will be appropriate for some evenings.

- **Pants and Shorts:** A couple pairs of pants and shorts each are recommended. Many people prefer lightweight pants made of cotton or other material, but denim, though not as comfortable, is certainly acceptable. Shorts will be desirable for warmer times of day and when cruising.
- **Field Clothing:** Outdoor stores such as Cabela's and REI carry field clothing that many birders find appealing. Pants and shirts made of lightweight, yet durable materials with multiple pockets and ventilated seams are popular and more reasonably priced than in the past.
- **Shirts:** Several t-shirts, (long and short-sleeved), in addition to other comfortable styles suitable for warm weather.
- **Bathing Suit**
- **Hat:** A hat for protection from the sun is essential.
- **Evening Wear:** The atmosphere aboard *Galileo* is casual, but women and men should wear Smart Casual attire for the few dressier occasions. For women this includes casual dresses or skirt/slacks ensembles. For men this includes khakis/slacks and open-collared shirts. Men may choose to wear a sports jacket for dressier evenings. The degree of dress is also in accordance with your personal preference.
- **Sweaters and Coats:** Warm weather will be the rule on this trip, but a sweater or light coat will come in handy some mornings and evenings.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Limited laundry services are available aboard ship. Laundry is handled by the crew staff. Charges are posted on the ship.

EQUIPMENT: One of the most important aspects of having an enjoyable travel experience is being prepared with proper equipment. The following items will come in handy during your trip to Greece:

- **Backpack** – Good for carrying extra clothing, field guides, supplies, and optical equipment during all land excursions
- **Notebooks and pens**
- **Travel alarm clock**
- **Polarized sunglasses with good UV protection**
- **Sunscreen, lip balm, skin lotions**
- **Personal toiletries**
- **Cameras, lenses, film, memory cards, and extra batteries**
- **Collapsible walking stick** – A highly recommended item for those who have trouble walking
- **Tissue packs**
- **Binoculars** – We strongly recommend good binoculars of at least 7 x 35, 8 x 42, 10 x 40, or 10 x 42 magnification. We recommend that you do NOT bring mini-binoculars of any kind. Some people like them because they are small and lightweight; but they have an extremely small field of view and very poor light gathering power. Trying to find a bird in your binoculars using minis is like trying to read a book through a keyhole. You will be very frustrated, and even if you do manage to get the bird in your binoculars before it flies, you will have a poor view. You will find that 7 x 35 or 8 x 42 binoculars are compact and light enough.

Spotting Scopes – Given the ship-based nature of the program and that most of our land-birding will take place around the archaeological sites, it is not necessary for you to bring a spotting scope. Your tour leaders will have scopes available for group use throughout the trip.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS:

PASSPORTS

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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/ 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.**

On board ship, it is customary for the purser to hold all passports for clearance with port authorities. Your passport will be collected upon embarkation, and returned upon disembarkation.

VISAS

Citizens of the United States and Canada do not need to obtain a tourist visa to enter Greece.

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

CURRENCY & MONEY MATTERS: Your trip to Greece includes most necessary expenses, including all meals aboard *Gallileo*. While U.S. dollars MIGHT be accepted in large cities and shops, it is always convenient to have a supply of Euros for such items as taxi rides, gifts, non-meal-time and off-ship refreshments, laundry tips, meals on your own, gratuities for the ship's staff and crew, and any personal items.

Upon embarkation, a shipboard account will be opened for your convenience. The Euro is the official currency on board. Credit cards are accepted for expenses on board that may be paid/settled at the end of the cruise. Most major currencies and traveller's cheques are accepted/exchanged at their official exchange rate. Note that it may not always be possible to make change for travelers' checks and cash in large denominations; the purser would appreciate the use of smaller denominations for settlement of your shipboard account.

There is no facility on board for exchanging U.S. dollars into Euros. It is best to acquire Euros before leaving the U.S. or at airports, or banks in EU participating countries.

The official currency of Greece is the Euro (EUR). As of January 27, 2010, the conversion rate is 1USD = .710018 EUR; 1EUR = 1.40842 USD.

You can check the latest currency conversion rate by visiting Italy Currency Converter at:

<http://wwp.greenwichmeantime.com/time-zone/europe/european-union/italy/currency-converter.htm>

ATM machines can be found in some towns (Euros) and you shouldn't have any problems using major cards in hotels, restaurants, and shops.

TIME: At the time of this tour, Greece is 7 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST).

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**

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.

If you require special medications, we suggest that you bring along an adequate supply, as the ship does not have a medical staff. The ship is equipped, however, with excellent radio and marine and satellite telephone facilities, and is never more than a few miles from shore so that aid in an emergency can be called.

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.

Sun Exposure – The sun's ultraviolet rays are dangerous under prolonged exposure (sometimes only a matter of minutes). Anytime you are outdoors you will want to protect your skin, including your lips, eyes, nose, and ears. A severe sunburn is potentially very painful and will affect your level of enjoyment. Always protect yourself when outdoors and be sure to bring an ample supply of high SPF sunscreen and lip balm. We strongly recommend the use of ultra-violet blocking, polarized sunglasses.

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

ELECTRICITY: Power on board the *Galileo* is 220V, with the recessed outlets of the round, two-pronged European type. If you plan to use American standard 110V equipment with the flat-pronged plugs, you will need to bring an all purpose transformer to convert the current for 110V use, in addition to a round European-type adapter plug.

SUGGESTED READING: Please visit our website, www.ventbird.com, which offers an affiliated online store carrying 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 Laboratory of Ornithology. You can also visit such other online stores such as www.amazon.com, and for those out-of-print or hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com, or www.buteobooks.com which specializes in ornithology books.

Birds

Mullarney, Killian and Lars Svensson and Dan Zetterstrom. *Birds of Europe*. Princeton Field Guides. Princeton University Press; Princeton, NJ, 1999.

This is the most important natural history book for this trip. It is probably the best all around field guide to the birds of Europe.

History, Philosophy & Culture

Ancient Greece is a subject widely written about. A great many books have been published addressing that country's illustrious history; theatre, art, and architecture; philosophy and culture; and wars. Although a person

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could research the topic indefinitely, the following list highlights some of the best material available for preparing oneself for this program.

Aeschylus. ***Oresteia***. Peter Meineck (translator). Hackett Publishing Company: Indianapolis, IN, 1998.

Product description (Source: Amazon.com)

Aeschylus, the earliest of the great Attic tragedians, presented his *Oresteia* at Athens' City Dionysia festival in 458 BCE. Born in the last quarter of the sixth century, Aeschylus had fought with the victorious Greeks in one and probably both of the Persian Wars (490 and 480-79). He died around 456 at about seventy years of age in Gela, Sicily. His epitaph records his role as a soldier at Marathon, not his artistic achievements, but these were many. The author of more than seventy plays, he won his first of thirteen tragic victories in 484. Of these plays, only seven remain. The *Oresteia* is Aeschylus' only complete surviving trilogy; the satyr play with which it was first performed, *Proteus*, is lost.

Peter Meineck provides what is considered an excellent translation.

Cahill, Thomas. ***Sailing the Wine Dark Sea: Why the Greeks Matter***. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group: New York, NY, 2004.

An outstanding book that chronicles the contribution of the ancient Greeks, as it relates to modern civilization, to the development of politics, thought, warfare, and civilization.

Euripides. ***Bacchae***. Paul Woodruff (translator). Hackett Publishing Company: Indianapolis, IN, 1998.

This is a highly regarded translation of one of Euripides' greatest works (Euripides, along with Aeschylus and Sophocles, are the three great tragedians of classical Athens), concerning the mythological story of King Pentheus of Thebes, his mother, and others who are severely punished by the god Dionysus for refusing to worship him.

Homer and Stanley Lombardo (translator). ***The Odyssey***. Hackett Publishing Company: Indianapolis, IN, 2000.

This is Homer's timeless story of Odysseus, hero of the Trojan War, facing monumental obstacles on his long journey home. Few people, if anybody, can capture the flavor, or voice, of Homer like Stanley Lombardo.

TIPPING: All tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, local guides, and staff and crew on the ship) is included on VENT tours.

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

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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 February 5, 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.