

GRAND SOUTHERN INDIA INCLUDING THE ANDAMAN ISLANDS

JANUARY 8-30, 2006

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India has a special place in my heart; perhaps it is my British heritage or the fact that India plays cricket or maybe something even more indefinable, for I can think of no country in the world that so overwhelms the senses with the richness and diversity of its culture, history and wonderful aromas of unleavened bread and mouth-watering spices. But it's the wildlife that really grabs your attention. Every nook and cranny in even the seemingly unlikeliest place teems with birds and mammals.

VENT's tours to south of the Indian subcontinent have surprised participants with the richness of its birds and other wildlife, the splendid comfort of most of its accommodations and exquisite cuisine. Our Southern India 2006 tour follows a very similar itinerary to that of previous tours but with some minor fine tuning to increase our chances of a few of the more difficult endemics. This will permit a more relaxed pace and the opportunity to watch at length some of India's most magnificent mammals including Tiger, Asian Elephant, Indian Wild Dog, Gaur, Sloth Bear, Nilgiri Langur and if we are very fortunate, the endangered Lion-tailed Macaque.

Our accommodations range from beautifully renovated British regimental barracks in Ooty, a classic hill station, to a Maharaja's palace in the graceful city of Mysore and Kabini Lodge located within roaring distance of Nagarhole National Park and some of Southern India's richest woodland and forest areas.

The Western Ghats, a dramatic series of granitic mountains that extend along the entire western edge of the peninsula, rise from emerald green lowlands garnished with paddies of ripening rice and a mosaic of deep, little known forests. Here a large number of species reside that are found nowhere else in the world (some are shared with neighboring Sri Lanka). We will make a special effort to locate as many of these species as possible, including Grey Junglefowl; Malabar Parakeet; Nilgiri Wood-Pigeon; Malabar Trogon; Malabar Grey Hornbill; White-bellied Tree-pie; Yellow-browed, Grey-headed and the very local Yellow-throated bulbuls; Black-fronted Babbler; Wynaad; Nilgiri and Grey-breasted laughingthrushes; the handsome Black-and-Orange Flycatcher; Nilgiri Pipit; White-bellied Shortwing and Loten's Sunbird.

Southern India is distinctly different from the north. Life is more genteel, caressed by a balmy tropical winter and nurtured by frequent rains. Exotic Dravidian temples punctuate the lush countryside and add a special element to our journey. Our explorations will take us to the finest reserves in southern India, including magnificent Nagarhole and Periyar National Parks, which contain the best concentrations of wildlife in the peninsula. We will also explore remnant patches of bird-rich montane forest among little known sholas hidden in the folds of these granite mountains, vast areas of semi-arid woodland and wander through a medieval village graced by Painted Storks and Spot-billed Pelicans

nesting in the thatch roofs. This is truly a photographer's and birder's fantasy. In addition to the large number of endemic birds, we will also encounter a number of species rarely if ever recorded on our Northern India tours: Red Spurfowl, Pompadour Green Pigeon, impressive White-bellied Woodpeckers, Heart-spotted Woodpecker, Indian Pitta, the rare White-bellied Minivet, Indian Scimitar-Babbler, Indian Blue Chat, Kashmir Flycatcher, Forest Wagtail and Black-throated Munia. We will also encounter a large number of mammals ranging from the spectacular Indian Giant Squirrel to the impressively common Leopard. Perhaps, as we have on previous tours, we will be treated to the unforgettable spectacle of a pack of Dholes (Indian Hunting Dogs) stalking a Spotted Deer at dawn among the southern India's dappled woodlands or surrounding a sounder of wild boar. Or maybe our next tour will be treated to that true king-of-beasts, the Bengal Tiger!

January 8-10, Days 1-3: Fly USA to Bangalore. You will need to depart the United States on January 8 in order to arrive in India on January 10th. Most likely, you will arrive at Bangalore airport in the early morning hours of the 10th.

After clearing customs and immigration, you will be met by a representative of our ground operator, and transferred to our lovely and very luxurious hotel in the heart of this thriving city for a much needed rest. If your arrival is not on January 10th, we would be happy to arrange a private airport to hotel transfer for you for an additional fee. The tour will gather during the early evening for introductions and a welcome dinner. Your leaders will advise you of the details upon your arrival.

Those participants continuing from the Sri Lanka tour will arrive in Bangalore on a morning flight from Colombo on January 10th. You will have the day at your leisure until the group dinner this evening

NIGHT: Royal Orchid Airport Hotel, Bangalore

January 11, Day 4: Bangalore to Mysore. This morning we will drive through the wonderful southern Indian countryside to the city of Mysore. As always in India, the place will be teeming with birds and fascinating things to see, imbibe, and photograph. We will stop frequently as time permits. Mysore is a lovely city which was, until independence, the seat of the Maharajas of Mysore, a princely state covering much of present day Karnataka. It is the epitome of "living history," and historians, architects, or for that matter anyone interested in seeing a civilization radically different than that in the West, will enjoy Mysore. Time will be set aside so that individuals can explore the markets and myriads of shops where some of the best wood crafts in the world are to be found.

Along the way we will visit Kukri Belur where Painted Storks and Spot-billed Pelicans nest in the midst of a typical south Indian village little changed literally for hundreds of years. We will also stop at a dam where large numbers of waterbirds occasionally congregate. In the past we have never been able to give this area much more than a brief scan. On this 2006 tour, we have built in more time. What we do know is that such exciting species as Black-necked Stork together with large numbers of waterfowl and shorebirds do occur there. What else occurs will have to wait for us to investigate.

NIGHT: Lalitha Mahal Hotel, Mysore

January 12, Day 5: Mysore to Nagarhole. This morning we will make a short drive from the city of Mysore to the tiny Ranganthitoo Bird Sanctuary. This small reserve is scenically very beautiful, set on several small islands in the Cauvery River. Immense colonies of cormorants, darters, egrets, herons, ibis, storks and spoonbills nest here in addition to a number of other interesting species such as: Great Thick-knee, Indian River Tern, lovely Streak-throated Swallows, Streaked Weaver, Red Avadavat, and Scaly-breasted and Black-headed munias. We should also be on the lookout for Mugger Crocodiles which still inhabit the area. The surrounding trees host a huge roost of Large Flying Foxes which frequently erupt and fly overhead.

Later in the day we will continue on to Nagarhole National Park, with regular stops along the way for such species as Cotton Pygmy-Goose, Red-naped and Black-headed ibis. The excitement as we enter the periphery of this huge forest is almost palpable. Spotted Deer skip across the road. Great piles of steaming dung can only belong to one owner and perhaps as on a previous tour we will be 'held up' by our first Asian Elephant as he lets us and the world know who is boss. We *should* arrive at our attractive and recently renovated lodge during the late afternoon or at least in time for dinner!

NIGHT: Kabini River Lodge, Nagarhole

January 13-15, Days 6-8: Nagarhole National Park. Nagarhole National Park together with the adjoining Mudumalai, Bandipur, and Wynaad reserves encompasses an area of approximately 2000 sq km. We will concentrate our efforts on Nagarhole with its relatively more luxuriant, lower elevation forests. This vast area supports one of the highest tiger-prey densities anywhere in Asia, and as a consequence Nagarhole supports one of the few truly thriving populations of tigers anywhere within the great cat's range (see Wildlife Conservation magazine June 1995). Similarly large numbers of leopard too are present. Notwithstanding, neither species is easy to observe as they have learnt well to hide themselves from man. Nevertheless, with the aid of open-backed jeeps and boats we will venture out at dawn and dusk to quietly seek out these and the myriad other wildlife forms for whom Nagarhole is home.

“Nagarhole is everything one might imagine wild India to be; vast, vast woodlands alive with bird song and the territorial calls of Barking Deer, only silenced by the nerve-tingling roar of courting tigers. Herds of elephant, sometimes a hundred strong, wading unmolested across the delightful Kabini river; giant Gaur somnolently munching on rich pasture or an Indian Nightjar trilling from our path as we make our way home in the dark.”

Here you will have the opportunity to acquaint yourselves with the entire spectrum of India's forest community, including many widespread Indian species in addition to a fine selection of southern India endemics. But Nagarhole is so much more; it is an opportunity to imbibe a reminder of what wild India was really like (see E.P. Gee 1964), seemingly endless forests and grasslands teeming with wildlife. Some of the species we may see here include Oriental Darter; Woolly-necked Stork; Grey-headed Fish-Eagle; Black-shouldered Kite; Crested Serpent-Eagle; Red-headed, White-backed and Long-billed vultures (both now very rare); Grey Junglefowl; Indian Peafowl; Barred Buttonquail; Indian River and Black-bellied terns; Alexandrine, Rose-ringed, Plum-headed and Malabar parakeets; Large Hawk-Cuckoo; with diligence the elusive but very attractive Blue-faced Malkoha; Indian Scops Owl; Brown Fish-Owl; Brown Hawk-Owl; Spotted Little Owl; Indian Edible-nest Swiftlet; White-rumped Needletail; Alpine Swift; Stork-billed Kingfisher; Brown-headed and White-cheeked barbets; Streak-throated Woodpecker; Black-rumped Flameback; the very handsome White-bellied and Heart-spotted woodpeckers; Indian Pitta—often in the dense scrub around our accommodations; Jerdon's Bush-lark; Large Cuckoo-shrike; Small Minivet; Golden-fronted Leafbird; White-bellied Drongo; Puff-throated, Rufous-bellied and Jungle babblers; Indian Scimitar-Babbler; Grey-breasted Prinia; several *Phylloscopus* warblers which should test our powers of identification; Tickell's Blue Flycatcher; White-browed Fantail; Chestnut-bellied and Velvet-fronted nuthatches; Purple-rumped and Purple sunbirds; Southern Hill Myna; Black-naped and Black-headed orioles; and Rufous Treepie.

The area is also superb for mammals, and any of the waterholes will be worth watching. Species we may see include: Asian Elephant; the gigantic Gaur; Wild Boar; Chital; Spotted Deer—a notably beautiful species; Sambar and Barking deer; Black-naped Hare; and Sloth Bear. If we are lucky we may even see Tiger, Leopard or a pack of Dhole (Asian Hunting Dog), all of which are resident in the area but are extremely difficult to see. Some of the less heralded but nevertheless very attractive species include: Golden Jackal, Smooth-coated Indian Otter, Small Indian Civet, Stripe-necked Mongoose and Three-striped Palm Squirrel.

NIGHT: Kabini River Lodge, Nagarhole

January 16, Day 9: Drive to Jungle Retreat at the Base of the Nilgiris. After a final morning's jeep safari we will head for the base of the Nilgiris and the periphery of Mudumalai National Park. In part because access to the national park is so problematical, but largely because the really good habitat lies just outside the park, we will concentrate our birding on a superb area of dry deciduous woodland and thorn scrub. The area supports a number of species either difficult or not found at all in Nagarhole. Species we may see here include: Rock Bush-Quail, Short-toed Eagle, Changeable Hawk-Eagle, Oriental Hobby (very rare), Red Spurfowl (elusive), Yellow-footed Green Pigeon, Malabar Parakeet, Jungle Owlet, Crested Treeswift, White-cheeked Barbet, Grey-headed Bulbul—this is one of the best places for this rarely seen endemic—Black-headed Cuckoo-shrike, Blue-capped Rock-Thrush, the extremely skulking Rufous Babbler, Thick-billed and Booted warblers, and Tickell's Flowerpecker. At night we will make a special effort to locate the distinctive sounding Jerdon's Nightjar.

NIGHT: Jungle Retreat , Madumalai

January 17, Day 10: Jungle Retreat. Located at the foot of the imposing Nilgiris we will explore the surrounding area of dry thorn scrub and savanna forest for some rather elusive and localised dry-country species, including Jungle, Painted and Rock bush-quail; Pallid Harrier; Oriental Hobby (seen superbly on our two previous Southern India tours); Blue-faced Malkoha; Sirkeer Malkoha; perhaps White-naped Woodpecker; White-bellied Minivet—very rare, though a group of four was seen superbly on our 2004 tour; the extremely localized Grey-headed Bulbul; Puff-throated and Yellow-billed babbler; and the very rare and poorly known White-naped Tit. This is also a good area for many more wide-ranging species, and we shall be on the lookout for these and several exciting mammals, including the rarely seen Striped Hyena, which we observed on our 2000 tour.

NIGHT: Jungle Retreat, Madumalai

January 18, Day 11: Drive to Ooty. After some final birding we will gradually climb the seemingly vertical face of the Nilgiri Hills through a series of "interesting" hairpin bends to the town of Ootacamund, better known as Ooty. Our accommodations, now operated by the world famous Taj Group, were once the regimental quarters of the British Raj.

NIGHT: Savoy Hotel, Ootacamund

January 19, Day 12: Ooty. This sprawling hill station, located at 7250 ft in the midst of the Nilgiri Hills, has been described as "an unlikely combination of southern England and Australia." The town has a distinctly faded, colonial charm with stone churches, public boys' school, and landscaped gardens. Although much of the forest has been replaced by tea estates, patches of evergreen forest, known as sholas, still remain in some of the intervening ravines. Here we will look for such specialities as Nilgiri Laughingthrush, the gorgeous Black-and-orange Flycatcher, the very-difficult-to-find White-bellied Shortwing, and, with a great deal of luck, the increasingly threatened Nilgiri Wood Pigeon. Other species we may find include Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike, Malabar Crested Lark, Forest Wagtail, White-throated Fantail, Ashy Prinia, Scaly Thrush, Indian Blue Robin, Kashmir Red-throated Flycatcher, Tickell's Flycatcher, the distinctive local subspecies of the Blackbird, Olive-backed Pipit, Common Rosefinch and Black-throated Munia.

NIGHT: Savoy Hotel, Ootacamund.

January 20, Day 13: Drive to Cochin. Our journey through Southern India continues this morning with a descent down the steep and spectacular north face of the Nilgiris via Kotagiri. As we discovered on our 1999 and 2003 tours, there is superb forest and woodland habitat from Munnar right down to the plains, and we will have the entire morning to explore this area. We will then continue on to our hotel at Cochin airport, which will be our base for exploring the lovely Sali Ali or Thattekad Sanctuary.

NIGHT: Abad Copper Castle, Cochin

January 21, Day 14: Thattakad Sanctuary. We have the entire day to explore this little known sanctuary, and we will need to depart early this morning in order to make the most of our time in these biologically rich wet lowland forests. In addition to some of southern India's more widespread species, there is also the possibility of encountering several very rare and local species such as the handsome Black Baza—we watched one hunting for 20 minutes during our 2004 tour, Red Spurfowl, Nilgiri Wood Pigeon, Orange-breasted Green Pigeon, Malabar Trogon, Rufous Babbler, Pied Thrush, Broad-tailed Grassbird—very tough, Rusty-tailed Flycatcher and Wynaad Laughingthrush, in addition to several very fancy night-birds: Great Eared Nightjar, Oriental Bay Owl, Mottled Wood Owl, Spot-bellied Eagle Owl and Sri Lanka Frogmouth—a pair were seen roosting during our 2004 tour.

NIGHT: Abad Copper Castle, Cochin

January 22, Day 15: Drive to Munnar. After some final birding we will drive up into the Western Ghats and the tea-growing area of Munnar. Our accommodation for the next two nights is an attractive modern guest house located in an idyllic setting surrounded by hills covered with tea gardens and patches of remnant forest.

NIGHT: Royal Retreat, Munnar

January 23, Day 16: Birding the Munnar-Eravikulam Plateau. Munnar and especially the Erivakulam Plateau present a spectacular landscape, and, although much of the forest has been cleared to make way for tea plantations, small patches of sub-tropical, biologically rich shola forest still remain in a few of the intervening gullies. We will focus our efforts on the area around Rajamalai within the Eravikulam National Park. Here in the sholas (immediately recognized at these high altitudes by their beautiful flowering rhododendrons) we will search for a number of South India endemics, including Grey-breasted Laughingthrush, Nilgiri Blue Flycatcher, Nilgiri Pipit, and the very uncommon and nomadic Nilgiri Wood-pigeon. Other species we may find include Bonelli's and Black eagles, Dusky Crag Martin, Pacific Swallow, Black Bulbul, Tickell's Leaf-Warbler, Oriental White-eye and Common Rosefinch.

This area supports roughly half the total world population of the endangered Nilgiri Tahr (a very localized goat-like antelope), in addition to a number of other interesting mammals such as Nilgiri Langur, Sambar and the endemic Malabar Squirrel. As a result of the long-term protection afforded to this area, our chances of seeing the Tahr and some of these other mammals is good.

NIGHT: Royal Retreat, Munnar

January 24, Day 17: Drive Munnar to Periyar via Bodinayakanur. This morning we will gradually descend from the cool of Munnar to Periyar National Park. However, *en route* we will make a special diversion via the town of Bodinayakanur where, with a bit of luck, among the sparse thorn scrub jungle interspersed with large trees on broken stony hillsides we will find the very little known but striking endemic Yellow-throated Bulbul. Other species we may find here include Blue-faced and Sirkeer malkohas, Red Spurfowl, Jungle Bush-quail, and Tawny-bellied Babbler.

NIGHT: Aranya Niwas, Thekkady

January 25-26, Days 18-19: Periyar National Park. Periyar is one of the finest reserves in southern India and encompasses an area of 777 sq km, ranging in altitude from 500 to 6622 ft, and is the southernmost of India's famous Tiger reserves. Located in the Cardamom Hills at the southern end of the Western Ghats, the park comprises an area of undulating hills and a multi-fingered lake formed by the damming of the Periyar River. Extensive, fire-climax grasslands provide ideal forage for numerous herbivores such as Asian Elephant, Gaur, Sambar and Barking Deer, in addition to Nilgiri Langur and Giant Red Flying-Squirrel. There is also a rich variety of woodland habitats, including Moist Deciduous Forest, which is characterised by Terminalia and Teak; Semi-Evergreen Forest along streams; and Tropical Evergreen Forest in the sholas, characterized by the attractive and important Silk Cotton

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Tree. These woodland habitats support an impressive list of birds including approximately half the peninsular endemics and near endemics. Of these we may see Grey Junglefowl, Blue-winged Parakeet, Malabar Trogon (the Asian Trogons are much less conspicuous than their counterparts in the Neotropics and require considerable diligence to find), Malabar Grey Hornbill, White-cheeked and Crimson-throated barbets, the very attractive White-bellied Tree-pie, Yellow-browed Bulbul, Rufous Babbler, White-bellied Blue Flycatcher, and Crimson-backed and Loten's sunbirds. Other birds we may see include Oriental Darter; Woolly-necked Stork; Oriental Honey-Buzzard; Besra; Red Spurfowl; Pompadour Green Pigeon; Mountain Imperial Pigeon; Emerald Dove; Plum-headed Parakeet; White-rumped Needletail; Chestnut-headed Bee-eater; Great Hornbill; Rufous, White-bellied and Heart-spotted woodpeckers; Greater Goldenback, Bronzed and Greater Racket-tailed drongos; Grey-headed and Southern Hill mynas; Rufous Treepie; Large Wood-shrike; Black-headed Cuckoo-shrike; Golden-fronted Leafbird; Fairy Bluebird; Black-crested Bulbul; Indian Scimitar-babbler; Brown-cheeked Fulvetta; Tickell's, Blue, Grey-headed and Paradise flycatchers; Black-naped Monarch; Plain Prinia; Black-browed Tit; Velvet-fronted Nuthatch; and Plain Flowerpecker. At this time of the year a number of wintering passerines may also be present, including Asian Brown, Brown-breasted and Rufous-tailed flycatchers; Greenish, Large-billed and Western Crowned leaf warblers; and Forest Wagtail. Periyar also harbours a number of very elusive specialities which we will make a special effort to locate, including the attractive Indian Pitta, Indian Blue Chat, Orange-headed Thrush and Puff-throated Babbler.

NIGHTS: Aranya Niwas, Thekkady.

January 27, Day 20: Drive to Cochin. Today we will finally take our leave of this wonderful area and drive west to the city of Cochin and fly to Chennai.

NIGHT: GRT Grand, Chennai (Madras)

January 28, Day 21: Fly Madras to Port Blair, Andaman Islands. This morning we will wing our way across the Bay of Bengal, south and eastwards to the tiny Andaman Islands. These little tropical pieces of paradise harbour a very distinctive avifauna including a number of species found nowhere else in the world.

NIGHT: Fortune Bay Island Hotel

January 29, Day 22: Andaman Islands - Mount Harriet and Chiriyappu. Located closer to the west coast of Burma than India, the Andaman Islands are typically balmy, emerald, tropical islands which still retain large areas of pristine rainforest. Isolated for millennia, these islands have witnessed the evolution of a rich array of endemic species and distinctive forms of more widespread species. In addition, because of the geographical location of these islands, the avifauna reflects a fascinating mix of typically Indian and Southeast Asia species. We have nearly two days to explore the mangroves, beaches, mud-flats and moist lowland forests. Some of the birds we may encounter include Pacific Reef Egret, Chinese Pond Heron, Yellow and Cinnamon bitterns, Andaman and Crested serpent eagles, Eastern Marsh Harrier, Japanese Sparrowhawk, White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Slaty-breasted Rail, Ruddy-breasted Crake, Watercock, Pintail Snipe, a good sprinkling of shorebirds including Terek Sandpiper and Little Stint, Black-naped Tern, Red Turtle-Dove, Pompadour Green Pigeon, Green Imperial Pigeon, the uncommon Andaman Wood Pigeon, Andaman Cuckoo-Dove, Vernal Hanging-Parrot, Alexandrine, Red-breasted and Long-tailed parakeets, Indian Cuckoo, Andaman Coucal, Edible-nest and Glossy swiftlets, the striking Black-capped Kingfisher, Collared Kingfisher, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Fulvous-breasted and Andaman woodpeckers, Black-naped Monarch, Andaman Drongo, Andaman Treepie, Bar-bellied Cuckoo-shrike, Asian Fairy-Bluebird, White-headed Starling, Asian Glossy Starling, Asian Brown Flycatcher, White-rumped Shama, Black-headed Bulbul, Black-browed Reed-Warbler, Pallas's Grasshopper-Warbler, Dusky Warbler, White-rumped Munia, Forest Wagtail, and Olive-backed Sunbird. With a bit of luck, we may encounter the little known Andaman Grey Teal, Andaman Scops Owl, Andaman Hawk Owl and Mangrove Whistler. With extraordinary luck we may encounter the very little known Andaman Crake, which some of us saw and of which we obtained unique sound recordings on our 2003 tour!

NIGHT: Fortune Bay Island Hotel

January 30, Day 23: Fly Port Blair to Chennai connecting with onward flight to the USA. This morning we will reluctantly depart these enchanting islands and fly back to Chennai, arriving at approximately 3:00 p.m. A dayroom will be available for your use in Chennai until late this evening. If your flight departs at another time other than early morning of January 31st, we will arrange a private airport to hotel transfer coordinated with your flight schedule.

NIGHT/DAY-ROOM: GRT Grand, Chennai (Madras)

PARTICIPANTS: This tour is limited to a maximum of 14 participants. Should registrations number 8 or less, this tour will be led by the first leader only.

LEADERS: David Bishop and Susan Myers

David Bishop has spent much of the past 29 years studying the birds and natural history of New Guinea and the Oriental region, in particular Indonesia and Bhutan. Once a police officer amid the streets of London's West End, David 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 finest quality tour. David has undertaken a number of expeditions to previously unexplored regions, such as the Van Rees Mountains of Irian Jaya, to survey little known and, in many cases, globally threatened species. This has resulted in the rediscovery of a number of species including the incomparable Wallace's Standardwing, a bizarre bird-of-paradise, and together with Jared Diamond in 1996, Heinrich's Nightjar, previously known from just a single specimen. This important work continues. In July 1997, David, together with Brian Coates, published *A Guide to the Birds of Wallacea* (Sulawesi, the Moluccas, and Lesser Sundas). David lives with his wife and two children on 27 acres of lovely kangaroo country in the university town of Armidale, northern NSW, Australia.

Susan Myers has been studying the fauna of Australia and Asia for over 20 years. After her university studies in Biological Sciences, she moved to Japan where she lived for four years, learning the language and studying the natural history and culture. Once a qualified nursing practitioner, Susan has also worked as a scuba dive instructor on Australia's Great Barrier Reef in Queensland, showing international visitors this marine marvel. Her passion and enthusiasm for all aspects of natural history, especially birds, began in early childhood. She has published papers on ornithology and general ecology in a variety of scientific journals. Susan has traveled extensively through most of southern and eastern Asia and led tour groups to many destinations in this region. Her deep affection and appreciation of Asia and its wildlife, her special language skills, and her understanding of the different cultures of this region ensure an extra dimension to your tour. Susan's involvement in nature tourism now exceeds 15 years.

EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS: Should you wish to make arrangements to extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least **two months** prior to your departure date. These arrangements may range from an extra night at the initial hotel of the tour to a week or more extension including accommodations, sightseeing, and transportation. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the **Southern India & the Andamans** is **\$8695.00** per person, based on double occupancy, and includes all meals beginning with breakfast on Day 4 to breakfast on Day 23, accommodations as stated, ground transportation during the tour, internal India flights, and guide services provided by the tour leader. The tour fee does not include roundtrip airfare from your home to Bangalore with a return from Chennai (Madras) back to the USA, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages other than those supplied as part of regular meals, special gratuities, telephone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates

are based upon group tariffs, if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small party supplement may be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$1590.00**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations or if you prefer to share a room, but have no roommate and one cannot be provided for you.

NOTE: Those participants joining the Grand Southern India tour directly after the Sri Lanka tour will need to purchase a one-way ticket from Colombo to Bangalore.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, complete the VENT registration form and return it with a deposit of **\$500.00** per person (check or money order in U.S. dollars.) If registering by phone, the deposit must be received within 10 days or the space will be released. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refunds are made according to the following schedule: If cancellation is made 120 days or more before departure date, the deposit less **\$75.00** per person is refundable. If cancellation is made fewer than 120 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions, as well as any transfers from one tour to another. ***We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself.***

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$75.00
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	No refund available.

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, as are other coverages such as terrorism protection; 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 Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

CLIMATE: Southern India, The Andaman Islands and Sri Lanka are generally warmer and more moist than the north and can, at times, be very hot and humid, especially in the lowlands and near the coast. However, the VENT tour is arranged at a time when the weather is not too oppressive and is, generally, very pleasant and may be referred to as "shirt-sleeve comfortable." The Andaman Islands are noticeably more humid, as is typical of tropical islands. It is a little drier and hotter in and around Mudumalai and Yala National Parks and quite cool around dawn and dusk at higher altitudes in the Nilgiris and Western Ghats. It may even be cold for the first few hours, around dawn on some of our early morning jeep rides. We may encounter some rain, but it is unlikely.

CLOTHING: For all VENT India tours bring light-weight long-sleeved shirts and pants in natural fabric such as cotton or cotton and man-made fibre mixes, or, even better, the new loose-fitting nylon field shirts and pants that are produced in ideal colors, such as those made by Columbia and Exofficio. These offer protection against

the sun and insects (very few) whilst remaining comfortable, cool, and easy to launder. A warm sweater or jacket are essential for the cool dawns and evenings. People who feel the cold easily may require additional protection. Robust walking boots with a good lug sole are essential; lightweight sports sneakers are generally insufficient. Thick socks help absorb perspiration and cushion one's feet, especially when walking constantly on a hard surface. A sound, rain-proof jacket is recommended. All clothing should be in muted colors, as this is less disturbing to birds and other wildlife. A wide-brimmed hat is also very important; however, please ensure that it is not white or a similar bright color. Sunglasses can also be useful for reducing glare and keeping dust out of one's eyes during rides in open vehicles.

Participants may wish to include one dressier outfit (such as a sports coat, dress or pant suit) for wearing to dinner at some of the smarter hotels and/or lodges.

DOCUMENTS: For U.S. citizens a current passport valid for at least six months after the conclusion of the tour and your return airline ticket are required for entry into India. Visas are required for India. We suggest you use a private agency like CIBT for obtaining your Indian visa. Details for doing this will be included in your registration packet. You may also contact the Indian Embassy for details on obtaining your Indian visa on your own. Our ground agents will arrange our special permit for the Andaman Islands.

HEALTH: Sanitation is not ideal; however, it has improved radically during the time that VENT has been operating tours to the sub-continent, largely as a result of greatly improved hygiene and the widespread availability of bottled, non-carbonated, water. Clients are advised **NOT** to drink the water anywhere, even in the very smart hotels of the larger cities. Indian and Sri Lankan beer is excellent, and tea and coffee and other bottled soft drinks are safe and widely available. Bottled water is also widely available, and this is perhaps one of the most important contributions to the reduction in sickness on tours to the Indian sub-continent. In addition, your tour leaders will carry iodine tablets for your use should you so wish. Clients are advised **NOT** to eat uncooked or partially cooked meat or vegetables, or food that has been cooling in the open, permitting flies to settle. Only eat fruit that you have peeled, preferably after washing the outside with clean water. **“BOIL IT, PEEL IT OR FORGET IT.”**

Traveler's diarrhea used to be a common complaint on trips to the Indian sub-continent. Fortunately, this increasingly is now uncommon and usually only as a result of the incautious eating of some of India's wonderfully spicy food! A prescription of Lomotol, to take care of the symptoms, is useful to have along. Malaria is present in some parts of the Indian sub-continent (including Sri Lanka). There are currently three popular prophylaxis treatments for malaria: Mefloquine (Lariam), Malarone, and Doxycycline. All of these medications are available by prescription only. Please consult your physician. Recommended vaccinations include Cholera (now considered only mildly effective), typhoid, and tetanus.

Please be sure to bring along all necessary prescription drugs and other pharmaceutical items. Although they can be purchased in India, you may not be able to obtain your preferred brand.

INSECT PROTECTION: Insects are generally not a problem at the time of VENT tours to the Indian sub-continent (including Sri Lanka); however, mosquitoes can be an occasional nuisance in some parts of the south. We recommend carrying Cutter's or similar insect repellent.

EQUIPMENT: Of course a good pair of binoculars in sound condition (please check) is essential. Some clients carry a second pair in case of emergency. The same advice applies to people who wear spectacles or contact lenses, to protect against accident or theft. Your tour leader will be carrying a Questar spotting scope; however, you are more than welcome (**in fact encouraged**) to bring your own spotting scope if you so wish.

The Indian sub-continent is a photographer's dream. Clients are strongly advised to check that all their equipment is in good working order, that they have new and plenty of spare batteries for all their flash units, etc., and that they are carrying more than enough film. A commercially available, lead-lined bag is very useful to keep

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your film cool. It does not keep film safe from X-rays, however.

Other items of use include a flashlight (torch), water bottle or canteen, a small day pack, plastic bags to protect your equipment, handywipes, and paper tissues and industrial masks (very useful in dusty, sandy locations such as the dry habitats).

ELECTRICITY: India and Sri Lanka both operate 230 – 240 volts, 50 cycles, AC systems.

SUGGESTED READING: Our website at www.ventbird.com offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from the store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You might also want to visit such other online stores as www.amazon.com, and for those out-of-print and hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com, or www.buteobooks.com, which specializes in ornithology books.

Grimmet, R., C. Inskipp and T. Inskipp. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. Helm Identification Guides. Christopher Helm & A.C. Black. London. 1998. **This book illustrates and documents in detail every species we are likely to encounter on any tour to the Indian subcontinent. All participants are recommended to obtain a copy of this guide as it greatly supersedes all previous guides we have advocated for tours to this region. This excellent guide covers all the species of southern India, the Andaman Islands and Sri Lanka.**

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TIPPING: As noted in our itineraries, tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, and local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. **We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.**

RESPONSIBILITY: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. 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 on July 22, 2005 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.