

ORNITHOLOGY 101 IN SOUTH TEXAS: A LEARN-ABOUT-BIRDS WORKSHOP

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During the past 15 plus years, birding has become increasingly sophisticated. Optical equipment and field guides are better than ever, and birders, in turn, now have more knowledge of field identification and distribution than ever before. As the hobby continues to evolve, our experience has taught us that many birders and observers of nature seek more from their experiences.

On this one-of-a-kind birding workshop, we will emphasize the underlying science of birds in conjunction with standard bird observation. In combining field identification with the results of scientific research of birds, life histories, and short, morning PowerPoint slide show presentations and discussions, we present an “Ornithology 101” learning experience.

The venue for this program is the Lower Rio Grande Valley of South Texas, a haven for birds and birders where visitors are treated to a wide diversity of waterfowl, shorebirds, waders, raptors, and passerines at any time of the year. The winter season is particularly productive as resident specialty birds are joined by a marvelous diversity of overwintering species from the north. In our travels we'll visit sites with place-names instantly recognizable to birders far and wide, places like Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, South Padre Island, and Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park. Perhaps less known but of equal caliber are newer areas like Estero Llano Grande State Park, Edinburg Scenic Wetlands, and other satellite sites of the World Birding Center. The World Birding Center is not just one place, but nine unique locations in the Rio Grande Valley. Each site has its own attractions for both the first-time visitor and expert birder.

While visiting these superb birding locations, we will discuss the origin and evolution of birds, and answer a wide range of questions related to current taxonomic relationships, speciation, and the division of birds into Orders, Families, Genera, Species, and Subspecies. For example, in viewing the beauty of herons and egrets and other members of the Order Ciconiiformes, we will discuss why Snowy Egrets and Little Blue Herons are more closely related to each other than the Cattle Egret is to them both; and while enjoying the diversity of waterfowl colors, we will learn why many males are so brilliantly colored and many females are not.

Other topics we'll explore are bird anatomy, bird brains, physiology, and the key features that allow for survival in a variety of habitats. We will talk about morphological adaptations and the evolution of various types of bills and their functions. Perhaps the most standout feature of birds is feathers, and we will delve into the evolution of feathers, bird flight, and ornamentation. We'll talk about the avian egg, and its development. Why do birds have 2-4 toes and how do they locomote? We will discuss the evolution of bird song and its relevance to courtship displays and territorial defense. Why are some birds monogamous, polygamous, polygynous, and even polyandrous (i.e. females with multiple

males)? We'll discuss these and other mating systems. Other topics include habitat selection, nest building, migration, orientation, and more.

We emphasize that this workshop presents a marvelous opportunity for anyone interested in learning more about birds, and that it will prove a valuable and fun experience for beginning birders and more experienced observers alike.

February 6, Day 1: Arrival into McAllen. Participants should plan to arrive in McAllen International Airport (airport code MFE) this afternoon and take the complementary shuttle to our hotel where a room will be reserved in your name. We'll convene in the hotel lobby at 6:00 p.m. for an official trip welcome and introduction followed by dinner at a local restaurant.

NIGHT: Hampton Inn & Suites, McAllen

February 7-10, Days 2-5: The "Lower" and "Middle" Valleys. The Lower Rio Grande Valley of South Texas is undeniably one of the country's preeminent destinations for birding and natural history observation. The subtropical environment that characterizes the region allows for conditions that provide excellent birding all year long, while an extensive system of parks and preserves protects large tracts of native brush, riparian woodland, and wetlands. The "Valley" is located in the middle of the Central Flyway, a bird migration route that generally follows the Great Plains in the United States and Canada. Early February is a good time for witnessing the after-effects of autumn migration, when over-wintering waterbirds, hawks, and songbirds from the north have settled in for the winter season. Of course, the Valley is most famous for the assortment of range-restricted specialty birds found nowhere else in the United States.

Geographically, the Rio Grande Valley extends from Falcon Dam in the north and west to the mouth of the Rio Grande and the Gulf of Mexico to the south and east. Within this broad area, the Valley can be further divided into the "Lower," "Middle," and "Upper" valleys. We will have four full days to explore a number of parks and preserves that dot the Lower and Middle valleys. All locations offer superior birding in terms of quantity and diversity, but of equal importance is the opportunity to observe birds at close range. It is for these reasons that South Texas was chosen as the host-site for this workshop.

Participants are advised, however, that the workshop emphasizes the life of birds beyond birdwatching. Although we will cover the technical descriptions of bird topography and identification, compiling a large list of birds, seeking Valley specialties, and chasing rare Mexican stray species are not priorities. We will begin early each morning with short discussions on various aspects of bird life history. We will expand on our morning talks with in-the-field examples as we encounter birds. We will stay focused on birds, and we hope to impart a great breadth of knowledge about evolutionary adaptations in birds.

Our schedule will be flexible and somewhat dependent on local conditions such as weather, tides, and where birds are concentrated. It is possible that we will visit new sites every day, or, conversely, we may make repeat visits to more productive areas. Among the likely destinations are:

- **Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge:** We may spend a full morning exploring Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge and several nearby areas. Often called the "jewel of our national wildlife refuge system," Santa Ana is the very essence of South Texas birding. Within the boundaries of the refuge sits a complex mosaic of habitats indicative of what early Texas looked like. Dense, impenetrable brush country intermingles with cattail marshes, freshwater impoundments, and towering tropical hardwood forests. Perhaps more than any other single location in South Texas, Santa Ana exists as a bastion for native birds, plants, and animals. The modern visitor center offers excellent interpretive displays and information about the refuge and features a well-stocked bookstore. In sum, a trip to Santa Ana is essential for any visiting birder.

Santa Ana is a dynamic place, with many birds that can easily be seen. We will walk a number of the roads and trails that penetrate the native habitat in search of such classic South Texas specialties as White-tipped Dove, Plain Chachalaca, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Green Jay, and Olive Sparrow. The marshy ponds and lakes in the center of the refuge commonly host Least Grebe and Black-bellied Whistling-Duck. Green Kingfishers are often sighted sitting quietly among the reeds or on a bare branch only inches above the surface of the water. Even Fulvous Whistling-Ducks and Ringed Kingfishers are present on occasion. A walk to Pintail Lake might produce a host of herons and egrets. Great Kiskadee and Couch's Kingbird can be common. Toward mid-morning we will want to pay attention to the skies when soaring birds take center stage. Red-tailed, Harris's, and Red-shouldered hawks often join Turkey and Black vultures on the rising thermals while Ospreys and accipiters are seen with regularity.

- **Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park/World Birding Center:** Another destination is the famous Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park. The center of the World Birding Center sites, it hosts the full assortment of resident Valley specialties and a variety of other birds. We may spend the greater part of a morning at Bentsen, watching the antics of Plain Chachalacas and marveling at the colors of Altamira Orioles, with these and other birds easy to observe at the park's feeders. This is one of the best places to spot a Gray Hawk or even a Clay-colored Thrush, a species that persists in south Texas as an uncommon breeding species.
- **Estero Llano Grande State Park:** Estero Llano Grande is both a state park and one of the World Birding Center sites which offers a very diverse mix of classic Valley birds, waterbirds and wintering songbirds. In recent years this site has emerged as the most exciting birding destination in the Valley. A system of flooded impoundments creates ideal feeding and roosting conditions for myriad birds associated with water. In fact, the viewing platform right at the visitor center is not to be missed! As evidence, we should enjoy stunning views of Anhinga, Neotropic Cormorant, Least Grebe, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, herons and egrets, ibises and spoonbills, Green and Belted kingfishers, and many others. The surrounding woodlands offer superb opportunities to view Plain Chachalaca, White-tipped Dove, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Great Kiskadee, Couch's Kingbird, Green Jay, Long-billed Thrasher, Clay-colored Thrush, and Olive Sparrow.
- **South Padre Island:** To those not from Texas, South Padre Island is probably best known as a massive Spring Break mecca for college students. For most of the year, however, South Padre Island, or SPI, is actually a fairly quiet and low-key place where a small commercial and residential zone is squeezed between the Gulf of Mexico on one side and the shores of the Laguna Madre on the other. Arriving from the mainland, we'll cross the Queen Isabella Causeway and spend part of a day on this, the world's longest barrier island. Our exploration of SPI will begin as soon as we reach the island. Upon reaching the island, a short drive to the south will see us in close proximity to an expansive mudflat studded with clumps of Black Mangrove of varying size. Shorebirds and wading birds will be our objective as we scan our surroundings for groups of wintering plovers, sandpipers, yellowlegs, dowitchers, herons, egrets, and ibis. Several miles to the north, both the South Padre Island Birding & Nature Center and the South Padre Island Convention Center are excellent locations to view large aggregations of waterbirds of varying stripes. In particular, the SPI Birding & Nature Center is of high appeal, a beautiful facility featuring exhibits and a short boardwalk into a mangrove wetland. Here, tidal pools and mudflats offer sanctuary to a fine variety of birds that can be enjoyed at surprisingly close range.
- **Edinburg Scenic Wetlands:** Located a few minutes north of McAllen, Edinburg Scenic Wetlands is a 40-acre site featuring wetlands, butterfly gardens, and a first-rate visitor center. Another of the World Birding Center satellites, the wetlands offers close encounters with nature in an otherwise urban setting, a delightful place that caters to local residents and visiting nature enthusiasts alike. A large tree-fringed lake is the park's centerpiece, and a great place to see water-associated bird species at close range. On any given day, birds such as Least and Pied-billed grebes, Neotropic and Double-crested cormorants, Anhinga, Ringed and Green kingfishers, Great Kiskadee, and Couch's Kingbird may be seen with relative

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ease. Enhancing the scene, a couple of viewing platforms offer spacious viewing conditions, in turn allowing for group discussions.

There are also a number of other smaller sanctuaries in the Lower Valley, and time-permitting we will visit some of them. Among the possibilities are the World Birding Center site of Quinta Mazatlan and Frontera Audubon Thicket, the latter a 15-acre jewel of a preserve containing a remnant patch of native subtropical forest. Here, Green Jays, White-tipped Doves, Plain Chachalacas, and a fine variety of other birds are possible.

NIGHTS: Holiday Inn Express Hotel & Suites, Weslaco

February 11, Day 6: Departure for Home. A single group transfer will be provided to McAllen International Airport for flights departing after 10:00 a.m.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 14 participants.

TOUR LEADER: Denver Holt (a second leader will be added if tour size warrants)

Denver Holt is a wildlife researcher and graduate of the University of Montana. He is founder and president of the Owl Research Institute and the Ninepipes Wildlife Research Center, a nonprofit organization located in Charlo, Montana. A dedicated field researcher in North and Central America, Denver believes that long-term field studies are the primary means to understanding trends in natural history.

Since 1978, Denver's focus has been researching owls and their ecology. He has published about 100 papers and technical documents, including four species accounts for the *Birds of North America* project. He was also team leader for the Strigidae family (owl) species accounts for *The Handbook of the Birds of the World, Volume 5*, covering 189 species of the world's owls. In collaboration with elementary school teachers, he has co-authored two children's science books on owls: *Owls, Whoo Are They?* and *Snowy Owls: Whoo Are They?* In 2006 he was a chapter author on owls for the book *Arctic Wings*, highlighting the birds of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The foreword was written by former United States President, Jimmy Carter, and the book won the prestigious National Outdoor Book Award for Design and Artistic Merit. In 2000, he was named Montana's "Wildlife Biologist of the Year" by the Wildlife Society of North America.

Denver's research has been acknowledged by the media, including a cover story for *National Geographic Magazine* in December 2002. His work has been the subject of many television bites on all the major networks, as well as featured on Audubon's *Up-Close* series, PBS's *Bird Watch*, Disney, and David Attenborough's *Life of Birds*, among others. His research on Snowy Owls has been showcased on documentaries for National Geographic Explorer, NHK Natural History Unit of Japan, and the Norwegian Broadcasting Company Natural History Unit. His Snowy Owl research has been the focus of the British Broadcasting Company's (BBC) documentary series, *Frozen Earth*, a sequel to the highly acclaimed *Planet Earth* series. In May 2011 and January 2012, Denver's research was featured in the *New York Times*. Also in 2011, Denver worked closely with a PBS documentary film crew featuring the breeding ecology of the Snowy Owl at his research site in Barrow, Alaska. The film, *The Magic of the Snowy Owl*, aired in 2012. Denver's research on Snowy Owls in Barrow, Alaska was featured in the Spring 2015 issue of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's *Living Bird* magazine. Denver has also been the keynote speaker for several major bird festivals in the United States.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for this tour is **\$2,095** per person based on double occupancy from McAllen. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 through breakfast on Day 6, lodging, ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to McAllen and return, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$275**. 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 & DEPOSIT: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The initial deposit for this tour is **\$300** per person. If you would like to pay your initial deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, 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 the initial deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard, Visa, or American Express at the time of registration. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at www.ventbird.com) should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

PAYMENTS: Initial tour deposits may be made by MasterCard, Visa, American Express, check, money order, or bank transfer. All other tour payments, including second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc., must be made by check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). 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 the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$150** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$50** per person. If cancellation is made between 120 and 90 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 90 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions. *We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.*

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$150*
Between 120 and 90 days before departure	No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance will be refunded
Fewer than 90 days before departure date	No refund available

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$50 per person.

Upon cancellation of the transportation or travel services, where you, the customer, are not at fault and have not cancelled in violation of the terms and conditions of any of the contract for transportation or travel services, all sums paid to VENT for services not received by you will be promptly refunded by VENT to you unless you otherwise advise VENT in writing.

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.

FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE: We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance as soon as possible to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. VENT recommends *Travel Insured International* as our preferred insurance provider. Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip.

Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available; however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as work-related cancellation, medical upgrade, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause among others. Contact *Travel Insured International* (800-243-3174 or www.travelinsured.com) prior to registration for details. Not all insurance providers provide the same levels of coverage. If you purchase insurance through a company other than *Travel Insured International*, please be advised that rules and stipulations may be different.

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

BAGGAGE: For your trip to Texas, please try to refrain from bringing excessive amounts of baggage. Luggage space in the vans may be at a premium. Soft luggage is much preferable to rigid suitcases for making the most of limited storage space. Please limit your luggage to one medium-sized bag and one carry-on per person. As a precaution against lost luggage, we suggest that you pack a change of clothes, toiletries, medications, important travel documents, optics, and any other essential items in your carry-on bag.

CLOTHING: South Texas is usually mild in February, but cool temperatures and rain are possible in the event of a cold front. Please bring clothing mainly suitable for warm weather, but also a layer of cold-weather attire to meet the potential range of conditions. Dress will be casual throughout, so we recommend clothing that is both comfortable and practical. We suggest bringing several t-shirts, long- and short-sleeved. Jeans are acceptable but are not as comfortable as cotton or other lightweight materials. Packing a light to medium jacket or warm sweater or fleece, or perhaps a turtleneck, is essential in case of cold weather. Many people prefer field-type clothing, sold by outdoor stores such as Cabela’s and REI, that include pants and shirts made of lightweight, yet durable materials with multiple pockets and ventilated seams. A hat for protection from the sun is equally essential. A wide-brimmed hat is best, but participants should bring a baseball cap at the very least.

FOOTWEAR: A light hiking boot or trail shoe will be appropriate for all outings. Athletic shoes are acceptable but could become muddy or wet depending on conditions.

LAUNDRY: On-site guest self-laundry facilities are available throughout the tour.

INTERNET ACCESS: Expect Wi-Fi to be available at both hotels.

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 Texas:

- **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, memory cards, and extra batteries**
- **Collapsible walking stick** – A highly recommended item for those who have trouble walking
- **Tissue packs**
- **Mosquito repellent**
- **Light weight rain gear**

BINOCULARS & SPOTTING SCOPES:

Binoculars – We strongly recommend good binoculars of at least 7x35, 8x42, 10x40, or 10x42 magnification. We recommend that you do NOT bring mini-binoculars of any kind. Some people like “minis” 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 7x35 or 8x42 binoculars are compact and light enough.

Spotting Scopes – Your tour leaders will have scopes available for group use throughout the trip, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so.

CLIMATE & WEATHER: February is generally an outstanding time of the year to visit the Rio Grande Valley of Texas. Warm, but not hot, days and mild nights are typical of the winter season. An average day begins with mornings in the upper upper 50s/low 60s, and then warms into the upper 70/low 80s in the afternoons. Because South Texas is at a relatively low latitude, warm temperatures can occur even in the winter, with daytime highs reaching the high 80. At the other end of the scale, cold fronts from the north are entirely possible, which could herald wind, rain, and daytime highs in the 40s. Overall, pleasant and mild days are expected, but rain and cooler temperatures are certainly possible.

CONDITIONS: This tour is not physically demanding. All walks will be over even terrain on established roads, paths, and trails. Most walks will be of short distance, although we may offer an outing or two of up to a mile round-trip in length.

THE PROGRAM: The focus of this tour is on the science of birds and extended observation of birds, and not on compiling a large species list, seeking Valley specialty birds, and chasing rare Mexican vagrant species. Each of the sites we visit are selected for their setting in which close and careful observation of birds is complemented by in-depth interpretation and discussion. Learning more about birds and their life histories is the emphasis, not just standard field identification. Anyone considering this tour should take these points into account before registering.

TIME ZONE: Central Standard Time (CST)

HEALTH: If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication. As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against hepatitis types A and B.

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 Georgia. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line at 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636), 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).

Chiggers, ticks, and mosquitoes are present in this part of Texas; thus, insect repellent is recommended.

SUGGESTED READING: A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend www.amazon.com which has a wide selection; www.buteobooks.com and www.nhbs.com which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and www.abebooks.com for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

Field Guides

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Birds: All of the following field guides are widely in use. Any of the following references are an excellent choice to bring on this trip.

Dunn, Jon L. & Jonathan Alderfer (Editors). *National Geographic Society Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. Sixth edition, 2011.

Sibley, David Allen. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. Alfred E. Knopf. National Audubon Society. Second edition. 2014.

Mammals:

Kays, Roland W. and Done E. Wilson. *Mammals of North America*. Princeton University Press: Princeton and Oxford, 2009 (second edition).

Butterflies:

Brock, Jim P. and Kenn Kaufman. *Butterflies of North America (Kaufman Focus Guides)*. Houghton Mifflin Co, 2003.

Other Birding Resources:

Lockwood, Mark and Brush Freeman. *The TOS Handbook of Texas Birds*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004. Annotated accounts with range maps of all Texas species.

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that tips are not expected and are entirely optional. Tips should be given directly to your tour leader; they should not be sent to the VENT office.

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, motor-coach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. When this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on April 25, 2017 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.