

PANAMA: THE DARIÉN WILDERNESS

FEBRUARY 15-24, 2008*

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**Dates differ from those that appear in our 2008 Tour Directory*

Wilderness is the word that comes to mind when the Darién of Panama is mentioned. The very name conjures up images of unbroken rainforest, a jungle so thick that the last leg of the Pan-American Highway still has not been cut through it. This image is largely accurate for this remote area on the doorstep of South America, yet the region has never been more accessible to birders. In conjunction with ANCON, a private Panamanian conservation group, VENT is pleased to offer this tour to the huge Darién National Park in the vicinity of Cana and Cerro Pirre.

Without a doubt this vast wilderness is the richest single area for wildlife in all of Central America. All of the large indicator species are still present in these forests, including jaguar, tapir, spider monkey, Harpy Eagle and other large raptors, Great Curassow, and four species of macaws, plus a phenomenal assortment of top-quality forest birds and a host of more widespread species. In addition, the Darién supports a number of range-restricted birds, so many that an entire plate in "A Field Guide to the Birds of Panama" is devoted to them. Because Cerro Pirre is so isolated from the mountains of both Colombia and Central America, a number of endemics have evolved here and are found nowhere else in the world.

A private charter flight will take us from Panama City to the old mining camp at Cana, our base in the foothills of Cerro Pirre. Quite simply, this is one of the "birdiest" places that we have ever been. The small clearing and airstrip here are surrounded by a mélange of secondary-growth of varying ages, while the ridges above are largely untouched forest, making for almost non-stop birding action. Some groups have recorded over 100 species during their first afternoon around the clearing! We will spend a full week here, working well-established trails out from Cana, spending much of our birding time within quality forest. Our flight taking us over the Pacific coast and lowlands until the last clearings are left behind and we turn inland over unbroken forest. Accommodations here are basic, but very clean and adequate—a large wooden cabin partitioned into rooms, with shared bathrooms and showers, and a separate dining hall—while on the mountain we will have comfortable tents set up for us. For those who love birding in wild places combined with hiking, camping and a taste of adventure, this trip is a must.

One further note: Not only is this a wilderness trip to a remote area, but all of our birding will be done on foot, and some of our hikes, especially up Cerro Pirre, are somewhat strenuous. We will rise early, for years of experience in the Neotropics have shown that this is when the birds are most active, and our days will be full. This trip should only be taken by persons in good health and good physical condition. At the end of this itinerary are sections on facilities, baggage, equipment, climate, etc. Please read them over carefully, as they will give you an idea of what the camps and conditions are like. You could not ask for stronger leadership for a trip like this—David Wolf has led

over 100 previous tours to southern Central America, including trips to the Darién, and the local ANCON guides are top-notch, more familiar with this region than anyone else and eager to share their knowledge of it. Please note that the itinerary mentions mainly the birds that are most special to this region, or those generally rare and hard-to-find anywhere. We should find a high percentage of them on this tour, but we will not see all of the possibilities in a one-week visit. Note also that there are many wonderful Panama birds that we will see here that are more widespread, and therefore not mentioned in the itinerary, and that the mammals of the region are noteworthy too.

February 15, Day 1: Arrival in Panama City and Transfer to the Country Inn & Suites Canal. Participants arriving in Panama City (Tocumen International Airport) anytime this afternoon or evening will be met and transferred to the Country Inn & Suites Canal, where a room will be reserved in your name. For early arrivals, the promenade behind the hotel offers a wonderful view of ships passing from the canal into the Pacific, plus an assortment of typical birds of the open Pacific lowlands.

NIGHT: Country Inn & Suites Canal, Panama City

February 16, Day 2: Charter Flight to Cana in the Darién Our charter flight will take us over wild terrain blanketed in unbroken forest to the Darién National Park at Cana. The lower ridges are dominated by dry “cuipo” forest, the giant trees bare at this season, but as we approach the Cerro Pirre area the forest becomes noticeably lush and more evergreen, until finally the tiny clearing at Cana appears and we touch down amidst this vast wilderness. Cana is an old gold-mining camp, nestled amidst low forested ridges at the upper end of a level valley at about 1800 feet above sea level.

After settling in and taking care of logistics, we will begin birding the area right around camp. The airstrip is surrounded by a mélange of second-growth of varying ages, unbelievably rich in birds, and we will find plenty to entertain us right here. Cecropia trees provide open perches or abundant food for species like raptors, Pied Puffbird, Spot-crowned Barbet, toucans, flycatchers, Swallow Tanager (irregular), oropendolas and Yellow-backed Oriole, while skulking in the vine-tangled second-growth are tough birds like Little Cuckoo, Slaty Spinetail, Pacific Antwren, White-headed Wren and Yellow-billed Cacique. Other notable species perhaps best found around the clearing include Tiny Hawk, Red-throated Caracara, Barred Puffbird, Jet and Bare-crowned antbirds, and Black-tipped Cotinga. The late afternoon movement of macaws and parrots is stunning, dominated by Blue-headed and Mealy parrots, but including four species of macaws. Each macaw has its own preferred habitat, the Great Green and Red-and-green feeding in the terra firme forests on the ridges and the Blue-and-yellow and Chestnut-fronted utilizing the swamp forest and second-growth in the valley, but at times all four may be seen from the clearing as they commute to and from their feeding and roosting sites.

NIGHT: Cana Field Station

February 17-22, Days 3-8: Cana and Cerro Pirre. Birding trails take off right from the edge of camp and we will explore the various habitats along them in earnest during our time here. One of the outstanding features of this tour is the chance to bird entirely on foot in one area, getting to know it intimately and giving us time to track down a high percentage of the many special birds found here. From ground level to the top of the canopy there is plenty to see! In the valley close to camp the forests are mostly secondary, though one might not guess this from their tall and well-developed appearance, with huge tangles of lianas cascading down from the crowns and dense damp thickets in the understory. Remarkably, this region has re-forested from earlier cycles of native settlement and periodic gold mining, and all of the wildlife is now present again. The Boca del Cupe Trail cuts through this forest for many miles, eventually reaching a distant native village on the Tuira River. This trail is so rich in birds that we will work parts of it over several days. In the shady understory, mixed-flocks dominated by antwrens are typical and they almost always have more interesting species tagging along, perhaps a Red-rumped Woodpecker, Black-striped Woodcreeper, Red-billed Scythebill, Black-tailed or Sulphur-rumped flycatcher, Stripe-throated Wren or even the enigmatic and rarely-seen Broad-billed Sapayoa. Small vine-tangled openings are the preferred habitat of Dusky-backed Jacamar, Moustached Antwren, Purple-throated Fruitcrow, Black-

ched Jay and White-headed Wren, while Crested Guan, Black-tailed Trogon and motmots sit in the shade of the midstory. Mixed-flocks overhead in the inter-locking canopy are harder to observe, but full of great possibilities, including Cinnamon Woodpecker, White-fronted Nunbird, Gray-cheeked Nunlet, Slaty-winged Foliage-gleaner, Double-banded Graytail, Rufous-winged Antbird, Gray Elaenia, One-colored Becard, Speckled Mourner, Yellow-backed and Lemon-spectacled tanagers, and at least a chance for rarities like Viridian Dacnis and White-eared Conebill. Dense heliconia thickets attract hummingbirds (especially Green Hermit and Green-crowned Woodnymph) while the thick tangles are ideal habitat for antbirds, Thicket Antpitta, Black-billed Flycatcher (rare), Brownish Flycatcher and Dusky-faced Tanager. Swampier spots sometimes harbor a surprise like an Agami Heron, tiger-heron or black-hawk. Always to be hoped for is an army ant swarm with the full complement of attendant birds and our chances of finding at least one swarm are reasonably good. The usual triumvirate of Bicolored, Spotted and spectacular Ocellated antbirds dominate the swarms, but both the legendary Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoo and beautiful Black-crowned Antpitta have been seen here regularly.

One of the special features of this tour is the opportunity to camp for two nights in the lush forest on Cerro Pirre, giving us access to the endemics and specialties found only in the upper-zone forests. Reaching the tented camp involves a steady uphill hike of 4-6 hours, slowly ascending several thousand feet in elevation on a well-established trail, but truthfully the hike is likely to take most of the day, for many of the finest birds of the region can be seen along this trail. The trail takes off directly from Cana, the character of the forest changing as we climb up-slope. At first it passes through drier tropical forest dominated by palms, with an open understory. A different cohort of birds is more likely in this zone than in the wetter forests above or below, the special possibilities including wood-quail (rarely seen well), Great Jacamar, Yellow-eared Toucanet, Crimson-bellied Woodpecker, Golden-crowned Spadebill, Golden-headed Manakin, Thrush-like Schiffornis, Slate-throated Gnatcatcher, and Scarlet-browed Tanager. Above 3500 ft the forest becomes noticeably damper and lush, with more moss and epiphytes on the large trees, and clumps of bamboo scattered through the understory. Here we will start finding typical "foothill" species in the mixed-flocks, perhaps including Red-headed Barbet, Spotted Barbtail, Lineated Foliage-gleaner, Russet Antshrike, Slaty Antwren, Immaculate Antbird, Slaty-capped Flycatcher, White-ruffed Manakin, Black-and-yellow Tanager and colorful *Tangara* tanagers. Rarer species sometimes associated with the flocks include Stripe-cheeked Woodpecker, Brown-billed Scythebill, Rufous-rumped Antwren, Sharpbill, Sooty-headed Wren, Yellow-browed Shrike-Vireo (devilish to spot) and Yellow-green Grosbeak. We should also pick up our first endemics in this zone, such as the Rufous-cheeked Hummingbird feeding at flowering shrubs, and we have chances for some truly stunning birds like Tawny-faced Quail (rare), Tody Motmot, Tawny-throated Leaf-tosser, Wing-banded Antbird and Rufous-breasted Antthrush.

Two nights of camping at mid-elevations puts the higher elevation endemics within our reach. The climate here is subtropical and pleasantly cool, with clouds and fog often sweeping the mountainsides. In this lush old-growth "cloud forest" are found rarities like the Russet-crowned Quail-Dove, Greenish Puffleg, Golden-headed Quetzal and endemic Varied Solitaire, as well as many of the previously mentioned species. From camp a final ascent takes us up through progressively more stunted forest as we near the ridgetop at just over 5200 ft. Here the trees are small and contorted, the forest floor is wet and peaty, and the understory is almost impenetrable. Birds are scarce in this zone, but anything that we find is likely to be a "good one." We will watch any flowering epiphytes for the strange Tooth-billed Hummingbird, and listen intently for the soft foraging notes of the endemic Pirre Bush-Tanager, typically the "leader" of the small flocks here. With them, if we are lucky, we will find the triad of upper-elevation endemics; the Beautiful Treerunner, Pirre Warbler and Green-naped Tanager. None are easy, but this is literally the only place in the world where one has a chance of seeing these species.

After hiking back down to base camp at the Cana Field Station, we will have one final day to enjoy these bird-rich forests. There is much to see and do here.

NIGHTS: Cana Field Station (February 16-18, 21-22) and Pirre Tent Camp (February 19-20)

February 23, Day 9: Charter Flight Back to Panama City. This morning we will have a little time to bird around the clearing at Cana, listening for the arriving charter flight that will take us back to Panama City and civilization.

NIGHT: Country Inn & Suites Canal, Panama City

February 24, Day 10: Departure for Home. Participants will be provided with transfers to the airport in time for morning or early afternoon flights home.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 10 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: David Wolf with the assistance of local leaders

David Wolf is a senior member of the VENT staff and one of our most experienced tour leaders. After birding the U.S. and Mexico for over a decade, an interest in the wildlife of Africa led him to Kenya in 1975 where he spent over a year studying the birds and other wildlife of the African continent. Soon after his return to Texas he began leading Rockport Wildlife Weekends for VENT, at that time a new company, and he hasn't looked back since. In addition to Africa, David has extensive birding and tour-leading experience in North America and the Neotropics. He unites great birding skills with a wide-ranging interest in all aspects of natural history. David and his wife, Mimi, live in Nacogdoches, Texas, with assorted horses, cats, and dogs.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for Panama: The Darién Wilderness is **\$3475** per person in double occupancy from Panama City, Panama. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 to dinner on Day 9, nine nights shared accommodations, ground and charter air transportation during the tour, tipping, park entrance fees, and guide services provided by the tour leader. It does not include airfare from your home to Panama City and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for Panama: The Darién Wilderness is **\$480**. 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. Note that rooms are limited at Cana Field Station (Days 2-5 and 7-8) and singles may be asked to share. If so, you will be credited appropriately.

FACILITIES: This is a true wilderness trip and facilities are limited, but they have steadily improved over the years and are quite comfortable, though basic. Cana Field Station has a total of 8 bedrooms (7 of which are available for tour participants), each with two single beds, a night table and a shoe rack. Bedding and towels are provided and will be changed every two days. Toilet and shower facilities consist of four bathrooms shared by the guests, with hot water showers available through solar panels installed for this purpose. Food will be served buffet style in a dining hall in a separate building, entirely screened in and with balconies for viewing. Given the remoteness of the area, the food is far better than adequate but by necessity somewhat simple. We will accommodate those with special dietary requests but must be provided with this information well in advance. Power is provided by a small solar-operated generator available in the morning from wake-up time until breakfast and in the evening during dinner and bedtime. Outlets will be available for charging batteries during these hours. During our camping expedition to Cerro Pirre, all tents and bedding will be provided and set up for us.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refunds are made according to the following schedule: if cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, the deposit less \$125 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 ap-

plies 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.***

If you cancel:

120 days or more before departure date
Fewer than 120 days before departure date

Your refund will be:

Your deposit minus \$125.
No refund available.

MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE REQUIREMENT: All participants are **required** to purchase a medical evacuation policy for this tour and will be asked to sign and return to the VENT office a waiver stating that this has been done. Such a policy should be available from any insurance company which provides trip cancellation coverage (see below).

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 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 AND EQUIPMENT: In case your checked luggage is delayed on your arriving flight, it's recommended that you pack all documents, medications, a change of clothes, your binoculars, and toiletry items in a carry-on bag.

On the charter flights Days 2, 4 and 11, **a strict baggage restriction of 25 lbs. per person** applies because of the size of the charter aircraft (which will also carry our supplies). Adherence to this restriction is very important for your safety. Please pack in soft-sided luggage.

A few hints to bear in mind in packing for this baggage restriction:

1. Mudboots are available so you don't need to bring your own.
2. Since our coolest temperatures will be in the upper 50's at night, you will not need much cool-weather clothing. Clothing that can be easily rinsed-out and dried will help reduce the weight of your bag.
3. Extra baggage can be stored at the Country Inn & Suites Canal while we are in the Darien.
4. On the hikes and camping trips, participants will be expected to carry their own personal gear for the 2 nights out (i.e. change of clothes and toothbrush), but all camping gear will be provided and carried up for us. This may have some bearing on the style of back pack that you choose to bring.

Because this is a wilderness trip where the only option is to be out on foot, it is very important that you are well-prepared with a few basic items including a sunhat, sunscreen, umbrella and/or poncho, water bottles (two quarts recommended), insect repellent, a day pack for carrying your field equipment (and personal items for the camping trip), a few large ziplock bags to protect gear from rain showers, and an alarm clock. A small but bright flashlight or headlamp is essential and you may consider a second one as a back-up. You may also wish to bring a small supply of energy snacks as only granola bars are available from the station.

CLOTHING: Needless to say, dress is casual throughout. Lightweight field clothing is the norm, especially clothes that can easily be rinsed out and dried. We suggest dark-colored field pants and shirts for forest birding (whites and bright colors and patterns startle the birds). Lightweight long-sleeved shirts that dry quickly are recommended; the long sleeves are not essential but offer additional protection from sun and biting insects. Seed ticks can be a problem here at times, so treating your field clothing thoroughly with Permethrin (several times) is recommended. For our two nights at cooler elevations you should have a light jacket or sweater, and perhaps a thermal top for sleeping in. Good footwear is essential, and for this we recommend sturdy hiking boots that are waterproof or water-resistant. Flip-flops or light sneakers are handy to have for use around the lodge. Mudboots are available. Also important are a poncho and umbrella for rain protection, and a hat for sun protection.

CLIMATE: At just under 2000 ft. elevation, Cana's climate is quite pleasant, though tropical. Expect the open areas to be warm and humid (to the upper 80's) by midday, while the shady forest interior remains pleasant throughout the day. Expect it to cool down at night to around 70 degrees. On Cerro Pirre at 3500 ft. elevation, expect cooler conditions during both day and night but never cold (down to the upper 50's). Although this tour is scheduled for the dry season, we may experience rain-showers at any time, especially on the mountain.

INSECT PROTECTION: Because chiggers and ticks can be a problem, we recommend carrying insect repellent and liberally applying it to your ankles and pant cuffs. You may also want to spray your field clothing with Permethrin several times to help repel the ticks and chiggers. In some parts of the forest mosquitoes are sometimes a problem, so wearing long-sleeved shirts and carrying a small repellent with you is advised.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry service is only available at the Country Inn & Suites Canal. The Cana Lodge has an outdoor sink for hand washing clothes and lines to hang them on to dry.

CURRENCY: The U.S. Dollar is the official currency of Panama. VISA and American Express are most commonly used, but MasterCard and Diners Club are also accepted.

DOCUMENTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure from Panama is required. Visas are not required for entry by United States citizens. A tourist entry card must be purchased from the airline on which you travel (approximately \$5.00 US). Non-United States citizens should check with their local Panamanian consulate/embassy for instructions.

HEALTH: In general, we recommend that you consult your doctor before taking any immunizations. Health requirements change frequently and often vary from district to district within a country. No vaccinations are required to enter Panama. However, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta advise that there is some risk of malaria. The CDC currently recommends that travelers to Darién Province in Panama should take one of the following antimalarial drugs (listed alphabetically): atovaquone/proguanil, doxycycline, mefloquine, or primaquine (in special circumstances). Your tetanus, Polio, and yellow fever vaccinations should be current. The water is drinkable in Panama and the food is safe. Please do check with your doctor for your own personal needs and prescription drugs (which may or may not be available on tour).

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 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line (877) FYI-TRIP. You can check the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian

Panama: The Darien Wilderness, Page 7

citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

MISC: Departure Tax - US \$20 (subject to change without notice)
Electricity - 120 volts; plugs are the flat 2-pin American type.
Language - The official language is Spanish, but English is spoken.
Time - Eastern Standard Time

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.

Field Guides:

Ridgely, Robert S. and John Gwynne. *A Guide to the Birds of Panama*. (Second Edition). Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. This excellent field guide is highly recommended as your primary reference book on the birds. No other field guides are really necessary.

Reid, Fiona A. *A Field Guide to the Mammals of Central America and Southeast Mexico*. Oxford University Press New York, 1997. The primary field guide for mammals in this region.

Emmons, Louise H. *Neotropical Rainforest Mammals: A Field Guide*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Background Reading:

Chapman, Frank. *My Tropical Air Castle*. New York: Appleton and Company, 1929. Fun reading by an early ornithologist in Panama. Out of print; try www.abebooks.com.

Chapman, Frank. *Life in an Air Castle*. New York: Appleton-Century Co, 1938. Out of print; try www.abebooks.com

Forsyth, Adrian and Ken Miyata. *Tropical Nature*. New York: Charles Scribner, 1987. Excellent introduction to many fascinating aspects of the tropical rainforest.

Hilty, Steven. 1994. *Birds of Tropical America*. Shelbourne, VT: Chapters Publishing, 1994. Subtitle: "A watcher's introduction to behavior, breeding and diversity." Highly recommended as the most readable and informative book on many different aspects of bird ecology and birding in the Neotropics.

Kricher, John C. *A Neotropical Companion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999. An excellent introduction to the rainforest.

McCullough, David. *A Path Between the Seas: The Creation of the Panama Canal*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999. An excellent history of the construction of the Panama Canal.

Richards, Paul W. *The Tropical Rain Forest: An Ecological Study*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. (Second Edition.) A more scientific review of the botanical structure of rainforests.

Reference:

Croat, Thomas B. *Flora of Barro Colorado Island*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978. A massive technical manual, but the best plant book available for the region.

Panama: The Darien Wilderness, Page 8

Hilty, Steven L. and William L. Brown. *A Guide to the Birds of Colombia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986. An excellent field guide that has most of the birds of Panama in it; perhaps useful as an additional reference book.

Ridgely, Robert S., and Guy Tudor. *Birds of South America Volume I, The Oscine Passerines: Jays, Swallows Wrens, Thrushes and Allies, Vireos, Wood-warblers, Tanagers, Icterids and Finches*. Austin: The University of Texas, 1989. Very useful reference, with range maps and illustrations of many species not previously illustrated.

Ridgely, Robert S., and Guy Tudor. *Birds of South America Volume II, The Suboscine Passerines: Ovenbirds and Woodcreepers, Antbirds, Gnateaters, and Tapaculos, Tyrant Flycatchers, Manakins and Cotingas*. Austin: The University of Texas, 1994. Very useful reference, with range maps and illustrations of many species not previously illustrated.

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

RESPONSIBILITY: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. When this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on December 3, 2007 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.