

EASTERN VENEZUELA

THE GRAND SAVANNA, TEPUIS, & RIO GRANDE RAINFORESTS

FEBRUARY 25-MARCH 7, 2008

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VENT is proud to offer this unique trip to Eastern Venezuela. Although several other operators offer trips to this destination, we believe none can approach this one in terms of diversity of habitats visited or in coverage of the magnificent tepui region and the Grand Savanna. Our tour includes a drive completely across the Grand Savanna and two early mornings of birding at the Venezuelan-Brazil border.

Southeastern Venezuela is one of the richest regions of endemism in all of South America, and the uniqueness of its avifauna is enhanced by the scenic grandeur and romance associated with the region. Southeastern Venezuela is especially remarkable for the tepuis (pronounced "ta-pu-e"), an Indian word for the mesa-like mountains with flat tops and vertical sandstone cliffs that dominate the landscape. All of the more than 35 endemic birds of this ancient land occur on the forested talus slopes at the feet of the tepuis or in the wet forests on the slopes leading into this legendary land of "El Dorado."

Our Eastern Venezuela itinerary includes all of the Grand Savanna right to the southeastern-most town in the country, Santa Elena. This not only gives us the opportunity to see the totality of the Grand Savanna, but also its prettiest section, which is in the far south. Only by going to the far southern end of the savanna can one have the opportunity to see Roraïama Mountain, as well as Kukenam, Ptari, and Guadacapiapué. Trips which venture only to the northern end of the grasslands (as most do) see only one or two very distant tepuis (if the weather is clear). Furthermore, by going all the way to the south, we add several birds that are rare or unlikely in the northern part of the savanna. These include Ocellated Crane, Red-bellied and Red-shouldered macaws, Least Night-hawk, Bicolored Wren, White-thighed Swallow and Tawny-headed Swallow

We also visit tropical dry forests between Puerto Ordaz and El Palmar and the rainforests of Rio Grande that lie to the east of El Palmar. The birdlife of the dry forests is strongly reminiscent of that in the llanos. Indeed, these dry forests and grasslands represent the very easternmost extension of the llanos avifauna. The rain forest, on the other hand, is almost pure Guianan – similar to that seen in Guyana or Surinam. The lowland forests harbor many big and relatively conspicuous birds – cracids, parrots, woodpeckers, cotingas, and oropendolas, among others – and their conspicuousness stands in sharp contrast to what one usually experiences in western Amazonia. We also have found antbirds to be easier to see in these Guianan forests than in Amazonia, and generally we have been able to find army ants and some of the professional ant-following birds with less trouble in eastern Venezuela than in western Amazonia.

In addition to the lowland forests, this tour itinerary concentrates for several days on the rich, endemic avifauna of the forested slopes of the famous "tepuis." Birds are less numerous in the tepuis, and inevitably some of the endemic take considerable patience to locate. Some of the southeastern Venezuela specialties we hope to find include Tepui Parrotlet, Rufous-breasted Sabrewing, Tepui Goldenthrout, Peacock Coquette, Velvet-browed Brilliant, Streak-backed Antshrike, Brown-breasted

Antpitta, Red-banded Fruiteater, Rose-collared Piha, Scarlet-horned Manakin, Olive Manakin, Ruddy Tody-flycatcher, Black-fronted Tyrannulet, Chapman's Tyrannulet (rare), Great Elaenia, Flutist Wren, Golden-tufted Grackle, Tepui Greenlet, Greater Flower-piercer, Olive-backed Tanager, and Tepui Brush-Finch.

February 25, Day 1: Arrival in Caracas, Venezuela. You should plan your flights to arrive Caracas, Venezuela (Maiquetía International Airport, CCS) between 10-11:30 PM. Participants arriving on other flights may either take a taxi to the hotel or arrange a private transfer through our office at an additional charge. After clearing customs and immigration, you will be met by our ground operator and transferred to our hotel, located less than 30 minutes from the airport.

NIGHT: Hotel Ole Caribe, Caracas

February 26, Day 2: Caracas to Pto. Ordaz; to the Rainforest at Las Claritas. We plan to depart early this morning for our 6:00 AM, one-hour flight to Pto. Ordaz. Upon arrival, we will transfer to an air-conditioned bus, which we will use for the remainder of the trip. Our first stop will be at a beautiful park right in Pto. Ordaz. There is a spectacular overlook of the waterfalls of the Caroní River here, and the park has tall dry forest and many birds typical of the region. A sampling might include Great and Snowy Egret, Capped Heron, Roadside Hawk, Orange-chinned Parakeets, Green-rumped Parakeet, Yellow-crowned Parrot, Russet-throated Puffbird, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Streak-headed Woodcreeper, Black-crested Antshrike, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Ochre-ored Flatbill (formerly Yellow-breasted Flycatcher), Brown-crested Flycatcher, Southern Beardless-Flycatcher, Social Flycatcher, Boat-billed Flycatcher, Piratic Flycatcher, Streaked Flycatcher, Tropical Kingbird, Buff-breasted Wren, Violaceous Jay, Pale-breasted Thrush, Orinocan Saltator (near-endemic), Tropical Gnatcatcher, Red-eyed (Chivi) Vireo, Scrub Greenlet, Black-collared Swallow, Tropical Parula, Burnished-buff Tanager, Trinidad Euphonia, Saffron Finch, and Yellow-rumped Cacique.

Stops later today could add Horned Screamer, Blue-winged Teal (northern migrant), Cocoli (White-necked) Heron, Striated Heron, Buff-necked Ibis, Whispering Ibis, White-tailed Kite, Black-collared Hawk, Pearl Kite, Southern Lapwing, Wattled Jacana, several migrant waders, Pale-vented Pigeon, White-headed Marsh-Tyrant, Short-crested Flycatcher, Hooded Tanager, Oriole Blackbird, Yellow Oriole, Red-breasted Blackbird, and more.

We will continue traveling, making occasional birding stops, plus a lunch stop, and plan to arrive at our overnight destination sometime late in the afternoon. After we pass the Rio Cuyuní, probably in mid-afternoon, the forest rapidly becomes much taller and wetter. The river itself provides a fine stop, often hosting Ringed and Amazon kingfishers, several species of swallow, i.e. white-winged, Black-collared, White-banded, and Southern Rough-winged, and Gray-breasted Martin. At the edge of adjacent woodlands, we could see a few flycatchers, tanagers, saltators, and perhaps even a family of Brown Jacamars. Birdlife changes quickly after we cross the river, and if time permits, we may make a roadside stop in the tall forest to view parrots or toucans, or perhaps other species before reaching Las Claritas.

NIGHT: Anaconda Bungalows, Las Claritas

February 27-28, Days 3-4: Tepui Highlands and Gran Sabana. During this portion of the tour, we will be looking especially for birds endemic to the southeastern highlands. One morning our route will take us gradually upward onto the forested slopes of the tepui highlands. By late morning we will have ascended several thousand feet and emerged onto the Gran Sabana (Grand Savanna), a very large and relict (old and isolated) type of grassland that extends far southward toward the Brazilian border. Some of the southeastern Venezuelan specialties we hope to find include Tepui Parrotlet, Rufous-breasted Sabrewing, Tepui Goldenthrout, Peacock Coquette, Velvet-browed Brilliant, Streak-backed Antshrike, Tepui (Brown-breasted) Antpitta, Red-banded Fruiteater, Rose-collared Piha, Scarlet-horned Manakin, Olive Manakin, Ruddy Tody-Flycatcher, Black-fronted Tyrannulet, Flutist Wren, Golden-tufted Mountain-Grackle, Tepui Greenlet, Olive-backed Tanager, and Tepui Brush-Finch. In fact, we may see 20 or more tepui endemics during this portion of the trip. Other possibilities

include the Fiery-shouldered Parakeet and Tepui Swift, or even the rare Roraiman Barbtail and the Greater Flowerpiercer.

High on everyone's list is the spectacular Guianan Cock-of-the-rock, and it has been a steady performer over the years. In fact we have always obtained good views of it a short distance up into the foothills of the Sierra de Lema. One of our first mornings will be devoted to insuring that everyone sees this spectacular bird. In addition, the birding is usually excellent in these wet foothills, even right along the road. Here we could see Red-and-green Macaws, Fiery-Shouldered Parakeets, Straight-billed Hermit, Masked Trogon, Golden-olive Woodpecker, Chestnut-rumped Woodpecker, Warbling Antbird, Wing-barred Piprites, the rare and local Sharpbill, Flutist Wren (regularly heard but difficult to see), Slaty-capped Shrike-Vireo, Tepui Greenlet, Roraiman (Two-banded) Warbler, Slate-throated Whitestart, and Fulvous Shrike-Tanager. Two other species that are high on our list of "must see" species are the White Bellbird and Bearded Bellbird. Remarkably, both species occur in the tepuis, often virtually within earshot of each other. They are not, however, necessarily easy to see, as both call from perches within the forest as well as above the canopy. We hope to be able to spot them when the males are calling from a perch above the canopy.

During our days, we will continue searching for endemic birds of the pan-tepui region. The scenic grandeur here is legendary, and we will have opportunities to appreciate the beauty of the region. In places sheer cliffs rise hundreds of feet above the forest or tower above the roadside. Sweeping forested landscapes are broken by characteristic mesa-like mountaintops, bluish in the distant haze. Ribbon-like waterfalls drop hundred of feet from the tops of cliffs to the forest below. This region was, reportedly, the setting for Hudson's famous book, *Green Mansions*, and its appeal is strong and unforgettable. The forest is particularly distinctive. Trees are often gnarled, shrubs are woody and dense, and leaves are often rather small, shiny, and leathery. Even the Gran Sabana, a vast rolling grassland situated mostly at 4500 feet elevation, is unusual. Composed of tough grasses and low woody growth, it resembles a short dense heath more than true grassland.

Our days will be filled with a collection of endemic and unusual birds (many of relic distribution), lovely scenery, intriguing forests, and perhaps a sense that this land may still hold the secret of the legendary El Dorado. We will also spend one or two mornings in the lowland forest near our lodging at the Anaconda. Most late afternoons we will relax here, as the birding from the yard at the Anaconda can be quite good. In fact, with telescopes set up, we have had some of our best studies of parrots, barbets, cotingas, and many other species right from the yard. In the lowlands the list of possibilities is large. There will be parrots (Blue-cheeked, Mealy, Black-headed, Blue-headed, and Caica are often along the road), Barbets (Black-spotted is regular here), several toucans and aracaries, and a host of smaller species as well.

NIGHTS: Anaconda Bungalows, Las Claritas

February 29-March 1, Days 5-6: To Santa Elaena From the Tepui Region. We will spend the morning in the Sierra de Lema. After a picnic lunch, we will continue southward across the Grand Savanna almost to the Brazilian border. This drive across the savanna is considered by many to be one of the most beautiful in all of Venezuela, and we are sure you will not be disappointed. Although we will do some birding this afternoon, the drive will be so spectacular that we will make a number of primarily "sight-seeing" stops for photography and to just take in the magnificent landscapes, featuring tepuis and lines of gallery forest along streams.

Birds may include White-tailed Hawk, Tepui Goldenthrroat, Plain-crested and Great elaenia, Tawny-headed Swallow, Black-faced Tanager, Burnished-buff Tanager, Red-shouldered Tanager, and with luck even a flock of Tepui Swifts or mixed group of White-collared and Tepui swifts. In moriche palm groves near Santa Elena, we could see Red-bellied Macaws and Orange-winged and Yellow-crowned parrots. We will be on the lookout for the rare White-throated Kingbird, as we approach the town of Santa Elena.

During our full day here we hope to add many species typical of lowland forests which, in this region draw from both Amazonian and Guianan avifaunas. A sample of species here includes White-tailed and Pearl kite, Savanna Hawk, Black-and-white Hawk-Eagle, Ruddy Pigeon, Red-and-green and Red-shouldered macaw, Fiery-shouldered and Painted parakeet, Blue-headed and Orange-winged parrot, Neotropical (Fork-tailed) Palm-Swift, Black-eared Fairy, Brown jacamar, Black Nunbird, Swallow-winged Puffbird, Black-necked, Many-banded, Channel-billed and

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White-throated toucan, Yellow-tufted, Golden-collared, Yellow-throated, Golden-olive, Lineated, Red-necked and Crimson-crested woodpecker, Dusky-throated Antshrike, Bronw-bellied Antwren, Black-throated Antbird, Screaming Piha, White-bearded, White-crowned, Golden-crowned and Striped Manakin and Dwarf Tyrant-Manakin, Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Short-tailed Pygmy-Tyrant, Zimmer's (Yellow-margined) Flatbill, Grayish Mourner, Piratic Flycatcher, White-winged Becard, Black-tailed Tityra, House Wren, Pale-breasted and Black-billed thrush, Tawny-crowned Greenlet, Slaty-capped Shrike-Vireo, American Redstart (North American breeding migrant), Golden-crowned Warbler, Bananaquit, Black-faced, Magpie, Yellow-backed, Fulvous-crested, White-shouldered, Silver-beaked, Paradise, Green-and-gold, Spotted, Bay-headed, Burnished-buff, and Opal-rumped tanager, Green, Purple and Red-legged honeycreeper, Blue Dacnis, Buff-throated Saltator, Yellow-green Grosbeak, Moriche Oriole and Olive Oropendola (scarce).

NIGHTS: Villa Fairmont, Santa Elena de Uairen

March 2, Day 7: The Grand Savanna. We will be up at dawn this morning for a short drive over the Grand Savanna. The southern Grand Savanna is lovely beyond comparison, and particularly at dawn, as the first rays of light fall on the vast groves of moriche palms. At dawn Red-bellied and Red-shouldered macaws are usually wheeling about, Least Nighthawks may still be chasing shadows across the grassy slopes, a Bicolored Wren may chuckle in the distance, or a Sooty-capped Hermit may dash across the road with a squeak and a wiggle of its long white tail. One person once said while standing out here, "On mornings like this, it is truly great to be alive." Another said, "It looks like the Cretaceous....without the dinosaurs." We would agree! It is indeed a beautiful place.

A sampling of species here, including some mentioned above, might include Northern Crested-Caracara, Ash-throated Crake (voice), Crested Bobwhite, Pale-vented Pigeon, Fork-tailed Palm-Swift, Black-throated Mango, White-tailed Goldenthrout, Brown-throated Parakeet, Blue-headed and Orange-winged parrots, Crimson-crested Woodpecker, White-throated Toucan, Amazonian White-tailed Trogon, Streak-headed Woodcreeper, Eastern Slaty-Antshrike, Dusky Antbird, Black-chinned Antbird, Golden-headed and White-bearded manakins, White-throated Kingbird (the only place in the country where it is regularly seen), and, of course, Tropical Kingbird. Also possible are Sulphury Flycatcher (around Moriche Palms), Yellowish Pipit, Paradise and Masked tanager, Purple-throated Euphonia, Finsch's Euphonia (rare here), Swallow-winged Puffbird Black-faced Tanager, Plumbeous Seedeater, Grassland Sparrow, and Wedge-tailed Grass-Finch.

About mid-day we'll begin our drive northward across the vast rolling plains, morichales (moriche palm groves), and gallery forests of the Grand Savanna. This is considered by many to be the most beautiful area in all of Venezuela, and we're sure you won't be disappointed. This region was made famous by Arthur Conan Doyle's *Lost World*, and is also the presumed setting for the delightful tale, *Green Mansions* by W.H. Hudson. After viewing a vast, palm-dotted landscape of valleys and rolling, green-clad slopes in the southern extent of the Grand Savanna, a tour member once exclaimed, "This could be the Cretaceous. The only thing it lacks is dinosaurs!" Beyond the great natural beauty of this region, there are many endemic species of birds in the forests and savannas, which now attract many birders and naturalists.

If the day is relatively clear, we should obtain some fine views of several large tepuis, including Iru-tepui, Kukenan-tepui, and the well-known Roraima-tepui, which tower nearly 9,000 feet high, and may show numerous ribbon-like waterfalls cascading from their summits. We will make frequent stops during our crossing of the savanna and plan to return to our quarters in Las Claritas about dusk. Some of the species we hope to see on our crossing are Tepui Swift (unpredictable in occurrence), Tepui Goldenthrout (another unpredictable species), Great Elaenia (uncommon), Tepui Spinetail, Swainson's Flycatcher, Pearly-vented Tody-Tyrant, Tawny-headed Swallow, Tropical Mockingbird, Burnish-buff Tanager, Black-faced Tanager, and Ruddy-breasted Seedeater. We will also be looking for the tiny and very rare Bearded Tachuri but we would have to be lucky to find this species.

NIGHT: Anaconda Bungalows, Las Claritas

March 3, Day 8: The upper Cuyuni River. We also will plan a visit to a display lek of Capuchinbirds. Large, oddly-proportioned, and with a call that sounds like a distant chain-saw, this is a bird to behold indeed. With pa-

tience we are usually able to get good looks at this remarkable species and to see some of its displays. There are always a few rarities to be on the lookout for, such as the Blue-backed Tanager, and of course plenty of commoner species to search for as well. Among them will be trogons, antbirds, flycatchers, thrushes, tanagers, and icterids (oropendolas and caciques).

NIGHT: Anaconda Bungalows, Las Claritas

March 4, Day 9: Morning Anaconda; Afternoon Drive to the Rio Grande Region (about 4 hours). We'll spend the early morning near the Anaconda and then depart northward for Rio Grande, making several stops en route. Near the Anaconda the road passes through a long section of rainforest, and gradually enters partially wooded country north of the Rio Cuyuní and El Dorado. We may make a few stops en route to look for birds; along the Rio Cuyuní there are usually several species of martins and swallows, as well as kingfishers, various tanagers, saltators, and sometimes a few hummingbirds. In the evening, as we approach the Rio Grande area, we will pass through a long region of rather dry forest, some of it now cleared for cattle ranching. Close to Rio Grande the environment abruptly becomes wetter, although deforestation is almost complete in and around the little town of El Palmar where we'll base for the next three nights.

NIGHT: Parador Taguapire, El Palmar

March 5, Day 10: Rio Grande Forest Reserve, Serrania de Imataca. The Rio Grande is a rather unimposing little river that slices through the heart of the Rio Grande Forest Reserve. The name "reserve" is perhaps something of a misnomer, for the region functions as logging reserves, and has been and continues to be heavily logged. Settlers have followed, and clearings, which are enlarged each year, now reach practically to the borders of the river itself. Nevertheless, logging roads run for dozens of kilometers beyond the river, and the entire area still provides visiting birders and naturalists with access to some of the best lowland rainforest birding in Venezuela. In fact, the increased "edge" habitat makes it possible to see a number of forest species more easily here than in unbroken rainforest. Sadly, however, we know that this is a temporary situation and the long-term future of this area as a forest reserve does not look good.

The birds of this region are distinctly Guianan, rather than Amazonian, with such species as Marail Guan; Painted and Golden-winged parakeets; Caica, Dusky, and Red-fan parrot; Red-billed and Channel-billed toucans; Black-necked and Green aracari; Green-tailed and Paradise jacamar; Black Nunbird; Ferruginous-backed Antbird; Brown-bellied and Ash-winged antwren; Painted Tody-Flycatcher; Buff-cheeked Greenlet; and Rose-breasted Chat. The list of birds for this area is very large and in all includes as many as five cracids, 13 parrots, a dozen woodpeckers, 10 woodcreepers, over 30 antbirds, and more than 50 species of flycatchers. The region is renowned for big birds — raptors, parrots, toucans, woodpeckers — and enjoys a reputation for one of the highest densities of Harpy Eagles anywhere in the Neotropics. While we certainly can't guarantee a Harpy Eagle on a visit to this region, we believe the chances of seeing one are better than almost anywhere else. If time permits we may also spend some time in nearby Tropical Dry Forest and a sample of species found in this habitat can be found under Day 11.

NIGHTS: Parador Taguapire, El Palmar

March 6, Day 11: El Palmar to Pto. Ordaz; evening flight to Caracas. Most of the morning we'll be in Tropical Dry Forest and savannas where we should add a number of new birds. Tropical dry forests are disappearing even faster than rainforest, often being bulldozed and burned for cattle pasture and this area is no exception. Accessible tropical forest is rapidly disappearing here and within a few decades will be all but gone. For the present, however, it still harbors an impressive number of birds, including Gray-headed Kite, Black Caracara, Copper-rumped Hummingbird, Glittering-throated Emerald, Russet-throated Puffbird, Eastern Slaty-Antshrike, Black-crested and Barred antshrike, White-bellied Antbird, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Yellow Tyrannulet, Pale-eyed Pygmy-Tyrant, Northern Scrub-Flycatcher, Common Tody-Flycatcher, Pied Water-Tyrant, Cattle Tyrant, Great Kiskadee, Boat-billed Flycatcher, Rusty-margined and Social flycatcher (the races of these last two species very similar here), Streaked and Fork-tailed flycatcher, Blue-backed Manakin, Gray-breasted Martin, Buff-breasted Wren, Bare-eyed Thrush, Long-billed Gnatwren, Scrub Greenlet, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Tropical Parula, White-lined, Silver-beaked, Blue-gray and Burnished-buff, and Turquoise tanager, Trinidad Euphonia, Blue-black Grassquit, Gray Seedeater, Saffron

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Finch, Grayish Saltator, Eastern Meadowlark, Yellow Oriole, Yellow-rumped Cacique and Crested Oropendola. We'll board an afternoon flight to Caracas.

NIGHT: Hotel Ole Caribe, Caracas

March 7, Day 12: Depart for Home. The tour ends this morning with an early transfer to the Caracas airport in time for flights departing between 8-10:00 AM. Transfers for flights departing at other times can be arranged in advance at an additional charge.

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

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 8 participants.

TOUR LEADER: David Ascanio

David Ascanio, a Venezuelan birder and naturalist, has spent the last 20 years guiding birding tours throughout his native country, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, Guyana, northern Peru, and western Ecuador. He is especially interested in bird vocalizations, and has a private library containing sounds of more than 70% of all the birds of Venezuela, including some which are the only ones known to science. David speaks excellent English and combines superb birding skills with an astonishing command of bird vocalizations. He has published several manuscripts about the birds of the llanos (plains) and the tepui endemics for which he has become an authority. He is an excellent communicator, has a great sense of humor, and is tireless in helping others find birds and wildlife. These traits have made him the most popular naturalist/guide in his country.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is **\$3565** per person in double occupancy from Caracas, Venezuela. This includes all meals from Breakfast on Day 2 to Dinner on Day 11, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground and air transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Caracas 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 this tour is **\$420**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you. Single rooms are not offered in Taguapire. The hotels will try to accommodate you in spare double rooms, but if these are not available, you will have to share on these particular nights.

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 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.***

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.

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.

ACCOMMODATIONS: Some of the hotels are quite rustic, with minimal services available. At a few locations, you may experience electrical outages; water shortage; items in rooms difficult to use (such as locks and lamps) or in disarray; and the rooms may be noisy. Therefore, please accept the accommodations for what they are – a place to sleep, not for luxury. A certain amount of resourcefulness and ingenuity may be needed to get maximum mileage out of your accommodations, as well as hotel dining facilities. Your leaders will do all they can to help with any problems you may have with your accommodation.

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: We request you limit your baggage to one large duffel (or soft sided suitcase) and one carry-on. Also, as a precaution, we recommend packing your binoculars, walking shoes, a change of clothes, personal medications and toiletries, and your travel documents in your airline carry-on bag.

CLIMATE & CLOTHING: January through March is generally drier than other months, but there could still be periods of rain. In general, the weather should be warm during the day and mild at night. Lightweight clothing is the rule. Long-sleeved shirts of light material are desirable as they provide additional protection against biting insects. Clothing that you can wash yourself and which dries quickly is preferred. We recommend you bring rubber boots and you should bring an umbrella or rain gear. **Please do not bring white or very light-colored shirts, pants or hats** as we will be doing much forest birding.

Be sure to bring a sweater or a jacket. We will spend some time at about 4,500 feet elevation, and it can become cool at these altitudes. Layering is a good idea. You can begin the day when it is cool with a sweater or light jacket and then shed these as it warms up.

Good footwear is essential. We strongly suggest good waterproof hiking boots with ridged soles or rubber boots. Also bring a pair of sneakers. Because towels are small and thin at some hotels we recommend you also bring a towel.

DEPARTURE TAX: Departure and airport tax is Bs 90,200, about USD \$45 and included in the cost of your air ticket.

DOCUMENTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure from Venezuela is required. Visas are not required for entry by United States citizens. Non United States citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions. You will be issued a tourist card by the airline you arrive. Please hold on to the copy they return to you upon entering immigration in Venezuela as you will need it to exit the country.

EQUIPMENT: A day pack is highly recommended for use in carrying your favorite "between-meal" snacks, lunch, your water bottle, etc. **Each person should bring a one-quart (or one liter) Nalgene plastic water**

bottle that has a tight fitting but wide lid for easy refilling. Large Ziploc bags are suggested to protect cameras and binoculars from rain or humidity. On trips to the tropics, it is always a good idea to bring some ear-plugs, and everyone should have an **alarm clock and a good flashlight** suitable for use when walking outside at night. Those persons not wishing to purchase bottled water should have aqueous iodine or other means of purifying water.

SUGGESTED PACKING LIST:

- three pairs of hiking pant (dark colors)
- three long-sleeved shirts (light weight material, dark colors)
- sunscreen lotion
- a good hat (no white or light-colored hats, please)
- Cutter's stick repellent (2)
- OFF insect spray
- socks, undergarments, etc.
- hiking boots
- sneakers
- towel, washcloth
- bath soap (optional)
- earplugs, toothbrush, toothpaste
- small mirror
- plastic water bottle (one quart size)
- day pack
- snacks, Ziploc bags (large size)
- first aid supplies (aspirin, etc.)
- sweater, polar fleece shirt or light jacket
- good rain gear
- rubber boots
- flashlight with spare batteries
- umbrella
- alarm clock and extra batteries for it
- Nalgene water bottle (with wide lid)

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.

No vaccinations are required to enter Venezuela. The CDC does suggest that your polio, tetanus and typhoid protection be up-to-date. Malaria is present in some rural areas of Venezuela including the chloroquine-resistant strain. In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line 877-FYI-TRIP (394-8747) or you can check their website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

You should not drink local water or use it for brushing your teeth. All hotels will supply drinking water in thermos bottles in your room (or in large bottles in hotel hallways and lobbies). Bottled water of various kinds is available at all restaurants. Extra water for rooms may be purchased by tour participants and will always be available when we are in the field. But all participants must have a canteen or water bottle.

INSECT PROTECTION: We recommend bringing an adequate supply of insect repellent, including a stick-type form for your hands and face, plus a pump-style container of OFF or Cutter's for your clothing.

MISCELLANEOUS:

- Currency - Bolivar
- Electric Current - 110 Volts (some adaptors may be needed)
- Language - Spanish
- Time - 1 hour ahead of Eastern Standard Time

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

Birds:

- Hilty, Steven L. *Birds of Venezuela*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002. **This is the most appropriate book for this trip. It treats and illustrates all of the species you will see.**
- Dunsterville-Branch, Hilary. *Venezuela: The Bradt Travel Guide*. Fourth Edition. Globe Pequot Press, Inc., June 2003.
- Hilty, S.L. and W.L. Brown. *A Guide to the Birds of Colombia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986. This covers most of the birds found in Venezuela and has some of the same plates.
- Hilty, Steven L. *Birds of Tropical America: A watcher's introduction to behavior, breeding and diversity*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005. Provides good natural history background for many aspects of tropical bird behavior.
- Restall, Robin; Rodner, Clemencia and Miguel Lentino. *Birds of Northern South America: An Identification Guide*. Volume 2: Plates and Maps. Helms Field Guides. 2006. Good new book with interesting format but no text in volume 2 and, with over 6000 illustrations, it treats far more species than most travelers to Venezuela would want or need.
- Ridgely, R. S. and G. Tudor. *Birds of South America*. Vols. I and II. Austin: University of Texas Press. Vol. 1 (1989) is subtitled *The Oscine Passerines*. Vol. 2 (1994) *The Suboscine Passerines*. Good references and superb plates, but these volumes are too large to use when traveling or to carry in the field.

Ecology:

- Forsyth, Adrian and Michael Fogden. *Portraits of the Rainforest*. Canada: Camden House, 1990.
- Forsyth, Adrian and Ken Miyata. *Tropical Nature*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1984. Excellent introductory reading on tropical natural history.
- Kricher, J.C. *A Neotropical Companion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989. Good coverage of tropical natural history.

History:

- Moron, Guillermo. *A History of Venezuela*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1964. A not-quite unopinionated history of Venezuela by a Venezuelan, but nevertheless worth reading for an overview on Venezuela's interesting past.
- Vigneras, Louis-Andre. *The Discovery of South America and the Andalusian Voyages*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976. An account of the various Spanish voyages of exploration, beginning with the third voyage of Columbus, and most of those which centered on the Venezuelan coast.

Mammals:

- Emmons, L.H. *Neotropical Rainforest Mammals*. A field guide. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990. Paperback. Very good.

Recording:

- At present there are no CD's or cassettes of bird vocalizations specifically for Venezuela. The most useful for travelers in Venezuela is probably Krabbe, N, J.V. Moore, P. Coopmans, M. Lysinger and R.S. Ridgely, 2001. *Birds of the Ecuadorian Highlands: The upper Montane and Paramo Zones of Ecuador*. John V. Moore recordings: a four-CD publication which has voices of many of the Andean species we will see in Venezuela. A DVD by P. Boesman (*Birds of Venezuela*, 2003; Bird Songs International) provides photos and songs of many Venezuelan birds but we have found information in DVD format to be less useful than a combination of a field guide and CD's and/or cassettes.

Video:

- *The Living Edens: The Lost World Venezuela's Ancient Tepius*. PBS Video Series. 2003

General:

- Dunsterville Branchy, Hillary. 2003. *Venezuela. The Bradt Travel Guide*. 4th edition. Globe Pequot Press. Good overview of the country. Also see Lonely Planet Guide; Insight Guide; Rough Guide to Venezuela and others of general interest.

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

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