



# DRY TORTUGAS

*April 27 - 30, 2027*

Located 70 miles west of Key West in the Gulf of Mexico, the seven islands that make up the Dry Tortugas are the only tropical islands associated with the mainland United States. During the breeding season, thousands of Sooty Terns and Brown Noddies come ashore to nest, making one of the tiny islands in the Tortugas chain the site of the largest concentration of these pelagic species in the Northern Hemisphere. This great seabird colony is surely one of the highlights of a visit to the Tortugas.

The Tortugas are also special because they serve as a stopover for migrating landbirds, including warblers, thrushes, cuckoos, and buntings, and there is always the possibility of a West Indian stray. While en route to and from Key West, we often encounter such pelagic species as Audubon's Shearwater, Brown Booby, and Bridled and Roseate terns. Masked Boobies and Magnificent Frigatebirds also breed on smaller keys in the Tortugas.

Our trip is timed for the height of migration and peak activity at the seabird colony. Each year holds new adventures and surprising discoveries. Most of our previous participants have agreed that visiting the Tortugas is one of the most unique birding experiences in North America.

Accommodations will be aboard the Coast Guard-inspected, 82-foot "Makai," a motor vessel that comfortably sleeps up to 9 participants in semi-private cabins. The "Makai" is clean, well-run, and has a crew of three. Special features of the vessel include central air conditioning, two bathrooms with showers, sun deck, shaded back deck, and a watermaker. We should enjoy fine cuisine as well.



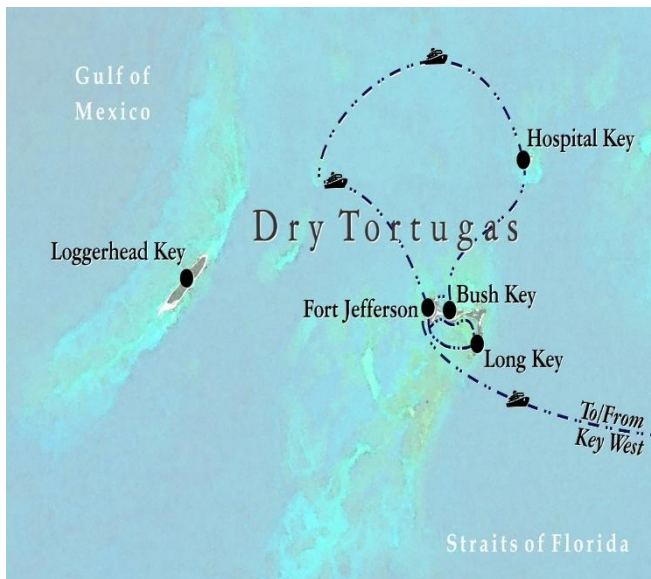
## April 27, Day 1: Arrival in Key West

Participants may arrive in Key West at any time this afternoon and take the complementary shuttle to the Doubletree Grand Key Resort. We recommend that you consider arriving as early as possible, or even on April 26, to offset travel fatigue and/or potential travel delays. Upon request, the VENT office will assist with any additional lodging arrangements.

At 5:00 p.m., the group will meet in the lobby for a brief orientation, a bit of birding, followed by dinner and a transfer to Robbie's Marina, where we'll have a reception with the crew aboard the vessel.

**NIGHT:** Aboard the *M/V Makai*

## April 28, Day 2: Key West to the Tortugas



The passage to the Tortugas takes a half-day, so we plan to depart the dock before dawn to maximize our time. Weather permitting, our route will take us southward into the Gulf Stream, where we will have a chance to see Audubon's Shearwater, Northern Gannet, Pomarine Jaeger, Bridled Tern, and perhaps other seabirds. A couple of favored buoys en route may harbor a few Brown Boobies and Roseate Terns. Our captain is intimately familiar with birding tours and knows where to go to give us the best chance

of finding the birds we want to see. We can expect a late morning or early afternoon arrival to the archipelago. Before anchoring, we'll be sure to include a stop by tiny Hospital Key, the only site in the U. S. where Masked Boobies nest. Set amid clear tropical waters, the sandy Dry Tortugas are beautiful tropical islands. Garden Key, the only key with year-round public access, is the site of historic Fort

Jefferson. One of the largest masonry structures in the world, the fort presents an incongruous sight amidst the shallow turquoise seas of the Tortugas.



*Masked Boobies nest on Hospital Key. It is their sole breeding colony in the U.S. © Rafael Galvez*

The history of the fort and islands is as fascinating as the birding. In 1513 the Spanish conquistador Ponce De Leon discovered and named the islands “Las Tortugas,” Spanish for “The Turtles.” Because none of the islands contained fresh water, they were later renamed the Dry Tortugas as a warning to passing mariners. By the mid-1800s, the United States recognized the strategic importance of the island chain, due to its location on a busy trade route with ships transiting between the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico. To protect the route, construction of Fort Jefferson began in 1846. It took 30 years to build and was actually never completed. The Union Army used the fort as a prison during the Civil War, 1861-1865.

The fort’s most famous occupant, Dr. Samuel Mudd, who set the broken leg of Lincoln’s assassin, John Wilkes Booth, was imprisoned here and left a legacy of humanitarian service before eventually receiving a pardon in 1869.

The Army abandoned Fort Jefferson in 1874. In 1908 the area became a wildlife refuge to protect the nesting terns, and in 1935 the fort and surrounding waters were given national monument status. In 1992, the entire Dry Tortugas chain was re-designated a national park to protect both the historical and natural features.

Today, Fort Jefferson’s massive walls provide refuge not to armies of men, but to hundreds of exhausted trans-Gulf migrants. Its shores are visited not by conquering armies from foreign lands, but by birders, naturalists, fishermen, and curious visitors. The trees within its grounds are sometimes teeming with songbirds. As many as twenty species of warblers may feed among the foliage, while mute Cattle Egrets stalk scarce prey below.



*Many bird species including warblers, thrushes, buntings, and others visit the fountain regularly © Rafael Galvez*

In addition to warblers, our searches in and around the fort may yield Yellow-billed Cuckoo, the “Antillean” Short-eared Owl, Common and Antillean nighthawks, Chuck-will’s-widow, Gray Kingbird, Black-whiskered Vireo, various thrushes, Indigo and Painted buntings, Dickcissel, Bobolink, and many others. Sky-watching often pays off with American Kestrels, Merlins, and Peregrine Falcons, all looking for an easy meal.

During the heat of the day, we can take refuge in the shade of the trees next to a gently percolating fountain. It is often in this fashion that we have our best sightings. By simply remaining patient, we can closely study a continuous procession of birds as they come to drink. Here we have had exceptional looks at many warblers, including Blue-winged, Cape May, Black-throated Blue, Prothonotary, Worm-eating, Kentucky, Hooded, and Ovenbird.

For those participants curious about the park's history, the park visitor center and gift shop contain books, videos, and items from the fort's heyday. There's also a self-guided tour of Fort Jefferson that allows visitors to explore the fort on their own.

Next to Garden Key is the huge Sooty Tern colony on Bush Key. At first light, the colony is raucous, as thousands of birds become active. Along with Sooty Terns are a few thousand Brown Noddies and numbers of Brown Pelicans. The spectacle is simply awesome, as terns and noddies come and go endlessly, and we should be able to locate some recent hatchlings. Bush Key is the only nesting site in the United States for these two species.



*Sooty Terns and Brown Noddies streaming out of the colony at Bush Key © Rafael Galvez*

Adjacent to Bush Key lies Long Key, the only nesting site in the United States for the Magnificent Frigatebird. One does not need to go to Long Key to see them, however. These splendid flyers pass directly over the fort or chase hapless Royal Terns just offshore. There's something unforgettable about seeing the frigatebirds floating above the fort as though suspended, the constant hubbub of the tern colony, the clear tropical waters, the sunsets and sunrises, the tired migrants seeking refuge in the trees—all combine to leave visitors with unforgettable memories.

**NIGHT:** Aboard the *M/V Makai*

## April 29, Day 3: Exploring the Tortugas

This morning we'll return to Garden Key for another round of exploration of the fort. Often, the turnover of species from one day to the next is amazing. By checking and double-checking the trees in and around the fort, we're bound to turn up new species for the trip. In the Tortugas, one simply never knows what one will find! Some seemingly out-of-place wanderers can include Roseate Spoonbill, Glossy Ibis, Sora, and Upland Sandpiper.

The Tortugas are also a great place to see rarities. Highlights of previous trips have included White-tailed Tropicbird, Red-footed Booby, Black Noddy, LaSagra's Flycatcher, "West Indian" Cave Swallow, Bahama Mockingbird, Bananaquit and Shiny Cowbird.

For anybody interested in snorkeling, the west beach offers a fine opportunity for those with the desire to explore an underwater world of coral, fish, and other colorful marine life.

Only if the weather permits, we may land on Loggerhead Key to the west. Dry and sandy, Loggerhead is different than the comparatively manicured Garden Key. The island is covered in low, dense-growing vegetation that makes foot access more difficult but may at times turn up something that we don't see elsewhere. Not to be overlooked is the famous lighthouse, built in 1856 to warn ships of the shallow water and sandy shoals. Our time on Loggerhead will depend on the productivity of the birding.



*Sunrise within Fort Jefferson's Parade Grounds on Garden Key © Rafael Galvez*

This evening we'll enjoy our last Dry Tortugas sunset. We will take dinghy rides in small groups along Bush Key as thousands of terns and noddies sweep right past us, leaving their colony towards the open sea for feeding. We will also coast Long Key and get closer to the frigatebird colony. Hundreds of them will be hanging effortlessly over the mangroves; some of the males may be displaying inflated throat pouches. The dinghy runs often turn up interesting shorebirds, wading birds, waterfowl and even aquatic species such as sea turtles, sharks and American shorebirds, wading birds, waterfowl and even aquatic species such as sea turtles, and American Crocodile. This is often ranked as one of the most magical experiences of the tour, as we get personal with swarms of countless birds while the sun sets.

**NIGHT:** Aboard the *M/V Makai*



*The M/V Makai © Makai Charters*

## April 30, Day 4: Dry Tortugas to Key West

We'll have about an hour for a final check of Ft. Jefferson before heading back toward Key West. We plan to arrive back at Robbie's Marina around 3:00 p.m. Transportation will be provided to the Doubletree Grand Key Resort.

Due to the possibility of a delayed arrival and the limited number of evening flights out of Key West, we recommend that participants DO NOT plan to fly out this evening. Upon request, VENT will assist with lodging arrangements in the Key West area.

## **ESSENTIAL TOUR INFORMATION**

**TOUR SIZE:** This tour will be limited to 9 participants.

**TOUR LEADER:** Rafael Galvez



**Rafael Galvez** has been birding and illustrating birds since childhood, a dual passion that developed when his family moved from Peru to South Florida. Always with a sketchpad in hand, he has traveled throughout the U.S., Latin America, and Eurasia in pursuit of birds. He served several years as a board member of the BirdLife International affiliate in the Republic of Georgia, developing educational and conservation programs. He gained knowledge of the Caucasus region while directing a series of records and documentary shorts on the ancient chants of the Georgian

nation. During that period, he also produced retrospective books and catalogs on the works of Russian realist painters. He has combined his love of art, education, and birds while collaborating in several publications, including a field guide to *Raptors and Owls of Georgia (Caucasus)*, which he illustrated and coauthored. After working with raptor research along the Black Sea, he returned to South Florida to spearhead a new phase for the Florida Keys Hawkwatch migration monitoring project, where he has participated as director. He loves sharing his passion for birds with audiences of all ages, and has been a guide and teacher for over 15 years. You can find some of his latest sketches and articles about painting in the field at his blog, GalvezBirds.com.

## **TOUR COSTS & PAYMENT INFORMATION**

**TOUR FEE:** \$3,595 per person. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 through lunch on Day 4, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, all ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does **not** include airfare to nor from Key West. The fee also excludes laundry, personal expenses, and other items of a personal nature. For information about gratuities, please see the “TIPPING” sub-section below.

**REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT:** You may register for this tour through the VENT [website](#) or by calling our office (512-328-5221). The deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person. We accept MasterCard and Visa

**PAYMENTS:** All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days (December 28, 2026) prior to the tour departure date.

**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 handle the hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

**FUEL SURCHARGES:** Our prices are based on fuel prices at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

**TIPPING:** An important part of the value of a VENT tour is knowing that tips for local service providers at our destinations—restaurant staff, hotel staff, drivers, local guides, and various other support staff—are included in your tour fee. If you would like to offer any of your local guides an additional tip, \$5 to \$10 a day is a common amount.

Tips for your VENT tour leader(s) are **not** included, but it is customary to tip one or both if you feel that you have received exceptional service. To assist in your planning, we recommend tipping your VENT tour leader(s) \$15 to \$20 per day, or the equivalent of approximately 2–4% of the tour fee.

If you plan to give tips by cash, they should be given directly to your tour leader at the end of the tour and **not** sent to the VENT office. Some of our tour leaders use mobile payment applications such as Venmo, PayPal, and Wise. If you would like to use this method, please ask your tour leaders directly whether they can accept tips through such an application.

We emphasize that tipping is optional and that these amounts are only recommendations. The amount you decide to tip is based entirely on your experience and at your discretion.

## **CANCELLATION & REFUNDS**

### **CANCELLATION BY PARTICIPANT:**

- **More than 120 days prior to the tour start date:** A refund of all monies paid will be issued, less 50% of the deposit.
- **120 days or fewer prior to the tour start date:** No refund will be provided.
- **Optional add-ons:** Some tours offer optional add-ons that are designated as non-refundable. Any such add-ons are clearly identified as non-refundable at the time of booking. By selecting and purchasing an optional add-on, the participant acknowledges and accepts its non-refundable status. Fees paid for non-refundable add-ons are not refundable under any circumstances, regardless of when the tour is cancelled.

This cancellation policy applies to all participants and all tours. Because unexpected events can occur, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance.

#### **CANCELLATION BY VENT:**

If VENT cancels a tour prior to departure without cause or good reason, VENT will provide the participant a full refund, which will constitute full settlement to the participant.

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. A ***“Force Majeure”*** event means any act beyond VENT’s control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

This VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside of the services described in the tour itinerary.

**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.**

## **TRAVEL INSURANCE**

**SUGGESTED OPTIONS:** To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit. VENT has partnered with **Redpoint Travel Protection** as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend its comprehensive **Ripcord** plan, which includes a medical evacuation benefit. With this in mind, it is important to note that medical evacuation is not offered by Redpoint as a stand-alone policy or benefit. For travelers not interested in comprehensive travel insurance, VENT recommends **Medjet** and its **MedjetAssist®** plan. Medjet is not an insurance company, and Medjet Assist is not an insurance product; rather, Medjet is a membership-based air-medical transport company specializing in moving hospitalized travelers from an admitting hospital to a medical facility of choice. Medjet does not provide medical evacuation service from the point of injury or illness; yet, the MedjetAssist plan offers robust enough travel protection to satisfy the medical evacuation insurance requirement in place for many VENT tours.

### **About Redpoint Travel's Ripcord Plan**

Ripcord is a completely integrated travel insurance program with single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims. Critical benefits include comprehensive travel insurance for trip cancellation/interruption, medical evacuation from your point of injury or illness to your hospital of choice; medical expense coverage, death of pet, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or political or security reasons, waiver for pre-existing medical conditions exclusion, and a "Cancel for Any Reason" benefit. Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.\*

For a price quote or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: [Ripcord Travel Insurance](#); or click the **Ripcord** logo on our website (click Help > Preparation and Insurance > Trip Insurance); or call +1-415-481-0600. Pricing is based on age, trip cost, trip length, and level of coverage.

\*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 15 days of making your first trip payment. The CFAR benefit provides reimbursement for 75% of covered costs, and increases the policy premium by approximately 50%. Policies may be purchased either for the full value of the tour fee at the time of deposit or in segments as individual tour payments are made (deposit, second deposit, final balance, additional arrangements, etc.). The “pay as you go” approach reduces up-front expense and ensures that the amount paid toward your full policy premium is in proportion to the amount paid toward the full tour fee. If you choose to “pay as you go,” you must cover each deposit or payment within 15 days, and insure all non-refundable trip costs in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

Redpoint considers COVID-19 illness as any other seasonal respiratory illness. Providing only a positive Covid-19 test result will likely not be considered a covered event per the terms and conditions of the company's policy. Redpoint maintains a [Coronavirus FAQ page](#) on its website that addresses questions and concerns travelers may have regarding COVID-19 and Redpoint's policy. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of relevant topics.

### **About Medjet’s MedjetAssist Plan**

MedjetAssist is a membership program that functions like AAA for motorists. The company’s primary service is air medical transport. Critical benefits of MedjetAssist include a staff on call and ready to provide assistance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; all-expenses-paid air medical transport in the United States and internationally to medical facility of choice, regardless of medical necessity; repatriation of remains; and no exclusions for pre-existing conditions.

For travelers under 75, MedjetAssist may be purchased as Short-Term Memberships of 8, 15, 21, and 30 days, or Regular Annual Memberships from 1 to 5 years. For travelers 75–84, Medjet offers a Diamond Membership that is the same program but with a few additional conditions.

For a price quote or to purchase MedjetAssist, please visit: [Medjet.com/VentBird](https://www.Medjet.com/VentBird) or call 1-800-527-7478. Pricing is based on type and term of membership.

## **GETTING THERE & REQUIRED TRAVEL DOCUMENTS**

**AIR TRAVEL:** 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. Per-person fees apply for each set of travel arrangements: \$50 domestic; \$75 international.\* Many of our travelers choose to make their own air travel arrangements, but we emphasize the benefits to using our services. If you book your air arrangements yourself, Victor Emanuel Travel is unable to provide support in managing any flight delays and/or cancellations that could occur before and during a tour. When you purchase air tickets through Victor Emanuel Travel, our staff has ready access to your air ticket record and can provide assistance as problems arise. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

\*An air ticket will be purchased by Victor Emanuel Travel on behalf of the traveler with the traveler's consent. A purchase is considered final upon receipt of payment. If a ticket is subsequently reissued at the behest of the traveler (i.e. voluntary change of plans), the same fee rates apply for the reissue process, in addition to any fees that may be charged by the airline.

**BAGGAGE:** Space for luggage aboard the *Makai* is very limited. Please bring no more than a small-to-medium duffel bag or soft-sided suitcase. Since we will be on the boat for no more than three nights, you should easily be able to fit clothes and basic toiletries in a small or medium bag. You will also probably want to bring a daypack or other carry-on bag to hold camera gear, binoculars, field guides, sunscreen, etc. Excess luggage can be safely stored in Key West.

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. Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government's attempts to improve airport security, we recommend that you check the website of the [Transportation Security Administration \(TSA\)](https://www.transportationsecurity.gov) for information pertaining to permissible carry-on items.

**GENERAL INFORMATION:** Accommodations for all three nights will be aboard the *Makai*. The vessel has four small semi-private cabins, including two cabins with two beds, which will be reserved for couples or pairs on a first-come, first-served basis. Specific spaces in both remaining three-bunk cabins will be assigned at the time of registration. Depending on the make-up of the group, we may have to mix sexes in any of the four cabins. The boat's two bathrooms, both with showers, will provide a private place to change clothes. You can read more about the M/V Makai, and see photos of its cabins and facilities by visiting the vessel's website: <http://mvmakai.com/about/>

In addition to a pair of sneakers or boat shoes, you may find it useful to have a pair of old sneakers or sandals that can get wet. Make sure to bring a towel and washcloth, which are not provided on the boat. Also bring a light jacket plus a sweatshirt or sweater, as mornings, evenings, and the run back to Key West can be chilly. Rain gear may be needed, and a hat for protection from the sun is essential.

Interested participants will have an opportunity to swim and/or snorkel at Fort Jefferson. The water is warm and shallow, and the fish and coral enchanting. Even the most dyed-in-the-wool birders appreciate the chance to cool off and experience the tropical marine life. You may prefer to bring your own equipment (mask, snorkel, and fins) with you or you can rent these items from a dive shop in Key West. These will not be provided by the M/V Makai.

If you're worried about seasickness, ask your doctor about preventative medication. Water conditions around the Tortugas are usually calm, but choppy seas are quite possible, most likely on the run to and from Key West.

**PACKING LIST AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:**

**Footwear:** It is strongly recommend wearing a pair of water shoes or closed-toe "amphibian" sandals that protect your feet, strap on tight, dry quickly, and expose the least amount of skin. We will be moving about the boat as we travel to and from the Dry Tortugas, so well-fitted shoes with good soles, that you don't mind getting wet, are essential to prevent any kind of slipping accidents. We will be doing quite a bit of walking once in the Dry Tortugas, searching for birds in Garden Key. The ground surfaces may be gravelly, rocky or uneven. As is the case with many locations we will visit throughout this tour, the ground may have puddles or standing rain or tidal water. Comfortable shoes are important. You are strongly discouraged from wearing flip-flops or any other form of open-toe sandals, shorts or short sleeves.

Protect your skin: Your first protection against the sun and nuisance insects is exposing less skin. Light, ventilated, long-sleeved shirts and long pants are strongly recommended, particularly those with UV protection.

Sun protection: In addition to long-sleeved shirts and long pants with UV protection, please bring a hat, sunblock lotion and sunglasses. The sun will be strong at this time of year, and considering we will often be close to water, it will be bouncing and reflecting on us from various angles. Without protection, getting a bad sunburn is a likely possibility.

Weather: We can expect temperatures up to the low 90s, with dips into the upper 60s. Humidity may be up to 75%. Clouds and rains come and go quickly through this region. Rain is possible at any moment. A rain-proof windbreaker and a light sweater are a good idea to bring. That being said, weather is always difficult to predict in South Florida with accuracy, and temperatures and humidity may be higher than anticipated.

Motion sickness: Even those who have earned their sea legs can at times succumb to motion sickness. It is best to prepare and ask your primary care physician if necessary, about preventative medicine. For those of you considering non-prescription motion sickness medicine, you may want to consider Dramamine (or Dimenhydrinate), or Bonine (Meclizine hydrochloride). Bonine (or generic substitute) tends to have milder side effects, particularly in that it causes little drowsiness. Dramamine has a solid reputation, but many report strong drowsiness as a side effect. It is important to note that Dramamine also markets a "non-drowsy" product that contains ginger root as its primary ingredient, and which may work for some but tends to have a more subtle effect on motion sickness.

A small backpack or daypack: It is a good idea to bring some kind of small bag to pack your things during our daily outings.

Consider carrying a small refillable water bottle with you to reduce waste. We will have water jugs with us at all times to refill your bottles.

A small flashlight will be useful for moving around in your bunker after dark.

Don't forget your optical equipment - binoculars, camera, chargers and batteries, etc. Once in the Dry Tortugas, we will not be able to replace any items we forgot back in Key West.

Your guide will bring a scope to share with the group, so you will not need to bring a scope.

No Wi-Fi or mobile phone service will be available upon leaving Key West.

If you have any dietary restrictions, please be sure to relay those to us when you sign up. The chef is excellent and willing to accommodate any dietary restrictions, but be aware that supplies on board are finite, so any dietary restrictions need to be specified ahead of time.

## **HEALTH & SAFETY**

**HEALTH:** VENT follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccinations.

If you are taking personal medication, prescription or over-the-counter, 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.

**COVID-19:** We continually emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. Although VENT no longer maintains any of its COVID-era prevention protocols, we strongly recommend best practices for protecting yourself and your fellow travelers against COVID-19 illness. These measures include receiving the primary series vaccinations for those eligible, staying “Up to Date” with COVID-19 booster shots, wearing high filtration N-95 or KN-95 masks when in airports and on airplanes, and avoiding risky social settings in the lead-up to your tour. These recommendations are firmly rooted in CDC guidance for avoiding COVID-19.

**SUN EXPOSURE:** The sun’s ultraviolet rays are dangerous under prolonged exposure (sometimes only a matter of minutes), even in winter and early spring. Anytime you are outdoors you will want to protect your skin, including your lips, eyes, nose, and ears. A severe sunburn is potentially very painful and will affect your level of enjoyment. Always protect yourself when outdoors and

be sure to bring an ample supply of high SPF sunscreen and lip balm. We strongly recommend the use of ultra-violet blocking, polarized sunglasses.

**INSECT REPELLENTS:** While in Key West, if you are susceptible to insect bites (mosquitoes and/or sand fleas), please apply repellent ahead of our meeting time. Spraying your clothes prior to wearing them is a good strategy. There are no mosquitoes in the Dry Tortugas.

Insect repellents for the skin are commonly available in three forms:

- **DEET:** (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide): A chemical compound that is marketed under various brand names (OFF!®, Cutter™, Ultrathon™, etc.) and offered in a variety of formulations including sprays, lotions, time-release preparations, and disposable wipes. The formulations will state a percentage of the active ingredient DEET on the packaging. DEET may be applied to exposed skin directly and/or sprayed on clothing. Please be careful when applying DEET as it can damage plastics and lens coatings.
- **Picaridin:** A synthetic formulation that is derived from piperine, a substance found in plants that produce black pepper.
- **Herbal insect repellents:** Various mixtures of organic ingredients such as oils from eucalyptus, citronella, cedar, and other herbs. The herbal repellents are more difficult to categorize because of the difference in ingredients from one brand to another. There is considerable variation in their effectiveness.

Insect repellent for clothing is marketed in one approved formulation:

- **Permanone® (Permethrin):** is an odorless spray-on repellent that may be used for pre-treatment of clothing, gear, and tents. It should not be used directly on the skin or sprayed on clothing while it is being worn. The pre-treatment process requires a number of hours to complete and must be done outdoors, so it is best completed in advance of travel. Do-it-yourself pre-treatment must be repeated more often than commercial treatment using Insect Shield® technology. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online.
- **Insect Shield® apparel:** Clothing pre-treated with Permanone is made by a variety of manufacturers. It is available for purchase from some sporting goods suppliers. The clothing is advertised as retaining its repellency for up to 70 washings.

The US EPA offers a search tool to help choose a repellent that is best for a particular situation. For example, some repellents work for mosquitoes, but not for ticks.

<https://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/which-insect-repellent-right-you>

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](http://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](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html) (click on travel health).

### **SUGGESTED READING & TRIP PREPARATION**

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](http://www.amazon.com) which has a wide selection; [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com) and [www.nhbs.com](http://www.nhbs.com) which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

Dunn, Jon et al. *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America*, Seventh edition. Washington, D. C.: National Geographic Society, 2017. Includes most of the possible West Indian strays.

Sibley, David A. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*, Second edition. New York: Knopf, 2014. Some may prefer to bring the smaller and more portable *Eastern* guide (2003).

### **CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY APPS & ONLINE RESOURCES:**

**eBird:** Among the largest and most successful citizen science projects in existence, eBird is an essential tool in promoting bird study and conservation. Among a range of benefits, eBird allows users to keep a variety of lists in a single application. When taxonomic splits are incorporated, lists are automatically updated. Additionally, trip leaders can share daily lists, so one only need accept a shared list and it will upload to your files! **Highly recommended.**

**MERLIN BIRD ID:** Merlin is an app designed as a birding coach for beginning and intermediate bird watchers. Excellent for use in the field, Merlin asks the observer a series of questions regarding

his or her bird sighting, including date and location, and color, size, and behavior of a bird. Merlin then processes the viewer's responses to present a shortlist of possible identifications, from which the user can choose the likely bird. Species profiles include a brief physical description, photographs, and sound samples. The Photo ID feature allows anyone with a camera to snap a photo and obtain a list of suggestions. Merlin's Sound ID feature allows identification of birds through audible recognition. To use Merlin, download the app, followed by the appropriate regional "pack."

## **TERMS, CONDITIONS & RESPONSIBILITIES**

**Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc.**, a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, "**VENT**") act only as agents for the participant 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 participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

VENT reserves the right (i) to substitute hotels of similar category, or the best reasonable substitution available under the circumstances, for those indicated and (ii) to make any changes in the itinerary that are deemed necessary by VENT or which are caused by third party transportation schedules (i.e. railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, etc.).

VENT reserves the right to substitute leaders or guides on any tour. Where VENT, in its sole discretion, determines such substitution is necessary, it will notify tour participants.

VENT reserves the right to cancel any tour prior to departure with or without cause or good reason. See the VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy set forth above.

Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on July 14, 2026 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

VENT reserves the right to decline any participant's Registration Form and/or refuse to allow any participant to participate in a tour as VENT deems reasonably necessary, in its sole discretion. VENT also reserves the right to remove any tour participant from any portion of a tour as VENT deems necessary, in its sole discretion, reasons for such removal include but are not limited to, medical needs, injury, illness, inability to meet physical demands of a tour, personality conflict or situations in which such removal is otherwise in the best interest of the tour, the tour group and/or such participant. A participant may also voluntarily depart from a tour. If a participant is removed from a tour or voluntarily departs from a tour, such participant will be responsible for any expenses associated with such removal or departure, including but not limited to, transportation, lodging, airfare and meals, and VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any such removed or departed participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by such participant.

Baggage is carried at the participant's risk entirely. No airline company, its employees, agents and/or affiliates (the "**Airline**") is to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time participants are not on board the Airline's aircraft. The participant ticket in use by any Airline, when issued, will constitute the sole contract between the Airline and the purchaser of the tickets and/or the participant. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for VENT tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airlines Reporting Corporation.

View the complete [Terms and Conditions](#) on our website.

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