



NEW ZEALAND HIGHLIGHTS

November 30 - December 18, 2026



The New Zealand Kaka, one of New Zealand's many special birds
© Dion Hobcroft

When New Zealand separated from Gondwanaland 70 million years ago, it had no mammals or large reptiles. Progressively isolated from the other land masses, it has followed its own evolutionary course since then, and in the virtual absence of predators, a remarkable array of flightless birds evolved, including kiwis, rails, the giant moas, even a flightless parrot. With the arrival of humans—first the Polynesians and later the Europeans—a long series of extinctions began. Hunting for food and minor forest clearance by the Maoris gave way to the clearing of large tracts of native habitat for the settlers' livestock. Exotics were released in misguided attempts to make the land “more like home,” predators were released to control them, man's camp followers became established, and alien plants arrived from all directions. All of these factors had a severe negative impact on the native birds and forests. Sadly, this process of extinction continued through the 20th century. Now an estimated ten percent of the world's endangered birds are found in New Zealand. All is not lost, however, because New Zealand is one of the world leaders in bird conservation, and tremendously innovative efforts are being made

to preserve the native birds and habitats. This tour offers an opportunity to see a superb assortment of the native birds. In the process, we'll learn a great deal about this fascinating and beautiful land.

New Zealand has six entire families of birds found nowhere else: the kiwis, New Zealand parrots, New Zealand wrens,

Mohuids (Yellowhead, Whitehead and Pipipi),

Stitchbird and New Zealand wattlebirds. We should see a representative or more of each one. In addition, there are over 40 more species of birds endemic to the country. The seabirds are outstanding; many of them nest in the region, and there are few places in the world where such a variety can be seen with such ease.

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New Zealand has much more to offer than birds. Scenery is paramount, from the lush lowland forests to majestic Southern Alps. Nowhere else but in this one country will you find such a diverse and spectacular combination of natural features—the mighty snow-capped peaks, deep fiords carved by the glaciers, tranquil lakes and bubbling mud pots, towering forests, dense coastal scrub, and lovely near-deserted beaches. This is also a wonderful country, with outstanding food, excellent accommodations and roads, friendly people, and remarkably tidy towns and countryside. All of these features make for an outstanding natural history tour—offering both comfort and unique biological treasures not to be seen elsewhere.



November 30-December 2, Days 1-3: Travel to Auckland

Participants arriving on either Air New Zealand Flight 5 (scheduled to depart Los Angeles on November 30 at 8:00 p.m. and cross the International Dateline before arriving in Auckland on December 2 at 6:00 a.m.) or Air New Zealand Flight 7 (scheduled to depart San Francisco on November 30 at 7:50 p.m. and cross the International Dateline before arriving in Auckland on December 2 at 5:50 a.m.) will be met and join the group transfer to One Tree Point, north of Auckland.

Participants are strongly encouraged to avoid the risk of misconnection and/or rest prior to the tour by arriving in Auckland on or prior to December 1. Upon request, VENT will be happy to assist with any additional lodging arrangements in the airport area (likely the Novotel Auckland Airport). Those choosing this option will be met in the lobby on the morning of December 2 at a time to be announced.

On December 2, we will take time to explore some birding sites to the north of Auckland. This includes wetlands at Mangere where we have a chance for a good cross-section of waterbirds and shorebirds, wetlands near Tawharanui that are reliable for the Brown Teal and Buff-banded Rail, and a coastal estuary at Pakiri with an excellent chance for the critically endangered Australian Fairy Tern, Red-breasted Dotterel and hopefully a Fernbird or the elusive Spotless Crake.

NIGHT (December 2): One Tree Point Motel, One Tree Point

December 3, Day 4: Pelagic Trip to Hauraki Gulf

New Zealand is justifiably famous as the seabird capital of the world and there's no better start to this tour than a pelagic trip to Hauraki Gulf. The combination of rugged coastline and the cold Southern Ocean mixing with the temperate Tasman Sea makes for nutrient-rich upwellings. The seabirds have to be seen to be believed. By taking a pelagic trip in the Hauraki Gulf, we may encounter a number of subtropical species. These include the endangered Parkinson's Petrel; Cook's Petrel; the Gray-faced Petrel; Black-winged Petrel (scarce); the endangered endemic Pycroft's Petrel (difficult); the superb little White-faced Storm-Petrel; Buller's, Fluttering, Little and Flesh-footed shearwaters; Common Diving-Petrel; and Fairy Prion. The recently rediscovered

New Zealand Storm-Petrel will very much be on our birding radar today, and we will hope one or more will be attracted to our chumming station. One species that is guaranteed in these waters is the beautiful Australasian Gannet, with its spectacular plunge-diving behavior into schools of baitfish.

NIGHT: One Tree Motel, One Tree Point

December 4, Day 5: Tiri Tiri Matangi Island

Our adventure continues with a day of birding on Tiri Tiri Matangi Island. On the boat trip to the island, we may see the strikingly handsome Buller's Shearwater, Fluttering Shearwater, Parasitic Jaeger, White-fronted Tern, the ubiquitous and rather dainty Silver Gull, and its larger relative, the Kelp Gull.

The first thing that often strikes a first-time visitor to this island is the rich bird song, so absent from the main islands. Spectacularly feathered Tui and New Zealand Bellbirds are responsible for much of this incredible song and provide excellent photographic opportunities. Both of these birds belong to the honeyeater family. The endangered North Island Saddleback, a representative of the endemic New Zealand wattlebird family, will also give excellent views. The Red-crowned Parakeet is also fairly common on the island, and we should encounter this rather quiet but brilliant, emerald-green parrot with its bright red crown. Nasal chattering often reveals its presence. The ultra-tame North Island Robin is another highlight. A small introduced population of Brown Quail is also possible to see.

More specialties await us in the forest, and Tiri Tiri Matangi Island will provide our best chance to encounter the incredible North Island Kokako—one of New Zealand's most special and sought-after birds. The incredible organ-like, liquid, bell-like notes will give us the sign to look for the Kokako as it creeps squirrel-like through dense foliage—a flash of gray with intense blue facial wattles. The Stitchbird also lives in the forest and is attracted to specially designed feeders aimed at protecting it from the pugnacious honeyeaters. The attractive Whitehead, a diminutive forest warbler, is inquisitive and can often be squeaked in. Both Fernbird and Rifleman have small populations recently established now on Tiri Tiri Matangi Island.

The giant flightless rail called the South Island Takahe (pronounced “Tuck-a-hey”) has a small population of a few pairs translocated onto the island. This is a critically endangered New Zealand endemic. At the time of our visit they are often nesting and quite secretive so we will need to be a bit lucky if we are to connect with one. We will have another, better chance to see this bird on Kapiti Island later in the tour.

Walking along the intertidal zone, we will need to keep on the lookout for Little Penguins—the world’s smallest penguin. Occasional Pacific Reef Egrets may be seen fishing along the rocky coastline.

If possible we will schedule a night walk at Tawharanui to have a chance to look for the elusive North Island Brown Kiwi.

NIGHT: Whangaparoa Lodge, Whangaparoa

December 5, Day 6: Whangaparoa to Rotorua

This morning after breakfast we will drive south towards Rotorua. First we will make a stop at Miranda on the Firth of Thames, which presents the greatest shorebird spectacle in New Zealand. The timing of our arrival is dependent on the time of high tide. Home to hundreds—even thousands—of Bar-tailed Godwits and Red Knots, the area often also boasts a sprinkling of rarer Asian species including Sharp-tailed and Curlew sandpiper plus Red-necked Stint. In addition, this location is a good site for the Red-breasted Dotterel, a chunky shorebird that is another rare and threatened species found only in New Zealand. Also frequently present are some non-breeding Wrybills. We will make another stop at a wetland that has proved reasonably reliable for sighting the elusive Australasian Bittern, if the water level is suitable. We will then head south to the famous geothermal city of Rotorua. The variety of geysers, hot pools and bubbling mud is exceptional. On the way we will search for the scarce and localized New Zealand Grebe and possibly the Australasian Shoveler and Little Black Cormorant.

NIGHT: Distinction Rotoru, Rotorua

December 6, Day 7: Rotorua to Whakapapa Village

We will explore the impressive Pureora Forest today, on the lookout for the scarce and inconspicuous Yellow-crowned Parakeet. This forest also often holds the elusive Long-tailed Koel and emerald green Shining Bronze-Cuckoo with chances for Tomtit, North Island Robin, Whitehead, Rifleman and New Zealand Kaka amongst others. Pureora Forest is an excellent example of old growth temperate rainforest. We will then continue south to Tongariro National Park. Here we will explore suitable fast-flowing torrents for the endangered, endemic Blue Duck. We may also have a chance to see Rifleman, Tomtit, New Zealand Pipit and with some luck, the scarce New Zealand Falcon. Wetlands at Lake Taupo will give us a good chance to see the timid Fernbird and a chance for Australasian Bittern. Afterwards we will continue on to Whakapapa Village below the summit of Mount Ruapehu, an active volcano with a snow clad summit.

NIGHT: Skotel Alpine Resort, Whakapapa Village

December 7, Day 8: Whakapapa Village to Kapiti Island

Depending upon our strike rate connecting with certain birds like Blue Duck, Shining Bronze-Cuckoo, Fernbird and New Zealand Grebe, we will spend the day wending south to the coastal town of Paraparaumu. On the way we will make certain stops at various wetlands, forest glades and coastal sites like the Manawatu Estuary. This estuary often turns up the odd rarity and on different visits we have seen Gull-billed, Little and Common terns. The beautiful Black-fronted Dotterel can also be found locally. An established population of Nankeen Night-Herons are cause for another stop at Upokongaro. We'll take a midafternoon ferry to Kapiti Island. The famous island of Kapiti has long been the jewel in the crown of New Zealand's island sanctuaries. By staying at a traditional, very comfortable nature lodge on private property, we will have the opportunity to take a night-walk to look for one of New Zealand's rarest and most special birds—the Little Spotted Kiwi. A sighting of this beautiful, small, gray-banded kiwi will be a huge event. While searching for the Little Spotted Kiwi, we may also find the Morepork, a small native hawk-owl and some Little Penguins.

NIGHT: Kapiti Island Lodge, Kapiti Island*

*Single accommodations not guaranteed. See ACCOMMODATIONS section below.

December 8, Day 9: Kapiti Island

During the day the abundance of birdlife is truly overwhelming, and it is a photographer's paradise. Regularly seen birds include the tame giant parrot—the New Zealand Kaka, New Zealand Pigeon, Sacred Kingfisher, Whitehead, Tui, New Zealand Bellbird, North Island Robin, Fantail, Silvereye, Weka, Red-crowned Parakeet, Paradise Shelduck, Variable Oystercatcher, Great Cormorant, and Little Pied Cormorant. Rarer birds we have a chance of encountering include Takahe, Long-tailed Cuckoo, New Zealand Falcon, North Island Saddleback, Tomtit, Royal Spoonbill and Brown Teal.

Taking our leave from this special island sanctuary, we will return to the main North Island, driving to the capital city of Wellington.

NIGHT: Rydges Wellington, Wellington

December 9, Day 10: Wellington to Picton

If time permits we will make a visit to the superb Te Papa Museum or Zealandia Sanctuary. From Wellington we will board the inter-island ferry to make the journey across Cook Strait. The crossing provides a good opportunity to see Southern Ocean seabirds including White-capped Albatross, Pintado Petrel, Sooty Shearwater, and the attractive endemic Spotted Shag. Sperm Whales are occasionally encountered, as are Dusky and Common dolphins. We will disembark at the beautiful town of Picton, where we will spend the night.

NIGHT: Picton Beachcomber Inn , Picton



The rare Malherbe's (Orange-fronted) Parakeet can sometimes be found in Picton. © Dion Hobcroft

December 10, Day 11: Marlborough Sound Boat Trip; Transfer to Kaikoura

We will enjoy a sheltered morning boat trip in Queen Charlotte Sound, one of the Marlborough Sounds, and home to the threatened endemic New Zealand King Shag, among an abundance of marine life. Birds we have encountered on this boat trip include excellent views of Fluttering Shearwater, White-fronted Tern, Parasitic Jaeger and with luck, New Zealand Falcon. If possible, we will land on Blumine Island, where we have a decent chance of encountering the ultra-rare Malherbe's Parakeet. We also have an excellent chance for marine mammals including the elusive Hector's Dolphin. After lunch, we will then head south, making stops at a few wetland and shorebird locations before arriving in picturesque Kaikoura.

NIGHT: Sudima Hotel , Kaikoura

December 11, Day 12: Kaikoura

Kaikoura is famous for its marine life, and the seabirds here are truly phenomenal. You have to venture only one mile offshore before you are in the deep ocean. This is New Zealand's equivalent of Monterey—only there are a lot more birds. By placing “baitballs” off the back of the boat, we can lure in incredible numbers of very tame albatrosses and petrels, including rare endemic Westland Petrel; White-chinned Petrel; Pintado Petrel; the giant Northern and Southern Royal and Antipodean albatross; White-capped and Salvin's albatross; Black-browed and with luck, the scarcer Buller's albatross; Northern Giant-Petrel; and Hutton's Shearwater. We will schedule an extended pelagic trip here (about four hours in duration) to visit some specific sea mountains that have on previous trips turned up rarer birds like the Soft-plumaged Petrel. Combine this abundance of birdlife with the truly spectacular setting of the snow-capped Seaward Kaikoura Range against the ocean and thriving New Zealand Fur Seal colonies, and it becomes clear why Kaikoura is a special destination. Beyond the marine birding, we have a chance to see the localized, introduced Cirl Bunting—a species quite difficult to see in its native Europe—and have occasionally encountered the elusive introduced Little Owl in this area.

NIGHT: Sudima Hotel, Kaikoura

December 12, Day 13: The Mackenzie Country

Today we will drive to the inland plains of the Mackenzie Country with its beautiful lakes and mountain backdrop (the Southern Alps, New Zealand's highest mountains). We will make a stop at St. Anne's Lagoon and the Ashley Estuary or possibly Lake Ellesmere depending upon local bird reports and the weather. Sometimes here we can connect with scarce shorebird migrants with both Black-fronted Tern and Wrybill being possible. While exploring the high country, we will be searching for the scarce New Zealand Falcon whilst in Wanaka we are sure to see Great Crested Grebes very closely thanks to a local conservation initiative.

NIGHT: Alps Apartment Motel, Twizel

December 13, Day 14: Lake Tekapo to Te Anau

At the head of Lake Tekapo, we are on the lookout for two special shorebirds. The critically endangered Black Stilt has its stronghold here and we will make a serious attempt to try to see this specialized alpine bird. Equally as interesting is the curious Wrybill that breeds in the shingle (gravel) of the glacial braided streams. This most unusual small plover has a bill that bends to the right. It is the only bird in the world with this specialized laterally curved bill, which makes the ideal tool for probing under shingle searching for caddisfly larvae. Other endemics we should encounter include the Black-billed Gull, the beautiful Black-fronted Tern, and the handsome Double-banded Plover. Several pairs of Great Crested Grebe nest on the various alpine wetlands we will visit. We also have a chance to see a population of introduced Chukar in this area at an alpine observatory. Another stop gives us a chance to look for the elusive population of Baillon's Crake that are highly localized breeders in small wetlands with muddy fringing vegetation.

NIGHT: Distinction Luxmore Hotel, Te Anau

December 14, Day 15: Northern Fiordland National Park and Milford Sound

Today will be dedicated to exploring spectacular Fiordland National Park, which includes Milford Sound. While taking in this incredible fiord and the stunning photographic opportunities it

allows, we will need to be on the lookout for the scarce Fiordland Penguin. This spectacular crested penguin is restricted to these cold, deep waters and a sighting will be a great bonus, as they are difficult to see. As we retrace our steps back to Te Anau, we will be scouting for some very special birds in incredibly spectacular surroundings. At the Homer Tunnel, we will search for the mischievous Kea—a parrot with a penchant for chewing up windshield wiper blades. Higher up on the scree slopes lives the diminutive South Island Wren, a representative of the New Zealand wren family. There is one site we can drive quite close to and then climb up into the boulders to look for this exquisite, tiny little bird. In the dense beech forests live more special birds like the Tomtit, the Rifleman (a close relative of the South Island Wren), the rare Yellowhead, and the dapper little Pipipi. We have had success searching for the rare Blue Duck in this area. We will bird our way to Milford Sound for our boat trip on this world-famous, spectacular sheltered waterway.

NIGHT: Distinction Luxmore Hotel, Te Anau



A beautiful Tomtit in Fiordland © Dion Hobcroft

December 15, Day 16: Te Anau to Stewart Island

We will make our way from Te Anau to the southernmost major town in New Zealand, Invercargill. In the high alpine country, birds are sparse, but we should encounter Swamp Harrier, Paradise Shelduck, Eurasian Blackbird, Song Thrush, Dunnock, Chaffinch, and Australian Magpie. Two interesting endemics we will re-encounter are the Black-billed Gull and the scarcer Black-fronted Tern. Both species nest on the glacial braided streams of the high country. If we are lucky, we may pick up a Little Owl perching out. If we make good time, we may have the chance to explore Tip Lagoon, a large tidal estuary that is home to great numbers of waterfowl and has hosted occasional rarities like Chestnut-breasted Shelduck. In the afternoon we will take the ferry from Bluff to Stewart Island, also called Rakiura. Stewart Island is New Zealand's third largest island and largely national park. During one of our evenings here, weather permitting, we will go with the resident kiwi trackers, to look for Southern Brown Kiwi feeding along the edge of the forest.

NIGHT: Kaka Retreat, Stewart Island*



We will have to be very lucky to find a Southern Brown Kiwi in the day but it is not impossible! © Dion Hobcroft

December 16, Day 17: Stewart Island

In the morning we will be dropped off by water taxi at Ulva Island in Paterson Inlet, a forested jewel, which will put us into some of the best avian bush walking in New Zealand. Ulva Island is a predator-free haven for a variety of birds including: Weka (an endemic subspecies), New Zealand Kaka, Tui, New Zealand Bellbird, Red-crowned and Yellow-crowned parakeet, the rare South Island Saddleback, Yellowhead, Pipipi, South Island Robin and New Zealand Pigeon. We'll take a slow walk on excellent paths around the island, with duration on the island of three to four hours. At lunchtime we are scheduled to catch a pelagic vessel to explore offshore.

This boat trip will take us out to the Muttonbird (or Titi) Islands; how far we go will depend on the weather conditions. There will be a number of different species of albatross, petrels, shearwaters and diving-petrels. The possibilities include penguins (Yellow-eyed, Fiordland and Little); Southern Royal albatross; Salvin's, White-capped and Buller's albatross; Northern and Southern giant-petrel; Brown Skua; Sooty Shearwaters; Cape and Cook's petrels; and Common Diving-Petrel. With luck we may encounter some rarer pelagic birds here including Mottled Petrel, Broad-billed Prion or Gray-backed Storm-Petrel.

NIGHT: Kaka Retreat, Stewart Island*

*Single accommodations not guaranteed. See ACCOMMODATIONS section below.

December 17, Day 18: Stewart Island to Dunedin

After taking the morning ferry from Stewart Island, we will return to Bluff and Invercargill, then drive north to the town of Dunedin. In the late afternoon we will explore Taiaroa Head by boat for a great opportunity to see three special birds. Taiaroa Head is famous for harboring the only mainland albatross-nesting colony in the world; the giant Northern Royal Albatross have been nesting here specially protected for several decades. These are truly giant birds—the world's largest flying birds—and are absolutely immense, with a three-meter wingspan. Nesting nearby is the superb Yellow-eyed Penguin, a threatened species unlike any other penguin in the world. Sadly now though, the population has dramatically declined here in recent years so we will need some luck for a sighting. The third special bird is the Otago Shag, a proposed split out of the

Stewart Island Shag. There is also a good chance to encounter the endemic Hooker's Sea Lion. If sea conditions permit, we will venture offshore to enjoy our final albatross feeding session.

NIGHT: Scenic Hotel Southern Cross, Dunedin

December 18, Day 19: Departure for Home

Transfers will be provided to Dunedin International Airport (code DUD) in time for all morning and afternoon departures which will connect with various flights to the USA. These flights will cross the International Dateline and arrive on December 18. Please be aware that air travel out of Dunedin is not covered by the tour fee. Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to help you with any flight arrangements (see AIR INFORMATION below).

ESSENTIAL TOUR INFORMATION

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 10 participants. However, VENT reserves the right to increase the tour limit by one in order to accommodate a couple when only one space is available.

TOUR LEADERS: Dion Hobcroft with the assistance of a local leader



Dion Hobcroft has been working for VENT since 2001. He has led many tours (more than 200) to Australia, New Guinea, New Zealand, Bhutan, Indonesia, India, China, Southwest Pacific, Philippines, Cambodia, Thailand, Malawi, Myanmar, Japan, Russia, Alaska, Tanzania, Uganda, Madagascar, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and the Antarctic. In 2007 and 2013–2019, 2021-2022 alone, Dion showed more than 2,000 species of birds to VENT clients. His informative, relaxed, and educational nature, combined with sharp eyes and ears, has established Dion as a favorite of many tour participants. His fieldwork for over 40 years on birds and other terrestrial vertebrates has allowed him to amass an extraordinary knowledge of the biodiversity in the Asia-Pacific region. Born in Tasmania and based in Sydney, Dion has traveled widely throughout Australasia, listing over 1,200 species, placing him in the top echelons of the region's birders. He is very tuned-in to the songs of bird species in the Asia-Pacific region and specializes in rare and elusive species. He is delighted to show these skulking rarities

to his travel companions. Dion has published several papers on field ornithology, served on national and state rare bird committees, managed *Birdline NSW*, run introduction to ornithology courses for Sydney University, and, before he traveled so continuously, was a popular speaker with various natural history societies. Dion has worked for many research and government agencies ranging from the Antarctic Division, Department of Environment NSW, Agriculture Protection WA, Taronga Zoo, Australian Museum, and the Queensland Department of Primary Industry. Dion lives in Sydney with his wife, Lise, and two children, Grace (age 24) and Daniel (age 20).

TOUR COSTS & PAYMENT INFORMATION

TOUR FEE: **\$11,255** per person based on double occupancy or **\$12,475** for a person requiring single accommodation. This includes all meals from lunch on Day 3 through dinner on Day 18, 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 Auckland nor from Dunedin; however, flights within the tour (if any) are included. 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. If the minimum group size is not met, each participant will be charged a small-group supplement—shared equally and communicated in advance—to allow the tour to proceed. Note that this fee does not cover nor guarantee single accommodations at the Kapiti Island Lodge (Day 8), where bunkhouse-style bedding will be provided and Kaka Retreat (Days 16 and 17), where you may be asked to share a two or three-bedroom unit with a shared bath and living room. However, if available at either location, single accommodations will be provided at no additional cost (see ACCOMMODATIONS section below).

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: You may register for this tour through the VENT [website](#) or by calling our office (512-328-5221). The initial deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. At 180 days VENT will collect a second deposit that brings the total deposit amount to 40% of the tour price. We accept MasterCard and Visa for both deposits.

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 (August 2, 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 very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES: Tour prices are based on the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If rates change drastically, it may be necessary to impose a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges have been passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

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 (including initial and second 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 (Pre-Tours and Extensions are considered self-contained tours separate from the main tour). 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. **Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be held responsible for any air ticket penalties.**

*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: Please limit baggage to one piece of luggage and one carry-on. The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. Please consult your pre-departure materials and/or airline to find out specific weight restrictions.

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.transportation.gov/air-ports) for information pertaining to permissible carry-on items.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS:

In addition to a passport valid for at least three months beyond your planned length of stay, a New Zealand Electronic Travel Authority (NZeTA) is required for U.S. and Canadian citizens to enter New Zealand. These can be obtained for a fee via the link below. Non-U.S. and Canadian citizens should check with their local consulate/embassy for instructions.

<https://nzeta.immigration.govt.nz/>

IMPORTANT: The visa details above are current for U.S. citizens as of June 16, 2026. Because entry requirements can change without notice, we kindly remind all participants to double-check the latest information before traveling. Travelers using non-U.S. passports are responsible for confirming any entry requirements that apply to their home country.

ACCOMMODATIONS: All accommodations are the best available in each area; many are good quality hotels and inns with laundry facilities, irons, and in-room tea/coffee.

VENT's local New Zealand operator reserves the right to make lodging changes based on circumstances beyond their control. The Tour Contact List, which will be provided about 30 days prior to departure, will reflect any such changes.

The Kapiti Island Lodge has several cabins, spacious walk-in tents and bunk rooms for accommodation. Bathrooms are a short walk from the rooms. Due to recently added rooms, we expect that all couples and pairs will each have their own room. Although single travelers should expect to be asked to share, single accommodations will be provided, if available, at no additional cost.

We believe the birding here—especially the chance to see Little Spotted Kiwi—makes an overnight visit a must. The Kapiti Island ferry departs from an ocean beach, the boat being reversed off a trailer. If the swell and wind direction are unfavorable, they cannot launch the boats. If we are cancelled by weather off Kapiti Island, we will spend the night in nearby Wellington and visit some conservation sanctuaries nearby.

At Kaka Retreat on Stewart Island, depending on group size and make-up, some participants may share a two or three-bedroom unit with a common living room and bathroom. Please

WALKING CONDITIONS-KIWIS: Most of the walks undertaken on this trip will be of short distance (less than a mile) with varying amounts of ups and downs. One exception to this will be

the search for South Island Wren in Fiordland National Park. The Rock Wren lives in the alpine zone in boulder fields and usually on steep slopes. It is likely that an uphill walk through boulders on a well-formed trail will be involved in the search for this species, though it is rarely more than half a mile from the bus.

The night time walk for the kiwis is possibly difficult. We will be walking on trails to find the kiwi, but the trails can be muddy, especially after rain. The local guide will provide you with a flashlight. Sometimes kiwis are found rather quickly, but on occasion it has taken three or more hours to locate one. While this can be a lengthy outing, the likelihood of seeing New Zealand's most sought-after and unique endemics makes it worth the effort. All activities are optional and it is very easy to take any of the scheduled activities off if you so desire.

Searching for kiwis is quite a special skill. We can optimize our chances for success by wearing non-rustling clothing (no Gore-Tex), keeping very quiet and staying close together as a group. We normally find the kiwis by listening for them foraging on the forest floor, so being quiet is critical to success. Kiwis are also very sensitive to any strange noises, so this is another reason why being quiet is essential. Having said this, we have an excellent strike rate for seeing kiwis on this tour, as long as the weather co-operates.

Also be aware that in New Zealand in December, it often does not get dark until 10:00 p.m. or so and we cannot begin to start searching until it is completely dark.

ISLAND SANCTUARIES: Both Tiri Tiri and Kapiti Island are free of pests. The Department of Conservation requests all visitors to diligently check that their packs are free of any introduced pests and seeds and that your boots are clean so that no weeds are transported to these special islands.

ISLAND STAYS: On Kapiti Island and Stewart Island we will store our excess luggage in a secure site in a waterproof luggage trailer and only take over what we will need for the night or nights. Please bring a daypack for this purpose.

CLOTHING: We will be visiting New Zealand in the austral summer and thus can expect cool morning temperatures but warmer days. Warm clothing is advised for the pelagic trips, as chilly winds are always possible. Raingear is essential as well, including waterproof pants, which can on occasion be very useful. Footwear brought into New Zealand should be clean of mud and vegetation, as customs officers will pay careful attention to this. Casual dress is the norm.

CURRENCY: New Zealand Dollar (NZD). Exchange facilities are available throughout New Zealand. MasterCard, American Express and Visa are widely accepted. Automatic teller machines are widely available and offer the best exchange rates. Check your card logo against the machine and don't forget your pin number and to keep your pin secure!

EQUIPMENT: You should have a pair of binoculars that are in good condition, along with a day pack (good for carrying books, sunscreen, camera, etc.). Your tour leader will have a spotting scope; however, you are welcome and encouraged to bring your own if you so wish. Other items that will be useful are a hat and sunscreen for sun protection, small flashlight or headlamp, alarm clock, and a small amount of non-spray insect repellent (any commercial product containing DEET in high concentrations is helpful). Insects are generally not a problem, though sand flies may be a nuisance in Fiordland National Park. Water is potable everywhere in New Zealand. Please bring your own water bottle on our daily excursions. All food and vegetables are safe.

PLEASE NOTE: Food products CANNOT be brought into New Zealand.

INTERNET: Expect Wi-Fi to be available in all locations except Kapiti Island.

MISCELLANEOUS:

Departure Tax - included in ticket price

Electricity - 240 volts

Language - English

Time - 17 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time

HEALTH & SAFETY

HEALTH: Tour participants are advised to contact their physicians for advice regarding medications to prevent seasickness on the pelagic trips. We take a number of pelagic trips on this tour and it is important to be medicated if you suffer from seasickness. Water is drinkable from the tap virtually everywhere in New Zealand and it is a very healthy country.

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: There are insect repellents for the skin and an insect repellent used to treat clothing that should not be applied to the skin.

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. 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).

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 which has a wide selection; www.buteobooks.com and www.nhbs.com which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and www.abebooks.com for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

Primary Field Guides:

Heather, Barrie D. and Hugh Robertson. *The Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, (most recent edition).

Scofield, P and Stephenson, B. *Birds of New Zealand: A Photographic Guide*. Auckland University Press, 2013.

CLO Apps

eBird. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. 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. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Merlin is an app designed as a birding coach for beginning and intermediate birdwatchers. Excellent for use in the field, Merlin asks the observer a series of questions about 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 and the appropriate regional "pack." For this trip, please download the pack Europe. Highly recommended.

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 June 16, 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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