# GRAND ALASKA: NOME & GAMBELL

*May 29 - June 8, 2027*

Our Grand Alaska program offers participants the option of taking a combination of individual sections. Those taking this section plus Grand Alaska Part I (June 7-16, 2027), Grand Alaska Part II (June 16-25, 2027) or Grand Alaska: Pribilofs & Anchorage (June 16-24, 2027) will have a tour that is truly comprehensive in scope. Those desiring a shorter trip may select one of these tours and still enjoy excellent birding in a more relaxed visit to some of the most beautiful and remote areas in North America.




When spring suddenly arrives on the adjacent shores of Alaska and Siberia, and thousands of birds rush northwards to claim nesting territories, some of these small navigators make big mistakes. Because of this, every year a number of Asian migrants wind up on North American soil, and a few have even colonized Alaska as breeding birds. Birders have learned that they can intercept some of these strays by positioning themselves at strategic points in western Alaska. Nome & Gambell is designed to do exactly that, and at the same time it will familiarize us with the multitude of Bering Sea and northern mainland (sub-Arctic) breeding specialties.

Gambell birding can be quite fabulous; remarkable strays that have occurred here include White-tailed Eagle, Black-tailed Gull, Oriental Pratincole, Green Sandpiper, Jack Snipe, Taiga Flycatcher, Siberian Stonechat, Siberian Rubythroat, Dusky Thrush, Eurasian Bullfinch, and many others. Our 2012 tour discovered and documented a Common ("Siberian") Chiffchaff, a first record for North America at the time, and one that has now been seen by three of our last ten groups to visit Gambell! Our 1989 tour discovered a Little Curlew here—a first record for Alaska and only the third ever for North America—and our 1995 tour found a Tree Pipit, only the second ever to that point for North America.

Regular here are Common Ringed Plover and Dovekie (both of which annually nest in small numbers), while Red-necked Stint, Slaty-backed Gull and Red-throated Pipit are nearly annual in occurrence. Even on days when no vagrants show up, the birding is exceptional. Tens of thousands of murres, puffins, guillemots and auklets that nest east of the village or on other cliffs on the island, are constantly moving just offshore, as are smaller flocks of scoters, eiders, and Harlequin Ducks. Migrants passing the point often include Arctic, Pacific, and Yellow-billed loons; Emperor Goose; King, Common, Steller's and Spectacled eiders; all three jaegers; and Ivory Gull (now very rare).



*Bluethroat (male), Nome, Alaska, © Kevin J. Zimmer*

## May 29, Day 1: Anchorage

Participants arriving into Anchorage will be met and transferred to the Crowne Plaza Anchorage-Midtown Hotel, where a room will be reserved in each person's name. We'll meet in the hotel lobby at 6:30 p.m. for a get-acquainted dinner and to discuss plans for tomorrow.

**NIGHT:** Anchorage Crowne Plaza Anchorage-Midtown, Anchorage

## May 30, Day 2: Anchorage to Nome

This morning we'll fly from Anchorage to Nome, arriving in late morning. We'll head straight to our hotel, get checked in, and then head to lunch. After lunch, we'll begin birding along the Council Road, which hugs the coastline south and east of town. Nome is the ivory capital of Alaska and was its gold capital in years gone by. Today the town is a major center for the native people of the region. Once a part of the Bering land bridge, the Seward Peninsula has been colonized by several Old-World species. Our first afternoon in this rich area will introduce us to some of these Siberian colonizers, as well as to some familiar birds in decidedly unfamiliar settings.

Here, pairs of colorful Eastern Yellow Wagtails (formerly common, but scarce in recent years) and Lapland Longspurs enliven the brown tundra, while Fox Sparrows and Gray-cheeked Thrushes sing from the willow thickets. Long-tailed Jaegers cruise tirelessly over the tundra, their approach noisily protested by pairs of Whimbrels or Pacific Golden-Plovers. The edges of the vast Safety Lagoon complex are a gathering spot for hordes of shorebirds, sometimes including numbers of bickering Bar-tailed Godwits. Farther out, at Safety Sound, are masses of resting gulls (mostly Glaucous, Short-billed, and Black-legged Kittiwakes), which we will check carefully for the occasional Slaty-backed, Sabine's, or Black-headed gull. Flocks of Brant and smaller clusters of Common Eiders are scattered liberally across the Sound, and jaegers of all three species can be seen harassing the Arctic and Aleutian terns. Red-throated and Pacific loons are frequent sights, as are groups of Tundra Swans and Sandhill Cranes. One or two pairs of Arctic Loons are typically present (and presumably nest) in the coastal lagoon complex between Safety Sound and Solomon, and seeing these rare birds will definitely be among our top priorities. There is more than enough to keep us busy this first day, and we will be sure to return to this dynamic area on one or more of our days in the Nome region.

**NIGHT:** Aurora Inn, Nome

## May 31-June 2, Days 3-5: Nome

We will have three full days to explore the area around Nome. Increased coverage over the past three decades has yielded a number of discoveries from this region, including the presence of breeding

Bristle-thighed Curlews and Bluethroats, as well as such vagrants as Eurasian Wigeon, Siberian Sand-Plover, Great Knot, Gray-tailed Tattler, and Black-headed Gull. Red-necked Stint, Emperor Goose, and Slaty-backed Gull are seen with some regularity, and it's a rare stay here that doesn't produce something unexpected. In the absence of "staked-out" rarities, we will search such standard hotspots as Safety Lagoon and the Nome River mouth, or devote more time to the exploration of the outer reaches of the area's three roads. Road conditions permitting, we'll spend one of our full days working the Kougarok Road.



*Muskox, Nome, Alaska © Kevin J. Zimmer*

Although our biggest "quest" bird out here is the Bristle-thighed Curlew (which typically requires a roundtrip hike of at least a few hours over some difficult terrain, with no guarantee of success), there is much more to this day. The Kougarok Road is arguably one of the best birding roads in North America! Harlequin Duck, Red-breasted Merganser, Rock and Willow ptarmigan, Gyrfalcon, Rough-legged Hawk, Golden Eagle, Wandering Tattler, Eastern Yellow Wagtail, Bluethroat, Golden-crowned Sparrow, and Redpoll are just a few of the many birds that we regularly see on this road. Additionally, mammal-viewing opportunities abound (Moose, Grizzly and Muskox are all regularly seen), and the scenery is exceptional. Regardless of our exact course of action over the three days, we're certain to see a number of typical breeding birds of the region, usually including Pacific and Red-throated loons, Brant, Common Eider, Bar-tailed Godwit, Long-tailed and Parasitic jaegers, Aleutian Tern, Willow and Rock ptarmigan, Gyrfalcon, Eastern Yellow Wagtail, Bluethroat, Northern Wheatear, Gray-cheeked Thrush, American Tree Sparrow, Golden-crowned Sparrow, and Redpoll. In some years, White Wagtails or early arriving Arctic Warblers may be present.

**NIGHTS:** Aurora Inn, Nome

## June 3, Day 6: Nome to Gambell

This morning we'll fly from Nome to the Yupik village of Gambell (flying time about one hour), at the northwestern tip of St. Lawrence Island. Regardless of the scheduled flight time, please note that we may experience weather delays in getting out to Gambell. Accordingly, this is a day when we need to remain particularly flexible in our plans. If the weather cooperates, we should be on the ground at Gambell by mid-day, ready to take on a whole new set of birds and birding experiences!

**NIGHT:** Sivuqaq Inn, Gambell

## June 4-6, Days 7-9: Gambell

A visit to Gambell can rightly be considered an adventure. The friendly villagers are subsistence hunters and wonderful workers of ivory. The opportunity to stay amongst these Bering Sea people provides a unique glimpse into an ancient culture that few outsiders ever experience. Our accommodations are in a community-owned facility with simple double-occupancy rooms. The building is heated and has plumbing with five shared bathrooms complete with flush toilets and hot showers (in 4 of the 5 bathrooms). Self-service, coin-operated laundry facilities are available within the building. Our birding here is done on foot (average hikes of about three miles roundtrip), often over slush and loose gravel, which can be tedious, but generally over flat terrain**. Do be aware, that walking conditions in the boneyards (which we check daily), while not particularly strenuous, is over uneven, highly disturbed and excavated ground, and could prove difficult for people with balance issues. A recently added network of hard-packed gravel roads through the village eliminated much of the need for slogging through loose gravel, allowing us to reach most of the closer birding sites within 20-30 minutes of easy walking**. **For more distant locales (e.g. North Beach or the south end of Troutman Lake and beyond), or for rare bird chases (where speed may be of the essence), your leaders will arrange and pay for group "taxi" rides in carts towed by ATVs. These rides are provided by villagers who are accustomed to driving the ATVs, and who are responsible for maintaining their own vehicles**. Participants, at their own discretion, may also opt to utilize this "taxi" service, in lieu of hiking, at any time for one-way or roundtrip rides to and from closer birding sites (Northwest Point, the boatyards, airstrip, near and far boneyards, marsh at the northeast corner of

Troutman Lake). A typical one-way ride to most birding locations is $10, and is solely at the discretion of the individual participant, who will be responsible for paying directly for these services. Your leaders will be happy to facilitate contacts with the taxi drivers, most of whom post their telephone numbers on the lodge bulletin board, and some of whom we've known for many years. Rides can usually be arranged on very short notice, and the drivers routinely arrange to drop people off at a birding site and return at a specified time to pick them up. We also carry radios in the field, further facilitating rides on demand. We have found this system to work very well, and it allows participants the option of hiking or riding depending on conditions at the moment. At the same time, it is much less expensive than charging each participant for full-day ATV rental (going rate of $90/day, or more than double what you would expect to pay for three round trip taxi rides), and avoids the inevitable frustration and inconvenience of having to swap out or repair rented ATVs that develop mechanical problems or break down (a regular occurrence).

The weather conditions are often harsh—temperatures are often just above freezing, with frequent fog, drizzle, or even occasional snow. In spite of this, the birding can be fabulous! Remarkable spring strays that have occurred here include White-tailed Eagle, Black-tailed Gull, Oriental Pratincole, Green Sandpiper, Great Knot, Eurasian Dotterel, Jack Snipe, Siberian House-Martin, Taiga Flycatcher, Dusky Warbler, Siberian Stonechat, Dusky Thrush, Eurasian Bullfinch, Common Rosefinch, Pallas's Bunting and many others. The 1989 VENT group discovered a Little Curlew here—the first for Alaska and only the third ever found on the North American continent! The 1995 VENT group discovered a Tree Pipit—only the second found in North America. Our 2011 group found a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, which represented not only a first island record, but a first record for the entire Bering Sea region of that North American breeder. Our 2012 group turned up a Common ("Siberian") Chiffchaff, which represented the first confirmed (photographically documented) record of that species for North America! Amazingly, we have now seen this species on three of our last ten visits! Our 2013 tour enjoyed a number of vagrants, topped by a Little Curlew (only the second Alaskan record) that we found on our last morning on the island. Common Ringed Plover, Red-necked Stint, Bluethroat, Red-throated Pipit and McKay's Bunting (exceedingly rare in recent years) occur with varying degrees of regularity. **Of course, the ultra-rarities are never to be expected, and one cannot count on seeing Siberian vagrants on any single visit.** Nonetheless, our daily checks of the marshy ponds south of the

village, the boneyards, and the lower slopes of Sivuqaq Mountain will be tinged with excitement and anticipation—practically anything is possible.

Even on days when no vagrants turn up, the birding is exciting. Tens of thousands of alcids nest on the cliffs just east of the village, and flocks are constantly passing very close to shore at Northwest Cape. Alcid diversity reaches its zenith in the Bering Sea, and we can expect to see as many as 10 species. Seven of these (Crested, Least and Parakeet auklets; Horned and Tufted puffins; Thick-billed Murre; and Pigeon Guillemot) should be present in numbers, whereas some searching may be required to find the Black Guillemot and Dovekie. For many years, small numbers of Dovekies were found (and were presumed to nest) on the mountain slopes above the village. However, for the past few years, no more than a single Dovekie has been found in the usual spot on the mountainside, although occasional individuals are still regularly seen mixed in among the Crested Auklet flocks passing by Northwest Cape during our sea watches. Common Murre, seen daily, in large numbers during our visits in the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s, have undergone a precipitous population decline throughout Alaska over the past several years, and have become worryingly scarce at Gambell the past few years. Regular migrants often seen at Gambell include Yellow-billed and Arctic loon, Emperor Goose, all four species of eiders, Red Phalarope, Slaty-backed Gull, Sabine's Gull, and all three species of jaegers. There are typically a few scattered nesting pairs of Rock Sandpipers and White Wagtails in the area as well. Snow Bunting and Lapland Longspur are the two common breeding passerines at Gambell! In years when the concentrations of sea ice offshore are still present (sadly, an increasingly rare occurrence over the past 20 years), occasional Ross's Gulls and Ivory Gulls may be seen moving past Northwest Cape.



*Siberian Sand-Plover, Gambell, Alaska © Kevin J. Zimmer*

**NIGHTS:** Sivuqaq Inn, Gambell

## June 7, Day 10: Gambell to Nome

Sometime today, we'll fly back to the relative comfort and civilization of Nome. During the afternoon or evening we should have time to check the mouth of the Nome River (where Slaty-backed Gull is often present and where other strays have been seen on occasion) and explore the Council Road at least to Safety Lagoon, the two most dynamic spots for waterfowl, shorebirds, gulls, terns, and jaegers, and the best locales in the Nome area for potential vagrants.

**NIGHT:** Aurora Inn, Nome

## June 8, Day 11: Departure for Home or morning at Leisure Prior to Beginning Grand Alaska Part I Tour

Participants not continuing on Part I will depart for Anchorage at roughly mid-day (subject to change). Some participants may find it necessary to overnight in Anchorage and depart the following day. A hotel room for the night of June 8 is not included in the Nome & Gambell tour fee. However, upon request, VENT will be happy to arrange lodging in Anchorage.



*Bristle-thighed Curlew, Nome, Alaska © Kevin J. Zimmer*

## Essential Tour Information

**TOUR SIZES:** This tour is limited to 12 participants.

**TOUR LEADERS:** Brian Gibbons and Raymond VanBuskirk.



**Brian Gibbons** grew up in suburban Dallas where he began exploring the wild world in local creeks and parks. Chasing butterflies and any animal that was unfortunate enough to cross paths with the Gibbons boys occupied his childhood. A wooden bird feeder kit sparked a flame that was stoked by a gift of the *Golden Guide* and family camping trips to Texas state parks. Twenty-five years ago Brian attended two VENT camps for young birders. Birds are now his primary interest, but all things wild continue to captivate him. After college, Brian undertook a variety of field biology research jobs that have taken him to the Caribbean, the Bering Sea, and the land of the midnight sun, arctic Alaska. He enjoys working with kids, hoping to spark environmental awareness through birds. For many years Brian's field research has involved bird banding. His most amazing recoveries were a female Wilson's Warbler that had been banded in Alaska and was captured by Brian in Colorado, and a Sooty Tern that perished after a hurricane on the Texas coast; it had plied the Gulf of Mexico and the oceans of the world for 24 years. Brian's recreational bird-seeking has taken him to Machu Picchu in Peru, the Great Wall in China, the plains of East Africa, and the Himalayas in Nepal. Brian leads birding trips in the United States, Central America, the Caribbean, and Europe. As well as being a fanatical birder, he loves capturing birds with photography. He lives in Tucson, Arizona with his wife, Lacrecia Johnson, and their son, Grayson.



**Raymond L. VanBuskirk's** love and admiration for the natural world was awakened amidst the pine forests of New Mexico where he grew up. From a very early age he nurtured his passion for birding, and for the past three decades he has dedicated his life to making this passion his career. Raymond joins the VENT family after seven years as a senior tour leader for another organization, and over a decade of leading birding tours independently. Raymond's extensive career includes significant contributions to ornithology, serving as a USFWS research technician studying seabirds on the Arctic Ocean and North Pacific, heading Rosy-Finch and Gray Vireo research studies across New Mexico, developing methods for

studying breeding ecology in Grasshopper Sparrows, and holding leadership roles such as past president of the Central New Mexico Bird Alliance and board member of Western Field Ornithologists. He's been a regular instructor for the American Birding Association's youth birding camps and at Hog Island Audubon Camp in Maine. Raymond is a proud member of QBNA, the continent's informal club for LGBTQIA+ birders, where he plays a key role in organizing and leading annual conferences that provide a safe, inclusive space for birders to connect and celebrate their shared love of the outdoors and queerness. When Raymond is not traveling, he resides in St. Louis, Missouri with his partner, Marissa, his stepdaughter, Savannah, their dog, Layla, and two large snakes.

## TOUR COSTS & PAYMENT INFORMATION

**TOUR FEE:** **$13,095** per person based on double occupancy or **$14,835** for a person requiring single accommodation. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 through breakfast on Day 11, 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 the Anchorage; however, flights within the tour 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.

Participants combining this tour with Grand Alaska Part I (June 7-16, 2027) will be rebated **$690** based on double occupancy and **$870** based on single occupancy.

**REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT:** You may register for this tour through the VENT website or by calling our office (512-328-5221). The initial deposit 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 (January 29, 2027) prior to departure.

**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.

**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.

**BAD WEATHER/ADDITIONAL EXPENSE RESPONSIBILITY:** Our Alaska tours operate in the late spring/early summer period. The weather is highly changeable at this time of year and our tours typically experience a range of conditions, from sunny and clear to overcast and rainy. From time to time, dense fog is a problem at the coastal outpost locations of St. Paul (Pribilof Islands), Nome, and Gambell (St. Lawrence Island), all places visited by our tours. Exceedingly foggy conditions occasionally lead to flight cancellations. Under such circumstances, tour participants will be responsible for any additional expenses that result, principally additional hotel nights. If a flight is cancelled due to bad weather, there will be no refund available for the unused rooms at the intended destination. Most hotels used on this tour have a 30-day cancellation policy for group bookings during

the high season. In case of flight cancellation, the VENT office or your tour leaders will make arrangements for additional room nights at the location at which your departure is delayed. Tour participants will either need to pay for the additional nights directly, at the time reservations are made, or, depending on the location, upon receipt of invoice from our office after the tour. VENT cannot be responsible for delays or changes in the itinerary due to weather-related problems.

## 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.

**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 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) for information pertaining to permissible carry-on items.

**The flights between Anchorage and Nome are on large jets, with industry standard baggage regulations**. The smaller plane used to fly between Nome and Gambell has more restrictive baggage

regulations (see below). Please use a VENT luggage tag (which will be mailed to all participants a few months prior to departure) to aid leaders in recognizing your baggage during our airport and hotel transfers.

**An additional small duffel bag is recommended, either for storing items in Anchorage or Nome, or for use as your main piece of luggage during one of our jaunts away from Anchorage (allowing you to store your large bag).**

All baggage will also be weighed prior to our flights between Nome and Gambell. Participants will be charged. Since 2022, Bering Air does not technically allow carry-on luggage, because there are no overhead baggage compartments, and the space beneath the seats is extremely minimal. Passengers are allowed to carry binoculars and limited camera gear onto the plane, but no large gear bags are permitted. Traditional carry-on bags will need to be checked, along with other checked baggage, and will count toward your 100-pound limit. Gear not needed for Gambell or Nome can be stored at the hotel in Anchorage. Gear required for Nome but not for Gambell can be stored in Nome.

## WHAT TO BRING

**CLOTHING:** The weather in Alaska in May and June is notoriously unpredictable and can still be quite cold. The "layered" technique is your best defense against the variable weather. We suggest you combine a thermal undershirt, shirt, sweater, and coat or jacket. Medium-weight wool or synthetic equivalent for shirts, pants, and sweaters is ideal. Cold-weather gear is essential and should include a warm coat or down jacket, warm hat, gloves, thermal underwear (both tops and bottoms), wool or synthetic equivalent socks, and warm shirts. A rain jacket or poncho is also essential for times when the weather turns misty. Since it can be surprisingly warm too, you should bring some lighter field clothing as well.

**FOOTWEAR:** Insulated waterproof boots, N.E.O.S. Overshoes or walking shoes are recommended for foot gear. **Birding around Nome and on day-trips in and around Anchorage does not require such footwear, because most walking in these locations will be along gravel roads or well-maintained trails, where comfortable hiking shoes should suffice. The one possible exception is the hike for Bristle-thighed Curlews in Nome, where we will be hiking off-road without benefit of trails, and**

**where the tundra can vary from reasonably dry to fairly wet or muddy in spots, depending on local variations in weather.**

**ALCOHOL: Gambell is officially a "dry" village, meaning that not only is alcohol not available, but that it is a crime to bring alcohol to the village. Please respect local laws, and do not carry alcohol to Gambell.**

**OTHER ITEMS:** We recommend you bring insect repellent, an alarm clock, sunglasses and sunscreen. The leaders will have a spotting scope and some reference books, but you may wish to bring your own. **Having your own spotting scope is particularly useful at Gambell, where we spend much time sea watching from shore. Most of the birds seen in any given sea watch are seen only in flight, making it difficult to share the "group" scopes to any meaningful extent. You should also bring your own spotting scope if you are planning on doing digiscope photography, both to avoid monopolizing the group scope(s), and to avoid any chance of scratching the eyepiece of the group scope(s) due to a mismatch in diameter of your camera lens versus the scope eyepiece**. A good North American field guide to the birds is the one reference that each participant should plan on carrying for their own personal use.

For Gambell, participants should bring a bar of soap and a towel (these items are usually provided by the lodge, but we have been unpleasantly surprised from time to time) and also may wish to bring ample cash (preferably in small, $5, $10, and $20 denominations) to pay for ATV rides and/or native crafts, such as ivory carvings. Credit cards are not accepted for these activities/items. Individual ATV rides at Gambell typically cost $15-20 round trip. Participants may find it helpful to carry two-way Walkabout radios to increase communication in the field as well as their own scopes for sea watching.

## DESTINATION INFORMATION & LOCAL CONDITIONS

**INTERNET ACCESS & CELLULAR SERVICE:** Expect Wi-Fi to be available in all locations, including, as of 2026, the Sivuqaq Inn (Gambell.) Wi-Fi is typically excellent at the hotel in Anchorage; reliable, but perhaps slower at the other locales visited). Participants with AT&T as their cellular provider can expect to have cellular service everywhere except Gambell. For cellular service at Gambell, you will need to purchase a GCI sim card (available in Nome, and in Anchorage, for $40 for a month with 2GB data). Verizon customers will need a GCI card for cellular service in Nome.

**LAUNDRY:** There is a self-serve laundry in Gambell and Nome. Our hotel in Anchorage offers both self-service and send-out laundry service.

**WEATHER:** Normally it is 25 to 45 degrees Fahrenheit at Gambell and anywhere from the 30s to 50s at Nome; however, each of these places are often windy with drizzle and fog. Elsewhere on the mainland, temperatures tend to be warmer and may reach the upper 60s or higher.

## 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.

**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.

### FIELD GUIDES:

***Field Guides—Birds:***

Armstrong, Robert H. *Guide to the Birds of Alaska.* 4th edition. Bothwell, WA: Alaska Northwest Books, 1995.

Brazil, Mark. *Birds of East Asia*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009. This is the best field guide for illustrating any of the possible Siberian vagrants that could turn up at Gambell, St. Paul or elsewhere.

Dunn, Jon L. and Jonathan Alderfer. *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America.* Seventh edition. Washington, D. C.: National Geographic Society, 2017. The recommended field guide.

Sibley, David Allen. *The Sibley Guide to Birds.* 2nd edition New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014. This classic field guide has been greatly expanded to cover many of the Eurasian vagrants that we could encounter at Gambell, St. Paul or elsewhere.

***Reference—Birds:***

Gabrielson, I. N. & F. E. Lincoln. *The Birds of Alaska.* Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole, 1959. Outdated now, but has a lot of information on the life histories of Alaskan birds. Try www.abebooks.com.

Grant, Peter J. *Gulls: A Guide to Identification.* Academic Press, 1997.

Harrison, Peter. *Seabirds: An Identification Guide.* Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1991 (reprint).

Hayman, Peter, John Marchant & Tony Prater. *Shorebirds: An Identification Guide to the Waders of the World.* Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1991 (reprint).

Kessel, Brina. *Birds of the Seward Peninsula, Alaska: Their Biogeography, Seasonality and Natural History*. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1996.

Kessel, Brina & Daniel D. Gibson. *Status and Distribution of Alaska Birds.* Studies in Avian Biology No. 1, 1978. Try www.abebooks.com.

Zimmer, K. J. *Birding in the American West: A Handbook.* Cornell University Press, 2000.

***General Background Reading:***

Freuchen, Peter. *Book of the Eskimos.* Fawcett Books, 1981. An easy-to-read classic account of Eskimo life, written in 1931. Out of Print, but appears on www.amazon.com. Other Freuchen titles are available as well: *Arctic Adventure* (AMS Press, 1995) and *Ivalu, the Eskimo Wife* (AMS Press, 1935).

Lopez, Barry. *Arctic Dreams: Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape.* Vintage Books, 2001.

McGinniss, Joe. *Going to Extremes.* Plume, 1989 (reissue edition). Raw non-fiction about the people and places of America's last frontier.

McPhee, John. *Coming into the Country.* Noonday Press, 1991 (reissue). Published in 1976, this chronicles a remarkable journey by kayak into the last frontier.

*Audubon* (May 1988). The entire issue is devoted to Alaska. Especially worthwhile is "Exploring Literature of the Far North," a great bibliography of interesting books on the region.

*National Geographic* (October 1982). "A New Day for Alaska's Pribilofs."

***Alaska Guidebooks:***

Rennick, Penny (ed.) *Mammals of Alaska.* Alaska Geographic Guides. Alaska Geographic Society, 1996.

A variety of books on Alaska are available through the Alaska Geographic Society: (907) 274-0521. Alaska Geographic Online is found at www.akgeo.com. Some of these resources include: Alaskan Native Peoples, Mammals of Alaska, and National Parks and Monuments of Alaska. On the tour a number of local guide books and pamphlets can be picked up at local gift shops, including: Louise

Potter's Wild Flowers Along Mt. McKinley Park Road (Camp Denali Publishers, n.d.). Although out of print, Potter's book is possibly available in Denali National Park; it is also found on www.amazon.com.

**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." 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 November 10, 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.

AKNG:20270529

11/13/2026 EL/SB

P/KZ 07/14/2025