FLORIDA IN WINTER

Gulf Beaches to Space Coast

January 9 - 17, 2027



The endemic Florida Scrub-Jay © Rafael Galvez

On this trip, participants will travel a swath of Florida from Gulf beaches to the Space Coast on the Atlantic Ocean, experiencing the wonders of winter birding in one of the country's top birding areas.

Florida is a fantastic place to be in winter and get away from colder climates, in the same manner as hundreds of species of wintering birds from throughout North America. Large numbers of waders and shorebirds can be expected along the tidal shallows and mangroves of the Gulf Coast, including specialties such as Roseate Spoonbill, Reddish Egret, Wood Stork, Wilson's Plover, up to five species of terns, and Black Skimmer. Inland, vast pine flatwoods will give us an opportunity to find the rare and declining Red-cockaded Woodpecker, along with Brown-headed Nuthatch, and, with luck, the elusive Bachman's Sparrow in the palmetto understory.

We will cross the peninsula and visit wetlands where Snail Kites and Limpkins forage and where bitterns and rails may be found with patience. Herons will be commencing their nesting season and Anhingas showing their breeding colors. Springs will shelter the threatened West-Indian Manatee while American Alligators bask on marshy edges. Once on the Atlantic Coast, we will visit Florida's

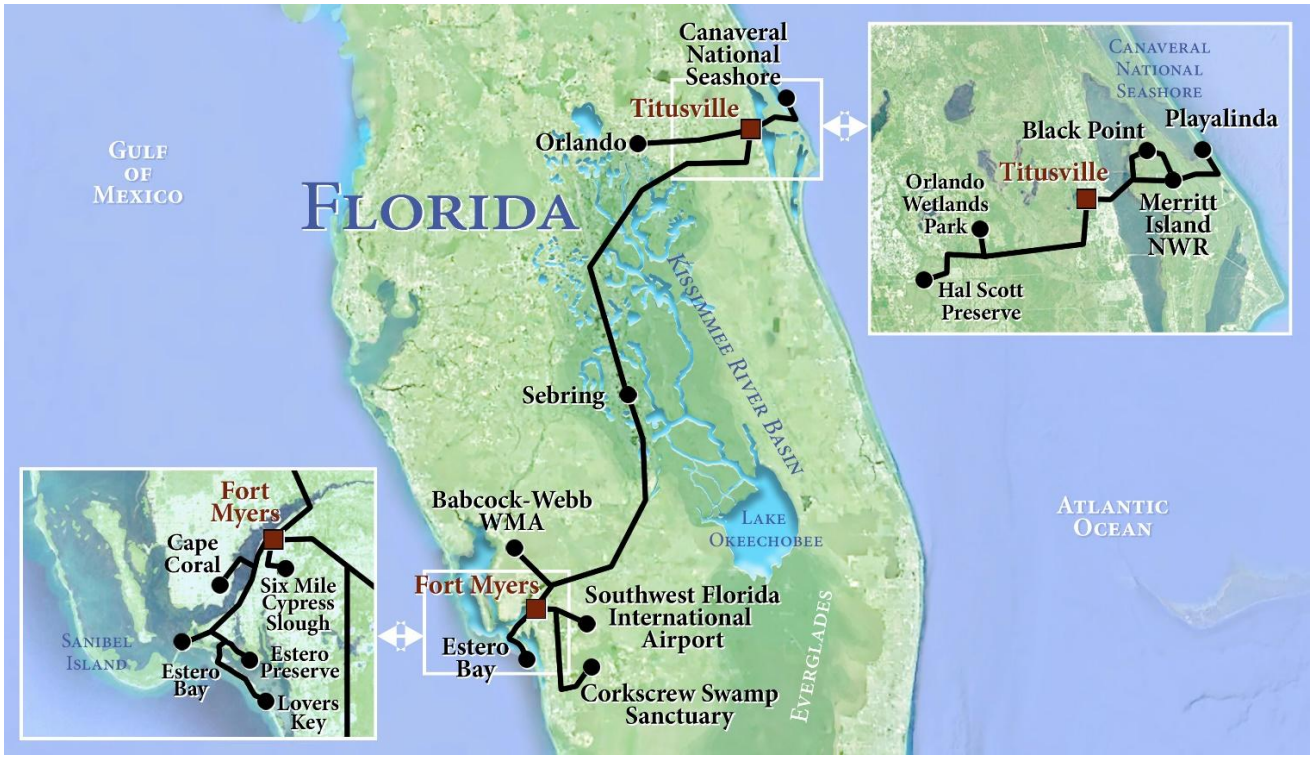
largest barrier island and enjoy close views of great congregations of waterfowl at Merritt Island, including more than a dozen species of ducks. Uplands along the coast host oak scrub where the state's sole endemic bird species can be found, the charismatic Florida Scrub-Jay.



Limpkins © Rafael Galvez

The tour starts on Florida's Gulf Coast, taking us through the Kissimmee River Basin, north of Lake Okeechobee and a diversity of habitats, to end on the Space Coast and marshes along the Canaveral National Seashore. This will be a slower paced exploration of the Sunshine State's prime wetland destinations including: Estero Bay and its mangrove flats teeming with spoonbills, Reddish Egrets and shorebirds; Corkscrew Swamp and its magical boardwalk through an ancient Bald Cypress forest; and Merritt Island's wildlife drive through impoundments that attract tremendous congregations of ducks, herons, storks, and ibises. The regional hammocks and pinelands will host an array of wintering birds including several woodpeckers, sparrows, and up to a dozen warbler species. Raptors along the way may include Swallow-tailed Kite, Short-tailed Hawk, and Crested Caracara.

With a diversity of habitats from coast to coast, an abundance of wintering species and good chances for a variety of specialties, a winter Florida trip is a must.



January 9, Day 1: Arrival in Ft. Myers

Participants should arrive in Ft. Myers (Southwest Florida International Airport; airport code RSW) at any time today. Upon arrival, you will be met in the baggage claim area by a representative of our ground transportation service, at which time you will be transferred to our hotel, the **Hampton Inn & Suites**, where a room has been reserved in your name. The distance to the hotel is about a 30-minute drive.

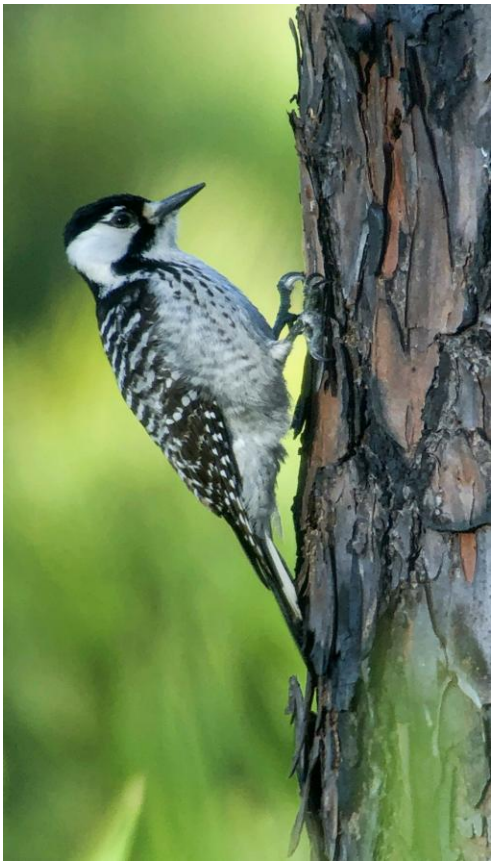
We will gather as a group at 5:00 p.m. in the lobby for a trip welcome and orientation meeting, followed by dinner.

NIGHT: Hampton Inn & Suites, Ft. Myers

January 10, Day 2: Babcock-Webb and Cape Coral

We will leave early this morning towards Babcock/Webb Wildlife Management Area in Punta Gorda. With more than 60,000 acres, the preserve holds a mosaic of habitats including large tracts of Pine

Flatwoods, where our primary focus will be searching for the endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker, a species of southeastern distribution that requires mature forests to survive. Family clans of this species excavate their holes in living trees that are typically 40–60 years of age, and the wells of resin maintained around the entrance of the holes are key in keeping predators away. Logging practices and a decrease in large stands of mature pines of a few species have resulted in great declines across this woodpecker's range, yet Babcock-Webb remains one of the best places in Florida to find this elusive species. Brown-headed Nuthatches, Pine Warblers, and Eastern Bluebirds also roam the extensive pine forests, and with great luck, we may even spot a Bachman's Sparrow or a Northern Bobwhite in the Saw Palmetto understory. The area is also good for "White-eyed" Eastern Towhee, and several woodpecker species including Pileated and Red-headed. Florida Sandhill Cranes also make use of the grassy clearings between the forests. At the freshwater marshes dotting the preserve, we will look for Anhinga, Limpkin, and other waterbirds, including Purple Gallinule. As is true of many sites we will visit during this tour, Babcock-Webb can be a great place for herons and egrets, with 10 species possible, including Little Blue, Tricolored and Snowy, plus White and Glossy ibises. Along surrounding sloughs, we may find Swamp Sparrow, Sedge and Marsh wrens if we are patient, while enjoying the ubiquitous song of Carolina wrens. We'll be sure to keep an eye out for aerial species such as flocks of wintering Tree Swallows, Red-shouldered Hawks patrolling the area, maybe a Snail Kite foraging on the wing, or if we are lucky, an early Swallow-tailed Kite returning to breeding grounds from South America. With so much to explore at Babcock-Webb, we could easily spend an entire day there and not scratch the surface. Aside from birds, we may even see mammals such as Nine-banded Armadillo and Sherman's Fox Squirrel; even the highly endangered Florida Panther has been seen there.



Red-cockaded Woodpecker © Rafael Galvez

Before returning south across the Caloosahatchee River, we will head into the City of Cape Coral, which holds the largest population of Florida Burrowing Owls, with hundreds of documented burrows found at numerous sites throughout the city. Unlike their western counterparts, Florida Burrowing Owls do not

depend on the holes of other animals, such as prairie dogs, but dig their own burrows. If time allows, before settling back at Fort Myers, we may visit Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve near our hotel, traversing a mature Bald Cypress forest and wetlands, where we may see American Alligators, and various freshwater species. Although the boardwalk is about a mile long, many birds can be found there including Mottled, Wood and Black-bellied Whistling ducks, Limpkin and large flocks of herons, egrets and ibises that arrive to roost in the afternoons.

NIGHT: Hampton Inn & Suites, Ft. Myers



Roseate Spoonbill © Rafael Galvez

January 11, Day 3: Gulf Coast Estuaries and the Beaches

This morning, we will head south of Fort Myers towards the coast and make stops in search of birds along the string of barrier islands including Fort Myers Beach, Little Estero Lagoon, Lovers Key, and others. Plovers and other shorebirds are the main attractions here. We will keep a look out for several plover species including Piping, Snowy, Wilson's, Semipalmated and Black-bellied. Up to a dozen sandpiper species are also possible including Red Knot, Whimbrel and sometimes even a Long-billed Curlew. Up to five gull and tern species are also expected along this stretch of the coast including Lesser Black-backed and Bonaparte's gulls, and Caspian, Royal and Sandwich terns, as well as Black

Skimmers. We'll be sure to keep an eye out over the sky, for Magnificent Frigatebirds that may be seen along the coast. Brown Pelican, bay ducks, Osprey and Bald Eagle are often found in the area. At tidal pools, we will look for a variety of wading birds including Roseate Spoonbill, Reddish Egret, Tricolored Heron, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron and several others. The flats and sandbars may attract wintering American White Pelicans and a wide range of shorebirds including Wilson's Plover, Willet, Marbled Godwit, Least and Western sandpipers and dowitchers. Mottled Duck, Hooded Merganser and several other ducks, grebes, and cormorants are also a possibility in the shallows. The surrounding mangrove forests are an important habitat for wintering songbirds and several warbler species such as Yellow-throated, Prairie, Black-and-white, and Northern Waterthrush may be found there, along with vireos, woodpeckers, and, with great luck, maybe even a Mangrove Cuckoo. With careful observation and fortune on our side, we may spot a Gopher Tortoise along the sandy bluffs.

NIGHT: Hampton Inn & Suites, Ft. Myers



Painted Bunting © Rafael Galvez

January 12, Day 4: Corkscrew Swamp

On this day we will head away from the Gulf Coast to the southernmost reaches of this tour, gently wrapping along the outer arms of the Greater Everglades Ecosystem flowing down from Lake Okeechobee. We will visit Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary and its wonderful boardwalk that offers more than two miles of access into the largest tract of old growth Bald Cypress in the country.

Simply strolling down this beautifully maintained boardwalk is a magical and haunting experience. As the gentle waters of the swamp reflect the contrast between the towering trunks and the lush understory filled with ferns and lichens, you get a sense this is a glimpse into a world thousands of years old. Many waterbirds are possible here, including Little Blue Heron, Snowy Egret, Wood Stork, Limpkin and Purple Gallinule. It isn't uncommon to find a Barred Owl resting on the branches, perfectly camouflaged against a heavily textured cypress trunk. Wintering songbirds may abound, including a variety of warblers, Cedar Waxwings and Painted Buntings. We can expect to hear the melody of a Carolina Wren reverberating through the flooded forest and catch glimpses of it atop an enigmatic cypress knee. A Pileated Woodpecker may be spotted cruising through the canopy festooned with Spanish Moss and epiphytes. It may even be possible to see a blooming Ghost Orchid (*Dendrophylax lindenii*) here! The surrounding slough and forest edges may be good places to search for Anhinga, Belted Kingfisher, Loggerhead Shrike and Red-shouldered Hawk. With luck, we may even spot a wintering Short-tailed Hawk, a stunning raptor that breeds in central Florida and winters primarily south of Lake Okeechobee.

In the afternoon, as we return towards Fort Myers, we may make a stop at Estero Bay Preserve State Park, which contains thousands of acres of protected wetlands and scrub habitat and offers many wildlife possibilities. Seasonally, some of the access points may be flooded, but we will make an effort to enter if possible. In addition to a great diversity of herons, egrets and shorebirds, this can also be a great spot for ducks, ranging from dabblers such as Mottled and American Wigeon, and bay ducks such as Redhead, both Lesser and Great scaups, Bufflehead and Hooded Merganser. The preserve can hold many surprises including rails, bitterns and other skulkers. Nelson's and Saltmarsh sparrows are regularly recorded from this preserve, and we may try our luck at these along the saltmarshes.

NIGHT: Hampton Inn & Suites, Ft. Myers

January 13, Day 5: Towards the Space Coast

We will leave the Gulf Coast this morning with our bags packed, slowly making our way towards the opposite coast of the Florida peninsula. Our primary aim will be to make it to the Space Coast in the early afternoon. This will be our longest distance traveled in a single day, and we will take the scenic route across the Kissimmee River Basin, a network of dozens of lakes that form the headwaters of Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades. Along the way we will be on the lookout for raptors, including Crested Caracara, Short-

tailed Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, and early arrivals of Swallow-tailed Kite, which return to Florida from South America in February. Many roadside birding possibilities could be in store, since we will be covering a tremendous tract of waterways, marshes, and lakes, and we will make a few selective stops to keep the day interesting.



Feeding frenzy of egrets at Merritt Island © Rafael Galvez

The Kissimmee River once meandered more than 100 miles, reaching up to three miles wide in places and organically fed many ecosystems through prolonged flooding. Unfortunately, a story that would repeat time and again in the tragic story of development and mismanagement of natural resources, during the 1940s the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began "fixing" this essential floodplain, as they did with the Everglades. The channeling, straightening, and dredging had devastating ecological consequences, and as is the case with the Everglades, decades later, we are mired in challenging conservation projects that will cost millions to restore these ecosystems to a sustainable state.

There is just simply too much we could potentially explore along the way, and the scenery as we travel along should present an authentic impression of wild Florida. We may stop for lunch in the town of Sebring or nearby. We will arrive to Titusville in time for a restful evening and dinner.

NIGHT: Hyatt Place, Titusville



Northern Pintail over Merritt Island © Rafael Galvez

January 14, Day 6: Merritt Island NWR

We will start this morning along Black Point Wildlife Drive at Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, a premier birding destination that offers seven miles of dike roads that entwine several lagoons and flats that may hold countless wintering ducks, wading birds and shorebirds. A winter morning spent along Black Point can be a spectacular wildlife experience that is difficult to match. The overall number and diversity of species varies from year to year, but it isn't uncommon to find great congregations of Northern Shoveler, Blue-winged and Green-winged teals, American Wigeon, Gadwall, as well as Hooded and Red-breasted mergansers, both scaup species and many others. Reddish Egrets and large feeding flocks of White and Glossy ibises, Great and Snowy egrets, Wood Storks and Roseate Spoonbills use the shallow impoundments to feed, at times gathering by the hundreds. Shorebirds of all kinds are possible, including peeps, dowitchers, Willets, Black-necked Stilts and American Avocets, and much more. Often, interesting species are discovered amidst the expected, such as Clapper Rail, or even a Eurasian Wigeon. Merritt Island NWR is roughly 140,000 acres and is located in one of the largest barrier islands in the country, along the Atlantic Coast. The centerpiece of the refuge is the wildlife drive, which gives access to lookout points, hiking trails and additional roads. However, the congregation of birds can, at times, be so

exciting and close to the road at any random point along the drive that one could potentially stop to bird anywhere.

In the afternoon, we may decide to visit the Scrub-Oak trails in the refuge in search of the endemic Florida Scrub-Jay. This charismatic species is endangered and found solely in ancient sandy scrubland ridges found primarily in central Florida. The nearby pinelands may hold Pileated Woodpecker, Pine Warblers, and many other wintering songbirds.

NIGHT: Hyatt Place, Titusville

January 15, Day 7: Wetlands and Pinelands for Florida Specialties



Snail Kite © Rafael Galvez

This day, we will visit several sites for some of the most emblematic bird species of the region. We will set out towards interior habitats such as the Orlando Wetlands Park in search of Limpkin and Snail Kite, two species that thrive when *Pomacea* "apple" snails are present. The Snail Kite–once known as the Everglades Kite–has suffered greatly in Florida due to complications with water management in the state's wetlands. While it is now quite difficult to find this kite in southern parts of the Everglades, it can still be found readily in central Florida. In this wetland park, we will also hope to find other freshwater marsh species such as Anhinga, Purple Gallinule, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck and Mottled Duck, and American and Least bitterns. American Alligator, Florida Softshell and Florida Snapping turtles should also be there, as well as other reptiles. We will likely encounter Fish Crow and Boat-tailed Grackle as well as wintering songbirds.

We may also visit the Hal Scott Regional Preserve at the north point of Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area to search for the endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker and Brown-headed Nuthatch, two localized species that we may have also searched for along Florida's west coast pinelands. This preserve

alone would merit an entire day and depending on what we've seen by this point in the tour, we may decide to explore it at length. As many as ten sparrow species have been reported at this time of year here, and that is a great number for Florida, including Grasshopper, Henslow's and Vesper.

During the afternoon, we may visit Playalinda Beach and some of the trails along Canaveral National Seashore. We may search for Florida Scrub-Jays if we did not already encounter them earlier during the tour. Along the coast, we may find gulls, terns and shorebirds. After scanning along the coastline, we may find Northern Gannets foraging the waters; groups of pelicans; Royal, Sandwich and Forster's terns; and maybe even a Magnificent Frigatebird. Groups of scoters and bay ducks, such as Redhead, may also be around, along with some wintering Common Loons and Horned Grebes.

It should also be noted that, depending on scheduling and weather conditions, the rocket launch complex at Cape Canaveral may be visible from our hotel, and there is a possibility a launching may be scheduled during our time there. In the past tours, this has been an exciting event that participants have enjoyed.

NIGHT: Hyatt Place, Titusville

January 16, Day 8: Space Coast to Orlando

With so many excellent locations to visit and a wide diversity of habitats accessible from the Space Coast, we will dedicate this day to returning to any locations that need revisiting and areas we missed, as we make our way towards our final destination, Orlando. After loading our luggage in the vans, we will likely revisit Black Point Wildlife Drive this morning – an area with many possibilities along the dike roads and trails. The number of birds and composition of species there may change from day to day, so it is always an exciting part of Merritt Island NWR to visit time and again. There are areas along Indian River where we can look for West Indian Manatee, and various trails along Canaveral National Seashore may offer shorebirds, if time allows. The drive from Titusville to Orlando takes about 50 minutes, and as we get closer to "O-Town," we may visit any of the various wetlands along the way, before arriving at our hotel by mid-afternoon. Our farewell dinner will be in Orlando.

NIGHT: Hyatt House Orlando Airport, Orlando

January 17, Day 9: Departures

Participants may leave any time today. Our hotel provides shuttle services to the Orlando "McCoy" International Airport (airport code MCO) 24 hours a day. The distance to MCO is 2.5 miles away, and signing up at the front desk may be required in anticipation.

ESSENTIAL TOUR INFORMATION

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 7 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: Rafael Galvez, with a second leader to be added if participation exceeds 6 participants.



Mariah Hryniewich was born and raised in Southwest Florida, where she has had a love for nature and wildlife since a young age. Her passion for birds grew quickly after connecting with the birding community and discovering the world through new eyes. Birds fascinated her, and she was hooked after having opportunities to witness the spectacle of migration at the Florida Keys Hawkwatch as an official counter. Her love for the natural world has only gotten stronger through various fieldwork with Avian Research and Conservation Institute conducting bird surveys and assisting in numerous raptor projects. When she is not working in the field, you can find her guiding field trips at birding shows or in the booth with Phone Skope as their birding manager and as an ambassador in the Kowa Sporting Optics booth. Mariah's enthusiasm for birds and nature is positively infectious. She is always eager to share with others while traveling around the world and guiding professional bird tours from remote Alaska to the jungles in the Neotropics. She feels most at home outside surrounded by nature.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for this tour is **$5,295** per person in double occupancy from Fort Myers (ends Orlando). This includes all food from dinner on Day 1 to dinner on Day 8, all lodging for eight nights during the tour, ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by

the tour leader/s. It does not include airfare to Fort Myers and from Orlando, airport departure taxes, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for this tour is **$1,250**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **$500** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, the deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration.

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 (September 11, 2026) prior to the tour departure date.

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.

FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

TRAVEL INSURANCE/TRAVEL PROTECTION: 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 Ripcord

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:

https://ripcordtravelprotection.com/ventbird; or click the **Ripcord** logo on our website (click Help and 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.

Coronavirus (COVID-19):

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 MedjetAssist

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.

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

*An air ticket will be purchased by Victor Emanuel Travel on behalf of the traveler with the traveler's consent. A purchase is considered final upon receipt of payment. If a ticket is subsequently reissued at

the behest of the traveler (i.e. voluntary change of plans), the same fee rates apply for the reissue process, in addition to any fees that may be charged by the airline.

BAGGAGE: Soft luggage is preferable to rigid suitcases for making the most of our limited storage space. Please limit your luggage to one medium-sized bag and one carry-on per person.

The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. 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 websites of your airline and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for the most updated information regarding checked baggage and carry-on items: http://www.tsa.gov/.

CLIMATE & WEATHER: Winter in central Florida offers generally warm, sunny, and pleasant weather, with temperatures into the 70s. Mornings and evenings can be cool, with lows possible to the upper 40s. Rain chances are relatively low during winter, and typically below 25% during the month of February. Along the Atlantic Coast, wind gusts can be persistent and strong, making temperatures in the morning feel cooler. Unusually cooler winters along the Cape Canaveral coast may drop into the upper 30s, while warmer winters along the Gulf Coast may register temperatures up to the mid-80s.

CLOTHING: This program is structured as casual. Field-type clothing will be appropriate for all occasions. We want you to be comfortable, so **please be prepared for varying conditions.** It is best to check forecasts for both coasts in anticipation, and pack clothing layers.

An important consideration when choosing clothes should be avoiding overexposure to the sun. The Florida sun can be intense, even in winter, and participants who are especially sensitive to sun exposure should take all necessary precautions. Long-sleeved shirts and field trousers are recommended. Such "field clothing" is made of lightweight, yet durable materials with multiple pockets and ventilated seams. Pants made of denim are acceptable, but not as comfortable in warmer conditions. Outdoor stores such as Cabela's and REI carry field clothing that many birders find appealing. Dull colors or earth tones are preferable. A windbreaker, sweater, or a jacket may come in

handy for early mornings and nights, especially in the event of a cold front. A hat for protection from the sun is essential. Many people prefer the wide-brimmed variety; a standard baseball cap offers less sun protection but will suffice.

FOOTWEAR: We will not be walking far from the vans in general, but the ground surfaces may be gravelly, rocky or uneven. At some locations we will visit throughout this tour, the ground may have puddles or tidal water. A light hiking boot or trail shoe will be the ideal footwear when in the field. Athletic shoes will suffice as well, and are especially appropriate for other occasions, such as around the hotels. No strenuous hiking is planned. We strongly discourage you from wearing flip-flops, sandals, or other types of open-toe shoe.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry service is not available at any of the hotels where we'll stay. Participants should bring enough clothing to get through the trip without the need to do laundry.

CONDITIONS: Early to mid-morning departures, typically leaving the hotel for the field by 7:00 a.m. Daily activities into mid-afternoon, with short hikes, and easy access to sites. We will be covering a lot of ground by vehicle across a wide range of habitats. Most of the birding will take place within close proximity to the vehicle, on well-maintained trails, roadsides and boardwalks. There will be some long drives, particularly on the day we travel from Fort Myers to Titusville.

EQUIPMENT: One of the most important aspects of having an enjoyable travel experience is being prepared with proper equipment. The following items will come in handy during your trip to Texas:

- **Backpack** – good for carrying extra clothing, field guides, supplies, and optical equipment during all land excursions.
- **Notebooks and pens**
- **Travel alarm clock**
- **Polarized sunglasses with good UV protection**
- **Sunscreen, lip balm, skin lotions**
- **Personal toiletries**

- **Cameras, lenses, memory cards, and extra batteries –** there are good photo opportunities situationally and photographers will want to keep your camera handy each day.
- **Collapsible walking stick –** a highly recommended item for those who have trouble walking.
- **Folding stool –** a recommended item for those who have trouble standing for more than 10 or 15 minutes at a time. The typical folding stool is small, lightweight and portable, consisting of three aluminum legs connected by a central bolt, with a sturdy but pliable material seat.
- **Tissue packs**
- **Water bottle –** a small water bottle that can be refilled for walks and other outings during the trip. We will have water jugs with us at all times to refill your bottles.
- **Insect repellent –** Mosquitoes are a possibility at almost all locations, so insect repellent may well come in handy. Please see the HEALTH section below for more information about mosquitos and bite prevention.

BINOCULARS & SPOTTING SCOPES:

Binoculars – We strongly recommend good binoculars of at least 7x35, 8x42, 10x40, or 10x42 magnification. We recommend that you do NOT bring mini-binoculars of any kind. Some people like "minis" because they are small and lightweight; but they have an extremely small field of view and very poor light gathering power. Trying to find a bird in your binoculars using minis is like trying to read a book through a keyhole. You will be very frustrated, and even if you do manage to get the bird in your binoculars before it flies, you will have a poor view. You will find that 7x35 or 8x42 binoculars are compact and light enough. As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binoculars in your airline carry-on bag.

Spotting Scopes – Your trip leaders will have scopes available for group use throughout the trip, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so.

INTERNET SERVICE: Complimentary Wi-Fi is available at all hotels.

TIME: Florida is located in the Eastern Time Zone, and in February operates on Eastern Standard Time (EST).

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

If you are taking personal medication, prescription or over-the-counter, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

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

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.

An 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 is best completed in advance of travel. Do-it-yourself pre-treatment has to 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 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line (800) CDC-INFO (800-232-4636). You can check the CDC website at https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html (click on Travel Health).

SUGGESTED READING: 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.

Birds: The National Geographic guide and the Sibley guide are both excellent resources; either is an excellent choice for this trip. A smaller version of Sibley that addresses only the birds of eastern North America is also a very good option.

Dunn, Jon and Jonathan Alderfer. ***National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America*.** Seventh Edition. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2017. Effectively shows all West Indian strays as well.

Sibley, David Allen. ***The Sibley Guide to Birds*.** Second edition. New York: Knopf, 2014.

Sibley, David Allen. ***Sibley Guide East: Field Guide to Birds of Western North America.*** Second edition. New York: Knopf, 2017.

Other birding resources:

Rodgers, James A., Herbert W. Kale II, Ray Ashton, et al. ***Rare and Endangered Biota of Florida—Birds (Vol. 5).*** Florida: University Press of Florida, 1996. Natural history, etc. of Florida specialties.

Toops, Connie and Willard E. Dilley. ***Birds of South Florida. An Interpretive Guide.*** Conway, Arkansas: River Road Press, 1986. Very good update on south Florida birdlife. Out of print, but still widely available online.

Butterflies:

Brock, Jim P. and Kenn Kaufman. ***Butterflies of North America (Kaufman Focus Guides).*** Houghton Mifflin Co, 2003.

Glassberg, Jeffrey. ***Butterflies Through Binoculars: Florida.*** New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Odenates:

Dunkle, Sidney W. ***Dragonflies Through Binoculars: A Field Guide to Dragonflies of North America.*** New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

General History and Natural History:

Douglas, Marjory Stoneman. ***The Everglades—River of Grass*.** Pineapple Press, 1997 (Reprint of the 1947 edition). A timeless classic. Highly recommended!

Zim, H.S. ***A Guide to Everglades National Park and the Nearby Florida Keys.*** A Golden Guide. New York: Golden Press, 1960. Very useful introduction to this region. Out of print, but still widely available online.

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.

RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc., a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, "***VENT***") act only as agents for the participant in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

VENT reserves the right (i) to substitute hotels of similar category, or the best reasonable substitution available under the circumstances, for those indicated and (ii) to make any changes in the itinerary

that are deemed necessary by VENT or which are caused by third party transportation schedules (i.e. railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, etc.).

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

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

Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on July 9, 2025, 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.

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