



ITALY

Birds and Art in Apulia & Matera

April 28 - May 8, 2026



Matera. Photo Marco Valtriani

The mild climate and strategic position of the southern Italian provinces of Apulia and Matera have attracted human settlers since the dawn of history. Here, where the turquoise waters of the Adriatic meet the Ionian Sea, medieval villages and wilderness parks dot one of Europe's most dramatic landscapes. Our tour is designed to take full advantage of this marvelous region's rich heritage, both natural and cultural.

In Matera, cave dwellings excavated some nine thousand years ago have been transformed into



European Roller. Photo Rick Wright

modern homes and shops; in Bari, resting place of Saint Nicholas, a massive medieval castle looms over grand palaces built by wealthy merchants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Traditional agricultural practices still survive here, and the countryside offers an almost overwhelming mix of habitats, from rugged oceanside cliffs and forested valleys to steppe-like plateaus and golden salt marshes.

The birds are just as diverse. Among the raptors that still haunt the blue skies here are Red Kites, Short-toed Snake-Eagles, Montagu's Harriers, and Lesser Kestrels, while the continent's most colorful birds—European Rollers, Eurasian Hoopoes, and European Bee-eaters—hunt smaller prey on open fields.

Among the many regional specialties we will seek are the Western Black-eared Wheatear, Blue Rock Thrush, and Calandra Lark. On seaside ponds and marshes, we hope to see the spectacular European Spoonbill, Western Marsh Harrier, and Black Stork. Purple Swamphens, perhaps the most impressive members of the rail family, are also possible.

Featuring a casual pace, a piquant mixture of natural history and cultural experiences, and an abundance of excellent and authentic cuisine, this new tour is specially designed to appeal to serious birders as well as to friends, partners, and traveling companions who seek a broader-based travel experience in the beautiful “heel” of the Italian boot.

April 28, Day One: Departure for Bari

International flights from the US to Italy typically leave in the evening, arriving in Italy the morning of Day Two. You will land at a European hub airport, such as Rome, London, or Frankfurt, on Day Two, and then take the short connecting flight to Bari’s Karol Wojtiła Airport (airport code BRI), arriving that same day, Day Two.

Night: in transit aboard overnight flight

April 29, Day Two: Arrival in Bari

On completing any immigration and customs formalities, you will be met by our driver for the transfer to our base for the entire tour, the elegant and charming *masseria* Fontana di Vite. The distance is approximately 59 km, which is about 45 minutes by road.

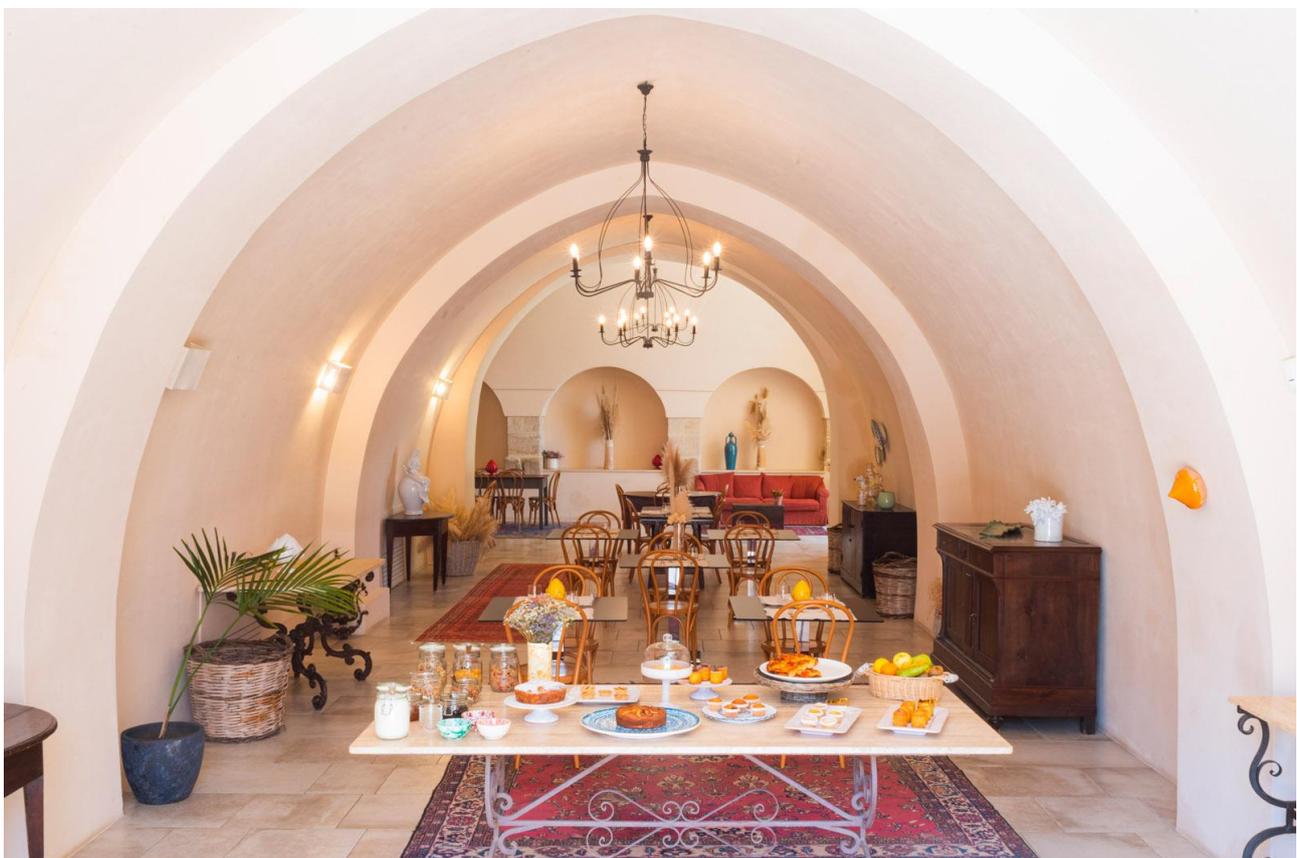


Our masseria, an elegant country manor overlooking Matera. Photo Fontana di Vite

Masserie were built in this region as early as the eighth century, when wealthy Apulian landowners consolidated their rural estates into walled compounds. Today, these fortified farms

still comprise orchards, groves, and fragrant gardens, but many have been converted into luxury hotels and retreats.

The four-star Fontana di Vite is one of the loveliest boutique hotels of this kind. Set on a hill overlooking Matera, the manor house is surrounded by golden fields and ten acres of olives, making it an oasis of solitude and peace. The fifteen guest rooms, lovingly and tastefully restored in 2017, are all different, but all reflect a careful balance of modern comfort and historical authenticity. Among the many thoughtful amenities are Wi-Fi, flat-screen television, a minibar, air conditioning, and private bathrooms with showers.



The breakfast room at Fontana di Vite. Photo Fontana di Vite

The public areas include two attractive lobbies, a lecture and meeting room, a library, a wine bar, and a highly regarded restaurant featuring regionally inspired dishes and the freshest of local ingredients. Outside, terraces and gardens offer plenty of space for relaxation and casual birding over a drink.

After time to unpack and settle in, we will meet for the first time as a group in our *masseria's* reception area at 7:00 pm. After introductions and a brief orientation to our plans, we will enjoy

dinner together, a chance for us to get to know each other a bit and to discuss our goals for the next exciting days.

Night: Masseria Fontana di Vite, Matera

April 30, Day Three: Parco della Murgia Materana

We'll enjoy a delicious breakfast together in the Fontana, then drive north and west into the dramatic landscapes of Murgia Materana Park. Limestone cliffs, deep river gorges, and ancient caves provide not just spectacular views but a wonderful backdrop to some of the best birding in southern Italy.



The Murgia Materana. Photo Marco Valtriani

As the morning warms, the high banks of the Gravina River are an excellent place to look for raptors such as Black and Red Kites, Egyptian Vultures, Short-toed Snake Eagles, and the locally abundant Lesser Kestrel; there are even records of the very rare Lanner Falcon. The rocky hillsides

are home to Blue Rock Thrushes, a few Western Black-eared Wheatears, and Eurasian Wrens, while scrubby thickets echo with the cheerful scratchy songs of dapper Sardinian Warblers. Both Italian and Spanish sparrows occur here, with brighter colors supplied by some of the most eagerly sought of Italian birds, the Eurasian Roller, European Bee-eater, and Eurasian Hoopoe, any one of which can flash through at any moment.

The park is almost as notable for its mammals. Obviously, most are much harder to see than birds, but with great luck, we might have a chance at sighting a Wolf, Wild Boar, European Badger, or the improbably shaped and colored Crested Porcupine. Even European Wildcats have been seen here. More common are Red Foxes, Weasels, and Pine Martens.



Ancient houses and churches in the caves of Murgia Materana. Photo Mattis / Wikimedia Commons

This is an equally venerable human landscape. The park's 25 square miles are dotted with archaeological sites including Stone Age cave dwellings, Bronze Age villages, and fortified farmsteads. There are also some 150 churches carved into the soft limestone, most of them dating to the early Middle Ages, with decoration reflecting the influences of both Rome and Byzantium.

Adjacent to the northern boundary of the park is Matera, our destination for tomorrow.

Night: Masseria Fontana di Vite, Matera

May 1, Day Four: Matera

After breakfast in our *masseria*, we will set out on the drive to Matera, half an hour to the west in the region of Basilicata. Continuously occupied for some 11,000 years, the city was designated a European Capital of Culture in 2019 in recognition of its long history, unique architecture, and distinctive foodways.



Matera. Photo Marco Valtriani

The most famous feature of Matera is the city's *sassi*, a complex of homes excavated in the soft stone of the area. The oldest date to around 7000 BC, when humans took up residence in natural caves, which they then expanded into livable spaces. Nine thousand years later, in the aftermath of the Second World War, the impoverished inhabitants of these caves were evicted, and the crumbling *sassi* went unoccupied for a full generation. Today, nearly half of these picturesque dwellings have been restored and modernized, and they now serve as tiny hotels, restaurants, shops, and residences for the “troglodytes,” as the locals cheerfully style themselves.

We will spend the entire day exploring this fascinating city, touring such surprising highlights as the Palombaro Lungo, a disused and inconceivably huge cistern dug in the nineteenth century. We also plan to visit a typical Matera grotto house, now a museum, still furnished as it was in the early twentieth century.



The cave church of Vitisciulo e Santa Luca. Photo mBoesch / Wikimedia Commons

Just as houses and storage buildings were carved into the stone, so too were churches, and we will stop in at some of the many *chiese rupresti*, most of them constructed in the high Middle Ages.

Not everything in Matera is subterranean. The Romanesque cathedral of Santa Maria de la Bruna features a fourteenth-century fresco depicting the Last Judgment. Dating to the eighth century, Santa Lucia alle Malve is a monastic complex that housed the first Benedictine nuns. The interior was painted beginning in the Middle Ages, and much of that ornament has been revealed and painstakingly conserved in recent years.



A male Lesser Kestrel bears down on its human admirers. Photo Shlomi-tova / Wikimedia Commons

As we wander the old city, we are almost certain to see some of Matera's best-known non-human residents, the Lesser Kestrels. More than 95% of the entire Mediterranean population of this beautiful little raptor nests in urban settings, and Matera, with its endless abundance of nooks and crannies, is home to the oldest city-breeding colony in the world, numbering a breathtaking thousand pairs. Matera is *the* place to get to know this colorful species, so often seen elsewhere as scattered threes and fours at a distance.

Please note that Matera's is *not* a flat landscape. Our visit here has been carefully planned, however, to avoid the steepest of the city's alleys and to concentrate on the more easily accessible, flatter, uppermost and lowermost levels of the town. As always, we will walk at a leisurely pace, stopping for a rest, or, just possibly, for coffee or ice cream as we go along.

We will return to our hotel in the late afternoon, with some time for relaxing before another fine dinner.

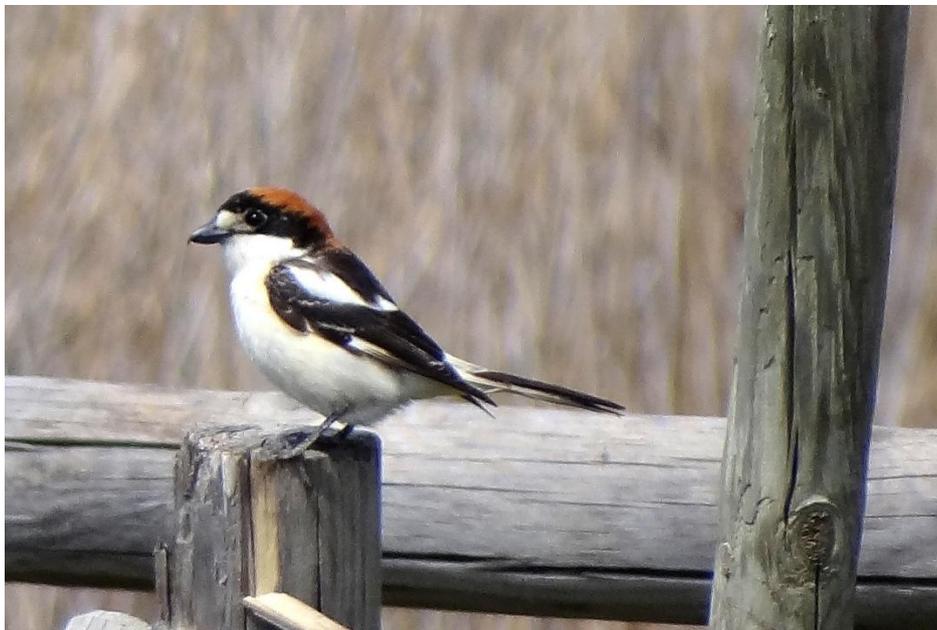
Night: Masseria Fontana di Vite, Matera

May 2 and 3, Days Five and Six

Alta Murgia National Park and Bari Vecchia. We will devote the better part of these two days to an exploration of Alta Murgia National Park, a vast preserve covering more than 650 square miles just west of Bari, 35 miles from the Adriatic. In spring, this broad, rocky plateau is aglow with the blossoms of tulips, gladioli, and orchids, and the air is fragrant with wild thyme.

The area has been inhabited by humans for many millennia, and archaeological sites abound. One of the most startling finds was made in 1993, when one of the many caves revealed the remarkably well-preserved skeleton of a Neanderthal man, dated to around 150,000 years ago. Encased in sparkling calcite deposits, “Altamura Man” still rests in Lamalunga Cave; the cave itself is closed to visitors, but the small museum offers a fascinating 3D view into the life, death, and discovery of this important fossil, along with a collection of contemporary artifacts.

Outdoors, the steppe-like expanses of Alta Murgia are a chance for us to look for specialties such as the European Roller, Woodchat Shrike, and Calandra and Greater Short-toed Larks; even the extremely rare and extremely cute Lesser Gray Shrike is an occasional visitor.



Woodchat Shrike. Photo: Rick Wright

Sardinian and Spectacled Warblers sing from the dense thickets, and stark rocky patches are home to Blue Rock Thrushes and Rock Sparrows. We will also search the scattered ruins of farmhouses and chapels for Little Owls, which nest in crannies in the stone walls.

After lunch on our second day here, we will return to visit Bari, the 2,000-year-old capital of Apulia. The old city is defended by a medieval castle, constructed in 1132 and fortified a hundred years later by Frederick II, author of the first European treatise on falconry. Inside the city walls, old Bari is a delightful maze of narrow streets and historic buildings. The Piazza Mercantile is surrounded by grand palaces built in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, ornamented with sculptures and fountains. The Romanesque cathedral of San Sabino is considerably older, its origins lying in the twelfth century, when the foundations were laid atop an older Byzantine church; the cathedral treasury preserves a rich collection of relics, including the remains of Saint Sabinus, brought here in 884.



Bari. Photo Bernard Gagnon / Wikimedia Commons

Even more famous than the cathedral is another of Bari's grand churches, the Basilica of Saint Nicholas, a major pilgrimage site for both Roman and Orthodox Catholics. In 1087, most of the skeleton of Bishop Nicholas of Myra, who had died in 343, was stolen by Apulian sailors and brought to Bari; two years later, the church was built to house the remains. Among his other virtues, Nicholas was known for his practice of giving gifts in secret to the needy; the mysterious alchemy of tradition, faith, and superstition would ultimately transform the saint into Santa Claus.

We will enjoy dinner together in Bari, then return to our *masseria* for a final night there before moving north the next morning.

Nights: Masseria Fontana di Vite, Matera

May 4, Day Seven: Saline di Margherita di Savoia

After several days of exploring the interior uplands, we will turn our attention to the shores of the Adriatic, north of Bari. We'll have breakfast, then bid a reluctant farewell to our beautiful *masseria* and strike out for the Apulian province of Barletta. Our first destination will be the Saline di Margherita di Savoia, named for the queen of Italy and mother of Victor Emanuel III, the last Italian monarch.

The *saline* were originally an enormous salt marsh and lagoon, but by the 1930s the entire area had been transformed into a large complex of artificial salt pans, making this the largest marine saltworks in Italy. This is also one of the most important sites in the Mediterranean region for migratory water birds, which stop here in spring after crossing the Adriatic from their Balkan wintering grounds; three dozen species remain to breed. The wetlands here are of international importance for Eurasian Wigeon, Common Shelduck, and Pied Avocets—they were of similar significance to the Slender-billed Curlew, which is now certainly extinct.

On our visit, we will be searching for a wide variety of marsh birds, perhaps including Pygmy Cormorants, Black Storks, Eurasian Spoonbills, and Western Marsh Harriers; we can also hope for such “bonus birds” as the Great Bittern or Ferruginous Duck. In May, we expect to find breeding well underway for many of the local specialties: 600 pairs of Pied Avocets breed in the area, along with as many as a thousand pairs each of Mediterranean and Slender-billed gulls. The gathering of Greater Flamingos here is regularly the largest on the Italian mainland.



Greater Flamingos. Photo: Rick Wright

We'll spend much of the day birding the *saline* at a leisurely place, then go on to our four-star hotel in a quiet residential area of historic Vieste, just 250 yards from the golden sands for which the area's beaches are so famous. Architecturally as different as possible from the Fontana, the Aranci easily rivals it in elegance, comfort, and style—and offers a lovely sea view to boot.

Our first dinner in the hotel's fine restaurant will introduce us to an excitingly creative menu built on the fresh fish and excellent vegetables of the Gargano peninsula.

Night: Hotel degli Aranci, Vieste



Our delightful Vieste hotel. Photo Hotel degli Aranci

May 5 and 6, Days Eight and Nine: Gargano National Park

The Gargano Peninsula is the prominent “spur” on the boot of Italy. The peninsula played a critical role in the conversion of the Lombard Arians in the sixth century, and by the early Middle Ages, the area was well established as a pilgrimage site for the veneration of the Archangel Michael. Atop Mount Gargano, the Sanctuary of Saint Michael marks the spot of the angel’s apparition around the year AD 490; this imposing complex of medieval buildings was declared a World Heritage Site in 2011.



Photo Bernard Gagnon / Wikimedia Commons

Centuries of human settlement notwithstanding, this is also a strikingly wild stretch of Adriatic coast. The northern shoreline of this large promontory is low and gentle, backed by large tracts of sand dunes. The rest of the Gargano coast, though, is jagged and rocky, covered in most places with dense maquis. Inland, there are oases of damp beech forest surrounded by dry, steppe-like habitats. This jumble of contrasting landscapes attracts an impressive range of migrating and breeding birds, and we will devote two full days to sampling the migrants and breeders of this attractive region.



Black Redstart. Photo: Rick Wright

Our visits to the scenic coastline offer chances at Scopoli's and Yelkouan Shearwaters, Pallid Swifts, and Red-rumped Swallows. Two large lakes on the northern shore, Lesina and Varano, are good places to look for migrant Pallid Harriers, Whiskered Terns, and Spanish and Italian Sparrows.

The drier upland habitats of the Gargano were long famous as the nesting site of Italy's last Little Bustards. Short walks from the road can still produce Calandra and Greater Short-toed Larks, Lesser Kestrel, or Woodchat Shrike. The area also attracts a fine variety of "flavors" of Western Yellow Wagtails, and if we discover a migrant flock, we will certainly take time to enjoy the tremendous variation in this appealing species.

Out on the rocky slopes, we will be looking for Black-headed Buntings, Western Black-eared Wheatears, Black Redstarts, Rock Buntings, and Blue Rock Thrushes. At times, these relatively shy birds can be seen right beside the road.

The scattered woodlands of the Gargano, oaks and pines, are the home of an entirely different suite of birds. Western Bonelli's Warblers, Short-toed Treecreepers, and various tits are likely, but

these are also the haunts of some much scarcer birds: Collared Flycatchers and Middle Spotted, Lesser Spotted, and White-backed woodpeckers are all present here, but invariably quite hard to find.

Nights: Hotel degli Aranci, Vieste



Blue Tit. Photo: Rick Wright

May 7, Day Ten: Tremiti

The Tremiti Archipelago, twelve miles off the coast, forms a disjunct unit of Gargano National Park. The ferry ride from Rodi Garganico on the mainland is a pleasant 40 minutes, another chance for good looks at Yelkouan and Scopoli's Shearwaters, dolphins, and other creatures of the open sea.

The islands themselves are a well-known spot for migrants as they pause on their spring flight across the Adriatic. The two great nesting specialties here are both classic birds of the

Mediterranean. The Audouin's Gull is one of the handsomest of the entire family, dark-backed and dark-billed; long a rare bird throughout its range, this species has seen its population steadily increase over the past twenty years, and while it is still far from common, we have a good chance at seeing multiple individuals.

The other local specialty is the dashing Eleonora's Falcon, named for the fourteenth-century Sardinian noblewoman who issued the first European decree protecting birds of prey. The falcons nest almost exclusively on remote, preferably uninhabited islands, and are particularly fond of "stepping-stone" islands used by small migrant birds. During periods of abundance, when large numbers of migrants are passing, the adults are known to capture more prey than their young need and store the excess by wedging the still living birds into crevices in the nesting cliffs, then recovering the imprisoned birds when the young falcons grow too importunate.



The Adriatic Sea at Vieste. Photo Wikimedia Commons

We will enjoy the birds, the views, and, of course, the food of the Tremiti, then return to the mainland and to our Gargano hotel and our final festive dinner together.

Nights: Hotel degli Aranci, Vieste

May 8, Day Eleven: Departures

Our tour ends with breakfast in our hotel and the transfer to the airport in Bari. To accommodate traffic or any other delays, please do not book your departing flight for earlier than 1:00 pm today.

If you would like to extend your stay in Bari or take advantage of the

city's train and air connections to the great European capitals, please contact the VENT office as

early in your planning as possible. We will be happy to help you make hotel reservations and other arrangements for more time in Italy or in Europe.

Essential Tour Information

TOUR SIZE: This tour is limited to 10 tour participants.

TOUR LEADER(s): This tour is led by **Rick Wright** and **Marco Valtriani**.



Rick Wright is a widely published author and sought-after lecturer and field trip leader. A native of southeast Nebraska, Rick studied French, German, Philosophy, and Life Sciences at the University of Nebraska before making a detour to Harvard Law School. He took the Ph.D. in German Languages and Literatures at Princeton University in 1990, then spent a dozen years as an academic, holding successive appointments as Assistant Professor of German at the University of Illinois, Reader in Art and Archaeology at

Princeton University, and Associate Professor of Medieval Studies at Fordham University. His numerous scholarly publications include two books on the Latin animal literature of the later Middle Ages. Among Rick's recent books are second editions of the *ABA Field Guide to Birds of New Jersey* and the *ABA Field Guide to Birds of Arizona*; his *Peterson Reference Guide to American Sparrows* is now a standard source for that avian family. He is also the co-author, with Sanford Sorkin, of *Watching Birds in Montclair* and *Watching Birds in the New Jersey Meadowlands*. Rick lives with his wife, Alison Beringer, and their jet-black lab, Quetzal, in northern New Jersey.



Marco Valtriani is a birding guide and field biologist constantly engaged in exploring the natural environments and observing the flora and fauna of Mediterranean Europe. For more than two decades, Marco has been guiding birders and naturalists throughout his native Italy and all of Europe. His passion and deep knowledge have motivated him to help people discover the natural beauty of

Europe's landscapes by creating and planning tours focused on birds and their environments. Whether it's along forest trails, the shores of lakes and lagoons, or quiet roads in the bucolic countryside, Marco's expertise can make all the difference for those in search of a meaningful

experience with nature. Like any self-respecting Italian, Marco is also an expert in wine and food, which are vital ingredients of the tours he leads. He eagerly shares his knowledge of the history, culture, and traditions that have shaped the landscapes of Europe.

TOUR COSTS and PAYMENT INFORMATION

TOUR FEE: The fee for the tour is \$8,650 per person based on double occupancy from Bari. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 2 to breakfast on Day 11, lodging and ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does **not** include airfare from your home to Bari and return. The fee also excludes alcoholic beverages, 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.

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT: If you request single accommodation, a single supplement of \$575 will be added to your tour fee.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: You may register for this tour through the VENT website or by calling our office (512-328-5221). The deposit for this tour is \$1,000 per person. A second deposit of **30% of the remaining tour fee** is due 180 days prior to departure (October 30, 2025). 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 (December 29, 2025) prior to the tour departure date.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CANCELLATION & REFUNDS

CANCELLATION BY PARTICIPANT:

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

This cancellation policy applies to all participants and all tours (Pre-Tours and Extensions are considered self-contained tours separate from the main tour). Because unexpected events can occur, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance.

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

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and

will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. A **“Force Majeure”** event means any act beyond VENT’s control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

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

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE/PROTECTION REQUIREMENT: This tour visits remote locations where immediate access to primary medical care may not be available. **For this reason, travel insurance/travel protection which covers you for emergency evacuation is required for participation on this tour.** This coverage is included in the **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance™** program. Alternatively, comparable service can be obtained through **Medjet** and its **MedjetAssist** plan. If you choose not to purchase insurance/travel protection through Ripcord or Medjet, you are required to obtain it through another provider. Please refer to the TRAVEL INSURANCE/TRAVEL PROTECTION section for additional information.

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

About Redpoint Travel’s Ripcord Plan

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

medical conditions exclusion, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” benefit. Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.*

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

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

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

About Medjet’s MedjetAssist Plan

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

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

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

GETTING THERE, AND 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: The airlines 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. We recommend that you check the [website of the Transportation Security Administration](#) (TSA) for information about permissible carry-on items.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS:

PASSPORTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your intended departure from Italy is required. Passports must have 2 blank pages for entry stamp.

WHAT TO BRING

CLOTHING: As this trip combines birding with walking in cities and at historical sites, you should pack a mix of clothing that prepares you for all activities. Our dress will always be casual, but you will be more comfortable most evenings wearing neater attire. The following items are recommended:

- **Pants:** A couple of pairs of pants are essential. Many people prefer mid-weight pants made of cotton or other material. Denim, though not as comfortable, is certainly acceptable for wearing in the field. In restaurants, churches, and museums, you will be more comfortable wearing neat, but still informal, attire.
- **Field Clothing:** Outdoor stores such as Cabela's and REI carry field clothing that many birders find appealing. Pants and shirts made of lightweight, durable materials with multiple pockets and ventilated seams are popular.
- **Shirts:** Comfortable long-sleeved shirts of any style are good for field wear.

- Hat: A hat for protection from the sun is essential.
- Sweaters and Coats: A sweater or jacket will come in handy on some mornings. In the event we encounter rain or mist; you'll want to have a water-repellent jacket as well. The weather can vary considerably in the course of a single day, so dressing in layers is a good strategy.

FOOTWEAR: Sturdy, broken-in hiking shoes are best for our birding expeditions; boots are fine, too, of course, but not necessary at any of the sites we visit. In the city, lighter weight but still sturdy shoes will be more comfortable.

EQUIPMENT: One of the most important aspects of an enjoyable travel experience is the proper equipment. The following will come in handy during your trip:

- Small daypack for extra clothing, books, supplies, and optics.
- Notebook and pencils.
- Alarm clock.
- Polarized sunglasses with good UV protection; high-SPF sunscreen.
- Lip balm and lotions.
- Cameras, lenses, extra batteries and memory cards.
- Telescoping walking stick – highly recommended for those with difficulty walking.
- Personal toiletries.
- Pocket packages of Kleenex.

Binoculars: We strongly recommend good binoculars of 7x, 8x, or 10x magnification. Do NOT bring mini binoculars of any kind. Some people like them 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 modern 7x35 or 8x42 binoculars are compact and light enough.

Spotting Scopes: Your leaders will have scopes available for group use throughout the trip, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please do so. The leader will let you know each evening whether scopes will be useful the following day.

DESTINATION INFORMATION AND LOCAL CONDITIONS

CLIMATE AND WEATHER: Spring is a remarkably pleasant time in southernmost Italy, with high temperatures in Puglia typically reaching 70° F and overnight lows in the 50s. Rainfall in May averages less than 1.5 inches, with most days sunny. These are long-term averages, of course, and you will want to be prepared for cooler or warmer days and perhaps a rainy afternoon.

CONDITIONS: Our days will be full of experiences, but our pace will always be easy and relaxed. We expect to leave our hotels each morning at or after 8:00 and are often able to schedule a break between our return to the hotel and dinner.

Transportation will be by minibus, with professional drivers. Your comfort is important, and we will plan in stops for bathrooms and to stretch our legs.

The physical demands posed by this trip are easy to moderate, but bear in mind that some of our historical and architectural sightseeing involves a moderate amount of walking and standing. Towns and villages often have uneven pavement, and in general, European cities have more curbs, stairs, and other minor obstacles than you may be used to.

Matera's *sassi* present a special case. To fully explore this remarkable city requires some physical exertion. To avoid considerably walking on the steepest, narrowest streets, we will concentrate our visit on the upper and lower portions of Matera, where roads are wider and more level and stairs are fewer. As at nearly all the sites we visit, it is easy to take some time off and relax with a coffee in a bar or café if the going appears too strenuous.

Thus, you will never be subjected to physical demands exceeding your capabilities.

While we are birding, our walking will be largely restricted to paths and roadsides, and we will not walk much more than a mile at a time. If you cannot comfortably walk a mile at a time on broad level paths, ascend and descend stairs, or stand for several minutes at a time as we search for birds, you will not find this tour enjoyable.

Most of our activities are optional, and thanks to our staying in just two hotels, it is possible—with the exception of Day Seven, when we move from Matera to the Gargano—to simply take a day off to relax or explore on your own if you'd like.

BIRDING ETIQUETTE: Birds and wildlife are naturally wary of loud sounds, so keeping conversations quiet in the field helps us all see more. When you do need to speak, a whisper or low voice works best. This creates a peaceful atmosphere where everyone can fully immerse themselves in the natural surroundings. When you spot something, please try to control your excitement and don't shout or point; a gentle tap on someone's shoulder often works better than calling out. When using the spotting scope, please form a line from the right, wait your turn, and look briefly before moving to the left so that others get a look. Once everyone has seen the bird, there may be time for more leisurely second views.

DESTINATION INFORMATION & LOCAL CONDITIONS

CURRENCY AND SPENDING: Your tour payment covers most necessary expenses while you are in Italy. You should plan to have cash to cover such personal expenses as taxis, gifts, laundry, gratuities, snacks, and any meals not taken with the group.

At the end of the tour, please be ready to reimburse your leader for any alcoholic beverages you have had at meals.

The official currency of Italy is the euro; US dollars are not accepted anywhere in the country. The current exchange rate can be found at xe.com. You can order euros through your bank before leaving home or withdraw them from ATMs at the airport or in towns in Italy.

Please ask your bank or credit card issuer about the use of ATM and credit cards abroad.

ELECTRICITY: Electrical current in Italy is 220-240V (110-120V in the US). Electrical outlets accept one of the two European standard plug types: the "Type C" Europlug and the "Type E" and "Type F" Schuko. All of these outlets are ungrounded, with openings for two round pins.



Newer electronic devices can run on 220V, but if you have items that do not, you will need a step-down transformer in addition to the plug adapter.

INTERNET ACCESS: Both of our hotels offer internet in the rooms and public areas.

LANGUAGE: Italian is spoken throughout, but nearly everyone in the large towns speaks good English. Marco is fully bilingual in English and Italian.

TIME ZONE: Italy observes Central European Time, which is 6 hours ahead of Eastern Time and 9 hours ahead of Pacific Time. Daylight saving time is expected to be in effect during our tour.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry service is available at an extra charge in our hotels, but it is always best to bring enough clothes to get you through the entire tour.

HEALTH AND SAFETY:

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

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

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

SUN EXPOSURE: The sun’s ultraviolet rays are dangerous under prolonged exposure (sometimes only a matter of minutes), even in winter and early spring. Anytime you are outdoors you will want to protect your skin, including your lips, eyes, nose, and ears. A severe sunburn is potentially very painful and will affect your level of enjoyment. Always protect yourself when outdoors and be sure to bring an ample supply of high SPF sunscreen and lip balm. We strongly recommend the use of ultra-violet blocking, polarized sunglasses.

BITING INSECTS: At this season, mosquitoes and other biting insects are usually scarce. 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: 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 AND 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. We also recommend Andrew Isles books for the Asia-Pacific region at <http://www.andrewisles.com> for difficult to find and out of print books for Australia.

FIELD GUIDES:

Birds

Mullarney, K., L. Svensson, and D. Zetterstrom. *Birds of Europe*. 3rd edition. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023. This is the standard field guide. If you bring any other bird guide, it should be in addition to, and not instead of, this outstanding book.

Mammals

MacDonald, D., and P. Barrett. *Mammals of Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

History, Art, and Architecture

Jones, C. *St. Nicholas of Myra, Bari, and Manhattan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

McGauley, C. *Matera, 1945–1960: A “National Disgrace.”* Lausanne: Peter Lang, 2019.

Seward, D., and S. Mountgarret. *Old Puglia: A Cultural Guide to Southeastern Italy*. London: Haus, 2016.

APPS AND ONLINE RESOURCES

EBird: Cornell Lab of Ornithology. One of the largest and most successful citizen science projects in existence, eBird is an essential tool in promoting bird study and conservation. 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 account. **Highly recommended.**

Merlin Bird ID: Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Merlin is an app designed as a birding coach for beginning

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

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 August 27, 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.

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

ITAC:20260428

Date: 8/11/25-RW

Date: 8/28/25-PN