



CORSICA

ABOARD *LE PONANT*

Birds and Culture in the Mediterranean Sea

&

GRAND CANYONS OF PROVENCE PRE-TRIP

May 9–18, 2027

May 6–10, 2027

This new cruise takes us out onto the western Mediterranean Sea for a circumnavigation of gorgeous Corsica, France's "Isle of Beauty," for which we have chartered the magnificent Le Ponant for our exclusive use. This elegant sailing ship, accepting no more than 32 passengers with a like number of crew, offers the extraordinary experience of cruising the Mediterranean aboard a private motor yacht, with friendly and attentive service by a professional crew and delicious meals by a Michelin-starred chef.



Le Ponant © Studio Ponant-SofiaSteege

With its three masts, *Le Ponant* is propelled by the wind whenever possible, a chance to encounter the sea, the sky, and the wildlife in much the same way as the earliest Corsican navigators. Our voyage aboard the *Ponant* brings us to ports of call off the beaten path, where we will enjoy privileged access to the authentic Corsica, savoring cultural encounters and all the wonders of this land of mountains, sea, and sky.

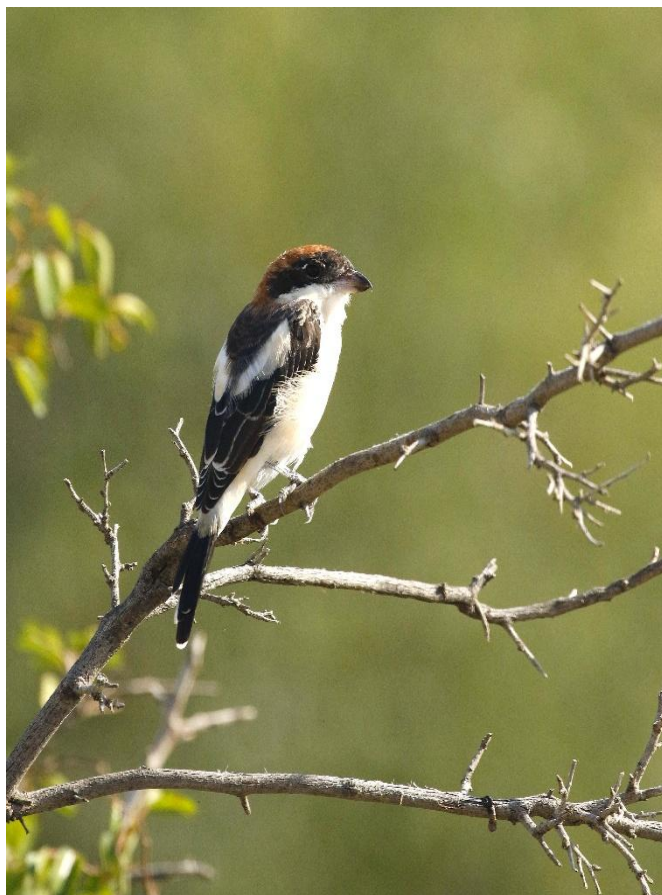
Our exciting itinerary begins on the French Riviera, in the sparkling city of Nice, then sails around the island of Corsica, stopping at Bastia, Porto Vecchio, Bonifacio, Ajaccio, and Calvi, ancient cityscapes that still bear witness to the long and complicated history of this crossroads of the Mediterranean. Our program includes tailor-made shore excursions each day, including a choice between cultural or historical outings and excursions more closely focused on the natural history of this stunning island, all described in detail in the daily itinerary below.



Corsica © Rick Wright

Neolithic archaeological sites, medieval fortresses, and quiet fishing towns reveal the rich human traditions of Corsica, its seashores and its mountains. Beaches and marshy lagoons are haunted by some of the most sought-after birds in Europe, while the rugged mountains with their open pine forests are home to a number of attractive Mediterranean specialties, including the delightful Corsican Nuthatch, found here and nowhere else in the world. We will also search out such feathered prizes as Red-crested Pochard, Great Spotted Cuckoo, Audouin's Gull, Alpine and Pallid swifts,

Eleonora's Falcon, Corsican Finch (restricted to Corsica and neighboring Sardinia), and Spotless Starling; the dense maquis shrublands offer song posts and prickly hiding places to Moltoni's, Marmora's, and Dartford warblers and the handsome *badius* Woodchat Shrike.



Woodchat Shrike © Andrew Whittaker

With historical and natural historical interpretation throughout the voyage, there simply is no better way to experience the charm of Corsica. Joining VENT tour leaders Barry Lyon and Rick Wright for this special departure are Larry Wolff and Perri Klass. Larry is Silver Professor of European History at New York University and Director of the NYU Center for European and Mediterranean Studies. Perri is a professor of Journalism and Pediatrics at NYU.

Whatever your interests, whether sailing, history, art, or nature—our time on the *Ponant* is an unparalleled chance to indulge them in the company of like-minded travelers and friends, all set against a backdrop of captivating beauty from the decks of one of the most elegant vessels in the world.

Those hoping to experience even more of Mediterranean France are invited to join our optional Grand Canyons of Provence Pre-trip, offering a perfect opportunity to explore some of mainland Europe's most jaw-dropping landscapes before we embark on our cruise around Corsica. After a night in Nice, we travel about three hours northwest to the valley of the River Verdon, which cuts a fifteen-mile gash between canyon walls nearly half a mile high. This is the famous home of the vultures, with four species possible, including large numbers of magnificent Eurasian Griffons. In addition, we will be looking for Moltoni's Warbler, Blue Rock-Thrush, Cirl Bunting, European Roller, and Little Bustard against the backdrop of some of Europe's most beautiful scenery.

May 9, Day 1: Travel to Nice, France

Most flights from the USA to France depart in the evening of Day One, May 9, arriving the following day, Day 2, May 10, at Nice Côte d'Azur Airport (airport code NCE). At the time of writing, Delta, Air France, and United offer a limited number of nonstop flights from New York to Nice, but most travel to destinations on the French Riviera requires a change of planes in Europe; connecting airports include those in London, Paris, Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Munich, and Rome.

If you are concerned about the length of the flight from your home to Nice, we recommend that you arrive in Europe a day or two early for a little rest and exploration on your own. Given sufficient notice, the VENT office will be happy to assist with travel arrangements including air tickets and extra hotel nights in Nice at our host hotel, **Hotel Anantara Plaza**.

NIGHT: Aboard international flight

May 10, Day 2: Arrival in Nice, France; Evening welcome and dinner

Participants should arrive today at Nice Côte d'Azur (airport code NCE). Once you have completed the immigration and customs formalities (please see the Documents section below for important information on requirements for entry into France), you will be met outside the baggage claim area by our local representative for the short private transfer to our hotel, the **Hotel Anantara Plaza**, where a room has been reserved in your name.

The five-star Hotel Anantara Plaza is located in a historic building with a Belle Epoque façade, 20 minutes from Nice's airport and adjacent to the old city, with immediate access to the Promenade des Anglais and the beautiful pedestrian Place Masséna. The hotel's grand interior has been completely renovated in a contemporary style by French and international architects and designers. Free Wi-Fi, a spa and wellness center, and a stunning rooftop restaurant and bar with panoramic views of the city and the Mediterranean are all available to guests.



Neptune Fountain, Place Massena, Nice © ArTono

We will gather as a group for the first time this evening in our hotel at 6:00 for a trip welcome and orientation, followed by dinner together in the hotel at 6:30, and a chance to get to know each other and talk about what to expect in the days ahead on board the *Ponant* and during our daily shore excursions on Corsica, France's "Isle of Beauty."

NIGHT: Hotel Anantara Plaza, Nice

May 11, Day 3: An Introduction to Old Nice, and Embarkation on *Le Ponant*

After a leisurely breakfast in our hotel, our bags will be collected and transferred to the waiting *Ponant* while we start our day with a walking tour of some of the cultural and historical highlights of Nice, capital of the French Riviera.

Highlights

- A guided walking tour of historic Nice
- Sampling local culinary specialties
- A sumptuous lunch
- Free time for shopping or wandering
- Embarkation on *Le Ponant* and departure from the port of Nice at 4:00 pm

We will divide into two groups this morning, each led by an expert local guide who will introduce us to some of this sparkling city's architectural and cultural highlights. First settled by the Greeks some 2,500 years ago, Nice—the name is derived from the Greek *Nikaia*, City of Victory—over the centuries changed hands continually between France and various Italian kingdoms and duchies. By 1860, when the Treaty of Turin resulted in the city's annexation to Napoleon III's Second Empire, Nice and neighboring towns on the Mediterranean coasts of France and Italy had become a favored winter resort for wealthy tourists from colder, rainier parts of Europe, including the British and Russian royal families. Today, the Promenade des Anglais and the Russian Orthodox cathedral of St. Nicholas recall the days when queens and czars made their annual visits here, while the city's rich artistic heritage is preserved and interpreted by museums dedicated to Matisse and Chagall.

We will leave the hotel at 9:00, after breakfast, for our two-hour walking tour of Nice. Throughout our stroll, our guides will offer historical insight into the significance of each site we visit. Our precise itinerary will be determined by our local guide but is sure to include time along the city's palm-lined **Promenade des Anglais**, long one of Europe's most attractive and most exclusive pedestrian boulevards. As we explore elegant Vieux Nice, we will spend time on **Place Masséna**, the vibrant main square of the old city, renowned for its striking architecture, exclusive boutiques, and famous light poles designed by Jaume Plensa. At the conclusion of our walking tour, we will have an hour or so of free time at the **Cours Saleya**, the very heart of the city, where a famous market specializes in spectacular flowers and delicious Provençal specialties. The immediate area is lined with specialty shops, including Fragonard, which is celebrating its 101st anniversary in 2027 and offers a full range of perfumes, personal care, and housewares.

Our guides will gather us and the two groups will coalesce at 12:30 for a fine leisurely lunch, after which we will board a chartered tourist train for the ride of a few minutes to **Castle Hill**. Here, almost 350 feet above the turquoise waters of the Mediterranean, we will enjoy exceptional views over the Mediterranean and the entire city, including the port where our ship awaits; to the north, a clear day even affords a spectacular glimpse of the looming pre-Alps. The wooded park here marks the spot where the Greeks founded the settlement of Nikaia in the third century BC. Fourteen hundred years later, Nikaia—now Nice—had grown to include churches, monasteries, and an important regional market, as well as serving as the residence of the city’s governor.



Castle Hill, Nice © kavalenkava

In the mid-sixteenth century, the hill was transformed into a purely military installation, a massive citadel built to withstand the repeated attacks of the French and others. When Nice finally surrendered to French forces in 1705, Louis XIV had the fortress, the cathedral church, and most of the other structures atop the hill dismantled; the cathedral survives as one of the most evocative ruins in France, while the fortified buildings were almost entirely razed. All that remains of the eponymous castle are fragments of the mighty walls. At the end of the nineteenth century, as Nice became a popular winter resort for the wealthy and the titled, the grounds of the old castle were

transformed into a scenic site for recreation and contemplation, centered on an impressive cascade created in 1885.

During our time on Castle Hill, we will have the chance to taste a number of wonderful local specialties, from tapenade and anchovy cream to Provençal wine and beer. As we enjoy locally produced olives and pissaladière—a flatbread topped with caramelized onions and olives—we will learn more about the history and culture of the olive in the Mediterranean. And for the athletic-minded among us, there is the chance to test your skill at pétanque, the traditional and often highly competitive Provençal version of boules.

At about 4:00, we'll descend by train from the hill, which Napoleon III is said to have called “the most beautiful landscape in the world,” then make our way to *Le Ponant*, awaiting us in the harbor in the center of Old Nice. The walk, for those who prefer a little exercise, is about 20 minutes from the hill to the ship. We will board the ship as a group at 4:30.

Our bags will be waiting for us, having been transferred from our hotel to the ship while we spent the day investigating the city. Once on board, we will have a moment to check in to our elegant staterooms, then gather for an orientation to the ship and a mandatory safety exercise as the *Ponant* slips out of the harbor and onto the open waters of the Mediterranean, a splendid sight as Nice recedes. A drink and a delicious dinner prepared by the ship's distinguished chef lead to our first night at sea on board this superb vessel, heading southeast to our first port of call in Corsica, Bastia.

NIGHT: On board *Le Ponant*

May 12, Day 4: Bastia and Biguglia Lake

This morning we will have our first views of Corsica, the French “Isle of Beauty.” The morning will be spent watching from the *Ponant's* comfortable deck, conversing in the lounge, or simply admiring the views as we make the breathtaking approach to the island and the entry to the port of Bastia at 12:00 noon. Among the species our birders will be seeking as we approach the island are two scarce Mediterranean specialties, the Yelkouan and Scopoli's Shearwaters.

Highlights

- **A relaxing morning at sea on the glittering Mediterranean**

- **Seabirding from the deck**
- **Arrival in Bastia and afternoon excursion options: 1) Birding at Biguglia Lake, or 2) An afternoon in Bastia**

As we enjoy our lunch on board, we will tie up in our first Corsican harbor, Bastia, at about noon. After lunch, we will make our way to land for our first set of excursions, both of which will leave from the ship at 1:30 pm, returning at 5:30.



Bastia © M. Schauer

Located in the northeast corner of the island, at the base of Cap Corse, Bastia is a young city by European standards, founded by the Genoese in the later Middle Ages. The fourteenth-century citadel still dominates the town's colorful squares, marketplaces, churches, and boutiques. Like much of Corsica, Bastia is now heavily dependent on summer tourism, but there is still some light industry—the city's most notable product is the L.N. Mattei Cap Corse, a herbal apéritif fragrant with the essences of Corsican wildflowers.

Today we offer the choice between two excursions on shore, one visiting cultural and historical sites and the other more closely focused on the island's birding and natural history. Each excursion is planned to last four hours.

Option 1: Biguglia Lake (depart 1:30 pm, return 5:30) Those of us choosing this afternoon's natural history excursion will leave the ship at 1:30 to drive half an hour south to one of Corsica's most productive birding hotspots, **Biguglia Lake**. This vast lagoon, at some 4400 acres the largest wetland on the island, is likely to produce one of the best bird lists of our entire cruise, with Greater Flamingo, European Turtle-Dove, Slender-billed and Audouin's Gulls, Squacco and Purple herons, Zitting



Flamingoes, Lake Biguglia © CL Medien

Cisticola, and Cetti's Warbler among the many possible sightings. Biguglia is also our first chance at such colorful Corsicans as European Bee-eater, European Roller, and Eurasian Hoopoe.

Our walk here, taken at a slow "birder's pace," will total about a mile and a half, depending on the point from which we enter the lake preserve. If it is open, we can pay a short visit to the **Fortin Ecology Museum**, at the northern end of the lake, with exhibits illustrating the area's habitats, flora

and fauna, and human traditions; the museum gives access to a fine boardwalk along the lake edge. If the museum is closed, we will probably enter the preserve a few minutes' drive farther south, at the peninsula of **San Damianu**, where a disused road leads walkers between two large ponds, one marshy and the other shallow open water.

If we find that we still have time, we may continue to the southern end of the lake and the Roman ruins of **Mariana**, in the shadow of the former cathedral of Lucciana, also known as **La Canonica**. The church is not always open, but its somber exterior is a remarkable example of the Pisan Romanesque, dating to the twelfth century. In a powerful demonstration of how closely intertwined nature and history can be here, this site is also home to Spotless Starlings and Eurasian Tree Sparrows, two of Corsica's many Mediterranean specialties.



Lucciana Cathedral, West Portal © Rick Wright

It is about 30 minutes aboard our private coach from La Canonica back to the ship, where we plan to arrive by 5:30 pm.

Our private coach will take us to Biguglia and back to the ship. The walking tour itself requires only light to moderate exertion, along flat, broad dirt and paved paths. Be sure to wear comfortable, broken-in walking shoes and a hat, and to apply sunscreen liberally.

Option 2: An Afternoon in Bastia (depart 1:30 pm, return 5:30) This afternoon's cultural and historical option will concentrate on the city of Bastia, Corsica's largest commercial port. Ten minutes' walk from the port, we will board our own Petit Train for the 25-minute ride into **Terra Vecchia**, the Old Town, where we will be met by our local historian guide for a stroll taking us to the city's most remarkable landmarks, in both the Old Town and **Terra Nova**, the New, all under the watch of the impressive towers of the **Church of Saint John the Baptist**.

Under the rule of Genoa from the late thirteenth into the eighteenth century, Bastia long served as the administrative capital of the island. As the principal link between Corsica and the Italian mainland, Bastia profited from a lively trade in wine, olives, and timber. The massive **Citadel**, built by the Genoese in the mid-fourteenth century, is a fortified complex surrounding the fourteenth-century **Governor's Palace**, its handsome exterior an outstanding example of the Italian influence on Corsica's architectural heritage. The city's **cathedral church**, dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin, dates



Citadel of Bastia © CL Medien

mostly to the seventeenth century, an equally fine specimen of the Italian Baroque. Among Bastia's other architectural jewels are the oratories of **Saint Roch** and of the **Immaculate Conception**, famous for the vibrant ornament of their interiors.

At the conclusion of our 90-minute guided tour, we will have an hour or so of personal time in Bastia for exploring or simply relaxing in the town's historic squares. We will return on foot to the ship by 5:30 pm for a drink and conversation before dinner together.

We have booked Bastia's famous Petit Train for our private transfer to the Old City; we will return to the ship on foot at the end of the afternoon. The walking tour itself requires only light to moderate exertion, though there are some steps and uneven surfaces along our route. Be sure to wear comfortable, broken-in walking shoes and a hat, and to apply sunscreen liberally.

Of course, as always, both of these excursions are optional, and you are more than welcome to spend the afternoon exploring Bastia on your own or just loafing on board the *Ponant*.

Once back on board, we will have a short break before our groups reassemble for a drink and a review of our experiences of the day, followed by dinner as the ship departs around 7:00 pm and we continue our voyage.

NIGHT: On board *Le Ponant*

May 13, Day 5: Porto-Vecchio

Porto-Vecchio is the southernmost port on Corsica's east coast, named for the barely discernible traces of a Roman harbor in the area. Malaria eventually drove the inhabitants of the Roman settlement to abandon the city, which did not see significant population regrowth until the mid-twentieth century, when fill and drainage schemes, eventually combined with pesticide spraying, finally eradicated the mosquito-borne malady.

Highlights

- **Morning excursion options: 1) birding the salt pans, or 2) a morning in historic Porto-Vecchio, with a visit to a Corsican coutelier**
- **Afternoon and evening at sea as we approach the stunning cliffs of Bonifacio**

We will arrive in the city's modern harbor in the very early morning. After breakfast, we offer two options for a morning's excursion on shore; both options will leave the ship at 8:30 am aboard private minibuses.

Option 1: The Salt Pans of Porto-Vecchio (depart 8:30 am, return 12:00 pm) Today's birding outing takes us just a short distance from the harbor to the ancient **salt pans of Porto-Vecchio**. Once used to evaporate saline water for the production of one of the period's most precious commodities, these shallow pools are today perhaps Corsica's best spot for migrant shorebirds, and on our walk of about a mile, we will be looking for everything from Little Ringed Plover to Curlew Sandpiper as we cover a network of dirt roads that take us from pond to pond. In addition to the waders, we also have a good chance of encountering Common Shelduck, European Stonechat, Common Chaffinch, or other colorful local specialties. Above the harbor, we have splendid views of the Old Town and citadel, a remarkable backdrop for a birding excursion anywhere. We expect to board our bus again at 11:45 for the 15-minute return drive to the ship, where we will all enjoy lunch together.

Our private minibus will deliver us to the ponds and return us to the ship. The outing proper features a gentle walk on flat, entirely unshaded terrain; we may encounter some mud and deep ruts. Be sure to wear comfortable, broken-in walking shoes that you don't mind getting dusty or muddy, along with a hat and a liberal dose of sunscreen.



Common Chaffinch © Rick Wright

Option 2: Old Town, Fortin, and a Corsican craftsman (depart 8:30 am, return 12:00 pm) Porto-

Vecchio, too, preserves imposing elements of its past as a Genoese stronghold. Our bus will take us into the Old Town, where we will begin a guided walking tour along winding cobblestone streets to the **Place de la République**, a lively square crowded with cafes and dominated by the eighteenth-century church of **John the Baptist**, notable for its stained glass and clever trompe-l'oeil decoration. Two hundred years older, the **Fortin** was constructed in the sixteenth century, before the town recovered from its centuries-long slump, to protect the harbor from invaders from the east, the north, and the south. The **Old Town**, in easy reach of the safety of the fortress, is a charming maze of narrow streets and old houses, many of them now eccentric boutiques and bars.

Our walking tour will last about 80 minutes, after which we have a rare opportunity to visit the workshop of a master artisan practicing one of Corsica's most characteristic handiworks. The knife is the island's traditional tool and weapon of choice, and fine cutlery is today the most desired of Corsican exports. On our visit to a local **coutelier**, we will learn about the materials and techniques that have been passed down through untold generations of exquisitely skilled craftsmen. Corsican makers now produce knives in a wide variety of shapes and sizes, with fixed and folding blades, and we have a chance to acquire fine handcrafted examples here in the sure knowledge that these are no imitations, but rather the work of true artists. We expect to have about 30 minutes of free time before we board our bus again for the 10-minute return drive to the ship, where we will enjoy lunch together.

Please note that this walking tour is not suitable for those with walking limitations, as the surfaces of the streets in this venerable city are rough and irregular. Be sure to wear comfortable, broken-in walking shoes and a hat, and to apply sunscreen liberally.

The *Ponant* sets sail again in the early afternoon, and all hands and all eyes will want to be on deck for some of the most scenic of all the scenic views Corsica affords. The approach to Bonifacio, perched high atop limestone cliffs bordering the strait that separates Corsica from Sardinia, is one of the most splendid seaside prospects in all of Europe.

Birders will also appreciate that this stretch of the Mediterranean is usually excellent for good views of Yelkouan and Scopoli's shearwaters, two splendid tubenoses that nest in the Mediterranean basin and on the Black Sea. The Yelkouan—the name is aptly derived from a Turkish word meaning “wind



Scopoli's Shearwater © Michael O'Brien

runner”—is the smaller, more fluttery of the two species, smudgy dark brown above and dingy whitish below, with a long, slender bill. This bird was long considered conspecific with the North Atlantic's blacker Manx Shearwater; it is listed as Vulnerable by Bird Life

International, and we are likely

to have seen a good percentage of the global population by the end of our cruise. The much larger, and somewhat commoner, Scopoli's Shearwater (in a funny twist of saltwater fate, the eponymous Tyrolean naturalist also gave his name to the plant that provides us with scopolamine) is heavier and more neatly marked, and can always be identified by its yellow bill; it has only recently been re-split from the very similar Cory's Shearwater of the Atlantic.

Our ship will arrive in Bonifacio's well-protected harbor late this evening, and we will spend the night in the quiet port beneath the imposing cliffs.

NIGHT: On board *Le Ponant*

May 14, Day 6: Bonifacio and Cape Pertusato, or a city tour and traditional Corsican degustation

The rising sun will find us at the very southern tip of Corsica, in the harbor of **Bonifacio**. The fortified city of Bonifacio overlooks the Mediterranean from sheer limestone cliffs—an unusual geologic feature on this island of granite. The view reaches south to the island of Sardinia, just seven miles away across the Bonifacian Strait. Sardinia and Corsica share a long and tangled history, starting with the imposition of Roman authority more than 2000 years ago and ending, for the historical moment, at least, in the year of Napoleon's birth, when France forced the short-lived Corsican Republic into an uneasy submission.

Highlights

- Spectacular views of the cliff-top city from our ship
- Morning excursion options: 1) birding Cape Pertusato, or 2) a guided tour of Bonifacio concluding with a traditional tasting of Corsican wine and charcuterie
- Afternoon at sea as we pass Sardinia and proceed north to Propriano



Bonifacio © ScottYellox

Bonifacio's strategic maritime position was obvious to the island's first settlers, and it is known to have been inhabited for over eight thousand years. Inevitably, the coastline here is guarded by two massive towers erected by the Genoese in the sixteenth century; together with the area's lighthouses, these ancient fortifications make the coast at Bonifacio one of the most dramatically scenic in the Mediterranean.

Our two groups will begin their explorations this morning at different times: birders and natural historians will be picked up at 8:00, while those more focused on cultural and historical sightseeing will depart at 8:30 am.

Option 1: Birding Cape Pertusato (depart 8:00 am, return 12:00 pm) We will be picked up at the ship at 8:00 am for the ten-minute drive to **Cape Pertusato**, where one of the island's iconic lighthouses watches over the Mediterranean. We will likely not undertake the full length of the steep hike to the light, but rather will concentrate on the dense, scrubby vegetation below the heights in search of songbirds. At the season of our visit, we can hope to encounter such regional specialties as Dartford, Sardinian, or Marmora's Warblers, that last a greatly sought-after Mediterranean specialty. All three of those species are somewhat secretive in the breeding season, but with patience and luck, we have good chances at seeing the adults as they tend to their nests and eggs.

This is a good site as well to look for the beautiful little Eleonora's Falcon, named for a fourteenth-century ruler of Sardinia who issued one of the first raptor conservation laws in history. Notoriously, this dark and dashing bird of prey defers nesting until the fall migration is in full swing, when the falcons can feed their young a ready supply of southbound passerines, some of which they hoard by wedging their injured prey into crevices in the rocks until the falconlets need another meal. We will walk about a mile out and back before returning to the ship by noon for lunch.

We will be dropped at the military signal station at the base of Cape Pertusato, then set out on a one-mile walk that begins with the descent of a short but rather steep road taking us to a narrow path through the garrigue. Typically, the best strategy for finding the birds of interest here is to stand patiently and watch and listen for the



Eleonora's Falcon © Nekrasov Ivan

sometimes furtive adults to sing or call; though the path is narrow, there is room for a folding stool if you have one and would rather sit than stand for a longer period. Be sure to wear comfortable,

broken-in walking shoes that you don't mind getting dusty or muddy, along with a hat and a liberal dose of sunscreen.

Option 2: Highlights of Bonifacio, with a Tasting (depart 8:30 am, return 12:00 pm) Today's cultural outing starts with an 8:30 departure, when our private Petit Train takes us from the port past the charming **Bosco** quarter. Along the way, we can admire the **convent of St. Francis** and the picturesque **mariners' cemetery** with its ornate mausoleums. Once we have reached the **church of St. Dominique**, a rare example of Corsican Gothic, built in the late thirteenth century probably by the Knights Templar, we will continue our visit on foot through the narrow streets and tall granite houses of Bonifacio. In the heart of the city, the church of **Ste. Marie Majeure** is a beautiful fusion of the Romanesque and the Baroque. **Two Emperors Street** is named for its most famous visitors, Charles V and Napoleon I; nearby are the **Place des Armes** and the **Jardin des Vestiges**, the site of ruined fortifications dating back to the thirteenth century. The **old market** offers dramatic views from the 230-foot cliffs. From the **Porte de Gênes**, the original entrance to Bonifacio's citadel, we will pay our respects at the chapel of **St. Roch**, constructed on the site where the city's last plague victim died in 1528.

Before we return to the marina, we will take an hour to sample some of Corsica's best food and drink in a tasting at the **Galerie des Ducs**. Over a delicious *spuntinu*, a traditional assortment of Corsican meats and cheeses, we will savor a glass of local wine while we take in the spectacular views of the cliffs and the turquoise sea. Our Petit Train will return us to the marina area, from which we will walk about half a mile over cobbled streets to the ship, arriving there by noon for lunch.

Please note that this walking tour is not suitable for those with mobility limitations or using wheelchairs or motorized scooters, as the surfaces of the streets are rough and irregular. On our return, the Petit Train is not able to take us all the way to the ship; the walk from our drop-off point at the marina to the Ponant is roughly three quarters of a mile. Be sure to wear comfortable, broken-in walking shoes, good sunglasses, and a hat, and to apply sunscreen liberally.

Just as awe-inspiring as the approach is our departure from Bonifacio. The white cliffs will recede from view as we head back out to sea for some relaxed time and another exquisite dinner on board our ship. We will dock in Propriano late this evening.

NIGHT: On board *Le Ponant*

May 15, Day 7: Propriano, Filitosa, and Tanchiccia or Sartène

Little visited and hardly known outside of Corsica, the small town of **Propriano** is the gateway to Corsica's extreme southwest, a land of ancient heritage and gentle landscapes. We will wake in the tranquil harbor this morning, then all set off together after breakfast for **Filitosa**, one of Europe's best-preserved and most complete Bronze Age sites.

Highlights

- **Spectacular views of Corsica's west coast**
- **Morning exploration of the Bronze Age city of Filitosa**
- **Afternoon excursion options 1) birding Tanchiccia Lake, or 2) a walk in "the most Corsican of Corsican villages," Sartène and its Museum of Prehistory**
- **Evening at sea as we continue up Corsica's "Green Coast"**

This morning we plan to leave the ship as a single group aboard a private coach at 8:30, then proceed about 45 minutes inland from Propriano. **Filitosa** was first settled at least 6000 years ago, and succeeding generations constructed a vast complex of domestic and military structures. Discovered by a farmer in 1946, this impressive site—its cultural significance has been compared to that of Stonehenge and Easter Island's moai—has been subjected to extensive archeological study, and arrowheads, pottery, and other items dating to 3300 BC have been recovered here. Two thousand years later, the complex was laid waste by Torrean invaders from the west, who reused some of the stone for the construction of more walls.

An easy walk from the visitor center takes us through an olive grove to the Megalithic townsite, ornamented with tall figured menhirs; below, a set of standing stones leads to the quarry that provided much of the site's original building material. The remains of watchtowers, houses, and defensive walls can all be visited, and a good small museum presents the history of the site and allows close views of some of the finest artifacts recovered thus far.

The open woods and gardens around the archaeological site can be quite good for birds, and we will be sure to keep an ear and an eye out for European Turtle-Doves, Great Tits, European Greenfinches, and other species as we wander this quiet and atmospheric locality.

We will be back on the *Ponant* at noon, then enjoy lunch together. Afterward, we offer two optional outings, one focused on the birds of the marshy pools of Tanchiccia, the other visiting the hilltop town of Sartène, famously styled “the most Corsican of all Corsican towns.” Both groups will leave the ship at 2:00 pm and return by 5:30.



Filitosa © Thomas Lenne

Option 1: Birding Tanchiccia (depart 2:00 pm, return 5:30) A forty-minute drive on narrow, twisting roads through lovely farm country takes us to the small but significant biodiversity preserve of **Tanchiccia**, an important site for both migratory waterbirds and nesting species of wetlands and reeds. A short, raised boardwalk leads to a comfortable blind, where we can hope to see Little Grebe, Red Kite, and perhaps a Purple Heron or Little Bittern. Western Marsh Harriers hunt the reedbeds while warblers chatter and sing from the dense emergent vegetation. Our naturalist guide will offer information about the ponds’ fragile ecosystem and the role they play in preserving biodiversity here between mountains and sea. If time allows, those who wish can also walk half a mile on a somewhat

steep, rocky trail out to the largest of the pools, where ducks and shorebirds loaf in the warmth of the afternoon. Tanchiccia is also a good place for songbirds, including Common Reed and Sardinian warblers; here, too, European Turtle-Doves purr softly from the woodland edges.

Be sure to wear comfortable, broken-in walking shoes that you don't mind getting dusty or muddy, along with a hat and a liberal dose of sunscreen.



Sartene © Sergiy Palamarchuk

Option 2: Sartène and the Museum of Prehistory (depart 2:00 pm, return 5:30) A scenic drive of half an hour takes us to **Sartène**, a picturesque medieval hill town aptly described by Prosper Mérimée as the most characteristically Corsican settlement on the island. The high granite houses seem to emerge straight out of the rocky promontory, while the village's maze of narrow cobbled passages piques the imagination. These streets and most of the houses lining them date to the early sixteenth century, while the ruins of the castle are at least three hundred years older. In the course of a one-hour walking tour, we will ascend to the historic heart of town and the **Place de la Libération**, which is presided over by the **church of Santa Maria**. Santa Maria is the starting point each year for the Catenacciu, Sartène's world-famous Good Friday procession, and the hood, chain, and 80-pound oaken cross used in the procession are kept in the church.

We will continue with a visit to the **Departmental Museum of Prehistory and Archeology**, where tools, pottery, statues, and other discoveries trace the history of Corsica from the Bronze Age into

Antiquity. These spectacular displays bring the island's ancient civilizations to life—and help deepen our understanding of such sites as Filitosa and their inhabitants. We will have up to an hour to immerse ourselves in the museum's collections, then enjoy some free time to enjoy the town at your own pace. Steep granite staircases lead to inspiring views of the valleys far below, and relaxing cafes offer a chance to sample local wines and simply soak in the atmosphere of one of the most charming villages in France.

This walking tour is not suitable for participants with mobility challenges. Our route takes us uphill and down on uneven, often steep surfaces, and thirty stairs must be climbed to reach the center of Sartène, where even more stairs await. Flat, comfortable walking shoes are required, as are a good hat and other forms of sun protection.

Both groups will be back on board by 5:30 pm, in time to watch the *Ponant* set sail again as we relax over drinks and dinner together.

NIGHT: On board *Le Ponant*

May 16, Day 8: Ajaccio: Col de Sorba and Vizzavona, or In the Footsteps of Napoleon



Ajaccio © Rick Wright

Beautiful **Ajaccio** is the largest city on Corsica, and it is the seat of government for the entire island, which enjoys the status of a “collectivité territoriale” within the French Republic, entitling Corsica to a greater degree of autonomy than some other jurisdictions. In 1769, Ajaccio was the birthplace of the most influential of all Frenchmen, who was said to

speak with a recognizably Corsican accent for the rest of his life, even after he was crowned Napoleon I in late 1804. Unsurprisingly, the town teems with Bonapartiana, from the future emperor's birthplace—now a fine museum—to the font in which the infant Napoleone was baptized.

After breakfast on board *Le Ponant*, we will set out again on one of two optional shore excursions. The first group will leave at 7:30 for a day-long expedition into the rugged highlands around Vizzavona, while the second will have half a day to explore historic Ajaccio, starting at 8:30 am.

Highlights

- **Excursion options: 1) a full day's birding in the mountains, with a chance at the endemic Corsican Nuthatch, or 2) a morning walking tour of Ajaccio, with a visit to the birthplace of Napoleon**
- **An afternoon visit to the Musée Fesch, one of Europe's largest and most important collections of paintings and other artworks**
- **Evening sailing past the beautiful Iles Sanguinaires**

Option 1: Birding Col de Sorba (depart 7:30 am,

return 3:30 pm) After leaving the ship at 7:30 am, a scenic 90-minute drive on twisting mountain roads takes us into the forested heart of Corsica. The mountains here, attaining an elevation of 4300 feet at the top of the famous pass of **Col de Sorba**, are clad in Corsican black pine, *laricio*, and comprise some of the best and most accessible sites for the endemic Corsican Nuthatch and the nearly endemic Corsican



Corsican Nuthatch © Agami Photo Agency

Finch. From the small parking area at the top of the pass, short, somewhat steep and rocky paths lead to some good spots to look and listen for these specialties, along with such other desiderata as Golden Eagle, Red Kite, Eurasian Wryneck, Moltoni's and Marmora's warblers, Cirl Bunting, and *Tyrrhenian* Spotted Flycatcher. With patience and a bit of luck, we should tally a nice selection of those and other sought-after montane species, perhaps including Red Crossbill or Great Spotted Woodpecker as well. Whatever we succeed in finding, the views from the high-elevation forests are breathtaking, making the trip well worth it. If we are so fortunate as to locate the Corsican Nuthatch quickly, we may move downslope to **Vizzavona**, where an enchanting streamside trail leads us into a towering forest of pine and beech.

Lunch for this group, at 12:30 or 1:00, will be in the almost impossibly delightful tiny village of **Vivario**, where we will enjoy a different type of Corsican specialty—the culinary type—beneath the town’s landmark bell tower. After lunch, we will board our coach for the return to the *Ponant*, with arrival at the ship planned for 3:30 pm.

This full-day mountain excursion involves driving on vertiginous mountain roads and walking short distances at some of the highest elevations of our trip (about 4400 feet). This outing is not suitable for participants with mobility challenges or for those using a wheelchair, walker, or other mobility aids. The trails we will be walking are unpaved, some of them with patches of loose gravel, tree roots, and uneven or rocky stretches. Be sure to wear sturdy, well-broken-in footwear, a hat, good sunglasses, and plenty of sunscreen, and bring a jacket or sweater, as it can turn suddenly cooler in the mountains.



Col de Sorba © Rick Wright

Option 2: Napoleon and Ajaccio (depart 8:30 am, return 12:30 pm) This four-hour excursion into the historical landscape of the city of **Ajaccio**, birthplace of Napoleon and site of his earliest military and political experiences, will leave the *Ponant* at 8:30. Our coach will take us fifteen minutes along the **Cours Napoléon**, the stylish main boulevard of Ajaccio, to the elegant residential neighborhood of **Le Casone**, with its imposing monument to the first French emperor, and then to **La Parata**, a spectacular viewpoint on the famous **Route des Sanguinaires**, a beautiful coastal road with sweeping vistas out

over beaches, the Mediterranean, and the eponymous islets, perhaps named for the dark purple-red of their sheer porphyry slopes.

A local historian will meet us for a guided walking tour of about 55 minutes. Along the way, we will drop in at some of the city's impressive wealth of renaissance and baroque buildings, including the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century **cathedral**, where Letizia Bonaparte is said to have experienced the first labor pains before rushing to her nearby home to give birth to baby Napoleon, who was christened in the church's font a few days after his birth, in 1769. It was in front of this same cathedral at Easter of 1792 that Napoleon, then a 22-year-old lieutenant in charge of the local national guard, ordered his men to open fire on Ajaccians—an episode that hastened the young man's departure for the French mainland. If, depending on the schedule of worship services, we are able to visit the interior of the cathedral, we will find one of the chapels decorated with paintings by Tintoretto and Delacroix.

We will move on then to the **Maison Bonaparte**, the family's longtime home in Ajaccio and Napoleon's birthplace. We will have an hour or so to enjoy the exhibits here before continuing to Place Foch, a palm-shaded square that often hosts a lively and colorful **morning market** with flowers, fruit, vegetables, and other local produce.

We will return to the ship at 12:30 pm, where we will enjoy lunch before setting out at 2:00 for an optional visit to the **Musée Fesch**. Founded by the Catholic cardinal and later prince Joseph Fesch, the half-brother of Napoleon's mother, this glorious museum is housed in the Palais Fesch, site of the tombs of the cardinal and of Letizia Bonaparte. At the time of his death, Fesch possessed the largest collection of paintings in the world, some 16,000 panels and canvases reaching from the Middle Ages to the First Empire. The museum's holdings have continued to grow, and the Fesch is now high on the list of the most important collections in Europe. Famous works hanging here include paintings by Botticelli, Titian, and Poussin; there are also drawings, sculptures, and an entire gallery devoted to the Bonaparte family. After a guided visit of an hour or so, we will return to the ship, planning to be on board at 4:00 pm.

Our morning's walk will cover about two miles, in part over uneven surfaces. Participants with limited mobility must be accompanied by someone to help; at La Parata, it is possible to remain with the bus, and those who do not want to take part in the walking tour proper can be taken back to the port.

As the ship pulls away from Ajaccio to follow the coast north, we will enjoy some of Corsica's most beautiful seascapes and landscapes. This western route, past the outlying islands, also gives us some of our best chances at marine mammals, including acrobatic bottlenose dolphins.

Dinner and drinks will, as always, be on board ship, which will sail through the night to reach Calvi, near the northwestern corner of the island.

NIGHT: On board *Le Ponant*

May 17, Day 9: Calvi and Haut Asco or Balagne

Calvi is a true scenic gem on an island hardly lacking in dramatic landscapes. The shimmering turquoise of the small bay lies right up against the granite majesty of 8000-foot Monte Grosso, combining two of the most spectacular features of Corsica's geology in a single view. The surrounding region, Balagne, is known as the Garden of Corsica thanks to its lush orchards set among rolling hills and charming villages. Today, on our last full day together, we will relish the opportunity to experience the island's captivating culture and splendid natural history one last time.



Calvi © Freesurf

Highlights

- **The shimmering Bay of Calvi**
- **High-altitude birding at the ski resort of Haut Asco**

- **Exploration of the Garden of Corsica, olive oil and wine tasting, and a walk in picturesque Sant'Antonino**

Calvi is the only port on our route that does not permit the *Ponant* to dock alongside in the harbor. Instead, we will be transported the short distance to and from shore in tenders to meet the waiting coaches for today's excursions on shore.



Yellow-billed Chough © Rick Wright

Option 1: Birding at Haut Asco (depart 8:00 am, return 4:00 pm) We will leave the ship at 8:00 am to drive into the scenic heart of Corsica's most rugged mountain landscapes. The forests of **Haut Asco**, renowned for their unspoiled beauty and rich biodiversity, are also known worldwide as some of the best and most challenging walking conditions in Europe. We will take it decidedly easier than the hikers along the famously rugged G20 mountain route, spending time birding around the ski resort and on some of the gentler trails that lead into the pine forests. Our objectives here include the endemic Corsican Nuthatch and regionally endemic Corsican Finch, of course, but we will also be on the lookout for Red-billed and Yellow-billed choughs, Crested Tits, Cirl Buntings, and other high-elevation specialties as we search the venerable pines. We will have lunch in a traditional Corsican

mountain chateau before returning to Calvi, where we will board the *Ponant* again at 4:00 pm to share our exploits with the rest of our friends over drinks and a festive final dinner on board.

This outing is not suitable for guests with limited mobility or guests who suffer from motion sickness or vertigo. The 90-minute drive on narrow and tortuous roads takes us to an elevation of 4600 feet, where we will take short walks on unpaved mountain paths with uneven surfaces and some inclines. Be sure to wear a comfortable, broken-in pair of sturdy walking shoes; the Corsican sun is even more intense at this altitude, so wear a hat, good sunglasses, and a liberally applied sunscreen. The weather may be colder up here than we have grown used to on the sea, so a jacket or sweater is a good idea as well.

Option 2: Hilltop Villages and Corsican Flavors (depart 8:00 am, return 4:00 pm) The **Balagne** region has been famous for centuries for its wines, made from grenache, nielluccio, and sciaccarello grapes as well as a range of special regional varieties. Those who choose this option will set out at 8:00 am for a panoramic drive to the viewpoint of Notre-Dame de la Serra, with a grand vista of Calvi Bay, the surrounding mountains, and the Mediterranean coastline. As we continue our drive past orchards, rolling hills, and charming villages, our expert local guide will share insights into the area's history, culture, and traditions.

Our first destination is a traditional **olive mill**, where we will see the donkey-powered press in action and learn about the other steps in the centuries-old process. A tasting will pair the fresh-pressed oil with local breads and other specialties, a classic combination. From here we will proceed to **Domaine Alzipratu**, a family-run vineyard nestled between the sea and the peaks of Monte-Grossu. Established more than 60 years ago, and now in the care of the third generation of the Acquaviva family, this 100-acre estate is certified organic; the wines are labeled with the AOC Corse-Calvi. One of the domaine's expert oenologists will guide us through the vineyard and the cellar, explaining the estate's sustainable agricultural practices and showing us the vessels used in various aging methods, from acacia barrels to terracotta jars. We will conclude our visit with a guided tasting of some of the wines, accompanied by Corsican meats and cheeses.

Our coach will take us on to **Cateri**, by way of the viewpoint at **Col de Salvi**, for a delightful lunch of traditional Corsican cuisine as we look out over the village and its famous balcony gardens. Afterward, we will explore the ancient village of **Sant'Antonino**, known as the Eagle Nest for its dramatic perch

atop a rocky outcrop. Here we will stroll through the narrow alleys and admire the centuries-old stone houses. The perfect finale to a full day's sightseeing is a glass of fresh-squeezed juice at Clos Sant'Antonini.



Sant'Antonino © Jon Ingall

We will be back on board the *Ponant* at 4:00 pm, when we can share our exploits with the rest of our friends over drinks and a festive final dinner on board.

Wear comfortable, broken-in walking shoes, a hat, and sunscreen on this excursion. While the walking is relatively easy at the olive orchard and the vineyard, a stroll through Sant'Antonino is more strenuous: no vehicles are permitted in the village, so our coach will park just below and those who wish to will have to climb about 30 steps into town; there are more steps and steep slopes in Sant'Antonino itself. It should be possible to wait at the bus if you do not want to walk up to the village.

NIGHT: On board *Le Ponant*

May 18, Day 10: Arrival in Nice, and Disembarkation

We expect to dock in Nice in the early morning, with disembarkation planned for around 8:00 am, followed by group transfers to the Nice airport.

GRAND CANYONS OF PROVENCE PRE-TRIP

May 6–10, 2027

To experience even more of Mediterranean France, join our pre-cruise extension. This short optional pre-trip, Grand Canyons of Provence, is a perfect opportunity to explore some of mainland Europe's most jaw-dropping landscapes before we embark on our cruise. After a first night in Nice, we travel about two hours northwest to the valley of the River Verdon, which cuts a fifteen-mile gash between canyon walls nearly half a mile high. This is the famous home of the vultures, with four species possible, including large numbers of magnificent Eurasian Griffons. In addition, we will be looking for Little Bustard, Moltoni's Warbler, Blue Rock-Thrush, European Roller, and Cirl Bunting, against the backdrop of some of Europe's most beautiful scenery.

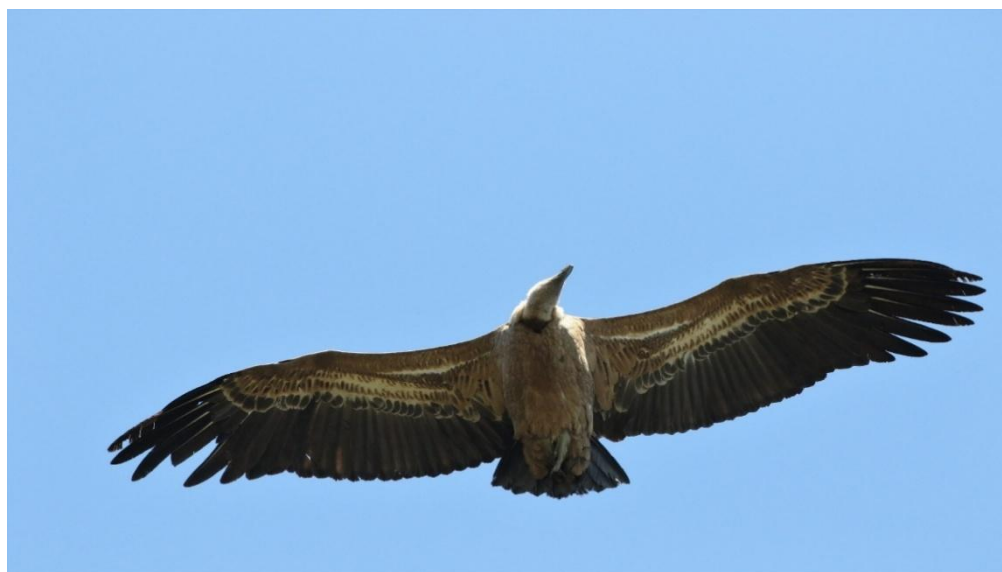


River Verdon © meridiem.photo

For more than two centuries, human visitors have been drawn to the turquoise waters of Provence's Verdon River. Thanks to their unconquerable steepness, the slopes of the Grand Canyons of the Verdon are also host to a dazzling variety of wildlife and plants. Most striking are the famous vultures: Cinereous, Egyptian, and Bearded vultures are all rare but possible, though the skies truly belong to the magnificent Eurasian Griffon, large numbers of which nest and roost on inaccessible canyon

ledges. As the morning warms, the griffons leave their overnight quarters to look for food, a journey that takes them right over—and often even below—the viewing sites along the Crest Road. It is, in the truest sense of the word, awesome to stand beneath these giants as the breezes lift them into the Provençal sky.

These forbidding landscapes are frequented by many other birds as well. Flamboyant Red-billed Choughs make their screaming way through the air below us, while the scrubby garrigue is home to Moltoni's Warblers, Blue Rock-Thrushes, and Cirl Buntings. Eurasian Hoopoes and European Rollers occasionally pass through, and there is even a chance at a Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush or Western Black-eared Wheatear bouncing around on the screen.



Eurasian Griffon © Brian Gibbons

On the final morning of this pre-trip, we will stop at a very different habitat in search of a few species found neither along the Verdon nor on the wild shores of Corsica, ranging from the familiar but astonishingly beautiful Great Crested Grebe to the elusive Little Bustard. Our excursion ends in Nice, where we will join the rest of our sailing companions for a convivial first meal together as a full group before boarding *Le Ponant* and setting out for Corsica the next day.

May 6, Day 1: Departure for France

Most flights from the USA to France depart in the evening of Day One, May 6, arriving the following day, Day 2, May 7, at Nice Côte d'Azur Airport (airport code NCE). At the time of writing, Delta, Air

France, and United offer a limited number of nonstop flights from New York to Nice, but most travel to destinations on the French Riviera requires a change of planes in Europe; connecting airports include those in London, Paris, Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Munich, and Rome.

If you are concerned about the length of the trans-Atlantic flight, we recommend arriving some days in advance for a chance to rest up and adjust to the time difference. With sufficient notice, the VENT office can make hotel reservations and other arrangements for you, often at our favorable group rates.

NIGHT: Aboard international flight

May 7, Day 2: Arrival in Nice

Participants should arrive today at Nice Côte d'Azur (airport code NCE). Once you have completed the immigration and customs formalities (please see the Documents section below for important information on requirements for entry into France), you will be met outside the baggage claim area by our local representative for the short private transfer to our hotel, the **Hotel Anantara Plaza**, where a room has been reserved in your name.

After checking in, you have the afternoon on your own to settle in or to do a little preliminary exploring of this jewel of the French Riviera. Early this evening, we will meet in the hotel lobby for a trip welcome and orientation before enjoying a fine dinner at a nearby restaurant, full of the tastes of the Mediterranean.

NIGHT: Hotel Anantara Plaza, Nice

May 8, Day 3: The Embouchure du Var, and on to La Palud-sur-Verdon

We will start our morning at the mouth of the **River Var**, a scant fifteen minutes from our hotel. Often said to provide the best birding in southeastern France, the few hundred yards of paved walkway along the wetland and river have witnessed more than 250 bird species since the area's designation as a Natura 2000 site. Early May is a splendid time to visit, and we will be looking for our first Common Shelducks, Alpine Swifts, Pied Avocets, and Kentish Plovers as we stroll the broad sidewalk.

This is famously one of the best places in Europe for terns: we have a chance at Little, Gull-billed, Caspian, Whiskered, Black, White-winged, Common, and Sandwich at this date, some of them migrants and others busy establishing their nesting territories on the low sand bars at the river mouth.



Pied Avocet © Rick Wright

Afterward we will head northwest into the mountainous heart of Provence. The two-and-a-quarter-hour drive from Nice takes us from sea level through steep garrigue-clad slopes to the charming village of La Palud, largest of three settlements in the Gorges du Verdon, Europe's largest canyon. La Palud is the elegant gateway to the national parks' extensive hiking routes and the famed Route des Crêtes, the only road through the canyon and our destination tomorrow.

Along the way, we will stop for some birding and a chance to photograph the stunning scenery of Mediterranean France while our expert local naturalist explains the natural and cultural features on our route. The plateau of **Valensole** and its famous lavender fields, for example, are home to Eurasian Skylark, Common Quail, and Spectacled Warbler, while dry pastures may host European Thick-knee, Rock Sparrow, or Ortolan Bunting. As most such areas are entirely private property, we will be birding from the roadsides, with spectacular views all around. We will have lunch together not far from **La Palud**, then arrive at our comfortable four-star hotel in the late afternoon.

The Hôtel and Spa des Gorges perches at an altitude of over 3000 feet, looking out over the valley of the River Verdon and the village of La Palud. In addition to bright, spacious rooms, the hotel also has a

heated pool, steam room, solarium, spa, fitness room, and an area dedicated to sports from petanque to basketball. We will enjoy our first dinner in the hotel's gourmet restaurant this evening. Haute-Provence occupies a special place in the history of French cooking, and the richness and variety of the local cuisine are unparalleled; the menu changes every day, but we are likely to have an opportunity to dine on trout and snails from the Verdon lamb from La Palud, goat cheese



Lavender fields, Valensole Plateau © StevanZZ

and almonds from Valensole, and olive oil and honey from greater Provence—all, of course, accompanied by one of the region's many excellent wines. Meals will be served in the elegant dining room or, weather permitting, on the terrace with its stunning mountain views.

NIGHT: Hôtel and Spa des Gorges du Verdon, La Palud-sur-Verdon

May 9, Day 4: The Gorges du Verdon

We will start our day with an easy walk along the wooded edges of the town of **La Palud**, just below our hotel, where Black Redstarts and European Serins sing while colorful tits and finches work their way through the trees.

Once the morning has warmed, our coach will take us about 20 minutes east, to the little village of **Rougou**. Nestled beneath an enormous stone outcrop topped by the ruins of a medieval castle, the narrow, quiet streets of Rougou take walkers past houses from the Middle Ages and Renaissance, familiar to generations of pilgrims following the paths below.



Verdon Gorge view from the village of Rougon © Arthur CC Hsieh

Today, Rougon is home to a thriving artist and artisan community, inspired by one-of-a-kind views of the mountains and the deep canyon of the Verdon River. It is here that we are likely to see our first birds of prey, chief among them the gigantic Eurasian Griffon, which nests and roosts on cliffs and ledges throughout the area. With extraordinary luck, we might even encounter a Cinereous Vulture or a very rare Bearded Vulture; Egyptian Vultures are now scarce anywhere in France, but their numbers are increasing, and this is as likely a place as any to spot one of these beautifully patterned birds.

We will have lunch at the aptly named Point Sublime, then explore the **Route des Crêtes**, an exhilarating and well-engineered road along the top of the canyon walls above the Verdon. There are several opportunities to park at sturdy viewing platforms, which give breathtaking views of the gorge—and of the vultures and choughs that can float by at or even below eye level.

As the afternoon progresses, Eurasian Griffons leave their roost sites on ledges and in caves on the walls of the canyon; as they take to the sky, they often pass right over the heads of human observers on their way to some succulent morsel of carrion. If the griffons are imposing, the Red-billed Choughs are nothing short of hilarious as they shoot through the sky on satiny black wings, their raspy screams echoing from the canyon sides. The sky is filled, too, with modestly clad Eurasian Crag-Martins



Route des Cretes above the Verdon River Gorge © Alexandre.ROSA

carrying food to their nests in the stony crannies. Common Swifts are rarely out of sight here, and hopeful eyes are always on the lookout for Pallid Swifts; more easily found is the massive, long-winged Alpine Swift, which nests in good numbers in the gorges.

Yellowhammers, Cirl Buntings, European Goldfinches, and Linnets add color and music to the dry clifftop scrub. Where the garrigue is at its darkest and densest, Moltoni's and perhaps Dartford warblers can be heard or, with great patience and greater luck, seen. Bare areas of stone and scree sometimes produce a Blue Rock-Thrush or even a Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush, and there is always a chance at the attractive Western Black-eared Wheatear, a standout even among its handsome tribe.



European Goldfinch © Rick Wright

Not all the wildlife here is feathered. Lepidopterists will find much to admire on a sunny day, and a wide range of appealing wildflowers somehow manages to thrive even where the soil is scant.

After completing the loop of the Crest Road, we will return to our hotel, with time for a drink, a rest, or a quick look around the gardens before another fine dinner together.

NIGHT: Hôtel and Spa des Gorges du Verdon, La Palud

May 10, Day 5: Vinon Aerodrome and Vinon Gravel Pits

We will check out—reluctantly—after breakfast to begin our leisurely return drive to Nice. A minor detour will take us down to Vinon, where the grassy expanses of a neglected airport still provide a home to one of Europe’s most badly imperiled grassland nesters, the Little Bustard. With the springtime spirit fully upon the males, this can be a good time of year to see them, but this species is never a given.

Just down the road, a series of large gravel pits have been transformed into fishing ponds and a wildlife refuge. Common Nightingales nest (and sing!) in the surrounding low woodlands, and the lakes themselves can be good for Great Crested Grebes and some other waterbird species we are unlikely to see once we have embarked on the *Ponant* on the way to Corsica. At this date, the lakeside colony of European Bee-eaters should be occupied as well, and we will spend some time enjoying these most acrobatic and colorful of French birds.

We should be back in Nice by late afternoon, with time to check in to our hotel there and perhaps relax a bit before gathering with our full group of cruise participants for a welcoming reception and dinner.

NIGHT: Hotel Anantara Plaza, Nice

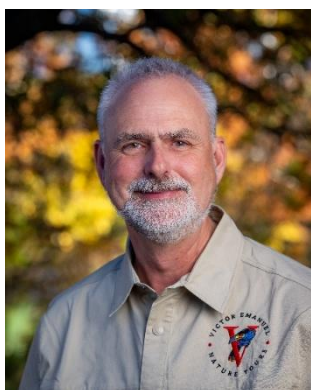
Essential Tour Information

TOUR SIZE: We have chartered *Le Ponant* exclusively for the use of our VENT travelers. Our cruise is limited to 28 participants. The Provence Pre-Trip is limited to 12 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: Barry Lyon, Rick Wright, Larry Wolff, and Perri Klass will lead our cruise. The pre-trip will be conducted by **Barry Lyon** and **Rick Wright**. At our shore sites, we will also be accompanied by local guides with expertise in history, culture, and natural history.



Barry Lyon's passion for the outdoors and birding has its roots in his childhood in southern California. During his teenage years, he attended several VENT/ABA youth birding camps, which ultimately led to his future involvement with Victor Emanuel Nature Tours. He holds a B.A. from the University of Arizona at Tucson where he studied history and political science, with an emphasis on environment and development politics. Barry joined the VENT team as a tour leader in 1995 and embarked on a travel-based career that has taken him to an array of worldwide destinations. He has lived in Austin, Texas since 2004 when he joined our office staff as an administrative assistant. In 2014 he was named Chief Operating Officer (COO), reflecting his increased experience and responsibilities. In 2023 Barry ascended to the role of Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Although Barry still leads two or three trips a year, these days his work is geared almost entirely toward business, customer relations, and the management of the company. Barry's background and his knowledge of natural history have provided him with a strong interest in conservation. He is a former board member and past president of Travis Audubon Society, which emphasizes conservation through birding and outdoor education for children. Barry resides in South Austin with his wife, Brooke Smith.



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 earned the Ph.D. in Germanic 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. Rick's 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 his *Field Guide to Birds of New*

Jersey and Field Guide to Birds of Arizona, and the Peterson Reference Guide to American Sparrows.

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.



Larry Wolff is the Silver Professor of European History at New York University, and at NYU he has held the positions of Director of the Center for European and Mediterranean Studies, Director of the Remarque Institute, and Co-director (with Perri Klass) of NYU Florence at Villa La Pietra. He received his B.A. from Harvard and his Ph.D. from Stanford. With particular interests in Eastern Europe and Mediterranean Europe, his books, which have been widely translated into foreign languages, include *Inventing*

Eastern Europe (1994), *Venice and the Slavs: The Discovery of Dalmatia in the Age of Enlightenment* (2001), *Paolina's Innocence: Child Abuse in Casanova's Venice* (2012), *The Singing Turk: Ottoman Power and Operatic Emotions on the European Stage* (2016), and *Woodrow Wilson and the Reimagining of Eastern Europe* (2020). His newest book is *The Shadow of the Empress: Fairy-Tale Opera and the End of the Habsburg Monarchy* (2023). Larry is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and has traveled as a lecturer with cruises in the Adriatic and around the Mediterranean. He also writes frequently about opera for the *New York Review of Books* and the *Times Literary Supplement* of London. He lived for many years in Boston and now lives in New York City with his wife, Perri Klass, the well-known doctor and writer.



Perri Klass, is Professor of Journalism and Pediatrics at New York University, where she directs the Minor in Medical Humanities. She attended Harvard Medical School and completed her residency in pediatrics at Children's Hospital, Boston. Dr. Klass has written extensively about medicine, children, literacy, and knitting. Her most recent book is *The Best Medicine: How Science and Public Health Gave Children a Future*, about how the decline in infant and child mortality has changed parenting,

pediatrics, and the world; her other nonfiction includes *Treatment Kind and Fair: Letters to a Young Doctor*, *Every Mother is a Daughter: the Neverending Quest for Success, Inner Peace, and a Really*

Clean Kitchen, which she coauthored with her mother, and *Quirky Kids: Understanding and Helping Your Child Who Doesn't Fit In*, which she coauthored with Eileen Costello, M.D. She has written regularly about children's issues for *The New York Times* for many years, and her medical journalism has appeared in a wide variety of publications, including *Harper's*, *The Atlantic*, *Smithsonian*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New Yorker*, *The New England Journal of Medicine*, and *Harvard Medicine*. Dr. Klass is the National Medical Director of Reach Out and Read, a program through which pediatricians promote parents reading aloud with young children, providing guidance and books to more than 4.4 million children and their families every year. She is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

TOUR COSTS & PAYMENT INFORMATION

TOUR FEE: Corsican Shores Cruise Aboard *Le Ponant*

Cabin prices quoted are per person in double occupancy and include port taxes. Single occupancy is 2 times the double occupancy rate. Cabins will be reserved on a first-come-first-served basis.

Porthole Cabins (6, 16)	\$28,800
Lower Window Suites (7, 9, 12, 14, 15, 17)	\$28,800
Jr. Suite (11, 8)	\$29,375
Prestige Suite (10)	\$30,240
Upper Deck Balcony (2)	\$31,100
Upper Deck Prestige (3, 5)	\$31,680
Privilege Suite (4)	\$32,840
Owner's Suite (1)	\$33,995

The fee for the Corsican Shores Cruise includes meals from dinner on Day 2 through breakfast on Day 10; an open bar on board ship (excludes Premium shelf liquors); hotel and ship accommodations as

stated in the itinerary; land transportation in Nice and on shore excursions, including transfers between the airport and our group hotel on arrival in Nice and transfers between the dock and the airport upon disembarkation; group transfers and baggage handling between airport, ship, and hotel; WiFi aboard the *Ponant*; shore excursions as described; laundry of five items per guest on the *Ponant*; gratuities to the crew and staff of the *Ponant*, and to local guides and drivers; and the services of VENT leaders and local guides.

Not included in your cruise fee is roundtrip airfare from your home to Nice and return; any fuel or exchange rate surcharges; passport fees; phone calls; laundry beyond five items per guest; excess baggage charges; passport or visa fees (if applicable); accommodations, meals, and transfers before or after the tour; personal and baggage insurance; gratuities to VENT leaders; and all items of a personal nature. Rates are based on group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may be imposed.

Grand Canyons of Provence Pre-Trip

The fee for our Grand Canyons of Provence pre-trip is \$6,490 per person in double occupancy. The fee for guaranteed single accommodations is \$7,350. Rates are based on group tariffs; if the trip does not have sufficient registration, a small-party surcharge may be imposed.

The fee for this pre-trip includes hotel accommodations for three nights, all meals from dinner on Day 2 to lunch on Day 4, transfers from Nice airport to our Nice hotel, all land transportation during the tour, guide services provided by leaders and drivers, driver gratuities, and entrance fees.

Not included in your pre-trip fee is roundtrip airfare from your home to Nice and return; transfers or accommodations other than those stated in the itinerary; meals before dinner on Day 2 or after lunch on Day 4; insurance against baggage loss, accident, evacuation, or trip cancellation; international or domestic departure taxes; gratuities to your VENT leaders; and items of a personal nature such as phone calls, laundry, postage, or email.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT:

CRUISE REGISTRATION:

You may register for this cruise at our website (ventbird.com) or by calling our office (512-328-5221). We ask those wanting single accommodations call the VENT office to register, please. A deposit of \$2,000 is required to reserve a space on this cruise. At 180 days VENT will collect a second deposit that brings the total deposit amount to 40% of the tour price. The balance of the fee is due 120 days prior to departure (date). We now offer online payment and you will receive a payment link via email allowing you to make payments at your convenience. If you prefer to pay the initial deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. This cruise is designed for persons in reasonably good health. By forwarding the expedition deposit, you certify that you do not have a physical condition or disability which would create a hazard to you or other passengers. VENT reserves the right to decline to accept or retain you or other passengers should your health, actions, or general deportment impede the operations of the expedition or the rights, welfare, or enjoyment of other passengers.

GRAND CANYONS OF PROVENCE PRE-TRIP REGISTRATION:

A deposit of \$1,000 is required to reserve a space on this tour. At 180 days VENT will collect a second deposit that brings the total deposit amount to 40% of the tour price. The balance of the fee is due 120 days prior to departure (date). We now offer online payment and you will receive a payment link via email allowing you to make payments at your convenience.

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 prior to the tour departure date.

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: VENT has reserved all of *Le Ponant* exclusively for our travelers. Your cruise fee includes tipping for all the ship's staff and crew and local guides. At the end of the voyage, VENT will distribute tips to them on behalf of our guests using a process that ensures fair distribution.

Just as on our land-based programs, if you feel that you have received exceptional service from anyone—local guides, cruise director, expedition leader, hotel manager, or cabin attendants—and would like to offer an additional tip, please give those tips directly to the individual. If you would like to offer any of these providers an additional tip, \$5 to \$10 a day is a common amount.

Tips for your VENT tour leaders are *not* included in the cruise fee, but it is customary to tip if you feel that you have received exceptional service. To assist in your planning, we recommend tipping each of your VENT tour leaders \$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 guidelines are only recommendations. The amount you decide to tip is based entirely on your experience and at your discretion.

CANCELLATION & REFUNDS

CANCELLATION POLICY:

- **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. Because unexpected events can occur, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

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.

Due to the nature of this cruise, weather conditions or government regulations may require changes to be made to the itinerary and/or the cancellation of certain shore excursions. Every attempt will be made within the limits of safety and time to adhere to the itinerary described. In the event of changes, passengers have no right to any refund or other compensation. Expedition fees are based on group participation. Should you choose not to take part in any activity or to make use of services provided, no refund will be made.

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 read the remainder of this 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](https://www.Medjet.com/VentBird) or call 1-800-527-7478. Pricing is based on type and term of membership.

GETTING THERE & REQUIRED TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

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

Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be held responsible for any air ticket penalties.

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

BAGGAGE: Your cruise fee includes baggage handling and transfers between the Nice airport, hotel, and ship. You are likely to be more comfortable if you limit your luggage to one medium-sized bag and one carry-on bag per person.

The airlines 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, travel documents, optics, and any other essential items in your carry-on bag.

Check the websites of your airline and of the Transportation Security Administration ([tsa.gov](https://www.tsa.gov)) for the most up-to-date information about checked baggage and carry-on items.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS:

PASSPORTS: You must travel with a passport valid for at least six months beyond the ending date of this tour; **if your passport expires before November 18, 2027, you must renew it** before embarking. Please also make sure that your passport has two blank pages for stamps. If you need a passport, you should apply for renewal well in advance of your departure date. For an additional fee, passports can be issued on an expedited basis. In the US, you can visit a passport office, most post offices, or your county clerk's office; US citizens can, at the time of writing, also renew their passports online at travel.state.gov.

Citizens of most other countries are subject to the same passport requirements and should consult with their national passport agency as early as possible should they need a new passport.

In addition to a passport meeting the requirements above, US citizens and citizens of some 50 other countries visiting Europe must also be in possession of an ETIAS document, which must be obtained online at etias.com. The cost for applicants between the ages of 18 and 70 was estimated in 2026 to be the equivalent of about USD 24.00; the fee is waived for those younger or older. The document is valid for three years or until the date of expiration of your passport.

If this is your first visit to a European Union country since April 2026, when the new European Entry and Exit System was inaugurated, you will have to provide certain additional personal data on entering France. A passport control officer will take a photo of your face, scan your fingerprints, or both; that information will be recorded in a digital file. This initial process can be made quicker by registering some of that data in advance, either at a self-service facility at the border entry point or on a mobile application. If you have already entered the EU under the new system, your data will already be in the EES, and only verification will be necessary. For more information about the EES, see travel-europe.europa.eu/ees/ltr/how-will-ees-work-what-new-during-border-checks.

Citizens of countries other than the US should consult a French embassy or consulate for accurate and detailed information about documents and other immigration requirements.

Once on board *Le Ponant*, your identification will be held by the ship staff for presentation by the ship's officers to customs authorities at each port. Should you for some reason need your document during an excursion on shore, it will be available at reception on the ship, where it must be returned on your return to the ship.

VISAS: Visas are not required for U.S. citizens traveling to this destination. If you hold a passport from another country, please check with your consulate or embassy for the most accurate guidance.

IMPORTANT: The visa details above are current for U.S. citizens as of June 25, 2026. Because entry requirements can change without notice, we kindly remind all participants to double-check the latest information before traveling. Travelers using non-U.S. passports are responsible for confirming any entry requirements that apply to their home country.

WHAT TO BRING

CLOTHING: Casual attire is the rule in the field, on city tours, and while we are cruising. Participants may also wish to pack some smarter attire for evenings and special occasions such as the Captain's Welcome and the farewell cocktail reception. Casual dresses, skirts, or slacks ensembles are a good choice for women; for men, khakis or other slacks and an open-collared shirt are comfortable and easy to pack. This is not required; obviously, you can dress to suit your own preference at all times.

We recommend packing a mix of clothing including:

Pants and shorts. Many people prefer lightweight pants made of cotton, but denim or other materials, though not as comfortable, are acceptable. Shorts may be desirable for the warmer times of day or when cruising, but are probably not suitable for our birding outings; shorts are not permitted at meals on board *Le Ponant*.

Field clothing. Outdoor stores carry pants and shirts made of durable, lightweight materials with multiple pockets and ventilated seams.

Shirts. Several T-shirts, long-sleeved and short-sleeved, can supplement other comfortable shirt styles.

Jackets and sweaters. We expect mild to warm weather on this trip, but a jacket or sweater will be very welcome should we encounter a cold front or strong winds; it will also be cooler on our excursions into the high mountains, when light gloves and a knit hat may come in handy.

Hats. Even on overcast days, the Mediterranean sun can cause damage to exposed skin. In addition to a wide-brimmed hat, you should be equipped with sunscreen and sunglasses, especially when we are at sea or in open areas on land.

Swimming suits. Corsica's beaches are world-famous for their soft sands and gentle waters. Bring a swimsuit if you would like to sun or swim (the water temperature in May is about 64° F, chilly for extended swims but tolerable by many people for shorter dips).

FOOTWEAR: Most of our birding and walking will be on level trails or roadsides. A sturdy, broken-in pair of hiking boots or walking shoes is recommended; you will be more comfortable wearing lighter shoes in the evening. Rocks, prickly plants, and other nuisances can be found anywhere in the habitats we visit, so do not wear open-toed shoes or sandals on any of our excursions.

Similarly, sidewalks and roadsides in the cities may have uneven surfaces, making a good pair of sturdy walking shoes the right choice for our cultural and historical explorations as well.

EQUIPMENT

Binoculars: For wildlife viewing, for admiring the landscape, and for better looks at the architectural and ornamental features of historic buildings, pack a pair of binoculars in good condition. Do not bring "mini" binoculars of any kind; their limited field of view and inferior light-gathering capacity will

keep you from enjoying many of the sights as much as you will with a modern 7x35, 8x42, or 10x40 model, any of which is compact and light enough for travel.

Spotting Scopes: Our leaders will have spotting scopes for group use during our birding excursions. If you have a scope and wish to bring it along, please do so; it will increase your enjoyment of waterfowl, shorebirds, and even open-country passerines on our outings.

A belt pack or daypack is handy for carrying books, sunscreen, camera, extra clothing, and so on. As a precaution when flying, you should pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medications, and all travel documents in your carry-on bag. **Do not check your passport and ETIAS, as they are required for check-in at airports, in hotels, and on *Le Ponant*.**

Other useful items include:

- notebooks and pens
- travel alarm
- polarized sunglasses with good UV protection
- high-SPF sunscreen, lip balm, skin lotions
- toiletries
- cameras, lenses, memory cards, and extra batteries; batteries and cards may not be conveniently available in most of the towns we visit.
- collapsible walking stick
- folding stool—especially for those who have trouble standing for more than ten or fifteen minutes at a time, whether on birding excursions or on city tours.
- tissue packs
- insect repellent—though it is early in the season, biting insects are possible at some of our locations. Please see the Health section below for more information.

DESTINATION INFORMATION & TOUR CONDITIONS

CRUISE CONDITIONS: The ship – *Le Ponant* is the first Relais & Châteaux sailing yacht, a majestic three-masted vessel with elegant lines and an interior design created by the Jean-Philippe Nuel studio to be a warm and intimate setting with a distinctive personality. Whether you are a lover of the sea or

simply a curious traveler, you will be thrilled at the joy of navigating under sail as we discover the wonderful shores of Corsica.

Le Ponant has four passenger decks (three with cabins), 16 staterooms (all outside, five with balconies and eleven with windows), a solarium, a restaurant with indoor/outdoor seating, spa and gym facilities, an infirmary, and a salon. The yacht's passenger capacity is 32. There are 32 crew members, ensuring friendly and highly personalized service.

The reception desk is open 24 hours a day. Other services available include an excursion desk, wake-up calls, and a shop. Letters and postcards can be mailed by the reception desk.

Staterooms: You will be issued key cards for your stateroom; the door locks behind you when you leave your stateroom. Each stateroom is equipped with adjustable air conditioning, a television with a free selection of movies and documentaries, an individual safe, toiletries and towels, and a bathrobe and slippers.

The program: Your trip to Corsica will be a relaxing and evenly paced, but full, travel experience offering visits to famous archaeological sites, guided tours, and cruising the Mediterranean Sea, in tandem with birding and natural history activities on shore. This trip offers a wide range of cultural, historical, and anthropological experiences in addition to birding excursions, and participants should consider this fact closely before registering.

We have designed this program to appeal to anyone, and we emphasize that the birding portions of the trip are optional. Participants whose main interest lies in history and culture do not need to be birders to enjoy this trip or to participate in the birding portions of the itinerary. Birdwatching activities are available as alternatives to the sightseeing options during the cruise.

Technical Information

- Length 288 feet, width 59 feet
- Built 1991, completely remodeled and refurbished 2021
- Registry: French

- Passenger capacity 32, staff and crew 32

Deck 2



- Grand Privilege Suite (4+2)
- Privilege Suite (4)
- Upper decks balcony stateroom (Alizés Prestige Stateroom with balcony, 3, 5)
- Upper decks balcony stateroom (Alizés Stateroom with balcony, 2)

Deck 3



- Prestige Suite (10)
- Junior Suite (8, 11)
- Window Stateroom (Mistral Prestige Stateroom, 7, 9, 12, 14, 15, 17)
- Porthole Stateroom (Mistral Stateroom, 6, 16)

Deck 4



- Owner's Suite (1)

Our time off the ship includes walking tours in cities and towns and visits to historical sites and birding areas. Depending on one's abilities, physical demands will be easy to moderate. Our activities in towns on the Corsican coast can include considerable walking and standing. These cities are ancient, and you must be able to negotiate uneven streets and sidewalks, cobblestone streets and paths, irregular curbs, and staircases. All walking will be done at a moderate pace. **Please take this into account to make sure that this tour is appropriate for you before registering.**

Our birding outings will involve only light walking, over easy to moderate terrain; at higher elevations, where the paths are rougher, we will walk only short stretches, and always at a slow "birder's pace."

Our program includes seven days at sea, punctuated by land excursions each day. Our day will typically begin with breakfast on board between 6:30 and 8:00 am, followed by disembarkation for transfers to historical, cultural, and birding sites. Because of the mountainous terrain of Corsica's interior, some of these transfers, whatever the actual distance involved, may take up to an hour and a half to reach our destination from the harbor.

While cruising at sea, you can join your leaders on deck for seawatching or remain inside to relax in the ship's public areas or in your cabin. We will never be very far from shore, and thus we can expect smooth seas most of the time.

Please read carefully the detailed descriptions of our shore excursions in the daily itinerary above and keep that information in mind when selecting your daily activities. **Note that the following outings or visits are not recommended for participants who have mobility challenges:**

Porto-Vecchio Old Town, Fortin, and Artisan Coutelier (May 13) – not suitable for users of wheelchairs or motorized scooters

Sartène and Museum of Prehistory (May 15) – not suitable for participants with difficulty walking

Maison Bonaparte (May 16) – inaccessible to wheelchair users

Col de Sorba (May 16) – trails not suitable for participants with difficulty walking

Haut Asco (May 17) – trails not suitable for participants with difficulty walking

Sant-Antonino (May 17) – not suitable for participants with difficulty walking

PRE-TRIP CONDITIONS: To explore even more of Mediterranean France, join our short pre-tour of central Provence, beginning and ending in Nice. This tour is short and undemanding, though there are

drives totaling about three hours on the second day and on the final day. Our birding will involve only a moderate amount of walking or, especially on the Crest Road, stationary observation. There will be no early starts, and we plan to have time to relax and enjoy our beautiful surroundings each day before dinner.

Our accommodations are elegant and comfortable. In Nice, our five-star hotel, the Anantara Plaza, is immediately adjacent to the old city's most exclusive shopping areas and to the historic Promenade des Anglais, a venerable Riviera institution. Our four-star La Palud hotel perches atop a prominent hill overlooking the village and the mountainous landscapes of the Verdon. The village of La Palud and several birding opportunities are just a short stroll from the hotel, which also offers its guests a wellness area with a heated pool, Jacuzzi, steam room, and solarium, along with an inviting panoramic terrace and lovely herb and flower gardens.

CLIMATE & WEATHER: **Cruise:** May temperatures on the Corsican coast average 70° F as a high and about 50° as a low. It will be cooler on the sea, of course, and it is consistently 10–12° cooler at the Col de Sorba and Haut Asco. Water temperatures hover around 64°, which some people find suitable for brief bouts of brisk swimming. At this season, daylight extends from 6:00 am to nearly 9:00 pm. Most days are sunny, though light rain is possible at any time, especially on the island's west coast. The wind is usually light and refreshing. That said, it is important to be prepared for the possibility of an early heat wave or a late cold front, which can raise temperatures well into the 80s or bring short periods of wind and cold rain.

Pre-trip: May weather in Provence is typically well suited to outdoor activities. In Nice, the temperature can rise to nearly 80° F during the day, with a pleasant cooling breeze from the harbor; nighttime temperatures there can fall into the 50s. In La Palud, at higher elevation and away from the moderating effects of the sea, temperatures generally range from the 40s overnight to the mid-60s during the day. An average May sees rain on eight of the 31 days, with a total of about 3 inches for the month.

FOOD & WATER: **Cruise:** The culinary experience aboard the ship celebrates both epicurean indulgence and the flavors of nature, with a focus on regional ingredients sourced from the destinations we visit on our cruise. Guided by the expertise of Alain Ducasse and Ducasse Conseil, the

kitchen creates exceptional meals at sea. Our chefs specialize in contemporary expressions of French haute cuisine, a considerable source of pride for all those associated with the ship.

Meals: Hot drinks and pastries are available every morning before breakfast. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner on *Le Ponant* are served à la carte or on request. Depending on the day and destination of our shore excursions, lunch will be either on board the *Ponant* or in a restaurant on shore. After our first meal together in Nice, all dinners will be on the ship, usually beginning at 7:00 or 7:30 pm.

Pre-trip: In addition to the good birding and great landscapes, our meals, too, will be a highlight. Nice is famous for its seafood and delicious vegetables, and the kitchen in La Palud serves a different selection every day of imaginative and irresistible Provençal classics, including vegetarian and vegan options, using the freshest seasonal products from the area.

CURRENCY & SPENDING: The official currency of France is the euro. For up-to-date exchange rates, visit xe.com. Your trip fee covers most necessary expenses. US dollars may be grudgingly accepted at an unfavorable exchange rate in some shops in large cities such as Nice, but it is far better to have a supply of euros at hand for taxi rides, gifts, off-ship refreshments, laundry, additional tips, meals on your own, and personal items.

There is no exchange office on board the ship. You can obtain euros from your bank before leaving the US, or at airport ATMs or banks in Nice and other cities. Small denominations will be most convenient.

Major credit cards are widely accepted, sometimes in preference to cash; check with your card issuer for more information about the use of ATM and credit cards abroad.

Aboard *Le Ponant*, an account will be opened for you, where all your expenses incurred on board will be recorded. Please leave a credit card imprint at reception; the bill with your receipt will be delivered to your stateroom the day before disembarkation. Visa, Mastercard, and American Express are accepted on board. You can also settle your expenses in cash, either euros or US dollars, at reception.

ELECTRICITY: Power on board the *Ponant* is 220V, with 110V outlets in the stateroom bathrooms. On land, power in France is 230V; outlets accept plugs with two round pins, Types C and F. Plug adapters are available at reception on *Le Ponant*; they can also be purchased in the US or, less conveniently, in France. If any of your devices and appliances operate only at 110V, you will also need an all-purpose transformer to convert the current.

INTERNET ACCESS: WiFi is available at our hotel in Nice and on the pre-trip, at our hotel in La Palud.

WiFi on board the *Ponant*, in staterooms and public areas, is included in your cruise fee. The ship also has a satellite communication system you can use to make calls around the world or to send and receive faxes; the cost of that service will be charged directly to your onboard account.

LANGUAGE: The official language of mainland France is French; you may infrequently hear Provençal spoken, especially away from larger settlements. English is widely spoken in Nice, less so in smaller towns in Provence.

Corsica's complicated history means that three languages are spoken here: French, Italian, and Corsican. Road signs and other public notices are often bilingual, in French and Corsican. Graffiti are almost always composed in Corsican. English is spoken by many people in Bastia and in Ajaccio; that is less often the case in smaller cities and towns.

Our local guides all speak fluent English, as do the officers and almost all the staff of *Le Ponant*.

TIME: At the time of our cruise, France, including Corsica, observes Central European Daylight Time, which is six hours ahead of Eastern Daylight Time and nine hours ahead of Pacific Daylight Time.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry service aboard the *Ponant* for five items per guest is included in your cruise fee. It takes 24 to 48 hours to have clothing laundered and ironed. Our hotels also offer laundry service at an additional charge, but especially given our short stays, it is far better to bring all the clothing you think you might need during the cruise.

HEALTH & SAFETY

MEDICAL SERVICES: Please return your medical information form in a timely manner. The *Ponant* has a nurse, available 24 hours a day for emergencies, and a telemedicine service in case of any medical difficulties. The ship is equipped with excellent radio and marine and satellite telephone facilities, and is never so far from shore that aid cannot be summoned quickly.

Passengers who are not fit for a cruise, including those with physical disabilities that affect mobility and balance, heart or immune deficiencies, or other conditions associated with poor health, are advised not to join the cruise or the pre-trip. A serious health emergency may result in an air evacuation, which will come at considerable expense to you. Insurance coverage for emergency

medical evacuation is required for participation in this program. Please see the section describing the Medical Evacuation Insurance Requirement above.

Le Ponant is not designed to accommodate passengers with reduced mobility. Every passenger must be able to be autonomous or travel with a companion who can provide all necessary assistance. If a person is deemed insufficiently fit to travel, the cruise company reserves the right to refuse boarding.

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 Mediterranean sun is very strong in May. Severe sunburn is painful and will affect your level of enjoyment. Anytime you are outdoors, including on the decks of our ship, you should protect your skin, including your lips, eyes, nose, and ears. Wear a broad-brimmed hat, long sleeves, and long pants. Bring an ample supply of high-SPF sunscreen and lip balm. We also strongly recommend the use of ultraviolet-blocking, polarized sunglasses.

VERTIGO AND MOTION SICKNESS: Corsica is a very mountainous landscape, with steep slopes and winding, twisting roads. Read the descriptions of our daily excursions carefully if you are subject to dizziness or motion sickness, and consult your physician about steps you can take to reduce vertigo.

BITING INSECTS: Mosquitoes are generally not common at the date of our tour, but a few may be encountered on land in the early morning or evening, especially if the spring has been a wet one on the west coast. The light breezes typical of the season typically drive flying insects away, but if you are concerned, the best defense is a good repellent: a good strategy is to spray your clothes before putting them on. We also recommend wearing long pants and long-sleeved shirts in the field. An effective prevention protocol is tucking your pants into your socks.

Chiggers – These tiny mites are found in most warm-weather areas of the world. They are especially numerous in summer in grassy areas, where, in the immature stage, they attach themselves to humans or other animals passing through the grass. Chiggers like to attach themselves to areas of thin skin, such as around the ankles, beltline, undergarment lines, knees, and elbows. Chiggers are usually attached to the skin for no more than a few hours before falling off.

Chiggers do not suck blood, and most species are not known to carry disease. They feed on bodily fluids by secreting an enzyme that liquefies the skin in the area of attachment. Our bodies respond by producing a hardened area; though the chigger is long gone, the body's natural process of reabsorbing the hardened area causes intense itching, often lasting for a week or more.

On our cruise, chiggers are likely to pose no problem at all, as the soil temperature is typically still too low at this season. Nevertheless, it is a good idea to

- Avoid walking or standing in areas dominated by grass.
- Tuck your pants into your socks to avoid direct contact between the skin and grass. Though chiggers can find their way through clothing, this is an effective prevention technique.
- Apply repellent to your skin and clothing. See the Repellent section below for important information about selecting and applying repellent.
- Apply powdered sulfur to waist, bottoms of pants, socks, and boots. If you use sulfur, always wash your hands thoroughly before touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Clothing dusted with sulfur will retain the odor through several washings.

- Shower at the end of each day afield. Use a washcloth to vigorously rub your legs, feet, and ankles.

By following these methods, you should be able to avoid all chigger bites, as well as tick bites. Should you be bitten by chiggers, you can reduce or eliminate the symptoms by applying benzocaine or hydrocortisone cream, calamine lotion, After Bite, or other anti-itch products.

Ticks – Like chiggers, ticks “ambush” passing vertebrates from a perch in tall grass or other vegetation. Unlike chiggers, they suck the blood of their hosts, and if not removed promptly, they may pass on a variety of serious diseases. DEET and permethrin-based repellents (see below) are generally effective in discouraging ticks. You are unlikely to encounter ticks if you stay on cleared paths and avoid grass and brush. On returning from an area that has ticks, you should check your skin and remove any ticks found immediately. Fortunately, ticks removed within a couple of hours of biting are unlikely to transmit pathogens to their human host.

Repellents – Certain repellents can be used directly on the skin, but there is one that can be used to treat clothing but must not be applied to the skin.

Repellents for the skin are commonly available in three forms:

- DEET (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide): A chemical compound marketed under various names (OFF!®, Cutter™, Ultrathon™, etc.) and offered as sprays, lotions, time-release preparations, and disposable wipes. The packaging indicates the percentage of the active ingredient DEET. DEET may be applied to exposed skin directly or sprayed on clothing. Please be careful when applying DEET, as it can damage plastics and lens coatings.
- Picaridin: A synthetic formulation derived from piperine, a substance found in the plant that produces black pepper.
- Herbal repellents: Mixtures of organic ingredients such as oils from eucalyptus, citronella, cedar, or other herbs. Ingredients differ widely from one brand to another. Similarly, there is considerable variation in their effectiveness.

An invertebrate repellent for use on clothing only, and not for direct application to the skin, is marketed in one approved formulation:

- Permanone® (Permethrin) is an odorless spray-on repellent that can be used for pretreatment of clothing, gear, and tents. It should not be used directly on the skin or sprayed on clothing while it is being worn. The pretreatment process requires some hours to complete and must be carried out outdoors, so is best completed in advance of travel. Do-it-yourself pretreatment 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 pretreated 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 has an online tool to help choose the most effective repellent for a given situation. For example, some repellents work against mosquitoes, but not against ticks. Visit

[epa.gov/insect-repellents/which-insect-repellent-right-you](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).

BIRDING SKILLS: It is a common misperception that all participants in group tours are highly skilled and experienced birders. In fact, our tours are designed to accommodate birders at all levels, whether they have been birding for years or are just taking up this captivating hobby. We don't race to see every bird possible, or dedicate disproportionate time to tracking down any one "target" bird, but rather seek to have the fullest, most satisfying experiences possible. We take ample time to enjoy each species we encounter, taking the opportunity to inform participants about the lives of the birds and the demands of their environments; our goals are improving your birding skills and deepening your appreciation of birds, their behaviors, and their habitats. Our leaders meet your skills where they are, serving as resources to answer questions and enhance your birding experience with individualized attention and instruction.

SUGGESTED READING: The field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour are available in many bookstores. Buteo Books (buteobooks.com) and the Natural History Book Service (nhbs.com) are important dealers in ornithological and natural historical titles; Buteo also carries an extensive inventory of hard-to-find and out-of-print used and collectible books, as does AbeBooks (abebooks.com).

For Birders

Svensson, L., et al. 2023. *Birds of Europe*. 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton UP. Published in Britain as *Collins Bird Guide*. Essential.

Apps and Online Resources from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology

The Lab's eBird is one of the largest and most successful citizen science projects in existence, an essential tool for the promotion of 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. Trip leaders can share daily lists with you, which are automatically uploaded to your account. Highly recommended.

Merlin Bird ID is an app intended as a birding coach for beginning and intermediate birders. Excellent for use in the field, Merlin asks observers a series of questions about the date and location of a sighting and the color, size, and behavior of the bird in question. Merlin processes the responses to present a shortlist of possible identifications, from which the user can choose the likely species. 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 suggests an identification for birds' songs and calls. To use Merlin, download the app, followed by the appropriate regional "pack." For this cruise, please download the pack for Western Europe. Highly recommended.

Discover the world of birds with the Lab's Birds of the World online resource, offering comprehensive life histories of all bird species and families. Visit the [Birds of the World website](https://birds.cornell.edu), where you can learn about the appearance, distribution, diet, and behavior of any bird in the world. Free samples are available at the home page, and full subscriptions are available at monthly, annual, and three-year levels. Highly recommended.

For all of us

Bryn, Alf Bonnevie. 2021. *Peaks and Bandits*. Transl. Bibbi Lee. Sheffield: Vertebrate Publishing. A lighthearted and witty account of an early twentieth-century excursion to the mountains of Corsica, by one of the most famous climbers of his time.

Carrington, Dorothy. 2008. *Granite Island: A Portrait of Corsica*. London: Penguin Classics. A fascinating look into the history, culture, and oddities of the island.

Ferrari, Jérôme. 2016. *The Sermon on the Fall of Rome*. Transl. Geoffery Strachan. London: Maclehose Press. A Prix Goncourt–winning novel, relating the story of a family and the demise of a community in twentieth-century Corsica and combining history, comedy, drama, and philosophy.

Goscinnny, René, and Albert Uderzo. 2004. *Asterix in Corsica*. Transl. Althea Bell and Derek Hockridge. London: Orion. 'Nuff said.

Mayle, Peter. 2015. *The Corsican Caper*. Comical sleuthing, good food, and witty observations from the pen of the famous travel writer, novelist, and memoirist.

Perfettini, Philippe. 2021. *Napoléon: Punk, dépressif, héros*. Paris: Edition des Equateurs. Not yet (2026) available in English; an unusual and refreshing account of the future emperor's life and early days in Ajaccio from the perspective of a local.

Roberts, Andrew. 2014. *Napoleon: A Life*. London: Penguin. One of the more recent titles in the vast literature of Bonapartiana.

TERMS, CONDITIONS & RESPONSIBILITIES

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

other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

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

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

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

Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on July 10, 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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