GRAND ALASKA PT I

Nome & Utqiagvik

June 7 - 16, 2027



Muskox, Nome, Alaska © Kevin J. Zimmer

Our Grand Alaska program offers participants the option of taking a combination of individual sections. Those taking this section plus Grand Alaska: Nome & Gambell (May 29-June 8, 2027), Grand Alaska Part II (June 16-25, 2027) or Grand Alaska: Pribilofs & Anchorage (June 16-24, 2027) will have a tour that is truly comprehensive in scope. Those desiring a shorter trip may select one of these tours and still enjoy excellent birding in a more relaxed visit to some of the most beautiful and remote areas in North America.

When spring suddenly arrives on the adjacent shores of Alaska and Siberia, and thousands of birds rush northwards to claim nesting territories, some of these small navigators make big mistakes. Because of this, every year a number of Asian migrants wind up on North American soil, and a few have even colonized Alaska as breeding birds. Birders have learned that they can intercept some of these strays by positioning themselves at strategic points in western Alaska.

Grand Alaska Part I: Nome & Utqiagvik will allow participants the opportunity to explore the varied habitats to be found in the Nome region. Nome, the old gold-rush capital of Alaska, still retains much

of the frontier character that typifies the Alaskan bush. Here, amidst wonderful examples of alpine and coastal tundra, we will search for some of the most special of Alaska's breeding birds including Arctic Loon, Rock and Willow ptarmigan, Gyrfalcon, Bristle-thighed Curlew, Bar-tailed Godwit, Rock Sandpiper, Aleutian Tern, Bluethroat, Northern Wheatear, Eastern Yellow Wagtail and others. We can also expect a nice cross-section of large mammals with Muskox, Moose, Grizzly (Brown Bear) and Reindeer (Caribou) among the possibilities. Early June is also the prime time for many migrants that do not normally breed around Nome, including Emperor Goose, Black Turnstone, Red Phalarope, Pomarine Jaeger, Sabine's Gull and a variety of other waterfowl and shorebirds. There are usually a few Red-necked Stints and Slaty-backed Gulls hanging around, and, in past years, this has proven the best time for occasional Asiatic vagrants, particularly shorebirds (among them, Lesser Sand-Plover, Great Knot, Wood Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper and Gray-tailed Tattler).



Utqiagvik (formerly known as Barrow) is an entirely different world! In a setting of 24-hour sunlight, the bird life is unmistakably High Arctic. Three species of eiders nest here (the magnificent King, the beautiful Steller's, and the bizarre Spectacled), with the males resplendent in their breeding dress, and there is no more accessible place in all of North America to see them. Displaying sandpipers are everywhere—Pectorals with their ruffs distended as they perform their strange hooting flights, dressy Dunlins singing shrill "songs" from atop moss-covered hummocks, and ponds alive with gorgeous Red and Red-necked phalaropes. Brilliant Snow Buntings and Lapland Longspurs are the common passerines! Yellow-billed Loon and Sabine's Gull are regular migrants that are seen in most years by our groups, Buff-breasted Sandpipers are present and displaying in some years, and there is always the very real chance of some Asiatic vagrant showing up (vagrants seen on our past

visits have included Red-necked and Temminck's stints, Gray-tailed Tattler, and Spoon-billed Sandpiper). If the lemming population is not in a crash year, we should be treated to the sight of Snowy Owls and Pomarine Jaegers cruising over the tundra. Even Polar Bear (seen by several of our past tours) is a possibility here!



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

June 7, Day 1: Arrival in Anchorage

Participants not continuing from the Grand Alaska: Nome & Gambell should plan to arrive in Anchorage sometime today. Those flying into Anchorage will be met and transferred to the Crowne Plaza Anchorage-Midtown Hotel, where a room will be reserved in each person's name.

NIGHT: Anchorage Crowne Plaza Anchorage-Midtown, Anchorage

June 8, Day 2: Anchorage to Nome

This morning, a group transfer to the Anchorage airport will be provided in time for a morning flight to Nome. Newly arriving participants be met by the leaders and participants continuing from Nome & Gambell upon arrival.

After lunch, we'll begin birding along the Council Road, which hugs the coastline south and east of town. Nome is the ivory capital of Alaska and was its gold capital in years gone by. Today the town is a

major center for the native people of the region. Once a part of the Bering land bridge, the Seward Peninsula has been colonized by several Old-World species. Our first afternoon in this rich area will introduce some of these Siberian colonizers, as well as some familiar birds in decidedly unfamiliar settings.



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

NIGHT: Aurora Inn, Nome

June 9-11, Days 3-5: Nome Area

One of these days will be devoted to exploration of the Kougarok Road, which runs north into the interior of the peninsula. In contrast to the low coastal tundra and beaches that border the first 30 miles of the Council Road, the landscape here is mountainous, with high, rocky domes overlooking the river valleys below. The dense willow thickets along the river are home to another Siberian colonizer, the late-arriving Arctic Warbler, whose hammering trills reverberate through the countryside. Here too are Gray-cheeked Thrush; Wilson's, Orange-crowned, and Yellow warblers; Northern Waterthrush; Fox, Golden-crowned, and American Tree sparrows; and Redpolls (Both "Hoary" and "Common" types, formerly treated as separate species, breed here.). Rapidly flowing rivers and ambient gravel bars are the preferred habitat of Harlequin Ducks, Red-breasted Mergansers, Wandering Tattlers, and Ruddy Turnstones. In good years, both Willow and Rock ptarmigan are frequently seen in willow thickets or rocks along the road. Large mammals are also frequently encountered. In addition to herds of semi-domesticated Reindeer (an introduced subspecies of Caribou; rare in recent years), our groups have been treated to regular sightings of Moose, Grizzly (Brown Bear), and Muskox!

A special quest bird is the Bluethroat, a beautiful little Eurasian Muscicapid (Old-World flycatcher) with a wonderful skylarking song. In years past this was considered one of the most difficult-to-find of all North American breeding birds, with known sites being reached only by special chartered bush flights. In 1987, during a VENT tour, Kevin Zimmer discovered a pair of Bluethroats constructing a nest along the Kougarok Road, farther from Nome than most birders had regularly ventured. These gorgeous birds have been found on every VENT Alaska tour since then, and seem to have become a fixture as well as a true highlight of our annual trips. Conditions permitting, we will offer an optional hike to search for the Bristle-thighed Curlew. This rare bird breeds in small numbers in the Nome area. In a typical year, one to three pairs breed on a large dome about 73 miles out of Nome. At the time of our annual visits, the curlews are often incubating eggs and remaining inconspicuous. The pairs have ranges that cover large sections of the mountain (we have seen these birds pick up and fly two miles to an opposite ridge without stopping), and hence, are not easy to find. To make matters more difficult, Whimbrels, which are quite similar to the Bristle-thighed in appearance (although not in

voice), also breed on the mountain, and are routinely mistaken for the Bristle-thighed by inexperienced or overly enthusiastic birders. Despite this, we have had pretty fair success in showing this rare bird to groups, recording it on approximately 75% of our attempts. The hike for the curlew typically involves a minimum of two hours (often twice that) of walking, much of it uphill (moderate slope) and over tussock grass formations that range from merely annoying to mildly treacherous in spots. **Whether or not you opt to hike for the curlew, a day's birding on the Kougarok Road is not to be missed.** Participants routinely rave about this day, and many have rated it as among their lifetime birding highlights.

Note: Our day on the Kougarok Road is likely to be a long one. After breakfast in Nome, we will be gone for the remainder of the day with lunch in the field. Depending on birding conditions, our return could be delayed until late evening with a very late dinner to follow.



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

The rest of our time in the Nome region will be left somewhat open, with our precise plans no doubt dictated by current road, weather and birding conditions. Most likely, we will devote one full day to further exploration of the Council Road, which, in addition to having the most dynamic spot for migrants (Safety Lagoon complex), can also boast of easily accessible alpine tundra on either side of Skookum Pass, and of the Nome region's only accessible spruce forest near Council itself. The Teller Road will likely occupy us for a day as well. This road is particularly good for alpine-breeding shorebirds, raptors, and Rock Ptarmigan, and has been the most regular road for seeing White Wagtail in recent years. There are always surprises in the Nome region, and it pays to be flexible with our schedule. Past groups have discovered such unexpected treats as territorial Red-throated Pipits, pairs of Red-necked Stints, and true vagrants including Siberian Sand-Plover, Gray-

tailed Tattler, Common Sandpiper, Great Knot, Brambling and Gray Wagtail. In addition to such unexpected vagrants, there are also a few resident birds such as Gyrfalcon, Northern Shrike, and Northern Wheatear that frequently require special efforts to find. Regardless of our exact course of action, there will always be plenty of excitement in birding this beautiful and remote outpost.

NIGHTS: Aurora Inn, Nome

June 12, Day 6: Nome to Anchorage

Depending on our actual flight departure time, we may have time this morning to check vantage points along the Nome coastline before returning to Anchorage. Migrants like Brant, sea ducks, and jaegers may still be moving offshore, and there's always a chance for a rare migrant like Emperor Goose, King Eider, or Sabine's Gull. At some point in the day we will fly back to the bustling big city of Anchorage and prepare for the next stage of our tour. Depending on flight schedules, we should have time for a late afternoon or post-dinner visit to nearby Westchester Lagoon, where water birds abound. Westchester Lagoon is typically dotted with nesting pairs of Red-necked Grebes, and the adjacent tidal mudflats offer foraging sites for Hudsonian Godwits, Short-billed Dowitchers, Surfbirds and a variety of other shorebirds, some of which regularly roost on islands in the lagoon during high tides. Both Greater and Lesser scaup are typically present on the lagoon, which also frequently hosts scoters, goldeneyes, Common Loons and Bonaparte's Gulls.

NIGHT: Anchorage Crowne Plaza Anchorage-Midtown, Anchorage

June 13-14, Days 7-8: Anchorage to Utqiagvik (Barrow)

On June 13, some participants may wish to take advantage of a rare chance to sleep-in, prior to our mid-afternoon flight to Utqiagvik (Barrow). For those not inclined, we'll offer an optional pre-breakfast birding excursion in Anchorage (depending on flight schedules). We'll likely focus our limited time on one of the nearby parks with such boreal forest birds as Spruce Grouse, Merlin, American Three-toed Woodpecker, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Western Wood-Pewee, Alder Flycatcher, Boreal Chickadee, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Swainson's and Varied thrush,

Townsend's and Orange-crowned warblers, Pine Grosbeak and White-winged Crossbill among the many possibilities.

A mid-afternoon flight (subject to change) will take us from Anchorage up to Utqiagvik. Lying well above the Arctic Circle, with sunlight 24 hours a day in summer, Utqiagvik is High Arctic—quite different from other areas we will have visited in Alaska.



King Eiders (males), Utqiagvik, Alaska © Kevin J. Zimmer

The remarkably flat coastal tundra here is pockmarked with shallow surface lakes and puddles and supports a different set of breeding shorebirds. Baird's Sandpipers are regular, Red Phalaropes are common, and Pectoral Sandpipers are everywhere, performing their odd hooting flight displays. In some years, one or more Buff-breasted Sandpipers, White-rumped Sandpipers, or Red-necked Stints have also been present and occasional rare vagrants like Gray-tailed Tattler, Curlew Sandpiper or Little Stint have sometimes been found. Utqiagvik is ***the*** place to see eiders in full breeding plumage. We should see flocks of Kings and lesser numbers of Commons migrating along the coast, and pairs of spectacular Kings, elegant Steller's (declining remarkably in the past few decades) and bizarre Spectacleds (also declining and considered threatened) on the inland lakes. Although the numbers of predators here vary (in concert with the local population cycles of lemmings), we are almost certain to see at least a few Snowy Owls, and perhaps some Short-eared Owls. In good lemming years, Snowy Owls are common, and Pomarine Jaegers can be downright abundant (although it must be said that we haven't experienced a good lemming year for several years now)! Our stay at Utqiagvik will allow us ample time to explore all the roads out of town as well as the base of the Point itself, a long gravel peninsula extending north into the ice-choked Arctic Ocean.



Spectacled Eiders, Barrow, Alaska © Kevin J. Zimmer

Other regular species around Utqiagvik include the likes of Pacific Loon, Tundra Swan, Brant (the western subspecies *nigricans*), Greater White-fronted Goose, Long-tailed Duck, American Golden-Plover, Dunlin, Red-necked Phalarope, Glaucous Gull, Snow Bunting, Lapland Longspur, and both redpolls. We might encounter migrant Sabine's Gulls on the tundra ponds or fly-by or resting Yellow-billed Loons along the coast. With real luck, we could even see a Ross's Gull or a Polar Bear!

NIGHTS: Top of the World Hotel, Utqiagvik

June 15, Day 9: Day in Utqiagvik (Barrow): Return to Anchorage

After a second full day in Utqiagvik, our flight will depart for Anchorage in the afternoon or early evening (subject to change). Our tour will conclude in Anchorage with a farewell dinner and final checklist session.



Snowy Owl (female), Barrow, Alaska © Kevin J. Zimmer

NIGHT: Anchorage Crowne Plaza Anchorage-Midtown, Anchorage

June 16, Day 10: Anchorage

Participants not continuing on Part II will be provided with transfers to the Anchorage Airport for any departing flight.

This will serve as a transition day between tours for Part I participants continuing on Part II or Pribilofs & Anchorage, providing what will no doubt be a welcome "sleep-in" morning (after a week or more of long days in the field) and opportunity for relaxation or sightseeing around Anchorage.

Essential Tour Information

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 12 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: Brian Gibbons and Raymond VanBuskirk.



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



Raymond L. VanBuskirk's love and admiration for the natural world was awakened amidst the pine forests of New Mexico where he grew up. From a very early age he nurtured his passion for birding, and for the past three decades he has dedicated his life to making this passion his career. Raymond joins the VENT family after seven years as a senior tour leader for another organization, and over a decade of leading birding tours independently. Raymond's extensive career includes significant contributions to ornithology, serving as a USFWS research technician studying seabirds on the Arctic Ocean and North Pacific, heading Rosy-Finch and Gray Vireo research studies across New Mexico, developing methods for studying breeding ecology in Grasshopper Sparrows, and holding leadership roles such as past president of the Central New Mexico Bird Alliance and board member of Western Field Ornithologists. He's been a regular instructor for the American Birding Association's youth birding camps and at Hog Island Audubon Camp in Maine. Raymond is a proud member of QBNA, the continent's informal club for LGBTQIA+ birders, where he plays a key role in organizing and leading annual conferences that provide a safe, inclusive space for birders to connect and celebrate their shared love of the outdoors and queerness. When Raymond is not traveling, he resides in St. Louis, Missouri with his partner, Marissa, his stepdaughter, Savannah, their dog, Layla, and two large snakes.

TOUR COSTS & PAYMENT INFORMATION

TOUR FEE: **$8,925** per person based on double occupancy or **$10,675** for a person requiring single accommodation. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 through dinner on Day 9, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, all ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does **not** include airfare to nor from Anchorage; however, flights within the tour are included. The fee also excludes laundry, personal expenses, and other items of a personal nature. For information about gratuities, please see the "TIPPING" sub-section below. If the minimum group size is not met, each participant will be charged a small-group supplement—shared equally and communicated in advance—to allow the tour to proceed.

Participants combining this tour with Grand Alaska: Nome & Gambell (May 29-June 8, 2027) will be rebated **$690** based on double occupancy and **$870** based on single occupancy.

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

PAYMENTS: All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days (February 7, 2027) prior to departure.

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

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

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

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

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

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

BAD WEATHER/ADDITIONAL EXPENSE RESPONSIBILITY: Our Alaska tours operate in the late spring/early summer period. The weather is highly changeable at this time of year and our tours typically experience a range of conditions, from sunny and clear to overcast and rainy. From time to time, dense fog is a problem at the coastal outpost locations of St. Paul (Pribilof Islands), Nome, and Gambell (St. Lawrence Island), all places visited by our tours. Exceedingly foggy conditions occasionally lead to flight cancellations. Under such circumstances, tour participants will be responsible for any additional expenses that result, principally additional hotel nights. If a flight is cancelled due to bad weather, there will be no refund available for the unused rooms at the intended destination. Most hotels used on this tour have a 30-day cancellation policy for group bookings during the high season. In case of flight cancellation, the VENT office or your tour leaders will make arrangements for additional room nights at the location at which your departure is delayed. Tour participants will either need to pay for the additional nights directly, at the time reservations are made, or, depending on the location, upon receipt of invoice from our office after the tour. VENT cannot be responsible for delays or changes in the itinerary due to weather-related problems.

CANCELLATION & REFUNDS

CANCELLATION BY PARTICIPANT:

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

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

CANCELLATION BY VENT:

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

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. A "***Force Majeure***" event means any act beyond VENT's control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

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

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

TRAVEL INSURANCE

SUGGESTED OPTIONS: To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit. VENT has partnered with **Redpoint Travel Protection** as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend its comprehensive **Ripcord** plan, which includes a medical evacuation benefit**.** With this in mind, it is important to note that medical evacuation is not offered by Redpoint as a stand-alone policy or benefit. For travelers not interested in comprehensive travel insurance, VENT recommends **Medjet** and its **MedjetAssist®** plan. Medjet is not

an insurance company, and Medjet Assist is not an insurance product; rather, Medjet is a membership-based air-medical transport company specializing in moving hospitalized travelers from an admitting hospital to a medical facility of choice. Medjet does not provide medical evacuation service from the point of injury or illness; yet, the MedjetAssist plan offers robust enough travel protection to satisfy the medical evacuation insurance requirement in place for many VENT tours.

About Redpoint Travel's Ripcord Plan

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

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

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

About Medjet's MedjetAssist Plan

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

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

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

GETTING THERE & REQUIRED TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

AIR TRAVEL: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Per person fees apply for each set of travel arrangements: $50 domestic; $75 international.* Many of our travelers choose to make their own air travel arrangements, but we emphasize the benefits to using our services. If you book your air arrangements yourself, Victor Emanuel Travel is unable to provide support in managing any flight delays and/or cancellations that could occur before and during a tour. When you purchase air tickets through Victor Emanuel Travel, our staff has ready access to your air ticket record and can provide assistance as problems arise. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements. Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be held responsible for any air ticket penalties.

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

BAGGAGE: Please limit baggage to one piece of luggage and one carry-on. The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal

responsibility of each participant. Please consult your pre-departure materials and/or airline to find out specific weight restrictions.

As a precaution against lost luggage, we suggest that you pack a change of clothes, toiletries, medications, important travel documents, optics, and any other essential items in your carry-on bag. Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government's attempts to improve airport security, we recommend that you check the website of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for information pertaining to permissible carry-on items.

Flights between Anchorage and Nome and Anchorage and Utqiagvik are on large jets, with industry standard baggage regulations. Please use a VENT luggage tag (which will be mailed to all participants a few months prior to departure) to aid leaders in recognizing your baggage during our airport and hotel transfers.

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

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

WHAT TO BRING

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

FOOTWEAR: Insulated waterproof boots, N.E.O.S. Overshoes or walking shoes are recommended for foot gear. **Waterproof footwear of some kind is essential for Utqiagvik.** P**articipants should bring rubber boots, waterproof boots, or N.E.O.S. Overshoes that extend to calf height for walking off-road on the wet tundra. Birding around Nome and on day-trips in and around Anchorage does not require such footwear, because most walking in these locations will be along gravel roads or well-maintained trails, where comfortable hiking shoes should suffice. The one possible exception is the hike for Bristle-thighed Curlews in Nome, where we will be hiking off-road without benefit of trails, and where the tundra can vary from reasonably dry to fairly wet or muddy in spots, depending on local variations in weather.**

ALCOHOL: At the time of this writing, Utqiagvik was also a dry community—the alcohol laws there have changed back and forth over the years.

OTHER ITEMS: We recommend you bring insect repellent, an alarm clock, sunglasses and sunscreen. Although the leaders will have a spotting scope and some reference books, you should also bring your own spotting scope if you are planning on doing digiscope photography, both to avoid monopolizing the group scope(s), and to avoid any chance of scratching the eyepiece of the group scope(s) due to a mismatch in diameter of your camera lens versus the scope eyepiece. A good North American field guide to the birds is the one reference that each participant should plan on carrying for their own personal use.

INTERNET ACCESS & CELLULAR SERVICE: Expect Wi-Fi to be available in all locations. Wi-Fi is typically excellent at the hotel in Anchorage and reliable, but perhaps slower, at the other locales visited. Participants with AT&T as their cellular provider can expect to have cellular service everywhere. However, those with Verizon as their carrier cannot expect service in Nome or Utqiagvik without a GCI card.

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

HEALTH & SAFETY

HEALTH: VENT follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases.

Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccinations.

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

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

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

Insect repellents for the skin are commonly available in three forms:

- DEET: (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide): A chemical compound that is marketed under various brand names (OFF!®, Cutter™, Ultrathon™, etc.) and offered in a variety of formulations including sprays, lotions, time-release preparations, and disposable wipes. The formulations will state a percentage of the active ingredient DEET on the packaging. DEET may be applied to exposed skin directly and/or sprayed on clothing. Please be careful when applying DEET as it can damage plastics and lens coatings.
- Picaridin: A synthetic formulation that is derived from piperine, a substance found in plants that produce black pepper.
- Herbal insect repellents: Various mixtures of organic ingredients such as oils from eucalyptus, citronella, cedar, and other herbs. The herbal repellents are more difficult to categorize

because of the difference in ingredients from one brand to another. There is considerable variation in their effectiveness.

Insect repellent for clothing is marketed in one approved formulation:

- Permanone® (Permethrin): is an odorless spray-on repellent that may be used for pre-treatment of clothing, gear, and tents. It should not be used directly on the skin or sprayed on clothing while it is being worn. The pre-treatment process requires a number of hours to complete and must be done outdoors, so it is best completed in advance of travel. Do-it-yourself pre-treatment must be repeated more often than commercial treatment using Insect Shield® technology. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online.
- Insect Shield® apparel: Clothing pre-treated with Permanone is made by a variety of manufacturers. It is available for purchase from some sporting goods suppliers. The clothing is advertised as retaining its repellency for up to 70 washings.

The US EPA offers a search tool to help choose a repellent that is best for a particular situation. For example, some repellents work for mosquitoes, but not for ticks.

https://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/which-insect-repellent-right-you

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta Georgia. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line at 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636), or you can check their website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

SUGGESTED READING & TRIP PREPARATION

A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend www.amazon.com which has a wide selection; www.buteobooks.com and www.nhbs.com which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and www.abebooks.com for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

Field Guides—Birds:

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

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

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

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

Reference—Birds:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

General Background Reading:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Alaska Guidebooks:

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

A variety of books on Alaska are available through the Alaska Geographic Society: (907) 274-0521. Alaska Geographic Online is found at www.akgeo.com. Some of these resources include: Alaskan Native Peoples, Mammals of Alaska, and National Parks and Monuments of Alaska. On the tour a number of local guide books and pamphlets can be picked up at local gift shops, including: Louise Potter's Wild Flowers Along Mt. McKinley Park Road (Camp Denali Publishers, n.d.). Although out of print, Potter's book is possibly available in Denali National Park; it is also found on www.amazon.com.

CLO Apps

***eBird.* Cornell Lab of Ornithology.** Among the largest and most successful citizen science projects in existence, eBird is an essential tool in promoting bird study and conservation. Among a range of benefits, eBird allows users to keep a variety of lists in a single application. When taxonomic splits are

incorporated, lists are automatically updated. Additionally, trip leaders can share daily lists, so one only need accept a shared list and it will upload to your files. Highly recommended.

Merlin Bird ID. **Cornell Lab of Ornithology.** Merlin is an app designed as a birding coach for beginning and intermediate birdwatchers. Excellent for use in the field, Merlin asks the observer a series of questions about his or her bird sighting, including date and location, and color, size, and behavior of a bird. Merlin then processes the viewer's responses to present a shortlist of possible identifications, from which the user can choose the likely bird. Species profiles include a brief physical description, photographs, and sound samples. The Photo ID feature allows anyone with a camera to snap a photo and obtain a list of suggestions. Merlin's Sound ID feature allows identification of birds through audible recognition. To use Merlin, download the app and the appropriate regional "pack." Highly recommended.

TERMS, CONDITIONS & RESPONSIBILITIES

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

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

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

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

Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on November 10, 2026 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

VENT reserves the right to decline any participant's Registration Form and/or refuse to allow any participant to participate in a tour as VENT deems reasonably necessary, in its sole discretion. VENT also reserves the right to remove any tour participant from any portion of a tour as VENT deems necessary, in its sole discretion, reasons for such removal include but are not limited to, medical needs, injury, illness, inability to meet physical demands of a tour, personality conflict or situations in which such removal is otherwise in the best interest of the tour, the tour group and/or such participant. A participant may also voluntarily depart from a tour. If a participant is removed from a tour or voluntarily departs from a tour, such participant will be responsible for any expenses associated with such removal or departure, including but not limited to, transportation, lodging, airfare and meals, and VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any such removed or departed participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by such participant.

Baggage is carried at the participant's risk entirely. No airline company, its employees, agents and/or affiliates (the "***Airline***") is to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time participants are not on board the Airline's aircraft. The participant ticket in use by any Airline, when issued, will constitute the sole contract between the Airline and the purchaser of the tickets and/or the participant. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for VENT tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airlines Reporting Corporation.

View the complete Terms and Conditions on our website.

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