



SHORT COSTA RICA

Toucans to Quetzals

February 13 - 21, 2027

Costa Rica is one of the premier birding destinations in the world and no part of this small and friendly country has more to offer than the Caribbean lowlands and nearby mountains. The sheer abundance of tropical birds in this region is stunning, not to mention their beauty and diversity, or the backdrop of spectacular scenery and lush vegetation. This compact tour, weekend through weekend inclusive, offers an action-packed introduction to Neotropical birding, yet has enough specialties to attract the well-traveled birder. Such perennial favorites as parrots, hummingbirds, trogons, toucans, and tanagers are numerous and easy to view here, while top quality birds like Great Tinamou, Great Curassow, Crested Guan, Great Green Macaw and raptors still survive well in the region and are, in fact, usually findable. Amidst this wealth are regional specialties like the Lattice-tailed Trogon, Snowy Cotinga, Rufous-winged Woodpecker, and Black-throated and Stripe-breasted wrens. This is the richest area of the country for biodiversity—over 400 species of birds are known from the region—while the cooler slopes not far above offer a different set of species, a high percentage of them endemic to these mountains. At this time of year, many of the birds are in full song as they begin their nesting season.

There are almost unlimited birding opportunities here, and in order to maximize our birding time, we will stay at only two lodges for the entire week, from there ranging out to sample many habitats.

While in the Sarapiquí lowlands, our field trips will include parts of three days in the tropical lowlands at, or near, the world-famous La Selva Field Station of the Organization for Tropical Studies (OTS), including a chance to



enter primary tropical rainforest on excellent trails, plus time to explore the more open habitats near the lodge. Two mornings will be spent in the subtropical and upper tropical zones of the foothills, home to numerous little-known birds not found at elevations just above or below.

Two days still higher up, in the montane forests of Cerro de la Muerte, offer yet another set of birds, those species typical of the higher temperate zone of the mountains. These cool oak-dominated forests are a stronghold for the magnificent Resplendent Quetzal, considered by many to be the most beautiful bird in the world. In general birds are not as abundant or diverse in the mountains, but a high percentage of those present are unique to a limited range at these elevations in Costa Rica and far western Panama, and the pleasantly cool climate makes seeking them a pleasure.

February 13, Day 1: Arrival in San José, Costa Rica

You should plan your flights to arrive in San José Juan Santamaria International Airport (airport code SJO) any time today. After clearing customs and immigration, you will be met by our ground operator and transferred to our hotel. Because most flights arrive San Jose this evening, there are no functions scheduled for today and participants will enjoy dinner on their own.

NIGHT: Xandari, San José

February 14, Day 2: En Route to Sarapiquí

Our trip begins as we travel from the heavily settled Meseta Central up through the mountainous coffee country to the saddle between Poas and Barva Volcanos. From here the road quickly descends the

Caribbean slope of Costa Rica, one of the wettest regions in Central America, an incredibly lush and scenic wonderland of rushing water and deep valleys, much of it still covered in a profusion of exotic plants. Our morning will be spent in this environment, at the La Paz Waterfall Garden, where the hummingbird feeders attract up to 10 species, including Green-crowned Brilliant, Violet Sabrewing, Coppery-headed Emerald, Black-bellied



Prong-billed Barbet

Hummingbird, and Purple-throated Mountain-gem. We should be well entertained by them. There are also plenty of other birds around the feeders and forest edge, including Prong-billed Barbet, Red-faced Spinetail, flycatchers, Silver-throated and several other dazzling tanagers, Yellow-thighed and Sooty-faced finches, and a nice assortment of more widespread birds. We will arrive at the lodge in the late afternoon, in time to enjoy the parade of birds at their feeders.

NIGHT: La Quinta de Sarapiquí, near Puerto Viejo

February 15-17, Days 3-5: La Selva Field Station and nearby lowlands

The Sarapiquí region, although now largely cleared and settled, harbors the richest avifauna in the country, and birds are generally conspicuous. We will bird the humid tropical lowlands for three rich days, visiting the world-famous La Selva Field Station of the Organization for Tropical Studies (near Puerto Viejo) and nearby areas. The great diversity of habitats here includes tall lowland rainforest, second-growth of varying ages, overgrown plantations, successional thickets, riverine forest, and swampy pastures. Within these habitats are numerous specialized niches. All are home to a wonderful variety of tropical birds. Initially we will linger along the La Selva entry road, getting acquainted with the common birds of the open country and second-growth. Flycatchers, tanagers, and seed-eating birds are abundant and conspicuous in the early morning hours.



Great Green Macaw

The forest edge is not far away, and we're sure to spot some spectacular large birds sitting up in the crowns of the tall trees. These may include Crested Guan, Mealy and White-crowned parrots, Gartered Trogon, Keel-billed and Yellow-throated toucans, Collared Aracari, Snowy Cotinga, Montezuma Oropendola and maybe even Great Green Macaw if we are very lucky. Close to the station itself are dense secondary thickets with young trees and vine-tangled forest edge, the preferred habitat for birds like Rufous-tailed Jacamar; Great and Fasciated

antshrikes; Long-tailed Tyrant; White-collared Manakin; Black-throated Wren; honeycreepers; Plain-colored, Crimson-collared and Scarlet-rumped tanagers; and Black-headed and Buff-throated saltators. Hummingbirds visit the flowering shrubs, including Rufous-tailed and Blue-chested hummingbirds, and White-necked Jacobin.

Eventually we will cross the footbridge over the Sarapiquí River (watching for Amazon Kingfisher and Buff-rumped Warbler) and enter the forest, concentrating our efforts on the forest interior. Birds are less conspicuous inside the tall forest, but many of the species found here rarely or never appear at the edge. With just a little luck we should actually see a Great or Little tinamou. Normally tinamous are heard only, or at best glimpsed as they flush, but here they are accustomed to people on the trails and have become quite “seeable.” Other special forest interior inhabitants include Great Curassow, Semiplumbeous Hawk, Brown-hooded Parrot, Slaty-tailed and Black-throated trogons, Broad-billed and Rufous motmots, Chestnut-colored Woodpecker, Northern Barred- Woodcreeper, Red-capped Manakin, Stripe-breasted Wren, Orange-billed Sparrow, and Scarlet-rumped Cacique, to mention a few. La Selva is also a good place to see mammals such as sloths, peccary, agouti and several species of monkeys. There is much to see and do here.



Northern Emerald Toucanet

NIGHTS: La Quinta de Sarapiquí, near Puerto Viejo

February 18, Day 6: Braulio Carillo National Park to San Gerardo de Dota

As we leave the Sarapiquí region today we will make a visit to the foothill forests in Braulio Carillo National Park. These forests are home to some of the least-known birds in Central America, but the birding here is not easy and requires time and patience. At times, almost nothing is heard or seen, but when the weather suddenly changes from sun to mist, or a large mixed flock appears in our vicinity, there can be birds everywhere. The potential rewards here are great, and amidst the more widespread foothill birds we may find specialties like the Snowcap (rare), Green Thorntail, Bronze-

tailed Plumeleteer, Lattice-tailed Trogon, Rufous-winged Woodpecker, White-ruffed Manakin, Tawny-capped Euphonia, and Emerald, Black-and-yellow, Tawny-crested and Carmiol's tanagers.



Resplendent Quetzal

After a picnic lunch, we will continue on to the cool heights of Cerro de la Muerte, a massive mountain in the heart of the country. Here we will get our introduction to the mountain avifauna at several roadside stops, before winding our way down a steep mountainside to San Gerardo de Dota. The lodge is nestled in a gorgeous valley by a rushing trout stream, home to Torrent Tyrannulet and American Dipper, and surrounded by flower-filled gardens, apple orchards, and beautiful montane oak forest. This is excellent habitat for the fabulous Resplendent Quetzal. They are rarely conspicuous, but here they visit the fruiting trees and sometimes even nest in holes in dead snags near the lodge.

NIGHT: Savegre Lodge, San Gerardo de Dota

February 19-20, Days 7-8: Cerro de la Muerte

The highlands of Costa Rica and far western Panama are the only significant mountains between Guatemala and the Colombian Andes. Because of this isolation, a surprising number of endemic birds are found here, many of them quite distinctive. As one goes up-slope, the percentage of species unique to this region increases, and in the highest scrub and grassy openings can be found the Volcano Hummingbird, Sooty Thrush,



Volcano Junco

Slaty Flowerpiercer and Volcano Junco. The dense forests and bamboo thickets just below the tops of the ridges are optimal habitat for Fiery-throated Hummingbird, Black-capped Flycatcher, Black-billed

Nightingale-Thrush, Black-cheeked Warbler, and the strange Large-footed Finch. In the tall oak forests of the main slopes, the birds typically roam in mixed-flocks, and when a flock is located we may well find Ruddy Treerunner, Buffy Tuftedcheek, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Yellow-winged Vireo, Ochraceous Wren, Flame-throated Warbler, Collared Redstart, and Sooty-capped Bush-Tanager. Most of the preceding are endemic to these highlands but we should also find some familiar birds at the southern end of their range, including Red-tailed Hawk, Band-tailed Pigeon, Hairy and Acorn woodpeckers, and wintering wood warblers. Several much scarcer mountain birds also occur here, and with luck we may find Sulphur-winged Parakeet, Costa Rican Pygmy-Owl, Ochraceous Pewee, Wrenthrush, or Black-thighed Grosbeak. In the afternoon on Day 8 we will drive back to San José, completing our wonderful week of birding in Costa Rica.

NIGHT (Day 7): Savegre Lodge, San Gerardo de Dota

NIGHT (Day 8): Xandari, San José

February 21, Day 9: Departure for home



Talamanca Hummingbird

The tour ends this morning with a transfer to the San José airport for flights departing before noon today. Transfers for flights departing at other times can be arranged in advance at an additional charge. When booking your return flight please keep in mind that transfers will depart from the hotel three hours before the scheduled departing flight time. In other words, if you schedule an early morning flight, your departure from the hotel will be very early.

SPECIAL NOTE: This tour is designed for very early morning departures, as daybreak comes early here, with breakfast times typically at 5:00-5:30 a.m. This is important because bird activity in the tropics is always highest in the first few hours of the morning, and we want to be out in the field to take advantage of this. Most days we will return to our lodge for lunch and a “siesta” break.

Essential Tour Information

TOUR SIZE: This tour is limited to 12 tour participants. However, VENT reserves the right to increase the tour limit by one to accommodate a couple when only one space is available

TOUR LEADER(s): This tour is led by **Brad McKinney** and a **Local Guide**.



Brad McKinney began birding during the winter of 1987–88, an exciting year in which many Mexican rarities were recorded in South Texas. His passion for birds has led to numerous birding trips and photography expeditions across North America, Mexico, Central America, and Hawaii. Brad loves pelagic birding and has guided Texas pelagic trips since 1995, many from his home town of South Padre Island. He has been a longtime tour leader at the Rio Grande Birding Festival and has led birding trips across Texas and Mexico. Brad has served on the Texas Bird Records

Committee for six years and co-authored A Birder's Guide to the Rio Grande Valley. He received his degree in biology at the University of Texas at Austin and a master's degree in marine ecology at the University of Texas at Brownsville. Brad's other interests include nature photography, surfing, and snowboarding with his son, Will. He lives at South Padre Island with his wife, Janette, and their dog, Sam.

TOUR COSTS & PAYMENT INFORMATION

TOUR FEE: **\$7,395** per person based on double occupancy or **\$8,325** for a person requiring single accommodation. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 through dinner on Day 8, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, all ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does **not** include airfare to nor from the starting/ending city; however, flights within the tour (if any) 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.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: You may register for this tour through the VENT [website](#) or by calling our office (512-328-5221). The initial deposit for this tour 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 (October 16, 2026) prior to the tour departure date.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CANCELLATION & REFUNDS

CANCELLATION BY PARTICIPANT:

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

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

CANCELLATION BY VENT:

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

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement.

A “**Force Majeure**” event means any act beyond VENT’s control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances;

(h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

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

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

TRAVEL INSURANCE

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: 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 \(TSA\)](https://www.transportation.gov/tsa) for information pertaining to permissible carry-on items.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS:

PASSPORTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure from Costa Rica is required.

VISA: Visas are not required for entry by United States citizens. Non United States citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions.

WHAT TO BRING

CLOTHING: As is the case for all of our tropical tours, lightweight field clothing is the norm for Costa Rica tours.

- **Long-sleeved shirts**
- **A sun hat**
- **thermal top and warm sweater or jacket:** essential for layering
- **gloves and a warm cap:** optional
- **Sunglasses**

FOOTWEAR: Water-resistant hiking boots or walking shoes and a second pair of lightweight shoes. Mudboots are not necessary.

EQUIPMENT: Having the right equipment makes the travel experience more enjoyable. Below is a list of items that will ensure you are well-prepared:

Sunscreen: Additional description as needed.

Small umbrella or poncho: in case of rain.

Binoculars: We strongly recommend you bring a pair of good binoculars of 8x32, 8x42, or 10x42 magnification. Please do not bring mini-binoculars of any kind. Some people like them because they are small and lightweight; but they have an extremely small field of view and very poor light gathering power. You will find that 8x32 binoculars are compact and light enough.

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

DESTINATION INFORMATION & LOCAL CONDITIONS

CLIMATE: Generally, the weather will be warm to hot and humid with daytime highs of 75 to 90 degrees. However, it is cool at night at San Gerardo de Dota (temperatures can be as low as the 40's and occasionally lower), Most days it warms up quickly once the sun is up. Trails should not be so muddy at this season.

CURRENCY: US \$ are widely accepted, as are Visa and Mastercard, so there is no need to change dollars into Costa Rican colones.

ELECTRICITY: 110/220 volts (same as USA); two-pin plugs are standard.

LANGUAGE: Spanish, although English is widely spoken.

TIME: Central Standard Time

INTERNET ACCESS: available at all locations (and generally, but not always, reliable).

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

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

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

[19](#) for our official statement regarding COVID-19 and the operation of our tours. Please visit the CDC website for the most up to date information about COVID-19 and associated guidance for proper health and hygiene: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>.

Insect Repellents – There are insect repellents for the skin and an insect repellent used to treat clothing that should not be applied to the skin.

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

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

An insect repellent for clothing is marketed in one approved formulation:

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

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

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

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line (800) CDC-INFO (800-232-4636). You can check the CDC website at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel>. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html> (click on Travel Health).

A Note About Chiggers: This tour visits areas where chiggers are known to occur. Chiggers are tiny parasitic mites found in most warm weather areas of the southern United States and the world's tropics. They are especially numerous in grassy areas, where, in the immature stage, they attach themselves to other animals or humans who make contact with the grass as they pass by. Chiggers do not suck blood and the majority of the world's species do not carry disease. They do feed on bodily fluids, however, through a process in which a digestive enzyme is produced by the chigger which essentially liquefies the skin around the area where the chigger is attached. The chigger is not usually attached to the skin for more than a few hours before it either falls off or is knocked off. Our bodies respond by producing a hardened area as a defense against the chigger's digestive enzyme. Though the chigger may be long gone, it is the presence of the hardened area, and the body's natural process of reabsorbing it that typically causes intense itching, often lasting for a week or more. Chiggers like to attach themselves to areas of thin skin, like around the ankles, beltline, undergarment lines, knees, and elbows.

Chiggers can be avoided by following these procedures:

- Avoid walking, or standing in particular, in areas dominated by grass. These areas are where one is most likely to encounter chiggers.
- Tuck your pants into your socks to avoid direct skin-to-grass contact. Chiggers can find their way through clothing, but this is a standard and effective prevention technique commonly employed by many.
- Apply a cream-style insect repellent, such as "Cutters" to your body from the waist down BEFORE putting on your clothing.

- Spray your pants and socks with a spray repellent such as “Cutters” or “Off.” Repellants with high concentrations of DEET (70-100%) are most effective. You do not need to apply these to your skin, only to clothing. (Be careful as DEET will damage plastics and lens coatings). Repel Permanone is an odorless aerosol insecticide that offers perhaps the best defense against chiggers. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online. It should only be applied to clothes and allowed to dry before you dress. Never apply Permanone directly to the skin. Permethrin is known to be a highly toxic chemical to insects. It is the active ingredient in Permanone, but is present in a small amount (0.5%).
- Powdered sulfur applied to waist, bottoms of pants, sock and boots is also effective at repelling chiggers. However, be warned that clothes will retain the sulfur odor for several washings.
- Shower at the end of each day in the field. 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. If, however, you are bitten by chiggers anyway, you can reduce or eliminate the symptoms by applying benzocaine or hydrocortisone creams, calamine lotion, After Bite, or any number of anti-itch products.

SUGGESTED READING: A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend www.amazon.com which has a wide selection; www.buteobooks.com and www.nhbs.com which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and www.abebooks.com for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles. We also recommend Andrew Isles books for the Asia-Pacific region at <http://www.andrewisles.com> for difficult to find and out of print books for Australia.

This list includes some basic field guides and reference volumes of use to the visitor. A great deal has been written about all aspects of Australia’s natural history. You will find a variety of selections in any library. Browse around a little and you will discover many resources not listed here.

Field Guides (Birds):

Dyer, Dale, and Steve N.G. Howell. Birds of Costa Rica: Princeton University Press, 2023.

Compact and Complete. One of two excellent field guides, the other being Garrigues and Dean (below).

Garrigues, Richard and Robert Dean, *The Birds of Costa Rica: A Field Guide*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007. Compact and complete, now the recommended field guide.

Stiles, Gary and Alexander Skutch. *A Guide to the Birds of Costa Rica*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990. The first field guide specifically for Costa Rica and still very useful, especially the text.

Ridgely, Robert S. *A Guide to the Birds of Panama*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992 (2nd ed.). Edition expanded to include Costa Rica and suitable for use here.

Field Guides (other):

DeVries, Philip. *The Butterflies of Costa Rica & Their Natural History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997. Lovely guide to butterflies; but no longer easy to obtain.

Garwood, Kim & Richard Lehman. *Butterflies of Central America, Volumes I, II & III*. Edition RiCale Publishing, 2011, 2012. Beautiful new photo guides to the butterflies of the region. Volume I covers most of those seen, while Volume II is only the complex hairstreak and metalmark group and Volume III is skippers.

Glassberg, Jeffrey. **A Swift Guide to the Butterflies of Mexico and Central America**. Sunstreak Books, 2007. The most practical guide to the butterflies of Costa Rica if this is one of your special interests.

Leenders, Twan. **A Guide to Amphibians and Reptiles of Costa Rica**. A Zona Tropical Publication; 2001.

Wainwright, Mark. **The Mammals of Costa Rica**. Comstock Published (a division of Cornell University Press), 2007. Excellent guide to the mammals.

Reid, Fiona A. **A Field Guide to the Mammals of Central America and Southeast Mexico**. Oxford University Press, 1997. Also a good mammal guide.

General Introduction to the Tropics:

Forsyth, Adrian, and Ken Miyata. **Tropical Nature**. Scribner, 1987. Paperback available. Excellent chapters, veryreadable and informative. Written for the layman; highly recommended.

Forsyth, Adrian, **Portraits of the Rainforest**. With photos by Michael and Pat Fogden. Camden East, ONT: Camden House, 1990. Stunning photos and a superb text by one of the best nature writers in the business.

Hilty, Steven. **Birds of Tropical America**. Shelburne, VT: Chapters Publishing Ltd, 1994. An excellent, easy-to-read book on the ecology of neotropical birds. Highly recommended

Kricher, John C. **A Neotropical Companion**. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999. Good introduction to the tropics.

Further Reading:

Janzen, Daniel H. (ed.). **Costa Rican Natural History**. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983. An encyclopedia that contains a wealth of information on the plants and animals of Costa Rica, especially those that have been studied in the field; also has chapters on geology and soils, agriculture, etc. Recommended as a technical reference book.

Perry, Donald. **Life Above the Jungle Floor**. Simon & Schuster, 1986. Out of Print, but still available. A popular book that tells much about life in the tropical rainforest, especially in the little-known canopy.

Skutch, Alexander F. **A Bird Watcher's Adventures in Tropical America**. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977. Fun reading from an eminent ornithologist who resided in Costa Rica.

Skutch, Alexander F. **A Naturalist in Costa Rica**. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1971. Good general background in the tropics from a prolific and very readable author. Reprinted in 1992.

APPS:

Merlin Bird ID. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The best app to use in the field. Nowadays considered the “future of birding”. Once you download the app, you must download the pack for Costa Rica. Includes bird description, photos and voices. Also, there is a section for Bird Photo ID which can be useful in the field. Highly recommended.

Ebird. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. This is nowadays your best way to keep your life list, all in a single application. When taxonomic splits are incorporated, your list will be automatically updated.

Furthermore, your guide will be able to share the daily list. You can just accept the list, and have it uploaded in your files! Highly recommended.

Bird Call Xeno. This app gives you access to one of the largest online bird libraries in the world.

Provided that your phone has an active data service, you'll be able to listen to the bird recordings uploaded in the site.

Costa Rica Birds. Field Guide. Birding Field Guides. A good source of information with bird voices and range maps. It provides multiple filter choices and easy search function. Downloadable in the App Store, Amazon appstore and Google Play.

Mammals of North, Central and South America - A mammal app.

Sky Guide. If you're interested in stargazing, you might want to consider using this app. Just hold your device overhead and it will show you the stars, constellations and planets. Downloadable in the App Store and Google Play.

Maps.me. If you like checking routes, roads and locations, this app allows you to track the tour route even with your phone offline! Just download the app and the Costa Rica map and you will be all set. Downloadable in the App Store and Google Play.

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