

ECUADOR: THE BEST OF AMAZONIA FEATURING NAPO WILDLIFE CENTER

JANUARY 15–24, 2024

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Please note this tour may be taken in combination with *Ecuador: Eastern Slope of the Andes*, January 22–February 1, 2024.



Scarlet Macaws at forest clay lick, Yasuní National Park © Brian Gibbons

From the lush Amazonian rainforests to the high Andean páramos, Ecuador is indeed a special place, boasting good access to birding habitat, unsurpassed scenic splendor, friendly people, and a stable government. Incredibly, over 1,670 species of birds have been recorded in the country, in an area smaller than the state of Colorado! Among them are many of the most spectacular and distinctive Neotropical species. “Ecuador: The Best of Amazonia” is designed to sample this magnificent avifauna in two choice areas, representing very different regions. Between them, they offer a full range of birding possibilities.

The exciting and very comfortable Napo Wildlife Center in the Río Napo lowlands of northeastern Ecuador lies within the most diverse avifaunal zone in the world, the vast rainforests of upper Amazonia. Located in the huge Yasuní National Park, at one million hectares the largest park in Ecuador, the Center is a model in sustainable development, born of the vision of the local indigenous community of Añangu. The lodge is located on the beautiful Añangucocha Lagoon, a picturesque lake ensconced in forest wilderness. This is one of the very few pristine areas remaining in the Napo River drainage, thanks to the care of this small, environmentally conscious community that is the custodian of some 25,000 hectares (that’s 100 square miles!). Over the years, a lot of pressure has been exerted on the community to open up this marvelous area to oil exploitation. The Añangu have stood fast against this tide to achieve their ultimate dream—to build and run their own jungle lodges. Their

vision is one of a healthy environment, one that will support their traditional way of life, while at the same time keeping them connected to a constantly more globalized world through sustainable management. Every member of the village has been involved in the planning and construction of the lodges. Hunting was discontinued years ago by unanimous decision, and the local school has been preparing its students with comprehensive courses in conservation, ecology and ecotourism. Our first two nights here will be spent at the Napo Cultural Center, located right in the Añangu Community. This offers us the chance to meet some of the local people and learn about their lifestyle, plus it is convenient for visiting the parrot licks and islands on the Napo River. After two nights here we will bird our way upstream by canoe to the actual Napo Wildlife Center facility.



Napo Wildlife Center lodge on Añangucocha Lagoon © Brian Gibbons

The lowland rainforests of Amazonia, superficially so uniform in appearance, are marvelously complex in reality. They are home to a web of species inhabiting every imaginable niche, and nearly 600 species of birds have been recorded at or near the Napo Wildlife Center. The full array of lowland birds is present, including guans, large raptors, and macaws. Antbirds are numerous and diverse, and mixed-species flocks of a great variety of birds regularly forage through the understory and sub-canopy here. Clay licks along the Napo River and inside the forest attract large numbers of parrots, while blackwater swamps and river islands add yet another dimension to birding here. Two sturdy towers provide great opportunities for viewing the forest canopy and its special inhabitants. Of course, part of the allure of the rainforest lies in the fact that one never knows what might appear. Seeing birds in this environment is not always easy and will undoubtedly challenge us, but we will surely experience many wonderful surprises here at Napo Wildlife Center.



This tour has been planned to show you a wide array of birds, but a few words of caution are prudent. In our many years of birding the tropics, we have found that it is extremely important to get out early, while the birds are singing and more active. On most days we will be up early and on some days we will be afield all day. Much of our travel and birding in the lowlands will be from boats, especially canoes, or on forest trails. Here we can also expect heat and humidity, while some rain is possible (which, of course, is why these forests are so incomparably lush). Accommodations are very comfortable and far more than adequate (the best in the region), but are of necessity relatively simple. This trip has been planned to show you some of the best of Ecuador, but may be too strenuous for those not in good health or not wishing to spend a good portion of their time in the field.

Those who wish to extend their stay in Ecuador and experience more of this remarkable country should consider joining our connecting tour: Ecuador: Eastern Slope of the Andes, for an unparalleled northern Ecuador birding and natural history extravaganza. Participants on that trip will visit three unique lodges located at different elevation zones on the beautiful eastern slope of the Andes, ranging from foothill cloud forest all the way up to paramo grassland above treeline.

January 15, Day 1: Arrival in Quito. Participants should plan to arrive in Quito today (airport code UIO; most flights from the United States arrive in the evening). Upon arrival, you will be met at the airport and transferred to the **San Jose de Puembo Hotel**. Due to the late arrival time, dinner tonight will be on your own.

Those wanting to avoid the risk of misconnecting or who desire more rest time (or acclimate to the higher elevation of the city) after the lengthy international flight are encouraged to arrive in Quito prior to January 15. Upon request, VENT will be happy to assist with these arrangements.

NIGHT: San Jose de Puembo, Puembo (near Quito airport)

January 16, Day 2: Coca to Napo Cultural Center. After breakfast, we'll transfer to the airport for our flight over the eastern cordillera of the Andes and down to the bustling frontier town of Francisco de Orellana, better known as Coca, on the banks of the Rio Napo. From the airport we will make a short transfer to the local port on the north bank of the river, where we'll board our comfortable covered canoe (complete with powerful outboard motors), and journey downstream, crisscrossing the Río Napo for about two hours to the landing site of the Napo Cultural Center. The birding along the river can be productive, but just watching the river as we slowly glide away from civilization is also fascinating. After arriving and getting situated, we will begin our birding right in and around the community, where the gardens and nearby secondary forest offer many possibilities

NIGHT: Napo Cultural Center, Kichwa Añangu Community

January 17, Day 3: Napo Cultural Center & Napo River. Today we will explore various areas along the Río Napo, including: two *saladeros* (clay licks) that attract hundreds of parrots, parakeets, parrotlets and even some macaws; a river island to seek out the specialized species inhabiting that unique habitat; and an incredible canopy tower from a vantage-point overlooking the jungle canopy.



Orange-cheeked Parrots and Cobalt-winged Parakeets at clay lick (*saladero*) © Brian Gibbons

Species possibilities will be many and we can hope for Spix's Guan; Ladder-tailed Nightjar; Olive-spotted Hummingbird; Gray-breasted Crake; Large-billed Tern; Cocoli Heron; Roseate Spoonbill; King and Greater Yellow-headed vultures; Scarlet-crowned and Gilded barbets; Little and Spot-breasted woodpeckers; Yellow-headed and Black caracaras; Scarlet-shouldered and Blue-winged parrotlets, Cobalt-winged Parakeet; Orange-cheeked, Blue-headed, Yellow-crowned, Mealy, and Orange-winged parrots; Dusky-headed and White-eyed parakeets; Castelnau's Antshrike; Black-and-white Antbird; White-lored Antpitta; Rusty-belted Tapaculo; Parker's, White-bellied, and Dark-breasted spinetails; Amazonian Umbrellabird; Spotted Tody-Flycatcher; Mottled-backed Elaenia; River Tyrannulet; Fuscous Flycatcher; Drab Water-Tyrant; Violaceous Jay; Thrush-like Wren; Oriole Blackbird; and Orange-headed Tanager; among many other species.

NIGHT: Napo Cultural Center, Kichwa Añangu Community

January 18–22, Days 4–8: Napo Wildlife Center. This morning we will depart the Cultural Center and spend part of the morning birding along the Napo River. After a scrumptious buffet lunch at the Napo landing area, we will board hand-paddled canoes to undertake a most unforgettable afternoon wildlife experience as we float and paddle along the mystical blackwater Añanguyacu stream, and its densely vegetated banks, to the Napo Wildlife Center. Getting our initial view of this impressive jungle lodge as we exit onto Añangucocha Lagoon is a remarkable experience. The sights and sounds of this *varzea* rainforest domain, teeming with birdlife, primates, caiman, the possibility of an (up-close-and-personal) encounter with a family of Giant River Otters, and who knows what else, guarantees a memorable adventure.



Golden-mantled Tamarin, Napo Wildlife Center © Brian Gibbons

Based in the unexpected comfort of the ecologically designed accommodations, we'll spend the next five days exploring and experiencing this magnificent area. We will quietly paddle and float along in ecologically constructed canoes, exploring the edge of the beautiful Añangucocha lagoon and the densely enshrouded blackwater streams in search of parrots, trogons, kingfishers, jacamars, nunbirds, barbets, araçaris and toucans, woodpeckers, flycatchers, and much more. Primates (among the 10 or 11 species found here) are often spotted along the streams, including White-fronted Capuchin and Common Squirrel monkeys and the special endemic Golden-mantled Tamarin. Two very sturdy towers will give us the chance to spot the denizens of the high canopy. We'll scout trails through low-lying *várzea* (seasonally-flooded ground) and terra firme (rich and well-drained upland terrain) forest, our ears and eyes attentive to any sound or movement. We will be on the lookout for swarms of army ants with their attendant antbirds, and mixed foraging flocks in the midstory and canopy. Our local guides are incredibly keen and know the exact territories of many of the more special and skulking species and we'll have excellent chances of seeing many of these more "difficult" species here. There will also be some time to relax back at the lodge during midday breaks—believe it or not, you can bird from your very own hammock

The species possibilities at the Napo Wildlife Center are too great to list here, but we will be in the realm of the richest avian diversity on earth, including tinamous; Zigzag, Agami and Capped herons; King and Greater Yellow-headed vultures; many raptors, including the magnificent Harpy Eagle (we would be very lucky to see one, but it is possible); guans; a wide array of macaws and parrots; Hoatzin; trogons; jacamars; toucans; Black-necked Red

and other cotingas; and a great variety of antbirds, manakins, flycatchers, tanagers and more—the list just goes on and on! Almost 600 species of birds have been recorded in this region and we will certainly find a lot of them.



Black-necked Red Cotinga © Brian Gibbons

NIGHTS: Napo Wildlife Center, Yasuní National Park

January 23, Day 9: Return to Coca and Flight to Quito. This morning we will depart from Napo Wildlife Center early and work our way back to the Río Napo by canoe, transferring to our covered motorized canoe for the trip back to Coca. We will then transfer to the airport for the return flight to the international airport in Quito.

Departing participants:

Those not continuing on to *Ecuador: Eastern Slope of the Andes* will be transferred to the San José de Puembo hotel, where you will have a room reserved in your name, and the rest of the afternoon and evening (including dinner) on your own. Those with departing flights scheduled for this evening or the following morning will receive transfer back to the airport.

Continuing participants:

Those continuing on to *Ecuador: Eastern Slope of the Andes* will meet up with newly arrived participants, who spent the previous night at the San José de Puembo, and continue on to Cabañas San Isidro. Please refer to that itinerary for further details.

NIGHT: San José de Puembo, Puembo (near Quito Airport)

January 24, Day 10: Departure for home. Transfers will be provided to the airport in time for this morning's departing flights.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 14 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: This tour will be led by **Paul Greenfield** and **Remy Grefa**.



Paul Greenfield grew up near New York City and became interested in birds as a child. He received his B.F.A. from Temple University where he was an art major at the Tyler School of Art. Since 1972, he has lived in Ecuador where his fascination for birds and art has culminated with the completion of 20 years of work illustrating *The Birds of Ecuador*, which he co-authored with Robert Ridgely. Paul is very involved in saving Ecuador's avian diversity and important habitats through his involvement with various foundations, as well as working with local government and communities to encourage their involvement in the protection of "their" biodiversity and the promotion of birding tourism in Ecuador. He has been showing visitors the birds of this fascinating country for over two decades and has led many Ecuador bird tours. He and his wife, Martha, live in Quito.



Remigio (Remy) Grefa was born and raised along the shores of the Napo River in the tiny indigenous Kichwa community of Añangu, in the upper Amazon Basin of Ecuador. As a child of the rainforest, he developed a close tie with the rich biodiversity of the Amazonian jungle, but became especially interested in birds as a young boy when he noticed foreign visiting birdwatchers arriving at a nearby nature lodge. It was then that he promised himself that when he grew up he would learn the names of the local birds, in English. . . and he eventually did! Throughout his formative years, his community had embarked on a groundbreaking nature tourism project of their own—the building and co-management (and eventually outright ownership) of the fabulous Napo Wildlife Center—and by the time Remy graduated from high school he was ready to join the ranks of this incredible endeavor. He

began working at the lodge from the ground up (odd jobs, dishwasher, laundry brigade, etc.); after a few months he was promoted to waiting tables, and after six months he became one of the lodge's bartenders for a year-and-a-half. He then graduated to boatman, where he was the second canoe paddler for many, many birding groups, which gave him the perfect opportunity to receive hands-on apprenticeship in birding, as well as English. In 2009, he took a job as a waiter on the *Manatee Amazon Explorer*, a houseboat style vessel that cruises the country's Napo and Aguarico rivers. He was eventually promoted again as an official birding and naturalist guide at Napo Wildlife Center by 2017 and continues to fill that role exceptionally to this day. Remy and his wife, Lola, along with their two daughters, Kayana and Wita, live in the parish of Dayuma, not far from the frontier town of Puerto Francisco de Orellana (more commonly known as "Coca").

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.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for this tour is **\$5,995 *** per person in double occupancy from Quito. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 to dinner on Day 9, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, internal air and ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leader. The tour fee does not include airfare from your home to Quito and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$1,800**.

*** Those combining this tour with *Ecuador: Eastern Slope of the Andes* (January 22 – February 1, 2024)**

will receive a combined tour discount of \$300 per person.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, the deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at <https://ventbird.com>) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

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 150 days (August 18, 2023) prior to the tour departure date.

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES: In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement 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 are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

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

CANCELLATION & REFUNDS:

Cancellation by Participant:

Refunds, if any, for any cancellation by a participant are made according to the following schedule: If participant cancels 180 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$500** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made between 179 and 151 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the tour fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 150 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre- and post-tour extensions. **For participants' protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

If participant cancels:

180 days or more before departure date
179 to 151 days before departure date

150 days or less before departure date

Participant's refund will be:

Participant's deposit minus \$500*

No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance of the tour fee will be refunded

No refund available

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person. To qualify, cancellation must occur 180 days or more before departure date; deposit transfers must be made at the time of cancellation; and one transfer per deposit.

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: 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 their **Ripcord** plan. Designed for all types of travelers, Ripcord is among the most comprehensive travel protection programs available.

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

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

*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 14 days of making your tour deposit. 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, mid-payment, 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 14 days in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. The primary medical expense benefit is available to U.S. residents only. For this reason, non-U.S. residents will pay an adjusted premium when purchasing a comprehensive policy, which includes all of the other benefits available to U.S. residents. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

Coronavirus (COVID-19):

Concerns about COVID-19 may present uncertainty for those holding travel insurance policies or who are considering future travel and purchasing such insurance. Redpoint features a **Coronavirus FAQ page** on its website that addresses questions and concerns regarding its travel insurance and the impact of COVID-19. We

strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of topics such as policy coverage and limitations, policy modifications, cancellation, refunds, and more.

Please visit the **Coronavirus FAQ** page at the following link:

https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid_19_faq/

Additionally, some countries maintain COVID-19 entry requirements, including mandates to purchase travel insurance covering medical expenses due to COVID-19 illness and in case of quarantine. Ripcord's comprehensive travel insurance plans are designed to satisfy the various country-specific travel insurance entry requirements. Those who purchase a Ripcord policy will receive a "letter of confirmation" that affirms that the policy satisfies such requirements.

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Per person fees apply for each set of travel arrangements: \$50 domestic; \$75 international.* Many of our travelers choose to make their own air travel arrangements, but we emphasize the benefits to using our services. If you book your air arrangements yourself, Victor Emanuel Travel is unable to provide support in managing any flight delays and/or cancellations that could occur before and during a tour. When you purchase air tickets through Victor Emanuel Travel, our staff has ready access to your air ticket record and can provide assistance as problems arise. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements. **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: We suggest that luggage be limited to *one* medium-sized duffel or other easy-to-manage piece of luggage, plus your carry-on bag. This is for two reasons: (1) **checked baggage weight must be limited on the internal flight** to Coca to up-to **50 pounds (23 kls)** per person, maximum; one **carry-on bag** is limited to **22 pounds (10 kls)**; (2) for those participants considering both Napo Wildlife Center and the Eastern slope of the Andes, **the two regions that we cover, have rather different climates**. While you are at Napo Wildlife Center, your bag for the Eastern Slope segment (should you wish to pack clothing for that trip separately) can be stored with our agent in Quito (upon arrival) and will be brought to Coca for you (also, please see the Laundry Service section below). For the Napo Wildlife Center segment, we suggest that you pack at least one change of clothing in plastic bags (i.e. zip lock) as a precaution against rain or spray during the motor-canoe transfer from Coca to the Napo Cultural Center (you do not need a "dry bag"). Also, please pack your travel documents, binoculars, camera equipment, necessary medications, and basic toiletries in your carry-on bag. Please note that we fly to Coca, and the same security regulations that apply in the United States apply here. Also note that tripods are not allowed as carry-ons and must be packed in your checked baggage.

The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. Please consult your airline to find out specific weight restrictions.

As a precaution against lost luggage on both international and local air travel, as mentioned above, 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: <http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/prohibited/permitted-prohibited-items.shtm>.

CLOTHING: The Best of Amazonia (Napó Wildlife Center) is “staged” in the neotropical lowlands which is generally warm/hot and humid. Dress is casual or informal throughout. Lightweight field clothing is the norm: long-sleeved shirts that dry quickly (although long sleeves are not essential, they *do* offer additional protection from the equatorial sun and biting insects). **Please wear darker colors, not whites, and avoid startling patterns that could frighten birds and other wildlife.** Also important are a hat and sunscreen for sun protection, a rain jacket, poncho or umbrella for rain protection. Good footwear is essential (see FOOTWEAR Section below), and for this we strongly suggest sturdy waterproof hiking boots or mud boots. Napó Wildlife Center provides mud boots and has a wide selection of sizes (although none larger than size 11), but if your shoe size is unusual, the fit might not be perfect. They also provide rain ponchos on all outings, if needed.

FOOTWEAR: For footwear, we recommend a good trail-walking shoe or a lightweight hiking boot when in the field, and a second, lighter pair to change into during downtime around the various lodges. Athletic shoes are acceptable but will not keep your feet dry and can become soiled from muddy conditions. Sandals or other open-toed shoes are appropriate around hotels and in towns. Napó Wildlife Center provides mud boots in most sizes, but be aware that these can become uncomfortable after an hour or two of jungle trail walking, so packing an extra pair of insoles for extra support is highly recommended.

LAUNDRY SERVICE; Excellent one-day laundry service is available and recommended at Napó Wildlife Center at a reasonable cost, greatly eliminating the need to bring lots of extra clothing.

CLIMATE & WEATHER: The Añangu Community and Napó Wildlife Center are in the tropical lowlands at around 250 meters above sea level. Here, you should be prepared for warm nights and warm to hot midday temperatures (the normal daily temperature range is the low 70s to upper 80s or low 90s). All cabins are equipped with ceiling fans as is the dining hall, and around the lodge at least there is often a nice breeze that comes off of Añangucocha Lagoon. Humidity is always high, especially within the forest. We may also get caught in an occasional rain shower.

EQUIPMENT: Note: As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medications and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag. Your leader will have a spotting scope, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so.

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

- **Daypack** – Good for carrying extra clothing, field guides, supplies, and optical equipment during all land excursions
- **Binoculars in good repair** – you may wish to pack a second pair (see Binoculars & Spotting Scope section below)
- **Polarized sunglasses** with good UV protection
- **Sunscreen, lip balm, skin lotions**
- **An ample supply of all personal medication** – it is a good idea to bring copies of all prescriptions
- **Insect repellent** – see INSECT REPELLENT section below
- **Notebooks and pens**
- **Travel alarm clock**
- **Personal toiletries**
- **Collapsible walking stick** – A highly recommended item for those who have trouble walking
- **Tissue packs**
- **Lens cloth**
- **Flashlight or headlamp**
- **Water bottle** – Napó Wildlife Center usually supplies an aluminum water bottle for guests
- **Cameras, lenses, memory cards, and extra batteries**

BINOCULARS & SPOTTING SCOPES:

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

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

CONDITIONS:

Accommodations:

The ecologically designed cabañas at the **Napo Wildlife Center** are spacious (450 square feet) with tall thatched roofs, private porches with lake views, electricity, ceiling fans, and window screens. Each cabaña has one king-sized bed and a twin bed with excellent mosquito netting. Flush toilets and hot water showers are provided in the modern bathrooms. There is also a safety deposit box in each cabaña. The large dining hall contains a library and bar with internet access (somewhat irregular) at a reasonable price.

The ample and comfortable cabins at **Napo Cultural Center** feature solar panel electricity, safety deposit box, mosquito netting, window screens, a private bathroom with hot water and flush toilet, and a balcony surrounded by beautiful natural gardens.

Getting around and birding at these two ‘sister’ lodges (both owned and run by the Añangu community) is done in fiberglass paddle canoes along narrow blackwater streams and around Añangucocha lagoon as well as on foot along forest trails through *terra firme* (over mostly well drained terrain) and *varzea* (through flatter low-lying, often seasonally flooded terrain); the jungle trails (earthen in nature, which can be muddy in certain areas, thus the idea of mud boots) vary depending on the terrain they pass through, some being relatively flat while others are a bit more hilly (especially the ‘Tiputini Trail, which follows along low ridge-tops and drops occasionally through low-lying sections, crossing a couple of forest streams along the way). Alternative options will be made available for participants that would prefer less walking or less time in the field. Also, we will spend a few hours atop two or three (up to four) towers that offer amazing opportunities to see dozens of species that inhabit the forest canopy. The typical daily schedule calls for a 5:30 am breakfast, 6:00 am departure for our morning outings, usually returning to the lodge for lunch and a midday downtime break until about 3:30–4:00 p.m. when we will set out for an afternoon bout of birding. We will weigh options to stay out in the forest a bit longer on one or two days, with a hot lunch brought to us in the field, if conditions and goals seem logistically viable. Birding by paddle-canoe is more relaxed of course and we will have several opportunities to enjoy this style of birding and nature-watching in the daytime and perhaps on one or two evenings. Our local paddlers are experts at maneuvering the canoes silently and carefully to give everyone a chance at seeing the birds we will spot. Our Napo River birding (accessed from the Napo Cultural Center) will be somewhat different, aboard a large, covered motorized dugout canoe to get around; we will observe one river-edge *saladero* (parrot clay lick) from our ‘river vantage point’ and disembark on one or two river islands that hold a somewhat strange combination of habitats (grasses, shrubs, cane, *Cecropia* stands and woodland, etc.) that are home to an interesting ecosystem with a handful of special bird species that are unique to them. We will also visit an interior forest *saladero*, walking along a half-mile paved trail to where we will hope to see hundreds of parakeets, smaller parrots and parrotlets along with the chance to observe Scarlet Macaws (and the occasional mega-mammal!), all at eye-level!

Note: Our two-hour transfer between the town of Francisco de Orellana (Coca) and Napo Cultural Center on our first and last days of the trip will be aboard a long, covered dugout motorized canoe fitted with comfortable seats.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS:

PASSPORTS - A passport is required for entry into Ecuador and should be valid for **a minimum of six months beyond the intended length of your stay**. If you need a passport, you should get it well in advance of your trip departure date. For additional fees, a passport can be issued on an expedited basis. In the United States this can be done at the nearest passport office, most post offices, or the county clerk's office. You may also visit <https://www.state.gov/travel/> for information on how to get or renew a passport.

As a safety measure, photocopy the first two pages of your passport. Keep the photocopies in a safe place, so if your passport is lost you will have proof of identification. Your passport should be signed and easily available at all times. You will need it for check-in at the airport on your first day of departure, so please do not pack it in your checked luggage.

VISAS - Citizens of the United States do not need to obtain a tourist visa to enter Ecuador. Rules and regulations pertaining to non-U.S. and Canadian citizens may vary; please check with the Ecuador consulate or embassy.

CURRENCY & MONEY MATTERS: The official currency of Ecuador is the US Dollar. Your Best of Amazonia/Eastern Slope of the Andes tours include all necessary expenses. You may want to bring enough cash to cover personal expenses not included in the program, such as bar bills, laundry, souvenirs and gifts, extra gratuities, meals on your own, and other personal items. It is strongly advised that your money be in U.S. Dollars and in smaller denominations of cash, as many places we visit may be unable to provide change for large bills. Major credit cards (MasterCard, Visa, American Express, and Diner's Club) are widely accepted in and around Quito. Napo Wildlife Center accepts Visa and MasterCard. Note that traveler's checks are no longer accepted in Ecuador. ATM service is available in the Quito-Puembo area and (in a pinch) at local banks in Coca. If your home currency differs from the US Dollar you can check the latest currency conversion rate by visiting "XE-The World's Favorite Currency Site" at: <http://www.xe.com/>.

ELECTRICITY: 110 volts is the standard (the same as in the U.S.), as are all electrical outlets throughout Ecuador. If you have equipment that uses 220-240V you will need an adapter to plug in your appliances as well as an all-purpose transformer if your appliances are not suitable for lower voltage or if they use a different style plug. Most computers provide plugs that accept both 110-120V and 220-240V simultaneously, though you may need a plug adapter that fits the US outlet system.

INTERNET ACCESS: Free Internet and Wi-fi access is available as follows: Quito (San José de Puembo) and Napo Wildlife Center (available at a reasonable cost, but somewhat irregular).

LANGUAGE: Spanish is the primary language spoken in Ecuador; the Añangu community at Napo Wildlife Center primarily speaks Kichwa (a dialect of Quechua) and Spanish, but many of the lodge employees speak various levels of English. Our naturalist guides at NWC speak English.

TIME: Ecuador is on Ecuador Time (ECT) and is 1 hour behind Eastern Daylight Time (EDT).

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. Also, keep copies of your prescription. 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>.

Malaria and Yellow-fever are reported for Ecuador, although neither are a problem at Napo Cultural Center or Napo Wildlife Center. That said, by following the recommendations set forth in the CLOTHING (above) and INSECT REPELLENT (below) sections, protection against any possible problems relating to insect bites will be assured. Again, please visit the CDC website for the most up to date information about tropical diseases 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).

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.

Field guides:

Ridgely, Robert S. and Greenfield, Paul J. *The Birds of Ecuador*. Cornell University Press, 2001.

This two-volume set is the “Bible” for anyone interested in Ecuador’s birds. The **Field Guide**, with 96 color plates, include illustrations of basically all the species found in the country. The informative text, designed to help species identification, includes distribution maps for all 1,600 species of Ecuador’s birds. The **Status, Distribution and Taxonomy** volume treats each of Ecuador’s species with detailed information not included in the Field Guide.

Additional Reading:

Hilty, Steven. *Birds of Tropical America*. Shelburne, VT: Chapters Publishing Ltd, 1994. Subtitle: “A watcher's introduction to behavior, breeding and diversity.” Highly recommended as the most readable and informative book on many different aspects of bird ecology (and birding!) in the Neotropics.

Ridgely, Robert S. and Guy Tudor. *The Birds of South America: Volume I, the Oscine Passerines*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1989. Excellent reference volumes, with text entries for all species and fantastic illustrations of many. This volume and the next together include all of the passerines.

Ridgely, Robert S. and Guy Tudor. *The Birds of South America: Volume II, the Suboscine Passerines*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1989.

Mammals:

Emmons, Louise H. *Neotropical Rainforest Mammals: A Field Guide*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997. Second edition.

Apps:

Ridgely, Robert S. and Greenfield, Paul J. *Birds of Ecuador–Field Guide*. Birds in the Hand LLC. This App is the updated version of *The Birds of Ecuador*, including nearly 1,700 species now recorded in this tiny South American country. It can be downloaded through the App Store or Google Play. For more information, connect to the following link:

<http://www.birdseyebirding.com/app-pages/birds-of-ecuador-field-guide/>

Or connect directly to: <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/birds-of-ecuador-field-guide/id1194665890> for the App Store; https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.birdseyebirding.birdseye.ecuador&hl=en_US for Google Play.

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that tips are not expected and are entirely optional. Tips should be given directly to your tour leader; they should not be sent to the VENT office.

RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc., a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, “*VENT*”) act only as agents for the participant in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity

which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

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

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

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

Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on April 24, 2023, 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.