

JAPAN IN WINTER: A CRANE & SEA-EAGLE SPECTACLE!

JANUARY 13-25, 2018

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Where else in the world can you watch stunning Red-crowned Cranes dance neck-to-neck amid a lovely snow-covered landscape? Can you picture the spectacle of thousands and thousands of Hooded and White-naped cranes gathered in open fields and then flying to roost at sunset? And what can rival wonderful views of majestic Steller's Sea-Eagles standing on the pack ice? If anything might rival them, it would be watching the world's largest owl, Blakiston's Fish-Owl, snatching a fish from a stream with its huge talons. Japan in Winter is an amazing experience!

Majestic cranes and stupendous eagles lead the way in what promises to be a truly memorable tour, an exciting birding adventure in a culturally unique country. We travel in style throughout the tour, in very comfortable small buses. After a few days on the island of Honshu, including a day in the Japanese Alps, we fly from Tokyo to Kagoshima in the southern part of Kyushu, to marvel at the amazing spectacle of over 13,000 cranes in the paddy fields. We'll watch thousands of Hooded and White-naped cranes, while searching through the huge aggregation for more rare visiting cranes among them. A few Common Cranes and Sandhill Cranes are present most years, and Demoiselle and Siberian crane put in an appearance some years.

When we can tear ourselves away from the cranes, we'll head northward to bird along nearby rivers, in quest of such global rarities as Black-faced Spoonbill and Saunders's Gull.

Before our flight back to Tokyo we will visit Miike, where we'll take a pleasant morning walk in a wooded preserve in search of such endemic and near-endemic species as Japanese Woodpecker, Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker, Ryukyu Minivet, Varied Tit and the scarce and shy Gray Bunting. Then we will leave the rural, quaint feel of southern Kyushu, Japan's southernmost main island, for the wilds of eastern Hokkaido, Japan's northern island.

Winters are cold and white in beautiful Hokkaido, and the landscape more open and rolling than Kyushu's. The beauty of this almost Siberian vista is complemented by some very exciting birds, notably Red-crowned Crane and Steller's Sea-Eagle. We will visit the winter display grounds of Red-crowned Cranes near Kushiro. The graceful cranes perform their spring dance against a backdrop of snowy hills, providing some of the best photo opportunities of the tour. Then we will continue toward the coastal capes and wetlands of southeast Hokkaido. Raptors, waterfowl and seabirds will keep us busy. We will likely encounter dozens of sea-eagles in the area, where Steller's outnumber White-tailed sea-eagles by ten to one. On a two hour boat cruise among islands just offshore, we'll have an excellent chance to see Spectacled Guillemot (a regional specialty) among six or more auks including Least Auklet (the world's smallest auk) and Ancient Murrelet, and loads of fancy Harlequin and Long-tailed ducks.

Japan in Winter, Page 2

We will also spend two nights at a superb and restful ryokan—a traditional Japanese inn—nestled in the Hokkaido woods. This is one of the best sites in the world to see Blakiston’s Fish-Owl, as it visits the stream just beyond the windows. In the whole of Hokkaido, there may be less than thirty breeding pairs of this bird—one of the world’s largest and rarest owls, and an owl that makes its living by catching fish. Although there is no absolute guarantee, we have an excellent chance to see this amazing bird. In 2016 we also saw both Solitary Snipe and Black Woodpecker near the inn.

Lakes and near shore waters offer more than 25 species of waterfowl, from ornate Mandarin Ducks, Smew, Baikal Teal and Falcated Ducks to immense Whooper Swans. Japan in winter is also home to many handsome prized bunting species such as Elegant, Meadow and Chestnut-eared buntings, and wonderful northern finches like Long-tailed Rosefinch, Eurasian Bullfinch, Japanese Grosbeak and Hawfinch.

During our stay at Karuizawa in the Japanese Alps, we may encounter Japan’s “Snow Monkeys,” the Japanese Macaque.

January 13-14, Days 1-2: Travel to Tokyo. Participants can take any of several non-stop flights from various United States airports which will depart on January 13 and arrive at Tokyo’s Narita International Airport on January 14. Upon arrival and after clearing customs and immigration, participants may take the courtesy shuttle to our airport-area hotel, where a room will be reserved in your name. Those arriving early enough on January 14 are welcome to join our leaders for dinner.

Participants wanting to avoid the risk of misconnecting with the group or missing dinner should consider arriving in Tokyo on or before January 13 and spending the night. Upon request, VENT will be happy to assist with any additional lodging arrangements. Kaz Shinoda, the Japanese leader for the tour, will likely offer a pre-trip option on January 14 for those arriving a day early.

NIGHT (January 14): Narita View Hotel, Narita

January 15, Day 3: The Greater Tokyo Area. After breakfast, we will drive to Choshi Port to see masses of Temminck’s Cormorants and a diversity of gulls including Black-tailed, Black-headed, Vega, Slaty-backed, Glaucous and Glaucous-winged gull. On our way to Choshi, we will drop in at a pond where we may see quite a variety of ducks, including Falcated Duck and the beautiful Smew. Later in the afternoon, we will walk along one of the tributaries of the Tonegawa River to look for hawks such as Eastern Marsh- and Hen harrier, Eastern Buzzard, Northern Goshawk, and Eurasian Kestrel. Then we’ll head for our hotel in Kasai, Tokyo.

NIGHT: Hotel Seaside Edogawa, Tokyo

January 16, Day 4: Tokyo to Karuizawa. Before breakfast, we will search out various birds in the woods around our hotel, which is located in Kasai Seaside Park and provides an excellent introduction to common Japanese birds such as Oriental Turtle-Dove; Bull-headed Shrike; Brown-eared Bulbul; Daurian Redstart; Dusky, Pale and Brown-headed thrush; Japanese Bush-Warbler; Japanese White-eye; White-cheeked Starling; Oriental Greenfinch; and Large-billed Crow. The park is also our best chance during the tour to see beautiful Azure-winged Magpies. The park faces Tokyo Bay, where vast flocks of Greater Scaup and Great Crested Grebe blanket the water. Rarities occasionally turn up here as well. After breakfast, we head for Karuizawa in the foothills of the Japanese Alps. On the way, we will drop in at Ura-Myogi, which is famous for its outstandingly beautiful mountain and forest scenery. Here we will be on the lookout for Brown Dipper and the endemic Japanese Accentor. With luck, we may encounter the mighty Mountain Hawk-Eagle.

NIGHT: Shiotsubo Onsen Hotel & Spa, Karuizawa

January 17, Day 5: Karuizawa to Haneda, Tokyo. Karuizawa holds out some superb possibilities among Japanese and Asian specialty birds. We will be on the quest this morning for such specialties as Japanese Pygmy and Japanese (or Green) woodpecker, Japanese Grosbeak, Hawfinch, Pallas's and Long-tailed rosefinches, Brown Dipper, Red-flanked Bluetail, Brambling, Eurasian Siskin, and the gorgeous Copper Pheasant. Though uncommon in January, Japanese Waxwing is possible as well. The bird feeders at our hotel attract some of these species as well as four species of tits (Varied, Coal, Japanese, and Willow), and sometimes Japanese Accentor, which should provide some nice photographic opportunities. We will visit the Chikumagawa River in the afternoon, an excellent area to look for the rather scarce and well camouflaged Long-billed Plover as well as the endemic Japanese Wagtail, both of which favor wide rocky streams. A reservoir nearby attracts an amazing variety of wintering ducks including Eastern Spot-billed Duck, Common Pochard, Tufted Duck and Smew. Rarities such as Falcated Duck or Baikal Teal are also much hoped-for possibilities. Leaving Karuizawa, we will drive to Haneda, in preparation for a morning flight to Kyushu.

NIGHT: Haneda Excel Hotel Tokyu at Haneda Airport, Tokyo

January 18, Day 6: Travel to Izumi on Kyushu. A morning flight takes us to Kagoshima on the island of Kyushu, the southernmost of the four main islands of Japan, where we should be seeing our first birds on Kyushu by late morning. By the afternoon we will be in search of such woodland birds as Elegant Bunting, Olive-backed Pipit, Ryukyu Minivet, Goldcrest, and Japanese Bush-Warbler, as well as gorgeous Mandarin Ducks at a reservoir near the Sendai River. On the way to our hotel, we will drop by a bluff to look for Japanese Murrelet and Blue Rock-Thrush. At Arasaki around sunset, we will take in the spectacle of thousands of White-naped and Hooded cranes flying to their nighttime roost.

NIGHT: Hotel King, Izumi

January 19, Day 7: Arasaki. Early this morning we will bird along a river near our hotel. After breakfast, we will visit the Arasaki Crane Reserve, where over 15,000 cranes gather each winter. The most common species here are Hooded and White-naped crane. Among them, we may find small numbers of Common and Sandhill cranes. There is even a slim possibility of rarities such as Demoiselle and Siberian crane (last seen in 2013). A few Black-faced Spoonbills may be present here too. Adjacent farmlands attract such birds as Japanese Green Pheasant, Ruddy-breasted Crake, Russet Sparrow, Carrion and Large-billed crow, Rook, and Daurian Jackdaw. On past tours, such rarities as Ruddy Shelduck (last seen in 2014), Temminck's Stint, and Long-toed Stint have turned up at Arasaki. Later in the afternoon, we will look for such northern bunting specialties as Meadow, Rustic, Chestnut-eared, Black-faced, and Common Reed buntings in reed beds along a river. Chinese Penduline-Tits also reside in the reed beds.

NIGHT: Hotel King, Izumi

January 20, Day 8: The Hikawa and Kumagawa Rivers. We will drive northwards for a couple of hours to the Hikawa and Kumagawa Rivers today. Targets in this region are Saunders's Gull and other gulls such as Vega and Black-tailed, and wintering shorebirds and waders including the endangered Black-faced Spoonbill. Other likely sightings include Common Shelduck, Northern Lapwing, Kentish Plover, Green Sandpiper and Eurasian Curlew. Pallas's Gull is an occasional rarity in this vicinity. The reed beds and paddy fields along the rivers sometimes attract hundreds of Russet Sparrows and thousands of Brambling. Another couple of hours' drive will take us to our Japanese inn near Miike, where you may enjoy the natural hot springs.

NIGHT: Yunomoto-Onsen Ryokan, Miyazaki*

*Single accommodations may not be available

January 21, Day 9: Morning in Miike; Travel to Kushiro on Hokkaido. We will visit Miike in the morning for woodland birds. Miike forms a part of the Kirishima-Yaku National Park, a fascinating region of volcanic activity. Miike is a circular lake about a kilometer in diameter surrounded by lush evergreen forest. Many of Japan's more common woodland birds occur here, plus such specialties as Japanese Woodpecker, Gray Bunting

Japan in Winter, Page 4

and Ryukyu Minivet. General woodland birds may include Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker, Olive-backed Pipit, Red-flanked Bluetail, and Japanese and Varied tit. White-backed Woodpecker is possible here and, in 2014, 2015 and 2016, we saw a Forest Wagtail at Miike (very rare for the area). With luck, among the wintering waterfowl such as Eastern Spot-billed Duck and Eurasian Wigeon on the lake, we may find the lovely Baikal Teal.

Leaving Miike, we will return to Kagoshima in time for a mid-afternoon flight to Tokyo's Haneda Airport, connecting from Haneda on a flight to Kushiro (on the northern island of Hokkaido) that arrives around 7:30 pm. (subject to change). We will transfer to Tsurui Village, where our cozy hotel is located.

NIGHT: Hotel Taito, Tsurui*

*Single accommodations may not be available

January 22, Day 10: Tsurui and Lake Kussharo. At sunrise, we will watch the spectacle of a roost of Red-crowned Cranes in the pink light of early morning reflecting off the snow, at a bridge near our hotel. After breakfast, we will visit the crane sanctuary in Tsurui to see and photograph at close range the renowned wintering flocks of Red-crowned Cranes. We will hear the hauntingly beautiful calls of these graceful cranes, as they perform their amazing dance. In the afternoon, we will drive north to Lake Kussharo to see and photograph Whooper Swans in the heavy frost and mist and look for other birds including possibly Ural Owl and winter songbirds. At our traditional inn in Yoroushi, we will mount a vigil for the globally rare Blakiston's Fish-Owl, which often turns up in the inn's yard after dark or in the pre-dawn hours. No more than 30 breeding pairs survive on Hokkaido. With a bit of good fortune, we will see this rare denizen of the northern forests. (Blakiston's Fish-Owl has been seen well by the group on the tour each year so far, 2013-2017.)

NIGHT: Yuyado Daiichi, Yoroushi

January 23, Day 11: Lake Furen and Ochiishi Nature Cruise. Today we will enjoy spectacular views of numerous Steller's and White-tailed sea-eagles at Lake Furenko. On a two-to-three hour boat cruise among islands just offshore, we'll have an excellent chance to see Spectacled Guillemot (a regional specialty) among six or more auks including Least Auklet (the world's smallest auk) and Ancient Murrelet, and loads of fancy Harlequin and Long-tailed ducks. We may be lucky enough to find a few Red-faced Cormorants among the more common Pelagic Cormorants. For those who wish to skip the boat trip, we may offer the alternative of a bus tour to a couple of birding sites on the Nemuro Peninsula. Many other birds are possible today too, such as Black and White-winged scoters, as well as Common and Red-breasted mergansers. Gulls are abundant too, with Slaty-backed, Glaucous and Glaucous-winged all common, and several grebes and loons such as Pacific Loon are possible. As we travel, we will watch for herds of Sika Deer and Red Foxes. And with one more overnight stay in Yoroushi, we will have another chance of a night-time sighting of Blakiston's Fish-Owl.

NIGHT: Yuyado Daiichi, Yoroushi

January 24, Day 12: Kushiro Area; Return to Tokyo. In the morning, at the river at Yoroushi we will be on the lookout for Brown Dipper and the scarce Solitary Snipe. Then we will take a leisurely drive back to Kushiro Airport. On the way, we will drop in at Akan International Crane Center Grus to bid farewell to the Red-crowned Cranes at a spot that offers excellent crane photo opportunities. Trees at the Crane Center can be a good spot for Coal Tit, Goldcrest, and Eurasian Treecreeper. We'll return to Kushiro Airport for a late afternoon flight to Tokyo's Haneda Airport, arriving in time for a break before a farewell dinner (flights subject to change).

NIGHT: Haneda Excel Hotel Tokyu at Haneda Airport, Tokyo

January 25, Day 13: Departure for Home. Shuttle transfers will be provided to Narita International Airport for various international departures. Please schedule international flight departures from Narita Airport no earlier than 12:00 p.m., to allow time to shuttle from Haneda Airport (90 minutes) and arrive with plenty of time (two and a half to three hours) before your departure.

Kaz Shinoda, the Japanese leader for the tour, may offer a post-trip option on January 25 for those flying home from Narita the following day.

TOUR SIZE: This tour is limited to 9 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: Kaz Shinoda & Bob Sundstrom

Kaz Shinoda has been integrally involved in the logistics and planning of our Japan in Winter tour. He was born in Yokohama, Japan, in 1957. From age 11 to 14 he lived in South Africa with his family and often went on safari where he learned about the fascinating world of wildlife. He later became a birdwatcher, and has now been a keen birder for nearly 20 years. Kaz graduated from Waseda University in Tokyo, and then taught English to high school students for more than two decades before dedicating himself to guiding visiting birders in the Tokyo area and around Japan. As a birding guide with more than a decade of experience, he has led birders throughout the Japanese Archipelago. As a nationally licensed English-speaking Tour Guide, Kaz is knowledgeable not only about birding in Japan, but also about Japanese geography, history, and especially culture, important subjects that help enhance a birding trip to this culturally unique country. His guiding experience has taken him throughout the country from Hokkaido to Okinawa and many places in between including Tobishima, Karuizawa, Hachijo-jima, Kyushu, and Amami. Kaz's considerable organizational and logistical skills are key to the success of our winter tour in Japan, while his philosophy of giving clients an enjoyable and rewarding birding experience makes him an extremely popular guide.

Bob Sundstrom has led VENT tours since 1989 to many destinations throughout North America, as well as Hawaii, Mexico, Belize, Trinidad & Tobago, Japan, Turkey, Iceland, Papua New Guinea, the Southwest Pacific, Antarctica, the Bering Sea, and the Galapagos. When not on tour, Bob keeps busy as lead writer for the public radio program *BirdNote*, heard on over 200 radio stations nationwide (visit www.birdnote.org.) With a doctorate in anthropology from the University of Washington, Bob enjoys learning about both the natural and cultural settings of his tours. He and his wife Sally live in rural Scatter Creek Valley, south of Olympia, Washington. Bob lived in Seattle for more than 25 years, and continues to teach birding workshops there and leads a program of short, regional tours starting in the Seattle area. During two seasons of work in the Pribilof Islands, he helped chronicle the occurrence of North American bird rarities. A skilled birder with a special interest in bird song, Bob has served on the boards of several nature and conservation organizations as well as the Washington State Bird Records Committee. He is a co-author of *The National Audubon Society Field Guide to the Pacific Northwest*.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for this tour is **\$7,295** per person based on double occupancy from Tokyo. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 2 to dinner on Day 12, lodging as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. The fee does not include airfare from your home to Tokyo and return, internal commercial Japanese flights as described in this itinerary (see "AIR INFORMATION" below), airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, telephone 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 **\$355**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you. This fee does not cover nor guarantee single accommodations at Yunomoto-Onsen Ryokan (Day 8) and Hotel Taito Tsurui (Day 9). However, if available, single accommodations will be provided at no additional cost.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The initial deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person. If you would like to pay your initial 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. If you prefer to pay the initial deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with American Express, MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form

Japan in Winter, Page 6

(available from the VENT office or by download at www.ventbird.com) should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

PAYMENTS: Initial tour deposits may be made by American Express, MasterCard, Visa, check, money order, or bank transfer. All other tour payments, including second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc., must be made by check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days 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.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Cancellation penalties and refunds are based on the following schedule: if cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$250** 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 fewer than 120 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions. *We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.*

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$250*
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	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.

Upon cancellation of the transportation or travel services, where you, the customer, are not at fault and have not cancelled in violation of the terms and conditions of any of the contract for transportation or travel services, all sums paid to VENT for services not received by you will be promptly refunded by VENT to you unless you otherwise advise VENT in writing.

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.

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.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE: **We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance as soon as possible to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. VENT recommends Travel Insured International as our preferred insurance provider.** Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available; however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering.** Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as work-related cancellation, medical upgrade, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause among others. **Contact Travel Insured International (www.travelinsured.com or 800-243-3174) prior to registration for details.** Not all insurance providers provide the same levels of coverage. If

you purchase insurance through a company other than Travel Insured International, please be advised that rules and stipulations may be different.

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. 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 responsible for any air ticket penalties.*

Note that there are some specific internal commercial Japanese flights associated with this tour, the cost of which is not covered by the tour fee, with which the VENT office will be happy to assist.

PACE: Walking will be at a relaxed pace mostly on flat ground. There will be no long walks except in Karuizawa, where we might walk a bit on icy tracks. Mostly, our bus or a nature center will be near at hand.

CLIMATE: At the time of our visit, we are likely to encounter a wide range of temperatures (from highs in the 50s to lows near 0 degrees Fahrenheit). As we head north, temperatures and humidity will decline. Please be prepared for very cold conditions at times, especially along the coast and at higher elevations, including snow and ice in Hokkaido and Karuizawa (see CLOTHING section below).

ACCOMMODATIONS: Hotels are a mixture of Western and traditional Japanese styles, and standards are very good. Most rooms are en suite, with private bathrooms. All the hotels and inns in Kyushu and Hokkaido have natural hot springs, which is very Japanese. As they provide excellent food, you will enjoy Japanese cuisine to the fullest. Sometimes meals will be taken at Japanese low tables. On a few nights you will be sleeping on traditional futons, which are quite comfortable.

INTERNET ACCESS: Wi-Fi is available at all hotels and lodges with the exception of Shiotsubo Onsen, Yunomoto-Onsen Ryokan, and Hotel Taito (subject to change.)

CLOTHING: Neat, casual clothing is recommended in this part of the world. For men, tie and jacket are not necessary; for women, slacks are perfectly acceptable for any occasion, as are skirts and dresses. Japan is a modern first world country where rules very similar to those of North America apply. In Japan it is customary to remove one's shoes when entering houses, traditional hotels (not Western hotels), temples and many other places. Each space will provide slippers for indoor wear. You may wish to bring your own slippers if you have large feet or prefer your own slippers.

In the south, winters are cool but sunny, but as one ventures further north, temperatures drop and snow falls. The island of Hokkaido in the far north of Japan and Karuizawa at the higher elevation can be quite cold (below freezing) in winter, with snow guaranteed. Hand and foot warmer chemical packs are strongly recommended. Please bring adequate warm clothing layers, including a waterproof/windproof jacket, gloves, hat and an outer layer to wear over pants, like rain/wind pants, for the Hokkaido and Karuizawa trips. You will find long underwear very welcome in the colder areas, and perhaps two layers for very cold morning outings. You will want all your warm layers for the two-to-three hour boat trip on Hokkaido, as it will be cooler when the boat is moving. A combination of insulating and windproof layers is preferable for these varied conditions to a cumbersome insulated parka.

Laundry service will be available at some (but not all) of the hotels at which we stay in Japan, primarily coin-operated, do-it-yourself machines.

FOOTWEAR: Lightweight hiking shoes or boots will be ideal for the warmer part of the trip, but you will need insulated footwear for the colder portions such as the Japanese Alps and snowy Hokkaido.

Japan in Winter, Page 8

We may encounter icy walking conditions on trails from the lodge in the Japanese Alps and on Hokkaido. For these areas, you may want to consider bringing along some ice traction devices that attach to your boots, of which there are a variety of items on the market. What we recommend are not serious mountaineering crampons, but some of the more modest accessories like the Yaktrax Pro or Kako ICEtrekkers, each weighing about 12 ounces. Although it's possible that the weather may be such that we won't need them, they might just come in handy to reach some special birds in icy conditions. You may peruse a sample of them on REI's website (<http://m.rei.com/mt/www.rei.com/category/12221603>).

SPECIAL NOTE: Flash photography of birds and the use of playback to elicit birds is not culturally acceptable in most cases in Japan. Please try to avoid bright colors. Although the birds and other wildlife are relatively approachable, we will be trying to see a number of very elusive species. Muted colors will enhance our chances. Please avoid brightly colored clothes, hats, gloves, bags, or other paraphernalia while birding.

CURRENCY: Japanese Yen. Credit cards are not as widely accepted as is customary in the U.S. or Europe, so it is important to have a ready supply of yen if you want to shop. ATM's are increasingly available and we recommend Citibank as all airports we utilize have an outlet for this bank. You can also purchase yen at Japanese airport currency exchanges, where you will almost certainly obtain a better rate than in the U.S.

DOCUMENTS: A passport valid for the full duration of your planned stay is required for United States citizens to enter Japan. U.S. citizens are not required to have a visa for stays of less than 90 days. Non-United States citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions.

EQUIPMENT: You should have a pair of binoculars in good condition (please check before departure!). Your tour leader will be carrying a spotting scope; however, you are **welcome and encouraged to bring your own spotting scope if you so wish**. You should bring all the camera equipment and spare batteries that you will need as there will be many excellent photographic opportunities. Batteries are widely available. UV and polarizing filters are recommended. Plastic bags are very useful to protect equipment from rain and dust, and you may wish to have an insulated wrap for your camera when outdoors, as cold temperatures can impair the electronics of digital cameras.

A small day pack (either waterproofed or with a strong plastic bag inside) is essential for carrying excess clothing, camera equipment, toiletries, food, and water. However, in many of the areas we will be birding, we will have regular access to our transport, which will be attended by a driver. Water bottles are important if you like to carry a regular supply of water. Drinks may be purchased from automatic dispensing machines virtually anywhere.

Other useful items include:

1. A small flashlight or headlamp may be essential to find your way around your room at night.
2. Handy-wipes and paper tissues are especially useful. All participants should carry sufficient for their personal needs for the entire tour.
3. Spare glasses or contact lenses.
4. A washcloth (face cloth) if you need one, since not part of most Japanese amenities.
5. A cloth napkin or supply of paper napkins. Napkins may not be present in some traditional inns.
6. Sunscreen and lip balm are essential.
7. Umbrella—the collapsible type is easy to carry and useful both against rain and sun.

8. If you have difficulty using chopsticks (*o-hashhi*), we would recommend bringing your own knife and fork in your checked luggage, as these are often not available in some restaurants.
9. An insulated wrap for your camera when outdoors, as cold temperatures can impair the electronics of digital cameras.
10. Hand and foot warmer chemical packs are strongly recommended, for the coldest hours on a few days of the trip.

LUGGAGE: When traveling within Japan, officially one piece of checked luggage weighing no more than 44 pounds is allowed free of charge. In addition you are allowed one piece of carry-on luggage and whatever you carry over your arm or in your hands (i.e. coat, book, purse, umbrella etc.). Expect overhead storage compartments comparable in size to those on American carriers.

MISC:

Departure Tax – included in the cost of your air ticket

Electricity - Japan uses 100 volts, 50 cycles, AC. American devices work just fine on this current. The Japanese-style plug has two parallel flat blades, similar to most American plugs, but actually slightly smaller. If you have devices with plugs with one larger blade (like most American extension cords), you will need an adaptor to use them in Japanese outlets.

Language - Japanese is the national language. Some younger people speak a little English but it can be difficult at times to find someone who speaks English fluently. Your local guide speaks, reads and writes fluently in both Japanese and English. Airport shuttle buses to hotels typically have the hotel name in both Japanese script and in English. Airport personnel are very skilled in using placards to help you find shuttles, etc.

Time - Japan is 15 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time.

Country Dialing Code - 81

Meals – Most breakfasts and dinners will be served in the lodging where we stay on a given day, and the food is of good to excellent quality. Lunches will typically be taken in a restaurant or café on the day's birding route. Some lunches we will take out from convenience stores, especially where no café is readily available. Convenience stores in Japan are of a different order than those in the U.S., and don't occupy the same lower status that they do in the U.S. A wide variety of hot and cold foods and drinks are often available, and they make convenient and clean restroom stops as well. These stops also enable a way to stock up on snacks and drinks for the day or perhaps several days on the same island.

Snacks/Drinks – You may want to bring some of your favorite snacks such as granola bars or dried fruit, but you will find that convenience stores are very common and widespread, provide variety and quality superior to that in the U.S., and they stock many snacks and other products that you will be familiar with (and some not so familiar). Vending machines for drinks are ubiquitous, even in rural areas, and typically stock both cold and hot beverages in cans and plastic bottles.

HEALTH: Unless advised otherwise, all water including tap water is potable and you can safely enjoy the salads, fresh fruit and vegetables.

No vaccinations are required, however, cholera and yellow fever inoculations are required only if you arrive within five days of departing from an infected area. A number of forms of hepatitis may be present in Japan, but very rare. We recommend participants contact their doctor for advice prior to departure.

All participants should bring a good quantity of all their medical/pharmaceutical supplies, as these will be very difficult to obtain anywhere on the tour.

If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, 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.

Japan in Winter, Page 10

As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against hepatitis types A and B.

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

SUGGESTED READING: 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.

Brazil, M. A. 2009. *Birds of East Asia*. * Princeton University Press, Princeton & Oxford. *Highly recommended:* An up to date publication on the birds of east Asia in English. This is the best available guide, and illustrates all the species that we are likely to encounter on this tour. Now also available as a digital download.

Brazil, M. A. 1991. *The Birds of Japan*. Christopher Helm, London. Provides a detailed summary of the status of all Japanese birds.

Brazil, M.A. 1987. *A Birdwatchers Guide to Japan*, Kodansha International, Japan. A detailed site guide with much information relating, in particular, habitat, likely birds, accommodation, and useful information for getting there. Out of print.

Wild Bird Society of Japan, 1982. *A Field Guide to the Birds of Japan*. At one time the best available guide for Japan, the common names and taxonomy are now out of date, and the illustrations not nearly as good as Brazil's 2009 guide to the region's birds.

Shimba, T. 2007. *A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Japan and East Asia*. Christopher Helm, London. An up to date publication on the birds of Japan in English, a photographic guide.

For a more exhaustive bibliography, see selections in the Apa and Lonely Planet Guides.

If participants have difficulty obtaining any titles, they may wish to contact the Natural History Book Service which has one of the most comprehensive collections of books on natural history: 2 Wills Road, Totnes, Devon, TQ9 5XN U.K. email: customer.services@nhbs.co.uk. Phone: 011-44-1803865913, Fax: 011-44-1803865280.

MAPS: Japan - 1:1,500,000 Nelles series

* Recommended to bring on tour.

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.

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