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PRESS RELEASE

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Two Guides from Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, the World's Largest Company Specializing in Birding Tours, In Guyana for Familiarization Trip

GEORGETOWN—Two esteemed birding guides, Steve Hilty and David Ascanio, from Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT) will be in Guyana from October 28 through November 4 on a product Familiarization (FAM) trip. The FAM trip is part of the Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA) – Guyana Trade and Investment Support (GTIS) birding tourism program that was launched in July.

In the more than 25 years that VENT has been doing business, they have grown to become the world's largest company specializing in birding tours. Every year they offer roughly 140 tours to more than 100 different destinations. And while VENT does conduct their trips with their own expertly trained guides, the company supplements their tours with local drivers and guides as well as in-country tourism operators. VENT also supports local conservation organizations in the countries where they offer tours.

The two VENT guides that will be on the trip are renowned in their own right. Steve Hilty is the author of several books, including *Birds of Venezuela*, the most common book used for birding in Guyana. Steve has combined his Ph.D. in zoology with more than 30 years of guiding trips in North and South America to become an expert in Neotropical birding. David Ascanio is widely considered to be the top birding guide in his home country of Venezuela. David has been guiding birding tours for 20 years in locations such as Venezuela, Peru, Ecuador, and Trinidad and Tobago, and is also renowned for his skill in duplicating bird vocalizations.

Both guides were recently in Guyana as part of a VENT birding tour that used a cruise ship to visit several different South American countries. The group enjoyed two splendid days of birding at and around Shanklands and Kaieteur Falls. The daily web log entries for Guyana (entries can be found at www.ventbird.com/news/journals/443/) described their time birding in Guyana as, "one of the best days of birding on our trip." The entry goes on to describe the experience, which included a Harpy Eagle sighting as, "an incredible day which left all of us feeling that this was one of those days that we will remember forever...It was truly phenomenal."

Thanks to the strategic efforts of the GTA-GTIS birding program, VENT recognizes that Guyana is serious about building its birding tourism sector and are very interested in expanding their Guyana program. To help facilitate the planning of possible future VENT trips in Guyana, the two guides will visit areas that remain unexplored to them. They will spend one day birding in Georgetown and six days in Guyana's interior, with stops at Iwokrama Rainforest, Rock View Lodge, Wowetta Village, and Karanambu Ranch.

The VENT FAM trip is the first of three that will be bringing international birding tour operators and media to Guyana to sample the country's birding experience. The trips with niche tour operators are one key component of the GTA-GTIS birding program strategy. This aspect of the program is focused on building a tour operator network instead of targeting consumers directly.

To gain the support from tour operators, it is important to give them opportunities to experience Guyana first hand. The tour operators must inspect and experience Guyana's birds and tourism products and services before they will design and sell a Guyana birding tour. The participants have been carefully selected to ensure that they have high potential of bringing groups to Guyana.

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Victor Emanuel Nature Tours Guides In Guyana for Familiarization Trip (page two)

Niche tour operators are a good target for Guyana because they bring in small groups of visitors, often consisting of loyal clients willing to explore new and different destinations. Focusing on the group tour market is beneficial because it will allow Guyana to develop better and more cost competitive birding programs. Further, working with groups should have a much better impact in terms of creating demand for local bird guides and other birding and general tourism related services and products within Guyana.

The GTA-GTIS birding program targets the travel trade as well as media and consumers. It includes birding guide training, development of birding tourism marketing materials including a website, www.guyanabirds.com, media relations and PR activities, and development of partnerships with international birding tour operators.

Birding tourism in Guyana is seen as beneficial on many levels. It contributes to conservation by focusing on unique places, sustainable activities and small groups of people highly interested in nature and preservation. The typically small-scale operations do not have high impacts on the environment and give local people opportunities to obtain employment and business benefits, while encouraging communities to conserve and protect their natural heritage. Birders are also generally well-educated middle aged and older people with the time and money to travel far and wide in search of the Neotropical birds on their checklists, many of which are found in Guyana.

The Birding Tourism Program is receiving support from GTIS, a joint project of the Government of Guyana and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The birding initiative's success relies on the involvement of several partners, including GTA and the Government of Guyana and Guyana's tourism private sector, represented by THAG and its members.

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MEDIA CONTACTS:

Indira Anandjit

Director, Guyana Tourism Authority

P: 592-223-6351

E: ianandjit@guyana-tourism.com

Kirk Smock

GTIS Public Affairs Specialist

P: 592-642-7184

E: ksmock@carana.com

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