

GENERAL INFORMATION

The following advice is culled from our extensive experience leading tours for birders worldwide.

SOME THINGS WE RECOMMEND YOU BRING

Please note that space in the vehicle may be fairly limited, but we understand that birders do need lots of equipment! There will be opportunities for laundry at places where we stay two nights or more.

- Binoculars (company policy prohibits guides from lending theirs)
- A spotting scope and tripod or window mount (optional)
- Field guides
- Any other birding equipment
- Photographic equipment
- Spare batteries for photographic and other gear
- Flashlight/torch/headlamp with spare batteries
- Toiletries
- Personal medication (including anti-malaria drugs). We recommend packing important medication (and a change of clothes) in your hand luggage in the unlikely event of lost luggage
- Some countries might require a valid Yellow Fever Certificate and we advise visiting a travel clinic or your family doctor and visiting the Center for Disease Control website, for health advice.
- Rain gear (seasonally dependent)
- Alarm clock
- Passport and, if required, visas – don't rely on past experience here since situations can change quickly from county to country
- Copies of passport, medical insurance policies and other important documents that can be left with the Birding Ecotours office or at your home
- Money for drinks, gifts, tips, items of a personal nature, etc. Traveler's checks are not recommended but Visa and Mastercard are widely accepted including for drawing local currency at ATMs
- Hiking boots plus another pair of shoes and sandals. Flip-flops/sandals are very good when we spend a lot of time in the van
- Cap/hat & sunglasses
- Sunscreen and lip sun protection
- Mosquito repellent
- Long-sleeved clothes as a precaution against biting insects

EMERGENCY CONTACT DETAILS

Our emergency contact numbers (all cell phones) are as follows (please note that the “+27” or “+26” should be substituted by a “0” if dialing from within South Africa):

Birding Ecotours office: Nadia: +27 72 211 9863

Fax: +27 21 592 7438

E-mail (which is checked almost daily): info@birdingecotours.com

FIELD GUIDES AND OTHER MEDIA

Please refer to our online resource for field guides and apps:

<http://birdingecotours.com/blog/?cat=recommended-bird-field-guides-for-the-7-continent>s

TRAVEL INSURANCE

It is imperative that you have proper medical cover while travelling (through your health insurance company and/or through a short-term travel insurance policy). Trip cancellation or interruption insurance is also vital – we find that it’s not uncommon for people to cancel due to last minute illness or whatever. <https://www.allianztravelinsurance.com/> is a good place to start.

TRAVEL AGENT

Lori Heathcote can help you arrange air travel (and sometimes travel insurance) and if you book through her company (at a reasonable cost), she can also provide emergency assistance. If you want to use her services, call her on 1-800-224-5399 or direct at 717-855-2128 (or e-mail her at lori@trvltime.com). She is based in PA so is on Eastern Time.

EXPECTATIONS AND RULES FOR GROUP TOURS

Thank you for joining a small group tour, and we trust you will have a truly wonderful experience.

If you are on a group tour with more than 2 or 3 participants, then kindly take heed of a few simple rules we follow to keep everyone in the group happy, and ultimately to maximize enjoyment of the tour for the group.

- 1) Once a day we swap seats in the vehicle. Those at the front one day go to the back the next day and then move forward each day until the process is repeated. Usually tour

members sort this out automatically, but the tour leader will help after the first couple of days if there are problems.

- 2) On trail walks, kindly swap your position every 10 minutes. If you are walking at the front, please drop to the back every 10 minutes, allowing the next person time near the tour leader. Both the local guide and the tour leader are often at the front, especially when communication between the two is necessary – one of these leaders may also sometimes be at the back of the group at times to help birders not near the leading guide at the time.
- 3) If you have any concerns or problems, please speak to the tour leader so we can solve the problem – that is our job but we do need to hear from you as soon as possible if you have any concerns. The longer you leave it, the more difficult it often becomes to solve.
- 4) Please be quiet whenever birding. If you need to talk, whisper and only to the person next to you. When we use playback, keep absolutely quiet and focus on trying to see the bird approaching. We discourage talking on the trails, especially on forest trails, but whispering to the person next to you is acceptable if done discreetly. The tour leader will say when it is even more necessary than usual to be quiet. The tour leader may also occasionally say if it is OK to talk freely. The guide may occasionally shout if he or she wants to get the group rapidly onto a bird that is already flying away – but this does not mean that it is OK to become noisy! ☺ The guide uses his/her discretion and aims to get everyone onto all the birds – but this usually means the group needs to stay very quiet whenever birding.
- 5) On forest trails, only the front two or three people usually hear what the tour leader or local guide is saying. We therefore ask that you whisper what is being seen or what the guide is saying, from the front to the back, so that the people at the back can be kept informed of what is being said and what the guide has found. It can get very frustrating for the people currently at the back, otherwise.
- 6) We emphasize communication. If you miss a bird, please tell the tour leader who then will try to get you onto the bird at some stage. Also, the guide sometimes ignores birds that the whole group has seen well, so please say if you want to see something again. While we love studying each species, we often don't have the luxury of spending as much time with each species as we'd like. For those who want to spend extra time photographing or studying fewer species, we recommend a photography or special trip – in some cases a private trip.
- 7) Scope – we ask that all participants have a quick look in the scope. Once everyone in the group has had a quick look, you are welcome to take a longer look. Don't spend long at the scope when others in the group have not seen the bird through it.
- 8) Please be aware at all times of where you are standing relative to other people. Taller people should generally allow shorter people to stand in front of them, or at very least to ensure they aren't in other people's way.

- 9) It is always good to wear neutral colors and to try and avoid fabrics that make a lot of noise when walking.
- 10) Opinion varies as to whether pointing chases the bird away – the guide will advise on this. Sometimes you might be advised not to point directly at a bird. Importantly, control your excitement and don't shout out when you see a bird – it happens all the time!
- 11) During any trip there will be activities that are optional and participants are welcome to sit out on these for various reasons—ill health, tiredness, difficulty of said activity etc. Please do not feel obliged to partake in every activity. These will often be highlighted in your itinerary. In some trips and on some days, there might not be opportunities to opt out though – please try and speak to us in advance if you plan to opt out.
- 12) When on a group tour remember that the guide makes decisions in favor of the majority of the group; this might not always suit every individual but it is important to keep in mind that the group's needs take precedence over an individual's needs.
- 13) At certain stops there are invariably curios for sale. We won't always have time to shop and when we do please try to keep it brief unless otherwise indicated by the guide.
- 14) Safety always comes first, so if, for example, stopping along a freeway is deemed by the driver/guide unsafe, then we might have to forfeit stopping and seeing a bird.
- 15) We use playback with great care. If we are going to use playback (ideally only once we've failed to see the bird without this tool), please gather around and see the bird; to protect the bird's interest we usually only call it in once.
- 16) Group dynamics on a birding tour can sometimes be tough because of personality clashes. We recommend keeping spirits up and making the most of a trip and compromising as much as possible to maximize enjoyment for everyone on the trip.
- 17) Get excited about the birds – it keeps the guides motivated – just don't make it noisy, though, or you'll chase the birds away! 😊
- 18) For specific destinations, we like to warn people about what to expect. For example, some countries are strenuous (e.g. Madagascar), some have times when we are restricted to the vehicle (e.g. some parks in South Africa), some have substandard accommodation in parts. We advise you to ask as many questions as you can before the tour to avoid nasty surprises! We'd prefer you to be pleasantly surprised, rather than the other way around.
- 19) If you have never joined a birding tour, we highly recommend speaking to us in detail first to find out which trips we recommend you start with (e.g. South Africa which is a very easy destination), what to expect, etc.