



MALAYSIA (INCLUDING BORNEO)

GENERAL INFORMATION



*Malaysia is blessed with many beautiful birds and **Rhinoceros Hornbill** is a very spectacular one (photo Liew Weng Keong)!*

OUR MALAYSIA (INCLUDING BORNEO) BIRDING TOURS

We have three extremely exciting set departure Malaysia birding tours which include two Borneo birding tours, all focusing on the different endemic and special birds found in each of the very different areas. Our Malaysia and Borneo birding tours are as follows:

1. **Birding Tour Malaysia: Peninsular Malaysia**
2. **Birding Tour Malaysia: Sabah Classic Tour**
3. **Birding Tour Borneo: Sarawak Restricted Range Endemics**

One of the most biodiverse countries in the world, Malaysia, including its states of Sarawak and Sabah on the island of Borneo (which it shares with the Kingdom of Brunei and Indonesia), supports some incredible lowland rainforest and staggering forested mountains. In turn, these habitats provide homes to a myriad of stunning birds and animals, many of which are endemic to the country, islands, or Greater Sunda region and are all targeted on our tours. Some of the special birds include **Mountain Peacock-Pheasant**, **Dulit Frogmouth**, **Black-crowned Pitta**, **Blue-banded Pitta**, **Friendly Bush Warbler**, **Rail-babbler**, **Helmeted Hornbill**, **Straw-headed Bulbul**, **Bornean Bristlehead**, **Whitehead's Trogon**, **Bornean Ground Cuckoo**, and **Black Oriole**. It's not just birds though, we should not forget to mention some incredible animals that occur here, such as **Bornean Orangutan**, **Proboscis Monkey**, and **Asian Elephant** (Bornean Pygmy Elephant), and we will always be looking out for these.

The information here is general to all our Malaysia birding tours and Borneo birding tours and we have also prepared tour-specific information for the three tours listed above, so please refer to those for additional information.

ITINERARY AND SPECIES RECORDING (BIRD LISTS AND ANIMAL LISTS)

Ahead of these Malaysian birdwatching tours we will send you a detailed daily itinerary (along with arrival instructions). We will then provide you with a printed copy of this itinerary on the first day of the tour.

The printed copy of the itinerary will include a bird list and list of other animals possible on the tour and we will go through this each night (but it is totally optional whether you join or not – though it is considered extremely useful). We always use the latest version of the International Ornithological Congress (IOC) taxonomy for our bird list and for all other wildlife, we use the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) taxonomy. While birding during the tour we will create eBird checklists and these will be shared with any participants who wish. Just provide us with your eBird user details at the beginning of the tour for us to do this.

Each evening we will go through the itinerary to give you any specifics to be aware of for the following day (like what clothes and equipment will be needed, when we will be having breakfast, departure time from the hotel, and any important birds we will be looking for, etc.).

After the completion of the tour, we will email you a PDF copy of an illustrated trip report. This will include a complete IOC and IUCN checklist of all wildlife recorded during the tour. Any interesting bird, animal, or landscape photographs will be included in the trip report and will also be added to our tour-specific Flickr pages as a reminder, and you are able to download these for free and share with your friends and family.

PASSPORT, VISA, AND LOCAL LAWS

To visit Malaysia, most visitors will not require a visa and are granted three months stay on arrival. If you're travelling between Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia (sometimes known as Malaysian Borneo and comprising the states of Sabah and Sarawak) you will need to carry your passport. You must get an entry stamp in East Malaysia at your initial port of entry. Please refer to your own government information for additional details on entry requirements.

It is likely that you will have to show proof of onward travel on arrival in Malaysia. Most airlines will not actually let you board a plane to the country without first seeing that you have an onward ticket to leave. Please make sure that you have all the necessary documents required and please [contact us](#) if you have any questions.

Please talk to your local embassy, consulate, or immigration office as they will be aware of any recent changes that we may be unaware of. Malaysia is a multicultural, mainly Muslim, country and has some very strict laws. Please read the full list of local laws as detailed on your government website, such as [here](#) and [here](#).

Please make sure that you bring a photocopy of your passport with you on the tour, these can be kept with other important documents like vaccine certificate, emergency contact details, and insurance documents.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

As mentioned in our standard [Terms and Conditions](#), we strongly encourage you to purchase comprehensive trip cancellation insurance to protect against unexpected events that might cause delays and interruptions to travel. It is important that the insurance covers illness, medical issues, accidents, repatriation, loss of luggage or any valuable items that you might be bringing (e.g. optical and camera equipment) etc. Also note that at the time of writing (March 2022) there is a requirement for everyone to have insurance that covers Covid-19 treatment, in the case of hospitalization or quarantine, insurance should also cover trip cancellation in case you catch Covid prior to the tour and then cannot commence the tour.

HEALTH AND PESTS

Please consult your doctor or local travel clinic regarding vaccine requirements before your tour to Malaysia/ Borneo. We recommend doing this around two months prior to the tour start date so that any required vaccine courses can be completed in time for your departure.

Please make yourself familiar with the Malaysian Covid-19 vaccination entry requirements ahead of the tour, this might include downloading specific apps onto your cell/mobile phone ahead of arrival. At the time of writing (March 2022), every tourist visiting Malaysia needs to pre-download and register on a smart phone app called "Mysejahtera", where you will need to fill out a health check form before arrival into Malaysia.

There is no risk of Yellow Fever in Malaysia, however, there is a certificate requirement for anyone arriving from countries with a risk of Yellow Fever transmission (including layovers in these countries of over twelve hours). Please refer to the World Health Organization's list of countries where Yellow Fever transmission is possible, [here](#).

Everyone visiting Malaysia should be up to date with standard vaccinations and boosters, like Diphtheria-Tetanus-Pertussis, Chickenpox (Varicella), Flu, Polio, Shingles, and Measles-Mumps-Rubella (MMR). Other vaccinations that might be required (depending on your personal situation, and to be confirmed by your travel clinic/doctor), include Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Japanese Encephalitis, Cholera, Tetanus, Rabies, Tuberculosis (TB), and Typhoid.

Please refer to the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) website [here](#), for further information on vaccines and how to stay healthy on the tour. Another great source of data is the “[Travel Health Pro](#)” website and information on Malaysia can be seen [here](#), with additional information specific to Borneo found [here](#). All three linked webpages are worth studying ahead of joining our tours.

Malaria is very low to low risk throughout most of Malaysia and Borneo. Other insect (or tick) borne bites can lead to Dengue, Zika, Chikungunya, Leishmaniasis, Scrub (Bush) Typhus (a rash from [Chiggers](#)) so these are all worth being aware of. Insect repellent with a high DEET content is highly recommended for most of the areas we visit in Malaysia (DEET usually works against both ticks and mosquitoes).

Tap water is not potable throughout Malaysia and contaminated water can lead to Leptospirosis and Schistosomiasis so care should be taken to avoid any potentially contaminated water and adjacent areas. Diarrheal diseases are common throughout Malaysia, including Borneo. Airborne and droplet transmitted diseases such as Avian/Bird Flu and Hantavirus are present.

If you pick up any scratches from plants (see the “Dangerous Animals and Plants” section below) or receive any bites from insects, they should be cleaned, treated with antiseptic cream/wipes, and covered quickly to reduce the chance of any infection.

Sunscreen (rated SPF 30+) should be used frequently, and a sunhat should be worn to protect from the sun’s powerful rays, with sunglasses used to help prevent glare. A plentiful intake of water (please bring a reusable water bottle, which we can fill daily with safe drinking water) is essential to maintain hydration.

MEDICAL CONDITIONS

It is really important that you are suitably covered with comprehensive medical insurance in the instance of any emergency situation while on any of our Malaysian or Bornean bird tours. If you don’t have insurance, the cost for medical care is likely to be very high (and you may even be refused entry into the country).

As detailed in our standard [Terms and Conditions](#), we require you to tell us when signing up for these tours of any medical conditions that we should be aware of. Please tell us if you have any walking/mobility issues, diabetes, epilepsy, food and medicinal allergies, heart conditions, and long-term illnesses etc. This will just make things easier for us, and you, in case an unexpected situation arises.

On some of these tours, particularly the two Borneo tours ([Sabah](#) and [Sarawak](#)), we will be in remote areas without any medical facilities and a serious injury might require a flight for treatment, and the cost for this sort of thing can be rather expensive.

DANGEROUS ANIMALS AND PLANTS

A megadiverse country, Malaysia is home to thousands of creatures throughout the peninsular and on the island of Borneo. Megafauna occurs and some of these are dangerous creatures, including **Tiger** (both Northern Indochinese and Malaysian subspecies), (Indochinese) **Leopard**, (Bornean) **Clouded Leopard**, **Sun Bear**, **Sumatran Rhinoceros**, **Bornean Orangutan**, **Malay Tapir**, **Bearded Pig**, **Gaur**, **Asian Elephant** (Bornean forms sometimes split and called Pygmy Elephants), and **Saltwater Crocodile**. While all of these creatures are big and potentially dangerous, the chance of coming across most of them is low (though we will be on the lookout for any of them during our tours!).

While not as big or as spectacular as the above species, some of the smaller creatures are potentially dangerous and much more likely to be encountered, and these include **Long-tailed Macaque**, various snakes (there are 16 species of venomous snakes in Malaysia – including **Malayan Pit Viper** and **King Cobra**), spiders, scorpions, ants, centipedes, and mosquitoes. Feral dogs should be avoided, due to a high chance of contracting rabies if bitten.

Special mention should be made for **leeches**, which occur throughout Malaysia and seem particularly abundant on Borneo. Even though we will be visiting Borneo in what should be the drier months, it is best to expect them to be present and be pleasantly surprised if we don't encounter them! They are an annoyance rather than being a real health issue, though we know no one likes them! Insect repellent sprayed (particularly citronella) on shoes and ankles can help to keep them at bay, as well as being great for reducing issues with other annoying creatures such as ticks, mosquitoes, and chiggers. "Leech socks" can be worth having within your luggage, and having some salt sachets is a good idea too. Leech socks can be purchased online.

All wildlife should be viewed from a safe distance to prevent disturbance and care should be taken when walking in the forest, particularly with where you put your hands and feet when moving through vegetation.

Many tropical plants are protected by rather large spikes, needles, or sharp thorns, so that they don't become food to a wide range of animals. Sometimes these appendages are used to help pull themselves through other plants to reach the canopy and the sun. These projections can be rather painful if they pierce the skin and can catch and rip clothing. Please do not just grab plants without checking for any potentially sharp or painful spikes etc. (this is also a good way of reducing the chance of getting ant, spider, and snake bites). It's always good to point out any dangerous-looking plants to others in the group while out walking.

FOOD AND WATER

It is not safe to drink the tap water in Malaysia. Bottled mineral water is safe and available everywhere but please bring a reusable water bottle to help us reduce the amount of plastic waste generated during the tour. The majority of alcoholic drinks are usually inexpensive, but in some areas the sale of alcohol is prohibited (or it is difficult and expensive to get hold of) due to religious reasons. Coffee and tea are commonly found across the country.

Mealtimes are likely to be variable depending on our birding or travel plans for the day and so if you need to eat food at a specific time of day (e.g. to take with medication) we recommend that you bring snacks to supplement the meals. A supply of cereal bars/protein bars, dried fruit etc. can come in useful. There will be limited opportunities to purchase snacks during the tours.

If you have any dietary requirements or food allergies, please let us know when you book the tour, so we can advise whether it will be suitable for you and make sure we can notify the people who will be preparing meals ahead of time, particularly important on our more remote [Sarawak tour](#).

Please see the tour-specific information for further details regarding “Food and Meals”.

CURRENCY AND MONEY

The Malaysian Ringgit (RM/MYR) is the official currency of Malaysia. The Malaysian Ringgit is divided into 100 sen (cents). The most frequently used banknotes are RM1, RM2, RM5, RM10, RM20, RM50, RM60, RM200, and RM600. Coins used are of the values 5 sen, 10 sen, 20 sen, and 50 sen. When we are in large hotels, shops, and restaurants in tourist areas or major cities, Visa and Mastercard can usually be used. Many transactions are made with cash in Malaysia, especially in more rural areas and therefore a supply of cash is useful for any personal expenses you may incur during the tour (such as drinks, souvenirs, gratuities, and laundry etc.).

It is possible to withdraw cash from ATMs, but some bank charges are likely to apply. Please notify your card supplier about your trip, so you do not find a block on your card. It will be possible to exchange or draw money at the airports and some of the major cities we visit but away from the cities, withdrawing cash can be difficult or simply impossible. We recommend that you withdraw cash /exchange currency at the international airport in Kuala Lumpur as this is likely to be most convenient for everyone.

ELECTRICITY

In Malaysia (including in Borneo) the power plugs and sockets are of Type G (known as the standard “British” plug). The standard voltage is 240 volts (V), and the standard frequency is 50 hertz (Hz). Further details and photos of this plug and electricity in Malaysia can be found [here](#).

Adaptors and voltage converters are likely to be needed for some visitors from overseas (e.g. if you are from the United States) — please be careful with certain appliances that utilize different frequencies. You can use your electric appliances in Malaysia, if the standard voltage in your country is in between 220–240 V (as is in the UK, Europe, Australia, and most of Asia and Africa). If the standard voltage in your country is in the range of 100–127 V (as is in the US, Canada, and most South American countries), you will need a voltage converter in Malaysia, but please visit [this website](#) for specific details.

Note that some places we stay on our tours may have no, or limited electricity; refer to tour-specific information. Some of these areas may run electricity off diesel generators and these may be turned on and off at certain times.

DOMESTIC FLIGHTS

Our Borneo tours require internal flights, these may, or may not be included in the tour costs depending on the actual tour. Please refer to the tour-specific information for details, including for baggage allowance on these flights. There are no internal flights required for our Peninsular Malaysia tour. Note that most flights to Kota Kinabalu (Sabah) will have to go via Kuala

Lumpur on Peninsular Malaysia, where immigration will grant you entry into the country etc. Note that our Sarawak tour also starts in Kota Kinabalu, rather than Kuching,

WHAT TO BRING: CLOTHING

We recommend that you bring a selection of loose and lightweight field clothing with green, brown, or dark colors, as these work best for forest birding (which we will be doing for the majority of our tours in the region). Please avoid bright/pale colors, for example no white, red, orange etc. during birding time. Casual and informal dress is appropriate for the hotels/accommodation we use.

We highly recommend trousers/long pants and long-sleeved shirts (these can be rolled up should you get too hot) for all birding activities, given the potential leech and insect issues (and the strong tropical sun). A selection of clothes is useful as you are likely to get hot and sweaty in some locations on some tours. You should also bring some warmer clothes as on all of our Malaysian bird tours we will spend some time birding at higher elevations, where nighttime temperatures could drop, and still be cool when we are birding. Please refer to the tour-specific information.

Although we will be birding during the dry season, rain is always a possibility, so light rain gear (including a small umbrella) is always worth having in your daypack. Leeches also enjoy damp conditions, and leech socks are advisable for your luggage, just in case.

There are limited opportunities for swimming on the tour so swimwear might not be necessary, unless you are planning to spend some time before/after the tours relaxing somewhere. Sunglasses, sunhat, and sunscreen (rated SPF 30 or higher) are however considered essential.

Lightweight walking boots are recommended for all of our Indonesian tours as they give extra ankle support while walking (necessary given some of the trails we will be birding on) and added protection against animal stings/bites. A pair of sandals (flipflops) or sneakers/trainers (tennis shoes) can be useful for when in vehicles and when walking between your room and restaurant in the hotels. Rubber boots can be useful in some circumstances.

Please refer to the tour-specific documents for further important information on clothing.

WHAT TO BRING: OTHER ITEMS

Do not forget: Binoculars, camera, field guide (see “Books” section below), flashlight (torch), spare batteries, power bank, converter plugs, plug adaptors, chargers, prescription drugs (please bring the generic names for these drugs with you), toiletries, prescription glasses (and a spare pair), insect repellent, sunscreen, sunglasses, alarm clock, money pouch, hiking poles/walking sticks, suggested medical kit (see [here](#)), leech socks, and daypacks.

Our tour leader/local guide will have a communal telescope for use during the tour. On some of our Malaysian bird tours the scope will be more useful than on others. The communal scope will allow everyone opportunities to look at birds briefly on a rotation basis. If you like to “digi-scope/phone-scope”, or you would like to take prolonged scope views of the birds, please bring your own scope for that, the communal scope will be for everyone to look at the birds but not for photography.

Some additional items to remember to bring include important travel documents, passport, cash (or ATM/credit cards to withdraw money), proof of vaccinations, and your travel or health insurance cards – photocopies of all can be carried by the tour leader in case of emergency.

We would recommend bringing a couple of different colored pens along with a 12-inch/30-centimeter ruler with you, these can make the checklist session easier to follow.

Please refer to the tour-specific documents for further information of items to bring on the individual tours. Further, additional details on what to bring on a birding tour can be seen on our useful blog post [here](#).

CRIME AND SAFETY

Malaysia is considered a safe country to visit with many friendly people, particularly for the type of tourism activities we will be undertaking on our tour. As like anywhere in the world, street crime and pickpocketing are of concern, particularly in the big cities, tourist areas, and airports. Take particular care of your passport and bank cards. Credit card fraud and scams are common.

Please store any personal items in hotel safety deposit boxes, though note many of the places we stay on our Malaysian tours will not have such facilities, so the best advice is probably to not bring anything of value that isn't really essential to the tour (e.g. jewelry etc.).

Domestic terrorism and political violence can erupt at any time and there has been several areas that have been particular flashpoints over recent years, these have included the areas off eastern Sabah. The overall political situation in Malaysia is considered to be stable, but can change if there is an election (or related activity) within the country, or the Middle East. Avoid any and all protests, demonstrations, and political rallies as they can turn violent and it is illegal for foreigners to take part in protests. We are constantly monitoring the situation on the ground where our tours go. Please see the tour-specific information for further information.

LANGUAGE

The official and national language in Malaysia is Malay, or Bahasa Malaysia. However, English is also widely spoken.

BOOKS

Birds of Malaysia: Covering Peninsular Malaysia, Malaysian Borneo and Singapore – Chong Leong Puan, Geoffrey Davison, and Kim Chye Lim (2020), Lynx Edicions. We recommend the flexibound version of this book, rather than the hardback and it is suitable for our Peninsular Malaysia bird tours and our Borneo bird tours.

Please take a look at our recommended [field guide blog](#) for additional information on this region. Some of the other bird books relevant to Malaysia include:

Birds of the Indonesian Archipelago: Greater Sundas and Wallacea – Eaton *et al.* (2021). Lynx Edicions, Second Edition.

A Field Guide to the Birds of Malaysia and Singapore – Lim Kim Seng *et al.* (2020). John Beaufoy Publishing.

Birds of the Philippines, Sumatra, Java, Bali, Borneo, Sulawesi, the Lesser Sundas and the Moluccas – Norman Arlott (2018) William Collins (HarperCollins imprint).

Phillipps' Field Guide to the Birds of Borneo: Sabah, Sarawak, Brunei and Kalimantan – Quentin Phillipps (2014), John Beaufoy Publishing, Third Edition.

Birds of Borneo – Susan Myers (2016), Helm, Second Edition.

A Field Guide to the Birds of Borneo, Sumatra, Java and Bali – J MacKinnon (1993), Oxford University Press.

Other specific-interest books, such as those covering reptiles, mammals, etc.:

A Naturalist's Guide to the Mammals of Southeast Asia: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam – Chris R Shepherd and Loretta Ann Shepherd (2018), John Beaufoy Publishing.

Field Guide to the Mammals of South-East Asia – Charles M Francis (2019), Bloomsbury Publishing, Second Edition.

Phillipps' Field Guide to the Mammals of Borneo and their Ecology: Sabah, Sarawak, Brunei and Kalimantan – Quentin Phillipps (2018), John Beaufoy Publishing, Second Edition.

A Field Guide to the Reptiles of South-East Asia: Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore, Sumatra, Borneo, Java, Bali – Indraneil Das (2015), Bloomsbury Publishing.

A Guide to Snakes of Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore – Tom Charlton (2020), Natural History Publications Borneo.

A Field Guide to the Snakes of Borneo – Robert B Stuebing *et al.* (2014), Natural History Publications Borneo, Second Edition.

A Field Guide to Tropical Reef Fishes of the Indo-Pacific: Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Vietnam – Gerald R Allen (2020), Tuttle Publishing, Fifth Edition.

A Naturalist's Guide to the Butterflies of Peninsular Malaysia Singapore and Thailand – Laurence G Kirton (2020), John Beaufoy Publishing, Third Edition.

Borneo Spiders: A Photographic Field Guide – Joseph K.H. Koh and Nicky Bay (2019), Sabah Forestry Department.

Field Guide to the Pitcher Plants of Borneo – Stewart McPherson and Alastair S Robinson (2012), Redfern Natural History.

Field Guide to the Pitcher Plants of Peninsular Malaysia and Indochina – Stewart McPherson and Alastair S Robinson (2012), Redfern Natural History.

SOUND RECORDINGS

You can listen to and download a range of Malaysian and Bornean bird calls and songs from the excellent [xeno-canto](#) bird sound library. Additional recordings may be found on [eBird](#) species accounts, if you can't find them on xeno-canto.

USEFUL WEBSITE RESOURCES AND APPS

Aves Vox – this app allows you to download a good selection of bird songs from the xeno-canto website onto your smart phone.

eBird – stacks of information easy to gather on your smart phone or other devices such as tablets and computers. Sound, photo, and video galleries exist for almost every species in Malaysia, including Bornean states of Sabah and Sarawak, via the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Macaulay Library.

IOC World Bird List – the website gives all the latest information on world bird taxonomy according to the scientific body that we use at Birding Ecotours. You can learn about species that have been newly described, any recent and past splits (creation of a new species) and lumps (deletion of a species) of existing species, and plenty of additional useful information.

Lonely Planet – contains lots of general travel information on Malaysia, though some of the places we will be going to are not likely to be mentioned. If you are interested in extending your stay in Malaysia before or after the tour, this will help you find some must-see places.



Malayan Peacock-Pheasant is a secretive beauty found on the Malay Peninsula.