



SUBTROPICAL SOUTH AFRICA BIRDING TOUR

TOUR-SPECIFIC INFORMATION



We will look for *Gurney's Sugarbirds* while birding on the famous Sani Pass in the Drakensberg Mountains.

TOUR OUTLINE

This 18-day subtropical South Africa birding tour gives you the opportunity to see a great many South African endemics and near-endemics while also giving you a thoroughly enjoyable safari experience (in Kruger National Park) where we could see exciting large game species, such as **Lion, Leopard and African Elephants**. This tour takes you from the KwaZulu-Natal coast to the heights of the Drakensberg Mountains, to the rich lowlands of Zululand, northwards to the world-famous Kruger National Park and finally to a drier bushveld area north of Johannesburg where we encounter several Kalahari bird specials.

PACE OF TOUR

This South African birding tour is a lengthy tour which may be tiring at times. In particular, this tour takes place in the spring/early summer period and as such our days are usually long and full, and we are constantly looking for new birds every day (this productive tour usually yields 400-450 bird species). This is an intense and fast-paced tour.

To ensure we take advantage of the early morning peak in bird activity, we will often leave the accommodation armed with simple (but adequate) breakfast packs, however, we will still likely enjoy a few delicious sit-down breakfasts on this tour. Similarly, lunches will often involve lunch packs, or simpler sandwiches/wraps which we eat while out birding (usually enjoying a picnic lunch) rather than a large sit-down meal. Occasionally, brunch is a better option, and this is likely as well. A range of snacks are usually available to participants. We do this so that we do not waste large amounts of time during the day when we could otherwise be out birding. Although these meals may be simpler, we will always ensure you are well fed so that you do not go hungry. Dinner is usually the main meal of the day, and will of course be a sit-down meal and are generally of a good standard.

It is possible to opt out of some activities, such as various morning and afternoon excursions. On some days, however, this won't be possible (please do ask your tour leader for specifics).

There will be the option for night birding excursions on this birding tour, however, (as with most of our birding excursions) these trips are not mandatory and we strongly recommend sitting out if you are finding the tour too tiring. Guided night drives are possible to book in Kruger National Park (where we are not allowed to drive around at night), however, these would be at your own expense and are only booked on the tour itself.

We generally ensure that we do have some meaningful down-time regularly on the tour, particularly on our non-travel days, while on the days when we travel between accommodation, there is less time for down-time (as this is otherwise spent traveling between destinations).

The guide discusses the daily plan with the group in detail each evening. Note that we do retain a sense of flexibility within reason, to allow for us to better maximize your birding experience.

WALKING AND STYLE OF BIRDING

The tour is generally considered 'easy' in terms of physical exertion. It does not involve a great deal of walking, or many prolonged periods of time where we will be walking/standing/on our

feet. Any walks that we do are generally less than two miles (3.2 kilometers), and usually under three hours in length.

- The notable exception is a roughly 3.5-kilometer walk (round-trip, some of which is uphill) at 6,500 feet (2,000 meters) altitude when we go look for Rudd's Lark near Wakkerstroom.
- We will also walk around at altitude (maximum 10,000 feet/3,200 meters) in the Drakensberg, however these walks are usually very quick and short, and we are never far from our vehicles.

For large portions of the trip most of the birding is vehicle-based, where we are driving along roadside routes, stopping strategically and opportunistically to look for various birds. We are normally always able to jump out the vehicle and bird from around/near the vehicle undertaking short walks (10-30 minutes generally), to see the birds.

Kindly note, we are restricted to our vehicles in the "Big Game Parks" (Kruger National Park, Isimangaliso Wetland Park and Mkhuze Game Reserve, on this tour). In these parks, it is illegal to alight from one's vehicle outside of designated areas, because of the presence of large, dangerous animals such as lions and elephants, amongst others. We are therefore restricted to the vehicle, except at areas like picnic sites and rest camps. During our time in these parks, we thus spend large portions of the day in the vehicle on safari drives, but we also spend time doing birding walks around the rest camps (and picnic areas/bird blinds) where we are allowed out.

In Kruger National Park we usually make use of an open-safari vehicle to better enhance our game viewing.

LENGTH OF DRIVES

There are a few days in which there are long drives, made even longer with lunch/birding/fuel stops, however most drives when not moving between accommodation involve far less travel. Some of the longer transfers of this trip include

- a. Pennington to Drakensberg,
- b. Drakensberg to Eshowe,
- c. Mkhuze area to Wakkerstroom,
- d. Wakkerstroom to Skukuza, and
- e. Skukuza to Dullstroom.

On these drives most of the day will be spent traveling and birding en route to our next overnight accommodation.

SAFETY (INCLUDING ALTITUDE SICKNESS)

This tour does not spend much time in large cities and we generally stay in tourist areas which are considered safe. While out birding, we may visit some areas which are less safe than others, however, we will be mostly vehicle-based in these areas and will only visit these areas if we deem them safe. We suggest rather not leaving personal items of value in the vehicle while it is unattended, if you are ever in doubt, please just check with the tour leader.

We spend time at altitude in the Drakensberg Mountains (maximum 10,000 feet/3,200 meters) where altitude sickness could perhaps be a problem, however, we only head into the high mountains for the day which is not normally long enough for altitude sickness to be a problem.

HEALTH, PESTS AND DANGEROUS ANIMALS

While out birding on foot in some areas there could be ticks around, and so it is mostly recommended to wear long trousers and check yourself for ticks after the day out in the field. Additionally, it is a good idea to spray your legs/trousers and particularly boots/socks with anti-tick spray. There is no risk of Lyme Disease in South Africa, however, African tick bite fever is a possibility which is generally much less severe than most other tick-borne diseases.

Rabies (although rare) does still exist in some areas in South Africa and although the chances of you encountering rabid animals is very low on this trip, we strongly advise against touching/petting domestic animals while out in rural areas. Please consult with your tour leader if you are ever unsure though.

***Note that dangerous animals (like Lion, Elephants) and venomous snakes and scorpions etc., are all possible, and these are all discussed in greater detail under the “South Africa General Information” document.**

Malaria

We strongly recommend anti-malaria drugs for the Zululand and Kruger National Park portions of this tour, from Day 6 onwards. Any one of the following three drugs are highly effective (albeit not 100 %, due to resistant strains of malaria) as malaria preventative measures:

Malarone® (atovaquone/proguanil),

Doxycycline, and

Larium® (mefloquine).

Mosquito repellent, long trousers/jeans and long-sleeved shirts, particularly at night when malaria (*Anopheles*) mosquitoes bite, are advised, in addition to the drugs.

In the unlikely event that one still contracts malaria after taking anti-malaria drugs and other precautions, the disease can still be easily treated if diagnosed soon after symptoms develop: suspect malaria if flu-like symptoms develop within a few weeks/months of visiting South Africa. If it is malaria, it can be treated with an alternative to the prophylactic that you chose.

TRANSPORTATION

Depending on the final group size, we will likely use a 14-seater minibus on this subtropical South Africa birding tour, ensuring everybody has a window seat. We have reduced the maximum group size to six participants to avoid having to tow a trailer which gives us further flexibility and opportunities while out birding. As with our other birding tours, we will use a seat rotation policy within the vehicle which will be explained to you by your tour leader at the start of the tour.

Airport transfers are included in the tour price for transfers taking place on the first day of the tour and the final day of the tour however would be for your own expense if you arrive on days preceding/following the tour. We will happily help arrange any of these transfers.

This tour includes the use of an open safari vehicle for our full days within the Kruger National Park. This vehicle greatly enhances our game viewing experiences whilst in the park.

Air-conditioning is available in our tour vehicles.

DOMESTIC FLIGHTS

There are no domestic flights on this birding tour, although you would need to catch a domestic flight, should you be joining our Best of Cape Town and Beyond birding tour which immediately precedes this tour.

ACCOMMODATION

The accommodation on this tour (as with all our South African tours) is of a good to excellent quality. It is worth noting that buildings in South Africa are often not heated like they are in North America and Europe, etc., and so for colder evenings (such as potentially in the Drakensberg and Dullstroom) it may be worth packing warmer sleeping clothes.

During our three nights in Kruger National Park we stay in government-run accommodation in a rest camp (Skukuza) within the park which means that the accommodation for these nights is a little more basic than elsewhere on tour, however, still of a good standard. We stay in the park itself to ensure the full safari experience and so that we can be out in the park early to optimize our birding.

Should you wish to arrive a day or two before the start of the tour, we strongly suggest staying at Botha House in Umdoni Park, where we are staying for our first night on tour. It is an idyllic place to start the tour and has some fantastic birding and views right on the doorstep. Please get in touch with the Birding Ecotours office to help organize this for you.

It is possible to get laundry washed at most of the establishments used on this tour, with the following notable:

- It is not possible to get laundry done within the Kruger National Park.
- Many establishments will only take laundry if we have a minimum of two nights, and the laundry is provided on the first day/arrival day.

ELECTRICITY

Lighting in rooms tends to be low wattage (especially in Kruger National Park), so you might like to bring a good quality torch/flashlight if you like reading in bed!

It is good practice to bring international adapters, as many establishments are changing their plug outlets to better align with international clients, and this is an aspect we do not have control over.

WEATHER

This tour takes place during the South African spring when we can expect varied weather conditions, from wind and rain to high heat and humidity, and possibly even cold temperatures. Although this tour takes place in October, with eastern South Africa receiving most of its rainfall between November and March, we can still expect some rain (and wind) at this time of the year, especially during our time in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Because of the likelihood of rain, we suggest bringing preventative gear (like a poncho, rain jacket).

It is also very possible that we experience hot and humid conditions without any rainfall on this tour with average daily high temperatures in Kruger being 86°F (30°C) at this time of the year. Conversely, it can get cold in the Drakensberg Mountains where the daily average low is around 48°C (9°C).

Excessive heat waves (with temperatures over 100°F (40°C)) with high humidity, and snow fall, have all been experienced on this tour in the past.

In summary, it is worth packing clothing for both cold and warm weather on this tour, the weather is unfortunately unpredictable at this time of the year.

WHAT TO BRING: CLOTHING AND OTHER ITEMS

Please see our blog on '[What to bring on a birding tour](#)' which will help you pack for this subtropical South Africa birding tour.