



**WESTERN SOUTH AFRICA: CAPE ENDEMIC,  
NAMAQUALAND FLOWERS AND THE KALAHARI**

**TOUR-SPECIFIC INFORMATION**



*Namaqua Sandgrouse is one of the many dry-country specials we'll look for in western South Africa.*

## TOUR OUTLINE

This 13-day tour allows access to most of the sought-after, arid-west specials (including many South African endemic and near-endemic bird species) found across western South Africa as well as some opportunities for big game viewing in the well-known Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. The tour starts in Cape Town, then takes you north along the west coast, where we transition from the fynbos biome into the rugged, hilly expanse of Namaqualand which should be in its impressive spring floral bloom. From here we head east into the vast dry plains of the Karoo and eventually into the Kalahari Desert where, after a few days visiting the big game Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, the tour will conclude in the small town of Upington, from where you will fly home.

## PACE OF TOUR

This is a busy and intense tour. It includes some long driving days (five hours, and more) and on these days we end up spending a considerable amount of time in the vehicle. We will have early starts on most mornings (around or just after sunrise) to avoid the midday heat, which can be quite unforgiving in this region. We will often only return to our accommodation either later in the morning, or only in the afternoon – depending on the exact route we take and species we are searching for. We will try to have the midday hours as down-time at our accommodation, where possible (though not always possible or practical).

It is important to note that although we do enjoy the spectacular floral displays in the Namaqualand, where it may be showing (this is a variable event, not prevalent every year) – this is first and foremost a birding tour, and birding will be our primary focus. Although some of our guides may have an interest in wildflowers, we always use specialist bird guides, rather than botanical guides, for this tour.

Breakfasts and lunches will mostly be simple, yet adequate, meal packs from our accommodations that we will take out on the road with us. We will, however, include the odd sit-down breakfast and lunch. Dinner will mostly be served at our accommodation, though in Cape Town we will eat out at restaurants.

Night drives will be another exciting aspect of birding on this tour, which may provide looks at some secretive nocturnal birds and animals. However, as on all our tours, these are always optional and you are more than welcome to opt out of any if you are feeling tired. This tour can become quite taxing physically so please make sure you do not over-exert yourself.

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

There is generally little walking involved with this tour, as we will mostly bird from the vehicle, with the longest walk estimated to be less than two miles (~three kilometers). Due to the remoteness of areas covered on the tour, and the nomadic nature of many of the target bird species, we will typically drive quite a lot on this tour – to and from birding areas. When we see birds, or get to a site or stakeout, we will then get out and bird around the vehicle, before moving onto the next area/site/bird.

Wherever possible we will ensure we get out of the vehicle to enjoy better looks at birds/animals/flowers, however, there will be limited opportunities for this in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. The Kgalagadi is a big-game reserve, and you are only allowed to walk around designated areas like rest camps and picnic sites. We try to make use of an open-safari vehicle to better enhance our game viewing, though kindly note that availability of these vehicles is limited in this reserve, and we are at the mercy of the park's availability, and rarely, we may not have access to this open-safari vehicle.

Most of the walking is on flat grounds and is easy, but kindly note that we will do some walks on rocky or uneven ground in certain places (e.g. looking for rockjumpers at Rooi Els, and searching for **Barlow's Lark** near Port Nolloth), so it is advised to wear appropriate footwear when out birding on this tour. The hardy and spiky vegetation along this tour can also be quite unforgiving on one's legs, so long pants are recommended.

We will likely spend some of our time in the Karoo waiting patiently at water troughs for the rare and nomadic **Sclater's Lark**, a species which can otherwise prove incredibly hard to find. This is a useful way to find several other, mostly nomadic, dry-country species as they come in to drink during the day.

### LENGTH OF DRIVES

There will be a few long transfer days on this tour, with the longest drive (between Pofadder and Kgalagadi) being about five hours. However, there is often good birding to be done along these transfer routes, and we will be sure to capitalize on this. The first few days of the tour will also consist of day-trip drives out from Cape Town, roughly 1.5 hours each way.

### SAFETY

We will mostly be outside of South Africa's main urban centers for the majority of this tour and, as with most of our birding tours, we should be quite safe throughout this tour. During our time in Cape Town, we will only visit areas that we deem safe, and won't be spending much time within the city itself. However, as is the case around any big city, it is always best to be aware and vigilant of yourself and your belongings. We also recommend that you do not leave your personal belongings and valuables in the vehicle while it is unattended, particularly in urban areas. If you are ever in doubt, please check with your tour leader.

We will also be visiting the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, in which we will mostly be limited to the vehicle, as it is a big-game nature reserve, with potentially dangerous animals. Here, we will be under the supervision of park rangers, who will instruct us on where we may alight from our open-top game-drive vehicle (e.g. at picnic sites etc.) and it is of utmost importance to adhere to their instruction when in the park.

### HEALTH, PESTS AND DANGEROUS ANIMALS

There is no risk of malaria in western South Africa.

Long trousers are, however, advised for protection from ticks, which do occur on this route and may lead to tick-bite fever, but this is rarely the case in this portion of the country. Thankfully, the ticks in South Africa do not carry Lyme disease.

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.

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

## TRANSPORTATION

A 14-seater minibus will be used on the tour, with an open-top safari vehicle used while in the Kalahari (pending availability). Due to our reduced maximum group size, this ensures that everyone will get a window seat while birding from the van. A seat rotation policy is strictly followed on this tour which will be explained to you by your guide at the start of the tour.

We will provide airport transfers to participants on the first and final days of the tour, which are included in the tour cost. Should you arrive in South Africa earlier than that or prolong your stay in South Africa after the tour, those transfers would be at your own expense. We will, however, help arrange transfers wherever they may be needed.

## DOMESTIC FLIGHTS

Although no domestic flights are required for this tour, you will likely need to take a domestic flight at the end of this tour from Upington to either Cape Town or Johannesburg. Upington is a small regional airport, and no international flights are offered from here. Kindly speak to the Birding Ecotours office about the logistics of this.

## ACCOMMODATION

We will stay in good quality accommodation throughout our tour (as with all our South African tours), varying from bed and breakfasts, to guesthouses and game lodges. Our lodge in the Kgalagadi is situated less than a mile from the park entrance, setting us up ideally to be at the park at opening time (our ranger will meet us at the park entrance).

It is important to note that buildings in South Africa are not as efficiently heated (or heated at all) as they are in Europe or North America, so please remember to pack adequate warm clothing.

## ELECTRICITY

Lighting in rooms tends to be low wattage, so you might like to bring a good quality torch/flashlight if you like to read 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 direct control over.

## **WEATHER**

On this tour we should plan for any kind of weather! This tour falls right at the beginning of spring, so it can be surprisingly cold on some nights, with the average temperature in Cape Town at this time of year being 70°F (21°C) during the day and 55°F (13°C) at night. If we happen to catch one of the last “cold fronts” of the season, blowing in from the Atlantic Ocean, we may get rain and cold weather, particularly while around Cape Town.

On the other hand, the Karoo and the Kalahari regions are semi-desert habitats which can get very hot and dry during the day (daytime temperatures reaching 89°F (32°C)), whilst becoming uncomfortably cold at night (sometimes down to 37°F (3°C)). We therefore advise people to bring warm clothing as well as a few shorts and t-shirts, to cover all bases. Layered clothing is usually best, so you can add, or remove, as necessary.

Wind can also be quite unpleasant in the Cape, being particularly buffeting close to Cape Town. In the Karoo and Kgalagadi, we will encounter much dust, and the wind can stir up the dust even more (as this area rarely receives rain), so we suggest bringing a scarf or buff to wear during such conditions. This is particularly useful when on our open-top safari drive in the Kalahari where dust may often be an issue.

## **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 western South Africa birding tour.