



**SOUTH AFRICA**

**GENERAL INFORMATION**



*Cape Rockjumper is always a crowd-favorite on our South African birding tours around the Cape.*

[www.birdingecotours.com](http://www.birdingecotours.com)



[info@birdingecotours.com](mailto:info@birdingecotours.com)

## OUR SOUTH AFRICAN BIRDING TOURS

We currently (at the time of updating this general information document, i.e. 16 March 2022) have six exciting set departure South African birding tours. These cover all of the country's important birding regions, provide opportunities for you to see most of the country's many endemics and specials, plus lots of mammals, spectacular scenery, and more. Our South African birding tours are as follows:

1. **Best of Cape Town and Beyond**
2. **Subtropical South Africa**
3. **Western South Africa: Cape Endemics, Namaqualand Wildflowers and the Kalahari**
4. **Premium Kruger and Escarpment Birding and Wildlife Safari**
5. **The Kalahari – Mammals and Birding**
6. **Photo Tour: Western Cape to Kruger National Park**

We also offer a number of South African birding day tours, if you only have a day or two to spare around one of the major cities, such as Johannesburg or Cape Town.

## PASSPORT AND VISA

Your passport must be valid for a period of at least six months after the date of your arrival in South Africa. Please make sure that there is at least one full empty page available in your passport. Please make sure that you also bring a photocopy of your passport, to be kept in a different location from your passport, in case of loss. Visas are generally not required but please check for your nationality.

## TRAVEL INSURANCE

We require (see Birding Tours Terms and Conditions - Birding Ecotours) that you purchase trip cancellation insurance in case you have to cancel due to illness just prior to the tour departure date, to protect yourself against accidents, medical, illness, loss of valuables, luggage etc. and travel interruptions or delays of all kinds. Allianz Travel and Generali Global Assistance are two options to consider.

## HEALTH/MALARIA

Please carefully read the Center for Disease Control (CDC) information for travelers to South Africa (or your government's equivalent health travel advice for South Africa). Below we have mentioned a couple of specific items but first and foremost kindly be advised by the updated information at the above link.

No vaccinations are required for South Africa however it is recommended that you are up to date with Hepatitis A and B, tetanus and polio. Please keep in mind that if you have not had any of these, one should make sure that you have been inoculated at least 6 weeks prior to your trip to take full effect.

## **Malaria**

We strongly recommend anti-malaria drugs for the Zululand and Kruger National Park portions of the subtropical South Africa tour and some other eastern South Africa tours of ours - when we'll be in malaria areas. Any one of the following three drugs are highly affective (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 months of visiting South Africa. If it is malaria, it can be treated with an alternative to the prophylactic that you chose.

There is no malaria in the Western or Northern Cape Provinces so our Cape trips do not pose a malaria issue.

## **MEDICAL CONDITIONS**

Please make sure that you are covered with medical insurance in case of an emergency while on these trips. Without insurance the cost of medical care can be extremely high. Please notify us at the time of registering for the tour of any medical conditions you think we should know about (including allergies, heart conditions, epilepsy, etc.). This will greatly help us to cater to your needs.

## **WATER / FOOD**

South Africa is one of the few countries in Africa where it is safe to drink the water in the major cities, eat unpeeled fresh vegetables and salads. However, we provide unlimited bottled water in the tour vehicles, and you are welcome to take water from the vehicle for evenings when not provided in the hotel rooms. More expensive bottled water at restaurants is excluded from the tour cost and is for your account, but (again) you can take water from our tour vehicle whenever you want.

## **CURRENCY AND MONEY**

South Africa uses rands (ZAR or simply R) with notes representing R200, R100, R50, R20 and R10 and coins representing R5, R2, R1, 50 cents, 20 cents and 10 cents.

Visa and Mastercard are widely accepted and to a lesser extent American Express, including for drawing cash from ATMs. Note: US and Canadian dollars, pound sterling and euros cannot be used for purchases. We will be able to exchange or draw money at the airport upon our arrival, and regularly during the tours.

## PELAGIC TRIP PREPARATION

This applies to our Cape Town pelagic trips. Please note that by request we also arrange one-day pelagic trips in Mozambique, Namibia, Australia, New Zealand, the USA, etc., and these notes generally apply for those as well. A pelagic trip is run over the course of one day (or sometimes a half day) and involves heading out into the open ocean in search of various species only occurring out at sea. While this is a truly spectacular adventure, one must remember that we are always at the mercy of the ever-changing sea conditions.

The vessel will depart from the specified port around sunrise and venture out into the ocean for usually a maximum distance of 30 nautical miles (55 kilometers) from land. Off southern Africa this is usually the 'drop zone', where deep water is present and many fishing vessels operate. On a pelagic trip we strive to try and find a fishing vessel, whether it be a trawler or a longliner, as they attract huge masses of birds. We spend quite a large part of the day out at sea (depending on weather and sea conditions) and return to our port of departure in the afternoon (usually any time between 2:00 and 4:00 p.m.). We provide a light lunch on board with various snacks, eats, and drinks, although if you should want anything specific, we recommend that you bring it yourself.

A pelagic trip is booked over two consecutive days (usually a weekend). The first day is used as the primary day, but should the previous day's weather forecast indicate that sea and/or weather conditions will prove more adverse on the first day, yet better on the second day, the pelagic trip will go ahead on the second day. However, it is possible that the trip may not go ahead at all due to adverse conditions over the entire two-day period. This is, unfortunately, not something we can predict and reliably confirm far in advance, and we are at the mercy of the weather/sea conditions and the word from our very experienced skippers, who ultimately give the final approval. Your safety on board the vessel is of paramount importance to us, and should the conditions of the sea prove to be too dangerous, the vessel will not go out. The pelagic trip is confirmed by the skipper, either way, a few days before it is due to depart. We will keep you informed about the decision.

What you will require:

- Most important is a waterproof layer of clothing. There is often wind out at sea, and it blowing off the swells creates some spray. It is very easy to get wet on board, especially while heading out to the trawling grounds and returning back to port.
- Layered and warm clothing. No matter the conditions predicted, whether it be sun or cloud, it can get cold out at sea, and bringing warm clothing is advised. It is also recommended to bring layered clothing, so that you can remove/add on as the conditions change. Sometimes it gets hot, so one needs to be prepared for this too (hence the need for layers).
- Applying sun lotion or anti-sunburn cream is recommended, no matter the conditions. It is very easy to get badly burnt out at sea, whether it be a sunny or cloudy day. Sunglasses are also vital.

- It is recommended to bring a hat that can be fastened to your head to prevent it from being blown away. Sunglasses are also recommended, as the glare from the ocean can be very bad at times, but note that it is very easy to lose a pair of sunglasses, and they will invariably pick up some spray from the ocean.
- Due to the nature of the pelagic trip, water/spray invariably gets on board the vessel, and it is very easy to get your feet completely wet. Either waterproof hiking boots, or sturdy Teva-type sandals that can be fastened to your feet are recommended.
- Anti-seasickness medication. Not everyone is affected by seasickness, but it is a very unpleasant experience should you get seasick. Various tablets, such as Stugeron, are recommended. Should you be prone to seasickness, it might be worth consulting your local pharmacist for stronger medication. Some seasickness pills make one very drowsy, so do consult a doctor and ask her/him as many questions as possible, before deciding.
- Binoculars and cameras are recommended (as in any birding excursion), but again please note that they can very easily get wet and could get damaged as a result. A covering over your camera is advised.

Further information on pelagic birding can be found [here](#).

## WEATHER

South Africa is a land of great physical contrasts, from mountains and forests to grasslands and semi-deserts. October, when many of our tours run, is spring so we can get elements of winter or summer weather – with luck the weather will be mild throughout! It is usually mild to warm or even hot at this time of the year and maximum temperatures can vary from about 68–86 °F (20–30 °C). Nights should be mild but there is a very small chance of temperatures slightly below freezing (32 °F) especially while at elevation in the Drakensberg (e.g. Dullstroom and Lesotho) – snow is even possible. So please be prepared for ALL weather possibilities, from a little below freezing to quite hot. Spring is unpredictable.

The Cape has winter rain – so we *should* miss rain there as we will be there in spring however rain can sometimes continue into spring too! Subtropical South Africa has summer thunderstorms, so we may experience these but often the rains only start in November or December – October is the end of the dry season over most of South Africa, except the Cape! But please be prepared for rain, even though there is not likely to be much.

The Cape pelagic trip can be cold and wet, or warm and very sunny, so be prepared with layers of clothing, waterproofing, as well as sunglasses and sunblock/sunscreen (reflection off the sea can burn eyes and skin severely).

**Please note that on our 2018 tour we had at least one Canadian person finding it colder than expected in the Cape (in October, so spring) – there was late “winter-type” weather this year. Accommodations are often not heated like they are in North America, Europe, etc. Kindly be prepared for all kinds of weather, from cold to hot.**

## ELECTRICITY

The standard voltage in South Africa is 220–240 V. If you intend to recharge video batteries etc. in your hotel room you will need an international adapter (South Africa mostly uses Type D – 3 round prongs in a triangular pattern, but also uses Types M and N, see [here](#) for further details and photos). Lighting tends to be low wattage, so you might like to bring a good quality torch/flashlight if you like reading in bed! A good torch will also be useful if you fancy joining us for a night walk or drive. If you intend to do any trips, you'd be advised to bring at least one good torch preferably with a good beam. All the places we will stay at will have electrical outlets for chargers and laptops.

**Note:** Please check all equipment that you plan on charging to see if it is 110/120 to 220/240 V compatible. If that is the case, you only need an adaptor to plug US plugs into. If your equipment is only listed as 110-120 V then you will need a [converter](#) to convert the electric current to 220–240 V.

## LENGTH OF DRIVES

There are a couple of days in which there are long drives – say 5 hours, without stops, however most days involve far less traveling. In the Kruger National Park, it is illegal to alight from one's vehicle because of the presence of large, dangerous animals such as lions and elephants, so we are restricted to the vehicle except at picnic areas and rest camps. In the Kruger National Park and Mkhuzo Game Reserve, we do thus spend most of the day in the vehicle, but we also spend time doing birding walks around the rest camps (and picnic areas).

**Some roads can be dusty so please consider bringing a scarf or other measures in case you're birding along an unpaved road and a car goes past putting up dust. Dust is a particular issue on our Cape Town and Beyond birding tour, when birding in the Tankwa Karoo.**

## WHAT TO BRING

### Clothing

Casual and informal dress is fine in the hotels. Loose lightweight field clothing works best, with a warm fleece or jacket for cooler weather. Shorts and T-shirts are fine – it's what the locals wear! You will also need to bring some warmer clothing, certainly a minimum of a warm fleece and a rain jacket. Rain is always a possibility, so an umbrella and or rain gear is always useful to have. Early mornings can feel a bit chilly in some areas so come prepared, especially in the Drakensberg/Lesotho/Dullstroom which is at relatively high altitudes.

Sunglasses, sunhat and sunscreen (rated SPF 30 or higher) are essential. A pair of trousers or a long skirt, and a long-sleeved shirt should be included to help protect against forest vegetation and the sun. Swimwear can be brought as there are swimming pools at some of the lodges.

We would recommend lightweight walking boots for when out on foot. You might like to consider sandals/tevas for use in the safari vehicles and for walking between your room and restaurant in the hotels and lodges.

**Do not forget** – BINOCULARS, prescription drugs (also bring the generic names for these drugs), toiletries, prescription glasses (and a spare pair), insect repellent, camera, flashlight, batteries (for electronic equipment and chargers for the re-chargeable batteries), converter plug set, if needed (the electricity supply is 220 V, 50 Hz) and plug adaptors, alarm clock, mosquito repellent, money pouch, field guide(s), soft-sided duffel style luggage is recommended (hard-sided luggage is not always ideal), daypack/backpack, and your favorite road snacks!

**Key documents and cash** – Passports, your travel or health insurance cards (you can send us copies to file in case of emergency), credit cards – Visa and Mastercard are best in South Africa – see above, US dollars, euro or pounds can be exchanged into rands if you prefer not to simply draw from ATMs, cash for drinks, gifts, **tips**, items of a personal nature etc.

## LUGGAGE

Due to restricted space in the vehicles, please pack as lightly as possible. A medium-sized, soft-sided duffel bag (not the hard-sided cases) works best for packing in the vehicles. This allows us to better fit the bags. Please bring a daypack to keep items that you wish to use or need on a daily basis.