



**BIRDING TOURS SOUTH AFRICA:
GENERAL INFORMATION**



PASSPORT

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 also bring a photocopy of your passport, to be kept in a different location from your passport, in case of loss.

VISA

Generally not required, but please check for your nationality.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself against accidents, medical conditions, illness, loss of valuables, luggage, etc., and travel interruptions or delays of all kinds.

General Global Assistance is one option: <https://www.generalitravelinsurance.com/>

HEALTH / MALARIA

Please visit the Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) website [here](#) for health information about traveling in South Africa.

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 vaccinations, you should make sure that you have been inoculated at least six weeks prior to your trip for the vaccination to take full effect.

Malaria

There is no malaria in most parts of South Africa except in north-eastern KwaZulu-Natal and the low altitude areas of Mpumalanga and Limpopo. But please find more information [here](#) because some of our tours lead through parts of the country where malaria does occur.

We strongly recommend taking malaria prophylactics when in Zululand or Kruger – see the malaria map at the [Centers for Disease Control](#) website – when we'll be in a malaria area. Any one of the following three drugs are highly effective (albeit not 100 percent due to resistant strains of malaria) as malaria preventative measures:

Malarone® (atovaquone/proguanil),

Doxycycline, and

Lariam® (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 after visiting South Africa. If it is malaria it can be treated with an alternative to the prophylactic that you chose.

MEDICAL CONDITIONS

Please make sure that you are covered with medical insurance in case of an emergency while on this trip. Without insurance the cost of medical care can be extremely high. Please notify us at the time of registering for this 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 and eat unpeeled fresh vegetables and salads. But we supply bottled water as most visitors prefer this.

CURRENCY

South African Rand (ZAR or simply R). Currently US\$ 1 is about ZAR 14.3 (Jan 2020), but it fluctuates widely.

Traveler's checks are difficult to cash. You need to visit a South African bank to cash traveler's checks and pay a commission. You're better off using a debit or credit card, which lets you make cheap or free ATM withdrawals to get South African rand. Visa and Mastercard are widely accepted and to a lesser extent American Express, including for drawing cash from ATMs. We will be able to exchange or draw money at the airport upon arrival and regularly during our tours at ATMs.

Note: US dollars, Canadian dollars, pound sterling, and euros cannot be used for purchases.

WEATHER

South Africa is a land of great physical contrasts, from mountains and forests to grasslands and semi-deserts. The country does have four seasons – summer, fall, winter, and spring – only they are reversed from the seasons in the Northern Hemisphere; summer: December to February, fall: March to May, winter: June to August, spring: September to November.

South Africa experiences a high degree of sunshine with rainfall about half of the global average, increasing from west to east, and with semi-desert regions in the north-west. While the Western Cape has a Mediterranean climate with winter rainfall, most of the country experiences summer rain. Subtropical South Africa has summer thunderstorms, so please be prepared for rain, even though there is not likely to be much.

For our major tours, those to the Western Cape and to Subtropical South Africa, which are run in February/March and October, weather conditions are the following:

February/March is late summer/early fall, and often it will be hot, but high in the mountains it can get surprisingly cold even in summer (so please do bring layers). March is one of the rainiest (but birdiest) months, but since South Africa is generally a dry country, rain rarely seriously interrupts the birding.

October is spring, so there are elements of winter or summer weather – with luck the weather will be mild and in between throughout! It is usually mild to warm or even hot at this time of year, and maximum temperatures can vary from about 20–30 °C. Nights should be mild, but there is a small chance of slightly below freezing temperatures especially high in the Drakensberg (e.g. Dullstroom and Lesotho) – even snow is a possibility. So please be prepared for all weather possibilities from a little below freezing to quite hot. Spring is unpredictable.

The Cape pelagic 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).

Be aware that accommodations are often not heated like they are in North America, Europe, etc. Kindly be prepared for all kinds of temperatures, from cold to hot. For more details please see <https://www.gov.za/about-SA/geography-and-climate>.

ELECTRICITY

It is 220-240V. If you intend to recharge camera batteries etc. in your hotel room you will need an international adapter (for three round prongs in a triangular pattern, ITA Type M, or occasionally the European plug, ITA Type C).

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 preferably with a good beam will also be useful if you fancy joining us for a night walk or drive. All the places we will stay will have electrical outlets for chargers and laptops.

Occasionally there might be a period of load shedding/rolling blackouts, and when the country struggles to generate enough power this can occur several times a week, usually for two to five hours at a time. Those with CPAP machines thus need to bring backup batteries.

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

LENGTH OF DRIVES

There may be a couple of days in which there are long drives - say five hours without stops. Most days involve far less traveling.

In Kruger National Park as well as in a number of other national parks and game reserves it is illegal to alight from one's vehicle because of the presence of large, dangerous mammals such as lions and elephants, so we are restricted to the vehicle except at picnic areas and rest camps. In these reserves we thus spend most of the day in the vehicle, but we also spend some time doing birding walks around the rest camps and picnic areas and staying in bird hides.

CAPE TOWN PELAGIC TRIPS

For the pelagic trip included in the Western Cape tours please see “Preparation for a Pelagic Trip” and “What you will require” at <https://www.birdingecotours.com/tour/cape-town-pelagic-trip-1-day/>. There is also a lot more information at <https://www.birdingecotours.com/pelagic-birding-with-birding-ecotours/>.

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 jacket. Rain is always a possibility, so an umbrella and/or rain gear is always useful to have. Early mornings can be chilly in some areas, especially in the Drakensberg/Lesotho/Dullstroom areas, which are at relatively high altitudes, so come prepared.

Sunglasses, sunhat, and sunscreen (rated SPF 15 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 accommodations. We would recommend lightweight walking boots for when out on foot. You might like to consider sandals for use in the safari vehicles and for walking between your room and restaurant in the hotels and lodges.

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 throwing up dust.

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 rechargeable batteries), converter plug set if needed (the electricity supply is 220 Volt, 50 Hz) and plug adapters, alarm clock, money pouch, field guide (s), soft-sided duffle-style luggage (hard-sided luggage is not ideal), daypack/backpack, favorite road snacks

Key Documents and cash

Passports, Travel- or Health Insurance Cards – photo copies of which can be left with our ground agent in case of emergency, Credit cards – Visa and Mastercard are best in South Africa – see earlier, Cash for drinks, gifts, tips, items of a personal nature, etc.

LUGGAGE

Due to restricted space in the vehicles please consider packing quite lightly. A medium soft-sided duffle 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 for items that you wish to use or need on a daily basis.

DANGEROUS ANIMALS

We will be visiting areas inhabited by very venomous snakes, although as usual we will be very lucky to see any. Black Mambas are relatively abundant in KwaZulu-Natal. The Boomslang (“tree snake”), an arboreal snake that is highly venomous and for which there is no anti-venom, is quite widespread in South Africa, but it often fails to inject venom because its fangs are set very far back in its head. Puffadders, Berg Adders and Night Adders can be very dangerous because they love to sun themselves in pathways and are extremely lethargic, not moving until accidentally trodden on. Unlike rattlesnakes they give no warning. Cobras, including spitting cobras, also occur in South Africa.

We recommend hiking boots, jeans/long trousers, and a good dose of care to minimize the danger of snakebites. We do not take anti-venom on our tours but will rush you to a private hospital if you do get bitten; your own travel insurance (especially medical insurance) is crucial.

In those game reserves where large predators freely lurk it is illegal to alight from one’s vehicle except in rest camps and picnic areas, for very good reason. The guides will also advise where hippos, crocodiles, etc., roam outside of the game reserves (such as at Lake St. Lucia).

CRIME

When arriving at Cape Town, Durban, or Johannesburg international airports extremely good care of one's personal belongings should be taken (as in any big city).

LANGUAGE

South Africa has an incredible 11 official languages, but most South Africans are fluent in English and it is very easy to get around the country using English.

BOOKS

Birds

Details of the field guide we recommend the most and of a good app with bird calls and a lot more can be found [here](#) (scroll down to southern Africa).

Mammals

Stuarts' Field Guide to Mammals of Southern Africa by Chris and Mathilde Stuart, Struik Publishers. 2015

Smithers' Mammals of Southern Africa – a field guide. Edited by Peter Apps. 1996

The Kingdon Pocket Guide to African Mammals by Johnathan Kingdon – Princeton University Press. 2005

Reptiles

Field Guide to Snakes and other Reptiles of Southern Africa by Bill Branch, Struik Publishers. 1998 - excellent

Butterflies

Field Guide to Butterflies of South Africa by Steve Woodhall, 2005 – the best of those available
Sasol First Field Guide to Butterflies and Moths of Southern Africa by Simon von Noort, 1999

Insects

Field guide to Insects of South Africa by Mike Picker, Charles Griffiths and Alan Weaving, Struik publishers. 2004

General Interest

“*The Long walk to Freedom*”, Nelson Mandela’s autobiography, is a must read.

MAPS

South Africa Map from ITMB 1: 1,500,000, 2012 edition – you may want to purchase a map before your trip to give you an idea of where we’ll be visiting.

HABITATS

We bird virtually every habitat in South Africa on our many tours, from open ocean to pristine grassland to forests from sea level (subtropical) to temperate (above 1000 meters), to dry woodland, to savanna, to wetlands of all kinds. Our detailed itineraries give a good overview.

IMPORTANT

Check whether your tour operator is legal in South Africa – please read [this](#) carefully.