



**NORTHERN THAILAND: SPECTACULAR RESIDENT AND
MIGRANT BIRDS**

TOUR-SPECIFIC INFORMATION



Himalayan Bluetail is one spectacular bird! We will be looking out for this stunner while birding in the mountains of northern Thailand.

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THAILAND CAN BE READ [HERE](#)**TOUR OUTLINE**

On this Thai birding tour, we will undertake a short circuit around the mountains (mainly) of northern Thailand as we take in excellent birding sites while we look for an eclectic mix of resident and migrant birds. Some of the areas we will bird include [Doi Inthanon National Park](#), [Doi Chiang Dao Wildlife Sanctuary](#), and [Doi Pha Hom Pok National Park](#) (including [Doi Ang Khang](#) and Doi Lang). We will also spend some time on the plains of the region which includes the huge [Chiang Saen Lake](#), the mighty Mekong River, as well as expansive rice paddies and lowland scrub. Doi Inthanon is Thailand's highest peak and has a whole suite of birds found nowhere else in the country and offers some top-quality birding. Some of the many highlights possible on this tour include **Mrs. Hume's Pheasant**, **Siberian Rubythroat**, **Pied Harrier**, **Ultramarine Flycatcher**, **Giant Nuthatch**, **Himalayan Cutia**, and a long list of thrushes, flycatchers, laughingthrushes, and other spectacular birds. This tour does offer some good photographic opportunities at several of the sites we visit.

DAILY ACTIVITIES, PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS, AND TOUR PACE

This birding tour runs at a fairly moderate pace but includes only a couple of one-night stays. Time will be spent traversing various mountains in search of a wealth of birds in the different elevation zones. We will bird on forest trails, forest tracks and roads, and will spend time visiting stakeouts and forest blinds/hides for some of the more secretive species.

There will be a fair bit of walking involved and this will often occur at a (relatively, for Thailand) high elevation, with hikes of around 2.5 miles (four kilometers), or more, on most mornings and afternoons. We will of course be walking slowly as we bird. Although in the mountains the majority of trails are flat for sections, but with (usually short) steep sections (these can be in the form of slopes with or without steps). We will also cover similar distances in the rice paddies.

The highest elevation we will be birding at is 8,415 feet (2,565 meters) when we are at the summit of Doi Inthanon. We can drive right to the top of the mountain here so minimal effort is required. We will walk some trails at the summit (there is a boardwalk through the unique, for Thailand, bog habitat here) which we will take at a slow pace. We will be spending a lot of time birding between 3,000–8,000 feet (1,000–2,500 meters) during the days at our mountain birding sites, but we will not be spending nights at elevation, we will drop down to the plains where we will stay at around 1,000–1,600 feet (300–500 meters). See the “Weather/Climate” information below.

It will be necessary to have an early breakfast on most mornings and quite a few of these will be boxed breakfasts taken in picnic-style or as a tailgate breakfast. This will ensure we will be at the birding areas when we need to be. A large majority of lunches will be taken in the field as boxed lunches in picnic-style. We will purchase fresh supplies each day from the nearest large supermarket. It is worth noting that toilet facilities on one of the mountains, Doi Lang, are non-existent, so going to the toilet in the bush will be a necessity at this site, if needed. We are likely to be out of range of a “proper toilet/restroom” for the majority of the day exploring Doi Lang. All the other mountain sites have suitable facilities. This information was accurate based on our 2020 pre-Covid tour ([see trip report here](#)), and will be updated as soon as we are allowed back up there!

Despite our accommodation being in the best locations possible, most days will require a drive of up to an hour from our base to where we will be birding. On some occasions we will have to leave the accommodation in the region of 05:00 hrs to get to where we need to be ahead of other birders/photographers, or to just get to the specific mountain pass that we need to be for sunrise. On one morning we will leave our accommodation at 04:30 hrs to reach the birding spot at the start of bird activity, this will require the use of 4x4 pick-up trucks as we drive up a rough mountain road for 90 minutes (more details on this lower down in this section). After the very early starts we will usually take a break back at our accommodation during the early afternoon to take some well-deserved rest. Due to the elevation at some of the sites, the temperature doesn't get as hot as other areas (see the "weather/climate" section below) so on some days we will be out and away from our accommodation all day, taking a rest over the lunch period (on most mountains this will be in cafes/park buildings, though on Doi Lang this will be within the shade of the forest).

On some evenings we will be birding until after dark. On one evening we will visit a **Pied Harrier** roost site, we will stay at the site until dark and will then drive back to our hotel, and on another evening, we will be out in the rice paddies until dusk, before driving back to our hotel. On these occasions our evening meals might be later than on other days.

On most days we will have to drive for around an hour to get to the birding spots from our chosen accommodation (which are the best/only choices for places to stay and have been selected based on years of birding in this region of Thailand). There will be a few days where we undertake longer drives, of approximately two to four hours as we move between different overnight bases. Many of the roads we will be taking are winding mountain roads and so if you suffer from motion sickness you will likely need to take some medication to counter the effects. Please note that the majority of sites we visit can be accessed in our regular tour vehicle, however one day trip (to the top of Doi Chiang Dao) will require a 4x4 pick-up truck. Accessing this site is via an approximately 90-minute bumpy road and is possibly not suitable for everyone (e.g. anyone suffering from a bad back), as it is very hard to make this trip particularly comfortable. Anyone not wanting to do this trip is welcome to sit it out and spend the morning birding in and around the grounds of our excellent accommodation (or sleeping in and enjoying a rest and late breakfast!).

Photo identification should be carried at all times, this is a requirement of the local laws but particularly necessary (and likely to get requested) when we are birding near to the Thai-Myanmar border where there are military checkpoints.

The birding in this part of Thailand has a great sense of adventure to it, and our tour offers some really thrilling birds and birding experiences (as well as some simply spectacular landscape views) and the information above should help you to be prepared for what to expect in this remote part of Thailand. If you have any questions on this tour, please message us via our [contact form](#).

Important Note: *the majority of mountain birding sites in this region (with the exception of Doi Inthanon), are along the Thai-Myanmar border, and access rules can change without warning, with whole mountains or roads suddenly closed, or other access restrictions put in place. If this happens, we will need to remain flexible and adjust our plans and focus on other suitable areas, of which there are many. It goes without saying that any such situation is beyond our control, but we will do our utmost to make the best out of any unexpected circumstances.*

SAFETY

Trips and falls are possible on the trails and mountain roads and care should be taken when walking/getting out of vehicles. A hiking pole or walking stick can be useful for extra support/grip. The weather can be cold and if you are not suitably prepared (see “Weather/Climate” information below) it can be rather uncomfortable and can also lead to illnesses.

WEATHER/CLIMATE

We are likely to experience a wide range of temperatures on this tour. When we are in the lowlands (e.g. in Chiang Mai city, the rice paddies, our accommodations at the foot of the various mountains, and at Chiang Saen) we are likely to get daytime temperatures of 91–93 °F (33–34 °C), but nighttime temperatures may drop as low as 41 °C (5 °C). In the mountains daytime temperatures are likely to be in the range of 50–77 °F (10–25 °C) and nighttime temperatures can drop to 32 °F (0 °C) at Doi Inthanon summit. By the time we reach the summit the temperatures are likely to be just above the nighttime temperatures so will feel cold, and are likely to be around 41 °F (5 °C) when we start birding. Fog and mist are common features in the plains in the early morning period and can persist until the sun burns it off.

The weather (and migrant birds) in this part of Thailand can be heavily influenced by the weather in China and if a cold air mass comes down from the north, temperatures could be lower than those outlined above.

ACCOMMODATION

We will stay in a range of accommodation during the tour, such as in city hotels and nature lodges. All are clean and comfortable with air-conditioning in the room (and/or fans where air-conditioning is unlikely to be necessary) and most have Wi-Fi either in the room or in the communal areas. Our nature lodges at Doi Inthanon and Chiang Dao have good grounds for birding, should you wish to take a break from the mountain birding, and are both situated in excellent birding areas. The city hotels are used for convenience where necessary and we will mainly just be sleeping/eating breakfast/dinner in those as we will be spending full days birding in the mountains, but they are all of a good standard.

MEALS

We will have a range of Thai food during the tour and at a couple of locations we will also have the opportunity for some high-quality western food, should that be of interest to the group, as an alternative. Mealtimes will vary during the tour, depending on the plan for the day. Some meals (several breakfasts and lunches) will be taken as picnics.

WHAT TO BRING: CLOTHING AND OTHER ITEMS

A woolly hat, gloves, and scarf can be useful for our time birding at the summit of Doi Inthanon. Please do not bring army style (camouflage) clothing because we will be birding close to the Thai-Myanmar border where there will be numerous military personnel and checkpoints and this type

of clothing might raise suspicion. A hiking pole or walking stick might be beneficial if you are not steady on your feet.



*A shy and secretive **Scaly Thrush** blending in perfectly with the leaf litter.*



***Spot-breasted Parrotbill** can be found in the mountains of northern Thailand.*