



**CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN VIETNAM:
ENDEMIC AND REGIONAL SPECIALS**

EXTRA-SMALL, SMALL-GROUP BIRDING TOUR

05 – 20 MARCH 2024

08 – 23 MARCH 2025

25 MARCH – 09 APRIL 2025



Bar-bellied Pitta, one of the stunning near-endemic targets on this exciting tour.

This extra-small, small-group birdwatching tour to central and southern Vietnam starts and ends in Ho Chi Minh City, formerly known as Saigon. This birding tour is a guaranteed departure with just four tour participants and has a maximum of just five tour participants, making it one of the most exclusive birding tours in Vietnam, with unrivalled viewing opportunities of great birds.

The tour focusses on finding as many of the endemic, near-endemic, and special birds of the region and provides excellent opportunities for anyone wanting to photograph Asian birds. We will visit the well-known sites of Cat Tien National Park, the Da Lat and Di Linh Plateaus, Mang Den, and Ngoc Linh Nature Reserve, as well as some less-well-publicized sites for specific target birds. By being in a very small group we will be able to utilize a series of bird blinds (bird hides), which will allow for some excellent photographic opportunities and close-up views of some of the key (and often secretive) species outlined below. A small group will also be beneficial when birding within the forest environments, enabling everyone to stand a higher chance of gaining great views of the many birds that are possible on this very exciting tour.

Some of the key species we will look for during the tour include, but are certainly not limited to, **Bar-bellied Pitta, Blue-rumped Pitta, Blue Pitta, Rusty-naped Pitta, Siamese Fireback, Silver Pheasant, Green Peafowl, Germain's Peacock-Pheasant, Orange-necked Partridge, Pale-headed Woodpecker, Necklaced Barbet, Red-vented Barbet, Long-tailed Broadbill, Silver-breasted Broadbill, Green Cochoa, Orange-breasted Laughingthrush, Chestnut-eared Laughingthrush, Golden-winged Laughingthrush, Red-tailed Laughingthrush, White-cheeked Laughingthrush, Black-hooded Laughingthrush, Brown-crowned Scimitar Babbler, Red-tailed Minla, Indochinese Fulvetta, Black-crowned Barwing, Short-billed Scimitar Babbler, Indochinese Green Magpie, Ratchet-tailed Treepie, Dalat Bush Warbler, Vietnamese Greenfinch, Vietnamese Cutia, Grey-crowned Crocias**, and plenty more. The tour also offers excellent animals, including gibbons, monkeys, and interesting reptiles.



*The striking **Indochinese Green Magpie** can be seen on this tour.*

Detailed Itinerary (16 days/15 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon)

After your arrival in Ho Chi Minh City's Tan Son Nhat International Airport, you will be met by our hotel representatives and transferred the short distance to our hotel. Your time today is at your leisure. We will have a group welcome meal at our hotel in the evening.

Overnight: Ho Chi Minh City

Day 2. Travel from Ho Chi Minh City to Cat Tien National Park

We will depart our hotel early and get some breakfast along the way. We will spend the morning and early afternoon in some bird blinds (bird hides) halfway between Ho Chi Minh City and Cat Tien National Park, where we will hope to find **Bar-bellied Pitta**, **Blue-rumped Pitta**, **Orange-necked Partridge**, and **Siamese Fireback**, as well as a range of babblers and bulbuls. Although this is the first birding we do of the whole tour, it's likely to rate as one of the best mornings on the tour, with many highlight species possible.



*We will look for **Blue-rumped Pitta** during the tour.*

In the afternoon we will complete our journey to Cat Tien National Park, one of the best-protected lowland forest reserves in Vietnam and all of Indochina. We will arrive for our three-night stay in the late afternoon.

Overnight: Cat Tien National Park

Days 3 – 4. Birding at Cat Tien National Park

Cat Tien was the first national park to be established in southern Vietnam. The park has an impressive bird list, with more than 300 species recorded, including several globally threatened species and Indochinese endemics, such as **Germain's Peacock-Pheasant**, **Orange-necked Partridge** (with luck), **Siamese Fireback**, **Green Peafowl**, **Pale-headed Woodpecker**, **Bar-bellied Pitta**, **Blue-rumped Pitta**, and **Grey-faced Tit-Babbler**.



Germain's Peacock-Pheasant is a target while birding at Cat Tien National Park.

There are literally hundreds of species to look for in the national park and other birds we will hope for during our stay include **Ashy-headed Green Pigeon**, **Orange-breasted Trogon**, **Banded Broadbill**, **Black-and-red Broadbill**, **Dusky Broadbill**, **Violet Cuckoo**, **Great Hornbill**, **Blue-bearded Bee-eater**, **Banded Kingfisher**, **White-crested Laughingthrush**, **White-bellied Woodpecker**, **Black-and-buff Woodpecker**, **Great Eared Nightjar**, **Large-tailed Nightjar**, and **Blyth's Frogmouth**. In addition to birds, Cat Tien's forests are an important refuge for **Black-shanked Douc Langur**, one of the least-known primates in Asia, and **Red-cheeked** (Yellow-cheeked) **Gibbon** and we will look for both of these during the tour. The sound of the whooping and screaming gibbons is *the* sound of the early morning here and is super impressive.

Our time here will offer some great birds and wildlife. The accommodation and food here is basic, but the bird/wildlife sightings make it worthwhile and an essential stop on any birding tour of Vietnam, the national park is that special. The temperatures here climb steeply during the day and so we will have early morning and late afternoon birding sessions, with the middle part of the day spent sitting out the heat.

Overnight (two nights): Cat Tien National Park

Day 5. Cat Tien National Park to Da Lat

We will have a final early morning birding session at Cat Tien National Park before we head north to the Da Lat Plateau during the middle of the day. We will have lunch along the way and will get on with some afternoon birding near Da Lat city after our arrival, where we will look for **Red-vented Barbet**, **Long-tailed Broadbill**, and other interesting targets.

Overnight: Da Lat

Days 6 – 7. Birding at Da Lat Plateau

We have two full days to explore the excellent birding sites around Da Lat, and we will focus on Ta Nung Valley, Ho Tuyen Lam (Tuyen Lam Lake), and Bidoup-Nui Ba National Park. We will spend one day utilizing bird blinds (bird hides) for a range of special birds and will birdwatch along forest trails and remote roadsides to mop up our many target birds.

Ta Nung Valley is a small remnant evergreen forest patch, where we will look for the rare and endemic **Grey-crowned Crocias**, along with **White-cheeked Laughingthrush**, **Blue-winged Minla** (a distinct local subspecies known as “Plain Minla”), **Rufous-backed Sibia**, **Black-headed Sibia**, **Vietnamese Greenfinch**, and **Black-throated Sunbird** (also a very distinct subspecies, known as “Langbian Sunbird”), all of which can be found here.



Grey-crowned Crocias is not known from many sites, it is an Endangered (BirdLife International) Vietnamese endemic, found in the montane zone of central Annam, Vietnam.

Bidoup-Nui Ba National Park is one of the five largest national parks in Vietnam. Vietnamese endemics found here include **Black-crowned Fulvetta**, **Dalat Bush Warbler**, and **Collared**

Laughingthrush. Other target birds in this national park include **Rusty-naped Pitta**, **Yellow-billed Nuthatch**, **White-spectacled Warbler**, **Chestnut-crowned Warbler**, **Kloss's Leaf Warbler**, **Mrs. Gould's (Annam) Sunbird**, **Spotted Forktail**, **Black-throated (Grey-crowned) Bushtit**, **Hume's Treecreeper**, **Grey-bellied Tesia**, **Dark-sided Thrush**, **Short-tailed Scimitar Babbler**, and a very distinctive endemic subspecies of **Red (Dalat) Crossbill**.



Collared Laughingthrush is a beautiful yet rare Vietnamese endemic (photo Phuc Lee).

Ho Tuyen Lam (Tuyen Lam Lake) is a man-made lake just outside the town. Vietnamese endemics found here include **Vietnamese Cutia**, **Grey-crowned Crocias**, and **Vietnamese Greenfinch**. Other target birds from this area could include **Yellow-billed Nuthatch**, **Black-headed Sibia**, **Black-headed Parrotbill**, **Burmese Shrike**, **Black-collared Starling**, **Vinous-breasted Starling**, and **Slender-billed Oriole**, as well as many others.

Overnight (two nights): Da Lat

Day 8. Da Lat Plateau to Di Linh (Birding at Nui San Pass)

We will have a final morning of birding around the Da Lat area. Later we will drive to Nui San Pass (Deo Suoi Lanh near Di Linh town), a forested pass along the road from Di Linh to Phan Thiet. Here we will look for one of the most beautiful birds in the region, **Indochinese Green Magpie**, along with near-endemic **Black-headed Parrotbill**. Other possibilities include **Silver-breasted Broadbill**, **Black-hooded Laughingthrush**, **Red-vented Barbet**, **Orange-headed Thrush**, **Black-chinned Yuhina**, and **Hainan Blue Flycatcher**.

Overnight: Di Linh

Day 9. Di Linh (Birding at Nui San Pass)

We will have a morning birding at Nui San Pass area to look for **Blue Pitta**, and other targets such as **Indochinese Green Magpie**, **Black-headed Parrotbill**, **Black-hooded Laughingthrush**, **Red-vented Barbet**, **Bar-backed Partridge**, **Collared Babbler**, **Yellow-vented Green Pigeon**, **Silver Pheasant**, **Maroon Oriole**, **Red-billed Scimitar Babbler**, **Long-tailed Broadbill**, **Orange-breasted Trogon**, and **Red-headed Trogon**.

In the afternoon we will travel back to Ho Chi Minh City to be well placed for our early morning flight the following day.

Overnight: Ho Chi Minh City.



Blue Pitta is a stunning bird, and we hope to see it during the tour.

Day 10. Morning flight from Ho Chi Minh City to Pleiku then travel to and birding at Mang Den

We will fly from Ho Chi Minh City's Tan Son Nhat International Airport to Pleiku airport, Kon Tum Province in Central Vietnam. After arrival at Pleiku we will drive to Mang Den, our first birding stop in Central Vietnam.

We plan on spending the afternoon in a bird blind (bird hide) looking for one of our top targets in the region, the increasingly rare, recently discovered, and endemic **Chestnut-eared Laughingthrush**. We will also have a back-up opportunity the following day if needed and there are lots of other excellent birds on offer in this area.

Overnight: Mang Den



We will search for the declining *Chestnut-eared Laughingthrush* while at Mang Den.

Day 11. Birding at Mang Den

We will spend the morning and afternoon birding sessions near Mang Den, where we will continue our search for **Chestnut-eared Laughingthrush**, if required. Other specials of Mang Den, of which there are many, include **Stripe-breasted Woodpecker**, **Yellow-billed Nuthatch**, **Black-hooded Laughingthrush**, **Short-tailed Scimitar Babbler**, **Ratchet-tailed Treepie**, **White-winged Magpie**, **Rufous-faced Warbler**, and **Grey-headed Parrotbill**.

Overnight: Mang Den

Day 12. Mang Den to Tu Mo Rong

There will be time for some early morning birding at Mang Den looking for more of the above species. In the afternoon we head further north to the rural village of Tu Mo Rong, where we will arrive in the late afternoon at our very basic accommodation for two nights.

Overnight: Tu Mo Rong

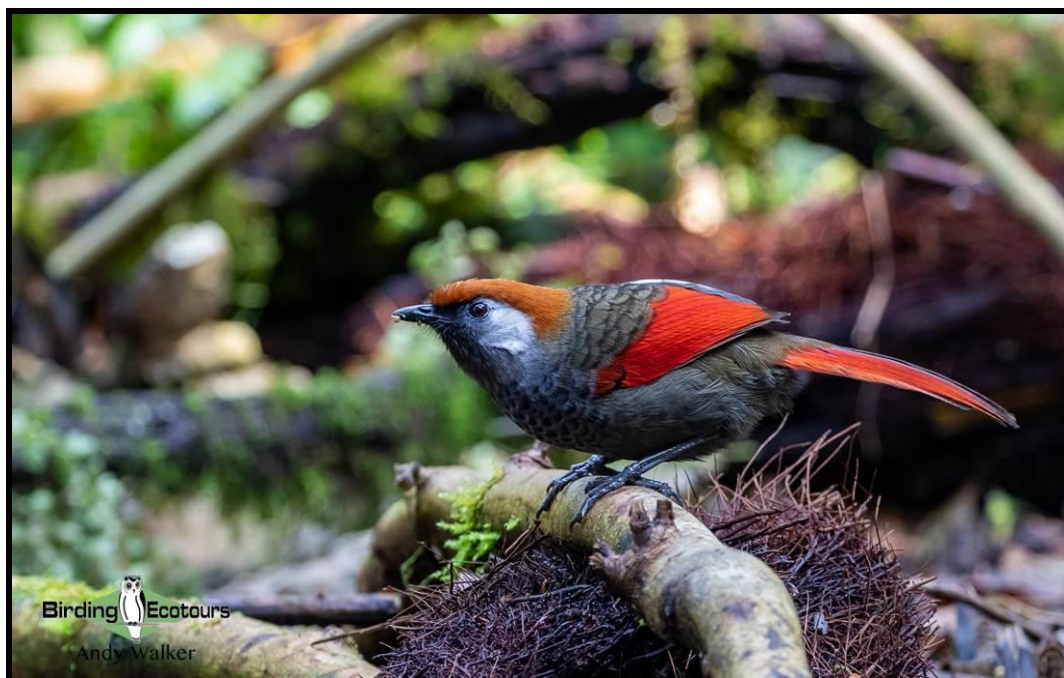
Day 13. Birding at Ngoc Linh Nature Reserve

We will spend the majority of the day birding at Ngoc Linh Nature Reserve. This is a really special area, where two species (**Golden-winged Laughingthrush** and **Black-crowned Barwing**) were described to science as recently as the 1990s! These new species were originally found by BirdLife International expeditions to the remote Mount Ngoc Linh (2,598 meters / 8,520 feet), which is the highest peak of the Central Highlands. We will of course be looking for these two key species, but plenty of other species are possible, such as **Indochinese Fulvetta**,

Red-tailed Laughingthrush, Green Shrike-babbler, Brown-crowned Scimitar Babbler, Red-tailed Minla, Green Cochoa, Golden-breasted Fulvetta, and Rusty-capped Fulvetta.



*One of our targets at Ngoc Linh Nature Reserve is **Golden-winged Laughingthrush**.*



*Laughingthrushes feature heavily on the tour, including the stunning **Red-tailed Laughingthrush**.*

Here we might find an interesting mixed flock or two which could hold interesting species like **Kloss's Leaf Warbler**, **Grey-cheeked Warbler**, **Chestnut-crowned Warbler**, **Yellow-cheeked Tit**, **Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher**, **Pygmy Flycatcher**, **Snowy-browed Flycatcher**, **Mountain Bulbul**, **White-browed** (formerly Blyth's) **Shrike-babbler**, **Rufous-winged Fulvetta**, **Silver-eared Mesia**, and **Vietnamese Cutia**.

During our time in Ngoc Linh Nature Reserve, we will bird forest trails, remote mountain roadsides, and make use of two bird blinds (bird hides) which may offer excellent photo opportunities of some of the most desired species.

Overnight: Tu Mo Rong

Day 14. Tu Mo Rong to Da Nang

Today, is a long travel day as we make our way from Tu Mo Rong in the mountains down to Da Nang, Vietnam's third largest city, on the coast. We will make a couple of birding stops along the way and stop for breaks and lunch as needed. We might spot some interesting birds during some of these breaks, such as **Wire-tailed Swallow** and **Striated Swallow**.

Depending on our timings and how tired we are (and the weather situation), we might have time to visit the nearby Son Tra Nature Reserve, where we will look for the Critically Endangered (The International Union for Conservation of Nature - IUCN) **Red-shanked Douc Langur**. If we don't have time this afternoon, we will be covering the site looking for the monkey and other birds the following morning in any case.

Overnight: Da Nang



Red-shanked Douc Langur is one special and attractive animal, and we will be looking for them at the end of the tour near the city of Da Nang.

Day 15. Bird and mammal watching on the Son Tra Peninsula, afternoon flight from Da Nang to Ho Chi Minh City

The final morning of the tour will be spent bird and mammal watching at the Son Tra Peninsula. We will look for the rather special **Red-shanked Douc Langur** as our main target, one highly desired primate. We might find some interesting birds while looking for the monkeys, such as **White-crested Laughingthrush**, **Racket-tailed Treepie**, **Indochinese Blue Flycatcher**, **Red-whiskered Bulbul**, **Olive-backed Sunbird**, and **Crimson Sunbird**.

After lunch we will fly from Da Nang back to Ho Chi Minh City for the final night of the tour. We will have a final group meal together in the evening and will try and decide on a “bird of the trip”, which we can assure you will be no easy task based on previous experiences here!

Overnight: Ho Chi Minh City

Day 16. Tour concludes with international departure from Ho Chi Minh City

A non-birding day. The tour concludes with your departure from Tan Son Nhat International Airport, Ho Chi Minh City anytime during the day. Please note that breakfast is included today but no other meals are included. Also note that the hotel check-out time is noon, if you intend to stay beyond check-out time additional fees will be payable to the hotel and will depend on their availability situation.

Overnight: Not included

Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors. In addition, we sometimes have to use a different international guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling.

Duration:	16 days
Group Size:	4 – 5
Dates:	05 – 20 March 2024 08 – 23 March 2025 25 March – 09 April 2025
Start:	Tan Son Nhat International Airport, Ho Chi Minh City
End:	Tan Son Nhat International Airport, Ho Chi Minh City
Prices:	US\$5,990 per person sharing – based on 4 – 5 participants and includes domestic flights (2024) US\$6,589 per person sharing – based on 4 – 5 participants and includes domestic flights (2025)

Single Supplements: US\$770 (2024)
US\$847 (2025)

Price includes:

Two domestic flights (Ho Chi Minh City to Pleiku and Da Nang to Ho Chi Minh City) with 44 pounds (20 kilograms) hold luggage and 15 pounds (7 kilograms) hand luggage
Meals (from evening welcome meal on Day 1 until breakfast on Day 16)
Bottled water (if taken from our vehicle/our supply), please bring a refillable water bottle. Note that water taken from your room (other than free water provided by the accommodation), e.g., out of a minibar/hotel restaurant etc., will be responsibility of individuals to pay for
One free drink (excluding wine/hard liquor) with meals
Accommodation (based on two sharing)
Guiding fees with expert local guide and international tour leader
All entrance fees to national parks, nature reserves, bird blinds (bird hides), etc.
Bird conservation contribution
All ground transport while on tour, including toll fees
Airport transfers (may be shared)

Price excludes:

International flights into and out of Tan Son Nhat International Airport, Ho Chi Minh City
Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts, laundry, etc.
Porter fee (if you'd like someone to carry your camera equipment/tripods etc.)
Extra drinks beyond those included with meals as described above (and all wine/hard liquor)
Drinking water (and any other drinks) out of hotel minibars
Personal insurance
Visa fees
Gratuities

Group size note:

Please note that this is an extra-small, small-group tour (even smaller than our usual small-group set departure tours!), with a maximum of just five tour participants and a tour guaranteed departure with just four participants. This is because we utilize bird blinds (bird hides) within the forest (see conservation note below) and this is the maximum number of clients we feel is suitable for these, to allow more comfortable viewing and excellent visibility and photographic opportunities for everyone on the tour. We feel that a larger group (anything over five participants) would result in insufficient views from the blinds for some tour participants, which we wish to avoid. Our preference in general is for small-group tours as this provides better experiences for you, and this is especially important on this tour. This works for your benefit by allowing you much better views of the birds, as well as great attention from our expert local guide and the Birding Ecotours tour leader, and therefore results in a great all-round birding experience. The smaller group size is also a huge benefit when we are birding within forests and really maximizes your chances of many great and rarely seen birds.

Photographic opportunities:

This tour offers excellent photo opportunities. We spend considerable time in bird blinds (bird hides) on this tour across a range of sites and elevations, and there is a realistic chance of photographing stunning, secretive, and rare species, including pittas, pheasants, partridges, babblers, and laughingthrushes, as well as numerous common species that are exciting too! Some of the possibilities for great photos include **Bar-bellied Pitta, Blue Pitta, Rusty-naped Pitta, Blue-rumped Pitta, Germain's Peacock-Pheasant, Orange-necked Partridge, Rufous-throated Partridge, Siamese Fireback, Golden-winged Laughingthrush, Chestnut-eared Laughingthrush, Collared Laughingthrush, Red-tailed Laughingthrush, Brown-crowned Scimitar Babbler, Short-tailed Scimitar Babbler**, and dozens more.

Conservation notes:

The conservation situation for many of the endemic and near-endemic birds we look for on this tour is rather perilous. The main reason for this is due to uncontrolled deforestation, hunting, and the illegal cagebird trade. Many of the species are considered Vulnerable or Endangered by BirdLife International, and most of these are in decline.

By joining this tour, you are helping with finances to go directly through our excellent team on the ground towards education programs for school children, helping with supplementary feeding of rare and endangered birds, and providing income to the local people who maintain the bird blinds (bird hides) we visit, including reformed hunters trying to make a living by now protecting the birds they once hunted. This model has been working well in other parts of Asia such as in parts of Thailand and Indonesia and is to be encouraged, it is a step in the right direction, and by visiting birders being seen in remote areas of Vietnam, hopefully it will help trigger the realization that there are treasures in the forest worth protecting for future generations, and that they can provide frequent income from visitors rather than one-off income from a cagebird. It is an uphill task, but one we are passionate about being involved in.

The additional benefit, and the benefit to you on this tour, is that these bird blinds (bird hides) give incredible glimpses into the secretive forest world that is so tough to see otherwise, and can result in staggering sightings of extremely difficult birds, like pittas, pheasants, partridges, babblers, and laughingthrushes.