



SOUTH AFRICA

GENERAL INFORMATION



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

www.birdingecotours.com



info@birdingecotours.com

OUR SOUTH AFRICAN BIRDING TOURS

We currently (at the time of updating this general information document, i.e. April 2024) have six exciting set departure South African birding tours. These cover all of the country's important birding regions, providing 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 and you should ensure 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 for most Western nationalities, though you are required to double-check for your particular nationality.

Birding Ecotours can assist in providing documentation to confirm your participation on the tour, in support of your visa application. The onus is on you, as a client, to secure your visa to travel here.

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, as well as 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 AND SAFETY

Please carefully read the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (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 six weeks prior to your trip to take full effect.

Malaria

We strongly recommend anti-malaria drugs for the below three South African tours during which we'll be in malaria areas (please refer to the tour-specific documents for further information):

1. **Subtropical South Africa**
2. **Premium Kruger and Escarpment Birding and Wildlife Safari**
3. **Photo Tour: Western Cape to Kruger National Park**

We'll be in malaria areas during the Zululand and Kruger National Park portions of the subtropical South Africa tour and some of our other eastern South Africa tours. 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*) mosquitos 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 weeks 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/western South Africa trips do not pose a malaria issue.

Dangerous Animals

On many of our South African birding tours we will be visiting areas inhabited by highly venomous snakes (such as Black Mambas, Puff Adders, cobras, etc.) and scorpions, although as usual we will be very lucky to see any. To minimize the risk of snakebites or scorpion stings (which is very low), 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 hospital if you do get bitten; your own travel insurance (especially medical insurance) is crucial.

In game reserves where large predators and other dangerous large animals (like elephants etc.) freely lurk, it is illegal to alight from one's vehicle, except in rest camps, picnic areas and other specifically designated areas, for very good reason. Our tour leaders will also advise where hippos,

crocodiles, etc., roam outside of the game reserves (such as around St Lucia, eastern South Africa, for example).

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). We also strongly advise you to only accept help from anyone should they be a trusted person.

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 and eat unpeeled fresh vegetables and salads.

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.

As always, please do inform us if you have any food allergies or other dietary requirements. South Africa is generally progressive regarding international food standards and preferences, and can usually cater to various requirements, though we cannot always guarantee this. If you have special requirements/allergies that are hard to meet in third world countries, we kindly ask if you can bring along appropriate/replacement foods.

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 money only at the major airports on your arrival (forex bureaus are not widely spread in the outlying towns and villages, where we spend the bulk of our time on tour). Withdrawing local currency (rands) from ATMs is easy, and this can be done widely throughout the country.

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 this country using English.

VEHICLES

Small minibuses (Toyota Quantums) with modified windows are generally used on our set departure group tours within the country (with 4 or more participants). Private tours have more flexibility, and a wide range of vehicles can be used (such as SUVs, 4x4s, etc.) depending on specific circumstances. Air-conditioning is available in our tour vehicles.

We carefully restrict the number of participants on our set departure group tours for a reason; to ensure there is adequate space in the minibus, and so that everyone gets a window seat. Please be aware that these vehicles are the best possible vehicles for these tours. We have tried and tested a wide range of vehicles over many years, and given the constraints of the set departure group tours, these are the best possible choice.

In some reserves, such as Kruger National Park and/or the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park (amongst others), we may also make use of open safari vehicles, for a period whilst we are within the park. This greatly enhances game viewing opportunities.

Note, we make use of a seat rotation policy on our tours, and the tour leader can explain this in detail to you at the start of your tour.

PELAGIC TRIP PREPARATION

Some of our set departure and custom South Africa birding tours include an exciting Cape Town pelagic trip, where we head out to sea for most of the day in search of albatrosses, petrels and other seabirds. Our pelagic trip will depart from the specified port (Simon's Town or Hout Bay) 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. The ride out can be quite rough and uncomfortable at times but it will be well worth the effort, should we find a fishing trawler which is packed with seabirds. We then have a similar-length ride back to the harbour after a few hours in the trawling grounds. 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.

Whether our pelagic goes out or not, is entirely at the mercy of the weather, as sometimes bad weather and winds roll in and we simply cannot go out to sea, as the swells are too large and dangerous. A pelagic trip is booked over two (or three) consecutive days (usually a weekend), despite this, there is probably around a 50:50 chance of the pelagic going ahead throughout the year. The first day is used as the primary day, with the second (and sometimes third) days available

should weather prove more favorable then. However, it is possible that the trip may not go ahead at all due to adverse conditions over the entire two-to-three-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 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. Should our pelagic trip be cancelled entirely, we will make alternative birding plans at the tour leader's discretion.

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 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 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.
- It is recommended to bring a hat that can be fastened to your head to prevent it from being blown away. Sunglasses are also strongly 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 them as many questions as possible, before deciding.
- Binoculars and cameras are recommended (as in any birding excursion), but again please note that they can 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 – snow is even possible. Conversely, some lowland regions, like parts of KwaZulu Natal (eg., St Lucia, Mkhuze, Hluhluwe) and Kruger National Park, can be almost excessively hot and humid. So please be prepared for ALL weather possibilities, from a little below freezing to hot. Spring is simply unpredictable.

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). 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 control over.

Lighting in rooms 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.

INTERNET/WIFI

Most of the establishments we stay at have access to Wi-Fi internet, and cell signal. Kindly note that in many places, the Wi-Fi is not accessible from your rooms, but only the main reception area/dining area.

Local sim cards can easily be purchased on your arrival at any of the major airports, as cell signal is generally widespread throughout the country. Vodacom and MTN are the main providers.

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/Wakkerstroom/Dullstroom region 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.

Laundry can usually be done at many establishments throughout the country (at your expense) – but please note that a lead time of at least one day is usually needed (it is therefore impossible to get laundry done if we stay at a hotel/lodge for only a single night – but is usually possible if we have two nights or longer). It is always worth asking your tour leader for recommendations and advice on the tour.

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.

Luggage

Due to restricted space in the vehicles, please pack as lightly as possible. A medium-to-large sized, soft-sided duffle bag (ideally, not the hard-sided cases) generally works best and allows us to better pack and fit the bags in the vehicle. Please be aware that you can indeed get soft-sided duffle bags that have wheels and handles, to make it easier for you to transport. Please bring a daypack to keep items that you wish to use or need on a daily basis.

Should tours contain domestic flights within South Africa, kindly note that there is generally a weight restriction of ~20 kilograms (~40 pounds), limited to a single checked bag, per person (i.e., 1x checked bag of 20kg/40lbs). Overweight baggage (or multiple bags) incurs a surcharge, which is payable by the respective client.

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 duffle 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.

BOOKS

South and southern African have a broad range of natural history books and field guides and we would recommend the below field guides for any of your South African birding tours. Further details on some of the below bird field guides can be found in our blog on recommended African field guides, [here](#).

Birds

1. *Sasol Birds of Southern Africa* (Fifth Edition) by Ian Sinclair et al. Struik Nature, 2020.
2. *Roberts Bird Guide* (Second Edition) by Hugh Chittenden, Greg Davies and Ingrid Weiersbye – John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, 2016.

Mammals

1. *Stuarts' Field Guide to Mammals of Southern Africa* by Chris and Mathilde Stuart – Struik Nature, 2015.
2. *Smithers' Mammals of Southern Africa – a field guide* by Peter Apps. – Struik Nature, 2012.

Reptiles

1. *Field Guide to Snakes and other Reptiles of Southern Africa* by Bill Branch – Struik Publishers, 1998.

Butterflies

1. *Field Guide to Butterflies of South Africa* by Steve Woodhall – Struik Nature, 2005.

Insects

1. *Field guide to Insects of South Africa* by Mike Picker, Charles Griffiths and Alan Weaving – Struik Nature, 2019.