



## JAMAICA BIRDING TOUR: ISLAND ENDEMIC IN THE HEART OF THE CARIBBEAN

### TOUR-SPECIFIC INFORMATION



*The Red-billed Streamertail is often referred to as the “doctor bird” by locals and is Jamaica’s national bird.*

## TOUR OUTLINE

On this birding adventure we explore the beautiful island nation of Jamaica. This tour begins with birding around the bustling capital, Kingston, where we will visit wetlands and dry-forest to target, amongst others, **Stolid Flycatcher** and **Bahama Mockingbird**, both species with restricted global ranges. Next, we ascend into the breathtaking Blue Mountains National Park, home to some of Jamaica's rarest birds, including Crested Quail-Dove, Rufous-throated Solitaire, and **Greater Antillean Elaenia**. We stay at the charming Starlight Chalet, an eco-lodge that serves as the perfect base for exploring the Blue Mountains, offering great sightings of many of Jamaica's endemic species right from its grounds. Midway through the tour, we head to the northeast, into Portland Parish, where we check into a peaceful group of villas overlooking the Caribbean Sea. With two full days of birding in this remote area, we will explore the famous Ecclesdown Road, searching for any remaining Jamaican endemics we have yet to see, which might include Jamaican Owl, **Black-billed Amazon**, and Black-billed Streamertail - one of the best hummingbirds in the world. We will also make a special effort to look for wintering migrants and the stunning White-tailed Tropicbird. This tour is perfect for a great week of birding in a true tropical paradise.

## PASSPORT, VISA, AND ENTRY FORM

Most visitors do not require a visa to visit Jamaica if staying for fewer than 90 days, however, you will need proof of your intended departure date and a return ticket to another country. Please make sure that you bring a photocopy of your passport with you on the tour, to be kept in a different location to your original passport, in case of loss/damage. This can be kept with other important documents such as vaccine certificate, emergency contact details, and insurance documents.

Australian, and United States (US) citizens need to have at least six months' validity remaining in their passports, and at least one blank page for entry and exit stamps. British/United Kingdom (UK) citizens and Canadian citizens only need their passports to be valid for the expected duration of the stay within Jamaica, but UK citizens need to have at least two blank pages for entry and exit stamps. Refer to the information here for US citizens, here for UK citizens, here for Canadian citizens, and here for Australian citizens, and please check these websites for any recent changes to ensure you are suitably covered.

Citizens of other countries should check their own governments' advice and contact their nearest embassies/consulates for up-to-date regulations and requirements.

Jamaica requires an entry form (C5 form) to be completed before arrival into the country, which can be completed online by following this link. This can be completed up to thirty days prior to arrival but must be completed at least the day before arrival.

## TRAVEL INSURANCE

As per our standard Terms and Conditions, we strongly recommend that you buy trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself against medical issues, accidents, illness, repatriation, loss of valuables or luggage, and travel interruptions or delays of all kinds.

## CRIME

Since the early 2000s Jamaica has unfortunately reported high levels of gang-related crime. While the people are friendly and welcoming, travelers can be targeted in certain areas. Incidents involving international visitors are primarily concentrated in specific parts of Kingston, Montego Bay, and Spanish Town, especially in the evening or at night. However, we have carefully designed this itinerary to avoid high-crime areas, staying primarily on private land or in remote locations far from where crime is reported. Throughout the tour, we will always be accompanied by a local guide or a trusted transfer service when outside accommodation grounds. While there are very few nocturnal activities planned during the tour, any night outings will take place in the remote northeast, well away from areas of concern. We also maintain constant communication with local guides and accommodation providers, who have reported no issues at the sites we visit.

In response to safety concerns, we have adjusted the itinerary to avoid high-crime areas in Kingston. For the first night of the tour, we stay in a hotel with 24-hour security, located in a safe part of the city. On our first morning, we hope to visit wetlands northwest of Kingston and the arid Hellshire Hills to the southwest—both of which are outside of high-risk areas and can be accessed safely. We will be accompanied by a local guide who regularly leads tours to these sites. If conditions change, we will not visit these sites, and instead we will depart earlier for the Blue Mountains where we will be in the remote highlands away from Kingston.

While the overall risk remains low, we encourage all participants to remain mindful that crime is a possibility throughout the trip. Please take extra care of personal belongings and ensure that no valuables are left visible in unattended vehicles.

Additionally, we advise you:

- Do not independently explore Kingston before or after the tour. If you are interested in doing so, book private transfers and use known tour operators.
- Be increasingly cautious whilst traveling after dark.
- Be mindful of optics and mobile phones when we are birding outside of the hotel grounds.
- Avoid solo traveling.
- Do not use public transport, book private transfers in advance and do not use local unmarked cars as a taxi.
- Be extra vigilant when visiting ATMs, and don't carry large amounts of cash.
- Use the hotel safe to secure your valuables.
- Leave valuable jewelry at home.

This is general advice, for more information please visit your respective government advisory. Refer [here](#) for US citizens, [here](#) for UK citizens, [here](#) for Canadian citizens, and [here](#) for Australian citizens, and please check these websites for any recent changes to ensure you are suitably covered.

## HEALTH, VACCINATIONS, AND MEDICAL CONDITIONS

Malaria is not present in Jamaica, however, Dengue fever and other insect-borne diseases, although uncommon, are present and so we recommend taking personal protective measures. These include using mosquito repellent, wearing long pants, and long-sleeved shirts, particularly at night when mosquitos and other biting insects are active. Please carefully read the CDC traveler advice [here](#) which contains information on required vaccinations to enter Jamaica. Please note, Jamaica requires a valid Yellow Fever Certificate if you are traveling from a region where yellow fever is present.

Please make sure that you are covered with suitable medical insurance in case of an emergency while on the tour, because without insurance the cost for medical care is likely to be extremely high. The [US travel advice](#) currently suggests obtaining medical evacuation insurance before traveling to Jamaica.

As per our general [Terms and Conditions](#), we require you to notify us at the time of registering for this tour of any medical conditions that we should know about (these should include, but not be limited to, walking/mobility issues, allergies, heart conditions, diabetes, epilepsy, long-term illnesses etc.). While Jamaica is a relatively small island, at times on this tour we are in remote areas away from hospitals and medical facilities.

## DANGEROUS ANIMALS

While Jamaica has very few venomous snakes, we will be visiting areas inhabited by these snakes, and as usual, we will be very lucky to see any. 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 try and rush you to a private hospital if you do get bitten (although we will often be in remote places); your own travel insurance (especially medical insurance) is crucial. Scorpions and spiders can cause problems (check your shoes/boots before putting them on), but there are no large terrestrial mammals on Jamaica to worry about. Continual care about placing hands and feet will reduce the chance of an unexpected encounter with something like a snake, spider, or scorpion.

## FOOD AND WATER

Water is generally potable in towns and cities, and at our accommodations, but it is best to drink bottled water while we are birding, as we will be visiting rural areas. An ample supply of drinking water is available throughout the tour in our vehicle, so please bring a refillable water bottle to try and reduce the amount of plastic waste. Ice is considered safe in high-standard restaurants and hotels but should probably be avoided in rural areas or on street stalls.

Mealtimes are likely to be within normal eating hours, but these will be somewhat flexible depending on our birding/travel plans and so if you need to eat food at a specific time of day (e.g. to agree with medication you are on) you may need to bring snacks to supplement the above, such as cereal bars/protein bars, dried fruit etc. There are limited opportunities to purchase snacks from convenience stores on this trip, so if you want items that are familiar, it is probably best to bring these from home. Different dietary preferences are well catered for in Jamaica, and both local and westernised food is readily available across the country.

## CURRENCY

The official currency of Jamaica is the Jamaican dollar (JMD/J\$), with banknotes available in denominations of 50, 100, 500, 1,000, 2,000, and 5,000 JMD. While the United States dollar (USD) is widely accepted, especially in tourist areas, paying in Jamaican dollars often provides better value. It's advisable to carry some local currency for smaller purchases and to avoid unfavorable exchange rates.

Visa and Mastercard are widely accepted at restaurants, shops, and hotels in major towns and cities and can be used for drawing cash from ATMs (bank charges may apply). Check with your card supplier whether you need to notify them of your trip to Jamaica, so you don't find your card disabled on your arrival in the country.

It will be possible to exchange or draw money at the airport, and during our time in Kingston, but it will be easier all round to either bring cash with you from home or sort it out at the airport. A small amount of local cash will be useful for personal purchases for items not included in the tour costs and for any gratuities. See the full list of what is/isn't included in the tour cost in the itinerary document here. Remember to remain vigilant when using ATMs for your safety and security.

## ELECTRICITY AND COMMUNICATION

Electricity is 110 V with the standard type A and type B electrical sockets (both have two flat parallel pins; type B has a grounding pin, see here for pictures). Although the electrical sockets are the same as in North America, not all sockets in Jamaica will be polarized (i.e. they are commonly type A) so you may still need an international adapter to use your plug, if you intend to recharge electrical devices, video batteries etc. in your room. All hotels and lodges we use have Wi-Fi, though it is only available in the public areas of the lodge in the Blue Mountains. Phone coverage is typically good throughout Jamaica, but it can be patchy when we are in the Blue Mountains, or when out birding in more remote areas such as Ecclesdown Road.

## ACCOMMODATION

We stay in a range of accommodation on the tour. Most of the accommodation is of a good standard, however the lodge in the Blue Mountains is more basic. The more basic accommodation is the only option for when birding in this remote area and gives us access to great birding right outside our rooms. All rooms (everywhere we stay) have air conditioning and/or a fan (air conditioning is not really considered necessary while staying in the mountains, where it is cooler). All rooms have private bathrooms with hot water, 24-hour electricity, and all have Wi-Fi connections. Laundry services are available throughout the tour. We use "standard" rooms on this tour, as is typical of most group birding tours around the world, and these are deemed by us to be sufficient for most people. If you would like to upgrade to a higher standard of room, such as a "luxury" room, this might be possible, depending on availability in some, but not all locations. Please note that there would be an extra charge for upgrading your room, please contact us to discuss options as far ahead of the tour commencement date as possible.



## WEATHER

Jamaica, located in the Caribbean just south of the Tropic of Cancer, enjoys a warm tropical climate year-round, with temperatures moderated by the Northeast Trade Winds. The island experiences two main seasons. The dry season, from December to April, brings warm but comfortable weather, with January and February the coolest months. Rainfall is at its lowest between January and March. The wet season, from May to November, is hotter and more humid. July and August are the hottest months, with temperatures reaching up to 90°F (32°C) and rarely falling below 77°F (25°C) at night. Rainfall is highest in May, June, October, and November. While hurricanes are possible between June and November, Jamaica is less frequently impacted than neighboring islands.

On this tour, we visit Jamaica at the end of March, during the dry season when daytime temperatures average around 79°F (26°C), cooling at night to around 72°F (22°C). We spend two full days in the Blue Mountains at an altitude of approximately 4,260 feet (1,300 meters) above sea level, where temperatures will be noticeably cooler than the lowlands. Short showers are possible during our tour, but prolonged rainfall is unlikely. Given its tropical climate, humidity in Jamaica is high, especially in the lowlands. To make the most of the comfortable morning weather, we will start early and adjust the afternoon schedule based on temperature and bird activity.

## SOME THINGS WE RECOMMEND YOU BRING ON THIS JAMAICAN BIRDING TOUR

### Clothing

In Jamaica, we expect the weather to be warm to hot during the day, so hot weather clothes are recommended as are a hat, sunglasses, and sunscreen. The weather is often mild at night, and for our two-night stay in the Blue Mountains temperatures may drop, so we recommend bringing long pants and sweaters. We will be birding through lowland and coastal rainforest which often have biting insects, particularly in the last two full tour days, so mosquito repellent, and long sleeves and long pants are advised. This tour is run in the dry season, which is great for birding (when Jamaica hosts many migratory species from North America), and means we shouldn't have much rain throughout the tour. That said, waterproofs are advised as we may encounter some light showers during the tour. There will be opportunity to swim during the tour. Camouflage clothing is strictly prohibited in Jamaica.

### Equipment

Don't forget your binoculars and camera! If you're unsteady on your feet, a hiking pole or walking stick is mandatory, especially while we are birding forest trails in the Blue Mountains National Park. Lightweight hiking boots are the best footwear for this tour with much of the birding along roads rather than long hikes through the forest. Sandals (flip-flops) or trainers are useful for walking around some of the accommodations but are not suitable for birding time (consider snake bites, mud, slips, and falls). We will be night birding on at least one night, and a flashlight or headlamp will be useful for this and are always useful in case of an unexpected power cut.

## BIRDING ECOTOURS EMERGENCY CONTACT DETAILS

Office: Cane +27-72-211-9863, Chris +44-7808-571-444

E-mail: [info@birdingecotours.com](mailto:info@birdingecotours.com) (which is checked almost daily)

## FIELD GUIDES

**Birds of the West Indies** (Kirwan, Levesque, Oberle, and Sharpe, 2019) – The best available bird guide for Jamaica and for the whole Caribbean. The illustrations are excellent and fit together seamlessly. Unusually the range maps are included on the plates, but this works well. There is a QR code for each species that links to the Internet Bird Collection database, allowing you to access a greater array of photographs, videos, and sounds.

**Birds of the West Indies** (Garrido, Keith, and Raffaele, 2020) – This guide is lighter and slimmer than the aforementioned field guide, but the illustrations, text and range maps are not as good, which makes this guide harder to use.

**A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Jamaica** (Haynes-Sutton, Downer, and Sutton, 2009) – A great guide and some may prefer this to the Birds of the West Indies as it only includes Jamaican species, but it is outdated and less useful in the field.

## USEFUL APPS AND WEBSITE RESOURCES

Aves Vox – a good app that enables the downloading of bird songs and calls from the xeno-canto website onto your cell phone.

eBird – there is a wealth of information contained on this website and the mobile app is now excellent and useful too. Photo, video, and sound galleries are available for practically every species in the world through The Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Macaulay Library.

Merlin – an app that can help you identify birds by sight (from photos) and sound (from recordings) and is a useful tool to aid bird identification. The app is getting expanded all the time with new data and regional information so is worth keeping an eye on. We recommend downloading the West Indies pack for this tour.

IOC World Bird List – this website contains all the latest details on the world of global bird taxonomy. You can read about newly described species, splits (creation of a new species) and lumps (deletion of a species) of existing species, and plenty of other important information.