



BIRDING TOUR NAMIBIA, OKAVANGO AND VICTORIA FALLS: TOUR-SPECIFIC INFORMATION



*The cute, and mostly terrestrial, **White-tailed Shrike** is a Namibian near-endemic.*

TOUR OUTLINE

This 18-day birding adventure includes three countries, Namibia, Botswana, and Zimbabwe. In Namibia we bird the coastline along the Namib Desert and Namibian Escarpment for a host of species that inhabit only northern Namibia and southern Angola. In addition, we will see one of the greatest shorebird spectacles on the African continent at Walvis Bay (plus find localized species such as **Damara Tern** and **Chestnut-banded Plover**). Further north, we spend a few days in Namibia's famous Etosha National Park where we enjoy a host of dry-country birds and other charismatic animals. We also bird the woodlands, rivers, and swamps of the Caprivi Strip and Botswana's Okavango Delta, which are inhabited by a phenomenal diversity of birds including the enigmatic **Pel's Fishing Owl**. Birding around the stunning Victoria Falls can also be very rewarding. The entire trip mixes truly unforgettable birding with impressive and unbelievably diverse scenery. Although the trip focuses on near-endemics and specials, we will end up with an impressive list of other birds as well as loads of mammals.

PACE OF TOUR

This Namibia, Okavango and Victoria Falls birding tour is a lengthy tour which may be tiring at times. In particular, this tour takes place in the early summer period and as such our days are usually long (with regular early starts) and full, and we are constantly looking for new birds every day (this productive tour usually yields around 400 bird species).

To ensure we take advantage of the early morning peak in bird activity, we will occasionally leave the accommodation with simple (but adequate) breakfast packs, however, we will still likely enjoy many delicious sit-down breakfasts on this tour (often taken later in the morning, after our early morning birding session). Similarly, lunches will often involve lunch packs, or simpler sandwiches/wraps which we eat while out birding or traveling, rather than a large sit-down meal. We use this method for breakfasts and lunches so that we do not waste large amounts of time during the day when we could otherwise be out birding. Although these meals may be simpler, we will always ensure you are well fed, so that you do not go hungry. Additionally, a range of snacks is usually available to participants, and can be bought at fuel station stops, etc. Dinner is usually the main meal of the day, and will of course be a sit-down meal and is generally of a very good standard (although sometimes vegetarian options are a little limited).

It is possible to opt out of some activities, such as various morning and afternoon excursions, and rather just enjoy some down-time or birding around camp. On some days, however, this won't be possible (please do ask your tour leader for specifics).

There will be the option for night birding excursions on this birding tour, however, (as with most of our birding excursions) these trips are not mandatory and we strongly recommend sitting out if you are finding the tour too tiring. Guided night drives are possible to book in Etosha National Park (where we are not allowed to drive around at night), however, these would be at your own expense and are only booked on the tour itself (at the camp's reception).

We generally ensure that we have some meaningful down-time regularly on the tour, particularly on our non-travel days, while on the days when we travel between accommodation, there is less time for down-time (as this is otherwise spent traveling between destinations).

The guide discusses the daily plan with the group in detail each evening. Note that we do retain a sense of flexibility, within reason, to allow for us to better maximize your birding experience.

WALKING AND STYLE OF BIRDING

The tour is generally considered ‘easy to moderate’ in terms of physical exertion. It does not involve a great deal of walking, or many prolonged periods of time where we will be walking/standing/on our feet. Any walks that we do are generally less than two miles (3.2 kilometers), and usually under two hours in length.

- The notable exception is the full morning that we spend out birding in the woodlands west of Divundu where we will be on our feet for longer periods and will be walking through quite sandy soil at times. This morning does not involve one long walk, but rather a series of shorter walks from the vehicle, which may last 1-2 hours at a time and can get tiring.

For large portions of the trip most of the birding is vehicle-based, where we are driving along roadside routes, stopping strategically and opportunistically to look for various birds and animals. We are normally always able to jump out the vehicle and bird from around/near the vehicle, undertaking short walks (10-30 minutes), to see the birds.

Kindly note, we are mostly restricted to our vehicle in Etosha National Park, and, to a lesser degree, Mahango Game Reserve. In these parks, it is illegal to alight from one’s vehicle outside of designated areas, because of the presence of large, dangerous animals such as lions and elephants, amongst others. We are therefore restricted to the vehicle, except at areas like picnic sites and rest camps. During our time in these parks, we thus spend large portions of the day in the vehicle on safari drives, but we also spend time doing birding walks around the rest camps (and picnic areas) where we are allowed out of the vehicle.

In Etosha National Park we make use of an open-top safari vehicle for the morning, to better enhance our game viewing experience.

LENGTH OF DRIVES

There are a few days in which there are long drives, made even longer with lunch/birding/fuel stops, however, most drives when not moving between accommodation involve far less travel. Some of the longer transfers of this trip include

1. Eastern Etosha to Rundu area
2. Shakawe to Katima Mulilo
3. Katima Mulilo to Victoria Falls (including two border crossings)

The above drives may take most of the day to complete. We’ll likely leave in the morning (e.g. 8 am) and spend the most of the day traveling and birding en route to our overnight accommodation, likely arriving in the late afternoon (e.g. 4 pm).

SAFETY

Crime

Although you will find that the people of Namibia, Botswana, and Zimbabwe are generally friendly, helpful and kind, crime is always a possibility (as it is virtually worldwide). While out

birding, we may visit some areas which are less safe than others, however, we will be mostly vehicle-based in these areas and will only visit these areas if we deem them safe. We urge you to be aware that crime is possible (although unlikely) throughout the trip – **please take very good care of your personal belongings and don't leave valuables visible in the vehicle when no one is with it.**

HEALTH, PESTS AND DANGEROUS ANIMALS

We will be visiting areas inhabited by venomous snakes, although as usual, we will be very lucky to even see a snake, and the likelihood of anybody getting bitten by a snake is low, however it is always worth being aware of their presence. 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 *extremely remote* places); your own travel insurance (especially medical insurance) is crucial.

While out birding on foot in some areas there could be ticks around, and so it is mostly recommended to wear long trousers and check yourself for ticks after the day out in the field. Additionally, it is a good idea to spray your legs/trousers and particularly boots/socks with anti-tick spray. There is no risk of Lyme Disease in Namibia, Botswana or Zimbabwe, however, African tick bite fever is a possibility which is generally much less severe than most other tick-borne diseases.

Rabies (although rare) does still exist in some areas in southern Africa and although the chances of you encountering rabid animals is very low on this trip, we strongly advise against touching/petting domestic animals while out in rural areas. Please consult with your tour leader if you are ever unsure though.

In game reserves, where large predators freely lurk, it is illegal for very good reasons to alight from one's vehicle except in rest camps and picnic areas. Scorpions and spiders may also cause problems.

Malaria and other diseases

We strongly recommend taking anti-malaria precautions. Any of the following three drugs is highly effective as a malaria preventative measure (albeit not 100 % due to resistant strains of malaria):

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 the tour. If it is malaria, it can be treated with an alternative to the prophylactic that you chose.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) [website](#), offers advice on how to further prevent contracting malaria while traveling.

Please also carefully read the CDC's health notices for traveling in [Namibia](#) and [Botswana](#). You can also take a look at the CDC's health notices for [Zimbabwe](#), but please be aware that we only venture into a tiny part of Zimbabwe near Botswana/Namibia, so the countrywide text for Zimbabwe does not really apply to this tour – the Botswana and especially Namibia sections are far more relevant here.

Please note, proof of Yellow Fever vaccination is required to enter Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe if you have visited a country with a risk of Yellow Fever transmission (see list of countries with risk of Yellow Fever transmission [here](#)). It is now widely accepted that Yellow Fever inoculation lasts as a lifetime vaccine (but you will still need to produce the certificate, even if it shows as a technically expired date).

TRANSPORTATION

Depending on the final group size, we will likely use a modified 12-seater minibus on this birding tour, ensuring everybody has a window seat. As with our other birding tours, we will use a seat rotation policy within the vehicle which will be explained to you by your tour leader at the start of the tour. Air-conditioning is available in our tour vehicle.

We will use a transfer company for the journey from Katima Mulilo (Namibia) to Victoria Falls (Zimbabwe) who will help facilitate (and speed up) our two border crossings on this drive.

Airport transfers are included in the tour price for transfers taking place *on the first day of the tour and the final day of the tour*, but would be for your own expense if you arrive on days preceding/following the tour. We will happily help arrange any of these transfers.

This tour includes the use of an open-top safari vehicle for a morning drive within Etosha National Park.

Another exciting element of this tour is that we will enjoy several boat trips. These boat trips are an excellent way to view and approach birds and other wildlife and access areas that we would otherwise be unable to access. For our Walvis Bay boat trip, we mostly stay within the bay, where the water is flat, however, we do often exit the bay (for around 30 minutes), where it can get a little choppy at times. If you are especially prone to seasickness, you might want to consider anti-seasickness medication, although we have never had any previous problems with seasickness on this boat trip.

The other boat cruises are on smaller, private boats along the Okavango and Zambezi Rivers and are a thoroughly enjoyable and tranquil way to see birds and wildlife, which are especially popular with photographers.

DOMESTIC FLIGHTS

There are no domestic flights required for this tour.

INTERNATIONAL BORDER CROSSINGS AND VISAS

This tour covers three different countries (Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe) and requires us to make four border crossings (in addition to arrivals/departures at airports). These border crossings do not take particularly long to cross, although the crossing into Zimbabwe can sometimes take a bit longer.

All three countries require your passport to be valid for at least six months after your departure from the country and you will also need at least three blank pages in your passport (your passport will gain a few extra stamps on this trip, so please consider this when checking the number of blank pages in your passport).

Namibia visa: Citizens of most nationalities (except a few African nationalities) will need a tourist visa to visit Namibia which is valid for 90 days. A visa on arrival application can be made online ([here](#)) before arrival in Namibia. You need to make sure you get a *multiple-entry visa* as we exit Namibia and then re-enter after two nights in Botswana. The accepted visa will need to be printed and produced at your port of entry. We suggest you make your visa on arrival online application one month prior to arriving in Namibia, and the e-visa should be granted within a day or two after submitting the application and making payment.

You can also obtain a visa upon your arrival in Namibia, however, this can be quite time-consuming and we strongly suggest obtaining the visa before your arrival, as some airlines don't always allow boarding without being shown a visa.

Botswana visa: Most (including USA, UK, Canada and Australia) nationals do not require a visa to enter Botswana, however, it is important to check visa requirements for your nationality (see [here](#)).

Zimbabwe visa: Most (including USA, UK, Canada and Australia) nationals will need to purchase a visa at the port of entry (while on tour) and are not required to apply for an e-visa before entering Zimbabwe. We strongly recommend bringing cash (US\$30-US\$90 depending on nationality and visa length) as sometimes the credit card facilities may be down. Some nationalities will, however, need to apply in advance, and the list can be seen [here](#).

ACCOMMODATION

The accommodation on this tour is of a good to excellent quality.

During our two nights in Etosha National Park we stay in government-run accommodation in a rest camp (Okaukuejo) within the park which means that the accommodation for these nights is a little more basic than elsewhere on tour, however, is still of a good standard. We stay in the park itself to ensure the full safari experience and so that we can be out in the park early to optimize our birding. The floodlit waterhole at Okaukuejo Camp is another massive drawcard to staying here, as you are able to sit and watch animals and birds come and go the whole night long, and this waterhole has produced some very special sightings over the years.

Should you wish to arrive a day or two before the start of the tour, we strongly suggest staying at Lagoon Lodge in Walvis Bay, where we are staying for our first two nights on tour. It is a lovely

place with views of the Walvis Bay lagoon (and its many flamingos and shorebirds) right from your doorstep. Please contact the Birding Ecotours office to help organize this for you.

It is possible to get laundry washed at most of the establishments used on this tour, with the following notable:

- It is not possible to get laundry done within Etosha National Park.
- Many establishments will only take laundry if we have a minimum of two nights, and the laundry is provided on the first day/arrival day.

ELECTRICITY

Electricity throughout the three countries is 220-240V. If you intend to recharge camera batteries etc. in your hotel room you will need an international adapter (three round prongs in a triangular pattern, [ITA Type D/M](#) for Namibia, [ITA Type D/G](#) for Botswana, and [ITA Type D/G](#) for Zimbabwe). [ITA Type C](#) plugs are also widespread throughout Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe. Note: If you are from North America or elsewhere, that does not use 220-240V electricity, then do 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 the US/Canadian/etc. 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.

MONEY AND ATMS

Namibian currency (Namibian dollars) can be obtained from ATM machines in Walvis Bay, soon after your arrival in Namibia, and can also be obtained from ATM machines throughout Namibia when we stop at fuel stations etc. However, please try to limit your ATM withdrawals as it can be an unnecessary inconvenience (and may result in additional international charges). We do not recommend withdrawing local currency in Botswana (Botswanan pula) as we will only be here for two nights and payments can be made with cards. In Zimbabwe we recommend carrying some US dollars (the unofficial currency), especially for acquiring your visa at the border post.

Please note, that card payment facilities should be available throughout the tour, and cash will likely only be needed for tipping.

WEATHER

Namibia's climate is typical of semi-desert terrain; hot days, and cool nights. The coastal regions are cooled by the cold Benguela Current, causing fog and inhibiting rainfall. With 300 days of sunshine on average per year, Namibia is truly a sunny place. Only during the summer months from November to April does rain occur, mostly as thunderstorms. The interior enjoys two rainy seasons: the short season is between October and December, marked by frequent thunderstorms. The longer season is from mid-January to April. Summer is from October to April. Temperatures can reach 110 °F (43 °C), while dropping at night to cool levels. Average daily temperatures range from 68 to 93 °F (20-34 °C). Winter is from May to September with wonderful warm days, which are contrasted by very cold nights when temperatures often drop to below freezing.

On this trip (taking place in summer) we expect very hot weather in the desert. Further east toward Victoria Falls (including Botswana) we expect hot and humid weather. The weather can be surprisingly cool on the coast, even in summer, so please be prepared for all weather but generally expect heat to be the main problem. It might rain, but since the areas visited are typically dry, we don't expect it to interrupt birding very much.

SOME THINGS WE RECOMMEND YOU BRING

Please see our blog on '[What to bring on a birding tour](#)' which will help you pack for this Namibia, Okavango and Victoria Falls birding tour.

Clothing specific to this tour

In Namibia, Botswana, and Zimbabwe we expect the weather to be warm to very hot during the day, and often mild at night. We do this tour at the best time for birds, but the disadvantage is the heat. However, the coast can sometimes be foggy and quite cool, and we recommend bringing sweaters, windbreakers, and long pants at least for the coastal part of the trip. Inland the Namib Desert is often extremely hot, but dry, whereas the Caprivi can be very hot and humid, even at night. So hot weather clothes are recommended, but long trousers, hiking boots, and long sleeves, although uncomfortable in hot weather, will help prevent insect and snake bites and sunburn. There is a chance of rain, especially in the Caprivi, the Okavango and at Victoria Falls.

FIELD GUIDES

Birds

Please refer [to our online resource for field guides and apps](#).

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

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, 440-page paperback. 2005 – the best of those available

Sasol First Field Guide to Butterflies and Moths of Southern Africa by Simon von Noort, 56-page paperback. 1999

Insects

Field guide to Insects of South Africa by Mike Picker, Charles Griffiths and Alan Weaving. 3rd Edition. Struik Publishers. 2019

IMPORTANT

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

