



SOUTH AFRICA BIRDING TOUR: BEST OF CAPE TOWN AND BEYOND

TOUR-SPECIFIC INFORMATION



*The gorgeous **Orange-breasted Sunbird** is a Cape endemic which we should easily see on this birding tour.*

TOUR OUTLINE

This short Cape birding tour is designed to give you a good introduction to the Cape and to give you a realistic chance of seeing most of the Cape's endemic bird species (excluding Fynbos Buttonquail, although please contact us if you would like to organize a pre-trip/extension to look for this cryptic endemic). Excitingly, we will embark on a single-day Cape Town pelagic to look for a memorable suite of seabirds (weather dependent).

The tour starts with a few days birding in the greater Cape Town area, before we head up the west coast and then further east into the Tankwa Karoo plains where we spend a full day seeking dry-country endemics and near-endemics. The tour then ends with a single night back in Cape Town so you can catch your flights home (or onwards to your next birding tour) the following morning (such as our set-departure subtropical South Africa birding tour which immediately follows this tour).

PACE OF TOUR

Although this is a short tour, we pack in a lot and as such it can mean some quite long days out birding, with limited down-time. On most of the days we will leave our accommodation early and only return late in the afternoon although on a couple of days we will ensure some down-time for you to take it easy. This is a fast-paced, short tour.

To ensure we take advantage of the early morning peak in bird activity, we will often leave the accommodation armed with fairly simple (but adequate) breakfast packs however we will still likely enjoy a few delicious sit-down breakfasts on this tour. Similarly, lunches will often involve lunch packs, or simpler sandwiches/wraps, which we eat while out birding (usually enjoying a picnic lunch) rather than a large sit-down meal, so that we do not waste large amounts of time during the day. A range of snacks are usually available to participants. Although these meals may be simpler, we will always ensure you are well fed so that you do not go hungry. Dinners will, of course, be a sit-down meal and are generally of a very good standard in the Cape, where we eat out at restaurants for most nights on the tour (though eating at our lodge in the Tankwa Karoo).

It is possible to opt out of some activities, such as various morning and afternoon excursions, and the pelagic trip. On some days, however, this won't be possible (please do ask your tour leader for specifics).

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' in terms of physical exertion. It does not involve a great deal of walking, and any walks that we do are generally less than a mile (1.6 kilometers), and under ~3 hours.

- The walks are never very strenuous although we might have to walk on uneven terrain when looking for rockjumpers near Betty's Bay.
- While birding in West Coast National Park and in the Tankwa Karoo we generally bird from the vehicle, although we can get out the vehicle and go for short walks strategically

and opportunistically, to see the birds.

- The vegetation in the Tankwa Karoo is very spiky and so long trousers are recommended to protect your legs from cuts and scrapes.

LENGTH OF DRIVES

This trip does not involve many long-distance transfers between accommodations, however, we do spend quite a lot of time in the vehicle, with many birding stops in between.

On our first couple of days, we will take day trips out from Cape Town, with a travel time of around 1.5 hours each way (much less for our pelagic day), with the transfer up the west coast also taking around 1.5 hours, with many birding stops en route.

The longest transfer of the trip, when we go from the west coast into the Tankwa Karoo, takes around 3.5 hours of driving, which excludes any birding stops along the way (of which there are a few). The transfer from the Tankwa Karoo back to Cape Town normally takes around three hours.

PELAGIC TRIP PREPARATION

This Cape birding tour includes 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 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 on this tour, 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 consecutive days (usually a weekend), despite this, there is probably around a 50:50 chance of the pelagic going ahead at this time of the year. The first day is used as the primary day, with the second day 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-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 very 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 canceled entirely, we will likely spend the morning at Cape Point (perhaps enjoying some land-based seawatching), however, the itinerary for this day will be at the tour

leader's discretion. In the event of cancellation of the pelagic, we will issue R3,000 vouchers to each tour participant which can be used for any future Birding Ecotours tours.

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 back 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 on 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 her/him as many questions as possible, before deciding.
- Binoculars and cameras are recommended (as in any birding excursion), but again please note that they can very easily 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](#).

SAFETY

Although this tour spends a lot of time in the greater Cape Town area (where safety is an issue in certain areas), we stay in safe suburbs where you generally do not need to worry about your personal safety. 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 you again do not need to worry about your personal safety. We suggest rather not leaving personal items of value in the vehicle while it is unattended, if you're ever in doubt, please just check with the tour leader.

HEALTH, PESTS AND DANGEROUS ANIMALS

There is no risk of malaria on this tour, as it is absent from this part of the country, however, there may still be mosquitoes around which are more of an annoyance than a health concern. In some

areas that we may walk, there could be ticks around, and so it is mostly recommended to wear long trousers and check yourself for ticks after a day out in the field. There is no risk of Lyme Disease in South Africa, however, African tick bite fever is possible but is generally much less severe than other tick-borne diseases.

***Note that dangerous and venomous snakes and scorpions, are possible, and this point is discussed in greater detail under the “South Africa General Information” document.**

TRANSPORTATION

Depending on the final group size, we will likely use a 14-seater minibus on this Cape birding tour, ensuring everybody has a window seat for every day of the tour. Air-conditioning is available in our tour vehicles. We will follow a seat-rotation policy every day to ensure fair viewing opportunities to everyone throughout the tour (your guide will explain further at the start of the tour).

We will provide airport transfers to participants on the first and final days of tour, which are included in the tour cost. Should you arrive in South Africa earlier than that or prolong your stay in South Africa after the tour, those transfers would be at your own expense. We will, however, help arrange transfers wherever they may be needed.

DOMESTIC FLIGHTS

There are no domestic flights on this Cape birding tour, although you would need to catch a domestic flight, should you be joining our subtropical South Africa birding tour which immediately follows this tour.

ACCOMMODATION

The accommodation on this tour (as with all our South African tours) is of good to excellent quality. It is worth noting that buildings in South Africa are often not heated like they are in North America and Europe, etc., and so for colder evenings it may be worth packing warmer sleeping clothes.

Our accommodation in the Tankwa Karoo is rustic, and more basic (than elsewhere on the tour) but is still of a good standard, with its own charm, and is certainly very comfortable. The accommodation is much more spread out, as we stay on a guest farm, which means that Wi-Fi may not be possible in your rooms but it will be possible in the dining area. Some of the rooms do not have a shower, but do have perfectly good baths – all rooms have hot water. By using this accommodation, we are basing ourselves right in the Tankwa Karoo with some great birding on our doorstep, which means we cut down significantly on travel times, compared to staying in the nearest town (around 50 miles/80 kilometers away). Additionally, with our nearest neighbors many miles away, it means there is almost no light pollution and the stargazing is simply spectacular.

It is possible to get laundry washed at most of the establishments used on this tour (generally, any of the establishments we stay at for two nights, or longer), provided they have a minimum of one-day lead time.

ELECTRICITY

Lighting in rooms tends to be low wattage (especially in the Tankwa Karoo), so you might like to bring a good quality torch/flashlight if you like to read in bed!

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 direct control over.

WEATHER

Many people are surprised how cold the Cape can be, even though this tour takes place in the spring months. It is possible that a cold front could pass through during our tour which might mean a few days of cold (and wet) weather. The wind can also be very strong at times which can make things unpleasant. We would thus recommend bringing ample cold weather clothing for this Cape birding tour. Conversely the weather can also be wonderful at this time of the year, although most conditions normally require long pants and a light jersey, as opposed to shorts and t-shirts.

Please note that on our 2018 tour we had at least one Canadian person finding it colder than expected in the Cape (in October, so spring) – there was late “winter-type” weather during that year. Accommodations are often not heated like they are in North America, Europe, etc. Kindly be prepared for all kinds of weather, from cold to hot.

The Tankwa Karoo will likely be the hottest destination we will visit on this tour, with daytime temperatures averaging 77-84°F (25-29°C). The average daytime temperature in Cape Town in October is 67-70°F (19-21°C) while the average nighttime temperature is 52-56°F (11-13°C).

Despite the generally cooler temperatures on this tour, the sun in the Cape can be intense and so we recommend the frequent application of sunscreen, particularly when out in the Tankwa Karoo.

The Tankwa Karoo is very dusty, and we recommend, if it is windy, that you wear a scarf or neck buff to cover your face and protect you from the dust.

WHAT TO BRING

Please see our blog on ‘[What to bring on a birding tour](#)’ which will help you pack for this Cape birding tour. In addition to what is suggested in this blog we recommend packing a buff to help protect you from dust while birding in the dry plains of the Tankwa Karoo.