



**SOUTH AFRICA BIRDING AND PHOTO TOUR – CAPE
TO KRUGER NATIONAL PARK**

TOUR-SPECIFIC INFORMATION



*The stunning **Southern Double-collared Sunbird** will be a highlight in the Cape area*

TOUR OUTLINE

This 15-day tour is centered on offering fantastic photographic opportunities of South Africa's most iconic birds and mammals. The tour starts in the picturesque Garden Route, complete with lush, forested hills set between dramatic mountains and serene beaches. We then venture west onto the rolling flats of the Agulhas Plain; a scene of agricultural land intermingled with areas of renosterveld fynbos. One such patch is found at De Hoop Nature Reserve, where we will base ourselves for two nights. From here, we move north, away from the coast, crossing over the stately Cape Fold Mountains into the arid desert region known as the Tankwa Karoo, which should provide us with stark landscapes and semi-desert specials. Journeying west, we cross back over another section of the Cape Fold Mountains and head towards the west coast to the holiday town of Langebaan, situated on the idyllic and bird-rich Langebaan Lagoon. The final region of this first segment of the tour is the beautiful city of Cape Town, in the southwest corner of South Africa. Here, we base ourselves for a few days while exploring the scenic mountainous and coastal regions beyond the city. This concludes the Cape leg of this tour, after which we will fly to the northeast of South Africa for a totally different wildlife experience.

After landing from our Cape Town flights, we spend five days in the world-renowned Kruger National Park enjoying the full safari experience. Over the five days spent in the park, we will go on game drives, see lots of exciting birdlife and hopefully acquaint ourselves with the Big Five, amongst the many other large mammals and tropical bird species found in the park. The tour will then end at Nelspruit/Mbombela from where we will fly out.

PACE OF TOUR

Even though this tour is quite busy, the pace is generally slower than our comparable tours of similar length, due to the photographic-oriented focus (rather than concentrating on accumulating high species numbers). That being said, the first part of the tour around the Garden Route and Cape Town covers lots of ground, with much driving, and we will have mostly full days. The Kruger leg of the tour should be more relaxed as we will return to the accommodation at midday between our morning and afternoon drives into the park. We will have early mornings most days (sunrise will be between 5:30 and 6:00).

Breakfast packs will be taken out most mornings for a picnic breakfast in the field, to make the most of peak birding activity at dawn. These are simple but perfectly adequate, and there may also be the opportunity for us to have a sit-down breakfast, on occasion. This would also apply for lunches. Dinners will involve sit-down meals at our accommodation or at nearby restaurants.

Night birding may also be done on this tour, but, as with all our tours, these are optional and you are welcome to opt out of any nocturnal excursions that may be offered. If interested, you can book a guided night drive in Kruger National Park upon our arrival at the rest camps, however, these would be at your own expense.

To re-emphasize, this is a photography-centered tour, and we therefore will spend longer periods observing and photographing animals and birds, than we normally do on our other regular birding tours.

WALKING AND STYLE OF BIRDING

This tour does not involve intense physical exertion and does not include any long or strenuous hikes. For the first part, the Garden Route to Cape Town leg of the tour, birding will either be done from the vehicle or on short walks. These walks should not be longer than two miles (3.2 kilometers) and will not be over steep terrain. It is worth mentioning that the walking track at Rooi Els where we look for **Cape Rockjumpers** is quite rocky and uneven.

In Kruger, we will mostly bird from the vehicle, as we are confined to our vehicle outside of certain designated areas (like hides/blinds, camps and picnic sites). We are restricted to our vehicles within the park, as it contains potentially dangerous wildlife such as **Lions** and **African Elephants**. We may also go for walks around the rest camps, though these are easy and short, typically under one mile (1.6 kilometers).

LENGTH OF DRIVES

Several of the days in the first part of the tour, from the Garden Route to Cape Town, will mostly be travel days with the odd birding stop en route to our next destination. Some of these longer transfer days include from the Garden Route to De Hoop Nature Reserve, De Hoop Nature Reserve to the Tankwa Karoo and the Tankwa Karoo to Langebaan. **On these transfer days, we'll likely leave in the morning (e.g. 8 am) and spend the whole day traveling and birding en route to our overnight accommodation, likely arriving in the late afternoon (e.g. 5 pm).**

We do not cover larger distances during the Kruger National Park leg of this trip, although will be mostly vehicle based while in the park.

SAFETY

Being away from urban centers for most of the tour, we do not expect crime to be a problem. During our time in Cape Town and other cities, we will only visit areas that we deem safe, and won't be spending much time within the city itself. However, as is the case in any big city, it is always best to be aware and vigilant of yourself and your belongings. We also recommend that you do not leave your personal belongings and valuables in the unattended vehicle, particularly in larger towns and cities, and when stopping in towns en route to your next destination. If you are ever in doubt about the safety of an area, please check with your tour leader.

While we are in the Kruger National Park, we will mostly be limited to the vehicle, as it is a big-game nature reserve, with potentially dangerous animals. Here, we will be under the supervision of park rangers, who will instruct us on where we may alight from our vehicle (e.g. at picnic sites etc.) and it is of utmost importance to adhere to their instruction while in the park.

HEALTH, PESTS AND DANGEROUS ANIMALS

When birding on foot, we advise wearing long pants and using tick repellent spray on your legs, socks and shoes as there could be ticks around. Ticks in South Africa fortunately do not carry Lyme Disease, but a bite may lead to tick-bite fever. This is, however, a far less threatening disease with generally no major, long-term consequences.

We also advise not touching or petting any stray dogs in rural areas on the off chance that they are carrying rabies; not a common disease in South Africa but it is still around.

***Note that dangerous animals (like Lions, Elephants) and venomous snakes and scorpions etc., are all possible, and these are all discussed in greater detail under the “South Africa General Information” document.**

Malaria

We strongly recommend taking anti-malaria medication for the Kruger National Park section of this tour. Taking place in January, this tour falls within the wet season for the Kruger region, so the risk of getting malaria is higher than during the dry season. Any one of the following three drugs is highly effective (albeit not 100 %, due to resistant strains of malaria) as protection against malaria:

Malarone® (atovaquone/proguanil),

Doxycycline, and

Larium® (mefloquine).

In addition to medication, the following measures can also be taken:

- Using mosquito repellent spray.
- Wearing long-sleeved shirts and trousers when out in the field, particularly near stagnant water.
- Wearing long sleeves at night, when malaria (*Anopheles*) mosquitoes are most active.

If you still manage to contract malaria, despite taking these precautions, it can generally be easily treated soon after symptoms are detected, with a prophylactic of your choice. Flu-like symptoms developing within weeks of the tour ending are indicative that you may have contracted malaria.

TRANSPORTATION

A 14-seater minibus will be the main tour vehicle which will ensure everybody has access to a window seat, every day of the tour. While in Kruger we will mostly be using an open-top safari vehicle, driven by game rangers. 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.

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

At the conclusion of the Cape Town leg of the tour, we will fly from Cape Town airport to the Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport (in Mbombela/Nelspruit), to commence with the Kruger portion of the trip. Kindly speak to the Birding Ecotours office to liaise about these logistics before booking any flights.

ACCOMMODATION

We will stay in comfortable lodges, guesthouses and rest camps that are of good to excellent quality. Our accommodation in Kruger National Park is more basic as it is government-run, but still comfortable. Staying inside the park allows us to be out at optimal birding time, first thing in the morning. The lodge we make use of in the Tankwa Karoo has its rooms (simple and rustic chalets/farmhouses) largely spread out. There are limited options in this region, and the homely nature of this lodge, combined with unparalleled access to the birds of the area make this an essential choice.

An important note is that South African buildings are not heated as effectively as they are in Europe or North America (and often not heated at all), so we advise you to bring adequate warm clothing, particularly for sleeping.

ELECTRICITY

Lighting in rooms tends to be low wattage (especially in Tankwa Karoo and Kruger National Park), so you might like to bring a good quality torch/flashlight if you like reading 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

This tour falls during mid-summer and our crossing regions of differing climates may add to the variability of weather. The Garden Route/Cape Town part should mostly be hot during the day (averaging around 79°F (26°C)) while being relatively cool at night (averaging around 62°F (16°C)), with the likelihood of strong winds in the afternoons. It would also be worth remembering to bring a scarf or buff, as it can get quite windy in the Cape. In the Karoo, this wind can kick up a lot of dust, making breathing uncomfortable, so you may want to consider bring along a buff/scarf.

The Karoo, being a semi-desert, should be hotter, drier, and a bit more extreme in temperature, often reaching 86°F (30°C) in the day and down to 50°F (10°C) at night.

Kruger National Park should also be hot (routinely reaching 95°F (35°C)) with additional humidity, and the likelihood of thunderstorms and rainfall. Therefore, we recommend mostly packing for warm weather, however, cold and wet weather is a possibility too. It is good practice to bring a raincoat/poncho for this part of the tour.

WHAT TO BRING: CLOTHING AND OTHER ITEMS

Please see our blog on '[What to bring on a birding tour](#)' which will help you pack for this Cape to Kruger Birding and Photography tour.