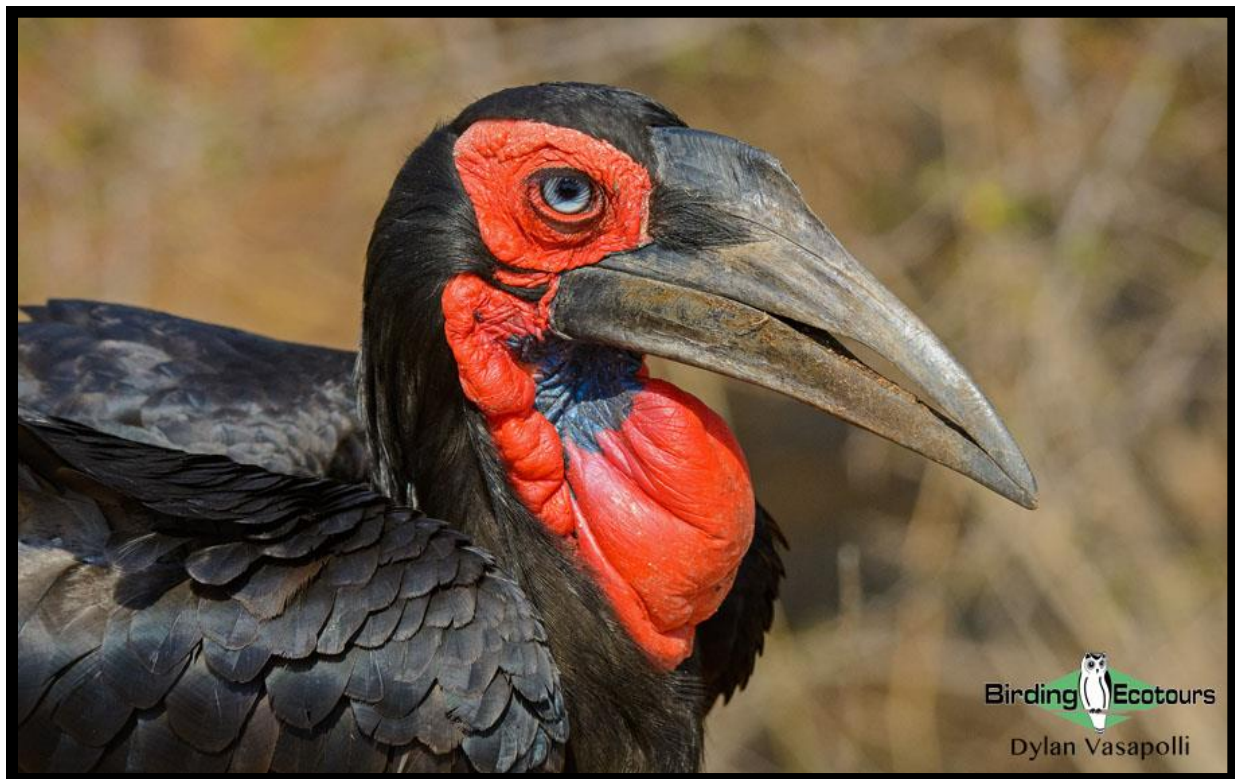




**SOUTH AFRICA: PREMIUM KRUGER &  
ESCARPMENT BIRDING & WILDLIFE SAFARI  
TOUR-SPECIFIC INFORMATION**



  
Birding Ecotours  
Dylan Vasapoli

*The Kruger is a major stronghold of the Vulnerable (IUCN) Southern Ground Hornbill*

## TOUR OUTLINE

This tour serves as an introduction to birding the lowland bushveld of eastern South Africa, as well as the grasslands and forests of the nearby escarpment. The main focus of the tour will be birding and game-viewing in the Greater Kruger conservation area, with chances of seeing such iconic mammals as **Lion, Leopard, White Rhinoceros** and **African Elephant**, amidst the myriad of bird species that occur in this massive park. The tour starts in Nelspruit/Mbombela, from where we will ascend the escarpment to our base at Mount Sheba for two nights of forest birding, after which we will descend back down and enter the Kruger National Park. After exploring the park for three days, we will move to our last base in the premier Sabi Sands Private Game Reserve, adjoining Kruger, for the remaining three nights, before heading back to Nelspruit/Mbombela where the tour will conclude and from where we will fly back home.

## PACE OF TOUR

Being just over a week long and with short driving distances, the pace of this tour is quite relaxed.

We will predominantly spend time birding and on safaris in the mornings and late afternoons so there may often be midday down time periods. Note that early starts are essential on this tour, and will usually see us departing around sunrise (roughly 5:30am).

In most instances, we will be able to meet up for a group communal coffee and light snacks, before our morning birding/safari – which will likely last for several hours. We will usually be able to return for a hot breakfast in the mid-morning (usually between 9-10am), which is usually followed by a break, though occasionally will be followed by transiting to new sites on the tour (with lunch had during this period as well – typically a sit-down meal). Our afternoons will usually involve an afternoon birding excursion/safari, which ends around sunset. A sit-down dinner will follow.

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 the guide may offer. If interested, you can book a guided night drive in Kruger National Park upon our arrival, however, these would be at your own expense.

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

In Kruger and Sabi Sands we will mostly be birding by open-top safari vehicles and will be taken out for morning and afternoon game drives by reserve rangers, providing us with a personalized safari experience. Most of the walking on this tour will be done at Mount Sheba. Mount Sheba consists of a network of well-worn trails, some of which can be quite steep, so even though the hikes won't be lengthy, it is better to be prepared and have the appropriate gear with you (i.e. good walking shoes, walking sticks, if necessary, etc.). Trail walks are likely to be no longer than two miles (3.2 kilometers), and we will also do light walks around the rest camps in Kruger and Sabi Sands.

## LENGTH OF DRIVES

The drives between each of our bases are roughly 2-3 hours long and, unlike many of our other southern African tours, there are no full-day travel days on this tour.

## SAFETY

Throughout this tour we spend most of our time in game parks and nature reserves, away from large cities. These areas are often frequented by tourists and are deemed to be safe. However, we suggest not leaving valuables in the unattended vehicle, particularly when stopping in towns. If you are unsure about the safety of an area, please ask your guide to clarify.

During our time in Kruger, we will not be allowed to alight from our vehicle, except at designated areas like the rest camps, hides and picnic sites. In Sabi Sands this will also be the case, as both of these parks contain potentially dangerous wildlife. It is of utmost importance to adhere to the instruction of the game rangers who will be driving us around in these reserves.

## HEALTH, PESTS AND DANGEROUS ANIMALS

When walking around Mount Sheba, we advise wearing long pants and using tick repellent 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 which is a far less threatening disease with generally no major long-term consequences.

We advise not touching or petting any stray dogs in rural areas on the off chance that they have 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

Taking place in September, this tour falls outside the wet season for the Kruger region, so the risk of contracting malaria is low. However, it would still be advised to take anti-malaria medication for this tour. 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*) mosquitos are most active.

If you still manage to contract malaria, despite taking the above precautions, it can generally be treated easily 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, however, while in Kruger and Sabi Sands we will mostly be using open-top safari vehicles, driven by game rangers. 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). Our small group size ensures that everyone gets a window seat and that we do not have to tow a trailer, giving us better maneuverability while birding.

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 required on this birding tour, though the small airports here offer limited international flights, and a domestic flight to/from a main center like Johannesburg or Cape Town may be required. Kindly speak to the Birding Ecotours office about the logistics of this.

## ACCOMMODATION

We stay in comfortable lodges and rest camps throughout this tour that are of good to excellent quality. Our accommodation in Kruger National Park is more basic than at Mount Sheba and Sabi Sands as it is government-run, but is still comfortable and tidy. Staying inside the park allows us to be out at optimal birding times, first thing in the morning and again in the late afternoon.

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 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 control over.

## WEATHER

This tour takes you through regions of differing climates. Kruger National Park is usually hot and humid (average daily temperatures can reach 86°F (30°C)), being subtropical and at low altitude. Conversely, Mount Sheba is at higher altitude on the escarpment and is therefore much cooler (temperatures can go down to 46°F (8°C) at night).

This tour also falls during spring when weather conditions across this region can be unpredictable. Even though eastern South Africa gets most of its rainfall from November onwards, we may still get some rain along our route, particularly in the mountains of the escarpment. Therefore, we advise packing for warm, cold and wet weather on this tour, to cover all bases.

## 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 South Africa birding tour