



**BUDGET SOUTH AFRICA BIRDING TOUR: THE NORTH  
TOUR-SPECIFIC INFORMATION**



*The characterful Retz's Helmetshrike can be seen during our time in the Lowveld.*

## TOUR OUTLINE

This is the final tour of our budget tour series, which also includes other essential parts of the country; [the Northern Cape](#), [Cape Town](#), and [Zululand](#). Each of our budget tours can be run as stand-alone tours, but combined, they offer an unrivalled budget birding journey across the full breadth of South Africa. This budget South African birding tour focuses on the avian-rich [Limpopo](#) and [Mpumalanga](#) Provinces, located in the northeast of the country. A variety of diverse habitats will be visited on this tour (starting and ending in Johannesburg), including Polokwane Plateau bushveld, montane grassland, [Afromontane Forest](#), [Mopani](#) and riverine woodlands, and several types of mixed woodlands. Each of these habitat types, with their respective avian assemblages, contribute to the impressive array of species on offer on this tour.

## PACE OF TOUR

At just over a weeklong and covering large distances, this will be a fairly fast-paced tour. This area of South Africa is extremely diverse, and we will do our best to make the most of our time to enjoy the incredible richness it has to offer.

In some instances, we will be able to meet up for group communal coffee and early breakfasts, before our morning birding. Most mornings are spent birding, followed by lunch either en route or at the accommodation. We will generally spend most of the morning out birding, before stopping for lunch somewhere or at the accommodation. Some days allow for downtime before our afternoon birding; however, on most days we return to birding fairly quickly, depending on the heat and the area we are visiting.

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.

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

A large portion of our birding will be done from the vicinity of the vehicle, often stopping at specific spots and spending time in the area searching for our specific targets. Some of the sites, such as Magoebaskloof, have forest trails that we will walk along. We should keep the walks to no longer than two miles (3.2 kilometers). However, the day in the Lowveld can be a bit longer. This remains flexible and will depend on participants' fitness levels and the target birds still to be found.

## 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. That being said, one or two of the travel days can be up to four hours of driving.

## SAFETY

Throughout this tour, we spend most of our time in areas 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.

## HEALTH, PESTS AND DANGEROUS ANIMALS

When on walking trails, 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 against touching or petting any stray dogs in rural areas on the off chance that they have rabies. Rabies is uncommon in South Africa, though present in some areas.

**\*Note that dangerous animals 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 May, this tour falls outside the wet season, 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, and wearing long sleeves at night, when malaria (Anopheles) mosquitoes 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 appropriate medication. 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 used for the duration of the tour. 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 the 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. The tour will start and end at OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg.

## ACCOMMODATION

We stay in good quality comfortable lodges and hotels throughout this tour. Please note that, because this is a budget tour, the accommodation may not be of the same standard as on our regular tours, but it will still be of a good quality.

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

Room lighting is often low wattage, so bring a good-quality torch/flashlight if you plan 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 control over.

## WEATHER

This tour takes you through regions of differing climates. The lower areas such as Tzaneen are usually hot and humid (average daily temperatures can reach 86 °F (30 °C)), being subtropical and at low altitude. Conversely, areas such as Magoebaskloof are at higher altitude on the escarpment and are therefore much cooler (temperatures can drop to 46 °F (8 °C) at night).

This tour falls in autumn, 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.