



TOURS INFORMATION FOR GAMBIA

These notes are designed to help you prepare for your tour. Please read carefully.

ENTERING GAMBIA: United Kingdom citizens will need a passport which is valid for three months after the date of return. A visa is not required. Citizens of other nations should contact the nearest Gambian consulate or Embassy for entry requirements.

TIME DIFFERENCE: There is no time difference between Gambia and Greenwich Mean Time.

FLIGHTS TO GAMBIA: Gambia can only be reached from the UK via charter flights, predominantly with Thomas Cook and Monarch. For those people who haven't travelled with these companies before it can sometimes be a shock to the system. Firstly they are VERY STRICT on luggage weight and please expect your hand baggage to be weighed at check in, with anything over 5kg having to go in with your hold luggage. Anything over the maximum weight for hold (checked) luggage will also be charged for. The seats are very small so you may wish to opt to pay for an upgrade. On board the plane you will be given a meal (covered in the tour price) and this usually includes a cup of coffee, tea or water. Any additional drinks or snacks must be paid for and this includes water.

CURRENCY: The Gambian currency is the Dalasi (GMD). As the tour price includes all travel, hotel and main meal costs, you need bring only enough to cover gifts, snacks, extra drinks or other purchases of a purely personal nature. English pounds and Euros are easier to change than US dollars. Money can be exchanged at our hotel where the rate is considerably better than at Gatwick.

LANGUAGE: English is widely spoken in the Gambia.

CLIMATE: It will be generally hot and dry with temperatures ranging from night time lows of about 15-20°C (60-70°F) to mid-day highs of about 25-35°C (80-95°F). As the rainy season will just be finishing there is always the chance of a shower. At the time of our tour there is a chance of some days with stronger winds, which will lower the temperature, especially in the mornings and evenings. It can be particularly cool on the early morning ferry crossing.

PACE OF TOUR: Most days we will have breakfast at our accommodation around 06.30 before we go birding. Lunch will be taken either at a suitable café where we can carry on birding and relaxing, or on travel days we will take a picnic with us. We will return to our hotel around 18.30-19.00 allowing an "hour to shower" before dinner. On at least a couple of nights we will have a later dinner (between 20.30 and 21.00) due to birding and driving.

HEALTH: It is essential that you contact your own doctor to obtain the latest information on the region you are visiting.

A malaria preventative is strongly recommended. It is important you seek medical advice about any inoculations you may need as situations do change. Currently a yellow fever inoculation is not compulsory but you may want to consider getting one. However if you are over 60 and have never had a yellow fever inoculation before, your doctor may advise you not to have one. Up-to-date inoculations against typhoid, tetanus, and polio should also be considered. As some of these inoculations and malaria preventatives cannot be given concurrently we suggest contacting your doctor straight away and obtain advice about when to start your treatment.

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Biting insects can be numerous especially in the evening at the Tendaba camp. A can of spray repellent should provide adequate protection as well as wearing long sleeved clothing. Repellents containing diethyltoluamide (DEET) are the most effective. The water on the coast is said to be safe to drink but to be safe we recommend bottled water, even for brushing teeth. Bottled water will be provided at meals and there will be a supply kept on the vehicle at all times. Soft drinks are available throughout the tour. Finally, remember to bring adequate supplies of all personal medication as it may be impossible to obtain them during the tour.

For further information on health advice refer to the Medical Advisory Services for Travellers Abroad website www.masta-travel-health.com

ACCOMMODATION: During the tour we'll be based at a good coastal hotel and at Tendaba and the Bird Safari Camps (the latter only necessary if we need to drive further east for Egyptian Plover – we have done this only once in the past), which are basic but are the only options for visiting the many good birdwatching areas in the Middle and Upper River parts of Gambia. Accommodation is in traditional 'rondavel' African-style huts (Tendaba) or large tents (Bird Safari camp), which are all equipped with a cold water shower (surprisingly welcome on a hot day) and toilet. The power here is run on a generator which is turned on around 18.00 and left on all night (far enough away not to keep us awake!) and there is an open-air restaurant and bar. As mentioned earlier, mosquitoes can sometimes be troublesome in the evenings at the Camps so it will be worth having long sleeve shirts and trousers with us just in case.

LAUNDRY: Laundry facilities are available at our hotel on the coast but not at Tendaba and the Bird Safari Camps.

ELECTRICITY: Sockets vary from room to room and from hotel to hotel from European 2 pin to UK style 3 pin types.

FOOD: The food at our hotel is generally varied and good. Breakfasts typically consist of bread, jam, fruit, cheese and eggs; you may wish to bring some cereal bars to supplement this. Lunch will usually be a sandwich, omelette or rice and fish/chicken. Although salads are supposed to be ok to eat it may be best to avoid them. Dinner is normally a buffet, with a choice of chicken, fish or meat with rice, pasta, vegetables and chips. Although Gambian food is said to be spicy there are plenty of non-spicy dishes to choose from. Up river the food is understandably more basic. Breakfasts and lunches are similar but dinner usually consists of rice, a meat dish, chips and a bowl of a tomato sauce. Please ensure you tell the office if you have any special food requirements. Likewise anyone with a nut allergy should remember that nuts are used in a lot of Gambian cooking.

Sunbird tours are all-inclusive and no refunds can be issued for any tour meals participants choose to miss. While we will try to do all we can to accommodate the requirements of all participants, please note that we cannot guarantee all causes of food allergies can be avoided at every destination. Participants with significant food allergies or special dietary needs should bring appropriate foods with them for those times when their needs can, regrettably, not be accommodated. Our tours are carefully scheduled to ensure the best possible birding experience and although the leaders will do all they can to make sure the group eats at a reasonable time, sometimes early or late lunches and/or evening meals cannot be avoided. Any participants who need to eat at specific times may need to take supplemental food with them.

DRINKS: Bottled water and/or a soft drink, beer or wine is provided at lunch and dinner, as is coffee or tea. All other drinks or 'personal' drinking water for use in your room etc. is the responsibility of the individual. We will keep bottled water on the minibus for use during the day.

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CLOTHING: Some guidebooks will tell you that shorts are unacceptable and may cause offence, as will ladies vest tops. However local people are used to seeing groups of tourists dressed in this way so we not think this is a problem. Lightweight and loose clothing will be most comfortable when in the field. Long sleeves and long trousers help to provide extra protection against the sun but short-sleeved shirts and shorts are fine. A good sun hat is essential. You may find a light sweater and a jacket useful. There may be opportunities to swim. Generally light walking shoes or boots will be adequate. Sandals may also be useful around the hotel grounds but are limited for use in the field due to prickly vegetation.

MISCELLANEOUS EQUIPMENT: Please bring the following:

Alarm clock	Plastic bags (useful for covering optics)
Notebook and pencil	Torch (power cuts are frequent)
Extra batteries	Small rucksack/shoulder bag
Sun protection lotion	Camera and film/memory cards
Sun glasses (also useful if the wind is blowing the sand about)	

Optional: Spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), field guide. Telescopes are useful on this tour.

Note: The most effective insect repellents are those containing at least 35% of the active ingredient diethyltoluamide (DEET). The higher the percentage, the greater the effectiveness. However, care must be taken to avoid getting the repellent on to optical equipment as it dissolves rubber and plastic and can damage coated lenses. A reasonably effective alternative which isn't corrosive is Mosi-guard, produced by MASTA. This is available from most high street chemists.

LEADER'S EQUIPMENT: The leader will provide the following:

Telescope & tripod for group use	Basic first-aid kit
Field guides & reference books	Play-back equipment

LUGGAGE: The checked-luggage weight limit on most international flights is usually 20kg (44lbs) although this can be lower with Charter companies. If possible, please bring your luggage in soft-sided bags or cases (rather than large hard 'Samsonite'-type suitcases) as these pack more easily into our vehicles during the tour. Please note that on many tours porters are not available to carry your luggage to the room. **Please do not bring any bag that is so heavy that you are unable to lift and carry it yourself.** As a general rule, in addition to using your Sunbird luggage labels, it is a good idea to fix identification to the *inside* of each piece of luggage.

Rules governing the luggage that may be checked in for flights or carried on board vary considerably between airlines with some companies now allowing only one checked bag per person, while others still allow two. Our Final Information document which will be sent to you approximately three weeks before departure will give details of the specific regulations imposed by the airline that we will be using for this tour. If you need advice about this prior to that time please contact the Sunbird office.

PHOTOGRAPHY: Generally there is good potential for getting some nice bird photos on this tour as many species are quite confiding and the light is usually very good. There is not too much in the way of stunning scenery and what mammals we do encounter tend to be very shy. Make sure you do not photograph any local people without asking their permission first. Make sure you bring enough memory storage, spare batteries and battery charger as these are unlikely to be widely available. Camera equipment should be packed in moisture and dustproof bags as a precaution. Digiscoping is perfectly compatible with the tour and there will be many opportunities, in good light, to achieve some great photos. However note that the tour leader's telescope is not available for this.

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There will be plenty of opportunities to take photos of birds, mammals and scenery and the leaders will do all they can to accommodate anyone wishing to take photographs. However if you are a serious photographer please bear in mind that this is first and foremost a birdwatching tour. Please do not allow your photographic desires to conflict with other participants' birdwatching activities.

TRAVEL INSURANCE: Travel insurance is essential and we insist that you take out suitable cover as soon as your tour is booked. If you are bringing expensive optical equipment or other valuable items, please make sure they are also adequately insured on your home contents policy, as most travel insurance policies do not cover very expensive individual items. You may wish to consult your insurance broker regarding coverage. Please also ensure that your policy covers you in the event of a medical emergency, cancellation of a trip or severe delays. Medical costs abroad can often be extremely expensive. Please note that Sunbird is not liable for any medical or repatriation costs resulting from injury or illness during a tour or for covering any costs resulting from a flight delay such as extra hotel accommodation.

If you wish, insurance can be arranged by Stephen Allen at Stephen Allen Insurance Broker, 13 Goldington Road, Bedford, MK40 3JY. Tel: 01234 215194. Please contact him for a quote and he will send the schedule directly to you.

TRANSPORT: For travelling around Gambia we will be using a small, air-conditioned, coach with a local driver. The leader will arrange a seating rotation. Participants should be able to ride in any seat in tour vehicles. For our trip on the river we will be using a motorised long boat. These have wooden boarding for seats (some have foam cushions) and are perfect for exploring the shallow inlets.

SMOKING: Smoking is not allowed in the vehicles or when the group is gathered for meals, checklists etc. If you are sharing a room with a non-smoker, please do not smoke in the room. If you smoke in the field, we ask that you do so well away and downwind from the group if possible.

TIPPING: All tour-based tips are included in the tour price. These include tips to local guides, drivers, hotel porters, and waiters and waitresses when we have group meals together in restaurants. You only need to pay tips for personal services such as room service or drinks from the bar.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Field Guides:

Borrow, Nik & Ron Demey. Birds of the Gambia and Senegal. 2011. Christopher Helm (1408134691). A brand new field guide with all species recorded in both countries illustrated and useful comments on distribution and identification. Also available as an e-book.

Maps: There are very few good maps of the country readily available. Some stockists may have a series of large-scale (1:50,000) maps which cover the entire country. Unfortunately a number of these are out of print though they are occasionally revised and so it may be worth checking to see if the Banjul sheet (No 10) is available. If so, this is worth obtaining as it shows all of the places we visit while based at the coast.

The Map Shop
Tel: 01684 593146
www.themapshop.co.uk

Stanfords
Tel: 020 7836 1321
www.stanfords.co.uk

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OBTAINING BOOKS: Most of the field guides and the major ornithological references in print are available by mail order from booksellers specialising in natural history titles. Three of these are:

Natural History Book Service Ltd
Tel: 01803 865913
www.nhbs.co.uk

Subbuteo Books
Tel: 0870 010 9700
www.wildlifebooks.com

WildSounds
Tel: 01263 741100
www.wildsounds.co.uk

AFRICAN BIRD CLUB: Please support this charity which aims to raise money to support conservation projects, encourages an interest in the conservation of birds, and liaises with and promotes the work of existing societies within the region. You will find their contact details and further information about the Club at www.africanbirdclub.org

FINAL INFORMATION: Final information with instructions for meeting the group, hotel addresses etc., and your air tickets, will be sent to you about three weeks before the start of the tour. If you have any questions about any aspect of the tour, please contact us.