



TOUR INFORMATION FOR PUERTO RICO in March

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

ENTERING PUERTO RICO: Puerto Rico is a United States territory. United Kingdom citizens need to have a passport that has a minimum validity of 6 months remaining after the tour has finished. This is an immigration requirement for many countries. All nationalities require a machine-readable passport if travelling to the USA under the visa waiver programme (see below).

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has made changes to the immigration requirements. Travellers seeking to travel under the Visa Waiver Program must pre-apply for authorisation using the Electronic System for Travel Authorisation (**ESTA**). **ESTA** must be completed online via their website.

Having an **ESTA** is a mandatory requirement and applications should be made online at least 72 hours before departure via their website <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov> as although the majority of responses are immediate, it can take 72 hours for approval in some cases. There is a small fee to pay as a processing charge followed by a small fee when authorisation has been granted.

For further information, or if you don't have access to the internet, please contact the Embassy of the United States in London on 020 3608 6998.

Citizens of other countries should contact their nearest US Embassy for entry requirements.

Once you've applied for your ESTA please remember to print it out and take a copy of that document onto the aircraft with you.

Flying via a US city: Most flights from the UK go via Miami. All visitors to the USA's first port-of-entry have their index fingerprints taken by an electronic scanner at Passport Control. You will also have your photograph taken at the same time. Although the process itself only takes a few minutes the queue can be quite long if several flights arrive at the same time!

You will then need to reclaim your checked-in luggage, go through security, then hand your luggage back to the airline staff who will be waiting nearby to give assistance. Once your luggage is back with the airline please proceed to the departure gate for your onward flight.

It is always a good idea to take a photocopy of your passport with you when travelling abroad. They can prove invaluable in helping you get a replacement if your original is lost or stolen. Obviously you should keep the photocopy in a separate bag to the originals.

ARRIVAL AND INTRODUCTORY MEETING: While the tour starts at 18.00 on Day 1 of the tour, you may be tempted by convenient flights arriving in San Juan from the US late in the evening. If you elect to arrive late in the evening of Day 1, please be aware that the birding day will start early on Day 2 and you may only get a few hours' sleep. If you can't arrive before early evening, you may want to consider arriving a day early.

TIME DIFFERENCE: Puerto Rico is 4 hours behind GMT.

CURRENCY: The local currency in Puerto Rico is the US dollar. Credit cards are accepted at the hotels and ATMs are plentiful.

PUERTO RICO: Tour Information ...2

LANGUAGE: Spanish is the principle language in Puerto Rico, but English is widely spoken there, especially in the San Juan metropolitan area.

CLIMATE: The days are generally quite warm (in the 80's F) and summer clothes are suitable year-round. Please be prepared for the possibility of cool, damp (or rainy) weather in the mountains. Light rain is always a possibility (although rare in March) so bring along a rain-proof jacket or umbrella. The March sun can feel intense, so a good broad-brimmed hat and sunglasses can be useful.

ALTITUDE: The highest elevation we visit is just over 3,000 feet above sea level, and most of the birding is conducted at or very close to sea level.

PACE OF THE TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE: This tour has daily starts between 06:30 and 07:00, and siestas on some afternoons. Many meals will be taken in the field with one picnic breakfast and two picnic lunches, returning to the hotel between 16.00 and 17.00, before dinner. There will be at least one (likely two) after dinner excursion for nightbirds, and trails are smooth and straightforward. Much of the birding is along roadsides, and the walks are less than 1½ miles in duration.

HEALTH: It is essential that you contact your own doctor to obtain the latest information on the regions you are visiting. Please contact your doctor well in advance of your tour's departure as some medication must be initiated weeks before the period of possible exposure.

It is recommended that you are up-to-date on routine vaccinations. These include measles-mumps-rubella (MMR), diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis, varicella (chickenpox), polio, and your yearly flu shot. It is further recommended that most travellers have protection against Hepatitis A and Typhoid.

Malaria and Chikungunya: Malaria and other tropical parasites are not common in Puerto Rico, but mosquitos in the country (more prevalent in the wet season) have been known to transmit Dengue Fever and (as of 2013) a few cases of Chikungunya and Zika. We typically encounter very few mosquitoes during the tour.

Miscellaneous: We typically encounter few biting insects during the course of the tour. We recommend using insect repellents with a high concentration of DEET. However, care must be taken to avoid getting the DEET repellent on optical equipment as DEET dissolves rubber and plastic and can damage coated lenses. Like most islands in the Caribbean, there are no chiggers in Puerto Rico. At our hotel near Guanica there are often small biting gnats, which are harmless but sometimes irritating. They seem to be easily warded off by insect repellent.

It may be difficult to obtain any special medication during the tour, so bring all you are likely to need.

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 stay at three separate hotels. The San Juan hotel which we use on the first and last nights is close to the airport and a standard higher-end US style hotel. For our second night we stay at a small locally-owned hotel in Hatillo which, although basic, is comfortable and well-appointed with fairly large rooms. At Guanica we'll stay in an expansive hotel with large suites with full kitchen facilities and private balconies overlooking the Caribbean Sea. Note that some couples often have to share one of these suites (each will have their own bedroom and bathroom, only the kitchen and balcony are shared).

PUERTO RICO: Tour Information ...3

LAUNDRY: Laundry facilities are available at our hotel in Guanica. Detergent may not be available however, so consider bringing a small amount of powdered detergent if you wish to wash your clothes during the tour.

ELECTRICITY: 110/120V AC 60Hz. An international travel plug is useful and can be bought in most airport departure lounges. You may find the following website helpful: <http://www.power-plugs-sockets.com>.

FOOD: Food is very good with some excellent seafood. Breakfasts are mostly in house (as our accommodation have kitchens). We do a big group shop during which participants are able to pick up their own breakfast provisions. Lunches are mostly in US-style restaurants or sandwich shops, but we do have two field picnics, and dinners are in local restaurants, often with a Caribbean flare.

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. Many restaurants offer set menus and are unable to accommodate all special requests within a group. Thus, 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, a soft drink or a beer (or wine if appropriate) are provided at meals, as is coffee or tea. In addition, we keep a supply of bottled water on the tour vehicles. Bottled or filtered water may also be provided in some rooms where we stay.

INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS: WiFi is available and free in San Juan and Hatillo, but as of 2015 not available in Guanica (although at our dinner locations there is often a WIFI connection). At our hotel in Guanica there is a general lack of mobile phone service due to the coastal mountains that block the signal.

Mobile phones can be useful while on tour but keep in mind that many countries operate on a different cellular technology. Your phone may be incompatible with the local system, so please check with your local carrier. Fortunately, with the advent of smartphones, it is easy to download applications such as Skype or Google Voice, which can make calling home free or very inexpensive. Another option is to replace the data ("SIM") card in your phone in-country. Two or three providers have shop fronts at the exit of the airport. The SIM cards, including data are very cheap. If you wish to use this option you will need to check that your smart phone has a SIM card slot.

FIELD CLOTHING: Dress is Informal throughout. The generally warm temperatures will dictate lightweight clothing for use in the field and elsewhere.

Sun hat	Long-sleeved shirts
Comfortable footwear	Lightweight cotton trousers
Sandals	Lightweight raincoat
Short-sleeved shirts	Shorts
Light sweater or jacket	Folding umbrella

PUERTO RICO: Tour Information ...4

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS:

Notebook & pencil	Alarm clock
Rucksack/small day pack	Torch with spare batteries
Small water canister or water bottle	Insect repellent
Shampoo (not provided at Guanica)	Personal medication

Optional: Telescope & tripod (recommended if you have them), camera, film or memory cards, spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), field guide, and swimwear.

On this tour we spend about three-quarters of the days visiting coastlines, large wetlands, and salt-flats where telescopes can be useful. However, at these locations birds tend to remain in view for some time, so generally the leader's telescope will provide sufficient views for everyone.

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, and we recommend this. It is available in most high street chemist (including those at the airport). Please make sure you never to spray insect repellent inside the vehicle or when you are standing close to other participants – it may drift on to their optical equipment.

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

Telescope	Reference books and maps
First aid kit	Icebox
Laser pointer	Playback equipment

LUGGAGE: Our Final Information document, which will be sent to you approximately three weeks before departure, will give details about baggage weight and size restrictions imposed by the airline used for this tour.

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 there are no porters to carry your luggage so please ensure that **no bag is so heavy that you are unable to lift and carry it yourself**. As a general rule, in addition to using your luggage labels, it is a good idea to fix identification to the *inside* of each piece of luggage.

PHOTOGRAPHY: Scenery and memory shots will be plentiful and simple to obtain. Although there will be occasions when bird photography is possible, a birdwatching tour is not normally the best means of pursuing this aim. Bring all your film or memory cards with you as it may be difficult to find precisely what you need during the tour. Camera equipment should be packed in moisture- and dust-proof bags, as a precaution. "Digiscoping" is perfectly compatible with the tour, though it is recommended you bring your own telescope as the leader's telescope is not available for this activity.

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.

PUERTO RICO: Tour Information ...5

TRANSPORT: We will be travelling by minibuses or people-carriers. When using 15-passenger minibuses we will take a maximum of eight passengers plus the leader/driver so that everyone has a window seat. The leader will arrange a seating rotation and participants should be able to ride in any seat in tour vehicles.

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.

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 Helen Fisher, Bullerwell Independent Insurance Brokers, 13 Goldington Road, Bedford, MK40 3JY. Tel: 01234-866964. Please contact Helen for a quote and she will send the schedule directly to you.

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:

Bond, James. 1985. *Birds of the West Indies*. Fifth Edition. Houghton Mifflin, Boston

National Geographic Society. 2006. *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. 4th Ed. One of the top two field guides for North America, more portable than the Sibley guide.

Raffaele, Herbert, Wiley, James, et al. 2003. *Birds of the West Indies*. Princeton University Press. **Recommended.**

Raffaele, Herbert, Wiley, James, et. al. 1998. *Birds of the West Indies*. Princeton University Press. This guide contains more comprehensive information and is an excellent reference guide. However, it is bulkier for field use than the previous recommended guide.

Sibley, David Allen. 2000. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York. Arguably the best North American field guide showing all of North America's birds that we may encounter on the trip. Although comprehensive, its larger-than-standard-field-guide size makes it difficult to carry into the field.

History:

Williams, Eric. 1970. *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean 1492-1969*. A comprehensive history of the region. Well written, but not exactly light reading.

PUERTO RICO: Tour Information ...6

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.

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

MAPS: Maps of the region may be available from:

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

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

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