



TOUR INFORMATION FOR THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

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

ENTERING THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: All citizens will need a passport valid for at least six months prior to the date of entry. Many tourist travellers to the Dominican Republic are required to pay for a tourist visa either on arrival (USD\$10) or in advance from your nearest Embassy. UK and Irish citizens can apply for one via the Embassy of the Dominican Republic in London www.dominicanembassy.org.uk/Touristcard.html.

If obtaining a tourist card on arrival, you will need to pay the fee (at a small desk on the right of the immigration room adjacent to the currency exchange) before joining the queue to go through Immigration at the airport.

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

ARRIVAL AND INTRODUCTORY MEETING: While the tour starts with an 18:00 meeting for a quick birding stop followed by dinner, you may be tempted by convenient flights arriving in Santo Domingo late in the evening. If you elect to arrive late in the evening of Day 1, we want you to be aware that the birding day will start early on Day 2; you may only get a few hours' sleep that night. If you can't arrive before early evening, you may want to consider arriving a day early and we would be pleased to make hotel arrangements for you. Our hotel is located in the colonial heart of Santo Domingo, within easy walking distance of many of the prime tourist locations in the city.

TIME DIFFERENCE: The Dominican Republic is 4 hours behind GMT.

LANGUAGE: Spanish is the official language in the Dominican Republic. Very few people outside Santo Domingo speak English. The owners and managers of our hotel in Barahona are all Norwegian, or Swiss, and speak English fluently.

CURRENCY: The local currency in the Dominican Republic is the peso. We find it easy and quick to change money in the airport although currency booths here give a lower exchange rate than a bank in downtown Santo Domingo. Visa and MasterCard credit cards are accepted widely. Although not accepted at the hotel in Barahona, they are taken at the hotels in Santo Domingo and Sabana de la Mar.

CLIMATE: The days are generally quite warm (often hovering around 90 degrees F), and summer clothes are suitable year-round. Please be prepared for the possibility of cool, damp (or rainy) weather on our two days in the Sierra de Bahoruco. In the early mornings it can feel surprisingly chilly at the top of the mountains, so a light or even medium weight jacket/sweater might be useful.

ALTITUDE: On two (possibly three) of the days we venture into the higher reaches of the Sierra de Bahoruco (above 5500 ft), but most of our birding is near (or even below) sea level.

PACE OF THE TOUR: Although not physically demanding, this tour involves long days, with one very early start (02:30), and several pre-dawn starts with subsequent long drives (two to three hours) due to the distance of our hotels from the best birding sites. Although the main highways in the country are generally in excellent shape the mountain roads can be very rough. We'll return to the hotel between 17:00 – 18:00 (with at least two optional after dinner trips for night birds).

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Walks will vary from easy to moderate and will in several cases involve walking on rocky, gradually inclined roads for two to three hours. Much of the birding is along roadsides. If the close Ridgeway's Hawk nests are not active we will offer an optional walk to a nesting area in a nearby valley, about a 2-mile round trip with an elevation gain of 800 feet.

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 jab. It is further recommended that most travellers have protection against Hepatitis A and Typhoid. Dengue Fever is not common on the island but is increasing in the Caribbean.

Although we generally encounter very few biting insects, there is a low risk of malaria exists in the Dominican Republic, (but no risk in the cities of Santo Domingo and Barahona). Personal protective measures, such as the use of insect repellents, help to reduce malaria risk. Useful information on all aspects of malaria, including how to reduce your chances of being bitten can be found at the website <http://www.preventingmalaria.info>.

Biting insects may be present in a few locations, but birding is relatively nuisance-free. It is worth noting that the island of Hispaniola is pleasantly free of chiggers, but small midges and mosquitoes are present in low numbers. We recommend using insect repellents with a high concentration of DEET.

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: We'll stay in comfortable hotels. Our hotel in Santo Domingo is located inside of the old colonial town, and within a block of the main walking street and most important tourist sites.

In Barahona we stay in a secluded cliffside hotel run by Europeans. In the past, we have experienced some issues with a lack of hot water in the bathrooms, but this has been steadily improving over the years. Several of the rooms are being modernized, with upgraded bathrooms. In Sabana de la Mar we stay in an incredible hotel that could easily have been designed by Salvadore Dali. Rooms there are large, many with forested balconies, and we will take our meals near the artificial waterfalls in an openair atrium.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry facilities are available at our hotel in Barahona. Plan for about a 24 hour turn-around.

ELECTRICITY: 110/120V AC 60Hz. Note that some rooms in Barahona have mainly two-pin plugs as the previous owners were Norwegians. 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>.

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FOOD: Most breakfasts and lunches will be picnics taken in the field. Our breakfasts will generally consist of standard cold fare, with yoghurt, cereal, fruit, etc., although on several days we will make use of our hotel's more substantial offerings. Field lunches will consist of sandwiches, fruit, snacks, and cold drinks. Dinners will be taken at or near our accommodation and are varied, ranging from restaurant fare to the excellent three-course family-style dinners prepared by our hotel in Barahona. Chicken and fish are widely eaten in the Caribbean, while beef is less common.

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 good in Santo Domingo, but often too slow to be reliably useful in Barahona, and absent in Sabana de la Mar.

FIELD CLOTHING: The following items are basic:

Sun hat	Long-sleeved shirts
Light-weight walking shoe	Lightweight cotton trousers
Sandals or comfortable shoes	Lightweight raincoat
Short-sleeved shirts	Shorts (optional)
Sweater or jacket (recommended)	Folding umbrella (optional)

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS:

Notebook and pen	Alarm clock
Small rucksack/day pack	Torch with spare batteries
Insect repellent	Sun glasses and sun lotion
Small water canteen or water bottle	Personal medication

Rubber Boots: If conditions are appropriate we may offer a third boat trip out onto a freshwater lake where rubber boots can be handy. If needed though boots can be purchased on the island nearby for only USD \$8.00 a pair.

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, swimwear.

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).

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Camping supply stores sell a product containing permethrin 0.5%, which must be applied directly to clothing in advance of wearing and allowed to dry. This non-staining, odourless chemical is non-toxic to humans and protective on clothing through several launderings.

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
First aid kit
Ice box

Field guides
Reference books & maps
Laser pointer

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.

We use 4x4 SUV's on the tour so space is at a premium. Please pack as lightly as possible.

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.

TRANSPORT: For much of the tour we'll travel on rough gravel roads with clearance issues so we use four-wheel drive SUV's, with a maximum of 4 participants per vehicle. Participants should be able to ride in any seat in tour vehicles. For the drives to and from the Southwest corner of the island (on excellent paved highways) we'll also have luggage in the car so it will be necessary for three participants to share the rear bench seat for this leg of our tour.

We will offer at least 2 boat trips during the tour. One on a shallow brackish lagoon in a small mostly covered skiff with a single outboard that typically lasts about an hour. The other out into Sabana Bay in a small powerboat, probably 20ft long. We're never more than a few hundred yards from shore in a protected bay. There are no toilets but we disembark onto docks in a few places that have facilities, and we're only on the boat for stretches of 30 minutes or less.

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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:

Keith, Allan and Wiley, James. 2003. *Birds of Hispaniola*. British Ornithologists Union.

National Geographic Society. 2011 *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. 6th edition. 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.

Steven Latta, Christopher Rimmer, et al. 2006. *Birds of the Dominican Republic and Haiti*. Basically this is a repackaged version of *Birds of the West Indies*, but there are some nice new plates of the Hispaniolan endemics, and it is better tailored for the island.

Sibley, David Allen. 2000. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. Arguably the best North American field guide showing all of North America's birds that we may encounter on the trip. Although comprehensive, it is 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.

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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.

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

Books for Birders
Tel: 01263 741139
www.birdingworld.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.