



TOUR INFORMATION FOR NORTHWEST THAILAND

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

ENTERING THAILAND: United Kingdom citizens will need a valid passport, which must be valid for at least 6 months after the date the tour ends. A visa is not required for tourist visits up to 30 days. Citizens of other nations should contact the nearest Thai Embassy for entry requirements.

If you are coming directly from a country where yellow fever is endemic, you may be asked to show proof of a current Yellow Fever vaccination.

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.

INTRODUCTORY MEETING: The trip begins the first evening at 18.00 with an introductory meeting with your leader followed by dinner. The introductory meeting will be informal and allow the leader the opportunity to introduce everyone to each other and to let you know generally what to expect on the trip - pace of the tour, daily routine, etc. We strongly recommend you arrange your flights to arrive in the late afternoon so that you can be present at the introductory meeting.

Since the journey to Thailand can be tiring, we recommend you consider arriving a day or so early. We can arrange lodging at our hotel and there is, of course, much to see in Bangkok.

TIME DIFFERENCE: Thailand is GMT + 7 hours.

LANGUAGE: Although Thai is the official language many people speak some English.

CURRENCY: The currency is the Thai Bahts (THB). As the tour price includes all travel, hotel and main meal costs, you need only bring enough money to cover items of a personal nature. Changing cash at bank kiosks offers a better rate of exchange than at hotels. Travellers cheques are no longer being accepted by many banks. Visa and American Express credit cards are accepted widely in Bangkok and Chiang Mai.

SHOPPING: Thailand is a shopper's mecca with fine quality goods and handicrafts at modest prices. Many items have no import duty, but it is wise to check with the Customs and Excise Department at your departing airport as to the duty status of any planned purchases. There will be an opportunity to spend part of at least one evening at the famous night market in Chiang Mai, which is within easy walking distance of our hotel. Shopping and bargaining is also possible while at Doi Ang Khang, at our lodging at Tha Ton where the hill tribes have many beautiful hand crafted goods to sell.

CUSTOMS: The export of antiques and Buddhist images is not permitted except where a letter of approval has been issued by the Department of Fine Arts.

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CLIMATE AND HABITAT: Thailand is basically tropical and humid and has a distinctly monsoonal climate, most of the rain falling between May and October during the southwest monsoon. Our trip takes place at the end of the 'cool' and dry months and daytime temperatures are unlikely to rise above 35°C (about 94°F). At Chiang Mai, it can be cool at night and the temperature may drop to as low as 13°C (55°F), but is nearly as warm as Bangkok during the day, though less humid. When we visit the summit of Thailand's highest mountain, Doi Inthanon, 2565 metres (8415 feet) above sea level, it could be distinctly chilly (probably no lower than 42°F but windy). Nights at Doi Ang Khang can also be chilly (to 40°F).

The great latitudinal span of the country (from 20 degrees N to only 6 degrees N of the equator) and the variation in topography combine to give the country a fascinating mosaic of different forest types, from dry deciduous to true tropical rain forest. Formerly, the entire country (other than small areas of freshwater swamp) was forested but the environment has been ravaged in the twentieth century so that only 18% of the country was forested at the end of 1980. An extensive network of National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries does exist so that representative examples of most habitat types are covered by reserves.

In summary, while the weather will be hot and dry, the possibility of rain showers cannot be discounted. Because much of our birdwatching is done on higher hills and mountains, the temperature should be pleasant, rather than uncomfortably hot for most of the time. One or two mornings on the highest summits will be cold, so a warm jacket is advised. Clothes can be discarded and left in the vehicles as the day warms up.

PACE OF THE TOUR: The tour is paced in a fairly leisurely manner, with lots of time being allowed to study and appreciate the birds we'll be looking at. In common with tours in most other primarily forested Southeastern Asian countries, there are not too many large birds and few easily photographable ones. We stay as close to the birding habitat as is practicable, given the constraints of good-standard accommodation.

One key requirement is that we will start our day's birding early so as to take advantage of the first rays of sunlight: 05:00 breakfasts are the norm much of the time. Bird activity will nonetheless continue at a fairly high level all day. Generally, however, following the early starts, we do not bird right through to dusk unless we have been able to take a leisurely lunch break (sometimes in the field) in the middle of the day. Since we will have multiple vehicles there is usually the opportunity to send a group back to the hotel for those that wish to have a shorter day and have time off to relax. Walking is fairly easy: mostly on roadsides and tracks, occasionally on narrow forest trails. Generally, we will seldom be more than a few hundred yards from our vehicles. There are a few moderately strenuous walks while at Doi Inthanon and Doi Ang Khang of about a mile but these will take over several hours. Fruit and other snacks and soft drinks and bottled water will be available throughout.

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.

There are no immunization requirements for Thailand but 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.

Malaria in Thailand is chiefly confined to a few lowland, forested areas bordering Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar - areas we do not visit on this trip - so a malaria prophylaxis may not be necessary but your doctor will be able to give you the latest advice.

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Although minor intestinal problems do occur in the tropics, Thailand is largely free of these complaints. The Thai people are especially particular about their drinking water and we are served bottled water as an extra precaution. Nevertheless, we recommend bringing an antibiotic like Cipro along, just in case. We will always have plenty of bottled drinking water available in the vehicles.

Insects: Mosquitoes may occur in the plains around Bangkok and Chiang Mai, and we will probably encounter a few ticks, and also a few midges or sandflies in the mountains of the north and possibly on the beaches on the extension. We recommend that you wear long trousers on those days. Leeches are usually no problem in the dry season.

We recommend using insect repellents with a high concentration of DEET. Care must be taken, however, to avoid getting the DEET repellent on optical equipment as DEET dissolves rubber and plastic and can damage coated lenses. Camping supply stores and outfitters carry some reasonably effective alternatives that contain natural products and aren't corrosive. A less effective alternative, which isn't corrosive is Mosi-guard, produced by MASTA. Mosi-guard is available in the UK in many high street chemists. Products containing tick- and chigger-repelling chemicals are particularly effective. Camping supply stores may sell such 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.

Anyone highly sensitive to insect bites or bee stings should bring an antihistamine.

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

Important: Some prescription drugs might be restricted in Thailand. Please seek advice from the Royal Thai Embassy (Tel: 0207 589 2944). We recommend that you take a copy of all prescriptions with the medication to prove they for personal use.

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

ACCOMMODATION: In Bangkok, we stay at a modern business and traveler's airport hotel. There are swimming pools, a sauna and a health club. In Chiang Mai we stay in a standard, nice tourist hotel, located near the Night Market.

At Chiang Saen Lake we will stay in a comfortable, but simple, resort near the lake.

Our next three nights will be spent in a resort near the entrance to Doi Inthanon National Park; it is some 38 km drive to the 2,500+ summit of the mountain, though there are many fine birding locations along the way and the grounds are attractively landscaped and have a few species we will be searching for. Our rooms are in Swiss-style wooden chalets, nicely furnished clean and attractive, each chalet having up to 4 or 5 rooms. Bedrooms are air-conditioned. Bathrooms have hot water and towels provided.

While visiting Doi Ang Khang we will be staying in a luxury hotel set on attractive grounds, situated in the cool montane zone on Doi Ang Khang, near the Burmese border. It is ½ km up the hill from the Royal Highland Agricultural Project and assorted northern hill-tribe Thai and Yunnan Chinese villages. Rooms are furnished with all expected modern conveniences including hot water.

While at Tha Ton, we use a simple resort right along the banks of the Mae Kok River with air-conditioned rooms on a terrace, accessible by a wooden walkway. For the final night, we stay at another luxury hotel, adjacent to the international airport. There are private (en suite) bathroom facilities at all the hotels and resorts used on the tour.

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LAUNDRY SERVICE: Available throughout the tour, but obviously more expensive at the larger hotels and cheaper at the up country resorts. For delicate items please make sure that you specify that those must not be ironed.

ELECTRICITY: 220 volts AC, 50 Hz. Thailand uses either a 2-round pin or flat-pin plugs. 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: In Bangkok and Chiang Mai hotels, there will usually be a choice of Thai or Western food. In country resorts (e.g. Inthanon and Ang Khang) usually only Thai food will be available for lunches/evening meals. Thai cuisine provides a wide range of dishes, catering for a wide range of palates from spicy to unseasoned, and is almost uniformly delicious. Breakfasts are usually termed "American breakfast" consisting of ham and eggs, toast, fruit or juice and coffee-tea. Cereal is usually available in the bigger hotels (e.g., Bangkok and Chiang Mai) but not usually in up-country resorts. Those wishing to avoid a high-cholesterol breakfast can settle for delicious rice soup "congee" with chicken, pork or shrimp for breakfast instead. Some days we'll take picnic lunches and some days, restaurant lunches.

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 insure 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 bring 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: Some internet facilities and international telephone services are available at most of the accommodation.

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. The SIM cards, including data can be 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 tour. If visiting a temple or shrine, please try to dress with respect (no shorts or sleeveless clothes). The following items are basic:

Sun hat	Sturdy footwear (light-weight hiking boots)
Light shoes or sandals	Short-sleeved and long-sleeved shirts
Sweater	Light-weight tight weave cotton trousers

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MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS:

Notebook and pencil	Alarm clock
Small torch with spare batteries	Face towel or large handkerchief
Small rucksack/daypack	Sunglasses and sunscreen lotion
Insect repellent	Personal medication
Wristwatch	Ear plugs (if you are a light sleeper)
Small water bottle/canteen	Compass
Pocket knife (with bottle opener) (put in your checked-in luggage)	

A small fold-out stool would be very useful as you may be spending some time sitting in the forest waiting for the birds to appear.

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). 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 have a telescope, a spotlight, a laser pointer, a first aid kit, copies of the more important field guides and basic references and maps.

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 shots, temples and hill tribe pictures will be easy to obtain as will a number of open country birds. Taking good photographs of forest birds is difficult as light is often limiting. At this time of year, flowers will be little in evidence. 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!

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.

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TRANSPORT: Land travel will be in air-conditioned minibuses throughout. The leader will arrange a seating rotation. Participants should be able to ride in any seat in tour vehicles. Internal flights are on regularly scheduled airlines.

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.

SHOPPING: Thailand is a shopper's mecca with fine quality goods and handicrafts at modest prices. Many items have no import duty, but it is wise to check with U.K. customs before you leave as to the duty status of any planned purchase. There will be an opportunity to spend part of at least one evening at the famous night market in Chiang Mai, which is within easy walking distance of our hotel.

The export of antiques and Buddhist images is not permitted except where a letter of approval has been issued by the Department of Fine Arts.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Field Guides

Robson, Craig. 2011. *Birds of South-East Asia*. This guide is a condensed version of A Field Guide to the Birds of South-East Asia (Robson 2000 below). In order to save space and weight, the species accounts are relatively short. Additionally, this guide contains more illustrations than the first (142 rather than 104), and all of the species text faces the relevant plates. For more detailed information on a given species consult the below-mentioned guide. There are some taxonomic changes between the two books. **Recommended.**

Robson, Craig. 2000. *A Field Guide to the Birds of South-East Asia*. The first field guide for this region since Ben King's classic 25 years ago. Covers Thailand Peninsular, Malaysia, Singapore, Myanmar (Burma), Laos Vietnam & Cambodia. Describes and illustrates over 1250 species in all plumage variations employing various eminent ID artists including Clive Byers, Ian Lewington & Jan Wilczur. 104 colour plates.

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Robson, Craig. 2002. *A Field Guide to the Birds of Thailand*. Princeton University Press. Uses illustrations mainly from the author's SE Asian guide (above) but has the advantage of possessing updated distribution maps for Thailand based on those in Lekagul & Round (1991) (see below).

King, B.F., E.C. Dickinson and M.W. Woodcock. 1975. *A Field Guide to the Birds of South-East Asia*. Collins, London. A useful reference with detailed plumage descriptions. Especially helpful for extra-limital southeastern Asian species that might occur in Thailand. The original, and for a long time, the only field guide to the birds of the region. Still useful but out of print.

Lekagul, Boonsong and Philip D. Round. 1991. *A Guide to the Birds of Thailand*. Saha Karn Bhaet Co., Ltd, Bangkok. Reprinted, though not revised, and available from bookstores in Bangkok, cost c. \$30.00

Other References

Thailand is on the periphery of the areas covered by most published popular works on South-East Asian biology. By far the best source of information is the *Natural History Bulletin of the Siam Society* which should be available through most major libraries. This contains a rich array of easily readable papers, including many on birds. <http://www.siam-society.org>

The Oriental Bird Club publications (*Forktail* and their bulletin, [Birding Asia](#)) regularly include information about Thailand. For anyone with more than a passing interest in Asian birds, joining the OBC is highly recommended. Their publications to date have been outstanding.

Conservation Data Center. 1989. *Birds of Doi Inthanon National Park: Check-list and Guide to Bird Finding*. Mahidol University, Bangkok.

Cox, M. J., P.P.V. Dijk, J. Nabhitachata, and K. Thirakhupt. 1998. *A photographic guide to Snakes and other Reptiles of Thailand and South-east Asia*. Asia Books Co., Bangkok.

Francis, C.M. 2001. *A photographic guide to Mammals of Thailand and South-east Asia*. Asia Books Co., Bangkok.

Inskipp, T., N. Lindsey, and W. Duckworth. 1996. *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region*. Oriental Bird Club. Although the taxonomy is slightly outdated, this checklist is extensively footnoted and the publication is highly recommended.

Kasornrorkbua, C., C. Chinuparawat, and C. Nualsri. 2008. *A Photographic Guide to the Raptors of Thailand*. Photographic Guides of Thai Birds. The text is in Thai (photos also labeled in English), but this book is invaluable as it contains many photographs for each species of Thai raptor. From the forward, it appears that an English edition is being worked on.

Lekagul, Boonsong, P.D. Round and Kamol Komolphalin. 1985. "Birdwatching for Palearctic Migrants in Thailand." *British Birds* 78: 2-39. A useful and informative review of the status of migrant birds, together with a list of some important birdwatching localities and descriptions of major habitat types.

Parr, J.W.K. 2003. Large Mammals of Thailand. Sarakadee Press, Bangkok. In English with nice plates and text accounts. Everything from squirrels and larger is covered.

Round, P.D. 1988. *Resident Forest Birds in Thailand: Their Status and Conservation*. International Council for Bird Preservation, Cambridge, UK. An assessment of the current status of Thai forest birds.

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Round, P.D. 2000. Field Check-list of Thai Birds. Bird Conservation Society of Thailand. Includes a complete list (through 1999) with distribution symbols for all recorded Thai species.

Round, P.D. and D. Gardner, 2008. *Birds of the Bangkok Area*. White Lotus, Bangkok. A review of the identification, status and ecology of birds of Thailand's Lower Central Plain.

Round, P. D., and W. Kongtong. 2009. *Birds of Laem Phak Bia*. The Chaipattana Foundation. This excellent guide with numerous color photos has both Thai and English text. This is a most important area for water birds and we'll spend the first two days of the tour here and nearby.

Smythies, B.E. 1986. *The Birds of Burma*. 3rd edition (revised). Nimrod Press, Liss, England. This useful handbook contains a wealth of descriptive and anecdotal information.

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

ORIENTAL BIRD CLUB: The Oriental Bird Club publications (Forktail and their bulletin, *Birding Asia*) regularly include information about Thailand. For anyone with more than a passing interest in Asian birds, joining the OBC is highly recommended. Their publications to date have been outstanding. 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.orientalbirdclub.org

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