



TOUR INFORMATION NOTES FOR GUATEMALA with Tikal extension.

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

ENTERING GUATEMALA: United Kingdom citizens will need a passport which is valid for six months beyond the intended length of stay. A visa is not required by British citizens. Citizens of other countries should contact their nearest Guatemala Embassy or Consulate for entry requirements.

Tourist cards are required and obtained upon entry at the border customs or from your airline.

FLYING VIA THE USA: The most cost-effective airline routing to Guatemala is via the USA. All nationalities stopping in the USA require a machine-readable passport if travelling to the USA under the visa waiver programme (see below).

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.

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!

On arrival at your US gateway airport you will 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.

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LEAVING GUATEMALA: A departure tax of US \$30 is due at the airport in Guatemala City upon departure, although this is usually included in the price of your international air ticket. A security fee of US \$3 might need to be paid in cash (U.S. dollars or Guatemalan *quetzales*) after you pass through airport security. The tour leader will discuss this with the group prior to departure.

INTRODUCTORY MEETING: Flights from the US typically arrive in Guatemala City in the afternoon or evening. As some clients might arrive late in the evening of the tour's first day, our introductory meeting may take place over breakfast on the second day. This informal meeting gives 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. If you choose to arrive a day early, please ask us to arrange an extra night's accommodation for you at our hotel.

TIME DIFFERENCE: Guatemala is six hours behind Greenwich Mean Time.

CURRENCY: The Guatemalan currency is the *quetzal*; U.S. dollars are widely but not invariably acceptable. You will unlikely to need any *quetzales* unless you plan on buying extra drinks or visiting a store for anything extra; the best way to obtain local currency is at an ATM at the airport or in Antigua. Credit cards are widely accepted in Antigua and in Guatemala City.

As mentioned above, you can exchange sterling or dollars at the airport if you plan on purchasing extra drinks or buying any souvenirs (Guatemala is known for its weaving and wooden masks). If you are not planning on buying much you are unlikely to need much extra. Once outside the airport sterling or euros won't be of much use so for the most flexibility we recommend taking some US dollars.

LANGUAGE: The major language in Guatemala is Spanish, though English is widely spoken in the cities. Our local leader is a native Spanish speaker with excellent English skills. The owners of Los Andes and Los Tarrales are native English speakers. You is no need to learn Spanish, but understanding even a few basic words will add interest to your trip, so you might consider bringing a small English-Spanish dictionary or phrase book.

CLIMATE: Occasional rain is always possible, but the dry season in the Guatemalan highlands is characterized by bright, sunny days and cool temperatures ranging from the 50°s and 60°s F at higher-elevation sites to the low 80°s at Los Tarrales, where it is also somewhat more humid. A sweater, light jacket and light gloves will probably add to your comfort at Rincon Suizo. The coldest location of the tour is at Todos Santos Cuchumatan, where we'll be looking for Goldman's Warbler. Here, it can be in the high 30°s or lower 40°s at night with a biting wind, although typically it warms up into the 50°s and 60°s quickly during the day. It is recommended that you bring some layers for this day, including a jacket, gloves, and a hat.

Weather in the El Petén lowlands (Tikal) is likely to be somewhat warmer with temperatures ranging from the 60s in early morning to the 80s or even low-90s in the afternoon. Rain showers are possible at any time and the air is constantly heavy with humidity, so light, quick-drying clothing is recommended.

ALTITUDE: The city of Antigua is at about 5,000 feet, with Rincon Suizo slightly higher. At Los Andes, we'll be birding between 3,500 and 5,500 feet. Los Tarrales is significantly lower, with most of our birding taking place at around 1,000 feet. The highest location of the tour is at Todos Santos Cuchamatan, where we'll be looking for Goldman's Warbler. Here, we'll reach over 12,000 feet in elevation, so we will make a special effort to go at a slow pace, drink plenty of water, and apply sunscreen! We'll descend slightly lower at Fuentes Georginas, which is just over 8,000 feet.

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PACE OF THE TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE: This tour is moderately strenuous*. Most days will begin with breakfast starting between 05:30 and 06:30, followed by several hours of walking on trails or roads that vary from level to somewhat steep – particularly at Los Andes and Los Tarrales. All our walks will be at a slow pace, with abundant opportunity to pause for a rest, but **please expect to be walking an average of four to six miles per day**. Some days we will take a boxed breakfast or boxed lunch with us in the field, but most days we will have a sit-down midday meal in a hotel or restaurant, followed by more relaxed birding in the afternoon or a drive to our next hotel.

*The hike to look for Horned Guan is very strenuous. This is an optional excursion and involves a relentlessly steep hike up the flank of one of the local volcanoes. Which location specifically depends on the local conditions and your guide's pre-tour scouting. The total hike could range anywhere from four to ten miles round-trip, and the trail conditions could vary from well-maintained switchbacks (but still very steep) to steep and rocky with some loose leaves. Despite the difficulty of the trail, we will have to maintain a reasonable pace so as to reach the guan habitat before it gets too late in the day. Thus, we might need to split up the group, with some proceeding at a slower pace with another guide. We'll make every effort to show this special bird to anyone who is able, but this is a situation where honesty and flexibility are crucial. The hike will be very challenging! Those who do not even wish to attempt the hike will be offered another birding option for the day.

There is a fair amount of driving on this tour, an unavoidable necessity for us to reach all of our birding destinations. Guatemalan roads are generally in poor shape, so traveling relatively short distances can take a long time. Expect several afternoon journeys that could take at least three to five hours, with a couple pit stops and snack breaks along the way. It's a good idea to bring a book to read or music to listen to during these journeys.

At Tikal, we will be on our feet a lot. Expect to walk at least five miles per day (perhaps up to eight) on broad, fairly level trails with some short, gentle hills. It is possible to climb some of the buildings at Tikal for a spectacular view of the ruins and jungle; this requires some fleetness of foot on high, steep stairs. Those who stay on the ground will find the pace of the extension fairly easy. Our lodge is situated only a hundred yards from the entrance to the Tikal archaeological site, so if you need a break from walking, you have the option to stay at the lodge and enjoy the birdy lodge grounds.

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

You should make sure that all routine vaccinations are up to date, including a tetanus booster. Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B and Typhoid vaccinations or boosters are also recommended for those who are not already protected against these diseases. Yellow fever is not a disease risk in Guatemala, but travelers arriving from a country where yellow fever is present must present proof of vaccination.

At the time of writing, there is no malaria risk in areas we visit on the main tour, including Guatemala City, Antigua or Atitlán. A malaria risk *does* exist in rural areas below 5000' elevation; *this may include areas we visit in the lowlands around Tikal*. If you will be visiting an area of Guatemala with a risk of malaria, you should discuss with your doctor regarding the best preventive measures to take. Primaquine is the preferred anti-malarial drug in Guatemala. Atovaquone/proguanil, chloroquine, doxycycline and mefloquine are alternative choices. Using insect repellent and wearing long trousers and sleeves to prevent mosquito bites is also effective as a preventive measure. 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>.

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You should bring adequate supplies of all prescription and special medications, as they are not likely to be conveniently available in the areas this tour visits. Many travellers to Guatemala experience digestive upsets; consult with your physician about the need to bring with you anything beyond over-the-counter diarrhea medication, and drink only bottled water and other beverages during your visit.

Biting insects and arachnids are scarce nearly everywhere on this tour, but biting gnats can be an annoyance at Los Tarrales; long sleeves, long trousers and perhaps a head net will ward off most of them. Some mosquitos are possible anywhere, and chiggers are present around Tikal but usually not a major problem. Careful application of repellent provides good protection, and the leader will advise you when it will be necessary. In general, a repellent should contain 30% of the active ingredient diethyltoluamide (DEET). Care must be taken as DEET can be corrosive to optics coatings and older rubber-armoring on binoculars and scopes. Camping supply stores and outfitters carry some reasonably effective alternatives which contain natural products and aren't corrosive.

Products containing tick- and chigger-repelling chemicals are particularly effective. Camping supply stores sell such a product containing permethrin 0.5%. This non-staining, odourless chemical is non-toxic to humans and protective on clothing through several launderings (it must be applied to your clothing a day or two before the tour starts).

The sun can be surprisingly strong, making a hat a necessity at most sites and sunglasses useful.

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

ACCOMMODATION: Our hotel in Antigua is comfortable, verging on the luxurious, with private bathroom facilities; it is built on the site of a baroque convent and incorporates some of the ruins.

The lodge at Los Andes is a comfortable and bright remodeled farmhouse with inviting dining and living rooms and comfortable porches for watching the feeders; all but two of the rooms have private bathroom facilities (often across the hall from the room). Our hotel in Santiago is comfortable with private bathroom facilities. The rooms at Los Tarrales all have private toilets; two of the rooms may share a shower. Our hotel in Guatemala City is of very good quality and has all the expected amenities. In Huehuetenango we use an old converted *posada*, or rustic family ranch home. It may be necessary to share bathrooms with one or more people for this one night (and depending on our rooming configuration, a couple singles may need to share a room). We use this hotel because it's the closest to our birding location and all other options are an hour or more away.

The Jungle Lodge at Tikal is a resort-style hotel, with comfortable rooms and private bathrooms, a restaurant, bar, swimming pool and many modern comforts and amenities. Electricity is sometimes shut off for a couple hours at a time depending on the solar-powered batteries, but it not usually a major inconvenience.

INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS: Most of our hotels have WiFi, with the exception of Los Tarrales. At some places, such as the Tikal Jungle Lodge, WiFi might only be available in the main lobby or restaurant and may not reach every room.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry service is practical only in Antigua or at Tikal.

ELECTRICITY: Electrical current and plugs at hotels are the same as in the US: 110 v, 60-cycle, parallel prong. 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: The food in Guatemala is of excellent quality. Our hotel breakfasts generally consist of eggs, bread, fried plantains, black beans, sugar cookies, juice and coffee or tea (decaffeinated coffee is not widely available). Midday meals and dinners usually feature chicken or beef, tortillas, black beans or pasta.

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, regretfully, 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.

FIELD CLOTHING: Dress is informal throughout the tour. The best approach to the variable climate is to take several layers of clothing that can be added or removed according to changes in temperature. The following items are basic:

Sun hat	Cotton socks
Long-sleeved shirts	Canvas shoes/sandals
Short-sleeved shirts	Sturdy, lightweight hiking boots or shoes
Cotton trousers	Lightweight sweater
Rain and windproof jacket	

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS: You should bring the following:

Notebook and pencil	Alarm clock
Small rucksack/day pack	Sun screen
Torch and spare batteries	Insect repellent
Sun glasses	Plastic bags (rain protection for optics)
Water bottle/canteen	Ear plugs (if you are a light sleeper)
Collapsible hiking stick (optional)	Personal medication and chapstick.
Travel umbrella (very useful when birding in the rainy tropics)	

Optional: Telescope & tripod, camera & film, spare binoculars (in case of loss or damage), spare spectacles, field guide, swimwear. Keep in mind that there are few waterbirds on the tour for 'scope study.

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.

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LEADER'S EQUIPMENT: The leader will have a telescope, playback equipment, spotlight, first aid kit, maps and copies of important field guides.

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.

Luggage restrictions for the flight to/from Flores in the Peten (Tikal) are as follows: The maximum baggage allowance per passenger is 15kg/35lbs for a checked bag and 5kg/10lbs for carry-on baggage. Dimensions for the checked bag are 42 x 24 inches. Excess baggage is subject to space availability and there may be an extra charge. It is possible to leave additional luggage at our hotel in Guatemala City where it will be stored and can be picked up upon your return.

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.

TRANSPORT: Transportation during the tour is by air-conditioned minibus with a professional driver. The leader will arrange a seating rotation. Participants should be able to ride in any seat in tour vehicles.

For the extension we'll have two internal flights using TAG (Transportes Aereos Guatemaltecos), a local carrier, which uses small propeller planes and seats about 18 passengers.

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.

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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. You only need to pay tips for personal services such as room service or drinks from the bar.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: There are many general books on travel in Guatemala, and reading one of them will certainly enhance your enjoyment of the trip. Among the best is *Fodor's Guatemala*, published in 2008; Iain Stewart's *Rough Guide to Guatemala* and *Moon Handbooks: Guatemala* are also recommended. Jonathan Maslow's *Bird of Life, Bird of Death* is a fascinating and poignant account of a sad period, thankfully past, in Guatemala's modern history.

There are several field guides covering Central American birds and other natural history:

Birds:

Fagan, Jesse and Komar, Oliver. 2016. *Peterson Field Guide to Birds of Northern Central America*. Peterson Field Guides. **Recommended.**

Howell, Stephen N.G. and Sophie Webb. 1995. *A Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America*. Oxford University Press.

National Geographic Society. 2006. *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. Fifth Edition. National Geographic Society, Washington, D.C. One of the top two field guides for North America, more portable than the Sibley guide. *

Sibley, David Allen. 2000. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York. Arguably the best field guide showing all North America's birds. Although comprehensive, its larger size makes it difficult to carry into the field. *

* Note: These guides cover only the birds of North America north of Mexico; they illustrate many northern migrants and winterers not shown in Howell and Webb. The Peterson guide illustrates all migrants and wintering species.

Butterflies:

Glassberg, J. 2007. *Swift Guide to the Butterflies of Mexico and Central America*. Sunstreak Books. Illustrated with photographs.

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

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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

NEOTROPICAL 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.neotropicalbirdclub.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. Other news will be communicated as necessary. If you have any questions about any aspect of the tour, please contact us.