



TOUR INFORMATION FOR WESTERN SAHARA

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

ENTERING WESTERN SAHARA: The Western Sahara was a former Spanish colony which was annexed by Morocco in 1975. The local people have been in dispute with Morocco over control of the region, and they have declared it a separate country – The Saharan Arab Democratic Republic which is recognised by various governments and is a member of the African Union. The UK Government regard its status as 'Undetermined'.

United Kingdom citizens will need a passport which is valid for six months beyond the intended length of stay. British passport holders and other EU nationals do not need a visa. *Note: If you have Israeli stamps on your passport you may be refused entry.*

It is a good idea to take multiple photocopies of your passport and air ticket with you when travelling abroad, especially Western Sahara where police checkpoints are common. 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.

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

CURRENCY: The Western Saharan currency is the Moroccan dirham. We suggest bring small amounts of Euros or US dollars to change on arrival. As the tour price includes all travel, accommodation, meals and drinks with meals, you will require only enough currency to cover snacks, drinks other than at meal times or other purchases of a purely personal nature. There is almost nothing in the way of souvenir shopping in Western Sahara.

LANGUAGE: The national language is Arabic, but French is widely spoken. A few people speak English and Spanish.

CLIMATE: It is generally warm to hot, dry, and sunny throughout the year. We expect warm to hot daytime conditions although it may get much cooler during the night and along the coast. We can expect temperatures up into the mid 30's °C during the middle of the day (though more typically in the mid-twenties) but down to around 10 °C during the night. There is always the risk of strong and cold winds so you should bring a suitable jacket to cope with this.

PACE OF TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE: This is an unusual tour in that there is not fixed itinerary. There should not be any particularly long walks but we will be driving and stopping at various locations to see what we can find. Depending on what we find, we may walk for a mile or so over flat sandy ground. There will be excursions at night to look for the Golden Nightjars and other creatures.

Lunch will either be a picnic at a birding site or we may return to our accommodation for a meal.

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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. You are not required to have any international certificates of vaccination unless coming from areas affected by cholera or yellow fever. We recommend that everyone has up-to-date typhoid and tetanus protection.

Mild intestinal disorders are difficult to avoid completely and we suggest that you bring diarrhoea medication such as Imodium and some rehydration medication.

We would recommend that you do not drink tap water, or eat salads anywhere on the tour. We also suggest you use bottled mineral water for teeth cleaning. It may be difficult to obtain special medication during the tour so bring all you are likely to need with you

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

ACCOMMODATION: In Dakhla we will stay in a modern hotel in the town. Down at Aousserd we stay in a local house. This has a limited number of rooms and some sharing may be required, although couples should be able to have their own room. The beds are mattresses on a carpeted floor and all bedding is provided. There are two toilet/shower rooms. While this is basic, it is preferable to camping, especially if the wind gets up.

ELECTRICITY: 110/220V 50Hz. Sockets (where available) take round, 2-pin plugs, so an international adaptor is required and can be bought in most airport departure lounges. Electricity at Aousserd is provided by a generator. You may find the following website helpful: <http://www.power-plugs-sockets.com>.

FOOD: During our time at Dakhla we can expect to sample local food such as tajines of chicken, lemon and olive; or lamb, prune and almond to couscous with lots of local vegetables. Fish is also a popular evening meal. Breakfast usually consists of a simple selection of bread, eggs, jam, orange juice, tea and coffee. Meals at Aousserd will be simple but good. Vegetarians can be catered for. We take a local person with us to Aousserd to cook basic but good meals during our stay there.

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, or a soft drink are provided at meals.. In addition, we keep a supply of bottled water on the tour vehicles.

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INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS: The hotel at Dakhla has good internet connection. There is none away from the town. Mobile phone access is good around Dakhla town but patchy away from there.

CLOTHING: Dress will be informal throughout the tour. During most of the tour, the warm temperatures will dictate light clothing and a sun hat. Shorts and sandals are acceptable but sandals are not always suitable for the field as we may walk through vegetation that can be prickly. However do be prepared for surprisingly cool conditions, especially if we get a northerly wind. We also venture out after dark when the temperature can drop considerably so a fleece or light sweater might be useful. Light-weight walking shoes or boots are adequate for most people. Women should keep shoulders and upper arms covered and shorts should be below the knee in Dakhla town and whilst at Aousserd.

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS: Please bring the following:

Small rucksack or shoulder bag	Good Torch (with spare batteries)
Insect repellent	Alarm clock
Drinks bottle	Sun cream
Sunglasses	Personal medication

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

Note: Hopefully biting insects will not be a problem but if you do suffer from them, then 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 provide the following:

Telescope and tripod	Small first-aid kit
Reference books	Maps
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.

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PHOTOGRAPHY: Memory cards may be difficult to impossible obtain so you should bring with you all that you expect to need. Camera equipment should be packed in moisture and dust-proof bags as a precaution. If you wish to 'digiscope' please ensure that you bring your own telescope.

There will be opportunities to take photos of wildlife 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: The transport for the tour will be in mainly in 4 x 4 Landcruisers or a minibus.

SMOKING: Smoking is not allowed in the vehicle 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.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Mullarney, Killian et al. Collins Bird Guide. 2010. HarperCollins. The 2nd edition is the latest, most up-to-date and portable field guide to the birds of Europe. This book has quickly become established as the standard field guide for the region. **Highly recommended, and also covers North Africa.**

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

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 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.