



TOUR INFORMATION FOR JAMAICA

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

ENTERING JAMAICA: United Kingdom citizens will need a passport valid for at least six months prior to the date of entry. A visa is not required. Citizens of other nations should contact their nearest Consulate for entry requirements.

Yellow Fever: If you have been to almost any other tropical country within six weeks of arriving into Jamaica, you will have to have a brief health interview after exiting the plane and before getting in line for immigration. A valid Yellow Fever vaccination is required if you are arriving from a country where the disease is a risk, **and this is enforced**.

FLYING VIA THE USA: At the present time there are no scheduled flights from the UK directly into Kingston and back of Montego Bay. If you wish Sunbird to arrange your flights we will most likely take you via the USA.

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, including the USA. 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.

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.

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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.

INTRODUCTORY MEETING: There will be an introductory meeting at 18:30 on Day 1 in the lobby of our first night's hotel. 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. We strongly recommend you arrange your flights to arrive by late afternoon so that you can be present at the introductory meeting. After the meeting, we will have dinner.

TIME DIFFERENCE: Jamaica is 5 hours behind Greenwich Mean Time.

CURRENCY: The local currency is the Jamaican Dollar (JMD). As the tour price includes all travel, hotel and main meal costs, you may not need any local currency, as dollars are accepted by most of our lodges, but you may find it useful to have \$20 to \$50 worth of local currency to cover such items as snacks, bar drinks, gifts, and other purchases of a purely personal nature. An ATM is at the exit of the Montego Bay airport, and we likely won't have any opportunity to exchange after that. The U.S. dollar and credit cards are widely accepted for any larger expenditure.

LANGUAGE: English.

CLIMATE: The days are generally quite warm and humid, and summer clothes are suitable year-round. But be prepared for rather cool, damp weather in the Blue Mountains (with lows possible into the mid-50's F), and slightly cool mornings at Marshall's Pen (morning lows usually in the upper-60's F). Rain is very unpredictable, with an occasional downpour possible, or even a totally dry week without a single drop.

ALTITUDE: Our highest elevation will be 3500 feet (1070 m).

PACE OF THE TOUR: Most mornings will start around 06:00, often with coffee and optional early birding, followed by a sit-down breakfast at 07:30 or 08:00. There will be a couple earlier mornings, either starting with an early breakfast at around 05.15 or a picnic breakfast after an early drive. We usually bird through the morning hours after breakfast to lunch. On most days we schedule one to two hours of free time after lunch and/or before dinner for rest, but sometimes we'll use the afternoon to drive to our next hotel, so there are some longer days.

The longest walks are of only about one mile (1.6 km) and do not climb substantially. Most walking is on level roads, although at Marshall's Pen there is some very uneven, rocky ground, and a 1/4-mile trail at Green Castle Estate one afternoon is steep in places. Those with balance and stability issues should bring a collapsible hiking stick with a wrist loop, and those who find it difficult to stand for long periods may wish to bring a small travel stool. On several evenings we might go owling within a short walk of our doorstep. There are several longish drives on typically rough, even if paved, Jamaican roads.

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.

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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.

There is no malaria or Yellow Fever in Jamaica.

Insects and Arachnids: Though chiggers are absent or rare, minute ticks can be a nuisance in a couple places, but they carry no diseases. Imported red fire ants are around but easily avoided by not standing in a nest for any length of time. Mosquitoes can be numerous in some years at the eastern end of the island, but we do not stay near human settlements where there is a risk of mosquito-borne diseases. To be protected, bring plenty of spray repellent and wear long sleeves and trousers when in the field. We recommend using insect repellents with a concentration of DEET. However perhaps the best prevention against ticks (but also mosquitoes) is to treat your clothing with permethrin one to a few days before you leave home. This non-staining, odourless chemical is non-toxic to humans and protective on clothing through several launderings

Anyone who is unusually sensitive to insect bites and stings (ants, wasps) should consider bringing an antihistamine such as Benadryl. Although pharmacies in Jamaica are well-supplied they are likely to be impossible to visit during this tour's schedule, so bring enough of the medications you normally use to last the duration of the trip. A first-aid kit will be available on tour.

Miscellaneous: There are no venomous snakes on Jamaica. One can never completely escape the risk of parasites or fungal infections. Please consult your GP. We avoid tap water in Montego Bay, but it is potable at our other hotels in Jamaica, or filtered and bottled water are readily available. Gastrointestinal problems are always a possibility while traveling; you may want to bring Imodium or some other reliable anti-diarrhea medication. Finally, you may wish to bring a broad-spectrum antibiotic in case of stubborn bacterial infections.

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: Our hotels and lodges are always among the best available, comfortable and modern, and all have rooms with private baths, hot water, and electricity at all locations. Marshall's Pen, a delightful bit of a departure, is a 200-year-old private "great house" with ten guest bedrooms with private baths, some ensuite, others just across the hall. Two rooms must share a bathroom there if the group is full.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry services are available at Marshall's Pen, however you may find it more convenient to wash your own in small batches.

ELECTRICITY: 110V AC 50Hz. 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: Jamaica is famous for its delicious local foods, such as ackee (known also as “vegetable scrambled eggs”), callaloo (a vegetable cooked as spinach), bammy (fried or steamed cakes made from cassava), and the famous jerk recipes. The food at Marshall’s Pen and Starlight Chalet is home-cooked and served family style, while on other nights we eat at standard restaurants.

We have one or two picnic breakfasts and one or two picnic lunches. The remaining meals are had at our lodging, with one lunch at a roadside “jerk centre,” and one at a guest house enroute, and one fast-food lunch.

Our 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.

Participants with significant food allergies or special dietary needs should bring appropriate foods with them for those times when their needs, regrettably, cannot 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. As it can get hot and dry, we recommend you bring a large, good quality water bottle and keep this topped up.

INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS: WiFi is available at all of our lodges, at least in the communal dining area.

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: Informal throughout. Comfortable field clothes and shoes are essential. The following items are basic requirements:

Sun hat	Long trousers for the field, preferably light cotton or a breathable, quick-drying fabric
Lightweight wool or wool-blend field socks	Shorts (for around the lodges)
Long-sleeved cotton or fast-drying microfiber shirts	Comfortable walking shoes/lightweight hiking shoes
T-shirts	Waterproof clothes (lightweight rain jacket)
Lightweight sweater / fleece	

Note: We recommend not wearing clothing in the field that reflects ultraviolet light, including bright white and fluorescent (or “neon”) colours. Birds can see near-UV light, and since shy birds are sensitive to our movements, such bright colours will accentuate them, possibly meaning the difference between seeing a reclusive bird and having it slink away unobserved. Normal reds, yellows, oranges, blues, and greens are fine.

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MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS: Please bring the following:

Alarm clock	Rubber flipflops for showers
Headlamp or torch plus spare batteries	Notebook and pencil
Compact umbrella	Wash cloth (not provided by some hotels)
Insect repellent	Plastic bags (rain protection for optical equipment)
Sunscreen	Cool-water laundry soap
Water bottle	Travel clothesline
Small day pack/rucksack	Hiking stick
Ear plugs (if you are a light sleeper)	Small, collapsible travel stool
Pocket knife	

Optional: Telescope & tripod, camera & film, spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), swimwear. Telescopes are an advantage.

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). New products containing tick- and chigger-repelling chemicals are particularly effective.

Camping supply stores 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. 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: Leaders will provide the following:

Telescope	First Aid Kit
Playback equipment	Maps and small field library
Spot light	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.

PHOTOGRAPHY: Scenery and "memory" shots will be plentiful and simple to obtain. Bring all your film/memory cards with you as even the more common varieties will certainly be more expensive than in Britain and may be difficult to obtain. If you wish to 'digiscope' please ensure that you bring your own telescope as the leader's telescope will not be available for this. Camera equipment should be packed in moisture- and dust- proof bags as a precaution.

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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 in minibuses driven by the leaders. Some roads may be quite bumpy and/or winding; anyone susceptible to motion sickness should bring an appropriate remedy. 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:

Birds:

Downer, Audrey, Ann Haynes-Sutton, Robert Sutton, and Yves-Jacques Rey-Millet. 2009. *A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Jamaica*. London: Christopher Helm . **Recommended**.

Raffaella, Herbert, et al. 2003. *Birds of the West Indies*. Princeton: Princeton UP. Illustrates many but not all of the similar species and forms found on other islands in the West Indies; recommended. [Note the publication date to avoid mixing this up with the older handbook version.]

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

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. If you have any questions about any aspect of the tour, please contact us.