



TOUR INFORMATION FOR BOLIVIA: The Chaco, Valle Zone and Central Andes

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

ENTERING BOLIVIA: United Kingdom citizens need to have a passport that has a minimum validity of 6 months remaining after the tour has finished. British citizens do not require a visa. Tourist cards are prepared by your arriving airline. Citizens of other countries should contact their nearest Bolivian Embassy for entry requirements.

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: The tour begins and ends in Santa Cruz. There will be an introductory meeting at our Santa Cruz hotel at 18.00 on Day 1, followed by dinner. This informal meeting affords 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 arranging your flights to arrive by late afternoon so that you can be present at the introductory meeting.

TIME DIFFERENCE: Bolivia is 5 hours behind British Summer Time (GMT -4).

CURRENCY: The local currency is the *boliviano*. Although your basic expenses on tour are covered, it's a good idea to have about USD \$20 worth of bolivianos for incidental expenses, gifts, alcohol, and tips for personal services. The best way to obtain cash is from ATMs, which can be found in the Santa Cruz airport and in Cochabamba; one may also use the foreign exchange desk in the airport upon arrival and might also be able to exchange cash at the hotel in Santa Cruz. Dollars are not widely accepted outside the major cities.

LANGUAGE: Spanish is spoken everywhere, even if as a second language for Quechua and Aymara people. Our leader speaks Spanish, so you will not be required to converse in the language. However, you may want to consider bringing a Latin American Spanish phrase book. It may be helpful to you in negotiating simple hotel and restaurant situations when the leader is not around.

CLIMATE: Since we will be nearing the end of the dry season, it will likely be mostly sunny and hot in the lowlands and interior valleys. As we work our way up in elevation, weather becomes much more unpredictable, and the cloud forest areas could get persistent to intermittent rain, mist or fog at any time. In the highest elevations, mornings are usually clear and cold whereas afternoons can be sunny and cool. Temperatures should stay between 50°-90°F for most of the tour; warmer temperatures are possible at the lowest elevations during the first half of the tour. There is also the slim chance of a late cold front, where even in the tropical lowlands low temperatures could drop to the upper 40's and highs only into the 60's.

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ALTITUDE: We will be going as high as 14,800 feet (4500 metres) on at least one day. Although we will do only a bit of walking here, some will be on a surface resembling a stony golf course down at about 13,750 feet (4200 metres). Some people experience just light-headedness and a need to take deeper breaths with only a little exertion; some just find it exhilarating. But many experience a delayed effect of nausea and headache, which can be mitigated by drinking plenty of water, and which will eventually disappear after several hours. Acetazolamide is an effective drug that alleviates side effects of high elevation. It can be purchased over the counter in Bolivia. While this is a prescription drug in the United States (Diamox), it can be purchased over the counter in Bolivia, and we'll be making a stop at a drugstore to obtain some during the tour. Please consult your doctor if you think high elevation may be an issue for you.

PACE OF THE TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE: Early mornings and full birding days will be the rule, but we always try to be back at the hotel well before dark and allow at least hour off before dinner. Sunrise is around 06:00, so daily departures from the hotel are usually around 04:30 to 05:30, depending on the length of the drive, and we are back to the hotel by about 04:30 to 05:00. The pace is considerably more relaxed during our day at Refugio Los Volcanes, as there will be no driving.

During most of the tour, birding will be on dirt or paved roadsides, but at Refugio Los Volcanes we'll be on trails and the main entrance road. The road itself is very steep in places with loose gravel, and footing can be difficult. Some of the trails are very flat and easy, but many are also narrow, quite steep in places, and they may have washed-out or rock-covered sections. We'll have to rock hop across a stream in several places if the plank bridges are out, and a stroll down the stream one afternoon might include some patches of knee-deep quicksand that one will have to pay attention to avoid. The farthest we walk from the lodge is less than a mile each way, often much less. Walking sticks are highly recommended.

In the areas of highest elevation at Cerro Tunari we'll spend a short period walking off the road on the tundra-like vegetation, and in some areas we may wander opportunistically up rock-strewn washes with very uneven footing. We may spend about an hour to look for Short-tailed Finch up to a $\frac{3}{4}$ kilometre away but within sight of the vehicle. We'll have to traverse a 50-metre section of large boulders and hop on rocks over a stream; this requires a fair amount of agility. During the occasional difficult hikes like this, one can stay with the vehicle.

Throughout the tour there will be lots of standing and watching, and we generally move very slowly. If this tends to tire your lower back a small, lightweight travel stool that you can carry with a strap over your shoulder would be useful.

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.

A Yellow Fever vaccination is recommended and is mandatory to enter Bolivia if arriving from a country where Yellow Fever is present.

Malaria: Malaria is very rare where we are. 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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Leishmaniasis: Tiny phlebotomine flies (technically called sand flies but not related to the gnats that bite in sandy areas) carrying the *Leishmania* parasite do exist at lower elevations in Bolivia, but the risk is not high, as we rarely see the insect, and not all are vectors. If the insect is seen (it looks like a tiny, pale mosquito and is active only from dawn to dusk), the leader will point it out; steps to avoid exposure are the same as for mosquitoes.

Insects: Mosquitoes will generally not be problem as we are here during the end of the dry season, but there may be small biting gnats, especially in the cloud forest and at Refugio Los Volcanes when it is sunny. Refugio is a transition zone to Amazonian foothill forest, so mosquitoes or sand flies could be here in the evening, and one should be protected. The best defence against any insects is to wear long-sleeved shirts and trousers, especially in the evenings and to use repellent on exposed skin. Roadside vegetation may have chiggers in the lower elevations, and we'll do our best to avoid them.

Careful application of insect repellent to trousers and socks provides good protection and the leader will advise you when it will be necessary.

Miscellaneous: One can never completely escape the risk of parasites or fungal infections. Please consult with your physician. We avoid tap water; 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. You also may wish to bring a broad-spectrum antibiotic in case of stubborn bacterial infections. Sun and UV exposure in the higher elevations can be very intense. Please bring adequate protection, including a sun hat and a strong sun screen of at least 15 rating. Snakes of any kind are rarely encountered in the tropics, and we will be lucky to see one. Furthermore, venomous species are in the minority in the Americas, and we spend very little time on trails in the humid lowlands where one would have the greatest chance of finding one. Still, it's always something to keep in mind.

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 be staying in hotels and lodges with a wide variety of comfort levels, some excellent and modern. All offer rooms with private bathrooms and hot water showers (usually heated with an electric coil at the shower head). At Refugio Los Volcanes, we will be without telephone but only 45 minutes from the nearest town and a couple of hours from Santa Cruz. Electricity is provided by solar cells and battery there, so while there is lighting in the rooms, there are no electrical outlets; batteries can be charged at the dining room, but electrical appliances such as razors and electric toothbrushes cannot be used. Single occupancy rooms may be available but cannot be guaranteed during the two nights here. All other hotels offer standard amenities, though you may want to bring your own shampoo and washcloth.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Two-day laundry service will be available at most of our hotels, but at Refugio Los Volcanes and in Comarapa clothing is hung to air dry, so that must be taken into account.

ELECTRICITY: Full-time electricity will be available at all our lodging except Refugio Los Volcanes, but since this is Bolivia, one should be prepared for a limited number of outlets in your room and occasional power cuts no matter where we are. Wattage and amplitude in Bolivia is almost always 230/50, but the outlet shape provides for both flat parallel 2-prongs and round 2-prongs. Check out <http://www.power-plugs-sockets.com/bolivia> for more information.

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INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS: None of our lodges have internet as most of these are located in rural areas. There are no internet cafés either. Even in the cities internet access is poor however this is something the country is trying to correct.

FOOD: We will start most days with picnic breakfasts and have (mostly) picnic lunches in the field. Dinners will usually be in our hotel restaurant and are typically simple meat or fish cuts with sides of steamed vegetables, rice and french fries.

Coffee on our picnics and in simpler restaurants all over Bolivia is instant (usually Nescafe), so if you require something of higher quality, you should consider bringing your own.

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 and/or a soft drink, beer or wine is provided at lunch and dinner, as is coffee or tea. All other drinks or 'personal' drinking water for use in your room etc. is the responsibility of the individual. We also try to keep bottled water on the minibus for 'emergency' use during the day.

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

Lightweight wool or wool-blend field socks	Sun hat
Long-sleeved cotton or fast-drying microfibre shirts	T-shirts
Lightweight sweater	Lightweight gloves
Trainers or sturdy hiking boots	Fleece or heavier sweater
Light cotton or fast-drying microweave trousers	Warm cap
Lightweight raincoat or windbreaker	Wind/rain-proof trousers
Shorts (for time spent in the hotels, but not recommended in the field)	
Sandals for wading in the creek at Refugio Los Volcanes	

Note: We recommend not wearing brightly-coloured clothing in the field. Birds are particularly sensitive to movement, and such bright colours will accentuate it, possibly meaning the difference between seeing a reclusive antpitta or tinamou or having it slink away unobserved.

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS:

Notebook and pen	Alarm clock
Torch, or headlamp, and spare batteries	Compact umbrella
Small rucksack/Day pack	Insect repellent
Sunglasses and Sunscreen	Water bottle
Ear plugs (if you are a light sleeper)	Hiking stick
Wash cloth (not provided by some hotels)	Pocket knife
Small, collapsible travel stool	Rubber flip-flops for showers
Power strip to recharge multiple items	Personal medication

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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 first aid kit, maps and copies of the more important field guides and references, as well as portable electronic playback equipment and 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. 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: Our transport will be either minibus, small bus, or a combination of utility vehicles, depending on the size of the group. The leader will arrange a seating rotation and participants should be able to ride in any seat in tour vehicle.

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.

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

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Field guides:

Herzog, S. K., et al. 2017. *Birds of Bolivia Field Guide*. **Recommended**

Erize, F., J. R. R. Mata and M. Rumboll. 2006. *Birds of South America: Non-Passerines: Rheas to Woodpeckers*. Princeton. Very helpful with excellent illustrations, but confusing nomenclature and taxonomy.

Ridgely, Robert S. and Guy Tudor. 2009. *Field Guide to the Songbirds of South America: The Passerines*. University of Texas Press. *This is the other of the two recommended books.*

General references:

Fjeldså, Jon and N. Krabbe. 1990. *Birds of the High Andes: A Manual to the Birds of the Temperate Zone of the Andes and Patagonia, South America*. Apollo, Denmark. A guide to South America's higher elevation species, covering most of those not included in Hilty et al. Although heavy, expensive, and very poorly bound, it is worth studying prior to the tour.

Forsyth, Adrian and Ken Miyata. 1984. *Tropical Nature*. New York: Scribner. A superb and very readable introduction to the ecology of tropical rain forests. Recommended.

Hilty, S. L. 1994. *Birds of Tropical America*. Chapters Publishing, Ltd., Shelburne, CT. Excellent treatment of natural history of Neotropical birds.

OBTAINING BOOKS: Most of the field guides and the major ornithological references, at least those in print, are available from booksellers specializing in natural history titles.

Natural History Book Service Ltd
Tel: 01803865913
www.nhbs.co.uk

WildSounds
Tel: 01263 741100
www.wildsounds.co.uk

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MAPS Country maps are 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.