



TOURS INFORMATION FOR GAMBIA

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

ENTERING GAMBIA: United Kingdom citizens will need a passport which is valid for three months after the date of return. A visa is not required. Citizens of other nations should contact the nearest Gambian consulate or Embassy for entry requirements.

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

FLIGHT TO GAMBIA: Gambia can only be reached from the UK via charter flights. At the time of writing we expect to use Titan Airways flights from London Gatwick airport. Although Thomas Cook Airlines fly from Birmingham and Manchester airports they only do so twice a week. Note that charter flights have a very strict weight allowance policy for both checked-in luggage and cabin bags. Cabin bags will be weighed at check in, and at the time of writing the maximum weight allowance with Titan is 6kg (subject to change). The seats are very small so you may wish to opt to pay for an upgrade. On board the plane you will be given a meal (covered in the tour price) and this usually includes a cup of coffee, tea or water. Any additional drinks or snacks must be paid for and this includes water.

CURRENCY: The Gambian currency is the Dalasi (GMD). As the tour price includes all travel, hotel and main meal costs, you need bring only enough to cover gifts, snacks, extra drinks or other purchases of a purely personal nature. English pounds and Euros are easier to change than US dollars. Money can be exchanged at our hotel where the rate is considerably better than at an airport.

LANGUAGE: English is widely spoken in the Gambia.

CLIMATE: It will be generally hot and dry with temperatures ranging from night time lows of about 15-20°C (60-70°F) to mid-day highs of about 25-35°C (80-95°F). As the rainy season will just be finishing there is always the chance of a shower. At the time of our tour there is a chance of some days with stronger winds, which will lower the temperature, especially in the mornings and evenings. It can be particularly cool on the early morning ferry crossing.

PACE OF TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE: Most days we will have breakfast at our accommodation around 06.30 before we go out birding. Lunch will be taken either at a suitable café where we can carry on birding and relaxing, or on travel days we will take a picnic with us. We will return to our hotel around 18.30-19.00 allowing an "hour to shower" before dinner. On at least a couple of nights we will have a later dinner (between 20.30 and 21.00) due to birding and driving.

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.

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A malaria preventative is strongly recommended. Useful information on all aspects of malaria, including how to reduce your chances of being bitten can be found at the website <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/malaria/prevention>

It is important you seek medical advice about any inoculations you may need as situations do change. Currently a yellow fever inoculation is not compulsory but you may want to consider getting one. However if you are over 60 and have never had a yellow fever inoculation before, your doctor may advise you not to have one. As some of these inoculations and malaria preventatives cannot be given concurrently we suggest contacting your doctor straight away and obtain advice about when to start your treatment.

Biting insects can be numerous especially in the evening at the Tendaba camp. A can of spray repellent should provide adequate protection as well as wearing long sleeved clothing. Repellents containing diethyltoluamide (DEET) are the most effective. The water on the coast is said to be safe to drink but to be safe we recommend bottled water, even for brushing teeth.

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

ACCOMMODATION: During the tour we'll be based at a good quality coastal hotel and at a lodge at Tendaba which is basic but close to good birdwatching areas. Accommodation here is in traditional 'rondavel' African-style huts (Tendaba) which are all equipped with a cold water shower (surprisingly welcome on a hot day) and toilet. The power here is run on a generator which is turned on around 18.00 and left on all night (far enough away not to keep us awake!) and there is an open-air restaurant and bar. As mentioned earlier, mosquitoes can sometimes be troublesome in the evenings so it will be worth wearing long sleeve shirts and trousers here.

LAUNDRY: Laundry facilities are available at our hotel on the coast but not at Tendaba.

ELECTRICITY: Sockets vary from room to room and from hotel to hotel from European 2 pin to UK style 3 pin types. You may find the following website helpful: <http://www.power-plugs-sockets.com>.

FOOD: The food at our hotel is generally varied and good. Breakfasts typically consist of bread, jam, fruit, cheese and eggs; you may wish to bring some cereal bars to supplement this. Lunch will usually be a sandwich, omelette or rice and fish/chicken. Although salads are supposed to be ok to eat it may be best to avoid them. Dinner is normally a buffet, with a choice of chicken, fish or meat with rice, pasta, vegetables and chips. Although Gambian food is said to be spicy there are plenty of non-spicy dishes to choose from. Up river the food is understandably more basic. Breakfasts and lunches are similar but dinner usually consists of rice, a meat dish, chips and a bowl of a tomato sauce. Please ensure you tell the office if you have any special food requirements. Likewise anyone with a nut allergy should remember that nuts are used in a lot of Gambian cooking.

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. 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.

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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: WiFi is available at our hotel near Banjul but not at our lodgings in Tendaba.

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: Some guidebooks will tell you that shorts are unacceptable and may cause offence, as will ladies vest tops, however local people are used to seeing groups of tourists dressed in this way so we do not think this is a problem. Lightweight and loose clothing will be most comfortable when in the field. Long sleeves and long trousers help to provide extra protection against the sun but short-sleeved shirts and shorts are fine. A good sun hat is essential. You may find a light sweater and a jacket useful. There may be opportunities to swim. Generally light walking shoes or boots will be adequate. Sandals may also be useful around the hotel grounds but are limited for use in the field due to prickly vegetation.

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS: Please bring the following:

Notebook and pencil	Alarm clock
Small rucksack/shoulder bag	Plastic bags (useful for covering optics)
Personal medication	Sun protection lotion
Torch (with extra batteries as power cuts are frequent)	
Sun glasses (also useful to protect eyes when the wind is blowing the sand about)	

Optional: Telescope & tripod (recommended if you have them), camera, 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 provide the following:

Telescope & tripod for group use	Basic first-aid kit
Field guides & reference books	Play-back equipment

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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: Generally there is good potential for taking some nice bird photos on this tour as many species are quite confiding and the light is usually very good. There is not too much in the way of stunning scenery and what mammals we do encounter tend to be very shy. Make sure you do not photograph any local people without asking their permission first. Make sure you bring enough memory storage, spare batteries and battery charger as these are unlikely to be widely available. Camera equipment should be packed in moisture and dustproof bags as a precaution.

Digiscoping is perfectly compatible with the tour and there will be many opportunities, in good light, to achieve some great photos. However note that the tour 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.

TRANSPORT: For travelling around Gambia we will be using a small, air-conditioned, coach with a local driver. The leader will arrange a seating rotation. Participants should be able to ride in any seat in our vehicles. For our trip on the river we will be using a motorised long boat. These have wooden boarding for seats (some have foam cushions) and are perfect for exploring the shallow inlets.

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.

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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:

Borrow, Nik & Ron Demey. *Birds of the Gambia and Senegal*. 2011. Christopher Helm (1408134691). A field guide with all species recorded in both countries illustrated and with useful comments on distribution and identification. Also available as an e-book.

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

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 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.