



## TOUR INFORMATION FOR MEXICO: Baja California

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

**ENTERING MEXICO:** United Kingdom citizens will need a passport valid for at least six months from the date of departure. Visas are not required. Citizens of other nations should contact the nearest Mexican Embassy for entry requirements. Tourist permit and customs forms will be handed out by your arriving airline, and your passport will be stamped upon arrival. Keep the tourist permit stub with your passport at all times; it is required for departure from the country

Yellow Fever vaccination is required if you are arriving from a country where the disease is a risk.

It is always a good idea to take a photocopy of your passport and air ticket with you when travelling abroad. 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.

**LEAVING MEXICO:** On the last day of the tour, we'll make the 80-minute drive back to the Los Cabos International Airport where the tour ends around midday. This means that flights home must not depart earlier than 14.00hrs that day.

**INTRODUCTORY MEETING:** There will be an introductory meeting and group dinner at 18.00 in the restaurant of our first night's hotel. We recommend you arrange your flights to arrive by late afternoon so that you can be present at this meeting. If you can't arrive before this, we suggest that you arrive a day early. After the meeting we will have dinner.

**CURRENCY:** The local currency is the Mexican peso. Consult your bank or [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com) for the current exchange rate. You will likely not need any pesos, as dollars are widely accepted, but you may find it useful to have \$20 to \$50 worth of local currency for small items, gifts, extra drinks, and services of a personal nature. The best way to obtain them is from an ATM, readily available at the airport or in town near our hotel. Credit cards are widely accepted.

**LANGUAGE:** The major language in Mexico is Spanish. English-speakers are seldom encountered except in the larger city hotels. Our leaders' Spanish ranges from functional to fluent and you will have no need to learn the language. However, understanding even a few basic words may add interest to your trip, so you might consider bringing a small English-Spanish dictionary or phrase book.

**CLIMATE:** The southern Baja California Peninsula usually has a warm and dry climate in late winter. Early mornings are pleasantly cool, and rain is remotely possible though very unlikely. The morning boat ride on Magdalena Bay can be quite chilly (lower 60's F are typical, but lower 50s is possible), accentuated by the wind, so a warm fleece or wind-proof jacket and light gloves are recommended, and even a warm hat to cover the ears would be a welcome protection for some.

**ALTITUDE:** This tour involves a maximum elevation of only 3190 feet (970 m).

**PACE OF THE TOUR:** We'll begin most days with breakfast at about 06:30, but one morning we start at 05:45 with a drive to the birding location followed by a picnic breakfast in the field. Breakfast is followed by birding most of the morning, then lunch at a restaurant, followed by a siesta or driving to the next hotel though the mid-afternoon with birding stops.

## MEXICO - Baja California: Tour Information...2

Each day will include one to two hours at the hotel before dinner, and on our one day in La Paz the afternoon is on your own.

Walking is mostly along roads and wide trails that are level to gently sloping, with the possibility of some short stretches of steeper gradients. We'll also occasionally be walking off the road and trails in wide washes, with loose sand in spots and small boulders to navigate. Good foot wear is essential, and many people find a collapsible hiking stick invaluable for walking over rough ground and down rocky sides of washes. Since birding often involves standing still for periods, some people like to have a small travel stool to sit on. Our longest walk will be about one mile each way over the course of an hour or more.

**HEALTH: It is essential that you contact your own doctor to obtain the latest information on the region 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.

Evidence of a Yellow Fever vaccination must be shown only if you are arriving from an infected area

It may be difficult to obtain any special medication during the tour, so bring all you are likely to need.

Insects: Biting insects and arachnids are seldom a major nuisance; during this season chiggers and mosquitoes are all but non-existent. If we are near mangroves in the late evening, there may be a few harmless mosquitos there, but nothing like in the warm season.

We do not often encounter snakes and take time to observe them whenever possible; most are not venomous, and venomous ones are not aggressive.

One can never completely escape the risk of parasites or fungal infections. We avoid tap water but 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.

Don't forget that the sun in Mexico can be very intense, especially while we are on the boat. Please bring adequate protection, including a sun hat and a strong sun screen of at least 15 rating.

For further information on health advice refer to the Medical Advisory Services for Travellers Abroad website [www.masta-travel-health.com](http://www.masta-travel-health.com)

**ACCOMMODATION:** Our hotels and lodges are always among the best available among the smaller hotels and bed & breakfast accommodation (we avoid the larger, all-inclusive resorts), comfortable and modern, and all have rooms with private baths and electricity at all locations.

Most are standard hotels, but our last night's stay is at the spacious Serendipity bed-and-breakfast in delightful Todos Santos. Many participants have expressed a desire to spend more time here, though by the time we arrive we've already seen nearly all the region's possible birds. If this is something you would like do on your own after the tour is over, we'd be happy to arrange extra nights here as well as a commercial airport transfer.

## MEXICO - Baja California: Tour Information...3

**COFFEE:** Early morning coffee is often not available so those craving morning coffee should bring a heating coil for making coffee, or a thermos that can be filled the night before.

**LAUNDRY SERVICE:** This will be available at all our hotels if submitted upon arrival, as we are at each hotel no more than two nights at a time. You may find it more convenient to wash your own in small batches.

**ELECTRICITY:** Electrical current is the same as in the USA (110v, AC60HZ) and plugs are parallel prong. Power failures occur but not with any regularity. Appliances with especially broad ground prongs may not fit outlets at some hotels. 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>.

**FOOD:** Most breakfasts and one lunch will be picnics, with remaining lunches and all dinners in restaurants. Despite common perception, spicy food is easy to avoid in Mexico. The food ranges from very good to outstanding, and we eat at some very nice restaurants featuring very fresh seafood and organic, locally grown vegetables.

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 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.

**INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS:** Wi-Fi is available throughout, although not always in your room, sometimes only near the office.

**FIELD CLOTHING:** Dress is informal throughout. Comfortable field clothes and shoes are essential.

Sun hat	Shorts (for around the lodges)
Lightweight wool or wool-blend field socks	Lightweight gloves
Long-sleeved cotton or fast-drying microfibre shirts	T-shirts
Lightweight, waterproof hiking shoes	Lightweight sweater / fleece
Long trousers for the field (preferably light cotton or a breathable, quick-drying fabric)	Wind-proof/light rain-proof jacket
Light tennis shoes (for around the lodges and easy trails)	

### MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS:

Notebook and pencil	Sunglasses and sunscreen
Small rucksack or day pack	Travel clothesline & laundry soap
Alarm clock	Universal sink plug
Torch & extra batteries	Insect repellent
Rubber flip-flops for showers	Ear plugs (if you are a light sleeper)
Hiking stick	Small cowl or warm hat
Small, collapsible stool	Personal medication

## MEXICO - Baja California: Tour Information...4

**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.

**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

Telescope	Field library
First Aid Kit	Maps
Laser pointer	Play-back 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.

**PHOTOGRAPHY:** Scenery and memory shots will be plentiful and simple to obtain but birds are difficult to photograph. Bring all the memory cards you are likely to need with you. Digiscoping is perfectly compatible with this tour, but please ensure that you bring your own telescope as the leader's telescope will not be available for this activity. Camera equipment should be packed in moisture- and dust-proof bags, as a precaution.

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 12-passenger minibus driven by the leader. While most of our driving is on paved highways, a couple roads are quite bumpy and sometimes winding; anyone susceptible to motion sickness should bring an appropriate remedy. Participants should be able to ride in any seat in tour vehicles.

The boats we use on Bahia Magdalena for a four to five-hour ride to see whales and birds are broad, stable open fibreglass boats seating up to six on padded benches or sometimes bucket seats, equipped with a large outboard motor.

## MEXICO - Baja California: Tour Information...5

**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

Dunn, Jon and Jonathan Alderfer. 2011. *Field Guide to the Birds of North America. Sixth Edition.* National Geographic Society, Washington, DC. One of the top two field guides for North America, more portable than the Sibley guide. The latest edition includes range maps that cover Baja California. **Recommended.**

Howell, Steve N. G. and Sophie Webb. 1995. *A Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America.* Oxford University Press. Optional, useful for range maps that show status.

Sibley, David Allen. 2014. *The Sibley Guide to Birds, Second Edition.* Alfred A. Knopf, New York. Much a matter of preference, this is an alternative to the National Geographic.

#### General Reference and Natural History

Brock, Jim P, and Kenn Kaufman. 2003. *Butterflies of North America.* Houghton Mifflin, Boston. Illustrated with digitally-enhanced photographs.

McPeak, Ron. 2000. *Amphibians and Reptiles of Baja California.* Sea Challengers, Monterey, CA.

Rebman, John P. and Norman Roberts. 2012. *Baja California Plant Field Guide.* 3rd edition. Sunbelt Publications, El Cajon, CA.

**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](http://www.nhbs.co.uk)

WildSounds  
Tel: 01263 741100  
[www.wildsounds.co.uk](http://www.wildsounds.co.uk)

## **MEXICO - Baja California: Tour Information...6**

**MAPS:** Maps of the region may be available from:

The Map Shop  
Tel: 01684 593146  
[www.themapshop.co.uk](http://www.themapshop.co.uk)

Stanfords  
Tel: 020 7836 1321  
[www.stanfords.co.uk](http://www.stanfords.co.uk)

**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. If you have any questions about the trip, please contact us.