



TOUR INFORMATION FOR COLOMBIA: The Santa Marta Mountains

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

ENTERING AND LEAVING COLOMBIA: United Kingdom citizens will need a passport to enter Colombia which is valid for more than 60 days after the date of arrival in Colombia. A visa is not required when entering Colombia as a tourist for 60 days or less for citizens of Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the USA. Citizens of other nations should check with their nearest Colombian embassy. The airline on which you travel to Colombia will issue you with a tourist card that must be completed before you reach the immigration desk.

Important: As soon as you book on the tour, please email the Sunbird office a **colour scan of your passport** – the page(s) with your photograph and passport details. These are needed by our ground agents to obtain permits to some of the reserves. It is then crucially important that you do **NOT** change your passport or get a new one, otherwise extra costs may be incurred.

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 from the originals.

CUSTOMS: Visitors must not enter or exit Colombia while carrying cash or other financial instruments worth more than US \$10,000. Colombian law forbids the export of pre-Colombian objects and other artefacts protected by cultural patrimony statutes.

TIME DIFFERENCE: Colombia is 6 hours behind British Summer Time (BST).

SAFETY: After years of instability, Colombia is once again a safe destination for sensible international travelers. The Colombian government has made impressive progress in strengthening its democratic institutions, promoting respect for human rights and the rule of law, intensifying counter-narcotics efforts, fostering socioeconomic development, addressing immediate humanitarian needs, and ending the threats to democracy posed by narcotics trafficking and terrorism. Security has improved massively and violence has decreased markedly in most areas, and there is no significant terrorist threat in the areas we will visit. However petty crimes such as pickpocketing are common in major cities including airports, so be careful.

In the Santa Marta Mountains, we stay at El Dorado reserve bought and protected by the NGO ProAves, which constantly advises us of the local political climate. With their help, we go to the greatest possible lengths to provide a safe and enjoyable tour. We take no risks and our Colombian assistants have their finger on the pulse of the local political climate at all times.

LANGUAGE: Spanish is the official language of Colombia. Some of the larger hotels have one or more employees who speak English, but English is not as commonly spoken as it is in some other South American countries. A Spanish dictionary or phrasebook is useful and will probably add interest to your trip.

CLIMATE: Temperatures in the Santa Marta area sees lows of around 55° F and highs in the 90s F; the El Dorado Lodge and San Lorenzo Ridge in the Santa Marta Mountains are cool and a fleece is recommended here (scarf and gloves if you are sensitive to the cold). Santa Marta coast and the Guajira Peninsular are very hot and dry.

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ALTITUDE: We visit sites from sea level to around 9,000 feet above sea level. Altitude sickness is unlikely at these elevations, but some participants may have minor symptoms such as headaches at the highest elevations; drinking plenty of water and walking slowly or sitting quietly is usually sufficient to alleviate any problems.

PACE OF TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE: This is a fairly easy trip, with only a few long drives or walks. Our days will begin between 05:00 and 06:00, but one day we will have to leave the lodge at 04:30 in order to reach our birding site at dawn. Some breakfasts will be taken in the field, others will be eaten at our hotels and lodges. On some days we will take a picnic lunch in the field and on others we will stop at roadside restaurants.

Although we'll take it slow and not cover long distances on foot, participants should be able to walk at a slow to moderate pace for around four hours at a time; we may walk in the sun on some roads, though most of our trails will be in the shade. Trekking shoes or boots are necessary as the trails in the Sierra Nevada are rocky and might be muddy and slippery, and a walking stick may be helpful at times. Rubber boots are not really recommended if you bring waterproof trekking shoes (we might have rain and muddy trails in the Sierra Nevada only).

Be aware that you will not be able to return to the lodge or the vehicle on your own should you become tired. On some days however, it will be possible to stay behind and bird the lodge grounds; there is time for a siesta on those days.

The group will typically return to our lodgings around 17:00, with dinner generally starting around 19:00. The leader will call a list of the birds recorded during the day either just before or just after dinner.

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.

No vaccinations certificates are necessary in order to enter Colombia. 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 and Yellow Fever.

Malaria and Yellow Fever: A very small part of the tour is conducted in areas where there is a low risk of malaria and yellow fever; the remainder is at altitudes where these do not occur. Your tour guides will not be taking anti-malarial or Yellow Fever drugs. Whether you choose to take anti-malarial medication or yellow fever vaccination is your personal choice. 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>.

Dengue Fever and Chikungunya: Dengue Fever occurs in parts of Colombia and seems to be becoming commoner in many parts of South America. There is no inoculation available for dengue, so no protection can be made in advance of travel. This disease is transmitted by diurnal mosquitoes mostly in heavily populated areas. Chikungunya Virus, also transmitted by diurnal mosquitoes, has also been reported recently in some areas of the country. It is important therefore cover up and use repellent wherever mosquitoes might be encountered.

Zika Virus: This virus is expanding into South America including Colombia, and health authorities are still trying to gauge its full impact. Please contact your GP if you any concerns.

There are few problems with insects on this tour. Chiggers are present off the roads in Santa Marta, but are not a real problem. Ticks can be a problem some years at Tayrona NP. There are a few mosquitoes in some areas. To be protected, bring plenty of spray repellent and wear long sleeved-shirts and long trousers when in the field.

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While not carriers of disease, chiggers are perhaps the biggest nuisance in the New World tropics. Nearly invisible, and inhabiting grassy and weedy edges in warm, humid climates where other hosts such as livestock or wild animals are common, they bite unseen and unfelt, drop off after having their fill of epidermis in just a few hours, and then a day later leave a spot that itches intensely for about three days or more. The best prevention against chiggers (and 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. Most economical is a 10% concentrate which you dilute and then treat clothing by soaking it in a large bag and then hang out to dry; be sure to look into this option well in advance of the tour.

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

CURRENCY: The local currency is the Colombian Peso. We recommend you bring a bank card that will work at ATMs and advise your bank that you will be travelling to Colombia. Traveller's cheques are very difficult to exchange and not recommended. ATMs are widely available in major cities and at airports. For any major items of expenditure, such as books or souvenirs, payment by credit card is recommended. MasterCard and Visa are widely accepted, American Express less commonly. As the tour price includes all travel, hotel and main meal costs, you only need to change enough money to cover items of a personal nature. If wishing to change money it is best to do so at the start of the tour on arrival at the Barranquilla airport as it is extremely difficult to do this elsewhere. It is possible to change money at the airport either before exiting the arrivals hall or immediately after exiting the hall (where the leader will be able to assist you if he is meeting you from that flight) We will spend some time in areas without ATM'S and where credit cards are not accepted, so it is wise to plan ahead. The leader will advise you where and when it will be possible to obtain money. Unlike some other Latin American countries, US Dollars ARE NOT widely accepted.

ACCOMMODATION: All the accommodation used on this tour has electricity, private bathroom, and free Wi-Fi. Hot water is available only in Barranquilla, at the Minca Hotel and at El Dorado Lodge; (it is sufficiently hot enough in the lowlands for only a few hotels to offer hot water). In Barranquilla we stay in a modern 3-star hotel. In Riohacha we use one of the best options in town, far away from the noisy sea front. La Jorara Lodge near Tayrona NP is a very comfortable place, with beautiful gardens and access to a wonderful white sand beach (don't forget your swimsuit!). Minca Hotel is comfortable and has a great hummingbird feeding station. We end our tour with 3 nights at El Dorado Lodge providing simple but comfortable rooms. El Dorado Lodge is a very birdy place with several hummingbird feeders and some exciting birding can be had right from the balconies.

LAUNDRY: Laundry service is available at El Dorado Lodge although drying depends on the sun.

ELECTRICITY: 110V AC 50Hz (US style plugs). 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: We will have our dinners and some of our lunches at restaurants, where the food is usually a choice of fish, chicken, pork and beef served with rice, fried banana, boiled cassava and salads. The Santa Marta coast offers some excellent fish and a fried red snapper with coconut-flavoured rice is one of the best ways to end a good birding day. The food served is never spicy, but you will always find some hot sauces to dress your meal as you prefer. On one day we may have picnic lunches of typical make-your-own sandwich fare.

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We will also have several simple field breakfasts (fruits, bread, jam, peanut butter, ham and cheese, fruit juice and coffee). Delicious meals are served at El Dorado lodge.

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 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, 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 of the rooms where we stay. As it can get hot and dry, we recommend that you bring a large, good-quality water bottle and keep it filled. It is not recommended to drink tap water anywhere in Colombia.

INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS: Internet and mobile reception are available at all our hotels. Free Wi-Fi at El Dorado Lodge is in the dining room.

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.

DRESS: Dress will be informal throughout the tour. Please wear drab colours but no military-style or camouflage clothing should be worn. The Colombian people tend to dress very smartly, especially when going out to dinner, so shorts are not appropriate in hotel restaurants in the evenings.

FIELD CLOTHING: The following items are basic requirements.

Sun hat	Comfortable waterproof hiking shoes
Light shoes/sandals	Short-sleeved shirts
Long-sleeved shirts	Lightweight trousers
Shorts	Waterproof rain jacket
Sweater	

If you are sensitive to the cold: gloves, warm hat and warm sweater for our morning at San Lorenzo ridge (9,000 m elevation). A folding umbrella is very useful in tropical downpours.

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MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS: Please bring the following:

Alarm Clock	Sun-glasses
Small rucksack/day pack	Sunscreen lotion
Notebook and pencil	Small travel towel
Water bottle	Torch with spare batteries
Luggage locks	Insect repellent
Plastic bags	Inflatable pillow or neck rest
Collapsible hiking stick	Personal medication

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 provide the following for group use:

Telescope and tripod	Spotlight
Laser pointer	Basic first-aid kit
Field guides and reference books	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.

PHOTOGRAPHY: Scenery and memory shots will be plentiful and easy to obtain, but birds are very difficult to photograph. Digiscoping is perfectly compatible with this tour, though you should bring your own telescope if you want to do this. The leader's telescope is for group members to look through. In the ProAves reserves photography is permitted but if you subsequently post any pictures online the reserve name should be acknowledged, and the species should be described using the name as in the McMullan guide (see Bibliography below).

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.

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SMOKING: Smoking is not allowed in the vehicles or when the group is gathered for meals, checklists, etc. Smoking is not allowed in some hotel rooms and is strictly forbidden in all ProAves lodge bedrooms. If you smoke in the field, we ask that you do so well away and downwind from the group.

TRANSPORTATION: Travel will mostly be by minibus, with 4wd jeeps used in the Santa Marta Mountains, where the road is in extremely bad shape. The ride to El Dorado and around the lodge is rough and uncomfortable; the longest drives on that road will be about 2 hours. The leader will arrange a seating rotation. Participants must be willing to take their turn to ride in any seat in our vehicles.

TRAVEL INSURANCE: Travel insurance is essential and we insist that you take out suitable cover as soon as your tour is booked. Theft is a worldwide problem so 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:

Erize, F. and M. Rumboll. 2006. *Birds of South America: Non-Passerines: Rheas to Woodpeckers*. Princeton Illustrated Checklists. An excellent complement to Ridgely and Tudor 2009.

Recommended.

Hilty, S. L., and W. L. Brown. *A Guide to the Birds of Colombia*. 1986. Princeton: Princeton UP. The best Neotropical field guide of its time. Now somewhat outdated in taxonomy and distribution matters, but still excellent.

McMullan, M. 2018. *Field Guide to the Birds of Colombia*. 3rd ed. ProAves. Small pocket-sized field guide that illustrates all the species on the Colombian list. **Highly recommended; the best field guide for this tour.** The 2nd edition is now out of print and can be hard to find/expensive. If neither of these editions is available when preparing for your trip, the 1st edition is still a good value and recommended to bring with you.

Restall, R., et al. *Birds of Northern South America: An Identification Guide*. 2007. 2 vols. New Haven: Yale UP. Species accounts in Vol 1, maps and plates in Vol 2. An excellent (but not infallible) and generally up-to-date reference, the second volume useful in the field as well.

Ridgely, R. S., and G. Tudor. *The Birds of South America*. 2 vols. 1989 and 1994. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Covers all the birds of South America known at the time of publication, though

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not all species are illustrated in the superb plates by Guy Tudor; excellent text with distribution maps. A must for anyone seriously interested in South American birds.

Ridgely, R. S., and G. Tudor. 2009. *Birds of South America: PASSERINES*. Christopher Helm/ A & C Black, London. New field guide version of the above two volumes. **Recommended**.

Recordings:

Alvarez, M., et al. 2008. *A Guide to the Bird Sounds of the Colombian Andes*. 7 cds. Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Krabbe N. 2008. *Birds of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia*. 2 cds. John V Moore Nature Recordings. Vocalizations from 135 species of birds found in El Dorado Bird Reserve and other parts of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.

Butterflies:

D'Abrera, B. 1984. *Butterflies of South America*. Hill House.

Mammals:

Emmons, L.H and F. Feer. 1997. *Neotropical Rainforest Mammals: A Field Guide*. Second edition. The University of Chicago Press. Far from comprehensive but seems to be the best compact guide currently available for Neotropical Mammals.

General:

Carriker M R. Vista Nieve. *The Remarkable True Adventures of an Early Twentieth Century Naturalist and His Family in Colombia, South America*. 2001. Blue Mantle Press. A fascinating account of Melbourne A Carriker who collected and described many of the Santa Marta Endemics.

Garcia Marquez G., *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Famous Colombian novel and writer, whose story takes place in the Santa Marta area.

Todd W.E. and Carriker M.A. *The Birds of the Santa Marta Region of Colombia*. A study in Altitudinal Distribution. 1922. Annals of the Carnegie Museum. This historical study of the birds of the Santa Marta Mountains can be downloaded from the following link
<http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/bibliography/8985>

Woods S. *Colombia*. 2008. Bradt. Good general travel guide to Colombia.

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

FINAL INFORMATION: Final information with instructions for meeting the group, hotel addresses etc., and your international air tickets will be sent out about three weeks before the start of the tour. If you have any questions, please contact us.