



TOUR INFORMATION FOR BORNEO - Sarawak

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

ENTERING BORNEO: The area of Borneo we visit is controlled by Malaysia, so all the Malaysia information below applies.

All citizens will need a passport which is valid for six months beyond the intended length of stay. A visa is not required. Citizens of other nations should contact their nearest Malaysian Consulate for entry requirements. **Visitors to Malaysia will receive from the airlines a Malaysian Disembarkation Card to complete and present to Malaysian Immigration upon arrival; it is important that you keep this card on your person throughout the tour.**

Proof of a Yellow Fever vaccination must be shown only if you are coming directly from an endemic zone. For more information on the latest entry procedures and requirements, please contact the Malaysian Embassy, 45-46 Belgrave Square, London, SW1X 8QT; telephone 020 7235 8033, fax 020 7235 5161, website www.malaysia.embassy-uk.co.uk

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.

CURRENCY: The local currency is the *ringgit* (MYR). As the tour price includes all travel, hotel and main meal costs, you need only bring enough money to cover items of a personal nature. We advise against travelers checks these days. American Express and major credit cards are widely accepted in leading hotels, restaurants and department stores in Kota Kinabalu. Credit cards are accepted at Danum Valley for drinks and incidentals.

LANGUAGE: Although 'Bahasa Malaysia' is the official language, English is spoken by a large proportion of Malaysians and is widely used in almost all private sectors such as banks, hotels, airlines etc. Your leader, Susan, speaks Malaysian.

ALTITUDE: The maximum elevation we will bird at not high, at Paya Maga it is approximately 985ft/300m to 1970ft/600m; our accommodation there is at approximately 1640ft/500m. Ba'kelalan village is located at 2985ft/910 m above sea level.

CLIMATE: Both Ba'kelalan and Paya Maga enjoy tropical climates that are a bit cooler than in the lowlands. The nights are fresh but usually not cold, although a jacket is advisable just in case. The temperature ranges from about 31°C (mid-day) to the low-20sC at night, although the averages are cooler in the mid 20s. Paya Maga is usually marginally warmer. The humidity is quite high, averaging about 80% year round, which may make it seem hotter. Rainfall can be expected at any time in brief, heavy downpours. Total annual rainfall averages between 200 and 260 cm (between 77-100 inches), the wet season typically runs from October to March, while the "not so wet" season is from April to September. There is always the chance of rain on any given day at any given time in Borneo.

PACE OF THE TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE: The average distance covered during our days in the field is around 1 - 2 miles per "birding period." Our pace is very slow, of course, and while not overly strenuous you will be on your feet for long periods. A lightweight, foldable stool may come in handy. To get to the remote field camp at Paya Maga (where we'll spend two nights) you will be required to hike a 3.3 mile stretch of trail.

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We'll start the hike in the morning and with birding stops it will take us roughly 3 hours. We'll hope to reach camp before the heat of midday. Since there is a lull in the bird activity in the middle of the afternoon, midday breaks are usually scheduled. The mornings will be early (as early as 05:30 departures from the accommodation in some places). Most of our birding during this tour will be on foot and away from the vehicles. Our birding at Ba'kelalan will involve some roadside birding, while at Paya Maga we'll be on fairly wide forest trails. To find the more skulking birds such as pittas, partridges, babblers and so on we will also be birding on narrow forest trails and sometimes even off trail. These trails are oftentimes freshly cut and may be slippery or "rooty." Where possible we will be walking on a downhill trend but of course the trails undulate and since we'll oftentimes need to return the way we came, some uphill walking is required. Susan will inform the group of trail conditions ahead of time so that anyone who wishes to opt out has that opportunity.

The proximity to the equator means the days are 12 hours long (year-round) so dawn and dusk are around 6 am/pm respectively. Evening or early morning owling is offered where possible for those who want to participate.

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.

There are no immunisation requirements for entry into Malaysia. However, Malaria preventatives are recommended as are up-to-date inoculations against Hepatitis A or immune globulin (IG) and for typhoid. Typhoid vaccination is particularly important because of the presence of *S. typhi* strains resistant to multiple antibiotics in this region. You should make sure that your other inoculations are up to date.

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>

A Yellow Fever inoculation is applicable to those who come from infected countries or those who have recently been to an infected country.

Although minor intestinal problems do occur in the tropics, Malaysia is remarkably free of these complaints. Malaysians are very particular about their drinking water and drinking water in a restaurant or cafe will have already been treated (usually with UV light). Fluid-replacement drinks and other electrolyte –replacement drinks in powder form may be worth bringing as they replace the vital salts and minerals lost during a bout of diarrhea.

As it may be inconvenient, or impossible, to replenish supplies during the tour, please ensure that you take adequate personal medication with you.

Insects: It is likely that we will find mosquitoes in the forest areas, and possibly a few ticks. We recommend using insect repellents with a high concentration of the active ingredient diethyltoluamide (DEET). The higher the percentage, the greater the effectiveness.

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Leeches can be found in Borneo at any time, particularly after rain, but they are easily repelled by a strong all-purpose repellent, with at least 30% active ingredient such as DEET. The widely-used technique is to make a pair of 'leech socks'. These are made from material such as densely woven cotton and come above the ankles onto the calf. These leech socks should have a drawstring at the top to hold them in place. These can also be sprayed with DEET repellent and this should guarantee that the little beasts will not get through to bare skin! Leech socks are available for purchase from the Oriental Bird Club (see below).

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: As this tour visits a rather remote region of Borneo which lacks the tourist infrastructure and luxuries of Sabah, a sense of adventure and a decent amount of preparation will ensure you have a great trip. Our tour begins and ends in Kota Kinabalu, and while there we stay in a fairly typical, well appointed, western style hotel with private bathrooms. While in Ba'kelalan we will stay in the local "homestay" which is quite simple, with shared bathrooms, but clean and comfortable. The homestay is run by a charming local family in their very large house (they live out the back). In the living areas you will find an endless supply of snacks and hot drinks, comfortable seating and a well-stocked library of natural history books. It is likely to be a memorable stay in a busy little village with no roads. Bathing here will either be through an overhead faucet or *mandi* style, which involves using a small container to scoop water out of a large container and pouring water over the body, in such a way that this water does not go back into the large container. Our two nights in Paya Maga, which is basically a remote campsite, will be much more basic. The campsite here is comprised of a small primitive wooden building with three separate rooms. One of the rooms is the kitchen and the two are for sleeping. Mattresses (3 inch foam) will be laid out on the floor and tent-like mosquito nets and light sleeping bags will be provided. You may wish to consider bringing a sheet along with you for these nights and you may also want to consider bringing a travel pillow. If you are a light sleeper you wish to take ear plugs. Behind the wooden building is a large outhouse with 5 simple pit style toilets (no seat) and bathing stalls (*mandi*). Once we leave Kota Kinabalu we may not have hot water for bathing for most of the trip.

LAUNDRY: Laundry service (in by 09.00, returned by 19.00) is available at some places (but the drying may be dependent on the weather conditions at some of the lodges). If you need laundry done please consult with the leader and she will help arrange with the hosts. While we will not be staying too long at Paya Maga you might want to bring a small laundry soap bar or small flask of biodegradable liquid detergent.

ELECTRICITY: 220V 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>.

FOOD: The food in this part of Malaysia is generally delicious and varied with a combination of Chinese, Western and local Malaysian and Sarawak dishes. At the lodges the evening meals are in the form of buffets. The food in this part of the world has a reputation for being spicy but in Malaysian cuisine, chili or "sambal" (similar in some ways to salsa) is usually added to the meal at the table and is thus optional.

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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, a soft drink or a beer (or wine if appropriate) are provided at meals, as is coffee or tea. Water will be available in the field and we'll have a large bottle for refills. We ask that you bring a large, good quality water bottle and keep this topped up. Juices and carbonated beverages will not be available at some locations. At meals either bottled or filtered water will be available.

INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS: In the hotels in the main towns free wifi is generally available. Most require a password, which we'll receive on check-in. Neither a signal nor Wifi are available at Paya Maga. A signal is available at Ba'kelalan but it is weak.

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 everywhere but this is a rather conservative country so it is not considered acceptable for men to go shirtless. Neat casual clothing for meal times. Bright clothing can scare forest birds so you need to wear clothing with subdued colours. The following items are basic:

Lightweight, sturdy walking shoes	Sandals or light shoes
Short and long-sleeved shirts	Lightweight, loose-fitting trousers
Sweater	Long socks
Knee-high rubber boots (these are highly recommended during our hike into Paya Maga and occasionally in Ba'kelalan where trails can oftentimes be quite muddy.)	

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS:

Alarm clock	Insect repellent
Notebook and pencil	Sun hat
Small torch with spare batteries	Sun screen
Water bottle/canteen	Wrist watch
Rucksack/small day pack	Plastic cup (for picnic lunches)
Ear plugs (if you are a light sleeper)	Personal medication
Pocket knife with bottle opener	

Waterproof poncho or collapsible umbrella – important

Optional: Telescope & tripod (recommended if you have them), camera, film or memory cards, spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), compass, field guide.

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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:

Telescope
Field library
Spotlight

Basic first aid kit
Laser pointer

Note: The leader's telescope is not to be used for digiscoping. Please do not handle the leader's telescope and tripod without prior permission.

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. 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/memory cards with you as it may be difficult to find precisely what you need at short notice. Camera equipment should be packed in moisture- and dust-proof bags, as a precaution. If you wish to 'digiscope' please ensure that you bring your own telescope.

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: During the tour we'll travel primarily in four-wheel drive vehicles. Most of the roads used will not be paved, and depending on how recent it has rained the roads can be quite dusty - so be prepared! For example, you will need protective coverings for cameras, lenses and binoculars. There will be one internal flight, from Lawas to Ba'kelalan, aboard a Twin Otter (Twin prop plane). The flight is operated by MASWings and is roughly 35 minutes. The baggage restriction for check-in luggage is 20kg.

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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:

Field Guides

Myers, Susan. 2016. *Birds of Borneo: Brunei, Sabah, Sarawak and Kalimantan*. Helm Field Guides, London. This is the fully updated and revised field guide that will be used during the tour. It describes and illustrates all the bird species of Borneo with distribution maps. **Recommended.**

Other References

Campbell, Elaine JF. 2011. *A Walk Through the Lowland Rain Forest of Sabah*. Natural History Publications Borneo, Kota Kinabalu. The tropical lowland rain forest in Sabah (Borneo) is an example of one of the richest ecosystems in the world, and this account puts together an introduction to the rain forest and its many biological facets with some of the finest photographs by wildlife photographer Ch'ien C. Lee and notes by naturalists who have been fascinated with the living treasures of the rain forest in Sabah.

Kirton, L.G. 2018. *Butterflies of Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand*. 2nd Edition. John Beaufoy Publishing, Malaysia. Concise photographic guide. Doesn't cover Borneo as such but there is much overlap.

Phillipps, Q. and Phillipps, K. 2016. *A Field Guide to the Mammals of Borneo and their Ecology*. The most complete work on the mammals, fully illustrated. Useful also for West Malaysia.

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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.birdingworld.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

ORIENTAL BIRD CLUB: The Oriental Bird Club publications (Forktail and their bulletin, Birding Asia) regularly include information about Myanmar. For anyone with more than a passing interest in Asian birds, joining the OBC is highly recommended. Their publications to date have been outstanding. 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.orientalbirdclub.org

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. Other news will be communicated as necessary. If you have any questions, please contact us.