



TOUR INFORMATION FOR CHINA: Lhasa and the Tibetan Plateau

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

ENTERING CHINA: United Kingdom citizens will need a passport valid for at least six months from date of departure and a tourist visa to enter China. This visa must be applied for individually through the Chinese Visa Application Service Centre (CVASC) website which can be reached via www.chinese-embassy.org.uk, or by telephone 0207 842 0960.

There are Chinese Embassies in London (tel: 020 7631 1430), Manchester (tel: 0161 2248672) and Edinburgh (tel: 0131 3164789). Citizens of other nations should contact the nearest Chinese Embassy for entry requirements.

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. This is needed to purchase the domestic air ticket. Note:** It is very important that you do **NOT** change your passport or get a new one, otherwise expenses may be incurred.

As soon as you have obtained a Chinese visa we will also need a scanned copy of that as well. This is needed by our ground agent to purchase the train ticket.

APPLYING FOR A VISA: Once the tour is confirmed to run (70-days before departure) we will send you details on how to apply for a visa. We recommend that you apply for a visa only within three months of the start of the tour. Please check with your nearest Visa Office for the most up-to-date information. Our ground agent's address should be entered on the visa form as the company or person to visit in China. When completing your visa application form it is only necessary to put **Beijing and Xining** as the areas to be visited. Please do not mention any other places we visit on this tour.

There are visa service agencies that can provide you with an information pack on how to obtain a visa. They will also process your application for you however they will charge a handling and processing fee. One such company is Trailfinders Visa Service <http://visas.trailfinders.com> (tel: 0207 368 1504).

Once you have obtained your visa, please email the Sunbird office a colour scan of the Chinese Visa inside your passport, as soon as it is issued and definitely no later than one month before the start of the tour. This is needed to obtain our restricted area permits for Huzhu Bei Shan, Chaka and Tibet.

It is always a good idea to take a photocopy of your passport and details of your 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 Chinese currency is called the yuan (CNY) and there are currently just about 8.05 yuan to £1 sterling (August 2016). It is possible to change cash and, more awkwardly, traveller's cheques at the capital airport upon arrival in Beijing. For those arriving early it is also possible to change cash (US dollars, Euros and £ Sterling) using a machine in the lobby of the hotel that you will use in Beijing. It will then not be possible to change money easily anywhere else on the tour until we return to Beijing at the very end.

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Once we are back in the Capital it will be possible to change money at the airport and also again cash in the lobby of our airport hotel. Credit cards are still not widely accepted outside the major cities in China. 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 such as laundry and gifts.

LANGUAGE: Mandarin Chinese is the official language throughout China though many people in Tibet province speak one of the three major Tibetan languages. Many Tibetans have a basic grasp of English but, although it is increasing, still rather few people speak English in much of China. This is especially true in the countryside, where we'll be most of the time. Wang Qingyu, our Chinese guide and co-leader, who will be with us throughout the tour, speaks excellent English but none of our drivers will speak much more than 'hello' and 'good morning'.

CLIMATE: At the start of the tour in Beijing it is likely to be fairly warm (up to 27-33°C) during the day, but the early mornings will be cooler. It will be similar to this in Beijing when we return there at the end of the trip. In August the weather in both Xining and Lhasa will be essentially similar to that in England, however, the days will probably be slightly warmer and the nights possibly a little cooler. Up on the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau and, particularly when we cross some of the higher passes near Koko Nur and near Wenchuan, it is likely to be considerably colder, especially in the mornings when temperatures can drop to around freezing. There will probably already be some snow on the highest peaks. Precipitation is rather scarce throughout the tour but is still a distinct possibility; this may fall as snow at some of the higher elevations that we visit. Precipitation is perhaps most likely on the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau and at Huzhu Bei Shan.

We recommend that you bring a variety of clothing suitable for hot and cold days and also cater for the possibility of heavy rain. The leader intends to take shorts, long trousers, T-shirts, long-sleeved shirts, a warm sweater, waterproof jacket and waterproof over trousers, gloves and both a sun hat and a warm woollen hat.

ALTITUDE: Beijing is at only about 80 metres elevation. However much of the rest of the tour is operated at quite high altitude and we will spend considerable amounts of time above 3,500 metres or 11,000 feet up on the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau. The elevations that we explore on the Plateau will range from 2045 metres up to a mighty 4800 metres and the following paragraphs detail, on a day by day basis, the altitudinal changes we will make.

When at such high altitudes we will attempt to limit our activities, try to avoid excessive up-hill walking and will move at a fairly slow pace so as to limit altitudinal headaches and breathlessness etc. **However, participants should note that this is a strenuous tour, much more so than most, if not all, of Sunbird's offerings.** Most altitudinal problems can be overcome by sitting quietly in or near the vehicle and drinking plenty of fluids. There will be oxygen available in at least one of the vehicles we will use on the tour.

Near the start of the tour we will fly from Beijing to Xining in Qinghai Province. Xining is at 2280 metres and is certainly high enough for us to experience mild altitudinal problems such as breathlessness and mild headaches. On our first afternoon we will drive north travelling up and over the modest Huzhu Pass (3460 metres). Most of the remaining birding at Huzhu will be done between 2475-2800 metres. We will spend two days birding at Huzhu Bei Shan and will cross this pass again when we return to Xining.

On at least one of the two days we are at Huzhu we will walk about two kilometres up a fairly steep valley climbing from the road at 2575 metres about 400 metres up. We will return the same way. This walk usually takes us between four and five hours and it's likely that we won't see everything on the first day and, since it's the best single site in the reserve, there's a good chance that we'd do the very same walk again on our second day at Huzhu Bei Shan. Elsewhere at Huzhu we will walk between one and three kilometres down a hard-surfaced road.

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We will also explore another, shallower valley ascending about 200 metres in a walk of two kilometres before returning the same way. Our birding here, as elsewhere on the tour, will be fairly leisurely with frequent pauses to look at birds or to simply enjoy the scenery.

Leaving Xining we'll next head west, driving up and on to the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau. It will take us most of the morning to make the gradual ascent from Xining onto the Plateau and we will be able to acclimatise a little as we go. However, the plateau is at about 3,200 metres (10,400 feet) and there is a risk of very mild altitude sickness here.

We will spend our first two nights on the Plateau in a hotel at Heimahe at about 3200 metres. On one day (about day six of the tour) we will have another walk of about three kilometres out along a lengthy, fairly flat grassy valley. Towards the end of this walk there's a steeper incline and we'll ascend about 100 metres in the last one kilometre or so. Again it's mostly grass underfoot. We'd walk back the very same way making this walk about six kilometres in length. We hope to find many of the Plateau's specialities, including Przevalski's Finch (or Pink-tailed Bunting), in this valley.

The following day we will venture into the South Koko Nor mountain range driving over the Rubber Mountain Pass that reaches 3817 metres (almost 11,900 feet). Chaka on the western side of this pass, where we spend our next night, is at about 3100 metres. The next day (day 8) we'll probably have a walk of about five kilometres (2.5 out and the same back) up a shallow dry river bed. There is no path - just a few sheep trails and between one third and one half of the route is over an uneven and rocky riverbed. We will probably leave the Chaka area after this walk, crossing back over the Rubber Mountain Pass and travelling back along the southern shore of Qinghai Hu (Lake Koko Nor or Koko Nur) before turning south to Gonghe. The hotel in Gonghe, where we will again spend two nights, is at a modest 2890 metres.

Leaving Gonghe the following morning we will continue south to the Ela Shan Pass near Wenchuan. We aim to do some bird watching around the Ela Pass before returning to Gonghe in the evening. This will be a long day with a total drive of about 340 kilometres. The Ela Pass is at almost 4500 metres and is by far the highest road pass that we'll cross during the entire tour. We will search for birds including White-winged Redstart, Brandt's Mountain Finch and Tibetan Rosefinch immediately around the road pass and within 600-1000 metres of our vehicle. Weather permitting, there will be an option to climb to the top of the Ela mountain (4800 metres) in order to search for Tibetan Snowcock and with luck, Tibetan Sandgrouse. The leader has visited this site numerous times and has only ever seen the latter two species on the summit and even there they are far from guaranteed.

We expect the strenuous, three kilometre walk from the road pass to the summit of the mountain to take us perhaps three hours and we will be walking slowly and making numerous stops to catch our breath and hopefully enjoying some birds. We will take the same steep path back down the mountain and the leader expects to be away from the vehicles for about six hours. This is by far the most strenuous walk we will do on the entire tour, it's undoubtedly not for everyone and, if the weather's unsuitable or a good proportion of the group aren't fit or are struggling with the high altitude, we won't even attempt it. We will return to Gonghe that evening.

We will drive back to Xining the very next day and take a train from there to Lhasa (3640 metres) that evening. This train, the highest in the world, crosses the mighty Tangula Shan Pass at 5070 metres. Oxygen is piped into the railway carriages for a short period while we cross the pass and we do not expect anyone to suffer any altitude problems other than perhaps a mild headache while on the train.

The final strenuous walk we'll do on the tour is near Lhasa on Day 12 or 13 when we will visit Xiongse Nunnery. The walk from the car park up to the Nunnery involves a 300 metre ascent up a steep 2-3-kilometre trail. Again the leader would expect this return walk to take us four hours or so.

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At Xiongse we would be looking for Tibetan Eared-pheasant, Giant Babax, Brown-cheeked Laughingthrush and, if we're lucky, Tibetan Snowcock. The leader has been to this site a good number of times and has usually been able to see the pheasant, babax and laughingthrush from the car park at the base of the trail. He's also seen the snowcock once from the car park (when it was very distant) and a couple of times from beside the nunnery. In summer 2015 a road between the car park and the Nunnery was completed and we drove up that road on our two most recent visits to Xiongse. We hope to be able to do so on our next visit but there was still a considerable amount of building work being undertaken on it and unfortunately it can't be guaranteed to be still open next year.

Diamox is a prescription medication that helps alleviate some of the problems of altitude sickness. Many people visiting the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau use Diamox, but our leader has not and feels unable to give advice on its use. You are encouraged to discuss its use with your doctor, health centre nurse or a pharmacist.

PACE OF TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE: This is not an easy, relaxing tour. There is a fair amount of travelling and a couple of the days are long and tiring. Moreover, Huzhu Bei Shan and the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau are both strenuous places to visit. Several of the trails we will explore are steep and while we will walk slowly we are at moderate to high altitudes and it is easy to become tired. A modest degree of fitness is recommended.

It is worth noting that sunrise in central Xining in mid-August is at about at 06:25hrs and sunset just before 20:15hrs. On a clear and cloudless day, it is usually sufficiently light to bird watch for 20 minutes either side of these times.

Due to the early morning bird activity in the areas that we visit, we will want to be out in the field early each day. This will occasionally mean being out for 05:00, driving to our first site and having a picnic breakfast there. On the day we drive to the Ela Shan Pass we will start even earlier than this, possibly at 04:00. In Qinghai Province and the Tibet Autonomous Region, and indeed throughout most of China, hotel breakfasts are rather poor so instead we will almost always have picnic breakfasts provided for us by our ground agent. These will usually consist of cereal (often muesli or cornflakes), yoghurt, fruit juice, instant noodles, biscuits, muffins, bread with jam or possibly honey, peanuts, sausages and boiled eggs plus tea and coffee and supplemented, where possible, by fruit, chocolate and steamed local bread. On some mornings in Qinghai our driver will be able to prepare fried egg sandwiches for those who would like them.

On our first day on the edge of the Plateau we will leave the hotel in Xining early, perhaps at about 05:00. We will drive north to Huzhu Bei Shan and anticipate having a picnic breakfast at the summit of Huzhu Pass around dawn.

A similar pattern will emerge for most days of the tour – we intend leaving the hotels quite early (usually around 06:00) each day. We will have picnic breakfasts almost every day and picnic lunches most days. We'll compile a checklist of the birds we've seen just before or just after dinner and then retire early to bed (especially when we are making an early start next day).

We will occasionally have two vehicles with us and will try to make as many of our birding excursions as possible optional, so that if you find the pace too tiring it is possible to take some time off and relax.

Essentially, we aim to provide dawn to dusk birding for those who want it and as many opportunities as possible to opt out for those who wish to pursue other interests or simply relax. We will spend about 24 hours on the train heading from Xining to Lhasa and while the scenery, the mammals and the birding can be excellent some people might like to catch up with some rest.

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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 including against typhoid and polio. Some doctors also suggest inoculation against Japanese B-encephalitis and tetanus and strongly recommend gammoglobulin against hepatitis.

Biting insects are not numerous although mosquitoes are occasionally found in the marshy areas on the edge of the Plateau. They are more common, but still not numerous, in the lowlands around Beijing. Malaria is not a problem anywhere in Northern China or on the Plateau. A can of spray repellent should provide adequate protection. We recommend bringing antihistamine if you are sensitive to insect bites.

Tap water is not safe to drink. Bottled water and soft drinks are readily available, and hot, boiled water (for coffee or tea) is available in hotels and on the train. We suggest bringing anti-diarrhoea medicine such as Imodium in case of an upset stomach. Be sure to bring adequate supplies of all personal medication, as it may be difficult to obtain them during the trip.

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

ACCOMMODATION: The hotels in Beijing, Xining and Lhasa are of a good standard with en suite bathrooms, proper restaurants and other facilities that you would normally expect such as gift shops in the lobby and facilities for making international phone calls etc.

The hotels and guest houses that we will use on the rest of the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau vary enormously. Almost the entire region is rarely visited by foreigners and as a consequence the accommodation, although recently significantly improved because better standards are being demanded by the growing number of middle class Chinese who are travelling, is still often simple. Even in some of the better hotels many of the rooms are poorly maintained.

The recently built hotel Heimahe near Qinghai Hu (Koko Nur) is still only occasionally visited by foreign visitors. It has recently been refurbished and is now of a Chinese 3-star standard. All the rooms are clean and each has an en suite bathroom with a western toilet and a shower. We will spend two nights there before moving on to spend one night at a relatively modern one-star guest house at Chaka. The latter is clean, warm and well maintained.

Please note that at Heimahe and at a couple of the other hotels/guest houses we will visit hot water is often NOT available until after 20:00 and that it is quite likely that we will have dinner and do our daily bird list before having showers.

Leaving Chaka our next hotel will be a decent one at Gonghe. All the rooms here have en suite bathrooms with a basin, western toilets and a shower. There's supposed to be 24hrs hot water here but we've found from past experience that it's rarely more than tepid until about 20:00. We will spend two nights in the Gonghe hotel before heading back to Xining. We will have access to a couple of day rooms in a hotel in Xining before taking the train overnight sleeper train to Lhasa.

LAUNDRY: Laundry facilities are available at several of the hotels on this tour. However, we are moving on frequently and the only place that it's really practical to use the hotel's laundry services is in Lhasa. However, in the past we have been able to persuade the staff at several of our hotels to do laundry privately for us. We have been able to secure this un-official, but reliable, service at Huzhu Bei Shan, Heimahe and Gonghe. At all three of these hotels the reception staff have offered a decent service but refuse to launder socks and underwear!

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ELECTRICITY: The Chinese current is 220 volts, 50 cycles. 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: Chinese cuisine is well-known and widely appreciated. Beer, soft drinks and green tea will be served with the food. The Chinese often also drink hard liquor, bai-jiu, with the food. Western brands of alcohol are not easily obtainable outside of the bigger cities on this tour (and where they are available, they are usually expensive), so you may wish to consider bringing your own supply. However please note that alcohol cannot be taken as a carry on item on the internal flights we have in China and it must be packed in your checked luggage.

Coffee and English-style tea are still uncommon in China, but hot water is readily available in hotel rooms and in restaurants. Cups are usually, but not always, provided so you may wish to bring your own, plus some instant coffee, drinking chocolate, cocoa or tea-bags (and powdered milk and sugar, if you like). Some people also take packets of soup, oxo cubes or other items that only need to be re-hydrated with water.

In contrast to evening meals typical Chinese breakfasts are disappointingly poor and unappealing to most westerners. They consist mostly of cold dishes – soya milk, steamed dumplings and rice porridge. Consequently, away from the international style hotel in Beijing where a variety of more western style dishes are available, we will have very few hotel breakfasts opting instead to have picnic breakfasts. These will usually consist of items such as muesli, instant noodles, biscuits, chocolate, fruit, peanuts, bread and jam (where bread is available). On most days we will also have picnic lunches and these will consist of similar items and probably cheese and or ham, jam or peanut butter sandwiches.

The Chinese way of eating differs from that in the west in that a selection of different dishes is shared by those sitting at the table. Food is almost always plentiful. Few of the restaurants we will visit provide knives and forks. Instead chopsticks, often disposable wooden ones, are used. If you are not used to eating with chopsticks, we suggest you start practising right away or bring your own cutlery.

A variety of Chinese sweets can be bought in some of the larger hotels (notably in Beijing and Xining) and in shops in towns or at the airport in Beijing. Chocolate and western sweets are not widely available so again you may wish to bring a supply of goodies to enliven your diet.

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, but 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 rooms where we stay.

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INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS: As you would expect an ever increasing number of hotels that we use have internet access. Most of the hotels that we use now have internet access and we expect this situation to continue, and possibly improve, in the future. The hotel that we will stay in at Huzhu Bei Shan has wireless internet and in the rooms; our hotel in Xining has wireless in the rooms; the hotel at Heimahe at the western end of Qinghai Hu has wireless in the rooms; the hotel at Gonghe has wireless in the rooms and our hotel in Lhasa has wireless internet in the lobby and cable access in the room. Participants should be aware, however, that internet access is occasionally suspended in China – perhaps because of floods, landslides or political issues. Mobile phone coverage is superb over most of China and, while not all foreign mobile operators have agreements with the Chinese carriers, many do. You are advised to contact your mobile phone provider in advance of the trip to confirm this.

FIELD CLOTHING: Dress will be informal throughout the tour. Warm, waterproof clothing, including thermal underwear, a hat and gloves will be needed for some of the time we are on the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau. These items may also be useful in other areas, particularly in the mornings and evenings. However, in the middle of the day lighter, cotton clothing will often be more comfortable even here and light weight clothing will be essential for the time we spend in and around Beijing. We also suggest bringing a rain jacket and rainproof over-trousers.

As to footwear, trainers will often be adequate, but stout shoes or boots will be essential for the rockier conditions on the Qinghai-Tibetan plateau and for the areas of wetter vegetation elsewhere. A sun hat is essential on the Plateau and we would also recommend bringing a pair of sunglasses along as well.

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS: Please bring the following.

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| Notebook and pencil | Sun hat | Universal sink plug |
| Small rucksack/Day pack | Cutlery for picnics | Plastic cup, teaspoon |
| High factor sunscreen or sun block | Insect repellent | Alarm Clock |
| Personal medication | | Laundry soap |
| | | Lip salve |

Optional: Telescope and tripod, camera and film, spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), field guide. Telescopes are a great advantage on the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau. Some people have found a hot water bottle useful on the plateau.

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 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: The leader will provide the following:

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| Telescope and tripod | Small first-aid kit |
| Field guides and reference books | Laser pointer |

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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.

Note that there are “left-luggage” facilities at our hotels in Beijing and in Xining so, if you want, you do not need to take all your luggage everywhere we go. Those intending to take advantage of these facilities should bring a suitable, lockable, bag.

Also note that porters are not usually available inside Xining and Lhasa railway stations and participants will be expected to carry their own luggage between our tour bus and the train. This might involve a walk of up to 500 or 600 metres. Obviously we will walk slowly but wheeled luggage will prove to be a distinct advantage here. A couple of the hotels that we stay in do not have lifts and we are likely to be staying on the second or third floor. Porters are usually not available to carry your luggage to your room, and the leader will also be unable to do this for you.

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: At some locations there will be good opportunities for photos of both birds and scenery. Camera equipment should be packed in moisture and dust-proof bags as a precaution. **If you wish to use a digital camera to digiscope, please make sure you also bring a telescope and tripod as the leader’s telescope will not be available for this activity.**

Please note that this is essentially a birdwatching tour. 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 for our time in Qinghai will be by a coach while around Lhasa we will use a similar if possibly smaller vehicle. We also have a couple of internal flights. Some of the drives are long and may last for up to seven hours, but we will, of course, make regular stops along the way to stretch and to bird watch. The leader will arrange a seating rotation. Participants should be able to ride in any seat in our vehicles.

There will be one long, 24-hour, train ride as we travel over the Tibetan Plateau from Xining to Lhasa. Our route will take us over the Tangula Shan Pass which, at 5070 metres, makes this the highest rail journey in the world. On it we will travel in what is called hard sleeper class. The carriage is divided into about 20 separate compartments each with six bunk beds (three on each side) and a small table. We hope to be able to only put four people in each compartment and not use the upper two beds for sleeping and instead will use these for storing our larger luggage. Increasingly however this is not being allowed on trains in China where demand for berths far exceeds supply. There will be a shared washroom and a toilet at both ends of the carriage. Usually one of these toilets is Western style, the other Chinese, hole in the floor style but this can vary from one carriage to the next. Warm bedding, usually in the form of quilts, will also be provided.

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Better quality soft sleeper berths (with four, more comfortable beds per cabin and a sliding, lockable door) are available on this train but these still cannot be booked directly by Chinese travel agents. Many soft sleeper berths still appear to be reserved for government officers and are extremely difficult to obtain. Our ground agent will endeavour to purchase soft sleeper tickets for us all – but this cannot be guaranteed.

Private single or double rooms are not available on the trains in overpopulated China – it is simply not possible to secure such rooms and even if we paid for all the beds and didn't occupy them the train guard would confiscate those that weren't being used and re-sell them. Sexes are not normally segregated on Chinese trains but, depending on the group dynamics we might attempt to segregate men and women in our party. On previous tours the train ride has proved to have been a real highlight of the entire trip.

SMOKING: Smoking is not allowed in the vehicle, nor at meal times, nor when the group is gathered together for the checklist. If you are sharing a room with a non-smoker, please don't smoke in the room. If you smoke in the field, please stand down wind of the group so that smoke doesn't drift into their faces.

Many Chinese men, and an increasing number of women, smoke heavily. We will not permit our drivers or locals guides to smoke in our vehicle or in close proximity to the group but we have no control over anyone else and inquisitive strangers may come up to us and smoke nearby. While we can and will ask them not to smoke near us we **cannot** stop them doing so. Moreover, while we will eat most, if not all, of our sit down meals in private dining rooms, very occasionally this is not possible and we might have to eat in the common dining hall where there might be smokers. This does not happen on every tour, or even on every other tour, but it can happen.

None of the hotels that we will stay in have designated non-smoking rooms and the rooms that we stay in might have been previously occupied by a smoker. While the bed linen will certainly be clean, cigarette odours in the bed rooms are fairly common. This has never proved to be a serious problem on any of our tours but if you are hyper-sensitive to cigarette smoke it could be.

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.

SOUVENIRS: China has a wide variety of wood and stone carvings, pottery, laquerware, silk paintings, clothing, books and numerous other items to buy. These are widely available, often even in some of our hotels such as the ones in Xining, Lhasa and Beijing.

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Our hotel in Lhasa is right in the centre of the tourist area in the city and is surrounded by dozens if not hundreds of shops selling a bewildering variety of items. Here, as elsewhere in China, the prices are rarely fixed and bargaining is common.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Birds:

Cheng Tso-Hsin. 1987. *A Synopsis of the Avifauna of China*. Science Press, Hamburg. (ISBN 3 490 12518 5). A monumental work on the systematics and distribution of China's birds. It is on sale in Britain for the equally monumental price of £115! Not recommended to anyone other than the most avid collector.

China Ornithological Society. *China Bird Reports for 2003, 2004 2005, 2006 and 2007-2008*. China Ornithological Society, Beijing. These attractive, well produced paperback books detailing many of the birds seen in China during a particular year. Copies of these reports starting in 2003 might be available from Paul in China. If you would like to reserve a copy (130 yuan each – currently about £13.00) please contact the Sunbird office in advance of the tour.

MacKinnon, John and Karen Phillipps. 2000. *A Field Guide to the Birds of China*. Oxford University Press, Oxford. **The best regional field guide - Recommended.**

Rasmussen, P. C. and Anderton, J. C. (2012) Second edition. *Birds of South Asia. The Ripley Guide. Vols. 1 and 2*. Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions, Washington D.C. and Barcelona. (ISBN 13: 9788496553859 - paperback).

Mammals:

Schaller, George. (2000) *Wildlife of the Tibetan Steppe*. University of Chicago Press. (ISBN 0226736539 - paperback).

Smith, A. and Xie, Y. (2008) *A Guide to the Mammals of China*. Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford. (ISBN 978-0-691-09984-2). A ground breaking, well-illustrated and informative guide that covers all the mammals of China - but bulky in this hardback. A much more portable softback version, entitled *Mammals of China* with the same plates and text, was published by Princeton in 2013 (ISBN: 9780691154275). See- <http://press.princeton.edu/titles/9976.html>. It's also now available as an ebook (ISBN: 9781400846887)

General:

Allwright, Gavin and Kanamaru, Atsushi eds. (2004). *Mapping the Tibetan World*. Kotan Publishing Inc. (ISBN 0-9701716-0-9)

Harper, D. et al. (2013) *Lonely Planet China*. Lonely Planet, Australia. Another excellent travel guide from the Lonely Planet stable. (ISBN 9781743216408)

Mayhew, B. et al. (2011). *Lonely Planet Tibet*. 8th edition. Lonely Planet, Australia. (ISBN 978-1741792188)

CHINA – Lhasa and the Tibetan Plateau: Tour Information...11

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

Another very useful source of bird sound recordings is –

Bird Songs International

www.birdsongs.com

info@birdsongs.com

Tel: 00 31 595 528679. Fax: 00 31 595 528629

Wierengastraat 42, NL-9969 PD Westernieland, The Netherlands.

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: 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: A Final Information sheet with instructions for meeting the group, hotel addresses, etc. and your flight tickets will be sent to you about three weeks before departure. If you have any questions about the tour, please contact us.