



TOUR INFORMATION FOR SOUTH CHINA in winter

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.

We will send you details on how to apply for a visa when we issue the final invoice. Our ground agent's address should be included as the company or person to visit in China.

When completing your visa application form it is only necessary to put the address of the hotel that we will use in Shanghai as the areas to be visited. Please do not mention any other places we visit on this tour as our ground agent and then the Sunbird office will supply you with a letter to submit along with your visa application.

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. As soon as you have obtained a Chinese visa we will also need a scanned copy of that as well. These are needed by our ground agents to obtain our train and internal plane tickets. It is then very important that you do NOT change your passport or get a new one, otherwise extra costs may be incurred to make any necessary changes.

We recommend that you apply for a visa only within three months of the start of the tour as this is usually valid for entry within 3 months from the date of issue. Please check with your nearest Visa Office for the most up-to-date information.

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).

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 stolen. Obviously, you should keep the photocopies in a separate bag to the originals.

CURRENCY: The currency in use in mainland Chinese is called the yuan (CNY) and there are currently (January 2018) about 8.7 yuan to one-pound Sterling. In mainland China it is possible to change money and traveller's cheques in to CNY on arrival Shanghai airport. In the past it has also been possible to change both cash and traveller's cheques in to CNY at the domestic airport in Shanghai, but things are changing so quickly in China that unfortunately we cannot be certain that this will be the case the next time we run this tour. Credit cards issued by foreign banks are not widely accepted outside the major cities in mainland 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.

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LANGUAGE: Few people in the rural areas of China that we will be visiting speak English. We will, of course, be accompanied throughout mainland China by a Chinese guide who speaks good English.

CLIMATE: The weather in South China is typically quite sunny and dry from October through to the end of January. Since this is a winter trip temperatures at Poyang Hu and Yancheng are likely to be cold, especially at night. It is likely to be slightly warmer at the sites that we will visit around Shanghai and especially near Fuzhou. Early morning temperatures for much of the tour will normally be around 4-5°C rising to a maximum of about 12-13°C midday, but possibly as high as 16-17°C near Fuzhou. However, it can be colder than this, perhaps especially in the hills near Wuyuan and near the coast at Yancheng NNR and we should be prepared for early morning temperatures to occasionally drop to perhaps 5-7°C **below** freezing. It is important to remember that it can feel much colder if the wind is blowing. In southern China in winter the humidity can be quite high and unfortunately there is a reasonable chance of early morning fog at Poyang Hu. There is also a reasonable chance of rain at some time during the tour and again this is perhaps most likely around Poyang Hu.

ALTITUDE: Virtually all the tour will be spent at altitudes of less than 250 metres. We will be doing quite a lot of walking, perhaps especially around Fuzhou and at Poyang Hu, and some of this might be on flagged steps or through reasonably long grass that can be a little tiring. This said such 'grassland walks' will be short and none of our walks will be particularly strenuous.

PACE OF TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE: This is not a particularly strenuous tour. There is a reasonable amount of travelling between one site and the next and a couple of the days are long and tiring. However, at this time of year the days are fairly short (the sun rises on average at about 07h00 and sets at about 17h15) and consequently the time we can spend in the field is fairly limited. Even so on a number of days we will leave our accommodation at about 05h30, an hour or so before we can see, and most days we will have picnic breakfasts in the field. It's likely that we will also have a large number of picnic lunches in the field throughout the tour, but we will return to our accommodation for all of our evening meals.

At most of the sites we will visit near Fuzhou, around Wuyuan, at Poyang Hu National Nature Reserve (NNR) we will typically leave the hotel for a full-day's birding sometime between 05h30 and 06h15 and will take a picnic breakfast with us. Our hotel at Yancheng is about a one-hour drive from the main birding sites and we anticipate leaving our hotel to go birding at about 05h45. We expect to have a picnic breakfast when we arrive at the reserve sometime between 08h00 and 09h00.

We 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.

HEALTH: **It is essential that you contact your own doctor to obtain the latest information on the regions you are visiting.** Please contact your doctor well in advance of your tour's departure as some medication must be initiated weeks before the period of possible exposure.

It is recommended that you are up-to-date on routine vaccinations. These include measles-mumps-rubella (MMR), diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis, varicella (chickenpox), polio, and your yearly flu jab. It is further recommended that most travellers have protection against Hepatitis A and Typhoid. Some doctors also suggest inoculation against Hepatitis B and Japanese B-encephalitis. Doctors in Hong Kong recommend inoculations against tetanus.

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Very few biting insects are active in South China in winter, but there still may be isolated concentrations of day-flying mosquitoes at one or two sites. We recommend that you bring an insect repellent and, if you are sensitive to bites, an antihistamine.

Tap water is not safe to drink anywhere in China. Bottled water and soft drinks are widely available, and your room will normally be supplied either with a large thermos flask of boiled water or a kettle with which you can make tea or coffee.

We suggest bringing anti-diarrhoea medicine such as Imodium in case of an upset stomach, as well as some packets of re-hydrate solution. Be sure to bring adequate supplies of all 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

It is cold in South China in winter and the weather is possibly the main health problem. Please make sure that you bring sufficient warm clothes and suitable footwear (see the section in these notes on clothing).

ACCOMMODATION: Varied. We will spend the first two nights of the tour in a three-star hotel in Changle. This hotel is close to the birding in the Minjiang Estuary. All the rooms are clean, and all have en suite bathrooms with western toilets and showers. We will also have our evening meals in the hotel's restaurant. Moving on from Changle our next stop will be in central Fuzhou city and the hotel there is of a very similar standard to the one at Changle. For the two nights we spend near Wuyuan we will stay in another three-star hotel. Once again, all the rooms have on suite facilities including a western toilet and shower, and once again the rooms are clean & warm.

After Wuyuan we will transfer to near Poyang Hu NNR. The three-star hotel here has recently been refurbished, is the best in the area and is again of a reasonable standard – all the rooms are clean, warm and each has a television and en suite facilities including a shower and western toilet. We will spend three nights there.

From there we will travel back to Shanghai and drive north to Yancheng where will spend three nights. This hotel, the one that we will use for one night as we travel back towards Shanghai and the hotel that we will use near the international airport in Shanghai, are all of a good four-star standard. All the rooms in these three hotels are warm and have en suite bathrooms with western toilets and showers. We will also have our evening meals at each of these places in the hotel's restaurant.

LAUNDRY: Laundry services are available at the hotels that we will stay at in Wuyuan and in Yancheng. However, the service at Wuyuan is a rather slow one & it often takes two days, even when requesting the express service, for our laundry to be returned to us – this is OK as we spend two nights there. The hotels in Changle, at Yongxiu near Poyang Hu do not have a laundry services as such but in the past, we have been able to persuade some of the staff to wash some of our items. Laundry again usually takes two days to be returned such that items handed in on the morning will be returned the evening of the following day. Laundry here has been done well but occasionally comes back still slightly damp. Away from these places it is probably more convenient to hand-wash items yourself.

ELECTRICITY: The Chinese current is 220 volts, 50 cycles. It is advisable to bring a plug adaptor if you intend to use any electrical equipment. You may find the following website helpful: <http://www.power-plugs-sockets.com>.

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FOOD: Western food will only be available in our hotel in Shanghai. In the more remote areas, we will of course be eating Chinese food, which on the evidence of past visits is often excellent and generously supplied. Green tea and soft drinks, mineral water or beer are served with the main meals. Chinese breakfasts are typically unpopular with Western tourists and we will usually have picnic breakfasts provided by our ground agent. In these past, these have consisted of items such as western cereals, milk, fruit (often bananas, oranges, and apples), yoghurt, chocolate bars such as Snickers, sachets of instant coffee (normally with milk and sugar already included since 'untainted' coffee is less widely available), tea, rice crackers and biscuits. We also expect to be having quite a number of picnic lunches and these are often eaten out in the field. These lunches consist of many of these same items often supplemented by boiled eggs, instant noodles, peanuts, and sometimes boiled potatoes. On a few occasions (where fresh bread is available) we will also have jam, peanut butter, cheese and/or ham sandwiches.

Both instant coffee (with sugar) and English-style tea are now quite widely available in China but nevertheless, you might like to bring tea bags, instant coffee (*without* sugar) and powdered milk. These last two items are also useful for converting congee, a watery rice gruel often served at sit-down Chinese breakfasts, into rice pudding. You might also consider bringing Muesli bars, Mars bars, packets of soup, instant noodles etc. Our ground agent will provide a number of large thermos flasks that will be useful for making hot drinks and noodles for our days in the field. We expect to have a sit-down breakfast on only a few occasions – in our Shanghai hotel our first and last mornings on the tour and in our hotel near Fuzhou railway station.

The Chinese way of eating food differs from the western way. A selection of different dishes is shared by those sitting at the same table and chopsticks are used. Food is almost always plentiful. Outside Shanghai few, if any, restaurants provide knives and forks. Instead chopsticks, sometimes even 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 and in shops in towns or at the railway stations or airports that we will visit. Chocolate is not widely available (other than from our ground agent who will be carrying several boxers of Snickers!), and the same applies to other western sweets, 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 what 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 and/or a soft drink or a beer is provided at lunch and dinner, as is coffee or tea. All other drinks or 'personal' drinking water for use in your room etc. is the responsibility of the individual.

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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 & WIFI internet is available in the rooms of our hotels in Shanghai, Changle, Wuyuan, near Poyang Hu, at Yancheng and in Nantong. It is also available at both the domestic and international airports in Shanghai and at the airport or railways station in Nanchang. Participants should be aware, however, that internet access is occasionally suspended in China – perhaps because of floods, landslides, or political issues. Please note that a modest number of western websites, such as Facebook, YouTube, Dropbox, the Google search engine, and Gmail accounts are actively blocked by the Chinese government. 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. 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: Dress will be informal throughout the tour. Warm, waterproof clothing, including thermal underwear, a warm hat, and gloves, will be needed on some days, especially if a cold front comes through. However, even on days when you've started out in all your cold weather gear, you may want to strip down a layer or two by early afternoon. If the weather is wet waterproof clothing, including a jacket and over-trousers will also be needed. Note that waterproof, rubber boots or Wellingtons will be **essential** in the Minjiang Estuary, Fuzhou, at Poyang Hu and possibly again around Yancheng NNR but stout shoes or boots will be adequate elsewhere.

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS: Please bring the following.

Notebook and pen	Alarm Clock
Rucksack/Day pack	Universal plug for wash basins
Rubber boots or Wellingtons	Sunscreen or sun block
Cutlery (if you can't use chopsticks)	Laundry soap
Torch (with extra batteries)	Insect repellent
Personal medication	

Optional: A telescope and tripod are almost essential on this tour due to the amount of time we spend scanning over large open areas of wetlands. The leader will have a telescope for group use but taking your own will maximise the time you can spend looking at birds. Camera, memory cards, spare binoculars, spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), and a field guide will also be useful.

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).

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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.

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, carry or wheel 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.

LEADER'S EQUIPMENT: The leader will provide the following:

High quality tripod mounted telescope
Field guides & reference books

Basic first-aid kit
Playback equipment

PHOTOGRAPHY: At some locations there will be good opportunities for photos. We advise bringing all the memory cards or storage systems you will need with you. Camera equipment should be packed in moisture and dust-proof bags as a precaution. "Digiscoping" is perfectly compatible with the tour, though it is recommended you bring your own telescope as the leader's telescope is not 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 do not allow your photographic activities to conflict with other participants' birdwatching.

TRANSPORT: Transportation is mostly by a variety of small buses. Some of the minibus rides may last for up to five hours, but we will, of course, make regular stops along the way to stretch and to bird watch. While most road journeys will be made along paved or hard surfaced roads, in some areas the roads will be rougher. This is especially true of some of the minor roads around Wuyuan and at Poyang Hu. The leader will arrange a seating rotation. Participants should be able to ride in any seat in tour vehicles. We will also use small boats to ferry us a short distance across to an island in the Minjiang Estuary and a slightly larger, but still small, boat to access several of the sites at Poyang Hu.

Individual boat journeys at Poyang Hu might last for up to two hours, we will charter the entire boat and will normally keep it for the entire day.

We will also have one, possibly two, two internal flights. The flights that we will be taking on Chinese airlines are of an international standard. We also expect to have one, possibly two, high speed rail journeys – the first of these will take us from Fuzhou northwest to Wuyuan. We might take another high-speed train from Nanchang back to Shanghai, though it is also possible to fly that route and we will decide closer to the time which of these two options better fits our schedule.

SMOKING: We request that you do not smoke 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.

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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: Nanchang is noted for its fine pottery. In addition, many Chinese items such as laquerware, wooden carvings, silk clothing and so on are available in Shanghai. Most prices in hotels and larger shops are fixed, but you may bargain in smaller shops.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Brazil, Mark. 2009. Field Guide to the Birds of East Asia. Christopher Helm. (ISBN-13: 0713670401). Covering Eastern China, Taiwan, Korea, Japan and Eastern Russia this excellent book contains up to date text, some excellent colour plates, and useful distributional maps on a large number of species we expect to see on this tour. **Recommended**

Bushan, B. et al. 1993. A Field Guide to the Waterbirds of Asia. Covers all the shorebirds, ducks, herons, egrets and others that we are likely to see on the tour. Excellent illustrations and something of a companion book to the "Field guide to the Birds of Japan".

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.

MacKinnon, John & Karen Phillipps. 2000. A Field Guide to the Birds of China. Oxford University Press, Oxford. (ISBN 0-19-854940 7). The best Chinese field guide – once recommended but now largely replaced by Mark Brazil's *Birds of East Asia*.

MacKinnon. 1999. Wild China. The latest in the "Wild Places of the World" series with an expert text and spectacular photographs describing the country's flora & fauna. Colour photos and maps.

Robson, C. 2000. A Field Guide to the Birds of South-east Asia. New Holland, London. Another excellent field guide that, while not dealing directly with the birds of China, contains good illustrations and some excellent text on a large number of species that we are likely to encounter.

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Mammals:

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).

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

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.