



TOUR INFORMATION FOR NEPAL

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

ENTERING NEPAL: All citizens require a passport which is valid for at least six months after the date of entry, with at least one blank page, plus a valid visa to enter and exit the country.

Information on how to obtain a multi-entry tourist visa can be found on the Embassy of Nepal in London's website <https://uk.nepalembassy.gov.np/1766-2>, or by telephoning their Visa section on 020 724 37859. Non-UK citizens should contact their nearest Embassy for visa information.

Although a multi-entry tourist visa can be obtained on arrival we strongly recommend clients obtain their visa in advance to ensure a smooth transition through Immigration on arrival.

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).

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 obtain permits to restricted reserves. Note:** It is very important that you do **NOT** change your passport otherwise expenses may be incurred.

It is always a good idea to take a photocopy of your passport and air ticket/electronic 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 currency is the Nepali rupee (INR). Nepali rupees may not be brought into or taken out of the country, but there are currency exchange services at the airport and at our first and last hotels in Kathmandu. Credit cards are accepted only in Kathmandu and at tourist areas (including the hotels in Chitwan and Lumbini). 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. Outside of Kathmandu, there are a few ATM machines near places that we will visit, but these should not be relied upon.

LANGUAGE: The national language is Nepali, but English is widely spoken in tourist areas. The tour leader speaks Nepali well, and our Nepalese local guide speaks fluent English and will accompany us throughout the tour.

CLIMATE: Our days at Koshi Tappu, Chitwan, and Lumbini should be very pleasant with temperatures in the 70°F-80°F range by midday. However, the early mornings and late afternoons (times when we will be out birding) can be quite chilly, with air temperatures as low as 50°F. In Kathmandu, we will be at 4,500 feet, and the night-time temperatures in March routinely drop to 40-50°F (close to freezing). At Pulchowki, colder weather is likely, at least in the early mornings, with wind chills often dropping to below freezing.

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ALTITUDE: Most of the tour is at low elevation, but we may reach 9,000 feet on Pulchowki, near Kathmandu.

PACE OF TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE: On several days, there will be walks starting at 06:30 and lasting for up to three hours. Most days we should finish at dusk (around 18:30), and we usually manage to have about a one-hour break before dinner. There may be one or two days when we get back after dusk, and we may therefore require a shorter break before dinner. At Chitwan National Park, our safari drives will typically start in the early morning (we may have to leave the hotel before dawn – around 06:15) and usually last for about three or three-and-a-half hours, after which time we will return to the hotel for breakfast. On several days there will be a further safari-drives in the afternoon (they usually run from about 16:00 - 18.00). On one day in Chitwan, we will take an all-day safari drive to reach the bird-rich forests of the Churia Hills, where we will pause in the field to eat a boxed lunch prepared by our hotel.

There is a reasonable amount of walking involved on this tour, although none of it is particularly strenuous. We will also explore Chitwan NP in open-topped jeeps.

At Koshi Tappu, Chitwan, and Lumbini, the terrain is ideal for long, gentle walks, as the habitat is full of good, level paths and tracks. We can expect to complete gradual walks of one to two miles in these locations, although we will take frequent breaks to observe the birds. None of these activities will be strenuous, and all walks on the trip can be easily undertaken by anyone with a reasonable degree of fitness.

At Pulchowki, although we are in a mountainous area, there will be a few, short uphill walks at a gentle pace. We may reach altitudes of about 9,000 feet at Pulchowki.

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.

Malaria: There is a low risk of malaria in Nepal (lower elevations only). 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>

Yellow Fever: There is no Yellow Fever risk in Nepal.

Biting insects, including mosquitos, are present in small numbers on this tour. The sun in the Nepali lowlands is intense. Please plan accordingly by wearing hats, long sleeves, and pants to limit exposure. Apply sunscreen liberally. Tap water is not safe to drink and should be avoided at all times. Bottled water (which the leader provides at meal times), soft drinks and beer are widely available. Do not eat salads or unpeeled fruit.

Mild upset stomachs, often brought on simply by a change of diet, can be hard to avoid in Nepal. We suggest bringing anti-diarrheal medicine such as Imodium. Gatorade or other electrolyte-replacement drinks in powder form are also worth bringing as they replace the vital salts and minerals lost during a bout of diarrhoea.

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Please bring adequate supplies of all personal medications, which may be impossible to obtain during the tour.

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

ACCOMMODATION: In Kathmandu we'll be staying close to the centre of this fascinating city in a good-quality, international-style hotel with private facilities in each room. At Koshi Tappu we'll spend three nights in a good-quality, attractively laid-out tented camp. The tents are clean, relatively well equipped, and spacious, and it's no problem for all but the tallest of people to stand upright in them; the tents are clean and relatively well equipped. Each tent has two proper full-size beds (not camp beds) and a small table inside and there are two chairs, a mirror, and a water container on the "porch." Each tent is also provided with a kerosene lamp, which will be lit by the camp staff every evening. Two blocks of four toilet and shower rooms are shared between four neighbouring tents and are within about 25 yards of each set of tents. There is a separate dining room and a bar. The camp compound is well lit at night, and there is usually a multitude of birds within the camp itself. We'll also spend five nights inside Chitwan National Park. We'll be staying at two different resorts: first at Kasara Lodge in the east, and then at Lumbini Buddha Garden Resort in the west. Both offer excellent, comfortable accommodation.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry facilities are available at our hotels in Kathmandu and at Chitwan. These laundry services are quick and cheap; items dropped off in the morning will normally be returned that evening. Be wary of handing in delicate items which might be damaged while cleaning.

ELECTRICITY: Nepal operates on the same 240 voltage as the UK but an adaptor is needed for the 2 or 3 round-pin sockets. An international travel plug can be bought in most airport departure lounges. You may find the following website helpful: <http://www.power-plugs-sockets.com>. Power cuts are common. Bring a flashlight and extra batteries.

FOOD: Throughout the tour we are served a wide variety of high-quality Nepali food. Salads or salad garnishes are frequently offered, but we suggest these should always be declined or left on the edge of your plate. The food we are served always includes a good selection of vegetarian dishes. In some of the places where we stay, meals are buffet-style with several different dishes available, while in other places set meals are provided. That said, a typical Nepali set meal consists of a choice of three or four different dishes.

We appreciate that not everyone likes to eat Nepali food (which can occasionally be a little bit spicy) every day or even at all. Almost all the places we visit will, if requested, provide western food. If a buffet is being served, this normally includes a western-style dish or two. If you require western-style food and cannot eat Nepali food, please advise the leader once you are on the tour. Even when a western-style meal is provided, please be advised that our meal preparers cook Nepali food to a higher standard than they cook western food.

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.

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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.

INTERNET ACCESS AND MOBILE PHONES: Several places we will visit have wireless internet available in the rooms or in common spaces within the hotel. Our hotels in Kathmandu, Chitwan, and Lumbini have inexpensive, or free, wireless service. There is no internet service at our hotel in Koshi Tappu.

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: Light, warm-weather wear is the general rule including a suitable hat and long-sleeved garments for protection against the sun. A jacket, sweater and gloves are required for the potentially cold mountains around Kathmandu and the cool early mornings elsewhere. Thermal underwear will be greatly appreciated here. Light footwear will be adequate most of the time, but the occasional longer walks require comfortable walking shoes or boots. Rain is possible, so adequate rainwear is advisable. If you think you will be cold in your tent you could either take a hot water bottle or be prepared to sleep in some of your own clothes under the bedding provided.

MISCELLANEOUS EQUIPMENT: Please bring the following:

Note book and pen	Alarm Clock
Shoulder bag or small rucksack for daily use	Water Canteen
Torch and spare batteries	Insect repellent
Sunglasses and sunscreen	Universal bath plug
Personal medication	Hot water bottle

Since our hotels in Kathmandu and at Chitwan NP (Kasara Lodge) have outdoor swimming pools, you might like to bring your swimsuit.

Optional: Telescope & tripod (recommended at Koshi Tappu), camera and memory cards, spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), field guide.

LEADER'S EQUIPMENT: The leader will provide the following for group use:

Telescope & tripod	Tape recording/Playback equipment
Field guides and references	Small first-aid kit

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.

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Note that on the domestic flight from Kathmandu to Biratnagar, the free checked-in bag allowance is 20kg, and the hand luggage allowance is 1 bag weighing a maximum of 5kg and with maximum dimensions of 55 cm x 40 cm x 20 cm.

If possible, please bring your luggage in soft-sided bags or cases (rather than large hard 'Samsonite'-type suitcases) as these stack 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: There will be plenty of opportunities to take photos of birds, mammals and scenery and the leaders and drivers 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. 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.

TRANSPORT: In Chitwan, we will travel around the park in one or two small, open-topped safari vehicles. These 8- to 15-seater vehicles invariably have poor suspension, and the unpaved tracks inside the reserve are often rough. Other than Chitwan, we will travel by 15-seat tourist bus. During the longer drives, bottled mineral water will be provided on the vehicles. The leader will arrange a seating rotation. Participants should be able to ride in any seat in tour vehicles.

We will fly one way from Kathmandu to Biratnagar on Buddha Air, which is the highest-rated Nepali airline for safety. All other travel in will be by road.

SMOKING: Smoking is prohibited in the vehicles or when the group is gathered for meals, checklists, etc. While in the field or traveling, use of a smokeless alternative such as nicotine gum is requested. Please do not smoke at short stops while traveling. If you smoke in the field, do so well away and downwind from the group and leave ample time between smoking and getting back into the vehicle. If you are sharing a room with a non-smoker, please do not smoke in the room. If any lodge, accommodation or location where the group is staying or is gathered has a more restrictive smoking policy, the more restrictive policy will prevail. The leader reserves the right to modify this policy if the situation warrants it.

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.

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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.

SHOPPING: We are frequently asked about the opportunities for shopping in Nepal. Fortunately, such opportunities abound. Around Chitwan and Lumbini, there are several small gift shops with attractive, traditional Nepali items such as jewellery, embroidery, artwork, carpets, Hindu and Buddhist charms, and souvenir clothing, at very reasonable prices. The best opportunities we will have to shop for higher quality items, however, will be in Kathmandu, both at the beginning and end of our tour. On our final night of the tour, our hotel is on Durbar Marg, one of the nicest shopping areas in Nepal. There are numerous curio shops, coffee shops and clothes along this short stretch of road. Within a kilometre of Durbar Marg is Thamel, a vibrant, bustling, sometimes-overwhelming shopping area that has been the tourist heart of Kathmandu since it opened its doors to the outside world. Here you can find almost anything you could think of buying in Nepal: jewellery, scarves, rugs, books, maps, prayer wheels, clothing, Thangka paintings, paper products, religious trinkets, etc. Make sure you bargain here, as prices are generally negotiable in all but the highest-end stores. There are many excellent restaurants and coffee shops scattered throughout. You may need cash for certain stores here, and there are a handful of ATMs scattered about the area. During our city tour, we will visit Boudanath, the largest Buddhist stupa in Nepal, with the largest selection of Buddhist items for sale. As you walk around the stupa and explore the monasteries, make sure to check out the small shops filled with beads, singing bowls, intricate carvings, and beautiful paintings. As in Thamel, you may need cash here, although the higher-end stores and boutiques accept major credit cards and many foreign currencies.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Clements, J.F. 2007. *The Clements Checklist of Birds of the World*. Cornell University Press. New York. The final edition of the taxonomic guide published by James Clements, now updated annually by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. **Recommended**

Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C. and Inskipp, T. 2016. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. Christopher Helm. London. (ISBN 819331509X). Most up-to-date version of a superb book with excellent plates, updated range maps, and comprehensive text.

Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C., Inskipp, T., and Baral, H.S. 2016. *Birds of Nepal*. Christopher Helm, London. (ISBN 978-1-4729-0571-0). A revised version of the authors' 2003 *Birds of Nepal*, with new, detailed range maps and updated taxonomy. This one covers all the birds that we are likely to encounter on this tour, is a very good book, and is much more portable than the two-part Rasmussen detailed below. **Recommended**.

Other references:

Baral, H.S. and Shah, K.B. 2008. *Wild Mammals of Nepal*. Himalayan Nature. Kathmandu.

Daniel, J.C. 2002. *The Book of Indian Reptiles and Amphibians*. Bombay Natural History Society, Bombay. A revised version of the original, 1983 edition. An excellent guide to the reptiles of India and the surrounding region, with many good color plates, containing field observations, photographs, and descriptions of 175 species.

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Gurun K.K. & Raj Singh. 1997. *Mammals of the Indian Subcontinent and Where to Watch Them*. This excellent new guide contains good colour plates of the vast majority of the mammals which occur in the Indian Subcontinent and is a much more portable paperback volume than Slater. The guide has been published privately in Great Britain to a very high quality but is not available for sale to the general public as yet. We have a limited supply of the guides in the Sunbird office should you wish to order a copy to take on the tour. *These are free of charge.*

Inskipp, Carol and Tim. 1991. *A Guide to the Birds of Nepal. 2nd. edition.* Helm, London. An excellent guide to the status and distribution of Nepal's birds. Also contains much useful identification information on the difficult groups of birds.

Inskipp, T., Lindsey, N. & Duckworth, W. *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region.* (1996). Oriental Bird Club. (ISBN 0-9529545-0-8). An excellent and authoritative list of all the birds of the Oriental region giving preferred English and scientific names, pseudonyms and a wealth of information on recent, not so recent and potential taxonomic changes.

Menon, Vivek. 2014. *Indian Mammals: A Field Guide.* Dorling Kindersley, New Delhi. (ISBN 9-35-009760-5). Most up-to-date version of an excellent, comprehensively illustrated informative book. Easily the best mammal guide to the subcontinent.

Smith, Colin. 1995. *Illustrated Checklist of Nepal's Butterflies.* White Lotus, Thailand. Revised version of a fairly comprehensive photographic guide that illustrates 70% of Nepal's butterflies.

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 are 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: 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.