



TOUR INFORMATION FOR TEXAS – The Upper Coast

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

ENTERING THE UNITED STATES: United Kingdom citizens need to have a passport that has a minimum validity of 6 months remaining after the tour has finished. This is an immigration requirement for many countries, including the USA. All nationalities require a machine-readable passport if travelling to the USA under the visa waiver programme (see below).

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has made changes to the immigration requirements. Travellers seeking to travel under the Visa Waiver Program must pre-apply for authorisation using the Electronic System for Travel Authorisation (**ESTA**). **ESTA** must be completed online via their website.

Having an **ESTA** is a mandatory requirement and applications should be made online at least 72 hours before departure via their website <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov> as although the majority of responses are immediate, it can take 72 hours for approval in some cases. There is a small fee to pay as a processing charge followed by a small fee when authorisation has been granted.

For further information, or if you don't have access to the internet, please contact the Embassy of the United States in London on 020 3608 6998.

Citizens of other countries should contact their nearest US Embassy for entry requirements.

Once you've applied for your ESTA please remember to print it out and take a copy of that document onto the aircraft with you.

All visitors to the USA's first port-of-entry have their index fingerprints taken by an electronic scanner at Passport Control. You will also have your photograph taken at the same time. Although the process itself only takes a few minutes the queue can be quite long if several flights arrive at the same time!

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 currency of the United States of America is the dollar (USD). Dollars can be obtained from the exchange facilities at the airport. As the tour price includes all travel, hotel and main meal costs, you only need bring enough dollars to cover gifts, snacks, or other purchases of a purely nature.

CLIMATE: April is variable in East Texas. It is often humid and temperatures may rise into the high 80s (F) or drop into the high 40s (F) after passage of a cold front. Rain occurs periodically with the passage of fronts but in some years it has remained dry.

TEXAS - UPPER COAST: Tour Information...2

PACE OF THE TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE: Days will be full, with departures usually around 05:30 to 06:00 and returning late to the hotel usually by 20:00 after a group dinner. Although we spend much time on foot, our walks are at a leisurely pace and on flat terrain so not at all strenuous. One possible exception is the walk for Yellow Rails conducted by staff or associates of Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge. This walk is strenuous and some choose to watch from the sidelines where they often get adequate views of Yellow Rail in flight. [*However, this walk has been discontinued as of 2017. We will pass along news if the walk has been revived.*] Otherwise, our birding pace will be leisurely and we'll have plenty of time to study the birds we see.

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.

Insects: East Texas has mosquitoes, ticks, and chiggers, though the latter two are infrequently encountered. We recommend using insect repellents with a high concentration of DEET.

Fire ants are widely distributed and thoroughly obnoxious so you will frequently need to watch where you stand.

Miscellaneous: In April the sun can be intense. A broad-brimmed hat, proper clothing and strong sun screen lotion are essential.

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: We stay in a standard, comfortable motel. Our motel for the first night of the tour is located near Houston's George Bush Intercontinental Airport.

Houston Airports: Our hotel for the first night of the tour is located near Houston's George Bush Intercontinental Airport. If you choose to fly into Houston's Hobby Airport, you will need to arrange transportation either to our motel or to Houston's George Bush Intercontinental Airport and get the motel's courtesy shuttle. Travel time across Houston between airports can be as much as an hour or more, depending on time of day and traffic.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry facilities are available at our hotels.

ELECTRICITY: 110/120V AC 60Hz. The plugs are 2-flat pins. 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: Food on the tour is U.S. standard with some good seafood options. Most lunches will be picnics.

Our 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.

UPPER TEXAS COAST: Tour Information...3

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, regretfully, 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 take supplemental food with them.

DRINKS: Bottled water or soft drinks or a beer are provided at meals, as is coffee or tea. In addition we keep a supply of bottled water on the tour vehicle. Bottled or filtered water may also be provided in some of the rooms where we stay.

INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS: Wireless Internet is available throughout. 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.

CLOTHING: The following items are basic:

Sun hat	Light-weight waterproof jacket
Wind-proof jacket	Warm sweater
Trainers or light shoes	Light-weight sweater
Lightweight trousers	Long-sleeved shirts
Water-proof boots	Gloves

WATERPROOF BOOTS: Waterproof footwear is not necessary, but can be useful at High Island, Sabine Woods, and elsewhere *if* the weather has been wet. The now-discontinued Yellow Rail walk at Anahuac NWR required waterproof boots. We will relay news if this walk has been revived and may be part of the tour's itinerary. We recommend boots along the lines of Wellingtons or Hunters (*or some type of calf-high rubber boots*); insulation is not necessary.

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS: Please bring the following:

Notebook	Alarm clock
Rucksack/Day pack	Torch with spare batteries
Sunglasses and sunscreen	Water bottle
Insect repellent	Ear plugs (if you are a light sleeper)

Optional: A telescope and tripod is an advantage when viewing waterbirds and shorebirds however this is of limited use when birding in woodland looking for migrants; spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), field guide.

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). 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.

TEXAS - UPPER COAST: Tour Information...4

Products containing tick- and chigger-repelling chemicals are also effective. Camping supply stores sell such products containing permethrin 0.5%, which can be applied directly to your clothing. This non-staining, odourless chemical is non-toxic to humans and protective on clothing through several washes. If using permethrin, please use only as directed in the instructions.

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

Telescope and tripod
Reference books
Laser pointer
Ice chest

Small first-aid kit
Maps
Playback equipment

LUGGAGE: Our Final Information document, which will be sent to you approximately three weeks before departure, will give details about baggage weight and size restrictions imposed by the airline used for this tour.

If possible, please bring your luggage in soft-sided bags or cases (rather than large hard 'Samsonite'-type suitcases) as these pack more easily into our vehicles during the tour. Please note that on many tours there are no porters to carry your luggage so please ensure that **no bag is so heavy that you are unable to lift and carry it yourself**. As a general rule, in addition to using your luggage labels, it is a good idea to fix identification to the *inside* of each piece of luggage.

PHOTOGRAPHY: Scenery and memory shots will be plentiful and simple to obtain. Memory cards may be difficult to obtain and will certainly be more expensive than at home so you should bring with you all that you expect to need. 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: We will be traveling by 15- (or 12) passenger window van or minivan, depending on the group size. When using 15-passenger window vans, we take a maximum of seven passengers plus the leader. Participants should be able to ride in any seat in tour vehicles and are expected to change seats with others daily.

SMOKING: Smoking and vaping 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.

UPPER TEXAS COAST: Tour Information...5

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

Dunn, J. L. and J. K. Alderfer. 2017. *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. 7th Edition. National Geographic Society, Washington, DC. One of the top two field guides for North America, more portable than the Sibley guide. The latest edition contains subspecies maps for many polytypic species. **Recommended.**

Eubanks, T.L., Jr., Behrstock, R.A., and R.J. Weeks. 2006. *Birdlife of Houston, Galveston and the Upper Texas Coast. Texas*. Number ten: Gulf Coast Studies. Sponsored by Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi. Just published this is certainly the definitive work on status and distribution to this rich and varied region. It includes much ecological information. **Highly recommended.**

Sibley, David. 2014. *The North American Bird Guide*. (2nd edition). ISBN 1-873403-98-4. Pica Press, Sussex. Arguably the best North American field guide, but bulkier than the National Geographic guide (see above). **Recommended.** Please also note that this is available as an app for Apple iPhone users.

Kaufman, Kenn. 2000. *Birds of North America*. Houghton Mifflin, New York. Illustrated with computer-enhanced photographs.

References

Brock, Jim P., and Kenn Kaufman. 2003. *Butterflies of North America*. Houghton Mifflin, illustrated with digitally-enhanced photographs. **Recommended.**

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.