



## TOUR INFORMATION FOR FRANCE

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

**ENTERING FRANCE:** United Kingdom citizens will need a passport which is valid for six months beyond the intended length of stay. British passport holders and other EU nationals do not need a visa. Citizens of other nations should contact their nearest French Embassy or Consulate for entry requirements.

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 is the Euro. As the tour price includes all travel, accommodation, meals and drinks with meals, you will require only enough currency to cover snacks, drinks other than at mealtimes or other purchases of a purely personal nature.

**LANGUAGE:** The national language is French, but English is widely spoken. Both your leaders are French speakers however a French phrase book might be worth bringing with you.

**CLIMATE:** May is a pleasant month in Southern France, generally sunny and often warm. Temperatures typically range from morning lows of 10°C/50°Fs (4°C/40°Fs in the Alps) to highs of 15°C/60°F or even 20°C/70°F. Afternoons in the lowlands can be hot, with temperatures that can reach 26°C/80°F. You will be most comfortable if you dress in layers that can be taken off as the day goes on. Although May is usually dry and sunny, rain is possible at any time, and you need to be prepared with a rain jacket or umbrella. Wind can be expected on most days, and in some years, the *mistral* can be ferocious for several days at a stretch, making temperatures seem cooler than they are. Wind-proof jacket and warm hat are then necessary to wear.

**PACE OF TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE:** This is a relaxed tour. We will be based in comfortable hotels. Our daily starts will be sometimes relatively late after breakfast (on most mornings around 7:00 or 07:30) but we will also have a few pre-dawn birding outings with early breakfast or possibly breakfast in the field. In order to enjoy various local cheese and wine specialities, we will take some lunches and dinners as a picnic or in small typical restaurants. On most afternoons, we will try to have a break, providing opportunities for shopping, casual sightseeing, or relaxation in the hotel.

Our birding walks are mostly moderately easy and short on good paths or trails but in the Alps and in Corsica we may have a few mountain hikes on moderately steep slopes. In the Alps, we plan to visit a Black Grouse lek that requires a 4 mile round trip hike with 150m elevation change. In Corsica, we do a walk with a maximum of 3 miles with 100m elevation change. All other walks will be less than 1 or 1.5 miles with slight or no elevation change. All these hikes are optional and one can always decide to stay back at the hotel or in the vehicle. In Camargue, we bird mostly from the roadsides or tracks; we may visit a few reserves where blinds are reached on slightly narrow trails with short but steep staircases. We may also walk about a mile on a wide, flat path between the marshes as well as short walks across the stones of La Crau.

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**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.

There are no major health hazards in France. Ticks are present in the area though they are rarely encountered on the paths and roads we stay on.

For further information on health advice refer to the Medical Advisory Services for Travellers Abroad website [www.masta-travel-health.com](http://www.masta-travel-health.com)

**ACCOMMODATION:** Tap water is safe and widely drunk in hotels and restaurants. Our hotels will be situated in nice rural surroundings or in small typical French villages. Rooms are all modern and clean, with private bathroom facilities in each. In some of the villages we are staying, hotels are relatively simple, but are the best options in the area and close to great birding spots. In most of these hotels there is no lift, so you need to be able to carry up your luggage one or two floors. Free Wi-Fi is available at most of our accommodations (not available at our hotel in Valle d'Asco in 2019). We will take great care in selecting local restaurants with typical meals.

**LAUNDRY SERVICE:** Laundry service is available in some hotels where items are returned within 24 hours on weekdays.

**ELECTRICITY:** Electricity is 220V AC but outlets require a standard European plug-adaptor that can best be described as one with double round-prong plugs. You may find the following website helpful: <http://www.power-plugs-sockets.com>.

**FOOD:** We will try to bring you the best of typical local cuisine but please note that this is not a high-profile gastronomic tour: our goal is to make you discover some of the very typical local food, to enjoy a picnic with local cheese, charcuterie and wine, to take you to some little restaurants that you would not find on your own!

Breakfasts will be the usual French fare of pastries and coffee (decaffeinated drinks are readily available). Our restaurant lunches are full meals, an opportunity to relax between the activities of the morning and the afternoon but many of these will be picnic, in which case, they will include local breads, cheeses, hams, and fruits bought at picturesque local markets or by organic local shops or producers. **NOTE: This is a difficult trip for vegetarians/vegans, so if this is your diet you will likely find your food options limited or unappealing. In southern France it is usual to eat relatively late in the evening, and though we will make every effort to be seated as early as possible, some dinners may finish around 10:00 pm.** We will try to combine those with occasional searches of owls and nightjars. The best way to sample the great variety of French food is to order the *menu*, the fixed meal selected by the chef to feature the day's freshest and best ingredients; it is also possible to order *à la carte*, of course, but the *menu* invariably provides the best dining experience. *Note that the price of this tour includes one glass of wine or beer at dinner.*

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. 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.

**INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS:** 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:** Informal dress is acceptable everywhere.

Fleece jacket	Lightweight walking shoes or boots
Medium-weight sweater	Rain clothes
Light/medium-weight trousers	Light/medium-weight shirts/blouses
Wool hat/cap	Sun hat
Thin gloves	Sunglasses

**MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS:** Please bring the following:

Notebook and pencil	Torch (with spare batteries)
Small rucksack or shoulder bag	Alarm clock
Insect repellent	Suncream
Universal sink plug	Personal medication
Water bottle	

**Optional:** A telescope and tripod will be very useful on this tour at the coastal locations, 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). Camping supply stores sell a product containing permethrin 0.5%, which must be applied directly to clothing in advance of wearing and allowed to dry. This non-staining, odourless chemical is non-toxic to humans and protective on clothing through several launderings.

Please make sure you never to spray insect repellent inside the vehicle or when you are standing close to other participants – it may drift on to their optical equipment.

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

Telescope and tripod	Small first-aid kit
Reference books	Maps
Laser pointer	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.

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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. Bear in mind that you are likely to have to carry your own luggage in the hotel, and most of the hotels used on this tour don't have a lift, so you may need to carry up your luggage one or two floors.

**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:** The transport for the tour will be by minibus or small coach. We will rotate the seating each day.

**SMOKING:** Smoking or vaping is not allowed in the vehicle or when the group is gathered for meals, checklists etc. If you are sharing a room with a non-smoker, please do not smoke in the room. If you smoke in the field, we ask that you do so well away and downwind from the group if possible.

**TRAVEL INSURANCE:** Travel insurance is essential and we insist that you take out suitable cover as soon as your tour is booked. If you are bringing expensive optical equipment or other valuable items, please make sure they are also adequately insured on your home contents policy, as most travel insurance policies do not cover very expensive individual items. You may wish to consult your insurance broker regarding coverage. Please also ensure that your policy covers you in the event of a medical emergency, cancellation of a trip or severe delays. Medical costs abroad can often be extremely expensive. Please note that Sunbird is not liable for any medical or repatriation costs resulting from injury or illness during a tour or for covering any costs resulting from a flight delay such as extra hotel accommodation.

If you wish, insurance can be arranged by Helen Fisher, Bullerwell Independent Insurance Brokers, 13 Goldington Road, Bedford, MK40 3JY. Tel: 01234-866964. Please contact Helen for a quote and she will send the schedule directly to you.

**TIPPING:** All tour-based tips are included in the tour price. These include tips to local guides, drivers, hotel porters, and waiters and waitresses when we have group meals together in restaurants. You only need to pay tips for personal services such as room service or drinks from the bar.

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### BIBLIOGRAPHY:

#### BIRDS

Mullarney, Killian et al. *Collins Bird Guide*. 2010. HarperCollins. The 2nd edition is the latest, most up-to-date and portable field guide to the birds of Europe. This book has quickly become established as the standard field guide for the region. **Highly recommended**

Note: An excellent electronic version of this guide is available for digital devices at the Apple and Android "Apps" stores. Search for it under "Collins Bird Guide."

Crossbill Guides. 2007. *The Nature Guide to the Camargue, La Crau, and Les Alpilles*. Crossbill Guides. A splendid introduction to the wildlife and ecology of southern France. Available at the Crau visitor's centre in St-Martin, or at <http://www.knnvuitgeverij.nl/www2/indexUK.htm>.

Van Duivendijk, N. 2011. *Advanced Bird ID Handbook: The Western Palearctic*. New Holland. Telegraphic summaries of the identification, ageing, and sexing criteria for European birds.

Jonsson, L. 1992. *Birds of Europe with North Africa and the Middle East*. Helm. The most beautiful field guide ever published. **Recommended.**

#### OTHER WILDLIFE

Dijkstra K-D and R. Lewington. 2018. *Field Guide to the Dragonflies of Britain and Europe*. Highly recommended.

Speybroeck J. et al. 2016. *Field Guide to the Amphibians & Reptiles of Britain and Europe*. Highly recommended.

Tolman T. and R. Lewington. 2009. *Collins Butterfly Guide*. Highly Recommended.

Waring P., Townsend M. and R. Lewington. 2018. *Field Guide to the Moths of Great Britain and Ireland*

#### OTHERS

Child, J. 2007. *My Life in France*. Anchor. Irresistibly charming memoir of an American icon's discovery of France and French culture.

Garrett, M. 2006. *Provence: A Cultural History*. Oxford University Press. An affectionate study of Provence through the ages.

Mayle, P. 1991. *A Year in Provence*. Somewhat snide but invariably entertaining outsider-looking-in narrative; first in what has become the author's series of anecdotal memoirs and novels set in southern France.

**FINAL INFORMATION:** Final information with instructions for meeting the group, hotel addresses, etc. and your air tickets will be sent out about three weeks before the start of the tour. Other news will be communicated as necessary. If you have any questions, please contact us.