



TOUR INFORMATION FOR MOROCCO in spring

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

ENTERING MOROCCO: 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. *Note: If you have Israeli stamps on your passport you may be refused entry.* As the political situation in the Middle East changes it would be wise to contact your nearest Embassy of the Kingdom of Morocco to check if any Israeli stamp in your passport would prevent you from entering Morocco. If that is the case you may need to apply for a new, spare passport. In the UK, the Embassy address is 49 Queen's Gate Gardens, London SW7 5NE (tel no. 020 7581 5001, fax no. 020 7225 3862). Citizens of other nations should contact their nearest Moroccan 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 Moroccan currency is the dirham. It is prohibited to import or export more than 2000 Dirhams. 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 meal times or other purchases of a purely personal nature.

LANGUAGE: The national language in Morocco is Arabic, but French is widely spoken. A few people speak English. A French phrase book might be worth bringing on the tour.

CLIMATE: It is generally warm to hot and dry throughout the year but in spring it can be cooler in the north and **very cold** in the mountains and desert areas. Temperatures range from 10-15°C (50-60°F) at night to daytime highs of 15-30°C (60-90°F) in lowland areas. In the mountains temperatures are usually 5-10°C (10-20°F) lower **but even in March it can be below freezing for most of the day at the ski resort (at 2600 metres some people feel the effect of being at altitude)**. Rainfall is low in the desert (a shower every four years or so) but moderate in the Atlas (whereas at this time of year it may still fall as snow) and along the coast. We may experience some windy days especially in the mountains and desert which can make an otherwise warm day seem very cold.

ALTITUDE: Whilst birding in the Atlas mountains, we'll reach heights of 2,600 m (8,500 ft). The walking here is not strenuous and mostly on level ground. We reach similar heights whilst driving over the Tiz N' Tichka pass. The Sahara desert is a relatively high desert at around 900 m (3,200 ft) asl and we'll spend several days at this altitude – this should not cause any issues, although it does mean the weather can be surprisingly chilly in the very early morning.

PACE OF TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE: Usually we drive to various locations and make short and slow walks from the vehicle. There are several longer strolls (two hours or so). To see much of this country, there are a few longer drives (on a couple of days much of the day is spent travelling) but the scenery is always changing and there will be birding stops as and when we see anything of interest. Breakfasts are usually between 06.00 and 07.00 There will be a couple of early starts where we return to our hotel for a late breakfast.

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On most days lunch will be a picnic at a birding site. Finding a wide variety of foods for picnics can sometimes be difficult and people may wish to bring their own cereal bars or snacks. Please bring your own plate, cup and utensils for picnic. We always try to return to the hotel in time for 'an hour to shower' before dinner at 19.30 or 20.00.

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.

Visitors to Morocco are not required to have any international certificates of vaccination unless coming from areas affected by cholera or yellow fever. Consult your doctor well in advance of the trip about necessary immunisations.

Mild intestinal disorders are difficult to avoid completely and we suggest that you bring diarrhoea medication such as Imodium and some rehydrate powders or tablets.

Water is generally safe to drink in the larger towns but we would recommend that you do not drink tap water, or eat salads anywhere on the tour. We also suggest you use bottled mineral water for teeth cleaning. Bottled water, beer, Moroccan wine, and soft drinks are widely available at our hotels. It may be difficult to obtain special medication during the tour so bring all you are likely to need with you.

Biting insects are not usually a problem on this tour but may be encountered. Insect repellent will provide adequate protection. Many brands use diethyltoluamide (DEET) which, while providing the best protection, can be corrosive and therefore require care when using. There are many 'natural' and less-harmful repellents available from various camping supply stores.

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

ACCOMMODATION: Our hotels will range from comfortable, modern hotels to local Auberges and Kasbahs - all of which have en suite facilities.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry services are available in Boulmane Dades, Erfoud and Agadir.

ELECTRICITY: 110/220V 50Hz. Moroccan sockets take round, 2-pin plugs, so an international adaptor is required and can be bought in most airport departure lounges. You may find the following website helpful: <http://www.power-plugs-sockets.com>.

FOOD: Breakfast usually consists of a simple selection of bread, eggs, jam, orange juice, tea and coffee. Lunch will either be a picnic with fresh bread, cheese, tinned tuna and sardines, plus lots of local fruit, olives, cucumber, tomatoes and onions, or we will stop in cafes, offering tajines, brochettes or omelettes, and hopefully on the coast some very fresh seafood. Dinners are often excellent, ranging from tajines of chicken, lemon and olive; or lamb, prune and almond to couscous with lots of local vegetables. In the more touristy areas we will also be more 'European' style food, such as pasta, on offer.

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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. 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 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: During most of the tour, the warm temperatures will dictate light clothing and a sun hat. Shorts and sandals are acceptable but are not always suitable for the field as we may walk through vegetation that can be prickly. Cool weather gear, including gloves and a good outdoor jacket, is needed to our time in the Atlas Mountains. Rain is possible during the tour. Light-weight walking shoes or boots are adequate for most people. However, we do encounter rocky and uneven terrain and possible wet conditions under foot in a few places so you may prefer to bring conventional walking boots.

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	Picnic crockery/cutlery
Water bottle	Personal medication
Sunglasses (particularly useful with snow as well as sun)	

Optional: A telescope and tripod will be very useful on this tour especially in the desert and coastal locations, spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), field guide.

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.

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. On one day in the desert we will transfer to 4x4 vehicles. We will not cover large distances in these vehicles but they are essential to reach some of the key birding sites.

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.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

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, and also covers North Africa**. This is now available in an excellent electronic version for smart phones.

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Bergier, P. & F. Bergier. (no date) *A birdwatchers' guide to Morocco*. Prion, England. A small introductory booklet giving additional information on birding in Morocco. The bulk of the book consists of a site-by-site "where to find the birds" guide and covers many areas we will visit on this tour. A useful status-coded, comprehensive, Moroccan bird list is included as an appendix.

Thevenot, M, R Vernon and P Bergier, *BOU Checklist Series: 20 The Birds of Morocco*. An excellent work containing detailed species accounts for every bird recorded in the country as well as useful sections on habitat, migration, geology etc.

AFRICAN 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.africanbirdclub.org

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.