



## TOUR INFORMATION FOR BELIZE

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

**ENTERING BELIZE:** United Kingdom citizens will need a passport which is valid for six months beyond the intended length of stay. UK citizens do not require a visa but you do need at least one blank page left in your passport for entrance and exit stamps. Citizens of other countries should contact their nearest Belize Embassy for entry requirements. Tourist cards will be issued by the airline on which you arrive.

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.

**FLYING VIA THE USA:** If travelling via the USA under the visa waiver programme (see below), all nationalities will require a machine-readable passport. 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!

You will then need to reclaim your checked-in luggage in the US airport, go through security, then hand your luggage back to the airline staff who will be waiting nearby to give assistance. Once your luggage is back with the airline please proceed to the departure gate for your onward flight.

**CURRENCY:** The local currency is the Belize dollar. U.S. dollars can be used everywhere in Belize. As the tour price includes all travel, accommodation, meals and a drink with meals, you will require only enough currency to cover snacks, extra drinks or other purchases of a purely personal nature such as laundry, postcards, souvenirs, etc. We suggest that you bring a small amount of U.S. Dollars in cash.

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**LANGUAGE:** The official language of Belize is English, though Spanish is widely used, and both languages are spoken countrywide. In coastal areas one may encounter Creole, a mixture of broken English, Carib and Spanish.

**CLIMATE:** Although March is the dry season, we could encounter rain (rarely heavy or prolonged) almost anywhere, so a light rain jacket or traveling umbrella is advised. Daytime temperatures usually range from 70-90° F dropping into the 50s and 60s (F). The general nature of the climate is humid.

**PACE OF TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE:** As on most tours to the Neotropics, early starts are important for seeing and hearing the birds while mid-day is best for watching butterflies. This is countered by the option for an afternoon siesta and only 12 hours of daylight, so late nights are not a problem. Although this is not a particularly strenuous tour, much of the time spent birding will be spent on foot so bear this in mind if you have difficulty walking. There will be at least one boat trip that doesn't require any walking. The terrain is flat to somewhat hilly and most trails are quite clear while others have rocks or exposed roots. Breakfasts are usually at 05:30 at our accommodation. Lunches are either in the field or at the lodge. Dinners are at the lodge.

**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. It is further recommended that most travelers have protection against Hepatitis A and Typhoid.

We have found that with proper eating habits, intestinal problems can be largely avoided. In most of Belize, it is unwise to drink untreated water, although bottled water and soft drinks are reliable and available.

Don't forget that the tropical sun can be very intense, particularly on the Caribbean coast. Please bring adequate protection from the sun, including a sun hat and a strong sunscreen of *at least* SPF15 rating. We recommend, as well, wearing long trousers and long-sleeved shirts.

There is a very low risk of malaria. 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. 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>

Biting insects can be locally numerous but are rarely a problem in the dry season. Careful application of repellent provides good protection and the leader will advise you when it will be necessary

Several species of poisonous snakes are present in Belize though we rarely encounter them. Watching where you step and keeping to well-cleared paths should prevent any problems.

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](http://www.masta-travel-health.com)

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**ACCOMMODATION:** Bird's Eye View Lodge is situated on the shores of Crooked Tree Lagoon and has comfortable air-conditioned rooms with private bathroom facilities. A large upstairs deck provides a stunning view of the Crooked Tree Lagoon which is often teeming with birds. La Milpa Ecolodge and Research Center on the Rio Bravo is located only three miles from the third largest archaeological site in Belize, the La Milpa Mayan Site, and offers comfortable, though somewhat rustic, accommodations under a beautiful thatched roof. Each room offers hot water, a private bathroom, and fans for keeping cool. Black Rock Lodge is nestled in diverse foothill forest along the edge of the Macal River and runs almost entirely on solar and hydro power. All rooms are beautifully constructed and offer breathtaking views of the canyon and river below. The food at Black Rock Lodge is exquisite, and most of the produce is grown on their organic farm (which is also a great place for birds so). Their herd of goats provides fresh milk and cheese and their free roaming chickens provide eggs. Other food resources are locally sourced. Bocawina Lodge offers comfortable, standard rooms with a lovely view of Mayflower's Antelope Waterfall.

**LAUNDRY SERVICE:** Laundry service is available at some hotels but best to do at stays of more than one night.

**ELECTRICITY:** 110V AC 50Hz. American-style plugs are required so 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:** 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 of the rooms where we stay.

**INTERNET ACCESS:** Wifi is available at all the lodges but may be very slow in some locations.

**CLOTHING:** Comfortable, light-weight clothing is appropriate, with a light sweater for evening wear. The following items are basic:

Light-weight sweater  
Comfortable walking shoes  
Lightweight cotton trousers  
Lightweight raincoat/windproof jacket

Sun hat  
Light shoes/sandals  
Long-sleeved cotton shirts

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

Notebook and pencil	Alarm clock
Small rucksack or shoulder bag	Torch and spare batteries
Insect repellent	Sunglasses and sun screen
Water bottle/canteen	Travel umbrella
Personal medication	Ear plugs (if you are a light sleeper)

**Optional:** A telescope and tripod will be useful, spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), field guide, swimwear.

**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.

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 but birds and butterflies are difficult to photograph. Bring all the memory cards you'll need as it may be difficult to find these during the tour. 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. 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:** Travel will be by mini-van or small bus, and we'll have a boat trip on Day 3. The leader will arrange a seating rotation. Participants should be able to ride in any seat in tour vehicles.

**SMOKING:** Smoking or 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.

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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.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:** There are several useful references on Belize including many recent magazine articles. In addition, field guides for adjacent countries, notably Mexico, are helpful. You will also find it useful to bring your favourite North American field guide as those dealing with Belize, Guatemala, Mexico etc., do not adequately illustrate most North American migrants. Similarly, there is no butterfly text specific to Belize but the reference books for neighbouring countries listed below should prove helpful.

### Field Guides and Checklists:

Fagan, Jesse and Komar, Oliver. 2016. *Peterson Field Guide to Birds of Northern Central America*. Peterson Field Guides. **Recommended.**

Howell & Webb. 1995. *A Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America*. Oxford University Press. The best bird guide for the region.

H. Lee Jones and A. C. Valley. 2000. *Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Belize*. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona, Spain. The most authoritative status and distribution information on Belize. Unfortunately, this publication is not widely available but it is for sale at Chan Chich.

Dunn, J. L. and J. K. Alderfer. 2017. *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. 7<sup>th</sup> edition. This new expanded guide includes full annotations on the art work. Over 300 new figures have been painted and subspecies maps for some 55 species are included in the back. All Asian species recorded through July of 2017 are included. One of the two top field guides in North America. **Recommended.**

Sibley, David Allen. 2017. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York. An electronic app is also available.

### Butterflies:

DeVries, Philip J. 1987. *The Butterflies of Costa Rica and their Natural History, Volume I: Papilionidae, Pieridae, Nymphalidae*. Princeton University Press.

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DeVries, Philip J. 1997. *The Butterflies of Costa Rica and their Natural History, Volume II: Riodinidae*. Princeton University Press. Though not true field guides, both volumes are very useful for their high-quality colour plates of specimens and in-depth natural history information.

Garwood, Kim & Richard Lehman. 2005. *Butterflies of Northeastern Mexico, A Photographic Checklist, 2nd Edition*. Eye Scry Publishing, McAllen, Texas.

**NEOTROPICAL 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.neotropicalbirdclub.org](http://www.neotropicalbirdclub.org)

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