



TOUR INFORMATION FOR BORNEO - Sabah

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

ENTERING BORNEO: The area of Borneo we visit is controlled by Malaysia, so all the Malaysia information below applies.

All citizens will need a passport which is valid for six months beyond the intended length of stay. A visa is not required. Citizens of other nations should contact their nearest Malaysian Consulate for entry requirements. **Visitors to Malaysia will receive from the airlines a Malaysian Disembarkation Card to complete and present to Malaysian Immigration upon arrival; it is important that you keep this card on your person throughout the tour.**

Proof of a Yellow Fever vaccination must be shown only if you are coming directly from an endemic zone. For more information on the latest entry procedures and requirements, please contact the Malaysian Embassy, 45-46 Belgrave Square, London, SW1X 8QT; telephone 020 7235 8033, fax 020 7235 5161, website www.malaysia.embassy-uk.co.uk

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 purchase the domestic air ticket. Note:** It is very important that you do **NOT** change your passport or get a new one, otherwise expenses may be incurred.

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 local currency is the *ringgit* (MYR). 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. We advise against using travelers as many outlets no longer cash them. Visa and major credit cards are widely accepted in leading hotels, restaurants and department stores in Kota Kinabalu. Credit cards are accepted at Danum Valley for drinks and incidentals.

LANGUAGE: Although 'Bahasa Malaysia' is the official language, English is spoken by a large proportion of Malaysians and is widely used in almost all private sectors such as banks, hotels, airlines etc. Your leader, Susan, speaks Malaysian.

ALTITUDE: The maximum elevation we will bird at is approximately 5,900ft/1,800m at the Timpahon Gate on Mount Kinabalu; our accommodation there is at approximately 4,200ft/1,300m. Our time at Kinabatangan is at sea level, while Danum Valley is in the foothills with an elevation of 980-1600ft/300-500m.

CLIMATE: At Mount Kinabalu the daytime temperature ranges from about 70F (mid-day) to the mid-50s F at night; while in the lowlands it reaches about 90°F. Night time temperatures will be correspondingly higher, as well. The humidity is quite high, averaging about 80% year-round, which may make it seem hotter. Rainfall can be expected at any time in brief, heavy downpours. Total annual rainfall averages between 200 and 260 cm (between 77 and 100 inches), the wet season typically runs from October to March, while the "not so wet" season is from April to September. There is always the chance of rain on any given day at any given time in Borneo.

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PACE OF THE TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE: The average distance covered during our days in the field is a bit more than a mile per “birding period”. Our pace is very slow, of course, but on some days we may walk up to two and a half miles per birding session. Since there is a lull in the bird activity in the middle of the afternoon, midday breaks are usually scheduled. The mornings will be early (as early as 05:30 departures from the hotel in some places). Most of our birding will be on foot, away from the vehicles. A lot of our birding will be roadside birding except during our stay at Bilit, where we will be birding from small boats.

To find the more skulking birds such as pittas, partridges, babblers and so on we will also be birding on narrow forest trails at times. These trails are not paved and may be slippery or “rooty”. Where possible we will be walking on a downhill trend but of course the trails undulate so some uphill walking is required.

We will generally take breakfast at or before dawn. Our proximity to the equator means the days are 12 hours long year-round so dawn and dusk are around 6 am/pm respectively. Evening or early morning owling is offered where possible for those who want to participate. Most of the trails are undulating, and steep but short uphill climbs are necessary in some places. The leader will inform the group of trail conditions ahead of time so that anyone who wishes to opt out has that opportunity.

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.

There are no immunisation requirements for entry into Malaysia. However, Malaria preventatives are recommended as are up-to-date inoculations against Hepatitis A or immune globulin (IG) and for typhoid. Typhoid vaccination is particularly important because of the presence of *S. typhi* strains resistant to multiple antibiotics in this region. You should make sure that your other inoculations are up to date.

A malaria preventative is strongly recommended. 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>

A Yellow Fever inoculation is applicable to those who come from infected countries or those who have recently been to an infected country.

Although minor intestinal problems do occur in the tropics, Malaysia is remarkably free of these complaints. Malaysians are very particular about their drinking water and drinking water in a restaurant or cafe will have already been treated (usually with UV light). Fluid-replacement drinks and other electrolyte replacement drinks in powder form may be worth bringing as they replace the vital salts and minerals lost during a bout of diarrhea.

As it may be inconvenient, or impossible, to replenish supplies during the tour, please ensure that you take adequate personal medication with you.

Insects: It is likely that we will find mosquitoes in the forest areas, and possibly a few ticks. We recommend using insect repellents with a high concentration of the active ingredient diethyltoluamide (DEET). The higher the percentage, the greater the effectiveness. 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. If spraying DEET repellents, please do so at a distance to the rest of the group.

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Leeches can be found in Borneo at any time, particularly after rain, but they are easily repelled by a strong all-purpose repellent, with at least 30% active ingredient such as DEET. The widely-used technique is to make a pair of 'leech socks'. These are made from material such as densely woven cotton and come above the ankles onto the calf. These leech socks should have a drawstring at the top to hold them in place. These can also be sprayed with DEET repellent and this should guarantee that the little beasts will not get through to bare skin! Leech socks are available for purchase from the Oriental Bird Club (see below).

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: Borneo Rainforest Lodge in Danum Valley is an upmarket wildlife lodge with fan-cooled rooms with private facilities and hot/cold water showers. It is considered by many to be one of the best lodges of its kind in Asia.

Bilit Rainforest Lodge is an award-winning ecotourism lodge, with twin-bedded rooms with air conditioning; private bathrooms with solar-powered hot water; 24-hour electricity provided by solar-powered cells, supplemented by generators as needed.

Tabin Wildlife Resort consists of 10 units of authentic Borneo timber bungalows with standard floor area of 17.5 ft x 17.5 ft. Each bungalow is a twin-bedded or double-bedded room with en-suite bathroom, hot water shower, private balcony overlooking hillside forest or the Lipad River, air conditioning and a ceiling fan. They are linked by an inter-connecting timber board walk to the Sunbird Café.

The accommodation at Kinabalu Park is very comfortable, also with private facilities.

Our hotel in Kota Kinabalu is a fairly typical, large, western style hotel.

LAUNDRY: Laundry service (in by 09.00 and returned by 19.00) is available at all places (but the drying may dependent on the sunlight at some of the lodges).

ELECTRICITY: 220V AC 50Hz. 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: The food in this part of Malaysia is generally delicious and varied with a combination of Chinese, Western and local Malaysian and Sabahan dishes. At the lodges the evening meals are in the form of buffets. The food in this part of the world has a reputation for being spicy but in Malaysian cuisine, chili or "sambal" (similar in some ways to salsa) is usually added to the meal at the table and is thus optional.

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 ensure 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.

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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: In the hotels in the main towns free wifi is generally available. Most require a password, which we'll receive on check-in. Wifi is now available at the remote Borneo Rainforest Lodge but it is a satellite signal so can be capricious. Wifi is available only in the common areas at Bilit Lodge.

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 everywhere but this is a rather conservative country so it is not considered acceptable for men to go shirtless. Neat casual clothing for meal times. Bright clothing can scare forest birds so you need to wear clothing with subdued colours. The following items are basic:

Lightweight, sturdy walking shoes

Short and long-sleeved shirts

Sweater

Knee-high rubber (Wellington) boots (these are **optional** and may or may not be useful depending on the amount of recent rain; be aware that Borneo is a hot, humid place and wearing boots may predispose you to overheating.)

Sandals or light shoes

Lightweight, loose-fitting trousers

Long socks

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS:

Alarm clock

Notebook and pencil

Small torch with spare batteries

Water bottle/canteen

Rucksack/small day pack

Ear plugs (if you are a light sleeper)

Pocket knife with bottle opener

Insect repellent

Sun hat

Sun screen

Wrist watch

Plastic cup (for picnic lunches)

Personal medication

Waterproof poncho or collapsible umbrella – important

Optional: Telescope & tripod (recommended if you have them), spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), compass, field guide.

LEADER'S EQUIPMENT:

Telescope

Field library

Spotlight

Basic first aid kit

Laser pointer

Note: The leader's telescope is not to be used for digiscoping. Please do not handle the leader's telescope and tripod without prior permission.

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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 are difficult to photograph. Although there will be occasions when bird photography is possible, a birdwatching tour is not normally the best means of pursuing this aim. Bring all your film/memory cards with you as it may be difficult to find precisely what you need at short notice. 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: Land travel will be in an air-conditioned minibus and the occasional eight-seater microbus. At Sukau, for the purposes of wildlife watching, small boats (no canopy) with a combination outboard/electric engine will be provided by the Bilit Rainforest Lodge management.

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.

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:

Field Guides

Myers, Susan. 2016. *Birds of Borneo: Brunei, Sabah, Sarawak and Kalimantan*. Helm Field Guides, London. This is the fully updated and revised field guide that will be used during the tour. It describes and illustrates all the bird species of Borneo with distribution maps. **Recommended.**

Other References

Campbell, Elaine JF. 2011. *A Walk Through the Lowland Rain Forest of Sabah*. Natural History Publications Borneo, Kota Kinabalu. The tropical lowland rain forest in Sabah (Borneo) is an example of one of the richest ecosystems in the world, and this account puts together an introduction to the rain forest and its many biological facets with some of the finest photographs by wildlife photographer Ch'ien C. Lee and notes by naturalists who have been fascinated with the living treasures of the rain forest in Sabah.

Kirton, L.G. 2018. *Butterflies of Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand*. 2nd Edition. John Beaufoy Publishing, Malaysia. Concise photographic guide. Doesn't cover Borneo as such but there is much overlap.

Phillipps, Q. and Phillipps, K. 2016. *A Field Guide to the Mammals of Borneo and their Ecology*. The most complete work on the mammals, fully illustrated. Useful also for West Malaysia.

ORIENTAL BIRD CLUB: The Oriental Bird Club publications (Forktail and their bulletin, Birding Asia) regularly include information about Myanmar. For anyone with more than a passing interest in Asian birds, joining the OBC is highly recommended. Their publications to date have been outstanding. 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 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.