



TOUR INFORMATION FOR ETHIOPIA

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

ENTERING ETHIOPIA: United Kingdom citizens will need a passport which is valid for six months beyond the intended length of stay plus a visa. A single-entry visa must be applied for individually. This is now best done via the eVisa service at www.ethiopiaevisa.com. This 30 day visa can be applied for at any time and is valid from the date of entry. You will need a passport-type photo on your computer to upload during the application process. The eVisa is normally issued within a few hours.

You can also obtain your visa on arrival but this can take some time and is not recommended. The visa can also be obtained by post from the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia, London (tel: 020 7589 7212). http://www.ethioembassy.org.uk/consular_services/Consular.htm The postal visa is valid for 30 days from the date of issue so it is advisable not to apply too early. Citizens of other nations should contact the nearest Ethiopian Consulate for entry requirements. We will send you details about hotel name and address needed to apply for the visa when we issue the final invoice.

There are visa service agencies that can provide you with an information pack on how to obtain a visa. They will also process your application for you although they will charge a handling and processing fee. One such company is Trailfinders Visa Service <http://visas.trailfinders.com> (tel: 0207 368 1504). Trailfinders give a discount on their visa processing fee if your flights are booked with them.

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 Ethiopian Birr (ETB). Ethiopian Birr may not be brought in or taken out of the country, but most currencies can be changed at the airport on arrival. Some hotels may be able to change small amounts of US dollar notes but once we are away from Addis, changing money will be difficult. Travelers' cheques are not worth bringing. 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. There are now some ATM's in Addis and some of the larger towns, and credit cards are now becoming more accepted although most places still do not take them.

LANGUAGE: Amharic is the main language but Arabic, English, French and Italian are also spoken.

CLIMATE: Temperatures will vary and it is difficult to predict what the weather will be like but generally hot temperatures can be expected. Down in the Rift Valley and at Awash National Park it should be fairly hot and dry with temperatures up to about 35°C or higher. The highland areas can be pleasantly warm during the day but very cool at night, possibly reaching 0°C. Suitable clothing for the cold evenings and early mornings will be necessary. Rain is possible in the highland region around the Bale Mountains. As we will be at altitudes of up to 13000 feet here the weather can change very quickly and good waterproof and windproof clothing is advisable. Bring a pair of gloves and perhaps a woolly hat for our day on the Sanetti Plateau.

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ALTITUDE: Addis Ababa is at 7000 feet (2100 metres) and much of the tour is spent at altitudes between that and 2000 feet (600 metres). We spend two nights in the town of Goba where the hotel is at 8997 feet (2700 metres). From there we spend a few hours on the Sanetti Plateau at around 12460 feet (3800 metres) on two consecutive days.

PACE OF TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE: The tour does require a reasonable degree of physical fitness. The many early mornings make this a tiring tour as well, so a reasonable amount of stamina is required. Walks are usually no more than two hours long and often shorter than that but there can be some long walks of around 2-3 miles. We do a lot of birding in the grounds of the various hotels and lodges. On the Sanetti Plateau we reach high altitudes (see above) but we do not do any extensive walking at this altitude although once we leave the plateau we walk up to two miles steadily downhill at lower altitudes. With lots of stops to look at birds this normally takes two or three hours but the vehicles travel with us, following us down and can be boarded at any time. The one strenuous walk can be through the forested hills at Dinsho, the Bale Mountains Park headquarters. Here we are taken by a local guide to look for owls and although the exact route varies each year, we can expect to walk about 2 miles up and down hill at about 8000 feet altitude.

There are some very early starts on this tour. This is because of the need to be on site at dawn in some places, especially when we expect high temperatures later in the day. On some days we will go out before breakfast and take breakfast in the field with the guides preparing tea, coffee, scrambled eggs etc. There may also be some early breakfasts at the hotel if that can be arranged. You should therefore be prepared for some days starting with departure at 05.30 or even 04.30 on a few days. Days before an early start should end early. Lunches are either taken in hotels or restaurants or we make our own picnic lunches on several days (see Food below).

Please note that there are some long drives on this tour. The quality of the roads in Ethiopia is improving all the time, thanks to a massive road building programme funded mainly by the Chinese. The drives from Goba to Negelle and from Negelle to Yabello each takes all day with very early starts and birding stops on the way. Travelling from Yabello to Awassa takes until mid-late afternoon. This road is currently (2018/19) being rebuilt and we therefore have to travel on temporary service roads in many places which are bumpy and may slow our journey. We will try to factor in breaks where we can, including one for lunch, but be prepared for a difficult journey on this day.

Because we spend a lot of time out in the field toilet stops are often just in the bush and you need to be prepared for that. In addition, where we can stop for a toilet break at a village or town, toilets are usually of the Asian squat type and are rarely very clean.

Finally please note that nothing ever happens quickly in Ethiopia. Service in the hotel restaurants can be slow and patience is required when trying to get anything done in a hurry. In addition complicated orders for a variety of different meals invariably go wrong so when faced with a large menu, the leader will select a few options to choose from to make the ordering process easier.

HEALTH: It is essential that you contact your own doctor to obtain the latest information on the region 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.

Malaria, although present, is not that widespread in Ethiopia, especially at the time of our visit and some doctors feel it is not necessary to take any preventative. **It is essential therefore that you take the latest advice available from your doctor or health centre.** As with any destination within Africa, a Yellow fever inoculation is recommended although it is no longer required to show the certificate on arrival. We suggest contacting them as soon as possible after booking in case their recommended treatment needs to be started before the tour.

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Biting insects are not numerous although mosquitoes and ticks occur locally. 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.

Avoid drinking tap water. Bottled water is readily available. Mild stomach upsets are possible and we strongly suggest bringing an adequate supply of a diarrhea treatment such as Imodium or Arret. Several sachets of re-hydrate powder can also be very useful as they replace the sugars and salts lost during bouts of diarrhoea.

Finally, be sure to bring adequate supplies of all personal medication, as it may be impossible to obtain them during the tour.

Sunlight can be intense so make sure you bring good quality sun cream as well as a sunhat, and make sure you stay adequately hydrated – bottled water is freely available on the tour vehicle.

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

ACCOMMODATION: The accommodation in Ethiopia does not compare with the well-appointed lodges and camps of other East African destinations and most of the places we stay in are a little basic in some respects. Having said that things are improving all the time and generally accommodation now is much better than it was when we first started running tours to Ethiopia in 1995. There can be a problem with a lack of maintenance so be prepared for leaky plumbing, lack of hot water, lights not working etc. At Debre Birhan we stay in a modern Hotel in the town with all the usual facilities. In Awash we use the Awash Falls Lodge which has no hot water. For our first visit to Lake Langano and at Awassa we stay in a recently renovated hotels on the lake shore. Both have good rooms with hot water. The hotel at Goba is old, but clean and functions well most of the time. Power cuts can be a problem here, which can in turn affect the supply of hot water. Negelle now has a new guesthouse which we will be using – it has comfortable rooms each with en suite facilities although maintenance is a problem as is a lack of hot water for showers.. At Yabello we use a lodge set in good grounds outside of the town. There are major issues here with lack of maintenance and the food is rather plain, but this is a vast improvement on Mobil Motel where most of the other groups stay and it is worth the various accommodation inconveniences for the location and birding in the lodge grounds. On our 2018 visit we found that conditions were improving here and most of the accommodation units had solar heated water. For our return visit to Lake Langano we spend 2 nights at Haro Lodge, a luxury lodge right on the lake shore.

Please note that many of the hotels have 'wet room' type showers lined with highly glazed tiles. These can become very slippery and care is needed.

LAUNDRY: Laundry services may be available at some of the places where we stay for more than one night but that cannot be guaranteed

ELECTRICITY: 220V AC Most plugs require an international two pin adaptor. Short power failures can happen at any time – a good head torch is essential. You may find the following website helpful: <http://www.power-plugs-sockets.com>.

FOOD: The food varies but generally consists of repeated variations of basic European dishes and is certainly not one of the highlights of the tour. That said things are improving each year. Because of the Italian influence they do make good spaghetti in Ethiopia and this is usually available as a choice at most places. Because of this you may find a tub of Parmesan cheese a very useful thing to bring. Some muesli or granola type bars might be useful for some of the early starts. The leader will buy fruit when available. In a few places the use of chilli can make the food a bit spicy.

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Please let the leader know if this is a problem for you. Local food – injera (a type of flat sourdough bread) and wot (spicy meat or vegetable stews) - are available everywhere we stay although the quality does vary a lot. There will be opportunities too try this. Vegetarians are not well catered for and often all that is on offer are just the vegetables accompanying the main meal although the ever-present spaghetti and tomato sauce is a good fall back. Some places have locally caught fish as an option as well, which can be excellent. Packed lunches taken from hotels are usually very poor and we dispense with them, relying instead on local cheese, tinned ham and pate, tuna etc purchased by the leader before the tour starts. They make excellent bread in Ethiopia and this is usually widely available to go with the lunches. We will eat breakfast in the field on some days, these consisting of scrambled eggs, bread, porridge, jam, tea, coffee etc cooked by our co-leader and drivers.

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 and/or a soft drink or beer is provided at meals, as is coffee or tea. Ethiopian wine is becoming much more widespread and more drinkable and will also be available. Other drinks are the responsibility of the individual. You may find it useful to bring a small water canteen to decant water from the larger bottles on the vehicles.

INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS: Away from Addis Ababa, internet although available in many places, does tend to be quite slow. Ethiopia has good mobile phone coverage but you will need to check with your provider to ensure you can use your own mobile network there. Obtaining a local sim card is getting easier and in theory can be done at the airport, although there is a complicated registration process to go through.

FIELD CLOTHING: Dress will be informal throughout the tour. During most of the tour, the high temperatures will dictate light and loose clothing. Shorts and sandals are acceptable but are not always suitable for the field as we often walk through vegetation that can be prickly. A good sun hat is essential. Cool weather and waterproof gear is needed to our time in the Bale Mountains, where a sweater and/or fleece and waterproof jacket will be needed along with gloves and a wooly hat for our day on the Sanetti Plateau. 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:

Alarm clock	Notebook and pencil
Hand-held torch (with spare batteries)	Small towel (hotels may only provide one)
Head torch	Personal medication
Sun protection lotion	Plastic bags (to protect equipment from dust)
Sun glasses	Small, folding umbrella
Universal sink plug	Insect repellent

Optional: Telescope and tripod (useful on this tour), spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), field guide.

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

Telescope and tripod

Field guides and reference books

Laser pointer

Basic First-aid kit

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: Ethiopia generally offers good photographic opportunities and although there will not be as much game as in Kenya, the birds are on the whole approachable. Bring all your memory cards and/or storage devices you will need with you these may be hard to obtain locally. Since dust may be a problem, cameras should be packed in tight plastic bags large enough to hold both camera and lens. Digiscoping is perfectly compatible with the tour, though it is recommended you bring your own telescope! **The leader's telescope is not available for this purpose.** Finally, Ethiopia is an extremely scenic country and a wide-angle lens would be very useful. Do not try to photograph any of the local people with first asking their permission. This is especially true in the Awash area.

There will be plenty of opportunities to take photos of birds, mammals and scenery and the leaders and drivers 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: Transportation is in a small Coaster coach for some of the tour but for the journey from Goba onwards we switch to 4x4 vehicles which we stay in until we return to Lake Langano several days later. On the Coaster there is one row of double seats and one of singles. The back seat is not suitable for travelling on and we tend to use that for storing day packs etc. A few other seats over wheel arches are also not really very comfortable. **Although this still gives us plenty of room, clients traveling on their own will not be able to have a double seat all to themselves and should be prepared to share seating.** We will be driving on metaled and dirt roads of variable quality – some can be very bumpy and dusty - and please note that there are some long drives on this trip. The leader will arrange a seating rotation for both the Coaster bus and the 4x4 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.

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.

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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 Sunbird brochure 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:

Ash, J., & Atkins, J. *Birds of Ethiopia and Eritrea*. 2009 Helm Field Guides, London. ISBN 978-1-4081-0979-3. This atlas to the birds of the region is very useful although it maybe a bit too heavy to bring on the tour. As well as clear and detailed maps, it also contains some superb introductory chapters on a variety of relevant topics including the history of ornithology and the geography of the region. **Very useful.**

Mullarney, Killian, Lars Svensson, Dan Zetterstrom & Peter J Grant. *Collins Bird Guide*. 1999. HarperCollins. (ISBN 0 00 219728 6). The latest, most up-to-date and portable field guide to the birds of Europe and very useful for the palearctic migrants we encounter. Available as an E-book.

Redman, N. Stevenson, T & Fanshawe J. *Birds of the Horn of Africa*. 2011. Helm Field Guides, London. ISBN 978-0-7136-6541-3. A brand new and excellent guide to the region. This is now the standard guide for the tour. Make sure you get the second edition which has several repainted plates. **Highly Recommended.**

Kingdon, J. *The Kingdon Pocket Guide to African Mammals*. 2004. A&C Black, London. ISBN 0-7136-6981-0. A pocket-sized version of the popular field guide which is much more 'user-friendly'. It contains the same illustrations and maps, but with less text. Also available as an E-book. **Recommended.**

Ornithological References and Guides:

Brown, L., K. Newman and E. Urban. 1982 onwards. *The Birds of Africa*. Academic Press, London. A monumental work that contains a wealth of information as well as superb colour plates of every species.

Clements, JF. 2000. *Birds of the World - A Checklist*. 5th edition. Pica Press. This totally revised edition lists all the subspecies and is therefore extremely useful when researching taxonomic issues.

Jenner, T. *Ethiopia Travellers' Handbook*. 2016. Meru Publishing

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.