



## TOUR INFORMATION FOR SCOTLAND in spring

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

**ENTERING THE UNITED KINGDOM:** Non-UK citizens will need a passport which is valid for six months beyond the intended length of stay. EU nationals do not need a visa. Citizens of other nations should contact their nearest British 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 local currency is the pound sterling. 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.

Visa and MasterCard are widely accepted throughout the United Kingdom. American Express less so. Money can be obtained from ATM cash machines with a credit card and your personal identification number (PIN); arrange this before you leave home, though charges will apply.

**LANGUAGE:** The main language spoken in Scotland is English, while Scottish Gaelic is a minority language. The dialect of English spoken in Scotland is referred to as Scottish English.

**CLIMATE:** Scotland will be coming out of winter in late April and therefore the climate will be variable (mornings and evening can get down to 5°C, whereas afternoons can reach 15°C), and we can anticipate some rain during the course of the tour. We expect to see snow in the Cairngorms.

**ALTITUDE:** The Cairngorms is 1309 metres however we'll stay around the national park's car park (635 metres) to look for some mountain species. Grantown-on-spey is 220m, and when visiting the coast we'll be at sea-level.

**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 (1 – 2 hours or so). We'll need a full day to get to and from the west coast but the scenery is always changing and there will be birding stops as and when we see anything of interest. The breakfast room at the hotel is open from 07.00 to 10.00am, and their restaurant is open for dinner from 18.30 to 20.00. 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. Celebrity talks are held at the hotel in the evenings, though on one evening we may visit a nearby hide in the hope of seeing Pine Marten and Badger.

**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 may be difficult to obtain special medication during the tour so bring all you are likely to need with you.

Water is safe to drink.

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Biting insects are not usually a problem at this time of year but if the weather warms up significantly we may encounter midges and mosquitos, so it is recommended that you take insect repellent. 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](http://www.masta-travel-health.com)

**ACCOMMODATION:** Grant Arms Hotel is situated in the fine Scottish country town of Grantown-on-spey. Built in 1765 during the reign of King George III and situated in the Cairngorms National Park, the Grant Arms Hotel is a traditional Scottish building, tastefully refurbished to provide thoroughly modern standards of comfort. Their en-suite bedrooms are furnished with tea and coffee making facilities, toiletries, hair dryer, colour TV, and direct dial phone (note that phone calls made from your room will be charged to you directly).

**LAUNDRY SERVICE:** Laundry services are available along with a drying room and boot wash.

**ELECTRICITY:** 230V 50Hz. Sockets take flat, 3-pin plugs, so an international adaptor is required if coming from outside the UK. You may find the following website helpful: <http://www.power-plugs-sockets.com>.

**FOOD:** Breakfast will be taken at the hotel and lunch will either be a picnic-style or we'll stop in cafes. Dinners are excellent using local produce.

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:** The Grant Arms Hotel offers free WiFi to clients. Mobile phones can be useful while on tour but reception within the Highlands can be patchy. 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.

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**CLOTHING:** In view of the weather possibilities, you will need dress in layers while keeping your luggage as small and light as possible. Sturdy walking shoes are recommended for walking along forest tracks and around the Cairngorms car park as surfaces are likely to be wet and slippery.

The following items are basic:

Walking shoes with good grip	Rain-proof clothes (including hat)
Medium-weight sweater	Medium weight trousers
Medium weight shirts	Gloves, woollen hat & scarf
Thick fleece or warm jacket	

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

Notebook and pencil	Alarm clock
Small rucksack or shoulder bag	Wrist watch
Insect repellent	Face cloth
Water bottle/canteen	Picnic crockery/cutlery
Personal medication	Ear-plugs (if you're a light sleeper)
Sunglasses (particularly useful with snow as well as sun)	
Thermal underwear if you suffer from the cold.	

**Optional:** A telescope and tripod will be very useful especially when scanning the mountains or seashore; 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.

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 so you should bring with you all that you expect to need. 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 leader will do everything possible 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 will be by minibus driven by the leader. We will rotate the seating each day.

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**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:** For non-UK residents, 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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.

**CHARITIES:** Both the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the Scottish Wildlife Trust aim to raise money to support conservation projects, encourage an interest in the conservation of birds, and liaise with and promotes the work of existing societies within the region. You will find their contact details and further information at <https://www.rspb.org.uk/> and <https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/>

**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.