



## TOUR INFORMATION FOR MEXICO: YUCATAN AND COZUMEL

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

**ENTERING MEXICO:** United Kingdom citizens will need a passport valid for at least six months from the date of departure. Visas are not required. Citizens of other nations should contact the nearest Mexican Embassy for entry requirements. Tourist cards are required and are issued by your entering airline.

A valid Yellow Fever vaccination is required if you are arriving from a country where the disease is a risk.

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.

**AIRPORT TRANSFER ON ARRIVAL:** We will arrange a direct shuttle from Cancun airport to our first night's hotel in Puerto Morelos. Note you may have to share a ride with other participants arriving around the same time. Details will be sent along with the Final Information about three weeks before the tour starts.

**INTRODUCTORY MEETING:** There will be an introductory meeting the evening of Day 1 at our hotel, which is approximately 30 minutes south of the Cancun airport. Exact timing of the meeting will be set once flight arrival times are known, but it's typically at 18:30. This informal meeting gives the leader the opportunity to introduce everyone to each other and to let you know generally what to expect on the trip - pace of the tour, daily routine, etc. We strongly recommend you arrange your flights to arrive the afternoon of Day 1 so that you can be present at the introductory meeting.

If you can't arrive before this, you may want to consider arriving a day early. An early arrival has the added benefit of building in a hedge against flight delays due to bad winter weather.

**CURRENCY:** The currency in Mexico is the Mexican Peso (MXN). It is always helpful to have some pesos (about £15 worth) with you, and these can be obtained at an ATM in Mexico. The best way to obtain local currency is from an ATM, readily available at the airport or in Puerto Morelos near our hotel. Credit cards are widely accepted.

**LANGUAGE:** The major language in Mexico is Spanish. English-speakers are seldom encountered except in the larger city hotels. Our leaders' Spanish ranges from functional to fluent and you will have no need to learn the language. However, understanding even a few basic words may add interest to your trip, so you might consider bringing a small English-Spanish dictionary or phrase book.

**CLIMATE:** We'll be here during the winter dry season, but weather is always unpredictable, and a cold front could pass through at any time. Daytime highs could reach the low 90s with lows possibly in the 50's (°F) range. It is usually humid and rain is quite possible. We suggest a folding umbrella or light rain clothes.

**ALTITUDE:** We will be at or near sea level for the entire tour.

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**PACE OF TOUR:** We will leave most mornings around 05:30 to be in the field for dawn (leaving at 04:30 on one day when we have a long drive to reach our destination). It gets dark early (by 18:00) so we won't be out late. On half of the days there will be the opportunity for a siesta break after lunch, followed by afternoon birding, and nearly every day we schedule an hour or two off before dinner. On our one longer day to the northern coast, we'll be out all day.

Almost all the birding is along level roads or largely flat ground, with no narrow forest trails. We walk slowly and since birding often involves standing still for periods, some people like to have a small travel stool to sit on. One day we'll take a boat trip for about three hours in mangrove lagoons. The only climbing you will need to do is in our hotels, most of which do not have lifts but are two or three stories high.

**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. These include measles-mumps-rubella (MMR), diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis, varicella (chickenpox), polio, and your yearly flu jab. It is further recommended that most travellers have protection against Hepatitis A and Typhoid.

Evidence of a Yellow Fever vaccination must be shown only if you are arriving from an infected area.

Miscellaneous: Biting insects and arachnids are seldom a major nuisance although chiggers can be locally numerous, and mosquito numbers vary greatly from year to year. 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.

Anyone who is unusually sensitive to insect bites and stings (ants, wasps) should consider bringing an antihistamine such as Benadryl.

We do not often encounter snakes and take time to observe them whenever possible; most are not venomous, and venomous ones are not aggressive.

One can never completely escape the risk of parasites or fungal infections.

We have found that careful eating habits are important in order to avoid most intestinal problems. In most of Mexico it is unwise to drink untreated water, although bottled water and soft drinks are reliable and are widely available for purchase in motels, restaurants, and stores.

Although we will be carrying water and other drinks, some sort of personal water purification system is suggested in case of emergency. The easiest and safest is a solution of crystalline iodine, available from pharmacies with a doctor's prescription. This super-saturated solution is effective as long as the crystals are present in the bottle, and only a small amount is needed for each quart of water. Other water purification tablets and systems are available from outdoor suppliers and outfitters. Imodium or Pepto Bismol in tablet form can be recommended as the best treatment for occasional traveller's diarrhoea. Electrolyte-replacement drinks in powder form are also worth bringing as they replace the vital salts and minerals lost during a bout of diarrhoea.

Don't forget that the sun in Mexico can be very intense. Please bring adequate protection, including a sun hat and a strong sunscreen of at least 15 SPF rating.

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Although pharmacies in Mexico are excellent and well-supplied they are impossible to visit during most of this tour's schedule, so bring enough of the medications you normally use to last the duration of the trip. A first-aid kit will be available at all times

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:** Our hotels and lodges are always among the best available among the smaller hotels. The Cielo Hotel and Beach Club is a comfortable hotel right on the beach, with a/c in all rooms, and a refreshing swimming pool. The Hotel Esquivel in Felipe Carrillo Puerto is a basic Mexican hotel away from the touristy areas, so nothing fancy should be expected. It has air-conditioners and ceiling fans in the rooms. It's only a couple of miles to our excellent birding road. The Hotel El Mesón del Marqués in Valladolid is a pleasant historic hotel with an excellent restaurant, set on the corner of the colonial *zócalo* (town square) opposite a large cathedral. The hotel on Cozumel is a modern resort hotel with all the usual facilities and is located right across the street from a good snorkeling opportunity, especially for beginners.

**COFFEE:** Early morning coffee is not often available so those craving coffee should bring a heating coil for making coffee, or a thermos that can be filled the night before.

**LAUNDRY SERVICE:** This will be available at all our hotels if submitted upon arrival, as we are at each hotel no more than two nights at a time. Note that a laundry service is no longer available at Meson del Marques, which would have been the most logical place to do it. You may find it more convenient to wash your own in small batches.

**ELECTRICITY:** Electrical current is the same as in the US (110v, AC60HZ) and plugs are parallel prong. Power failures occur but not with any regularity. Appliances with especially broad ground prongs may not fit outlets at some hotels. 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:** We have picnic breakfasts most days, consisting of various bakery products, cheese, yogurt, and bananas. Lunches and dinners are in restaurants and are typically very good; most dishes are not spicy unless hot sauce is added; and this can be very hot indeed in the Yucatan, the home of the habanero pepper.

Sunbird 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, regretfully, 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.

**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:** Wi-Fi is available at all hotels but is often intermittent and, when it does work, not very fast, so it shouldn't be relied upon.

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**CLOTHING:** Comfortable field clothes and shoes are essential. The following items are basic:

|   |                                |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Long-sleeved cotton or fast-drying microfibre shirts          | Sun hat                        |
| Long trousers, cotton or fast-drying microfibre               | T-shirts                       |
| Lightweight wool or wool-blend socks                          | Shorts (for around the lodges) |
| Lightweight sweater / fleece                                  | Light-weight rain clothes      |
| Sturdy footwear (lightweight, waterproof hiking shoes)        | Lightweight gloves             |
| Light-weight trainers (for around the lodges and easy trails) |                                |

Note: We recommend not wearing clothing in the field that reflects ultraviolet light, including bright white and fluorescent (or "neon") colours. Birds can see near-UV light, and since shy birds are sensitive to our movements, such bright colours will accentuate them. Normal reds, yellows, oranges, blues, and greens are fine.

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

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|--------------------------------|---|
| Notebook and pencil            | Sunglasses and sunscreen                    |
| Small rucksack or day pack     | Travel clothesline & laundry soap           |
| Alarm clock                    | Universal sink plug                         |
| Torch & extra batteries        | Insect repellent                            |
| Water bottle                   | Ear plugs (if you are a light sleeper)      |
| Flip-flops for the showers     | Hiking stick                                |
| Small collapsible travel stool | Folding umbrella (essential)                |
| Personal medication            | Pocket knife (packed in checked-in luggage) |

**Optional:** Telescope & tripod (recommended if you have them), spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), field guide, swimwear, small (pint-sized) thermos or heating coil if you wish to have early morning coffee.

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

|               |                     |
|---------------|---------------------|
| Telescope     | Field library       |
| First-aid kit | Maps                |
| Laser pointer | Play-back 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 are difficult to photograph. Bring all the memory cards you are likely to need with you. Digiscoping is perfectly compatible with this tour, but please ensure that you bring your own telescope as the leader's telescope will not be available for this activity. Camera equipment should be packed in moisture- and dust-proof bags, as a precaution.

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.

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Please do not allow your photographic desires to conflict with other participants' birdwatching activities.

**TRANSPORT:** We will be traveling by 12-passenger minibus, depending on the group size. When using 15-passenger minibuses, we take a maximum of seven passengers plus the leader. Participants must be able to ride in any seat in our tour vehicle; anyone susceptible to motion sickness should bring an appropriate remedy.

**SMOKING:** Smoking and 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.

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY: T**

#### Birds

Howell, Steve N.G. and Sophie Webb. 1995. *A Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America*. Oxford University Press. **This is the recommended guide.** You may want to consider having the plates removed and rebound separately for carrying in the field.

Kaufman, Kenn. 2000. *Field Guide to Birds of North America*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Co. A good and user-friendly photo guide for North America; useful for North American migrants in Mexico.

Sibley, David Allen. 2014. *The Sibley Guide to Eastern Birds, Second Edition*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York. Good for the eastern North American migrants we encounter on this tour.

#### General Reference and Natural History

Glassberg, J. 2018. *A Swift Guide to the Butterflies of Mexico and Central America, 2nd Ed.* Princeton University Press. Recommended.

Lee, Julian C. 2000. *A Field Guide to the Amphibians and Reptiles of the Maya World*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca.

## **MEXICO: Yucatan & Cozumel: Tour Information...6**

Reid, Fiona A. 1997. *A Field Guide to the Mammals of Central America and Southeast Mexico*. Oxford University Press. **Recommended.**

**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. If you have any questions about the trip, please contact us.