



TOUR INFORMATION FOR BRAZIL - MINAS GERAIS

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

ENTERING BRAZIL: United Kingdom citizens will need a passport valid for at least six months beyond the date of entry into Brazil. A visa is not required when entering Brazil as a tourist. Citizens of other countries should consult their nearest Brazilian consulate for entry requirements. Please remember that any tourist card you receive on your flight to Brazil must be kept in your passport as it will have to be surrendered upon departure.

A Yellow Fever vaccination is mandatory if you travel from Brazil to neighbouring countries (Colombia for example). You may not be allowed to board the plane without your Yellow Fever vaccination card.

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.

INTRODUCTORY MEETING: This tour begins at 19.00 of Day 1 in Belo Horizonte, and there will be a short introductory meeting at the first night's hotel. 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.

As Day 2 starts very early in the morning, you may wish to arrive a day early to acclimatise.

END OF TOUR: The tour will end at 15.00 at the Belo Horizonte airport. Please make sure all departing flights leave after 17.00 that day.

CURRENCY: The local currency is the Brazilian Real. 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 such as laundry, drinks, postcards, souvenirs, etc. ATMs are available at the São Paulo airport if you wish to obtain some reals, but we suggest you bring some US dollars in cash as well. For any major items of expenditure, such as books or souvenirs, payment by credit card is recommended. Visa, Mastercard and American Express are all widely accepted.

LANGUAGE: Portuguese is spoken throughout Brazil. Some of the larger hotels have one or more employees who speak English, but a Portuguese dictionary or phrasebook is useful and will probably add interest to your trip.

CLIMATE: We'll be in Minas Gerais roughly at the end of the dry season and the start of the rainy season, when song activity begins to peak. This usually means a good chance of an afternoon or evening rain or two, but it probably won't rain most days; having a poncho or travel umbrella in your daypack is still recommended, but trails will not be muddy enough to warrant rubber boots. As we'll be at lower elevations during the entire tour, it will be hot in the sun, with daily highs usually in the upper 80's F (30 °C). Night and early morning can be cool (around 50°F; 10°C).

ALTITUDE: Locations visited are at low elevations, from sea level to about 3,500 feet.

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PACE OF TOUR: As on most of our Neotropical tours, we have only 12 hours of sunlight for birding, thus we will be making early starts most days (05:00-06:00 a.m.) so as to be out in the field for the first few hours of the day when birds are most active. We will normally have very early breakfasts at our lodging before birding, rather than come back for a later breakfast. Caraça is the exception where breakfast is served starting at 07:30, so we'll be birding for a couple hours before breakfast our three mornings there. (If you require early morning coffee on these days, bring your own water heater and coffee or a thermal travel mug to fill with coffee the evening before.) There will be occasional optional owling excursions before or after dinner, and these will of course be longer days. Although we walk at a slow to moderate pace, we will bird for hours at a time on most mornings. Be aware that you may not be able to return to the lodge or vehicle on your own if you become tired. Most days at Canastra we will leave the hotel for the whole day, with a picnic lunch in the field. While at Caraça, we will return each day for lunch, venturing out into the field again in mid-afternoon. Participants should be able to walk at a slow to moderate pace for four to five hours at a time with frequent long stops (the longest trail is about 3 km), and a small travel stool is handy for those who find stand for long periods especially tiring. Most trails are flat and well maintained but may have numerous exposed roots and rocks. Three trails we walk are steep for sections ranging from 100-500 meters and require a moderate level of fitness.

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. Please consult with your doctor about the advisability of getting an oral typhoid series and a hepatitis A vaccination.

It is recommended that all travelers should be up to date on routine vaccinations. These include measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccine, varicella (chickenpox) vaccine, polio vaccine, and your yearly flu shot.

Brazil is quite clean, and we will be exploring places that have been visited by international tourists for some time. Malaria is basically non-existent in the areas we will visit, there having been no outbreaks in over 20 years. If you choose to take anti-malarial drugs, please remember that many must be initiated one or more weeks before the period of exposure and continued for several weeks after it concludes; there are some potential side effects to consider.

One can never completely escape the risk of parasites or fungal infections. We avoid tap water but filtered and bottled water are readily available. Gastrointestinal problems are always a possibility while traveling; you may want to bring Immodium or some other reliable anti-diarrhea medication. Finally, you may wish to bring a broad-spectrum antibiotic in case of stubborn bacterial infections.

Bring a good insect repellent for mosquitoes and chiggers (the main invertebrate nuisance in the neotropics). 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; ask your doctor for more information. Although pharmacies in Brazil are excellent and well-supplied they are very difficult to visit during 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.

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We do not often encounter snakes and take time to observe them whenever possible; most are not venomous, and venomous ones are not aggressive; we'll always be within driving distance of medical assistance in the case of an emergency.

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

ACCOMMODATION: We'll be staying in a good quality hotel in Belo Horizonte. The hotel in Sao Roque near Canastra is simple and is the best option in town. In Caraça we will stay in a monastery with comfortable rooms that accepts visitors (it is not a hotel, so rooms are not cleaned on a daily basis). At Cipo we stay in lovely cabins with plenty of birds in the garden. All rooms will have a private shower and toilet. AC is available everywhere but in Caraça (where the nights are cool, and AC will not be needed).

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry services are available at all our hotels except Caraça.

ELECTRICITY: Electricity varies in different parts of Brazil, usually being 110 volt and some 220 volt. Make sure your devices are dual voltage or bring a converter. In most places outlets accept North American-style parallel prongs (without ground), but some places like Caraça only accept rounded prongs. Newer construction in Brazil has a style of plug unique to the country, which is two rounded prongs with a slightly offset third (grounding) prong, all set in a recessed base. You should bring along a European-style (two round prongs) adaptor, which should work in these new plugs. You may find the following website helpful: <http://www.power-plugs-sockets.com>. Below are examples of the variety of outlets we will encounter.



FOOD: The food is varied and scrumptious throughout, typically served buffet style. A green salad (often with locally grown greens), rice, and beans are standard fare, and the main dishes, sides, and desserts vary continually.

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, 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.

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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 of the rooms where we stay.

INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS: WiFi is available at all our accommodation (sometimes slow).

CLOTHING: Comfortable field clothes and shoes are essential. Please avoid bright whites and loud colours for your field clothing.

Long-sleeved fast-drying microfibre shirts	Sun hat
Comfortable, sturdy footwear for trail walking	Short-sleeved shirts
Light shoes (for around the hotels)	Lightweight sweater / fleece
Shorts (for around the lodges)	
Long trousers for the field, preferably light cotton or a breathable, quick-drying fabric	
Folding umbrella and/or poncho (very useful in case of a tropical downpour)	

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS: Please bring the following:

Notebook and pencil	Sunscreen
Alarm clock	Water bottle
Small day pack/rucksack	Travel clothesline
Small overnight bag	Wrist watch
Torch or head torch plus spare batteries	Pocket knife
Rubber flip-flops for showers	Cool-water laundry soap
Ear plugs (if you are a light sleeper)	Small, collapsible travel stool
Wash cloth (not provided by some hotels)	Insect repellent
Plastic bags (rain protection for optical equipment)	Personal medication

Optional: Telescope & tripod (recommended if you have them), 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
Field guide, reference books, maps	Spot-light
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.

The checked-luggage weight limit on our internal flight is 23 kg (50 lbs), and carry-on is limited to 5 kg; this is variably enforced, so be prepared. Currently, Brazil does not allow tripods in any carry-on luggage on any internal flight.

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PHOTOGRAPHY: Although there will be occasions when bird photography is possible, a birdwatching tour is not normally the best means of pursuing this aim. If you are a serious photographer, please contact us for further information about photographic possibilities. It may be difficult to recharge batteries with limited electricity so be sure to bring enough to last all week and remember to bring as many memory cards as you think you may need. Camera equipment should be packed in moisture- and dust-proof bags, as a precaution. 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: We will use the same minibus the whole tour. The day we will visit the Canastra plateau we will use several 4x4 vehicles. Some roads in Canastra may be quite bumpy; anyone susceptible to motion sickness should bring an appropriate remedy. Road can also be very dusty in Canastra, and you should have protective coverings for cameras, lenses and binoculars. The tour includes two long travelling days, so bring a book or music to enjoy these drives.

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:

Birds:

Erize, F., J. R. R. Mata and M. Rumboll. 2006. *Birds of South America: Non-Passerines: Rheas to Woodpeckers*. Princeton. Very helpful with excellent illustrations, and a superbly compact size but uses confusing, antiquated nomenclature and taxonomy.

Ridgely, R. S., Gwynne, J. A., Tudor, G. and M. Argel. 2016. *Birds of Brazil, the Atlantic Forest of Southeast Brazil*. Wildlife Conservation Society. Excellent plates and updated range maps. **The currently recommended field guide for the trip.**

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Ridgely, R. S. and G. Tudor. 2009. *Field Guide to the Songbirds of South America*. University of Texas Press, Austin. Clearly too big to be considered a field guide, it is still more portable than and does update and picture more species than the large-two volume hard-bound set that was published in the 1990's.

van Perlo, Ber. 2009. *A Field Guide to the Birds of Brazil*. Oxford University Press. A good and exhaustive field guide for the all country. An eBook form is available but not recommended as the formatting makes it difficult and slow; the newer smartphone app is a big improvement however, and is recommended if you use apps, but it does not include any taxonomic updates.

Mammals:

Emmons, Louise H. and Francois Feer. 1997. *Neotropical Rainforest Mammals - A Field Guide*. Second edition. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London. Though out-of-date, a field-guide-sized book with good colour plates. **Recommended.**

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

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, please contact us.