



## TOUR INFORMATION FOR MEXICO: SAN BLAS

**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.

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.

**PUERTO VALLARTA AIRPORT PICK-UP TIMES:** There will be two pick-ups at the Puerto Vallarta Airport on Day 1: 15:00 and 17:00. These may be adjusted if the participants' arrival times warrant.

Note: Because the tour starts with a 19:00 meeting and dinner in the evening of Day 1 of the tour, you may be tempted by convenient flights arriving in Puerto Vallarta late in the evening. If you elect to arrive late in the evening of Day 1, we want you to be aware that the birding day will start early on Day 2; you may only get a few hours' sleep that night. If you can't arrive before early evening, you may want to consider arriving a day early; we would be happy to make hotel arrangements for you.

If you plan to arrive later than 18:00 on Day 1 of the tour or if you plan to arrive a day or two in advance of the tour, you should be prepared to take a taxi to the hotel (a five-minute ride costing [January 2019] about 260 pesos (about USD \$15, depending on the exchange rate). After you exit customs and immigration you pass through an area with people trying to sell timeshares and offering free drinks and then exit to the area where people meet incoming passengers, go directly to the official taxi booths (there are two or three companies) opposite where you exit. Please follow this procedure and do not take taxis in any other way. The people there speak English and will sell you a ticket for the zone to which you are traveling (Hotel Hacienda Buenaventura). You then go outside to the official taxi stands and take a taxi, using your ticket. Should you wish to tip, 10% is sufficient.

**INTRODUCTORY MEETING:** There will be an introductory meeting at about 19:00 on Day 1 of the tour. 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 by late afternoon so that you can be present at the introductory meeting.

**DEPARTURE DATE:** The tour ends with return to the Puerto Vallarta airport in early afternoon on the last day. Because we drive from San Blas to the airport on the last morning (a three-hour drive, with a one-hour time change - it's an hour later in Puerto Vallarta than in San Blas) please try to find a flight leaving at 14:00. or later so that our departure from San Blas won't be too early!

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**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. Often it is best to change as much as you think you will need at start of the trip. The advent of ATMs means that traveller's cheques are becoming obsolete and cash or an ATM card is the best way to obtain currency.

**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:** San Blas is in the tropical lowlands, so the climate is usually warm to hot (70°s to 80°s F) and variably humid, but early and late in the day it can be cooler on boat trips (50°s F and humid). This is the dry season though, so rain is unusual - but it always best to bring a small umbrella or poncho, just in case. The early morning at Cerro de San Juan can be cool enough (40°s F, rarely lower) for a jacket and light gloves but things soon become warm to hot (60°s to 70°s F).

**ALTITUDE:** We reach about 10,000 feet on the slopes of the volcanoes. We'll move slowly at higher elevations.

**PACE OF THE TOUR:** As with all tours in the tropics, we'll try to be in the field around dawn which means 06:30. Most birding sites are within 5 minutes' walk to 30 minutes' drive of our hotel in San Blas, where we'll have buffet breakfasts before we leave in the mornings. The first morning at Puerto Vallarta we'll be in the field for a few hours before breakfast (coffee should be available at the hotel). We'll return to have a hot brunch before packing the minibus and heading to San Blas. Lunches will be at the hotel restaurant except for one or two picnic lunches. Dinners will be at the hotel which, in the opinion of many, has some of the best food in all of Mexico.

When birding in and around San Blas, we'll be on trails and roads that are mostly flat and present no particular problem; one uphill cobbled road is steep in places though, and we take our time and rest when necessary. On a couple of days, we have boat trips on the river for up to 5 hours. Most days we're in the field for 5-6 hours (birding, walking slowly, resting when necessary) before returning for lunch, a siesta and/or swim in the pool, and an afternoon birding near the town. The exception is an all-day trip to some pine-oak forest at 5000 feet elevation on Cerro de San Juan, about an hour's drive from San Blas. We'll return in time to rest and shower before dinner.

**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 is further recommended that most travellers have protection against Hepatitis A and Typhoid.

A Yellow Fever vaccination certificate is not required to enter Mexico. Click here for further information: [http://travelhealthpro.org.uk/country/147/mexico#Vaccine\\_recommendations](http://travelhealthpro.org.uk/country/147/mexico#Vaccine_recommendations)

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Malaria: It is recommended that travellers to the Mexican state of Nayarit (where San Blas is) are at risk for malaria. Note that in the opinion of our hotel owners, there have been no recent cases of malaria in San Blas, however please contact your doctor for further information. 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>

Insects are sometimes present and 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.

Miscellaneous: 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 30 SPF rating.

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](http://www.masta-travel-health.com)

**ACCOMMODATION:** The first night we stay in the Hotel Hacienda Buenaventura, a resort hotel by the beach in Puerto Vallarta which has all the usual tourist facilities, but not an elevator. In San Blas we stay at the family-run Garza Canela Hotel, which has many years catering to birding groups and has a justly famous restaurant, friendly and helpful staff, an open-air pool, and gift shop. The rooms are spacious and very comfortable with air conditioning and a ceiling fan, television, and Wi-Fi, but no phone. Phone calls can be made and faxes sent from the front office during business hours and into the evening, after which time we should be asleep. The beach and town square are about 10 minutes' walk in opposite directions from the hotel.

**LAUNDRY SERVICE:** Laundry service is available at our hotel in San Blas.

**ELECTRICITY:** Electrical current is the same as in the US (110v, AC60HZ) but the configuration of electrical sockets varies throughout the country and some are 2-prong not 3-prong. An international travel plug is useful and can be bought in most airport departure lounges. You may find the following website helpful: <http://www.powerplugs-sockets.com>.

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**FOOD:** Many restaurants offer set menus and are unable to accommodate all special requests within a group. Thus, clients 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.

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 the hotel during business hours and into the evening.

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.

### **CLOTHING:**

Light-weight sweater	Wind-proof jacket
Light-weight trousers	Sun hat
Walking, or hiking boots (if ankle support is needed)	Light-weight raincoat

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

Notebook and pencil	Alarm clock
Small rucksack or day pack	Insect repellent
Torch with spare batteries	Sunglasses and sun screen
Water bottle or canteen	Travel clothesline
Folding umbrella (just in case)	Laundry soap
Ear plugs (good idea if you are a light sleeper)	Universal sink plug
Personal medication	

**Optional:** Telescope and 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	Maps
Field library	First Aid Kit
Laser pointer	Play-back equipment

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

**TRANSPORT:** We will be travelling by 12-passenger minibus. The leader will arrange a seating rotation. Participants should be able to ride in any seat in tour vehicles.

**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.

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY:** There are many general books on travel in Mexico, and reading one of them will certainly enhance your enjoyment of the trip. One of the best is Fodor's Guide to Mexico, published by David McKay and edited by Fisher, Brown et al. Another very pleasant travel book about Mexico is Kate Simon's *Mexico: Places and Pleasures*, published by Thomas Crowell, 1979. There are several field guides covering Mexican birds and other natural history:

Glassberg, Jeffrey. 2007. *A Swift Guide to the Butterflies of Mexico and Central America*. Sunstreak Books, [www.sunstreakbooks.com](http://www.sunstreakbooks.com).

Howell, Steve N.G. and Sophie Webb. 1995. *A Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America*. Oxford University Press. **Recommended.**

Sibley, David Allen. 2003. *The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western North America*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York. A regional guide containing the same concise and accurate illustrations and information as in the more comprehensive guide though smaller and much easier to carry. **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.