

TOP 10 THINGS YOU MUST TAKE ON YOUR NEXT GUIDED BIRDING TOUR



So, you've decided to take the plunge and are signed up for a guided birding tour (hopefully it's one with Birding by Bus!). You've paid the deposit, bought your flights, and have diligently studied the birds of the region. Now it's just a few days before the tour is slated to begin, and you need to pack your gear. What should be on your list as the highest priority items for the tour?

While we can't possibly come up with every single thing you'll need in your suitcase or backpack, there are a handful of indispensable items that we've learned are particularly useful for tour guests. Your guide will likely have a laser pointer and a speaker for playbacks, so you can leave yours at home. The guide should also have a spotting scope to share, but if you have your own and enjoy scoping birds beyond a brief look, consider bringing it.

I. Refillable Water Bottle

Staying hydrated while on a birding tour is important. You'll want to be drinking plenty of water, especially if you're birding in the tropics where it's hot, or at high altitudes (above 5,000') where your body works harder to breathe and therefore loses more water.

Choosing a reusable water bottle over disposable plastic bottles is clearly better for the environment in numerous ways. Refillable bottles require less fossil fuels to produce, they won't pack landfills, and it will save you tons of money! When choosing a reusable water bottle, find one that is easy to clean, strong enough not to bend or break, is lightweight, and has a good seal so water won't leak all over your stuff. It can even double as something of a fashion accessory — find one in your favorite color and we'll even help you decorate it with a new Birding by Bus sticker.



II. Lens Cloth

A simple and small accessory that can vastly improve your view of the birds when your lenses get smudged or fogged. Which lenses, you ask? Well, it could be your binoculars that need a cleaning, a spotting scope, your camera lens, or even eyewear. Keep all your glass sparkling clean for the best possible views and spectacular photos of those beautiful birds. First brush or blow away any loose dirt, and then use a soft lint-free cloth or a high quality microfiber cloth to gently rub the lenses in a circular motion. We might cringe if we see you rubbing your expensive binocular lenses with your t-shirt.

III. Rain Jacket



You just never know when a storm is going to blow in, so a light waterproof rain jacket is always good to have close at hand. Look for one that that compacts neatly into a tiny bundle and easily fits into your day pack. A thin layer like this can also make for a good windbreaker if the wind kicks up or you're riding in a boat or open-top vehicle. If the jacket isn't brand new, consider freshening up its ability to repel water with a new coat of waterproofing spray.



IV. Small Flashlight or Headlamp

A compact bright LED flashlight will come in handy on your birding tour. Not for shining at the birds (your guide will handle that), but for getting yourself around in dimly lit areas before sunrise and after dark. They can also be useful for doing bird checklists in the dark!

V. Waterproof Sandals

Waterproof sandals are really handy for birding in boats, on beaches, and even for casually walking around town when you're not in the field. You'll probably want to air your feet out in comfortable sandals while lounging around your hotel room or hanging around in eco-lodges, especially if your hiking boots or trail shoes get wet. They can be worn comfortably in hot climates, or paired with a wool sock in colder climates. Sandals that dry quickly are ideal. A fully waterproof and quick-drying walking sandal that doubles as a shower shoe can be especially useful if you don't like going barefoot in a hotel shower. While for most birding on trails you'll want either a comfortable trail shoe, light hiking boot, or possibly even a knee-high rubber boot (depending on the type of habitats covered), a sandal is still a great addition for your trip. We don't leave home without our Birkenstock Arizona Essential sandals.

VI. Hat with a Brim



Hats are a must and were created to provide protection from the elements. While birding, the sun could be beating down on you for long periods of time. Look for a hat with a wide brim that helps keep the sun off your face — whether it's a baseball cap, a safari or bucket hat, or even a straw sun hat. If it will rain a lot where you're headed, consider a hat that's quick drying or waterproof. Simply re-applying sunscreen isn't enough for complete protection from the effects of direct sunlight. So grab your hat and your buff (see item #7 below) to protect your eyes and skin while also preventing your body from overheating.



VIII. Carabiner

A carabiner is a versatile multi-purpose shackle that can serve many a purpose during a birding tour. It's hard to predict exactly what you'll need one for, but chances are that you'll have a use for one at some point. It's essentially a metal loop with a spring-loaded gate, and they come in many different shapes and styles. The kind you'll want need not be the heavy-duty type that's used for mountaineering - go with something light not intended for climbing. What can you do with your carabiner? Clip your water bottle to your belt or backpack, use as a keychain, or hang laundry, your backpack, or wet shoes to dry. Also good to lock your backpack zippers, secure a hammock, or fix a bag strap — you just never know when you might need it!

A buff, or neck gaiter, is an item of clothing worn on the neck or head that might really be the best invention since sliced bread. A

VII. Buff (Neck Gaiter)

short closed tube of fabric, it's one of the most versatile pieces of clothing, and is useful outdoors both in hot and cold climates. It's meant to protect your neck and face from the sun or from cold conditions. While birding on warm, sunny days, (in addition to applying sunscreen, which you should also bring!) use a buff as protection from getting sunburned. On cold days, they shield one's neck and face from getting cold and windburned. Buffs can be used to cover your neck, face, ears, head, or some combination thereof. We've used them to shield our mouths from breathing in dust and debris while birding on dusty roads, as a face covering for Covid-19, and even pulled up behind the head to help prevent our caps from blowing away on a windy day. They can be worn in a hundred different ways and come in many different colors, patterns, and fabrics. Make a fashion statement and choose one that best reflects your own personal style!

IX. Smartphone App Bird Field Guide

There's nothing as satisfying as flipping through the pages of a bird field guide. While hard copy field guides are great reference tools, they can be bulky and heavy to carry in the field. Technological advances have converted paper field guides into apps for your smartphone. Digital birding apps take up no more space than your cell phone, which you're probably already carrying in your pocket anyway. Many field guide apps also have an audio library of bird sounds, going beyond the visual contents of the paper version. We still use and enjoy paper field guides, but tend to leave them at home or in the hotel room, while utilizing smartphone apps while actually in the field.

Before your trip, do some research on the best smartphone apps that feature the birds of the region you're traveling to.

Tip: Check out Merlin Bird ID by Cornell.

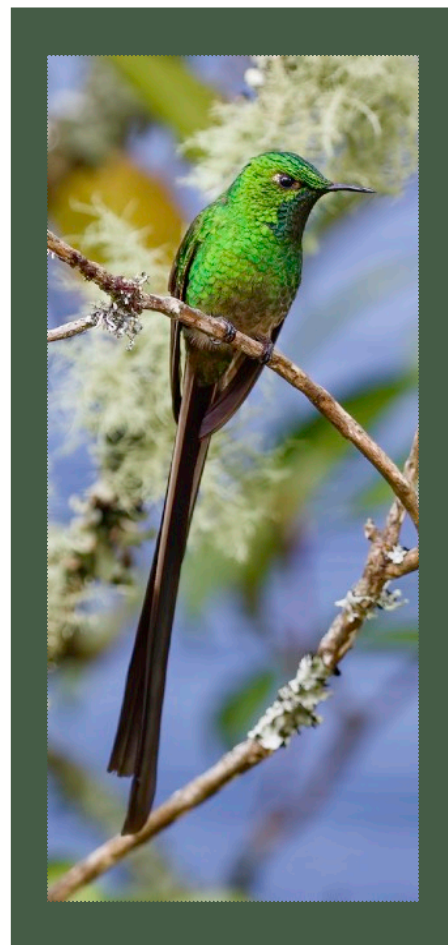


X. Electrolyte Tablets



Hydration is super important. If you're out birding, chances are you're being physically active and even spending some time in full sun. Drinking water on the birding trails is key to avoiding dehydration, but sometimes water is not enough. When you sweat, you lose electrolytes like sodium, potassium, magnesium, and calcium, which help control your fluid balance and regulate blood pressure. Mid-afternoon headaches, queasiness, or feeling lethargic— all of these annoying conditions can often be attributed to dehydration. If any of these things are issues for you, electrolyte tablets may help.

The best electrolyte tablets can either be swallowed in capsule-form or dissolved into water for a fizzy, refreshing drink. An advantage of tablet supplements over sports drinks is that they are often sugar and calorie-free. In addition to electrolytes, some tablets also include ingredients like caffeine to give you another extra boost. You may or may not want to include caffeine, so look carefully before you buy. Adding a good electrolyte tablet to your water bottle could go a long way toward keeping you hydrated, happy, and finding more birds!



GOES WITHOUT SAYING: Binoculars

Don't forget your own "binocs", "bins", or "binos" — a must-have on any birding tour!

QUOTE OF THE DAY:

"Inside us all waiting patiently, sits a tiny little adventurous bird."



BONUS TIP: Day Pack

A small backpack or waist pack goes a long way in keeping essential items on you in the field. Where else you gonna put that water bottle, rain jacket, and snacks?

DREAM, DISCOVER, BIRD ON!