



Photo: Common Kingfisher, by Pedro Marques

12 Days Birds & Culture Programme in Southern Portugal (Group Tour)

Lisbon Estuaries, Alentejo & Algarve

(Group size: Maximum 7 Participants)

Birds & Nature Tours Portugal

Overview

Portugal offers a fantastic diversity of habitats and consequently of birds in a relatively small area, so the birding programmes designed by Birds & Nature Tours Portugal enable you to visit several species rich areas without needing to travel long distances.

In practical terms, you will find within half an hour's drive from Lisbon city centre and its International Airport the Tagus Estuary and the Sado Estuary Nature Reserves. These two remarkable protected wetland areas have extensive bird lists that include Greater Flamingo, White Stork, Eurasian

Spoonbill, Glossy Ibis, Squacco and Purple Herons, Booted Eagle, Black-winged Kite, Little Bustard, Collared Pratincole, Pallid Swift, Bluethroat, Dartford, Savi's and Melodious Warblers, Iberian Chiffchaff, Iberian Grey and Woodchat Shrikes, Spotless Starling, Rock Sparrow, European Serin, Cirl Bunting and an excellent selection of ducks, waders, gulls and terns.

A further one hour's drive takes you to complementary biotopes and consequently new bird species in the Alentejo. Here, you will visit both the rolling plains of Castro Verde (the home of Great Bustard, Common Crane, Red Kite, Montagu's Harrier, Lesser Kestrel, Stone Curlew, Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Great Spotted Cuckoo, European Roller, Calandra Lark, Tawny Pipit, Rufous Bush Robin, etc...) and the bluffs and hills of the Guadiana Valley Natural Park, noted for species like Black Stork, Iberian Imperial, Golden and Bonelli's Eagles, Eurasian Black and Griffon Vultures, Turtle Dove, Eurasian Eagle Owl, White-rumped Swift, Iberian Green Woodpecker, Eurasian Crag Martin, Red-rumped Swallow, Black-eared Wheatear, Blue Rock Thrush, Golden Oriole, Spanish Sparrow, Hawfinch and Rock Bunting.

After exploring these Alentejo biotopes, another short 45-minute drive takes you to the Algarve, a region rich in protected wetland areas situated on a major fly-way for migrants from Africa and notable in particular for waders and passerines. Some of the places you will visit, namely the Ria Formosa Natural Park and the Castro Marim Nature Reserve, are unique in Portugal as sites for rare and highly localised species, like Audouin's and Slender-billed Gulls and Lesser Short-toed Lark. These are also excellent spots for getting close views of scarce species like Little Bittern and Purple Swamphen. Little Owl, Red-necked Nightjar, Eurasian Hoopoe, Common Kingfisher, European Bee-eater, Sardinian and Spectacled Warblers and Iberian Magpie are particularly abundant here. The cliffs and shore at Cape St. Vincent should provide an excellent opportunity for participants to see a wide range of sea bird species.

All this birding activity is combined with visits to some of the most interesting historical and cultural sites of Portugal in Évora, Mértola, Sagres and Lisbon. In fact, the country's rich cultural heritage is on display throughout the whole of our route. At various times we'll be joined by qualified historians who will guide us through the historic districts of Évora, Mértola and Lisbon, where we'll wander along winding streets, through historic plazas and squares en route to an array of castles, cathedrals, museums, Roman ruins, and promenades. We'll have numerous opportunities to sample Portugal's many culinary delights and great wines, including one wine tasting event.

Itinerary

Day 1 – Transfer from Lisbon Airport (or from your Lisbon hotel). Travel to Alcochete. Visit several areas and a variety of habitats within the Tagus Estuary Nature Reserve, including the inter-tidal mudflats and salt marshes of Hortas, the salt pans of Atalaya, Ribeira das Enguias and Samouco and the Barroca d’Alva rice fields and pastures. Overnight stay at the Hotel Quinta da Praia das Fontes, in Alcochete (or equivalent).

Day 2 – Visit other interesting sites and habitats in the Tagus Estuary Nature Reserve, including the open fields, rice fields, reed beds, lagoons, inter-tidal mudflats and salt marshes of the Ponta da Erva area. During the breeding season, we visit a heronry on the river Tagus. Wine tasting at Companhia das Lezírias. Overnight stay at the Hotel Quinta da Praia das Fontes (or equivalent).

Day 3 – Visit the cork oak woodlands of Pancas (Tagus estuary). Visit the Sado Estuary Nature Reserve (northern bank), namely the salt pans, inter-tidal mudflats and salt marshes of Mitrena, Mourisca and Zambujal. Overnight stay at the Hotel Quinta da Praia das Fontes (or equivalent).

Day 4 – Travel to Mértola, in the Alentejo region. Visit the city of Évora, including the main monuments and the Almedres cromlech. Visit the great Castro Verde rolling plains. Overnight stay at the Hotel Museu, in Mértola (or equivalent).

Day 5 – Visit the bluffs and hills of the Guadiana Valley Natural Park, including the Mértola, Mina de São Domingos and Alcaria Ruiva areas. Overnight stay at the Hotel Museu (or equivalent).

Day 6 – Visit other interesting areas of the great Castro Verde rolling plains. Overnight stay at the Hotel Museu (or equivalent).

Day 7 – Visit the town of Mértola, including the main museums and archaeological sites. Visit other interesting areas of the Guadiana valley. Overnight stay at the Hotel Museu (or equivalent).

Day 8 – Travel to Tavira, in the Algarve region. Visit the complex of canals, saline flats and salt pans of the Castro Marim Nature Reserve and of the Tavira area (Ria Formosa Natural Park). Overnight stay at the Hotel Vila Galé Albacora, in Tavira (or equivalent).

Day 9 – Visit several habitats including dunes, open water, inter-tidal mudflats, salt marshes, salt pans, reed beds, lagoons and pine woods in other areas of the Ria Formosa Natural Park (Olhão, Quinta do Lago and Ludo). Overnight stay at the Hotel Vila Galé Albacora (or equivalent).

Day 10 – Visit the Sagres and the Cape St. Vincent regions. Birding at the cliffs and sea shore. During the migration period, this area offers abundant opportunities to observe migrating birds. Visit the local fortress. Visit the Salgados lagoon. Overnight stay at the Hotel Vila Galé Albacora (or equivalent).

Day 11 – Return to Lisbon, visiting on the way the inter-tidal mudflats, salt marshes and rice fields of Comporta and Carrasqueira (Sado Estuary Nature Reserve). Overnight stay at the Hotel Zenit, in Lisbon (or equivalent).

Day 12 – Visit the city of Lisbon, including the main squares and avenues, the Baixa (downtown area), some of the hilltop districts, the Castle of São Jorge, the cathedral and, in Belém (the historic area from which the Portuguese caravels departed to discover the world), the Monument to the Discoveries and two UNESCO World Heritage Sites: the beautiful Tower of Belém and the Jerónimos Monastery. Overnight stay at the Hotel Zenit (or equivalent). End of programme.

Price

3.350 Euros per person. Price includes guide fees (including professional historian guides in Évora, Mértola and Lisbon), transfer from the airport/hotel, ground transport (in air-conditioned vehicles), accommodation (including breakfast), meals (lunches in local cafes and dinners in local restaurants, including quality wine at dinner), one wine tasting at a wine cellar, bottled water throughout the tour, free use of optical equipment (quality binoculars and telescopes) and field guides, bird list, entrance fees to private or protected areas, entrance fees to museums and historical and cultural sites, a contribution of 60 Euros to our Conservation Project in the Guadiana Valley Natural Park (Portugal), participant's accident insurance and VAT. Single supplement: 450 Euros. Not included are flights and items of a personal nature.

Note

The tours start and end in Lisbon. If you need accommodation for the nights before and/or after the tour, we are happy to help. We suggest you discuss your flight details with us before booking your flights. These are small group tours with a maximum of 7 participants. We guarantee that any tour will run for 2 people or more.

For enquiries, please contact us:

E-mail: booking@birds.pt

Phone: (00351) 913 299 990
www.birds.pt