



TROPICAL BIRDING TOURS

Always putting your safety at the center of the birding experience

Version: April 09, 2021. We will update this document periodically based on current public health protocols.

Guidelines for Tropical Birding Tours in the time of Covid-19

TROPICAL BIRDING TOURS and their staff will do everything they can to adhere to the following suggestions and recommendations and specifically the ATTA health and safety guidelines developed in collaboration with the Cleveland Clinic. These are in line with international travel industry standards. However, the laws of the country we operate our tours in will always take precedent. In these unpredictable times, local laws can change at short notice, and we will always adhere to the latest recommendations.

PLEASE NOTE: The **TROPICAL BIRDING** tour leader has the ultimate authority on the tour and will decide what protocols must be followed on the ground based on the latest, up-to-date international information and local guidelines and laws.

Is BIRDING/NATURE/OUTDOOR TOURISM safer than other forms of tourism?

Yes. An important distinction must be made between different types of tourism, and the different situations associated with them. TROPICAL BIRDING run tours for birding, nature photography, and natural history. By and large TROPICAL BIRDING'S tours are by their very nature, outdoors-based tourism, which is considerably safer than regular tourism. Outdoor activities are advised to improve mental health and enjoyment. Our group sizes are much smaller than mainstream tourism, and our primary objective is to stay away from crowds and other people. We were doing this long before Covid, and nothing has changed. Our tours focus on areas of natural beauty, and this often means being away from people. Thus, stepping back into nature-based tourism is far less intimidating, and safer than all other forms of traditional tourism. For example, a city tour of London's museums may be considered unsafe, but a trip to an isolated mountain lodge in the cloudforest of Ecuador, would arguably be safer than many home activities in western cities such as shopping or going to a gas station. Tropical Birding has been running Covid "safety tours" since June 2020, and so far without any known Covid infections among staff and participants.



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Bubble Up, Bird Safe, Bird Happy....

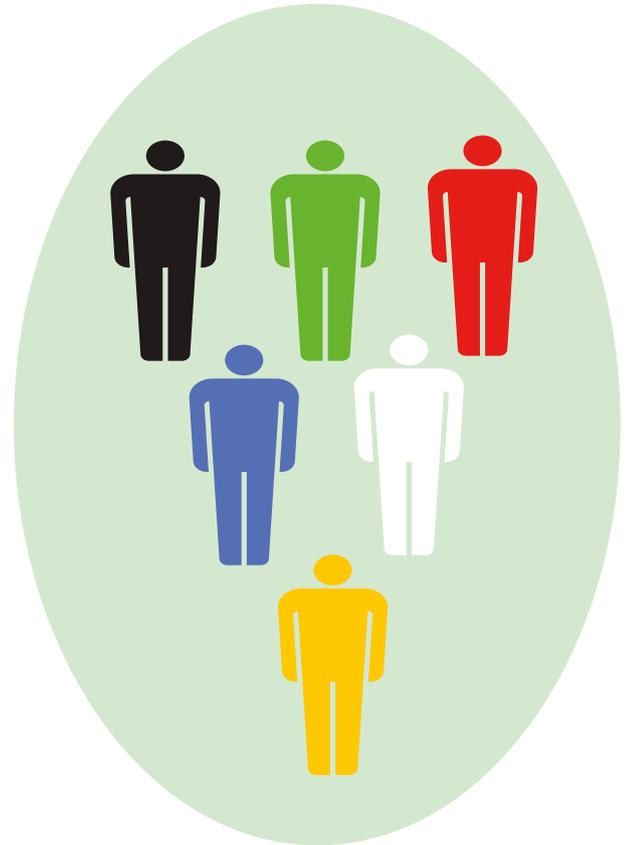
What is BIRDING in a BUBBLE?

Now that there are established international standards for Covid-negative tests before and at the end of a tour (primarily for international flights and immigration protocols), the TROPICAL BIRDING tour group will form a “bubble” on meeting at the start of the tour. As everyone has recently tested negative, and because socially distancing in a birding group is essentially impossible, the tour will be conducted in a normal social setting. This affords some additional comfort within the group and reduces the need for the group to social distance and wear masks, but only WHEN WE ARE WITHIN OUR OWN GROUP TOUR BUBBLE. Whenever a short-term guide joins the group, or we interact with lodge staff, or the group is in an area where other groups are present, a safety-first mentality will be adopted, with all persons in the group required to wear masks, except when eating/-drinking.

Please refrain from some in-past-times social activities like taking photos for other visitors, showing your back-of-the-camera shots to friendly strangers, etc.

Are MASKS mandatory on TROPICAL BIRDING tours?

Yes. While masks, which need to be brought from home, are a necessary part of tour participants personal field kit for the foreseeable future, this does not mean they will be worn during every tour setting, 24 hours a day. The TB tour leader will outline this clearly at the start of the tour, which will highlight local mask laws, and where masks may not be required (e.g., on a remote mountain trail, in the open, where there are no other groups/people present). For your own and others safety, we recommend mask wearing at all times, but when it's only our bubble, the masks may be removed if approved by your tour leader. Ultimately, your tour leader will be the arbiter of such decisions



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PLEASE NOTE: TROPICAL BIRDING does not supply surgical masks for tour participants, as there are many variations on these, and different people have their own personal tastes, and tour participants will need a personal supply during their journey, and usage differs between different people. The TROPICAL BIRDING guide will carry a limited number of spares, in case of emergency only. However, TROPICAL BIRDING requires all participants to carry with them, from their home, a set of masks, of a standard accepted internationally for protection. If you need guidance on mask types, please view WHO or CDC guidelines online. PLEASE ENSURE YOU HAVE PLENTY OF MASKS AND SPARES FOR THE DURATION OF THE TRIP. This should be at a minimum, one mask per day, per person.

Are GLOVES mandatory on TROPICAL BIRDING tours?

No. In line with supporting medical advice, regular washing and sanitizing of hands is suggested, and gloves are not needed/required, if washing is followed regularly. In addition, your own supply of hand sanitizer can be used regularly thus reducing the need for gloves.

What are the COVID TESTING/VACCINATION REQUIREMENTS to be able to book a TROPICAL BIRDING tour?

In order to join a Tropical Birding tour, you must meet one of the following two requirements:

Be fully vaccinated by the time the tour starts. “Fully vaccinated” means that you have received two doses of a two-dose vaccine (such as Moderna and Pfizer), and it has been at least two weeks since the second dose OR you have received a single-dose vaccine (such as Johnson & Johnson) and it has been at least two weeks since you received it.

Be unvaccinated but agree to get tested for Covid with a PCR test within 96 hours of the start of the tour. Results must be sent to Tropical Birding, and a positive test result will unfortunately exclude you from going on the tour.

Note that local laws in the tour destination and/or your home country may mandate additional testing regardless of your vaccination status. Our office staff will inform you of any requirements at your destination, but you are responsible for being aware of any requirements of your home country. If you will need a test to return home, our office staff can help organize this. While TROPICAL BIRDING will always endeavor to minimize disruption of the tour itinerary as a result of the need for testing, this may sometimes be unavoidable. For example, on some Ecuador tours it is possible to get tested on site, at specific lodges, while in other destinations it may be necessary to travel to a town specifically to do so, slightly affecting the originally planned tour itinerary. We are trying to keep the disruptions to an absolute minimum.



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As PCR-test prices vary greatly, not only between countries but also within countries, the fee for the Covid test taken during the tour, **is not included in the tour fee**. These fees change unpredictably, making it difficult to estimate without overcharging the participant. This personal expense often needs to be paid in cash. You will be notified of the cost for this by the appropriate Tropical Birding tour manager. Keep in mind that even then, prices may fluctuate depending on supply and demand, so bring some extra cash including small bills to minimize hassles.

PERSONAL HAND SANITIZER & CLEANSING PRODUCTS

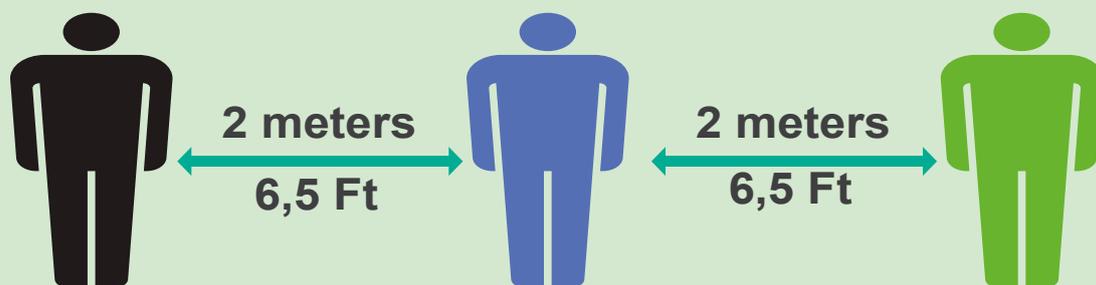
It is essential that ALL participants bring with them plentiful personal cleaning products, specifically hand sanitizer and alcohol-based, germ-cleaning products for their own use. These should be kept as your own personal supply and not shared with others in the group.

In addition to your own supply, TROPICAL BIRDING, will provide hand sanitizer within the busses or other transport. Your personal sanitiser is best kept for personal use only and not shared with others. Whenever motor vehicles are used (cars, buses and vans), a set of sanitizer will come with vehicle for group use.



SAFE AND SENSIBLE SOCIAL DISTANCING

TROPICAL BIRDING always recommends safe, social distancing throughout, when in the company of anyone OUTSIDE of the tour bubble. The standard guideline for this has become a minimum of 2 meters/6.5ft. This can be challenging or impossible in some situations. For example, when sharing a small forest blind, and a local guide is also present. In these situations, we will try and do this wherever we can.



For example, there are places on tours where it is traditional for people to take selfies and scenery shots, and sometimes these are well-established tourist sites, where other visitors gather too (e.g., Angkor Wat in Cambodia, Iguazu Falls in Brazil). In these circumstances, we would insist on group patience, and to take your time until there is a gap in the number of people present, and then only take photo when safe distancing can be practiced. While TROPICAL BIRDING tries to avoid crowded sites, this may not always possible in some areas.

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Does TROPICAL BIRDING have a vehicle sterilizing protocol?

Yes. If the guide is also the driver for the tour, then the rental/personal vehicle will be sanitized before the tour safety bubble meets for the first time, and periodically thereafter. This will be performed by wipes or spray, such as Lysol, or similar. As the tour will operate in a safety bubble, with generally no other people getting in or out of the vehicle bubble, this does not need to be done incessantly, but it will be undertaken regularly. This does not require a “deep clean”, which is not always possible due to time constraints, and location. In the case of tours where a driver is provided by an authorised local transport company, the licensed drivers will provide the cleaning and care of the vehicle in accordance with local tourism guidelines.

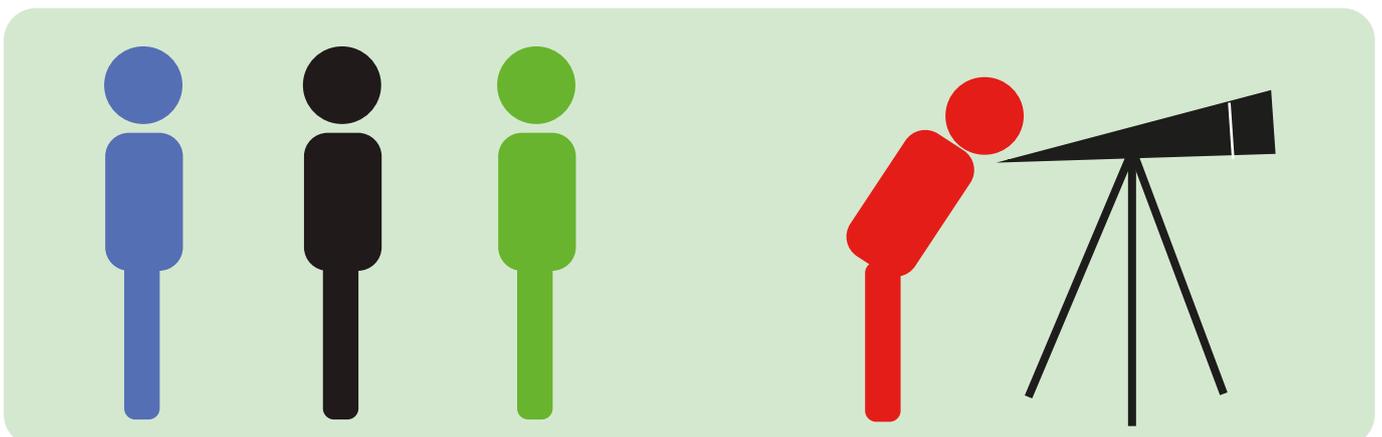


Can I cough during a TROPICAL BIRDING tour?

Yes. Not every cough is a bad cough! We NEED to cough at times, it is a natural and necessary human behaviour. The only thing TROPICAL BIRDING ask of you, is that when you do so, please follow good “cough etiquette”, i.e., try to cough away from the group, and cover your mouth with your arm, coughing into the inside of your elbow. Please also let the guide (and group) know if you have an existing condition with a cough, at the start of the tour.

Do TROPICAL BIRDING still provide GROUP SPOTTING SCOPES?

Yes. On TROPICAL BIRDING “Birding”, and “Birding with a Camera” tours (but not photo tours), the guide will have a top brand spotting telescope for group use. The body of this will be kept clean. However, strong, high alcohol content, cleaning products are damaging to the extremely expensive optical coatings, which feature on these products, and therefore cannot be used on them. Therefore, please be aware that the eyepiece and objective lenses cannot be cleaned with traditional sanitizer products, as your hands can be. It is not possible/practical to have more than one spotting scope per group, and so if you would prefer not to use a “group scope” or would like scope views without using the group scope, please bring your own personal scope with you from home. Other group members (who do not have a personal scope) should understand that a personal, participant-owned scope, is NOT for group use, but reserved for the owner’s personal use, unlike the guide’s group scope. It should be noted that scopes are not necessary on many of our tours, so we are not suggesting every participant now owns and brings individual spotting scopes!



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Who is responsible for any COSTS RELATING TO COVID?

The tour participant, and NOT TROPICAL BIRDING TOURS.

ANY AND ALL costs arising from any Covid-19-related issues are NOT included in the TROPICAL BIRDING tour fee, and the individual tour participant is responsible for all of these payments. These include, but are not restricted to, payment for Covid treatment/medical fees on tour, transport and accommodation in case of quarantine, and the costs of any Covid tests needed for the tour, either before, during, or after the tour. Tropical Birding will facilitate all arrangements in terms of ensuring that participants are safe and given rapid access to the best locally available medical treatment, but costs are to be borne by the participant.

Should participants get personal MEDICAL INSURANCE for the tour?

Yes. It is strongly recommended that all participants joining a TROPICAL BIRDING* tour come on tour with personal health insurance that covers any costs relating to Covid (or any other medical issues). Please find and buy the very best insurance with the most cover and the fewest exclusions. In this arena you get what you pay for and cheap insurance often comes with exclusions, so please ensure your insurance covers you to the maximum, and it tailored for your specific needs. TROPICAL BIRDING does not provide/arrange insurance; this is the responsibility of the individual tour participant. Failure to arrange this before joining the tour, may result in significant medical costs for the individual while on tour, which TROPICAL BIRDING will NOT be able to assist with. TROPICAL BIRDING has a responsibility and commitment to continue on with the tour program with all the other healthy participants, where possible and the law permits.

What happens if ONE OF THE TOUR GROUP SHOWS COVID-LIKE SYMPTOMS?

If more than one of the following well-recognised, symptoms of Covid are shown by an individual, then that person will be isolated from the group, and a test ordered, if considered needed by the TROPICAL BIRDING tour leader. If a test is designated as needed, any costs associated with the test and any treatment required will be paid for by the tour participant. As the locations of tours vary greatly across our full tour repertoire, we recommend bringing spare money in US dollars cash, so that a test can be paid for in the many tour instances where credit card payments are not possible. The period of isolation of the participant will depend on the situation and local laws.

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Some Widespread Symptoms of Covid-19:

- **Continuous cough / congestion**
- **Fever and/high temperature (above 100F/37.8C)**
- **Sudden loss of taste and/smell**

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Are regular TEMPERATURE CHECKS required on tour?

Yes. The TROPICAL BIRDING guide will be carrying an electronic thermometer during the tour and may decide to take a participant's body temperatures at any given time. On signing up for the tour, the participant is agreeing to this happening at any time, at the guide's discretion. At a minimum, this will be taken every 4 days.

NOTE: A high body temperature is an indication of ill health. But elevated body temperature can be caused by many common ailments, and so we will attempt to use all indicators at our discretion to assess the need for medical assessment. However, please be aware that a normal body temperature is not the same as a negative Covid test; people can have normal body temperature, but still be carrying the virus, so the general guidelines continue to apply, no matter the result of a temperature check. Normal body temperature is within the range 97-99F (36-37.2C). A high body temperature is from 100F (37.8C) and above.

Do tour participants require a COVID VACCINE to join a tour?

Not Yet . Vaccines are still not available to everyone who wants one. Once we reach that point, we will consider changing this requirement. If you are unvaccinated, you may join tour as long as you test negative for Covid (with a PCR test) within 96 hours of the tour. Keep in mind that some destinations may require you to be fully vaccinated in order to visit. Our office staff will inform you if that is the case, but Tropical Birding cannot be held responsible for costs incurred to you if a vaccine mandate is issued by a local government at the last minute and you are not fully vaccinated.

Do ALL of these rules apply to ALL of the group?

Yes. These guidelines apply to all of the group members, the TROPICAL BIRDING tour guide(s), any drivers used on the tour, and any other local guides come in contact with through the tour also.

Are these guidelines different for VACCINATED participants?

No. All safety guidelines apply to vaccinated and non-vaccinated members of the tour bubble

Do these guidelines apply to ALL TROPICAL BIRDING TOURS?

Yes. TROPICAL BIRDING operates a variety of tours, including birding tours, Birding with a Camera tours, Photo tours, and Enigmatic Wildlife tours, as well as a wider variety of customised tours. However, on ALL of these tours, these general guidelines will be applied, and always in lieu of local regulations. (i.e., TROPICAL BIRDING does NOT run custom tours, where mask wearing in public is not undertaken). No matter what the tour type, and destination, **TROPICAL BIRDING WILL ALWAYS PUT THE SAFETY OF YOU AND OUR STAFF** at the heart of the tour experience.

Are these guidelines the final word? – What else can I do?

No. There are always further measures that can, or you may wish, to be taken, including:

- Try to avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth without sanitization first.
- Avoid handshakes and hugs with others, even "within the tour safety bubble."
- Spraying of your own luggage.

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- Spraying of your footwear.
- Bringing your own spotting scope.
- Not encouraging close interaction with other people met on the tour.
- Promptly speak up if you feel the onset of symptoms.
- Do not panic, not every bout of temperature is the coronavirus.
- Remember also, good precautionary action (e.g., mask wearing when appropriate) can genuinely prevent human-to-human infection, even when in close contact with an infected individual. Heroic, Covid-related, health workers are testament to this.
- Additional mask wearing than indicated by the TROPICAL BIRDING guide.

We all appreciate those that take extra care or actions such as these; it is a personal choice that will be respected. After all, there are an array of differing, ever evolving, scientific and journalistic opinions on the effectiveness of some of those listed.

Does TROPICAL BIRDING offer CUSTOM TOURS?

YES, YES, YES. TROPICAL BIRDING has been running custom tours regularly since its inception 20 years ago. If you are nervous, or consider yourself vulnerable within group travel, we can easily arrange a customised tour for you only, you and a personal bubble only, or a family group only, if you feel more comfortable with that.

TROPICAL BIRDING has been doing this successfully for 20 years, (often over 50% of our annual tours are customised ones), and the virus has not changed that. If anything, we are running more custom tours than ever now..

Has TROPICAL BIRDING run tours SINCE THE START OF THE COVID PANDEMIC?

Yes. TROPICAL BIRDING has run a number of varied tours following the emergence of the pandemic, all since mid-2020. This has included to destinations such as USA, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Panama, and Colombia. This is not because TROPICAL BIRDING likes to take risks. We consulted with doctors and the Cleveland Clinic both before operating our first post-Covid, during (we regularly have doctors and nurses on our tours, and this has not changed since the onset of Covid), and after our tours. This is an ongoing process and consultation, to allow us to update best practices, in this fluid situation, which we are learning more and more about with each passing day, and tour. For this reason, these guidelines are sure to change as we learn more about the virus and best practices to avoid it.

Has TROPICAL BIRDING run tours SINCE THE START OF THE COVID PANDEMIC?

TROPICAL BIRDING TOURS was formed by experienced tour guides in 2001 and has been running hundreds of tours a year in recent times. Some of the best practices may have changed since the arrival of Covid, but the core tour principle remains unchanged; safety first.

LAST (HAPPY) NOTE: TROPICAL BIRDING TOURS WAS FOUNDED ON THE BASIS OF FUN TIMES IN THE FIELD, WHETHER IT BE ON EXPERT TOURS FOR BIRDING, NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY, OR NATURE OBSERVATION. THIS HAS NOT CHANGED; OUR TOURS ARE STILL FUN! TROPICAL BIRDING'S TOURS HAVE ALWAYS PROVIDED AN ATTRACTION AND/OR A DISTRACTION, AND SOME WOULD SAY, THIS HAS BECOME EVER MORE SO NOW. You can be safe and have a good time, they are not mutually exclusive! Nature, after all, is the greatest of great healers.

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TB RULE OF 3 (W.M.D.):

1. WASH. Wash hands and body surfaced regularly, with water and soap or sanitizer.
2. MASKS. Wear masks when outside of the tour safety bubble.
3. DISTANCE. Keep your social distance, as a precautionary measure from people outside of the tour safety bubble.

REMEMBER: SMALL SAFETY STEPS TRAVEL FAR

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