Eagle-Eye Tours

Eastern Australia Itinerary

Link: Eastern Australia

Tour Overview

Australia is a naturalist's dream come true, with an extraordinary diversity of landscapes, birds and other wildlife. Our Eastern Australia birding tour samples some of the best of this remarkable continent, from the tropical rainforests, wetlands and Great Barrier Reef of Far North Queensland to the subtropical forests, coastal heathlands, mountains and eucalyptus woodlands of southeastern Australia. Along the way, we search for iconic species such as Southern Cassowary, bowerbirds, riflebirds, lyrebirds and fairywrens, while also enjoying opportunities for Platypus, kangaroos, wallabies and other uniquely Australian wildlife.

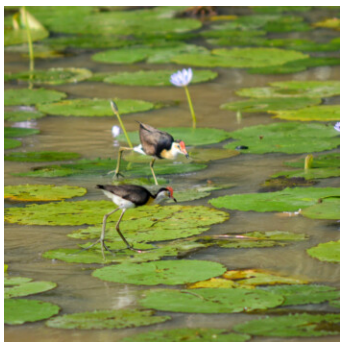
Australia's extraordinary level of endemism makes every stage of the journey rewarding. We explore the Daintree and Atherton Tablelands, bird the magnificent forests of Lamington National Park, venture offshore from Sydney in search of albatrosses, shearwaters and petrels, and finish among the spectacular scenery and rich birdlife of the Blue Mountains and Capertee Valley. With mostly easy birding, comfortable accommodations and an exceptional variety of habitats and wildlife, this is a superb and rewarding journey through eastern Australia.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Cairns

Our Eastern Australia birding tour begins today with a welcome dinner, where we get to know one another and discuss the exciting journey ahead. Night in Cairns.

Day 2: Around Cairns



We spend the day exploring several excellent birding sites around Cairns, taking in freshwater wetlands, grasslands, rainforest and coastal habitats. Wetlands and surrounding vegetation support an impressive diversity of birds, and we will search for Magpie Goose, Green Pygmy-Goose, Comb-crested Jacana, White-browed Crake, Orange-footed Megapode, Crimson Finch, Chestnut-breasted Munia, Varied Triller, Black-faced Monarch and Yellow, Brown and Brown-backed Honeyeaters. Nearby grasslands provide opportunities for Little Curlew, Black-fronted Dotterel and Australian Pipit, while around the Botanic Gardens we may encounter Australian Brush-turkey, Torresian Imperial-Pigeon, Black Butcherbird, Sahul Sunbird and, with luck, Rufous Owl Along the coast, we search for migratory shorebirds such as Far Eastern Curlew, Whimbrel, Great Knot, Red-necked Stint and Gray-tailed Tattler, alongside Pied Oystercatcher, Red-capped Plover and Pacific Reef-Heron, with chances for Beach Stone-Curlew and possibly Terek Sandpiper. A variety of terns may also be encountered. Night in Cairns.

Day 3: The Great Barrier Reef

Today we take a full-day cruise from Cairns to Michaelmas Cay, a beautiful coral cay and important seabird sanctuary on the Great Barrier Reef. The relaxing boat ride takes approximately two hours (one-way), with opportunities to watch for seabirds and other marine life along the way. Thousands of seabirds can gather on Michaelmas Cay, with Sooty and Greater Crested Terns, Common Noddy, Brown Booby and Silver Gull among the regular species. We will also be on the lookout for Great Frigatebird, Red-footed and Masked Boobies, Bridled and Black-naped Terns, Black Noddy and other less common visitors. There is plenty of time to enjoy the cay and surrounding reef, with opportunities for snorkelling or simply enjoying the remarkable spectacle of the seabird colony. We return to Cairns in the late afternoon. Night in Cairns.

Day 4: Cairns to Port Douglas

We begin the day birding at the northern end of the Cairns Esplanade, where the mangroves and surrounding vegetation provide opportunities for Mangrove Robin, Double-eyed Fig-Parrot, Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove, Rainbow Bee-eater and other tropical species. We then travel north towards Port Douglas, stopping at wetlands along the way to search for Torresian Kingfisher, Crimson Finch, Marsh Sandpiper and other waders and waterbirds. After arriving in Port Douglas, we explore some of the excellent wetlands around town. Possibilities include Green Pygmy-Goose, Plumed Whistling-Duck, Radjah Shelduck, Comb-crested Jacana, Australasian Swamphen and Dusky Moorhen, while Eastern Osprey and other raptors may be seen overhead. Night in Port Douglas.

Day 5: Daintree River Cruise

We begin the day with a boat cruise on the Daintree River, exploring rainforest and mangrove habitats for tropical birds. We will be on the lookout for Great-billed Heron, Black Bittern, Papuan Frogmouth, Shining Flycatcher, Azure and Little Kingfishers, Large-billed Gerygone and Green Oriole, as well as the possibility of a saltwater crocodile. After the cruise, we head inland to explore a mix of rainforest and woodland habitats. Here we may encounter Pacific Baza, Forest Kingfisher, Macleay's and other honeyeaters, Lemon-bellied Flyrobin, Rufous Shrikethrush, Topknot Pigeon and Great Bowerbird. As we continue into drier country, the birdlife changes considerably, with opportunities for Pale-headed Rosella, Red-winged Parrot, Apostlebird and Blue-winged Kookaburra. Night in Port Douglas.

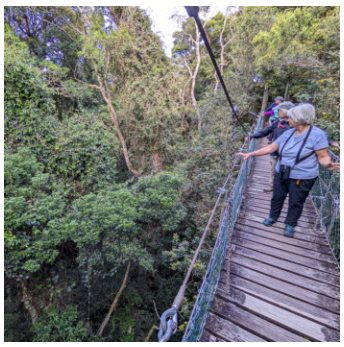
Days 6 and 7: Atherton Tablelands

The Atherton Tablelands are a region of beautiful scenery, with crater lakes, waterfalls, lush rainforest, open woodlands, pastures and scattered wetlands nestled among some of Queensland's highest mountains. Birding here can be superb, with possibilities including Golden Bowerbird, Tooth-billed Bowerbird, Spotted Catbird, Victoria's Riflebird, Pied Monarch and Chowchilla. We will also search for Tablelands specialties such as Atherton Scrubwren, Mountain Thornbill and Bridled Honeyeater, while more open habitats may produce Blue-winged Kookaburra, Forest Kingfisher, Red-backed Fairywren, Chestnut-breasted Munia and other woodland and wetland birds. We will explore a selection of rainforest, lakes, wetlands and open country, adapting our route according to recent sightings and local conditions. We will also keep watch for Sarus Crane and other local specialties and have a reasonable chance of encountering the spectacular Southern Cassowary. Around Yungaburra, we have an opportunity to look for Platypus, one of Australia's most distinctive mammals. Two nights on the Atherton Tablelands.

Day 8: Atherton Tablelands to Cairns

We spend our final morning on the Atherton Tablelands searching for species we may have missed over the previous two days. As we make our way back towards Cairns, we explore drier habitats for White-browed Robin and other woodland birds. Time and tide permitting, we may finish with another visit to the Cairns Esplanade. Night in Cairns.

Day 9: Transfer to Lamington National Park



We take a morning flight from Cairns to Brisbane. Depending on flight timings, we may spend some time birding the coastal mangroves and wetlands around Brisbane, where we have opportunities for Mangrove Honeyeater, Mangrove Gerygone and other shorebirds and coastal species. We then travel south to the Green Mountains section of Lamington National Park. This spectacular World Heritage-listed landscape protects extensive subtropical rainforest and provides a dramatic change from the tropical habitats of northern Queensland. Two nights at O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat.

Day 10: Lamington Park

We have a full day to explore the magnificent subtropical rainforests of Lamington National Park. The forests surrounding O'Reilly's are home to an exceptional diversity of birds, and we will search for specialties such as Australian Logrunner, Green Catbird, Regent and Satin Bowerbirds, Paradise Riflebird, Noisy Pitta, Eastern Whipbird and Russet-tailed Thrush. We will also make a special effort to find the elusive Albert's Lyrebird. The area offers wonderful opportunities to observe and photograph Australian King-Parrots, Crimson Rosellas and other colourful forest birds. Night at O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat.

Day 11: Transfer to Brisbane Airport and flight to Sydney

We depart Lamington National Park and travel to Brisbane Airport for our flight to Sydney. After arriving in Sydney, we transfer to our hotel and have some time to relax ahead of tomorrow's pelagic birding trip. Night in Sydney.

Day 12: Sydney Pelagic

Today we embark on a full-day pelagic birding trip from Sydney, heading offshore towards the edge of the continental shelf in search of the diverse seabirds found in these waters. Depending on conditions and the season, we may encounter Wedge-tailed, Flesh-footed, Short-tailed and Fluttering Shearwaters, along with Gray-faced Petrel, Wilson's Storm-Petrel, Australasian Gannet and several species of albatross. Black-browed and Shy Albatrosses are among the possibilities, while less common species such as Buller's Albatross may also be encountered. Dolphins, whales and other marine wildlife are possible as we travel offshore. Guests who choose not to participate in the pelagic will have the day free to explore independently. As our guide(s) will be aboard the pelagic, no alternative guided activities will be offered. Night in Sydney.

Day 13: Coastal Heathlands and Barren Grounds

We travel south from Sydney, exploring some of the coastal forests and heathlands of southeastern New South Wales. Depending on recent sightings and local conditions, we may make birding stops along the way before continuing to Barren Grounds Nature Reserve. At Barren Grounds, we search the coastal heath for the endangered Eastern Bristlebird and other specialties such as Southern Emu-wren, Ground Parrot and Beautiful Firetail. The surrounding forests and woodlands may also produce Superb Lyrebird, Pilotbird, Rockwarbler, honeyeaters and other southeastern Australian species. Night in Kiama.

Days 14 and 15: Blue Mountains and Capertee Valley

We travel inland to the spectacular Blue Mountains, exploring wetlands, woodlands and open country along the way. Around the Lithgow area, wetlands provide opportunities for Pink-eared Duck, Blue-billed Duck, Australasian Shoveler and Hoary-headed Grebe, with the possibility of other less common waterbirds. We also spend a full day exploring Capertee Valley, one of New South Wales' premier birding destinations. Its open eucalyptus woodlands, grasslands and flowering forests support a wonderful diversity of birds, including Little and Musk Lorikeets, Diamond Firetail, White-winged Chough, Eastern Shrike-tit, Hooded Robin and a variety of woodswallows and honeyeaters. We will also keep watch for Turquoise Parrot and the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater, a rare and unpredictable visitor to the valley. The region is also excellent for Australian wildlife, with chances for kangaroos, wallabies and other native mammals. Two nights in the Lithgow area.

Day 16: Blue Mountains and return to Sydney

We begin the day with some final birding around Lithgow before making our way through the Blue Mountains towards Sydney. Along the way, we visit selected forest and woodland sites, with possibilities including Flame and Scarlet Robins, King Parrot, Crimson Rosella, White-throated Treecreeper, honeyeaters and thornbills. We enjoy some of the region's magnificent scenery and make birding stops as time and conditions allow before returning to Sydney in the late afternoon. Tonight we enjoy our final dinner together and reflect on the many birds and other wildlife encountered during our journey through Eastern Australia. Night in Sydney.

Day 17: International flight departs Sydney or transfer to Tasmania

Our Eastern Australia birding tour draws to a close and you will transfer to the airport for flights home or connections to our Tasmania tour.

What to Expect

Overview
The Eastern Australia tour is a moderately paced birding tour, with the chance to also see some fantastic mammals. Our daily travel schedule varies; most days involve a full day of birding, usually with a picnic lunch in a prime birding spot, other days we will be taking boat trips or driving to a new location. Please note that our guides will not be using laser pointers on this tour due to local regulations.

Food
We generally have breakfast at the hotel before we head out for the day. Sometimes we will have optional pre-breakfast walks. We often take a picnic lunch in the field, but will occasionally stop at a restaurant or cafe for lunch. Dinner is usually at the lodge or a nearby restaurant. Each evening after dinner we compile the day's checklist, review the day's activities, birds, mammals and other observations, and plan the next day's activities.

Accommodation
We generally stay in 3 to 4-star hotels or lodges in locations close to where we want to go birding.

Walking
The walking on this tour is easy to moderate walking and hiking, with frequent short forays away from the van. The longest walk is around 2 km (1.2 miles) with some steepness.

Driving
Driving distances vary from short to moderate, with long drives of up to 3 hours on a few days. We

make frequent stops during each day’s travel.

Climate
Climate of these regions changes from seasonably warm to mild as we head further south. October is normally settled, with temperatures in Cairns averaging 24° C (75° F) with a humidity of 54%, very pleasant for birding. In Cairns a light jacket is recommended for our trip to the reef in case onshore winds are cool. Most days are warm or hot, dry and sunny, but overcast conditions are frequent with possible rain and high humidity in coastal areas. The sun can be intense, so sunscreen and a brimmed hat are advised. Wet weather protection is recommended with light waterproof pants and jacket ideal.

Internal Flights
Our itinerary includes two internal flights, not included in the price of the tour. These will be booked by Eagle-Eye Tours for you, and the cost added to your invoice.

Boat Trips

There are also two pelagic trips and a river cruise on this tour, which are included in the price. Please see details below.

The Great Barrier Reef Cruise will be on board a comfortable, air-conditioned 32m (105ft) sailing and motor catamaran, this is a two-hour long cruise with the opportunity to swim, snorkel or scuba dive. There will be bathrooms on board, as well as a buffet lunch. There is a sunny top deck, and a shaded main deck. Water temperatures range from 22-29° C (75-85 ° F). Please note that drones are not permitted.

The Daintree River Cruise is a 2-hour cruise on calm waters. The boat itself will depend on group size, but it will have a roof for shade, and swivel chairs. There will not be a bathroom on board, but there are public toilets by the jetty.

The Continental Shelf pelagic trip is a full day excursion. The vessel is typically a 45′ fiberglass monohull, and once we are offshore, about 22 nautical miles from the coast, conditions may become choppy. Bottled water is provided onboard, and we will bring our own snacks.

For any of these boat trips, plans could change slightly if reports of vagrant or accidental species, within reasonable driving distance, are received, or if there is any unfavorable weather.

Please note, those who have experienced motion or seasickness in the past should consult their doctor regarding seasickness medications, and take them as prescribed. Participants are responsible for their own medications, as well as bringing suitable sun-protective clothing, hats and sunscreen, for comfort throughout the day.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes
• Price includes 10% Australian GST
• All accommodations
• All meals and soft drinks
• Ground transportation
• Three boat trips included - pelagic from SydneyKaima, Great Barrier Reef trip from Cairns and a trip on the Daintree River.
• One guide and vehicle with 4 - 8 participants, two guides and vehicles with 9 - 12 participants

Tour Price Does Not Include
• Two internal flights additional (~AUD$300 total)
• Travel to and from start/end location
• Travel Insurance
• Items of a personal nature
• Alcoholic beverages