

Florida Itinerary

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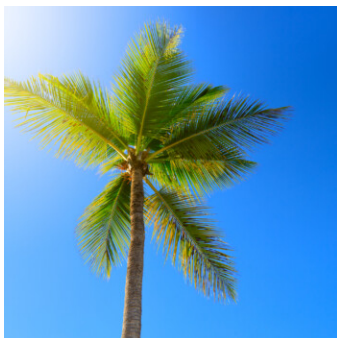
Tour Overview

Winter is a great time to visit south Florida, the subtropics of the United States. On our Florida birding tour, we experience a range of fascinating habitats from upland pine forests, prairies and cypress swamps to mangrove swamps, hardwood hammocks, and the sheltered waters of the Florida Keys. We take in the famous Ding Darling NWR for its waterbirds, Babcock-Webb WMA for the pine trio of Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Bachman's Sparrow and Brown-headed Nuthatch, Everglades National Park for Mottled Duck, Limpkin, Wood Stork, Roseate Spoonbill, Snail Kite, Swallow-tailed Kite, Short-tailed Hawk, Purple Gallinule and others, and the Keys for southern Florida specialties such as Mangrove Cuckoo and White-crowned Pigeon.

We also take a day trip to the fabulous Dry Tortugas, to witness the onset of breeding by thousands of Sooty Terns, Brown Noddies and Magnificent Frigatebirds. We end our tour in the Miami area, where several exotic species have become naturalized - various parakeets and parrots, mynas, exotic waterbirds, Red-whiskered Bulbuls and Spot-breasted Orioles are resident here. We will also keep track of local sightings, in case a vagrant occurs close by.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival - Fort Myers



Our Florida birding tour begins with a meeting for dinner in the hotel lobby at 6:30 p.m. Night in Fort Myers.

Day 2: Ding Darling NWR and San Carlos Bay



Our first birding day is a big one, as we visit the world-renowned Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island. Among the spectacular array of waders and shorebirds we will search for some local specialties, including Roseate Spoonbill, Wood Stork and Yellow-crowned Night-Heron. With some luck we may catch a glimpse of a resident Short-tailed Hawk or Bald Eagle flying overhead. We will also stop at San Carlos Bay/Bunche Beach Preserve to look for saltwater-loving species such as Black Skimmer and Reddish Egret. In the early evening we will look for resident Burrowing Owls and Monk Parakeets in Cape Coral. Night in Fort Myers.

Day 3: Babcock-Webb WMA



On day 3 we will drive north to Babcock-Webb Wildlife Management area, a large tract of slash pine and marsh, for three pinewoods specialties - Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Brown-headed Nuthatch and a chance for Bachman's Sparrow. Other species here include Eastern Towhee, Brown Thrasher, Eastern Bluebird and Eastern Meadowlark. Sandhill Cranes nest in the area, and roadside wetlands support American Coot and Common Gallinule. In the afternoon, we search for species we may have missed and look nearby for Florida Scrub-Jay, a threatened species found only in Florida. Nearby wetlands support Black-bellied Whistling-Duck and Glossy Ibis. Night in Fort Myers.

Day 4: Corkscrew Swamp and Miccosukee



In the morning we visit the famous Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. After checking the visitors center birdfeeders for Common Ground-Dove and Painted Bunting we will head out on the beautiful boardwalks in search of the swamp's residents, including Limpkin. Many northern warblers spend their winter months here, and Tufted Titmice forage in the cypress. In the afternoon we carry on across southern Florida towards Homestead, stopping in the Miccosukee area to search for the endangered Snail Kite foraging along the irrigation canals. Night in Homestead.

Day 5: Everglades



We spend the day in the Everglades, Marjory Stoneman Douglas's "River of Grass". We travel from Royal Palms to Flamingo, the terminus of Everglades National Park's main road. We stop at well-known sites such as Anhinga Trail, where conspicuous residents include Purple Gallinule, and, appropriately, Anhinga, Mahogany Hammock with its diverse tropical hardwood trees and marvelous land snails, and Paurotis and Nine-mile Ponds for Mottled Duck, Wood Stork, Roseate Spoonbill and soaring Short-tailed Hawk. The mudflats at Flamingo host shorebirds and terns, including Marbled Godwit, and Eco Pond occasionally has Glossy and White Ibis, and possibly Black-necked Stilt. We will also be on the watch for American Crocodile and West Indian Manatee. Our tally of birds could include many specialties of southern Florida - White-crowned Pigeon, Short-tailed and Swainson's Hawks, Barred Owl, White-tailed Kite and even Scissor-tailed Flycatcher. Night in Homestead.

Day 6: Florida Keys



We begin the morning birding the Homestead area, this region of south Florida is well known as being an excellent site for over-wintering birds, often with a decidedly western flair! After, we leave Homestead and head down to the keys. We stop first in Key Largo in search of specialties such as White-crowned Pigeon and Yellow-throated Warbler, and with luck scarcer species such as Mangrove Cuckoo or Shiny Cuckoo. Night in Key West.

Day 7: Dry Tortugas



We will take a day trip via boat to Dry Tortugas National Park to explore the birds & wildlife of the island. At this time of year we have a chance to see Sooty Tern, Masked Booby, Brown Noddy, and Magnificent Frigatebird nesting on these islands. There is also excellent snorkelling to be enjoyed here (equipment provided). Night in Key West.

Day 8: Florida Keys



This morning we will explore the lower Keys. We'll visit Zachary Taylor State Park and the Key West Botanical Garden, as well as look for the diminutive Key Deer on Big Pine Key. The keys are a hotspot for rarities, so we will watch for reports of any unusual visitors. Recent rarities on the Keys in the last few winters have included Western Spindalis, Black-faced Grassquit, Cuban Pewee and Red-legged Thrush. We bird our way up the Keys visiting several excellent spots along our way to Miami. Night in Miami.

Day 9: Miami Area



Our final birding day will be spent in the unlikely birding destination of urban Miami. Numerous exotic species have become naturalized here - various parakeets and parrots, mynas, Gray-headed Swamphen, Egyptian Goose, Red-whiskered Bulbul and Spot-breasted Oriole are possible. We will also keep track of local sightings, in case a vagrant occurs close by. There are usually one or two goodies to be found like the Bahama Mockingbird. Night in Miami.

Day 10: Departure - Miami

Our Florida birding tour concludes today in Miami. You can depart anytime for your flights home.

What to Expect

Overview The Florida tour is a relatively fast paced birding tour. You can expect early mornings and long days in the field, followed by a restful evening and early nights. **Food** We often go birding right after (or sometimes before) breakfast and take a picnic lunch in the field, but will occasionally stop at a restaurant for lunch. We will spend the whole day birding. Most days we return in the late afternoon to our accommodations, and in the evening we arrange to go to a local restaurant. After dinner will be personal time at the hotel. 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** Generally we stay in comfortable hotel rooms in locations close to where we want to go birding. **Walking** The walking on this tour is easy to moderate. Most birding locations involve just short forays away from the van, but there will be some longer days including going to Oscar Scherer and Corkscrew Swamp, which are just under 5km (3 miles) in length. Participants must be able to walk slowly for up to three hours in warm weather. The topography of southern Florida is quite flat, and most trails are well groomed, paved or boardwalks. **Driving** Driving distances vary from short on some days to moderate on others, and we make frequent stops during each day's travel. **Climate** The climate of this region is generally mild to seasonably warm with average February temperatures ranging from 25°C (76° F) during the day to 16° C (60°F) at night. Temperatures will be higher from Miami southwards. There is generally little rain at this time of year but humidity is high. The sun can be intense, so sunscreen and a brimmed hat are advised. Mosquitoes and small biting flies can be a nuisance, but are usually not severe in this region; insect repellent is recommended as a precaution.

Chiggers and ticks are present; we will avoid walking in tall grass where possible. Boat Trips Our Florida birding tour includes a boat trip out to the Dry Tortugas; motion sickness on boat trips can be an issue, although the size of the boat minimizes the problem. It may be quite cool on the water, so layered clothing underneath a waterproof windbreaker would be desirable. Boat trips are rarely cancelled due to weather, however, if this occurs, we will bird alternative locations. You will have the option to go snorkeling in the Dry Tortugas. Standard snorkeling equipment is included, but you will want to bring your prescription mask if you require one.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes

- All accommodation (Good, comfortable)
- All breakfasts and lunches
- Ground transportation (15-passenger vans)
- One EET guide with 4 - 8 participants, 2 guides with 9 - 12 participants in 2 vehicles
- Full-day boat ride to Dry Tortugas
- All park, conservation and entrance fees

Tour Price Does Not Include

- Flights to and from start/ end location
 - Evening meals
 - Travel Insurance
 - Items of a personal nature
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