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TOUR INFORMATION FOR ESTONIA in spring

These notes are designed to help you prepare for your tour. Please read carefully.

ENTERING ESTONIA: United Kingdom citizens will need a passport, which is valid for at least three months beyond intended length of stay. A visa is not required. Citizens of other nations should contact the nearest Estonian embassy for entry requirements.

It is always a good idea to take a photocopy of your passport and air ticket with you when travelling abroad. They can prove invaluable in helping you get replacements if your originals are lost or stolen. Obviously you should keep the photocopies in a separate bag to the originals.

TIME DIFFERENCE: Estonia is 2 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time

CURRENCY: The currency in Estonia is the Euro (EUR). As the tour price includes all travel, accommodation, meals and drinks with meals, you will require only enough currency to cover snacks, drinks other than at meal times, or other purchases of a purely personal nature.

LANGUAGE: The national language is Estonian but Finnish, English, Russian and German are also widely spoken and understood.

CLIMATE: We can expect almost any kind of weather during this trip. Our early mornings, especially when watching the Arctic migration can feel very cold and it may be below freezing. If it is windy it can feel even colder. The days can be mixed and we could have rain one day and warm sun the next.

PACE OF TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE: This tour is not a strenuous one but we may have some early starts, all of which are for optional pre-breakfast excursions. Leisurely walking, occasionally over moderately rough terrain, is the only physical requirement. Some longer walks (though not more than 4 miles) may be taken, but on flat ground, and good paths or boardwalks. The minibus is never too far away if anyone wants to return early or sit out any particular walk. On most days we either take a packed lunch with us or will have lunch in local restaurants. In the evenings there will be an 'hour to shower' before checklist and dinner.

HEALTH: It is essential that you contact your own doctor to obtain the latest information on the region you are visiting.

There are no major health problems in Estonia. Water is safe to drink at all the places where we stay.

For further information on health advice refer to the Medical Advisory Services for Travellers Abroad website www.masta-travel-health.com

In the unlikely event of you requiring medical attention of any kind while you are away, it is wise to carry a European Health Insurance Certificate card (EHIC) with you <http://www.nhs-e111-ehic.org.uk>

ACCOMMODATION: Throughout the tour we'll be staying in hotels or holiday parks. All rooms will have a private shower and toilet.

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LAUNDRY: May be available at some of the hotels where we stay for more than one night.

ELECTRICITY: 220V AC 50Hz. An international travel plug is useful and can be bought in most airport departure lounges. European-style 2-pin plugs are in use. Please see the following website for more information <http://www.power-plugs-sockets.com>.

FOOD: Normal western standards. Fish and different meats are frequently served as main meals. Please let us know in advance if you are a vegetarian.

Sunbird tours are all-inclusive and no refunds can be issued for any tour meals participants choose to miss. While we will try to do all we can to accommodate the requirements of all participants, please note that we cannot guarantee all causes of food allergies can be avoided at every destination. Many restaurants offer set menus and are unable to accommodate all special requests within a group. Thus, participants with significant food allergies or special dietary needs should bring appropriate foods with them for those times when their needs can, regrettably, not be accommodated. Our tours are carefully scheduled to insure the best possible birding experience and although the leaders will do all they can to make sure the group eats at a reasonable time, sometimes early or late lunches and/or evening meals cannot be avoided. Any participants who need to eat at specific times may need to bring supplemental food with them.

DRINKS: Bottled water, a soft drink or a beer (or wine if appropriate) are provided at meals, as is coffee or tea. In addition we keep a supply of bottled water on the tour vehicles.

INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS: Estonia leads the way when it comes to free internet access with nearly all hotels (including the ones we use), restaurants, cafes, airports, ferries and petrol stations offering free WiFi. Mobile phone access is very good throughout.

FIELD CLOTHING: Since the weather can be very mixed and potentially cold, bring a good jacket, waterproofs, gloves, hat and a warm sweater. The combination of low temperatures and wind may make it feel cold so it is advisable to take several layers of wind-proof and warm clothing.

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS: You should bring the following:

Notebook and pen

Alarm clock

Small rucksack/Day pack

Personal medication

Optional: Telescope and tripod (these are strongly recommended for this tour, especially for seawatching and scanning the wetlands), spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), notebook, field guide.

LEADER'S EQUIPMENT: The leader will provide the following:

Telescope & tripod for group use

Basic First-aid kit

Reference Books

LUGGAGE: Our Final Information document, which will be sent to you approximately three weeks before departure, will give details about baggage weight and size restrictions imposed by the airline used for this tour.

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If possible, please bring your luggage in soft-sided bags or cases (rather than large hard 'Samsonite'-type suitcases) as these pack more easily into our vehicles during the tour. Please note that on many tours there are no porters to carry your luggage so please ensure that **no bag is so heavy that you are unable to lift and carry it yourself**. As a general rule, in addition to using your luggage labels, it is a good idea to fix identification to the *inside* of each piece of luggage.

PHOTOGRAPHY: Camera equipment should be packed in moisture and dust-proof bags as a precaution. Although there will be occasions when dedicated bird photography is possible, a birdwatching tour is not normally the best means of pursuing this aim. Digiscoping on the other hand is perfectly compatible with the tour, though you should bring your own telescope if you intend to do this as the tour leader's telescope is not available for this activity.

There will be plenty of opportunities to take photos of birds and scenery and the leaders will do all they can to accommodate anyone wishing to take photographs. However if you are a serious photographer please bear in mind that this is first and foremost a birdwatching tour. Please do not allow your photographic desires to conflict with other participants' birdwatching activities.

TRANSPORT: Our transport will be by minibus for maximum flexibility. Please note that the leaders will operate a rotation system for seating in the vehicles.

SMOKING: Smoking is not allowed in the vehicles or when the group is gathered for meals, checklists etc. If you are sharing a room with a non-smoker, please do not smoke in the room. If you smoke in the field, we ask that you do so well away and downwind from the group if possible.

TRAVEL INSURANCE: Travel insurance is essential and we insist that you take out suitable cover as soon as your tour is booked. If you are bringing expensive optical equipment or other valuable items, please make sure they are also adequately insured on your home contents policy, as most travel insurance policies do not cover very expensive individual items. You may wish to consult your insurance broker regarding coverage. Please also ensure that your policy covers you in the event of a medical emergency, cancellation of a trip or severe delays. Medical costs abroad can often be extremely expensive. Please note that Sunbird is not liable for any medical or repatriation costs resulting from injury or illness during a tour or for covering any costs resulting from a flight delay such as extra hotel accommodation.

If you wish, insurance can be arranged by Helen Fisher, Bullerwell Independent Insurance Brokers, 13 Goldington Road, Bedford, MK40 3JY. Tel: 01234-866964. Please contact Helen for a quote and she will send the schedule directly to you.

TIPPING: All tour-based tips are included in the tour price. These include tips to local guides, drivers, hotel porters, and waiters and waitresses when we have group meals together in restaurants. You only need to pay tips for personal services such as room service or drinks from the bar.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Mullarney, Killian, Lars Svensson, Dan Zetterström & Peter J Grant. Collins Bird Guide. 1999. HarperCollins. (ISBN 0 00 219728 6). The latest, most up-to-date and portable field guide to the birds of Europe. This book has quickly become established as the standard field guide for the region. Second edition 2013. **Highly recommended**.

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D Macdonald and C Barret. A Field Guide to the Mammals of Britain and Europe, 1993. Harper Collins. The latest and best field guide to mammals of the region.

OBTAINING BOOKS: Most of the field guides and the major ornithological references in print are available by mail order from booksellers specialising in natural history titles.

Natural History Book Service Ltd
Tel: 01803 865913
www.nhbs.co.uk

Subbuteo Books
Tel: 0870 010 9700
www.wildlifebooks.com

WildSounds
Tel: 01263 741100
www.wildsounds.co.uk

MAPS: Maps of the region may be available from:

The Map Shop
Tel: 01684 593146
www.themapshop.co.uk

Stanfords
Tel: 020 7836 1321
www.stanfords.co.uk

FINAL INFORMATION: Final information with instructions for meeting the group, hotel addresses etc. will be sent to you about three weeks before the start of the tour. Other news will be communicated as necessary. If you have any questions about any aspect of the tour, please contact us.