

Tipping Guidelines

with thanks to Chris Lotz at Birding Ecotours

We regularly get questions about tipping on our bird tours; this page is designed to help you navigate what can be rocky ground for many travelers!

Tipping is never compulsory on any of our tours, but most tour participants do tip guides and other ground staff members if they feel they've worked hard and done a great job. Don't feel obliged to tip, but if you do, it's much appreciated since the staff on our tours invariably work hard and skillfully.

All of our trips are, of course, led by qualified, experienced birding guides. But the number of staff (and hence the potential number of people to tip) varies considerably. In some places—such as Australia, South Africa, and Namibia—there aren't many staff members. But in other countries, such as Bhutan and Madagascar, trips might seem over-staffed because of local laws and regulations. These countries have a legal requirement that a driver and a local guide must accompany the whole tour, and in many places it's also compulsory to use park guides at all reserves and national parks.

A global standard for tips on birding safaris is generally US\$10–15 per client per day for birding tour leaders. Some birders pay only half that, others pay double or more. In many places, we are joined by a local guide for one or more days. These guides often join our trips at national parks and special birding sites—they know where to find the birds and other fauna better than anyone at their sites. We'd recommend \$10 per day for these people—if, for example, they're with you for half a day, we'd suggest half of the daily amounts indicated above for the tour leader.

Drivers often get US\$10 per participant per day—if this sounds excessive consider that most drivers do a lot more than just driving; for example, they are often responsible for helping with logistics, luggage, etc. during the course of the tour. On day trips, drivers of safari vehicles or jeeps and boat drivers (some of whom are very knowledgeable about where some of the water-associated birds hang out), can be tipped in line with the above recommendations—\$10 for an all-day trip and \$5 for a shorter one.

It's also appropriate to leave a small tip for the cleaning staff at hotels and lodges based on the number of days you've stayed there. On almost all of our tours meals, however, are included, as are tips to servers at restaurants and at lodges/hotels, so don't worry about tipping at meal times.

If you have any questions about what's appropriate, just ask your trip leader. On some trips, you can ask your trip leader to do all additional tipping for you, and then you can settle your account with the guide at the end of the trip.

If you do tip less than these standards, however, no one will feel insulted but will rather be thankful for getting a little extra in addition to what they are paid as staff. And if you tip more than the recommended amount, people will be most grateful.

Hard currencies such as US dollars, pounds sterling, and euros are usually preferred by the trip leaders, but local currency is generally preferable for the local guides, drivers, etc. Local currency can easily be drawn from ATMs everywhere we go, using your ATM card. Most folks draw an initial amount of local currency for gifts, gratuities, and alcoholic drinks on arrival at the airport. If, in the course of the trip, you need to top up your local currency, your leader can help you do this. Just ask!