

DESERTS OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

BIRDING AND NATURAL HISTORY

January 12 - 16, 2025



Wild **LATITUDES**

WORLDWIDE NATURE TOURS

DESERTS OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

BIRDING AND NATURAL HISTORY

Join us on a 5-day journey through the enchanting Sonoran and Mojave deserts of Southern California. Led by naturalist and birding guide Ivan Phillipson, this tour offers a rich exploration of the region's rugged landscapes and arid-adapted animals and plants.

The tour begins and ends in **Palm Springs**, in the **Coachella Valley**. This is the western edge of the Sonoran Desert—a landscape of sand dunes, cacti, dry flood channels, and boulder-strewn slopes. Surrounding the valley are the snow-dusted peaks of several mountain ranges. A fascinating mixture of birds, other vertebrates, insects, and desert plants awaits you in this unique environment.

Our exciting and educational journey will take us to nature hotspots across the Coachella Valley, through **Joshua Tree National Park**, to the shores of the **Salton Sea**, and into **Anza Borrego Desert State Park**. You'll not only see wonderful birds on this trip, but you'll also learn about desert ecosystems and the region's fascinating geology. Several of the most magnificent sites we'll visit are lush desert oases, shaded by native California Fan Palms.

Some special birds we hope to find include **Greater Roadrunner**, **Phainopepla**, **Verdin**, **Gambel's Quail**, **Common Ground Dove**, **Ladder-backed Woodpecker**, **Neotropical Cormorant**, **Burrowing Owl**, **Cactus Wren**, **Abert's Towhee**, and **Black-throated Sparrow**.

Ivan grew up in Southern California, and has spent countless days exploring the region's deserts. He's excited to be your guide—to help you enrich your knowledge of the birds, wildlife, plants, and landscapes of the Sonoran and Mojave deserts.

We're opening this tour exclusively to members of the Golden Gate Bird Alliance, so if you're interested, **please contact the GGBA Travel Desk at travelprogram@goldengatebirds.org**



Steve Robertson and Ivan Phillipson
Co-owners and Lead Guides at Wild Latitudes

TRIP DETAILS

Start Date: January 12, 2025

Duration of Tour: 5 days

Number of participants: Max of 8

Fee for Tour: \$1,885 per person

Deposit: \$950

Single Supplement: \$485

Trip Leaders: Ivan Phillipson

Included:

- Double-occupancy lodging
- Ground transportation
- Breakfasts and lunches
- Excursions and park fees
- Guiding services

Not Included:

- Flights
- Dinners
- Alcoholic beverages
- Personal items
- Optional gratuities for guides

DESERTS OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

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ITINERARY

Tentative and subject to change depending on weather, road, or other conditions.

Day 1 - Jan 12 8 - Arrival to Palm Springs and Visiting the Thousand Palms Oasis

Welcome to the **Coachella Valley**! Your guide, Ivan Phillipson, will greet you at the Palm Springs Airport. After brief introductions all around, we'll head off to enjoy a delicious lunch in **Palm Springs**. Then we'll check in to our hotel and prepare for our late afternoon outing: exploring the **Thousand Palms Oasis**.

This impressive grove of California Fan Palms is in the **Coachella Valley Preserve**. The palms depend on groundwater forced to the surface here along the San Andreas Fault. The preserve also protects a large area of wind-blown sand habitat, which is crucial for several endangered animals, like the Coachella Valley Fringe-toed Lizard.

Some special birds we hope to see here include **Greater Roadrunner**, **Gambel's Quail**, **Verdin**, **Phainopepla**, and **Black-tailed Gnatcatcher**.

As evening approaches, we'll make our way to dinner, then back to the hotel.

Lodging: [Holiday Inn Express & Suites Rancho Mirage](#)

Day 2 - Jan 13 - Big Morongo Canyon and Joshua Tree National Park

Heading out right after breakfast, we have a full day of birding and nature exploration ahead of us. Our first stop, where we'll spend several hours, is **Big Morongo Canyon Preserve**. This is another oasis, with flowing surface water that supports dense stands of Fremont Cottonwood.

Big Morongo is one of the most diverse bird hotspots in the entire region. Birds are attracted by the tree cover and fresh water. Over 200 species have been seen at the preserve. We'll be on the lookout for birds like **Ladder-backed Woodpecker**, **Oak Titmouse**, **California Thrasher**, and **Black-throated Sparrow**.



Ladder-backed Woodpecker



Palm Oasis in the Coachella Valley

DESERTS OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Jan 12-16, 2025

Next, we drive north, picking up some picnic lunches as we make our way to the north end of **Joshua Tree National Park**. At this point, we have entered the **Mojave Desert**. Joshua Trees are the iconic plants of this ecoregion. As we drive through the national park, we'll make several stops to take in the scenery and to chat about geology and ecology. Time allowing, we'll do an easy hike through a gorgeous desert ecosystem, surrounded by massive granite boulders. The Mojave Desert gives way to the Sonoran Desert as we head south, returning to Palm Springs.

We'll fill out our bird and wildlife lists in the evening before enjoying another dinner together.

Lodging: [Holiday Inn Express & Suites Rancho Mirage](#)

Day 3 - Jan 14 - Indian Canyons and the Salton Sea

We check out of our hotel this morning, and head to the **Indian Canyons**, just south of Palm Springs. There are several beautiful desert canyons on land belonging to the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians. We'll hike through one of these canyons—through a large palm oasis, and along a rocky ridge. As always, we'll be looking for birds. Species



Greater Roadrunner



Black-throated Sparrow



Cactus Wren



Burrowing Owl



Joshua Tree National Park

we may find here include **White-throated Swift**, **Rock Wren**, **Canyon Wren**, **Abert's Towhee**, and **Scott's Oriole**.

With packed lunches to go, we'll next head southeast, dropping in elevation until we are about 230 feet below sea level. Our destination is the north shore of the **Salton Sea**. This large body of water—partially natural, partially man-made—has a long and complicated history. Large numbers of waterbirds and shorebirds, of many species, spend their winters on the Salton Sea. Other species stop here on migration, as they travel along the **Pacific Flyway**.

Birding at several sites along the lakeshore, we'll be looking for species like **Surf Scoter**, **Western Grebe**, **Black-necked Stilt**, **Black-bellied Plover**, **Willet**, **American White Pelican**, **Green Heron**, **Cactus Wren**, **Abert's Towhee**, and **Sage Thrasher**.

We'll head to dinner after a full day of birding and exploring. Our lodging tonight is just south of the Salton Sea. We're now in the heart of the **Imperial Valley**, a rich agricultural region.

Lodging: [Best Western Plus Main Street Inn, Brawley](#)

DESERTS OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Jan 12-16, 2025

Day 4 - Jan 15 - South Shore of the Salton Sea and Anza-Borrego Desert State Park

Early this morning, we take a short drive to the south shore of the Salton Sea. Even more bird species and larger flocks are found at this end of the lake. We'll likely see many of the same species as yesterday, but hope to pick up quite a few more. Possibilities include **Snow Goose**, **Ross's Goose**, **Common Ground Dove**, **White-faced Ibis**, **Neotropic Cormorant**, **Bell's Vireo**, and **Loggerhead Shrike**. We'll make a special effort to find Burrowing Owls, which are fairly common in this area.

We'll return to the hotel to check out. After a hearty lunch in town, we hit the road and head east to **Anza Borrego Desert State Park**. Our scenic drive will take us through a beautiful and fascinating desert landscape. We'll stop in several places to learn about desert plants, look for birds, and enjoy short walks.



California Fan Palms in the Indian Canyons



Canyon Wren



Verdin

The Salton Sea



We end the day in the small, isolated community of **Borrego Springs**. Looming to the east are the Laguna Mountains. Before dinner, we'll go through our bird and wildlife lists and celebrate the day.

Lodging: [Borrego Springs Resort and Spa](#)

Day 5 - Jan 16 - Scenic Journey Across the Mountains

On our last day, our road takes us across a wide range of natural environments—from the desert, into the Laguna and San Jacinto mountains, and back down to Palm Springs in the Coachella Valley. We'll stop in the charming mountain town of **Julian** to grab a snack and coffee. Time and weather allowing, we'll do some light birding at a stop or two in the mountains.

Our adventure ends as we say our goodbyes at the Palm Springs Airport. Until next time!



IMPORTANT INFORMATION

YOUR GUIDE

IVAN PHILLIPSEN

Ivan is a dedicated naturalist with a background in scientific research. He holds a M.S. in Biology from Cal State San Bernardino and a Ph.D. in Zoology from Oregon State University. As Co-owner of Wild Latitudes, Ivan has been able to apply his knowledge in crafting and leading ecotours around the world.

Natural history is Ivan's true passion and what he is most excited to share with tour participants. Although he is fascinated by just about every aspect of nature, Ivan is particularly fond of birds, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates, plants, and geology. Everything is interconnected in nature and he does his best to take a holistic approach when teaching about the natural world.



IMPORTANT INFORMATION

THE PACE AND STYLE OF OUR TOURS

The primary goal of our trips is to experience and learn about the natural world, especially the region's birds and other wildlife, and of course, to have fun! As birding is often a primary focus of our tours, and birds are active in the morning, we will sometimes have early morning outings before breakfast. That said, our style of birding may not be ideal for hard-core "listers." We prefer to spend time observing the species we encounter, and learn a bit about their natural history, rather than rushing through the field to add the maximum number of species to our bird list. We also make diversions for interesting, non-avian wildlife, plants, geological wonders, and cultural activities. The pace of most of our trips is moderate, and we encourage anyone in good health to attend and enjoy the experience. Please contact us about if you need specific information on the types of physical activities on a tour and their physical requirements.

We strive to immerse participants in the local culture and to that end, wherever possible, we stay in locally owned and operated hotels that are designed and run in an environmentally sustainable way. Though some accommodations may be more basic than others, all are safe, clean and comfortable. We also utilize the services of local guides, visit local markets, and other culturally significant sites.

TOUR DATE AND TRIP LEADER CHANGES

Leaders and schedules are determined up to a year in advance of our tours. In the event that we have a change in a tour's dates or leaders, we reserve the right to do so, and will strive to inform participants as early in the process as possible. Additional leaders may be added to tours according to the group size, and will be specified in the tour itinerary. We also reserve the right to cancel any trip for which there are insufficient reservations.

DEPOSIT POLICY

A deposit is due at the time of registration. ***A deposit is the only thing that guarantees your place on the trip.***

PAYMENT POLICY

Full payment is required **90 days** prior to the tour departure date for international tours or any tour involving flights; and **30 days** prior to the tour departure date for local (i.e. in the Portland, Oregon area), van-based tours.

CANCELLATION POLICY

In the event a participant needs to cancel a reservation for any tour, the following policies will apply:

- **90 days** or more prior to tour departure date, the deposit will be refunded, minus an administrative fee of \$100.
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IMPORTANT INFORMATION

- **Less than 90 days but more than 60 days** prior to tour departure date, all payments refunded, minus 50% of deposit.
- **Less than 60 days** prior to tour departure date, no refunds will be given.

We *strongly* recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself from unforeseen circumstances.

If for any reason Wild Latitudes cancels a tour prior to the start of the tour, full refunds—minus the cost of any internal/in-country airline tickets purchased and/or any non-refundable deposits or expenses already made by Wild Latitudes—will be given to all participants. In the event that the tour is canceled while underway due to unforeseeable events such as but not limited to natural disaster, military activities, social uprising, or other extremely dangerous conditions not within the control of Wild Latitudes, no refund will be issued.