Philippines

Luzon, Visayan & Palawan Endemics (Relaxed)



Palawan Peacock-Pheasant by Erik Forsyth

Composed of 7,107 islands scattered across a vast stretch of tropical sea, the Philippines unfortunately hold the unenviable distinction of harbouring the highest number of bird species facing imminent extinction. Many of these critically endangered, yet spectacular, species now survive only in increasingly fragmented and shrinking remnants of habitat. During our relaxed tour we may encounter up to 100 endemics!

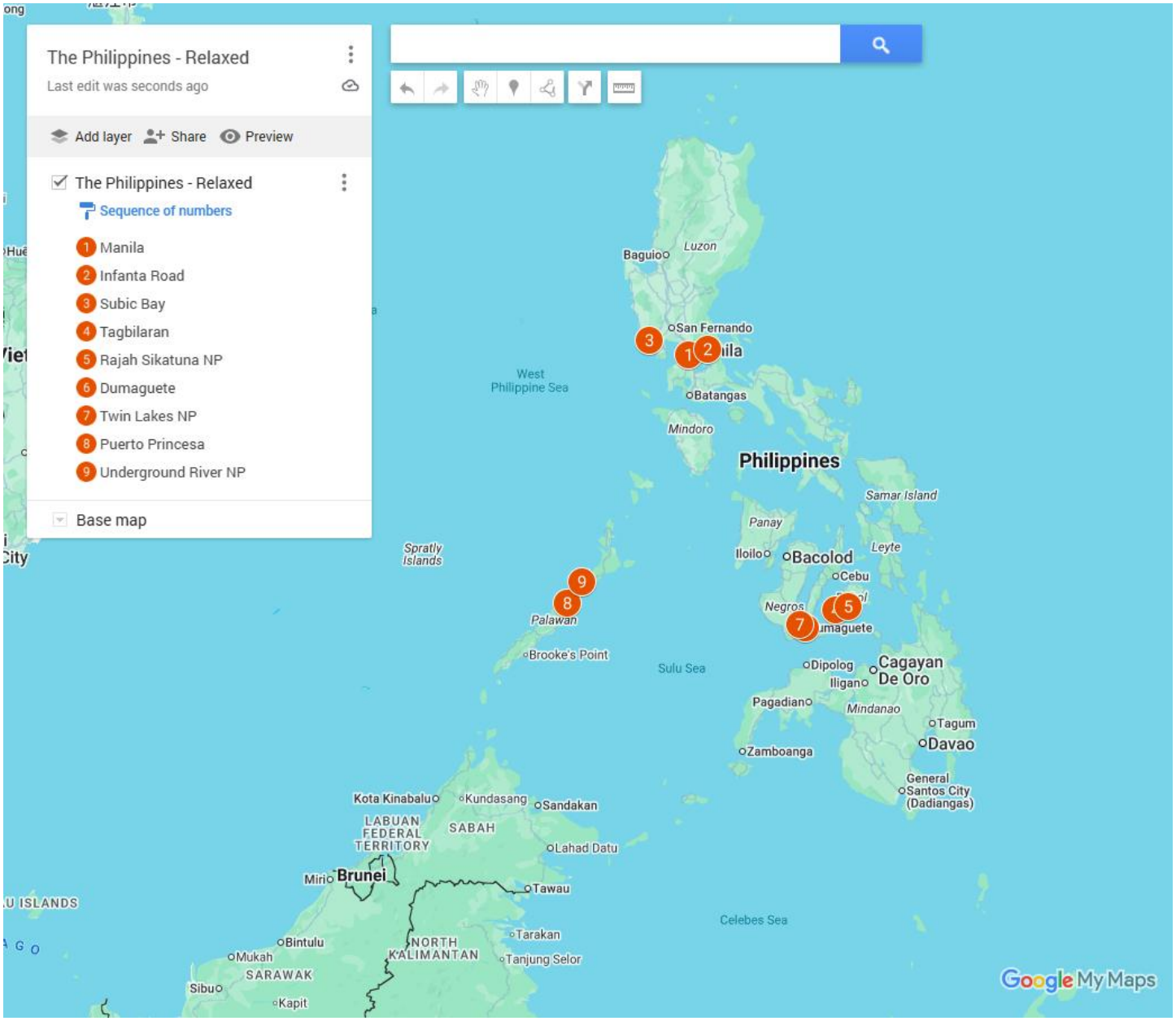
We begin on the island of Luzon, where we'll explore montane, foothill, and lowland forest localities in search of specials such as Stripe-headed Rhabdornis, Rough-crested and Scale-feathered Malkoha, Rufous Coucal, Coleto, Flaming Sunbird and the sensational, Yellow-breasted Fruit Dove, among many other fabulous endemics.

On the remarkable Visayan archipelago, we visit the islands of Bohol and Negros, where we'll enjoy numerous highly sought-after and extremely range-restricted species such as Negros Striped Babblers, Black-belted Flowerpecker, Bohol Sunbird, Visayan Tailorbird and Visayan Broadbill. We also have good chances of finding rare endemic mammals, including the strange Philippine Tarsier and the Philippine Colugo (Flying Lemur), while the Chocolate Hills scenery is simply spellbinding!

On Palawan, white sandy beaches, extensive coral reefs, and an underground river form a spectacular backdrop to our birding. Highlights are likely to include the mega Palawan Peacock-Pheasant, mound-building Philippine Megapode, Philippine Pitta, the incredibly beautiful Blue Paradise Flycatcher, Spot-throated and Red-headed Flamebacks, Palawan Frogmouth, and Palawan Hornbill—among the nearly 30 endemic species inhabiting the island.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Manila (Luzon)**
Day 2	**Manila to Infanta Road via La Mesa Park**
Day 3	**Infanta Road**
Day 4	**Infanta Road to Subic Bay via Palo Alto**
Day 5	**Subic Bay**
Day 6	**Subic Bay; flight to Tagbilaran (Bohol)**
Day 7	**Rajah Sikatuna National Park**
Day 8	**Rajah Sikatuna National Park & Philippine Tarsier Sanctuary**
Day 9	**Tagbilaran; ferry to Dumaguete (Negros)**
Day 10	**Twin Lakes National Park**
Day 11	**Twin Lakes National Park; flight to Puerto Princesa (Palawan)**
Days 12 & 13	**Puerto Princesa, Sabang (Underground River NP), Irawan & Napsan Road**
Day 14	**Puerto Princesa, flight to Manila & final departure**


The Philippines - Relaxed
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Sequence of numbers
1 Manila
2 Infanta Road
3 Subic Bay
4 Tagbilaran
5 Rajah Sikatuna NP
6 Dumaguete
7 Twin Lakes NP
8 Puerto Princesa
9 Underground River NP
Base map
Baguio
Luzon
San Fernando
Batangas
West Philippine Sea
Mindoro
Philippines
Samar Island
Panay
Iloilo
Bacolod
Leyte
Cebu
Negros
Spratly Islands
Palawan
Brooke's Point
Sulu Sea
Dipolog
Iligan
Cagayan De Oro
Pagadian
Mindanao
Tagum
Davao
Zamboanga
General Santos City (Dadiangas)
Kota Kinabalu
Kundasang
Sandakan
LABUAN FEDERAL TERRITORY
SABAH
Lahad Datu
Miri
Brunei
Tawau
Celebes Sea
Bintulu
Mukah
SARAWAK
NORTH KALIMANTAN
Tarakan
Tanjung Selor
Sibu
Kapit
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Birding sites in detail

LUZON



Ashy Thrush by David Hoddinott

La Mesa. This small park near Manila has an area of forested trails where we will search for Ashy Thrush, Lowland White-eye, Hooded and Philippine Pittas, Philippine Magpie-Robin, Philippine Pied Fantail, Grey-backed Tailorbird, Philippine Pygmy Woodpecker, White-eared Brown Dove, and Elegant Tit, while chances also exist of encountering Slaty-legged Crake, the spectacular Spotted Wood Kingfisher, and Black-chinned Fruit Dove.

Infanta Road. This road is home to several spectacular Philippines endemics, many of which are challenging to find elsewhere. Mixed flocks here often contain the active Blue-headed Fantail, the secretive and recently split Bicol Ground Warbler, Balicassiao, Coleto, Bar-bellied Cuckooshrike, Olive-backed Flowerpecker, Philippine Fairy-bluebird (now very rare or locally extinct elsewhere), Sulphur-billed Nuthatch, Elegant Tit and Citrine Canary-flycatcher.

Many other highly sought-after species can be found here, including the spectacular Spotted Wood Kingfisher, Barred Rail, Plain Bush-hen, Luzon and the rare (Northern) Rufous Hornbills, attractive Flame-breasted, Yellow-breasted and Cream-bellied Fruit Doves, Philippine Cuckoo-Dove, Scale-feathered Malkoha, Rufous-crowned Bee-eater, Brown-breasted Kingfisher, Amethyst Brown Dove, Stripe-headed Rhabdornis, White-browed Shama, Philippine and Yellow-wattled Bulbuls, Flaming Sunbird and Bicolored Flowerpecker, while overhead we will watch for Philippine Hawk-Eagle, Philippine Serpent Eagle, Guaiabero, Purple Needletail, Ameline Swiftlet and Blue-crowned Racket-tail.



Spotted Wood Kingfisher by Glen Valentine

Subic Bay. Subic Bay has tall tropical forests in which we'll search for a huge number of Philippines endemics, as well as several scarce Luzon endemics. At dawn, it is sometimes possible to see thousands of Philippine, Large and Golden-crowned Flying Foxes returning to daytime roosts before we head to our birding area. Among other more widespread Philippine specialities, we will specifically be looking for the localised Green Racket-tail that often whizzes past through the canopy, the tangle-loving Rufous



Philippines Serpent Eagle by Glen Valentine

Coucal, Rough-crested Malkoha, Blackish Cuckooshrike, retiring White-browed Shama and Northern Sooty Woodpecker.

Slightly more widespread but no-less-desirable species we'll also be targeting during our time here include the impressive Luzon Flameback, huge White-bellied Woodpecker, Philippine Hawk-Eagle, Philippine Serpent Eagle, Philippine Falconet, Philippine Honey Buzzard, Whiskered Treeswift, Purple Needletail, Blue-naped Parrot, Guaiabero (a type of endemic fig parrot), Philippine Hanging Parrot, Philippine Green Pigeon, Rufous-crowned Bee-eater, Bar-bellied Cuckooshrike, Pygmy Flowerpecker and Coleto.

Optional night birding in this area may produce Chocolate and Luzon Boobooks, Philippine Nightjar and Philippine Scops Owl.

BOHOL

Rajah Sikatuna National Park. We will be birding a sizable tract of lush tropical forest. Although challenging to locate at other sites in the Philippines, the calls of Azure-breasted Pitta are fairly common here, and we have good chances of obtaining views of this colourful creature, as well as the uncommon Rufous-lored (Winchell's) Kingfisher. In addition, we will also be seaching for Bohol Sunbird, Visayan Babbler, Visayan Blue Fantail, Rufous-tailed Jungle Flycatcher and the terrestrial Striated Wren-Babbler. Samar Hornbills are normally seen here with some regularity, as is Philippine Trogon, the dazzling Philippine Fairy-bluebird, Black-faced Coucal, Buff-spotted Flameback, the brilliant Northern Silvery Kingfisher, Handsome and Purple-throated Sunbirds, Philippine Leaf Warbler, Bicolored Flowerpecker, Philippine Oriole, Yellow-bellied Whistler, Rufous-fronted Tailorbird and (Short-tailed if split) Balicassiao and the fantastic Visayan Broadbill.



Visayan Broadbill by David Hoddinott

Interestingly, there are a large number of frogs and lizards present in the reserve. These include the flying lizards of Asia (of the genus Draco), which have wing-like



Philippine Tarsier by Glen Valentine

membranes connected to long expandable ribs on each side, enabling them to glide without ever coming to the ground.

Open patches surrounding the forest at dusk can be productive for Everett's Scops Owl and Philippine Frogmouth, as well as mammals that may include Philippine Tarsier, large numbers of Philippine Flying Fox and the incredible, gliding Philippine Colugo (Flying Lemur) - a large arboreal mammal that has generous amounts of skin membrane between its forelimbs and tail helping it to glide extreme distances from tree to tree, and one of only two representatives of a very bizarre mammal family.

NEGROS

Balinsasayao Twin Lakes National Park. Arriving at the picturesque, forest-lined crater lakes in this wonderful protected area just after dawn will afford us excellent chances of seeing endemic forest denizens such as Visayan Hornbill and Blue-crowned Racket-tail sitting up on exposed perches or flying overhead to their feeding sites.

A lookout deck at the park's restaurant is an especially good place to watch for feeding flowerpeckers and sunbirds and also for viewing mixed flocks moving through the surrounding forest and here we hope to encounter Orange-bellied, Bicolored, Red-keeled and Black-belted Flowerpeckers, dazzling Magnificent and Maroon-naped Sunbirds, the scarce White-winged and Bar-bellied (Visayan if split) Cuckooshrikes and (White-bellied if split) Balicassiao.

Short, forest trails down to the lake-edge will give us access to habitat for Amethyst (Grey-breasted if split) Brown Dove, the vocal but shy Philippine Hawk-Cuckoo, Spotted Wood Kingfisher and Visayan Tailorbird.

We'll also embark on a very pleasnt and leisurely paddle-boat trip on the larger of the two crater lakes which will be our best chance of seeing Philippine Spine-tailed Swifts as they often skim low over the water, Pink-bellied Imperial Pigeon, the brilliant Yellow-breasted Fruit Dove and



Maroon-naped Sunbird by Glen Valentine



Yellow-breasted Fruit Dove by David Hoddinott

Philippine Oriole. We'll certainly keep our eyes peeled overhead for raptors such as Philippine and Crested Honey Buzzard, the rare Pinsker's Hawk-Eagle, Osprey, Crested Goshawk and Philippine Serpent Eagle.

Dumaguete area/EDC. The surrounding hills hold the endemic Negros Striped Babbler, a higher altitude species that very few birders have seen. We hope to be able to drive right to the altitude and area for this previously mythical species and will patiently stake out a small area where a pair regularly moves through while feeding, often together with other mixed flock species like Warbling White-eye, Sulphur-billed Nuthatch, Elegant Tit, Philippine Tailorbird, Lemon-throated Leaf Warbler, Balicassiao, Visayan Fantail and Visayan Bulbul.

An optional evening of owling may produce the much-desired Negros Scops Owl and Luzon (Visayan) Boobook.

PALAWAN

Puerto Princesa & Irawan. Top of our desireed list will be the ornate Palawan Peacock-Pheasant. Although the reliable male who entertained visiting birders for 20 years is no longer, the recent addition of an excellent hide has put this species back on the 'very likely to be seen' map!

Rufous-backed Dwarf Kingfisher can often be heard dashing from one perch to the next as we search for the attractive Blue-headed Racket-tail, Chestnut-breasted Malkoha, Stork-billed and Ruddy Kingfishers, White-bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-throated Leafbird that might be found in a fruiting tree along with the vociferous and surprisingly showy White-vented Shama, the dazzling Blue Paradise Flycatcher, Palawan Crow, Palawan Drongo, Palawan Bulbul, flocks of Common Hill Myna, Black-throated Oriole, Black-chinned Fruit Dove, Bar-bellied Cuckooshrike and Fiery Minivet. As the day warms up, we'll be glancing skywards for soaring Crested Serpent Eagle, Changeable Hawk-Eagle, Crested Goshawk and Crested Honey Buzzard, as well as Brown-backed Needletails.



Blue Paradise Flycatcher by Glen Valentine



Palawan Fairy-bluebird by Glen Valentine

Tall mangrove habitat in the area is likely to produce Copper-throated Sunbird, Collared Kingfisher, Pied Triller, Ashy-fronted Bulbul and the distinctive, endemic Palawan Sunbird, while scenic forested stretches may reveal a variety of interesting species such as the endemic Palawan Hornbill, Lovely Sunbird, Square-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo, Pale (Palawan) Spiderhunter, the vibrant Palawan Flowerpecker, Palawan Tit and a chance for the resident Oriental Hobby that has nested on nearby cliff ledges. We'll also stake out a reliable area for the critically endangered, Red-vented Cockatoo that is now almost entirely restricted to Palawan and small offshore islands.

Optional night birding in the area can be productive, and we may find Palawan Frogmouth, Palawan Scops Owl, the distinctive, endemic subspecies of Spotted Wood Owl and the more widespread Large-tailed Nightjar.

Napsan Road. Heart-warmingly, Palawan is still mostly blanketed in forest. The entire length of the Napsan Road, now gaining in popularity as one of the best areas to see many of Palawan's trickier endemics, meanders its way through good-quality, intact foothill forest. Birding along this road is excellent and it certainly appears to be the core area for endemic gems like Palawan Hornbill, Spot-throated and Red-headed Flamebacks, Palawan Fairy-bluebird, Striped Flowerpecker, Blue-headed Racket-tail and the secretive Falcated Wren-Babbler.



Red-vented Cockatoos by Glen Valentine

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Moderate. Suitable for most birding interest levels. Has some walking in hot & humid conditions. A few early morning departures.
Birding Ease		Moderate. Bird density is low overall, mostly within the forest interior. Some endemics require patience & persistence.
Accommodation		Moderate to comfortable standard.
Walking / Trails		Moderate walking. Some trails can be uneven, others have short, steep sections. We aim to avoid tougher hikes.
Vehicles / Roads		Mostly minibus style vehicles. Roads are variable, some can be bumpy or muddy after rains.
Photography		Worthwhile to good. Some ad hoc blinds. Typical forest habitat difficulties.
Annoyances		Malaria & other biting insects are present. Environment can be very hot & humid.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 14;
- Bottled drinking water, tea and coffee at meals;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services;
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights (except as stated above);
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions & activities;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

Our Relaxed series of tours are designed to focus on having an enjoyable holiday with a bird and wildlife focus. Where possible; we have reduced or removed long drives, single night stays and poor/rustic accommodation. We have also sought to reduce or remove difficult hikes, narrow/muddy trails and otherwise oppressive environmental conditions. Early starts and night birding are mostly optional, and we will not spend much time searching for difficult and/or skulking species. These tours are not suitable for hardcore birders and listers, or dedicated photographers.

- This tour DOES require a GOOD level of fitness. Participants should also be in good general health. Much of the forest birding will be done on foot and may require walking or standing for several hours a day.
- This Philippines tour is designed to be a less intensive birding experience than our standard classic tours.
- There are some unavoidable early morning starts.
- Some days involve long drives.
- Due to the number of nightbirds, nocturnal birding is beneficial, but sessions are optional.
- Lodgings are generally good; we will stay either in hotels or guesthouses. Be aware that at times we may experience maintenance problems in these facilities that are beyond our control.
- We will spend most of this tour well away from medical facilities.
- Most areas will be hot and humid. We will thus look to make best use of the early mornings and avoid, as far as possible, birding in the middle of the day. In the rainforest areas the humidity will be high and potentially very uncomfortable.
- Access to some sites changes from year to year, and we may not be permitted to visit some locations.
- For the comfort of your fellow travellers, do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20kg (44lb) for check in luggage and 8kg (+-18lb) for hand luggage.

Arrival and Departure Details

Day 1 of the tour is set aside as an arrival day, so you are thus free to arrive at any time. The tour will conclude in the mid-morning of day 14 at Manila International Airport.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Manila International Airport (IATA: MNL) is the main port of entry and departure for international flights to The Philippines.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.