# Micronesia

## Endemics of the Caroline & Northern Mariana Islands



**Pohnpei Lorikeet by Jonathan Slifkin**

*The tiny, remote islands-some 600 in total-that make up the Federated States of Micronesia, along with the island nation of Palau, have long remained off most birders' radar. A combination of challenging logistics, the need for special permissions from local landowners to access key birding sites, and limited research into species diversity and genetics has contributed to the region receiving only a handful of birding visitors.*

*We are, however, thrilled to announce our inaugural Endemics of Micronesia tour! Much like our successful Lesser and Greater Antilles trips, this tour aims to target every single endemic species across the entire Micronesian region.*

*Join us on an adventure-filled quest to seek out nearly sixty endemic species and over thirty endemic subspecies-many of which are likely to be elevated to full species status as regional research continues to expand. This is truly one of the most remote and exciting birding destinations on the planet.*

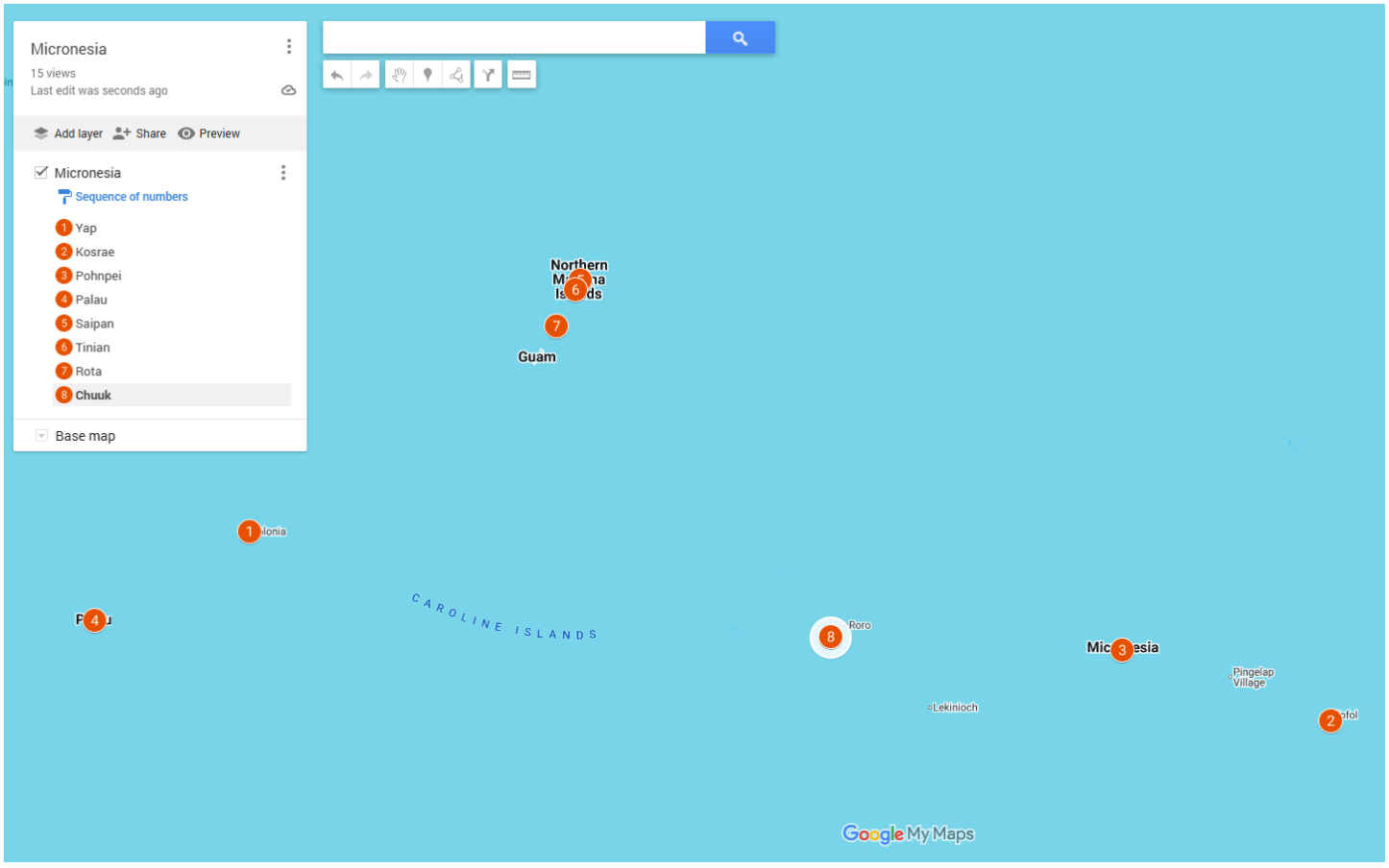
*Our journey takes you through the Federated States of Micronesia-an independent nation since 1979-comprising the four states of Yap, Chuuk, Pohnpei, and Kosrae. We also visit the Republic of Palau, a separate independent country within the Micronesian region, and conclude with exploration of the Northern Mariana Islands, an unincorporated territory and commonwealth of the United States.*

*By venturing to these remote lands-characterized by pristine beaches, lush forests, unspoiled coral reefs, and glistening turquoise seas-you'll have the best possible chance of seeing every endemic and near-endemic bird species found in Micronesia.*

*A birding adventure unlike any other awaits!*

## *Itinerary & Map*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Days 1 to 3** | **Yap State** |
| **Days 3 & 4** | **Kosrae State** |
| **Days 5 to 7** | **Pohnpei State** |
| **Days 7 to 10** | **Republic of Palau** |
| **Days 11 to 13** | **The Northern Marianas: Saipan, Tinian and Rota** |
| **Days 14 to 16** | **Chuuk State** |



## *Birding sites in detail*



Yap Monarch by Jonathan Slifkin

**Yap State.** Easily the best place on the planet to see gargantuan Manta Rays year round (sometimes possible to be seen whilst snorkelling) and with unspoiled tranquil beaches dotted along a coastline boasting spectacular reefs and marine life, the inhabitants of Yap have long had a deep and meaningful connection to the ocean. This is a land that is just about as far removed from the hustle and bustle of modern day life as imaginable; where in some of the small remote villages on the island, men wear loin cloths and women grass-skirts and where traditional and carefully coordinated dance is the median by which tales of lore and legend are passed down through the generations. It is an island steeped in tradition and culture with fascinating discoveries to be made around seemingly every corner - perhaps none more so than the presence of large stone-money discs (or rai) that once represented the only currency on the island.

We focus our birding at a couple of sites (one very close to our accommodation) which are reliable for such key targets as Yap Monarch, Micronesian Myzomela, and Micronesian Rufous Fantail, along with a species which will likely call for considerably more patience - the Yap Cicadabird. Also possible at these two locations are the near-threatened White-throated Ground Dove - a striking little dove with a deeply noted song.

In season, nearby endemic Serianthes trees are home to nesting White-tailed Tropicbirds and preferred resting stops for delightful Fairy Terns. The limbs of these endemic trees can also be coveted foraging sites for both the endangered Yap White-eye and the near-threatened Plain White-eye.



Yap White-eye by Jonathan Slifkin

**Kosrae State.** Tiny Kosrae State is the smallest and easternmost island in the Caroline Islands Archipelago. Perhaps given its small size it's not surprising that the island is home to only two single-island endemics! We'll make for an isolated patch of forest accessible by road in which the beautiful and little known Kosrae Fruit Dove is known to inhabit, and later turn our attention to the positively plumbeous-plumaged Kosrae White-eye. Another target will be the Micronesian Starling - a species possible on almost every island - but the subspecies here is endemic and usually easily seen.

We also pay a visit to a remarkable cave system, home to a healthy population of Caroline Islands Swiftlet.



Kosrae Fruit Dove by Jonathan Slifkin

**Pohnpei State.** Many of these islands are gob-smackingly beautiful, and those in isolated Pohnpei State, also known as the Garden of Micronesia are no exception, with lush tropical forest fueled by nutrient rich soils blanketing islands fringed by brilliant and diverse barrier reefs.

Checking into our hotel, there may be time before dusk to explore the surrounding mangroves that dominate the lagoon. This may provide the opportunity for a sighting of our first Pohnpei endemic - the striking and cinnamon-capped Pohnpei Kingfisher, and we'll listen for its shrieky trilled call to hone in on its position.

Venturing into a variety of habitats, we'll seek out the near-threatened Pohnpei Lorikeet (one of seven endemics in Pohnpei) whose deep maroon/burgundy plumage is somewhat unusual amongst members of the Psittaculidae family. Sharing the lush forests of the island with the lorikeet are the endangered and difficult Pohnpei Cicadabird (the female of which may perhaps be more coveted by photographers), Pohnpei Fantail, Pohnpei Flycatcher and both endemic White-eyes (Pohnpei and Long-billed). The Micronesian Imperial Pigeon has recovered remarkably well on this island, making the subspecies here far easier to see than on any other island on the tour. Sadly the same cannot be said for the Pohnpei Starling which hasn't been reliably sighted since 1995; but with so few birders making their way to these islands, who knows whether it may still be out there. Perhaps we can rediscover it!



Pohnpei Flycatcher by Jonathan Slifkin

Assuming all endemics have been sighted, and no targets remain, we may take advantage of our time in Pohnpei State by visiting an idyllic and tranquil setting known locally as the Venice of the Pacific - the mythical ruins of Nan Madol - a well preserved archaeological site crisscrossed by a remarkable system of canals.

**Republic of Palau.** Arriving in Palau, renowned as the most biodiverse and endemic-rich of all of the islands in the region, we make for our accommodation conveniently situated in a central location allowing for relative ease of access to both birding sites and restaurants.

With almost twenty single-island endemics, along with ten near-endemics and endemic subspecies to be found on this island, we allocate multiple days on this large and relatively more developed of the islands on the tour.



**Golden White-eye by Jonathan Slifkin**

The majority of the birds are not overly difficult to find, however we will need to concentrate our searches in a few different areas - including taking a boat trip south to the striking "Rock Islands" located off of Koror, where we have our only chance for the seemingly steroid-infused Giant White-eye, beautifully patterned, endangered and shy Palau Ground Dove and Caroline Islands White-eye. On the Rock Islands we will also target two likely splits - the extremely rare (possibly less than 30 individuals) White-breasted Swallow, and the far more common Micronesian Megapode. There is even the possibility whilst here of witnessing Tropical Shearwaters.

Back on the main island two of the more challenging species promise to be the Palau Scops Owl, and Palau Nightjar - however we have identified a couple of typically reliable sites frequented by both of these nocturnal specialists - thereby dramatically improving our odds of close and truly memorable encounters.

Early morning starts will be needed for the best opportunities for sightings of both the endemic subspecies of Blue-faced Parrotfinch and Palau Bush Warbler. Many other species are either more populous, cooperative, or wide-ranging and should prove significantly easier to see. These include the splendid Palau Fruit Dove, Morningbird, Dusky White-eye, plentiful Palau Cicadabird, tiny Palau Kingfisher, Palau Fantail, softly toned Palau Flycatcher; and darting across the skies above for the Palau Swiftlet.



**Palau "Rock Islands" by Erik Forsyth**

The birding on Palau and the Rock Islands promises to be some of the best and most rewarding (in terms of numbers of endemics) of the entire trip, and we will try to add to the already impressive tally of targets by also seeking out the endemic subspecies of Nicobar Pigeon (another probable split) , Nankeen Night Heron, Collared Kingfisher, Buff-banded Rail and Purple Swamphen.

We will likely swell these numbers still further with incidental sightings of others

that frequent some of the prime habitats we visit. These include: Pacific Golden Plover, Grey-tailed Tattler, Black Noddy, Whiskered Tern, White Tern, Great Crested Tern, Pacific Reef Heron, and Little Pied Cormorant.



**Palau Scops Owl by Jonathan Slifkin**

**The Northern Marianas: Saipan, Tinian and Rota.** The tiny islands of the Northern Marianas represent a US Commonwealth in the heart of the Pacific and are neighbored by the far more internationally renowned Guam - a US Territory we will need to fly into during our time in the Marianas, and where we will set aside sufficient time to have a try for the critically endangered Guam Rail. Thankfully, from a birding perspective, and perhaps paradoxically, the three islands that are most accessible due to development and popularity with tourists are the three (of the 14 Marianas) that are home to the single-island endemics we'll be searching for.

*Saipan*

The largest and most populous island (although populous is a relative term when one considers the total population on the island is under 50,000!) is home to the largest number of endemics in the Northern Marianas, and some like the Golden White-eye are absolutely stunning! Using our lodging as a base we'll make our way to prime habitats(the entire island can be driven around in under an hour so time spent getting to site will be minimal) to see this and other crucial targets. Mariana Swiftlet should be straightforward to see whilst feeding over large expanses of both cleared and forested habitat, and the Mariana Fruit Dove's tendency to frequent select forested habitat means we can narrow our search to the most likely sites. The Mariana Kingfisher is far easier here than on the other Marianas we visit, as indeed is the Micronesian Myzomela and the Bridled White-eye. Saipan Reed Warbler rounds off our targets on what promises to be a bird-rich island stay. During our time on Saipan we will also make the short boat ride across to nearby Managaha Island in order to target the wonderfully weird Micronesian Megapode.



**Blue-faced Parrotfinch by Jonathan Slifkin**

*Tinian*

Widely known for species below water (hence the relatively large number of diving enthusiasts who explore its numerous shipwrecks and reefs) rather than above it, and with a lone single-island endemic (the Tinian Monarch) the tiny island of Tinian calls for the least amount of time spent in the Marianas, and indeed our time here will be fleeting,

as we pay only a day visit in order to see the Tinian Monarch and try for the endemic subspecies of Micronesian Starling, before moving on to the larger and more target-rich neighbouring island of Rota.



**Micronesia Megapode by Jonathan Slifkin**

As with so many of these tiny Micronesian Islands, they existed in relative international obscurity up until the Second World War, when they were thrust into the spotlight, bearing witness to some intense battles between Japanese and American soldiers. During your birding outings on this and several of the other islands, you may see for yourselves the remnants of those fervent mid-20th century battles , with pill boxes, cannon bunkers, and other relics of war littering portions of the otherwise largely unspoilt landscapes. Tinian itself played a hugely significant role in WWII, as the departure point of both the Enola Gay and Bockscar with their atomic payloads bound for the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

*Rota*

We are sure to receive a warm welcome on Rota - lovingly referred to as "the world's friendliest island". This land of coconut crabs and sweet potatoes is quiet and peaceful, and home to the single-island endemic Rota White-eye, together with an endemic subspecies of Mariana Kingfisher and endemic subspecies of Micronesian Rufous Fantail. However, perhaps the key reason for our spending as long as we do here is the opportunity to see the last surviving wild population of Mariana Crow on the planet (following this species extirpation on Guam thanks to the introduction of Brown Tree Snake). The crow is the subject of a frantic conservation effort involving an intense captive breeding program and the releasing of successfully hatched fledglings to join the paltry number of wild survivors. The primary cause of the decimation of this species on Guam was predation by the introduced Brown Tree Snake, while a declining population on Rota is attributed to feral cats and possibly rats. A portion of your total tour price has been set aside as a donation to the efforts of the conservationists on the front line of this gargantuan effort to save both of these species from oblivion.



**Mariana Flycatcher by Jonathan Slifkin**

**Chuuk State.** Micronesia on the whole is a safe destination for birders, and on all of the other islands residents are largely welcoming and very friendly. There are however some regions in Chuuk State that are the exception, and we must ensure we are granted special permissions by

our local contacts prior to birding at some of the key sites necessary to see the endemics found on some of the 16 islands that make up Chuuk.



**Chuuk Monarch by Jonathan Slifkin**

Upon arrival in Chuuk State we check into our resort offering spectacular sunset views over the reef-filled seas. During our time here (after our morning birding, and before any late afternoon birding sessions commence), why not take advantage of down time and the prime location of this resort by renting a kayak or stand-up paddleboard and setting out across one of the most naturally stunning peninsulas in all of Micronesia.

In terms of the birding, possible sightings relatively close to our hotel are the endemic subspecies of Micronesian Myzomela, along with the striking and quite plentiful Purple-capped Fruit Dove. Considerably more time and effort will need to be reserved for the critically endangered Caroline Islands Ground Dove. Other species we will focus on whilst at our primary birding sites include Caroline Reed Warbler, Caroline Islands White-eye, and the lovely pastel-colored Chuuk Flycatcher.

Following our first afternoon birding on Chuuk, we make a very short boat ride across to the nearby island of Tonoas, where we stroll along easily negotiable paths for a memorable encounters with one of the most stunning species in Micronesia - the splendid Chuuk Monarch.



**Caroline Islands Ground Dove by Jonathan Slifkin**

Perhaps the roughest island in Chuuk State is Tol, where accessing land calls for some intense negotiation and banter and where there is still the possibility of receiving some abuse from locals. The hiking on Tol is also by far the most strenuous encountered on any of the islands.However a visit here is necessary to have a chance for the critically endangered Teardrop White-eye, and the endemic subspecies of Micronesian Imperial Pigeon. Given the difficulties often associated with visiting Tol a visit to this island will be offered only as an optional 1-day extension at the end of the tour. Those clients wanting to go to Tol can do so on Day 16, while others not wanting to expose themselves to the aforementioned difficulties can end the tour late on day 15.

## *Tour Grading & Key*

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|---|---|---|
| **Overall Ease** |  | Mostly easy. Several flights & transfers from one island to another. Suitable for all birding and wildlife interest levels. |
| **Birding Ease** |  | Undemanding. Most species provide good visuals; forest interior birding is very limited. |
| **Accommodation** |  | Very comfortable. |
| **Walking / Trails** |  | Moderate amount of walking, mostly on flat ground, wide trails and around lodge gardens. One optional strenuous hike. |
| **Vehicles / Roads** |  | Limited driving, mostly on sealed roads. |
| **Photography** |  | Good to excellent. No dedicated hides. |
| **Annoyances** |  | None of note. |

## *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 lunch on day 1 to breakfast on day 16**;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve entrance fees (except Tol Island);
- All guiding services
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions (ie: Kayaking, snorkelling);
- Access to Tol Island for those that wish to climb Mount Winipot.
- 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.**

- The maximum weight limit for some of the crucial plane connections between islands is 2 200lbs. Therefore, the cumulative weight of each guest plus ALL of their luggage, i.e. guest + carry-on luggage + checked luggage + optics + any photography equipment, CANNOT exceed 240lbs per person. Any guest exceeding this limit will be denied boarding by the airlines. If they wish to proceed with the trip, they will incur the financial burden of rendezvousing with the group if/when possible (including but not limited to the cost of new airline tickets, accommodations, meals, on-ground transportation, and any other expenses incurred). Neither Rockjumper nor our local agents will be held responsible for any costs incurred in this instance.
- Accommodation throughout the trip is of a good standard and the hotels and resorts that we make use of range from comfortable to very good. There is no camping on this trip.
- The tour pace is mostly relaxed, with reasonably easy to occasionally moderate walking. There will be one optional strenuous hike on Mount Winipot (South Tol).
- The visit to Tol Island for its sole endemic, Teardrop White-eye is both optional and only applicable for the very hardcore/fit birder. It involves a very difficult and often slippery hike up Mount Winipot with no handrails, accompanied by armed landowners as some of the local villagers can be hostile to foreigners. Access costs depend on group size but are approximately $US1000 per person over and above the tour price and must be paid in cash on site.

## *Arrival and Departure Details*

The tour will begin on Yap Island (Federated States of Micronesia) on Day 1, according to the above itinerary and conclude on the morning of day 16** on Rota Island (United States Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands).

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.

Yap International Airport, Colonia (IATA: YAP) is the main port of entry for international flights for this tour, whilst Chuuk International Airport, Chuuk (IATA: TKK), is the main port of departure.

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.**

****The length, start/end point and order of the itinerary will almost certainly be adjusted due to flight & routing refinement or changes.**