Ghana

Birds & Wildlife (Relaxed)

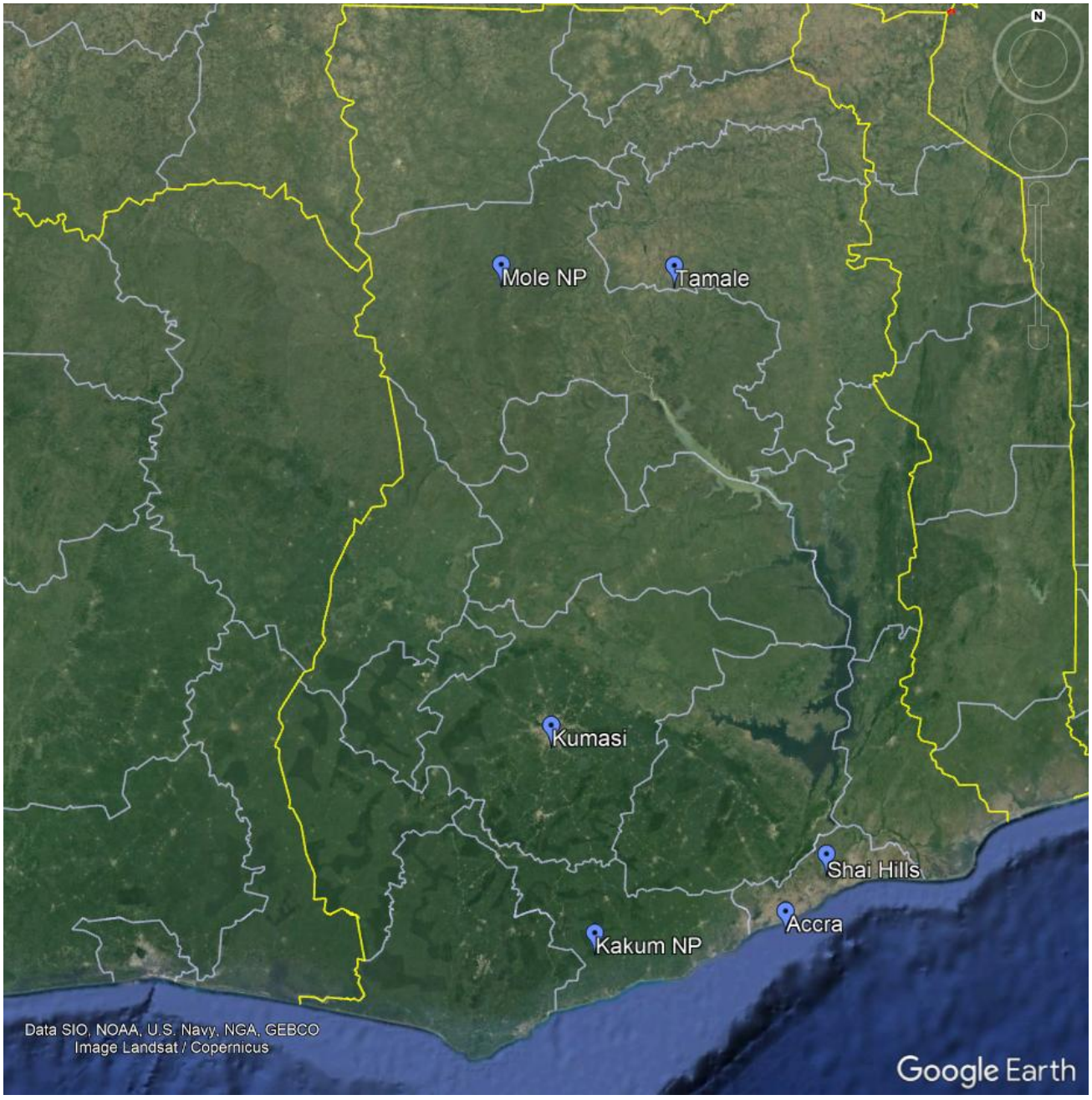


Black Bee-eater by David Hoddinott

Ghana is a West African destination like no other: it is a politically stable, English-speaking nation that is acknowledged as the friendliest country in the region. It is also one of the safest countries in which the Upper Guinea forest block, an internationally recognised Endemic Bird Area, can be accessed, and our birding tour of Ghana allows for a thorough exploration of the most exciting West African birding habitats. From Guinea savanna to lush rainforest, we will see much of what Ghana has to offer, promising a truly impressive bird tally and a thoroughly enjoyable experience. Our days in this wonderful country will be spent ambling forested trails, scanning for canopy species from a fabulous walkway, and exploring vast tracts of deciduous woodland. Typical African families such as turacos, barbets, sunbirds and greenbuls are particularly well represented, yielding a colourful and interesting bounty of species. Furthermore, we have the chance to see one of Africa's most highly sought-after birds – the fabled White-necked Rockfowl!

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival into Accra**
Day 2	**Shai Hills**
Day 3	**Accra to Kakum National Park**
Days 4 to 6	**Kakum National Park & surrounds**
Day 7	**Kakum to Bonkro Forest & Rockfowl colony**
Day 8	**Bonkro Forest to Mole National Park**
Days 9 to 11	**Mole National Park**
Day 12	**Mole National Park to Tamale, flight to Accra**
Day 13	**Final departure**



Birding sites in detail



West African Potto by Nigel Redman

Shai Hills. This sanctuary, situated about an hour outside the capital, is an expanse of grassland and woodland dominated by the steeply rising Shai Hills. The birding here is very good and we are bound to turn up something interesting; this is the best site in Ghana for White-crowned Cliff Chat and an excellent spot for Stone Partridge, African Hobby, Blue-bellied and Purple Rollers, Vinaceous Dove, Double-toothed Barbet, Greater and Lesser Honeyguides, Red-shouldered Cuckooshrike, Violet and Guinea Turacos and Brown Babbler.

Kakum National Park. This 607 km² (234 mi²) National Park is the jewel in the crown of Ghana's protected reserve system. The park conserves a critically important block of primary and secondary upper Guinea forest that is surrounded by a sea of humanity and its resultant deforestation. During our days in this area, we will explore several sections of this vast protected area, as well as a selection of nearby habitats.

Easily accessible from the park headquarters at Abrafo is the world famous Kakum canopy walkway, the only such structure of this size on the African continent. It is 350m long (over 1 000ft), 40m (132ft) high and is suspended between 7 emergent forest trees, which support platforms stable enough to allow telescope use. We will make special arrangements for the early opening and late closure of the walkway, thereby allowing us patronage during these critical birding hours.

Amongst the many species we hope to see from the walkway are some of West Africa's most sought-after forest jewels. Species that regularly attend the multi-species canopy bird waves include the cotinga-like Blue Cuckooshrike, Violet-backed Hyliota, Sharpe's Apalis (an upper Guinea endemic), Rufous-crowned Eremomela, African Shrike-flycatcher, Lemon-bellied Crombec, Green Hylia, Yellow-mantled and the beautiful Preuss's Weavers, Cassin's Honeybird, Willcocks's and the extremely rare Yellow-footed Honeyguides, White-headed and Forest Wood Hoopoes, Tit-Hylia, Grey Longbill, Red-headed and Crested Malimbes and Grey-headed, White-breasted and Chestnut-breasted Nigritas. Other species we hope to see include the elusive canopy-dwelling Fernando Po Batis, Yellow-billed Turaco, the indescribably beautiful



Sharpe's Apalis by Greg de Klerk



Blue Cuckooshrike by Adam Riley

Black Bee-eater, Yellow-spotted and Hairy-breasted Barbets, family flocks of the striking Red-billed Helmetshrike, Chestnut-capped Flycatcher, which also travel in small family groups, the strange-looking Naked-faced Barbet, Red-rumped Tinkerbird, Sabine's Puffback and Maxwell's Black Weaver.

The tree platforms provide a fabulous vista over the forest and forest edge, thereby providing a unique opportunity for spotting passing birds. Raptor watching is particularly productive and previous trips have produced unbeatable views of the rarely seen Congo Serpent Eagle, Cassin's Hawk-Eagle, Red-thighed Sparrowhawk, Red-necked Buzzard, Palm-nut Vulture, African Harrier-Hawk, African Cuckoo-Hawk and African Hobby. Other birds that we might see include Piping, Black Casqued Wattled, Yellow-casqued Wattled and Brown-cheeked Hornbills, Grey and Red-fronted Parrots, Rosy Bee-eater and mixed flocks of swifts that often include Cassin's and Sabine's Spinetails and, if we are lucky, Black Spinetail. Velvet-mantled Drongo is in constant attendance, as are a wide variety of sunbirds including Fraser's, Little Green, Collared, Olive, the stunning Buff-throated, Olive-bellied, Superb and sought-after Johanna's.

We will also walk the forest trails, covering both deep interior forest and forest edge at Abrafo and Antwikwaa (various sections of Kakum.) This is the realm of greenbuls and there is certainly no shortage of these sociable birds. Species we hope to find include Little, Little Grey, Plain, Slender-billed, Yellow-whiskered, Golden, Honeyguide, Swamp Palm, Icterine, Red-tailed and Western Bearded Greenbuls, as well as Grey-headed and Red-tailed Bristlebills and Western Nicator. Further birds of the forest interior include Red-chested Goshawk, White-spotted Flufftail, Blue-headed Wood Dove, Olive Long-tailed Cuckoo, Black-throated Coucal, Red-billed Dwarf, Black Dwarf and the bizarre White-crested Hornbills, Rufous-sided Broadbill performing its incredible circular dance routine, Finsch's Rufous Thrush, Fraser's Forest Flycatcher, Blue-headed Crested Flycatcher, Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher, Western Oriole and Shining Drongo. Although the forest interior birding is challenging, hard work and perseverance should net us a good selection of these special species.

We will also be ever alert for Safari Ant activity, not only in order to avoid their painful bites, but also (and more importantly!) because they provide us with our best opportunity for viewing shy ant-attending birds such as the three species of Bristlebill, White-tailed and rare Brown-chested Alethes, Forest Robin and White-tailed Rufous Thrush. Rarities, which we will be on the constant lookout for, include Forest Francolin and Red-fronted Antpecker and while these both occur in



Long-tailed Hawk by David Hoddinott

Kakum we would be extremely fortunate to find them!



Red-billed Helmetshrike by Adam Riley

The forest edge is also extremely productive and supports a different cast of species including Ahanta Francolin, the seldom seen Yellow-throated Cuckoo, Yellow-billed Barbet, Yellow-rumped, Speckled and Yellow-throated Tinkerbirds, Buff-spotted, Brown-eared, Gabon and Fire-bellied Woodpeckers, the rare Kemp's Longbill, Yellow-browed and Olive-green Camaropteras, Green Crombec, Dusky-blue Flycatcher, Black-and-white Shrike-flycatcher, Black-winged Oriole, Splendid, Copper-tailed and Chestnut-winged Starlings and Blue-billed Malimbe.

We will also undertake several nocturnal excursions in the hope of finding Fraser's Eagle-Owl, Red-chested Owlet and the very rare and aberrant Brown Nightjar. During the nocturnal excursion, we may well hear Nkulengu Rail, a near impossible rail to see! These large forest rallids roost high in trees and emit their loud "Congo-drum" duets after dusk and in the pre-dawn.

Rainforest mammals are inconspicuous but we should see several species of primates, which may include Spot-nosed and Lowe's Monkeys and Olive and Western Pied Colobus. A night walk will provide the opportunity of finding West African Potto, a slow moving and primitive primate that subsists largely on tree-gum, as well as several species of fast moving galagos. Many other mammals occur in Kakum but most are very seldom seen; these include Forest Elephant, Giant Forest Hog, Leopard, Water Chevrotain (a primitive antelope that is largely aquatic and often feeds on meat), 5 species of duiker, Bongo, 3 species of pangolin, and the arboreal Brush-tailed Porcupine. We can, however, count on seeing several species of squirrel, including African Giant Squirrel.



Cassin's Honeybird by David Hoddinott

While we are in the vicinity, we may have take time to visit one of Ghana's most notorious edifices, the Cape Coast Castle. Originally built by the Swedish in 1653, it is now a World Heritage Site and a chilling reminder of the horrors of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. In particular, a visit to the dank dungeons and the notorious "Door of No Return" is a deep and sobering experience. During the



Tit Hylia by Nigel Redman

height of this abhorrent trade, it is estimated that between 12 and 20 million West Africans were removed to the New World!

Aboabo. If the road to the Aboabo area is in decent repair then we will spend some time at this site. Here potential targets include Red-vented Malimbe, Thick-billed Honeyguide, Tessmann's Flycatcher, Yellow-billed Barbet, African Piculet (a very rare bird in West Africa), Black-capped Apalis and the elusive Long-tailed Hawk, amongst a multitude of more widespread forest species.

Bonkro Forest. In the early afternoon we'll set off on a hike into the Bonkro Forest, making our way towards some isolated rock domes. Here we will wait patiently for the bizarre and pre-historic looking White-necked Rockfowl to appear at its nesting colony. Although the birds will not be nesting, they regularly roost at the nest site we stand an excellent chance of seeing this near-mythical species. How long we need to wait varies, but can be for several hours.

Other species of interest that we'll be searching for during our stay include White-crested and Black Dwarf Hornbills, Grey-headed and Red-tailed Bristlebill's, Rufous-sided Broadbill, Fire-bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-throated and Thick-billed Cuckoos, Forest Wood Hoopoe and perhaps Sharpe's Apalis, whilst Western Wattled Cuckooshrike would be a mega find. Indeed, if our luck is in, we could even bump into Long-tailed or Tree Pangolin.

We'll then head back down the trail, to enjoy a celebratory meal at our lodge in this remote, local community. Up until recently, the nearest accommodation was in the city of Kumasi, which meant many hours of driving to reach the city late in the evening. This new lodge not only removed a lot of late-night travel time, but assists



White-necked Rockfowl by Adam Riley



Violet Turaco by Nigel Redman

the local community in further protecting this priceless forest. This evening, we will venture out for a night walk to see what nocturnal species we may find.

Bonkro Forest to Mole National Park. This is mostly a travel day as we head into a new biome, the Guinea Savanna belt. As we travel north we will keep a lookout for the beautiful Blue-bellied and Abyssinian Rollers, Dark Chanting Goshawk, Beaudouin's Snake Eagle, Grasshopper Buzzard and, if we are exceptionally lucky, we may encounter the scarce and localised White-throated Francolin.

Mole National Park. The 4,840 km² Mole National Park is Ghana's second most well-visited protected area after Kakum. Our hotel here is scenically situated on a 250 m high escarpment within the National Park and overlooks a seemingly endless vista of broad-leaved woodlands and wetlands. Frolicking pachyderms sometimes populate an elephant-wallow at the base of the escarpment. The elephants of Mole are renowned for their tolerance and on foot it is possible to get very close to them. From the viewing platform at the lodge, we are also able to scan over the marsh and see Common Warthog, Waterbuck, Bushbuck and handsome Kob.

The woodland surrounding our lodge is a superb place to begin birding. Seedeaters abound and we should find mixed flocks of Lavender Waxbill, Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu, Red-billed and Bar-breasted Firefinches, Pin-tailed and Exclamatory Paradise Whydahs, Chestnut-crowned Sparrow-Weaver, Northern Grey-headed Sparrow and Yellow-fronted Canary. We will also explore the rocky escarpment below the lodge and here we hope to find family groups of Stone Partridge and Double-spurred Francolin.

The moist woodland surrounding the swamp is home to some special birds and in particular, we will search for the highly desirable Oriole Warbler, one of West Africa's most beautiful birds. In fact, colourful birds are the rule here rather than the exception. Bruce's Green Pigeon, Violet Turaco, Rose-ringed Parakeet, Senegal Parrot, Blue-breasted and Grey-headed Kingfishers, Red-throated and Northern Carmine Bee-eaters, Abyssinian, Purple and Broad-billed Rollers, Bearded Barbet, Western Violet-backed, Green-headed, Pygmy, Beautiful and Splendid Sunbirds, Orange-breasted and Grey-



Red-throated Bee-eater by Nigel Redman

headed Bushshrikes and Lesser Blue-eared, Purple and Long-tailed Glossy Starlings are just some of the possible species on offer!



Bearded Barbet by Nigel Redman

The broad-leaved woodlands offer up a wonderful assortment of targets and these include Black Scimitarbill, Fine-spotted and Brown-backed Woodpeckers, Yellow-bellied Hyliota, Dorst's and Rufous Cisticolas, mega Emin's Shrike, White-shouldered Black Tit, African Spotted Creeper, rare Gambaga Flycatcher, Black-faced and Black-bellied Firefinches, uncommon Togo Paradise Whydah and Brown-rumped and Cabanis's Buntings, while more widespread species include Green Wood Hoopoe, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, African Grey Woodpecker, African Thrush, Senegal Eremomela, Northern Crombec, Northern Black, African Blue and European Pied Flycatchers, Brown-throated Wattle-eye, Senegal Batis, African Golden Oriole, Northern Puffback, Yellow-billed Shrike, Brubru, White-crested Helmetshrike (this race topped with an enormous, floppy crest), Red-headed Weaver and the ubiquitous Bush Petronia.

The more densely wooded regions of the park are often good areas to find Swamp Flycatcher, White-crowned and Snowy-crowned Robin-Chats, Blackcap and Brown Babblers, Yellow-throated Leaflove and Red-shouldered Cuckooshrike. Time will also be spent exploring the deeper reaches of Mole NP. Here natural openings in the woodland often get burnt at this time of year attracting some very interesting species such as Forbes's Plover and the scarce Rufous-rumped Lark. Other species associated with these burns include White-fronted Black Chat, Sun Lark, Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark and Four-banded Sandgrouse.

Raptors are particularly prolific in Mole and regularly encountered species include White-backed, White-headed and Hooded Vultures, Western Banded and Brown Snake Eagles, Bateleur, Lizard Buzzard, Wahlberg's, Booted and Martial Eagles, Ayres's and African Hawk-Eagles, Lanner Falcon and African Hobby.

We will also venture out on a couple of nocturnal excursions to look for the likes of Greyish Eagle-Owl, Northern White-faced Owl, and Freckled, Long-tailed, Plain and the spectacular Standard-winged Nightjars.



Pygmy Sunbird by Glen Valentine

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Birding can be challenging in the southern lowland forests as well as slow & low-density in the broad-leaved woodlands. Some long travel days, low food diversity, high heat & humidity.
Birding Ease		Moderate. Primarily forest birding with several low-density species. Some species (ie: Rockfowl require patience.)
Accommodation		Variable. Comfortable, but can be simple (Bonkro).
Walking / Trails		Canopy tower/walkway, forest trails, roadside birding. Trail to Rockfowl site has one short but fairly steep section.
Vehicles / Roads		Small coach. Several long drives. Roads are reasonable, traffic very congested in Accra.
Photography		Worthwhile to good. No dedicated hides. Typical forest orientated lighting difficulties & skulking species. Many species show well in binoculars or telescope but can often be a bit distant for good photos.
Annoyances		Food diversity is a little limited but is generally tasty & adequate with plenty of rice dishes, vegetables, fruit, fish & chicken. High heat & humidity levels. Active deforestation is highly probable. Tsetse flies and stingless/sweat bees can be annoying in some areas. A fly hat is recommended.

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 13;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve & site entrance fees;
- 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;
- 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.

Single Accommodation is NOT available at Bonkro Forest lodge currently. Guests will have to share. All rooms have a wooden pull-out divider for some privacy when sleeping if required.

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 made 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.

- Some time is spent in vehicles as we do have to cover long distances to get to the best areas for birds. Some of the roads are in poor condition and the going will be slow and potentially frustrating at times. Traffic in certain urban areas can be congested. The more luggage you pack the less room there is in the vehicle, so it is important for your comfort and that of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20 kg (44 lb) for check in luggage and 8 kg (18 lb) for hand luggage.
- In some areas, it may be very hot, especially in Mole. We will thus make good use of the early mornings and will have many early starts to avoid, as far as possible, birding in the middle of the day. Furthermore, in the rainforest areas in the south the humidity will be high and uncomfortable.
- Accommodation is generally of a good standard in Ghana. We will do our utmost to make your stay as comfortable as possible, but at times we may experience maintenance problems that are beyond our control. In the smaller towns, while we always opt for the best available accommodation, but these may still be more basic than the standard of what you have come to expect from the developed world.

Arrival and Departure Details

Day 1 of the tour is set aside as an arrival day, and you may arrive at any time. The tour will conclude in Accra after breakfast of day 13.

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.

Katoka International Airport, Accra (IATA: ACC) is the main port of entry and departure for international flights for this tour and is well serviced by most of the world's major airlines.

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.