Portugal

Birds and Culture

Tour Leader: Whitney Lanfranco

February 1 - 14, 2025
Portugal is a small country that is rich in birds, beauty, culture, and history. Surrounded by water on two sides and in the direct migration path of many birds going between Europe and Africa, it has long been overlooked by birders who are only recently starting to discover its hidden treasures. The area’s spectacular birds include species like Greater Flamingo, both Black and White Stork, Eurasian Spoonbill, Great Bustard, Spanish Eagle, Iberian Green Woodpecker, and Eurasian Hoopoe to mention a few highlights. We’ll make time to enjoy the area’s delicious cuisine and fine wine as well.

This tour will offer an opportunity to experience this beautiful Iberian country in full, with stops at vibrant wetlands, rolling plains, open water, cork oak forest, salt pans, as well as historic castles, winding streets, and ancient Roman ruins. The relative closeness of things means no long days in the car and allows us to travel at a leisurely pace. We will stop to smell the roses (or sip the wine!) while enjoying the vast cultural and natural beauty that Portugal has to offer.

Itinerary Overview:

February 1: Arrival in Lisbon, Portugal
February 2: Transfer to Alcochete and Birding at Tagus Estuary Natural Reserve
February 3: Birding Tagus Estuary and Wine Tasting at Companhia das Lezírias
February 4: Sado Estuary and More
February 5: Transfer to Mértola and Birding Castro Verde Plains
February 6: Guadiana Valley Natural Park
February 7: Castro Verde
February 8: Exploring Mértola
February 9: Transfer to Tavira and Birding Castro Marim Natural Reserve
February 10: Ria Formosa Natural Park
February 11: Sagres and the Cape St. Vincent Regions
February 12: Transfer to Lisbon with Birding Along the Way
February 13: Lisbon City Tour
February 14: Departure from Lisbon

Detailed Itinerary:

February 1: Arrival in Lisbon, Portugal

Our tour will begin at As Janelas Verdes Hotel in downtown Lisbon. This is an easy taxi ride from the airport. A room will be held in your name at the hotel so you can check in upon arrival. (A taxi from the Lisbon Airport costs about $35, this cost is not included).

Overnight: As Janelas Verdes or similar

Eurasian Hoopoe
February 2: Transfer to Alcochete and Birding at Tagus Estuary Natural Reserve

We will travel a short distance from Lisbon to the delightful seaside town of Alcochete. Located on the south bank of the River Tagus, its name derives from the Arabic word for kiln, as several have been found in the local area. It also is near the Tagus Estuary Natural Reserve which is one of the largest wetlands in southern Europe and an important migration stopover site and wintering ground for waterfowl and other aquatic species. Here we will visit several areas and a variety of habitats, including the inter-tidal mudflats and salt marshes of Horta and the Barroca d’Alva rice fields and pastures. Shorebirds and waterfowl species are abundant here and we will scan for species such as Greater Flamingo, Common Greenshank, Common Redshank, Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint, Pied Avocet, Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwits, and Common Kingfisher. The salt marshes are also home to many passerines like Sardinian and Cetti’s Warblers, and Zitting Cisticola. In the evening we will settle in at the historic and comfortable Hotel Quinta da Praia das Fontes, in Alcochete, and enjoy dinner at one of the delicious local restaurants.

Overnight: Hotel Quinta da Praia das Fontes or similar

February 3: Birding Tagus Estuary and Wine Tasting at Companhia das Lezírias

The Tagus Estuary Natural Reserve is much to diverse, and extensive, to only devote one day to it. We will continue exploring other interesting sites and habitats, including the open fields, rice fields, reed beds, lagoons, inter-tidal mudflats, and salt marshes of the Ponta da Erva area. The diversity of habitats we visit allows for an abundance of species and we will work on adding to our list from the previous day. Let’s not forget we are in Portugal a country known for its fine wine so we will finish our day with wine tasting at Companhia das Lezírias!

Overnight: Hotel Quinta da Praia das Fontes or similar

February 4: Sado Estuary and More

It’s our final day in the Tagus Estuary Natural Reserve! We will spend the day visiting the Sado Estuary Natural Reserve, namely the salt pans, inter-tidal mudflats, and salt marshes of Mitrena, Mourisca, and Zambujal. We also take time to explore the Cork Oak woodlands of Pancas. Cork Oak is an evergreen oak tree with a thick bark that is the primary source of cork for wine bottle stoppers and a multitude of other uses. Thanks to these trees, Portugal produces about half of the world’s output of commercial...
cork. However, for birders, the cork oaks provide the best habitat for woodland birds in the estuary including Short-toed Treecreeper, Great and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, Cirl Bunting, European Robin, Blue and Great Tits, and Eurasian Jay.

*Overnight: Hotel Quinta da Praia das Fontes or similar*

### February 5: Transfer to Mértola and Birding Castro Verde Plains

Our next stop is the magical town of Mértola, in the Alentejo region. Mertola’s strategic location on the Guadiana River at the border of Spain has long made it an important trading post since the Roman Empire. It’s not a far drive but along the way, we will visit the historical city of Évora. Considered a world heritage site, Évora is a museum city with roots dating back to Roman times. We will admire the architecture and medieval buildings and visit several monuments including the Almendres Cromlech, an archaeological site consisting of several megalithic structures dating back to the 6th millennium BC. Our birding will focus on the great Castro Verde rolling plains associated with the steppe-like habitat and birds such as Red Kite, Great and Little Bustards, Calandra Lark, Back-bellied Sandgrouse, Corn Bunting, and Iberian Grey Shrike. In the evening we will arrive in Mértola, a region known for delicious wine and food, and have dinner at one of the local restaurants. The next few evenings we will stay at the Hotel Museu, a historic hotel offering picturesque views of the Guadiana River and a museum, where a unique collection representing the various remains of an Islamic neighborhood and a Roman warehouse found during its construction are on display.

*Overnight: Hotel Museu*

### February 6: Guadiana Valley Natural Park

Today we will visit the bluffs and hills of the Guadiana Valley Natural Park, including the Mértola, Mina de São Domingos, and Alcaria Ruiva areas. This beautiful landscape is where we will search for Spanish, Bonelli’s, and Golden Eagles, Eurasian Griffon, Iberian Green Woodpecker, Iberian Magpie, and Blue Rock Thrush and we’ll keep an eye out for the endangered Iberian Lynx as we drive along. We will return to Mértola in the evening and enjoy another delicious meal and local wine.

*Overnight: Hotel Museu*
February 7: Castro Verde

The unique rolling plains of Castro Verde are the most important zone in Portugal for steppe bird conservation. Our last day birding this area will be spent visiting some other places in the area to add species to our list or get better views. We will return to the charming village of Mértola.

*Overnight: Hotel Museu*

February 8: Exploring Mértola

Although we have been staying in Mértola for several days we can’t leave without exploring this picturesque hilltop village. We will spend the day exploring and visiting the main museums and archaeological sites, including the church castle. If needed and if time permits, we will return to the Guadiana Valley in the late afternoon and then spend our last night in Mértola.

*Overnight: Hotel Museu*

February 9: Transfer to Tavira and Birding Castro Marim Natural Reserve

We will say goodbye to Mértola and travel to Tavira, in the Algarve region where the coastal dunes and islands form diverse habitats for many species. We will visit the complex of canals, saline flats, and salt pans of the Castro Marim Natural Reserve and of the Tavira area (Ria Formosa Natural Park) scanning for various waterfowl such as Common Shelduck, Eurasian Spoonbill, Eurasian Oystercatcher, and Audouin’s, Slender-billed, and Mediterranean Gulls. Our home for the next few days is the stunning Hotel Vila Galé Albacora in Tavira. It is the result of the restoration of a former tuna fishing camp with beautiful views of the Ria Formosa.

*Overnight: Hotel Vila Galé Albacora*

February 10: Ria Formosa Natural Park

We will visit several habitats including dunes, open water, inter-tidal mudflats, salt marshes, salt pans, reed beds, lagoons, and pine woods in other areas of the Ria Formosa Natural Park. A freshwater lake created in the residential community of Quinta do Lago will allow close views of species such as Western Swamphen, Eurasian Coot, Common and Red-crested Pochards, Ferruginous Duck, Little Grebe, Black-headed Weaver, and Mistle Thrush.

*Overnight: Hotel Vila Galé Albacora*
February 11: Sagres and the Cape St. Vincent Regions

One of the wonderful things about birding Portugal is our easy access to the seas! We will spend the morning visiting the Sagres and the Cape St. Vincent regions where we can bird at the cliffs and seashores. During the migration period, this area offers abundant opportunities to observe migrating seabirds. We then will make a stop at the local fortress which was built in the 16th century to protect the coast from frequent attacks by Moorish pirates. We finish the day at the Salgados Lagoon, an extensive saline lake that is an important location for waterbirds.

Overnight: Hotel Vila Galé Albacora

February 12: Transfer to Lisbon with Birding Along the Way

Our time in Portugal is coming to an end but there are still birds to see. We will return to Lisbon but will stop along the way to visit the inter-tidal mudflats, salt marshes, and rice fields of Comporta and Carrasqueira (Sado Estuary Natural Reserve) and add any species we might have missed.

Overnight: As Janelas Verdes or similar

February 13: Lisbon City Tour

It’s time to return to the hustle and bustle of Lisbon! You can’t leave Portugal without exploring its capital! In the morning we will meet with a cultural guide who will take us to some of the main attractions including the Baixa (downtown area), some of the hilltop districts, the Castle of São Jorge, the cathedral, and, in Belém (the historic area from which the Portuguese caravels departed to discover the world), the Monument to the Discoveries and two UNESCO World Heritage Sites: the beautiful Tower of Belém and the Jerónimos Monastery. After spending the day learning more about the rich history of Portugal we will return to Hotel As Janelas Verdes where we will toast to our wonderful memories of Portugal.

Overnight: As Janelas Verdes or similar

February 14: Departure from Lisbon

Transfer to the Lisbon Airport (A taxi to the Lisbon Airport costs about $35, this cost is not included).
Trip Details:

Cost:
Price per person (double occupancy), from Lisbon, Portugal: $6,699
Single Supplement: $700
Minimum Participants: 6
Maximum Participants: 10

Price Includes:
expert Guide
ground Transportation in Portugal
All Lodging
All Meals
Park Entrance Fees

Price Does Not Include:
Airfare to and from Lisbon, Portugal
Visa and Passport Fees (if applicable)
Alcoholic Beverages
Personal Items
Travel Insurance
Tips

Deposit:
A deposit of $500 per person is required to hold your spot on this tour. The remaining balance is due no later than 3 months prior to the scheduled start date of the tour (November 3, 2024).

If you have any questions about this tour or would like to sign up for it, please contact us at info@sabrewingnaturetours.com, by phone at 317-324-8505, or register through our website at sabrewingnaturetours.com.

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