



White-browed Shrike-Babbler

Vietnam

The Best of the South

Tour Leader: Rob Ripma

February 1-12, 2026

February 1: Arrival in Ho Chi Minh City

Everyone had arrived early to have a chance to adjust to the time, so everyone spent the day exploring Ho Chi Minh City on their own. The group met in the evening for a fantastic Vietnamese welcome dinner at a local restaurant and then relaxed and prepared for the start of the tour early the following morning.

February 2: Ma Da Forest and Cat Tien National Park

We packed up and headed out from Hotel Majestic in the dark, as we needed to get to Ma Da Forest early to start birding. After a couple of hours driving, we arrived at a coffee shop to have some coffee and breakfast. The stop was also good for birding, and we started to add our first species of the tour. Highlights included Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Common and White-throated Kingfishers, Malaysian Pied-Fantail, and Racket-tailed Treepie.

Once we finished here, we headed to one of the two bird hides that we would visit today. The birds arrived quickly with the best being Siamese Fireback, Laced Woodpecker, Bar-bellied Pitta, and White-crested Laughingthrush.



Siamese Fireback

After a stop back in town for lunch, we continued to the other hide. We again had excellent activity, and the star of the show was a group of five Silver-breasted Broadbills! We had a bit of a drive ahead of us, so once we saw the broadbills, we started our drive to Cat Tien. We arrived shortly before dusk and boarded the ferry for the short trip across the river. Although we didn't have time for any birding, we did see our only Great Eared-Nightjars of the trip flying around near our rooms.



Orange-breasted Trogon



Silver-breasted Broadbill

February 3: Birding Cat Tien National Park

Our day started early with breakfast before sunrise. We quickly gathered our gear and started walking along the main road in the park once the sun came up. We spent the whole morning along the road getting acquainted with all the wonderful species that can be found in this park. Highlights for the morning included Thick-billed Green-Pigeon, Green-billed Malkoha, Orange-breasted Trogon, Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Vernal Hanging- Parrot, Black-and-red Broadbill, Indochinese Cuckooshrike, Ruby-cheeked Sunbird, Asian Fairy-bluebird, and Blue-winged and Golden-fronted Leafbirds.

After lunch back at the park headquarters, we headed off to the first hide we would visit in Cat Tien. The target here was Germain's Peacock-Pheasant, one of the big specialties of the park. Everyone was very excited to see and photograph this very beautiful bird! We slowly birded our way back to our lodging, and while the birding was slow, we found a large flock of green-pigeons that had both Thick-billed and Ashy-headed! We also spotted our only Lesser Adjutant of the trip.

February 4: Birding Cat Tien National Park

We started early again and headed to a different hide to start our day. It was very active and we saw many difficult to see species here like Germain's Peacock-Pheasant, Slaty-legged Crake, and Blue-rumped and Bar-bellied Pittas. Other species around the hide included, Red Junglefowl, Laced

Woodpecker, Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, four species of bulbul, Puff-throated, Buff-breasted, and Abbott's Babblers, Orange-headed Thrush, and Siberian Blue Robin. On our way back to the lodge, we made a special effort to find Banded Broadbill, which after much effort from our local guide, we were able to locate!

After a midday break, we set out to the grasslands in the park to look for a different set of birds. Our first stop netted us good looks at both Yellow Bittern and Heart-spotted Woodpecker. As we continued, we added many birds to our list including Green Peafowl, Orange-breasted Green-Pigeon, Vinous-breasted Myna and Pied Bushchat.

February 5: Transfer to Da Lat

We spent a few hours on our final morning at Cat Tein in a different part of the park searching for species that we had missed to this point. Some of the species we added were Collared Falconet, Red-breasted Parakeet, and Large Woodshrike. As we were driving back to pack up, we found our only Golden-crested Myna of the trip as well. It was an excellent final morning!

After a long drive and with a stop for a wonderful lunch, we arrived in Da Lat and started birding right away. We quickly found the endemic Vietnamese Greenfinch and then encountered a large and very active mixed flock. It was hard to get on everything, but highlights were Yellow-billed and Chestnut-vented Nuthatches, Fire-breasted Flowerpeckers, and Mrs. Gould's Sunbird. Farther along we came across our first Blue-winged Minla. It was starting to get dark, so we headed to the spot to try for Oriental Scops-Owl. On the way, we found a roosting Gray Nightjar. As it got dark, the owl started calling and came very close, but we were unfortunately never able to find it.

We headed on to our next hotel, Ana Mandara Villas and had dinner in their fantastic restaurant.

February 6: Birding Da Lat

Our birding area for the day was about one hour from our hotel so we left early with boxed breakfasts so that we could get there at the best time. We spent the first couple of hours looking for flocks along the roadside with mixed luck. We came across one good flock that was very active and hard to follow but did see Speckled Piculet, White-browed Shrike-Babbler, Clicking Shrike-Babbler, and White-bellied Erpornis. We decided it was time to visit the first hide of the day. The hide was productive with much improved views of White-browed Shrike-Babbler and many new species including Rufous-throated Partridge, Gray-bellied Tesia, Short-tailed Scimitar-Babbler, Mountain Fulvetta, Scaly Thrush, Large Niltava, and White-tailed Robin.

During our lunch and coffee stop, our only, Gray-faced Buzzard of the trip was perched high up in a tree across the road. After the stop, we continued to another hide for the afternoon. Here we had many great views and photo ops but the hoped for Silver Pheasant didn't show and we eventually

had to start on our way back to Da Lat. On the way, our local guide spotted a Red Crossbill as we were driving, and we were able to stop and get excellent looks at a group of four crossbills.

February 7: Birding Da Lat

We started much closer to Da Lat today at Datanla Waterfall Gardens. It was already full of photographers when we arrived, but we found a good spot to bird from and saw some excellent species. Highlights for our time here included Red-headed Trogon, Clicking Shrike-Babbler, Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo, Gray-crowned Crocias, Black-headed Sibia, White-cheeked Laughingthrush, Blue Whistling-Thrush, and Black-throated and Mrs. Gould's Sunbirds.



Red-headed Trogon

After a wonderful buffet breakfast back at our hotel, we spent the rest of the day roadside birding and visiting a couple of hides. Highlights seen included Rufous-throated Partridge, Rufous-browed Flycatcher, Black-crowned Fulvetta, Lesser Shortwing, and Rufous-backed Sibia. As we were about to end our day, we found a Necklaced Barbet perched up, allowing for great views!

February 8: Birding Da Lat

We returned to the hides this morning, hoping to finally get looks at Silver Pheasant and fortunately, we were in luck! Two individuals came in this morning allowing for wonderful views. We spent a bit of time birding along the roadside with highlights being Green-backed and Black-throated Tits and Red Crossbill before heading back to our hotel for a break.



Green-backed Tit

In the afternoon we decided to give the hides one more try in hopes of finding a Rusty-naped Pitta but we didn't have any luck with this species. We did have good views of White-cheeked Laughingthrush and spent time photographing all of the species that visited the hide.

February 9: Transfer to Di Linh

Our day started back at Datanla Waterfall. The birding was very productive with highlights including Banded Bay Cuckoo, Clicking Shrike-Babbler, Slender-billed Oriole, Hill Prinia, Vietnamese Cutia, Gray-crowned Crocias, Gray Bushchat, and Orange-bellied Leafbird.

We returned to the hotel for breakfast and to pack up and then started on our journey to Di Linh. After lunch in town, we headed straight to the first of two hides that we would visit in this area. It was extremely productive with highlights being Silver Pheasant, Blue-rumped and Blue Pittas, and Indochinese Green-Magpie. We headed to our hotel, Ivory Falls Villa, and enjoyed an incredible dinner before settling in for the night.

February 10: Birding Deo Nui San

Today started with some roadside birding in the Nui San Pass. Even with a little rain, the birding was fantastic and we added a number of species including Yellow-vented Green-Pigeon, Long-tailed Broadbill, Maroon Oriole, and Black-headed Parrotbill. Next, we visited another hide where we enjoyed views of Bar-backed Partridge, Blue Pitta, Asian Stubtail, Scaly Thrush, White-throated Rock-Thrush, and more.

During and after lunch at our hotel, we spent a bit of time birding around the property. Highlights included Black-winged Kite, Black-collared Starling, and Vinous-breasted Myna.

In the afternoon, we visited another area near Nui San pass where we saw our only Annam Prinias and Chestnut-capped Babblers of the trip. We returned to Ivory Falls for another wonderful dinner and to get packed up for our trip back to Ho Chi Minh City the next day.

February 11: Transfer to Ho Chi Minh City

We had a bit of time to go birding before we needed to head back to the city and despite the rain, we found a couple of good birds. As we were leaving the hotel, an Asian Barred Owlet was spotted and everyone enjoyed scope views. The biggest highlight while out this morning though was our only sighting of Black-chinned Yuhina.

We headed back to the hotel to do our final packing before leaving for Ho Chi Minh City. It rained for most of the trip back and was pouring when we got to the hotel. We gathered for a final dinner as a group before some people headed to the airport for late overnight flights home.

February 12: Departure from Ho Chi Minh City

Our tour ended with 214 species seen and many nonbird highlights including Lesser Mouse-deer, Black-shanked Douc Langer, and Yellow-cheeked Gibbon. Thanks to Phuc Le and Vietbird for their excellent logistics and guiding.