

JAPAN

Birding & Culture

44.09° N - 35.68° N



June 11-25, 2027



Wild **LATITUDES**
WORLDWIDE NATURE TOURS

JAPAN

Birding & Culture

Greetings Fellow Traveler,

Japan is a land of exquisite contrasts—where ancient cedar forests and volcanic mountains rise beyond neon-lit skylines, and centuries-old temples stand quietly amid the rhythm of modern life. Stretching from the bustling metropolis of Tokyo to the wild frontier of Hokkaido, this island nation offers an extraordinary blend of cultural depth and biological richness. For the naturalist traveler, Japan is a revelation: a place where endemic species thrive in beautiful habitats, and where tradition and landscape are inseparable.

Our journey begins in **Tokyo** on the island of Honshu, where serene shrines and coastal wetlands will introduce us to our first birds, including species like **Eastern Spot-billed Duck**, **Eurasian Oystercatcher**, **Far Eastern Curlew**, and the colorful **Azure-winged Magpie**. From there we travel into the **cool mountain forests of Shiga Kogen** and Togakushi, where towering cedars, maples, and fern-filled understories provide habitat for **Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker**, **Japanese Grosbeak**, **Siberian Blue Robin**, and the endemic **Green Pheasant**. Along the way, we explore historic sites such as **Zenkoji Temple** and **Matsumoto Castle**, deepening our understanding of the cultural roots that shape this remarkable country.

Crossing to the northern island of **Hokkaido**, the landscape opens into vast wetlands, caldera lakes, and rugged coastal wilderness. In **Kushiro-Shitsugen National Park** we search for the iconic **Red-crowned Crane**, while forests and volcanic slopes in **Akan-Mashu National Park** may yield **Black Woodpecker**, **Gray-headed Woodpecker**, and **Long-tailed Tit**. The UNESCO-listed **Shiretoko Peninsula** offers some of Japan's most dramatic scenery and richest wildlife. Here, we'll have opportunities to encounter birds like **Whooper Swan**, **Falcated Duck**, **Japanese Robin**, and **White-tailed Eagle**. Boat tours along the coast will help us find seabirds such as **Rhinoceros Auklet** and **Spectacled Guillemot**, as well as **whales** and **dolphins**. Almost unbelievably, the Shiretoko Peninsula is so wild that it's also home to one of Asia's densest **Brown Bear** populations.

Throughout the tour, we balance focused birding with meaningful cultural experiences, comfortable lodging, and the camaraderie that comes from sharing daily discoveries in beautiful places. Japan's blend of refinement and wildness makes it unlike anywhere else in the world—and by the journey's end, you will have experienced not only a remarkable array of birds and wildlife, but also the spirit of a country where nature and tradition remain deeply intertwined. We hope you'll join us!



Steve Robertson and Ivan Phillipsen
Co-owners and Lead Guides at Wild Latitudes
info@wildlatitudes.com 503-714-3504

TRIP DETAILS

Start Date: June 11, 2027

Duration of Tour: 15 days

Number of participants: Max of 12

Fee: \$7,650 per person

Deposit: \$3,800

Single Supplement: \$1,295

Trip Leaders: Ivan Phillipsen

Included:

- Double-occupancy lodging
- Ground transportation
- Breakfasts and lunches
- Excursions and park fees
- Guiding services

Not Included:

- Flights
- Dinners
- Alcoholic beverages
- Personal items
- Optional gratuities for guides



ITINERARY

Tentative and subject to change depending on weather, road, or other conditions.

Day 1 - June 11 - Arrival in Tokyo

Welcome to Japan, the “Land of the Rising Sun!” Your journey begins in the vibrant metropolis of **Tokyo**, situated on the eastern shore of Japan’s largest island, Honshu, Tokyo is a dazzling fusion of ancient tradition and cutting-edge modernity, where serene temples and gardens coexist seamlessly with vibrant neighborhoods, world-class cuisine, and an energy that makes it one of the most fascinating cities on Earth.

Upon arrival at Haneda International Airport (HND), you’ll be greeted by **Ivan Phillipsen** from Wild Latitudes and our local Japanese birding guide. Our hotel is conveniently located close to the airport, allowing for a smooth transition after your long flight, giving us time to settle in and refresh. In the evening, we’ll gather for our first dinner together, where we’ll discuss the exciting days of birding and cultural exploration ahead.

Lodging: Haneda Excel Tokyu Hotel

Day 2 - June 12 - Tokyo: Culture, Cityscapes, and Coastal Birding

Today we dive into the fascinating contrasts of Tokyo—a city where ancient tradition meets futuristic innovation. We'll utilize jumbo taxis to navigate the city as a group, visiting iconic sites like the **Meiji Shrine**, a serene Shinto oasis dedicated to Emperor Meiji and Empress Shoken. We'll also visit the historic **Asakusa** district to see the beautiful **Senso-ji Temple**. For our first taste of Japanese birdlife, we'll head to **Kasai-Rinkai Park** on the shores of Tokyo Bay. Here, we'll look for species such as **Eastern Spot-billed Duck**, **Eurasian Oystercatcher**, **Kentish Plover**, **Far Eastern Curlew**, **Common Kingfisher**, **Brown-eared Bulbul**, and the striking **Azure-winged Magpie**.

We'll gather in the evening to start working on our bird and wildlife lists (our nightly custom), then take the famous Tokyo subway to a local restaurant for a delicious Japanese dinner.

Lodging: Haneda Excel Tokyu Hotel



Azure-winged Magpie



Torii gate at Meiji Jingu shrine, Tokyo



Tokyo



Sensō-ji shrine is Asakusa, Tokyo

Day 3 - June 13 - Tokyo to Shiga Kogen via Nagano

This is primarily a travel day. Leaving the bustle of Tokyo behind, we head toward the mountainous heart of Honshu. We'll take jumbo taxis to Ueno Station to board a high-speed train to **Nagano**—an experience that is a cultural staple of Japanese travel. After picking up our vans in Nagano, we'll drive into the mountains to **Shiga Kogen**, a beautiful highlands area known as a premier ski resort in winter. If time allows, we'll enjoy some light birding around our mountain hotel, searching for **Common Cuckoo**, **Great Spotted Woodpecker**, **Coal Tit**, **Asian House Martin**, **Brown-headed Thrush**, and **Siberian Blue Robin**.

Lodging: Hotel Takimoto



Shiga Kogen in the Japanese Alps

Days 4 and 5 - June 14, 15 - Birding Shiga Kogen

The mountain forests of Shiga Kogen are a lush mosaic of towering cedars and broadleaf trees like maples, dogwoods, and magnolias. Understory plants like azaleas, ferns, and mosses add to the botanical richness. Cool, moist air and high elevation create ideal conditions for these layered forests, which feel ancient, peaceful, and alive with birdsong.

We'll spend these two days visiting various birding locations around the Shiga Kogen area. Some bird species we hope to see include **Eastern Buzzard**, **Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker**, **Eurasian Jay**, **Japanese Bush Warbler**, **Japanese Grosbeak**, and with luck, the shy and endemic **Green Pheasant**. We might also encounter some endemic mammals: **Japanese Macaque** (the famous "Snow Monkey"), **Japanese Squirrel**, and the strange **Japanese Serow**, a type of "goat-antelope."

Lodging: [Hotel Takimoto](#)

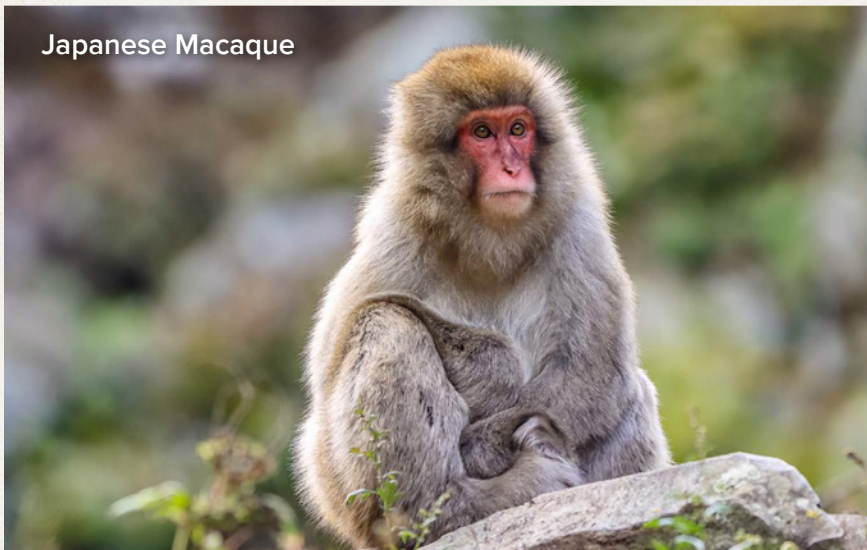
Day 6 - June 16 - Shiga Kogen to Nagano and Zenkoji Temple

After one more morning birding session in the Shiga Kogen area, we drive approximately two hours back to the city of Nagano. In the afternoon, we visit **Zenkoji**

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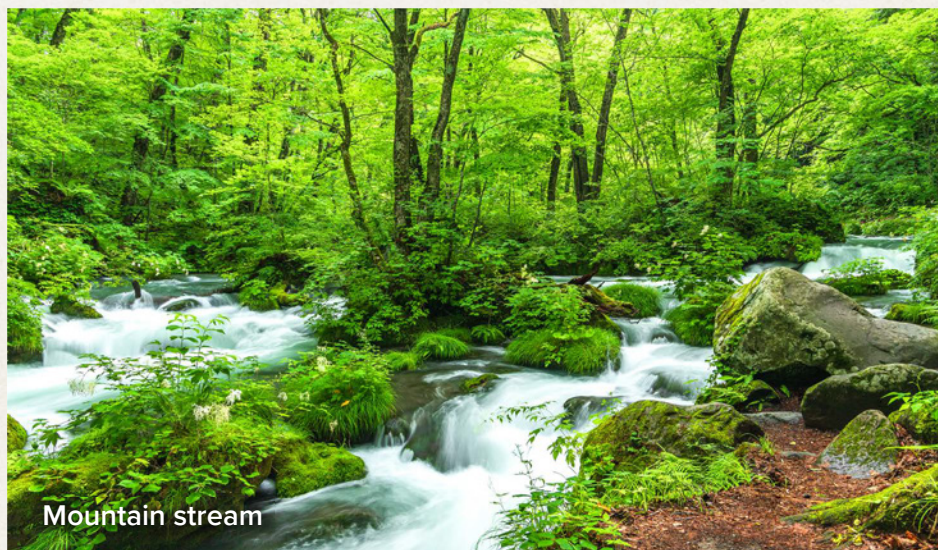
Japanese Macaque



Narcissus Flycatcher



Japanese Grosbeak



Mountain stream



Zenkoji Temple in Nagano



Japanese Serow

Temple, one of Japan's most important Buddhist sites, founded in the 7th century and deeply woven into the spiritual history of the region. This cultural interlude provides insight into how religion, history, and landscape intersect in Japan.

Lodging: Dormy Inn Nagano

Day 7 - June 17 - Togakushi Forest Park

Today we devote a full day to birding **Togakushi Forest Park**, a superb forest reserve at the base of the Togakushi Mountains. This is a high-altitude sanctuary where a mixed forest of cedar, larch, and oak converges with snow-fed wetlands to create an ecosystem rich in alpine flora and protected mountain wildlife. The ecosystem here is dominated by ancient conifers, including a magnificent two-kilometer avenue of 400-year-old Japanese Cedars leading to **Okusha Shrine**, an atmospheric and historically significant site.

Our Commitment to Conservation

On every Wild Latitudes tour, we aim to make a positive conservation impact wherever we travel. We utilize the services of local guides and, when possible, stay in environmentally-sensitive, locally-owned lodges. Through our partnership with the Rainforest Trust, a portion of all international tour fees goes to purchasing rainforest acreage, for its protection in perpetuity. On every trip, we also make a contribution to a local conservation effort that works to protect a native species or ecosystem.

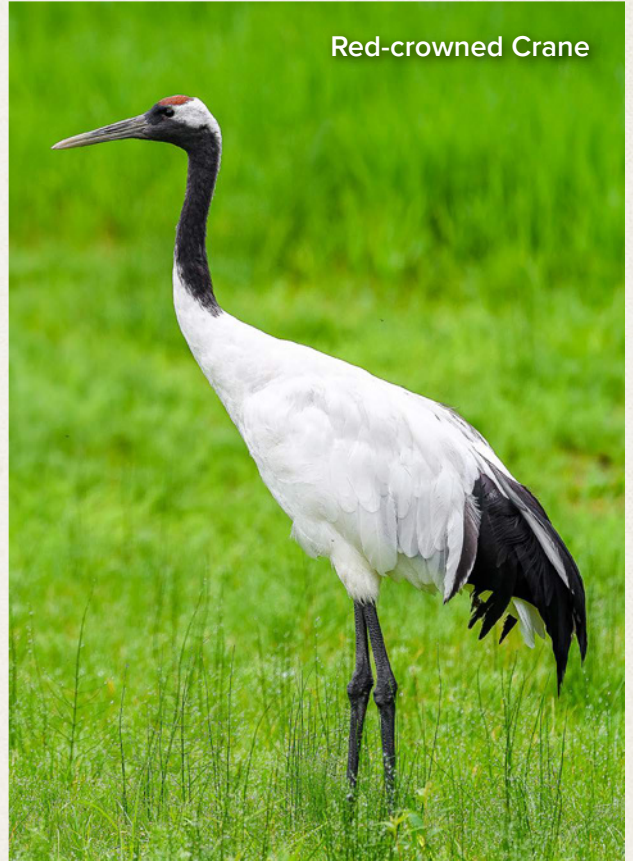


Ancient Japanese Cedars on path to Okusha Shrine

Varied Tit



Red-crowned Crane



Birding in these forests can be excellent, with possibilities including **Japanese Woodpecker**, **Bull-headed Shrike**, **Varied Tit**, **Asian Stubtail**, **Eurasian Treecreeper**, **Japanese Leaf Warbler**, and **Japanese Thrush**. The combination of prime habitat and cultural landmarks makes this one of the most memorable days of the tour.

Lodging: Dormy Inn Nagano

Day 8 - June 18 - Matsumoto Castle and Fly to Hokkaido

We drive to Matsumoto city this morning to visit **Matsumoto Castle**, one of Japan's best-preserved original castles and a striking example of feudal architecture, founded as a defensive fort in 1504. Afterward, we return our vans, and head to the Matsumoto Airport. We're flying north to **Hokkaido**, Japan's northernmost main island.

Upon arrival in the coastal city of **Kushiro**, we collect our vehicles and settle into our hotel. Hokkaido's cooler climate, expansive wetlands, and lower human density create a very different ecological feel from Honshu, and it quickly becomes clear why this region is so important for birds and wildlife.

Lodging: Dormy Inn Kushiro

Day 9 - June 19 - Kushiro Wetlands National Park

We'll spend the day exploring **Kushiro-Shitsugen National Park**, Japan's largest wetland and a globally significant ecosystem. This vast landscape of reed beds, rivers, and marshes supports a unique assemblage of birds. A top target for us today is the iconic **Red-crowned Crane**, though at this time of year they can be challenging to find as pairs are dispersed and raising chicks.

Other species may include **Latham's Snipe**, **Gray Heron**, **Marsh Tit**, **Eastern Crowned Warbler**, **Chestnut-cheeked Starling**, and **Russet Sparrow**. We'll keep our eyes open for other wildlife like **Sika Deer** and the **Japanese Raccoon Dog**, or *tanuki*, a native canid adapted to Japan's forests and farmlands and is also a beloved figure in folklore and art, celebrated as a mischievous shape-shifter and symbol of good fortune.

If time allows, we may visit the **Kushiro City Museum** in the late afternoon for additional context on the region's natural and cultural history.

Lodging: Dormy Inn Kushiro



Day 10 - June 20 - Kushiro to Akan-Mashu National Park

Today we bird in **Akan-Mashu National Park**. This region is defined by its dramatic caldera geology, featuring some of Japan's clearest crater lakes and active volcanic peaks like Mount Meakan and Mount Oakan. This rugged terrain supports a diverse ecosystem of subalpine Dwarf Siberian Pine and lush forests of Sakhalin Fir, which

provide a vital habitat for the rare **Blakiston's Fish-Owl** and the iconic **Red Fox**. We'll visit sites such as the Wakoto Peninsula, the famously clear **Lake Mashu**, and the sulfur vents of Mt. Iwo. The varied habitats here can produce **Black Woodpecker**, **Gray-headed Woodpecker**, **Long-tailed Tit**, **Warbling White-eye**, **Eurasian Nuthatch**, and **White Wagtail**.

We end the day in the hot spring town of **Kawayu Onsen**, where geothermal activity shapes both the landscape and local culture.

Lodging: TBD (hotel in Kawayu Onsen)

Day 11 - June 21 - Akan-Mashu to the Shiretoko Peninsula

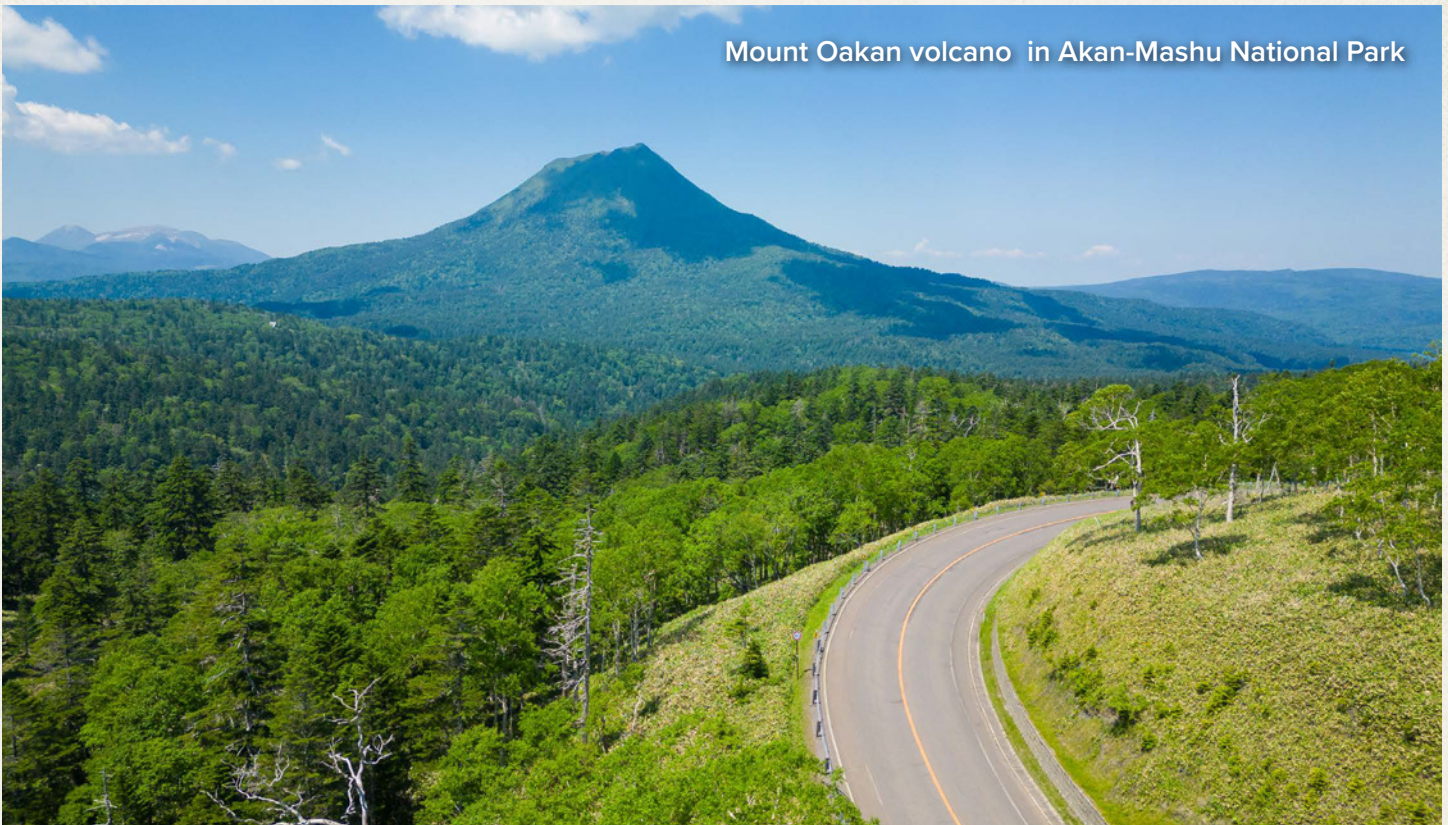


Japanese Robin

After morning birding, we drive toward Abashiri, stopping at the **Northern Peoples Museum**, which offers insight into the Indigenous Ainu culture and the broader human history of northern Japan. Continuing on to the town of **Rausu**, we bird coastal wetlands and lakes such as Lake Tofutsu, where **Whooper Swan**, **Falcated Duck**, **Little Ringed Plover**, **Gray-tailed Tattler**, and **Black-headed Gull** are all possible.

We now find ourselves on the **Shiretoko Peninsula**. This is a rugged, volcanic finger of land that extends into the **Sea of Okhotsk**, characterized by its “wild frontier” landscape of steep sea cliffs and a central spine of towering peaks. This UNESCO World Heritage site thrives with biodiversity, known for its primeval forest and dramatic

waterfalls that plunge directly into the ocean from coastal heights. The peninsula serves as a critical sanctuary for one of the world's densest populations of **Brown Bear** (*Ursus arctos*, the same species as our Grizzly Bear). The natural abundance of the peninsula extends to the surrounding waters, where cold, nutrient-rich currents attract **Sperm Whales**, **Orcas**, and a variety of seabirds, creating a rare and concentrated meeting point for both terrestrial and marine wildlife.



Mount Oakan volcano in Akan-Mashu National Park

If conditions allow, we may stop at **Shiretoko Pass**, where **Pacific Swift**, **Sakhalin Leaf Warbler**, **Japanese Robin**, and **Amur Stonechat** are among the potential highlights. Then we'll check in to our hotel and, as always, gather in the evening to review our bird and wildlife lists before dinner.

Lodging: [Shiretoko Serai](#)

Day 12 - June 22 - Shiretoko Peninsula: Boat Tour I

This morning we take our first **boat tour along the Shiretoko coast** on the Nemuro Channel. These waters are rich in marine life, and we hope to encounter humpback and sperm whales, along with seabirds such as **Rhinoceros Auklet**, **Common Murre**, **Ancient Murrelet**, **Black-legged Kittiwake**, **Slaty-backed Gull**, and **Laysan Albatross**.

In the afternoon, we may bird along the Poe River boardwalk, explore the grasslands of Notsuke Spit, or visit the geyser in Rausu. After dinner, there may be an optional late evening excursion available for those keen to try for the legendary **Blakiston's Fish-Owl** (extra fee).

Lodging: [Shiretoko Serai](#)



The Shiretoko Peninsula

Day 13 - June 23 - Shiretoko Peninsula: Boat Tour II

We take a second boat tour today, visiting whichever route we did not explore the previous day. Species we hope to see include **Japanese Cormorant**, **Spectacled Guillemot**, and **White-tailed Eagle**. The remainder of the day is flexible, allowing us to revisit productive sites or enjoy the dramatic scenery of the Shiretoko Peninsula.

A second optional attempt for **Blakiston's Fish-Owl** is possible this evening.

Lodging: Shiretoko Serai

Day 14 - June 24 - Return to Tokyo via Kushiro

We drive back to Kushiro this morning and take an afternoon flight to Tokyo's Haneda Airport. In the evening, we gather to finish off our bird and wildlife lists, for a farewell dinner, and final overnight at the airport hotel, sharing stories, favorite sightings, and reflections on an extraordinary journey through Japan's wild landscapes—before parting ways with a heartfelt *Dōmo arigatōgozaimasu!*

Lodging: Haneda Excel Tokyu Hotel

Day 15 - June 25 - Departures

We'll say our final farewells as some of us fly home and others extend their travels in Japan or elsewhere. *Sayonara!*

Matsumoto Castle



IMPORTANT INFORMATION

YOUR GUIDE

IVAN PHILLIPSEN

Ivan is a dedicated naturalist with a background in scientific research. He holds a M.S. in Biology from Cal State San Bernardino and a Ph.D. in Zoology from Oregon State University. As Co-owner of Wild Latitudes, Ivan has been able to apply his knowledge in crafting and leading ecotours around the world.

Natural history is Ivan's true passion and what he is most excited to share with tour participants. Although he is fascinated by just about every aspect of nature, Ivan is particularly fond of birds, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates, plants, and geology. Everything is interconnected in nature and he does his best to take a holistic approach when teaching about the natural world.



IMPORTANT INFORMATION

THE PACE AND STYLE OF OUR TOURS

The primary goal of our trips is to experience and learn about the natural world, especially the region's birds and other wildlife, and of course, to have fun! As birding is often a primary focus of our tours, and birds are active in the morning, we will sometimes have early morning outings before breakfast. That said, our style of birding may not be ideal for hard-core "listers." We prefer to spend time observing the species we encounter, and learn a bit about their natural history, rather than rushing through the field to add the maximum number of species to our bird list. We also make diversions for interesting, non-avian wildlife, plants, geological wonders, and cultural activities. The pace of most of our trips is moderate, and we encourage anyone in good health to attend and enjoy the experience. Please contact us about if you need specific information on the types of physical activities on a tour and their physical requirements.

We strive to immerse participants in the local culture and to that end, wherever possible, we stay in locally owned and operated hotels that are designed and run in an environmentally sustainable way. Though some accommodations may be more basic than others, all are safe, clean and comfortable. We also utilize the services of local guides, visit local markets, and other culturally significant sites.

TOUR DATE AND TRIP LEADER CHANGES

Leaders and schedules are determined up to a year in advance of our tours. In the event that we have a change in a tour's dates or leaders, we reserve the right to do so, and will strive to inform participants as early in the process as possible. Additional leaders may be added to tours according to the group size, and will be specified in the tour itinerary. We also reserve the right to cancel any trip for which there are insufficient reservations.

HOW TO REGISTER FOR THE TOUR

When you're ready to sign up for the tour, please let us know by doing one of the following:

- Send us an email at info@wildlatitudes.com
- Call us at 503-714-3504

Then we'll send you the link to our online registration form. You can choose to pay your deposit by credit card or check. See 'Deposit Policy' below.

DEPOSIT POLICY

A deposit is due at the time of registration. ***A deposit is the only thing that guarantees your place on the trip.*** Registration can be made over the phone with a credit card: 503-714-3504. *Note:* there is an additional 3.0% fee for credit card payments. This is only what we are charged by the credit card company.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Checks are happily accepted and should be made out to *Wild Latitudes LLC*. Include the tour name on the memo line of the check and send to:

Wild Latitudes, PO Box 25115, Portland, OR 97298.

PAYMENT POLICY

Full payment is required **90 days** prior to the tour departure date for international tours or any tour involving flights; and **30 days** prior to the tour departure date for local (i.e. in the Portland, Oregon area), van-based tours.

CANCELLATION POLICY

In the event a participant needs to cancel a reservation for any tour, the following policies will apply:

- **90 days** or more prior to tour departure date, the deposit will be refunded, minus an administrative fee of \$100.
- **Less than 90 days** prior to tour departure date, no refunds will be given.

We *strongly* recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself from unforeseen circumstances.

If for any reason Wild Latitudes cancels a tour prior to the start of the tour, full refunds—minus the cost of any internal/in-country airline tickets purchased and/or any non-refundable deposits or expenses already made by Wild Latitudes—will be given to all participants. In the event that the tour is canceled while underway due to unforeseeable events such as but not limited to natural disaster, military activities, social uprising, or other extremely dangerous conditions not within the control of Wild Latitudes, no refund will be issued.