

Birding The Philippines

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Day 1	Outbound flight to Manila
Day 2	Overnight Manila
Day 3	Manila to Bohol
Day 4/5	Rajah Sikatuna and Tarsier Sanctuary
Day 6	Ferry crossing from Bohol to Cebu
Day 7	EDC and Twin Lakes
Day 8	Fly Manila and transfer Los Banos
Day 9	Mt Makiling and transfer Infanta Road
Day 10	Infanta Road, La View
Day 11	La View to Palo Alto
Day 12	Subic
Day 13	Subic; fly Palawan
Day 14	Birdwing Hide
Day 15	Underground River National Park
Day 16	Fly Manila; inbound flight
Day 17	Arrive UK

Departs

January

Focus

Birds, Mammals and Herpetofauna

Grading

A/B. A moderate level of fitness is required, with time spent on foot in humid conditions. Early starts and late finishes encouraged. Please see detailed notes at the end of the itinerary.

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code PHL01)



From Top: Palawan Peacock-Pheasant, Palawan Flowerpecker, Raffles Malkoha



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Introduction

Scattered across the western Pacific, the Philippines comprise more than 7,000 volcanic islands lying between the South China Sea and the Philippine Sea. Together, they form a landscape of striking natural diversity – where remnants of ancient rainforest cloak mountain ranges, coral reefs flourish beneath turquoise waters, and sculpted rice terraces cling to hillsides shaped by generations of farmers. For the naturalist, this is one of Asia's most rewarding destinations: an archipelago forged by fire and ocean, and home to an extraordinary wealth of endemic species.

Geographically, the Philippines occupy a fascinating crossroads between Asia and Australasia. Each of the principal island groups – Luzon in the north, the Visayas at the centre, and Mindanao and Palawan to the south – has its own distinct character, both culturally and ecologically. Over millennia, tectonic forces have created a fragmented landscape of mountains and deep ocean channels, isolating wildlife populations and driving remarkable evolutionary processes. As a result, the country supports more than 200 endemic bird species, alongside a rich variety of unique mammals, reptiles and amphibians. Surrounding seas form part of the global Coral Triangle, making them equally rich in biodiversity, with vibrant coral reefs supporting tropical fish, sea turtles, dolphins and whales.

The climate is predominantly tropical, with seasonal monsoon rains sustaining these rich ecosystems. While much of the original forest has been lost, significant areas remain, particularly in upland and protected regions. Towering dipterocarp trees dominate the lowland forests, while higher elevations give way to mossy, cloud-draped oak and laurel forests alive with birdlife. Mangroves and coastal wetlands provide vital habitats for herons, egrets and kingfishers, while offshore islets host breeding colonies of terns and frigatebirds. This diversity of habitats makes the Philippines a microcosm of tropical ecosystems and an exceptional destination for birdwatching and wildlife exploration.

The human story of the Philippines is equally compelling. The islands were first settled tens of thousands of years ago by Austronesian peoples, whose cultural traditions still endure today. In later centuries, traders and colonisers from China, Malaysia, Spain and the United States each left their mark, shaping a cultural tapestry that blends Asian and Western influences. Spanish rule, lasting over 300 years, introduced Christianity and distinctive architectural styles, while long-standing traditions tied to land and community remain strong. The famous rice terraces of the Cordillera Mountains stand as a testament to centuries of careful land management, while bustling towns and coastal villages reflect a vibrant, welcoming culture.

For travellers, the Philippines offer a captivating blend of wildlife, scenery and culture. The landscapes are dramatic yet inviting, and the wildlife is both diverse and often highly distinctive. Whether listening for the soft call of an Ashy Thrush deep in Luzon's forests, admiring the iridescent plumage of a Palawan Peacock-Pheasant, or watching fruit bats silhouetted against a tropical sunset, each day reveals a new dimension of this remarkable country.

Itinerary



NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Depart UK for Manila

For those travelling on the group flights, we depart London Heathrow today on an overnight flight to Manila.

Day 2

Arrive Manila

After arriving in Manila, you will be met and transferred to a conveniently located hotel close to the international airport. The remainder of the afternoon is at leisure to relax and recover after your journey.

In the evening, we will meet for a welcome dinner and introductory briefing, where you will be joined by your local guide and tour leader. This provides an excellent opportunity to get to know your fellow travellers and to run through the itinerary for the exciting days ahead.

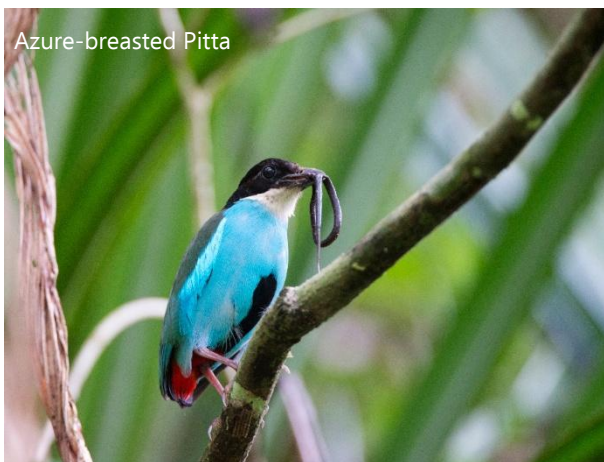
Overnight: Manila, Luzon

Day 3

Manila to Bohol

An early start sees the group transferring back to the airport for the flight to Tagbilaran on the island of Bohol. On arrival, a short transfer brings us to the attractive Loboc River Resort, where we enjoy lunch and check in to our comfortable riverside accommodation.

By mid-afternoon, we set out for our first birding excursion to nearby Rajah Sikatuna National Park. Here, lowland limestone forest, dense undergrowth and forest edge habitats provide an excellent introduction to Bohol's endemic birdlife. In the soft light of the afternoon, we may encounter flocks of Wattled Broadbills moving through the canopy, while the forest floor holds the possibility of the elusive Azure-breasted Pitta. Mixed feeding flocks of bulbuls, babblers and flowerpeckers add constant activity, and the haunting calls of Philippine Fairy-bluebirds may be heard echoing through the trees.



Azure-breasted Pitta



Rufous-fronted Tailorbird

As dusk falls, the forest begins to change character, with nocturnal sounds emerging from the shadows. This first taste of Bohol's rich tropical biodiversity provides an exciting and memorable introduction to the days ahead.

Overnight: Loboc, Bohol

Day 4

Rajah Sikatuna

Today is spent fully exploring the forest trails of Rajah Sikatuna National Park. Early mornings here are particularly rewarding, as the forest comes alive with sound — the bubbling calls of Black-faced Coucal and the high-pitched notes of Yellow-breasted Tailorbird carrying through the trees. Quiet stretches of shaded forest may reveal Rufous-lored Kingfisher perched motionless above a stream, while flashes of colour betray the presence of Wattled Broadbills moving through the canopy.

Along the forest edge and more open trails, we may encounter the lively activity of Brown Tit-Babblers and the soft, musical calls of Streaked Ground Babblers, often foraging close to the ground. The diversity of birdlife here is impressive, with each walk offering new species and behaviours to enjoy.

Around midday, we pause for lunch near the famous Chocolate Hills, where the more open landscape provides a contrast to the dense forest. These areas can attract additional species, including flyovers such as Philippine Bulbul and other widespread endemics.

In the afternoon, we return to Rajah Sikatuna for further exploration, with time to search for some of the park's more elusive residents, including the beautiful Philippine Trogon. As the light softens once more, the forest takes on a different atmosphere, rounding off a rich and rewarding day of birding in one of Bohol's most important wildlife areas.

Overnight: Loboc, Bohol

Day 5

This morning we return to Rajah Sikatuna National Park to explore some of its quieter trails, giving us the chance to seek out species that may have eluded us the previous day. The forest here is wonderfully alive, with Streaked Ground Babblers often moving through the leaf litter, while the canopy above is busy with the activity of Flame-crowned Flowerpeckers and Blue-headed Fantails. With a little patience, further specialities may reveal themselves, adding to an already impressive list.

In the afternoon, we visit the Philippine Tarsier Sanctuary, where these tiny and enchanting primates can be observed in their natural habitat. Set within forest edge and secondary growth, the sanctuary also offers excellent birding, with possibilities including small flocks of Visayan Hornbills and Rufous Coucals foraging through the vegetation. The combination of close-up wildlife encounters and relaxed forest birding makes for a thoroughly enjoyable and memorable day.

Overnight: Loboc, Bohol

Rajah Sikatuna & Tarsier Sanctuary



Sulphur-bellied Nuthatch



Philippine Bulbul

Day 6

Bohol to Cebu

After optional early-morning birding, we transfer to Tagbilaran port for the ferry crossing to Dumaguete on Negros, travelling across calm tropical waters fringed with coconut-lined shores. On arrival, we transfer to our hotel, where we take lunch and check in.

Later in the afternoon, we visit Casa Roro, a local reserve protecting valuable fragments of lowland forest and an important refuge for several Negros endemics. Birding here can be particularly rewarding, with chances to encounter species specially adapted to these increasingly scarce habitats. As dusk falls, there is the option to head out in search of the rare and elusive Negros Scops Owl, listening for its distinctive call as it emerges after dark. Although Negros' forests are now fragmented, they remain vitally important for a range of island-specialist species, making these first encounters both exciting and highly rewarding.

Overnight: Dumaguete City, Negros

Day 7

EDC & Twin Lakes

Visayan Wattled Broadbill



This morning we begin at the EDC reserve, a small but productive area of forest known for its diversity of endemic and near-endemic birds. Birding here can be particularly rewarding, with regular sightings of Negros Striped Babbler and Visayan Hornbill, while fruiting trees often attract an array of flowerpeckers and bulbuls. The mix of woodland and more open areas provides plenty of variety and excellent opportunities to add to our growing species list.

After lunch, we continue to the scenic Twin Lakes, where the combination of freshwater habitats and surrounding forest offers a contrasting birding experience. Here we may encounter species such as Negros Leaf Warbler, while the open skies above sometimes produce passing raptors. The peaceful setting, with its forested slopes and tranquil waters, makes for a relaxing yet productive afternoon, and the day concludes with fine views across the rolling hills of Negros.

Overnight: Dumaguete City, Negros

Day 8

Flight to Manila & transfer to Los Baños

An early start, with the option for some final morning birding, gives us the chance to pick up any remaining species before we transfer to Dumaguete Airport for our flight to Manila.

On arrival, we continue by road on a scenic journey of approximately 1.5 hours to Los Baños, set within the grounds of the University of the Philippines. This leafy campus, lying at the foot of Mount Makiling, provides a pleasant and accessible introduction to Luzon's birdlife.

In the late afternoon, we enjoy some relaxed birding in the surrounding gardens and forest-edge habitats, where species such as Olive-backed Sunbird, Asian Brown Flycatcher and Philippine Drongo are often seen. This gentle session offers a smooth transition between islands, highlighting subtle differences in habitat and birdlife as we begin the next phase of the tour.

Overnight: Los Baños, Luzon

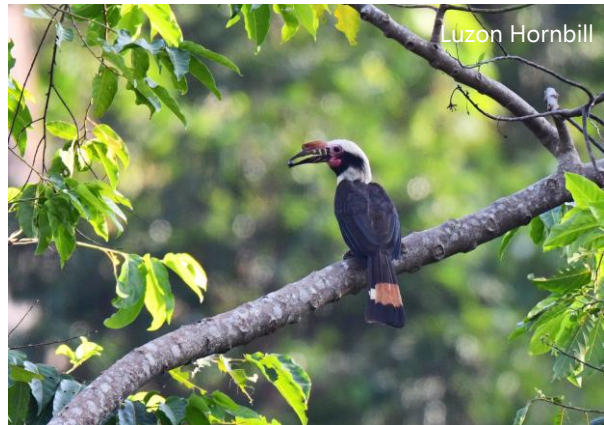
Day 9

Mount Makiling & Infanta Road

We begin the day exploring the forested slopes of Mount Makiling, a volcanic ridge cloaked in rich lowland and montane forest. This is one of Luzon's most productive birding areas, and an early start offers excellent chances to encounter species such as Luzon Hornbill, Rufous Coucal and the elusive Ashy Thrush, often heard before it is seen. The mix of towering trees and dense undergrowth creates a varied and rewarding habitat, alive with bird calls and movement.



Luzon Bleeding-heart Dove



Luzon Hornbill

After an early lunch, we transfer to Infanta Road, leaving our luggage en route before continuing with an afternoon of birding along this renowned forest corridor. The roadside habitats here regularly host active mixed feeding flocks, with bulbuls, flycatchers and drongos moving through the trees and offering excellent viewing and photographic opportunities. As the light softens, the forest becomes increasingly atmospheric, providing a fitting backdrop for an engaging afternoon's birding.

Overnight: Infanta Road, Luzon

Day 10

Infanta Road, La View

A full day exploring Infanta Road allows us to experience a rich variety of habitats, including primary and secondary lowland forest, riparian areas and more open roadside edges. Early morning is particularly rewarding, as the forest comes alive with activity — Blue-headed Fantails and Green-backed Whistlers flit through the canopy, while the elusive Ashy Thrush may be seen quietly moving along the forest floor.

Throughout the day, the diversity of birdlife becomes increasingly apparent. Mixed feeding flocks drift through both the canopy and understorey, offering an ever-changing selection of species, while overhead there is always the possibility of raptors such as Philippine Serpent-Eagle soaring above the forest. We will pace the day to make the most of peak activity in the early morning and again later in the afternoon, with time to enjoy the scenery and absorb the atmosphere of this excellent birding location. These varied habitats ensure a rewarding and engaging day, with opportunities to encounter both local specialities and more widespread lowland species.

Overnight: Infanta Road, Luzon

Day 11

La View to Palo Alto

Spotted Wood Kingfisher



We make an early start this morning, travelling from La View to Palo Alto, where we begin our birding in a mix of forest and more open habitats. En route, we may pause at La Mesa Eco Park, a valuable remnant of lowland forest, offering the chance to observe a variety of species in a more accessible setting.

Continuing onwards, we drive towards Subic, stopping at Candaba Marsh, one of the most important wetland sites in the Philippines. This

expansive area of open water, reedbeds and agricultural fields can be alive with birdlife, with possibilities including Philippine Swampphen, various egrets, herons and waders, providing a refreshing contrast to the forest birding of previous days.

By late afternoon we arrive in Subic and head out for our first birding session in this rich lowland forest. As dusk approaches, there is the opportunity to search for a range of species including Green Racket-tail Parrot, hornbills and, after dark, a selection of nightbirds. The combination of habitats and the transition into evening make this an especially atmospheric and rewarding day.

Overnight: Subic, Luzon

Day 12

Subic Bay

A full day is devoted to exploring the excellent birding habitats of Subic Bay, one of Luzon's most rewarding lowland forest areas. We begin early along forest trails, where the morning chorus provides a lively backdrop as we search for key species such as Luzon Hornbill, Tarictic Hornbill and the striking Balicassiao. The mix of tall dipterocarp forest and more open edges supports a rich diversity of birdlife, making for an engaging and productive start to the day.

Along forest edges and clearings, we may encounter active flocks containing Blue-naped Parrot, Guaiabero and White-lored Oriole, often feeding in fruiting trees or moving noisily between perches. The variety and movement within these flocks provide excellent opportunities for both observation and photography.

In the afternoon, we explore quieter roads and riverine areas, where the pace slows and different species come to the fore. Here we have further chances to see Rufous Coucal, Blackish Cuckooshrike and, with luck, the diminutive but charismatic Philippine Falconet. As the light softens, the forest once again becomes especially atmospheric, rounding off a rewarding and varied day in this important birding area.

Overnight: Subic, Luzon

Day 13

Subic to Palawan

A final early morning in Subic offers the opportunity for some last-minute birding, with a chance to pick up any remaining species before we depart. After breakfast, we transfer to Manila for our flight to Puerto Princesa on Palawan.

On arrival, we head out for a late afternoon birding excursion. A particular highlight is the visit to a Philippine Cockatoo roost, where these highly endangered and charismatic parrots may be seen gathering as dusk approaches — a memorable and special experience.

For those who wish, there is also an optional evening excursion to nearby Rasa (Cana) Island in search of the rare Mantanani Scops Owl, offering an exciting opportunity to encounter one of the region's most elusive nocturnal species.

Overnight: Puerto Princesa City, Palawan



Day 14



Palawan Peacock Pheasant

Birdwing Hide & Irawan

This morning we spend time at the excellent Birdwing Hide, offering outstanding close-up views of one of Palawan's most sought-after species — the stunning Palawan Peacock-Pheasant. With patience, this beautifully marked bird often emerges into view, providing a real highlight of our time on the island.

We also explore nearby forest trails and riverine edges, where a rich variety of Palawan endemics may be encountered.

Possibilities include Palawan Flycatcher, the striking Spot-throated Flameback and lively Ashy-headed Babblers, along with a range of other lowland forest species.

In the afternoon, we continue birding in the Irawan area, where further time in suitable habitat gives us an excellent chance of adding new species to our list. As evening falls, there is the option for an owling excursion, offering the chance to search for some of Palawan's elusive nocturnal species and bringing another rewarding day to a close.

Overnight: Puerto Princesa City, Palawan

Day 15

Underground River National Park

This morning we visit the remarkable Underground River National Park, a UNESCO-listed site renowned for its dramatic limestone karst landscape and rich biodiversity. Exploring the mangrove-lined waterways and forested trails, we experience a fascinating mix of coastal and lowland forest habitats. The area supports a wealth of birdlife, with regular sightings of Palawan Hornbill and Palawan Drongo, while the surrounding forest provides further chances for a range of endemics — and, with luck, another encounter with the elusive Palawan Peacock-Pheasant.

In the afternoon, we return towards Puerto Princesa for further birding in nearby forest and edge habitats. Here we may encounter species such as the elegant Blue Paradise Flycatcher and the melodious White-vented Shama, providing a fitting end to an exciting and species-rich day on Palawan.

Overnight: Puerto Princesa City, Palawan

Day 16

Transfer to Manila, depart for UK

We enjoy a final morning of birding in the Puerto Princesa area, with the opportunity to revisit favourite sites or seek out any species we may have missed. This relaxed session provides a fitting conclusion to our time on Palawan, allowing us to make the most of these rich lowland forest habitats.

After lunch and hotel check-out, we transfer to the airport for the return flight to Manila, bringing our 15-day journey across the Philippines to a close.

Over the course of the tour, we will have experienced an exceptional diversity of landscapes and wildlife — from the misty mountain forests of Luzon to the unique island endemics of Bohol, Negros and Palawan. These varied habitats, combined with the remarkable birdlife and warm local hospitality, create a truly memorable experience, leaving lasting impressions long after the journey has ended.

Day 17

Arrive UK

After an outstanding birding trip to these diverse islands, we arrive back in the UK.

Tour Grading

This is an escorted natural history holiday suitable for anyone with a reasonable level of fitness and mobility. Much of the wildlife-viewing will be undertaken on foot, and you should be prepared for warm, humid conditions, as well as occasional muddy paths, uneven terrain and some gentle slopes. In addition, there may be sections of unpaved roads and the presence of biting insects in certain areas.

To make the most of the tour, days are generally full, often beginning early and finishing later in the evening to take advantage of peak wildlife activity. While this maximises our chances of seeing as much as possible, there will still be opportunities to relax. All activities are optional, and where practical you are welcome to take time out and enjoy the comfort of the hotel if preferred.

Throughout the tour, accommodation is clean, comfortable and well suited to the locations visited, providing a welcoming base after each rewarding day in the field.

Tour Focus

This tour offers a broad natural history focus. While there is a strong emphasis on birding throughout, equal attention is given to mammals and herpetofauna. You will be accompanied during the day by an expert local naturalist and birding guide, ensuring the best possible chances of locating key species. In the evenings, guided walks provide opportunities to encounter nocturnal birds and mammals. Please be aware that this tour may involve sightings of reptiles, including snakes, and you can also expect a rich diversity of butterflies and other insects.

If birds are your primary interest, you are very likely to find this tour highly rewarding. However, if your interests are limited solely to one group — such as mammals — and you would prefer not to spend time searching for birds (or vice versa), this itinerary may not be ideally suited to your preferences. We recommend considering this carefully before booking.

It is also worth noting that mammals, particularly in tropical forest environments, can be elusive. Many species are naturally shy, occur at low densities, and are most active at dawn, dusk or during the night. As with birding, success often relies on moving quietly and patiently through suitable habitat. Your guide may use specialist techniques and equipment to enhance viewing opportunities, but flexibility and realistic expectations are essential. While specific sightings can never be guaranteed, the opportunity to explore these habitats is a highlight in itself — and the sense of anticipation each day is all part of what makes this tour so special.

Please do not hesitate to talk to the Operations Manager, Dan Lay (dan@naturetrek.co.uk or 01962 733051), if you have any additional questions regarding this holiday.

Weather, Clothing & Equipment

January is an excellent time to visit the Philippines, falling within the dry season when conditions are generally warm and settled. Temperatures typically range from around 23°C in the cooler highland areas to a more humid 31°C in the lowlands and along the coast. While rainfall is usually limited at this time of year, any showers that do occur are often brief and heavy, quickly clearing to leave warm and pleasant conditions.

For guidance on what to bring, please refer to the separate clothing list included within the pre-departure information, a copy of which will be sent to you upon booking. As this is a wildlife-focused holiday, a good pair of binoculars is, of course, essential.

Luggage Allowance

Standard airline international baggage regulations apply to international flights.

What's Included

All accommodation, meals and drinking water are included starting with dinner on Day 2 and ending with lunch on Day 16. Snacks, soft/alcoholic drinks and items of a personal nature are not included in the price of the tour.

How to Book Your Place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements and your interest in an extension at the time of booking.

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Bohol Chocolate Hills

