

São Tomé and Príncipe

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly London to Lisbon, overnight
Day 2	Fly São Tomé
Day 3/4	Obo National Park and southern São Tomé
Day 5	Fly to Príncipe
Day 6 - 10	General natural history excursions in Príncipe including boat trip to Tinhosas islands
Day 11	Fly to São Tomé; city tour; fly London
Day 12	Arrival in London

Departs

September

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code STP01)

Grading

A/B. Gentle, daily birdwatching walks and boat trips, with a few optional strenuous walks.

Focus

Birds (mainly), whales and dolphins.



Newton's Sunbird



Príncipe Island



Príncipe Seedeater



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Introduction

São Tomé and Príncipe lie in the Gulf of Guinea, about 250km east of Gabon, and are part of the Cameroon Line, a 1,600 km chain of volcanoes which includes two other volcanic islands (Bioko and Anóbon), and stretches southwest from the Nigerian Jos Plateau. The second smallest country in Africa, after the Seychelles, it is composed of two islands – Sao Tomé is the largest, whilst Príncipe is about nine times smaller.

Relative to their size, these islands are home to the greatest number of endemic birds globally, and it is not surprising that they are often called the 'African Galápagos'. The oldest part of the archipelago is Príncipe, which has been reliably dated to 31 million years old! This, combined with the fact that they have never been connected to mainland Africa, accounts for the high level of faunal and floral endemism.

Once one of the world's biggest producers of cocoa, this has meant that extensive areas of the islands have been modified by agriculture, but the rugged terrain has also meant that sizeable tracts of primary forest have been preserved. Hundreds of square kilometers across both islands are now protected as part of the Obo National Park. Entering these forests is like stepping into a new world; with a few exceptions (several African bird species have been introduced), all the birds encountered here occur nowhere else. All of the above combined with the 'leve leve' (or easy going) atmosphere of these two islands will certainly make this holiday extremely enjoyable and hard to forget!

Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & 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

Lisbon

Today we will take an afternoon flight from London to Lisbon, where we will stay overnight at a nearby airport hotel. If you'd like to spend a few nights in Lisbon and explore this sunny capital, please see further below for details.

Day 2

São Tomé

We will take a morning flight from Lisbon to São Tomé and arrive in the late afternoon. A short drive will take us to Omali Lodge, our base for the next three nights.

Day 3

Obo National Park

Today we will explore the central Sao Toméan highlands, and make our way up to an ancient crater lake, nowadays mostly dry, named Lagoa Amélia (Amélia Lagoon). The road from the town of Sao Tomé winds its way up the mountain, passing agricultural fields, villages and coffee plantations, and the journey should produce a glimpse of our first endemics! Newton's Sunbird is common throughout the island, and it shouldn't take too long for us to see it. The botanical research centre at Bom Sucesso is the starting point of the trail into the Obo National Park and this is a good place

to try and find Sao Tomé Thrush and Sao Tomé Oriole. We will follow the trail towards Pico de São Tomé, the island's highest peak where we will be looking for São Tomé Spinetail. This will be our best chance to see Sao Tomé White-eye, and we should also be able to see a few Black-capped Speirops! Higher up the mountain is the dry crater lake which is a good place from which to survey the forests to try and find São Tomé Green Pigeon, São Tomé Olive Pigeon as well as African Emerald Cuckoo. With luck on our side, we might even hear (or better yet, see) the elusive Sao Tomé Scops Owl!

Day 4

Southern São Tomé

Today, we will explore the southeastern part of Sao Tomé Island. Starting from Sao Tomé city we will make our way to Porto Alegre, at the southern tip of the island, using the coastal road which passes several fishing villages alternated with beaches. We will be stopping at several places, always on the lookout for any sightings, including Roça São João, an old plantation house which has been transformed into ecotourism accommodation and an art gallery, where we should see São Tomé Paradise-flycatcher and São Tomé Prinia. Other species we might see include White-winged Widowbird, Golden-backed Bishop and Black-winged Red Bishop, Southern Masked Weaver and Pin-tailed Whydah, African Palm and Little Swifts, and possibly a Harlequin Quail. Further on, we will also stop at the river Malanza, where surrounded by mangrove trees (the bark of the red mangrove trees was traditionally used on the plantations to dye the sacks for cocoa), we should have good views of Sao Tomé Kingfisher, Reed Cormorant and Western Reef Heron. Here, we should also be able to see the only primate on the islands, the Mona monkey. On the way to Praia Jalé, one the most important spots for turtle nesting on the island, we should be able to see Príncipe Weaver, Giant Weaver and even Sao Tomé Weaver.

Day 5

Príncipe

Leaving Omali Lodge behind, a short flight (30 minutes) will take us to Príncipe Island. We will transfer to our base for the remaining six nights, Roça Sundy. British Astronomer Arthur Eddington was here in 1919, and during a total solar eclipse proved Albert Einstein's relativity theory for the first time. We will begin exploring the island by walking to nearby Ribeira Izé beach, alongside the cocoa plantation. Ribeira Izé was the first capital of the island, and we can still see some of the ruins from those times. After a well-deserved picnic lunch on the beach, we will visit a local mangrove where we'll have the chance of seeing Príncipe Kingfisher and Green-backed heron. Our walk should also produce the Príncipe Golden Weaver and the unusual and vociferous Dohrn's Thrush-babbler, Príncipe Speirops and Príncipe Starling.

Days 6 - 10

Príncipe

During these days, we will take our time to explore all that Príncipe Island has to offer, including its luxuriant dense forests and breathtaking coast, and we'll also take to the sea on two occasions to look for seabirds, whales and dolphins.

For those interested in exploring the surroundings of Roça Sundy, Sr Paulino, who was worked in the plantation for many years will be able to show us around the premises, and teach us a little bit about the history of the island. He also manages the chocolate factory that has re-opened adjacent to Roça Sundy.

Oque Pipi Waterfall Trail

We will walk to the beautiful and rarely visited Oque Pipi waterfall (make sure to bring a swimsuit!). This is not an easy hike, but we'll take it slowly and stop on the way for any exciting sightings. From the Nova Estrela Viewing Point we'll be able to see the small islet known as 'Boné do Jóquei' (Jockey's Cap) and its canopy of 'caroceiros' (tropical almond trees). Depending on what time we arrive at the viewing point, we may be fortunate to see the African Grey Parrots flying to their roosts.

Whale and dolphin watching (season dependant)

Whales can be very easily seen (and heard) off the coast of Príncipe, from the beach as well as offshore by boat. Humpback whales pass by roughly between August and October, and we will go out on a dedicated whale and dolphin watching boat trip to try to see as many cetaceans as possible! These sightings are of course not guaranteed, but the amazing views of the islands and its deserted beaches (and the seabirds) will keep us entertained!

Tinhosas Islands

'Ilhas Tinhosas' are about 20km southwest of Príncipe and hold the most impressive seabird colonies in the Eastern tropical Atlantic Ocean. These two barren rocky islands are named Tinhosa Grande (great Tinhosa) and Tinhosa Pequena (small Tinhosa) and are both remote and endowed with abundant seabird life. An early morning boat trip will take us there where we will have the chance of seeing Black and Brown Noddies, Brown Boobies, White-tailed Tropicbirds, and Bridled Terns. Please note that as it is a protected area we won't be able to land.

Pico Papagaio (Parrots Peak)

Pico Papagaio is one of Príncipe Island's most famous mountains. Visible from the town of Santo António, it is approximately 700 metres high and is formed from volcanic basalt. Surrounded by secondary and primary rainforest, it lies within the boundaries of the National Park. During this walk, which will take us to the top of the mountain, we'll be on the lookout for Príncipe White-eye, among other interesting birds and plants. Besides all that, the views of the island from up here are simply spectacular! This will be a highly strenuous walk, so for those that are not keen, we'll give the option of staying near the lodge or going snorkelling.

Day 11

São Tomé; Flight out

On this day, we will have to leave Príncipe Island and board the short flight back to Sao Tomé. We will have some time to explore the main city, named after the island, before reluctantly boarding our flight back to Lisbon.

Day 12

Arrival London

We will arrive into Lisbon airport in the early hours of the morning, and board our onward flight back to London.

Tour grading

Grade A/B. Leisurely half day walks and boat trips (all of them optional), with four full day excursions to nearby locations. The walk up Pico Papagaio (Parrots Peak) will be the most strenuous walk we will do, but it will be optional.

Weather

Sao Tomé and Príncipe has an equatorial climate which means maximum average daily temperature of 27 to 29 degrees Celsius. We will be visiting at the end of the longest dry season, or 'gravana', which starts in June and finishes in September. It will be hot and humid, with dry and sunny weather interspersed with overcast and rainy spells (often heavy).

Food

All meals are included in the tour cost except for dinner on day 1. Lunches will be either picnics or visits to local restaurants. Bottled water will be included throughout. Soft and alcoholic drinks are only included at lunch on day 8.

Accommodation

For the first three nights we will be staying at Hotel Omali, a short walk away from Lagarto Beach. In Príncipe, we will stay at Roça Sundry, the biggest plantation estate on the island. Rooms are en-suite throughout.

Optional extensions

If you'd like to spend a few days in Lisbon, either before or after this tour, we will be pleased to offer hotel suggestions and book them as well.

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, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

Your safety & security

You have chosen to travel to Sao Tomé and Príncipe. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice> prior to travel.

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Jockey's Cap



White-tailed Tropicbird



Roça Sundry