

CAMBODIA: ANCIENT TEMPLES & ENDANGERED BIRDS JANUARY 22-FEBRUARY 6, 2020

This tour will provide participants with an opportunity to visit one of southeast Asia's most exciting destinations. Poorly known and not often visited by American travelers, Cambodia has much to offer in terms of its rich cultural and historical heritage and its dwindling populations of several of the world's rarest birds. The tour will be conducted in coordination with the Sam Veasna Center for Wildlife Conservation. The center is Cambodia's leading and most renowned ecotourism operator, and has an excellent reputation for their efforts in preserving sustainable human communities and endangered bird species. The tour will give us a chance to see Cambodia from the inside out as we will visit many places that well off-the-beaten path taken by most tour operators. The tour will include visits to many of Cambodia's best wildlife sanctuaries as well as visits to historical sites like the ancient Angkor Wat temple complex and the city of Phnom Penh. Sam Veasna is a non-profit organization that redirects all of its earnings into local communities and wildlife preservation in an attempt to benefit both people and animals through their work. Such efforts are difficult in a country like Cambodia where government focus on sustainable wildlife is minimal, so supporting the work of such organizations is environmentally responsible tourism.

The tour includes opportunities to see some of the world's most endangered birds including the magnificent Giant Ibis, a shy forest dwelling ibis with a remaining population estimated at only about 370 birds. It has been eradicated in all of the surrounding countries and persists now only in localized areas of Cambodia. Another critically endangered species available on the tour will be the White-shouldered Ibis; a bit less rare than the Giant Ibis but also eradicated from most other parts of southeast Asia. We will also witness the unforgettable spectacle of the waterbird colony at Lake Tonle Sap where large numbers of herons and egrets are joined by Lesser and Greater adjutants (both in rapid decline) and Painted Storks.

We will also spend time at the Vulture Restaurant at Veal Krous where 3 species of critically endangered vultures come to feed on animal carcasses and in a grassland sanctuary searching for the very rare Bengal Florican. At Kratie on the Mekong River we will search for Asian Golden Weaver and the recently described Mekong Wagtail, and near Phnom Penh for Cambodian Tailorbird. The tour will conclude in the historic city of Phnom Penh where we will visit the city's most important cultural sites including the royal palace and Independence Monument.

Wednesday-Thursday January 22-23, Day 1-2: Our tour begins with arrival in Siem Reap (airport code REP) on January 23. Note that in order to reach Siem Reap on the 23rd you will need to depart from the US on a flight on January 22. Flights into Siem Reap arrive late in the evening and we will commence birding early the following

morning. It is strongly suggested that you plan to arrive a day or two early to acclimate to the significant time change and to rest a bit after the long flight. Arrangements for pre-trip touring or birding activities can be made if you're interested. Night in Siem Reap.

Friday-Sunday January 24-26, Day 3-5: We will have 3 full days to explore the rich birding areas near Siem Reap. We will spend most of one day touring and birding at the temple complex of Angkor Wat, a truly amazing World Heritage site. The complex is surrounded by ample forest where birds like Hainan Blue-Flycatcher, Forest Wagtail, Red-breasted Parakeet, Black Baza and White-throated Rock-Thrush occur. Angkor was one of the world's wealthiest cities in the 12th century and the ancient splendor of these temples is still evident today. This is a site worth more time than will be available during the tour, which is another reason to consider an early arrival. Another day will be spent touring the waterbird colonies at Tonle Sap lake, southeast Asia's largest freshwater lake. This is a great venue for photography as we travel by boat through the canals radiating from the lake. Large numbers of Asian Openbill are present along with smaller numbers of Painted Stork, Greater and Lesser adjutants and the declining Spot-billed Pelican are often at arm's length. There are also chances for Cinnamon, Yellow and Black bittern as well as chances to learn about Cambodia's famous "floating villages." Our third day around Siem Reap will take us to a large wetland complex called Ang Trepeang Thmor. This area was used as a slave labor camp during the brutal regime of the Khmer Rouge after the Viet Nam war. Today it provides habitat for large numbers of waterbirds including Bronze-winged and Pheasant-tailed jacanas, Cinnamon and Yellow bitterns, Knob-billed Duck and Painted Stork. Hopefully among the latter we will find a rare Milky Stork, another species in dramatic decline. In the northern portion of the reserve we can look for Sarus Crane, Pied Harrier and other grassland species. Nights in Siem Reap.

Monday-Wednesday January 27-29, Days 6-8: The first day of this leg of the journey will be largely a travel day, although it will include a stop a grassland complex where we hope to see the endangered Bengal Florican. This is one of the world's best, and last sites to have a reasonable chance to see this rare and enigmatic species. En route we may encounter a White-rumped Falcon, another rare and declining species. We will arrive in Tmatboey by early evening and will spend the next 3 nights in simple wooden huts in this isolated village. It is here at Tmatboey that we will have a chance to see two of the planet's rarest birds: Giant Ibis and White-shouldered Ibis. The area around the village is comprised of dry savanna and seasonally flooded rice paddies where these two birds still breed. We will walk through the paddies at dawn in hopes of seeing the birds as they depart their evening roost and fly to feeding areas. The local villagers receive a great deal of economic benefit from the presence of these birds and thus keep close track of their whereabouts. With the help of local guides we should get good views of them. Other exciting birds here include White-bellied, Great Slaty, Black-headed and Yellow-crowned woodpeckers, Crested Treeswift and Greater and Common flameback. Roosting owls are also in abundance here and with the help of local guides we might find Brown Fish-Owl, Spotted Wood-Owl and Barn Owl. Nights in Tmatboey.

Thursday-Friday January 30-31, Days 9-10: This morning we will drive to the Okoki Safari Camp in the Kulen Promtep Wildlife Sanctuary where we will spend the next 2 nights. Here we will experience a unique southeast Asian habitat known *dipterocarp* forest. This bird-rich habitat is home to a very healthy population and diversity of birds including the scarce Black-headed Woodpecker, a true crowd pleaser. The drive will give us more chances to find White-rumped Falcon, a very difficult species due to its tiny size and declining numbers. The main reason for visiting Okoki is to attempt to see another critically endangered bird: the White-winged Duck. This species is also in drastic decline throughout its range, but there are a couple of ponds at Okoki where we will have chances to find it. It is difficult as it is a shy and reclusive bird, but with one full day and another morning our chances are good. Other good birds around the camp include Black-and-red Broadbill, Puff-throated Babbler, Banded Kingfisher and possibly Barbellied Pitta. At night we can search for Collared Scops-Owl, Oriental Bay Owl and Blyth's Frogmouth. Nights at Okoki Tent Camp.

Saturday February 1, Day 11: This morning's destination will be the "vulture restaurant" site at Boeng Toal. The villagers who maintain the site put out cow carcasses in hopes of attracting the three Critically Endangered species that occur here—Red-headed, Slender-billed, and White-rumped vultures. Widespread use of the veterinary pharmaceutical Diclofenac, which is extremely toxic to vultures, has decimated the populations with catastrophic 95% declines. Over all of Asia these once common birds have been reduced to tiny remnant populations existing almost entirely on large forest preserves or where they are fed drug free carcasses. Boeng Toal is one of the last places remaining to see these three species together. Accommodations here are basic with shared shower and toilet facilities, but the birding will more than compensate for the rustic quarters. The dry forests surrounding the camp provide chances for Savanna, Indian and Large-tailed nightjars, Brown-backed Needletail, Black-headed, Rufous-bellied and Great Slaty woodpeckers, Chestnut-tailed and Vinous-breasted starlings plus other woodland birds. Night at Boeng Toal.

Sunday-Tuesday February 2-4, Days 12-14: Leaving Boeng Toal, we move southeast toward Kratie, crossing the mighty Mekong River in what will be largely a travel day. A late afternoon arrival will give us two full days to bird this area. Most of the first day will be spent on a boat on the Mekong River where we will have a chance to see Irrawaddy Dolphins, a southeastern endemic mammal similar in appearance to beluga whales. The Mekong also has great birds including a newly described species of wagtail, the Mekong Wagtail. Other birds on the river will include Small Pratincole, Kentish Plover, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Pale Martin, Asian Golden Weaver (rare) and Chestnut-capped Babbler. Our second full day near Kratie will take us to the Seima Protection Forest where over 300 species of birds have been recorded! The forest is also home to many mammals including Yellow-cheeked Gibbon and Asian Elephant (rare). A high bird list is certain on this day and some of the more hoped for birds will be Green Peafowl, Gold-crested Myna, Red-vented Barber, Orange-breasted Trogon, Great Hornbill, Siamese Fireback and Orange-necked Partridge. Nights at Sen Monorom.

Wednesday February 5, Day 15: After more birding in Siem we will begin driving to Phnom Phen. Along the way we will stop and look for the recently discovered Cambodian Tailorbird, a species most often encountered very close to the limits of the city. We will then tour some of Phnom Phen's most historic sites including the royal palace and Independence Monument before our final dinner together. Night in Phnom Phen.

Thursday February 6, Day 16: The tour will conclude this morning with flights home from Phnom Phen.

COST

The price for this tour \$4995 and includes all lodging starting with Day 2 in Siem Reap and ending Day 15 in Phnom Phen, ground transportation in Cambodia , guide service throughout and all meals beginning with breakfast on Day 3 through breakfast on Day 16. The price does not include airfare, any departure taxes (typically included in your plane ticket), immigration documentation (also included in your ticket price), alcoholic beverages, phone calls, laundry, gratuities or items of a personal nature. A single supplement of \$375 will be charged if you choose to room alone.

REQUIRED TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

A current passport valid beyond the date of your return and a visa is necessary for US citizens to enter Cambodia. It is recommended that your passport be valid for at least 6 months beyond the dates of your visit, as regulations vary from country to country, and are subject to change. Tourist visas are required for US citizens entering Cambodia. These are available online and can be purchased and printed prior to your travel. A Tourist Visa is now available on-line and has worked well, just print off two copies.

DEPOSIT & REGISTRATION

A deposit of \$1000 and a completed registration form will be required to secure a place on this tour. Checks should be made payable to Otus asio Tours and mailed to Jan Hansen at 900 Hillsborough Road in Chapel Hill NC 27516

PACE

We'll be in the field early (around 6.30 am) so that we can hear the birds singing as the day starts. For some critical species such as the Giant Ibis, this may be our only opportunity to discover if they are present or not. Typically we'll return to our hotel or lodge for lunch and then

rest up during the heat of the day when bird activity is virtually nil, before going out again in the late afternoon. Our longest walks will be at Tmatboey when we search for the Giant Ibis. At Tmatboey, we'll depart before dawn and walk through short grassland on indistinct trails, the area is flat but the surface can be very uneven at times. It is important to bring a flashlight, and a hiking stick may be helpful. The distance we will walk depends on how quickly we find the ibis but will be between one to three miles. On one day we will explore Angkor and there will be opportunities to either bird around or explore the ruins, depending upon your interests. We will take a boat trip at Kratie where we use two six seater motorized boats to explore the Mekong River with its many islands that harbor birdlife.

MINIMUM/MAXIMUM

A minimum of four persons will be required to operate the tour and it will be limited to seven people.

SMOKING

Smoking is not allowed in tour vehicles. Anyone wishing a smoking room should specify so on their registration form.

HEALTH

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that all travelers be up to date on routine vaccinations. These include measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccine, varicella (chickenpox) vaccine, polio vaccine, and your yearly flu shot.

They further recommend that most travelers have protection against Hepatitis A and Typhoid. Please contact your doctor well in advance of your tour's departure as some medications must be initiated weeks before the period of possible exposure.

The most current information about travelers' health recommendations can be found on the CDC's Travel Health website at <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/cambodia> .

Malaria: Malaria is present, including the chloroquine-resistant strain. Please consult your doctor or local travel clinic for recommendations.

Tap water in Cambodia is not potable and should be avoided.

Miscellaneous: Insects such as mosquitoes and sand-flies can be a problem although scarce in the dry season. We recommend using insect repellents with a high concentration of DEET.

CLIMATE

Cambodia is generally hot with high temperatures approaching 90 F (32 C) and the forests do not offer a great deal of shade. Night temperatures can be warm in the north but generally cool enough, 70 F (22 C) for a light jacket. Humidity averages from 70-80% year round; our visit in mid-winter coincides with a period of lower humidity at just below 75%. It is unlikely that we'll encounter any rain at this time of year; that said, there is always a possibility.

INFORMATION

For more information contact Jan Hansen at 919-259-9423 or at otusasiotours@gmail.com.