

COVID 19 – Birding Abroad Limited – Statement January 2022

Since the beginning of the global coronavirus pandemic in 2020, great strides have been made in science and medicine towards the prevention and treatment of the disease, giving renewed hope that overseas travel, sensibly regulated with testing and other precautionary measures, can gradually return to many parts of the world. New variants and spikes in the virus inevitably mean that the path to the 'new normal' will be hesitant and traveller confidence will take time to recover. But the signs are encouraging. Overseas travel has resumed in increasing volumes across the world as governments, the tourist industry and individuals manage the risks rationally and carefully. Having adequate 'covid proof' personal travel insurance will be essential (see below). We are guardedly optimistic that 2022 will see further strong strides towards uncomplicated foreign travel and we can look forward to your company once more.

Testing and documentation

For tours that involve an international flight to the destination country, please ensure that you follow the latest guidance issued by airlines, the UK government and the host country regarding travel requirements prior to departure, and before returning to the UK.

Travellers can expect to undergo checks of their covid inoculation status, to complete various forms (e.g., passenger locator forms and other country specific forms) and sometimes undertake physical temperature checks prior to outward and homebound flights.

Whilst it is your own responsibility to check the testing processes and entry and exit documentation that relate to your flight, we will try to provide you with the best possible support to help make this as clear and straightforward as practicable. We are here to assist you and want the informal and personalised friendly contact which we enjoy with our clients to reinforce your feeling of being in safe hands.

These are after all, relatively minor inconveniences for everyone which have been put in place to ensure the best possible health and safety outcomes for all travellers and to protect the UK and any host country overseas.

Whilst on Tour

The health and safety of our clients is paramount and ahead of each tour we will provide information on the measures we will need to adopt as individuals and as a group whilst on tour to ensure we all remain safe. We will follow government and industry rules and guidelines as well as procedures put in place by our hosts whilst overseas. This could include for example mask wearing in certain places. These will be tailored to any specific country we are visiting and should not inconvenience us greatly, and we would ask that you accept these in everyone's best interest.

Cancellations and your money

Alongside upholding your health and safety as a priority, we want you to have confidence in Birding Abroad to provide an excellent service through these still difficult times. Foremost amongst these considerations is how we will deal with cancellations and how we provide you with reassurance over any monies you have placed with us for a tour you have booked.

During normal 'non-covid' times our regular terms and conditions will apply and by and large these will remain our guiding principles. But whilst we remain in the midst of the pandemic, we feel it right to provide some more detail and the following should be read alongside our regular terms and conditions. Our destinations for 2022 have been carefully selected to try to avoid the most

problematic scenarios, but times are still unpredictable, and so we set out our pledges nevertheless for transparency and reassurance.

What reasons might there be for a tour not going ahead?

- If government advice changes and it becomes illegal to travel abroad for holidays, including any UK Government imposed lockdowns.
- If the FCDO (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office) advises against non-essential travel to your destination.
- If you are required to quarantine on arrival at your destination and there isn't the option to forgo this quarantine period by providing evidence of a negative Covid-19 test, or that you are fully vaccinated.
- If you are required to quarantine on arrival back in the UK and there isn't the option to forgo this quarantine period by providing evidence of a negative Covid-19 test, or that you are fully vaccinated.

We would like to reassure you that if your booking with us is cancelled for one of the above reasons, you will be offered a place on the same tour deferred most likely to the following year, or a credit towards an alternative tour with Birding Abroad or to receive a refund.

Is the refund a “full refund”?

For some destinations we are required to make advance payments to hotels, to overseas ground agents and for transport. We may not in all cases be able to recover these monies, though we would endeavor to come to mutually beneficial arrangements with such service providers. So, there would be a shared sense of responsibility in the hope that no one is unfairly or disproportionately out of pocket, company or customer. The closer to departure that a covid related cancellation occurs for the reasons set out above, the more difficult it is for us to fully recover every item of cost.

We will in every case try to make the refund a full refund, subject to the caveat above that some charges may apply. Should we deduct an amount to cover the above circumstances, then you may be able to claim back any such losses through your travel insurance.

Travel Insurance

Having comprehensive personal travel insurance is essential. You should have a policy in place which covers the many wide-ranging scenarios which might arise before, during and when returning from the tour country. The policy should include coronavirus specific clauses. It is not possible for us to state here every possible coronavirus eventuality which may result in disruption to or cancellation of a tour. The following are examples only and taking the advice of your insurer is imperative.

- Your insurance should cover cancellation charges, any medical and hospitalization care, repatriation and if you are prevented by local rules from continuing with the tour.
- If you decide to cancel your tour with us (before we officially cancel a tour), our regular booking conditions will apply. We will provide a cancellation invoice to you and you may be able to make a claim on your travel insurance.
- If you are not able to travel because you or your travelling partner or friend has been diagnosed with Covid-19 or because of other Government regulations affecting your home area.

We always try to offer cancelled places to other potential customers and if we can secure a fresh booking to replace the one you have made, we will offer you a refund, again less any non-recoverable costs. Such replacements become less likely at short notice before the due departure date.

Flights and insurance

We do not include international flights in our tour pricing arrangements and operate on a ground tour basis only, so our tours begin and end at the designated host country airport. It is your responsibility to ensure you arrive in time for the start of the tour. You should have adequate travel insurance to cover the cost of cancelled flights, and the costs thereafter of the ground tour, if you fail or are unable to join the tour. Many airlines are now issuing tickets which have a degree of flexibility attached for rescheduling to a future date or are offering vouchers for future travel.

What happens if you contract coronavirus whilst abroad?

If you test positive in an overseas destination during a tour, you'll need to inform your Birding Abroad leader and your insurance company. You will then need to follow the specific guidance given to you by your insurance company, which may include the need to self-isolate in a hotel room or to attend a specified medical facility for assessment and possibly for treatment. Your Birding Abroad leader will be on hand to assist you. It is likely that you won't be able to travel home until you've had a COVID-19 test that comes back negative. Your insurance policy should cover the costs of any such eventualities.

Should it be clear that the remainder of the tour can proceed, then the Birding Abroad leader will be obliged to remain with the tour. We will ensure that you are being adequately looked after of course and are in full contact with relatives and your insurer at home, but this is a risk that all of us will have to accept when travelling abroad during the pandemic. Should you have to remain under medical supervision or in quarantine after the tour has concluded, then again, your insurance should cover this period of recovery and any testing required until such time that you are discharged to make the journey home.

We reserve the right to ask you to take a lateral flow test during the tour if we suspect coronavirus symptoms. In the interest of the safety and welfare of all group members we also reserve the right to call a doctor or medical practitioner to investigate further if we feel there are concerns about your health. Costs associated with such an intervention will be passed onto you as the client at the time or in due course.

General

Please check your policy details carefully and liaise with your insurer prior to the tour to clarify and resolve any queries you have in relation to cover. We ask that you provide with us with proof that you have travel insurance prior to departure. We will not check the fine print of your policy and cannot accept responsibility for inadequate insurance cover.

Please have a copy of your travel insurance policy with you on tour.

In the period before each tour we will write to confirm (or otherwise) that the tour will be proceeding and refer you to the UK Government website which provides relevant guidance for the country we are visiting. This will enable you to check the conditions which have to be met to gain entry to, to travel within and to travel home from the country being visited.