

Spain

SPANISH STEPPES IN WINTER

LIMOSA HOLIDAYS | TOUR INFO PACK



The Spanish steppes are a vital stronghold for many threatened species, including Griffon Vulture © Stephen Daly/Daly Wildlife

2019 **Sunday 20th - Saturday 26th January (7 days)** **Small group tour with Fernando Enrique & Mike Crewe**

Escape the worst of the British weather and join us for a week of wonderful winter birding amid the rugged sierras and rolling steppe grasslands of Extremadura - the 'wild heart of Spain'. Six nights at a beautifully restored country house hotel set in delightful countryside near Trujillo, enjoying the vulture-filled skies of Peña Falcon, Great and Little Bustards, Spanish Imperial Eagle and the exotic Iberian Magpie - plus thousands of wintering Cranes!

- Escape the British winter in our favourite corner of Europe
- Exciting birding amid the steppes and sierras of fabulous Extremadura
- Great and Little Bustards, Black-winged Kite, Iberian Magpie, Southern Grey Shrike
- The vulture-filled skies of magnificent Monfragüe National Park
- Spectacular numbers of wintering Common Cranes
- Single-centre holiday staying at a beautifully restored, privately-owned country house hotel
- See historic Trujillo, birthplace of the Conquistadors - and countless White Storks!
- Expertly led by Limosa's resident, English-speaking Spanish specialist, Fernando Enrique

What's Included?

- Limosa Tour Leader/s
- Return flights - London Heathrow to Madrid, nonstop with British Airways/Iberia
- 6 nights accommodation at lovely *Viña las Torres*, in fabulous Extremadura
- All main meals - including dinner one evening at a restaurant on Trujillo's *Plaza Mayor*
- Minibus transport
- All excursions, entry fees, tour based tips & taxes

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Outline Itinerary

- Day 1:** We fly London-Madrid and transfer to our hotel near Trujillo, in Extremadura. Night Viña las Torres
- Days 2-6:** From our base near historic Trujillo we explore the beautiful Monfragüe National Park and the steppes and sierras of Extremadura. Nights at Viña las Torres
- Day 7:** We return to Madrid, fly London

Tour Overview

Hoopoes bouncing through the *dehesas* on zebra wings; tawny winter grasslands dotted with groups of stately Great Bustards; squadrons of mighty Cinereous (Black) and Griffon Vultures floating silently in the sky above the immense rock pinnacle of Peña Falcon; the deep grunting of Purple Swamphens hidden within dense stands of bullrushes... Focusing on the rolling steppes and rugged sierras of Extremadura, our January birdwatching tour to Spain promises all this - and more! For a winter visit to the 'wild heart of Spain' adds the thrill of spectacular thousands of Common Cranes, which arrive here from northern Europe to feed beneath the oaks and in harvested fields of maize and rice.

From Madrid, we head west to delightful *Viña Las Torres*, a small and beautifully renovated country house estate set amidst wonderful birding country a few miles from Trujillo. With good home cooking and wine included with our evening meals, this comfortable *hotel rural* will be our base throughout the holiday. Iberian (Azure-winged) Magpies roost in numbers in the garden and more than 90 species of bird have been recorded within just five minutes walk of the hotel - so it can be hard to tear ourselves away! But we will... for winter days in Extremadura are always memorable, filled with more birds than you could wish for.

Visits to magnificent Monfragüe National Park form the centrepiece of our tour. With its oak and scrub-covered hillsides, plunging river valleys and massive vulture crags, this is one of our all-time favourite places. Birds of prey are more numerous here than anywhere else in

Western Europe. In January, we can expect to find a dozen or more different species including the scarce Black-winged Kite, Cinereous (Black) and Griffon Vultures, and up to three species of eagle - Bonelli's, Golden and the endemic Spanish Imperial. This is also an excellent time to see the solitary Southern Grey (Iberian) Shrike and the exotic but sociable Iberian Magpie - two further Iberian endemics that make their homes in the beautiful *dehesa* woodlands that ring this fine national park.

Out on the rolling plains, flocks of Calandra Larks and droves of bustards - both Great and Little - will have come together for the winter. As we scan the January fields for them, we may unearth Black-bellied and Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, and parties of Eurasian Stone-curlew, too.

During our stay, we'll pay a visit to the historic old town of Trujillo, enjoying far-reaching views from the medieval battlements followed by dinner one evening at a restaurant in the cobbled *Plaza Mayor*, overseen by the formidable statue of Francisco Pizarro, conqueror of Peru. Even in winter, a few White Storks may already be back at their rooftop nests in the town.

We think the variety of species on this January tour will surprise you as we go in search of everything from flocks of Spanish Sparrows, Red Avadavats and Common Waxbills amid rice fields on the plains to Eurasian Crag Martins, Alpine Accentors and Hawfinches in the shadow of hilltop Moorish castles. Join us for a great week of birding amid the rugged sierras and rolling steppe grasslands of Extremadura - and leave the worst of the British winter behind!

Daily Itinerary

Day 1

TO MADRID & TRUJILLO

Our January birdwatching tour to Spain begins with a morning flight from London Heathrow to Madrid, where Fernando will be waiting to welcome us.

We head west towards the rolling steppe grasslands, beautiful oak woodlands and rugged sierras of Extremadura - the 'wild heart of Spain'.

The journey takes around three hours, but we'll stop along the way for something to eat - and maybe have a first try for the elusive Black-winged Kite. Although it is winter, the prospect of watching White Storks, Eurasian Hoopoes and Southern Grey Shrikes may come as a welcome surprise.

Early evening arrival at our comfortable rural retreat for the week, a small and beautifully renovated country house hotel set amidst wonderful birding country just a few miles south of the medieval hilltop town of Trujillo. Cattle Egrets, Spanish Sparrows and Spotless Starlings forage in the fields, and Iberian Magpies gather to roost in the garden. *Night Viña Las Torres*

Days 2 – 6

MONFRAGUE NATIONAL PARK, THE STEPPE & SIERRAS OF EXTREMADURA

To begin our appreciation of this lovely region we only have to take a short walk outside: more than 90 species of bird have been recorded within five minutes walk of the hotel. Nearby, we could well hear the eerie cries of Eurasian Stone-curlew drifting over the steppe, or watch birds of prey soaring effortlessly overhead.

North from Trujillo, our route to Monfragüe National Park passes through mile after mile of unspoilt *dehesas* - a park-like habitat of cork and evergreen oaks, foraged by pigs. On sunny days in late January, the woodlands come alive with the hollow calls of Hoopoe, fluting Woodlarks, and the ceaseless chatter of Iberian Magpies. Sardinian Warblers scold us from the brush and Southern Grey Shrikes perch like sentries beside the road, while the squat form of a Little Owl glares down at us from atop one of the massive erratic boulders so characteristic of these 'hard lands'.

This is probably the richest spot in Europe for birds of prey. As the immense shapes of Griffon Vultures launch themselves from sun-warmed crags to patrol the sweeping skies, we'll watch for Cinereous Vulture, Red Kite, Peregrine and three big eagles: Bonelli's, Golden and the very rare Spanish Imperial are all resident in the park. We could even be lucky enough to come across the huge Eagle Owl, out sunning itself on a favoured ledge.

Always magical, Monfragüe's *Cistus*-covered hillsides and deep plunging valleys are equally rich in small birds. Eurasian Crag Martin, Crested and Thekla Larks, Dartford Warbler, Blue Rock Thrush, Black Redstart, Rock Bunting and Red-billed Chough are all likely - and we could see Firecrest and Short-toed Treecreeper, too.

To the south of Monfragüe, our attention will turn to the sweeping plains, a major stronghold of the spectacular Great Bustard, which gathers into flocks (or droves) at this season. We should also see Little Bustards as we search for the scarce Black-winged Kite; sailing on the breeze like a giant paper plane, winter is perhaps the best time of year to see this oft-elusive resident. We'll listen out for the distinctive Pochard-like calls of nomadic Pin-tailed Sandgrouse and the telltale 'chuckling' of Black-bellied Sandgrouse passing over the steppe. As we scour the fields for them, flocks of Calandra Larks and Skylarks, Spanish Sparrows, Corn Buntings, finches and pipits may be put to flight by the sudden appearance of a low-flying Hen Harrier or dashing Merlin - both are winter visitors here.

In January, thousands of stately Common Cranes from northern Europe will also be present, feasting on acorns beneath the trees and the glut of food left behind in Extremadura's fields of harvested maize and rice. They make a stirring sight and sound, and are one of the highlights of a winter visit to the Spanish steppes.

For sheer variety of species, this whole area is hard to beat. Glossy Ibis, Eurasian Spoonbill, Purple Swamphen, Common Kingfisher, Alpine Accentor, Black Redstart, Water Pipit and Hawfinch, along with Common Waxbill and Red Avadavat (two tiny, introduced finches now firmly established in this corner of Iberia) are among many other 'winter birds' enjoyed by our previous groups - and unexpected surprises on our January 2016 tour included vagrant Ring-necked Duck and Sociable Lapwing, too!

No visit to this wonderful region would be complete without a walk through historic old Trujillo town, with its winding cobbled streets, delightful medieval architecture and mellow pan-tiled roofs. Even in winter, a few White

Storks are likely to be attending their rooftop nests. One evening, we'll take dinner in town, pausing to admire the glorious views across the plains from atop the medieval battlements and afterwards dropping back down to a restaurant overlooking the beautiful *Plaza Mayor* with its imposing statue of the Conquistador Francisco Pizarro, mounted on horseback. *Nights at Viña Las Torres*

Day 7

RETURN TO MADRID, FLY LONDON

After breakfast this morning, we bid a reluctant farewell to our hosts Juan Pedro and Belen and make our way back to Madrid. There'll be time to enjoy a little more birding along the way.

Late afternoon flight to London, where our winter birdwatching tour to the Spanish Steppes concludes.

Trip Information

Group Limit Max 10 participants & 2 leaders

Birds: 120-140 species

Accommodation 6 nights accommodation at lovely *Viña Las Torres*, a small and beautifully renovated country house hotel situated at the heart of the Sierra de Lagares, just a few miles from Trujillo. All rooms have private facilities.

Meals All main meals are included in the tour price, commencing with lunch on Day 1 and concluding with lunch on Day 7. Delicious home cooking and wine included with our evening meals at the hotel on 5 nights. On one evening during our stay here we'll eat out, taking dinner together at a restaurant in historic Trujillo. Lunches will be picnics in some of our favourite places.

Walking Easy; short walks. One uphill walk followed by a steep climb up a series of stone steps to reach the viewpoint overlooking the heart of Monfragüe National Park is optional. Wear comfy walking shoes or lightweight boots with sturdy corrugated soles for grip.

Weather The weather in Extremadura in late January is mild (5-13C/41-55F), averaging 9C/47F. The late autumn and early winter rains will be tailing away by late January, but some rainfall is likely during the winter months.

Flights We fly with British Airways/Iberia nonstop from London Heathrow-Madrid.

Ground Transport By minibus.

Tour Cost

2019 (7 days): £1595 (inc flights from London)

Land only: £1495

Deposit: £300

Single Supp: £140

Cost includes

- Services of expert Limosa guide/s
- Return flights London Heathrow-Madrid
- 6 nights hotel accommodation in Spain
- All main meals - including dinner one evening at a restaurant in Trujillo, and wine with our evening meals at *Viña las Torres*
- Minibus transport
- All excursions, entry fees, tour based tips and taxes
- Map & Limosa checklist of birds

Cost excludes

Insurance, drinks, airport/in-flight meals and snacks & other items of a personal nature.

What You Say...

"You will see from the above grades [on feedback form] that I really enjoyed the trip (again)."

BP, Spanish Steppes in Winter tour

"The two leaders complemented each other perfectly. Fernando's ability to identify birds on the wing within a nanosecond was awesome. Mike was great fun and easy to get on with."

CG, Spanish Steppes in Winter tour

About Your Guides

Fernando Enrique Fernando is our resident Spanish expert, a bird tour guide, all-round naturalist and biologist whose home is at Algeciras overlooking the Strait of Gibraltar. As a child, he was fascinated by the kettles of raptors that formed above his home and being born in the Strait, Europe's most important bird migration route, helped shape his love of birds and nature. At 18, Fernando became one of the youngest bird-ringers in Spain, while his eagerness to learn about more and more species led him to travel widely in Europe, Africa, Asia and Central America. Despite his relatively young age (he's now 32), he has already worked on projects with Montagu's Harriers, Lesser Kestrels, Griffon Vultures and White Storks as well as studying the effects of wind farms on birds. Spanish is Fernando's first language but his command of English is excellent and he is a delight to travel with, earning rave reviews from participants. He leads our tours to northern Morocco as well as those across Spain. Having lived and worked in north, central and southern Spain, he knows the birds of these regions exceptionally well.

Mike Crewe Born and raised in Oxford, Mike first joined Limosa in 1997 having spent 16 years working in horticulture - his love and knowledge of which subject still often shines through. In 2009, after 13 years working for us - both in the Limosa office and as a guide - Mike emigrated to New Jersey with his American wife Megan, to take up a post at the Cape May Bird Observatory. Tour leading has always been his first love however, and he returned to the fold early in 2016 to resume his tour leading duties with Limosa! Aside from birds, Mike claims his other real passion is for plants. However, those who have travelled with him on tour will know that this isn't strictly true for one quickly comes to realise that he's a very highly accomplished all-round naturalist who takes great pleasure in sharing his discoveries with others. When he's not away from home guiding our groups across Europe, Asia, Africa or the Americas, Mike's is also one of the voices that may greet you when phoning the *Limosa* office. Mike is a veteran of numerous Limosa holidays to Spain over the past 20 years.

Financial Security

Limosa Holidays is a fully bonded Tour Operator and a member of the Association of Independent Tour Operators (AITO). We hold an ATOL (Air Tour Operators Licence) granted by the CAA, providing for your protection in the event of Limosa Holidays' insolvency. Our ATOL licence number is ATOL 2950.

For tours not including the cost of a flight from the UK or for holidays booked by you as 'Land Only', all payments made to us are fully bonded through the Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited (ABTOT). Our ABTOT membership number is 5230. For details please see our brochure or website: <http://www.limosaholidays.co.uk/financial-protection>

Limosa Loyalty Discount

We are proud of the number of loyal customers who travel regularly with us. As our way of saying 'thank you', we offer a **Frequent Travel Discount**. Under the scheme, everyone who takes four trips with us is entitled to claim a 5% discount on their 5th trip. ^{*1}

^{*1} **Conditions:** This offer applies to the basic tour cost only and excludes certain commission-based trips, extra costs such as additional flights or accommodation, private extensions and cancellations. • Discounts cannot be given in lieu of tour deposits or off the cost of single room supplements. • **Please note discount must be requested at time of booking!**

How To Book

Check availability on our website or with our office. We are happy to hold Provisional Reservations for up to 7 days. After this, we do require a Booking Form and deposit to confirm your place on tour. Any unconfirmed space will be released.

Book Online, by Phone or by Post

You can book and pay the deposit simply and securely **Online** via our website, using the '**Book This Tour**' button on the relevant tour page or the **Booking** tab at the top of the page.

Telephone bookings must be confirmed in writing by completion of a Booking Form (there's one tucked inside every brochure or as a PDF download from our website), which can be mailed to us in the time honoured way.

Be sure to read our **Booking Conditions** and **General Information** (found at the back of our brochure, on our website or available from our office on request) prior to booking.

When to Book

Early booking is advised since flights and accommodation are much more easily secured well in advance. To encourage early booking, we are pleased to offer an **Early Bird Discount** - see our current brochure or website for details.

All our tours are limited to small group sizes. So they can fill up quickly - sometimes even before our new brochure comes out! Single rooms in particular can often be in short supply and among the first to go, so do try to plan well ahead if you definitely require one of these.

Last-minute Bookings: We inevitably receive a few unexpected cancellations over the course of a season so it is always worth enquiring about vacancies on any tour - even for those departing in just a few weeks!

Payments

Deposit: The amount of **booking deposit** per person is shown alongside every tour. We accept deposit payments by **electronic bank transfer** (please ask for our bank details), **UK debit card** and **cheque** (made payable to *Limosa Holidays* and drawn on a UK bank in GBPounds Sterling).

For payment of **booking deposits** only we also accept Visa and MasterCard credit cards.

Balance: Full payment of the **tour balance** is due not later than 12 weeks prior to departure (20 weeks in the case of certain tours such as cruises or those involving rail travel). We will send you an invoice before the balance is due.

We accept balance payments and any additional payments (e.g. interim flight deposits, flight upgrades, extra hotels etc) by **electronic bank transfer (BACS), UK debit card** or **cheque**.

Payment by overseas customers must be in GB Pounds Sterling and may be made by electronic transfer direct to our bank (*please ask for our bank details*).

We do **not** accept cheques on US Banks in US Dollars, or cheques in Euros or Eurocheques.

Credit cards - please note:

(i) We do **NOT accept** credit cards or overseas debit cards for balance payments (including any additional or interim payments) from customers living within the UK or European Economic Area (the EEA is the EU countries plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway).

(ii) For customers living in North America, Australia and all other areas outside of the UK and the European Economic Area **we are able to accept payment by Visa and MasterCard credit cards or overseas debit card but with a charge of 2.5% of the transaction amount to help offset card company charges.**

Late Booking Payments: In order for us to guarantee your airline seats, hotels etc., full payment is required at time of booking for all late bookings (*i.e. bookings made within 12 weeks of departure*).

Other Things You Need To Know

Passports & Visas

For UK passport holders, for stays of up to three months, your **passport must be valid for the proposed duration of your stay**.

No additional period of validity beyond this is required, but when travelling anywhere overseas we **always recommend** that your passport has a minimum of 6 months left to run after your intended date of return home in case of unforeseen delay.

• **VISA NOT REQUIRED by UK passport holders** for this tour.

Holders of non-UK passports should contact the nearest Spanish embassy or consulate to enquire whether or not they require a visa. If a visa is required, you need to apply locally. If the embassy or consulate requires you to provide a letter confirming that you are booked on an all-inclusive tour, please contact our office and we will be happy to provide one.

Health & Vaccinations

Compulsory vaccinations: None.

Recommended vaccinations: For travel everywhere (even within the UK) however, we recommend you check you are up-to-date with protection against tetanus, polio and hepatitis A.

The above information, together with that contained within our Travel Information sheets (sent to everyone who books), outlines health requirements for this tour. **Please note that these details are given for guidance only - and are only for certain diseases - and you must consult your doctor in good time prior to travel as to what immunisations (if any) are needed for your chosen holiday.**

For full and up-to-date health information we **urge everyone to consult The National Travel Health Network and Centre (NaTHNaC) website www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk prior to booking any overseas holiday.**

NaTHNaC is funded by the UK Government's Health Protection Agency and provides health information for both health professionals and travellers, with information compiled by its own clinical and scientific team. You can search for individual country requirements, which are updated regularly.

Your Safety & Travel Advice

An unavoidable aspect of travelling abroad nowadays is the risk it may pose to your safety and security. The best advice on current risks is provided by the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO). In order to assess and protect

against any risks in your chosen destination we **strongly recommend** that you refer to the relevant FCO Travel Advice - both prior to booking and regularly before you travel. See www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

It is standard Limosa policy for our office to send a copy of the relevant FCO Travel Advice about the tour to all participants along with their Final Letter (ca. 2-3 weeks prior to the trip).

'**Travel Aware**' - staying safe and healthy abroad - is a travel safety campaign run by the FCO, and another useful resource. Go to: <https://www.gov.uk/travelaware>

Travel Insurance

Good travel insurance is **essential** before setting off on any overseas trip. In common with all responsible tour operators, **it is a condition of booking** that all clients are fully and adequately insured before travelling overseas with us.

Be aware that some destinations may require you to produce proof of comprehensive travel insurance (e.g. valid insurance certificate) at immigration on arrival in the country, so you should carry your documentation with you.

Your travel insurance should cover against cancellation, curtailment, missed departure, delay, personal accident, death, loss of baggage and valuables (see note below), personal liability and legal expenses. Most importantly, your insurance must cover you fully in respect of medical care and repatriation should you become too ill to continue with the tour, including the cost of emergency evacuation by helicopter or air ambulance should this be necessary. Note that passenger liability insurance covering the transportation that we hire, particularly in Third World countries, may be inadequate; it is therefore important that your insurance cover includes sufficient provision for your dependents in the event of an accident.

We recommend that you obtain travel insurance as soon as possible after booking your holiday to ensure you are protected right from the word go in the event of unexpected cancellation prior to departure due to accident or illness. You must inform your insurers of any

pre-existing medical conditions (including those of persons not necessarily travelling but upon whom your holiday may depend) that may require treatment during a period of overseas travel or might cause you to cancel the trip.

Once you have arranged your insurance, please be sure to send us the following essential details: name and contact details of your insurance provider, your policy number, expiry date and your insurers 24hr Emergency Assistance number.

Important Things to Note about Insurance

- Travel Insurance does **not** normally provide sufficient cover for valuable optical equipment, which is often best protected under your own household insurance policy. If in doubt ask your insurers for advice prior to travel.
- Most travel insurance policies limit the amount of cover, typically up to a maximum tour cost of £5000 per person. If the tour you are booking exceeds this amount, additional cover can usually be provided upon payment of additional premium. **We recommend all travellers** check their individual policy limit to ensure the full cost of their holiday is covered.

Arranging Your Insurance: due to UK Government legislation, under Financial Services Authority (FSA) regulations, we are not allowed to offer or recommend travel related insurance to customers. Premiums can vary widely according to your age, needs, health, choice of destination and other factors, while many people nowadays have Annual Travel Insurance cover. For these reasons, we leave you free to shop around and pick your own policy, one best suited to your own individual needs.

General Information

www.limosaholidays.co.uk

Our website gives easy access to detailed tour itineraries (Tour Info Packs), trip reports, trip photos and the latest Limosa News.

Special Diets & Other Requests

We pass on all such requests to the airlines, hotels and other suppliers, and do our best to ensure (but of course cannot guarantee) that your needs will be met. Please be sure to tell us about these (in as much detail as possible) at the time of booking, to allow good time to make the necessary arrangements.

Smoking

Almost all of our clients prefer a smoke-free environment. For the enjoyment and comfort of all, we ask that smokers refrain from smoking in proximity to the group and respect our NO SMOKING policy in the vehicle, at meal times and when watching wildlife.

Any Questions?

If you have any questions at any time, you'll find our office staff friendly, efficient, approachable - and just a phone call away, eager to assist you in every way.

Our office is open 09.00-17.00 hrs Mon-Fri, and can also be reached by fax and email. In the event we are unable to take your call, please leave a message on our answerphone (24 hrs) and our office will contact you as soon as we can.

Thank you for your interest in our tours. We do hope that you will be able to join us - and we look forward to hearing from you again!

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